La Cité, Toulouse, France | 2020

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Client: La Région Occitanie
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The runway and maintenance buildings were located on the South side.

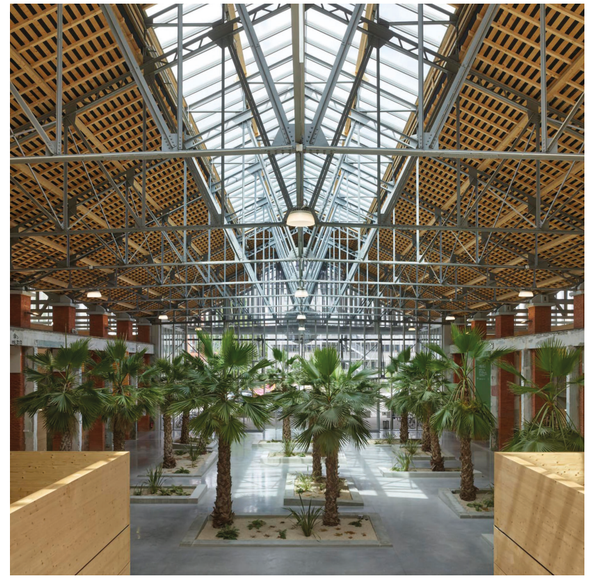
Project Description

Sponsored by La Region Occitanie, the project of La Cité consists of the renovation of the historic site of Les Halles Latétoère, in order to create a third-place dedicated to collaborative and sustainable innovation. La Cité hosts several public and private services devoted to young start-ups, such as Ad'Occ, At Home, Nubbõ, and Roselab. The project is located in the South-East of Toulouse, in the suburb of Montaudran, next to the railway running along the protected historic runway of the Aéropostale.

The building itself is registered as the heritage of the aeronautical industrial history of Toulouse. Built between 1917 and 1918 by the industrial pioneer Pierre-Georges Latécoère, Les Halles Latécoère witnessed the origin of the industrialization of the aeronautic sector in Toulouse. Since World War I, the factory is located on the Northern side of this 45-ha aeronautic site, spread along the railway connecting Toulouse to Sète. The runway and maintenance buildings were located on the South side.

The three halls of Les Halles Latécoère housed the first aeronautic production in Toulouse. On a wider scale, the site is located in an area undergoing development. The direct environment of the site is constituted of residential areas and logistic and industrial activities. La Cité and its 12 698 m² is composed of co-working spaces, meeting rooms, a 200-seats conference room, a restaurant, a Fablab, and a large space for events. Due to the sector dynamism and the need for additional activities to consolidate this new infrastructure, the architects suggested a global vision of La Cité, encompassing the whole site. Just like the innovative structures that it shelters, La Cité has to anticipate the future evolutions of its surrounding spaces so as to lead its development. In this regard, the project required the renovation of the historic Halles shell.

The three production halls were gradually transformed since their original construction in 1917. The transformations are mostly focused on the roofs (framework and covering), the façades, and the interior features (brick pillars and rolling bridges). The metal awnings and contiguous warehouses have been demolished to open up the historic façades and offer new openings toward the building. The docks have been preserved and converted into an open terrace. The project aims to highlight the existing building, showcasing the halls' structure with new additions built as light structures from the floor up and with as little contact as possible with the existing construction. Originally, the roof followed the shape of the framework, built in concrete. In opposition to the two lateral halls, the roof of the central hall was subject to little modifications through time. Concerning the lateral façade design, it alternates openings and pillars and reiterates the use of vertical blades to mark every entry. This allows direct and natural lighting of the South West offices while conserving the alternating rhythm on the façade.



Above the main entrance, the blades are horizontally oriented to generate a monumental access awning. The project develops a design grid of wooden beams and pillars based on the grid of the existing building. This grid of 5m by 5m is filled by either fully glazed panels, panels including a glazed section above a wooden apron wall, or fully wooden panels. All thermal and acoustic insulation is fully integrated into these panels composing a completely flexible and modular system. This light construction system on two floor levels is designed to accommodate the most common use in the program, office space.

The floorplan spans 3 grid widths developing plateau width of 15m allowing the creation of open-spaces of about 40 desk stations. The recreational areas are located in between two plateaus and are organized around technical blocs integrating the kitchen blocs, toilets, copy areas, and technical installations, keeping the office plateaus largely open and calm, free of any annex surfaces and equipment. On the upper level, a footbridge connects all the modules around the large central space. Interior restoration The brick pillars were stripped down to reveal and magnify their variations in color but also to allow the masonry to breathe naturally. A recessed joint also detaches them visually from the floor and avoids water infiltration by capillarity. The concrete pillars are repaired and the industrial rolling beams are preserved.

The rolling beam in the central nave is locked in place and the rolling beam of the third nave is moved and repositioned in the central nave as well. This space is a public square, partly mineral and partly planted to create a cool green environment, a place of free expression and interaction equipped with benches. This space is at the heart of the system, welcoming, uniting, and connecting users. At the center are located the services, meeting rooms, restoration, and connection to other areas. This is the first space the visitor encounters and as such represents the system. It's a place of encounters with the conference room as the crown jewel.

Modular in terms of use, comfort, and flexibility contribute to the quality of the whole project. The occupation of this space is by definition flexible and its bare design reflects the aesthetic of the Halles. The office and shared spaces are designed to be modular and flexible working spaces. They are punctuated by informal working areas, phone booths, and rest and recreational areas thoughtfully located close to the working spaces. These recreational areas can also become areas for creative interventions by artists hosted on the site. The large ceiling height allows for the creation and exhibition of large-scale prototypes.