

DOMINIQUE PERRAULT
LA BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE
DE FRANCE

PORTRAIT D'UN PROJET

1988 – 1998



© Michel Denard/Dominique Perreault Architects/Adap

{BnF

Exhibition

François-Mitterrand, Paris 13^e

April 10 | July 22 2018 | bnf.fr



PRESS KIT

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Dominique Perrault - The Bibliothèque nationale de France

Portrait of a project 1988 - 1998

The Bibliothèque nationale de France has given its architect Dominique Perrault 'carte blanche' to develop an exhibition dedicated to the building he designed in 1989: with an original 'mise en abyme', a large-scale scenography presents the story of the conception and construction of the BnF, one of the most important contemporary public buildings in France.

"I wish to be launched the construction and fitting-out of the – or one of the – biggest libraries in the world, of a completely new type." announced François Mitterrand, the then President of the French Republic on July 14th 1988.

In 1989, architect Dominique Perrault, aged only 36, was the winner of the international competition. After the Grand Louvre, the Opéra Bastille and the Institut du monde arabe, this new project located outside of Paris historic districts completed the policy of large public works projects led during the two seven-year terms of François Mitterrand. The architect's mission was to create 'a symbolic place for Paris and a library for France', a place open to all, which is both a public area for passing through and the beginning of an initiatory journey.

The project, which was innovative because of its architecture and its integration in the urban landscape, was the founding act of the development of a new neighborhood of Paris. It was also a fundamental creation in the practice of Dominique Perrault and the first example of a 'Groundscape' architecture: an architecture considering the underground space as a new field of research to redefine the nature of the urban territories and to outline a new form of urban life.

In 2018, the Research Library celebrates the 20th anniversary of its full public opening. On this occasion, the exhibition entrusted to Dominique Perrault by Laurence Engel, President of the BnF, presents for the first time the history and evolution of this emblematic building recently labeled as an outstanding contemporary building'. It goes back over a creation process imbued with intense and fruitful debates between 1988 and 1998, with the involvement of numerous collaborators and with the various experiments that punctuated its conception and achievement.

The exhibition path, divided in four major sections, invites visitors to discover the unknown secrets of the whole project, from its architecture to its urban integration into the cityscape, from the creation of the garden to the various furniture elements. The original exhibition design - an open plan environment made of hanging mesh strips and immersive screenings which creates special light effects responds to the architectural elements and the specific furniture of the BnF. Some outstanding pieces and documents express a turning point in the history of architecture and construction, and illustrate a very large-scale work. Original films, sketches, plans and models from the architect's archives and various public collections offer a fresh look at this building, which is a true symbol of contemporary Parisian Architecture.

Exhibition

Dominique Perrault - The Bibliothèque nationale de France portrait of a project 1988 -1998

April 10 | July 22 2018

Gallery 2
BnF | François-Mitterrand
Quai François Mauriac, Paris XIII^e

Tuesday to Saturday 10 a.m. – 7 p.m.
Sunday 1 p.m. – 7 p.m.
Closed Mondays and public holidays
Price : 9 euros, reduced price: 7 euros
FNAC reservation : 0892 684 694 / www.fnac.com

Organizers

Dominique Perrault, architect, member of the Institut
Scientific director :
Frédéric Migayrou
deputy director of the National Museum of Modern Art, Pompidou Center
Scénography :
Gaëlle Lauriot-Prévost
architect designer, art director associate of Dominique Perrault Architecture
Audiovisuel director :
Richard Copans, director and producer, Les Films d'ici

Publication

La Bibliothèque nationale de France - Dominique Perrault
Portrait d'un projet 1988-1998

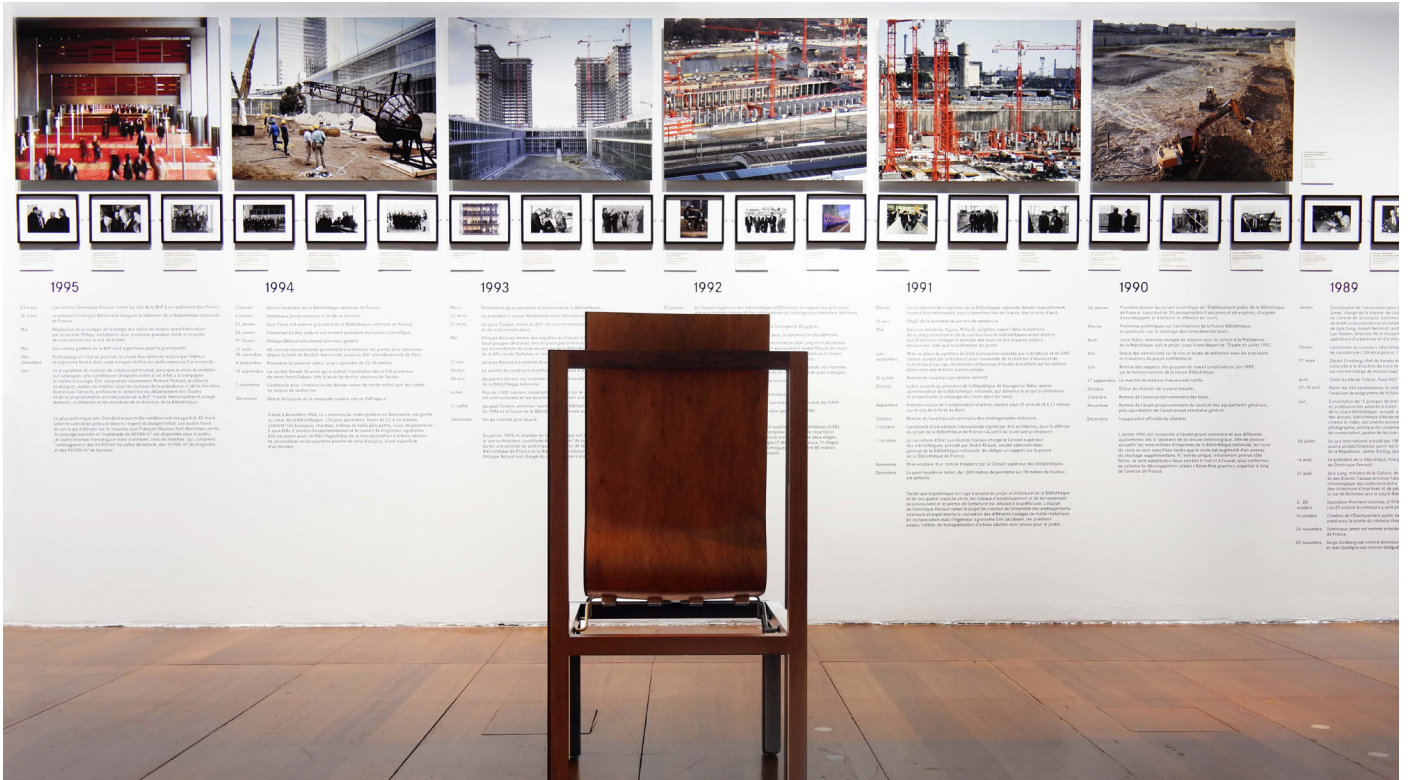
under the direction of Frédéric Migayrou

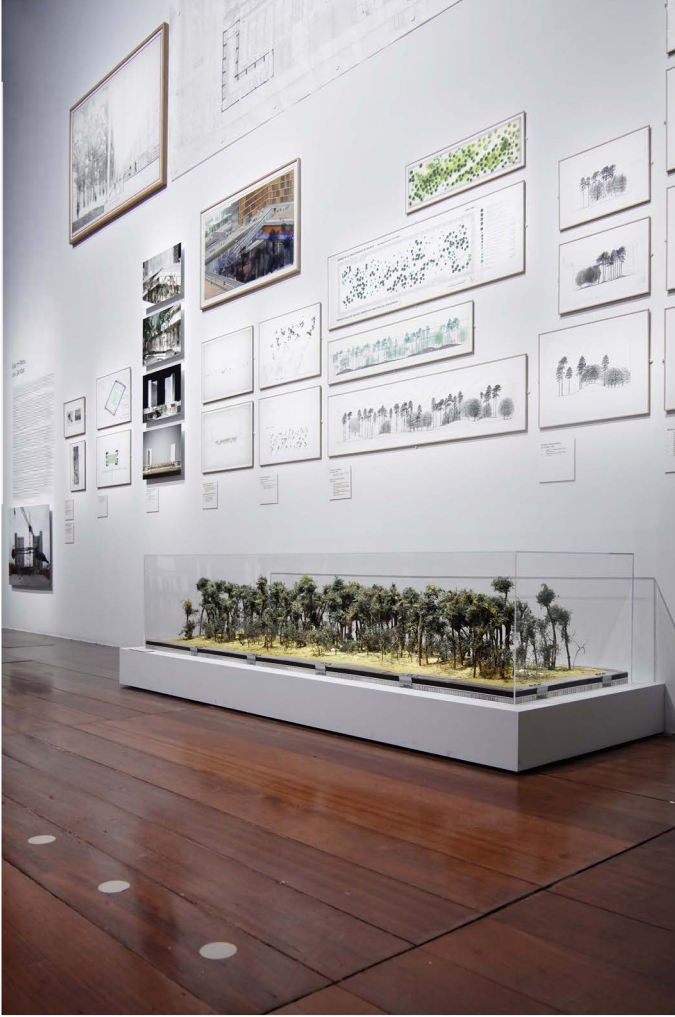
with texts from : Emmanuelle Chiapponne-Piriou, Laurence Engel, Michael Jakob, Stéphane Laurent, Gaëlle Lauriot-Prevost, Frédéric Migayrou, Dominique Perrault, Jacqueline Sanson, Richard Rogers, Anthony Vidler.

24 x 30 cm
700 visuals, 448 pages
Éditions HYX

Exhibition design

Visuals available for promotional purposes throughout the duration of the exhibition.





Visuals

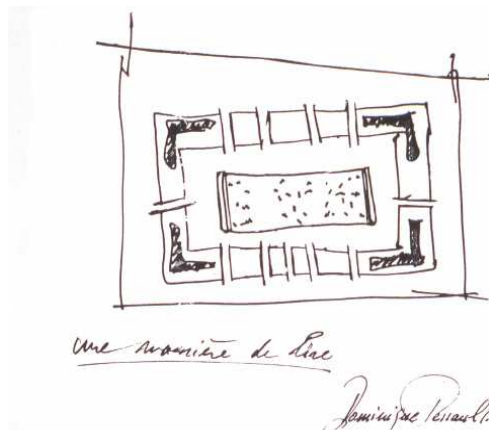
Visuals available for promotional purposes throughout the duration of the exhibition.



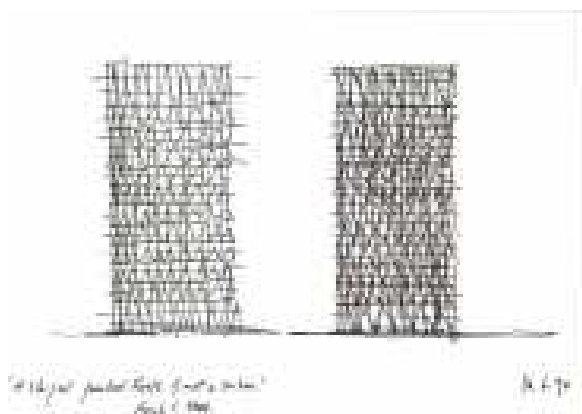
Dominique Perrault ©JAA
The Sankei Shimbun



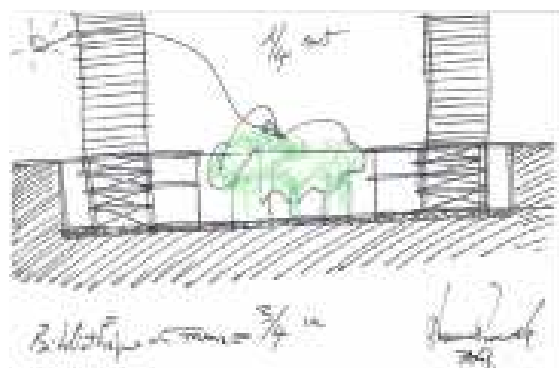
Gaëlle Lauriot-Prévost
© Dominique Perrault Architecte /
ADAGP, Paris 2018



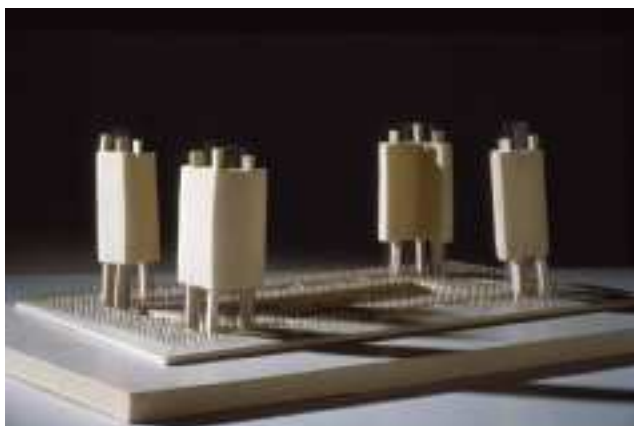
BnF esplanade, sketch 1990 © Dominique Perrault
Architecte / ADAGP, Paris 2018



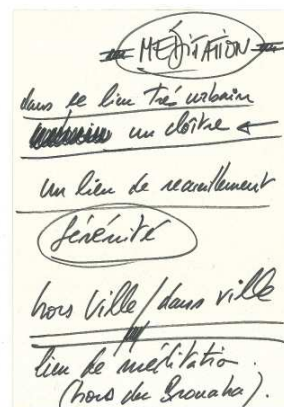
BnF, Tower façades, sketch 1990
© Dominique Perrault Architecte / ADAGP, Paris 2018



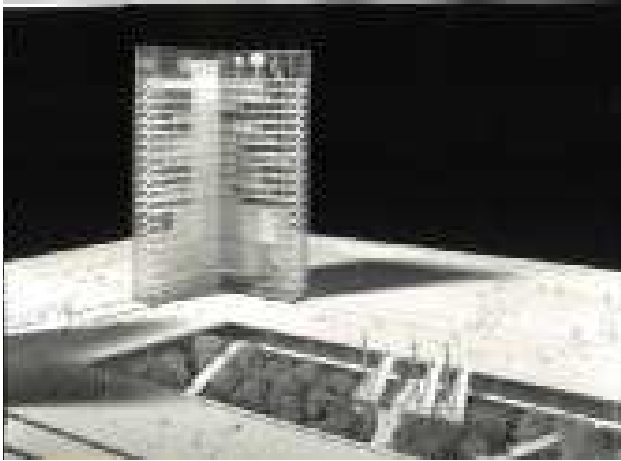
BnF, Cross-sectional, sketch 1990
© Dominique Perrault Architecte / ADAGP, Paris 2018



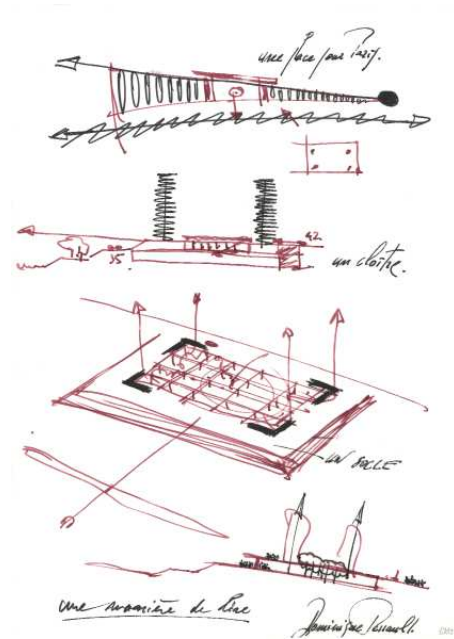
BnF, Scale model 1/1000, March 1989
© Michel Denancé/Dominique Perrault architecte/ADAGP,
Paris 2018



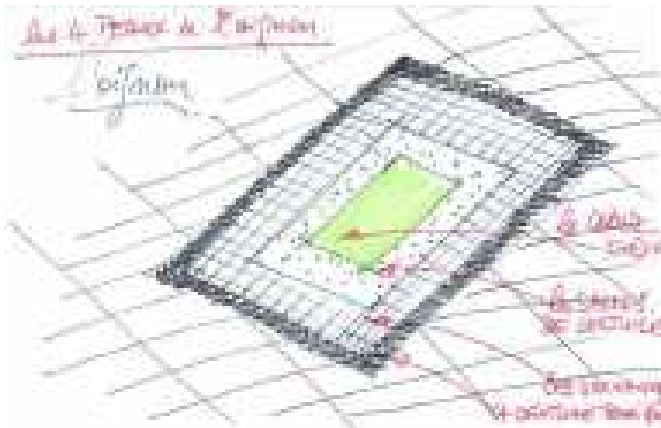
Handwritten 1989
© Dominique Perrault Architecte /
ADAGP, Paris 2018



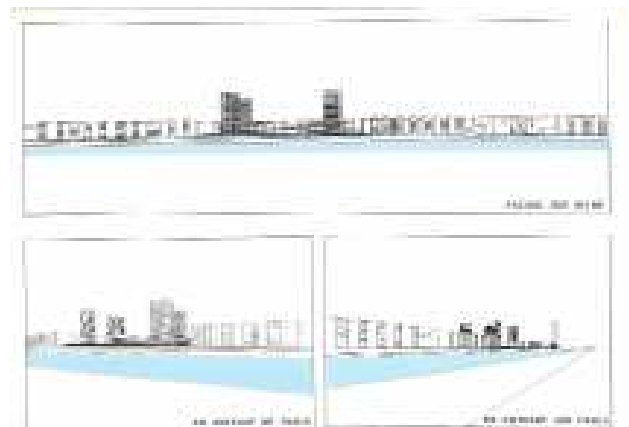
BnF, Competition model, juillet 1989
 © Alain Goustard/Dominique Perrault architecte/ADAGP, Paris 2018



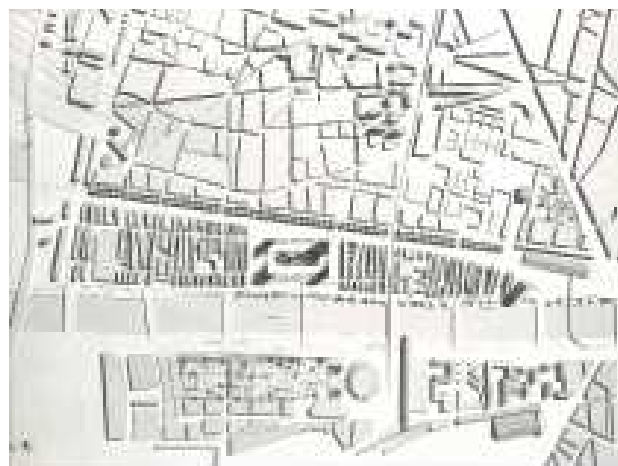
BnF sketch, April-May 1989
 © Dominique Perrault Architecte / ADAGP, Paris 2018



BnF sketch
 © Dominique Perrault Architecte / ADAGP, Paris, 2018



BnF, Volumetric urban study, 1989
 © Dominique Perrault Architecte / ADAGP, Paris 2018



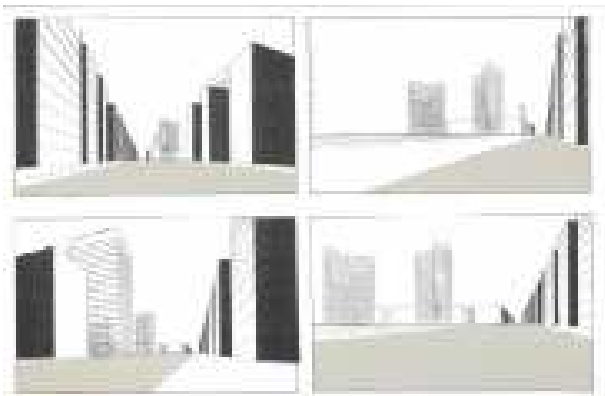
Urban proposal for the Seine Rive Gauche district, étude Sémapa
 1989-1990
 © Dominique Perrault Architecte / ADAGP, Paris 2018



BnF, Competition model scale 1/333, 1989
© Michel Denancé/Dominique Perrault architecte/ADAGP, Paris 2018



Construction site: concrete structural farmwork of the North-South, décembre 1992
© Michel Denancé / Dominique Perrault Architecte / ADAGP, Paris 2018



BnF, urban insertion study, 1989
© Dominique Perrault Architecte / ADAGP, Paris 2018



BnF, Arial view of the Tolbiac site, 1989 (right unknown, document provided by the city of Paris for the competition.)



BnF, garden and esplanade under construction, September 1994 © Michel Denancé



BnF, garden viewed from the terrace of the reception level
© Georges Fessy/ Dominique Perrault Architecte / ADAGP, Paris, 2018



BnF, a seat in the reading room
© Georges Fessy / Dominique Perrault Architecte / GLP Design / ADAGP, Paris 2018



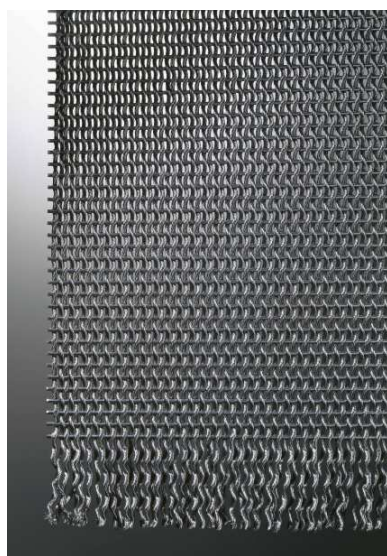
BnF, set of table, lamp and chair on the garden level
© Georges Fessy / Dominique Perrault Architecte / GLP Design / ADAGP, Paris 2018



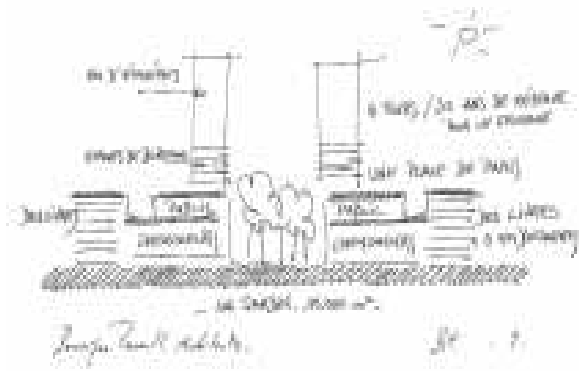
BnF, new Doussie wood and steel chair and original chair entirely made of Doussie.
© Georges Fessy/Dominique Perrault Architecte / GLP Design/ADAGP, Paris 2018



The new chair the readings rooms made of Doussie and steel, 2014.
© Georges Fessy / Dominique Perrault Architecte / ADAGP, Paris 2018



BnF, Metal mesh of woven stainless steel, interior wall hangings of the halls of the towers, 1996
© Georges Fessy / Dominique Perrault Architecte / GLP Design / ADAGP, Paris 2018



BnF, Schematic section, 1990
© Dominique Perrault Architecte / ADAGP, Paris 2018



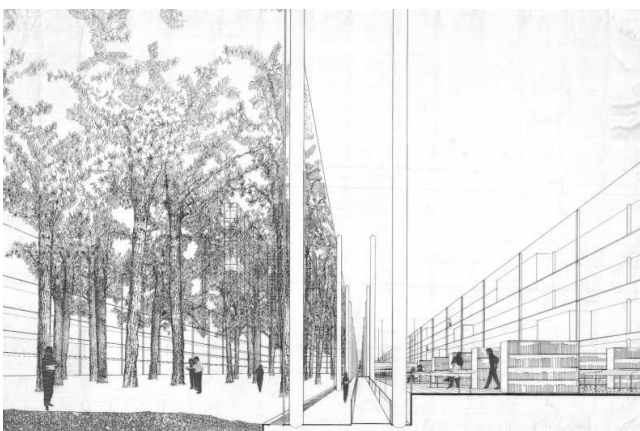
View of the BnF looking westward, 1995
© Georges Fessy / Dominique Perrault Architecte / ADAGP, Paris 2018



BnF, research reading room study model, scale 1:100, 1991
© Michel Denancé / Dominique Perrault Architecte / ADAGP, Paris 2018



BnF, research reading room study model, scale 1:100, 1991
© Dominique Perrault Architecte / ADAGP, Paris 2018

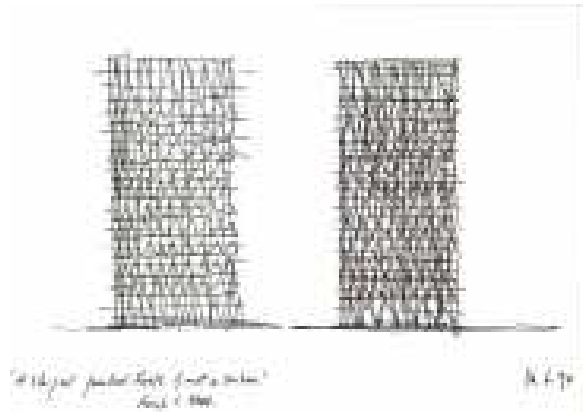


BnF, garden perspective, ink on tracing paper, 1990
© Dominique Perrault Architecte / ADAGP, Paris 2018



Garden level ambulatory, paper-wood collage, plexiglas, photocopy and pastels, 1991
© Dominique Perrault Architecte / ADAGP, Paris 2018

Presentation



The exhibition Dominique Perrault - The Bibliothèque nationale de France. Portrait of a project 1988-1998 opens the doors of the architect's studio and allows visitors to discover the creation process that gave birth to the François-Mitterrand Library. On the premises of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the exhibition presents to the general public, for the first time ever, the history of the design of this building that has become a monument; it also accounts for the numerous aspects of the creation and building process. In 2018, the Research Library (Rez-de-jardin level) will celebrate the 20th anniversary of its full public opening. This year, it is also the 30th anniversary

of the speech made by François Mitterrand on 14 July 1988; freshly reelected for his second term in office, the then President of the French Republic put forward his desire to offer the Nation a new national library.

Imagined and designed by the architect and his staff, the exhibition is divided in four thematic sections. First two parts present the architectural object and its inclusion within the territory as a milestone of the urban development visible today. The third part focuses on the emblematic void that the architect wished to place at the heart of his project, namely the garden or the creation of a real piece of forest near the Seine river. The last part of the exhibition plunges visitors into the details of indoor facilities and furniture especially conceived for the place.

The major part of documents, presented for the first time, belong to Dominique Perrault's archives. A few other pieces are part of the public collections of the Centre Pompidou and the FRAC Centre. A wide variety of documents will be presented to visitors: sketches, technical drawings, slides and ektachromes, photomontages, digital or handmade perspectives, study and competition models on various scales, samples of materials, prototypes, etc.

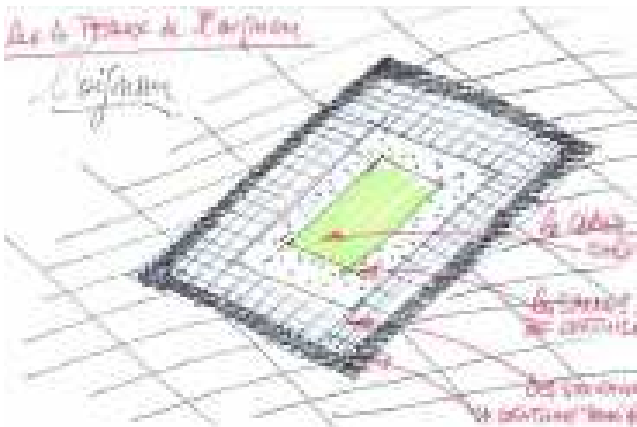
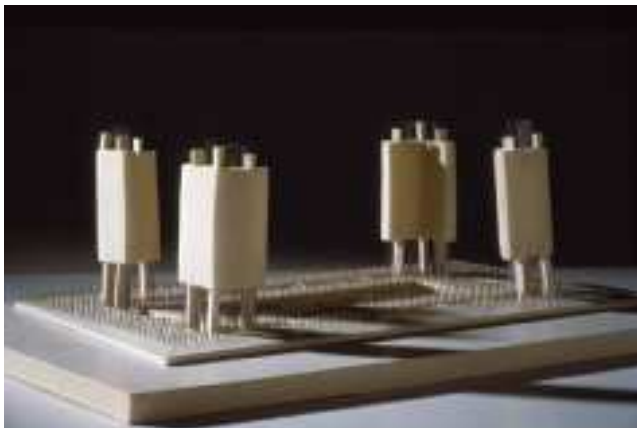
These documents were made in a pivotal period for architecture and construction, at the junction of a manual precision work and the early days of computer assisted design. For instance, all the documents created for the competition were hand-drawn whereas digital tools were introduced during the project's development, until the end of the work. This collection of archives shows how important the building site was.

All press kit citations are excerpts from the book:

La Bibliothèque nationale de France - Dominique Perrault / Portrait d'un projet 1988-1998
under the direction de Frédéric Migayrou, Éditions HX

The exhibition

In August 1989, François Mitterrand designated Dominique Perrault among the four winners of the international competition. The French architect, age 36, was unknown to the general public. He proposed a building, both simple and bold; and imagined as indicated in the text written for the competition: "a piece of urban art, a minimalist installation, the 'less is more' of emotion where objects and the materials of which they are made count for nothing without the lights that transcend them. Towers, case - or sheath -like structures of glass, with a double skin and sun filters which multiply the reflections and highlights, and magnify the shadows: the absolute magic of the diffraction of light by means of these crystalline prisms. Nature offset, with a garden where all you see is the foliage of the trees." (Dominique Perrault, text of the competition, 1989).



The project is made of four corner towers, , which were almost immediately compared to open books.

These towers emerge from a platform built unifying the whole.

Working both on absence and some kind of 'disappearance' of architecture stands as a founding act in the architect's creative process.

These four towers mark out a volume, a non-building presenting itself as an esplanade embedded in the platform around a central void. The absence of building is an essential aspect of the architectural composition. Above all, the Library appears as a square, with a 400 meters long esplanade standing 8 met above the Seine river.

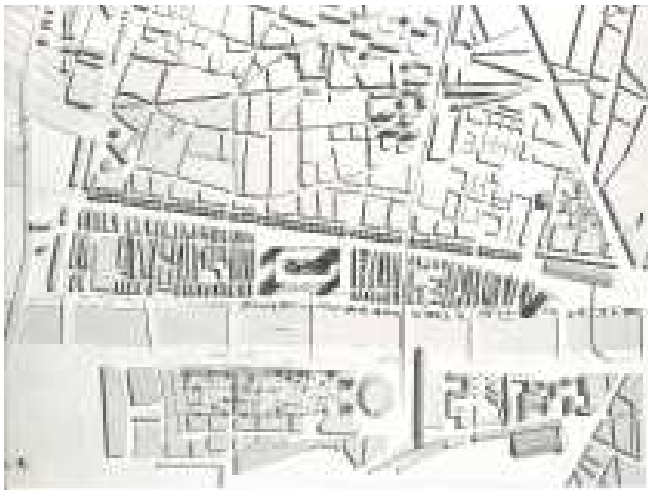
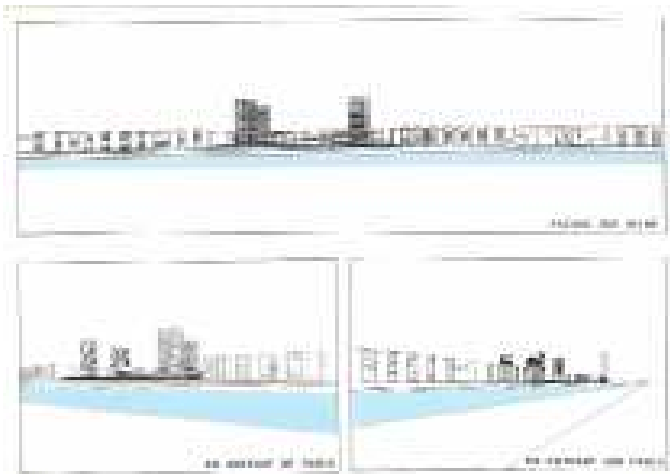
Without denying the monumental aspect of the Library, the architect also develops the theme of the cloister. Dominique Perrault explains that it was fantastic "to manage both the extrovert and the introvert on this place which is the Library. That the void should be able to separate the outside from the inside. Because, the garden is an inside. Walking around the garden is like being 300 kms. Away from Paris.

The architect's answer to the program is to place the readers around the garden in the platform and the books in the glass towers. It is an open and extroverted installation, symbolically connected to a democratic purpose: to make available to the majority of people the whole world of knowledge and disseminate it.

The distribution of the program in the building was slightly modified. The towers, originally designed to store the books, eventually contain only one third of the collections and offices. The other two thirds of the collection are stored in the basement. The idea of the entrance hall on the side of the Seine river was eventually given up to gain extra place. The architecture also evolved; one of the main changes was the height of the towers which were shortened by about 20 meters.

In December 1992, the shell of the basement was being finished. A massive retaining wall ensures effective protection of the Bibliothèque from the Seine.. Actually, numerous collections will be stored 14 metres under the river level. The construction of the towers started at the beginning of 1993. It ended in 1994 and the esplanade was covered with ipe wood. The interior architecture of the Research and Reference libraries was finished on 30 March 1995 when François Mitterrand inaugurated the building.

The monument and the territory



Industrial wasteland and new district

On 12 April 1989, the place chosen for the future Bibliothèque nationale was announced. It is an industrial wasteland, a 7 hectare site along the Seine river, in the 13th district of Paris, offered to the State by the town council and its mayor, Jacques Chirac. The choice of the site is imaginative and original in the major works (Grands Travaux) policy: it comes with a reflection about Paris and the future metropolis. Whereas the previous Grands Travaux – the Pyramide du Louvre and the Opéra bastille - carried out during the first seven-year term were developed in the historic heart of Paris, this project takes place in an outlying and deserted territory under reconstruction. At that time, this choice might have seemed incongruous.

"The choice of an industrial brownfield to set up the project of the second seven-year term is not completely unexpected or innocent; it corresponds to some kind of a conquest, of expansion, of enlargement of the historical city beyond itself.

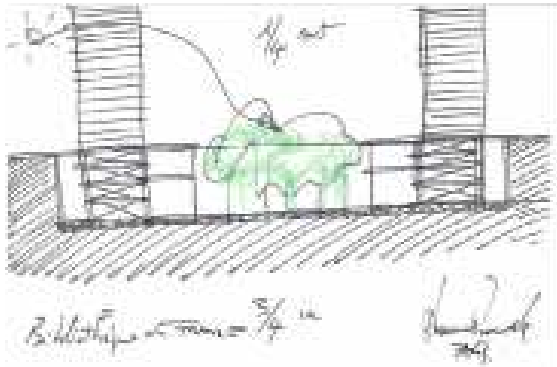
The so-called illegibility of the project rather appears to me as an exploited blindness. Jacques Chirac, the then Mayor of Paris, developed at that time an urban policy of readjustment at the East side of the city. In terms of fitting-outs and equipments, from a social and economic point of view, it is the beginning of a changeover from the West to the East of the capital. (...) Among the big projects, it is the first that focuses on an industrial wasteland. It is a space for reconstitution, of revelation. The project includes nature as a sacred and untouchable element, which corresponds to François Mitterrand's viewpoint or, at least, to his sensitivity. (...) The project is open on all sides, it promises futures, in the plural form." (Dominique Perrault)

Consequently, the building shall be able to house a library but also to give birth to a new district. So, it symbolically marks the early days of what will become one of the major town planning operations in Paris; the Seine Rive gauche district that runs along the river for two kilometres and will grow during the twenty following years. At the moment of the inauguration, in 1995, the Tolbiac district was a big building site, still insufficiently served by public transport. The section of line 14 or Paris metro, between Madeleine and Bibliothèque François-Mitterrand was inaugurated in October 1998.



The garden

Placed 10 metres under the level of the Seine river, the central garden makes the connection between the two dimensions of the project: an extrovert public building of national importance and the need of intimacy linked to the use of a library, its silent and timeless aspect connected to the idea of a cloister. It reinforces the powerful topography of places, going with the initiatory journey and introducing the natural light into the rez-de-jardin.



For Dominique Perrault, “The garden is a story. And the tree is one of the major characters among the elements of this story. When visitors arrive on the square, they are above the trees, in front of the treetops. In the library, at the Haut-de-jardin level (reference library), they wander in a gallery which is at the level of the upper part of the branches (...). Then, the towers’ feet are extremely vertical, namely 30 metres that are the foundations of the towers and support the tons of books stored in some twenty storeys. (...) Then, there are the corridors of the cloister. The nature is here; visitors are under the trees. The path covered is tangible, from above to below and the relationship with nature plays a very important role. It is a story, a path toward quietness and a certain form of loneliness. The nature takes us several hundreds of kilometres away from Paris. The city has completely disappeared. This place is a place where you can just stop and spend several hours. The researchers are going to use this space for hours and days; they are going to switch between the city and their cells, their tables, their chairs thanks to this story connected to a specific topography.”

In September 1994, a hundred tall and adult pine trees from the state forest of Bord in Normandy were carefully wrapped and transported via a special convoy to the building site of the Library. The tall pine trees were brought down and replanted in the garden. Progressively covered with younger trees, ferns and other species, the forest took shape. This garden is not open to the public, which had been specified in the rules of the competition. This decision was defended by François Mitterrand.

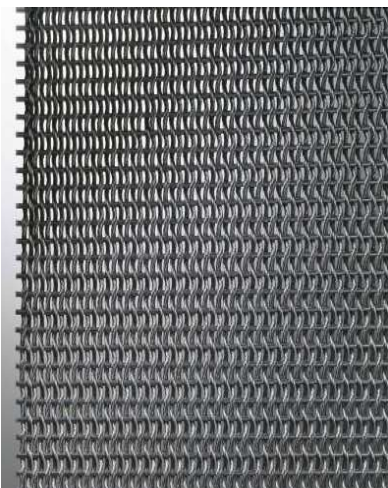
Materials and elements of furniture



The choice of materials was voluntarily limited: steel, wood, concrete and glass. Some raw, authentic and solid materials with sustainable power. They will age and acquire a patina without losing their qualities like the different types of wood used for the outdoor square and the shutters of the towers. The interior fittings and elements of furniture, as well as the signage, represented the final step of the project. They have been implemented from 1995. According to François Mitterrand's wishes, the Bibliothèque nationale de France was an entire project, conceived as a whole by the architect including the details of the layout and the elements of furniture, which is rather rare in the history of the French public procurement.



As in all historic libraries, the elements of furniture are extremely important. Above all, the library is in the service of its readers; it must provide them with the comfort necessary to long hours of study. Imagined and designed in collaboration with designer Gaëlle Lauriot-Prévost, the interior fittings and design are the continuation of the architecture at the personal level of the reader. They were a real challenge considering the dimensions of the place (4,000 readers' seats). The result is a marriage of materials – concrete, tropical woods and various types of mesh – and colors among which the only pure one is the Terre d'Afrique red color of the carpet proposed by the architect and chosen by François Mitterrand himself. The choice of the metal mesh is linked to the research in terms of materials. The mesh points out an architectural language connected to industry. The various types of mesh and weaving of threads in metal are the results of long and original researches. So far used in industry, the material is, for the first time ever, transposed in architecture and develops completely new qualities. The filtering metal cloth adapts itself to various functions: acoustic or lighting components, ornaments for ceilings used to hide the air-conditioning devices, etc.



The metal is mainly present in the lamps of the entrance halls, conceived like halberds stuck in the walls, or in the 'masts' of the reading rooms and corridors, dressed with metal braiding and used as supports for lamps, signage elements, projectors or loudspeakers. The mesh also allows to dress the fire escapes, hiding them while being permeable to air. Eventually, it is a material that is receptive to light and adorns itself with numerous reflections.

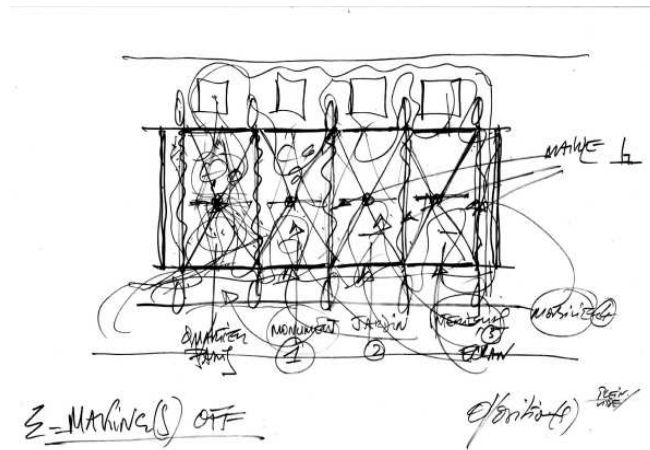
The two major elements of furniture are the chair and the table lamp in the reading rooms. At the start of the project, the idea was to pay tribute to architect and designer Jean Prouvé and to reedit elements of furniture that he had created; eventually, all the elements were specifically made for the building. The archetypal chair was the subject of researches in terms of usability and technology. The basis is a body fixed to a simple frame; it is unstuck from the frame thanks to a metal piece. Much lighter and more comfortable than an armchair, it is broader than an ordinary chair. Its base, well-settled in the room, allows to define a personal space on each reading area. In the same way, the horizontal table lamp 'protects' the working area.



The same attention has been paid to the other elements of furniture: bookshelves, tables... For the sake of harmony, the doussie wood was used to make them as well as the floors and the wall panellings chosen for the interior fittings. The elements of furniture are made of important pieces of wood with a solid aspect. They compose a quiet skyline at the human scale.

"There are very few materials; these are essential materials such as wood, metal, concrete and glass, which are never developed in variations of color or tone. There is no range. The material is raw with its own smell and texture, with its own nature that recreates in some way an interior architecture. It is not an interior layout; it is more like a kind of architecture rather than design. This form of architecture is going to create an interior landscape with a succession of different light fixtures. There is no direct light in this library. Everything is indirect whether to read a big map or a small book, to light a large room or a reading cell. The light does not exist until it meets a material or a surface; the lights are reflected on materials and change the tones not because they are more red, yellow or orange than the others but rather because they are reflected by the wood, the metal, some parts of the metal cloth, some glass." (Dominique Perrault)

Exhibition design



The exhibition design is an original layouts designed by Dominique Perrault and Gaëlle Lauriot-Prévost, followed by Frédéric Migayrou, scientific director of the exhibition.

An open path

The scenography echoes the architecture of the building and its elements of furniture; it invites visitors to follow a free and immersive path. Disclosing the volume of Gallery 2, it does not include any partition but leaves the columns visible to generate rhythm in the area.. It relies on the architectural elements of the library and sequences the 750 square metres available in four cells corresponding to the thematic sections of the exhibition path outlined by strips of metal mesh. Here made of aluminium while of stainless steel in the rest of the building, the mesh is an emblematic element of the BnF architecture. Five strips of coiled mesh (14 X 4 metres) are suspended 2,20 metres above the floor. They let the gallery opened, with no partition; they sequence the area and allow the light to come in with transparent effects.

80 chairs of the library are placed all over the exhibition area. Some of them are the original ones, made of wood. The other ones are new, made of wood and metal; in the long-term, they will be the only ones used in the BnF reading rooms. Randomly placed in the area, these chairs form some kind of a low cloth all over the surface. Visitors are free to sit on them to discover the videos.



An immersive visit

Four screens – 6.85 x 4 meters each – are settled in each cell, at the center of the exhibition area. Of a scale in line with the space, they can be seen from both sides and contribute to the immersive effect. The thematic films projected and made by Richard Copans invite the visitors to grasp the monumental aspect of the BnF, its inclusion in the territory, the size of the garden as well as the Library's elements of furniture. As visual accounts without words, they show original and outstanding images of the building taken by a drone flying over the garden or the neighbourhood. The light projected by the screens is reflected by meshes and creates a very special atmosphere made of light variations and transparency. The twilight connected to a minimalist soundscape further reinforces the visitor's immersion in the space and history of the building.

A documentary wandering

A series of wood showcases, lit from above, is arranged in the exhibition area. Each of them presents various documents and objects as well as a choice of video excerpts to listen to individually with headphones.

A picture rail on the side wall illustrates each thematic section through graphic materials never presented before. For example, the first section dedicated to the architectural object is the opportunity to discover some sketches, study drawings and plates presented for the international architecture competition in 1989.



A square for Paris, a library for France

Dominique Perrault, text of the competition

A place and not a building

The “grands projets” of the President of the Republic that have been completed to date are all closely associated with a site, and a history – in a word, a place with a name. The Bibliothèque de France is to be built on a stretch of industrial waste land on the banks of the Seine in the East End of Paris. It represents the starting-point for a complete restructuring of this entire sector of the 13th arrondissement. The institution encompasses within it an element of Grandeur and an element of generosity. If we refer ourselves to the urban history of the great monuments which have been the fundamental signs of the city’s thrust toward new territory, the greatest gift that it is possible to give to Paris consists, today, in offering space, and emptiness – in a word, a place that is open, free, and stirring. Accordingly, the enormous building, which is envisaged with envisaged with supporting emphatic architectural contortions, is transformed into a project that involves the void. Proposing as it does to the History of France a focus on immateriality and non-ostentation, this is an absolute luxury in the city. It is this context which engenders the concept of the project.

A square for Paris, a library for France

An initiatory place and not some monster of a building, part-temple and part-supermarket. A place of reference for the East End of Paris. A place that is part and parcel of the continuity of the sequence of large empty spaces along the Seine, like the place de la Concorde, the Champs de Mars, and the Invalides. In this way the site beside the Seine becomes one of major importance with the activation of this place; the hill in the 13th arrondissement gives on to the Seine, and turns its back on the disgrace of the sad Porte de Choisy and Porte d’Ivry highrise tower-blocks. In an operation designed to save and redeem the place, the institution introduces its generosity, while the Bibliothèque de France contributes its influence and radiance. With this combination of a free and open space, built to the scale of the capital, and horizontality, the Bibliothèque de France unfurls its breadth and volume by way of its four “beacon” – like markers, akin to tension – rods or braces for the flat area between them, offering a verticality that defines a virtual volume, which, in turn, crystallizes all the magic, presence and poetry of the complex.

A symbolic place

With its four corner towers resembling four open books all facing one another, and delimiting a symbolic place, the Bibliothèque de France – a mythical place – imposes its presence and identity on the scale of the city by the adjustment of its four corners. These urban landmarks develop and enhance the idea of the “book”, with a random kind of use of the towers, the occupation of which is like an accumulation of learning, of knowledge that is never complete, and of a slow but on-going process of sedimentation. Other complementary metaphors spring to mind, be it book-towers, or silos, or vast racks with countless shelves, or vertical labyrinths, and all these unambiguous images converge on a powerful identity of these architectural objects. The installation of a square underpins the notion of availability, as applied to treasure. It is the towers which have helped to situate and identify this treasure as cultural. The public space will offer a direct and natural physical contact between the sacred institution and the man in the street. The inclusion of an “inlaid”, sunken garden rounds off the symbolic sitting of the project, offering a quiet spot away from the fuss and bother of the city. Like a cloister, this tranquil, unruffled space will invite contemplation and a flowering of intellectual endeavour.

A magic place

This project is a piece of urban art, a minimalist installation, the “less is more” of emotion, where objects and the materials of which they are made count for nothing without the lights which transcend them. Towers, case – or sheath – like structures of glass, with a double skin and sun filters which multiply the reflections and highlights, and magnify the shadows: the absolute magic of the diffraction of light by means of these crystalline prisms. Nature offset, with a garden where all you see is the foliage

of the trees."A sea of trees, a froth of leaves". An initiatory walk across footbridges slung among the branches of the trees, somewhere between sky and earth. Last of all, the soft protection of under-growth, with aromas and rustling sounds, reunions with oneself, and with another world. Night vision: the Bibliothèque de France will be set in a halo of light, emanating from the garden and the service periphery. A diaphanous light will rise up through the interiors of the glass towers, culminating in four topmost points, which will shimmer like four lighthouse beacons. This liquid light will spread over the square, while the towers will be reflected in the Seine.

An urban place

What could be more urban and more public than a pedestrian square? The challenge of creating a void preserves the future of the district, while at the same time steering its development and offering conspicuous architectural requirements, such as can be learnt from the great squares of Paris. A square is a space that is lined or hemmed by a system of continuous structures – combining porches, covered walks, and a lofty crowning feature forming a skyline – delimits the public space. Here, the setting serves as a backdrop, not a water-front foreground. It will accommodate diverse and varied architectural scripts, the sole rule being their shared role of accompanying, in their own right, the institution's urban influence.

A place for reading

From the parvi-like courtyard of the main entrance, with its sweeping river frontage, the general reception area is situated between the Seine and the garden. Arriving from the RER train station, people will head for this single and all-encompassing area, by way of the garden, using the footbridges slung between the trees. The reception and organizational area level, which is in direct contact with the neighbourhood, is crucial to the intense nature of the public life of the Bibliothèque de France. This whole network is so structured as to lead the reader, newcomer and old hand alike, to the heart of the edifice, towards places that are protected and protective – safeguarded and safeguards. This is an initiatory itinerary proceeding away from hubbub towards hush, away from consumer information towards the data required for selecting books – a walk that plunges the reader into a journey of exploration into the knowledge and learning of humankind. Around this garden, the specialized (thematic) libraries (current affairs, audio-visual, study, and research) are arranged on several mezzanine levels within a very tall volumetric space. These reading areas, with their variable geometry, are entirely glassed-in on the garden side, and equipped, on their outer perimeter, with a range of facilities which offer readers all the technical slit running along their entire length. The library service system could not exist without its deliveries to the towers, which house the stacks and the administrative departments, based on a changing order, and adapting in real time to the development of the library's financial and functional management system. In our view, these concepts of service quality and efficiency are fundamental, because they encourage the reader to foster his interest in and enthusiasm for "what is written".

A place capable of growing

The towers are inter-connected by a network of circulation services reserved for the conveyance of books by the staff. This is the nerve center of all the activities of the Bibliothèque de France. This belt -or ring-like configuration underscores the potential of the project in terms of flexibility and adaptability-applied to every type of branch-circuit, at any given point in the complex. This internal (in-house) service system incorporates every type of technology, every type of specific circulation for users, and every type of security arrangement, as well as all the adjoining premises.

Supple, flexible, with variable geometry, these are the keywords that have governed the functional formulation of the project. As it evolves during the phases of programming and planning, construction, and operation, the simple straightforward and rational organization between towers and horizontal girders guarantees the efficiency and reality of the principles of adaptability. The actual number of square meters proposed, with the annexation of areas peripheral to the service beltway, may be very considerably increased, or alternatively lowered, by reducing the occupation density of the various levels. Similarly, the "modularity" of the reading areas offers a potential for growth, by increasing the number of mezzanines, or quite simply getting rid of them. All these possible adjustments and their ease of implementation ensure that the program will be strictly adhered to, in terms of both surface area and altimetry. They also ensure an open door for constructive dialogue with the developer, the contractor, and those using the library.

Dominique Perrault biography

Praemium Imperiale award winner, Dominique Perrault, leading figure in French architecture is a professor and director of the Underground Architecture Laboratory (SUB) at the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne in Switzerland. He is also the founder of DPAX, a multidisciplinary research platform exploring architecture from a wider perspective.

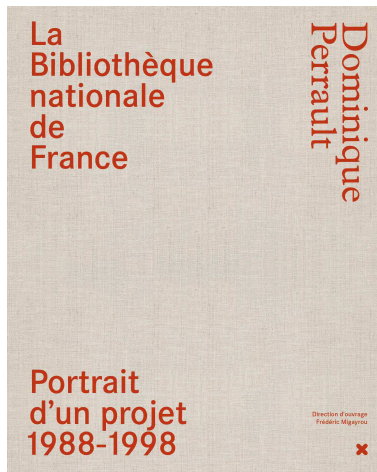
He gained international recognition after winning the competition for the Bibliothèque nationale de France in 1989 at the age of 36. This project marked the starting point of many other public and private commissions abroad, such as The Velodrome and Olympic Swimming Pool of Berlin, the extension of the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg, the Olympic Tennis Center in Madrid, the Ewha University Campus in Seoul, and the Fukoku Tower in Osaka, Japan. In 2014, he delivered the DC Tower in Vienna, the tallest tower in Austria, an icon of the new business district, as well as the Grand Theatre in Albi, France. In 2016 he published the book "Groundscape - Other topographies", dedicated to his research work on underground architecture, theme introduced in his earliest projects. He has received many prestigious prizes and awards, including the "Grande Médaille d'or d'Architecture" from the Académie d'Architecture in 2010, the Mies van der Rohe prize, the French national Grand Prize for Architecture, the Equerre d'argent prize for the Hotel Industriel Berlier and the Seoul Metropolitan Architecture Award as well as the AFEX Award for the Ewha Womans University in Korea. In 2015 he was elected to the French Academy of Fine Arts.

In 2016, Dominique Perrault completed three major rehabilitation and extension projects, including the Pont de Sèvres Towers – Citylights in Western Paris, the new mechanicals hall of the École Polytechnique Fédérale in Lausanne as well as the Dufour Pavilion, new entrance of the Château de Versailles. Current studies and urban research projects include the Olympic Village – Paris 2024, a new transit center in Gangnam, Seoul, the new Villejuif-IGR station of the Grand Paris Express, and the "Mission Ile de la Cité," an urban study commissioned in december 2015 by the president of the French Republic François Hollande that reflects upon the future of the thriving, historical center of Paris from now until 2040. The new Paris Longchamp historic center will be inaugurated in april 2018, and the new Poste du Louvre in early 2019.

Milestones

April 1988	François Léotard, Minister of Culture and Communication, evokes the idea of a Bibliothèque nationale bis to house the books published after 1990 and the periodicals published after 1959. Several locations are proposed in Paris or Saint-Denis.
July 1988	Assignment letter from François Mitterrand, President of the French Republic to the First Minister, Michel Rocard.
Sept.1988	Jacques Chirac, Mayor of Paris, makes available to the State, a land owned by the City of Paris. Located on the left bank of the Seine River in the Tolbiac district, it could be used to establish the new library.
Dec.1988	Under the authority of Emile Biasini, Secretary of State for major works, journalist Dominique Jamet is entrusted with a mission of coordination and reflection about the "Très Grande bibliothèque".
Feb. 1989	Launch of the international competition of architecture. 244 architects compete. 20 are invited to propose their idea of the future library.
April 1989	Choice of the Tolbiac site - 13th district of Paris – for the settlement of the Très Grande Bibliothèque.
Aug. 1989	Selection of architect Dominique Perrault by François Mitterrand, President of the French Republic, at the end of the competition. Jack Lang, Minister of Culture and Communication, announces that the idea of the caesura - namely the chronological partition of the collections between the Richelieu and Tolbiac libraries – is given up.
Dec.1989	Dominique Jamet is appointed President of the Etablissement public de la Bibliothèque nationale de France.
1990	Preliminary design and beginning of the draining and excavation works. First controversies about the architecture of the future library, especially about the four towers.
1991	Launch of the first invitations to tender.
1992	Last modifications concerning the distribution of storage areas: one third in the towers and two thirds in the basement. Beginning of the building of the shell.
1993	Completion of the concrete structure for the whole project and settlement of the first technical installations (electricity, air-conditioning system, plumbing)
January.1994	Decree establishing the birth of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.
1994	Completion of the waterproofing of the building: The library begins to take shape in the urban landscape of the Eastern side of Paris.
1995	Planting of the garden. The interior fitting-out start to be implemented. Completion of the reading rooms of the Research and Reference libraries
30 March1995	Inauguration of the building by François Mitterrand, President of the French Republic
1996	Implementation of furniture and signage elements. Implementation of the first collections. Autumn: opening to the readers and the public.
March1998 July	Beginning of the transfer of the collections from Richelieu, which will end in 1999
1998	Opening of the "rez-de-jardin", reserved for researchers

Publication



La Bibliothèque nationale de France - Dominique Perrault Portrait d'un projet 1988-1998

Under the direction of Frédéric Migayrou, deputy director of the National Museum of Modern Art, Pompidou

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Éditions HYX

Developing successively six thematic sections, this book presents the history and issues of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, from its design to its inauguration. Punctuated with over 700 images, it traces the adventure of a unique project which has become a symbol of Paris architecture. The numerous essays, interviews and original texts by architect Dominique Perrault offer the opportunity to explore all the facets of this architectural project, down to the slightest details of its construction, of its garden, interior fittings and elements of furniture.

Twenty years after the full public opening of the building, the book takes a fresh look on its inclusion in an architectural and political history then punctuated with controversies and intense debates.

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