

Beauvais: A White-clad Theater

The new Beauvaisis Theater is already considered by some to be the city's 3rd cathedral. But it is the white concrete envelope that really catches the eye.

Read this article in issue 88 of Béton[s] le Magazine.



The new Beauvais theater is already considered by some to be the city's 3rd cathedral. [©Eqiom]

Saint-Maximin stone is the material that characterizes the town of Beauvais, in the Oise region. Its light hue gives dimension to the Gothic cathedral of Saint-Pierre, as well as the Romanesque church of Saint-Etienne. Many of the city's buildings feature a similar color scheme, creating an urban unity.

The new Beauvaisis Theater is designed to fit into this environment, replacing an older, more modest venue. The plot is located on a fairly narrow street and faces small apartment buildings with a maximum floor area of R + 4. To give the site a breath of fresh air, architects François Chochon and David Joulin, associated with the firm AJC, quickly came up with the idea of

turning the building by just over 90° and moving the facades back from the property line. In this configuration, the main

entrance, now a walk-through, starts from a small planted esplanade.

With a capacity of 674 seats and a floor area of 1,150 m², the theater's main auditorium faces the street. At this point, its façade rises to a height of almost 28 m.

The concrete tells a story

To break up the building's massiveness, the architects played with its exterior forms: cut-aways, sloping walls, light-intake zones, and variations in height. All these elements create a rhythmic envelope that changes with the viewpoint and the light.

From the outset, concrete was the obvious choice. "With noise levels reaching 110 dB in the auditoriums, and the proximity of residential areas, it was essential to build an envelope with a very high level of inertia," explains David Joulin. The entire superstructure was cast in place. It was left unfinished, requiring lengthy preparation of formwork and molds. Demathieu & Bard, in charge of the works, did everything in his power to meet the architects' expectations. "We had a good working relationship."

Today, the casting is complete. The finishing phase is now underway, to smooth out any imperfections before applying the varnish... But the contract has been fulfilled, as David Joulin confirms: "Concrete also tells a story. The know-how of men."

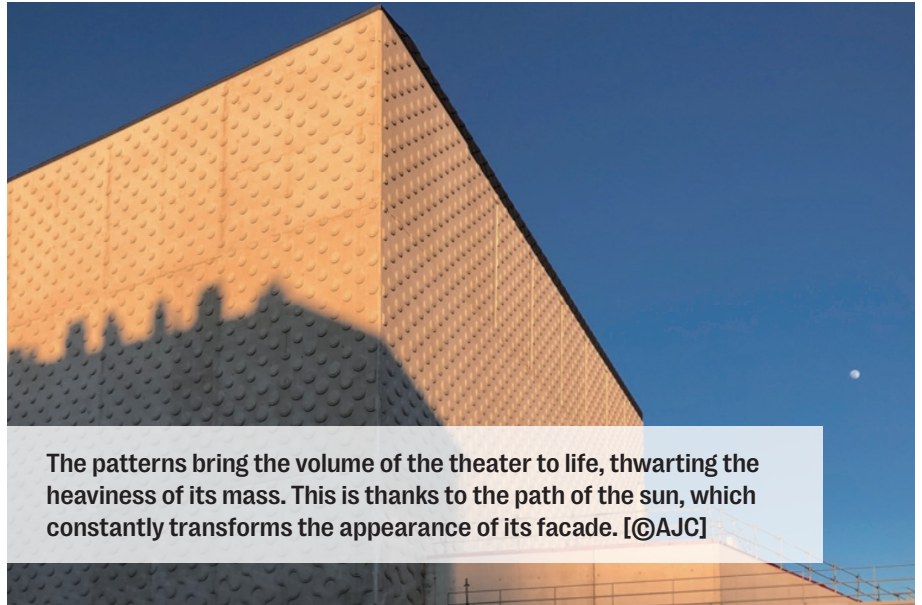


The new Beauvaisis Theater is set in an urban environment facing small apartment buildings with a maximum height of R + 4. [©AJC]

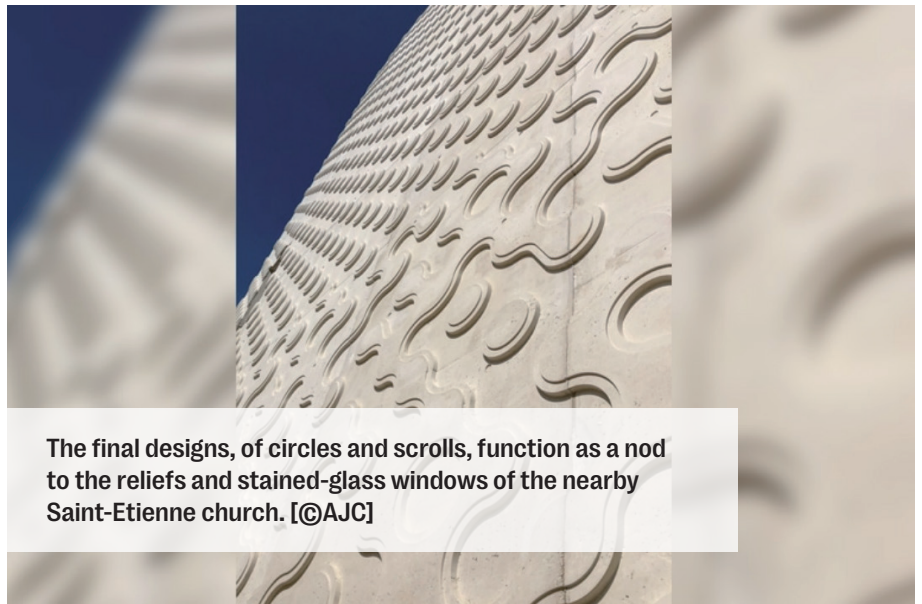
Do not get caught up in coloring gimmicks

Work on the concrete had already begun in the design phase. It was necessary to give the building a scale, even if unconsciously. "The motifs we implemented bring the volume of the Beauvaisis Theater to life, thwarting the heaviness of its mass. This is thanks to the path of the sun, which constantly transforms the appearance of the façade," explains David Joulin. The final designs, of circles and scrolls, function as a nod to the reliefs and stained-glass windows of the nearby Saint-Etienne church. Above all, they are organized according to an ascending progression. "We're moving from a solid material on the first floor to one that evaporates as it rises, helping to soften the power of the stage cage against the Beauvais sky..."

The other aspect of concrete is its color. In keeping with the color of the city, the result is a blend of white cement - CEM I from Aalborg Portland France - aggregates and sand. "We played with the proportions of the two sands used in our plant to obtain the right shade," concludes Guillaume Brossard, concrete project manager at Eqiom France. "We did not want to resort to artificial coloring." The manufacturer supplied almost 1,500 m³ of this specific concrete, out of a total of 4,500 m³.



The patterns bring the volume of the theater to life, thwarting the heaviness of its mass. This is thanks to the path of the sun, which constantly transforms the appearance of its facade. [©AJC]



The final designs, of circles and scrolls, function as a nod to the reliefs and stained-glass windows of the nearby Saint-Etienne church. [©AJC]



Concrete also tells a story. The know-how of men. [©AJC]