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Elke Mittmann

Jean-Yves Barrier. Architect, Designer, and Artist.
2005-2023

Jean-Yves Barrier. Architecte, Designer et Artiste.
2005-2023

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While the earlier presentation of the work by Jean-Yves Barrier published in 2009 under the title *Jean-Yves Barrier. Architect and Urbanist / Architecte et Urbaniste*, which documented the first 25 years of his practice, focused on architectural and urbanistic projects, this second volume presenting his work since the mid-2000s and dedicating, in addition to his architectural work, also to his artistic projects lets appear a further facet of his œuvre: the relationship between architecture and art.

This new volume also shows once again the astonishing variety of architectural typologies that Barrier deals with in his current œuvre. Whether it concerns residential buildings, collective housing, public facilities, urban design or functional buildings (such as supermarkets, an employment office or an engineering structure), Barrier never adopts a repetitive or doctrinaire attitude, but develops new solutions for each project, which can be found in his ideal »lexicon of constants«. This is particularly true for the permanent search for urban coherence for the most varied interventions: in city centres, in derelict industrial zones or in diffuse peri-urban spaces. Contemporary garden cities, condensed and compact assemblies, collages or the interweaving with what exists represent possibilities for Barrier to requalify and redevelop forgotten or abandoned urban situations with contemporary architecture. This is accompanied by the search to create urban signs and new networks in urban space.

But it is not only the city that serves him as an architectural projection screen, but also and in particular the manifold interplay between art, design and architecture, which is expressed in a specific method, an edifice of thoughts, which allows him to achieve a creative coherence on these various levels of scale and thus simultaneously connects different disciplines with each other. The recent emblematic achievement of this transdisciplinary approach is the youth hostel in Tours, delivered in 2019. This was a complete assignment in which the artistic approach and design are extended into the architecture: interior design, furniture, design objects and architecture are inseparably linked. Other projects, such as interventions in the urban space or landscape, are on the borderline between Land art and artwork.

Elke Mittmann is an art historian. She studied at the Universities Paris-IV-Sorbonne and Leipzig and holds a doctorate. She holds a doctorate in art history and a habilitation in architectural history. After working for many years at the Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau, she has been director of the Maison de l'architecture Centre-Val de Loire in Orléans since 2011 and is currently teaching at the École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Strasbourg.

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Elke Mittmann **Jean-Yves Barrier 2005-2023**

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Jean-Yves Barrier

Architect, Designer, and Artist

2005-2023



Alors que la précédente présentation de l'œuvre de Jean-Yves Barrier publiée en 2009 sous le titre *Jean-Yves Barrier. Architect and Urbanist / Architecte et Urbaniste*, qui documentait les 25 premières années de sa pratique, se concentrait sur des projets architecturaux et urbanistiques, ce second volume présentant son travail depuis le milieu des années 2000 et consacré, en plus de son travail architectural, à ses projets artistiques, laisse apparaître une autre facette de son œuvre: la relation entre l'architecture et l'art.

Ce nouvel ouvrage témoigne aussi à nouveau de la richesse étonnante de typologies abordées dans cette production récente de Barrier. Qu'il s'agisse des maisons individuelles, des immeubles collectifs ou des logements sociaux, des équipements publics, des aménagements urbains ou des bâtiments fonctionnels tels que des supermarchés, d'un pôle emploi ou d'un ouvrage d'art, l'approche de Barrier, n'est jamais répétitive ou doctrinaire, mais lui permet d'inventer pour chaque projet des solutions inédites issues d'un lexique de constantes caractérisant l'ensemble de son œuvre. C'est d'abord ses recherches pour redonner une cohérence urbaine à ses interventions les plus diverses; dans des centres villes, des sites industriels désaffectés ou des zones diffuses. C'est à travers des cités jardin contemporaines, des ensembles plus compacts, ou des collages et imbrications qu'il développe de véritables architectures de notre temps pour requalifier et réhabiliter des espaces oubliés. C'est aussi de concevoir des signaux urbains et d'imaginer de nouveaux maillages, visant à continuer l'écriture de la ville existante, qui caractérise son œuvre. Une fine lecture du territoire et du contexte paysager, urbain et architectural lui permet ensuite des réinterprétations des situations patrimoniales très souvent complexes pour inventer à partir de ces constats une architecture contemporaine.

Mais ce n'est pas que la ville qui lui sert d'écran de projection architecturale, mais surtout aussi l'interaction avec l'art et le design et l'architecture qui se manifeste à travers une méthode et une pensée permettant d'aborder avec cohérence toutes les échelles et de relier dans une seule œuvre plusieurs disciplines. La réalisation emblématique récente de cette démarche transdisciplinaire est l'Auberge de jeunesse de Tours, livré en 2019. C'était une mission complète dans laquelle l'approche artistique et le design se prolongent dans l'architecture: l'aménagement intérieur, les meubles, les objets de design et l'architecture y sont inséparablement liés. D'autres projets encore, tels que des interventions dans l'espace urbain ou paysager se situent à la lisière entre land art et œuvre d'art.

Elke Mittmann est historienne de l'art, diplômée de l'Université Paris-IV-Sorbonne et de l'Université de Leipzig. Elle détient un doctorat en histoire de l'art et une habilitation à diriger des recherches en histoire de l'architecture. Elle a travaillé pendant de nombreuses années à la Fondation Bauhaus à Dessau, dirige depuis 2011 la Maison de l'architecture Centre-Val de Loire à Orléans et enseigne aujourd'hui à l'École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Strasbourg.

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translated into English by
Andrew Ayers

Edition Axel Menges

Table of contents

| | |
|-----|---|
| 6 | Elke Mittmann: Introduction |
| 14 | Selected buildings, building projects and other works |
| 142 | Credits for the selected buildings, building projects and other works |
| 143 | Working team |
| 143 | Illustration credits |

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1. Jean-Yves Barrier, Piazza XVI Maggio, Ragusa, Sicily, 2012.
2. Jean-Yves Barrier, Saïd Sahbi Mosque, Kairouan, Tunisia, 2018.
3. Jean-Yves Barrier, the city wall of the medina of Sousse, Tunisia, 2018.
4. Poster for »L'Oreille qui voit«, 1974.
5. Stiff Ouessant radar tower. Original sketch by Jean Prouvé, 1978.
6. Sketch by Jean-Yves Barrier for Jean Prouvé.



Introduction

»For me, the architectural work is now identified with these things: there is a street in Seville made up of superimposed balconies, elevated bridges, stairs, noise, and silence, and it seems to recur in all my drawings. Here the search has ended; its object is the architecture it has rediscovered. This rediscovered architecture is part of our civic history. All gratuitous invention is removed: form and function are by now identified in the object; the object, whether part of the country or the city, is a relationship of things. There no longer exists purity of design, which is not also a recompositioning of all this, and in the end the artist can write, in Walter Benjamin's words, »Therefore I am deformed by connections with everything that surrounds me here.« The emergence of relations among things, more than the things themselves, always gives rise to new meanings.«¹

So wrote Italian architect Aldo Rossi in his 1981 book *A Scientific Autobiography* when describing his conceptual and methodical approach to architecture and his particular view of the city. In this sense, architecture can be understood not as an addition of solitary structures or iconic buildings but as constituting the entirety of the city, something that is intrinsically linked to the history and morphology of the existing urbanity. This »architecture retrouvée« is tied into the strata of history and can be interpreted as being in continuity with the extant city as a sort of »writing«, be it material or immaterial. The morphological, typological, formal, or structural traces that together form a collective memory are what compose the different articulations of this »writing of the city.«

Operating in an intrinsic dialogue with its surroundings, Jean-Yves Barrier's architecture resonates with respect to this reading of the city. His work can never be dissociated from its context, and always seeks to recount the present and future of a place, as though time were the primary condition for architecture to exist. Though architecture is what configures a given space, in Barrier's approach it also possesses the ability to exist in a more global sense at every scale of creation, covering the whole spectrum from the design object to urban form.

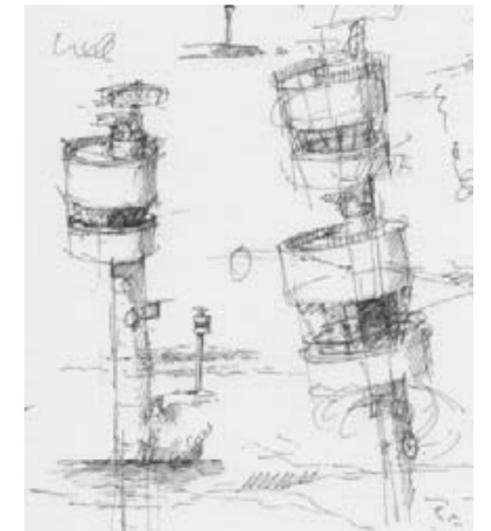
Following on from a previous volume, *Jean-Yves Barrier – Architect and Urbanist* (2009), which covered the first 25 years of his career, this book showcases Barrier's œuvre from 2005 until the present, with project descriptions of 25 new realizations. While the initial volume concentrated on the twin orientation of his work as both an architect and urbanist, the current one highlights another facet of his career, namely the interrelation between architecture and art.

A biographical overview

Nothing in Barrier's background predestined him for architecture. In 1966, he enrolled in the architecture section at the School of Fine Arts in Tours, but wanted to become a painter. Two years later he turned his attention to experimental theatre, a discipline he would continue to be involved with until the late 1970s, designing both sets and sound environments with the Théâtre de l'Utopie, as well as co-creating the sequential-art performance »L'Oreille qui voit« (1974) with the poet, author, and dramaturge Pierre Halet (1924–1996). In parallel, he became involved with the Atelier d'urbanisme de agglomerations de Tours (Tours Agglomeration Urban Workshop, or ATU), and pursued his calling as an artist, exhibiting his drawings and paintings all over France (Tours, Grenoble, Toulouse, and Monaco, among others) between 1974 and 1980. In 1977, his canvas *Les Javelots migrants* represented France at the Madrid Biennale and was acquired that same year by the National Sports Museum in Paris.

Barrier's return to architecture came through art, when in 1977 Halet offered him a plot of land in Chancay (Indre-et-Loire) to build a studio so he could indulge his passion for painting. This first built work, a solar house that adopted ecological principles long before they became the norm, won him an award in the 1979 housing competition organized by the French TV channel Antenne 2 and the French Environment Ministry.

This outline of Barrier's early career underlines the atypical path that led to his becoming an architect. Rather than following the classic curricu-



lum, he learnt architecture and urbanism through his involvement with ATU, from 1972 to 1982. At the time, the institution was directed by Jean-Claude Drouin (1933–2020), with whom Barrier realized his first important projects (among them a vacation centre for Radio France in Chançay, 1980–81), and took part in the call for ideas for the development of the eastern and western sectors of the 1989 Paris Universal Exhibition, in particular designing a pavilion for youth and technology (the exhibition was cancelled in 1983 for political reasons).² Drouin also introduced Barrier to Jean Prouvé (1901–1984), another major figure in his early career, and in 1978 he had the chance to execute drawings for Prouvé's final work, the Stiff radar tower on the Île d'Ouessant.

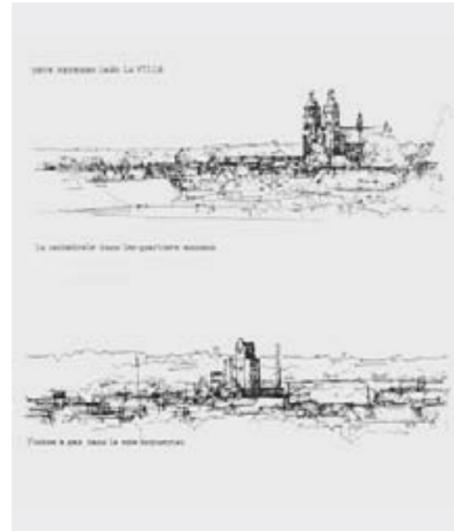
Around the same time (1981/82), Barrier took part in a project for the rehabilitation of a disused gasworks in the Tonnellé neighbourhood of Tours. This industrial landmark, with its soaring, 50 m-high reinforced-concrete profile, had been built by the architect Maurice Veillon in 1947–53, but after only ten years' service was closed – France was progressively halting industrial production in favour of natural gas, and by 1969 the plant had been entirely abandoned. Drouin proposed its conversion into an art centre, but it was not until the early 1980s that a firm brief was finally drawn up when the local authority decided to turn it into a centre for arts and technology and a contemporary-art museum, a project that, in 1982, was made part of the programme for the development of artistic creation set up by the then culture minister, Jack Lang. In a series of drawings and sketches, Barrier explored the urban character of this concrete monument, highlighting its silhouette and bringing out its character as a second major landmark in the city of Tours alongside the cathedral.

Following these first projects, which gained wide-scale attention at a national level, and his official recognition as an architect in January 1981, Barrier won the 1983 commission for 27 pieces of railway infrastructure on the new TGV Atlantique line between Paris and Tours. Passing through several protected landscapes, this stretch of track includes Barrier's astonishing Loire crossing at

Vouvray, completed in 1989. Again in 1983, he won a special mention from the jury of *Le Moniteur's* Prize for a First Work (awarded to young architects for their first building) for his multi-function hall in Chançay. Among the jurors was Renzo Piano, who recognized Barrier's apposite sense of proportions and use of regulating lines, which has proved to be a defining characteristic of his œuvre ever since.

Following these promising débuts, Barrier founded his architecture office in 1985 in Tours. A global approach to architecture and urbanity has always been a defining characteristic of his œuvre: designed for its specific context, his work provides landmarks that allow for a sense of place in rural or suburban settings, while in urban situations his architecture organizes and configures space in such a way as to ensure continuity of the »writing« of the city, in the sense implied by Aldo Rossi. Emblematic of this approach are Barrier's interventions at Saint-Pierre-des-Corps (Indre-et-Loire): winner of the 1988 competition for the re-development of the town centre, he designed a major ensemble comprising a municipal library, a social and cultural centre, and a concert hall and auditorium. Completed in 1996, the complex is currently the subject of a bid for historic-monument status. In the same period, Barrier extended Saint-Pierre's Line-Porcher school, which won him a nomination for the 1991 Équerre d'argent (France's most prestigious architecture prize), and he would later design the layout of Saint-Pierre's Avenue Jean-Bonnin (2000).

While developing his ideas of an »urban architecture«, Barrier was also experimenting with the possibilities of domotics, in particular at his own home in Chambray-lès-Tours (Indre-et-Loire, 1988–90), where all the electrical systems are connected to a central computer and can be programmed via remote control or by Internet. The house was also an experiment in new ways of living, featuring a »sound« or »communication« space, designed for watching films and listening to music in ideal conditions, and a »health space« next to the bathroom that is fitted out with balneotherapy equipment and a large glazed bay that



7. Multi-purpose hall and fire brigade garage in Chançay, 1983.

8, 9. Project to transform the gasworks into a centre for scientific and technical culture, Tours. culture centre, Tours. Sketch and model. Atelier d'urbanisme, 1982.

10. Extension of the École Line Porcher, Saint-Pierre-des-Corps, 1990/91.

11. Saint-Pierre-des-Corps festival hall, 1993.

12. Avenue Jean Bonnin, Saint-Pierre-des-Corps, 1994–99.

13. Carrefour de l'Hippodrome, Chambray-lès-Tours, 1988/89.



allows sunlight to pour in. Bioclimatic principles also guided the house's design, with north-south orientation, a timber frame, and abundant glass, thereby ensuring plentiful daylight and a sense of warmth.

As of the early 90s, Barrier's œuvre began to include artistic interventions that sought to bring a new identity to public spaces. Among them were the Carrefour de l'Hippodrome in Chambray-lès-Tours, which earned him the 1993 »Ruban d'or« (Gold Ribbon), awarded by the Ministère de l'Équipement, des Transports et du Tourisme, or his project for the street-lighting of Saint-Pierre-des-Corps, which earned him the 1995 »Ville Phare« national prize from the Académie nationale des arts de la rue.

Also in 1993, he met the American architect Peter Eisenman (born in 1932) in the context of an international competition for a new centre for contemporary creation in Tours. As his architect of record,³ Barrier discovered Eisenman's work, which at the time was concerned with notions of deconstruction, fragmentation, fractal geometry, and folding.

Since the late 1990s, Barrier has worked extensively on housing, building his first ensemble of dwellings in Paris (Bercy) in 1993–96 and a series of houses in Rennes as well as the Amiraute apartment building (1996–2000). Rennes is also home to his extraordinary Salvatierra block, which in 2004 earned him the Habitat solaire, habitat d'aujourd'hui (contemporary solar dwelling) award from Observ'ER (the Observatoire des énergies renouvelables, or Observatory for Renewable Energy). Realized as part of the European Commission's CEPHEUS programme (Cost Efficient Passive House as European Standard), which was launched in 2004 to build, evaluate, and promote low-energy housing prototypes, Salvatierra stood out through its use of ecological materials. Realized with a lean reinforced-concrete frame, the building is clad in blocks of cob – a mixture of earth and straw – that ensure stable temperatures thanks to their high thermal inertia.

Barrier has also won awards for the shopping centres he has built in heritage areas, for example Blanc Carroi at the edge of Chinon, which earned him the 2008 trophy in the eighth national com-

petition for the best Entrée de ville (town entry), awarded by the Ligue urbaine et rurale (Urban and Rural League), or the 2010 trophy for the creation of business and commercial parks awarded by the CNCC (Conseil national des centres commerciaux, or National Council for Shopping Centres). That same year he completed another emblematic project in Chinon, the »vertical link«, an urban elevator that connects the lower and upper towns, thereby redefining this sector of old Chinon, dominated by its royal castle, by setting up a surprising dialogue with the historic fabric.

Barrier's search for a dialogue with context does not only apply to the built heritage but also to topography and other geographic specificities, as is the case for a certain number of projects he realized in Saint-Pierre-des-Corps, among them housing in a flood-prone zone.⁴ His structural and architectural solutions at Les Jardins Boileau (2010–13) and the Maison Lunais were hailed at a national level when they were listed in the Environment and Housing Ministries' 2016 Grand Prix d'aménagement (development prize), whose theme that year was »How to build better in flood-prone construction zones.« In 2019, Cap 55, an office building in Saint-Pierre-des-Corps, won the Pyramide d'argent (silver pyramid), awarded by the Fédération des promoteurs immobiliers de France (FPI, or Federation of French Real-Estate Developers).

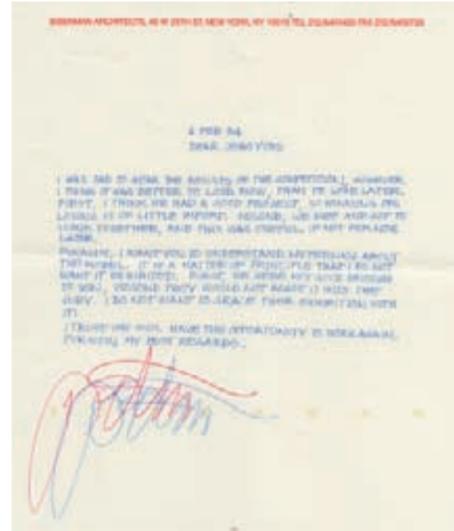
This brief overview of Barrier's career, which mentions but a small part of his output since the 1970s, shows all the structural and architectural inventiveness of his work, as well as the extraordinary variety of typologies to which he has turned his attention over the years.

An œuvre of diversity

»Producing an architecture for today means working within the paradigms of our epoch«, says Barrier with respect to his way of thinking and designing. In this constant effort to reflect the Zeitgeist, his approach, whatever the typology or context – detached homes, collective housing, social dwell-

ings, public facilities, urban developments, or utilitarian structures such as supermarkets, employment offices, or engineering infrastructure – is never repetitive or doctrinaire, but allows him the liberty to produce innovative solutions for each project. On the other hand, a careful reading of the territory and the context – be it from the point of view of landscape, urbanism, or architecture – allows him to reinterpret what are often complex historical situations, using his observations to invent or update an architecture that seeks to dialogue with its surroundings with a view to bringing out the best in them. Barrier also strives to renew the coherence of the urban situations in which he intervenes, be they town centres, abandoned industrial sites, or loosely developed peripheral zones, which he redefines and rehabilitates through typologies such as contemporary garden cities (Les Brandons in Blainville-sur-Orne (Calvados, 2000–07)), or the compact and dense housing ensembles he built at the Papeteries de Bretagne redevelopment site (Rennes, 2006–13).

Not only do architecture and urbanism fuse in Barrier's approach, he also connects art, design, and architecture according to a method and a way of thinking that allow every scale to be coherently tackled, uniting several disciplines in the same work. Among his recent realizations, the most emblematic example of this transdisciplinary approach is his 2016–19 youth hostel in Tours, where he was given full rein to combine art, design, and architecture in one project: the interior décor, the furniture, the objects, and the building itself are all indissociably linked. Meanwhile, other projects, such as his interventions in public space or the landscape, are located at the border between land art and artwork *tout court*, as demonstrated by the *Coquepicots* on the Carrefour de l'Hippodrome in Chambray-lès-Tours (2015–17), an updating of a project initially realized in the late 1980s. Moreover, the *Coquepicots* harks back to Barrier's first experiences in the world of theatre, since it literally stage manages the loose urban periphery in which it is located, a place that was devoid of urban cues from which to draw.



- 14. Centre de création contemporaine Tours competition, with Peter Eisenman.
- 15. Letter from Peter Eisenman to Jean-Yves Barrier.
- 16. Apartment building in Bercy, Paris, 1993–96.
- 17. Résidence Salvatierra, Rennes, 1998–2001.
- 18. Résidence l'Amirauté, Rennes, 1996–2000.



It can be said that Barrier's œuvre contains the idea of an »architecture retrouvée«, in the sense that each project seeks to go back to architecture's universal foundations. Form or image are secondary concerns to Barrier, his primary interest being architecture's essential principles, which he reinterprets with multiple variations in each of his projects, using a lexicon of constants that seems to define the very essence of each realization.

Regulating lines – the quest for perfect proportions

A recurring feature in Barrier's methodological lexicon is the search for perfect harmonies through the use of regulating lines. In this quest for balanced proportions, the whole is united with the parts, since he seeks to create harmonic relationships between each component of the building. This approach has a long history going back to classical antiquity, where regulating lines governed the proportions of temples (e.g. the Temple of Po-

seidon in Paestum, 430 BCE), and continued into the Romanesque era (the Abbey of Saint-Étienne de Marmoutier, 11th century CE), the Gothic period (Cologne Cathedral), the Renaissance (Alberti's Palazzo Rucellai in Florence, c. 1455, or Palladio's Villa Foscari in the Veneto, c. 1560) and on into the 17th century (François Blondel's Porte Saint-Denis in Paris, 1671–73), not to mention in Ottoman mosques or Hindu temples, to give just a few emblematic examples. While regulating lines regained a certain importance in the 19th century, particularly in the ideas of Frenchman Auguste Choisy (1841–1909) and German architect August Thiersch (1843–1917), it was in the early 20th century that they would be introduced into Modern architecture by Le Corbusier (e.g. the Villa Stein de Monzie, Garches, 1927).

As a method, regulating lines are based in the use of triangles and rectangles to determine the proportions of a building. »The regulating line is a satisfaction of a spiritual order that leads to the pursuit of ingenious and harmonious relations. It confers on the work the quality of eurythmy«, wrote Le Corbusier in 1923.⁵ This approach, which

moreover seeks to establish a cadence and rhythm in the built work, is one of the oldest systems of architectural design, and it could be said that to a certain degree Barrier connects the entirety of his oeuvre to this rich history, and in doing so links each of his buildings to the very origins of architecture. Numbers, geometries, and measurements are for him the tools that allow regulating lines to be established, with units, halves, thirds, quarters, fifths, and the golden section coming together to create arithmetical relationships that create a harmony of proportions. Such an approach allows all the parts of a building to be related both to each other and to the whole, as well as establishing a proportional relationship between the building and its surroundings. The result of this geometric »exercise«, which Barrier renews with each project, is perfect visual cohesion.

To put it another way, Barrier's mastery of proportions allows him to objectify the forms he produces. In this sense, form is not the starting point for the creative act, but the consequence of many factors, among them the search for a harmony of proportions, which often leads him to the simplest geometric form, as can be seen in many of his schemes, among them the industrial kitchen in Rennes (1994–96) or his recent design for a Leclerc supermarket in Fondettes (Indre-et-Loire).

The fold – a form of resistance

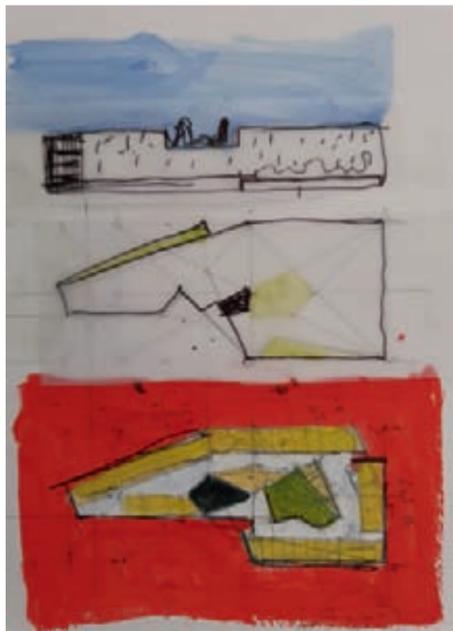
Another constant in Barrier's work is the fold, which he uses both geometrically and structurally. In the second half of the 20th century, and in particular the 1980s and 90s, the fold became a recurring architectural feature all around the world, used, for example, by Walter Netsch at the United States (Saudi Arabia, 1999). But it was above all Peter Eisenman who, as of the 1990s, developed an architectural approach to the fold based on the philosophical concepts set forth by Gilles Deleuze.⁶ In Eisenman's approach, folding became a system of spatial differentiation linked to

themes of continuity and infinite formal variation, with repetitive operations of folding giving rise to singular formal results.

Even though Barrier worked with Eisenman in 1992–93, at a time when the American architect was experimenting with and developing his idea of the fold in architecture (as can be seen in their competition entry for the Centre de création contemporaine Tours, he uses folding as a structural, regulating, and formal device. Eisenman, on the other hand, uses the geometric form of the grid as the departure point for the act of folding, a method akin to a conceptual protocol established at the beginning of the design process.

For Barrier, folding is a way to manipulate solid matter and dissolve mass into lightness, the fold creating internal tensions of traction and compression that allow a reduction in envelope thickness. A vector of weightlessness, the fold also produces a sense of movement that dynamizes and diversifies the façade, giving it both a coherent image and its own, recognisable identity. He first used the approach in 1993 at the library in Saint-Pierre-des-Corps, where the folding of the upper windows allows better light penetration, all the while accentuating the structural aspect of this ring of glazing.

Not merely an architectural form in Barrier's oeuvre, the fold is in fact a fundamental, transversal tool for designing at every scale. This globality of the fold in his work can be seen in particular as of 2008, when he began producing design objects that allowed him to explore the relationship between art and architecture. In 2010 he launched the wall-shelf range Tol'Pli and the Tol'Rigami lamp, which he followed in 2012 with Bi'Pli, an ingenious modular system of folded sheet-metal book ends that slot into horizontal slabs to form freestanding shelves. His experiments with folding also allowed him to generate artworks such as his *Nomad* sculpture, shown in the 2015 »Archi-Sculpture« exhibition at the Villa Datriis, a contemporary sculpture centre in L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue (Vaucluse). Barrier has also used folding in inte-



19. Study sketch of a building complex, 2019.
20. Study sketch for a graphic work, 2019.
21. Tol'Rigami lamp, 2010.
22. Rotonde of the municipal library of Saint-Pierre-des-Corps, 1993.
23. Leclerc de Fondettes shopping centre, Fondettes, 2015/16.

¹ Aldo Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography*, Oppositions Books, 1981, p.19.

² With this new World's Fair, which was announced in 1981 with the theme »The paths of freedom: a project for the third millennium«, France was planning to remodel the banks of the Seine in Paris to celebrate both the bicentenary of the French Revolution and the centenary of the 1889 Exposition Universelle. See Denis Fainsilber, »Quand la France torpillait son Exposition universelle«, *Les Échos*, 5 March 2016, <https://www.lesechos.fr/2016/03/quand-la-france-torpillait-son-exposition-universelle-204379>

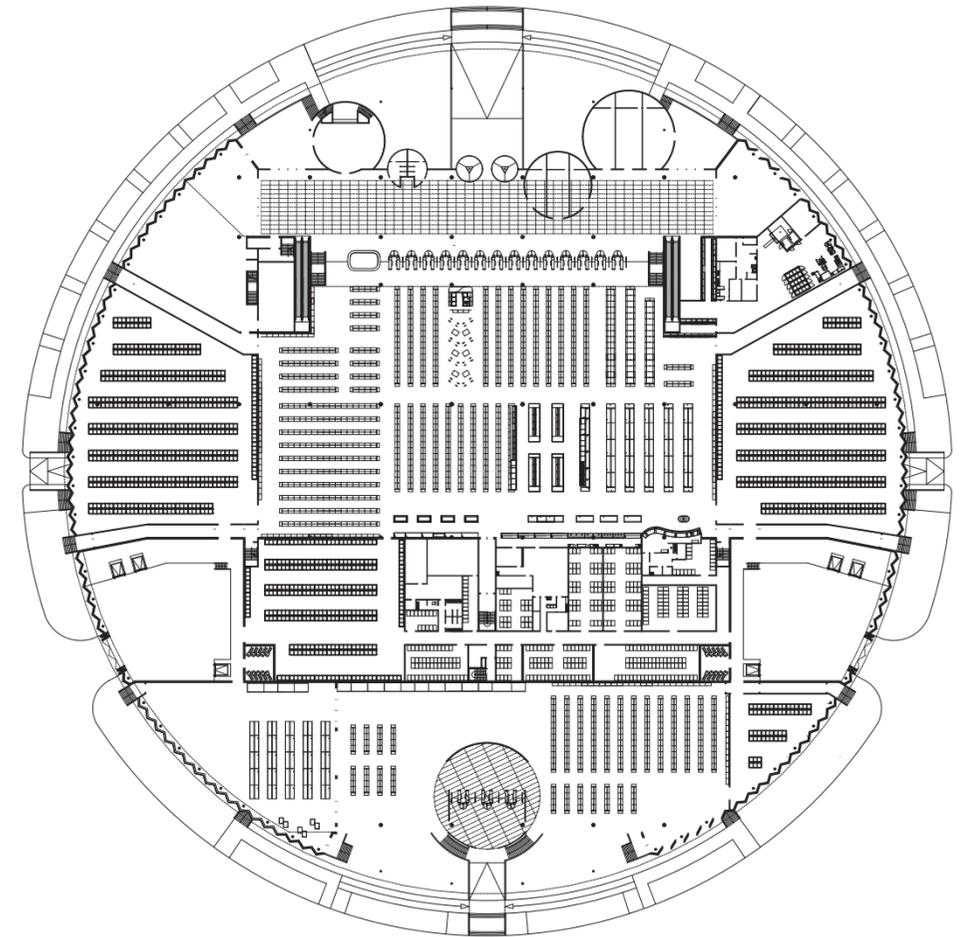
³ Among those taking part were COOP Himmelb(l)au, Claude Parent, Rem Koolhaas, Daniel Libeskind, and Peter Eisenman.

⁴ Saint-Pierre-des-Corps is located on a sand bar between the Rivers Loire and Cher, and is at high risk of flooding.

⁵ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 1923.

⁶ See Gilles Deleuze, *Le pli. Leibniz et le baroque*, Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1988.

⁷ Karl Bötticher, *Lehre der tektonischen Grundformen. Dorische, ionische und korinthische Bauweise*, Berlin, 1874, p. 5.



rior design, such as in the monumental staircase at the Audilab HQ in Saint-Pierre-des-Corps (2017 to 2021), which features the installation of 7/7 made up of folded disks suspended from the ceiling, and in his work in public space, such as the 552 *Coquepicots* he installed on the Carrefour de l'Hippodrome in Chambray-lès-Tours.

While the fold, thanks to its modularity and repetitive capacity, occupies a transversal position that embraces every scale of creation in Barrier's oeuvre, it is also inherently linked to the structural approach in his architecture, the goal being to make visible the structural logic of each project, all the while ensuring an economy of means. This logic leads, in turn, to another constant in his work, namely the rational use of materials and textures for their intrinsic properties. The specific materiality of Barrier's buildings is highlighted in a methodical approach that leads to the final architectural form. One could go so far as to quote the German architect Karl Bötticher, who in 1874 wrote that »knowledge of the structural logic of a material allows understanding of the different parts of the building, its form, and the organization of its spaces.«⁷ To describe the capacity materials, have to generate and configure architectural space and form, Bötticher used the term *Tektonik* (tectonics), which refers not only to the word's »constructive« meaning (according to its Greek etymology) or its geological use, but is the origin of another way of understanding architecture that

one might define as »form follows tectonics.« Even if Bötticher's theoretical ideas might at first seem rather far from Barrier's general preoccupations, they are in fact central to them, because the intrinsic properties of materials and their structural logic are a major component in his architectural design process.

All the approaches described above, be it the desire to continue the writing of the city, the recourse to regulating lines, the use of folds, or a »realist« attitude towards materials and structure combine in Barrier's design process, literally »condensing« in each of his projects, thereby demonstrating that for him architecture is not about creating forms or beautiful images but a methodical process that, through these constants, allows a new architectural solution to be found for each given programme. In this sense, Barrier's multifaceted oeuvre is entirely unique, and resists all attempts at classification.

Headquarters for the Ouest France editorial team, Île de Nantes, Nantes, Loire-Atlantique, 2006–08

Located in the waters of the Loire in central Nantes, the Île de Nantes (originally several smaller islands) has been the site of a vast urban-regeneration operation since the 1990s. After a process of deindustrialization saw its shipbuilding activities cease in the 1980s, the city began planning the cultural recovery of this abandoned heritage, setting out to transform the island into a new neighbourhood while preserving the memory of its maritime and industrial past.

In the late 1990s, based on a careful reading of the terrain, the architects/landscape designers Alexandre Chemetoff and Jean-Louis Berthomieu drew up a masterplan for the island that sought an urban diversity in which «everything is possible.» A first «landmark» came in 2000 with the building of Jean Nouvel's new courthouse, after which the construction on the very same quayside of Jean-Yves Barrier's headquarters for *Ouest France*, in 2006–08, marked a second major step in the Île de Nantes regeneration scheme.

The programme is divided between two buildings separated into three distinct volumes. The first building houses the *Ouest France* group's editorial team in offices of 3,200 m², while the second, the 5,300 m² Le Rhuys, which was acquired by Mado France, contains office space for: the Nantes teams of Radio France (France Bleu Loire Océan); the Ministry of Justice (the commercial court and district judges); the headquarters of Samoa (the Société d'aménagement de la métropole ouest-atlantique de l'Île de Nantes); and Moniteur Ouest. In this way, a true media hub has been created, bringing together press, radio and television under one roof.

In their masterplan, Chemetoff and Berthomieu sought both to make the quayside publicly accessible and to create new thoroughfares that would open up views and perspectives onto the Loire. Barrier's project fully takes on board these ideas of placemaking. To open up views towards the river, he traced out a thoroughfare that would become the principal axis of the project, with the main parts of the complex located on either side. Wedge-shaped in plan, Le Rhuys develops horizontally oriented façades on both the river front and along almost the entire length of this new street. The Ouest France wing, meanwhile, more vertical and compact, acts as an urban marker on the river, but also develops accommodation behind, thereby defining the other side of the new thoroughfare and making of it a true urban street. Even if the latter physically separates the two structures, it is also what unifies them, by creating a continuous line between their bases, which anchor them to the ground.

This «common base» between the two main volumes gives way to a more complex dialogue above, inherited from classic Modernism, where a tension between verticals and horizontals brings about a sensation of harmony and balance: for each horizontal there is always a corresponding vertical. This principle is also reflected in the way the two façades are structured: the quasi-dematerialization of the first three floors of the Ouest France building – thanks to the dynamic and almost frenetic rhythm of its close-spaced, vertical-

ly oriented windows, which are incorporated into a folded building envelope – is matched by the three floors of Le Rhuys whose fenestration is slower in rhythm and more widely spaced, as well as being set flush with the envelope, resulting in a flat and almost monolithic surface. The third volume, a prolongation of Le Rhuys, exhibits an even more pronounced dematerialization, because the concrete structure becomes a «façade» thanks to its twelve giant square bays.

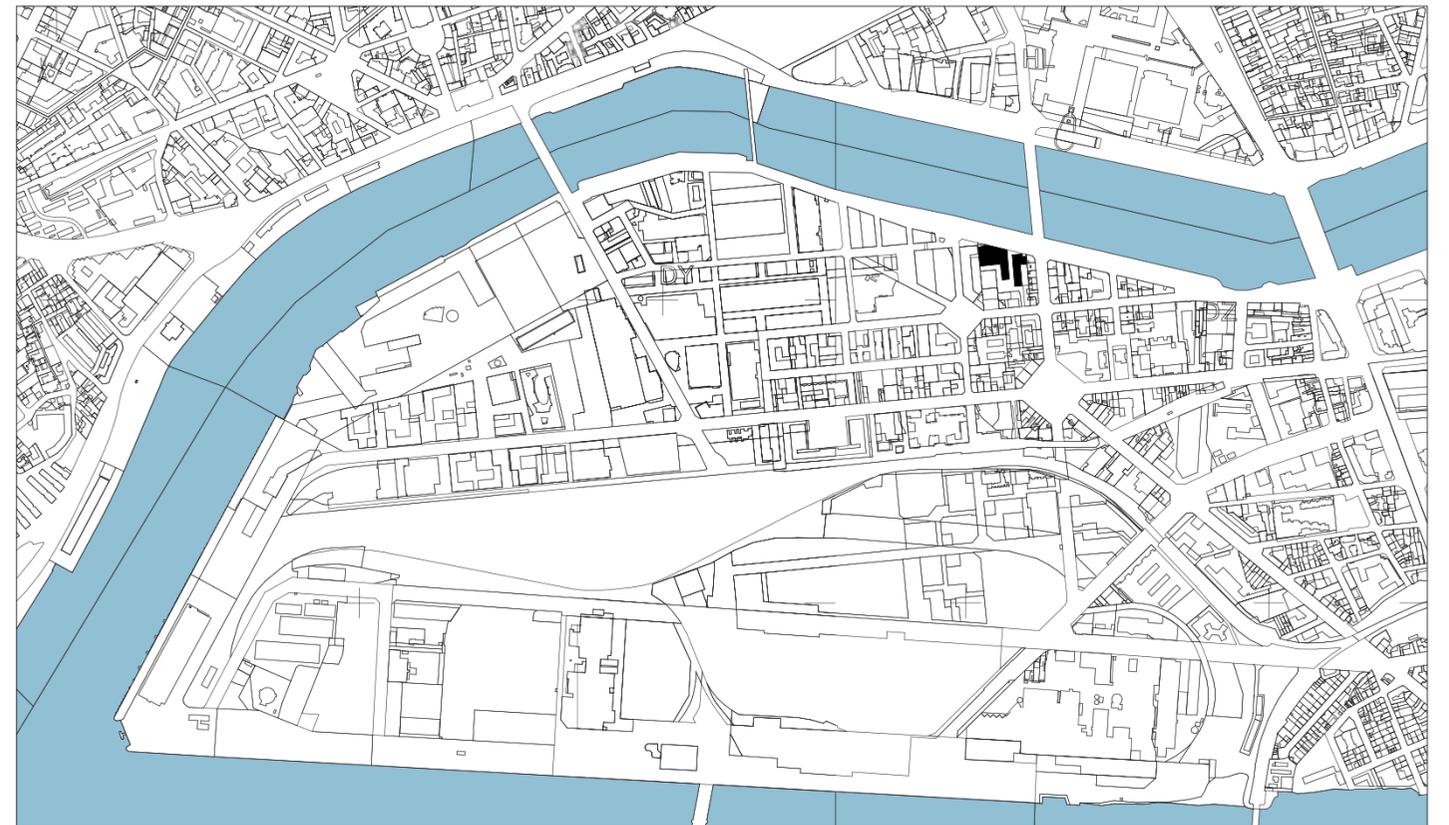
This desire to achieve balance is also found in the way the building is integrated into its immediate environment, since the three-part vertical façade division (base, standard floors, roof) of a neighbouring 19th-century building is reproduced in the elevations of the adjacent Ouest France block: a base, a central section and an attic floor repeat this cadence of urban verticality, the string courses of the existing edifice continuing naturally into the new volumes. As in all of Barrier's buildings, the architecture has been carefully designed so that perfectly drawn lines anchor the whole as a tightly controlled mass in the urban context.

From the outside envelope to the interior spaces, the desire to design every detail by hand in an almost Miesian spirit – the shutter boxes, the solar-panel structure on the roof, the layout and proportions of modules, the vents, cables, etc. – forms a sort of «invisible» layer that creates a harmonious and well-proportioned relationship between each part and each detail. Perhaps the most interesting thing to point out here is that all this complexity was already present in the first sketch for the project, drawn up in October 2002: elevations, proportions, the general morphology and the choice of colours. But the project isn't just the result of formal or functional considerations, for it is also the metaphorical transposition of the image of a newspaper: the black volumes correspond to printing ink while the concertinaed façades evoke the folded paper of a broadsheet.

While this kind of balancing act is a constant in Barrier's œuvre, the Ouest France building stands out in the subtle handling of light and materials as well as in the search for a structural solution that is unique to each project. Here, the waterside site led him to respond to the river's changing light and the reflections from its surface. A dialogue with this environment begins structurally, thanks to the vast glazed openings that allow maximum river views while framing the architectural and urban panorama of the opposite bank in an almost photographic manner. Where materials and construction are concerned, the Ouest France wing enjoys particularly luminous interiors thanks to the use of Danpalon, a polycarbonate that reflects the river's sparkling colours by day but at night is translucent, turning the structure into a giant magic lantern that finds itself with an abstract double reflected in the Loire. The effect is reinforced by the fact that the polycarbonate is corrugated, thereby multiplying the almost prismatic reflections of the light and helping to make the ensemble a strong presence in the cityscape – a landmark and perhaps even a contemporary monument in this new neighbourhood of Nantes.

1. Main façade facing the Loire.
2. Site plan.

- pp.16, 17
- 3, 4. Exterior views.
5. Stub road between the two parts of the property.





Blanc Carroi shopping centre, Chinon, Indre-et-Loire, 2007–14

Located in the La Plaine Des Vaux redevelopment sector, between the old town of Chinon and the Chinonaise Forest, the Blanc Carroi shopping centre is home to a Leclerc hypermarket, a Bricomarché hardware store, various other small and medium-sized retail spaces, as well as a petrol station and a drive-in restaurant. It is situated within the perimeter established by UNESCO in 2000 when it declared the Val de Loire a World Heritage Site. As a result, the architectural approach seeks to merge this retail zone into the surrounding landscape by evoking a clearing in the forest, with abundant light at the centre and shadow at the edges, close to the trees.

Among other recommendations, UNESCO prohibited large commercial signs and billboards, which reinforced the idea of integrating them completely into the façade so that they would »disappear« when seen from afar and »reappear« as you move closer – an ambiguous approach to advertising that makes it an integral part of the architecture. Going beyond the paradigms and new archetypes of the »decorated« shed and the »duck«, as theorized by the architects Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi in the 1970s with respect to emerging typologies of retail construction, the Blanc Carroi shopping centre proposes a new approach that plays on different scales of vision, billboards and other forms of advertising becoming purely architectural features. This is achieved using a double façade into which the billboard is entirely integrated, allowing it to appear in a »filtered« manner, like a watermark, thanks to polycarbonate panels and a grid structure with huge expanses of glazing. There is a certain abstraction

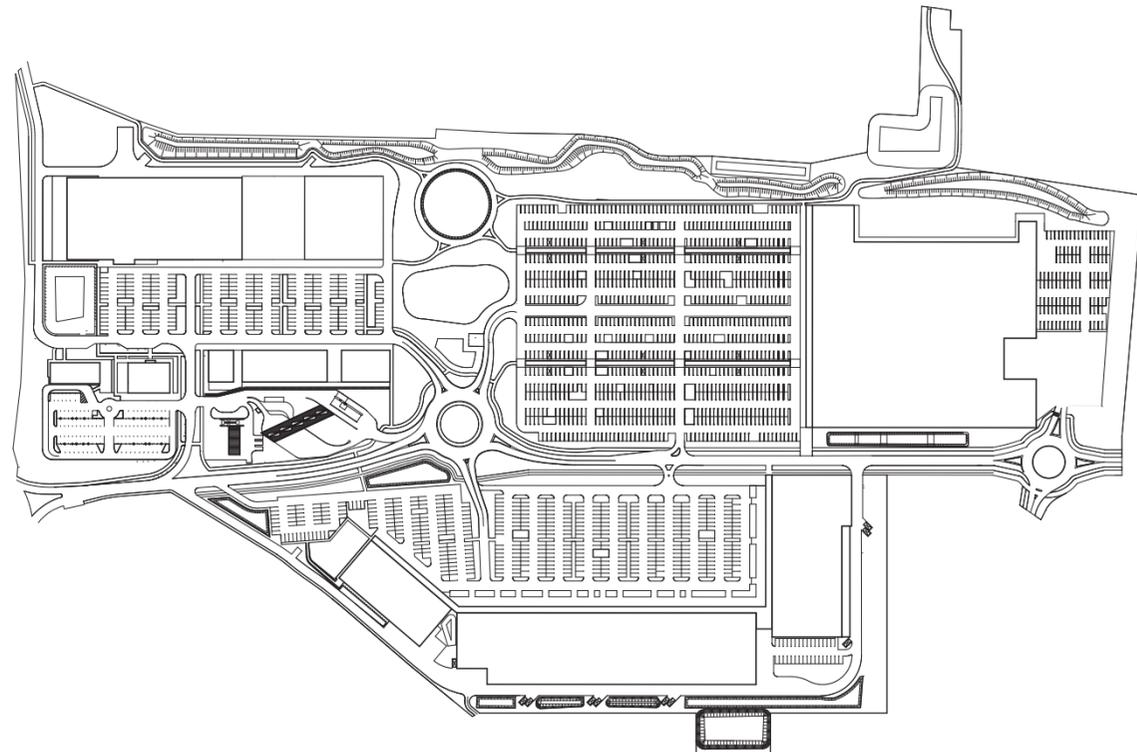
in the result, as though the billboard is partly disconnected from its advertising function. All along the façade, a succession of advertising panels can be read in different ways depending whether they are seen from a moving car or from the point of view of the pedestrian. The choice of colours – black for the building's base and translucent polycarbonate for the upper part – recalls the contrast between the light-hued stone and the dark slate traditionally used for construction in the region.

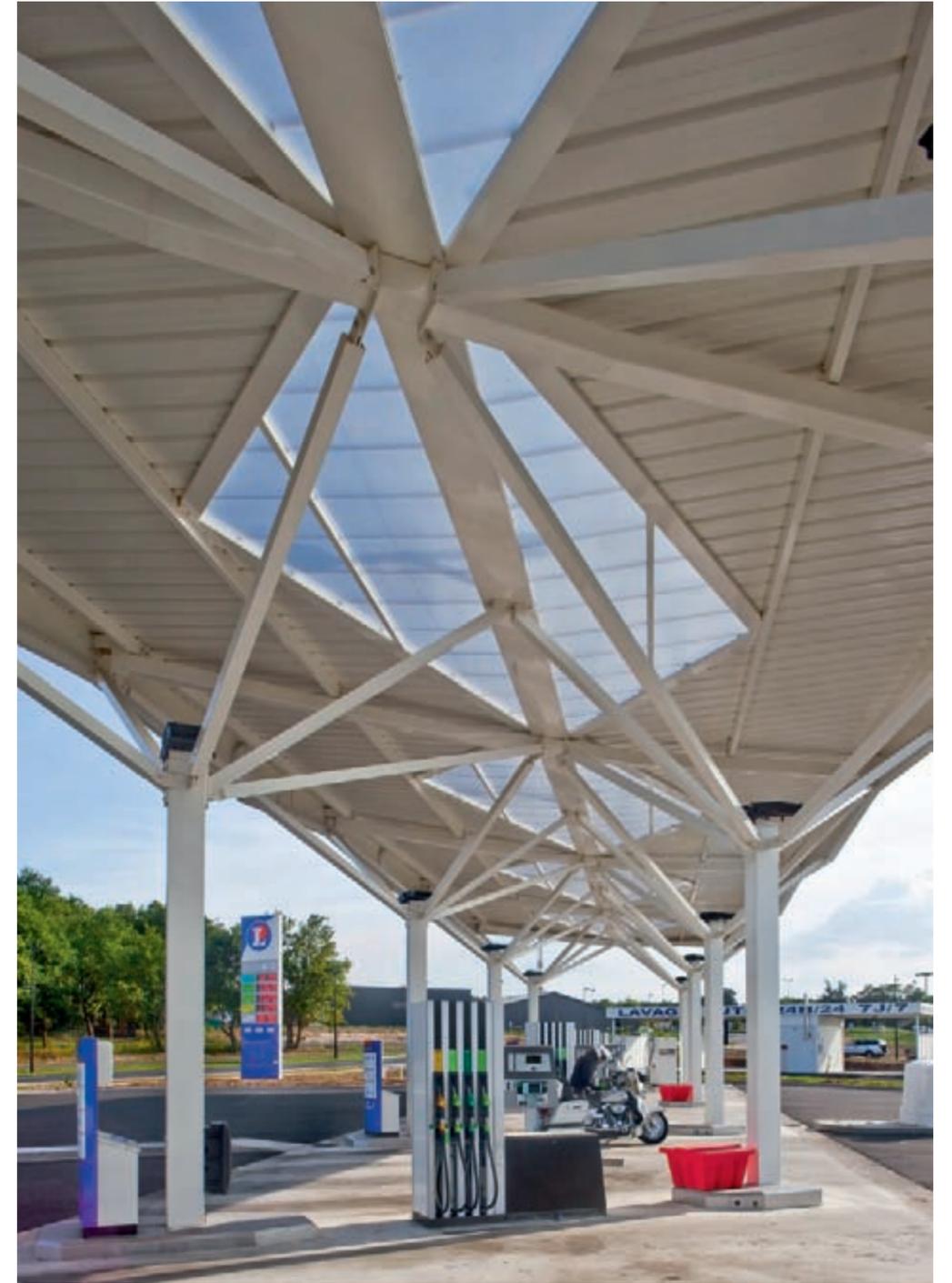
The shopping centre's three parts are linked by a roundabout. On each side we find a building with an adjoining car park, planned on a perfect grid, thereby expressing a search for neutrality and abstraction in the structuring of the plan and the design of the buildings. Moreover, the grid helps to compensate for the sloping ground, and is highlighted by certain architectural features, such as the metal drain pipes, which also visually balance this change in level by establishing a continuous, abstract building line across space.

The grid structures not only the plan but also the rest of the architecture, in particular the arcades. This internal street, which links the different buildings, makes the grid manifest via a series of repeating metal columns. As in most of Barrier's projects, metal is not used in a purely structural or technical way, since it is also an integral part of the architectural design. Here it takes on a tectonic aspect: the structure needs no cladding but instead generates an elegance and lightness of form, as well as a texture and a volume – in other words, structure becomes architecture in a Miesian sense, the one indivisible from the other.

The Blanc Carroi shopping centre was awarded the 2010 trophy in the eighth Concours National des Entrées de Ville.

1. Site plan.
2. Double façades protecting the walkway.
3. The walkway.





Leclerc de Fondettes shopping centre, Fondettes Indre-et-Loire, 2015/16, project

In 2015, looking to expand, the Centre Leclerc in Fondettes decided to construct a new building at the northern edge of the *commune*, near a residential neighbourhood, on a plot of land located between a light-industrial zone and the site of future large amenities. This new shopping centre will provide 5,000 m² of retail space as well as all the infrastructure needed for logistics, delivery and parking. The main entrance will be sited in the axis of the large roundabout that leads into Fondettes, and all the shops will face towards the historic centre. Meanwhile, at the building's rear, there will be a landscaped park with rainwater-retention pools.

Given the lack of a pertinent architectural context, and because of the shopping centre's size, visibility and impact on the environment, the goal was to create a new landmark, an urban sign, a monument even. In reaction to these parameters, Barrier opted for a simple, autonomous form, a perfect circle with a simple curved façade, which will allow all the shopping centre's activities to be contained in one single volume – circulation, storage, service courtyards, technical spaces and everything else needed to ensure the functioning of a large commercial outfit.

The circular form is highly unusual for this kind of programme, which is usually housed in a simple rectangular box, demonstrating that the architectural choice does not simply follow a functional flow chart but determines the organization of the interior and its relationship to the exterior. This is manifest in the plan, reminiscent of an electronic circuit board, the circle becoming a sort of »spatial

discipline« that governs technical functioning and the flow of goods and people round the centre. Not only formal and functional, this choice is also ecological, since the 2016 ALUR law stipulates that building footprints must be kept to a minimum to prevent urban sprawl. As a result, 80% of the parking will be located in the basement.

The perfect circle also recalls an urban archetype, the fortified village, which was hermetically sealed against the exterior and concentrated a multitude of activities inside. All of the shops and retail space, but also all the infrastructure (escalators, travellers and footbridges), as well as the administrative spaces with their patios and relaxation areas, constitute, just like the medieval village, an »urban settlement.«

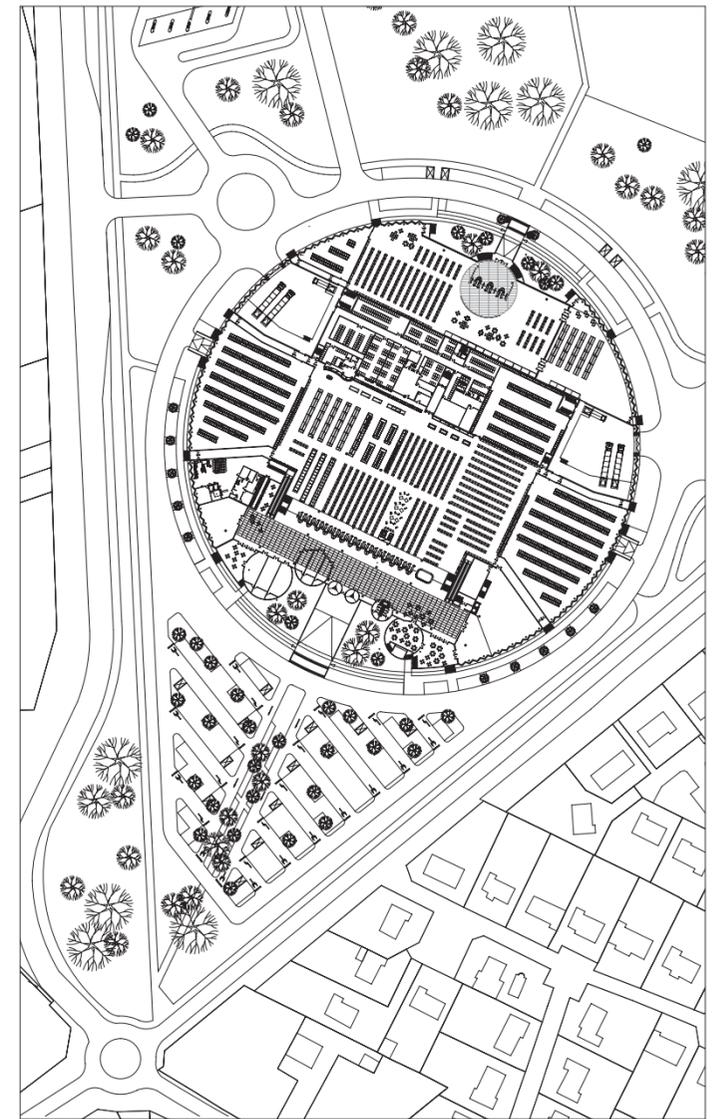
Even if treated as an envelope wrapped round the building, the façade isn't simply a membrane separating outside from in, but, as always in Barrier's work, is carefully detailed. Thanks to its dynamic folding, the elevation vibrates, the alternating solids and voids thus created offering different views and sources of light. Planned in white aluminium (Myral), the building will mark its context with its pure architectonic force, becoming an image unto itself and doing away with the need for billboards and signs to tell you what it is.

The Centre Leclerc in Fondettes is closely linked to another of Barrier's retail realizations, the Blanc Carroi in Chinon. Once again, he continues to experiment with a new generation of supermarkets by inventing an architectural language for a typology that hitherto has generally been entirely lacking in architectural merit – a paradox when you think about it, for why eschew an architectural and urban approach where thousands of people can appreciate it every day?

1–4. Elevations.

5. Computer-generated perspective of the building façade.

6, 7. Plans of the semi-buried car park and the ground floor.



Orangery at the botanical garden in Tours, Indre-et-Loire, 2006–09

Created thanks to the tenacity and generosity of the pharmacist Jean-Anthyme Margueron (1771–1858), the botanical garden in Tours is located on former wetlands crossed by the Sainte-Anne stream. The original project included a school of botany for students at the new school of medicine and pharmacy just opposite. Laid out between 1831 and 1843, the garden has remained exactly as initially intended, apart from the arrival of glasshouses, in 1869, and the evolution of its collections in the years since. Today the garden has a double status, linked to its scientific origins: the municipality looks after maintenance, while the University Laboratory of Vegetal Biology at the UFR of Pharmaceutical Sciences is in charge of research. Landmarked on the supplementary inventory of French national heritage, the site was designated a «Botanical Garden of France and Francophone Countries» in 2000.

In 2007–08, the decision was taken to extend the garden by 6,500 m² to the north, with a new orangery, a building for the gardeners and a contemporary garden, baptized «des deux mondes» («the Garden of the Two Worlds»). The construction of the new orangery, as well as the renovation of the original glasshouses, was undertaken in order to conserve endangered species from South Africa and the tropics and for overwintering non-hardy plants. The new glasshouse, which measures around 1,000 m², is placed next to a tall central stone building with a historicizing décor, either side of which are the lower historic greenhouses in glass and metal¹; backing up like a buttress against the northern wall of the historic structures, the 47 m-long, 10 m-high addition seeks the light by rising several metres above them, but without dominating. Conceived for overwintering large plants in tubs that are sensitive to the cold, such as bougainvilleas and olive, orange and palm trees, the orangery, with its frank, taut lines, doubles up as an exhibition space during the warmer months.

By evoking the archetypal form of the 19th-century greenhouse, dematerialized through the

use of glass, the new orangery sets off and amplifies the historic structure. Though inspired by the classic model developed as of the late 17th century, which became particularly common in the 19th century thanks to the industrial revolution (when technical advances made it possible to construct vast buildings in iron and glass to overwinter fragile plants), Barrier's realization, also in metal and glass, is far more sophisticated with respect to climate control, offering the ideal environment for plant growth. Both a receptacle and a living organism that reacts to external climate, the new orangery provides specific conditions of light, temperature and hygrometry thanks to roof-mounted sensors that feed a computer controlling the blinds and windows, which open or close depending on temperature and the amount of sunlight. Developed in partnership with the botanists so as to best stabilize the parameters, the system makes the building autonomous. Also in the classic greenhouse tradition, a maintenance foot-bridge crowns the edifice.

Even if the building seems high-tech where its functioning is concerned, it is nonetheless a work of architecture that stands out due to its lightness (despite its great volume) and the lean, balanced design of its metal structure. The latter derives from Barrier's concern to treat each material in such a way as to reveal all its intrinsic qualities and its authenticity (an approach for which the engineer Jean Prouvé was famous); bringing out the intelligence of the material, Barrier has created not just a constructive system, but a work of architecture in which each piece is designed individually to create a harmonious ensemble. The regular, repetitive rhythm «magnifies» the archetypal form of the greenhouse and turns this giant rectangle into a backdrop for the Jardin des deux mondes.

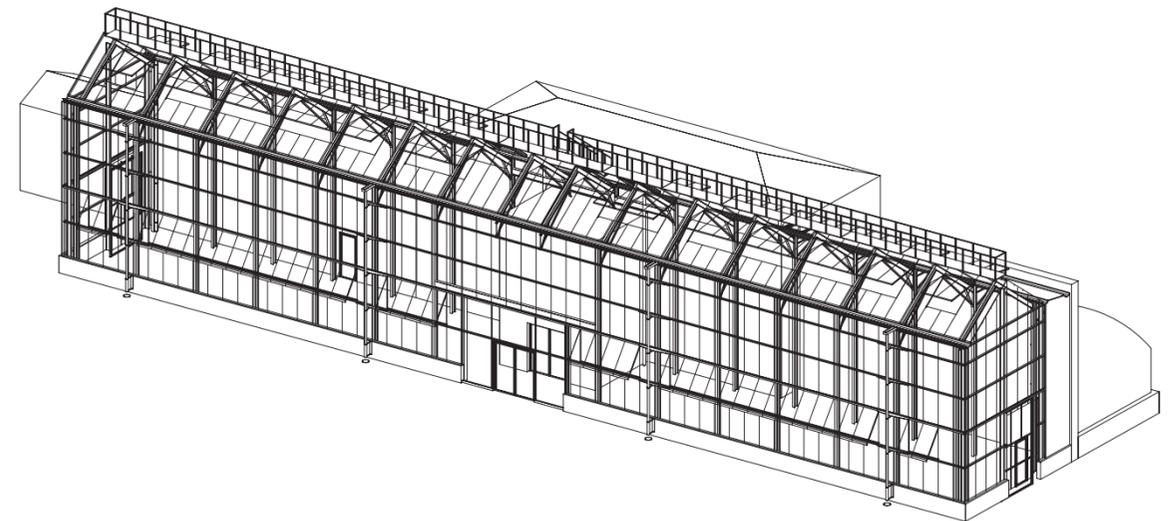
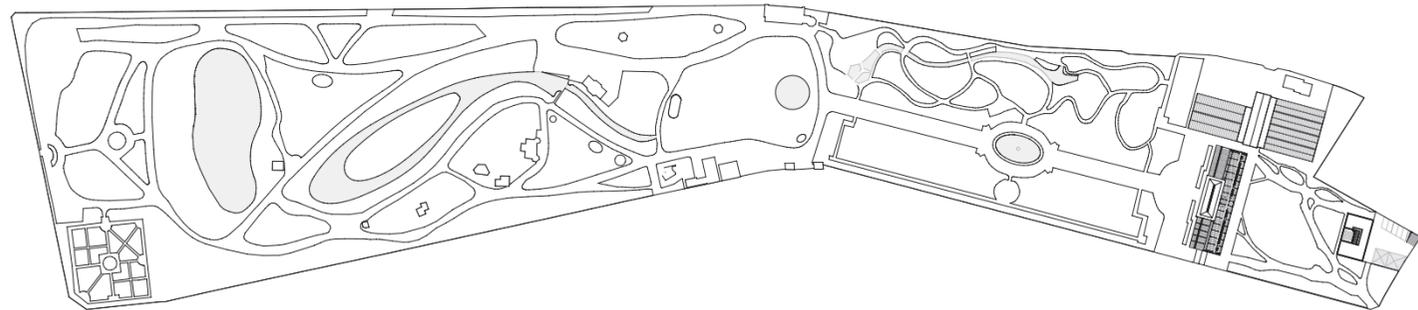
But the orangery doesn't only enter into dialogue with the historic greenhouses, it also responds to a second new structure, which forms the other focal point of the botanical garden's extension: the gardener's building, located in the axis of the greenhouses. This second contemporary structure helps make clear the switch from the old garden to the new as the visitor passes from one century to another.

Responding to the orangery's simple volume, the rectangular (11 x 19 m) building dialogues with the orangery's all-glass exterior by proposing a different form of lightness: a façade in perforated aluminium that filters the view from the inside and is printed on the outside with a photograph of a bamboo grove. In this way, a certain intimacy is obtained by completely enveloping the building like a membrane. While the orangery transposes the archetype of the historic greenhouse, the gardeners' building looks to the far more ancient form of the rural Mediterranean house with its central patio, the latter not only bringing daylight into the heart of the interior but also providing a relaxation space for the gardeners. Another garden is perched on top of the roof and, when lit up at night, seems to float like a discreet evocation of the labour that goes into ensuring the botanical garden will survive for future generations.

The existing structures were renovated by Barrier's office in tandem with construction of the new orangery.

1. Site plan with the park.
2. View of the greenhouse from the park.
3. Axonometric view of the greenhouse.

- pp. 26, 27.
4. View of the greenhouse from the street.
 5. Existing part of the greenhouse.
 - 6, 7. The gardeners' house.



Experiments with houses

Though houses are but a small part of Barrier's practice, they form a laboratory in which he can explore innovations that will benefit other projects to come. In particular, they were the opportunity to experiment with bioclimatic and domotic design, such as his pioneering 1990 domotic house in Chambray-lès-Tours, which afterwards informed the 1994 Résidence du Mai in Chinon, a housing scheme for the disabled where some of the technical equipment can be controlled remotely from beds and wheelchairs. Here, three very different houses are discussed: the transformation of the Paumelle House in 2006–09 and of the Villa Serge in 2008–12, and the 2017 unbuilt ULUL House, an all-timber project submitted for a competition organized by the Domaine de la Bourdaisière.

Realized for Yvonne and Philippe Paumelle, owners of the Oniris art gallery in Rennes, the first of the three concerns a 1970s regionalist-style granite house in Brittany, which Barrier transformed into a more contemporary, fluid home that is better adapted to its owners' artistic penchants. As well as entirely reconfiguring the room layout around a large living area, he altered fenestration and doorways to open up interior perspectives that continue outside, via a large terrace and a small patio, into a sculpture park and an aromatic garden. To create a connection with the outdoor landscape and transform the rather compact dwelling into something freer, Barrier added two glass volumes: a cubic winter garden that prolongs the dining room, and a small freestanding vertical greenhouse between the terrace and the patio. Large glazed bays replaced the old French doors with their small panes, harmonizing with the simplicity of the metal-grid structures of the greenhouse additions. This desire to unify the new and old parts of the house can also be found in the treatment of the interior space, which has become an enfilade of »white cubes«, a sort of extension of Oniris inside the home, where works by François Morellet, Claude Viallat, Vera Molnár and others are displayed. In this way, the owners' professional and personal lives become one in their private home.

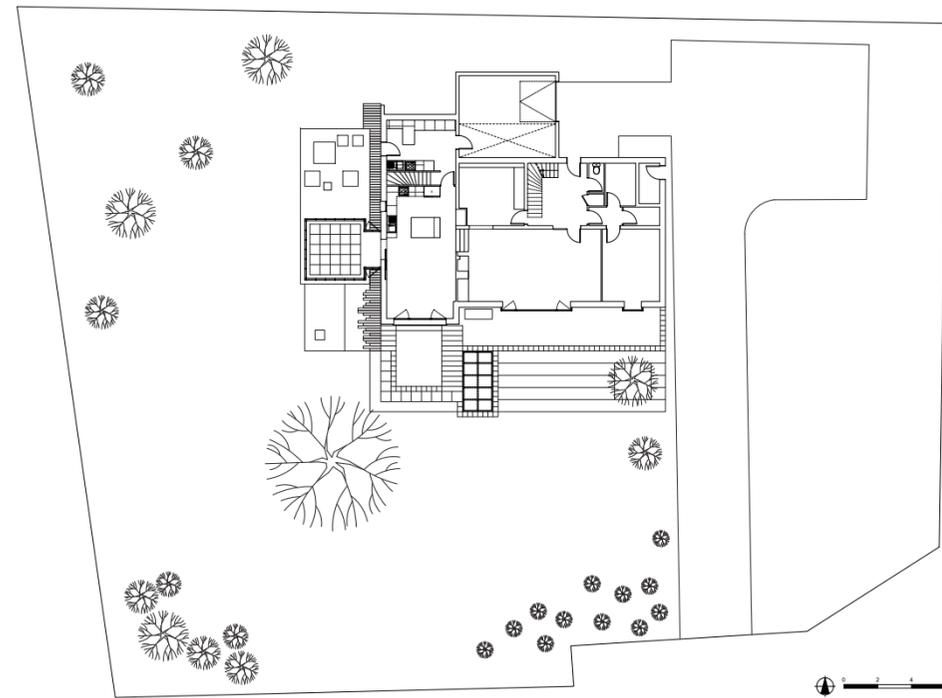
The Villa Serge is Barrier's own house on the Île d'Yeu (Vendée). Built around 1906, it was one of the first of its kind on the island and is the archetype of the seaside home, with its front garden whose wall is cadenced by terracotta urns, its ironwork, and its park surrounded by a high stone enclosure and planted with exotic species. Originally square in plan, the house had been extended over the years to the rear, with little coherence among the various parts. Barrier chose to work with what he had by inverting the functions, creating a central »street« that accesses all parts of the house; in this way, he created a perspective that traverses the entire dwelling and its history, and opens onto the park. As a result, the interior is divided up symmetrically, but where the day spaces with their large windows were formerly oriented north, towards the sea, the house now opens towards the south, onto a large terrace and the garden. As in the Paumelle House, the new rooms are treated as white cubes to provide a suitable backdrop for the owners' art collection, while the old part of the building, with its panelling and tiled flooring, has been restored in the spirit of the origi-

nal. The more minimalist approach adopted in the remodelling of the extensions transforms these spaces to adapt them to a new lifestyle: the central street accesses on one side the sitting room, which doubles up as a gallery for Post-Impressionist Île d'Yeu painters (Bertrand, Lecomte, Calot, Murique, Dezaunay, Nassivet, as well as the leader of the Saint-Jean-de-Monts school, Eugène Corneau), and on the other the dining room, which showcases contemporary pieces by Vera Molnár, Aurélie Nemours, Morellet, Viallat, Bonnefoi and others. The street itself, which is top-lit, serves as an exhibition space for the new generation of painters working on the Île d'Yeu.

While the two houses discussed above were experiments in the transformation and rehabilitation of existing regionalist and seaside properties, the third (unrealized) example was an experiment in eco-living, the result of Barrier's participation in the first edition of the Festival of Woods and Forests at the Domaine de la Bourdaisière in Montlouis-sur-Loire. Held in 2016, the event brought together a wide public as well as the main players in the French timber industry, the festival's goal being to help make France a leader in timber construction and biosourced materials. Under the competition rules, the ULUL House, as Barrier named it, had to be constructed entirely in wood or timber-derived materials, including all the interior fittings: sanitary equipment, textiles, insulation, energy production, the roof, all the furniture, the kitchen, the heating, the plumbing, the wall coverings, the foundations, etc. There was also a requirement to favour local materials, in particular species available from La Bourdaisière: sequoia, cedar, hazel, oak, acacia, sycamore and box. Intended as a prototype contemporary dwelling, the all-timber house was required to have a floor surface of at least 36 m² on two levels, be capable of disassembly and transport to other sites, and cost no more than 150,000, a sum that had to cover everything, from initial studies to construction.

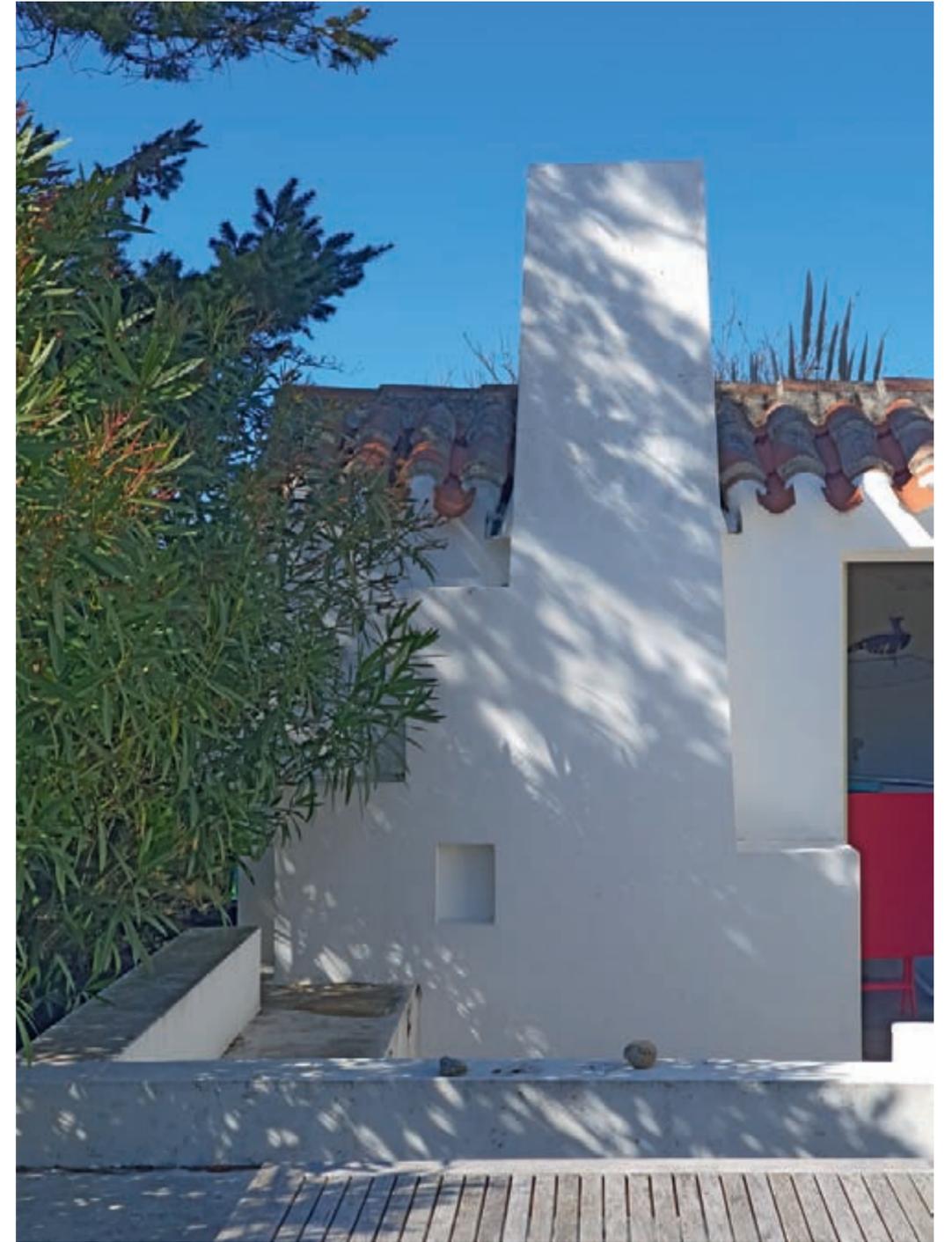
Barrier proposed a project that demonstrated all the requirements set forth in the brief in an easily readable way. Measuring 85 m², the ULUL House uses different types of wood and timber derivatives (wood wool, pulp, cellulose, etc.), with bamboo for the plumbing and the wind-turbine mast, wicker for the light fittings, and fruit-tree timber for the furniture. Formally, the house adopts the soft organic curves found in plant life, using a strong, simple structure: a pointed arch, like an upturned ship, which brings all the loads down to the ground and creates a free, spacious and elegant internal volume. In the manner of a Quonset Hut, the roof descends to grade, minimizing construction time and the amount of materials used, while digital prefabrication ensures rapid manufacture. The fluid, vaulted form, of which one part is raised to form the second level, imprints its character on the interior, as though everything were carved from a single timber block: the dining table rises seamlessly from the floorboards, which also become benches, while closets, bookcases, and shelving are fully integrated into this formal and material unity. By combining nature and innovation with structural experimentation and a formal language that conceptualizes the architecture within the parameters of sustainable development, the ULUL House advances the ecological approach in house building.

1. Paumelle House. Plan.
2. Paumelle House. The sculpture garden.



- 3. Paumelle House. The winter garden.
- 4. Paumelle House. The small greenhouse.





5. Villa Serge. Ground-floor plan.
6. Villa Serge. The garden.
7. Villa Serge. The small patio.