

LE GUIDE **HISTORY** AND stories

Musée de
la **Def**ense



Defacto
Établissement public de gestion
du quartier d'affaires de la Défense





GUIDE TO HISTORY and stories

From the time of Neandertal man to that of the business man, it is hard to encompass the incredible epic of a small hill metamorphosed into Europe's leading business quarter. Simply a hill. Its name, Chantecoq, resonates like a country walk from which one contemplates the ravishing sunset over the forest of Saint-Germain. The sun hasn't changed. But it is now reflected in majestic façades of glass and steel. Its achievement was a daring task of herculean proportions. The La Défense quarter has now established itself as the flaming symbol of an ambitious future. It continues in the visionary tradition, from the Louvre to the Arc de Triomphe, passing through the Concorde, to drive the destiny of a winning Paris.

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ITS HISTORY IS STILL BEING WRITTEN



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A map showing the Paris region

Stories

MYSTERIOUS MEGALITHS

In the Celtic language "P" was pronounced "K" and the Celtic term "Kwarisi" or « Karisi » seems to have indicated the quarries where the megaliths were extracted. While it is sometimes difficult to establish what these objects meant or how they were used, there is every indication that the megaliths that our Parisii ancestors erected performed a religious function for a very long time.

IN MEGALITHIC TIMES

To the east of Paris there lies a little hill, tucked into a loop of the River Seine. By the end of the Neolithic age, humans were erecting megaliths on top of the region's wooded mounds, to mark their passage. Later on, these mounds were used for much higher structures that were, however, still turned towards the sky. Archaeologists have found deposits which indicate that Neanderthal man favoured the river banks for chipping stones. The technique that produced this flaky debris was given a name... Levalloisian. Today, the names of these places are to some extent inspired by that distant age, when people devoted so much energy to the production of menhirs. Pierre-Platte (Flat Stone), la Fosse (the Ditch), le Trou (the Hole), les Chaillots (the Pebbles), la Borne (the Boundary stone)... Even Nanterre (Nemetdor in Celtic), means 'sacred enclosure' or 'sanctuary'.



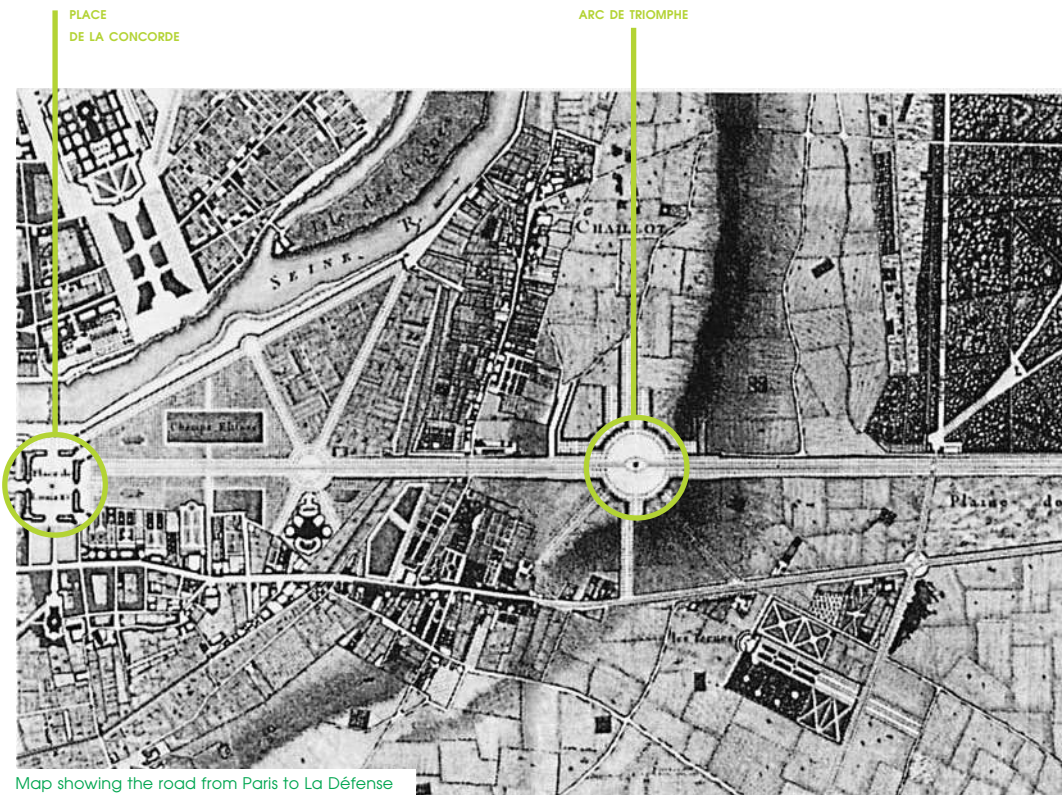
Sainte Geneviève – 16th century painting

A STRATEGIC SITE

Three centuries BC, during the Iron Age, a tribe of Parisii settled on the banks of the River Seine. These people were great travellers, who had come from beyond the River Rhine, and they were not slow to grasp their opportunity and take over the region. They found that the hills were easy to cross. The road to Rouen and Normandy was close by. This ancient track gave rise to the name Courbevoie (curva via, or curved road). In the course of history, the Romans conquered the region and made Lutecia its administrative centre, with Nemetdor (Nanterre) serving as the religious capital of the Parisii. The next thousand years proved particularly challenging. The ravages of the Hundred Years' War were followed by spectacular flooding in 1373, when the River Seine broke its banks. Further troubles came during the latter part of the XIV and early XV centuries, with the onset of the Bubonic Plague.

THE BIRTH OF A HISTORIC AXIS

In the XV century, the main residence of the Kings of France was the palace of the Louvre, but they also liked to spend time at their country residence, the castle of Saint-Germain en Laye. The idea of building a straight road to connect the two destinations dates from this period. The obstacle that the Neuilly crossing presented had already been resolved by the introduction of a ferry. On 9 June 1605, during one of King Henri IV's outings, after the fall of the royal coach into the water, prompting the king to instruct his Intendant, Sully, to undertake the construction of a wooden bridge. The historic Axis was cautiously taking shape; during the reign of King Louis XIV, it became the obligatory route that every royal expedition took, when the King wanted to cross the little Chantecoq hill to go hunting in the forest of Saint-Germain.



Map showing the road from Paris to La Défense

Stories

HERE BE PARISII

The Parisii quickly imposed their rule. This is evidenced by their gold coins, which are among the loveliest Gaulish coinage of the time. 60 of these precious coins have been found at Puteaux. Warrior burial places and other remains have also been found at Nanterre, indicating that there was an important proto-urban town there. It was spread over an area

greater than 15 hectares, which is twice the size of the Île de la Cité, in Paris.

FROM NULLY TO NEUILLY

In 1316, a village grew up around the old monastic farm that was called "Nully". By 1140, a ferry service had already been set up on the River Seine here, and so it became the crossing place for travellers between Paris and Normandy.

AS SEEN BY LE NÔTRE

Le Nôtre has mythical stature in the history of gardens, and he summed up his vision as follows: *"The space that is intended to be walked through is also the place where the gaze can escape beyond the limits of our improvements and without which a garden would be merely a garden, a town strewn with a maze of stree".*

VUE DU PONT DE NEUILLY PRÈS PARIS

Dédié à Monsieur Lapoulle de La Ferté
 Approuvé par le Parlement, le 10 Mars 1768

L'un des Commissaires G^{ds} de la Maison du Roi
 Crèvecoeur G^{de} de Mesmes Secrétaire du Roi, Administrateur G^{de} des Postes

Placé sur des fondations de 1768
 Révisé en 1768

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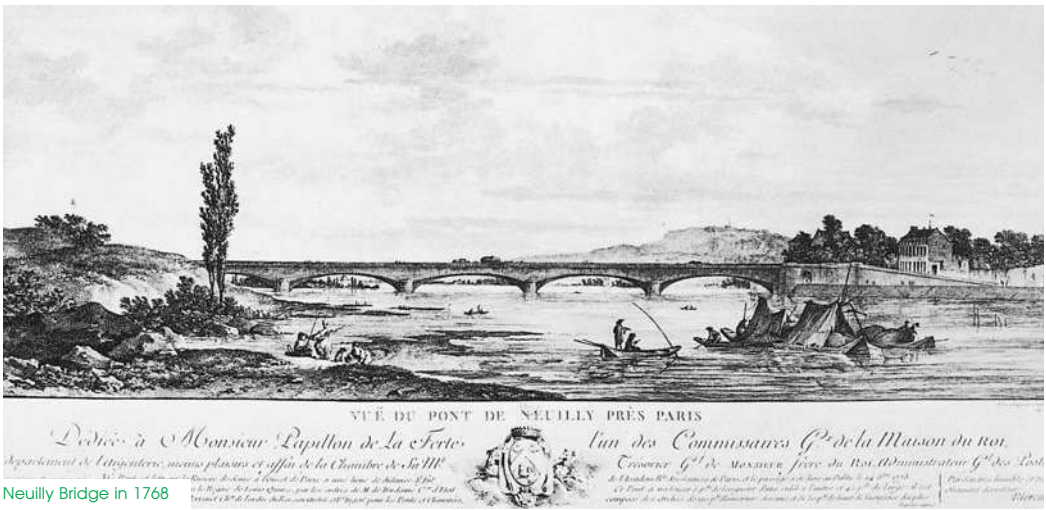
VUE DU PONT DE NEUILLY PRÈS PARIS

*Dédiée à Monsieur Lapoulle de La Ferté,
Ayant eue le privilège, comme plusieurs et affés de la Chambre des MM^s*

*L'un des Commissaires G^rs de la Maison du Roi,
Crisseur G^r de Meauxen Jure du Roi, Administrateur G^r des Postes*

Le Roy a permis à l'entrepreneur de faire construire le Pont de Neuilly sur la Seine, entre les communes de Neuilly et de St. Denis, d'une longueur de 100 toises, avec un pont de pierre de 100 toises de long, et de 10 toises de large, et de 10 toises de haut, pour servir de passage aux voitures et aux piétons.

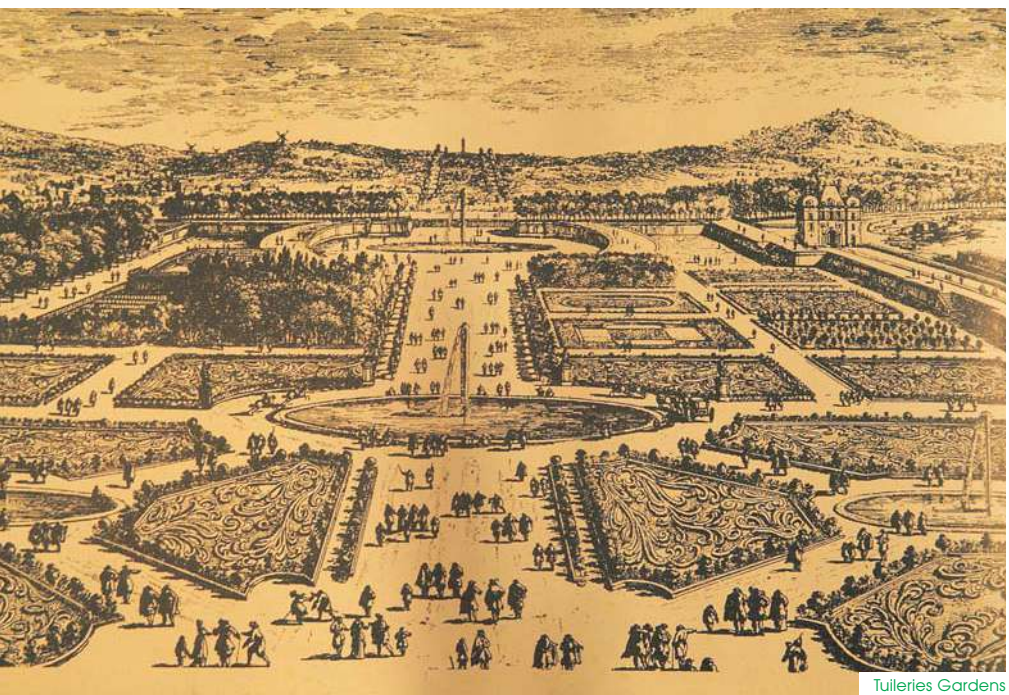
Paris chez les Libraires, au Palais National, sous le Vestibule, par le Bureau de l'Imprimerie, et par les Bureaux de la Ville, de la Province, et de l'Etranger.

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Vaux le Vicomte Gardens

Born in Paris on 12 of March 1613, André Le Notre has passed into posterity as History's most creative and ambitious gardener, to whom we owe the famous "jardins à la française". In the service of King Louis XIV from 1645 until his death in 1700, he designed the layout of the park at Versailles, and those of Vaux-le-Vicomte and Chantilly.



Tuileries Gardens



Wooden Bridge in Neuilly

THE CONQUEST OF NEW SPACES

There is no doubt that the Renaissance influenced the way people saw things by reviving a previously unknown concept: the art of perspective and the disposition of space. This was the time when town plans were being rationalised. The new urban grid-plans consisted of straight lines, or axes. Roads were planted with lines of trees that stretched to the horizon, where a public monument often loomed large. Colbert was inspired by this new vision and he persuaded King Louis XIV to change the lay-out of the Tuileries gardens. Was this not necessary, in order to exhibit the magnificence of France, and of her King? The King's First Gardener, André Le Nôtre, has won his place in history with his new designs for these gardens and by imposing his *à la française* style. Since everyone by that time was aware of perspective, Le Nôtre's plans included opening up the garden wall to the West. However, he could not have known that, with this simple action, he had provided the starting point for the capital's main axis!

INTRODUCING A PERSPECTIVE

Imposing it! Gaining ground. The tone had been set, and confirmed by a royal ordonnance dated August 1668. *"May broad avenues terminating in triumphal arches announce the entrance to the town in a majestic way.... May an étoile (a radiating intersection) be seen in this place, on this side, roads laid out at an angle, and on the other, roads that fan out..."*. Le Nôtre got working and built a new road, one that started in the Tuileries Gardens and ended at the hill of Chaillot. He planted elm trees on either side of the track, as part of a grand undertaking which inspired Pei, the famous architect of three centuries later, to propose extending this line of elms as far as the esplanade of La Défense! Le Nôtre was well aware that he had created one of the world's loveliest perspective views in all its majesty. Although it was called 'Grand Cours' (Great Way) to start with, it was subsequently decided to call it 'Champs Élysées'. Those mystical Elysian Fields, where, according to Greek mythology, the Happy Ones enjoyed a well-earned repose...

Stories

A NOISY FINISH

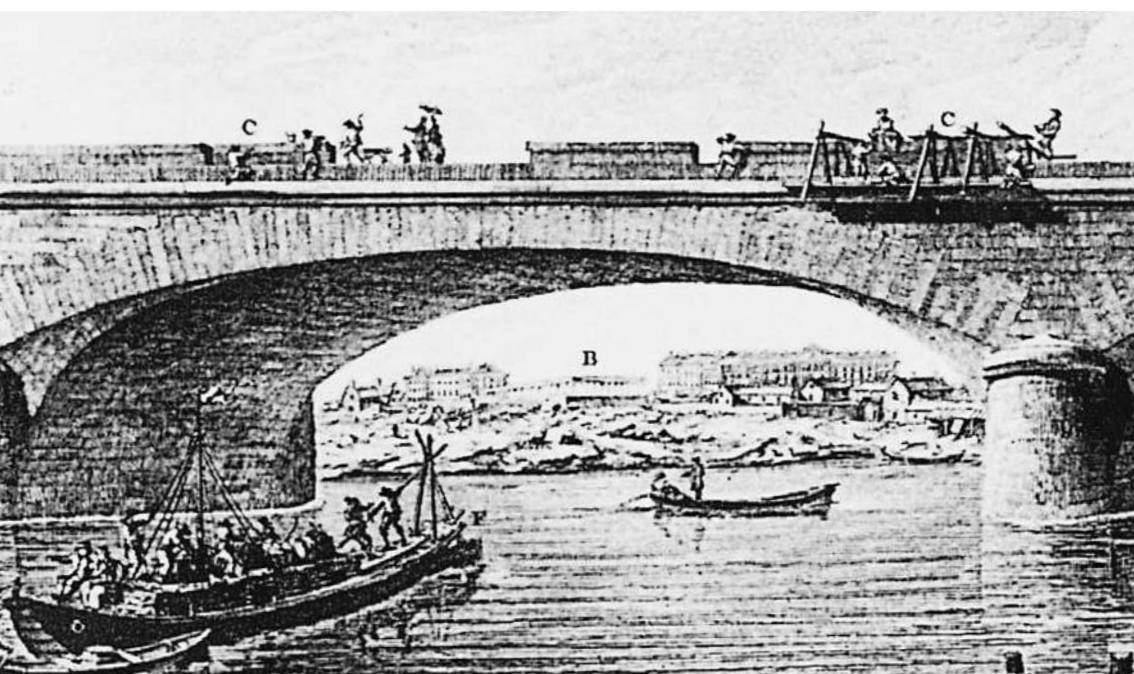
With his strong feeling for drama, Perronet marked the onset of the construction of the Neuilly bridge in stone by destroying the previous bridge with one enormous blow. Having arranged for each truss to be carefully unbolted, the bridge then collapsed in one go and the noise it made was heard as far away as Paris.

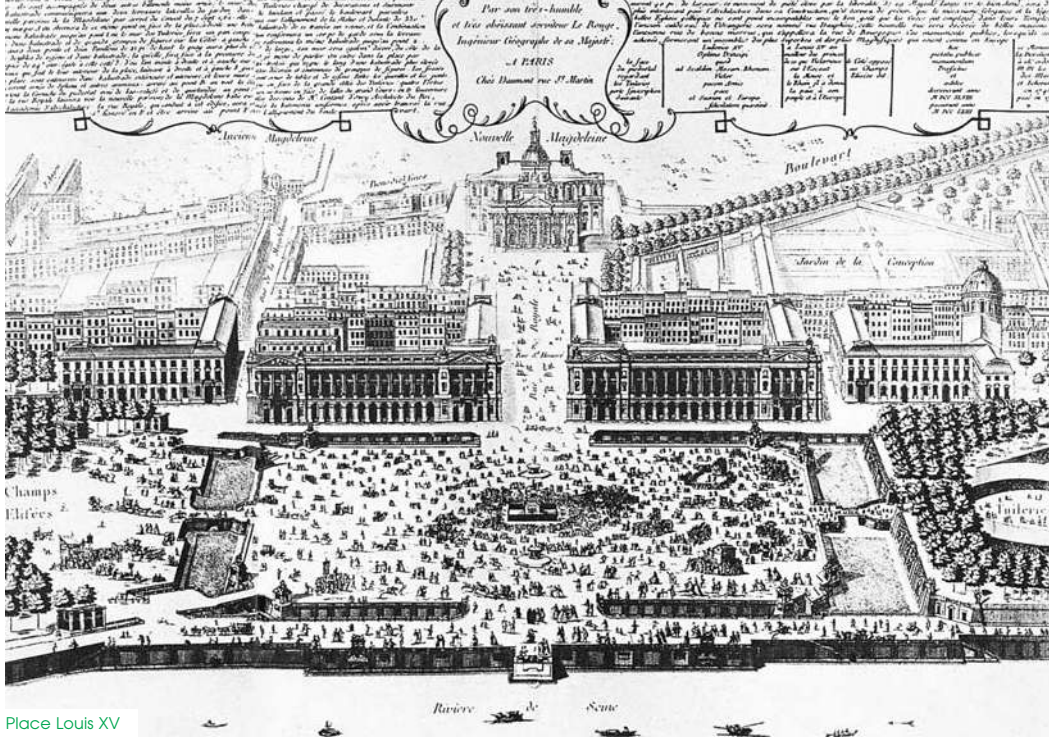
THE TRIUMPHAL GATE

The Romans were the first to build triumphal arches. Originally, these arches or triumphal gates were built of wood and erected in honour of victorious generals who had been awarded a triumph. They were surmounted by trophies of armour and weapons taken from the enemy and by a statue of the victor.

THE LINE ADVANCES, STEP BY STEP

In his visionary enthusiasm, Le Nôtre would have liked to have extended this perspective view as far as the Chantecoq hill. But, at that time, Paris was so insalubrious that the King preferred to exile himself to the far more appealing decorum of life at Versailles. The axis had to wait a little longer... just until the death of King Louis XIV in 1715 and the accession of Louis XV, who decided on a series of improvements. The Marquis de Mérimy, Directeur Général for the King's Buildings, took up the challenge. He started with the great empty space that lay between the Tuileries and the Champs Elysées, and transformed it into a huge square, dedicated to the monarch. An equestrian statue bearing its effigy was installed in this space. However, the French Revolution did away with it, and, much later on, it was replaced with the Luxor obelisk, which still stands proudly in the centre of today's Place de la Concorde. The original intention had been to extend the field of vision from the terraces of the Tuileries right along to the hills of Chaillot. The gamble paid off and the result is definitely the loveliest view in Europe. Work was also initiated in the Champs Elysées, where the vegetable plots gave way to squares. Henceforth, these huge spaces were used for recreation, and people came there for tournaments and the newly-installed carousels. The old wooden bridge at Neuilly was rebuilt in stone. The work took four years; 872 workmen and 168 horses were required to construct this new design for a deck arch bridge. The opening ceremony on 22nd September 1722 was the occasion for a great display, in the presence of King Louis XV and the whole court. In 1766, Perronet took up the task of laying out the road in a direct line from the Champs Elysées. Then, he extended it from the hill of Chaillot and the first houses in Neuilly, along the road that was called Chemin du Cours at the time, to the top of the Chantecoq hill. Once it had reached that point, he laid out a round intersection, modelled on the Place de l'Etoile, which was called the Etoile de Chantecoq, or Place de la Demi-Lune (Half-moon Square). The 40 metre-tall obelisk that was intended to stand in the centre was actually never made - but the line of perspective had been drawn. All that was left to do was to level the road. The work began in 1768, when the object was to





Place Louis XV

level-off the slope from the Place Louis XV to the Neuilly Bridge. Between 1772 and 1776, this levelling process succeeded in lowering the hill by more than 5 metres. The excavated soil was used for re-laying the Champs Elysées. Much as these efforts were successful in improving the view, this ascetic advantage was not accompanied by comfort or security. Unfortunately, it was still difficult to cross the Champs Elysées in a carriage and the place was equally inhospitable to pedestrians. Above all, you had to be on guard against anyone out there at night-time...

Stories

WHERE DID NAPOLEON GO?

The statue of Napoleon that was carved by Seurre used to preside over the Roundabout of the Emperor (subsequently the Roundabout of La Défense) and can now be found in Les Invalides.



The building of Neuilly Bridge

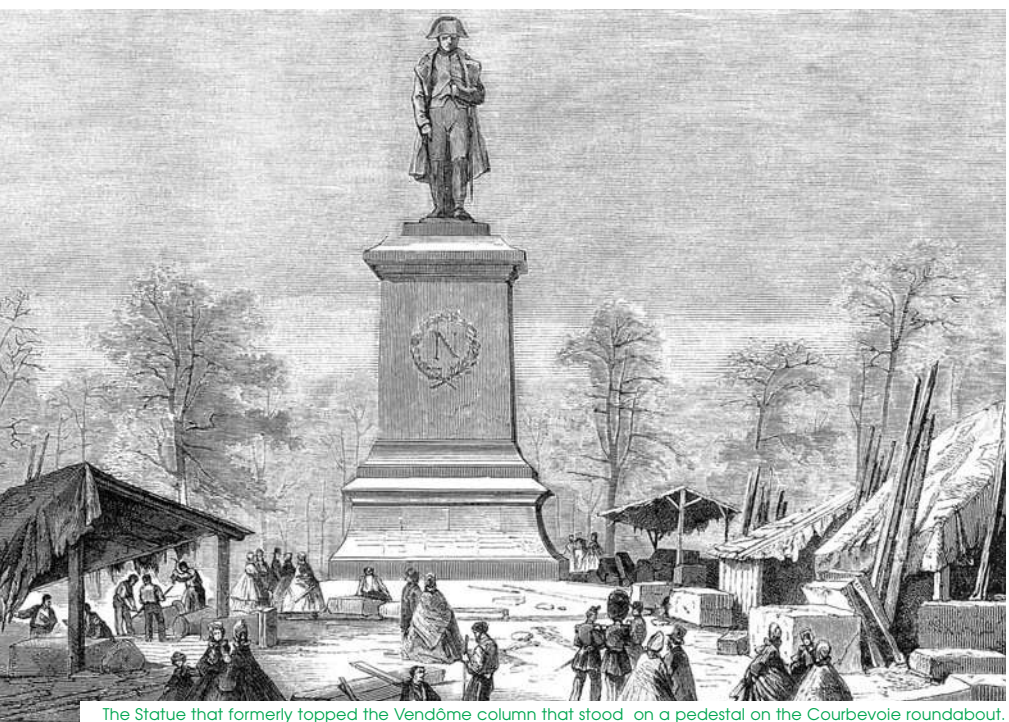


La Défense de Paris

GREATER PRESTIGE

This had been a royal road, but it became an imperial one after Napoleon I's victorious return from the Battle of Austerlitz, when he ordered the erection of a triumphal arch to celebrate the prestige and glory of the Armée. The Minister of the Interior, Champigny, had the bright idea of placing it at the tollgate of the Etoile, where it could be seen from afar. Chalgrin was the architect, and he took his inspiration from the Arch of Titus in Rome. The first stone was laid on 15 August 1806, Saint-Napoleon day when Napoleon's life was celebrated, but the monument was only inaugurated 30 years later, by King Louis-Philippe. It was not until 1854 that the surrounding square took shape under Haussmann's direction. He gave it a sunburst of 12 avenues, and as many segments, on which he intended to erect 12 identical hotels.

It was a time of grand projects. The second triumphal arch was erected between the Louvre and the Tuileries, following a decision by Napoleon I in February 1806. The architects Percier and Fontaine drew up a design that was inspired by the arch of Septimius Severus in Rome. During the Second Empire, plans were already being drawn up for extending the Imperial Way to the plain of Montesson and Saint Germain. Haussmann gave this vision concrete form, and in 1846 it was named 'l'Avenue de la Grande Armée', in honour of the soldiers of the Napoleonic Empire.



The Statue that formerly topped the Vendôme column that stood on a pedestal on the Courbevoie roundabout.



Avenue de La Défense

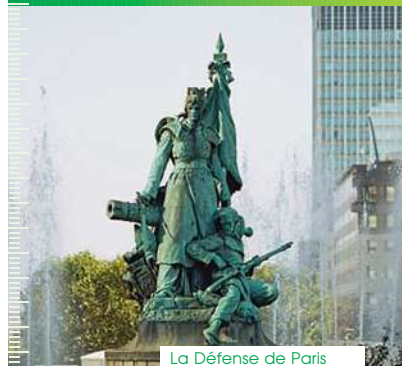
LA DÉFENSE GETS ITS NAME

The axis was awarded its crown by Emperor Napoleon III, in 1863. The statue of Napoleon I was set on the Vendôme column, but it was moved to embellish the Place de la Demi-Lune, which was given a new name 'Rond-point de l'Empereur' (Emperor roundabout). Subsequent events ensured that this statue did not stay put. In 1870, the Franco-Prussian War required its removal to a safe place; 8 years later, a different statue was installed. The General Council for the Seine had, in fact, decided to pay homage to the defenders of Paris and had organised a competition to select the sculpture that would best represent the spirit of the place. Great names such as Gustave Doré and Rodin were deployed, but it was a work by Louis Ernest Barrias that won the day with its vibrant depiction of the resisting forces, albeit in an academic style. It was unveiled in the presence of a 100,000 people who had gathered on 12 August 1883 for the ceremony. 'La Défense de Paris' gave its name initially to the roundabout and avenue that lead to the Neuilly Bridge, and this was then followed by the rest of the business district. This statue was intended to stay put for 87 years, but it proved an encumbrance when large-scale works were initiated. It was moved to a building site, and then to the Neuilly cemetery, where it had to wait a whole century before being re-instated in all its glory on a plinth, right in the middle of the esplanade – the open space in La Défense.

Stories

LA DÉFENSE, A GREAT SYMBOL

In 1878, Barthélémy Forest, a member of the General Council for the Seine, recalled "that this allegorical monument of La Défense de Paris has been erected on the very spot where, on the night of the 18th and 19th January 1871, our valiant battalions set out to Buzenval, to attempt a final and supreme effort against the lines of the besieging forces..."

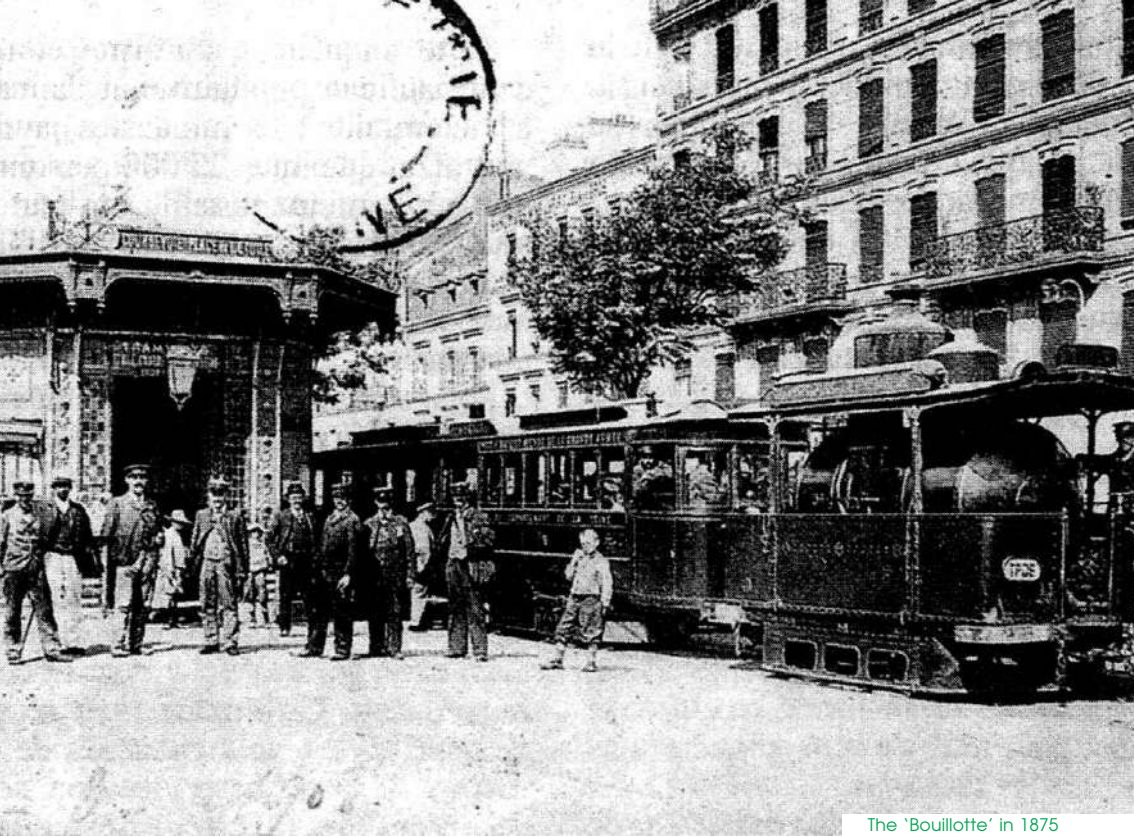


La Défense de Paris



THE FIRST STIRRINGS

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The 'Bouillotte' in 1875

THE FUTURE IS EMERGING IN THE WEST

The XIX century was distinguished by an industrial revolution. This was accompanied by a new surge in urban development – this was invariably turned towards the West. Paris was no exception to this new rule. The 8th arrondissement (town quarter) and the avenues that radiated out from the Etoile were the first sectors to benefit and they put on an exuberant display of their new wealth. At the beginning of the XX century, the same rationale applied and the area around La Défense began to be developed. The hills gradually lost their pastoral aspect as dozens of factories sprang up. From then on, communes bordering La Défense were home to new factories and all kinds of industrial production; aviation, automobile, laundries, breweries, tanneries, heavy metal production, refineries, dye shops, and textile industries. The avenue de La Défense seemed to be the only space that had been spared the effects of this new craze for industry. Its relaxed ambiance was maintained by artists' studios and local bistros.... New workers were pouring in, in ever-increasing numbers, and public transport services were developed to serve them. For many years, a tram could be seen travelling along the Courbevoie-Etoile route. It was drawn by a steam engine whose water had to be heated to 200° at every stop before it could set off again, which earned it the nickname of 'Bouillotte' (hot water bottle).

Stories

SOME SKYSCRAPERS, ALREADY

The architect Auguste Perret put this project forward on the occasion of the 1926 competition, and it already included some real skyscrapers, that were directly inspired by the towers in New York of the time. In any case, this impeccable line of skyscrapers has become part of the great tradition of classical designs in the French style.

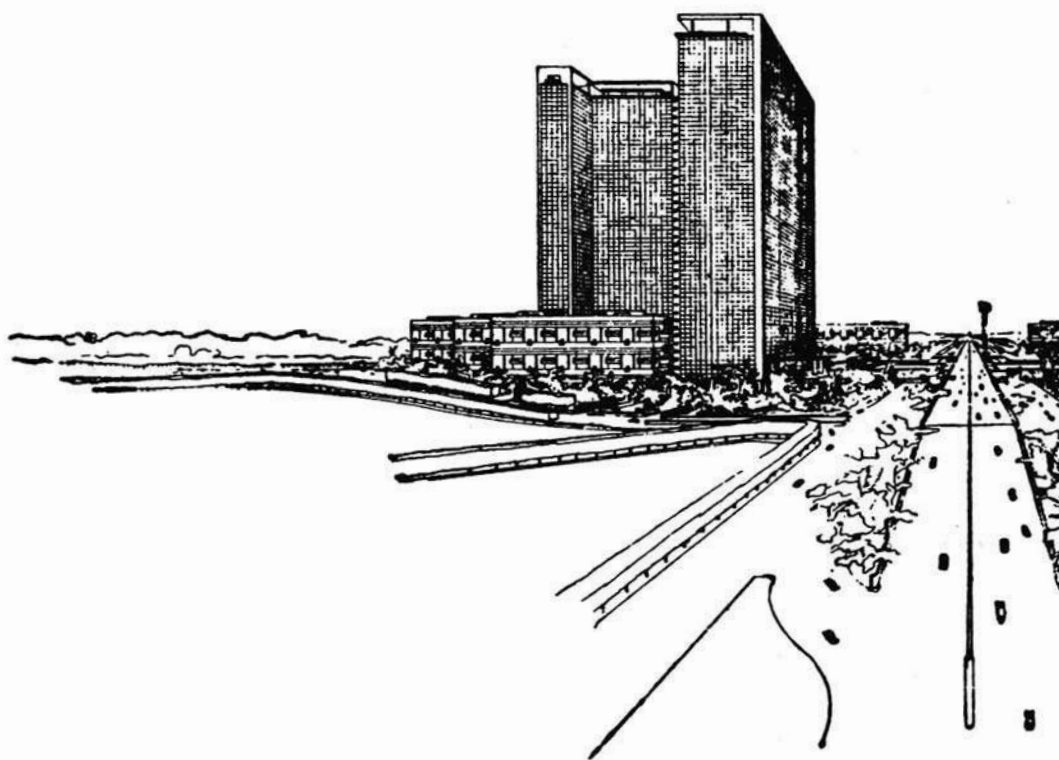
LIKE A ROCKET

Among the 35 entries submitted at the end of the design competition that was launched in 1931, Andre Granet's project offered a perspective view of a huge base bearing a statue of Marshall Foch. From the distance, it looked like a gigantic rocket.

IDEAS IN THE AIR

The historic Axis retained its ability to fire the imagination and inspire long-lived projects. The first of these was in 1911 and it involved the construction of various public buildings at Porte Maillot, including a sports centre, an exhibition centre and some government buildings. After the First World War, the burial of the Unknown Soldier beneath the Arc de Triomphe in 1920 gave rise to such patriotic fervour that it was proposed to rename the Champs Élysées the 'Triumphal Way' and the Place Maillot, which was lined with monuments glorifying the brave soldiers, the 'Place des Poilus' (square of the soldiers). Though this martial spirit subsided after a few years, new initiatives continued to be put forward. In 1926, Léon Rosenthal, a wealthy art lover launched a competition to develop the route. The response was swift and the greatest architects of the moment submitted plans: Le Corbusier, Auguste Perret, Mallet-Stevens... alas! Their ambitious projects appeared to extend well beyond the aims of the town councillors, who did not want to spoil the radiating plan of the Place de l'Etoile. Furthermore, the strategy that they had adopted required the inclusion of the entire Etoile-Défense axis in all future projects. However, Le Corbusier's visionary project should get a mention, because he had envisaged providing two separate levels for cars and pedestrians.

In 1931, a new competition was organised under the aegis of the Ville de Paris (the City Hall). Henri Prot, the town planner, established the criteria: while combining aesthetics and realism, the re-design of the triumphal way must optimise the circulation of traffic and ensure that the structures do not exceed the height of the Arc de Triomphe. First prize was awarded to the architect Bigot and the sculptor Landowski. Their plan involved re-designing Porte Maillot as the arc of a circle (and renaming it Place Clémenceau), enlarging the Neuilly Bridge



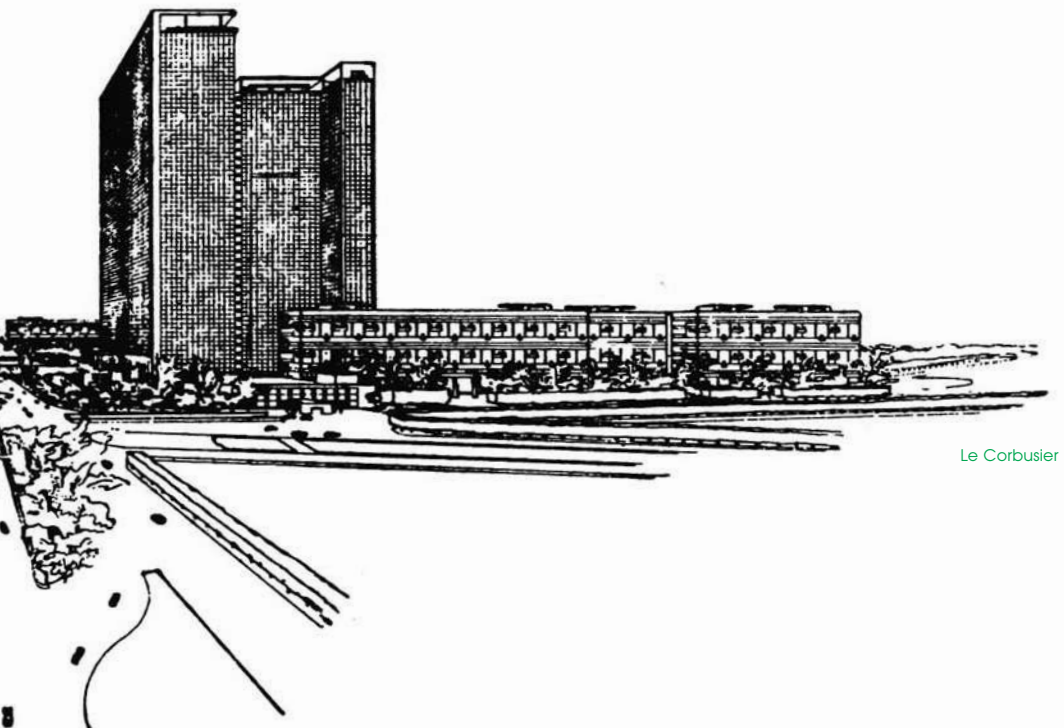


Antoine Etex, antique-style chariot for the Arc de Triomphe at the Etoile. 1840

(re-named Pont des Maréchaux) and erecting a huge statue of Victory, to replace the statue by Barrias. However, this project was not received with real enthusiasm and it gradually sank under the blows of the economic crisis and the war, which put an end to any ambitions about implementing it. The plan to enlarge the Neuilly Bridge was the only part that was carried out; it was rebuilt in 1938, when it was given its current shape, and was redeveloped once again in 1987, when the metro was extended.

LONG LIVE THE REVOLUTION !

Historians label the events that transformed the modes of production, meaning work, during the 19th century as the Industrial Revolution. Thanks to steam engines, which were fed on coal, craft production gave way to production on an enormous scale. The industrial applications of these steam engines were many and varied. From then on, large quantities of better-quality textiles could be produced, and foundries could use steam-driven blowers to produce better steel. Water could now be pumped, and above all, locomotives could be driven. The home-based artisan workers were gradually replaced by a factory-based workforce.



Le Corbusier



Place de La Défense

A TIME FOR IMPORTANT DECISIONS

The period after the war was characterised by a new distribution of the population. People were leaving the countryside and, for the first time, the urban population was greater than the rural population. From then on, the 1919 and 1924 laws about the embellishment and extension of towns were applied to all communities of more than 10,000 inhabitants. In Paris, the town planner Henri Prost and the future Minister for Reconstruction, Raul Dautry, were working on a plan to develop the Paris region (acronym PARP). Their plan involved a more homogenous form of development for the area between the centre and the suburbs, and it excluded unplanned urban sprawl by establishing an urban perimeter, “a 35km-circle around Paris”. The Triumphal Way from Paris was declared

a public utility. From then on, its starting point was La Défense roundabout, and it extended 15km through the forest of Saint-Germain to the Croix de Noaille (requiring compulsory purchases and the removal of trees on a large scale); the perfect alignment of this historic Axis can be checked on any map.

The planning process was intensified after the war, when a Ministry for Reconstruction and Town Planning was installed, which set its sights on a wholesale modernisation process. André Prothin headed this development department and was one of the most committed proponents of an extension that now began to take shape, via the development of the La Défense roundabout. A new town quarter was established that was capable of sustaining a new development drive. Furthermore, the idea was now no longer restricted to driving an axis through the city, but involved a properly planned axis that would be managed by the Technical Service for the Development of the Paris Region.



Shanty town, Nanterre

A LONG-DRAWN OUT IDEA

This idea finally came to fruition in 1950: the town quarter of La Défense was used for creating a real business centre outside Paris. In fact, The General Council for the Seine defended the idea by resorting to an idea that had first been formulated in 1931 by Citibank, the world's largest financial services bank, which had been advocating this policy for a long time. The project concentrated minds to such an extent that it was considered a development priority. The plan was to decentralise the large government ministries and to construct a grouping of public buildings there. The project had been given the go-ahead but its implementation was still uncertain. There was much discussion about locating the UNESCO head office there, along with a congress and conference centre; Le Corbusier was envisaging a museum of the XX century and the idea of a universal exhibition began to emerge. This last suggestion was to become a real leitmotiv between 1949 and 1964. However, the whole enterprise was proving so difficult to finance, and the civil servants were so dismayed about relocating outside Paris, that nothing came of it. However, from now on, the main point had been established. La Défense constituted the great challenge for the future. This was well understood by André Prothin, who was already talking in terms of the "Paris de demain" - tomorrow's Paris.



La Défense roundabout, 1958



THE PIONEER SPIRIT

- 21 FROM THE FIRST STONE...
- 22 ... TO THE FIRST PLAN
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- 24 AND EPAD CREATED LA DALLE
- 25 THEY WERE THE FIRST TO BELIEVE IN IT



1955 Project map

FROM THE FIRST STONE...

The project for building a universal exhibition hall at La Défense had clearly been compromised. Emmanuel Pouvreau, the influential President of the French machine-tool constructors' trades union in 1948, viewed this as an opportunity for a different proposal. This was to build a great palace of mechanical engineering, one that would be capable of promoting French industrial know-how. A triangular site at La Défense roundabout was selected for purchase. The three architects Robert Camelot, Jean de Mailly, and Bernard Zehruss (known as the Three Wise Men) who had hitherto supported the exhibition project, gave an enthusiastic welcome to this new challenge, which was undoubtedly more realistic. Their association with the new plan worked wonders and the result was an astonishing project, the CNIT (National Centre for Industries and Technologies) - its architectural design alone was to provide a show-case for cutting-edge French technology. This building takes the form of a triangular vault resting on three supports; it was developed in collaboration with an Italian architect called Pier Luigi Nervi, who specialised in concrete frames. It took all the ingenuity that Nicolas Esquillan, the consultant engineer from Boussiron, could summon to find the definitive solution to the challenge presented by its double concrete skin. Scale for scale, this huge roof would be 20 times thinner than an egg-shell. One can only guess at the clever calculations and the level of ingenuity that were required to build it. The construction process was watched by regular troops of idlers, who always congregate in great numbers when something unusual is happening. Nevertheless, the unconventional structure was anathemised by its adversaries, who were shocked to see a building rise up that was apparently more suited to a fair-ground. However, Malraux, whose feeling for art was not in question, described it much more justly as a *"cathedral for the modern ages"*.

Stories

A RECORD-BEATING CNIT

The CNIT represents a real technical feat, for which 35,000m³ of concrete and 300 km of scaffolding poles were needed. Each of the three huge supports bears 6,500 tons (the weight of the Eiffel Tower). It extends over an area of 80,000 sq.m on 5 levels. The triangular vault rises 46 metres and covers an area the size of the Place de la Concorde.

A CNIT TO BEAT ALL VISITS

The CNIT was opened during the last days of the Fourth Republic. The first professional show room (Mécanelec), was honoured by successive visits from President Coty and General de Gaulle. The following year, the public, in its turn, was able to discover the building, during the Florallies Internationales show which clocked up two million visitors.



CNIT



... TO THE FIRST PLAN

Emmanuel Pouvreau was determined to achieve this project and nothing was going to stop him. He applied for a building permit for the CNIT building in 1954. The planning department was caught napping and had to produce the planning requirements for the zone in record time, there being no earlier drafts. This document was published in the official journal on 20 October 1956, and gave the green light to the CNIT project in its entirety. It provided the necessary legal framework for starting work on the project. For the first time, the plan also drew up a framework development for La Défense. It established not only the limits of this area but also zones for various types of ground occupancy. The extension of the axis was protected from urban sprawl by a 140 metres-wide non-built-up area. This zone is reserved for the future motorway and for extending Line 1 of the Paris Metro. The town planners' development aims take the great Champs Elysées line of perspective fully into account and they plan to build on each side of it. They have plans for 12-storey towers, alternating with low apartment blocks. A 120 metres tower gives the whole arrangement a dignified look.



THE STATE CREATED EPAD

An innovatory aspect of the perimeter around La Défense is that it is in two zones. Zone A consists of 130 hectares and overlaps part of Puteaux and Courbevoie; it will become the business quarter. Zone B consists of 650 hectares and covers part of the town of Nanterre. However, the development touches on three communes and is proving a real puzzle. The solution has been to create a structure that was previously unknown in France. It takes the form of a public entity with an industrial and commercial character. The creation of EPAD (the Public Body for the Development of La Défense) was established by a decree of 9 September 1958. This body's mission was given a span of 30 years. In plain terms, it involves acquiring and liberating land, drawing up and implementing public infrastructures and amenities, ceding developed spaces and construction rights, animating and promoting the site. EPAD's role is also to ensure that the whole operation is adequately financed, all with an eye to achieving rapid profitability. EPAD has an equal status Board of Directors, involving 18 members (9 representatives from local groups and public bodies, and 9 representatives of the State) and a MD, André Prothin, who is the first person to hold this office. It can rely on these people for advice on how to manage all its tasks correctly. Once set up, the first extensive action that EPAD was responsible for rehousing occupants of slum districts that were located just beyond the Place de La Défense. Compulsory purchase orders were taken out for 415 hectares of ground. The 480 industrial sites and the families who were living in the 9,250 dilapidated housing units were relocated; this enabled EPAD to give the first development process all the attention it deserved.

ANDRÉ PROTHIN, OR A TASTE FOR A CHALLENGE.

As the first Director of EPAD from 1958 until 1969, André Prothin was entrusted by General de Gaulle with the task of creating a large business centre on 760 hectares with old and obsolete buildings and inadequate public transport. His experience as chief engineer for the Paris Works, then as the top director of town planning in France, entrusted with reconstructing the country, made him the man for the job. He defended the project with passion and finally overcame even the most reluctant objectors.



André Prothin



The Michelet quarries

AND EPAD CREATED LA DALLE

The development plan that was finalised in 1956 encountered opposition on this account: it involved slicing the business quarter in two by inserting a continuous stream of 60,000 cars - a road carrying one of France's densest traffic flows! In its initial proposal EPAD hoped to lessen the impact by reserving this avenue for drivers intending to access the main roads. The roundabout would be divided into two branches which would absorb the regional traffic while peripheral roads around the quarter would provide for local access. Though this proposal had the merit of regulating traffic flow, it would also have brutally disrupted the continuity of the historic Axis. The Roads and Bridges Authority thought they had found an acceptable solution, one that involved managing regional and long distance traffic via subterranean passages. But what about

the pedestrians? A few bright sparks had already thought of the ideal solution... It was an idea of Leonardo da Vinci which had been recorded in the Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historical Monuments, and had been exhumed by Le Corbusier for the 1926 competition for the development of Porte Maillot. Leonardo's idea was to build a town on two levels: a 'Commoditas' level that included services, parking, delivery bays, would be buried beneath a 'Voluptas' level that was dedicated to pedestrians and buildings. This was all that was needed to convince EPAD, which observed that the principle could be adapted with astonishing ease to the local geography. The process of lopping 22 metres from the top of the hill - to lower it to the level of the River Seine - was easily combined with the development of a huge artificial open space, and the construction of functional platforms. When this utopian vision was given form it looked like a concrete slab (la Dalle)



Esso



The Esplanade in 1974



The first Espace Info-Défense, 1974

that sloped gently; it was intended to be a huge pedestrian area, as large as the Place de la Concorde, and embellished with 20 hectares of gardens. The first overall plan by Camelot, De Mailly was approved by decree in December 1964. The architectural planning order was deployed over a length comparable to the Champs Élysées, and involved a major order (750,000 sq.m for office blocks limited to 25 floors), an intermediate order (for apartment blocks of 5 to 12 floors constituting enclosed spaces, set around internal gardens) and a low order (for setting up commercial premises along the streets and squares). These structures would be inserted into a green framework consisting of lawns, trees and shrubberies, to create a harmonious effect.

THEY WERE THE FIRST TO BELIEVE IN IT

By 1956, the petroleum consortium ESSO was trying to gather the staff that were deployed in 12 premises around Paris into a single site, where a suitable headquarters could be built. This was to be the first company to set its sights on developing the potential that La Défense presented. The building work took three years and produced one of the first structures that were specifically intended for offices (it was also the first such building to be demolished, 30 years later). File lifts, self-service, cinemas, and medical facilities were innovations that heralded the advent of a new era for working conditions. Communications were avant-garde, too: the front of the building was actually a curtain wall and at night-time some of the office windows were lit up to show the ESSO logo like a gigantic billboard. ESSO was definitely a pioneer, since it did not hesitate to erect its tower on land that was still boggy... However, this construction provided the saving impulse. It was quickly followed by the construction of the Aquitaine Tower, followed in 1965 by Nobel, which caused a sensation with its 28 floors, erected in 13 months. The latter structure was erected by the architects Mailly and Depussé, and is the oldest sky-scraper in La Défense; with its wholly removable panels it is an exemplary instance of modal architecture. To these towers were added Europe, Aurore and Atlantic, all first-generation products, and all identical down to the last centimetre (42 metres x 24 metres); they went on being built until 1973.

ONE SOLUTION FOR ALL

Many blocks of council flats were built, over the area, to re-house the 9,500 expropriated families who had been renting detached houses. Artisans and industrial workers were able to find housing on the 55 hectares of industrial zone that had been set aside for them in Nanterre, Courbevoie and Villeneuve-la-Garenne.

SOMETHING NEW WITH ESSO

The façade of the ESSO building was not a load-bearing part of the structure. It consisted of a metallic curtain wall, a complete innovation for the period. The building was supported by a concrete core, which housed the lifts and the whole network of systems, starting with the wiring that kept the structure up.

EVERYONE IS TALKING ABOUT IT

Japan stands for modernity, and the whole country was fascinated by La Défense. Emperor Hiro Hito even paid a visit to the Nobel Tower in 1969. Nowadays, too, Japanese tourists still come here, to retrace their Emperor's footsteps, and they are as interested as ever.



Hiro Hito visits the Nobel Tower, 1971



BETTING ON THE FUTURE

The 1960s and 70s

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Pomagalski - 1968

BELIEVING IN IT, PROMOTING IT

From then on, every dream was given free rein. The national press hastened to support La Défense, publishing lengthy articles glorifying "the town quarter of the future". In July 1967, Paris Match caused a sensation by devoting a double-spread to a drawing by Yves Tanguy. This gave an impression of what this futuristic quarter could look like, and included a sketchy outline of the 24 towers provided for in the masterplan of 1964. Although the area itself could more accurately be described as a huge building site, EPAD was riding this wave and there was no lack of enthusiasm or arguments in support of the sales that were being made, while the construction of the parking levels and the esplanade was still underway. Given that the lower levels were in the public domain (being filled with parking lots, roadways and other networks), promoters were invited to purchase a "right to build", more precisely, a "volume of air". The latter had to be in keeping with established norms (42 metres x 24 metres x 100 metres). By the beginning of the 1970s, the first results were encouraging; La Défense already contained a central system for air-conditioning and heating, 3,500 parking places, 15km of pipe galleries, several road interchanges, 6 hectares of paving for pedestrians and La Défense stations for the SNCF and RER (regional express railway) railway lines. Three buildings had been erected: ESSO, Nobel, Aquitaine and four more were under construction: Aurore, Atlantique, EDF and Europe.



Gan Tower under construction

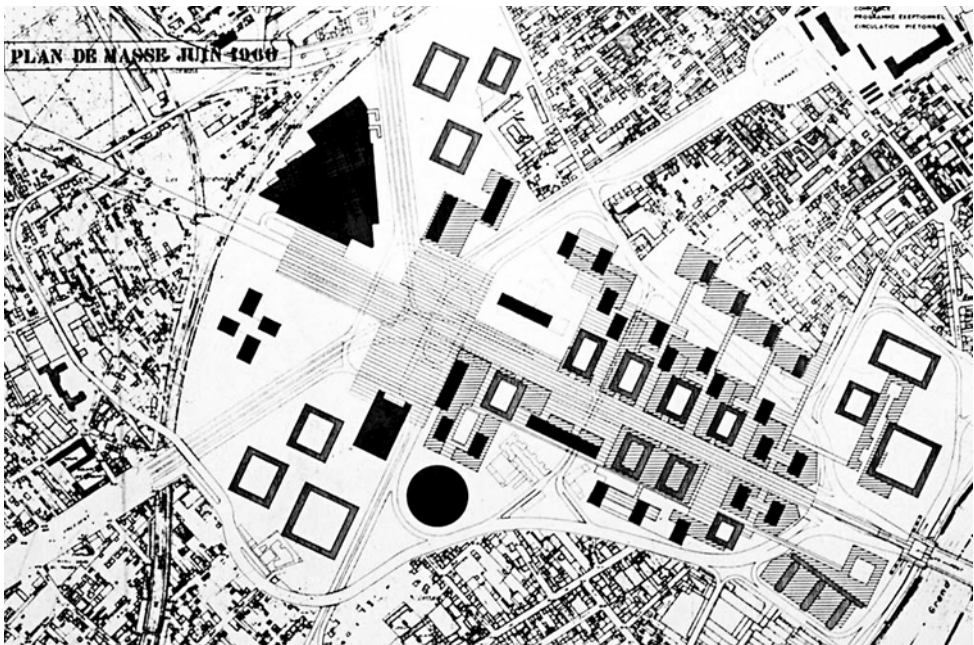


The CNIT parking in 1960



THE FIRST UNCERTAIN STEPS

However, the times were changing. People's expectations were changing and the first wave of building no longer met the requirements of the age. First Masterplan constraints were no longer suitable with companies new expectations and increasingly sophisticated technical possibilities. For instance, UAP chose to centralise its offices at La Défense, on condition it would be allowed to secure an office block that measured 70,000 sq.m. EPAD was regretfully obliged to limit their offer to two neighbouring towers, each measuring 28,000 sq.m. Something had to be done, and quickly; the viability and commercial success of La Défense were at stake. Jean Millier, the engineer in the Roads and Bridges Authority, and the new EPAD Director, took the matter in hand and revised the masterplan. Without further ado, the permitted size for offices was doubled to 1,600,000 sq.m. As for height, all limits were lifted. The effect was instantaneous. From then on, UAP had a free hand and its tower rose proudly to 190 metres. The GAN and FIAT towers quickly overtook it, achieving 187 metres and 227 metres respectively. In spite of all this, things were not turning out for the best. The advent of these towers with their arrogant dimensions came at a time when there was growing alarm about the built



environment. Armies of bulldozers had flattened Les Halles, the traditional marketplace in the middle of Paris. La Villette and the towers along the River Seine were a cause of alarm to Parisians; nothing seemed capable of containing the developers' frenzy... and their sacrilegious excesses were compounded when the huge outline of the GAN tower rose up inexorably behind the Arc de Triomphe, a blot on a previously unmarked horizon. The proponents of a traditional approach that was frozen in time were set against the defenders of a modern approach that was keen to burst its bounds. Giscard d'Estaing was Finance Minister at the time and he proposed demolishing some of the buildings that had caused this furore. It took an intervention by the President, Georges Pompidou, on 12 October 1972, for the construction to be approved, thereby putting a definitive end to tergiversations and doubts about the future of La Défense. The second-generation towers won the day. They were larger, being built around a concrete core containing the lifts and services, and they looked out over huge stretches of landscape, shining with artificial light just like their counterparts across the Atlantic. La Défense had a new face, one



THE WAY IS OPENED

Long years passed before this business quarter was supplied with a public transport service worthy of the name. In 1968, a permanent station was finally opened for the many travellers who come from Saint-Lazare, Versailles and Saint-Nom-La-Bretèche.

RER* FOLLOWS THE TREND

The project was finally approved in 1961 and "La Défense" station was opened in February 1970. It was built on 5 levels and constitutes an interchange station of monumental size: it's 225 metres long, 65 metres wide and 27 metres high. Nowadays, it serves the T2 tramline, 4 railway lines, RER A, line 1 of the Paris metro and 16 bus services.

(RER* = Paris Metropolitan and regional rail system)



RER under construction



Flat tower

that would henceforth be dominated by gigantic structures and by the presence of works of art on a monumental scale. EPAD launched its new policy, which had a strong emphasis on culture, by acquiring a great many artworks and distributing them around the site. As a true pioneer, ESSO had already invited Vincent Guiro to carve a concrete wall in 1971. A year on, the 'mechanical bird' by Philolaos was the first of a long series of artistic commissions, which would turn La Défense, spurred on by Jean Millier, then the Director of EPAD, into a site with a cultural dimension that bore witness to the age. During this period, EPAD also expressed a desire to provide specially designated natural areas. This gave rise to a large lawn on top of the concrete esplanade, following careful research into the conditions at La Défense.



A Giraffe on the esplanade, 1973

TOUGHING OUT THE PETROL CRISIS

This event affected the newly started project badly. In 1973, the petrol crisis put the whole economy in jeopardy, along with associated sectors such as housing. For the next five years, not one lot in the whole of the La Défense sector was sold. The Générale, Neptune, and Manhattan towers were left desperately empty or under-occupied. EPAD announced a provisional deficit of 800 million francs, but, nevertheless, managed to keep going. A sculpture by Miro helped to lighten the gloomy atmosphere: the Foire au Troc (Barter market) and the Jazz Festival served to brighten the lives of the inhabitants. Finally, the clouds were dispelled when Raymond Barre, then Prime Minister, announced a series of measures in October 1978. These new dispositions included authorisations for an additional 350,000 sq.m of offices, the completion of the André Malraux Park, continued work on building the motorway under the esplanade, and the unblocking of credits for improving the environment. Plans were even made for moving the Ministry for Infrastructure and Housing there. Ten days after this noisy wake-up call by the public authorities, Citibank, the leading global banking group, announced its intention to build 21,000 sq.m of offices opposite the CNIT, right on top of the shopping centre. From then on, one thing was sure: the future had gained the day.



Jazz at La Défense, 1982

JEAN MILLIER, THE REVIVAL

Jean Millier (disappeared in 2006) had been the General Civil Engineer and a former student of the école Polytechnique, and had experienced half a century of construction as an important office-holder. As CEO of EPAD between 1969 and 1977, he had to engage in a passionate struggle to secure a revision of the master plan restricting the height of the towers ... this was turning away investors, with their ever-increasing demands for height. The government was receptive to his arguments and approved the construction of larger buildings and higher towers, which, in turn, allowed the project to recover its economic viability.

ONE THAT WILL NEVER BE SEEN

The Polak brothers' Tourisme TV tower was conceived as a giant antenna 725 metres high, which could cover an area 600km in diameter and reach 75 million viewers in Europe. In spite of its proven profitability, its financial backers got cold feet and the onset of satellites led to the project being abandoned.



Tourisme TV Tower

WHEN THERE'S JAZZ

Since 1977, the National Jazz Competition has been held at La Défense and has become a trend-setting event in France. The great names of Contemporary Jazz have all learned the ropes in front of an audience in the business quarter, during the La Défense Jazz Festival.



A NEW DEPARTURE

The 1980s and 90s

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WORK IS RESUMED

These signs of a revival proved lasting. The housing market picked up and was better than before. The number of new buildings was multiplying, encouraged by a young and ambitious promoter called Christian Pellerin. From now on though, every initiative was ruled by reason. The dominant impulse was now no longer to build upwards, but took a more rational turn, aiming to build well. The human element had regained its rights and the aim was to produce a pleasant environment. The architects were obeying a quality imperative that was linked to economic considerations. Individual offices were becoming more convivial places to work in, particularly with regard to their use of natural light. From then on, the trend was for third-generation offices, among which the Descartes, Pascal and Voltaire towers feature, whose names are a perfect match for this new philosophy. At the same time, La Défense opened the Quatre Temps shopping centre in 1981. It encompasses 105,000 sq.m and is the largest such complex in Europe, constituting an attractive hub for the quarter and contributing to its vitality.



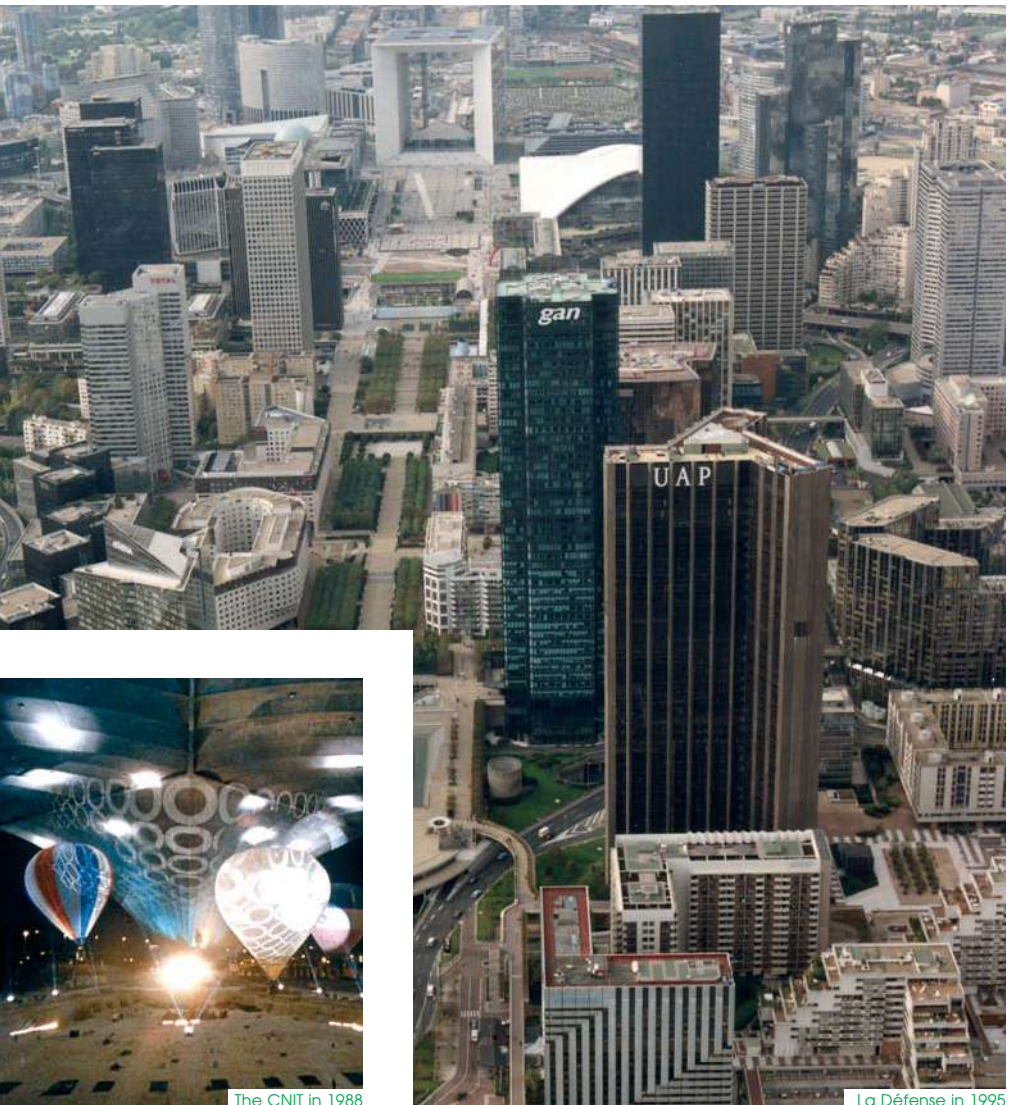
AIG



LES QUATRE TEMPS

A NEW FACE

By the 1990s, the business quarter had reached the balance point. A lot of skill was required in order to squeeze new office blocks onto the narrow sites and intersections that were still available. Indeed, this gave rise to real technical feats: unusual shapes that played with curves and provided slender forms which freed-up the airspace and attained vertiginous heights. Among such constructions are KUPDKA and CBC with their distinguished buildings, and the twin towers of the Société Générale. They were inventing a new form of construction, one that respected the environment, by applying the most sophisticated new technologies. However, this movement was constantly being overtaken by progress. The new millennium welcomed the first architectural works premières réalisations, such as Cœur Défense on the former ESSO site, Défense Plaza, CBX and Exaltis. The impressive EDF is real futuristic vessel, designed by Pei, Cobb, and Freed&Partner, which justabout finishes off the design of the esplanade and gives us a lively impression of what the future will look like. All these new structures have one thing in common: they are very aware of the new environmental stakes. We may certainly regard these as the precursors of an age-old concern: sustainable development.



The CNIT in 1988

La Défense in 1995



The Agnès Fountain

TO ENCLOSE OR NOT, THAT IS THE QUESTION

Given the diversity of the buildings that make up La Défense, it needed to find a strong unifying symbol that could draw the whole lot together. This idea arose in an unexpected way in 1969. At the time, sky-scrappers had just been authorised and the architect Ieoh Ming Pei had been asked to build a 70 to 80-floor high tower opposite the CNIT, which was intended to be highest in Europe. Pei already had a vision, about how to 'head' La Défense. He proposed moving the building programme right to the middle of the esplanade, thereby providing a masterly focus for the historic Axis. He designed a double sky-scraper in the shape of a V, which would be concealed from view by the piers of the Arc de Triomphe. This project would never see the light of day (Pei was able to take comfort later on when he built the Louvre pyramid... at the starting point to the axis!). However, the problem about how to 'head' La Défense continued to exercise minds for many years to come. President Pompidou selected a project designed by Emile Aillaud that involved two concave blocks of flats in the form of a semicircle, which would close the historic Axis and reflect the image of the city. Although a few reservations were expressed, this proposal was finally accepted on 10 July 1973, though in a more modest version. The mirror structures were reduced from 70 metres to 50 metres. However, the hour was not propitious for any such ambitious projects, even when reduced, and it was mercilessly swept aside by the crisis. In 1979, when the storm had blown over, 10 architects worked on the project, before the consultation exercise folded. Two years later, at the end of a new consultation, President Giscard d'Estaing chose Jean Willerval. The selection panel had been enchanted by his mirror installations, in which broken mirror pieces are arranged in fan shapes. Now, the historic Axis would trace a route through a landscape of glass cliffs.

Stories

THE FIRST TO COME IN, THE LAST TO BE TOLD

Although Johan Otto von Spreckelsen had just been chosen as the overall winner of the "Tête Défense" contest, informing him proved rather tricky as he had gone to a little Scandinavian island, with no telephone, to fish.

GREAT ARCH, GREAT FEATS OF PROWESS

Johan von Spreckelsen's first idea for the two lateral façades was to print a giant circuit on them. He abandoned this idea and demanded instead a perfectly flat surface, on which heavy glass panels could be fixed with no perceptible joints. The panels had to be optically perfect to ensure a uniform reflection. He was extraordinarily demanding and rejected 3,000 panels which did not achieve the spotless degree of whiteness that he required.

BETTER AND BETTER

The new building materials, the sophisticated glass panels, and climate-controlled air conditioning systems have reduced running costs. For instance, the ELF tower consumed 3 times less than the Fiat Tower, although the latter was a model for the second generation towers.



Esplanade Général de Gaulle



The Arche

A WINDOW ONTO THE FUTURE

The prize-winner's joy was short-lived. Once elected President of the Republic in 1981, François Mitterrand decided to add the 'Tête Défense' (La Défense head) project to his list of grand public works, and he jettisoned the newly-approved project without further ado. The new project was to be on a grander scale. It was announced that the aim was to mark the historic Axis by erecting a monumental structure, one that would represent the French State for centuries to come. This was to be an exceptional competition, with exceptional participants. The proposals numbered 424. However, it did not take long before Johan Otto Von Spreckelsen, a Danish architect unknown in France, who was director of the Architectural Department in the Académie Royale, won over the President of Republic. His idea for a hollowed-out cube, a magisterial Arc de Triomphe in a contemporary outline of white marble had all the simplicity of the obvious. It blended intelligently with the surroundings, while proclaiming its uniqueness. Standing on a slight bias, for technical reasons, and to enhance its cubic volume. It is out of alignment by 6°30' with regard to the Axis, which is exactly the same angle that the square courtyard of the Louvre has to the axis. Above all, this arch for the new age achieves a master-stroke, in marking a perspective view that dates back many centuries, and by opening a window onto the future. That same year, 1989, the new CNIT (Centre for New Industries and Technologies) opened its doors. The only part to be retained was the structure: with its famous vaulted roof and its façade, stripped of all protuberances, it has been totally transformed; it has become an advanced technology centre at the service of the business community and the public, and a real centre at the heart of the locality. From then on, La Défense has had a head... and a heart.



THE NEW CNIT

10,000 visitors come here every day, mainly to see the exhibitions which are constantly being put on in the halls that feature on the 20,000 sq.m lower level, where the nec plus ultra of computer products from round the world can be viewed in the boutiques.

21 meeting rooms and 3 auditoriums can cater for participants from anywhere in the world... not forgetting the bars, the shops, the leading brand names and restaurants, that are open to the public.



HIGH TECH MUSIC FOR AN AVANT-GARDE QUARTER.

In July 1990, during the National Celebration, Jean-Michel Jarre organised an action-packed concert on the esplanade of La Défense, at which 2 million fascinated spectators throbbed to the electronic beat and marvelled at the 10 tons of fireworks that were set off on that memorable night.



ITS HISTORY IS STILL BEING WRITTEN

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- 39 THE NEW ERA IS ALREADY HERE



The esplanade park in La Défense

A CITY WITHIN THE CITY

Having successfully overcome the petrol crisis, the housing crisis and the periods of recession, thanks to the continuing determination of the State to guarantee the operation success, La Défense has demonstrated the viability of a concept that is capable of sustaining business and an excellent quality of life. As a living quarter, a business centre, a commercial space, a tourist destination, an open-air museum of modern art, this 'separate' town quarter combines all the functions of a city in a harmonious way.



The Takis Fountain

THE NEW ERA IS ALREADY HERE

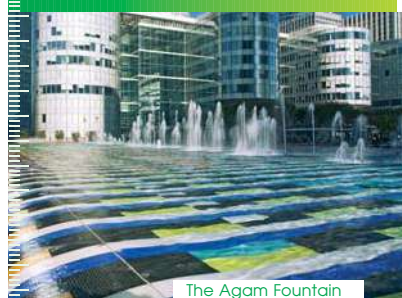
La Défense's strength lies in its ability to reinvent itself constantly, in order to keep pace with the times - and to keep a step ahead. Having decided to maintain its place among the leading business quarters, and this despite growing competition from other great capitals cities in Europe, the French state had been working on a renovation plan since 2005. It was launched officially in July 2006 by Nicolas Sarkozy, then the Interior Minister, as a particularly ambitious plan that foresees the construction of 450,000 sq.m of new offices, a considerable part of which will involve demolitions and reconstructions, and of 100,000 sq.m of new housing. Plans are also in place for improving the transport services, for renovating the circular boulevard, and for projecting a livelier and more exciting image.

La Défense in figures

- 160** hectares
- 3** million sq.m offices
- 2,500** headquarters
- 150,000** employees
- 600,000** sq.m apartments
- 20,000** inhabitants
- 400,000** people pass through every day
- 180,000** sq.m retail space in the Quatre Temps shopping centre
- 100,000** sq.m local shops
- 2,600** hotel rooms
- 50** terraces with cafés and restaurants
- 16** cinemas
- 31** hectares of pedestrian areas and walkways



- 11** hectares of green spaces
- 60** monumental modern art sculptures
- 90,000** sq.m highways, of which **60,000** sq.m are covered
- WIFI hotspot** in every public space
- 20** fountains, including two monumental ones (AGAM and TAKIS)



The Agam Fountain

