TECHNICAL DATA/SITE INFORMATION/PROJECT INFORMATION

Architect: Richard Rogers Partnership
Project: Tribunal de Grande Instance
Location: Bordeaux, France

Project Type: Extension of existing Court of Justice
Approx. Ft²: 25,000 m² or 225,000 square feet
Functions: Café
Concourse - two levels
Judicial Offices
Holding Cells
Courtrooms (7) – for civil and criminal
Chamber of Commerce

Structure: Light-weight steel, stone/concrete, glazing and sustainable elements
Parking: Not specified, but underground parking is assumed.
Abitare, Dec. 1999 n.357, p.110
Architectural Review, Mar. 1993 v.193, pp.48-51
www.richardrogers.co.uk/

In 1992 an international competition was held to determine which architecture firm would be responsible for designing the new Law Courts in Bordeaux, France. The contest was won by the London-based firm Richard Rogers Partnership. Situated in the heart of historic Bordeaux, the site for the project is a melting pot of archetypes and styles. From the existing neoclassical law court building to the medieval walls that still stand, each element of the site acts as a link to the history of Bordeaux. Due to its central locale and close proximity to the town’s cathedral and city hall, the site lends itself to being a place for the public. The scheme developed by the Richard Rogers Partnership sought to exploit this public potential by creating a grand concourse that would link the various elements of the site together and thus creating a cohesiveness amongst all of the sites various pieces.
In an attempt to create a dialogue with the city, the Richard Rogers Partnership designed the Law Courts to meet the request of the French Ministry of Defense. Their demand was for the RRP to create a building that would have a feeling of transparency and openness, while instilling a positive perception of the accessibility of the French Judicial System. At the entry level the public gains access to the building through a series of free standing ramps. When approaching the building, the public passes over the ancient moat and into the grand concourse which surrounds the seven free standing courtrooms. A progression of spatial sequences is created from the general life of the street to the public events on the concourse. One's journey terminates once finally inside the privacy of the offices and courtrooms, ending a unique experience through a judicial complex.
An interesting quality of the courtroom typology is the arrangement of its spaces and the procession that its inhabitants make from their cells or offices to the courtrooms. When evaluating the design by the RRP, it is interesting to see the positioning of programmatic elements by floors and their vertical relationships to one another. Located on the ground floor of the complex are the holding cells for the criminals and the offices for judicial officials.

On the two floors above reside the chambers for civil suits involving families and minors. Housed within a linear bar, their private spaces are linked to the courtrooms by landbridges that cross through the public atrium. This decision in turn puts the public on display as they travel from space to space within the court building. A sectional relationship is created, thus further emphasizing the private and public realms.
In working with the site and its context, the RRP set out to use materials that would not only reflect the medieval elements on the site, but also work towards making the design environmentally friendly. The courts sit on a stone-clad plinth and are supported by concrete bases, which in turn support the timber-clad volumes above. The roof consists of a lightweight steel structure that supports a copper-clad roof plane. An anodized aluminum facade wraps around the support block, tempered by a variety of brise-soleils and setbacks. The concrete floor-plates support the office spaces and are connected by vertical cores. The courtrooms themselves are a combination of high-tech and traditional construction methods. Laminated timber and red cedar strips were used to line the interior and exterior of the rooms.
In addition to using sustainable materials and construction methods, the RRP wanted light to have a significant role within the building. With a rich history in High-Tech architecture, RRP conceived of using a maximum amount of glazing in the building. Their concern for an energy-efficient building impacted all aspects of the projects design. The orientation of the building on the site shields the vulnerable glazed spaces while maximizing the use of daylight. Within the building is an atrium that helps provide natural light as well as create a reservoir of clean and tempered air. Natural light saturates the lower floors through glass bridges and walkways that help animate the atrium void surrounding the concourse. The courtrooms themselves have large ocular skylights that provide controlled natural daylight to the space below.
ANALYSIS DIAGRAMS

PERSPECTIVE 1

PERSPECTIVE 2

PERSPECTIVE 3

EXISTING ELEMENTS

PUBLIC APPROACH

PERMEABILITY V. TRANSPARENCY