

BREAKING THROUGH THE PARISIAN SKYLINE



Case Study: HAMONIC + MASSON & Associés

Over the last several decades, French law has imposed strict height limits to keep the historic and iconic skyline of Paris purposefully low. But in more recent years, businesses like the architecture firm HAMONIC + MASSON & Associés actively lobbied to enable the City of Lights to grow upward, reflecting its rising population. Their efforts proved successful; in November 2011, the Paris City Council amended the urban planning laws that govern the Massena-Bruneseau area of the 13th arrondissement, one of 20 municipalities that subdivide the capitol, and raised the height limitation on the construction of housing blocks from 37 to 50 meters, or roughly 165 feet. Many cited the decision as a historic move that will forever change the landscape of Paris.

HAMONIC + MASSON & Associés was one of the first architectural firms to capitalize on this change, partnering with Comte Vollenweider Architects to design the ZAC Masséna Paris Rive Gauche high-rise. This project marked the first collaboration between the two firms. “We both put our egos to one side in order to create one building with its own form and own materials,” says HAMONIC + MASSON Director Jean-Christophe Masson. “Combining two different styles of architecture should have been the pitfall of this project, but we worked harmoniously, and the result speaks for itself.”



HAMONIC + MASSON used Vectorworks Architect software to design the dual-towered ZAC Masséna.

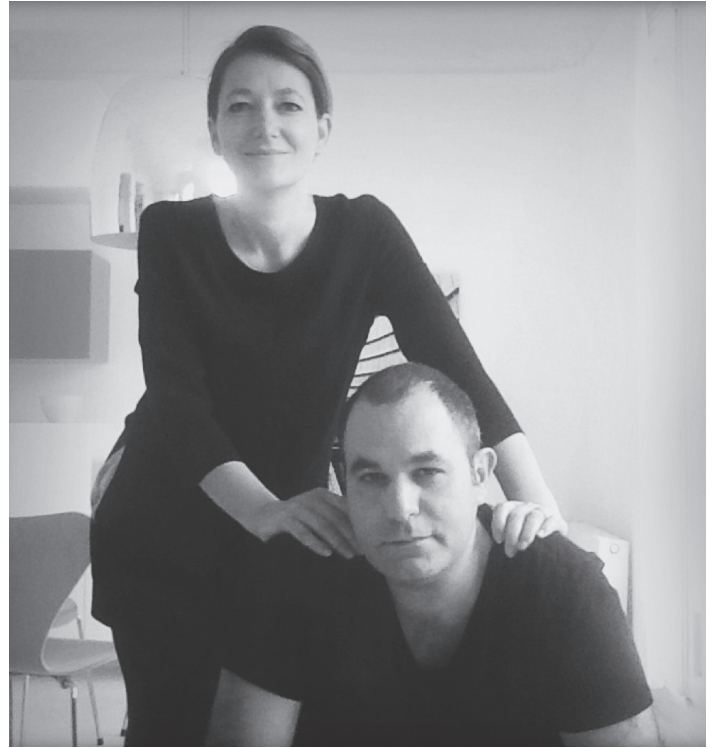
The project emerged after HAMONIC + MASSON won a competition organized by the Paris City Council in partnership with a local housing authority with a private promoter as the client (Bouygues Immobilier). The project's objective was to mark this landscape with a remarkable building, combining offices, private housing, social housing, and parking, as well as beautiful architecture.

HAMONIC + MASSON turned to Vectorworks Architect software to design the dual-towered structure, which will reside in Paris along the southern bank of the River Seine. "Our project will be delivered at the beginning of 2015 and will be the first 50-meter-tall housing solution to be built in Paris since the start of the 1970s," says Masson. "It is symbolic of a willingness to question the possibility of height in Paris. Functioning as one single building whilst offering social housing and home ownership opportunities, the project links the strict rigidity of the Avenue de France, the railway landscape, the entrance to Ivry suburb, and finally the transition of a linear city toward a vertical one."

Experimenting with Urban Design

Masson and his partner Gaëlle Hamonic didn't create the high-rise with the intent to simply exceed the old height barrier. Rather, since the ZAC building was the first mixed-use high-rise to be built in Paris in more than 30 years, the designers felt it had to be something greater than projects that came before. Their inspiration was literally a twist on the traditional tower structure, which fits in with the firm's guiding principles of focusing on functionality for their clients while also experimenting with the classic "city image." Each story of the two towers is aligned differently than those above and below it. This series of shifting floors creates a swirling prism that rethinks urban space and is a design that the architects feel has a lot of potential for future projects.

While the look of the building's exterior was obviously important, Hamonic and Masson sought innovation inside the structure, as well. The ZAC high-rise achieves diversity by combining 17 stories of public housing in one tower with 14 stories of privately owned flats in another, combining for 200 units. Both towers rest on a common base filled with shops that open up onto the Avenue de France, one of the busiest areas of the vibrant city. Despite the dichotomy, Hamonic and Masson's firm made no distinction when designing the interiors. The architects found a way to not only break through the ceiling of the old Parisian skyline in an eye-catching way, but also to bridge the divide between public and private housing in the eyes of Parisians.



Gaëlle Hamonic and Jean-Christophe Masson



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Another goal that guided Hamonic and Masson throughout the design process was a desire to emphasize light. They were particularly inspired by the concept of heliotropism — the movement of plants in response to the direction of the sun. As the sun moves across the sky above Paris, it will always be shining into some of the apartments in the two towers because of their varied orientations. This not only makes lighting the interior spaces easier, but it also makes these spaces seem larger and more open to the bustling streets and picturesque riverfront right outside.

Striving to diversify traditional design concepts in both a horizontal and vertical sense has been a focus of the firm since its 1997 inception by founding members of the French Touch Association, a group that brings together French architects from over 20 firms with the purpose of promoting architecture education and opening dialog among architects. Since then, HAMONIC + MASSON has received multiple accolades for their work, including the Architecture et Maître d'Ouvrage (AMO) 2011 Spécial Saint-Gobain award for the construction of 62 public housing units in the 12th arrondissement, as well as a nomination for the Mies Van Der Rohe Award in 2003. Such achievements are a credit to the firm's 15 associates who work on projects throughout France that include cultural facilities, schools, commercial buildings, offices, and residential projects.



The complexity of the project and its relationship with the street-level plaza is quickly conveyed through this massing study document.

Innovation Through Vectorworks

HAMONIC + MASSON uses Vectorworks software because it is well-suited for the way the firm works, which means a 2D orientation for competitions and the use of 3D for advanced projects that require more time.

“For us, Vectorworks is an obvious choice,” says Hamonic. “The advantage of using Vectorworks is that it works fast because it’s logical, intuitive, and easy to learn. Aimed at organized users, Vectorworks is very close to the architect because it’s dedicated to architecture. It’s intuitive.”

Acknowledgements

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