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Bailly school project

Architect Mikou Design Studio

Client City of Saint-Denis

Cost €10m

Start date September 2008

Completion January 2010

Floor space 7,000 sq m



Picture credits: Kleinfehn



Mikou Design Studio has created a colourful school that will regenerate a run-down corner of Paris



The children are our future. Taking note of this well-worn cliché, Mikou Design Studio recently completed an inspirational school in the tough Saint-Denis neighbourhood of a not-so-gay Paris. The project lies at the heart of Plaine Commune's forthcoming regeneration plan for the Bailly district, and it's hoped the school will become a restorative force, a building that will herald a change in fortunes for the locals. Housing a pre-school and elementary school under one roof, the building's brightly coloured eaves that overhang the street below seem to encapsulate the optimism of the project. These quiff-like features provide shelter and, according to Mikou, are inspired by cathedral lamps. Granted, a somewhat unlikely reference for a school project, especially when you consider the secularism of French education, but all the more interesting for it. Stretching along the Rue de Bailly, the school's glazed brick structure forms the base for a glazed, screen-printed facade, which the practice hopes will "protect the intimacy of the children".

The site was an elongated, skinny affair, which required an inventive architectural solution. Mikou's answer was to create a

finger-shaped floorplan. The three buildings extend vertically away from the main foyer, thereby avoiding overexposure to the road and reception area. They cluster around long perpendicular corridors that run the length of the building on both floors. Meanwhile, the teaching staff are positioned at the north and south ends of the school.

The classrooms themselves are oriented around a series of courtyards/gardens, which double as playgrounds. Noise is insulated by a glass screen on the Rue de Bailly side of the main corridor. Although site restrictions dictated a linear design, the liberal application of brightly coloured paints on the concrete structure dispel any feelings of po-faced rigidity. Individual walls, arches and ceilings are highlighted in a mixture of blues, yellows and greens and the spaces have an exceptionally clean look.

"We had to invent some new and attractive spaces on a very difficult site," says Selma Mikou, one of the project's architects. "We managed to create a new shape and space typologies for the building. It was really enjoyable."

Top left Multi-coloured eaves overhang the street below

Top right The bright walls instill a sense of levity to the project

Above left Large rooftop windows allow an abundance of natural light