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Zigzags Inside and Out

The tyranny of the axes that prevails all over Paris is challenged here by a capricious band. This project creates new views and treats the building substance with respect. The zigzag spine connects the interior and exterior spaces. Less becomes more.

• The authors' approach in terms of both urban planning and architecture was to preserve the urban surroundings and intervene as little as possible in the Palais de Tokyo. The spine of the project is a new zigzag ramp that uses the Passerelle Debilly to cross the river, then deviates from it, turns into the exterior courtyard of the Palais de Tokyo, leaps over the pool, winds its way through the forecourt, reaches the colonnade and ends in Boulevard Wilson, linking all levels of the building. The zigzag ramp results from the permissible gradient and provides constantly changing views of the river landscape and the historical monuments.

Three pocket parks fill the wedge-shaped spaces between the arms of the ramp, and there is a geometrical arboretum on the upper level of the forecourt. The ramp is a surprising intervention and a strong, convincing commentary on the typically Parisian "Centre cour et jardin" design with its pronounced symmetry and axiality, thereby ironically alleviating the compulsive filling-in of the triangular, asymmetrical site with a classicist design.

The authors responded to the tyranny of the axes with their capricious zigzag band. All the storeys of the museum are accessible by elevator from the ramp. The necessary interventions are carefully and respectfully integrated in the existing building substance. The main entrance is located in the forecourt by the Boulevard Wilson and provides a convenient access to the Visitors' Center on the ground floor, from where all the floors are accessible.

The Interior Zigzags

There is an intelligent connection between the interior and exterior spaces: the zigzag spine is continued inside the building. Another zigzag ramp leads through the courtyards and the comb-like projecting rooms on the west façade that accommodate the exhibition.

This forms an exciting path of discovery that winds its way through all the rooms of the museum and the courtyards. It connects the two exhibition floors and provides a complete circuit. The top floor of the museum has not been changed at all.

Special attention was paid to the treatment of textures and vegetation. Nature, embodied by the plants on the courtyards, is used as a metaphor for the difference between human beings. This concept differs from the usual approach to "normality", which tends to exclude those who deviate from the norm. The authors took great care in giving each courtyard its own theme of sensuous perception, and orientation in the interior of the building is facilitated by different perfumes.

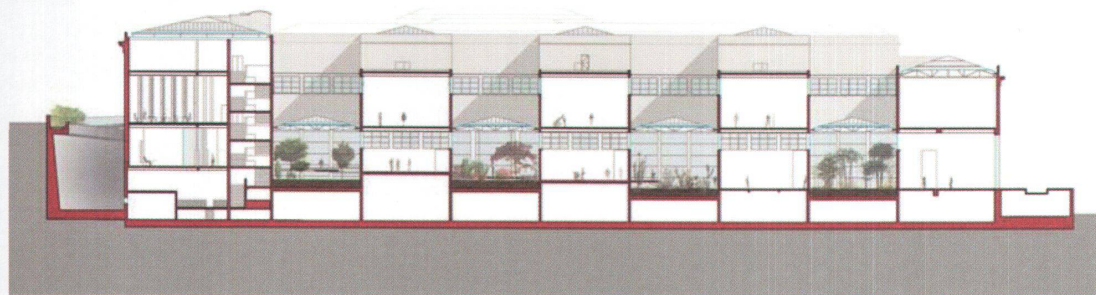
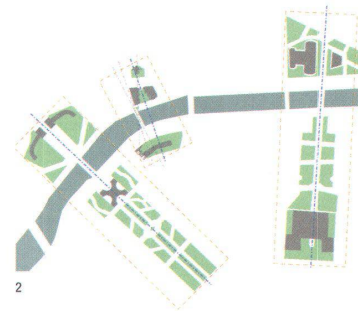
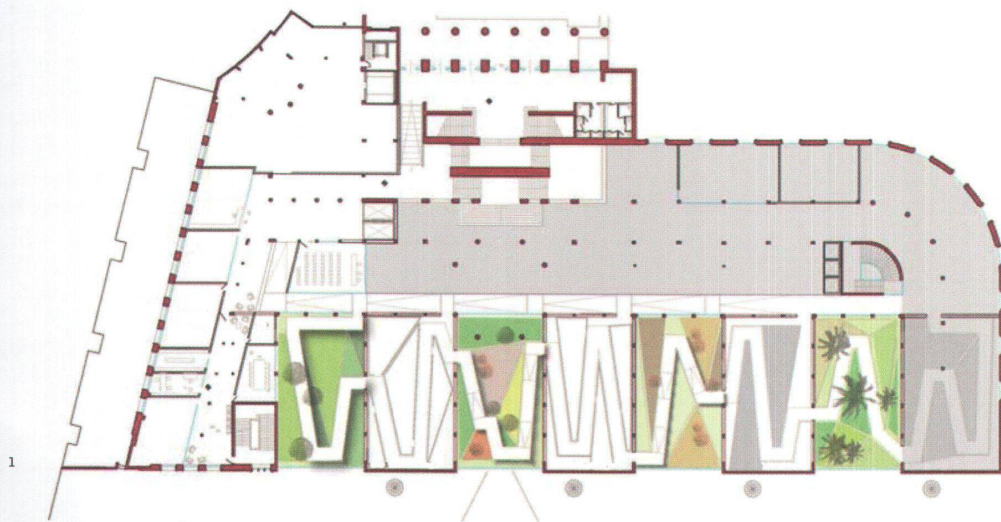
Exhibition Boxes

The project is packed with surprises, for example the exhibition boxes, which are connected by the path of discovery. Unfortunately, the exhibition concept on the theme of sensorial perception was not developed in sufficient detail. Its connection with the five senses in particular and accessibility in general could have been developed in greater detail, as could, too, the concept of the exhibition boxes. The project's most convincing quality is its restraint. Much has been achieved with sparing means. •

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1 The zigzag band continues in the interior of the Palais de Tokyo.

2 The project is a response to the great axes of the city of Paris.

3 The path of discovery leads alternately through the courtyards and interior spaces.

4 The zigzag band is obedient to the conditions of the permissible gradient.

5 The authors' vision of the deviation from the Passerelle Debilly.

6 The zigzag band is an ironic comment on the classicist rigidity of the outer courtyard.

