

Jean-Louis Veret

Born 20 November, 1927 in Paris

Died 4 September, 2011 in Royan

Nationality: French

Architect, urbanist, teacher

Taught at Harvard GSD,

Studied at Ecole des Beaux Arts in the studio of Arretche and Gromort

Practice: Atelier de Montrouge, independent practice

Jean-Louis Veret, the last living associate of Le Corbusier's, died on September 4th, 2011. He will be interred in Pere Lachais in Paris.

In 1952, after graduation from the Ecole des Beaux Arts, he joined the studio Le Corbusier. For the next three years he oversaw the construction of the Sarabai House and the Mill Owners Building in Ahmedabad, India. Upon his return in 1955 he cofounded The Atelier de Montrouge with Jean Renaudie, Pierre Riboulet and Gerard Thurnaer. Inspired by Le Corbusier's "Athens Charter". The Atelier created urban planning studies and various public buildings in North Africa and France. He was one of France's most distinguished architects in the last half of the 20th Century. In 1968 Veret was named "Chief Architect of Public Buildings and Monuments" by Andre Malnaux.

In 1979 Jean-Louis Veret opened his own private practice. Shortly thereafter he commenced the restoration of the Villa Savoye which continued in various phases until 1992. One of his most internationally praised projects was also his smallest. This was the elegant Headquarters and retail shops of the Japanese cosmetic firm Shu Uemura. Its black curvilinear facade can still be seen on Boulevard St. Germain just west of Café Deux Magots.

Among his many activities, Jean-Louis Veret was Visiting Critic at Harvard University Graduate School of Design in 1978, Visiting Professor at the school of Architecture Nancy (1981), Professor of the School of Architecture Paris la Villette (1985-1993), and participated in ministerial committees in France and abroad. He curated and organized numerous exhibitions, including in 1978 the exhibition "Colours of India" at the Galerie Bernheim, and in 1985 the exhibition "Architecture in India" at the Ecole des Beaux Arts Paris, where his experience with Le Corbusier is highlighted.

Jean-Louis Veret is survived by his wife Helene who was the French photo editor of Life Magazine and two daughters Diane and Estelle.

Biography

Atelier de Montrouge

The Atelier de Montrouge was founded in November 1958 by Jean-Renaudie, Pierre Riboulet, Gérard Thurnauer and Jean-Louis Véret. The Atelier, based at 32 rue d'Estienne d'Orves in Montrouge, clearly identified itself with its locality. In its creations, it had two distinct periods: the Renaudie, Riboulet, Thurnauer and Véret architectural workshop (ATM1, 1958-68, until the departure of Renaudie on 31 July 1968), and the Riboulet, Thurnauer and Véret architectural workshop (ATM2, 1968-81; from 1 January 1979, during which each architect had the right to practice in his own name). In 1965, the practice won the Prix du Cercle d'Etudes Architecturales, and was also acclaimed in 1981 when it received the Grand Prix National d'Architecture.

Pierre Riboulet, Gérard Thurnauer and Jean-Louis Véret met at the Ecole nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, at the workshop of Georges Gromort and Louis Arretche (1945-52). Outside their studies, they were also marked by their experience with Michel Ecochard at the Morocco Department of Urban Planning (three internships 1949, 1951 and 1952), by the art history lectures of Pierre Francastel (1948-51), and above all by their involvement in the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (encounter with Sigtuna in 1952, and CIAM 9 Aix-en-Provence in 1953). Graduating in November 1952, they had the chance to collaborate with some of the leading figures of the time. Véret worked for Le Corbusier in autumn 1952 then left for India as the head of the Ahmedabad construction sites (1953-55). Working for the ATIC (created by Jean Prouvé), Riboulet and Thurnauer developed an emergency project of 190 homes in Argenteuil for Emmaüs (1954-57). They then worked in association with Ecochard, who designed the Federal University of Karachi (1954-59). Jean Renaudie joined the project in 1956; Véret soon joined them. Their experience together engendered a desire for workshop-based cooperative work, an idea that came to fruition in 1958 when they settled

in Montrouge in a small detached building at the back of a courtyard belonging to Véret's brother.

ATM's associative roots helped it stand out in the architectural landscape of the time, as their collective structure was rare. The architects' choice corresponded to a desire to share ideas and reflect on issues together, and even open themselves up to multidisciplinary collaborations. It was to them a means of avoiding enclosure in reductionist or systematic thought; this way, they could cultivate their own personal approach, reworking theories and models. This approach was central to their activity.

During the first period of the workshop (the quartet period, 1958-68), the architects were not involved in vast housing and urban renovation projects, and preferred to explore other possibilities of rethinking the problem of housing. They were interested in working through the different scales of reflection (from object to terrain) and were involved in urban planning as well as architectural projects, on very different programs. Their first productions—such as the Moulin Messagier (1959-62), the Nouakchott hospital (1959-79), the Le Merlier holiday village (1959-65), the State electricity body's (EDF) data processing centre, SIM n° 1 (1960-65), the Clamart library (1962-66) and the EDF accommodation in Ivry-sur-Seine (1963-67)—reveal their capacity to extend the ideas of the Modern Movement to give architecture a contemporary expression, reflecting the nature of each programme, its constructional truth and the lifestyle of its occupants. Furthermore, their urban planning studies in 1959 in Rouen, and in the Var and Paris regions, as well as their housing project studies—like those of the CCEA (1958-59), Goussainville (1961-62) and Saint-Denis (for the re-housing of the Francs-Moisins slum, 1964-66)—reveal the main themes of their method. Their approach was to assess both the social and architectural realities of the context and draw inspiration from examples of traditional

housing. They also re-evaluated the underlying precepts of the Athens Charter so as to propose forms, or complex, dynamic urban infrastructures, which offered their inhabitants new qualities.

From the end of the 1960s, the Atelier's positions became clearer. The quartet were politically committed intellectuals, and they were early advocates of both the "right to habitation" and the "right to the city"; they were also actively involved in the debates of the time (organised among others by the Cercle d'Etudes Architecturales) and became the focus for passionate discussion about the city and the political dimension of their profession. Divergences of opinion, expressed during the Le Vaudreuil project (1967-68), and the events of May '68 led to Jean Renaudie's departure from Montrouge. The trio continued the adventure however, while engaging even more in different reflection groups. Thus, while Thurnauer participated in different inter-ministerial commissions (the Mission Basse-Seine, Plan, etc.), Riboulet, who along with Véret founded the Environnement M68 group in 1969 (with a mission to produce a white paper on social housing), started working in a university framework, assisting in the creation of the *Espaces et sociétés* review in 1970, alongside Henri Lefebvre and Anatole Kopp.

During the second period of the Atelier (the trio period, 1968-81), these individual commitments nourished their output and their production reached maturity, with projects responding concretely to the new problems of the age, like new towns, integrated amenities, urban renewal, regional planning, and the industrialisation of construction. While no actual construction was carried out on their part, the Le Vaudreuil study, developed within the framework of the multidisciplinary mission directing production (1968-78), helped the architects clarify their theoretical intentions concerning urban creation. Beyond this hugely complex study, which occupied them for a long period, the Atelier

designed and produced a certain number of large-scale projects, which were implemented over several years. This was particularly the case with the Istres and Marne-la-Vallée projects (Les Heures Claires, 1970-77 and the Arche Guédon, 1973-83, respectively), combining various services programs (for teaching, sporting, recreational and social amenities), as well as the park district in Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines (1975-80, produced by Véret and Thurnauer). In the course of these projects, the Atelier enhanced its approach and developed certain ideas, particularly the idea of encouraging residents' involvement in the creation of their environment via a form of flexible, progressive, and transformable architecture. During this work, and also in the course of less complex programmes—like the EDF's data centre, the SM n° 3, in Orléans-la-Source (1966-69), the young women's hostel at Tolbiac (1969-74) or the Centre d'Etudes Catalanes (1972-77)—the Atelier continued its research into a form of architectural expression inscribed very much in the present, between the heroic and the commonplace. Finally, in its urban planning studies, at Cap Ferret (UPA 4, 1971-72) as well as Istres (looking at how to expand the town centre, 1972-77) or in Paris (la Villette, 1976-77), it reaffirmed its desire to plan for the future by improving the living conditions of the whole of society today.

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Paris, 20 November 1927

Born into a lower-middle class family of shopkeepers, Jean-Louis Véret studied at the Ecole des beaux-arts in Paris within the Gromort-Arretche workshop. He graduated alongside Gérard Thurnauer and Jean-Louis Véret in 1957, and with them and Jean Renaudie founded the Atelier de Montrouge in 1958.

In 1979, he founded his own practice. As head architect of Bâtiments Civils et Palais Nationaux, Jean-Louis Véret was responsible for site redevelopment and restoration as well as the creation of new buildings for the film archives at the National Centre for Cinema in Bois-d'Arcy (1985-92). He was at the head of various restoration campaigns for Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye (1985-94) and of the redevelopment of the Théâtre de l'Est Parisien (rehearsal rooms and auditoriums, 1982-83). In parallel he produced different projects, particularly for the health services (the laboratories of the Avicenne Hospital in Bobigny, 1983-89, and a study for the master plan of the Raymond-Poincaré hospital in Garches, 1983-87), as well as for Shu Uemura (which has various boutiques in Japan and France, including the headquarters and boutique on the boulevard Saint Germain, completed in 1986). All these projects, both creative and restorative, were acclaimed by critics.

Aside from his practice, Jean-Louis Véret has been involved in a number of ministerial commissions and has developed educative activities, both in France and abroad. He was the "visiting critic" to Harvard's School of Architecture (1977-78), guest professor to the Ecole d'Architecture in Nancy (1981), and lecturer at the Ecole d'Architecture de Paris-la-Villette (1985-93). He has also organised a number of exhibitions, including one for the ICCMOS network (Man and Heritage, 1986-87), and two relating directly to his experience working with Le Corbusier's ideas: Colours of India (Bernheim Gallery, 1978) and Architecture in India (at Paris's Ecole nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, 1985).

Jean-Louis Véret has been a member of the Le Corbusier Foundation since its creation, and closely follows its activities, showing unremitting energy when upholding or even proposing development projects. Following his involvement in the Cité de la Musique competition at the Parc de la Villette (1984, with Iannis Xenakis), he proposed a reconstruction of the Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau (1985).