



**MAC 19**  
PARIS



**BNP PARIBAS**

The bank for a changing world

# MAC 19

The fringe of Paris 19<sup>th</sup> arrondissement hosts the corporate address Mac 19 (163 boulevard Macdonald), where units of the French Retail Banking division are housed. This slice of office spaces is part of the rehabilitation project of the former Macdonald warehouse, undertaken by the City of Paris. Together with public schools and amenities, business incubators and housing units, they are the new addition to the existing structure dedicated to commercial and shopping facilities. The aim of this grand conversion program is to create a unique urban complex atop the northeastern logistics flagship at 12 meters above the ground. The specific morphology of the warehouse, witness of a bygone era, showcases a rare opportunity to write on this palimpsest a new urban and architectural history which is strongly oriented to reconquer this long neglected territory stretching from the *Porte de La Chapelle* to the *Porte de La Villette*. BNP Paribas devotes considerable attention to urban renewal through its presence in rejuvenated office buildings in disadvantaged neighbourhoods such as notably the Claude Bernard urban development zone, the *Grands Moulins* in Pantin, the *Plaine Saint Denis* business district. Consistently, BNP Paribas conducts the "*Projet Banlieue*" (support to local initiatives towards low-income communities), launched in 2006.



Between the *Périphérique* and Montmartre, works at the warehouse in 2012

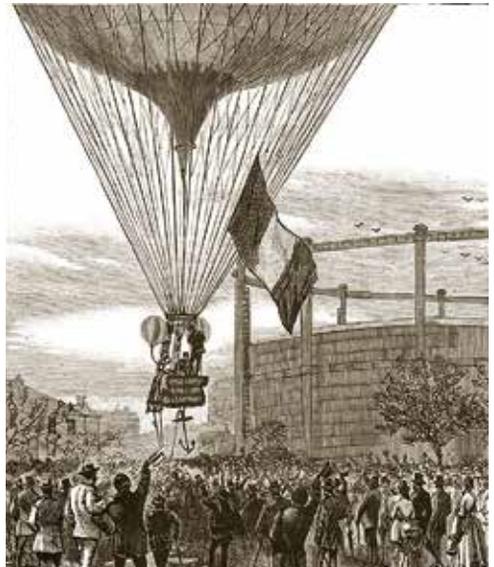
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The northeastern area of Paris was primarily a wide agricultural plain filling up the gap between **the hills of Montmartre and Romainville**. This flat land, well-known for growing cereals, vegetables and vines, was crossed by the old Roman road leading to the Flanders. At the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, there was a small settlement adjacent. Then, a **small dwelling, dubbed *vilette***, was built as a leprosarium by the monks of Saint-Lazare, **under a royal charter issued in 1374**. Over the next centuries, La Villette became a wealthy community as it was the renowned food supplier of Paris wholesale market *Les Halles* albeit being the first village encountered 2 km away from Paris entrance gate *Saint-Martin*.

But, at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the life of the peasant village endured major changes. The ***Mur des Fermiers Généraux*** (the farmers-general were a company of tax collectors) was built between **1784 and 1790** to collect customs duties on goods entering Paris. Then in 1802, Bonaparte ordered the construction of the *Canal de l'Ourcq* to provide a plentiful supply of water to the Parisians. Bonaparte had also in mind the idea of implementing an efficient mean of river transportation circumventing the twists and turns of the river Seine which would as a result, partly free Paris waterways from cumbersome and bulky freight ships and barges. A few years later, the whole by-pass system was completed with the ***Bassin de La Villette*** in **1808**, and the *Canals Saint-Denis, de l'Ourcq* and *Saint-Martin* between 1821 and 1825. However, as the largest artificial lake in Paris, the *Bassin* was at first a **fashionable promenade** before being turned into a **busy**



*Bassin de La Villette* circa 1810



Balloon ascent from the *La Villette* gas works (late 19<sup>th</sup> century)

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Façade on *Boulevard Macdonald* circa 1970

**hub and industrial area** thanks to its tax free location outside Paris.

During King Louis-Philippe's reign, France was again threatening to be invaded and besieged. Consequently, a new defense wall, called *Les Fortifications*, was completed in 1845, incorporating the outskirts of Paris, as advocated by Adolphe Thiers when he was Prime Minister. Its foreground was a *non aedificandi* easement, nicknamed *La Zone* after deprived people settled in for decades.

Simultaneously, the deployment of waterways and railroads crisscrossed the area and subdivided it into isolated plots favoured by industrial facilities. Such a site, bordered by road and rail, quartered **the gas factory of La Villette built in 1858** for the *Compagnie parisienne d'éclairage et de chauffage par le gaz* (company providing gas lighting and heating for the Parisians).

As every outskirts suburb within *Les Fortifications* and in spite of its fierce opposition, **La Villette was incorporated into the city of Paris in 1860** and thus liable for the tax on goods. Nevertheless La Villette remained a developing area. The slaughterhouses of La Villette and their huge market halls were built in the late 1860s. The military path along the inner side of the defense wall was converted into a thoroughfare **in 1864** and called **the Boulevard Macdonald** after a Marshal of France (1765-1840) during the Napoleonic wars.

Lighting gas, produced by roasting coal, was used **to inflate balloons** too. During the Franco-Prussian War, besieged Paris in 1870 saw departures of loads of dispatches and mail as well as individuals on board balloons. Soon after, series of high-altitude balloon flights, most of them for scientific research purposes, were performed in the presence of the Parisian smart set who flooded into the La Villette gas facility on these occasions.

When **Thiers's defense wall was put down in 1921**, it was replaced by social housing units and the completion of the *Boulevard des Maréchaux*, instead of the large and shady promenade initially planned. Then, to reduce Paris ever-increasing traffic, the *Boulevard Périphérique* (the ring road around Paris) was constructed between **1956 and 1973**. At the same time and in the wake of WWII, the deindustrialization of La Villette got started. **The gas works were closed in 1955** and the slaughterhouses in 1974. Even so, the city of Paris kept an industrial development zone at the junction of the *Canal Saint-Denis*, the Eastern Railways and the *Petite Ceinture*

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Façade on Boulevard Macdonald circa 2016

(a railway line running inside Paris). This very spot, where the coal roasting works stood, was chosen to build the enormous warehouse, which imposing base faced the boulevard and backed the railways.

The **Macdonald warehouse** was designed in the late **1960s** by architect **Marcel Forest** (1910-1998), a native of the northern city of Tourcoing and well-known for his industrial and utilitarian buildings. As part of a global

policy to reduce heavy truck traffic in the French capital, the facility was to be used by the **freight company Calberson** as a centre of reception and distribution of goods at the entrance of Paris.

At the time, the **three-storey monolithic concrete building** was a **technical achievement** as its layout had to comply with the quirky narrowness of the plot while flaunting a **sober and repetitive rough façade**. The **roof**



Entrance hall

terrace, often called its **fifth façade** and designed to host a hypothetical landing ground, boasts an outstanding panoramic view over the hill of Montmartre and the Sacred-Heart Basilica, the Eiffel Tower furthering away. With its outsized dimensions displaying an exceptional extension of **617 meters** along the *Boulevard Macdonald*, it is the longest building of Paris, ie the length of the *île Saint-Louis* (Saint Louis island in the heart of Paris). From the beginning, Marcel Forest conceived the building as a base to accommodate additional levels in case this was

necessary. This visionary approach was reflected by the **adaptative reuse** of the warehouse through times, from the Louvre Museum's reserve collection storage to the city of Paris car pound or the logistics of retailers. After the disused edifice was **put on the market in 2006**, it was bought in 2009 by the public company set up to **regenerate the North East of Paris**. At the end of 2009, rehabilitation works started with the architects Floris Alkemade and Xaveer de Geyter coordinating the realization of the whole program while a **team of fifteen internationally**



The glassy internal street and roof top

**renowned architects** design their own segment of the building. In a nod to its history and the various roles the Macdonald warehouse has played, this technical feat contributes to ensure its **mixture of distinguishable urban uses**. Its original plinth, now breached by the new tram line, scaled up with a combination of added levels and hollowed gardens and patios. Indeed the new look complex is an urban neighbourhood as it incorporates the city life of 8,000 inhabitants and employees, 800 school children and 60 babies (day nursery).

It is proving to be one of the **most ambitious public multi-purpose venues in Europe**. BNP Paribas occupies 28,000 sqm of office space monitored by BNP Paribas Real Estate and designed by architects Marc Mimram and François Leclercq. The **60 meter long interior street covered by a glazed roof** and the three landscaped patios are the main architectural features of the scheme which focuses deeply on **user friendly work and living spaces** as well as the **highest environmental and low energy consumption standards**.



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