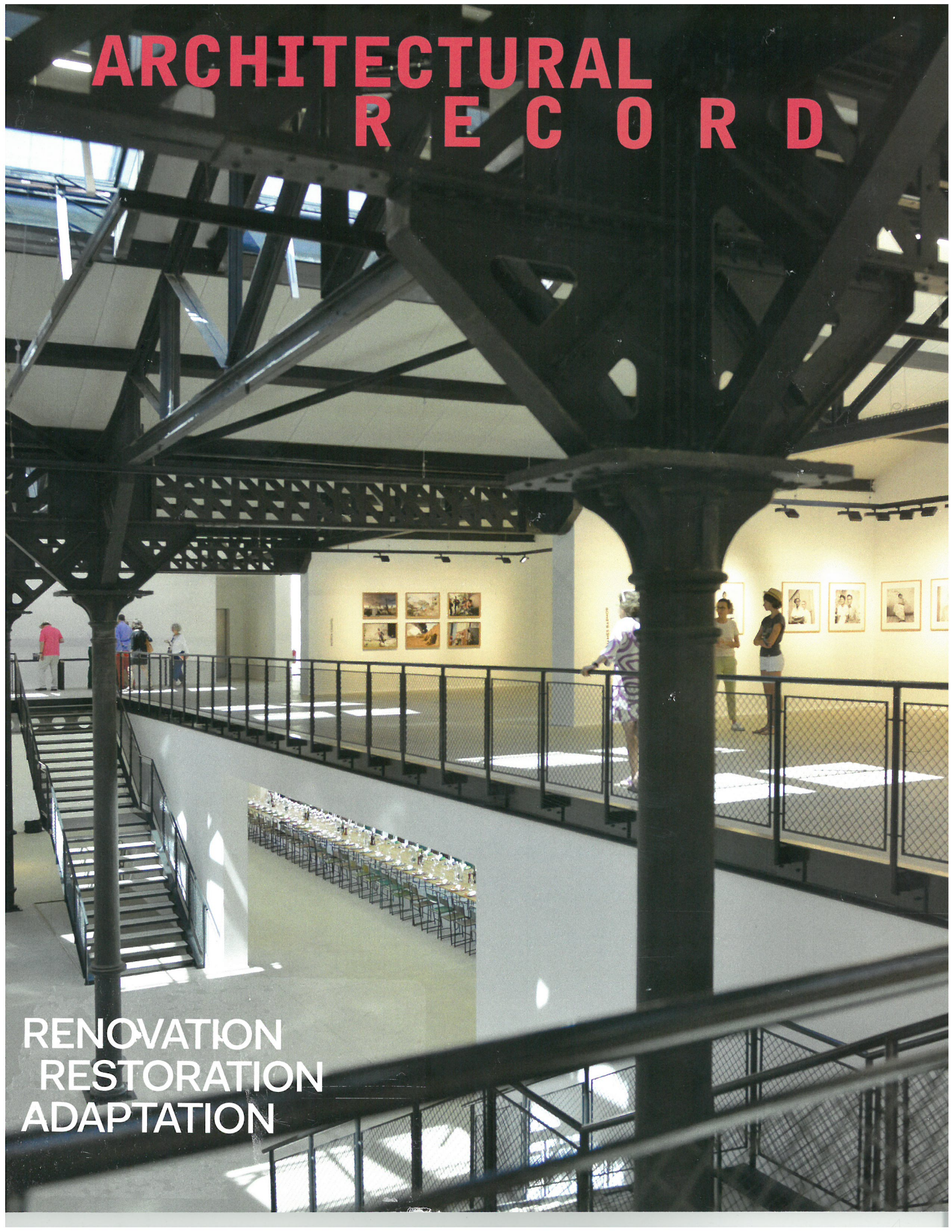


ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

RENOVATION
RESTORATION
ADAPTATION



Luma | Arles, France | Selldorf Architects

Back on Track

An arts foundation reinvents an old rail yard in a historic town in France.

BY CAROLINE ROUX

In 1984, France's national railway, the SNCF, shut down a rail yard with a handful of handsome 19th-century industrial sheds in the sun-washed southern city of Arles. The so-called *Parcs des Ateliers*, where broken trains had been repaired since the 1850s, was a major provider of employment in the town, which now numbers 54,000 inhabitants. But after the yards closed, the 16-acre sunken site remained unoccupied and unloved, a dustbowl next to the Avenue Victor Hugo, one of the city's main roads. Only the historic Roman amphitheaters and favorite spots of Van Gogh (who produced 30 paintings here between 1888 and 1889) were able to shore up the town's fortunes with tourism.

But like plenty of other postindustrial sites—the power station in London that's now the Tate Modern (RECORD, July 2016, page 70; June 2000, page 102), or the distillery in Milan that's returned as the Prada Foundation (RECORD, July 2015, page 56)—culture has flowed like water into the spaces that industry left behind. In this case, a radical new arts campus is rising from the SNCF's ashes, in the private hands of Maja Hoffmann, a Swiss pharmaceutical heiress, philanthropist, and collector of contemporary art, who arrived in Arles when she was just a few weeks old and considers it her hometown. Her foundation, Luma, begun in 2004 with the mission of spurring artistic activity rather than just exhibiting its results, will spend a sum estimated to be north of \$100 million on the project. The centerpiece of the new *Parcs des Ateliers* site is Frank Gehry's dazzling (literally, with its stainless-steel cladding) 185-foot-high tower for an art and research center, which will open in 2018. Its architect says the clustered blocks are inspired by the rock formations that occur naturally in the region.

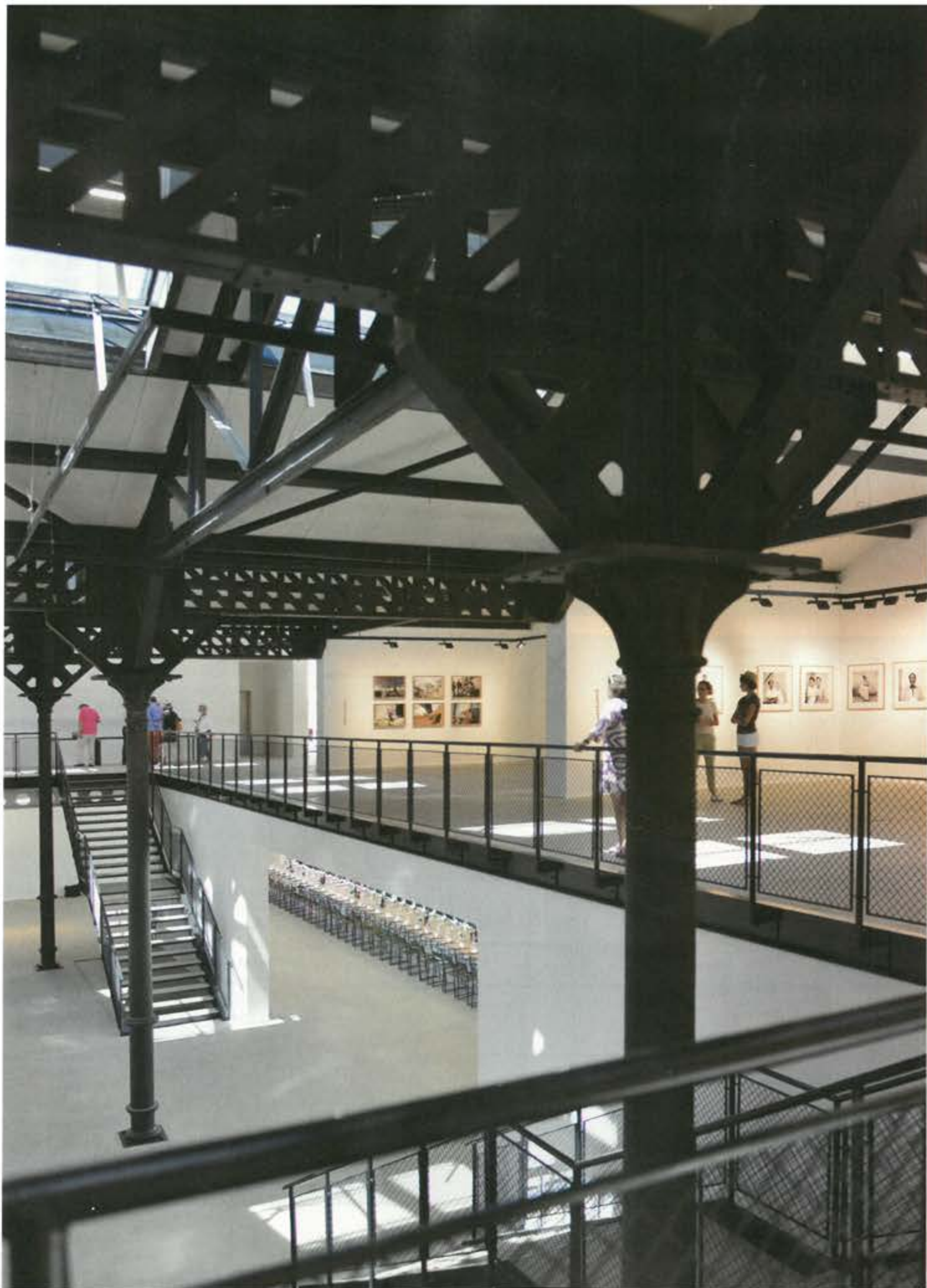
But in the meantime, New York-based Selldorf Architects completed the stunning conversion of two buildings last summer—*Les Forges*, or the foundry building, and the *Mécanique Générale*, which had been the main repair space. The adapted structures have already hosted a range of events, including

performances by Benjamin Millepied's L.A. Dance Project and an installation by artist Jordan Wolfson of a puppet in chains being thrown violently to the floor.

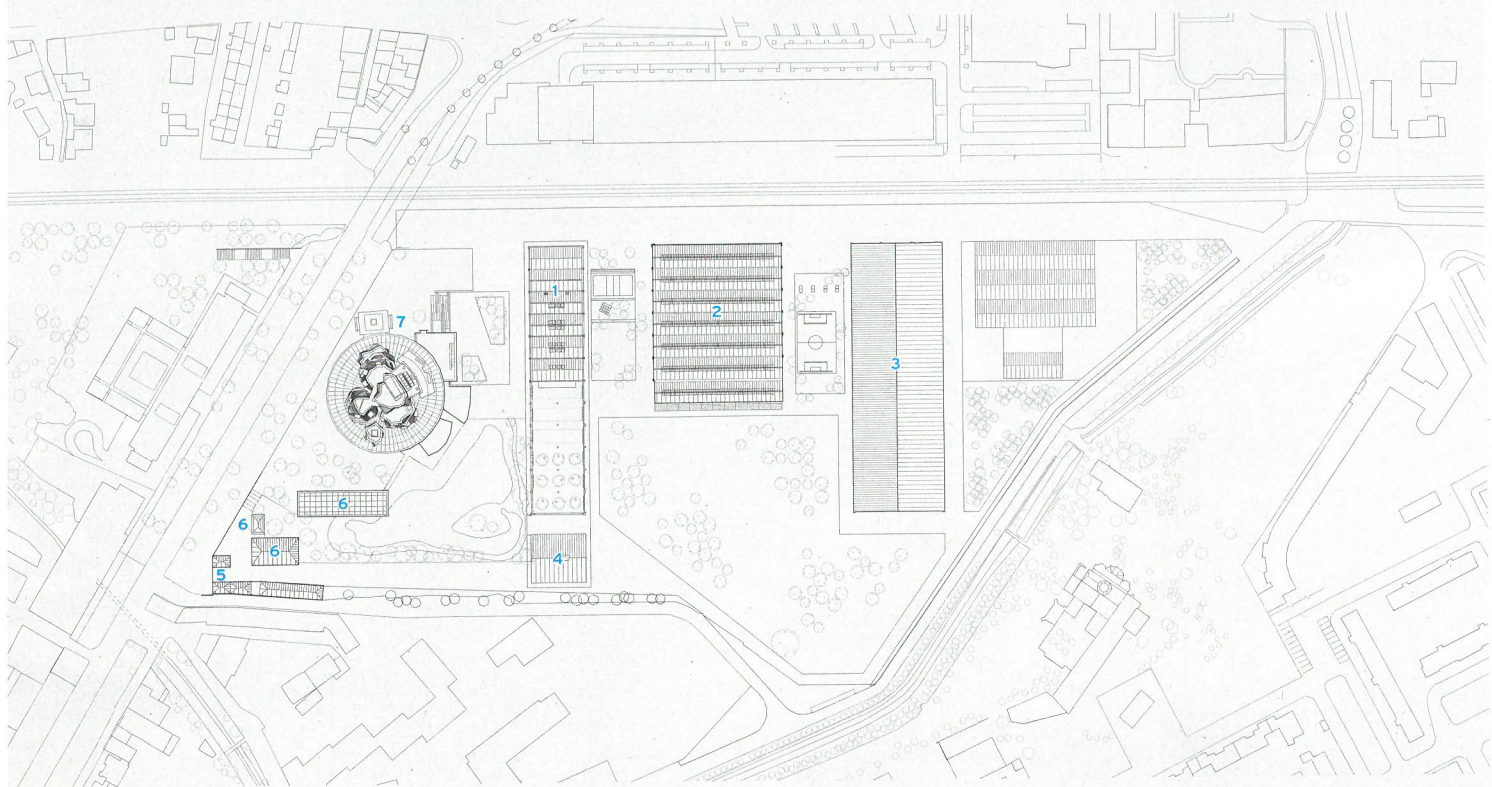
The firm's principal, Annabelle Selldorf, was charged not only with turning the buildings into galleries, but with the master plan of the *Parc* as well. She was a natural choice, having both a long-standing relationship with the art world and a reputation for subtle renovation projects, such as making over a Manhattan roller-skating rink as an art gallery for Hauser + Wirth in 2013. "My work is about proportions, light, and integrity of structure—what the building brings to the project," she says.



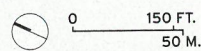
WORKSHOP REDUX The Luma Foundation is creating an arts center in Arles in a former train yard for the SNCF (top). Selldorf Architects is turning the limestone and stucco structures, such as *Les Forges* (right), into gallery space, including installing a mezzanine level (opposite). Nearby a new stainless-steel tower for art and research is being constructed by Frank Gehry.



PHOTOGRAPHY: © HERVE HOZE; COURTESY SELLDORF ARCHITECTS (OPPOSITE, 2)



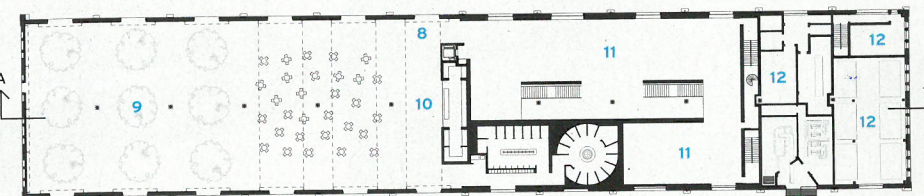
SITE PLAN



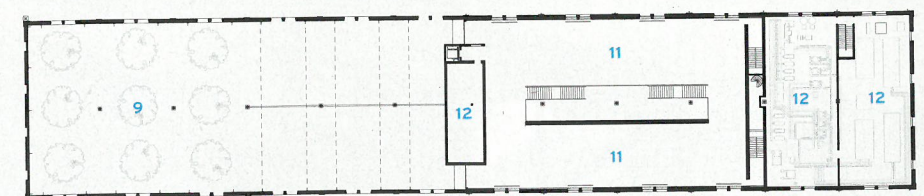
- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| 1 FORGES | 5 CAFÉ AND VISITORS' CENTER | 9 COURTYARD |
| 2 MÉCANIQUE | 6 SOCIAL CENTER AND HOTEL | 10 CAFÉ |
| 3 GRAND HALL | 7 ART AND RESEARCH CENTER | 11 GALLERY |
| 4 DANCE STUDIO AND ARTISTS' RESIDENCE | 8 ENTRY | 12 MECHANICAL |



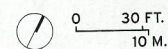
LES FORGES SECTION A - A



LES FORGES GROUND-FLOOR PLAN



LES FORGES SECOND-FLOOR PLAN



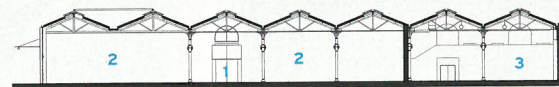
When Selldorf first visited Arles, she says, she “couldn’t take in the incredible size of the site.” The vast space is 23 feet below the street, on the same level as the railway. “You descend a slope to enter it. And this is not a ‘park’ in the usual sense—there’s all that dusty gravel and intense sun,” she adds. Accordingly, Selldorf is working with the Belgian landscape designer Bas Smets on developing a softer context, with newly introduced undulations and greenery that will guide visitors from building to building and create what Hoffmann calls “a public garden for my fellow citizens.”

At Les Forges, the architect inherited a gabled structure of soaring cast-iron columns and steel trusses, with limestone walls and clay-tile roofs. In this former foundry, Selldorf ripped off the old roof, replacing its tiles; stabilized the cast-iron structure; and added a mezzanine level to create a total of 31,000 square feet of gallery space. She installed concrete floors on the ground level and mezzanine, and, to get light to the interior, inserted glazing in the upper windows where smaller panes or plywood had been and in some of the lower-level openings, while adding a few skylights. In the middle of Les Forges is an open-air courtyard café, another amenity in this dramatic, elongated volume. “The galleries have worked really well for conferences and symposia through the winter, too,” says Selldorf.



PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY SELLDORF ARCHITECTS (OPPOSITE, 2)

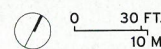
HEAVY METAL In the 31,000-square-foot Les Forges (above and this image), Selldorf added a mezzanine with skylights and concrete floors to create a gallery, and restored the cast-iron columns and steel trusses.



LA MÉCANIQUE SECTION A - A



LA MÉCANIQUE GROUND-FLOOR PLAN



- 1 ENTRY VESTIBULE
- 2 GALLERY
- 3 WORKSHOP
- 4 MECHANICAL



The Mécanique building now offers a heroic, open-plan exhibition space of 48,000 square feet, mostly on one floor. Here the cast-iron structure with stuccoed limestone walls needed less extensive repairs. But Selldorf has added a 65-foot-long, column-free extension along the west elevation that mimics the structure's gabled bays—but with a dark gray concrete-block facade and zinc roof whose new materials allude to the building's past: a section had burned down years ago, and the remaining part was simply sealed up with concrete blocks. Selldorf has rewritten this history using contemporary architectural language.

The vastness and flexibility of the hall allow a multitude of uses. Last summer, it accommodated a huge photography show, with the insertion of diagonal walls, while in a space behind that, dancers performed for an audience sitting on temporary bleachers. Washed by day with natural light through new elongated glass strips, at night it felt surprisingly intimate.

The site's other major building—a 54,000-square-foot old boiler house called La Grande Halle—was reconfigured in 2008 as a multi-purpose structure. French architects Alain Moatti and Henri Rivière added a steel-mesh wall to the west and a supersized LED screen on its north side.

Several more renovations are in the works. Another redo by Selldorf, La Formation, is being made into a dance studio and an artists' residence. A cluster of structures at one corner of the site has an orientation center on part of the ground floor, but more is planned there, including a hotel. All in all, the blossoming Parc des Ateliers is already creating its own history: the transition from industry to art that tells a truly 21st-century story. ■

Caroline Roux is based in London and writes about contemporary art and architecture. She contributes regularly to the Financial Times and the Economist.

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY SELLDORF ARCHITECTS



SPATIAL ELABORATIONS

The Mécanique building, a 48,000-square-foot exhibition hall, includes a 65-foot-long column-free addition (opposite, top); the materials are dark gray concrete block with a zinc roof. Inside (opposite, bottom), linear skylights illuminate the galleries and thick, freestanding partitions give flexibility to the division of space.

credits

ARCHITECT: Selldorf Architects – Annabelle Selldorf, principal; Sara Lopercolo, partner in charge; John Spencer, project manager; David Bench, project architect; Ian Ollivier, architectural designer

ARCHITECT OF RECORD: C+D Architects

ENGINEERS: Terrell (structural, m/e/p)

CONSULTANTS: Bureau Bas Smets (landscape); Studio ZNA, Ingelux (lighting); Transsolar (sustainability)

CLIENT REPRESENTATIVE AND CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT: Myamo

CLIENT: Luma Foundation

SIZE: 31,000 square feet (Les Forges); 48,000 square feet (Mécanique Générale)

COST: withheld

COMPLETION DATE: June 2016

SOURCES

GLASS: Guardian

SKYLIGHTS: Schüco (Mécanique Générale); Souchier (Les Forges)

STEEL-FRAMED WINDOWS AND DOORS: Jansen Janisol

PAINTS AND STAINS: Tollens

EXTERIOR SHADES: Warema

VENTILATION LOUVERS: Renson

DOWNLIGHTS: ERCO