

Maison de l'Économie Créative et de la Culture en Aquitaine (MÉCA) - Bordeaux, France

By Nicholas Navarro

Located between the Saint-Jean Train Station and the River Garonne in Bordeaux, MÉCA is a combination of three separate art institutions to make a singular cultural hub. The 18,000 sq m loop built in 2019 includes the FRAC for contemporary art, the OARA for performing arts, and the ALCA for literature, cinema, and audiovisuals. The intent of the MÉCA is to blend the world of professional artists and creators with that of the general public to bring about innovation and to stimulate the creative process.

Like many of BIG's projects, there is an emphasis on open space and natural lighting. For the sake of exposure, the public area has many windows that reveal the various projects throughout the gateway at the urban room. Adjacent to the river, the 1,100 sq m urban room begins with a concrete ramp that stems directly from the pavement to the main area which contains rotations of sculptures exposed to the public as well as the various, and variously shaped windows. One of the main goals was to achieve a sense of transparency within the building such that you could almost see through to the other side and everything within(1).

There is a large use of negative space within the building as MÉCA itself is an art piece. Most of the interior is displayed as quite bare which provides a fantastic opportunity to see some exposed structure in the concrete columns and steel beam systems. Though the mechanical systems remain hidden. The idea is to go for a raw unfiltered view of what goes on inside but the MEP would remove some of the grace and make it seem more industrial inside than artful.

A large focus of the building is its facade which is made up almost entirely of 4,800 precast, prefabricated concrete panels only interspaced with a variety of windows. The concrete is specifically sandblasted to make it seem more raw with the texture of the local sandstone of Bordeaux. The concrete facade also functions as a radiator of sorts, absorbing the heat during the day and reradiating it back into the building, contributing to its overall sustainability(2).

Upon entering MÉCA from the ground floor, visitors arrive at the lobby where they can relax in the spiral pit or dine at the restaurant Le CREM, furnished with red furniture and cork chairs designed by BIG in reference to the city known for wine. A giant periscope by the restaurant and elevators allows visitors to see the activity in the outdoor urban room and vice-versa, creating an indoor-outdoor dialogue. On the same ground floor, those with tickets can enjoy performances in OARA's 250-seat theatre featuring flexible seating configurations and acoustic systems optimized by an all-black checkerboard panel of concrete, wood and perforated metal.

The 850 sq m roof terrace functions as an extension of the galleries and provides an amazing view out over the city and particularly of the Basilica of St. Michael, integrating it smoothly with the surrounding city(3).

Sources:

- (1) [MÉCA Bordeaux Building: BIG - e-architect](#)
- (2) [MECA preliminary project – Bordeaux | France | Incide](#)
- (3) [MÉCA Cultural Center / BIG | ArchDaily](#)

