

La Timone

Energy rehabilitation of the Pharmacy building on the La Timone site.

CLIENT

Aix-Marseille University

TEAM

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Credits: © Romuald Nicolas

KEYPOINTS

Preservation of the original architectural identity.
High-Rise Public Building (IGH ERP).

ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE

Energy renovation
Photovoltaic roofing
Preservation of surrounding wildlife

The Pharmacy building on the La Timone site, located in Marseille, was designed in 1968 by architect René Egger, known for his numerous large-scale housing projects in the region. This iconic structure, classified as a high-rise building (IGH), is a part of Marseille's architectural heritage, recognizable by its distinctive reinforced concrete style and its interplay of colors—particularly orange and blue—which symbolize the city's port activity.

Highly visible due to its size and location, the building had suffered from a negative image caused by the deterioration of its façades and poor interior comfort. To meet current standards and improve user comfort, an energy rehabilitation project was launched as part of the France Relance program. As the site remained occupied during construction, a phased work schedule was implemented to ensure the faculty's activities could continue throughout the duration of the project.



Typology	Construction cost	Status
Refurbishment	18M€	Delivery 2024
GFA	Location	Project delivery
25,505 m² of GFA	Marseille, France	Design & Build

Architectural intentions and respect for the existing identity

The original façades consist of a reinforced concrete grid made up of vertical fins and protruding slabs—a “shelf façade” concept typical of post-war modern architecture. This design, which emphasizes concrete, recessed the glazed surfaces, negatively impacting interior daylight comfort and giving the façades a dark appearance.

Our teams envisioned a new façade composed of vertical curtain walls applied to the slabs, inserted between the concrete fins. These new glazed façades, extended outward from the building, emerge from the shadows and bring a new luminous and reflective aspect to this high-rise building. The curtain walls feature screen printing and orange-colored side cladding, a nod to the original wooden band façades—an iconic color of René Egger's distinctive architectural style. The vertical concrete fins, key elements of the building, are preserved, restored, and highlighted by the new curtain walls. They emphasize the verticality of the tripod-shaped tower, enhance its slenderness, and contribute to the building's identity within the neighborhood.

A respectful modernization of the original architecture, highlighting its distinctive elements while integrating contemporary solutions.



Thermal renovation

An ambitious energy rehabilitation that transforms an iconic building into a modern, bright, and high-performing structure.

The rehabilitation project aims to improve the building's energy performance through two main aspects: the façade and the heating system. The existing façade had numerous thermal bridges, particularly at the edges of the exterior slabs, and was made of poorly insulated wooden frames with single glazing, making the building highly energy-consuming. The new façade, composed of vertical aluminum curtain walls with double glazing, set back from the slab edges, eliminates these thermal bridges. The orange screen printing contributes to solar control, preventing excessive light penetration.

To meet the C+D high-rise building (IGH) requirements, a "shadow box" system was implemented at slab level, ensuring fire separation between floors while creating a mirrored effect. The upper part of the curtain walls consists of transparent operable frames, while the lower part, although visually similar, is actually a glazed fire-resistant panel. This system transforms the building's dark image into a bright and modern structure.

The canopy is also undergoing major work, including the removal of slats, repainting of both sides, and painting of the structure and façade, in coordination with the stakeholders of this existing artistic feature.

The heating system has been completely renovated, with new HVAC units installed on all floors to deliver treated air to the roof, and new ceiling cassettes replacing the old radiators. The oil boiler has been replaced with a gas boiler, and a field of photovoltaic panels is planned on the roof to complete the energy renovation package.

The construction site is organized into seven phases to maintain faculty activities throughout the work. Temporary buffer spaces have been created to relocate occupants, and a relocation expert is managing the necessary moves. To carry out this occupied-site project, a top-down approach was followed, allowing the first areas connected to rooftop equipment to be delivered early.





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