

Questionnaire pour le livre Remodeling - 2011

“Renovation & Addition”

1/ Why “Renovation & Addition”? What meaning does this have in terms of your work, moreover in the aspect of today’s architecture?

Renovation and addition raise the three fundamental architectural questions of contextuality, materiality and functionality. Renovating and extending stresses the point that through history construction has always dealt with transforming existing buildings. The idea that we can build everything from scratch is an exclusively twentieth century modernist view. Today, no one believes in the tabula rasa any more, and contemporary and sustainable approaches require that we take into consideration the phenomenological and materialistic values of built forms as opposed to purely abstract concepts alone.

2/ Compared to the process of building a whole new building, is there a difference in the process of renovating or reconstructing the existing building? Do these methods have a distinctive feature which you find attractive?

To a certain extent, every new building can be considered as a renovation and extension of its urban and architectural context, in exactly the same way as an additional building in relation to an existing one. So to me there is no essential difference between the two approaches. I would even say that making new buildings is a particular way of carrying out the renovating process on an urban or territorial scale. A distinctive feature I find in renovation programs is the need to reconsider the relationship between form and function. When housing new internal uses in pre-existing shells, one has to face the fact that a precise program must be adaptable to different built forms and that those uses might change in the future.

In a way, undetermined use of space has replaced precise brief-defined building types, so much so that all repurposed buildings are treated as reworkings of existing structures. Today, faced with ever more undetermined and adaptable briefs, architects have to use timescales very cleverly, coming up with retroactive designs and positioning themselves within a renovation strategy even for new builds. This is the reason why I find extending and renovating a very didactic exercise.

3/ Do you have a standard in terms of selecting which part of the building is to be preserved and which part should be renovated? (In this case, the term ‘part’ refers to not only the materials and structural elements but also to the memories and the historical context of the building) Also, how do you maintain balance between the two parts?

I have no predetermined standards, but I usually decide to keep parts of a building according to their intrinsic materialistic value rather than referring to heritage-related or historical criteria. For instance, it is more important to restore thick walls because of their inertia and the fact that they would be difficult to build today, rather than just because they are old. In the present project, I was interested in

keeping an example of an archetypal suburban Parisian house for its build qualities (bare brick walls on a traditional stone base, jack-arch floor with iron framework) as well as for its elementary geometry (a regular square) and its typological and contextual values.

4/ Reconstruction and extension seems like an effort to enhance the spatial value of the existing building. Is there a strategy or know-how for this subject?

I do not believe in strategies being specific for extensions. Here the new and the old combine in a single unit divided into three parts. My intention was to erase differences between renovation and addition by using the same type of geometry and the same materials for both parts while reversing their structural order. In other projects, I have chosen to create a radical opposition between old and new. It all depends on the context.

5/ Are there any common mistakes or obstacles you usually confront while doing projects like this? Share with us one episode you've experienced while you were working on the project featured in this book.

In my experience, the main problems faced in renovating buildings involve squaring thermal and access regulations with the preservation of the qualities of the existing buildings as well as integrating technical facilities into existing structures. An example might be preserving thick bare walls where new thermal regulations stipulate cavity walls, particularly when working on larger heritage buildings.

6/ The architectural projects, which you've designed and constructed, might also be reconstructed or extended by someone in the future. As the original artist, do you have any special requests for them?

Just one: ask yourself what this building wants to become.