The city of light just got brighter with Metek's social housing project

OCTOBER 05, 2017 **Text** LENA GOSIN **Photos** DIDIER BOY DE LA TOUR, IRINA PRODUCTIONS, AND METEK
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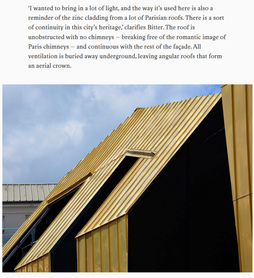
PARIS – In the city of romance and light, a new social housing project clearly inherits the Parisian flair and reunites two courtyards after decades of separation. Metek demolished and renovated 19th century residences to create three new buildings and two reconversion projects in the 19th arrondissement. Although the street-facing façade is maintained, it's *carte blanche* behind it.

'This neighbourhood has always been considered avant-garde, this is somehow a good place for architects. There's Lacaton Vassal's Ourcq Jaures Student & Social Housing just close by and Tschumi's Parc de la Villette around the corner. Here it's alive!' explains Sarah Bitter, founder of Metek. Surrounded by recently completed buildings, it seems clear that Paris is in fact reinventing itself.

The result is a series of small residential buildings neatly tucked away from the street housing 31 units and seven artist lofts at the back of the plot. From the street the building stands like any other 'haubourien' building of Paris. However, peer through the entrances and you'll see it is completely redone. This first building now has circulation as an added layer of stairs and balconies at the back. Everything is out in the open courtyard to be shared.

Past this first block and within the courtyard, residents are surrounded by a series of gold copper-clad apartments. Ranging from two to four-storey blocks, they all have a black mineral base of brick. From a half-storey height, the copper gold – an alloy of copper and aluminium – starts running up the façade to then encompass the roof. Balconies have the same standing seam panels but perforated to maximise daylight penetration.

'I wanted to bring in a lot of light, and the way it's used here is also a reminder of the zinc cladding from a lot of Parisian roofs. There is a sort of continuity in this city's heritage,' clarifies Bitter. The roof is unobstructed with no chimneys – breaking free of the romantic image of Paris chimneys – and continuous with the rest of the façade. All ventilation is buried away underground, leaving angular roofs that form an aerial crown.



'I work on the ground and the skyline.' Indeed, great care was given to how the brick cladding at the base of the residences touches the original paving of the courtyard.

The loft space at the back had been hidden away by consecutive crude buildings and the old original façade was completely remade using oak and brick. Inside the disused printing shop, Metek set up a communal space that continues the linearity of the courtyard. It is a living-working set-up where workspaces face the communal space and then the seven artist living quarters face the main courtyard.

Courtyard Circulation

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