

7/ The definitive and the spontaneous



First day of demolition
Bagnolet, France (93)

**0081 Renovation of an individual house in
Bagnolet, France (93)**

Cost of construction
26,000 euros*
SHON: 50 m²
Privaet client

Date of completion: January 2008
Duration of construction: 2 months

All-trades contractor:
Keros construction
Demolition: 2,800 euros*
Carpentry: 2,500 euros*
Paint: 1,500 euros*
Plumbing: 3,200 euros*
Linoleum: 800 euros*

Interior woodwork contractor:
Pierre Sanz
15,000 euros*

*all taxes included

The evolution of the vocabulary of architecture reflects the consolidation of the architect's power over the domain of construction. There is a shift from a metaphorical, empirical and colourful vocabulary to an abstract, learned language full of references. Architecture was radically reformed when the figure of the architect emerged. Plan, section, perspective, standardisation and the strength design of materials have accumulated, been systematised and fine-tuned to define the practice as we know it today. Within this apparatus for producing buildings, *one idea seems to have taken permanent hold: the immortality of buildings. Architecture is born but doesn't die. Everything takes place, is thought out as if it were built for eternity.* Architecture is increasingly fragile because it requires constant maintenance, sometimes at extraordinary cost. It is also conditional, as Rem Koolhaas writes (article "Junkspace" in Content - 2004). Its survival depends on a steady flow of electricity, mechanical ventilation, the "upgrading" of defective materials and joints... Yet we do not build in a deliberately temporary manner. This may be one of the reasons why architecture preserves this serious air, this absolute symbolic dimension that Bataille criticises. What is being built today could very easily fall into ruin in the absence of upkeep. However, these ruins would not disappear unless stupendous effort went into demolishing them.



Conservation of the heating pipes left floating
by the demolition of the walls
Bagnolet, France (93)

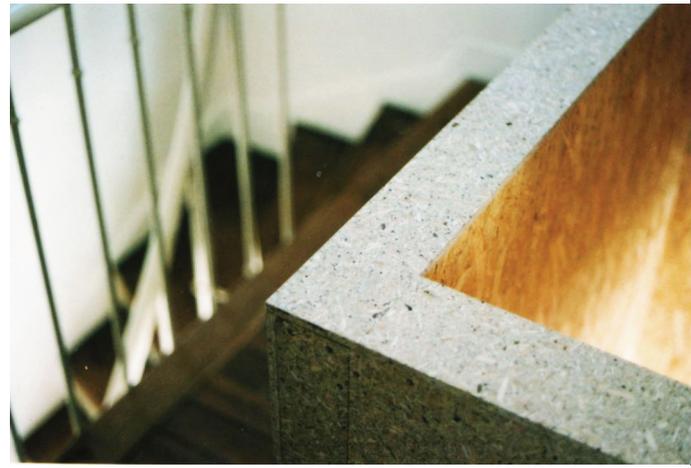
The boudoir; 2 m² isolation room
Bagnolet, France (93)





Conservation of the existing floor, concrete reprise of the chute, and the set of multi-function panels (MFP) on the floor and walls of the refurbished room
Bagnoleet, France (93)

Madame Lemoine had only a very small budget to make the house habitable. We availed of thirty thousand euros to transform the interior of a worker's house with tight and overly-partitioned spaces into a residence open to the light and flexible enough to accommodate the impressive number of objects she was to bring with her. Furthermore, we only had a few short months in which to think about the project and complete it. Given the exorbitant cost of stone in the Paris region, it seemed unreasonable to make irreversible "architectural decisions" in so short a time. It seemed preferable in a first phase to get rid of the many internal partitions and to create a space that could accommodate its inhabitants, at least temporarily. This would give them time to become accustomed to this new territory before considering any major restructuring. Moreover, the budget did not allow for the complete upgrading of the electricity, the plastering of the walls, the replacement of the antiquated heating system and so on. Madame Lemoine's project was therefore a wooden skin that, once the demolition was completed, was to cover the entire interior of the little house. This skin, considered indifferently as temporary or permanent, reorganised the interior spaces, included phenomenal storage space and made it possible to distribute the electrical wiring very economically without embedding or plastering.



View of the chute from the upper floor (above)
View of the chute from the ground floor (below)
Bagnoleet, France (93)

The entry of the bathroom (left) and of the budoir (right)
Bagnoleet, France (93)

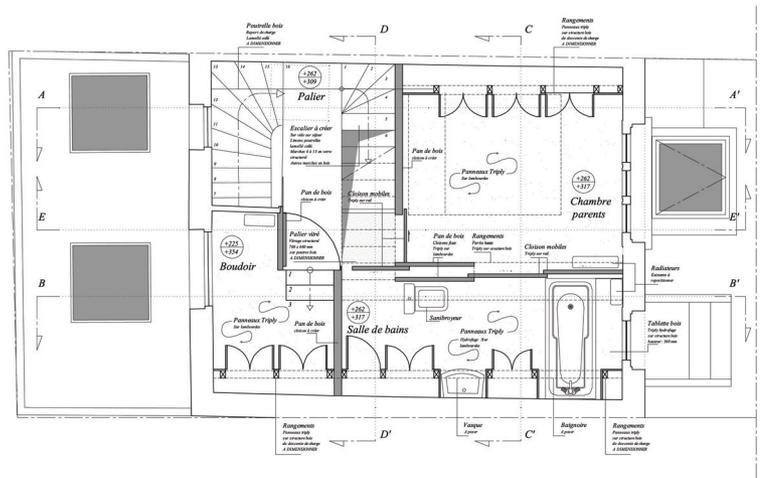


View of the principal room of the ground floor
Bagnoleet, France (93)

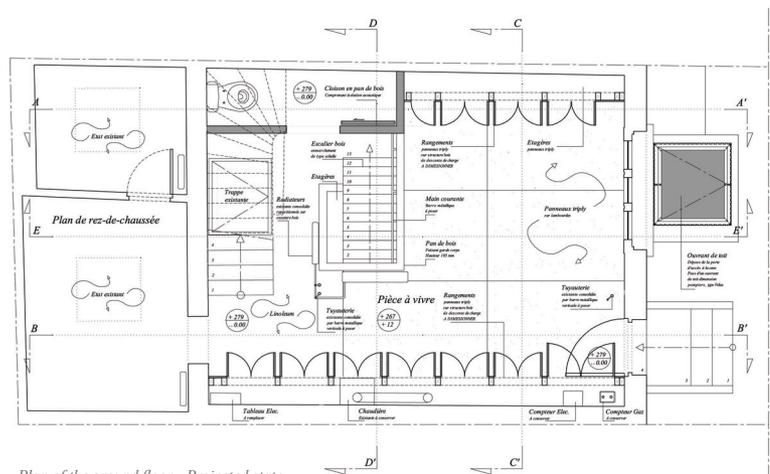
Strangely, the simple realisation that our choices did not commit us to “eternity” but only addressed a need at that moment gave a freedom to the project process. Just as carnival architectures and costumes are created in full awareness of their impending end, the project was able to play with its form and its destiny. The wooden skin is uninhibited. The material took on a baroque presence; we were able to build a 2m x 2m boudoir with radiators and their pipes left loose, floating in the void left by the demolition of the walls that had previously held them up, an army of cupboards was nestled in the walls, floors and partitions. The quality of the execution as well as the atmosphere and the articulations between the spaces were not at any moment treated lightly. Yet, it was possible to multiply the risk-taking thanks to the loss of the “gravity” that is inseparable from any idea of eternity. If only architecture wasn’t so heavy! If only it could be done with the simplest of means... so many more people could have access to it. While architects could be useful for so many things in our territory, how is it that my architect friends are kept for entire years in a state of inactivity, occupied like 200 of their fellows by the competition to obtain the least public project? I dream of an architectural practice that is “portable”, light, readily available to any person, whatever their budget.



View of the window of the principal room of the ground floor
Bagnolet, France (93)



Plan of the upper floor
Bagnolet, France (93)



Plan of the ground floor - Projected state
Bagnolet, France (93)