

13/05/16

Le Parisien – press clipping

In the heart of La Samaritaine's construction site

By Philippe Baverel

13 May 2016, 00h00 | Update : 13 May 2016, 6.19am

The department store closed in 2005, as it no longer met fire standards. Between the Seine and Rue de Rivoli, La Samaritaine (part of the LVMH group, owner of this paper) is now just a huge empty metal carcass. Nearly a year after the start of this huge project with a budget of €500 million, "La Samaritaine has been deboned," observes its president, Jean-Jacques Guiony. Inside the Jourdain Building - an Art Nouveau masterpiece dating from 1907-1910 - the magnificent banisters still in place and the bare metal structures stripped back and awaiting restoration are an ode to Eiffel-style architecture.

In these buildings, partly listed as historical monuments and inaccessible to the public since the closure of the famous department store in June 2005, "respect for the historic character of places and that of safety standards are two contradictory requirements," says Guiony. Nevertheless, today laying fireproof floors and applying paint guaranteeing the fire stability of metal structures permits the reconciliation of the two. Similarly, the metal frame of the Jourdain glass roof is to be preserved and the glass replaced by light-sensitive glass which will adapt to the sun's brightness, ensuring guests sitting at the luxury Cheval Blanc hotel's restaurant terrace (located just under the glass roof) are not dazzled by the sun.

Opening scheduled for end of 2018

Carrying out works of this magnitude, covering a total area of 70,000 m², is a challenge. Currently, 400 people are working in shifts on the site from 8.00am to 7.00pm six days a week, with the site closed on Sundays. "Since receiving the green light in June 2015 from the *Conseil d'Etat*, or State Council, we haven't wasted any time. While there has been more asbestos to remove than expected, our goal remains the simultaneous opening of the department store, hotel, offices and 96 social housing units in late 2018," Guiony continues.

The department store will extend over 21,000 m², spread over the ground floor, first floor and basement of the three buildings (Sauvage, Jourdain and Rivoli) and on the first five floors under the Jourdain glass roof. The luxury hotel, whose 72 rooms and suites all offer views of the Seine, will occupy the Sauvage Wing, whose Art Deco facade fronts the Quai du Louvre.

Formerly located at 83, Rue de Rivoli, on the ground floor of a building which was demolished to make way for Sanaa's celebrated 25 m high, 73 m long corrugated-glass facade, the Maison du Projet (Showroom) - designed as a window onto the largest building site in the heart of Paris along with Les Halles - reopens today at 1, Rue du Pont-Neuf.

Visitors will find a model of the site, an information panel and archive photos and films - "a look behind the hoarding", concludes Jean-Jacques Guiony.

1, Rue du Pont-Neuf on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 1.00pm to 8.00pm. Free admission