

19/05/16

**Le Figaro – press clipping**

**La Samaritaine, a gigantic construction site on the Seine**

By Béatrice De Rochebouet  
19 May 2016 at 7.00am

**Site visit**

With 27 months to go, the La Samaritaine construction site managed by Vinci is in full swing, ushering in an unprecedented 70,000m<sup>2</sup> multi-use development including a department store, a luxury hotel, social housing and offices.

At 27 months away from the opening of La Samaritaine, a small army of 400 workers - soon to be 1000 - is working tirelessly. Donning safety helmets, safety boots and high-visibility jackets, we're here to observe how the work is progressing, in the midst of the rubble and the fine rain of the mists intended to keep the dust down.

Vinci project manager Guillaume Duchy is in charge of this extraordinary site, which is provoking the daily anger of residents. The nearby school continues to hold classes despite the never-ending din from excavators, lorries and cranes. Even the landlord of the L'Elite bar – the only business that escaped destruction next to the gaping hole bordering the Rue de Rivoli – continues to leave his terrace tables outside for early-evening drinks.

It has been necessary to secure the neighbouring streets, set up acoustic and anti-dust hoardings along all the facades, install sound level meters in order to react immediately if noise levels are exceeded, build temporary offices next to the site to avoid staff using the street, together with a temporary road inside the site for lorries to drive around inside, thus reducing congestion in the streets outside. In addition, there are meetings with local residents and a toll-free number set up, linked permanently to the team. The logistics are mind-boggling.

This project, combining renovation, restructuring and new construction, is all the more complex as the site is in the midst of a dense urban network of housing, a nursery, a clinic and shops, plus non-stop traffic. In addition, it must coordinate with neighbouring projects such as the extension of the Climespace network from the Place de la Concorde and the ERDF works preparing to close the river banks, to the annoyance of many Parisians.

The difficulty of this project lies in the fact that it mixes the renovation of old buildings - mostly classified in the Inventaire des Monuments Historiques as listed buildings, including the Jourdain glass roof and the Sauvage building beside the Seine – with the construction of new areas, together with the contemporary facade created by the Sanaa agency on the Rue de Rivoli. The long-awaited, cutting-edge implant has been widely criticised, being likened to a “white shower curtain”.

From the terrace with its framework of lift cages, the view of the rooftops of Paris is breathtaking. From on high, it is easier to comprehend the unprecedented scale of this multi-use project, linking several blocks through underpasses, courtyards and escalators. The Art

Nouveau elements have been carefully numbered, piece by piece, to be reassembled in their original places.

There will be a department store, with a retail area covering the entire site from the first basement to the first floor, plus an extension under the large glass roof. From the new courtyard on the Rue de Rivoli to the rejuvenated Jourdain Hall, La Samaritaine will offer a unique Parisian shopping experience – and major competition to BHV, located a few steps away.

Next is a visit to the construction site of the Cheval Blanc palace hotel, part of the LVMH group, which will offer 72 rooms and suites in the Sauvage building, with spectacular views over the Seine. This is the second Cheval Blanc hotel, following the first one which opened in Courchevel in 2006, and today is one of France's top eight palace hotels.

The design and operation of the hotel has been entrusted to LVMH Hôtel Management, a subsidiary of LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton Group. The development also includes 96 social housing units on the Rivoli section on the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec in the Rivoli islet and in the Joudain-Plateau building, an 80-place creche and office floors able to accommodate from one to 12 companies.

In 2018, Parisians will be able to discover the new La Samaritaine, which has been empty since its closure in 2005 and the subject of numerous controversies and legal wrangles over its building permit. The department store is expecting 20-30,000 visitors a day, creating 4,400 jobs on site and in the surrounding neighbourhood.

A major rejuvenation is under way in this part of the capital, including the new Canopée des Halles nearby – the bane of architectural purists. Headed by Dominique Perrault, La Poste du Louvre, the Louvre post office, is also under renovation, followed shortly afterwards by the stock exchange building, to be a showcase for part of François Pinault's contemporary art collection.

The Figaro.fr

Culture