



J189 > urban and landscape design of the town centre in Écouflant (France)

project management atelier d'architecture King Kong (architect prime contractor), Kaplan Projets (landscape architect), Egis Centre-Ouest (engineering company)

constructor city of Écouflant

total cost 2,2 M€ ttc

surface area 20 000 m²

chronology project initiated in 2005 // work started in 2008 and completed in 2015

The town of Écouflant is divided into two parts – the historical centre, a cul-de-sac naturally delineated by three rivers, and the Évantard neighbourhood, considered as a 'suburb' of the town of Angers. The landscape in which the town is set is stunning and its personality strongly defined by the natural environment. However, 65 % of land in and around the town is prone to flooding, and this has stunted its development down the years. The historical town centre has changed little over the last century but its morphology is highly original. The periphery is characterised by roadways and a dialogue between buildings and the surrounding landscape. The built zones function like chess pieces on a board, with a labyrinth of public spaces flowing in and around them. Such iconic architectural elements as the church, old and new town halls and the 'logis', a Renaissance town house, were to be conserved and their aesthetic and functional qualities developed and promoted. A desire for an increased number of planted spaces was also expressed and their precise distribution across the urban fabric of the town required particular care and attention. The same was true for the choice of urban furnishings and ground coverings.

The local town council expressed a desire to foster development and increase the pace of modernisation. Their main aim was to reutilise existing buildings for new purposes, demolish and rebuild other council-owned buildings, redefine the main public spaces and their corollaries, including transport and car parking facilities and finally, strengthen bonds between the rivers and the landscape. King Kong's scope of intervention was framed by a definition contract with a 2.2 M€ budget. Preliminary meetings were held with elected local government representatives and administrative staff, and then with the town council in its entirety, and a number of workshops and consultation sessions were organised to present the project to the general public and gain a better understanding of the local citizens' needs and desires.

The architects at King Kong focussed their design on regenerating the buildings around the town's periphery, thereby breaking the shackles hitherto rendering its development impossible. The public spaces were redefined and given a new clarity of status. Better attention was paid to their design and presentation, in keeping with their intended use as public amenities for today and for tomorrow. The mineral nature of the central area, including the square in front of the town hall and church, was maintained, as were its bonds with the surrounding landscape. Strong visual and pedestrian ties exist between this area and the peripheral zones. The only planted area, however, was situated around the church. The stance adopted by King Kong for the landscaping here was rooted in the typology of the town centre, its close bonds with the waterways and countryside, inspiring the architects to create a series of gardens, scenic spots to stop for a while and rest or chat, closed gardens in the form of belvederes, kitchen gardens and fruit orchards. The pedestrian areas have been paved with stone slabs, set into compacted ground walkways. The road network in and around the town has been left practically untouched, with some modifications to road status within the perimeter of the new amenities.

The design phase and building work went very smoothly, both in terms of the town planning programme and public spaces in general. The local inhabitants are delighted with the result and may now profit from the presence of benches, public toilets and play areas for children. The town centre has become a far more pleasant place to visit and the ample green spaces and planting have been well received. The ground floor areas of a number of buildings have been reworked to accommodate not only the post office, but also a number of shops, all of which are doing very well. A multi-media library has been created in the new buildings provided for in the King Kong masterplan for the town, along with an up-to-date school canteen and housing units. This has breathed fresh life into a town which was very much stuck in the past, and this without the least trace of a dispute or opposition from either the town council or population at large.



site map

