

ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE



© Daniel Fondimare / Patrick Doriot

ARCHITECTURAL EXPRESSION OF THE CONSTRUCTIONS:

A SENSITIVE APPROACH, IN PROFOUND HARMONY WITH THE SPIRIT AND BEAUTY OF THE PLACE

The Dam across the Couesnon, with open access, it blends unobtrusively into the bay, the landscaped parking area... the works, winners of Europe-wide competitions, all have a part in restoring Mont St-Michel to a marine setting.

They are closely connected by seeking consistency of their main purpose with the spirit of the place, forging links between the site's landscape and architecture, and its engineering and cultural dimension.

Sober and elegant, using quality materials, they all combine unobtrusiveness with intelligent design.

This sensitive architectural approach puts into practice a sustainable development operation focussing resolutely on the bay and the abbey, a shrine of the heritage and of spirituality.

- > THE DAM, AN AMAZING CONNECTION WITH THE BROADER LANDSCAPE
- > CAUSEWAY AND PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE, UNOBTRUSIVE WORKS IN THE BAY
- > PARKING AREA AND BUILDINGS, BLENDING IN WITH THE SCENERY

ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE

© Thomas Jouanneau



THE DAM, AN AMAZING CONNECTION WITH THE BROADER LANDSCAPE

“The dam emplacement is a nexus point within the broader landscape, unique in the Mont St-Michel bay area. It stands at the interface between the inland and the ‘inner bay’, between the channelled Couesnon and the river’s meanderings out to sea, between a world recovered from the sea by man and the constantly reshaped reality of the seascape.

This space also forms a link between the two banks of the Couesnon, between East and West, between Brittany and Normandy. It is a site that opens up towards Mont St-Michel itself, a place for mixing and exchanging that needs preserving, thereby enhancing the countryside and the surrounding area.

BLENDING IN UNOBTRUSIVELY WITH THE SCENERY

The dam’s unobtrusive architecture does not compete with the verticality of the Mont.

With horizontality the guiding principle, it fits in at the height of the sea walls, continuing the silhouette of the river banks. Far from over-emphasizing its engineering function, the dam plays both on the horizontal continuity of the superstructures and the vertical rhythm of the piers; from the Mont, a simple horizontal line above the water; from inland, in the rectilinear perspective of the Couesnon, with the piers dotted along the way, like buttresses.

The play of opening and closing the sluice gates and modulating the water level gives a very varied perception of the dam from full opacity to great transparency when the gates are completely open.

This variable visual impact of the dam corresponds to the natural, random and cyclical logic of fluctuations of the Couesnon in these tidal waters. The harmonious way this water regulator fits in with the surroundings, the combination of the engineering mechanisms and the cycles of the natural elements, is especially important...”

Luc Weizmann, Dam architect – www.lwa.fr



© GeoMer

ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE



CAUSEWAY AND PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE, UNOBTRUSIVE WORKS IN THE BAY

“Mont St-Michel derives all its strength from the landscape in which it stands erect, as the only point of intensity in the infinite flatness of the sands, neither truly an island nor really a peninsula. The one imperative of the project was not to disturb the spirit of the place in connection with this ambiguous status and the lack of landmarks or scale. Visitors must continue to be lost in contemplation. Their walk is a place for sensations, for becoming immersed in the immensity of it all. The approach is as much a trip as a stop; it has to take a little time to get to this ‘somewhere else’ lost in the distance on the marine horizon.

TWO SEQUENCES FOLLOWING ON, ONE AND THE SAME CONSTRUCTION

This interpretation of the site led us to opt for total horizontality and to go for as delicate a design as possible. The access structure comprising two sequences one after the other – the causeway and the jetty – draws across the landscape a completely flat line, which on crossing the Couesnon, is carried on in an extremely simple thin blade borne by a set of posts in close succession. The rhythm introduced by the piers starting from the bed of the Couesnon is actively involved in the idea of insularity; they express the intermittent presence of the sea at their foot. At high tide, the structure’s outline is reflected in the water. The structure’s horizontality is emphasized through the repetitiveness of the graceful piers.



From the mainland to the Mont, the structure’s overall geometry forms a continuous, flowing movement. The bridge slowly pulls out eastwards and then sweeps around in the other direction from the start of the jetty, opening up vistas across the bay and Tombelaine Rock. The Mont comes gradually into view, in a sequence-length shot taking in the whole bay. The outline is held by the outer curve, with no breaks due to the variations in breadth. Very gradual adjustments lend fluidity to the line of the bridge over the sands.

The structure is minimal in its expression, but ambitious in its design and performance. It is a piece of high performance engineering that unostentatiously handles the forces on it.”

Dietmar Feichtinger, Architect for the access structure
www.feichtingerarchitectes.com

ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE

© Véolia Transport - Syndicat Mixte



PARKING AREA AND BUILDINGS, BLENDING IN WITH THE SCENERY

“The bay’s majestic horizons and the farmland scenery of the polders are the raw material that fuels the project. This country landscape is reinterpreted through sea walls, ditches, woodlands, orchards.... The parking area takes over these ‘bits’ of surrounding countryside to create new sites and blend in with the wider expanses.

The real work is that of the soil: it helps to carve the land and create a scenic spot. The ground profile absorbs and conceals the parking lots. To the south, a gently sloping embankment looks like a slight raising of the fields, hiding the extent of the car park and leaving a clear view out to the bay horizon, on which the Mont appears to float. To the north, there is a dyke closing off the parking area so as to downplay the visual impact of the vehicles while recalling the history of the construction of the polders at the foot of the Mont over the last few centuries.

Inside, small ditches nudge visitors towards footpaths that take them very quickly away from the vehicles. The walk out to the Mont and the emotion of discovering it begin right there.”

Agence HYL / Pascale Hannetel, Arnaud Yver & Christophe Laforge
Landscape architects and town planners, designers of the parking area - www.hyl.fr

“The buildings’ design is based on the traditional farms in the area. Buildings set around long yards, with large double-pitched roofs. Working with this form, we designed two families of buildings, the ones in the same thick stonework, using the old materials, but including more contemporary, more refined details; the others very light, made of glass and timber, with timber latticework to filter the sunlight. Simplicity of forms and materials... These new buildings provide a new built-up look to La Caserne, latched on to the local architecture.”

Bruno Mader, architect
Designer of the parking area buildings



© Cabinet HYL / Bruno Mader, architect - Alfred PETER, landscape architect - Artefact Architectes - Véolia Transport - Pictures not contractually binding