

URBAN REHABILITA- TION OF THE RIVE SECTOR 2015, Geneva – Switzerland

Coauthor Pierre-Alain Dupraz Architectes

Promotor Ville de Genève
Engineering INGENI SA (engineering), PROAP (landscape)

The competition comprehended the rehabilitation of a public space of approximately 25.000 m² at the heart of the city of Geneva around the *Rive* sector, a major urban articulation of the left bank of Geneva where various urban fabrics, multiple services and several kinds of transport meet. The rehabilitation of this area should not only solve the problems caused by mobility and traffic but also to create a large pedestrian area in the city centre. What we found was, therefore, a vacant space, without concrete limits, without any design identifying its uses, without guides for walking, resting or just enjoying public space that the proposal seeks to define and create, giving birth to a new square and a new pedestrian urban axis. The square defines a centre around which public transport circulation, pedestrian circulation and living spaces are organised. Its design extends and contaminates the adjacent areas, creating a high-quality spatial and urban continuity, which runs through the intervention area while freeing up the entire central space of the new axis in which the underground parking accesses cores are lowered concerning the street level and incorporated into a bank. This continuity and fluidity towards the famous *jet d'eau* allow maximum appropriation of this new public space on market days.

The new square demarcates a centre on this axis through three founding elements: floor, ceiling, and masts. The proposed design for the floor fits the one already existing in the city with stone and concrete curbs, which, in the intervention area, intensifies to highlight the uniqueness of the square. Gradually, the concrete becomes brighter (with the addition of vitreous aggregates) and the pavement metric becomes denser, where one recognises the roundabout's diagonals (subtly ensuring the integration of all elements of the sub-soil structures). The square then becomes a shiny surface, able to reflect the sky and the suspended ceiling. The suspended ceiling is the visible expression of the roundabout's public transport infrastructures and, at the same time, it has an aesthetic function and an architectural form of great lightness, transparency and brilliance. It is a shell woven by the finest strands, which makes the primary function of a rigid overhead structure almost to disappear becoming a subtle, luminous, suspended structure (where the illumination coincides with the intersections of the primary lines) and finally setting up the square.

The site acquires its identity, between floor and ceiling, while giving rise to a new urban façade made up of elegant and thin masts, far enough away from existing building facades to give order and rhythm to the square's diagonals. The masts evoke the history of the city: at their base, they are solid black concrete as a foundation, then elegant painted steel shafts making up the cornice of nineteenth-century historic buildings and, finally, turning into evanescent ends of polished aluminum, dissolving into infinity.

