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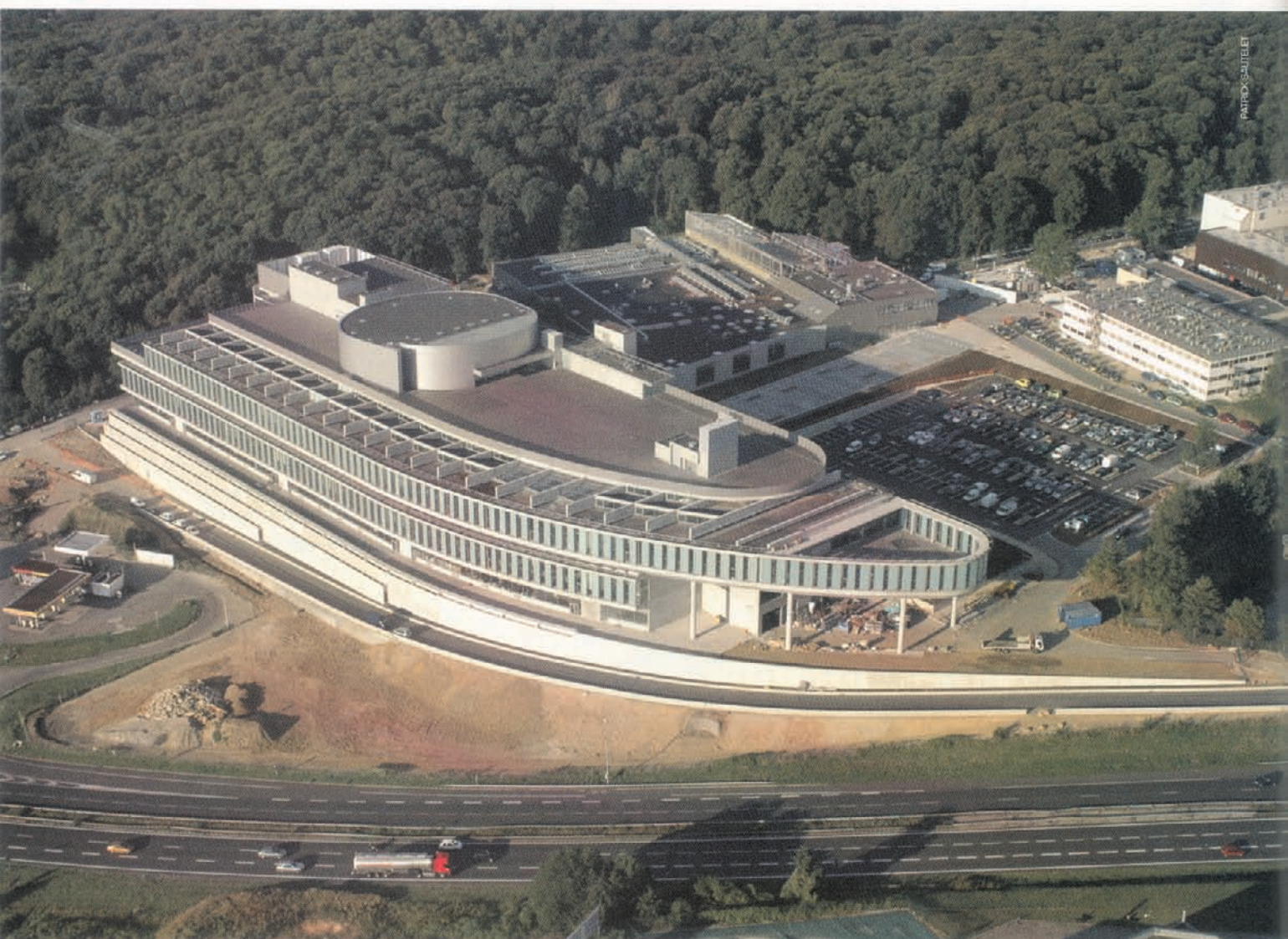
REFLECTIONS ON BRIGHTON

Bennetts Associates' Jubilee Library | PLUS: Concrete Quarterly

Shapes of the sea drive design centre

The dynamic of travel is reflected in the sweeping concrete curves of PSA Peugeot Citroën's Automotive Design Network by architect Atelier d'Architecture Ripault-Duhart, bordering a motorway south-west of Paris

By Sutherland Lyall. Photographs by Patrick Sautelet and Patrick Muller



Sweeping plinth and glazing bands (in fact, double-height) reduce the scale and emphasise horizontal flow. The roof is used as a car exhibition area



PATRICK MULLER

Above: top light helps with daylight modelling on the presentation floor. Below: presentation turntables. Bottom: building isolated by planting areas

The new PSA Peugeot Citroën design centre sits like an ocean liner above the RN118 at Vélizy-Villacoublay to the south-west of Paris. It seems to hang over the motorway because it sits right over the edge of PSA Peugeot Citroën's 12ha motorway-side plateau. It is an enormous building, its scale somehow reinforced by the great 10m-high vertical concrete skirt around the base and the repetitive translucent-clear pattern of the angled glazing that wraps the 220m-long elevations of the two most visible upper floors. At one end of the building, the top floor is extended beyond the floor below like a prow, supported on a recessed curving edge beam and slender circular concrete columns.



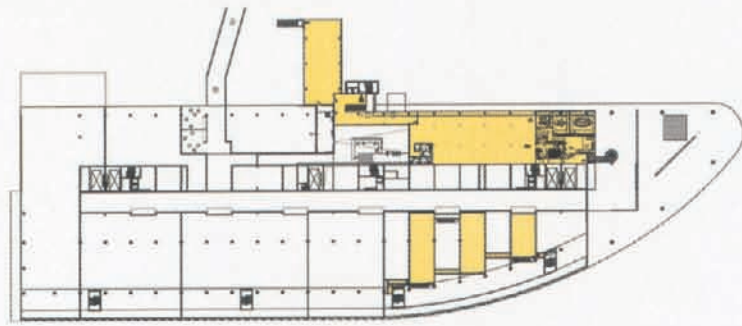
PATRICK SAUTELET



into full-size clay mock-ups, which are rendered in plaster and then in steel, glass and upholstery and finally paraded on whichever bit of the rooftop is available. On the semicircular upper floor they are relatively safe from the cameras of the curious and the malign because the high band of fenestration continues around the roofless end. The roof, the *niveau de présentation des maquettes*, set back from the perimeter a level above, makes you think immediately of Fiat's old testing circuit on the roof at Lingotto near Turin. But though prototype cars can drive around on this roof, 32m above ground, it is only to get them into position for viewing.

If it has a slightly fortress-like quality that is because what happens inside is secret. This is the place where stylists, engineers, modelmakers, coachbuilders and technicians create the future Citroëns and Peugeots. And because PSA Peugeot Citroën has links with other car manufacturers, it is also involved in developing some Toyotas and Fiats. This is an enormous secure studio workshop, where in one place sketch designs are turned into models, which are turned

The whole ensemble meets two of the classic criteria of what Edmund Burke thought of as 'sublimity': repetition and the tendency towards infinity. But this probably wasn't in the mind of the designers because they have deployed an old optical illusion to make the real bulk seem apparently smaller. The glazing bands, by which we tend to judge the scale of a building, are deceptive, as they are not normal storey-height, but are rather two 5m-high bands of glazing bordered by thickened roof and



management floor

quality innovation research

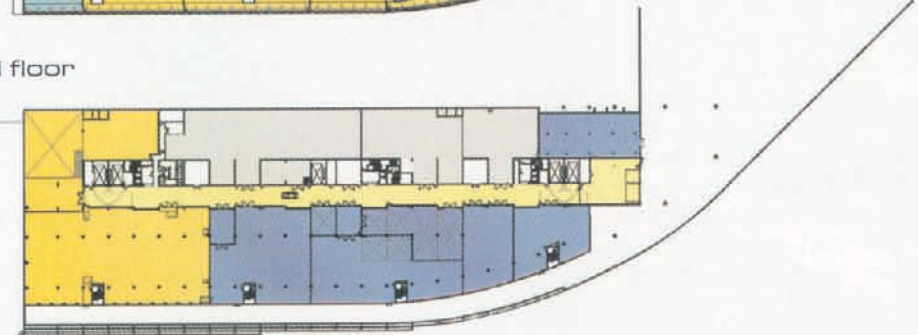
edge beams and separated by a continuous metre-deep setback. It is only when you see a person against the great concrete wall around the car-parking base, which encloses three lower car-parking levels for 700 cars, that you begin to grasp the building's sheer size. And yet from across the motorway, especially at night, it is a distant, dream-like ocean liner.

Inside, the floor plans are arranged with a longitudinal 6m-wide utility passage dividing the building lengthways, with two-thirds of the 65m-wide floor area overlooking the motorway and a third looking back over the company site. The passage is more than a circulation route, capable of having cars moved down it, as it is the services artery as well. The curve at the motorway end of this section of the floor reflects the curving end of the plateau on which the building sits. On the garden and entrance floors are model stores, a practical workshop, stock rooms and sales rooms. Below, buried in the edge of the plateau, is a full-size virtual reality facility, a kind of visualiser and simulator that the company claims is unique. There are car-size lifts from these studios and workshops up to the roof; three



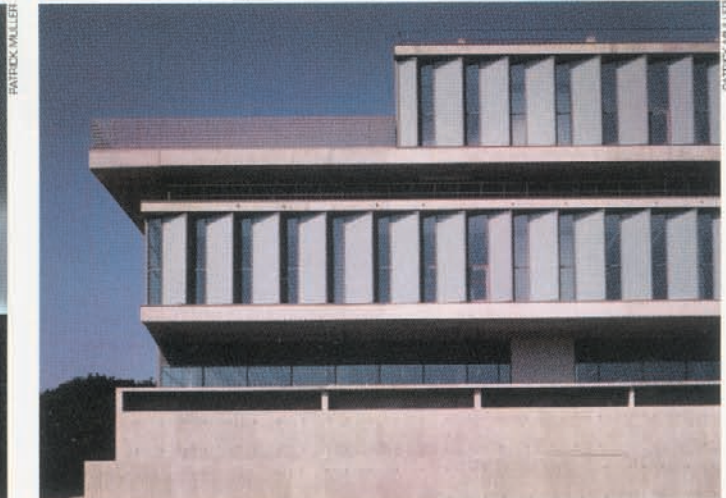
ground floor

reception/exhibition/restaurant
circulation
research
design workshops
workshops

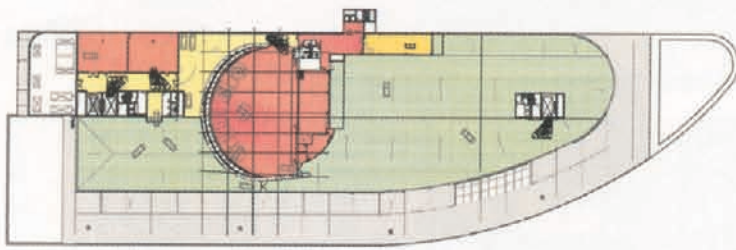


garden floor

design spaces
circulation
workshops
archive storage

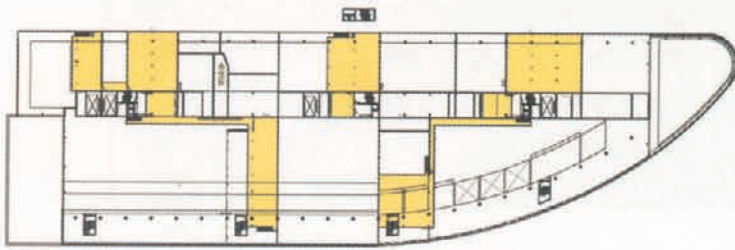


Above left: presentation area reformed. Above right: simple, uniform cladding that masks mezzanines and changes of function behind



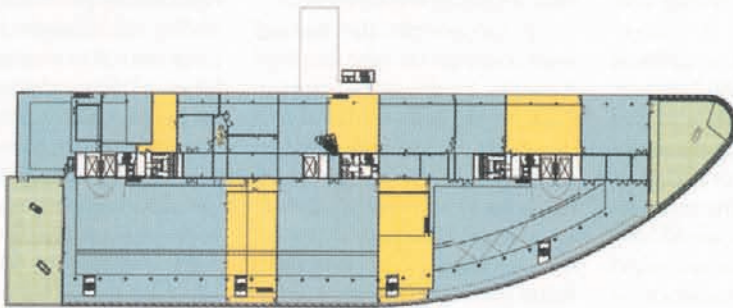
presentation floor

- model presentation rooms
- model presentation terraces
- design spaces
- model circulation



design mezzanine

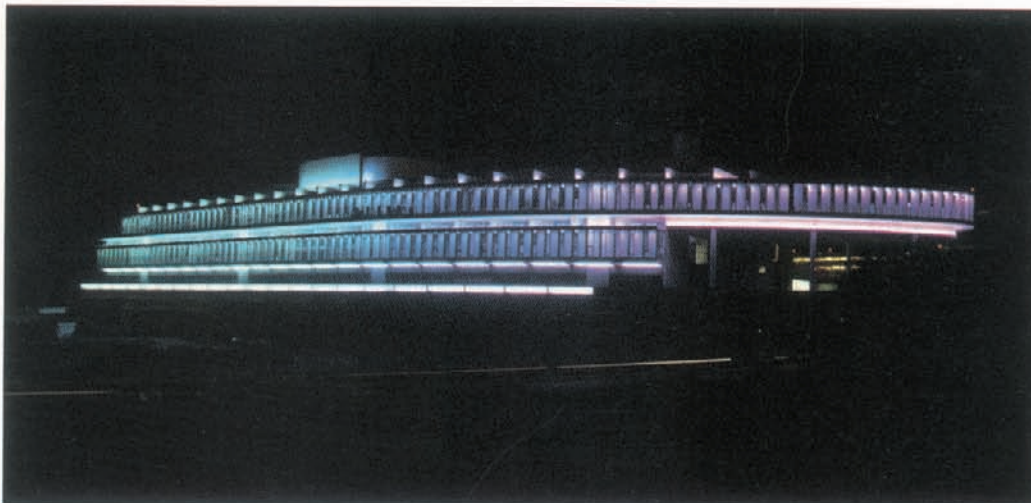
- design spaces



design floor



- design spaces
- design workshops
- design workshop terrace



The liner-like quality emphasised at night, with lighting by James Turrell with consultant Concepto

of them each under the control of a design studio.

The two workshop studio floors each have three vast and lofty studio workshops with 7m ceilings. One studio is for Citroën design, one is for Peugeot and one is for collaborative design with external business partners. The heavy reinforced concrete floors on each level have to span around 30m and be capable of taking considerable point loads: mock-ups of cars are considerably heavier than the real thing, with clay vehicle prototypes weighing as much as three tonnes. The structural solution to this twin problem – of industrial-scale loadings plus long spans – was to support the floors with lateral beams more than 2m deep spanning across the big spaces. With 5m still clear under the beams, it has been possible to insert mezzanines where they have become necessary.

The glazing system alternates translucent and clear glass, with the translucent panels set at an angle to form a sawtooth pattern on plan. This is partly a deliberately repetitive visual device, partly a way of providing some kind of visual industrial security and partly to allow daylight to penetrate to the back wall, 30m away.

CREDITS

CLIENT
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