CULTURAL CENTRE,
PARIS, FRANCE
ARCHITECT
JACOBS + MACFARLANE

IN THE OPEN AIR

To transform a century-old warehouse into a new cultural centre for Paris, Jakobs + Macfarlane took circulation outside with a radical tubular-steel grid.

Just over century ago, if you had been standing on the Pont d'Austerlitz bridge in Paris looking up river to the east, your eye might have been drawn to a new warehouse being constructed on the Left Bank. You might have marvelled at the sheer scale of the thing, with its curious reinforced concrete structure that seemed to go on for ever, beating a steady rhythm.

28m long, the river frontage. Completed in 1907, the Docks de Paris as the building came to be known, was a gigantic repository for bulk goods shipped up and down the River Seine by barge. Heretically looking to the future this functional monolith symbolised the industrial progress and efficiency of a new century. It was the first building in Paris to employ a reinforced concrete structure and according to Brendan Macfarlane, one of the architects of the recent remodelling, Le Corbusier was said to be fascinated by it.

The view from the Pont d'Austerlitz has changed hugely since 1907 yet there is still a palpable sense of things on the move. Now the reborn Docks de Paris has come to represent...