CULTURAL CENTRE, PARIS, FRANCE
Architect: JAKOB + MACFARLANE

Tank-like glass walls. The shops and cafés are yet to arrive (though leases have been signed), but however enthralling the architecture, the project's success will ultimately depend on how it works as a commercial and social organism. In terms of commerce, the French government has invested around 40 million euros (£35 million) in the venture and formed a 50-year partnership with the PAP and Ville de Paris. A separate property company will manage the building, collect rents and pay an annual licence fee to the PAP. In terms of refining a sense of social dynamism, the remodelling aims to draw people in and channel them around the new spaces, so that the building becomes active in the life of the wider urban realm. Originally a monolithic barrier boxing the river, the building is now a permeable, welcoming structure. Part of its midsection (next to the newly refurbished party) has been demolished, opening up routes and views to and along the river. This encourages casual exploration and connects it more intimately with its surroundings. A continuous public route extends up from the riverfront to the roof deck and down again, so people can either stroll through it or stop off to investigate the various spaces.

Crucial to this strategy is the notion of what Brendan MacFarlane describes as the 'plug-over', the warped steel parasite containing a network of stairs that transport visitors from a waterfront arcade of shops and cafés to an active, habitable roofscape, via the intermediate exhibition space. Four storeys above the river, restaurants, pergolas, gardens and Parisian panoramas now await what the architects conceive of as 'a square in the sky' and a new focal point for the neighbourhood.

The idea of linking circulation up the side of a building like a set of saddlebags has an obvious...