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The Lycée Français in New York

**A SHOWCASE FOR THE FRENCH-SPEAKING
COMMUNITY**

Florence Michel



THE LYCÉE FRANÇAIS IN NEW YORK, A SHOWCASE FOR THE FRENCH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY

In New York they say that the architecture of the new *Lycée français* (serving French students from kindergarten through upper secondary education) was inspired by the rationalism of Descartes. What is beyond doubt, however, is that the design and materials chosen by the American firm of architects, *Polshak Partnership Architects*, which designed the building, provide a thoroughly modern setting for its distinctive educational project.

Despite its superb location between 5th Avenue and Park Avenue, the first *Lycée français* was divided between three campuses located in six former mansions which did not lend themselves to renovation. It was therefore decided to sell the property in order to build a new facility on a nearby site in the same neighbourhood, between 75th and 76th Streets, that would meet the needs of future users and be better adapted to the *Lycée's* specific organisational and educational concept.

The first problem that had to be solved was the relationship between the building and the city, for it was essential to ensure children's safety in a densely populated urban setting. The solution found was to have school buses enter on one side of the building and go out on the other, after letting the children off in a safe inner courtyard that is used as a playground after the entrance gates are closed.

The metal structure and glass outer walls on the northern side allow users to see the city and let in natural light, while the southern side, more protected from sunlight, has concrete panels with a stone-like pattern that recalls the original mansions of the first *Lycée*.

The internal organisation of the *Lycée* reflects the desire – strongly supported by parents – to ensure that teachers and support staff are in close contact with some 1 000 pupils (capacity 1 250). Since classes are grouped by grade (early primary classes, 5th and 6th grades, etc.), each of the five floors of the northern and southern buildings has its own teachers' room and administrative department. Although the physics, chemistry and science laboratories have been grouped together, each floor also has its own rooms for the teaching of art.



Lycée students gather in the light filled 6th floor passageway of the school. On one side of the hall is an outdoor terrace and on the other an art studio/exhibition space.

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The common areas (cafeteria, entrance hall, library, gym) are at ground floor and basement levels. This means that the central courtyard begins at the third level, creating a spacious open area in the midst of a building with a total floor area of 16 000 m². Every square meter has been put to good use, and a running track has even been installed on the roof of the building. An auditorium, which will be open to the public and will be used for various performances and events, should enable both the *Lycée* and the local French community to participate actively in the life of the city.

The *Lycée* received private funding for this project, but raised the full amount of the large budget required by selling its property (USD 60 million) and issuing tax-exempt bonds (USD 95 million). Even though the tuition fees had to be increased, they are still 30% lower than the fees charged by private schools in New York. Some 120 pupils receive full or partial scholarships. Some other characteristic features of the *Lycée* are its bilingual education, which follows the curriculum of French *lycées*, and its diverse student body with over 50 nationalities – an openness to the world that Descartes would no doubt have appreciated. France's President, Jacques Chirac, came in person to inaugurate the *Lycée* in September 2003, proving that this distinctive institution is indeed a showcase for France and the French-speaking community in New York.

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A BUILDING DEVELOPMENT PLAN AT LAVAL UNIVERSITY, QUEBEC

Laval University is launching a series of major development projects aimed at meeting the needs of an institution that currently offers over 350 academic programmes to more than 36 000 students. It also ranks among the top ten Canadian universities in terms of research. Between now and the spring of 2005, nearly 130 million Canadian dollars will be invested in campus infrastructure, bringing total investment in this field since 1990 to some CAD 300 million. The administrators responsible for this construction say that these building projects will literally transform the landscape of their university and will have many positive side effects that will have a major impact not only on the university community, but also on the Quebec region and society as a whole, since they will make it possible to house multi-disciplinary research teams under a single roof.

This article will focus on three of the most important construction projects that are already under way or about to start: the Wood Processing Centre, the Optics, Photonics and Laser Centre, and Ferdinand-Vandry Hall. A brief history of the Laval University campus is provided at the end of this article.



The Wood Processing Centre (CTBO)

The Wood Processing Centre

Work on the Wood Processing Centre (*Centre de transformation du bois ouvré*, CTBO) began on 18 September 2003 and will continue until early 2005.

With its state-of-the-art technological facilities, the CTBO will become both a research centre that is unique in Canada and a Pan-Canadian education and training centre. What is more, this centre, which the representatives of Laval University describe as being the only one of its kind in the world, will be built entirely of wood