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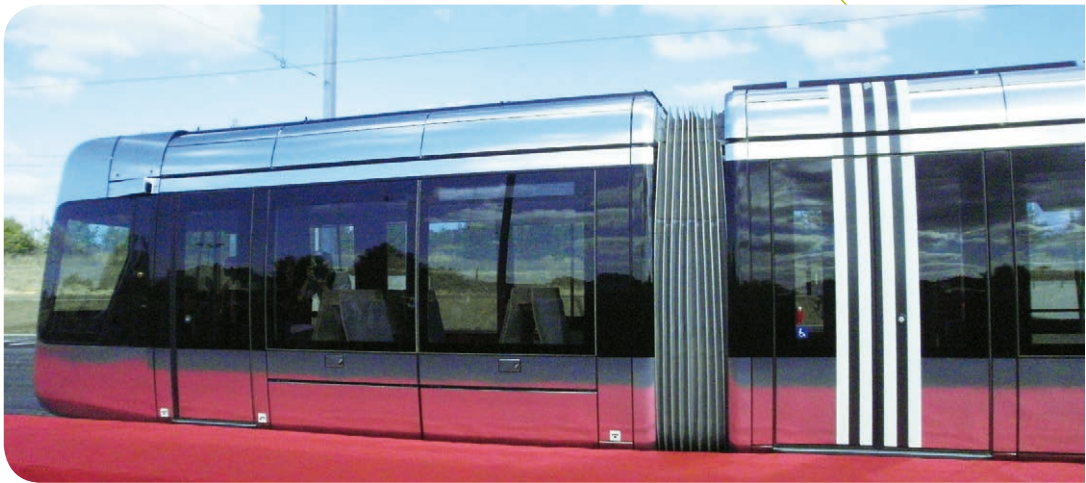
TOURS BUILDS UP MOMENTUM



Tours, in France's Loire Valley, is currently in the throes of constructing its first tramline, due to run 15km north-south across the city from September 2013. Possibly to encourage its inhabitants that the works disrupting their daily lives will come to an end, one day, the first of the 21 trams on order has already been unveiled to the public eye. And dazzling it certainly is!

The look and the feel of the 43.7-metre Citadis, by Alstom, are the fruit of 'Ensemble(s),' a creative collective comprising artist Daniel Buren, designer Roger Tallon, design firm rcp Design Global, urban specialist Jacques Levy, urban planning researcher Serge Thibault, multimedia artists Patrick Rimoux, and sound creator Louis Dandrel.

As well as looking good, the purpose of the "Loire mirror of water" livery, in ultra glossy lacquer, is to create a rippling and reflective impression as the vehicle runs along its route. To complement this waterscape effect, the lower part of the tram nose, subtly curved to conceal the bumpers, has a similar gloss



The first tram for Tours gets the red carpet treatment

finish, too. Furthermore, LED strips frame either side of the contour vertically, thus integrating the headlights to diffuse a continuous beam of light. The width between the two strips is identical to that of the track gauge; and this neat fit is no lucky coincidence. Of course the clued-in design team had a purpose in mind: the LEDs continue under the tram to create an unbroken line of light with the track, and hence the impression of a cursor. At the rear of the vehicle, red light strips serve to help alert pedestrians and road users of the running direction.

To give the tram a sense of the unexpected, the

interior has several surprises up its sleeve. The two sides are asymmetrical, with one designed to deliver a 'softer' atmosphere with its wood plaquage (treated with anti-graffiti), softer seats, and an overall matte finish; while opposite, the look and feel is all smoothness, redness, and gloss, plus harder seats (Mobility sat down and yes, there is a difference!) to deliver more punch. "Structurally, the tram represents an extremely rigid envelope to work with," points out Régine Charvet-Pello from rcp Design Global. "But for the interior it is possible to choose one's ambiances." Continuing in this vein, the grab bars come in two different colours and surfaces: the green are smooth like a creeper; the brown are granular like bark. And to echo the asphalt of the pavements outside, the flooring is surfaced in a glittering grey cladding.

Style counts, too, with the seating configuration departing from the familiar to give riders food



Nose of the tram – "like a cursor"





The 'bench' encourages passengers to travel differently

for thought, even if subconsciously. Besides the familiar single seats and fold-downs, a curved bench purports to be a 'public bench,' inviting passengers to sit, and travel, differently, while the all-in-one 'family' seat can accommodate two, three, or two and a half passengers.

Specially designed, body-tinted Parsol glass is used to maximise the benefits of the wide picture windows, giving passengers the best possible panoramic views of the city, and helping create that feel-good factor associated with natural light. To enhance this effect, the system of LED lighting is programmed to echo the changing seasons: 'cold' blue light for summer, 'warm' yellow for winter, and an intermediary light for mid-seasons.

"What I like when on board is that we are inside without really realising it," Jean Germain, mayor of Tours, told Mobility. "We are shielded, of course, from the elements, the sun and the air, hot and cold, but without the impression of being confined. With these wide views to the outside it's rather like being on the terrace of a café," he adds. Class act. Further to embracing the talents

and the influences of big name international designers and artists, local skills have also been brought to play to make the tram extra special. An incredible amount of work was carried out to design just one element: the series of 21 unique 'buds' fitted to the central grab poles. Ms Charvet-Pello is extremely proud – if not enamoured! – of this particular feature, which was designed and cast jointly by students from local technical colleges, artisans, and gilded metal



"Rather like being on the terrace of a café." The Mayor of Tours, Jean Germain, with Régine Charvet-Pello, rcp Design Global



workers. As far as she is concerned, the 'buds' are certainly no designer's whim. "A traditional tram, you get used to it," she told Mobility. "But what I'm looking for is to continuously provoke poetry, the elements of surprise, the unexpected, pleasure – or displeasure. Who knows, maybe people won't like some of the buds. But it doesn't matter. The buds are just one detail, certainly, but they count," she adds. "It was the same process for cars at the beginning of the 20th century, which had distinctive emblems on the top of their bonnets. The buds symbolise: MY tramway."

Making a difference

"Thanks to the work of the designers we have crossed a threshold, both in the interior and exterior, and elevated our range," acknowledges Jérôme Wallut, managing director, Alstom Transport France. "The advice and guidance of our partners has helped us create something rather different from what has been done before." These ambitions to take the tram one step further have even roused interest from abroad, and mayor of Tours, Jean Germain, for one, is delighted by the all the attention. "We have already had many delegations come to visit the first tram," he said at the unveiling ceremony. "The vehicle has been here at the maintenance site [brand new facility north of the city] now for three weeks, since the beginning of

September, and we have already received a delegation from Australia, two delegations from China – all in just three weeks. And the Norwegian Embassy, too,” he adds. “Yes, I do think this tram represents the ‘*goût français*,’” he concedes, when pressed by Mobility. “But at the same time it’s our way of seeing things. Culture is inseparable from France, with all the qualities and weaknesses this implies.” Artist Daniel Buren’s views on this matter are much stronger (see interview at end of this article), while Ms Charvet-Pello, 100% convinced of



“Budding” grab pole

the pertinence of this particular art-and-design approach, is clearly thrilled the Tours project gave her free rein to explore all her designer heart’s desires. “This will be the first hand-crafted tramway in the world, and at the same time it will deliver the highest aesthetic qualities,” she told Mobility. “I want it all! Like a little girl, I want all the toys in the shop window! And I’ve been lucky enough to be able to do it all. Nothing was out of bounds.”

Backdrop – the “4th landscape”

The Tours project is a prime example of the French way of (re)doing the tram – an approach that encompasses the fleet, its infrastructure, and plenty more besides. And this ‘plenty more besides’ cannot be understated; it is the defining feature of the French tram touch. Urban

redevelopment forms an integral part of pretty much every tram project in the Hexagon these days. And Tours is no exception.

The city has themed its tramway on the design concept ‘faire entrer la Vi(II)e dans le tram’ (‘Bring the City/Life on board the tram’), a somewhat intellectualised approach that “invites the public to become a passenger and an actor of the city again, within urban atmospheres reinterpreted by an artistic work, the only one of its kind.” Spearheading the concept, Ensemble(s) has worked its creative skills on the everyday, fixed objects in the immediate surroundings of the line – lighting, benches, pavements – to blend them seamlessly with its mobile element, the tram. The ambition is that everything functions together as a whole, to create the “4th landscape of Touraine” after its chateaux, its renowned gardens, and the rich patrimony of the Loire valley.

This objective explains the minute attention paid to establishing strong visual connections between the tram and the pavement, for instance. Rather than a stand-alone object, the vehicle is designed to ‘flow’ into its urban surroundings, largely thanks to the precise alignment of Mr Buren’s signature black and white stripes: every double door is highlighted by seven such stripes, each 8.7cm wide, that extend over the platforms of the tram stops and flow up the totem poles, thus “creating a sense of continuity and seamless mobility.” To complement this effect, the opening buttons on the exterior of the tram are specially sized and designed to merge into one of the black strips.

Countdown

Tours is certainly building up momentum as it prepares to join the rapidly expanding club of French tram cities. And with his current mandate conveniently running up to 2014, Mr Germain is certain to see in the all-important inauguration of the service. Hoping for a political revelation, in September 2012 Mobility asked him how he felt about being the mayor who brought the tram to town. But this being the festive unveiling ceremony for the first Citadis, he was in no mood to delve deep. “Well, I think it’s better to be remem-



Sowing the turf

bered for this than as the mayor who bought the digging, the noise, and disruption to the city during the works!” he laughed.

In view of the painstaking attention being paid to every detail of Tours’ first tramline, coupled with the energy and enthusiasm of all the actors involved, its official opening later this year is set to be quite spectacular; on a par with the dazzling firework extravaganzas held at the Château de Versailles, one suspects ●

Lesley Brown

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Tours tramway – facts & figures

- Line 1 runs 15km north south
- 1.8km of the line is powered by a ground supply
- 29 stations
- 5 park & rides
- fleet of 21 Citadis trams by Alstom (of which 3 in reserve), each 43.7 metres long with a maximum capacity of 300 passengers (when full, this means each tram carries the equivalent of three articulated buses, or 200 cars)
- 1 tram every 6 minutes at peaks (compared to 1 bus every 10 minutes), and operating from 5am to 1am
- 54,900 riders expected daily
- 2,013 trees planted; more than two trees replacing every one felled
- 6.7km of turfed platform
- 19.3km of cycle paths
- 400,000m² of redevelopment, of which 40,000m² in natural stone
- total cost: €269 million



"It was an adventure that generated a lot of enthusiasm"

Mobility asked Daniel Buren about his participation in the creative collective Ensemble(s), how the Tours project relates to his other work, as well as his views on the tramway in general.

Could you describe your experience as part of the collective Ensemble(s)?

I've had many occasions to work in a team and it's an activity that I really enjoy. It's a change for the artist, who is usually all alone with himself. Here in Tours, this experiment is even more developed and more ambitious since everything started with the bet that a stable of different people, different disciplines, from geography to philosophy, urbanism, design, visual arts, sound and light design, etc. could lead to a final product that is both rich and homogenous, where all the participants, once they've been definitively selected and have come to a common agreement, would finally be able to produce a total work of art that includes the other participants' technical and aesthetic requirements. A work that demonstrates its concern for the culture of the country in question, for the environment, for the different populations who will use this means of transportation, et cetera.

It was an adventure that generated a lot of enthusiasm, where all the pieces of the puzzle came together little by little to form an ensemble that we all hope will be as harmonious as possible. We are not going to have – as is, unfortunately, almost always the case – a bunch of different stations designed by dozens of artists who have no relationship with the person who will design the tram livery, who has no relationship with the person who will take care of the tram's interior, who has no idea how the ticket machines on the



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platforms will look nor how the stations will fit into the urban fabric... the kind of situation where every specialist is all alone in his corner, or practically.

Here, we all know each other, and everything that happens is constantly being discussed, questioned, even adjusted if necessary so that everything works together with everyone's contributions taken into consideration. Each contributor tries to remain as original and authentic to herself or himself as possible, but with the end goal being a common project that is, as I said, as harmonious as possible.

What can you say about the role of the work of art in the public space? Christian Lacroix was involved in the Montpellier tramway, Hervé Di Rosa is the artist on board the project for Aubagne.... Is your role in Tours similar to theirs?

I'm not familiar with Hervé Di Rosa's project, so I can't comment on it. However, I am familiar with what Christian Lacroix did in Montpellier and my sense of charity forbids me to talk about it. We did not work in the same way and I think that's obvious when you see the results! At least, I hope it is.

The technical, spatial, security constraints – did they cut back on your creativity? Or,

on the contrary, did they give you ideas?

Wherever it is, as far as I'm concerned, strong constraints are an integral part of the work, of my work. You just have to work with them, and, if possible, either sublimate them, or escape them, or evade them. They should never rein in the imagination or hamper the project that you want to do, or, if that's the case, then it's time to change the project. If it's impossible, well, that just means that you need to abandon the project immediately and quit this adventure where the constraints – whether technical, security, or other – would diminish, or even cancel the project that you wanted to bring to term. On the other hand, oftentimes constraints can push you to sharpen your imagination, and that's why I always say that the form of an artwork is often the result of all these constraints, resolved one after the other.

Regarding the tram vehicle as moving object. How has this influenced your approach?

I've done hundreds of works of all kinds that move, for more than 45 years now! There were people (sandwich boards in Paris in early '68, then picket signs in NYC in '73 and '78), sails on Optimists (the first time was in Berlin in 1974, then in twenty or so places over the last nearly 40 years, the most recent being just last year on the Bosphorus in Istanbul), trains (all the

trains that passed through the Art Institute of Chicago during a year), trucks (at random and while they were stopped, in the streets of NYC in 1970), cars (in the Netherlands in 1969), horses (in Freiburg in the 90's), on escalators (the first time was in the Mässtrich museum in Holland, then in Australia, then in São Paulo, then in Leipzig where they are installed permanently in the exhibition hall, then in Basel where they're also permanently installed in the Messe Basel, and then most recently for the Louis Vuitton and Marc Jacobs runway show in Paris), et cetera. I've done hundred of motion-based projects, to say nothing of flags and other weather vanes. I've also done mobile projects for performances in theatres, with choreography, musicians, et cetera...

The columns you designed for the Palais Royal continue to be admired, 25 years after their installation. How do you see your contribution to the Tours tramway in 25 years?

I don't think I will be able to see it in 25 years! What a shame! So I can't imagine that.

The French are very attentive to the aesthetic of the tram and its surroundings. Is this a political issue, or rather the desire to appeal to the French love of beautiful things?

You're too kind! If the majority of French people were interested in beautiful things, we would know it, and, more importantly, we would see it! Instead, we are witnessing a generalised disaster on the French territory where ugliness has gained the upper hand in almost everything. Monstrous advertisements, ridiculous architecture swarming all over France, from North to South and from East to West, never taking the environment, or people, or the characteristics of the different regions into account. Moreover, whenever an architectural or decorative or public work is supposed to appeal to the sensibilities of the general public – in France, in any case – you're sure to wind up with some horror that is difficult to defend. I think that livery for the tram in Montpellier is a good example – even if most people seem quite pleased with it! As

far as political will goes, it's hardly even concerned with aesthetics, but more often than not, an economic will, and then the desire to please the greatest number in order to be re-elected! Which doesn't automatically lead to the most pertinent artworks, that's the least that you can say. In fact, what we need, if we have a strong aesthetic ambition, is above all not to worry to trying to please, and, especially not to *displease* the majority, but to do the most beautiful thing possible, even if it means offending the general sensibility in the short term (especially when this sensibility is as mediocre as it is in France, for example). Then, we can hope that a majority of people will accept and appreciate what you've done, and in that way, the overall level will have been raised up just a little, which will make the next projects more demanding in terms of quality, aesthetics, et cetera. I think that this position is equally true for architecture and works of art and plenty of other things in the public sphere. In order to have a successful public project – whether it's as modest as a statue in a public plaza or something as extremely vast and ambitious as a new tram for an agglomeration – you need to bring together not only a team of the highest quality, but the best engineers, the best architects, the best designers, et cetera. And, above all, the best mayor and best municipality possible. That's a lot of people, and it's quite rare, to be honest. In Tours, all these qualities came together. If the project is a success, it's because of this rare ensemble, with good will coming from everyone involved.

I think about what happened at the Palais Royal, where there was a ferocious and violent animosity towards my work, which almost ended up being destroyed before it was even finished, which turned into a quasi-unanimous acceptance in a matter of years. The project made no concessions to taste, to fashion, and certainly not to any so-called general sensibility, on the contrary! However, the majority of people adapted their own sensibility to this work that, on first blush, had absolutely nothing to do with their aesthetic criteria. You need to work towards this sort of turnaround,

you should never try to make the work correspond to the ambient criteria of the majority (especially when it's a question of aesthetics). Let's hope that the same thing happens with the Tours tramway, even though it's a bit risky to compare the two undertakings, since they don't have much to do with one another, with the exception that they're each, in their own way, public works.

Do you yourself use public transport? If so, what modes? If not, why not?

I use all types of public transport: the train, the plane, the bus, the taxi, the boat, the cable car, the metro, the tram.... everything that's at my disposal in all the cities, villages, and countries that I visit, plus everything that allows you, collectively, to get from point A to point B over long distances. In cities, especially in the interior of big cities, there should only be public transportation. Unfortunately, that's still a long way off... ●

Interview translated by Emily Lechner