

The singularity, force and emotion which emanate from the architectures of Stéphane Fernandez appeared from the very first project built in the Alps in Abriès, marking the landscape and visitors with its radical yet sensitive presence. This chalet saw the appearance of raw and accepted archetypal forms, the combined expression of volume and mass, the close relationship between depth and openings, and a built identity connected to the refined implementation of materials. From the start, the architecture delivers on one of its most thrilling promises: by transcending its primary duty—building a shelter for humans—it offers them a powerful relationship with nature. It reestablishes this primal link in an immersive and contemplative way, in a cultural and constructive way. In this well-defined encounter, the intensity of the relationship awakens the senses, accentuating the feeling of being alive, of being in the world.

The conceptual principles that have continued to guide and inform Stéphane Fernandez in his professional and pedagogical work emerged out of this first project. These principles are surely at the root of the feeling of permanence that his built works now evoke throughout France. More specifically, his architectures confront users with intense and contrasting experiences, depending on the scale at which they occur.

At a local level, Stéphane Fernandez presents a powerful connection between the architectural object and its surrounding environment, which is always accepted as such. Legibility and sensitivity to the specifics of the site, the quality of the positioning, immediately emerge out of this connection. Each project boasts a close and unique relationship between the large scales of the natural or urban sites, and the architectures housed within them.

At an architectural level, the experience of anyone exploring these projects is qualified by their contact with the materials. An emotion arises from the architecture’s capacity to excite the body, and the substance which makes it up. Each project draws its character from an erudite and applied exploration of the construction. In particular, the architect places his trust in the artisanal, analogical process of producing the initial ingredients which make up the architecture. Walls, framework, woodwork, and cladding are just some of the resources which can be used to interrogate architectural choices. Stéphane Fernandez continuously explores Louis Kahn’s advice to ask each material what it desires, so that is can become matter. This exploration, which seeks out the order hidden in all things, naturally extends into the assiduous work with the artisans to reveal it. In particular, the design of the concrete comb, combined with the movement of the hand, is what creates the emotion that radiates from the walls of the childcare centre in Aix-en-Provence. In the same way, the closeness between the structural design and the patient, meticulous assembly of the Ipé woodwork is the source of the architectural expressiveness of the children’s pavilion in Saint-Raphaël.

At the level of the room, a new experience takes hold of visitors. Each project seeks out a calibrated, amplified relationship through the depth of the openings. Not a single project departs from this. Whether the openings frame the sky vertically, or their environment horizontally, experiencing the architecture of Stéphane Fernandez means submitting to this way of cutting up the world—partial and emergent—which is renewed with every project.

This conceptual, cultural and architectural permanence now forms a network across France, inviting us to explore this new cartography to discover these rare, intense architectures. With Stéphane Fernandez, the power of an enlightened yet pragmatic architecture is unleashed, a deep tenderness, rooted in an immediate, open, welcoming, profound and luminous experience.

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