



FRENCH WEST INDIES

Martinique, Case studies in modernism

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Martinique's modern architecture is characterized by its widespread dissemination. Owing to its history, cyclonic destructions and seismic damage, Martinique's heritage, prior to the nineteenth century, is limited.

PART OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY architecture survives in a confined way, a church here, a market there, with an emblematic example: the Schœlcher library (1889), built following architect Henri Picq's plans. The bulk of extant constructions was realized during the twentieth century when the number of dwellings tripled. In that respect, Martinique is located within the American context although administratively it

is part of Europe. In this context and during that period (1927–1969), a good many of Martinique's residents chose to endorse architectural modernity.

MARTINIQUE'S MODERNITY was promoted by architects, among which Louis Caillat (1901–2002), Maurice de Lavigne Sainte-Suzanne (1917–1992), but also by enthusiastic or determined contractors and engineers: René Dantin, Constant Eudarc and Raoul de Jaham; and also by a few enlightened building sponsors such as Donald Monplaisir or pharmacist Charles Glaudon. However in Martinique this new architecture was not confined to 'learned' architecture. Thanks to the realizations of many contractors and to menial draftsmen, a real dissemination of vernacular modernism is patent. This commitment was an unusual feature of Martinique's modernity.

THE 1930s

Apparently the first modern work in Martinique would have been for the Fort-de-France sailing club in 1927, an unbuilt project by architect Gérard Corbin¹ of Guadeloupe (1905). The first modern building erected was l'Église du Prêcheur, probably built around 1930.

A key factor seems to be at the origin of this architecture's development. Through the May 21, 1930 law, the French State allocated 50 million francs to Martinique to repair the damage caused by Mount Pelée's last volcanic explosion in September 1929.² Concurrently the Conseil général (Regional Council) raised a public loan of 150 million francs.³ These efforts materialized as the renewal of many public constructions: town halls in Saint-Pierre (1934), in Grande-Rivière (1932), at Lamentin (1934, Louis Caillat), schools in Basse-Pointe and Bellefontaine

Fig. 1. Basse-Pointe School, 1930s

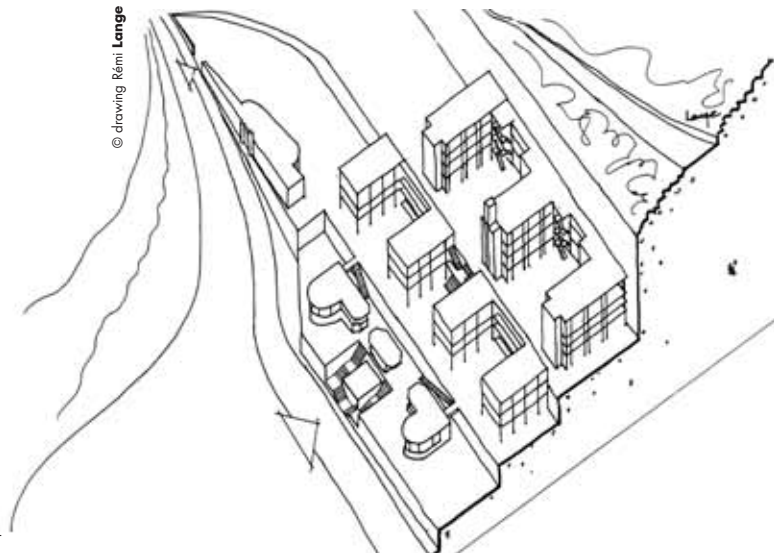


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Fig. 2. Lycée Schœlcher seen from the entrance, 1937

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Fig. 3. Lycée Schœlcher, axonometric view

(1930s), but also the Clarac hospital (1935, Wulfleff and Verrey)⁴ and the Lycée Schœlcher (1937), as well as a volcanology observatory at the Morne des Cadets (1935, Louis Caillat) (fig. 1). It is worth mentioning that these projects occurred at a moment when in continental France modern municipal buildings were being constructed in Boulogne-Billancourt, Suresnes, Villeurbanne, Clichy, Villejuif, and for hospitals such as Beaujon in Clichy (1935, Jean Walter) and lycées (high schools) such as Camille-Sée (1934, François Le Cœur). In Guadeloupe architect Ali Tur (1889–1970), member of the Société des architectes modernes, developed a genuine architectural œuvre with many public buildings but also churches.⁵

THE LYCÉE SCHŒLCHER* (figs. 2, 3 & 4)

The Lycée Schœlcher, designed for the tri-centennial, is implemented by stages between 1937 and 1938. With its 80,000 sqm built in a 4-hectare park, it is a highly significant work. The earthworks and retaining walls of

the hill overlooking the Fort-de-France bay lasted nearly ten years, and the school's construction itself began in 1933. Honoré Donat supervised the works. The post and beam structure, designed anti-seismically, was conceived by the Parisian civil engineers office Delefosse and Trompat.⁷ The works were carried out by the Roy-Camille, Kalfon and Roseau firms of Martinique. The Lycée's general composition consists of a central axis emphasized at the entrance by a clock tower. The layout makes the most of the hill, with buildings spaced out on three terraces and positioned perpendicular to the slope, allowing the trade winds to ensure cross-ventilation. The entrance provides, thanks to its staircase, a link with the first terrace and the administration buildings. Another flight of stairs provides access to the second terrace on which four teaching buildings are distributed around three courtyards facing the sea. The 3-story constructions are connected to each other by outdoor but covered catwalks and stairways. The last

Fig. 4. Lycée Schœlcher, catwalks and flights of stairs



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Fig. 5. Haller, tri-centennial exhibition's front gate, 1935



terrace, which is situated between the second and third stories, welcomes three 4-story buildings, around two courtyards. The clock tower extends the central building. All buildings accommodate classrooms: covered outdoor galleries lead to the classrooms that cross through the buildings. Windows are endowed with wooden jalousies. Transparency, sequences of shallow steps, the rhythm of posts, roof-terraces and continuous bands of balconies produce entirely original aesthetics.⁸ Sadly, this first-rate ensemble is currently threatened with destruction, although it deserves to be rehabilitated, be it with a revised brief.

IN 1935 an event celebrating the colony's tri-centennial was organized in Fort-de-France at the Parc Gallieni.

THE DORMOY HOUSE (fig. 6)

Louis Caillat was commissioned by René Dormoy, construction and civil works engineer, and contractor, to build this residence. The rectangular ground floor welcomes a covered gallery leading to two living rooms, a bedroom and a study. An adjoining volume encloses the kitchen and bathrooms. The second story comprises two bedrooms with curbed walls, one of which opens onto a large terrace. Windows, bearing on high breast walls, closed by jalousies, are shaped into continuous bands under the outcrop of the brise-soleils. A system of natural ventilation emerges on the façade like a concrete trellis. The stoneware floor replicates various rug patterns; the furniture in exotic woods was especially made to order. Today the house, over-exposed to the nuisances of



Fig. 6. Louis Caillat, Dormoy house, 1933

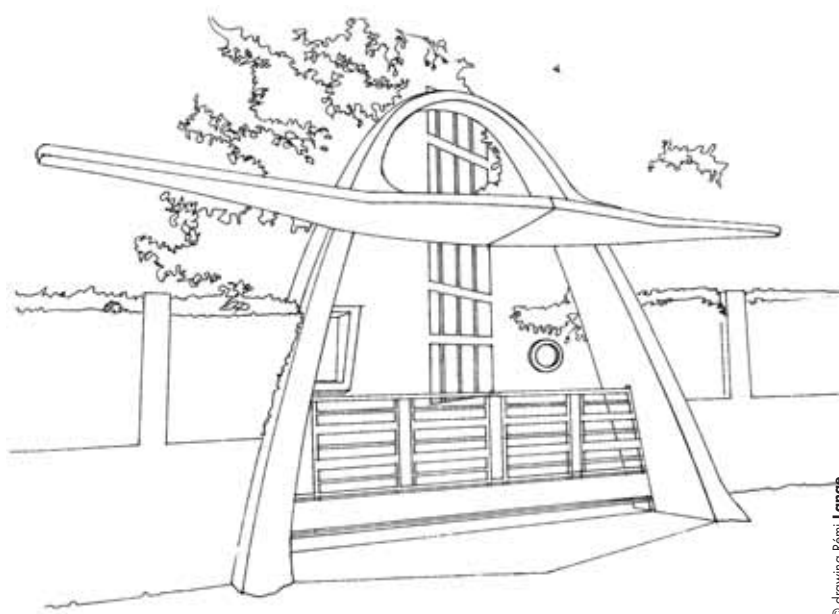


Fig. 7. Louis Caillat, front gate of the Monplaisir house, 1946

The exhibition entrance's striking feature is a monumental modernist front gate, no doubt influenced by the aesthetics of the 1925 Arts décoratifs World Fair (fig. 5). Architect Robert Haller is the author of the exhibition's layout and of the 15-meter high fountain of light also set up at Terres-Sainville: "The waterfall takes place from the top down in successive cascades onto level surfaces of glass. At night an inner light of varying color turns the drops into pearls, rubies, topaz gems, emeralds."⁹ This new neighborhood in Fort-de-France was designed by town planners René and Paul Danger.¹⁰

In this context, private commissioning was not outdone, as for example in Fort-de-France: the Dormoy House (1933, Louis Caillat), the Baude house (193*), the Didier house (1933, Louis Caillat), la Rotonde (1935, Louis Caillat), the Nationale building (1938, Rendu); and likewise in Saint-Pierre, the Roy-Camille House (1936, Louis Caillat).

a very busy road, has been altered and is in a very poor general state.

The modern shapes were well perceived by different social sets and did not remain the prerogative of enlightened connoisseurs. In 1935, the houses of Nestoret, artisan bricklayer, and Thorell, cabinetmaker, located in Fort-de-France, are signs of that dissemination. Thus, in small towns or in the countryside, artisans build using formal references to the modern movement, without architects.

THE POSTWAR PERIOD

During the war the island did not suffer any destruction, but construction came to a standstill due to a severe embargo. In the days following the conflict, building activity takes up again, with an important share for domestic architecture. As early as 1946, the Monplaisir House is built on the Bellevue heights of Fort-de-France

by Louis Caillat, who concurrently erects villas for the military at Fort Desaix. That same year, engineer Eudarc builds the Massel house in Balata (above Fort-de-France). In 1948 Lamartinière realizes the Maison Rose (Pink House) for dentist Sylvestre; the articulation of volumes, the central core, and the outcropping flat roofs can be related to the houses of Frank Lloyd Wright. Architect Marcel Salasc (1885–1966) builds in turn the Richer building in Sainte-Marie in 1946, then in 1948, the Trade Unions House according to a layout consisting exclusively of circles.

THE MONPLAISIR HOUSE (figs. 7 & 8)

This beautiful family dwelling was realized by Louis Caillat for Donald Monplaisir, a tradesman in Fort-de-France.

height. The second floor's volume matches the living room and mezzanine volume, and comprises three bedrooms and bathrooms giving onto an open balcony. The roof is laid out as a terrace and nightly reception place. The floors are of granite, marble or stoneware. In 1946 it was difficult to lay hands on these materials, but Donald Monplaisir had family in Sainte-Lucie and managed to come by them. The influence of Brazilian architecture's formal freedom is no doubt at the root of this bold project.¹¹ Donald Monplaisir's son is the house's current owner and its advocate, and the house's current state is absolutely remarkable.

THE 1950s see the introduction of collective dwelling projects and the first briefs for middle-class housing



Fig. 8. Louis Caillat, main façades of the Monplaisir House, 1946



Fig. 9. L'Impératrice Hotel, 1955

Before the war, he had lived in one of the architect's buildings and therefore chooses Caillat, granting him great freedom for the project. When drawing close to the building, the atmosphere is quickly palpable thanks to the railing's front gates, genuine concrete sculptures of organic shapes. The building is characterized by its largely differing façades. The street façade expresses the building's horizontal and vertical circulations, with two curved stairwells that sculpt volumes. The striking and imposing features of the living area's two façades, joined by a rounded angle, are the balconies' horizontal line and the monumental solar protections: suspended concrete curtain walls of organic shapes. Views and light are directed while shade is sustained. Spaces are free flowing thanks to the post and beam structure. The ground floor is practically wide open, closed off only by pillars, entrances and stairs. Favoring the view overlooking the Fort-de-France bay requires some extra

estates, with for instance the Petit Paradis by Maurice de Lavigne Sainte-Suzanne (Schœlcher, 1956). The Impératrice Hotel, the extension of an existing building, was designed in 1955 by a Charles Glaudon fascinated by ferroconcrete construction techniques, and imposes its façade on the jardin de la Savane (garden) (fig. 9).

AS IN THE OTHER FRENCH DEPARTMENTS, social housing estates become common. In 1952, a first development is built at the Baies des Tourelles, designed by architect Desbordes for the Société des habitations et repas bon marché (Society of affordable dwellings and meals). The first collective HLM (*Habitations à loyer modéré*, moderate rent dwellings), work of architect Lavigne, is erected in Saint-Georges, Batelière (Schœlcher, 1958). In 1959, the same architect builds for the Société immobilière des Antilles Guyane the elegant Résidence Sainte-Catherine, a residential block of

apartments, in Cluny, a neighborhood of Fort-de-France, as well as the Résidence des Palmiers (1960) (fig. 10).

THE CONSTRUCTION of *grands ensembles* (large social housing developments) that marked the construction policies of the 1960s, occurred in Martinique at the same time as in continental France. The following are worth mentioning: the Floréal development (Fort-de-France) in 1963, following a block plan by Georges Candilis (1913–1995),¹² Dillon (Fort-de-France) in 1965,



Fig. 10. Lavigne, résidence Les Palmiers, 1960

following a plan by Antoine de Roux (head of the Antilles Guyana Town Planning Agency) and Batelière (Schœlcher) in 1969 on a block plan by Maurice de Lavigne Sainte-Suzanne.

RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE

Religious architecture is present and spreads out throughout the period, from the Église du Prêcheur in 1930 to the Bethléem Chapel in 1960. Are noteworthy: the Sainte-Thérèse Church (Fort-de-France, 1938), Josseaud Church (Remy, 1952), the Saint-Christophe Church in Dillon (Fort-de-France, 1955) by architects Tessier and Crevaux (fig. 11), the Bethléem Chapel (Fort-de-France, 1960). The two latter are the most radical, and Saint-Christophe truly belongs to its time, with its curves, its vault, its concrete lateral ventilation that incorporates colored glass piers, and finally its apse, a vaulted tower that plays with light in a Le Corbusier-like spirit.

A NEW FORMAL VOCABULARY, AND CONSTRUCTION ASPECTS

During the 1930s, the bulk of rural dwellings is built with plant materials: sugar cane straw roofs, and woven *ti-baume*¹³ walls, and traditional housing is usually the rule, as in continental France.

Using concrete and reinforced cement allowed all sorts of climatic adjustments that also prompted aesthetic researches. Covered galleries, cantilevered horizontal brise-soleils, vertical brise-soleils of varied profiles, screen walls, have become common (fig. 12). Inclined posts and cruciform pillars renew the load bearing element. Sometimes there are unexpected additions, such as a concrete covered gallery in front of a traditional cabin. Flat roofs are made with filler blocks until the 1960s when the concrete slab becomes a common deed. Using it

Fig. 11. Tessier and Crevaux, Saint-Christophe church, 1955



makes it possible to create terraces that are very pleasant for the hot hours of the day. In spite of the maritime influence, of the sand's uncertain origin and of the slimness of sections, constructions are often in very decent condition: with little spalling or cracks, doubtless thanks to the concrete's composition that is rich in hydraulic binder. On the other hand, humidity, rainfalls and the relative quality of paints, combined with the absence of upkeep, present the onlooker with many liquid stains, fungal growths and other dirty marks.

SUPPLYING RAW MATERIALS for concrete was not always easy. Thus, bamboo membranes were at times substitutes for metal reinforcement.¹⁴ Buildings concerned do not seem to have aged less soundly than others. Moreover, deliveries on the Atlantic coast are often difficult, owing to the ocean's roughness. As a result construction elements were thrown out of ships straight into the sea (directly for the form panels, in barrels for the cement bags) and experimented swimmers were left to retrieve them at their own risk...

PROBLEMS OF ATTRIBUTION, ARCHITECTS AND OTHER BUILDERS

For the moment, out of all the modernist buildings recorded by ADAM Martinique, only a third (90) can be attributed to an author (architect or other construction practitioner). This situation is the result of different factors: the lack of archives, the relocation of others (overseas archives center in Aix-en-Provence), and a vernacular built production without architect or written record.¹⁵

Among the architects, the following can be considered significant: Louis Caillat, Xavier Rendu, Robert Haller, André Desbordes, Léon Humblet, Germain Olivier, Charles Wulffleff and Alois Verrey, Maurice de Lavigne Sainte-Suzanne, Alexandre Ziwès, Fernand Tessier and Maurice Creveaux, Marcel Salasc, Clément Lison, Claude Meyert-Levy, Henri Madelain, Claude Le Folcavez, Lamartinière (see *appendix*).¹⁶ Louis Caillat alone builds nearly a third of the buildings recorded. And the paradox is that Martinique's most prolific modernist architect is not an architect. This self-taught practitioner, of continental French stock, trained himself while working at Ali Tur's practice in Guadeloupe.¹⁷ He settles in Martinique in 1933 and produces architecture works whose value will mark their time.¹⁸ It is possible that a certain number of buildings from the 1930s in Martinique are the work of Ali Tur.¹⁹ Desbordes seems to focus on school buildings. Lison and



Fig. 12. Rose-Marie-Sanon House, brises-soleil, le Lamentin, 1963

Lamartinière are both engineer-architect graduates of the École spéciale des travaux publics (ESTP, renowned civil engineering school).²⁰

AS FAR AS THE ENGINEERS are concerned, are of significance: Jules Roy-Camille [7], Raoul De Jaham [5], Honoré Donat [4], François Lubin [3], and Constant Euradic [2]. Jules Roy-Camille (ESTP 1924) who begins his career in Guadeloupe in 1926, is an engineer of the Arts et Métiers et Travaux publics de l'État (prominent construction and civil engineering state school). Honoré Donat (ESTP 1925), present in Martinique as early as 1929, sets up the department of public and large scale works, the first (public) research unit for reinforced concrete.²¹ Albert Delaval, concrete construction engineer



Fig. 13. Building of the former *Crédit martiniquais* bank after restoration

and Joseph de La Guarrigue, a Polytechnique graduate (prestigious science and engineering school), are also worth mentioning. At the time the construction firms that build in Martinique are those of Roy-Camille, Raoul de Jaham, Jacques Kalfon, Joseph et Emmanuel Roseau, the Dantin brothers (René, Robert and Richard).

A RENEWED INTEREST AND THE FIRST RESTORATIONS

In the 1970s a certain weariness for modern shapes and a postmodern international context was coupled with, in the Antilles, a rejection by independence movements of shapes that were perceived as 'imported.' Incorporated, adjusted, *creolized*, modernity is today part and parcel of Martinique's history of architecture, both learned and vernacular. As such, it deserves to be recognized and enhanced, particularly since it conveys values of social progress, democracy and emancipation. The adjustment of modern shapes to the tropical climate was an original contribution to the movement. The ADAM Martinique association, formed in 1996, has led a number of initiatives to draw the elected representatives and the public's attention to this heritage. Two restorations illustrate a certain evolution: the restoration of the former *Crédit*

martiniquais (bank of Martinique) building and of the Trade Unions House. The bank building, completed in 1937 by engineer Valide and the Dantin firm, was doubled in 1947, then again enlarged in 1953 and finally concealed by a curtain wall at the beginning of the 1980s. The restoration, realized in 2003 by architect Yves Tanguy and the BRED bank, current owner of the building, endeavored to recapture the spirit of the building's original aesthetics, if not its actual state (fig. 13).²² The restored building has recovered its original coupled pillars, loggias, as well as the horizontal lines of its *brise-soleils*.

EMMANUELLE GALLO is an architect, a philosopher of art and culture and an architectural historian (specializing in the contemporary period). After a period of studio practice, she taught history of architecture, construction design, history of construction in several institutions such as the Institut d'art de l'Université Paris 1. Currently, she is writing a dissertation on the history of domestic heating in France. She has published papers on the history of architecture, on the history of heating, and a book in conjunction with an exhibition on the history of a nineteenth century palace hotel in Normandy. Founding member of Docomomo France, she has been member of the Docomomo International Specialist Committee on Technology since 2002.

JEAN DOUCET is a federal engineer of public works. In 1996, he founded the Adam Martinique organization in which thirty architects, urbanists, historians and actors in the field of culture and national

heritage gather around the subject of Martinique's national heritage of modern architecture. The organization has sponsored lectures, exhibitions, television reports and a series of short films, as well as information panels in front of the main buildings. Adam Martinique has received public funding to produce a census of the entire modernist heritage and is currently preparing the first work on this subject.

Translated by **Isabelle Kite**

NOTES

- 1** Architect, graduate of the École spéciale des travaux publics (1928), works for the Guadeloupe sous-préfecture (sub-district of a French department) but also for a private practice (ESTP yearbook).
- 2** May 8, 1902, the town of Saint-Pierre and its surroundings were destroyed, causing 30,000 casualties. Another eruption occurred in 1929.
- 3** Following the damage caused by the cyclone of September 12, 1928, Guadeloupe was granted 40 millions francs of subsidies as well as 50 millions of municipal loans. Christian Galpin, *Ali Tur architecte, 1929-1937, itinéraire d'une reconstruction* (Conseil général de la Guadeloupe, 1993), 8 p.
- 4** *Illustration* 4838 (November 23, 1935). Introduces the hospital and quotes the designers' names.
- 5** Architect D.P.L.G., postwar graduate, he becomes in 1925 one of the architects of the Ministry of Colonies. After the 1929 cyclone, he is chosen as Guadeloupe's architect, and as such he also builds the pavilion at the 1931 Colonial Fair, with a patent modernist character contrasting with the conformist exoticism of other pavilions.
- 6** The lycée Schœlcher was originally located in Saint-Pierre, then transferred to Fort-de-France.
- 7** Delefosse, civil engineer of the Ponts et Chaussées, béton armé/fer, Sageret, 1938.
- 8** The question of the author's identification remains open for the moment. The spatial complexity and the subtlety of aesthetic researches, the building's importance, all speak in favor of an architect. Some aspects evoke Ali Tur's architecture.
- 9** *Le Courrier des Antilles* (Saturday April 11, 1934) and the *Bulletin de la Chambre de Commerce de la Martinique* 2-3 (April-June 1936): 11.
- 10** During the 1931 colonial Fair, they present a regional development plan, in the Martinique Pavilion. Victor Sévère, "L'Urbanisme aux colonies, Fort-de-France (1639-1931)," *L'Architecture* 8 (Paris, 1931): 284-288. Raymond Danger, "L'Urbanisme à la Martinique, trois siècles d'urbanisme colonial : Fort-de-France," *L'Urbanisme aux colonies et dans les pays tropicaux* (Delayance: La Charité-sur-Loire, 1932-1935), 325-338.
- 11** The exhibition on Brazilian architecture at the MoMA in New York takes place in 1943 and is the subject of broadcasts in the Anglophone press.
- 12** With Alexis Josic and Shadrach Woods, 500 inexpensive dwellings are partially realized (1957), as well as the development plan for the Balata neighborhood with Louis Caillat as architect in charge of the operation, 500 dwellings, cultural and shopping centers, nursery and elementary schools. The Georges Candilis archives are accessible at the Institut français d'architecture archives.
- 13** Local species of trees whose branches can be used woven for construction.
- 14** This novel experiment was led at the Maison Laventure in Grande-Rivière (1935) and for the Torgiléo at Bellefontaine (1948).
- 15** Up to now the association has focused on gathering information in situ.
- 16** See frame on right.
- 17** Ali Tur, architect D.P.L.G. (1920), has his main practice in Paris, is a member of the Société des architectes modernes founded in 1922 by Frantz Jourdain.
- 18** Ali Tur's architecture influenced Louis Caillat. For instance, the option chosen for the Lamentin town hall is reminiscent of the Palais de Justice (law courts) of Basse-Terre.
- 19** In publications, Ali Tur presents his works in Guadeloupe only. In 1936 in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* he writes: "This method [doing without the architect] has just been, again, adopted by Martinique's department of construction works where the Palais du Conseil général of this colony has been handed over for competition between building firms." It is therefore quite possible that he had already been in contact with this department/section before 1936 (and that he was trying to get even with it?). *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 3 (1936): 87-104 (quote: 92).

20 In 1921 Léon Eyrolles creates in his École spéciale des travaux publics the degree of engineer-architect. Criticized by the architects D.P.L.G., it will disappear after the war. Hélène Vacher, "L'École spéciale des travaux publics et la formation aux métiers du bâtiment au début du XX^e siècle : le projet de l'ingénieur-architecte," 107^e Congrès national des sociétés historiques et scientifiques, Nancy, April 16, 2002.

21 Roy-Camille and De Jaham are fairly widespread names in Martinique, visible on commercial ads in the local press and in the colonial phonebooks of 1946.

22 Eric Montagne, the BRED bank's director, was particularly supportive of this project.

Xavier Rendu, *National building*, 1938



Louis Caillat, in turn fitter, draughtsman, lithographer, heating technician, architect-draughtsman, becomes a member of the

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Order of architects (French Antilles region) in 1954 and even regional president in 1975.

Xavier Rendu (1880-193*), architect D.P.L.G. 1910, student of Chédanne, in Paris, chief-architect of the Compagnie nationale d'assurance sur la vie, GAN building (ex-La Nationale, 1938).

Robert Haller, architect, graduate of the École spéciale des travaux publics 1921, was director of construction works in Laos.

Lamartinière, architect, graduate of the École spéciale des travaux publics, Sylvestre house (Fort-de-France) 1949, pharmacy in Saint-Pierre, 1950s.

André Desbordes (1914-*), architect, graduate of the École spéciale d'architecture 1939.

Léon Humblet, architect D.P.L.G. 1937, Chartres, CGM building (ex-IEDOM) 1956.

Germain Olivier (1869), architect D.P.L.G. 1903, (SADG, Montauban), Château Aubery in Ducos and several colonial palaces for various fairs in Marseille (1920), Grenoble (1925), Paris (1931), Brussels (1935).

Charles Wulffleff (1874-), architect D.P.L.G. 1909, (SADG 1909) Paris, associate of Alois Verrey (1889-), architect D.P.L.G. 1920 (SADG 1921).

Maurice de Lavigne Sainte-Suzanne, architect D.P.L.G. Saint-Brieuc, Petit Paradis housing estate (1956), Grand Paradis building (1958), Batelière housing estate (1958), Résidence Sainte-Catherine 1959.

Alexandre Ziwès, architect D.P.L.G. Paris, architect of the Menier establishment, Plein ciel building (end of the 1960s).

Claude Meyer-Levy (1908-), architect D.P.L.G. (1933, SADG), student of Umbdenstock-Tournon, architecte des bâtiments civils et palais nationaux.

Fernand Tessier, D.P.L.G. Dourdan, and Maurice Creveaux, architect D.P.L.G. (Saint-Cloud), Saint-Christophe church (1955).

Marcel Salasc, not found in the professional yearbooks. His daughter recalls that he worked in Algeria before settling in Martinique in 1939.

Clément Lison, architect, graduate of the École spéciale des travaux publics, in 1948 his place of residence is in Fort-de-France, in the Sageret; in 1954 he works in Claude Le Cœur's practice, Annuaire ESTP (1954), town hall at the Diamant (1935), Post office at Rivière-Salée (1955), town hall and building of the Marin (Fort-de-France, 1950s), Cherchel House in Bellevue (Fort-de-France, 1960s).