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EDITORIAL

## THE BARON'S STONES

What if we were to take inspiration from existing structures to build our contemporary cities? This theory is not new, but it is well illustrated by the *Paris Haussmann* exhibition running until May 2017 at the Pavillon de l'Arsenal, Paris' urban planning and architecture centre. Its curators, architects Benoit Jallon and Umberto Napolitano (LAN office), together with the environmental engineering expert Franck Boutté, pursued a typo-morphological analysis of the elements comprising the Haussmannian urban fabric, from its broad lines to balustrade ornaments, and including the Parisian building block and rental building, to reveal the invariants that made the Haussmann recipe such a success. Indeed, they believe Haussmann's Paris distinguishes itself from other cities as a model of density, but also "diversity", "connectivity", "flexibility" and "reversibility". In short, the Paris built between 1850 and 1914 ticks all the boxes of our contemporary cities' challenges... and trends.

*Paris Haussmann* is also an invitation. What if architects were to re-examine Paris splendid grid layout to rethink urban fabric? What if they were to set density goals by taking inspiration from the balance of full and empty spaces suggested by the Haussmannian block? What if they were to consider flexibility in view of the changes in uses the Haussmannian rental building has been the subject of over time? What if, parallel to a desire to use either concrete or timber, they were to envisage building with stone? Why do we not contemplate modernizing what we already have in quantity beneath our feet, instead of doing our utmost to experiment, which, ironically, exhausts the environmental capital we all aim to protect? By proposing a report on stone construction that runs against the current evolutions, *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* is defending a paradigm shift in which the architect recommends a form of architecture adapted to its surroundings, but also a long-lasting sustainable city in which fashionable "shared gardens" are aligned with local distribution channels as well as serving communication strategies.

What does *Paris Haussmann* tell us implicitly? As commendable and daring as such fashionable experiments are, it reveals that they will only make sense if they form part of the big picture. The exhibition does not encourage the reproduction of a model any more than it invites us to draw indiscriminately from a catalogue in which each part is linked to the whole. It inspires a modernized view of the stone city rather than an old-fashioned vision of the City of Light.