

Of style

Léone Drapeaud – Photos Romain Laprade

Mixing and matching architectural styles and references with great refinement, Bernard Dubois's work is nonetheless pervaded with subtle humour. Erudite yet averse to theorization, bold yet delicate, Dubois may well be one of Belgium's famed humble heroes.



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Hybrid-historicism

Dubois's work is always strikingly neat, elegant and engaging. PNY, a small burger joint in an up-and-coming neighbourhood of Paris, is no exception. Its enfilade of lacquered wood arches, which offer secluded dining areas, resonates with the shiny black finishes, black matt leather seating, powdery white furniture and deep red floor. Yet behind the flawless detailing which testifies to the tasteful architect's acute awareness of technicalities, Dubois barely conceals the provocative smile or wink which seems to inform almost every design decision.

Dubois investigates architectural style in the manner of Durand's *Leçons d'architecture* cornered by an intuitive critical paranoia. He cultivates contradictions by combining unrelated and at times even conflicting references from the repertoire of forms and techniques of twentieth-century architectural history. Dubois particularly enjoys alluding to postmodern architecture of the 1970s and 1980s, which in the case of PNY he has melded with textures and materials reminiscent of the 1930s as well as hints of the 1960s diner.

Minimal-postmodernism

In line with Lyotard, who defines postmodernism as 'incredulity towards meta-narratives', Dubois questions architecture's grand narratives and highlights their preconceptions and inconsistencies. For instance, the change of material on the edges of the arches and tables elegantly challenges the prevalence of the object over the surface, which according to Dubois is considered in bad taste.

The arcade divides the deep space, making it appear less narrow while reinforcing the primary central axis. The kitchen window – which is scaled down compared to the other arches to compensate for the smaller adjacent booth – validates, in the manner of a trompe l'oeil, the prevalence of the frontal perspective. In line with his belief that the depiction of a space makes up much of its narrative, Dubois pays great attention to how his projects are photographed. Perhaps highlighting an unplanned contradiction in PNY's spatial hierarchies, Dubois confessed surprise that his own personal favourite of Romain Laprade's reportage of PNY is an oblique view that creates a diagonal enfilade in the mirror rather than a central view.

Retro-futurism

While strongly referencing the cliché diner of the 1960s – the booths, the shiny surfaces and the sense of openness replicated by lateral mirrors above the seating – PNY also calls to mind more futuristic forms of the same era through its curved arcade, directional tubular lights and integrated sound system. PNY thus highlights a tension between an idealized past and the future it projected.

The kitchen, which closes the perspective like a spaceship command hub, is staged as a laboratory, with white tiling, bright lights and stainless-steel surfaces. It stands in stark contrast with the warm undertones of the restaurant, perhaps reflecting upon the role of technology and both its alienating and empowering effects, which continue to be questioned today.



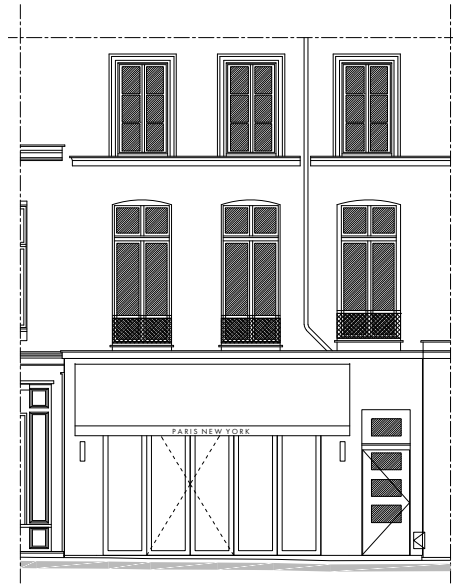
Decorative-functionalism

Dubois's intricate design details are never purely mannerist. Rather, they are opportunities to address specific technical or functional requirements. The silhouette of Hollein's Vienna Retti candle shop façade, crossed with Botta's circular arcade of the Novazzano Housing Project, offers seated guests an intimate atmosphere thanks to its lower narrowness while widening the perspective for standing viewers. The space is thus perceived differently by users depending on their needs.

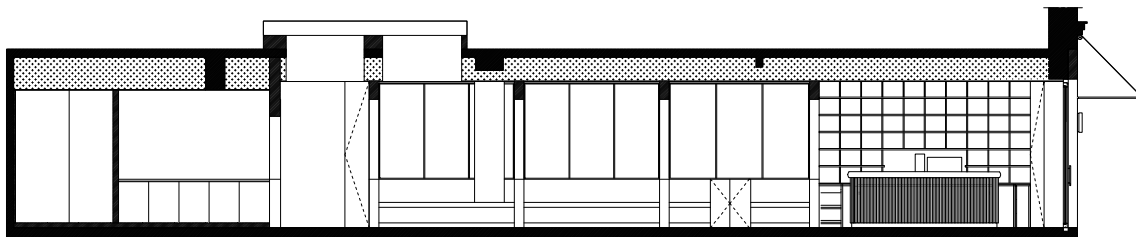
The 5 mm offset of the shiny black metal jamb of the arcade shields the lacquered multiplex in case of bumps. Similarly, the black rubber on the table edges protects the white melamine surface. Dubois never dwells on the technical difficulties of his projects. He considers that solving them is a self-evident aspect of his work unworthy of mention.

New-eclecticism

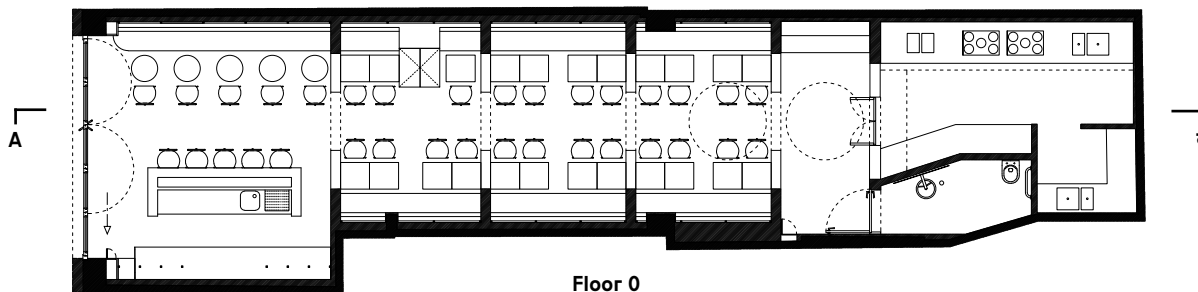
Through these multiple hybridizations of styles and movements, Dubois disconnects form and meaning. He subverts its political content by considering architecture as pure form and obviously relishes in playing with the contradictions and ambiguities of the vast catalogue of architectural history. Dubois's work can be read as a call for a new eclecticism which indiscriminately seizes architectural elements and invents iconoclast relationships between history, space and aesthetics.▲■●



Elevation



Section Aa



Floor 0



Architect
**Bernard Dubois
Architects**
Website
bernarddubois.com

Official project name
**PNY Faubourg
Saint-Antoine**
Location
Paris, France
Programme
Restaurant

Procedure
Direct commission
Client
Paris New York
Lead contractor
T.D.5

Completion
April 2019
Total floor area
100 m²
Budget
**€ 350,000
(excl. VAT and fees)**

I prefer to show only built projects. I generally don't show ongoing projects or unbuilt ones. The project's photographic presentation is very important because in many cases, people discover the project in photographs before they discover it physically. To me, photography is also a means of stepping back from the built project and of looking at it with an external and objective eye.

Bernard Dubois