

MMIAH EUROPEAN PROJECT

Guidelines and Analysis of Best Practices in Valorizing Maritime, Military and Industrial Heritage



City of La Rochelle

1. The Maritime Museum, an Interpretation Center about Maritime Activities

A Museum that is at land and at sea

In 1988, under an initiative of Patrick Schnepf who had become aware of the need to protect La Rochelle's maritime heritage, the City purchased the *France I*, a meteorological frigate which had been given to a nonprofit association to turn it into a Maritime Museum. Twenty years later, in 2008, the Maritime Museum became an institution directly managed by the City of La Rochelle.



The France I, the flagship of the Maritime Museum

The *France I* features exhibits on life on board, meteorology and emblematic ships of the human adventure. The frigate is a listed historical monument and is also host to a bar, run by a private company that organizes musical entertainment and is also present along the wharf where it has opened a brewery in a section of the former Encan. Today, the Maritime Museum is developing immersive and sensory exhibits on *the France I* so that visitors can experience life on board a meteorological ship. An exhibit on the history of meteorology will also be opened in the future.



The Bar de la Mer on the France I



L'Angoumois, a former industrial fishing trawler

The Maritime Museum owns 8 vessels, 7 of which are listed as historical landmarks: the *France I*, the *Angoumois*, the *Saint-Gilles*, the *Manuel Joël*, the TD-6 dredger, the *Joshua*, and the *Duperré* speed boat. In addition, a collection of 41 vessels is on display in the great hall located in the former Encan,

retracing the history of leisure boating. A great deal of time and work have gone into maintaining these vessels in working and sailing order while valorizing maritime history and know-how. The Maritime Museum also owns the slipway, which was built by the Germans in 1942 as part of the Atlantic Wall. It was part of the vast defensive system that included the submarine base of La Pallice. Furthermore, since 2003, a substantial amount of work has been dedicated to gathering intangible cultural heritage in the form of the recollections of seafarers: video interviews of over 400 witnesses, seamen's' books, and pictures from former sailors, Encan staff members or shipyard workers, all of which are available online and valorized during exhibits. During Heritage Day celebrations, elders are also present each year to share their own stories.



The Maritime Museum slipway.



*The memories of former sailors,
valorizing intangible maritime heritage.*

In 2014, extension works were carried out at the museum, in line with the larger reconversion plans for the former fishing market. Architect Patrick Bouchain was entrusted with the design of the redeployment of the museum, which he conceived as a row of buildings on land, the hall of flags that



*The "La Rochelle born of the sea"
exhibition in the hall of flags.*



*Inauguration of the "Nous avons fait la Delmas"
exhibition in the dark room, attended by the
President of the Republic.*

includes the permanent exhibit "La Rochelle born from the sea," a workshop, and a training room. The facilities are connected by a large stretched canvas shaped like a spinnaker and held by poles.

On the other side of the wharf, the great hall of the former Encan fishing market has been reused and dedicated to the history of leisure boating. It also includes a dark room for temporary exhibitions as well as an auditorium which is used for receptions, events or conferences. Finally, the piers of the Maritime Museum berth about 40 classical yachts, some of which are listed as landmarks, belonging to private owners or nonprofit associations. This makes of La Rochelle the leading city in France for the number of vessels listed as historical landmarks.



The Maritime Museum is thus organized around 4 diverse areas, offering a unique site where ships are open to visitors, exhibitions are both on land and afloat, and where open public spaces serve to highlight maritime know-how and crafts (maintenance, restoration, sailing on the ships), in the same spirit as that found in Anglo-Saxon maritime museums.

- **On land facilities in the former Encan fishing wharf:** reception hall, auditorium temporary exhibitions.
- **On land areas under the "flags" and the slipway:** reception-ticket office, "La Rochelle born from the sea" permanent exhibition, educational workshops, slipway.
- **Afloat/on board:** ships to be explored and interpreted.
- **Along the piers:** a seafront promenade to enjoy classical yachts.

The Maritime Museum has been designed as an interpretation center for maritime heritage and its ambition is to serve as maritime entrance hall to La Rochelle.

Partnerships to Foster a Mix of Heritage, Creation and Event Production

The Maritime Museum developed strong bonds with a solid network of maritime nonprofit association, starting with the Association of Friends of the Maritime Museum (*Association des Amis du Musée Maritime - AAMMLR*) which contributes to ship maintenance, restoration and operation. Significant work was carried out by the association to restore and valorize small leisure boats, 41 of which are currently listed as historical landmarks and owned by the City of La Rochelle. The Museum also works with the Classical Yacht Club which develops actions aimed at showcasing classical yachts, namely through the organization of regattas. The Maritime Museums also became host to the headquarters of the association of French lighthouses in 2018, which has been working on lighthouse history and their valorization as part of our heritage, potentially enabling us to organize an exhibition about this theme in a few years.



Some partners are also working with other cultural key players to open our maritime heritage to film shoots, or cultural celebrations and events. The *France I* was rented in 2016 by the film production company, Curiosa Films, for the filming of *Knock* by Lorraine Lévy with Omar Sy, and also hosted several live radio shows.

Filming of Knock aboard the France I in 2016

During the 2018 edition of Heritage Day, the Maritime Museum welcomed the 2nd tattoo event, Ink' Glorious Sailors, in partnership with La Sirène, L'Horizon and the Association of Friends of the Maritime Museum. Forty-two professional tattoo artists were present along with exhibits, concerts, entertainment and two conferences by Pierre-Yves Belfils (Quai Branly Museum) on the history of tattoos, attracting 14,000 visitors over two days.



Ink'Glorious Sailors tattoo event during the 2018 Heritage Days



The PiXii event at the Maritime Museum in 2018

The Maritime Museum auditorium also hosted the poetic and musical show by Isabelle Autissier, Pascal Ducourtieux and Jean-Marc Desbois, *La voix, les mots, la mer* (the voice, the words, the sea). The objective was to open up maritime heritage and link it with creative initiatives. Finally, in connection with Sunny Side of the Docs, the Maritime Museum hosts the PiXii festival that showcases facilities and immersive experiences in line with offers aimed at facilitating museum and heritage appreciation.

Climate and Oceans: Temporary Exhibition and the Climate Hall

Today, the Maritime Museum has been developing a new orientation focused on the interaction between climate and the oceans. In 2018, various conferences were hosted on the subject:

Raphaël Glucksmann (ocean, climate and political ecology), Hugo Verlomme (the ocean in the future) or Pierre Laroutou (Pacte Finance-Climat 2020), aimed at offering solutions at the European level in terms of funding and the energetic transition.



Raphaël Glucksmann's conference during the NML #4 gatherings.



Pierre Laroutou's conference to present Pacte Finance Climat 2020

The major Climate-Ocean exhibition is currently in the works in partnership with the Museum of Natural History of the City, aimed at increasing public awareness regarding the interaction between oceans and the climate through a multidisciplinary, interactive and immersive approach. This initiative is supported by the Ocean & Climate platform, the Tara Foundation, the Léa Nature Foundation, and the Nouvelle Aquitaine Region and will open on November 9th at the Maritime Museum's temporary exhibition hall for two years.



The Climate-Ocean exhibition serves as a prelude to the development of a new permanent area that will serve as a scientific, technical and industrial center on climate-ocean interactions and that is structured around the ESCAL'Océan association that federates all concerned stakeholders in the La Rochelle area.

2. La Sirène, a former grain silo reconverted into a concert Hall



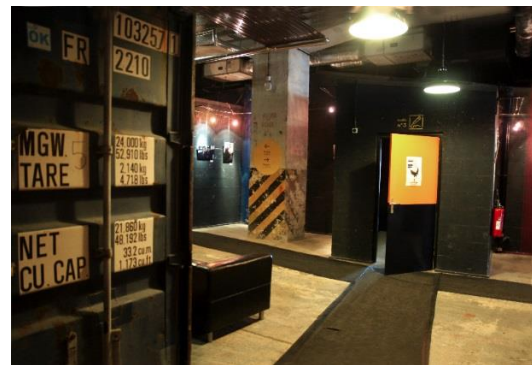
La Sirène is a concert hall that opened in 2011 in a former grain silo of the 1920s that subsequently became the warehouse for the Charles Charriau company of Marrans. This company was specialized in grains and was the first to import corn and rice from Indochina into the La Pallice port, as well as barley from Morocco. The building is made of concrete blocks and is 3 stories high with a few opening on the façade. Following WWII, the building served as bonded warehouse for the customs authority.

In the past, the La Pallice port area was a regular walking destination for the inhabitants of La Rochelle; however, access was restricted in 2006 when its status was changed to make it an autonomous port. The Port is aware of the inconvenience this represented for the inhabitants and developed a policy of openness and sustainable development, thus contributing old buildings to be used for cultural and nonprofit initiatives. The former grain market was therefore made available to the Agglomeration Communities of La Rochelle which transformed it into a concert hall operated by the XLR association under a public contracting agreement. The building was rehabilitated by Patrick Bouchain, an architect that is specialized in reconvertng former industrial sites into cultural venues (Lieu Unique in Nantes, Magasin in Grenoble, Condition Publique in Roubaix). The roof of the top floor was elevated and a large black and yellow canvas stretched between various poles adds consistency to the building. A large cylinder that presumably served to store bags occupies the entrance of La Sirène as urban furniture. The structure and outside of the building were left in their original state to keep the industrial look. This represented a cost-effective approach on the building that was reinvested on materials and technical equipment, in addition to facilitating reappropriation of the port area by the residents. Therefore, the creation of La Sirene contributed to this reappropriation. On the basin side, large balconies create a link between the structures and serve as emergency exit and outside area where people can stroll, exchange and smoke.

The Club, located on the first floor, is the first concert hall capable of welcoming between 400 and 600 people. The floor is varnished in red, and two bars surround a magnificent balcony. This area is at a human scale, offering a welcoming and warm environment that is ideal for an outing, cocktails or other late night DJ events.



The great concert hall located on the second floor where the former grain silo was, can welcome up to 1,200 people and offers perfect visibility of the stage for concerts. 156 artists were welcomed here in 2018.



The great concert hall (left) and the current port-level floor (right)

The current port-level floor, which was the original cellar, hosts the artists, either those performing in the evening or others staying for a creative residency. Rehearsal studios are also available at very affordable rates, making of La Sirène a truly conducive place for artists, not only those who practice as amateurs, but also for aspiring professionals. Furthermore, the dock and the club are increasingly emerging as exhibition areas which themes resonate with the programming and events at La Sirene.



The ground floor welcomes both artists and exhibitions.



The last panel of the Musiques Actuelles fresco was completed in 2019

La Sirène has participated in several events connected to maritime, military and industrial heritage. During "EUROPAVOX On Tours de La Rochelle," la Sirène organized 3 different concerts in each of the towers of La Rochelle. It also takes part in the Chef de Baie Fishing Port Day, where it is in charge of the festival's entertainment and music as well as the technical and stage aspects. Finally, during Heritage Days, La Sirène handled the musical programming for the tattoo event, *"Ink' Glorious Sailors,"* at the Maritime Museum. La Sirène also recently inaugurated the last panel of the *Musiques Actuelles* street art fresco in partnership with La Rochelle Port Atlantique and a few businesses in the port. By integrating all these activities, La Sirène reached 68,000 people in 2018.

3. Espace Encan, going from the Fish Market to the Convention Center



Following the transfer of the fishing port to Chef de Baie in 1994, the fish market built in 1956 was transformed into a convention center to welcome large events and to make of La Rochelle a preferred business travel destination. This initiative was carried out under the general restructuration plan for the site, which included the Aquarium, the convention center and the Maritime Museum. In 2000, the rehabilitation of the Encan was focused on preserving the identity of the building, both in the color codes and in its façades facing the wet docks, recalling the initial function of the site. Architect Eric Cordier decided to maintain the maritime spirit of the premises: conservation of the exterior aspects of the building, interior fittings primarily made of exotic wood cladding, large openings on the basin, "upper deck" terrace facing the towers of La Rochelle, etc.

The layout of the Encan forecourt helps integrate the Encan in the urban area to recreate a lively and entertaining space around the docks of the *Chalutiers* basin. Inside, each room has been named after one of the emblematic vessels of the height of the fishing port era, that could be seen from the large bay windows of the hall: *Ilatte*, *Richelieu*, *Eider*, *Tadorne*,



Antioche, Casoar, Letzer, Chassiron, Baleine, Jean Guiton. The latest reception area is named Chantaco, inspired by a port trawler named after the gulf of Biarritz, and also illustrates this desire to reconcile modernism and maritime heritage conservation.



Today, Espace Encan welcomes several hundred events per year, such as congresses, scientific seminars, meetings, conferences, workshops, events and major modern art shows. The Conference on the Economy of the Ocean took place in 2016. Each year, it also welcomes the International Festival of Adventure Films and Sunny Side of the Docs, the largest market for international documentaries that will be celebrating 30 years of existence in 2019. Espace Encan is a place of encounters, exchanges and outreach to the world that welcomes international events.

While the site belongs to the Agglomeration Communities of La Rochelle, it is managed under a public contracting agreement by Société d'économie mixte (SEM) La Rochelle Événements, specialized in event enhancement, service engineering and event production. Since 2017, the Agglomeration Communities, which now has a solid track record in tourism promotion, turned over management of the community Tourist Office based in La Rochelle and including 27 communes to this company. Thanks to this double activity, La Rochelle Événements - which was renamed La Rochelle Tourisme & Événements - boasts 192 events in 2018 and has been able to develop its actions in a more effective and consistent way to improve the attractiveness of the area and to promote its economic development.



Maritime Museum of La Rochelle ©Julien Chauvet

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