

Press release

14 December 2004

Spectacular new viaduct opens in the South of France

On 14 December, the President of the French Republic, Jacques Chirac, officially opened the Millau Viaduct in France's southern Aveyron region. The Viaduct completes the A75 motorway across the Massif Central, creating a direct link between Paris towards Barcelona, and spans the Tarn Gorge to alleviate the notorious traffic congestion throughout the area.

Designed by Foster and Partners in association with an engineering group led by the French engineer Michel Virlogeux, the Viaduct illustrates how a collaboration between architects and engineers can result in a structure of breathtaking beauty. Although the soaring structure sets a number of records it is highest viaduct in the world, for example its beauty lies primarily in its clarity of expression.

"We were attracted by the elegance and logic of a structure that would march across the heroic landscape, and - in the most minimal way connect one plateau to the other", Lord Foster explained of the design's genesis. "We were driven by the scale of the idea and a shared passion for the poetic dimension of engineering and its sculptural potential. During the design process, there were never any conflicts between satisfying the structural demands and our aesthetic ideas; they evolved together."

Spanning the 2.5 kilometres across the Tarn Gorge in a single gesture, the designs

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sculptural quality is apparent in the viaducts plastic forms, expressed at all scales from the overall structure to the smallest detail, and executed with the minimum possible forms, materials and dimensions. Subtly lit at night, the Millau Viaduct is a graceful manmade intervention in the natural landscape.