

Press release

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Groundbreaking for new Zenith music and cultural centre

Construction has started on site at Foster and Partners scheme for a state of the art Zenith music and cultural facility in St Etienne. Placing the formerly industrial city on the cultural map, Zenith is a bold design that uses a highly innovative environmental strategy and an efficiency of form to create a strong urban presence and a prominent 21st century landmark. The world class facility forms the heart of an exciting project, initiated by the City, to revitalise the area to the north-east of the city centre, transforming St Etienne into one of the foremost cities for culture in the region, and regenerating the wider urban context.

The distinct aerodynamic form of the Foster design will be an instantly recognisable symbol. It responds to ecological concerns, with the cantilevered roof acting as a scoop or literally a wind-catcher - to channel and intensify the wind flow, directing it through the building to ventilate the auditorium naturally by night time cooling. The system is fully reversible and can respond to prevalent winds from both northerly and southerly directions.

Access to the concert hall is via a large external ramped plinth that bridges the busy Rue Scheurer Kestner, creating a large public plaza in the buildings forecourt, and allowing audience members to enter and exit quickly and efficiently. A glazed foyer accommodates internal circulation and provides access to all floors and visitor amenities.

The auditorium can be configured for an audience ranging from 1100 to 7200, and the additional facilities include the VIP reception, backstage areas, changing and production spaces, staff refectories, delivery areas and 1100 car parking spaces. A proposed pedestrian boulevard is part of a comprehensive landscape strategy being evolved to link Zenith to other existing cultural facilities in the immediate area, including the Cite de Design and the Stade Geoffrey Guichard.

"The City of St Etienne has transformed a basic programme for a cost-efficient, large-scale venue into an architectural opportunity. It has been a pleasure to respond to this enlightened approach with an innovative strategy that uses natural energy and economy of form to create a venue that will reinvigorate the city, and offer a memorable experience to all those that use it."

Norman Foster, Founder and Executive Chairman

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