

Press release

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Masterplan for Marseille's old port displayed at MIPIM

Marseille's Vieux Port, one of the great Mediterranean ports, is about to be transformed. Work has started on Michel Desvigne's and Foster + Partners' competition-winning masterplan for its regeneration.

The project will reclaim the quaysides as a civic space, creating new informal venues for performances and events and removing traffic to create a safe, semi-pedestrianised public realm. The transformation of the World Heritage-listed port is one of a series of projects to be completed in time for the city's inauguration as European Capital of Culture in 2013.

Enlarging the space for pedestrians, the technical installations and boat houses on the quays will be replaced with new platforms and clubhouses over the water.

The harbour will be landscaped with a pale-coloured granite, which echoes the shade of the original limestone cobbles – the materials are hard-wearing with a rough texture, appropriate for the port setting, and the design eliminates kerbs and changes in level to improve accessibility, as well as using removable cast iron bollards to maximise flexibility.

At Quai des Belges, the prominent eastern edge of the harbour, a dramatic blade of

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reflective stainless steel will shelter a flexible new events pavilion. Open on all sides, its 46 by 22 metre canopy is supported by slender pillars – the canopy's polished, mirrored surface reflects the surrounding port and tapers towards the edges, minimising its profile and reducing the structure's visual impact.

"I know the harbour at Marseille well and it is a truly grand space. This project is a great opportunity to enhance it using very simple means, to improve it with small, discreet pavilions for events, for markets, for special occasions. Our approach has been to work with the climate, to create shade, but at the same time to respect the space of the harbour – just making it better."

Norman Foster, Founder and Executive Chairman