



Stainless steel: the aesthetics of the façade

Thanks to its aesthetic appeal, durability, and ability to be easily shaped and formed, stainless steel has become the material of choice for building façades. Available in a range of aspects (matt, glossy, coloured, etc.), shapes, textures (smooth, perforated, ribbed), and product types (panels, cassettes, slats, shingles, scales, etc.), stainless steel gives architects a palate of creative options to work with!

Stainless steel cladding

Stainless steel is well-suited for cladding and is often used to clad both a building's façade and roof. As this 'full skin' cladding essentially encloses the building in an envelope of stainless steel, it is a popular choice for architects looking to make a striking statement with their design. Take for example Metz's Waves Actisud shopping centre. Designed by Gianni Ranauldo Design-Dubosc & Associés for Compagnie de Phalsbourg, the building is completely clad in mirror-polished stainless steel (grade 304 with a Uginox Bright aspect). The shopping centre is now a shimmering icon that reflects the constant momentum of the Metz metro area.



The Philharmonie de Paris concert hall, built in 2015 and designed by Ateliers Jean Nouvel Métra & Associés, takes a similar approach. Located in the Parc de la Villette, in the city's 19th arrondissement, the building is encased in an innovative metal envelope punctuated with a cladding made of bright stainless steel sheets (grade 316, Uginox Bright appearance). The result is reminiscent of a whirlpool.



Stainless steel for aesthetic, functional façades

Architects have long used stainless steel to bring an aesthetic touch to a building's façade. Take for example the 150 room Rail Hotel Residence, designed by the Suzel Brout architectural firm. Built above the tracks of Paris' Montparnasse Station, the building uses over-insulated façades clad in stainless steel sheets (grade 304L with an Uginox Bright appearance) to give the building a unified, enriched perspective.



But stainless steel doesn't just add an aesthetic aspect to a building's façade, it can be used to serve specific functions too. The new Edgar Morin University Library, located on the Paris XII campus in Villetaneuse, is a prime example. Designed by architect Bernard Ropa, the library's immense glass façade is punctuated by a series of vertical sunshades made from perforated bright annealed stainless steel (grade 304L, Uginox Bright appearance).

Not only does this give the building a unique aesthetic appeal, it also serves the very practical function of screening the building from the sun.



That's a wrap

Drawing inspiration from the mashrabiya style of the Arabic world, some architects protect a building from the sun by wrapping the façade in a light stainless steel mesh. This style can be seen in the refurbished conservation centre of the Nord Departmental Archives in Lille. When the centre annexed a neighbouring building, the Alzua+/Zig Zag Architecture Agency used stainless steel mesh (grade 304 Uginox Matt) to bring the two buildings together. Featuring allegorical perforations, the building hints at a plant motif.

This wrapping technique is well-suited for rehabilitation and restructuring projects and for all types of cladding. Not only does it add an aesthetic touch to the project, it also increases the building's insulation. That's why De Jong Architects opted to use stainless steel mesh when rehabilitating a university library in Annecy-le-Vieux. The design creatively uses the mesh to veil a historic farmhouse with the surrounding buildings. On the mesh, the studio reproduced text by legendary mathematician, physicist, and philosopher René Descartes.



Stainless steel, a 'green' product

From an environmental point of view, stainless steel is the 'green' material par excellence. Stainless steel is corrosion resistant, durable and recyclable, with a recovery rate in construction of almost 100%. Stainless steel has no impact on the environment and is suitable for use in façades, particularly where they are exposed to weather.

Stainless steel façades are also easy to maintain and offer a long service life. Furthermore, prefabricated stainless steel components, which are delivered in situ for quick installment, limit such building site nuisances as noise and dust.



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