

The Light Empty Core

At the center of the building is a huge, light empty space. Six glass-covered travellers run through it, and a fountain acts to cancel the opposition in the building between empty and full, hollow and solid. At the central point of the terminal, at the very spot where its concentration becomes most intense, Terminal 1's highly structured system seems to give way to the unexpected moving walkways and the ever-changing flow of water.

Motion and Light

Movement is the essence of terminal architecture, on the outside and within. There is no dichotomy between the building and the roads: both are part of an integral whole that expresses connection, passage and interchange. Motion prevails, of course, outside the building, but it does inside as well, especially in the empty core and in the underground corridors connecting the main building to the satellites.

Space and the speed of passenger movement are made to correspond by reducing ceiling height in places where passengers stop and increasing it where the speed of movement is most intense. In general, the building is composed of a series of highly different spaces, where the volume, the light and the grain of the concrete change together with the function.

Variations in light intensity, from deeply shaded light to bright sunlight, contribute greatly to giving the passage through the terminal the character of an initiation. Travelers pass from the dark zones in the main building to the light-filled empty core, and then back through the low-lit corridors before reaching the transparent brightness of the satellites. Light and shade symbolically echo the opposition between earth and sky.

Passenger Flows

Ring roads and two symmetrical access ramps on a north-south axis lead up to the terminal, which is also linked by way of a people mover to the suburban RER train station and to the Parisian area.

Traffic is organized on three levels: departures, transfers and arrivals. The separation of incoming and outgoing passenger flows necessitates a security system at the entrance to the satellites. The public traffic levels are positioned between the baggage handling level and the parking facilities on the upper floors. Departing passengers have access to the departures level from one of the two ring roads circling the building or by elevator down from the parking floors.

They then take the travellers across the building's empty core to reach the transit level before continuing to the satellites when it is time for boarding. Baggage is moved vertically down to the centralized baggage sorting premises on the lower floor, and then by tunnel to the satellites and aircraft.

Arriving passengers take the travellers up across the empty core to the baggage claim and customs area.

The Master Plan

Put into service in March 1974, Terminal 1 was the first element of the Charles-de-Gaulle airport at Roissy. Its block plan was outlined in 1967. The airport extends over 3,000 hectares, that is to say, one third of Paris' surface area, in a farming area free of urban constraints but close enough to the nearby capital, and easily accessible by the Autoroute du Nord.

The whole was designed with an eye to maintaining a sense of three-dimensional movement through space. As you approach the terminal, the landscape and the buildings are seen from a continually changing perspective. The main elements that stand out from a distance - Terminal 1, the control tower and the water tower - are circular and therefore their form does not indicate the lie of the land. But the shifting relationship in their apparent size and relative position provides a sense of spatial direction. The roads were drawn as a series of curves following on from another, winding up and down into what ultimately becomes a fusion of paths leading to the building and the building itself.