Le Havre town centre, which was rebuilt by Auguste Perret, is the first mid 20th-century urban settlement in Europe to be included in the World Heritage List.

In July 2005, Unesco added the town centre rebuilt by Auguste Perret to its World Heritage List. Perret was a major 20th-century architect and “poet in concrete” who was both traditionalist and innovative in approach. He successfully rose to the challenge before him, seeking inspiration in architectural tradition and drawing on his own strong desire for modernisation to reinvent a unique, open town centre that is harmonious and resolutely innovative across an area of 133 hectares.

“Concrete is stone that we manufacture”
Auguste Perret.

The challenge was a unique one – almost an entire town centre had to be rebuilt in a relatively short time despite a lack of materials and resources. Auguste Perret and his students formed a Studio and applied all the theories and techniques he had developed during his long career. A decision was taken on the timetable and principles for the town’s reconstruction. There was an architectural layout providing order for all the buildings, the “bones” of the buildings were to be visible, there would be vertical windows to increase airiness and light and public and private open spaces would provide a sense of having room to breathe. Perret never forgot his search for perfection in making maximum use of his favourite building material – concrete.

Whether roughened, washed, painted or unsurfaced, concrete displays a palette of colours ranging from pink to white. With his eye for detail right down to the shape of the columns, while at the same time developing prefabrication techniques, the architect became a town planner, reflecting the timeless aestheticism of structural Classicism.

> Sightseeing

Le Havre
World Heritage

- Go at your own speed, using the map overleaf to guide you on your stroll.
- Exhibition entitled “The Reconstruction of Le Havre”: 2nd floor of the Tourist Office.
- Show apartment, typical of the reconstruction period: open Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays > booking required at the Tourist Office.
- Guided coach tour: “City Tour” in French. Calendar of City Tours available at the Tourist Office or on the website: www.lehavretourisme.com.
- In English: Guided tour on foot – Information from Le Havre Tourist Office.
- Take a boat trip for a view of the town from the seaward side.
  Information: phone (+33) (0) 235 28 99 53.
- Take a helicopter ride: The “Perret Heritage” flight (approx. 10 minutes).
  Information: Helistar – Le Havre-Octeville Airport.
  Phone (+33) (0) 235 54 13 13.
- Enjoy a flight on a twin-engined plane.
  Information: Aviation Service Normandie, Le Havre-Octeville Airport.
  Phone (+33) (0) 235 44 89 95.
1. St. Joseph's church (Église Saint-Joseph): Building began in 1951, based on previously-unused plans by Auguste Perret for a basilica church in Paris. The bell tower was completed in 1957 by Georges Brochard and Raymond Audigier, after Perret’s death. The layout, which is centred at ground level, becomes octagonal at the base of the 110-metre lantern tower. The skilful use of concrete combines harmoniously with the 13,000 pieces of coloured glass used by Marguerite Huré in her creations. This is a spiritual lighthouse overlooking the town, dedicated to the victims of the air raids, and is one of the architectural masterpieces of the 20th century.

2. Raoul Dufy Junior High School (collège Raoul Dufy) was inaugurated in 1956. Designed by Pierre-Édouard Lambert, a member of the Perret workshop, it refers back to the structural Classicism (cornices, screen walls, columns) seen in the building of the Economic and Social Council in Paris (designed by Perret in 1946).

3. Central market (halles centrales): Built on the site of the pre-war market, it was designed in 1966 by André Le Donné, Charles Fabre and Jean Le Soudier. It has a vaulted concrete roof.


5. Le Perreys District (tum right into Rue M. Yvon): formerly the fishermen’s district, close to the shipbuilding yard (destroyed). It still has a few pre-war brick buildings, giving it a picturesque charm.


7. Southern esplanade: the group of apartment blocks was completed in 1956 in a style making extensive use of Auguste Perret’s architectural ideas – slender balconies, terra-cotta, post-and-beam structures, glass-slabbled covered walkways (entrance from Boulevard Français 1er. Turn into the narrow passageway at the back of the courtyard to reach Rue Paris).

8. Rue de Paris: aligned with the Town Hall, Perret’s design is reminiscent of Rue de Rivoli in Paris, with shops set beneath wide arcades. The apartment blocks, all of the same height and all laid out in the same way, nevertheless display diversity in their architectural expression.

9. Notre-Dame Cathedral and Museum: some of the few remains of the old town centre. The buildings were restored to resemble the originals. The cathedral dates from the foundation of the town in the 16th c. (lantern tower). The Museum dates from the 18th century.

10. Shipowner’s House (maison de l’armateur): a late 18th-century mansion. It includes a very rare, and breathtaking, central well of light flanked by living rooms and corridors.

11. Saint-François District: the second of the town’s historic areas, still boasting a few buildings dating from the 16th to 18th centuries. This district has a strong character of its own. It was not rebuilt by the Auguste Perret workshop and its architecture includes regional features such as sloping roofs, brick and slate. The 16th-century town plan designed by Jérôme Bellarmino has been reintroduced here.

12. Footbridge (passerelle de la Bourse): built by Guillaume Gillet in 1969. The bridge spans the Commerce Basin, one of the oldest harbour basins in Le Havre. The bridge provides an admirable view of it.

13. The Exchange (immeuble des combattants): an apartment building. Designed by Charles Fabre and André Le Donné, the building was completed in 1957. It has a unique concrete structure, and is a symbol of the town’s post-war reconstruction.

14. Le Volcan: the Arts Centre built in 1982 to designs by Oscar Niemeyer, the architect of Brasilia. The two curved areas contain two auditoriums, a cinema and administrative offices.

15. Show apartment: located on the first floor of a condominium designed by the Perret workshop in 1950, this apartment has a layout and décor reminiscent of the projects of its day.

16. Place de l’Hôtel de Ville: a huge design including a square and apartment blocks designed by Auguste Perret. The Town Hall (hôtel de ville), a symbol of the rebirth of Le Havre, is also an example of the architect’s ideas. The great colonnade gives it a Classical look while its tower rising to more than 70 metres is decidedly modern.

17. The “Combattants’ Apartments” (immobiles des combattants): the apartment blocks along Avenue Foch, although built to an identical design, all differ from each other in some way. The attention to detail is remarkable here, as are the low reliefs along the façades illustrating the history of Le Havre through the ages and depicting historical figures (artists, seafarers, soldiers, architects, industrialists, explorers etc.)

18. Square Saint-Roch: this public garden was recreated to its original design and has now regained many of the features of its “English-style” garden layout (1868). The wall repeats the screen wall motifs seen on Place de l’Hôtel de Ville. They were designed solely by A. Perret.

19. These apartment blocks, built between 1949 and 1954, illustrate the exceptional care taken with architectural detail (note the treatment of the concrete, wrought ironwork, capitals on the top of columns)

20. Porte océane (Gateway): taking up a project designed for Porte Maillot in Paris, Auguste Perret built a monumental construction here to create a finishing touch for Avenue Foch. The two 13-storey towers symbolise the town gate. Looking out to the distant horizon (a symbol of travel and trade), they precede the entrance to the town while, at the same time, becoming one of its emblems.

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Address: OFFICE DE TOURISME LE HAVRE & POINTE DE CAUX
186 bd Clemenceau - BP 649 - 76059 Le Havre cedex
TEL: (+33) (0) 232 740 404 - www.lehavretourisme.com

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This sign indicates that the place is open to the public. For information on times and conditions, phone the Tourist Office on (+33) (0) 232 74 04 04