



## **CULTURAL CENTER OF THE STAVROS NIARCHOS FOUNDATION**

Athens, Greece

2008-2016

The Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center reused a site abandoned after the 2004 Olympic Games, located near the Phaleron, the ancient port of Athens in the bay of Kallithea. In a public park covering 170,000 square meters, which rises from grade to a height of about thirty meters, there is the new Opera House and the new headquarters of the National Library.

The design of the Cultural Center originates from a topographic gesture: cutting a strip of land and raising it, designing a sloping park whose summit regains sea views on one side, and on the other a panorama of the Acropolis, some 4 kilometers away to the north. The hill was built using waste land excavated from highway or subway tunnels. The park's gradients do not exceed 5 or 6%, so they can be easily traversed even by people with poor mobility. The creation of a close bond with water is also the origin of a second landmark: the cutting of a canal – 30 meters, and 400 meters long, and 150 centimeters deep – which brings water from the gulf into the site. Finally, hemmed in between the canal and the hill, the Agora opens up: a large rectangular public square, 40 meters wide, which leads to the spaces of the Cultural Center.

The Opera House, which seats up to 1400 people, repeats the classic horseshoe shape of the Italian theater. Collaboration with Arup's acoustic engineers made the shape of the interior as compact as possible. Its acoustics can be calibrated by operating special curtains positioned at the end of the auditorium, so adapting the theater to operas, classical concerts or electronic music. The building also contains a 450-seat theater for theatrical performances, and 5 multi-purpose rehearsal rooms for the orchestra, chorus or corps de ballet.

From the start the Library project had the symbolic goal of making books visible to the people lingering in the agora or walking along the canal. Since the building's structure required a rigid central block to prevent torsion, it was decided to surround this cube with books, both outside and inside where the reading rooms are laid out on two levels. The Library overlooks the agora through a 24-meter high glass façade supported by complex lattice beams also in structural glass. Since it is a National Library, the spaces lend themselves to different uses: children's activities; music-recording studios; a business center for management training and much else.



At the top of the hill, towards the bay, a large square roof unfolds measuring 100 meters along each side: this is the so-called “flying carpet”, suspended 17 meters high on slender steel columns. This gigantic sail has two functions: to cast shade, sheltering a scenic reading room overlooking the sea, and capture energy, using one hectare of solar panels covering it, sufficient for the building's basic needs. The final form of this roof is the result of the assemblage of 750 pieces of ferrocement, all of different sizes, joined by bonding the iron links along their edges.

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