

Discovering the architect of bamboo

July 1 2013, by Lionel Pousaz



Credit: Deidi Von Schaewen

Simon Velez is known for his impressive constructions made of bamboo. The Colombian architect is the subject of an outdoor exhibition at Rossinière.

An earthly material has made its way into modern architecture: thanks to Simon Velez, [bamboo](#) has earned an unprecedented recognition. Known for his impressive "church without religion" or yet for his Expo 2000 pavilion in Hanover, the Colombian architect uses the gramineae's [unique properties](#). This summer his work will be the subject of an exhibition at Rossinière. From 30 June 30 to 22 September, visitors will have the opportunity to discover his work along an outdoors pathway.

Bamboo is suitable for different types of architectural experiments that may be either intimate or monumental, urban or rural. Simon Velez has even dared to use it in road structures, with his bamboo [footbridge](#)

overlooking the Bogota-Medellin highway. With a greater than steel weight/strength ratio and its extraordinary resilience, the use of this [natural material](#) undeniably opens new possibilities.

Henhouses and small cars

At Rossinière, visitors will have the opportunity to discover Simon Velez's work through photographer Deidi Von Schäwen's images as well as through films and models, but also through concrete achievements. Thus, visitors are required to populate bamboo henhouses whereas the younger will have the opportunity to engage in races in [small cars](#) that the architect has built with the same material for his own grandchildren.

"The concept of the outdoor exhibition seemed the best way to introduce Simon Velez's work to a broader family audience," said Pierre Frey, curator, EPFL professor and author of a monograph on the Colombian architect's work, recently published by Actes Sud.



Architecture going local

Simon Velez's approach constitutes an ecological undertaking at the crossroads of modern and traditional architecture. Such a concept is reminiscent of the current craze for local fresh products. "The endemic Colombian bamboo, of the *Guadua Augustifolia* species, is among the best in the world in terms of construction, explained Pierre Frey. Simon Velez employs sustainable and local materials for a local market. It is one of the few world-renowned architects to be able to put into practice this type of approach. "

The work of Simon Velez can sometimes be quite impressive and sometimes it discreetly comes into view in a Colombian farm's backyard, harmoniously integrated to people's lives. The choice of material constitutes an essential first step in this direction. Unfortunately for us, Europe has no exploitable species of bamboo. It is then time for a walk at Rossinière, where visitors are invited to take solace regardless of this injustice.

Provided by Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne

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