

FILM 3- A LIVING HERITAGE

Mathieu Lehanneur, designer, discusses his creation at the church of Saint-Hilaire at Melle, where he refurbished the choir, combining Romanesque and contemporary art.

Mathieu Lehanneur

The project at Saint-Hilaire-de-Melle consisted in entirely rethinking and redesigning the choir of the church, whose first stones were laid in the 11th century. Today, it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The goal was to recreate the Romanesque spirit – since we are dealing with a Romanesque church – but not to simply copy the style. The idea was to recreate the Romanesque spirit without necessarily recreating the Romanesque style. Looking at how the Romanesque architects worked and how all of science worked at that time, I realized that they were extremely sensitive to what we call telluric energy, that is to say, the energy of the stones. And both the construction and the choice of church construction sites were linked to this energy, which was not readily understood by the scientists nor the clergy. The renovation recreated this form of energy between the building's existing columns. It created these vibrations that seem to emanate from the choir itself. In the end, that is what creates the site's magical feel according to me. We have two resolutely different styles between the former building and the renovated one, but they are like two very different entities, two foreign bodies that, surprisingly, coexist very well with each other. That was a good surprise ; even though I had been rather confident, we still had to show the end result to the people of the beautiful town of Melle.

The true advantage of such a project is first to have the time ; because it is pretty rare for a client to commission you and say « take the time you need ». And the second advantage is to have a sort of ego problem. When you suddenly tell yourself : I am designing and building something that will continue to exist after I am gone, after my children are gone, maybe even after my grand-children are gone. And that, that is a source of infinite pressure and true pride, I cannot deny it !

Romanesque treasures of Poitou-Charentes, Poitou-Charentes region, 2014.

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