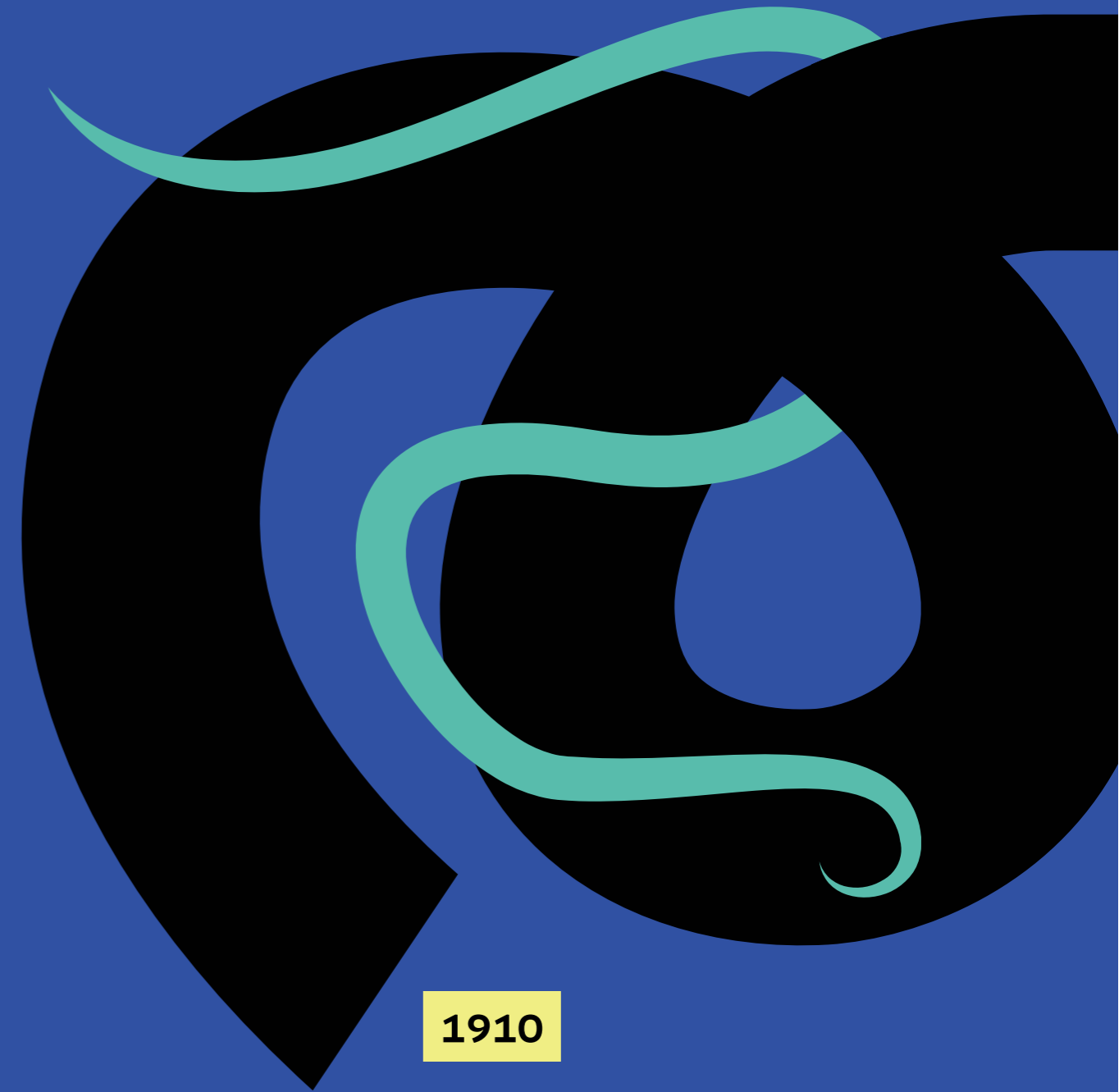


ORAN
RAILWAY
STATION



1910

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RAILWAY
STATION

OPENING DATE :
1910

LOCATION :
ORAN - ALGERIA

ARCHITECT :
MARIUS TOUDOIRE
(1852-1922)

CERAMICIST :
ERNEST SOUPIREAU
(1853-1941)

The edifice was designed in 1905 by the Parisian architect Marius Toudoire, the staff architect for the Compagnie du chemin de fer de Paris à Lyon et à la Méditerranée (PLM), who had also drawn the plans for the Gare de Lyon in Paris. Oran station was “the first station to be designed in the purest Oriental style” in Algeria. By choosing this style, the private company and its architect undoubtedly hoped to gain the good graces of Algeria’s governor Charles Jonnart, a promoter of the neo-Moorish style. At the time, the colony’s rail system was being extended. Construction of the station, which began in 1908, was completed in 1910.

The station is made up of several Considère-system reinforced concrete structures, erected on either side of the tracks. The main building presents two long façades laid out in an L shape. The first, 84 meters long (on the Boulevard Mellah-Ali side), is for departures; the other, 60 meters long, handles arrivals and overlooks the Saint-Michel neighborhood (Haï Sidi El Bachir). A 34.5-meter tower, similar in shape to the minaret of the great mosque of Algiers, stands at the angle of the L. It bears a clock with four 3-meter faces, plainly visible from the street. The impressive size of the construction is further magnified by its position on the city’s heights.

The main façade is the one with the most decoration. It offers a symmetrical composition, with two lateral porches and a central domed pavilion featuring three horseshoe arches opening onto the ticket-window room. The squinches are decorated with inlaid colored stones and ceramic tiles with white and blue leaf patterns. Carved wood awnings protect the window section. The small building housing the station restaurant is separate, but the composition of its façades matches that of the main building.

Much of the original interior decoration is still visible, notably the plaster molding. Conversely, the wooden latticework on the original ticket windows has been replaced by more modest paneling, although it is still based on mashrabiya patterns.

In this case, the architect’s historicist references were local. Toudoire drew upon the shapes and ornamentation visible in the nearby city of Tlemcen to give the building a clearly Neo-Moorish style. The tower, featuring clerestory windows and topped with ornamentation, is similar to the minarets found on most of the medieval mosques of Tlemcen. The tile decor on the façade imitates that of the *mihrab* (prayer room) of the mosque known as Sidi Bel Hassan (14th century), like the profile of the capitals — which, in this case, were cast concrete. The placement of the bays in solid walls covered with whitewash, and the ribbed dome over the cupola featuring carved muqarnas are also reminiscent of the region’s great sanctuaries. These buildings had been the subject of extensive description and illustration in books like the one by Georges and William Marçais, *Les Monuments Arabes de Tlemcen*, Paris, 1903.

A few years later, Toudoire would base his design for the Algiers department store Galeries de France (currently the Museum of Modern Art, or MAMA) on the decoration of the Oran station façade. The second building features the same wooden awning, the same tower-cum-minaret, and the same ceramic tile ornamentation. Ceramicist Ernest Soupireau, who carried out the decoration of the department store as well as that of the great panel ornamenting the façade of Bejaia mosque, may also have created the ceramic tile at Oran Station.

