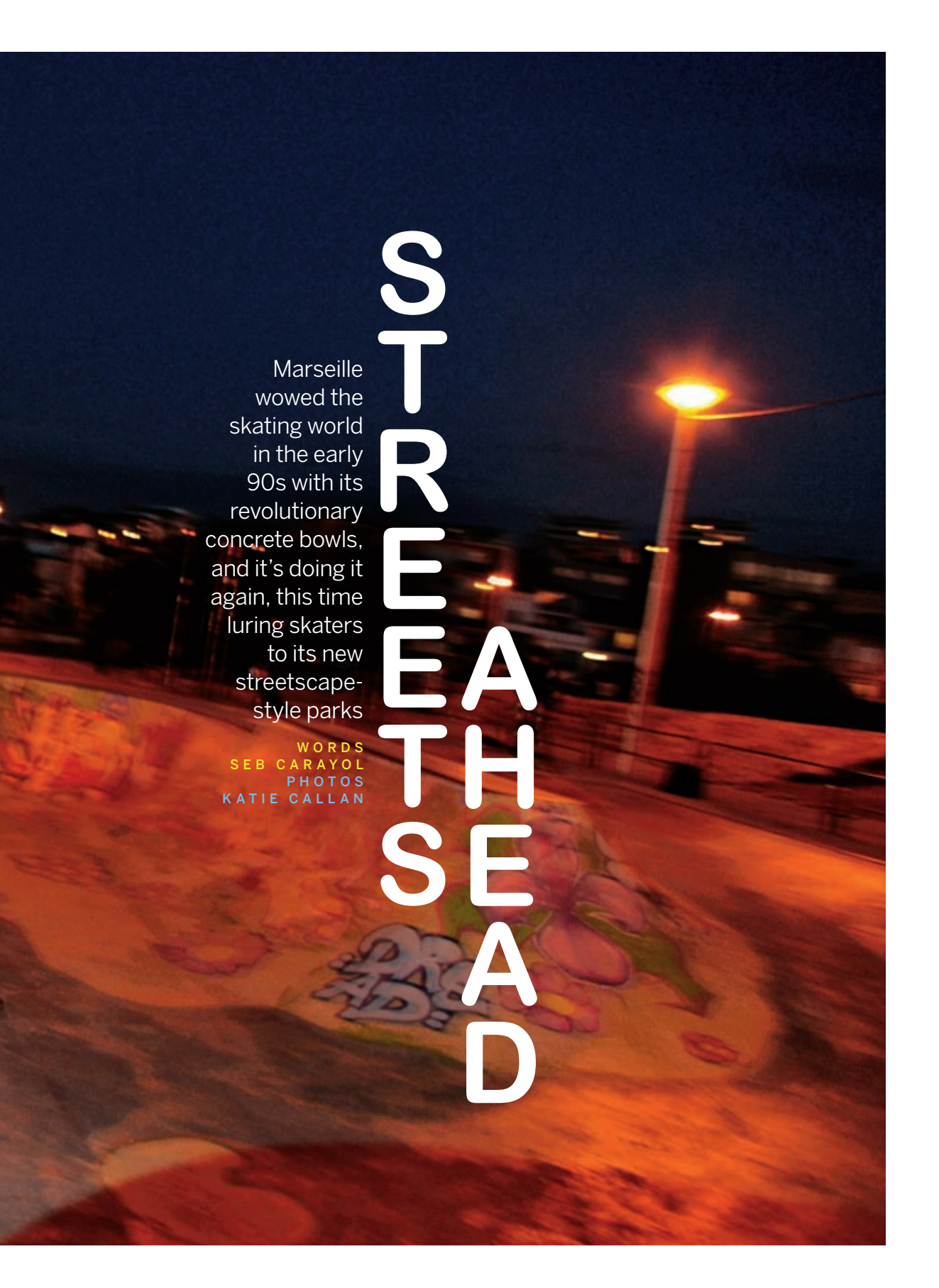




Marseille
wowed the
skating world
in the early
90s with its
revolutionary
concrete bowls,
and it's doing it
again, this time
luring skaters
to its new
streetscape-
style parks

WORDS
SEB CARAYOL
PHOTOS
KATIE CALLAN

STREETSCAPE



“WE LOVE THE FACT THAT THIS IS A TRULY URBAN ENVIRONMENT”



ON A GRAFFITI-ADORNED WALL

in Marseille, a red neon light panel reads: “Skateboarding is not a crime,” in metre-high letters. This assertive skateboarders’ slogan triumphantly lights up La Faille, one of the two new skateparks that have just opened in the city. And it never sounded so appropriate. La Faille is free, furnished with all the street furniture loved by skaters – benches, curbs, banks and handrails. It’s located in La Friche Belle de Mai, a government-funded

cultural complex set in an abandoned tobacco factory that has been a hub for over 400 creatives, housing theatre and dance companies, artists’ workshops and radio stations since 1992. As well as La Faille, the biggest indoor skatepark in France just opened last month in La Capelette neighbourhood. Spanning 3,250m², this wooden rollercoaster of an obstacle course is so enormous its architects had room to plant a few palm trees. The park forms part of the Palais de la Glace et de La Glisse (PGG), a project that cost €44.8m and includes an ice rink, restaurants and tiered, raised stands able to accommodate up to 10,000 spectators.

Ironically, the militant neon light installation at La Faille, by artist Lionel Scoccimaro, was funded by the same city that still issues tickets to the skaters that venture to public spaces such as Place Bargemon, where skateboarding is seen as a misdemeanour. But as the slogan claims, skateboarding has never technically been a crime in Marseille and this year, the capital of coastal Provence will once again become Europe’s undisputed skateboarding capital.

BACK IN 1991, the Marseille municipality built Le Prado outdoor concrete skatepark on Les Gastons Beach, consisting of five interconnected bowls of different heights



La Faille is a permanent skatepark geared towards street skaters; *previous spread*, Mehdi Salah skateboarding at the Prado bowl, built in 1991

that mimic empty swimming pools. Although this radical construction sounded quite incongruous at the time, it succeeded way beyond expectations and for a decade Marseille's bowls were a one-of-a-kind novelty in Europe, attracting legendary pro skaters from as far away as the US, in search of the perfect curve at the park (or on the topless beach a few yards away). From 1999 to 2006 Le Prado hosted a series of annual competitions that made Marseille's bowls a mandatory pilgrimage for any skateboarder – postcards of it were printed and it even featured in Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 video game.

Le Prado, aka "Le Bowl", is still a cool hangout for youth and is packed at all times of day and night, but for the seasoned skateboarder it started to lose its edge a few years ago. "From 2002 on, Le Bowl started to feel dated and skaters migrated to the new, bigger European concrete parks in Brixlegg [Austria], Malmö [Sweden] and Bologna [Italy]," muses local hero Mehdi Salah (29). "Even though he's been following the PGG über-park's project from the ground up (he worked as a carpenter on the construction), Mehdi won't stop going to his old favourite haunt, Le Bowl. "I have too many good memories >



MARSEILLE'S SKATE SCENE

SHOPS

XOXO (PICTURED)

Across from the Prado skatepark, XOXO offers boards for hire for €4 per hour or €8 per day. 197 Avenue Pierre Mendès-France, Vieille Chapelle

MICHIGAN

This historic downtown skateshop has been open since the late 80s. 10 Rue Pisançon, Vieux-Port

EATS

O'STOP

This traditional restaurant is open 24/7 and it's where skaters go to eat *lapin grand-mère* (rabbit) at 5am.

16 Rue Saint Saëns, Vieux-Port, tel: +33 (0)4 9133 8534

L'AUTHENTIQUE

A two-minute walk from the Prado skatepark, this café has huge, affordable sandwiches with quality ingredients and some vegetarian options. 17 Avenue de la Pointe-Rouge, Pointe-Rouge, tel: +33 (0)4 9173 2182

PARTY

THE RED LION PUB

Just 100m from the Prado, this English pub turns into the official post-skate-contest celebration spot. 231 Avenue Pierre Mendès-France, Pointe-Rouge

LE CABARET ALEATOIRE

Part of La Friche, this cabaret has excellent live shows. 41 Rue Forbin, Belle de Mai

L'EMBOBINEUSE

The quintessential punky concert place. Mayhem-style fun guaranteed. 11 Boulevard Bouès, Belle de Mai



NOW THERE
ARE TWO NEW
SKATEPARKS,
EVERYBODY'S
HAPPY



there," he says. He's glad that not only one, but two new skateparks have appeared in town, "so now everybody's happy". The reason Le Prado fell from grace was that it never catered to the new generation of street skaters who see street furniture such as benches, banks and handrails as their own, blank canvas. Until this year, young skateboarders in Marseille had been playing hide-and-seek with the authorities and almost by coincidence these two new skateparks became the perfect solution.

In 2003, the organisation behind La Friche Belle de Mai decided it should dedicate some of the vast unused space in its former tobacco factory to sports. But not just any sports. "We did not want just another football field in there," explains Odile Thiéry of the arts complex. "For us a football field was the epitome of a closed space as you have to join a club and it's never open to the public." So the organisation hired a sociologist and an open-minded PE teacher to think about how sports with an artistic twist can become popular in a highly urbanised environment. The result took many forms over the years. For instance, Les Vélos Sonores was set up as a programme of bike rides through the city with audio commentary and music, and a rock-climbing trail was created on the factory's walls complete with visuals. Then the people at La Friche met Momo. A former sponsored skater, Laurent "Momo" Molinier joined the BSM association (Board Spirit Marseille) to teach skateboard classes to kids on temporary obstacles in one of the courtyards in La Friche. Thanks to Momo's charisma and his ability to engage people, he made himself so indispensable that the organisation started toying with the idea of building a permanent skatepark specifically geared towards street skaters. And so, in 2008, La Faille project was born.

STEPHANE FLANDRIN AND Samuel Stambul, the duo behind Constructo architecture practice were hand picked to convert the steep-sided space between some train tracks and a terrace that's part of Radio Grenouille's HQ into the new skatepark. Hardcore skaters themselves, they relished the challenge and knew exactly how steep the perfect handrail has to be and how high the ideal curb needs to be. The result is a skatepark with a perfect obstacle course reproducing what can be found in the streets in a confined space. Momo is thrilled with the result: "We love the fact that this is a truly urban environment, surrounded by graffiti, which is what we're used to. The Prado is too far, and you have to pay for the PGG indoor

Clockwise from below, Prado skatepark; La Faille streetpark; Laurent "Momo" Molinier; Chloé Bernard inside XOXO skateshop; skatepark design duo Samuel Stambul (left) and Stéphane Flandrin; Mehdi Salah



skatepark – not all kids can afford that." Odile Thiéry shares his enthusiasm: "There will be special events, of course. But for now, we're just discovering this whole new group of young visitors, and can't wait to see how we are going to collaborate." The grind is on. With the Prado, La Faille and the PGG, Marseille has begun a new reign as Europe's skateboard capital. In fact, they might even think of changing that slogan to: "Not skateboarding is a crime."

La Faille streetpark

Open 8am–midnight. Bus 49, stop: Jobin-Pautrier. lafriche.org

The Prado skatepark

Open to the public 24/7. Bus 19 and 47, stop: Les Gatons Plage

Le Palais de la Glace et de la Glisse (PGG)

Boulevard Fernand Bonnefoy. Open 10am–10pm on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays; 1pm–10pm the rest of the week. €4.50 per session. Buses 18 and 72, stop: Capelette-La Poste

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WHERE TO STAY IN MARSEILLE



● UNDER €90 NEW HOTEL BOMPARD

Spend the day at the new skateparks, then retreat to this tranquil hotel set in wooded grounds. *Doubles from €85, book at hotels.easyJet.com*



● UNDER €100 SUITE AFFAIRE

After sampling the city's edgy street sports, experience its sophisticated side at this renovated residence near the Old Port. *Doubles from €97, book at hotels.easyJet.com*



● UNDER €150 PULLMAN MARSEILLE PALM BEACH

Refine your skateboard moves in town, then work on your tan by the pool at this luxurious four-star. *Doubles from €143, book at hotels.easyJet.com*