

Fernand Pouillon



Residence Victor Hugo, 1955–1957.

My first encounter with Fernand Pouillon's work was when I stumbled upon a few photographs of Residence Victor-Hugo (1955–1957) in a publication I was reading. I remember thinking that it was just another example of a large-scale classical 20th century development, the typical architecture that students were advised to avoid. It wasn't until later when I learned that in order to appreciate Pouillon's architectural legacy, I had to look at it from afar and try to understand what he called 'the finished composition'.

Those familiar with Pouillon's work know that he meticulously combined urban and architectural agendas, developing large-scale residential projects characterised by their individuality and integrity. To the unfamiliar eye, however, his projects might appear as just another classical post-war development – the type widely criticised or even demolished today.


Philosophy and Approach


Pouillon studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris (1934) and started his career in Aix-en-Provence and Marseille, collaborating with Auguste Perret on the reconstruction of the Vieux Port district. Unlike the open-plan designs of post-war, large-scale construction projects, Pouillon preferred forms that resembled squares and courtyards. “When planning a town, it is not a question of simply drawing up a plan: one must imagine each architectural structure in minute detail. [...] The shape and appearance of the buildings should dictate the layout of the town.”

Pouillon’s firm, Comptoir National du Logement, handled the development, construction and architecture of his projects, likely enabling him to achieve his vision of ‘the finished composition’ and to ‘imagine each architectural structure in minute detail.’

He focused on the power of evocation, resulting in coherent and consistent buildings. His ability to view construction, architecture and the urban form as a whole created buildings with their own autonomy. Although influenced by familiar classical proportions, he avoided neo-classicism, which endowed his work with a timeless quality. His talent for combining diversity and repetition is remarkable – in his work, the bay as a unit of form provides repetition and tempo, defining and punctuating the overall appearance of the building.

Notable Projects

In Residence Buffalo (1955–1958) ² , Pouillon developed a social residential cluster with royal-like proportions and materials. The project’s scale, inner courtyards and exclusive use of natural stone evoke the ambience of Palais Royal or Place de Vogue in Paris. The subtle changes between different bays and the proportions of openings give this project its robust and rich character. The quality and maintenance of the project’s public spaces remain remarkable to this day. By creating such a ‘royal’ environment, the inhabitants are able to appreciate the place they live in.

Residence du Point du Jour (1957–1963) ³  is a plan with 2,260 dwellings that uncannily achieves a pleasant urban environment. In this project, Pouillon exemplifies his ability

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 Fernand Pouillon



Residence Buffalo,
1955–1958.



Residence du Point du Jour,
1955–1958.

to address urban and architectural agendas simultaneously. The buildings' composition in the ensemble and the transition from one façade bay to the next express his talent for creating a rich and diverse architectural and social environment. The public gardens, fountains, colonnade and transparent entrances on the ground level all participate in this unique 'finished composition,' defining the project as a place that reflects the city in itself.

A Personal Encounter

On one of my visits to Residence du Point du Jour, I had the chance to meet an old man who had been living there for over thirty years. He described how nice it was to live there and the fact that almost nothing had changed. He then invited me to his apartment on the 11th floor. As I was entering the apartment, I was immediately exposed to the quality of the plan. His first question to me was, "Did you know that he was in prison?"

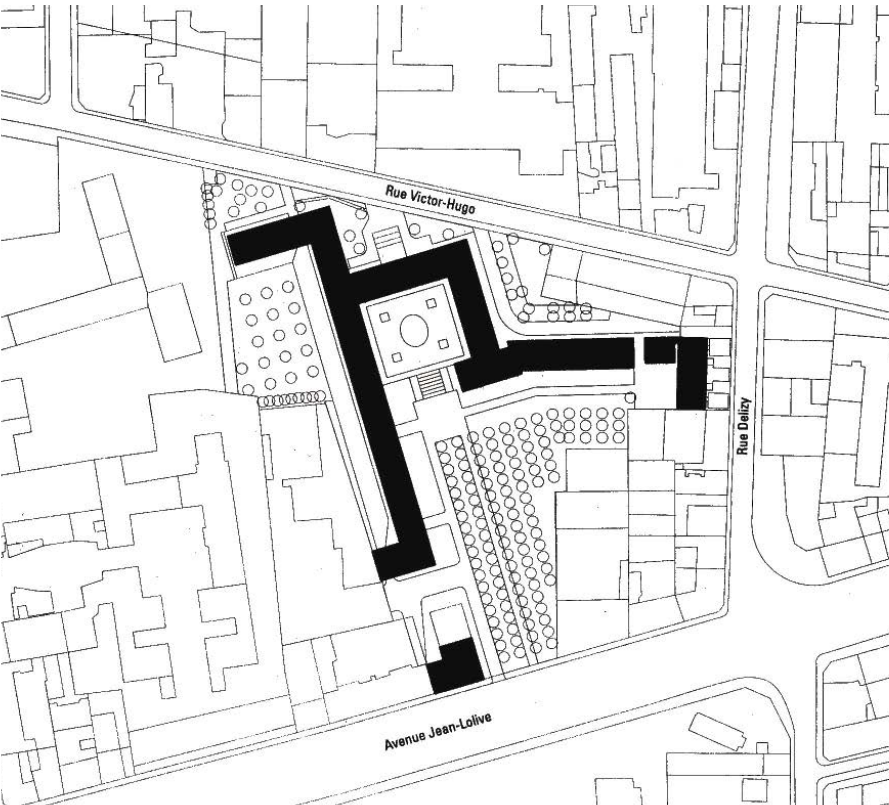
The Shadow of Scandal


The 1961 bankruptcy and subsequent collapse of Pouillon's architectural and engineering firm, Comptoir National du Logement, has been sensationalized in France, overshadowing his work. Pouillon's career in France stopped the moment he was arrested, and after serving time in prison, he migrated to Algeria in 1965. He then continued to develop projects in Algeria, Iran and Morocco until he returned to France in 1983 at the age of 73. He had several projects under development when he passed away in 1986.



Residence le Parc, 1955–1958.

1955-1957
Pantin
Résidence Victor-Hugo



1 
282 apartments and commercial
101 Avenue Jean Lolive,
93500 Pantin, France

5 minutes walk from Metro 5: Église
de Pantin to Avenue Jean Lolive





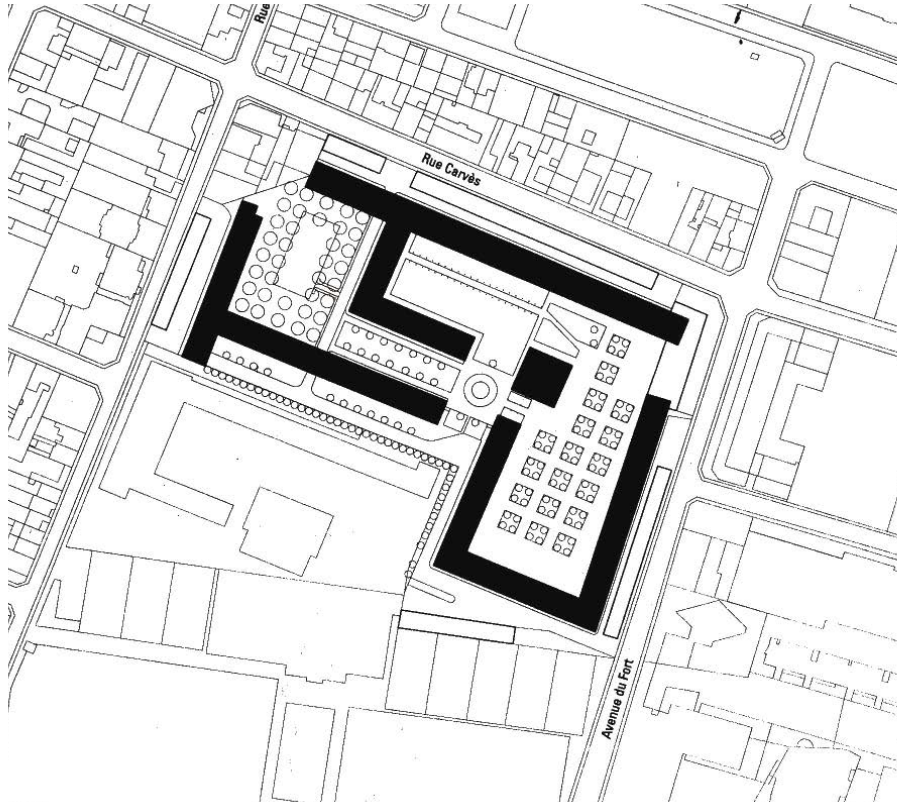


2 ①

466 apartments and commercial
Avenue Fort,
92120 Montrouge, France

15 minutes walk from RER B:
Laplace to Avenue Fort

1955–1958
Montrouge
Résidence Buffalo





Residence Buffalo, 1955–1958.

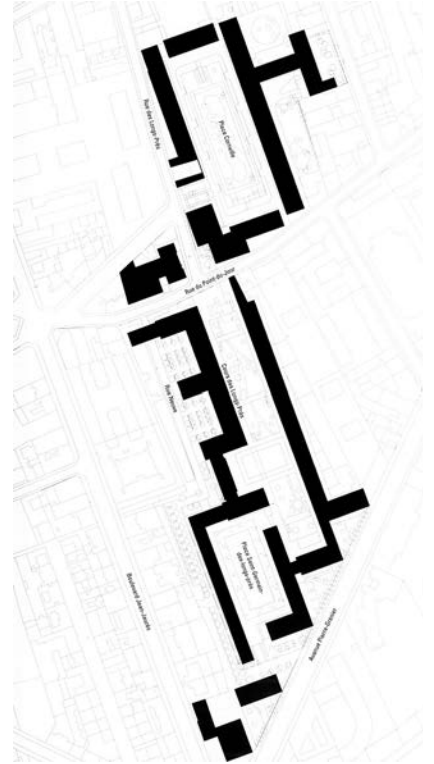




3 ①

2,260 apartments and commercial
Rue Neuve Saint-Germain,
92100 Boulogne-Billancourt, France

10 minutes walk from Metro 9:
Marcel Sembat to Rue Neuve
Saint-Germain



1957–1963
Boulogne-Billancourt
Résidence du Point-du-Jour



Residence du Point du Jour,
1955–1958.



Residence du Point du Jour,
1955–1958.



Residence du Point du Jour,
1955–1958.

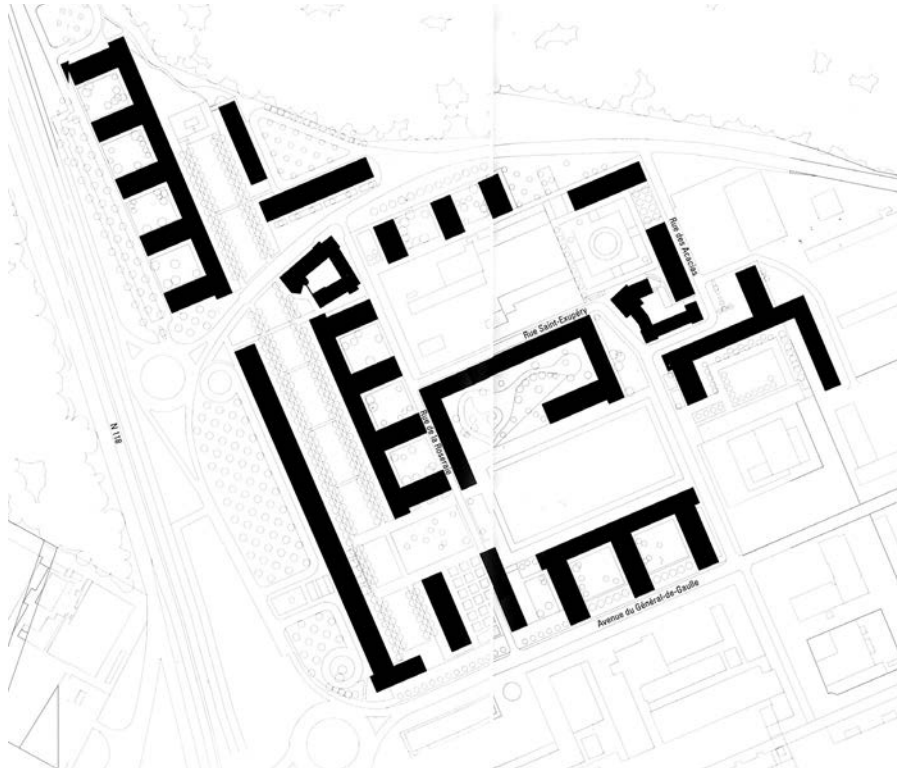



Local Heroes •2

Residence du Point du Jour,
1955–1958.



1957–1962
Meudon la Foret
Résidence Le Parc



4 
2,635 apartments and commercial
Avenue du Général de Gaulle,
Meudon, France

RER C – Meudon Val Fleury
from the station bus no. 289
to Eglise de Meudon-la-forêt



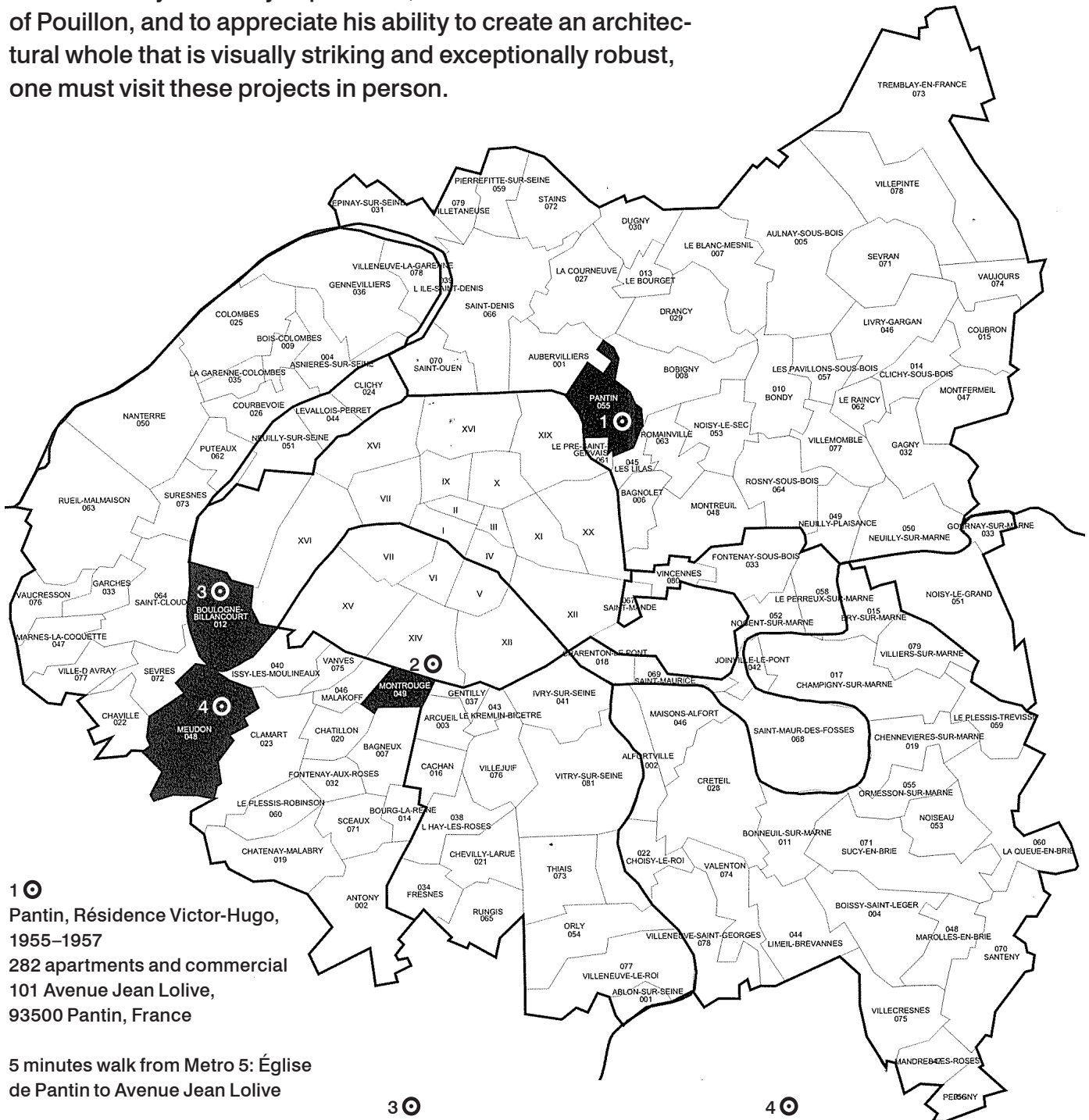
Residence le Parc, 1955–1958.






Grand Ensembles in Paris

All IV Grand Ensembles in Paris can be visited in one ambitious day. From my experience, to understand the work of Pouillon, and to appreciate his ability to create an architectural whole that is visually striking and exceptionally robust, one must visit these projects in person.




1 
Pantin, Résidence Victor-Hugo,
1955–1957
282 apartments and commercial
101 Avenue Jean Lolive,
93500 Pantin, France


5 minutes walk from Metro 5: Église
de Pantin to Avenue Jean Lolive

2 
Montrouge, Résidence Buffalo,
1955–1958
466 apartments and commercial
Avenue Fort,
92120 Montrouge, France

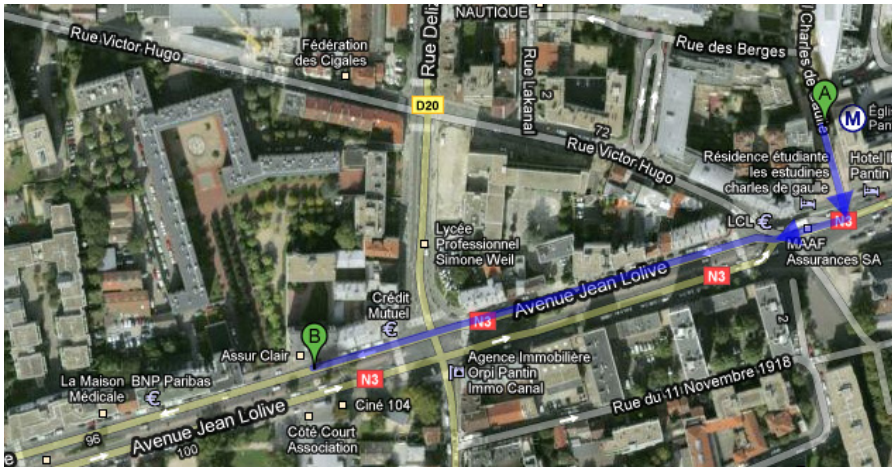
15 minutes walk from RER B:
Laplace to Avenue Fort

3 
Boulogne-Billancourt,
Résidence du Point-du-Jour,
1957–1963
2,260 apartments and commercial
Rue Neuve Saint-Germain,
92100 Boulogne-Billancourt, France

10 minutes walk from Metro 9:
Marcel Sembat to Rue Neuve
Saint-Germain

4 
Meudon la Forêt,
Résidence Le Parc,
1957–1962
2,635 apartments and commercial
Avenue du Général de Gaulle,
Meudon, France

RER C – Meudon Val Fleury
from the station bus no. 289
to Eglise de Meudon-la-forêt



1 Ⓞ

Pantin, Résidence Victor-Hugo,
1955–1957

282 apartments and commercial
101 Avenue Jean Lolive,
93500 Pantin, France

5 minutes walk from Metro 5: Église
de Pantin to Avenue Jean Lolive

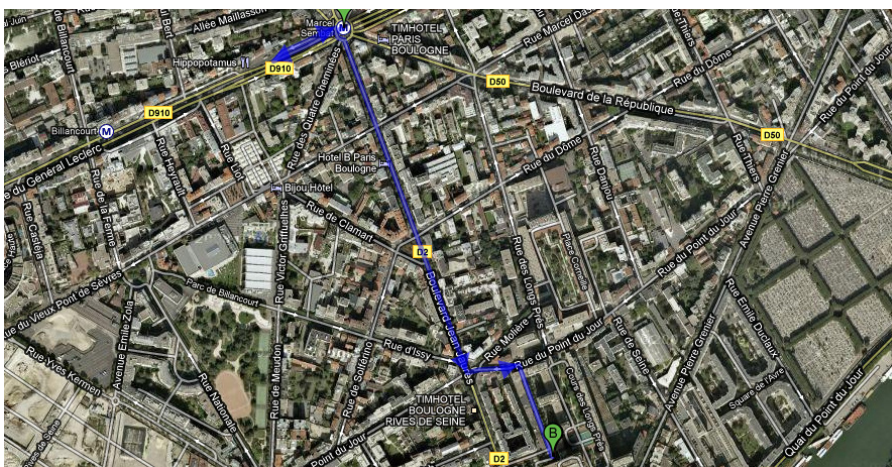


2 Ⓞ

Montrouge, Résidence Buffalo,
1955–1958

466 apartments and commercial
Avenue Fort,
92120 Montrouge, France

15 minutes walk from RER B:
Laplace to Avenue Fort

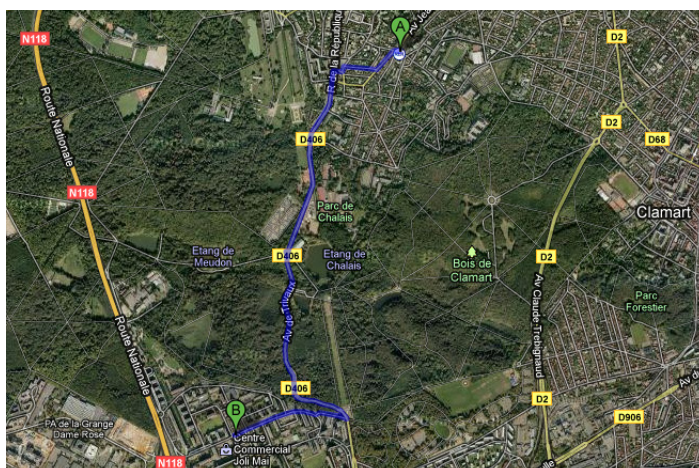


3 Ⓞ

Boulogne-Billancourt,
Résidence du Point-du-Jour,
1957–1963

2,260 apartments and commercial
Rue Neuve Saint-Germain,
92100 Boulogne-Billancourt, France

10 minutes walk from Metro 9:
Marcel Sembat to Rue Neuve
Saint-Germain



4 Ⓞ

Meudon la Foret,
Résidence Le Parc,
1957–1962

2,635 apartments and commercial
Avenue du Général de Gaulle,
Meudon, France

RER C – Meudon Val Fleury
from the station bus no. 289
to Eglise de Meudon-la-forêt

Books (selection):

The best book for a Pouillon trip:
Fernand Pouillon, Architecte, Pantin, Montrouge, Boulogne-Billancourt, Meudon-La-Forêt (French),
Jacques Lucan, Editions Picard
ISBN 9782708406919

Fernand Pouillon, Architetto delle 200 colonne (Italian/French),
Bernard Felix Dubor, Electa
ISBN 978-2866530396 (French)
Electa ISBN 88-435-2308-2 (Italian)

Fernand Pouillon, architecte méditerranéen (French),
Jean-Lucien Bonillo, Editions Imbernon, ISBN: 2-9516396-0-0

Fernand Pouillon, New Foudation of the city, New foundation of a discipline. (English), Alberto Ferlenga (in the book *Modern Cities* by Jean-Francois Lejeune),
Princeton Architectural Press
ISBN 1-56898-058-2

Rationalistischer Klassizismus in Frankreich, Auguste Perret und Fernand Pouillon als Stadtebauer (German), Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani (in his book *Die Stadt im 20. Jahrhundert*, page 637), Verlag Wachenbach
ISBN 978-3-8031-3633-6

Fernand Pouillon in Algier (German)
Jean-Lucien Bonillo, *Bauwelt* 36-2003, page 50 (Themanummer *StadtBauwelt Algier*)

Fernand Pouillon, Le Corbusier und andere (German), Jean-Lucien Bonillo, *Bauwelt* 4-1998, page 1392 (Themanummer *StadtBauwelt Marseille*)

Stones Of The Abbey / Les Pierres Sauvages (Roman in English/ French), Fernand Pouillon, Harcourt
ISBN: 0156851008 (English edition), Editions du Seuil, ISBN: 9782020010238 (French edition)

Mémoires d'un architecte (French),
Fernand Pouillon, Editions du Seuil
ISBN: 978-2020011143



Fernand Pouillon, 1912–1986.

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