
LE PLAZA
EVERYTHING IS RUNNING SMOOTHLY
TOUT FONCTIONNE NORMALEMENT

The Plaza throws its doors wide open to pop culture in all its forms.

From cinema and comics to video games, web culture, TV series, role-playing games and fan fiction, pop culture kindles counter-narratives to dominant stories through its ability to bring together communities of meaning and shared knowledge. Constantly alive and evolving, it endlessly reinvents itself. It remixes—and above all questions—our past and our future. Both emotional memory and protean material, it transcends divisions to become a playground for imagining other possibilities.

PLAZA CENTRE CINEMA

In Geneva, the rebirth of a historic cinema nestled within a listed building coincides with the emergence Plaza Centre Cinéma, a new cultural hub bringing together the iconic movie theater, an immersive venue, exhibition spaces, a bookshop-café, a brasserie and a cinema-hotel.

A masterpiece of postwar modernist architecture, the Plaza is becoming Plaza Centre Cinéma. Alongside its iconic movie theater, the site now unfolds into an immersive space, exhibition venues, a bookshop-café, as well as Brasserie Europe and Le Plaza Cinema-Hotel. New narratives and experiences emerge through the combined programming of these infrastructures, in resonance with the artistic and political challenges facing a 21st-century cinema venue.

Here, cinema is no longer confined to the darkness of the screening room but permeates the hours of the day. It slips into wandering paths, appears around the corner of an exhibition, an immersive installation or a virtual reality experience. It flows through the spaces, inhabits the brasserie, accompanies conversations at the bar, before returning to the grand auditorium through performances, retrospectives, premieres, festivals and nights devoted equally to gaming and the moving image. It even extends into the intimate atmosphere of the Cinema-Hotel rooms, conceived as small screening rooms. This porosity between spaces, disciplines and audiences sketches out an open laboratory where new ways of inhabiting culture can be invented.

Different tones and temporalities of programming intertwine to create an aesthetic continuum in which every visitor can feel at home while exploring unfamiliar territories. As the boundaries between cinematic forms evolve and cultural hierarchies fade, the Plaza seeks to become a point of convergence between the mythology of cinema and the expectations of new audiences. Pop culture therefore becomes the guiding thread of the programming.

Drawing on the very history of the Plaza cinema—which left its mark on its era while paying particular attention to the event dimension surrounding screenings—the future center merges exploration and spectacle. Alongside its signature formats, Plaza Centre Cinéma will rely on collaborations, co-productions and partnerships with renowned festivals to enrich its program of premieres and innovative formats. This openness also extends to an educational component aimed at the general public as well at professionals and artists.

Benefiting from its unique setting—a listed heritage building constructed in 1952 and restored with exemplary care—Plaza Centre Cinéma is coming back to life in downtown Geneva, just steps away from the railway station and Lake Geneva, fully embedded in Geneva's cultural landscape while engaging internationally.





Neons from the *From Below* series by
Christian Robert-Tissot, © Nicolas Lieber.

THE SPACES

Inaugurated in 1952, the Plaza complex was among the first multifunctional buildings in Switzerland, recognizable by its glass-and-aluminium curtain wall façade. Its remarkable movie theater coexisted with a brasserie, shopping arcades and office spaces, forming an innovative ensemble for its time. Respecting the legacy of Marc J. Saugey (1908–1971), the renovation restores the original spaces while extending them through the addition of an immersive venue and a cinema-hotel, both absent from the initial plans. With the exception of the brasserie, inaugurated in early June 2026, all spaces will open to the public in early 2027.

THE MOVIE THEATER

The configuration of the movie theater is distinguished above all by its roof structure, composed of six long aluminium trusses that give the space both the futuristic appearance of a spaceship and the organic form of a seashell. It is also characterized by its monumental balcony and its suspended foyer-gallery known as the “promenoir.” Another architectural feature lies in the seamless access from the street: audiences enter the cinema via a gentle slope, without interruption. This fluidity is reinforced by the transparency of the fully glazed doors.

With 500 seats in the stalls and 100 in the balcony, the auditorium’s capacity has been reduced by half in order to meet contemporary standards of safety and comfort. The space will recover its original color palette, while the concrete stage will be extended with a retractable proscenium designed to host cine-concerts, performances and conferences. The balcony, redesigned with convivial seating and directly connected to the restaurant, will also function independently for private screenings and events.

THE IMMERSIVE ROOM

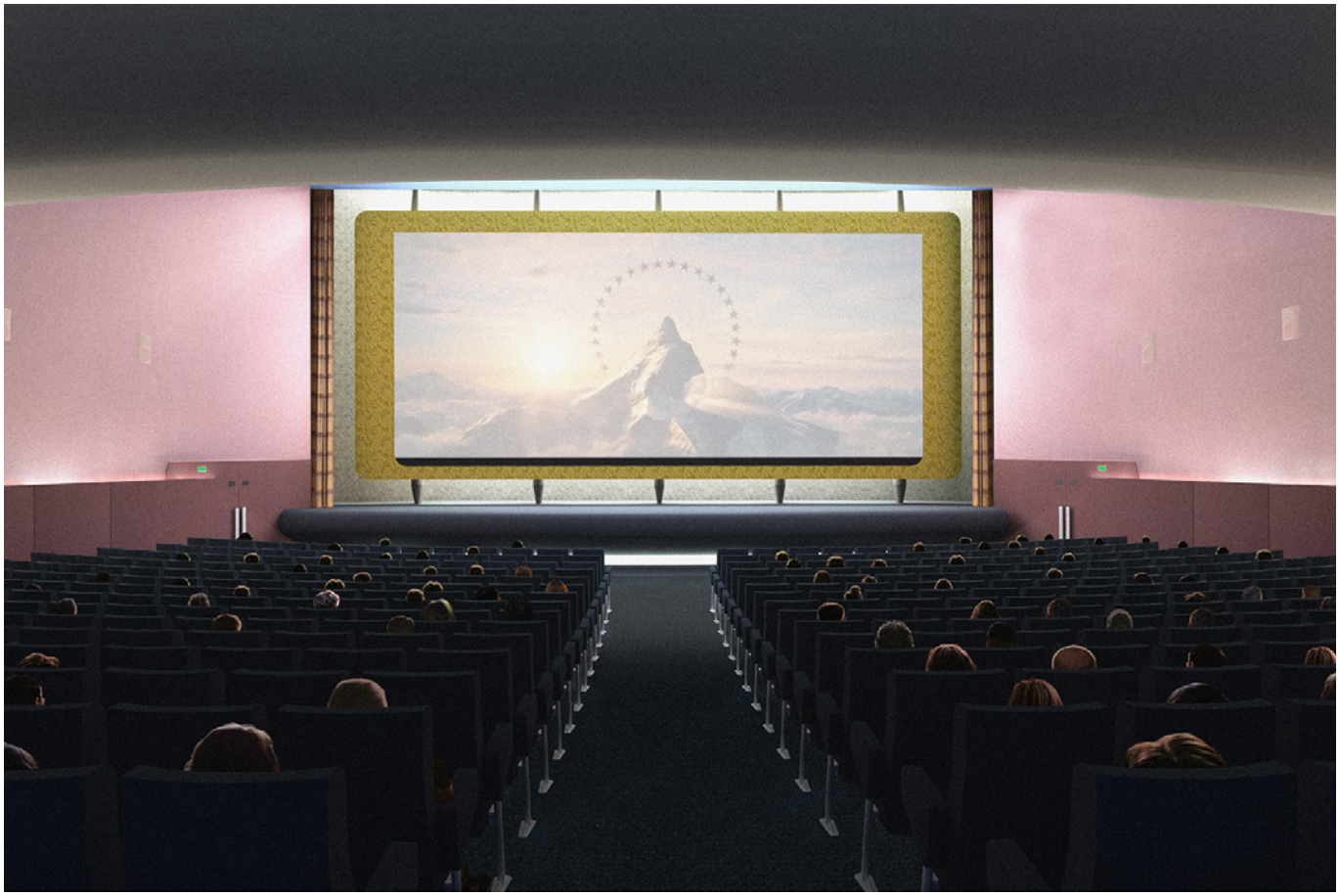
The immersive venue is a new circular space excavated beneath the historic movie theater. Measuring 100 square meters in diameter, it will be dedicated to contemporary forms of digital and interactive creation, while also accommodating audiovisual installations, including 360° projections and virtual reality experiences, and may even serve as a second screening room.

THE SARTORELLI ROOM

The former projection workshop, where every film reel was once checked, has been entirely reimagined. Equipped with generously comfortable seating and a gentle incline ensuring optimal visibility from every seat, it becomes a complementary and more intimate screening room suited to a variety of uses, like masterclasses or encounters with specific audiences. Its name pays tribute to Carlo Sartorelli, the emblematic projectionist of the Plaza cinema from 1955 to 1983. For nearly thirty years, he meticulously documented the history and details of screenings in notebooks that have since become invaluable archives. This venue will open a few months after the launch of Plaza Centre Cinéma.

EXHIBITION SPACES

By reinventing the functions of the spaces, the renovation works have opened up a sequence of rooms that will operate as exhibition spaces connected to the program. Some of these areas will also function as display windows visible day and night along the left side of the building.





Rendering of the historic auditorium,
© FdMP architectes.

The balcony of the Cinéma Plaza, suspended over the stalls across a span of 20 meters,
© Nicolas Lieber.

THE VENUES

THE CINEMA-HOTEL

The 17 rooms of the cinema-hotel are conceived as small private screening rooms, each equipped with a projection system and immersive audio. The programming offered will be exclusive and curated by the Plaza, complementing the cinema's film program. With warm wood paneling and Lynchian velvet curtains, the atmosphere is both urban and intimate, appealing as much to cinephiles as to visitors seeking a singular stay.

Offering guests privileged access to the full range of Plaza programming and spaces, this cinematic cocoon invites visitors to experience cinema as a total and continuous immersion. Refusing to interrupt the thread between projection and everyday life already means inhabiting time and images differently.

BRASSERIE EUROPE

Open seven days a week and inspired by the spirit of the great European brasseries, the Plaza restaurant reinterprets their codes through refined yet accessible gourmet variations. Guided by the seasons and fresh market produce, the menu evolves continuously, enriched by weekly specials and daily suggestions. The understated elegance of the setting is expressed through noble materials and Swiss craftsmanship, all in keeping with Saugey's architectural language.

THE BOOKSHOP-CAFÉ

The former "Bar-Glacier" will also be restored and, together with the bookshop and its extension, will form a lively and convivial ensemble. Talks, music and activities echoing the program will make this a highly accessible space where students, creative communities and younger generations can also come to work or meet. It will function both as a festive prelude and as a resonating chamber for the emotions experienced within the Plaza itself.

MONT-BLANC CENTRE

Above the movie theater rise the eight floors of Mont-Blanc Centre, distinguished by its characteristic curtain-wall façade. Among the offices housed there are those of the Plaza Foundation and several cinema-related organizations: FIFDH (International Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights), GIFF, Everybody's Perfect, Cinéforom and Rita Productions. Other cultural organizations further enrich this ecosystem, including Fluxum Foundation, dedicated to choreographic creation, and Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève.





The glass façade of Brasserie Europe, © Federal.li.

The Cinéma Plaza Cinema-Hotel features 17 rooms equipped with projection systems and immersive audio, © Roman Lusser.

ARCHITECTURE

In Geneva, few buildings embody the postwar modernist spirit with such force. Designed between 1951 and 1953 by the architect Marc J. Saugey, the building expresses a profoundly new vision of the city, inspired by major American metropolises: a place where shops, cinema, dining, offices and circulation spaces merge into a single architectural continuum. More than a building, Saugey conceived a total urban experience: fluid, open and shaped as much by the movement of passersby as by light itself.

The genius of the Plaza lies notably in its movie theater, a true technical and aesthetic manifesto. Suspended above the audience, six immense aluminium trusses rising ten meters high form a spectacular roof structure deliberately left exposed. Accentuated by neon lighting, these futuristic forms represented, in the early 1950s, a pioneering achievement both in Switzerland and across Europe. The eye moves freely through this vast volume without visual obstruction: the balcony and the promenoir —a suspended foyer-gallery halfway up the auditorium— seem to float in space thanks to the bold engineering developed with engineer Pierre Froidevaux.

For Saugey, architecture was above all a matter of movement and sequence. The Plaza unfolds like a cinematic scene: from the sidewalk of Rue du Cendrier to the foot of the screen, visitors progress seamlessly, guided by shop windows, transparencies, lights and perspectives. The cinema foyer acts as a miniature urban crossroads where the boundaries between public and commercial space dissolve. This fluidity became one of the defining motifs of Saugey's work, whose covered passages, ramps and glazed façades profoundly shaped Geneva's urban landscape. Built on a sloping site at the corner of Rue du Cendrier and Rue de Chantepoulet, the complex deploys an ingenious system of ramps, public passageways and continuous circulation linking the street naturally to the various entrances of the building.

The current restoration seeks to recover this original coherence down to the smallest details. Through stratigraphic analyses and extensive archival research, the architects have restored the original colors, illuminated cornices, door handles, shop windows, mailboxes and even the raised signage designed by Saugey. Everywhere, the same attention is paid to the continuity of materials, the softness of thresholds and the organic elegance that defines his architectural language.

The complete reopening of the site, scheduled for the end of 2026, will reveal a Plaza restored in all its spectacular dimension. Faithful to Saugey's spirit, the project does not seek to freeze the building in nostalgia, but rather to extend its original ambition: to make architecture an art of movement, perception and collective experience.





Exterior view of the Cinéma Plaza in 1953, photographer unknown.

Neon lines highlight the aluminium trusses of the roof structure, © Max Kettel.

HISTORY

Inaugurated in November 1952, the Plaza immediately established itself as a major landmark in Geneva's cultural history. Passionate about cinema and a fervent advocate of innovation, Marc J. Saugey envisioned the largest movie theater in Geneva, with 1,250 seats, and one of the largest in Switzerland. Its immense screen, conceived as a true theatrical stage, was framed in gilded wood and enhanced by an ingenious curtain system that will be reintroduced after the renovation thanks to an international art competition.

The cinema opened in 1952 with *Le Petit Monde de Don Camillo* by Julien Duvivier. But it was in 1953 that the Plaza confirmed its pioneering status by hosting Switzerland's first Cinemascope screening with *The Robe* by Henry Koster, simultaneously with its international premieres in Los Angeles, New York and Paris. Over the decades, the Plaza became an essential venue for cinematic spectacle. Popular successes such as *Fantômas*, *Doctor Zhivago*—which remained on screen for more than three months in 1966—*E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* and *Titanic* drew generations of moviegoers.

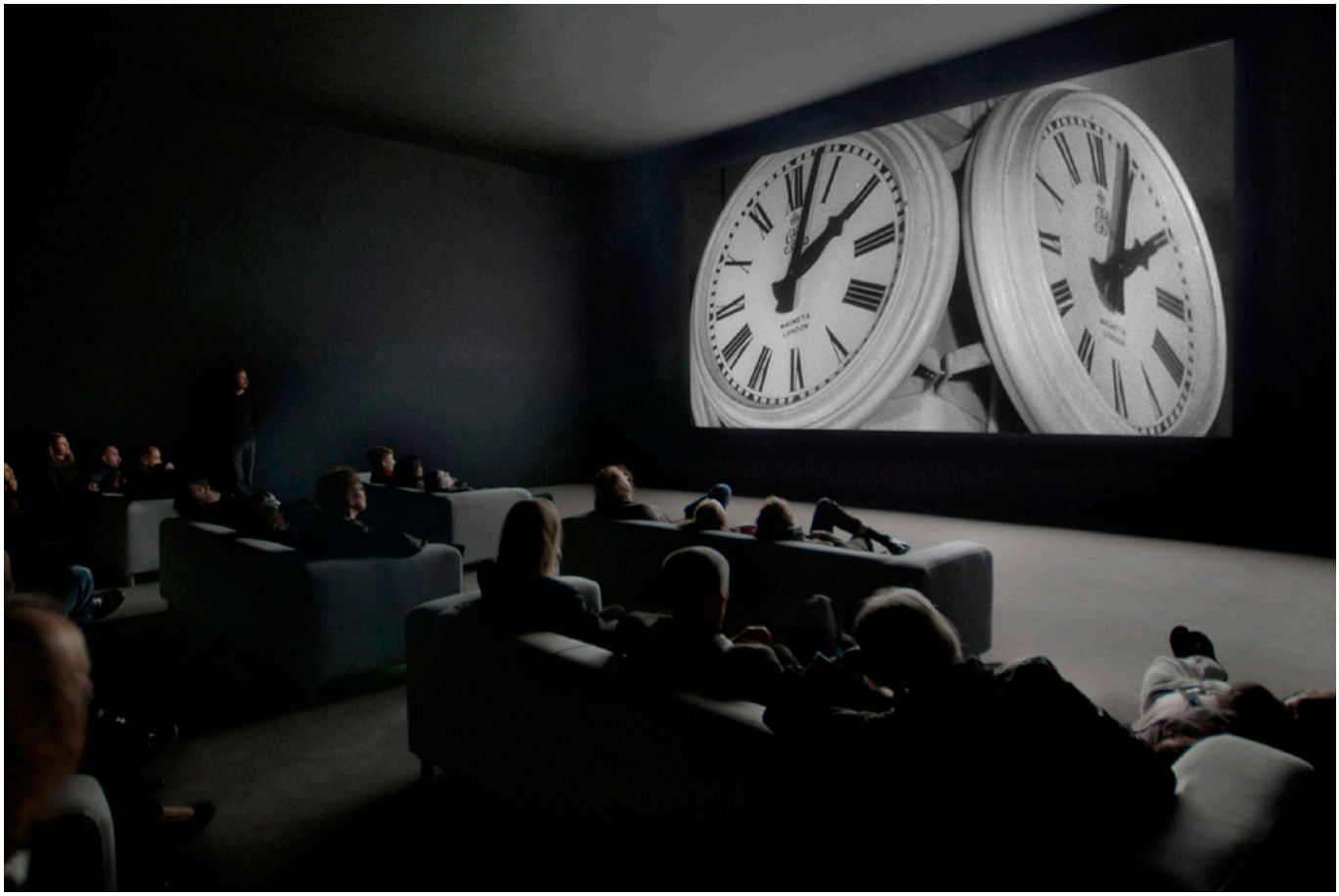
The precise history of these screenings could later be reconstructed thanks to the meticulous notebooks of Carlo Sartorelli, the cinema's emblematic projectionist for more than thirty years. These archives are filled with vivid anecdotes, such as the spectacular installation in 1977 of a giant gorilla on the cinema's marquee, evoking the skyscrapers of New York against the curtain-wall façade of Mont-Blanc Centre. Such memories continue to nourish the collective imagination today: James Bond nights, premieres, rediscoveries of classics and excursions into auteur cinema.

But after the prosperous postwar years, changing cultural practices and the crisis affecting downtown movie theaters led to a slow decline. The Plaza eventually closed its doors in early 2004, opening a new chapter: that of its survival. What followed was a long struggle for its preservation, led by architectural historians, cultural professionals and numerous citizens attached to this iconic place.

The decisive turning point came in 2019, when the Fondation Hans Wilsdorf acquired the entire site and created a dedicated foundation. Before renovation work began, the Plaza Foundation launched a prelude of events designed to keep the venue alive. Christian Marclay's cult work *The Clock*—a monumental twenty-four-hour cinematic clock—was shown there for several weeks. Gilles Jobin combined choreography, digital arts and live motion capture in the performance *Virtual Crossings*. The Foundation also invited actress Isabelle Huppert to present her cinematic pantheon, as well as filmmaker Mark Cousins to revisit the history of cinema through the singular perspective of his sprawling film works.

During the renovation works, the façades themselves became sites for artistic interventions. Among them were poster series by Fabienne Radi and Clovis Duran, which ironically decontextualized films once screened at the Plaza, followed by the publication *Il était une fois Le Plaza*. And finally, how could one fail to mention the Plaza's historic neon sign crowning the main façade? Instead of announcing the films currently showing, the luminous sign now addresses passersby through cinematic quotations renewed every three months by Geneva-based artist Christian Robert-Tissot. Transposed into urban space and the contemporary context, these quotations acquire new resonances and continue their journey through the imagination of each passerby.





Night view of the Cinéma Plaza in 1953, © Atelier Kern.

The Clock, the cult work by Christian Marclay, presented at Plaza during summer 2021, © Michel Giesbrecht.

CONTACTS

Sandra Mudronja
Director of Communications & Development
T +41 22 552 82 83
M +41 79 445 87 92
smudronja@fondation-plaza.ch

Francesca Serra
Communications & Press Relations Officer
T +41 22 552 82 85
M +41 78 811 61 75
fserra@fondation-plaza.ch

CENTRE
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Le Plaza Centre Cinéma
Rue de Chantepoulet 1, 1201 Genève
www.leplaza-cinema.ch