



outrage

We all now know Jean Nouvel's views on court house design – his almost cruelly severe building at Nantes is intended to warn the citizen that for all the supposed people-friendliness of modern democratic government, State justice is a powerful, unforgiving, unrelenting affair. The problem with these sorts of ideas is that as they filter down through the profession, less talented architects dress them up in less competent and palatable ways.

The recently completed Palais de Justice in Caen, in Normandy, by Architecture Studio of Paris, is a grotesque example of this phenomenon. The building itself is sharp and black, with its main entrance at a prow-like corner. Visitors to this new courtroom must climb 17 steps (passing a sort of monumental pot on the half landing when pausing for breath). Some of these visitors are, apparently, presumed guilty until proven otherwise, for tacky signs direct wheelchair users to their own entrance round the back. This, it emerges, is reached by running the gauntlet alongside the entrance for the police vans and what look like the service entries for the dustbins and the meter readers. TIMOTHY BRITAIN-CATLIN