

The Future of Urban housing: START-Ivry, Adaptable Affordable Homes for All

Award-winning project proves that human-centred design—not bigger budgets or size—can radically improve collective housing and address global urban challenges.

IVRY-SUR-SEINE, GREATER PARIS, FRANCE, November 27, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As cities worldwide struggle to provide housing that is both affordable and suited to rapidly evolving lifestyles, a landmark European project is offering a bold new blueprint. START-Ivry, designed by the architecture practice STAR strategies + architecture, is [redefining what contemporary housing can be](#): flexible, resilient, socially inclusive, and genuinely shaped around real human lives.



START-Ivry is part of a major urban redevelopment transforming former industrial land into a vibrant mixed-neighbourhood. © Nicolas Grosmond

Located just outside Paris, in Ivry-Sur-Seine, START-Ivry is part of a major urban redevelopment

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Today, behind photogenic façades and ambitious energy labels often lie shockingly mediocre and standardised dwellings. Our diverse society cannot be contained within a standardised plan.”

*Beatriz Ramo, Founder of
STAR strategies + architecture,
Rotterdam*

transforming former industrial land into a vibrant mixed-neighbourhood. But while many new housing schemes replicate outdated standards, START-Ivry proposes an entirely different model.

“At a time when families are more diverse than ever, homes must evolve with people — not force people to fit into rigid standardised layouts,” says Spanish architect Beatriz Ramo, founder of the Dutch office STAR strategies + architecture.

In START-Ivry, adaptability begins on day one. Many dwellings are already versatile enough to host different household types without change, including the ‘signature’

super-adaptable two-bedroom unit for family and non-family cohabitation. Others can easily expand, merge, transform or reconfigure as life evolves. In this project, the housing adapts to its residents — not the reverse.

This human-centred design method, developed over more than a decade of research, [challenges conventional housing production](#), which prioritises square-metre efficiency over quality of life. Instead, START-Ivry focuses on spatial flexibility, long-term sustainability, and the idea that resilient homes must be capable of absorbing life's many changes.

Around the world, cities are struggling with rising housing costs, shrinking household sizes, ageing populations and unprecedented household diversity and mobility. Adaptable housing is emerging as a critical urban infrastructure — as essential as resilient energy or transport systems.

“A dwelling does not host numbers but people; it hosts life in all its unpredictable, disorderly and non-standard forms. Our diverse society cannot be captured in a standardised plan,” points Beatriz Ramo.

The project has gained significant international attention, receiving more than twenty awards and nominations, including recognitions from the [AZ Azure Awards](#), Architizer, the BCIA British Construction and Infrastructure Awards, the German Design Awards, Archello, and the Baffa Rivolta Prize.

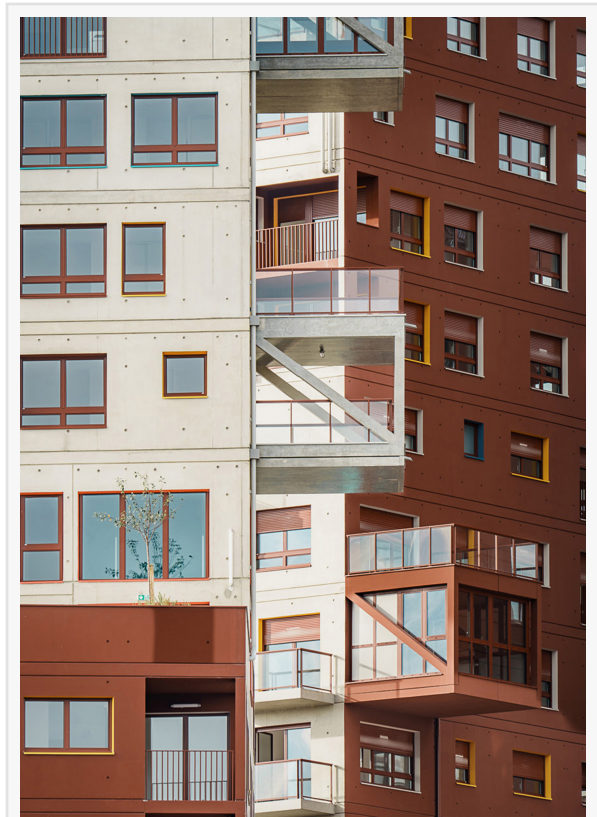
As global cities prepare for demographic shifts, climate constraints and rising housing pressures, START-Ivry demonstrates how architecture can offer solutions rooted in adaptability, social mix and urban resilience, without adding surface or budget.

By allowing homes to evolve with their residents, adaptable housing can also reduce forced moves, support intergenerational living and strengthen social stability — crucial issues in today's urban environments.

“The future of housing isn't about collecting green certificates,” adds Ramo. “It's about creating homes that support how people actually live — and how their lives will change.”

About STAR strategies + architecture

STAR is a Rotterdam-based architecture and research office working at the intersection of design,



START-Ivry is redefining what contemporary housing can be: flexible, resilient, socially inclusive, and genuinely shaped around real human lives. © Nicolas Grosmond

urban strategy and housing innovation. The practice is internationally recognised for its pioneering research on adaptability and for creating flexible living environments for 21st-century cities.

Beatriz Ramo, founder of STAR, is a recognised critical voice in collective housing. She challenges the ongoing standardisation of housing production. Her research and built work advocate for adaptable designs that respond to the diversity and evolving needs of contemporary households — a position that has contributed meaningfully to the debate on housing quality. Ramo is also managing contributing editor of MONU – Magazine on Urbanism and served on the Scientific Committee of the AIGP- Atelier International du Grand Paris (2012–2016), advising the French government on housing solutions.

START-Ivry is the materialisation of STAR's housing theories, developed over nearly a decade of research. STAR is currently preparing a book on its housing research and theories, in which START-Ivry is presented as a case study of a new way to conceive and produce housing.

COMPLETE PROJECT TEXT:

START-Ivry: Form follows life

- Rethinking housing from the inside out: a new generation of social and private housing, where the dwelling adapts to its inhabitants – and not the other way around
START-Ivry sets out to redefine housing culture. It rejects the prevailing standardisation of housing production and responds to the growing diversity of contemporary lifestyles. It rethinks housing from the inside — starting from the resident — restoring the central role of the floor plan, and boldly reversing the conventional process by starting with architecture: the architect is selected first, and developers are then invited to compete. START embodies a genuine paradigm shift.

START stands for Social, Transformable, Affordable and Resilient Typologies — housing solutions that respond to contemporary life. Located in Ivry-sur-Seine, a city historically linked to architectural innovation, START paves the way for a new cycle of experimentation in housing. START is both a manifesto and a demonstration: it proves that much better housing can be



Adaptable housing is emerging as a critical urban infrastructure — as essential as resilient energy or transport systems. © Nicolas Grosmond

achieved without increasing surface areas and within very constrained budgets. A pilot project. A vanguard.

At the confluence of the Seine and Marne rivers, in Ivry-sur-Seine, within Greater Paris, the five START buildings enjoy an exceptional site, comprise 288 dwellings – including social, intermediate and market-rate housing – and shape a new urban skyline for the city.

- Reconciling households and housing: a plural society faced with standardised plans

Households and housing have evolved along entirely different logics, creating a paradoxical mismatch between spaces and the people who live in them.

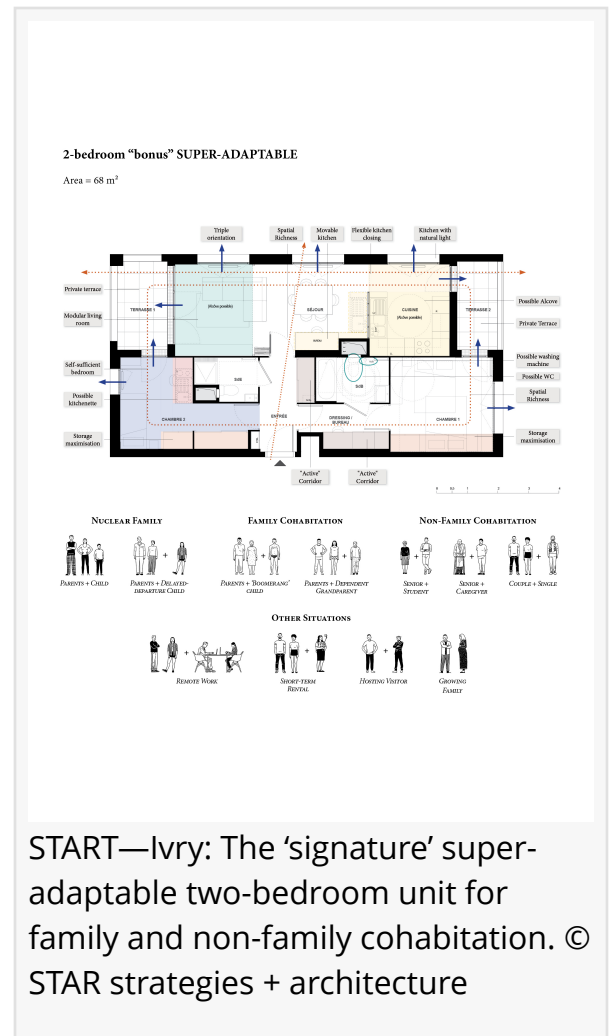
- Households have become extremely diverse: single-parent families, blended families, unemployed young people, elderly requiring assistance, non-family cohabitations, remote workers, "boomerang" children...

- Housing, meanwhile, has followed a different trajectory: standardised by numbers and regulations, it serves developer logic far more than the realities of how people live. Behind attractive façades, it often hides the poverty of ambition on the inside.

Contemporary society, with all its contradictions and diversity, cannot be captured in the uniformity of a standardised plan. START builds on this richness: a project conceived from the inhabitants and their ways of living, creating housing tailored to their circumstances and able to adapt to life's changes. Dwellings are enlarged in anticipation of a child; a kitchen is relocated to create an extra bedroom; children's rooms are transformed into a rental studio; a neighbouring unit is purchased to extend the current one; or, even in its initial state, the dwelling already accommodates a wide range of users and situations... In this project, it is the housing that adapts to its inhabitants, not the other way around.

- START Founding principles

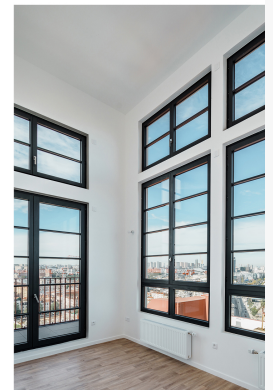
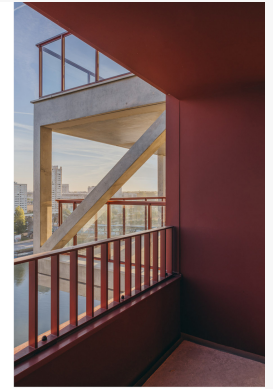
The project offers a wide range of typologies and solutions, from studios to five-bedroom units, including many intermediate configurations called "bonus" and "plus". It is structured around three complementary sets of principles:



- The 10 Adaptability Principles ensure flexibility and resilience in the dwellings over time. Examples include divisible large units, “plus” alcove rooms serving especially single parents or those working from home, modular living rooms, and super-adaptable two-bedroom units designed to accommodate all kinds of cohabitation.

- The 8 Quality Principles, such as naturally lit kitchens and bathrooms, maximisation of storage space, or the minimisation or activation of corridors.

- The 10 Principles for a Good Tower set out the conditions for a positive, desirable density that integrates well into its context — including quality circulation spaces, shared spaces and terraces, and rich encounters with both the ground and the sky.



START-Ivry focuses on spatial flexibility, long-term sustainability, and the idea that resilient homes must be capable of absorbing life's many changes. © Nicolas Grosmond – Vladimir Partalo

- A narrative architecture: when the inside defines the building

The geometry of the volumes, the rhythm of the windows, and the colour accents — all central to START's identity — originate from its internal world. Here, the richness within shapes the exterior, not the reverse. The result is a vibrant architecture in which form, use, and meaning are inseparable — an architecture that transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary.

Geometry is in the service of dwellings: housing quality determines the depth of the volumes. Exceptionally slender — just 14 metres deep for buildings rising up to 56 metres — they maximise typological variety, natural light, ventilation, and views. Ninety percent of homes enjoy double or triple orientations, and most benefit from views of the Seine or the Marne. Each tower is structured into three distinct parts, offering three different readings: street, city, and sky, while a turquoise “band” of shared spaces at the seventh floor introduces a horizontal rhythm into the verticality.

The façades follow no rigid grid: windows, balconies, ‘plugs’, and loggias are placed to serve domestic use, from storage to adaptability. What might appear as “disorder” becomes the architectural expression of life, mirroring that of its inhabitants — at times controlled, at times

unpredictable.

Colour accents act as an architectural code, with a palette revealing interior functions: from typology-coded doors to window jambs coloured according to the function behind them. The main façade treatments — raw concrete and red paint — echo the architectural history of Ivry, particularly its emblematic concrete and brick buildings.

- Programme: surfaces and social mix

With a surface area of 22,863 m², including 19,700 m² of housing, START-Ivry spans five towers ranging from 13 to 19 storeys (including the ground floor) and incorporates a commercial plinth with 14 adaptable retail units, creating an active hub at the interface of several key facilities in the urban redevelopment zone. Restaurants, gyms, bakeries, pharmacies, supermarkets and hair salons are planned to serve both residents and the wider neighbourhood.

The programme includes 288 dwellings — up to 350 in case of future subdivisions — of which half are for homeownership, 34% are social housing, and the remainder are intermediate housing. Two of the five towers are mixed, combining different housing regimes, even on the same corridor — a configuration rarely seen in France, which START has chosen to explore.

All START dwellings – private, social and intermediate – share the use of communal spaces on the upper floors, including multi-purpose rooms and guest rooms, as well as more than 2,000 m² of shared terraces distributed at different heights.

START creates 2,600 m² of new public spaces at ground level: a central square facing the Seine, and two pedestrian alleys that cross the commercial plinth, link the square to the main avenue, and frame views of the iconic cable bridge over the Seine.

- Sustainability: what is the point of climate-adapted housing if housing is not adapted to the people who live in it?

START achieves a 20% reduction in energy consumption compared to current standards and uses 20% low-carbon concrete for both structure and façades, reducing materials and embodied carbon. Heating is provided by geothermal energy.

But START goes far beyond environmental performance. Today, a building can collect “green” certifications while failing to respond to the realities of contemporary life. START reintroduces a dimension often forgotten in sustainability debates: the inhabitant and their evolving spatial needs.

The current obsession with labelling makes unmeasurable issues secondary: an adult child moving back in, a live-in carer, empty bedrooms after children leave, the difficulties of a single parent, a divorce, a blended family, remote work... Housing must adapt to these real-life situations to be truly sustainable.

START places the inhabitant at the heart of design, integrating the social and economic dimensions into sustainability. Divisible dwellings, super-adaptable homes, and “plus” or “bonus” typologies are proof. For example, a divisible dwelling (≥ 3 bedrooms) embodies all three pillars:

- Social: adapts to changing spatial household needs.
- Environmental: creates a new dwelling without consuming extra resources.
- Economic: generates additional income through renting or selling the new unit.

- Inverse Method: challenging the status quo

Defying convention, START-Ivry began thanks to a pioneering process — the Inverse Method — devised by the municipal land developer and refined with the architect. Contrary to standard practice, the architect was selected first — based on a methodological proposal, not simply visual renderings — and the developers were then invited to compete based on the architect’s project. The brief was therefore not written by the developer, but by the architect.

For eight months, monthly design workshops brought together all stakeholders — the land manager, the architect, the municipality, urban planners, future developers (with their contractors and consultants) — around a shared project. All aspects were addressed collectively: design, construction, management, lifestyles...

The winning developer was selected for their ability to align with the architect’s project. The architect’s contract was transferred to them, while the land manager retained an active role to ensure continuity, embedding the design principles into the sale agreement and safeguarding the architect’s central role. Without the Inverse Method, START simply could not have come into being.

- Ivry-sur-Seine: a pioneer in housing

START, located in Ivry-sur-Seine, is part of a distinguished legacy of urban experimentation and has always championed ambitious public architecture as a tool for social transformation. This context enabled the emergence of visionary housing projects — notably the work of Jean Renaudie and Renée Gailhoustet — and with START, continues today to support innovative approaches to housing production.

This tradition gave rise to the ambition of hosting a pilot project which, through a fundamental rethink of the design process and meticulous attention to the housing plans, would propose new housing solutions

Governed almost continuously by the French Communist Party since 1925, Ivry-sur-Seine implements a price regulation policy through “controlled prices”, allowing a broad range of households to access high-quality housing in an otherwise inaccessible market.

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Prize List START-Ivry

2025

- Shortlisted - ARCHELLO Awards - "Housing Project of the Year – High Rise Tower" (ongoing);
- 2nd PRIZE GADA Awards (Re-Thinking the Future) - "Public Landscape – Built";
- SILVER WINNER - AMA Architecture Madrid Awards - "Residential Architecture" category;
- Longlisted - ARCHELLO Awards - "Public Space of the Year";
- WINNER - BLT Built Design Awards - "Architectural Design - Social Housing";
- WINNER - German Design Awards - "Excellent Architecture - Residential Architecture";
- PLATINUM WINNER - "Public & Urban Spaces (Landscape)", GOLD WINNER - "Housing Developments", and BRONZE WINNER - category "Residential Architecture" at the ADC Awards;
- FINALIST - Matilde Baffa Ugo Rivolta European Award for Social Housing (ongoing);
- WINNER of Batiactu Reader's Award - Trophées de la Construction;
- WINNER - LOOP Design Awards - "Architecture – Social Architecture", "Architecture – Multi Unit Housing", "Landscape – Public Space", "Landscape – Rooftop Design";
- Shortlisted - AHA Architecture Hunter - "Public & Urban Design", "Social Housing" and "High Rise Buildings";
- WINNER - RTF Rethinking the Future Awards - "Woman in Construction (Built)";
- WINNER - DNA Paris Design Awards - "Housing";
- PLATINUM WINNER of the Houzee Awards - "Social Housing", "Multi-Family Housing", "Affordable Housing", "Accessible and Inclusive Housing", "Urban Landscape Design", "Courtyard & Patio Design";
- FINALIST - BCIA British Construction and Infrastructure Awards - "International Project";
- WINNER of both Jury's and People's Choice Awards - AZ Awards - "Urban Design - Built developments";
- SPECIAL MENTION - Architizer A+ Awards - "Affordable Housing";

2024

- WINNER Prize ARVHA Femmes d'Architecture - « Œuvre original »;
- RUNNER-UP / 3rd PRIZE GADA Awards (Re-Thinking the Future) - "Housing (over 5 floors) – Built";
- WINNER - Prize Défis Urbains (Innovapresse), - « Modes d'habiter»;
- WINNER - Prize Classement des Promoteurs (Innovapresse) - « Réversibilité / modularité ».

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