

BNP PARIBAS

39-41 rue Grenette
LYON



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The bank for a changing world

39-41 RUE GRENETTE

In 1914, Banque Nationale de Crédit (BNC), a forerunner of BNP Paribas, acquired the whole block between 39 rue Grenette and 38-40 rue Dubois (today named *rue Henri-Germain*). During the AGM held on 12 April 1916, the directors announced that a building was already being constructed to meet the bank's growing business in Lyon. They additionally pointed out the "remarkable progress made by the branch in the beautiful and industrious city of Lyon, which spirit of initiative was reasserted once more with the inauguration of the Sample Fair, a true economic offensive." At the time, Lyon was one of Europe's largest banking centres and the First World War was still going on. This one-hundred-plus years of ownership enhances the unceasing commitment of BNP Paribas to customers and communities of the *Presqu'île* area, a historical cross-flow of European cultural and commercial traditions for centuries.



Rue Grenette with the Basilica of Fourvière.

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Lyon's location both at the **confluence of the Rhône and Saône rivers**, and the **crossroads of Northern and Southern France**, has without doubt played a major role in making the city what it is today. Starting out as the small Celtic village of **Condate** before becoming

the flourishing Roman regional capital **Lugdunum**, and then an ecclesiastical town under the **Germanic Holy Roman Empire**, Lyon was joined to France as late as **1312** in the reign of King Philip IV, known as The Fair. Shortly, the French monarchy favoured the city with

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The main staircase.

minting royal coinage and holding annual fairs where trade settlements used the bills of exchange, an innovative mean of payment originating in Italy. Thanks to the Italian and German merchant bankers, the town became the beating heart of banking operations where the **prices of the European currencies** were fixed and the **interest rates** charged, however the latter practice was prohibited elsewhere in France at the time.

In return, the Kings of France did like the **entrepreneurial spirit** in Lyon, where the printing and weaving industries developed successful businesses from the late 15th century onwards, plus its **festivals**, including the famous tournaments held at "rue Grenette", as well as its **financial abilities**. Thus the French King Henri II issued a royal bond in 1555, called the **Grand Parti de Lyon**, to pay for the costly Italian Wars. The loan included **stupendous modern** features, using as a first the assimilation and constant annuities techniques, although the algebraic formula being only discovered by French-born mathematician Antoine Deparcieux in 1742.

Lyon's financial sector was dominated by **family-run banking houses, originating from manufacturing and silk trading**, until the advent of the banking institutions founded in the wake of the French legislation passed in 1848 and 1863. As a result of this modern banking concept, these new credit institutions were attracted by Lyon's booming economy and hastened to open branches, competing with the local banks in their traditional markets. That was what the Comptoir National d'Escompte de Paris (CNEP), another forerunner of BNP Paribas, did in 1868. Under the same circumstances, **in 1910 the Comptoir d'Escompte de Mulhouse (CEM) acquired Banque De Riaz Audra & Cie**,

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The vault.

which had been set up by a Swiss cloth manufacturing family towards the end of the 18th century at 10, quai de Retz (nowadays called *quai Jean-Moulin*), a prestigious address at the time. The manager was Auguste de Riaz, an 85-year-old Huguenot from Agen, whose son Henri famously preferred literature and the arts to financial affairs.

BNC was set up in 1913 to take over the French branch network of the Alsace-based CEM, which headquarters were in German territory at the time. Then BNC, which wanted its Lyon business to switch to the main banks branch network model, took advantage of the real estate opportunity offered by the **1895 road-widening decree affecting "rue Grenette"**, to move its offices to

the *Presqu'île* business district designed during the **French Second Empire** (1852-1870).

"Rue Grenette" was first laid out around 1350, when a rampart, constructed after a flood had devastated the *Presqu'île* in 580, was demolished. At the time it was called "rue des Albergeries" (Street of the Inns) due to the many hostelries there. **During the Renaissance, being one of the widest and prettiest streets in the city**, it was a well suited venue for both commercial and festive events. It was also a major European centre for humanism and poetry, where such notables as **Louise Labé** and **Clément Marot** strolled daily, as did **François Rabelais**, a doctor at the nearby "Hôtel-Dieu" (the city's main hospital) who was currently writing "Gargantua and Pantagruel". Only

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The number 41 entrance door arched pediment with the Mercury relief.



The glass roof of the hall.

in 1615 did the street take its present name when the **grain market** was started up there.

Construction in the district forged ahead during the 18th and 19th centuries, and “rue Grenette” became lined with **Lyon-styled rental houses** boasting narrow facades with deep vaulted cellars and entry halls extending up to the parallel street. The ground floors were laid out as shops, while the upper floors were divided into apartments. Number 39 “rue Grenette” was home first to **soft drinks manufacturer Goujon**, then **café-owner Chapa**, then Duclos’ famous **restaurant Aux escargots de Bourgogne** - The Burgundy Snail -, which prided upon selling the best oysters at the lowest price.

When purchased by BNC, number 39 had been rebuilt on the surface area alike but came along with a large adjacent lot where three neighbouring houses had been demolished. The bank built its branch there following the praised banking architecture of the time. Hence, it flaunts the **eclectic style** with an asymmetrical façade retaining the original side entry span crowned by an **arched pediment with an oculus**. The entrance door, framed by **Tuscan columns**, is topped by a **relief depicting Mercury**. The five regular spans are punctuated by **colossal order ungrooved engaged columns with Ionic capitals**. The yellow stone adorning the front façade and the grey stone covering the rough-cut bossages of the basement may indicate a supply from the nearby **Saint-Cyr-au-Mont-d’Or quarries**. As it sports five arches at ground floor level, balustrades and **Neo-Renaissance embellishments**, the new edifice bears a resemblance to the **Loge du Change**, Lyon’s first stock exchange building, designed between 1631 and 1651 and now the Protestant church since 1803. Laid out by the French company **Fichet**, since the vault was wisely

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The roof terrace overlooking the Palace of Commerce.

fitted in the cellar. The main hall was covered by a glass roof, which was replaced in 1927 under the direction of **local architect René Revoux**, with a glass sky made of translucent concrete.

From the day **it opened in September 1922**, the Lyon-Grenette branch was BNC's largest. In 1932, it was transferred to the Banque Nationale pour le Commerce et l'Industrie (BNCI), set up to take over the assets of BNC, which was liquidated in the wake of the 1929 crash. As business increased, BNCI set up there a **regional back-office** as early as 1936, to handle accounting and collection for Southeastern France.

Banque Nationale de Paris (BNP), formed by the merger of BNCI and CNEP in 1966, equipped the premises with a tele-phone switchboard and computers alike the main

offices in Paris. Later on, in 1975, "rue Grenette" became home to the **first Regional Division** and in 1988 accommodated the first regional dealing room while the sixth floor was renovated and the new roof terrace implemented. In 2000, the sills of the three windows at the centre of the façade were lowered to create a direct access to the new ATM hall, hence broadly opening up the branch in its historic neighbourhood which is **one of Europe's largest commercial areas**. In a **determined move to keep pace** with the latest customer requirements, the bank carried out a further renovation project in 2008-2009.

The building, which is situated in the *Vieux Lyon* – Old Lyon - area that was designated a **UNESCO world heritage site** in 1998, today hosts, alongside the Regional Division, a branch plus a Private Banking Centre.



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