

Architect Manuelle Gautrand adds soul to Parramatta's plans

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French architect Manuelle Gautrand has plans for the Parramatta Square cultural centre. Picture: Neil Fenelon

Globally renowned architect Manuelle Gautrand is bringing lessons learned from Paris's famous La Defense business district to ensure Sydney's Parramatta is never slapped with the same ghost town moniker.

The French architect has been named alongside Australian firms DesignInc and Lacoste + Stevenson as the designer of the landmark \$50 million cultural space at the heart the \$2bn Parramatta Square urban renewal plan that will transform the outlying hub into Sydney's second CBD.

Yet in approaching the development, Gautrand will be borrowing from experiences learned at the world's best known and most controversial satellite CBD on the fringes of Paris. "La Defense has very beautiful architecture and towers that are very interesting, but the problem is that its monoprogrammatic, it's only a CBD and there isn't enough housing and if you don't have enough housing there won't be any life," Gautrand told *The Australian*.

“Business has to be absolutely integrated with housing and other [amenities] ... you cannot have places that you go to work and with nowhere there for you to live.”

Built more than 50 years ago, La Defense on Paris’s outskirts attracts more than 180,000 workers a day and is headquarters to 15 of the world’s top 50 companies, but limited plans for housing from the outset means it has faced persistent problems with its streetscape and retaining a population beyond business hours.

Parramatta is likely to be more successful in its evolution into Sydney’s second CBD, Gautrand said, as it has a growing residential population and multiple commitments from developers and the council for many cultural spaces, open spaces and sports facilities.

“You need to add a lot of other functions; there needs to be housing, there needs to be sports and cultural [facilities]. To be a liveable city, you need to have a mix of programs, and an integration of different [buildings],” Gautrand said.

Gautrand, who is best known for projects including Barclays Bank: “Origami” headquarters in Paris and Citroen’s sculptural head office and showroom on the Champs Elysees, will add to the precinct with Five Parramatta Square, a new cultural centre anchoring the 3ha Parramatta Square civic plaza, business and retail zone that will become the centrepiece of the suburb.

The transparent glass building fronted by a sprawling LED screen for public art projections and cantilevered over the existing town hall will become the new home for Parramatta’s library.

Other new age features will include a rooftop garden and external surfaces throughout designed for public art projects.

Parramatta Council alongside Walker Corporation, Charter Hall and other developers are each responsible for parcels at Parramatta Square, while the state government will connect the suburb located more than 23km from the centre of Sydney with a \$1bn light rail network.