

Sites and their stories

Q&A / MANUELLE GAUTRAND

According to award-winning architect Manuelle Gautrand, developers need to understand the land they're building on to truly succeed – when it comes to both sustainability and, just as importantly, emotion.

By Nic Mousse
Photography Alex Crétey Systemans

Manuelle Gautrand is a force in contemporary French architecture. Based in Paris, she has, for more than 20 years, been helping to shape French cities with a combination of commercial, retail, cultural and residential projects – often adeptly combining such uses into impressive mixed-use projects. A winner of the European Prize for Architecture in 2017 (she was the first woman and first French architect to be awarded the gong), she has completed a number of notable buildings in Paris, including the Citroën's C42 showroom on the Champs-Élysées and the AVA Tower at La Défense. We visited her studio near Place de la Bastille to find out how the city she calls home has shaped her work.

You were born in Marseille and studied in Montpellier. Why base your studio in Paris?
Paris is the central hub in France, it's very easy to get anywhere in France from here and so many other designers are based here. But I'm in love with Paris, so the reason I stay is for personal pleasure. It's my city. It's very important to be rooted in a city because the more you are rooted somewhere, the more deeply you understand that place and can observe its evolution.

How do you go about understanding a new place or site you're working on?
When we start a project, we analyse the site deeply to understand its DNA. We look at its geography, topography, weather and climate. But we also look at the culture of the site and its history, unpacking what the story of the site was from generation to generation. A project rooted in the place can emerge. My aim is to also create an architecture that is personal and emotional, which might involve reinterpreting historical elements in a contemporary way.

You don't have a trademark style that visually connects your projects. Does this site analysis play a part in the creation of distinct buildings?
This analysis ensures that I don't create generic architecture and that I don't have to rely on ready-made or standard solutions. We don't want to create buildings that can be easily labelled. Part of ensuring that this is the case also comes from finding a unique ecological solution for each project, specific to the ecology of a site. This begins with the master plan and the way you orient a building and its relationship with its neighbours. But it's also about trying to work with natural ventilation and minimise the need to rely on heating. I also like to reuse materials but, rather than simply recycling them, I like to metamorphose them.

Can you provide an example of this?
We have a residential project in Montpellier where we were innovative in terms of sustainability. We had to excavate 12,000 cubic metres of soil to build basement parking for the apartment and we decided to use the soil to create these beautiful, rammed-earth blocks. We will work with a local company to manufacture them. When it's complete later this year, it will be the first building in France to use rammed earth at that scale.

Does having a strong understanding of a place and its ecology deliver more sustainable architecture?
Yes. And it's very important to get the message across that sustainability is not painful. We are facing a huge environmental crisis and lots of people are stressed and anxious. But architects can act and do work that is sustainable, that doesn't result in sad buildings. Sustainability can be playful and it can be generous, and it's important to realise this.



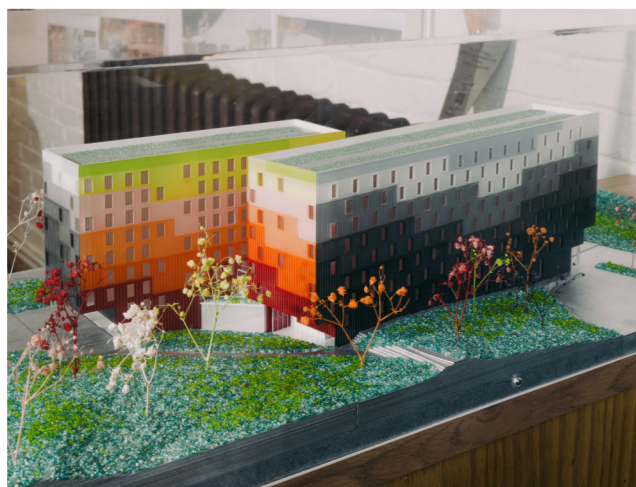
(1) Model making (2) The studio near Place de La Bastille (3) Material samples (4) Manuelle Gautrand (5) Model for a hotel at Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport (6) Building cross section



The CV
Born in Marseille, Manuelle Gautrand studied architecture at Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture in Montpellier, where she founded her namesake studio in 1991. By 1993 she had relocated to Paris and hasn't looked back since, picking up awards from the likes of the French Academie d'Architecture and Mipim, the American Architecture Prize, the German Design Award and, most notably, the European Prize for Architecture. Major projects in the French capital include the Citroën C42 showroom on the Champs-Élysées, the La Gaité Lyrique arts centre and the Pathé Alésia cinema.

“Architects can do work that is sustainable, that doesn't result in sad buildings. Sustainability can be playful”

How are sustainability requirements shaping contemporary French architecture?
Development regulations are changing in France, which means that infill developments, reuse and refurbishments will be prioritised in cities. It's an area I've been working in for a long time: one of my first projects was the Museum of Modern, Contemporary and Outsider Art in Lille, where I refurbished the existing building and added an extension. It's interesting to work on a building made by somebody else because you enter into the mind of another architect. It's important to remember that one plus one can make three.
manuelle-gautrand.com



STUDIO WE'D HIRE / FESTEN ARCHITECTURE

How to create a universe



The design duo behind Paris-based interiors studio Festen Architecture, founded by business-and-life partners Charlotte de Tonnac and Hugo Sauzay, are at the forefront of the city's interior architectural output. Their work can be found at restaurants, nightclubs and hotels across the French capital – including the Château Voltaire and the buzzy Hôtel Le Pigalle – but also in the south of France at the Roches Rouges hotel and near Portofino, at the Splendido del Mare by Belmond.

When MONOCLE meets De Tonnac for a coffee near the Jardins du Palais-Royal, she is between meetings about a forthcoming hotel on the Rue Balzac and

projects further afield, including the restoration of an old convent in Nice, hotels in Mexico, Berlin and the Swiss Alps, and six residential projects in New York.

“Each project is a blank page and we always start from zero,” says De Tonnac after enumerating what's on her busy docket. “We conduct a lot of research before starting something to learn about the history, culture and atmosphere of a place or building that we then translate through a Festen lens.”

In Mexico, De Tonnac and Sauzay are working with a local ceramicist who used to collaborate with late Mexican architect and engineer Luis Barragán. For interior design projects closer to home, the pair have fostered a long-term partnership with a woodworker who makes his own wax on an open flame to give the boiseries of a room a honeyed hue. “Almost every project of ours features a wood-panelled room because it's a material we love and continue to explore,” she adds. “It has an enveloping quality; it's sensual. I find it reassuring.”

Another big component of interior design by Festen is the mixing and mingling of furniture from different eras and bespoke pieces. “We like to bring in older, patinated elements to make a space feel more alive and less brand-new,” says De Tonnac, as she describes how a 19th-century *hôtel de ville* might feature furniture from the 1920s and the mid-century.

Festen now counts a team of 20 or so people to help but the creative dialogue between De Tonnac and Sauzay remains the starting point. “We don't have the exact same taste but there is a common design base that we share,” she says. “I have design references that keep coming back to me, mental images that I cherish or people's houses that I'm fascinated by, such as Cy Twombly's homes or Donald Judd's apartment in New York. I like it when people create their own universe and the essence of a person is in a house.”

festenarchitecture.com
• GRACE CHARLTON

AT HOME WITH... / MARION STORA

The perfect setting

Interior designer Marion Stora and her husband, Didier, were rushing through Paris on their way to an Italian language lesson when they saw a “for sale” banner hung up on the balcony of an apartment. It was early 2018 and the couple were planning a move to Rome. But a few steps from the Champs de Mars on the bustling streets of the French capital's Left Bank, the couple stopped in their tracks.

“It was a chance viewing but it upended our plans for the future,” says Stora. “We immediately fell in love with the apartment and cancelled our move to Italy.”

Set in a 19th-century building, the apartment featured original arched windows and doors – good bones that immediately appealed to Stora. “Then there are the views,” she adds. “From the living room, we can see three different streets, over the city's rooftops and on to the Eiffel Tower.”

Working with Paris-based landscape artist Arnaud Casaus, Stora populated the balcony spaces with lush grasses and climbing plants. Inside, the designer drew inspiration from galleries and auction houses – Bauhaus specialists Galerie Desprez Breheret, Finnish auction house Anmaris and Galerie Anne-Sophie Duval, known for its art deco treasures, went on to inform the furnishing.

Six years on, Stora has created a harmonious dwelling space for her family.

“Through my work, I create spaces that tell the stories of its inhabitants. In our case, it meant thinking of everything I brought into the apartment as a gift to our son,” says Stora. “But it was also about creating a setting for our family – throughout the process I knew that I couldn't create beauty without comfort.”

It might have been a spur-of-the-moment decision but it evolved into a project that has left the architect well pleased to bring similar Parisian sensibilities to other homeowners in the French capital.

marionstora.com
• JULIA LASICA



FURNITURE / FRANCE

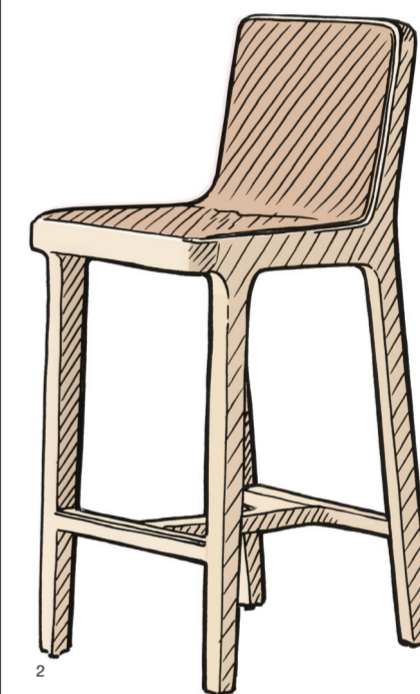
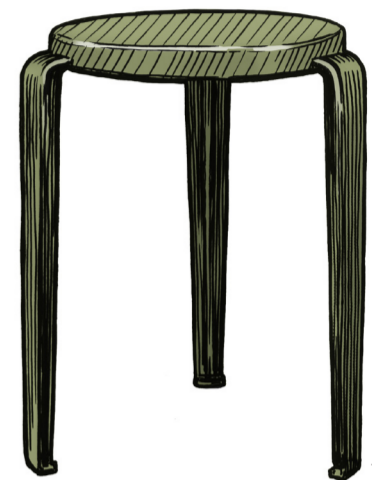
France is renowned for its fine furniture. For those looking to furnish their home or office with distinctly Gallic flair, here are five of our favourite pieces.

By Nic Mousse
Illustration Anje Jager

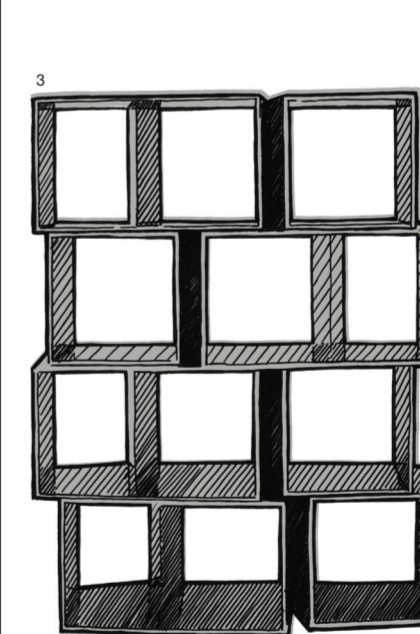
FIVE FRENCH OBJECTS

1 LOU STOOL, TIPTOE × MONOCLE

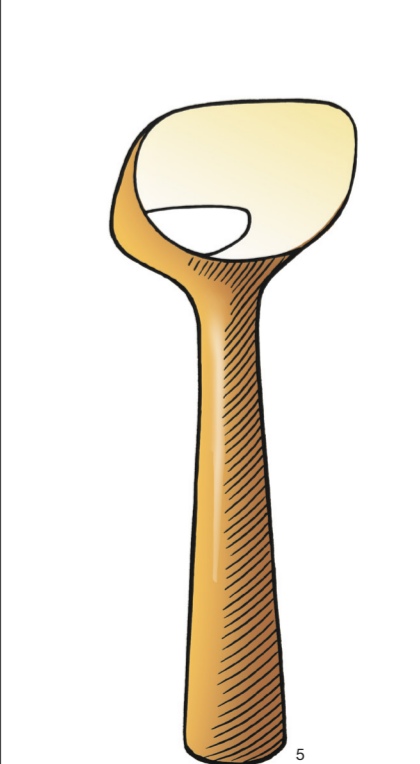
Tiptoe and Monocle have collaborated on this exclusive colourway of the Lou stool, an easy-to-assemble perch that can serve as a seat, bedside or side table. Made in Europe from sustainably sourced oak, with powder-coated steel legs, it's finished in an olive hue, is stackable and recyclable and is a hardy addition to any home.
tiptoe.fr



2 EMEA STOOL, ALKI
French furniture manufacturer Alki is celebrating 20 years of its Emea collection this year. The line was first designed by Jean Louis Irtzoki in 2004 and consists of stools, chairs and tables with clean and gently curved silhouettes. Our pick of the bunch is the stool, which is the perfect perch for a late-night tippie.
alki.fr



3 CUTS BOOKSHELF, LIGNE ROSET
French furniture heavyweight Ligne Roset tapped Philippe Nigro to shake up the form of typically dull bookcases. The result is Cuts, a grouping of three parallelepiped forms offset at 20-degree angles. Cuts modules can be stacked in a range of configurations, allowing it to be tailored to suit any space.
ligne-roset.com



4 BEAU RIVAGE CHAIR, RUDY GUÉNAIRE
Rudy Guénaire's handsome, Bauhaus-inspired Beau Rivage chair is part of the designer's partnership with Paris-based online design marketplace Monde Singulier. Made from tubular steel and upholstered in pearl-white Alcantara fabric and cream or matte-brown leather, the chair evokes the designs of Europe's interwar years.
monde-singulier.com



CARPENTRY / GENNEVILLIERS

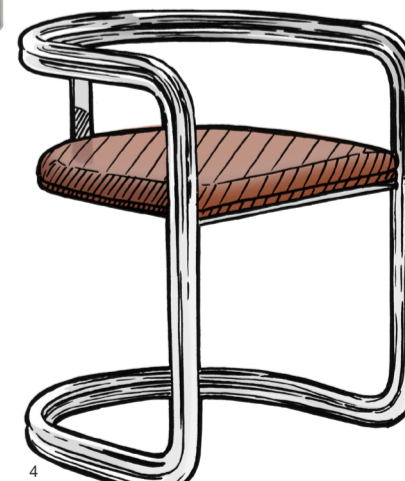
Second chances

In the Parisian suburb of Gennevilliers, Atelier Extramuros, a carpentry workshop, creates furniture from wood that would otherwise be wasted. Situated on the premises of the waste-management company Veolia, the workshop nabs material from the 200 to 400 trucks that visit every day – each carrying around 30 tonnes. “It's not that sexy being here but it's important,” says Laëticia Rouch, director of Atelier Extramuros. “You never know what you might find.”

Atelier Extramuros is also a social project that helps those struggling to find jobs to acquire woodworking skills, offering apprenticeships from four months to two years. “We're conducting a fight against waste: waste of material but also of human capabilities,” says co-founder Jean-François Connan. “We can't cast people aside.” What began as a Paris-based community project in 2005 now welcomes about 200 apprentices per year.

“We employ and train people facing educational, familial or social difficulties, people with disabilities, refugees,” says Connan. About 80 per cent of Atelier Extramuros' carpenters go on to find employment as carpenters, framers, basket-weavers and even luthiers. The workshop's primary output revolves around creating projects for companies and organisations including L'Oréal and Unesco. Tables for boardrooms and bookcases can be made to measure.

As conversations in the design world continue to move towards reusing materials, Connan and Rouch are glad to see the shift. “We welcome people trying to start their own upcycling business because it's good to have competition,” says Rouch. “If more people realise that there is an alternative to buying brand new, that's ultimately positive for us all.”
atelier-extramuros.com
• GRACE CHARLTON



5 NONETTE FLOOR LAMP, ROCHE BOBOIS
Designed by Cédric Ragot, this ceramic enamel floor lamp is inspired by the silhouette of a nun carrying her corset hat. The resulting, oblong-shaped lamp-head gently diffuses light. The effect? An appropriately ethereal glow.
roche-bobois.com