

MARK

ANOTHER
ARCHITECTURE

MARK #9

AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2007

EUROPE €19.95 / UK £14
JAPAN ¥ 3,570 / KOREA ₩ 40,000 / WON
CANADA \$ 29.50 / USA \$ 24.95

BY THE MAKERS OF
FRAME

FRONTAL IMPACT

CARCHITECTURE
IN PARIS



8 710966 141267

CRUMPLE ZONE

**THE NEW CITROËN SHOWROOM IN
PARIS, DESIGNED BY MANUELLE
GAUTRAND, LOOKS LIKE IT HAS
JUST BEEN THROUGH A CRASH TEST.**

TEXT DAVID KEUNING
PHOTOS PHILIPPE RUALT

MANUELLE LAUTRAND



THIS PAGE THE FACADE IS FLAT ON THE
BOTTOM BUT BECOMES INCREASINGLY
EXPRESSIVE TOWARDS THE TOP.

'I DID NOT WANT THE
WORD CITROËN ANYWHERE
ON THE FAÇADE. THAT
WAS HARD FOR THEM
TO SWALLOW'

MANUELLE GAUTRAND



THIS PAGE THE GLASS FAÇADE OF THE CITROËN BUILDING STANDS AMONG THE ADJACENT BUILDINGS IN HAUSSMANN STYLE.

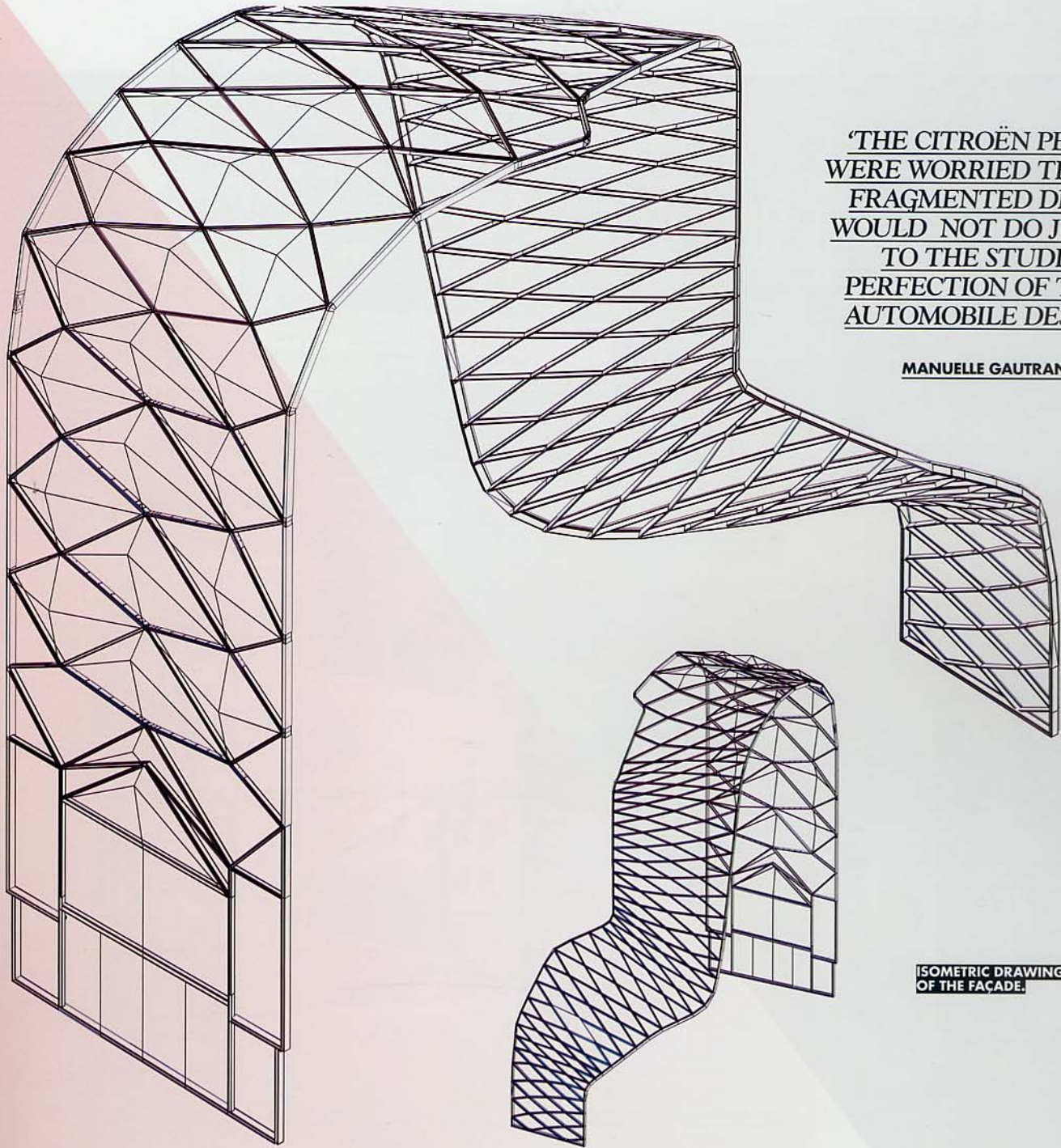
IN HER LATEST PROJECTS, MANUELLE Gautrand seems to be developing a remarkable predilection for crumpled façades. Not only does the Paris showroom of carmaker Citroën look like it has just been through a crash test, but the hotel for Oskar Jensen in Copenhagen and the Black Crystal office building in Amsterdam (both in development) bear the appearance of a crumpled wad of paper. 'Actually, I hate producing the same idea twice,' says Manuelle Gautrand. 'But in the case of the Black Crystal, for instance, the client absolutely loved my design for Citroën and wanted something similar. So I grudgingly consented.'

While the showroom at 42 Avenue des

Champs-Élysées thus marks the unintentional start of a signature formal idiom for Gautrand, the edifice is also part of a long tradition: not just for Citroën, but also for the Champs-Élysées as a location for carmakers' flagship stores. The property has been owned by Citroën since 1927 and has housed their main showroom for decades, designed on a monumental scale in the International Style. When parent company PSA ran into financial difficulties in the 1980s, it decided to rent out the expensive location for 20 years to a restaurant chain, which irreparably damaged the existing building. Soon after the millennium, many other carmakers began radical renovations of their showrooms on the avenue. Toyota hired

Ora İto, Franck Hammoutene took charge of the Renault location. Citroën felt it could not remain behind. In 2002, two years before the rental contract with the restaurant chain was due to expire, it launched a design competition for a new building. About 40 agencies took part in the first round, which was an ideas competition. The second round, which required a complete design, came down to five architects. Aside from Gautrand, these were Zaha Hadid, Christian de Portzamparc, Jacques Ferrier and Christian Biecher. Daniel Libeskind also made it through to the second round, but he did not complete a design.

The brief took up no more than two A4 sheets. 'Unlike the showrooms of other brands on the



'THE CITROËN PEOPLE
WERE WORRIED THAT MY
FRAGMENTED DESIGN
WOULD NOT DO JUSTICE
TO THE STUDIED
PERFECTION OF THEIR
AUTOMOBILE DESIGNS'

MANUELLE GAUTRAND

ISOMETRIC DRAWINGS
OF THE FAÇADE.

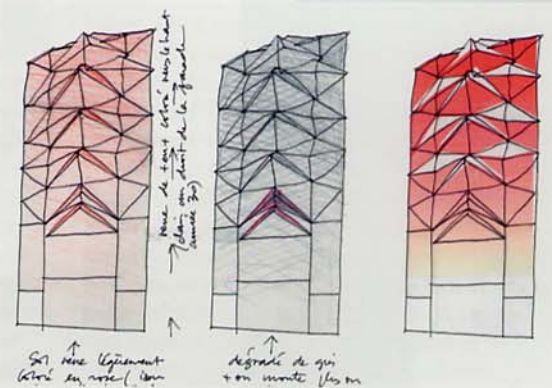
CONCEPT STUDY INTO
THE CHEVRON.



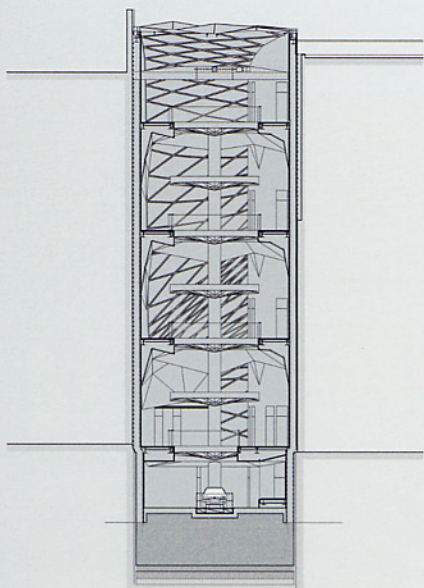
MODEL PHOTOS.



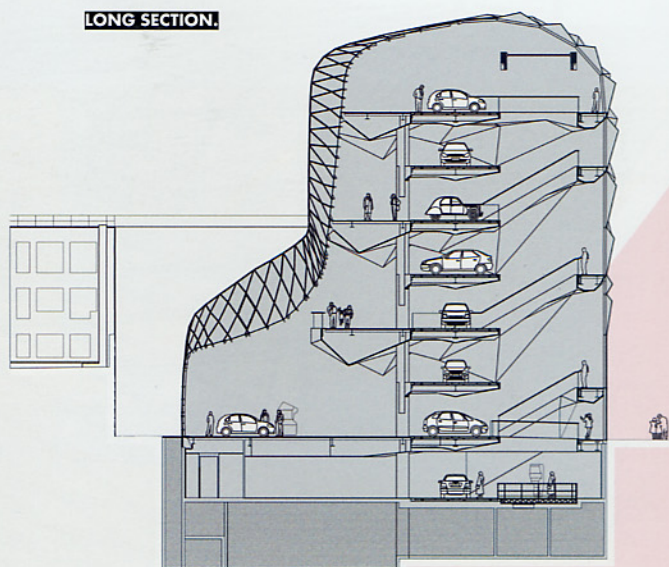
SKETCH OF THE FAÇADE WITH
DIFFERENT COLOUR STUDIES.



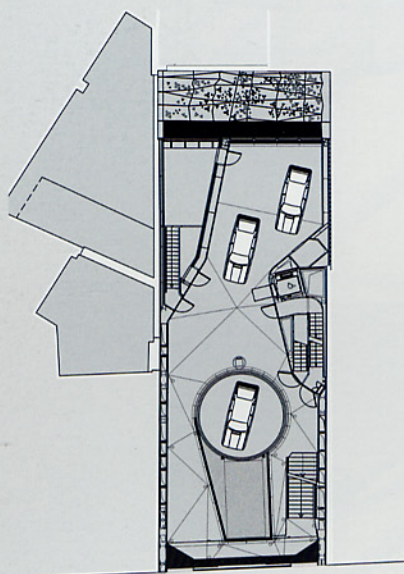
CROSS SECTION.



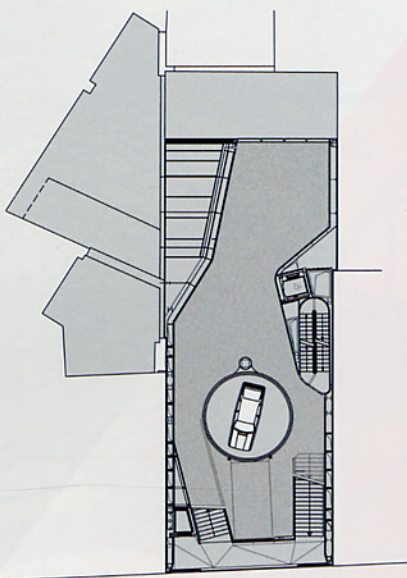
LONG SECTION.



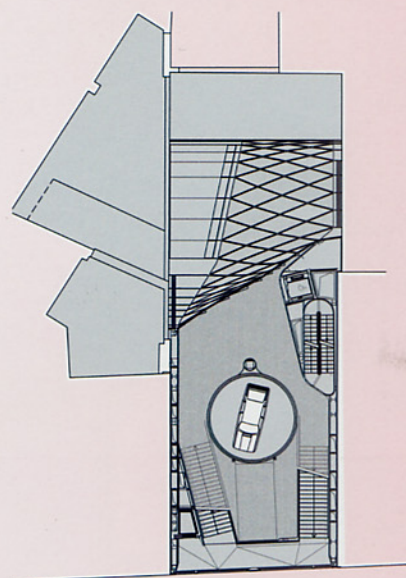
GROUND FLOOR.



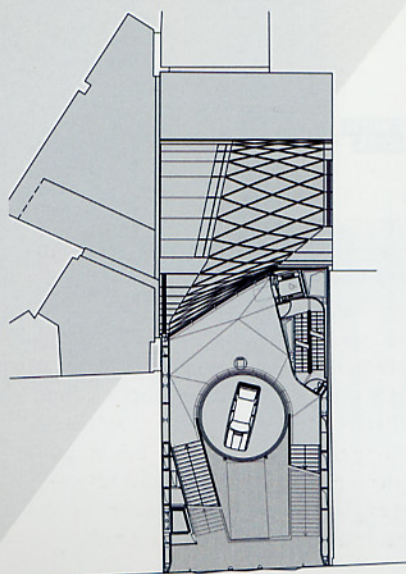
GROUND FLOOR MEZZANINE.



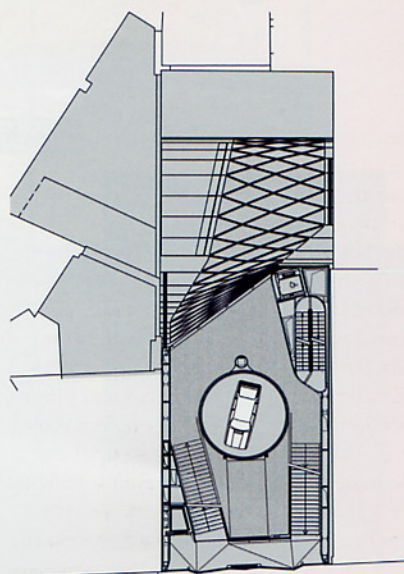
FIRST FLOOR MEZZANINE.



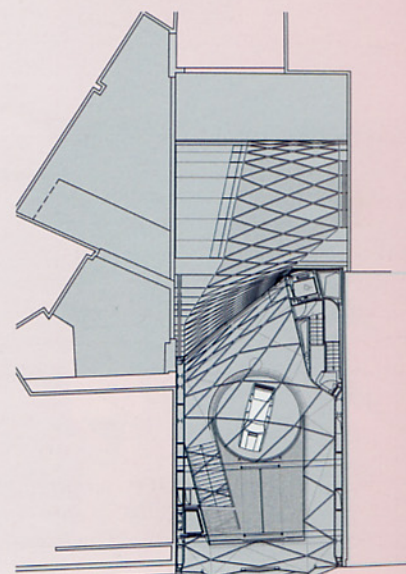
SECOND FLOOR.



SECOND FLOOR MEZZANINE.



THIRD FLOOR.



'CITROËN WANTED A SPACE
THAT WOULD LURE PEOPLE INTO
SPENDING TIME THERE SOLELY
THROUGH ITS DESIGN'

MANUELLE GAUTRAND

THIS PAGE THE EDIFICE IS ENTIRELY COMPOSED OF A STEEL STRUCTURE, JUST AS THE SHELVING STRUCTURE IN THE MIDDLE.

avenue, Citroën did not want weird extras whose only purpose is to draw people in,' says Gautrand. 'At Toyota and Renault, for instance, a major portion of the space is taken up by cafés or restaurants, but that's boring. After all, if you want to go to a café or a restaurant in Paris, you're not going to go to Renault. Citroën wanted the opposite: a space that was solely dedicated to cars and that would lure people into spending time there solely through its design.'

Gautrand's winning design is based on two central ideas: that of a giant shelving structure with eight platforms for cars and that of a glass envelope incorporating the chevron, Citroën's logo. 'You would think that they would find that

a good idea, their logo as an element of the façade design, but it took me quite a bit of persuasion to get them to agree,' Gautrand recalls. 'First of all, other than the logo, I did not want the word Citroën anywhere on the façade. That was hard for them to swallow, especially as the word used to be featured in giant letters in their famous 1927 showroom. In the second place, the chevrons do not have exactly the same proportions as the official emblem, and furthermore I play a game with them: only the bottom one is double, as it is supposed to be, and as they go up they turn into single chevrons and are even somewhat deformed. I also play with deformation in the mirrors on the underside of the platforms on the

shelving structure. They feature diamond-like facets, casting fragmented reflections of the cars below. The Citroën people were initially worried that this fragmented reflection would not do justice to the studied perfection of the automobile designs, but it's a credit to them that they let me have my way on these points.'

Gautrand wanted the company's signature colour, the bright red used in the logo, prominently featured in the façade. She found that the conservative Paris building preservation authorities, however, were not on her side. The bright colour, achieved through a red foil laminated between two layers of glass, is therefore tempered by adding a white, translucent layer of insulation



THIS PAGE WITH A LIGHT STEEL CONSTRUCTION AND POLISHED WALL PANELS, MANUELLE GAUTRAND HAS ATTEMPTED TO MIMIC THE INHERENT STREAMLINED FORMAL IDIOM OF AUTOMOBILES.

between the foil and the outer glass plate. This makes the surprise all the greater once you enter the building and the red of the façade strikes you from behind. The interior is otherwise entirely white, except the shelving structure, which is also bright red. In the cellar, it's the other way round: there, red dominates. The multimedia space located there, with its numerous television monitors, requires a darker environment than the bright light of the floors above.

The building's primary function is to display cars, and Gautrand says that the round shapes of the building itself are inspired by the fluid shapes of an automobile. This imagery brings to mind the famous essay about the Citroën DS by Roland

Barthes, to which the car probably owes some of its cult status. In his book *Mythologies* (1957) he writes, 'The Déesse is obviously an exaltation of glass, and pressed metal is only a support for it. Here, the glass surfaces are not windows, openings pierced in a dark shell; they are vast walls of air and space, with the curvature, the spread and the brilliance of soap bubbles . . .' This statement is also partly applicable to Gautrand's showroom. Yet although the building is indeed not an object with a clearly identifiable front, roof, and rear, the façade nevertheless does not immediately evoke a car that has just left the factory. The façade looks more like the aftermath of an aesthetic crash test, carried out by a silversmith with

a finishing mallet. Does Gautrand have much of a personal connection with the automobile industry? 'I don't drive a Citroën myself,' she answers. 'I think Citroën is a fantastic company, and their car concepts, especially, are amazing. But in my own life cars play only a marginal role. I live and work in the centre of Paris, and a car isn't of much use there.' Perhaps she has more affinity with the luxury fashion shops on the Champs-Élysées: the crumpled refinement of No. 42 has turned it into a boutique for cars.

<http://perso.orange.fr/manuelle.gautrand>