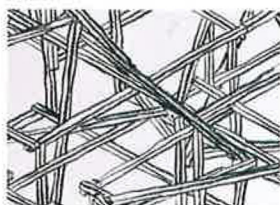


surface

LUXURY BY DESIGN



DESIGN

JUNE 2011
DISPLAY UNTIL JUNE 20

Manuelle Gautrand
36, Bd de la Bastille
75012 Paris,
France



Palace in Wonderland

MANUELLE GAUTRAND
 TURNS A DESERTED
 THEATER INTO A HAVEN
 FOR THE SENSES.

The building that houses the Gaîté Lyrique, a recently finished 140,000-square-foot digital art and electronic music center in Paris, has an illustrious, if oddball, past. Built in 1862 as an Italian-style operetta theater, it was an established cultural institution for more than a century. But in 1989, after a period of decline, developers sought to transform the building into an indoor amusement park—only to have their finances quickly dry up. Most of the original architecture, save the facade, lobby, and foyer, got destroyed in the process, and the building ended up abandoned for over a decade. Local residents came up with a nickname for it: “The Sad Mute.”

In 2001, the city of Paris at last decided to do something about the space. To that end, the government provided roughly \$88 million for construction costs, plus more to operate the center, and commissioned Manuelle Gautrand, a French architect known for creating light, elegant, occasionally unconventional buildings, such as the Citroën showroom on the Champs-Élysées, to design it. The result: a colorful, hard-to-pin-down hodgepodge of, as Gautrand puts it, “playful, peaceful, and emotional spaces.”

The complex, which includes two multi-purpose halls, an auditorium, videogame arcade, artist studios, and two cafés, melds neoclassical architecture—a “palace spirit,” says Gautrand—with contemporary design. From the large, chandelier-like metal-and-Plexiglas light fixtures in the foyer, to the clusters of Cassina-manufactured translucent resin dodecahedron furniture, to the *éclaireuses* (mobile multi-use pods for artists and visitors), to the music-emitting speakers throughout each room, the Gaîté Lyrique’s chameleon-like design epitomizes versatility. Says Gautrand: “My big stress, my big anxiety, was to anticipate how the digital arts would be in 10 years.” No matter. Even if the building needs a minor tweak in a decade, this much is clear: Locals won’t ever again call it sad. Or mute. —SPENCER BAILEY

