What’s on your desk, Manuelle Gautrand?

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Boulevard de la Bastille, located directly on Canal Saint-Martin, a few steps away from the Opéra Bastille. This is the very spot where for fifteen years or so one of the most famous architects in France, Manuelle Gautrand, has had her office. “I love this building,” she says, the woman with the everlasting smile. “This is a simple but absolutely beautiful industrial building from the 1920s, with a frame structure of industrial reinforced concrete and brick walls, and a long line of windows. And just as in those days, some commercial firms still rent premises here – printing shops, toy manufacturers and small jewellery workshops that even operate their own smelting furnaces. And so we’re here, too, the creative people – architectural firms, design studios, start-ups, coworking spaces and business incubators. It’s a great, wild mix.” Manuelle Gautrand’s studio is on the fourth floor, 300 square meters of it. She has remodelled and rebuilt the offices a number of times, using it herself as an experimental laboratory for her own architectural language. Her actual workroom she deploys exclusively for confidential discussions and zoom conferences, and is separated from her employees' open-plan office by plywood and glass walls. This harmonises with

the industrial charm of the entire building, she says. And it complies with their company philosophy – uncomplicated, transparent and egalitarian. We visited the Parisian architect and talked to her about the design of her workplace.

1. I like the raw aesthetic and warm tactile quality of plywood. It’s a cheap yet very sensuous material that blends in wonderfully with the industrial spirit of the reinforced concrete skeleton.
2. A photo of our refurbishment project in the Gaité Lyrique in Paris, which we completed in 2011 – a flamboyant pink room with large, mobile seat sculptures.
3. I can’t work without paper. Nor without a touch of chaos. Sometimes I check out old concept brochures again years later to see how the plans and concepts have turned out and how a building has actually evolved after completion.
4. We work a lot with models, especially in wood, gypsum and cardboard. I make some models myself to familiarise myself more with the project.
5. I love plants. Most of all cacti! Four years ago, I went on holiday to Mexico for the first time, and I’ve had a passion for cactus ever since. We also have a huge climbing plant in the office; it clings to reinforced concrete beams, cable ducts and acoustic panels and grows incessantly from year to year.
6. My Eero Saarinen table: I love marble in all its forms and types. And for me the table is the perfect symbiosis of geometry and sensuousness.
7. Matching white Panton chairs.
8. A handbag with Bambi? Why not! As an architect, you spend part of your time dreaming. This means as well that you’re allowed deep down to remain a child.
9. We have lots of books and magazines in the office. In my own workroom I mostly have art catalogues, urban planning books, writings on architectural theory and publications on nature, landscape and garden design.
10. This is a 3D-printed plastic model of a concept store with a radial, circular construction grid we designed for Cairo. Unfortunately, the project was not built. Dreaming and not building is part of my job.

Manuelle Gautrand; © Studio Gaudin Ramet