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HANJIE WANDA SQUARE PLAZA

## WHITE LIGHTNING

UNSTUDIO'S EXTRAORDINARY HANJIE WANDA SQUARE PLAZA

RETAIL LIGHTING • FESTIVALS OF LIGHT... ART OR ENTERTAINMENT?  
EXTERIOR PRODUCT ROUND-UP • ANNE BUREAU INTERVIEWED

# [feb/mar]

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**040 Interview**  
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Pic: Marc Vernier

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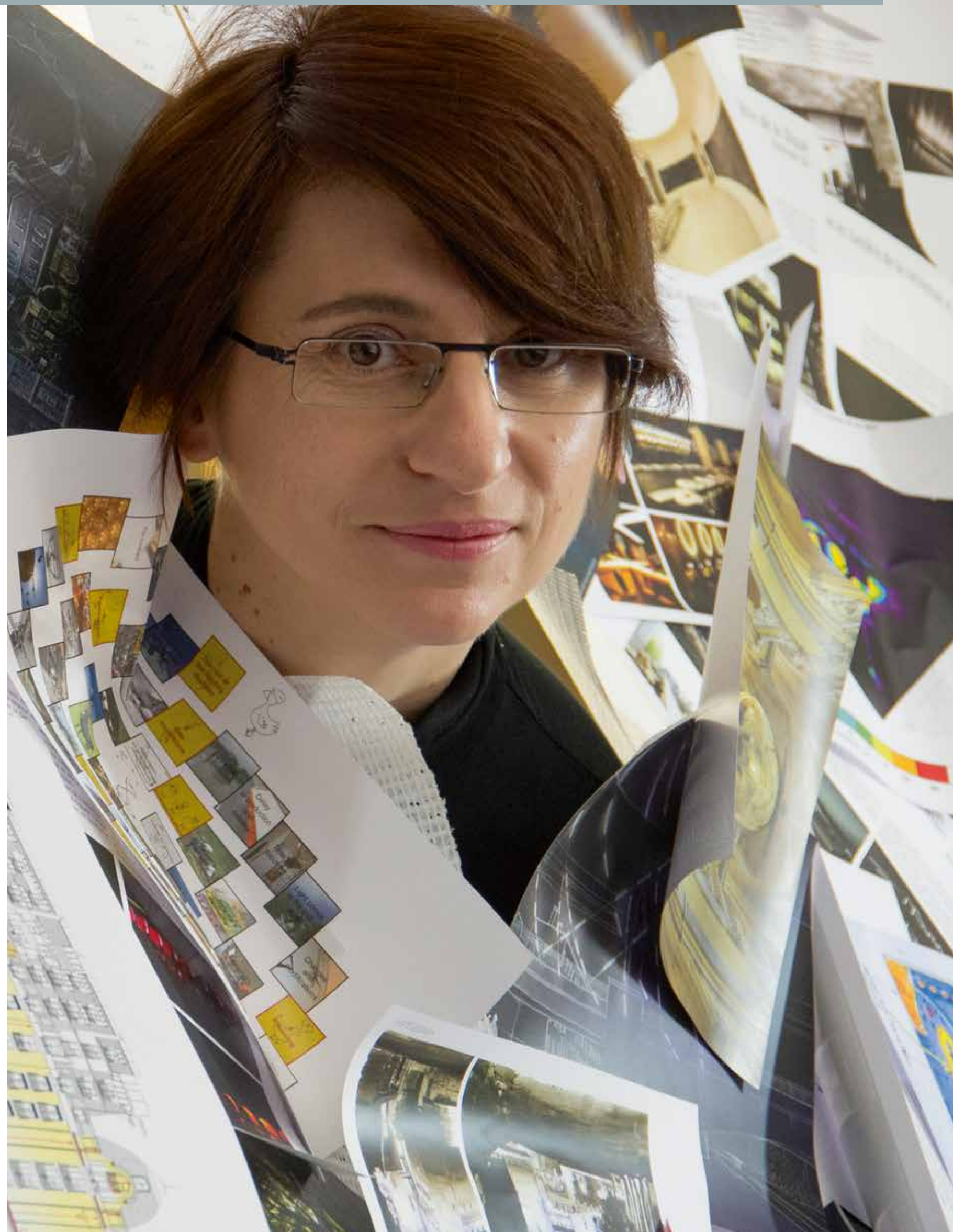
Aménagement des espaces du R+1 au FIAP à Paris



*interview*

# IT'S A WONDERFUL LIGHT

*Olivia Collette talks to French lighting designer Anne Bureau of Wonderfullight about her love of lighting and art.*





Photograph: Jean-Marc Charles



Entirely lit using LED fixtures, the Puilaurens Castle's lighting combines static white and blue lighting to contrast the castle's smooth surface and the surrounding hill's jagged edges. Inset, Ann Bureau's watercolour mock-up of the scheme.

Anne Bureau has a difficult time settling on an answer when I ask her who her lighting idol is. "An idol is perfect, but nobody's perfect," she says.

She mentions esteemed lighting designer Roger Narboni, her one-time employer and mentor, who she admires because he constantly questions himself, despite being a respected leader in his field. She then considers James Turrell and Olafur Eliasson, and though they're visual artists, they've worked with light in ways that Bureau finds breathtaking.

It takes a good 24 hours before Bureau decides on a final answer: Claude Monet and William Turner, both painters. Sensing my befuddlement, she explains: "They paint light. All of their work is about perceiving things in relation to light. If I have idols, they'd be it."

My benign, somewhat clichéd question is supposed to infer who she models herself after in her own field. It may even flatter

whomever she namedrops. But for her, lighting design is broader than the discussions it can get boxed into, so the answer I'm expecting is a terribly moot point. Seeing the bigger picture is part of the reason she went off-brief when she lit the historic Dordogne River quays in Argentat, France, in 2004. "They wanted something dynamic and colour-changing," Bureau recalls, "but for me, it didn't make sense to have that kind of scheme with those houses lining the docks."

Instead, Bureau tapped into Argentat's own history. Located in the middle of France, the riverside town was part of a trade route coming from the west coast, near Bordeaux, and its docks welcomed myriad wooden barges.

"We designed lampposts that looked like the lanterns those bargemen may have used, as though they'd forgotten them on the docks," says Bureau. "The project is two-fold: there's the lighting on the quay,

and there's its reflection in the water."

Bureau sporadically lit up some of the houses' rooftops rather than their façades, making it less intrusive for residents. She also gave the town the dynamic lighting it wanted, but only on the bridge, and the changes are slow and gradual.

"The lighting is very soft," she tells me. "It was all done very respectfully." So much so that it earned her the 2005 Grand Prix des Lumières de la Ville in the Heritage category. Art has been something of a leitmotif throughout Bureau's 20-year career. It's even part of her design process, since she paints her mock-ups in watercolour.

"I find watercolour works best for showing lighting effects," she says. "Before, I'd use pencils. But for some time now, I've been using watercolour. It can darken better, or draw parallels between water and light. It better demonstrates what I want to do."

The influence of art started at a young age, just as she'd begun her studies in industri-



Photograph: Hervé Abbadie



Photograph: Citroën communication and Jérôme Lejeune



Photograph: Gabriel Kowalski

**Top** Home to Claude Monet's *Nymphéas* paintings, the Musée de l'Orangerie (architect: Brochet Lajus Pueyo) needed to be relit without damaging the artwork. To do this, a sheer cloth was placed over the oval rooms and halogen and fluorescent sources were directed towards the slanted ceiling that leads up to the skylight. **Above left** DS World Paris (interior architect: WIPdesign) is a space that combines retail, history and displays with dynamic lighting. **Above right** The "Bruxelles" Conference Room At Fiap Jean Monnet In Paris (interior architect: Gabriel Kowalski). Light sources are installed within the floating ceiling, but nothing is visible on the ceiling surface. Indirect light from the floating ceiling lights the room.

al design at Les Ateliers: École Nationale Supérieure de Création Industrielle in Paris. During this time, she met light artist Yann Kersalé when she interned in his studio for six months.

"I didn't know that kind of work existed," she remembers. "I told myself that this was what I wanted to do, and I wasn't even eighteen years old."

Bureau also worked with Narboni both during and after studies. At first, she designed luminaires, many of them destined for Italo Rosa's revamp of the Cours des 50-Otages in Nantes, an 800-metre strip with many pedestrian and bike paths. She then became a lighting designer and project manager under Narboni.

Afterwards, lighting designer Georges Berne hired her. "Up to then, I'd mostly worked on exterior projects," she says. "With Georges, I learned a lot about interior lighting. This period taught me much about fieldwork." In 1995, two years after graduating, Bureau

started her own firm in Bordeaux, not far from where she grew up. In 2011, she co-founded Wonderfullight with long-time business partner Nicolas Marquette. Art then came full circle when, in 1998, Bureau started working on the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris, which just happens to be the permanent home of eight of Monet's water lily paintings, known as the 'Nymphéas'.

The *Nymphéas* came to the museum in the 1920s and were displayed in two oval rooms with overhead natural illumination streaming in from the museum's skylight. The works were originally painted in a similarly lit environment.

A floor was built above the rooms in the 1950s to accommodate the extensive Walter Guillaume collection, and torn down in the 1990s to reintroduce the previous lighting conditions to the oval rooms.

"By that point, we couldn't use natural light because it was discovered that it deterior-

ates paintings," Bureau recalls. "When it comes to art conservation, what matters is the amount of exposure over the course of a year, regardless of whether the lumens come from the sun or from artificial light." To calibrate that exposure, a sheer cloth covers the ceiling to filter the natural light, and installed above it are fluorescent and halogen fixtures providing indirect light, their beams aimed at the slanted walls that lead up to the glass ceiling. This provides a comfortable balance of natural and artificial light, while preventing damage to the pieces.

The stunning project has earned Bureau many nods from her peers, including a blurb in Malcolm Innes's book, *Lighting for Interior Design*.

Ever the perfectionist, Bureau admits, "I'd really like to update this project. The design still works, but it needs a retrofit. We'd obviously replace the halogens with LED fixtures. But in 2003, when we finished





Photograph: Pierre Bourdis / Xavier Testelin



Photograph: Cyrille Weiner



**Top** The Dordogne Quays in Argentat. Bureau lit the rooftops of the houses lining the river so the lighting wouldn't be too intrusive for residents.

**Middle** Bureau's mock-up watercolour of the Franklin Quay and Place Saint-Sauveur at the Port of Saint-Goustan in Auray, due for completion late this year.

**Above** Pole International de la Préhistoire in Les Eyzies-De-Tayac-Sireuil (architect: W-Architectures) features comfortable yet imperceptible lighting.

the study, it wasn't possible yet."

That doesn't mean Bureau is entirely sold on LED. "I think the hegemony of LED is kind of a shame," she explains. "LEDs have advanced enormously, and they allow you to do things that you couldn't with other technologies. But some sources, like incandescents, have almost disappeared. They're an endangered species."

Still, she points out that the Puilaurens Castle was entirely lit using LED; the result is spectacular, and a touch dramatic. It emphasises the castle's smooth façade and the contrasting jagged texture of the rocky mountain it's on. In lighting the hill, Bureau also avoided the "floating castle" effect. "We wanted to do something lunar and mysterious, so we used cold tints," she says. LEDs allowed her to combine static

blue and white, and to turn lights on or off immediately. "Unlike metal halide, LEDs don't take fifteen minutes to go on or off," she adds. "They're also much easier to dim than discharge lamps."

Ultimately, Bureau prefers being free to use the sources she thinks are best, which, in the case of the Pôle international de la Préhistoire, meant a mixture of traditional and LED fixtures.

The challenge was to make the lighting as subtle as possible and to avoid clutter. For example, the recessed fixtures along the stairs barely look like they're lit, and they're installed in a linear formation. The footbridge connecting the parking lot to the building was lit using thin LED strips installed vertically between glass panels. "It punctuates the path elegantly," says

## HIGHLIGHTS

### Projects that you would like to change:

The lighting of Mont-St-Michel. What was done was quality work. I wouldn't redo it because it's poorly done. I want to redo it because I'd love to work on this site.

### Projects you admire:

One beautiful project that uses a lot of natural light is the Las Capuchinas Sacramentarias convent in Tlalpan, Mexico City, by Luis Barragán. It's such a tiny space but it has an absolutely phenomenal ambiance. Even if you're not a believer, there's a grandeur and spirituality that emanates from the space with its play on volume and light. Some of the strongest things I've seen were James Turrell's Heavy Water installation and Olafur Eliasson's Weather Project at the Tate Modern.

### Projects you dislike:

Projects where technique is used for no reason. It's there to show off, but it doesn't serve the architecture or the space.

### Lighting Hero:

Claude Monet and William Turner. They paint light. All of their work is about perceiving things in relation to light. If I have idols, they'd be it.

### Notable projects:

A few projects stand out. In chronological order, I'd say the Dordogne River quays in Argentat in 2004, the Musée de l'Orangerie in 2006, the Pôle international de la Préhistoire in 2010, and the Puilaurens Castle in 2012.

### Most memorable project:

My favourite project is always the next one. Even if I'm satisfied with a project, I'm a perfectionist. So my favourite project is the next one because it's the one I'll do even better.

### Current projects:

For interiors, we've just finished the DS World Paris car showroom. Right now, we're also working on the Glass Museum and Studio in Sars-Poteries, with W Architecture; the upcoming Vincent Van Gogh Foundation in Arles, with Fluor Architecture; the regional auditorium of Haute-Normandie in Rouen with King Kong architects; and the fitness centre in Mornac with Atelier Ferret Architectes.

For exteriors, we're bidding on the House of Lights at Place Royale in Brussels. We're also working on different public space projects in Najac, Lormont and Luz-Saint-Sauveur.

Bureau. "At the same time, it allows us to achieve the required level of 20 lux on the ground."

The photos of the footbridge conceal the project's complexities, like the intricate cabling. All you see is the minimalist, contemporary result, and that's what Bureau is after.

"For us, technique is at the service of simplicity and discretion, or for some projects, a certain kind of poetry," Bureau remarks. "If people don't notice the lighting, it's a good thing. If they don't know where it's coming from but they feel comfortable in a space, that's a big part of it."

The rest is like an impression left by Monet's brush strokes.

[www.wonderfulight.com](http://www.wonderfulight.com)