

Le Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau embrasse un programme si étendu qu'il permet de mettre en cause l'essentiel des problèmes actuellement pendans de l'art décoratif de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme.

Le Corbusier, *Almanach d'architecture moderne*, 1926

«TODAY THIS PAVILION IS BUILT TO CONVEY INTENTIONS»

In 2025, the centenary of the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts celebrated the triumph of a modernity known as «Art Deco» since the 1960s. As in 1925, the pavilion designed by Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret for the magazine *L'Esprit Nouveau* appeared to be a marginalized work, even though it was one of the few in this eclectic and highly decorative exhibition to engage in a profound reflection on the organization of contemporary society, a truly political project.

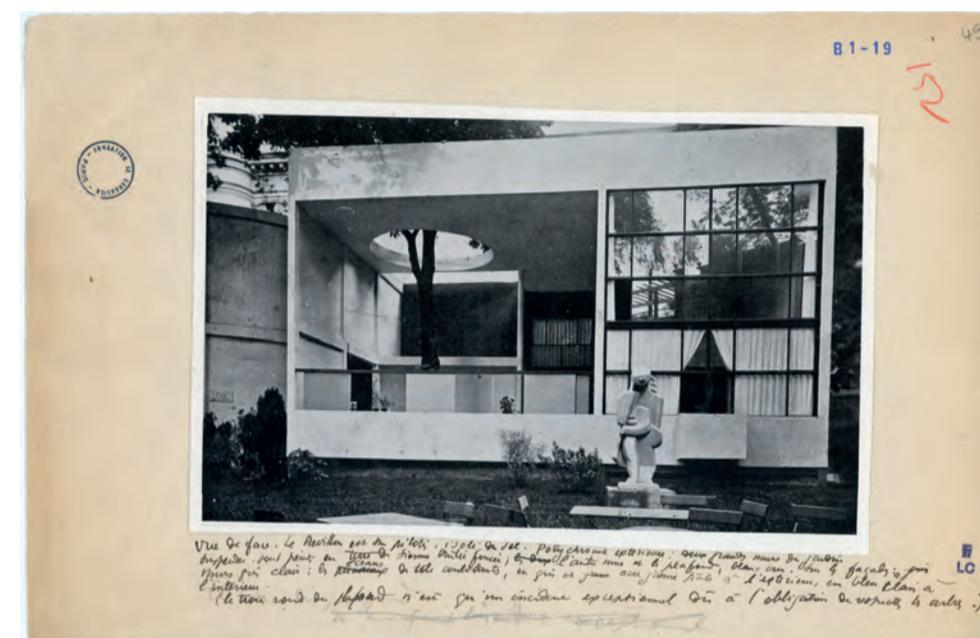
The design of the Pavilion began in 1924. Inaugurated on July 10, 1925, it was demolished in the spring of 1926. A few weeks later, Le Corbusier published *Almanach d'architecture moderne* (*Almanac of Modern Architecture*), which he presented as his «Golden Book.» A popular publication, an almanac is a collection of information published annually on a given subject; by extension, it is a propaganda and advertising pamphlet.

This is the purpose of this book, in which the architect delivers his own account of the history of the Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau in the form of a retroactive manifesto.

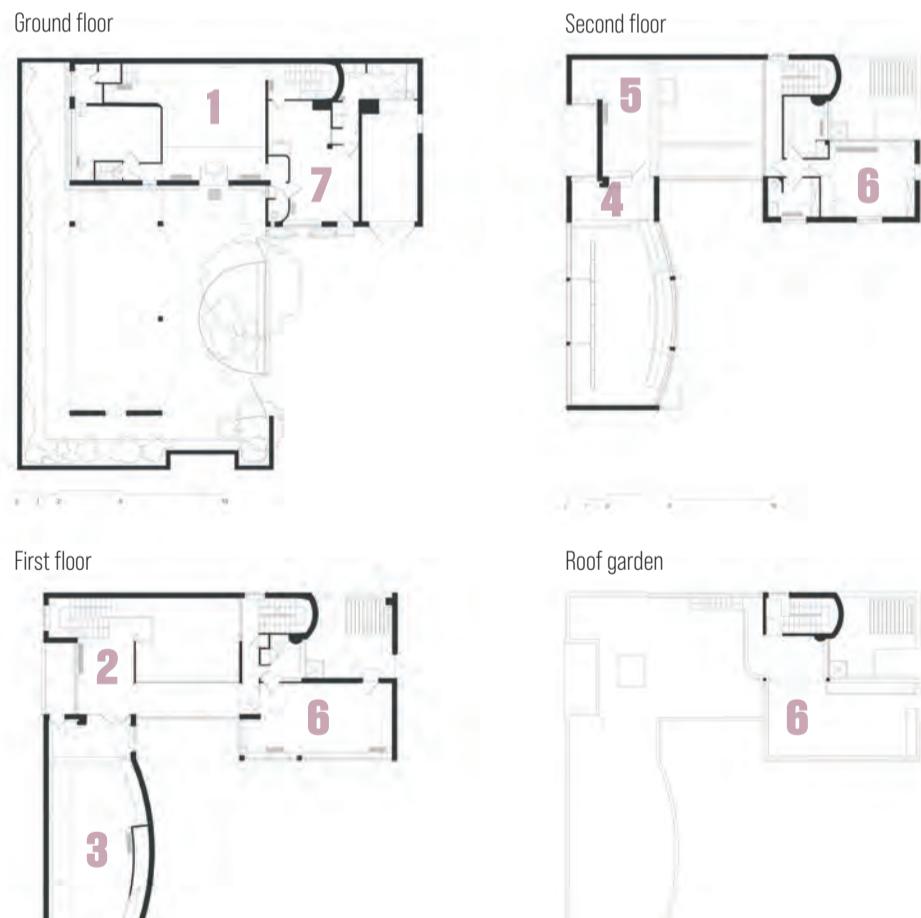
A CUTTING-EDGE CONTRIBUTION TO A CONTROVERSIAL EXHIBITION

While condemning the Exhibition in the columns of *L'Esprit Nouveau*, Le Corbusier requested a site on March 13, 1924, on which to build a pavilion. The unpromising plot of land granted to him in a recess of the Grand Palais was one of the many difficulties faced by the Atelier. The erection in March 1925 of a wooden fence to protect visitors from a delayed construction site was used by Le Corbusier as proof of the violent opposition of academicism and the authorities to modernity. Although it is true that Paul Léon, Deputy Commissioner General of the Exhibition, did not spare his criticism of the Swiss architect, the latter and Pierre Jeanneret were awarded an honorary diploma in October 1925, the value of which he relativized: «These fabulous awards are also given to works that mean nothing to me.» (Letter from Le Corbusier to his parents, November 3, 1925).

The constructed object consists of two «wings»: a typical apartment on a scale of 1:1 based on the *Immeuble-villas* concept developed in 1922, along with its components—furniture, objects, works of art, polychromy—and a space where Le Corbusier expounds his theories of reformist urban planning. It is the three-dimensional development of the pages of the magazine *L'Esprit Nouveau* and the unprecedented realization of numerous theories developed by the architect over several years.



EXHIBITION PLAN



ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau (PEN), 1925 – Archives FLC - L2(13)12 / Le Corbusier, model of *Almanach d'architecture moderne*, 1926 – Archives FLC - B1(19)48
2. Façade du PEN, 1925 – Archives FLC - L2(13)20
3. 3D view of the PEN – Illéna Mauro, Architect – Ingénierie and PhD Student (ENSA Versailles)
4. Le Corbusier, model of *Almanach d'architecture moderne*, 1926 – Archives FLC - B1(19)48
5. Portrait of Le Corbusier – Tirage Kengy Imai – Archives FLC - L4(5)16 / Plan Voisin – Archives FLC - Plan 31872
6. Living room of the PEN, 1925 – Archives FLC - L2(13)40 / Salon du PEN, 1925 : les peintures puristes – Archives FLC - L2(13)34 / Terrasse du PEN – Archives FLC - L2(13)22
7. Reconstruction of the PEN in Bologna (before restoration), 2017 – Matteo Monti - City of Bologna

Plans of the Maison La Roche: Raphaël Dizard – ANTEFACTUM · Iconography: Isabelle Godinou · Graphic design: Iona Bernard · Translation: Chloé Keraudren · Le Corbusier's Work © FLC / ADAGP 2026

« THE ESPRIT NOUVEAU PAVILLION IS DEDICATED TO HOUSING REFORM (PLAN TRANSFORMATION, STANDARDIZATION AND INDUSTRIALIZATION) »

Excerpt from the invitation card to the inauguration of the Pavilion

B3 The Pavilion offers visitors the chance to view a partially furnished «living unit» in a villa building, which serves as a model. New ways of building and living in a mechanized world. The 180 m² of this «apartment» type bourgeois apartment, which includes a cloakroom, a boudoir, and a servant's room, is part of a two-level configuration already tried out by other architects for artists' studios in Paris.

Nevertheless, the L-shaped layout around a «hanging garden» and the open spatial design made possible by the free floor plan and with «standard lockers,» the use of large bay windows to flood the space with light, and the use of purist polychromy in volumes with carefully calculated proportions, offer a unique physical, intellectual, and emotional experience that the Maison La Roche further enhances even more. This cell explains the principle of the «machine for living» stated by Le Corbusier as early as 1921. Intended to a serial man – «everyone, [...] anyone» – it is a machine because it is designed just as perfectly as a car or an airplane and as beautiful as the Parthenon, and not because it is based on mechanistic solutions, such as sleight of hand.

« A CALL TO INDUSTRIALISTS »

Accordingly, this project must lead to a complete reform of the architectural production process: «Without standardization, industrialization is impossible: consequently, there can be no organized construction sites and no financial solution to the price of construction, no solution to the rent crisis» (*Almanac*, 1926). Unlike traditional masonry, the Pavilion separates the framework from the infill: a structure of posts and beams; exterior and interior walls made of prefabricated Solomite (an insulating material made of compressed straw). Standardization also applies to metal doors (Ronéo), seamless parquet flooring (Eubolith), tubular staircase, and all finishing work. It is only partially achieved due to the difficult and conflictual conditions on the construction site and a lack of control over the economic model. Nevertheless, it breathes an exceptional new spirit into this purist manifesto which, in Le Corbusier's own words, constitutes «an appeal to industrialists.»

« L'Esprit Nouveau is a magazine without capital, but his pavilion is fifty times larger than that of l'Illustration or l'Intransigeant; the proportions are sometimes quite incongruous! »

Le Corbusier, *Vient de paraître*, 1925

« EVERYTHING PROCLAIMS THE ARRIVAL OF A NEW SPIRIT » : « PURISM » AS A SOCIAL PROJECT.

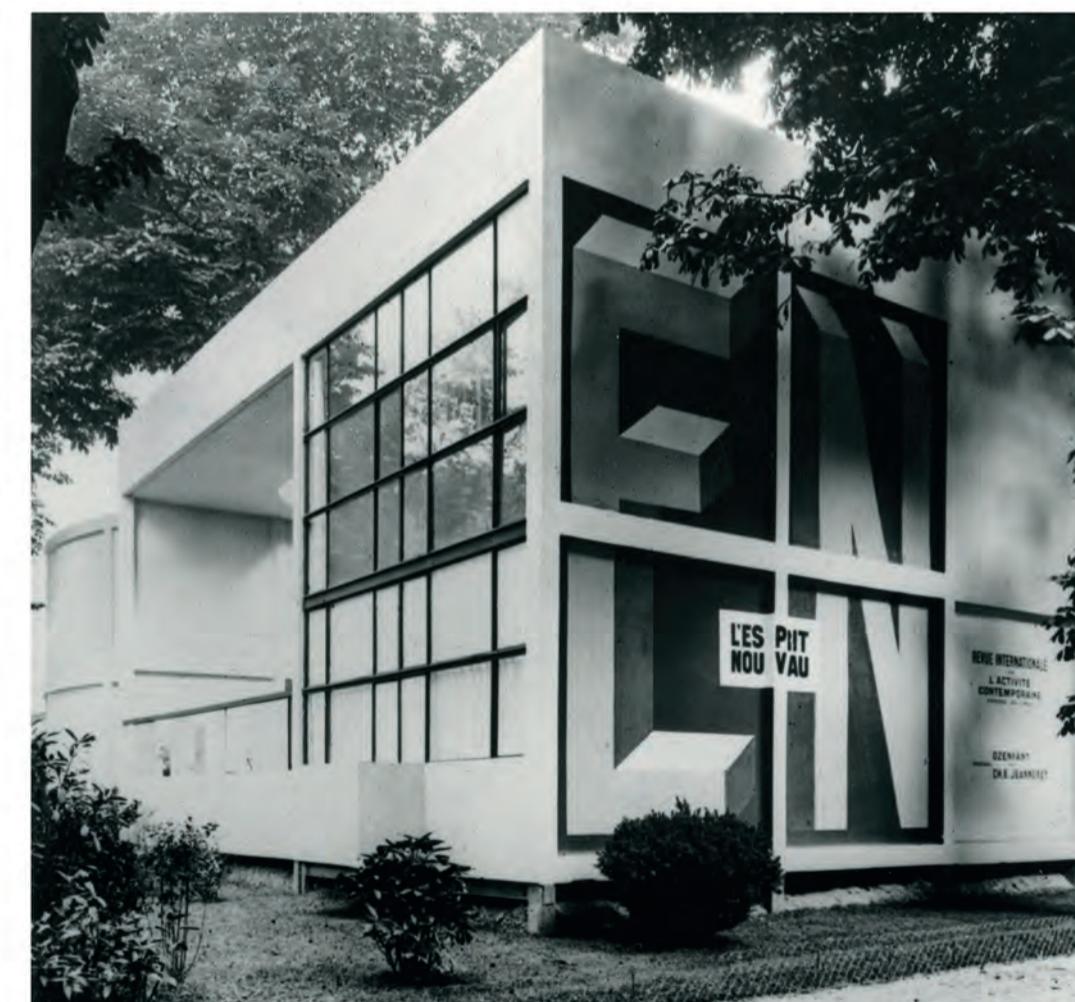
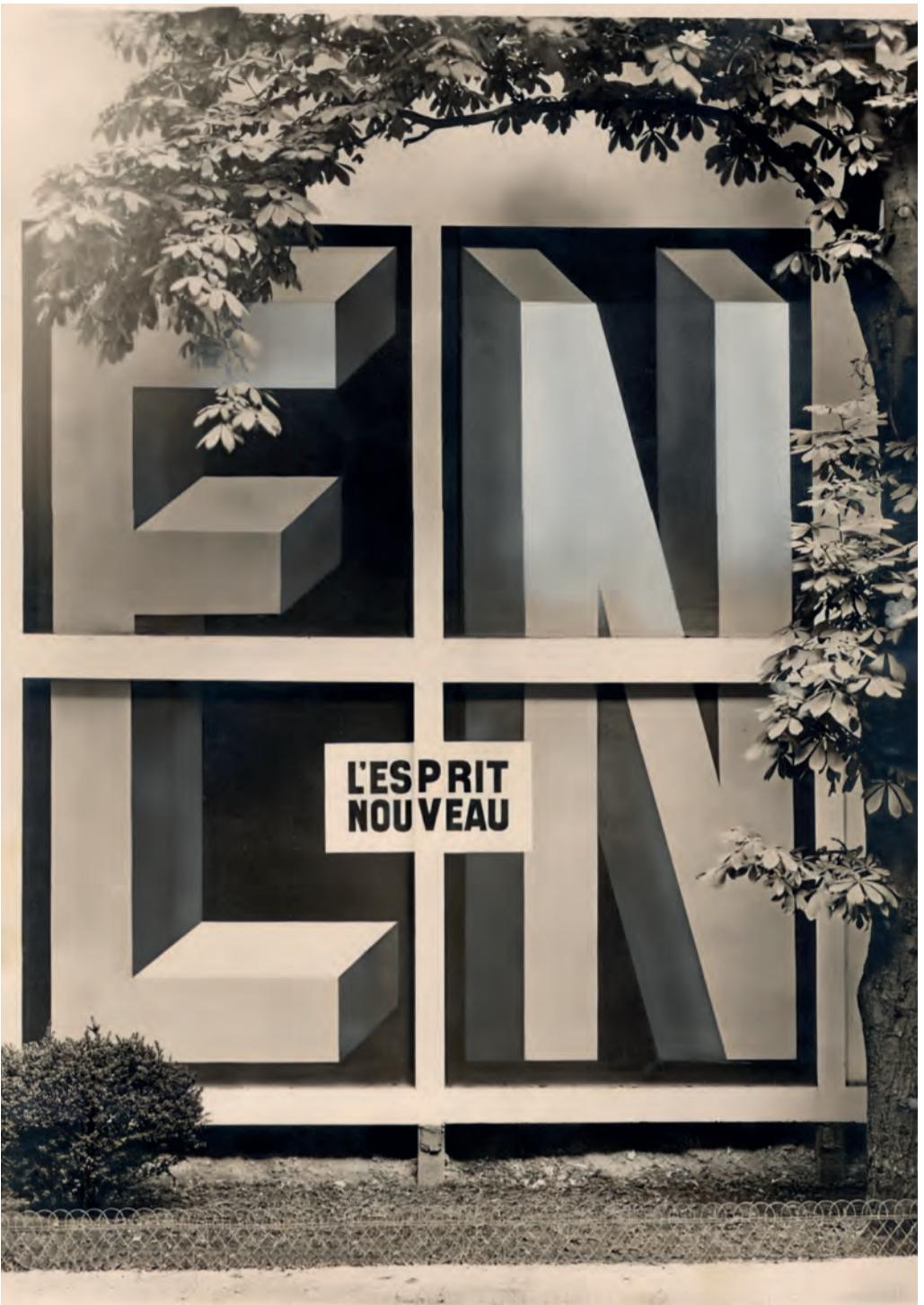
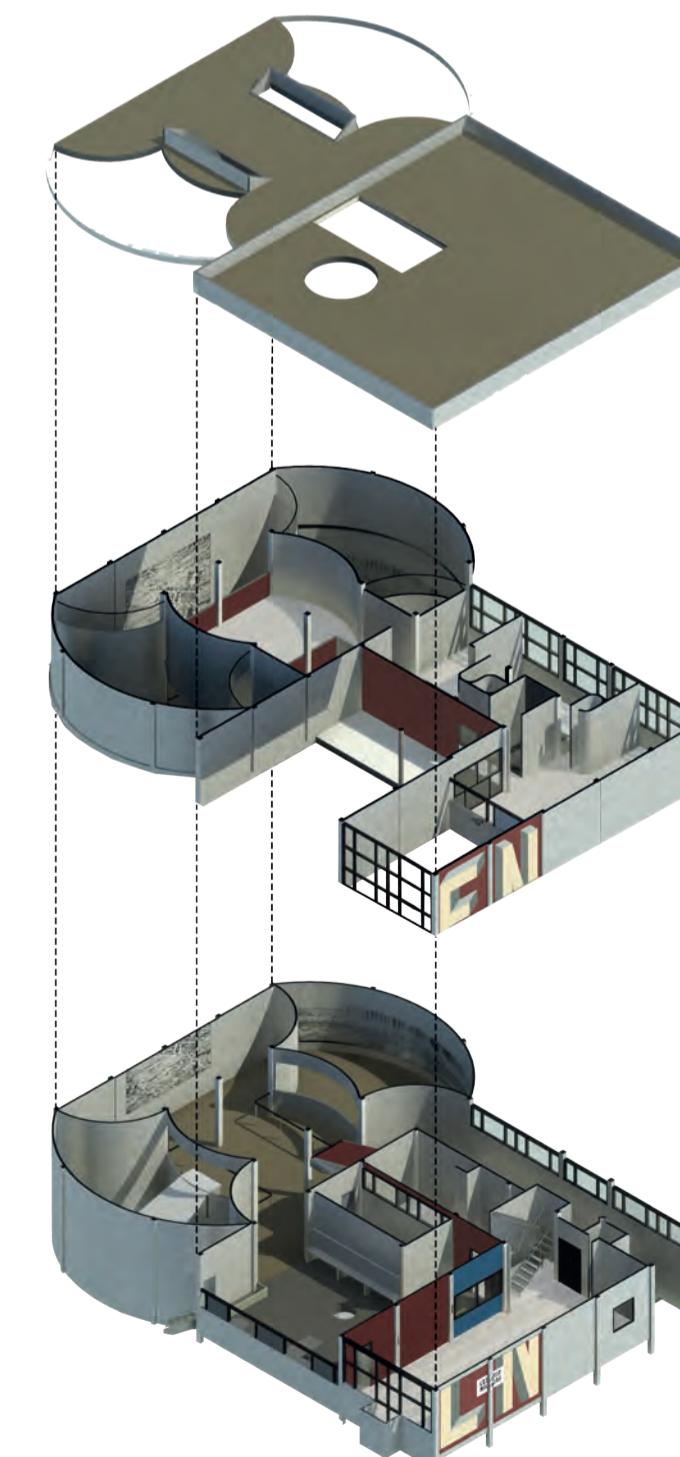
When he was granted a concession on August 26, 1924, Le Corbusier had been developing a new artistic and intellectual project for around ten years which, in his own words, touched on all «forms of human activity.» Between 1920 and 1925, this project found a space for reflection and dissemination in the 28 issues of the magazine *L'Esprit Nouveau*, founded with the painter Amédée Ozenfant and the «Dada» poet Paul Dermée. The journal borrowed its title from a lecture, «L'Esprit Nouveau des poètes» (1919), in which Guillaume Apollinaire argued for a break with all forms of academicism. In this vein, *L'Esprit Nouveau* aimed to establish contact «between the world of arts and letters on the one hand, and the world of science and industry (applied sciences) on the other» (*EN* 1-1920).

Its circulation was modest, but it found readers in many countries. Charles-Édouard Jeanneret published his first articles there under the pseudonym Le Corbusier. He produced four books, some of which included previously unpublished articles, which represented methodological and theoretical stages in this rethinking: *Vers une architecture* (1923 – Toward an architect), *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* (1925 – The Decorative art of Today), *Urbanisme* (1925 – Urbanism), and *La Peinture moderne* (1925 – The Modern painting). This series, which concluded in 1926 with the publication of *Almanach d'architecture moderne*, constitutes «the theory of what the pavilion [must] be the objectification of» (*Almanach*, 1926).

«PURISM» : RESTORING ORDER TO THE WORLD AND UNIVERSALITY

Among these articles, «Le Purisme» (*EN* 4-1921), co-authored with Ozenfant, revisits the ideas that the two artists had already published in 1919 in *Après Le Cubisme* (After Cubism), a work marked, from the very first lines, by the seal of rupture: «1914, the earth-shattering event. Then everything was blown apart by gunfire. In people's minds too. Everything was said and done. The old world was shattered, trampled, repressed, buried. With the war over, everything is being organized, clarified, and purified; factories are rising, nothing is as it was before the war.»

«Purism» refers to an art form based on the rejection of imitation of past styles and the use of «primaries» forms of «high generality» and invariants – «the circle, the triangle, the square, and the rectangle» – as well as colors believed to trigger the same sensations in all human beings. «The means of realizing the Work of Art is a transmissible, universal language» (*EN* 4-1921). The Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau, like the Maison La Roche, embodies this ambition.



1924—1926 ALMANACH D'UN ESPRIT NOUVEAU

THE PAVILION BY LE CORBUSIER AND PIERRE JEANNERET AT THE INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION OF MODERN DECORATIVE AND INDUSTRIAL ARTS IN PARIS

JANUARY 21ST – MARCH 2ND
MAISON LA ROCHE
TUES. – SAT. - 10AM – 18PM

FONDATION
LE CORBUSIER

THE IMMEUBLE-VILLAS : THE BALANCE BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE

During his visit to the Certosa di Galluzzo monastery in Val d'Ema near Florence on September 15, 1907, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret sketched his observations of the monks' cells, which were shaped like small houses arranged in an L-shape around a private garden. Isolated in his private sphere, each monk benefited from the services offered by the lay brothers who lived in rooms beyond the cloister, which, like an outdoor passageway, connected each house. He was captivated by this combination of individual and collective life, which he imagined applying to the renewal of collective housing. That same evening, he wrote to his parents: «I have found the solution for the workers' house—a single type.» The monastery, but also the phalanstery derived from cooperative socialism, or the ocean liner, whose complementary nature of cabins and shared services he praised in *L'Esprit Nouveau*, are among the models that inspired the concept of the Immeuble-villas.

FROM THE CITROHAN HOUSE CELL TO THE STANDARD-SIZED HOUSING UNIT

After designing numerous solutions for single-family homes, such as the Maison Citrohan (1920 and 1922), the embryonic cell of the Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau, Le Corbusier delivered his first contribution to collective housing in the Immeuble-villas. This is a large rental building comprising one hundred villas based on the Citrohan model, accessed by elevators; each villa had its own loggia garden, and residents enjoyed shared facilities, including a food cooperative, sports facilities at the foot of the building, a running track, and solariums on the roof terrace. Day and night, a domestic service was available to residents, who could have meals delivered from the large restaurant kitchen in each building. A theoretical model comparable to Moisei Guinzburg's Soviet Narkomfin in Moscow (1928), but devoid of any collectivist purpose, the Villa Building, of which the Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau is the built manifesto, was intended to be constructed using industrial methods. To this end, Le Corbusier established numerous contacts with private investors, notably the Franco-American Housing Group, which at the time was also proposing apartment buildings with shared services. None of his projects in the Paris region came to fruition, but they extended a line of thinking that would continue until the construction of the Unités d'habitation de grande taille (Housing Units of Standard Size), including the one in Marseille (1945-1953).

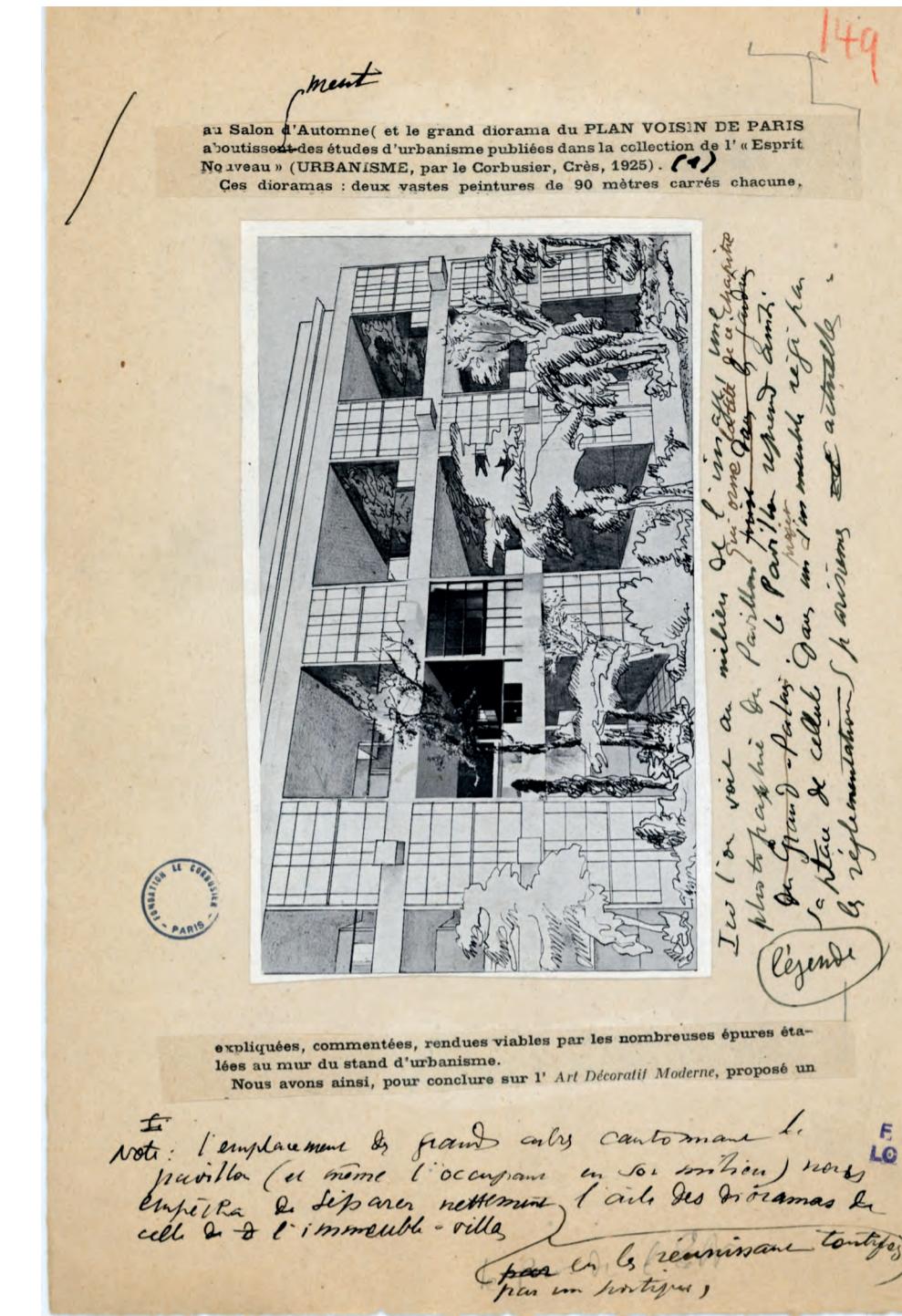
« THE DECOR IS DEAD AND THE SPIRIT OF ARCHITECTURE IS ASSERTING ITSELF » : A TOTAL WORK OF ART, PURIST AND « OBJETS TYPES »

Le Corbusier, *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*, 1925

The «cell» designed for the Pavillon breaks with what was generally presented at the 1925 Exhibition, particularly by French decorators. For Le Corbusier, the challenge was not to participate in defining a (French) style, but to restore order, unity, and harmony through the organization of «standard objects» that met the «standard needs» of modern man. His highly theoretical approach led to the reformed definition of a standard interior applicable everywhere and to everyone: a universal interior in harmony with the mechanized world.

SELECTING INVARIANTS TO BUILD A UNIVERSAL INTERIOR

As early as the 1910s, Le Corbusier developed a theoretical framework for selecting the constituent elements of this standardized interior, in which arbitrariness and accident had no place. If he asserted in 1926 that the Pavillon «is entirely constructed from standard elements» (*Almanach*), it was because its components fell into categories that produced standards: Industry, Folklore, Culture, and Nature. Furniture and useful objects, such as curtains, lamps, pipes, pots, and Berber rugs, belonged to the first two categories. In both cases, these are not works of art but tools, «servants, slaves, attendants» adapted to permanent needs and on a human scale because they are produced according to scientific laws or have stood the test of time. In the Pavillon, Culture is manifested in the architecture itself («machine for living» and «for moving») and in the works of art; as for the plants and the box of butterflies, they manifest the perfection of Nature. With the economic elimination of decor and knick-knacks, this organization based on functions and actions gives the Pavillon a political dimension that embodies the prescriptions of the eponymous magazine and the book *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*: «the miracle of architecture [...] will be, on the day when decorative art ceases.»



« THE HOUSE IS NOTHING MORE THAN CABINETS ON THE ONE HAND, AND TABLES AND CHAIRS ON THE OTHER. THE REST IS CLUTTER. »

Le Corbusier, « Un seul corps de métier », *Les Arts de la Maison*, automne 1925

Inspired by the theories of Adolf Loos, the precepts of German designers, and the research of Francis Jourdain, Le Corbusier wanted to «de-furnish» the home. The few pieces of furniture that were allowed reflected lifestyles dating back to time immemorial or the industrial era. For the Pavillon, Le Corbusier and Jeanneret designed «standard lockers» and two types of tables inspired by professional office furniture (notably stackable tables with steel tube legs and wooden tops, also found in the Maison La Roche). The seats («Machines à s'asseoir»—«Seating machines») cater to two ways of sitting: the gray-painted bentwood chair (Kohn) for an active posture, and the dark blue, gray, red, and brown Club armchair (Abel Motté) for a comfortable posture—which is added the sofa bed (Abel Motté) for reclining. Le Corbusier did not design any steel tube seat and quickly abandoned the idea of purchasing a Surrepos armchair, whose design would nevertheless influence that of the continuously adjustable chaise longue, created with Pierre Jeanneret and Charlotte Perriand in 1928. Unlike the designs of interior decorators, the furniture in the Pavillon was purchased commercially, with some pieces revised in their form to comply with the principle of «high generality.» Humble, discreet, anonymous, sober, perfectly understandable, and serving a single function, they must be able to fit into «private mansions» (the Maison La Roche) as well as «small workers' houses,» thus constituting the invariants of an interior constructed by color and dominated by the notions of lightness and «calm»: a total work of art in the purist style.



URBANISM: «CELLS = ONE MAN; CELLS = THE CITY»

Le Corbusier, *Précisions*, 1930

Le Corbusier exhibited his ideas on urban planning in the left wing of the Pavilion. The centerpiece was a diorama of the Plan Voisin for Paris, sponsored by the automobile manufacturer who symbolically lent his name to the project. «The automobile has killed the big city. The automobile must save the big city,» he wrote in April 1925 to Michelin in a vain attempt to convince him to associate his name with that of Voisin. According to the architect and urban planner, Paris, like all cities with a long history, has a road network that is unsuited to mechanical speeds. The Voisin Plan adapted the principles of the City of 3 Million Inhabitants, already presented at the 1922 Salon d'Automne and then published in *L'Esprit Nouveau et l'Urbanisme* (1925), to the right bank. The aim was to spark debate on the congested and unsanitary city, which had been disrupted by the Industrial Revolution. Le Corbusier proposed removing the existing fabric of a vast area comprising the Marais, bounded by the Seine to the south, the Gare de l'Est to the north, the Champs-Élysées roundabout to the west, and the Rue Vieille-du-Temple to the east. However, the plan spares monuments such as the Louvre, the Palais-Royal, and the Place Vendôme, leading to some distortions in the ideal orthogonal grid as defined in 1922.

FOR A REFORMING URBAN PLANNING APPROACH

Eighteen cruciform office skyscrapers, for which Le Corbusier consulted engineer Eugène Freyssinet, rise up from the ground, while the residential buildings are Immeuble-villas arranged in staggered rows. Composed of apartments considered to be standard units, the villa-style buildings themselves became the basic unit of the urban plan. «Units = one man; units = the city.» Le Corbusier summarized in 1929. However, the means of implementing this plan were not addressed, giving the project the status of a manifesto. This idea, which he was the only one to put forward at the 1925 Exhibition, was further developed in the drafting of the *Athens Charter*, which emerged from the debates at the 1933 International Congress of Modern Architecture, and the publication of *La Ville Radieuse* (1935). These texts share the fundamental principles of the Voisin Plan: separation of functions linked by a hierarchical and orthonormal road system, densification in height in favor of a green city, and the death of the street. These are all elements of doctrine, some of which were already enunciated in the 19th century, which would structure the development of cities on an international scale for three decades after the Second World War, three decades after the Second World War.

« Until INDUSTRY takes hold of construction, we will remain in the dark: urban planning will remain in textbooks, and without urban planning, society will wither away. »

Le Corbusier, *Almanach d'architecture moderne*, 1926

« THE PAVILLION DE L'ESPRIT NOUVEAU, THE ONLY CONTRIBUTION OF FRENCH 'MODERN' ARCHITECTURE IN THIS EXHIBITION »

Georges Charenol, « La Rue – Les jardins », *L'Amour de l'art*, 1925

As the Pavillon was completed late and located in a low-traffic area, it attracted fewer visitors. In the press, only trade magazines seemed to analyze this striking proposal, with a strong interest in the interior design, even though comments often mixed analysis of the Pavilion with a study of Le Corbusier's ideas. While the urban planning projects were generally considered too radical, the purist design of modern housing crystallized opposing positions, with some seeing it as the way forward and others as the disturbing announcement of a house that «will be nothing more than a cage sanitized by fans and sterilizers, lit, heated, and powered by captured energy» (Guillaume Janneau, *Art et décoration*, May 1925).

Among the most favorable magazines, Christian Zervos' *Les Cahiers d'art* and Jean Badovici's *L'Architecture Vivante* delivered enthusiastic commentary on the Pavilion and the architect's designs, marking the beginning of a close collaboration with the latter. Here, reception and dissemination sometimes intertwined, even though the magazine *L'Esprit Nouveau* no longer existed. In Italy and Sweden, for example, articles on the Exhibition mention the Pavilion, often in glowing terms. Finally, in his *Almanach*, Le Corbusier presents the Pavilion and the difficult conditions under which it was built. Although its construction is described as «well of bitterness» (Letter from Le Corbusier to Pierre Laguionie, August 30, 1926), it nevertheless constituted a major milestone in his work, as evidenced by several subsequent publications.

Convinced by Le Corbusier's ideas, readers of the magazine *L'Esprit Nouveau* saw his Pavilion as a successful embodiment of his ideas. Some did not hesitate to commission him to design a purist house, such as René Guiette in Antwerp (1925-1927) and Madame Meyer in Neuilly-sur-Seine (1925-1926 – not built). More broadly, the various solutions defined in 1925 led to the completion of numerous projects, such as the Villa Stein-de Monzie (1926-1928) and apartment buildings constructed with the support of industry. For the 1937 International Exhibition of Arts and Techniques Applied to Modern Life, Le Corbusier attempted, unsuccessfully, to exhibit not just a cell but the entire building on the Bastion Kellermann. Ultimately, it was with the full-scale Unités d'Habitation built after the war in Marseille, Rezé-lès-Nantes, and Berlin that the prototype found concrete expression.



« TRANSPORTING THE EN PAVILION TO A PLOT OF LAND PURCHASED IN THE SUBURBS »

As early as 1925, Le Corbusier hoped, in vain, to rebuild his Pavilion in the Paris suburbs. In 1977, twelve years after Le Corbusier's death, architects Giuliano and Glaucio Gresleri, on behalf of *Parametro* magazine, carried out a reconstruction in Bologna. In 1986, François Barré, then Deputy Director of the *Établissement public de la Villette*, contacted the Fondation Le Corbusier to propose a reconstruction of the pavilion «as a folly» in the Parc de la Villette, which was being developed by Bernard Tschumi. The project failed. Five years later, in 1991, Gérard Monnier, then President of the French section of DoCoMoMo, proposed its restoration in Montsouris Park, after the destruction by fire of the Bey of Tunis Palace, a remnant of the 1867 World's Fair. Ultimately, the original Pavilion remains an image. Nevertheless, its form and spirit would be referenced throughout the 20th and 21st centuries.



Texts written by the exhibition curators, Bénédicte Gandini, Élise Koering, and Gilles Ragot.