

Le Corbusier 1887-1965



Le Corbusier by Willy Rizzo Sept 19th at Maison LaRoche, 10 square du Docteur Blanche, 75016 Paris-France (selctism, 2013)

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Introduction

Charles-Edouard Jeanneret-Gris was born in 1868 in La Chaux-de-Fonds, a small city in Neuchâtel canton in north-western Switzerland. It was not until he moved to Paris in 1917 that he assumed the pseudonym Le Corbusier. He was born into an artistic family with his father Edouard Jeanneret working as an artist who painted dials in the town's renowned watch industry, and his mother Madame Jeanneret who was a musician and piano teacher. It was this creative upbringing that sparked the artist in the young Le Corbusier, along with the beautiful Jura Mountains where his family moved to escape the Albigensian Wars of the 12th century. (Biography, 2013)

Following in the footsteps of his father Le Corbusier studied the art of enamelling and engraving watch faces at the Arts Décoratifs at La Chaux-de-Fonds arts school in Switzerland. It was here where he met possibly the most influential person in his career L'Éplattenier, a teacher at the school whom Corbusier often referred to as "my master" and his "only teacher". Corbusier's inner artist flourished at the school where he studied drawing, art history and the naturalist aesthetics of art nouveau. Eventually his talent surpassed the level of a watchmaker and he chose to study art and decoration intending to one day become a painter. Under the tuition of L'Éplattenier Corbusier was obliged to study architecture, and it was here that Corbusier's artistic background met with the ideas of architecture. At the age of 20 he designed his first house and set out on a number of apprenticeships through the Mediterranean and Central Europe.

(Biography, 2013) .

Almost all of Le Corbusier's work follows the golden ratio which is a number found in nature, art and even the human form. Many believe that if anything is to look naturally proportioned that it must follow this ratio.

Work History

While training at Arts Decoratifs at La Chaux-de-Fonds Corbusier focused mainly on painting as he originally wanted to be a painter. However under the tuition of L'Eplattenier he was able to study architecture. It is here that Corbusier's artistic view of architecture was able to flourish and he designed his first house at the age of 20, in 1907.

Once finished school Corbusier travelled throughout Europe and the Mediterranean. While travelling Corbusier acted as an apprentice for various architects such as Auguste Perret and Peter Behrens. While working under Auguste Perret Le Corbusier learned about reinforced concrete construction, which would become a deciding factor in many of his later architectural designs. (Biography, 2013). Travelling throughout Europe opened Corbusier's eyes to many different forms of architecture and it was now that he made his three most important architectural discoveries.

1. The contrast between large collective spaces and individual compartmentalised spaces, an observation that formed the basis for many of his designs for post war European affordable accommodation.
2. Classical proportion via Renaissance architecture
3. Geometric forms and the use of landscape as an architectural tool.

In 1918 Corbusier moved to Paris and worked as an architect for the French Government, designing mainly reinforced concrete structures. He envisioned architecture as a factory production line producing block like housing units identical to each other to meet with the demands of an increasing population (Biography, 2013). He put these theories to the test when he designed the Maison Citrohan which he referred to as "the machine of living". These designs all featured support pillars that raised the house above the ground, a roof terrace, an open floor plan, an ornamentation-free facade and horizontal windows in strips for maximum natural light (Biography, 2013).

Corbusier's first building in France was the Villa La Roche 1923, designed as a home for Swiss banker Raoul La Roche. La Roche was an avid art collector and he wanted to use the building as a home and a private gallery to display some of his art. The building was constrained by a lot of

zoning regulations including a north orientation, existing trees and height and boundary limitations. Corbusier's ideas of having large open areas inside a building suited the owner's specifications for large areas to display his art exactly. An architectural promenade was designed into the building along with small compact staircases and hallways winding through compartmental living quarters to maximise the viewing space (Noordam, 2013).

The Villa Savoye build in 1931 is the greatest example of Corbusier's purist design when it came to architecture. It is the best example of his efforts at designing a "machine a habiter, a machine for living". It is located in a suburb near Paris and is the culmination of Corbusier's design efforts up to that point and the basis for much of his later architecture. It looks different from every angle, adding greatly to its aesthetic appeal. The design features of the Villa Savoye include.

- Modular design, the result LeCorbusier's researches into mathematics, architecture (the golden section), and human proportion.
- Pilotis, the house is raised on stilts to separate it from the earth. This maximises the amount of light and space available to the bottom floor of the house.
- No historical Ornament.
- Pure colour, white and subtle colour's in the interior living areas.
- Built in furniture.
- Ribbon windows, roof garden and an integral garage (the curve of the ground floor of the house is based on the turning radius of the 1927 Citroen).



Exterior view



Exterior view



Winding garage door.



This is the interior view showing much of LeCorbusier's exterior framed furniture.

Other architecture that LeCorbusier designed was:

- The Carpenter Centre at Cambridge Massachusetts 1961-1964.
- The Centre Le Corbusier at Zurich, Switzerland 1963-1967.
- Convent of La Tourette at Eveux-sur-Arbresle, near Lyon, France 1957-1960.
- House at Weissenhof at Stuttgart, Germany 1927
- Museum at Ahmedabad, in Ahmedabad, India 1953-1963.
- Notre-Dame-du-Haut, at Ronchamp, France, 1922.
- Unite d'Habitation, at Marseilles, France, 1946-1952
- United Nations Headquarters, New York, 1947-1953.

At first LeCorbusier furnished his houses with furniture designed from the designer Thonet but in 1928 along with fellow architect Charlotte Perrinand he began to design a range of furniture. The main design of the furniture was mixing the media of metal and cushioning in order to give a modern yet elegant design. The metal frame was not hidden beneath the cushion and upholstery; instead it acted as a visible basket that the cushion sat into. LeCorbusier later wrote a book outlining his views on furniture style and functionality. He then used this book to design a large range of furniture that is still very popular to this day (ezinearticles.com, 2013). The range featured chrome plated tubular frames with singular coloured cushions.



This is the LeCorbusier LC2 Chair. It is roughly 400mm³. It became hugely popular and came in a variety of different colours. Sticking with Corbusiers purist ideas the colours normally complimented each other rather than contrasted. Many designers have adopted this design and modified it.

(decori, 2013)

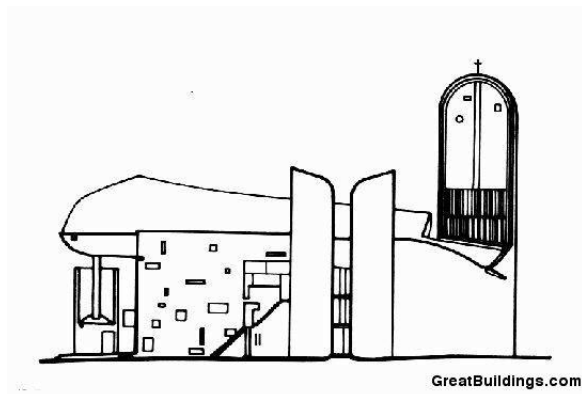


This is the LeCorbusier LC4 chair or Chaise Lounge. It is split into three main parts: the solid base at the bottom, the slightly curved tubular frame or basket at the middle and the seat and cushion on top. The top part could be made from cushion and leather, upholstery including animal skin.

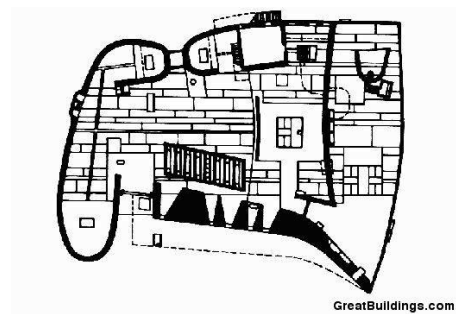
(lecorbusier00chaiseloungelecorbusier00chaiselounge, 2013).

The above two chairs are possibly the most recognised of LeCorbusiers furniture range and have sold millions worldwide. They are still popular to this day and the basic idea behind them has defined the modernist design of the furniture being designed today. They and other designs are all documented in Corbusiers book *L'Art Decoratif d'aujourd'hui*. In the book he describes the furniture as extensions of human limbs (decori, 2013).

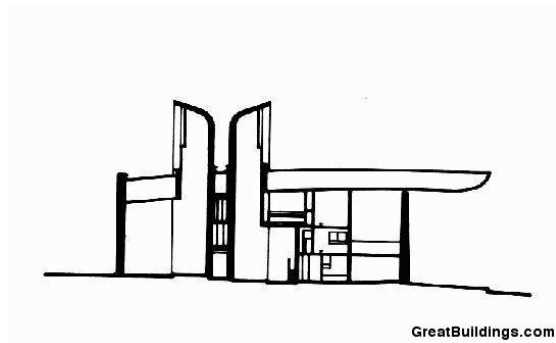
In the later works of LeCorbusier we can still see his artistic side showing in some of the magnificent cathedrals designed by him. The Notre Dame du Haut 1955, or Ronchamp located in France is possibly one of the most non-conformist designs undertaken by Corbusier. It reflects a transition that Corbusier went through in his later life where his designs became more extreme. The designs featured sweeping curves that seemed to be structurally un-sound, but in actual fact are immensely powerful and complex. The Notre dame du Haut was a church with two side entrances, an axial main altar and three chapels beneath towers (buildings, 2013)



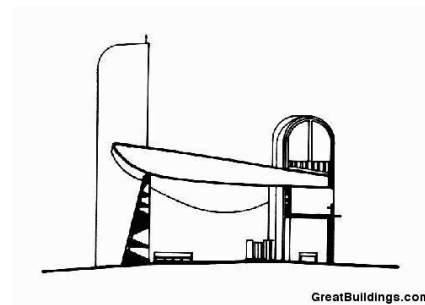
Elevation



Plan



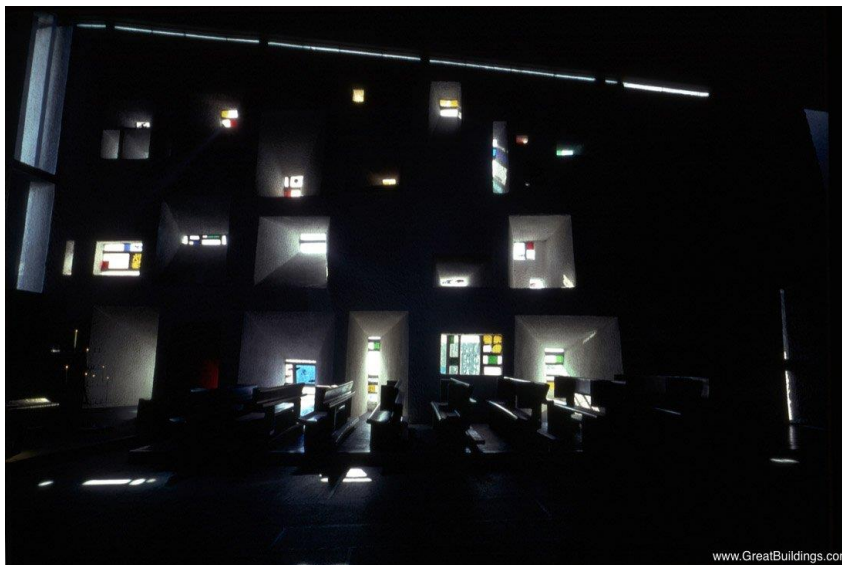
Sectional view



Sectional View



This is the front view of the Notre Dame du Haut. Corbusier hadn't abandoned old practices in his later years and used the surrounding area to emphasize his building by placing it on top of a small hill.



The bizarre windows letting in very little light are a stark contrast to the windows in Corbusier's earlier works. The effect may have been to minimise the amount of light within the building. The windows are decorated with stained glass panels.

All pictures were referenced from (buildings, 2013).

Materials, styles, influences, designs and books

When it came to architecture LeCorbusier was a founding father in reinforced concrete. He pioneered some of the most extremely elaborate designs with the added strength of the concrete. He used “pilotis” which were reinforced concrete beams to support the upper floors making good use of the area around a building. And where he could he used large open windows to maximise the light entering the building.

When designing furniture Corbusier used a lot of tubular steel to form baskets for the cushions to sit into. The tubular steel was able to be shaped into sweeping curves to resemble the curve of the human back, providing optimum support and strength. The cushions were usually foam cushions covered in fine leather or an upholstered fabric. Some of his designs were also decorated with pony hair (lecorbusier00chaiseloungelecorbusier00chaiselounge, 2013).

Not all of Corbusiers furniture was steel most of his built in wardrobes and bedroom furniture was timber. His timber furniture was also very simplistic and highly functional. Designed to take up as little space as possible and emphasize the benefit of negative space.



Here is an example of wooden furniture manufactured by Le Corbusier. The simplistic design is made from oak and

features decorative dove-tail joints on the corners. Much of Le Corbusier's work is

manufactured from oak. Generally oak has a straight uniform grain pattern which may have suited Corbusier's design style.

One of the main influences in Le Corbusier's furniture designing history was Charlotte Perriand. She was one of the most influential furniture designers of the early modern movement. Le Corbusier along with Charlotte Perriand introduced the "machine age" aesthetic to interiors in the steel, aluminium and glass furniture they created in the late 1920's and 30's (museum, 2013). Perriand originally wanted to work at Corbusiers studio as a furniture designer but ended up working there for over a decade working on various architectural projects, as well as furniture design. Here she worked alongside Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret to design some of the most influential modernist designs of that time.

Over Le Corbusiers long work history in the architectural, interior and furniture design industry he has written a number of books that highlighted his views on the aesthetics and structure of both architecture and furniture. Some of the books which became very famous written by Le Corbusier are;

- Toward an Architecture by Le Corbusier, John Goodman and Jean-Louis Cohen (Oct 15, 2007)
- Towards a New Architecture (Dover Architecture) by Le Corbusier (Feb 1, 1985)
- The City of To-morrow and Its Planning (Dover architecture) by Le Corbusier and Frederick Etchells (Apr 1, 1987)
- Le Modulor and Modulor 2 by Le Corbusier (Feb 14 2000)
- Journey to the East by Le Corbusier and Ivan Aknin (Nov 16, 2007)
- The Decorative Art of Today by Le Corbusier and James Dunnett (Mar 16, 1987)

All of the above books highlight Corbusier's design preferences at the time when they were written. They influenced the designs of many designers that came after them and altered the direction that architectural; interior and furniture design went after their release (reads, 2013).

Famous Pieces and Designs

As Le Corbusier worked on a vast number of projects from small one-off houses to large industrial size cities, all of which gave him great fame and wealth, it is hard to single out individual works as being famous. When it comes to architecture the first two buildings that spring to mind that epitomise Corbusier's modern views on architecture are the Villa La Roche and the Villa Savoye, both in suburbs of Paris. Both of these buildings showcase Corbusier's use of open space and cubed-living quarters to emphasise the surrounding area and to maximise on space. It was around the same time that they were being designed that Corbusier was referring as his architecture as a machine for living.

Corbusier however did not only design small housing units he also designed large office blocks, apartment complexes, government buildings and even whole cities all over the world. Some of his larger works that might be considered more famous than others would be the United Nations Headquarters located in New York City completed in 1952, which he worked on with fellow architects Oscar Niemeyer and Harrison & Abramovitz.

The building which highlights Corbusier's attempts at designing a building on a production line level, to house the post WW2 population of Europe was the Unite d'Habitation. After world War two the need for affordable housing was at an unprecedented high and Le Corbusier was tasked with designing housing that was compact but comfortable. What Corbusier designed was a marvel of modern architecture. He managed to fit 1600 residents into relatively small units by maximising on the space available by allowing inhabitants to have their own private space, but outside of that private space they would shop, eat, exercise and gather in communal areas.

When it came to furniture the range of furniture most associated with Le Corbusier is the bent tubular steel range and most notably the LC1 Chair and the Chaise lounge chair. Although the fact that that many designers are still replicating almost all of Corbusier's designs highlights just how famous many of his designs were and still are.

Items Currently on Show or Display

The last ever building designed by Le Corbusier was turned into a museum for his life's work when he died just before it was finished. It is located on the shores of Lake Zurich in the middle of the woods. It showcases his genius when it came to using concrete, stone and steel as building materials. The final building was wrapped in steel and glass to give it a truly futuristic look. The house itself contains some of Le Corbusiers original paintings and furniture.

Much else of Le Corbusiers other works are sitting exactly where they were originally built as they are enormous complexes. A lot of the original designs of the furniture are still being manufactured today and originals of them are also available at a high price. (Centerlecorbusier, 2013)

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