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Acknowledgments

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280 Paris to Toulouse: The Urban Space of French Cities Christoph Schnoor
Foreword

The work of Le Corbusier features in the earliest installation shots of the young Museum of Modern Art. The inaugural architecture exhibition, in 1932, Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson’s Modern Architecture: International Exhibition, placed the model of the Villa Savoye front and center in the gallery, the keystone to an exhibition that launched the Department of Architecture and spurred a lively and ongoing discussion on how to bring architecture into the Museum. Le Corbusier, in both his person and his work, would reappear at the Museum on multiple occasions. Yet as Jean-Louis Cohen, guest curator of Le Corbusier: An Atlas of Modern Landscapes, describes in this volume, this relationship has always been partial and incomplete.

It is only fitting, then, that Le Corbusier should return in an exhibition that not only embraces his astonishing range of creative practices—watercolors, films, sketchbooks, paintings, found objects, furniture, and models—but also highlights the geographic extension of his designs and built work across his six-decade career. An atlas both in the structure of its presentation and in its organization of a new interpretive territory, the range of material in the galleries is matched by the catalogue’s equally impressive group of scholars, curators, and critics. For the generations of students and practitioners of architecture who have grown up on Le Corbusier’s work, as well as for those who will first encounter him here, this is an invaluable opportunity to reassess the significance of this modern visionary to contemporary practice.

In its ambitious constellation of research, planning, and preparation, this project is indebted to the Fondation Le Corbusier in Paris. We extend sincere thanks to its director, Michel Richard, and to Isabelle Godineau, Head of Archives and Collections. The Fondation has graciously opened its archive and made available the full breadth of its remarkable collection. The overwhelming majority of the works included here, as well as in the accompanying exhibition, are due to this generosity. The Fondation has also been a judicious collaborator and enthusiastic advocate during the long development of this project.

I commend Jean-Louis Cohen, Sheldon H. Solow Professor in the History of Architecture, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University; and Barry Bergdoll, The Philip Johnson Chief Curator of Architecture and Design at MoMA, for their curatorial vision and unflagging efforts in realizing this undertaking. I am grateful to them and to their many colleagues at the Museum and elsewhere for their contributions. On behalf of the Trustees and the staff of the Museum, I would especially like to thank Hyundai Card for its major support of this exhibition. Additional generous support is provided by Sue and Edgar Wachenheim III and by The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art.

Glenn D. Lowry
Director, The Museum of Modern Art

Hyundai Card

Hyundai Card is proud to sponsor The Museum of Modern Art’s first major exhibition on the prodigious oeuvre of Le Corbusier, one of the most influential figures in the field of modern architecture.

Le Corbusier did not merely design masterpieces but also upended existing architectural notions and formulated principles still critical for today’s practice. His progressive insight and groundbreaking approach to design were the hallmarks of his career, and these qualities are in line with the philosophy of Hyundai Card. As Korea’s leading credit card issuer, Hyundai Card constantly challenges convention with innovative ideas. Hyundai Card is more than just a finance company, interested only in numbers; it is also an enthusiastic promoter of design and art, finding ways to embrace them in different areas of our business, from designing unique credit cards to building a design library for our members to enjoy.

As the sponsor of this landmark exhibition, we sincerely hope that Le Corbusier: An Atlas of Modern Landscapes will promote innovation, allowing the legacy of Le Corbusier and his thought-provoking work to continue into the future.
Le Corbusier was introduced to New York audiences in Modern Architecture: International Exhibition, the inaugural architecture exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art, in 1932. In this exhibition he was identified as a leading proponent of the International Style; indeed, he would soon be one of the rare architects to have built on three continents before the advent of commercial intercontinental jet service. By 1932 he had already designed or built projects in France, Switzerland, Germany, the Soviet Union, and Tunisia, and his influence had been in the ascendant in South America since his 1929 trip to Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil. This influence only deepened with his role in designing the Ministry of Education and Health in Rio de Janeiro (1936) and with the construction of the house for Dr. Curutchet in La Plata, Argentina (1949–54). The conquest of two more continents followed. In 1952, with the vast project at Chandigarh, he began a new and profound engagement with a landscape unlike any he had experienced to date, and he was subsequently able to draw on his decades-long studies of exhibition space in designs for the National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo (1954–59). And in 1962, thirty years after Le Corbusier’s introduction to American audiences at MoMA, he saw the opening of his first and only building in North America, the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University. Only Australia and Antarctica were never on the itineraries of this globe-traversing architect, although the former has not been beyond the reach of his influence.

Yet already in 1932, in The International Style, the popular book published at the same time as MoMA’s exhibition, there were unmistakable hints that his buildings did not always conform fully to Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson’s definition of the new style, nor to its suggestion of a universalist architectural aesthetic, unvaried by site or locale. If the Villas Stein–de Monzie (1926–28) and Savoye (1928–31) seemed near-perfect embodiments of Hitchcock and Johnson’s three points of the International Style, as well as of Le Corbusier’s Five Points, the load-bearing rough masonry walls of the Villa de Mandrot (1929–31) at Le Pradet were clearly earthbound, related to the Mediterranean vernacular of nearby farm buildings on the southern coast of France. And the roof terrace of the apartment for Charles de Beistegui (1929–31), off the Champs-Élysées, was a confirmation of Le Corbusier’s claim that “the outside is always inside,” as well as an evocative composition of built and planted forms set in a very calculated and unexpected relationship with monuments on the horizon, including the Arc de Triomphe at the head of Paris’s grandest axis.

Neither at ground nor sky level did Le Corbusier create an architecture divorced from its landscape, even if his practice and views had moved quite far from the mnemonic abstractions of nature and the integrated site plans of his early adherence to the style saïrin (fir tree style) of his native Chaux-de-Fonds. To organize a new generation of research, analysis, and interpretation of Le Corbusier’s practice using the metaphor and, in part, the form of an atlas, as we have done here, is not, however, to return to the notion of an international practice, either in the sense of the International Style—pitted polemically as it was against the growing attractions of regionalism in the arts in Depression-era America—or in the sense of the last twenty years of globalizing practices, in particular of so-called starchitects, whose signature branded forms are intended to be recognized no matter where they are set down. Rather it is to acknowledge a profound relationship between practice and place in Le Corbusier’s life and work, one that entails nothing less than his concept of vision, of the way he looked at the world on journeys first by traditional means, across the Balkans to Greece and Turkey, and then in the airplanes that for him were as much an extension of his retina as a means of conveyance. Airplanes were an integral part of the way he conceived of his buildings as instruments for crafting both optical and bodily relationships to landscapes; the notion of the landscape encompassed everything from the physical occupation of an interior to the projected occupa-
tion of an exterior framed by any number of devices, from the fenêtre en languier (ribbon window) to cuts through walls or hedges that frame a larger exterior, a distant view, or dis-
tail horizon into something easily apprehended by the eye and the mind.

And while these techniques remain integral to a set of compositional strategies that Le Corbusier developed over decades, they were not invariable in his adaptation of them to specific places and specific cultures. What is revealed in this atlas—which is as much a sur-
vey of the last twenty years of revisionist thinking, by scholars who have devoted themselves to retracing the contours of Le Corbusier’s practice in different venues—is the extent to which Le Corbusier’s travels and artistic practice were not to be dissociated. From the time of his voyage d’Orient in 1911 to his discovery of the landscapes and cultures of Chandigarh and Ahmedabad, which are vastly different one from another and would be the venues for a substantial portion of his post-World War II built production, Le Corbusier was engaged not with the ways in which things are similar around the world but rather with the ways in which they are distinct, with layers of culture that resonate even in worlds in mutation from the forces of modernization. Having abandoned the “pack donkey’s way,” by rejecting the

1 “Le Corbusier and Australia: Reaction and Reception in the Antipodes,” a research project, is currently under way at the University of Queensland.

German setting. This meant not simply considering the architect in the cultural milieu of, an exhibition at The Museum of Mies in Berlin. Terence Riley and I organized plified for greater clarity but also that they are systematically isolated from their sites. The International Style, which in countless editions has served several generations of twenty-century readers and architecture students, is not only that all are redrawn and sim-
ple art. Indeed, what is striking about the floor plans provided for every building reproduced in The International Style, which in countless editions has served several generations of twentieth-century readers and architecture students, is not only that all are redrawn and simpl-
ified for greater clarity but also that they are systematically isolated from their sites.

A decade ago, to explore a substantial revision of our understanding of the work of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, another of the great so-called form-givers of modern archi-
tecture, Terence Riley and I organized Mies in Berlin, an exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art, which contextualized the work of his Berlin years, from 1905 to 1933, in its German setting. This meant not simply considering the architect in the cultural milieu of the German capital at its great moment of intellectual and artistic experimentation. It also entailed situating his designs, both realized and proposed, in the specific urban and suburban landscapes for which they were created, beginning with the earliest neo-Biedermeier villas in Babelsberg, where both Mies and the architectural object as a largely autonomous work of spa-
tial art. Indeed, what is striking about the floor plans provided for every building reproduced in The International Style, which in countless editions has served several generations of twentieth-century readers and architecture students, is not only that all are redrawn and sim-
plified for greater clarity but also that they are systematically isolated from their sites.


These techniques, echoed as well in Le Corbusier’s use of photography and film, soon merged with those most modern forms of capturing the landscape, both static and moving, of recording the changing haptic and optic relationships between viewer and viewed. The experi-
ence and cultural meaning of landscape was in many ways as central to Le Corbusier’s vision of design and his conception of architecture and cities as it was to architects more commonly associated with the organic, such as Alvar Aalto or Frank Lloyd Wright. As landscape histo-
rian Caroline Constant has noted, in a compendium of two decades of essays that attempt to reweave the historically fractured entwinement of modern architecture and landscapes, “Indeed, the notion of genius loci was crucial even to an iconoclast such as Le Corbusier. . . . Unlike his approach to architecture and urbanism, which evolved as his radical a priori theo-
retical assumptions were tested through his built work, Le Corbusier’s approach to landscape evolved a posteriori from practice. Thus, despite the militant tone of his utopian urban pro-
nouncements, Le Corbusier carefully calibrated his building designs to their specific locales.”

What this atlas contains, then, is both a tour of Le Corbusier’s international activi-
ties and an accounting of the diverse and sometimes contradictory relationships he developed with places, from his native alpine birthplace to his refuge on the Mediterranean coast, a voyage that took him from mountains to sea, from a snowbound climate to one of year-round vegetation. But this was not solely a European journey, for it was in Chandigarh more than anywhere else (other than perhaps the pilgrimage church at Ronchamp) that Le Corbusier developed, in the final decade and a half of his practice, a more profound notion of the archi-
tect as one whose work encompasses the relationship of people to physical environment. The aim of this “atlas of modern landscapes” is to revisit some of the most influential works of twentieth-century architecture and expand our understanding of them, by both embedding them within the specific geographic, social and cultural circumstances that they were central to Le Corbusier’s experience of the world and the frames of experience he sought to embody.

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6 See also Christophe Girot, ed., Mies van der Rohe: Architektur (Vienna: gta Verlag, 2011).


If there is a blind spot in the astonishingly vast literature dedicated to Le Corbusier, it is certainly his relationship to landscape, which provided him with scenes to observe, stimulus for invention, horizons against which to set his projects, and a fertile field for metaphors. Even though few architects have been as extensively studied—in all aspects of his production, from buildings and city plans to paintings, drawings, and publications—and his abundant correspondence has revealed the complexity of his thought and the contradictions between his public persona and inner reflections, stereotypes about him persist, often the result of his own rhetoric.

The implementation of his new urbanism, of which he styled himself the prophet, by lesser architects and anonymous institutions has made it synonymous with monotony and even state-sponsored oppression. Le Corbusier made clear that “city planning and architecture can bring sites and landscapes into the city or make them into a feature of the city itself, a decisive feature of plastic awareness and sensitivity,” yet certain critics refuse to see anything in his work other than an aggressive indifference toward landscape and gardens.1 This attitude is but one expression of the totalitarian ambition still attributed to him, such as this near-caricature in Jan Woudstra’s dismissive analysis: “Le Corbusier’s ideas about landscape were simplistic and obsessively directed towards the control of the living environment irrespective of people’s needs, without sympathy and sensitivity towards people, places and nature.”2 But such a statement is nothing new; the diatribes of Alexandre de Senger, as well as Swiss and German reactionaries who ranted against so-called nomadic architecture, without anchor in soil or region, demonstrate that this type of discourse goes as far back as the 1930s.3

None of the large exhibitions of Le Corbusier’s work over the last twenty-five years, from those organized at the Centre Georges Pompidou and Hayward Gallery for the centennial of his birth, in 1987, to The Art of Architecture, a traveling exhibition that began in 2007, have meaningfully addressed the issue of landscape.4 Certain isolated authors have analyzed its role, often in relation to specific projects, such as Caroline Constant on Chandigarh and Bruno Reichlin (the first scholar to consider specific buildings by Le Corbusier as machines for the serialization of a new mode of life),5 but the issue itself has been largely ignored. This was the case with Le Corbusier’s 1952 apartment for himself, which was designed as an extra-urban project.6 In the Cause of Landscape

Jean-Louis Cohen


for viewing the landscape) on the Villa La Lac, in Corseaux, and sometimes in a broader context, such as Beatrix Colomina; there is also Dorothee Imbert, who has discussed the gardens of the houses of the 1920s and ‘30s. With the exception of these studies—along with an issue of Casabella on Le Corbusier’s strategies of observation, a symposium on his relationship to nature, organized by the Fondation Le Corbusier in 1991, and a provocative issue of Massilia, the journal of Corbusian studies, devoted to landscape in 2004—this dimension of his work has remained largely unexamined. His preoccupation with landscape is nevertheless present, although so deeply intertwined with his architectural, urbanistic, pictorial, and literary work that it has become as invisible as Edgar Allan Poe’s purloined letter. It is constructive at this point to specify how we will address the idea of landscape in this volume, both in its accepted sense as well as in terms of what it meant for Le Corbusier.

The term “landscape,” in use in the Anglophone world since the end of the sixteenth century, denotes both the physical and visible form of a specific outdoor space and its graphic, pictorial, or photographic representation; it was strictly rural in origin but today it is understood to be nonspecific. In his Court traité du paysage (Short treatise on landscape) (1997), the philosopher Alan Roger underlined the intimate connection between the two meanings, demonstrating that landscape resulted from the cultural construct of artisation. Using this word, borrowed from the philosopher of aesthetics Charles Lalo and, further upstream, from Michel de Montaigne, Roger argued that landscape was impossible without representation. The fertility of the term in Le Corbusier’s work stems from this ambiguity, in which many semantic meanings overlap. The relationship of building to landscape is manifested in some of his work, but in a large portion of his production it is latent, not the central focus of the project. He did not theorize explicitly about its role, but he was aware of the writings of French geographers such as Paul Vidal de la Blache and Jean Brunhes, and he maintained an intuitive and open relationship to its multiple significations (fig. 1). Le Corbusier approached the question of landscape from diverse angles. Observation always came first, as it was through vision that he usually encountered landscape; he would define himself in his last book, Mise au point (1966), as “an ass, but with a sharp eye.” Next came notation, the capturing of landscape, most often in drawings but also in words, a skill developed in his correspondence with the Swiss writer and artist William Ritter, and in photographs and, briefly, on film. Landscapes were recorded through changing artistic patterns, from the Russianian paintings of Charles Leplattier, which shaped his views of mountains during excursions in the Jura, to the Post-Impressionist visions of Paul Signac, which guided him through Istanbul, and the works he saw during his tours of European museums, which inspired his perception of Paris as a fantastic setting, rendered almost hallucinatory in his drawings. As he continued to explore Europe and the world from Paris, the instrument of artisation drifted toward the photographic, although Le Corbusier ceased taking pictures around 1914, except for a brief episode in the mid-1930s. Instead he amassed a considerable collection of postcards of landscapes, the effect of which on his reflections has incidentally never been fully accounted for. Finally, his lifelong observation of landscapes led to countless aphorisms and illuminating autobiographical accounts.

It was from these observations that he developed his building projects and city plans. The former took into account not only the siting of buildings and their immediate environments, most notably the gardens that surrounded them, but also the distant horizons onto which they opened, transforming territories into landscapes that responded to the machine age, of which Le Corbusier was determined to be the great interpreter. Thus Le Corbusier developed a notion of landscape that included both the microscopic scale of a building’s immediate environment and the small landscapes that it created or sustained, such as terraces, and the macroscopic scale of urban ensembles and large terrains. The principle of the atlas adopted here also deserves some clarification. The idea of a Corbusian atlas can be understood in its most literal sense, as a mapping of places lived, observed, drawn, designed, and built by Le Corbusier, to complement the thematic vision of his residential oeuvre. The principle of the atlas adopted here also deserves some clarification. The idea of a Corbusian atlas can be understood in its most literal sense, as a mapping of places lived, observed, drawn, designed, and built by Le Corbusier, to complement the thematic vision of his residential oeuvre. The principle of the atlas adopted here also deserves some clarification. The idea of a Corbusian atlas can be understood in its most literal sense, as a mapping of places lived, observed, drawn, designed, and built by Le Corbusier, to complement the thematic vision of his residential oeuvre. The principle of the atlas adopted here also deserves some clarification. The idea of a Corbusian atlas can be understood in its most literal sense, as a mapping of places lived, observed, drawn, designed, and built by Le Corbusier, to complement the thematic vision of his residential oeuvre. The principle of the atlas adopted here also deserves some clarification. The idea of a Corbusian atlas can be understood in its most literal sense, as a mapping of places lived, observed, drawn, designed, and built by Le Corbusier, to complement the thematic vision of his residential oeuvre.
and biographical survey carried out by the Encyclopédie of 1877.12 His global practice of urbanism and architecture, along with his constant travels to places increasingly distant from Europe, resulted in a personal cartography assembled in the form of the thousands of postcards that both situated his projects and recorded his trips. D’Alembert’s definition, in the “Atlas” entry of the Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers (1751), two hundred years after the mathematician and geographer Mercator first used the word, in 1569, could also apply to Le Corbusier: “This term was given to the collection of geographic maps of all the known parts of the world either because we see on a map the parts of the world as if we were standing at the summit of Mount Atlas, described by the Ancients, and viewed as the highest point on the globe, or because maps, so to say, carry the world, as Atlas did in the myth.”13 Le Corbusier flew higher than the mountains of North Africa but was invested in projects forming the bedrock of the modern world.

The atlas brings additional figures to mind, such as anatomical or surgical atlases. It is true that Le Corbusier often used metaphors grounded in medicine, likening cities to circulatory systems, recommending surgery to cure them of their ills, developing an anatomical, pathologi-
cal, and clinical atlas through his analyses and proposals for urban areas. The atlas also evokes true that Le Corbusier often used metaphors grounded in medicine, likening cities to circulatory systems, recommending surgery to cure them of their ills, developing an anatomical, pathologi-
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cal, and clinical atlas through his analyses and proposals for urban areas. The atlas also evokes

Workbund in Stuttgart—which can be understood as a rhetorical strategy for pretending that architecture had become autonomous thanks to the development of reinforced concrete, three points bear directly on the question of landscape. In L’Architecture vivante in 1927, Le Corbusier related two of the three—the pilotis and the roof terrace—to the landscape: “The house is in the air, far from the ground; the garden passes under the house; the garden is also on top of the house, on the roof.”18 As for the ribbon window, which pitted him against the Parisian architect Auguste Perret, who favored the vertical, its foremost characteristic is the panoramic view it offers. Two of the principal dimensions of Le Corbusier’s relationship to landscape are thus accounted for in this theoretical formulation. Landscape is both the site where the building is placed and the site onto which it looks, and therefore it deals both with small- and large-scale considerations.

**Itinerant Observations**

Over the course of six decades, beginning with his early education at the École d’Art in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Le Corbusier pursued an intense interest in the world’s landscapes. L’Éplattenier, his first mentor, did not limit his teachings to working in the industrial arts or reading John Ruskin; he instructed his students through the study of nature during excursions to the tops of mountains. In 1950 his former pupil would recall, “[i] studied nature under an excellent master; [i] observed natural phenomena in a place far from the city, in the mountains of the High Jura….”19 Nature is order and law, unity and diversity without end, subtlety, harmony and strength.20 He had been more cautious in L’Art décoratif d’aujourd’hui (The Decorative Art of Today) (1925) when he noted the same master’s advice: “Don’t treat nature like the landscapists who show us only its appearance. Study its causes, forms and vital development, and synthesize them in the creation of ornaments.”21 The many drawings he realized in the Jura, followed by those from his travels in Italy and the Orient and eventually Paris and other French regions, clearly reveal, however, that he remained attached to the appearance of landscape (fig. 4).

Ritter, his second mentor, continued Jeanneret’s education by guiding him toward Germany and Eastern Europe, requesting regular correspondence on his discoveries in the form of letters and sketches, and directing his attention to vernacular culture. The contribution of his third mentor, Perret, would not be limited to construction techniques in reinforced concrete or suggestions to read Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc and Adolf Loos; the discovery of the sight of Paris from the heights of the terrace at 25bis rue Franklin, where Perret lived and worked, played a fundamental role in Le Corbusier’s urban thinking, embedding in him the idea of high-rises that surveyed the ground. His fourth and final mentor, the painter Amédée Ozenfant, also shaped his way of looking at Paris and encouraged him to begin painting in oil; the landscape exerts a partial presence in some of these works. Moreover, Ozenfant introduced him to automobile travel, thus bringing about the rupture between the viewpoint of the pedestrian, witnessed in Jeanneret’s earliest sketchbooks, and a new perception enabled by speed. Attentive to both the grand landscapes of mountains and coastlines as well as to those of the city, Le Corbusier accrued his observations over the years, nourishing his written discourse with his impressions and employing multiple mediums. These included photography, a brief use of film, and, above all, drawing, filling the pages of the pocket sketchbooks that provide a true record of his travels around the world. With the same authority that he announced new ways of designing buildings and cities, he presented himself as a guide for his readers and listeners, as if the “eyes that do not see,” evoked in Vers une architecture, must be opened to unknown or misunderstood places.21 This posture of unveiling took on an epic dimension in Le Corbusier’s lectures and narratives that outlined in a few words or traits his interpretation of a landscape discovered through various modes of travel, as he would do on his return from South America, in Précisions (Precisions).
Landscape-Types and Memory

Distinct temporalities governed Le Corbusier’s response to landscape. One is that of the site barely glimpsed, corresponding to a single moment, although the experience might subsequently be perpetuated or drawn out in writing. These snapshots constituted a background in montage, a set of reflections that fueled his early discoveries and accompanied him all his life. The architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri has correctly identified the contrast between “machine and memory” in Le Corbusier’s work: I propose to identify the machine of memory that this work, in its deployment, constitutes. 23 By recording landscapes both visually and verbally, he could repeatedly reuse the places that moved him, transforming them into what could be called “landscape-types,” after his “object-types.” These landscape-types were often formed through memories that could be said to be Le Corbusier’s primal scenes, after Sigmund Freud’s term for the shock suffered by children witnessing or imagining the apparent violence of sexual relations between their parents. 24 An analogue of this violence can be found in the dominating relationship between built structure and natural site, something Jeanneret did not fail to observe nor, once he became Le Corbusier, to reproduce in his own projects. He did not shy away from erotic metaphors in his observations of the urban body, as when he noted, for example, in 1934 that Algiers, which he left by sea, professionally frustrated, was “a magnificent body, supple-hipped and full-breasted, but covered by the sickening scabs of a skin disease.” 25


Figs. 7 and 8 “Un paysage urbain à composer” (An urban landscape to compose). 1911. Imaginary views of Rome featuring horizontal lines and elementary volumes, Pencil and sepia on paper, each: 4 11/16 x 10 1/16" (21 x 27 cm). Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. Sketchbook 4

During his travels in the Balkans and around the Mediterranean in 1911, Jeanneret made two particularly productive stops, first in Athens and then in Rome. He analyzed the composition and contour modulation of the Parthenon in its tiniest details, but he was also extremely interested in the Acropolis itself (fig. 6), perceiving that the site extended visually across Attica and the Saronic Gulf. In Le Voyage d’Orient (Journey to the East) (1911) he described a drama unfolding before his eyes, which left an indelible mark:

Many an evening from the side of Lycaonbattus that overlooks the Acropolis, I could see beyond the modern city lighting up, the disabled hull and its marble vigil—the Parthenon—dominating it, as if it were taking it toward Piraeus. . . . Like a rocky hull, a giant tragic carcass in the dying light above all this red earth. . . . Here is truly a most infernal sight: a faltering sky extinguishing itself in the sea. The Peloponnesian Mountains await the shadow to disappear, and as the night is clinging to all that is steadfast, the entire landscape suspends itself to the horizontal line of the sea. The dark knot that binds the sky to the darkened earth is that black pilot of marble. Its columns, sparingly out of the shadow, carry the obscure front, but flashes of light spurt out between them like flames that would leap out of the portholes of a blazing ship. 26

A few weeks later, his discovery of Rome inspired further comment on the relationship between buildings and topography, in which he analyzed two sets of opposing figures (figs. 7 and 8). The first contained the long north horizontal set against the turbulent jumble of the existing city, linear elongation against apparent chaos, the archetype of which was Bramante’s Vatican galleries. He would make explicit reference to this example in 1933, in his plan for the city of Stockholm. 27 The second figure was created by the free game of autonomous geometric forms detached on a plan, as found in other Roman monuments; his overquoted aphorism “Architecture is the masterful, correct, and magnificent play of volumes brought together in light” describes this figure. 28 Such a dynamic relationship between prisms would be the basis for several projects.

These landscape-types transcribed in his pocket sketchbooks would be developed in highly varied forms. The landscape-type arising from the experience of the Parthenon, a “block from another world” doubling as a “contemplator of the sea,” was the model for his 1918 painting Le Cheminée (The Fireplace) (page 226), in which an oblique white volume,
slightly raised on the ledge of a fireplace, evokes a building on an esplanade.29 The site of Athens figured in the first appearance of the Unité d’Habitation de Grandeur Conforme, ten years before Le Corbusier was commissioned to build one in Marseille during his lecture “The Great Waste,” at the Hotel Stevens in Chicago on November 26, 1936, he drew a section view of a côte-jardin verticale (vertical garden city) between a blue crayon line indicating the ocean and a silhouette of mountains (fig. 9), exactly as he had drawn the Acropolis from Mount Lycabettus in 1911. The presence of “the same phenomenon” at the Acropolis, in La Cheminée, and in the superstructure of the Unité of Marseille would be even more clearly enunciated in a sketch prepared for the publication New World of Space.30

The two landscape-types that emerged from his Roman studies can be traced through several other projects. The dominant horizontal reappears at the Convent of Sainte-Marie de la Tourette (1953–60), where it is the fundamental element in a building designed from top to bottom. Le Corbusier followed a similar process in his conception of the Venice hospital (1964), designing it starting from the upper level, which was slated for patients’ rooms and would act as a bridge above the building’s lower components.31 The arrangement of autonomous volumes in dialogue with one another under the benevolent eye of hills or mountains emerges in several city plans, such as in his plan for Saint-Dié (1945), with housing units deployed in a vast valley in front of the summits of the Vosges, and even in the earliest sketches for Chandigarh (1951–65), with the Capitol buildings placed in precisely calibrated reciprocal relationships to the Swaté Range. Between the sublime horizontal expanses of infinite planes and the picturesque effect of collected prisms is enacted a dialectic that is anything but indifferent to landscape.

Capturing the Landscape

An additional dialectic deals with the view of the landscape captured by the eye, whether placed in concert with it or in opposition. These voyeuristic sightseeing interiors can be autonomous, such as in the Villas Stean–de Monzie (1928–29) and Savoye (1928–31), in which Colinomas has perceived “a machine to see, a cinematographic camera.”32 Yet even the more generic projects, capable of being inserted into multiple locations, were nevertheless designed as camerae lucidae, enabling distant observation. Many of his projects were just as mobile as the Kodak Box Jeanneret employed on his travels to the East, and some even appear to have taken on its form.33 The large linear buildings designed from the 1920s onward could also perform this role, constituted as they were by a succession of cells, modular compositions from which the contemplation of landscape was possible.

This approach was formulated most clearly in his 1929 plan for Rio de Janeiro, in which the living rooms of the inhabited freeway enabled discovery of the city’s beauty. Le Corbusier the artistically commented on this aspect in 1946: “This rock in Rio de Janeiro is famous. Untamed mountains surround it; the ocean bathes it. Palm trees, banana trees, tropical splendors animate the site. One stops, takes a seat—a frame all around. The four sides of a perspective! The room is arranged facing the site. The landscape completely enters the room” (fig. 10).34 In an earlier version, first published in 1942 in La Maison des hommes (The Home of Man), he wrote, “The pact with nature has been sealed! By means available to town planning, it is possible to enter nature in the lease.”35 He generalized his system to make it adaptable both for places already analyzed and those where he longed to work, stating, “Rio de Janeiro is a celebrated site. But Algiers, Marseille, Oran, Nice and all the Côtes d’Azur, Barcelona and many maritime and inland towns can boast of admirable landscapes.”36

The allusion to Marseille, which he had sketched several times en route to Algiers shortly before writing that text, is prescient. The Unité d’Habitation, designed four years later, captures the Provençal landscape in several registers akin to photographic framing, the most spectacular example being the roof terrace, the views from which could be likened to the panoramic views he had conceived since the 1920s, as in the presentations of the Ville Contemporaine (1922) and Plan Voisin (1925). A parapet obstructs the view of the building’s immediate surroundings and directs the viewer’s gaze toward the distant horizons of the bay and hills. Through this configuration the terrace doubles back to the young Jeanneret’s impressions of Athens (page 109, plates 18 and 19). The mineral table of the roof evokes the Acropolis, as already seen. Yet Jeanneret had also noted in 1911 that “the steep slopes of the hill and the higher elevation of the temple above the stone slabs of the Propylaea conceal from view all traces of modern life,” and, by reconstructing the perception of those who first inhabited the site, he evoked the view they would have had: “Priests came out of the cella..."37
sensing the bosom of the mountains behind them and sideways, and under the portico, they would cast a horizontal glance above the Propylaea at the sea and at the distant mountain it washes.”37 It is this horizontal glance, scoring the surrounding houses and small gardens, that he would construct in Marseille. In 1930 Le Corbusier would write of his visit to Rio, another situation that left a strong impression, that “the eye of the man who sees wide horizons is prouder, wide horizons confer dignity, that is the thought of a planner.”38 In addition, the Unité’s second system consists of the loggias for each apartment, which provide protection from the intense, almost vertical sunlight in the summer and fully capture the low light of winter. They provide residents with a plunging view down onto the building’s immediate surroundings and also act like theater boxes, framing the distant sight of hills and the still-rural suburbs of Marseille (page 22).

The only project that would give Le Corbusier the opportunity to orient the view toward the Parisian heights was a hotel designed in 1908 to replace Victor Laloue’s Gare d’Orsay, of 1900. In a sort of inversion of the Plan Voisin the view extends from a high-rise building toward a horizon no longer intersected by office towers. He could, therefore, freed from his own project, boast of “this geographic locality, this extraordinary element of the Parisian countryside: the Seine, the Tuileries, the hill of Montmartre, the hill of the Panthéon, Les Invalides, Notre-Dame, a feast for the mind and eyes” (fig. 11).39 He reiterated this proposition for the hotel to Malraux in order to justify a design contested by local authorities, writing “I have Paris—Paris—France, Paris—Universe in me, through me. I shudder! This city is still beautiful!”40 But his efforts to create a new observatory onto the city would be in vain.

Urban Landscape

By this time Le Corbusier had been reflecting on general aspects of urban landscapes and their transformations for nearly half a century, with his initial observations coming out of a project assigned by L’Épateiller for a publication on urbanism. This term had first appeared in the French lexic in 1910 and had developed out of the term construction des villes (construction of cities), a literal translation of the German Stadtbaulich. Inspired by his readings in the work of Friedrich Heinrich Eichstädt, which would enable the implementation of the Plan Voisin. His reflections fall under the heading of “paysage urbain” (urban landscape). This syntagm, which would become very popular in architectural discourse, was, in the manner of many Corbusian phrases such as cée-jardine verticale, a pure oxymoron, as “landscape” at this time exclusively denoted rural areas, either wild or cultivated. In the German version of Urbanisme, published by Hans Hildebrandt in 1929, “urban landscape” would be translated as Stadtlandschaft, a term widely used in Germany during the Nazi regime as well as in Munich, which have been acutely analyzed by Christoph Schnoor, his curiosity led him from architectural objects toward urban ensembles, revealed in his watercolors of Istanbul and sketches of Athens and Rome in 1911.35

One of the favorite themes of his notations was the relation between buildings and vegetation. Jeanneret rejected the basic separation of Haussmann’s Paris between building blocks and parks. In a 1911 notebook he jotted in the margins of his Roman sketches that “we must try to see if there is a way to plant the large pine trees of Naples or Berlin around our houses, instead of gardens.”46 Returning to his notes for “La Construction des villes” while writing Urbanisme (The City of Tomorrow and Its Planning) (1925), he would declare, “What could be more charming!” than churches set in greenery, a situation that a radical solution such as the Plan Voisin would have enabled (fig. 12).47 In that plan the opposition between the city of stone and the city of vegetation would have been resolved in favor of the latter, and he envisioned that “the Tuileries might be continued over whole quarters of Paris in the form of parks, whether of the formal French kind or in the undulating English style, and could be combined with purely geometrical architecture.”48

These echoes in Urbanisme add to those of Vers une architecture; both reflect on the composition of urban groupings shaped on the basis of a new type of vision. As he had similarly observed in Rome, he noted, “From the Eiffel Tower and its platforms at heights of 300, 600 and 900 feet, our horizontal vision is dealing with vast subjects which move and influence us deeply.” Here he conjured the “purity of the city’s silhouette . . . regained,” which would enable the implementation of the Plan Voisin.

Fig. 17. The City of Tomorrow and Its Planning. 1925. A project assigned by L ’Eplattenier for a publication on urbanism, this term had first appeared in the French lexic in 1910 and had developed out of the term construction des villes (construction of cities), a literal translation of the German Stadtbaulich. Inspired by his readings in the work of Friedrich Heinrich Eichstädt, which would enable the implementation of the Plan Voisin. His reflections fall under the heading of “paysage urbain” (urban landscape). This syntagm, which would become very popular in architectural discourse, was, in the manner of many Corbusian phrases such as cée-jardine verticale, a pure oxymoron, as “landscape” at this time exclusively denoted rural areas, either wild or cultivated. In the German version of Urbanisme, published by Hans Hildebrandt in 1929, “urban landscape” would be translated as Stadtlandschaft, a term widely used in Germany during the Nazi regime as well as
the period of reconstruction after 1945, and would take on a second meaning of “city as landscape.” Its origin was undoubtedly in Paul Schultz-Naumburg’s Kulturarken which Jeanneret read in 1910, taking notes that reveal an intense attentiveness to the discussion on urbanism and parks.46

Vision in Motion

The idea of “vision in motion,” made popular in 1947 through the posthumous publication of a vividly illustrated book by László Moholy-Nagy, transposes the dynamic character of the observational strategies deployed by Le Corbusier.47 The major breaks that mark his thoughts on city and landscape can be traced back to his discovery of new modes of travel, each one radically altering his perception and method of notation. As such, technical objects were caught in a double game of gazes. The “eyes that do not see” ocean liners, automobiles, and airplanes are the same eyes that cannot see from these floating, rolling, or flying mechanisms.

His early adherence to the theories of the Viennese architect Camillo Sitte was linked to the pace and wandering shape of his youthful travels through cities on foot, with backpack strapped on. He rejected these theories in 1925, turning against the “most willful piece of work” by Sitte, which combined “a glorification of the curved line and a spacious demonstration of its unvaried beauties.”48 This rejection coincided with the automotive vision acquired on his trips with Ozanant and eventually from behind the wheel of his own Ford and, later, his Avions Voisin C12 (fig. 13). Thereafter, Le Corbusier appeared to feel a certain joy in describing his discovery of twentieth-century means of transport, to the alteration of his personal visual experience and his method of notation. As such, technical objects were caught in a double game of gazes. The “eyes that do not see” ocean liners, automobiles, and airplanes are the same eyes that cannot see from these floating, rolling, or flying mechanisms.

His American experiences provided another perception of rapid routes. Although truly lyrical on the subject of the automobile, Le Corbusier remained relatively taciturn on the topic of the railway, inheritance of the previous century, except in a few cases, such as an account of his 1934 trip from Paris to Rome. The famous sketch of the Piazza dei Miracoli in Pisa, which he compared to the Palace of the Soviets (1931–32), was done on foot (the ensemble is roughly 1,300 feet [450 meters] from the train) and not from a train, as he would write. But it was seen from the window of a railroad carriage that he drew the hills of the southern border of Tuscany and Lazio on June 6 (fig. 14). These landscapes inspired the library of shades, in which the total four-hour cycle of day and night, which he would discuss in one of his lectures delivered after he disembarked,49 he first saw the site of Ronchamp on May 20, 1950, on a train from Paris to Basel; he drew the church in ruins and the cemetery below (fig. 15), sensing the importance that the pathway would have for the project. In this seminal sketch he contrasted the parkway designed for pleasure with the flights of the Acropolis topped by the Parthenon.50

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Jeanneret had experienced the view from a ship well before he crossed the Atlantic. In 1911 he had arrived in Athens by boat, and there he ruminated on his expectations for the future. In 1934 he repeated in 1934 on the roof of the Fiat factory, where he disembarked.50 He first saw the site of Ronchamp on May 20, 1950, on a trip by train from Paris to Basel; he drew the church in ruins and the cemetery below (fig. 15), sensing the importance that the pathway would have for the project. In this seminal sketch he contrasted the parkway designed for pleasure with the flights of the Acropolis topped by the Parthenon.50

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city’s monuments without sketching anything, although he did draw the deck of the ship he took from Patras to Brindisi. It was unquestionably the perspective from a boat crossing the waters of Lake Geneva that led him to design the horizontal window along the length of the Villa Le Lac in Corseaux (1924–25), which frames both the surface of the water and the moun-
tains.11 His subsequent discoveries of distant lands, sketchbook in hand, often took place from a ship’s deck. This was the case in Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro in 1929, where all projects began with observation of the sites’ relationship to the water. This first impres-
sion remained powerful in the drawings he made for both projects: the business center for
Buenos Aires is depicted from the Rio de la Plata, and the proposed inhabitable highway for
Rio is shown from offshore, in play with the horizontal coastline, the ragged outline of the
hills, and the peak of the Sugarloaf Mountain.

Algiers is a clear case of this perspective from the sea; it was in a sketch done while
approaching the city by boat, in March 1931, that Le Corbusier formulated his reflections
(fig. 16). After drawing a cluster of skyscrapers, similar to those proposed by the urban plan-
nner Maurice Rotival, he conceived the idea to “draw a large horizontal in the air,” as he noted
in his sketchbook from the voyage, declaring that he did not envision “excessive skyscrapers in
the Horizontal Window," pp. 64–78; and

Each of the four routes he analyzed—highways, railroads, waterways, airways—
thus never abandoned his curiosity for the airplane, its morphology, and its configuration as
a flying camera lucida with portholes opened onto territories below. His frequent long-distance
travels of the 1950s prompted reflections beyond issues of landscape: on a flight between
Bombay and Delhi in November 1955 he was again carried away by “the airplane which looks,
seen all, minutely.”59 In his sketchbook he noted, “One could write a Condition humaine
on the basis of discovering-revealing airplane flight = the stratospheric sky, the sea of clouds
with all its biology; the islands the continents, the mountains the plains, the hydrography = brook stream river meanders and deltas. Erosion natural or induced deserts, agricultural
cultures.”

52 See Romain, “Le Prix et Care of the Horizontal Window,” pp. 54–78, and his essay in this volume.
55 Le Corbusier, Précisions, p. 34.
56 Le Corbusier, “Unité,” L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui, 18, special issue (April
book 168, 428.
58 Ibid., sketchbook 137, 337. Le Corbusier was explicitly referring to Malraux’s book, published in 1933.
His interest in panoramic vision, which he had deployed in the dioramas for the Ville Contemporaine and Plan Vison, fed this new experience, which was both visual and kinetic.

Landscape Saved by Architecture

Le Corbusier’s public image, shaped for the most part by his urban projects, is that of an iconoclast or, rather, an urbanist who proposed to save only parcels of existing cities: Notre Dame in Paris, a fragment of the Casbah in Algiers, the Kremlin in Moscow. But several of his projects were deliberately marked by the most precise attention to landscape. While it was extremely rare for him to engage in preservation in its strictest sense, as in his discourse on Capri, he did not hesitate to rhetorically address the necessity to save landscapes threatened by urbanization.

Thus in 1934 he addressed himself to Jean-Pierre Faure and Théodore Lafon, his Algerian contacts, in an account of “a trip to the Italian lakes (at the foot of the Alps)” from which he “had confirmation of the absolute necessity from both the speculative and social perspectives of preserving the integrity of the splendid nature entrusted to the developers. It’s one or the other: either we destroy the landscape pure and simple, a scandalous societal loss, or, through intelligent interventions, we save the surrounding nature, the landscape, and the natural beauties, creating at the same time a modern scheme.”

Far from being a loss, or, through intelligent interventions, we save the surrounding nature, the landscape, and the natural beauties, creating at the same time a modern scheme.

The “intelligent intervention” he suggested for Algiers would consist mainly of concentrating places, high places in both senses of the term: altitude followed by elevation. “The geographic situation, the political tensions which surround them, etc. There are designated places, high places in both senses of the term: altitude followed by elevation.”

At the inauguration of Ronchamp, in 1955, Le Corbusier declared, “There are places that are sacred, and we don’t know why: because of the site, the landscape, the geographic situation, the political tensions which surround them, etc. There are designated places, high places in both senses of the term: altitude followed by elevation.” The dialectic of balance is particularly active at Ronchamp, a “high place” constituted by the double effect of topography and architecture, the first suggesting the second, the second fig. 18  “Unité de paysage.” 1945. From Le Corbusier, Manière de penser l’urbanisme: Édition de l’Architecture d’aujourd’hui (1946). p. 85


63 Le Corbusier, Looking at City Planning, p. 67-68.


67 Le Corbusier, Looking at City Planning, p. 67-68.

complementing the first. Elsewhere he evoked “architectural feats” that were summoned by “predestined sites,” considering those feats as plants inserted in the landscapes of Le Havre, Lyon, Paris, and Marseille.66 Ronchamp, far removed from the city, was incontestably one of the landscape-types on which Le Corbusier most directly focused his attention, following Mount Athos and the Athenian Acropolis: his building, just as religious, extending the hill or the mountain.

We can identify two other landscape-types. The first is the coastal city, first discovered by Le Corbusier in 1911, in Athens and Naples, followed by Rio de Janeiro, Algiers, and Marseille. The second is the city on a plain surrounded by mountains, also discovered in 1911, at Villa Adriana (fig. 19), and followed by Geneva, Saint-Dié, and Chandigarh. In both landscape-types, random order is combined with the persistence of visual and topographical patterns. The projects for Algiers and Chandigarh are also marked by a certain temporal duration, developing as they did through a patient survey of the sites, renewed on multiple trips, spanning a period of several years.

The Case of Algiers

The Plan Obus of 1932, while notable for its conceptual and graphic clarity, is an eminent manifestation of the complex relationship, maintained over thirteen years, between Le Corbusier and Algiers. Few places would capture his attention and emotions as intensely as this “city which looks at itself,” as he described it in Poésie sur Alger (Poetry on Algiers) of 1950, a small collection of his reminiscences of the city, including frustrations provoked by the failure of all of his undertakings there.67 Two years earlier, in an issue of L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui devoted to his work, he returned to the Plan Obus to clarify its relationship to the site, in a text that deals quite clearly with the symbiosis between building and landscape. Le Corbusier declared that he saw in the now-abandoned proposal the “first attempt at harmony, great harmony, between a geometric human project of steel, concrete and glass, and the surrounding nature: African earth, hills, plains and the great chain of the Atlas mountains, infinite sea.” But on the level of the immediate setting, they were inseparable from the buildings turned toward the bay they overlooked, as the Parthenon had done, that “consonant with the immensity of the sea.”

As he had done in Paris, where the unbuiltable Plan Vosien led to several small projects inserted into the city’s fabric, Le Corbusier made studies for several buildings derived from his Algiers plan, parceled in 1933 into so many isolated pieces. Tafuri, probably thinking more about Le Corbusier’s sculptures, observed, “What in the Plan ‘Obus’ is designed to go into a machine insuring its significations is destined to reemerge, isolated, as an enigmatic fragment.” Inscribed into the system of vending paths that had made a sharp impression, the buildings turned toward the bay they overlooked, as the Pantheon had done, that “conterminator of the sea.” But on the level of the immediate setting, they were inseparable from valleys open onto space. There the buildings will plunge down to find their home.” But the project also established new views, for “at the top, the edge against the sky will be the only crowning horizontal line. Here the reason of order, nobility, calm, the indisputable will reign against the sky the line is no longer uneven, as is customary, but straight.” This analysis of a site conceived according to a vertical model, with its supports based on the slope of the crowning horizontal, also developed from his reading of the sixteenth-century Villa d’Este, which he had visited in 1911 and returned to in 1946, observing, “See here how architectural inventiveness makes use of the material conditions of the site: a site wild with incident. The slopes are exploited, and the broken contours bridged. Left, the profile, right, the face. The composition of the face is closed by the pure straight line of the roof.”

Fifteen years later Le Corbusier compared the project for Algiers with the Palace of the Soviets, likening the curving buildings and inhabitable highway to the conch shells in which he had heard the voices of Muscovite orators reverberate, declaring.

Attention! We reveal the secret engines of harmony: we are at the heart of an acoustic event where everything accords, the acoustic of forms, extraction from one science that must forgive us to another. This dominant horizontal is an echo of the plane of the sea, the curves of the building are like sonorous conch shells: they project sounds (or views) outwards; inwards, they receive all sounds (or views); they sweep across the horizon like the beams of a light-house. The horizontal roads are the terrestrial material; they are on the level of the African plain; the one which sinks down indicates the depth of the vast continent: the others intersecting at sinusoid right angles like the meandering edge of the sea.”

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69 Le Corbusier, “Unité,” p. 16.
70 Tafuri, “Machine et mémoire,” p. 211.
the surrounding topography. The Laloin building (fig. 20) was set in a ravine around which the chemin du Taléry wound its way and the habitable viaducts crossed, providing housing both under the roadway and above it. The principle was to "reconstitute the loggias of the arcades at the port" that had fascinated Le Corbusier since his first trip to Algiers and often again thereafter. A project for an apartment house was placed on a steep slope, in a manner similar to many such houses situated on the foothills of the city. It was divided into two blocks separated by an opening at street level, a principle he would favor for the entire city, to the point of developing a regulatory proposal for boulevards on which the cornice level of every building would have used his project's cross section. And the buildings designed for Prosper Durand above the Oued Ouchala redeployed the hybrid of infrastructure and residence, but on a more even site between the hills. Their stacked levels also overlooked the sea, as if Le Corbusier had reproduced on flat ground the configuration of hills and ravines he found so inspiring.

Chandigarh

If landscape was the matrix for Le Corbusier's projects in Algiers, it was the backdrop for his work in Chandigarh, as Montmartre had been for the Plan Voisin. Le Corbusier was finally given the chance, after twenty-five years of unrealized projects, to build a city from the ground-up. He noted this when preparing for his first meeting with his Indian interlocutors, observing, "It is the hour that I have been waiting for;" the time "to construct a Capitol for "India the humane and profound civilization." 73 The site of the future capital could not have been more different from the one in Algiers, and his experience there would be completely distinct. He determined the outlines of the city plan fairly quickly—all the more so since it relied on a critique of the earlier work of the American planner Albert Mayer—although not without carefully studying the forms of existing houses and villages, as the plain in no way presented a clean slate. The inflections of the system first developed in 1945 and known as 7V , for the checkerboard of main roads across the city creates in his plan an orthogonal system deployed on the plains that the British architect Jane Drew felt had "a quality of beauty hinted at in the paintings of Giotto." 74 She described the setting in 1953, observing that "the slope of the site is toward the south and thus the eye is led up, and is always roving over the background of the endless ranges of the Himalayas" (fig. 21). The Siwalik Range performed the role of Le Grammont in Corseaux, while the Capitol buildings extend- ing across the plain recalls Jeanneret's 1915 sketches based on Piro Ligero's view of Rome (page 112, fig. 5). Two orders adjoin within the monumental composition of the spaces of power, which reproduced the layout of the Ville Radieuse's center in its separation from the rest of the city, and the living quarters, whose design Le Corbusier delegated to his cousin and former partner Pierre Jeanneret. 75 Far from considering the two visually compatible, Le Corbusier aimed to make the residential quarters invisible from the center, noting in his sketchbook, 'Attentions! [On the] city side the Capitol must be enclosed by a continuous glacis (consisting) of a horizontal embankment (hide all construction of the city)." 76 He thus seems to have been wary of the city whose outlines he himself had traced and aimed to erase them, as the view from the Acropolis erased Athens.

While Pierre Jeanneret, Drew, and Maxwell Fry developed the city's housing and public services, Mohinder Singh Randhawa, an agronomist specializing in rural environments and agriculture, designed the landscape scheme, relying on recommendations developed by A. L. Fletcher, the advisor to the Punjab government for the new capital. 77 With the model of the British garden city in mind, Randhawa formulated a program highly specific to modern India's landscapes. He planned the principal green spaces and supervised, on the basis of drawings made in Paris, the alignment of plantings that gave character to the streets of Chandigarh's different quarters. 78

Largely uninvolved with the development of the city's landscape, Le Corbusier focused in the Capitol Complex, enriching his ideas with observations of Indian gardens. He was less concerned with revealing the "conditions of nature," although he certainly kept them in mind, than with working out in his notes and sketches his impressions of various sites, proceeding in a near-mannerist way. He chose elements from a lexicon of Mughal compositions, 79 80

72 Drawing, FLC 13816.
75 See Mohinder Singh Randhawa, Beautiful Trees and Gardens (Delhi: Indian Institute of Agricultural Research, 1961).
which he quickly sketched down and then modified and assembled according to a new syntax. On the garden of the Presidential Palace in Delhi, completed by Edwin Lutyens in 1929 for the viceroy, he wrote in 1951, “The sun sets on the axis over the canal//canal//everywhere the water, pools, and watercourses glimmer.” But it was in the Pinjore garden, an hour from Chandigarh by car, where he found a proportional sequence close to the units of the Modular, which furnished him with the materials necessary for the task (page 376, fig. 9). For the Capitol he skewed the axes of the garden, in the same manner he would subvert the symmetries specific to the monumental forms of the buildings. Faced with the flatness of the plain, he denied it by implanting a network of humps and hollowed-out recessions similar to the flower beds planted at the bottom of the garden paths (fig. 22), explaining, “Artificial hills have been created with fill from the excavations made for streets and parking strips. These hills responding to the buildings of the Capitol will be covered with trees. . . . In certain parts of the Capitol the horizon will be enclosed by walls of green.” This project, exceptional in all respects, thus inverts the relation between buildings and landscape, so that they play against one another to a certain degree.

Landscape as Metaphor

Landscape’s most fertile role in Le Corbusier’s thinking retained nothing of the literal; it involves neither geographic interpretation nor landscape’s active or reactive presence in his projects. Landscape was edifying, if I may say so, because it generated analogies and metaphors, figures of speech that had immense importance in all of his work, as in his most provocative aphorisms such as “The house is a machine for living in.” Along with the machine and mythology, images of landscape were summoned to support a project or biographic episode. He used the analogy of the steep mountain path to describe the elements of his project for the Centrosoyuz Headquarters (1928–36) in Moscow in a 1929 lecture in Buenos Aires. Almost at the same time his formulation of the loi du méandre, during his observation of the plains of Uruguay in 1929, transformed the landscape into a sort of projective test, revealing his own thought processes to himself. Toward the end of his life, far removed from the immense landscapes he had surveyed, he discovered one in his Parisian studio (fig. 23). He described it as though it had been created by a process of sedimentation that had escaped his notice but which he nonetheless knew by heart:

Fig. 23  Le Corbusier in his Paris painting studio. 1959. Photograph by Gisèle Freund. Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. FLC Le 9-49

I live in my archipelago, my sea, it’s thirty years of accumulations diversely attached to intellectual and manual activities. Here and there, on the ground, groups of objects, devices, books, texts, drawings. These are my islands! . . . There are very clear islands of work: the island of the telephone, the workbooks, the intermittent and imperative daily work. . . . There are volcanic islands which emerge and disappear at the chosen hour; a sheet of plywood on the arms of two chairs. Here I edit a book, prepare an article, dictate something, etc. Lastly, there is the vertical island, the painting easel in front of the island of colors. . . . The archipelago is tight. The passes are narrow. But I navigate within them with the security and the precision of an old captain.

Thus he succeeded in making his most secret place a microcosm, there condensing six decades of observations.

83 Le Corbusier, Précisions, p. 41.
La Chaux-de-Fonds
Birthplace
38 rue de la Serré
Projects
1. Paul Ditisheim department store, 120 boulevard Léopold-Robert, 1913
2. Garden city, Les Crêtets, 1914

Workplaces
1. École d'Art (currently Bibliothèque de la Ville), 33 rue du Progrès
2. First office, 54 rue Numa Droz

Projects
1. Paul Ditisheim department store, 120 boulevard Léopold-Robert, 1913
2. Garden city, Les Crêtets, 1914

Switzerland & Germany

Projects
Building, Les Eaux-Vives, Geneva, 1930
Mundaneum, Geneva, 1928
Palace of the League of Nations, Geneva, 1927
Pont Butin, Geneva 1915
Urban plan, Geneva, 1933
Rentalanstalt building, Zurich, 1933
Sanatorium, Zurich, 1934

Built Works
Villa Le Lac, Corseaux, 1924–25
Clarté apartment building, Geneva, 1930–32
Villa Favre-Jacot, Le Locle, 1912–13
Exhibition pavilion for Heidi Weber, Zurich, 1962–67

La Chaux-de-Fonds

Built Works
1. Cinéma Scala, 52 rue de la Serré, 1916
2. Villa Fallot, 1 chemin de Pouillerel, 1905–07
3. Villa Jacquemet, 8 chemin de Pouillerel, 1907
4. Villa Jeanneney-Pernet, 12 chemin de Pouillerel, 1912
6. Villa Stotzer, 6 chemin de Pouillerel, 1907–08

Clarté apartment building, Geneva, 1930–32
Villa Favre-Jacot, Le Locle, 1912–13
Exhibition pavilion for Heidi Weber, Zurich, 1962–67

Visits
Visited January–May 1911
Visited March–December 1910

Residences of Le Corbusier

Workplaces of Le Corbusier
1. École d’Art (currently Bibliothèque de la Ville), 33 rue du Progrès
2. First office, 54 rue Numa Droz

Projects
1. Paul Ditisheim department store, 120 boulevard Léopold-Robert, 1913
2. Garden city, Les Crêtets, 1914

1. Cinéma Scala, 52 rue de la Serré, 1916
2. Villa Fallot, 1 chemin de Pouillerel, 1905–07
3. Villa Jacquemet, 8 chemin de Pouillerel, 1907
4. Villa Jeanneney-Pernet, 12 chemin de Pouillerel, 1912
6. Villa Stotzer, 6 chemin de Pouillerel, 1907–08

Visited March–December 1910
Projects
Built Works
Unile d’Habitation, Berlin-Charlottenburg, 1956–58
Two houses at the Weissenhofsiedlung exhibition, Stuttgart, 1927

Completed Works
1. Villa Le Lac, Corseaux, 1924–25
2. Clarté apartment building, Geneva, 1930–32

Visited January–May 1911
Projects
Built Works
1. Paul Ditisheim department store, 120 boulevard Léopold-Robert, 1913
2. Garden city, Les Crêtets, 1914

Key
- Visited March–December 1910
- Visited January–May 1911
- Projects
- Built Work
- Residences of Le Corbusier
- Workplaces of Le Corbusier
In 1925, in the chapter entitled “Confession” in *L’Art décoratif d’aujourd’hui* (The Decorative Art of Today), Le Corbusier reminisced, evoking his place of birth, his discovery of nature, his first mentor, and his plan to develop a style du pays (regional style) and use it to transform the standards of home décor.1

With this declaration of allegiance to the decorative arts and regionalism, and of participation in the “heroic conquering spirit” of Art Nouveau, he appears to be inscribing his personal history into the artistic and architectural culture of his time, counting himself among those who “brought forth the new machine spirit.” It suggests a desire to secure the interpretation of this first biographical, intellectual, and affective sequence of his life—a period both determinative and unfortunate. “Here ends,” he wrote, “my first chapter.” But, as Marie-Jeanne Dumont has pointed out, in this account of origins, with its epic tone, nothing is given a geographical location, nothing is given a name: not the Swiss town of La Chaux-de-Fonds, nor the Jura, nor the mountain Pouillerel, nor the Vallée du Doubs, nor the fir tree that would become emblematic, not even the name of his mentor, Charles L’Eplattenier; everything is projected into a time of myth and a space of utopia, in the double sense of the term.2

The text is signed “Le Corbusier,” who thus provides a cathartic and authorized version of his past. But since the death of Le Corbusier, it has been Charles-Édouard Jeanneret who in numerous critical studies has been situated in that contemporary natural and cultural environment, in the projects of those years, in the first essays, and in the abundant correspondence. These studies enable us to assess his formative years at home, revealing not only his complex, contradictory nature but also his vitality and rigor, and the determination and the doubts that contributed to his intellectual and artistic development during this period.3

From 1902 to 1914 his most significant influence was the École d’Art of La-Chaux-de-Fonds, but bit by bit other factors began to change Jeanneret’s relationship to and perception of the local landscape: his travels, the books he was reading, and the new mentors who replaced L’Eplattenier. But a more philosophical rupture appears in a letter to his second mentor and friend, William Ritter, in which Jeanneret described the Villa Jeanneret-Perrin,
the villa he had built in 1912 for his parents, in terms that are rather audacious: “An anachronism of place, a dépaysement whose function is not to eliminate me but instead to suggest other lands, water, the sea especially calling forth views from a distance.”4 His neologism, dépaysement, is most clearly understood as disorientation (dépaysement) but also introduces a conscious process of separation, anticipating the nonplace evoked in his “Confession”; this rupture with the Jurassic landscape was not only sentimental or imaginative but also called into question the very idea of regionalism in architecture.5 Jeanneret metaphorically suggested this shift in the interior of the villa’s living room fireplace, where he painted a dead bird reposing as a butterfly gathering pollen from flowers borrowed from Ottoman ceramics rather than from local flora.6

In fact Jeanneret’s hesitant but progressive dépaysement emerged in three movements: the first, rather briefly, Jeanneret’s submission to the local style du pays called for by L’Épplattenier; the second, the critical confrontation with this style that began in 1907, after his trip to Italy while still under the influence of John Ruskin; the third, starting in 1912, his deconstruction of the regionalism of his first completed projects, to be replaced in his teaching and his new architectural projects with a discreet and heterogeneous Neoclassicism.

The first movement began when Jeanneret enrolled at the École d’Art in 1902 to learn the craft of watchcase engraving. But he was more inclined toward art and toyed with the idea of becoming a painter. His first known landscape painting dates from that year: a watercolor, rather fresh in its awkwardness but still hewing to the iconography of the Jurassic landscape—pine trees, pastures, herds of cows—that at the end of the nineteenth century had become a distinct genre of alpine landscape and still remained the dominant paradigm in Switzerland. Jeanneret had seen the landscapes of such local painters as Albert de Meuron, Jules Jacot-Guillarmod, Édouard Jeanmaire, and L’Épplattenier (fig. 1) in the Musée des Beaux-Arts at the Collège Industriel, adjacent to his school. Two landscapes by L’Épplattenier seem to have lodged in his imagination: Au sommet Temps de mars (1907), both of which hang today at the Musée des Beaux-Arts of La Chaux-de-Fonds. But in 1905 L’Épplattenier, a young professor of drawing, urged Jeanneret to enroll in his Cours Supérieur d’Art et de Décoration, a new class on decorative arts, rather than in painting, pushing the student in a different direction. Thus Jeanneret would not be a landscape painter; he would not depict Jurassic nature. Instead he would “henceforth study its causes, forms and vital development, and synthesize them in the creation of ornaments.”7

L’Épplattenier had studied at the Mintarqipsikola (School of model drawing) in Budapest and at the École Nationale des Arts Décoratifs and the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He had kept abreast of the emergence of Art Nouveau in Europe and the subsequent revival of ornamentation and wanted to open the school to fields other than the decoration of watches; a devotee of Ruskinian ideals, he called for a return to nature and its direct observation through drawing, the probity of the artisan and his methods, and imitation into the grammar and history of styles of art through studying great works. His ideology contained an element of nationalism, a return to local tradition, to a rural and vernacular architecture, would counteract the internationalist eclecticism of architecture and the industrial disfigurement of cities.4 With his students he developed a regional style, the style sapin (fir tree style), using a formal vocabulary derived from the fauna and flora of the Jura.8 Jeanneret was an enthusiastic participant in this project and divided his time between drawing on place and consulting periodicals and reference works on design and ornamentation in the school’s library.9 The few landscapes he sketched in pencil and watercolor during this time have a generally qualified quality: lack of detail, alternating masses of dark and light, linear compositional rhythms.10 They are similar to studies in geometric stylization based on fir trees and nodus, most notably L’Épplattenier’s own.11

The most striking works of the style sapin were created between 1905 and 1907, and the Villa Fallet, a collaborative work directed by Jeanneret, remains its definitive example and a manifesto for L’Épplattenier’s students (fig. 3).12 It was the first example of the new style du pays referred to in the art ducoratif of Lausanne, the Seven Lamps of Architecture (1849), Owen Jones, The Grammar of Ornaments (1856), Eugène Grasset, La Plante et ses applications ornementales (1896) and Methods de composition ornementale (1903) and Charles Blanc, Grammaire des arts du dessin (1867) and Grammaire des arts décoratifs (1891). The French, English, and German reviews available at the school included Art d’Édication and L’Art decoratif; The Magazine of Art and The Studio; Die Kunste and Berliner Architekturnachrichten.13 Drawings, FLC 1446, 1775, 2017, 2045, 2053, 4504, and 4507; 12 Annex Hélodier, Charles L’Épplattenier (Neuchâtel, Switzerland: Éditions Attinger 2011), pp. 34–36.
Ornamental language applied to domestic architecture, which had previously been used only on the watchcases sent by the school to the world’s fair in Milan. The integration of architecture and landscape, showing an almost mimetic relation between the two, is vividly shown in an early sketch. The interior of the Chapelle Indépendante, in nearby Cernier, Fontainemelon, decorated in its entirety by Jeanneret and his fellow students, was described by the president of the commission of the École d’Art as akin to being “in the middle of a forest; everything is silent and calm; one sees the sky only if one looks up; all around the firs and their branches form a tapestry rich in lines and colors, linked to the earth by columns, the verticals of the tree trunks.”

The influence of the Germanic countries is evident in the Villa Fallet and the Chapelle Indépendante, but during Jeanneret’s 1908 visit to Vienna, his firsthand experience of the Wiener Werkstätte and the architecture of Otto Wagner and Josef Hoffmann raised doubts in his mind about the work he had felt so original, but which had lost its inspiration diminished because Viennese artists and architects did not use nature as the basis for their forms. He was thereafter conscious of an opposition between German modern architecture, whose coldness and classical leanings he deplored, and the Latin movement, based in a Mediterranean style, whose search for beauty was predicated on the laws of nature appealed to him. He felt that L’Eplattenier’s hope for a regionalism that would overcome this antagonism was nothing but a pipe dream. “Where the Parisians place a leaf modeled after nature, and our taste remains unsullied.” He had come to understand that the decorative arts would not be the solution to the problem of architecture. After Vienna, Jeanneret headed for Paris, instead of Dresden, as L’Eplattenier had planned for him, confirming his preference for the Latin style. This was further strengthened by a long stay in Germany in 1910, during which he made architectural studies began to show the influence of the Neoclassicism of German architecture, combined with the idea developed by Alexandre Cirigna-Vanezy of an “other regionalism” specific to the Jura but to the Suisse Romande. And despite his new interest in the picturesque urban landscape, of the sort advocated by Camillo Sitte and of which the pragmatic and rational industrial city-planning of La Chaux-de-Fonds was a counterexample, Jeanneret continued to paint a few mountain views, some rather melancholic in tone, others violently expressive and colored, like the images that would be included in Le Voyage d’Orient (Journey to the East) (1916). From this point on, he preferred the lakeside landscape of Neuchâtel, with its likeness to the Mediterranean landscape, to the Jura.

Two texts from 1914 close this Jurassic chapter: “Le Renouveau dans l’architecture,” in which he rejected both eclecticmism and regionalism, and Un Mouvement d’art à La Chaux-de-Fonds, which traced the brief but exemplary history of the Nouvelle Section, which had been terminated that year, and L’Eplattenier dismissed, leaving Jeanneret with no future there. But this painful episode was liberating for him; he thus did not feel it necessary to eliminate from the latter text a remark made by the German architect Theodor Fischer that his master would surely have disapproved of: “I am surprised that abstract stylization of natural forms is still cultivated. In my opinion, only the concrete goal, concrete materials, and the concrete object can lead to a proper style.”

![Fig. 3. Villa Fallet, La Chaux-de-Fonds. 1905-07. Elevations of the west, south, and east facades. Blueprint, 23 x 33 1/2" (59.3 x 105 cm). Bibliothèque de la Ville, La Chaux-de-Fonds](image)

![Fig. 4. Project for the Ateliers d’Art, La Chaux-de-Fonds. 1912. Colored pencil and ink on paper, 12 1/2 x 15 1/2" (31 x 40 cm). Musée National d’Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris](image)
Plate 1  Jura landscape. 1902
Watercolor on paper, 4⅛ x 6⅜" (11.9 x 15.9 cm)
Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. FLC 2185

Plate 2  Landscape with lake. 1905
Pencil, watercolor, and ink on paper;
4⅛ x 6⅜" (12.2 x 17.3 cm)
Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. FLC 1746

Plate 3  Forest. n.d.
Pencil, watercolor, gouache, and pastel on paper;
5⅝ x 4⅞" (13.5 x 12.3 cm)
Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. FLC 2100

Plate 4  Mountain landscape. 1904–05
Pencil and watercolor on paper; 2⅞ x 6⅜" (7.3 x 17.1 cm)
Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. FLC 2021
Plate 5  Mountain landscape. 1904–05
Pencil, watercolor, and gouache on paper, 6 9/16 x 8 11/16" (16.7 x 22 cm)
Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. FLC 2210

Plate 6  Blue mountains. 1910
Pencil, watercolor, ink on paper, 6 3/8 x 7 11/16" (16.2 x 22 cm)
Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. FLC 2033

Plate 7  Forest in winter. 1910–11
Pencil and gouache on paper, 8 11/16 x 11 1/2" (22 x 39.2 cm)
Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. FLC 5834
Following his discovery of Germany, the Balkans, and the Mediterranean, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret returned to La Chaux-de-Fonds, where he divided his time between teaching in the new section of the town’s art school and working as an architect and interior designer. He produced several designs for furniture for a group of progressive Jewish clients and worked on urban development projects, the most accomplished of which was the garden city of Les Gréets (1914), a picturesque ensemble in which reminiscences abound of the work of Richard Riemerschmid and Heinrich Tessenow in Hellerau and of Georg Metzendorf in Essen.

In 1912, on a site near the houses that he had worked on with René Chapallaz from 1906 to 1907, he designed and built a large villa for his parents that overlooked the city. For the Maison Blanche, as it was quickly nicknamed, Jeanneret drew on many of the observations he had made during his travels. Unlike his chalet-style Villa Fallet of 1905–07, this house would not be defined by a stereotypical form. It was set on terraced land rather than a promontory, on an embankment supported by a retaining wall.

Seen from the access path, the house recalls sketches Jeanneret had made of dwellings the previous year in Istanbul. From the road it can be reached by a meandering walkway that leads up to the corner of the garden. The path starts under a pergola similar to those Jeanneret had drawn in Pompeii, then it turns to the right, leading to a well-concealed front door. The dual entity formed by the house and its adjacent garden, which is set on a masonry base in the middle of the plot and hidden from the street, strongly recalls Hermann Muthesius’s house in Nikolassee (1906–07). Jeanneret knew this precedent from its publication in Lanthaus und Garten (Country house and garden) as well as from firsthand experience; he attended a performance of A Midsummer Night’s Dream at Muthesius’s home in its “forest of pines,” as he reported to his parents in June 1910.1 The white coating and asbestos-cement roof relate the house to contemporary German constructions. Also, from certain angles the house calls to mind photographs published by Paul Schultz-Neumburg in his Kulturarbeiten (Cultural works), while numerous details correspond to the simple, straightforward architectural forms of the early years of the previous century, such as those celebrated by Paul Mebes in Um 1800 (Around 1800) (1900).2

The interior is striking in its luminosity, another echo of houses by Muthesius. The axis connecting the main living areas leads from the dining room, which opens on the garden through an apsida window, to the living room illuminated by a rectangular window overlooking the horizon”—to the anteroom, which recalls a “large window with a forest view.”3 On the second floor the bedrooms are lit by a band of windows facing the horizon. This strip recalls Frank Lloyd Wright’s Winslow House in River Forest (1893–94), which Jeanneret knew through the Wasmuth publication of 1911.4 A very precise relation was thus established in which the open spaces of the interior relate to one another as well as to the panorama of the town and the surrounding hilltops.5

2 Paul Schultz-Neumburg, Kulturarbeiten (Cultural works), published by Wasmuth, a series of which a monograph on Frank Lloyd Wright was published in 1911.
3 Jeanne Steimer, quoted in Arthur Rüegg, Traditionelle Entwicklung (Cultural works), while numerous details correspond to the simple, straightforward architectural forms of the early years of the previous century, such as those celebrated by Paul Mebes in Um 1800 (Around 1800) (1900).

1. “large window overlooking the horizon”—to the anteroom, which reveals a “large window with a forest view.” On the second floor the bedrooms are lit by a band of windows facing the horizon. This strip recalls Frank Lloyd Wright’s Winslow House in River Forest (1893–94), which Jeanneret knew through the Wasmuth publication of 1911. A very precise relation was thus established in which the open spaces of the interior relate to one another as well as to the panorama of the town and the surrounding hilltops. 1

Villa Jeanneret-Perret, La Chaux-de-Fonds. 1912. Exterior perspective. Pencil on paper, 25 1/4 x 21 5/16 (64.7 x 54.8 cm). Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. FLC 30269

Villa Jeanneret-Perret, La Chaux-de-Fonds. 1912. Interior perspective. Pencil on tracing paper, 19 3/4 x 25 1/4 (50.7 x 64.5 cm). Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. FLC 30269
The house built by Charles-Édouard Jeanneret for the industrialist Anatole Schwob, the manufacturer of Cyma watches, was his last project in his hometown. It was also the only one of his early residences that he judged good enough to be included in the pages of L'Esprit nouveau, although he left the commentary to Amédée Ozenfant. As opposed to his earlier houses, which were suburban, the villa was built on a city block that had been reconstructed in 1835 on Charles-Henri Junot’s grid plan. Jeanneret had just completed his first building in the city center, the Cinéma Scala, whose vast roof evoked Heinrich Tessenow’s Festival House (1910–12), which he had seen in Halleur.

The comfortable Villa Schwob recapitulates the years of his formation, but above all it announces his turn toward abstraction in the 1920s. As he wrote to Auguste Perret in 1916, Jeanneret based the house on the principle of the concrete maison bouteille (bottle house), which he had designed while working for his mentor in 1909. He told Perret that it would have “facades with terraces ‘à la française’ . . . but made out of reinforced concrete.” However, the building was not cast all at once, and its framework was based on research Le Corbusier had undertaken in 1914 for the Dom-Ino housing-scheme patent. He thus used “a skeleton of concrete built in a few weeks and filled in with pretty, bare bricks,” achieving a result that recalls the side facade of Perret’s Champs-Élysées Théâtre (1912). The theater’s main, square facade reappears in Villa Schwob’s large white surface facing the rue du Doubs. In L’Esprit nouveau Le Corbusier published the villa as a prime example of the systematic use of regulating lines.

The clear-cut cubic volume with semi-cylindrical extensions marks the definitive departure from the vernacular and classical forms of his earlier houses. The exterior retains a certain flavor of Istanbul, with concrete elements replacing the wooden panels of Ottoman constructions. But the nickname “Turkish Villa,” which it was rapidly given by neighbors, speaks as much to the eccentricity of its appearance as to an Orientalism that is difficult to identify. Indeed, the sources of the house are numerous. The sequence leading from the entrance to the double-height living room appears to reproduce the layout of the Villa Diomedes in Pompeii, organized around an atrium. This main area, truly the center of the house, recalls the large open spaces of Parisian artists’ studios, invoked by the south-facing window, and also resembles the nave of the garage by Perret on rue de Ponthieu (1906–07).

In its overall organization the villa illustrates the new position Jeanneret took toward the urban landscape of his hometown. The picturesque illustrations found in the sketches he produced prior to 1914 are abandoned in favor of a more individual, almost nihilistic form that uses surrounding structures as foils. The building is presented as an autonomous object that connects to the continuity of the block only through the modeling of the service wings at the rear. While Jeanneret would harbor lasting resentment toward his client, who refused to pay the architect’s fee because of substantial overruns in the villa’s construction costs, he would also see in the house a true turning point. In June 1920 he wrote to William Ritter, saying, “I want to dedicate myself to serious, even learned works, that is to say paintings that are at least an extension of my Villa Schwob.”

A ribbon window 36 feet (11 meters) long, or almost that long, opens up the Villa Le Lac, also known as the Petite Maison, on the landscape of Lake Geneva (fig. 1). Le Corbusier employed various architectural devices for the house in Corseaux in order to adapt his design to a site he considered a veritable salle de spectacle, or theater; in this essay I will demonstrate how he inserted the Petite Maison into the site and opened the small dwelling to the surrounding landscape.1

By the time Charles-Édouard and Albert Jeanneret left for Paris in 1917, their father had withdrawn from active life, and the Villa Jeanneret-Perret (1912)—the construction of which had taken the entirety of the family’s savings—was too large for the parents alone, and, above all, its maintenance was onerous.2 Thus the elder Jeannerets decided to sell the house and to rent a small, suitable chalet in Les Châbles, in Blonay, above Vevey, to which they moved in October 1919.3

The correspondence between Le Corbusier and his father suggests that starting in the spring of 1923, they were looking for a piece of land on which to build a very small house.4 The die was cast in September 1923, when a site was found for what his mother described as a very small “paris” house.5 The hunt for the right land had proved exhausting: landowners suspicious, greedy, little inclined to sell; Le Corbusier impetuous, impatient, wanting to wind things up. But the greatest difficulties came from the requirements that Le Corbusier imposed. His initial and fundamental demand was a piece of land that would offer a view of the landscape at Les Châbles that Georges-Édouard had extolled. This search is evidenced by, among other things, an album filled with sketches of sites and landscapes, on the hillside and at the lake, sometimes punctuated with the perimeter of the hypothetical project, other times in plan, elevation, and perspective views.6 The chalet at Les Châbles served as a model for the project, even for its furnishings. A corollary to his requirement for the site’s view was its specific placement in a relatively limited area, close to Les Châbles, ranging from the magnificent Côte de Lavau to Rivaz, Corseaux, Vevey, La Tour-de-Peil, and the heights of Clarens (in one drawing Le Corbusier shows the Castle du Châtelard).7

His second requirement, that the design be a response to the landscape’s demands (fig. 2), was of a more intellectual order. It consisted of Le Corbusier’s ambition to confer a theoretical status on the innovations that his designs for the site would produce. One example was the “new [architectural] word” that arose out of the creation of the house’s ribbon window, and the exploration of the spatial and perceptual potential of this “new word,” which was derived, according to the Corbusian belief system, from new construction technologies.8 Another was...
the testing of new architectural figures that drew the user’s attention to specific benefits and relationships—structural, spatial, perceptual, and symbolic—of the various architectural layouts employed. Indeed, the Petite Maison, created to satisfy his parents’ urgent need for a minimal dwelling, gradually took on the character of an architectural manifesto.

The scaled-down requirements of an elderly couple, the need to reduce to a minimum the distribution of space, with an emphasis on the living room, and the importance of the view, combined with the fact that different terrains, from the lake to the highlands, suggested a long, narrow plan running parallel to the lakeside or to the contours of the ground, led Le Corbusier toward the idea of a “puny house in the shape of a sleeping-car,” as Georges-Édouard noted in his diary.16 “The plan in my pocket, I went off to look for a site,” Le Corbusier later wrote, with the explanation that “the new elements of modern architecture made it possible to adapt to a site whatever the circumstances.”17 These statements are supported by the various sketches of the Petite Maison (fig. 3)—on a hillside, set down amid vineyard terraces, always within that “Léman landscape, all handcrafted,” as he explained in a lecture he gave on February 18, 1924, in Lausanne.18 The Petite Maison, still under construction, was already being used to illustrate the notion of a standard, a “machine for living,” “a reappraisal of all the elements [that] proceed from inside to out,” and the origin of feelings.

In the notes for that lecture Le Corbusier put forth, for the first time, his own history of architecture, tracing back a history of windows and of the material and technical assumptions that had led up to the present point, to the fenêtre en longueur, the ribbon window: it is illustrated with a series of diagrammatic sketches of historical and modern windows and a curious drawing of the Petite Maison, which appears in the foreground against the backdrop of the lake and the Savoy Alps, but with the ribbon window turned toward the viewer, that is, toward the mountains instead of the lake, giving the drawing a conceptual dimension in a paragraph of his lecture notes that approaches “the landscape architecture question.”19

But the creation of the ribbon window—an innovative device that took advantage of a technical advance, improved the supply of natural light, and revolutionized the relationship between inside and outside—preceded the Lausanne lecture and owed something, perhaps one to a perpetual panorama20—was a corollary of Walter Benjamin’s observation that the interior was “not just the universe but also the élit of the private individual.”21

Perret’s aversion to the ribbon window—because unlike the vertical (French style) window, which “enlivens us, letting us see a complete space: street, garden, sky,” it “sentences one to a perpetual panorama”—was a corollary of Walter Benjamin’s observation that the interior was “not just the universe but also the elus of the private individual.”22

The ribbon window achieves the opposite effect, as Le Corbusier wrote, introducing “the immensity of the outdoors, the unfathomable unity of a lakeside landscape with its storms or radiant calms.”23 Nature and the landscape, the feelings they convey and the values they embody, take place in the interior (fig. 4). It is impossible to keep the ribbon window at a distance, difficult to escape from the dominance of the landscape, of a “site [that] ‘is there’ as if one were in the garden.”24 In the Petite Maison, the ribbon window subverts another symbol element of refined bourgeois architecture: “the enfold along the facade,” originally meant to “establish a relationship among the noble spaces of the dwelling” and “to demonstrate to the visitor the wealth of the dwelling, in proportion to the length of this window’s anthropomorphic significance, as he wrote, “The vertical window frames man, it is in agreement with his silhouette… the vertical line is the line of the vertical stance, it is the life line.”25 Rainer Maria Rilke, in his poem cycle Die Fenster (The Windows) (1927), would provide the best possible confirmation of this centuries-old cultural topos. In the ribbon window Perret quite rightly recognized a transgression, one that attacked values profoundly rooted in the culture and the experience of the interior, which is likely why he believed Le Corbusier to be “destroying the beautiful French tradition.”26

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12 Georges-Édouard Jeanneret, diary entry, December 17, 1923.
13 Le Corbusier, Precisions, pp. 130, 127.
14 Le Corbusier, lecture notes (see note 6), FLC C3-6-30
15 Ibid.
17 Le Corbusier, ordinaire memo, FLC F3-16. Le Corbusier noted that in February 1926 Perret had demanded that Albert Nocito, the publisher of L’Architecture avante, no longer publish Le Corbusier’s works in the magazine. Auguste Perret, p. 15.
19 Le Corbusier, Precisions, p. 130.
As a result, with the ribbon window “making the majesty of the magnificent site enter into the house,” the inhabitant experiences a state of uncommon visual and psychological ambivalence.23 Divided between two antithetical spaces, the place where he is and the place of his desire, confined to the role of spectator, he becomes aware of the dissolving of “the center, the warm core” of that microcosm, the private dwelling, and of interiority’s flight into the great outdoors (fig. 5).25 For Georges-Édouard true nature was the place that redeemed his center, the warm core” of that microcosm, the private dwelling, and of interiority’s flight into the great outdoors (fig. 5).25 For Georges-Édouard true nature was the place that redeemed the goal of authentic experience—thus, his dwelling looking out over Lake Geneva would be a minuscule log in true nature’s womb.26

Only nature could offset the dismay with society and the future that was occasionally found in Georges-Édouard’s diary and letters (and in certain autobiographical pages written by his son); this emotional extreme recalls the hypochondriac states or the enchantments andุดرية images that filled so many of the pages of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse (Julie, or the New Heloise (1761) or his Confessions (1789) or Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire (Ravvies of the Solitary Walker) (1782). Georges-Édouard’s writings make no mention of Rousseau, who so thoroughly influenced both the way he listened to himself and the modern projection of the self in nature. But a subtle relationship triangulates among the feelings and the places for which Georges-Édouard, his architect son, and Rousseau felt affection.

Le Corbusier deserves credit for greater emphasis.24 Divided between two antithetical spaces, the place where he is and the place of his desire, confined to the role of spectator, he becomes aware of the dissolving of “the center, the warm core” of that microcosm, the private dwelling, and of interiority’s flight into the great outdoors (fig. 5).25 For Georges-Édouard true nature was the place that redeemed the goal of authentic experience—thus, his dwelling looking out over Lake Geneva would be a minuscule log in true nature’s womb.26

The enclosing wall, painted an almost Pompeian red, the white limewashed screen, and the stone wall, is an unexpected artifice that helps to domesticate the summer room. Moreover, the whiteness challenges one’s automatic perception; the rustic material has disappeared, but its imprint remains, visual and tactile, so that the screen-wall becomes a sign of itself, of the modern projection of the self in nature. But a subtle relationship triangulates among the feelings and the places for which Georges-Édouard, his architect son, and Rousseau felt affection.

23 For this type of enfilade, see Monique Sall and Anne Dubois, Monographie de l’architecture moderne (Paris: Hazan and Archives d’Architecture moderne, 1989), p. 50. See also Georges Hirth, Das deutsche Trivial de la vie privée: Maisons et mentalités, XVII–XIX siècles (Munich: G. Reichlin, 1923), no mention of Rousseau, who so thoroughly influenced both the way he listened to himself and the modern projection of the self in nature. But a subtle relationship triangulates among the feelings and the places for which Georges-Édouard, his architect son, and Rousseau felt affection.

24 Le Corbusier, Precision, p. 130.


27 Le Corbusier, Une Petite Maison, (1923), p. 30. Le Corbusier’s personal library did not include Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse, but Les Confessions was present there in two volumes, in a 1908–9th edition, with the exception “Ch. G. Jeanneret, 1909” and underlined passages, including “Go to Italy, visit the region, seek out its loveliest spots, take a boat on the lake, and ask yourself whether nature did not make this beautiful place in a Julie, or a Claire, and a Saint-Prix.” Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Confessions, trans. Angela Schiller (1760; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 148.

28 Le Corbusier, Precision, pp. 128–30.


30 Le Corbusier, Une Petite Maison, (1923), p. 30. Le Corbusier’s personal library did not include Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse, but Les Confessions was present there in two volumes, in a 1908–9th edition, with the exception “Ch. G. Jeanneret, 1909” and underlined passages, including “Go to Italy, visit the region, seek out its loveliest spots, take a boat on the lake, and ask yourself whether nature did not make this beautiful place in a Julie, or a Claire, and a Saint-Prix.” Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Confessions, trans. Angela Schiller (1760; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 148.
The messages articulated by the totality of these elements or devices are related but call for separate analysis. First: the screen, in exposed stone with the traditional “hole in the wall” type of opening, appears at one end of the history of architecture told through the history of windows, with the ribbon window, the “contemporary architectural revolution” Le Corbusier brought about by the use of new construction techniques, forming the other end. Second: upon reading, in Une Petite Maison, that “the south wall . . . was nevertheless pierced with a square aperture in proportion (object at a human scale),” one might say that Le Corbusier, in this “room of greenery,” had deliberately reinstated Perret’s anthropomorphic concept. Finally: contrary to the ribbon window, the screen’s opening selects and detaches a view from the continuum of the landscape. As Otto Friedrich Bollnow wrote of the “rupturous effect of the window,” what one sees through “seems removed from chance: all chance is abolished.” This is confirmed by how that opening has been photographed, framing a subject that is fixed (the lakeside of Vevey) or mobile (such as a sailboat, in which case the photographer necessarily must employ patience). Le Corbusier held on to this effect of the painting-view, in the third sketch of the Petite Maison he added a “nouveau cliché,” sketched in pencil, depicting the view with a sailboat, as it would appear in the small publication sent to the press.

The two types of openings establish a comparison that for Le Corbusier demarcated the frontier between tradition and the new architecture, in which each is assigned a leading role in the characterization of its space and with its shape confers paradigmatic features (fig. 7). This is clearly manifested in the circumstances of the windows’ existence: their technological systems, the spaces they frame, and the visual and mental relationship that they establish with a stupendous landscape. These spaces have a paradoxical relationship with each other: the ribbon window makes the interior space a thorough participant in the exterior space, whereas the view that opens up in the rustic wall of the screen gives the enclosed space of the garden the features of an interior. The opposition is perfectly orchestrated by a series of correlations that were gradually established on the construction site. The ribbon window and hole in the wall are at the same height, and the width of the latter corresponds to the sum of the two basic modules—one wide and the other narrow—that make up by their juxtaposition the ribbon window. Thus, seen from the lake, the screen and the visible portion of the facade are two low, long rectangles with the same proportions, with the opening in an axial position and of almost the same color (white for the screen, probably pale green for the plaster of the facade, although in some sketches it is still “pale pink”). At an earlier stage Le Corbusier envisioned the screen in reinforced concrete, with the opening sloping down to the right, and, in one sketch painted “dark pink.”

The Villa Le Lac’s simple, symmetrical figures of facade and screen, its elementary composition and paratactic juxtapositions, the protected space of its garden that seems like an unfinished room, the archaic connotations of the wall facing the lake and the screen—all these things together must have suggested to Le Corbusier, in a letter sent from the construction site to his fiancée, Yvonne Gallis, “an ancient temple at the water’s edge” (fig. 8). The messages articulated by the totality of these elements or devices are related but call for separate analysis. First: the screen, in exposed stone with the traditional “hole in the wall” type of opening, appears at one end of the history of architecture told through the history of windows, with the ribbon window, the “contemporary architectural revolution” Le Corbusier brought about by the use of new construction techniques, forming the other end. Second: upon reading, in Une Petite Maison, that “the south wall . . . was nevertheless pierced with a square aperture in proportion (object at a human scale),” one might say that Le Corbusier, in this “room of greenery,” had deliberately reinstated Perret’s anthropomorphic concept. Finally: contrary to the ribbon window, the screen’s opening selects and detaches a view from the continuum of the landscape. As Otto Friedrich Bollnow wrote of the “rupturous effect of the window,” what one sees through “seems removed from chance: all chance is abolished.” This is confirmed by how that opening has been photographed, framing a subject that is fixed (the lakeside of Vevey) or mobile (such as a sailboat, in which case the photographer necessarily must employ patience). Le Corbusier held on to this effect of the painting-view, in the third sketch of the Petite Maison he added a “nouveau cliché,” sketched in pencil, depicting the view with a sailboat, as it would appear in the small publication sent to the press.

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The Bassin Lémanique and its hillsides and mountains were omnipresent in guidebooks and on train-station billboards after World War I, thanks to the area’s thorough transformation into western Switzerland’s foremost tourist resort during the preceding decades. Le Corbusier’s parents were thus naturally drawn to that region when they decided to leave La Chaux-de-Fonds in 1919 for a more benign climate. Their son may well have played a role in selecting the spectacularly sited chalet Les Châbles, near Blonay, a village above Vevey.1 In September 1922, on one of his visits to his parents, his painterly instincts were triggered by the wide basin of Lake Geneva and the panorama of the Alps that was the raison d’être of their new home. Within days he had produced an impressive series of landscape studies from Blonay and its environs (fig. 1).2

Decades later, in Une Petite Maison (1954), Le Corbusier described those early visits and studies as part of his search for a site for the Villa Le Lac, the little house that he subsequently built for his parents in nearby Corseaux: “1922, 1923, I repeatedly take the rapid Paris–Milan or the Orient Express (Paris–Ankara). I carry in my pocket a plan for a house. The plan before the site? The plan for a house in order to find it a site? Yes.”3 A little sketch, also published in that book, identifies the location of the site that was finally chosen. It was close to international rail lines so that, as might be expected from rapid Paris–Milan or the Orient Express (Paris–Ankara). I carry in my pocket a plan for a house. The plan before the site? The plan for a house in order to find it a site? Yes.”4

Could Le Corbusier have known the monumental views of Lake Geneva painted by Ferdinand Hodler a few years before? By most accounts, Hodler was the most important Swiss painter of the early twentieth century. He had turned Alpine vistas into emblematic works of art after the lakes, glaciers, and mountain peaks of the Swiss Alps, and especially the Bernese Oberland, were opened to tourism via steamboat, railway, and cog railway in the late nineteenth century.5 These works basically present two themes. The first is a dramatization of the Alps as the result of awe-inspiring geological catastrophes; this was a theme that, a few years earlier, had interested Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc and John Ruskin, among others, though Hodler’s main source of inspiration was doubtless the geologist Carl Vogt.6 The other theme demonstrates Hodler’s conception of the landscape as the threshold to a transcendental understanding of the universe.7 The views of Lake Geneva that he painted in the last years of his life, from just a few miles west of Blonay, in Chexbres, represent both a synthesis of those themes and a climax in European landscape painting in its evolution from Symbolism to abstraction.8

Berlin, Munich, Zurich, Vienna, Milan, and Marseille would be practically at the doorstep of the Villa Le Lac, also called the Petite Maison, thanks to the excellent connections between Lausanne and the rest of the world. Then the book presents the result of the undertaking: the house itself, shown in plan, as it was allegedly designed in advance, along with a panorama of the lake it faces. The transportation map and the Alpine panorama are featured on a double-page spread, as if in a travel brochure.
Le Corbusier’s dialogue with Lake Geneva began just a few years after Hodler’s ended. If not a direct influence, Hodler was certainly an eye-opening precedent for the intriguing catalogue of psychophysiological qualities in landscapes that Le Corbusier would develop as he studied the Riviera Lémanique and its topography. In 1922, however, Le Corbusier’s interest was still primarily pictorial. Possibly encouraged by the painter Amédée Ozenfant, who had joined him for several of his trips to Blonay, Le Corbusier produced a series of color drawings in a plain Neoclassical style that owes more to Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot than to Hodler.9 These are folios 3 and 4, which I now think may be dated 1919, in Le Corbusier:—Alben Le Riche, 1887–1965, published in La Corbusier, Une Petite Affiche, p.16.10

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generated. The difference between a broken or continuous line is enough to stimulate the heartbeat, in response to the shocking or soothing effect produced by the forms.13

What was at stake was clearly not, after all, a theory of landscape painting but a new aesthetic that would help architects to organize the world.14 In another sketch done for the same location, Le Corbusier explicitly linked the Alpine sublime of the Dent du Midi to the Germanic and ultimately Gothic architecture of the late nineteenth century, for him synonymous with the bad influence of the English and the Swiss-Germans on the colonization of the Suisse Romande. That influence, we understand, could only be overcome by reconfiguring architecture according to a new, purified kind of Classicism, in harmony with both the sober outline of Le Grammont and the remnants of the “useful past,” embodied by the stone retaining walls of the Lavaux region, that “secular, perhaps millenary work.”15

When a few years later, in 1925, Le Corbusier was working on the League of Nations proposal, it was the Petit lac—the western tip of Lake Geneva and its panorama—that came into focus.16 It is interesting that most renderings of the proposed palace depict the complex as seen from the lake, so that “the calm” and “pleasing” contours of the Jura mountains in the background are the only natural context included. The more “disturbing” vista, on the south horizon, of Mont Blanc, Geneva’s all-too-well-known postcard motif, is reserved for the few who have access to the Assembly Hall’s roof terrace.17 In the rendering of that point of view (fig. 3) the vanishing lines of the floor slabs point not toward Mont Blanc but toward Le Môle, a cone-shaped mountain located about halfway between Geneva and Mont Blanc, so that the latter appears like a ruined version of the former, its Platonic prototype, at its foot. If nature and history confront us with the results of millenary processes of decay, was the implied message,
then architecture must orient itself toward the purity of origins, and the same should go for the League of Nations. It may be useful to note that in terms of geology, at least according to Viollet-le-Duc, Mont Blanc’s present physiognomy was the result of a millenary ruination process, which began with an almost cone-shaped massif. Given the unique magic of the ingressive panorama of the Savoy Alps in the drawing made from Les Châbles, it seems fitting that the architect, searching for a site for his parents’ house, should end up choosing land immediately on the shore of the lake, so that the disquieting drama of the Alpine skyline would be mitigated by the mysterious silence of the sheet of water from which it rises as if from the sea. Although ruled by a rigorous discipline of domestic functions, the Petite Maison, barely larger than a trailer, is nothing so much as a tool for trimming views of the landscape. As if to illustrate an archetypal dichotomy, the views fit into two categories: the almost square (although actually horizontally rectangular) “hole” in the garden wall overlooking the lake, which corresponds to the classical proportions of a landscape painting, and the fenêtre en longueur (ribbon window) of the living room, which corresponds to the panorama (fig. 4). In fact the fenêtre en longueur, no less than 36 feet (about 11 meters) long, can be said to have been placed to frame the very view that is the subject of that drawing made from Les Châbles. By proposing such a frame for an Alpine view, Le Corbusier returned to one of the birthplaces of the panorama as an artistic technique window in the garden wall and the strip window of the house itself. From Le Corbusier, Une Petite Maison, 1923 (Zurich: Girsberger, 1954), pp. 54–55.

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Fig. 4. Villa Le Lac, Corseaux, 1924–25. View of the picture window in the garden wall and the strip window of the house itself. From Le Corbusier, Une Petite Maison, 1923 (Zurich: Girsberger, 1954), pp. 54–55.

Fig. 5. Forestay Waterfall, Bellevue-Chexbres, Switzerland. Photograph by Stefan Banz.

Marcel Duchamp’s Étant donnéts: 1. La Chute d’eau, 2. Le Gaz d’éclairage (Given: 1. The Waterfall; 2. The Illuminating Gas) (1946–66) offers what is arguably the most extreme alternative to Le Corbusier’s technique of capturing a landscape by means of architecture. If the Petite Maison is an optical apparatus for capturing a panoramic lakeside view, Étant donnéts is closer to the perceptual model of the camera obscura. Duchamp’s work replaces Le Corbusier’s strip window with two tiny peepholes; instead of a lakeside panorama, viewers discover a reclining female nude in close-up and, in the background, a quasi–Art Nouveau landscape consisting of a waterfall surrounded by a few weepy trees.

Duchamp probably did not know about the house in Corseaux. Even if he had, given his “intransigent and unwavering despise” of the architect, he would have had no wish to visit it when he stayed at the Hôtel Bellevue, in nearby Chexbres, in 1946. Recent scholarship has revealed, however, that Étant donnéts owes its key motif to that short stay on the Riviera Lémanique. While at the hotel, Duchamp had taken a few photographs of a nearby waterfall, which later served as the basis for the image of the chute in his installation, but he appar-}


romantic site, emptied of all traces of human hubbub—or almost (figs. 6 and 7). In his vedute Le Corbusier makes us forget that the Riviera Lémanique is anything but the bucolic paradise described in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse (Julie, or the new Héloïse) (1761), but is indeed a heavily urbanized stretch of land. Duchamp, in turn, literally turns his back on everything that attracted him to the site in the first place. Rather than paying his tribute to the spectacular lakeside view, he proceeds to his somber meditation on the forgotten waterfall—not without, however, subjecting it (as Le Corbusier had done with the Riviera Lémanique) to a radical cleansing operation, eliminating its cultural and architectural ânâtânts donnâés (the mill, the distillery, the shooting stand), so that we are left with a mere kitsch parody of a Courbet waterfall.

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Plate 10  Palace of the League of Nations, Geneva, 1927
Perspective in the landscape
Charcoal and pencil on tracing paper,
22\(\frac{13}{16}\) x 6\(\frac{11}{16}\) (75.7 x 186.6 cm)
Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. FLC 23169

Plate 11  Palace of the League of Nations, Geneva, 1927
Axonometric view from the west
Heliographic print on paper with ink and collage additions,
53\(\frac{3}{8}\) x 57\(\frac{7}{8}\) (135.5 x 147 cm)
Institut für Geschichte und Theorie der Architektur (iga),
ETH Zürich
In 1929 El Lissitzky, who was once Le Corbusier’s greatest Russian ally, published a devastating article in the Moscow journal строительная промышленность (Building industry), criticizing his project for the Mundaneum, or Cité Mondiale (World city), located outside of Geneva, and the Czech critic Karel Teige would reiterate the language of the critique. The message was simple: by using regulating lines based on the golden section and taking recourse in forms reminiscent of ziggurats, Le Corbusier had turned the founding principles of modern architecture on their heads and revived the academic practices of composition and monumentality.1

In 1928 Le Corbusier had accepted a commission from the Belgian philanthropist Paul Otlet, a man driven by the desire to advance goodwill among the citizens of the world through culture and education. Before 1914 Otlet had envisioned the creation of a Cité Mondiale and entrusted the design to the French architect Ernest Hébrard for a site located on the Dutch coast.2 For Le Corbusier the project seemed to present an opportunity to avenge his defeat the previous year in the competition for the League of Nations, all the more so since the chosen site was on the shore of Lake Geneva, not far from the site of his lost battle.

His proposal for the Mundaneum was the more ambitious of the two projects. Its components—library, museum, scientific association, university, research institute—would have spread out to form a complex urban composition organized along two parallel axes, one leading to the lake and the other establishing the relationship between the most monumental element of the ensemble—the museum—and the other institutions. Based on a spiral plan, Le Corbusier’s design for the museum suggested the forms of Mesopotamian ziggurats and Egyptian mastabas. In his drawings Le Corbusier systematically compared the museum’s silhouette to the Alpine peaks on the opposite side of the lake.

As he would explain in a pamphlet published with Otlet in 1928, elements of the landscape were the first consideration of the project: “The chosen site is situated between the Grand-Saconnex and Prégrny, on an elevated plateau overlooking the Geneva region and providing from all four cardinal points the most majestic sights.”3 He insisted that the Mundaneum “present itself to the view from all points: from the city, from its docks, from the large lake, from the small lake. It is like a gigantic landmark.” More than a proportional grid, the regulating lines of the plan were conceived in their geographic dimension, so that the “diagonals of the World Museum on which the architectural composition is based rigorously indicate the four cardinal points.”

This extremely ambitious project was also founded on the encounter between two orders: one external, of a landscape already reflected upon by Le Corbusier in his Villa Le Lac in Corseaux (1924–25) and his project for the League of Nations; the other internal, based on the geometry of the plan. But Otlet’s ambitions by far surpassed his resources, and the enterprise was abandoned. Le Corbusier nonetheless subsequently recycled his concept for the museum, dropping the historicist features but insisting on the spiral plan; the best example is the Musée à Croissance Illimitée (Museum of unlimited growth) of 1931.4

The concept of Städtebau (urban planning) was new to Charles-Édouard Jeanneret when he arrived in Germany in 1910. He responded enthusiastically to the idea of urban space, and his subsequent thorough investigation led to a deep understanding of the field. His detailed studies during his travels in Germany, from April 1910 through May 1911, laid the foundation not only for his urban schemes but also for his architectural designs. He spent more than a year in Germany, traveling, researching, and working, and the four caméras de voyage he devoted to this period are bursting with evidence of how tirelessly he sought information and inspiration.¹ His manuscript “La Construction des villes” (The construction of cities), the result of his rather “impertinent research,” combines his detailed and thorough investigation of the visual and aesthetic aspects of Städtebau with arguments for functionality, although with a predominant focus on beauty.² Jeanneret arrived in Munich on April 9, 1910, hoping to find work with Theodor Fischer, the planner of the city’s urban extensions, whom he would come to greatly respect and praise. Although Fischer did not have a job for Jeanneret, in their conversations he must have given the aspiring architect valuable insights into town planning, perhaps suggesting literature for him to read. Jeanneret found a room in Lotzbeckstraße, thus situating himself in the heart of Classicist Munich, just behind the Odeonsplatz. His drawings of the Theatinerkirche and Theatinerstraße, which depict urban situations from unfamiliar perspectives, reveal his interest in the juxtapositions of spaces and buildings (fig. 1).³ Munich was his home base for the next two months, during which time he conducted a thorough search of the available literature on the field of Städtebau. He spent many hours at the Königliche Hof- und Staatsbibliothek (Royal court and state library), as well as in the small library of the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum. Since the library was situated in the Ludwigsstraße, Jeanneret would have been constantly exposed to this serene, even barren Classicist street, which “does not have a single tree but is an impossible impressive wall of stone, powerful, not pierced by shops.”⁴ Just to the north was the university building designed by Friedrich von Gärtner and erected in 1835–40; Jeanneret bought postcards of this building (fig. 2) and noted the dimensions of the impressive courtyardlike setback of the Frauenkirche, comparable in monumentality, received attention in a series of atmospheric watercolors. To Jeanneret it stood for the magnificent unity of a single material—red brick—at a monumental height of 318 feet (97 meters) “that crushes the spectator with its vertiginous surface, forcing him to contort his body to grasp, with difficulties, the ensemble of its brutal lines.”⁵ Jeanneret devoted several pages of “La Construction des villes” to a comparison of the Frauenkirche with San Marco, in Venice, the “fairy-tale spectacle of gold and marble” and “a fantastic oriental gem in a sober classical jewelry box.”⁶ Städtebau was a field that was not only new to Jeanneret but had also recently been established as a discipline separate from architecture. He dove deeply into his research and began writing a brochure, at the suggestion of his teacher, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret’s collection, Bibliothèque de la Ville, La Chaux-de-Fonds that seems to anticipate the intended blocks of the Ville Contemporaine de Trois Millions d’Habitsants (Contemporary City for Three Million Inhabitants) (1922). The late-Gothic Frauenkirche, comparable in monumentality, received attention in a series of atmospheric watercolors. To Jeanneret it stood for the magnificent unity of a single material—red brick—at a monumental height of 318 feet (97 meters) “that crushes the spectator with its vertiginous surface, forcing him to contort his body to grasp, with difficulties, the ensemble of its brutal lines.”⁵ Jeanneret devoted several pages of “La Construction des villes” to a comparison of the Frauenkirche with San Marco, in Venice, the “fairy-tale spectacle of gold and marble” and “a fantastic oriental gem in a sober classical jewelry box.”⁶ Städtebau was a field that was not only new to Jeanneret but had also recently been established as a discipline separate from architecture. He dove deeply into his research and began writing a brochure, at the suggestion of his teacher, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret’s collection, Bibliothèque de la Ville, La Chaux-de-Fonds, his assignment was to make a case for aesthetically based urban design as outlined by Camillo Sitte in Der Städtebau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen (City Planning According to Artistic Principles) (1889).⁷ Thus in Munich and Berlin Jeanneret worked his way through the contemporary literature on town planning, mostly in German, digesting more than seventy titles, of which Sitte’s Städtebau was his most fundamental point of reference. Similarly influential were works by contemporary architects and art historians Paul Schultz-Naumburg, Karl Herrn, Albert Erich Brinckmann, and Fischer.⁸ Jeanneret expanded the project far beyond the intended dimensions of a brochure, until in October of that year he had written more than six hundred pages for what would become “La Construction des villes.” Not only did he go past the deadline for the conference, but in the end it was

² Ibid.

Fig. 1. View from Theatinerstraße looking toward Odeonsplatz, Munich, 1910–11. Pencil on paper, 4 x 7 7/8" (10.6 × 20 cm). Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. FLC 3236.

Fig. 2. Friedrich von Gärtner (German, 1791–1847). University, Munich. 1835–40. Postcard, c. 1910. From Charles-Édouard Jeanneret’s collection, Bibliothèque de la Ville, La Chaux-de-Fonds
L’Eplattenier who wrote the article for that event. In early November Jeanneret began a job in the office of Peter Behrens in Neußebaldeberg, after which his research continued with diminished intensity and was finally abandoned in March 1911. He did not reengage with the topic again until 1915, in Paris, and the manuscript was never published in his lifetime.

By the end of 1910 Jeanneret had completed two chapters, “Des moyens possibles” (possible strategies for future urban design) and “Application critique” (Critical application), along with various introductory sections, and had written the first five sections of the largest chapter, “Les Eléments constitutifs de la ville” (The constitutive elements of the city). He had also collected an abundance of material in the form of excerpts, his own translations of German urban design literature, and fragments of the five remaining sections. Even in its incomplete state, “La Construction des villes” was an unusual treatise on urban design: instead of emulating Josef Stübben’s near-contemporary Der Städtebau (1890), which was far more technical and regulatory in its orientation, it became instead a grammar of the aesthetically constituent elements of the city, in this way anticipating Cornelius Gardt’s Handbuch des Städtebaues (1900). Jeanneret defined the city as being formed of residential blocks, streets, squares, enclosing walls, bridges, trees, gardens and parks, and garden-cities. The strength of this grammar of the city lies in Jeanneret’s elaboration of the aesthetic and functional impact of various elements that make it up (fig. 3).

Such an approach goes beyond Sitte’s, which investigated only urban squares and their visual-spatial impact while scarcely devoting a sentence to the form and layout of streets and streetscapes. Jeanneret, on the other hand, felt that his own chapter on streets was the most important in his manuscript. In ascribing such importance to streets and their design, he limited Sitte’s direct influence on his manuscript. Jeanneret worked with both Sitte’s original German text and Camille Martin’s French translation from 1902; he did not integrate Martin’s gratuitously added chapter on streets into his own manuscript but instead took his views on good street design primarily from Henrici and Schultze-Naumburg, whose remarks on curved streets and skilful setbacks were of fundamental importance to him. These ideas are demonstrated in Jeanneret’s precise little figure-ground drawing of the street.

Neuhausen Straße in Munich (fig. 4), which included the Frauenkirche. Following Schultze-Naumburg’s model, Jeanneret explored a setback of several houses (fig. 3) that creates a little square to the side of the street and whose slight outer curve directs the gaze of the passerby toward the towers of the Frauenkirche. In his discussion of the spatial qualities of streets, Schultze-Naumburg introduced the notion of organic street systems; Jeanneret adopted the position that organic street layout was far more functional than a grid structure, such as the one in La Chaux-de-Fonds, and followed the German architect in arguing for a separation of different categories of traffic. Thus, his later classement des rues (classification of streets) finds its point of departure here. In this way Jeanneret understood medieval towns such as Ulm as organic entities, with streets and squares laid out in a manner that respected the visual perception of the passerby.

Around 1890, as Sitte was engaging in the first discussion of urban space in his Städtebau, a branch of architectural and aesthetic theory devoted to the phenomenon of space was emerging in Germany. August Schmarsow, Heinrich Wolfflin, and Adolf von Hildebrand were among the artists and art historians who were developing the idea of space as an abstract concept with a tangible impact. The influence of new disciplines such as physiology and psychology on art theory, another evolving field, became apparent. Sitte himself embodied this interplay of influences, with both medical and artistic training that lent him a particular awareness of the observer’s perception of space and the built environment. However, it seems that Jeanneret was not familiar with the details of these theories; nowhere in the manuscript of “La Construction des villes” is there any mention of Schmarsow, Wolfflin, or others exploring theories of perception. Indeed, Jeanneret absorbed the principle of space and its impact on the observer purely via the applied practical aesthetics of Henrici, Sitte, Schultze-Naumburg, and Brinckmann, from whom he drew such ideas as the enclosure of public squares and the asymmetrical organization of monu-

ments thereon (Sitte); the impact of the street space on the flaneur (Henrici); the significance of space as an abstract concept with a tangible impact. The influence of new disciplines such as physiology and psychology on art theory, another evolving field, became apparent. Indeed, Jeanneret absorbed the principle of space and its impact on the observer purely via the applied practical aesthetics of Henrici, Sitte, Schultze-Naumburg, and Brinckmann, from whom he drew such ideas as the enclosure of public squares and the asymmetrical organization of monuments thereon (Sitte); the impact of the street space on the flaneur (Henrici); the significance of space as an abstract concept with a tangible impact. The influence of new disciplines such as physiology and psychology on art theory, another evolving field, became apparent. Indeed, Jeanneret absorbed the principle of space and its impact on the observer purely via the applied practical aesthetics of Henrici, Sitte, Schultze-Naumburg, and Brinckmann, from whom he drew such ideas as the enclosure of public squares and the asymmetrical organization of monuments thereon (Sitte); the impact of the street space on the flaneur (Henrici); the significance of space as an abstract concept with a tangible impact. The influence of new disciplines such as physiology and psychology on art theory, another evolving field, became apparent. Indeed, Jeanneret absorbed the principle of space and its impact on the observer purely via the applied practical aesthetics of Henrici, Sitte, Schultze-Naumburg, and Brinckmann, from whom he drew such ideas as the enclosure of public squares and the asymmetrical organization of monuments thereon (Sitte); the impact of the street space on the flaneur (Henrici);
of the opening to the square (Schultze-Naumburg); the observation of human scale in the enclosure of squares (Brinckmann); and a significant interest in the uniform, symmetrical French royal square (Brinckmann again). Jeanneret followed these positions closely, noting, “Let’s conclude in the way that Mr. Brinckmann perfectly sums up his book” and then translating Brinckmann’s “Städte bauen heißt: mit dem Hausmaterial Raum gestalten!” into French: “Construire des villes veut dire: au moyen du matériau maison créer des volumes!” (To construct cities is to shape spaces using buildings!). Jeanneret treated architectural space as a malleable, abstract element, often using the term corporalité to express the tangible quality of the intangible.19

“Berlin extended a horrid welcome to me this morning,” Jeanneret wrote to his parents on October 18, 1910, having just arrived from Munich.22 And, three days later, “Berlin does not win me over, and once you leave the vast avenues, it is just revulsion, pure horror.”23 Berlin might not have felt welcoming to Jeanneret, but it provided the single largest contribution to his education in urban design, possibly for decades. In June 1910 he had traveled there to see exhibitions including the Ton-Kalk-Cement Ausstellung (Clay-limestone-cement exhibition) and the Städtebau-Ausstellung, with the latter showcasing the newest developments in urban design. From June 8 to June 20 he attended sessions of the Werkbund congress and saw the winning entries of the competition to design a master plan for Gross-Berlin (greater Berlin); he decided that he would have liked to work for the architect Hermann Jansen, whose approach he appreciated as “essentially practical.”24 Jansen’s design for the competition interpreted Sitte’s theories in the form of large-perimeter blocks with generous gardens inside, a landscape of parks weaving through the city and vistas in the city, an idea that combined picturesque town planning with the monumental unity Walter Curt Behnert advocated at the time.25 As soon as the refreshing calm of public gardens is introduced into the argument, Jeanneret’s tone relaxes. “In the Tiergarten,” he noted, “one enjoys anew the impression of great peace in this great forest in immediate proximity to the noisy roads.”26 His near-Romantic portrait of the new garden suburbs such as Nikolaiwasse, just thirty minutes by train from the city center, as peaceful, almost paradisiacal, completed his vivid image of Berlin: “So that, when on a spring or summer evening, one takes a walk in any of these suburbs, the visitor arriving from the great furnace of Berlin will be deeply surprised; he will indeed feel himself living in a reviving peace.”27 This was in fact his own experience of exploring Nikolaiwasse, where he had seen, among other buildings, Hermann Muthesius’s large villas inspired by English Arts and Crafts houses.

On his way back to Munich from Berlin, Jeanneret visited eleven cities in just five days, among them Halle, Naumburg, Würzburg, and Augsburg. This journey was a little masterpiece of meticulous planning, using the train schedule, with Jeanneret often spending just a few hours in a town. One focus of this tour, in fact its central aim, was on taking photographs from the same points as Schultze-Naumburg had done for the Städtebau volume of his Kulturbeziehungen, capturing images of urban spaces in which spatial architectural qualities were clearly visible. Jeanneret used these views as design inspirations for his chapter “Application critique”: his photo of St. Ulrich in Augsburg, for example, suggests that the church, in closing the vista of a long, stretched urban square, may have informed his sketches for La Chaux-de-Fonds, such as one in which he proposes a similar closing-off of the avenue Léopold-Robert with a building placed perpendicular to the street.

The Städtebau-Ausstellung showed examples of recent German garden suburbs. Here Jeanneret became aware of the new development in Halle near Dresden, by Richard Riemerschmid. Despite its later fame for Heinrich Tessenow’s Festspielhaus (Festival theatre) (1911), Halle was only mentioned in passing in “La Construction des villes.”28 In October 1910, while visiting his brother, Albert, who was studying eurythmics, Jeanneret paid the suburb a visit and declared, 

21 Jeanneret, letter to his parents, October 18, 1910, FLC R1-5-67.
22 Jeanneret, letter to his parents, October 21, 1910, FLC R1-5-68.
26 La Corbusier, Les Voyages d ’Allemagne, sketchbook 2, p. 122.
27 Jeanneret, Étude sur le mouvement d ’art décoratif en Allemagne, p. 379.
In general, Riemerschmid does not enthuse me.”

Jeanneret showed more interest in the Margarethenhöhe, Georg Metzendorf’s workers’ settlement, designed for the Margarethe-Krupp-Stiftung in Essen, which he had also seen exhibited in the Städtebau-Ausstellung.

Jeanneret carefully read Metzendorf’s brochure on the settlement’s design and translated the core of it for his chapter on garden cities. Realizing that the Margarethenhöhe incorporated many of the features he had discussed in chapters on the correct layout of streets and squares, Jeanneret went so far as to use some of the settlement’s prominent features, above all Metzendorf’s highly Romantic bridge building that served as entry into the colony (fig. 5), as a model for his 1914 design for the garden suburb Les Crêtets in La Chaux-de-Fonds (fig. 6).

During his year in Germany, Jeanneret had absorbed knowledge about urban design like a sponge, gaining a deep understanding of the perception and modulation of urban space. Although, as Le Corbusier, he would later almost completely renounce his 1910 crash course in Städtebau, it laid the foundations for his urban designs and, more than that, helped him to develop and articulate architectural space.

Plate 12  View of the Orangerie at Schloss Sanssouci, Potsdam. 1910
Watercolor, pencil, and ink on paper, mounted on cardboard, 11 11/16 x 8 11/16" (29 x 22 cm)
Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. FLC 2857

Plate 13  View of the Frauenkirche, Munich. 1911
Watercolor, pencil, and ink on paper, 14 x 17 5/16" (35.5 x 44 cm)
Institut für Geschichte und Theorie der Architektur (gta), ETH Zürich

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3. Villa Savoye, Poissy. 1928–31
4. Unité d’Habitation, Marseille. 1945–52. Roof terrace
5. Capitol Complex, Chandigarh. 1951–65. Tower of Shadows and Assembly
6. Capitol Complex with Open Hand Monument, Chandigarh. 1951–65

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