

■ Educational guide



The La Roche House – Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret.
Photo Olivier Martin-Gambier

The La Roche House

Constructed between 1923 and 1925 by Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, the La Roche House represents an exceptional architectural undertaking. Its originality lies in the unification it forges between two different spaces, each serving a different function: an art gallery on one hand and, on the other, the private apartments of the resident and collector, Raoul La Roche.

The La Roche House occupies the end of the Docteur Blanche cul-de-sac in Paris's 16th arrondissement, a neighborhood under development at the time. The use of new construction materials allowed Le Corbusier to put into practice here what he would define in 1927 as the “Five Points towards a New Architecture”: the open facade, the open plan, the long horizontal window, the roof garden, and the pilotis.

As a key precedent to the Villa Savoye in Poissy (1928), an architectural icon, the La Roche House constitutes itself a hallmark in the history of the Modern Movement. From 1925 to 1933, numerous architects, writers, artists, and collectors came to visit this experimental home, leaving their mark with a signature in the visitor's book, kept open in the entrance hall.

The La Roche House, as well as the adjacent Jeanneret House, were classified as historical monuments in 1996. Since 1970, they have undergone several restoration campaigns.



FONDATION LE CORBUSIER

■ The proprietor and the architect

THEMES

- The role of the architect (to build and to manage the space).
- The architectural commission, the patron
- The architect, his patron
- A private residence

BEFORE THE VISIT

- Le Corbusier
- The Bauhaus
- The Modern Movement:
 - Alvar Aalto
 - Mallet-Stevens
 - Mies Van der Rohe
 - Piet Mondrian
 - Théo Van Doesburg
- Docomomo France (documents on the architecture of the Modern Movement)

AFTER THE VISIT

- “Purist house”
- Purist movement
- Modern housing
- Domestic architecture inscribed or classified as a Historical Monument

HISTORICAL PERIODS

The 20th century and our age

ART HISTORY

Spatial arts

Daily arts

Visual arts

NOTE: Le Corbusier is cited as an example in the reference list for the communal habitat (Radiant city) and for sacred architecture (the chapel at Ronchamp)

The patron:



Portrait of Raoul La Roche
Photo Sartiny

Born in Basel, Switzerland, **Raoul La Roche** (1889-1965) settled in Paris in 1912 and began work at the Crédit Commercial de France (Commercial Credit of France). In 1918, he met Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (who would not adopt the pseudonym, Le Corbusier until 1920). Eager to familiarize himself with modern painting, he was immediately drawn to the Purist style that Le Corbusier and his friend, Amédée Ozenfant, had developed in their tableaux. Initially, he bought from them their own canvasses, then, following their advice, built up a significant collection of cubist and purist works. Thoroughly convinced of the ideas the two painters had defined and advocated, he funded the diffusion of their review *l'Esprit Nouveau* (The New Spirit), published from 1920 to 1925. From 1921 and on, La Roche

acquired works by Picasso, Braque, Fernand Léger, Juan Gris, and Jacques Lipchitz. As his collection grew, he sought a means to properly hang and display the avant-garde tableaux. His apartment on rue de Constantine in the 7th arrondissement of Paris had grown unsuitable for such a collection. It's at this time, then, that Raoul La Roche commissioned from his friend and architect a house-gallery, suitable not only to house and give prominence to his art collection but also to serve as his principal residence.

The architect:

Born Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, **Le Corbusier** (1887-1965), left his birthplace La Chaux-de-Fonds in Switzerland, in 1917, and settled definitively in Paris. His teacher, Charles L'Eplattenier, played a critical role in his education. Le Corbusier explained: “One of my teachers (a very remarkable man) gently dissuaded me from the choice of a mediocre career. He wanted to turn me into an architect. I loathed architecture and architects... As I was only sixteen, I accepted his verdict and obeyed his edict: I took up architecture.”¹ Between 1907 and 1911, Le Corbusier made a certain number of tours in Italy,



Portrait of Le Corbusier

Germany, and the Orient to study art and architecture. By 1923, when he received the commission for the La Roche House, he had already designed several edifices at La Chaux-de-Fonds and in Paris (the Ozenfant House). As an architect, urban planner, painter, and writer, he conducted various studies on artistic creation and the modern habitat. In 1923, he published *Towards an Architecture*, which remains today one of the iconic references of modern architecture.

The series of “purist” houses:

In the 1920s, Le Corbusier undertook the construction of roughly a dozen private residences in Paris and its surroundings, denoted by the term, the “purist” houses. Among his clients figured artists (the painter Ozenfant, the sculptors Miestchaninoff and Lipchitz...), connoisseurs of art (Raoul La Roche, the Steins), and the “enlightened” bourgeois of the time (Church, Savoye). The character of these houses evolved over the course of the decade. To begin with, in 1922, the Besnus House in Vaucresson and Ozenfant’s studio in Paris lay the foundations of the « Five Points towards a New Architecture ». The La Roche House introduced one year later the theme of the “architectural promenade”, a formal principle that culminated five years later in the Villa Savoye (1928).

The Jeanneret and La Roche Houses are representative of the ideas that Le Corbusier explored in the 1920s. Devoid of ornamentation and composed of simple, geometric forms, they are the fruit of a new architectural language. In their outright defiance of the academic aesthetic tradition, they join the ranks of the Modern Movement*. As such, these two houses helped Le Corbusier to establish himself as a renowned architect; it was after these years of experimentation that, at the end of the decade, he received his first major commissions: the Centrosoyus in Moscow; in Paris, the Salvation Army Cité de Refuge and the Swiss pavilion at the Cité Universitaire; the Clarté building in Geneva...



1 Photo Olivier Martin-Gambier



2 Photo Olivier Martin-Gambier



3 Photo Olivier Martin-Gambier

1. Ozenfant’s studio, Paris, 1922
2. Lipchitz-Miestchaninoff studios, Boulogne, 1923
3. Stein-de-Monzie House, Garches, 1926
4. Villa Savoye, Poissy, 1928



4 Photo Paul Koslowski

■ Conception and construction

THEMES

- The building and its terrain
- Construction

BEFORE THE VISIT

- The architectural project
- The construction
- The structure

AFTER THE VISIT

- The art of architecture, the relation with a particular site
- The site today, the site in 1923
- Urbanism

The project, the construction:

Assisted by his cousin, Pierre Jeanneret, Le Corbusier first imagined a project for a large architectural unity situated along the Docteur Blanche cul-de-sac. After having conceived several different structures, the associates settled upon a project for two adjoint houses, each with a distinct floor plan. As Le Corbusier described it “One accommodates a family with children, and is thus composed of a quantity of small rooms and all amenities needed by a family, whereas the second is designed for a bachelor, owner of a collection of modern paintings, and passionate about art.”² That is to say, the first house was designed for Le Corbusier’s brother (Albert Jeanneret), his wife (Lotti Rääf), and their two daughters, and the second for Raoul La Roche. Construction began in November of 1923, and in March of 1925, La Roche moved definitively into his new house. However, certain elements of the home, such as the furnishings, were not completed until November of that same year.



Bird's eye view, project for three houses (for Lotti Rääf, M. Motte, and Sigismond Marcel, 7-10 May 1923. (FLC 15111)



Construction site of the La Roche House, entrance hall and bay window, 1924 (FLC L2-12-22)

One program, two functions:

In response to Raoul La Roche’s commission, Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret designed a project for a home/gallery that clearly disassociates the two functions. On one half on the plan, they situated the art gallery and library, designed to house a significant collection of modern art and sculpture. They arranged the residential space on the other half, reserved specifically for domestic activities. Raoul La Roche’s private apartments are directly adjacent to the Jeanneret House, whereas the gallery, perpendicular to the private street that runs along the square du Docteur Blanche, is immediately visible from the entrance of the cul-de-sac.

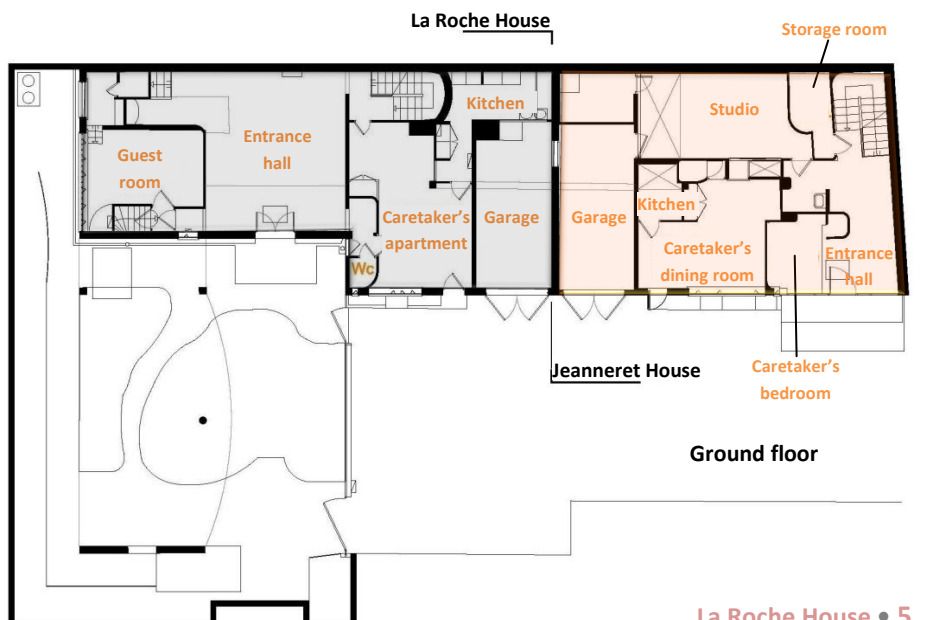
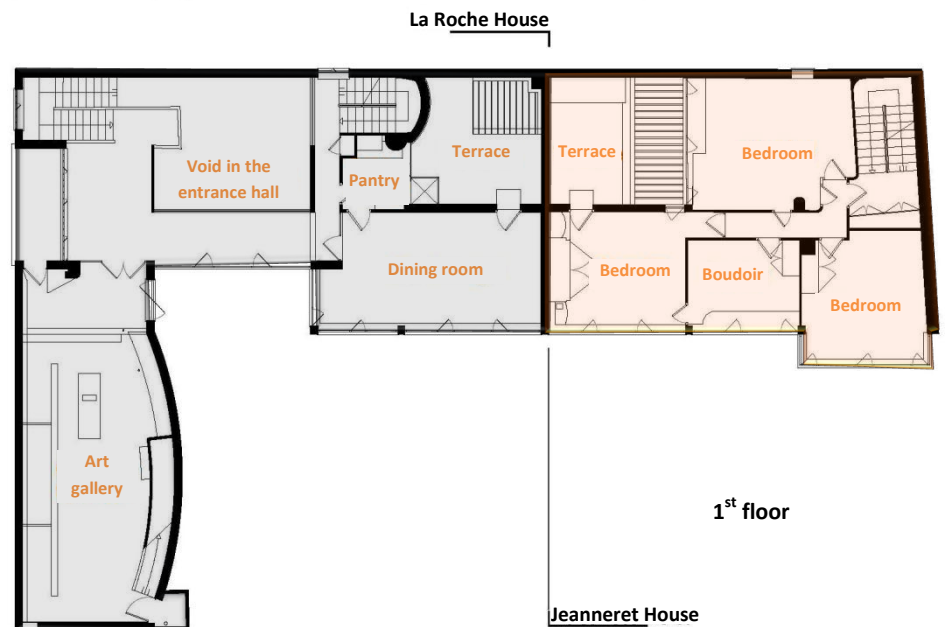
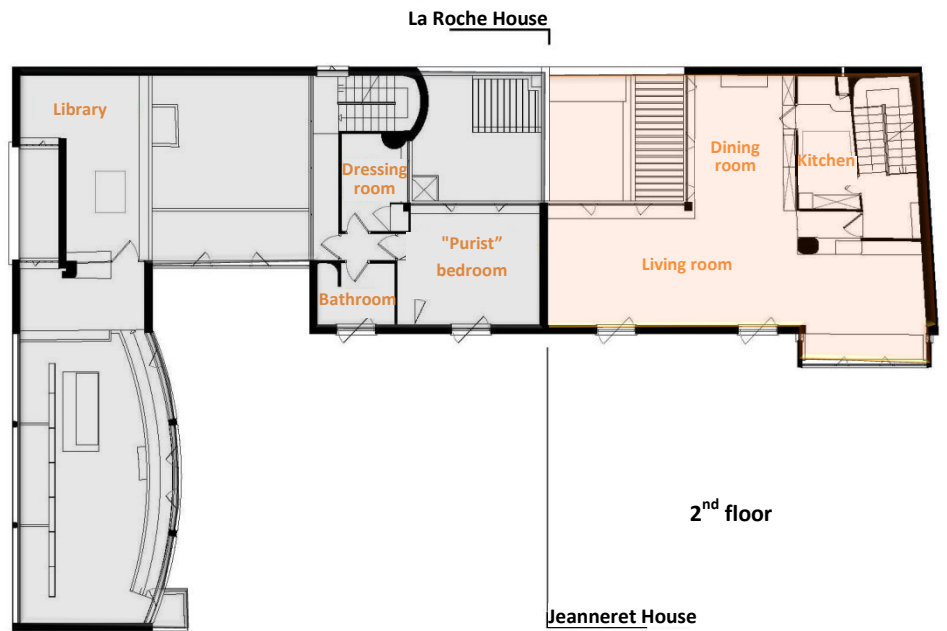
Plan of the Jeanneret and La Roche Houses

THEMES

- A reading of the plan

BEFORE THE VISIT

- Distribution of the various rooms



■ The exterior of the house

THEMES

- Circulation
- A reading of the facade (balance/imbalance – empty/filled, symmetry)

BEFORE THE VISIT

- How a building secures itself in the ground: the foundations
- Five Points towards a New Architecture

AFTER THE VISIT

- The classical ideal, a Greek temple facing the landscape
- Construction on pilotis
- The Dom-ino system

The Dom-ino system

Since 1914, Le Corbusier had elaborated a new industrial construction process based on modular elements.

Its title, the “Dom-ino” system, references the contraction of the Latin term, *domus* (house) and the word “*innovation*”. Composed of three walls, six posts, and a staircase, each module can be combined with others so as to construct houses or even monumental edifices.

The pilotis:

Visually juxtaposed to the bulk of the gallery, the slender pilotis* supporting the La Roche House free up space on the ground. This architectural tool invites the visitor to move freely under the building. With the space gained by the pilotis, the architects could create a garden: “By building on pilotis, we can recuperate in the garden nearly the totality of the terrain occupied by the construction”³



La Roche House. Photo: Pietro Luigi Piccardo, (FLC L2-12-45-001)

The long, horizontal windows:

By eliminating load-bearing walls, Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret could introduce multiple large openings into the facade.* The long, horizontal window replaces the vertical model that architects had by and large employed until this time. A band of windows bridges the La Roche and Jeanneret Houses, whereas two long windows pierce the superior elevation of the art gallery. Light can thereby enter further into the depths of the house, reaching even the corners of the room. Moreover, these openings serve to dissolve the boundary between the interior and exterior.



La Roche House (at the back) and Jeanneret House (to the right) Photo: Charles Gérard, 1927 (FLC L2-12-23-001)

The open plan:

According to traditional construction techniques, load-bearing walls should determine the interior organization of the rooms on each floor. From this point on, the use of reinforced concrete* liberated the floor plan from such conventions: “Floors are no longer stacked on top of one another by compartmentalization.”⁴ For this reason, the architects could arrange the interior partitions as needed, that is to say in accordance with needs of function or style as opposed to structural demands.



Framework of the Dom-ino House

The open facade:

The La Roche House, just like the neighboring Jeanneret House, is formally composed of elements ranging from simple geometric shapes to perfectly smooth walls. Since the framework of the two houses consists of concrete posts and beams and brick blocks, the walls do not bear weight: “The facades are no longer anything more than lightweight membranes of insulating walls or windows.”⁵ A veritable architectural tool, the open facade logically follows from the construction process Le Corbusier had developed, the Dom-ino system.

The roof garden:

As early as 1915, Le Corbusier sought a new type of roof to replace the traditional inclined model, noting that the water is shed onto the exterior walls would freeze during the winter. In contrast, the new techniques introduced by reinforced concrete permitted “the construction of roof terraces* equipped with internal water



View of the roof terrace of the La Roche and Jeanneret Houses. Original state. L2 (12) 55

drainage systems.”⁶ So as to maintain a consistent level of humidity on the roof garden and thereby prevent the reinforced concrete from cracking, Le Corbusier planted flowers, grass and shrubs in this space. Redefining the traditional concept of the roof, he claimed that “the space on the roof is that the most distant from the noise of the street, fully exposed to the light of the sun and to the air the most pure.”⁷ From this moment on, the suspended roof garden constituted a veritable space of relaxation, furnished with a shelter in case of bad weather, plants, and cement slabs.

“The Five Points towards a New Architecture”

Although Le Corbusier did not formalize the “Five Points towards a New Architecture” until 1927, the La Roche House can be considered as the first implementation of the ensemble of these five elements. This new architectural language would formally culminate at the Villa Savoye, constructed in 1928.

The pilotis, first of all, allowed the architects to apply the principle of the open plan* throughout the totality of the house, inviting visitors to circulate freely even under the building. “Reinforced concrete has given us pilotis. The house is in the air, far above the ground; the garden runs under the house; it is also the on the house, on the roof”⁸

Next, the long, horizontal window enters without interruption into the facade, an envelope that no longer bears weight. “The window is one of the essential elements of the house. Progress brings liberation. Concrete is revolutionizing the history of the window.”⁹

Thirdly the roof garden redefines the traditional roof as a suspended garden at the top of the house.

The open plan, for its part, liberates the interior organization and renders the spatial distribution on each floor entirely independent.

Finally, the open facade becomes an envelope, independent of the structure “The windows can run uninterrupted from one end of the façade to the other”.¹⁰

■ The interior organization: private and public spaces

THEMES

- Notions of space and line
- Reception rooms, the private domain

BEFORE THE VISIT

- The distribution of light in a dwelling
- The industrial era and modern construction techniques (reinforced concrete, glass, the architectural framework, metal furnishings, etc.)

AFTER THE VISIT

- Light, color, circulation (stairs, ramp)

The interior of the La Roche House comprises two distinct spaces: the public and the private, serviced by two staircases that part from the entrance hall. By disassociating the two functions, Le Corbusier responded imaginatively to La Roche's commission. In one wing of the building, he designed a reception area that houses an art gallery open to the public and, in the other, a residence suitable for a bachelor. To the left of the entrance hall, the public domain consists of the guest room on the ground floor, the art gallery on the first floor, and the library on the second. The private domain, to the right, houses the caretaker's apartments and the kitchen on the ground floor, the dining room and pantry on the first, and Raoul La Roche's "purist" bedroom on the second, preceded by a dressing room and bathroom. Finally, access to the roof garden can be found on the very last floor.



The entrance hall:

Submerged in shadow under the foot bridge, the visitor first steps into the foyer, a stunning volume of space bathed light. As if suspended in the void, a small balcony immediately attracts his/her eye. The visitor searches the room, its three elevations laid perfectly bare, for a staircase leading to the upper levels.

Le Corbusier, unwilling to obstruct the space with an ostentatious, monumental staircase, chose to conceal both staircases behind each wall of the foyer. As, from the entrance, the visitor glimpses into the various spaces of the house, he/she is invited to take an "architectural promenade", a concept the architect highly valued. The visitor's view of the entrance hall constantly changes as he/she circulates about the house, discovering new perspectives at each floor.



The entrance hall (public domain). Photos Olivier Martin-Gambier

THEMES

- The architectural promenade

BEFORE THE VISIT

- De Stijl

AFTER THE VISIT

- The Villa Savoye, in Poissy (Yvelines)

“The architectural promenade”

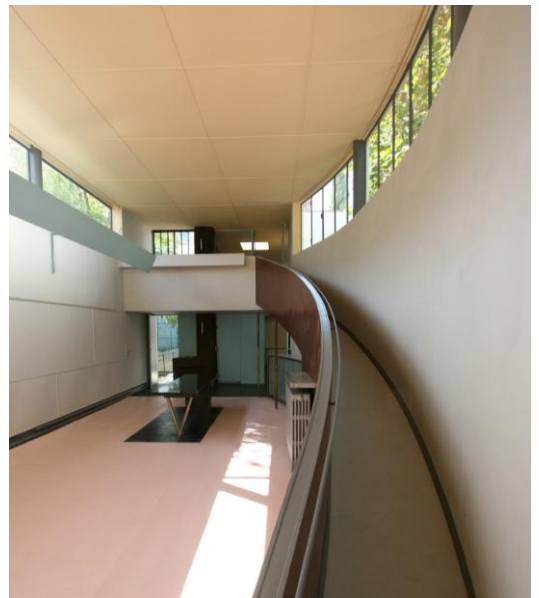
The concept of the “architectural promenade” first crystallized in the La Roche House, though this term did not appear until 1929 in the first volume of *Œuvre complète*. There, Le Corbusier used the phrase to describe the La Roche House: “The second house will be something like an architectural promenade. We enter: the architectural spectacle presents itself to our gaze; we follow an itinerary, and various points of view unfold one after the other; we play with the flood of light illuminating the walls or casting shadows. The window bays open up views onto the exterior, and we rediscover the architectural whole.”¹¹ The interior circulation became a preoccupation Le Corbusier would pursue throughout the rest of his career: “Everything, especially in architecture, is a question of circulation.”¹²

The principle of the “architectural promenade” was inspired by Arabic architecture: “Arabic architecture teaches us a valuable lesson. It is best appreciated on foot: it is by walking, by moving that one discerns the underlying architectural arrangement. This principle is exactly the opposite of baroque architecture.”¹³

We can apply the notion of the “architectural promenade” to three essential elements of the La Roche House: first, the use of various architectural means to build an entrance that would spark the visitor’s curiosity and invite him to follow the determined path; secondly, the creation of multiple, successive points of view; and finally, the maintenance of the relation between the diverse components and the architectural whole.

The interior ramp:

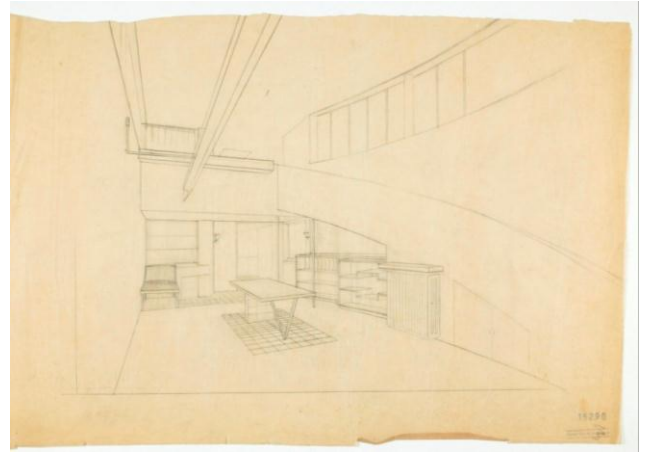
The “architectural promenade” is symbolized by the interior ramp* that links the art gallery and the library. For Le Corbusier, the ramp was the instrument of choice to connect two given floors. It manifests the fluidity of the space in a solid, visual form. Additionally, this architectural element directs the visitor and orchestrates a sequence of various points of view. Le Corbusier wrote, “We climb a ramp little by little, a sensation entirely different from that given by climbing a staircase. Stairs separate one floor from another; a ramp ties them together.”¹⁴



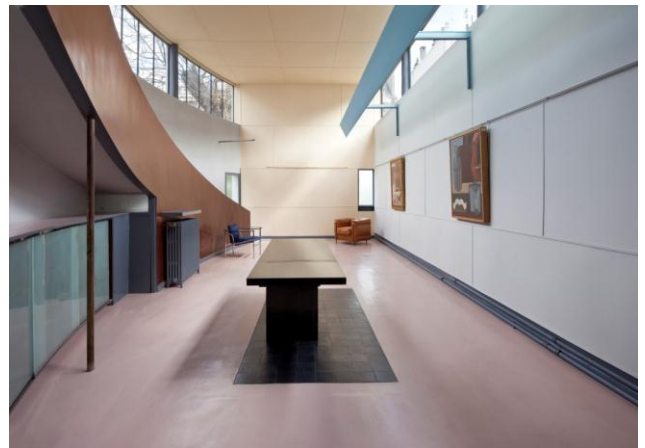
The interior ramp. Photo Olivier Martin-Gambier

The art gallery:

The atmosphere of the art gallery breaks radically with that of the entrance hall. While the latter expands vertically and reaches three levels in height, the gallery stretches out horizontally. The movement suggested by the picture railing to the right and by the curved ramp to the left introduces another dynamic. The ramp, for its part, invites the visitor to follow the “architectural promenade”, promising a succession of new perspectives. Thanks to two horizontal window bays that span the length of the gallery, the light varies here depending upon the time of day and the weather. As opposed to the monochromy of the foyer, broad expanses of pure color (burnt umber, light blue, light grey and yellow ochre) distinguish the diverse elements and structure the volumes of the gallery.



Sketch of the 1928 design – FLC 15290



The gallery. Photo Olivier Martin-Gambier

The library:

A place of study and contemplation, the library situates itself on the last floor of the building. Preceded by the mezzanine, it is secluded from the rest of the house and overlooks the immense, plunging void of the entrance hall. Two lighting systems (zenithal and lateral) bring in natural light conducive to reading. A concrete shelf, designed to store art books, doubles here as a balustrade.*



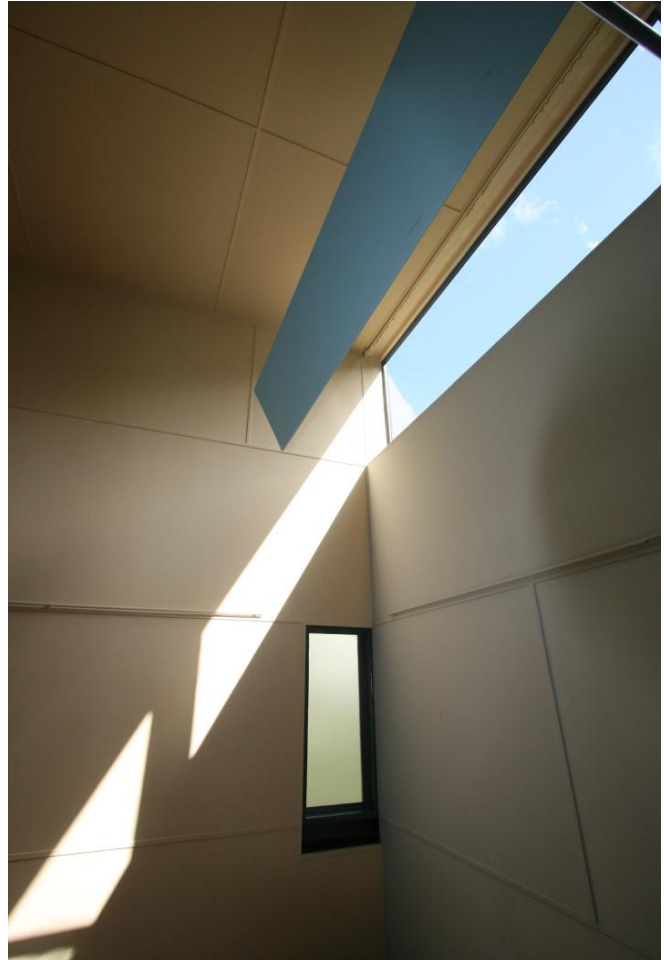
The library. Photo Fred Boissonnas, 1926 – FLC L2 (12)109

Later transformations:

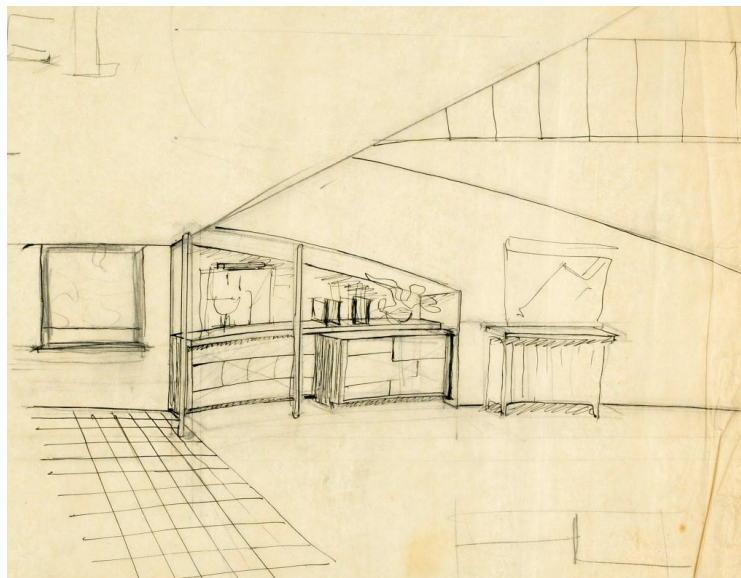
Following an accident in the gallery (during which two radiators broke down due to the cold), Raoul La Roche undertook a significant construction campaign. In 1928, Le Corbusier and his collaborator/interior designer, Charlotte Perriand, introduced several modifications to the art gallery.

They reconsidered the lighting system and significantly improved it, adding a light fixture to the Eastern wall so as to protect the artworks from direct light. The team covered the original parquet floor with pink rubber carpeting and black stone tiles. To resolve the acoustic

problem, they replaced part of the partition beneath the ramp with a low shelf. The same year, they installed a black marble-top table with V-shaped, steel legs. Finally, in 1936, hardboard panels were attached to the walls and ceiling so as to reinforce the thermal insulation. Despite these numerous problems, Raoul La Roche remained an accommodating and generous client, his friendship unflinching.



Light fixture in the art gallery.
Photo Olivier Martin-Gambier



Bookcase under the
ramp in the gallery,
January April 1928
(FLC 15250)

TO NOTE IN SITU:

- The paintings in the dining room belong to Le Corbusier's Purist period. The colors match those used on the walls of the house.



Still life with siphon,
Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, 1921. Paris



The dining room. Photo Olivier Martin-Gambier

The dining room:

Located on the first floor in the private domain of the house, the dining room offers an expansive view of the exterior. The bare lightbulbs, suspended in the middle of the room, reference Le Corbusier's tendency to minimally treat the interior decoration. The walls and ceiling of the dining room are painted in a light, burnt sienna tone. The furniture in this room was reproduced during the 2009 restoration* campaign.

The purist bedroom:

As a complement to the library in the public domain, the proprietor's bedroom occupies the last floor of the private apartments. Because Raoul La Roche hung here purist paintings by Le Corbusier and Ozenfant, his favorite tableaux, this room is also called the "purist bedroom". The bedroom is small in comparison with the rest of the house, and it is sparsely furnished with a bed, a metal table, a low armoire, and a rug.



Still life with lantern,
Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, 1922. Paris



La Roche's bedroom, ("the purist bedroom"). Photo Olivier Martin-Gambier

Color and architecture

THEMES

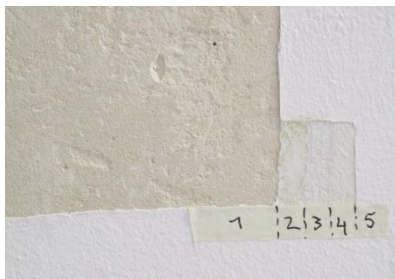
- Polychromy

BEFORE THE VISIT

- The “purist” palette

AFTER THE VISIT

- The furniture
- Contemporary designers / architects:
 - Charlotte Perriand,
 - Eileen Gray,
 - Pierre Jeanneret



Restoration panels on the principal facade of the La Roche House – Ariel Bertrand

1: Cement base (1924)

2: Base coat

3: Layer of light grey paint (1936)

4 and 5: Layers of modern, white acrylic paint

First attempt at architectural polychromy:

At the La Roche House, Le Corbusier systematically experimented on the introduction of color in architecture for the first time. His treatment of polychromy* in the building well illustrates the continuity that, for him, ran between his two practices: his



Chimney in the corner of the gallery. Photo Olivier Martin-Gambier

activity as a painter and his work as an architect. He chose each shade for its own special qualities so as to either suppress or magnify the architectural volumes. “At the interior, the first attempts at architectural polychromy, based on specific optical reactions, put into practice the notion of architectural camouflage, i.e., either the affirmation or suppression of certain volumes. The interior of the house must be white, but in order to make this white stand out, a multitude of colors must be carefully applied: the walls in shadow should be blue, those that are fully illuminated should be red... we make the bulk of the building disappear by painting it in a raw umber tone, and so on.”¹⁵ Color engages various elements and objects, such as the chimney or interior ramp, in an architectural drama, creating new spatial and visual relationships. On one hand, the monochrome, light, raw sienna of the entrance hall forms a continuity between the interior and the exterior facades (in their original state, see the exterior color panels), creating a fluid passage between the outside and inside. On the other hand, the yellow ochre shade gives way to a range of colors: burnt umber, light blue, light grey, yellow ochre. The use of polychromy evokes a new perception of space, investing the “architectural promenade” with a certain rhythm. Le Corbusier’s research on purist color theory led him to define three color ranges: intense, dynamic, and transitional. Indicating a new artistic preoccupation, this early attempt at architectural polychromy would evolve in his later constructions, eventually moving to the exterior facades.

The furniture:

The current furniture in the house was either conceived or selected by Le Corbusier. For the most part, the storage units are built-in elements, integrated fully into the architecture itself. An array of mobile, independent pieces complement these functional components and complete the ensemble: Thonet chairs, Maple armchairs, La Roche tables designed by Le Corbusier (reproduced today by Cassina), Berber rugs, garden furniture... Some had been added to the house at a later date, like the reclining armchair in 1930 (designed by Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret and Charlotte Perriand) and the small model of the Grand Comfort armchair. The careful attention Le Corbusier paid to the interior design of the house would be a constant factor in his later work.

■ The restoration campaigns

THEMES

- The concept of cultural heritage
- Restoration questions and policy
- The concept of intellectual and land property

BEFORE THE VISIT

- Raising awareness about cultural heritage
- Preservation, conservation, restoration, presentation to the public

AFTER THE VISIT

- Inscription or classification of an edifice as a historical monument
- The role of the architect in chief of historical monuments
- The trades of cultural heritage
- The workings of the Fondation Le Corbusier: an institution for the protection of an edifice

Little before his death in 1965 and with no direct heir, Raoul La Roche left his home to his friend, Le Corbusier, who wished to locate there the premises of the future Fondation Le Corbusier. In 1968, the La Roche House was officially declared to belong to this institution. Since the first general restoration in 1970, which aimed to open the La Roche House to the public, numerous interventions have taken place to rehabilitate the edifice, as much at the exterior as in the interior.

In 2008 and 2009, a new restoration campaign was launched by the architect in chief of historical monuments, Pierre-Antoine Gatier. Gatier's objective was to evidence the original, double function of the house-gallery by allowing the public to access the totality of rooms in the building. The interior restoration required an exhaustive study of the original colors and materials. Conservators conducted surveys on the walls and various furnishings, some of which can still be seen today. These panels allow us to retrace the chronology of the coats of paint that have been applied since 1923. The study was completed by the consultation of archival documents, including business quotes, old photographs, etc.



Color survey conducted during the 2009 interior restoration of the La Roche House – Dining room



Stratigraphy / Analysis of the paint layers conducted during the 2009 interior restoration of the La Roche House – Dining room

■ The architectural context

THEMES

- Architecture in the 19th century
- Architecture at the beginning of the 20th century

BEFORE THE VISIT

- Art nouveau
- Decorative art

AFTER THE VISIT

- The International style
- Other architects of the 1930s

In Paris, the 19th century lasted until World War I in the world of architecture; the building model fostered under the Second Empire survived, given some modifications. Stone-cut, often ornamental edifices endured until the coming of the Art Nouveau movement, which covered the facades in a vegetal decor.

At the beginning of the 1920s, everything changed. For one, Art Deco was on the rise. In comparison with the styles that preceded it, its buildings were more sober and geometric, their decoration restrained to precise points on the façade.

Art Deco architecture would go on to become the predominant style of the 1920s.

In 1919, Walter Gropius founded the Bauhaus in Germany. The Bauhaus school would exercise a great influence on modern architecture and the visual arts.

In 1925, the Exhibition of Decorative Arts was held in Paris. For this event, Le Corbusier constructed the Esprit Nouveau (New Spirit) pavilion – the birthplace of the new style that would dominate the 1930s.

The key terms of “l’esprit nouveau” - in other words, the “new spirit” - are as follows: rationalism, functionalism (as associated with new construction techniques), reinforced concrete, large glass surfaces, and metal finishings, among others.

Le Corbusier’s pavilion can be read as a precursor to the International style.

Among the artists that we find surrounding Le Corbusier in these years:

Fernand Léger, Amédée Ozenfant, Chaïm Jacob Lipchitz, Oscar Miestchaninoff, Juan Gris, Maurice Denis, Chano Orloff, Julio Gonzalez, Pablo Gargallo, the brothers Jean and Joël Martel, Henri Laurens, Ossip Zadkine, Piet Mondrian, etc.

A few key names of the architectural world in the 1930s (in chronological order):

- Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959)

- Henri Sauvage (1873-1932)

- Auguste Perret (1874-1954), source of inspiration for Le Corbusier in terms of his conception of architecture. Le Corbusier worked in his studio upon his arrival in Paris. Notably, the Perret brothers designed the plans for the first concrete apartment building on rue Franklin in the 16th arrondissement of Paris.

- Pierre Patout (1879-1965)

- Pierre Chareau (1883-1950), architect of the Glass House built between 1928 and 1931; rue Saint-Guillaume in the 7th arrondissement of Paris.

- Robert Mallet-Stevens (1886-1945), architect of a development project that took a step in an entirely new direction: the rue Mallet-Stevens (1926-1934) in the 16th arrondissement of Paris (at the end of rue du Docteur Blanche).

- Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969)

- André Lurçat (1894-1970)

- Alvar Aalto (1898-1976)

Le Corbusier: architect and artist

THEMES

- Purism
- The synthesis of the arts

BEFORE THE VISIT

- Cubism
- The review "L'Esprit Nouveau" (The New Spirit)

AFTER THE VISIT

- Architect/Artist

At a young age, Le Corbusier wanted to pursue a career as a painter. However, his teacher, Charles L'Eplattenier, dissuaded him and convinced him to become an architect. Though he continued his pictorial work, he simultaneously undertook a career in architecture. For example, he often returned from travels in his youth with quantities of sketches and watercolors done from life studies. Later, settled in Paris, his experiences in the pictorial world multiplying, he set out to discover his own style. He met there the painter, Amédée Ozenfant, who supported him in this vocation. Their exchange allowed the two of them to bring together the fruit of their individual research, helping them to share and elaborate a new aesthetic they termed "Purism"*. In 1918, they published their ideas in a collective work entitled *After Cubism*. Distancing themselves from the precedent announced in this title, Le Corbusier and Ozenfant advocated the return to order and harmony by means of simple, geometric forms and broad expanses of pure color. The two painters allocated an equally large place to the machine in their paintings. In 1918, the first tableau by Le Corbusier, *La Cheminée (The Chimney)*, exemplified the meticulous composition that would define his purist architecture of the 1920s (such as the La Roche House). Le Corbusier painted numerous still lifes until 1928, the year he began to abandon the principles of Purism. At this time, the simple, geometric forms grew more complex, the colors more raw, and the subjects renewed. Though Le Corbusier came to be recognized more and more as an architect, he did not in any case reduce his activity as a painter. In 1930, as a testimony to the dialogue he encouraged among architecture and the arts, he introduced the notion of the "synthesis of the arts" to his creative repertoire, just before joining the *Association for the synthesis of the art* presided over by Henri Matisse. As early as the 1940s, Le Corbusier began the *Ozon*, *Ubu* and *Taureaux* series that signaled a new direction in his pictorial activity. His visual work is immense, nearly protean; he produced a multitude of sculptures, enamels, engravings, tapestries, murals and photographs.



Le Corbusier, *The Chimney*, 1918, oil paint.

Le Corbusier, *I was dreaming*, (first version) 1953.

Le Corbusier, *The sea*, 1964.

Chronology

Biography

1887 October 6th, born **Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier)** at La Chaux-de-Fonds in Switzerland; son of Georges Edouard Jeanneret, watch engraver and enameller, and of Marie Charlotte Amélie Jeanneret-Perret, musician.

1917 Settles in Paris.

1918 Meets Amédée Ozenfant and co-founds the Purist pictorial movement.

1919-1920 Creation of the avant-garde review, *L'Esprit Nouveau*. Adopts the pen name, Le Corbusier.

1922 Establishes an architectural firm with his cousin, Pierre Jeanneret, with whom he collaborates until the 1950s.

1923-1925 Construction of the La Roche-Jeanneret Houses. Publishes three books: *Towards an Architecture, Urbanism, and Decorative Art Today*.

1925 Construction of the Esprit Nouveau pavilion (Paris) and the Cité Frugès Modern Quarters (Pessac). Begins studies for the Plan Voisin in Paris

1926 Construction of the Villa Cook in Boulogne (Hauts-de-Seine), the Guiette House (Anvers, Belgium) and the Salvation Army Palais du peuple (Paris, 13th arrondissement).

1928 Foundation of the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM) in La Sarraz, Switzerland. Construction of the Villa Church in Ville d'Avray, Hauts-de-Seine, (destroyed).

1929 Construction of the Villa Savoye in Poissy (Yvelines).

1930 French naturalization; marriage to Yvonne Gallis. Construction of the Swiss pavillon (Cité internationale universitaire, Paris, 14th arrondissement).

1931 Construction of the studio-apartment on rue Nungesser et Coli (Paris, 16th arrondissement)

Architectural context

1900 Guimard: metro entrances (Paris).
Gaudi : Güel park (Barcelona).

1904 Tony Garnier: the International City (Lyon).

1910 Construction of the Champs-Élysées Theater by Auguste Perret (Paris)

1919 Gropius founds the Bauhaus in Weimar
Mies van der Rohe: projects for a glass skyscraper

1920 Piet Mondrian: neo-plasticism
Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner: constructivist manifesto in Moscow

1924 First chairs made of steel tubes (Marcel Breuer, Mart Stam, Mies van der Rohe).

1925 Under pressure from right-wing parties in Germany, the Bauhaus relocates from Weimar to Dessau in new buildings designed by Gropius.

1926 Mallet-Stevens builds an ensemble of houses (rue Mallet-Stevens) in Paris and in Saint-Jean-de-Luz le Casino. André Lurçat : Guggenbühl House, Paris.

1928 Hannes Meyer succeeds Gropius as Bauhaus director. Fernand Léger gives a lecture on Le Corbusier.

1930 Mies van der Rohe becomes the new director of the Bauhaus.

1931 Pierre Chareau constructs the Glass House

1932 The Bauhaus relocates from Dessau to Berlin.

■ Chronology

Biography

1933 Drafts the Athens Charter, which codifies modern ideas about zoning and green spaces and inspires many of the large ensembles of the “Thirty Glorious Years” between 1945 and 1975 in France. Construction of the Salvation Army Cité de Refuge (Paris, 13th arrondissement)

1935 Lecture tour around the United States

1937 Publication of *When the Cathedrals Were White*.

1938-1945 Activity as a painter, writer, and urban planner; few architectural commissions.

1945 Formalization of the Modulor system, which establishes ideal architectural dimensions based on human proportions.

1947 Lays the foundation stone at the Unité d’habitation (housing unit) in Marseille.

1951-1962 Numerous projects and constructions in India, in Ahmedabad (Gujarat) and particularly in Chandigarh (Penjab)

1951 Construction of the Notre-Dame-du-Haut chapel in Ronchamp (Haute-Saône).

1952 Construction of the Unité d’habitation in Rezé (Loire-Atlantique) and the Cabanon in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin (Maritime Alps).

1954 Publication of *A Small House*.

1957 Death of Yvonne Le Corbusier. Construction of the Sainte Marie de la Tourette Convent (near Lyon).

1962 Retrospective at the National Museum of Modern Art in Paris. Construction of the Unité d’habitation in Firminy.

1965 August 27th, death of Le Corbusier in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin (Maritime Alps) while swimming in the Mediterranean. Classification of the Villa Savoye as a historical monument.

1968 Creation of the Fondation Le Corbusier, recognized as a public-interest organization (Paris, 16th arrondissement).

Architectural context

1933 The Bauhaus is shut down by the police.

1942 Mies van der Rohe : first buildings at the Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago.

1948 Frank Lloyd Wright : first circular house.

1952 Breuer, Nervi, Zehruss : UNESCO, Paris

1956 Brasilia plan by Lucio Costa.

1959 Inauguration of the Guggenheim Museum, New-York, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Dissolution of the International Congress of Modern Architecture at the 11th congress.

■ Architectural vocabulary

- **Facade:** the exterior face of a building, or an ensemble of faces that are seen globally at the exterior.
- **Balustrade:** a protective railing placed on the side of a staircase or around the perimeter of a terrace in order to prevent an accidental fall.
- **Modern Movement:** Also known as Modern Architecture, the International style, and Modernism, this movement initially appeared in the first half of the 20th century. Many European architects contributed to the development of the architectural current, proposing a new aesthetic in reaction to the ubiquitous influence of the academies. Their research culminated in the resurgence of a minimal decor and of pure, geometrical lines, as opposed to the style promoted by Art Nouveau or the decorative tradition. In addition, the evolution of industrial techniques enabled them to capitalize on new materials such as concrete and steel. One of the principal concerns posed by this movement was that of the communal modern habitat.
- **Open plan:** The elimination of load-bearing walls, thanks to the use of reinforced concrete, permits an interior spatial distribution in which each floor is independent of the others.
- **Pilotis:** a group of “pilasters” designed to support a building above the ground, opening up the circulatory space beneath the structure.
- **Polychromy:** the use of multiple colors in architecture or statuary.
- **Program:** The client (the patron) commissions a work from an architect and details the whole of his/her needs and expectations. The objectives of the client determine the program.
- **Purism:** pictorial movement the painters, Le Corbusier and Amédée Ozenfant (1886-1966), put into theory in a manifesto published in 1918. As a post-cubist movement, it sought a purified aesthetic that tended toward the representation of quotidian objects, valorizing simple forms.
- **Ramp:** an inclined surface that functions as a means of passage between two floors.
- **Reinforced concrete:** a highly resistant material made from a pairing of cement and steel bars.
- **Restoration:** work that rehabilitates an edifice by means of rigorous scientific analysis, a process that potentially involves the restitution of its original state.
- **Roof-terrace :** a flat surface that replaces an inclined roof and give access to the exterior, sometimes equipped with a garden.

■ Notes

1. Le Corbusier, in Jean Petit, *Le Corbusier lui-même*, Geneva, Jean Petit, 1970, p. 25-26, quoted in Jean Jenger, *Le Corbusier: Architect, Painter, Poet*, trans. Caroline Beamish, New-York, Harry N. Abrams, 1996, p. 14-15
2. Le Corbusier, *Œuvre Complète, 1910-1929*, vol. 1, Zurich, Les Editions d'Architecture, 1964, p.60, quoted in Jacques Sbriglio, *Le Corbusier : The Villas La Roche-Jeanneret*, trans. Sarah Parsons, Basel, Birkhäuser, 1997, p.59
3. ; 5. ; 6. ; 7. ; 8. ; 9. ; 10: Le Corbusier, *L'architecture vivante, 1927, quotations translated by Deborah Lenahan*, pp.16-25
4. Le Corbusier, *Œuvre Complète*, op. cit., p.128, quoted in Sbriglio, op. cit., p.120-121
11. Le Corbusier, *Œuvre Complète, 1910-1929*, vol. 1, quotation translated by Deborah Lenahan, op. cit., p.60
12. Le Corbusier, *Une maison – un palais, à la recherche d'une unité architecturale*, trans: D. Lenahan, G. Grès, Paris, p.78
13. Le Corbusier, *Œuvre Complète, 1929-1934*, vol. 2, 7th Ed., Zurich, Les Editions d'Architecture, 1964, p.24, quoted in Sbriglio, op. cit., p.110
14. *Ibid.*, quotation translated by Deborah Lenahan, p.24
15. Le Corbusier, *Œuvre Complète, 1910-1929*, vol. 1, quotation translated by Deborah Lenahan, op. cit., p.60

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Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday:

10:00 AM – 12:30 PM, 1:30 PM – 6:00 PM

Friday:

10:30 AM – 12:30 PM, 1:30 PM – 5:00 PM

Library

On appointment

(reservation by telephone only)

Opening hours:

Monday to Thursday: 1:30 PM – 6:00 PM

Friday: 1:30 PM – 5:00 PM

Closed:

Sunday, Monday morning, and public holidays

The Fondation Le Corbusier was created in 1968 in keeping with the wishes of the architect. It currently occupies the La Roche and Jeanneret Houses on the square du Docteur Blanche in Paris. Le Corbusier's sole legatee, it functions also as the proprietor of his studio-apartment, located on rue Nungesser et Coli in the 16th arrondissement of Paris, as well as of the "Small House" overlooking Lac Léman, built for his parents.

As early as 1949, Le Corbusier devoted a certain amount of his activity to the project to establish the Fondation, fearful that the ensemble of his archives and work would not be dispersed.

Recognized as a public-interest organization, the Fondation looks to conserve and diffuse Le Corbusier's work. It is therefore responsible for the majority of the architect's archives: drawings, studies, plans, writings, and photographs, all available for consultation in its library. It owns the rights to much of his visual artwork as well: paintings, drawings, preliminary tapestry sketches, paper collages, engravings, and sculptures. The public may view these works at the exhibitions organized in the La Roche House, as well as at events held in France and across the world. Annually, the Fondation hosts themed conferences and offers research scholarships to students.

The La Roche House is open to the public from Monday to Saturday. A visit to this hallmark of Modern Architecture may interest those involved in various domains such as art history, architecture, the visual arts, the sciences, and technology.



FONDATION LE CORBUSIER