

**HOUSE THREE: The House on Stilts—Villa Savoye, Poissy-sur-Seine, France.
1929–31**

Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret) (French, born Switzerland. 1887–1965), with Pierre Jeanneret (Swiss, 1896–1967)



IMAGE 9: Northwest and southwest facades. 1995–99. Photo: Paul Koslowski. Fondation Le Corbusier. © 2004 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris



IMAGE 10: Exterior view. 1930. Photo courtesy the Architecture and Design Study Center, The Museum of Modern Art, New York



IMAGE 11: Entrance hall. 1995–99. Photo: Paul Koslowski. Fondation Le Corbusier. © 2004 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris



IMAGE 12: Living room and roof garden. 1995–99. Photo: Paul Koslowski. Fondation Le Corbusier. © 2004 Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris



IMAGE 13: Master apartment bathroom. 1995–99. Photo: Paul Koslowski. Fondation Le Corbusier. © 2004 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

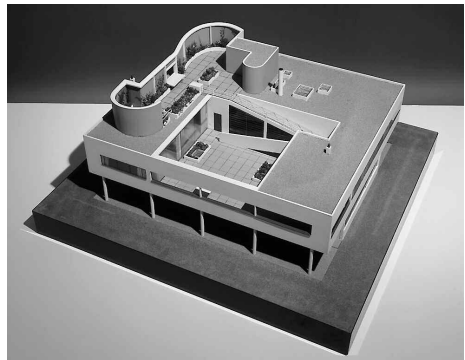


IMAGE 14: Model. 1932. Wood, aluminum, and plastic, 11 ¼ x 22 ½ x 25 ½" (28.6 x 57.2 x 64.8 cm). Modelmaker: Theodore Conrad. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase. © 2004 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris



IMAGE 15: Le Corbusier, with Pierre Jeanneret and Charlotte Perriand (French, 1903–1999). Chaise Longue. 1928. Chrome-plated steel, fabric, and leather, 26 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 23 x 62 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (67 x 58.4 x 158.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Thonet Industries, Inc.

ABOUT THE VILLA SAVOYE

Designed by Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret) and his cousin, Pierre Jeanneret, with interior spaces and furnishings by Charlotte Perriand, the Villa Savoye was named after its original owners, Pierre and Eugénie Savoye. Intended as a country home for the family, Villa Savoye was built between 1929 and 1931 on an open area of farmland in the town of Poissy, approximately twenty-five miles outside of Paris.

The Savoye family was the first to own a car in the area, and Le Corbusier included features in the design of the house to accommodate the automobile. For instance, there is a ramp for the car leading into the garage and the driveway, the curve of which equals the turning radius of a large car. The interior of the house, which also contains ramps (as well as a spiral stairway) echoes the ramps and curve of the driveway. The Villa Savoye has other features that were considered unusual at the time the house was built, such as *pilotis*, or reinforced concrete columns (or stilts), and a flat roof. A *ribbon window* surrounds the ground floor of the house. Just inside the entrance on the ground floor there is a washbasin for guests to clean their hands in and an area along a wall where they can hang up their coats. The upper levels of the house are accessible by ramp or spiral stairway. On the first floor, the bedrooms, guest room, kitchen, bathroom, and living room are arranged in an L-shape around a terrace. The bathroom, built for Mrs. Savoye, features a bathtub and a lounge “chair” made from blue and black tiles; the tub is built into the floor. The house’s flat roof contains a garden.

Although Mrs. Savoye retained ownership, the family vacated Villa Savoye during World War II and it suffered extensive damage. After the war, the town of Poissy attempted to expropriate the house and demolish it in order to build a school in its place. The deteriorated state of Villa Savoye, along with its impending destruction, attracted international concern. Le Corbusier intervened and worked with the French Ministry of Culture to ensure Villa Savoye’s preservation. After Le Corbusier’s death, in 1965, the Ministry took gradual steps to restore the house and open it to the public as a museum.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Show your students Images 9 through 14 of Villa Savoye.

- **Look closely at these images. List five words that describe this house. What do you see in the pictures that made you choose these words? Have your classmates share their responses. Did everyone select similar words? Do you notice any differences between people’s responses?**
- **Can you think of any similarities or differences between your home (or other houses you have seen) and Villa Savoye?**

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY

Le Corbusier once likened a house to a machine: “A house is a machine for living in. Baths, sun, hot water, cold water, warmth at will, conservation of food, hygiene, beauty in the sense of good proportion. An armchair is a machine for sitting in, and so on.”⁴ Some of the critics’ responses were not so enthusiastic. One particularly scathing review called the Villa Savoye an “alien space capsule that has just touched down on a Virgilian landscape.”⁵

The architect Frank Lloyd Wright also had a negative reaction to the Villa Savoye. He once referred to it as a “box on stilts.”⁶ He described Le Corbusier’s work as a “childish attempt to make buildings resemble steamships, flying machines, or locomotives.”⁷

Ask your students to write an essay that addresses the following:

- **Consider all of the above comments. Do you think the criticism of Le Corbusier’s design was fair or not?**
- **How do you suppose most people reacted when they saw Villa Savoye for the first time in the 1930s? Do you think people would have similar reactions today?**

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Look at the image of Rietveld’s Red Blue Chair (Image 8). What kinds of comparisons can you make between the chair and Le Corbusier’s Chaise Longue (Image 15)? Consider the materials used, the shapes, and what the sensation of sitting in each chair might be.

ABOUT LE CORBUSIER (CHARLES-ÉDOUARD JEANNERET) AND PIERRE JEANNERET

The architect, painter, and lithographer Charles-Édouard Jeanneret was born in 1887, in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland. He later adopted the Huguenot name “Le Corbusier” as a way of acknowledging his ancestral heritage. Most of the residents in his town could trace their lineage to Huguenots who fled France during the sixteenth century to avoid persecution.

While he was growing up, Le Corbusier spent a lot of time with his father hiking near their home. He often carried small sketchpads with him, a habit that lasted throughout his lifetime. As a teenager, he enjoyed sketching the natural landscape in his area. Le Corbusier attended art school from the age of seventeen to twenty. His earliest design was a house for a local jeweler, which he completed when he was just eighteen years old. When he was twenty-three years old, he spent five months working for Peter Behrens, a Berlin-based architect who was recognized at the time for his designs of factories and houses. One of Le Corbusier’s colleagues included another young architect, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (see House Five). In 1917, Le Corbusier moved to Paris, where he established an architectural practice with his cousin, Pierre Jeanneret (born 1896, in Geneva). Both men gained fame for their role in developing the International Style of architecture. From 1922 to 1940 and from 1951 to 1955 they collaborated on various projects. Their firm attracted many young, promising architects because of the innovation of their designs, particularly houses, which reflected their commitment to using modern materials like concrete and steel. Another notable achievement was their obtainment of a patent for horizontal sliding windows.

Along with the Villa Savoye, Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret completed projects in Europe, North and South America, Asia, and Africa, including homes, furniture, churches, large-scale urban housing, factories, and government buildings. Le Corbusier was one of a team of architects that designed the United Nations headquarters in New York City, completed in 1953. Le Corbusier died in France, in 1965; Pierre Jeanneret died two years later, in Geneva.

4. Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1986), 89.

5. Charles Jencks, *Le Corbusier and the Continual Revolution in Architecture* (New York: The Monacelli Press, Inc., 1989), 173.

6. *Ibid.*, 173.

7. Gwendolyn Wright, in *Frank Lloyd Wright: Architect*, Peter Reed and Terence Riley, eds. (New York: The Museum Modern Art, 1994), 86.

RESEARCH PROJECTS

1. Le Corbusier's Five Points of Architecture

The Villa Savoye incorporates Le Corbusier's five points of architecture, which he spelled out in his book *Vers une architecture*, 1923 (later translated into English, titled *Towards a New Architecture*), and which he believed were indispensable to successful design.

Pilotis. *Pilotis* are reinforced concrete columns, or stilts, that raise a structure off the ground. The use of pilotis in the Villa Savoye ensured that the inhabitants of the home would be elevated aboveground, promoting a hygienic lifestyle. (Hygiene was very important to Le Corbusier—Image 12 shows a washbasin inside the entrance of the Villa Savoye, where people could wash off any outside dirt before entering the home.)

Free Plan. A *free plan*, achieved through the separation of load-bearing columns from the walls, subdivides the space. The columns, not the walls, carry the weight of the building so that the walls can be placed anywhere.

Free Facade. A *free facade* works like a *free plan*, but vertically. Since columns, not walls, carry the weight of the building, windows can pierce the walls anywhere.

Ribbon Windows. *Ribbon windows* are long horizontal bands of sliding windows. As the Villa Savoye's facade is free of columns and does not support anything, windows can run along its entire width.

Roof Garden. A *roof garden* is for the enjoyment of the outdoors right on top of the home.

Using the resources in the back of this guide, have your students prepare a class presentation or write a paper in response to the following:

- **Explore other building designs by Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret. How would you compare them to Villa Savoye? For example, do you notice similarities between the types of materials used? Do you think Le Corbusier pursued similar ideas in many of his designs? Can you find examples of Le Corbusier's five points in his other designs?**

2. International Style

The building designs of Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe are often referred to as belonging to the *International Style* of architecture. This term was coined from a 1932 exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art called *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition*. The exhibition included Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, Mies van der Rohe, and Frank Lloyd Wright. Some of the distinguishing features of International Style architecture are its sleek, simple designs; use of materials such as concrete and metal; flat surfaces; and rectangular shapes.

Using the resources in the back of this guide, find out more about International Style. Learn more about critics' and other people's responses to International Style. Do you agree or disagree with what you have read? Why? Think about your own neighborhood, the area around your school, or places that you have visited. Do you see examples of International Style architecture in buildings today? Write an essay presenting your ideas.

GLOSSARY

International Style: International Style architecture is generally characterized by its use of materials such as steel, concrete, and glass, and its boxy structures and lack of decoration.