



Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, *Maison La Roche, Paris, France, 1925*. © FLC/SPA, 1976.

## The Role of the *Fondation Le Corbusier* in the Conservation of the Le Corbusier's Architectural Work

BY BÉNÉDICTE GANDINI AND MICHEL RICHARD

***I here declare, for every eventuality, that I leave everything that I possess to an administrative entity, the "Fondation Le Corbusier", or any other meaningful form, which shall become a spiritual entity, that is, a continuation of the endeavor pursued throughout a lifetime.***

Le Corbusier, 13 January 1960, Archives FLC

Le Corbusier died on 27 August 1965 at Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, near his *Cabanon*.

Without direct heirs and driven by the fear that his carefully conserved archives and works be scattered after his death, Le Corbusier spent the last fifteen years of his life conceiving and implementing, down to its smallest details, the project of a Foundation that would bear his name.

Today the activity of the *Fondation Le Corbusier* comprises two main undertakings: circulating his work and spreading his ideas; preserving the architect's work and collections. Indeed as the legatee and direct offshoot of its creator Le Corbusier, the Foundation holds the moral rights to this work and therefore has a duty to constantly watch over his architectural work (and indeed the artist's entire legacy).

For the Foundation each of his buildings constitute a piece of art in and of itself. Each issue concerned in the restoration of Le Corbusier's buildings is effectively governed by this specificity.

**docomomo** *Journal* 53, issued on the occasion of the commemoration of Le Corbusier's death is dedicated to the activity of the *Fondation Le Corbusier* in monitoring the restoration of as many of his architectural works as possible. In this introduction we will briefly explain how the Foundation is permanently involved in the conservation of his architectural work, highlighting its specificity.

The articles will describe a selection of interventions in different countries.

By way of introduction, the example of the *Maisons La Roche* and *Jeanneret* is presented as what should be considered as an exemplary intervention implemented by the Foundation itself.

All these examples provide a comprehensive contribution to the study of 20<sup>th</sup> century heritage conservation methods

and illustrate how a methodical restoration can preserve the authenticity of an outstanding building.

### Complexity of the Architectural Work

Relatively modest in quantitative terms, Le Corbusier's architectural work is spatially extensive, distributed across eleven countries on four continents. If the majority of works are in Europe, in particular France and Switzerland, some buildings — and by no means the least important — are located in the states of the Punjab and Gujarat in India, and others in Tunisia, Japan, Iraq, Argentina, Russia and the USA.

These buildings are very different in nature and in size: they include villas and houses, cultural buildings, multi-family housing, office buildings, gymnasiums, stadiums, etc. The status of the owners also varies widely — ranging from public authorities (including nation-states such as Tunisia, India or Japan) to associations, private owners, condominiums, etc.

Their conservation status also varies greatly and the legislation or heritage protection policy may differ greatly from one country to another.

Today we can observe an important transformation in regards to proprietors and/or uses (new uses or new norms — hygiene, security, environmental criteria, etc.). And the awareness of the high quality of these works, is very often accompanied today by a desire to bring to light their original spirit.

Otherwise, some buildings will be required to take into account new constraints, such as tourist visitation, that risk altering the quality of authenticity or originality that contributed to their fame.

### The role of the *Fondation Le Corbusier*

All restoration and development projects, involving Le Corbusier's executed architectural projects, are submitted to an international committee of experts. Its role is both to contribute to the need to respect Le Corbusier's original work and to make recommendations, on the basis of which the Foundation's Governing Board can either authorize applications addressed to it or express its reservations.

This expertise involves experts being sent regularly to advise owners, allocatees or occupants of buildings executed by Le Corbusier before and during the restoration process.



The monitoring of restoration projects is carried out by the Foundation architect, who also has the role of consultant to the owners. In this capacity, the architect contributes to research undertaken in the Foundation's archives, she organises the network of owners and contractors and coordinates the Foundation's initiatives with the territorial authorities and state territorial authorities. The Foundation architect ensures that archives of architectural restoration work are put together as the work progresses, by collecting the research undertaken for each restoration project: historical research, technical matters, planning application file, colour samplings, etc. and where possible, retrieving authentic components removed during restoration work. All these elements will ultimately enable more detailed knowledge of each of the buildings created by Le Corbusier and consequently facilitate maintenance in the long term. They also contribute to improving overall knowledge of the work's gestation and meaning.

Gilles Ragot's article about the extensive restoration of the *Cité de Refuge* in Paris is one example of the means by which the Foundation controls a restoration, but it also illustrates how it can provide assistance to the owner and the architect in charge during the research and construction phases. This restoration conducted by the chief architect of historical monuments, François Chatillon, is conducted altogether under the control of the owner and the developer, the *Fondation Le Corbusier*, the Ministry of Culture (DRAC, STAP) and the City (Old Paris Commission).

Le Corbusier's mural painting in the Villa E-1027 in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, near the *Cabanon*, illustrates another example of a different type of support with the excellent intervention performed by Marie-Odile Hubert to conserve the original work of Le Corbusier, as well as his own restorations of his work in the villa.

At present the other paintings on the site, located in the *Cabanon* and in the *Etoile de Mer*, are being restored by Marie-Odile Hubert. The *Fondation Le Corbusier* and the Ministry of Culture supervise this conservation work.

### Conservation and Archives

For the *Fondation Le Corbusier*, each building is a prototype, a unique experience, a clue to Le Corbusier's creative process. Furthermore, it constitutes an important step in the chronology of various restoration campaigns.

Any renovation, restoration project, or accident, even, grants us the opportunity to enrich our material knowledge of a work, to understand its evolution, its building process, the hazards of its construction... For this reason, it is critical that the Foundation be involved in the studies and the work accomplished during restoration. Research undertaken, updated materials, and discovered documents enhance the history and comprehension of the edifice. The analysis of these living archives in light of the documents conserved by the Foundation, offers the opportunity to benefit from a fruitful interface. Such archives nourish scientific research and stimulate interest in the restoration of the building in question.

The conservation of current and future archives has become a question of the utmost importance for architects

and proprietors: it prevents them from wasting precious time, it allows them to confirm their hypotheses, and even permits them to avoid significant errors.

The *Couvent de la Tourette* in Eveux in France, the *Petite Villa* on the Lake Genevain Switzerland and the *Villa Savoye* respectively presented by Roberta Grignolo, Elise Koering and Susanna Caccia and Carlo Olmo, highlight the importance of historical studies. They also emphasize the numerous campaigns of restoration successively carried out by Le Corbusier himself on the buildings. All of them present fundamental issues regarding the preservation of the original work.

### Networks

The Foundation has developed an arrangement providing it at all times with the most reliable information possible on the current state of buildings and the likelihood of possible changes. This arrangement involves a network of the buildings' owners, with which the Foundation is in regular contact. It also has an unsolicited network of correspondents in all the countries concerned, informing it without fail of suspicious movements or serious threats.

In most countries, the Foundation is in constant contact with State agencies and is systematically concerned in the review and monitoring of projects for which they are responsible. This does not necessarily mean that there is always a consensus of opinions on projects under review, but it is an instance of productive discussion.

Moreover, the work that has been in progress for over 10 years for the nomination of "The Architectural's work of Le Corbusier" on the World Heritage List has accentuated the relations between the *Fondation Le Corbusier* and leaders of the architectural profession in different countries. The cooperation is illustrated finally by the last dossier submitted in January 2015 to the World Heritage Center. The proposed Series nomination consists of 17 works or sites in 7 countries (Argentina, Germany, Belgium, France, India, Japan and Switzerland).

Some articles in this issue of the *docomomo Journal* 53 reflect the continual correlation between the *Fondation Le Corbusier* and the owners or managers of Le Corbusier's architectural works of Le Corbusier in the world. This is illustrated with the essay on the *Villa Curutchet* in La Plata, Argentina, by Julio Santana and Jorge Néstor Bozzano, the text on the *Musée d'Art Occidental*, in Tokyo, by Yoshiyuki Yamana and Kyo Fukuda or by the Shika Jain's "Heritage in danger" contribution about the Capitol Complex in Chandigarh.

The *Fondation Le Corbusier* is directly involved in these matters, as the owner of three iconic Le Corbusier buildings belonging to the series nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List. The Foundation is particularly responsible as regards the maintenance and permanence of the architectural works bequeathed to it:

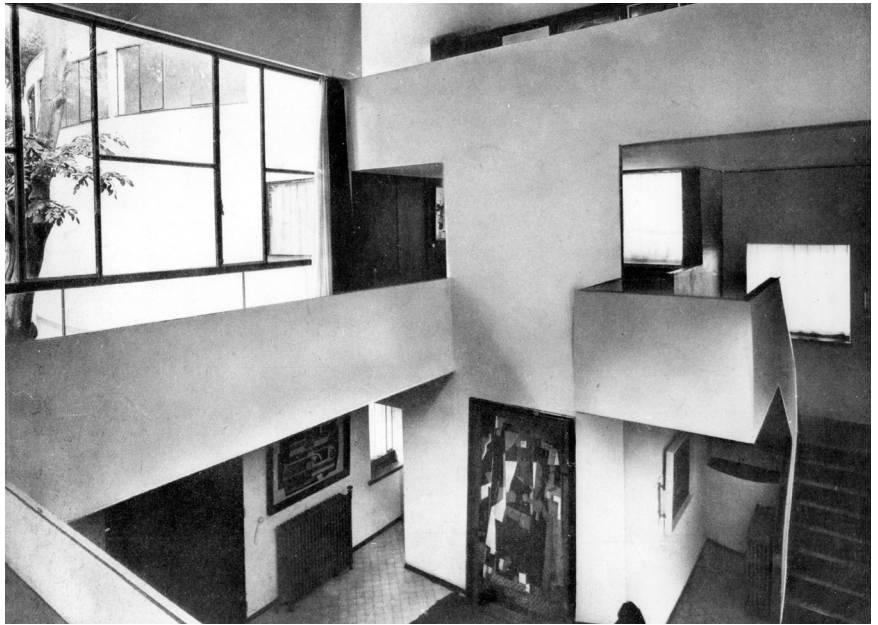
the *Maisons La Roche* and *Jeanneret*, headquarters of the Foundation in Paris (1925); Le Corbusier's apartment located on the top two floors of the Molitor building (1932), in Paris, and the *Petite Villa* on shore of Lake Geneva, in Switzerland, which had been the house for his parents (1924).

01 Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, *Maison La Roche*, Paris, France, 1925. © FLC/SPA, 1926.



02 Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, *Maisons La Roche and Jeanneret*, Paris, France, 1925. After the restoration of the facades. © Ph. Cemal Emden, 2015.





03 Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, *Maison La Roche*, Paris, France, 1925. © FLC/SPA, 1924.



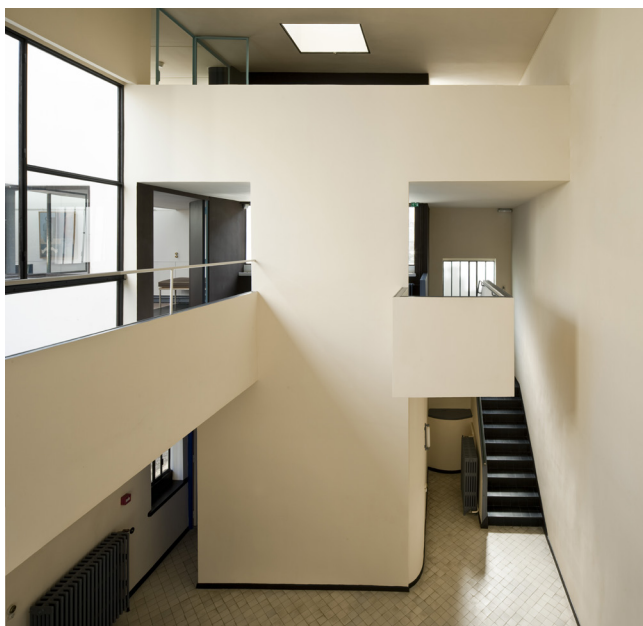
04 Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, *Maisons La Roche and Jeanneret*, Paris, France, 1925. Before restoration. © Olivier Martin Gambier, 2010.



05 Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, *Maisons La Roche and Jeanneret*, Paris, France, 1925. Before restoration. © Olivier Martin Gambier, 2010.



06 Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, *Maisons La Roche and Jeanneret*, Paris, France, 1925. After the restoration of the facades. © Ph. Cemal Emden, 2015.



07 Le Corbusier - Pierre Jeanneret, *Maisons La Roche* and *Jeanneret*, Paris, France, 1925. After the restoration. © Olivier Martin Gambier, 2010.

After the restoration of the interior of the *Maison La Roche* in 2008/2009, the restoration of its facades will be completed, with the restitution of the original garden, at the end of 2015. Simultaneously, the Foundation is directing a restoration work at the *Petite Villa* in Corseaux. Two articles, one by Franz Graf and Giulia Marino, the other by Elise Koering, reflect the method developed for this building.

Finally, the Foundation is also involved in the study of the conservation of the apartment-studio of Le Corbusier.

The restoration work for the facades of the *Maisons La Roche* and *Jeanneret* highlights the important methodology implemented based on archives, in-situ surveys, testimonials and continuous confrontation between these various sources of information and documentation.

### **An Exemplary Restoration: the *Maisons La Roche* and *Jeanneret***

*Maison La Roche* now has tens of thousands of visitors each year. For many scholars, students and enthusiasts, it stands as the first major landmark in the work of this modernist architect-artist and one of the keys to its interpretation. It gave Le Corbusier the opportunity to implement the constructive principles and vocabulary that were to characterize most of his subsequent projects and creations. These consisted in the subtle application of the *Five Points for a New Architecture* as well as in systematizing the use of polychromy, the invention of the ramp, continuity between inside and outside, etc. It also provided an apposite illustration of the concept of the *promenade architecturale*.

Currently open to visitors from all over the world since 1925, the *Maison La Roche* has indeed significantly contributed to its creator's reception. In undertaking the restoration, the Foundation wished to offer, to the visitors, a piece of art as close as possible to the "jewel case" that had been entrusted to it, thereby maintaining its donor's generous gesture. This was why it proved necessary to go back on

some of the changes that had been made by the Foundation in 1970 when the Foundation occupied in the *Maisons La Roche* and *Jeanneret*. The purpose was to go back to the situation of 1936, the date of the last changes made by Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret. Over and above strictly "archaeological" considerations, and given that the house had lost its residential function with its owner's death, the aim was to restore the spirit of the place around three key principles: to present a place for living with its different functions, to maintain its original commission as a collector's gallery displaying paintings by reorganizing the exhibition space and finally to preserve its educational role by promoting understanding of the work undertaken to restore it.

The restoration work started in 2008 with the renovation of the interiors of *Maison La Roche*, was completed in spring 2015 with the reconstitution of the original facades and gardens of *Maisons La Roche* and *Jeanneret*. It was the outcome of a process involving intense research and experimentation and it contributed to renewing techniques implemented over the previous decades for the preservation of Le Corbusier's built work. These involved systematizing and combining historical and archival research, core drilling and other types of material analyses, technical studies, addressing data acquired with historical accounts, and setting up scientific committees to monitor work in progress. In this context, the different invited experts had to propose their recommendations before the restoration work started.

It was on this basis that the Foundation undertook this most important project, and entrusted management of the work to Pierre-Antoine Gatier, ACMH. Also involved in this undertaking were the committee of experts for the architectural work — a group of specialists on Le Corbusier's built work set up by the Foundation — and the Foundation's Board of Directors. At the end of the preliminary study, the French National Historic Monuments Commission approved the decision to undertake restoration on the basis of a joint agreement between the project manager and the Foundation.

As regards the exterior, the same principles presided over the choice of color and materials when restoring the facades as closely as possible to the original.

Restoration of *Maison La Roche* had helped to underline the pertinence and plastic qualities of the architectural polychromy and to emphasize the role of color in the design and perception of the different spaces. It thus seemed logical to echo the interior space in the outward surfaces, their diverse hues shifting with the hours of daylight. *Maisons La Roche* and *Jeanneret* recovered their original 1925 Auteuil ton pierre ("stone toned") facades.

Rediscovering the polychromy of the interiors and the "stone colored" facades (Le Corbusier's quotation) was a surprise to specialists and novices alike, reared on images of the famous "white villas" of the Modern Movement. The role of the Foundation and the experts attached to it, may well, on occasion, to unsettle our vision of the work, and thus help to reinvent it. But "it's another story..."

**"Left totally white, the house would just be a pot of cream".**

Le Corbusier, *Almanach d'Architecture Moderne*, p. 146, 1926.