

André Wogenscky and Marta Pan's House Workshop: Thoughts on Conservation and Museography

BY AUDREY AULUS

The aim of the Fondation Marta Pan – André Wogenscky is to promote the work of the architect and the work of the sculptor. Nowadays there are a lot of issues that arise regarding the accessibility and the museography of the house/workshop in Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse. This house/workshop deserves a wider recognition and in that sense, before making any changes, the intervention has to be considered in the interest of the work's integrity. The house is a complex heritage object due to its conception made by an architect and an artist at the same time, evolving according to their needs and aspirations.

The concept of synthesis of the arts was a leading principle of modern architecture, which aimed to transcend disciplinary divisions to ultimately create “the new building of the future that will unite every discipline”. This artistic, quasi-ideological quest underlying the Bauhaus movement would gradually develop into a fruitful social utopia, although research remained individual for fear of loss of autonomy. Communion of minds eventually materialized in the 20th century, when artists and architects came to work together to promote a holistic approach. These included French creators André Wogenscky and Marta Pan, whose collaboration inspired two bodies of work characterized by the same demanding quest for modernity.

When they first met, André Wogenscky was a young architect and branch manager for Le Corbusier, while 23-year old Hungarian sculptor Marta Pan had just arrived in France. Both had several creations to their names, but they already shared the same convictions. However, their personal and professional relationship never altered the sovereignty of their own work. They inspired each other and created rich and comprehensive works, the most representative embodiment of which is their beautiful house/workshop in Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse. More than a mere work of art, this first collaborative effort became their home for their entire lives and evolved according to their aesthetic needs and aspirations.

Built between 1950 and 1952, the house was designed to serve a threefold purpose: aside from the living areas, the house included a workshop for Marta Pan as well as a drawing studio for the archi-

tect. The house was made of raw concrete (a revolutionary 20th century material) and was partially covered with stone panels. Its façades, interspersed with red and black flat tints, were mainly painted white. Situated halfway up the hill on a 2,000m² plot in the rural region of Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse, the house sat at the top of a driveway (Figure 01, 02). “The layout enables visitors to discover the house step by step, like a sculpture, all the way to the parking area in the north, from where they can view the building's exact proportions”. From that vantage point, the view opens all the way to the garden, visible beyond the house. In the park, Marta Pan's sculptures appear as tension points that regulate the landscape and tie it in with the architecture. At the entrance to the house, “the visitor's gaze focuses directly on two elements arranged at right angles”: the boiler situated in the hallway — transformed into an artistic installation with its colorful pipes — and Marta Pan's door handle, sculpted onto the simple plate-glass entrance¹ (Figure 03).

The 150m² house is an 11.5 metres sided square. The architecture follows a layout that spirals from the kitchen and develops with well-balanced proportions from the ground floor to the first floor, all the way to the roof (Figure 09). The kitchen, a 2.26 metre sided square, is the heart of the house, its cornerstone. Based on the same principle as the *Unité d'Habitation* in Marseille, it is designed for its inhabitants, i.e. it follows the *Modulor* theory that André Wogenscky developed with Le Corbusier. The functional kitchen, with its predominantly white lacquer, extends into a dining area, originally with a sturdy six-seater wooden table with

wooden cubes for chairs — replicas of Le Corbusier's (Figure 04). The furniture has since been changed and replaced with Arne Jacobsen chairs.

Kitchen, living room and workshop: the space flows all the way to the garden outside.

The house does not consist of distinct rooms, but rather of a large interior volume that opens to the south. Empty spaces on the upper floor create two high-ceilinged areas (4.80 m), one in the living room and the other in the workshop, while private spaces (workshops, dining room, bedrooms) have low ceilings (2.26 m). The layout comprises spaces with their own living functions and equipment, yet these are interconnected so the gaze goes from one to the next in an endless series of architectural perspectives.⁵ (Figure 05).

Large wooden windows invite the surrounding landscape to come inside, further accentuating the interior volumes. The sensation is highlighted with a “conversation pit” (a couch embedded in a recess in the floor) and the later addition of a water feature along the southern façade (Figure 06). The water flows from the inside to the outside and its constant murmur brings nature and water to life inside the house itself — two key elements of Marta Pan's work. The light is controlled with a concrete frame in the southern façade, which acts as a *brise-soleil* and regulates the light in the summer without eliminating it in the winter. While Marta Pan enjoys the view of the many birds that “come to nest, feed and bathe” outside her workshop, André Wogenscky's workshop on the first floor only has a thin horizontal window, based on the principle that nature disrupts intellectual concentration. The tranquil office nevertheless opens onto the living room and Marta Pan's workshop. Defying the day/night separation rule, the first floor also houses the landing, two bedrooms with ensuite bathrooms and a linen cupboard. A key element of modern architecture, the jointly designed rooftop terrace completes the ensemble. Grassy at first and later layered with pebbles, it shares the same principle as the solarium in *Villa Savoye* (1928–1931). Placed in the center, it includes a white curved wall that also acts as a wind-break (Figure 07, 09). The rooftop terrace is encircled by parapets, the height of which serves a twofold purpose: to lean on your elbows when standing and to contemplate the distant valley when lying down. As Marta Pan once said, the couple spent “wonderful holidays” there, living on the edge of the heavens as often as they could⁶.



01 André Wogenscky and Marta Pan, House/Workshop, Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse, France, 1950-1952. The house in the 1950s. © Archives wsr, Fondation Marta Pan-André Wogenscky.



02 André Wogenscky and Marta Pan, House/Workshop, Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse, France, 1950-1952. The house and the garden nowadays. © Audrey Aulus, 2015.

Household needs determined the spatial organization, which was nevertheless “pushed to the point of aesthetic organization”⁷. This study of proportions gave rise to different configurations and dimensions, thereby turning architecture into something akin to music⁸. From the outside, the façades create an abstract geometry, like a tableau resulting from specific internal functions (Figure 01, 02, 07, 09). The openings in the couple’s bedroom illustrate this perfectly: one corresponds to the field of vision of a person standing, another is elongated and corresponds to the field of vision from the bed (using only natural light), and a third is simply aesthetic. Just for the record, André Wogenscky was amused when he realized that the latter corresponded to the viewing height of his dog!

Convinced that the environment affects people⁹, André Wogenscky designed buildings according to the personality of its inhabitants, creating “organic architecture”. He assumed that our psychological behavior is affected by a combination of forms, proportions and rhythms created by the surrounding space, and that architecture affects our mental state. In his mind, a house should envelop and protect physically and psychologically, without imprisoning.

In order to do this, architecture requires dynamism, energy and action. In his book *Architecture Active* (1972), André Wogenscky develops his theory of an energy-charged architecture, which expresses itself in terms of forces. Colors and materials share in this reflection, *activating* the architecture. In the house, vermilion red galvanizes the whites, the greyness of the concrete and the blacks. This combination (different from Le Corbusier)

would become his signature for a long time. “Spots of color, like this red-orange (...), mark out the space in the change of levels with the driveway, on shelves and in corners — the kitchen especially — like landmarks, or like a rhythm”¹⁰. André Wogenscky added that color was a material above all else¹¹, and there is plenty of it in the house. In the high open spaces, the two big bare concrete walls¹² catch the light and bring colors to life. The wooden cladding that served as formwork draws lines on the surface. Whether mat or shiny, the ruggedness counterbalances the kitchen’s lacquered surfaces and the ground floor’s smooth marble, and contrasts with the small round and shiny tiles that decorate the bathrooms and the entrance to the office. The wooden windows, the warm wood of the wardrobes, the rugs that cover the floors and the wallpapered ceilings in the bedrooms capture this light to create a hushed atmosphere.

“Tactfully disrupting the strict laws of architecture to inject movement and perpetual growth”, such is André Wogenscky’s adage. In the same spirit, he uses curves as a counterpoint to straight lines. Curves point to Marta Pan: “The sphere is my spare body. Everywhere there are curves in the house, that’s me”¹³ (Figure 08). From the architect’s lines to the jointly designed spaces, Marta Pan’s input is everywhere: sculpted clay gargoyles decorating the façades, a small sculpture blocking the window of the drawing studio, the luminescent handrail along the length of the stairs and the external chimney for the boiler. André Wogenscky is like an acupuncturist, pointing at the sensitive spot, where function calls for emptiness and gratuitous-

ness; but it is Marta Pan who injects the final touch of energy. The architect thus leaves spaces (niches for sculptures) that integrate her ideas (the colored piping of the boiler for example) and takes her activities into account, with a large bay that connects the workshop and the garden (useful to bring in and take out large sculptures). The spaces dedicated to various activities are interconnected in one big space and create vertical and horizontal visual perspectives. No partitions, no doors and no frontal obstacles: only changing spatial perceptions. Based on the same principle as for *Villa Savoye*, the furniture serves to define the spaces, like the built-in cupboards in the bedrooms, which create a partition between the doorway and the bathroom. Continuity and independence express the close-knit life of the two artists, who respected each other’s work.

In 2011, the house in Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse entered a new phase when it became the headquarters of the Marta Pan-André Wogenscky foundation. Featured on the additional list of France’s historical monuments from 1997, the house embodied more than ever André Wogenscky’s principle: “Every house should be a shelter, a dwelling and a temple”¹⁴. Destined to protect and promote both the architect and the artist’s work, the institution has been thinking about various issues relating to its accessibility to the public. Addressed in an end-of-year project for a Master’s degree in architecture from the *École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne*¹⁵, these challenges focused on the promotion of a rich collection of works and archives, as well as on the suitability of the house and its site for special events. Access to the house, which

03 André Wogenscky and Marta Pan, House/Workshop, Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse, France, 1950-1952. The entrance: Boiler and Marta Pan's door handle (Nowadays, the same model is visible). © Archives wsr, Fondation Marta Pan-André Wogenscky.



04 André Wogenscky and Marta Pan, House/Workshop, Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse, France, 1950-1952. The interior of the house in the 1950s. View of the living-room, the kitchen and, in the background, the stairs and the water feature. The "Conversation pit" didn't yet exist. © Archives wsr, Fondation Marta Pan-André Wogenscky.



05 André Wogenscky and Marta Pan, House/Workshop, Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse, France, 1950-1952. High-ceilinged areas in the 1950s, living room's. © Archives wsr, Fondation Marta Pan-André Wogenscky.



06 André Wogenscky and Marta Pan, House/Workshop, Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse, France, 1950-1952. "Conversation pit" designed in the 1970s. © Archives wsr, Fondation Marta Pan-André Wogenscky.

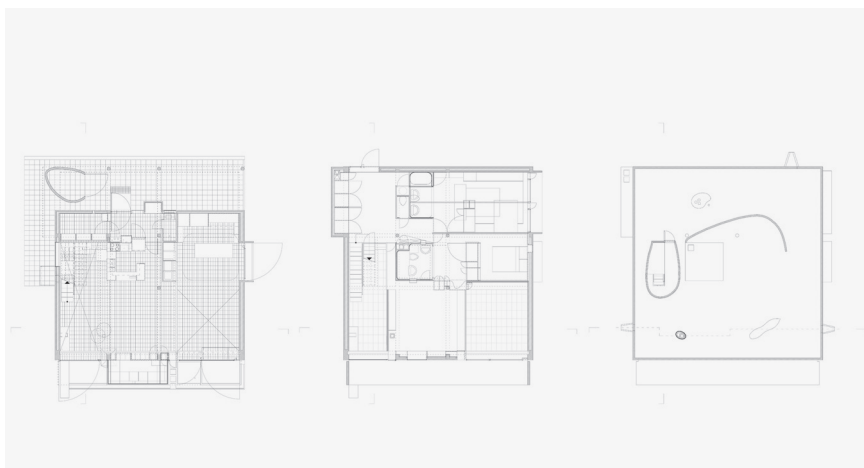


07 André Wogenscky and Marta Pan, House/Workshop, Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse, France, 1950-1952. 1:50 scale model of the house (current state). © Produced and photographed by Audrey Aulus, 2015.



08 André Wogenscky and Marta Pan, House/Workshop, Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse, France, 1950-1952. View of the current second floor high-ceilinged areas with first workshop of Marta Pan in the house (moved into the garage) and the rich collection of works and archives. © Audrey Aulus, 2015.

- 09 André Wogenscky and Marta Pan, House/Workshop, Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse, France, 1950–1952 Plans of the three levels of the house. Modifications and the project of conservation according to the research. © Plans are drawing by Audrey Aulus, 2015.



was left untouched, raises other questions, relating to the security of certain artifacts, museography, and to the various measures required for its restoration and conservation. Recognizing a work is essential for its safeguard, forgetfulness and disinterest being the two worst enemies of heritage. Opening to the public has proven to be one of the best ways of gaining exposure. However, it must be thought through beforehand, with decisions based on meticulous analyses and material knowledge that integrate the house's transformation over the years. Lived in by André Wogenscky and Marta Pan for over 50 years, the house did indeed change to the rhythm of their own development and the extension of their activities, i.e. Marta Pan's workshop was moved into a garage built under the garden, the terracotta tiles on the ground floor were replaced with marble, and the southern façade underwent a complete overhaul with the installation of a "conversation pit" embedded in the floor, which perceptibly changed the space and its relationship with the landscaped gardens.

Transforming the house into a museum seems the best way of keeping its integrity and avoiding converting too many spaces. There is no question of removing the strata to return to an initial state, which would be both a material and immaterial loss, i.e. a negation of the life and development of the needs and thoughts of André Wogenscky and Marta Pan. With that mind, it seems inconceivable to use the house for another purpose, especially if the aim is to preserve its integrity and minimize the changes that accessibility to the public demand. For these reasons, conservation should not be called into question because of excessive modern norms. Reassured by a satisfactory survey

of the state of conservation of the house (carried out as part of the preliminary investigative work during the Master's project) we believe the material and its authenticity must prevail. Only the intrinsic aspects of the house's architecture can dictate the most reasonable solutions, both in terms of preservation and safety and security. ■

Notes

- 1 Elodie Vitale, *Le Bauhaus de Weimar: 1919–1925*, Liège, Editions Mardaga, 1989.
- 2 André Wogenscky writing about the house, Manuscript archives — Fondation Marta Pan-André Wogenscky, Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse.
- 3 *Idem*.
- 4 The original handle was later replaced. Today, the same model is used for the entrance doors at the *Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires* (built by Jean Dubuisson in Paris and inaugurated in 1972) — a project in which Marta Pan shared.
- 5 Manuscript text, WSR dossier, from the archives of Fondation Marta Pan-André Wogenscky, Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse.
- 6 Martine Dassault, "L'esprit d'un sage", in *Décoration Internationale*, 78–83.
- 7 André Wogenscky's words.
- 8 The initiative paid off since Olivier Messiaen, one of the most influential contemporary music composers of the second half of the 20th century, apparently found a "musical landscape" there. François Barré, *André Wogenscky, Marta Pan: l'Œuvre Croisée*, Paris, Editions Cercle d'art, 2007.
- 9 When André created the magazine *L'Homme et l'Architecture*, he insisted that every cover read: "If you want to create men, start with the environment". See also his book: André Wogenscky, *Architecture Active*, Paris, Casterman, 1972.
- 10 François Barré, *André Wogenscky, Marta Pan: l'Œuvre Croisée*, Paris, Editions Cercle d'Art, 2007.
- 11 "There is no colour that is not a material". Quote by André Wogenscky in Annick

Pély-Audan's book, *André Wogenscky*, Paris, Editions Cercle d'Art, 1993.

- 12 Bare concrete, often used in the second part of the modern movement (towards brutalism), which usually conveys a feeling of austerity and functionality, is somewhat suppressed by color here.
- 13 François Barré, *op.cit.*.
- 14 Dominique Amouroux, *André Wogenscky, Carnets d'architectes n°11*, Paris, Editions du Patrimoine-Centre des Monuments Nationaux, 2012. As stated by André Wogenscky.
- 15 Audrey Aulus, *La Maison-Atelier d'André Wogenscky et Marta Pan — Conservation, Muséographie et Extension*, work directed by Franz Graf, Giulia Marino, Elena Cogato Lanza; expert Dominique Amouroux, director of Fondation Marta Pan-André Wogenscky, *Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne*, Architecture Department, 2015. Derived from an in-depth analysis of archival sources and a comprehensive diagnostic survey, this end-of-course project focuses on the restoration of the house/workshop. Depending on the needs of the foundation and its desire to showcase its heritage, possible extensions have been considered in-situ, under the house. This has the advantage of not disrupting the interplay established between architecture, sculpture and nature.

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