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LE CORBUSIER

On 27th August, 1965, while swimming at Roquebrune, St. Martin, 78-year-old Le Corbusier (Charles Edouard Jeanneret) died of a heart attack. Designer of Chandigarh, the new capital of the Punjab, of the world-famous Pilgrim's Chapel at Ronchamp and of the Unité de Grandeur Conforme in Marseilles, Le Corbusier is universally acknowledged to be the most gifted architect of our day. After many years' struggle for recognition, he was besieged with commissions for major works in all parts of the world, especially in the period after the war. A vast number of books have been written about his work. Of the many marks of honour he received, we would single out the honorary degrees from Zurich University and from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, the Order of Merit awarded by Queen Elizabeth, and the highest order of the *légion d'honneur*, which he received personally from President de Gaulle shortly before his death.

For Le Corbusier the road to fame was hard and frustrating. He continually met with lack of understanding, intellectual complacency and prejudice. That he eventually achieved success was due entirely to his own imperturbable spirit, his uncompromising will and unbending determination.

Le Corbusier was born at La Chaux-de-Fonds on 6th October, 1887. His father and grandfather were engravers, his mother a musician. He



Le Corbusier.

showed a talent for drawing at an early age, entering the *Ecole des Beaux Arts* of his native town when he was only 14. Here L'Eplattenier, a teacher whom he held in great esteem, introduced him to works of art from all periods and from all nations, and aroused his interest in architecture. His first building — a villa for a member of the board of governors at the art school at La Chaux-de-Fonds — was commissioned just after his eighteenth birthday. With the money he got for this work he set out on a journey that took him through Italy to Budapest and Vienna, where he made the acquaintance of Josef Hoffmann, director and founder of the "Viennese Workshops".

In 1908, when he was twenty, he came to Paris where he got the chance to work with Auguste Perret who was one of the first to understand the architectural possibilities of reinforced concrete as a building material. After working with Perret for fifteen months, he spent a few more years travelling abroad. In Germany, he first worked for some months with Peter Behrens and then for a short time with Heinrich Tessenow. He paid close attention to German efforts to produce a contemporary architecture but

did not give them unqualified approval. He took away lasting impressions from the Balkans, Hungary, Rumania, Turkey and particularly Rome and Athens.

Responding to a call from L'Eplattenier, he spent some years teaching at the La Chaux-de-Fonds Art School. However, feeling his style was cramped in his native town, he transferred to Paris in 1917 and made it his permanent home.

In the French capital he first worked as a painter and founded, with Ozenfant, what came to be known as "purism". Being at odds with the contemporary movements in art (which he considered inappropriate for our times and therefore false and inartistic) and feeling he had to give his artistic efforts a theoretical basis, he joined forces with Paul Dermée in 1928 to found the "Esprit Nouveau". In numerous articles which he wrote for this periodical he expressed his ideas on the pictorial arts including architecture.

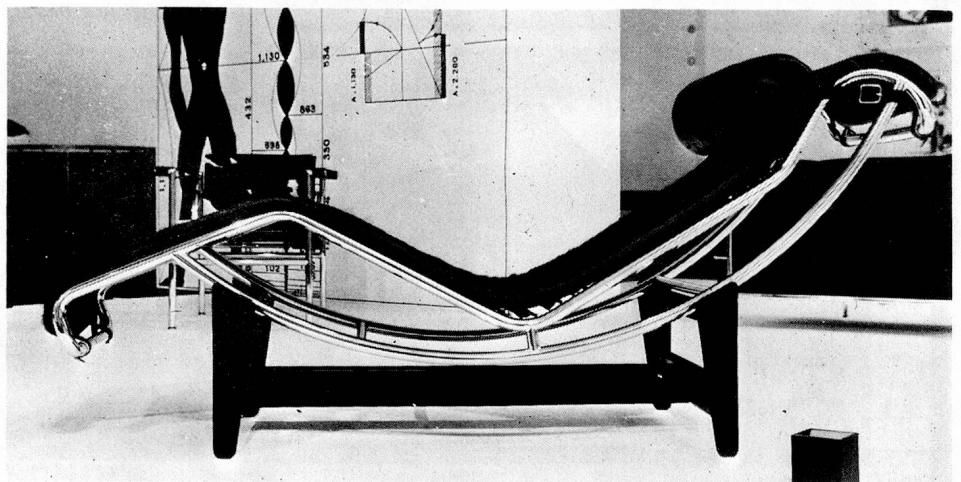
Le Corbusier believed that more than any pictorial art, architecture had been bogged down in the past, that it had taken a wrong turning. From 1922 onwards, when he opened an architect's office in Paris with his cousin Pierre Jeanneret, he devoted all his energies to architecture.

This was the beginning of a long struggle to make architecture an expression of *our* times and not just a weak or feeble imitation of the art of bygone days. His first important written work, "Vers une Architecture" was published by Crès in Paris in 1923.

Le Corbusier felt that the most important contemporary task was to provide decent accommodation for the masses. This could be done only through the industrialised building of standard houses and through organic town-planning. In 1914, under the impression of the war destruction in Flanders, he designed the assembly building system "Domino", a method whereby structural scaffolding, supports, ceilings and staircases are prefabricated and can be arranged in a great variety of possibilities. The building-in operation also makes use of the prefabricated elements. The walls having no bearing

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Rest chair designed by Le Corbusier.