



COLOR

# PAVILLON SUISSE

  
*Le Corbusier*

UNIVERSITY CAMPUS. PARIS, FRANCE

1933



**PAVILLON SUISSE** — Just beyond the dreariness of the Paris ring road lies a laboratory of modern architecture: a student dormitory designed by Le Corbusier, which holds true to the architect's belief that a home should be "a machine for living in." For its residents, the Fondation Suisse is a machine made of light, color—and more than a few pieces of designer furniture.





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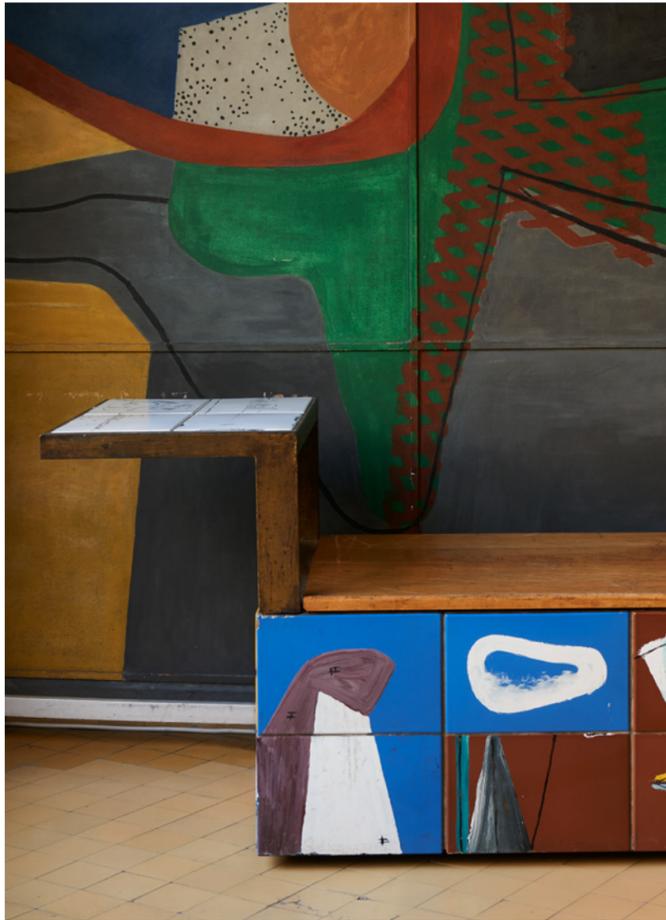


**FOOTNOTE** — Charlotte Perriand designed the original decor of each room. Though they were modernized at the turn of the millennium, the administration saw fit to preserve one of the original rooms and have Perriand approve the new furnishings.

The life mission of Le Corbusier was to build utopias—preferably in reinforced concrete. From Rio de Janeiro to Baghdad, from Moscow to New York, the pioneer architect poured *béton brut* to form “machines for living” for 20th-century urbanites. He ticked ahead of time, weaving co-working zones, roof gardens, and color swatches into his “space and light and order” master plan. Trust Le Corbusier, then, to elevate a gray student dormitory into a heritage site. The location was the Cité Internationale Universitaire on the *périphérique* of Paris. This educational utopia still houses 6,000 students in dozens of national-themed *maisons*. Graduates lodging in the Maison du Japon dormitory, for example, enter past a wooden panel depicting the rising sun. Those in the Maison du Maroc can study in Moorish-modernist splendor. When the time came to build a house for Swiss students in 1924, only one architect could speak for Switzerland’s

pared-down modernism. But negotiations with Le Corbusier were time-consuming. After stops, starts, and other wind-ups, the often-prickly visionary was persuaded that “in Paris, it was important that Switzerland appear in another guise than the poet’s rustic image of chalets and cows.” The Fondation Suisse, or Pavillon Suisse, was finally built between 1931 and 1933. Like so many of Le Corbusier’s creations, it was impacted by budgetary oversights and material shortages—caused variously by World War (as was the case for his color-and-concrete Unité d’Habitation in Marseille) or, in this case, straightforward Swiss parsimony. With a tight budget, Le Corbusier mirrored many of his students’ greatest desires: to weave contemporary fantasy with a pocketful of francs. The Fondation Suisse became the genesis of his later creations. Its ruler-flat façade was like a mini version of the United Nations headquarters: starkly beautiful and archi-

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tecturally pure. Le Corbusier fully indulged in his self-proclaimed “Five Points for a New Architecture.” Pillars pushed the building skyward above an urban jungle swatched emerald and gray. This floating foundation meant there was no need for supporting walls or planned interiors: the layout could be freeform, airy, open-plan.

Such freedoms inspired the key invention: the 45 revolutionary guestrooms. To trim construction costs—with a side-benefit of reducing student angst—all were identically radical. Each combined storage space, a toilet, and a panoramic study area. At just 172 square feet (16 square meters), room design was necessarily functional, with just enough space to pontificate, fornicate, and read Albert Camus. So clever was the layout that for decades the Fonda-

tion Suisse was the only *maison* in the Cité Internationale Universitaire to boast in-room showers.

Communal areas were all about intimacy and color. A roof garden gave verdant succor to souls exiled from Switzerland. In high summer—when academics and architects can apply to stay in the Fondation Suisse—the shaded space under the pavilion shines the same green sheen.

In 1948, Le Corbusier returned to the building to apply a kaleidoscopic finishing touch. Inside the lower level salon, replete with LC3 Grand Confort armchairs, the Swiss-French hand-painted a vast mural with rainbow talking heads. That’s Le Corbusier: connecting concrete with color to create a community that lasts. —

