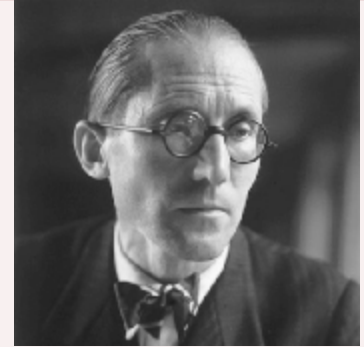


# Charles-Edouard Jeanneret Le Corbusier 1887-1965

Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, who chose to be known as Le Corbusier, is famous for his contributions to Modern Architecture. He was a pioneer in theoretical studies of modern design and was dedicated to providing better living conditions for the residents of crowded cities. His career spanned five decades, with his iconic buildings constructed throughout central Europe, India, Russia, and one structure each in North and South America. He was also an urban planner, painter, sculptor, writer, and modern furniture designer.

He was born in La Chaux-de-Fonds, a small town of Neuchâtel canton in north-western Switzerland, just five kilometres across the border from France. Attracted to the visual arts, he studied at the La-Chaux-de-Fonds Art School.

In his early years he frequently travelled around Europe. About 1907 he went to Paris and found work in the office of Auguste Perret. Between October 1910 and March 1911 he worked near Berlin for the renowned architect Peter Behrens, where he might have met Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius. Later in 1911 he journeyed to the Balkans and visited Greece and Turkey, filling sketchbooks with renderings of what he saw, including many famous sketches of the Parthenon, whose forms he would later praise in his work *Vers une architecture* (1923).



Le Corbusier taught at his old school during World War I, returning to Paris when the war was over. During these four years, he worked on theoretical architectural studies using modern techniques, including his project for the *Domino House* (1914-1915), an open floor plan consisting of concrete slabs supported by a minimal number of thin, reinforced concrete columns around the edges. This design became the foundation for most of his architecture for the next ten years. Soon he would begin his own architectural practice with his cousin, Pierre Jeanneret (1896-1967), a partnership that lasted until 1940.

In 1918 Le Corbusier met the disillusioned Cubist, Amédée Ozenfant, who encouraged him to paint, and the two began a period of collaboration. Rejecting Cubism as irrational and “romantic,” the pair jointly published their manifesto, *Après le Cubisme* and established a new artistic movement, Purism, establishing the Purist journal *L'Esprit Nouveau*. In the first issue of the journal, in 1920, Charles-Edouard Jeanneret adopted “Le Corbusier”, an altered form of his maternal grandfather’s name, “Lecorbésier”, as a pseudonym, reflecting his belief that anyone could reinvent oneself. Between 1918 and 1922 Le Corbusier built nothing, concentrating his efforts on Purist theory and painting. In 1922 he and his cousin opened a studio in Paris at 35 rue de Sèvres.

His theoretical studies soon advanced into several different single-family house models. Among these was the Maison “Citrohan”, a pun on the name of the French Citroën automaker, for the modern industrial methods and materials Le Corbusier advocated using for the house. Between 1922 and 1927, Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret designed many of these private houses for clients around Paris, including the Villa Lipschitz, Maison Cook, Maison Planeix, and the Maison LaRoche/Albert Jeanneret, which now houses the Fondation Le Corbusier. He took French citizenship in 1930.

Le Corbusier sought efficient ways to house large numbers of people in response to the urban housing crisis. He believed that his new, modern architectural forms would provide a new organisational solution that would raise the quality of life of the lower classes. His *Immeubles Villas* (1922) called for large blocks of cell-like individual apartments stacked one on top of the other, with plans that included a living room, bedrooms, and kitchen, as well as a garden terrace.

In 1922 he also presented his scheme for a “Contemporary City” for three million inhabitants (*Ville Contemporaine*). He began a new journal called *L'Esprit Nouveau* that advocated the use of modern industrial techniques and strategies to transform society into a more efficient environment with a higher standard of living on all socioeconomic levels. His dictum “Architecture or Revolution” became his rallying cry for the book *Vers une architecture*.

He continued to create radical reconstruction plans for cities until the 1960s, and whilst his architectural vocabulary changed utterly in the post-war years, he continued to favour wholesale demolition of the historic city. Only twice was he commissioned to design a city layout, the first of which was a new city built from scratch, the Indian city of Chandigarh. While engaged at Chandigarh, he also designed the city layout and several of the buildings for Bhubaneshwar.

Against his doctor’s orders, on August 27, 1965, Le Corbusier went for a swim in the Mediterranean Sea at Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, France. His body was found by bathers and he was pronounced dead at 11 a.m.

## Furniture

Le Corbusier began experimenting with furniture design in 1928 after inviting the architect, Charlotte Perriand, to join his studio. His cousin, Pierre Jeanneret, also collaborated on many of the designs. Before the arrival of Perriand, Le Corbusier relied on ready-made furniture to furnish his projects, such as the simple pieces manufactured by Thonet.

In 1928 Le Corbusier and Perriand began to put the expectations for furniture Le Corbusier outlined in his 1925 book *L'Art Décoratif d'aujourd'hui* into practice. In the book he defined three different furniture types: type-needs, type-furniture, and human-limb objects. He defined human-limb objects as: “Extensions of our limbs and adapted to human functions that are. Type-needs, type-functions, therefore type-objects and type-furniture. The human-limb object is a docile servant. A good servant is discreet and self-effacing in order to leave his master free. Certainly, works of art are tools, beautiful tools. And long live the good taste manifested by choice, subtlety, proportion, and harmony”.

In the year 1964, while Le Corbusier was still alive, Cassina S.p.A. of Milan acquired the exclusive worldwide rights to manufacture his furniture designs. Today many copies exist, but Cassina is still the only manufacturer authorised by the Fondation Le Corbusier.

