



LA CASA

ESPACIOS DOMÉSTICOS
MODOS DE HABITAR

ABADA EDITORES

LA CASA

ESPACIOS DOMÉSTICOS MODOS DE HABITAR

II CONGRESO INTERNACIONAL CULTURA Y CIUDAD
GRANADA, 23-25 ENERO 2019



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La Casa. Espacios domésticos, modos de habitar
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La casa como metáfora del viaje. Fotógrafos y arquitectos en Mallorca	1993
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Immeuble-villas de Le Corbusier y un recuerdo evocado en una sobremesa ***Le Corbusier's Immeuble-villas and an After Lunch Remembrance***

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Resumen

Le Corbusier presentó por vez primera el proyecto *Immeuble-villas* en noviembre de 1922, en el stand de Urbanismo del Salón de Otoño de París. Se plantea como una nueva tipología de vivienda colectiva, que comprende espacios privados –120 apartamentos– y espacios comunitarios –almacén, cocina central, restaurante, lavandería, pista de atletismo, solarios, salas de deporte, de juego, de estudio y de fiestas. En el primer volumen de *Œuvre complète* encontramos un texto de presentación, donde el propio autor apunta que dibujó el *Immeuble-villas* «en el dorso de una carta de restaurante». Sin embargo, una búsqueda en el Archivo de la Fondation Le Corbusier ha permitido encontrar un conjunto de esbozos en su agenda personal, inéditos, que podrían haber constituido uno de los primeros ensayos sobre el *Immeuble-villas*, o incluso quizás el primero. Este conjunto de esbozos podrá arrojar alguna luz sobre una serie de cuestiones en torno a este emblemático proyecto, que nunca llegó a ser construido pero que sigue desempeñando un papel indiscutible en la producción arquitectónica mundial.

Palabras clave: Le Corbusier, movimiento moderno, vivienda colectiva, *Immeuble-villas*

Bloque temático: El proyecto doméstico como núcleo de la modernidad: casa singular y vivienda colectiva, del Movimiento Moderno al siglo XXI

Abstract

In November 1922 at the Urbanism Stand of the Autumn Salon in Paris, Le Corbusier presented, for the first time, the immeuble-villas project. It emerged as a new typology of collective housing, including private spaces –120 apartments– and communal areas –warehouse, central kitchen, restaurant, launderette, running track, solariums and sports, game, study and party facilities. In the first volume of his Œuvre Complète, Le Corbusier points out that Immeuble-villas was sketched «onto the back of a restaurant menu». However, a research at the Archives of the Le Corbusier Foundation uncovered a set of sketches in his personal diary, a unique finding that may have been one of the first trials about the Immeuble-villas project, or perhaps even the very first one. This set of sketches may help to illuminate some questions about this iconic project, which was never built but that plays even today an undeniably important role in architectural production worldwide.

Keywords: Le Corbusier, modern movement, collective housing, *Immeuble-villas*

Topic: *The domestic project as the heart of modernity: the single, one-off house and collective housing, from the Modern Movement to the 21st century*

Apparently, the origin of the Immeuble-villas project (Figure 1) dates back to the contact Le Corbusier established with an important real estate society that was interested in constructing luxury buildings in Paris, where «French good taste is combined with the American sense of comfort»: the *Groupe de l'Habitation Franco-Américaine*.¹ In the beginning of February 1922, Daniel Niestlé,² Le Corbusier's friend and member of the board of directors of the magazine *L'Esprit Nouveau*, becomes aware of the existence of the *Groupe de l'Habitation Franco-Américaine* and visits their offices (at that point based in number 61 of avenue Victor-Emmanuel III,³ in Paris). In the sequence of this visit, Niestlé received on February 8th, a letter from the society's co-director Charles Sée, together with a brochure that defined the structuring of the buildings to be constructed by the group.⁴ In this letter, Charles Sée expressed the intention of soon constructing four sets of buildings in Paris: in avenue d'Orsay, rue Jean-Nicot and rue de l'Université (7^{ème} arrondissement); in rue de la Santé (13^{ème} arrondissement); avenue de la Motte-Picquet and avenue de Suffren (15^{ème} arrondissement); in rue Jasmin, rue Henri-Heine, rue du Docteur-Blanche and rue Raffet (16^{ème} arrondissement).⁵ A few days after sending this

¹ This origin was denounced by Pierre-Alain Croset in the article "Immeuble-villas. Les origines d'un type", in Jacques Lucan (dir.), *Le Corbusier: une encyclopédie. Ouvrage publié à l'occasion de l'exposition 'L'aventure Le Corbusier'* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, CCI, 1987), 178-189. A preserved folder at the Le Corbusier Foundation testifies the relation between Le Corbusier and this society: FLC F2-16-(112-122).

² Daniel Niestlé, son of the owner of a large educational publisher in Neuchâtel, established himself in Paris, as Le Corbusier did, founding the publisher *Les Éditions de l'Avenir Féminin*. He was the owner of *Les Éditions d'Art* (Typo a Lithographie – Phototypie – Eau-forte – Burin – Héliogravure). He was invited to become a partner of a publisher, together with Le Corbusier and Ozenfant – which he eventually refused, allegedly due to being too involved with his own publisher–, and later in 1921 he was invited to be a member of the management board of the magazine *L'Esprit Nouveau*, when the magazine was facing some management problems –a position he kept until the closing of the magazine in 1925. See, on this subject, FLC A1-14-225. He was also a client of Le Corbusier, having commissioned the Maison Rambouillet project, designed in 1923.

³ Currently avenue Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

⁴ "Les IMMEUBLES du GROUPE de l'Habitation Franco-Américaine", FLC F2-16-122.

⁵ «Faisant suite à la visite que vous avez bien voulu nous rendre, nous avons le plaisir de vous remettre, ci-joint, la notice qui définit l'organisation des immeubles de rapport que nous allons construire. Nous allons réaliser quatre groupes d'immeubles: 7^{ème} arrondissement: Cet immeuble sera bordé par l'avenue d'Orsay, la rue Jean Nicot et la rue de l'Université. Il comportera des appartements conformes à ceux décrits à deux salons, trois, quatre ou cinq chambres à coucher. Une deuxième chambre de domestique non attente à l'appartement pourra être réservée. 13^{ème} arrondissement: Immeuble rue de la Santé, presque à l'angle du boulevard de Port-Royal. Cet immeuble comportera de petits appartements composés d'un salon, une salle à manger, deux ou trois chambres à coucher. 15^{ème} arrondissement: Immeuble situé à l'angle de l'avenue de la Motte-Picquet, de l'avenue de Suffre [sic], en face de l'Ecole Militaire. Cet immeuble comportera des appartements conformes à ceux décrits dans la notice avec deux, trois, quatre ou cinq chambres à coucher et deuxième chambre de domestique. / 16^{ème} arrondissement: Immeuble bordé par les rues Jasmin, Henri Heine, Docteur Blanche et Raffet. Cet immeuble comportera d s [sic] appartements à deux, trois, quatre ou cinq chambres à coucher avec deuxième chambre de domestique. Dans tous ces immeubles, les étages supérieurs seront des studios de grande hauteur, surmontés par une terrasse plate. Nous ne vous adresserons que sous quelques jours les plans des quatre groupes d'immeubles avec une vue en perspective, un plan d'un étage, des plans à grande échelle des divers appartements ainsi que l'indication des conditions financières tant participation de capital que montant de loyer. Nous sommes à votre disposition pour vous envoyer d'autres notices, si vous le désirez, ou pour les envoyer directement aux personnes dont vous pourriez nous donner l'adresse» [translation: Pursuant to your kind visit, we are pleased to provide you with the attached information, which defines the organisation of the investment properties that we intend to construct. Our plan is to create four groups of buildings: 7^{ème} arrondissement: this building will be bordered by the Avenue d'Orsay, the Rue Jean Nicot and the Rue de l'Université. It will feature apartments in accordance with those described, with two living rooms and three, four, or five bedrooms. A second maid's bedroom, independent of the apartment, can also be reserved. 13^{ème} arrondissement: Building in the Rue de la Santé, quite near the corner of the Boulevard de Port-Royal. This building will feature small apartments consisting of a living room, dining room, and two or three bedrooms. 15^{ème} arrondissement: Building situated at the corner of the Avenue de la Motte-Picquet and the Avenue de Suffre [sic], opposite the Ecole Militaire. This building will feature apartments in accordance with those described in the information, with two, three, four, or five bedrooms and a second maid's bedroom. 16^{ème} arrondissement: Building bordered by the Rue Jasmin, Rue Henri Heine, Rue Docteur Blanche, and Rue Raffet. This building will feature apartments with two, three, four, or five bedrooms with second maid's bedroom. In all these buildings, the upper floors will be studios with high ceilings with terraced lofts. In just a few short days, you will receive the plans for the four groups of buildings, with a perspective view, a floor plan, large-scale plans for the various apartments as well as information on financial terms, such

first letter, Charles Sée apparently sent Daniel Niestlé the designs of those four projects –a perspective, the plan of one floor and detailed plans of several apartments–, as well as the respective financial conditions –both to participate in the equity, as well as for renting.

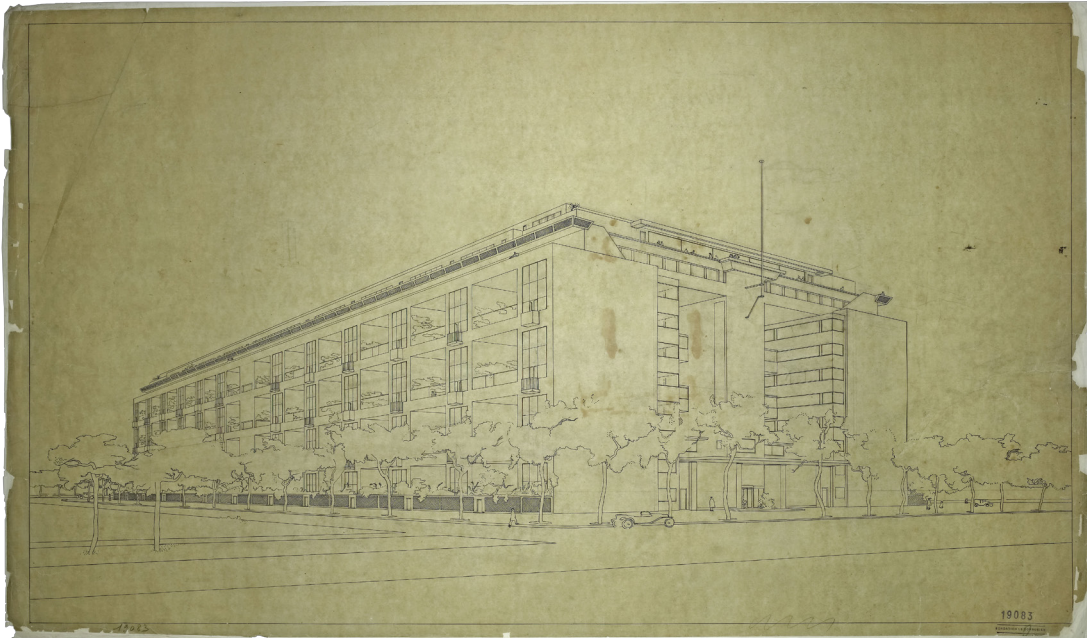


Figure 1: Le Corbusier, Immeuble-villas, 1922
Source: FLC 19083 (1922)

Le Corbusier did not have at the time any mandate for collective housing in Paris. He had just opened his studio –l'Atelier Le Corbusier– together with his cousin Pierre Jeanneret, in number 29 bis of the rue d'Astorg, and apparently saw in this real estate society the image of the informed client. He then sent, on February 24th, a letter to the society signed by «a manager [of the magazine *L'Esprit Nouveau*]⁶», to which he added three published issues of the magazine, highlighting three articles (“Trois rappels à Messieurs les architectes. III Le plan”,⁷ “Des yeux qui ne voient pas. II Les avions”,⁸ “Maisons en série”⁹), also expressing the “liveliest interest” for the group’s ideas, emphasizing his affinities, and tacitly inviting the real estate society to present

as venture capital and rental costs. We are at your complete disposal and would be happy to supply you with any further information, if desired. Should you know of any party that is potentially interested in this undertaking, we would be pleased to send them our information as well, upon receipt of address]. Letter from the Groupe de l'Habitation Franco-Américaine, signed by Charles Sée, addressed to Daniel Nestlé [sic], dated February 8, 1922, FLC F2-16-112. This last terrain corresponds to the city lot where, sometime later, Le Corbusier planned and built Maison la Roche and Maison Jeanneret.

⁶ Le Corbusier founded the magazine *L'Esprit Nouveau* in 1920, together with Amédée Ozenfant and Paul Dermée. The magazine had 28 issues, edited between 1920 and 1925.

⁷ Le Corbusier-Saugnier, “Trois rappels à MM. les architectes: 3e article”, *L'Esprit Nouveau* (n.º 4, Janvier 1921): 457-470. Later republished in 1923, in Le Corbusier-Saugnier, *Vers une architecture* (Paris: Éditions Crès, 1923); translated by John Goodman: *Toward an Architecture* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2007).

⁸ Le Corbusier-Saugnier, “Des yeux qui ne voient pas... II. Les avions”, *L'Esprit Nouveau* (n.º 9, Juin 1921): 973-988. Later republished in 1923, in Le Corbusier-Saugnier, *Vers une architecture*; translated by John Goodman: *Toward an Architecture*.

⁹ Le Corbusier-Saugnier, “Maisons en série”, *L'Esprit Nouveau* (n.º 13, Décembre 1921): 1525-1542. Later republished in 1923, in Le Corbusier-Saugnier, *Vers une architecture*; translated by John Goodman: *Toward an Architecture*.

their projects to be published in an ensuing issue.¹⁰ The group replied in a letter dated February 27th, subscribing to the magazine and inviting Le Corbusier to meet the co-director of the Groupe de l'Habitation Franco-Américaine, Charles Sée,¹¹ for whom the articles of *L'Esprit Nouveau* «are perfectly aligned with what we do».¹² From the first encounter resulted the commission of a project to Le Corbusier for a group of houses to be carried out in a terrain in Auteuil, in the 16^{ème} arrondissement, in Paris, between avenue de Versailles and the quai d'Auteuil,¹³ next to rue Wilhem and close to Parc Sainte-Périne.¹⁴ Nevertheless, it is not known whether before or after the development of the project for this set of single-family homes, Le Corbusier also began to develop a study for a collective housing building: the *Immeuble-villas*.

Le Corbusier stated that the Immeuble-villas project was sketched «onto the back of a restaurant menu». However, in pages 66 and 67 of his diary from February to March 1922, Le Corbusier created what may be one of the first set of sketches of the Immeuble-villas, or possibly even the very first one (Figure 2). In fact, it is possible that this set of sketches on his

¹⁰ «Nous avons sous les yeux votre prospectus: "Les immeubles du Groupe de l'Habitation Franco Américaine" que nous avons parcouru avec le plus vif intérêt, étant donné que nous faisons depuis plus de quinze mois, dans notre Revue, une campagne énergique en vue de réaliser des programmes analogues à celui que vous avez entrepris. Nous nous permettons de vous remettre quelques numéros de notre Revue où vous trouverez des articles de Le Corbusier, ayant directement trait à cette question. En vous faisant cet envoi, nous pensons vous renseigner sur l'important effort de presse que nous faisons par notre revue, laquelle est répandue mondialement et à un très fort tirage. Nous vous signalons, d'autre part, que les articles de Le Corbusier ont été, à chaque fois, très commentés par la grande presse. Nous serions même disposés à examiner la réalisation de vos projets afin de voir s'ils peuvent cadrer avec l'esprit de notre Revue et s'ils peuvent être signalés à nos lecteurs par l'entremise de notre Revue» [translation: We have received your prospectus entitled "The Buildings of the Franco-American Housing Group" which we have examined with the utmost interest, especially given the fact that for the last fifteen months, in our Journal, we have been running an energetic campaign whose goal is to carry out programmes akin to those which you have undertaken. We have taken the liberty to include several issues of our Journal in which you will find articles on Le Corbusier specifically addressing this question. In our sending you these copies, it is our hope to apprise you of the importance of our efforts in the press as represented by our Journal, which enjoys an international readership and high circulation figures. We should also like to point out that the articles on Le Corbusier have each been extremely well received by the mainstream press. We should also be quite disposed to examine the realisation of your projects in order to see whether they correspond with the spirit of our Journal and the profile of our readers]. Letter from the management board of *L'Esprit Nouveau*, addressed to the Groupe de l'Habitation Franco-Américaine, dated February 24th, 1922, FLC F2-16-114.

¹¹ Charles Sée was an engineer from the École Centrale de Paris (graduated in 1891) and member of the Editorial Board of *La Construction moderne*. He shared the direction of the group with the architect Aristide Daniel.

¹² «Nous venons vous remercier de votre lettre du 24 Février et nous tenons à vous dire combien nous avons été intéressés par les articles de Messieurs LE CORBUSIER-SAUGNIER, lesquels sont si parfaitement conforme à ce que nous réalisons. / Il sera très agréable à notre Directeur, Monsieur Charles SEE, de s'entretenir avec Monsieur LE CORBUSIER-SAUGNIER, tel jour et heure que celui-ci voudrait bien nous designer. Pour plus de sureté, un rendez-vous pourrait être fixé par téléphone. Nous avons, par ailleurs, lu avec grand intérêt votre revue que nous ne connaissions pas du tout et si un abonné de plus, peut vous être agréable, c'est avec plaisir que nous vous demanderons de nous en faire régulièrement le service» [translation: We should like to thank you for your letter of 24 February, adding how much we were interested by the articles by Messieurs LE CORBUSIER-SAUGNIER, which are in perfect conformity with what we undertake. / Our Director, Monsieur Charles SEE, would be quite honoured to receive Monsieur LE CORBUSIER-SAUGNIER, with the date and time of the meeting to be made at his convenience. In the interest of greater security, arrangements for the meeting can be made by telephone. We have read your magazine with great interest, one which we were not familiar with, and if adding one more subscriber would be agreeable to you, then it is with great pleasure that we indeed request that you begin our subscription]. Letter from the group, addressed to Le Corbusier, dated February 27th, 1922, FLC F2-16-115. According to the existing documentation from the Archives of the Le Corbusier Foundation, the group subscribed to the magazine from issue 16 to 17, with the subscriber number 1066, and from issue 18 to 24 with the subscriber number 1047. See, on this subject, FLC A2-10-97 and FLC A2-9-294.

¹³ Currently quai Louis Blériot.

¹⁴ There is no record of this meeting, but the existence of this commission can be inferred by the following letter, sent by Le Corbusier to Charles Sée, in which he indicates that he finalized «les avant-projets du groupe dont nous avons causé pour Auteuil et que je serais très heureux de vous les soumettre» [translation: the drafts of the groups that we discussed for Auteuil and that I would be very happy to submit to you]. Letter from Le Corbusier, addressed to Charles Sée, dated April 27th, 1922, FLC F2-16-116.

diary was created right after the drawing made on the back of the menu. Or even that his affirmation lacked some precision, and that Immeuble-villas was drawn on improvised sheets – that it was– but rather on two pages of his diary, and not on the back of a menu card.

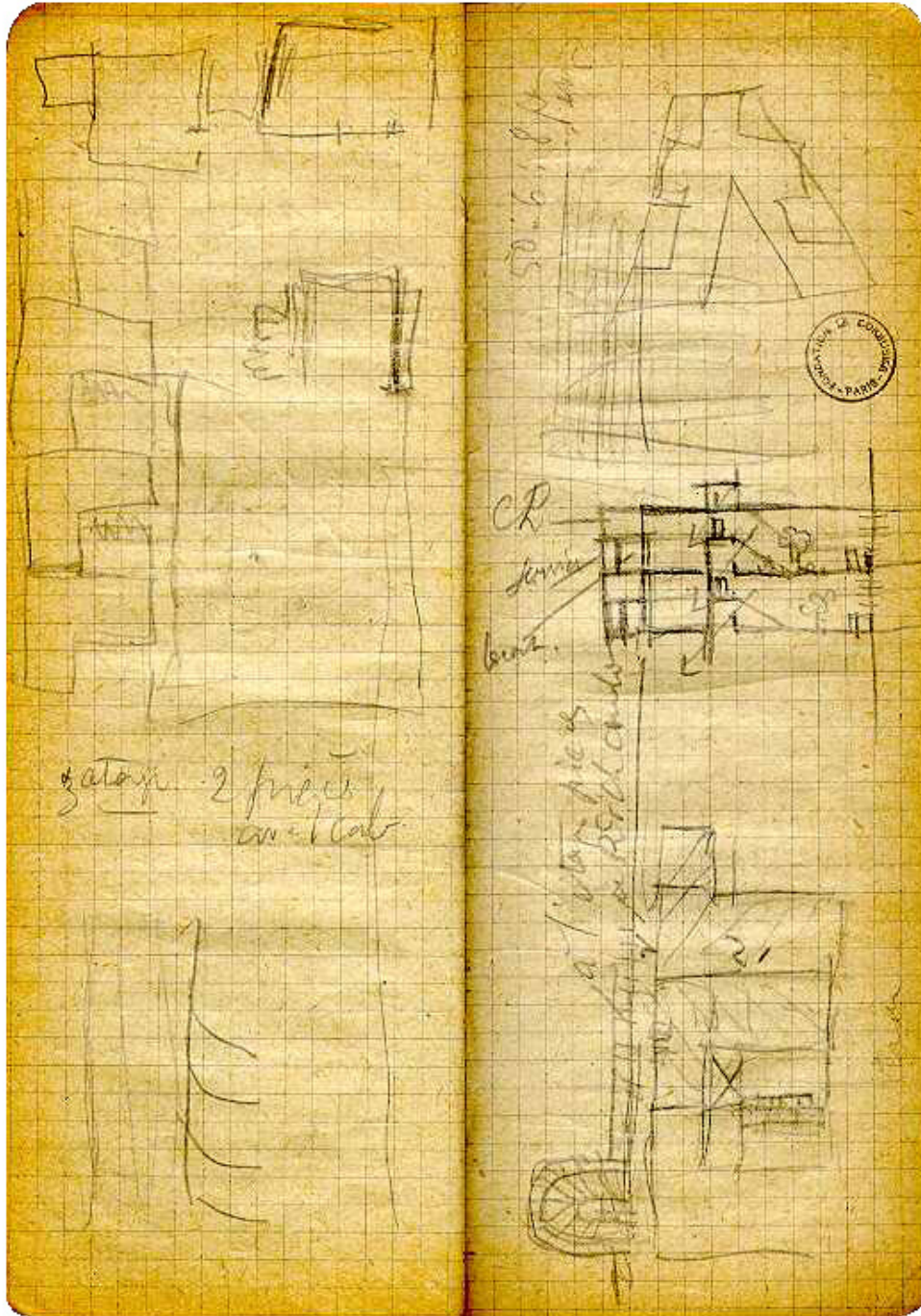


Figure 2: Le Corbusier, pages 67 and 68 of his personal diary, February-March 1922
Source: FLC F3-3-2-035 (1922)

What we know for certain is that on the side of the external margin of page 66 of his diary, the left one, emerges a schematic plan of a cluster of L shaped apartments, displayed side by side and differentiating the empty spaces they generated. The “L” shape configuration of the

apartments allowed a clear isolation of the void spaces that resulted from each other, visually and acoustically, and relate them with the building's exterior.

Still on the left page, next to the fold of the diary, a sketch defined the set of apartments – whose recesses created by the void spaces generated several subsequent “M” shapes in the plan. These apartments seem to be displayed around a “U” shaped porch that defines in its centre, an empty space, a kind of incomplete cloister.

On the top and bottom of the right side page two possible variations seem to have been tested. On the top of the page there is a plan of a possible adaptation of this structure to the sharp corner of a city block. Unlike the scenario of an insertion in a regular lot, which appears to have been tried out in the two sketches on the left side page, Le Corbusier seems to have attempted here to understand how the theoretical solution he found could adapt to an irregular urban lot. Moreover, on the bottom of the right side page, Le Corbusier seems to have tried out a different, alternative aggregation scheme, in which the “L” shaped apartments emerge as being semi-detached, two by two, placed symmetrically one toward the other, as a mirror. In this case, the individuality of the void spaces would not be naturally guaranteed, and an added element to divide the neighbouring adjacent spaces would be necessary. On the opposite end of the void spaces emerges the circulation corridor, with the communal stairs standing from the interior façade plane.

At the centre of the right side page, Le Corbusier depicts the only section drawing out of the set of sketches. It is a section that traverses two superimposed apartments, including the circulation corridors –which would allow access to both apartments (one public, the other for service use)–, the apartment wings parallel to the access corridors, and the outside voids –a sort of suspended garden. These suspended gardens would communicate with the outside by means of a series of horizontal plans. This is a particularly curious annotation: while the brise-soleil was first applied by Le Corbusier in the buildings of the Plan Macià project, in Barcelona, in 1933,¹⁵ the truth is that this section proves that the brise-soleil was in fact assayed by Le Corbusier firstly in 1922, in the scope of the suspended gardens of the Immeuble-villas project –even though later, in the definitive and most well-known drawings of this project, this element was removed. Through this section, and judging by the stairs that are represented in the suspended garden, we can verify that the apartments would have two floors (this fact may in addition be confirmed by the representation of the same stairs, in plan, on the left side page). The slabs that would constitute the pavement of the suspended gardens seem to be interrupted near the apartment wing parallel to the access corridor, and that void would traverse the building from top to bottom. A set of arrows, depicted in a diagonal, seem to point out the existence of this opening in the slabs, which would allow for a relationship between the garden and the top and bottom apartments to be established, as well as for the passage of light and air circulation. Given the lack of definition in the lower part of this sketch, the building seems to be able to continue expanding infinitely in that direction, not being clear, from the drawing, how many superimposed apartments would constitute its totality.

All the sketches from this set appear to be, ultimately, conducing to what is known as the final configuration of the Immeubles-villas project. (Figures 3-4)

¹⁵ On the use of brise-soleil in the work of Le Corbusier, refer to Tim Benton, “La Villa Baizeau et le brise-soleil”, in *Le Corbusier et la Méditerranée* (Marseille: Editions Parenthèses, 1987), 125-129.

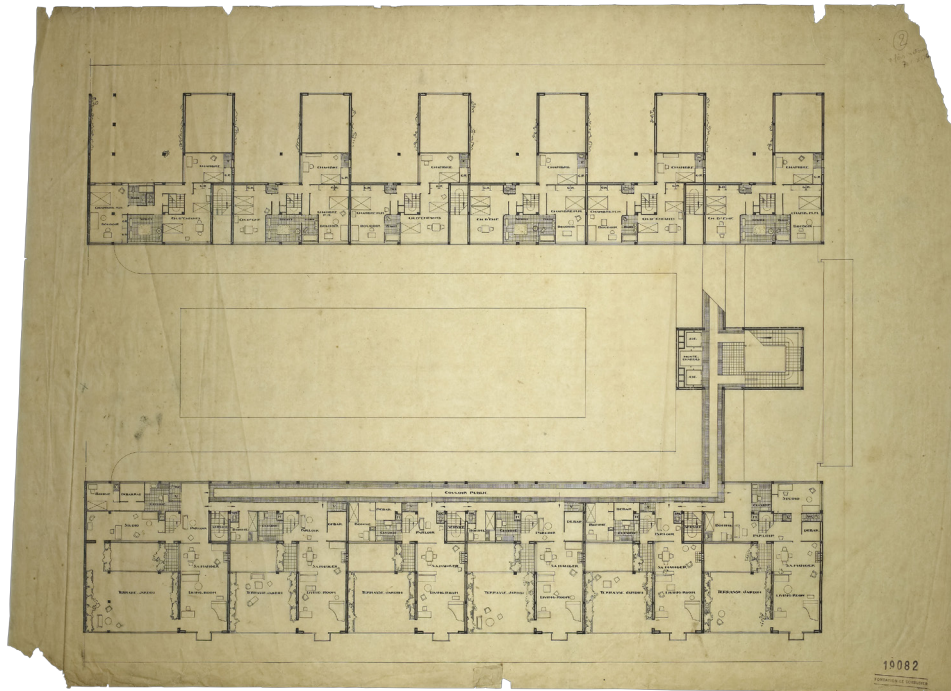


Figure 3: Le Corbusier, Plan of half of the Immeuble-villas, 1922
Source: FLC 19082 (1922)

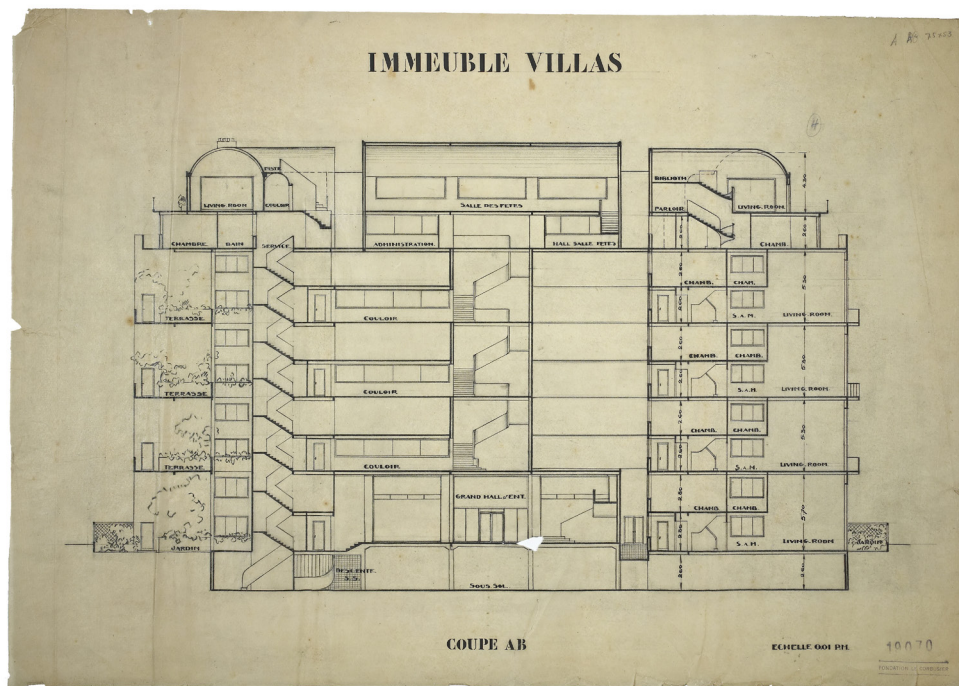


Figure 4: Le Corbusier, Section of the Immeuble-villas, 1922
Source: FLC 19070 (1922)

Nevertheless, two small sketches in this page spread, located on the top part of the left side page, also deserve special attention. The right side sketch resembles a rectangle with two concurrent sides emphasized in an apparently insistent way (with several redundantly

overlapping lines), resulting in an “L” shape whose lines correspond to the total measure of the rectangle sides in which it lies. By making this sketch, Le Corbusier could very well be explaining to Pierre Jeanneret¹⁶ the essence of the Immeuble-villas apartment, composed by two perpendicular wings that occupy the totality of the rectangle in which its plan is inscribed, and that isolate its own suspended garden from the next adjoining apartment. The sketch on the left side is more enigmatic, because it seems to depict the negative of an apartment plan, and consequently, its respective suspended garden. To its regular plan a small square is added, which would render irregular the patio shape. This small square, added to the suspended garden plan, has not been seen in any other illustration of the Immeuble-villas project. Why, then, would Le Corbusier add this small figure?

In fact, Le Corbusier stated in two distinct texts that the Immeuble-villas project was drawn, as mentioned, «onto the back of a restaurant menu», but also that its sketch was made «from an after lunch remembrance, of a Charterhouse in Italy». In *Precisions on the present state of architecture and city planning* he indicated:

Let me show you by what ways, through twenty years of attentive curiosity, certitudes have come to us. The beginning of these studies, for me, goes back to my visit to the Carthusian monastery of Ema near Florence, in 1907. In the musical landscape of Tuscany I saw a *modern city* crowning a hill. The noblest silhouette in the landscape, an uninterrupted crown of monks' cells; each cell has a view on the plain, and opens on a lower level on an entirely closed garden. I thought I had never seen such a happy interpretation of a dwelling. The back of each cell opens by a door and a wicket on a circular street. This street is covered by an arcade: the cloister. Through this way the monastery services operate –prayer, visits, food, funerals. This “modern city” dates from the fifteenth century. Its radiant vision has always stayed with me. In 1910, returning from Athens, I again stopped at Ema. One day in 1922, I talked about it to my associate Pierre Jeanneret; on the back of a restaurant menu, we drew up spontaneously the *immeuble-villas* [townhouse buildings]; the idea was born.¹⁷

And in *Œuvre complète*, he reiterated:

Villas-Apartments and the Pavilion “Esprit-Nouveau”. The Villas apartment-blocks originated in an after-dinner remembrance of an Italian Charterhouse and sketched on the back of a restaurant menu.¹⁸

¹⁶ If we consider his description in *Precisions on the present state of architecture and city planning* as being valid. See, on this subject, footnote 17, in the current article.

¹⁷ «Permettez-moi de vous montrer par quels chemins, à travers vingt années de curiosité attentive, des certitudes sont venues. L'origine de ces recherches, pour mon compte, remonte à la visite de la 'Chartreuse d'Ema' aux environs de Florence, en 1907. J'ai vu, dans ce paysage musical de la Toscane, une cité moderne couronnant la colline. La plus noble silhouette dans le paysage, la couronne ininterrompue des cellules des moines; chaque cellule a vue sur la plaine, et dégage sur un jardinet en contrebas entièrement clos. J'ai pensé ne pouvoir jamais rencontrer une telle interprétation joyeuse de l'habitation. Le dos de chaque cellule ouvre par une porte et un guichet sur une rue circulaire. Cette rue est couverte d'une arcade: le cloître. Par là fonctionnent les services communs, -la prière, les visites, le manger, les enterrements. Cette “cité moderne” est du quinzième siècle. La vision radieuse m'en est demeurée pour toujours. En 1910, revenant d'Athènes, je m'arrêtais une fois encore à la Chartreuse. Un jour de 1922, j'en parle à mon associé Pierre Jeanneret; sur le dos d'un menu de restaurant, nous avons spontanément dessiné les “immeubles villas”; l'idée était éclosée». Le Corbusier, *Precisions sur un état présent de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme* (Paris: Éditions Crès, Collection de L'Esprit Nouveau, 1930), 91-92; translated by Edith Schreiber Aujame: *Precisions on the present state of architecture and city planning: with an American prologue, a Brazilian corollary followed by The temperature of Paris and The atmosphere of Moscow* (Cambridge/ Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991), 91.

¹⁸ «Tout d'abord, les “IMMEUBLES-VILLAS”. Ils sont nés d'un souvenir évoqué après un déjeuner, d'une Chartreuse d'Italie (bonheur par la sérénité) et crayonné sur le dos d'un menu de restaurant». Le Corbusier et Pierre Jeanneret, *Œuvre complète 1910-1929* (Zurich: Girsberger, 1937), 40-41, translated in: Le Corbusier, Boesiger, Willy, Stonorov, O., Bill, Max, *Le Corbusier 1910-65* (Zurich: Les Éditions d'Architecture Zurich, 1964-1965), 26. This version corresponds to an extension of what was

This reference to a charterhouse is repeated by Le Corbusier many other times, while with a different purpose, other than describing the first drawing moment of the project.¹⁹ Yet what is relevant is that in all these texts, Le Corbusier refers to a charterhouse in Galluzzo, in the outskirts of the Italian city of Florence, called Florence Charterhouse of the Valley of Ema (Figure 5): a monastery that had been founded in 1342 by Florentine nobleman Niccolò Acciaiuoli and that Charles-Edouard Jeanneret²⁰ visited for the first time during his trip to Italy in 1907, at 19 years of age, and one of the few buildings he revisited in that country four years after his first visit, on the return of his trip to the Middle East.

already written in the first one, in German language: «VILLENBLOCKS. Corbusier ist diese Idee in Erinnerung an ein italienisches Karthäuserkloster gekommen» [translation: VILLENBLOCKS. Corbusier ist diese Idee in Erinnerung an ein italienisches Karthäuserkloster gekommen]. Le Corbusier und Pierre Jeanneret, *Ihr gesamtes Werk von 1910-1929* (Zürich: Verlag Dr. H. Girsberger, 1930), 36.

¹⁹ «Notre homme, en 1922, avait abandonné l'architecture depuis six années; il recommence à bâtir après avoir toutefois, dans "L'Esprit Nouveau", dès 1920, préparé des bases doctrinales péremptoires à cette reprise d'activité. Ses premières nouvelles maisons manifestent une conception neuve de l'architecture, expression de l'esprit d'une époque. Des tracés régulateurs en éclairent les façades (les façades seulement). La recherche est complexe et symphonique: mesures-bases d'urbanisme ("Ville Contemporaine de trois millions d'habitants", 1922), détermination de l'unité cellulaire (contenant du logis), de la maille des circulations (réseau), en réalité, phénomène d'organisation architecturale fondamentale ressenti déjà une première fois, quinze années auparavant, à la Chartreuse d'Ema en Toscane (liberté individuelle et organisation collective) [1907]» [translation: In 1922, our man had not been practising architecture for six years; then he began to build again, having, since 1920, prepared in *L'Esprit Nouveau* certain fundamental positions without which such a resumption of work would have been impossible. The first of his new houses bore witness to a new conception of architecture; it expressed the spirit of an era. The façades of those buildings (only the façades) all bore the imprint of the regulating lines. His studies were complex and far-reaching: basic measures of urbanism ("Ville Contemporaine de trois millions d'habitants", 1922), determination of the cellular unit (capacity of dwellings), the mesh of communications (network of roads and transport lines): in reality, a process of fundamental architectural organization which he had already experienced once, fifteen years earlier, at the Charterhouse of Ema in Tuscany (individual freedom and collective organization) (1907)]. Le Corbusier, *Le Modulor: Essai sur une mesure harmonique à l'échelle humaine applicable universellement à l'architecture et à la mécanique* (Boulogne: Éditions de l'Architecture d'aujourd'hui, 1950), 27-28; translated by Peter de Francia and Anna Bostock: *The Modulor: A Harmonious Measure to the Human Scale Universally Applicable to Architecture and Mechanics* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), 27-28. «L'apparition du thème de l'Unité d'Habitation remonte à une première vi site à la Chartreuse d'Ema en Toscane en 1907. Ce thème est dans mes plans de 1922 au Salon d'Automne: une Ville Contemporaine de 3 millions d'Habitants: "les Immeubles-Villas". Il réapparaissait au Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau en 1925» [translation: The theme of the Unité d'Habitation first came to mind during my first visit to the Chartreuse of Ema in Tuscany in 1907. It appeared in my plans at the Salon d'Automne in 1922: a contemporary town for 3 million inhabitants: "les Immeubles Villas" and again the Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau in 1925]. Le Corbusier, *Œuvre complète 1946-1952* (Zürich: Girsberger, 1953), 191. «[...] 1907 (visite de la Chartreuse d'Ema en Toscane); depuis 1910 (seconde visite à la Chartreuse d'Ema); de 1920 à 1960 (quarante années de recherches incessantes et de confrontations: "architecture et urbanisme", à travers un monde de réalités), les "Immeubles-Villas" [...].» [translation: [...] 1907, visit to the Carthusian monastery of Ema in Tuscany; 1910 [sic], second visit to the Carthusian monastery Ema; 1920 to 1960 (forty years of ceaseless research and comparative analysis of problems of architecture and urbanism, the 'Immeuble-Villas' [...]). Le Corbusier, *L'atelier de la recherche patiente* (Paris: Vincent & Fréal, 1960), 50; translated by James Palmes: *Creation is a Patient Search* (New York: Praeger, 1960), 50. «Corbu devant: 1922. La ville contemporaine de 3 millions d'habitants. L'immeuble-villas (découvert en 1910 [sic] à la Chartreuse d'Ema)» [translation: Corbu before: 1922. A contemporary city for three million inhabitants. The townhouse apartments (discovered in 1910 [sic] at the Carthusian monastery of Ema)]. Le Corbusier, *Mise au point* (Paris: Les Éditions Forces Vives, 1965), 21; translated by Ivan Zaknic: *Le Corbusier: the Final Testament of Père Corbu* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1997), 88.

²⁰ Le Corbusier is the pseudonym adopted by Charles-Edouard Jeanneret from 1920, when he began signing the articles in the magazine *L'Esprit Nouveau*. In the current article, whenever we refer to a period prior to 1920, Le Corbusier is designated as his Christian name.

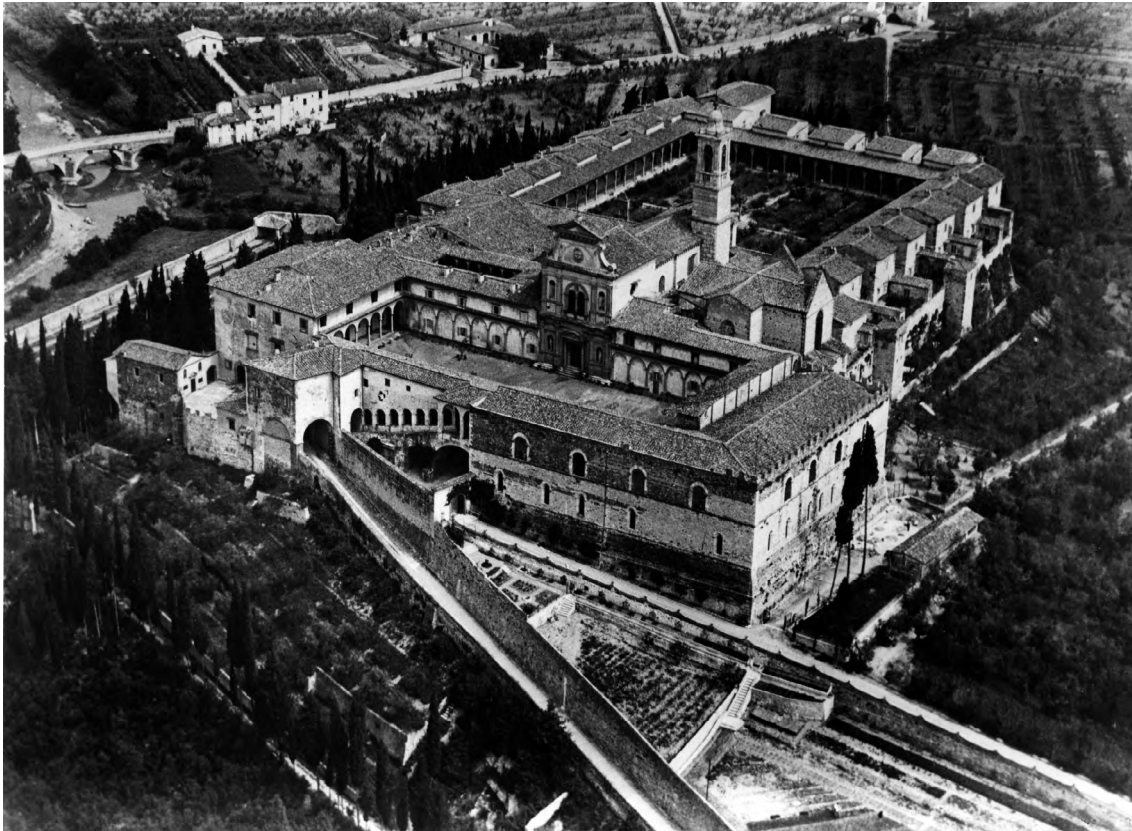


Figure 5: Ema Valley Charterhouse, Galluzzo

Source: Giovanni Leoncini, *La Certosa di Firenze nei suoi rapporti con l'architettura certosina* (1980)

Indeed, if we compare a plan of the Florence Charterhouse of the Valley of Ema with a plan of the Immeuble-villas (Figure 6), we recognize the exceptional presence of the patio, which, in the case of the Immeuble-villas project, works as the Charterhouse's great cloister. In the monastery, the patio provides access to the cells, whereas in Immeuble-villas, the patio gives access to the apartments. In both cases, the patio organizes the whole building.

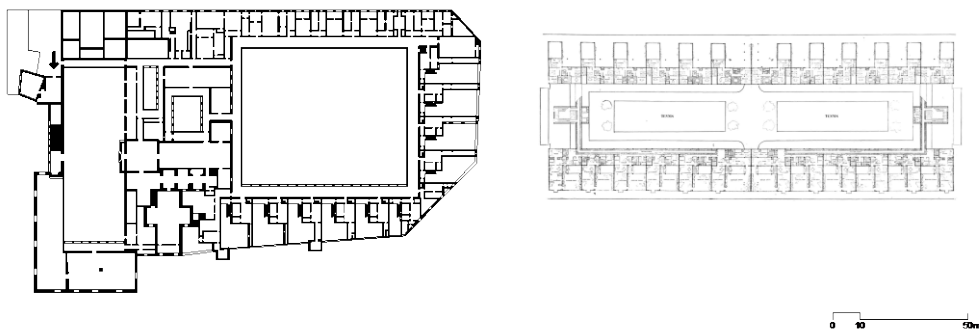


Figure 6: Plan of the Ema Valley Charterhouse and plan of the Immeuble-villas

Source: M. Sequeira (2018)

Similarly, if we compare the plan of a cell of the Charterhouse of the Valley of Ema with a plan from an apartment of the Immeuble-villas project (Figure 7), we realize the resemblance and the importance of what, in the case of the charterhouse, constitutes the patio –the space that is

responsible for its individual character, embraced by the various rooms—, and what, in the case of the Immeuble-villas project, constitutes the “suspended garden”. This is a garden space that, instead of missing a ceiling—which would allow for the contemplation of the sky—, misses a wall, thus allowing the contemplation of the landscape.

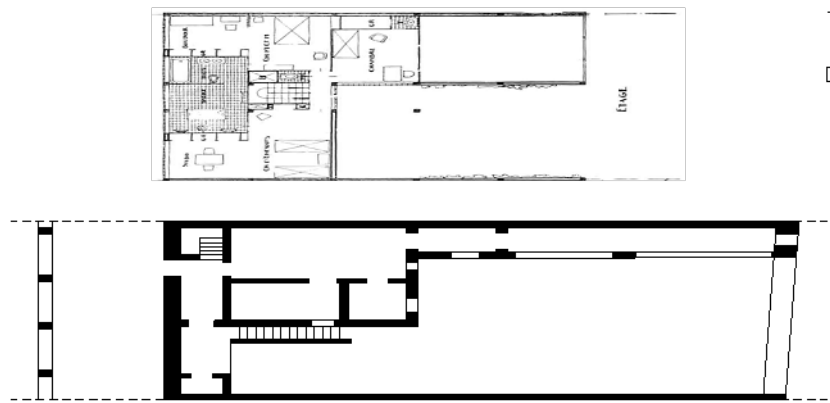


Figure 7: Plan of the Ema Valley Charterhouse cell and plan of the Immeuble-villas apartment
Source: M. Sequeira (2018)

Nevertheless, a detail appears to be different. Whilst in the plan of an apartment of the Immeuble-villas project the two wings occupy almost the entirety of the sides of the plan, in the case of the Carthusian cells one of the “L” shaped wings does not seem to touch upon the neighbouring cell, and from that distance results a space that, within the cell’s patio, results as being more retracted. The Carthusian cell’s patio does not, thusly, correspond to a quadrilateral shape, but rather, just as in the case of the cell’s own plan, to an “L”, in this case inverted. This difference is not too considerable, and the essence of the Carthusian cell is indeed reproduced in the Immeuble-villas apartment, despite this small divergence. It is, however, determinant for us to understand that in this sketch Le Corbusier was not referring to his own project, as in the other sketches of these two pages, but most likely evoking, eventually with Pierre Jeanneret²¹ a «remembrance if an Italian Charterhouse», and explaining to his cousin and partner the origin of the project.

The revelation of this set of drawings allows after all to show that in February and March 1922 Le Corbusier was already considering the Immeuble-villas project—even if the first dated sketches only left the drawing tables of the Atelier Le Corbusier in June 1922—, and that at this point he was testing out some unusual variants of the project—such as the implementation, for the first time, of a brise-soleil— but mostly that the analogy of the Florence Charterhouse was not just a poetic reference from Le Corbusier, but rather that this notable monastic typology was in fact in his mind when he began drawing the project that would become the origin of the collective Corbusian housing, as demonstrated in the articles “Cartujas revisitadas. Tras la pista de Le Corbusier”²² and “The 1922 Immeuble-villas and Carthusian variants”.²³ Later, aboard the

²¹ If we consider his description in *Precisions on the present state of architecture and city planning* as being valid. See, on this subject, footnote 16, in the current article.

²² See, on this subject, Marta Sequeira, “Cartujas revisitadas. Tras la pista de Le Corbusier” in Antonio S. Río Vázquez (ed.), *Le Corbusier 2015-1965. Modernidad y contemporaneidad* (Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Diseño editorial, 2015) 54-87.

Lutétia, as he wrote ten conferences he delivered in Buenos Aires, specifically the fourth, “A dwelling at human scale”, delivered on October 10th 1929 and later published in *Précisions sur un état présent de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme*, he stated:

If you knew how happy I am when I can say: my revolutionary ideas are in history, in every period and every country (the houses of Flanders, the pilotis of Siam or of the lake-dwellers, the cell of a [carthusian] monk being sanctified).

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²³ See, on this subject, Marta Sequeira, “Immeuble-villas de 1922 y las variantes cartujas/ “The 1922 Immeuble-villas and the Carthusian variants”, in Jorge Torres Cueco, Clara Mejía Vallejo (ed.), *La Recherche patiente. Le Corbusier. 50 años después/ fifty years later* (Valencia: General de Ediciones de Arquitectura, 2017) 262-273.

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