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Frank Lloyd Wright and the Young Le Corbusier

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Frank Lloyd Wright's influence on European architecture after 1910, especially in Germany and Holland, is well documented. Little attention, however, has been given to Wright's possible influence on Le Corbusier (Charles-Edouard Jeanneret). This article argues that Wright had a major effect on Jeanneret's development in the 1910s, contributing to several of the basic principles of his mature work. A previously unpublished letter by Le Corbusier of 1925 is the main document that sheds light on this question. The paper examines Jeanneret's knowledge of the early publications of Wright's work, and compares selected designs of the 1910s with Wright's published work. Among the formal characteristics that appear first in Jeanneret's designs in a Wrightian context are the continuous band of windows extending the full length of a façade and often even around the corners, the dynamic relationship of interior spaces of differing heights, and the plastic manipulation of architectural form by the removal of "slices" from a building's mass in special ways. These traits lead directly to some of the most distinctive features of Le Corbusier's work of the 1920s, including elements of his "Five Points" of architecture.

IT HAS LONG BEEN acknowledged that Frank Lloyd Wright had a powerful impact on the development of modern architecture in Europe, beginning with the publication of his designs in 1910 by Ernst Wasmuth in Berlin. The study of this impact has focused on Germany and Holland, where Wright's influence is especially evident, as in the early work of Walter Gropius and in the *de Stijl* movement. The possible effect of Wright on Le Corbusier has remained largely unexamined. However, many of the designs by the young Le Corbusier (or Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, as he will be called here when referring to him before he adopted the pseudonym Le Corbusier, ca. 1920) suggest that Wright's work was important to his development, especially when seen in the light of one of his previously unpublished letters.¹

The extensive literature on Le Corbusier contains only a few suggestions of Wright's influence. Reyner Banham spoke of Le Corbusier's "ambivalent" attitude toward Wright, and mentioned the Wright-like plan and interior spaces of his Schwob

House in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland, of 1916.² Stanislaus von Moos and Maurice Besset later made similar observations, and Besset suggested more generally that Wright contributed to Le Corbusier's notion of the "free plan."³ Yet most studies of Le Corbusier have made no reference to Wright, or have done so mainly to contrast the two architects.⁴ As for the literature on Wright, there have been many works on his influence in Europe, beginning with an essay by the Dutch architect J. J. P. Oud in 1925, but these have generally made no mention of Le Corbusier.⁵ An exception is a recent study of Wright's influence in Central Europe by Heidemarie Kief; it includes a section on Le Corbusier suggesting Wrightian elements in his designs of 1914–1916.⁶ There is evidence, however, that Wright's work affected Le Corbusier even earlier than this, and that it played an important role in the development of his mature work.

The Literary Evidence

Charles-Edouard Jeanneret had his first opportunity for contact with Wright's work in Berlin in 1910. It is well known that Gropius, Jeanneret, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe were all in Berlin at this time, working in the office of Peter Behrens—although they were probably not all there at the same time (Mies's tenure with Behrens overlapped with that of both

2. Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, London, 1960, 220.

3. Stanislaus von Moos, *Le Corbusier: Elemente einer Synthese*, Frauenfeld, 1968, 52; Maurice Besset, *Qui était Le Corbusier?*, Geneva, 1968, 27, 86.

4. For example, Peter Blake, *Le Corbusier: Architecture and Form*, New York, 1960, cites Wright frequently, but nearly always to emphasize the differences between the two architects. An extreme example of this view is Carl Birger Troedsson, *Two Standpoints toward Modern Architecture: Wright and Le Corbusier*, Göteborg, 1951; he describes the two architects' work and ideals as diametrically opposed and "incompatible."

5. J. J. P. Oud, "The Influence of Frank Lloyd Wright on the Architecture of Europe," in H. T. Wijdeveld, ed., *The Life-Work of the American Architect Frank Lloyd Wright*, Santpoort, Holland, 1925, 85–89. See also: Nikolaus Pevsner, "Frank Lloyd Wright's Peaceful Penetration of Europe," *The Architects' Journal*, 4 May 1939, 731–734; Henry Russell Hitchcock, "Wright's Influence Abroad," *Parnassus*, December 1940, 11–15; Vincent J. Scully, "Wright vs. the International Style," *Art News*, March 1954, 32–35, 64–66.

6. Heidemarie Kief, *Der Einfluss Frank Lloyd Wrights auf die mittel-europäische Einzelhausarchitektur*, Stuttgart, 1978, 139–143.

1. I thank those who assisted me in this investigation: Stanford Anderson, Neil Levine, Henri Zerner, Reyner Banham, Heidi Kief-Niederwörmeier, J. Jessurun, Denise Ridard, and Laurence Homolka.

For Le Corbusier's letter, see *Appendix* below.

Gropius and Jeanneret, but Gropius evidently left the office shortly before Jeanneret arrived).⁷ Wright also was in Berlin in 1910, conferring with the publisher Wasmuth on the monumental portfolio of his drawings, *Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe von Frank Lloyd Wright*, published that year, and the smaller volume of photographs and plans, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Ausgeführte Bauten* of 1911.⁸ Wasmuth also mounted an exhibition of Wright's work in Berlin.⁹ Although the precise circumstances of this exhibit are not known, both Gropius and Mies apparently saw it, and were well acquainted with the Wasmuth publications.¹⁰ In a description of the early years of the modern movement in Europe written in 1940, Mies recalled the powerful effect of Wright's work:

At this moment [1910], so critical for us, the exhibition of the work of Frank Lloyd Wright came to Berlin. This comprehensive display and the exhaustive publication of his works enabled us to become really acquainted with the achievements of this architect. The encounter was destined to prove of great significance to the European development.¹¹

From April 1910 to May 1911, the 23-year-old Jeanneret was in Germany, partly on a mission from the Ecole d'Art of his native La Chaux-de-Fonds, to study contemporary German architecture and decorative arts. His report to the Ecole and other documents reveal that he was in Berlin in the spring of 1910, primarily to see architectural exhibitions; again in June, when he toured the A. E. G. factories; and for five months beginning in November, when working for Behrens.¹² Especially considering his acquaintance with Mies in Behrens' office, Jeanneret probably saw at least one of the Wasmuth publications or the exhibition cited by Mies.

In his later writings, however, Le Corbusier never mentioned seeing Wright's work in Berlin. In fact, he seldom referred to Wright at all, and when he did, his remarks tended to be am-

biguous or contradictory. In a reference to Wright in his *Oeuvre complète* of 1929 (see below), Le Corbusier gave no hint that the American had made any special impression on him. There is even a persistent story, reported by both Pevsner and Banham, that when the Dutch architect H. T. Wijdeveld invited Le Corbusier in 1925 to contribute to his *Wendigen* anthology on Wright, Le Corbusier declined with the comment, "I do not know this architect."¹³ But a very different picture is revealed in a letter that Le Corbusier wrote to Wijdeveld, dated 5 August 1925.¹⁴ Although at the beginning of this letter Le Corbusier implied that he knew little about Wright, he then became increasingly eloquent about the impact that Wright's work had made on him in the 1910s. Following is the bulk of this letter, perhaps the most extensive statement that Le Corbusier made about Wright:

I received your telegram this morning. . . . I will respond at once to your question about Wright's work. My response is brief and you will understand why.

It was around 1914 or 1915 (?) [Le Corbusier's question mark] that I first saw reproductions of Wright's houses and an office building. Since then I have seen nothing else. Some friends from Prague once promised me an album of Wright's work, but I never received this album. Thus you see that I lack the information to write on this question. But this does not keep me from affirming that the sight of these several houses in 1914 strongly impressed me. I was totally unaware that there could be in America an architectural manifestation so purified and so innovative. One sensed in Wright's plans the *good schooling* of our Ecole des Beaux-Arts, that is to say, a tendency toward order, toward organization, toward a creation of pure architecture. That contrasted strongly at the time with the fits of disordered regionalism, with that spreading and paradoxical malady of the modern spirit, attracted to coquettish or decaying old villages constructed haphazardly with primitive tools. Wright *introduced order*, and he imposed himself as an architect. Moreover, his sections and façades took into account reinforced concrete. At that time, this was a real accomplishment. To my knowledge, Wright was one of the first to indicate the architectural solutions for reinforced concrete. Others employed reinforced concrete without discovering its essential rhythm, but he affirmed the horizontal, that marvelous contribution of reinforced concrete, and an architectural value of the highest order.

Although I knew almost nothing about Wright, I still remember clearly the shock I felt at seeing these houses, spiritual and smiling—with a Japanese smile.

The book you are planning is a happy event. We are all too much in the habit of forgetting quickly those who have been directly helpful to our orientation. . . .¹⁵

13. Pevsner, "Wright's Peaceful Penetration," 732; Banham, *Theory*, 221. Pevsner may have heard this directly from Wijdeveld, whom he listed as one of his sources in this article. Banham heard the story from André Lurçat.

14. This letter was mentioned by Kief, *Der Einfluss Wrights*, 238, note 312, who kindly provided me with a copy of it. It is published here with the permission of J. Jessurun, Chief Director of the Nederlands Documentatiecentrum voor de Bouwkunst (NDB), Amsterdam.

15. See *Appendix* below for transcription of the letter. It is noteworthy that toward the end of the letter, Le Corbusier stated, "Although I

7. See my remarks on this question in "Romanticism, Rationalism, and the Domino System," in Russell Walden, ed., *The Open Hand: Essays on Le Corbusier*, Cambridge, Mass., 1977, 27, 40.

8. These publications will be referred to hereafter simply as "the 1910 Wasmuth portfolio" and "the 1911 Wasmuth volume." Page references to the 1911 Wasmuth volume refer to the later English edition, *Frank Lloyd Wright, The Early Work*, New York, 1968.

9. I have not been able to find the precise location and dates of this exhibition, either in the literature on Wright or in German architectural journals of the period. According to Robert L. Sweeney (in *Frank Lloyd Wright, An Annotated Bibliography*, Los Angeles, 1978, xxiv), a special edition of the 1911 Wasmuth volume was used as a catalogue for the exhibition.

10. Sweeney, *Wright*, xxiv. See also the cited articles by Pevsner, Hitchcock, and Scully; and Kief, *Der Einfluss Wrights*, 132 and 169–170. Kief also describes Wright's influence on Peter Behrens, which she believes is evident at least as early as 1911.

11. Philip C. Johnson, *Mies van der Rohe*, New York, 1947, 195–196.

12. Ch.-E. Jeanneret, *Etude sur le mouvement d'art décoratif en Allemagne*, La Chaux-de-Fonds, 1912, 6, 35, 42.



Fig. 1. Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, Jeanneret House, La Chaux-de-Fonds, 1912–1913 (Photograph courtesy of Charles Jencks).



Fig. 2. Frank Lloyd Wright, the smaller Martin House (also called Barton House), Buffalo, 1904 (1911 Wasmuth volume, 54).

In his published writings, Le Corbusier did not reveal these impressions that Wright's work had made on him. Indeed, perhaps his only public reference to Wright is in the introduction to the first volume of his *Oeuvre complète* of 1929, in which

knew almost nothing about Wright," ("J'ignorais presque tout de Wright, . . ." [my emphasis]), thus revealing that the episode he was describing had not been his first exposure to Wright or his work.



Fig. 3. Le Corbusier, Stein House, Garches, 1927 (*Oeuvre complète 1910–1929*, 147).

Le Corbusier simply mentioned Wright briefly as a "precursor" of the modern movement, along with Louis Sullivan. But this passage does provide a clue to the nature of his early contact with Wright's work:

One day in 1913, a magazine arrived carrying the works of Frank Lloyd Wright, that precursor and student of Sullivan, an even greater precursor.¹⁶

This magazine must have been the *Schweizerische Bauzeitung*, where Hendrik Berlage published an article in three consecutive issues in September 1912 that constituted the first presentation of Wright's work in a European periodical.¹⁷ The article, entitled "Neuere amerikanische Architektur," was devoted almost wholly to Wright, whose work had impressed Berlage greatly when he was in America the year before. Twenty-three of the 30 illustrations in the article were of buildings by Wright; of the rest, one was a house by a follower of Wright, and three were buildings by Sullivan. Included were illustrations of several of Wright's Prairie Houses (the Coonley, Dana, Martin and

16. "Un jour, en 1913, arriva un magasin apportant les oeuvres de Frank Lloyd Wright, ce précurseur, élève de Sullivan, plus grand précurseur encore" (Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, *Oeuvre complète 1910–1929*, Erlenbach, 1929, 10). Le Corbusier's use of the word "magasin" is somewhat puzzling, as the word normally means "store." But in this context it seems to refer to a periodical magazine. The German translation of Le Corbusier's text that was included in the *Oeuvre complète* interpreted it this way ("Eines Tages, im Jahre 1913, brachte eine Zeitschrift Werke von Frank Lloyd Wright . . ."), although the accompanying English translation implausibly made it a "bookshop" displaying Wright's works. All the historians who have noted this passage have interpreted it as referring to a periodical magazine (von Moos, *Le Corbusier*, 20; Kief, *Der Einfluss Wrights*, 104; Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, 5th ed., Cambridge, Mass., 1971, 426).

17. H. P. Berlage, "Neuere amerikanische Architektur," *Schweizerische Bauzeitung*, LX, 14, 21, 28 September 1912, 148–150, 165–167, 178.

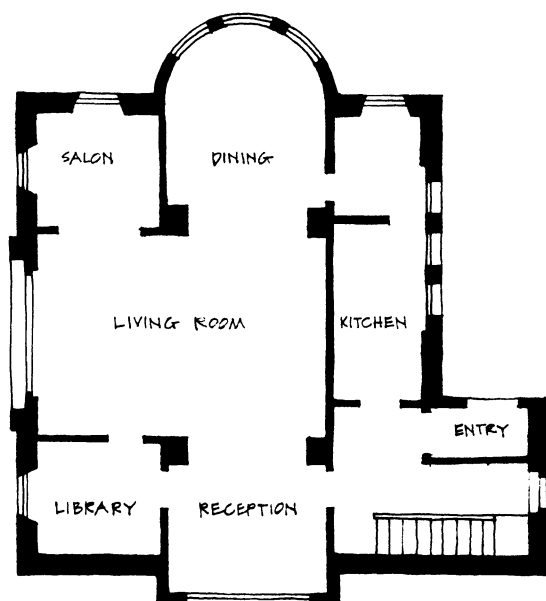


Fig. 4. Jeanneret, plan for Jeanneret House (Redrawn by author).

Thomas houses, the Hardy and Westcott projects, and Wright's own studio), as well as his Larkin Building and Unity Temple. These were no doubt the "reproductions of Wright's houses and an office building" that Le Corbusier recalled in his 1925 letter to Wijdeveld. Berlage also lectured on Wright, in Zurich and elsewhere beginning in March 1912, and Jeanneret reportedly heard one of these lectures.¹⁸

The Designs

Among Jeanneret's designs of the 1910s that reveal the influence of Wright's published work, perhaps the earliest is the house that he designed for his parents after returning to La Chaux-de-Fonds in 1912; it was constructed the following year (Fig. 1). Although this building has been described as deriving from designs by Peter Behrens, such as his Schröder House near Hagen,¹⁹ the house is closer to designs by Wright. It can be compared especially to Wright's smaller Martin House in Buffalo, which was illustrated in Berlage's *Schweizerische Bauzeitung* article of 1912, as well as in both of Wasmuth's publications

18. Banham, *Theory*, 221. Banham tells me that Le Corbusier himself mentioned this to him, in an interview. Sweeney, *Wright*, xxviii, states that Berlage "delivered three speeches in Zurich" on Wright's work. Giedion, *Space*, 426, wrote that Le Corbusier was "directed to Wright through an article which appeared in the *Schweizerische Bauzeitung* in 1912, and which was an extensive résumé by Berlage himself of a lecture he had given in Zurich."

19. Von Moos, *Le Corbusier*, 47; also Willy Boesinger, ed., *Le Corbusier*, New York, 1972, 9. The Jeanneret House is illustrated and described in Jean Petit, *Le Corbusier lui-même*, Paris, 1970, 44, and in Etienne Chavanne and Michel Laville, "Les premières constructions de Le Corbusier," *Werk*, December 1963, 486.

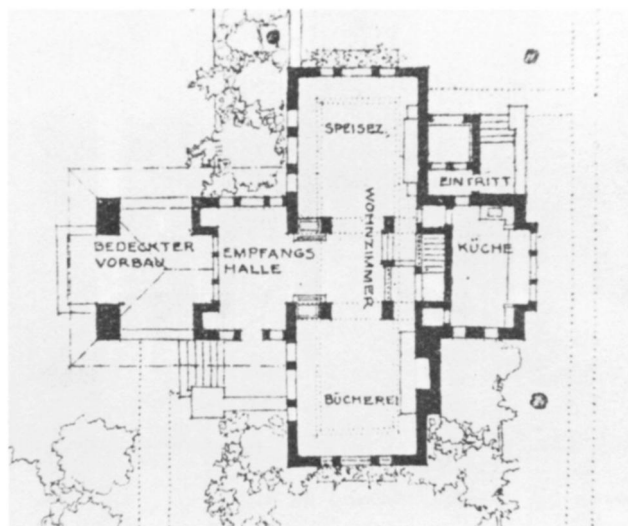


Fig. 5. Wright, smaller Martin House, plan (Berlage, "Neuere amerikanische Architektur," 1912, 149).

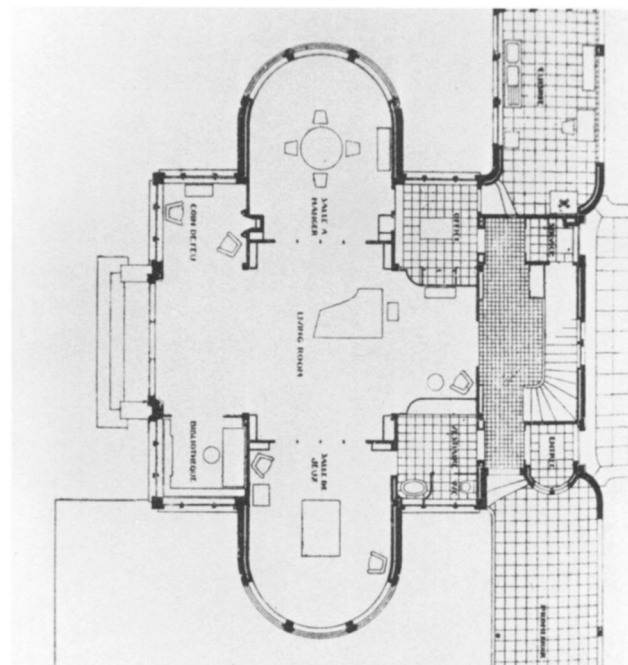


Fig. 6. Jeanneret, Schwob House, La Chaux-de-Fonds, 1916–1917, plan (*L'Esprit Nouveau*, no. 6, 689).

(Fig. 2).²⁰ The proportions of the main façade, the solid lower story punctuated by three windows, and the continuous row of windows right under the broadly projecting roof and extending around the corners are all strikingly similar in the two houses. These elements were among the distinctive features of Wright's

20. The same photograph of this house (also known as the Barton House) is in Berlage's article, plate 35, and in the 1911 Wasmuth volume, 54. A drawing evidently based on this photograph is in the 1910 Wasmuth portfolio, plate XXVI.

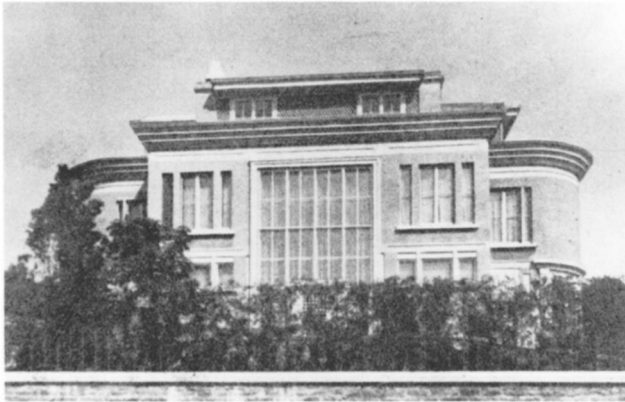


Fig. 7. Jeanneret, Schwob House, garden façade (*L'Esprit Nouveau*, no. 6, 681).

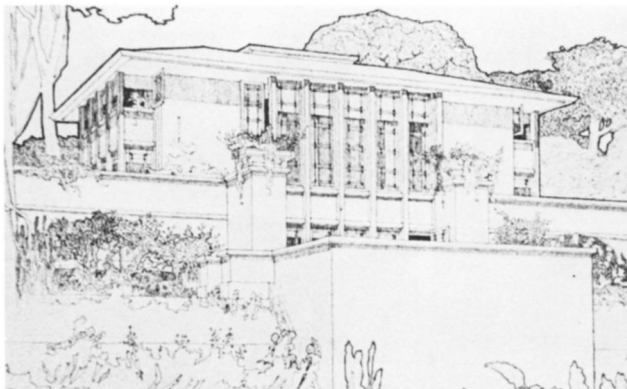


Fig. 8. Wright, Hardy House project (1910 Wasmuth portfolio, pl. XV; pl. 44).

work. Even the un-Wrightian steeply pitched roof of Jeanneret's house was reportedly intended at first to be flat or nearly flat.²¹ Berlage, in his article on Wright, had singled out the smaller Martin House for special praise, and had pointed out the novelty of its forms:

The masonry walls are broken only slightly by windows. In striking contrast, the upper story is distinguished by a continuous row of small windows. . . . When one considers further the low-pitched roof resting unexpectedly right on this story . . . and projecting far beyond the walls, . . . one can imagine what an extraordinary impression this house makes. . . . One can speak of a true originality in these country-houses, and a spontaneous American architecture, because there is nothing of this kind to be seen in Europe.²²

The horizontal row of windows, stretching the entire length of a façade and often even extending around the corners, was

21. Chavanne and Laville, "Les premières constructions," 486. Drawings exist showing that Jeanneret's design for his parents' house went through several stages, the final version being the most Wrightian in character. This accords with the likelihood that Jeanneret saw Berlage's article in late 1912 or early 1913, while he was in the process of designing the house.

22. *Schweizerische Bauzeitung*, 14 September 1912, 150 (my translation).



Fig. 9. Wright, Unity Temple, Oak Park, Illinois, 1906 (Berlage, "Neuere amerikanische Architektur, 1912, pl. 40).

repeated by Jeanneret in other designs of the 1910s, such as a "Domino" house design that he later published in *Vers une architecture* (Fig. 20).²³ In the 1920s he transformed this pattern of fenestration into a continuous window-strip, and it became an essential component of his mature work. In fact he listed it in 1929 as one of his "Five Points of a New Architecture," the "fenêtre en longueur."²⁴ By then, Le Corbusier used this horizontal fenestration very differently from Wright, emphasizing the separation of the wall from the structural system, as seen in the Stein House of 1927 (Fig. 3). Still, Jeanneret's house of 1912–1913 for his parents reveals that the development of this "fenêtre en longueur" was initially aided by his exposure to Wright's work. The Wrightian character of this house is also seen in its plan (Fig. 4), whose principal rooms—living room, dining room, and reception hall—are open to one another and form a T-shaped

Die Mauerflächen sind nur wenig von Fenstern durchbrochen. In wirkungsvollem Gegensatz dazu zeichnet sich das Obergeschoss durch eine geschlossene Reihe von kleinen Fenstern aus. . . . Wenn man dann noch ferner in Betracht zieht, dass das sehr flach geneigte Dach unvermittelt auf diesem Geschoss ruht, und . . . das Dach sehr weit vorspringt, . . . dann kann man sich vorstellen, dass ein solches Haus eine ungemein grosse Anziehungskraft ausübt. . . . Man kann in bezug auf diese Landhäuser . . . doch wohl von Originalität reden und daher von einer ursprünglichen amerikanischen Architektur, indem derartige in Europa doch wohl nicht zu finden ist.

23. *Vers une architecture*, Paris, 1923, 196. Le Corbusier's caption to this illustration states that "les fenêtres font le tour de la maison." The sketch probably dates ca. 1916. Also see a design for apartment houses that Le Corbusier later dated 1920 (*Vers une architecture*, 46).

24. *Oeuvre complète, 1910–1929*, 128. Le Corbusier's "Five Points" ("Les pilotis, les toits-jardins, le plan libre, la fenêtre en longueur, la façade libre") had previously been published in Alfred Roth, *Zwei Wohnhäuser von Le Corbusier und Pierre Jeanneret*, Stuttgart, 1927.

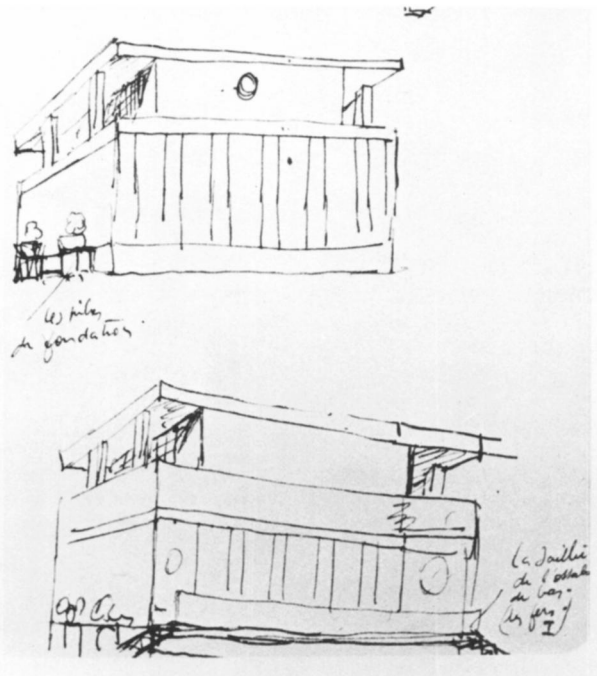


Fig. 10. Jeanneret, designs for concrete houses, ca. 1915 (*Le Corbusier Sketchbooks*, vol. 1, 115).

space, similar to the plan of the smaller Martin House and other designs by Wright illustrated in Wasmuth's publications (Fig. 5).²⁵ Jeanneret fitted small rooms into the corners of the T-shaped space, making the house essentially square, in contrast to Wright's cruciform plan. But the principal space in Jeanneret's house reveals itself by extending beyond the façades, most notably in the semicircular projection of the dining room, an element also found in Wright's published designs, such as the Winslow House.²⁶

About four years after designing his parents' house, Jeanneret used a modified version of its plan for the Schwob House in La Chaux-de-Fonds (Fig. 6); its similarity to Wright's plans has been pointed out by Banham and von Moos.²⁷ In the Schwob House, the Wrightian quality is also pronounced in the spatial character of the major rooms, with a double-story living room open to single-story rooms at the sides. This interior spatial arrangement is expressed in the garden façade (Fig. 7), which recalls Wright's designs for houses with two-story interior spaces, such as the Roberts House and the Hardy House (Fig. 8), il-

25. For example, the plans of the Metzger, Hickox, Willitts, and Henderson houses, illustrated in the 1910 Wasmuth portfolio, plates IX, XXIV, XXV, and XXVII. The Martin House plan is in Berlage, "Neuere amerikanische Architektur," 149; the 1910 Wasmuth portfolio, plates XXXVI and XXXII; and the 1911 Wasmuth volume.

26. The 1910 Wasmuth portfolio, plate III, and the 1911 Wasmuth volume. A similar form is found in the Dana House (1910 Wasmuth portfolio, plate XXXI).

27. Banham, *Theory*, 220; von Moos, *Le Corbusier*, 52.

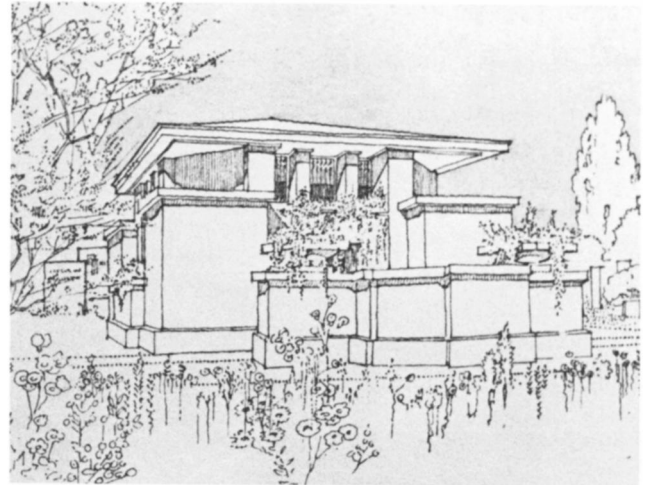


Fig. 11. Wright, design for Petit chapel (1910 Wasmuth portfolio, pl. XLI).

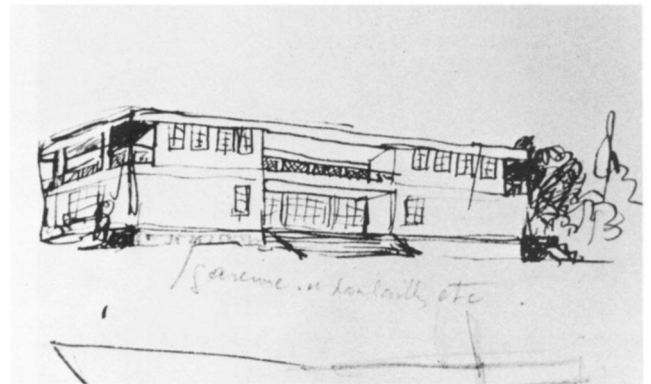


Fig. 12. Jeanneret, design for concrete house, ca. 1915 (*Le Corbusier Sketchbooks*, vol. 1, 116).

lustrated in Berlage's article and the Wasmuth editions.²⁸ This type of double-story space onto which other spaces open from above or below was to become an important element in Le Corbusier's designs of the 1920s, such as the Citrohan House project and the "Esprit Nouveau" apartment prototype. Like the "fenêtre en longueur," its development seems to have been assisted by Wright's published work.

Further evidence of Wright's influence is found in Jeanneret's sketches of the mid- and late 1910s for domestic houses employing his "Domino System" of reinforced concrete construction. Some of these sketches recall Wright's concrete Unity Temple, which was illustrated in Berlage's article (Figs. 9, 10). More specifically, many of Jeanneret's designs are characterized by an unusual feature: a recessed upper story, under a projecting roof aligned with the lower story, giving the impression that a horizontal slice has been made into the cubic mass of the build-

28. These comparisons have been pointed out by Banham, *Theory*, 220; von Moos, *Le Corbusier*, 52; and Kief, *Der Einfluss Wrights*, 140.

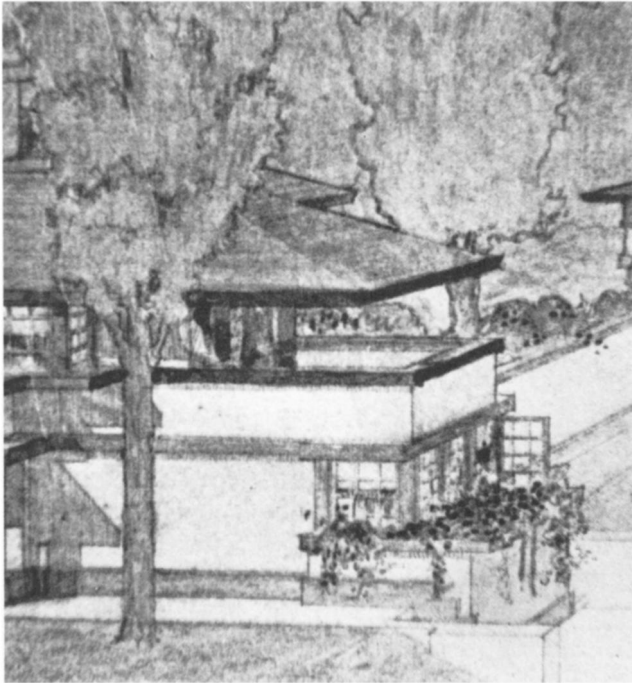


Fig. 13. Wright, drawing of Westcott House project, detail (Berlage, "Neuere amerikanische Architektur, 1912, pl. 44).

ing, just below the roof (Figs. 10, 12, 14). In some cases there are structural columns passing through this "slice," but they are pulled back from the corners of the building, so that the corners are completely open.²⁹ Other sketches by Jeanneret show only the corners removed, either with or without glazing (Fig. 16), and in some cases the "slice" extends uninterrupted across the façade.³⁰ These peculiar plays of mass and void were among the most distinctive features of Wright's Prairie Houses, and can be seen in numerous variations in the Wasmuth publications and in Berlage's article (Figs. 13, 15).³¹ Even Jeanneret's placement of columns or piers, pulled back from the open corners, is found in Wright's designs for the Martin and Coonley houses and the Pettit chapel (Fig. 11).³²

In his "Neuere amerikanische Architektur," Berlage included views of the Coonley House and the Westcott project, in which these "slices" and missing corners are prominent.³³ However, another house he illustrated that had these characteristics was

29. *Le Corbusier Sketchbooks*, vol. I, Cambridge, Mass., 1981, figs. 115 and 116 (from Sketchbook A2, dated 1915). Another design with this feature is illustrated in *Le Corbusier's Oeuvre complète 1910-1929*, 26.

30. See *Oeuvre complète 1910-1929*, 24, 26.

31. For example, the 1910 Wasmuth portfolio, plates XLV (Gale House) and LIII (Westcott House); the 1911 Wasmuth volume, 57 (Willitts House) and 123-124 (Coonley House); Berlage, "Neuere amerikanische Architektur," plates 41 (Coonley House) and 44 (Westcott House).

32. The 1910 Wasmuth portfolio, plate XLI; the 1911 Wasmuth volume, 52, 113; Berlage's 1912 article, plates 41, 44.

33. Berlage, "Neuere amerikanische Architektur," 1912, plates 41, 44.

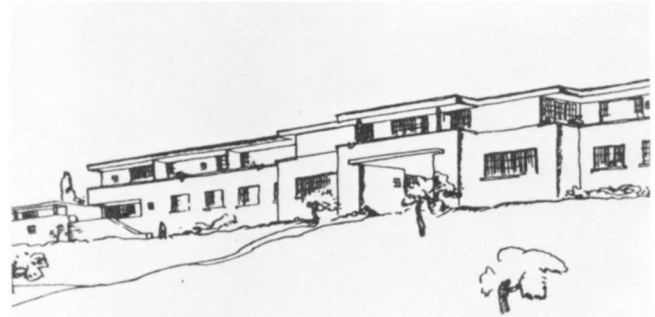


Fig. 14. Jeanneret, design for "Domino" houses, detail (*Vers une architecture*, 190-191).

not by Wright (Fig. 17).³⁴ It is Walter Burley Griffin's Bovee House in Evanston, Illinois, of 1908, although Berlage did not identify it. His caption reads only "Typus eines amerikan. Beton- und Eisenbeton-Hauses" ("A typical American concrete and reinforced concrete house"). This gave the erroneous impression that many of the domestic houses of Wright and his followers were constructed of concrete—especially as it was the only comment in Berlage's article concerning materials or construction. In reality, virtually all of the executed Prairie Houses up to this time were built of traditional materials, even though Wright had designed several houses specifically for reinforced concrete. These included the Bock Studio project and the *Ladies Home Journal* "Fireproof House," both of which were illustrated and described in the 1910 Wasmuth portfolio (Fig. 18).³⁵

Berlage's somewhat misleading implication about the construction of the Prairie Houses suggests one of the reasons that Jeanneret would have been especially interested in Wright's work. Throughout the 1910s, Jeanneret was preoccupied with the idea of using reinforced concrete in domestic architecture, for which he created the "Domino" system of concrete construction. Many of the technical problems he encountered in developing this system resulted from the novelty of reinforced concrete in domestic houses. To the extent that Berlage's article, and even the Wasmuth publications, gave the impression that Wright and his followers were actually building reinforced concrete houses in America, Jeanneret would naturally be drawn to their designs. This is supported by the letter, quoted above, in which he recalled that his first reaction to Wright's buildings was heightened by their innovative use of reinforced concrete.

Moreover, even though Wright's Prairie Houses were not actually executed in reinforced concrete, this material was implied by many of their formal characteristics: cantilevered forms, flat or nearly flat roofs, the removal of horizontal portions of

34. *Ibid.*, 167, fig. 7.

35. The 1910 Wasmuth portfolio, plates XIV, LXII.



Fig. 15. Wright, drawing of Gale House (1910 Wasmuth portfolio, pl. XLV).

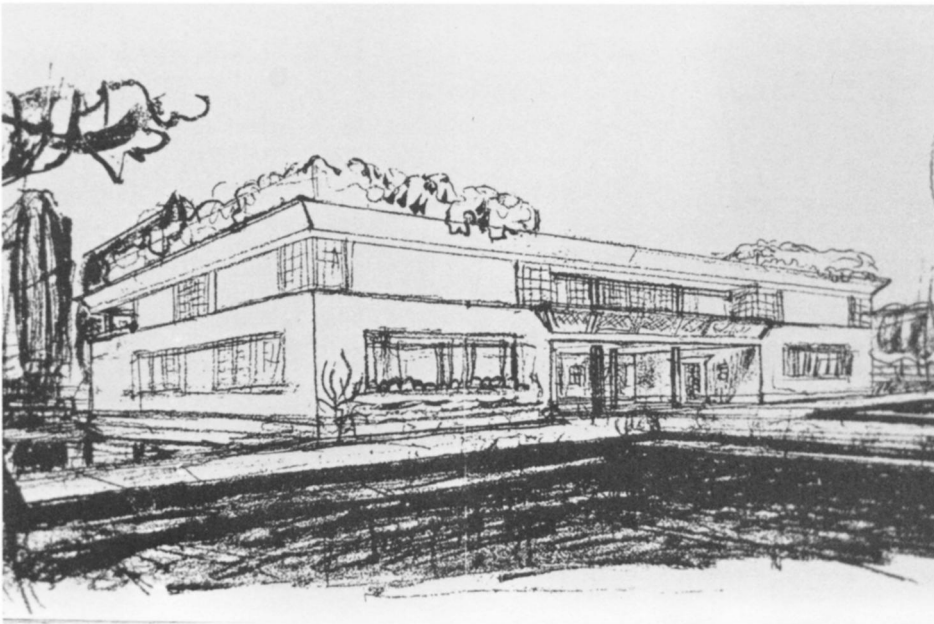


Fig. 16. Jeanneret, design for "Domino" house, ca. 1915 (*Vers une architecture*, 193–194).

walls, the use of relatively slender structural piers, and a generally "plastic" handling of architectural form (a word that Berlage used in his article to describe Wright's houses).³⁶ It was precisely these features of Wright's work that seem to have impressed Jeanneret most and influenced his own designs. Just as Wright's distinctive patterns of fenestration evidently contributed to the development of Le Corbusier's mature work, so

too did the play of mass and void in Wright's houses. The removal of corners and "slices" from the mass of a building can be followed in a continuous progression in Jeanneret's designs of the 1910s, contributing eventually to the free handling of façades in his work of the 1920s (Fig. 19)—an element that he codified as one of his "Five Points," the "façade libre."

Jeanneret's sketches of the 1910s contain still another feature linking them to Wright's work: the incorporation of vegetation into domestic architecture in unconventional ways. In his article,

36. Berlage, "Neuere amerikanische Architektur," 150.

Berlage had described Wright's innovation of extending the walls of a house outward to form boxes for plants, not only on the ground floor but on the upper levels as well.³⁷ Here and in Wasmuth's publications, there are numerous illustrations of Wright's variations on this theme and other types of architectural foliage, such as arbor entry-ways and plantings on flat concrete roofs (Fig. 18).³⁸ Jeanneret's designs for the "Domino" houses similarly incorporate planting, as seen in a sketch for a house with vegetation under the windows of both stories, on the roof, and around an arbor serving as an entry-way (Fig. 20).

37. Ibid.

38. See the 1910 Wasmuth portfolio, plates XIV ("Concrete house for *Ladies Home Journal*") and XXXIII (Larkin Building).

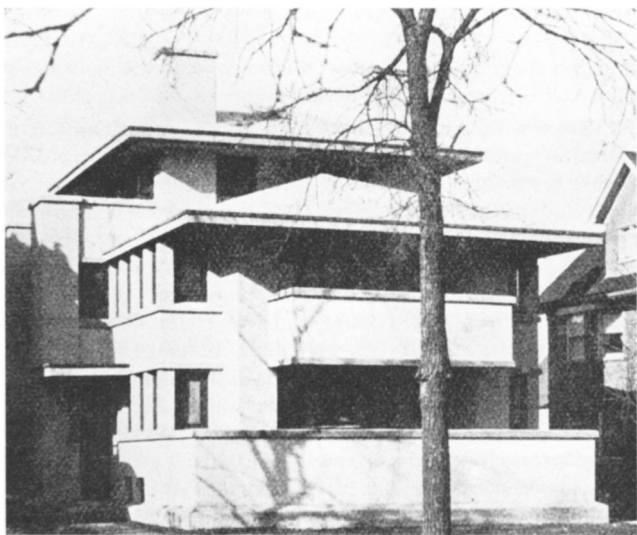


Fig. 17. Walter Burley Griffin, Bovee House, Evanston, Illinois (Berlage, "Neuere amerikanische Architektur," 1912, 167).

This house is also notably Wrightian in its overall proportions and its continuous band of windows extending the full width of the façade and even "around the house," as Le Corbusier pointed out when he later included the design in *Vers une architecture*.³⁹ Architectural vegetation ultimately came to assume a major role in Le Corbusier's work, as in the two-story garden adjacent to each apartment in his "Immeubles-villas" of the 1920s, and his ubiquitous "roof gardens," another of his "Five Points."

Thus Wright's works, as published by Wasmuth and especially by Berlage, seem to have contributed to the evolution of several of the essential components of Le Corbusier's mature architecture. These include the horizontal window, the complex interior spaces that often have differing heights, the incorporation of foliage into architecture, and the plastic manipulation of the mass of a building by removing corners and horizontal "slices" from it. To varying degrees, these characteristics can be associated with four of the "Five Points" that Le Corbusier himself listed as the hallmarks of his work—the horizontal window, free plan, roof garden, and free façade. The appeal of Wright's designs to the young Jeanneret in the 1910s was evidently strengthened by their association with reinforced concrete, which was a particularly appropriate material for these formal innovations. Le Corbusier eventually transformed these elements radically and used them to serve purposes very different from those of Wright. Ironically, Wright himself encouraged the view that Le Corbusier's work had little in common with his own, by his strident attacks on Le Corbusier as the epitome

39. *Vers une architecture*, 196. Le Corbusier's caption to this illustration reads, "Maison 'Domino.' Logement et échoppe. Pas de murs portants; les fenêtres font le tour de la maison."

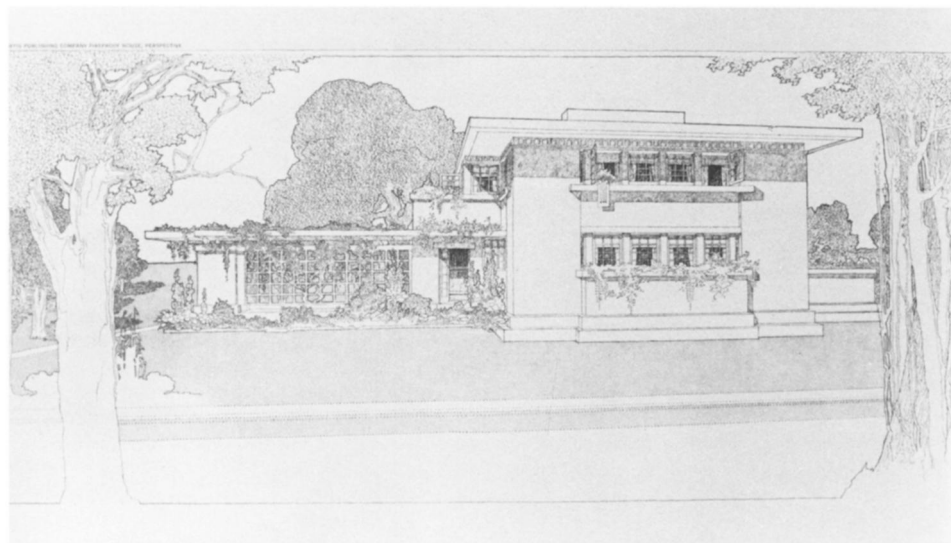


Fig. 18. Wright, "Concrete House for *Ladies Home Journal*" (1910 Wasmuth portfolio, pl. XIV).

of the worst tendencies of mechanistic modernism.⁴⁰ But probably the main reason for the neglect of Wright's influence on Le Corbusier is the fact that Le Corbusier himself—in marked

40. For example, F. L. Wright, *Modern Architecture*, Princeton, 1931, 66, 77, 103, and his review of *Vers une architecture*, *World Unity*, September 1928, 393–395.



Fig. 19. Le Corbusier, Stein House, detail (*Oeuvre complète 1910–1929*, 146).

contrast to Mies—made no public statement of his debt to Wright, or at most simply mentioned him as a “precursor.” Only in his letter of 1925 to Wijdeveld did Le Corbusier suggest the impact that Wright's work actually had on him, noting candidly that “We are all too much in the habit of forgetting quickly those who have been directly helpful to our orientation.”

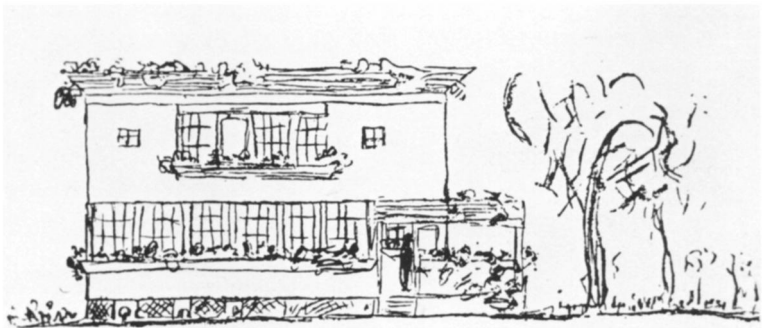


Fig. 20. Jeanneret, design for “Domino” house (*Vers une architecture*, 196).

Appendix: Letter from Le Corbusier to H. T. Wijdeveld

Monsieur Wijdeveld

Cher monsieur—

J'ai reçu votre télégramme ce matin. Je n'avais jamais vu de lettres de vous. Je suis allé 3 rue du Cherche-Midi, à l'ancien domicile de l'Esprit Nouveau, et j'ai en effet trouvé vos deux lettres du 25 juin et du 21 juillet. Que de retard! J'en suis désolé.

Je vais répondre sans retard à votre question concernant l'oeuvre de Wright. Ma réponse est courte et vous comprendrez pourquoi:

C'est vers 1914 ou 1915 (?) [sic] que j'ai vu pour la première fois des reproductions de villas de Wright et d'une maison de bureaux. Depuis je n'ai jamais vu autre chose. [Sentence begun and crossed out] Toutefois des amis de Prague m'avaient promis un jour, un album de l'oeuvre de Wright; [word crossed out] et cet album ne m'est pas parvenu. Vous voyez donc que je manque de références pour écrire sur cette question. Mais ceci ne m'empêche pas d'affirmer que la vue des quelques villas de 1914 m'avait fortement impressionné. J'ignorais totalement qu'il peut y avoir en Amérique une manifestation d'architecture si épurée et si novatrice. On sentait dans les plans de Wright la bonne école de l'Ecole des Beaux Arts d'ici, c'est-à-dire, une inclination vers l'ordre, vers l'or-

ganisation, vers une création de pure architecture. Cela contrastait fortement à ce moment avec les accès du régionalisme accidenté, avec cette maladie envahissante et paradoxale de l'esprit moderne s'inclinant vers les vieux villages coquets ou pourris construits tant bien que mal avec un outillage élémentaire. Wright ordonnait et il s'imposait en architecte. Mais de plus, ses coupes et ses façades faisaient état du ciment armé. A ce moment-là, c'était un titre. Or Wright, l'un des premiers à ma connaissance, désignait les solutions architecturales de béton armé. D'autres employaient le béton armé sans découvrir son rythme essentiel, lui affirmait l'horizontale, apport merveilleux du ciment armé et valeur architecturale de premier ordre.

J'ignorais presque tout de Wright, je me souviens toutefois nettement du choc que produisait sur moi ces villas spirituelles et souriantes . . . d'un rire japonais.

Le livre que vous projetez me paraît un heureux événement. Nous avons tous trop l'habitude d'oublier vite ceux qui ont été directement utiles à notre orientation. Un livre qui révèle l'oeuvre d'une vie, rétablit ses droits à la vérité.

Croyez cher monsieur à mes sentiments les meilleurs. Je serai heureux de vous voir à votre prochain passage à Paris.

C E Jeanneret

le 5 août 1925