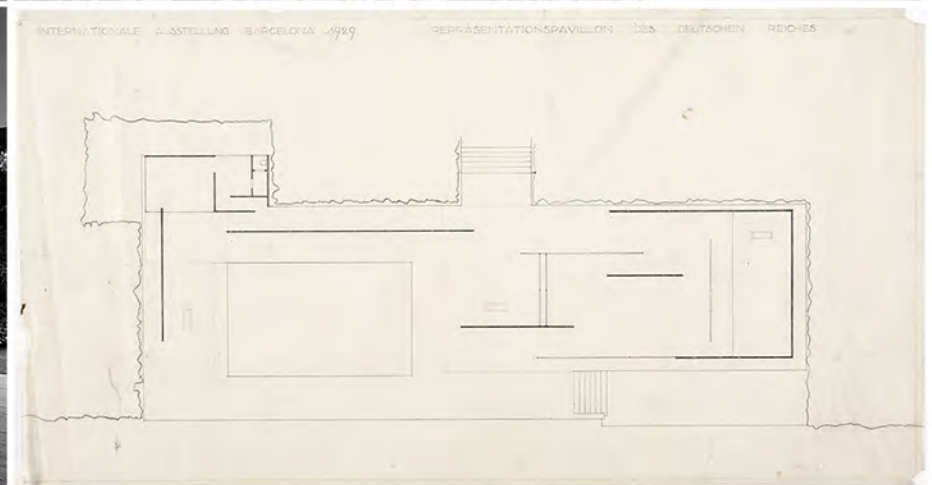
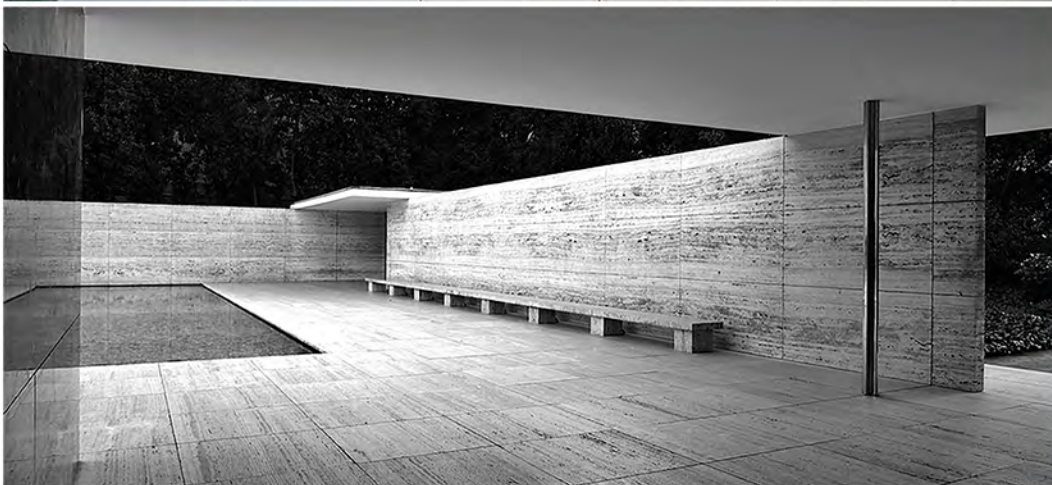


## Task 1

## The Barcelona Pavilion

Mies van der Rohe 1929

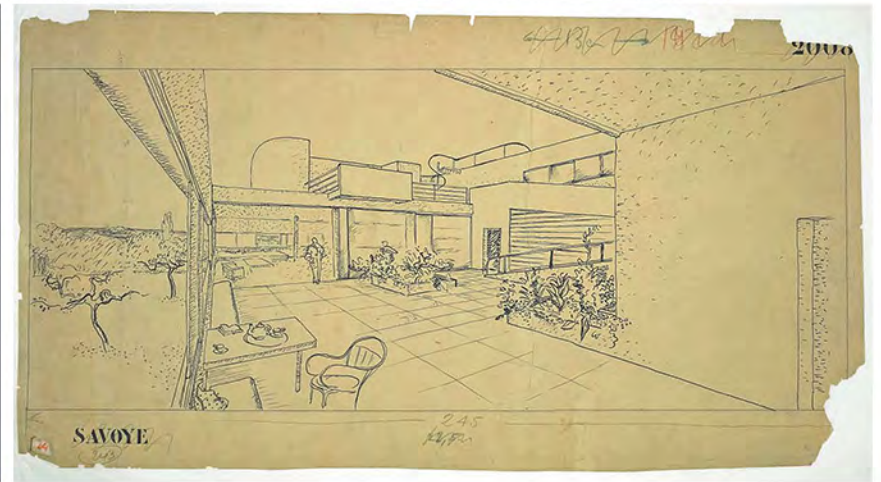
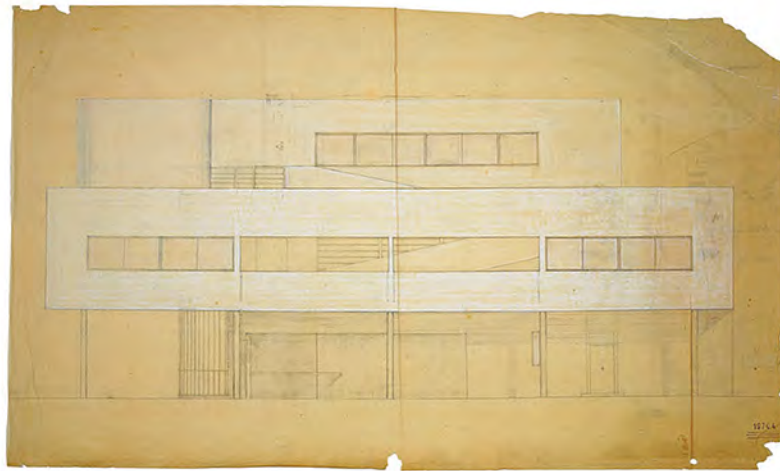




Task 1

Villa Savoye

Le Corbusier 1929



## Task 1 - text one

### The International Style and the Myth of Functionalism <sup>1</sup>

#### The Barcelona Pavilion

'It is a paradox of great works of art that they should announce with unparalleled force the values of a new outlook while simultaneously invoking at a deep level, the values which informed classic moments in the past. This is another reason why it is never adequate to characterise a work merely in terms of a style phase linked to other works of art contemporary with it. Focillon has suggested that 'the time that gives support to a work of art does not give definition either to its principle or to its specific form.' This shrewd observation seems specially pertinent to two masterworks of the international style: the Villa Savoye at Poissy by Le Corbusier, and the Barcelona Pavilion by Mies van der Rohe, both of 1929.

...As a demonstration of the power of modern structural invention to create unprecedented spatial effects, the building was a *tour de force*. The thin roof slab was poised delicately on eight cruciform steel supports coated in chrome, a conception recalling the Dom-ino skeleton (Le Corbusier 1914-15), but only a single storey in height. In this context the structural frame was far from being a low-cost instrument of standardisation; it was clad in expensive materials - marble and onyx veneers, semi-reflecting glass, sharp-edged stainless steel. This simple trabeated and symmetrical structure was placed to one end of a raised podium and carefully composed to relate to two rectangular pools, which added further to the sense of luxury and the feeling of dematerialisation through reflections. A counterpoint was set in motion by shifting the axis of the main pool off that of the rectangular pavilion, and this visual movement was carried through in the way vertical planar partitions were set down, some within the covered space, others extending into the surroundings, all of them independent of the grid of supports. Thus, while some of them actually bore weight, the *idea* expressed was of the independence of wall planes from traditional supporting roles. Joints and details in the fabric were carefully controlled so as not to disturb a taut, weightless character in most of the surfaces'.

<sup>1</sup> Curtis, William J. R. Modern Architecture since 1900. Oxford, Phaidon. Ch.13, P183-185

For your reference the full text that these paragraphs were taken from including photographs and drawings is included in this pdf

## Task 1 - text two

### The Image and Idea of Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye at Poissy <sup>2</sup>

#### Villa Savoye

Architecture embraces not just three dimensions but four. It is by its nature involved with time and change. We grasp the form of a building gradually as we move towards it and through it, comparing scenographic incidents one with another, and incorporating them into a growing sense of the whole. The same building seems ever different under changing conditions of weather and light, as values of silhouette, shape and depth are played down or accentuated. These qualities of movement and change lie near the heart of the Villa Savoye's conception. Thus a description of the building is best conducted as a sort of promenade.

... The first impression is of a horizontal white box, poised on *pilotis*, set off against the rustic surroundings, the far panorama and the sky. The driveway passes through the undercroft, circles the building beneath the overhang and re-emerges to return to the road on the left hand side. The main first-level box is surmounted by curved volumes just visible to the rear. Bit by bit one gathers that the villa is not as detached as it first appeared. It is sculpted and hollowed to allow the surroundings to enter it, and its formal energies emanate to the borders of the site.

The main 'facade' is somewhat blank and forbidding and gives the impression (later to be disproved) of a completely symmetrical building, rooted to the ground in its middle part. The strong horizontal emphasis is supplied by the overall shape, the single strip window running from one end to the other of the (main) upper level, and the repeated horizontals of the factory glazing at the lower level (hiding the mundane functions of servants' and chauffeur's quarters). The predominant verticals at this stage are the ranks of cylindrical *pilotis* receding on each side behind the suggested facade plane: they supply an airy sense of lightness'.

<sup>2</sup> Curtis, William J. R. Modern Architecture since 1900. Oxford, Phaidon. Ch.13, P186-187

For your reference the full text that these paragraphs were taken from including photographs and drawings is included in this pdf

These tasks will form the basis of the conversation at your interview,

## Task 1

Presented here are two seminal works from the early modern period, the Barcelona Pavilion by Mies van der Rohe and Villa Savoye by Le Corbusier, both of 1929. Curtis introduces the idea that great works of art transcend their time. He then goes on to describe the dematerialisation, the *idea* of the independence of the wall planes and 'a taut, weightless character in most of the surfaces'. In the second text Curtis talks of Villa Savoye in terms of being 'sculpted and hollowed to allow the surroundings to enter it' and of 'an airy sense of lightness'. Reflect on these two texts and how these spatial qualities are described in the drawings and the photographs. Write 300 words on your observations having read the texts and studied the drawings and photographs.

## Task 2

Come prepared to discuss the work of 5 architects that you admire. Which particular buildings of these architects interest you and why? What are the particular qualities of these buildings that interest you?

## Task 3

Architects are informed by the world around them, which books, journals or magazines inform your world? What are the references that inform your world?

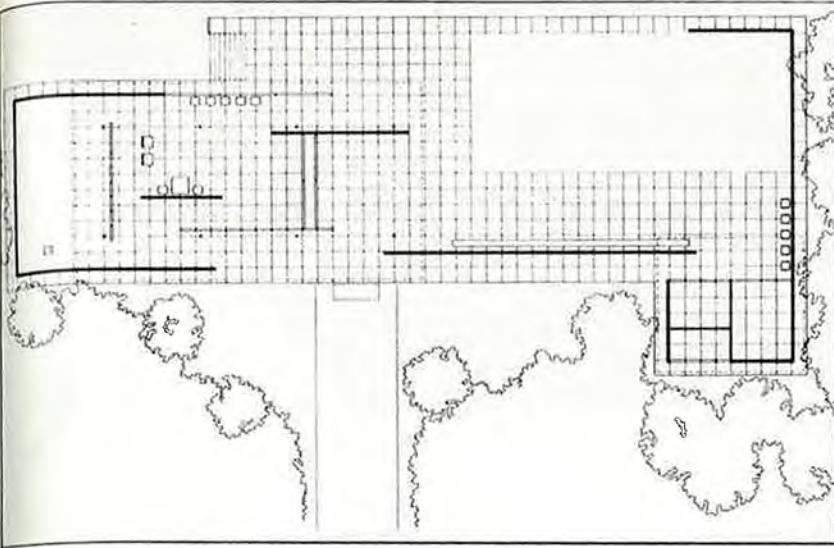
# Modern Architecture since 1900

William J R Curtis

Phaidon, Oxford  
1<sup>st</sup> Edition 1982

The reason for using the first edition is that subsequent editions were revised and the text became less poetic





It is a paradox of great works of art that they should announce with unparalleled force the values of a new outlook while simultaneously invoking at a deep level, the values which informed classic moments in the past. This is another reason why it is never adequate to characterize a work merely in terms of a style phase linked to other works of art contemporary with it. Focillon has suggested that 'the time that gives support to a work of art does not give definition either to its principle or to its specific form.' This shrewd observation seems specially pertinent to two master-works of the International Style: the Villa Savoye at Poissy by Le Corbusier, and the Barcelona Pavilion by Mies van der Rohe, both of 1929.

The latter was built as a temporary structure at the Barcelona exhibition of that year, and had the honorific function of representing the cultural values of modern Germany (figs. 13.13, 13.14, 13.15). Mies wrote revealingly of the task:









The era of monumental expositions that make money is past. Today we judge an exposition by what it accomplishes in the cultural field.

Economic, technical and cultural conditions have changed radically. It is very important for our culture and our society, as well as for technology and industry, to find good solutions. German industry, and indeed, European industry as a whole must understand and solve these specific tasks. The path must lead from quantity towards quality, from the extensive to the intensive.

Along this path industry and technology will join with the forces of thought and culture.

Evidently the pavilion was supposed to have an ambassadorial function and to reflect values not unlike those which had informed the Deutscher Werkbund before the First World War. One is not surprised to discover that Mies van der Rohe's design embodied a deliberate synthesis of form and technique, of modern and Classical values. As a demonstration of the power of modern structural invention to create unprecedented spatial effects, the building was a *tour de force*. The thin roof slab was poised delicately on eight cruciform steel supports coated in chrome, a conception recalling the Dom-ino skeleton, but only a single storey in height. In this context the structural frame was far from being a low-cost instrument of standardization; it was clad in expensive materials — marble and onyx veneers, semi-reflecting glass, sharp-edged stainless steel. This simple trabeated and symmetrical structure was placed to one end of a raised podium and carefully composed to relate to two rectangular pools, which added further to the sense of luxury and the feeling of dematerialization through reflections. A counterpoint was set in motion by shifting the axis of the main pool off that of the rectangular pavilion, and this visual movement was carried through in the way vertical planar partitions were set down, some within the covered space, others extending into the surroundings, all of them independent of the grid of supports. Thus, while some of them actually bore weight, the *idea* expressed was of the independence of wall planes from traditional supporting roles. Joints and details in the fabric were carefully controlled so as not to disturb a taut, weightless character in most of the surfaces.

The visual pushes and pulls engendered by the irregular placement of the partitions corresponded with the meandering path that the visitor took through the interior. This was furnished with heavy leather chairs supported by criss-cross stainless steel flanges coated in chrome ('Barcelona chairs'). Otherwise the space was completely uncluttered, a demonstration, perhaps, of a new way of life, supposed to have a special

appeal to the cultivated industrial élite. Recalling the Deutscher Werkbund Pavilion of 1914, there was a Classical contemporary female statue by one of the Pavilion pools: it made an odd touch alongside the rectangular rigours of Mies's machine-age fantasy, but it was a further reminder that the building as a whole was guided by a Classical sense.

In terms of Mies van der Rohe's evolving vocabulary, the form of the Pavilion was a synthesis of the sort of pivotal plan he had experimented with in the brick villa of 1923, with the hovering horizontal slabs and grid structures he had envisaged in his office block project of 1922. In the intervening seven years he had had the opportunity to test variations of his ideas — in the Rosa Luxemburg monument of 1924, in the Weissenhof designs of 1925–7, and in the superbly proportioned Krefeld house of 1927–8. The Barcelona Pavilion accumulated all these discoveries into a single statement, which did not, however, suffer from the overburdening of ideas. In the mind of its creator, perhaps, the Pavilion may have been the purest embodiment of the *Zeitgeist*. For Mies van der Rohe the most significant spiritual artifacts were those which translated 'the will of the epoch into space'.

But the Pavilion, like the Schroeder House, the Bauhaus buildings or Le Corbusier's villas, was also an elegant solution to broader, shared problems of expression of the period. Historians have rightly drawn attention to the similarity of the plan to Mondrian's paintings; to the 'factuality' of the materials employed (relating Mies to the 'New Objectivity'); to the simplicity of the wall surfaces recalling Berlage's pleas for well-proportioned surfaces unadorned from top to bottom; to the novelty and richness of the space conception with its floating planes and painterly illusions and ambiguities. It is entirely understandable, then, that Hitchcock and Johnson should have singled out the building as an exemplar of the International Style.

Yet the roots of Mies van der Rohe's master-work seem to lie deeper than this in history. Attention has already been drawn to the architect's early admiration for Schinkel, manifest particularly in his neo-classical designs of the pre-First World War years. It was the reduction of form to the most expressive simple geometries which most excited him about his great Prussian predecessor. Surely one recognizes a similar concentration on essentials of Classicism in the Barcelona Pavilion, especially in its impeccable proportions, its sense of repose, and its restatement in abstract form of the elemental column and entablature. In this way the simplifications of the International Style were capable of blending an imagery of contemporary concerns with a reminiscence of architecture's most enduring values.





# 14. The Image and Idea of Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye at Poissy

To make a plan is to determine and fix ideas.

It is to have had ideas.

It is to so order these ideas that they become intelligible, capable of execution and communicable.

... A plan is to some extent like an analytical contents table. In a form so condensed that it seems as clear as a crystal and like a geometrical figure, it contains an enormous quantity of ideas and the impulse of an intention.

Le Corbusier, 1923

The last chapter examined the validity of the notion of the 'International Style' and found it strong in some respects, weak in others. It seems that the early apologists of modern architecture were over-preoccupied with defining a supra-historical identity for the style and were not sufficiently attentive to individual and personal intentions. There was a broadly shared language of expression in the 1920s in certain countries of Western Europe and part of the United States, but this was only one of a number, and the most interesting works conceived within it were so individual as to remain uncategorizable.

Beyond even the individual architectural language of the artist there is another level which has to be grasped if the inner meaning of a new tradition is to be understood. This lies in the special intellectual chemistry of the classic work. Here one is interested in the way the problems of a particular context have been solved, and in the manner in which an individual work of art extends both the personal themes of an artist and the broader preoccupations of a period. In this case the Villa Savoye at Poissy of 1928-9 by Le Corbusier has been singled out for monographic scrutiny. For, like the Barcelona Pavilion, the Villa 'contains an enormous quantity of ideas' and splices together concerns of its own time and perennial values of the architectural art. To probe into its underlying meanings is necessarily to enter still further Le Corbusier's patterns of thinking in his early maturity.

Architecture embraces not just three dimensions, but four. It is by its nature involved with time and change. We grasp the form of a building gradually as

we move towards it and through it, comparing scenographic incidents one with another, and incorporating them into a growing sense of the whole. The same building seems ever different under changing conditions of weather and light, as values of silhouette, shape, and depth are played down or accentuated. These qualities of movement and change lie near the heart of the Villa Savoye's conception. Thus a description of the building is best conducted as a sort of promenade.

The Villa Savoye (also known evocatively as 'Les Heures Claires') stands about twenty miles north-west of Paris on the outskirts of the small town of Poissy, on a site bordered by trees on three sides, yet with a long view beyond the fourth towards the softly rolling fields and valleys of the Île de France. Perhaps one arrives by car, in which case one leaves the road and passes by a small white cubic gate lodge which guards the entrance to the drive. The gravel way turns slowly into the trees, its destination mysterious. Then one catches the first view of the villa standing fifty yards away towards the centre of a field.

The first impression is of a horizontal white box, poised on *pilotis*, set off against the rustic surroundings, the far panorama and the sky. The driveway passes through the undercroft, circles the building beneath the overhang, and re-emerges to return to the road on the left-hand side. The main first-level box is surmounted by curved volumes just visible to the rear. Bit by bit one gathers that the villa is not as detached as it first appeared. It is sculpted and hollowed to allow the surroundings to enter it, and its formal energies





14.1 Le Corbusier, 'Les Heures Claires', the Villa Savoye at Poissy, 1928-9, axonometric sketch showing relationship of roof terrace to sun and the processional character of automobile approach.

14.2 Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, 1928-9, exterior view.



emanate to the borders of the site (figs. 14.1, 14.2).

The main 'façade' is somewhat blank and forbidding and gives the impression (later to be disproved) of a completely symmetrical building, rooted to the ground in its middle part. The strong horizontal emphasis is supplied by the overall shape, the single strip window running from one end to the other of the (main) upper level (fig. 14.3), and the repeated horizontals of the factory glazing at the lower level (hiding the mundane functions of servants' and chauffeur's quarters). The predominant verticals at this stage are the ranks of cylindrical *pilotis* receding on each side behind the suggested façade plane: they supply an airy sense of lightness.

The approach to the building has a curious quality of ritual, as if one were being drawn without choice into some Corbusian machine-age ceremony. The car passes beneath the overhang as a forceful reminder of a guiding point of the artist's doctrine. The entrance is





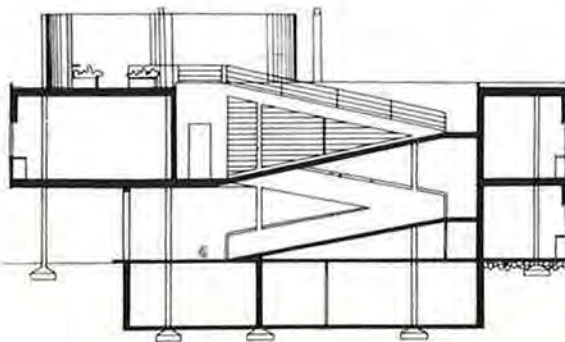
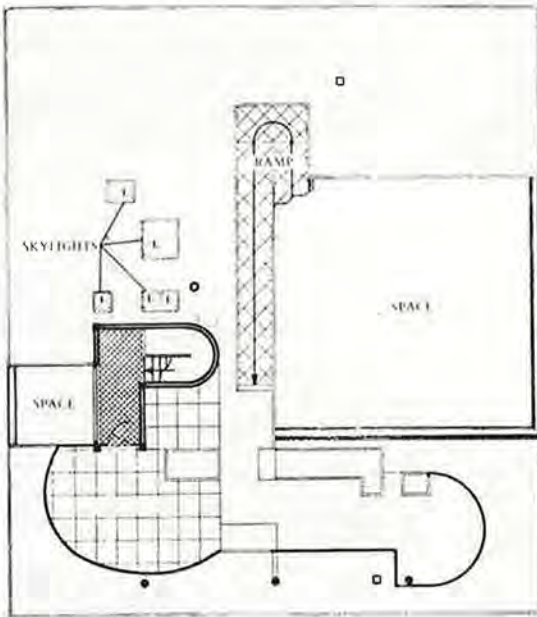
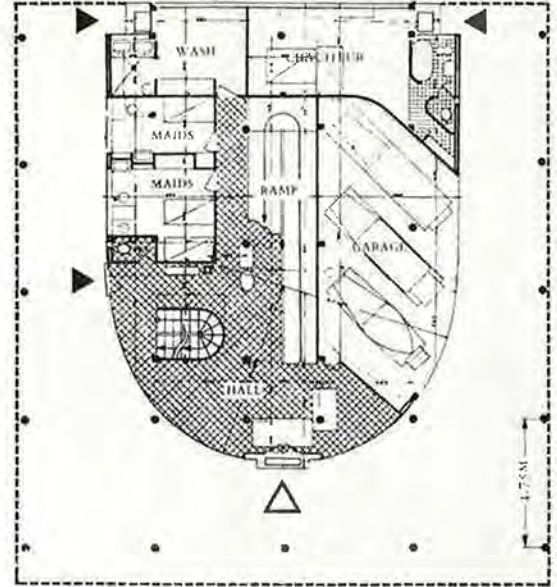
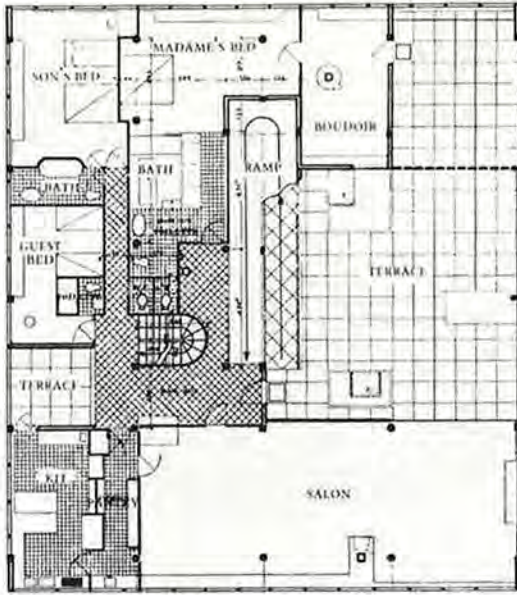


14.3 Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, 1928–9, view towards entrance.



14.4 Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, 1928–9, interior view towards entrance with wash basin in hall in foreground and ramp to left.





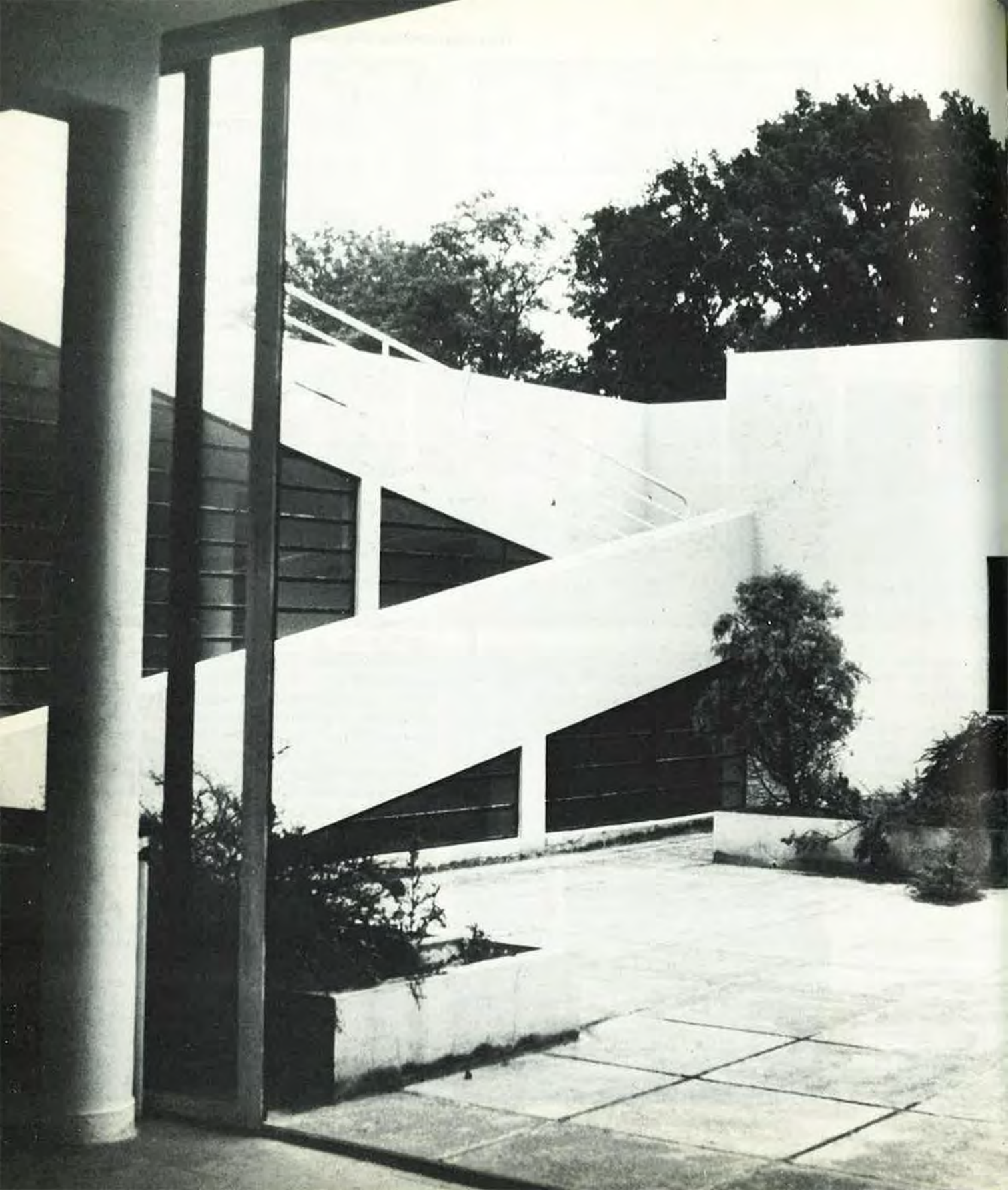
found at the apex of a curve formed by the glazed lower level. A chauffeur is assumed, and as one is put down on the main axis, the car continues to follow the curve, then to slide in diagonally beneath the rectangular superstructure.

One passes through the main doors into the vestibule, a space defined by curved glass surfaces to either side. The main choices are clear. Straight ahead a ramp passes along the main axis of the building to the upper levels. To the left is a spiral stair linking the servants' zone to the world above. Ahead and slightly to the left is the hall leading to the chauffeur's quarters, a wash-basin standing mysteriously in it (fig. 14.4). The surfaces are brittle and smooth, the atmosphere clinical. The space is set about with the pure forms of cylindrical *pilotis*. Those near the door are grouped to form a sort of portico and – a subtle touch – one of them is made square in plan to correspond to the corner of an interior wall flanking the other side of the base of the ramp. Another refined detail catches the eye: the small white tiles in the floor are laid out on the diagonal, and effect a subtle link between the various curved and rectangular geometries.

The ramp is the very spine of the idea: in plan it stands on the axis and passes between the grid of *pilotis* (not so regularly spaced as one might at first imagine); in section it suggests a dynamic passage through the horizontal floor slabs, bringing with it a gradual expansion of space the higher one goes. The plan of the building is square, one of the ideal shapes which the architect so admired, and part of the richness of the Villa Savoye comes from the dynamics of curved forms within a stable perimeter (fig. 14.5). The ramp guides the 'promenade architecturale' and links the various

14.5 Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, 1928-9, plans and longitudinal section of final scheme, 1929: (top right) ground floor plan; (top) first floor plan; (centre) roof level plan; (bottom) longitudinal section.









14.6 (left) Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, 1928-9, view from salon on main, first-floor level, towards the roof terrace and the ramp.

14.7 (right) Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, 1928-9, view up last leg of ramp towards solarium.

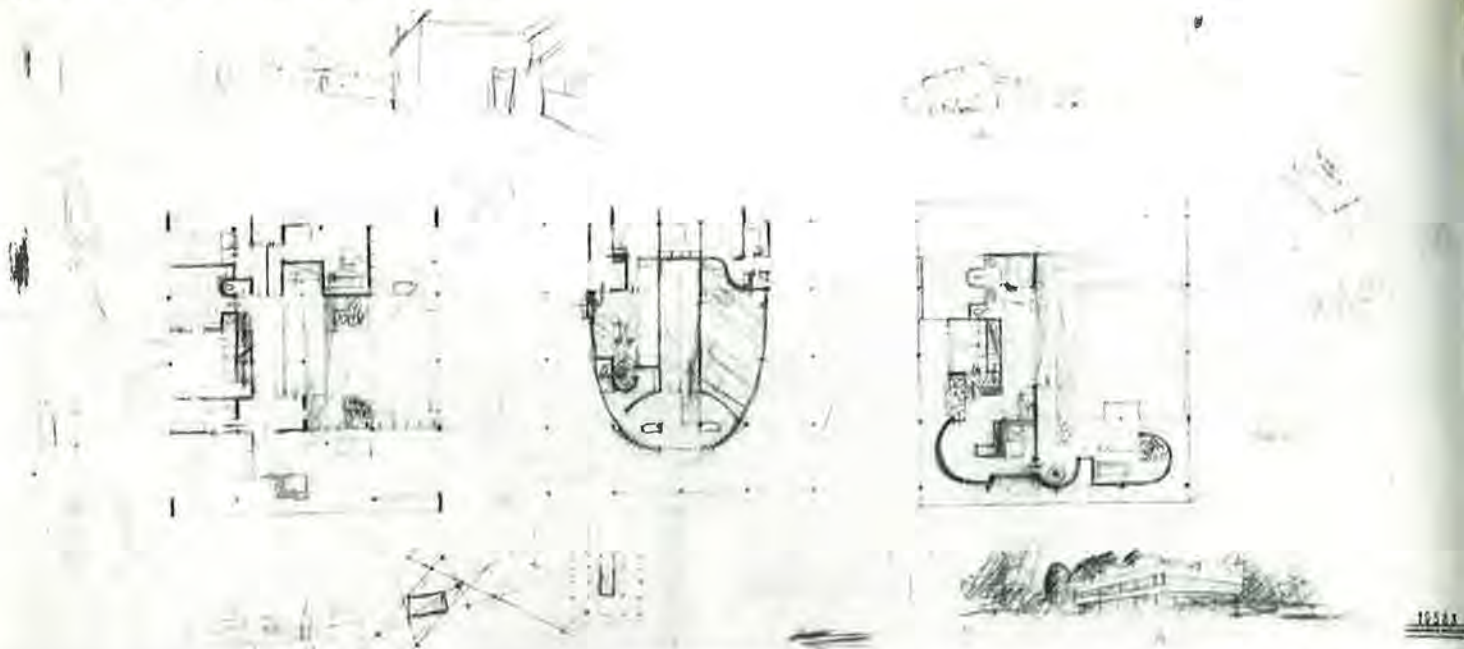
events: in turn it supplies an ennobling, almost ceremonial character of ascent.

After turning back on its original direction, the ramp emerges on the first floor, the main living level of the house (as at Garches, a *piano nobile*) where the most formal and most public spaces are situated. They stand around the roof terrace, a sort of outdoor room concealed from the exterior by a uniform strip window without glass. This catches the sun at all times of the day (it faces in a southerly direction) and helps to fill the house with light. The biggest room is the salon (fig. 14.6) with large glazing giving straight on to the terrace with a strip window facing the best view, that of the distant hills, to the north-west. To the other two sides of the roof terrace are the more 'private' areas: the kitchen (in the corner) with its own tiny terrace; the guest bedroom; Madame Savoye's bedroom, boudoir, and bathroom; and her son's bedroom and bathroom. The Villa Savoye was not an all-the-year home, but a sort of country retreat or summer weekend residence – a villa in the ancient tradition, where the well-to-do might retire and enjoy the greenery and fresh air of the countryside. Among other curiosities on the main level are the fireplace in the salon expressed as a free-standing stack, and a blue-tiled reclining seat next to the main bathroom, suggesting something of both Madame Savoye's and Le Corbusier's obsessive interest in cleanliness and athleticism.

The related themes of health, fresh air, sunlight, and intellectual clarity are reinforced as one continues up the ramp to the topmost level, again making a return at a middle level landing. The floor of the ramp is finished in paving laid on a diagonal to reinforce the sense of movement, in contrast to the orthogonal details of analogous flagstones on the main terrace. It is in these upper regions that the artist's nautical fantasies are felt most vividly, especially in the delicate tubular 'ship's' railings, and the curious stack containing the top of spiral stair. This is a relative of other cylinders in the composition; the spiral stair can be seen 'peeling' away below it behind liquidly dark and semi-transparent areas of glazing. As at Garches, and in Le Corbusier's paintings, the richness of the effect comes from the harmony and similarity of basic geometrical forms, from the control of proportion and ratio, and from effects of illusion whereby objects are glimpsed through layers of glass or through windows cut clean through the plainest of white surfaces. Ambiguity constantly reinforces visual tension (Plate 7).

The final slope of the ramp ascends towards the solarium (fig. 14.7) – seen first from the outside as a hovering curved volume, but from this position, a thin strip-like plane – with a small window cut clean into it. It is this which now holds the attention, a rectangle of blue sky and passing clouds, seen in an entirely monochrome surround. As one draws level with it, one





has the breathtaking view of the distant valleys which captured the attention in the very first approach. Then the building was seen surrounded by the setting; now the setting is framed by the building. The adequate provision of greenery was a central part of Le Corbusier's machine-age mythology. At the Villa Savoye nature is celebrated as dramatically as the idea of the house as a *machine à habiter* or the processional theme of the car, by means of carefully orchestrated views of trees and grass. The vignettes of the exterior have an almost super-real intensity, as if the artist has clipped bits of the outside world and spliced them together in a collage.

If the Villa Savoye draws together a number of earlier Le Corbusier themes, it also reveals the continuation of earlier formal experiments. In *Vers une architecture* he had referred to the idea of setting down 'standards' and then, through a gradual process of experiment and refinement, 'perfecting' them by paring them down to their most essential characteristics. He claimed that this had occurred between Paestum and the Parthenon. In a sense one may see the Villa Savoye as a culmination of a similar path of refinement but telescoped into the single decade of the 1920s. The propositions of the Maison Citrohan, the principles of the 'five points of a new architecture', the proposals of *Vers une architecture*, the suggestions of the various intermediary schemes (e.g., Maison Cook, the unrealized Maison Meyer, Villa Stein) were ennobled, dignified, and simplified to an extreme degree. One is bound to say that the Villa Savoye, like the Robie House, like certain of Palladio's mature villas,

represents a high point of expression within a vocabulary of type forms.

When the architect was first approached with the commission in 1928, Le Corbusier had at last achieved his synthesis; he was a mature architect of the highest order. It is intriguing to speculate on his possible initial responses to Madame Savoye's suggestions for a country house and to a site which was not, for once, hemmed in by other buildings. It is tempting to speculate that he was intrigued by the possibility of weaving his own fantasy of modern life around a sort of ritualistic celebration of his client's high bourgeois habits – the arrival by car, the 'ablutions' in the chauffeur's hall, the companion stair for the servants, the ramp for the initiated or the well-to-do. One guesses, too, that Le Corbusier must have immediately realized that this site gave him the possibility of making a sculpture in the round – rather than a building with a single façade like Maison Cook, or a front and back like the Villa Stein at Garches.

Unfortunately, the evidence of Le Corbusier's sketches for the Villa Savoye is incomplete, patchy, and not firmly dated. It seems that there were about three different schemes between October 1928 and April 1929. As was often the case in his design processes, some ideas which emerged early were later discarded, only to be picked up again and reincorporated into the final project: for the earliest sketches are in fact quite close to the finished building. Among the intermediary explorations was one of an almost neo-classical formality with a symmetrical box protruding behind the screens of the façade (fig. 14.9); and another

14.8 Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, development sketches on a single sheet, late 1928 (Fondation Le Corbusier no. 19583). Note that part of the curved upper level is given to Madame Savoye's quarters.