

Le Corbusier

The Complete Buildings

CEMAL EMDEN

Edited by Burcu Kütükçüoğlu

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Five Points in Miniature

PEDRO BANDEIRA

It is very rare to see this little modernist object designed by Le Corbusier, from the entrance of Villa Savoye, photographed or published. With a surface area of about 35 square metres, the so-called Gardener's House (Loge du Jardinier) is almost always ignored, overshadowed by the exuberance and appeal of the villa.

With an unquestionable formal coherence, Le Corbusier applied in this small home four of the Five Points that he advocated for modern architecture: the pilotis, the free plan, the free facade and the horizontal window, leaving out only the roof garden – a leisure that the gardener was, ironically, denied.

The commonality of principles between the two houses mirrors a willingness of modern architecture to be accessible and transversal from an economic and social point of view. However, in the particular case of this villa, the contrast between the scale and programme of the houses is abysmal. This comparison would be totally unnecessary if Le Corbusier had not designed this object as a small replica of Villa Savoye.

This formal dependency on the main house relegates the Gardener's House to the background, to a level of mere representation or image. The Gardener's House is not a house but an image of a house. And indeed, the plan is too small to be free, the columns too close to the walls to be released or to release the facade, and its horizontal window, although generous, is nonetheless single.

The two things that interest me in Cemal Emden's photograph of the Gardener's House are almost contradictory. The first is the fact that this house does not look inhabited or attempt to appear so. The opaque glass surface of the window betrays nothing. There are no curtains, potted flowers or light inside. The only thing that seems alive in this house is a surveillance camera, pointed in an uncertain direction (one wonders if it is looking for an owner, or perhaps some affection). The second is the dignity that the photograph attaches to this subject. The correction of perspective, ensuring vertical alignments, makes a higher volume of a lighter house, suggesting a willingness to rise and perhaps leave.

I am interested in the brief attention and exclusivity that the Gardener's House received in this image. It compels me to think of this house as an autonomous and detached gesture of the architect. I wonder if it is possible to look at this house without knowing that it is a part of the Villa Savoye; to look at this object as if there were not also another, privileged object that gives it meaning. Probably it is not; there is no place for an innocent, naive gaze. Yet another irony emerges. In disrepair or recovery, Villa Savoye has become an archetype of modernism, occupying the minds of all architects. In fact it looks as if these two houses were constructed to be archetypes, whose existence takes on a meaning beyond the question of habitability. Ultimately, everything is image, everything is architecture, a house is not a home.



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Front Cover

Palace of Justice, Chandigarh, India, 1952

Back Cover

Chapelle Notre Dame du Haut, Ronchamp, France, 1950-55

Frontispiece

Villa Savoye et Loge du Jardinier, Poissy, France, 1928

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