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Beginnings of the Modern Style in Paris

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by *Stani von Moos*

In a pictorial report illustrated by Monica Schefold, the author presents works of three Paris architects between 1912 and 1932.

Apartment House in the Rue Vavin, 1913, and Apartment House on the Rue des Amiraux, 1925

45

Architect: *Henri Sauvage*

Deriving his idiom from the 'Jugendstil', Henri Sauvage suddenly sees the possibility of reducing decorative elements and the plastic activation of the elevation. In 1913 there occurs the first attempt at a house with massive, step-like recessing of the elevation and its tub-like elaboration of balconies. In 1925 the attempt is repeated with more perfect means. There is almost created a 'residence hill': the house on the Rue des Amiraux is step-recessed on all four sides, and in the resulting hollow interior space there is installed a public bath. The vertical stairwells are set on the faces and give rise to projecting tower structures. The author considers the relationship between this building and the plans of Antonio Sant'Elia.

Houses on the Rue Mallet-Stevens, 1927

49

Architect: *Robert Mallet-Stevens*

Mallet-Stevens came neither from the classicist Beaux-Arts tradition nor from the Art Nouveau movement. His stylistic means is the stereometric simplification of shape, as initiated in particular by Joseph Hoffmann's Stoclet house in Brussels. This geometrization was, to be sure, not applied by him in the sense of a simplification of the buildings, but developed into a new element of subjective expressiveness and the final prestige idiom of the bourgeois age.

'Maison de Verre', 1931/32

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Architect: *Pierre Chareau*

Pierre Chareau with this house made his contribution to the new movement of rational building and living. The external walls of the house are of glass bricks, and even at night this permits diffuse illumination of the interior by means of searchlights. The interior, in its structural detailing, shows extreme precision, in fact, preciousness. The structural parts, walls and steps are mobile, or at least they create an effect of the utmost lightness. The floor of hard rubber and the walls of glass, wood or finely perforated metal foil produce a wonderful play of effects. The largely 'mechanized' furniture is also by Pierre Chareau.

Product Design in the France of the 'Twenties

57

by *Hans Curjel*

Current histories of the 'twenties easily create the impression that between 1920 and 1930 in the field of furniture and appliances the German-speaking countries and the Low Countries were in the lead over France. Mention is made of the Dutchmen Rietveld, Oud, Mondrian, Van Doesburg, the 'Werkbünde' and 'Bauhaus'. The author recalls, on the contrary, that in France even in the first decades of this century Auguste Perret and Tony Garnier were at work, that in 1918 Le Corbusier settled in Paris, he who saw architecture as a whole from town-planning to furniture. In 1920, along with Ozenfant, he founded the review 'L'Esprit Nouveau', in which also the questions of functionalism, standards and mass production were taken up.

In the Paris 'Exposition des Arts décoratifs' of 1925 there prevailed the heavy feeling-laden shapes of a would-be cubism. On the other hand, there were also the contributions of Robert Mallet-Stevens, Francis Jourdain and Pierre Chareau. Above all, Le Corbusier in the 'Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau' showed how he realized his principles in architecture and appliance production.

The author then takes up contemporary documents which deal critically with the situation in 1925. Henry van de Velde's criticism of the Paris exhibition sees the possibility of a rebirth of architecture and applied arts only on the plane of morality, the morality of pure form, which will triumph over the false, the adventitious and the sentimental. Le Corbusier recognizes the new style in objects, whose 'true luxury derives from the elegance of their conception, from the purity of their execution, from the efficacy of the services they perform'. Of his 'Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau' he said: 'We wanted to fit out our pavilion with industrial products in which the law of economy, commercial selection, could produce its effect and confer on these objects what can be called a style.'

La Roche House in Paris

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Architect: *Le Corbusier, Paris*

The house was erected in 1923/24 for the art collector Raoul La Roche, who in the last few years has donated his magnificent collection of cubist and purist pictures to the Basel Art Museum and the Museum of Modern Art in Paris. Le Corbusier in this house, especially early in his career, consistently realized his architectural principles: construction in reinforced concrete, flat roof with roof garden, harmonious regularity of proportions, free plan. The result was an outstanding unity of architecture and contents, the art works of the owner.

Engineering School of Leicester University

70

Architects: *James Stirling & James Gowan, London*

The building serves a new engineering faculty of 250 students; it comprises workshops, research laboratories, lecture halls and administration offices. The workshops have overhead illumination and cover almost the entire available area. The striking glass construction of the roof is for the purpose of shielding the rooms from the sun and of providing them with north light.

Endicott Laboratories (Endo), Garden City, Long Island

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Architect: *Paul Rudolph, New Haven*

The headquarters of the Endo Concerns is situated on a highway and thus offers free access to automobiles, and it attracts the attention of those driving past—an image of the company.