

## Le Corbusier architecture tour of Switzerland

Friday, 05 Dec 2008 00:00

Considered by many to be the most important architect of the 20th century, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris – who chose to be known as Le Corbusier – was the driving force behind the International style.

Also known as Modern architecture, the movement stressed the importance of form and the elimination of ornament - values explored by Le Corbusier over a career spanning five decades.

His Five Points – first expressed in the L'Esprit Nouveau - epitomise the style, and allowed his work to spread from his native Switzerland around the world, including developments in France, India, Russia, Chile, Germany and even Iraq.



Le Maison Blanche (credit: Eveline Perroud)

Born in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland, Le Corbusier began his career in his home town with La Maison Blanche – a very personal project for his parents, completed in 1912.

It is one of a number of Le Corbusier buildings still standing in Switzerland, and here travelbite.co.uk takes a look at what is on offer to visitors as they explore his native land.

### La Chaux-de-Fonds

**Le Maison Blanche** was the first independent project completed by Le Corbusier, and draws on his experience in Paris as a student of Auguste Perret and Peter Behrens in Berlin.

Situated in his home town of La Chaux-de-Fonds, guests are invited to explore one of the early works of the aspiring architect, who had not yet taken the name Le Corbusier.

Built for his parents, the White House breaks with the Art Nouveau common to the region at the time, and instead begins the exploration of the neoclassical which define the young architect during the following decade.

The building has recently undergone a complete renovation and was opened to the public in 2005. It is recognised by United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the nation of Switzerland as a site of explicit value.

The house is open to the public on Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 10:00 to 17:00, with adults paying 10CHF (£5.60) and children and students charged 6CHF (£3.40).

La Chaux-de-Fonds is also home to a number of other villas designed by Le Corbusier.

**Villa Fallet** (completed in 1905) is situated at 1 Chemin de Pouillerel, **Villa Strotzer** (1907) is a little further along at 6 Chemin de Pouillerel and **Villa Jacquemet** (1907) is at number eight on the same street.

The three buildings illustrate the development of early Le Corbusier, but sadly none is open to the public.

A little further into town, the Villa Schwob – presently owned by watchmaker **Ebel** - was completed by Le Corbusier in 1916.

Situated at 167 Rue du Doubs, La Chaux-de-Fonds, the Villa Schwob illustrates perhaps the most complete realisation of Le Corbusier's young self. It was also the final building completed in the town; following a disagreement over costs with the projects developers, Le Corbusier left La Chaux-de-Fonds, never to return.

### Corseaux

Over in Corseaux, the **Villa Le Lac** was again built by Le Corbusier for his parents to live in. Completed in 1923, his mother remained at the property until her death in 1960.

The building was the most modest of the architect's designs in his native Switzerland, and among the first of his creations to exhibit a truly Modern style. Here we see the first horizontal windows, used to take advantage of the lakeside view.

The villa is open to the public, but only on Wednesday afternoons, from 13.30 pm to 17.30 from April to October. Admission is 5CHF (£2.40) per person.

### Zurich

The financial capital of Switzerland, Zurich, is also home to the final building designed by the country's leading contemporary architect.

Le Corbusier designed [Heidi Weber House](#) and has today been transformed into a museum dedicated to his memory.

Completed in 1963, the building now houses a collection inspired by the unity of Le Corbusier's architecture, sculptures, paintings, furniture designs and writings. It is located on the verdant shores of Lake Zurich, and marks a radical departure for an artist still striving for innovation even in his final years.

Instead of the concrete which has so come define his work, Le Corbusier here uses glass and steel to frame his final master piece. It does, however, incorporate the central theme of being supported by pilotis. These pilotis support the structure of the house, allowing the inside to be altered radically, both quickly and cheaply – an signature of Le Corbusier's work.

### **More Information**

The Barbican art gallery will be holding a retrospective of Le Corbusier during early 2009.

Described as the first major survey of the internationally renowned architect in London for more than 20 years, the exhibition will include original architectural models, interior reconstructions, drawings, furniture, vintage photographs, films, tapestries, paintings, sculpture and books.

The aim is to explore the chronological development of Le Corbusier's work, with highlights including a reconstruction of the Plan Voisin in Paris, original models of Ronchamp, and Unité d'habitation and the film version of Le Corbusier and Edgard Varèse's Poème Electronique.

Tickets are priced at £6. Take a look at the [Barbican](#) website for more information on the exhibition.

*Chris O'Toole*

© 2008 [www.travelbite.co.uk](http://www.travelbite.co.uk)