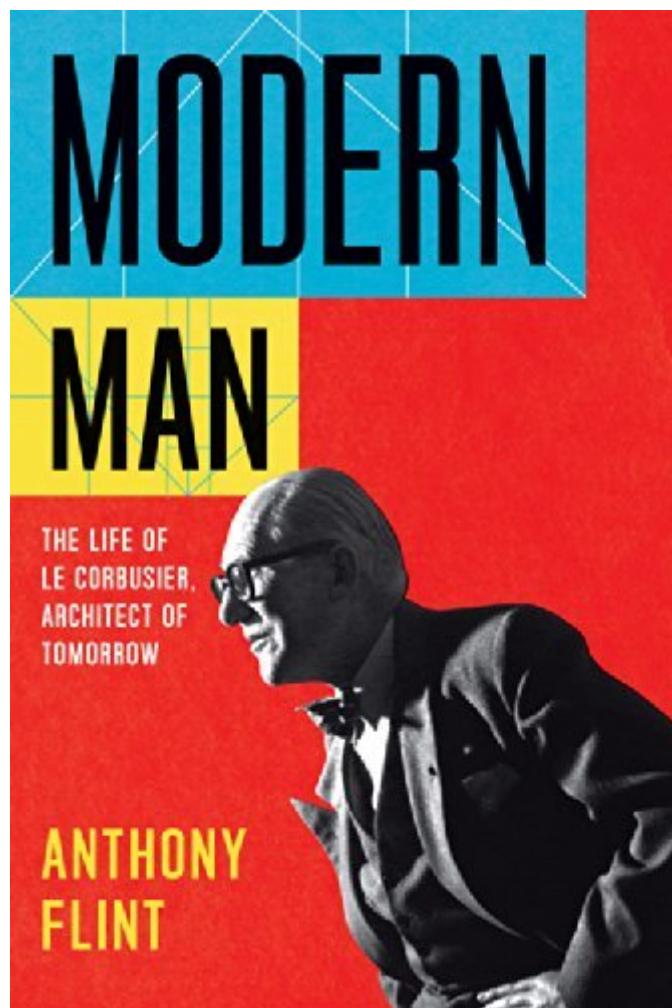


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# Modern Man: The Life Of Le Corbusier, Architect Of Tomorrow



## Synopsis

From the award-winning author of *Wrestling with Moses* comes a fascinating, accessible biography of the most important architect of the twentieth century. *Modern Man* is a riveting biography of Le Corbusier—a man who invented new ways of building and thinking. *Modern Man* is a penetrating psychological portrait of a true genius and constant self-inventor, as well as a sweeping tale filled with exotic locales, sex and celebrity (he was a lover of Josephine Baker), and high-stakes projects. In Flint's telling, Corbusier isn't just the grandfather of modern architecture but a man who sought to remake the world according to his vision, dispelling the Victorian style and replacing it with something never seen before. His legacy remains controversial today, as the world grapples with how to house its skyrocketing urban population and the cult of the "starchitect" continues to grow. *Modern Man*

## Book Information

File Size: 37089 KB

Print Length: 290 pages

Publisher: Publishing (November 4, 2014)

Publication Date: November 4, 2014

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00K5XMX52

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #37,021 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #2

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Arts & Photography > Architecture > Architects, A-Z #3

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Arts & Photography > Architecture > History & Periods #8

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## Customer Reviews

A Wouter Jansen's review was made as part of a critical review assignment for the Fall 2015

Economics of Entrepreneurship seminar at the University of Nebraska Omaha, taught by Art Diamond. (The course syllabus stated that part of the critical review assignment consisted of the making of a video recording of the review, and the posting of the review to .)

Great book. Great edition.

Fantastic history

Informative but boring. Not worth my money. Maybe it would be more interesting for an architect or architect student.

Dull

Excellent bio of most important artist/architect/urban theorist.

"Modern Man: The Life of Le Corbusier, Architect of Tomorrow" is a light biography of the pioneering modernist architect Le Corbusier and his major works by Anthony Flint, who is a journalist and policy advisor on planning and development. Written in a literate but breezy style, it introduces the reader to some of the concepts that propelled modernist architecture for half a century and to its most obsessive and ideological proponent, "the original star architect", Le Corbusier. The author jumps right into 1929, as Le Corbusier returns to Europe from Argentina, where he met and bedded Josephine Baker. Flint name-drops a lot, but Le Corbusier did live in an interesting time and knew many famous people. He flashes back to Le Corbusier's Swiss origins -he was born Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Grise- and early career by way of background, but there is never much context for Le Corbusier's life and work. The book is short and its focus narrow. Le Corbusier designed 78 buildings that were completed in 12 countries. Flint's descriptions focus on the architect's most famous and influential works. There are enthusiastic descriptions of the circumstances under which the works were built and of the buildings themselves: Villa Jeanneret-Perret (Maison Blanche), Villa Savoye, Unité d'Habitation at Marseilles, United Nations Headquarters, Chapel of Notre Dame de Haut at Ronchamp, Chandigarh in India, the cabanon in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, and Harvard University's Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts. Flint acknowledges the collaborative nature of the UN Headquarters design but barely mentions other architects on the project in Chandigarh, and I believe many of those buildings were designed

by others. The focus of "Modern Man" is very strongly on Le Corbusier. We don't get any insight into how his atelier worked or the roles that others played in Le Corbusier designs. "Modern Man" is intended for a lay audience. Buildings are not described in technical or historical terms but in terms everyone can understand. The author's intentions and audience are puzzling, though. The book won't appeal to students of architecture, as it lacks depth in that area. It won't appeal to fans of artist biographies, as we never know much about Le Corbusier beyond that he was an imperious, arrogant, and difficult personality, driven by a utopian dream of imposing maximum order and affordable modern housing on the urban landscape. He is one-dimensional, and there is no insight into his method of working, thought processes, or personal life outside of marriage to an alcoholic with whom he had little in common. Le Corbusier interacted with a lot of influential people, but Flint's focus is narrow. I assume the book is intended to introduce laypersons to a force in architecture whose enduring influence is all around them. But "Modern Man" gives the impression that the publisher's mandate was to make it short and easy to understand. Mission accomplished, but there is no context for Le Corbusier's modernist ideas or even an explanation of what those ideas were, why they emerged in the 20th century, and what they were trying to accomplish. We get only Le Corbusier's four requirements for a contemporary building, which he published in 1927: pilotis (stilts), flat roof, free plan, free facade. We need historical context -some idea of what came before and why and how it changed. I also felt that the reader needs some insight into the process of designing -how the atelier functioned, the roles of other designers, what, exactly, did Le Corbusier and his colleagues do. I found the book lopsided toward descriptions of buildings without any context. In the Epilogue, Flint discusses the backlash against modernism and Le Corbusier in particular, as well as his lasting influence.

It was touch and go as to whether I was going to read past the first few pages of *Modern Man: The Life of Le Corbusier, Architect of Tomorrow*. We find Le Corbusier and Josephine Baker in a stateroom on a cruise ship returning to Europe from South America. The author tells us what Le Corbusier is thinking and how he is propping himself up on an elbow and how crisp the sheets are. Since this is a biography of Le Corbusier, and not a novel about his life, I was surprised to find what appears to be speculation and outright imagination. It is certainly possible to write history that is both accurate and lively without resorting to making things up. I enjoy Candice Millard's and Matthew Algeo's histories for example. Lynne Olson and Dominic Sandbrook also come to mind as historians who can back up every statement and tell a great story at the same time. But I'm glad I kept on with *Modern Man*, because the imagined thoughts were not frequent, and I really wanted to

know a little about the first "starchitect." This was quite a good book for someone like me who has no background in architecture, but would like to learn a little, but is more interested in the man and the times. Le Corbusier, who early on decided to go by the single name, a made up one at that, may well have been a brilliant architect, but that seems to be debatable. What is certain is that he was a master self-promoter and odd character. It's amazing what you can get away with if people think you are a genius. He joined the Vichy government as soon as it was in place and then when the Americans were on the way, he switched to their side without missing a beat. Everyone, including DeGaulle, knew Le Corbusier was lying when he claimed to have been in the Resistance, but they overlooked it. A decent introduction to the man and the pioneer star architect.

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