

Le corbusier, the modernist

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Architecture as a medium started during the Egyptian era, then the Greek and Roman Period followed, after which the development seemed just to have died down. No further design was evident but only reinvention of the three distinct styles from Byzantines to gothic, renaissance to baroque, neo-classicism to art nouveau and art deco. All contributed to designs of sinuous curves and decorations creating an atmosphere of brilliant exuberance (“ Neoclassic”).

However at the start of the 20th century a new movement was born - the international style of modern architecture. This is a form of rebellion on the established architectural norms at the time and to basically express in style that is totally different from the past. Coupled with the development of concrete, steel and glass, it became the barometer by which succeeding styles evolved (“ History”).

The International Style of Architecture

The international style is characterized by three basic principles; the marked influence of volume rather than mass; balance rather than applied symmetry; and the total expulsion of ornaments to the composition of the structure both in the façade and interior spaces. This movement is brought about by the advent of the industrial revolution. Thus, the international style is anchored towards machines, or that structural spaces are “ machines where one can live in” (“ International Style”).

One of the pillars of the international movement was Le Corbusier, the Swedish Architect who eventually made a name for himself while in Paris. He was a tireless artisan, through pamphlets, manifestos, magazines, books and

even exhibitions he was able to project the merits of the movement not only in Europe but the America's as well.

Part of his (Le Corbusier) design innovation is; the structure is raised on stilts to make it appear light and floating; free flowing plan, so dwellers will have the freedom to rearrange the spaces according to their needs; make the walls independent of the structure - thus curtain walls were developed; provide horizontal bands of windows to keep the light in; and most of all top the structure with a roof garden to bring the natural environment to the structure (Rybczynski).

The resulting structure is a study of steel columns and beams, a skeleton devoid of any decorative ornament. It projects an architecture that is harsh and brutal in appearance, but with the application of ground to ceiling plate glass windows it tempered the façade and promotes the functional side of the structure. The walls are no longer planned as load bearing but only as decorative panels devised mainly to protect dwellers from the elements. The elevator shafts are now exposed and part of the design retinue ("International").

The Villa Savoye

The most important building that expressed the tenets of the international style is the Villa Savoye, near the suburbs in Paris. This building is memorable since it was designed by one of the movers of the style - Le Corbusier. The Villa Savoye captures the essence of the movement because of its abject simplicity and is considered by many as the climax of Le

Corbusier's work as it virtually expressed the style in its purist form (Sullivan).

What make the Villa Savoye the true representative of the international style are the different components that truly define the spirit of the style. The façade is endemic throughout, meaning the design does not distinguish the front, the sides or the rear of the building and it is of plain reinforced concrete that added to its effortless appeal.

The Villa Savoye is obviously modular in design and follows the pattern on human proportion; the building seems to float because of the series of “pilotis” or stilts that raise it from the ground, though it may be a form modern classicism; it does not have any attachment to historical ornament but is actually an expression of a modern abstract sculptural composition; and the external façade is pure white that suggests birth, purity, simplicity and health (“LeCorbusier”).

The building has an open interior plan that defines the logic of large spaces; to go up or down between floors is best served by a corkscrew spiral staircase and a reliable ramp system; the windows provides a wealthy interplay of light, reminiscent of industrial architecture; of course the feature that Le Corbusier emphasized is the roof garden at the top of the structure – to promote oneness with the natural environment even when inside the building; and the ground floor has an integral garage (“LeCorbusier”).

All the characteristics of the international style as expounded by Le Corbusier are all incorporated in the Villa Savoye. And owing to the

importance of the Villa Savoye to the international style, it has become a relic and a pilgrimage site for students of architecture.

Conclusion

Never in the history of architecture have a style that truly evolved without the undue influence of the past. Two movements have expressed the sincerity to really deviate from this form of evolution – the modern movement of Frank Lloyd Wright (organic style) and the international style. Both styles have echoed desires for large uninterrupted open spaces and simplicity in design without the use of elaborate ornaments.

The development of the skyscraper in the United States put into full use the international style of architecture. The buildings were now constructed according to the new manual on steel construction with reinforced concrete as the material of choice on the walls and foundations. The façade fully utilize the versatility of plate glass as it clad the structure from the ground floor up to the penthouse.

The glass curtain walls may have added to the aesthetic appeal of the building, but it also plagued insulation engineers, for it resulted in problems about heating and cooling, particularly during the cold and warm months. Therefore new standards were set as it increases the energy requirement of buildings.

But, even with some negative perceptions, nobody can question the effects of the international style in our modern society. It has revolutionized our ideas of a modern structure.

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