

# LE CORBUSIER

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## LE CORBUSIER EN LONDRES, 1938

## LE CORBUSIER IN LONDON, 1938

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Aunque los estudios sobre Le Corbusier parecen haber agotado casi todos los temas posibles, por extraño que resulte están todavía por estudiar las pocas visitas que realizó a Inglaterra. Una reciente publicación titulada *Le Corbusier and Britain* parecía que iba a cubrir esta laguna, pero el libro se ocupa únicamente de la recepción del arquitecto suizo en Inglaterra a través de una antología de textos dedicados a la recensión de sus escritos o comentarios a sus obras. Con el presente artículo se pretende aportar algunos datos, en especial a partir de cartas inéditas cursadas entre Le Corbusier y Wells Coates en 1938, del epistolario entre el primero y su familia, y de los proyectos recogidos en sus *Obras Completas 1*.

**Palabras clave:** Viajes; Cartas; Dibujos; Exposiciones

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*Although studies on Le Corbusier appear to have covered almost all the topics possible, strange though it may seem, the few visits he made to Britain have still not been investigated in detail. A recent publication under the title *Le Corbusier and Britain* at first sight appeared to cover this gap, but the book in fact concentrated solely on the reception of the Swiss architect in England, as seen through an anthology of texts given over to critical reviews of his writings or comments on his work. The present paper is intended to provide further details, especially on the basis of unpublished letters between Le Corbusier and Wells Coates from 1938, of letters between the architect and his family, and of projects included in his complete works 1.*

**Keywords:** Travels; Letters; Drawings; Exhibition



1. Estand de Venesta Plywood Company,  
Londres 1930.

1. Stand of the Venesta Plywood Company,  
London 1930.

## Viajes y fotografías

Entre las miles de fotos que se conservan de Le Corbusier, apenas se ha dado a conocer alguna de sus viajes a Inglaterra en el periodo de entreguerras, lugar en el que nunca consiguió construir un proyecto, salvo dos pequeños stands, uno para la firma Venesta Plywood en la *Building Trades Exhibition* (fig. 1), celebrada en el Olympia Hall de Londres en septiembre de 1930, proyectado junto con Pierre Jeanneret y Charlotte Perriand (Rüegg 2012, p. 291), y el otro para el promotor Arundell Clark en 1938 **2**.

Aunque sabemos que Le Corbusier estuvo en Londres en mayo de 1934 para asistir a una reunión del CIRPAC, pudiendo visitar el moderno bloque de viviendas de Highpoint One de Berthold Lubetkin, hasta el presente no se ha publicado ningún registro fotográfico ni documental de aquel viaje, si bien Le Corbusier dejaría constancia de la visita a Highgate en el artículo “The Vertical Garden City”, aparecido en *Architectural Review* en enero de 1936 **3**.

De ahí que cobre especial interés una fotografía de enero de 1938 en la que, a pesar de su escasa calidad, podemos distinguir a Le Corbusier rodeado por un grupo de arquitectos británicos, entre los que se encuentran Godfrey Samuel, Wells Coates, J. M. Richards, Serge Chermayeff y Maxwell Fry (fig. 2).

En el presente artículo podemos confirmar la fecha y el lugar en que fue tomada: el 19 de enero de 1938, en la exposición *Los elementos de la arquitectura moderna* organizada por el grupo MARS (*Modern Architecture Research Group*), la sección inglesa del CIAM, en las New Burlington Galleries de Bond Street en Londres. Le Corbusier, tras una elegante cena



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de etiqueta, acababa de dirigirse al público reunido en una recepción privada en los locales la exposición, y al final de la velada los anfitriones quisieron fotografiarse con su invitado.

Para ello eligieron la primera sala de la exposición dedicada a los fines de la arquitectura, y se situaron delante del panel informativo diseñado por Peter Moro con atractivos dibujos de Gordon Cullen, por entonces joven arquitecto colaborador en el estudio de Lubetkin y Tecton (fig. 3). El panel intentaba mostrar cómo los elementos de la nueva arquitectura no eran otros que los definidos en 1624 por el primer tratadista inglés, sir Henry Wotton, en su libro *The Elements of Architecture*, asegurando así al reticente público inglés que la nueva arquitectura se insertaba en una gran tradición.

## Journeys and Photographs

Among the thousands of photos of Le Corbusier's that are preserved, scarcely any have been made public of his journeys to England in the inter-war period. This was a country in which he never succeeded in building any project, apart from a couple of small stands, one for the Venesta Plywood Company at the *Building Trades Exhibition* (fig. 1) that was held at Olympia in London in September 1930, designed jointly with Pierre Jeanneret and Charlotte Perriand (Rüegg 2012, p. 291), and another for the promoter Arundell Clark in 1938 **2**.

It is known that Le Corbusier was in London in May 1934 to attend a meeting of CIRPAC, and was able to visit the modern housing block Highpoint One by Berthold Lubetkin. However, until now no photographic nor documentary record of this journey has been published. It is true that Le Corbusier himself did leave an indication of his visit to Highgate in an article entitled “The Vertical Garden City” that came out



2. Samuel, Le Corbusier, Coates, Richards, Chermayeff y Fry.  
3. Panel de Peter Moro y Gordon Cullen (1938).

2. Samuel, Le Corbusier, Coates, Richards, Chermayeff and Fry.  
3. Panel by Peter Moro and Gordon Cullen (1938).

in the *Architectural Review* in January 1936 <sup>3</sup>. Hence it is of particular interest to find a photograph from January 1938 in which, despite its poor quality, it is possible to make out Le Corbusier surrounded by a group of British architects. Among these are Godfrey Samuel, Wells Coates, J. M. Richards, Serge Chermayeff and Maxwell Fry (fig. 2).

It is possible at this point to confirm the date and place when it was taken: 19 January 1938, in the exhibition on *The Elements of Modern Architecture* organized by the MARS group (*Modern Architecture Research Group*), the British section of CIAM, in the New Burlington Galleries in Bond Street in London. After an elegant formal dinner, Le Corbusier had just spoken to those attending a private reception in the exhibition locale and at the end of the evening his hosts requested to be photographed together with their guest.

For this purpose, they chose the first room of the exhibition, given over to the purposes of architecture, and they posed in front of the information panel designed by Peter Moro with attractive drawings by Gordon Cullen, then a young architect working in the Lubetkin and Tecton practice (fig. 3). The panel attempted to show how the elements of new architecture were none other than those defined in 1624 by the first English author to produce a treatise on the subject, Sir Henry Wotton, in his book *The Elements of Architecture*. In this way, it was trying to reassure the reticent British public that new architecture formed part of a great tradition.

## Letters between Le Corbusier and Wells Coates

The limited information about those journeys by Le Corbusier to England is mostly to be found in the archives of the architect Wells Coates (1909-1986), the representative of CIAM in England. These are preserved in the *Canadian Centre for Architecture* in Montreal (fig. 4). It is there that may be seen the copy of the letter which he sent to Le Corbusier on 16 January inviting him to visit the London exhibition, which had been inaugurated four days earlier.

Thus, it is not true, as some have claimed, that Le Corbusier inaugurated this exhibition on 12 January. In fact, he received the letter from Wells Coates in Zurich, where he was attending



2



3

## Cartas entre Le Corbusier y Wells Coates

Los pocos datos de aquellos viajes de Le Corbusier a Inglaterra se encuentran en los archivos del arquitecto Wells Coates (1909-1986), representante inglés de los CIAM en Inglaterra, conservados en el *Canadian Centre for Architecture* de Montreal (fig. 4). Allí se encuentra la copia de la carta que éste envía a Le Corbusier el 16 de enero invitándole a visitar la exposición de Londres, inaugurada cuatro días antes.

No es cierto pues, como se ha escrito, que Le Corbusier inaugurase la exposición el 12 de enero. De hecho recibe la carta de Wells Coates en Zúrich, donde se encontraba atendiendo la exposición de su *Obra Plástica* organizada en el Kunsthau del 15 de enero al 6 de febrero (fig. 5). Todo ello nos hace pensar que acudir en esas fechas a Londres debió suponerle un cierto incomodo, que se justifica por la urgente necesidad que tenía Le Corbusier por aquel entonces de explorar nuevos frentes ante la falta de encargos profesionales. Por su interés,



4. Wells Coates, ca. 1938.  
 5. Le Corbusier en Zúrich, 1938.  
 4. Wells Coates, circa 1938.  
 5. Le Corbusier in Zurich, 1938.

ya que es un documento inédito, la re-  
 producimos por entero:

Dear Corbusier,

The M.A.R.S. Exhibition has opened suc-  
 cessfully and we are all pleased with the  
 reception it has had in the English press.  
 We are looking forward to your first vis-  
 it to London since the 1934 meeting of  
 CIAM here, and all arrangements have  
 been made, as I shall I tell you here, for  
 you reception.

Journalists and photographers will be at  
 Croydon to meet your aeroplane, and it  
 would be nice of you to say a few words  
 to them for publication on the evening  
 of the reception which is being held in  
 your honour.

I shall meet you at Victoria on your arri-  
 val from the Croydon aerodrome. If you  
 would be so kind as to accept my invita-  
 tion, will you stay with me at my studio-  
 apartment, where I have two cabins? If  
 so, I shall take you there from Victoria,  
 and we shall have time to dress for din-  
 ner and the reception. As this functions  
 go in England, evening dress is usually  
 worn, and I would therefore suggest  
 that you bring the necessaries with you:  
 "white" tie! (or "smoking"... "black"  
 tie, will do, of course!)

Then we have arranged a small dinner  
 for you at the Reform Club, in Pall Mall,  
 which I hope is an experience you have  
 not yet had. The members of the Com-  
 mittee for the Exhibition will be present:  
 Samuel, Chermayeff, Fry and myself; also  
 Richards and Summerson, who have been  
 responsible for the Press and the Catalogue,  
 Photographs, etc. for the Exhibition.  
 After that, we shall have time to take you  
 to the Exhibition, before our guests begin  
 to arrive at nine o'clock. We hope that  
 during the course of the evening you will  
 address the company either in French or  
 English. After the reception, we hope to  
 arrange some private party for you, to suit  
 your taste, perhaps in a private house, or  
 at some other place, to be arranged.

Our Exhibition is, as you may know,  
 the first comprehensive statement of the  
 creed of Modern Architecture which has  
 been attempted in England, and we feel  
 very pleased indeed that you will honour  
 us with your presence.

I hope your arrangements will be such  
 that you will not have to rush back to  
 Paris at once, buy stay with us here for a



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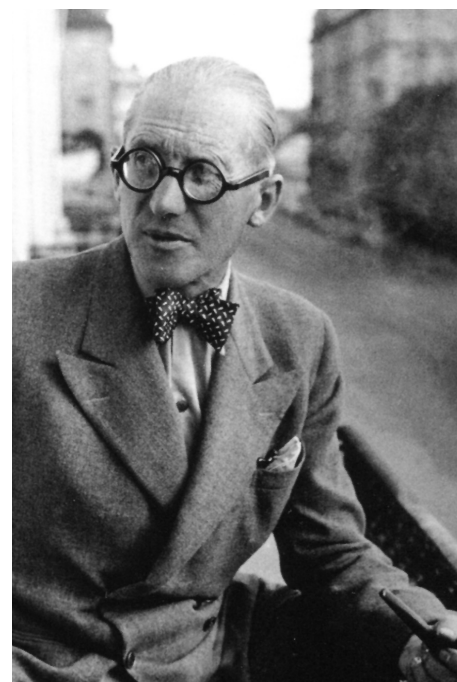
few days. Would you be good enough to  
 let me know if there is any special arran-  
 gements you would like to have made for  
 your stay, by telegram?

Looking forward to the pleasure of see-  
 ing you again, and sending you the war-  
 mest greetings of the Group.

Very sincerely, yours,  
 (Wells Coates)

En cualquier caso, la invitación y el  
 programa previsto debieron complacer a  
 Le Corbusier, ya que en una carta que éste  
 envía a su madre el lunes 17 de enero, le da  
 noticia de su viaje: "Salgo el miércoles a la  
 una en avión hacia Londres, donde soy huésped  
 de honor en una gran recepción esa misma  
 noche" 4 (Baudouï y Dercelles 2013, p. 577).

Le Corbusier llegó al antiguo aeródromo de  
 Croydon de Londres, en vuelo desde Zúrich,  
 el día 19 de enero. De sus impresiones sobre  
 la exposición, tenemos una buena muestra en  
 el elogioso artículo que publicaría dos meses  
 después en *Architectural Review* 5; texto  
 reeditado recientemente en un libro dedicado  
 al impacto de Le Corbusier en Gran Bretaña,  
 por lo que tan solo nos limitaremos a recoger  
 algunas de sus atinadas valoraciones:



5

the exhibition of his *Oeuvre Plastique*, or  
 visual artworks, organized in the Kunsthaus  
 between 15 January and 6 February (fig. 5).  
 This leads to the conclusion that travelling  
 to London at this time must have been  
 somewhat inconvenient for him, and may  
 have been triggered by the urgent need  
 Le Corbusier had at that point to seek out  
 fresh alternatives in view of his lack of  
 professional commissions. Since this is a  
 hitherto unpublished document, its interest  
 is such as to justify reproducing it in full:

Dear Corbusier,

The MARS Exhibition has opened suc-  
 cessfully and we are all pleased with the  
 reception it has had in the English press.

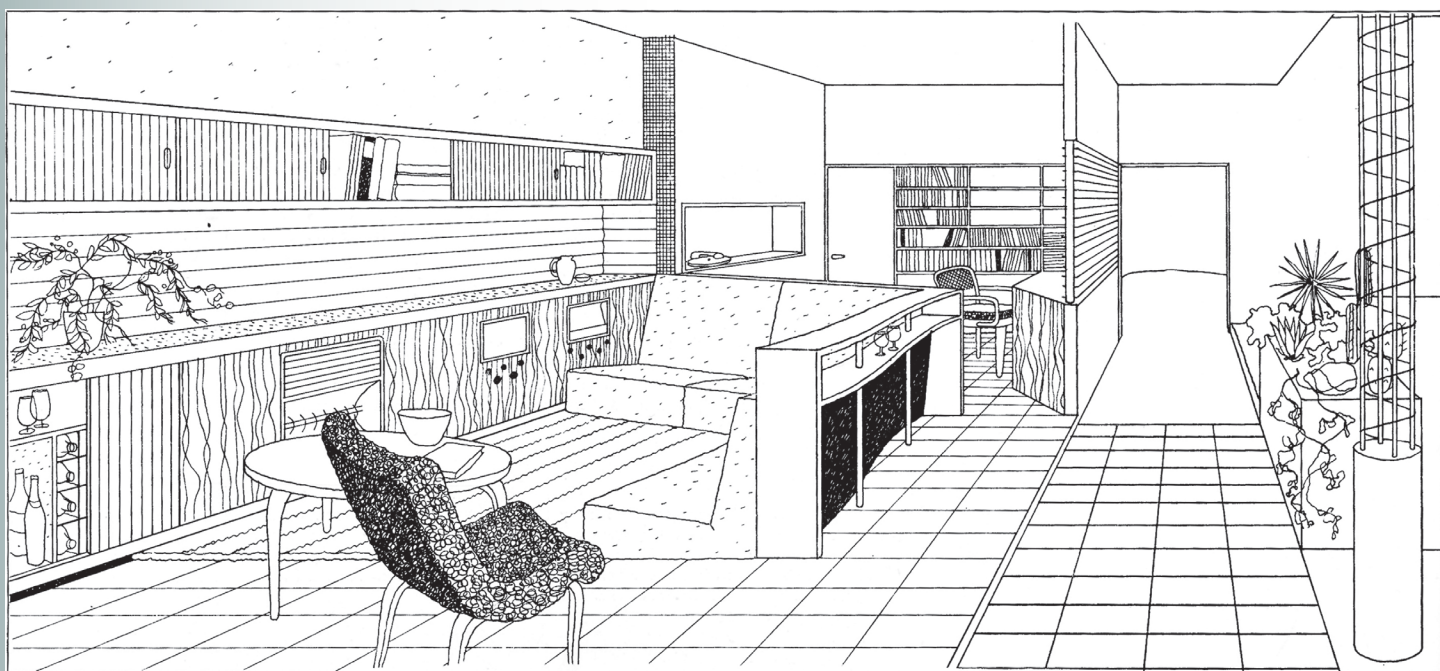
We are looking forward to your first visit  
 to London since the 1934 meeting of CIAM  
 here, and all arrangements have been made,  
 as I shall I tell you here, for your reception.

Journalists and photographers will be at  
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 honour.

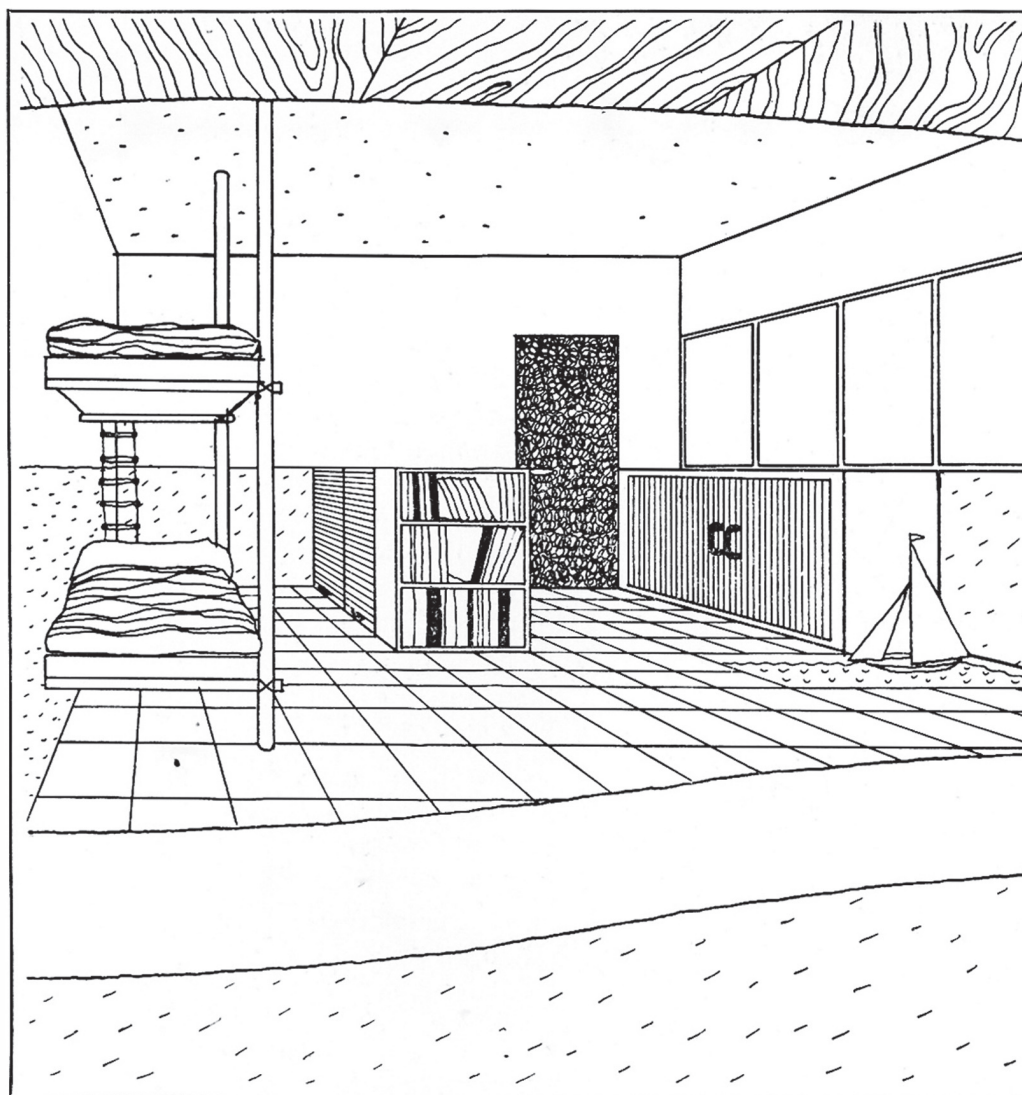
I shall meet you at Victoria on your arrival  
 from the Croydon aerodrome. If you would  
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As these functions go in England, evening  
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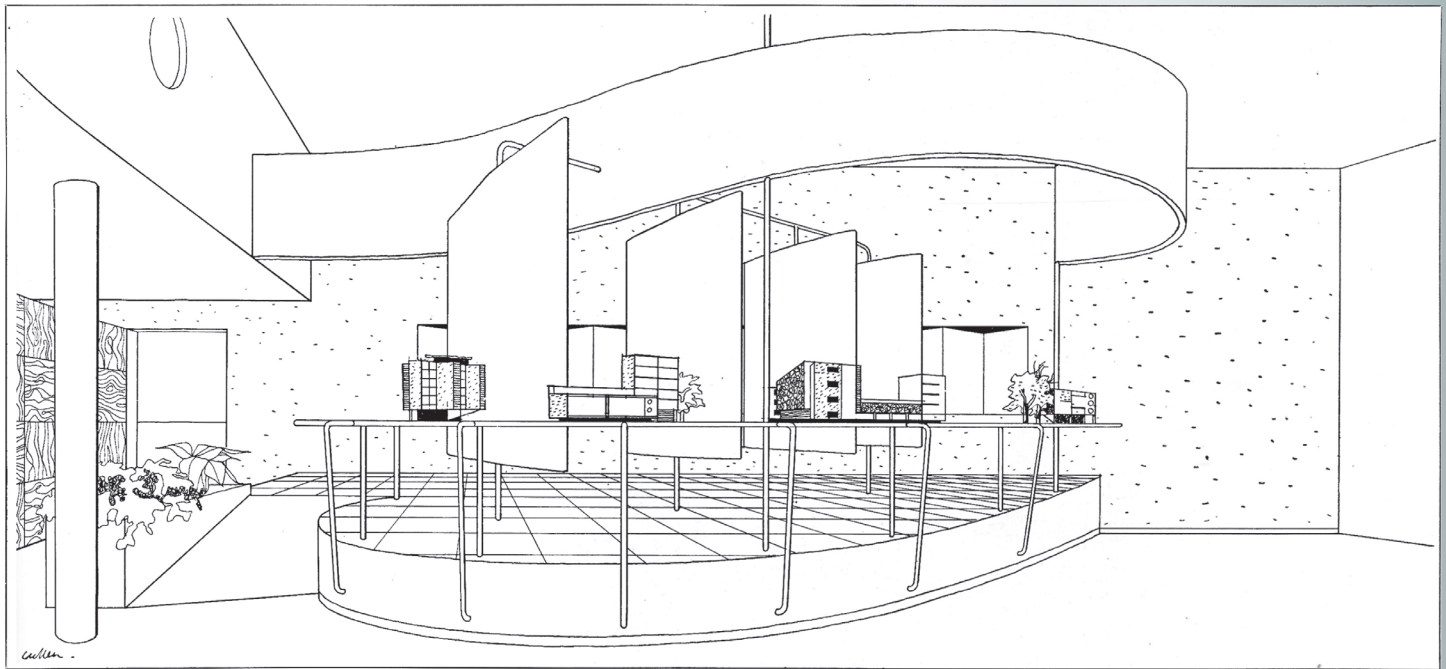


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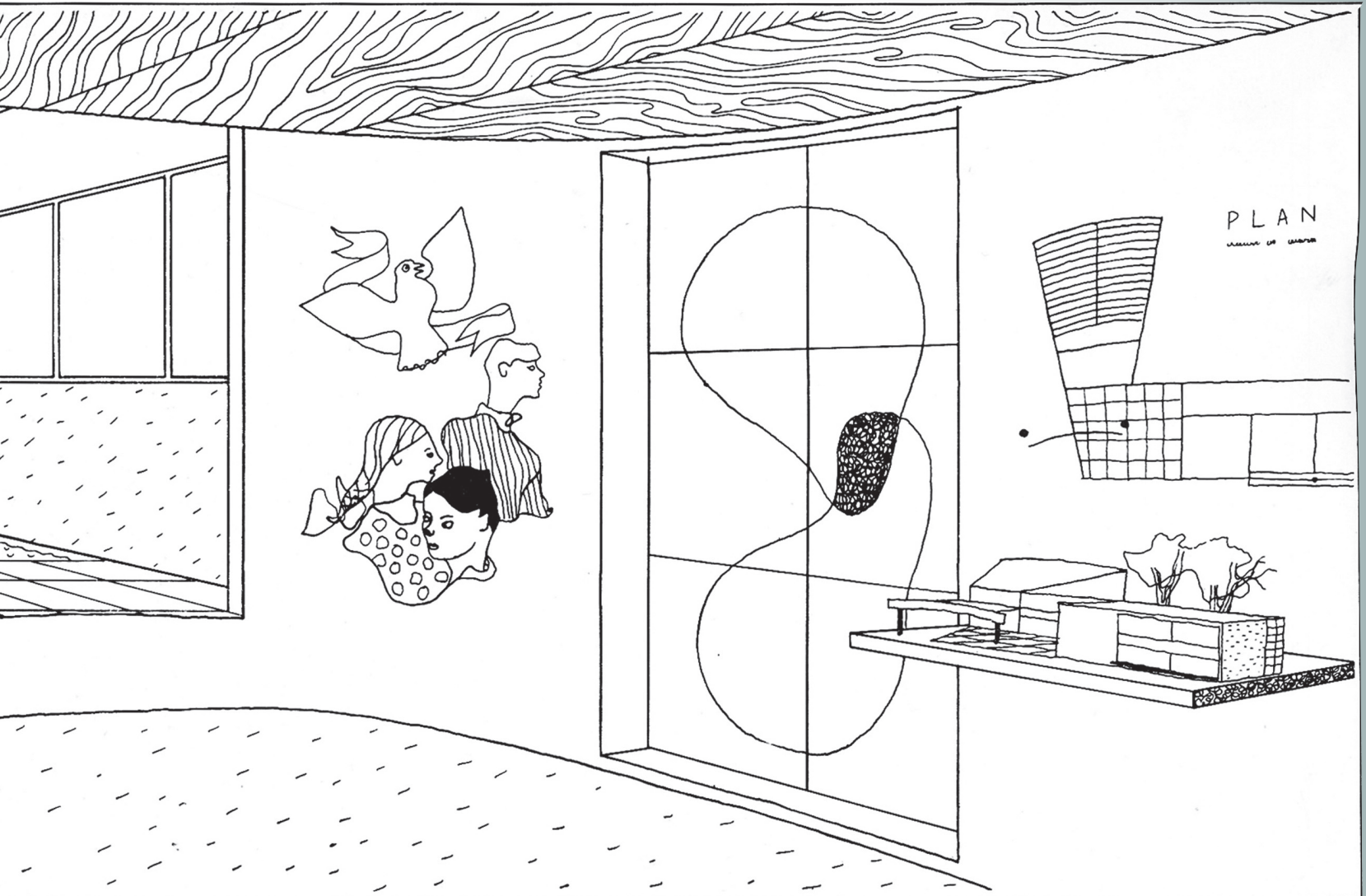


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- 6. Gordon Cullen, stand de apartamento moderno diseñado por Wells Coates.
- 7. Gordon Cullen, stand dedicado a la infancia, diseño de Ernő Goldfinger.
- 8. Gordon Cullen, recinto dedicado a la arquitectura internacional.
- 6. Gordon Cullen, Stand for a Modern Apartment, Designed by Wells Coates.
- 7. Gordon Cullen, Stand Dedicated to Childhood, Designed by Ernő Goldfinger.
- 8. Gordon Cullen, Area Dedicated to International Architecture.



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experience you have not yet had. The members of the Committee for the Exhibition will be present: Samuel, Chermayeff, Fry and myself; also Richards and Summerson, who have been responsible for the Press and the Catalogue, Photographs, etc. for the Exhibition. After that, we shall have time to take you to the Exhibition, before our guests begin to arrive at nine o'clock. We hope that during the course of the evening you will address the company either in French or English. After the reception, we hope to arrange some private party for you, to suit your taste, perhaps in a private house, or at some other place, to be arranged.

Our Exhibition is, as you may know, the first comprehensive statement of the creed of Modern Architecture which has been attempted in England, and we feel very pleased indeed that you will honour us with your presence.

I hope your arrangements will be such that you will not have to rush back to Paris at once, but stay with us here for a few days. Would you be good enough to let me know if there is any special arrangement you would like to have made for your stay, by telegram?

Looking forward to the pleasure of seeing you again, and sending you the warmest greetings of the Group.

Very sincerely, yours,  
(Wells Coates)

In any case, the invitation and the programme envisaged must have suited Le Corbusier, since he wrote a letter to his mother on Monday, 17 de January, to tell her the news about his journey. "On Wednesday at one I'm flying to London, where I am to be the guest of honour at a big reception that same evening" <sup>4</sup> (Baudouï and Dercelles 2013, p. 577).

On 19 January, Le Corbusier arrived at the old Croydon Aerodrome near London on his flight from Zurich. As to his impressions of the exhibition, there is a good indication in the approving article that he was to publish two months later in *The Architectural Review* <sup>5</sup>. This text has recently been republished in a book dedicated to the impact Le Corbusier had in Great Britain, so that only the more salient of his insightful assessments will be quoted here:

"On January 19th I dropped out of an airplane into the midst of a charming demonstration of youth, which revealed the architecture of tomorrow to be as smiling as it is self-reliant. Much has been accomplished. It is no longer a case of fighting a battle all over the world, but a victory already won in every part of it. [...]"

The party I attended in this setting was a crowd so delighted with all it saw as to let itself be gently carried away by the promise of town-planning,

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The party I attended in this setting was a crowd so delighted with all it saw as to let itself be gently carried away by the promise of town-planning, construction, and technology, things which by all the rules ought to have been invincibly tedious and forbidding. But the only memories of these the guests took away with them were of the lyrical appeal of those poems in steel, glass, and concrete. The New Architecture can no longer be reproached with being more insensitive and soulless technics. The MARS Exhibition will prevent the repetition of such calumnies as these. [...]"

One must be allowed a little indulgence to weave such luminous dreams as these after seeing the MARS Exhibition, for that exhibition was one where youth and enthusiasm have expressed themselves in purity and precision".

De este artículo conviene destacar el aire de condescendencia con el que Le Corbusier valora a los arquitectos ingleses, ya que todos ellos eran de su misma generación, con una obra arquitectónica relevante, y a los que difícilmente se les podía tildar de jóvenes. En cualquier caso, sus palabras de elogio debieron ser sinceras, ya que la recepción con la que celebraron su visita debió ser memorable, y la exposición (no suficientemente estudiada aún) constituía una muestra realmente notable de la arquitectura internacional a través de fotografías y maquetas de unos 139 proyectos, entre los que se encontraban, además de una nutrida representación de la moderna arquitectura inglesa, obras de Gropius, Mies, Aalto, Neutra, Breuer, Mendelshon, Lurçat, Lescaze, Howe, Raymond Hood, por citar los más conocidos. Y destacando entre todos ellos Le Cor-

busier, ya que se incluían fotografías de diez de sus proyectos: la Villa Savoye, la "Armée du Salut", el Plan Obús, la cooperativa agraria, el apartamento Beistegui, su apartamento en París, el Pabellón Suizo, la "Ville Radieuse", el Palacio de los Soviets y la villa en La Celle-Sant-Cloud. Incluso el catálogo editado, con su conjunto de textos –y presentación de G. Bernard Shaw–, fotos y sobrios dibujos de línea clara de Gordon Cullen, era todo un lujo para aquella época (figs. 6 y 9).

Le Corbusier permaneció unos días en Londres visitando algunos edificios de sus colegas. Regresó el 23 de enero, ya que en otra carta que escribe a su madre ese mismo día vuelve a hacer referencia a su estancia en Inglaterra y a sus dos rápidos desplazamientos en avión: "Gira de celebraciones tanto en Zúrich como en Londres. Muy brillante en Londres, ciudad de rancia aristocracia" <sup>6</sup> (Baudouï y Dercelles, p. 579).

A su vez, Wells Coates le escribió una carta de agradecimiento, fechada el 23 de enero, que volvemos transcribir por entero al estar inédita:

Dear Corbusier,

I wanted to write you a personal line, to say how much we have appreciated your coming to assist us so valuably, in the arrangements we have made for the MARS Exhibition. I think you will have realised how much we have worked to achieve this exhibition: how much discussion and conflict to arrive at the principles; how much work to get the principles into an organisation; what further work, to achieve the finance from the building industry; and lastly to design and execute and realise the show in the way we have. We are conscious of the limitations, and the deficiencies of the show, but we have believed it necessary to get the thing realised, and then to see that it was properly attended. Fortunately we have broken all records for attendance at these Galleries, and the press has been excellent. It only needed the presence of yourself to lend authority and weight to our endeavours, and



9. Recinto dedicado a la arquitectura internacional.

9. Area Dedicated to International Architecture.

we are very grateful to you, for coming to us, at a time when you are so heavily occupied, and assisting us in the splendid way you have. I only hope that the strain has not been too much for you, and that you will remember this last visit to London and the MARS in a pleasant way.

I was much impressed by your advice in regard to the work we must do to further the effect the exhibition has created, and to go on, with some important projects in relation to London town-planning. I shall make it my personal duty to inform the responsible members of the Group of your ideas on this subject, and let you know our decisions about it, as soon as possible. Then, I hope, we may have the opportunity of coming to Paris to discuss these with you, and may I conclude with the hope, that we may soon again see you in London, working with us.

With kindest wishes to you and Madame, and to Pierre Jeanneret.

Sincerely yours,  
(Wells Coates)

La carta de Wells Coates refleja algo más que mero agradecimiento. Por una parte la fascinación que suscitaba Le Corbusier en aquellos pioneros ingleses de la modernidad, y por otra, su poder de seducción, siempre atento a vender sus ideas, a conseguir un nuevo encargo, o a convencer a sus anfitriones para que sacasen adelante algún proyecto en Londres en el que pudiera colaborar. Otra carta inédita de Wells Coates, fechada el 8 de febrero en su apartamento del 18 Yeoman's Row de Londres, confirma estos dos extremos:

Mon cher Corbusier,

Thank you *so much*, the beautiful *dessins* finally arrived on Saturday (there was a delay with the Customs) and I have delivered, to the respective recipients, those destined for them, including a spray of orchids, which were received with joy, as coming from you. Mine, occupies a prominent position on the walls of my studio, and a frame, in accordance with your sketch, will eventually be made for it. It is really very nice of you to send us such glorious presents, and I am very grateful to you.



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You are so good to remember everything: including the 7 shillings! I, too, will be exact, and say that the orchids cost 10 shillings 6 pence (a lot, but, after all, they were so lovely! and they last so long!) All this can wait until the next time we meet.

I hope that I may soon come to Paris for a few days, and see you, and all the things you are doing.

With all best wishes, and many thanks,  
Sincerely,  
(Wells Coates)

P.S.: This letter did not get posted last night, and now this morning your letter has arrived. I do apologise for not having answered you at once, but I have been away in the country since Saturday... I am looking forward to seeing your "documentation concernant l'entreprise d'un grand bloc d'immeubles a Londres" and to the ideas for working in London which we discussed. Perhaps you would like to put down on paper more clearly what you have in mind, in order that we may proceed with the idea?

Realmente asombra estas líneas de Wells Coates, un profesional ya consagrado, ya que parecen escritas con el candor juvenil de alguien que ha recibido, como inmerecido presente, unos dibujos de Le Corbusier, y atesora como valioso recuerdo el regalo de unas orquideas. De mayor interés es la posdata, en la que menciona que acaba de recibir la carta de Le Corbusier en la que éste le comenta que muy pronto le enviará la documentación sobre un gran edificio de apartamen-

construction, and technology, things which by all the rules ought to have been invincibly tedious and forbidding. But the only memories of these the guests took away with them were of the lyrical appeal of those poems in steel, glass, and concrete. The New Architecture can no longer be reproached with being mere insensitive and soulless technics. The MARS Exhibition will prevent the repetition of such calumnies as these. [...]

One must be allowed a little indulgence to weave such luminous dreams as these after seeing the MARS Exhibition, for that exhibition was one where youth and enthusiasm have expressed themselves in purity and precision".

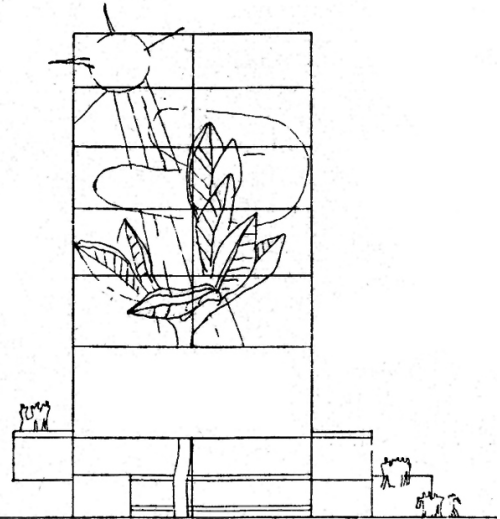
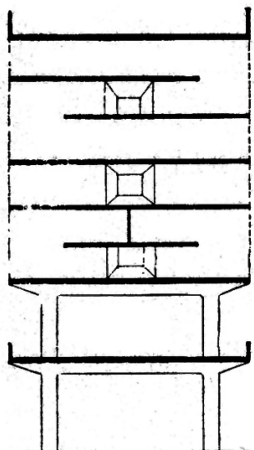
One feature of this article that should be stressed is the condescending air that Le Corbusier adopts in his assessment of the British architects, since all of them were of his own generation, with a solid history of architectural work to their credit, and could hardly be called youngsters. In any case, his words of praise must have been genuine enough, since the reception with which his visit was celebrated must have been memorable. More than that, the exhibition, which has still not been sufficiently studied, constituted a really striking sample of international architecture shown in photographs and models of 139 projects. Among these, alongside a major representation of modern British architecture, there were works by Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, Aalto, Neutra, Breuer, Mendelsohn, Lurçat, Lescaze, Howe, and Raymond Hood, to quote just the best known. Pride of place among them all went to Le Corbusier, since there were photographs of ten of his projects: the Villa Savoye, the Cité du Refuge building, the "Plan Obus" for Algiers, an agricultural co-operative, the Beistegui apartment, his own apartment in Paris, the Swiss Pavilion, the Radiant City or "Ville Radieuse", the Palace of the Soviets, and the villa at La Celle-Saint-Cloud. Even the published catalogue, with its set of texts and its introduction by George Bernard Shaw, together with photographs and sober, light line-drawings by Gordon Cullen, was very luxurious for that period (figs. 6 and 9).

Le Corbusier remained for some days in London, visiting various buildings by several of his colleagues. He returned on 23 January, as in another letter he wrote to his mother that day he once more refers to his stay in England and his two quick flights: "Both Zurich and London were gala tours. The visit to London, a town full of aristocrats, was particularly brilliant" 6 (Baudouin and Dercelles, p. 579).



10. Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City; Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition*. Londres 1939.  
11. Le Corbusier, pabellón en la *Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition*. Londres 1939.

10. Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City; Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition*. London 1939.  
11. Le Corbusier, Pavilion in *Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition*. London 1939.



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tos para Londres, semejante al que esperaba construir en París. La carta había sido enviada desde su estudio de París, con la misma fecha del 8 de febrero, cruzándose con la de su destinatario (lo que indica la eficacia del correo aéreo de entonces), y su breve texto dice así 7:

Querido amigo,

He recibido su telegrama en el que me comunica que aún no han llegado los dibujos. He preguntado al remitente y me confirma que habían salido por vía aérea la víspera de su reclamación. Creo que los tendrá en sus manos en unos días. Le agradecería que me avisara cuando todo esté en orden.

Pronto le enviaré una documentación relativa a un gran bloque de pisos de alquiler en Londres, similar al que esperamos poder construir aquí en París.

Recuerdos a todos y un cordial saludo para usted.

Le Corbusier

## Dibujos para exposiciones

Del inmueble de Londres y de posibles colaboraciones con Wells Coates poco se ha sabido. Hay constancia en el epistolario de Le Corbusier de que realizó un viaje a Londres el 21 de octubre de 1938. Al parecer había contactado con algunos promotores y arquitectos que le debieron dar esperanzas de poder construir un ambicioso proyecto en un barrio de Londres. De ello escribe a su madre el 25 de octubre con una mezcla de entusiasmo y prevención 8:

Regresé de Londres el domingo por la mañana: una hora y diez minutos Londres-París. Tres días de trabajo. Y balance seguramente positivo (¡Por fin!). Gozo de una popularidad considerable en Inglaterra, y hay gente interesada en hacerme encargos. Realmente parece que se abre una nueva etapa para mí: las cosas parecen arreglarse. En Londres tengo encargos de gente importante. E incluso un asunto de gran envergadura que me callo. Mientras las libras esterlinas no estén sobre mi mesa, no diré nada.

El proyecto del que habla Le Corbusier tiene que relacionarse con unos bocetos con fecha de octubre de 1938 y unos planos de ejecución de enero de 1939, para la exposición de la *Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition*, en la que Le Corbusier proponía construir a tamaño natural, dentro de la gran nave del *Earls Court Exhibition Center*, un fragmento de una Unidad de Habitación de su *Ville Radiuse*, para demostrar al público inglés de las posibilidades de una “*Radiant City: Sun, Space, Green*”, de la que también se exhibiría una maqueta (fig. 6).

Lo más atractivo de ese proyecto de stand es el dibujo reproducido en su *Obra Completa* de un pabellón anunciador –algo surreal, con la evocación de los sentidos de la vista y del oído mediante un gran ojo y una oreja– que envuelve una maqueta de un posible barrio de Londres diseñado según sus presupuestos urbanísticos (fig. 7). Es de suponer que por el ambiente prebélico que ya se vivía en Gran Bretaña todo quedó en nada, ya que en los archivos publicados por los Archivos Garland no hay un desarrollo a mayores del proyecto 9.

De aquellos viajes a Londres también se debe el encargo de Arundell Clarke para la *Woman’s Fair* en el Olympia, en noviembre de 1938, en la que se exhibió el interior de un prototipo de casa de fin de semana diseñado junto al arquitecto Clive Entwistle. De esta arquitectura efímera, de escaso interés, sólo nos quedan cuatro fotografías en los archivos del RIBA y unos planos del proyecto 10.

A esta colaboración se debe referir Le Corbusier en una carta a su madre del 18 de noviembre, al comentarle 11: “Sigo teniendo la esperanza de trabajar en Londres. Jóvenes de familias importantes, arquitectos de talento, quieren

In his turn, Wells Coates wrote him a letter of thanks, dated 23 January, which is here reproduced in full, since it has so far never been published:

Dear Corbusier,

I wanted to write you a personal line, to say how much we have appreciated your coming to assist us so valuably, in the arrangements we have made for the MARS Exhibition. I think you will have realised how much we have worked to achieve this exhibition: how much discussion and conflict to arrive at the principles; how much work to get the principles into an organisation; what further work, to achieve the finance from the building industry; and lastly to design and execute and realise the show in the way we have. We are conscious of the limitations, and the deficiencies of the show, but we have believed it necessary to get the thing realised, and then to see that it was properly attended. Fortunately we have broken all records for attendance at these Galleries, and the press has been excellent. It only needed the presence of yourself to lend authority and weight to our endeavours, and we are very grateful to you, for coming to us, at a time when you are so heavily occupied, and assisting us in the splendid way you have. I only hope that the strain has not been too much for you, and that you will remember this last visit to London and the MARS in a pleasant way.

I was much impressed by your advice in regard to the work we must do to further the effect the exhibition has created, and to go on, with some important projects in relation to London town-planning. I shall make it my personal duty to inform the responsible members of the Group of your ideas on this subject, and let you know our decisions about it, as soon as possible. Then, I hope, we may have the opportunity of coming to Paris to discuss these with you, and may I conclude with the hope, that we may soon again see you in London, working with us.

With kindest wishes to you and Madame, and to Pierre Jeanneret.

Sincerely yours,  
(Wells Coates)

This letter from Wells Coates reflects more than merely gratitude. On the one hand, there is the fascination aroused by Le Corbusier in those British pioneers of modernity. On the other, there is his power of seduction, always on the lookout to sell his ideas, to win a new commission, or to convince his hosts that they should set up some project in London in which he could collaborate. A further unpublished letter from Wells Coates, dated 8 February and written from his apartment at 18 Yeoman’s Row in London, confirms these two major points:

Mon cher Corbusier,

Thank you *so much*, the beautiful *dessins* finally arrived on Saturday (there was a delay with the Customs) and



I have delivered, to the respective recipients, those destined for them, including a spray of orchids, which were received with joy, as coming from you. Mine occupies a prominent position on the walls of my studio, and a frame, in accordance with your sketch, will eventually be made for it. It is really very nice of you to send us such glorious presents, and I am very grateful to you.

You are so good to remember everything: including the 7 shillings! I, too, will be exact, and say that the orchids cost 10 shillings 6 pence (a lot, but, after all, they were so lovely! and they last so long!) All this can wait until the next time we meet.

I hope that I may soon come to Paris for a few days, and see you, and all the things you are doing.

With all best wishes, and many thanks,

Sincerely,  
(Wells Coates)

P.S.: This letter did not get posted last night, and now this morning your letter has arrived. I do apologise for not having answered you at once, but I have been away in the country since Saturday... I am looking forward to seeing your "documentation concernant l'entreprise d'un grand bloc d'immeubles à Londres" and to the ideas for working in London which we discussed. Perhaps you would like to put down on paper more clearly what you have in mind, in order that we may proceed with the idea?

These lines written by Wells Coates are really astonishing, as he was a well-established professional, but they seem to have been put on paper by an enthusiastic and naive youth who has received an undeserved present of a couple of Le Corbusier's drawings, and who treasures as a precious memory the gift of a few orchids. Even more striking is the post-script, in which he mentions that he has just received a letter from Le Corbusier who had commented that very soon he would be sending him documentation about a large apartment block for London, similar to one he hoped to build in Paris. The letter had been sent from his office in Paris, on the same date, 8 February, and had crossed in the post with the letter from his correspondent (which is a sign of the efficiency of air mail at that time). Its brief text runs thus 7:

My Dear Friend,

I got your telegram, in which you say that the drawings haven't yet arrived. I asked the person who sent them, who told me that they had been despatched, by air, the day before your enquiry came. I'm sure that they will be in your hands within a few days. I'd appreciate it if you could let me know once all is well. I shall soon be sending you documentation concerning a proposal for a large block of rental housing in London, similar to what we're hoping to build here in Paris. My best wishes to everybody.

Yours sincerely,  
Le Corbusier

fundar la firma *Le Corbusier and Partners*. Tengo velas encendidas en todos los países. Mantengo las llamas”.

Sin embargo las prometedoras colaboraciones se reducirían, ya tras la guerra, a la traducción al inglés de varios libros y artículos de Le Corbusier por parte de Clive Entwistle. A partir de esa fecha, las únicas referencias a Le Corbusier en el ámbito británico que cabe mencionar son dos escritos del historiador John Summerson, recogidos en *Architect & Building News*: una elogiosa reseña del tercer volumen de la *Oeuvre Complète*, del 14 de junio de 1939, y un artículo titulado “The Poetry of Le Corbusier” publicado el 5 de abril de 1940, cinco meses antes de dar comienzo el terrible *Blitz* sobre Londres 12. ■

#### NOTAS

1 / Agradezco a Ramiro Clavero los documentos relacionados con Wells Coates del *Canadian Centre for Architecture* que me consiguió en su día. También la ayuda del arquitecto Álvaro Velasco que me hizo llegar una copia del *Mars Exhibition Catalogue* y del reportaje en *The Architecture Review* del número 83 de 1938.

2 / Recibieron en encargo gracias a Jack Pritchard que había visitado el stand realizado por Le Corbusier, Jeanneret y Perriand en el Salón de Otoño de 1929. Le Corbusier no acudió a Londres para la ejecución del stand, fue Ch. Perriand quien viajó aquel septiembre. Pritchard será famoso por el patrocinio del diseño de muebles modernos a famosos arquitectos de la década de los treinta. Se publicó un dibujo en axonometría del stand en *Architectural Review*, en septiembre de 1930.

3 / Eric Mumford, en su libro sobre el CIAM afirma, equivocadamente, que Le Corbusier no pudo acudir a aquella reunión, que se celebró en la sede del RIBA (Mumford 2000, p. 92). El artículo se ha recogido en *Le Corbusier and Britain* (Murray y Osley 2009, pp. 91-95).

4 / La traducción de los textos en francés de debe a la profesora Pilar Chías Navarro, a quien agradezco esta tarea. “Je pars mercredi à une heure en avion pour Londres, où je suis hôte d'honneur d'une grande reception le soir même”.

5 / Se incluye en *Le Corbusier and Britain* (Murray y Osley 2009, pp. 109-111).

6 / “Tournée de fête à Zurich comme à Londres. Très brillante à Londres, cette ville de dense aristocratie”.

7 / “Cher Ami, J'ai reçu votre télégramme me disant que les dessins n'étaient pas arrivés. L'expéditeur questionné m'a dit qu'ils étaient partis la veille de votre réclamation, par avion. Je pense qu'ils sont entre vos mains depuis plusieurs jours. Vous seriez gentil de m'aviser si tout est en ordre. Je vous enverrai bientôt une documentation concernant l'entreprise d'un grand bloc d'immeubles à loyers à Londres, semblable à celui que nous espérons pouvoir faire ici, à Paris. Mes amitiés à tout le monde et bien cordialement à vous”.

8 / “Je suis rentré dimanche matin de Londres: une heure dix minutes Londres-Paris. Trois jours d'occupations. Et bilan probablement

positif (Enfin!). Je bénéficie d'une cote considérable en Angleterre, et des gens ont intérêt à m'employer. D'ailleurs il semble que le destin s'oriente vers une nouvelle phase pour moi: les choses semblent s'arranger. À Londres, j'ai à faire à des gens de qualité. Et même une affaire d'immense envergure à me taire. Et tant que les livres Sterling ne seront pas alignés sur ma table, je ne dirai rien”.

9 / *Oeuvre Complète 4*, pp. 13-15. Allen Brooks, pp. 525-530.

10 / En los archivos del RIBA las fotografías se catalogan como “Arundell Clarke weekend Cottage, Stand 199, Woman's Fair, Olympia, London, 1938”. También hay información en los archivos Garland de otra arquitectura efímera, “Luxury House for Arundell Clarke, Ideal Homes 1939”, vol. 14, p. 535. También en la *Oeuvre complète 4, 1938-1946*, p. 26, se recoge en una página un proyecto de vivienda unifamiliar fechado el 23 de febrero de 1939, denominado “Maison Clarke Arundell, 1939”; sin embargo este proyecto no se relaciona con los anteriores y es la versión final de una serie de bocetos para “Maisons montées à sec, 1938” que se recogen en los archivos Garland, vol. 14, pp. 41-54.

11 / “J'ai toutefois l'espoir de travaux à Londres. Des jeunes gens de grande famille, architectes de talent, veulent fonder la firme “Le Corbusier and Partners”. J'ai des petites flammes allumées en tous pays. J'entretiens les foyers”.

12 / Ambas recogidas en *Le Corbusier and Britain* (pp. 112-113, 117-121). Entre sus cartas hay una dirigida a su madre el 3 de junio de 1939, con membrete del Hotel Fleming, Picadilly, Londres; no hemos podido contrastar si Le Corbusier visitó Londres en esos días.

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Las ilustraciones proceden de las siguientes publicaciones:

Fig. 1, 3 y 9: *Le Corbusier and Britain*.

Fig. 2: E. Darling.

Fig. 4: L. Cohn.

Fig. 5: N. Herschdorfer.

Figs. 6-8: *Mars Exhibition Catalogue*.

Figs. 10 y 11: *Le Corbusier: Oeuvre Complète 4*.





## Drawings for Exhibitions

As for the building in London, or possible collaboration with Wells Coates, little more emerged. There is an indication in Le Corbusier's correspondence that he took a trip to London on 21 October 1938. It would appear that he had contacted several promoters and architects who must have raised his hopes that it would be possible to build an ambitious project in some quarter of London. He wrote about this to his mother on 25 October with a mixture of enthusiasm and y prevention 8:

I got back from London on Sunday: one hour and ten minutes from London to Paris. Three days work. On balance it was probably positive (at last!). I'm well thought of in England, and there are people interested in employing me. Besides, it looks as if fate is sending me off in a new direction: things seem to be settling down in my favour. In London, I've been having to do with well-placed folk. I've even got a huge deal lined up about which I mustn't talk for the moment. Until the pounds sterling are actually piled up on my desk, I'll keep mum.

The project Le Corbusier mentioned must be linked to some sketches dated October 1938 and building planes from January 1939, for the *Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition*. For this Le Corbusier proposed to build a full-scale section of a Living Unit from his *Ville Radiuse* inside the main hall of the *Earls Court Exhibition Centre*, so as to show the British public the possibilities of a "Radiant City: Sun, Space, Green", of which a model was also to be on display (fig. 10).

The most attractive feature of this project for a stand is the drawing reproduced in his *Complete Works* of an introductory pavilion. This was surreal, evoking the sense of sight and hearing by means of a huge eye and ear, surrounding a model of a possible quarter of London designed according to his town-planning proposals (fig. 11). It is to be supposed that in the atmosphere of war threats that was already prevailing in Great Britain all of this came to nothing, as in the documents published by the Garland Archives there is no further development of the project 9. It is thanks to these journeys to London also that Arundell Clarke gave him a commission for the *Woman's Fair* in Olympia in November 1938, in which the interior of a prototype weekend house designed jointly with the architect Clive

Entwistle was exhibited. Of this ephemeral architecture, of limited interest, there remain just four photographs in the archives of the RIBA and a few plans of the project 10.

It must be to this collaboration that Le Corbusier was referring in the letter he wrote to his mother on 18 November, in which he commented 11: "I still have some hopes of work in London. Some young fellows from good families, talented architects, would like to found the firm of 'Le Corbusier and Partners'. I've got a few little flames started in all sorts of countries. I'm keeping these alight".

However, these promising collaborations were to be reduced, at this time after the war was over, to the translation into English of several books and articles of Le Corbusier's by Clive Entwistle. From that date onwards, the only references to Le Corbusier in the British context that are worth mentioning are two articles by the historian John Summerson published in *Architect and Building News*: a very positive critical review of the third volume of the *Oeuvre Complète*, from 14 June 1939, and a piece entitled "The Poetry of Le Corbusier" published on 5 April 1940, five months after the dreadful Blitz on London had started 12. ■

### NOTES

- 1 / I should like to thank Ramiro Clavero for the documents relating to Wells Coates from the *Canadian Centre for Architecture* which he was able to obtain for me. I should also like to acknowledge the assistance of the architect Álvaro Velasco who provided me with a copy of the *Mars Exhibition Catalogue* and of the report on it from number 83 of the *Architecture Review*, of 1938.
- 2 / They got the commission thanks to Jack Pritchard who had visited the stand that had been designed by Le Corbusier, Jeanneret and Perriand for the Autumn Salon of 1929. Le Corbusier did not go to London to oversee construction of the stand, as it was C. Perriand who went there that September. Pritchard was to become famous because of his sponsorship of the design of modern furniture by famous architects in the 1930s. An axonometric drawing of the stand was published in the *Architectural Review* in September 1930.
- 3 / In his book on CIAM, Eric Mumford mistakenly affirms that Le Corbusier was not able to go to that meeting, which was held in the headquarters of the RIBA (Mumford 2000, p. 92). This article was included in *Le Corbusier and Britain* (Murray and Osley 2009, pp. 91-95).
- 4 / "Je pars mercredi à une heure en avion pour Londres, où je suis hôte d'honneur d'une grande réception le soir même".
- 5 / This is included in *Le Corbusier and Britain* (Murray and Osley 2009, pp. 109-111).
- 6 / "Tournée de fête à Zurich comme à Londres. Très brillante à Londres, cette ville de dense aristocratie".
- 7 / "Cher Ami, J'ai reçu votre télégramme me disant que les dessins n'étaient pas arrivés. L'expéditeur questionné m'a dit qu'ils étaient partis la veille de votre réclamation, par avion. Je pense qu'ils sont entre vos mains depuis plusieurs jours. Vous seriez gentil de m'aviser si tout est en ordre. Je vous enverrai

bientôt une documentation concernant l'entreprise d'un grand bloc d'immeubles à loyers à Londres, semblable à celui que nous espérons pouvoir faire ici, à Paris. Mes amitiés à tout le monde et bien cordialement à vous".

8 / "Je suis rentré dimanche matin de Londres: une heure dix minutes Londres-Paris. Trois jours d'occupations. Et bilan probablement positif (Enfin!). Je bénéficie d'une cote considérable en Angleterre, et des gens ont intérêt à m'employer. D'ailleurs il semble que le destin s'oriente vers une nouvelle phase pour moi: les choses semblent s'arranger. À Londres, j'ai à faire à des gens de qualité. Et même une affaire d'immense envergure à me taire. Et tant que les livres Sterling ne seront pas alignées sur ma table, je ne dirai rien".

9 / *Oeuvre Complète 4*, pp. 13-15. Allen Brooks, pp. 525-530.

10 / In the archives of RIBA, these photographs are catalogued as "Arundell Clarke Weekend Cottage, Stand 199, Woman's Fair, Olympia, London, 1938". There is also information in the Garland archives about another ephemeral piece of architecture a "Luxury House for Arundell Clarke, Ideal Homes 1939", vol. 14, p. 535. The *Oeuvre complète 4, 1938-1946*, p. 26, also includes a page showing a project for a detached house dating from 23 February 1939, under the title "Maison Clarke Arundell, 1939". However, this project was not related to the previous plans and was the final version of a series of sketches for "Maisons montées à sec, 1938" included in the Garland archives, vol. 14, pp. 41-54.

11 / "J'ai toutefois l'espoir de travaux à London. Des jeunes gens de grande famille, architectes de talent, veulent fonder la firme "Le Corbusier and Partners". J'ai des petites flammes allumées en tous pays. J'entretiens les foyers".

12 / Both included in *Le Corbusier and Britain* (pp.112-113, 117-121). Among his letters there is one to his mother dated 3 June 1939 on headed notepaper from the Fleming Hotel, Piccadilly, London. However, it has not proved possible check whether Le Corbusier actually visited London at that time.

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