

## PRESS DOSSIER

### INAUGURATION OF THE NEWLY RESTORED MAISON BLANCHE

LA CHAUX-DE-FONDS, 28TH OCTOBER 2005

La Maison blanche was the first freelance project of a young architect who wasn't called Le Corbusier yet. The site is about to be revived and become a place of reference for the pioneering architecture of the 20th century.

#### INAUGURATION

The Maison blanche Association is welcoming, on the premises, the authorities of the City of La Chaux-de-Fonds, the Canton of Neuchâtel and the Swiss Confederation as well as the donators, those who have carried out the restoration, the Le Corbusier Foundation, the media, the tourist office.

#### Speeches

- Mr Pascal Couchepin, Federal Councillor, Head of the Department of Home Affairs;
- Mrs Sylvie Perrinjaquet, Government Councillor, Head of the Department of Education, Culture and Sport;
- Mr Didier Berberat, President of the Municipal Council of La Chaux-de-Fonds, Head of the Department of Education, Youth and Social Affairs;
- Mr Christophe Stawarz, President of the Maison blanche Association.

Texts by Le Corbusier will be read by Charles Joris.

- 29th October 2005: special opening day for the members of the Maison blanche Association and the Municipal Parliament of La Chaux-de-Fonds.
- 30th October 2005: open day with visits every 30 minutes.

Pictures: [www.maisonblanche.ch](http://www.maisonblanche.ch)

# A S S O C I A T I O N M A I S O N B L A N C H E

Villa Jeanneret-Perret • Le Corbusier • 1912

## THE MAISON BLANCHE, INFORMATION

**La Maison blanche**  
Rue de Pouillerel 12  
CH-2300 La Chaux-de-Fonds

[www.maisonblanche.ch](http://www.maisonblanche.ch)  
[contact@maisonblanche.ch](mailto:contact@maisonblanche.ch)

**Association Maison blanche**  
Case postale 2339  
CH-2302 La Chaux-de-Fonds

CCP 17-345375-5

### Opening times, from November 2005:

Friday, Saturday, Sunday  
10am – 5pm

#### Admission prices:

adults	CHF 10.-
children* , students, unemployed	CHF 6.-
seniors	CHF 9.-
family ticket	CHF 22.-

*\*children under 12 are admitted free*

#### group tickets (at least 10 people):

adults	CHF 9.-
children*, students, unemployed	CHF 8.-
seniors	CHF 5.-

*\*children under 12 are admitted free*

Visits outside the opening times:  
reservations are necessary

Group of 20 visitors at the most; extra charge: CHF 100.-  
Duration: 30-60 mn

Case postale 2329 • CH-2302 La Chaux-de-Fonds • CCP 17-345375-5  
[www.maisonblanche.ch](http://www.maisonblanche.ch)

Avec le patronage de la Commission nationale suisse pour l'UNESCO



## Le Corbusier, back to the Roots 1912-1919

La Maison blanche is under the patronage of the Swiss National Commission for UNESCO, and has been proposed by the Swiss Government for inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

### Le Corbusier opus 1

In February 1912, Charles-Edouard Jeanneret opened his own architectural office in La Chaux-de-Fonds, the city of his birth, and where he began his career after completing his education at the advanced course of the Ecole d'Art. The architect who later took the name "Le Corbusier" was 25 years old. He had distanced himself from the spirit of Art Nouveau, traveled in Europe and in the Middle East, learned from the masters of modern architecture... The Maison blanche was his first independent project and a very personal creation. It was destined for his parents, and he lived and worked there himself for several years.

Building began two months after Charles-Edouard Jeanneret launched his independent career, for the young architect it was a veritable experimental laboratory and an educational experience: he tested ideas, techniques, material. The finished work did not completely correspond to the official plans.

In November 1912, six months after building began, the family moved into the villa.

### Return to the Roots

From 1912 to 1919, Charles-Edouard Jeanneret made various additions and modifications; therefore the restoration does not aim to re-establish the original state of the building, but respects subsequent changes made under his auspices.

Our knowledge about the first years of the building and its surroundings are based on a systematic analysis of archives, examination of plans and old photographs, pictorial surveys, and an archaeological analysis.

Changes to the façades, the roof, and to the walls and floors of the rooms have been restored to the textures and colors of the beginning of the 20th century. Most of the radiators could be kept. The old sanitary installations in the bathrooms were replaced; the kitchen, on the other hand, had to be renovated to correspond to current needs.

The complete furnishings have been restored to evoke the atmosphere seen in photographs of some rooms from the times of the Jeannerets. Other furnishings are local creations from the time of the original construction (the sofa for example).

### A Key Building

The Maison blanche is a witness to the pioneering architecture of the 20th century and the development of Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier); his characteristic neoclassic style breaks with the regional Art Nouveau and is based on his experience in Paris as a student of Auguste Perret and in Berlin with Peter Behrens: *"It attempts to show L'Eplattenier a different type of architecture. Earlier houses present a picturesque exterior image. The villa Jeanneret-Perret departs from that image to turn from the inside to the exterior."* (Jacques Gubler, Professor, Department of Architecture, EPFL (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne), revue Architecture, 15.11.1987).

*"The basic structure of the building consists of only the exterior walls and four interior pillars 50 x 60 cm. The remaining walls are light partitions which can easily be replaced without great cost [...] the proportions of all the rooms have been carefully studied and [...] the proportions of certain rooms obey particular laws of architecture which have become completely lost today, and but which were used earlier during the great eras of antique art (mathematical ratio, length, depth, height).* Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, notice of sale, 21.01.1919.

The organization of the interior spaces and their interaction varies on each floor, but is based on the same structure.

*"Built for his parents, the work of a novice, field for experimentation of the young architect, the villa is a witness to a period of trial and transition [...] the state in which Charles-Edouard Jeanneret left it merits absolute respect."* Bernhard Furrer, President of the Federal Commission for Historic Monuments, 14.04.2003.

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## Chronology - 1904-1919

**1904-1906** Charles-Edouard Jeanneret was a student of Charles L'Eplattenier at the l'Ecole d'Art. Construction of the Maison Fallet under the supervision of the architect René Chapallaz. **1907-1908** Travels in Italy and Eastern Europe. Projects: Villa Stotzer and Villa Jaquemot in collaboration with René Chapallaz. **1908-1911** Internships with the brothers Perret and Peter Behrens. **1911** Travels in the Middle East. **1912** Charles-Edouard Jeanneret opened his own architecture bureau; building of the Maison blanche. **1919** The family Jeanneret left the house, which was then sold. In the course of the century it had many owners. The essential architecture has been preserved, but the Eternit roof (fiber cement shingles) was replaced by tiles; the garden and the garden house had been substantially altered.

## 1979 - 2005

**1979** The Maison blanche is classified as a historic monument by the Canton of Neuchâtel. **1994** Restoration of the exterior: the Swiss Confederation recognizes the building as a work of national interest. **2000** Creation of the Association Maison blanche. Purchase of the building, search for funds for its restoration. **2003** Publication of the preparatory study for its restoration. **2004** Work begins. **2005 Inauguration of the restored Maison blanche.**

## The Façades

Each façade has a unique composition; none is truly symmetric. There are ten different types of windows, from traditional rectangular bay windows to large innovative openings, proportioned in a subtle equilibrium.

Polychromatic in 1912, the façades were whitewashed six months after the family took possession of the house.

## THE ROOF

An Eternit roof made the Maison blanche light and airy. The tiles, which were added in the 1940s, remained until 2004. The restoration gave the roof its original aspect.

## THE "CHAMBRE D'ÉTÉ" (GARDEN HOUSE)

### AND THE GARDEN

The "chambre d'été" extends across the south side of the exterior, and echoes the geometry of the interior space. Its conception is strongly influenced by his travels in the Middle East (1911; architectural vernacular of the Balkans, travels in Italy...).

The "chambre d'été" is *"totally protected from the outside, with a panoramic view of the mountain range and is oriented to permit constant use from morning to evening protected from the wind. With its paved floor, in the middle of the lawn and flowerbeds, it is always dry..."*

Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, notice of sale, 21.01.1919.

Below the level of the "chambre d'été," the garden reflects the concept of the architectural promenade developed by Le Corbusier. The terraces and walls structure the slope; the hill towards the house follows a clever path. His father, Georges Jeanneret, was a passionate gardener, who enjoyed caring for the flowerbeds, vegetable garden, trees, and berry bushes.

Changes during the 1950s completely transformed the physiognomy of the garden. A painstaking analysis of traces of information garnered from old photographs has enabled restoration of the original form. The signature of Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, can only be seen as a general sketch.

## THE GROUND FLOOR

The four interior columns *"organize the center of the structure and situate the family's space in the music salon, this is a homage to his mother whose piano dominated the orthogonal intersection of the axes and the line of the western apse [...]"* (Jacques Gubler, Professor, Department of Architecture, EPFL, revue Architecture, 15.11.1987)

The opening of the French doors placed between the central pillars defines a space free of support (3 x 14 m), that the father of the architect called the *"transept of the cathedral."*

In 1912, the walls were painted in light colours, with the exception of the entrance hall, the library and the small salon, which were re-wallpapered in jute, and the room of Charles-Edouard on the upper floor, which was painted ochre. The door connecting the library to the salon was walled off shortly afterwards, and the salon was then wallpapered in a floral motif, which was reprinted in 2005 based on known fragments.

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The floors of the hallways, the kitchen, and the bathrooms have been re-covered in blue and white checked (partially restored) linoleum. The tiles of the entrance vestibule are white and black checked.

The ceramic chimney is original. Above the entrance of the hearth was an ornamented lintel dated "1913" with two cornucopias and two birds (one living and one dead). This work of Charles-Edouard Jeanneret disappeared in the course of the 1990s...

### THE LOWER LEVEL

The cellars and the atelier of Charles-Edouard Jeanneret's father, enameller of watch faces, are in the lower level. The architect considered the possibility of transforming this space into living quarters.

### THE GROUND FLOOR

The ground floor was the area of the private family life of the Jeannerets. Charles-Edouard Jeanneret had his architect's office there.

*"My bedroom is semi-circular and yellow [...] The bedroom of my father and mother is bordered by four windows under a large completely white eave. This room is white and the view of the countryside, of the woods up to Mont-Racine, is a large uneven blue line."*

Charles-Edouard Jeanneret

### THE ATTICS

Albert Jeanneret, the brother of Charles-Edouard, lived in the room with the dormer window.

The house was built on a hill that was not serviced by the public water network. Rainwater was collected from the roof into a cistern at the bottom of the house. From there it was pumped to a tank in the attic, where it flowed into the distribution conduits by gravity. The wooden tank with a double zinc lining is still in place.

### Association Maison blanche

Classified as an important national monument, but abandoned for many years, la Maison blanche could be revived thanks to the commitment of citizens from all walks of life who founded the Association on 31 January 2000.

With the support of the public, foundations, and private donors, the Association Maison blanche was able to realize this ambitious project: The acquisition of the propriety and its complete restoration while simultaneously respecting the work of the architect, and thus permitting it to be opened to the public, to schools of architecture and art, to political representatives, and to the economic world....

The multidisciplinary studies conducted in view of the restoration enormously enriched our knowledge of the Maison blanche. It enchants us, bears witness to the value of this treasured heritage of La Chaux-de-Fonds and illuminates this significant trajectory in the career of Le Corbusier: a necessary link between his education and his mature works!

### Executive committee of the Association Maison blanche

Christophe Stawarz, president; Martine Voumard, vice president;  
Jean-Daniel Goumaz, secretary; Stéphane Beaud, treasurer;  
Ariane Borel, Robert Monnier, Boris Evard, Jean-Jacques Noverraz, Pascal Bourquin, members.

### Commission for the realisation of the project

Robert Monnier, architect FAS-SIA, president; Arthur Rüegg, architect BSA-SIA, professor EPFZ; Giuseppe Gerster, architect SIA, federal expert, Federal Office of Culture; Jacques Bujard, curator of State monuments and sites, Neuchâtel; Christophe Stawarz, president of the executive committee of the Association Maison blanche; Denis Clerc, city architect of the city of La Chaux-de-Fonds; Jean-Daniel Jeanneret, architect in charge of the city's patrimony of La Chaux-de-Fonds; Edmond Charrière, curator of the Musée des Beaux-Arts, La Chaux-de-Fonds; Pierre Minder, architect SIA, master builder.

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## Agents

Architect	MSBR S.A., Pierre Minder, architect EPFL-SIA, La Chaux-de-Fonds
Landscape architect	Planum, Peter Wullschleger, Landscape architect, HES-FSAP, La Chaux-de-Fonds
Art historian	Catherine Courtiau, Genève
Building statics	Pierre Beurret, La Chaux-de-Fonds
Heating and building technology	Planair S.A., Pierre Renaud, La Sagne
Conservation and restoration	Atelier Muttner, E.+M. Muttner, Le Landeron
Sanitary	Bureau d'études sanitaires, Laurent Geiser, La Chaux-de-Fonds
Photographic documentation	Eveline Perroud, La Chaux-de-Fonds

## SUBSIDIES AND DONATIONS

*(Conditions in October 2005)*

### Purchase of La Maison blanche

LOTÉRIE ROMANDE  
FEDERAL OFFICE OF CULTURE  
ÉTAT DE NEUCHÂTEL  
VILLE DE LA CHAUX-DE-FONDS

### Financial support for the preparatory studies of the restoration

ÉTAT DE NEUCHÂTEL  
LOTÉRIE ROMANDE  
SWISS HERITAGE SOCIETY  
FEDERAL OFFICE OF CULTURE

### Financial support for the restoration

LOTÉRIE ROMANDE  
ÉTAT DE NEUCHÂTEL  
FEDERAL OFFICE OF CULTURE  
THE GETTY FOUNDATION  
FONDATION DU JUBILÉ DU CRÉDIT SUISSE  
FONDS SUISSE POUR LE PAYSAGE  
SOPHIE UND KARL BINDING STIFTUNG  
ERNST GÖHNER STIFTUNG  
ECAP, ÉTABLISSEMENT CANTONAL D'ASSURANCE  
ET DE PRÉVOYANCE  
POURCENT CULTUREL MIGROS  
BANK VONTOBEL FAMILIE STIFTUNG  
GOETHE STIFTUNG  
ALFRED RICHTERICH STIFTUNG  
ESCAD SA

ETERNIT SA donated the roofing material.

### The Maison Blanche Association also thanks the following individuals and companies for their donations and invaluable contributions to the revival of the Maison Blanche:

AA AGENTUR ARBER GMBH, ZOLLIKON  
AERMO MÖBEL AG, DIETIKON  
ALIAS S.P.A., GRUMELLO DEL MONTE, ITALIE  
BIBLIOTHÈQUE DE LA VILLE DE LA CHAUX-DE-FONDS  
BOLAY BAUER ANNE-CATHERINE, BAUER PIERRE, LA CHAUX-DE-FONDS  
BRINGOLF ANOUK & LUCIEN, LA CHAUX-DE-FONDS  
CAFÉS LA SEMEUSE, LA CHAUX-DE-FONDS  
CHANÉE DUCROCO, PARIS

# A S S O C I A T I O N M A I S O N B L A N C H E

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CRÉABÉTON MATÉRIAUX SA, LYSS

EBEL, LA CHAUX-DE-FONDS

EGS SÉCURITÉ SA, COLOMBIER

ETIENNE RENÉE, HAUTERIVE

FONDATION LE CORBUSIER, PARIS

FONTAINE FRANCIS, TAPISSIER DÉCORATEUR, LA CHAUX-DE-FONDS

FORS AG, STUDEN

G D'ENCRE, LE LOCLE

JEANMAIRE SA, LA CHAUX-DE-FONDS

KT COLOR, USTER

L'ATELIER VOLANT, LA CHAUX-DE-FONDS

MARTI SA, LA CHAUX-DE-FONDS

MIELE SA, CRISSIER

MODOLO EMANUELLE & DINO, LA CHAUX-DE-FONDS

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MUSÉE D'HISTOIRE NATURELLE, LA CHAUX-DE-FONDS

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TAPISANO AG

TARKETT

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