

1418, AVENUE DES PINS, LA MAISON ERNEST CORMIER AND THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

In September of 1930 Ernest Cormier purchased the parcel of land from the Estate of George C. Hague that was to be the site of his own home.¹ He was forty-five years of age, and had in the previous decade established a formidable career and public persona as an architect and civil engineer, exhibiting watercolorist and sculptor.²

Apart from his more public persona, there was also Cormier the private man. Cormier's first wife, Berthe Leduc, died in 1918.³ In the following years when he was establishing his career as architect-engineer-artist, Cormier met Clorinthe Perron with whom he began a lifelong relationship. Clorinthe Perron and her sister Cécile had worked as artists' models for Cormier and his friends Henri Hébert, the sculptor and his brother Adrien Hébert, the painter. While suitable as a companion in the context of the private and artistic lives shared with his friends, at that time Clorinthe Perron was not considered an acceptable wife for the son of a socially-prominent physician whose career as architect-engineer brought him into contact with the established patrons of the ecclesiastical, educational and civic structures he was then building.⁴ While the artistic facet of Cormier's life was discussed in the press, as a means of complementing his career as an engineer and Beaux-Arts-trained architect, his personal life was kept from public view. Officially, Mrs. Cormier, i.e. Berthe Leduc, had died in 1918, and there was no second Mrs. Cormier.⁵

I believe that this compartmentalization of Cormier's life into the public person and private man, viz the architect-engineer-artist, the companion of Clorinthe Perron, the photographer, gardener and ceramicist, the book binder and bibliophile, was at the core of the programme Cormier evolved for his house and largely determined its *parti*. One could conjecture then that the residence at 1418, Avenue des Pins was an expression in architectural terms of Ernest Cormier himself.

Cormier's choice of a site on the southern slope of Mount Royal reflected a continuing fascination with buildings on mountain sites that dates back to his early student projects in Rome, such as the Villa Madama, situated on one of the hills of that city.⁶ This interest was again manifested in his watercolour renderings, done after photos he had taken on his trips to Europe between the wars.⁷ While the hills of Rome were a topographical fact of Cormier's student days there, Mount Royal is the primary topographical feature of the architect's native city whose northern slope was the site of the project that was to preoc-

cupy him to varying degrees of involvement for nearly forty years of his life.⁸ The site Cormier chose for his house was almost midway between the Université de Montréal and his Mansfield Street office. It afforded a spectacular view of the city below and was in an area traditionally inhabited by members of Montréal's business and social elite in whose company Cormier, as an ambitious professional, was increasingly enmeshed.⁹ In such a neighbourhood, an attractive up-to-date house could draw the attention of a well-heeled potential clientele, the depressed financial climate of the period notwithstanding.

The Cormier house is attached to the eastern wall of the much larger Gillespie house, built in 1926 by Barott and Blackader.¹⁰ The two-storey studio block is lower than the height of the Gillespie house and is set back between the Gillespie house façade and that of the entry pavilion, leaving space for a terraced front lawn (fig. 1). The Gillespie house physically dominates these three masses; yet the simplicity of the vertical elements of both the door with its framing devices, and the window with its sculpture and window box, create sufficient compositional tension to visually re-assert the presence of the Cormier house. Thus, this modern house, by 1930 standards, does not overwhelm the more traditional elements of the neighbourhood. It is only when viewed from the eastern side that one could perceive a house which projects far out from its sloping site, and comprises four visible floors and an enclosed rear garden over a garage that is five levels below the Pine Avenue entrance terrace (fig. 2).¹¹ These elements — front terrace, house, garden and garage — are analogous to those of the forecourt, *corps-de-logis*, gardens and stabling, albeit arranged on a level site in the traditional Parisian townhouse of the late eighteenth century.¹² Cormier, because of a personal predilection, was convinced of the validity of the Beaux-Arts architectural traditions which he took such pains to learn in Paris and Rome.¹³ Given the programme that he presumably set for his house whose spaces had to accommodate the various aspects of his public, professional, artistic and private lives, only a traditional Beaux-Arts approach with spaces set aside for different contexts and functions was possible. The interlocking spaces of Frank Lloyd Wright and the open planning of Le Corbusier or even Mies were therefore irrelevant.¹⁴

The plan of the house is basically a "T" shape, axially arranged around a dominant stairwell and disposed down the slope of the mountain. The uppermost floor on a north-south axis contains the entry, cloakroom and kitchen facilities, symmetrically arranged opposite the dining room and wet bar that they serve and around the central stairwell and hall. The stairwell is the fulcrum of the east-west axis leading across the hall through the studio entry into the studio itself. Thus, on this floor are the most accessible public rooms or *chambres d'apparat* of the house which, with their service rooms, could accommodate whatever formal entertaining or meeting facilities were required



fig. 1 Ernest Cormier, **Cormier House, Montréal, 1930-31**, view from avenue des Pins, Montréal, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture / Canadian Centre for Architecture, 01 Arc 606 N. (Photo: S.J. Hayward)



fig. 2 Ernest Cormier, **Cormier House, Montréal, 1930-31**, East façade, Montréal, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture / Canadian Centre for Architecture, 01 Arc 607N. (Photo: S.J. Hayward)

in the context of Cormier's professional or artistic life and which architecturally present the most visible aspect of Cormier's public persona.¹⁵

In a reversal of the usual domestic formula, one descends to the more private level of the house. In doing so Cormier successfully exploited the site limitations and kept his domestic life from public view. From the staircase, on an east-west axis, one passes through another columned entry into the windowless library. On the north-south axis are the maids' quarters and entry, linen and wine storage, stairhall, dressing room and master bedroom. A subsidiary east-west axis includes bathrooms and another room originally intended as a bedroom, leading off the library.¹⁶

Below this complex of *chambre de commodités*, comprising *chambre à coucher*, *cabinets*, library, and service rooms, is an apartment provided for Clorinthe Perron and her sister Cécile. This is accessible by either the interior staircase or the exterior side entrance. The apartment contains a *salle commune*, normally considered a servant's communal hall but is here, in fact, a living room with fireplace and view over the city and the primary access to the garden. Left of the stair is a bedroom, dressing room, bathroom and closet suite. To the right of the stair is a kitchen and a workroom for one of Cormier's various activities as book-binder and sculptor.¹⁷ The staircase provides access to the floor below with storage and furnace room and yet another workroom or atelier, supposedly for ceramics, as it was at one time apparently provided with a kiln.¹⁸

What then were the architectural precedents for such a house? Traditionally designed houses perched on spectacular sites were featured throughout the 1920's in architectural journals familiar to Cormier. California houses by such architects as Myron Hunt and George Washington Smith, for example, in a modified Mediterranean style, were illustrated in the pages of the *Architectural Record* along with old or more recently built hill-sited villas in Spain, Southern France and Italy.¹⁹ Such buildings, with their bold massing, plain stuccoed walls and simple fenestration, had a profound influence on architects of Cormier's generation including those working in the International style. These more contemporary buildings, illustrated in the pages of *L'architecture vivante*, *Art et Décoration* or *L'architecture* in Cormier's library, include projects by Eileen Gray and Jean Badovici, Rob. Mallet-Stevens, Edouard Joseph Djo-Bourgeois, Gabriel Guévrekian, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright.²⁰

Yet, while many of these houses may have served as potential models for his house plan, the problems inherent in a difficult site were not the only determining factors. As Pierre Richard Bisson has pointed out, one of the principal precedents for the Cormier house with its two-storey studio-salon, flanked on one side by service and living areas, was the house J. Omer Marchand built for himself between 1912 and 1914 on a more conventional site on Wood

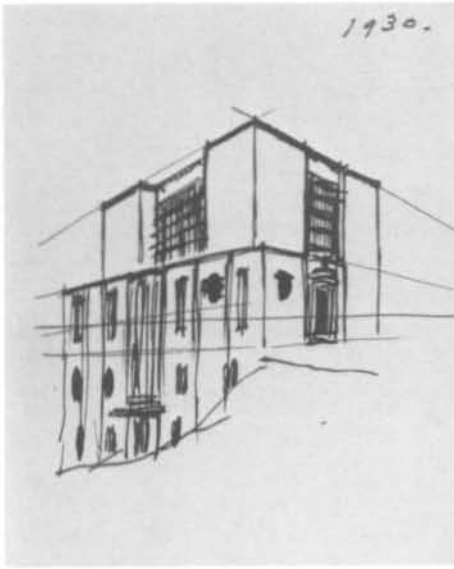


fig. 3 Ernest Cormier, *Cormier House*, Montréal, 1930, preliminary perspective sketch, red and black ink on paper, 13.8 cm × 11.5 cm, Montréal, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture / Canadian Centre for Architecture, ARO1:3005, boîte 905, folio A-39.

Avenue.²¹ Cormier was perhaps attempting to restate Marchand's concept of the studio house as the archetypal dwelling appropriate to the architect.

In a small sketch in red ink on paper found in the dossier dealing with the land purchase of 1930, the year inscribed on the sketch, Cormier drew in some, but not all, of the essential masses and fenestration of the building (fig. 3).²² The façade of the eastern block of the house comprises a long central columnar mass terminating at its base with a door and small canopy. This central unit is flanked by windows arranged in a "T" shape. This composition recalls that of the street façade

of Peter Behrens's Cuno house at Hagen Eppenhause built around 1909-1910.²³ In addition to certain visual similarities between the two façades, it must be borne in mind that the central vertical elements in both buildings contain monumental stairwells with central hall and large drawing rooms, all on the same axis; so too does Behrens's Schroeder house next to the Cuno house which has, in addition, a screen of four columns separating the drawing room from the hall-stairwell complex.²⁴ It must be remembered that Cormier owned books on Peter Behrens.²⁵

The small sketch however does not include a number of significant elements which Cormier incorporated in the finished house. One of these was the addition of a rectangular clerestory well which provided light through the east window of the studio, as well as dramatic overhead light to the columned entry way to the studio. In the juxtaposition of these external elements, Cormier may well have been influenced by Perret's similar treatment of interconnecting rectangular or block-like masses found in his 1926 house for Mr. Mouron in Versailles.²⁶ The south façade of the Cormier house was to a certain degree determined by that of the adjoining Gillespie house. However, in its massing,

fenestration and stuccoed surfaces, it owes more to the works of architects like Rob. Mallet-Stevens (fig. 4).²⁷

To return to the small sketch, we notice that the entrance way is not as Cormier completed it. For this Cormier adapted its main elements, such as the receding vertical panels framing the central door and overdoor sculpture, from the front doorway of the Pavillon du Collectionneur designed by Pierre Patout in conjunction with the interior designer Emile Jacques Ruhlmann for the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* held in Paris between April and October of 1925.²⁸ Notwithstanding the participation of such avant-garde architects as Melnikov from Russia, as well as Le Corbusier from France, the Pavillon du Collectionneur was the focal point of France's participation in the exhibition and it was widely praised at the time. Couched as a modern building with plenty of stylistic allusions to the eighteenth century, the pavilion was to be the dwelling of an imaginary sophisticated connoisseur and patron of the contemporary art and design that merited being shown

inside.²⁹ Perhaps by alluding to this façade by Patout, an architect he admired very much and apparently worked with, Cormier was appropriating for himself the role of the sophisticated modern connoisseur as a necessary complement to the role of architect-engineer. Thus, Cormier's house may have been not only a modern reworking of Marchand's earlier house as the archetypal dwelling of the architect, but also a comment about the qualities required of the modern architect, certainly one like Ernest Cormier.

The Pavillon du Collectionneur and the 1925 exhibition were interesting for other aspects related to the field of design that influence Cormier's career. It was during this period that issues related to design were undergoing changes analogous to those occurring in the areas of architecture, sculpture and painting.³⁰ Perhaps the best that can be said of the *Exposition* is that it brought into sharp focus the problems that had beset the decorative arts since the time of



fig. 4 Ernest Cormier, Cormier House, Montréal, 1930-31, South façade, Montréal, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture / Canadian Centre for Architecture, 01 Arc 608N. (Photo: S.J. Hayward)

William Morris; namely, how does an industrialized society produce innovative design of excellent quality while taking into account the new possibilities of machine production. Perhaps the major personality in France who was then grappling with this issue was Le Corbusier.³¹ His architectural participation in the *Exposition* was in the form of the ill-sited Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau.³² This totally modern building was named after the polemical art journal *L'Esprit Nouveau* that was the mouthpiece of Le Corbusier and his associates and from whose pages were culled the series of articles that comprised his scathing attack on the state of design at the time.³³ Entitled *L'Art Décoratif d'Aujourd'hui*, it was published just in time for the *Exposition*, and Cormier owned a copy. The focus of Le Corbusier's criticisms was the essentially historicist approach to a type of design intended primarily for the luxury market fostered by the *Exposition's* organizers and the Société des Artistes Décorateurs with whom Le Corbusier was ideologically at odds.³⁴

Le Corbusier was of course acutely aware of all aspects of German and Austrian architecture and design whose influence had swept over Europe in successive waves since the turn of the century. These embraced a wide range of ideas that included an approach to design in which all the individual elements were subordinated to the overall look or ensemble; the adoption of Adolf Loos's ideas concerning the rejection of all unnecessary ornaments; and Hermann Muthesius's dictum that designers had to produce standardized archetypal objects, stripped of historical associations, whose forms were based on mathematical calculation and determined by function. Perhaps the most significant idea was that of the state-sponsored collaborative design workshops that led to the post-war creation of the Bauhaus.³⁵

In the period of reconstruction after the war, French designers, especially those associated with the Société des Artistes Décorateurs, rejected whatever influences heretofore had been coming from Germany, especially since the successful German design presentation at the 1910 Salon d'Automne which Cormier most likely visited.³⁶ Instead, French designers retreated into simplified reworking of the classical design vocabulary popular in Europe between 1765 and 1840, exploiting the full gamut of luxurious surface finishes updated to reflect the impact of Cubism, Futurism and the Wiener Werkstätte with colour combinations that were influenced by the Fauves and the orientalism and exoticism of the Ballets Russes.³⁷ This more traditionally-based synthetic approach to design that we now call Art Déco can be seen in its finest and most distilled expression in the works of Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann and Jean-Michel Frank, both of whose works had a profound influence on Cormier.³⁸ The other more avant-garde approach, informed as it was by ideas emanating from Germany, Austria and Italy, was naturally spearheaded by Le Corbusier and a cadre of like-minded young designers, some of whom had been, earlier in their

careers, in the traditionalist camp.³⁹ From this modern approach, Cormier extrapolated and incorporated many ideas into the furnishings that he designed. These include a suppression of nearly all ornament; a systematization of seating and table furniture types according to function; and a virtual elimination of storage or case pieces in favour of built-in storage facilities. All of these ideas reflected the influence of Le Corbusier and others, and Cormier's own inclination by virtue of his training as an engineer. Yet Cormier's interiors are far from anything designed by Le Corbusier.

The first room or ensemble to be considered is the studio which one enters through the rather dramatic entry with its Bois Jourdain marble-faced columns which appear to support the light-well above (fig. 5). Cormier, like other architects of his time, seems to have been fascinated with the simplified but powerful forms of Egyptian architecture. The combination of the shapes of the columned entry into the tombs at Beni-Hasan, combined with that of the stepped pyramid or *mastaba*, obviously suggested possibilities for the studio entry way.⁴⁰

The mottled grayish-bronze of the marble columns focuses attention on these same materials in the fireplace, a rectangular mass flanked with fluted and truncated quarter-columns. This gray-bronze colour is repeated in the small squares set into the floor where the tan and honey-coloured terrazzo surfaces intersect.⁴¹ The light honey colour is repeated in the Japanese wood-fiber wallpaper on the walls that take one's eye up to the *mastaba* — like a coffered ceiling, lit at night from a source hidden behind the reeded cornice moldings. The materials of the walls, floor, fireplace and columns have an inherent small-scale pattern that is given a geometric order and visual tension by the manner in which they are assembled. The colour range of these materials gives the room its warmth, an aspect that is enhanced especially in the daytime by the interplay of smooth and matte textures.

The first furniture grouping that one encounters in the room is a large black and gold table with marble top about which are clustered two short and two long benches. This group and the matching lower octagonal table are a stylistically distinct visual foil to the rest of the furniture in the room and, although they were designed by Cormier, they were not, however, originally designed for his home.⁴² Nor was the round table in the corner at the right. Previously thought to have been designed by Ruhlmann and purchased by Cormier at the 1925 *Exposition*, the table was actually designed by Maurice Dufrène and was featured prominently in 1922 promotional literature for the La Maîtrise shop at Galerie Lafayette which Dufrène directed.⁴³

The other furniture was, however, designed for the room, the most imposing of which was the long divan in front of the radiator beneath the window. Its rectangular, unadorned, block-like arms were veneered in macassar



fig. 5 Ernest Cormier, **Cormier House, Montréal**,
1930-31, view from hall into studio, Montréal,
Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture /
Canadian Centre for Architecture, 01 Arc 089N.
(Photo: S.J. Hayward)



fig. 6 Ernest Cormier, *Cormier House, Montréal*, 1930-31, interior of Studio, Montréal, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture / Canadian Centre for Architecture, 01 Arc 086N.
(Photo: S.J. Hayward)

ebony and it was covered in an amethyst velvet to match the window curtains.⁴⁴ The whole ensemble formed a tall consistently-coloured unit (fig. 6).⁴⁵

The shape of the armchairs used in the studio and elsewhere seems to have been derived from examples by Francis Jourdain, another important designer.⁴⁶ The design sources of the smaller chairs in the corner of the studio will be discussed in conjunction with the dining room furniture. We see, however, that Cormier evolved three basic types of seating furniture which he then used throughout the house. These were dictated by placement and function, an idea that Le Corbusier would have endorsed. Yet, at the same time, these types also allude to, but do not literally copy, the eighteenth-century hierarchy of seating furniture for a *chambre d'apparat* comprising the *sièges meublants* or large scale seating furniture visually conceived as part of the architectural framework, and the *sièges courants* or smaller chairs moved about according to social needs.⁴⁷ The idea of a modern object alluding to the past, as we shall see, is a leitmotif Cormier wove throughout his house.

fig. 7 Ernest Cormier, *Cormier House, Montréal, 1930-31*, interior of dining room, Montréal, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture / Canadian Centre for Architecture, 01 Arc 398N. (Photo: S.J. Hayward)



For the design of his dining room, Cormier reworked many of the same ideas he had used in the design of his studio, but in different materials (fig. 7). The rectangular walnut panels with ebony covered studs are similar in tonality to the end-cut wooden floor laid in a geometric pattern. The original brown silk-velvet curtains and the burgundy striae mohair-velvet chair upholstery likewise related to the colour of the side-board which was made of a mottled plum and grey levanto marble.⁴⁸

The room has many allusions to Ruhlmann's designs; the ceiling, with its *caillouté* pattern coffers, is similar to one Ruhlmann created for a salon on the steamship *Ile de France*.⁴⁹ The ordering of other elements in the room also recalls the work of Ruhlmann. The symmetrical placement of doors or windows flanking a central buffet and mirrored wall recall a 1923 Ruhlmann project for a dining room.⁵⁰ This in turn, however, is very much within the context of the traditional interior architecture of dining rooms in large French houses that can be traced back to an early eighteenth-century dining room elevation by Jean

Berain.⁵¹ The dining room table is essentially an extensible trestle table reduced to its most basic elements, executed however in walnut and macassar ebony.⁵² Cormier initially made two designs for dining room chairs that could be used elsewhere in the house.⁵³ One is derived from early eighteenth-century English designs with a characteristic cabriole leg; the second seems to be a variant of a chair design available at the time in Montréal department stores.⁵⁴ Ultimately the design Cormier chose was one developed by Philippe Petit and sold through the *Décorations Intérieures Modernes* shop in Paris.⁵⁵

Cormier commissioned two different photos of the dining room from Hayward, the photographer, showing the room under different lighting conditions. Cormier was obviously fascinated with the play of light on the textures of different materials including the Japanese wood-fiber wallpaper that he assembled in different patterns in various areas of the house, horizontally in the studio and checker-patterned in the hallway and upper stairwell.⁵⁶ Cormier was probably influenced by Jean-Michel Frank's handling of similar exotic and precious materials. His 1927 drawing room done for the Comte de Noailles features walls covered with rectangular sheets of parchment arranged to suggest stone blocks.⁵⁷

Cormier's interest in surface textures extended to such details as the intersecting lozenge pattern for the acid-etched window in the stairwell (fig. 8).⁵⁸ Cormier delineated these shimmering window and wall surfaces by outlining the window in what appears to be ornamental bars of chrome tubing, the only instance where he used this material in the house. These bars are in fact part of the heating coil that completely surrounds the window embrasure.⁵⁹ Cormier used flat chromium-plated bronze straps, again in polished and matte finishes, for the balustrade of the staircase whose design was influenced by a 1928 staircase by Maurice Dufrene who used these materials in a similar manner.⁶⁰ The Ruhlmannesque lighting fixtures in the upper and lower stairhalls were made locally after Cormier's own drawing.⁶¹

From the marble-faced lower stairwell, one passes through another columned entry (again with Egyptian architectural allusions) that gives access to the library (fig. 9). The gold-leaf facing on the columns is similar in tonality to that of the ensemble of the stele over the fireplace made of black and gold marble.⁶² The golden colours of the entry and the fireplace corner provide a counterpoint to the sumptuousness of the materials used in the library whose floor, furniture, fitted shelves and panelling were all executed in highly figured walnut.⁶³

In this room, as in the dining room and studio, Cormier has placed a principal piece of furniture at or near the room's central axis.⁶⁴ Strategically seated behind the desk where Cormier worked on its practical marble surface, one can see beyond this windowless room, through the columns, to the lighted



fig. 8 Ernest Cormier,
Cormier House,
Montréal, 1930-31,
view of hall and upper
stairwell from studio,
Montréal, Collection
Centre Canadien
d'Architecture /
Canadian Centre for
Architecture, 01 Arc
352N. (Photo: S.J.
Hayward)

fig. 9 Ernest Cormier,
Cormier House,
Montréal, 1930-31,
view of library from
lower hall, Montréal,
Collection Centre
Canadien d'Architecture
/ Canadian Centre for
Architecture, 01 Arc
602N. (Photo: S.J.
Hayward)





fig. 10 Ernest Cormier, **Cormier House, Montréal, 1930-31**, interior of library, Montréal, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture / Canadian Centre for Architecture, 01 Arc 088N. (Photo: S.J. Hayward)

fig. 11 Ernest Cormier, **Cormier House, Montréal, 1930-31**, interior of dressing room, Montréal, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture / Canadian Centre for Architecture, 01 Arc 599N. (Photo: S.J. Hayward)

fig. 12 Ernest Cormier, **Cormier House, Montréal, 1930-31**, interior of bedroom, Montréal, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture / Canadian Centre for Architecture, 01 Arc 600N. (Photo: S.J. Hayward)



stairwell and hallway, or straight ahead through the door opposite, across the adjacent room, through the window, to the city below. Slightly to the left of the columns is the caracul-covered divan placed under the bookcase in a manner that recalls the placement of the studio divan under the window. To the right of the door opposite the desk is the fireplace; to the left of the door is a large bookcase which, along with the divan, would have provided the three interior focal points of the room when viewed from the desk. Thus, the visual texture and complexity of these three solids alternating with the voids or penetrations of the doors would preclude any sense of claustrophobia that this interior room could engender (fig. 10).

Adjacent to the library was Cormier's bedroom suite, entered through a long narrow dressing room with a large, rather masculine dressing table-desk and stool at one end, in front of the curtained window. The opposite end of the room was fitted with three full-length dressing mirrors.⁶⁵ The walls of the by now familiar Japanese fiber paper were arranged so as to suggest the pattern of cut stone blocks (fig. 11).

The bedroom is a rectangular chamber provided with a simple bedframe and two coffers veneered in a geometric pattern of walnut and macassar ebony. The walls were completely covered with velvet attached to tracks which allowed for openings at the doors and windows.⁶⁶ The bed was centered on a carpet, the only one to be seen in any major room of the house (fig. 12). This emphasis on soft sound-absorbing materials was not only appropriate to the room's function, but, as Odile Henault and Larry Richards have suggested, was also an aspect of the sumptuousness typical of the tastes of the period.⁶⁷ It also recalls the classicism of the Napoleonic period in France when bedrooms were quite often partially or completely curtained in fabric.⁶⁸ But, it also alludes to the far distant past — the Middle Ages. In that period, bedrooms were the most expensively furnished chambers in the houses of the wealthy.

Frequently fitted out with hangings or tapestries for heat rather than sound insulation, they were the repositories of the owner's most valued possessions, kept in coffers and trunks.⁶⁹ The nomadic owners of such houses transported belongings from house to house where they would be re-installed. From this evolved the concept of *meubles* — or moveable furniture.⁷⁰ Thus, while Cormier designed a room that reflected the luxury of the period he lived in, with simple archetypal shapes, he was at the same time referring to the oldest concept of furniture itself. This, I feel, is essential to understanding Cormier for whom the past and the present were not in conflict but a continuum. Le Corbusier felt that historical and hierarchical associations had to be eliminated in order to start anew, probably because the vestiges of the past were all around him. It is interesting that Cormier makes this statement in the most private and intimate room of his house. This medieval conceit continues when one pushes



fig. 13 Ernest Cormier, Cormier House, Montréal, 1930-31, view of garden, Montréal, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture / Canadian Centre for Architecture, 01 Arc 609N.
(Photo: S.J. Hayward)

back the arras-like wall curtains of the bedroom to look outside onto a walled-in garden⁷¹ or *Hortus conclusus*, with its own medievalizing tower, whose interior stairwell provided access to the garage and a very twentieth-century means of transportation (fig. 13).

Below this floor is Clorinthe Perron's apartment about whose décor we have only a drawing for the living room (*Salle de commune*) fireplace and another sheet with a floor plan for the bedroom furniture placement on the verso of which is a freehand sketch of this same furniture and one official photograph showing the living room in an unfinished state.⁷² Yet again we see walls covered in Japanese wood-fiber paper. Most of the furniture was purchased from department stores, either in Paris or Montréal.⁷³ This far more conventionally domestic setting than others in the house was, according to the accounts of Cormier's servant, where Cormier and Clorinthe lived much of their lives together (fig. 14).

Within a year of its completion the house was featured in the pages of the *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* with illustrations of the interiors and plans of the two uppermost floors.⁷⁴ The house was well received and won the R.A.I.C. prize. However, it did not bring Cormier any known commissions for domestic architecture. One of the prime reasons for this was



fig. 14 Ernest Cormier, *Cormier House*, Montréal, 1930-31, view of Clorinthe Perron's living room, Montréal, collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture / Canadian Centre for Architecture, 01 Arc 601N. (Photo: S.J. Hayward)

of course the financial depression during which Cormier apparently supported his rather lavish lifestyle by his commissions as a consultant-engineer. There were other reasons that have to do more with prevailing aesthetic trends in North America.

For the type of clientele that an architect like Cormier may have been trying to cultivate and for whom the *parade* of public life was a daily reality, the bible, as it were, of interior design since the early days of the century was Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman's *The Decoration of Houses* whose ideas were later updated in Elsie de Wolfe's *The House in Good Taste*.⁷⁵ Their design principles, based upon traditions dating from the Renaissance through the eighteenth century, informed the interiors of Beaux-Arts houses in New

York, Newport and Montréal such as Marchand's house for Rodolphe Forget, Ernest Barott's house for William Yuile and Robert and F.R. Findlay's house for J.A. Raymond.⁷⁶ These were all built within a generation and little more than a stone's throw away from the Cormier house.

The other main trend in North America was the colonial revival. In an age when millions of new immigrants were settling into a new life, the need for re-asserting the traditions of a colonial-revolutionary past was manifested in the creation of such institutions as Colonial Williamsburg.⁷⁷ In Canada this interest in the eighteenth century was reflected in the research carried out by scholars like Marius Barbeau and Ramsay Traquair. This brought about an appreciation of North-American antiques and, naturally enough, the reproductions of them dominated the home-furnishings trade.

North-American department stores in the late 1920's did devote considerable space and money in an attempt to promote the latest in European design, as well as its North-American translations.⁷⁸ To this latter end, Jean-Marie Gauvreau established the *École du meuble* in Montréal in 1929 to train Québec designers and craftsmen.⁷⁹ These efforts, however, achieved only limited success. While it was acceptable to "do over" one's drawing room, study, or boudoir as a means of keeping aesthetically abreast of the times, it was however, outside of the milieu of persons associated with the arts, architecture and the

media, not yet acceptable to design a whole house and its interiors in a totally modern idiom. With rare exceptions, modern design of whatever persuasion was deemed acceptable only for public, educational, civic and commercial buildings, not domestic architecture. This ambivalence toward a total acceptance of a more modern architectural idiom was reflected in MacDougall's "Proposed Hillside Residence" of 1935, as well as Cormier's own project for a house for the French Delegation of about the same period where these architects offered traditional and modern solutions to their respective clients.⁸⁰

It was perhaps the fact that the Cormier house was such a personal expression in architectural and visual terms of the totality of Ernest Cormier that the ideas it embodied could not easily relate to the needs of any other client for domestic architecture. It is in the very underlying aesthetic unity of the ensemble of the house, its furnishings and its gardens that express the inherent complexities, intelligence, taste, wit and irony of Ernest Cormier that make the house the great work of art it truly is.

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This paper is a much abridged version of a lecture given within the context of a colloquium dealing with Ernest Cormier and the Problems of Modernity.

At the Canadian Centre for Architecture, I would especially like to thank Phyllis Lambert, Isabelle Gournay and Nicholas Olsberg for inviting me to participate in the colloquium. It was with Phyllis Lambert that I met Clorinthe Perron Cormier. In the Archives Department, I would like to thank Robert Desaulniers, Robert Fortier, Eric Vanasse and Linda Portugal for their help in providing access to all the Cormier material in the extensive Cormier Archive. In the Library, research was greatly assisted with the help of Murray Waddington, Rosemary Haddad, Peter Trépanier, Renata Guttman, Pierre Boisvert and Susie Quintal. Countless photographs and slides were provided through the good graces and patience of Alain Laforest and Gilles Lessard. At the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, I would like to thank John R. Porter and Pierre Archambault for allowing me the time to devote to this project, to Rosalind Pepall for her many suggestions, to Brian Merrett for providing photographs and information on J. Omer Marchand and to Nicole Khoury for putting order into seemingly endless versions of the text.

I am especially grateful to my wife, Myra Nan Rosenfeld, for her wise counsel and indefatigable encouragement.

Notes

1 The land was purchased from the Estate of George C. Hague on the 19th of September 1930 for \$16000.00. Fonds Cormier, Documents Personels; Propriété, Document 01,816/A8.

2 On his letterhead of this period, Cormier referred to himself as “Architecte // et Ingénieur-Constructeur;” a June 1927 article by Jean CHAUVIN in the series “Interviews d’Artistes” appearing in *La Revue Populaire* was entitled “Ernest Cormier // Architecte, peintre, sculpteur.” Apart from his better-known architectural activities listed in Isabelle GOURNAY, ed., *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal* (Montréal: Centre Canadien d’Architecture / Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1990), 173-174 (hereafter cited as CORMIER, *Exhibition Catalogue*), Cormier exhibited at the galleries of the Art Association of Montreal (now the Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal / Montreal Museum of Fine Arts) in 1908, 1914, 1918, 1922-1924, 1926, 1927, 1929-1933, see “Ernest Cormier,” Canadian Artists Files, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Late in his life Cormier stated, “Le véritable architecte est forcément un artiste puisque L’Architecture est le premier des beaux-arts; viennent ensuite la peinture, la sculpture et la gravure,” in Willie CHEVALIER, “Entretien avec Ernest Cormier,” *Vie des Arts XX*, no. 81 (Hiver 1975-76): 18.

3 CORMIER, *Exhibition Catalogue*, 172.

4 Phyllis LAMBERT, “Architecture Where Cultures Meet,” in CORMIER, *Exhibition Catalogue*, 18 and 28, footnote 3. Ernest Cormier and Clorinthe Perron were married in 1976, one year after Cormier moved from his house at 1418, av. des Pins (the subject of this paper) to another of his properties (which since 1947 contained his offices), situated at the corner of av. des Pins and Côte-des-Neiges and three years after he had retired from private practice in 1973. Thus, during the period 1931-1975 when Cormier lived in his house there was officially no Mrs. Ernest Cormier.

5 This fact was somewhat confused in the press. In an article on Cormier, “La personnalité de la semaine,” by Arthur PREVOST in *Le Canada*, 2nd ed. (9 August 1952), Prevost stated, “De retour au Canada en 1920 il épousa une montréalaise Mlle Berthe Leduc.” The date here was possibly a typographical error. In another article published a year earlier by Betty SIGLER, “Plans by Cormier,” in *Canadian Business* (July 1951): 84, is stated: “One summer — in 1910 — when he was home on his holidays he married a girl from Montréal, Berthe Leduc... In 1919 (sic)... While he was waiting for his first clients, however, the flu epidemic killed his wife. There has been no second Mrs. Cormier.”

6 See CORMIER, *Exhibition Catalogue*, 20, fig. 1, as well as “Ernest Cormier,” Canadian Artists Files, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, photos 79, 80, 81 for photographs of Cormier’s watercolours of 1914, showing the sections of the frescoed vaults of the loggia of the Villa Madama.

7 Such as an anonymous mediterranean villa set into a sharply sloping site overlooking the sea, along with other mediterranean coastal views, seen in photographs taken by Cormier in the 1920’s, see AROI: Nit 8, with the villa shown at the top left. Documents in the Cormier Archive / Fonds Cormier at the Centre Canadien d’Architecture / Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) will be cited hereafter with numbers beginning with the code AROI. Cormier’s watercolour views of Amalfi near Naples were exhibited at the Art Association of Montreal in 1924 and in 1932; views of Ravello were exhibited in 1927 and in 1929, see “Ernest Cormier,” Canadian Artists Files, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

8 See Michel FOURNIER, “Tradition and Modernism: The Construction of the Université,” in CORMIER, *Exhibition Catalogue*, 42-61, and Isabelle GOURNAY, “The Work of Cormier at the Université de Montréal,” also in CORMIER, *Exhibition Catalogue*, 63-84.

9 François REMILLARD and Brian MERRETT, *Mansions of the Golden Square Mile 1850-1939* (Montréal: Meridien Press, 1987), 20-25, 230-235.

10 *Architecture Domestique I, Les Résidences*, Répertoire d'architecture traditionnelle sur le territoire de la communauté urbaine de Montréal (Montréal: Service de la planification du territoire, Communauté urbaine de Montréal, 1987), 278-279.

11 The side view was more readily visible before the construction of the apartment block on the adjacent lot in the late 1950's.

12 This can be seen in the ground plan of the Maison Fortin built in 1795 by the architect Brunau, published in J.-Ch. KRAFFT et N. RANSONNETTE, *Plans, coupes, élévations des plus belles maisons et hôtels construits à Paris & dans les environs de 1771-1802*, reproduction en fac-simile avec notices par J. Mayor & D. DeRobert, préface de Paul Marmottan (Paris: Librairie d'Art Décoratif et Industriel, 1909), pl. 33.

13 Isabelle GOURNAY, "Ernest Cormier: Training and Early Works," in CORMIER, *Exhibition Catalogue*, 31-42; and Ives DECHAMPS, "They Both Build: Notes on the Training of Ernest Cormier, Architect and Engineer-Builder," in CORMIER, *Exhibition Catalogue*, 125-131.

14 Odile HENAULT and Larry RICHARDS, "Cormier House," *Trace* 1, no. 1 (January 1981): 28-29.

15 AROI:3005, chemise 1-5, plancher D; see also CORMIER, *Exhibition Catalogue*, 21, fig. 2. Cormier's designation of the principal room as a studio reflected those aspects of his professional and artistic lives, but also the fashionable usage for such a term at least, apparently, in Parisian circles. Around 1914 the materials used in the decoration of the more formal Parisian salon or *chambre d'apparat* were replaced by those more appropriate to a *studio-fumoir* in the home of a bachelor with artistic interests, see Florence CAMARD, *Michel Dufet, Architecte-Décorateur* (Paris: Éditions de l'Amateur, 1988), 67.

16 AROI:3005, chemise 1-6, plancher C.

17 AROI:3005, chemise 1-7, plancher B.

18 AROI:3005, chemise 1-8, plancher A.

19 "Living Garden, San Raphael Heights, Pasadena, California, Myron Hunt, architect," in *The Architectural Record* XLIII, no.1 (January 1918): 65-73; "Charles B. Blaney Residence, Saratoga California, Willis Polk and Co. architect," in the *Architectural Record* XLIII, no.2 (February 1918): 98ff. "Casa Draecena, Georges Washington Smith, architect," in *The Architectural Record* XLVIII, no. 4 (October 1920): 260-272; Elmer GREY, "Some Country House Architecture in the Far West," in *The Architectural Record* LIII, no. 4 (October 1922): 304-345; Rose HENDERSON, "A Primitive Basis for Modern Architecture," in *The Architectural Record* 54, no. 2, serial 299 (August 1923): 188-196. In 1924, Mildred Stapley and Arthur Byne published a series of articles on Andalusian architecture and gardens; see Mildred STAPLEY and Arthur BYNE, "The Villa of the Duquesa Parcent — the Garden 'Del Rey Moro' in *The Architectural Record* 55 (1924): 373-381; STAPLEY and BYNE, "The Garden 'Del Rey Moro' Ronda, and Las Ermitas, Sierra de Cordova," *The Architectural Record* 55 (1924): 381-387; STAPLEY and BYNE, "The Generalife, Grenada," in *The Architectural Record* 55 (1924): 569-577; and STAPLEY and BYNE, "The Acosta Garden, Grenada," *The Architectural Record* 55 (1924): 578-585.

20 Several houses built on sloping or precipitous sites include Eileen Gray and Jean Badovici's E-1027 House at Roquebrune of 1926-1927 in which the principal rooms were on the main entry level, with maid's room and guest room on the floor below, illustrated in J. Stewart JOHNSON, *Eileen Gray Designer* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1979), 39. Rob. Mallet-Stevens and his assistants, Djo-Bourgeois and Gabriel Guévrekian designed a huge villa and enclosed garden complex at Hyères on the Côte d'Azur for the Comte de Noailles between 1924 and 1926 that seems echoed in a smaller scale in Cormier's own house and garden complex, see "Une Villa Moderne à Hyères," in *Art et Décoration* (Paris) (July 1928): 1ff. In 1927, Djo-Bourgeois designed a villa at Saint Clair at Var near Toulon whose primary entry and principal rooms are on the

upper floor, with kitchen, bedroom and service room and terrace on the lower level, see “Villa à Saint Clair (Var),” in *Art et Décoration* (Paris) (March 1928): 66-67. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s Tugendhat House in Brno Czechoslovakia of 1930, like the Djo-Bourgeois house at Var, and Cormier’s own house, appears to be a single-storey house from the street façade and, like these houses, has more private rooms on the level below. Cormier may not have been aware of the design of this house prior to the building of his own house in 1930, see Philip JOHNSON and Henry-Russell HITCHCOCK, *Modern Architecture International Exhibition* (1932; reprint, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1969), 126-127. In North America, Frank Lloyd Wright built a number of significant hillside houses such as the 1905 Thomas Hardy House in Racine, Wisconsin, whose main entry level floor contains the living room and bedrooms, above which are two other bedrooms, and below which are the dining room, kitchen and service rooms. From the same period is an unrealized project for a residence for Thaxter Shaw on the slopes of Mount Royal which has a similar disposition of rooms above and below the main entry level. Both projects were illustrated in Frank Lloyd WRIGHT, introduction, *Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe von Frank Lloyd Wright* (Berlin: Ernst Wasmuth A.G., 1910), tafel XV-: Hardy House, tafel XV-: Thaxter Shaw House. Cormier owned a copy of this book.

21 Pierre-Richard BISSON, “De l’émulation aux hostilités, Les Rapports entre Ernest Cormier et Jean-Omer Marchand,” in *ARQ Architecture, Québec* (February 1990): 16.

22 AROI:3005, boîte 905, folio A-39, av. des Pins-Achat, red and black ink on paper, inscribed 1930, approx. 13,8 cm x 11,5 cm.

23 Fritz HOEBER, *Peter Behrens* (Munich: Müller & Rentsch, 1913), 93, ill. 96, for an illustration of both the Cuno and the adjacent Schroeder houses.

24 HOEBER, *Peter Behrens*, 92, ill., 88, ill. 91, for illustrations of the plans of the Cuno and Schroeder houses respectively.

25 In addition to Fritz Hoeber’s book on Peter Behrens cited above, Cormier also owned a copy of Paul Joseph CREMERS, *Peter Behrens: Sein Werk von 1909 bis zur Gegenwart* (Essen: Baedeker, 1928), these being the only two monographs available on Behrens until the 1950’s.

26 Illustrated in *Art et Décoration* (Paris) (January 1928): pl. 9; see also Jean-Claude DELORME, *Les Villas d’artistes à Paris* (Paris: Les Éditions de Paris, 1987), 55, for a plan of the Mouron (Cassandre) house which shows that the uppermost interconnecting block is in fact a lightwell over the stairwell, and furthermore the disposition of the stairwell, inner hall, living, dining and service rooms is similar to that of Cormier’s house.

27 Such as the façade of the house of Mr. Gompel, Paris, as redone by Rob. Mallet-Stevens, illustrated in *Art et Décoration* (Paris) (January 1928): 11; or Mallet-Stevens’s house for Mme. C. Rue Denfert Rochereau, Boulogne, illustrated in *L’Architecture Vivante* (Paris) (Automne 1926): pl. 23.

28 Illustrated in *Art et Décoration* (Paris) (June 1925). Cormier also used these vertical panels to frame the doors of the main façade of the Université de Montréal.

29 Florence CAMARD, *Ruhlmann Master of Art Deco* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984), 88-89.

30 For perhaps the best overviews of this complex subject see Nancy TROY, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France, Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Yvonne BRUNHAMMER and Suzanne TISE, *The Decorative Arts in France, La Société des Artistes Décorateurs, 1900-1942* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990); and Yvonne BRUNHAMMER et al., *Les Années U.A.M., 1929-1958* (Paris: Musée des Arts Décoratifs, 1988).

31 Although in retrospect, this may not have been apparent at the time.

32 The “Pavillon de L’Esprit Nouveau” was designed by Le Corbusier and his associate Pierre

Jeanneret, and was situated out of the mainstream of the exhibits, its purist form was juxtaposed against the backdrop of the very Beaux-Arts style Grand Palais. A useful plan giving the location of the important *Pavillons* can be found in *Art et Décoration (Paris)* (June 1925), *passim*.

33 The journal *L'Esprit Nouveau* was published principally by Amadée Ozenfant and Le Corbusier.

34 The Société, comprised of a group of independent designers, artists and craftsmen, was organised in 1901 in the wake of France's rather lacklustre design entries in the 1900 *Exposition Universelle*. It had become apparent that Art Nouveau was dying if not already dead, and that France was losing its pre-eminent position as a design innovator. A new impetus was coming from Germany, initially from Munich where designers, craftsmen and manufacturers set up large workshops or *Werkstätte* in which their collaborative efforts led to the production of modestly-priced well-designed furniture. What was equally significant was their approach to the display of these collaborative efforts, namely that the overall unified conception of a display-room *ensemble* was more important than the individual elements that made up the *ensemble*. This was the reverse of the approach manifested in France for much of the nineteenth century. These ideas were made evident by the German participation in the 1900 *Exposition* and they had a profound impact on French designers at the time notwithstanding that the more Germanic aspects of these designs were largely rejected by the public as having little to do with French tradition. The difficulty facing French designers was in the attempt to reconcile on the one hand the problem of creating an indigenously French design for a larger spectrum of society that at the same time respected the unified intellectual and aesthetic principles that underlay much of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French architecture and interior design. See Suzanne TISE, "1900-1914," in BRUNHAM-MER, TISE, *The Decorative Arts in France*, 9-29.

35 In 1907, the Deutscher Werkbund was founded with many of the same concerns of improving national design and industry that had engendered the founding of the Munich and Vienna *Werkstätte*, and the Société des Artistes Décorateurs in France. It was, however, a larger, more encompassing alliance of German and European designers, architects, manufacturers and writers that included Van de Velde from Holland; from Austria, Joseph Maria Olbrich and Joseph Hoffmann (then immersed in the Palais Stoclet project); as well as, from Germany, Bruno Paul and Richard Riemerschmid (also associated with the Munich *Werkstätte* that had exhibited in Paris), Peter Behrens (then designing buildings, appliances and promotional material for the huge German electrical utility, the A.E.G.), along with Herman Muthesius, often considered the intellectual or spiritual father of the Werkbund. At perhaps its most important manifestation, the July 1914 Cologne Exhibition closed by the outbreak of the war the following month, Muthesius, in a speech that nearly precipitated a split in the Werkbund on ideological grounds, made his famous plea for standardization in industry and objects created for use within the contexts of architecture and the applied arts. Implicit in this was the acceptance of machine production. See Julius POSENER, "Between Art and Industry, The Deutscher Werkbund," in Lucius BURCKHARDT, ed., *The Werkbund History and Ideology 1907-1933* (Woodbury, New York: Barrons, 1980), 7-15; also Alan WINDSOR, *Peter Behrens, Architect and Designer 1868-1940* (London: The Architectural Press, 1981), 139-140. Muthesius was to a degree restating ideas he had expressed at the 1911 Werkbund Congress to an audience that included Mies van der Rohe, Gropius and Le Corbusier, then in Germany preparing his *Étude sur le mouvement d'art décoratif en Allemagne* (1912; reprint, New York: DaCapo Press, 1968). See Reyner BANHAM, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, 2nd ed. (New York and Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 68-78. Adolf Loos's influential essay "Ornament and Crime," had first appeared in French — in an abridged version — "Ornement et Crime," trans. Marcel Ray, in *Les Cahiers d'Aujourd'hui* (June 1913): 247-256. It was subsequently reprinted in *L'Esprit Nouveau*, n° 2 (1920): 159-168, as well as in *L'Architecture Vivante*, n° 12 (été 1926): 28-30, a copy of which was in Cormier's Library. It must be remembered that Loos was living in Paris between 1923 and 1926-7, and in February and early March of 1926 he gave a series of lectures at the Sorbonne, see Burkhard RUKSCHICIO and Roland SCHACHEL, *Adolf Loos, Leben und Werk* (Salzburg und Wein:

Residenz Verlag, 1982): 34. Thus Loos was not an unknown quantity in the intellectual climate of Paris in the 1920's.

36 1910 was indeed a good year for Cormier to have been in Paris, for the Munich participation in the Salon d'Automne was but one aspect of the Salon's presentations which also included a major exhibition of early Cubist paintings. Earlier that year Diaghilev and his entourage had presented to a Parisian audience such ballet spectacles as *The Firebird* and *Sheherazade* with astounding success.

37 Parisian department stores had assumed a greater role in the promotion of more modern design by allocating greater space to furnishing displays in specialty shops, most notably the La Maîtrise Shop headed by designer Maurice Dufrène, at Galeries LaFayette and the Pomone Shop at Bon-Marché under the direction of Paul Follot, see Yvonne BRUNHAMMER "1919-1924," in BRUNHAMMER, TISE, *The Decorative Arts in France*, 45.

38 Although Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann (1879-1933) was a few years older than Cormier, he is also known to have audited sessions at Pascal's studio during the 1908-1909 season, and it is highly likely that Cormier met Ruhlmann during the spring of 1909, if not later. See Florence CAMARD, *Michel Dufet Architecte-Décorateur* (Paris: Éditions de L'Amateur, 1988), 28. Cormier owned a number of publications on or about Ruhlmann including *Croquis de Ruhlmann* (Paris: Éditions Albert Levy, 1924); Jean BADOVICI, *Harmonies Intérieures de Ruhlmann* (Paris: Éditions Albert Morancé, 1924), in addition to the journals *Art et Décoration* and *L'Art vivant* which frequently illustrated Ruhlmann's works. While the main part of the career of Jean-Michel Frank (1895-1941) was in the decade of the 1930's, he had, prior to the time Cormier commenced building his own house in the fall of 1930, received his most important and influential commissions. These comprised projects for the Vicomte Charles de Noailles in Paris, published in *Art et Industrie* (10 September and 10 December 1927), as well as an important commission for Templeton Crocker in San Francisco, published in *Art et Industrie* (May 1930). See also Adolphe CHANAUX, *Jean-Michel Frank* (Paris: Éditions du Regard, 1980), passim.

39 See Suzanne TISE, "1926-1929" in BRUNHAMMER, TISE, *The Decorative Arts in France*, 121-140.

40 Cormier had photographed (from books) these two monuments, AROI:Nit 183, top right and lower left, for illustrations in his *Cours d'architecture à l'usage des ingénieurs*, n.d., about 23. This same combination of shapes had obviously appealed to Ruhlmann (or Patout, his collaborating architect) and is quite evident in an advertisement for "Ruhlmann Décorateur" in *Art et Décoration* (Paris) (October 1928): opp. 97.

41 The design is possibly derived from a carpet design by Ruhlmann, see CAMARD, *Ruhlmann*, 116 and 240.

42 The design of the table was copied from an oval dining room table designed by Maurice Lucet and Pierre Lahalle and shown at the Salon d'Automne of 1913, illustrated in TROY, *Modernism*, 122, fig. 90. Cormier has changed the original colour scheme of white and gold [?] to a black lacquer and gold finish and has adapted the original oval shape to a rectangular one. The octagonal table, not visible in Hayward's photographs, is Cormier's re-working of the standard model's posing table or pedestal whose upper part swivels on a track in its base, much like the simpler version Henri Hébert had in his studio. Stylistically, this group of furniture is earlier than that in the rest of the room, its Neo-Classical design vocabulary is of a type that had been in style in the period c.1912 to 1922-23, see TROY, *Modernism*, 102-158 and CAMARD, *Michel Dufet*, 23ff. These pieces were in fact made for Cormier's St. Urbain Street studio, as can be seen in photographs of the studio in the early 1920's. AROI:Nit S19-18(02), S19-40(08), plus the working drawing for the large rectangular table and a related cabinet (possibly never executed) in dossier AROI:650F-6, plus bills from Crevier & Fils, dated 4 January 1922, for making the rectangular and octagonal tables, along with bills from the Bromsgrove Guild, dated 20 May 1922, for the ebonizing and gilding of these pieces, file AROI:650F-2.

- 43 Illustrated in BRUNHAMMER, TISE, *The Decorative Arts in France*, 47.
- 44 Drawing number AROI:3005, chemise 7-03, bill from supplier Louis Pistono no. 5803, 15 May 1931.
- 45 Precedents for such a divan placed in front of a window include examples by Ruhlmann, in BADOVICI, *Harmonies*, 5 and another by J.- Ch. Moreux, illustrated in *Art et Décoration (Paris)* (February 1927): 53.
- 46 Drawing numbers AROI:3005, chemise 7-01,-02, bill from supplier Louis Pistono, no. 5804, 15 May 1931, for the first of six such chairs. The designs by Francis Jourdain were published in *Répertoire du Goût Moderne*, no.1 (Paris: Etienne Lévy, 1928), pl. 27.
- 47 See Henry HAVARD, *Dictionnaire de l'Ameublement et de La Décoration depuis le XIII^e siècle jusqu'à nos jours*, 4 vols. (Paris: Maison Quantin, [1887-1890]), vol. 4, col. 1007. See also F.J.B. WATSON, *Louis XVI Furniture* (London: Tiranti, 1960), 33-35.
- 48 The drawing number for the wall panelling is AROI:3005, chemise 4-03, -04, supplied by Louis Pistono, bill no. 5643, 15 May 1931; small buffet with marble top (*désserte*) AROI:3005, chemise 7-1, supplied by Louis Pistono, bill no. 6802, 15 May 1931; large buffet in rouge levanto marble, AROI:3005, boîte 905, folio A-5, most probably supplied by Wallace Sandstone Quarries who supplied a quotation for most of the marble and stone revetments in the interior of the house, AROI:3005, boîte 905, folio 17-7, 3 January 1931.
- 49 Illustrated in CAMARD, *Ruhlmann*, 131, in the Salon du Thé in the reception hall of the *Île de France* of 1927, which room has a cornice similar to the one used in Cormier's dining room.
- 50 Illustrated in BADOVICI, *Harmonies*, pl. 32.
- 51 Illustrated in Peter THORNTON, *Authentic Decor, The Domestic Interior 1620-1920* (New York: Viking Press, 1984), 70, pl. 80.
- 52 AROI:3005, chemise 7-06,-07, supplied by Louis Pistono, bill no. 5800, 15 May 1931.
- 53 AROI:3005, boîte 905, folio A-7.
- 54 Such as the chair illustrated in *Canadian Homes and Gardens* (February 1929): 19, featuring a display at the Robert Simpson Company of furniture made by the North American Furniture Company; the model of chair illustrated was purchased for the dining area in Clorinthe Perron's apartment in the Cormier house, see note 75 below.
- 55 Illustrated in *Art et Décoration (Paris)* (June 1924): 191, for a room designed by Petit, and shown at the XV^e Salon des Artistes Décorateurs, which Cormier may have visited. The same chair was used again by Petit in a dining room he designed for the Comtesse A. de M. à Paris, and illustrated in *Art et Décoration (Paris)* (May 1930): 161. Philippe Petit designed furniture for a company called Décorations Intérieures Modernes or D.I.M., at 19 Place de la Madeleine, Paris. Cormier's own design is AROI:3005, chemise 7-08, -09, -10.
- 56 This has been discussed in HENAULT, RICHARDS, "Cormier House," 31. The paper, was evidently popular in Europe and North America at the time. An advertisement for "Le Bois Essif" wood-fiber paper in which the promotional text is printed on an actual sample of the paper, is found in *Art et Industrie*, 5th year, 10 May 1929, between pages 8 and 9. The paper was also featured in the interiors of a Montréal home decorated by the T. Eaton Co. Ltd., illustrated in *Canadian Homes and Gardens* (June 1929): 44.
- 57 Illustrated in *Art et Industrie* (10 December 1927): 21-23.
- 58 Drawing AROI:3005, chemise 8-01.
- 59 Drawing AROI:3005 boîte 905, folio A-5. Perhaps Cormier thought that this was an appropriate functional use of chromed metal tubing. He certainly did not use this material for furniture designs as had Breuer, Mies, or Le Corbusier by this time.

- 60 Drawing AROI:3005, chemise 6-07, supplied by Montreal Architectural Iron Works Ltd., contract dated 30 March 1931, with the nickel, copper and chrome plating executed by R. Povencher Co. Ltd., see AROI:3005, boîte 905, folio A-65. The 1928 staircase by Maurice Dufrène was illustrated in *Art et Décoration (Paris)* (November 1928): 131.
- 61 See Cormier drawing AROI:3005, boîte 905, folio A-5. Similar light fixtures by Ruhlmann were featured in the Pavillon du Collectionneur at the 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, illustrated in CAMARD, Ruhlmann, 90.
- 62 Drawing AROI:3005, chemise 6-03, quotation from supplier, Wallace Sandstone Quarries, 3 January 1931, fireplace "C" in black and gold marble, AROI, boîte 905, folio A-1. The precedent for such a fireplace design, with a bas-relief above, is to be found in Ruhlmann's fireplace for the dining room in the Pavillon du Collectionneur which is made of very similar sections of large scale Cyma mouldings, executed in Portor (i.e. black- and gold-veined) marble, illustrated in CAMARD, Ruhlmann, 160. Over the Ruhlmann fireplace is a classicising bas-relief by Janniot.
- 63 Drawing AROI:3005, chemise 4-07 for the library panelling executed in walnut by the Bromsgrove Guild, quotation of 19 February 1931. The drawing for the desk is perhaps lost, but the desk was supplied by Louis Pistono, bill no. 5016, 4 August 1930. The floors were supplied by A. Ross Grafton & Co. per quotation of 9 January 1931, drawing AROI:3005, chemise 5-02.
- 64 See Cormier sectional drawing AROI:3005, chemise 3-01.
- 65 See Cormier drawing AROI:3005, chemise 7-12 for the dressing table and AROI:3005, chemise 7-13 for the stool, supplied by Louis Pistono, bill no. 6071, dated 15 May 1931, for the table and bill no. 6437, dated 5 November 1931, for the stool. The precedent for placing the dressing table in front of the curtained window may be seen in a similar arrangement by Ruhlmann, illustrated in CAMARD, Ruhlmann, 97. The concept of a man's dressing room where one arranged one's cravate and donned one's clothes can be traced back to at least the eighteenth century. For an eighteenth-century engraving of 1781 illustrating such a room see, THORNTON, *Authentic Decor*, 170, pl. 214.
- 66 See Cormier drawing AROI:3005, boîte 410, folio B-32 for the bed, and AROI:3005, chemise 7-14 for the coffers, Louis Pistono bills 6327 and 6436 respectively, dated 5 November 1931, and AROI:3005, boîte 905, folio A-5 for a "Detail of the bedroom hangings," made by The Gwynne Studios, Montréal, per quotation of 21 May 1931, AROI:3005, boîte 905, folio A-38.
- 67 See HENAULT, RICHARDS, "Cormier House," 31.
- 68 See "Bedchamber Designed for Monsieur G., Paris," reproduced from Charles PERCIER and Pierre-Léonard FONTAINE, *Receuil des décorations intérieures* (Paris: 1801-1812) in M. PRAZ, *An Illustrated History of Furnishing* (New York: Georges Braziller, 1964), 180. Cormier owned an Italian version of Percier and Fontaine.
- 69 For illustrations of this see depictions such as Jan vanEyck and Assistants, *The Birth of Saint-John*, miniature from the *Heures de Milan*, Museo Civico Turin, reproduced in Mario Praz, *An Illustrated History of Furnishing* (New York: Braziller, 1964), 83, fig. 35.
- 70 E. VIOLLET-LE-DUC, *Dictionnaire Raisoné du Mobilier Français de l'époque carlovin-gienne à la renaissance*, 6 vols. (Paris: Librairie Central d'Architecture, Morel et Cie, 1868-1875), vol. 1, 23-30; see also HAVARD, *Dictionnaire* 3, col. 756-762.
- 71 The garden at the back of Cormier's house was divided into two sections, each corresponding approximately in width to the blocks of the house. The larger terraced garden was below the studio and was directly accessible from the stair off the living room in Clorinthe Perron's apartment. The smaller garden within a stone balustrade was directly below the dining room and Cormier's bedroom.
- 72 See drawings AROI:3005, chemise 6-01, -02 for the fireplace, and drawing AROI:3005, boîte 410, folio B-32 recto/verso for the furniture placement and furniture.

73 The carpet in the foreground is a variant of one designed by Maurice Dufren  and retailed at the La Ma trise Shop at Galeries LaFayette, see BRUNHAMMER, TISE, *The Decorative Arts in France*, 55 pl. 62 for an identical rug by Dufren  but in different colour range. The origins of the table in the foreground and the cabinet against the back wall are uncertain. Certainly some furniture was purchased in Montr al. The small chair next to the table in the dining area was available at Simpson's, see footnote 54 above. The large upholstered chair to the left seems to have derived from the same designs by Francis Jourdain that served as the prototype for the armchairs in the studio, see footnote 46 above. The other upholstered armchair is similar to one designed by Ruhlmann but differs significantly in some details, see CAMARD, *Ruhlmann*, 137 for a comparable chair.

74 *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* 9 (July 1932): 159-164.

75 Edith WHARTON and Ogden CODMAN, *The Decoration of Houses* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1897), and Elsie DE WOLFE, *The House in Good Taste* (New York: The Century Company, 1913).

76 REMILLARD, MERRETT, *Mansions*, 198-203, 222-225, 228-229.

77 David GEBHARD, "Traditionalism and Design: Old Models for New," in *High Styles* (New York: The Whitney Museum of Art, 1985), 48-81.

78 Alastair DUNCAN, *American Art Deco* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986), 20-30.

79 Gloria LESSER, * cole du Meuble 1930-1950, Interior Design and Decorative Art in Montreal* (Montr al: Ch teau Dufresne, Mus e des arts d coratifs de Montr al / Montreal Museum of Decorative Arts, 1989), passim.

80 MacDougall's project is illustrated in the *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* 12 (June 1935): 103; Cormier drawings AROI:Nit 82.15 (TNO)G.

Résumé

1418, AVENUE DES PINS, LA MAISON ERNEST CORMIER ET LE CONTEXTE EUROPÉEN

On peut supposer que la maison située au 1418 de l'avenue des Pins illustre bien l'art de l'architecture comme l'entendait Cormier. Au cœur du programme qui a contribué au parti adopté pour cette maison, il y a la vie privée et publique d'Ernest Cormier l'architecte-ingénieur-artiste, également photographe et jardinier amateur, céramiste, relieur, bibliophile, qui fut aussi le compagnon de Clorinthe Perron. La maison, marquée par l'influence historique Beaux-Arts, comporte des espaces distincts prévus pour des fonctions et contextes différents, qui conviennent mieux à Cormier que les aires ouvertes ou s'imbriquant les unes aux autres, auxquelles sont généralement associés le nom d'architectes contemporains tels que Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe et Frank Lloyd Wright.

Le plan en forme de «T», dont l'axe s'articule autour d'une imposante cage d'escalier se répartit sur quatre niveaux, outre celui du garage au bas du flanc est du mont Royal. Le niveau supérieur donne sur la rue; il regroupe les pièces accessibles au public et les plus révélatrices de l'homme mondain que fut Cormier : le salon et la salle à manger, ou chambres d'apparat, avec leurs pièces attenantes, tout en permettant d'accueillir les hôtes pour les réunions ou réceptions, répondent aux attentes du professionnel et de l'artiste. Contrairement à l'usage courant, les quartiers privés du maître de maison sont logés aux étages inférieurs. Ce faisant, Cormier tire le maximum des contraintes de l'emplacement et soustrait sa vie privée des regards indiscrets. Ce deuxième niveau loge les chambres de commodité : les appartements de Cormier, ceux de ses domestiques et sa bibliothèque. Les appartements de Clorinthe et Cécile Perron, qui donnent sur le jardin, étaient un étage plus bas; enfin, la salle de chauffage, des pièces de rangement et un atelier occupaient le tout premier niveau.

Mais cette maison n'est pas toute nouvelle; en lisant *Architectural Record* et au cours de ses voyages, Cormier découvrit des maisons apparues dès 1914, érigées elles aussi à des endroits spectaculaires en Californie et autour de la Méditerranée. Ces maisons au style méditerranéen simplifié influencèrent l'architecture domestique contemporaine construite dans le Style international alors naissant, qu'on doit à des architectes tels que Eileen Gray, Jean Badovici, Rob Mallet-Stevens, E.-J. Djo-Bourgeois, Gabriel Guévreakan, Mies van der Rohe et dont Cormier connaissait les œuvres grâce aux revues *L'Architecture vivante*, *Art et Décoration*. Certaines réalisations de Frank Lloyd Wright sont illustrées dans *Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe* publié en 1910, une autre publication qui se trouvait dans sa bibliothèque. À ce moment-là, Cormier retravaillait aussi la conception novatrice de J. Omer Marchand transposée dans

le plan de son propre studio construit de 1912 à 1914. Toutefois, le plan du rez-de-chaussée de la maison Cormier est largement tributaire des plans des maisons Cuno et Schroöder de Peter Behrens exécutées à Hagen-Eppenhäusen vers 1909-1910. En outre, la fenestration et les volumes du côté est de la maison Cormier ont des points communs avec la façade sur rue de la maison Cuno de Behrens, tout en intégrant des éléments empruntés à la maison d'Auguste Perret construite pour M. Mouron à Versailles en 1926. Un croquis d'étude de la maison suggère que l'agencement des volumes monolithiques de la façade principale et du puits d'éclairage s'inspirent probablement aussi de la maison de Perret. Le côté jardin a plus de similarités avec les façades de maisons contemporaines de Rob Mallet-Stevens.

À compter de 1930, les questions liées à la décoration intérieure évoluent sensiblement comme dans les domaines de l'architecture, de la sculpture et de la peinture. De nombreux facteurs qu'on jugeait potentiellement irréconciliables en matière de design : qualité élevée vs. production en nombre, design propre à un pays vs. un marché qui a tendance à s'internationaliser — étaient des questions très d'actualité à l'Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes de 1925 à Paris. En France, Le Corbusier et ses collègues sont les principaux partisans du pro-modernisme qui tient compte des influences venues par vagues successives d'Autriche et d'Allemagne depuis le début du siècle.

Apparemment, conscient de ces subtilités, Cormier crée le mobilier de sa maison en transposant et en combinant une foule d'idées sous-jacentes aux méthodes plus modernes telles que prônées par les Muthesius, Loos, Le Corbusier et d'autres encore : suppression de presque tous les ornements, systématisation des types de sièges et de tables selon la fonction qui leur est attribuée, élimination presque complète des meubles de rangement au profit d'espaces de rangement encastrés. Certes, si ces idées séduisent Cormier, ingénieur et architecte de formation, il reste que l'aspect du décor intérieur, les textures des surfaces et des meubles qu'il a imaginés pour sa maison, doivent plus aux œuvres de E.J. Ruhlmann, Jean-Michel Frank et Francis Jourdain. Si les meubles de ces créateurs contemporains ne rappellent aucune période précise, ils s'apparentent néanmoins à certains types de meubles traditionnels. Cormier était un homme pour qui le passé et le présent s'enchaînent sans heurt ; ce genre de mobilier, plutôt que celui créé par Le Corbusier convenait mieux pour sa propre maison dont les éléments reprennent d'ailleurs certains archétypes.

La maison fut bien reçue par la critique qui loua aussi la qualité du décor intérieur. Mais par la suite aucun particulier n'aurait commandé de maison à Cormier ; la récession économique et la prédominance de certains courants esthétiques en architecture domestique auraient nui. De plus, la maison Cormier, si bien conçue pour les besoins spécifiques de son créateur, était difficile à adapter à ceux d'éventuels clients. L'esthétique harmonieuse de l'ensemble si évidente dans le site, la structure, l'ameublement et les jardins, font de la maison Cormier une œuvre d'art remarquable.

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