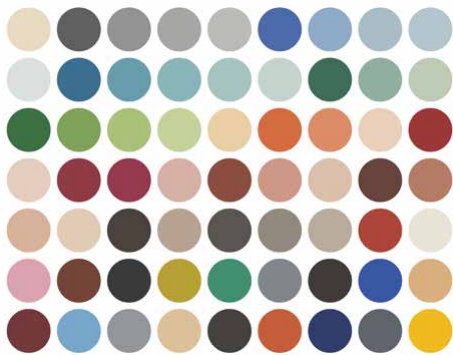




Le Corbusier – the freedom of a closed system

In 1931 and 1959, Le Corbusier developed a color system with a total of 63 nuanced and concise tones. Long forgotten, the colors are more relevant today than ever – once meant for wallpaper, these colors now adorn furniture, walls, radiators and watches.



Classic modernist architecture is inseparably linked with one name: Le Corbusier. Even more than five decades after his death, the Swiss-born is an architectural demigod. He left behind icons such as the Villa Savoye in Paris, a recently restored family home on the Weissenhof in Stuttgart or – his late work – the Notre-Dame-du-Haut chapel in Ronchamp. These and 14 further buildings spread across seven countries were added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2016 – that's more than any architect could ever hope for.



This example of a lounge shows how well intense and contrasting color combinations can work for an interior without appearing too shrill.

Star architect and iconic brand

Le Corbusier not only set standards in terms of architecture (despite the failure of his urban planning visions), he also recognized the power of branding early on. Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris, born in 1887, quickly realized that his extremely complex name (even for Francophone standards) would be an obstacle to his future success, particularly internationally. So, in 1920 he renamed himself Le Corbusier, founded an office with his cousin Pierre Jeanneret in Paris in 1922, and started wearing his recognizable, thick-rimmed, round glasses. The brand was born, the glasses became a bestseller among architects. Today, one would certainly call Le Corbusier a star architect. In August 1965, he drowned on the Côte d'Azur after having suffered a heart attack. Five years earlier, he founded the 'Fondation Le Corbusier', a foundation that protects and preserves his own artistic work. A brand strategy that has been consistently thought through to the end. And so, the foundation continues to watch meticulously over the architectural legacy, but also over less well-known facets. For example, his colors.

Polychrome legacy

For a long time, Le Corbusier was associated with white cubes – simple, pure and straightforward. But anyone who visits the twin house in Stuttgart today is immersed in an intense cosmos of color. Indeed, Le Corbusier planned polychrome outside, and even more prominently inside. The color concept was both an aesthetic experience and a clarification of the architectural intentions. This aspect of Le Corbusier's work was recognized by the 1990s not least, thanks to Arthur Rüegg from Zurich, Switzerland, who has been researching Le Corbusier since the 1970s – and rediscovered the "Polychromie architecturale", so to speak. The professor, who taught at the ETH Zurich until 2007, retrieved Le Corbusier's color schemes from the archives and re-issued them together with Birkhäuser Verlag (see book tip). The charts comprise of two collections, one from 1931 with 43 shades and one from 1959 with 20 shades, both created for the Basel wallpaper manufacturer Salubra.



Photo: Leicht Küchen

Le Corbusier is also present in the kitchen, thanks to the collection from kitchen manufacturer Leicht.

The total of 63 tones are not only characterized by timeless topicality and elegance, they also result – more importantly – in harmonious combinations of natural and powerful luminous nuances. Color experts say that the chart can be used to create both calm and lively, stimulating compositions. However, it's impossible to achieve shrill or flat and boring results. The colors have names like: 'bleu outremer', 'Rouge vermillon' or 'le jaune vif', even the most conservative builders find it difficult to hide their fascination entirely.

As enlightening as the 63 colors are, they do not follow the inner logic of a color system that wants to take into account the entire color space. Le Corbusier's color chart remains a subjective collection of colors that leaves out more colors than it includes. But it is precisely this reduction that makes the colors so affable; the grand master's selection and brand transform what is basically a mix of pigments, binders, fillers and additives into a commodity that transports culture.

Complex approach

The next chapter in the history of the 63 colors begins around the late 1990s. Together with Arthur Rüegg, the small Swiss paint manufacturer kt.color analyzes the 63 colors in order to recreate them and make them fit for modern architecture again. So, the colors became trendy again, for indoor and outdoor applications, always based on minerals and natural pigments – just like the originals.

Back in 2008, the interest in the Corbusier colors grew when Zurich-based Les Couleurs Suisse AG took over the global marketing of the colors from Fondation Le Corbusier and started issuing licenses to companies that wanted to enhance their products using these prestigious colors. The manufacturer of electrical switches Jung is one of the current 20 licensees, but also chair manufacturer Dietiker, radiator specialist Runtal, Anker with floor coverings, Heroal with external doors and Dauphin with the furniture system Bosse Modul Space.



Jung has been producing its LS 990 switch series in Le Corbusier's colors since 2014. The paint is applied manually in a special process, creating a matt, slightly rough surface.

Color under license

In 2014, Jung started with ten shades, in the meantime, the LS990 switch series is now available in all 63 tones. This leads to the conclusion that Le Corbusier's colors not only serve as a marketing story but actually impact and create a market effect. After all, it is anything but trivial to create accurate color recipes for plastic products. The licensing stipulates an exact match with the original colors, which are available to the companies as master samples for the complex shading process. The fact that Le Corbusier mixed adhesive-based dyes back then proves to be an additional challenge today, because plastic batches, Perlon fibers, powder coatings, lacquers or ceramic glazes always follow their own material-specific principles. Due to the complex and time-consuming development process, companies are usually involved for the long term. Office furniture manufacturer Dauphin for example, has been selling the puristic Bosse Modul Space portable furniture system in twelve licensed finishes, from 'blanc ivoire' to 'gris' since 2017. Striking color accents, continuing attention and continuously growing brand awareness among

interior designers, and indeed customers, are Dauphin's reason for the commitment.

Similar with Keimfarben: Le Corbusier is often the door opener for architects or interior designers looking for external or interior paint solutions. As Les Couleurs Suisse puts it: "The value of such a license is beyond question. Not only does it create up- and cross-selling opportunities, it also allows us to form an emotional bond with our customer". Incidentally, the license fees are based on factors such as product segment, geographical scope and, of course, duration.

Ceramic and colorful

While many of the licensees tend to operate in the B2B market, the youngest member addresses the end customer directly: Rado. The watch specialist presents the True Thinline wristwatch in nine matt colors from the Le Corbusier color system. Both the case and the bracelet are made of solid-colored, injection-molded ceramic – a difficult process, and not just in terms of color



Offered by Rado, the True Thinline wristwatch is available as limited edition in nine matt colors.

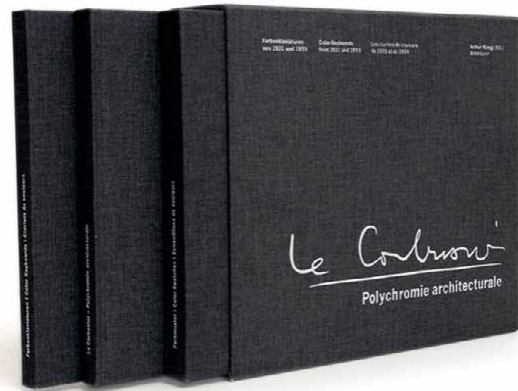
accuracy. The watch, which is limited to 999 copies of each color, also presents the complete color system arranged in a circle on the back of the watch casing – as a counterpart to the dial, so to speak. Le Corbusier would surely have enjoyed the elegant timepiece himself.

BOOK TIP

The 'Polychromie architecturale' with the color system from 1931 and 1951 comes complete with historical references. The three-volumes in a smart slipcase are available for 349 Euro. The work by Arthur Rüegg is now in its third edition published by Birkhäuser.



Office furniture manufacturer Dauphin sells its Bosse Modul Space system in twelve licensed paint finishes, from "blanc ivoire" to "gris".



With color management solutions from GMG, colors can be reproduced accurately in print. The 63 colors of the Le Corbusier's color system, as described here, are no exception.