

Welcome to the Gallery and to this evening's **Vision Culture Lecture** on CHARLOTTE PERRIAND. The Vision Culture Lectures are a Gallery initiative to promote international dialogue, reference and access. We are fortunate to have UNESCO endorsement for this Lecture series and support from HSBC Malaysia.

This evening's speaker, architect and teacher, Ezlina Adnan has been involved in the field of design even before her graduation from University of North London in 2002. Soon after graduating, she qualified in England and Malaysia. During her student days, she designed and built a garden pavillion for youth in a London community park. She has served as a 1) consultant and urban designer of Zaini Dubus Richez Architects (ZDR), KL, and 2) is actively involved with mosque design guidelines for Abu Dhabi. She is also a lecturer and design tutor in University Malaya and in the International Islamic University Malaysia.

Though Ezlina's involvement in design has primarily been in architecture and urban design, her design philosophy is similar to **Charlotte Perriand's**, stemming from social and cultural points of view - *design by people and for the people*.

She strongly believes in what Perriand's designs and creations stand for - **daring to be different** and **contesting the norms of the society** with people's interests and needs as the central ideology.

We are delighted to have Ezlina Adnan present this Lecture, **Charlotte Perriand, Architect & Designer**, and look forward to an active discussion after.

On History

Perriand

Reflections of Feminism and Modern Architecture, by Mary McLeod

In the United States today, feminist architecture history—like feminism in general—has nearly disappeared. The flood of publications during the early 1990s (*Sexuality and Space*, *The Sex of Architecture*, *Architecture and Feminism*) has by now ground to a halt; few schools continue to offer classes on “gender and architecture”; and scholars in their twenties or thirties tend to find other subjects—sustainability, digitalization, and globalization—more compelling. In addition to the larger social and political forces that seem to militate against feminist scholarship these days, its very success over the past three decades may have contributed to its decline. Names of once-forgotten women have been resurrected, the reputations of architecture’s male heroes have been taken down a notch or two, and blatant examples of sexual inequity and discrimination in the



Charlotte Perriand in her attic apartment, Paris, 1928.

courtesy, Abrams Books

profession have been exposed, if not resolved. However, most feminist architecture historians and critics would reject any assessment of their project as complete, or its viability as dependent upon academic fashion. Although this lull is undoubtedly considered a setback, one positive by-product may be that it offers a period of relative calm, removed from the heated polemics of an earlier period, to reflect on feminist historical writing and to reexamine its methods and premises.

Recently, I had just such an opportunity as the editor and one of the authors of a book on the French designer Charlotte Perriand.⁽¹⁾ Perriand is often grouped together with Eileen Gray and Lilly Reich as one of the unsung “heroes” of the European Modern Movement,

whose design accomplishments have been eclipsed by those of the acknowledged giants: Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe. Aside from the three tubular-steel chairs that she designed with Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret as a member of their firm, Perriand's work was little known, even though her career spanned three-quarters of a century and extended to locales as diverse as Brazil, Congo, England, France, Japan, French New Guinea, Switzerland, and Vietnam. My initial interest in undertaking this book was sparked by a desire to redress this "wrong" and to make certain that her innovative designs would be removed from the shadow of Le Corbusier's towering presence. However, the frequently collaborative nature of her work—like that of Reich, Ray Eames, and Alison Smithson—has made it more difficult to assess her contributions. In addition, like many successful women architects of her generation, Perriand did not wish to perceive herself first and foremost as a woman designer; nor did she particularly identify with the feminist movement in France, thus complicating efforts to cast her as a "role model" for contemporary women practitioners. Her career necessitated a more complex reading of the ways that gender intersected with Modern architecture than I had originally envisioned and raised several issues about the assumptions underlying many feminist readings of that architecture.

The first of these is the tendency to see women architects as victims, whose talent and vital contributions have been suppressed by their male collaborators or associates. This interpretation had a certain strategic value in the 1970s and 1980s, alerting architects to the shortcomings of the "Modern masters" and bringing the issue of gender discrimination to the fore. No doubt there were disturbing inequities in the profession, as is clearly evident in Le Corbusier's oft-quoted, dismissive response to Perriand—"We don't embroider cushions in my atelier"—when she first asked him for a job there. However, Perriand's deep admiration for Le Corbusier, her insistence that being a woman did not interfere with her career, and her pleasure in seeing her work as part of a collaborative process all suggest that this characterization of women designers as victims, at least in Perriand's case, has been overstated. Here, a personal anecdote might be relevant. When I interviewed Perriand in 1997 and mentioned the photograph of her reclining on the chaise lounge with her head turned away from the camera, she responded angrily to a question about Beatriz Colomina's reading of the image as representing Le Corbusier's denial of her authorship and creative vision.⁽²⁾ Perriand told me that she herself had set up the shot, that Pierre Jeanneret took the photo, and that Le Corbusier played no role in its conception and in fact was not there at the time. She insisted that it was her choice to turn her head in order to emphasize the chaise rather than its occupant, and that it was also her choice to use that image in her photomontage of the model apartment that she designed with Le Corbusier and Jeanneret for the 1929 Salon d'Automne apartment building. Nor was she troubled by the fact that the pivoting chair that she designed and displayed on her own was attributed jointly to Le Corbusier-Jeanneret-Perriand when Thonet began producing the partnership's furniture in 1930. Perriand saw this as an opportunity to have the chair manufactured and concluded that it would have more impact as part of the atelier's line of tubular-steel furniture: attaining individual recognition as a designer was less important than having the chair regarded as part of a collective vision of modern living. She saw herself as an equal participant with considerable choice and control in her collaboration with Le Corbusier and Jeanneret.

A second issue to consider is the relationship between Modern architecture and the entry of women into the profession. Although Le Corbusier was no feminist hero, his atelier seems to have been a place where several women designers chose to work, including Perriand and Stanisłavia Nowicki before World War II and Edith Schreiber, Blanche Limco, and Maria Fenyo immediately afterward. To what extent did the culture of the Modern Movement, and in particular Le Corbusier's commitment to new attitudes and social mores, help foster women's participation in the profession? Did the adventure of creating something new, the Modern Movement's commitment to collective values, and its emphasis on collaboration (however paradoxical, given Le Corbusier's self-proclaimed role as artist-genius) prove especially conducive to strong, independent women? Judging from Perriand's descriptions, not only did she consider herself the equal of the male employees, but she also enjoyed their warmth, camaraderie, and respect. The atelier provided an environment in which she and her colleagues, male and female, could grow and develop professionally.

Third, her salon exhibitions of the late 1920s call into question the stereotypical characterization of Modernism as instrumental rationalism and therefore male. What is evident in her 1928 dining room and the 1929 model apartment, as well as in the broader movement for domestic reform during that decade, was that scientific planning and functionalism were not simply male concerns but were also significant components of women's vision of domestic liberation. Much feminist scholarship has been devoted to the demystification of hierarchical distinctions between attributes such as rationality, functionalism, and structure (traditionally associated with male truth) and characteristics such as decoration, superfluity, and fantasy (associated with a more feminine subjective sensibility) and to disputing the subordination of the latter. But what becomes clear when one examines the interwar discussions about "scientific" household management is that such a dichotomy is much too simplistic. The domestic reform movement contributed to the feminization of rationality, just as women (and society at large) increasingly perceived rationality as fundamental to their own identities. The idea that housework could be rationalized and made "scientific" meant that all women—even homemakers—could see themselves, and be seen, as rational and scientific. Though rarely acknowledged in such terms, the functionalism and rational planning of Modern domestic architecture were similarly connected to women's identities. To repeat: Perriand's salon exhibits in 1928 and 1929 challenge characterizations of both Modernism and rationality as exclusively male.

In addition, these projects raise questions about how we characterize feminism or feminist thought. All too often, those of us who are feminist critics and historians evaluate women's historical position by today's standards (whether in terms of individual economic and political rights or from a poststructuralist perspective emphasizing the fluidity of gender and identity). However, if women's struggle for emancipation is to be seen as an evolving, historical phenomenon, it is important to examine earlier, more "compromised" efforts and to assess them in terms of their own social and political context. Historian Karen Offen has proposed the term "relational feminism" to describe the pioneering efforts of many earlier 20th-century European reformers who attempted to

improve women's situation as *women*, emphasizing their distinctive contributions to society rather than insisting on individual rights, irrespective of sex. These family-oriented feminists rejected the 19th-century image of the self-sacrificing *femme au foyer* but, because they believed that there were biological and cultural differences between women and men, still saw women as having primary responsibility for the home and children.⁽³⁾ In France, prior to the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in 1949, the sexual division of labor was rarely seen as oppressive but rather as part of a necessary complementarity of the sexes. In the view of women domestic reformers such as Paulette Bernège and Henriette Cavaignac and designers such as Perriand and Le Corbusier, modern technology and scientific planning could liberate women from domestic drudgery, enabling them to use their time in more fulfilling ways, whether in their role as mothers and wives, or pursuing a career, or enjoying leisure activities. Certainly most visitors to the Salon d'Automne who saw Perriand's kitchen assumed that a woman would be working in it, but the remarks of contemporary critics make clear that many would have also assumed that this woman was a *femme moderne*, forging a new identity both for herself and society.

I would like to see histories of Modern architecture explore this apparent paradox, allowing us to include efforts different from our own as part of the rich and diverse history of improving women's condition. I believe that a deeper knowledge of how gender was constructed, maintained, and challenged would help us address present-day inequities in the profession. This means going beyond reductive charges of sexism and victimization and simplistic value judgments of good and bad in order to arrive at a fuller, more complex vision of Modernism—one that includes both its regressive and progressive dimensions.

Notes

1. Mary McLeod, ed., *Charlotte Perriand: An Art of Living* (New York: Harry N. Abrams with The Architectural League of New York, 2003).
2. Charlotte Perriand, interview with Mary McLeod, June 30, 1997. For Beatriz Colomina's analysis, see "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism," in Colomina, ed., *Sexuality and Space* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), 106-107.
3. Karen Offen, "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach," *Signs* 14, Autumn 1988, 119-157.

Dear Friends:

I am delighted to welcome you to this Exhibition celebrating the life and work of CHARLOTTE PERRIAND. The Gallery is very pleased to participate in the French Film and Art Festival through this show and to present an overview of this important designer's work.

I thank Mr. Bruno Plasse, Director of the Alliance Francaise and his team, for bringing this show to us and to Mr. Danielle Blaze, the Cultural Director at the French Embassy for his full endorsement. I thank His Excellency MARC BARETY, for his encouragement and for speaking this evening. And a big THANK YOU to all of you for being here.

Now, may I invite His Excellency to say a few words.

Thank you Excellency.

Please do walk through and view the exhibition posters which document important design exhibitions and landmarks in Charlotte Perriand's life. We also have available tonight, four designer pieces by Perriand, (courtesy of Space)

2 Ombra armchairs in leather

**The Plana low table in embossed black painted wood
and the Rifleso container unit in painted wood.**

All made by Cassina and offered at steep discount to retail for this show.

Please ask me, Dhaima or Sylvia for more details.

And now, ladies and gentleman, we thank God for the good weather that allows us to dine on the balcony. Dinner is served.

Charlotte Perriand

A Life of Creation; An Autobiography

by Charlotte Perriand

New York: The Monacelli Press, 2003

Charlotte Perriand

An Art of Living

Edited by Mary McLeod

New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2003

Although she is often considered one of the 20th century's most renowned women in architecture, Charlotte Perriand (1903—1999) was not an architect — she regarded herself an interior designer and took issue with those who thought her merely a furniture designer. Her best-known interior was a temporary installation that she and Pierre Jeanneret completed while in the atelier of Le Corbusier for the 1929 Paris Salon d'Automne exhibition. In that same year, in collaboration with Le Corbusier and Jeanneret, she designed three chairs: the *chaise-longue*, *grand confort*, and *fauteuil à dossier basculant*. All were essential "equipment" in the 1930s architecture of Le Corbusier, and all are in production today.

Though Perriand's fame was established in Le Corbusier's firm where she worked as an associate from 1927 to 1937, she was just thirty-four when, at the height of the Depression, she left the studio. For the next six decades she designed mostly interiors. While with Le Corbusier, Perriand espoused belief in metal and new technology as means for modern furniture, in the mid-30s she adopted a preference for wood. Le Corbusier himself had moved in a similar direction as had Aalto, Breuer, and many renowned artists. As box gave way to human psyche, Surrealist artists like Miró and Calder experimented with "free-form" — form easily translated into furniture, if not so easily into interiors. For the editor of a leftist paper *Ce Soir*, Perriand designed a free form desk. A unique, large, and apparently expensive object, the desk seemed to contradict Popular Front convictions Perriand espoused at the time. Indeed, bourgeois tastes and socialist notions were not easily reconciled. "One-offs" were obviously exclusive, whereas Modernist aesthetics of simplification and serialization were rejected by the French populace. Today, issues of cost and mass-market are addressed in Michael Graves's Target line and Phillipe Starck's cheap chairs — but with production, materials, marketing, and consumers unavailable to Perriand in the 30s.

When the Germans took France in 1940, Perriand took refuge in Japan. There, local tradition, craft, a love of wood, and the presence of bamboo (a strong yet lightweight, standard yet unique, warm, malleable, organic "tube") encouraged design in wood, Perriand now taking cues from Japanese vernacular form. In 1941 the famed 1929 *chaise longue* was translated into bamboo-and-wood, and Perriand's lightweight tubular steel "folding and stacking chairs" from the mid-30s were done with a heavy wood frame and cushions of a woven straw fabric. Perriand's stay in Japan culminated in a 1941 exhibition of her work at Takashimaya, a department store in Tokyo and Osaka. As at Stuttgart in 1927, the exhibition was a "room within a room" set up inside the warehouse-like store itself. Designed with the Japanese architect Junzo Sakakura, the exhibition room was modulated by existing department store columns and further modulated by Perriand's floor and wall materials. The resulting "space" (and here one relies solely on black-and-white images of the installation) was not unlike that of

the 1929 Salon, or of Le Corbusier's Villa Church *bibliothèque*, or of the lobby and *bibliothèque* of his Pavillon Suisse. Obviously, furniture grew chunkier as wood replaced metal. Yet, it was still of Modern form. In agreement with Japanese preference, Perriand placed furniture closer to the ground, thus creating a greater sense of space. Like Le Corbusier's *pilotis*, legs lifted these objects into the air, permitting an uninterrupted horizontal plane. While space flowed unencumbered, furniture was arranged in orthogonal "rooms." Lost in this wood translation was the illusive spaciousness of earlier high-tech interiors, an effect achieved with the gloss of synthetic floors and ceilings, the chromed legs and mirrored sliding doors of metal furniture, and the translucency of tabletops and vertical partitions. Designing in wood, Perriand enhanced space not with surface shine and translucency, but by placing "other space" — murals and lighted openings, both of which possessed their own space, space of an order different than that of the interior ensemble itself — at dominant focal points. Earlier, Le Corbusier had employed similar strategies using murals and coloration to "explode" the space of enclosure, a space simultaneously planar and volumetric.

BIASES ARE ALL TOO EVIDENT. SENTIMENTAL MOMENTS APPEAR AS OBSTACLES IN OTHERWISE INTRIGUING STORIES. AND OPINIONS ON THINGS AND EVENTS OUTSIDE PERRIAND'S REALM OF EXPERTISE ARE OFFERED ALL TOO OFTEN.

From national to international, from metal to wood, from industrial to indigenous, from the here and now to an a-historic wandering, Perriand's transition was permanent. It added significance to her *œuvre*, for it initiated a dialectic. To reiterate, in the late 30s, while retaining a taste for Modernist space and form, Perriand adopted organic materials and shapes, and then traditional, vernacular design. This adoption affected proportions and structure. Her furniture no longer defied gravity; the opposite was true. Inertness replaced mobility. Space was absorbed, not heightened. Oddly, this contrast is most evident not in Perriand's interiors but in her three mountain structures for minimal habitation. On the one hand, her Modernist 1937—1938 Bivouac and barrel shelters — refuges for "inexpensive vacation retreats" comprised of tubular-metal supports and aluminum panels and braced by metal cables — were shiny, minimal, lightweight capsules. They were intended to be assembled on site, mass-produced, and to delicately hover on snow-covered mountainsides. By contrast, the traditional 1960 Méribel-les-Allues wood chalet that Perriand designed as her own retreat is rooted in the ground, blended with nature, heavy, organic, and inert. Where the first is anonymous and "for the people," the latter is personal, a "second home," a refuge exclusively for Perriand. The transition can be understood as moving from, in Umberto Eco's terms, a positivistic-technological ideology towards a materialistic-historical one: both "optimistic ideologies of progress" that seek to build a better world but in very different ways.¹

Leaving Japan, Perriand moved to Indochina, where, in 1943, she married Jacques Martin, an executive with Air France, and gave birth to her only child, Pernette. In France after the war, Perriand found that "the polluted Paris air wasn't good for Pernette," and she and her family moved to Jacques's sister's "comfortable, sunny house in the Champagne region, complete with garden, rosebushes, cherry trees, cats, and dogs" [A, 206].

Perriand continued to design. Her guest rooms of the Hôtel du Doron (1947) and later for student rooms in the Maison de la Tunisie (1952),² feature a colored accent wall combined with a continuous, shallow desktop. Whereas the hotel rooms seem almost quaint, the student rooms offer color and Noguchi-esque free-form as relief to the inherent heaviness of an opaque,

almost monolithic wood. In 1950 a far more intriguing Perriand is evidenced in her kitchens for Le Corbusier's *Marseilles Unité* housing. Later, with Jean Prouvé, Perriand designed wall cabinets and storage units for Air France staff housing in Brazzaville, Congo. In both instances, metal was reintroduced into a wood aesthetic as was the sense of mass production, though the latter was never realized.

In the mid-50s in Japan, together with Sakakura and Martha Villiger, Perriand designed the exhibition *Synthesis of the Arts*, a living and dining room ensemble for the department store Takashimaya. Proportions, intimate scale, color, the warmth of wood, and subdued metal parts were crucial in achieving a humane, delicate aesthetic. As noted above, in 1960 Perriand built a rustic chalet for her own use (tempting another comparison to Le Corbusier and his 1952 *cabanon*), but perhaps more importantly, at this time she designed two interior screen walls: one, a colored pleated fabric for the Tokyo Air France agency; the other, a "staggered bookshelf" for her own Air France apartment in Rio. Both, in a sense, are thickened walls, the latter more "equipment" than the former. The bookshelf of 1962 owes its conceptual origin to the wall of *casiers* in both the *Villa Church* and the *Salon d'Automne* of 1929. In Rio, as earlier in the mid-fifties Japan *Synthesis of the Arts* exhibition and in her design for shelving in the *Maison du Mexique*, Perriand brings color and the warmth and texture of wood to this wall. The design of a functional wall that both partially separates and fully invigorates modern space seems the very essence of furniture as equipment. Perriand elaborated the concept in her designs for bathrooms. With the bathroom for the 1929 *Salon d'Automne* as precedent, Perriand pursued the idea in the Delafon bathroom for the '37 Paris World's Fair (together with Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret), in a 1952 design for her own Paris apartment, arguably in the very wonderful "Maison du Sahara" capsules with Prouvé in 1958, and ultimately in a 1975 prefabricated polyester bathroom — mass-produced and plugged into *Arc 1800*, ski resort units in the French Alps. These late manifestations of prefabrication and equipment are important for they return Perriand to what seems her most significant contribution to Modern design: working walls (sometimes swollen to include kitchen or bath). Neither furniture or "interiors" *per se*, these highly ambiguous — in the most positive sense of the word — elements of architecture are simultaneously object and place and as such question the notion of furniture and room as distinct and immutable entities. Certainly similar "questions" occurred in earlier architecture; and after Perriand and Le Corbusier, Kahn found like value in *poché* space, while various PoMO masters allowed thickened walls to swallow up the built-ins and barely mentionables. The concept is not original, but Perriand's Modernist manifestation might be.

OFTEN PERRIAND'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY SEEMS EXCRUCIATINGLY SELF-CENTERED—BELEAGUED BY THE WORD "I." THIS IS MOST EVIDENT IN HER TELLING OF VARIOUS ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS, A TELLING THAT COMPRISES A SUBSTANTIAL PART OF HER BOOK AND TENDS TOWARD THE FRIVOLOUS.

Recently, several accounts of Perriand's life and work have appeared including Perriand's autobiography and an extensive, beautifully made review of her work, *Charlotte Perriand: An Art of Living*, edited by Mary McLeod. The former is Perriand's personal account of her life and friendships. It makes little attempt to directly account for her design, but offers instead a chronological record of her life and valuable insight into personal and professional relationships. The latter, by contrast, is a detailed review of Perriand's work, a collection of essays that more or less chronologically examines not Perriand the person, but Perriand the designer, her furniture and interiors, and their political and social context. Taken together, the two give a

well-rounded view of Perriand. Neither book critically examines Perriand's design from formal or functional points of view. (Isn't the *gran comfort* too wide for most human bodies, the *petite comfort* too narrow? And why is the former a diminutive 25" [62 cm] high, causing it, or everything around it, to look positively wacky in the company of "real" furniture?) But this is by design and not omission.

Issued in French as *Vie de creation* in 1998 — a year before Perriand's death at the age of 96 — Charlotte Perriand's autobiography was published in English five years later by The Monacelli Press as *Charlotte Perriand: A Life of Creation*. It is dedicated: "To Tessa and future generations who will build the twenty-first century." At ninety-five, Perriand tells the story of her long life in design. Many of the book's shortcomings result from this distant perspective. Recollections are sometimes inaccurate. Biases are all too evident. Sentimental moments appear as obstacles in otherwise intriguing stories. And opinions on things and events outside Perriand's realm of expertise are offered all too often. In addition, the book only marginally establishes the conditions of the times in which Perriand lived. And unlike Henry Adams' *Education*, for instance, or even Bob Dylan's *Chronicles*, Perriand's autobiography seldom elevates its telling to a point at which the inevitable truths of experience are communicated. Still, the autobiography succeeds, for one value of autobiographical writing is not its accuracy of accounting but its capacity to convey the author's way of thinking about things. And whereas a too guarded recollection necessarily diminishes this conveyance, one imagines Perriand's writing at least semi-unguarded. That is to say, she does not tell all, but the absence of the sound of hammer on nail-head is conspicuous. We are encouraged to speculate, and in such encouragement some idea of her way of thinking is communicated.

This being said, one notes that often the impression Perriand renders of herself is less than flattering. Again and again she tells of her socialist convictions, her sympathies with the French working class, and her various attempts to better the everyday life of the average French citizen through furniture design — attempts that reached their apex in 1934, when Perriand wrote "The Housewife and Her Home" column for *Vendredi*, the "Fight-Against-Fascism" review [73]. Yet despite these stated convictions, almost always Perriand's actions belie an allegiance either solely to herself or to political parties overtly responsible for social misery on the largest scale.

For instance, when in June 1940, the Germans marched effortlessly into Paris, the thirty-seven-year-old Charlotte Perriand escaped by train to Marseilles. There she boarded an ocean liner and traveled in a "first-class, mahogany-finished cabin" (129) to Japan. In Japan, she assumed a government position as design consultant in decorative art with the Imperial Ministry of Trade and Industry at a "salary of 100,000 francs a year, plus fees and travel expenses" (121). Perriand — who pleads "Not for anything in the world did I want to leave Paris," and then asks, "Would it be able to defend itself?" (125) — exited the chaos of war in comfort and luxury, not forgetting to take proper skiing and mountaineering gear, having learned in advance, she tells us, that "there was a lot of snow in Japan" (122). Apparently, Perriand was untroubled by atrocities committed in Nanjing by Japanese soldiers against innocent Chinese citizens and by the menacing presence of Japan in French Indochina. She seemed untroubled, too, by the presence of Stalin during her extensive stays in the Soviet Union in the early '30s; and untroubled later by the notorious Mao regime during her 1972 visit to the People's Republic of China. Indeed, during that visit, when the tourist Perriand sensed herself intrusive as she attempted to pry "in the old quarters, hoping to see one of those small traditional dwellings nestled in a square

courtyard," she tells us that to avoid ostracism she gladly would "have slipped into a Mao outfit" [357, A] if only to be free to see all that she wanted to see.

Often Perriand's autobiography seems excruciatingly self-centered — beleaguered by the word "I." This is most evident in her telling of various romantic relationships, a telling that comprises a substantial part of her book and tends toward the frivolous. Thus while still a student in Paris's Union Centrale des Arts Décoratif, she married an Englishman. "He was called Percy," she writes (20), then explains that "at the time marriage was the only way for the chrysalis I was to turn into a butterfly . . ." (20). She divorced a few years later. In the '30s, she pursued Pierre Jeanerret, Le Corbusier's partner. Jeanerret appears in the book's photos six times more often than both of Perriand's husbands combined. "Pierre followed me," (58) Perriand writes triumphantly. And later, "Poor Pierre . . ." (64) and then ". . . so I dragged Pierre along . . . where amid fragrant thyme and rosemary we swam naked . . ." (102). Indeed, in reading the autobiography one imagines that being naked in public was a particular preoccupation of Perriand. "I wondered how I could sunbathe nude with a priest around," she mused (102), while the autobiography's illustrative text shows Perriand in 1935 from the back, topless, hands raised above her head Rocky-style. More than a quarter of the book's photos are not of Perriand's design work, but of Perriand herself. There are no images of Perriand in her 40s; only two of her in her 50s; and then three of her in her 60s. The front 'cover' of the Monacelli English edition features three photographs, all of Perriand herself, including a cropped version of the well-known "Charlotte and Corb" image (with husband Perry smiling benignly in the background while tending bar for the occasion) and the oh-so-controversial photograph of a face-to-the-wall Charlotte, reclining, with skirt at the knee, on the 1929 *chaise-longue*.³

THE BOOK IS A REVELATION. ALL SEEMS FRESH, EVEN NEW. THERE IS A PRECARIOUS BALANCE THAT MUST BE MAINTAINED, HOWEVER, IN PRESENTING PERRIAND AT THIS TIME, WHEN SO MUCH IS CONSTANTLY BEING MADE OF SO LITTLE. FOR PERRIAND'S IMPORTANCE IS IN MANY WAYS MARGINAL.

Charlotte Perriand: An Art of Living is a far more comprehensive, accurate, and analytical account of Perriand and her work. Edited by Mary McLeod, the book is a collection of introduction and eight essays. The first four essays (for brevity, I've abstracted all titles) are arranged more or less chronologically: Esther Da Costa Meyer's "Perriand Before Le Corbusier;" Mary McLeod's "Domestic Equipment, 1928—29;" Danilo Udovicki-Selb's "Perriand and the Popular Front"; and Yasushi Zenno's "Perriand in Japan, 1940—41." The next three are overviews that collect Perriand by type, association, and "object-ness": Arthur Ruegg's "Transforming the Bathroom, 1927—57"; Roger Aujame's "Perriand and Jean Prouvé"; and Joan Ockman's "Lessons from Objects." The final essay, "Perriand and the Alps," is a largely pictorial review of six decades of Perriand's designs for various ski huts and resorts. Throughout, the book is richly illustrated in black and white photographs and line drawings. In addition, it features fifty-nine color plates, color being essential to interior design. Four short "Recollections of Charlotte Perriand" followed by five "Selected Writings by Charlotte Perriand" end the book. The selected writings offer Perriand's own theoretical insight into each phase of her long career, adding "ideology" to practice and therefore expanding one's understanding of Perriand's purpose.

McLeod's collection is largely historical. It touches on the last half of Perriand's long career, but far greater emphasis is placed on Perriand's more productive and significant first thirty years.

Despite Perriand's relative fame, little was known about her work after she left Le Corbusier's atelier. Indeed, Carol Corden's entry on Perriand in the 1982 *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architecture* is limited to about 200 words. Because of this, the book is a revelation. All seems fresh, even new. There is a precarious balance that must be maintained, however, in presenting Perriand at this time, when so much is constantly being made of so little. For Perriand's importance is in many ways marginal. By its very nature, a monograph must promote its central figure. McLeod quite ably elevates Perriand's work, but for the purpose of scrutinizing it carefully, from several angles and with great critical insight. "I hope," she writes in her introduction, "that by expanding the conventional historical perspective to examine what has usually been considered a modest or marginal practice — because of her position as a woman, working in collaboration, and designing interiors — it will help provide a fuller and more nuanced understanding of French modernism" (20). I think it is to McLeod's great credit that the "understanding" goes well beyond French Modernism. Indeed, and rather unfortunately, the essays (Da Costa Meyer's is the exception) too infrequently place Perriand in the context of other French designers of interiors and furniture — Herbst, Chareau, Gray, for instance — and too infrequently focus on essentials of interior design—color, scale, space, light. What McLeod's book makes evident again and again, however, is the role of salons, furniture rooms, and marketing images — that is, the role of the ephemeral and almost wholly visual — in the promotion and dissemination of "interior design." (Has anyone ever sat in a Perriand chair?) This being said, McLeod's emphasis on materials and production, on Perriand's associations with artists and industrial designers is entirely appropriate to Perriand. One wonders if it is indicative of French Modernism as well?

What then is the significance of Charlotte Perriand — her life, her thoughts, her work — to the 21st century? For while her designs were extremely good, arguably they were never as essential as those of Herbst, Chareau, Noguchi, Breuer, Eames or a host of other furniture and interior designers. And her life's story, though it spans nearly the entire century and involves architects and artists of great renown, lacks heroic conviction and is often fraught with contradictions. Yet, both work and life are the subjects of an autobiography and a large, unusually beautiful and intelligent review, work too good to be dismissed as fashionable elaboration on the odd or irrelevant. Not to ask of these books "Why Perriand?" is to risk underestimating the significance of her life and design. My own answer is that first, Perriand was a woman in architecture; second, Perriand made a decisive move from metal to wood, a move implying much more than simple preference; third, like Gray, Chareau, Breuer, and others, Perriand cultivated the extremely potent notions of furniture as equipment and of functional wall as ambiguous entity.

I suspect, however, that neither the autobiography nor Mary McLeod's *An Art of Living* would agree with this answer. Each sees the work differently and in its own way. Significance is not absolute. The two books together expose Perriand's life and work and way of thinking. The exposé provokes the reader to thought. One could hardly ask for more.

Notes

1. The nomenclature is from Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyper Reality*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1986), 91.

2. One question, however, the 1947 wood chairs pictured in Perriand's Shangri-La nightclub in Méribel-les-Allues (McLeod, 172, Fig. 22). The nightclub's seemingly uneven, apparently stone floor could only have encouraged the notorious instability of three-

legged chairs. That reviewers never interrogate the comfort and function of furniture is unfortunate, for as with architecture of a certain kind “commodity” is an essential criterion.

3. That Perriand was an extremely short person is not noted when this image is “analyzed.” Yet Perriand’s size seems of the utmost importance since a good deal of the furniture that she designed or helped to execute — including the chaise-longue — is unusually small, so much so that it borders on the dysfunctional. Scale is significant to interior design and is only understood in relationship to the human body. Almost all of Perriand’s work is shown without the human figure, the obvious exception being two of the four photos of the 1955 *Takashimaya Synthesis of the Arts* exhibition that feature female Japanese models conveniently attired to “work” with the show.



CAS/SO/51201/13x606

51201 Ombra armchair in leather cat X Black (13x606).

Frame in chrome

Dim: W707 x D82 x H65cm

Brand: Cassina

Design by: Charlotte Perriand

RM 22,870



CAS/TA/51510

51510 Plana low table in embossed black painted wood.

Dim: 183 x 70 x H33cm

Brand: Cassina

Design by: Charlotte Perriand

RM 16,010



CAS/5G/51303

Rifleso container unit in painted wood.
Exterior black and interior burgundy red w/low support feet.
Dim: 200 x 44 x H70cm

Brand: Cassina
Design by: Charlotte Perriand
RM 34,620

RSVPs:

May 14 – Opening

HE Marc & Yasmina
David Blaize
Bruno Plasse + 8 from Alliance
Space- 3
Shalini, Dhaima, Sylvia
Charan Kang , Karen Abraham, Hena Mukerjee, Gita Jayabalan
HE & Mrs. Jose & Maria Paz – Brazil
PS Elizabeth Moggie
Geoffrey Thomas & En. Roslan Said
Mandy Johnson
Larry Gan
Kay and Murad
David and Asha
Saheran Suhendran (KAAP) <sox@kaaplav.com>
Farrah & Partner <farrahvr@intermovers.com>
Xavier FLAMAND + 3
Swee Chin cell : + 6012 277 8871
Tan Sri Radzi Mansor
Ramli, Siva & Guest
Japanese Ambassador & Wife
PS Christine Johari & Son
Ms. Miki Choong of Centurise Group (2 pax)
Mr. SK Chong

May 17 – Lecture

PS Elizabeth Moggie

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May 14 - Opening

Programme would therefore be

6:30 arrival of the Guest

7:00 arrival of the Guest of Honour

7:10 speech by HE Marc Baréty

BIOGRAPHY

1903 Born in Paris, where she spends her childhood punctuated by frequent trips to Savoie.

1920 Enrols on a five year furniture design course at the Ecole de l'Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs.

1926 Marries her first husband a year after graduation and converts their attic apartment into a 'machine age' interior.

1927 Exhibits the Bar sous le Toit filled with tubular steel furniture at the Salon d'Automne. When Le Corbusier sees it, he invites Perriand to join his studio at 35 rue de Sèvres to design furniture and interiors.

1928 Designs three chairs with Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret – the LC2 Grand Confort armchair, the B301 reclining chair and B306 chaise longue – for the studio's architectural projects.

1929 Creates a model modern apartment in glass and tubular steel to be exhibited as Equipement d'Habitation – or Living Equipment – at the Salon d'Automne.

1930 Separates from her husband and moves to Montparnasse. Travels to Moscow for a CIAM conference and designs fixtures for Pavilion Suisse at Cité Universitaire in Paris.

1932 Starts work on the Salvation Army headquarters project in Paris.

1933 Travels to Moscow and Athens to participate in CIAM conferences.

1934 Designs the furniture and interior fixtures for Le Corbusier's new apartment on rue Nungesser-et-Coli.

1937 Leaves Le Corbusier's studio to collaborate with the artist Fernand Leger on a pavilion for the Paris Exhibition and to work on a ski resort in Savoie.

1939 When World War II begins, she leaves Savoie to return to Paris and to design prefabricated buildings with Jean Prouvé and Pierre Jeanneret.

1940 Sails for Japan where she has been appointed as an advisor on industrial design to the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

1942 Forced to leave Japan as an "undesirable alien", but is trapped by the naval blockade and forced to spend the rest of the war in Vietnam, where she marries her second husband and gives birth to a daughter, Pernette.

1946 Returns to France and revives her career as an independent designer and her collaboration with Jean Prouvé.

1947 Works with Fernand Leger on the design of Hôpital Saint-Lo.

1950 Designs a prototype kitchen for Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation apartment building in Marseilles.

1951 Organises the French section of the Milan Triennale exhibition.

1957 Designs the League of Nations building for the United Nations in Geneva.

1959 Works with Le Corbusier and the Brazilian architect Lucio Costa on the interior of their Maison du Brésil at Cité Universitaire in Paris.

1960 Collaborates with Erno Goldfinger on the design of the French Tourist Office on London's Piccadilly.

1962 Begins a long-running project to design a series of ski resorts in Savoie.

1985 Retrospective of her work at Musée des Arts-Décoratifs in Paris.

1998 Publication of her autobiography, *Vie de Création*, or *Life of Creation*, and presentation of a retrospective at the Design Museum, London.

1999 Charlotte Perriand dies in Paris.

Best pieces:

One of the most influential furniture designers of the early modern movement, CHARLOTTE PERRIAND (1903-1999) introduced the 'machine age' aesthetic to interiors in the steel, aluminium and glass furniture she created at Le Corbusier's architectural studio in the late 1920s and 1930s. She then continued her experiments with different materials.

When the 24 year old Charlotte Perriand strode into Le Corbusier's studio at 35 rue de Sèvres, Paris in 1927, and asked him to hire her as a furniture designer, his response was terse. "We don't embroider cushions here," he replied and showed her the door. A few months later Le Corbusier apologised. After being taken by his cousin Pierre Jeanneret to see the glacial Bar sous le Toît, or rooftop bar that Perriand had created in glass, steel and aluminium, for the Salon D'Automne exhibition in Paris, Le Corbusier invited her to join his studio.

Together with Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, Perriand developed a series of tubular steel chairs, which were then – and are still today – hailed as icons of the machine age. At Le Corbusier's request, one chair was designed "for conversation", this was the B301 sling back chair; another "for relaxation", the square-shaped and chunkily upholstered LC2 Grand Confort; and a third for sleeping, the elegant B306 chaise longue recliner inspired by the sensual curves of 18th century day-beds.

Le Corbusier specified exactly what he expected from furniture in his 1925 book *L'Art Décoratif d'aujourd'hui* by identifying three different types: besoins-types or type-needs; meubles-types or type-furniture; and objets-membres humains or human-limb objects. He defined the latter as: *"Extensions of our limbs and adapted to human functions that are. Type-needs, type-functions, therefore type-objects and type-furniture. The human-limb object is a docile servant. A good servant is discreet and self-effacing in order to leave his master free. Certainly, works of art are tools, beautiful tools. And long live the good taste manifested by choice, subtlety, proportion and harmony."*

Perriand proceeded to put Le Corbusier's principles into practise by developing three chairs with chromium-plated tubular steel bases for two of his 1928 projects.

The revolutionary tubular steel furnishings and system furniture designed by the three were presented as "Équipement de l'habitation" (home equipment) at the 1929 "Salon d'Automne", where they were widely acclaimed. These functional pieces include the "Basculant B301", an armchair with a chromium-plated tubular steel frame and a seat and back covered in calf hide. Other hits were the "Chaise longue B306" (later the "LC4" chaise longue) and the model "B302", an armchair featuring a round upholstered seat and a round upholstered back. In 1928 the three designed "Grand Confort B302" (later "LC3"), a comfortable armchair with thick upholstery.

In 1937 Charlotte Perriand and Pierre Jeanneret collaborated on designing a mountain chalet of sheet aluminium, which they showed at the "Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne" and later they came up with plans for prefab houses made of aluminium.

When Japan joined the war as a German ally, she tried to return to France but, because of the naval blockade, found herself trapped in Vietnam from 1942 until 1946. During her enforced Vietnamese exile, Perriand studied local techniques of woodwork and weaving. She also married her second husband, Jacques Martin, and gave birth to their daughter, Pernette.

She remained an influential figure in the modern movement until her death in 1999, when she was acclaimed as one of the very few women to have succeeded in that male domain.

Quote: *"The most important thing to realise is that what drives the modern movement is a spirit of enquiry, it's a process of analysis and not a style. We worked with ideals."*

Ezlina Adnan was born on November 29, 1974, in Perak, Malaysia. She has keen interest in architecture both professionally and academically. A 2002 graduate from University of North London, London, UK; Ezlina possessed Professional Diploma in Architecture and MA in Urban Design. She also obtained Part II Architecture qualification from Royal Institute of British Architecture (RIBA) and Malaysia's Board of Architects (LAM). She has been actively involved in the industry since 1998. She served as a consultant and urban designer of Zaini Dubus Richez Architects (ZDR), KL. Her current involvement is becoming a head urban designer who is responsible on the planning and developing architectural guidelines for future mosques developments in Abu Dhabi; (a project between University of Malaya Consultancy Unit (UPUM) and RDAH Harris Architect). Ezlina has true passion in teaching; which explains her simultaneous present as lecturer cum design tutor in University Malaya (UM) and in International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) despite juggling between her busy schedules as a head urban designer. A high spirited lady, Ezlina was engaged in many other projects such as being a Judge for Best Presentation Award MIFF 2010 (Malaysian International Furniture Fair), involved in the set up of Glulamated Timber Interest Group under the Malaysian Timber Council (MTC) and was a coordinator of UM Architecture Competition for Green Urban Society 2010. She is a graduate member of Malaysian Institute of Architects (PAM) and Malaysia's Board of Architects (LAM). At the moment, she is preparing to sit for LAM Professional Exam Part III.



EXHIBITION May 2 – 20, 2010 @ SHALINI GANENDRA FINE ART

Charlotte PERRIAND (1903 - 1999) , pioneer of interior architecture, introduced the concept of fitting-out adapted to the user at a time when decorative art had become an institution and where the setting imposed its luxury in daily life. Collaborating with Le Corbusier, member/founder of the Union of Modern artists (UAM), she lived for several years in Japan a country which at that time was unknown to most. There she developed a dogma which became a life long guide, " volumetry of the space".

This bilingual exhibition (French-English) at SGFA includes drawings by Charlotte PERRIAND, photographs of her works and abstracts from her writings. The exhibition invites the general public to observe Charlotte PERRIAND's life through her work. It is organized by topic, and follows a chronological order to highlight the rationale of the evolution of Charlotte PERRIAND and her ability to adapt to the environments in which she exerted creativity.

Furniture designed by PERRIAND will also be on display.



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With thanks to:

SPACE



Charlotte Perriand, Architect & Designer

VISION CULTURE LECTURE

By Ezlina Adnan

Monday May 17, 2010 @ 6:30 pm

SHALINI GANENDRA FINE ART The Private Gallery

#14 Jalan 16/5 Section 16 PJ (Map available upon request)

RSVP stag@tm.net.my or +603 7952 5778 by May 15.

Light dinner and cocktails will be served.

We are delighted to present a lecture exploring the life and work of CHARLOTTE PERRIAND as part of the *Vision Culture Lectures*.

One of the most influential furniture designers of the early modern movement, Perriand (1903-1999) introduced the 'machine age' aesthetic to interiors in the steel, aluminium and glass furniture she created at Le Corbusier's architectural studio in the late 1920s and 1930s. She then continued her experiments with different materials.

This bilingual exhibition (French-English) at SGFA includes drawings by Perriand, photographs of her works and abstracts from her writings. The Lecture will be held against the backdrop of this exhibition which invites the general public to observe Charlotte Perriand's life through her work.

Furniture designed by PERRIAND will also be on display.

HSBC 



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