PAPARAZZA MODERNA:

LOVERS & FRENEMIES

LAKE VEREA

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INTRODUCTION

Paparazza Moderna is a *modus operandi* – it is a way of being and a lens for looking at architecture that enables us to experience it viscerally while exposing the stories behind its facades. We have always been drawn to Modern architecture in our practice and in our lives. It infatuates and intrigues us. Back in 2011, we created the personas of the Paparazza Moderna to set an intention to delve deeper into this fascination. We defined a basic set of rules and wrote a manifesto to guide our actions and our photographic style.

PAPARAZZA MODERNA: FRENEMIES ran from 2011-2018 and focused on single-family houses designed in the United States by iconic Modernist architects. The series spotlighted pairs of architects who started as friends, helping and influencing each other, then suffered a rupture and were later reconciled. The six protagonists of this series are: Chapter 1: **Walter Gropius** vs. **Marcel Breuer** and the houses they built in New England; Chapter 2: **Rudolf M. Schindler** vs. **Richard J. Neutra** in California; and Chapter 3: **Philip Johnson** vs. **Ludwig Mies van der Rohe** in Connecticut, New York, and Illinois. The resulting portraits of each house are not documentary, but compositions of multiple photographs capturing our immediate and personal encounter with the architecture. Each portrait is accompanied by anecdotes and poetic interpretations. We used two sets of cameras: two Mamiya

C330 6x6 medium format cameras with different lenses (135 and 180 mm) and two Contax 35 mm format cameras. We shot with Kodak Ektar ISO100 film.

In 2025, we started a new chapter: **PAPARAZZA MODERNA: LOVERS.** We pivoted our interest from the United States to Europe and from men to women. We kept our focus on single-family houses and stayed within the same time frame — houses built between the 1920s and the 1960s. We had started to think about and research women architects operating in the Modern period back in 2022. Then, between February and May of 2025, we became Paparazza Moderna once again and sought out the fourteen protagonists that make up this series. We traveled by train for 9,000 km, through eleven countries. The trip started in winter: short days, cold weather, snow, frozen lakes, and trees with no leaves. As we kept on moving, the weather turned to spring; days became longer, streams of water poured over the mountains from the melting snow, green leaves sprouted on the trees, the light and landscapes changed radically, people became friendlier.

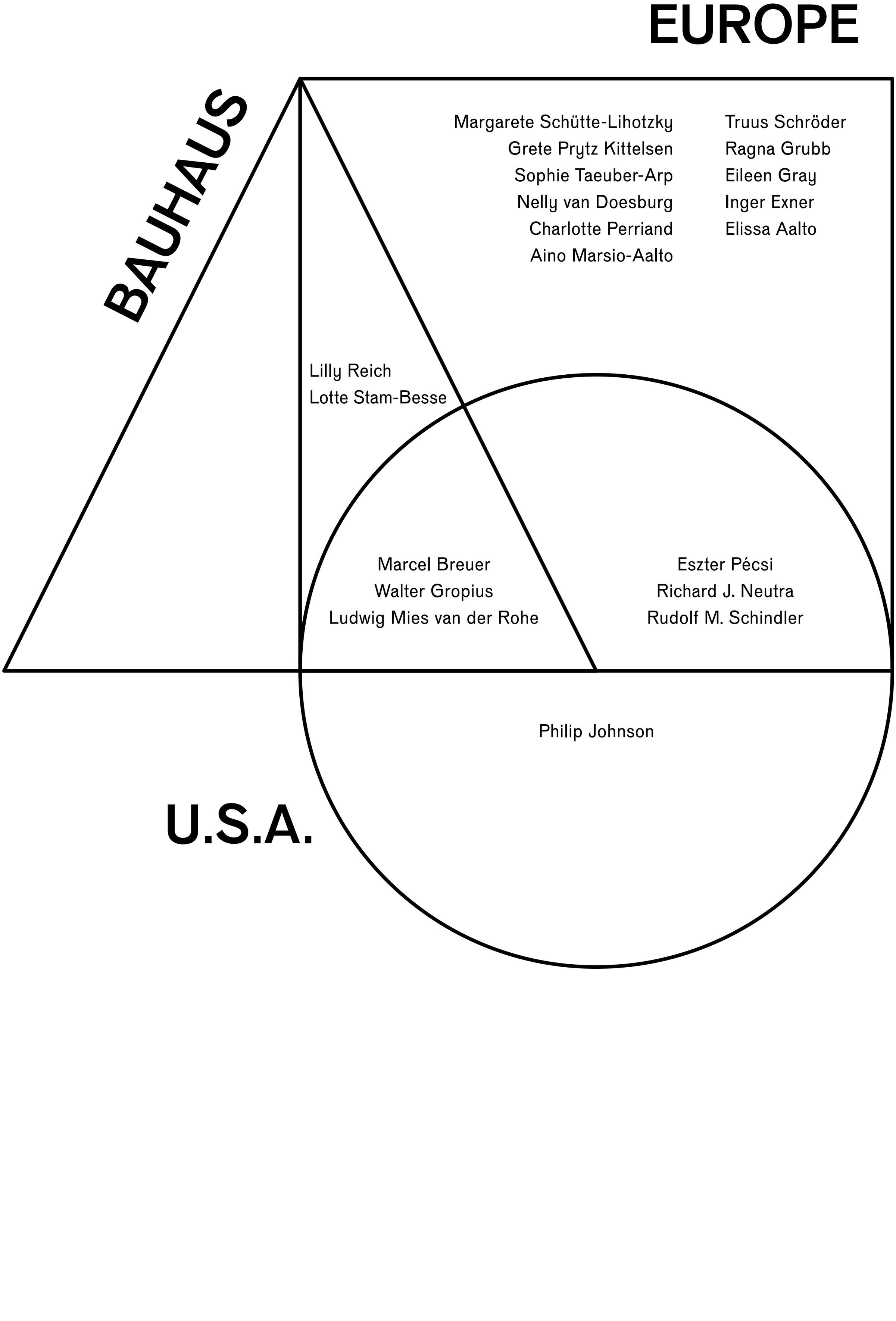
For this chapter, we chose a new uniform and equipment. We traveled with two 35mm cameras: a Contax N1 and a Contax NX, with 35–80 mm Macro and 70–300 mm lenses. We used Kodak Gold ISO 400 film. For the first time in the Paparazza Moderna project, we incorporated a tripod and a digital camera to document us while we shot the houses for the *Paparazza in Action* series—a Sony

A7R5 with a 70–200 mm Macro and a 24–105 mm lens. When we started the project in 2011, we needed a GPS device and printed maps to find the sites; in 2025, both were replaced by the iPhone. Also new to this journey, we kept a written diary of our travels. As we had done before, we kept a collection of travel ephemera as a time capsule. We also maintained our research methods, using the internet. However, this time proved to be more of a challenge as it can be difficult to find information on women architects as individuals. We observed that that most of them partnered with men and were framed by those partnerships. We came to understand that this is a product of the historical moment, when, with few exceptions, women could not operate as architects independently. We also observed that many of these collaborations and partnerships had a romantic component, therefore the name of the series: Lovers.

PAPARAZZA MODERNA: LOVERS features: **Eileen Gray, Charlotte Perriand, Nelly van Doesburg** and **Sophie Taeuber-Arp** in France, **Truus Schröder** and **Lotte Stam-Besse** in the Netherlands, **Aino Marsio-Aalto** and **Elissa Aalto** in Finland, **Grete Prytz Kittelsen** in Norway, **Ragna Grubb** and **Inger Exner** in Denmark, **Lilly Reich** in the Czech Republic, **Eszter Pécsi** in Hugary, and **Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky** in Austria.

LAKE VEREA, 2025.

CHART


EUROPE
BAUHAUS
Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky
Grete Prytz Kittelsen
Sophie Taeuber-Arp
Nelly van Doesburg
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Lilly Reich
Lotte Stam-Besse
Marcel Breuer
Walter Gropius
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe
Eszter Pécsi
Richard J. Neutra
Rudolf M. Schindler
Philip Johnson
U.S.A.

MANIFESTO

1. We start by gendering the word Paparazzo.
   We invent *Paparazza.*
2. **WE BECOME PAPARAZZA MODERNA.**
3. We research over the **internet.**
4. We learn the **historical** facts of the **architects** and **houses**, the **places**, and the **moments**.
5. We define the equipment: *IPHONES, GPS, MAPS, CAMERAS, LENSES, FILM, TRIPOD, ETC..*
6. **WE PLAN THE JOURNEY.**
7. **WE PICK AND WE WEAR A UNIFORM.**
8. **WE EMBRACE AND WE LOVE THE UNCERTAIN.**
9. **WE ARRIVE UNANNOUNCED.**
10. **WE KISS TO START THE SESSION.**
11. WE AS *PAPARAZZA* ARE **BRAVE** TO STEP INTO OTHERS' TIME.
12. WE USE **IDENTICAL** ANALOGUE CAMERAS WITH DIFFERENT LENSES THAT WE **EXCHANGE** THROUGHOUT THE SHOOT TO **FUSE** OUR INDEPENDENT IDENTITIES.
13. WE CHANNEL THE *PAPARAZZA* **ATTITUDE** AND LOOK FOR DETAILS THAT REVEAL THE **PASSAGE OF TIME** IN THE MATERIALS, THE **TRACE LEFT** BY THE INHABITANTS, AND **THE HISTORY THAT LINGERS ON.**
14. We have *fun.*
15. We sharpen our intuition in case we need to run.
16. We react spontaneously.

17. We hyperfocus and fully engage in the single moment that we visit the houses. **THAT MOMENT SETS THE NARRATIVE.** If, in the moment we arrive, the house is *MESSY, UNDER RENOVATION, CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC, IN A PRISTINE, PERFECT, RENOVATED STATE, OR CHANGED BEYOND RECOGNITION—that is the story we tell.*
18. We listen to the whispers of the houses and of the spirits.
19. We photograph ourselves while shooting the sites.
20. WE *ENTER* IF SOMEONE OPENS A *DOOR.*
21. WE WELCOME THE **RAIN,** THE **SNOW,** AND THE **SHINING SUN** ALIKE.
22. **WE TAKE AS MUCH AS WE CAN FROM THAT FIRST AND ONLY ENCOUNTER.**
23. WE ACT AS **FAST AS WE CAN.**
24. **WE KISS WHEN FINISHED.**
25. We leave as *swiftly* as we came.
26. We *keep all of the ephemera* collected on the journey to create a *ZEITGEIST TIME CAPSULE.*
27. We write a *detailed diary* of the travels.
28. **We** TRUST THE TIME **of the analogue photographic process and** WAIT TO SEE THE IMAGES **once we** DEVELOP THE FILM **at the END OF THE JOURNEY.**
29. We keep the adrenaline HIGH through out the *whole project.*

PART 1: FRENEMIES

INTRODUCTION

The moment is 2010: questions arise in our minds that demand answers. These questions lead to even more questions—yet no answers. What is our dream house? Is it a glass house? A brick house? A steel house? A wooden house? What kind of house do we build if given the opportunity for a fresh start?

Since we stared our practice, we portray buildings—houses that serve as paragons of **modern architectural history** — as **Modern Ruins.** We begin in our hometown, Mexico City, where houses are hidden from street view and require formal permission to enter. These negotiations quickly become too tedious and restrictive for the kind of fresh and spontaneous portraits we seek. We expand our search to other cities and countries—only to encounter the same closed-off conditions. Then, the image of the **fence-free** countryside of the United States sparks a new idea: what if we seek out the houses of the **Modern European architects who emigrated there?** This thought sends the project in a new direction. What if we visit unannounced and shoot the houses like **celebrities?** What if we become architecture's paparazzi? **What if we gender the word paparazzo (male) into paparazza (female)?**

These questions lead us to a deeper one: **what is the most intimate side of architecture?** For us, the most intimate is the **single-family house.** What kinds of homes did the iconic architects of Modernism design and build for themselves after arriving in the U.S. from Europe?

Books and the internet offer pristine images of newly completed buildings—too perfect, too one-dimensional to give us a complete understanding. So, we begin reading about the lives of the architects who intrigue us. We become fascinated by the stories we find online—tales of **love-hate relationships, personal rivalries, and ambitions.** This leaves us wondering: what is true? What is fiction? What has been exaggerated with time? We feel inspired—we have to go and see these houses for ourselves. At this point, the houses become the standard-bearers of our quest.

We begin by photographing the homes of **Walter Gropius** and **Marcel Breuer,** key figures of the **Bauhaus,** in New England. Then we move to California to photograph the houses of **Rudolf Schindler** and **Richard Neutra.** We finish by visiting homes designed by **Mies van der Rohe** and the one **American architect** in our series, **Philip Johnson,** in the Midwest and New England. We undertake extensive road trips, researching addresses and following online clues to reach each destination. We visit as many houses as possible.

To our surprise, we find homes that are perfectly preserved, others altered, some unrecognizable, and a few demolished. We photograph and exhibit only those that retain their intended lines, design, and essential character. We are fascinated by homes where current tenants have added surreal, unimaginable elements—

and saddened when the original architecture has been transformed beyond recognition.

Working quickly with a paparazza mindset to avoid being caught, we search for the details that attract us: traces of time on materials, marks left by the people who lived there, and the stories embedded in the language of modernism. We use two pairs of analog cameras with identical bodies and different lenses, which we exchange during the shoot. This method highlights **our commitment to blending our independent perspectives into a shared identity.**

The result is a composition of images that form our portrait of each house. Each one reflects the **emotions** we feel—a visual, narrative, and poetic rendering of these **homes as living characters** and the unique auras they emanate.

Chapter one:
WALTER GROPIUS VS. MARCEL BREUER IN NEW ENGLAND

For **Walter Gropius** and **Marcel Breuer,** leaving Germany and Europe happened in stages and individually—first to London, then to New York City. Gropius kept in touch with Breuer, a star student turned peer and friend, and later, upon arriving in the USA, a partner. Once they secured steady jobs—Gropius as Director and Breuer as Professor at the **Harvard Graduate School of Design—Helen Storrow,** a philanthropist and founder of the Girl Scouts, granted each of them **$18,000 USD** and a shared plot of land in **Lincoln, Massachusetts,** so they could build their dream homes. Gropius, feeling superior, took the uphill lot **(#15),** and Breuer the lower one **(#16).**

A student of theirs commissioned their first job for an American client: the **Hagerty House in Cohasset, Massachusetts (#34).** The audacious design turned into a nightmare for the client; the house was built too close to the seashore, and the glass windows couldn't withstand the harsh weather. Over the years, the house underwent many alterations to adapt to the conditions, until advances in glass technology finally made the original design viable.

Their next commission came from **Mr. Chamberlain (#17),** a client who envisioned a secluded cottage in the woods—modern, practical, and for his eyes only. Chamberlain longed for solitude and silence. The duo

designed and built a 500-square-foot wooden cottage on 10 acres of land. Their design was bold and functional, exploring the cantilever principle to its extreme. The architectural community began to buzz about the fearless design and speculated on the implications of its groundbreaking principles. Meanwhile, Chamberlain refused to let anyone see his private refuge. Legend has it that Mies van der Rohe was caught lurking around the site, sketching the structure. The buzz became so intense that Gropius and Breuer were eventually forced to ask Chamberlain to host an open house so fellow architects could see the innovation for themselves. Chamberlain was devastated after this event—his sanctuary had lost its aura. The house was never photographed or shown again until 2016, when it came up for sale for the first time.

As tensions heightened between Gropius and Breuer—largely due to Gropius's superiority complex (Breuer demanded to be treated as an equal)—**Dr. Virgil Abele** commissioned them to design his new house **(#18).** His only stipulation was that the duo replicate the entrance porch Gropius had designed for his own house in Lincoln. Around the same time, Breuer—who had divorced his Bauhaus sweetheart before arriving in the U.S.—fell in love with his office secretary. This was the last straw for Gropius, who decided to dissolve the partnership, leaving Breuer to complete Dr. Abele's house on his own.

When we visited the house ourselves, the aura of deterioration was evident. It was neglected, surrounded by debris, and guarded by a **stuffed blue gorilla** sucking its thumb—witnessing the passage of time.

After their separation, Gropius remained in his Lincoln house until his death, while Breuer moved on to New York City and later New Canaan, Connecticut, where he built the **Bi-Nuclear House** for his family with his new wife. This was one of the last houses he designed before transitioning to the **Brutalist style** that brought him global acclaim, with iconic buildings such as the UNESCO headquarters in Paris and the former Whitney Museum in New York City.

Gropius and Breuer remained distant for many years. Legend has it that it was **László Moholy-Nagy**, on his deathbed, who implored them to reconcile.

#15
Gropius House.
Lincoln, Massachusetts.
1937

It is this house that lays the foundation for both Gropius and his protégé, Breuer, in the United States. Upon his arrival, Gropius meets a wealthy philanthropist, Helen Storrow. Intrigued by his vision, she offers him a plot of land and $18,000 USD to build his dream house. When Breuer arrives shortly after,

he is offered the same deal. Gropius builds his house at the top of the hill; Breuer's is situated at its foot.

House Anecdote:

This house is a museum where visitors get an inside look at how Walter Gropius lives from the moment he arrives in the U.S. in 1937 with his wife, until his death in 1968. We visit the house on a Wednesday—on purpose—because that day it is closed to the public. We want to move around freely, without anyone watching over us.

The first thing that surprises us is that all the light bulbs are on, even though it's the middle of the day. Why? We love pressing our cameras against the glass windows to peek inside. As we look in, we see the architect's tools displayed on a desk, and the kitchen utensils arranged in the windows make the house feel like something between a mausoleum and a Disneyland-esque set. We walk around the house and climb the exterior stairs, following the shadows, to look at the upper terrace. Painted in a soft pink, it offers undisturbed views of the surrounding landscape. When we come across the outdoor shower, we understand that the architect is a bon vivant and a lover of nature. As we continue, we recognize the porch—we've seen many photos of Walter and his wife lounging there. Directly in front of it stands a stone in the garden, acting as a central element. This stone is the symbol of what Gropius and this house represent to us: a cornerstone from

which the garden of modernism spreads exponentially, to the U.S. and to the world. Some of the glass blocks in the foyer are broken. The house is beautiful and carries just the right amount of natural decay. We are deeply moved by the history it exhales.

#16
Breuer House.
Lincoln, Massachusetts.
1937

While Gropius lived in his house until his death, Breuer did not stay long in his first abode. He separated from his first wife before leaving Europe, so this house served as a bachelor pad. The Gropiuses next door seemed to take on a parental role at times—at least that's what the correspondence suggests.

House Anecdote:

Walking downhill from the Gropius House, we arrive at the Breuer House. Breuer plants trees to create privacy and only lives there for a short time, so the house has a completely different feeling. She is privately owned and designed to blend into the landscape. By now, the trees have grown into a natural fortress surrounding the house. A golden Labrador watches us, barely moving from his spot. We walk as close as possible and catch a glimpse into the dining room. We notice a water leak under the dining table and laugh when we remember reading

somewhere that Breuer himself mentions this issue. We now see it more as a charming characteristic than a problem that hasn't been fixed. We feel like we're being watched and notice a silhouette in a second-story window. We start to move faster, and just as we're about to leave, a woman walks toward us. "What are you doing?" she asks, in a polite and calm voice.

"We're admiring your house! Did you know it's the first house Marcel Breuer builds in the U.S. for himself?""Yes, I know," she replies. "We didn't really know anything about that when we bought it years ago. We just loved the design and its functionalism. Over the years, people start showing up and knocking on the door, wanting to come in. That's when we realize this house is something special. I'd invite you in, but I have an assassin Chihuahua inside," she says. We look at each other and respond, "Thank you for the explanation. Your other dog, the golden Labrador, seems very calm and barely moves from his spot." She replies, "Yes, he used to escape every day, so we install an invisible electric fence around the house that connects to his collar. Now he stays close to home, and we're all happy." We say goodbye and leave. We never see or hear the assassin Chihuahua she mentions. Later, we find out that the couple living in the house are behavioral psychologists.

#17
Chamberlain Cottage, by Gropius & Breuer. Sudbury, Massachusetts. 1940

This house caused a sensation when it was first built. The design is functional and pushes cantilevers to the extreme. This 500 square foot cottage, commissioned by a very private client, was photographed only when new and then disappeared behind thick shrubs, with no visitors allowed. It was almost forgotten until 2016, when it came up for sale. Even today, it's still hard to know exactly where Chamberlain Cottage is located. In February 2016 the property was sold for $1.25 million and six months later was sold again for $2.3 million!

#18
Abele House, by Gropius & Breuer. Framingham, Massachusetts. 1940

The last home Breuer and Gropius created together was for local doctor Vigil Abele, who specifically requested the same entrance structure as the Gropius House. There are conflicting stories about what happened during the project. The one thing we do know is that Gropius dropped out, leaving Breuer to complete it alone. Had Breuer—who had by then established an independent career—misbehaved by starting an affair with the office secretary, ultimately

breaking up their professional relationship? When we photographed the Abele House, signs of neglect were visible everywhere. The aura of a breakup and lingering sadness seemed to hang over this, their final collaboration. A blue gorilla with melancholic ayes guards the entrance of the majestic house.

House Anecdote:

The chaotic exterior is pure paparazza eye candy! We can tell the current owner has a sense of humor—a stuffed blue gorilla stands guard at the entrance. The house is rundown yet unaltered, aging with grace. Dr. Victor Abele commissioned the house from Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer, requesting an exact replica of the entrance porch from the Gropius House. Planning began just as the personal and professional relationship between the two architects started to crumble. Breuer ultimately finished the project on his own. To us, this house carries the aura of their separation—an example that, sometimes, it's hard to escape your fate. And yet, the house is beautiful. It makes us wonder: who lives there now? Are they marble or stone workers? We spotted pieces of crypts, stone slabs, and other curious elements. The house invites narratives and untold stories, and we love that. The essence remains. We could see the aura of decay.

While shooting the house from across the street, one of us heard the word "one" whispered in their ear. "Did

you hear that?", "What?", "One. Someone just whispered 'one.'", "What do we do?", "Shoot!"At that moment, a car sped toward the house. A little boy stepped out and walked inside. It was our time to go. Maybe she's changed since then—she may look different now than when we met her years ago.

Chapter two:
RUDOLF M. SCHINDLER VS. RICHARD J. NEUTRA IN CALIFORNIA

Rudolf Schindler and Richard Neutra met while studying architecture at the **Vienna Polytechnic Institute.** Schindler, five years older than Neutra, was the first to travel to the United States in search of **Frank Lloyd Wright,** enchanted by the **Wasmuth Portfolio**—a collection of elaborate drawings that introduced Wright's work to Europe. After much effort, Schindler finally met Wright on the last day of 1914. In 1918, Wright hired Schindler, who was sent in 1920 to Los Angeles to oversee the construction of the **Hollyhock House.** He moved there with his new wife, musicologist and composer **Pauline Gibling.** Over the years, the two friends corresponded regularly, and Schindler repeatedly insisted Neutra join him in the U.S. In 1925, Neutra arrived in Los Angeles with his wife Dione and their son to work for Wright, marking the beginning of their communal living. **Schindler's Kings Road House (#19),** completed in **1922** with financial support from Gibling's family, was an embodiment of both Schindler's and Gibling's experimental ideologies—and became a hub of **Hollywood bohemian life.**

In 1926, along with planner Carol Aronovici, Schindler and Neutra formed the **Architectural Group for Industry and Commerce (AGIC),** collaborating on numerous projects. At this point, their friendship was at its peak.

According to some historians, their communal life was so intimate that even their wives were swapped in the communal living experience.

Philip Lovell, a physician and naturopath who specialized in healthy living, commissioned Schindler to design his beach house and Neutra to design the landscaping. The result was one of **Schindler's masterpieces (#20).** Plans were underway for Schindler to also design Lovell's vacation homes in the San Gabriel Mountains and in Palm Springs. However, suspecting Schindler of pursuing his wife, Lovell dismissed him from the projects. Strangely, Neutra was then commissioned to design **Lovell's Silverlake House. Neutra** rose to the occasion and build a masterpiece, and America's first steel-frame residence **(#21).**

The final blow to their relationship came with the announcement of the architects selected for the **1932 Modern Architecture exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York,** curated by **Philip Johnson** and **Henry-Russell Hitchcock.** Neutra was included; Schindler was not.

Shortly thereafter, the Neutras left the Kings Road House and moved into the VDL, their own home in the **Silverlake** neighborhood of Los Angeles **(#22).** From then on, the rivalry between Schindler and Neutra intensified. Each architect designed his commissions to outdo the other. Gibling eventually left Schindler and moved to

a commune in Carmel, California. Later, she had an affair with composer **John Cage,** who was 20 years her junior.

Schindler, Gibling, and Neutra eventually severed all communication. Even when Gibling returned to occupy one side of the Kings Road House in the late 1930s, she and Schindler communicated only through the mail—sending letters via the U.S. Postal Service that departed from and returned to the same address. As an act of occupation, she painted the **half of the house she lived in pink.** As time went on, each architect followed his own career and life path.

In 1953, Schindler was admitted to the intensive care unit at **Cedars of Lebanon Hospital** in the final stages of prostate cancer. By **coincidence,** Neutra—having just suffered a heart attack—was sent to recover in the **same hospital room.** Nurses later recalled ten days of the two German-speaking architects arguing, singing, and laughing together. Schindler died later that year. Neutra continued to live and work in his Silverlake home with Dion. He retired in 1968 and passed away in Germany in 1970.

#19
Schindler House, Kings Road.
R.M. Schindler.
West Hollywood
1921

Built with financial support from Schindler's wife Pauline Gibling's family—the Kings Road House is an expression of the couple's shared ideologies. After its completion, it quickly became a hub of Hollywood bohemian life. The house was originally designed for two families to cohabit. First came Clyde and Marion Chace, followed by Richard and Dione Neutra, and later, RM Schindler and Pauline Gibling. Together, yet separate. One house, one kitchen, four studios, and outdoor nest–like sleeping quarters, all surrounded by gardens. The concept of cohabitation and the emphasis on outdoor living appear to have come primarily from Gibling, who later left Schindler to join an artist commune. She returned a decade later to occupy her side of the house, which she famously painted pink. Despite living under the same roof, Gibling and Schindler communicated only through letters. Gibling outlived Schindler by 24 years.

#20
Lovell New Port Beach House.
R.M. Schindler.
New Port Beach.
1926

Schindler's Masterpiece! He received this commission from Philip Lovell, a local celebrity physician and naturopath devoted to a healthy lifestyle. Lovell also invited Neutra to design the landscaping. The plan was for Schindler to design Lovell's vacation homes in the mountains and in Palm Springs. But then something happened that broke the relationship. What was it? Was Schindler pursuing Lovell's wife, got caught and lost the future commission?

#21
Lovell House.
Richard J. Neutra.
Silverlake, Los Angeles.
1927–29

Rumors are rife and inconclusive—the plot thickens. Three years later, Neutra is the chosen one to design a home in Silverlake for Philip Lovell and his family. Neutra rises to the occasion, creating one of his masterpieces and first steel-frame structure built in America. Unlike Schindler's commission for Lovell, Neutra's design was featured in the 1932 Modern Architecture exhibition at MoMA.

#22
VDL House.
Richard J. Neutra.
Silver Lake, Los Angeles.
1932

In 1932, Neutra faced significant challenges. That year, he moved into his own residence, the VDL Research House, named after his benefactor, Cornelius H. Van der Leeuw. The house featured an imposing glass façade and a rooftop garden and was designed to accommodate two families. It served as both Neutra's home and his architectural office. This period also marked a rise in Neutra's fame; his Lovell House commission was featured in the 1932 "Modern Architecture" exhibition at MoMA, unlike Schindler's commission for Lovell. Additionally, in 1949, Time magazine referred to Neutra as "second only to lordly Frank Lloyd Wright," their mutual hero. We wonder how Schindler felt about this.

House Anecdote:

The VDL House in Silver Lake is operated by the Neutra family and functions as a foundation. We visit on a Sunday when the house is closed to the public. On Saturdays, you can pay to tour the interior, and it is very popular. One of the things that fascinates us is whether they intend to make the security camera visible on the street number 2300 of the house. When you look at the street number, you see the camera, and the camera sees you. We don't know if it is the calamity of the day, but we notice a broken

window that creates a beautiful reflection. We walk around the house to the other side, as it has two entrances on different streets—one for the house and the other for the offices. We see a totally different perspective of the house. While shooting, an old man starts yelling at us. “Hey, what are you doing? Come this way! Hey, what are you doing? Come this way!” He keeps yelling. We walk toward him, and he tells us, “You are missing the best spot. I know this house from the inside out. I used to rent a room in it. I will show you the perfect spot to shoot it.” We walk with him and see his recommendation. He tells us that he used to sit down in the afternoon to have tea with Richard Neutra, and they were close friends. “He was a very nice guy, but his wife wasn’t around. I would ask him: ‘Richard, where is your wife Dione?’” The answer to this question is something we have never heard before, because all the stories we read about her portray her completely differently. “So, where is your wife, Richard?” he would ask, and Neutra would reply: “My wife is in Hollywood trying to get laid!” We don’t know if this is true, if he was exaggerating, or what. We stand speechless while the old man walks away.

Chapter three:
LUDWIG MIES VAN DER ROHE VS. PHILIP JOHNSON

Mies, a self-made man, began a brilliant and steady career in architecture at a young age. He worked alongside the masterminds who shaped modernism and gave birth to a new architectural language in Berlin. **Johnson, a wealthy heir,** was a late bloomer. Although obsessed with architecture from an early age, he started as an observer, then became a curator, later a commissioner, and eventually, a renowned architect in his own right. **Mies and Johnson met in Berlin in the 1930s.** Johnson was captivated by Mies's style and personality. From that moment on, their careers would intertwine—at times harmoniously, at other times competitively—until Mies's death. Johnson's admiration for Mies bordered on imitation, earning him the nickname "**Mies van der Johnson**" among peers. Mies, in turn, benefited from Johnson's devotion, seizing opportunities to build projects through Johnson's commissions, participating in exhibitions at **MoMA,** and eventually becoming **partners** for the design and construction of the **Seagram Building.** Mies had dreamed of a **glass building since the early 1920s,** seeing the translucent material as a symbol of German technical superiority. He designed glass houses and buildings intended to blend into their surroundings, and, together with **Lilly Reich, created the famous Glass**

Room in Stuttgart. When **Edith Farnsworth** approached him, the opportunity to realize a true glass house became tangible. However, the client needed time to secure the necessary inheritance to fund the project. In the meantime, Johnson—his own client—proceeded to build a glass house for himself.

#23
Glass House.
Philip Johnson.
New Canaan.
1949

This was Johnson's own home until he passed away (right here!) in 2005. It is a place he adores and, over time, surrounds with further buildings to house his painting and sculpture collections, a library and a drawing room and other cool features to host his private soirées. But how much inspiration does he take from Mies, a man he has admired for years, who has been working on a similar building—the Farnsworth House—just as Johnson starts to plan his abode? After all, Mies had exhibited a model of his design at MoMA in an exhibition curated by Johnson in 1947. The question thus remains: admirer, copycat, or both?

#24
Brick House.
Philip Johnson.
New Canaan.
1949

In front of the Glass House stands its opposite, both in position and principles. It is conceived as a place to hide the utilities that have no room in the Glass House but is also used to host short- and long-term guests like Andy Warhol and Mies van der Rohe, in addition to serving as a place for very private trysts. Glass House and Brick House: Yin and Yang? Eros and Thanatos?

#25
Edith Farnsworth House.
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.
Plano, Illinois.
1951

Here, the architect's dream turns into the client's nightmare. In 1945, prominent Chicago doctor Edith Farnsworth commissioned Mies to design a weekend haven. Five years later—after a long wait for her inheritance to finance the venture—what she gets is not at all what she envisioned. The result is much more costly than agreed. It is far from the retreat she had hoped for. Instead, it is an uncomfortable, transparent lantern that attracts insects and offers no privacy. She is upset. They go to court. There are speculations that it is the intimate relationship between client and architect that plays the main role in both the conception of the design

and the fallout that follows its completion. Mies was heard saying: “The lady expected the architect to go along with the house,” whereas Farnsworth appeared to be bitterly disappointed: “Perhaps as a man he is not the clairvoyant primitive that I thought he was, but simply colder and more cruel than anybody I have ever known. Perhaps it was never a friend and a collaborator, so to speak, that he wanted, but a dupe and a victim.”

#26
McCormick House,
Elmurst Museum.
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.
Elmhurst, Illinois.
1952

Commissioned by Robert Hall McCormick and poet Isabella Gardner, the house was moved from its original site in 1992 by the Elmhurst Fine Art Museum. It was a prototype for a proposed group of smaller, affordable middle-class houses that the client hoped to develop—but never did. This is one of the three private houses in the USA designed by Mies. It served as a private residence and remained unknown until 1991, when it became part of the museum. The day we shot it, inflatable bunnies and elephants occupied the interior. Metaphor or satire?

PART 2:
LOVERS

INTRODUCTION

For a long time we have been intrigued by the **lack of historical information** and visibility of women architects, artists, writers, painters, sculptors, thinkers, etc. We rely on **Virginia Woolf**'s theses in ***A Room of One's Own*** as a clever and visionary explanation. If we don't know about these women, it is because they lacked the opportunity to study and to be independent. Women needed to have money to break from their circumstance. We also think that women needed strong character to break from what was expected of them. Few did, and from the ones that did, many were erased or forgotten by history.

The twentieth century was a time of radical change, especially if we look into what the turn of the century in Europe meant for **gender equality, legal rights, education, the right to vote, reproductive rights, economic independence,** among others. The fourteen women that are the protagonists of this series are heroes that broke and expanded the social and labor rules. They were profound thinkers that pushed their beliefs to the unimaginable. It is unbelievable that up until the mid-century, women were not allowed to have a bank account on their own. **Sweden was the exception by allowing the financial independence of women in 1928, it took untill the mid 1970´s for it to be a general right in Europe.** Nordic countries were the first to accept women to study architecture, Germany followed. In 1906, Finland, which was part of Russia at that moment, was the first country

that opened up for women to vote, followed by Norway in 1913, Denmark in 1915, Germany and Austria in 1918, 1919 the Netherlands, 1920 in Czechoslovakia, Spain in 1931, France in 1944, and Switzerland in 1971.These facts make us wonder and appreciate even more that without the right to education, to choose a government and the right to control your own money, these fourteen women built the world they envisioned to live in and that today we are able to visit them all in 2025.

From the fourteen protagonists of this saga, only **Eileen Gray, Ragna Grubb**, and **Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky** managed to design and build on their own; the rest partnered with men. For some of them, men doubled as husbands and professional partners, like **Lotte Stam-Beese, Aino Marsio Aalto, Elissa Kaila Mäkiniemi Aalto, Grete Prytz Kittelsen, Inger Exner, Eszter Pécsi, Nelly van Doesburg, and Sophie Taeuber-Arp.** Others, like **Lilly Reich** and **Truus Schröder-Schräder,** paired in strong intellectual professional partnerships while maintaining love affairs, because the men happened to be married to someone else. **Charlotte Perriand** partnered with various men that proved to have the highest respect for her mind and style and thought of her as equal, while Eileen Gray, in her independence and genius, provoked jealousy from her male counterparts.

The protagonists and the constructions we visited were **affected by the Second World War in varying degrees.** No matter the country or the city, all of them had repercussions caused by the political conflicts. Yet, all of the constructions we visited survived, as resilient warriors. We applaud the people that have organized and gathered to save these houses as expressions of radical architecture and lifestyles. It is a genuine act of resistance over destruction. As we visit one by one, the houses and their surroundings have been restored and reconstructed as if nothing ever happened.

In **eleven weeks** we travelled **nine thousand kilometers** through **eleven countries** and shot **fifty five rolls of film.** This epic journey changed our lives. We engaged in an adventure of discovery to discover ourselves. We praise the courageous women that designed and built houses that today are still **radical** and **outstanding.** They **fought** to be **educated** and **independent,** fought to build the **environments** that suited their **concept of intimacy,** fought to **change the status quo,** fought to be **heard,** fought to be **remembered.**

We started the saga in late **February 2025** in **Barcelona,** looking for **Lilly Reich** at the Barcelona Pavilion (1929), designed together with Mies van der Rohe, with whom she collaborated in all of the houses we photographed. Next, **Marseille:** Le Corbusier's Cité Radieuse (1947–1952). We stayed in an original unit

to experience and photograph **Charlotte Perriand**'s interior design; then, in the Alps, her architecture at Les Arcs ski resort built in the 1960s, and the one and only home she built for herself in 1960: Perriand's chalet in Méribel-les-Allues. In **Utrecht,** we visited **Truus Schröder-Schräder**'s 1924 house, designed together with Gerrit Rietveld. In **Nagele,** we spent a couple of days in a house designed by **Lotte Stam-Besse** at the heart of the utopic city built between 1947 and 1955 in the center of the Netherlands. In **Krefeld,** Germany, we looked for **Lilly Reich** at the 1927–1928 Haus Lange and Haus Esters. In **Helsinki:** the 1935–1936 **Aino Marsio** and Alvar Aalto house, the 1937 Savoy Restaurant, and the 1929 Paimio Sanatorium. In **Jyväskylä: Elissa Kaila Mäkiniemi** Aalto's Muuratsalo Experimental House from 1952–1954, and the 1954 Aalto studio in Helsinki. In **Oslo: Grete Prytz Kittelsen,** "Queen of Scandinavian Design," and the house-studio built between 1952 and 1955, together with her husband Arne Korsmo. In **Copenhagen: Ragna Grubb**'s 1934 Women's Building. In **Skovshoved,** Denmark: **Inger Exner**'s family home, designed together with her husband Johannes in 1961. In **Brno: Lilly Reich**'s 1928 Villa Tugendhat. In **Budapest: Eszter Pécsi**'s 1936 Villa Rózsi Walter and her own 1931 house. In **Vienna: Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky**'s 1967 apartment and the 1927 Frankfurt Kitchen at the MAK Center. In **Meudon: Nelly van Doesburg**'s 1930s house built together with her

husband Theo van Doesburg, and Sophie Taeuber-Arp's house and studio built in 1927. The last stop was in May, when spring was in full bloom: **Eileen Gray**'s 1926 E-1027 in **Roquebrune-Cap-Martin,** 1932-1934 Villa Tempe à Pailla Near **Menton** and 1954-1958 Villa Lou Pérou close to **Saint-Tropez.**

Chapter one: EILEEN GRAY

Kathleen Eileen Moray Smith, born on August 9, 1878, in Enniscorthy, County Wexford, Ireland, died at the age of 98 on October 31, 1976, in Paris, France.

She was born into a wealthy, aristocratic family, which allowed her to study at the **Slade School of Fine Art in London in 1898,** and later at the **Académie Julian and the Académie Colarossi in Paris.** Eileen was gorgeous, educated, glamorous, elegant, and original—and she had the personality to act upon all of it. A curious soul, she constantly experimented with materials and forms. Fascinated by the exoticism of Japan, she studied and mastered the **art of lacquer** techniques under **Master Seizo Sugawara** in Paris. She devoured journals and magazines and was always up to date with fashion, design, architecture, and art. At the same time, she was shy and uninterested in fame or recognition. During the 1920s and 1930s, she drove a convertible **Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost**—a choice that perfectly reflected her personality. She would drive from Paris to the south of France. She was the quintessential modern woman.

She moved to Paris in the early 1900s, had love affairs with both men and women, and was a private person who kept her intimate life to herself. One of her most prolific relationships was with **Jean Badovici,** who played an important role in both her romantic and creative life. As editor of the modernist journal ***L'Architecture Vivante,*** he encouraged her to think deeply about architecture.

He introduced her to **Le Corbusier** and **Walter Gropius.** Together, they experimented with restoring and designing interiors of houses in the 11th-century pilgrimage town of **Vézelay,** which had been devastated after World War I. His influence was so significant that she named her design gallery in Paris **Jean Désert,** in his honor. Later, she code-named **E-1027**—the dream house she designed while their love was at its peak, on a plot of land that belonged to him—as follows: E = Eileen, 10 = J (Jean, the 10th letter of the alphabet), 2 = B (Badovici), 7 = G (Gray). After their breakup, Bodavechi kept the house claiming he owned the land. This is were the misfortune of the house started. Gray moved on, she designed a new villa for herself, **Villa Tempe à Pailla,** only 5 miles away. She had a love affair with the famous French cabaret singer Damia, with whom she would parade around Paris in a convertible with Damia's black panther pet riding in the back seat. What a dream! She lived in Paris and worked everyday of her life. She lived to be 98! Eileen's designs and style is omnipresent in our life's, specially the **Bibendum Chair** and the **E-1027 adjustable table.** Although she was a little bit of an outsider for most part of her life, it was her **Dragons Armchair (1917-1919)** that brought back her name to stardom when the chair that belonged to **Yves Sain Laurent** and **Pierre Bergé was actioned in 2009 for €21.9 million. The Dragons Armchair holds the record as the most expensive chair in the world!** Sweet.

#1
E-1027.
Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, France.
1926

A dream house in the dream location by a dream creator. She as her **own client** conceived a house that opens to the scenery of the **Mediterranean Sea** and keeps total privacy. She designed and built every single detail of the house—the furniture, the carpets, the lamps—everything. E-1027 is a true **Gesamtkunstwerk!** Two of the most iconic furniture designs that remain omnipresent in our everyday lives—the adjustable **E-1027 table** and the **Bibendum Chair—were originally conceived for this house.**

The house feels like a boat, open and airy. The day we visit, the sun shines and the sea is deep blue. The plants are happy and the flowers are blooming. Totally and **recently restored,** the house is open to visitors seasonally. For little more than an hour, we are ushered through the property alongside a group of architecture enthusiasts. We move fast from room to room grasping and shooting as much as we can. We are starstruck by the experience and completely taken aback by the house's beauty, elegance, audacity, modernity, functionality, sensuality—and yes, its sexiness.

We are surprised and amused with the words and concepts that she hand stenciled all over the house. We love the typography and the precision. We imagine

her painting letter by letter, of what is to happen there. "**Défense de rire**" is the first one we see. This is a beautiful game of words that set the tone to us, the guests upon the arrival to the house. It loosely translates as a sarcastic way to say "Forbiden to Laugh" while inciting you to do so. Other messages and clues follow: hats, silverware, glasses, light objects, paper to write letters. The signs reveal to us a personality type that inspires to guide and keep order, and at the same time provokes humor and a sense of play.

The fact that the living room doubles as her sleeping room, while Badovici's room is on the lower floor, absolutely made our day! She claimed the main space of the house and a nautical chart with the words: "**Invitation au voyage, beau temps**"—a quote from **Charles Baudelaire's 1857 Les Fleurs du mal.** The built-in furniture she designed is sublime and clever. The house is perfect for living in silence, inviting friends for cocktails, dance parties, sunbathing, moonbathing, and romantic explorations. Every detail is sophisticated and precise—never too much, never too little. She thoughtfully designed everything needed for a **hedonistic lifestyle.**

We know the house has been completely restored, and that aside from the walls and floors, nothing is original. We've seen some of the original furniture and accessories in museums. Nevertheless, we love being able to travel back in time and witness the house in its splendor—

before the breakup, before Badovici's death, before the Nazi occupation, the murder, the drama.

As total fans of Gray we are **disappointed** with the perpetuation of **Le Courbusier murals.** And yet, they are what makes the story both tragic and juicy. His attempt to make her house his own reflects a deep **misunderstanding of her poetry and style.** He invades the walls with unsolicited paintings that disrupt the perfect balance of the house. This intrusion occurs after Gray and Bodavici have broken up, and Bodavici is who allows Le Courbusier to stain her perfection, later he tries to bring Le Courbusier back to reson and erase the murals but doesn't succeed. As if that weren't enough, Le Courbusier buys the plot of land right up the hill and builds his summer cabin — **Le Cabanon**— a sad attempt to overshadow her. Evidently, after these two barbaric acts of imposition, Gray never returns to E-1027. And because life works in mysterious ways, Le Corbusier drowns right in front of her house. E-1027 is the last building he ever sees.

What makes this house so sexy? The curves, the lines, the cylindrical shower, the outdoor shower, the multi-mirrors that reflect countless images, the Bibendum chair that hugs you, the fur draped over furniture and beds, the openness, the natural surroundings that embrace the house, the geometries cast by the shadows, the Baudelaire-inspired invitation to leave the world behind, the eroticism of the infinite sea. E-1027 is an Erotic Love poem.

Chapter two:

CHARLOTTE PERRIAND

Charlotte Perriand was born in Paris on October 2, 1903, and died there as well, on October 27, 1999, at the age of 96.

Charlotte was born into a family involved in Paris's **fashion world**—her father was a tailor, and her mother a seamstress, both working in high fashion. She spent her childhood with family in **Burgundy.** During World War I, she was sent to **Savoy** to live with her paternal grandparents. There, she connected deeply with nature. Her **love for the organic world and natural forms,** along with her passion for the mountains, took root during this time. Another early childhood event that shaped her worldview was a hospital stay after surgery. When she returned home, she was appalled by the cluttered environment—she had grown to love the white emptiness and calm of the hospital room.

Between 1920 and 1925, she studied at the **École de l'Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs,** where she focused on furniture design, decorative arts, and interior architecture. But the school was too traditional and academic for her, and this triggered her imagination to challenge the canon. To compensate, she took evening classes at the **Académie de la Grande Chaumière,** a progressive, non-academic school in **Montparnasse.**

There, she became acquainted with **Paris's avant-garde and modernist circles.** She knocked on **Le Corbusier**'s door asking for a job, but he turned her away with the now-famous line: **"We don't embroider cushions here."** Not long after, she invited Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret to see her **Bar sous le Toit installation** at the Salon d'Automne. Impressed by her innovative use of materials and machine-inspired aesthetic, Le Corbusier "ate his words" and invited her to join his and Pierre's studio. This marked the beginning of a **decade-long collaboration (1927–1937).** For the **Villa Savoye** (1929–31), she worked on furniture, interior layouts, and color schemes. For the **Pavillon Suisse and the Cité Internationale Universitaire** (1930–32), she designed the student rooms and their furnishings. During this time, she also co-designed the iconic **LC Series.** In 1952, she collaborated again with Le Corbusier on the **Unité d'Habitation in Marseille,** where she developed a kitchen prototype, furniture, and storage systems.

In 1940, Perriand was **invited by the Japanese government** to serve as a design advisor. The experience revolutionized her thinking. She studied new techniques and aesthetics, and her deep admiration for Japanese culture and philosophy profoundly transformed her approach to design. When Japan entered WWII, she was forced to leave and lived from 1942 to 1946 in **Hanoi,** then part of French Indochina. There, she married French

diplomat Jacques Martin and immersed herself in the study of **wood, lacquer, and weaving techniques.** She returned to France in 1946. After the war, she also worked closely with **Jean Prouvé** on seminal project that blurred the line between architecture and furniture design.

Her love for the mountains and for snow sports led her to design her own **chalet in Méribel-les-Allues in 1960,** in the Savoy region where she spent part of her childhood. From 1967 through the 1970s, she led the design together with a team of young architects of **Les Arcs,** a visionary ski resort. Now considered a landmark of modern **Alpine architecture,** Les Arcs reflects her ideals: buildings positioned for optimal views of **Mont Blanc,** compact and ergonomic interiors, environmentally sensitive design with minimal impact on the landscape, and use of local materials. It was a clever and humane response to mass tourism.

During the 1970s and 80s, her international and local reputation flourished. She had exhibitions in Tokyo, Paris, and London, and in 1998, she published her memoir: **Charlotte Perriand: A Life of Creation.** Her design philosophy—**"l'art de vivre"**—was about visual harmony, natural materials, ergonomic spaces, and environmental sensitivity. She was open-minded and hardworking, with highly personal and therefore original approach to architecture and design, always true to her passions. She once said: "The most important thing to realize is that what drives the modern movement is a spirit of enquiry;

it's a process of analysis and not a style,". Towards the ends of her life she reflected: **"We worked with ideals."**

#2
Charlotte Perriand's Personal Chalet. "The Chalet by the Singing Water." Méribel-les-Allues, France.
1960–61

Situated in a dreamlike setting in the **Savoy region,** where she spent part of her childhood, the chalet is the only structure Perriand ever built for herself and her daughter. It embodies her ideals and philosophy—a dream creation in a dream landscape. **It is a love declaration to nature, the mountains and the snow.**

Set close to the road, the chalet blends into the environment, nearly disappearing under the snow. Built with stone and wood and topped with a classic Alpine gabled roof, it fits seamlessly into the local aesthetic and regulations. It's a small two-story structure, remarkable in its balance between Japanese and Alpine traditions. It could just as easily sit in the Japanese mountains as in the French Alps. Since 2016, the chalet has been **officially protected as a historic monument.**

The day we visit, the sun is shining, and the sky is clear and deep blue. Thick snow covers the roof and the surroundings. It's hard to walk around it—but we

are overjoyed to have found it. The chalet is so well **camouflaged** that it's easy to miss. But once we start looking closely, we're marvelled by the **simplicity and elegance.** We arrive at the site around noon. Skiers are coming down the mountain, carrying their skis, walking their dogs. Everyone seems friendly and joyful, enjoying the snow and the fresh mountain air. To work efficiently, we split up and take different sides of the chalet to photograph it as quickly as possible. The light is perfect, and the architecture looks splendid. We kiss, take our positions, and start shooting. All is bliss and joy—until suddenly we both hear an alarm. We stepped too close to the door, and it has gone off. We run back to the car—scared, thrilled, and excited. People around us stop and stare, wondering what just happened. We leave the scene as fast as we can, high on adrenaline, laughing, feeling young, running through the snow, breathless, and **happy.**

Chapter three:

TRUUS SCHRÖDER

Truus Schröder was born Gertrudia Antonia in Deventer, Netherlands, on August 23, 1889, and died April 12, 1985, in Utrecht, Netherlands.

Truus father owned a textile factory; her mother died when she was only four years old, so she was sent to boarding school at a convent. Later, she **studied to be a pharmacist** in Arnhem. In 1911, she married **Frits Schröder,** had a son and two daughters. Also in 1911, Truus met **Gerrit Rietveld,** then a cabinetmaker, when he delivered a desk that Frits had commissioned. This moment is key to the story. When the desk was delivered, Truus and Gerrit experienced love at first sight. Taken by the man but disappointed with the simple design, she looked at the desk, sighed, and said something like, **“This is not at all what I was seeking in life.”** This moment and her words marked the beginning of their love affair and their shared passion for radical design.

In 1921, ten years after their first encounter, Truus and Frits commissioned Gerrit to redesign a room of their family home—this initiated their creative partnership. Frits, eleven years her senior, died in 1923. In 1924, Gerrit registered as an architect, and Truus, now a widow and head of her household, used the money from selling her previous house and Frits’s inheritance to fully engage

with Gerrit in designing the Rietveld Schröder House in Utrecht. In **seven months,** she managed to secure the funds, find and buy the plot of land, and fully immerse herself and Gerrit in designing the ideal project. By 1925, the family moved in. Gerrit and Truus kept their **love and creative affair very active.** They designed together, in 1925, a Glass Radio Cabinet, and in 1926, a Hanging Glass Cabinet. Also in 1926, they custom-designed fifteen pieces for Truus's sister Ann Harrestein's house in Amsterdam. In 1927, the Birza House interiors followed, along with a proposal for standardized housing. In 1930, they were commissioned to design the Van Urk House in Blaricum, which integrated custom furniture into a fluid spacial design. In 1934, Truus financed the residential **blocks on Erasmuslaan,** next to her house. Here, they continued experiment with sliding doors as a spacial concept. In 1938, they were commissioned to **design housing for single women, a totally new concept at the time.** Together, they were unstoppable!

Their progressive ideas led, in the 1920s, to the creation of their joint firm: **"Schröder en Rietveld Architecten,"** as listed in the telephone book. In 1957, Gerrit's wife Vrouwgien Hadders, whom he had married in 1911, passed away. Right after her death, Gerrit moved in with Truus, and they lived together until his death in 1964. By the **1970s, Truus founded the Rietveld Schröder House Foundation.** She lived her entire life in the house.

By the end of her life, she donated the house and their archives to the Centraal Museum. The house opened to the public two years after her death, in 1987, and was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in the year 2000. **They are buried next to each other in Den en Rust Cemetery in Bilthoven.**

#3
The Rietveld-Schröder House.
Utrecht, Netherlands.
1924

The house is open to the public and you have to join a group tour to see the interior. The day we visit, the sun is shining and the sky is blue. It is a beautiful, crisp winter day. This house is a wonder—it **is a love story that developed over time.** As with many real love stories, it does not look at all like anything else around it. It **clashes with the neighborhood, just as their love story clashed with traditionalists.** Truus and Gerrit, in their unconventional way, merge in their co-creation.

The house is the combination of two strong, original, intense, deep, thoughtful personalities. It is also a commitment to its time and aesthetics by following and pushing forward the ideals, shapes, and colors of **De Stijl.** Every detail—the sliding doors, the colors, the built-in furniture—is the result of their two minds thinking as one. They were also radically different. He was an introvert, she

was an extrovert. He came from the working class and she from an industrialist family. As opposites that attracts they had more in common than in contrast as they both believed in simplicity as an aesthetic principle.

The house is an example of active living. Slide two walls and voilà! The sleeping quarters are ready and private. Slide another wall and the washing room is ready for a bath. When all walls are slid in, the upper floor of the house becomes one large room—the only visible reminders are the rails on the ceiling and the colors on the floor.

This is not a house for someone who is conservative, attached to social norms, or lazy. This is a house for a family that believes in **discipline, avant-garde aesthetics, and order.** Custom built-in furniture—structure and beauty—**leans closer to a sculpture than to a cabinet.** Designed to keep clutter controlled, a tower-like structure that, when disarticulated piece by piece, reveals it contains a movie projector, pencil boxes, and more compartments to keep unused objects out of sight. So smart! Patches of color on the floor tell you what room you're in—even when there are no walls in sight. Wooden squares that seem decorative are actually used to block the light coming from the windows. **The house is like a puzzle that you assemble and disassemble.**

Truus and Gerrit thought of everything—even how to keep the professional architectural practice and service areas totally separated from the private and intimate. A

feature that made us laugh and reflect on technology is a **speaker device** from which to talk from the first floor to whoever is at the door. Very clever and practical! A perfectly arranged universe in a 55m² (600 ft²) ground floor and a 70m² (750 ft²) upper floor. **A unique and beautiful love story in a unique and beautiful house, with unique and ingenious solutions to everyday needs in a transformative outcome that, although rooted in its moment, is timeless.**

Chapter four:

LOTTE STAM-BEESE

Lotte Stam-Beese was born Charlotte Ida Beese on January 28, 1903, in Reisicht (at that time part of Germany, now Rokitki, Poland) and died on November 18, 1988, in Kimpen, Netherlands.

Lotte studied at the **Bauhaus** in **Dessau** from 1926 to 1929. She started studying **textiles** and photography. Her **photographs** had an important impact at the Bauhaus, appearing on the front page of their journal in 1928. That same year, she became the first female to study architecture under the direction of **Hannes Meyer,** who was married and with whom she fell in love, beginning an intense **affair.** As director, he couldn't face a scandal and convinced her to leave the school.

In 1930, Hannes Meyer was dismissed as director and founded the "**Red Bauhaus Brigade,**" promoting an exodus with former students to **Russia** to undertake architecture and urban planning projects. They rejoined in 1931 in **Moscow,** where their relationship crumbled. She left Russia for **Brno,** where their son Peter was born. She raised her son as a single mother and worked for **Bohuslav Fuchs,** whom she sued for not paying her maternity leave. Persistent as she was, she won and received the money she was owed. For political reasons, she relocated to **Ukraine** in 1932, leaving Peter in Prague with her friends.

Later in Ukraine, she joined **Ernst May**'s "**May Brigade**" who was replicating his successful housing program "**New Frankfurt**" of functional, affordable, and hygienic housing with functionalist design by planning entire new cities with emphasis on creating residential areas independent from industry, communal living by sharing kitchens and nurseries, using prefabricated materials with modernist principles such as communal green spaces and public services. This experience was not a successful one; as a foreign architect, she had many practical problems.

In 1934, she started a relationship with **Mart Stam.** Together they left Russia for the Netherlands, where they married and reunited with her son, Peter. As she had left the Bauhaus with no diploma in architecture, she enrolled at the **Academy of Architecture in Amsterdam,** graduating in 1945 at the age of 42, which gave her recognition as an architect and urban planner. In 1946, she was hired as an urban planner in Rotterdam. She was the **first woman to hold that position in the Netherlands** and worked on the reconstruction plan of **Cornelis van Traa** and many other major projects. She worked in the municipal service until 1968—22 years non-stop—becoming one of the most influential players in the reconstruction of postwar Rotterdam.

After her retirement in 1968, she was awarded the **Wolfert van Borselen** medal and was made **Knight in the Order of Orange-Nassau.** There is a street named

after her in Rotterdam. Her photographs and designs are in major collections like the Stedelijk Museum, Bauhaus Archive, and Getty Research Institute.

#4
The Utopic City of Nagele.
Nagele, Netherlands.
1954–1958

Nagele is situated on **reclaimed land** that used to be underwater. It is the result of the construction of the **Noordoostpolder dike,** which in 1936 began pumping water. By 1942, the land was officially reclaimed—dry and ready to be occupied by farms and new villages. This gave the opportunity to start a town from zero, and therefore to apply the most advanced ideas and designs by the **De 8 en Opbouw group, part of the CIAM (International Congress of Modern Architecture).**

De 8 en Opbouw members were: Mart Stam, Lotte Stam-Beese, Gerrit Rietveld, Cornelis van Eesteren, and Johannes van der Broek. Lotte was a key element. She had experience in planning and building new, modern, functional, and prefabricated cities. **She designed 32 houses** around the shared green area of the Karwijhof courtyard. All 32 houses are **modular, with flat roofs, front and back ribbon windows that maximize light-flooded interiors, two stories, and both front and backyards.** The houses are a fabulous example of **Doorzonwoningen,**

which literally means **“sun-through houses”** This was a postwar type that prioritized sunlight and airflow from the front and back of the house—promoting **healthy living** and modernist values that were fundamental to her practice. The Karwijhof blocks are protected as monuments under the heritage organization Vereniging Hendrick de Keyser, which runs the **“Monument and Bed”** program that manages historic houses in the Netherlands.

Through that organization, we rented the house for two nights so we could fully experience the utopic city and Lotte’s architecture. We drove from Utrecht to Nagele and arrived at night. Since all of the houses in the block are exactly the same, we struggled a little bit to find ours. It was a cold winter night, and it felt like a ghost town. Once we got inside, we felt an instant warmth. We left our luggage and went out to look for a place to have dinner. We drove around town and were impressed by how ordered and modern it felt: all flat roofs, broad streets, many green areas and trees. We finally found the one and only place to eat. When we opened the door, the family that runs the place knew right away we were foreigners and approached us in a friendly and polite way. We had their star dish: fries with bacon and cheese—yummy!

Back at the house, we opened all the curtains to experience the light—and what a surprise. The full moon entered the rooms and filled the with **silver light** for most of the night. In the morning, the sun shone and filled

the interior from the kitchen side. In the afternoon, the sun entered through the opposite side—the side of the living room. All day long, the light flooded the rooms in a beautiful and cozy manner. We walked up and down the steep steps, sat in every room, made coffee, and slept in a different room every night to fully enjoy the architecture. **The distribution, orientation, and scale are those of an ideal house.** We could feel Lotte's idealistic, deep belief in architecture as a social tool—her reserved personality, which was described by Michelle Provoost as **"a visionary with moral depth by combining social thought with clear spatial strategies."** We understood that Lotte was resilient, idealistic, with non-negotiable socialist ideals—a hard-working woman. She once wrote in the Dutch journal Opbouw: **"The land belongs to all of us"—the ultimate statement of love.**

Chapter five:

AINO MARSIO-AALTO

Aino Maria Marsio-Aalto was born on January 25, 1894, in Helsinki. She died on January 13, 1949, also in Helsinki, from cancer.

She was one of the **first women to enter the Architectural Program at the Helsinki University of Technology in 1913.** There, she trained in carpentry and masonry alongside a rigorous academic practice. She got her diploma in January 1920, and in **1921 she travelled to Italy, Austria, and Germany,** sketching and taking photos of buildings and things that inspired her. In 1923, she moved to Jyväskylä to work at the architectural office of **Gunnar Wahlroos and met Alvar Aalto.** Alvar and Aino connected immediately in a personal and professional way, and soon after meeting in 1924, they got married. Aino joined Alvar's firm and became a key partner. In 1925 Johanna "Hanni" was born. Aino was interested in the **Japanese-inspired notion of "quiet beauty" and the need for affordable design.** She was curious and would experiment with **wood, glass, metal, and fabrics.** She was hardworking and active both in the family and the professional world, in which Alvar and Aino were **equal partners.** She had a true love for nature. She would take inspiration from simple things, such as the ripples made by a rock when thrown into water—that inspired the

Bölgeblick (which literally means "**Ripple View**") glass collection (many sizes of glasses, plates, bowls, carafes), for which she won second place at the Karhula-Iittala competition in 1932 and the gold medal at the Milan Triennale in 1936—a timeless classic design that has been in production ever since. Another example is the 1936 **Savoy Vase,** inspired by the shapes of waves. This vase is a true love declaration—it is inspired by Alvar's sketch and completed by Aino. To top it all off, **Aalto literally means "waves."** The vase was originally designed to hold tulips for the luxury Savoy restaurant, for which Aino designed the full interior—a beautiful time capsule that overlooks Helsinki from the top floor of a building. The vase was introduced at Karhula-Iittala, winning the first prize, and made its debut at the 1937 Paris World's Fair.

Her interest in affordable design and her **training in carpentry** led Aino to design many timeless pieces that changed the way we see and understand furniture—such as the Nursery and Children's Furniture from 1929, the Side Table 606, the stools and Paimio Cantilever Chair, the Armchair 26 (all from 1932), the stacking stools, and so on. The success of these designs, together with her interest in creating warm, practical, and comfortable interiors, led to the creation of **Artek, founded by Aino and Alvar Aalto, Maire Gullichsen, and Nils-Gustav Hahl in 1935.** Artek was a revolution—a warm response to the cold style of modernism. **Artek used bent birch plywood when the**

Bauhaus was using bent steel tubes. Aino was appointed artistic director. She shaped the graphic identity, designed the glassware, furniture, and the first showroom. Right before this, Aino and Alvar created together one of their masterpieces—the **Paimio Sanatorium,** completed in 1933—in which Aino played a decisive role. She designed the **bentwood Paimio Chair, the side tables, the wardrobes, the colors, the lighting fixtures, and the washbasins. It is impossible to know where Aino ended and Alvar began—two minds on a mission, two geniuses at work.**

During WWII, they continued working—Aino in Artek and Alvar on urban reconstruction planning and emergency housing. In 1940, Alvar took a position to teach at MIT, and later, between 1947 and 1949, he designed and built **Baker House at MIT,** leaving Aino alone. Aino kept working at Artek without telling anyone that she was sick with cancer. She kept on—strong, gentle, and disciplined. She died at the age of 54, on a cold day—January 13, 1949. Alvar went into a deep sad mood; his architecture changed. He would never be the same. **Aino was not the kind to take the spotlight.** She would move the strings from afar, would write in magazines anonymously about the subjects that interested her. Her designs and genius have been overshadowed by his—until recently, when her name has come back to the place she belongs.

#5
The Aalto House.
Munkkiniemi Helsinki.
Helsinki, Finland.
1935-36

In 1934, the couple bought the land to design and build their dream house. **Munkkiniemi** is a suburb of Helsinki with easy access to the city center by tram—the same tram in 1934 and today. The plot is situated on top of a hill, with views of a sports field and **Eliel Saarinen's Munkkiniemi Pension,** built in 1918. This is no coincidence—instead, it is part of the appeal for the Aaltos to have such an illustrious view.

The house is run by the Aalto Foundation, and you can visit it all year long by booking a tour. The day we visit, the sun is shining on a winter day. The trees have no leaves, and the grass is waiting for spring to come. The outside of the house is very different from what we've seen in photos, which always portray a lush, green, leafy garden. We start the tour by taking off our shoes, following the Scandinavian tradition. We are part of a small group and are able to freely photograph the house in a short amount of time. The house is small, practical, cozy, warm, and seems totally authentic. We feel as if Aino and Alvar (maybe Elissa too?) are about to join us any moment. We are charmed by her portrait on top of the piano, her glassware in the cabinets, her furniture designs, her lamps, her prototypes, her touch, her textiles, the indoor plants.

The house, designed as the ideal space to live

and work, is a perfect example of what intimacy is. The dimensions, materials, and practical ways of dividing and uniting public, private, and professional spaces—just perfect. **We are moved and can sense the love between the couple.** We can imagine them working side by side—in the office, in the garden—sharing a **vermouth** before lunch, laughing, creating, sitting in front of the chimney, indulging in **endless conversations.** We are astonished that a ninety-year-old house feels so contemporary. We reflect and understand the timeless principles of their design and architecture. We think about Aino's influence on Alvar and the changes we see in his architecture after she dies. We are especially interested in his need and capacity to work with Aino and later Elissa, and we look for similarities in our own practice and life—this sparked by the fact that Verea and Alvar share the same birthday.

This house is a powerful inspiration and a beautiful example of the possibility to build your intimate world entirely by surrounding yourself with objects you've created—living the life you invite others to live and enjoy. The comfort, the warmth, the ideal illumination, the scale of the rooms that feel good to the body, living, working, and pleasure—**all under the same roof in perfect harmony = Love.**

Chapter six: ELISSA AALTO

Elissa Aalto was born Elsa Kaila Mäkiniemi on November 22, 1922, in Kemi, in the north of Finland. She died on April 12, 1994, in Helsinki.

Elissa was highly focused, detail-oriented, modest, and often described as unshakable by her colleagues. She was born in a time of turmoil for Finland, which in 1917 had gained independence from the Russian Empire. During her youth, she lived through the Winter War of 1939–1940. In 1942, she moved south from her hometown to study architecture at the **Helsinki University of Technology** and graduated in 1949. She entered the workforce during a postwar boom for architecture in the country. The same year she graduated, **she entered one of the most prestigious and demanding practices: the Alvar Aalto Architectural Office.** Earlier that same year, on January 13, Aino Marsio died of cancer, leaving a void in the office and in the heart of Alvar Aalto's life and practice.

As soon as Elissa started working at the office, she was assigned important local and international projects like the **Säynätsalo** Town Hall (1949–1952) and the **Baker House Dormitory** at MIT in Boston, among others. According to Alvar's friends, the passing of Aino left him sad and lonely, lost, and disoriented. Aino was his soulmate, intellectual partner, and artistic inspiration. He lost his other half—his core. While he experienced grief, he went through a deep inner and stylistic transformation, and Elissa—Elsa at that time—was there to witness and be

part of it. Little by little, the professional began to become personal. He changed her name to Elissa and initiated a physical transformation: altering her hairstyle, her fashion choices in style, fabrics, and colors. They married in 1952, and from that moment on, she became Elissa Aalto.

Elissa, 25 years younger than Alvar, became a **key figure** in his life and work. They complemented each other deeply. She knew how to adapt to his new interests, and together they created architecture that didn't resemble the work he produced during Aino's life. Elissa's technical skills and personality were perceived as "invisible but essential," and she was described as **"a precisionist with a poetic sense of space"** by other architects in the office. She moved into the house that Alvar and Aino had built together and made minor changes. **She designed a cabinet next to Aino's in the dining room,** a vanity in one of the upstairs rooms, and other details so she could feel at home—not like a guest in her own house. Alvar and Elissa shared a passion for literature, philosophy, and design theory, and they loved spending time in nature. **They were both workaholics** and immersed themselves in the office, designing and building. In his later years, Alvar began to suffer from health problems, which slowed him down in the 1970s. He died on May 11, 1976, at the age of 78, in his own home. After his death and until 1994, Elissa completed the projects they had started together. She then retired quietly and pushed for his legacy to live on by

giving interviews, lectures, and participating in international exhibitions. During her lifetime, she also designed textiles for Artek. After Alvar's death, she organized the Alvar Aalto Foundation, to which she donated the house, studio, experimental house, archive, and more. She died peacefully at the age of 71. **Elissa, Aino, and Alvar are buried next to each other in the Hietaniemi Cemetery.**

#6

Muuratsalo Experimental House.
Jyväskylä, Finland.
1952-1954

The house is located on the island of **Muuratsalo** in **Lake Päijänne, near Jyväskylä**—Alvar's hometown—in the center of Finland. The site is surrounded by very tall and beautiful trees. At the time of its construction, **the house is only accessible by boat** once the lake has defrosted. It is a dream hideaway. Alvar and Elissa looked for an isolated site that inspired them to experiment with materials and architecture—no constraints, no neighbors who could complain, no regulations, far from any urban environment. It became their playground and a place where they could live their love freely, away from offices and the pressure of public recognition.

Alvar was all about the details, so **he even designed a boat** to travel in style. As a reflection of his feelings—at a moment when he felt more recognized abroad than by his own country—he named it **“Nemo Propheta in Patria” (“No one is a prophet in their own land”).** The experimental house is about freedom and breaking with tradition. They spent their summers exploring the lake on the boat, getting inspired by nature and light, thinking about materials, shapes, and combinations that are extraordinary. The boat, the house, and the sauna are key to the creation of this personal sanctuary—a haven that belongs only to Elissa and Alvar. Aino has no place in this new adventure that belongs just to the two of them. We visit the house on a weekday in the last days of winter, just before the start of the visitor season.

We take a taxi from Jyväskylä and admire the beautiful landscape along the way. The lakes are still frozen, the light is crisp, and the trees are just beginning to grow new leaves. We arrive at the marked point on the map, step out of the car, and look for a way to see the house. We walk along the fence that marks the edge of the property until we reach the lake. We enter the property from the lakeside. We begin walking, not knowing the exact direction—just following our instinct. Between the trees, we spot a wooden cabin and approach it. It is the **Sauna!** Beautiful, set atop stones and logs. We love the way the wood is used—it’s arranged in a way that creates surprising patterns. The

ends of the trunks that form the side walls have star-like burning marks—so thoughtful. The entrance door has no ordinary handle but a gorgeous branch, perfectly selected to fit the hand.

We keep walking. We encounter a wooden bridge, cross it, and in the distance, between the trees, we spot the side of the house—a majestic white brick wall that forms an angle blending perfectly into the landscape. We get as close as possible, walking between streams of water from melting snow piles. Birds are singing, and rays of light shine through the trees. We feel the adrenaline pumping. We love the adventure. We photograph the house from a distance, and with zoom, we manage to capture the details. It is truly remarkable. **We imagine the couple, immersed in full experimental mode, surrounded by nature—and by love.**

Chapter seven:

GRETE PRYTZ KITTELSEN

Grete was born Adelgunde Margarethe Prytz on June 28, 1917, in Oslo and died at age 93 in Oslo on September 25, 2010.

Grete was born into the renowned **J. Tostrup goldsmith family,** dating back to the nineteenth century. Her father, Jacob Prytz—also a distinguished goldsmith—was the **head of Norway's Academy of Craft and Industry.** She followed the family tradition and earned her goldsmith diploma from **Oslo's Art and Craft School** in **1941.**

During WWII, she was part of Norway's resistance movement. In 1945, **she married architect Arne Korsmo** and divorced him in 1960. Between 1949 and 1950, she received a **Fulbright** grant to study at **Chicago's Institute of Design,** broadening her connections and influences by meeting figures like Mies van der Rohe and Alvar Aalto. After her time in Chicago, she returned to work at the family brand, which was a pioneer in enamel techniques. In the 1950s, she was in full force mass-producing enamelware in partnership with the **Cathrineholm factory.** At the same time, she was designing avant-garde jewelry made with silver, enamel, and glass. She was prolific and very good at managing different techniques—from the artisanal to the industrial. She was awarded important prizes like the Milan Triennale Grand Prix in 1954, and

gold medals in 1957 and 1961. In 1971, she married **Sverre Loe Kittelsen** and became a widow in 2002. In 1986, she became **Knight of the First Class of the Order of St. Olaf.**

Technically skilled and rebelling against elitist design, her goal was to create user-friendly objects of high quality at affordable prices. She was described as elegant, vibrant, and charismatic—qualities that made her very popular both locally and internationally. She was an outstanding host, with charming conversation and uncompromising ideals. At social gatherings, Alvar Aalto always wanted to be seated next to her. She was known as the **"Queen of Scandinavian Design"** for her enchanting personality, bold approach to quality budget friendly design, unique vision, and for pushing forward a modern Scandinavian aesthetic.

#7
Planetveien 12,
Prytz Kittelsen-Korsmo
House Studio
Oslo, Norway.
1952-55

This house is the result of the union between the couple—a love story between Arne Korsmo and Grete Prytz. Designed and built between 1952 and 1955, the glass-and-steel house follows the modernist principles of open plan living, blending indoors and outdoors through translucent panels and floor-to-ceiling windows. Grete and Arne's

house is one of three houses designed in the same style and located next to each other. Theirs is the middle and the most experimental house of the trio. We can attribute this to Grete's personality and her instrumental involvement in the design of the house-studio, which is considered one of the most **significant private Norwegian houses of the twentieth century.** The property's interior furnishings and architecture have been legally protected since 2014. Just like Grete, the house is totally unique and features bold innovations and unconventional elements—like a mechanical stairway that can be lifted to open up the main living room, creating space for dance parties or other gatherings; a built-in modular seating area that doubles as an amphitheater-style lounge; and a plywood kitchen that can transform into workspace. These are just a few of the clever and creative solutions to create a true intimate, social, creative, professional, and personal life laboratory. The basement, specially designed as Grete's workshop, still holds the original oven in which she produced her most personal enamel objects.

The house is located uphill in a suburban area of Oslo. To get there, we walk a steep street, then cross between two hills with small creeks of defrosted snow, serenaded by birds singing, sunshine, blue skies—and Google Maps as our guide. Once we arrive, we stop for a minute to catch our breath. We unpack our cameras, we kiss and start shooting. We love the boldness of the trio of houses—nothing looks

like them around the block, or in the neighborhood for that matter. The shining sun casts beautiful shadows on the façade, and we can see a coat hanging behind the translucent glass next to the entrance door.

We recognize Grete's studio on the left side of the house and especially love the chair at the entrance facing the mailbox with a platform on top—**a beautiful reminder of Grete's reputation as an excellent host.** What a welcome for yourself and guests! To be able to sit down and to put bags in a specially designed structure so they are not on the ground. Clever, elegant, practical and caring. We shoot as fast as we can. Exciting. People walking babies and dogs, give us cold friendly smiles—we imagine they're used to having architecture fans like us lurking around the iconic house. Before leaving and walking back again through the creek, we decide to go around and see if it's possible to view the house from the opposite side. We walk in between melting snow and Bingo! We can see the floor-to-ceiling glass of the two-story house and a peek of the studio entrance! What a happy moment. Mission accomplished. Now we can descend the steep trail and head toward our next adventure.

Chapter eight: INGER EXNER

Inger Augusta Kristensen was born on August 20, 1926, in Randers, Denmark, she is 99 years old.

Inger was born into a Christian bourgeois family; her father was a metals merchant, and she was one of five sisters. She attended Randers Statsskole (High School), where she met her soon-to-be husband **Johannes Exner.** After high school, both continued to study architecture at the **Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen.** She began her studies in 1946 and obtained her diploma in 1954. Between 1951 and 1953, she worked at Acton Bjørn and Sigvard Bernadotte's industrial design firm. Inger and Johannes married in 1952, and by 1958, they had started their joint practice, in which they designed **churches, private homes, cultural buildings, and restoration projects.** They excelled in designing modern churches in which they combined traditional Christian symbolism with special emphasis on understanding the churchgoer's holistic views and needs. In their restoration projects, their philosophy was to preserve the full story of the place. In her own words: We do not recreate; we continue the story. **They treated buildings as living documents.** For the Koldinghus Castle restoration project, which took twenty years, the ruins left by the fire were integrated into the modern interventions using materials such as steel and glass.

Their work was recognized and received numerous awards. In 1983, they were honoured with the **Eckersberg Medal for outstanding artistic achievements in architecture by the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts.** In 1991, they received the **Nykredit Architecture Prize,** Denmark's largest architectural award. In 1992, they were named honorary members of the **American Institute of Architects (AIA).** Also in 1992, they received the **C.F. Hansen Medal,** Denmark's most prestigious architectural award. In 1994, they were awarded the **Europa Nostra Award** for the restoration of Koldinghus Castle. When Inger was 92, and three years after the death of Johannes, in 2018, they received the Danish Architects' Association Honor Medal as lifetime recognition of their legacy. She is known for her intelligence, deep humanism, spirituality, persistence, and careful attention to detail, taking her time to solve and realize projects. Her colleagues describe her by saying "She works with great seriousness, never with ego". She worked as an equal to Johannes in the projects they undertook together. She was a quiet voice, letting her projects speak for themselves.

#8
Exner House Studio, together with husband Johannes Exner.
Skodsborg, Denmark.
1961

When we start our research, Inger is not in the panorama. We have our first magical encounter with her while visiting the **Danish Architecture Center (DAC) in Copenhagen.** While browsing books at the museum store, Verea is magnetically pulled toward a book. We flip through its pages and stop at the image of her house. At that moment, we look at each other and know we have to go see it.

To do so, we take a train from Copenhagen Central Station, then a bus, and finally walk. The house is built in an area known for summer residences and old villas in what used to be royal hunting grounds. It is a quiet residential area close to the sea. The landscape and surroundings are beautiful. The houses have pitched roofs that exude tranquility.

We spot the house from afar. As we approach, our heartbeats accelerate. It does not look at all like the neighboring houses. We unpack our cameras and start shooting from the fence. We notice that the trees in the garden contrast sharply with the surroundings. Next to the house, a small hill with a ziggurat shape also stands out.

While we shoot from between the bushes at the fence, we see a woman approaching us. We look at each other—we've been caught. Oh no. We put our cameras down and wait for her to come closer.

She says, "What are you doing?"

"We are admiring your house."

"We don't like that you are taking photos of our house."

"We're sorry. We came to see your house and look at it by ourselves. We admire the work of Inger Exner, and to see this house is a dream come true."

"We feel unsafe with you taking photos."

We look at each other with surprise, never thinking it would feel unsafe in such a calm neighborhood in Denmark. We stay quiet. Then she says, "Do you want to see the house?"

"Yes," we reply.

"I'm going to ask my father. Give me five minutes and I'll be back."

We wait no more than two minutes before she comes back and says, "My father said you can come in—but no photos." We pack our cameras and follow her.

The father doesn't speak fluent English, so we mainly speak to the daughter. We ask if they know about the Exners. The father leaves for a minute and returns with books about the house and the architects. We exchange words of appreciation and follow them inside for a full tour. The house is smart, large, very well-lit, spacious—three

stories that interlock—three bedrooms, a living room, a dining room, an independent studio accessible from the street, and a cellar. We appreciate the tour and are ecstatic.

Then she asks, “Do you want to climb the burial site?”

“Ohh, the structure in the garden is a burial site? How interesting.”

The father says, “Yes, but it has not been excavated, so we don’t know what is in there. We only know it’s from the Bronze Age.”

“Do you want to climb it?” the daughter asks.

“Yes,” we reply.

We follow her and get to the top. “Look to the right—you can see Sweden across the sea.” We climb down, and then she asks, “Do you want me to take a photo of you in front of the house?”

“Yes,” we reply with euphoria and enthusiasm.

This is a dream—and a first—where we are not allowed to take photos, and instead, we are photographed by the owners in the house. A true gift. We stand still, carry our bags, and smile as she takes photos of us from different angles. As we are about to leave, she says, “You can take photos in this little alley and from the street, and that is it.” We take the opportunity and shoot as much as we can.

This is the best Paparazza Moderna ever!

Chapter nine: RAGNA GRUBB

Ragna was born in March 20, 1903 in Copenhaguen and she died June 9, 1961.

She was born into a middle-class family. As a student, she travelled to Italy and Switzerland, where she became convinced that she wanted to become an architect. She entered the **Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts** and obtained her diploma in 1933. In 1934, she won the competition to design and build the innovative concept of **Kvindernes Bygning (The Women's Building).** By 1935, she established her own practice in order to complete this endeavour.

She married Christian Laursen in 1937. Nina was born in 1939, and Jan in 1941. Her practice focused on social housing, functionalist small private houses, summer homes, and restoration projects. Her architectural practice slowly diminished as her family grew. Her life and work are little researched and documented. **She was one of the first women to have an independent practice and was a pioneer in socially committed design.**

#9
Kvindernes Bygning,
Women's Building.
Copenhagen, Denmark.
1934

This building is a key figure in Danish architectural and **feminist history.** The idea behind it begins long before Ragna is even born—in 1895—when **Emma Gad,** a social advocate, envisions a safe space for women to gather, learn, do business, hold exhibitions, socialize, and live. It takes Gad more than thirty years to raise the necessary funds, build public awareness, secure the land, and complete all the planning needed to fulfill her vision. A committee of women's associations, including women's rights and social reform groups, organizes a public competition open to Danish architects. Competitors submit their design proposals anonymously. The required program includes: office space for associations, an assembly hall, commercial units, and a hotel or hostel where women can live independently.

Ragna's design wins the competition for its understanding of the **social mission, its modernist clarity, and its functional organization.** It is a major moment for her—and for Danish history—as she has received her diploma just one year earlier. Her design is built between 1936 and 1937.

The day we visit the Women's Building is a beautiful, sunny winter day. We arrive around midday; the street is full of young people gathering outside. From a distance,

we hear a band rehearsing. We look at the building with sleek, modern lines. The entrance has two glass doors, and inside we can see information on the walls about the history of the construction. As we're looking, a young man exits and lets us in. We enter and photograph as many details as possible. Since there isn't much information available online, we're unsure what is original and what has been altered.

From the street, we peek through another window and see the interior of a bar that is set to open in an hour. We then approach the other commercial space and are astounded to find that it is a **bookstore devoted to women authors, feminism, and women's studies.** We go in, browse the books, and start a conversation with the two women who run it. They tell us that the bookstore opened recently—and that when they rented the space, they had no idea of the building's history.

We love this kind of thing—it supports our theory that architecture built with a clear purpose retains that spirit through time. We buy a couple of books and leave, happy to see men and women stopping at the window, pleasantly surprised by this specialized bookstore.

By the time we leave the shop, the bar is open. We go in, walk around—it's empty—and we order a gin and tonic. We sit near the window; the sun streams in. It is a beautiful afternoon. We raise a toast to the brave and innovative women who opened the way for us to be here, now.

Chapter ten: LILLY REICH

Lilly Reich, born in Berlin on December 16, 1885, died also in Berlin on December 14, 1947.

She was precocious, prolific, and enlightened. She moved to Vienna, and by 1909 she already belonged to the **Wiener Werkstätte** and had worked with **Josef Hoffmann.** By 1911 she moved back to Berlin and began to work independently. In 1920, she was the first woman on the board of the **Deutscher Werkbund,** which was a really big deal at the time. There she met **Ludwig Mies van der Rohe,** with whom she would have a romantic and profesional relationship and will collaborate from that moment on in seminal projects such as the **1925 Weissenhof Exhibition and the 1927 Glasraum (Glass Room), both in Stuttgart; the 1929 Pabellón (Barcelona Pavilion); the Villa Tugendhat in Brno (1928–30);** and many more.

Reich started her career as a **textile designer** and as an **exhibition designer,** in which she excelled. In her 1927 **"Die Wohnung" (The Dwelling)** exhibition in Stuttgart, she revolutionized industrial exhibitions, inventing a new way to exhibit materials and modernist living. She opened the way to a new form of exhibition and display by using clean lines, raw materials, intentionally thin illumination, glass vitrines and suspended vitrines. Her solutions looked like no other. She was bold with her use of colors, shapes, and materials. She designed furniture that is everywhere and that for a long time had been accredited to Mies van der

Rohe, like: the **Barcelona Chair and Ottoman (1929), the Brno Chair (1929–30), the whole MR Collection (1927–29), the entire Tugendhat Villa interiors—custom cabinetry, curtains, tables, chairs, the magnificent semicircular exotic wood room divider, the bright colors, and luxurious fabric in the furniture.** Later in 1932 she was appointed director of the Interior Design workshop at the Bauhaus in Berlin when Mies was director. When WWII broke she had a difficult time, Mies left for Chicago, she went with him, but came back quickly to Berlin and stayed there untill 1947 when she died of cancer. She remained close and loyal to Mies and took care of his archive that survives thanks to her commitment.

She had a deep understanding of sensory experience by privileging touch in her choice of materials and finishes, the visual intensity of color, and a sense of proportion to the human scale that resulted in cozy interiors and ergonomic furniture.

#10
The Tugendhat Villa.
Brno, Czech Republic.
1928-30

The Tugendhat Villa (Brno 1928–30) is a masterpiece with a **bittersweet history.** It all starts in 1920s Berlin when **Grete Löw-Beer** meets Lilly Reich and Mies van der Rohe at the Deutscher Werkbund. Grete was born in 1903 in Brno into a wealthy

German-Jewish family. She had studied at the best schools and was passionate about modern art and architecture. She married Hans Weiss in 1922, had a daughter, and divorced in 1928. That same year she married Fritz Tugendhat and was gifted a plot of land uphill from her parents' villa overlooking the city of Brno. Her father gave her the land, full freedom to choose the kind of house she wanted and an unlimited amount of money to fulfill her dream.

From 1929 to 1930, Lilly Reich and Mies van der Rohe applied their masterstokes to make the perfect ideal house for Grete, Fritz, and the children. The house had the **most advanced technological features available,** like a washing machine, a motorized structure to lower the main space windows so the house would integrate with the garden, and a photography darkroom. Luxury materials like exotic woods, expensive translucent Moroccan onyx, and custom-made furniture designed by Lilly Reich. We can thank this lucid moment with the creation of the iconic Brno Chair. **It is clear that Grete's avant-garde personality pushed and allowed the masterminds to create a sublime ensemble.**

The **bitter part of the history** starts in 1938 when the family left for **Switzerland** under threat of the **Nazis,** and later moved to **Venezuela** in 1941. In 1939, the villa was confiscated by the **Gestapo** and kept changing hands throughout the war and later occupations. Although

she was living far away, Grete was actively looking to preserve the villa. In 1963, the villa was declared a **Cultural Monument,** and in 1967, Grete returned for the first time to Brno to start a campaign to restore the house to its original glory and to establish the house as a museum for public viewings. After a visit to Brno, Grete died in a car accident in 1970 and didn't get to see the restoration that later took place in the 1980s. The villa opened as a museum in 1994 and in 2001 was inscribed on the list of **UNESCO** World Heritage Sites.

For us, the Villa is an example of quiet, harmonious sophistication. She does not look at all like anything around her—a brave, ultra-sleek form and content that is still radical by today's standards. Every detail is thought through and managed with care and love. The furniture with bright colors, the curtains that open and close the space, the magnificent dining room with a table that can seat a small gathering or grow to accommodate a larger group, surrounded by the semicircular glossy Macassar ebony wall, is all breathtaking.

The Villa is modern and welcoming. We visit the house on a beautiful spring day, blue skies, green foliage everywhere. The shadows and the light invades the house and makes it even more cozy than imagined. We tour the house for over ninety minutes and shoot as much as we can. We stay in the garden looking at the house from the outside for a couple of hours, we loose ourselves in the

beauty of the angles, the transparency of the windows, the reflection of the trees and clouds into the interiors.

We can see Lilly's attention to detail and sensual experience all over—her chairs, chaise lounges, cabinets with smooth surfaces that you just want to rub. The curved glass by the entrance echoes the curved details on the furniture and interiors. The simple façade to the street with the opening space from which you get to see the city afar is the perfect subtle entry into a home where every sense is pampered.

And yes, we had seen images of this house, floor plans, and texts describing it. And yes, to see her in person, to feel the space, to understand the transparency between interior and exterior, enlightened our understanding of the genius of Lilly Reich.

We understand this house as a love story between Mies and Lilly and also a collaboration between two incredible women, Grete and Lilly. It is their force together that makes this house so unique and beautiful beyond words. We praise the restoration and the possibility to see her at her best. We feel the sadness of the occupation and of the loss, the dramatic history. A dream house that was shortly a haven—only lived in by the family for eight years. **We can feel the love between the minds behind the design and also the love behind the newly wedded couple looking into a fresh new start. Two love stories.**

Chapter eleven: ESZTER PÉCSI

Eszter Pollák was born on March 8, 1898, in Kecskemét, Hungary. She died on May 4, 1975, in New York City.

Eszter was a passionate pioneer and a hardworking woman. Because Hungary did not admit women to study technical careers at the time, she studied from 1915 to 1919 at the **Technische Hochschule in Berlin-Charlottenburg.** In 1919, once Hungary opened its universities to women, she returned home and enrolled at the **Budapest University of Technology and Economics (Műegyetem). She became the first woman to graduate as a civil engineer in Hungary, exactly on the day she turned 22.** In 1922, she married modernist architect József Fischer, who was two years younger than her. They had two sons, both of whom became architects. From 1922 to 1930, she worked at the structural engineering firm **Guth & Gergely,** where among many other innovative projects she engineered the **largest indoor pool in Europe** at the time, using 31-meter-long concrete beams.

In 1930, she left the firm and established a new practice with her husband, which operated until 1948. In 1936, they designed the **Walter Rózsi Villa in Budapest,** commissioned by the famous opera singer. The villa now houses the **Hungarian Museum of Architecture** due to its exemplary modernist character and uniqueness. Together, they designed numerous private villas and several hospitals. Her many forward-thinking and extraordinary

structures include the construction of the **first steel-frame high-rise hospital on Fiume út.**

During WWII, the couple provided covert refuge in their home to people persecuted by the Nazis—an act of both courage and great personal risk. After the war, Eszter played an important role in reconstructing her city: she inspected buildings damaged by bombs and led the reinforcement of the National Theatre, a potent symbol of resilience and reconstruction.

In 1949, under Soviet influence, she was appointed **chief structural engineer for the state-owned KGMtI office.** However, in 1957, she was dismissed due to her and József's political associations. She left Hungary and went into exile in **Vienna,** where she designed the structure for the **first city-center multi-story parking garage next to the Opera House.**

By 1958, she had emigrated to **New York,** and József joined her in 1964 after years of being denied a passport. In New York, she joined the engineering firm **Farkas & Barron.** Fellow Hungarian émigré and friend **Marcel Breuer,** already a prominent architect, helped her secure high-profile projects. She later moved to **Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM),** where she collaborated on the **Hotel Americana and Columbia University high-rise dormitory structures.**

Between 1959 and 1970, she lectured in engineering and architecture at **New York University.** In 1965, she

was honored as the **City of New York's Best Structural Engineer of the Year for her unprecedented structural design for the safe construction of high-rise buildings near the Hudson River.**

In 1970, she suffered a stroke that left her partially paralyzed. She died in 1975, and József cared for her until the end.

#11
Pécsi-Fisher house, together with husband József Fischer. Budapest, Hugary. 1931

Pécsi-Fisher house, together with husband József Fischer. Budapest, Hugary 1931

Eszter had a prodigious mind; she was committed to social change and progressive thinking.

In 1931, when the Hungarian Ministry of Welfare and the Hungarian Ministry of Culture joined forces to create an equivalent of Stuttgart's 1927 Weissenhof Estate—a project showcasing modern architecture—Eszter and József, along with 21 other architects, were invited to participate. They were each given an adjacent, same-sized plot of land in **Pasarét** and a limited budget to encourage efficiency. All houses had to meet a few core requirements: flat roofs, functional floor plans, integrated indoor-outdoor spaces, modern materials, and the use of the latest technologies. Beyond that, the architects had carte

blanche to approach the design however they wished.

To get to Napraforgó utca 20, we take a tram that traverses from Buda to Pest and then begins to climb uphill. As we ascend, the scenery changes dramatically—it becomes less urban, more luscious and green. It is a sunny day. We arrive at the station, step down, and follow the directions on Google Maps. The instructions are unclear, and there are no signs whatsoever to guide us. Still, we keep walking, enjoying the fragrant smell of the flowers. Suddenly, we begin to notice flat roofs—and we know we've arrived. We take out our cameras and start shooting. We can hear children playing with a ball and birds singing. It feels like a family neighborhood. There is no traffic, and the streets are rather narrow. From the street, we can see parts of the houses, though most are surrounded by trees and bushes. Their house is the tallest in the area.

We love the way the windows are painted red on the inside and admire the outdoor staircase. We notice a motorcycle and an SUV parked inside the gate. Next to the entrance, there is a silver plaque that reads **Fisher House,** along with an abstract map of the other houses that are part of this experimental development. We also notice cameras mounted throughout the property.

Suddenly, a young couple with two small children carrying shopping bags walks toward us. We try to strike up a conversation. The parents don't make eye contact, though the little girl smiles. They continue walking, open

the gate, and enter the house. **No success in learning more** about the interior or what it's like to live in such a special home.

Minutes after the family enters, the children we had heard playing with a ball come outside again—this time with their father—and start playing around us. We read this as a subtle sign that they may not feel comfortable with our presence. The three of them begin playing very close to us. At one point, the ball comes flying straight at us—fast and dangerously close to our cameras. We react quickly, stop the ball skillfully, and kick it back to the father, who catches it with his hands. They look at us, stunned that we had the reflexes and the ability to respond so naturally. **Lucky for us, we both played soccer back when it wasn't so common for girls to do so.**

After this moment, we pack up our cameras and head back to the tram station. When the tram arrives, it feels as if we've stepped back in time—the car is made entirely of wood, quite different from the one we took to get there. The people look different, too. It is a magical moment suspended in time.

Chapter twelve: MARGARETE SCHÜTTE-LIHOTZKY

Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky was born on January 23, 1897, in Vienna, then part of Austria-Hungary. She died on January 18, 2000, in Vienna, just five days before turning 103.

Margarete was born into a progressive, culturally engaged family. Her father worked at the Ministry of War, and her mother came from a bourgeois intellectual background. Her mother supported the idea of her daughter pursuing higher education—an uncommon path for women at the time. In 1916, during World War I, she entered the **University of Applied Arts in Vienna and was one of the first women to study architecture there.** Her mentor, **Oskar Strnad,** had a significant influence on her thinking. He believed in "architecture for all." She received her diploma in 1919 and soon began collaborating with **Adolf Loos** on housing projects for war widows, as well as other initiatives focused on addressing the needs of **war veterans, women, and low-income families by designing small, affordable apartments with efficient, functional interiors.**

In 1926, she was invited by progressive city planner **Ernst May** to join the **New Frankfurt Project.** This ambitious initiative, which began in 1925, aimed to solve the post-war housing shortage by building affordable, high-quality housing using industrial construction methods and modernist architecture. The project promoted a healthy, functional, and efficient model of living, using standardized, mass-produced housing units, with an emphasis on light, air, flat roofs, clean lines, and minimal ornamentation.
One of the key innovations that improved quality of life—especially for women—was the Frankfurt Kitchen, which Margarete designed at the age of **29.** Over **10,000 of these kitchens were produced, all in a blue-green color.** She was inspired by train kitchens, where everything was within arm's reach. **The color was chosen because it was believed to repel flies, have a calming effect, and brighten dark spaces.** The kitchen main features: a built-in stool so it could also be used as a workspace, sliding drawers, labeled aluminum storage bins for flour, rice, sugar, etc., integrated waste chute, enamel or aluminum sink with a drainboard, foldable built-in ironing board, overhead and under-counter storage, and modern lighting. **It was truly a revolutionary design that shaped modern kitchen layouts for decades.**

In the 1930s, she again joined Ernst May, this time working on major urban planning and housing projects in

the **Soviet Union.** She spent several years in the USSR, designing housing and schools. In 1938, she moved to **Turkey,** where she worked with **Bruno Taut,** focusing on educational planning and school buildings.

Later that same year, under secrecy, she returned to Austria to join the **Communist resistance against the Nazi regime.** In 1941, she was arrested by the **Gestapo** and **imprisoned until 1945.** After the war, she continued to uphold her ideals and worked on reconstruction and social housing projects. She remained active in politics all her life and was a long-time member of the **Communist Party.** In the 1960s, she traveled to China as part of international delegations organized by **peace movements,** and also visited Cuba, expressing solidarity with newly emerging socialist states.

She devoted her life to the social causes she believed in and continued working toward them. She especially focused on schools and **child-centered design,** believing that real societal change began with education. Her designs for schools reflected progressive educational values, emphasizing openness, functionality, and accessibility.

Her political affiliations and the fact that she **was a woman in a male-dominated profession made it difficult for her to fully thrive in the architectural field,** especially after the war. Still, she remained resilient and continued to **publish essays, give lectures, and campaign for peace, women's rights, and social justice.**

In 1980, she was awarded the **Architecture Prize of the City of Vienna** for her lifelong social commitment. In 1988, she received the **United Nations Peace Medal for her activism,** and the **Bruno Kreisky Prize for Human Rights.** After her death in 2000, many schools, streets, and institutions in Austria and Germany were named in her honor. Her legacy is also preserved through the **Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky Prize for women in architecture.**

#12
Apartment.
Vienna, Austria.
1967

In 2021, the 55-square-meter apartment where Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky lived from 1970 until her death in 2000 was declared a **protected monument.** She had designed and planned the interiors, kitchen, and furniture between 1967 and 1969.

The Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky Club, founded in 2013, restored the apartment and turned it into a museum and research center: the Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky **Zentrum.** The restoration was carried out by the University of Applied Arts Vienna and funded by the **Austrian Monuments Office** and the **City of Vienna.** They recreated her kitchen using the original plans and reconstructed much of the furniture. The apartment opened to the public in 2024.

We booked a visit through the Zentrum's website to see and photograph the apartment. We arrived and rang the bell. A woman opened the door and began speaking in German, rapidly she switched to English and she let us in. Another woman was already visiting. We asked if it was possible to take photos, and she said yes, please.

We began photographing and carefully observing the details. It was an unusually hot day. As soon as the other visitor finished, **we were approached and given an explanation** of the Zentrum, **the restoration, and the mission of t**he group maintaining it. We learned that the **restoration** was carried out by women architects, and that most of the visitors are women as well.

We pointed at a hanging lamp with loose fabric draping from it. She told us it was designed by **Adolf Loos** and had been a gift to her. We pointed at a tea cart with Turkish glasses, which came from her time in Turkey. Then we pointed toward the end of the room, where a sofa stood in front of a wall covered with a beautiful rug and surrounded by books. During the day, this was her reading spot; at night, it doubled as her bed.

We asked about the kitchen and were given a brief tour. She told us that it followed the design of the Frankfurt Kitchen, which Margarete had **optimized forty years later for her personal use.** The surfaces were white, the cabinets deep green, with bright red interiors—a nod to Chinese aesthetics—creating a beautiful and surprising

contrast. The orange tiles reminded her of Turkey. The space was functional and compact. An open layout connected the kitchen to the dining table and a window to the terrace.

The apartment and the terrace felt well-lit, simple, cozy, frugal, practical—perfect.

Margarete was an exemplary, strong, and committed woman who fought for her ideals. Her design of the Frankfurt Kitchen was a turning point in architectural history. To see her apartment helped us understand her character and her congruence with her values, her travels, and her passions.

Chapter thirteen:

NELLY VAN DOESBURG

Nelly Molijn was born on June 14, 1899, in Utrecht, Netherlands, and died in Meudon on June 22, 1975.

She was born into a middle-class family, **studied piano and music, trained as a classical pianist.** Nelly and **Theo van Doesburg** met in 1920; they experienced an intense and immediate connection, a coup de foudre. They married in 1920. When they met, Nelly was already a talented pianist. Theo, 17 years older than her, was a key member of the **De Stijl movement. Her musical training and knowledge complemented the movement's principles and especially touched Theo's practice — her structure, rhythm, and harmony complemented his purity, order, and balance.**

They would perform together in **Dada and De Stijl evenings.** She used the pseudonym **Pétro van Doesburg** and played modernist compositions by **Erik Satie** and other avant-garde composers, while he would lecture and present visual works. These events, which mashed up visual arts, performance, and music, helped spread the movement's ideas across Europe.

Between 1921 and 1922, the couple lived in **Weimar,** where Theo looked for a position at the Bauhaus — a position that never materialized. In the late 1920s, they moved to Paris as active members of the Dada and avant-

garde circles. Paris was their base, although they moved around quite a lot looking for work and opportunities.

Once they had secured funds to build a house of their own, they looked for a place that would offer calm and silence, as opposed to the hectic lifestyle of Paris, the epitome of the avant-garde. **Meudon** was the perfect choice: close enough to Paris, surrounded by woods, and with more affordable land, so they could design an ideal place to live and work. From 1927 to 1929, Theo worked on the designs. Due to his poor health, they moved into the unfinished house in 1929. To treat his tuberculosis, Theo traveled to a sanatorium in **Davos** and died upon arrival on March 7, 1931 at the age of 47.

Sad, devastated, and all by herself, Nelly finished the last details of the house that had been left under construction. She also **devoted the rest of her life to organizing, selling, promoting, preserving, and managing his artistic and intellectual estate.** During WWII, she stayed in Meudon, protecting Theo's work so it wouldn't be confiscated as **"degenerate"** under occupied France by the Nazis. She sold and donated iconic works to the **MoMA, the Stedelijk Museum, and the Centre Pompidou,** among others. She kept on working on her own paintings, following De Stijl principles, and exhibited randomly, always alongside his works. She also lectured and spread his legacy. Nelly lived the rest of her life in the house they created together. Upon her death in 1975, the house became an artist residency.

#13
Van Doesburg Studio-House together with husband Theo van Doesburg. Meudon-Val-Fleury, France. 1927-1930

Van Doesburg Studio-House together with husband Theo van Doesburg. Meudon-Val-Fleury, France. 1927-1930

Since the 1980s, the house has been run by the **Theo and Nelly van Doesburg House Foundation,** a non-profit entity from the Netherlands. It is only open to the public a few days a year because it houses an artist residency program. We approached the foundation to book the tour months in advance and waited patiently for the confirmation. Once we had the confirmation, we had to shift and move our travel itinerary to make it.

Finally, the day came. We took an Uber from Paris to Meudon-Val-Fleury, now a suburb of Paris. The places we saw on the way to Meudon were parts of Paris we had never seen before. It was an eye-opener: along the Seine River, brutalist, modernist, and post-modernist buildings that changed our vision of a city we thought we knew pretty well.

We arrived before the time of the meeting with the idea of shooting the house from the outside without being noticed. It was a sunny, beautiful day. As we started to shoot the house, we saw other visitors like us who had also arrived early. We felt observed but kept on going until we were fully surrounded.

The facade is bright white, the sun hitting it directly, drawing shadows that are deep and dark. The play of light and dark alters and activates the architecture. **The facade is classic De Stijl, in shapes and colors.** The woman in charge opens the door at the exact time of the rendezvous. We all enter the house. As usual, we are the last ones to join. We try to step away from the group so we can shoot and experience the house.

Opposed to the outside, the inside is in different shades of **gray,** with some **yellow** accents on the tabletops. We learn that Theo died before finishing the house. Nelly stepped up to the occasion, took final decisions on the program of the house, the colors, added drapes instead of doors, and transformed the original idea of a **house-studio into a house-studio-gallery.** She also took on the responsibility to manage her late husband's estate and devoted her life to securing a space in important public and private collections for the **De Stijl movement.**

There is not much furniture or signs of use from her time. Other than the architecture, the things that remain are the built-in tables — a striking, massive one in the main living room and studio area, two others with yellow tops, one in the kitchen and one in the rooms with the chimney and stained glass ceiling.

Every single detail in the house relates to the De Stijl aesthetic: the color squares, shades of grey that accentuate the geometries of the architecture, the

distribution of the house, the design of the entrance door from inside, the kitchen floor. The house is small, but feels large and generous. There's a raw, artistic charm to the place. The white cubic plinth that never got to see the sculpture it was designed for feels a little bit like a premonition — of an artist who dreamed of a house he never got to see. In our view this all makes sense, **the cubic plinth recasts itself into a sculpture, and the house of the artist transfigures into a house of her own.**

Chapter fourteen:

SOPHIE TAEUBER-ARP

Sophie Henrietta Gertrud Taeuber was born in Davos on January 19, 1889. She died in Zurich on January 13, 1943.

Sophie's father was a pharmacist and died when she was two years old. She was one of five children. Upon his death, her mother moved the family to **Trogen,** where she ran a boarding house. Between 1906 and 1910, she attended the **School of Applied Arts in St. Gallen,** where she had formal education in **textile design and decorative arts, also learning embroidery, weaving, color theory, and composition** — all of which are reflected in her artistic practice. From 1910 to 1914, she went to the **Kunstgewerbeschule in Munich, where she studied design, drawing, and applied arts** influenced by the **Art Nouveau movement,** with emphasis on the unity of form and function — principles that were constant in her later work. During that time, between 1911 and 1913, she attended **Émile Jaques-Dalcroze's School of Eurhythmics in Hellerau, Germany.** There she trained in rhythmic movement and expressive dance, which helped her understand spatial balance, movement, and rhythm under a new modern approach that also influenced her deeply.

In 1915, she met **Jean Arp.** Both were deeply involved in the **Dada movement around Cabaret Voltaire.** In 1922, they got married, and she added his last name to hers. Between 1916 and 1929, as a highly respected educator, **she taught textile and design at the Zurich School of Applied Arts. Jean and Sophie became creative and artistic partners across painting, sculpture, design, and architecture.** Jean said about Sophie: **“Her works are full of restrained joy, with a subtle smile, like a song sung softly to oneself.”** Their collaborations came in many different shapes and forms, **co-signing** in many cases. Both of them produced abstract wooden reliefs — hers more geometric, his more organic. **Jean totally supported her creative vision.** In 1918, she conceived the **Dada Marionettes** for The King Stag play — 17 puppets that have become iconic representations of Dada and modernist performance art.

Their most groundbreaking joint project, also involving **Theo van Doesburg,** was the **Aubette cultural center and entertainment complex in Strasbourg (1926–1928),** for which they designed murals, furniture, and the entire interior layout. She was in charge of the tearoom, the bar, and the banquet hall — where she excelled in her interior and architectural abilities, also designing the walls, ceilings, and furnishings. The center was a total **Gesamtkunstwerk.** The Aubette commission gave them important recognition and the funds to buy land at **the edge of the Meudon**

forest in 1927 for their house-studio. She left her teaching position and fully — and successfully — engaged in interior design commissions in Basel, Berlin, and Paris.

Sophie designed their house-studio in 1929, and in 1930 the couple moved in. Surrounded by nature, she devoted herself to her art, participating in important exhibitions alongside **Kurt Schwitters, Piet Mondrian, and long-time collaborator and neighbor Theo van Doesburg.** As WWII raised concerns for their and their circle's safety, they started to move frequently. After the **Nazi occupation** in 1940, they temporarily settled in **Grasse,** in the unoccupied south of France. In 1942, she returned to Zurich to work as editor of **Plastique/Plastic magazine,** which promoted the work of abstract artists in exile.

On January 13, 1943, **she died unexpectedly while staying at Max Bill's** house due to carbon monoxide poisoning from a faulty stove. Her tragic death shocked the art community and left Jean totally heartbroken and devastated.

#14
Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Jean Arp House Studio.
Meudon-Val-Fleury, France.
1927

While visiting **Nelly and Teo van Doesburg's house,** we had a hunch and decided to visit Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Jean Arp's house-studio within walking distance. We are super fans of the artist couple, so we take the opportunity and venture to see if we can visit. It is a 10-minute uphill walk from one house to the other. The sun is shining strong, the sky is blue, and the weather has a summerlike feeling.

We arrive at the house. The gate is closed. We see a sign that announces the tour hours. Happily, the next tour is only minutes away. We wait at the door alongside a cute couple of young girls. Suddenly, a crowd of people starts to exit, and we know it is our time to come in.

From one moment to the next, the blue sky starts to turn gray. Unexpectedly, a gust of wind blows and vigorously shakes the trees. We are gathered in the central part of the property, open air, surrounded by Jean Arp's sculptures and a forest behind us. A young man starts the tour by telling the story of Sophie and Jean. He is passionate, and his enthusiasm is contagious.
As he goes deeper into the story, we look at each other, marveling. We had no idea that Sophie herself designed the house-studio we are seeing in front of our eyes. We are ecstatic. We hold hands and squeeze tight. **Sophie just**

became the fourteenth woman of the series. Beautiful.

Sophie designed a three-story building made out of meulière stone — a locally sourced material commonly used in the region — and concrete balconies that cantilever. She cleverly used the land's characteristics in such a way that from the street, you see a two-story building, and from the garden, you get the full view of all three stories. She designed the upper floor for her studio, with abundant light coming from the windows and flooding the space. Next to it is a smaller sleeping room. A beautiful staircase connects to the lower floor, which is at street level, where she designed Jean's atelier. The distribution is exactly like hers, with the small sleeping quarter that could double as a secondary working space. The ground floor is for the kitchen, living and dining rooms, and utility space. Here the roof is lower, and the spaces are darker than the studios above. The floors are connected with geometric staircases — different on every floor.

Sophie thought through and designed every detail in the house, inside and out: built-in wardrobes, tables and shelving, a dynamic color palette on walls and furniture, lighting fixtures, and outstanding four-color candleholders that are still in production — made out of solid beech wood, finished with glossy paint in primary colors, with brass inserts to secure the candles. These are as much sculptures as they are utilitarian objects. The house is managed by the Fondation Arp, established in 1978 by

Jean's second wife, Marguerite Arp-Hagenbach. It hosts exhibitions and has few traces of the furniture and colors from the time when Sophie lived there.

As we tour, shoot, and marvel at the house and Sophie's spatial genius spatial and material skills, the weather keeps on changing. The wind becomes rain, the blue skies are obscured by heavy clouds, and our hearts keep racing — fast and happy. Just like whirlwind, she blow us away. We didn't see it coming, and it made us the happiest to have her as the one to end the Lovers series.

We are forever grateful to all the women who led our way and showed us to keep going courageously, no matter what.

VITRINE

#34
Hagerty House, by Gropius & Breuer.
Cohasset, Massachusetts
1938

Breuer and Gropius had worked together many times before, but the Hagerty House was their first joint project in the U.S.

Commissioned by Josephine M. Hagerty, the mother of a Harvard student. The design aimed to capture the essence of the open sea. According to legend, the glass did not withstand the sea breeze, and the client was not pleased. However, Breuer seemed to have loved the staircase—he reused the same design, like a souvenir, in his later home in New Canaan. Throughout the years, the house has undergone many transformations. The current owners have carefully restored it to its original state.

House Anecdote:

The Hagerty House sits just a few meters from the sea. It's a small house with a big personality. It was the first house Gropius and Breuer were commissioned to design in the U.S., built for Josephine Hagerty, the mother of one of their Harvard students.

Josephine wanted a simple, practical home by the sea. She already owned the plot of land, on which they went on to design a house that looked like a camera pointing toward the Atlantic Ocean—or a box on the rocks. The project was entirely avant-garde. Their vision was for the

structure to become “one” with the sea. The story behind it is fascinating. We encourage you to research it further, as we did, to discover more details and anecdotes.

According to our research, when the house was finished, Josephine was happy. But then came the first storm—and all the glass shattered. The windows were ruined. This happened repeatedly, and she kept replacing them. Eventually, fed up, she approached the architects to find a solution. They offered none, explaining that the glass and openness were part of the experimental nature of the design. So, Josephine made a difficult decision: she sealed off the windows facing the sea. As a result, the house lost its intended openness and connection to the ocean.

Years later, a young couple purchased the home. By then, technology had advanced, and it was finally possible to reopen the windows and restore the original vision. The new owners studied the original plans and faithfully brought the house back to its authentic state. The day we visited, the paint looked fresh and the house was in pristine condition. Everything was perfect.

#39
Darling House.
Richard J. Neutra.
San Francisco, California.
1937

The Darling House was originally designed by Richard Neutra, together with Otto Winkler, as a family home for Dr. H. Darling. It must have been a special place—the house stayed in the family for 81 years, passing through several generations. When we visited and photographed it in 2013, it was owned by Alvin and Elaine Pelavin, who were part of the extended family of the original owners.

The house hit the market for the very first time in 2018 and sold for $2.2 million.

Darling House is one of Neutra's early redwood homes. It sits next to a very different-looking neighbor, which makes for a fun visual contrast: pitched roof versus flat, green versus red. A simple banister and a few flowers welcome you at the entrance with exquisite simplicity.

#37
Mosk House.
Richard J. Neutra.
Silver Lake, Los Angeles.
1933

Originally this house was conceived as a study for steep hillside development to experiment on how to build in challenging terrains. It was designed as a family home for Ernst and Bertha Mosk. And what happened after, is a little bit of a mistery.

Finding a house like this goes beyond Paparazza Moderna's wildest dreams. Iconic architecture playfully decorated with bowling balls, gnomes perched on rocks, decorative toad statues, and other bibelots—an ingenious, low-maintenance solution for a garden in a city where rainfall is scarce.

It's a one-of-a-kind, imaginative outdoor display.

A joyful discovery!

We'd never seen anything like it before—it wins first prize for originality!

#43
Rockefeller Guest House.
Philip Johnson.
New York City, New York.
1950

This one is a rare marvel—a survivor of the urge to devour low-rise structures in Manhattan and replace them with high-rises. This house originally conceived as a guesthouse and showroom for the Rockefellers' art collection. The design was simple, almost minimal, yet every detail meticulously considered, like the copper-threaded chenille draperies woven by Anni Albers. Johnson loved the space so much that he and David Whitney lived there for eight years, starting in 1971. The guesthouse had no kitchen, which posed no problem for the couple—meals came from the Four Seasons restaurant.

The day we visit, construction workers are getting in, renovation is underway. Again, lucky us that we get to pick in!

#45
Richard and Geraldine Hodgson House, “House for a Television Executive”.
Philip Johnson.
New Canaan, Connecticut.
1951

This house is a collab operation between Johnson and Landis Gores. Ghostly, overlooked, or neglected? Is this house used seasonally? We find it mysterious!

ABOUT LAKE VEREA

Lake Verea outside of **The Rietveld-Schröder House**
Utrecht, Netherlands (2025)

LAKE VEREA is a queer artist duo formed in 2005, consisting of **Francisca Rivero-Lake Cortina** (born 1973) and **Carla Verea Hernández** (born 1978), both from Mexico City. Their artistic collaborative practice focuses on expanded photography, integrating various media such as installation, textiles, performance, and video. Through this hybrid approach, Lake Verea experiments with photographic techniques and formats to create intimate and personal portraits, often questioning authorship and exploring themes of memory, portraiture, modern architecture, and the exploration of artists' archives.

Working across both analog and digital platforms—from 19th-century cameras to iPhones—they select their tools in response to each project's demands. Frequently, they photograph simultaneously using two cameras, exchanging them mid-session to dissolve individual authorship and emphasize their identity as a duo. In some bodies of work, they inhabit personas during research and shooting, generating alternate narratives that subvert linear or canonical histories.

At the heart of their work is a search for intimacy and storytelling—a commitment to seeing differently, to revealing overlooked details and proposing personal counter-histories through image-making.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All works by Lake Verea (Francisca Rivero-Lake Cortina & Carla Verea Hernández)

Concept and exhibition design:
Lake Verea (Francisca Rivero-Lake Cortina
& Carla Verea Hernández)

Rendering and 3D model:
Imanol Meza Coriche

Graphic Design:
Cam Rivero-Lake

Photographic Printing:
Griffin Editions; Joanna Raynes and Zac Thompson.

Exhibition Team:
Andrew Benner, Director of Exhibitions
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The Yale School of Architecture's exhibition program is supported in part by the Robert A.M. Stern Fund, the Pickard Chilton Dean's Resource Fund, the Nitkin Family Dean's Discretionary Fund in Architecture, the Fred Koetter Exhibitions Fund, the Kibel Foundation Fund, and the James Wilder Green Dean's Resource Fund.

Lake Verea would like to thank the following for their friendship and support for this travel: Catherine Petitgas, Ingar Dragset, Simon Fujiwara, Patricia Hernádez, Ramón Gandarias and Anne Clergue.

Special thanks to: Andrew Benner, Deborah Berke, Alison Walsh, Nina Rappaport, David Reinfurt, Richard Deflumeri, Jay Bates, Jaime Kriksciun,Ryan Cyr, Zach Wilder, A.J. Artemel, and ALL at the Yale University team for making this dream come true. Joanna Raynes and Zac Thompson at Griffin Editions for the beautiful prints on the last rolls of Kodak Professional Endura Premier Paper.

Our families for their unconditional support:
Adelaida Cortina Cespedes, Paco Rivero-Lake, Josefa Rivero-Lake Cortina, Rodolfo Albin Rivero-Lake, Camila Rivero-Lake, Patricia Hernández Ramirez, Ramón Gandarias, Pedro Verea Hernandez, Jimena Woodworth, Jimena Verea Woodworth, Antonia Verea Woodworth, Úrsula Verea Hernandez, Carlos Peyrelongue, Juan Manuel Martínez Parente Verea, Marina Martínez Parente Verea, Jacinta Verea Hernandez, Jacinta Puente Verea and Santiago Puente Verea.

Our Galleries, collectors and best friends:
Brenda and Sox Danilowitz, Eeva-Liissa Polkenen and Turner Brooks, Juan Carlos Bendana-Pinel, Yasuko Egawa, Issa Maria Benitez, Fernando Cordero, Iris & Jean Baptiste Dalle, Lolita Beistegui, Ignacio Garza, Jamie Denburg Habie, Hector Esrawe, Darin Klein, Arthur Castro, Juan Carlos Campos, Colette Decroux, Rudy Weissenberg, Rodman Primack, Sophie Avernin, Javier Arredondo, Alejandra Ríos, Mercedes Saenz, Lucas Dougherty, Sandra Vertiz, Oren Tatcher, Rosa Yagüe, Fabiola Iza, Daniel Garza-Usabiaga and Pablo León de la Barra.

Vitra Design Museum for hosting Paparazza Moderna Exhibition in 2019, specially to Viviane Steppmanns, Federica Zanco, Mateo Kries and Anna and Rolf Fehlbaum.

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