



Le Corbusier's Hands (MIT Press)

By André Wogenscky

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Le Corbusier's Hands offers a poetic and personal portrait of Le Corbusier--a nuanced portrayal that is in contrast to the popular image of Le Corbusier the aloof modernist. The author knew Le Corbusier intimately for thirty years, first as his draftsman and main assistant, later as his colleague and personal friend. In this book, written in the mid-1980s, Wogenscky remembers his mentor in a series of revealing personal statements and evocative reflections unlike anything that exists in the vast literature on Le Corbusier. Wogenscky draws a portrait in swift, deft strokes--50 short chapters, one leading to the next, one memory of Le Corbusier opening into another. Appearing and reappearing like a leitmotif are Le Corbusier's hands--touching, taking, drawing, offering, closing, opening, grasping, releasing: "It was his hands that revealed him.... They spoke all his feelings, all the vibrations of his inner life that his face tried to conceal."

Wogenscky writes about Le Corbusier's work, including the famous design of the chapel at Ronchamp, his ideas for high-density Unités d'Habitation linked to the center of a "Radiant City," and his "Modulor" system for defining proportions--which Wogenscky compares to a piano tuner's finding the exact relation between sounds. He remembers the day Picasso spent with Le Corbusier at the Marseilles building site--"All day long they outdid one another in a show of modesty," he observes in amazement. He adds, speaking for himself and the others present, "We were inside a double energy field." And Wogenscky writes about Le Corbusier more personally. "I have spent years trying to understand what went on in his mind and in his hand," he tells us. With Le Corbusier's Hands, Wogenscky gives us a unique record of an enigmatic genius.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

An assistant to and friend of Le Corbusier, Wogenscky portrays the modernist architect, designer and writer in 50 short chapters in this slender volume, an emotional and poetic accompaniment to traditional biographies. Eschewing biographical facts and reproductions of Le Corbusier's work, Wogenscky offers a more intimate look at Le Corbusier: detailed images of the wrinkles in his hands, a memory of his mother playing Händel on the piano and the guiding ideology behind his influential design principle for Unités d'Habitation, the urban housing units he designed. Using enigmatic and often contradictory quotations and anecdotes from Le Corbusier's letters and work, Wogenscky gives a balanced, airy view of the architect. Quotations from writers and thinkers like Rilke, Montaigne and Lao-tzu (identified only in the notes in the back) add depth, but the lack of attribution may make it difficult for readers to differentiate between contributions from outside sources and Le Corbusier's own words. A singular complement to Le Corbusier's work, this book is also an inspiring depiction of an artist.

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Review

"A singular complement to Le Corbusier's work, this book is also an inspiring depiction of an artist."
Publishers Weekly

"[I]t's the author's recurring portraits of Le Corbusier's hands that tell his true story - one of genius and frailty, power and tenderness." *Metropolis*

About the Author

André Wogenscky was a French architect and Le Corbusier's assistant for 20 years.

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Sally Oneal:

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