



"Corbusier" zinc stencils from the Bazar Hotel de Ville

Terry Crook

It is clear, even after forty years from graduation, that a reunion can rekindle fond memories of the Oxford School of Architecture. While reconnecting with fellow students at the reunion for the 1971 and 1972 graduating years held at Heythrop Park on June 2nd, a few of us recalled an intense fun-filled five-day trip to Paris in March of 1967 led by Tom Porter, Betty Hill and Mr. Kayll. How young and impressionable we were, eager to absorb the art, architecture and streets of Paris - and all on a low budget. Our flights (I say flights because these WWII prop driven planes were two small to carry all 68 of us) took off from a muddy grass runway at Lympe in Kent bound for a similar field across the Channel at Beauvais. Our coach entered Paris to howls of laughter from bystanders exchanging waves from one of our entourage (whose name escapes me) on the front seat dressed very convincingly as Charles de Gaul. Where was the police escort?

Of, course Paris also has great food. And so how does a keen group of architecture students* combine the best of French architecture and food? Simple, a 4:00 am visit to the tragically condemned Les Halles market in search of the legendary early morning onion soup. Our goal was elusive but a helpful market worker who escorted us through a maze of back streets to reach our destination - a café known only to locals that was just opening its doors rewarded our efforts. To this day I have never tasted onion soup that good. I suspect we may still be able to find the soup but sadly not the venerable iron and glass structure and the sights, sounds and smells it hosted.

We experienced more gastronomic delights at "Julien" a local eatery on the Rue Saint-Denis recommended by Tom Porter. We had a little trouble with the French menu and Terry recalls that the table covers were paper and we were able to draw our orders - apparently with limited success as a sketch of a chicken produced a sparrow stew with a 1cm wishbone. The sketch wasn't entirely wasted as it was torn off and used for l'addition.

Our programme included visits to several art galleries, the remaining art nouveau Metro stations of Hector Guimard and Versailles. We did however give Mr. Kayll's guided tours of the Paris Sewers a miss (although I understand they were breathtaking) in favour of the pursuit of modern architecture. Like most architecture students in the sixties we were big fans of the work of Le Corbusier. Inspired by a prearranged trip to the iconic "machine for living" Villa Savoy in Poissy we were keen to experience Corb's more recent (at the time) work and ventured on to

Neuilly in search of the Maison Jaoul on the rue Longchamp. We found the driveway entrance securely gated with an intercom inset in the wall. After several attempts in our schoolboy French announcing our pilgrimage from the Oxford school of Architecture (that may have helped) we were pleasantly surprised to hear a "please come in" and the opening of the automatic gate. The voice on the intercom was that of Madame Jaoule, the widow of Doctor Jaoule, a delightful lady who was more than happy to show us around the two houses. With a brutal use of brick and concrete, Maisons Jaoule were a real contrast to the clean modernity of the Villa Savoy. Although finished in 1956, Corb designed these houses in 1937, a few years before he developed the dimensions and proportions of the "Modulor Man". Yet, as the attached photo shows, we were keen to explore the concept. Le Corbusier first established a height for the Modular Man of 175 cm (216 cm to the outstretched fingertips), based upon the average Frenchman. He later increased these dimensions to 183 cm (226 cm) to more closely reflect the height of an English policeman. At 178 cm I was somewhere in between, and my outstretched fingertips could just touch the underside of the concrete slab - perhaps politically correct somewhere between Frenchmen and the English police.

And so, after five intense days we returned to Oxford a little wiser, a little more worldly and charged for the pursuit of architecture.



Corbusier's "Modulor Man" at Maisons Jaoul

Photo: Terry Crook

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