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The Price of Desire - Eileen Gray's house E1027

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E1027 was Eileen Gray’s concept of a dwelling for tomorrow in a place that has become a myth on a site that is magical. The house built between 1926 and 1929 was the first architectural work of Eileen Gray; she was then 51 years old and mainly self-taught in architecture. The house, built for sheltering her love with Jean Badovici, offers many layers of interpretation, starting with both the choice of its location carved in a landscape mastered by natural elements and the relationship between technological and handmade design solutions.

E1027 is a house full of ingenious thinking leading down mystically from a small staircase to a brilliant view over the Mediterranean Sea and Monte Carlo. The interior is a vivid combination of comfortable and inventive design articulating several functions in a large open plan, a dining area, a place for tea, a place for siesta. Beds fold into walls, a table becomes a desk, and the hall has her written instructions for visitors - entrez lentement and défense de rire.

If it is to recognize common features to modernist architecture, the emancipation and impact of the house relies upon the refuse of modernity as a male-hero-focused narrative. Gray designed many of her most famous furniture pieces here, including the low-slung Transat armchair and the iconic Satellite mirror as response to specific needs and purposes of the space. Our paper based upon the case study of E1027 discusses Gray’s feminine understanding of modern architecture and interiors as a way of designing ‘the shell of man’ - his extension, his release, his spiritual emanation’. The pioneering modernist Eileen Gray disagreed completely with Le Corbusier’s oft-quoted line about a house being a machine à habiter. It will come into the paper’s arguments that Gray’s legacy is the evidence that a pure intellectual response, i.e. insidious chauvinism falls short of beauty, emotion and identity. It will be as well discussed the meaning of the price of desire both in the expression of Cheska Vallois and of director Mary McGuckian’s film while approaching the feminist identity of Gray’s architecture.