

RONCHAMP

2006 - 2011 Ronchamp, France

Commissioned to reconstruct a Marian shrine semi-destroyed by the war, in the early 1950s Le Corbusier designed one of his most famous works at Ronchamp: an icon of 20th-century architecture. Over the years the success of the Chapelle de Notre-Dame-du-Haut had led to the construction of a series of outbuildings, which had partially distorted the spatial and religious balance of the site. In 2006 the Association pour l'Oeuvre de Notre-Dame-du-Haut asked Renzo Piano to design a small monastery for 12 Poor Clare nuns, so returning a human presence to the hill and restoring its original spiritual dimension.

After an inspection of the monumental complex it was decided not to build at the top or near Le Corbusier's chapel. Instead the new buildings were incorporated into the sides of the hill, half hidden by the vegetation and partly buried, so that they would be invisible from the parvis. The old porter's lodge was demolished, because it was placed in the wrong position in relation to the footpath and the car park was moved as far from the chapel as far as possible. Visitors are welcomed to a new reception building with ticket office, bookshop, services and a refreshment area. From here, they walk up to the Chapelle de Notre-Dame-du-Haut. On the slope between the porter's lodge and the chapel, moved to the east, the new monastery is set, fragmented into two longitudinal buildings that follow the landforms.

Sister Brigitte de Singly, abbess of the Poor Clares of Besançon, wanted a place "of silence, prayer, peace and inner joy", in Le Corbusier's words. Her tenacious presence and constant discussions during the design phase were crucial factors in the success of the delicate building site. The monastery is divided into two elongated bodies half-buried in the hillside, which closely follow the contours of the site and open out towards the forest with large windows. The lower level is intended for the nuns' cells and guest quarters, while the building further up the hill, closer to the chapel, is reserved for community living spaces and a small oratory. The choice to use a clear and luminous concrete is in harmony with the tones of Le Corbusier's *béton*, while the generous glazing and metal uprights declare the contemporary nature of the project. The flat roofs of the porter's lodge and the monastery have been colonized by vegetation, so that the new buildings are even more camouflaged and invisible from the chapel. The landscape design by Michel Corajoud has led to the reforestation of the hill, devoting great care to the outdoor spaces and footpaths, including the footpath and car park.

The external measure and restraint of the project is enriched by a careful use of color in the interiors of the monastery. Shades of orange and yellow kindle the walls on the upper side and the ceilings of the cells, the communal spaces and the floor of the oratory.

A small winter garden, 90 centimeters deep, is interspersed with the two windows that separate the cells and the rooms of the guesthouse from the forest, while double-flow mechanical ventilation systems, connected to geothermal probes set 100 meters underground, ensure ideal, controlled temperatures in both summer and winter.

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