

MAISON BY DESIGN

Almost 80 years after legendary French architect Charlotte Perriand designed *La Maison au bord de l'eau*, it finally comes to life this month on Miami Beach, courtesy of Louis Vuitton.

BY JEAN NAYAR





f the masterful French architect Le Corbusier were alive to see the exquisite, compact house perched on the beach behind The Raleigh Hotel this Art Basel, he'd probably breathe a sigh of satisfaction. Known as *La Maison au bord de l'eau* ("the house on the water"), the jewel box of a beach house was designed by his protégée many decades ago, Charlotte Perriand, one of the few female architects of her day and a pivotal force in defining modern design. The plans for the house were recently uncovered by Louis Vuitton Women's Creative Director Julie de Libran and her team, when they were granted access to Perriand's archives for inspiration in designing Louis Vuitton's Spring/Summer 2014 Icons collection. Cognizant of the design-loving crowd that would converge on Miami Beach this season for Design Miami and Art Basel Miami Beach, Louis Vuitton seized on the opportunity to bring to life Perriand's unrealized vision and give the groundbreaking house the recognition it deserves.

Originally designed by Perriand in 1934 for a competition sponsored by *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* magazine, the house is a quintessential expression of the precepts she held dear—simplicity, beauty, fine craftsmanship, natural materials, balanced proportions, harmonious palettes, and refined detail. "Her work doesn't age,"

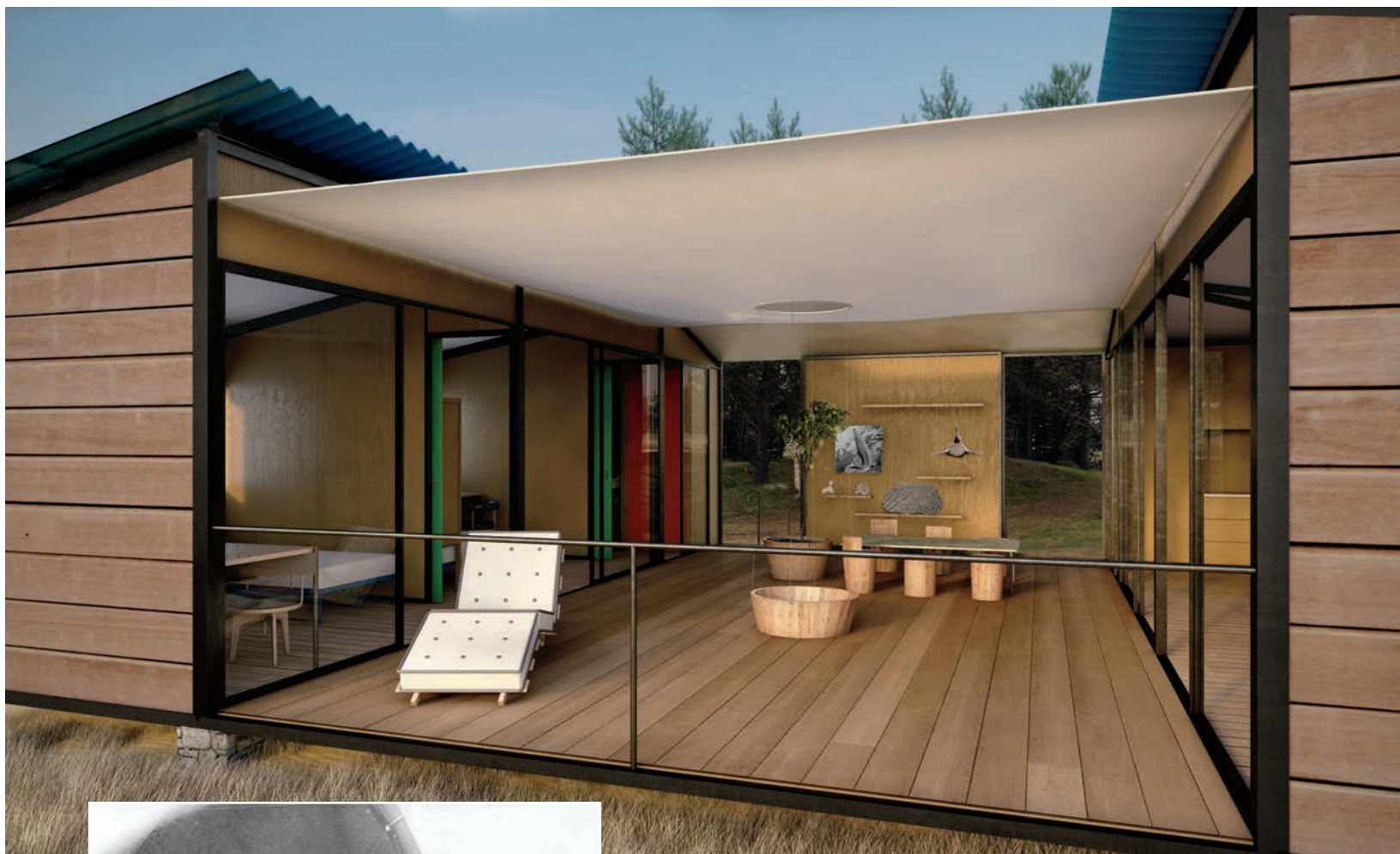
says Pernette Perriand-Barsac, Perriand's daughter, who assisted the designer throughout much of her 60-plus-year career. "When you see the designs she did in the '30s, you can totally imagine these designs are from [just] yesterday." This may explain why the beach house would look so at ease amid both the Deco structures that were built when Perriand's career was taking off and the contemporary buildings designed by today's world-class architects in Miami.

When it was conceived, *La Maison au bord de l'eau* was way ahead of its time. Winning second place in the competition, the house was designed as a low-cost, high-design pre-fabricated holiday home for the masses. Laying the groundwork for the now commonplace notion of "design for all," it was emblematic of an egalitarian approach to design that reflected the leftist leanings Perriand and other culture creators shared as the Art Deco era unfolded before World War II. "Charlotte was a real activist on a political level, and she really came to this [point of view] along with her friends [Pablo] Picasso and [Fernand] Léger," says Jacques



FROM TOP: A model of *La Maison au bord de l'eau*, with a view from the bedroom looking out on the terrace; Charlotte Perriand with Le Corbusier.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Rendering of the finished house as seen from the beach. Originally designed in 1934, the building was crafted in a workshop in Milan and shipped to Miami, where it will be on display during Design Miami.



FROM TOP: A view of the terrace. Envisioned as a “holiday home for the masses,” the eco-friendly structure is all clean lines, made of iroko and okoume hardwoods and glass set on a stainless steel frame; Perriand on holiday in the Balears.

Perriand believed that better design could create a better society and developed her functional living environments to give life to this idea.

Barsac, who is married to Pernette Perriand-Barsac and has authored several books on Charlotte Perriand and her work. “The house is directly inspired by her own experience of holiday and leisure,” adds Barsac, who sees the structure and its accessible simplicity as “totally in sync with Charlotte Perriand, with what she envisioned, and it is totally a reflection of who she was.”

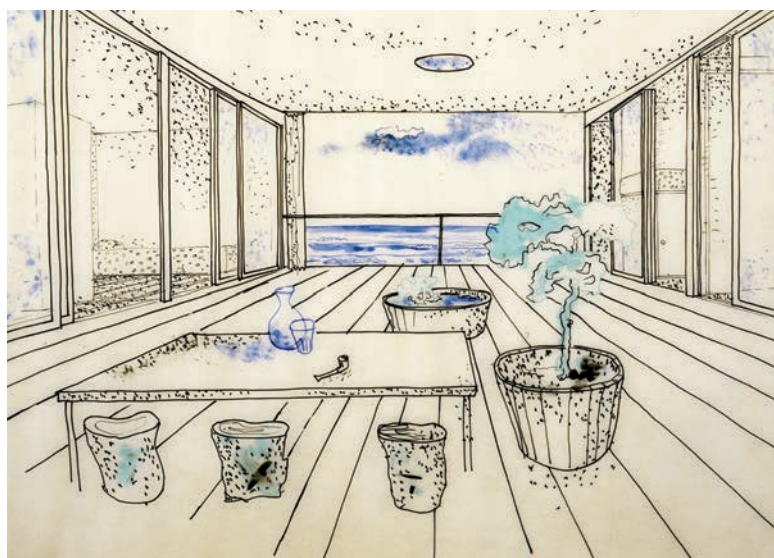
Meticulously crafted in a workshop outside Milan, *La Maison au bord de l'eau* was created in keeping with Perriand’s original plans, under the guidance of her daughter, Pernette, then deconstructed and shipped to Miami, where it was rebuilt and will be on display for design aficionados to enjoy—and available for a prospective collector to acquire from December 3 to 8 as a Design Miami satellite. Adapted only to meet current American building codes for accessibility and energy efficiency, it is made of iroko and okoume hardwoods and glass set on a stainless steel frame and enhanced with aluminum details. The house is also furnished, as Perriand would have wished, with newly fabricated leather, walnut, and oak chairs, slate tables, and light fixtures she designed between 1929 and 1942 (no original examples remain, and each new piece is individually numbered and signed).

As an architect, furniture designer, photographer, political activist, and world traveler, Perriand shattered barriers and bucked aesthetic tradition with her clean-lined designs, which have stood the test of time and have made her a modernist legend (her LC4 chaise

longue, designed with Pierre Jeanneret while working at Le Corbusier's studio, is perhaps her most iconic piece). Though Le Corbusier would surely have appreciated its integrity of form and rigorous attention to detail, *La Maison au bord de l'eau* is actually "the first building that she designed outside of the Le Corbusier office, the first project as a freelance designer and architect," Barsac says. As such, she was free to apply her skill in a way that reflected her personal take on the value of design. "The extension of the art of dwelling is the art of living—living in harmony with man's deepest drives and with his adopted or fabricated environment," Perriand wrote in an essay that appeared in *L'Art de Vivre* decades after she designed the house. Firm in her belief that better design could create a better society, she developed her functional living environments—including her design of *La Maison au bord de l'eau*—to give life to this idea.

Avant-garde in concept, the house was also designed to be eco-friendly—particularly with respect to its modest footprint and use of sustainable, high-quality natural materials. Of the four iterations of the house, which were modular in plan and intended to build one upon the other depending on the setting, Louis Vuitton chose to create the largest, though "my mother would have chosen the most local version and economical version," believes Perriand-Barsac, "because for her, it was a better version than a camping tent."

As Louis Vuitton entrenches its presence in Miami (its temporary store in the Design District, which opened last fall, will be replaced by a permanent location next fall), the company's respectful nod to Perriand's work is a boon to all who love modern design and have the opportunity to see it this season. "With art and design so essential to Louis Vuitton, we are pleased to have Charlotte Perriand's *La Maison au bord de l'eau* unveiled here in the United States," says Valérie Chapoulaud-Floquet, president and chief executive officer of Louis Vuitton Americas. "It is a natural fit to showcase the home during the important art season in Miami as a Design Miami/Design Satellite." And just as Le Corbusier did when he nurtured the work of the budding Perriand in the late 1920s, it is also heartening to see one French icon of design celebrate the work and vision of another. *La Maison au bord de l'eau* will be on display at the Raleigh Hotel and available to view for Design Miami ticket holders from December 3–8. For exact times and more information, visit miami2013.designmiami.com **OD**



FROM TOP: Aerial view of the modular home; a sketch Perriand did of the interior; the terrace looking out onto the beach. The Art Basel *maison* will be furnished with newly fabricated leather, walnut, and oak chairs, slate tables, and light fixtures that were originally designed by Perriand between 1929 and 1942.

