

Charlotte Perriand – from machinal design to craftsmanship

The change of Perriand's design perspective through time



Architectural History Thesis

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Cover images:

Chaise Longue Basculante, 1928. Photograph, in Perriand, *A Life of Creation* (Amsterdam: University Press, 2003), 14

Author unknown. *Perriand in mountains, 1939*. Photograph. Archpapers. N.d. <https://archpapers.com/alpine-shelter-charlotte-perriand/>

Abstract:

This thesis investigates the life of Charlotte Perriand. Specifically her ideas on design and architecture. At the beginning of her career being inspired by the industry and machines and later inspired by natural forms and materials.

The primary source is the autobiography of Perriand, where she has explained first-hand her relationships both professional as well as personal and her travels abroad. Additionally, research articles and biographies will be used for the literature research, as well as a documentary about her life and work.

The thesis explores the shift in design style from traditional to modernist in her early career and how she was inspired by machines to create functional and elegant furniture in the first part. The second part explores the cause and the change that her design style underwent, as she stepped away from machinal design and started spending time outdoors, working with natural materials, and making nature accessible to people through her leisure architecture. In the last part her travels and especially her time in Japan are studied and the influence she had on Japanese export. Furthermore, her later work is discussed and how it was inspired by her travels and the way she was capable to adapt to different contexts and embracing them in her designs.

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I. Introduction:

Charlotte Perriand was a woman of change because she was able to adapt her opinion on materials and design processes, as she understood more about them. During her career she learned to adapt to the circumstances and realized that all materials can be used in a design when used accurately, taking the context as well as the use of the design object into account. The most obvious change is Perriand being inspired by the industry and machines at the beginning of her career and later changing to craftsmanship and organic forms and materials. This change was even shown in the way she dressed. At the beginning of her career, she wore a self-designed necklace of chrome steel balls that showed her passion for the mechanical age and materials such as metal and glass. Later in life, she exchanged this metal necklace for a shell necklace with a flower hanger, which could be interpreted as a way to demonstrate her break with the avant-garde and a symbol showing her interest in the natural materials.

This thesis will research the change that Perriand underwent during her design career from being a machine-age fanatic to using natural materials and being inspired by nature in her designs. This shift in style will be made implicit by researching several periods of her life in depth. Also, different projects that Perriand realized, such as the tubular Chaise longue basculante and its adaptations of it in natural materials will be investigated, as well as exhibitions such as *Selection, Tradition, Creation* in Tokyo and Osaka. A crucial source is the autobiography of Perriand, called *A Life of Creation*¹, which will give a firsthand insight on her experiences.

Perriand was one of the pioneers designing with materials that were inspired by machine production, such as steel and aluminium. During her career, she made a radical turn to natural materials in her work, when she designed the wooden armchair with rush seat for the 'Maison du jeune homme' in 1935. This design change developed when she spent time in Japan in the 1940's.

This thesis will research why she changed her mind and how she was inspired by the Japanese craftsmen and design. Therefore the main research question that will be answered is *how Charlotte Perriand caused change in modernist design from machinal to artisanal and what brought about this change*. To gain insight into her development and how this change came about, this thesis will investigate several periods in Perriand's life. These are the schooling of Perriand in the traditional styles of art and design and the switch to the machine-inspired design; the return to nature in her designs as well as in her private life; her time in Japan and other countries and how it influenced her design language and works later in life.

This thesis is based on literature review. The life and work of Perriand have been discussed in a variety of books and articles. Many of these sources often are written to give an overview of her life and work or focus mainly on her time working for Le Corbusier at the atelier Rue de Sèvres. Other sources concentrate on the time Perriand spent in Japan and the projects she completed there. In the time between these two periods, between 1935 and 1939, she 'rediscovered' working with natural materials. As previously mentioned, this started with the design of a wooden and rush armchair and continued with designs like the Hexagonal free-form table made of pine in 1938. This time period, in which she started designing with natural materials, is less discussed in

¹ Charlotte Perriand, *A Life of Creation : An Autobiography*. (New York: Monacelli Press, 2003)

literature and not yet investigated in depth. There is literature about the change from traditional arts of the beginning of the century to the modern design with modern 'new' materials. Less literature has discussed the change of materials that happened when she 'discovered' nature before going to Japan as well as the lessons that she learned in Japan, that influenced her design choices in her later career. Furthermore, there is not yet research that combined the questions of how the change between these periods came to be and how they influenced each other. These topics will be investigated in this research.

In this historical writing, primary and secondary literature is used. Besides Perriand's autobiography her notebooks will give more insight and photos taken by her and of her will be analyzed. The secondary literature that will be used are biographies, articles and a documentary.

This thesis, following the introduction is divided into four chapters. These follow the life of Perriand in chronological order and divide her life into different periods. Chapter two focuses on the period in which Perriand was inspired by machinal design and worked at the Rue de Sèvres. This chapter is introduced by explaining her life and schooling, which was in the traditional arts of that time. It describes the change that she underwent by using new materials in her designs that showed that she belonged to the modernist movement. It continues to describe the projects that she did independently and for the atelier and her work at the UAM.

The third chapter describes how Perriand started to focus more on natural materials and nature as a whole, starting to use it as an inspiration for her designs. It investigates the projects that she did with this new outlook on materials and how this outlook was influenced.

In the fourth chapter the period is researched that Perriand spent abroad, especially her time in Japan. This chapter will explain why she went to Japan and how that time influenced her work and life as well as the effect she had on Japanese design at that time. Afterwards, the influences will be discussed that her time abroad had on her later work and life.

Chapter five gives a conclusion of this thesis and will answer the main questions and discussion points. A summary statement will be given and the value of this investigation on architecture in general will be discussed.

II. Machine-inspired design 1928-1935

Schooling and changing design style 1921-1927

Perriand was schooled at the Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs (UCAD) in Paris until 1925. There she was taught the Art Deco style and supervised by designer and architect Henri Rapin and educated in different disciplines such as furniture drawing, bookbinding, wood sculpturing and history. Additionally, Perriand followed evening lectures by Maurice Dufresne², who was co-founder of the Societe des artistes decorateurs, of which later Perriand was a member until she left to cofound the UAM. He also was the vice president of the Salon d'Automne, where Perriand was a member since 1929.

The school taught her strict parameters of designing, which gradually started changing into a personal, more 'modern' design style. For instance, the chair she sketched in 1922 in her second year, had a traditional design as it was made from wood and had subtle curves, which was the style taught to her at the UCAD. Her style started changing in 1926 when she got married to Percy Kilner Scholefield an Englishman and moved to an old photographers studio at the Place Saint-Sulpice in Paris. Her marriage only lasted a few years, but for Perriand it was the 'only way for the chrysalis [she] was to turn into a butterfly, and a butterfly is a creature that takes flight.'³ In that year she had an exhibition at the Salon des Artistes Décorateurs in Paris, where the furniture was an example of craftsmanship but in contrast, she used wallpaper that indicated mass production.⁴

Later that year she stopped associating herself with the traditional use of wood, textiles and wallpaper. She became a part of the modernist movement, a movement that opposed ornamentation, embraced industrial life that came from industrialization and was less traditional than previous styles. Perriand was right at the centre of the action. 'I discovered English literature, Cocteau's films, and Louis Armstrong. I learned the Charleston.'⁵ She got a short haircut and started wearing a necklace made of chromed copper balls, to show that she belonged to the machine age and was completely immersed in it. She was proud to be part of the Modern Movement and what it achieved. With this movement embracing the industrialization a very big part of the people living in Europe and America got the chance and the means to lead a better life⁶ with not only better working hours in general, but also innovations that enabled them to have more free time and designs in furniture and interior that enabled them to live a more practical life and have better health and hygiene.

She took her inspiration for her designs from the expensive cars that she watched on the Champs-Élysées and the technical details that were shown at the Paris automobile show⁷ and started designing new furniture for her apartment, the centre of attention being a nickel-plated cocktail bar with an aluminium countertop where she could entertain her friends. This *Bar sous le toit* was presented at the Salon d'Automne in 1927 and got a lot of attention from the media for its materials as well as the fact that Perriand had incorporated sound into her design by placing a gramophone in the ceiling of the bar.⁸

² Perriand, 2003, 17.

³ Ibid, 20.

⁴ Mary Caroline McLeod, Charlotte Perriand, Roger Aujame, Architectural League of New York, *Charlotte Perriand : An Art of Living*. (New York: H.N. Abrams, in association with the Architectural League of New York, 2003), 25.

⁵ Perriand, 2003, 21.

⁶ Penny Sparke, *A Century of Design : Design Pioneers of the 20th Century*. (London: Beazley 1998), 6.

⁷ Perriand, 2003, 21.

⁸ McLeod, 2003, 30.

During this time of change Perriand discovered the writings of Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture* (1923) and *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* (1925), where he made fun of the use of expensive materials and methods and explained that there was no need to use natural materials such as wood, as there was steel available.⁹ This was precisely in line with the interests of Perriand and therefore she decided she wanted to work for Le Corbusier.

In October of 1927, she went to the atelier at the Rue de Sèvres to offer her services to Le Corbusier. As she describes in her autobiography, he took a short look at the drawings that she had with her and said: 'We don't embroider cushions here.'¹⁰ Perriand did not give up that easily and invited him to her exhibition of the *Bar sous le toit* (Figure 1). Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret did visit the exposition at the Salon d'Automne the next day and noticed that this kind of interior architecture was what they were looking for at the atelier. Until then, the interiors of their designs were very artisanal and did not fit the free floor space that the atelier advocated for. This was because these modern ideas had not yet been developed in furniture and interior designs.¹¹ When he saw the designs that Perriand had made at the Salon d'Automne, Le Corbusier decided to hire Perriand as 'associate in charge of interior equipment' for his atelier, seeing that his prejudice of her only being able to embroider cushions was not true.

Early work until 1929

Perriand's first project at the Rue de Sèvres was the design of furniture that could be used in the architectural designs of the atelier. Le Corbusier had a clear opinion about furniture, which should be standardized, functional and efficient as well as versatile and anonymous. As McLeod describes in the book *Charlotte Perriand: an art of living*¹², Le Corbusier had designed the furniture himself in previous designs and most of it was custom made, but as the demand for his designs got bigger he couldn't design all the furniture himself and made many efforts to get his furniture designs mass-produced. The designs of the Bauhaus, a German school that combined architecture, design, crafts and fine arts, were being produced by the German Standard-Möbel firm, however, France did not have a similar firm to fabricate the designs of the atelier. Therefore Le Corbusier decided that the atelier had to produce them.

The first assignment that Perriand got for the atelier was the redesign of the interior for the gallery space of the Villa La Roche in Paris and designing furniture pieces for other interiors. Le Corbusier, Jeanneret and Perriand decided on designing different kinds of sitting furniture based on posture sketches that Le Corbusier made and Perriand copied with wooden mannequins. She studied these postures and based on them made five designs that differed completely from each other. Jeanneret and Perriand worked out the details of the chairs and Perriand asked the craftsman she always worked together with to make the prototypes. For one of the designs, the *Chaise longue basculante* (Figure 2), she decided to use airplane tubes as base of the chair.¹³ When they were ready she invited them to her studio and surprised them with the prototypes. As she writes in *A life of creation*,¹⁴ after a few murmurs of approval Le Corbusier said: 'They're delightful.' The designs that she had made had a structure of tubular steel, which was very innovative for that time. This

⁹ Ibid, 30.

¹⁰ Perriand, 2003, 23.

¹¹ Carmen Espejel, *Women Architects in the Modern Movement*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018), 203.

¹² Mary McLeod is a professor at Columbia University, researching modern architecture and focusing on Le Corbusier. McLeod, 2003, 37.

¹³ Jacques Barsac, Sébastien Cherruet, Charlotte Perriand et al. *Charlotte Perriand : Inventing a New World*. (Paris, France: Éditions Gallimard, 2019), 58

¹⁴ Perriand, 2003, 31.

tubular steel design, the *Wassily Chair* was first introduced by Marcel Breuer, a designer of the Bauhaus, in 1925, but steel had not been used that way in France.

Parallel to working at the atelier, she designed a dining room independently in 1928. The space was functional and elegant, the furniture could be easily cleaned and clutter was minimized. The ideas behind her designs could be traced back to an experience that she had as a young girl when she had an operation to remove her appendix. She felt very much at ease in her hospital room, where there was no clutter and the furniture was simple and practical. This minimalist architecture appealed her and she writes in her autobiography, after returning home to her parents' house 'the clutter of furniture and objects accosted [her] and [she] began to cry.'¹⁵

In April of 1929 Perriand wrote an essay, entitled 'Wood or Metal?'¹⁶ (Figure 3) in the British magazine *The Studio*. This was in reaction to a critique on the use of metal in furniture by John Gloag¹⁷ in the same magazine a few months earlier. In this essay, she compares metal in furniture to cement in architecture and calls it a revolution and a material superior to natural materials. She states that the properties of metal are better than those of wood and that wood is prone to decay. In contrast, metal can be treated with protection to stay in good shape. Additionally, she proposes the use of metal in combination with other materials like leather, rubber, marble and vegetable substances, which can lead to new 'aesthetic effects.' In the essay, she also mentions that a modern mentality suggests coloured paint, red and blue as well as transparent materials. With this essay, Perriand manifests her preference for machinal materials over what she calls 'vegetable substances' and demonstrates this strong opinion which would change later in her career.

Perriand had worked on the interior design of a dwelling with Le Corbusier and Jeanneret, which was exhibited at the Salon d'Automne of 1929 *Un équipement intérieur d'une habitation*. The designs that were exhibited were the *Chaise longue basculante*, the *Fauteuil dossier basculant* and the *Fauteuil grand confort*, which they had designed in 1928. Additionally, the *Swivel chair* that Perriand had designed independently was added to the space. Furthermore, Perriand had developed shelves, a table made of chromed metal and glass, as well as a kitchen and bedroom.¹⁸ The costs of this exhibition, were covered by Thonet, which was the world's largest furniture manufacturer in 1921 and was known for its practical, light furniture made from bentwood as well as the upcoming furniture style made from tubular steel. Thonet therefore got the rights to produce the furniture that was exhibited. As written by Tim Benton in *The Modern Life* by McGuirk et al.,¹⁹ only few of the furniture pieces were sold, which was partly a consequence of the Wall Street Crash. The furniture presented at the Salon d'Automne exhibition was the last collaborative furniture project that Perriand did with Le Corbusier and Jeanneret. It presents, as Mary McLeod²⁰ writes 'a bohemian casualness and aristocratic ease.'

Union des Artistes Modernes (UAM)

Perriand left the *Societe des Artistes Décorateurs* in 1929 because she did not agree with the design style that they represented. Back then the public wanted furniture that was inspired by the furniture of royals and noblemen. The furniture that the modernists were producing was seen as hospital-furniture. Together with other designers she founded the Union des Artistes Modernes (UAM) in 1930. The group of founders, among whom were Perriand, René Herbst and Robert Mallet-Stevens,

¹⁵ Perriand, 2003, 12

¹⁶ Charlotte Perriand, "Wood or Metal?," *The Studio* 97, April 1929, pp.278-279, AChP

¹⁷ John Gloag, Unknown title, *The Studio*, January 1929.

¹⁸ Barsac et al., 2019, 56–59.

¹⁹ Justin McGuirk, Charlotte Perriand. *Charlotte Perriand : The Modern Life*. (London: Design Museum, 2021), 26.

²⁰ McLeod, 2003, 62.

called themselves l' Union and wanted to step back from the decorative movement and focus on modernist ideas like the structure, function and new materials and techniques. They had previously exhibited at the Salon des Artistes Décorateurs in 1928, with an interdisciplinary section of different display areas that together formed a whole where they were promoting new design solutions. The next year they wanted to join the exhibition as a group again but were turned down by the committee. As a consequence, they decided not to exhibit there and to leave the *Societe des Artistes Décorateurs*. The group was joined by many architects and designers, such as Le Corbusier, Jeanneret and Eileen Gray.²¹ Perriand had invested a lot of energy into the founding of the UAM but as she writes 'was too sucked into the Le Corbusier galaxy to be fully involved',²² which meant that although she was one of the founders she was never in the directing committee. A movement that derived from the UAM in 1949 was the *Formes Utiles*, to the foundation of which Perriand contributed. This movement wanted to promote everyday objects, handmade or machine-produced, to the general public. This was a new development in France that was called 'industrial aesthetics' and later took on the term 'design.'²³

It is no surprise that Perriand was drawn to the modern movement, as she was inclined to functional design without ornamentation from an early age. Industrialization was just beginning and she belonged to the group of people that embraced it. For Perriand this meant being inspired by the materials and details that were used in production processes and even using automobile or airplane parts in her designs. She was the perfect addition to the Atelier Rue de Sèvres, as her designs and design ideals fit perfectly into the free floor architecture that the atelier created. Perriand disagreed so much with the traditional design practices that she even left the French society of interior architects and furniture designers and founded the UAM with a group of designers that agreed with her. Perriand had to turn her back on traditional design that used natural materials to create ornamented furniture, to develop new design ideals and find a style that suited her which was elegant, functional and could be produced for the masses.

²¹ René, Herbst, *Union des artistes modernes paris 1930-1955: 25 années u.a.m.* (Paris: Éditions du Salon des Arts Ménagers, 1956).

²² Perriand, 2003, 34.

²³ Barsac et al., 2019, 246.

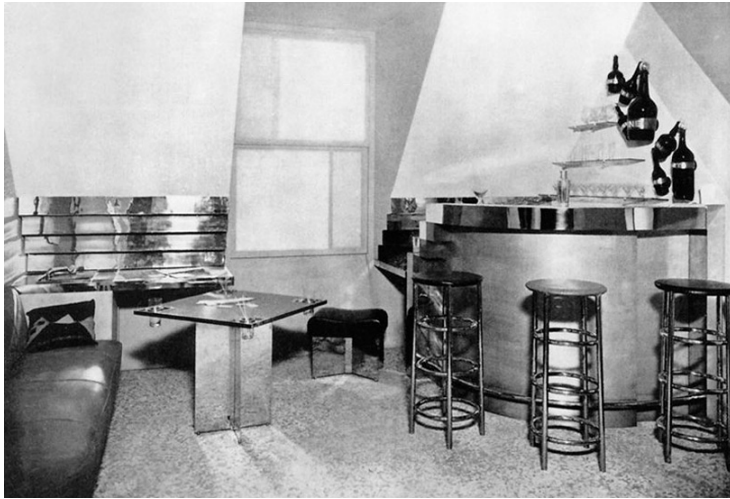


Fig 1 Bar sous le toit, 1927. Photograph, in Perrand, A Life of Creation (Amsterdam: University Press, 2003), 6



Fig 2 Chaise Longue Basculante, 1928. Photograph, in Perriand, A Life of Creation (Amsterdam: University Press, 2003), 14

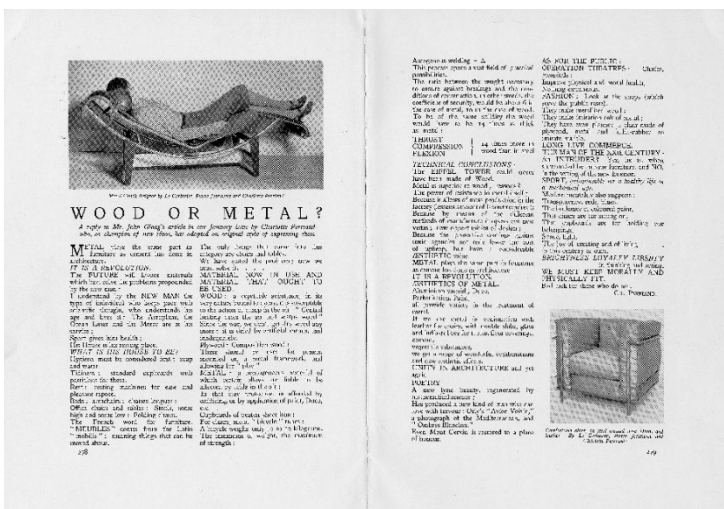


Fig 3 'Wood or Metal?', published in The Studio, 97 (April 1929)

III. Return to nature in design and private life 1935-1939

Stock Market Crash

The Stock Market Crash in 1929 led to an economic crisis in the world and caused unemployment, bankruptcy and the rise of fascism in Russia, Spain, Italy and Germany. These disasters led designers of the time to think about how to make a 'better world' and rethink their way of designing. Before, machines had been the symbol of freedom from tedious manual labour, but the crash changed all this. As they had caused the first crisis of modern time, many designers were searching for new inspiration²⁴. Machines were no longer seen as the ultimate solution but as the cause of the enormous financial crisis. This made many designers look for new inspiration. Perriand found it in nature and as we can see later, she was not the only one.

During the years of the great depression, which in France lasted from about 1931 until the end of the decade, there was intense political unrest²⁵. The followers of the Popular Front held marches and workers went on strikes and factory sit-ins. When the government of France became Socialist in 1936, the workweek was shortened to 40 hours and holidays and weekends were introduced, which meant people had time off. Also, workers formed unions to bargain for working circumstances and fair pay²⁶. From that moment on, the workers could leave the city and spend more time in nature. As Perriand writes: 'Parisians learned what it was like to sit on fresh grass, see apple and cherry trees, and gaze on cornflowers and poppies in wheat fields. They seized hold of nature's gift.'²⁷

Spending time outdoors

Just like the rest of the Parisians this meant that Perriand could spend more time outdoors. She often drove to beaches in Normandy with Pierre Jeanneret and her good friend Fernand Léger, which she had met at the reception of the German Embassy in 1930 and who was her neighbour in Montparnasse. There they spent their weekends outdoors and would collect lots of objects laying on the beaches. 'We would fill our backpacks with treasures: pebbles, bits of shoes, lumps of wood riddled with holes, horsehair brushes-all smoothed and ennobled by the sea.'²⁸ When they were not at the beach on the weekend, they explored industrial areas with lots of different materials and forms to see or taking long hikes in the forests at Fontainebleau. These treasures that they found outdoors, which they called 'objects of poetic reaction',²⁹ were given care, but not altered and afterwards photographed. They called this *art brut*. Moreover, they added them to the exhibitions of their interiors, as they evoked emotions and added to the atmosphere in the space.

Perriand practised many sports such as swimming, caving and canoeing. She was especially drawn to the mountains, as she spent a lot of time in the Savoy as a child, the region her father was from. After her divorce, her mother gave her a railway pass and a pair of skis. This enabled her to travel to the mountains frequently, where she slept in a tent in the summers and mountain refuges

²⁴ *Charlotte Perriand- Pionier van de Levenskunst*, directed by Stephane Ghez (ARTE France, CinéTévé), 16:34 to 17:08. https://www.npostart.nl/close-up/23-05-2020/AT_2141517

²⁵ Perriand, 2003, 79.

²⁶ Ibid, 80.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, 97.

²⁹ Barsac et al., 2019, 104.

in the winter. She took her friends, designers who worked with her at the atelier, such as Junzō Sakakura, Pierre Jeanneret, František Sammer and Edmond Wanner with her as well.

Earlier in her career, she used indoor plants in her designs, which stood out, as they often were the only vegetable substances in her designs. Examples are her Saint-Sulpice apartment in 1927, where she had a vase with flowers and two cacti as decoration for the space and the 1928 exposition of the Saint-Sulpice apartment with several potted trees and vases with flowers throughout the space. As Penny Sparkle³⁰ interprets, these house plants could be seen as having a deeper meaning than just being decorations. They represent bringing live nature indoors and therefore expressing a certain continuity with the past.

Adapting to changes

The first time Perriand used wood in an interior design since her time at the UCAD was in the *Maison du jeune homme* (Figure 4), which was displayed at the Exposition Universelle in Brussels, 1935³¹. Together with her Swivel Chair she displayed a chair, that reminded of the *Chaise à dossier basculant*, but was made of wood and straw and had curved forms. The former representing industrial manufacture and the latter representing craftsmanship and the use of natural materials and forms that ‘called out to be caressed.’³² Perriand had this chair made by craftsmen that she knew from years earlier the result was inexpensive and comfortable. This change surprised her modernist colleagues and she got critiqued for it, among others by Pierre Chareau who said that she was ‘betraying the moderns.’³³ The two chairs that were displayed, so different in production, material and style, could be seen as the turning point, which led to a shift to the natural materials.

One of the reasons that Perriand started using more natural materials and craftsmanship for production was that she was eager to produce furniture for the average consumer. Only very few of the machine inspired furnishings were produced and the costs for producing them when they were not industrially produced were too high, therefore only being sold to the wealthy. Therefore she had to come up with a cheaper solution, which was the use of materials, such as untreated wood, instead of steel or leather.

A designer that designed with natural materials and whose designs received more positive critique³⁴ was Ida Falkenberg-Liefrinck who was inspired by the material rattan at the beginning of the 1930s. This material was uncommon for a European designer as it is made from plants that mostly grow in Indonesia. Falkenberg-Liefrinck probably had access to it, as Indonesia was a Dutch colony until 1949. She did not like the designs that were being made of that material up until then, as they were very traditional and the material was not being used for its great constructive traits. Therefore she decided to make her designs, where she only used material where it was constructively necessary.³⁵ Perriand and Falkenberg-Liefrinck possibly inspired each other, as they were both members of CIAM and therefore probably knew of each other’s work.

After working with a large variety of materials and despite having declared her preference for metal in 1929, Perriand had arrived at the insight that there are no good or bad materials but that a concept depended on many conditions, for example materials, place, techniques and

³⁰ McGuirk et al., 2021, 131.

³¹ Ibid, 213.

³² Perriand, 2003, 70.

³³ McGuirk et al., 2021, 213.

³⁴ Het Nieuwe Instituut, “Falkenberg-Liefrinck, Ida,” Het Nieuwe Instituut, <https://zoeken.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/nl/personen/detail/556dbcf1-9c5b-5fdc-986c-9206038b0f90>

³⁵ Het Nieuwe Instituut, “Falkenberg-Liefrinck, Ida.” <https://zoeken.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/nl/personen/detail/556dbcf1-9c5b-5fdc-986c-9206038b0f90>

traditions as well as the way of manufacturing and distributing.³⁶ This was useful for her, as she could therefore adapt to the circumstances of any design assignment. She liked to play with the contrast of metal and wood and culture and nature, which she demonstrated in more of her designs such as the exhibition at the Salon d'Automne of 1929, where she used pony skin to cover a metal armchair and wildcat fur to place on the bed.

Only very few of the machine inspired furnishings were produced and the costs for producing them when they were not industrially produced were too high, therefore only being sold to the wealthy. As Perriand was eager to produce furniture for the average consumer, she had to come up with a cheaper solution, which was the use of cheaper materials, such as untreated wood, instead of steel or leather. However, this was not the only way that she rethought her designs.

Leisure architecture

As the demand for leisure architecture grew, Perriand started designing inexpensive leisure housing, which was related to the leftist campaigns for holidays. Some of them could even be built affordably by the users themselves. The first two designs were the Maison de week-end and the Maison au bord de l'eau, which she designed in 1934. The Maison au bord de l'eau was inspired by the fisherman's houses in the area of Arcachon Bay. It consisted different elements that could be industrially produced and be set up into a flexible house, which was delivered in a mounting box.³⁷ Additionally she designed two mountain refuges, the bivouac shelter and the barrel shelter, which could both be easily assembled by the climbers.

In 1937 Perriand designed another leisure cabin the Tritanon for the competition of *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* together with Pierre Jeanneret. For this project the proportions of a bed were taken as the base measurements of the cabin. The amount of residents in the cabin determines how many huts are placed next to each other, to create a bigger living space.³⁸ Sliding partitions separate the modular living spaces from each other and these modular pieces could be easily assembled and disassembled. Earlier Perriand had also worked with sliding elements in the plans of Le Corbusier's design for the Radiant City in 1930. There the bedrooms of the children were separated by sliding doors, to give privacy when they were closed and lots of room for playing when they were open. This allowed for more flexible living space and the optimal use of the apartment. As it would turn out, she would later spend time in Japan, where the concept of sliding partitions belonged to the traditional architecture.

Natural and free form furniture

Perriand was also interested in the free form. These forms derived from nature and the objects that she found during her walks along the beach. She started experimenting with asymmetrical forms and wood around 1937 and discovered that a free form table, with sides of different lengths, was optimal for accommodating more people comfortably instead of a rectangular table.

In 1938 she designed her 'free form' tables (Figure 5) placing only three round legs under the tabletop, which provided more space for chairs at the table. The table had space for seven guests

³⁶ Perriand, 2003, 70.

³⁷ Starlight Vattano, Giorgia Gaeta. "The Minimum House Designs of Pioneer Modernists Eileen Gray and Charlotte Perriand." *Athens Journal of Architecture* 2 (2): 151–68. (2016): 13, <https://doi.org/10.30958/aja.2-2-4>.

³⁸ Georgia Ntelmekoura, Riusech Quetglas, Francisco José, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya "Analysis of the Mountain Shelters and Weekend Huts by Charlotte Perriand." Dissertation, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, (2008): 17, <https://upcommons.upc.edu/bitstream/handle/2099.1/5688/thesis-texts.Ch.Perriand.pdf?sequence=6>

that could face each other in conversation, but it was more efficient in space than a round table. All the tables of the free form series were handcrafted by carpenters and made from pine wood. Perriand describes that she wanted to make the tabletop 'smooth and enticingly voluptuous', and as if the table were a body with soft and delicate skin she states that 'Wood is made for caressing and can be as soft as a woman's thighs.'³⁹

Another free form design she made in 1938 was the Boomerang desk. This form came about as she studied the needs of the user, who was Jean-Richard Bloch, an editor of the *Ce soir* newspaper.⁴⁰ In his group editorial meetings the members of his team sat around the outside of the table. By turning in his chair, he could address every individual, without creating a hierarchic atmosphere. She continued the design of her free form tables throughout her career.

The Stock Market Crash made clear that industrial production was not the ultimate solution. Before the crisis, she had complete faith in machines and the industrial process, but the crisis led her to step away from the idea that all the furniture had to be produced industrially to be of good quality and cheap. Now that she had discovered her design style, she learned that elegant and functional furniture could not only be made with machinal materials but that natural materials could achieve the same and even adding a sensual aspect. Perriand was an outdoor person, who loved to be in nature. As the rest of the population started to spend more time in nature when holidays and weekends were introduced, Perriand started designing leisure cabins that used technical solutions to be functional to make vacationing outdoors accessible. Therefore nature was brought to people by furniture made of natural materials using modernist ideas such as simplicity, cleanness, functionality and good technique and at the same time, people were brought to nature through simple and functional architecture.

³⁹ Perriand, 2003, 106.

⁴⁰ Barsac et al., 2019, 200.

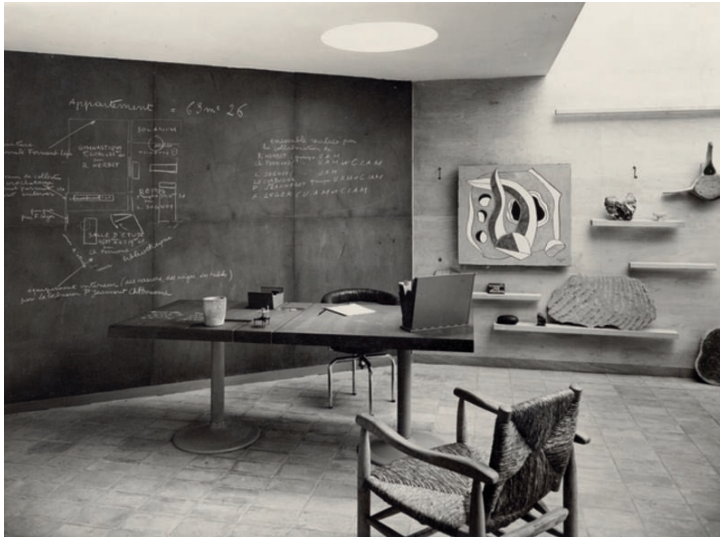


Fig 4 La Maison du Jeune Homme, Brussels International Exhibition, 1935. Photograph, in Perriand, A Life of Creation (Amsterdam: University Press, 2003), 28



Fig 5 Free Form table in her studio in Montparnasse, 1938. Photograph, in Perriand, A Life of Creation (Amsterdam: University Press, 2003), 28

IV. Time abroad and later work

Japan-Traveling, learning and discovering

In February of 1940, amid the wartime that had begun a few months earlier in Europe Perriand received a message from Japan. It was from her friend Sakakura, whom she had collaborated with at the Atelier de Sèvres. The letter contained an invitation to work with the Japanese Trade Ministry as a decorative art design consultant. As the situation was unstable around her, she was hesitating about accepting the offer, but her friend Léger told her that this could be her only chance. Already as a child, she had dreamed of travelling far away. 'I gazed at the snowy Maurienne peaks and told myself: 'One day I'll go up there.' To me they seemed as inaccessible as China, or the moon.'⁴¹ The following invitation came on March 13. It was a rolled-up, 30-meter long letter made of very thin Japanese paper, which was covered with India-ink drawings and signed with greetings from Sakakura and others. The doubts that Perriand had had before were gone. '[She] couldn't say no'⁴² and decided to leave for Japan in June of 1940.

Perriand was not the first European designer to be invited to Japan as design consultant. Bruno Taut, a German architect and planner went to Japan already in 1933 to give lectures there. Both designers were social activists and sympathized with socialists and communists. For Taut especially⁴³, but also for Perriand, the stay in Japan was therefore also a choice that was made to escape the political situation in Europe and the possible problems that they could encounter due to their political views.⁴⁴

Perriand's sailboat left in Marseilles and went around Gibraltar to Lisbon, then Cape Town and Durban. Afterwards, they sailed to Southeast Asia, Bombay and Singapore, then to Hong Kong, Shanghai and finally reached Kobe on August 21st. There she was welcomed by Sakakura who 'helped [her] with her first steps in his native land.'⁴⁵ She soon learned, that the Japanese have different habits that are linked to theism and could be misinterpreted by foreigners as hysterical. Therefore she tried to be more open-minded and learn about their unique way of living. Several reasons led the Japanese government to want to invite a western designer to Japan to discover and explain how the Japanese crafts could best be used and exported. The economy of Japan was depressed, the number of trading partners that wanted to stay in business with Japan was declining because of the political situation and the agriculture was suffering. These circumstances led to a demand for crafts that could be used for trade. The aim was to use traditional Japanese crafts and materials to produce western style products.⁴⁶ She was accompanied by an interpreter, Mrs Makami and an industrial art student, Sori Yanagi. His father was the founder of the *mingei* movement, Soetsu Yanagi. Mingei translates as 'folk crafts' and the movement tried to make a differentiation between ordinary crafts and the way of design at that time in Japan, which was influenced by the industrialization and the westernization that was happening. Vernacular objects were admired and seen as a cure to the negative effects of

⁴¹ Perriand, 2003, 14.

⁴² Ibid, 121.

⁴³ After the Reichstag fire in Berlin, Bruno Taut was warned that the Nazis had blacklisted him. He accepted the offer to go to Japan for three months, but stayed there for three years, as a return to Nazi-Germany was too big of a risk.

⁴⁴ Rosemarie Haag Bletter, "Strangers in a Strange Land : Bruno Taut and Charlotte Perriand As Design Consultants in Japan," *West 86th Volume*, 27 (2021)

⁴⁵ Perriand, 2003, 137.

⁴⁶ Barsac et al., 2019, 273.

industrialism. Yanagi believed that anonymous historical objects would always surpass objects that could be mass-produced.⁴⁷ Perriand visited the Japan Folk Crafts museum and the house where Yanagi lived in September of 1940. The museum contained a collection of everyday objects and was built by Yanagi himself in the synthesis of traditional Japanese, Traditional Korean and Western architecture. Perriand appreciated the definition of the *mingei* Folk Crafts of Yanagi, which is ‘oneness of use and beauty’ and the ‘unification of popularity, cheapness and beauty.’⁴⁸ She agreed that in design a human touch was important to give life to the product and give it a personality. For example, the kettles by Morioka have bumps on them, that give a special sound to the water in it.⁴⁹ Nevertheless Yanagi and Perriand had a completely different opinion on mass production. Yanagi was very much against mass production, which according to him and his group, could not contain beauty. Perriand on the other hand was still optimistic about mass production.

Sakakura had given Perriand the *Book of Tea* by Okakura Kakuzō in Paris so she could get to know the Japanese customs and learn about the Philosophy of Tea. A passage from the book talks about hygiene and simplicity that this philosophy is about. ‘The Philosophy of Tea is not mere aestheticism [...]. It is hygiene, for it enforces cleanliness; it shows comfort in simplicity rather than in the complex and costly.’⁵⁰ This book of tea was important for Perriand, as she was able to understand the Japanese culture better through this book. She used it as inspiration for design projects and it served as a guideline for certain spaces, for example for the Teahouse at the Japanese Cultural festival of 1993.

Perriand ‘discovered’ the tatami and how flexible its use of was throughout all types of Japanese architecture. The tatami is a mat that is used as floor covering and comes in standard sizes that are twice as long as wide and made from woven rush. It was used everywhere from peasant dwellings to hotels. The difference between these floors was in the quality of the tatami mats themselves and in the frequency in which they were replaced. This standardization on which architecture in Japan was based, was a principle that some designers in Europe were using in their designs. One example was the Modulor of Le Corbusier. Perriand had also experimented with a standard measurement during her Tritianon project. As explained in the previous chapter she had used the measurement of a bed as standard and based the cabin proportions on this measurement. The tatami standard was therefore of great interest to Perriand.

A building that stood out to Perriand and that approached ‘with something like religious awe’⁵¹, was the imperial villa of Katsura in Kyoto. It has a wooden structure that supports the heavy roofs, which rest on wooden columns that have a distance of four tatami mats between each other. Between these columns, crosspieces are placed, that have runners for the sliding façade and partition panels. These are very light and can be removed to be cleaned, repaired or replaced.⁵² Perriand hoped that the Japanese architects would learn of their traditions to build contemporary houses and use their knowledge to use contemporary materials to re-create traditional methods.⁵³ Later in her career different projects were inspired by this traditional Japanese architecture.

⁴⁷ McGuirk et al., 2021, 159–160.

⁴⁸ Shoichiro Sendai. “Influence of ‘Mingei (Folk Crafts)’ on the Creative Theories of Charlotte Perriand.” *Japan Architectural Review* 4, no. 4: 548–55 (2021): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1002/2475-8876.12237>.

⁴⁹ Perriand, 2003, 146.

⁵⁰ Okakura Kakuzō. *The Book of Tea*. Champaign, Ill.: Project Gutenberg, 1997. <https://web-p-ebSCOhost-com.tudelft.idm.oclc.org/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=cf1ab760-9637-4191-a109-2d5ac6d72d1e%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=1032300&db=nlebk>

⁵¹ Perriand, 2003, 147.

⁵² *Ibid*, 148.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 149.

Examples of these projects are the Méribel chalet (1960) and the Tea House in Paris (1993) which will be discussed later.

The architectural principles that were being used in Japan were precisely what modernists in Europe were starting to discover and had been looking for. The architects of the modern movement were eager to create livable spaces that would be affordable for the lower and middle class and could be kept clean easily. One of the goals was to bring hygiene to the dwellers, which is precisely what the Philosophy of Tea, as mentioned above, talks about.

Japan- Teaching

A big part of Perriand's task in Japan was giving lectures to Japanese students and engineers. In October of 1940, she visited a decorative arts exhibition in Tokyo, where she noticed that many of the design objects were created without considering their function and by looking at European examples without knowing their use.

As is written in *Charlotte Perriand et le Japon*, by Jacques Barsac, Perriand said following at a conference in Sendai on 4 November 1940:

'All European production should not be respected prematurely. Respect it [only] in the technical sense, keep well-informed of research in European and American countries, but not in the methods resulting from decorative art. The way of life and the past of Japan is not the same as ours. Furniture in Japan does not exist, and the architecture is extremely bare compared to ours, it presents a more uniformly similar appearance [through the use of] standards. This idea is important, because it makes you begin from a clean slate, while we already have a heavy past: our styles taught in our schools, Henry II, Louis XIII, XIV, XV, XVI, etc. [...] Since 1900 we have already had several styles: 1900, 1925, 1927, 1940... The one makes the next unfashionable, that is to say fugitive style, of decoration. If you look at our production with too much respect, once the form reaches you, if it is not solidly designed, it will already be outdated.'⁵⁴

'You have to invent, search within yourself with your materials, your technique, which you will improve.'⁵⁵

Before giving her lectures she often asked to see the work that the students had produced. She noticed that they were taught the concept of decorative arts and not the adequate use of technique and that the products they were aiming to produce were made for an export market that they did not know enough of. She taught them to leave the ideas that came from the west and to stop copying western examples but to invent new designs by thinking of their traditions and their sensible way of doing. Traditional Japanese design did already have many similarities with modern architecture and this is the message that she wanted to portray.⁵⁶ She had the idea to exhibit the best of these improved designs in an exhibition that she was planning.⁵⁷

Japan- Exhibition: Tradition, Selection, Creation

Bamboo was often used in architecture and design in Japan and was often thought of as simple, clean-cut and functional and natural. In 1941 the use of imported and precious materials like iron,

⁵⁴ Jacques Barsac, *Charlotte Perriand Et Le Japon*. (Paris: Norma, 2008), 98.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 100.

⁵⁶ Barsac et al., 2019, 296.

⁵⁷ Perriand, 2003, 152.

copper, leather and rubber were prohibited for most industrial designs in Japan, due to the implementation of the metal collection law.⁵⁸ This led to a reinvention of many designs in local materials like ceramic, bamboo and wood. Many household products were redesigned with these local materials and showcased in different exhibitions. These products were called *daiyōhin*, which can be translated as ‘substitute products.’ In 1941 Perriand organized an exhibition together with Sakakura called *Tradition, Selection, Creation* (Figure 6) at the Takashimaya department store in Tokyo and Osaka. She was impressed by the many possibilities of use that bamboo had, because of its versatility. Additionally, she wanted to present other materials such as wood, fabric and lacquer and how they could be used in modern designs. The exposition showed the *Chaise longue basculante* that Perriand had designed for Le Corbusier, completely transformed from steel and leather into bamboo. Furthermore, several other pieces that she had designed during her time in Japan were shown. Perriand designed a cantilever chair for the exhibition that was based on the Paimo chair designed by the architect Alvar Aalto. Instead of the plywood that he used for it, she designed the chair in bamboo. She also presented innovative objects that were designed for export made by Japanese designers. This showed how modern designs could be made with traditional Japanese materials and craftsmanship. Additionally, she added *mingei* objects to this exhibition, for example, a Northeastern farmer’s straw cape and presented ideas as how to incorporate *mingei* straw crafts into modern design. She redesigned straw mats, inspired by the farmers straw capes as a cushion and mat set for her chairs.⁵⁹ This exhibition was a perfect example of handmade modernism and the synthesis of traditional Japanese crafts and materials with avant-garde modernism, which together developed a certain harmony.

Perriand had planned to spend two years in Japan, but as Japan was at war, she was not able to return to France. She managed to go to Indochina, which was a French colony and stayed there until 1946 when she was able to return to France.

Other time spent abroad and take-aways

Apart from her time spent in Japan Perriand spent more time abroad. Often these were short travels for conferences, exhibitions and design projects, but some countries she visited more frequently or for a longer period namely Indochina and Brazil.

Perriand spent four years in Indochina from 1943 to 1946, after having spent two years in Japan. Indochina was a French colony at that time, consisting of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. This time was not planned but turned out to be inevitable because France was at war with Japan. She asked for refuge in Indochina and the director of Economic Affairs of the colony, Jacques Martin, invited her to work there as an ‘Inspector of Applied Arts’ to organize the crafts. She spent most of her time in Vietnam, especially Hanoi, where she studied the local traditions had an exhibition about Japanese crafts. Despite the bad conditions due to the war that was going on she took her position as advisor very seriously and helped in guiding artisans of different materials such as paper, textile, leather, lacquer and wood.⁶⁰ In Hanoi she designed a prefabricated building, the Arts and Crafts Pavilion, with woven roofing, wood and glass, which housed an exhibition space. She was responsible for the program of the exhibition and chose objects from the industry sectors that she was visiting.⁶¹ Besides these exhibitions she continued designing, for example creating a new variation of the *Chaise longue* in rattan. In Indochina, she married Jacques Martin and their daughter was born there in 1944. In 1946 she finally was able to return to France with her daughter.

⁵⁸ Barsac et al., 2019, 287.

⁵⁹ McLeod, 2003, 97.

⁶⁰ McGuirk et al., 2021, 163.

⁶¹ Barsac et al., 2019, 304.

Jacques Martin moved to Rio de Janeiro in 1962, as he had gotten the post as Air France general in Latin America. This meant that Perriand travelled there numerous times to visit him with her daughter. He had asked her to furnish their house, which she did by taking inspiration from the Brazilian nature, culture and materials. She discovered new materials like jacaranda wood, which was darker than the wood that she had worked with before. In Brazil, she met Roberto Burle Marx, whom she referred to as 'A great lord in a sensual setting.'⁶² Burle Marx was a modernist landscape architect and public urban space designer. He often used natural elements and forms in his designs and was an advocate for plant life preservation in Brazil. In the house in Brazil, Perriand placed one of his compositions in front of the entrance. Furthermore, she designed a coffee table made from jacaranda wood with a top made of rattan mesh. Not everything in the house was inspired by Brazil as she took her previous encounter with the Japanese encounter as inspiration for the lighting in the house. She used Noguchi paper lanterns, which was a Japanese technique to diffuse the light.⁶³

A return to Japan 1955

In 1954 the Japanese firm Tendo imported a machine from the United States that was able to bent plywood. This process was first used in a design by the designer Alvar Aalto, whom Perriand admired and whose designs had inspired her before. The *Paimio chair* designed by Aalto in 1931, which Perriand had used as inspiration for her bamboo cantilever chair back in 1941, was the first chair deliberately implementing the natural spring effect by using the bent plywood technique. The moulding wood technique had been a subject of experiments since the end of the 19th century and started being used for three-dimensional shapes in the 1930s. Some of the designers besides Aalto were Marcel Breuer, Charles and Ray Eames, Eero Saarinen and Arne Jacobsen, as well as Perriand.

The firm Tendo asked her to design a bent plywood chair in 1954, which she accepted enthusiastically, as she was eager to test this method. Her idea was to design a stackable chair that could be fabricated by a single piece of plywood. The inspiration for the name (*Ombre chair*) and black colour came from the Japanese bunraku theatre, where the puppeteers were dressed in black and hidden in the background. The form derived from the elegant clean line that reminded of calligraphy. These were the same principles that she used when designing the stackable *Table Air France* for her husband in 1953. This table was made from a black sheet of anodized aluminium and reminded of a sheet of folded origami.⁶⁴ The stacking principle was also taken from the Japanese tradition of furniture that is used and stacked afterwards, so that the space stays empty and can be used flexibly.

These pieces as well as other new designs among which the *Double Chaise Longue* and the *Stackable Low Lounge Chair* were presented in another exhibition of Perriand in Tokyo in 1955. This exhibition was initiated by Perriand, working together with Le Corbusier and Fernand Léger and was called *Synthesis of the Arts* (Figure 7). It reflected the dilemma that many countries like Japan and France were facing, as they were searching for the right balance between their traditions and the challenges of globalization and consumer society. The idea behind it was that industrial manufacturing techniques, art, architecture and other design sectors had to work together to design the modern dwelling.⁶⁵ The furniture pieces in the exhibition were designed by Perriand and the tapestries were made by Le Corbusier and Léger. The latter also designed the ceramics. These works came out of the exploration of French traditional artisanal knowledge and emphasized the combination of applied arts, furniture, architecture and traditional crafts.

⁶² Perriand, 2003, 286.

⁶³ Ibid, 287.

⁶⁴ Barsac et al., 2019, 336, 338.

⁶⁵ McGuirk et al., 2021, 188.

The central theme of the exhibition was the combination of the themes of tradition and innovation as well as industrial design and craftsmanship. This idea was discussed by her in the catalogue of the exhibition, where she explains that the furniture was tested for several years before being produced in large quantities in plastic or aluminium. Her interiors were completed with pieces of furniture that were produced on a smaller scale, made of natural materials. That way, Perriand writes, there is a contrast between pieces that are beautiful due to the exactness of their industrial production and craft pieces that are sensual, made of natural materials and shapes that can be caressed.⁶⁶

During her return to Japan, the fruits of the work Perriand did in 1940 were also visible, as the designer Isamu Noguchi was producing the paper lanterns in collaboration with local craftsmen and selling them abroad in the 1950s, having had success marketing them in Europe and the US.⁶⁷ This showed that during her first time in Japan Perriand had succeeded to give an impulse to Japanese designers to keep in touch with their traditional techniques and materials whilst designing and combining these with innovative ideas that could work in the west, without copying from the West.

Designing architecture

In 1960 Perriand started building a little chalet for herself in the village Méribel-les-Allures (Figure 8). The chalet had to fit into the building regulations of the ski resort and therefore confine to the traditional housing in that area, which used exposed stone and timber and a sloped roof. Therefore she decided to study the traditional architecture in the Savoye region by visiting old farms in the region and photographing the peasant houses to learn from them. For the design of the chalet, she kept the traditional structure and combined it with the idea of bringing the outside light, air and view in by using glass panels and sliding windows. The interior design is very minimal and shows off the wood and stone. Perriand also took her inspiration from Japanese architecture, as she used straw tatami mats as part of the flooring.⁶⁸

The biggest architectural project that Perriand created was the Les Arcs ski resort, which was a project split into three parts on different sites and could house a total of 30.000 guests. This project took from 1967 until 1989 to be conceived and built. The idea behind these buildings was to keep the landscape untouched for the most part. This was possible by building big buildings with a dense population instead of building many chalets distributed over the whole landscape for vacationers. The design of the buildings had to fit in the landscape, so the buildings adapt to the form of the landscape and therefore stand out less. Perriand implemented her research of the minimum dwelling, that she had begun at the Atelier Rue de Sèvres, into the development of the resort, which resulted in apartments of 30 square meters for four or five people. These had high-density programs but were well thought through to work in an optimal way.⁶⁹

For the Japanese Cultural Festival in 1993 Hiroshi Teshigahara a filmmaker, ceramist and master flower arranger was asked to illustrate the notion of cultural exchange at the UNESCO plaza in Paris. Therefore he invited Tadao Ando, Ettore Sottsass, Yae Lun Choi and Perriand to each design a tea house for the plaza. Teshigahara's principle, was to create a setting that was simple and peaceful by keeping out his surroundings. In the spirit of this principle Perriand created a space that was surrounded by a bamboo forest and therefore cut-off from the rest of Paris (Figure 9). Part of

⁶⁶ Barsac et al., 2019, 318.

⁶⁷ Mary McLeod, 2003, 113.

⁶⁸ McGuirk et al., 2021, 256.

⁶⁹ Barsac et al., 2019, 351, 163.

these bamboo rods supported a tent that covered the space and was made from Mylar polyester. The ground was filled with pebbles and above it a structure seemed to float, made from pinewood and covered with tatami mats. Furthermore the space contained an altar with a floral arrangement and hanging above it was a painting by Teshigahara with the Japanese character of 'flight.' For this concept she again took inspiration from the *Book of Tea*, that she had used during her time in Japan. The book states that the tea-room is a structure that houses a poetic impulse and Perriand wanted to create this space for people to meditate. She called the result 'harmonious, starkly beautiful, seemingly humble, but very refined.'⁷⁰ The final design was a combination of the Japanese tradition of teaism and traditional elements such as the tatami mats and the present and future represented by the Mylar tent.⁷¹

During her first time in Japan, Perriand had encountered the *mingei* movement and agreed with its followers that human touch is important to give life to a design. However, she disagreed with their view of industrial production to make furniture. As the possibilities for machinal production of furniture with different materials grew, she learned to combine both, sensual craft pieces and industrially produced pieces in her interiors and appreciate their contrast.

Perriand was impressed by the Philosophy of Tea and used its principles in her designs until the end of her life. She discovered that traditional Japanese design was very similar to modernist design, as it was based on hygiene, functionality and simplicity. As her purpose there was to advise export, her most important advice for Japanese designers and craftsmen was to be inspired by their traditional design style, materials and techniques to make innovative designs.

During her travels, she was eager to learn about local materials and traditional techniques to use them in her projects. She did this by redesigning pieces she had already designed with new materials or creating completely new designs, inspired by materials, techniques or traditions of a place. This showed her capability to adapt to the change of context from one place to another and to embrace it in her designs.

⁷⁰ Perriand, 2003, 376.

⁷¹ Barsac et al., 2019, 300.



Fig 6 Tradition, Selection, Creation exhibition, Osaka, 1941. Photograph, in Perriand, A Life of Creation (Amsterdam: University Press, 2003), 45



Fig 7 Stackable lounge chair and Shadow Chair in the background, Proposal for a Synthesis of the Arts, Tokyo, 1955. Photograph, in McGuirk, Justin, Perriand, Charlotte. Charlotte Perriand: The Modern Life, (London: The Design Museum, 2021), 197



Fig 8 Meribel Chalet, 1960. Main room on the ground floor. Photograph, in McGuirk, Justin, Perriand, Charlotte. Charlotte Perriand: The Modern Life, (London: The Design Museum, 2021), 254,255



Fig 9 Tea House in the UNESCO gardens, Paris, 1993. Photograph, in Barsac, Jacques, Cherruet, Sébastien, Perriand, Charlotte. Charlotte Perriand: Inventing A New World (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2019), 301

V. Conclusion

In the documentary *Charlotte Perriand: Pioneer in the Art of Living* by Stéphane Ghez⁷², Perriand talks in an interview about the negative reviews that she got when she made her first natural wood and straw chair design in 1935. She explains that she does not exclude anything when designing, by which she meant that every material was possible to use when designing as long as it was accurately applied and that the use of a material depended on the way that it was used in the piece, as well as the location where the piece would be used and the manner of how the piece would be used. This phrase of not excluding anything sums up the way that Perriand worked and lived and one therefore can say that she was a woman of change.

Having gone from traditional arts at the beginning of the 20th century to machine-inspired design and later being inspired by natural forms and materials she showed she could adapt to the time she was in and the necessary changes that this time required. Not only could she adapt to the time but she was also inspired by the places that she visited.

The first change from the traditional Art Deco style that she was taught at school to the machine-inspired design of the modern movement was rooted in the way that she felt about space from an early age. The elaborate designs of the decorative arts period were too much for her and she desired more minimalistic and simple spaces and furniture that were functional and elegant at the same time. She was inspired by the way tubular steel was used in furniture by the Bauhaus and advocated for the use of materials that were also used in machines at that time, as they were very innovative and ideally could be mass-produced in order to reach the general public without being expensive.

Her outlook on machinal materials changed in the 1930s. Part of this change was the stock market crash in 1929 when many people lost faith in industrial manufacturing, but apart from this Perriand was attracted to nature ever since she was younger, spending her time in the Savoie region where her grandparents lived. She learned to appreciate natural materials, their forms and properties and spent plenty of time outdoors in her free time, which inspired her and gave her many ideas for new projects. Her time abroad in Japan, Indochina and Brazil were crucial to this evolution of her design style, as she learned about new materials and techniques of using materials in design.

Her work in Japan led to Japanese designers being more successful in the export of the products that they were producing. This work was not copying the Western work anymore, but the pieces were innovative and based on the traditions and crafts of Japan. Perriand herself profited from it, as she learned about the Japanese tradition of teaism and their traditional architecture, crafts and natural materials, which inspired and were taken into her work onward.

This thesis is of value for architecture in general, as it shows how important it is for architects and designers to be open to change related to for example new techniques, materials and styles and knowing in which setting to appropriately use them. As Perriand said: Do not exclude anything!

⁷² Charlotte Perriand: Pioneer in the Art of Living, 23:34 to 23:41.

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