

Charlotte Perriand

The Modern Life

Large Print Guide



Charlotte Perriand is one of the great designers of the twentieth century. Her furniture designs have become enduring classics, and her harmonious approach to modern interiors remains influential. This is the first retrospective of her work in the UK for twenty-five years, and draws on the Charlotte Perriand Archives in Paris to shed new light on her creative process.

Born in 1903, Perriand was already being noticed as a talented designer in her early twenties. Joining the studio of the modernist architect Le Corbusier, she developed the steel-tube furniture pieces that would long bear his name alone. Elegantly radical, they would become icons of modernism. But it was when she rejected that approach, and made her love of nature central to her work, that she found her unique voice.

At the heart of Perriand's nearly seventy-year career was a desire to balance contrasting elements: craftsmanship and industrial production, urban and rural, East and West. Influenced by the sense of space in traditional Japanese interiors, she sought that openness and flexibility in her own – qualities that came to define modern living. Perriand designed at every scale, from stools to ski resorts, but above all she strove to make good design accessible to as many people as possible.

The Machine Age

‘I called it my ball-bearing necklace, a symbol of my adherence to the twentieth-century machine age. I was proud that my jewellery didn’t rival that of the Queen of England.’

Charlotte Perriand caused a stir in 1927 when she exhibited her ‘Bar sous le toit’ (Bar under the roof), designed for her own apartment in Saint-Sulpice, Paris. With its shiny metallic surfaces, it was the embodiment of the machine aesthetic. At twenty-four years old, Perriand was already being feted as a designer to watch.

Perriand dreamed of working for the modernist master Le Corbusier but, when she presented herself at his studio, he dismissed her with the line, ‘We don’t embroider cushions here.’ Nevertheless, when Le Corbusier saw the ‘Bar sous le toit’, he swiftly employed her and set her to work on a range of furniture, or what he liked to call ‘interior equipment’.

The tubular steel chairs she designed with Le Corbusier and his cousin Pierre Jeanneret became icons of modernist design. But, beyond furniture, the decade Perriand spent in Le Corbusier’s studio forged a designer with a rigorous approach to interior architecture. It was the way she balanced these principles with other influences later in her career that would make her unique.

Place Saint-Sulpice, Paris

'I showed my 'Bar sous le toit' at the Salon d'Automne in 1927, inaugurating it with all my friends. The upright Salon hadn't expected its galleries to bubble with such brazen youth.'

In 1927, in a former photographer's studio loft with vast windows and skylights, Perriand created a striking space for herself and her first husband, an Englishman called Percy Scholefield. Designed to be open-plan and multifunctional, the apartment was bold and modern, grabbing the attention of all who visited. Her inventive solutions to make the studio feel more spacious included chimney stacks covered with mirrors, and cabinets with sliding doors fitted into the sloping roof spaces. At the far end was the feature that so impressed Le Corbusier when he saw it at the 'Salon d'Automne': the 'Bar sous le toit' (Bar under the roof).

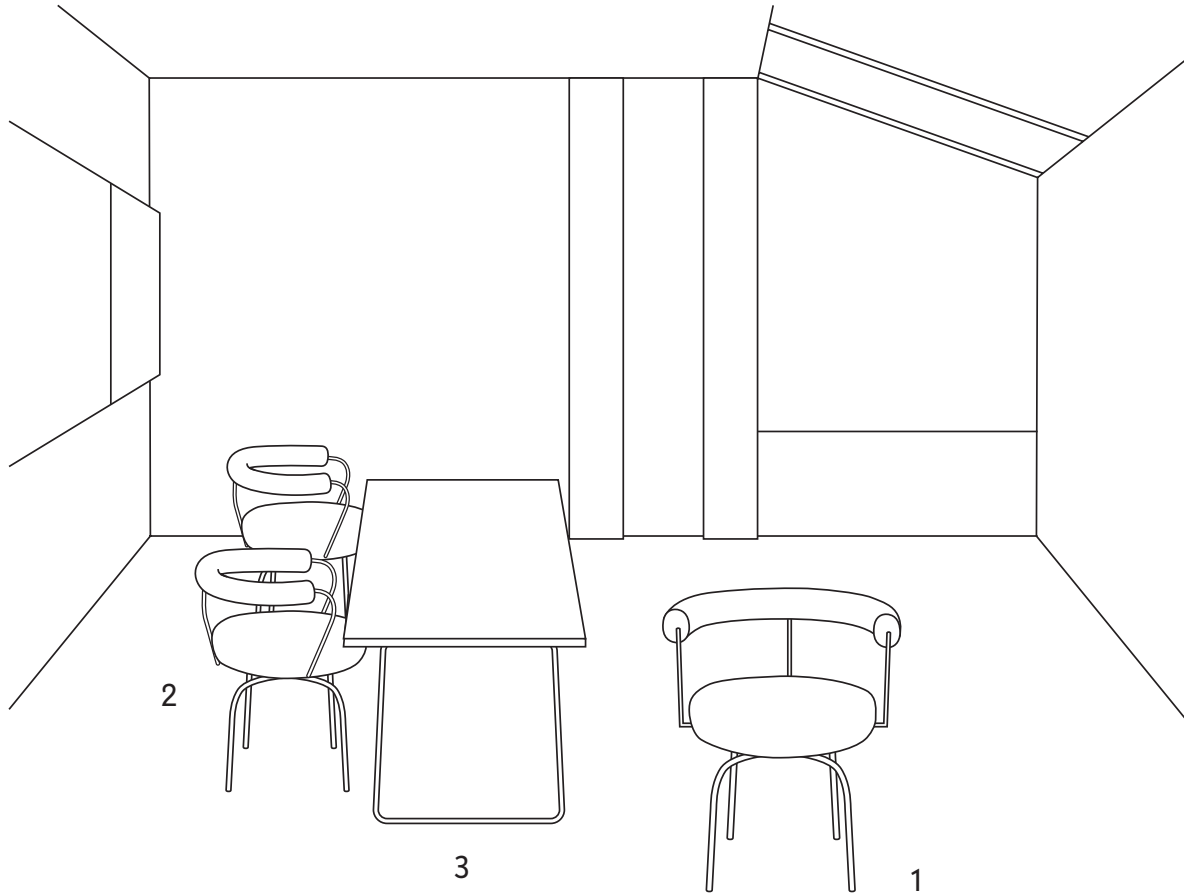
Charlotte Perriand, with Le Corbusier's
hands holding a plate like a halo, 1928

Pierre Jeanneret

Photographic reproduction

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Dining room in the Place Saint-Sulpice apartment-studio, Paris, 1927
Charlotte Perriand
Recreation based on the 1927 original



- 1 'Fauteuil pivotant' (Swivel chair), 1927
Charlotte Perriand
Metal, leather
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

- 2 'Fauteuils pivotants' (Swivel chairs), 1927
Charlotte Perriand
2021 reissues based on the 1927 original,
made by Cassina, I Maestri Collection
Metal, leather

Regarded as a milestone in her career, this chair was designed by Perriand for her own apartment when she was just 24 years old. The tubular steel frame incorporates ball bearings – which she also wore around her neck as jewellery – allowing the chair to swivel. This made it a much more dynamic and multifunctional piece of furniture. The chair would later be included in the catalogue of furniture issued by Le Corbusier.

- 3 'Table extensible' (Extendable table), 1927
Charlotte Perriand
Chromed steel, wood, rubber
Centre Pompidou, Paris
National Museum of Modern Art – Centre for Industrial Creation

To solve the problem of limited space in her apartment, Perriand designed this wall-mounted extendable table. Intended to be rolled open and closed by a crank concealed in a kitchen trolley, the rubber-topped table can seat up to eleven people. More than a simple mechanical effect, this design made her living space more flexible.

Ball-bearing necklace, 1927

Charlotte Perriand

Chrome-plated metal

Archives Charlotte Perriand

‘Nature morte, le mouvement à billes’

(Still life with ball bearings), 1926

Fernand Léger

Oil on canvas

Kunstmuseum Basel

Several photographs of Perriand from the late 1920s show her wearing a necklace of ball bearings. She had one in chrome and one that was gold-plated. Ball bearings, used in industrial machinery, were a symbol of modern efficiency, as depicted in this painting of 1926 by the artist Fernand Léger. By wearing them around her neck, Perriand was presenting herself as a quintessential modern woman. Perriand and Léger became good friends and their work explored parallel themes.



Interior Equipment

‘Metal plays the same part in furniture as cement has done in architecture. It is a revolution.’

Le Corbusier described the home as ‘a machine for living’ and, by the same logic, he referred to furniture as ‘interior equipment’. The idea was that furniture should be as functional and practical as possible, and that it should free up more space in the home. Working alongside Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, Perriand spearheaded furniture design in the studio. She developed a series of tubular steel chairs for the Villa Church and Villa La Roche. Designing welded-steel frames, she aimed to create standardised forms that could be mass-produced. Indeed, her aim was for the bicycle company Peugeot to manufacture them, as they specialised in tubular steel, but Peugeot were not persuaded. These models were first exhibited at the ‘Salon d’Automne’ in 1929 and have since become icons of modernist design.

Charlotte Perriand and Le Corbusier by the window in ‘Bar sous le toit’ (Bar under the roof), Place Saint-Sulpice, Paris, 1928
Unknown photographer
Photographic reproduction
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Prototype for the 'Fauteuil grand confort'

(Very comfortable armchair), large model, 1928

Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, Charlotte Perriand

Tubular steel, leather

Centre Pompidou, Paris

National Museum of Modern Art – Centre for Industrial Creation

The 'Fauteuil grand confort' encloses voluptuous leather cushions in a streamlined metal frame, which is tilted back slightly for comfort. The design draws on the form of an English club chair, but Perriand's use of an external metalwork structure was unique in furniture production at the time.

Prototype for the 'Fauteuil grand confort'

(Very comfortable armchair), small model, 1928

Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, Charlotte Perriand

Tubular steel, leather

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Described by Perriand as a 'cushion basket', the small model of the 'Fauteuil grand confort' does not differ much from its larger counterpart. Both use sprayed steel tubing, which holds spring-core upholstery with four down-filled, leather cushions. The difference lies in their size and way in which they are upholstered.

‘Siège à dossier basculant’ (Seat with tilting back-rest), 1928

Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, Charlotte Perriand

Tubular steel, leather, rubber

Vitra Design Museum

This was an updated version of the British Army campaign chair, which was portable and had leather straps for armrests. Called ‘basculant’ because of its tilting back-support, the chair was ergonomically designed for sitting in an upright position, suitable for working. Its simple form is reduced to the bare essentials – a tubular-steel frame slung with leather.

‘Chaise longue basculante’ (Adjustable reclining chair), 1928

Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, Charlotte Perriand

Lacquered sheet steel, chrome-plated tubular steel, rubber, canvas, steel springs

Vitra Design Museum

The ‘Chaise longue basculante’ is probably the most recognisable of Perriand’s furniture designs. Various reclining chairs already existed on the market, including Thonet’s 1880 bentwood rocking chair and others for medical use, but this design combined adjustability and elegance. Perriand incorporated a base on which, unlike previous chairs of its type, a sliding cradle could adopt any position without the need for mechanical parts.



Pages from sketchbook for tables and chairs, 1928

Charlotte Perriand

Ink, pencil, gouache on paper

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Perriand kept two portfolios of the furniture she developed while working for Le Corbusier. This one relates to tables and chairs, while another logs her cabinets. Running to seventy-two pages, it reveals her development process, starting with photographs from advertisements of chairs that were already on the market. You can see her sketches and notes as she attempts to perfect her tubular-metal designs, including comments such as 'Not practical'.



'Travail et Sport' (Work and Sport), four perspective renderings, 1927–8
Charlotte Perriand
Print on board
Private collection

'Travail et Sport' (Work and Sport) model, 1927–8
Charlotte Perriand
Wood, plastic, metal
Archives Charlotte Perriand

In this series of drawings from the interior-design publication 'Répertoire du goût moderne II' (Directory of Modern Taste II), Perriand imagined a multi-functional space for work, relaxation and exercise. As a keen sportswoman, her interest in the subject was personal. Her choice of steel and reinforced concrete allowed her to design a free plan that included a roof terrace for relaxation, a typewriter table as a workstation, and sliding bay windows to ensure the space was brightly lit.

'Wood or Metal?', 1929
Charlotte Perriand
Published in 'The Studio', April 1929
Archives Charlotte Perriand

In January 1929, the British writer John Gloag, who was a member of the Design & Industries Association, published an article in the influential British magazine 'The Studio'. It violently attacked the use of metal in furniture. Perriand responded by writing a polemical manifesto, entitled 'Wood or Metal?', in which she championed metal as a superior material and one that symbolised progress and the modern world.

from left

Research sketches for the 'casiers' (Storage cabinets), 1929

Charlotte Perriand

Pencil on paper

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Ergonomic study for chairs adapted
to the positions of a mannequin, 1928

Charlotte Perriand

Silver printed photograph with India ink

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Study of different sitting positions, April 1927

Le Corbusier

Print on board reproduction

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Patent drawing for the 'Chaise longue basculante'
(Adjustable reclining chair) sliding system, 1929

Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, Charlotte Perriand

8 April 1929, issued on 4 September 1929

Print on board reproduction

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Thonet's brochure presenting the Le Corbusier,
Jeanneret, Perriand range, May 1931

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Un équipement intérieur d'une habitation (Equipment for a dwelling) at the Salon d'Automne, 1929

'Our initiative in spring 1929 must have shaken and, at the same time, awakened the committee for the 'Salon des Artistes Décorateurs'... It was a great success.'

Le Corbusier, Jeanneret and Perriand presented this installation at the 1929 'Salon d'Automne'. It represented a single-room apartment that was a masterclass in open-plan living and the radical use of space, and it celebrated modern materials – metal and glass. The open-plan living area is separated from the kitchen, bathroom and sleeping areas by metal storage cabinets. All the surfaces are chromed steel and glass, and the floor was originally made of raw glass slabs laid on sand. To furnish the apartment, they chose the tubular steel furniture they had designed the previous year.

'Photomontage of Un équipement intérieur d'une habitation'
(Equipment for a dwelling), presented at the 'Salon d'Automne', 1929

Charlotte Perriand

Photographic reproduction

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Living room-dining room in 'Un équipement intérieur d'une habitation' (Equipment for a dwelling), presented at the 'Salon d'Automne', 1929

Jean Collas

Vintage photographs

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Kitchen in 'Un équipement intérieur d'une habitation' (Equipment for a dwelling), presented at the 'Salon d'Automne', 1929

Jean Collas

Vintage photographs

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Bedroom in 'Un équipement intérieur d'une habitation' (Equipment for a dwelling), presented at the 'Salon d'Automne', 1929

Jean Collas

Vintage photograph

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Bathroom in 'Un équipement intérieur d'une habitation' (Equipment for a dwelling), presented at the 'Salon d'Automne', 1929

Jean Collas

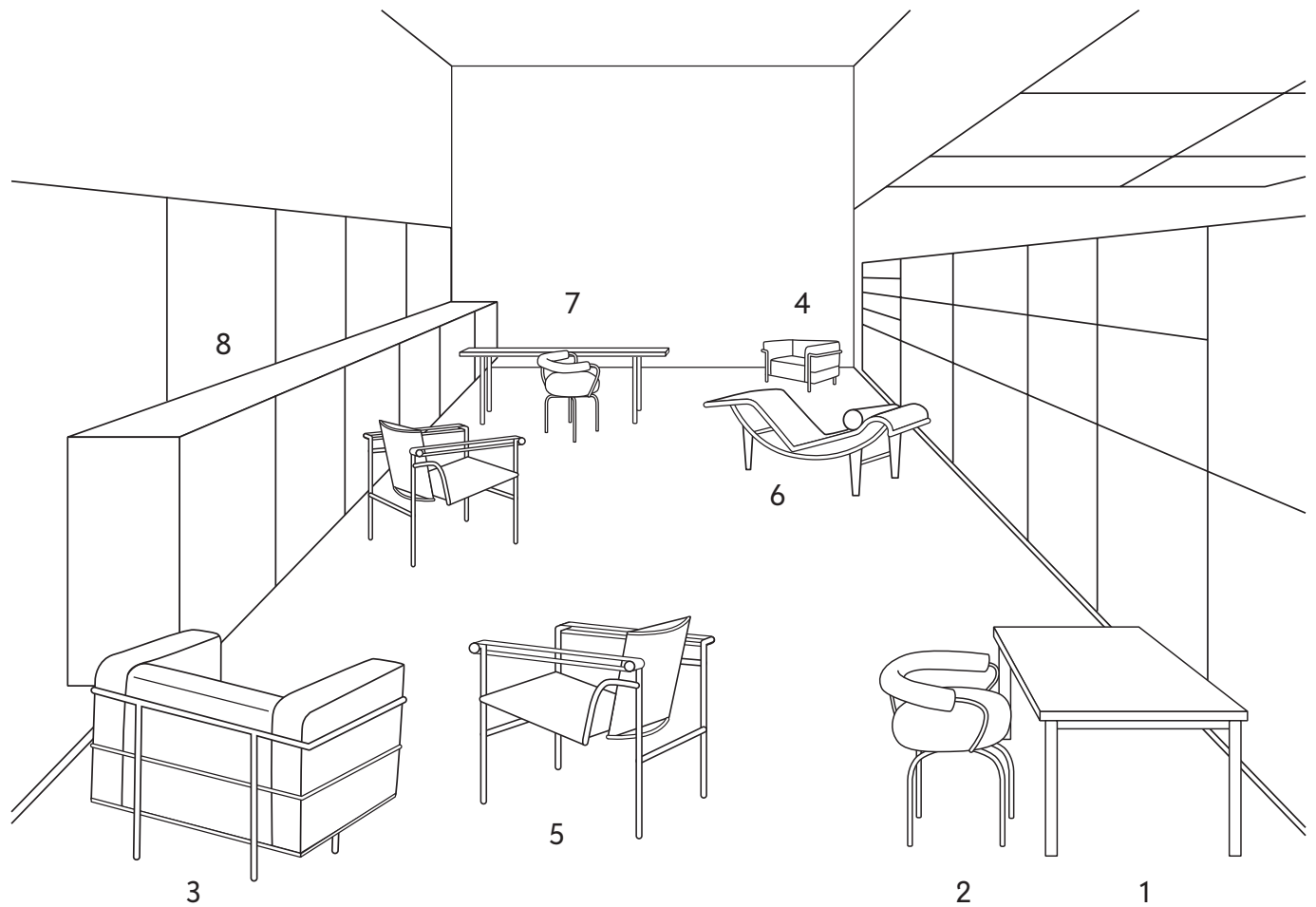
Vintage photograph

Archives Charlotte Perriand

'Un équipement intérieur d'une habitation' (Equipment for a dwelling),
presented at the 'Salon d'Automne', 1929

Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, Charlotte Perriand

Recreation based on the 1929 original



- 1 Tubular table, 1928
Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, Charlotte Perriand
2021 reissue based on the 1928 original,
made by Cassina, I Maestri Collection
Metal, glass
- 2 'Fauteuils pivotants' (Swivel chairs), 1927
Charlotte Perriand
2021 reissues based on the 1927 original,
made by Cassina, I Maestri Collection
Metal, leather
- 3 'Fauteuil grand confort (Very comfortable armchair),
large model, 1928
Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, Charlotte Perriand
2021 reissue based on the 1928 original,
made by Cassina, I Maestri Collection
Metal frame with removable leather cushions
- 4 'Fauteuil grand confort' (Very comfortable armchair),
small model, 1928
Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, Charlotte Perriand
2021 reissue based on the 1928 original,
made by Cassina, I Maestri Collection
Tubular steel, leather

- 5 'Fauteuils à dossier basculant'
(Armchairs with tilting back-rests), 1928
Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, Charlotte Perriand
2021 reissues based on the 1928 original,
made by Cassina, I Maestri Collection
Metal tubing, pony skin, leather, rubber
- 6 'Chaise longue basculante' (Adjustable reclining chair), 1928
Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, Charlotte Perriand
2021 reissue based on the 1928 original,
made by Cassina, I Maestri Collection
Lacquered sheet steel, chrome-plated tubular steel, rubber,
canvas, steel springs
- 7 Dining table, 1928
Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, Charlotte Perriand
2021 reissue based on the 1928 original,
made by Cassina, I Maestri Collection
Tubular steel, glass
- 8 'Casiers' (Storage cabinets), 1928
Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, Charlotte Perriand
2021 reissue based on the 1928 original,
made by Cassina, I Maestri Collection
Steel, glass

'Bar sous le toit' (Bar under the roof)
presented at the 'Salon d'Automne', 1927
Charlotte Perriand
Silver printed photograph
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Perspective rendering of the 'Bar sous le toit' (Bar under the roof) and
dining room in the Place Saint-Sulpice apartment-studio, Paris, 1927
Charlotte Perriand
Published in 'L'Art international d'aujourd'hui' (vol. 6, 'Intérieurs'), 1929
Print
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Perriand exhibited the 'Bar sous le toit', her breakthrough work, at the 1927 'Salon d'Automne'. In reaction to what she saw as the fussy, overly decorative and predominantly wooden designs of her peers, this was a recreation of the aluminium, chrome and glass room that she had originally built for her own attic apartment in Saint-Sulpice, Paris. With leather cushions and nickel-plated surfaces, it was a futuristic realisation of the machine aesthetic, informed more by car showrooms of the Champs-Élysées than traditional Parisian decorative arts. After Perriand invited Le Corbusier to view her work at the 'Salon d'Automne', he was so impressed that he invited her to join his studio.

A creative friendship

‘Pierre was like a brother to everyone; he was the link between Corbu and the rest of us... He was the modern-age mechanic, entirely given over to the machine.’

Perriand made several lifelong friendships at Le Corbusier’s studio, but the most significant was with his cousin, Pierre Jeanneret. Theirs was a close and creative relationship. Perriand’s photographs of found objects in the natural world were often taken during walks with Jeanneret on beaches or in forests. They sent each other letters and photographs while away travelling.

Although Perriand broke with Le Corbusier and left his studio in 1937, she continued to collaborate with Jeanneret. They worked jointly on designs for mountain refuges and on housing and furniture projects. In the late 1940s, with their differences resolved, the three designers worked together again on Le Corbusier’s most famous housing project, the Unité d’Habitation in Marseille.

Pierre Jeanneret and Charlotte Perriand on board
the sailing boat ‘Aventure’, 15 August 1938

Paul Gutmann

Photographic reproduction

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Two ID photographs of Pierre Jeanneret, c.1942

Unknown photographer

Vintage photographs

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Letter from Charlotte Perriand to Pierre Jeanneret, 1936

Ink on paper

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Perriand had a close working relationship with Le Corbusier's cousin and business partner, Pierre Jeanneret, with whom she formed a lifelong friendship. In this letter to him, she shares her belief that architecture is a fundamentally social discipline. She underlines part of the sentence that reads: 'the Profession of Architecture is work in the service of humanity'. The two passport photos sent by Jeanneret six years later show, by contrast, the playful side of their correspondence. He has written on one, 'Without news. It's fun!', and on the other, 'With news'.

Fernand Léger, Charlotte Perriand,
Le Corbusier, Albert Jeanneret, Pierre Jeanneret and Matila Ghyka
(left to right) in Athens, 1933
Unknown photographer
Print from negative
Archives Charlotte Perriand

As Le Corbusier's associate, Perriand worked closely with the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM), which set the social agenda of the modernist movement. In this photograph, she can be seen among her peers, between the artist Fernand Léger and Le Corbusier. The 1933 Congress had taken place on a cruise ship between Marseille and Athens, and the key topic was the idea of the 'functional city'.

'L'élément biologique: la cellule de 14m² par habitant'

(The biological element: the 14m² module per inhabitant), 1935

Le Corbusier

Éditions de L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui, 1935

Ink printed on paper

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Perspective rendering for a 'minimum dwelling' module, 1931

Unknown photographer

Print

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Between 1927 and 1930, a housing crisis prompted Perriand, Le Corbusier and Jeanneret to embark on a project to calculate the minimum space required for a person to live comfortably. Although the official allowance was defined as 7.5 square metres per inhabitant, Perriand insisted on a minimum of 14 square metres. To support her ideas, she designed various reconfigurable, multi-use modules called 'cellules', organised around a collective living space. By day, the space worked as a playroom, living room and kitchen, while sliding partitions created comfortable bedrooms at night. In 1935, Le Corbusier published their findings in 'L'élément biologique', but omitted Perriand's name and only briefly mentioned their collaboration in an article published later.

'Siège pliant et empilable' (Folding stackable chair), 1936

Charlotte Perriand

Metal, canvas

Museum für Gestaltung Zürich (Museum of Design Zurich) /

Design Collection / Zurich University of the Arts

The tubular-steel furniture Perriand designed for Le Corbusier was not commercially successful, being produced in limited runs at high prices. However, Perriand still aimed to make her furniture affordable. This folding seat, modelled on a camping chair, was much simpler and cheaper to manufacture. It originally came with seat cushions, and formed part of a suite of furniture options designed for 'A living room on a budget', which she exhibited in 1936.

Villa Martinez, Buenos Aires, perspective drawing
of the entrance and façade, October 1930
Charlotte Perriand for the studio of Le Corbusier-Jeanneret
Pencil and pastels on tracing paper
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Villa Martinez, Buenos Aires, perspective drawing
of the ground-floor interior, October 1930
Charlotte Perriand
Pencil and pastels on tracing paper
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Villa Martinez, Buenos Aires, perspective drawing
of the terrace, October 1930
Charlotte Perriand
Pencil and pastels on tracing paper
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Villa Martinez, Buenos Aires, perspective drawing of the
bedroom with metal cabinets and sliding bed, October 1930
Charlotte Perriand
Pencil and pastels on tracing paper
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Le Corbusier entrusted Perriand with the design of a house for Julián Martínez, a lawyer in Buenos Aires. This was an opportunity to put their system of metal cabinets, as tested in the 'Salon d'Automne', into full effect. The cabinets were deployed as an architectural element, used as room dividers and lining the walls to keep the space as free as possible. The house was to be raised off the ground, with a glazed façade in classic Corbusian style. The client decided not to proceed, however, and the house was not built until the 1990s.

'Le Tritrianon', drawing of the exterior with gardens
and perspective rendering of the floor plan, 1937

Charlotte Perriand, Pierre Jeanneret

Pencil on paper

Archives Charlotte Perriand

In response to a competition in 1937 in the French architecture magazine 'L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui', Perriand worked with Jeanneret to design a weekend house she called 'Le Tritrianon'. Also known as the 'Maison de l'agriculture' (Agricultural house), it comprised small huts where families of 'weekend farmers' could enjoy the outdoors and partake in gardening and growing crops. Each hut is surrounded by gardens. Perriand's concept was designed to be easily assembled and disassembled in a modular fashion. The design revolved around a central dwelling with a sleeping area and a room for 'services'. From here, different modules could be attached to enlarge the living area, according to the needs of the residents.

Model of 'Maison au bord de l'eau' (House by the water),
1/20 scale, 1934
Charlotte Perriand
2021 replica made by Wayne Bessey, based on the 1934 original
Oak, cherry, walnut, plastic

clockwise from top left

Bird's-eye view of 'Maison au bord de l'eau' (House by the water), 1934

Charlotte Perriand

Graphite, pencil, ink on tracing paper

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Charlotte Perriand on a beach in Croatia, 1937

Unknown photographer

Print from negative

Archives Charlotte Perriand

'Maison au bord de l'eau' (House by the water),
perspective rendering of the terrace, 1934

Charlotte Perriand

India ink with colour on tracing paper

Archives Charlotte Perriand

These are two of Perriand's most playful and evocative drawings. This house began as a competition entry for a modest weekend home, which here she has adapted for a wealthier clientele. It has three sides arranged around a terrace. The rooms have sliding doors opening on to the terrace, which looks out to sea. Raising the house off the ground created space for parking and storage underneath. In one of the drawings, the terrace has a protective rain cover. The other drawing is jokingly signed 'Raoul Dufy' after the French painter, possibly in reference to Perriand's use of colour and style of illustration.

'Charlotte Perriand: Créer l'habitat au XX siècle'
(Creating a home in the 20th century)

Jacques Barsac

Film

Produced by Antenne 2 and Ciné Service Technique

Run time: 9 mins 48 secs

Nature and the Synthesis of the Arts

‘Léger, Pierre [Jeanneret] and I used to go to the Normandy beaches... We would fill our backpacks with treasure: pebbles, bits of shoes, lumps of wood riddled with holes, horsehair brushes all smoothed and ennobled by the sea... We called it our Art Brut.’

In the mid-1930s, Perriand turned away from the machine aesthetic she had previously embraced. Her work began to take on the organic forms she found in nature. She photographed trees and stones, and collected rocks from beaches. Drawn to the sensual qualities of wood, she began designing free-form tables.

During the Second World War, Perriand spent two formative years in Japan, where she'd been invited by the government to advise on how the country's traditional craft products could be modernised. She immersed herself in the local way of life. This exposure to the open, flexible spaces of Japanese houses – in particular, the sense of ordered emptiness – would influence the rest of her career.

When she returned to Tokyo years later, Perriand staged an exhibition called ‘Proposal for a Synthesis of the Arts’ in 1955. It was a manifesto of sorts, demonstrating her belief that architecture, design and art should work together to create a harmonious interior. Here, industrial metal shelving along with crafted wooden tables and stools were shown surrounded by modernist paintings and tapestries by her friends Fernand Léger and Le Corbusier.

Free forms

‘Wood is made for caressing, and can be soft as a woman’s thighs.’

In the late 1930s, Perriand turned decisively away from metal manufacture in favour of heavy wooden furniture. This was a significant statement at a time when the machine age had become associated with industrial-scale warfare, the rise of fascism and the atrocities of the Spanish Civil War. Influenced by her study of natural forms, Perriand designed a number of free-form tables. These were not just organic shapes, but highly considered designs for social gatherings. The six-sided pine table, originally designed for her studio in Montparnasse, Paris, allowed more seated guests than a rectangular one, and the three table legs left more space for their knees. Such tables would become a feature of her interior layouts for the next fifty years.

Raw tree-trunk coffee table, 1940
Charlotte Perriand
2011 replica, based on the 1940 original
Wood
Archives Charlotte Perriand

‘Pierre de Bourron’
Stone found by Charlotte Perriand
and Pierre Jeanneret, c. 1935
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Six-sided free-form table, c. 1951
Charlotte Perriand
Varnished pine
Comma Foundation, Belgium



Wisteria found by Charlotte Perriand, 1969

Archives Charlotte Perriand

With her friends Pierre Jeanneret and Fernand Léger, Perriand would visit beaches in Normandy and forage for pebbles, bits of wood, discarded objects and other pieces of 'treasure'. She often took photos and treated them as sculptural objects displayed in her studio and some of her interiors.

Fan table prototype, 1972

Charlotte Perriand

Oak

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Charlotte Perriand on the beach with a friend, c. 1935

Pierre Jeanneret

Photographic reproduction

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Study room in 'Maison du jeune homme' (House for a young man),
exhibited at the Exposition Universelle, Brussels, 1935

Charlotte Perriand

Vintage photograph

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Built for the 1935 Exposition Universelle in Brussels, the 'Maison du jeune homme' was intended to show how a young bachelor could live and work. In an area of 63 square metres, it comprised a studio apartment and gym. Perriand worked closely with Fernand Léger on the concept, designing the house for a range of artistic disciplines and sports. The living and office space included modernist metal furnishings, a large wooden desk with a straw armchair, and a large blackboard. Alongside a Léger painting and pieces of flint and bone on the shelves, Perriand created a photomontage to depict the relationship between humanity and progress to spark inspiration.

Charlotte Perriand's studio in Montparnasse,
with hexagonal free-form table, 1938

Charlotte Perriand

Vintage photograph

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Manifesto coffee table, 1937

Charlotte Perriand, Fernand Léger, Pablo Picasso

Replica, based on the 1937 original

Wood, metal

Archives Charlotte Perriand

The year before she designed his desk, Perriand had designed a coffee table for Jean-Richard Bloch. As the editor of a Communist Party newspaper, he took an anti-fascist position in his coverage of the Spanish Civil War. This table featured four zinc etching plates used to print two drawings by Fernand Léger and Pablo Picasso's diptych 'The Dream and Lie of Franco', which denounced the Spanish dictator's atrocities. The table, now lost, was a statement of Perriand's stance during her most politically active period.

- 1 'The Dream and Lie of Franco', plate 1, 1937
Pablo Picasso
Aquatint etching
Archives Charlotte Perriand

- 2 'The Dream and Lie of Franco', plate 2, 1937
Pablo Picasso
Aquatint etching
Archives Charlotte Perriand

- 3 'Fragment de vitrage' (Fragment of glass), 1933
Fernand Léger
Print on paper
Archives Charlotte Perriand

- 4 'Aidez l'Espagne' (Help Spain) poster, 1937
Joan Miró
Stencil on paper
Archives Charlotte Perriand

- 5 'Tire-bouchon' (corkscrew), 1933
Fernand Léger
Print on paper
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Boomerang desk, 1938

Charlotte Perriand

2021 reissue based on the 1938 original,
made by Cassina, I Maestri Collection

Wood

Photograph of Jean-Richard Bloch at his desk, 1938

Unknown photographer

Vintage photograph

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Ergonomic drawing of the Boomerang desk, 1938

Charlotte Perriand

Print on paper

Archives Charlotte Perriand

One of Perriand's most significant 'free-form' pieces was the desk she designed for Jean-Richard Bloch, editor of the French newspaper 'Ce soir'. Named after a boomerang because of its shape, the curved top was highly functional, designed for group editorial meetings. Just by swivelling in his chair behind the boomerang, Bloch could turn to face each member of the team without imposing any hierarchy.

Wall-mounted storage cabinet, 1938

Charlotte Perriand

2021 reissue based on the 1938 original, made by Cassina

Wood

'Fauteuil pivotant B302' (Swivel chair), 1928

Charlotte Perriand

Steel, leather

Centre Pompidou, Paris

National Museum of Modern Art – Centre for Industrial Creation

'Objet dans l'espace' (Object in space), 1932

Fernand Léger

Pencil and India ink on paper

Musée National Fernand Léger, Biot, France, Inv. MNFL 2017.1.1

Charlotte Perriand on the beach, c.1935

Pierre Jeanneret

Print

Archives Charlotte Perriand

'Queues de comètes, étude pour un paravent'

(Comet tails, study for a screen), c.1930

Fernand Léger

Oil on canvas

Donation de Nadia Léger et Georges Bauquier en 1969

Musée National Fernand Léger, Biot, France, inv. MNFL 95006

In the early 1930s, the painter Fernand Léger was – like his friend Perriand – fascinated by natural forms. This triptych study for a room divider appears to draw on his observation of flints and other rock forms.



4

Natural objects found by Charlotte Perriand
and Pierre Jeanneret, c.1932
Sandstone, flint, bone
Archives Charlotte Perriand

These are some of the objects Perriand collected on her walks with Jeanneret: a flint, a chicken carcass and a piece of weathered stone – each had qualities that fascinated her. In photographing them, she was making studies that would influence a new phase of her work.



Snow on the stone I, Fontainebleau forest, 1935
Charlotte Perriand
Print
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Snow on the stone II, Fontainebleau forest, 1935
Charlotte Perriand
Print
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Free-form sideboard, 1939

Charlotte Perriand

Fir, aluminium

Centre Pompidou, Paris

National Museum of Modern Art – Centre for Industrial Creation

Tree trunk found by Charlotte Perriand, c. 1970

Archives Charlotte Perriand

‘Potence pivotant’ (Pivoting stem) wall-mounted light, 1939

Charlotte Perriand

Metal

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Photographs of a kitchen for an apartment in
Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation, Marseille, 1949

Gaston Karquel

Vintage photographs

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Model of apartment kitchen in Le Corbusier's
Unité d'Habitation, Marseille, 1949

Charlotte Perriand

Wood, plastic

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Le Corbusier invited Perriand to help him design the interiors of what would become his most famous housing project, the Unité d'Habitation in Marseille. Perriand made a number of contributions, including the design of the kitchen, which was installed in 321 of the apartments. The layout created flexible, open-plan living spaces, with the kitchen-bar combined with the living room. Her design was based on ideas for a modern, labour-saving kitchen – developed by household reformers since the late nineteenth century. The kitchen was modular, featuring built-in cabinets with sliding doors, and advanced features for the time: an electric stove with oven and fume hood, and a sink with integrated waste-disposal unit.

Two years in Japan

‘No other material has more infinite possibilities than bamboo.’

In 1940, Perriand was invited to Tokyo on the initiative of Junzō Sakakura, a former colleague from Le Corbusier’s studio, to advise on how to modernise Japanese crafts for export. As the Nazis had occupied Paris early in the Second World War, Perriand remained in Japan for two years, absorbing its culture and craft traditions. Her study of traditional Japanese architecture and the importance of empty space would have a huge influence on her approach to interiors.

Perriand displayed her work with local craftsmen in the exhibition Selection, Tradition, Creation, which she curated in Tokyo in 1941. There, some of her familiar modernist designs found a new identity in bamboo and wood. Although it was a fruitful period, Japan’s attack on the US naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, in December 1941 led to political tensions that forced her to move to present-day Vietnam.

Charlotte Perriand discusses her red-pine table with cabinetmakers, including Jiro Hayashi in the foreground; on the left, Junzō Sakakura translates, 1940
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Cantilever bamboo chair, 1940

Charlotte Perriand

Replica made in Japan in 2012 by Chuzo Tozawa

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Cross-based bamboo armchair, 1940

Charlotte Perriand

Replica made in Japan in 2012 by Chuzo Tozawa

Archives Charlotte Perriand

‘Chaise longue basculante’

(Adjustable reclining chair) in bamboo, 1940

Charlotte Perriand

2021 reissue based on the 1940 original,

made by Cassina, I Maestri Collection

Bamboo, oak, beech

During her time in Japan, Perriand experimented with the manufacturing potential of bamboo. This is a very literal translation of her 1929 chaise longue – an icon of modernism – into a craft object. However, its functional qualities were unchanged and Perriand was pleased with the result, concluding that ‘there is no set formula for creation’.

'Banquette méandre' (Meandering bench), 1940

Charlotte Perriand

Replica based on the 1940 original, made by Cassina

Bamboo and wood

Wood and bamboo chair, 1940

Charlotte Perriand

Replica based on the 1940 original, made by Cassina

Bamboo and wood

Sailor graffiti carpet, 1940

Charlotte Perriand

Replica based on the 1940 original, made by Cassina

Wool

Photographs of the exhibition 'Contact avec l'Art Japonais: Sélection, Tradition, Création' (Contact with Japanese Art: Selection, Tradition, Creation), Tokyo, 1941

Ferenz Haar

Vintage photographs

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Sailor's chalk drawing on the deck of 'Hakusan Maru', 1940

Charlotte Perriand

Vintage photograph

Archives Charlotte Perriand

The design of this carpet was based on some chalk graffiti that Perriand photographed on the deck of the ship on which she sailed to Japan.

It was the work of a Japanese sailor, but Perriand was so taken with it that she enlarged the image and transposed it directly on to the carpet.

from left

Charlotte Perriand in Japan, 1954

Unknown photographer

Photographic reproduction

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Exhibition catalogue for 'Contact avec l'Art Japonais: Sélection, Tradition, Création' (Contact with Japanese Art: Selection, Tradition, Creation), December 1941

Charlotte Perriand, Junzō Sakakura

Archives Charlotte Perriand

In 1941, Perriand and architect Junzō Sakakura staged the exhibition Selection, Tradition, Creation in the Takashimaya department store in Tokyo. At the beginning of the year, Perriand had been invited by the Japanese Ministry of Commerce, on Sakakura's recommendation, to offer practical advice to improve design for export crafts, with the idea of increasing trade. Japan's economy was depressed and the government

hoped to increase exports by producing modern Western-style products that drew on traditional Japanese crafts. The exhibition showcased Perriand's designs alongside objects from the Japan Folk Crafts Museum collection, set in traditional Japanese interiors. She included many of her early furniture designs, such as the cantilever chair and chaise longue, but now recreated in bamboo.

Japan notebook, 1940

Charlotte Perriand

Ink and pencil on paper

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Perriand kept this notebook during her first year in Japan. It is both a journal and a record of her encounters with different craftspeople as she travelled the country. She made rough sketches in which you can see her working out how to use bamboo, which was a new material to her.

Photographs of the exhibition 'Proposition d'une Synthèse des Arts' (Proposal for a Synthesis of the Arts), Takashimaya department store, Tokyo, 1955

Unknown photographer

Vintage photograph

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Proposal for a Synthesis of the Arts

‘There is art in everything, whether it be an action, a vase, a saucepan, a glass, a sculpture, a jewel, a way of being.’

In 1955, Perriand staged another exhibition in Tokyo, fourteen years after her first. Now a designer of international reputation, she used it to demonstrate some of the principles of what she called ‘the art of dwelling’. The central idea was that art, architecture and industrial design should work in unison to create the modern home. This was what she called ‘the synthesis of the arts’.

The exhibition featured her signature storage cabinets and free-form tables, alongside stackable chairs and simple stools. The balance of contrasts – wood and metal, rustic and industrial – was a key concept. She invited Le Corbusier and Fernand Léger to provide artwork, so the exhibition captured a Parisian sensibility transplanted to Tokyo.

Perriand at the exhibition ‘Proposition d’une synthèse des arts’ (Proposal for a Synthesis of the Arts), Takashimaya department store, Tokyo, 1955
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Free-form table, 1956

Charlotte Perriand

Mahogany

Centre national des arts plastiques

FNAC 91699

Perriand continued to develop her free-form table designs throughout her career. Although originally intended for her own use, some models, including this one, went into production through Galerie Steph Simon. This design includes spline joints to highlight its construction. The heavy elliptical top is supported by one broad leg and two round ones, freeing up more space for guests.

Tripod stool, 1946

Charlotte Perriand

Ash

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Perriand designed various versions of this three-legged stool, all loosely modelled on the shepherd's stools she saw in the mountainous Savoie region of France, where she liked to walk and ski. She admired the economy of means by which shepherds could make themselves comfortable. This particular stool was designed for her husband's business residence in Tokyo.

'Ombre' (Shadow) stacking chairs, 1954

Charlotte Perriand

Bent and stained plywood

Archives Charlotte Perriand

This stacking chair was made from a single sheet of plywood, cut and bent into shape. Perriand called it 'Ombre' after the Japanese shadow theatre, because it cuts a shadowy silhouette.

'Air France' stacking table, 1954

Charlotte Perriand

Anodised aluminium

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Perriand was interested in the Japanese tradition of using individual folding tables that could be stacked after mealtimes, rather than seating everyone at a single large table. Her version is designed from a single sheet of aluminium, folded like a piece of origami. It was produced by Jean Prouvé's workshop and was named 'Air France' after the company for which her husband worked as an executive.

Double chaise longue, 1952

Charlotte Perriand

Replica based on the 1952 original, made by Cassina

Wood, fabric

'Nuage' (Cloud) bookshelf, Steph Simon edition, c.1958

Charlotte Perriand

Folded sheet-metal, plastic

Galerie Laffanour-Downtown, Paris

Since her first visit to Japan in 1940, Perriand had been struck by the shelving units she saw at Kyoto's Katsura Imperial Villa. '[They were] arranged on the walls, in the form of a cloud,' she wrote in her journal. Nearly a decade later, she unveiled 'Nuage' (Cloud), a modular bookshelf of standardised parts that could be rearranged in various configurations, and that includes sliding panels, trays and shelves. It was produced and sold by Steph Simon and gained popularity in the 1950s and 1960s.

'Les huit's' (The eights), 1951

Le Corbusier

Wool tapestry

Mobilier National, Paris

'Sans titre: l'enfant à l'oiseau' (Untitled: child with a bird), 1953

Fernand Léger

Bas-relief in clay with enamelled paint

Donation de Nadia Léger et Georges Bauquier en 1969

Musée National Fernand Léger, Biot, France, inv. MNFL 99009

'Akari' (light) pendant lamps, c.1958

Isamu Noguchi

Paper

Galerie Laffanour-Downtown, Paris

The Japanese-American sculptor and designer Isamu Noguchi transformed a traditional Japanese craft into modern design for the home. After visiting Gifu, a city in Japan renowned for its manufacture of paper lanterns, he designed the first of his lamps called 'Akari', meaning light and weightlessness. Each light is handcrafted from Japanese 'washi' paper using traditional methods. On Perriand's advice, Noguchi's lighting was sold by Galerie Steph Simon to complement her furniture.

Template of free-form table, 1962
Charlotte Perriand
Craft paper
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Jacques Martin's apartment
in Rio de Janeiro, 1963
Pernette Perriand-Barsac
Photographic reproduction
Archives Charlotte Perriand

In 1961, Perriand's husband, Jacques Martin, was appointed general superintendent of Air France for Latin America and moved to an apartment in Rio de Janeiro. A year later, Perriand arrived to design the interiors. During a visit to a cabinet-maker, she was taken by an enormous piece of solid jacaranda wood. She chalked the surface with the outline for a table to seat fifteen people, with a top 6 centimetres thick and more than 4 metres long, taking the pattern of the grain into account. Reversing her usual working methods, she noted the dimensions to check against the size of the apartment.

Modular Designs for Modern Living

‘Better to spend a day in the sun than to spend it dusting our useless objects.’

The post-war years in Europe were a period of reconstruction and modernisation. With an established reputation, Perriand was now increasingly in demand. She designed interiors for student dormitories in Paris and Air France offices around the world, and – a devotee of mountains – she collaborated on numerous ski resorts, not all of them built.

Her chief collaborator during this period was the designer Jean Prouvé, who ran his own metalworking factory. Perriand designed a number of modular furnishing systems using the bent sheet metal technique in which Prouvé specialised. Most famous of these are her bookcases-cum-space-dividers, which could be assembled in any number of different ways.

This was the period that saw the growth of mass tourism, and Perriand’s crowning achievement was the ski resort of Les Arcs. Here, in a resort for tens of thousands of people, Perriand demonstrated that she was no mere furniture designer but a creative force who could design on an urban scale. At Les Arcs, she brought to fruition her vision of design, architecture and landscape coming together as an integrated whole.

Wall lights with adjustable shade, 1962

Charlotte Perriand

Plastic, metal

Galerie Laffanour-Downtown, Paris

Perriand designed many lights for her interiors during her career. She worked closely with Jean Prouvé to produce metal fittings for her designs. These wall-mounted shutter lights are adjustable so as to direct light where it is needed, and come in a range of colours. They can be installed individually to light a specific spot or in clusters to make a display.

Photomontage, 'With a thousand apologies to the incumbent ministers, 'Elle' constitutes the first Ministry of Women', October 1950

Frédérique Orvan

Published in 'Elle' magazine

Photographic reproduction

Archives Charlotte Perriand

In the years after the Second World War, France was in reconstruction mode; so, efficient, modular construction was a priority. In light of this, in October 1950, 'Elle' magazine presented 'as a laugh and with a thousand apologies', a fictional ministerial cabinet made up entirely of women. Perriand was appointed by 'Elle' to the Ministry of Reconstruction. When asked what her programme would be, she spoke of the urgency of building housing, schools and hospitals, as well as introducing fixed rents for landlords and renters' rights for tenants.

The 'hardware store': Perriand and Jean Prouvé

'We were the eternal French accomplices.'

Modular furniture was gaining popularity in post-war Europe and the United States. Made of standardised parts that were industrially produced, such furniture was affordable and adaptable. In Perriand's work, this concept was realised through her collaboration with the engineer and designer Jean Prouvé. He hired Perriand to design furniture that his workshop could make and sell. The most famous outcome of this partnership was her 'bibliothèques', or bookcases.

Perriand called Prouvé's workshop her 'hardware store'. She developed a system of U-shaped metal brackets – the hardware – and wooden shelves that could be assembled in multiple configurations. The system was used in a number of Parisian student dormitories, and was sold to the public through the gallerist Steph Simon. Storage systems were essential to Perriand's vision of a spacious home, and could be used as wall units or room dividers.

A presentation of light fixtures by Isamu Noguchi, dining table, free-form cabinet, 'Nuage' bookcase by Charlotte Perriand, and Bachelor chair by Verner Panton at the Galerie Steph Simon, Paris, c.1960

Jean Biaugeaud

Photographic reproduction

Archives Charlotte Perriand and Archives Steph Simon

Stackable low lounge chair, referred to as the Conversation chair, 1954

Charlotte Perriand

Plywood

Archives Charlotte Perriand

To accompany her 'Air France' table, Perriand designed the Conversation chair. Her original design used bamboo and wooden slats to form the legs, seat and back, with curved legs to avoid damaging the straw tatami mats used on Japanese floors. Later she adapted the chair, using bent plywood so it could be stacked.

Wardrobe for the 'Pavillon du Brésil', 1956–9

Charlotte Perriand

Wood, metal, plastic

Collection Laurence and Patrick Seguin

This wardrobe was designed for use in Le Corbusier's housing project for Brazilian students in Paris. It works as a large room-dividing unit and uses Perriand's combination of industrial elements – plastic drawers and metal doors – within a wooden framework. There were 92 of these units made. This was the last project on which Perriand and Le Corbusier collaborated.

Bookcase modules, 1952

Charlotte Perriand

2021 reissues based on the 1952 originals,
made by Cassina, I Maestri Collection

Lacquered aluminium

These folded-metal shelving supports were designed by Perriand and manufactured by Jean Prouvé's workshop for the bookcases in the 'Maison du Mexique' and 'Maison de la Tunisie'. Perriand replaced the usual wooden supports used for shelving with folded metal pieces that are designed to sit between the wooden shelves. This modular system allowed the shelving units to be produced in different variations and colours.

Storage drawer unit, 1952–4

Charlotte Perriand

Painted wood, metal, Perspex

Centre Pompidou, Paris

National Museum of Modern Art – Centre for Industrial Creation

In 1947, Perriand applied for a patent for her 'Drawer for all types of furniture'. Consisting of stacked drawers mounted on runners, it was intended for use in various rooms in the house. The first models were made of folded sheet metal, while later ones were of coloured Plexiglas that could be injection-moulded and therefore mass-produced.

Jean Prouvé and Charlotte Perriand, c.1953
Unknown photographer
Photographic reproduction
Archives Charlotte Perriand

'Air France' stacking table, 1954
Charlotte Perriand
Anodised aluminium
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Variations of bookcase modular system, c.1958
Charlotte Perriand
Photographic reproductions
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Storage drawer unit, 1952–5
Charlotte Perriand
Photographic reproduction
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Blueprint of the standardised mounting system
for the 'Mexique'-type bookcases, June 1954
Charlotte Perriand
Photographic reproduction
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Drawings for storage, from the
Galerie Steph Simon brochure, 1958
Charlotte Perriand
Ink on paper
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Drawings for solid wood furniture, desks, tables and
sideboards, from the Galerie Steph Simon brochure, 1958
Charlotte Perriand
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Designs for pedestal bookcase, from the
Galerie Steph Simon brochure, 1956
Charlotte Perriand
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Designs for pedestal bookcase, from the
Galerie Steph Simon brochure, 1956
Charlotte Perriand
Archives Charlotte Perriand

These blueprints represent the technical drawings used to
manufacture Perriand's bookcase modules and accompanying parts.
The brochures produced by Galerie Steph Simon demonstrate the
different ways in which this kit of parts could be assembled.

Colour variations of the bookshelf for the
Maison de la Tunisie, 1/10 scale models, 1952
Charlotte Perriand, Silvano Bozzolini,
Nicolas Schöffer, Sonia Delaunay
Wood, metal
Archives Charlotte Perriand

At the same time as fitting out the interiors of the *Maison du Mexique*, Perriand was doing the same for the *Maison de la Tunisie*, which housed Tunisian students. Here she opted for a different approach, placing a storage unit integrated with a long bench along one wall of each bedroom. A number of artists were assigned to create the colour schemes for the rooms. These models show bookcases coloured by Sonia Delaunay, Silvano Bozzolini, Nicolas Schöffer and Perriand herself.

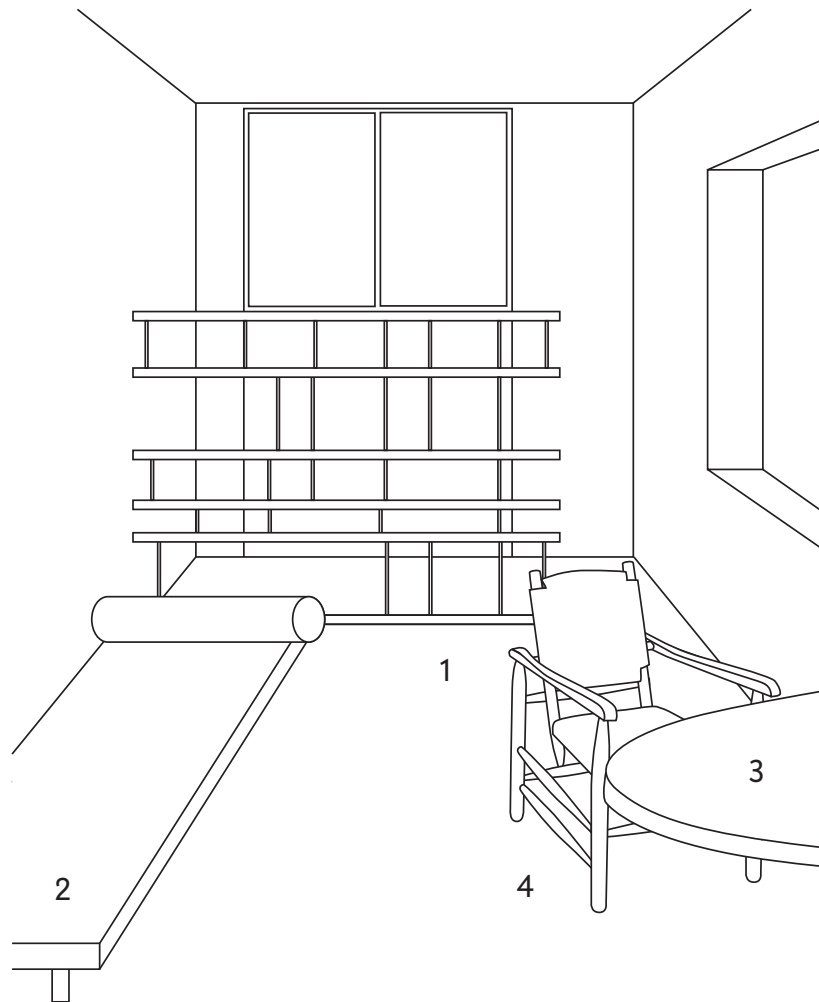
Room in the *Maison de la Tunisie* of the
Cité internationale universitaire, Paris, 1952
Gaston Karquel
Vintage photograph
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Maison du Mexique, Paris

‘What is the most important element of a domestic interior? We can answer without hesitation: storage. Without well-planned storage, empty space in the home becomes impossible.’

In 1952, Perriand was commissioned to design the interiors of the *Maison du Mexique*, a dormitory for Mexican students on the outskirts of Paris. There were seventy-seven rooms to fit out. Her first move was to replace the partition wall between the bedroom and bathroom with one of her bookcases. Acting as both room divider and storage unit, it made the rooms feel bigger. This and the ‘Brazza’ wardrobe were manufactured by Jean Prouvé, while the bed Perriand chose was one of Prouvé’s own designs. She complemented these metal elements with her straw chair and one of her free-form table designs.

Maison du Mexique student's room
Charlotte Perriand
Recreation based on the 1952 original



- 1 Bookcase for the *Maison du Mexique* student's room, 1952
Charlotte Perriand
Varnished pine, folded aluminium
Centre Pompidou, Paris
National Museum of Modern Art – Centre for Industrial Creation

- 2 SCAL bed with swivel shelf, 1952
Jean Prouvé
Metal, wood
Archives Charlotte Perriand

- 3 Free-form table no. 407h, 1952
Charlotte Perriand
Wood, metal
Musée d'art moderne et contemporain,
Saint-Étienne Métropole, France

- 4 Wood and straw chair, 1935
Charlotte Perriand
Wood, straw
Archives Charlotte Perriand



Air France travel agency, London

‘The idea was that the programme could be updated for each new agency to incorporate state-of-the-art communications techniques. In the entrance area, passengers could take the weight off their feet with a boomerang-shaped seating unit made of thick wood. The agency was ready for take-off.’

Perriand had a long-standing relationship with the airline Air France, designing a number of its agencies and apartments around the world. In London, Perriand was appointed to refurbish a difficult site on New Bond Street after several other architects had failed to impress. The centrepiece of her design was a floor-to-ceiling bookcase, recreated here. This was placed alongside a giant image of a Cambodian sculpture, intended to give customers the travel bug. Agents’ desks were arranged in a sawtooth pattern to give each customer their own space, while chairs by Charles and Ray Eames acted as points of colour. The Boomerang bench, specially made for the agency’s foyer, is also recreated here.

Long-haul bookings area at Air France London, showing
Perriand’s room-divider produced by Steph Simon, 1957
Gaston Karquel
Photographic reproduction
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Air France London, drawing of Perriand's
bamboo-poster and herringbone furniture, 1957

Charlotte Perriand

Pencil and ink on paper

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Air France London, drawing of Perriand's shelving wall, 1957

Charlotte Perriand

Pencil and ink on paper

Archives Charlotte Perriand



Air France London, drawing of Perriand's
shelving wall and storage chest, 1957

Charlotte Perriand

Pencil and ink on paper

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Air France London, overview of the
counters with Boomerang bench, 1957

Gaston Karquel

Vintage photograph

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Air France London, façade of the agency, 158 New Bond Street, 1957
Gaston Karquel
Vintage photograph
Archives Charlotte Perriand

from left

Letter from Ernő Goldfinger to Charlotte Perriand, 1967
Ink on paper
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Reception desk at French Railways House, London, 1963
Charlotte Perriand, Ernő Goldfinger
Photographic reproduction
Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Collections

Illustration for the invitation to the
inauguration of French Railways House, London, 1963
Charlotte Perriand, Ernő Goldfinger
Ink on paper
Archives Charlotte Perriand

The celebrated architect Ernő Goldfinger invited Perriand to work with him on the interior of French Railways House on Piccadilly, London. The building had been designed by another London architecture practice, Shaw & Lloyd. Goldfinger and Perriand would also collaborate on the Paris office in 1967. Note the flirtatious way in which the two designers corresponded. Here, a simple note from Goldfinger to say that he is attaching some drawings of the Paris office comes with a doodle of a bleeding heart.

Boomerang bench for Air France London, 1957

Charlotte Perriand

2021 replica based on the 1957 original, made by Cassina
Wood

Air France London, shelving, 1957

Charlotte Perriand

2021 replica based on the 1957 original, fabricated by Sice Previt
Wood, metal

The architecture of leisure

‘The organisation of leisure is one of the most urgent problems.’

Perriand’s first architectural projects under her own name were the weekend houses she designed in the 1930s. They set the trajectory for her architectural career, which was closely linked to the advent of mass tourism. More specifically, her most significant projects were set in the mountains.

An avid hiker and skier, Perriand designed two mountain refuges in the late 1930s. These were modular, aluminium shelters, designed to be light-weight and easy to assemble on rocky terrain. They were a foretaste of the more serious work she would undertake designing ski resorts from the 1950s onwards.

Her most significant project was Les Arcs, a ski resort in the mountains of Perriand’s beloved Savoie region. With 30,000 beds, the resort was designed and built over two decades, from 1967 to 1989. Here, many of Perriand’s ideas about good interiors for the masses and the relationship of architecture to the landscape came together at an impressive scale.

Charlotte Perriand facing a valley, c.1930

Unknown photographer

Photographic reproduction

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Charlotte Perriand skiing in the mountains, 1938

Unknown photographer

Print from negative

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Charlotte Perriand and Marianne Clouzot
in Entre-deux-Eaux in the Alps, August 1932

Unknown photographer

Print from negative

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Charlotte Perriand rock-climbing, 1928

Unknown photographer

Print from negative

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Charlotte Perriand in the mountains, c.1940

Unknown photographer

Print from negative

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Model of 'Refuge Bivouac', 1936–8

Charlotte Perriand, André Tournon

Metal, wood

Centre Pompidou, Paris

National Museum of Modern Art – Centre for Industrial Creation

Charlotte Perriand and two friends during
the installation of 'Refuge Bivouac', 1938

Pierre Jeanneret

Vintage photograph

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Perriand's first mountain shelter, the 'Refuge Bivouac' was designed to be carried on foot and assembled on site, making minimal impact on the natural surroundings. It functioned like a flat-packed miniature house. The idea stemmed from Perriand's research into the minimal dwelling and her interest in using industrial prefabrication. In collaboration with engineer André Tournon, she developed panels of hardboard sandwiched between aluminium, creating lightweight pieces that could be easily transported and installed anywhere. The shelter takes its inspiration from a simple lean-to structure, allowing the inhabitant to personalise the space.

'Refuge Tonneau', cross-section, December 1938

Charlotte Perriand, Pierre Jeanneret

Pencil on tracing paper

Archives Charlotte Perriand

'Refuge Tonneau', cross-section showing position of beds, 26 April 1938

Charlotte Perriand, Pierre Jeanneret

Pencil on tracing paper

Archives Charlotte Perriand

'Refuge Tonneau', model, 1938

Charlotte Perriand, Pierre Jeanneret

Aluminium

Centre Pompidou, Paris

National Museum of Modern Art –Centre for Industrial Creation

Hoping to improve on the design of the 'Refuge Bivouac', Perriand found an unlikely source of inspiration – a children's merry-go-round. This was translated into the futuristic-looking 'Refuge Tonneau'. Consisting of a tubular-steel frame and twelve prefabricated aluminium panels, it could be erected in just four days. It was lightweight enough to be carried up steep slopes and robust enough to withstand extreme alpine weather. Perriand, collaborating with Pierre Jeanneret, designed the interior to be compact and easily transformable. The beds can be used as benches during the day, while cubic stools provide storage.

Les Arcs

‘I wanted to establish a perfect harmony between the sky, the mountain pastures and mankind.’

Although Perriand had already worked on two previous ski resorts in the 1950s and 1960s, Les Arcs was on a much larger scale. Accommodating 30,000 people, it was built at three different altitudes: 1,600, 1,800 and 2,000 metres. Work began at the lowest altitude, on Arc 1600 in 1967, and it took more than twenty years to complete the whole resort.

Like many of Perriand’s projects, Les Arcs was a collaboration. She worked with architect Gaston Regairaz and a host of engineers, including her friend Jean Prouvé. However, Perriand took the creative lead, steering the project to build more than one thousand rooms a year.

Perriand designed a set of ‘reclining buildings’ that nestle into the mountain slopes, with all rooms having clear views of the landscape. She incorporated everything she had learned about creating spacious, open-plan living in ‘minimum dwellings’. Les Arcs was the crowning achievement of a long career.

Les Arcs presentation photograph, depicting
La Cascade residence, Arc 1600, 1967–9
Pernette Perriand-Barsac
Photographic reproduction
Archives Charlotte Perriand

- 1 Arc 1600, La Cascade residence, perspective sketch of a section of the north façade, 11 October 1968
Charlotte Perriand
Pencil on tracing paper
Archives Charlotte Perriand

- 2 Arc 1600, La Cascade residence, elevation of the north façade, 15 May 1987
Charlotte Perriand
Pencil on tracing paper
Archives Charlotte Perriand

- 3 Arc 1800, Chantel Haut, 6 May 1977
Charlotte Perriand
Pencil on tracing paper
Archives Charlotte Perriand

- 4 Arc 1800, Aiguille Grive residence, living room from the mezzanine, 1986–9
Pernette Perriand-Barsac
Photographic reproduction
Archives Charlotte Perriand

- 5 Arc 1800, Pierra Menta Cup on building, 30 October 1979
Charlotte Perriand
Pencil on tracing paper
Archives Charlotte Perriand

- 6 Arc 1600, La Cascade residence, perspective sketch of the north façade entrance, 12 May 1977
Charlotte Perriand
Pencil on tracing paper
Archives Charlotte Perriand
- 7 Arc 1600, La Cascade residence, north/south studio cut, 30 December 1968
Charlotte Perriand
Pencil on tracing paper
Archives Charlotte Perriand
- 8 Arc 1800, Les Mirantins, section of the staircase, 6 May 1977
Charlotte Perriand
Pencil on tracing paper
Archives Charlotte Perriand
- 9 Arc 1800, comparative sizes of the different rooms, 27 February 1976
Charlotte Perriand
Pencil on tracing paper
Archives Charlotte Perriand
- 10 Arc 1800, Chantel Haut, sketch of the north and south residences, 6 May 1977
Charlotte Perriand
Pencil on tracing paper
Archives Charlotte Perriand

- 11 Arc 1800, Chantel Haut, cross-section of the buildings, 1981
Charlotte Perriand
Pencil on tracing paper
Archives Charlotte Perriand

- 12 Arc 1800, Chantel Haut, plan of the terraces, 1981
Charlotte Perriand
Pencil on tracing paper
Archives Charlotte Perriand

Les Arcs was a hugely ambitious project, and in this set of drawings you can see Perriand resolving a number of complex issues. First, there was the relationship of the buildings to the uneven landscape, and the way she makes them nestle into the contours of the mountain. Then there are the bathroom and kitchen modules, which she designed to be prefabricated as complete units that could simply be craned into place. Finally, there is the arrangement of the interiors. Perriand was a master at designing small spaces, and she ensured that each had a comfortable layout and good views of the landscape.

Pentagonal table for Arc 1800, Lauzières residence, 1976

Charlotte Perriand

Pine, metal

Galerie Laffanour-Downtown, Paris

Perriand designed this five-sided pine tabletop for the middle phase of the project, Arc 1800. She liked multi-sided tables because of the way they fit into small or awkward spaces. You can see how she includes the tables in her plans of the apartments, treating the architectural layout and the furnishing as parts of an integrated design.

Relief model showing the locations of Arc 1600
and Arc 1800, 1/800 scale, with film, 2019

Fondation Louis Vuitton

Wood, polyurethane, plexiglass, LED lights

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Run time: 6 mins 39 secs

Perriand's design for Les Arcs was progressive in its approach towards the natural environment. It was intentionally free of cars, and each building was planned to make minimal impact on the mountain landscape. With Arc 1600 and Arc 1800, the buildings are designed to lean into the slope rather than towering above them, making them appear to melt into the mountainside. This can be seen in the model, which highlights the relief of the land on which the two sites were built. The film focuses on the main buildings and interiors within these two sites.

Arc 1800, prefabricated bathroom, 1975

Charlotte Perriand

Fibreglass, polyester, ceramic, stainless steel

Centre Pompidou, Paris

National Museum of Modern Art – Centre for Industrial Creation

Arc 1800, prefabricated kitchen unit, 1975

Charlotte Perriand

Fibreglass, polyester, stainless steel

Centre Pompidou, Paris

National Museum of Modern Art – Centre for Industrial Creation

Les Arcs, prefabricated bathroom being installed by crane, c.1978

Unknown photographer

Photographic reproduction

Archives Charlotte Perriand

From the start, Perriand wanted to prefabricate the kitchens and bathrooms for Les Arcs. Her idea was to use cranes to lift the ready-made modules into place, so as to avoid clashing with various tradesmen (plumbers, painters, electricians, tilers) working in restricted spaces. Her idea was initially rejected and it was only with the construction of Arc 1800 that prefabricated elements began to be used. The installation was undertaken by ship-builders who were experienced in producing modular bathrooms and kitchens made of polyester fibre.



Arc 1800, sketch of pre-assembled bathroom, 30 January 1975

Charlotte Perriand

Pencil on tracing paper

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Arc 1800, sketch of prefabricated bar/kitchen, 13 July 1969

Charlotte Perriand

Pencil on tracing paper

Archives Charlotte Perriand

clockwise from left

Méribel chalet, elevation drawings of the interior, 1960

Charlotte Perriand

Pencil on tracing paper

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Méribel chalet, elevation drawings of the interior and southern façade details, 1960

Charlotte Perriand

Pencil on tracing paper

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Méribel chalet, main room on the ground floor, 1960

Pernette Perriand-Barsac

Photographic reproduction

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Méribel chalet, main room on the ground floor, 1960

Pernette Perriand-Barsac

Vintage photograph

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Méribel chalet, exterior, 1960

Pernette Perriand-Barsac

Vintage photograph

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Méribel chalet, living area on ground floor, 1960

Pernette Perriand-Barsac

Vintage photograph

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Méribel chalet, closed bed, bay window and gable wall, 1960

Pernette Perriand-Barsac

Vintage photograph

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Charlotte Perriand in front of the Méribel chalet under construction, 1960

Pernette Perriand-Barsac

Vintage photograph

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Between 1960 and 1961, Perriand designed and built herself a small chalet in Méribel Les Allues in France's Savoie region – not far from the ski resorts she would later design in the same area. In her autobiography, she wrote that it was the perfect space for daydreaming, where she would often escape when she needed a break from the city. Nestled on the side of a mountain overlooking a valley, the chalet has two floors that can be entered from the slope outside, and a large terrace. The interior is minimal, with wood and exposed stone. Perriand was inspired by the rustic furniture of Savoie, where her grandparents lived, while details such as straw tatami mats point to her years spent in Japan. The interior feels traditional but is highly modern.

'Charlotte Perriand: Créer l'habitat au XX siècle'

(Creating a home in the 20th century)

Jacques Barsac

Film

Produced by Antenne 2 and Ciné Service Technique

Run time: 8 mins 7 secs

Charlotte Perriand having fun at the Méribel chalet, c. 1984

Pernette Perriand-Barsac

Photographic reproduction

Archives Charlotte Perriand



Vase from Brazil, c. 1960

Unknown

Plastic

Archives Charlotte Perriand

Perriand bought this vase in Brazil. Fashioned from a plastic bottle, it could not be more humble, and yet Perriand was charmed by it. She felt it captured the essence of good design: resourceful, intelligent and infused with humanity.

Charlotte Perriand in her studio, Paris, January 1991

Robert Doisneau

Photographic reproduction

Atelier Robert Doisneau

“Man is really happy only when he strives, when he attempts something and makes a success of it; his happiness cannot be solely material. The extension of an art of dwelling is the art of living – living in harmony with man’s deepest drives and with his adopted and fabricated environment.”

— Charlotte Perriand