1987 marks the centenary of Le Corbusier's birth. Particularly in Britain he tends now only to be revered for the impact of his town-planning ideas and denigrated because many of his buildings were somehow flawed—sometimes in the most basic of ways. Yet he was head and shoulders the greatest architect of the twentieth century and rivaled in influence only by Mies van der Rohe—and perhaps Walter Gropius. But while Mies' was a reductive architecture, Le Corbusier's was dense and complex and multi-faceted. Though Frank Lloyd-Wright, Alvar Aalto and Louis Kahn all made magnificent buildings, Le Corbusier stands out for the extraordinary range of ideas, influences and intuitions he developed and absorbed in his career and which are packed into each of his buildings. While he lived, there was no twentieth-century art movement and few intellectual currents he had not looked at and drawn from, but always in a deep synthesis or provocative syncretism with yet other concerns.

Because of this, and both despite and because of his voluminous publications and the immediate poetry and power of his buildings, Le Corbusier is the least understood of modern architects. His post-Second World War buildings in particular largely defied adequate critical exegesis, though some penetrating if partial analyses of some of the works are now appearing, and there are no doubt a few practising architects who have understood them profoundly. Here, in Britain, as well as being blamed for the tower blocks that march through London's East End and similar razed areas of other British cities, he is usually trivialised as the great form maker. This interpretation legitimised first a vapid International Style and then a mindless Brutalism and the resulting plodding banalities were attributed to the architects lacking the Master's magic with form. That may also be true, but the problem was more profoundly one of lack of understanding. As I argue in analysing La Tourette (p48), Le Corbusier's was a many levelled architecture in which the various aspects interact in a series of internal dialogues. His genius was that very nuance of formal play, and allusion is informed by, reinforces and even comments on programmatic intent. But it was not just that the forcefulness of Le Corbusier buildings masked their complexity and subtlety; his publications explain surprisingly little about the buildings themselves, and can even be quite misleading. With Le Corbusier it is necessary to unravel the buildings, and once these are understood then the writings often take on new and deeper meanings that could not be grasped before. Though the essential tool to study the buildings is still the Oeuvre Complète, this is a highly edited view. Eager to present the buildings as