

arts & architecture

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STAIRS

FROM AN EXHIBITION AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, SELECTED AND DESIGNED BY BERNARD RUDOFSKY, ARCHITECT

Ascending or descending a flight of stairs once called for a display of grace unmarred by any sign of physical exertion, while steps leading to altars or thrones imposed a veritable ritual of movement. The towers of Biblical times, ziggurats, stepped pyramids and hanging gardens, were architecture made almost entirely of stairs. In the so-called Tower of Babel—probably the most venturesome construction ever undertaken—stairs and ramps reached their most exalted station. But since man failed to go to heaven by way of stairs, their importance declined. The space problems and seemingly unlimited variations according to which steps can be arranged have fascinated architects and craftsmen of all times.

—BERNARD RUDOFSKY



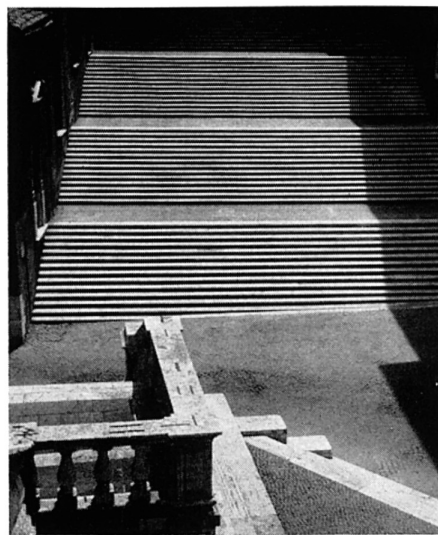
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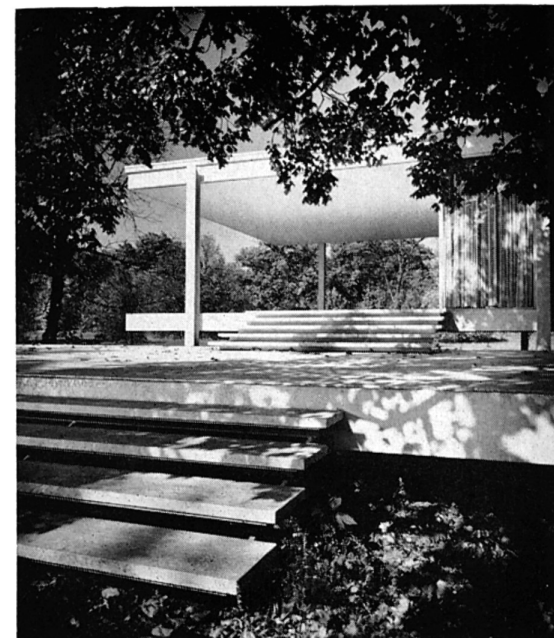
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PHOTOGRAPH BY DOLF SIEBERT

Included in this exhibition are ziggurats, church stairs, outdoor staircases, house stairs, both inside and out, ramps, stairs with banisters and without, spiral stairs, theater stairs, stairs used as astronomical instruments, and stairs which form paths and streets. Rome boasted veritable "stairscapes." The situation of the city on seven hills led to the construction of staircases in every phase of Roman history. Some stairs are dominated by their rails and banisters; others serve uses for which they are not intended. In Delhi and Jaipur gigantic flights of steps, leading nowhere, serve as the world's largest equinoctial sundials. With the birth of modern architecture came an interest on the part of architects in flights of steps unlike any they had ever known: irregular height, width or depth; or meandering, curving erratically.

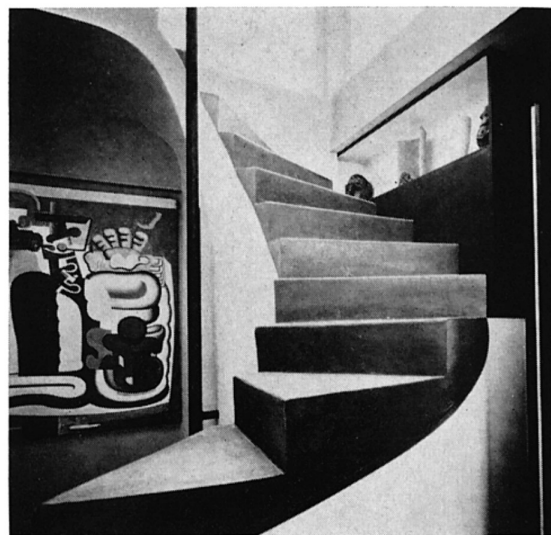


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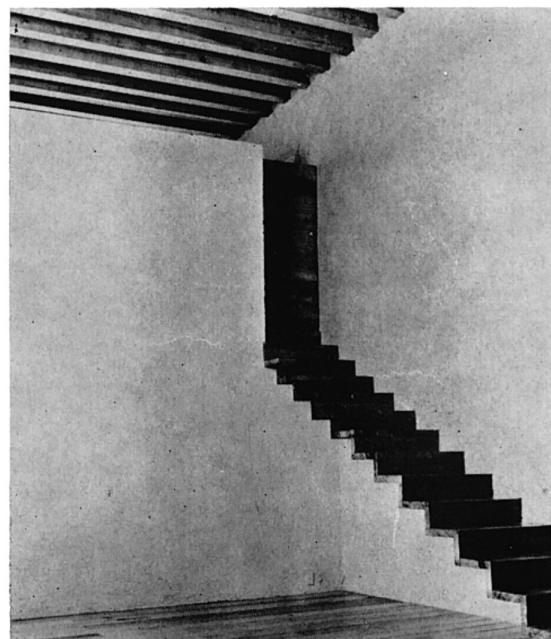
- 1. HEWN LOG, 1670 NORWEGIAN BARN
- 2. MACHU PICCHU RUINS, PERU
- 3. SENATE, CAMPIDOGGIO, ROME, ITALY
- 4. NORTH BRIDGE FOOT RAMP, DUSSELDORF, GERMANY
- 5. FARNSWORTH HOUSE, ILLINOIS,
MIES VAN DER ROHE, ARCHITECT
- 6. STAIRCASE IN DEPARTMENT STORE DUFAYEL,
PARIS, FRANCE
- 7. LE CORBUSIER'S OWN APARTMENT AT LA PORTE MOLITOR
- 8. LUIS BARRAGAN'S OWN HOUSE, TACUBAYA, MEXICO
- 9. ST. KNUD LAVARD CHURCH SPIRAL STAIRCASE,
NEAR COPENHAGEN, DENMARK



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