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Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye

Picture: Jean-Christophe Ballot

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Site-seeing: iconic modernist houses around the world

Now you can plan your grand tour by consulting the Iconic Houses website



BY MATT GIBBERD & ALBERT HILL
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There are some ardent architecture aficionados out there (and, yes, we count ourselves among them) who will arrange their entire holiday around a house. We don't necessarily mean staying in the house, indeed possibly not even going inside the house – sometimes just a glimpse of a great building will do. Recently, we took a trip to the otherwise unremarkable Paris suburb of Poissy to see Le Corbusier's great masterpiece, the [Villa Savoye](#). It was closed to the public that day leaving us straining to see it through a chain-link fence. Even this, however, was enough to make it the highlight of a French holiday.

Admittedly this might not be a view shared by the rest of the family. There are some (naming no names) who would rather slope off to the spa, or spend the afternoon on a trampoline rather than travel

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Villa Savoye

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to some far-flung residential road to admire a 50-year old slab of concrete, or particularly fascinating bit of brick. But to us dedicated architecture fans, no trouble is too much in the search for seeing the very finest house.

Expert sleuthing skills have always been essential to tracking down outstanding architecture. Also a readiness for disappointment – it’s often happened that a

long trip will end in seeing a house recently reduced to rubble to make way for something larger, newer and shinier (you can imagine how popular that is with the family who have been dragged away from the hotel pool). Such hazards, however, may be a thing of the past thanks to the [Iconic Houses](#) network, an organisation that has set up a website pinpointing on a map all the best modernist houses across the world and how to access them.

The Iconic Houses network is the brainchild of Natascha Drabbe, a Dutch architectural historian who owns one of Holland’s most celebrated houses, the Van Schijndel House in Utrecht. She herself was one of these people that planned her holidays around architecture she could enjoy and so the website seemed one that was crying out to be created. She started her research in 2009 and the network was formed in 2012 together with Susanna Pettersson, then director of the Alvar Aalto Foundation and now director of The Finnish Institute in London.



Melnikov House by Konstantin Melnikov, Moscow, Russia

[Enlarge](#)

More than simply an architectural sight-seeing guide though, the network is an amazing communication resource for the people involved with the conservation of “iconic houses”, helping them to share ideas, tips and assistance. As Drabbe says, “with

the most interesting houses, architects often experimented with new materials and construction methods, many of which present problems for conservationists”. The hope is that the increased awareness of these houses will result in less piles of rubble and many more being saved for the enjoyment of avid architecture fans like us.

On November 12 at the V&A in London, there is to be the very first [Iconic Houses Symposium](#), at which you can hear the cases of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Fallingwater, Mies van der Rohe’s Villa Tugendhat and the Melnikov House in Moscow discussed. Villa Tugendhat in the Czech Republic for example, has recently undergone a £5m refurbishment while the fate of the Melnikov House is one of the thorniest issues in conservation, with many accusing the Russians of neglecting one of the most eccentric and engaging masterpieces of 20th-century architecture.

These houses might be the most celebrated that fall under the remit of the IH network, but there are many less well known residences that Drabbe says deserve wider attention. Haus Schminke by Hans Scharoun in Germany, for instance, has a spectacular, swooping form that makes it one her favourites and Paul Rudolph’s Umbrella House in Florida is an exquisite example of minimal mid-century architecture.

One of the best things about the IH website is the number of new possible holiday destinations that it opens up. We never knew, for instance, that there was a Gio Ponti house in Venezuela or that one of the best houses of the 1940s was built in Japan (the Kunio Maekawa house in Tokyo). Flights are now



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