

# E.1027, THE ENDLESS STORY

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After suffering years of ill-treatment, the house that Eileen Gray built for her younger lover, Jean Badovici, has been returned to its original splendour and is open for guided visits

After it had been left abandoned, used by the German army as a target for shooting practice, discredited (and stripped out) by an owner who was a morphine addict and was found murdered on the floor of the living room, then turned upside down by vandals in more recent years, the white house that dominates the sea at **Roquebrune Cap-Martin**, on the **Côte d'Azur**, has finally been put back in shape, and has been open to the public since last May.

Considered one of the masterpieces of modernism, but with a sensuality that makes it different from many other buildings of the period, it was the first building designed by **Eileen Gray**. It was a project of her mature years: she was 48 when she began building it in 1926. For the three years it took to complete, she lived in a small apartment in **Roquebrune**, devoting herself to it body and soul, living the life of a recluse and eating on the site during the day; apart from her swims in the clear water of the Mediterranean, that was her only amusement.

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Her lover and mentor, the architect and intellectual **Jean Badovici**, fifteen years her junior, only came to check the progress of the works when he wasn't busy running his magazine, **L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui**. This house 'au bord de la mer' had been his idea and it was for him that **Gray** designed it. She gave it a codified name: **E.1027**. The E stands for Eileen, the 10 stands for the letter J of Jean (the 10th letter of the alphabet), the 2 is the B of Badovici, and the 7 is the G of Gray.

**Gray** was an independent woman. 'Even in the smallest house one needs to feel alone, completely alone', she wrote. She modelled the space on this need for isolation and freedom. She had calculated everything: the movement through the house, the gestures, the habits. And the perfect orientation of each room, the idealised view to the outside, and the suspense that is created passing from one room to the next. But there was one thing she hadn't foreseen: the arrogance of which a legend of architecture like **Le Corbusier** was capable. **Badovici** had introduced her to him a few years earlier. When **Corbu** saw the house he praised it and **Gray** was happy. But there was something dramatic about what then happened. So dramatic, in fact, that a film has been made about it, **The Price of Desire**, which came out this year.

The 'tragedy' was played out in 1938. **Gray** and **Badovici** split up and he invited **Corbu** to come and live in the house when she wasn't there. And that was where the architect of the **Ville Radieuse** decided to cover her immaculately white walls with not one, but eight paintings. What's more he also had himself photographed whilst he was doing it, completely naked. His sexist drawings made fun of the fact that **Gray** was bisexual (before **Badovici** she had had lesbian affairs) and of her relationship with her lover. Obviously, **Eileen Gray** reacted badly. She described what he had done as 'an act of vandalism'.

The architectural historian **Beatriz Colomina** prefers to interpret it as a psychiatric case. It appears that **Le Corbusier** had developed a real obsession about **E.1027**; this is confirmed by the fact that at a certain point he decided to build his own summer hideaway nearby, **the Cabanon**, thereby also violating the privacy of her house. As for **Eileen**, after that she never went back to the house.

[e1027.org](http://e1027.org)

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