

Eileen Gray's iconic E1027 house on the Côte d'Azur opens to visitors

ARCHITECTURE / 15 JUN 2015 / BY FANNY HARPER



E-1027 is now open after a long restoration process. The house was designed by Eileen Gray in 1927. *Photography: Tim Benton*

▶ ↗ ■■■ 1 OF 9

Friends of E.1027

After years of decay and a long restoration process, E-1027, the iconic house built by Irish architect and designer Eileen Gray in 1927, is at last open to visit.

Gray created the building for herself and her then-lover architect Jean Badovici as a secluded retreat clutching the French Mediterranean coastline. The house was built on a slight diagonal facing out to sea. With its horizontal white lines, funnel-like stairwell opening onto the roof and token buoy hitched to the side, it's like a modernist ship ready to set sail.

Michael Likierman is a retired British businessman who runs Cap Moderne, the association set up to manage and finish the restoration work for the Conservatoire du Littoral, which bought the house in disrepair in 1999. He explains that French regulations impose an intentionally aged interior, which accounts for the chipped floor tiles and patinaed walls that you can find inside. Gray's clever concertina bay windows and sliding shutters have been lovingly restored but, says Likierman, 'the reproductions of Eileen Gray's fixed cabinets are not right. We'll be having them done again based on new research. The aim is to recreate the interior exactly as it was in 1929 from photos.'

Friends of E.1027

The architecture and fittings were conceived by Gray to work as an inseparable whole. A few of her ingenious inbuilt cupboards remain, complete with pivoting drawers, concealed lighting and cubbyholes. The furniture had long gone, but Zeev Aram of the Aram Store, who holds the license to all of Gray's furniture designs, has donated reproductions. Some, such as the Bibendum chair, Transat chair and E-1027 side table, were part of the original furnishings, while others were not. Until they gain their own patina, these brand new, flawless pieces cut a subtle contrast with the cracked and water-stained walls and floors.

The real clash, though, comes from Le Corbusier's notorious, colourful murals. His colourful, abstract paintings are said to have horrified Gray at the time, although she had long since left the house to Badovici. Le Corbusier clearly loved this spot too - he built his holiday cabin and a set of camping units just above E-1027, and all are part of the visit, making it a feast for lovers of 20th-century architecture.