



The Rietveld Schröder House

Paul Overy

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With Lenneke Büller, Frank den Oudsten, and Bertus Mulder

The Rietveld Schröder House incorporates a variety of perspectives to unite the client, architect, and structure in a rare complete document of a living landmark.

Newly restored and open to the public, the small semi-detached house on the outskirts of Utrecht was the prototype of a style that was one of the most reproduced and influential of any domestic building of the early modern period. It was constructed in 1925, the first complete building designed by Gerrit Rietveld, a Dutch designer who began his career as a craftsman and who later became identified with the De Stijl group.

Two remarkable series of photographs by Frank den Oudsten record the house as it was shortly before Mrs. Schröder's death and as it is today after restoration. These form a clear comparative record of the way in which the house was changed to fulfill the client's different needs. Den Oudsten's color photographs, supplemented with many black and white archival photographs dating from the early years of the house, show Rietveld's mastery of a fresh design syntax an open plan, interlocking planes and colors, built in furniture, sculpture like storage units that was thoroughly modern then and remains crisp and vital today.

Paul Overy analyzes the project in light of today's shifting attitudes toward modernism and in relation to the De Stijl group of artists and architects. Among the book's revelations is an interview with Mrs. Schröder who commissioned the house and continued to live in it until her death in 1985 at the age of 95. In this personal account she reveals that as a recent widow and mother of three children she wanted a house that would demonstrate how to live a new kind of life in the 20th century. Her house was a declaration that an independent modern woman intended to live informally and without ostentation, among objects that were at once functional and aesthetically significant.

The recent, careful restoration described here was carried out by Bertus Mulder, a friend of Mrs. Schröder and former employer of Rietveld. Paul Overy is a well known architectural critic and the author of *De Stijl*. He is Lecturer in History of Art and Design at the London Institute.

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