In 1927, the great Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier completed a house in the Paris suburb of Garches.

The house has become an icon of modern architecture.

Other major architectural events took place that year: Konstantin Melnikov built his cylinder house in Moscow; Alvar Aalto won the competition for the design of the Vippur Library in Vyborg, Russia; Pierre Chareau began work on the Maison de Verre in Paris; and sixteen leading architects of the modern movement, including Le Corbusier, showcased projects for working-class housing at the Weissenhof exhibition in Stuttgart. And in the new medium of cinema, 1927 featured Fritz Lang’s landmark film Metropolis—starring audiences with visions of how buildings in the future could look.

But no structure of the early modernist era has gained more renown than Le Corbusier’s Villa de Monzie/Stein at Garches. In 1947, British scholar Colin Rowe’s essay “The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa” brought Garches to the foreground. And Garches—as architects refer to the house—has stayed there ever since.

Architect Jeffrey Hildner revisits the mathematics of the ideal villa. He uncovers Rowe’s oversights and sweeps away the mythologies about Garches that Rowe’s essay generated. In addition, Hildner’s analysis and drawings reveal new aspects of Le Corbusier’s work that have remained hidden until now.

Garches 1234 picks up where Rowe’s essay left off and throws bold light on Le Corbusier’s assertion that at Garches, more than any of his other projects, “proportion ruled absolutely there, as absolute mistress.”

Hildner published an early version of this essay in the refereed Journal of Architectural Education. Here the essay appears in its final and fully illustrated form.