



# Le Corbusier's “Naked”: “Absolute Honesty” and (Exhibitionist) Display in Bathroom Settings

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**ABSTRACT** *This article could be described as “how Modernism got (us) naked.” It examines both vernacular and professional design examples of (1) the meaning of “naked” in relationship to bathroom design as an important aspect of twentieth-century design, and (2) why and how bathrooms were transformed into Naked spaces by two interrelated ideas – modernism and the museum. A sequence of the various interpretations of Naked in bathroom design includes aspects of planning, aesthetics rhetorical devices, and archetypal practices.*

**KEYWORDS:** modernism, interior, design, bathroom, museum

Modernism upended traditions about architectural space, and the bathroom was no exception. The story of the chronological transformation from the nineteenth century's hygienic White Box into the twenty-first century's Naked bathroom is based on the premise that the design condition, Naked, did not suddenly appear in the 1990 decade in luxury apartments and boutique hotels as something new. Rather, it emerged from a sequence of design iterations begun by Modernists, which evolved as a series of replications, marked by linked and similar solutions that can be traced through time.

Naked is a bathroom in which one or more bathroom fixtures are visible through transparent partitions, or a fixture is located out of the context of a private space, such as a bathtub located in a bedroom (Intypes 2005–11; Yang 2005: 21; Wasilewski 2011: 83). Naked is archetypal in that it represents an ideal example of a historical and culturally determined practice of design from which similar models are derived, emulated or reiterated. Other archetypal practices, such as White Box, Scene Seen, and Island, contribute to the Naked bathroom (Jennings 2007: 54) (Figure 1).

Two influential design sources, canonical architects, such as Le Corbusier, Wright, Gray, and Neutra, and plumbing manufacturers, which included Standard and Kohler, provided the scaffolding for the new design characterized as Naked. First, they borrowed four museum display devices to aestheticize the functional bathroom into one of beauty and status. Second, they elevated industrially produced functional objects, such as sinks and toilets, to *objet d'art* status, which was technologically and artistically appropriate for museum exhibition. Third, they compartmentalized functions of the bathroom into spatial entities. Fourth, Modernist materials imparted a heightened sense of spatial experience and bodily pleasure that led to attention-seeking behavior.

Although there are many art and/or performance art examples having to do with bathroom fixtures, including Marcel Duchamp's 1917 work that turned an ordinary urinal, which he named *Fountain*, into a work of art. This article, however, excludes art examples in



**Figure 1**

Three archetypal practices go hand in hand with the Modernist principles and museum display systems in which the Naked archetype emerged. Intypes Research and Teaching Project.

favor of an architecturally focused argument about the archetypical practice Naked in the context of Modernist architectural principles.

The meaning of "naked" is an important aspect of the history of twentieth-century Modernism. In the term's first usage during the Renaissance (1528), naked characterized an unfinished and empty space, a room, wall, or floor without carpets, hangings, or similar furnishings. By the middle of the nineteenth century, naked became associated with a lack of ornament or decoration. Naked came to mean plain or unadorned. In 1929, Le Corbusier described the modernist principle of "absolute honesty" as naked (Banham 1984: 150). Le Corbusier's naked denoted a lack of disguise in which an object's true intention was not concealed.

In studying the nomenclature of naked, one is reminded of art historian Kenneth Clark's distinctions between the terms naked and nude. Naked "implies some of the embarrassment most of us feel in that condition. The word nude, on the other hand, carries, in educated usage, no uncomfortable overtone." The word nude "was forced into our vocabulary by critics of the early eighteenth century to persuade the artless islanders that, in countries where painting and sculpture were practiced and valued as they should be, the naked human body was the central subject of art." Naked is provocative; nude is evocative. Le Corbusier chose the provocative term to indicate the strength of his conviction about materials (Clark 1956: 3).

### **Design Evolution**

The history of bathroom fixtures and bathroom spaces is primarily a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century technological and spatial development. An 1898 article in *Architectural Record* described "the epoch of what is commonly called exposed plumbing" as commencing about 1880.

It was in that year that there were slight improvements noticed, which began to follow each other so rapidly that it is easy enough to point out the years 1880 and 1881 as the beginning of the present era of sanitary and improved plumbing ... Prior to 1880 plumbing fixtures were considered so unsightly that architects were accustomed to sacrifice even the occupant's health to hide such unsightliness. (*Architectural Record* 1898: 111, 112)

For much of the twentieth century, bathrooms could be understood as the accommodation of three essential fixtures – sink, toilet, and tub or tub with shower – in one space, with one or more users at a time. With changes in the technology and the lowering of plumbing costs, bathrooms gradually became an integral part of the American middle-class home (Giedion 1969: 682–712; Gottfried and Jennings 2009: 280–3, 305, 315–26). The bathroom progressed from a renovated bedroom to the specially designed standard cell. Apartment

houses for the wealthy were among the first to use a room (Wilkie 1986: 653). Bathrooms were zoned away from public areas, except for a half-bath or “powder room” (toilet and sink) that was located in the public living area of the house.

By the early twentieth century the room developed into a simple, autonomous, and hygienic white box. Adolf Loos’ 1898 article, “Plumbers,” made it clear that “one of the fundamental tenets of Modernism was its image of hygiene, its ideal of bringing cleanliness and order to the great unwashed” (Lahiji and Friedman 1997: 167). According to Adrian Forty the pursuit of hygiene in England reached its “most vivid expression” in the 1920s and 1930s. “The white enamel bathtub and basin, the tiled walls and the chromium fittings, all with hard, bright finishes became an image of hygiene that [expressed] made a virtue of cleanliness” (Forty 1986: 116, 117). Ordinary American bathrooms retained a hygienic white aesthetic well into the 1920s, in spite of plumbing manufacturers advocating colors as early as 1906:

It is preferable not to make the bathroom all white, as it gives a cold, cheerless appearance, and does not add any to its sanitary effectiveness. Decorate the walls and ceilings with some light tint, such as pale green, buff, terra cotta, etc. (Standard Sanitary 1906: 57)

Although early bathrooms were little more than white boxes, the Modernist White Box, an undecorated space with white walls, white ceiling, and continuous neutral floor, originated in 1927 as a clean envelope in a German housing exposition calling for a bare white architecture (Intypes 2003–11; Suh 2003, 94–8; Scolere 2004: 23–33) (see Figure 1).

White Box also emerged as an aesthetic in the influential 1932 Museum of Modern Art exhibition, “Modern Architecture: International Exhibition,” organized by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson. The show of contemporary European and American architecture toured nationally and brought European architectural developments to a wide audience in America. In the title of the tour and its accompanying book, Hitchcock and Johnson coined the phrase “The International Style”: a style expressing volume as opposed to mass and solidity, regularity as opposed to axial symmetry, and the exclusion of applied decoration. To Hitchcock and Johnson, Modernism meant something almost entirely aesthetic, as represented by Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe (Wiseman 1998: 163–4).

The bathroom accommodated the most basic of human functions, but Americans used modern technology, plumbing fixtures, and bathroom spaces as identifications of their social status. By 1912 American plumbing manufacturers avowed that the bathroom was a place of beauty in the modern home and deserved special

treatment spatially and materially. By 1930 colorful advertisements in American magazines, such as *Time* and *The Saturday Evening Post*, made bathroom beauty and design as important, if not more so, than any other room in the house. Crane Plumbing's marketing conjoined the terms "purpose" (function) with decoration (beauty), the result of which was "temples of health and charm" (*Time* 1930). A 1935 article in *House and Garden* magazine declared that the new trend in bathrooms was architectural and reported that although glass bathtubs were being manufactured, "their cost puts them out of reach of the ordinary purse" (*House and Garden* 1935).

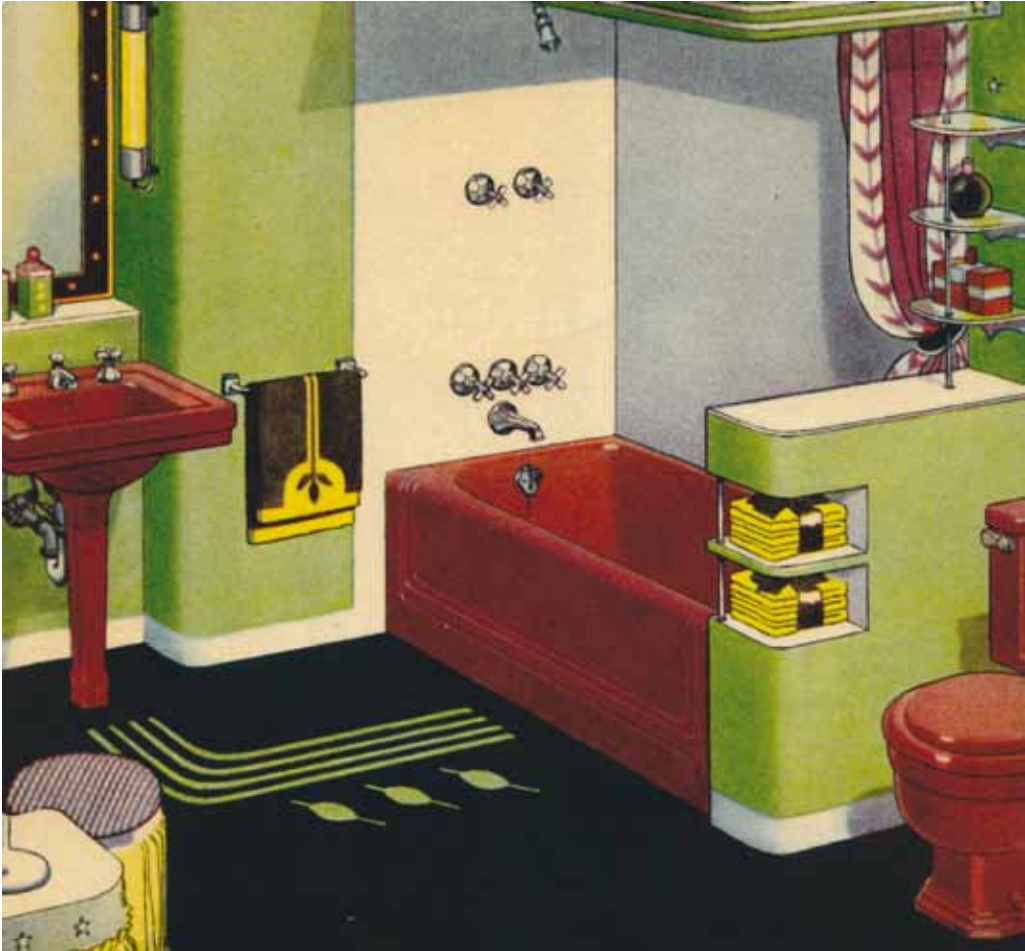
The bathroom's significance in Modernist architecture has been an overlooked area of research, but architect Mies van der Rohe's drawings for the Tugendhat House (1928–30) in Brno, Czechoslovakia included sections of the Governess's room detailing a cabinet and built-in sink. For the Farnsworth House (1945–51) in Plano, Illinois van der Rohe prepared cross-sections through the bathtub and fireplace and a section of a toilet. The drawings reside in the Museum of Modern Art's collection.

### **Museum Display Devices and *Objet d'art* Status**

Four museum display devices (*vignette*, *niche*, plinth, *vitrine*) promoted the bathroom as a designed space, significant in its own right and worthy of architectural attention. Early on, bathrooms were simply containers for fixtures, but plumbing and tile manufacturers led the way in encouraging architects, decorators, and contractors, as well as home and apartment owners, to treat the bathroom as an "architectural problem – *building* appropriate fixtures into the room with appropriate tiling, instead of merely *arranging*" fixtures on a floor plan (Mott 1914: 14). Standard Plumbing cited the bathroom as a long neglected space and urged homeowners to realize its "*importance as an interior*" (*Saturday Evening Post* 1930). These edicts insisted that a bathroom should have coordinated design decor, as well as spatial manipulations of the wall and floor planes (Jennings 1992: 271).

The device that depicted the bathroom "as an interior" was the *vignette*, a museum practice in which a themed interior scene developed from objects in a collection. In advertisements, fixtures and fittings were illustrated in colorful rendered perspectives and depicted as pieces in an ensemble, sometimes amid ostentatious, capacious, and luxurious settings. Showrooms offered real spaces in which clients experienced the bathroom as luxurious, often stylistic settings. Architecture came first, before fixtures were added (Mott 1914: 14) (Figure 2).

Display strategies, such as *vignette*, shaped consumer ideas about the use and aesthetics of space. The process of establishing brand names, then as now, involved attaching social signifiers to commodities to create a fantasy world, which was represented as being realistic and possible.



**Figure 2**

By the 1930s, planar ornament and rounded walls and partitions associated with *Moderne* styling contributed to Standard's Apartment Group *vignette* (Standard Apartment Group 1937: bet. 188–9).

In a 1929 full-page advertisement for Kohler Plumbing, two-thirds of the page featured a watercolor rendering of a *vignette* designed by New York City architect Ely Jacques Kahn for the Metropolitan Museum of Art's "The Architect and Industrial Arts" Exhibition. For a "Modern Bath and Dressing Room," Kahn produced "an agreeable setting for an important element in the house without decoration as the basis." The room combined "artistry" (Art Deco) with "logical simplicity" (Modernism), including glass walls that could be cleaned easily and a softly cushioned rubber floor that obviated the need for bath mats (*Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 1929; Metropolitan Museum of Art 1929: 63, 65).

Standard Sanitary Manufacturing Company's 1929 catalog proposed alternative bathroom color schemes featuring "Rose du

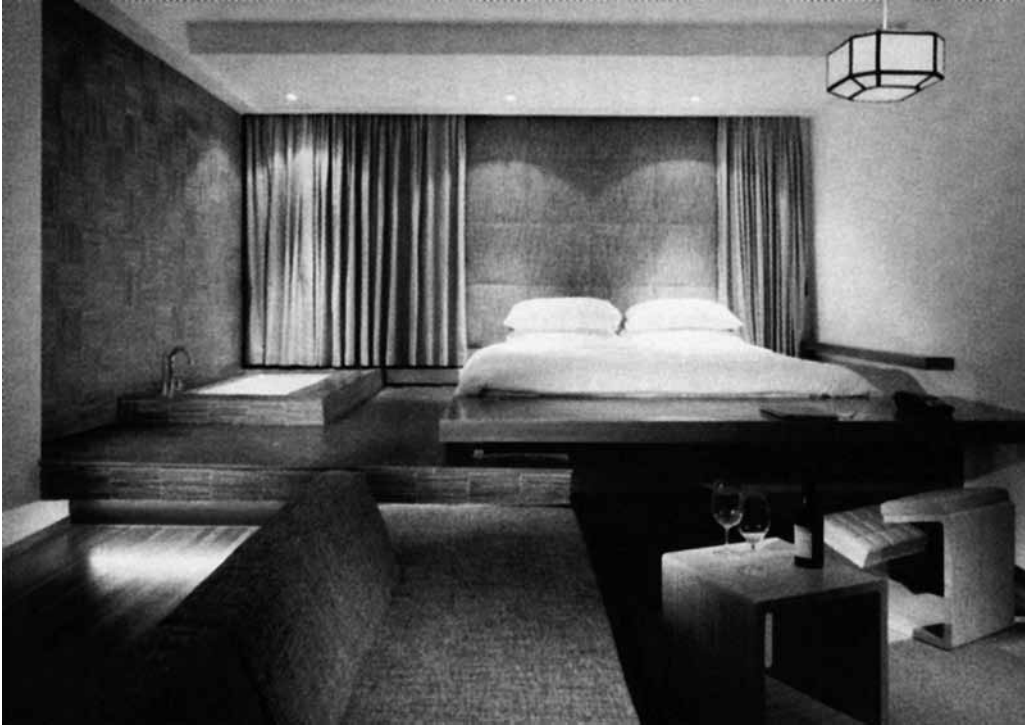
Barry," as the fixture color in an "artist's painting." The rendering enlarged the actual space, while Standard claimed that the room's spaciousness was accomplished by the placement of the fixtures. Standard's bathroom perspectives transformed small sanitary functional rooms into romanticized palatial settings (Jennings 1992: 271).

Between 1950 and 1960, *vignettes* influenced the development of Modernist bathrooms expressing fluidity and free plan. In a recent photographic *vignette* for Agape, Philippe Starck's *Chiocciola* shower (a translucent shell) appeared in a Naked context, a room in which all of the fixtures were arranged in an open plan with the bed. Starck characterized his design as "*haute couture* for the shower."

Trade sources also illustrated *vignettes* in which a single fixture as *objet* was illustrated within its immediate surroundings. The suggestion of mirror, tile, mural, or panel surrounds contributed to objectifying and elevating the status of one fixture above all the rest. In the context of a museum the artifacts in a *vignette* assume an aura of importance; objects are endowed with a sense of significance. Some *vignettes* established a single plumbing fixture, the most utilitarian of objects, as worthy of a museum display, as if it were an *objet d'art*.

Whether in a rendering or a real architectural space, a *niche* (a recession in the wall) and/or a plinth (a platform) became a convenient device to display a single fixture as *objet*. A single fixture placed in a *niche* distinguished it as a prized object (Figure 3). Standard Sanitary's *vignette* for Design P85 in 1912 illustrated *niches* for both a tub and lavatory (Standard Sanitary 1912: 26.) Le Corbusier's ink on tracing paper sketch for the Villa Schwob (1916) illustrated a large bathroom in which the bathtub was placed in its own alcove (von Moos and Ruegg 2002: 223). Standard Sanitary's elaborate *vignettes* expanded a *niche* to include spatial experience. Its *Ivoire de Medici* bathroom in 1929 featured a bathtub recessed in a large alcove. The tub space was reached by ascending three steps. Once inside, draperies closed off the room to allow for solitude. In the same catalog, the Orchid of Vincennes bathroom was illustrated with a toilet placed in a round corner with a full-height drapery to close off the space visually, but not acoustically (Standard Sanitary 1929: n.p.). Both architects and manufacturers also relied on a plinth to raise the *objet* off the floor in order to isolate and call attention to a single fixture, a display strategy of contemporary boutique hotels for bathrooms, fixtures, and, often, a bed (Putnam 2001: 36) (Figure 4).

The most contrived commodity aesthetic for a work of art belonged to Standard Plumbing who presented a client with an album of specifications. The simulated leather cover and back contained a title page, "Specification," listing Howard Thrall as the residence's owner; Authur [sic] Brooks, builder; Standard's Springfield office as submitter; and the date – June 26, 1935. [A border comprised of three lines that imitated matting framed each page of scrapbook-quality paper.] Each image of a single fixture, cut from a catalog page, was secured with gold photo-mounts. There were seven pages in



**Figure 3**

Standard Plumbing's rendered *vignette* for The Two-in-One Group signified the *objet d'art* status of a sink and a toilet with a *niche* and a private room for a large bathtub (Standard Sanitary Manufacturing Company, *Planning Your Plumbing Wisely* (Springfield, IL: c.1936), 4 in Jennings 1992: 272).

all, illustrating the Thrall family's choices for a tub, sink, toilet, and showerhead, as well as a sink and toilet for a second bathroom, and a third sink in the basement (Standard Sanitary 1935).

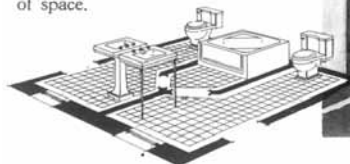
Practical *objets* represented reiterative industrial designs – the improvement of technological functions, as well as artistic styling. In its 1937 catalog American Standard Plumbing Fixtures illustrated its company's "parade of progress" in toilet design with a fifty-year retrospective of six toilet images distributed one by one on a sweeping curve beginning at the bottom of the page with the 1885 model. The retrospective culminated at the top of the page with the largest, and latest, image of the "artistically designed, thoroughly sanitary Master One-Piece Closet." Although the One-Piece was efficient, and "outstandingly modern," American Standard claimed its goal was to "completely satisfy the essential requisite of good proportion in design" (American Standard 1937a).

Among Modernists, however, Le Corbusier uplifted a commonplace washbasin to museum object status when he located it in the entry hall of the Villa Savoye. Taken altogether, the sink, factory-



### The Two-in-One Group

Had you ever imagined that a bathroom of such distinction with the practical uses of two bathrooms, could be built in a space as small as ten feet square. Well, here it is! The Neo-Angle Bath is in its own compartment with a door to each room. A beautiful Vitreous China lavatory and quiet, attractive Master One-Piece Closet are in each of the rooms outside the bath compartment. Note that three fixture colors are used, but the entire ensemble is in harmony. It is a novel and most efficient use of space.



Fixtures:  
Neo-Angle Bath, P 2100 E  
Blackford, Restary Lavatories  
Master One-Piece Closets

**Figure 4**

A00 Architects placed the bed and a tub on two plinths for the Studio King Lounge guest room in the Urban Hotel (2008) in Shanghai. The first was a stone platform on which a tub was sunk; a wood plinth raised the bed slightly higher than the platform (Sole 2008: 279). Photo credit: Nacása & Partners Inc.

like industrial glazing, and an ordinary industrial ramp comprise a ceremonial entry. "The washbasin suggests the ablutions of a ritual entry, for example in a mosque or a church" (Passanti 1997: 441).

Fittings also emerged as significant *objets* in *vignettes* in their placement, strong profiles, and materials (bright white, or in the machine-like finishes of nickel, chrome, and stainless steel). In the twentieth century, and the first decade of the twenty-first, the design of plumbing fixtures and fittings as *objet* attracted the attention of internationally prominent architects and industrial designers.

Art museums increasingly regarded fixtures and fittings as *objet d'art*. There are two in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City – the Vola Spout designed in 1968 by Danish architect Arne Jacobsen for a kitchen (Hackney 1972) and Italian architect Mario Bellini's "Class Water Faucet," for a bathroom, designed in 1978 of chromed brass. In 2008 the Philadelphia Art Museum acquired the Lavasca Mini tub designed by Matteo Thun for its permanent contemporary design collection. The tub was cited for its "innovative use of technology, material, and organic spherical shape as paramount to Bernini's boat fountain in Rome." Manufactured by the Milan-based Rapsel, the vessel weighed 440 pounds and was produced using a composite material called Cristalplant (Petriello 2009).

## Functional Compartmentalization

At the same time that Modernism's free plan concept took shape in the public areas of a house, modern designers and trade manufacturers yielded to a functional concern when they compartmentalized plumbing fixtures by removing them from a one-room setting. Compartmentalization made possible one of the conditions of Naked – the detachment and removal of one or more fixtures from a bathroom, such as a tub placed in a non-bathroom setting.

Initially the small size of the standard bathroom reflected American's ambivalence about bodily functions, and health critics were undecided about whether the toilet should be placed in the room with other fixtures and functions, or in a separate compartment. The hotel industry's model of one bathroom per bedroom may have influenced the domestic minimal bathroom comprised of a sink, a tub, and a toilet in one room. By the early 1920s, the standard bathroom size was five feet by five feet (Lupton and Miller 1992: 34).

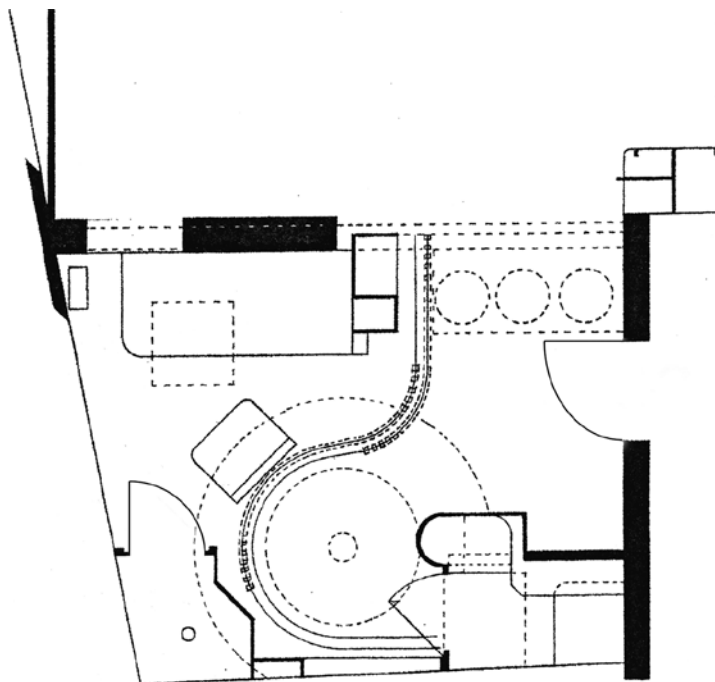
Hygiene and compactness aside, the desire for, and the practical advantage of, separate facilities, or a partitioned space for the toilet, allowed for multiple users of the bathroom at the same time.

In 1912 Standard Sanitary predicted that a toilet in a separate closet enclosure, reached from both the bathroom and the hall, would "become more general in the future" (Standard Sanitary 1912: 15). Closet was the operative concept in that when advertisements and catalogs for plumbing companies depicted a toilet in a separate room with a door, the space was tiny (Lupton and Miller 1992: 36). Plumbing manufacturers' *vignettes* also depicted the bathtub in its own room. Standard Plumbing called this configuration the Two-in-One Group (see Figure 3). Two spaces with sink and toilet were located on either side of the bathtub space, allowing two to three people to use all the facilities at one time (American Standard 1937b).

In 1926 architect Eileen Gray designed a compartmentalized bathroom in a one-room apartment (Figure 5):

The main space, 15-0 feet square, included a bed-living-room, with the kitchen, bathroom and hall neatly packed into the remaining 9-0' × 15'-0. The fixtures were screened from each other by a primitive form of flexible door and very ingenious perforated metal screens. (Rykwert 1971)

When the Museum of Modern Art mounted its first modern architectural exhibition (1932), only two American houses were determined worthy of inclusion: Richard Neutra's Lovell House (1929), widely published and praised as one of the first examples of the International Style in the United States (Jandl 1991: 40), and the Aluminaire House, designed by A. Lawrence Kocher and Albert Frey, the first structure built in America by a disciple of Le Corbusier (Kocher et al. 1990: 59; Rosa 1990: 42). As a house

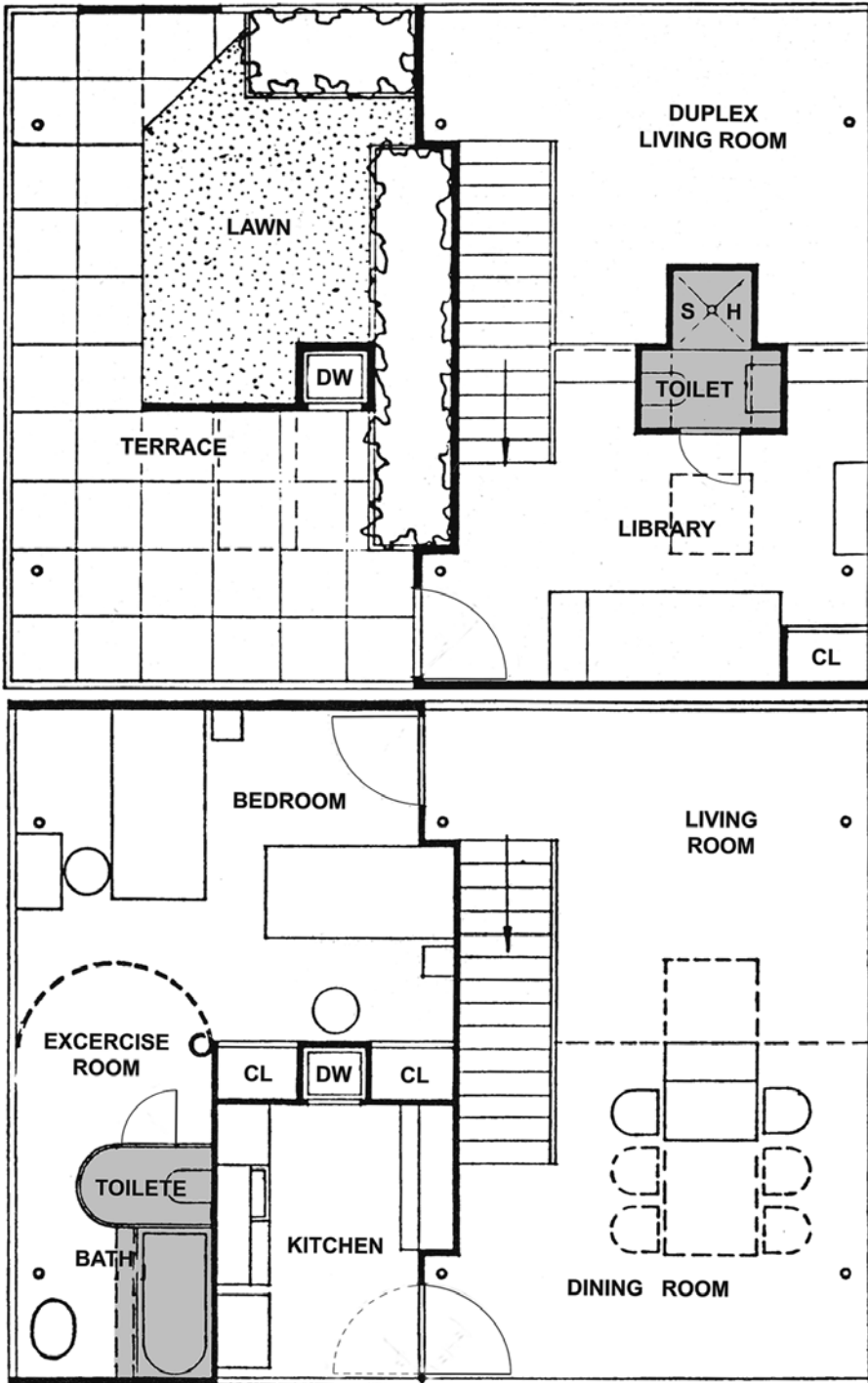


**Figure 5**

Although functions and features were visibly screened, sound was not masked, providing perhaps an example of Gray's interest in body awareness (Rykwert 1971: 73).

type, the *Aluminaire* drew heavily on Corbusian precedents, evoking the *Maisons Citrohan* in its plan and the *Esprit Nouveau Pavilion* in its section (Cunningham 1998: 136). The master bedroom suite, comprised of two built-in closets, an exercise room that could be closed off for privacy with a soft wall and a folding partition on a curved track, also included a toilet cubicle with a curved wall, and small bathroom with tub and sink (Kocher et al. 1990: 62, 64; Rosa 1990: 42) (Figure 6). The second floor library doubled as a second bedroom with its own compact toilet and sink; the shower stall cantilevered over the living room below (Cunningham 1998: 138).

A few other examples of Modernist compartmentalization include Frank Lloyd Wright's mid-century Usonian house exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum. Wright separated the toilet cell from a bathroom's space (Stoller n.d.). In *Case Study House No. 21* (1960) Pierre Koenig located two bathrooms in a court at the core of the house, satisfying the code concerning ventilation for baths and at the same time freeing the exterior walls from the required small bathroom window (McCoy 1975: 69). A plan illustrated three separate spaces in the master bath area, the largest of which was a room with double sinks; there was a shower stall, and a toilet room with door. In another bedroom Koenig arranged a line of fixtures along a wall.



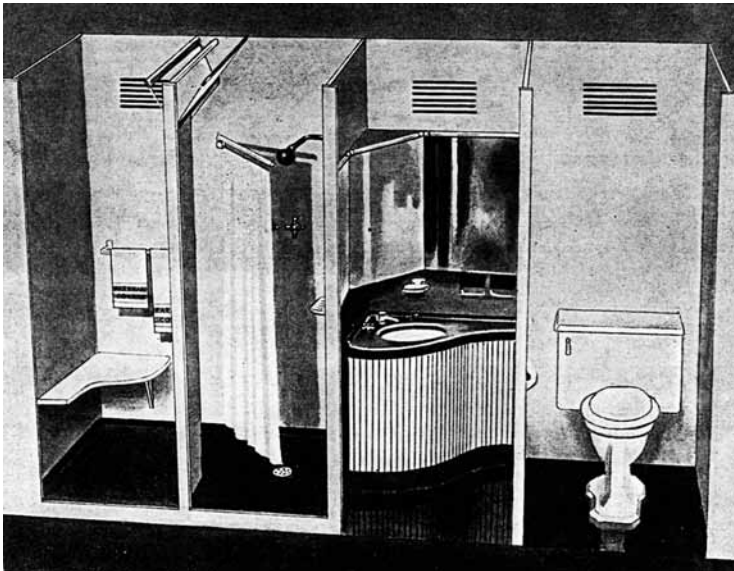
**Figure 6**

The first (bottom) and second (top) floor plans of the Aluminaire House (1931) reveal that the bathroom designs were just as progressive as the house (Rosa 1990: 42).

The space was organized symmetrically with a sink located on either side of a space containing a shower and a toilet.

In roadside motels ordinary Americans experienced the separation of fixtures into independent *niches* and alcoves to increase flexibility and efficiency. Prior to World War II, trade literature for tourist courts reported on additional bathroom conveniences that could be implemented without additional expenditure. The first recommendation, offered by the *Tourist Court Journal* in 1941, divided "the equipment according to its functions. For example, the toilet can be placed in a separate compartment, leaving the bathroom free for the use of the rest of the family. Or an extra lavatory can be provided outside the regular bathroom, increasing the washing facilities greatly at a little extra expense." The second scheme placed the toilet and bathtub in one room, and the lavatory against the wall in the bedroom. Both schemes, characterized as practical, convenient, and modern, benefited traveling families, because they allowed members to use separate fixtures at the same time (Sidney 1941: 5–6).

In 1945 the *Tourist Court Journal* advocated a prefabricated bathroom that could be placed as a separate unit adjacent to a tourist court. Once again, the proposal provided greater flexibility and efficiency for families (Figure 7). "It speeds up the bathing and dressing procedure" of two to four people in a party, especially benefiting a couple with two children. Each one will be attending to his or her toilet in privacy, plus heavy insulation between walls to



**Figure 7**

The prefabricated "in-line" bathroom for tourist courts isolated each bathroom function into four spaces with three separate doors and a soft wall (*Tourist Court Journal* 1945: 19).

deaden sounds.” This in-line bathroom unit met with people’s desire for privacy and the efficiency of an entire family using each function of the unit (*Tourist Court Journal* 1945: 19).

The compartmentalization of plumbing fixtures in the 1940s era set the standard for many hotels, especially franchised ones, such as Holiday Inn. The “1966 Idea Room,” designed by Robert O. Burton and presented at the American Motor Hotel Association convention, included a “lavatory niche” separated from a room containing a bathtub and toilet (*Hotel Management Review* 1966).

A *vitrine*, a glass showcase for displaying objects, provided another characteristic of Naked – one or more fixtures are visible through transparent walls. A *vitrine* or Naked bathroom and a curtain wall fulfilled the Modernists’ desire for crystalline expression.

The museum *vitrine* is intended to protect its contents from dust, damage, and theft; a *vitrine* is large and can have an assertive, sculptural presence within an exhibition gallery (Putnam 2001: 34, 36). In all settings, the act of placing an object in a *vitrine* immediately focuses attention on it and suggests that it might also be both precious and vulnerable. Things cease to be everyday items once they are displayed inside a transparent box. The *vitrine* renders untouchable the contained object and makes it important and precious.

Modernists first adapted the *vitrine* as an appropriate spatial and visual device for showers. In the chronological sequence leading to Naked as a typology, one begins with the Crystal House (1934), a true *vitrine* in which all the rooms, including the bathroom, were glass. The Crystal House, designed by George Fred Keck for the Century of Progress International Exposition, featured a shower consisting of three full-height walls of glass trimmed in chrome (Raley 1934: 41; Slade 1970: 352) (Figure 8). The shower-*vitrine* faced a window wall whose view could be closed off by venetian blinds. Draperies behind the sink could be drawn for privacy.

Essentially the Modernist glass house was a *vitrine* that offered two effects that can be characterized as Scene Seen (see Figure 1). By day, the emphasis for occupants is about seeing outside to view a landscape or sky-scape. By night, however, when the transparent interior is artificially lit, the emphasis is about others looking in. Those on the outside see the occupants and furnishings, in effect, becoming a scene for others to view (Mendez 2008: 98). Most importantly, those inside became comfortable with being on display.

It should be noted that Mies van der Roe’s Farnsworth House (1947), and Philip Johnson’s Glass House (1949) are iconic examples of a house as *vitrine*. However, the bathrooms in both houses are protected for privacy with solid walls.

There are examples from the 1940–80 period of residential bathrooms featuring window-walls that provided visual access to outdoor spaces. In 1949 a perspective on trace of the Charles Eames Case Study House No. 9 illustrated a sliding glass door dividing the exterior patio from the bathroom (Perspective Drawing,



**Figure 8**

The "husband's bathroom," installed on the third floor of The Crystal House (1934), was a *vitrine*, and included a shower-*vitrine* (Raley 1934: 41).

Entenza House 1949). Photographs also offer evidence. The bathroom window-wall of the Wilton C. Dinges House (1962) overlooked a courtyard of exotic birds that roamed in a high-walled garden (*Interior Design* 1962). In the Tandy House (1969), I.M. Pei tucked a bathtub in a *niche* with one large glass wall that extended the view from the bathtub into the landscape (Photograph, Tandy House 1969). Arthur Charles Erickson designed a similar bathroom for the 1977 Francisco Kripacz House (Photograph, Kripacz House 1977). Although the wall visually and physically opened the bathroom to an exterior, none were *vitrines*, but all were moving toward Naked with a Scene Seen effect.

It was the boutique hotel that transformed the modernist's open plan into something more fluid by adapting a *vitrine* as an appropriate device for bathroom space and fixtures. Boutique hotels began appearing in the 1980s in major cities, such as London, New York, and San Francisco. They filled a need for small, unique, intimate, and luxurious high-style settings. Many incorporated *avant-garde* furnishings and minimalist architecture; the White Box reappeared

to provide the bathroom with a gallery or spa aesthetic. Boutique hotels differentiated themselves from chain hotels in architectural and interior design, as well as personalized services.

The merging of private space (bathrooms) with semi-public areas (guest rooms and suites) in boutique hotels seemed especially daring as old spaces shifted to accommodate new spaces. Naked simply takes this concept to an extreme as designers created a visually active open plan, implying an openness of behavior. The bathroom in boutique hotels literally disappeared as a private room with opaque walls.

Various design interpretations using a *vitrine* reveal attitudes about concealment and exposure. For the Hotel Saint-James (1989) in London Jean Nouvel removed the tub and a sink from the toilet, placing the sink against a wall in the bedroom. Between the sink wall and the bed, Nouvel placed a bathtub parallel to the bed. Three glass walls kept water from splashing onto the bed, but did not quite become a *vitrine* (Ivry 1990: 98). For the Standard Hotel (2000) in London, Philippe Starck and Anda Andrei created a *vitrine* that housed a sink and a toilet, but the bathtub was removed from this context and aligned on a wall opposite the box. A full-length curtain provided closed visual access on one side of a glass wall (Ogundehin 2000: 84). One of the best examples of a boutique hotel's *vitrine* was architect Eva Jiricna's design for the Hotel Josef (2002) in Prague (*Architectural Review* 2003: 75) (Figure 9). In various rooms Jiricna toyed with crystalline effects with window walls, transparent sinks, and table tops. Many of these *vitrines* were set on plinths, as if they were in a museum. By 2000 luxury apartments joined the ranks of boutique hotels in the design of an entire bathroom as a *vitrine*.

Designers also adopted the Naked practice for luxury apartments in the United States and Korea establishing an entire bathroom as a *vitrine* set on a plinth. In most of these examples, the toilet was not isolated in its own cell, but visible as an *objet* through glass walls (Kim 2009: 91). The *vitrine* in a residential context differs from a hotel, in that one becomes a permanent experience, the other a transitory one.

The effect of a bathroom as a *vitrine* is akin to the shop window and commercial display cases, both designed to seduce the passerby. Placing fixtures (or people) in a *vitrine* "museumizes" them – the glass creates not just a physical barrier, but it establishes an official distance between object and viewer.

### **Body Awareness**

Bathrooms designed by modernists expressed a body awareness and material sensuousness central to the development of a Naked bathroom. The bathroom often contained a profusion of mirrors, valued as a source of light, as well as for the ideological role it played "in the domestic world of the well-to-do, as redundancy, superfluity, reflection: the mirror is an opulent object which affords the





**Figure 9**

Room 801 of the Hotel Josef (2002) featured a large *vitrine* for shower and sink, set on a plinth, facing a curtain wall. Hotel Josef [2002] Eva Jiricna; Prague, Czech Republic (*Architectural Review* 2003: 75).

Photo credit: Milena Findeis.

self-indulgent bourgeois individual the opportunity to ... reproduce his own image and revel in his possessions" (Baudrillard 1996: 22–3).

The value of crystalline expression in bathroom design was not lost on architects and plumbing manufacturers who developed transparent bathtubs and sinks. Otto Wagner designed a small apartment for himself in his Kostleregasse Apartment development (1889). Wagner's bathroom with its transparent glass bathtub garnered attention for "displaying a deceptive piety" regarding sleeping and bathing (Figure 10). "The ambivalence between the aesthetics of transparency, the ethic of purity, and the erotic aspect could not be denied." New materials (brass and nickel), coordinated design, and a "nude hygiene" manifest by the glass bathtub resided in an apartment that can be considered a manifesto of modern architecture (Wagner 2002: 71).

Josef Hoffman lined the walls of the ample bathroom in the Palais Stoclet (1911) with pale marble inlaid with strips of black marble and malachite and designed silver toilet articles arranged on a dressing table shelf (Pile 2005: 294).



**Figure 10**

Architect Adolf Loos praised Otto Wagner's invention in the Kostleregasse Apartment as a "bedroom with bathtub." The room and its transparent glass tub were exhibited at the 1900 World Fair in Paris (Wagner 2002: 71). Photo credit: Anonymous, 1899.

More completely than any other building, arguably, Palais Stoclet exemplified the *fin-de-siecle* ideal of the aestheticization of life over which the architect and artist assumed control, transforming the dwelling from a setting for normal, everyday life into a higher realm consecrated by art. (Weston 2004: 32)

In those areas of Gray's E.1027 House (1929) "where contact with the body is most intimate, the bedroom and bathroom, Gray strove to heighten body awareness. The profusion of shimmering materials in the bathroom, for instance, included tiled walls, folding mirrors, porcelain sinks, and a polished tub enclosure, whose cool surfaces provided a soothing respite from the relentless Mediterranean sun. Such material palpability invoked a sense of the erotic: the house is marked by the experience of a sexed body." "The poverty of modern

architecture," Gray wrote during the 1940s, "stems from the atrophy of sensuality. Everything is dominated by reason in order to create amazement without proper research. The art of the engineer is not enough if it is not guided by the primitive needs of men – reason without instinct. We must mistrust merely pictorial elements if they are not assimilated by instinct" (Constant 1994: 275).

Le Corbusier's large master bathroom in the Villa Savoye (1930) became a model of beauty and repose. A chaise rendered in small gray glass tiles adjoins the blue tiled-tub, evoking the Chaise Lounge (1928) designed with Charlotte Perriand. The bathrooms in the Aluminaire House (1931) received special attention with a curved wall and a special mirror. The walls were clad in black Vitrolite glass, with the exception of the toilet compartment, which utilized a translucent plastic called Lumarith, set in a shiny aluminum frame (Jandl 1991: 40). The Aluminaire's chaise was similar in shape to Villa Savoye's chaise, because Frey prepared almost all the construction drawings for the Villa, including the tile chaise in the bathroom (Kocher et al. 1990: 62, 64).

In the same time period, American plumbing manufacturers introduced materials and aspects of comfort that mirrored similar body awareness as European Modernist architects. The Ely Kahn-commissioned bathroom for Kohler (1929), included in the Exhibition of American Industrial Art, featured walls of glass, radiators recessed behind tiled grilles, and above which hung towels for warming.

Into this setting are introduced a Kohler bath and lavatory of gleaming black, with chromium-plated fittings – faucets, handles, and escutcheons – also of Kohler make, in the graceful Cellini design ... Kohler's fixtures of modern style and beauty, in lovely color or lustrous white, are made for simplest bathrooms as well as costly ones. (*Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 1929: 6)

There are several contemporary examples of transparent bathtubs, including the Jolie tub from Regia, an Italian bathroom fittings company, made from a polyester and acrylic resin; glass pigments, mixed in the resin provide the vivid colors that are available (blue, orange, red) (Apartment Therapy 2009). Prizma's line includes a glass fixture collection (tub, sink, shower) and a glass floor (Prizma Europe n.d.). Noveellina International Design produces a shower *vitrine* and the *Cristalli* glass tub (Novellini International Design n.d.). The "Water Lounge" concept by NOA Design Bureau and manufactured by Hoesch (Hoesch n.d.) comprises a rectangular glass *vitrine* placed on a plinth. Inside the tub there is a wooden chaise reminiscent of the Le Corbusier's Savoye.

A popular concept in the development of Naked removed the bathtub from the bathroom and placed it in close proximity to the bed. The tubs were commanding – large and sculptural – and the

bedroom was often set in a spa-like aesthetic. In the Gran Hotel (2003) in Barcelona, a deep free-standing tub was located parallel to the bed, but the sink was located in an adjacent space that was screened from the bed and bath (Lovatt-Smith 2003).

A tub's surface, color, texture, and sometimes reflective qualities, reiterated Gray's body awareness in what was once the most intimate part of the house. The Dulcamara suite in the SIDE Hotel (2001) in Hamburg, Germany housed Matteo Thun's sensuous red ovoid tub, the Lavasca Mini (*Interior Design* 2001: 246).

In boutique hotels a tub often became an Island, an isolated object that is detached from the walls so that it can be approached from all of its sides (Mendez 2008: 48–52) (see Figure 1). The “Starck X” Freestanding Tub for Duravit, for instance, is “cubist, understated and minimalist”; advertisements suggested that it “invites you to wallow in luxurious indulgence.” The rectangular “ascetic version,” set on a plinth above the floor area, contained a channel that could be filled with stones (marble pebbles) or covered with wood. The Starck X was always photographed in a White Box as an Island, and in a space with at least one window wall.

The best and final example in this story about how modernism led to Naked space is the nineteen-floor Standard Hotel in the hip Meatpacking District in Manhattan. When it opened in 2009, it joined a long line of boutique hotels with an open plan bedroom–bathroom. However, the adjacent High Line Park, built on abandoned railroad tracks three stories above the street, offered new views into the Standard's “wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling windows,” “massive peek-a-boo showers,” and oversized tubs. Some rooms boast a 180 degree water and city skyline view through the curtain wall and an “exposed open plan bathroom” (Baum 2009) (Figure 11).

Hotel guests prance around in the buff or have sex in full view of the audience in the park. Variouslly called the “eye-ful tower,” “inn decency,” or peep show, the interior architecture and design of the Standard seemingly encourages narcissism and exhibitionism from the inside-out and voyeurism from the outside-in – perhaps a natural progression of the Scene Seen effect.

The way in which Standard's clientele interpret the space should not be surprising. It can be traced back through a series of reiterations of Modernist characteristics and museum effects – free plan and fluidity, the bathroom *vignette*, fixtures as beautiful objects, transparency and crystalline expression, space as a *vitrine* and the Scene Seen effect that resulted from it, the White Box, body awareness and material sensuousness.

The Naked archetype, probably part of some larger societal need or function, may be generational, more comfortable for a young cohort than an aging one. It may simply be a body awareness in which some are more comfortable in their own skin and with their bodily functions than others. There is no doubt, however, that Standard Hotel's clientele's behavior is just the latest, modern interpretation



**Figure 11**

Standard's guests, and those who enjoy watching them, suggest that Naked, as a design practice, and naked as a behavior, became standard in the twenty-first century; Photo credit: Thomas Loof. Permission: Standard Hotel.

of Le Corbusier's naked as absolute honesty, naked as a lack of disguise, in which no function and no one is concealed.

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