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Architecture for hope: Jean Prouvé's 'Maison Les Jours Meilleurs'

Immerse yourself in the timeless elegance and social impact of visionary architect and designer Jean Prouvé's *Better Days House* at Galerie Patrick Seguin in Paris.

by Aarthi Mohan | Published on : Apr 01, 2024

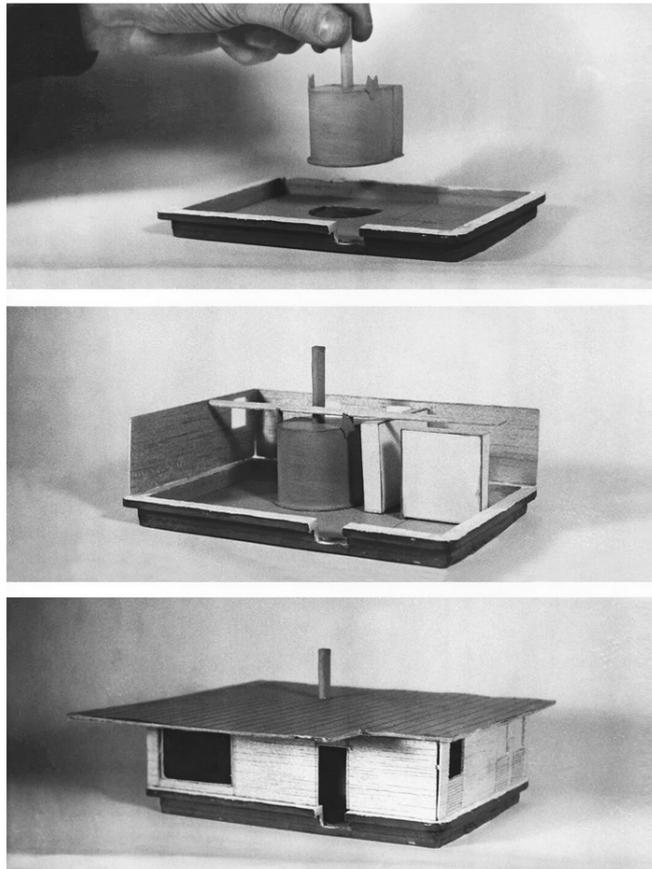
Amidst the harsh winter of 1954, a plea for emergency housing from Abbé Pierre echoed through the streets of **Paris**, stirring hearts and igniting action. Responding to this call with unwavering dedication, architect Jean Prouvé embarked on a journey fuelled with compassion and **innovation**. Swiftly, he devised a solution that merged pioneering construction techniques with a deep sense of social responsibility. The result was the *Maison Les Jours Meilleurs*; a beacon of hope erected on Quai Alexandre-III, symbolising the architect's commitment to social duty.



Installation of the *Les Jours Meilleurs* house at the Salon des Arts Ménagers home show, housing section, Paris, February 1956

Image: Courtesy of Emmaüs international, légataire universel de l'abbé Pierre and Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail

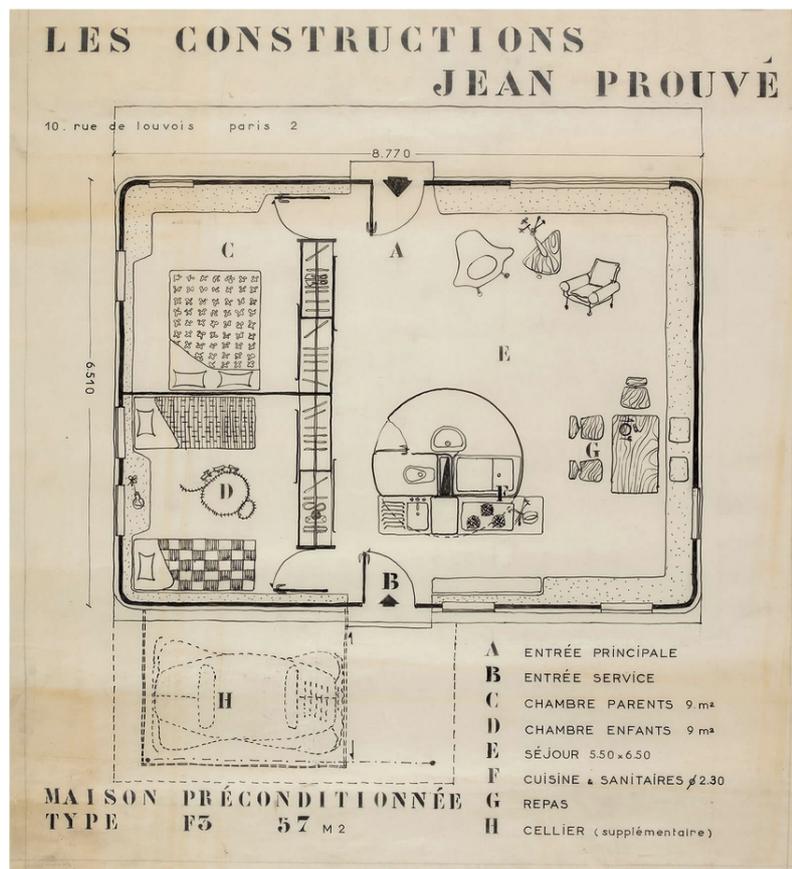
Now seven decades later, Galerie Patrick Seguin in **France** pays homage to the iconic creation, exhibiting the principal element of this industrialised house: The load-bearing service core with an **immersive exhibition**. On view from March 15 - April 20, 2024, *Jean Prouvé, Maison Les Jours Meilleurs, 1956* transports one back to the vibrant Paris of 1956 to explore the convergence of **design, architecture** and social consciousness.



A model prototype of the *Les Jours Meilleurs* house which demonstrates the construction system, Les Constructions Jean Prouvé, 1956

Image: Courtesy of Fonds Jean Prouvé, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre Pompidou

Prouvé's inventive spirit lay not merely in erecting structures but in revolutionising the very essence of dwelling. His approach, aptly termed as that of a 'constructeur' by Le Corbusier, seamlessly blended finesse with engineering prowess. At once an architect and an engineer, the term encompasses the singularity of the architect's elegant approach and vital social motivation, manufacturing 'brilliant solutions' for the modern era's most urgent needs. Though the **French architect** is today synonymous with bent sheet-steel frames of his iconic furniture, his seminal contributions to **modern architecture** and his socially engaged praxis as a builder; united the worlds of industry, architecture, engineering and design, his contributions deserve far more attention than they have historically been afforded.



An F3 pre-packaged house, 57m², floor plan: variant with three rooms and storeroom, Les Constructions Jean Prouvé, around 1957

Image: Courtesy of Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Philippe Migeat

Central to the visionary architect's ethos was the democratisation of design. The *Better Days House* stands as a testament to this vision, offering a pre-packaged solution to the pressing issue of emergency housing. Acutely aware of the shifting social and political landscape of his time, Prouvé adapted his construction system to the exigencies of his historical moment. His metal building systems used economical but durable construction materials that could easily be assembled, dismantled, transported and modified. In the 1930s, the architect began to create prototypes and secure patents for portable building systems or 'demountable' houses.



Installation of the *Les Jours Meilleurs* house at Salon des Arts Ménagers home show, housing section, Paris, February 1956

Image: Courtesy of Emmaüs international, légataire universel de l'abbé Pierre. Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail

Maison Les Jours Meilleurs encapsulates the architect's ideal of a light, dynamic mass-produced accommodation. Created to meet a housing emergency, the house combined earlier experiments with innovative building techniques. The measures taken by the French government after the war were an insufficient response to a housing crisis that hit the disadvantaged very hard. Prouvé did not succeed in launching mass production for single-family and collective housing units he had been experimenting with in his Maxeville plant. At the International Congress of Modern Architecture (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne - CIAM) in July 1953. Just after definitively leaving his workshop, he presented his work on the mass production of housing and in particular the daring construction principle of a small house centred around a load-bearing core.



Delivery of the central core in the presence of Abbé Pierre, Paris, February 1956

Image: Courtesy of Emmaüs international, légataire universel de l'abbé Pierre. Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail

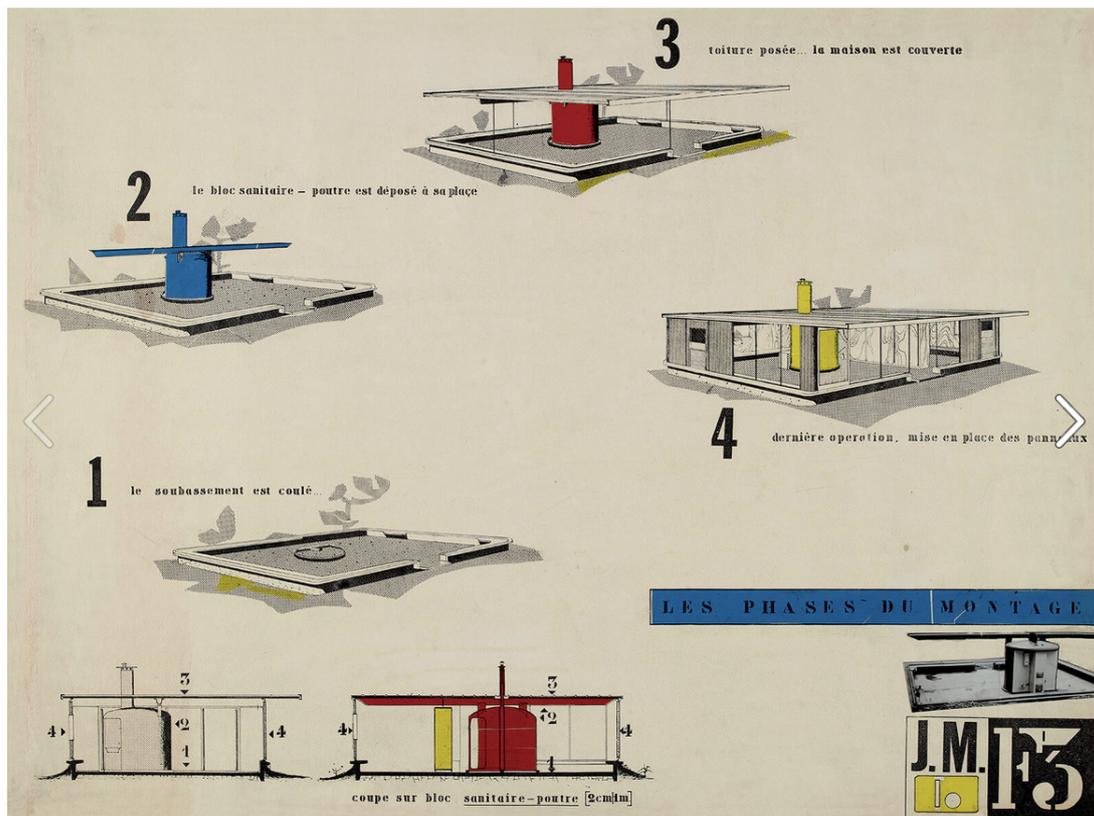
A few months later, Pierre, a former parliamentarian and founder of the Emmaüs movement, rallied public opinion regarding the plight of the homeless and succeeded in obtaining substantial funding from donations and the state. Representing a small group of architects associated with the architect, Michel Bataille persuaded Abbé to invest in a mass production project capable of providing an inexpensive, rapid and lasting form of emergency housing.



Installation of the *Les Jours Meilleurs* house, Salon des Arts Ménagers home show, housing section, Paris, February 1956

Image: Courtesy of Emmaüs international, légataire universel de l'abbé Pierre, Rama Nassar. Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail

Deprived of his production facilities but equipped with his design studies for a structural service core, in a few weeks Prouvé with his team, came up with a 'pre-packaged' family dwelling that was light yet sturdy and affordable yet cosy. Optimistically titled *Better Days House*, this project was emblematic of Pierre and Prouvé's social commitment and the battles they fought against all odds; bureaucracy, in particular. Hailed highly by journalists and architects and enthusiastically received by the public when it was shown at the Salone des Arts Menagers in 1956, the prototype seemed to meet all the requirements for imminent mass production. However, due to the lack of an official seal of approval, only a few of the houses were built.



A description de *Les Jours Meilleurs* house, Les Constructions Jean Prouvé, ca. 1956-57

Image: Courtesy of Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI, Dist. RMN - Grand Palais - Photo Philippe Migeat & Georges Meguerditchian

Erected in seven hours, this demountable prefabricated architecture was based on the principle of a central load-bearing core, a marvel of engineering that not only supports the structure but also houses all the technical installations of the kitchen and the bathroom. Surrounding the core are meticulously crafted living spaces, characterised by sleek lines and thoughtful design elements. From the integration of natural light to the efficient use of space, every aspect of the house reflects Prouvé's commitment to blending form with function.

JEAN PROUVÉ MAISON LES JOURS MEILLEURS, 1956

UN IDÉAL D'HABITAT INDUSTRIALISÉ

La maison de Jean Prouvé de Jean Prouvé illustre parfaitement son idéal d'habitat industrialisé, une œuvre emblématique. Les matériaux utilisés par l'architecte sont les produits industriels les plus modernes de son époque, tels que le béton armé, l'acier et le verre. Cette maison est une véritable œuvre d'art, qui a inspiré de nombreux architectes et designers. Elle est une preuve de la capacité de l'industrie à créer des environnements de vie modernes et confortables. Elle est une œuvre d'art qui a inspiré de nombreux architectes et designers. Elle est une preuve de la capacité de l'industrie à créer des environnements de vie modernes et confortables.

Le projet de cette maison a été initié par Jean Prouvé et son associé, l'architecte et designer Jean Renaudie. Ils ont travaillé ensemble pour créer une maison qui soit à la fois fonctionnelle et esthétique. Cette maison est une véritable œuvre d'art, qui a inspiré de nombreux architectes et designers. Elle est une preuve de la capacité de l'industrie à créer des environnements de vie modernes et confortables.

Jean Prouvé's Maison de Jean Prouvé illustrates perfectly his ideal of "light, elegant" mass-produced accommodation. Combined with its unique design, it combined better ergonomics with innovative building techniques. The measures taken by the French government at the time were insufficient to ensure the production of the type of housing that Prouvé did not succeed in building mass in the 1950s. At the International Congress of Modern Architecture in 1952, Prouvé presented his Maison de Jean Prouvé as a model of a new type of housing. It was a mass-produced project that was designed for a particular type of housing. It was a model of a new type of housing. It was a mass-produced project that was designed for a particular type of housing. It was a model of a new type of housing. It was a mass-produced project that was designed for a particular type of housing.



Innovative and inspiring, Le Corbusier's words on the *Better Days House*
Image: Courtesy of Galerie Patrick Seguin

Upon visiting the prototype exhibited in Paris in February 1956, Corbusier exclaimed about the *Better Days House*, saying, "Jean Prouvé has built the handsom-est house I know of. The most perfect object for living in and the most sparkling thing ever constructed." Corbusier's admiration for Prouvé's creation underscored the profound impact the house had on contemporaries, not only as a feat of ingenuity but also as a testament to the power of design to address pressing social issues.



Synergy for social change: Prouvé and Le Corbusier's enduring collaboration

Image: Courtesy of Galerie Patrick Seguin

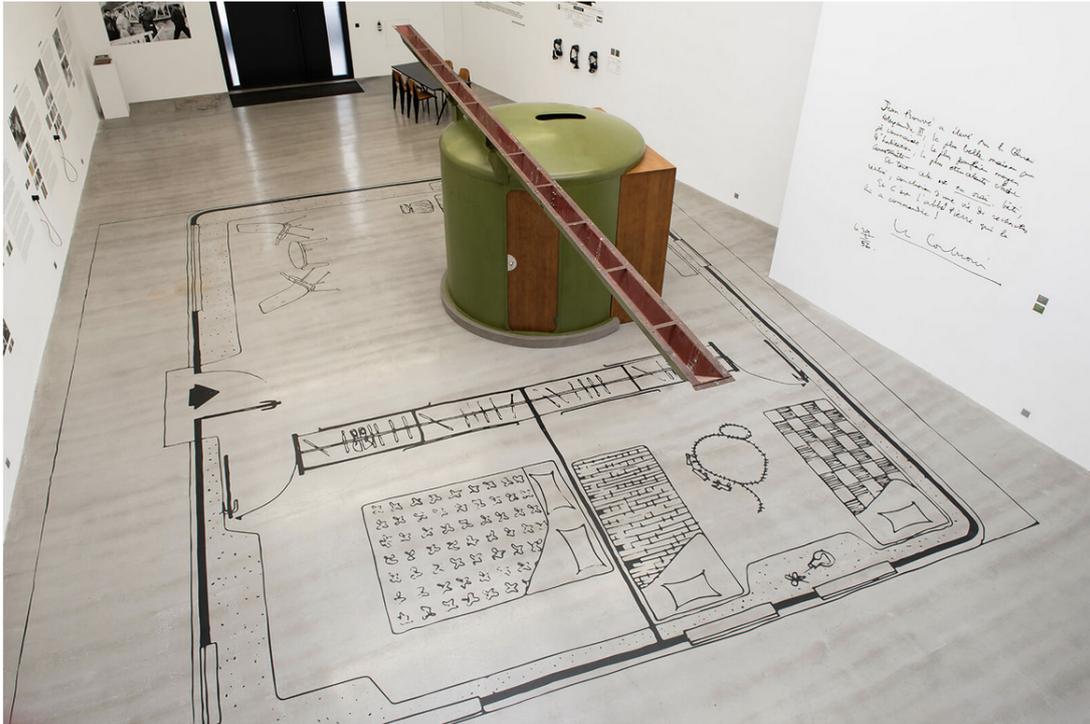
Prouvé's aspirations transcended mere architectural accolades. His enduring friendship and collaboration with **Le Corbusier** underscored a shared belief in architecture as a catalyst for social change. Together, they navigated the turbulent waters of post-war reconstruction, their designs embodied an unwavering optimism for a brighter, more inclusive future. Through their synergy, they pioneered a new architectural language; one rooted in pragmatism yet infused with a profound sense of humanism.



Travel through time and discover the evolution of *Maison Les Jours Meilleurs* in virtual reality

Image: Courtesy of Galerie Patrick Seguin and Le Visiomatique

Beyond the physical space of the gallery, the **architecture exhibition** extends into the digital realm, offering visitors a **virtual reality** tour of Prouvé's iconic *Maison Les Jours Meilleurs*, allowing them to explore every nook and cranny of the structure. From the load-bearing core to the carefully crafted living spaces, every detail comes to life, giving a first-hand glimpse into the architect's vision. Through **photographs** and documents, one can witness the evolution of the house; a journey to inspire architects and designers, transcending temporal boundaries to resonate with contemporary challenges.



Design for change: Dive into Prouvé's visionary work and its impact on society

Image: Courtesy of Galerie Patrick Seguin

As visitors engage with Prouvé's work, they are not only transported to a bygone era of architectural innovation but also challenged to envision a future where design catalyses positive change. Through interactive workshops and design labs, participants gain valuable insights into Prouvé's social consciousness and his unwavering commitment to addressing pressing issues such as housing inequality and environmental **sustainability**. By contextualising the architect's work within the larger socio-political landscape of his time, the **immersive exhibition** is more than just a showcase; it is a celebration of creativity, collaboration and the enduring power of design. With each meticulously crafted dwelling and every visionary design, Prouvé's legacy continues to inspire generations to come, reminding us of the transformative potential of architecture in shaping a better tomorrow.

'Jean Prouvé, *Maison Les Jours Meilleurs, 1956*' is on view from March 15 - April 20, 2024 at Galerie Patrick Seguin, Paris.