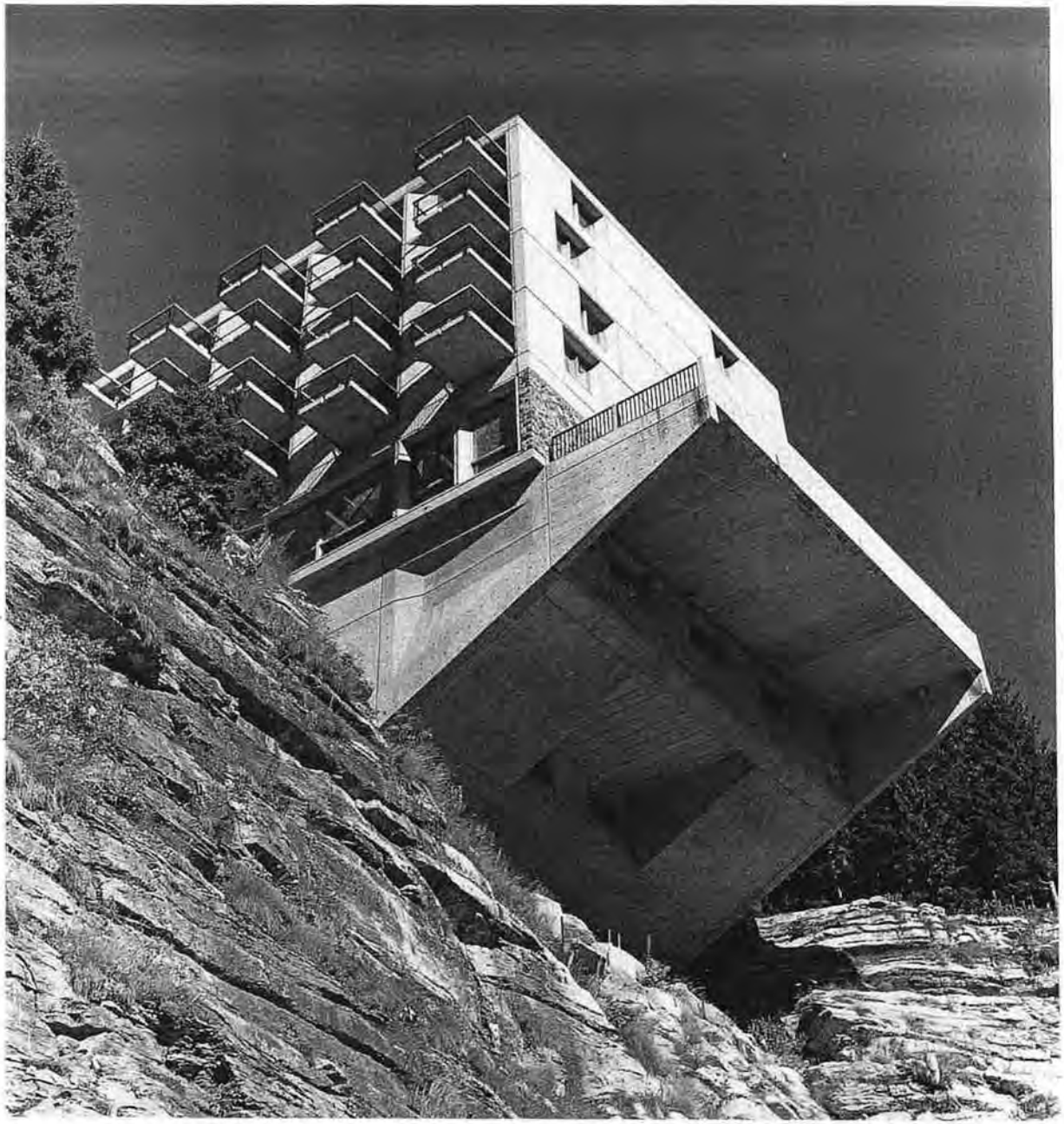


Hôtel Le Flaine. Its audacious cantilever as seen from below became something of a trademark for the resort.

Marcel (lajko) Breuer & Flaine

taken from bob gatje's 'a memoir'

I happened to be in Lajkó's office one day in early 1960 when he received a telephone call from **Eric Boissonnas** an old New Canaan friend calling from Paris. He had me wait while he took the call and mentioned to me briefly after-

Eric and Rémi Boissonnas at Flaine.

ward the possibility of a new ski town at Flaine, in the Haute-Savoie region of France. It seemed like a long shot, and in any case Breuer understood that he was being asked only to be the master planner of architectural work that would be produced locally by others. He reminisced briefly about his project for a hotel in Obergurgl, Austria, just before World War II, when he was apparently a very good skier, and we went on to other matters.

The valley Eric Boissonnas had briefly described to Lajkó over the telephone measures about two miles wide by four miles long and nestles in the French Alps about an hour and a half's drive south and east of Geneva. Its floor is at an altitude of about one mile above sea level. The mountains that surround it rise another 3,500 feet or so and create a bowl shape with steep cliffs to the north and broad, sunny slopes to the south. It was vacant in the 1950s except for some shepherds' huts and one shelter for overland hikers, called Fédération. The land was owned by about three hundred French farming families, some of whom still drove sheep up to summer pastures, but during the winter, snows blocked the only path up from the nearby towns of Arâches-les-Carroz.

Gérard Chervaz, an architect who taught at the University of Geneva, and René Martens, who ran a small company that made yogurt, were skiing buddies who occasionally rented a light plane to take them for spring skiing on the slopes of Mont Blanc. Flying up from Geneva in the mid-1950s, they often crossed right over Flaine and wondered why such a conveniently located valley had not been developed for skiing, at the time a booming business in Europe. They researched the matter and in 1958 secured an option on the valley's development from the local French authorities. They

soon found that their banking contacts in Switzerland were not interested in investing in France and began to look elsewhere. Their search finally led them to **Rémi Boissonnas,** a banker in Paris, who called his brother in Connecticut, knowing that Eric had decided to leave his wife's family's company, Schlumberger, and was looking for something to do. Involvement in the project led to Sylvie and Eric's return to France and would occupy most of their energies, and money, for thirty years.

Eric was a scientist/musician with business experience. Sylvie, like her sister Dominique de Menil, was a patron of the arts and a collector with impeccable taste. The couple had hired Philip Johnson to design a house in New Canaan, which wrapped around Eric's pipe organ, quite close to Johnson's own Glass House and to the Breuers. Philip later designed another spectacular house for them in Cap Bénat overlooking the Mediterranean, but he was irked when he heard that they had given the Flaine commission to Lajkó. Sylvie has said that he complained, "Breuer, I suppose, is good for big things whereas I'm only good for little things . . ."

By the time Eric took over the reins at Flaine in 1959, the design group already included several local architects expert in the layout of ski trails and alpine planning. Eric added a very progressive firm of economic planners headed by **Max Stern,** about whom he had read in *Le Monde,* and Max led him to an eccentric French structural engineer, **Jean Barets,** who was trying to market a system of prefabricated concrete parts for building construction.

Barets's approach appealed to Eric's intellectual side, and they soon developed a scenario involving precasting the building pieces in the Arve River valley below Flaine, where water and transport were readily available, and carrying the pieces by overhead télépherique to the building site. Barets argued that Eric could thereby gain crucial time and save interest on his investment while the road was improved and extended past Arâches-les-Carroz, over the pass, and into the valley.

The firm Eric founded to develop Flaine and to own its buildings was located in Paris—the Société d'Etudes de Participation et de Développement (SEPAD). In order to buy land and plan the surroundings, he needed a quasi-public corporation—the Société d'Aménagement Arve et Giffre (SAG)—which he named after the two rivers bordering Flaine. It was directed on a day-to-day basis by a brilliant and experienced civil engineer named **Frédéric Berlottier.** All of these people, and the work they had done, were unknown to me and, with the exception of Sylvie and Eric, to Lajkó in 1960.

New York: 1960–1963

By the time of an associates' luncheon several weeks after we received the phone call from Boissonnas, Lajkó had received some maps locating the valley of Flaine and an outline of the program, and had signed a two-page agreement for work on a cost-plus basis that was to last for twenty years. We briefly discussed the assignment of an associate-in-charge. Herb Beckhard was the logical choice, having just come back from Caracas with little else in the way of major projects in New York.

Paul Koralek had left a résumé a few weeks earlier that mentioned his fluent French. He was hired to digest the enormous written program that had started to arrive from France, and he continued with the project for the balance of the year. He worked under Herb's supervision but had direct access to Breuer—a tribute to the immediate rapport that sprang up between the two men. They developed a series of trial-and-error schemes for the layout of Flaine as a resort town based on the environmental studies of Laurent Chappis, a member of Eric's original design team who looked at the valley first in terms of exposure to the sun, viability of ski trails, and risk of avalanche. As the only one who had waded through the French texts, Paul felt honor-bound to speak up for the functional pros and cons of building placement as opposed to the sculptural effects that seemed to be driving Breuer's search for a solution. The very large contour model of the valley, built up of hundreds of layers of thin cork, became an object of wonder in the drafting room. It measured six by four feet and rose about two feet above its base. Pushpins defined alternate routes for the road snaking down from the pass above, and small wooden blocks were moved around daily by Lajkó

Fred Berlottier with Lajkó at a master-plan discussion in Annecy.

as he searched for the form of a town that could be created at the base of the awesome cliffs.

Lajkó first visited Flaine Valley by helicopter with the Boissonnas brothers in the spring of 1960. Rémi Boissonnas remembers meeting him for the first time as he landed in the midst of the northern slope: "Breuer got out of the helicopter, waddled over to a nearby rock, and sat down. After fifteen minutes, during which he looked carefully but said hardly a word, he indicated that he was satisfied and asked to be taken to the other side of the valley. There he got out, waddled to another rock, surveyed the scene, and that was it. I remember noting that he was a very good listener." According to Eric, Lajkó's principal remark was "We must not spoil the site."

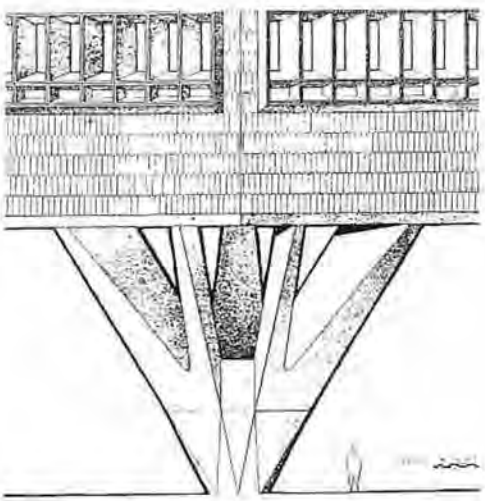
Lajkó returned to New York and continued his own personal evaluation of the site. Several months later, Eric's design team appeared in New York, and its three French architects presented their preliminary sketches of a site plan. Lajkó listened attentively to the presentations, and when he spoke eventually in critique, his remarks were totally practical in nature rather than the aesthetic evaluation that the French had been expecting. He pointed to contours that would cause a road to drop suddenly by ten feet, a plateau that was not wide enough for the depth of a useful building, and the interruption of a ski trail by a road crossing. Rémi says that the French architects were totally deflated and that he was embarrassed for them by the time Breuer rose tentatively and modestly to show the sketches on which he and Paul had been working. They showed a greater familiarity with the actual site, gained through a careful study of documents and the model, than that of the local people who had been walking and skiing the valley for months.

Sylvie Boissonnas said of Lajkó, "He had such strength, and he made good sense, too."

Members of the design team—architects, planners, and client—would come to New York every other month for a few days of discussions, and on alternate months Lajkó would attend meetings in Paris with his latest scheme. The topography of the mountain terrain was so complex that the working model, which had changed by the time of each meeting, was an indispensable aid with which to picture the logical route for an approach road and to find areas flat enough to be adapted as building sites.

During a lull in the Flaine job, Paul Koralek worked with Ham Smith on the presentation of our entry to a developers competition for Charles Center in Baltimore. Our sponsor was the Ferry family, for whom Lajkó had also worked at Vassar College and the Bryn Mawr School. The project boasted two spectacular five-armed tree columns at its base. According to Paul, great care was lavished on these huge sculptural objects at the sloping ground level while the stories above were treated as being almost unimportant—not an entirely unreasonable response to the way the average pedestrian experiences an office building. One of the other competitors was Mies van der Rohe—who eventually won—and the drafting crew was excited to be in such exalted company, although Breuer shrugged it off.

By the end of 1960 Koralek had agreed to move to France to participate as Lajkó's representative in a Flaine planning office run by the design team. But when he won the Dublin Library competition, on which he had worked after hours with two classmates, he decided that his career required his return to his home in London. It was clear to Lajkó that Flaine would somehow have to be restaffed.



The Charles Center project. There were to be two of these tree columns at the base of the tall office structure where there was a sharp drop in the site.

Breuer's. He found the new office much more to his liking, although his father was sure he'd offended Rockefeller by leaving SOM. At his first meeting, Lajkó greeted him with, "Those are very nice drawings. Do you like to work here? By the way, we're having a little party for the staff . . ."

Breuer had been invited in 1961 to visit Pakistan in connection with a master-planning job for a new capital city to be called Islamabad—perhaps the country's answer to Le Corbusier's work at Chandighar in India. It was a fantastic commission, but Breuer was leery of doing work so far from home. It may be that Connie didn't like him traveling so much or that he had heard horror stories from other architects about not getting paid. In any case, he could not resolve a contractual issue with the Pakistani government and refused the commission. The problem had to do with the arbitration of potential disputes, which the government wanted to refer to its supreme court. Breuer held out for the International Chamber of Commerce, assuming that the Pakistani court might be biased. The meetings broke up in acrimony: "You mean to suggest, Mr. Breuer, that a Pakistani supreme-court justice would not be fair?!" Many times later Lajkó wondered out loud whether he should have given in to secure such an exceptional job.

On the way back from Pakistan, Lajkó and Ham Smith, who had accompanied him, had planned a layover in Athens. Ham had the joy of roaming the Acropolis with Breuer, who was admiring and unstinting in his praise of the superimposition of that marble marvel on its rocky base. When Ham mentioned that he had never visited the hill towns of Italy, Lajkó made him change his plane ticket at once and take a detour on his way home. According to Ham, his later discussion of the black-and-white-striped marble of the Orvieto Cathedral influenced Breuer's decision to use black-and-white striated marble-faced panels for the facade of the addition to the Cleveland Museum, which the two were later to design together.

In taking over Flaine, I plunged into the correspondence and drawings that had been produced in a year of work with Paul Koralek. There were eight volumes of commercial program data, all in French, and I understood very little of the language. Paul said I was not to worry, since Lajkó had waved it all aside in order to concentrate on the three-dimensional problem of fitting building shapes into the hollows of the valley. In fact, Paul was rather surprised to find one of the preeminent "functionalists" of the modern school making formal compositions independent of their eventual use. Were these blocks of buildings that formed streets and squares to be used for hotels, apartment houses, or shops? Lajkó didn't seem to care at that point. It was also a surprise for me since every other project I'd ever worked on with him had begun with a rigorous analysis of the program, its areas, and its interrelationships.

His reliance upon sculptural instinct rather than fickle programming was based upon his experience and proved to be correct. In the years that were to follow, many of the components changed their role not once but several times in response to the realities of a wild real-estate market. He saw that the first problems to be solved were how to get vehicles into the town without crossing the paths of pedestrians and skiers, and how to relate building forms in an unobtrusive way to the overwhelming physical drama of the bare stone cliffs that lined the northern face of the valley. The use of the buildings would come later. The first master plans were more theoretical than practical since Breuer knew little of how a winter resort worked; for example, the original skating rink was a dramatic circle, but people don't skate in circles. In fact, Lajkó, and the rest of us, had no idea what we were getting into.

I approached our first design meeting in New York with excitement and some trepidation. How would this august body of French professionals accept a new lieutenant who spoke no French and had a lot to learn in catching up with their deliberations? As I met and got to know them, my fears subsided and I realized that the best evidence of Eric Boissonnas' genius lay in the high quality of the people he had chosen to work with him and the decency and fairness with which he presided over their deliberations. It was a project that occupied the rest of his business life, and while it gave him and Sylvie many problems, it was ultimately a source of great satisfaction.

The geometry involved in creating alpine roads is challenging, since the rates of ascent and descent must be strictly limited in percentage terms

Eric Boissonnas, Gérard Chervaz, René Martens, Breuer, and Max Stern on the slopes of Flaine, 1960.

Flaine, 1961. The alpine shelter, Fédération, was still standing at the start of construction.

and must periodically provide a space wide enough to include the partial circle of a hairpin turn. Throughout 1960, Fred Berlottier, the chief engineer and technical director, had traced the route of the new road from Arâches-les-Carroz over the pass and down to the first set of cliffs. To keep the costs under control he tried to minimize blasting and the need for bridges.

Construction had just started when the first snow fell in October 1960. Plans were stymied at that point, however, by the natural terrain and the need to avoid crossing certain of the ski trails with the road. When I joined the team, it was on its third or fourth variant of the master plan, which was based on bringing cars eastward along the base of the cliffs to the north and then descending south and west on a spiraling bridge that would provide a dramatic but expensive entry to town. There were other objections to the scheme besides its cost, and we faced a figurative and literal impasse. All our drawings were derived from complex topographic maps that had not been surveyed in the field, because of the difficulty of access, but were generated by remarkable aerial stereographic techniques that were nevertheless limited in accuracy. There was one point on the map just west of the future town where the contour lines, which join points of common elevation, all came together in a big black mess that had been assumed to indicate a tall or even overhanging cliff. It threatened to become the absolute obstacle.

Fred Berlottier was not convinced and, after worrying about it for months, asked for a helicopter reconnaissance to look at the location close

up. As the helicopter hovered in front of the cliff, Fred could see that there was just barely room for one last narrow hairpin turn, and the problem was solved. Driving in today, no one is the wiser, but I always slow down for that last turn, remembering the drama of Fred's discovery.

The guidelines that had been established at the outset and were to influence what was eventually built included: no parking in town (drivers get a ticket if their cars stand longer than ten minutes before returning to a parking field); short walking distances for those carrying skis (hence, a concentration of relatively high buildings rather than the customary widely scattered chalets—a practice Lajkó used to call "smearing houses like butter all over the landscape"); minimal air pollution and avoidance of tearing through frozen roadways to access underground utilities (which led to a gas-fired central heating plant that gave off only water vapor—Breuer's wood-burning fireplaces create the only smoke in town—and a network of utility tunnels that distributed high-pressure hot water for heating to all the buildings and allowed a maintenance worker to stand erect inside when making repairs to the plumbing). These rules were tough to abide by and required a client who was willing to invest for the long haul, but Eric was just that. The goal was a clean town with white snow where children could run anywhere and friends would pass each other at central meetingplaces rather than wave from within cars. It seemed like something worth trying to achieve.

The basic building blocks of the town were to be hotels with varying degrees of luxury (although few ski hotels try to compete with their city cousins). They were measured by the standards of the Credit Hôtelier from five stars (deluxe) to a modest two stars (even our two-star hotels were eventually reclassified as three stars because of all the nice features we built into them). Each hotel was to be paired with and directly connected to an apartment house so that co-op owners could use the hotel restaurants and turn their apartment keys over to the hotel staff for service while the owners were away and subletting.

The final master plan of 1961 (it was to continue through many more revisions as experience and governments dictated changes) called for a five-story luxury hotel and apartment house along the north side of the central square, a comfortable pair of four-story buildings defining the western edge, and a modest pair to the south of only two stories so as not to spoil the view of the valley from the north. The buildings formed a U that was open to the eastern slopes and had a skating rink at its center, tucked into a rock outcropping that had been the site of an old shelter for mountain hikers. Immediately surrounding the central pedestrian space at the town's center (a *place* in French, and a *piazza* in the drafting room) were to be shops, offices, cafés, and restaurants that would give Flaine the animation and the life of a real town. It was a European composition and one that Lajkó took to his heart.

Early on in the planning and design process, two of the local architects, Denys Pradelle and Laurent Chappis, began to tangle with Lajkó. He tried for a while to respect their local experience, but when they began to insist that only steeply sloping roofs could be used in the Alps, it was clear that we had a problem. It had been Eric's democratic idea that Flaine would contain buildings by a whole variety of architects whose relationship would somehow be made coherent under Lajkó's guidance. The theory never had to be put to the test since, once the master plan was resolved and approved, Pradelle and Chappis quietly withdrew from the design team, sensing that their ideas would never prevail over those of Lajkó as long as he had the total support of Eric Boissonnas.

There did remain the formality of getting the general council of SAG, the quasi-public body that controlled the land, to approve Breuer as the only architect of Flaine. A majority of its members were local politicians, and Eric feared that there might be some opposition on behalf of local, or at least French, architects who were in effect being shunted aside. The night before Eric was to go to Annecy to defend his decision, he found a pocket edition of a French encyclopedia by the bed of his young son when he stopped by to bid him good night. Leafing through it, he came upon the entry for "architecture" and found a roster of great architects of the past and a list of five great modern architects; Breuer was one. In mentioning this in the next day's meeting, he observed that among the five there was not a single French architect. Someone on the council, thinking that perhaps the encyclopedia's author was prejudiced against the French, asked about the previous centuries. In the seventeenth was Mansart, in the eighteenth was Gabriel, and in the nineteenth were Eiffel and Haussmann, although neither of these last were architects. Finally, a council member said, "All right, if, thanks to Mr. Breuer, Flaine becomes as well known as the Eiffel Tower, we'll have to accept him."

Guided by the commercial program of our planners, we began tentative sketches of what the buildings might look like. The technicians suggested a palette of exterior materials that began with concrete, both poured-in-place and prefabricated in the river valley below. This was to be combined with a local stone ranging in color from dark gray to sandy beige and an imported wood from Cameroon in French West Africa—doussié—that looked and acted like teak, due to its natural oils, and required minimum exterior treatment and upkeep. We were imposing a visual discipline similar to the natural homogeneity of the old villages of Europe. The pedestrian center would be embellished with flags, awnings, signs, umbrellas, and placards of every conceivable color, but the body of each building was to be very restrained in hue and appearance.

We had originally been encouraged by Jean Barets to be very free with our designs ("Anything is possible with precasting"), but after the first set of

hotel plans, with their varying room sizes, had been submitted for discussion, he changed his tune ("We must be reasonable"). We were led through an exercise of standardization that would allow the maximum reuse of repetitive forms and a resulting economy in costs. It turned out to be remarkably easy and productive since the largest bedroom was to be about fourteen feet wide and the smallest about three-quarters of that, or ten feet. That meant that a pair of large bedrooms could be faced with four facade units while the small pair used three, provided that the central panel was blank or designed to accept the end of a partition.

Then it came time to establish exactly what the dimensions were to be. The luxury hotel, which was then called "A," was initially to have parking underneath the building between the poured concrete columns that supported it. The standard width for European parking stalls at that time was two and a half meters (about eight feet two inches), and the width of the columns necessary to support the seven floors above (five floors of bedrooms, a ground floor or rez-de-chaussée, and a penthouse) was forty centimeters (sixteen inches). Three cars at "2m50" (as it was written) plus one column at forty centimeters added up to "7m90"—just right for a pair of large hotel rooms. Of course, to the mathematically inclined (which included me, as the party responsible for the preparation of drawings), 7m90 was awfully close to a nice round eight meters, and considering that we were then going to divide this into halves and quarters, four and two meters seemed terribly logical. Eric Boissonnas had another logic in mind, that of absolute cost. He pointed out that eight meters was almost exactly 1.3 percent longer than 7m90 and that, rather than extend the length of each of the buildings, he would prefer that the draftsmen master the arithmetic.

And so it was that the basic planning module of Flaine for almost twenty years was 1m975, or "one ninety seven five!," as we used to shout across the drafting room. This measure, which is exactly 77 $^{3}/_{4}$ inches, was then occasionally divided into 98.75 centimeters, making a mockery of the beautiful metric system. A final ironic twist to this cautionary tale was provided by history. Construction was halted for a while on Hôtel A, and when work began again with a new program, it had grown two stories in height, adding ten centimeters to the required column width. In the meantime, however, parking under the buildings had been prohibited, so that we never had to go to eight meters after all. We took the ten centimeters out of the space between the columns and stayed with 7m90. Eric was right, of course—I can still do the mathematics in my sleep—but he was wrong about the size. All the rooms at Flaine are too small, but that had more to do with the times, economics, and our shared Calvinism.

Eric and his financial advisers had figured out that in the inflationary 1960s money could be saved by swift negotiations, rather than by traditional

bidding, and we were under great time pressure to complete designs and drawings on or ahead of schedule. He had to invest ten million dollars in the access road and would be partially compensated by the government only after five hundred beds were available in hotels or apartments at Flaine—an arrangement that was obviously meant to preclude having the state pay for roads to nowhere if the developer was to go bankrupt. This put a premium on opening two hotels and an apartment house as soon as possible. It also led to an overall program based on ten thousand beds and a schedule that called for the completion of the town in ten years.

The pace of production picked up, and we met once a month for a week at a time, alternately in Paris and New York. Lajkó was always in attendance in New York, although he sometimes avoided the meetings to tend to other projects, while I was pretty much imprisoned with ten or more experts around the table. Initially everyone spoke English, but gradually the pressures of the project led to internal discussions in French, which I had either to begin to understand or risk being taken advantage of. My knowledge of the technical jargon grew quickly, but I was hopelessly lost when the same friendly figures conducted colloquial discussions at lunchtime. Lajkó's knowledge of French had never grown much past what he had learned in Paris in the 1920s, and his favorite ploy when stumped was to select an English word and give it a French pronunciation—which often worked.

In honor of his twelve years in the United States, and his choice of an American architect, Eric decreed that not only was Breuer to be referred to as Lajkó but that everyone on the design team was to go by first name or nickname. This succeeded remarkably well considering how contrary it was to normal French usage. Rémi told me years later, "I never had any problem calling you 'Bob'—after all, you were American—but for me Laurenti was never 'André.' Why, I never even went to school with him."

The rhythm of meetings imposed a rigorous discipline on the large drafting-room crew that was by now working on the project. Included were Peter Samton, **Jeff Vandeberg,** Guillermo Carreras, Allen Cunningham, and **Paul Willen**. Peter produced many of the early rendered elevations and perspectives that Lajkó used to sell his ideas. Breuer seemed to prefer his loose, conceptual style to the more polished professional renderings that were standard at the time. Jeff reminded me years later that I had suggested he be fired as a "goof-off" at some tense moment in the drafting schedule. Murray Emslie intervened, Breuer said he was to be "given to Herb," and Jeff went on to become a productive member of another crew. Jeff thought at the time, and perhaps still does, that, since he was the only Dutchman on staff, I was annoyed at his spreading the translation of my last name.

Guillermo worked on the team for two years. He was in charge of the detailed design of the first-stage buildings before he left in mid-1963 to join Peter Samton and Mario Romanach at the Gruzen firm designing buildings for

the upcoming New York World's Fair. Allen came on board in late 1962 and soon proved to be the most responsible member of the group—thoroughly immersed in the sweep and complexity of the project, and immensely respected by Breuer. Paul Willen joined us late and briefly. He knew he had "arrived" when he was given the job of folding and filing all the hundreds of record prints of Flaine drawings that we accumulated in the New York office. With this special knowledge, he assumed he would avoid being laid off.

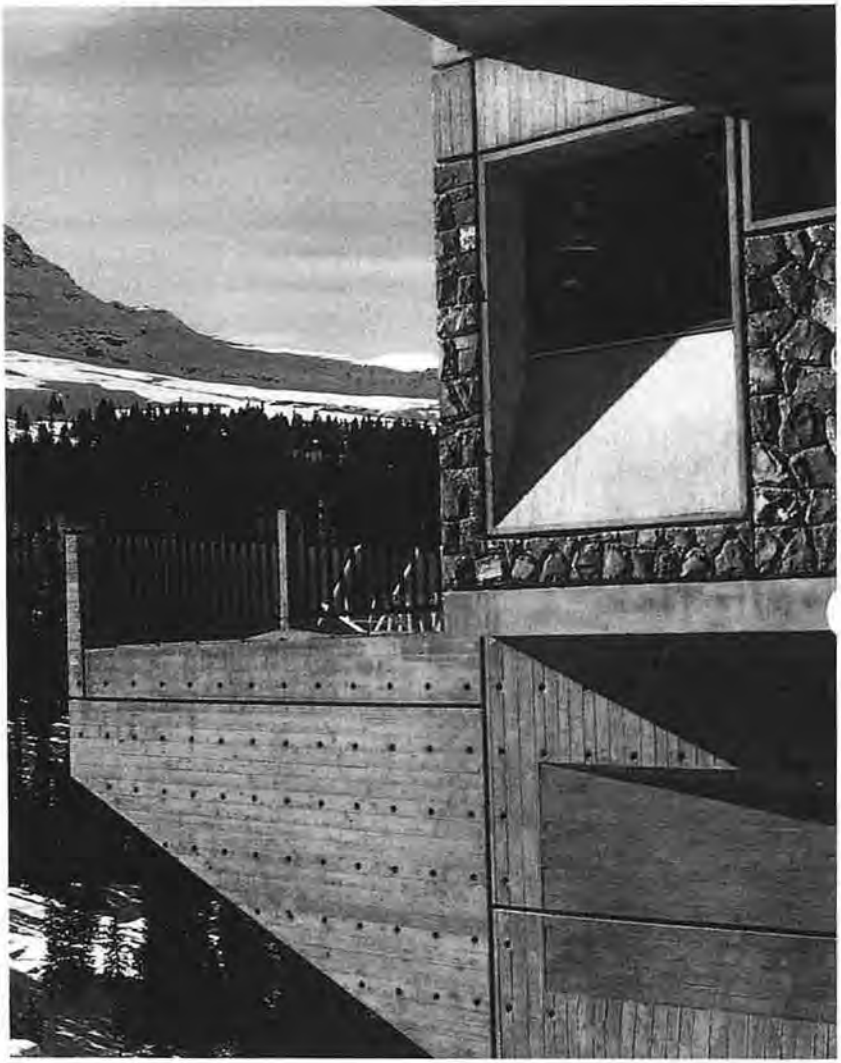
All-day meetings of the Flaine design team would be followed by hasty discussions over the drafting boards and frequent all-night work to change the drawings for the next day's meeting. If I were leaving for a week in Paris, many drawings had to be finished, printed, and folded in the French manner at the last minute while the taxi was waiting downstairs. Lajkó usually came along but would go off to Holland, Switzerland, or Belgium to look after other projects once the essential decisions had been made. We always stayed at the Hôtel Pont-Royal, which was just around the corner from the office of the SEPAD. It was Lajkó's favorite, since he had first discovered it in the 1920s, and was frequented by writers and movie stars.

Another ritual of the meetings in Paris was lunch. In New York we could only offer our clients a Third Avenue deli, but lunch in Paris was invariably at the Restaurant du Mont Blanc of Charles Allard on a little square behind the church of Saint Clothilde. It was an easy walk from the rue de Villersexel, and we would sometimes be twelve or fifteen in single or double file as we strode through the narrow streets of the seventh arrondissement. Eric insisted on everything being first-class and even paid for Lajkó to travel in the front of the plane, although there was one embarrassing flight when Breuer found his thrifty clients flying in the back.

Jean Barets convinced Eric that "fast track" bidding could surmount his time problem. This is a technique designed to select a contractor based on incomplete contract documents in order to get the contractor mobilized and underway while the documents are being finished. The time saved translates into savings in the escalation of costs in inflationary periods; the downside is a relatively restricted period of time during which the contractor is working on a cost-plus basis before a firm fixed-price bid is agreed to.

Our drawings for the first four or five buildings were fairly well advanced, but Lajkó was leery of using this procedure before the final details had been worked out. He preferred to see the specifications written and the architectural drawings coordinated with the structural and mechanical demands of our engineers, Barets's firm COFEBA—which were slow in coming and had already forced us into many last-minute revisions. Nevertheless he went along with the proposal, deferring to the French experts who were the responsible parties.

A solicitation for fast-track proposals was launched in early 1963, and



A detail of the Hôtel Le Flaine. All the essential materials of the ski town—board-form concrete, rubble-stone, wood, and pre-cast concrete—were to be seen in its first building.

one of the great national builders, Boussiron, was chosen based on its unit prices and fine reputation. Activity in the field really began to heat up as excavation began at the building site while construction of the precasting plant was completed in the river valley below.

We had designed three hotels, of which "A" was to be the most luxurious. Its facade was determined by Lajkó's desire to break away from the typical hotel plan in which closets were placed adjacent to the corridor by the bathroom: "Why not put it next to the window?" Why not, indeed? So I worked out a pattern whereby the closet block on one floor protected the

balcony of the floor below. It was a three-dimensional checkerboard with many ins and outs and resultant shadows. The problem lay in precasting its forms; the idea was set aside when the first bids came in and the future of Hôtel A was put on hold.

Hôtel B was more straightforward except for the fact that the land available for its foundations was cut short by a cliff that tumbled down to the valley floor below. Breuer decided to push the building out into the air over the cliff by means of an audacious concrete cantilever. I gulped silently when he first proposed the idea, since it seemed such an extravagant gesture, but its image, jutting out over its cliff, became a symbol of the resort that was published on the cover of innumerable international magazines. Sylvie remembers that Lajkó always liked to surprise people and catch them slightly off guard. It was certainly true that in the drafting room Lajkó felt free to make wild suggestions that the rest of us would only rarely have dared to offer and frequently tried to discourage.

The facade of Hôtel B was made up of what was to become a typical mixture of Flaine facade panels—windows with and without balconies and the famous inverted pyramid that Eric adopted as a trademark. It was nothing more than Lajkó's way of making a blank concrete panel look interesting under sunlight. (Hôtel B was soon to be renamed the Grand Hôtel Le Flaine after its sale to the Provenaz family, who ran the Grand Hôtel d'Albion in Aix-les-Bains.)

Hôtel C was renamed the Gradins Gris after its gray concrete steps and contained one of the most handsome of the many cast-concrete fireplaces with which we enlivened each of the hotel lounges.

Two apartment houses and a group of shops completed the first stage of construction for which Boussiron was under contract. Once we had completed all the documents for each, the contractor had agreed to turn the unit prices and cost-plus billing procedures into lump sums with which the SEPAD could budget and begin to plan for future construction.

I visited the site with Lajkó and others a number of times as the extraordinary project began. On one of the first of my visits, I shared the open steel back of a dump truck with René Martens, one of the original discoverers of Flaine, as we bounced along the provisional gravel road into the valley. We talked about the past, and he explained that at one time or another he had held three different passports as his family tried to keep him from conscription during World War I. One of them was American since he had gone to school briefly in the United States. My request for further details narrowed it down to New York, then to Brooklyn, and eventually to P.S. 152—the very same grammar school I had attended many years later.

By the summer of 1963 the cables had been stretched from the valley floor to the top of the Grandes-Platières, although the only vehicle that could ride them was an open box big enough for six people. It normally

Breuer with his golfing cane, André Laurenti, and me, Flaine, 1963.

took the workers up to the site of the upper lift station, then under construction. It was a thrilling ride, which would be duplicated in a proper gondola many times in subsequent years.

The valley of Flaine in its virgin state was truly remarkable. Bright sun and cool breezes were characteristic throughout the entire summer, and from a vantage point alongside the old stone hut, Fédération, at its center, with only the ashes in the fireplace to hint that anyone had ever been there in a hundred years, the valley was awesome. There were fields of moss and wildflowers, evidence of mountain goats and rabbits, wind song in the tall black pines, and gray rocks everywhere. The air was so clear that distances shrank, and it was hard to keep dimensions in mind no matter how familiar the survey maps. Rémi Boissonnas always kept this vision of Flaine and its first generation of pioneers as his ideal and regretted years later, in the full flower of its commercial success, that we had to share it with "all these people."

My first impressions of its wild beauty returned when I visited Flaine years later in summer with two of my daughters. We took the gondola to the summit of the Grandes-Platières and stepped out onto the crest that they had seen only as a broad snow field. Now the wind-worn mountaintop showed itself to be sliced by wide, deep crevasses that made even walking dangerous, and the taming of the valley for which we had been responsible during twenty years of construction could almost be forgotten.

One wintry evening the design team arrived at the Hôtel Croix de Savoie, at the far side of Arâches-les-Carroz where the new road began, and found that

Lunch in the workers canteen at Flaine, 1963. Sylvie Boissonnas and Christian Boucher are in the foreground; Breuer, Aliette Texier Laurenti, and I are in the background.

the power lines were down. Dinner was prepared over a coal stove and served by candlelight. With the snow beginning to fall heavily, we spent the night in the metal Quonset huts that had been built as the workers camp just above Flaine. When we awoke the next day, we were surrounded by three feet of new-fallen snow, and Eric announced that the morning's work session would be delayed until after lunch so that we could all go skiing.

As the pace of construction picked up, Eric began to get nervous about the time lost in sending drawings and messages back and forth between Paris and New York and asked Lajkó to consider again the idea of opening an office in Paris. Toward the end of the summer of 1963, Breuer asked me what I would think about moving to Paris and I put the question to Barbara that night in Bedford. Within a week my family began the preparations that were to see us move out of our home just after the new year and into a great adventure.

Establishing a new office had its complexities, and Lajkó decided that I should spend most of the month of November in Paris making the arrangements. Our economic planners, the Bureau d'Etudes de Réalisations Urbaines (BERU), owned a full floor in a new office building by the Parc des Expositions, southwest of the city center; and they had more space than they needed at that moment. Thanks to its president, Max Stern, we were offered temporary space there. I advertised in the *Figaro* for a secretary and draftsmen/designers and had hired three employees just before returning home for Thanksgiving. Drafting tables, desks, chairs, and file cabinets were

ordered for January delivery, and my new friends at the BERU were extremely helpful in making us feel very much at home.

Lajkó came over to join me during the third week, and he approved of the arrangements I'd made. We dined with the Boissonnas family one night, and on the next he introduced me to his favorite nightclub—Le Crazy-Horse Saloon ("salooooon," as he pronounced it with glee). We stood at the bar and enjoyed the raucous show, although I was initially inhibited by all that female flesh while standing at the elbow of my fatherly mentor. The next night we were on the Right Bank for an opening of an exhibition of Alexander Calder's new "stabiles" (as opposed to his more familiar "mobiles") at the Maeght Gallery, where we met quite a number of Breuer's old friends. As seven o'clock approached, Lajkó's stomach was rumbling, and after making arrangements to breakfast the next morning with Leo Lionni, Calder, and one or two other friends, we headed off by taxi to his favorite Hungarian restaurant, Le Paprika. It was a festive evening highlighted by the appearance of a cimbalom player who had just defected from the French concert tour of the Hungarian National Orchestra. He played complex arrangements of old gypsy tunes that astonished me and reduced Breuer to tears of happiness.

The following morning, I was downstairs ahead of Lajkó and asked the concierge for my copy of the *Herald Tribune*, which he handed over, folded in quarters. I noticed a headline in the lower left-hand quadrant that spoke of "President" Johnson and said to myself, "The *Trib* is getting sloppy when they can't get the vice president's title right." Then I opened the paper to the shrieking headlines of Kennedy's assassination and shared the shocking news with Breuer a moment later. The report had hit the Maeght the night before, just moments after we had left, but I marveled that it had been possible for us to move around Paris oblivious to such horror. Once before I had seen world-shaking news for the first time in a newspaper headline—the dropping of the atomic bomb in the *Los Angeles Times* in Deep Springs, California—since the remote mountain location cut off radio transmission during the day. I never thought it could happen again.

Breuer and his friends huddled over breakfast as we explored the same dire possibilities that troubled the rest of the world that morning, but we were so far away from home that the conversation was edged in terror. I was only able to reach my family by phone a day later in Atlanta where they were visiting friends, and I joined a vast throng of expatriates to hear Ambassador Charles Bohlin speak at the American Cathedral that Sunday. I was invited to the home of French friends for dinner that night and my host suggested we watch the evening news to catch footage of some of the funeral preparations. At seven o'clock the screen went black with the startling announcement that late-breaking news of the assassination of Kennedy's assassin was awaited; the ground seemed to tremble in uncertainty. I have rarely been so glad to head home as I was a few days later, when I arrived just in time for Thanksgiving.

The Paris Office: 1964–1966

My family sailed aboard the *France* in early January, and the first days in Paris were exciting, complicated, and didn't leave much time for productive work at the office. My new bilingual secretary, Solange Gaches, was in charge of the telephone and arranging for the delivery of office furniture, but it was a few days before a drafting staff began to assemble.

Marcel Breuer at Flaine, 1964.

Allen Cunningham had been fully occupied with Flaine for a year or more, and he and his family were due to follow us to Europe in early March 1964. Lajkó had offered him an associateship—enthusiastically supported by the rest of us—but although he agreed to move to Paris, he was unwilling to make the ten-year (and perhaps permanent) commitment that Breuer wanted. Along with the Cunningham family, the Paris office also welcomed Guillermo Carreras and his wife and children. Although he had left the office six months earlier to follow his mentor, Mario Romanach, to the Gruzen office to work on the Spanish and American Express Pavilions for the New York World's Fair, he was offered the job captaincy of a new French commission by Breuer, which proved irresistible.

Meantime, the supposedly routine issuance of my residency permit (*carte de séjour*) was taking much more time than Cabinet Rougier, the expediter we had hired, had predicted, and I made repeated visits on short notice to the central police station on the Ile de la Cité, each time appearing with that "one more" document that had not been requested the previous time. The *carte* was a necessary prelude to all sorts of other business—opening bank accounts, getting a work permit—so the delay became a big deal. When the paperwork was finally complete I was amused

to read its explanatory, conspiratorial preface, which, loosely translated, said: "Mr. Gatje, having entered the country in the guise of a tourist, desires to have his status regularized . . ."

In Paris I established relations with two accountants, Guy Warnod (for our taxes) and a Monsieur Pert (for the books), and a lawyer, Jack Hutchins of Cabinet Archibald, and they served the office for years to come. Jack was an American who had settled in Paris with his wife, Alice, after his service at the Nuremberg trials and had handled Lajkó's affairs at UNESCO.

In the 1960s there was a small scholarship organization in New York called Atlantique that was devoted to the exchange of French and American architects. Some years before, its executive director, Annie Garrigue, a school friend of my wife's, had arranged for a job in the Breuer office in New York for Jean-Paul Kozlowski, a Polish-born, Parisian-trained architect. He was living with his wife in Paris when we arrived. We became friends with another Atlantique alumnus, Jean-Pierre Chevalier, who introduced me to one of his classmates from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, **Eric Cercler.** I hired Eric as one of our first French employees along with **Daniel Chiquet,** a professional draftsman who was working toward his degree in architecture. Once Allen Cunningham was settled, we had the beginnings of an office. Drawings were unrolled and the design principles of Marcel Breuer in general and Flaine in particular were explained to the newcomers.

In coming to France I knew that I would be dealing with a different language, but I was totally unprepared for the legal differences of the Napoleonic Code, which would govern the practice and responsibilities of architects in constantly surprising ways.

Even the tools of the trade were different. In New York we made working drawings in pencil on soft-surfaced tracing paper. It required care and rubber erasers to keep the drawings from smudging during their life of continual change. Lettering was done by hand, and an ability to letter neatly in pencil was a matter of pride, and something I demanded.

In France the paper was hard and brittle. Drawings were laid out casually in pencil to be overlaid carefully in ink. Errors were corrected by scratching with a razor blade. Scribbled notes were replaced eventually with mechanical ink lettering using plastic templates. And worst of all, although a graduate architect was expected to lay out details and compose facades in pencil, it was up to a draftsman to translate the architect's grand designs into legible drawings. Eric Cercler was aghast at the idea that we were all expected to draft our own drawings and could never understand that I actually found pleasure in organizing and producing a fine graphic document.

If I had been more experienced, I might have decided that it was easier and better for us, as Americans, to adapt to the local traditions; instead, I insisted, with Lajkó's agreement, that we were an American office and we

would run it our way. Everyone who flew over to Paris, including Breuer, usually carried a supply of drafting materials from New York to provide items that were not available on the Parisian market. Rolls of sketching trace were yellow in New York and white in Paris; erasers were pink and soft in the United States and green and hard in France; and so on. We did convince the French that our "parallel edges" were an improvement on T-squares and drafting machines, but we kept running out of the braided cable that made the edges work. In the years that have followed, thanks to exchange studies and work patterns, I've seen other offices in Paris begin to draw in pencil while some in New York have adopted ink. Today, computer-aided drafting (CAD) has in many cases made hand work a thing of the past.

Practicing architecture at "long distance," as Lajkó used to describe it, had its difficulties but also its advantages. The principal advantage in being in New York in those days was that our Flaine clients and engineers could not expect constant, daily attention and their questions and comments tended to be saved up for our monthly meetings. Once we were close at hand, the temptation to organize meetings for discussion and coordination proved irresistible, and COFEBA even put one of its engineers to work in our office. The pressure to complete our sets of coordinated documents was very real, and as we began to feel at home, the productivity of our drafting staff improved dramatically. By February 1964 we had eleven people at work on the boards. Lajkó paid us a first visit early that month, but once he had sampled the pace and detail of the coordination meetings, he moved on to other appointments in Europe. Soon the snows at Flaine would melt, and Boussiron, the general contractor, was anxious to be at work as soon as the ground began to thaw.

The Gatjes and the Sterns in the Forêt de Fontainebleau. The two families play boules as Lajkó looks on.

I found that being in Paris finally put us in a position to understand the enormous undertaking Eric Boissonnas had begun and the terrible difficulties that he was having in carrying it through. While we had been in New York, despite our monthly meetings in the early 1960s, Eric had chosen to keep me, and Lajkó, largely in the dark about the local political problems he had encountered. It may be that he reasoned that we could not possibly understand them (probably true) or that we were better left alone to do our architecture. In any case, once I was in place in France it was impossible not to hear stories, rumors, and facts (although it was sometimes difficult to tell one from the other) about our so-called friends in Annecy and Arâches-les-Carroz.

Improving the road up from Magland, through the villages en route and up to the start of our road, required the aid of the national government, the purchase of land, and the cooperation of the local municipalities. Our road, which the SAG was to build, descended from a pass called Pierre Carrée to the valley floor. For a time all was going well and land could be bought at the going rate. Then Gaz de France, which had to buy land by a specific date for the gas pipeline that was to fuel Flaine, began to bid at higher prices. Before long, land speculation on the part of the farmers, who should have felt some loyalty to the development that was going to enrich them in other ways, was rampant. There were 170 families involved, embroiled in centuries of friendships and feuds. If one farmer agreed to sell, it might cause a neighbor to renege on a previous agreement. This ballet went on for months. To try to calm the waters, Eric brought in an "expropriation judge" to set the land prices, but it was too late and the judge was literally run out of town by pitchfork. It was only when Eric threatened to close down the ski lifts in les Carroz, which he had bought in the meantime in order to modernize them, that the locals saw the wisdom of an orderly acquisition of land by Flaine.

As the building season of spring 1964 approached, the SEPAD was under severe financial pressure, and important low-interest loans that had been promised by FNAFU, a development arm of the national government, were months overdue. No one spoke openly of a crisis to come, but tensions were rising and there was a risk that all our efforts to rush drawings for the first four buildings through to completion might have been wasted. Writing in his own book about Flaine, Eric Boissonnas quotes a highly placed French official summing up the situation: "Flaine is something like a planetary space program whose launching is controlled by the way that cows are milked in Arâches."

France in the 1960s was far ahead of most other countries in terms of an enlightened national policy for urban planning and the construction of low-cost housing. One of the experts in the field was our planning consultant at Flaine—the BERU—in the person of Max Stern. The firm was already involved in the planning of several large projects that went by the acronym

Flaine, 1964. Eric Boissonnas, Breuer, Jacqueline Westerkamp, Gatje, Pierre Lamy, and Rémi Boissonnas stand at the end of the construction road.

ZUP (*zone à urbaniser en priorité,* or priority planning zone) and were usually under the control of very distinguished architects, including foreigners such as Oscar Niemeyer from Brazil. The ZUP program was an attempt on the part of the national government to stimulate local initiatives in the planning of extensions to or within existing cities and awarded a considerable subsidy, provided that the local city or town followed strict rules, chose good architects, and received approval of the final site plan from the appropriate ministries in Paris. The program worked well and several years later Lajkó spoke of his happy experience to a dinner partner, New York's Governor Nelson Rockefeller. I wrote a brief description of the process for Breuer in the late 1960s for transmission to Rockefeller, which may well have helped in the formulation of New York's successful planning program, the Urban Design Council (UDC).

Max knew of the plans of the city of Bayonne, a medium-sized city in southwestern France near the Atlantic coast and north of the more famous Biarritz, to launch a ZUP to develop and control a large area of land just across the Adour River from the center of town. Centuries ago, it had been the Jewish quarter, and the city had just acquired it by expropriation from several old landholding families. The program specified a resident population of fifteen thousand people in low- to medium-cost housing—so-called "HLMs" (*habitation à loyer modéré,* or housing at moderate rental)—and was a major undertaking for Bayonne. The BERU had already been named as programmer and commercial planner for the project, and Max Stern nomi-

city administration with his easy charm and rapid progress in their language. There was only one early, momentary setback when he inadvertently threw in a word from the gutter while making a presentation to the city council.

Once we got involved in creating actual building types, Lajkó's ingenuity proved invaluable. The legislation that controlled the design of HLM apartments was extremely literal and complex. France's wartime experience with power outages, elevator failures, and inadequate natural ventilation imposed specific requirements on all apartments that contained more than one bedroom. Each such apartment had to have "through ventilation" with windows on at least two different facades; kitchens were required to have windows and an adjacent drying room for laundry exposed to outside breezes; bathrooms were to be ventilated by interconnected systems of chimneys, permitting natural draft, rather than by electric ventilating fans that might break down.

Breuer responded with ideas he had first proposed in the early 1920s (but never used) for "skip-floor" plans and apartments served by corridor elevators on every third floor. Since the French government was subsidizing the construction of these low-cost apartments, the strict rules limited the size of each apartment type. The contractors, in bidding for the right to build them, were accepting a fixed price and only competing with one another on the standards of finish and fittings. The architect had very little room in which to maneuver, and the three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle that Breuer proposed provided duplex apartments of considerable beauty and utility, considering all the rules that had to be obeyed.

The concrete forming method adopted by the builder when construction finally began in 1966 was equally ingenious in adapting an industrialized technique called "tunnel forming" to the complex interior shapes required. Metal tunnels were built side by side on the ceiling slab of the apartment below; after the concrete had been poured around and between them, they were collapsed inwardly and re-erected on the next floor. Precast-concrete facade panels provided deep shade for the un-air-conditioned apartments. Their pattern reflected the different room arrangements on each floor. Some had corridors, while others crossed over or under the corridor that served them. It was one of Lajkó's most subtle and complex checkerboards.

French chimneys, which look picturesque on the sloping roofs of sixth-floor seventeenth-century garrets, made for an odd-looking rooftop forest of tall spindly stacks on our flat roofs. We decided to mask their bizarre profile somewhat by using a high parapet all around the roof perimeter, with just enough openings to allow the natural draft to work. We were not the first to propose this solution, but each exception had to be argued before the insurance authorities in Paris who controlled much of the architecture of France.

I found a sympathetic bureaucrat who understood exactly what we wanted to do and why it would improve the looks of our buildings. Still, he resisted, with crystal-clear Gallic logic: "If I let you do this, soon everyone will do it and the problem of the ugly chimneys will become less severe. Our organization believes the better way is to change the law and permit artificial ventilation with low fan housings on the roof. We need the ugly buildings to convince the legislators to change the law." When I asked how long this battle had been going on, he admitted to fifteen years and shrugged as he approved our plans. The law was changed the next year.

Lajkó visited the Paris office about once a month, prompted by the need for regular meetings at Bayonne and others in or about Flaine. They became a pleasant routine, and we saw more of him than we would have in a typical week in New York. On one visit I went with Breuer to the inaugural celebration of an installation at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs of the dining room that he had designed many years earlier for the Kandinskys in Paris. Madame Kandinsky was moving to a smaller apartment and had given the furniture to the Louvre. We had dinner with the painter's widow, who had remained a close friend of Lajkó's over the years, but it was difficult for me to follow the chatter, which tended to drift free-form from German to French, with a little English thrown in. Sylvie and Eric had once invited Madame Kandinsky to dine with Lajkó, who found her sad and bitter. Lajkó tried to cheer her up: "Oh, Nina, don't you remember all the fun we used to have in the cafés?" She would regularly call the Paris office to find out when Breuer would be in town next, and years later, a new secretary was scolded by the imperious lady for not recognizing her name and its importance in art history.

In early April 1964 the rumblings of Flaine's political problems became louder, and I was called in for the first in a series of complicated meetings with the general contractor, Boussiron. In addition to the other financial pressures weighing on Eric Boissonnas, Boussiron was trying to wriggle out of its agreement. Chosen from a very short list of reputable contractors with the right banking connections, they had agreed to begin work on the project on a cost-plus basis. They were to be reimbursed for their actual costs plus a profit rather than being held to a fixed-price bid. They were, however, obligated to turn the unit prices into building-by-building lump sums as soon as the documents were ready, and that moment had come. Boussiron, in the meantime, had discovered the comfort of working on cost-plus and was dragging its heels, claiming that it had not foreseen all the difficulties of building in a remote alpine valley.

In a way, each party to the dispute that erupted had a hidden agenda. Boussiron was having financial difficulties that had nothing to do with Flaine and was looking to the Boissonnas family to bail it out. Eric was worried that the promised government loans might never come through, and he was

beginning to think that an enforced pause in the program of building might not be such a bad idea. It almost seemed as if Lajkó and I were the only ones who wanted the argument resolved in the interests of not seeing this beautiful project abandoned. Breuer was incredulous when I wrote him of my first fears, and when he came over in the end of April he told Eric, "In all my years as an architect, if I have learned any one thing it is *never fire the builder!*" Eric replied, "Lajkó, *you* know I can't fire the builder. *I* know I can't fire the builder. My problem is that *the builder* knows I can't fire the builder, and that is going to lead to blackmail." So he fired the builder.

A lawyer specialized in building matters was called in, and his first advice to Eric was to fire the whole building team—everyone who had gotten him into this awful mess. Eric knew that Lajkó had opposed the advice of COFEBA in embarking on the premature fast-track system and refused to let us go, but he did dismiss Jean Barets and some of the other technicians. The next few months were devoted to legal wrangling over the terms under which Eric's development company, the SEPAD, would take title to everything in and around Flaine Valley. Foundations, buildings, precasting plant—all were to be eventually mothballed. Boussiron would not budge, and we had many a long and turbulent meeting, all orchestrated by the lawyer. My French was not up to following most of the shouting, but I had an occasional role to play. This usually involved standing up on cue from Rémi, slamming shut my attaché case, and joining our side in marching out of the room while someone stayed behind to avoid an absolute breakdown in negotiations. Eventually, Boussiron gave in, canceled the contract, and abandoned its claim to an indemnity. Rémi told Boussiron they had tried to "harness Flaine to a white elephant."

The lack of the title *architecte* made it impossible for Breuer to personally assume the responsibilities and the potential liabilities of his practice in France. He had associated with Bernard Zehrfuss for UNESCO, the Laugiers in Nice for IBM France, and temporarily, COFEBA for Flaine. When it came to public clients such as the city of Bayonne, and even the SAG, the title was required. Normally it was reserved for graduates of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts who were awarded diplomas by the government, giving them the exclusive right to use the initials DPLG after their name. Graduates of "lesser" schools in France, such as the Ecole Spéciale in Paris (which in the 1960s actually offered a better education in architecture than the Beaux-Arts), could call themselves architects and join the Ordre des Architectes Français (French Order of Architects), but they always lacked the DPLG, which helped in getting work, especially from the government.

I used to get into arguments with my French friends over what I saw as the sorry state of French architectural education, and everyone tended to agree that the Beaux-Arts was behind the times. Even the government that

ran it had such lack of confidence in its graduates that it gave more and more authority to engineers, who were better trained at their schools, also run by the government.

Then, to cap it all off, the national insurance companies, who had to pay for the liability claims lodged against architects, decided to band together in self-protection. They formed nationwide control bureaus that had to approve an architect's plans before they could be used as a basis for the umbrella coverage required by the client for a project of any size. This may have avoided many building errors, but it also had a stultifying effect on the inventiveness of French architects. If there were no precedents, no examiner at the Bureau de Contrôle was likely to approve a detail. Without the approval there was no insurance, and without the insurance no client could afford to proceed. At the same time, architects were required to carry their own liability insurance, which would be incorporated into the overall "umbrella" written for the project. Under the Napoleonic Code, an architect is responsible for his or her errors for ten years. The Ordre des Architectes Français had formed its own insurance company to write ten-year insurance, but only for its members. It was possible to obtain similar coverage from Lloyds of London, but the cost was prohibitive. Since America had, and still has, no reciprocal agreement with France regarding the licensing of French architects in the United States, the French government was not about to make it easy for Americans to practice in France.

The contract for the ZUP de Bayonne contained a clause limiting Lajkó's activities to master planning until he could call himself an architect for the buildings that he hoped to design. In addition, Eric Boissonnas knew that sooner or later the SAG would want its architect to be so titled, if only for local political effect. In the fall of 1963 Eric had offered to intervene with friends in the government on Breuer's behalf, and André Malraux, the minister of culture at the time, agreed to help Lajkó get into the Ordre. Problems arose when it was discovered that whatever paper Breuer had received on graduation from the Bauhaus had never been given equivalency to a French diploma. His years of teaching at the Harvard Graduate School of Design didn't count either. Finally, after months of wrangling, an escape clause was found in the legislation, granting the title of *architecte* to established "men of art whose ability to build had been adequately demonstrated." Lajkó was admitted to the Ordre des Architectes Français on June 1, 1964, almost exactly a year after Malraux had intervened.

Up to that time we had been using the New York letterhead of Marcel Breuer and Associates with an overprint of our Paris address and telephone number. We now became "Marcel Breuer Architecte." Of course, I was not able to call myself *architecte* at the time and I hid behind the invented title *directeur des études* (something like design director). Since none of the New York associates were French architects, we could never use the firm

name "Marcel Breuer and Associates," and all the firm's business had to be channeled through Breuer personally—taxes, real estate, and the like. When Lajkó eventually retired, the rules had been simplified, and with my Cornell diploma I applied for, and received, the title of *architecte* in 1976. It took me exactly a year, without the help of Malraux. In this way, we could continue to have a partner at the head of the Paris office.

It came time for me to formally join the partnership in June 1964, a year after my "elders"—Murray, Herb, and Ham. My signature on the documents that had arrived from New York was witnessed by the U.S. consul, and the document was secured in blue ribbon under a wad of hot red wax embossed with the seal of the ambassador.

In July of the same year the termination agreement with Boussiron had been reached, the shutdown of the job site at Flaine had begun, and COFEBA had been dismissed. To replace the engineers, Eric retained another

Flaine, 1964. The design team inspects precast parts at Magland in the Arve River valley.

The comic-book publishers moved out just before Christmas and we were involved in renovations until the following Easter.

Once the shelving was removed, we could inspect the space we had bought. It dated back to at least the sixteenth century, and the wooden floors showed their age. The masonry walls were covered with cracked plaster, and the ceiling in the entry had a disconcerting sag in the middle. As co-op owners of the space we were responsible for adding what we needed—a central heating system, new electrical circuitry and lighting, and a toilet for staff and visitors.

A good part of André's practice involved the renovation of old space in Paris, and since he worked only two blocks away, he took over all the dealings with the builders and the inspection of the work as it progressed. We laid new heating pipes and electrical cable, scraped the floors, and repaired the french windows. Before replastering the walls and ceilings, we had to do something about that central sag, despite the agent's assurance that it hadn't moved in a hundred years. Once the ceiling had been taken down, we looked aghast at what might at any moment have been a disaster. The main hand-hewn beam that crossed the space had been notched at one side to receive a cross-member that would have framed the hearth of a now long-gone fireplace during the building's residential days. This was normal and would have presented no problem except that a century or so later someone else had come along to frame the hearth of another fireplace on the other side of the beam and, unaware of the first cut, had made a notch nearly opposite. The notch was so deep that there was little wood left in the main beam. Perhaps three inches remained of what had been a twelve-inch-wide beam, and it had dropped about six inches at this point of weakness. We had to wonder what was holding it up except habit.

We eventually slid the shallowest steel I-beam we could find under the old wood one very carefully and inserted some gentle wedges between them. The ceiling was replastered, and the dropped beam that resulted from all these gyrations was just high enough for me to walk underneath. It served to hide a line of lights that illuminated a large photo-mural we installed just behind the receptionist's desk.

We had one setback just before we were due to move in. One of the plumbers left a hot torch on some oily rags as he left work for the day. The fire didn't spread far before it was detected, but an area around two of the street windows had to be braced until the insurance company agreed with our repair plan. The arched opening between the entry and the adjacent room, which had housed the pot-bellied stove, was closed down to an arched window for verbal communication between the two spaces, and we always kept a bouquet of bright flowers there next to the receptionist.

Finally, just after Easter 1965 we said goodbye to the BERU at Parc des Expositions and loaded everything into a big moving van. When parked out-

side 48 rue Chapon, it completely blocked the narrow, one-way street. I didn't know what we were going to do about that as the movers began the process of unloading and carrying all our furniture and file cabinets up two winding flights of stairs. It probably lasted only an hour or two, but the screeching horns and shouted curses that echoed up from the street below still resound in my memory.

After we had been in the office for several years we realized that the street came to a grinding halt every time any truck had to stop for a delivery; our holdup had simply been a little longer than usual. The noises on the street picked up with the arrival of spring as more kids were playing outside and we opened the windows for ventilation. We even had an accordionist who came by once a month or so.

Outfitting the new space after the furniture had been moved was relatively simple. The walls and ceiling were glossy white, the doors and carpet were charcoal gray, exposed pipes ran everywhere, and there wasn't a straight wall or flat floor to be found. Lajkó loved it. He did suggest some dark cork for a few walls as a tackboard, and I roamed all over Paris before finding exactly the right two-by-four-foot panels in a warehouse devoted to commercial refrigeration equipment. The final touch was an enameled plaque to go beside the great dark green doorway on the street. It read "MARCEL BREUER ARCHITECTE" in blue letters on a white field. It took six weeks to have made but lasted until we moved the office to Montparnasse many years later; by then it had accumulated a few rusty dings and looked as if it had been in place for centuries. We really felt like Parisians.

As 1964 drew to a close, Eric Boissonnas had put much of his financial house in order. He invited Barbara and me on a largely ceremonial visit to Flaine to inspect the job site, which had finally been taken over from Boussiron. We met Eric and Sylvie, Rémi, Fred Berlottier, and Gérard Chervaz at the precasting plant at Magland under low-lying clouds that hid the tops of the mountains lining the Arve Valley. In contrast to the bustle of my last visit, everything was dead still. Tall piles of gray precast concrete pieces were neatly stacked and cataloged with painted numbers. Fresh snow had left most of them wet and dark. We boarded a special open bin about ten feet square that was transported by cables that normally carried building material. After a jerky start, we rode over pylons that jutted out from the mountain face at an almost perpendicular angle. The swirling fog suddenly gave way to brilliant sunshine above a solid cloud bank. The truck that was waiting for us, and the valley beyond, could be clearly seen way down below.

We had a pleasant lunch in the workers barracks—there were a few left over as site guardians—and then drove down into the heart of the valley where, again, all was silence. Tall cranes had been folded in half and seemed to have their heads bowed in sadness. Great holes in the rock, parts of poured concrete walls with projecting spikes of reinforcing steel, each wrapped in

Andy Weunsche, Claudio Cavalcanti, Gatje, Eric Cercler, John Sullivan, and Guillermo Carreras in the Paris office drafting room.

a large walk-in closet. A narrow winding wooden stair led to a dining mezzanine, and within a few months of our arrival, the restaurant had expanded to a third level. A nimble set of waitresses carried every meal up those stairs and every dirty dish down them. We used to arrive for lunch en masse—five or six at a time—at about one o'clock and had to wait for at least a half hour before being seated. This became annoying, especially as we saw the regulars—the plumber from across the street, the shopkeepers from down the block—ushered past us to waiting tables.

We delicately took up the matter with Monsieur Jean behind the bar and learned that most of his clientele had regular reservations; if we intended to dine there consistently he would happily give us a time slot. So from then on we had a large table waiting for us daily at half past one, and our napkins were even assigned cubbyholes in the rack downstairs. We were usually five or six, but if Lajkó was with us the party swelled to include every chair we could borrow from the neighbors. The food was good country cooking, inexpensive and based upon what was featured at the market that day. We felt very much at home in our neighborhood.

When Lajkó was in town, he dominated lunch with news from the New York office and memories of Paris in the 1920s. Otherwise discussions were rarely about architecture and frequently concerned art or politics. Our common language was French, but the regulars at nearby tables noted all the foreign accents. The Vietnam War was on, Johnson was running against Goldwater, and de Gaulle was up for re-election. John and Guillermo could

speak for the right wing; Andy, Allen, and Henri took strong positions on the left; the rest of us would slosh back and forth guided by liberal instinct or, in the case of Eric, a determined independence. I remember one particularly animated argument over dessert that involved two of the waitresses and the construction workers across the aisle. It had to do with the regularity of French verb formation.

Jane Yu, the head of interior design in the New York office, came through Paris in June and stayed at our apartment for several days before heading down to Italy to join Breuer's secretary, **Mary Farris.** Breuer was trying yet another cure for his bad back at a thermal spa near Vicenza and had invited the two of them to stop by and relieve his boredom. "It's so sad, surrounded by old people and my own dark thoughts," he remarked. He rented a convertible with which to show them the sights but must have been distracted. After driving straight through one of the pedestrian city squares as the locals scattered wildly with vocal and gestured objections, he found himself going up the down ramp of the Autostrada with the wind blowing his fringe of gray hair straight up over his forehead. Jane kept leaning over and hitting him: "Wrong way! Wrong way! Breuer, you're on the wrong side!"

I went to New York in July and received a once-in-a-lifetime tongue-lashing from Breuer over the excess time we were spending on Torin UKD. I was devastated to see that Lajkó had taken Rufus Stillman's side in our argument over why the project was moving so slowly and the fees rising so quickly. I appreciated the support that Herb gave me at the end of a turbulent partners' meeting convened just to chew me out. When I got back to Paris and explained the situation to Allen, we succeeded in cutting the number of working drawings we had planned, and the client stopped changing the program.

Back at the drafting boards, some of us were still working on future plans for Flaine, and we tried to keep au courant with its political prospects. By mid-1965 the problem of the road seemed to have been settled, but Flaine had still to acquire rights to ski on the 1,500 broad acres that faced north, across the valley from our building sites. In the eleventh century the nobleman who owned the mountain had given to his peasants the right to graze cattle on these slopes during the summer, but this right was not passed on through inheritance. It was available only to those who owned cattle and enough land to feed them in winter. Anyone selling land or moving away lost grazing rights. The original contracts had been kept in Milan, since the dukes of Savoy were then in control, but they had been destroyed by fire and only imperfectly replaced in the seventeenth century with documents now held in Annecy. This ancient form of "ownership" went by the name of "Albergataire" and was only known in certain alpine valleys. No one had been using the rights for years and title to the land was cloudy indeed.

The design team riding the work gondola to the Grandes Platières, Flaine, 1966.

Eric Boissonnas placed a notice in the local newspaper asking claimants to state their rights. Three thousand people responded. To cover administrative expenses, each respondent was asked to put up the very modest sum of five francs, and the number dropped to six hundred. To deal with the candidates who remained, Eric asked that they elect a president. He proposed a price that the president found to be fair; the assembly, however, rejected it, along with a half dozen proposals that followed. Finally, Eric made one last offer. He gave the president his price and said that, when all the signatures had been secured, he would double the sum. It worked.

Sometime in the autumn, faced with continuing legal and administrative problems, Eric Boissonnas realized it was time to play serious politics if he was ever to pursue his dream of developing Flaine. Wolves were circling and there were rumors that the Rothschilds were interested in taking over.

He began by contacting his cousin, Maurice Couve de Murville, who was then the French foreign minister. With a few words from the top, the bureaucracy began moving again, although it was not until the following spring that the minister of tourism finally took definitive action. The minister convened a meeting at the prefecture in Annecy composed of the mayors and town councils of the three communities involved. He wasted no words: "Gentlemen, in my role as minister of tourism I am frequently asked to intercede in disputes between Parisian promoters and the local citizenry. And I know that it is usually the moneymen from Paris who are squeezing the country folk. I am here today to tell you that I have studied the dossier

of Flaine very carefully and I know that, in this case, the shoe is on the other foot. Monsieur Boissonnas is being treated most unfairly by your townspeople. I haven't much time but wanted you to know that we will give you twenty-four more hours within which to convince everyone that they must honor their solemn agreements. If the options are not ratified by that time, your towns will be expropriated and we will take care of matters from Paris. No questions." With that, he turned on his heel and left the room. Twenty-four hours later, everything was settled. Work was resumed on the road, and there was clear title ahead for construction.

There remained the matter of a collaboration with the Rothschilds to resolve. Eric had great admiration for the technical qualifications of the experts who were part of the Rothschild group: **Emile Allais,** the dean of French skiing; Denis Creissels, France's leading designer of ski lifts; and COTEBA. In order to maintain the possibility of working with them, he decided not to close the door on negotiations with the parent group. And his hand was immeasurably strengthened when someone passed to him the confidential report from Allais to the Rothschilds in which, after surveying the valley on snowshoe, he predicted, "Properly developed, I think Flaine ten years from now will be one of the greatest ski areas in the world."

Fatigued and under pressure from Rémi, Eric was on the verge of making a deal with the Rothschilds. Eric had chosen Henry Briffod, an old friend and loyal politician, to head the SAG, and the two brothers decided to explain the situation to him during lunch just before a general meeting of the board. The president listened with apparent agreement, but during the board meeting that followed, the old Socialist launched into a long, impassioned diatribe denouncing any association with a Rothschild. With this evidence of opposition within his own organization, Eric decided to disclaim any such intention and the threat passed. He did manage to retain the services of Allais and Creissels, who both became enthusiastic members of our design team.

I worked with Emile Allais very closely at times as we tried to respect the needs of his ski trails when they got near our buildings. In order to draw the trails and their contours, I had to know as much about their slopes as I did about Berlottier's roads. When describing a trail that he was sure was possible to build between the upper and middle plateaus, he gave me his rules regarding percentage of slope; after testing it at the drafting board, I tried to prove it to be a physical impossibility. "Well then," he said, "we'll just have to break my rules."

In anticipation of the relaunching of Flaine, Eric had hired a new public-relations and advertising firm in Paris called ICPA headed by a woman named Hugette Imber-Vier. One of its first assignments was to design a logo for Flaine. I was a little miffed by this, since we had been using the italic

My final proposal to Eric.

lowercase letters in a box that I had designed years ago for our presentation drawings and had assumed their official status. Eric explained that they needed something much more "mode" than our disciplined letterform and predicted that Lajkó would also hit the roof when he told him that ICPA was suggesting colors for Flaine that were not red, yellow, and blue. (He was right, especially when they turned out to be magenta, chartreuse, and navy.) I asked to have a crack at the logo, and Eric said he would consider a mini-competition.

I sketched for many hours at home in the evening, plumbing the essence of those six letters and their relationship one to the other. Rarely have I enjoyed a pure design challenge as much. I submitted my version, but ICPA's was chosen as more commercial. Eric told me privately that he preferred the looks of mine and suggested that we use it on all our drawings, which we did. Lajkó later added his compliments but told me frankly that mine was illegible. He was probably right.

In early December Lajkó was on his way to a meeting with Max Stern and me in Bayonne, and some problems had arisen that I was anxious to see resolved before his arrival. Our fees for the design of the buildings at the ZUP were funded by the local HLM society rather than by the city itself, and we had to deal with the infamous Monsieur Forcade. Whether it was because a foreign architect had been forced on him or just because delay was part of the bureaucratic game, Forcade was simply not paying his bills. I had tried to explain by telephone to Breuer that Max had assured me that sooner or later the society had to pay; in fact, the French government had set up a special bank that gave low-interest loans to professionals who were waiting for other parts of the government to pay their fees. Breuer was a tough businessman, and he had become sufficiently Americanized that his last words to me by telephone were "Threaten to sue them!" When I told this to Max, he nearly fell over. I had a problem.

I turned to our secretary, Madame Roche, and we explored every aspect of the impasse. She offered to compose a letter. After reading it with

satisfaction, I signed the letter and sent it off to the mayor. During our meetings the next week, it was evident to Max and me that the tensions had been relieved, and Lajkó wondered what all the fuss had been about. It was noted for the record that our bills had been approved for payment, and that was that. As we were leaving the final meeting, Dr. Grênet took me aside: "Monsieur Gatje, I just wanted to say a word about your letter of last week. When it arrived, we were approaching something of a breaking point, and I was concerned by what you might have to say. After reading your letter, I was greatly relieved and realized that, with it in hand, I would be able to bring everyone back together. But more to the point was the elegance of its composition. I passed the letter around the table to the members of my city council and said, 'How is it possible for an American to deal with such a difficult situation in *our* language with a subtlety and nuance that I know I could not possibly have employed?' I just wanted to congratulate you." I smiled appreciatively and passed the compliment on to Madame Roche.

Lajkó and I had decided that I should return to New York in the middle of the summer of 1966, since the pace of the Paris office remained slow compared to the explosion of commissions that Lajkó had received in New York. Flaine was still on hold, Bayonne was in Darroquy's hands, Eric Cercler could handle Sarget, and Torin UKD posed few remaining problems for Geoff Spyer in London. There were meetings with IBM France about the need for new buildings at La Gaude, but no one was prepared to make a commitment.

One of the last projects Guillermo and I worked on with Lajkó at Bayonne was a pair of water towers needed to maintain water pressure in the twelve-story apartment blocks we were building. These utilitarian structures dot the countryside in France, which has an approach to hydraulics that is different from that of most other countries. When they are well designed, they can become local monuments. For our ZUP it was decided that something special was required since the towers would be tall enough to read as a signal from afar. We gathered all the technical storage data from the city via COTEBA and explored the most economical forming and pouring methods then available for such a tall concrete structure.

As we fed the data to Breuer on one of his visits to Paris, we shared one of those magical moments of pure sculptural creation. The three of us were hunched over Guillermo's drawing board while Lajkó moved his soft black pencil and occasionally an eraser over the several sketches that had been produced for his consideration. The shapes that evolved looked like nothing so much as great wine goblets with a ribbed surface that was inspired, if not dictated, by the slip-form and post-tensioning techniques suggested by our engineers. There were to be two, side by side at heights of 150 and 235 feet. The final presentation drawing, with its complex ink-toned shadows playing across the curved and faceted shapes, became one of Breuer's favorites and

Just before he returned to New York, Guillermo took a weekend trip to Amsterdam and reported to me on the following Monday a curious thing he had noted. Passing by the largest modern furniture shop in town he had seen a pair of cantilevered steel Breuer side chairs in the window with the attribution "Mart Stam." Since it was Sunday, he was not able to ask anyone about the error, but we decided together that I should write a mild letter of correction as head of Breuer's Paris office, which I did from a rather haughty and naive position, regarding the "chairs, that all the world knows were designed by Marcel Breuer." Several weeks later I got a letter from the store, which was also the manufacturer and distributor of the chair. The store "found it astonishing that, after all the years of litigation, the Breuer camp was still asserting authorship." I was, at that time, completely uninformed about the Breuer-Stam lawsuit, which was particularly sensitive in this case because Stam was Dutch. (Stam also apparently later claimed authorship of the great van Nelle Factory in Rotterdam designed by van der Vlugt and Brinckmann, for which he served only as job captain.) I casually mentioned the exchange of correspondence to Breuer during his next trip to Paris. He turned stony-faced as he said simply, "I don't want to talk about it."

My second daughter, Marianna, was born at the American Hospital in Neuilly in late May, just in time for some farewell picnics in the Chevreuse Valley out past Versailles with the Kozlowskis and Cunninghams and *their* newborns. I later told Marianna that we'd given her a priceless opening line—"You know, I was born in Paris . . ."—but she trumped that when she married a Frenchman.

Allen Cunningham was slated to return to England and a career in architecture and planning that led to a very prestigious post as the head of the London Polytechnic School of Architecture. I was to pass the director's baton to Eric Cercler, who certainly had the training, if not the personality, to run the office. Lajkó had chosen Mario Jossa, a young Italian-American architect, as his principal design representative in Paris. Mario had been working in New York while I was abroad and had come over from the Gruzen office at Guillermo's suggestion.

In a great irony of professional timing, Eric Boissonnas announced at the end of spring 1966 that he would recommence the building of Flaine, and a new contracting group began work that summer. Similarly, the negotiations with IBM became more active, and new design work began shortly after my return to New York. I remained the partner in charge of all the French work, and we did most of the design with Lajkó in New York. During the following years I was in France almost monthly, as Breuer began to weary of the travel, but the work I had initially been sent to do passed gradually to the hands of others, and I became a New York architect rather than an expatriate.

Hôtel Le Flaine. Non-load-bearing windows, balconies, and facade panels are stacked on the left to create a "fabric" of mullions and voids; Breuer instinctively staggered the joints of the end wall to imply the masonry's ability to bear load.

would break its axis. Draftsmen and masons had to be trained but the walls were rarely built entirely according to the Breuer rules.

These guidelines didn't mean that every Breuer stone wall or fireplace looked like every other one. Differences in local color and source made for qualities as unique as the hand of the mason who was laying the stone. Walls at Flaine range from black to gray in color, while the New England houses are a symphony of earth tones. But in each case they look like a Breuer wall—even though Le Corbusier may have been the first to use rubblestone architecturally at his Pavillon Suisse.

Rubblestone is a great example of Semperian earthwork because it originates in the earth and shares its color. Breuer was perfectly content to have such a wall rise directly from the ground, since any rain-spattered dirt that might stain its surface would blend with the color of the stone. Brick or dressed stone were preferably laid on a base growing out of the concrete foundation to free it visually and literally from the dirt of the ground. If this was not possible, due to sloping ground, for instance, Breuer would call for a two-foot-wide strip of gravel at the base of the wall to absorb the rain and ease the grass-cutting. These methods of articulation between materials happened to look good, at least to our collective eye, but it's hard to say whether this was because they served a useful, practical purpose or because of their sculptural effect.

Jointing is a characteristic quality of any masonry material, and its pattern reflects its purpose and, frequently, its strength as well. If units of masonry are laid with a stacked vertical joint they don't look as if they will hold together very well, and they won't, unless they are tied back to some other structure. Brick, if used purely decoratively as a facing, often has stacked joints to emphasize that characteristic. If instead the minute vertical joints are offset in what is called a "running" bond, they appear to have greater integrity as a bearing wall, and they do. Breuer always preferred a running bond simply as pattern, and he would offset joints even in tile work, where strength was irrelevant. If we staggered the joints in a ceramic-tile wall, however, we usually let the vertical joints run through in order to make the decorative intent perfectly obvious.

For a floor of quarry tile, Breuer had another, very practical reason for offset joints. He had learned that quarry tile was extruded from a clay molding machine and cut to length. He reasoned—correctly—that the width of a "square" tile set by the machine was likely to be more dependable than the length controlled by the knife that cut it. If the tile wasn't exactly square, it was difficult to make sharp cross corners, and thus masons always asked that joints be wider than really necessary. Since Lajkó preferred seeing the joints in tilework kept to an absolute minimum (to prevent the buildup of dirt and mildew on the cement of the joint), he called for fine joints and recommended that the extruded side of the tile be used for the continuous

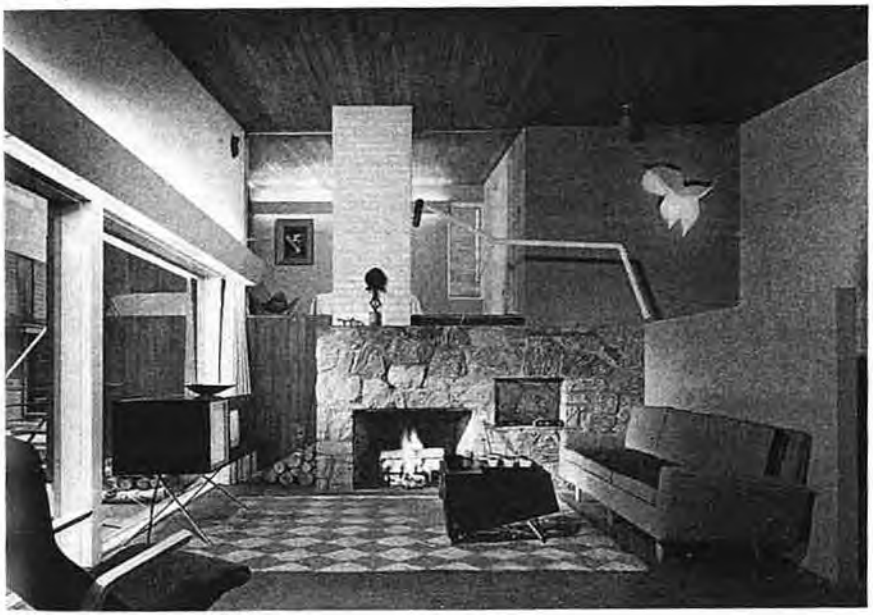
The Caesar cottage. The fireplace is of bush-hammered concrete; the opening is bridged by a projecting steel angle. The freestanding flues (usually hidden within the chimney) are of the same tile.

joints that had to line up. Staggered joints became so much of a part of his palette that we drew them instinctively and often forgot the rational process that lay behind them.

Many of the building corners at Flaine have joints between the precast-concrete panels that are stacked on one facade and staggered just around the corner. All the panels were supported in the same way—by tying them back to structural walls—so their literal strength in compression was not the issue. It seems to have been simply an architectural instinct that said that if the panels were largely window frames they were clearly a curtain wall and should be hung in a fashion that would make their non-bearing purpose clear, whereas a largely solid end wall should "read" visually as if it were doing some work in supporting itself.

The *hearth*, according to Semper (via Frampton), is an essential part of any dwelling, and I can't think of any of Lajkó's houses that didn't have at least one beautiful fireplace. Each was different and presented a continual challenge to his ingenuity. We made them of stone and brick, concrete and clay tile; sometimes they were part of a wall but more often they were free-

The Clark house. The all-brick fireplace features a projecting lintel over the firebox. The lintels supporting the upper band of brick are apparent from below.



The House in the Garden at MoMA. The fireplace featured a rare combination of rubblestone and brick.

did often repeat two old Hungarian jokes: "If you have a Hungarian friend, you don't need an enemy," and "A Hungarian is someone who can enter a revolving door behind you and come out in front of you." When Sue left after a few years, Jane Yu took over the interiors department.

I was in Paris in late January 1968 for meetings with Eric Boissonnas and the Flaine group. Construction was proceeding apace, and there were many last-minute details to be arranged. We made a three-day trip into the valley walking and skiing across land that I knew better as contoured drawings and climbing around concrete skeletons beginning to rise from foundations that had been asleep for so long. We stayed in the workers barracks, still painted in the bright red, yellow, and blue that Breuer had casually suggested. These were gradually being converted into student housing so that a first group of young skiers would be able to try out the slopes before the official inauguration, which was now set for the holiday season of 1968–69. While the barracks functioned as a student camp, the Boissonnas' daughter Sylvina, who worked as a sometime barmaid, had designed a swinging nightclub at the end of one of the huts called the "Juglotube." It was decorated with highway signs, flashing lights, and emergency sawhorses that had been ordered in Paris. When their delivery was threatened by a highway truckers' strike, her uncle Rémi was drafted into service and drove a truck laden with decor up from the capital at the last minute.

Before I left Paris, Eric asked if I would accompany him on what he thought would be largely a courtesy call to a graphic artist whose work had been recommended to Sylvie by her cousin Madame Couve de Murville, the

Changing the guard at Flaine, 1967. Standing in the valley are Mario Jossa (who was taking over), Fred Berlottier, Rémi Boissonnas, Gatje, and a person unknown.

Cassandre's alphabet. Backlit bronze lettering identifies all the buildings at Flaine.

wife of the foreign minister. The artist had designed a new alphabet that could be used in print as well as in three-dimensional letterform on buildings, and perhaps Flaine would be a good place to try it out. We took a cab to a shabby district in southwest Paris, and as we climbed the rickety stairs to the third floor, Eric mentioned, "By the way, the artist goes by the name of Cassandre." I should have been struck dumb by the knowledge that I was about to meet one of the giants of graphic art—designer of the great *Normandie* posters, the Dubonnet man, and thousands of images of France between the wars. But there was something so casual about the identification that it didn't sink in at that moment, and certainly there was nothing remarkable about the old couple who opened the door and ushered us into their faded apartment.

Around the walls of their living room, as a sort of cornice just below the ceiling, was a series of brown paper sheets about eighteen inches square on which were charcoal cartoons for an entire alphabet that included numerals and ligatures. The paper was thick with impasto since the shapes had been painted out and reconfigured. The old man brightened a bit as he introduced us to each of the letters and described their particular charac-

Flaine opened officially to the public at Christmas 1968. The month beforehand had been one of chaotic last-minute preparations. Sylvie Boissonnas personally swept the floor of the main lift station, hung curtains, and even scrubbed toilets as the opening day approached. When the newly ordered Aalto chairs arrived for the hotel lounge, she was aghast to learn that they had been shipped "knocked down" without adequate instructions. Breuer, who was nearby, got down on the floor to examine the "kit," discovered that an essential part was missing, and was able to improvise a fix.

Lajkó and I participated in some pre-opening festivities for the design team. Talking to Yves Tayssier of COTEBA over cocktails in the lounge of Hôtel B—now christened "Le Flaine"—he reminded me that the floor we were standing on was actually cantilevered out over a cliff that fell several hundred feet to the valley floor below. He suggested that we should paint a prominent dashed white line across the midpoint of the lounge, where it became airborne, with a cautionary label such as "Warning! From here on you are in the hands of the architects."

Flaine was far from presentable its first year. Only two hotels and one apartment house were up, and the rest of the resort was just a building site with excavations and foundation work visible everywhere, although largely camouflaged by the snow. Still, it was very exciting to see the resort finally in operation when I returned a month later with a group of thirty skier friends from the United States and Europe. It certainly helped to be known to the owners and the pioneering staff, and we were completely spoiled as one of the first paying ski groups to arrive.

Le Flaine was at that time owned and managed by the Provenaz family, which also owned a four-star resort hotel in Aix-les-Bains. Monsieur Provenaz was a very stiff, traditional *hôtelier* who wore a suit every evening and seemed to expect that we should have come in evening clothes rather than parkas, sweaters, and slacks. Eric Boissonnas assured us that the presence of Provenaz gave Flaine credibility in the financial and social world of France and we forgave him his eccentricity, particularly since the food and service were excellent. The next year he had unbent a bit—he wore a turtleneck under his suit jacket. There was a proper concierge in the entry lobby—a man weighing close to three hundred pounds but with a splendid uniform and a jolly disposition.

Lajkó visited Flaine shortly after the opening and had lunch with the Boissonnas family on the dining terrace outside Le Flaine. During the elegant meal, complete with fine linen napkins, silver service, and a smiling maître d'hôtel pouring wine for Breuer, Sylvie erupted, "Lajkó, isn't it remarkable? Just a few years ago this spot was a wild and inaccessible desert and now look at it. Why, it's just as if someone had waved a magic wand!"

In addition to the new buildings, there were several old shepherds' barns remaining in various spots in the valley, and each was eventually

Lajkó, Connie, and Sylvie at Flaine for the inauguration of the new ice sculpture, 1971.

turned into a rustic restaurant-bar that made a good foil for our modern architecture. One of the more enterprising developers in this line was a smiling German who ran the Hôtel Gradins Gris (Gray Steps)—"Daddy Joe" Wilkehr—who became a great favorite of our groups over the years and arranged late-night fondue parties up on the slopes with most people afterward sliding down the mountain on trays while yodeling in the moonlight.

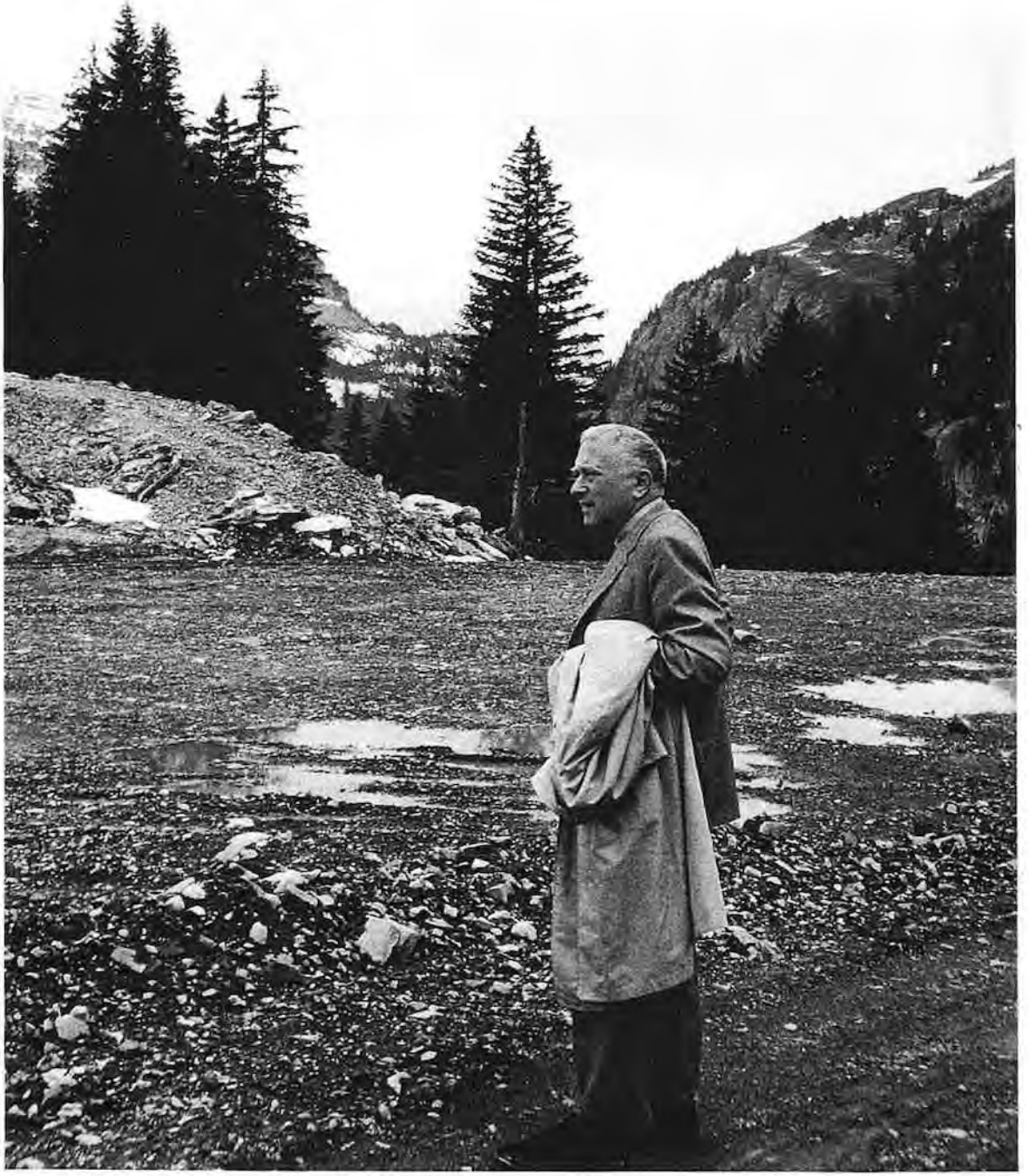
An architect is lucky to receive some compliments at the opening of a building and perhaps even favorable reviews in the press. Never, however, has any project given back to its architects as much pleasure and satisfaction over many years as Flaine has to me and, I hope, to Lajkó. He usually visited once a year and was certainly honored by the Boissonnas family and their important guests, but he was no longer the skier of his Obergurgl days and walked with difficulty around town. In my case, I had the thrill of using a piece of architecture I had helped design. Weeklong visits with admiring friends and family meant seeing the town not just with an eye to publishable photographs but in the evening as the lights came on, or in the early morning before the ground fog had lifted, or from high above at the start of a descent on skis. We visited our "competition," Avoriaz, one day, and I admired the fantastic wood structures that its Belgian architects had sculpted out of cedar shakes. They also had confronted the automobile problem, and their solution—reindeer-drawn sleds—was very picturesque. Eric Boissonnas had been disappointed to see this upstart open a year before we did, due to his political problems, and worried about our ability to catch up. On the contrary, in a few years, the press called Flaine a couture "Balen-

ciaga," comparing it to Avoriaz as a trendy, ready-to-wear "Dorothy Bis." I never returned to Avoriaz, but I heard later that its wooden shingles had weathered badly in the alpine winters and that the last of the reindeer was to be seen running wild in the woods.

In the middle of summer 1969 Eric Boissonnas organized a one-week "retreat" for the design team and principal staff of Flaine in order to assess the first year of operations and to learn from one another's experiences. We met at the Grand Hôtel d'Albion in Aix-les-Bains, under the still watchful eye of Monsieur Provenaz, its owner. At the farewell banquet, which was held at a beautiful restaurant in the middle of a lake, everyone was so relaxed, or drunk, that the staid assembly descended into a sort of food fight with bread balls being lofted at the instigation of Denis Creissels, our lift designer. Earlier, during the course of the meeting, Emile Allais had asked that the minutes record an obligation that the architects be "required" to visit Flaine once each year during the operating season to see their work in actual use, as opposed to our inspection trips during the construction in summer. He felt this would enable us to better appreciate the day-to-day problems that might arise with real people on real skis. No one took exception to this brilliant idea, and I visited Flaine to ski every season for the next ten years.

Rumors of a possible expansion of IBM La Gaude had begun even while I was still living in Paris, but for one reason or another, despite occasional meetings, new buildings were delayed. In the meantime, a village of "temporary" trailers had sprung up at the bottom of the site, and internal communication within the lab was severely compromised by people having to shuttle back and forth from one site to another. It finally took an architect, El Noyes, to blow the whistle, especially on a site that had just been given official landmark status by the French government.

Expanding the facility in 1968, which had been designed in 1960 at a stand-alone maximum size by dictate of the company, was not going to be easy. The northern wings of the double Y, which faced downhill toward the open part of the site, already stood on columns twenty-five feet high, and the hillside just kept falling away, making any horizontal extension impossible. Since the new program stipulated deep laboratories without windows, we proposed and it was decided that it could be built partially underground at the foot of the last column, with a roof of grass, connected to the existing building via an elevator tower that leaned against its downhill end. Great walls of rubblestone defined huge "scoops" out of the hillside, and two major expansions, each as big as the original building, were constructed in this fashion during the subsequent years. The design work was done in New York; working drawings were made under Mario Jossa's control in the Paris office. Mario developed close relationships with the Paris



the engineering consultants on the staff of Philipp Holzmann, the great builder of his two Harnischmacher houses. No one, myself included, could quite imagine how our interests could be served by professionals who would be captive to the contractor rather than professionally independent. What Lajkó knew, and what we began to trust, was that it would all work out if the contractor was rigorously honest and responsible.

Since the client didn't quite believe in negotiating directly and only with Holzmann, we worked out bidding terms whereby the firm's professional fees to that date would be absorbed in the cost of construction if Holzmann turned out to be the low bidder; otherwise the firm would take on an independent consulting role. We never had to face that eventuality, since Holzmann did deliver a very attractive low bid.

I had a disagreement with Mort over his insistence on a rooftop sign that would dominate the building when seen from the autobahn. At the beginning of construction, the site was semi-rural and I tried to convince him that freestanding letters hovering over a nearby line of evergreens would do the trick. This time we lost the rooftop-sign battle, but a few years later the site was surrounded by industrial buildings of every sort and any niceties of building graphics would have been overwhelmed. The company name can still be seen from the autobahn in spite of the new buildings built in the foreground, and our later addition to the warehouse has bold new graphics.

After his August 1972 recuperation on Cape Cod, Lajkó told his partners that on the advice of his doctors he was going to start slowing down a bit and proposed that he come into the office only for half days. Since his back pains woke him early, he tended to be in during the morning and return to New Canaan after lunch. Eventually, the daily commute got to be too much for him, and he and Connie moved back to the city. They sold their beloved stone house to Gerry Bratti, a masonry contractor who hired the firm to renovate and enlarge the house some years later. Herb did such a great job with it that Lajkó told him it was a better piece of architecture than when he had lived in it. (Of course, it helped that Gerry had more money to spend on it than Breuer had when he originally built it.)

Despite occasional health setbacks, Breuer began to feel stronger, and particularly after the move to the apartment on Sixty-third Street, he was spending more and more time in the office. His bad back made it difficult to walk any distance and also made for restless nights. He had strong sleeping pills, which he tended to avoid taking until absolutely necessary. Since that was often at four or five in the morning, he sometimes turned up very groggy at the office. He was stoic about the pain and would more often speak about it in the abstract than let on that he was hurting at the moment.

During the run of the Metropolitan Museum exhibition, we indulged in a flurry of business entertaining, and it did seem, for a while, that some new contacts were developing. We had a very interesting approach from Stratton Mountain in Vermont about doing some planning for a destination ski resort à la Flaine, and IBM Boca Raton seemed to be stirring as well. In addition to commissioning another assembly plant for Torin, this time in Australia, Rufus asked for yet another house. Breuer combined elements from the stick structure of his Wellfleet cottage with rubblestone painted white that warmed Tician's Greek heart as he worked on it. After happily living in it for several years, Rufus eventually moved back to his first house and asked Lajkó which, of the three, was his favorite, guessing that it would be the first. Breuer responded, "No, Rufus, it's the third. You got your nose too much into the first one . . ." Rufus was floored. He thought he had been an ideal client.

Sidney (Bill) Morrell had been brought to our attention as a public-relations consultant for Flaine in the United States in the 1960s, and we turned to this charming Australian for new-business advice. We were aware of a vague diplomatic life in his background, which turned out to be a spectacular career in the Office of Strategic Services, and a number of the staff that he put to work on our account seemed to have come from the same world.

By 1973 Flaine was in full operation, and the original group of buildings that surrounded the former small shelter was complete. More than five thousand skiers visited on an average winter weekend. Life in the main town square, called the Forum, was alive with cafés, ski shops, and ski schools

Emile Allais surrounded by skiers at Flaine, 1972. Most of those posing in this publicity photo were members of the original pioneering staff of instructors and shopkeepers including the Gatjes' au pair Marie-Jeanne Pouchelon.

Design discussion in Breuer's office. Lajkó, Claes Erickson, and Gatje review the model of the Hôtel Résidence.

sporting bright banners, umbrellas, and signposts. Sylvie Boissonnas was a bit nervous about the visual clutter and asked Lajkó if he thought all this was going overboard. "Not at all," said Lajkó. "It's just what I wanted and expected."

I was walking with Sylvie along the path at the edge of the lower slopes on a particularly brilliant Sunday, surrounded by happy visitors and their children. Although she herself was not a skier, she was well known to the community and, in her long fur coat, recognizable from a distance. I made a reference to all the years of troubles, now safely behind us, and suggested the joy it must give to her, knowing that she had, in effect, made Flaine possible. She responded, "Oh yes, it's marvelous seeing all these people enjoy themselves, but what is even better is seeing all of you men—Eric, Lajkó, Max, and yourself—finally vindicated in what you worked so hard to accomplish."

In 1982 Sylvie was interviewing me for a book to be written about Flaine, and we fell to reminiscing about the final size and shape of the resort as it was being completed. She said the best proof of its independence and stature was that when she moved about town she could now overhear the comments of tourists and shopkeepers with no fear of being recognized. She added, "Why, when I order something I even have to spell my name!"

The next step in the development of the valley was to build at the crest of the cliff that looked out over the Forum. The narrow plateau, known as Flaine Supérieur or Flaine Forêt, was only wide enough for a double line of

Flaine, 1972. At the time of this photograph the ski resort was almost complete.

The Hôtel Résidence. This apartment hotel on the bluff at Flaine Forêt overlooks the center of town.

buildings on either side of the access road. In order to reduce the overpowering visual impact of a line of buildings along the top of the hill, tall hotels and apartment buildings, averaging eight or ten stories, were kept to the north or uphill side, while three- and four-story apartments climbed down the hill opposite on stilts; bridges connected their upper levels to the sidewalk. We developed the master plan in New York under Breuer's watchful but increasingly less-involved eye.

The first and largest hotel at the eastern end, the Hôtel Résidence, was softly Z-shaped in plan and organized as an apartment-hotel under the recently liberalized rules of the French Ministry of Tourism. Eric asked that we use more wood on the facade, partly because he wanted a different look above the town center. The main reason for the wood, however, was that the precasting plant was becoming increasingly expensive to operate with the fall-off in production as the annual building program slowed, and wood covered the rough character of poured-in-place concrete structures. The new hotel was developed within our architectural guidelines but without Lajkó's

The ecumenical chapel. Breuer broke all of his own rules at Flaine in this marvelous building.

direct input, and I was heartened to hear him say after it was built that he thought it was the best-looking building at Flaine. I was further pleased to hear that the Boissonnas family had sold their apartment in the town center in order to live in the penthouse of the Hôtel Résidence.

One of the last and best of Breuer's personal contributions to the town was the ecumenical chapel, which Eric finally found financing to support. It was built in the midst of a tall stand of dark pine trees that had been reserved for it from the inception of Flaine. When I heard that we had received the go-ahead, I immediately began gathering program data and assembling a design team. With some hesitation, but firm resolve, Breuer said simply, "No Bob, I want to do this one by myself." I immediately backed off, and he chose a draftsman from the crew. The jewel that they created was the exception to every architectural rule that we had established at Flaine. The structure was of wood, sheathed in an almost iridescent skin of black slate tiles. The walls inclined inward as they rose, and the forms that resulted intersected one another at surprising angles. Built in 1974, it could have belonged to the

1990s deconstructivist movement in architecture. I had never seen Lajkó sketch or talk about anything quite like it, and it was a source of great pride for him when the chapel was recognized as proof of his continuing inventiveness and vitality.

I'm not certain that Breuer ever got back to Flaine to see it finished. According to Sylvie, at one point during the last trip that he did make, they stopped to survey the whole valley from the approach road above. Lajkó said, "One can't see anything; that's good." Daniel Chiquet, who was on that same trip, as a courtesy took Lajkó around on a general tour of what had been built in the past year, knowing of his gradual retirement from direct involvement in the project. He was completely astonished at Breuer's familiarity with every detail of what he was being shown.

In order to minimize the need for vehicular connections between the upper and middle plateaus, we designed an inclined elevator—a sort of modern funicular—that continuously travels up and down between the two stations without an attendant. The red-orange cab has become something of a symbol of the resort. The design of its two stations was assigned to a new draftsman in the office, Claes Erickson, one of the brightest recent additions to our staff. We were shocked when his wife called one day to say that he was in Bellevue Hospital; he had been stabbed in the eye the night before at an East Side restaurant in a fight with a man who had been bothering her. It was clear that Claes would lose the sight in that eye, but we were heartened when, after a week or two, he was able to return to work on a part-time basis. Breuer was personally solicitous of his care and comfort. Two weeks later, however, an embolism, resulting from the trauma, suddenly took Claes's life. We were shattered. No urban violence had ever before intruded into the small family of our office.

In 1972 the European Investment Bank had commissioned a new headquarters in Luxembourg and was required by charter to hire an architect from the Common Market. The choice was Denys Lasdun, an English architect based in London. Breuer was selected as architectural adviser to the bank. Lajkó may have been given some off-the-record hint by the bank that it would have preferred him as its architect, but in any case, he entered the relationship with the impression that it was to be a collaboration and he prepared a scheme. According to Tician, the meetings went from bad to worse until a moment came when Breuer ordered Lasdun out of the office at the top of his voice. A scheme was finally completed and built by Lasdun, but Lajkó would have nothing more to do with the project.

In December 1974 Bill Morrell and Tician took an exploratory trip through the Middle East to scout new business possibilities through some of Bill's wartime contacts. Many other American architects were doing the same thing,

The Paris office, 1974. The staff is posed at the windows of 48 rue Chapon.

since business was very slow in the United States while the Arab economies were booming. The trip was quite successful, and after Tician made his report to the partners, it was decided to invest in sending him and Judy to live in Teheran for what turned out to be a year. Breuer was uneasy about the venture, but most of his architect friends were doing the same thing and he reasoned that they couldn't all be wrong. Tician left in March 1975.

Mario Jossa was running the Paris office very well, and the affection that Lajkó had felt for him on their first meeting developed into a professional relationship that only deepened with time. Breuer always considered his business trips to Europe as half holidays (as, frankly, did I), and he felt very much at home on the rue Chapon. His first order to Mario on arrival was invariably, "Let's organize a lunch for the office." This might mean taking everyone, including the secretaries, out to a restaurant commandeered for the occasion, or the spreading of a vast array of hors d'oeuvres over several drafting tables.

Breuer was often accompanied by Connie, especially while their daughter, Cesca, was at school in Switzerland. Mario acted as their chauffeur on trips to Holland and Switzerland to see old friends and clients. (Connie did not trust Lajkó's driving any more than the rest of us did.) Everywhere,

Marcel Breuer in his office, 1960.

Bob Gatje's biography of Marcel Breuer not only traces the outline of a great architect's career but gives us an affectionate portrait of a vibrant personality who alternately befriended, studied under, worked with, taught, and quite often, charmed the most notable of his generation. Gatje's account reminds us that the thousands of long hours that architects spend in the pursuit of their profession add up to not only careers but lifetimes—lifetimes that are defined by professional relationships that can be as intimate, if not more so, than any others.

—**Terence Riley**, *chief curator of architecture and design, Museum of Modern Art*