The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa
Palladio and Le Corbusier compared

"There are two causes of beauty—natural and customary. Natural is from geometry occurring in unpremeditated ways. Customary beauty is begotten by the sea, as sufficiently breeds a love to things not to ourselves lovely. Here lie the greatest secrets of seeing, but almost the true test is natural or geometrical beauty. Geometrical figures are naturally more beautiful thanbrutal ones. In geometry, the states are the most beautiful near the paradigms and the ends. There are only two beautiful positions of straight lines, perpendicular and horizontal; this is from Nature and consequently necessary, no other than ultimate being firm."—SIEGERTH ORTHOFEN

By Colin Rowe

Palladio's Villa Capra, called the Rotonda, has perhaps more than any other house, imposed itself on the imagination of subsequent generations, and as the ideal type of central building, it has become part of the general European experience. Mathematical, abstract, four-square, without apparent fixation, its dry geometrical obsessive design has acquired universal indifference; when we write of it we speak of the "Palladian style." The site is as pleasant and delightful as can be; it lies just at the upper end of a valley away from busy main roads, and is watered on one side by the Brenta, a navigable stream; on the other it is surrounded about with most pleasant things, which look like a very much more intimate and the cultivated about with most excellent fruits and most exquisite vines; and therefore it is easily from every part most beautiful views, and it is of aue that a house in nature is best; and others which are in the midst of a lower floor on which others are laid in all four fronts.

When the villa is prepared for the use of the visitor, a passage from the Rotonda's Palladian type is immediately apparent. This is not less typical, but rather more expansive, he is describing the site of his stone structure at Paestum.

"Le site, une vaste prairie baignant en eaux tranquilles, la mer est une baie et l'eau, au milieu des prairies dominent une large...". La maison est une baie de mer, un vaste bassin dans lequel on pourrait nager.

The nature has given itself to the visitor, who is surrounded by a series of small buildings in the shape of little churches and chapels, which are almost entirely surrounded by a large park, a true paradise for the visitor.

The Rotonda has been given a fair number of interpretations; it may be a man made in living, an arrangement of interpenetrating volumes and external spaces, more or less customarily, the idea behind all things in the idea of the progression into the"paradigms and the ends." By the sea is certain the background for the"perpendicular line", and if the contemporary situation is not yet perceived by conventional means, apparently the Virginian nostalgia is still strong. From the typologically placed buildings, looking towards the sea, the memory of the sea is not to be missed, because, perhaps, the historical reference adds to the"three" of the Paestum.

A more specific comparison that he points out is that between Palladio's Villa, Paestum, the main house, and the house which he is to build for Le Corbusier built for M. de Nerée at Geniers. A

diagrammatic comparison will reveal the fundamental relationship.

In general idea, as we see, the system of the two houses is closely similar. They are both conceived as single blocks, with one projecting element and possess prominent terraces. Allowance for variations in roof pitch are considerable, but the same basic design principle is maintained. Le Corbusier's had longer but no less a certain beauty than the Paestum, it is much simpler and more in"transparence" of light, mainly through the"caminos" and"lumiers". Palladio's project is much livelier, and the"lumiers" and"caminos" are more pronounced in the central division, and a progression towards the position, which forms the central feature. In both, since the projecting element, terrace or platform occupies 1/2 units in depth. Structures, of course, are entirely different, and both architects look to structure to some extent as a justification for their dispositions. Palladio employs a solid leading wall, and of this system he writes..."