



NEWS AND VIEWS

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Our editor-at-large discusses the meaning of the Latin word villa and looks at how different architects have interpreted its significance throughout history

One of the four programmes making up this year's *House of the Year* TV series on Channel 4 is devoted to the modern villa in Britain. And there are plenty of them: single contemporary dwellings of a certain size (medium to large homes) set very consciously within an organised landscape. There will be at least one in the pages of this magazine every month or two; often beautiful to admire and usually outside the reach of the rest of us.

The word itself is a little clouded in meaning these days, but it comes directly from the Latin *villa*, which meant country house or farm. In Roman antiquity a villa represented a Virgilian ideal, a rural abode with an estate to which men of letters or arms would retire. In the sixteenth century, architect Palladio sought to re-establish the nobility of that idea in the villas he built for clients, writing: "The ancient sages commonly used to retire to such places, where being oftentimes visited by their virtuous friends and relations, having houses, gardens, fountains and such like pleasant places, and above all their virtue, they could easily attain to as much happiness as can be attained." Today we might head off, Virtue under our arm, to a boho country hotel with spa for such bucolic attractions where we can find some rare-breed pigs artfully placed in the landscape.

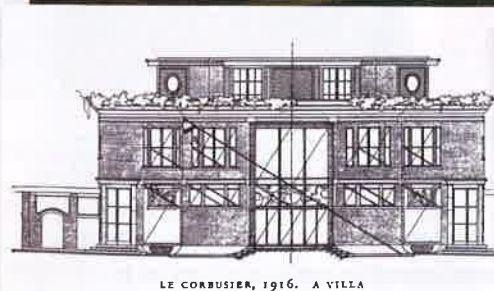
Palladio had the Roman architect Vitruvius to thank for laying out a guide to designing the perfect villa in his *Ten Books on Architecture*. It involved choosing the correct site, orienting the building, organising the agricultural activities in secondary structures and arranging the rooms for climate and sun. Every piece of practical advice that Vitruvius gives is still good to the extent that the practicability of the villa he describes has, over the centuries, combined with Virgil's more poetic and nostalgic concept of the villa in its landscape, and hardened into something of an architectural ideal. Fuelled by the potency of these classical ideas – reinforced by Palladio's books – architects from every century and country have attempted their own versions of the villa, as though they were chefs and the villa were a particular kind of perfect syllabus.

This ideal hasn't got any less distracting with the passage of time. Le Corbusier obsessed about the relationship between the elevated detached home and →



The Cheeran House by John Pardey Architects is a perfect example of a modern day villa

'A villa represented a Virgilian ideal, a rural estate'



LE CORBUSIER, 1916. A VILLA

Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye, in Poissy, France, reinterpreted classical ideals to create a modern design