

Architect of Vision

New York's drift toward chaos already was apparent thirty years ago when the architect Le Corbusier visited this city. He called New York "a catastrophe with which a too hasty destiny has overwhelmed courageous and confident people, though a beautiful and worthy catastrophe ending as lost." He proceeded to evaluate it with the kind of planning overview that the city still rejects, as he listed its virtues with a large and poetic vision.

"Faced with difficulties," he declared, "New York falters. Still streaming with sweat from its exertions, wiping off its forehead, it sees what it has done and suddenly realizes, 'Well, we didn't get it done properly. Let's start over again.' " Unfortunately, that fresh start never has been made. Today Le Corbusier is dead—his most productive years cut off just when the world had belatedly begun to accept the vision of this extraordinary man. His death becomes most poignantly New York's loss, for opportunities missed, buildings unbuilt, plans unplanned.

He saw New York as a brilliant and beautiful place, chaotic but with a magnificent potential. The dream died long before the man.