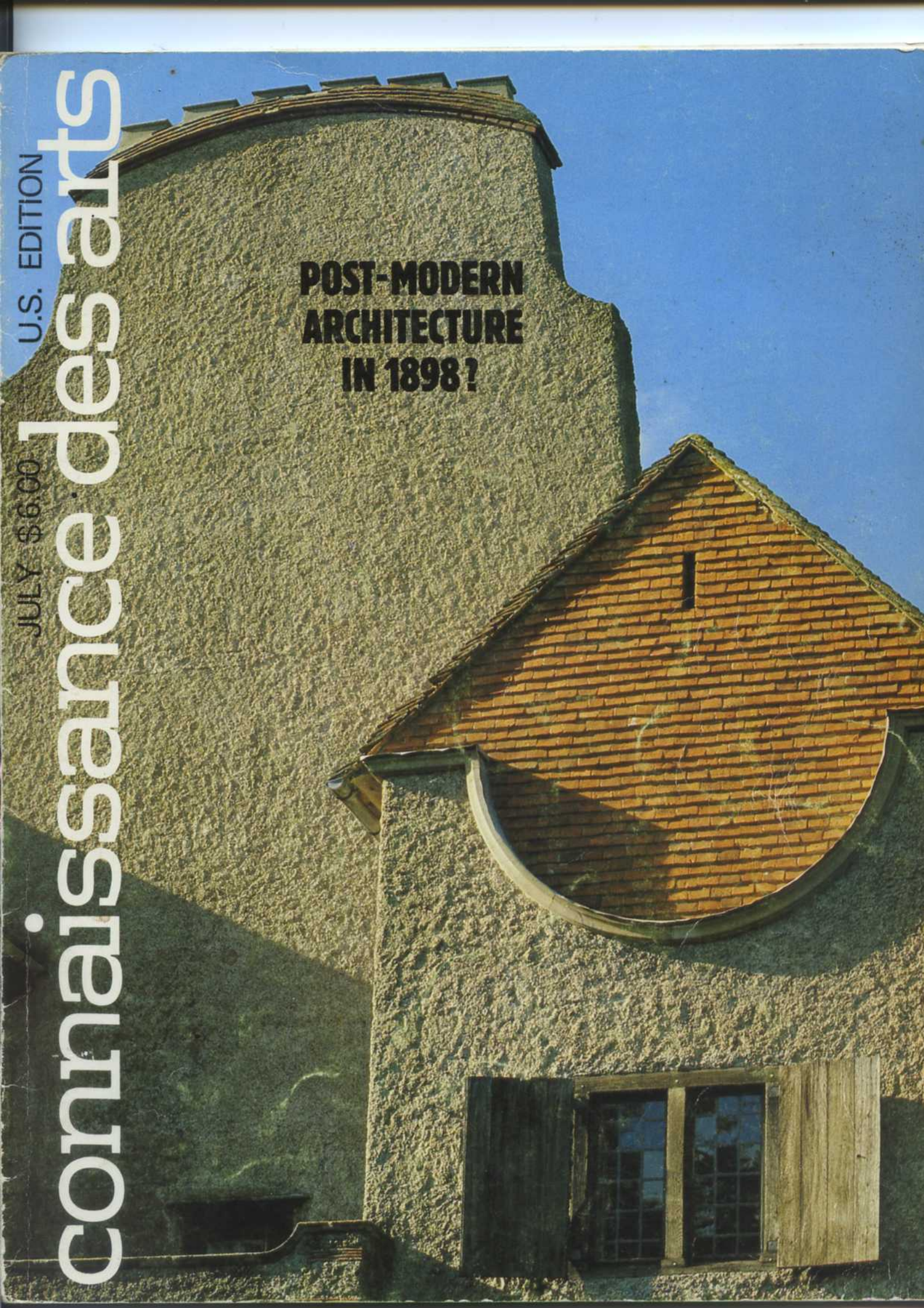


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# connaissance des arts

**POST-MODERN  
ARCHITECTURE  
IN 1898?**





A LUTYENS HOUSE:

# STUDY IN SYMBOLISM

by Axelle de Gaigneron / photos Roger Guillemot

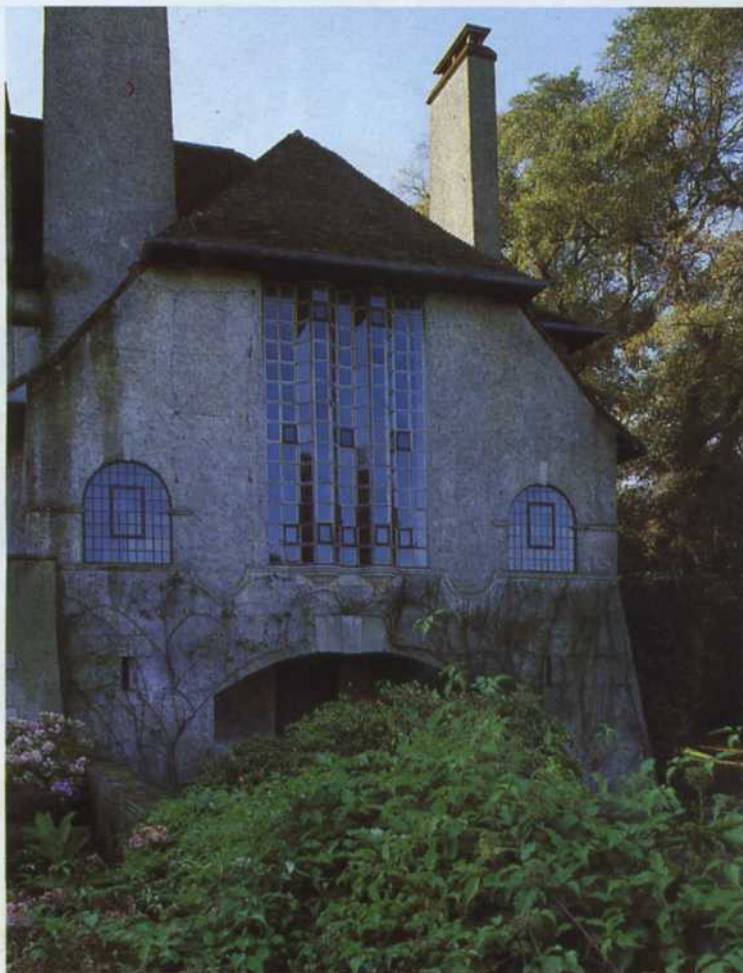
The Bois des Moutiers, high up on the cliff of Varengueville 7 km from Dieppe, is much more than just an example of Lutyens' work (see box) proposed for the scrutiny of the modern observer. It is, in fact, a whole grouping of symbols, circumstances, fates, coincidences and spiritual and aesthetic ideals. This combination of factors, translated into the architecture and the surrounding landscape by means of a rigorous yet multi-

faceted symbolism, constitutes a unique portrait in its genre of a certain aspect of the end of the 19th century. It represents a moment of quite exceptional harmony within that short and very hybrid period spanning the end of Orientalism and the beginning of Art Nouveau, the Far-Eastern movement, Naturalism and various other characteristic end-of-century mystical trends. The originality and the importance of the Bois des Moutiers, which has been a

classified monument since 1975, are rooted in this fact.

Why Varengueville? Because in 1898, there was no other place where such a project would have been feasible. From 1880 to 1900, Dieppe was a seaside resort whose popularity rivaled Deauville. However, Dieppe was frequented by a rather different crowd, intellectuals rather than high society.

The attractiveness of the surrounding countryside brought in

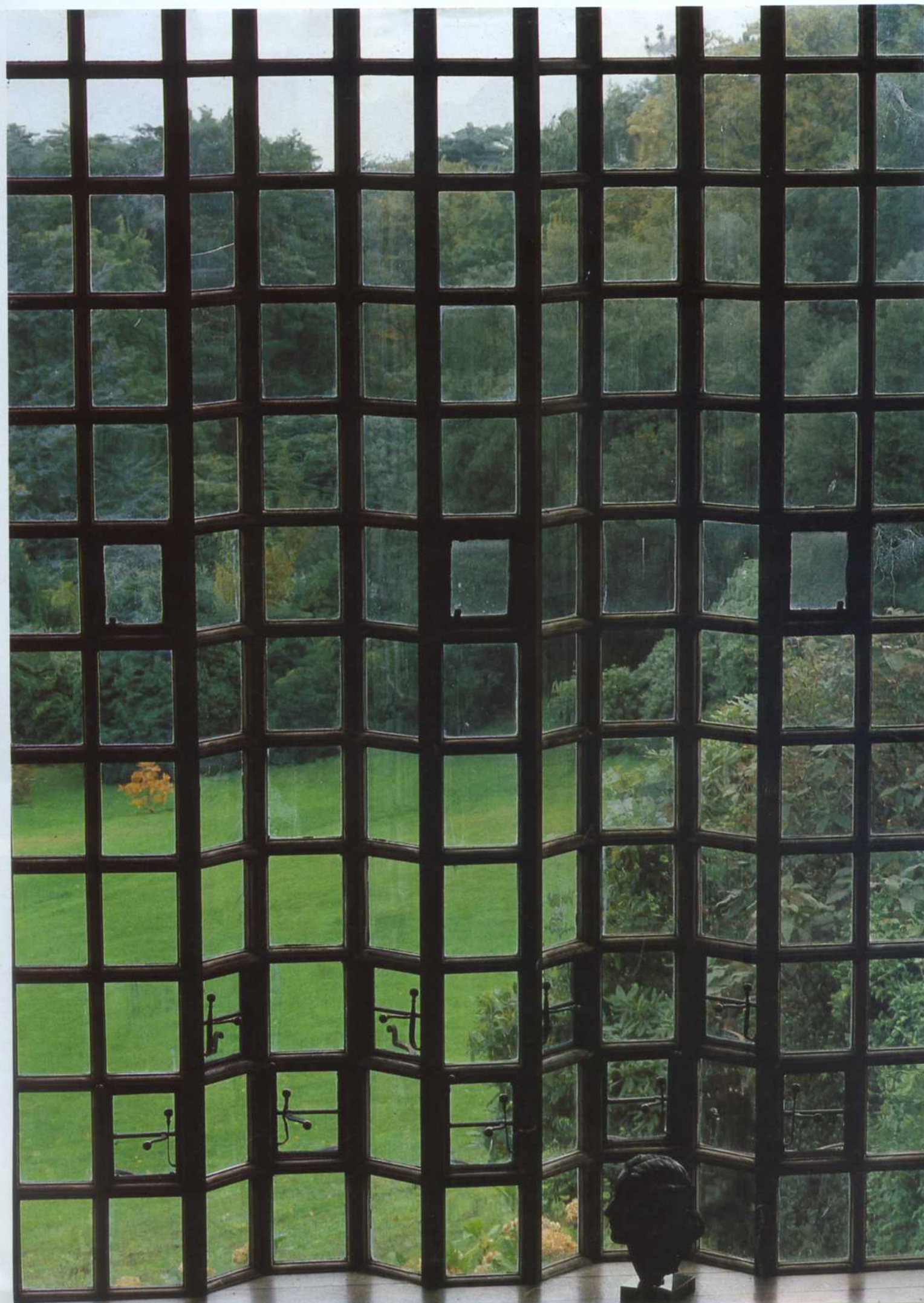


The Bois des Moutiers, an odd private residence at Varengueville near Dieppe, lacks coherent style and has a special place in the body of Edwin Lutyens' work. Even works devoted to this English architect often fail to give this house its due. But it is remarkable in its relationships with symbolic thought as well as in its revelation of the atmosphere reigning there at the end of the last century when numerous artists and writers put Dieppe back in style.

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*In 1898 Sir Edwin Landseer Lutyens (1869-1944) built one of the three houses commissioned by Guillaume Mallet in Varengueville, 7 km from Dieppe. The architecture and interior decoration, still intact, may serve as an important testimony to the architect's efforts in the field of private houses. Within the essentially symbolic conception of architecture, every element has its significance. These narrow openings symbolize the individual's relationship with the outside world. In the living-room/auditorium, note the unusual system for opening the window-panes.*









a large number of French and English painters. Subsequently, these painters proved a drawing card for artists engaged in all kinds of activities – composers, writers and poets. This highly eclectic universe gravitated around a central kernel of international “gentry,” led by such extravagant personalities as Princess Caracciolo, goddaughter of the Prince of Wales, and Robert de Montesquiou, leader of the “Decadent Aesthetes.” Among these personalities were Saint-Saëns, Gabriel Fauré, Reynaldo Hahn, Renoir, Pissarro, Monet, Puvis de Chavannes, Gervex, Helleu, Jacques Emile Blanche, Henri de Régnier, Alexandre Dumas the Younger, Huysmans, Pierre Louÿs, Maurice Barrès, Georges

de Porto-Riche and Marcel Proust. The English colony, which gravitated around painter Walter Sickert (known as the “Dieppe Corot”), included poets Arthur Symons and George Moore, Smithers, editor of the famous Yellow Book, Blovitz, editor of the Times, and Max Beerbohm, illustrator for Vanity Fair. In 1895, three years before Lutyens built the Bois des Moutiers, Aubrey Beardsley joined this little group of expatriates.

Against this sparkling backdrop of people and ideas, the people who influenced the “esthetic curiosity” known as the Bois des Moutiers emerged quite naturally, as if by osmosis, out of the same social and intellectual conditions as had produced such influential and

seminal figures as Beardsley himself.

The first protagonist in the drama is Guillaume Mallet (1860-1944), descended from a long line of Protestant bankers, a man open to every current of thought who had first been introduced to the science of gardens and landscaping during his English childhood. This erstwhile cavalry officer saw Varengeville as the perfect climate for fulfilment of his ambitions. He wanted to build a house and landscape a park in accordance with his convictions, centered around Symbolistic Naturalism. Our second protagonist is his wife, Marie Adélaïde Grunélius, a théosophist; in the creation of the Bois des Moutiers, her particular



