

Shammai Winitzer

Frank Lloyd Wright

Research Paper

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I. Introduction

Frank Lloyd Wright wanted to be an architect from the time he was a child. Wright was born in Wisconsin in 1867 and moved to Chicago, Illinois in 1887, during the Industrial Revolution. Despite his move to Chicago, Wright did not like cities, because he felt that all of the buildings in them were cramped and that consequently people had no privacy in which to live. In contrast to cities, Wright did like the flat, open prairie lands of the Midwest region. He found a way to make homes mimic the Prairie: they, too, would be flat and open. Wright stood up against the American architecture by designing his own. The long-term impact is that nowadays America has an architecture of their own. His Prairie Style houses were private and not cramped, even in the middle of urban areas. Frank Lloyd Wright designed all of his Prairie houses horizontally instead of vertically. Horizontality for Wright's houses was one of his key ideas. Traditionally people built buildings, especially public buildings, vertically, with high towers and vaulted roofs, as a way to symbolize a connection to the heavens. What Wright imagined, then, was truly revolutionary.

II. Frank Lloyd Wright's Life

Frank Lloyd Wright was born on June 8, 1867 in Richland Center, Wisconsin. Wright's mother, Anna Lloyd Jones, was a teacher, and Wright's father, William Carey Wright, was a musician. Before Wright was born, his mother wanted Wright to become an architect. Wright lived on a farm with his family. His mother managed to buy Wright a set of blocks to build and play with, even though his family was poor. In 1885, Wright's parents divorced and Wright went to live with his mother. Wright went to high school, but quit after two years, in order to move, in 1887, to Chicago.

When Wright arrived in Chicago, he was 20 years old. Wright's first job was working with an architect named Joseph Lyman Silsbee, from whom he earned a salary of eight dollars per week. While Wright was working with Silsbee, he was already thinking about his own ideas of architecture. This agrees with Wright's opinion of the significance of continued reflection on his work: "An idea is salvation by imagination" (BrainyQuote). Soon after he arrived to Chicago, Wright fell in love with a woman named Catherine Lee Tobin (Kitty). Around that time, Wright got to know a man named Louis Sullivan, who was a famous architect in Chicago. Sullivan hired Wright as a colleague. Soon afterwards, Wright and Kitty married, in 1919, and Wright requested money from his boss, in order to build a house for the two in Oak Park, a suburb of Chicago. With Kitty, Wright had six children. However, Wright soon fell in love with a married woman named Mamah Cheney, and they decided to abandon their respective families and go off to Europe. Wright left Oak Park with Cheney, leaving his family with six young children and many unpaid loans. Wright and Kitty did not divorce.

When Mamah and Wright came back to America, Wright built a house in Wisconsin for them to live in, and he called it Taliesin. Mamah brought her two children with her to Taliesin. A

tragic event occurred there soon thereafter. In 1914, Taliesin's cook, Julian Carlton, poured gasoline around the house and lit it on fire. Though Wright was not in Taliesin at the time, Mamah and her two children were trapped there, along with some other staff from the house. While people were trying to exit the house, Julian Carlton waited outside with an axe, which he used to kill everyone. After this tragedy, Wright decided to rebuild Taliesin in memory of Mamah. Another of Wright's famous sentences seems to capture his sense of purpose in this regard: "I know the price of success: dedication, hard work, and an unremitting devotion to the things you want to see happen" (AZ Quotes).

In 1922, Kitty finally accepted a divorce from Wright. Then, in 1923, Wright married Miriam Noel, a woman who had sent condolences after the Taliesin event, and he asked her to move into Taliesin with him. In that year Anna, Wright's mother, died. Soon after, Wright met a 26 year-old woman named Olgivanna (or Olga), and they fell in love, even though this time, too, both were married to other people. Olga moved into Taliesin with her daughter, Svetlana. That same year, lightning struck Taliesin, and Wright had to borrow a loan from the bank to rebuild it again. Wright divorced Miriam Noel in 1927.

Wright's architectural work continued in the following years, which produced some of his most important buildings in his unique style. In 1949, Wright received a gold medal from the American Institute of Architects in recognition of developing a new style of architecture in America. During the latter years, Wright continued to build and design as many houses as he could before he died. He said of this period: "The longer I live, the more beautiful life becomes" (CMGWW.com). Before Wright died, he designed a house called Taliesin West in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1937. On April 9th, 1959 Frank Lloyd Wright died there, at age 91. Wright's dying

request was to be buried next to Mamah Borthwick Cheney in Spring Green, Wisconsin, the site of the original Taliesin. Later, however, Olgivanna died in 1985, in Scottsdale, Arizona, and Olga's dying request was to have Wright's body exhumed, cremated, and buried alongside her Taliesin West. With the help of Olga's daughter, Iovanna, they accomplished this.

III. The Prairie Style

The Prairie Style was a type of architecture that Frank Lloyd Wright invented. Wright had wanted a new style of architecture for America, instead of following the Classic Style. The Classic Style represented a continuation of the idea of Ancient Rome and Greece in the area of architecture. In Ancient Rome and Greece's style, buildings had many pillars, giving them a sense of verticality and a connection to the heavens. In Wright's view, America, which would develop into a great power in the modern world, needed and deserved ideas of its own, instead of following the the same type of architecture from Ancient Rome and Greece, borrowed by modern Europe.

Wright wanted to create a type of architecture that represented America. He wanted change for America. Wright wanted an architecture that would reflect America as it appears in nature. Wright said: "Buildings, too, are children of Earth and Sun" (BrainyQuote), and it seems as if he wanted an American style that would connect to the American landscape.

Wright had moved to Chicago in 1887, and had began working with Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan (1856-1924) in 1888. Louis Sullivan and Dankmar Adler were the prominent figures in the development of modern American architecture in the late 1800s. They helped to develop the Chicago style of architecture, which was in its own way beginning to move away

from the Classical Style of Europe. This style was characterized by tall buildings, big horizontal windows, and simple decorations. An example of these characteristics in a building is the Marshall Field's department store, now Macy's, in downtown Chicago. The five years Wright had spent with Adler and Sullivan were professionally the most influential years of his life, with Wright gaining considerable architectural knowledge during this time.

Adler and Sullivan designed great houses together. Wright joined them in this work, until one day he began to work independently, in secret. This behavior of Wright is not entirely surprising, since his own words from years post hint at a sense of importance: "Early in life I had to choose between honest arrogance and hypocritical humility. I chose the former and have seen no reason to change" (BrainyQuote). This work produced the first building Wright ever designed, named the Wart Willits house. It was horizontal, not vertical in its look. The house was not small and cramped. Instead, it was big and open, while still allowing for a measure of privacy. However, when Adler and Sullivan found out about what Wright had done, then fired him Wrighty immediately. After this, Wright began to work on his own. This was the period when Wright developed his Prairie Houses, which were, like the Wart Willits house, largely horizontal.

IV. Wright's Horizontal Design

Frank Lloyd Wright designed the majority of his private houses horizontally, and two stories high. Wright wanted his buildings to connect with nature, so they would not be too removed from their physical surroundings. We see this idea in much of Wright's thinking, such as in the following: "The good building is not one that hurts the landscape, but one which makes

the landscape more beautiful than it was before the building was built” (AZ Quotes). He wanted to make people feel that their houses were still related to nature, and not only to a city. Wright also wanted his houses not to be cramped. Wright also liked to use stained windows in many of his Prairie Style houses.

The best example of a Prairie Style house is the Robie House, which was built in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago in 1909. It is said that the Robie House was influenced by Wright’s visit to Japan at that time. One wonders whether, more specifically, it was the famous temples there that got his attention. Perhaps here we can see one explanation for the Prairie Style design, which is horizontally shaped. It is known that, traditionally, people use vertical towers to suggest a connection with God. Wright had wanted the complete opposite for his new design: To use horizontality to connect with nature. As he wrote, “I believe in God, only I spell it Nature” (Usonia.com).

The design of the Robie House emphasises horizontal lines, and includes details that hint at a connection to nature. In the inside of the Robie House, almost everything is horizontal (see picture 1). It includes several cantilevers, which are extensions of the roof far over the balcony (see picture 2). The cantilevers are very horizontal in their orientation. The windows have a design is two pieces of wheat (see picture 4). “The space within becomes the reality of the building” (BrainyQuote), Wright once said. If so, then it is possible to say that Wright’s masterpiece is an example of nature in a home.

V. Conclusion

Frank Lloyd Wright did not like cities. He did not like them because he felt that all of the houses in them were cramped and that therefore people had no privacy in them. Wright liked the flat, open prairie lands of the Midwest region. Wright stood up for American architecture. Before Wright, America did not have its own architectural style; it had brought an old style from Europe with roots in Rome and Greece, instead of developing its own. Wright found a way to make his Prairie Style houses private and not cramped in the urban area and to connect it to the landscape of this country. Wright managed to put in this key idea in the majority of his houses. Wright connected to nature differently than many other architects: He wanted to save nature, not destroy it. He once said, “study nature, love nature, stay close to nature. It will never fail you” (Goodreads.com). This was his idea for architecture for this modern world.

VI. Bibliography

Documentary:

Movie/Documentary: Frank Lloyd Wright a film by Ken Burns & Lynn Novick

This movie will help with Frank Lloyd Wright’s early life. It will also help me find where he built his buildings and more about his way of architecture called the Prairie Style.

Books:

Book: Frank Lloyd Wright By Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer

This book will helped me find explain the Prairie Style. It also helped me find out the ways Wright built his houses.

Book: Frank Lloyd Wright Field Guide by Thomas Heinz

This book will help me with why he wanted to build certain houses and where he built them.

Book: The Prairie School Frank Lloyd Wright and His Midwest Contemporaries by H. Allen Brooks

This will help me understand more about the Prairie Style and how he taught it to others. There were school that young architects were hoping they could learn the Prairie Style and work with Frank Lloyd Wright.

Frank Lloyd Wright by David K. Wright:

This book will help me with explaining Frank Lloyd Wright.

Book: Frank Lloyd Wright by Jan Adkins:

This book will help me explain the Prairie Style.

Websites:

Websites:

Website: <http://www.sah.org/about-sah/charnley-persky-house/history>

This will help to find out what Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Sullivan built together.

Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation:

This website will explain what Frank Lloyd Wright did for a living.

Frank Lloyd Wright Tried to Solve the City:

This website will help me find out why he built specific houses in cities.

Tracing Frank Lloyd Wright in Oak Park, Illinois: New York Times:

This website will help me figure out where he built his buildings and what time he built them.

Primary:

Pictures:



1. Robie House: example of inside with horizontal lines

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2. Robie House: example of roof with cantilever

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3. Robie House: inside view

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4. Robie House: window with wheat sheaves

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