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THE DESTRUCTION OF THE BOX

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Frank Lloyd Wright wrote eloquently and often about the destruction of the box,¹ and writers ever since have indiscriminately used such phrases as "open space" and "flowing space," whether they are discussing interiors by Wright, Le Corbusier, or any number of 20th-century architects. In so doing they reveal basic misconceptions concerning Wright's achievement: Wright's spaces are more open and flowing than those that existed previously, but they are also profoundly different both in their design and in their psychological impact from the interiors with which they are often associated.

When Wright entered the profession late in the 1880s the Shingle Style had largely spent its force. From this style he inherited the idea of using generous openings between principal rooms and of occasionally basing his layout upon an axial or cruciform plan. Until about 1900 this exerted a considerable influence on his work.

1. Wright's most concise discussion of the box will be found in *An Autobiography*, (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1943) pp. 141-142 in the section "Building the New House."

But Shingle Style planning did not call into question the basic concept of the room. The four walls, joined at the corners, and the uniform floor and ceiling remained; the room continued to be a box. What had changed was the degree of openness between the rooms and this was achieved by increasing the size of the door (the hinged door gave way to a sliding door, or might be eliminated altogether) until it approached the size of the wall itself. The specific organization and use of the room was not affected. What one gained was a sense of spaciousness while looking from room to room. What one lost was a sense of privacy.

Wright realized this. He also saw that room specialization exceeded realistic limits with each social or family function requiring a separate room. In effect, one box, neatly labeled, was placed beside another and a series of these boxes made up the home. This was nothing new; the room as a box had been a western tradition since earliest times. It was a situation that Wright inherited, yet he soon redefined the concept of interior space, and he began this process by dismembering the traditional box.