

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT NEWSLETTER

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THE WARD WILLITS HOUSE BY FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

by Mark David Linch

This is the second of a series of three articles on the Ward Winfield Willits House (Highland Park, Illinois, 1902) designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. The purpose of this article is to integrate information into a sequence of events leading to the completion of the house. The information derives from specifications, photographs, legal documents, and letters.

The initial association between Willits and Wright has origins which are not totally known. However, the association probably began in this way:¹ Ward Willits, a young man trained in the law, joined the firm of Adams and Westlake, a brass and bronze foundry, in 1879 and was promoted to vice-president and director in 1891. Orlando Giannini joined the same firm as a designer and foreman in 1891. Although he remained only until 1898 and although the firm employed roughly one thousand people at the time, it is probable that Willits and Giannini were acquainted. Willits was a very sharp, intelligent, and managerial man, and it is unlikely that a talent such as Giannini's would have escaped his notice. This acquaintance, then, would provide the link with Frank Lloyd Wright.

Orlando Giannini subsequently entered into a partnership with Fritz Hilgart in 1899. Prior to the Willits commission, they produced the glass for at least two houses by Wright. The *1902 Chicago Architectural Club Catalogue* indicates that these houses were the Joseph Husser House (Chicago, 1899) and the Frank Thomas House (Oak Park, 1901). Giannini was the artist/designer and Hilgart was the technician.²

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Being the thorough and meticulous man he was, Willits may have even located a copy of this catalogue in an effort to find an architect for the new home he was contemplating.³ It becomes even more likely that Giannini was the initial link to Wright when one considers that Giannini was listed in the catalogue. Willits could then have arranged to formally meet Wright through his previous acquaintance, Giannini, which would have been the proper procedure during that Victorian time. The meeting of Willits and Wright is plausible in this scenario.

The next step in the commission of Wright also remains nebulous. The working drawings of the house are dated June 2, 1902, but the early contacts between client and architect and the specific order of events are sketchy. There are, however, two valuable clues. In the first, a letter to Wright dated May 4, 1902, Willits states:

I've been looking over that plan again today and am more strongly than ever of the opinion that the arrangement of the east side is not right. The arrangement for the reception room and den is too expensive for the little use we will have for the former. The scheme is all right artistically from the outside, but it is neither in the line of utility nor economy. Moreover, I doubt the wisdom of so great a width overall on a 200' lot. Better narrow it down some so we will have more lawn on the west side of the house. I've been thinking too that the plan of narrowing down the nursery to 12' will not do. As when we come to make two rooms of it they will likely be only 12 x 12 each which is too small.

1. The speculative ideas herein presented are based on my proximity to the material. These theories are intended to fill critical gaps in the story. They in no way can be viewed as absolute fact at this juncture. During this embryonic period of developing a more complete work, it would be beneficial to acquire reactions regarding such material.
2. Postcard from Robert C. Spencer to Grant V. Manson in mid-1950s. Manson Collection, Oak Park Public Library.
3. The old family home on Clark Street in Chicago which his father, Job Evans Willits, had bought, no longer suited the needs of the young family. His 1897 marriage to Cecilia May Berry had resulted in the birth of three children by 1901.

The length of hall is too great also. I fear you will have to make a radical change on the East side of the first floor and modify the second floor plan considerably. As the plan is at present, I'm quite sure the house would cost a good deal more than I wish to spend.

I will mail a plan to you tomorrow from the office.

Yours Truly,
Ward W. Willits

This letter indicates that the plans and elevations of the house were well delineated at that date. Willits' comments also reveal that he did not fully appreciate the uniqueness of his proposed house.

There is further significance in this first clue. Not only does it reveal Willits' reaction to the design, but it also provides an intriguing insight into the degree of influence which Willits attempted to exert over the design in its early phase. Many slight and subtle changes in dimensions must have had like impact upon the exterior. Shortening the west side, rearranging and compacting the east side, maintaining a nursery dimension on the north side, and appealing for more economy and utility are all changes requested by Willits which would have had the effect of making the plan weaker with respect to the cruciform design. These changes would have made it more like the plan of "A Home in a Prairie Town" and less like the plan of "A Small House with 'Lots of Room in It.'"⁴ The latter plan is basically cruciform, while the plan of the former is tighter to the center. The significance is that the changes proposed by Willits would have decreased the overall horizontality and the strong prairie relationship in favor of economy and utility. Fortunately, he did not have much success in this regard.

The other clue, though undated, is a drawing which may have been one of the preliminary drawings which Wright gave to Willits. The most significant feature of the drawing is the facade design which features a different window treatment than the final design. There were dimensional changes on this facade as well, and Wright's refinements were affected.⁵ This facade resembles the one of "A Home in a Prairie Town." It is this similarity which might be the basis for Willits having "unequivocally"⁶ stated that there was a couple of years' delay between design and construction. When soliciting Wright's services, Willits may have been shown the "Prairie" home and took it to be the design for his house.⁷

Turning to the matter of site selection, the next step in the process, Highland Park undoubtedly was chosen as the city for the residence because John McGregor Adams, President of Adams and Westlake, lived there. The relationship between the two men was extremely friendly and close. Willits literally followed in the footsteps of his

mentor and friend, including choices of club memberships, and even named his son born in 1900 for Adams. Upon Adams' death in 1904, Willits succeeded him as President of Adams and Westlake.

The property was purchased early in 1902, and Emil Rudolph was commissioned to execute a Plat of Survey which was completed on July 3. Another survey was completed in March of the following year after Willits purchased an additional wedge of land. Located at a corner site on Sheridan Road, it is a brief walk to the Highland Park Station of the Chicago and Northwestern Railway, which was the major link to the City of Chicago, located twenty miles to the south. Much of the equipment and appliances for the house was shipped via this line. The shape of the site is trapezoidal, which provides for a variety of exterior spaces created by the cruciform house which was to be placed on it.

After an announcement in the *Sheridan Road Newsletter* of July 25, 1902, the events leading to the completion of the house are better documented. The notice read:

Frank Wright is at work on plans for an attractive residence which W. W. Willits [sic], vice-president of the Adams & Westlake Co., will build on Sheridan road near Forest avenue. The lot is 200 x 350 feet, and the house will cost \$20,000.

In order to place the building of this house in local perspective, it is necessary to understand the history of the area. It was becoming a very popular location, as the addition that year to the well known Moraine Hotel testifies. Several homes were being built in the area at about the same time. The next announcement in the same issue of the *Sheridan Road Newsletter* is of a house being built nearby by Walter Hatley of the Board of Trade.⁸ The population of 3000 was fairly spread out, though, relative to each other. Neighbors were hundreds of feet apart. The summer programs of symphony at Ravinia Park began just two years later, on August 15, 1904. This establishment was considered to be quite a resort at the time, and the consequent pride which residents felt in the project can not be overestimated.

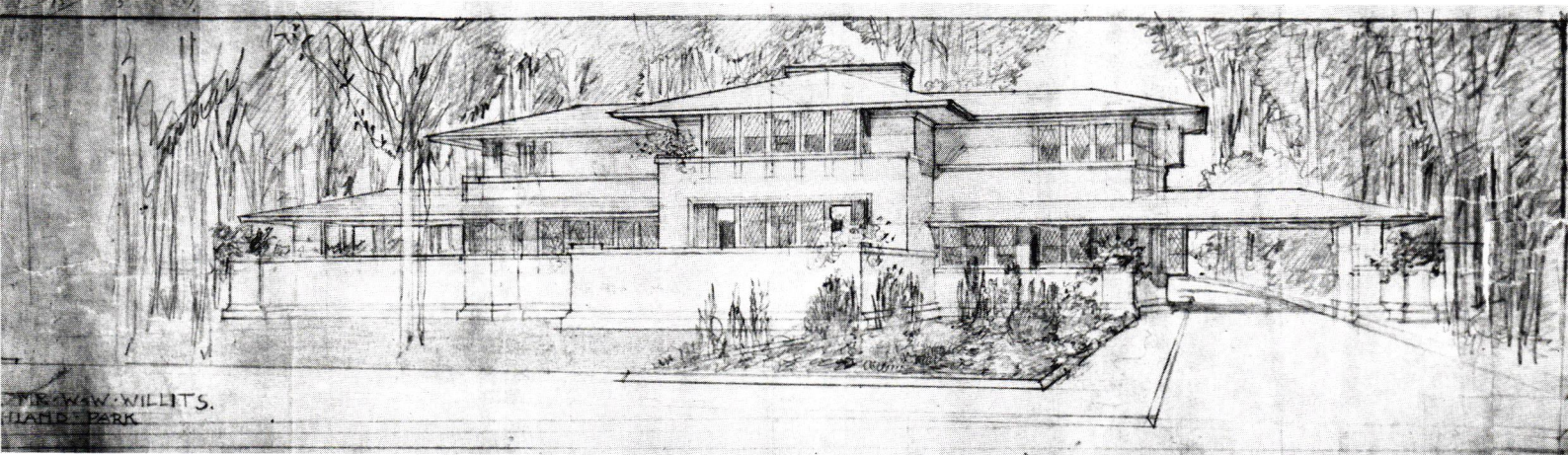
4. See "A Home in a Prairie Town," *Ladies' Home Journal*, February 1901, p. 17; and "A Small House with 'Lots of Room in It,'" *Ladies' Home Journal*, July 1901, p. 15.

5. I intend to discuss changes affecting the design elements in the third article, which is to focus on design analysis and development.

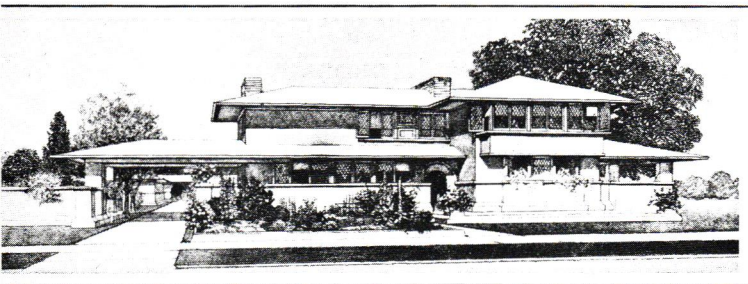
6. Grant Manson, *Frank Lloyd Wright to 1910* (New York: Reinhold, 1958), p. 103, Note 12.

7. It could also be that Willits solicited Wright's services in 1901 after seeing these plans published or after a previous exhibition. Giannini would still seem to be the likely link.

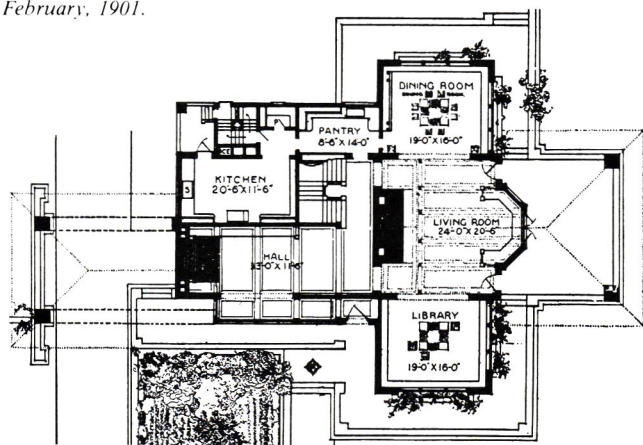
8. Walter Hatley was a very prominent citizen and was quite a philanthropist, having donated 10% of the \$100,000 cost of the new Highland Park Hospital a few years later. He also donated \$3000 toward the purchase of a site.



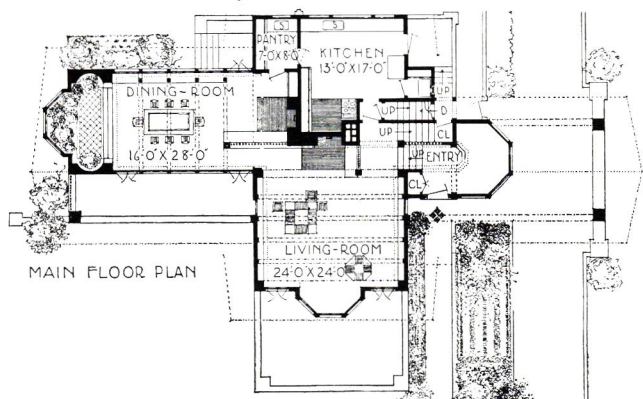
Preliminary drawing, in Wright's own hand, of front elevation of Willits House. Photo courtesy Thomas A. Heinz.



Front elevation, "A Home in a Prairie Town." Ladies' Home Journal, February, 1901.



Ground floor plan, "A Home in a Prairie Town." Ladies' Home Journal, February, 1901, p. 17.

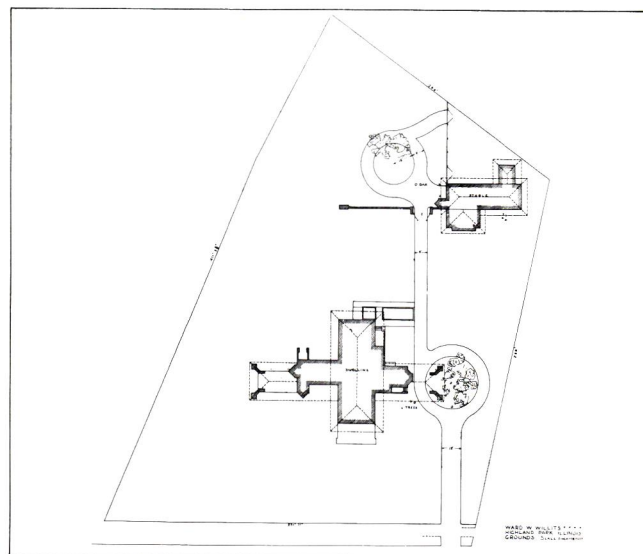


Main floor plan, "A Small House with 'Lots of Room in It.'" Ladies' Home Journal, July, 1901, p. 15.

The specifications of the "proposed house"⁹ were thoroughly analyzed (and probably requested as well) by Willits. He made continuous requests and suggestions for revisions which would improve the durability of the house. All changes mentioned were based upon Willits' desire to make the house as economical as possible over both the short and long term.

The specifications are undated except for some parts which were revised in December 1902. The specifications include protections and guidelines similar to those found in specifications today. They were divided into the following sections: General Conditions, Masonry, Carpentry, Plumbing and Sewerage, Electric Wiring, Hot Water Heating, Lathing and Plastering.

9. Phrase used in a letter to Walter Burley Griffin, August 6, 1902.



Plat of Survey for Ward W. Willits House. Courtesy University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Notable provisions of the General Conditions¹⁰ read as follows:

“As shown” means as shown by the contract drawings and by notes, figures, and writings or sketches thereon, or by models.

“As shown later” means as shown by further scale and details, drawings, models, etc. so far as they may be consistent with this specification and the contract drawings.

“As directed” means as directed by the Architect or his representative and to his *entire* satisfaction.

“Subject to approval” or “Approved” means subject to the inspection and *entire* approval of the Architect before being worked or fitted into the building. (*Italics added*)

These definitions, as well as their prominence within the specifications, reveal that Wright maintained rigid control over the design. If an element was not designed yet, due to Wright’s “lack of inspiration”¹¹ or whatever, it could be left out of the drawings and completed later. This brings to mind the “Scope Drawing”¹² process used today by firms designing very large projects. The process hardly seems necessary for a house, but Wright did indeed maintain control this way. In respect to the Willits House, it was to the owner’s benefit, especially because it allowed the house to be enclosed only six months after ground was broken.

The first phase of the actual construction of the house is outlined in the Masonry Specification.¹³ The foundation was to be built of rubble stone bedded flat, with the area walls of 8” brickwork. As nearly as can be estimated by the condition of the site, the excavation was completed by mid-September of 1902. It is known that the trees were being cleared from the site through the end of August.¹⁴ The excavated dirt was removed, and the basement was smoothed in preparation for a tamped cinder floor which was subsequently covered with concrete. Backfilling was later done as directed.

The next set of known construction photographs date from about mid-October and reveal that the method of construction was predominantly balloon frame. The Carpentry Specification¹⁵ indicates that the wood used was hemlock in 2” x 4” dimensions. Girders were 2” x 12”, joists were 2” x 10” and 2” x 8”, and rafters were 2” x 8” (valley) and 2” x 6” (hip). White cedar shingles were specified to be dipped in stain. Flashings were galvanized iron. The photographs of perhaps early November show the house further along and the fireplace underway.

The flues were surrounded by 8” brickwork on a substructure of concrete. The hearths, jambs, backs, and

breasts of the fireplace were faced with Roman pressed brick at a cost of \$30.00 per thousand. The brick was laid in lime mortar, with horizontal joints white and vertical joints colored to match the brick. This of course accentuated the horizontality of the interior in keeping with Wright’s prairie ideals.

The Plumbing and Electrical Specifications¹⁶ are less interesting. Suffice to say that the pipes were galvanized iron (switched from wrought iron) and that the electric wiring contractor installed wiring, bell work, speaking tubes, cutting, and switching.

The Hot Water Heating Specification¹⁷ states that the radiators were all to be direct except those in the living room:

Indirect radiators shall be placed in basement enclosed in #24 galvanized iron casings, with proper inlets with dampers to supply fresh air from outside to register pipes. Registers are to be bronzed set in strong tin boxes.

The system therein described is for radiant heating. It is one of the earliest uses by Wright of such a system.

A winter photograph shows Mrs. Willits in front of the house, which was yet to be plastered and yet to have its windows installed. It dates from about mid-January of 1903, during which time the interior finishings were underway and the exterior glass was being designed and made. Coordination between the carpentry and glass contractors for the working of the window sashes is the subject of a January 10, 1903, letter from Willits to Wright. The outside trim was specified as free from sap or knots and left rough sawn on most exposed surfaces. Thus a more natural touch was added. The exterior plastering and the placing of the windows was completed by the end of February. Interesting to note is the fact that the downspout is painted dark on the lower level, but it is not on the second level, an oversight perhaps. There have been suggestions¹⁸ that the color of the plaster used on the exterior was not white, but there is no evidence to show otherwise.

10. AIA contract signed August 19, 1902, witnessed by Griffin.

11. See Mark David Lynch, “Ward Winfield Willits, A Client of Frank Lloyd Wright,” *The Frank Lloyd Wright Newsletter*, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 14.

12. Scope drawings are not complete documents. They allow the architect time to finish design detail later while getting construction underway immediately. This saves time and money.

13. See note 10.

14. From a letter to Wright dated August 29, 1902.

15. See note 10.

16. AIA contract signed September 16, 1902, with Wickum.

17. AIA contract signed November 21, 1902, with Foster, Glidden and Woodruff.

18. See H. Allen Brooks, “Observations Concerning the Color of Wright’s Plaster Surfaced Prairie Houses,” *The Frank Lloyd Wright Newsletter*, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 19.

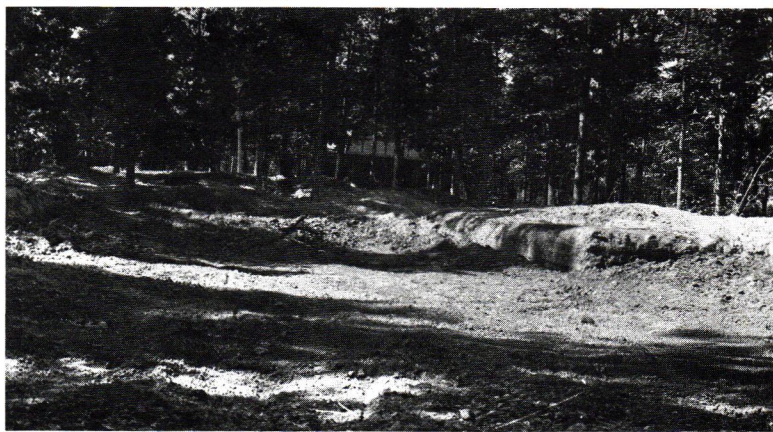
19. From certificates of payment authorized by the Wright office.

The target date for the completion of the house was May 1, 1903. Although Willits had expressed concern about whether or not the house would be finished on time, he probably moved in as scheduled and then spent another couple of months tolerating the miscellaneous work to complete the house. John A. Wickum (electric wiring) was last paid on July 8, 1903, which was thirty days after the completion of his work as specified in his contract (and in other contracts as well). Foster, Glidden and Woodruff (plumbing, heating, gasfitting) were last paid August 17. Fred Clow (general) was last paid on September 3, thus completing work on the house.¹⁹

The Ward W. Willits House was designed sometime early in the spring of 1902, and construction began in September of the same year. Willits moved into the house in May 1903. All aspects of the construction were complete by the end of August 1903. The first prairie masterpiece was thus born. ■



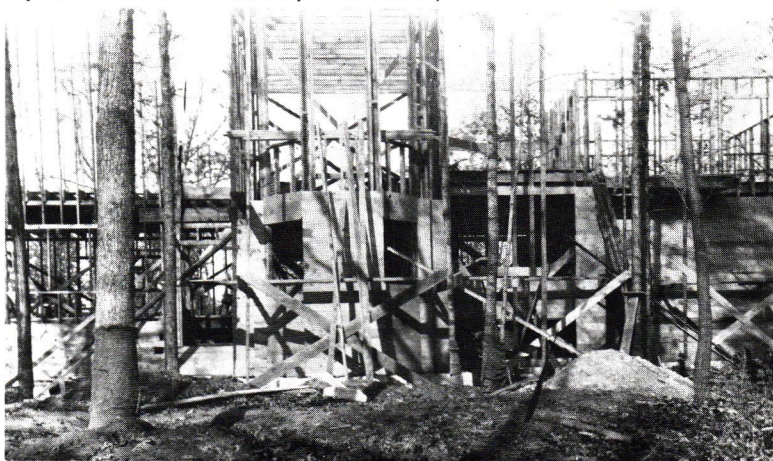
Mr. and Mrs. Ward W. Willits.



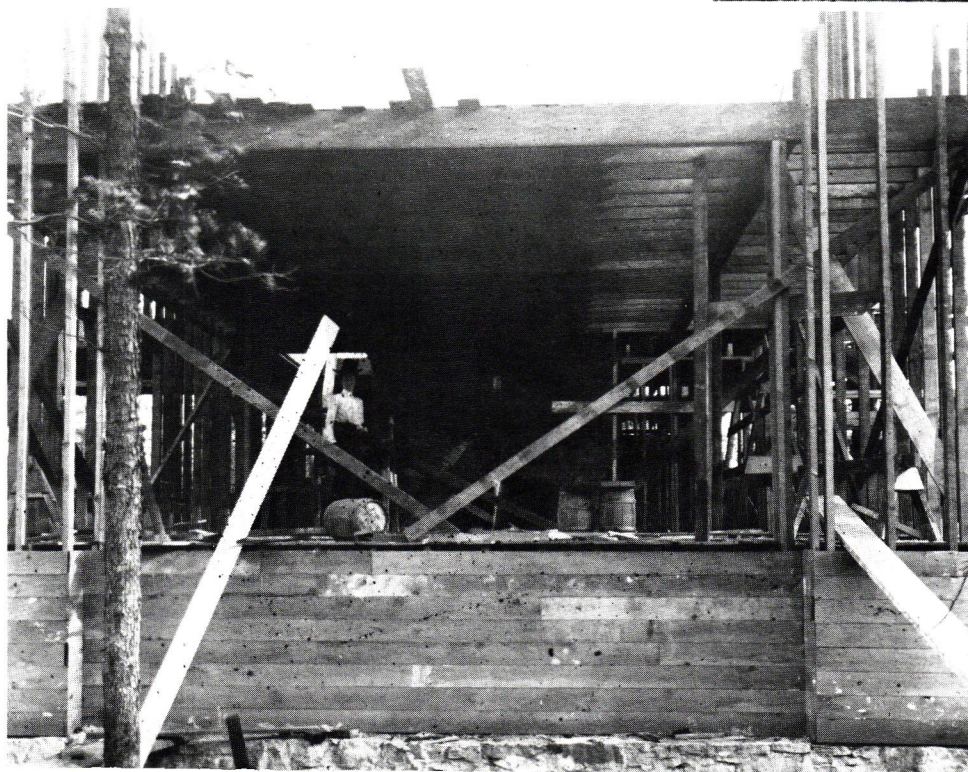
Excavation photo looking north along axis, probably taken mid-September, 1902. All historic photos courtesy Peter W. Burnside.



Willits House, looking east across Sheridan Road before the stucco was applied, mid-January, 1903.



South wing of the Willits House, looking north to the reception hall before the porte cochere, mid-October, 1902.



Willits House from the front porch looking east into the living room, early November, 1902. Note the fireplace, which has not yet been faced with Roman brick.

THE DECORATIVE DESIGNS OF FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

The following articles are the texts of two of the lectures given at a symposium on January 20, 1979, in conjunction with The Decorative Designs of Frank Lloyd Wright, an exhibition held at the David and Alfred Smart Gallery at the University of Chicago.

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT'S "THE ART AND CRAFT OF THE MACHINE"

by David A. Hanks

Many of Frank Lloyd Wright's earliest principles of architecture and the decorative arts developed from nineteenth century reform thought, which fed into the aesthetic movement and culminated in the Arts and Crafts Movement in England and America. Wright expounded Arts and Crafts principles of simplicity, propriety, and honest use of material. And, as H. Allen Brooks has pointed out, the Arts and Crafts Movement helped to create an artistic environment that made Wright's progressive architecture and accompanying furniture more acceptable to the client.¹ Wright derived certain ideas from the movement and then in turn made a substantial contribution to it. As Vincent Scully put it, "Wright summed up his century and went on."² He differed with those within the movement who considered only hand-wrought products to be true art and shunned any use of the machine. Wright developed his aesthetic in the context of the capabilities of machine production.

Crucial for understanding Wright's departure from the Arts and Crafts Movement is his justifiably famous address, "The Art and Craft of the Machine." This pivotal talk represented the transition for Wright and American furniture from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. The address was first delivered on March 6, 1901, to the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society at Hull House in Chicago and was again presented in Chicago to the Western Society of Engineers two weeks later on March twentieth. It was subsequently printed in the catalogue of the Fourteenth Annual Exhibition of the Chicago Architectural Club in 1901. This entire catalogue, including the title page, was designed by the Chicago architect Robert Spencer, Wright's colleague and a member of the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society. The address has since been reprinted many times, recently in *Frank Lloyd Wright: Writings and Buildings*.³

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Chicago was one of the most important centers of the Arts and Crafts Movement in America.⁴ Hull House, where the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society was organized on October 22, 1897, became the focal point for the movement's activities in Chicago. This pioneer social settlement house had been established by Jane Addams in 1889, after her visit to Toynbee Hall in London, where C. R. Ashbee's Guild School of Handicraft began. The Hull House buildings, designed by Pond & Pond, were built between 1891 and 1908. Unfortunately, the complex was demolished in 1963, with the exception of the 1856 home of the Hull family, around which Hull House had been built.

Frank Lloyd Wright was one of the charter members of the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society. This fact, as well as the title of Wright's address, indicates his participation in the progressive movement of his day. Along with his fellow members of the Arts and Crafts Society, Wright was concerned about what he saw as a decline in craftsmanship and a generally poor quality of design. He would have agreed with the consensus of the Society reported in the February 1898 issue of *House Beautiful* magazine:

At a recent meeting of the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society, a spirited discussion took place as to whether the public taste or the manufacturer's obduracy was most to blame for the shocking commercial furniture in all the large stores, and the fact that it is almost impossible to purchase, for example, a really good chair for a small sum of money.⁵

Although Wright agreed with the statement of the problem, he strongly disagreed with his fellow members on both the cause of the "shocking commercial furniture" and the solution. What had been a "spirited discussion" with his colleagues became a division that resulted in a major split in the membership. Most members of the Society attributed the cause to the Industrial Revolution and the evils of the machine which they felt endangered the human spirit. Their solution to this dilemma, following the example of their English colleagues, was to return to the ideals of the Middle Ages, a period when the individual craftsmen were believed to have had sole responsibility for the design and execution of an object,

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1. H. Allen Brooks, *The Prairie School* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), pp. 14-26.
 2. Vincent Scully, *American Architecture and Urbanism* (New York: Frederick Praeger, 1969), p. 122.
 3. "The Art and Craft of the Machine," reprinted in *Frank Lloyd Wright: Writings and Buildings*, selected by Edgar Kaufmann, Jr. and Ben Raeburn (New York: Horizon Press, 1960), pp. 55-73.
 4. See H. Allen Brooks, *op. cit.*; Sharon S. Darling, *Chicago Metalsmiths* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1977); and *The Arts and Crafts Movement in America*, ed. Robert Judson Clark (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972).
 5. *House Beautiful*, Vol. 3, p. 103.

using handcraft techniques from conception to completion. Wright disagreed with this premise and proposed another solution.

In "The Art and Craft of the Machine," he postulated an ideal resolution to the problems and contradictions that had developed in the technological age brought on by the Industrial Revolution. Wright said "... we are at last face to face with the machine — the modern Sphinx — whose riddle the artist must solve if he would that art live."⁶ Wright's answer to what he metaphorically referred to as the "Riddle of the Sphinx" was the result of a struggle within his own work, a struggle visible in his designs for furniture in the 1890s.

Wright's revolutionary furniture designs seem to have begun around 1895 in his experiments with the furnishings of his own house. Since few photographs of Wright interiors before 1895 exist, a photograph of the living room of the George Blossom House (Chicago, Illinois, 1892) is a rare document. According to Blossom family history, Wright may have designed some of the furniture for this house.⁷ For the living room Wright designed a recessed inglenook: a brick fireplace from which simple geometrically shaped built-in benches of wood continue on either side into the lowest of the horizontal panels of the wall.

He did not begin designing abstract free standing furniture until 1895, when he remodeled the dining room of his own Oak Park house. Wright's dining room was first published in the February 1897 issue of the *House Beautiful* and subsequently in the December 1899 issue.⁸ Wright's tall back dining chairs seem to have no historical precedent; the turned spindles in these chairs were subsequently replaced with vertical slats, characteristic of Wright's later tall back chairs. They are strongly rectilinear with little use of ornament, since the structure of the chair itself provided this. Even more dramatic is the so-called "cube chair" of c. 1898, seen here in an installation view which was illustrated on the cover of the 1902 catalogue of the Chicago Architectural Club. Both chairs provided prototypes for much of Wright's later furniture. It is interesting to speculate on the reason Wright placed the statue of his son John on this very abstract cube chair. Why would the architect have made such a personal statement on the cover of the catalogue of a public exhibition of his work? What may have been indicated here, symbolically or subconsciously, was a major stimulus for Wright's abstract designs — his own family and the education of his children.

6. "The Art and Craft of the Machine," *op. cit.*, p. 55.

7. From a 1977 telephone conversation between George Blossom III and Thomas A. Heinz.

8. See "Successful Houses, III," *House Beautiful*, February 1897, pp. 64-69; and Alfred H. Granger, "An Architect's Studio," *House Beautiful*, December 1899, pp. 36-45.

THE ART AND CRAFT OF THE MACHINE

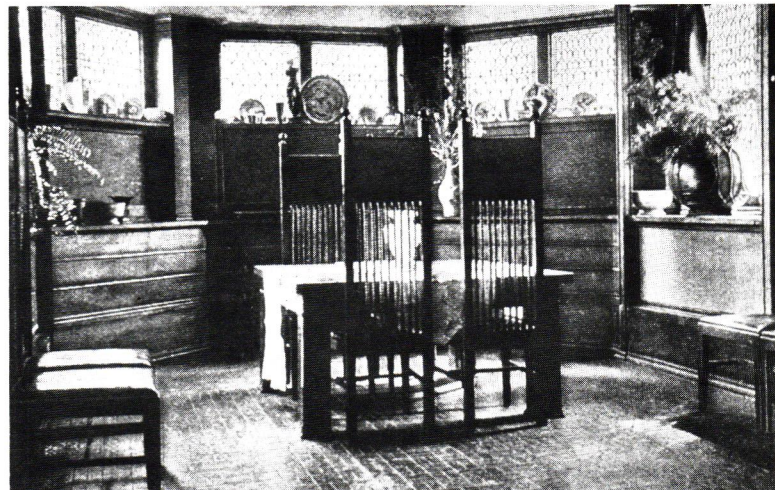
AS WE work along our various ways, there takes shape within us, in some sort, an ideal—something we are to become—some work to be done. This, I think, is denied to very few, and we begin really to live only when the thrill of this ideal moves us in what we will to accomplish. In the years which have been devoted in my own life to working out in stubborn materials a feeling for the beautiful, in the vortex of distorted complex conditions, a hope has grown stronger with the experience of each year, amounting now to a gradually deepening conviction that in the Machine lies the only future of art and craft—as I believe, a glorious future; that the Machine is, in fact, the metamorphosis of ancient art and craft; that we are at last face to face with the machine—the modern Sphinx—whose riddle the artist must solve if he would that art live—for his nature holds the key. For one, I promise "whatever gods may be" to lend such energy and purpose as I may possess to help make that meaning plain; to return again and again to the task whenever and wherever need be; for this plain duty is thus relentlessly marked out for the artist in this, the Machine Age, although there is involved an adjustment to cherished gods, perplexing and painful in the extreme; the fire of many long-honored ideals shall go down to ashes to reappear, phoenix like, with new purposes.

The great ethics of the Machine are as yet, in the main, beyond the ken of the artist or student of sociology; but the artist mind may now approach the nature of this thing from experience, which has become the commonplace of his field; to suggest, in time, I hope, to prove, that the machine is capable of carrying to fruition high ideals in art—higher than the world has yet seen!

Catalogue of the Fourteenth Annual Exhibition of the Chicago Architectural Club, 1901. Courtesy Thomas A. Heinz.



Living room of the George Blossom House, 1892. Photo courtesy Museum of Modern Art.



Remodeled dining Room, c. 1896, of Wright's own house. House Beautiful, February 1897. Above.

Cube chair, c. 1898. Cover, Catalogue of the Chicago Architectural Club, 1902. Below.



Wright's earliest furniture designs were derived from the abstract forms of Froebel blocks, an important influence which Wright himself acknowledged in *An Autobiography*.⁹ Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), the German pedagogical reformer, was primarily concerned with the education of children. His concept of the child's harmonious development attached much importance to the earliest years, up to the age of seven. Froebel developed a graduated course of exercises, modeled on the games which interested children. Vincent Scully explains Wright's turning to the abstract Froebel forms:

... Wright did not decisively work his way back to the abstract Froebel shapes of his childhood — which were to become essential components of his mature architecture and graphics — until he designed a playroom for his own children in 1895. Before that, his decorative motifs, although derived from several nineteenth century sources, had been primarily Sullivanian in character.¹⁰

It is tempting to speculate that Wright's attention to his children's play and learning activities helped him to arrive at the abstract forms that were to transform American architecture at the turn of the century. Wright's turning to abstract forms was also a way of ordering his world. An indication of the importance of furniture in the development of his architecture is the fact that he chose a chair to be the only item illustrated in a catalogue of his work. Wright's furniture provided an easy means of experimentation in the manipulation of three dimensional abstract forms.

The machine represented the technological means for Wright to achieve the visual expression which he was attempting. His position, as outlined in "The Art and Craft of the Machine," represented a major breakthrough in the decorative arts. The danger was not due to the machine itself, Wright stated, but in the individual or artist who controlled it. The machine had been wrongly used in the past in producing highly ornamented, carved furniture in period styles which were suitable only for craft traditions. The problem with the machine was that it had been "forced by false ideals to do violence to this simplicity."¹¹ A machine used to imitate wood carving was machinery used for the wrong purpose. Any highly ornamental period or revival style was most inappropriate for manufacture by the machine. The machine, rightly used, was the answer to the "Riddle of the Sphinx" and Wright's solution to the modern dilemma. Wright's own furniture was evidence that the machine "was capable of carrying to fruition high ideals in art — higher than the world had yet seen."¹² Opposed to strictly handcraft methods advocated by the Arts and Crafts Society, Wright recognized that the machine was suitable for manufacturing furniture, and he designed for the machine, or at least he designed furniture that was amenable to machine production. For him, the key to

designing for machine production was simplicity: "William Morris pleaded well for simplicity as the basis of all true art. Let us understand the significance to art of that word — SIMPLICITY — for it is vital to the Art of the Machine."¹³ Wright's principle of simplicity can be seen in the design for the cube chair, which has no ornamentation. Its straight, geometric lines appeared to be amenable to machine production.

Instead of blaming the machine for the poor quality of current furniture designs, Wright felt the artist could learn from the machine:

It teaches us that the beauty of wood lies in its qualities as wood; no treatment that did not bring out these qualities all the time could be plastic, and therefore not appropriate — so not beautiful, the machine teaches us, if we have left it to the machine that certain simple forms and handling are suitable to bring out the beauty of wood and certain forms are not; that all woodcarving is apt to be a forcing of the material, an insult to its finer possibilities as a material having in itself intrinsically artistic properties, of which its beautiful marking is one, its texture another, its color a third. The Machine, by its wonderful cutting, shaping, smoothing, and repetitive capacity, has made it possible to use it without waste that the poor as well as the rich may enjoy to-day beautiful surface treatments of clean, strong forms . . .¹⁴

The dilemma or "Riddle of the Sphinx" could be solved by the artist who would design for the machine. Wright hoped the Arts and Crafts Society would be an experimental station where the artist and the manufacturer would be brought together to work toward common goals. To this end, Wright invited manufacturers to meet at Hull House with the artists. "Without the interest and co-operation of the manufacturers," Wright wrote, "the society cannot begin to do its work, for this is the cornerstone of its organization."¹⁵ However, Wright was unsuccessful in persuading the members of the Society to abandon their handicraft ideals and to accept the machine. He expressed his discouragement in later years: "It was useless. As I look back upon it."¹⁶

In spite of this seemingly straightforward antithesis, the issue was not as clearcut as portrayed by Wright and some historians. Attitudes of Wright's contemporaries toward

9. Frank Lloyd Wright, *An Autobiography* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1943), pp. 13-14.

10. Vincent Scully, Foreword to *The Decorative Designs of Frank Lloyd Wright*, by David A. Hanks (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1979) p. xiv.

11. "The Art and Craft of the Machine," *op. cit.*, p. 65.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

16. "In the Cause of Architecture," *The Architectural Record*, October 1928, p. 217.

the machine were often ambivalent, and the machine was seldom rejected outright. The constitution of the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society itself agreed "to consider the relation of the machine to the workingman."¹⁷ Oscar Lovell Triggs of the University of Chicago wrote in an 1897 article entitled "Arts and Crafts," "... it may be that on account of machine-made products we may be obliged to reconstruct our notions of beauty and yield the necessity of having some human content in the product."¹⁸ However, Triggs resisted Wright's positive acceptance of the machine: "The Machine products and arts products, at least as we now understand them, are as wide as the poles asunder, and there is no possible compromise . . . the fact remains that to have beauty in an object the human hand must touch the materials into shape . . ."¹⁹ This was written four years before Wright's famous address, and although thoughts expressed by Triggs were to persist into the twentieth century, the attitude toward the machine was to change in part due to Wright's influence. This was to be felt in Europe also, where the English Arts and Crafts leader Charles R. Ashbee finally agreed with his friend Wright's philosophy, though with reservations.²⁰

It was still left for Wright to solve the technological problems presented by his philosophical ideal. This is why Wright's furniture designs from 1895 to 1900 are so important in the history of American furniture. Wright's furniture was considered an integral part of the architecture. His dining room furniture is of the same wood as the panelling in the room. The dining room furniture and the cube chair are this country's first modern furniture because they are abstract, without historical precedent, and without ornament.

The furniture commercially available in 1895 was completely unsuitable for Wright's interiors. To achieve his "high ideal in Art," Wright experienced many difficulties:

The trials of the early days were many and at this distance picturesque. Workmen seldom like to think, especially if there is financial risk entailed; at your peril do you disturb their established processes mental or technical. To do anything in an unusual, even if in a better way, is to complicate the situation at once. Simple things at that time in any industrial field were nowhere at hand . . .²¹

We know that Wright returned to certain manufacturers in the Chicago area over and over because they were able

to produce furniture to his unique specifications. Most of the early furniture was manufactured by John W. Ayers of Chicago, until a fire destroyed this cabinetmaker's factory late in 1906.²² His was not a large shop, yet it probably made use of the variety of woodworking machines available in the 1890s. An understanding of the manufacturing techniques available is important to an understanding of Wright's furniture. There were differences between the large and small shops in Chicago, where the large manufacturers could include a division which might specialize in custom-made furniture for architects. In Ayers, however, Wright evidently had found a sympathetic cabinetmaker who was willing and able to execute his progressive furniture designs. Without him, Wright might have had difficulty in achieving his "high ideal in Art."

Wright's ideal of designing furniture which could be manufactured by the machine could not be totally achieved, however. His furniture that appears to be made completely by machine was actually produced (as was nineteenth century furniture in general) by a combination of hand and machine techniques. The simple design of the cube chair was indeed amenable to machine production, but the skills of an expert craftsman were required in finishing the piece by hand.

"The Art and Craft of the Machine," then, represents the ideal to which Wright aspired. He was among the first of the reformists in America to advocate the use of the machine and to put these principles of simplicity and the honest use of materials into practice. Wright's revolutionary furniture attests to his ability to design for the machine. This ideal was never fully achieved, but his attempt was significantly important. Wright's own decorative designs provided the experimental laboratory that he had hoped the Arts and Crafts Society would provide. Much of America's progressive furniture design would depend on this experimentation and on the resulting new forms which emerged from the ideal that was first expressed so eloquently by Wright in "The Art and Craft of the Machine." ■

22. Unpublished manuscript by Irma Strauss.

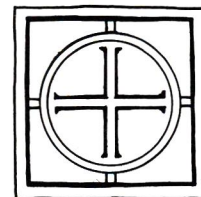
17. "Chicago Arts and Crafts Society," *Hull House Bulletin*, 1897.

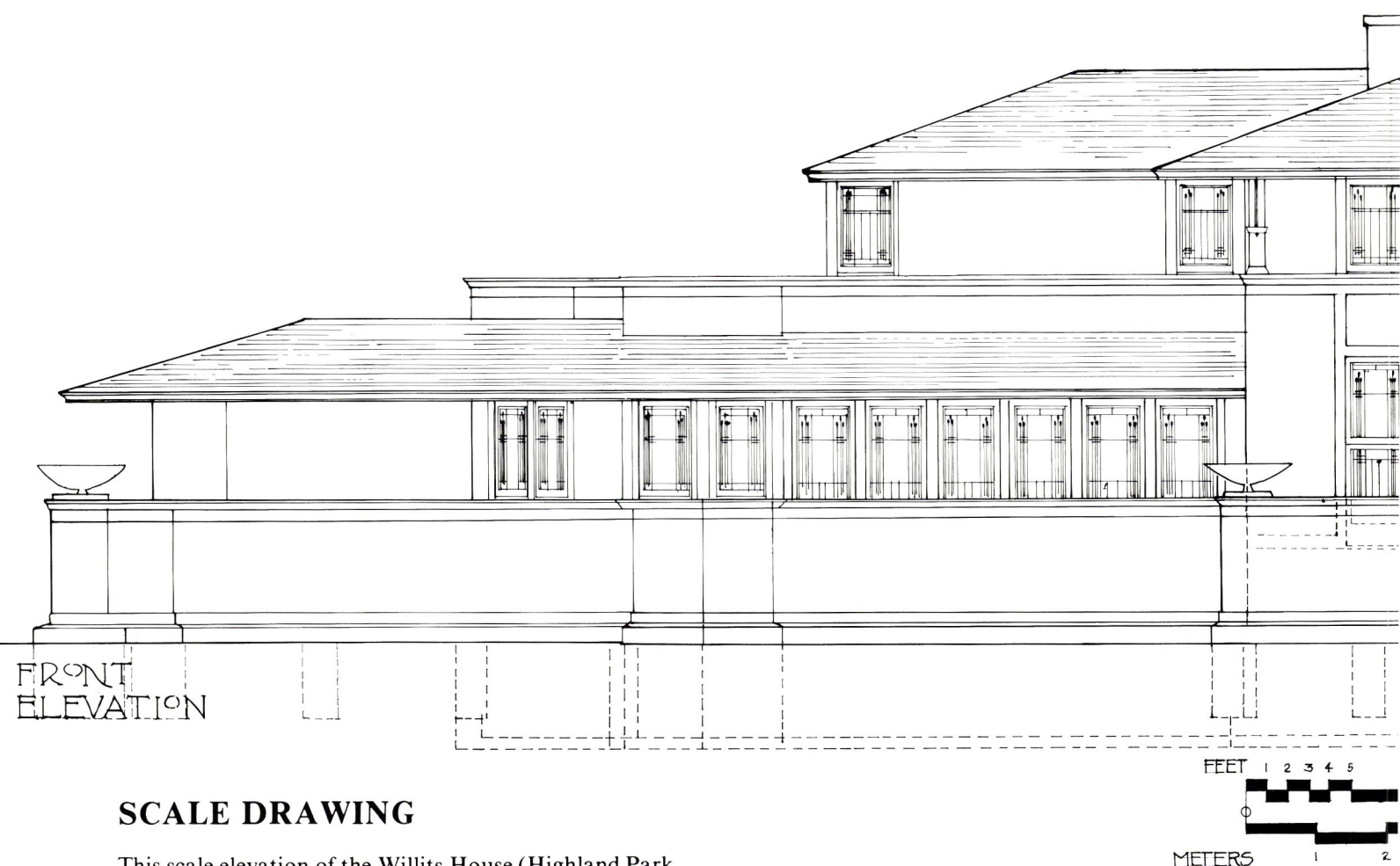
18. *Brush and Pencil*, December 1897.

19. *Ibid.*

20. See C. R. Ashbee, "Frank Lloyd Wright, A Study and an Appreciation," Foreword to *Ausgeführte Bauten*, 1911, reprinted as *Frank Lloyd Wright, The Early Work* (New York, Horizon Press, 1968), pp. 3-8.

21. "In the Cause of Architecture," *The Architectural Record*, March 1908, p. 158.





SCALE DRAWING

This scale elevation of the Willits House (Highland Park, Illinois, 1902) is the first in a series of scale plans and elevations which will be a regular feature of the *Newsletter*. Shown at a 1/8th scale, they will aid in understanding the relative size of Wright's buildings. ■

This elevation is re-drawn by Mark David Linch from the working drawings now housed at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, and the dimensions shown were taken by Mr. Linch from the building itself. ■

DATING OF FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT BUILDINGS

The Association has begun to compile an additional list of Wright's works. Since he often revised his designs right up to the time of construction, it is felt that the dating of the built buildings should refer to the last date of the working drawings or to the initial construction date. If the working drawings are known to exist, we are seeking the last revision date and the "formal" date (usually the earlier of the two). Building permits and information from personal correspondence are also helpful in establishing the initial construction date of the buildings. When known, it is this initial construction date that will be used in the *Newsletter*, beginning with the next issue; when another date is used, it will be referenced as such. Anyone with first hand information as to these dates is urged to contact: The Editor, *The Frank Lloyd Wright Newsletter*, P.O. Box 2100, Oak Park, Illinois 60303. ■

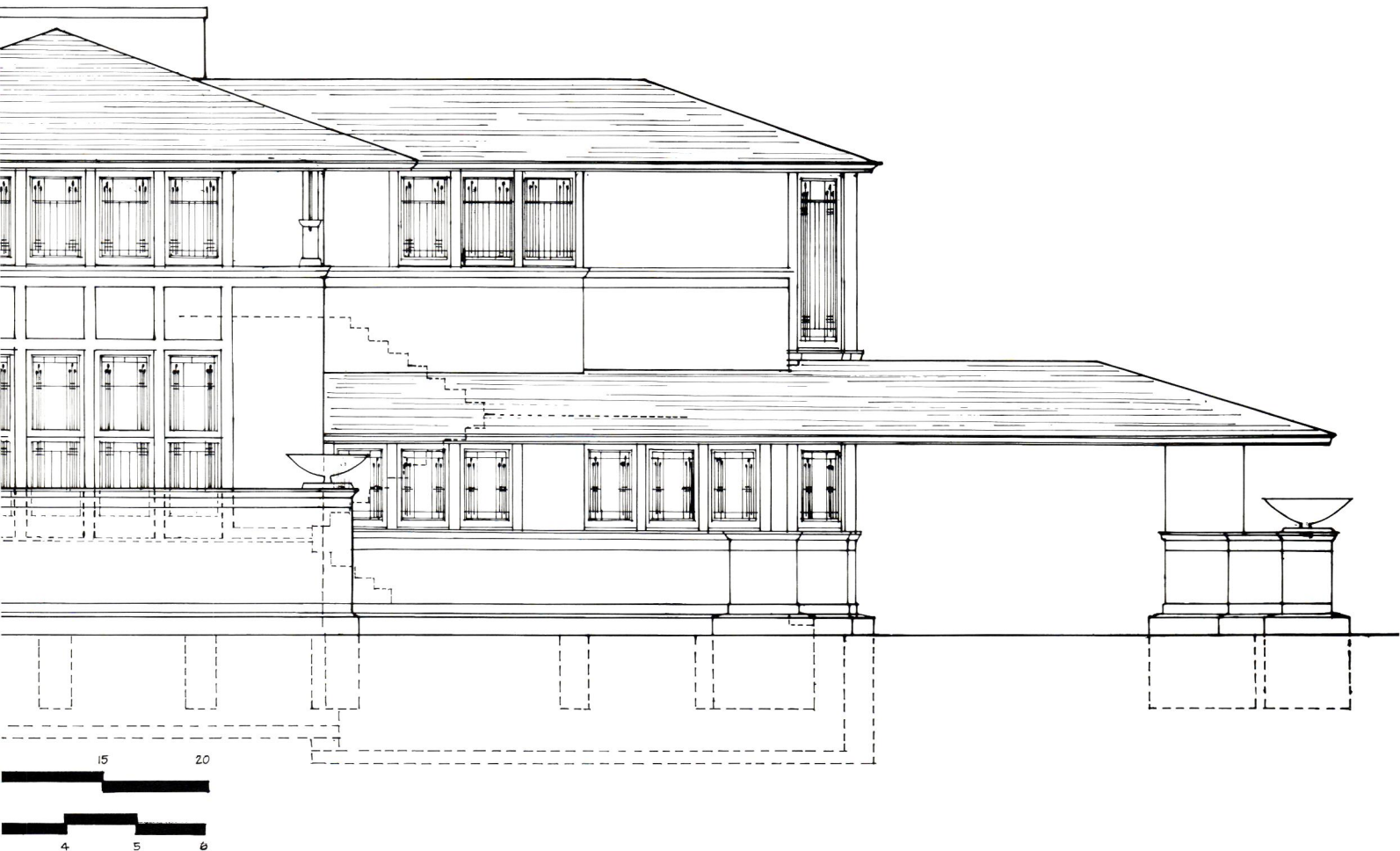
THE PLACE OF OBJECTS: FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS INTERIOR DESIGN AND THE DECORATIVE ARTS

by David G. De Long

If Wright's skill as a designer of decorative objects were judged solely by his most obvious production of that sort — namely the furniture, fabrics, and related items designed in the early 1950s for mass production — his reputation might not profit.¹ Yet countless individual designs for objects conceived as part of a specific architectural setting suggest a very real skill indeed. These objects, as is well known from Wright's own statements, were not meant to be seen or analyzed in isolation but were considered instead as elements contributing to the definition of interior space.²

No fair evaluation of Wright's work can avoid discussing the interiors of his buildings, for they constitute the essential component of his architectural vision. Yet, like the individual objects, they cannot be analyzed in isolation, for each space is part of a larger whole. There are, however, several designs by Wright for installations

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within pre-existing buildings that can be considered without reference to their setting. Three in particular are Browne's Bookstore (1908), the Edgar J. Kaufmann Office (1937), and the Hoffman Auto Showroom (1954).³ My purpose in focusing on these isolated installations is to arrive at a fuller understanding of how Wright approached the design of interiors: how he used objects to define space, how these spaces relate to his contemporary work of larger scale, and how certain principles appear to underlie the creation of these spaces.⁴

Browne's Bookstore, now long demolished, was installed in Chicago's Fine Arts Building.⁵ That it was allotted seven illustrations in *Ausgeführte Bauten* suggests a certain prominence in Wright's early work, a prominence justified by an inspection of the photographs showing

them, aimed at them often but assimilated them. Such precious things may often take their places as elements in the design . . .

"I tried to make my clients see that furniture and furnishings that were not built in as integral features of the building should be designed as attributes of whatever furniture was built in and should be seen as a minor part of the building itself even if detached or kept aside to be employed only on occasion.

"...the ideal of an organic simplicity seen as the countenance of perfect integration, abolished all fixtures, rejected all superficial decoration, made all lighting and heating apparatus architectural features of the house and, so far as possible, all furniture was to be designed by the architect as a natural part of the whole building. Hangings, rugs, carpet — all came into the same category. . . . No sculpture, no painting unless co-operating with the architect."

Frank Lloyd Wright, *An Autobiography* (New York, 1932; enlarged editions, 1943, 1977; all quotations are from the 1943 edition), pp. 144-45, 150.

Reflecting a concern no doubt felt by Wright as well, Bruce Goff, in response to a request to have one of his lamp designs copied, told me in June, 1974, "only someone unsympathetic to my work would want to see the lamp outside the space for which I designed it."

3. For dates and names of Wright's designs before 1941, I have relied on Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *In the Nature of Materials; the Buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright, 1887-1941* (New York, 1942). For later dates, with validation when possible, Olgivanna Lloyd Wright, *Frank Lloyd Wright: his life, his work, his words* (New York, 1966), pp. 205-222.
4. I am grateful to Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., for suggesting this approach and for advice on how to proceed. I am also grateful to Henry-Russell Hitchcock for his valuable suggestions and for allowing me access to his Wright archive. I would like also to thank Thomas A. Heinz for his kind assistance in gathering material.
5. Wright maintained an office in the Fine Arts Building in 1908 and 1910-11; Grant Carpenter Manson, *Frank Lloyd Wright to 1910; the First Golden Age* (New York, 1958), Appendix B, p. 215. Francis Fisher Browne (1843-1913), for whom Wright designed the bookstore, was publisher of *The Dial* magazine. Browne and other tenants are identified in Robert L. Sweeney, *Frank Lloyd Wright; An Annotated Bibliography* (Los Angeles, 1978), pp. xxiv-xxvii. For additional information, Joan Pomaranc, *Fine Arts Building* (brochure published by the Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks, 1977).

1. Wright's furniture designs for Heritage-Henredon, fabrics and wallpapers for F. Schumacher & Company, rugs for Karastan, paints for The Martin-Senour Co., and accessories for Minic Accessories, are announced (and illustrated) in "Frank Lloyd Wright designs home furnishings you can buy!", *House Beautiful*, Vol. 98, November, 1955, pp. 282-90. Also, "Frank Lloyd Wright projects," *Interiors*, Vol. 114, June, 1955, p. 130. For additional information, David A. Hanks, *The Decorative Designs of Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York, 1979), pp. 185-98.

2. Among Wright's many statements on this point:
 "As for objects of art in the house, even in that early day they were bêtes noires of the new simplicity. If well chosen, all right. But only if each were properly digested by the whole. Antique or modern sculpture, paintings, pottery, might well enough become objectives in the architectural scheme. And I accepted

Wright's skillful transformation of the space.⁶ Shoulder-height bookcases divide the long, narrow shell of the main room into five alcoves, each large enough to contain a table and four chairs. A sixth alcove, at one end, contains a built-in seat beneath three tall windows. At the opposite end and related to a low window are a table and four chairs. Kept free of the wall and placed to one side of the space, they provide a less emphatic terminal indicative of the way to the second room beyond. A fireplace composed of simple planes lies opposite the doorway to this smaller room. Long, low library tables along each side of the second space enhance the domestic atmosphere.

As the design of the store illustrates, even the simplest interior is treated in an architectural manner: it is a total reworking of the pre-existing space, one that produces a fully unified result. Such designs are obviously governed by the same principles that underlie all of Wright's work. Among those most significant for the design of interiors, four can be identified:

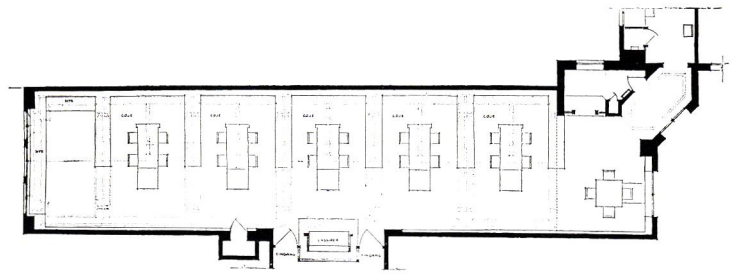
First, wherever possible, screening elements replace conventional partitions so that areas are defined without restricting spatial flow.

Second, each part is considered as contributing to the whole effect and even most moveable accessories are assigned a precise location, resulting in a fixity of parts that reinforces the pervasive sense of unity.

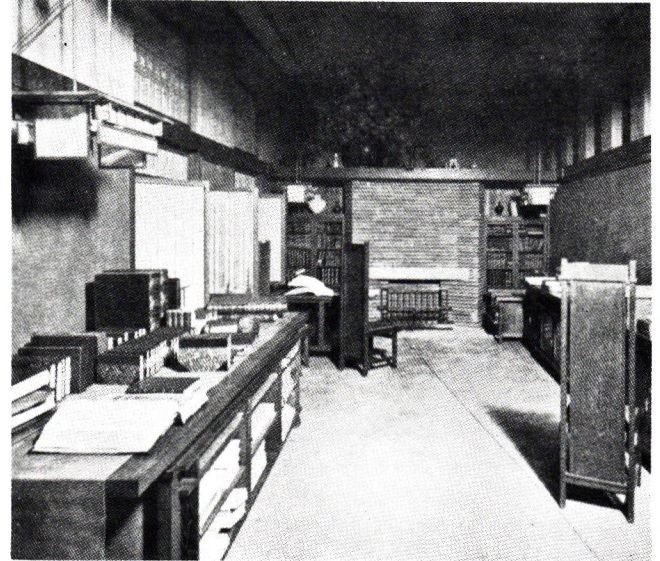
Third, selected movable objects are treated in a special manner that expresses their detached nature.

Fourth, interior elements are massed in ways that suggest organizing horizontal and vertical axes. Like the organization of Wright's major building complexes, these axes generally describe a perimeter rather than a central line, respecting and enhancing the core of the enclosed space itself, as the wings of Taliesin respect the hill of its site. Terminals that partly define these interior axes provide an area of repose without stopping movement, promoting the sense of continuity and insuring that the overall effect of repose is never static.

In Browne's Bookstore, the shoulder-height bookcases clearly provide screening elements, defining specific areas without obscuring an overall impression of unity. These bookcases, most of the furnishings, and selected decorative objects are given a fixed position within the architectural framework. Partly this is achieved by the continuous pattern of wood moldings that contribute so forcibly to the sense of unity; the horizontal moldings of the bookcases continue as lines along the walls and across the doors and windows, integrating surfaces and openings into an overall scheme. Molding strips along the coved



Plan of Browne's Bookstore. Ausgeführte Bauten, 1911.



Interior of Browne's Bookstore. Ausgeführte Bauten, 1911.

ceiling and patterned floor areas reinforce the effect. Even light switches are designed with an attitude of fixed location, placed within wood strips on the blank ends of the bookcases. Further, the major pieces of furniture are either built-in, as the window seat, or related to the architectural forms in a fixed way, as the alcove tables that are placed in the center of their respective areas and attached at one end to a tall bookcase unit. These tall units not only anchor the tables of each alcove and provide an additional element of enclosure, but they also add vertical accents that modulate the long space. The tall case nearest the passage to the second room serves as a pedestal for an object as fixed in location as the bookcases themselves: the Victory of Samothrace delineates a major vertical axis near a major point of transition to a lower and different place beyond. This vertical element is balanced at the opposite end by an object similarly fixed within the architectural scheme: the round urn with its architecturally-scaled branches. It is lower and less prominent than the statue and relates to the more relaxed space of the window seat.

Somewhat different in detail from the built-in furniture is the design for the movable chair, shown with purpose in an angled position. Like the ends of the bookcases, the tall backs of these chairs are outlined with wood strips, but

6. Frank Lloyd Wright, *Ausgeführte Bauten* (Berlin, 1911), reprinted as *Frank Lloyd Wright: The Early Work* (New York, 1968), pp. 100-107. The store is also illustrated and described in Manson (note 5 above), pp. 166-67.

unlike the bookcases where the horizontal is emphasized by the projecting shelves, the vertical lines of the chairs are emphasized by the extended side trim. Narrow slots further differentiate the movable chairs from the fixed bookcases. Decorative divisions of the windows and the panels of the suspended lighting fixtures repeat the square shape of the chair seat, establishing through geometric similarity a tie between the chairs, changeable in location, and the windows and lights, changeable as a source of varying illumination.⁷ The lights are also an astonishing essay in the separation of parts; Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., has suggested that photographs of these lights published in *Ausgeführte Bauten* may well have encouraged parallel European development at a larger scale.⁸

Reflecting Wright's use of perimeter axes to structure interior space, the major line of movement in Browne's Bookstore is kept to one side of the room. At one end of the axis the window seat provides repose and suggests a second line of movement to one side. At the opposite end of the long space, the lighter ensemble of table and chairs forms a less conclusive terminus that subtly encourages passage to the room beyond. There, reflecting the real terminus of space established by the limitations of the rented area, the fireplace lies squarely on the central axis.

A survey of Wright's earlier work shows a consistent application of these same interior themes. In his own house in Oak Park (1889), openings between rooms are stripped of traditional framing details and placed beneath a continuous string course so that the remaining sections of wall tend to read as panels, or screens.⁹ Wright's firm control over the placement of objects within a room can also be shown in this early example of his work, as Allen Brooks has noted with corroboration from John Lloyd Wright.¹⁰ Wright often stated his belief that any object within a space could be disruptive unless its selection and placement were firmly controlled by the architect, and wherever possible within his interiors, objects were massed in ways that added to the total architectural effect without compromising the identity of the objects themselves.¹¹

The Oak Park house also illustrates Wright's early use of perimeter axes. Defined by such focal elements as the fireplace and inglenook, or such generators of movement as openings between major rooms, these axes enhance the sense of informality that Wright sought within residential interiors. No formal, central axis could achieve such an effect.

The use of perimeter axes is more developed in a slightly later example, the George Blossom House (Chicago, Illinois, 1892).¹² It is also one of Wright's few designs — even in these early years — that incorporates traditional

motives. The main axis linking entrance and fireplace passes through the center of the hall, as might be expected for so academic a design. Yet in the central living room this same axis falls to one side of the space, balanced by a parallel axis linking the library and dining room on the opposite end. The recessed fireplace with its inglenook provides a clear terminal for the main axis, yet the placement of the fireplace in the extreme corner of the room also stresses the asymmetrical location of that axis in the room through which it passes. Moreover, the treatment of the built-in seat as an extension of the high base achieves an effect of continuity that encourages movement rather than providing a static terminal. In an adjacent corner the three lower risers of the main stair define a third axis, parallel to the fireplace, but along the opposite side of the room. The shift of this axis to the far wall within the stair can be perceived through the screen above a built-in seat, adding spatial richness. Similar screens that enrich interior axes appear in other works of the period, notably the Ward W. Willits House (Highland Park, Illinois, 1902).¹³ In still later designs of the period, perimeter axes and terminals can be defined by informal groupings of furniture alone, as in the Darwin D. Martin House (Buffalo, New York, 1904).¹⁴ And the round chairs that Wright designed for the Martin House reflect his attitude towards movable objects that cannot be fixed in location.

As is well known, Wright considered furniture as part of the whole and when possible designed it entirely. The furniture was usually architectural in scale and often

7. In a talk at the conference, *An American Architecture: Its Roots, Growth, and Horizons* (Milwaukee, November 28-30, 1977), Thomas A. Heinz demonstrated that the art glass patterns in Wright's early work are sometimes different in their geometry from the predominant forms of the building within which they are placed.

8. Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., introduction to *Frank Lloyd Wright: The Early Work* (New York, 1968; reprint of *Ausgeführte Bauten*, Berlin, 1911), p. xvi.

9. As noted, among others, by Hitchcock (note 3 above), p. 18 and caption to figure 13. Wright often spoke of the treatment of enclosing elements as screens, his third motive:

"To eliminate the room as a box and the house as another by making all walls enclosing screens — the ceilings and floors and enclosing screens to flow into each other as one large enclosure of space, with minor subdivisions only." Frank Lloyd Wright, *Modern Architecture* (1931), as quoted in *Frank Lloyd Wright, Writings and Buildings*, selected by Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., and Ben Raeburn (New York, 1960), p. 45.

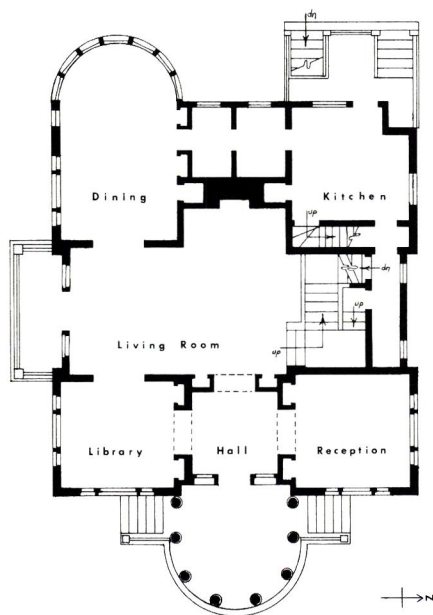
10. H. Allen Brooks, "Chicago Architecture: Its Debt to the Arts and Crafts," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 30, No. 4, December, 1971, pp. 312-17.

11. For a characteristic statement, note 2 above.

12. Partly described in Hitchcock (note 3 above), pp. 19-21.

13. Described in Hitchcock (note 3 above), pp. 42-43.

14. A furniture layout for the Martin House (1904) is published in Hanks (note 1 above), p. 94. A furniture layout for the second Francis W. Little House (Wayzata, Minnesota, 1913ff) appears in Morrison Heckscher and Elizabeth G. Miller, *An Architect and his Client: Frank Lloyd Wright and Francis W. Little*, brochure published by the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, 1973). For a discussion of how Wright's furniture contributes to a definition of interior space by suggesting boundaries without full closure, Donald Kalec, "The Prairie School Furniture," *Prairie School Review*, Vol. 1, No. 4, Fourth Quarter, 1964, pp. 5-21.



Plan of George Blossom House. Drawing courtesy Wayne M. Charney.

built-in.¹⁵ For Wright the difficulty with furniture lay not in the design of built-in buffets or cabinets, nor in massive, formal dining arrangements that were fixed in location as firmly as the cabinets they complemented, but rather in the design of movable chairs whose location could not be controlled. As he wrote:

Human beings must group, sit or recline, confound them, and they must dine — but dining is much easier to manage and always a great artistic opportunity. Arrangements for the informality of sitting in comfort singly or in groups still belonging in disarray to the scheme as a whole: *that* is a matter difficult to accomplish.¹⁶

Perhaps partly to express the contrary nature of these movable items, Wright designed them with obvious variations, as the chairs in Browne's Bookstore. The round chairs designed for the Martin House seem a clearer example, for their relative visual lightness and round shape contrast more obviously with the powerful organizing piers of the total scheme.¹⁷

Unity Temple (Oak Park, Illinois, 1906) is often cited as a major example of Wright's developing treatment of walls as screens. The long, narrow windows help achieve this effect along the exterior boundaries of the building, and within the space Wright's use of wood strips not only lightens and clarifies this sense of screened enclosure, but also intensifies the unity of the space itself.¹⁸ For Wright, the result was a more plastic, more continuous interior. It was, as is now widely recognized and as he himself sensed, revolutionary.¹⁹

Unifying wood strips were particularly useful in transforming pre-existing interior spaces, as Wright demonstrated in designing the installation of his work in the 1907 Chicago Architectural Club exhibit as well as in Browne's Bookstore of the following year. Each drawing and object in the exhibit was positioned according to a total architectural scheme made evident by the patterns of the lines themselves.²⁰ This impulse towards fixity and

connectedness in even the smallest of commissions was a strong theme in Wright's work from the very beginning and probably was the single most important determinant of his interiors. This theme has demonstrable origins in his early training and was often manifested in various grid systems, as several critics have noted.²¹ But ultimately Wright was not bound by their use nor restricted by his desire for a fixity of parts, for it was the sense of organization that governed his efforts rather than any single system itself. Nor did the sense of organization restrict him in later work to rectilinear or even triangular geometries, for his curvilinear designs reflect a similar attitude of flexible control.

As these selected examples suggest, Wright developed basic principles of design that shaped his interiors in the twenty years of practice preceding Browne's Bookstore. Contemporary with Browne's Bookstore and also designed for installation within pre-existing shells are two additional examples of interior design that deserve mention: the Pebbles and Balch Decorating Shop (Oak Park, Illinois, 1907) and the W. Scott Thurber Art Gallery (Fine Arts Building, Chicago, Illinois, 1909; both demolished). Similar in spirit and detail to Browne's, they

15. Among Wright's many statements relating to the design of furniture as part of the whole:

"In Organic Architecture, then, it is quite impossible to consider the building as one thing, its furnishing another and its setting and environment still another. The Spirit in which these buildings are conceived sees all these together at work as one thing The very chairs and tables, cabinets and even musical instruments, where practicable, are of the building itself, never fixtures upon it."

Frank Lloyd Wright, preface to *Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe* (Berlin, 1910), as quoted in *Writings and Buildings* (note 9 above), p. 102.

16. Wright, *An Autobiography* (note 2 above), p. 145.

17. These chairs, with modifications, were later used by Wright in the Herbert F. Johnson, Jr., House (near Racine, Wisconsin, 1937), Hitchcock (note 3 above), caption to figure 103; and also proposed for Fallingwater (Mill Run, 1935-37), Donald Hoffmann, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater; the house and its history* (New York, 1978), p. 69. For additional discussion of the chair, Hanks (note 1 above), p. 95.

18. As noted by Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., in his article, "Frank Lloyd Wright: Plasticity, Continuity, and Ornament," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 37, No. 1, March, 1978, pp. 34-39.

19. Among Wright's many statements discussing this achievement:

"When the interior had thus become wholly plastic, instead of structural, a new element, as I have said, had entered architecture. Strangely enough an element that had not existed in architectural history before. Not alone in the trim, but in numerous ways too tedious to describe in words, this revolutionary sense of the plastic whole, an instinct with me at first, began to work more and more intelligently and have fascinating, unforeseen consequences."

Wright, *Modern Architecture* (1931), as quoted in *Writings and Buildings* (note 9 above), p. 45. For a discussion of the terms plasticity and continuity, Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., "Plasticity, Continuity, and Ornament" (note 10 above).

20. For other exhibits with which Wright was associated in these early years, Hanks (note 1 above), p. 20.

21. The use of various grids and patterns, ties to the kindergarten "toys" of the German educational reformer Friedrich Froebel that Wright had as a child, and connections to other intellectual currents of the time are discussed in Richard C. McCormac, "The Anatomy of Wright's Aesthetic," *Architectural Review*, Vol. 143, February, 1968, pp. 143-46; and John Sergeant, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian Houses; the case for organic architecture* (New York, 1976), Appendix A, pp. 183-87. Both seem to underestimate Wright's mind.

reflect the same principles developed over the preceding two decades. Grant Manson cites the clean surfaces and simple forms of both as particularly appropriate for the items on display and suggests that Wright's 1906 trip to Japan had helped crystallize the designs.²² The woodwork in the art gallery was fumed oak with bronze paint worked into the grain and with inlaid lines of white holly. The central area of the floors was white magnesite cement, divided from a dull yellow border of the same material by inlaid brass strips. The cork walls were bronzed, and a brighter bronzing accented the rough plaster dado. Within the white glass skylights were yellow and black pieces set between bronze comes of various widths.²³

Wright's principles of interior design remained essentially unchanged in later phases of his prolific career, but they were often differently expressed than in his early Chicago work. As that early period was ending his furniture designs were already undergoing transition: woods tended to be waxed rather than stained, and hence lighter in tone; the small-scale decorative strips of his earlier furniture began to give way to stronger framing members, and a clearer expression of horizontality resulted.²⁴

During the first transitional years, in the mid to late teens, Wright continued to use wood strips to outline selected areas of the walls and ceilings and to integrate those areas with door and window openings. A sketch for the Henry J. Allen House (Wichita, Kansas, 1917) seems to illustrate Wright's statement in this regard: "Furniture, pictures and bric-a-brac are unnecessary because the walls can be made to include them or *be* them."²⁵ But more intensively from the 1920s on, the definition of selected areas was made by contrasting textures of the materials themselves, and openings were devised as natural parts of the structural system. Increasingly, fieldstone, brick, and other materials normally associated with exterior use found their place inside as a further expression of integrated design. Writing of Mrs. George Madison Millard's house (Pasadena, California, 1923), in which windows were conceived as part of the structural system of concrete blocks, Wright said: "The sense of interior space coming through, the openings all woven together as integral features of the shell."²⁶

During these same transitional years, brighter colors began to figure more prominently in his work. The predominant browns and autumnal tones of his early interiors were more frequently enhanced by brighter colors, as lavender and mauve in Hollyhock House (for Aline Barnsdall, Los Angeles, California, 1919-21). In later examples, as Fallingwater (Mill Run, Pennsylvania, 1935-37) or the Hanna House (Palo Alto, California, 1937), "Cherokee red" was featured.²⁷ And while he began in these years to design his own art objects — beginning with Midway Gardens in 1914 — he continued to

incorporate other examples in his work, as illustrated by the Oriental art that constitutes a major component of the interiors of Taliesin.²⁸

Wright's major interior installation to follow the first phase of his career came not during the transitional years, but well after: the Edgar J. Kaufmann Office, originally located on the tenth floor of the Kaufmann Store at Fifth Avenue and Smithfield Street in Pittsburgh. Extensive correspondence between Wright and the client documents the importance of the commission in Wright's mind.²⁹ Work on the office proceeded more or less concurrently with Fallingwater, the Kaufmanns' weekend retreat. Kaufmann had discussed the office commission with Wright as early as December, 1934, and had requested sketches in May, 1935; preliminary sketches were sent from Taliesin in October, and the contract for the execution of the office was signed in June, 1936. Construction was slowed by delays in receiving materials, and work was not completed until late in 1937.³⁰

22. Manson (note 5 above), pp. 165-68.

23. As described in "Art Gallery Designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, Architect," *The International Studio*, Vol. 39, February, 1910, pp. xcv-xcvi.

24. These changes have been noted in Morrison Heckscher, "Frank Lloyd Wright's Furniture for Francis W. Little," *Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 117, No. 873, December, 1975, pp. 866, 869-72.

25. Wright, *An Autobiography* (note 2 above), p. 491.

26. Wright, *An Autobiography* (note 2 above), p. 235.

27. The colors for Hollyhock House are described in Kathryn Smith, "Frank Lloyd Wright, Hollyhock House, and Olive Hill, 1914-1924," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 38, March, 1979, pp. 15-33. The use of "Cherokee red" is discussed in Hoffmann, *Fallingwater* (note 17 above), pp. 58-59. Bright colors had not been excluded from Wright's earlier work; a description of his B. Harley Bradley House (Kankakee, Illinois, 1900) states that the color of the walls, floor coverings and hangings of the main floor was deep red, combined with yellow overhead; picture caption, *The Chicago Architectural Annual*, published by the Chicago Architectural Club; a selection of works exhibited at the Art Institute in March, 1902.

28. Wright's involvement with fine arts, and the stages through which he passed — his connections to typical Arts and Crafts attitudes before 1900, his experiments with an integration of the arts around 1900, the design of his own decorative objects beginning in 1914, and the consistency of his attitudes towards the arts by the 1930s — are set forth in Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., "The Fine Arts and Frank Lloyd Wright," *Four Great Makers of Modern Architecture*, proceedings of the symposium held at the School of Architecture, Columbia University, 1961 (New York, 1963), pp. 27-37. The connection between Wright and the Arts and Crafts movement is discussed in H. Allen Brooks, "Chicago Architecture: Its Debt to the Arts and Crafts," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 30, December, 1971, pp. 312-317; and Alan Crawford, "Ten Letters from Frank Lloyd Wright to Charles Robert Ashbee," *Architectural History* (Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain), Vol. 13, 1970, pp. 64-76. For a discussion of the Oriental art at Taliesin, Hitchcock (note 3 above), especially pp. 64, 79, and caption to figure 273.

29. The records of Wright's commissions from Edgar J. Kaufmann have been carefully preserved by the Kaufmann family and are now maintained at the Avery Architectural Library, Columbia University in the City of New York. I am grateful to Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., for permission to inspect the Kaufmann archive and to Adolf K. Placzek, Avery Librarian, and Janet Parks, Avery Archivist, for their welcome assistance.

30. The dates are confirmed by documents in the Kaufmann archive (note 29 above). For a published summary of the sequence of events, Hoffmann, *Fallingwater* (note 21 above), pp. 12, 14, 15, 21, 26, 33, 49, 73, 91. The office was published in the special issue on Frank Lloyd Wright, *Architectural Forum*, Vol. 68, January, 1938, pp. 48-49.

The office was a complete architectural insertion within an existing building and comprised not only the furniture, lighting fixtures, and other interior fittings, but also the walls, floor, and ceiling. The predominant material was cypress plywood, waxed to retain a light tone. The approximate dimensions of the office are 23 by 26.5 feet, with a ceiling height of eight feet. Two carpets and covers for the four chairs, five ottomans, and one seat were woven according to Wright's designs by Loja (Mrs. Eliel) Saarinen and shipped from Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, on January 3, 1938. Meetings and ample correspondence between Wright and Mrs. Saarinen underline Wright's concern with even the smallest of details.³¹

The high and low cabinets along two walls interlock with partial and full-height banks of fixed louvers along adjacent walls, creating a sense of screened enclosure typical of Wright's interior design. The top lines of the cabinets as well as the horizontal and vertical lines of the louvered walls contribute to the fixity of parts by establishing lines along which other elements are placed. The louvers also mask the pre-existing windows of the building, achieving an image of complete integration. The desk itself, with its low cabinets and extendable surfaces, is attached at its narrow end to the back wall of a wide alcove. A partition linking one of the building's columns to the outer wall of the office forms this alcove and provides space for a small vestibule on the opposite side. The position of the desk within its recessed enclosure is analogous to the placement of the fireplace in many of Wright's early houses, and like those fireplaces it serves as an anchoring device within the screened enclosure.

Wright had proposed a similar linking of table and cabinets by 1915 for one of the American System Ready-Cut standardized houses. Beginning in the 1930s, residential dining tables often assumed a similar position, no longer freestanding but extending out from some element of the room and often defining a secondary axis at the perimeter of that room. In the Kaufmann Office, the desk defines an axis perpendicular to the main route of entrance; both axes respect the central space by being placed to one side, thus reaffirming Wright's principles of interior design as surely as the unity and fixity of the other elements.

The architecturally sculptured walls within the alcove provide extraordinary decorative emphasis and deserve special mention. Like their predecessor, the fireplace relief in Hollyhock House, the abstract geometric forms do not reflect the dominant forms of the architectural setting. Here the shapes are largely hexagonal, paralleling Wright's increased use of angular geometries in this period. Wright believed that buildings planned with such angles provided a more natural setting for human movement than did strictly rectilinear geometry; his early

architectural studies incorporating hexagonal planning, such as the 1922 project for the Tahoe Summer Colony (Lake Tahoe, California), culminated in the Hanna House.³²

In the Kaufmann Office, the angular geometry of the sculptured wall responds not to the plan shapes, but instead to the angular details of the movable chairs and ottomans. Similar to the tie between the movable chairs and window patterns in Browne's Bookstore, a special relationship based on a geometric variation is established. The movable elements thus receive special expression, enhanced by the forms that lighten the mass of the walls and make them appear more plastic and more continuous. Going beyond the Hollyhock relief, here there is no articulated frame but instead a weaving of perimeter lines into the adjoining elements. The back return of the arms of the Kaufmann office chair, like the return of the ottomans in the Samuel Freeman House (Los Angeles, California, 1924) or the ceiling molding strips in the Frederick C. Robie House (Chicago, Illinois, 1909), also stress continuity.

In 1956, following Edgar J. Kaufmann's death in 1955, the office was reinstalled on the fifteenth floor of the First National Bank Building in Pittsburgh where it served as the office for the Edgar J. Kaufmann Charitable Foundation and Charitable Trust. It has since been dismantled again; in 1974, Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., sent it to the Victoria and Albert Museum (London) where it was exhibited from October 19 to November 15.³³

The Hoffman Auto Showroom in New York City, though altered, also survives.³⁴ Designed in 1954 for installation on the ground floor of a Park Avenue office building, it reflects Wright's growing fascination in later years with curvilinear geometrics. It also illustrates his extraordinary ability to develop the full architectural potentialities of a given form, even under such restricted conditions as this conventional shell imposed.

The design can be summarized in simple terms: a circular turntable near the windowed corner of the space is enclosed by a spiral ramp; mirrors and bright, colorful finishes enhance the sense of movement. Mirrors also reinforce the inherent unity of the spiral form: wrapped around the columns within the curve of the ramp and placed along selected areas of the walls, they tend to dissolve the ordinary appearance of the building's structure and emphasize the ramp itself, creating the effect of a powerful, continuous form within a screened enclosure. Ceiling and floor finishes fix the curved form within its enclosure: the slightly raised circular turntable had a polished red surface in contrast to the dark floor; the disc indented within the ceiling responds to this shape, and its gold finish contrasted with the aluminum finish of

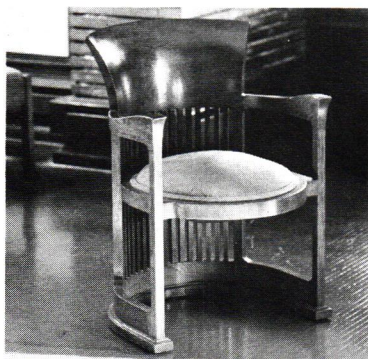
the surrounding surface. The corner placement of the spiral ramp generates a strong sense of movement at the perimeter, taking the place of a conventional axis. A minor axis is established between the door, placed to one side of the space, and the curved balcony that terminates the spiral. As designed, all elements were given a fixed position, and the place of movable elements was, suitably, assumed by the cars themselves. Their movement was actual on the turntable and implied on the ramp. It was indeed a showroom dedicated to its goods.

Wright had, of course, explored curvilinear geometries many times before. As early as 1895, in the Wolf Lake Amusement Park project, or even earlier, in the 1893 Municipal Boathouse in Madison, circular forms had provided organizational means. But other early uses of circular forms tended to be decorative in nature, as the circular shapes in the Avery Coonley Playhouse windows (Riverside, Illinois, 1912) or the Midway Gardens murals (Chicago, Illinois, 1914). The 1925 project for the Gordon Strong Planetarium (Sugar Loaf Mountain, Maryland) marked a turning point: the massive internal spiral gives form to the building itself and provides an elaborate path for automobiles. This design signals Wright's developing pursuit of architectural manifestations of continuity and of the liberating movement he associated with automobile travel.³⁵ In succeeding years Wright often employed circular forms in his designs, and in several he developed spiral forms. Most famous, of course, is New York's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (1943-59); others include the V.C. Morris Shop (San Francisco, California, 1948) and the David Wright House (Phoenix, Arizona, 1950-52). In each, Wright sensed the need for vertical release of interior space to give proper expression to the spiral: the central space is left uncovered in the

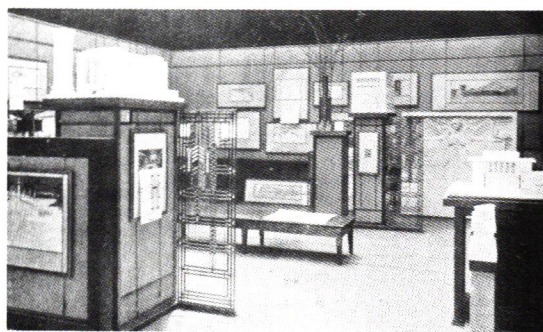
planetarium and house, and expressed as a skylight in the museum and shop. In the showroom, the highly reflective gold surface of the ceiling disc within the spiral implies a sense of openness and light. And in the showroom Wright fulfilled his initial vision of the spiral: as a form honoring the automobile.

As Browne's Bookstore, the Kaufmann Office, and the Hoffman Showroom suggest, Wright approached interior design as architecture even when there was no building to design. His work of this sort paralleled his other and far more numerous commissions, and he was guided by a related and consistently applied set of principles. His achievement was partly dependent on the design of decorative objects, but he saw these objects as components of a total vision. ■

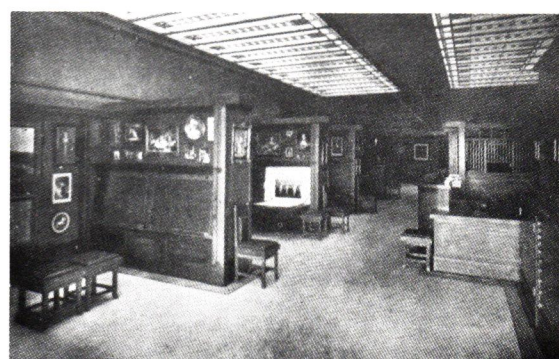
31. For instance, a lengthy debate concerning the reduction of one carpet by five and five-eighths inches. The correspondence, with confirming dates, is contained in the Kaufmann archive at Avery Library (note 29 above).
32. Wright had often incorporated triangular geometries within his early work, as seen in the A.C. McAfee project, near Chicago, 1894. But before the early 1920s these geometries were primarily, if not exclusively, octagonal in nature. By the early 1930s, Wright's triangular geometries were based almost exclusively on hexagonal derivations. For a discussion of this aspect of Wright's work, Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., "Centrality and Symmetry in Wright's Architecture," *Architect's Yearbook*, Vol. 9, 1960, pp. 120-31. Also, Kaufmann, "Plasticity, Continuity, and Ornament" (note 18 above).
33. For an account of its recent movements, Hoffmann, *Fallingwater* (note 17 above), p. 91, note 6. Also: "Unique Office of Merchant Prince; Designed for Edgar J. Kaufmann by Frank Lloyd Wright," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Daily Magazine, March 19, 1957; "Strong Room," *Architects' Journal*, Vol. 160, September 18, 1974, p. 655; and Toni del Renzio, "Frank Lloyd Wright and the Pop Traditions," *Art and Artists*, Vol. 9, January, 1975, pp. 3, 28-31.
34. It is located at 430 Park Avenue, at 56th Street. Most of the finishes have been neutralized. It is now used as a showroom by Mercedes-Benz.
35. For a discussion of Wright's circular geometries and their meaning to him, particularly in terms of continuity and movement, Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., "Centrality and Symmetry" (note 32 above), and "Plasticity, Continuity, and Ornament" (note 18 above).



Barrel chair from the Darwin D. Martin House. Photo courtesy Thomas A. Heinz.

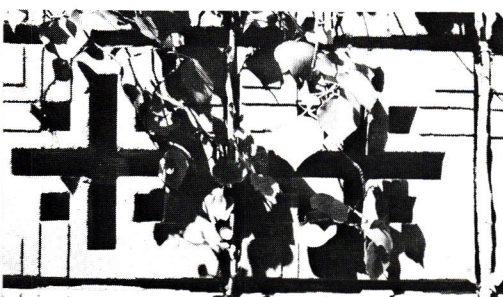


1907 Chicago Architectural Club Exhibit, Art Institute, Chicago. Ausgeführte Bauten, 1911.

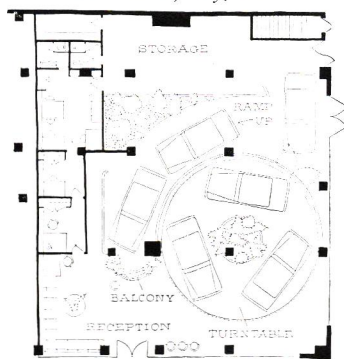


Interior of Thurber Art Gallery, Ausgeführte Bauten, 1911.

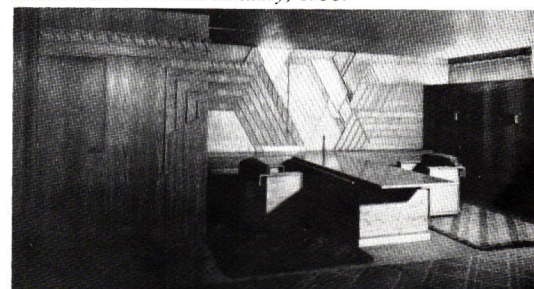
Detail, window blocks, Mrs. George Millard House. Photo courtesy Thomas A. Heinz.



Max Hoffman Jaguar Auto Showroom. Architectural Forum, July, 1955.



Plywood mural in Edgar Kaufmann Office. Architectural Forum, January, 1938.



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ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

Patrick J. Meehan is preparing a book tentatively titled *A Research Guide to Frank Lloyd Wright Archival Materials*. He is seeking information concerning the location and extent of Wright-related archival materials, including original Frank Lloyd Wright manuscripts, letters, drawings, furniture, and other items. Any information should be sent to: Patrick J. Meehan, 3629 South 94th Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53228. ■

"SAGUAROS"

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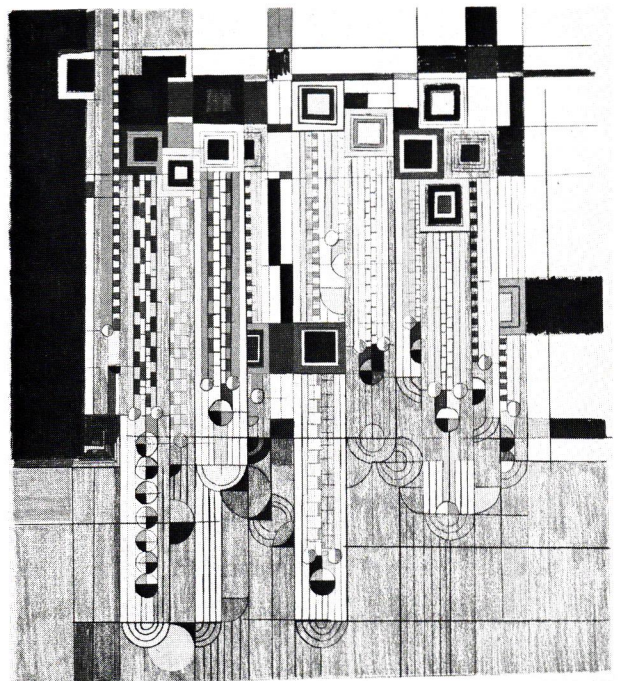
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DARWIN D. MARTIN HOUSE, BUFFALO, STATUS TO CHANGE

by Jack Quinan, Buffalo, and Edgar Tafel, New York City

The Darwin D. Martin House (1904), which has been owned by the State University of New York since 1967, may be sold. Used for several years as a residence for the president of the University, for the past nine years the building has housed the University Archives and the University Alumni Association (see *The Frank Lloyd Wright Newsletter*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 8-9) and has been open for tours and visitors (see *The Frank Lloyd Wright Newsletter*, Vol. 1, No. 3, p.4). Now, citing high maintenance and restoration costs, the University has taken the first step toward the sale of the building.

In a recent statement, President Robert L. Ketter said: "We have tried to obtain funds to have the Frank Lloyd Wright house, located at 125 Jewett Parkway, Buffalo, New York, renovated for the past nine years. However, the state budget has refused to provide these funds. Renovation and preservation are more important to us than who owns the house. The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York recently passed a resolution which allows the Chancellor of the State University of New York to transfer the house to the New York State Office of General Services, the only group authorized to sell state property. We have been informed that the house will not be transferred unless adequate assurances are given that it will be put in sound condition and maintained as an historical trust."

It is unlikely that the house will be sold to a private owner. One possibility is that the New York State Park and Recreation Department would assume control of the building. This department, which already operates five or six historic properties, is equipped to maintain and restore the building, thus keeping this magnificent prairie home open to the public for study and enjoyment. It is hoped that such a solution may be found. ■

EXHIBITION

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT and DARWIN D. MARTIN

An exhibition of artifacts designed by Frank Lloyd Wright for the Darwin D. Martin House (Buffalo, 1904) and the Larkin Building (Buffalo, 1904) will open in the Kenan Center, Lockport, New York, on Saturday, December 8, 1979. Supplemented by plans and photographs, this will be the first comprehensive showing of Wright's decorative design created for the Buffalo buildings. Guest-curated by Charlotta Kotik, Associate Curator at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, assisted by Terry Higginson, Artist in Residence at the Kenan Center, this exhibition is supported by a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts. The exhibition will be on view through January 6, 1980. ■

NEW CORRESPONDENT

JACK QUINAN, BUFFALO, NEW YORK

We welcome Jack Quinan to the Board of Correspondents of the Frank Lloyd Wright Association. Mr. Quinan did his undergraduate work at Dartmouth College and received his masters and doctoral degrees in Art History from Brown University, where he studied under Robert Jordy. Previously at the University of Rhode Island, Mr. Quinan is currently Assistant Professor of Art at the State University of New York at Buffalo, where he teaches architectural history, including a course on Frank Lloyd Wright. Presently at work studying the Larkin Building (Buffalo, 1904), he will present a paper on the results of his research at the Society of Architectural Historians Annual Meeting in Madison, Wisconsin, in April 1980.

As with other Correspondents, Mr. Quinan will be a local representative for the *Newsletter*, contributing articles and information and acting as a contact for Association members in the Buffalo area. ■

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Thomas A. Heinz, Editor

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Masthead design by Al Drap, Fort Smith, Arkansas.

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT REMODELING DISCOVERED

by Thomas A. Heinz

Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, Taliesin, telephoned me recently, saying that he had found some drawings of a house in Oak Park located at 338 North Kenilworth Avenue. The drawings have no date but appear to be from the 1920s. Photographs of the house as it exists now were sent to Mr. Pfeiffer, who confirmed that it is, in fact, the same house as appears in the drawings.

The extent of the execution of the plans cannot be determined until the drawings can be closely compared to the building as it exists today. However, it is clear that the front porch of the house is not in keeping with the design of the rest of the building. In fact, the porch is quite Wrightian and shows many similarities to the George Smith House (Oak Park, Illinois, 1898). ■

