



FRANK LOYD WRIGHT

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AN INTERVIEW WITH LORRAINE ROBIE O'CONNOR

by Irma Strauss

In the spring of 1976, Robie House welcomed back the youngest and sole surviving member of the family for which the famed residence was built. In helping David Hanks with research for the exhibition and catalogue, *The Decorative Designs of Frank Lloyd Wright*, I located Mrs. Lorraine Robie O'Connor and arranged for her to explore the entire house for the first time since her family's brief two-year residence there which ended in 1912. Mrs. O'Connor explained that she had returned to visit the house as a University of Chicago graduate student in 1931. It was then occupied by the Chicago Theological Seminary, and she was permitted access only to the living and dining room area on the raised first floor because the original bedrooms, billiard room, and children's playroom then served as dormitory quarters for the seminarians.

Mrs. O'Connor was an infant when she moved into the house late in 1909 or early in 1910 with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Frederick C. Robie, and her brother, Frederick Jr., then three years old. Her parents had met at a dance when her mother, Lora Hieronymus, was a student at the University of Chicago. By that time her father had left his studies at the Purdue University School of Engineering to help in his father's growing manufacturing business in Chicago, the Excelsior Supply Company. The company made auto, motorcycle, bicycle, and sewing machine parts.¹ After their marriage in 1902, the Robies lived in an apartment in the Colonial Court building which still stands at 5310 South Cornell Avenue. Planning a large family, the couple soon began to think about building a house in the university community that they both loved. When Robie, who was mechanically inventive, tried to discuss his unusual ideas with architects and builders, each directed him to Frank Lloyd Wright as the one capable of realizing his highly imaginative building schemes. Following this advice, in 1906 Robie, aged 27, commissioned Wright, aged 39, to design, construct, and furnish an urban house.

Irma Strauss is an historian of architectural furniture and decorative arts.



This photo of Mrs. O'Connor as a baby in the arms of her mother was taken before the family moved into its new house. Note that Mrs. Robie is seated in a Stickley chair in their apartment. Photo courtesy Lorraine Robie O'Connor.

In October, 1958, when Robie House was threatened with demolition by the Chicago Theological Seminary, *Architectural Forum* published part of an interview between Robie and his son which described the building process and Robie's contributions to the design and construction of the house.² Mrs. O'Connor was not able to amplify this discussion because she was an infant when the house was planned. However, she is able to recollect many family stories. She remembers hearing that the handsome wrought iron gates (now destroyed) for the eight foot high brick walls that lent privacy to the service yard at the southeast side of the house had been specified by her father to foil possible attempts to kidnap her brother, who would play in that area.³ Her father had also recommended to Wright that the playroom be level with the outdoor play area so that Mrs. Robie would not have to come downstairs to help the children in and out with their tricycles. Wright's buildings are usually entered ceremonially, in Japanese fashion, by means of a series of spatial experiences; this is particularly true of the Robie House with its ground floor entrance and complex route up to the monumental living/dining space. Mrs. O'Connor insists, however, that visitors always used the porch door entrance leading into the living room because it was located on the level where the servants, who answered the door, were usually occupied. She also believes that her parents ate their meals alone at a small triangular table, designed by Wright but now lost, in the eastern projecting point of the dining room—an arrangement also suggested by her father so that he could eat his breakfast in the early morning sun. Mrs. O'Connor states that while she and her brother were very young they ate with their nursemaid; she also remembers her mother's relating that the splendid dining room ensemble, now on permanent display in the Alfred and David Smart Gallery



Fred Robie, Jr., "walks the plank" at the construction site. Photo courtesy Lorraine Robie O'Connor.

at the university, was used only for formal dining when entertaining guests and was not used as a gathering place for the family.

According to Mrs. O'Connor, her family left the house and all its furnishings (except one piece) in 1912 when her parents separated and her father's business failed. In 1977, Mrs. O'Connor gave that one piece of furniture—her late brother's junior-sized bed which had been designed by Wright—to the Smart Gallery where it joined the collection of what remains of the Robie House furniture. ■

¹The *Chicago Lakeside Directories* reveal that in 1905, 1906, and 1907, Frederick Robie was an assistant manager of the Excelsior Supply Company, 233-37 Randolph Street, variously described through 1911 as a "bicycle and sewing machine" and "auto and bicycle" and "motorcycle supply company." In 1908 a second company, Factory Sales Company, was listed under "automobile supplies" with Frederick as secretary and his father George as president. In 1909, the Excelsior Supply Company was listed as an "auto and bicycle" supply business with George as president, but by 1910 George Robie had died and Fred C. was listed as president and general manager of the company, then located at 400 Randolph Street, "at the Randolph St. bridge." In 1911, the company was located at 22nd and Union Streets and was described in the white pages as "motorcycles," while in the business pages the Excelsior Supply Company was listed under "auto supplies." By 1912, Fred Robie was no longer listed anywhere in the residential or business pages of the directory, while the Excelsior Motor and Manufacturing Company showed Ignaz Schwinn as president and Fred Whitfield as secretary. This bears out current information that the present Schwinn Bicycle Company bought out Excelsior Supply. Mrs. O'Connor believes that her father's major interest had been the construction of electrical automobiles and that by 1906 he had already put together a prototype automobile.

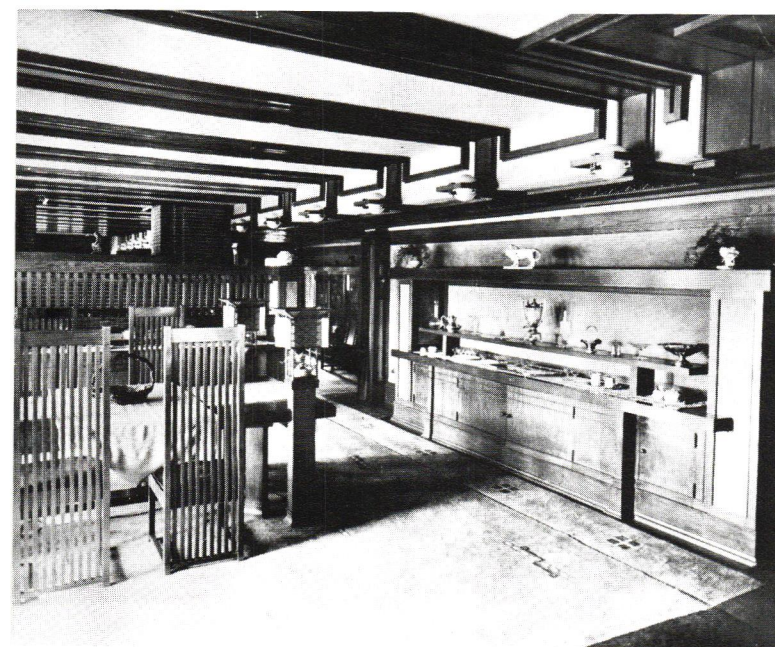
²Fred C. Robie and Fred C. Robie, Sr., "Mr. Robie Knew What He Wanted," *Architectural Forum*, October 1958, pp. 126-7, 206, 210.

³This is not as delusional as it seems. A perusal of newspapers of the turn of the century indicates that child-snatching may have been more prevalent than it is today. So-called "gypsies" were often accused of this crime; while children taken by them were sometimes found and re-united with their real parents after many years, often they were never located.

⁴While many pieces of the Robie House furniture are saved, all the custom made rugs, glass lamps, and embroidered accessories are apparently lost. Two living room chairs are presently on loan by the Smart Gallery to the Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio Foundation in Oak Park, Illinois.



Robie House as it appeared shortly after completion. Photo courtesy Lorraine Robie O'Connor.



These five interiors of the Robie House were taken in 1916 when the second owners, Mr. and Mrs. Marshall D. Wilbur, lived in it. Comparing these with photos published in the 1911 Wasmuth edition and Leonard K. Eaton's Two Chicago Architects and Their Clients confirms Mrs. O'Connor's statement that her family left all the furnishings with the house; even the table linens appear to be the same. An art glass table lamp, however, a prominent feature in earlier photos, is not evident here. Also significant is the fact that these are the earliest photos in which the sofa appears. According to Irma Strauss, there is a perspective

drawing of the davenport in the Prairie Archives collection at the Milwaukee Art Center (index #PA-1977-1.11), ca. 1906. Pencil on the drawing are the words "Hold for future," which may explain why early photos do not show the piece; it is also possible that it was originally placed in the billiard room, of which no early photos have been located. Note that all the furniture pieces are related by the flaring of the legs, front and back. To see all the furniture currently owned by the University of Chicago installed back in its original setting would be a unique opportunity. All photos courtesy Jeannette Wilbur Scofield.



CATHERINE TOBIN WRIGHT'S SCRAPBOOK

by Walter Schmidt

During the 1950s I was an avid searcher of used book stores for material on Frank Lloyd Wright. Such searches are often unrewarding. Those dusty shelves and narrow aisles on hot summer days coupled with comments from the clerks that the "Wright stuff doesn't stay around long" depress one after awhile. However, occasionally something significant turns up.

On such a day, I found Catherine Tobin Wright's scrapbook. The shop owner had recently purchased a group of materials which included the album and had not had time to evaluate them. He was clearly not impressed by the book's appearance. Nor could anyone be: it was falling apart, pages were loose and coming out, and photos of children were piled between the pages. The owner did point out that he had identified it by some Frank Lloyd Wright stationery in it. He thought that if there were nothing else of value that I could always use the stationery for trading. It is from the Schiller Building and is watermarked 1896. In a simple, traditional script with no symbol used, it is almost identical to the Adler & Sullivan stationery illustrated in *The Prairie School Tradition*.¹

The stationery convinced me that the album was authentic and belonged to the Wrights. Looking through it quickly, I saw a photo of Wright and a building or two, but mostly it contained dozens of photos of children. I believe the owner was uninterested in it, for he offered to sell it to me for less than fifty dollars.

Leaving the shop, I was not really sure if I had found a bargain or wasted money on this musty little book. Would the postcards and trivia turn out to be worthwhile? On closer inspection I found that the album contained two photos of Frank Lloyd Wright with his family, a hand-written poem, and some postcards from well known Wright associates. Since it is difficult to identify such personal materials, I eventually contacted Wright's son, John Lloyd Wright. He remembered the album well and found it "a mystery to have appeared in an old book store."² He identified much of the material, and I sent him the duplicate family photos, which I believe eventually became part of the collection at the Avery Library.

The most exciting items in the album are two black ink drawings of flowers. They are dated January, 1897, and signed F. L. Wright on the page in which they are pasted. John Lloyd Wright states that the handwriting is his mother's, but it very much resembles Wright's early hand.

Walter Schmidt, who teaches in the San Francisco area, has spent the last twenty-five years accumulating one of the largest archives of Frank Lloyd Wright material held by an individual in the United States.

These delicate, precise drawings bring to mind the Frank Lloyd Wright photographs of plants which are bound in the front of the 1896-7 *The House Beautiful* by William C. Gannett. They certainly exhibit more grace than Wright's foliage drawings done for Silsbee projects ten years previously.³ However, these 1897 drawings are still naturalistic and not in the abstract mode of his more mature style.

Wright was an amateur photographer. In the album there are two very similar photographs that possibly were taken by him. He appears in them wearing his artist's smock, sitting on the terrace wall, with his family lined up for inspection. The photos are in a wide angle format, 2" × 6¾". John Lloyd Wright recalls another photo taken about the time with the group on the front steps. He searched for it at the time of publication of his book⁴ but was unable to locate it. In all of these photos, one sees the architect/artist taking a break from the studio, and the family is right at hand. One tries to imagine working in a studio/office with wife, six children, and in-laws so close. It must have worked for Wright, however, for it was his method of operation throughout his career.

Another item in the scrapbook is an undated Christmas card from Isabel Roberts, inscribed, "Dear Friend, your courage and fortitude under life's heaviest sorrows have helped me many times these past months." C. R. Ashbee and his wife Mary corresponded with the Wrights from London. Perhaps as early as August, 1909, they had an inkling of Wright's desire to leave his marriage. Mary wrote on August 14, 1909, "Has Mr. Wright gone to Europe? Will he let us know his address? We are both well and I hope you are—." There is another card from Mary Ashbee dated August 27, 1911, "Do let us hear how you are."

So the family that had been the core of Catherine's existence was broken. The two older sons, both architects, were working independently or with their father. The long-time studio members were dispersing. The daily lunches which must have been a large part of Catherine's daily routine were over. When Wright returned from Europe, the home and studio complex was turned into two residences to generate income for Catherine. It must have been difficult for her to understand and impossible to accept; for over a decade she refused her husband's requests for a divorce.

Among the refuse from this marriage is this little scrapbook which somehow ended up in an old bookshop. It is a mother's album with few architectural photos; only the Oak Park home and studio and Hillside have been

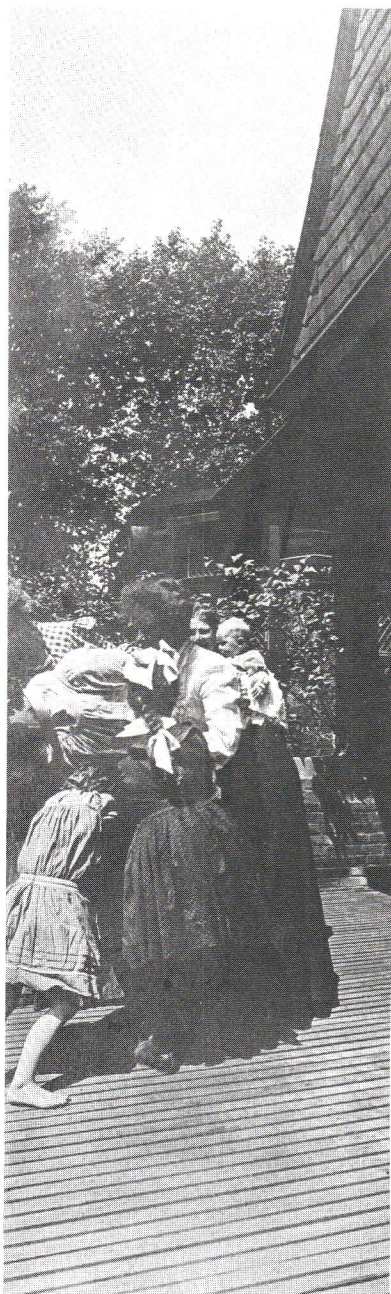
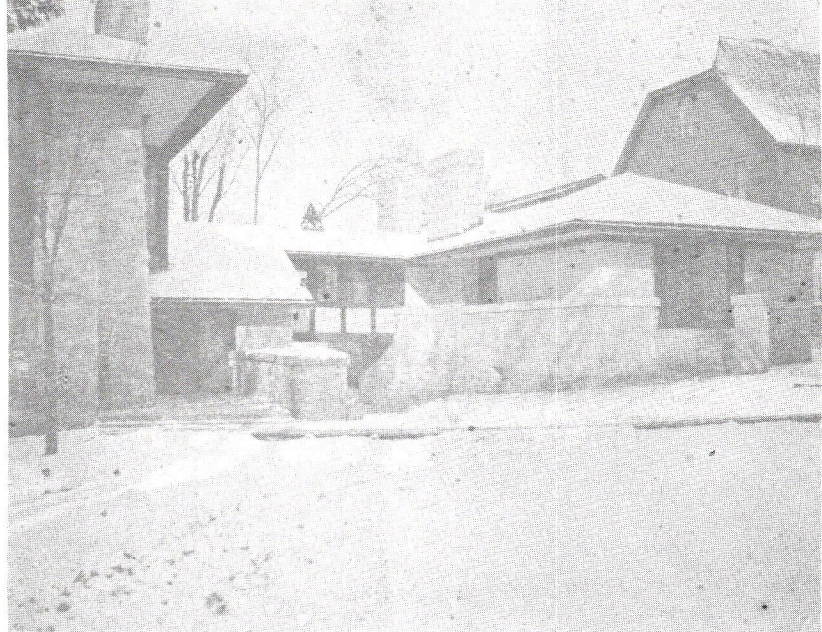
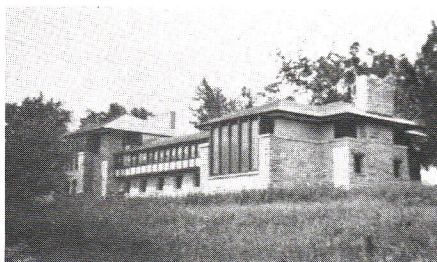
¹ Brian A. Spencer, ed., *The Prairie School Tradition* (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1979), p. 29.

² Letter to the author, January 14, 1965.

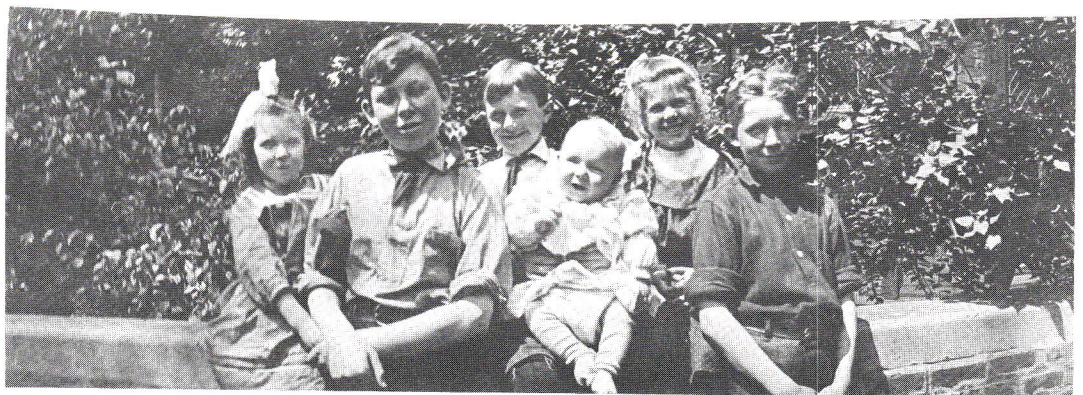
³ See Grant C. Manson, *Frank Lloyd Wright to 1910: The First Golden Age* (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1958), pp. 16, 19.

⁴ John Lloyd Wright, *My Father Who Is On Earth* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1946).

identified as Wright designs. Significantly perhaps, there are no photos of Mr. and Mrs. Wright alone. Reading and comparing items from the album, one receives a glimpse of the family's life—parties, lunches, work, and play. Ultimately, too, one sees its dissolution and senses the heartbreak. There are a few postcards and valentines. That is all that is left. ■



(Clockwise from upper left) **1.** Hillside School, a reversed print. **2.** North side of Hillside School soon after its completion in 1902. The original is a blueprint positive. **3.** Boys' dormitory at Hillside School, looking south, with the new building barely visible at the extreme left. This structure was demolished before the drafting room was built. **4.** Group photo of the children taken on the terrace of the Oak Park home in June, 1904. Left to right: Frances, Lloyd, David, Robert Llewellyn, Catherine and John. **5.** Another family photo including Catherine and her mother. **6.** Family antics on the terrace. All photos courtesy Walter Schmidt.





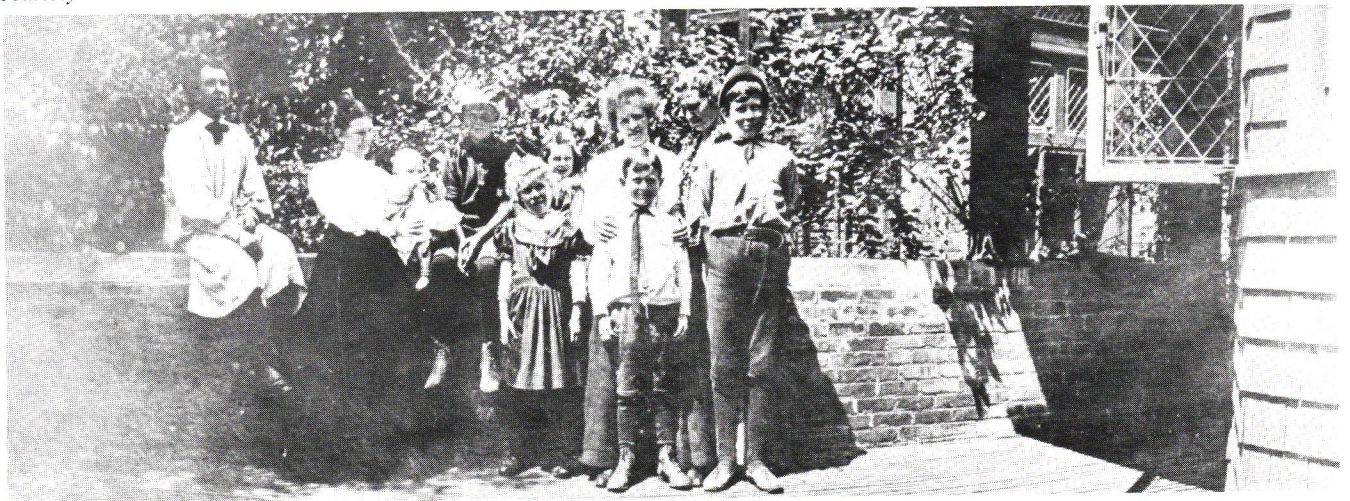
Unidentified photo from the album.



(Above and left) Flower drawings by Frank Lloyd Wright dated January, 1897.



Frank Lloyd Wright, in his artist's smock, joined his family for this photo, taken on the same day in June, 1904. Wright probably took this photo himself with his circuit camera. The lens of this camera swept from side to side, causing the floor boards and walls to appear warped. All photos courtesy Walter Schmidt.



POSTCARDS FROM TALIESIN

by Edgar Tafel

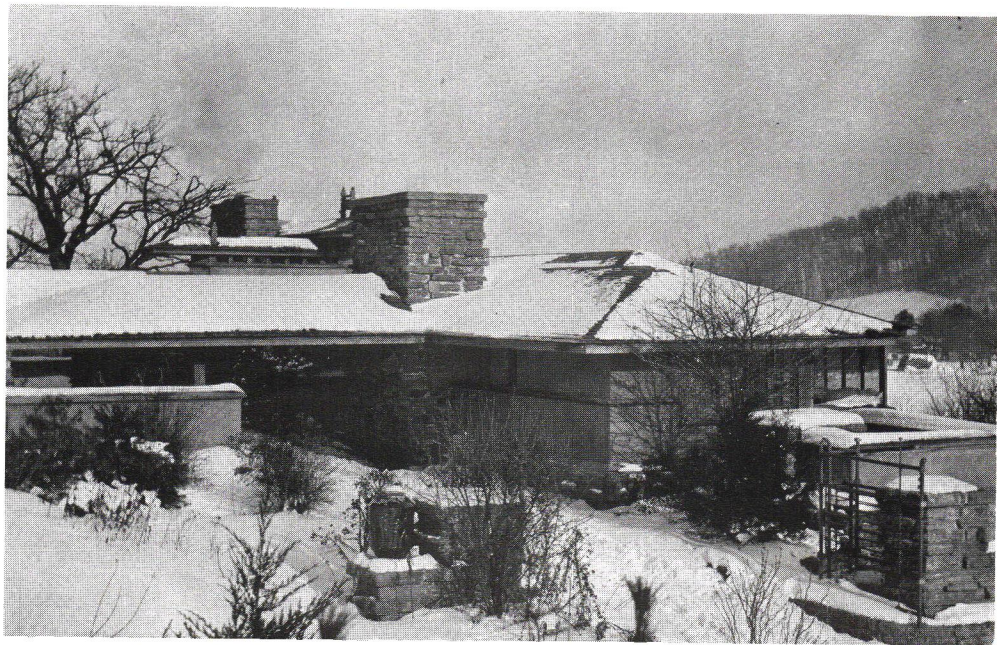
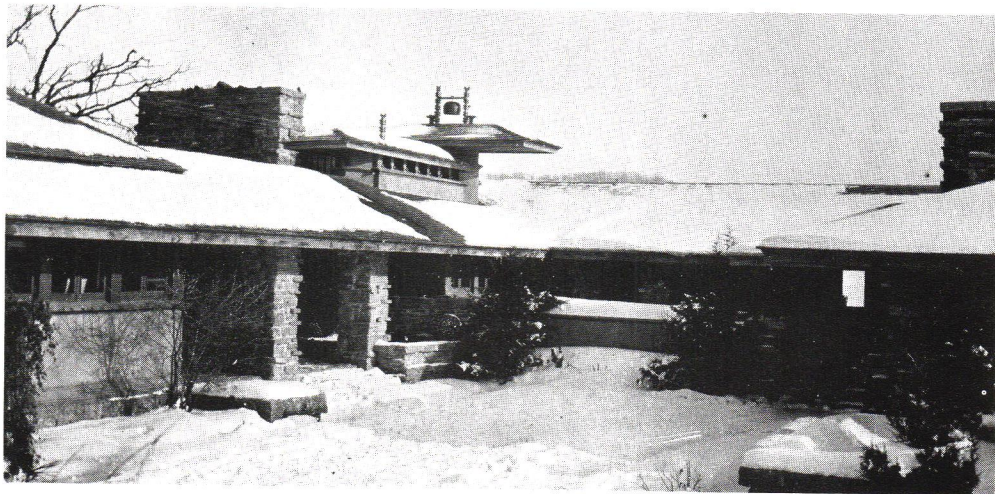
Maginel Wright Barney, "Little Sis" as Mr. Wright called her, lived next door to me in New York City from about 1950 until just before her death in 1966. Mr. Wright often visited her there, and she brought him "next door" once to visit and to see my house. Soon after I moved here, she gave me an assortment of postcards of Taliesin and environs which were possibly taken by a roving photographer. They are, apparently, Taliesin II and were taken in the dead of winter in 1917 or 1918.

1. North side of help's quarters. The stone wall at the right was later removed and Mr. Wright's "little dining room" placed there.

2. This photo, showing the help's kitchen area on the top of the hill, was printed backwards. Apparently the dovecote was on both sides of the upper room; the stone walls were the exterior of the pantry.

3. The arrival court, with porte-cochere at right and studio at left.

4. Note the entrance gate which was later removed.

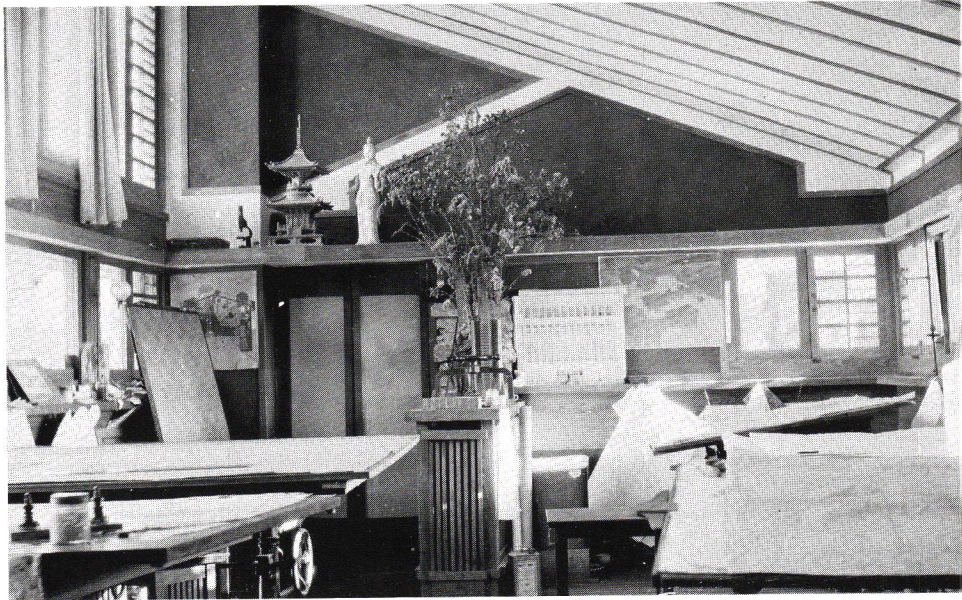


Edgar Tafel, now a practicing architect in New York, was a member of the Taliesin Fellowship from 1932 to 1941. He is the author of Apprentice to Genius.

5. In the studio the view towards the fireplace has remained unchanged. At one time, Mr. Wright had an oil painting of his mother over the fireplace.

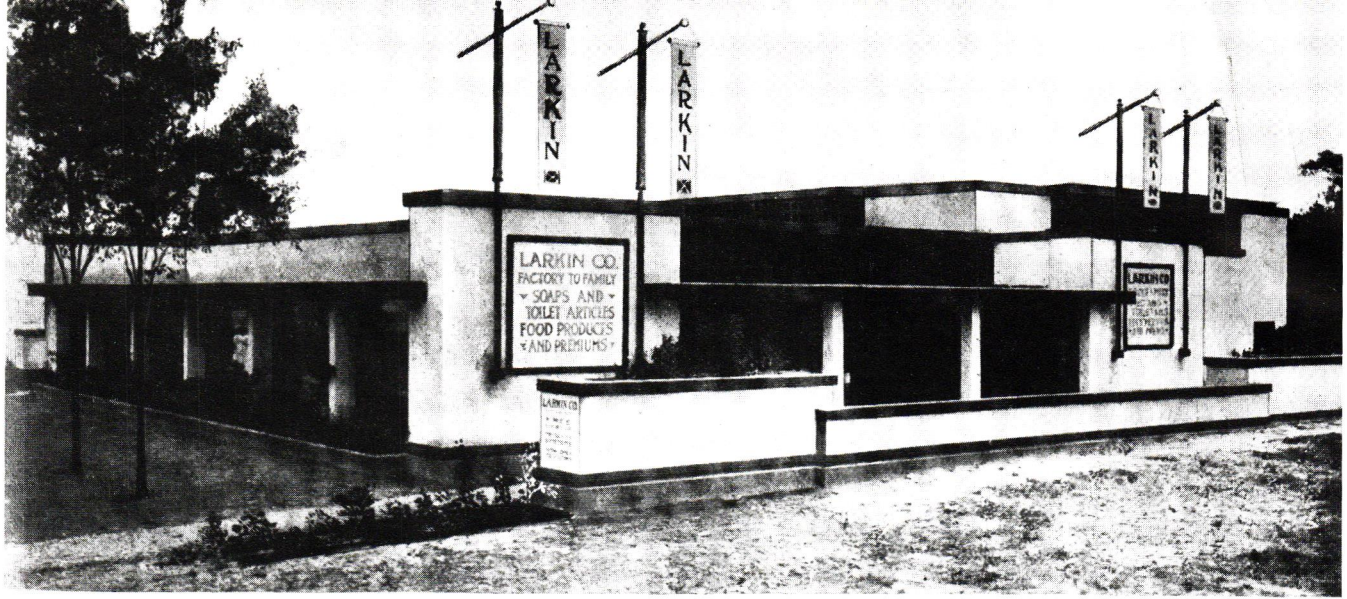


6. Studio after the first alteration; the diagonal band above the door shows the original roof line. Later the room was enlarged by moving the left wall further north. Note mural drawing from Midway Gardens on left wall, radiator grille in center of photo, and gas lighting.



7. Caretaker on horseback.



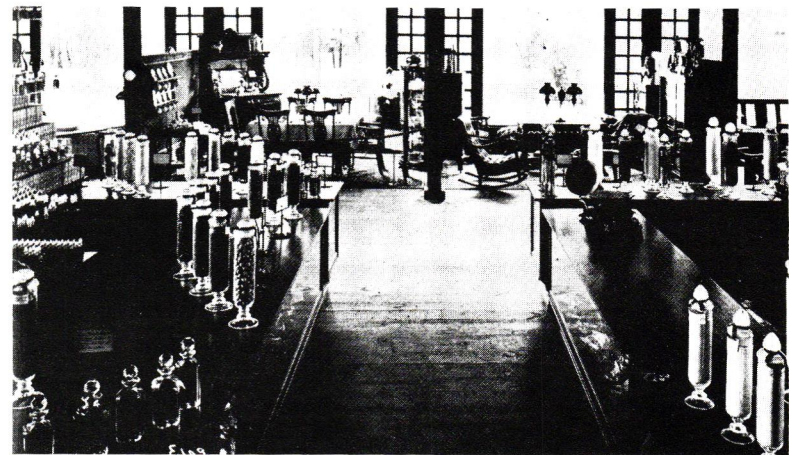


Exterior (above) and interior (below) of Larkin Company exhibition pavilion, 1907. Source: Official Bluebook of the Jamestown Ter-Centennial Exposition.

LARKIN COMPANY JAMESTOWN EXHIBITION PAVILION

by Richard Guy Wilson and Joseph Dye Lahendro

The exhibition pavilion Frank Lloyd Wright designed for the Larkin Company at the Jamestown Ter-Centennial Celebration in 1907 has caused some puzzlement among chroniclers of Wright's architecture. William Storrer in the second edition of his guidebook to Wright's architecture even speculated that it was never built. However, research has revealed that the pavilion was built, and while no longer standing, several photographs indicate its basic appearance. It stood in contrast to the remainder of the exposition, which was in the typical Beaux Arts-American Renaissance idioms of the day and attempted, as one of the guidebooks claimed: "to adhere closely to a style which by adoption and long association has become distinctively American—The Colonial." Against this wave of imitation, the Wright building must have seemed out of place. A book published at the time on the exhibition claimed the building "was an original and unique specimen of architecture and was admirably adopted for display purposes."¹ The building contained "a trifle over fifteen hundred square feet of floor space," with an exhibition area and a small auditorium. On display were Larkin Company products and giveaway items. Included was some furniture that the Blue Book claimed: "was substantial, of modern design and workmanship," but unfortunately the manufacturer was not given. In the auditorium, hourly shows of motion pictures of the Larkin Company's home office and factories were shown. Whether Wright was responsible for the installation of



the exhibit is unknown, but it is significant that the exhibit received a "gold medal" for installation, and the products, also, received an award for "excellence."

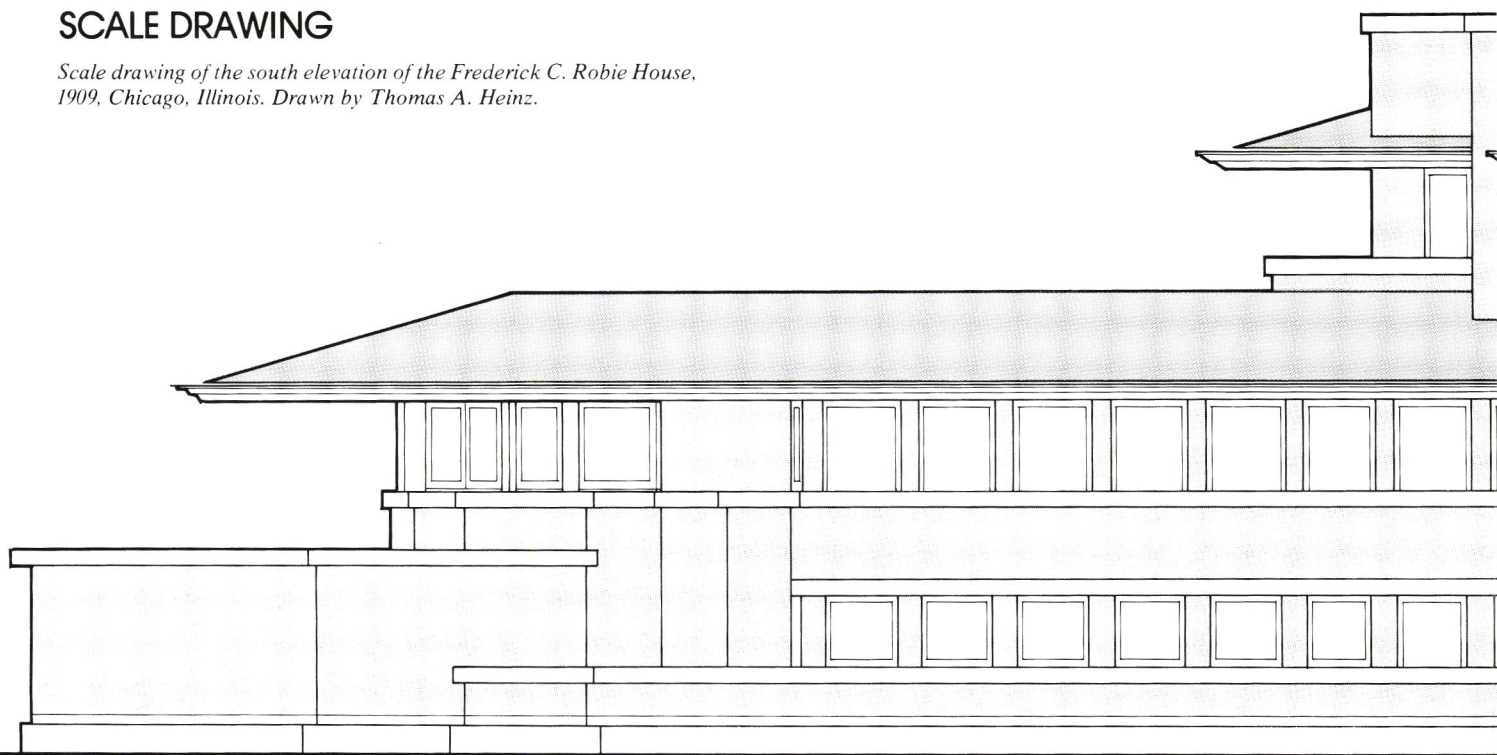
The Larkin Company Exhibition Pavilion was certainly not a major building by Wright, but it does provide an interesting specimen of his architecture, and one that judging by the photographs has certain recalls of Japanese architecture. Wright visited Japan in 1905 and his architecture upon his return became freer in composition and frequently abandoned the classical hierarchy that had dominated his earlier work. The Larkin Company pavilion with the rectangular distribution of walls and glazing recalls Japanese enclosures. The interior view likewise reveals a Japanese sensibility of moveable partitions that open to the outside. No information is given on materials, but the pavilion was most certainly inexpensive and built of timber, stucco, and glass. The floor level may have been a few feet below grade. Finally, one might note that the pavilion looks to the future: the vertical masts and banners are a premonition of the Midway Gardens. ■

Richard Guy Wilson is chairman of the architectural history department at the University of Virginia. Joseph Dye Lahendro is a registered architect currently studying architectural history.

¹ *The Official Blue Book of the Jamestown Ter-Centennial Exposition* (Norfolk: The Colonial Publishing Company, 1907).

SCALE DRAWING

Scale drawing of the south elevation of the Frederick C. Robie House, 1909, Chicago, Illinois. Drawn by Thomas A. Heinz.



SOUTH ELEVATION

GRADY GAMMAGE AUDITORIUM AND THE BAGHDAD OPERA PROJECT: TWO LATE DESIGNS BY FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

by Stephen D. Helmer

While familiar to many, Frank Lloyd Wright's Baghdad opera project suffers, like so much of his late work, from a lack of serious critical attention. His Grady Gammage Memorial Auditorium at Arizona State University (ASU) in Tempe (Fig. 1) is similarly unexplored, except for a chapter in Charles Jencks' *Modern Movements in Architecture* in which the author points to both Baghdad and Gammage as corroboration of what he concludes is Wright's "Collapse Into Formalism."¹ I would like to help close the gap and to introduce a set of plans which provides something of a missing link between the first two. Wright's preliminary drawings for ASU, reproduced in part here (Figs. 2, 4, 10, & 13), show clearly his original intentions for the site, thereby exonerating him from the most disappointing features of Gammage, and also furnishing evidence which even more effectively than the published Baghdad drawings counters Jencks' charges.

Stephen D. Helmer began his graduate studies at Arizona State University, where he was able to experience Grady Gammage Auditorium first hand for several years. He completed his doctorate at Cornell University, majoring in history of city planning.

In May, 1957, Wright flew to Baghdad for initial consultations on a cultural center, one of whose main features was an opera house. Preliminary designs were prepared over the next year, but due to a change in the government of Iraq, the project was dropped. Determined that his opera idea not be lost, Wright modified it to suit the needs of a second client, making it the centerpiece of a similar, collegiate fine arts complex. The history of this adaptation process is rather convoluted and at first glance clouded by conflicting evidence. A scenario can be constructed, though, which reconciles the apparent discrepancies.

Some time between May, 1957, and the summer of 1958, Wright began a series of visits to the ASU campus to inspect potential sites for an ensemble of arts buildings, the dream of then University president Grady Gammage, long-time friend of Wright and the auditorium's eventual namesake. The exact date of the first visit is disputed,² but in terms of trying to establish a simultaneous, rather than sequential, development for the Baghdad opera and Gammage, the ASU visits prove little. The fact is that at that time Wright had not the slightest reason to consider adapting the Baghdad opera for ASU, though he may well have been discussing the generalities of the latter project with Dr. Gammage and various civic leaders. Wright was confident that he would build the opera for King Faisal of Iraq, and was therefore unlikely to offer it to another client.³



That is, until summer of 1958 when King Faisal was deposed and subsequent disruptions naturally called the project into question. However, this was well after the Baghdad designs had been completed, publicly exhibited and published. Nothing in the program or tentative site for the ASU project can have influenced the Baghdad opera.

The idea of modifying the Baghdad design for another client certainly could have crossed Wright's mind after the coup in Iraq. However, any thoughts he might have had were probably not committed to paper until early 1959.⁴ Not surprisingly, this coincides exactly with the decision of the revolutionary government in Baghdad to scrap the opera house in favor of programs with more popular appeal. Subsequent transposition of the opera to Arizona was relatively easy and sensible—the generous balconies, promenades, and other pedestrian spaces being well suited to year-round enjoyment in the similar desert climate.

Wright devoted only a few months to the ASU designs before his death in April, 1959. So tentative was this venture that a formal commission was not forthcoming from the Board of Regents until two months later. The State eventually did sign a contract with Wright's successors, the Taliesin Associated Architects (TAA), but the public controversy and official footdragging that marked the long period preceding final construction fully justified the care with which Dr. Gammage had guarded his plans during the early stages of development.⁵

¹Charles Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture* (Garden City, New York, 1973), pp. 109-111 & 124-40 develop this theme.

²May 1957 is the date cited in official University literature for Wright's first campus visit—the same month he traveled to Baghdad. Though the source here is Gilbert L. Cady, then Vice President for Business Affairs at ASU and close confidant of Dr. Gammage, Mr. Cady's recollections were not written down until seven years later, when material was being gathered for publications surrounding the completion of the project in 1964. (Author's interview, January 9, 1978, with Dean E. Smith, Director of the ASU Bureau of Publications, who personally researched the material for the Gammage brochures.) Dr. Gammage's widow also feels the 1957 is correct, though she did not accompany her husband on those campus tours with the architect. (Author's interview, January 9, 1978.) John H. Howe, Wright's chief assistant in the drafting room, agrees that it is possible that Wright at least visited ASU as early as 1957. (Author's interview, October 27, 1980.)

³Wright often adapted unbuilt designs for other clients, but he virtually never offered the same basic plan to two at the same time.

⁴A poll of present Taliesin fellows who were also in residence during the late 1950's, as well as records in the Foundation archives, indicate that the ASU project came into the office not earlier than winter 1958-59. (The Wright correspondence is presently not open for study, though one would hope that at some point business correspondence could be separated from understandably sensitive personal letters and made available). This information was gathered for me by Director of Archives, Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, who along with others at Taliesin cooperated enthusiastically on this research. Particular weight must be given corroboration of the early 1959 date provided by John H. Howe, who translated Wright's rough sketches into drawings which were then further developed by Wright. Howe worked in this manner to produce a great majority of the renderings for the later projects. It is this intimate connection with the preliminary drawings for ASU that makes Howe's testimony on dating so convincing. (Author's interview, January 27, 1980.)

⁵The regents committed themselves in principle to an arts center on June 27, 1959, the "commission" to TAA specifying that compensation was contingent upon approval of the designs by the board and appropriation or donation of funds. The regents contracted with TAA on April 30, 1960, to produce detailed plans and specifications. A second contract to supervise construction was approved on April 20, 1961. The Arizona legislature authorized funds this same year. Construction contracts were awarded on May 19, 1962, and the auditorium completed in September 1964.



Fig. 1. South elevation, Grady Gammage Auditorium. Unless otherwise noted, all photographs are courtesy Stephen D. Helmer.

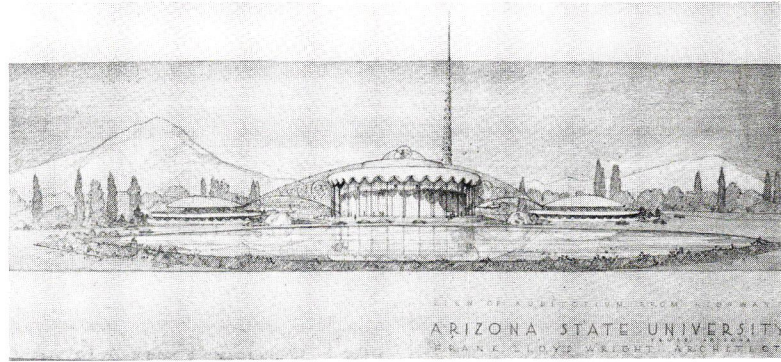


Fig. 2. South elevation, auditorium, Arizona State University, Tempe, ca. 1959. Source: ASU Physical Plant Planning and Construction. Used with permission of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation.

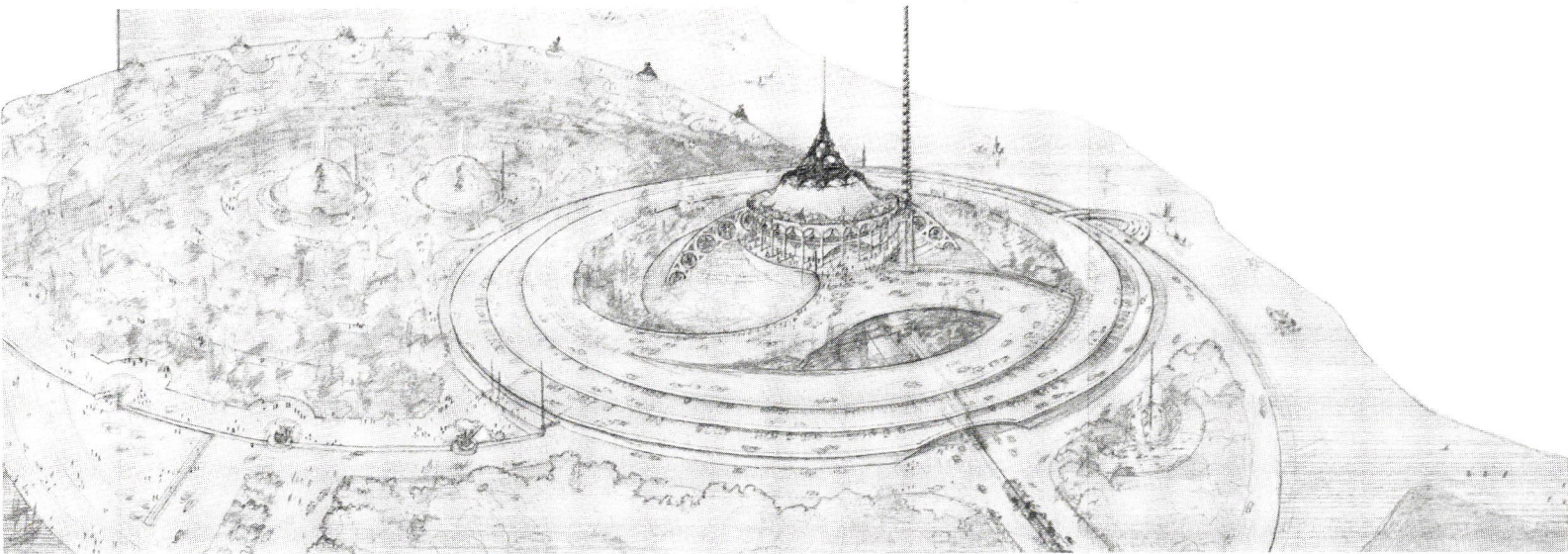


Fig. 3. Grand opera and civic auditorium, Baghdad, Iraq, 1957. Source: Architectural Forum, May, 1958. (© 1958, Time, Inc.)



Fig. 4. (above) Master plan, ASU project. Source: ASU Physical Plant Planning and Construction. Used with permission of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation.

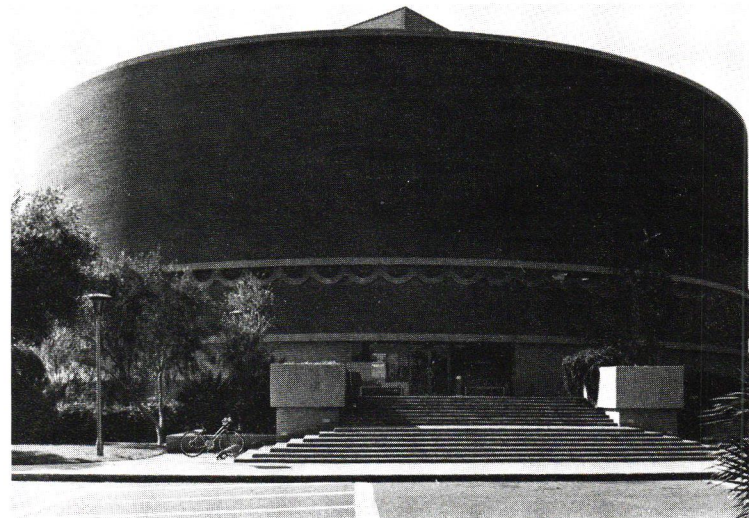


Fig. 5. (above) Looking south to classroom entrance of Gammage Auditorium.

Fig. 6. (right) South colonnade of Gammage Auditorium.

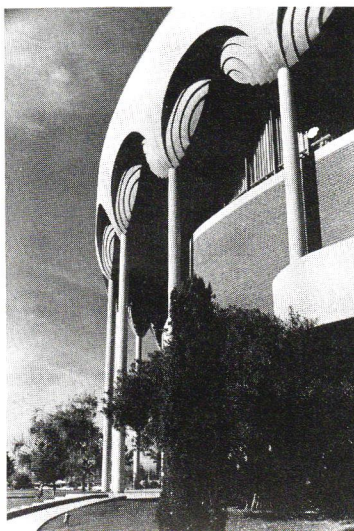


Fig. 7. (right) Side entry to Gammage Auditorium, with pedestrian bridge at second level.



In any evaluation of the various designs themselves, it must be noted that there are some genuine changes in Wright's late work. In this specific case the unprecedented venture into literary historicism is most puzzling, all the more for its eclectic approach. At Baghdad Wright rather seriously mixes his metaphors. The stern, moralistic connotations of the Adam and Eve fountains in their Garden of Eden behind the opera clash with the fantasy and reckless adventurism of the figure of Aladdin standing atop the hall with his wonderful lamp, admittedly explained as the symbol of human imagination. Presumably, though, much of the sculpture involved literal representation more than personification. "Scenes" from the *Thousand and One Nights* were to decorate the two arched pedestrian walks.⁶ For ASU the sculptural program was modified. Aladdin became "His Majesty the American Citizen with his Lamp: the Imagination," and the medallions on the crescent arms saluted "Agriculture, the Arts, Manufacture, and the Professions."⁷

This sudden literalism is hard to account for, but the flights of fancy seem far less bothersome if one recalls, for all its serious spacial elaborations, the decidedly whimsical atmosphere of the long-vanished Midway Gardens. One should also note the healthy bit of practicality associated with these ornamental delectations. The great spire—Word of Manonnet—standing before the Baghdad opera and reoccurring, unnamed, at the side entry at ASU, doubles as a television broadcasting tower. While not labeled as such on any of the published Baghdad drawings, it is so indicated on the ASU plans. Surely Wright derived this idea from Baghdad, where he had incorporated into the composition three huge towers which served the television studios of his adjoining Baghdad University.

Two other practical matters should be mentioned: the pedestrian bridges and parking. At Baghdad it is not certain if the arched ramps were intended as anything more than extensions of the system of promenades and a connection to the sunken gardens below (Figs. 3 & 11). In the ASU drawings they serve to join the auditorium with the adjacent two-level parking structures (Fig. 2). Lacking these parking domes, Gammage utilizes the pedestrian bridges to provide direct access from the parking lots to the two balconies.⁸

If practical considerations became increasingly important with regard to the bridges, the parking situation steadily deteriorated. One of Wright's overriding concerns at Baghdad was to prevent the rising tide of automobiles from inundating the architecture. A three-tiered circular "ziggurat" surrounding the opera (Fig. 3) provided 1920 parking spaces for a 5300 capacity auditorium, a 2.76 seating-to-parking ratio. Even this figure might seem high if measured against normal one- and two-to-a-car American driving habits. Yet the ASU drawings show 806 spaces for a 3300 capacity hall, a 4.1 ratio. Finally,

with the elimination of the parking domes, only 527 immediately adjacent spaces serve the 3019 seat Gammage, a staggering 5.7 ratio. Little wonder that when the Phoenix Symphony called Gammage home, charter busses were not a convenience but a necessity.⁹

Why does Gammage differ so from Wright's drawings? As noted before, the project had not progressed beyond the preliminary stage before Wright's death. His successors at TAA produced the working drawings and supervised construction, headed by William Wesley Peters. But Taliesin is not really implicated in the considerable deviations from Wright's intentions; a TAA perspective published as late as 1962 shows his auditorium concept substantially intact.¹⁰ An economy-minded legislature and board of regents seem to have been the surgeons who excised so many significant elements from Wright's design.¹¹ TAA was responsible for such minor changes as elimination of box seats and introduction of continuous run Continental seating. These were matters not only of bringing Wright's highly schematic preliminary proposals into line with a detailed program, but of adjusting to a program greatly different than the one with which Wright had originally worked.¹²

⁶ "Frank Lloyd Wright Designs for Baghdad," *Architectural Forum*, CVIII (May, 1958), p. 95.

⁷ ASU preliminary drawings, cross-section not illustrated here.

⁸ The parking domes may have been part of the ideal image which an architect does not necessarily expect the client to accept at first. In any case, TAA has here made provision for eventual addition of the domes by sinking the present parking areas. The same is true for the areas originally designated for the reflecting pool. (Author's interview with Charles Montooth, January 7, 1978.)

⁹ This economizing on the parking structures also radically affected the character of the auditorium's setting. Rather than being surrounded with the broad pedestrian plaza Wright envisioned (Fig. 4), Gammage is hedged about with asphalt drives and parking lots.

¹⁰ "The Living Heritage of Frank Lloyd Wright," *Arizona Highways*, XXXVIII (April, 1962), pp. 6-7.

¹¹ For instance, they apparently found it hard to justify the parking domes when the cost of each space was five times that of a ground level space.

¹² Wright's basic design concept remained intact, though TAA refined his preliminary plans and in some cases adapted ideas he had used elsewhere to the changed program at Gammage. The Baghdad project's horseshoe boxes, typical of opera houses, were not appropriate for a collegiate setting and were eliminated. Continental rows were introduced to help maximize seating efficiency as other functions were added which competed for space.

In addition to overseeing all aspects of the project, William Wesley Peters specifically directed the engineering efforts. Major items included adding the "flying balcony" (detached from the back wall to release sound energy trapped under deep balconies), whose principle Wright had learned from Adler in the Chicago Auditorium. Another was the redesign of the pedestrian walkways stretching to either side of the main auditorium so that they would meet legal requirements for emergency exits serving the two balconies. In this area Peters collaborated with Mendel Glickman, an engineer who had worked with Wright on numerous large projects.

Many of the less obvious refinements to Wright's preliminary drawings were carried out by John H. Howe and Alvin Wiehle. Wiehle worked on the detailing of the exterior, especially fenestration. Howe concentrated on the auditorium's interior, being largely responsible for the proscenium and the treatment of the side walls with their curved entries. Thomas Casey and John Rattenbury helped in developing specifications and working drawings, as well as later supervising construction. Many others contributed; almost every fellowship member in the drafting room was encouraged to work on some aspect of each project. (Author's interviews with Peters and Howe, October 26 & 27, 1980, respectively.)

Let us now turn to the question of formalism. Jencks uses this term in reference to two interrelated aspects of Wright's late work: the growing predominance of single geometric forms and what he feels is a lack of organic qualities. Examining the Baghdad project and Gammage, one can appreciate Jencks' concerns. However, a thorough analysis, which also includes the ASU drawings, yields quite different conclusions.

There seems to be a need to explain the emphatic geometry of the late Wright, as if it was an embarrassment or mystery. Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., suggests that Wright developed naturally and logically from his explorations of territoriality and flowing space to these "concentrated paens of purity in flux."¹³ To Vincent Scully, European International Style provides the vital clue.¹⁴ Both propositions may be partially true, yet both seem to ignore the fact that no theory must be developed to account for the apparent rise of this geometric interest. It was always there. During Wright's Prairie years, individual geometric forms became the building blocks with which he created dense compositions whose overall effect was not primarily geometric. That by the 1930s and 1940s the individual triangle, polygon, or circle should come to the fore can hardly be surprising.

However, one should not become so beguiled with the geometry of plan that one overlooks the significant ways in which Wright tempered its harshness in the third dimension. Unlike his European contemporaries, Wright never left the lean geometric solid unembellished. In fact, the emergence of increasingly rich and exotic ornament parallels quite closely the growing dominance of solitary geometries. True, at Gammage the unadorned wall surfaces of the smaller cylinder boldly declare the circular theme (Fig. 5). Yet, if completely filled with the stage-related functions as originally planned, its stark exterior would not have been turned full-face to a public approach from the rear.¹⁵ By contrast, the cylindrical form is masked in the main public areas. At the front entries it is screened by a row of slim columns supporting a portico (Figs. 1 & 6). In addition, the side entries manifest that rich building-up of forms and faceted glass panes that are so characteristically Wrightian (Figs. 7 & 8).

As in the case of geometry, those who have emphasized the corollary property of symmetry in the late work¹⁶ have neglected the subtle refinements Wright often employed to break the perfect balance or enliven it. In Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church (Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, 1956) he placed the chancel in front of one of the four interior arms, thus shifting the focus sharply off axis. At the Kalita Humphreys Theatre (Dallas, Texas, 1955) he extended one side of the polygonal structure to form a foyer and placed the main approach at an angle completely off the axis of symmetry.

Gammage lacks the only overtly asymmetrical element present in the Baghdad and ASU drawings, the giant

spire. Still, in both the ASU designs the auditorium is not actually experienced as symmetrical; in fact, that possibility is consciously discouraged. Arriving by car, one alights at entries so close to the building that its sheer size prevents one from easily perceiving its two equal sides. More importantly, one approaches Gammage on drives which run across the axis of symmetry (Figs. 4 & 12) as at the Johnson Wax Administration Building. Again, the only exception is the originally non-public rear entry. The Baghdad opera also constitutes an exception in this regard, since it forms the terminal feature of an explanade leading straight from the city. However, the rigid axial orientation toward Mecca is a perfectly justifiable response to the specific cultural context; it was not carried over to Arizona.

So, it would seem, the influence of geometry and symmetry itself is neither so pronounced nor as pernicious as has been claimed. The next question is whether these elements have contributed to a lack of organic qualities. Jencks seems to feel that by the 1950s Wright's geometry had begun to take on a life of its own and was being allowed to contradict virtually all fifty-one of his earlier definitions of organic architecture.¹⁷ Of particular concern to two other critics, James M. Dennis and Lu B. Wenneker, is what they see as the displacement of Wright's earlier topographical organicism by an "ornamental organicism," the arbitrary "absorption" of the site by a forcefully expanding geometric pattern.¹⁸

While it must be admitted that late in his career Wright did use the triangle, polygon, and circle for reasons not directly related to a given site or program, he was demonstrating no abstract, intellectual interest in geometry. Rather, he employed these forms precisely because they were more "organic," in the sense that, among regular, buildable forms, they manifested a high degree of continuity and plasticity—traits Wright admired in nature and found so lacking in the conventional architectural "box." His search for a more fluid line had led from the complex interlocking of traditional rectangles, through the rounded corners and circular capped "dendriform" columns of the Johnson Wax Building and the flexing walls of the polygonal structures beginning in the 1930s, to the circle itself. Also particularly relevant is Wright's increasing use of the curve to accommodate vehicular movement—especially in association with large public

¹³ Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., "Frank Lloyd Wright: the 11th Decade," *Architectural Forum*, CXXX (June, 1969), p. 41.

¹⁴ Vincent J. Scully, Jr., "Wright vs. International Style," *Art News*, LIII (March, 1954), pp. 32-35, & 64-66.

¹⁵ This is less true at ASU than Baghdad, though at the former the flanking buildings would have mitigated somewhat the effect from the campus side.

¹⁶ Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., "Centrality and Symmetry in Wright's Architecture," *Architect's Yearbook*, IX (1960), pp. 120-131.

¹⁷ Jencks, *Modern Movements*, p. 137.

¹⁸ James M. Dennis and Lu B. Wenneker, "Ornamentation and the Organic Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright," *Art Journal*, XXV (Fall, 1965), pp. 9 & 13.



Fig. 8. (above) Intersection of pedestrian bridge and colonnade.

Fig. 11. (below) Lateral section, Baghdad project. Source: Architectural Forum, May, 1958.

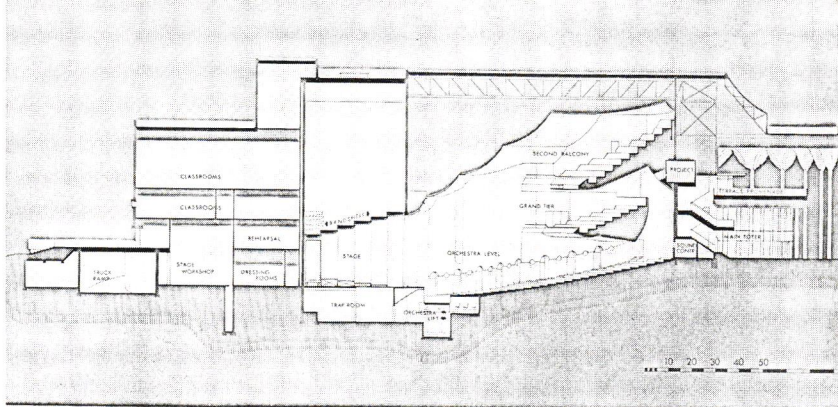


Fig. 9. (top) Longitudinal section of Gammage Auditorium. Source: Contemporary Theatre Architecture, by Ned Bowman and Maxwell Silverman. Used with the permission of the New York Public Library.

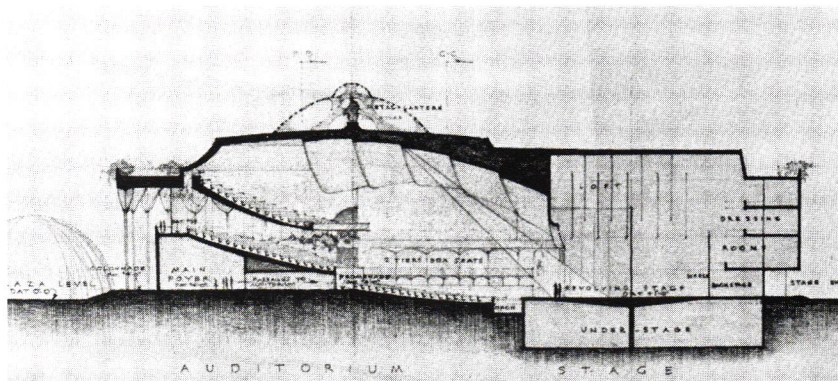


Fig. 10. (above) Longitudinal section of ASU auditorium project. Source: ASU Physical Plant Planning and Construction. Used with permission of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation.

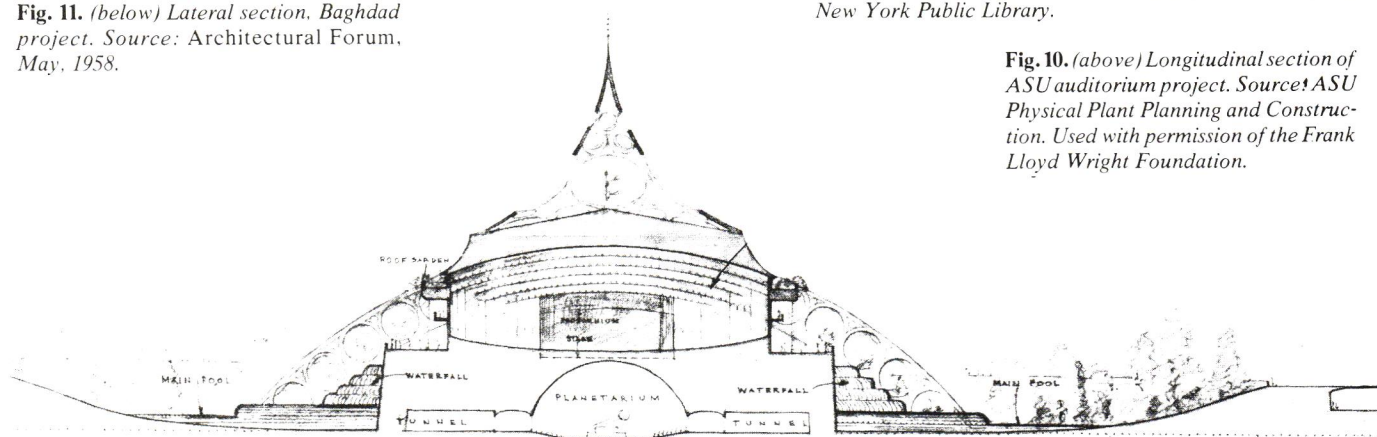
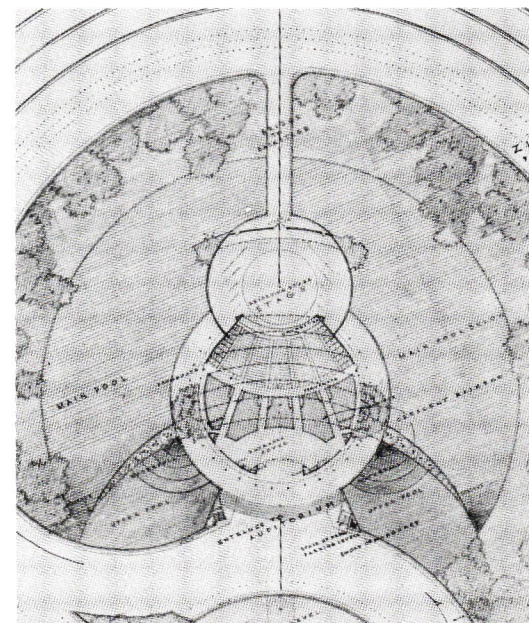
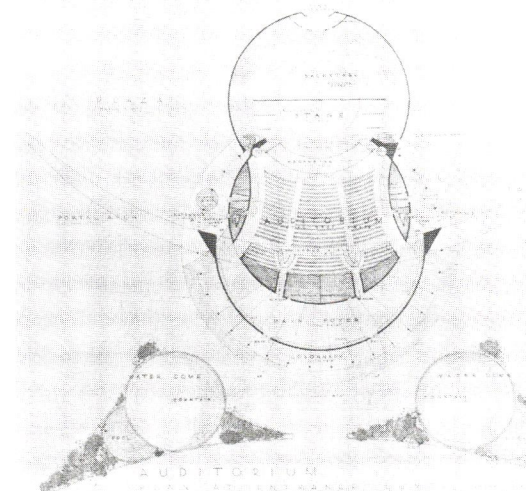
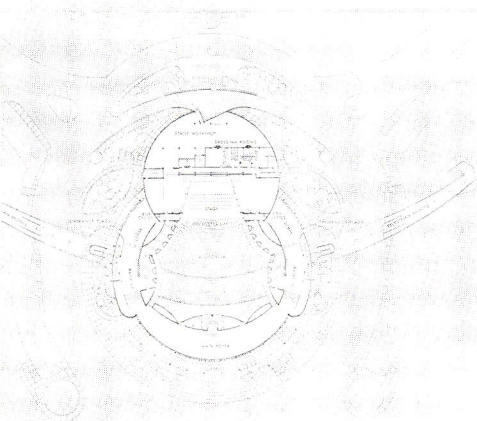


Fig. 12. Plan for Gammage Auditorium. Source: Contemporary Theatre Architecture. Bowman and Silverman. Used with the permission of the New York Public Library.

Fig. 13. Plan, ASU project. Source: ASU Physical Plant Planning and Construction. Used with permission of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation.

Fig. 14. Plan of Baghdad project. Source: Architectural Forum, May, 1958.



buildings—as seen in the Gordon Strong Planetarium (Sugar Loaf Mountain, Maryland, 1925) and the community center and self-service garage for Edgar Kaufmann (Pittsburgh, both 1947). The auto “ziggurat” surrounding the Baghdad opera (Fig. 3) is much like the parking structure for the Pittsburgh community center.

But just how architecturally organic is this ultimate circle? Looking at the longitudinal section of Gammage (Fig. 9), one wonders. Here the auditorium space seems to have been rather arbitrarily carved out of the predetermined cylindrical form. However effective the circle (or spiral) might have been for the circulation system of the Guggenheim Museum, it would appear not to be a very organic shape for a theater. Yet in the same section from the ASU drawings (Fig. 10)—a section not published for Baghdad—Wright contradicts that assumption. There the shell-like auditorium space expands outward from the proscenium to the very top of the structural ceiling and all the way out to the colonnade, conforming to the inward curve of the sloping roof. Note particularly how at Gammage this same area between the downward curving roofline and the auditorium’s back wall is simply dead space.

The question of the relationship of inner reality to outer form arises with the stage portion of the building as well and is best studied by comparing the three ground plans (Figs. 12, 13, & 14). The revolving stage which naturally generated the form of the rear cylinder has been replaced at Gammage by a rectangular fixed stage.¹⁹ The rest of the space became workshops, dressing rooms, offices, classrooms, and rehearsal halls for the music department. Wright’s original site plan (Fig. 4) called for a separate building to house the music and art departments, including a gallery attached to the art building and an independent recital hall/drama workshop theater. But the client insisted that as much of the entire program as possible be combined in the single auditorium building.²⁰ Considering this incredible demand, Taliesin responded amazingly well and still held to a phenomenally low budget of \$2,460,000, \$17.81 a square foot in 1964! The art department had to be cut, though Gammage’s generous foyer was equipped to allow the display of painting and sculpture.²¹

The problem of the small theater was resolved by George Izenour of Yale, in collaboration with Vern O. Knudsen, acoustical consultant for the project, and Taliesin’s Wesley Peters. He devised a collapsible band shell-like hood for the stage (Fig. 12); this allowed musical groups to perform and could be drawn back for theater. His success in producing an acoustically flexible hall is generally admitted. However, presumably the lack of seating flexibility—the sliding screens drawn across the large lateral aisle that Wright desired (Figs. 13 & 14)—caused the University in the end to construct a separate smaller hall, an independent Taliesin effort. In any case, judged by both of Wright’s original designs, not Gammage, the auditorium he

conceived is quite functionally organic; its form reflects the programmatic realities.

The two ground plans by Wright prove the auditorium to be structurally quite organic as well. At Baghdad, as the auditorium space approaches the stage, the walls break away from the circular contour and reach out to meet the stage, reminding one of the embracing forms of the “Romeo and Juliet” windmill (Spring Green, Wisconsin, 1896). In the ASU design, the two circular forms are even more strongly wed. The auditorium proper and the lobby are two non-concentric circles which merge at the side entrances. The curves of the stage area walls reverse as they intersect those of the main volume and intertwine all the way out to the colonnade. By contrast, a hardening and regularization seems evident at Gammage, imposed by a stringent budget—and, one might surmise, the whole process of transposing fairly rhapsodic initial renderings into brick and steel.²² Here the two circular forms appear rather harshly abutted, with reverse curves subdividing but not joining the two.

In yet a third area, that of relation of building to site, Wright’s drawings again show his powers of organic creation still undiminished. Surely it is a formidable task to make two large cylinders fit *into* the landscape rather than *on* it like some latter-day Pantheon, but Wright found some quite convincing ways of doing just that. As the section of Baghdad shows (Fig. 11), the opera was to occupy an eminence within a basin containing gardens and waterfalls. The two arms drew the structure down into this luxuriant valley. Even on the flat ASU site (Fig. 2) these crescents sweeping across the roofline to the subsidiary parking domes would have done much to marry the building to its site. However, as built (Fig. 1), these outreaching arms, joined only to the upper decks, leave a great mass of the building extending above them and therefore lose much of their organic effect. In each area, Wright’s own drawings certainly blunt the charge of lack of organicism.

¹⁹ An unexplained discrepancy exists between the disposition of the revolving stage at Baghdad and ASU. Such a stage is normally divided in two or three parts, thereby allowing the rear portion to be dressed while performance continues, and then rotated into place. The Baghdad stage is shown as if it was to be used conventionally to its full depth, with wing flats extending right to the back wall.

²⁰ Actually, the University Regents initially agreed to the entire fine arts complex in principle on June 27, 1959. However, it apparently became clear that the legislature was not prepared to appropriate the \$6.5 million estimated for the entire scheme. TAA added the classrooms to the auditorium in hopes of persuading the legislators.

²¹ In order to accommodate daylight exhibitions as well as receptions, TAA altered the wall under the colonnade from a perfectly solid one with two small entries (Fig. 13) to one almost totally glazed with multiple openings (Figs. 1 & 12). (Author’s interview with Peters, October 26, 1980.)

²² A more supple form might have been achieved had Wright’s intention to build in monolithic concrete been carried out. Unhappily, steel frame construction was cheaper in Phoenix at that time. (Author’s interview with Montooth and Pfeiffer, January 7, 1978.)

What conclusions can be drawn from all this? Overall, if the Baghdad opera had been built, it might well have been judged a late masterpiece, a work to stand beside the Guggenheim, though no more easily compared to it than Johnson's Wax, Fallingwater, or Robie House, so individual was it. Wright himself somewhat compromised the building in adapting it in a developed state to a substantially different site. However, as finally realized in Gammage, the original design has been greatly reduced. Generally rigidified and cheapened by financial exigency, forced to serve functions which violated its organic integrity, stripped of its subsidiary structures, pedestrian plaza, fantastic spire and other ornamental enrichments, and finally—against Wright's profoundest wishes—"flooded with acres of antipathetic motor cars," Gammage radiates only a portion of its original brilliance. Had some Arizonans been less parsimonious and more open-minded, all might have possessed a truly rare and unflawed gem. To those who lived through the battles to approve its construction, it seems a miracle it was built at all.

Wright's preliminary drawings show unmistakably that he did not intend Gammage to be built as it finally was. Moreover, along with the Baghdad designs they suggest that during his later years, far from lapsing into formalism or departing from the fundamental themes of his earlier work, Wright, with a firmer mastery than architects half his age, had launched on yet another fresh phase in their development. ■

BOOKS AVAILABLE AT A DISCOUNT

In addition to the books in the third quarter 1980 issue of the *Newsletter*, the following books are now available to members of the Association at savings up to 20%. To order, send your check to: The Frank Lloyd Wright Association—Books, P.O. Box 2100, Oak Park, Illinois 60303. Allow 5 to 7 weeks for delivery. For shipping and handling, please add \$1.75 per book to your remittance (US\$ for all orders sent outside the U.S.).

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This re-publication of the 1911 Wasmuth edition of Wright's work includes an introduction by Edgar Kaufmann, Jr.
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An Autobiography, by Frank Lloyd Wright, 620 pages, 82 illustrations.

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The Natural House, by Frank Lloyd Wright, 223 pages, 112 illustrations.

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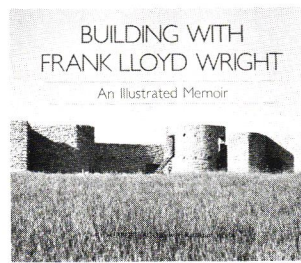
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Genius and the Mobocracy, by Frank Lloyd Wright, 247 pages, 117 illustrations.

A biography of Louis Sullivan with many of his drawings. This edition also includes two essays by Sullivan on Wright's work.

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BOOK REVIEW



Building with Frank Lloyd Wright, by Herbert and Katherine Jacobs. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1978, 147 pp., illustrated, \$14.95

reviewed by Leonard K. Eaton

In recent years the literature on Frank Lloyd Wright has broadened to include a number of accounts by clients on what it was like actually to build with the "Great Man." Of these, undoubtedly the most interesting is the volume under considerations here. Herbert and Katherine Jacobs, who collaborated on this memoir, built the first, and perhaps the most important of Wright's Usonian houses, lived in it for some years, sold it, and then subsequently built the amazing solar hemicycle house of 1944-48. Both projects were landmarks in the career of the architect. The first can be understood as one of Wright's most creative responses to the challenge of the depression. It was built for \$5,500, including the architect's fee, and it encompassed numerous technological innovations. The most important of these were undoubtedly the sandwich panel wall system and radiant heating. Both were radical experiments in 1935, and both were incorporated into many subsequent buildings. The second house was Wright's answer to a difficult environmental problem: a site on the crest of a wind-swept hill. In form it perhaps belongs to the great sequence of semi-circular buildings in Wright's late work which culminated in the Guggenheim Museum.

So much, then, for the place of these buildings in Wright's career. The interest of this book really lies in its portrayal of the Jacobses themselves. As clients, they clearly belong to a different category from those who built with Wright during his Prairie period. In 1969 I published a book showing that the Wright clients of 1893-1913 were primarily white, protestant, middle class families in which the husbands had strong inclinations toward gadgetry and music. Most were politically conservative. Herbert Jacobs, by way of contrast, was Jewish, liberal, and certainly not able to spend large sums on his building projects. He and his wife, in fact, did a great deal of work on their own houses; in this respect they were probably typical of a great many of the Usonian clients. It is interesting to note that there was nothing in the Jacobses background to indicate that they were handy with tools. They became skilled because of the demands imposed on them by their houses.

So this book is valuable in many ways. The authors reprint much of their correspondence with Wright, and there

Leonard K. Eaton is Professor of Architecture at the University of Michigan and author of Two Chicago Architects and Their Clients.

are numerous drawings and photographs of both the building process and the finished dwellings. The Jacobses emerge as an extremely attractive couple: realistic and clear-eyed in their understanding of Wright and certainly appreciative of his greatness. Association with him was obviously one of the great events of their lives. They were on one occasion disowned by Wright, but they remained among his admirers and were ultimately reinstated in favor. (This did not always occur.) Much other literature on Wright is in preparation. Let us hope that it includes other client-narratives such as this. ■

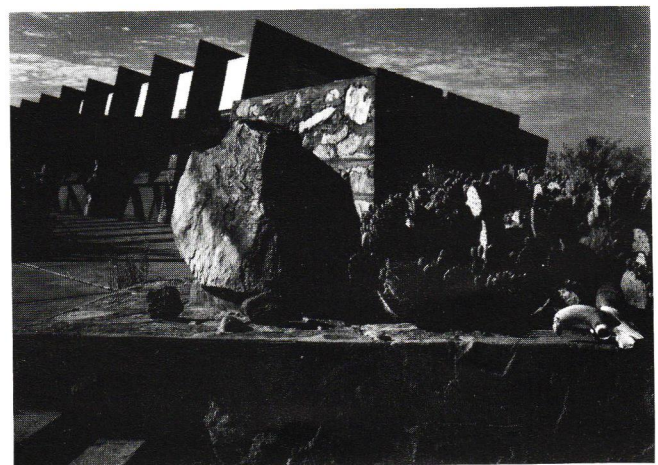
THIRD "TALIESIN DAY" SEMINAR SCHEDULED

In response to requests by participants of the first two seminars held in April at Taliesin West and in September in Wisconsin, and by other interested persons, Mrs. Frank Lloyd Wright and the staff of the architectural office of Taliesin will host a third "Taliesin Day" on Saturday, March 28th, 1981, at Taliesin West.

As before, part of the activities will include a tour of the campus and buildings not on regular public tours. The seminar will consist of a series of lectures and meetings held in different locations at Taliesin West, including Wright's home and an original house designed in 1938 for Ralph Jester. Topics will cover the education of architects, current design trends, future building trends, and the drawing techniques used by Frank Lloyd Wright. An exhibition of original Frank Lloyd Wright drawings will be a highlight of the day. A film will be shown of the work of the firm as consultants on a highway project in the Colorado Rockies.

For additional information, contact Charles Montooth, Taliesin West, Scottsdale, Az. 85258. (602) 948-6400. ■

Taliesin West, 1943. Photo courtesy Edmund Teske.





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Frank Lloyd Wright with Elizabeth Gordon, editor of House Beautiful, ca. 1950. Photo courtesy John Engstead.

