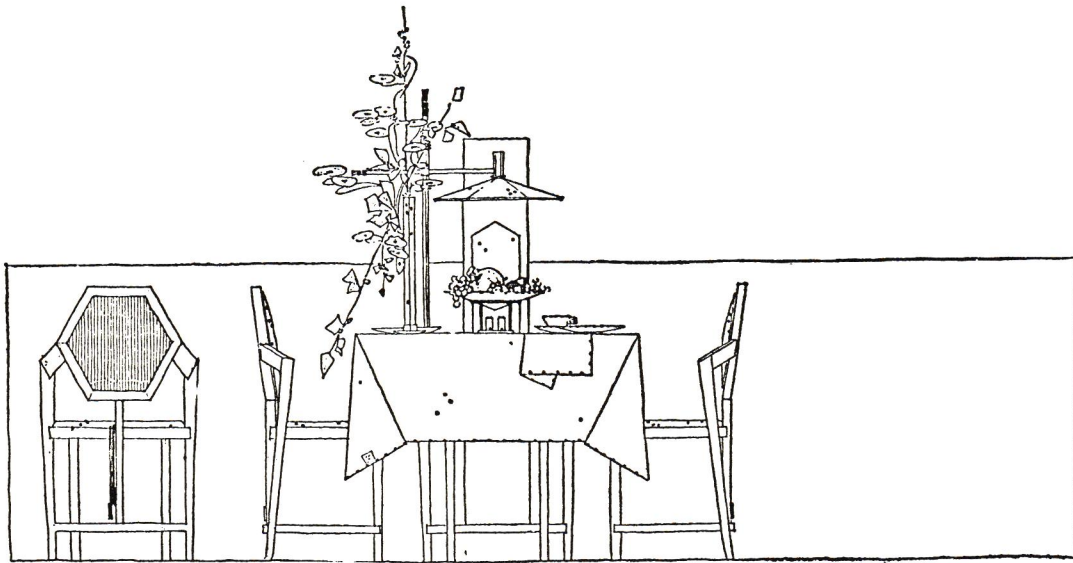


The
**PRAIRIE
SCHOOL**
Review

Volume I, Number 4

Fourth Quarter, 1964

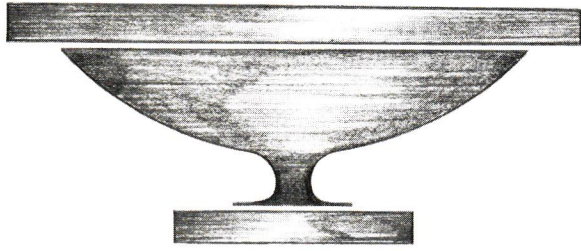
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ABOVE: This is a sketch prepared by Frank Lloyd Wright for the furniture and accessories of the Midway Gardens in Chicago. This structure and its contents represented one of Wright's great triumphs of total design. Although these chairs were not built for Midway Gardens, they were executed in several variations for the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo. A photograph of one of these is included in the portfolio of this issue.

COVER: The dining room of the first mature Prairie house, designed for Ward W. Willitts by Frank Lloyd Wright, shows excellent examples of both free standing and built in furniture. So well done was this furniture that only minor refinements occur over the next 15 years.

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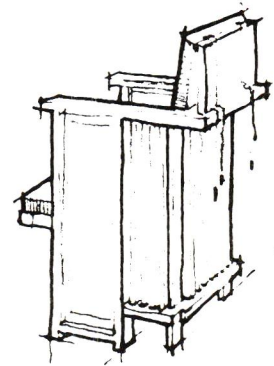
The PRAIRIE SCHOOL *Review*

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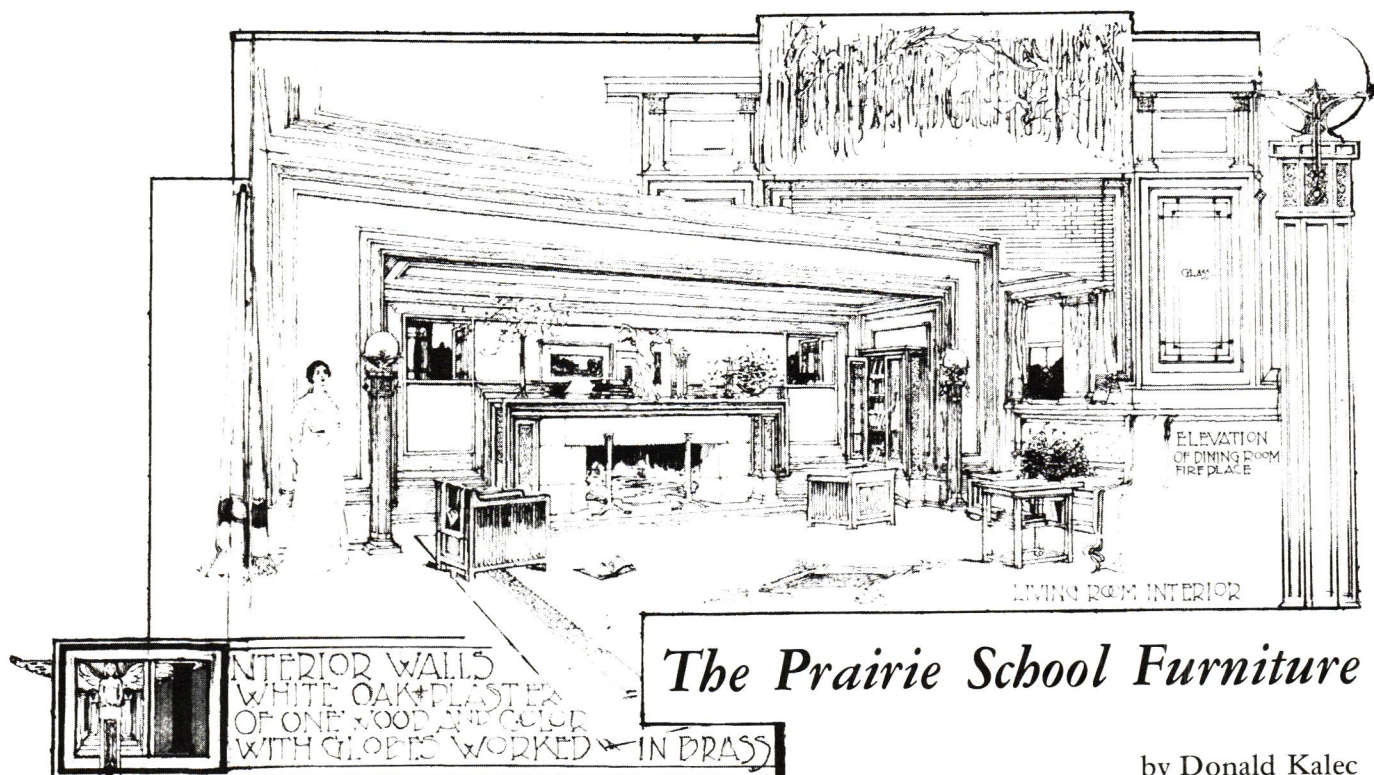
From the EDITORS

The first year of publication of THE PRAIRIE SCHOOL REVIEW draws to a close, and the editors are pleased to announce that publication of the monograph will continue. Although the number of subscriptions is not sufficient to cover costs, the sale of books in the Prairie School field has helped to make up the deficit. Aside from the monetary viewpoint, THE PRAIRIE SCHOOL REVIEW has been welcomed in a wide area. Guest editors and others have made significant contributions in time and effort, and we hope that the monograph will continue to be an important voice in the history of the development of modern American architecture.

There has been a great deal of publicity regarding preservation of historic buildings, particularly since the demolition of the Garrick Theater in Chicago. Notices have reached us concerning the threatened Elmslie building discussed by Mr. Hoffmann in this issue; there are rumors of the purchase of Chicago's Reliance Building for demolition, and the possible loss of Sullivan's Dooley Building in Salt Lake City; the Imperial Hotel's fate is still uncertain, and various houses by G. W. Maher and Frank Lloyd Wright in the Chicago area are still in danger.

When the threatened buildings fall within our area of interest we will continue to report such items and will support their preservation by any means at our disposal. However, we would like to make clear that the REVIEW is primarily concerned with architectural history. It is our opinion that architectural preservation will be best served by making the public aware of the architectural significance of certain existing buildings. Any individual building worthy of preservation will benefit from our efforts if our readers take up the challenge and make personal efforts to prevent defacement and destruction. This will be true of all types of structures whether or not they fall into the category of the buildings with which we are primarily concerned. In general we refer to this "style" as the "Prairie School" when applied to residential work and the "Chicago School" when referring to commercial buildings. There is a good deal of overlapping in the two terms, but we will not quarrel over semantics. We will present the material as we see fit and invite constructive criticism from any who care to comment.

Nearly always the reports of destruction of buildings of architectural merit are made only after it is too late to save the structure. With a public that is aware of its heritage and willing to protect it, preservation efforts will be constant and include buildings not in danger, thereby preventing them from ever reaching a point where their demise is eminent. It is simply a case of treating the cause rather than the effect: apathy. Only when we have an informed public, both professional and lay, will preservation become fully accepted.



The Prairie School Furniture

by Donald Kalec

The author of this study holds a degree in industrial design from Auburn University and a degree in architecture from the University of Florida. Mr. Kalec has done extensive research in the field of Prairie architecture while living and working in Chicago for the past two years.

While the buildings and principles of the Prairie School are acknowledged and revered today, one phase of their creative effort has not only been misunderstood but subjected to ridicule and neglect—the Prairie furniture. One phrase has been canted so often that it is a rooted part of conventional wisdom by now. "Frank Lloyd Wright was a genius in architecture but his furniture is the ugliest and most uncomfortable ever seen." Other critics have gone on to suggest that furniture was the Achilles Heel of Wright and the rest of the Prairie School architects, and that its unsuitability hastened the demise of the whole Prairie School.

Like all "conventional wisdom", this relation of furniture to architecture, architect and client is not born out by a close look at the complete scene. The absolute design integration philosophy of the Prairie architects and their ability to beautifully execute furniture, rugs, curtains, lights and sculpture is a true measure of the creative level reached by these men. That this fertile era in the development of an American architecture should be so forgotten is a sad and damning comment on the state of contemporary vision.

It is hard to imagine today the bleak absence of any type or form of suitable, comfortable or beautiful furniture. There was nothing compatible to the

early Prairie houses except "mission" furniture and, bulky and crude as it was, many Prairie house owners furnished their homes with it as the last resort. Other Prairie house owners, not so interested or sensitive, simply moved in their old furnishings—probably unaware of the incongruence. The photo of the white iron bedstead in the Willitts house is an indication of the horrors that tortured the Prairie architects when they returned to visit one of their clients. It may very well be that the profusion of built in furniture was due as much to an attempt to control the final environment as it was to a desire to integrate the furniture with the architecture. A built in buffet or sofa meant that before the moving day the client would have to dispose of the "a-la-mode" piece currently gracing the front parlor. Fortunately most of the clients who were able to have a Prairie School architect design their houses, also were affluent and sensitive enough to want furnishings in harmony with the house.

Most of Wright's homes, from the Bradley house of 1900 through the Coonley house of 1908 and the Robie house of 1909, had furniture designed by the architect as well as carpets, draperies, hangings and urns. Wright believed that it was the duty of an "unconventional" architect to design a

total environment and not to leave the client with the frustrating job of trying to find suitable furnishings independently. Walter Burley Griffin's homes also were filled with his solid designs, and George Maher's furniture carefully followed the pattern and decoration of his motif rhythm theory.

The vision of the Prairie School architects was that of a "total architecture" with every facet of the building contributing to the whole environment — the landscaping, architecture, interior design, and lighting — interwoven into a unified whole. All of these elements were subordinated to the central motif. "The whole is to the parts as the parts are to the whole," Mr. Wright used to explain. George Grant Elmslie put it another way. "There should be in any conception only one idea, one theme, one purpose."

This idea alone was a revolution in terms of furniture. It meant a strict discipline of design in which each piece would echo the broad design concepts of the architecture and yet be subordinated to it, the furniture being of a lower hierarchy in the design scale than the building itself. This is one reason why some of the furnishings were not complete or adequate solutions in themselves. A chair was designed as a very real, integral part of the architecture first, and as a comfortable, easily movable piece of furniture second. Often the former overrode the considerations of the latter. Not that the Prairie School architects were blind to comfort and movability; as they gained experience in this totally new approach to designing furniture, it did indeed become lighter and better adapted to the contours of the human body. That they did not achieve this total harmony and the creation of superbly comfortable furniture can in no way detract from what they did accomplish. Without the Prairie School furniture there could have been no Prairie house as we know it, in terms of the interior space and the complete design concept.

To design a perfect chair without a context is a simple freshman project. To design a chair which is comfortable, practical and in complete harmony with its surrounding is perhaps the most difficult design of all. Then as now, money was not forthcoming to finance this long tedious exploration in the nature of relationships. Anything that was done along these lines was done because the architect cared — and cared enough to invest himself (and his profit) in the principles in which he believed.

In keeping with the horizon line of the prairie and the low, long lines of the earth-hugging Prairie houses which nestled into and became a part of the prairie, the furniture also had a carefully calculated horizontality. The planes of table, desk and cabinet

tops were emphasized by extending them far beyond the upright supports. Their thickness was exaggerated by using a three or four inch wide board as the side facing even though the top was only 3/4 inches thick. This thickening of the horizontal line also had other advantages as well as aesthetics. Shelves or table tops with this additional visual "weight" could carry a great deal of clutter without appearing disorganized. The strong horizontal could overpower any divergent line or shapes placed upon it. This meant, in very practical housekeeping terms, that a Prairie house interior could be in quite a state of disarray, yet appear organized because of the unifying horizontal lines which would "order" the room automatically. Photographs often show a staggering amount of clutter on shelves and tables that is not even noticed when visiting the actual house. One must be in the space to come under its influence.

These thickened edges also acted structurally as beams to support (visually and actually) the surface above, enabling wide cantilevers and long book shelves to exist without intermediate support. This reduced the size and number of supporting uprights which further emphasized the horizontal line, and in turn gave the designer greater freedom in placing the supports for best visual effect.

The heavy top plane of the dining tables was supported by four massive legs, often with flared bases (see Willitts and Evans interiors) so that the table appeared rooted and built in as part of the floor. Actually the legs were hollow and the table much lighter than it appeared. Between the legs on the short ends of the table vertical square spindles danced across the opening to abut the terminal table leg. As a definite link between the furniture and the architecture these square vertical spindles were indispensable in the Prairie School interiors. They formed screens between piers, walls, cabinets and ceilings to create visual privacy without bottling up the ever flowing free space. Repeated in the tall chair backs and beneath the tables they formed such a complete bond that it is difficult to tell which belongs to the house and which belongs to the movable furniture. The lower tables in the living rooms had extended planes for tops, but the lower portions usually contained storage facilities of one kind or another, often in the form of doored boxes set apart from the massive legs to clearly articulate the structure from the storage container. Thin high stands were popular with the Prairie School architects as bases for flowing plants or objects of art, usually in the form of vases or pots containing dried planting arrangements.

Chairs were as diverse in form as the tables

were similar. All were bounded in outline by a solid geometric form, be it a square, semicircle or rectangle. The common denominator was their use of flat plank and square spindles to create the myriad forms and shapes. Beds and dressers followed the same general outlines while most of the couches were simple built in benches with loose cushions.

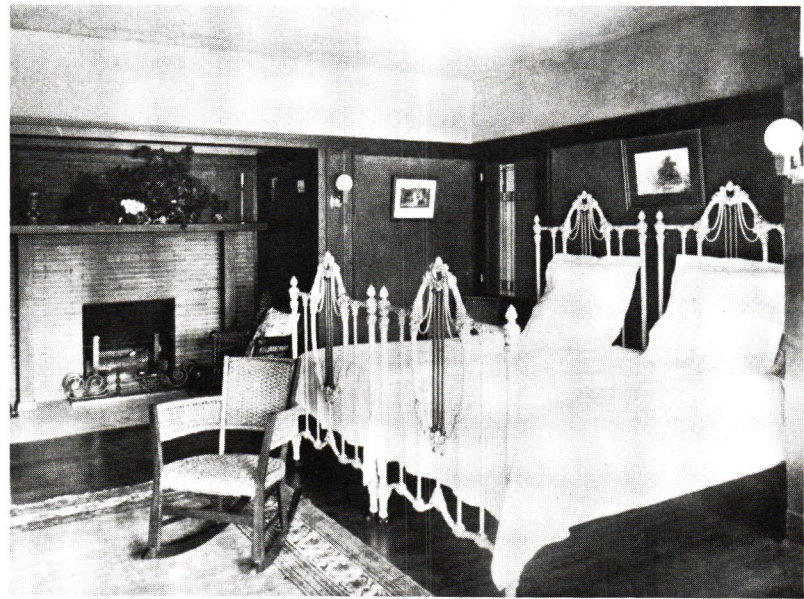
Each of the Prairie School architects developed a singular style of furniture to match his own architecture; the remarkable thing is that the pieces are all so similar in spirit. George Grant Elmslie's pieces break away from the strict geometrical forms to become more flowing, more lyrical, using more ornament; not surprising since he worked with Louis Sullivan for so many years.

William Drummond's work is a little lighter, a little more delicate than that of the other Prairie architects. He used light toned woods or painted his cabinets to match the walls. Even the built in cases were more open, due to the use of clear and patterned glass in bright colors to cover all of the shelves. There is little feeling of "mass" since the wood is used only for the sides and tops. The furniture drawings of Walter Burley Griffin show a massiveness and solidity that at times even surpass Wright's sturdy pieces. The combination table, couch and lamp designed by Griffin's wife, Marion Mahoney Griffin (who worked with Wright for eleven years) for the E. P. Irving residence in Decatur, Illinois (1910) is an interesting combination of uses not usually found in the Prairie School furniture.¹

The Prairie School Architects, lead by Frank Lloyd Wright's investigation into the nature of materials, sought to understand the glories and limitations of each material and the process of fabricating it into the total architecture. Furniture was never forced into shapes unnatural to wood. Wood carving was "a forcing of the material, an insult to its finer possibilities as a material having in itself intrinsically artistic properties, of which beautiful markings is one, its texture another, its color a third."² Bent wood was also an unnatural forcing of the wood. Geometrical or straight lines were natural to the machinery of the period at work; therefore the furnishings as well as the entire interior took on a rectilinear character. "Stuffed" couches or chairs would have been absurd in such

a setting, their forms incompatible with the architecture. The Prairie School pioneers preferred to use loose cushions on wood frames for their lounge furniture to preserve the rectilinear spirit and to clearly define padding from structure.

Nearly all of the custom furniture that went into Wright's Prairie houses was made by the Niedecken-Walbridge Co. of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. More than just a cabinet maker, George Niedecken's advertisements in the *Western Architect* magazine called attention to the fact that his profession was interior architecture. To have even understood the simplicity Mr. Wright was striving to achieve amidst the overgrown and unrestrained Victorian jungle in the average home took a special sort of person. To have also executed the exquisitely detailed and finely finished pieces that flowed



Some of the Willetts house furnishings were obviously not by Wright.

from the Niedecken shop in Milwaukee to the Prairie house interiors so that each piece took its rightful place effortlessly was a feat almost beyond belief.³

The joinery and wood details were of standard furniture construction — it was to the forms that Wright and later the whole Prairie School addressed themselves. The joining of table top to side piece was with a 45° mitre on all sides so that the top would appear as a solid plane rather than as an inlaid veneer with solid wood banding around.

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¹ The April 1913 issue of *The Western Architect* credits the Irving house furniture to H. V. von Holst; however, Marion Mahoney is undoubtedly the author of these pieces. See picture portfolio.

² From "The Art and Craft of the Machine", a lecture delivered at Hull House in Chicago by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1901. Several versions have been published.

³ Ed. note: So far as is known, no study of Niedecken and his work has ever been undertaken. It would be interesting to learn just how much he influenced Wright and the other Prairie School architects.

Many of the dining tables had extra leaves which were added to the ends of the table by resting the leaves on wooden cantilevers that slid out from under the center table top. In this way the unsightly crack down the middle of the conventional table was eliminated. Hinges and pulls were of dull brass and as unobtrusive as possible. It was after the Prairie years that Wright began using the piano hinge as a decorative element in his cabinet designs.



Piano case and stool for a grand piano made for the residence of Mr. E. P. Irving, Decatur, Illinois, by George M. Niedecken.

It was enough then that the hinges were thin and small, and that the rich beauty of plain oak should predominate. Small brass knobs were used widely as drawer pulls and the cabinet doors usually opened with a key, the diminutive lock plate being the only exposed hardware.

According to the philosophy of the Prairie School architects, only a few materials were used and in each category (wood, masonry, metal) only one species of wood, one type of brick or stone, and only one metal, could be employed throughout the house. This severe discipline was necessary if the building was to emerge as an integral interwoven fabric. Oak, a logical choice, was used as the primary material. If oak was to be the symbol of wood then this meant its use everywhere in the building where natural wood was exposed — not only furniture but trim, window frames, doors, lighting fixtures, and floors. Walnut, also a popular wood at that time, was not suitable for flooring or exterior exposure. Oak could fulfill with ease all of the manifold uses of wood demanded in a Prairie School building.

Frank Lloyd Wright loved the tawny, honey tone of oak. The grain of oak is interesting without being too dominant. Due to the small scale pattern of the oak grain, very small trim pieces (often applied to broader oaken surfaces for decoration) could be cut without losing any of the grain character. A broader grained wood which depends upon the swirls and burls for effect would be totally undistinguished in little pieces or strips. Who knows but that oak, as the deciduous example of strength and durability, appealed to Mr. Wright and the other Prairie School architects for its symbolic qualities.

In keeping with the Prairie School philosophy of the natural use of materials, wood was seldom stained, painted, shellacked or varnished. This concept was first effected by Frank Lloyd Wright who grew up in an environment where simple natural elements were the staff of life. Even the drawings of English cathedrals which graced his nursery were framed simply in flat oak. The Japanese houses with their severe simplicity of form and beautiful materials left clean for their own sake, fascinated him. In *Architectural Record*, May 1928, Wright wrote on "wood" with the passion that most men reserve for their secret love letters. The oak was only waxed to bring out its deeper beauty; no other finishing was desired or required.⁴ This very light waxing is the only way to protect the wood and yet retain a very important quality of wood — its tactile beauty, the unique feel of wood grain under the finger tips. The Prairie School architects understood this beauty at the beginning of the century. Only the Scandinavian cabinet makers seem to love the "woodness" of wood today.

In the Prairie homes where economy placed oak out of the plans, birch was often used. Here a dark stain helped the wood trim and furniture to accentuate the plaster planes of wall and ceiling, as in Frank Lloyd Wright's Edwin Cheney house. Walter Burley Griffin preferred the darker wood tones in keeping with his more massive articulation of solids and voids, and heavier membering of gable and eaves. The William H. Emery house in Elmhurst, Illinois independently designed by Griffin in 1902 (Griffin also worked with Frank Lloyd Wright from 1899-1905) has the dark stained oak trim and built in cabinet work. William Drummond tried variations of the natural oak also. His own home in River Forest (1911) is an enchanting interplay of rich warm oak trim and light, rough textured plaster walls. Strangely enough, the

⁴ Wright, Frank Lloyd, "In the Cause of Architecture. IV: The meaning of materials; Wood." *Architectural Record*, LXIII (May, 1928), 481-488.

house Mr. Drummond designed for Ralph S. Baker in Wilmette, Illinois (1914) had all painted woodwork and furniture with only textural differences between wood and plaster to differentiate the two materials.⁵ This was an exception to the Prairie School philosophy. William Schmidt, John Van Bergen and George Maher nearly always fashioned their houses and furniture from natural woods.

It is interesting to note that when Mr. Wright developed his wooden walled Usonian houses 30 years later a new wood was needed for economy's sake which could also withstand weathering on the exterior. Most often used was cypress, full of natural oils to resist moisture and termites, easily worked, and of the same honey color. Here, as in the Prairie houses with their oak, cypress was used for floors, trim, doors and windows, walls and furniture—a constant thread in an intregally woven fabric.

While wood played the major role in the drama of the Prairie School furniture, other materials made their entrances also. Wright mentions in his *Autobiography* designing clothes for his wife Catherine, and we assume this was more than just a casual interest in the selection of woven goods. Many of Wright's first houses had woven fabrics in place of doors, although not many original examples have come down through the years to illustrate what fabrics the Prairie School architects used. The selections in any dry goods store must have been slim indeed, for the horrors of the Victorian age were as manifest in printed yard goods as they were in general interior decoration. Natural texture of the warp and woof of the fabric itself was what the Prairie designers wanted—not a printed design added superficially to the fabric's surface. In addition to these natural, textured fabrics, prints of small geometric patterns were used in furniture upholstery. Photographs of the interiors of the Prairie houses often show the absence of curtains. The fantastic geometrical richness of the patterned glass became sufficient decoration.⁶

Architects of the Prairie School disliked any devices at the windows—drapes, shades or blinds—a reaction, at least in part, to the quaint Victorian habit of smothering each window with gauzie

under curtains, filmy side curtains, over curtains and heavy velvet drapes until only a twelve inch patch of daylight peeked through with obvious embarrassment. All this paraphernalia was contrary to the simplicity of the Prairie School philosophy. Windows were too important in the quest of uniting interior space with exterior space to be covered at all.

It was manditory that openings be treated exactly the same on the inside as on the outside to help break down the wall as an apparent division. For the same reason deep overhangs were employed to shade the windows so that shutters would not be needed on the outside. Only in the town houses where tight lots demanded privacy at the window openings did curtains appear as in the Susan Lawrence Dana house in Springfield, Illinois, one of Wright's most complete designs and a masterpiece of the Prairie years. Even here the curtain fabrics were of a solid textured weave with infrequent geometric patterns to repeat the rich leadings of the window geometry.

By all accounts the autumnal colors were favored in the Prairie schemes. This may have been due to



Chairs, tables, lamp and rug designed in 1916 by Purcell and Elmslie for Alexander Brothers General Office in Philadelphia.

the fact that it was easier to produce pleasing color combinations using only the earth colors (especially at that time) than it was to find the right shades of blue or green, especially when used in combination. Wright was particularly fond of the golds, reds and browns, and the resulting monochromatic color scheme was the chromatic essence of the Prairie.

Just as the plantings on the exterior softened the

⁵ See THE PRAIRIE SCHOOL REVIEW, Second Quarter 1964, 18-19.

⁶ The leaded glazing was actually an effective screen against persons seeing in during the day due to each small pane of glass reflecting at a slightly different angle. Most of the houses were equipped with roller shades, however, which could be drawn at night.

crisp outlines of the house, rugs were used on the interior to impart texture, comfort and color. Those bought ready made were, of necessity, plain and simple as no patterning of that time would have been in harmony with the total effect desired by the Prairie School architects. Wright on occasion had the opportunity to design rugs or carpeting for his clients resulting in a harmonious integration of the floor covering with the architecture. Mr. F. C. Robie recalls that the hand woven wool rug from Austria in the dining and living areas of his house designed by Wright had geometric patterns which repeated with variations the configurations of the electroplated windows. The sunshine flashing through the windows would throw constantly changing shadows and colors on the rug "screen" so that the whole area became a harmonious dance between projected pattern and woven design. The E. Bogk house in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (1913) had a brilliant orange carpet with small inset patterns of blues and yellows widely dispersed across the rug's surface. The effect was a warmth and richness of color hardly equaled in an interior decorator's wildest dream.

Glass doors to protect and yet reveal the contents of built in cabinets were used by all of the Prairie architects. Rather than using large framed pieces of glass, the architects took advantage of this opportunity to pattern these cabinet doors like the windows. Wright and Drummond often used the leaded or electroplated windows, and their cabinet work usually repeated the same parti. Without these small areas of rich, geometric shapes and insets of green, gold and milky glass, the interiors of the Prairie houses would have been severe indeed. The patterned glass sparkled forth from the wide expanses of golden oak to create a rich effect in the cabinet work that has never been equaled. The Prairie School architects understood so well that the eye needs small scale enrichment to focus upon at close distances and to contrast with the unbroken planes of plaster, brick or wood.

The fabrication of the glass doors and windows was usually done by glass maker Orlando Giannini, another craftsman genius who was able to understand what the Prairie School architects wanted.

Where leaded or electroplated glass could not be incorporated due to the budget, the glass areas were subdivided into complex geometric shapes by wood muntins of various thicknesses, both in the windows and in the cabinet doors. The china cabinet of William Drummond's home is an excellent example of the intricate detail of muntin, glass stop and decorative molding relationship which

was manifest in the wooden grill works.

Despite the advances made by the Prairie School architects in designing singlehandedly a whole new style of furniture to integrate with their pioneering of an indigenous American architectural form, their efforts have been castigated and criticized from all sides. Even learned critics condemn the Prairie School movement for failing to provide furniture that was comfortable, adaptable, flexible, movable and beautiful. Part of this criticism stems from the design cannon followed today (or at least given lip service) that an object's form grows from the practical requirements of the problem; whether this final form fits into the next level of environment is quite beside the point. Frank Lloyd Wright and the other Prairie School architects preferred to work from the higher level of total environment down to the practical considerations.

This is not to say that comfort was not an important item; but they knew that one man's comfort may be another man's back ache. The high straight backed dining chairs which appear so strange today were designed for a society where women were corseted from knee to shoulder blade, and men stood as if they had a poker strapped to their backs. When they sat down to eat, they sat straight and tall; "correctness", manners and moral values were more important than comfort. Even while some find this attitude archaic in our easy going, comfort loving world, there is nothing archaic about these chairs. Families have handed them down from one generation to the next and many are still in use. The chair seats were quite shallow so it was possible to rest the back against the chair from the base of the spine all the way to the head. "We grew up sitting in these chairs and we still use them. I guess we're used to them," one young woman explained. "They're really quite comfortable."

Their flexibility and movability is another knot which binds this era's appreciation of the Prairie furniture. Here again needs and living patterns have changed drastically since the early 1900's. Then a job, a house and a way of life were fixed entities. The dining table sat in the middle of the dining room with the chairs around, and this was where everyone ate each day. There was no need for a table to do anything except expand when company came. The same was true, to a lesser extent, with the living room furniture. Mobility was not the way up; a series of apartments and rented houses was not the environment for young families. The very solidity and "rootedness" of the Prairie architecture and its concordant furniture was a direct reflection of this stable way of life.

Of the practicality and sturdiness of the Prairie furniture there can be no question. The natural wood sans highly finished surfaces could absorb nicks, scratches and dents and need only a new coat of wax to restore the beauty. While the pieces may have been ponderous, they stood up under several generations of children playing under, over and around them. In fact, children love the Prairie furniture for it provides all sorts of levels, cubby-holes and hiding places for a crawling child. Where does one hide under a plastic pedestal table? Better still, where does the tiger hide?

In addition to the revolution in furniture, there was the revolution in space. To the Prairie architects space was a tangible thing, more important as an architectural element than form, structure or materials. The spatial composition was the germ of the entire building. Space was like a gas which filled every part of the interior and flowed through actual or glazed openings in the walls and ceiling. Rooms as cubicles with doors leading one to another shut off this space flow and made the house a series of boxes within boxes, confining the family life to compartments closed off from each other and from the outside world. Besides resembling a penal institution this type of architecture was suggestive of the Old World order, certainly not expressive of the new freedom loving American spirit where the open plains and limitless horizon called a new challenge to any man who would listen and follow.

The interiors of these new Prairie houses were open, especially on the main floor, to allow the space to flow freely from entrance hall to living room to dining room to library. Architectural elements, piers, jogs in walls, and wing walls, were used to divert and arrange the spatial flow in a carefully conceived sequence of spaces to be experienced as one moved through the house. Privacy was obtained where needed and interest created by developing certain angles of vision. A view was withheld here and a vista opened there by the logical arrangement of screening elements. The architecture itself could be a screen as in the pier arrangements or wall configurations, but even the freely disposed architectural elements in the Prairie plans were not flexible enough to keep up with the varied and complex screening arrangements demanded by this new spatial architecture. It was at this point that furniture assumed a new role of a higher order: that of arranging, diverting and controlling the interior and interior-exterior space flow. Little has it been realized how much the furniture actually does create the new environment found in the Prairie houses.

Most of the actual molding of space was done by built in units, but movable pieces had a very important part to play also. The tall spindle back chairs, found in many of the Prairie dining rooms and laughed at today as examples of personal whimsy on the part of their designers, had an important role in the creation of auxiliary spaces. These elongated backs were actually screens and were used in the free flowing Prairie house spaces to define the dining area during meal times. Taller than a seated person's head, a group of them pulled up around the dining table created a cozy room within a room, a room without a roof so that the great space could still be appreciated, but nevertheless a room with visual boundaries to contain the meal time fellowship. The corner light posts on the Robie house dining table were also excellent space definers to demarcate the act of dining from the other activities in the great room.

The variations and combinations of the built in pieces were as personal as the diffuse natures of the Prairie houses themselves. Within these variations, however, a certain range of general forms and combinations of these forms were repeated by the Prairie School architects. These furniture "types" were not arbitrary but selected for a specific use in a specific location. The materials, proportion, and relationships changed; the general forms did not.

One of the most simple was the freestanding unit — usually a storage case of one kind or another — which stood alone in the room to mark a visual boundary or indicate a change of function. A good example are the storage units in the Gale house which stand between the dining room and living room, each not quite touching the side walls that flow past them unbroken from area to area. Only about six feet tall, the cabinets allow the ceiling to run from living room to dining room without interruption. Thus the space is allowed to flow over the tops and around both sides increasing the visual space and defining two areas within one large room.

Used in a very similar way to demarcate various activities were the units which were placed between architectural elements, such as two freestanding piers, piers and wall, or two walls. These freestanding piers, which acted as terminal masses for the wooden cases, were sometimes structural, sometimes mechanical chases and sometimes solely space dividers; ideally they combined all of these functions. Consisting of brick or plaster with wood trim, they extended from floor to ceiling. The case work between them was five to six feet high and clearly non-structural. In many places only a

grill of vertical square spindles served as a screen between the piers. More often a low wooden case performed the same screening function and, at the same time, provided storage. The case between the two plaster and wood piers in William Drummond's home separate the dining room from one end of the living room. The low height freed space to flow across the cabinet top as well as over the top of the deck, yet the cabinet is tall enough to prevent a view of the table from the living area. Where more privacy than this was desired, a spindle screen was set atop the cabinet extending to light cove or ceiling level.

Another variation of screening furniture was the wood cabinet which ran perpendicular to a wall and formed its own terminal. At times this terminal mass was a higher cabinet into which the lower,



The living room of the H. C. Price house in Arizona was built in 1956. The influence of the Prairie furniture of 50 years earlier is evident in this large Usonian house by Frank Lloyd Wright.

longer casework could abut as in Wright's R. W. Evans house; in other places the cases ended in an auxiliary feature such as a light, or a series of open shelves attached to the end of the enclosed cabinet. In locations where appropriate, the casework repeated a minor architectural motif such as terminating in a diamond shape. In some cases the cabinets merely stopped — their simple proportion justifying a certain length or height.

This particular type of built in furniture was usually found near an opening of some kind so that the wall and its perpendicular extension of cabinets formed a cozy L shape, the cabinets screening a circulation area from the enclosed nook.

The advantages of having a built in piece of

furniture do the work of a wall were many. The furniture could be easily extended or contracted in length and heightened or shortened to give it a flexibility that a solid wall could never match. This made it possible to control the degree of screening necessary for privacy as well as the configuration needed to stop a space in one place and lead the eye from space to space in another. The fact that the cabinets were just above eye level in height allowed the eye to partake of three or four rooms and feel the extension of space therein without actually seeing all of the room. The mind enjoys completing what the eye cannot see which lends an air of mystery and excitement. The "space beyond" as imagined is vastly more interesting than the totally open area where all can be seen and comprehended at a glance. While acting as an effective visual barrier, however, these furniture pieces do not block vision in the same sense as a wall. The open shelves and glazed cabinet doors let the eye wander into the recesses to look at the objects contained. In this way these furniture pieces are truly only screens and not a visual block.

The Prairie architects used this psychology to make their modest homes more visually spacious than the "great" houses of that day with their dark, cluttered boxes for rooms. The absence of these space controlling furniture pieces is also precisely why so many of the "open plan" tract and ranch houses today are unsatisfactory. The effective use of screen furniture is an integral part of the entire concept.

Finally, the built in cases were the prototype of today's storage wall where a tremendous amount of material can be stored in an area usually devoted to a wall of studs, lath and plaster. The Prairie architects knew how to make their screen walls work for them, visually as well as practically.

Not all of the built in furniture was out in the room. Many pieces were built against a brick or stud wall, especially the dining buffets found in almost all of the Prairie dining rooms. The dining room buffet in the Robie house was an excellent example of the general form used by the Prairie architects in their wall cabinets. The base cabinet was treated as a plane with narrow strips of wood to emphasize the horizontal lines and to break up the flat wood surfaces into interesting patterns. Projected "masses" at each end (here, piers of plaster with wood moldings) stopped the strong horizontal lines and contained the composition within their outline. The counter top projected beyond the terminal masses biting into them and anchoring the buffet solidly to the uprights. The lower cupboard doors stopped short of the vertical piers and

a slight reveal or recess was introduced to separate these elements. The upper buffet shelf also stopped short of the terminals and was supported by its own uprights. The separation of shelf from the piers and the long cantilevers at each end helped this shelf to float in the center of the composition as if fixed by lines of force. The whole composition was capped by a deck which projected slightly forward of the side piers.

The horizontal planes dominated in every sense even when the buffet was used for dishes and service pieces. The wood molding and base ran along the wall, around the projecting piers, and across the lower wood cabinets as well, making the buffet "architecture" instead of just a piece of attached furniture.

Besides performing the necessary storage function the built in wall cabinets in Prairie houses were used to break down the wall as a visual barrier. The projecting and receding planes served to soften the exact wall plane, and the dominant horizontal elements with vertical accents further fragmented the solid wall into an interesting patterned screen. It almost seemed as if, within the shifting planes, lines and forms, one could actually see through the wall. This kind of storage cabinet was used most often on the wall between dining area and kitchen. Since the buffet held the prepared food prior to serving, it became the physical transition between food preparation (kitchen) and food consumption (dining), and pointed the way to the day when this dining-kitchen divider would indeed be just a screen or an open counter.

The built in furniture was placed on an outside window wall for the same purposes as its location on an interior wall — convenient out-of-the-way storage and making the wall less a barrier. Holes "punched" for windows and doors were unnatural to the Prairie spirit and an unintegrated feature to be eliminated. By combining the openings with casework it became a creative way to weave both window and cabinet into the warp of the house.

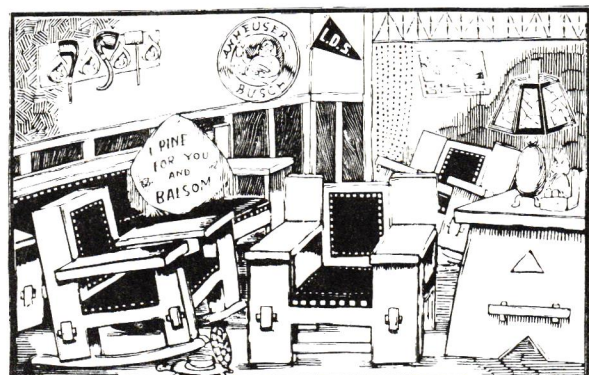
In William Drummond's home the windows fell naturally between deck, end book cases and base cabinet. The flat oak stripping tied the elements together until one was left to wonder, where is wall — where is furniture — where is window? This side of the living room had become something different from and greater than any of its parts.

Another of Drummond's cases framed the dining windows in the Baker house. Here the terminal masses were storage pieces also, and their bulk was enough to hold the window between

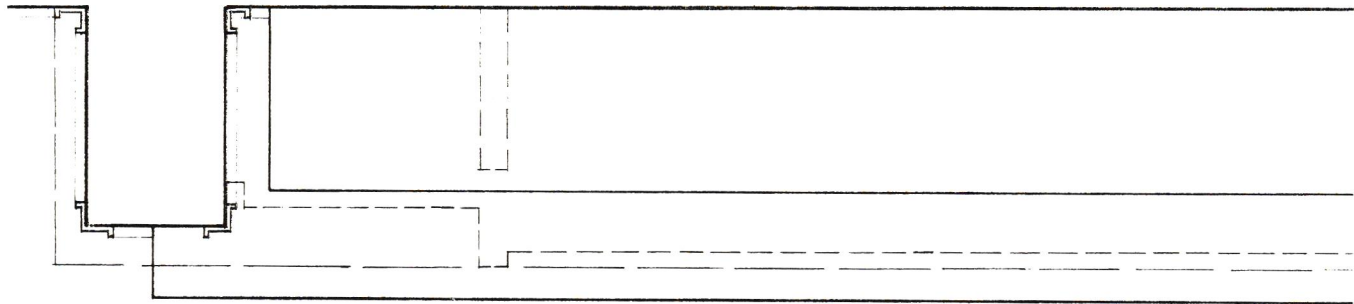
without auxiliary wooden bandings. The glazed doors of the buffet repeated the general proportions of the window mullions behind.

The Ward Willitts buffet exemplified another way of "wall busting". The use of front posts and rear mullions blurred the actual glass plane separation between exterior and interior. The end cabinets with their glass doors and glazed backs further fragmented and confused any clear distinction between inside cabinets and outside architecture. All was space flowing in light through uprights which resembled a building in one instant and furniture in another. And finally there was the release to the out of doors which could be visually two feet within the room. The play of glazed planes in space was almost surrealism in nature, a mystical juggling of air, matter and space to form the side of a dining room.

With the technological advances in the exploration of outer space, the investigations of the "inner space of an architecture" continue. Certainly the insights of Bruno Zevi, Vincent Scully, Jr., and Peter Blake have opened up a new appreciation of what the Prairie School architects were trying to do spatially. That the often abused Prairie furniture was able to play as important a role in spatial formation as it did reflects a great deal of the innovational spirit of the Prairie School architects. Certainly no architect since, with the exception of Frank Lloyd Wright, has used furniture as flexibly, creatively and architecturally to further enforce the central ruling parti of the building. No other architects have managed to integrate building and furnishings into a greater environmental whole, and it may well be that those strange, awkward, bulky chairs and chests are, in reality, one of the major accomplishments of the Prairie School. They are not in themselves prototypes of perfection; what the furniture contributed to the total architecture was the real achievement.

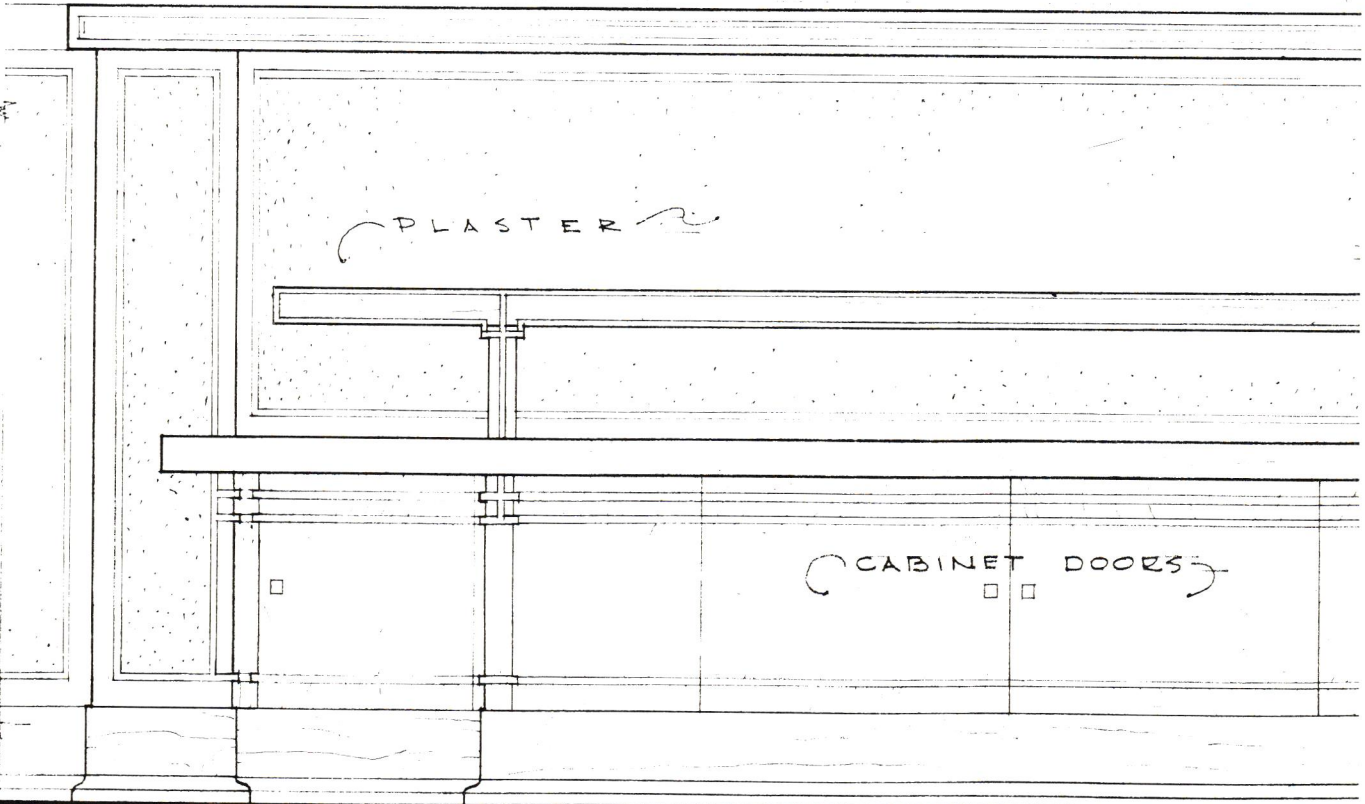
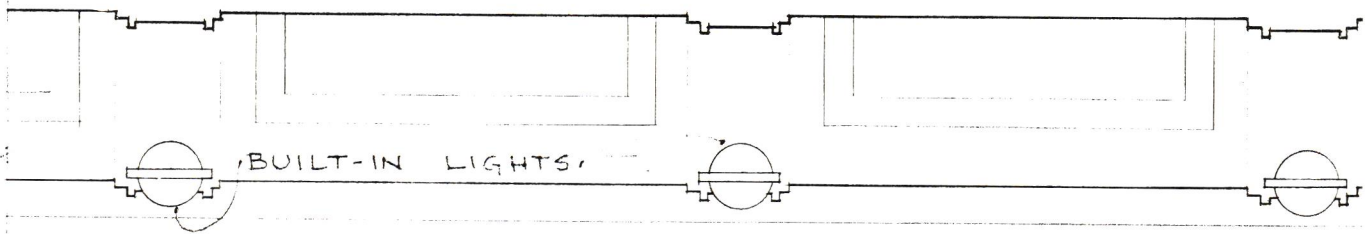


IN THE BACKGROUND OF AMERICA'S AESTHETIC TASTE
MISSION FURNITURE
ENGRAVED BY JOHN HELD JR. PHILOSOPHER AND POET



PLAN

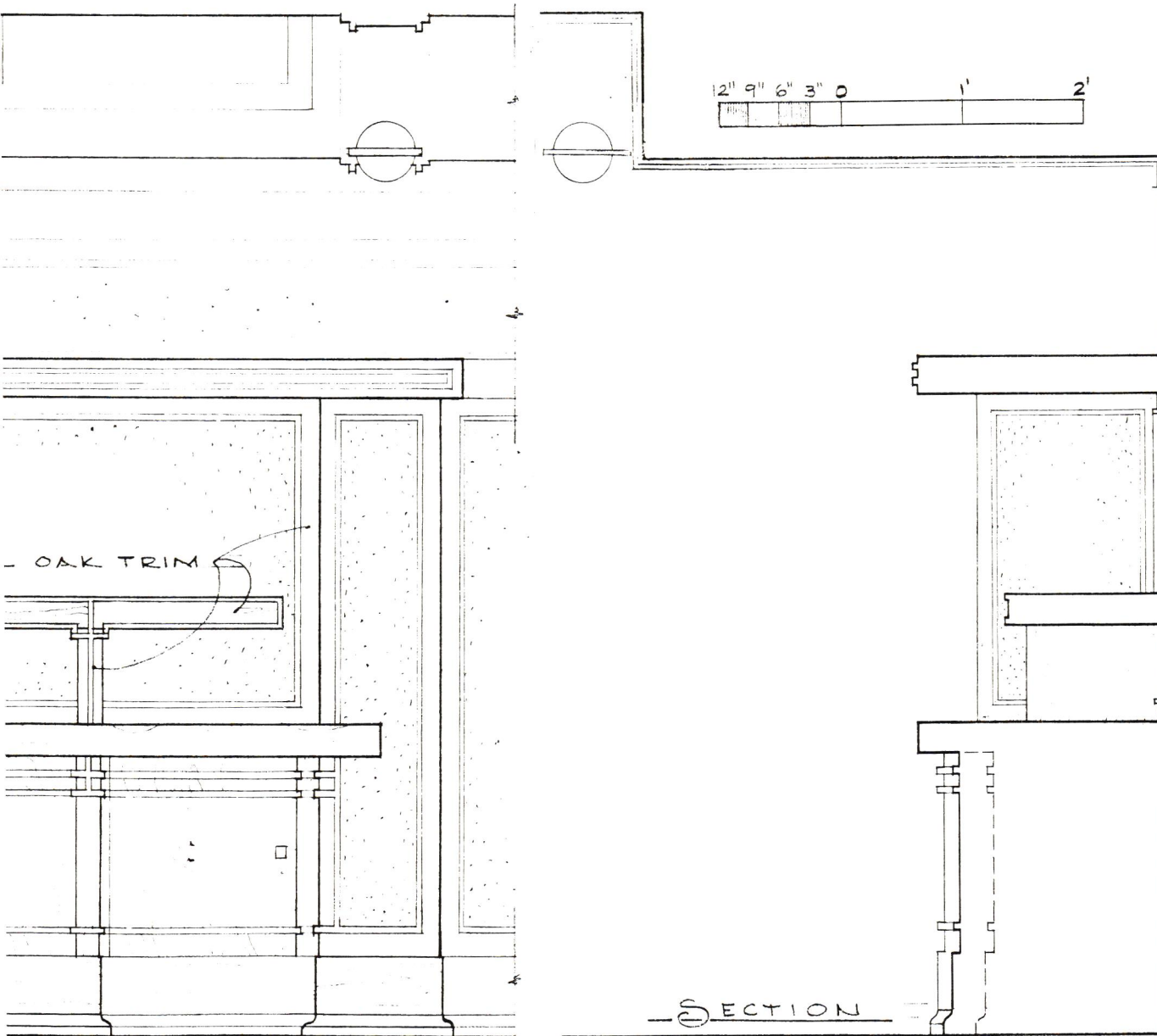
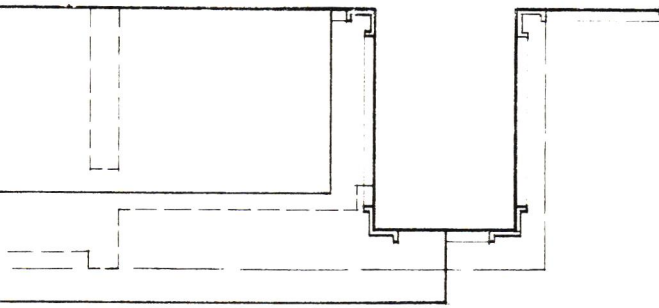
ELEVATION BELOW



MEASURED DRAWING

This drawing of the Robie House dining room buffet was prepared by Donald Kalec using blueprints of Frank Lloyd Wright's original drawings as the primary source of information. The original buffet has been removed from the house and a true measured drawing cannot be made. However, several other built in cabinets throughout the house were studied carefully and this drawing is probably an accurate representation of the original. The buffet will be replaced when the house is restored by the University of Chicago.

The architects for the proposed restoration are Taliesin Associated Architects headed by William Wesley Peters.

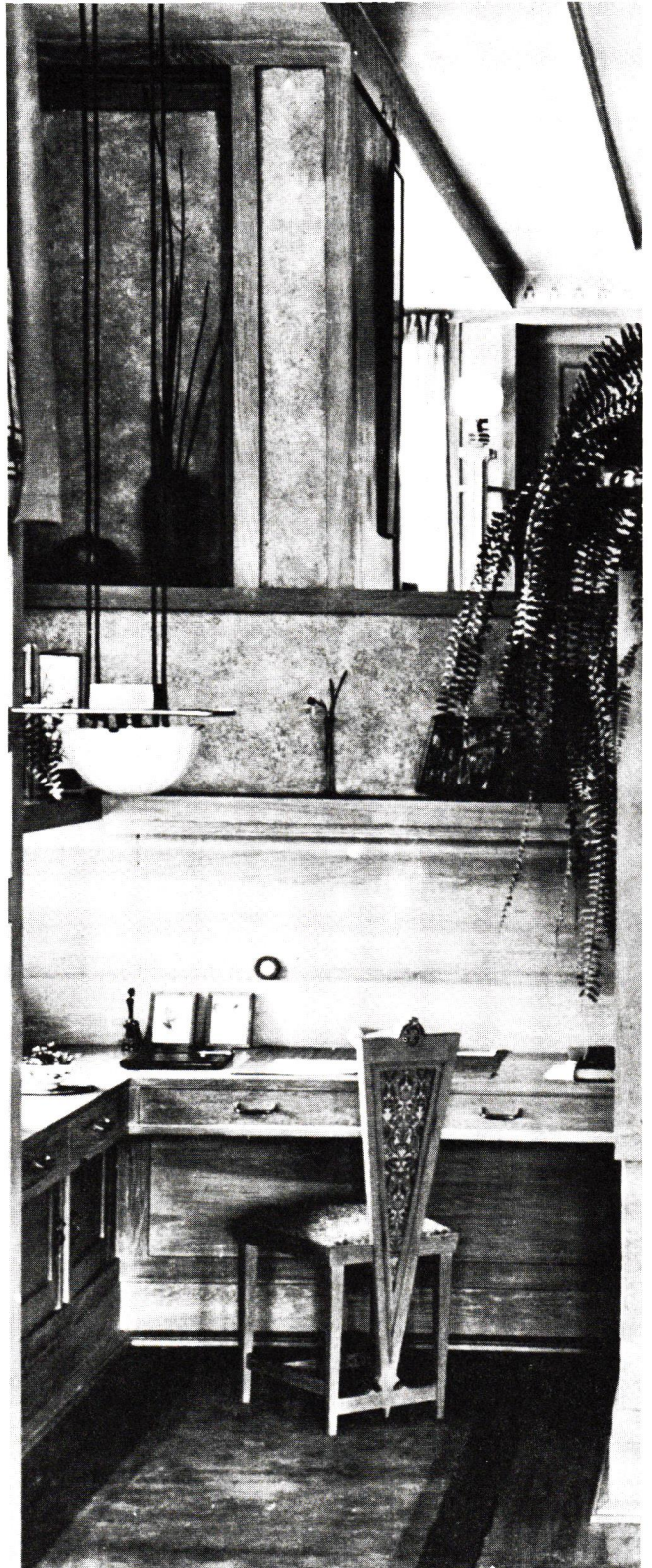


A Portfolio of Prairie School Furniture

Right: A detail showing a chair, curtains, rugs, lamps and built in desk of the Purcell house in Minneapolis.

Purcell & Elmslie, 1913.

Below: Dining chairs and table designed in 1910 by George Grant Elmslie for his wife.

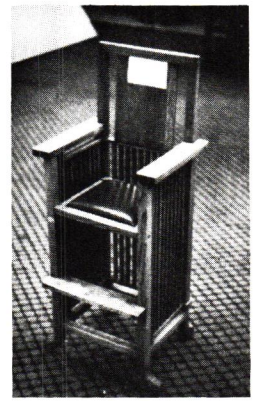
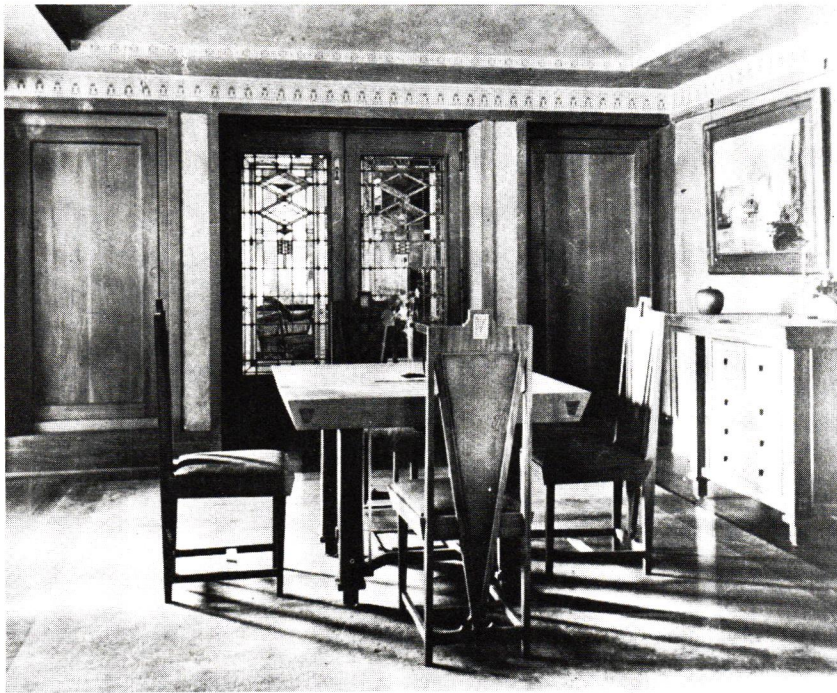


Purcell & Elmslie Photo



Purcell & Elmslie Photo





This charming child's chair was designed by William Drummond in 1913 and is still in use.

*Above: Dining room table and chairs in the Purcell house in Minneapolis, 1913.
Right: The living room of William Drummond's own house in River Forest, Illinois, 1911.
Below: The Robie house dining room as designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1906.*

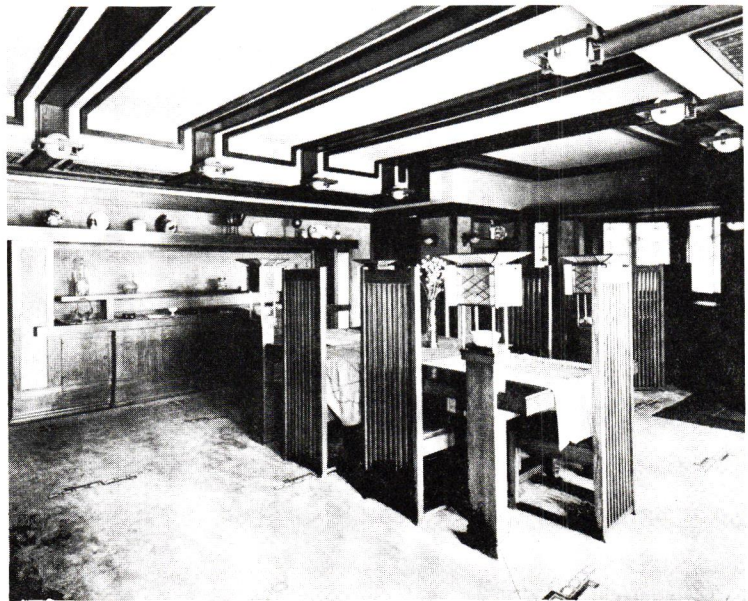
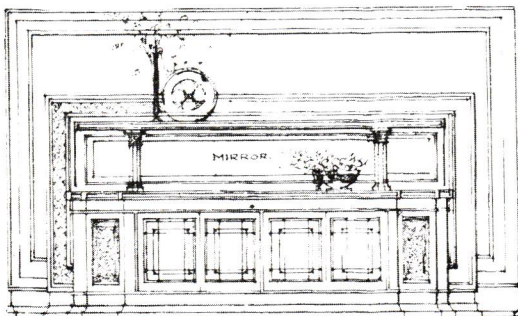
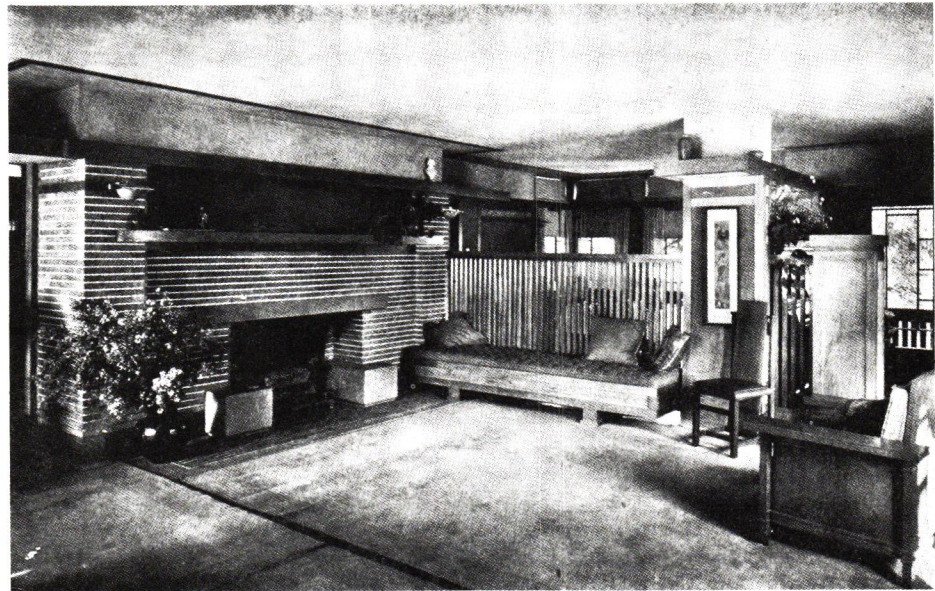




Photo by Leon Lewandowski, IIT

The pieces on this page are examples of the only two furniture designs still existing in Louis Sullivan's Bradley house in Madison, Wisconsin. The Bradley furniture was undoubtedly designed by George Elmslie.

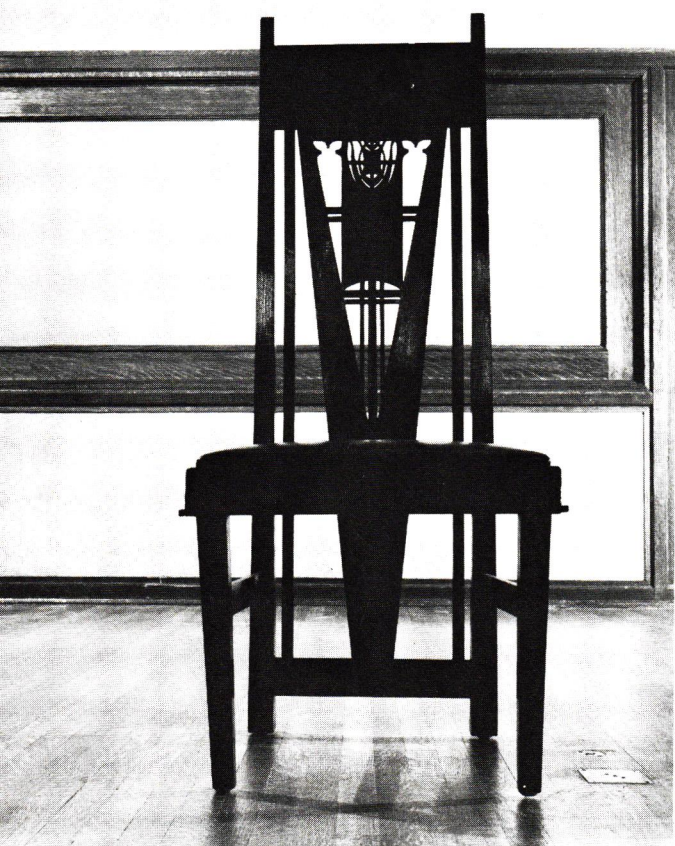
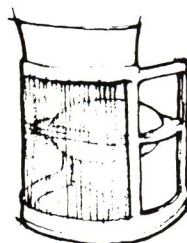
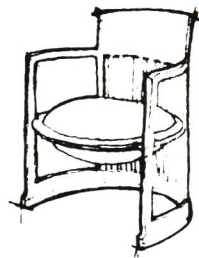


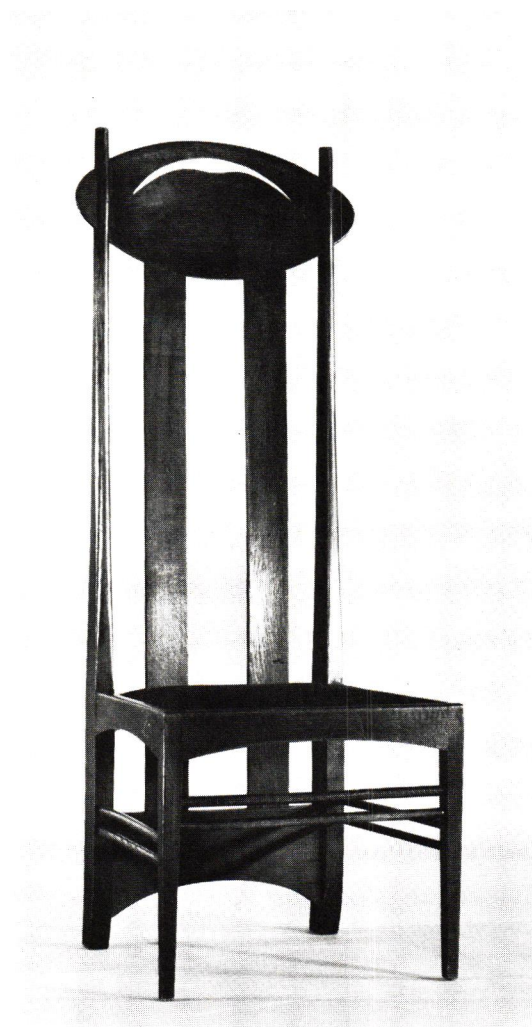
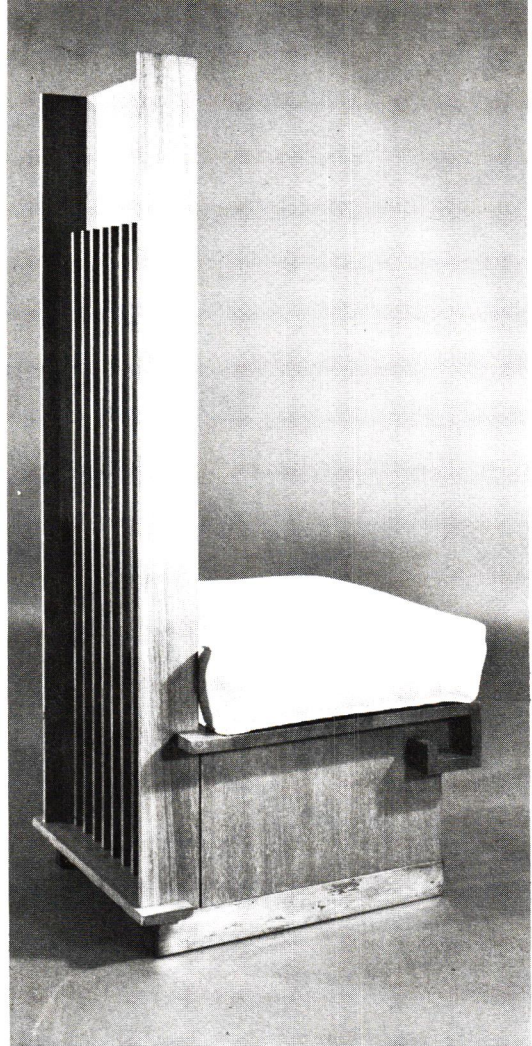
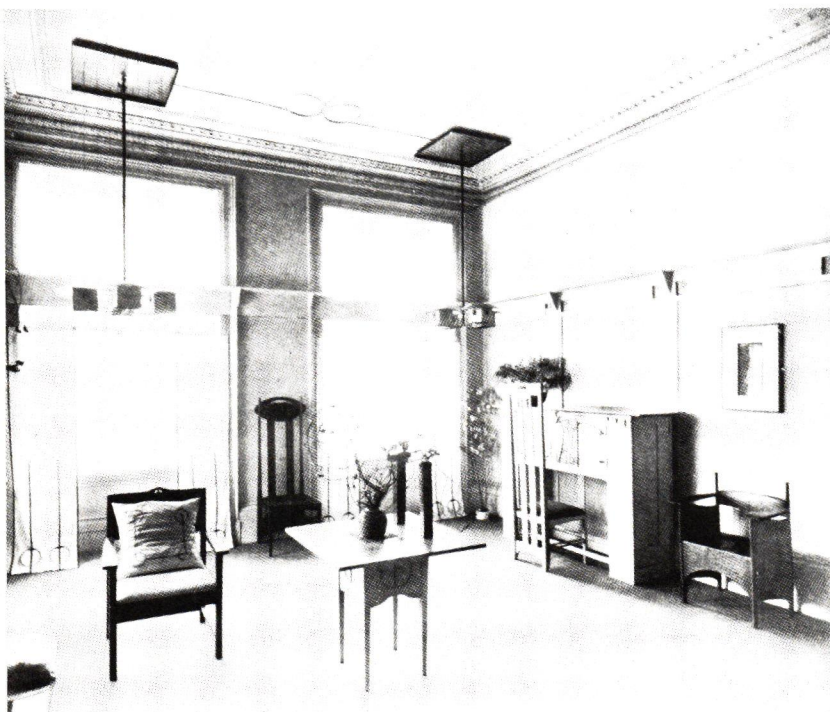
Photo by Len Gittleman, IIT

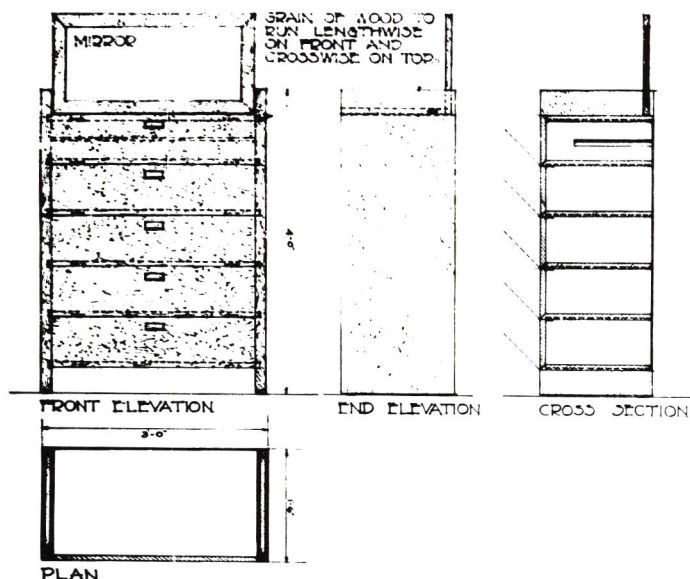


*This modern Prairie School chair was done in 1957 by Frank Lloyd Wright.
The chair below was designed by Scottish architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh for his own house in 1900.*



*Another design by Mackintosh is this interior.
Little is known of his influence on the Prairie architects in the United States or vice versa.*

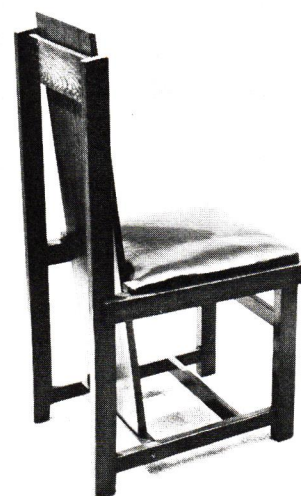




CATHOLIC COLLEGE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

FULL SIZE & 1/2" SCALE DETAILS
OF CHIFFONIER

W. B. GRIFFIN - A. A. FRITSCH
ARCHITECTS IN CONJUNCTION
395 COLLINS ST. MELBOURNE
JAN 9TH 1917.



Three 1904 chairs by Wright

Top: Side Chair

Center: Metal office chair

Bottom: Pine arm chair

These chairs and those on
page 19 are from the
collection of the Museum of
Modern Art, New York.

Photos by George Barrows.

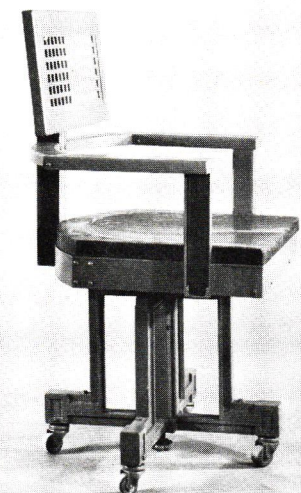
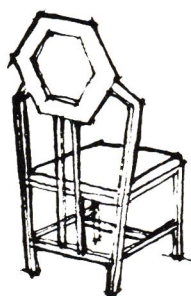
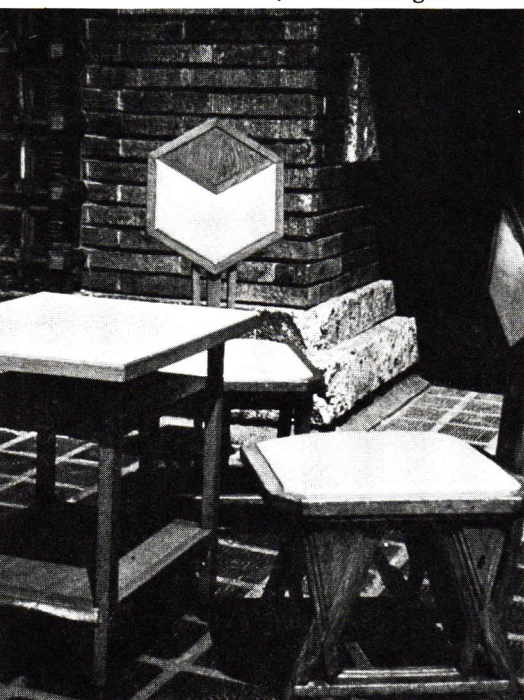
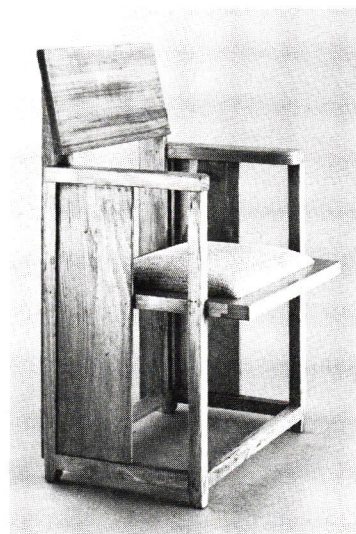


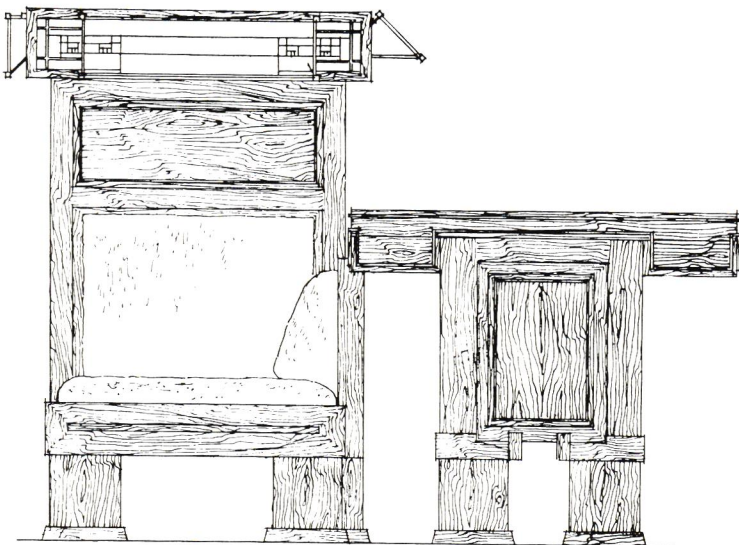
Photo by Lawrence Rogers



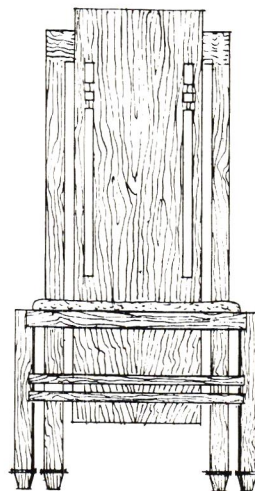
Two chairs and a small table still being used
at Wright's Imperial Hotel in Tokyo,
Japan.



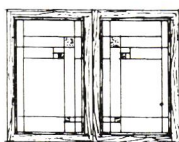
Page 21: This is a page from *The Western Architect* of April 1913. Herman von Holst is given credit for these pieces but Marion Mahoney was actually the designer of this furniture.



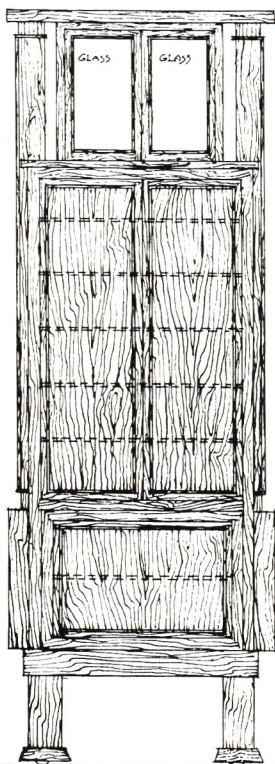
END ELEVATION COUCH AND TABLE



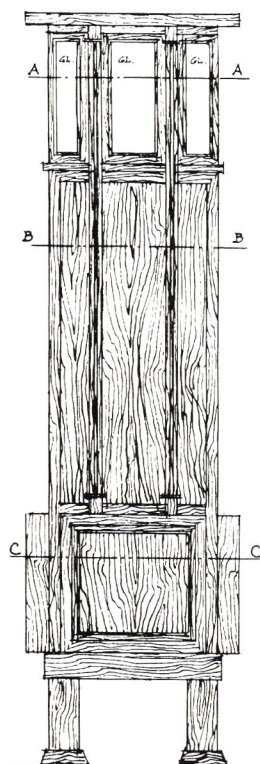
DESIGN FOR DINING CHAIR
FRONT ELEVATION



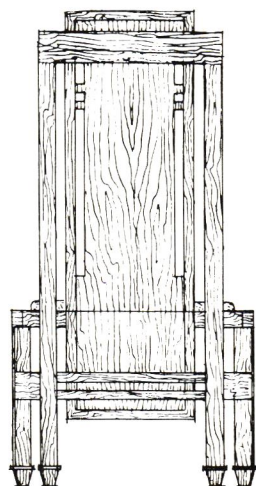
DOORS IN UPPER PART OF CABINET



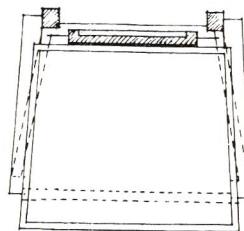
FRONT ELEVATION



SIDE ELEVATION

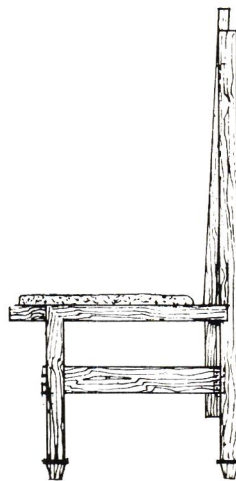


REAR ELEVATION



PLAN OF SEAT

DETAILS OF SPECIAL
MADE FURNITURE DE-
SIGN BY MR. H. V.
VON HOLST, FOR E. P.
IRVING RESIDENCE,
DECATUR, ILLINOIS.
FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT,
ARCHITECT, CHICAGO
ILLINOIS :: :: :: ::



SIDE ELEVATION

MUSIC CABINET

Elmslie's Topeka Legacy

by Donald L. Hoffman



Mr. Hoffmann, a professional journalist with the Kansas City Star, has written extensively about the development of modern American architecture. He is particularly interested in the work of the "Prairie" and "Chicago" architects.

When George Grant Elmslie was commissioned to design a new house for the Capitol Building and Loan Association of Topeka, Kansas, the First World War had ended, and the architects of the Prairie School were scattered. Louis H. Sullivan, whom Elmslie had served loyally for two decades, was without work. Frank Lloyd Wright, who had been with Elmslie in the offices of Joseph Lyman Silsbee and Adler & Sullivan, was waging his own battles in Japan and California. Walter Burley Griffin had gone to Australia. Elmslie himself, after productive years between 1909 and 1920 with William Gray Purcell, was alone.

How Elmslie received the commission is unknown to descendants and successors of the association officers. Our best information comes from

W. L. Hamilton, now Kansas State Savings and Loan Commissioner. When the building was constructed (1922-1924), Hamilton was a clerk with the association. He writes:

Mr. Charles S. Elliott, who was the founder of the association and also the president and managing officer, was the guiding spirit in the planning and construction of this building . . . The building attracted wide interest at that time from people from all over the country . . . Mr. Elliott and the other men who were associated with him at that time are now all deceased. I do not know who suggested Mr. Elmslie to Mr. Elliott . . . ¹

¹ Letter to the author.

Henry Bubb, president of the association today², recalled recently: "Their thought was to build an office building that reminded people of the American home."³ J. Hugo Nelson, a senior vice-president, recalls that the high-pitched gable roof, in particular, was conceived as symbolizing the home. The concept, he says, was in line with a slogan of the time that the American home was the safeguard of liberty.⁴

Though restricted by a narrow site at the northeast corner of Sixth Street and Kansas Avenue, and perhaps by a program calling for a rather sentimental theme, Elmslie clearly was not hampered by a tight budget. He collaborated with a team of artisans: Emil R. Zettler, sculptor; John W. Norton, muralist; and Kristian Schneider, who modeled the terra cotta ornament which Elmslie designed.⁵ Schneider had been Sullivan's modeler more than 20 years.⁶

Although the structure is equivalent in height to an eight or nine story office building, because of the extraordinarily high base which provided a banking floor and mezzanine office space for the association and a high roof, there are only four floors of commercial office space. These, with their narrow brick mullions and spandrels embellished with terra cotta plaques, are reminiscent of Sullivan's Wainwright building in St. Louis.

The gabled roof not only is reminiscent of Sullivan's St. Nicholas hotel in St. Louis, but its Gothic overtones make it the least successful feature of the building. It can only be defended in terms of the symbolical home theme and by the need to counteract a base out of proportion with the small number of office floors. The north party-wall of the building is the only wall not handsomely finished; even the east alley-front is ornamented with terra cotta, some of it multi-colored, and a large leaded glass window lighting the banking floor. The dado of the building is gray granite and the remainder of the facing is of elegant Roman brick in soft tapestry buff and orange colors. The excellent terra cotta work is, of course, Sullivanesque in its organic patterns, but it must be remembered that much of Sullivan's ornament from the 1890's until 1909 when Elmslie left him was in fact Elmslie's. In contrast, the small leaded glass panes at the top of the granite dado are strictly geometrical, in the manner of Wright. The three on the broad south face present geometricized tulips.

Zettler's sculpture and relief panels, with themes

such as the Kansas family, the pioneer, home, work, and civic culture, are subdued and integrated with the structure. Considered apart, their artistic merit may be slight; but as ornament, they greatly enhance the building — which is exactly what they should do. Similar themes were expressed in Norton's murals around the mezzanine. The foyer had a fountain with a sculpture of a young girl by Zettler.

Forty years ago William L. Steele, who was associated with Purcell & Elmslie in building the Woodbury County courthouse (1916-1918) in Sioux City, Iowa, appraised the Capitol Building and Loan Association structure. His words still ring true.

This building would look out of place in New York or Chicago. It has been designed for and in Topeka. Hence its great individuality and charm. It is a definite demonstration that a business building need not be a square box with regularly spaced holes . . .⁷



A detail showing Elmslie's terra cotta ornament as executed by Emil Zettler.

Yet today the building stands vacant. Its doors have been locked for three years. The association has moved one block south into a larger, sleek curtain-wall building.

The association, largest financial institution in Kansas, still owns the old building but not the land beneath it. Officers say that the four office floors are too cramped to be successful rental space; that the desires of the landowners are uncertain; and that the area has been designated for urban renewal.

How long the building can escape demolition, no one knows. Topekan seem unaware that George Grant Elmslie willed them a gift of the human spirit.

⁷ The Western Architect, September, 1924.

² Reorganized, the firm in recent years has been known as the Capitol Federal Savings and Loan Association.

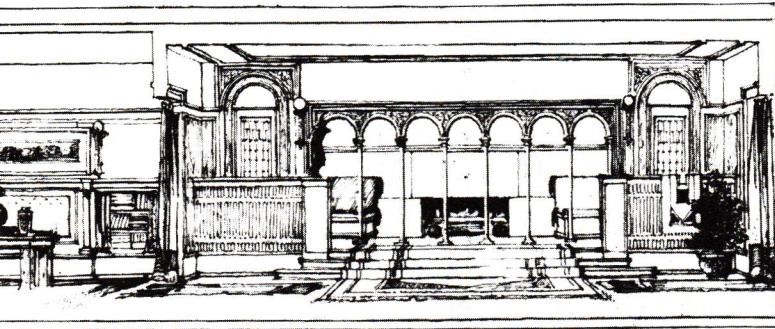
³ Conversation with the author.

⁴ Conversation with the author.

⁵ See *The Western Architect*, September, 1924.

⁶ Hugh Morrison, *Louis Sullivan*, New York, 1935.

Book Reviews



THE WORK OF FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT from 1893 to 1900, by Robert C. Spencer, Jr. Facsimile from The Architectural Review, 1900. The Prairie School Press, 117 Fir Street, Park Forest, Illinois, 1964. 18 pp. plus double page plates, \$2.50.

Frank Lloyd Wright's early work has been analyzed in countless books and periodicals. The most important single source of information concerning his architecture prior to 1900 is this study by Wright's friend, Robert C. Spencer, Jr. It was originally published in *The Architectural Review* (Boston) and was the first national recognition given to the young architect.

This edition reproduces the original in its entirety in its original format. A great many drawings and photographs supplement the text, many of which are unavailable elsewhere. Of no small consequence are the magnificent double page renderings of the Winslow, Husser, and Heller houses.

The monograph is of particular interest since it was written by a contemporary before Wright became fashionable. In 1900 this work was revolutionary and to many critics, incomprehensible. Spencer, however, knew Wright and was a practicing architect himself. He wrote well and any student of the Prairie movement can ill afford to pass such an important article.

Robert Spencer continued to write after this early success and his contributions to the architectural periodicals of the first decade of the twentieth century were an excellent commentary on the development of the Prairie School period. Let us hope that this publication will prompt the PRAIRIE SCHOOL PRESS to produce other facsimiles in similar fashion.

Reviewed by L. H. Hobson

THE CHICAGO SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE, A History of Commercial and Public Building in the Chicago Area, 1875-1925, by Carl W. Condit. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, 1964. 238 pp. 196 photos, \$8.50.

The subtitle is an accurate description of Dr. Condit's expanded version of *The Rise of The Skyscraper*. This is a history of that period of primarily commercial architecture usually termed "The Chicago School". After a perfunctory bow to the early history of Chicago, Condit takes the reader through the years by means of direct narrative, with an obvious preference for telling it as it was. What could have been only a long recital of facts is treated in a manner which soon generates an enthusiasm with his audience and Condit's story of Chicago's architecture becomes a tale of great interest and excitement.

The period is covered by means of choosing the great firms and the great buildings and discussing the best of both. The author being an historian of technology, structure usually predominates in favor of architecture, but in the case of Chicago architecture, the two are difficult to separate. However, the addition of some discussion of architectural planning would have been an appropriate addition to a number of the buildings covered. While it is refreshing to read post-Zevi architectural comment which does not sprinkle the word "space" liberally on every page, it is sometimes consternating to encounter a two-dimensionalism exemplified by such as the dismissal of the lobby of the Railway Exchange as "a work of showy classicism".

The Prairie School was covered by Condit in his earlier work in only the briefest fashion. Now he discusses this work in somewhat greater detail. Maher, Griffin, van Bergen, Purcell and Elmslie, Guenzel and Drummond and others who practiced residential work are included. He chooses to cover only work in the Chicago area and does not make a critical evaluation of their buildings. Such a study would, of course, have been beyond the scope of the present volume. Still it should be made clear that developments of the Prairie School architecture were parallel to the Chicago School and not merely an outgrowth of the commercial work.

Such shortcomings, though, are nearly unavoidable in a survey work of this type, and they do not detract from what is accomplished. It is as an introduction and reference work that *The Chicago School of Architecture* is at its best. Condit tells the story of a building well and enlivens the text with illuminating biographical details. The photographs are genuinely illustrative of the text, and an excellent index and bibliography are included.

The effect of the book on non-architects and non-Chicagoans will be particularly beneficial, for the central theme of such a work is automatically the vast sub-stratum of high-quality building and laborious theoretical development which was necessary to produce the architecture and architectural giants whose names the world associates with Chicago.

Reviewed by Joseph Buch

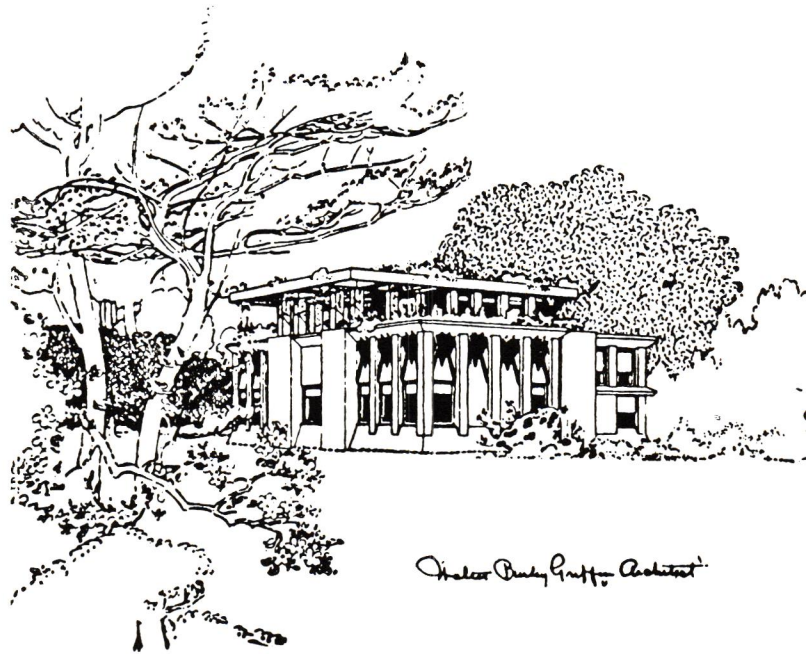
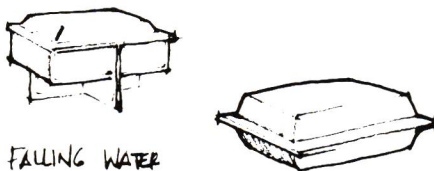
IMAGES OF AMERICAN LIVING, Four Centuries of Architecture and Furniture as Cultural Expression, by Alan Gowans. Lippincott, New York, New York, 1964. 498 pp. illustrated, \$16.50.

Mr. Gowans' synthesis of the scholar's approach with the cultural historian's approach gives an excellent perspective of the sources of American building and craftsmanship in a readable and sympathetic book. His thesis is that the strength or weakness of a nation's culture can be read from its embodiment in architecture and furniture. To demonstrate this, he analyzes the choice of materials and the adaptations of medieval patterns used by the colonists of various European cultures. His conclusions are entirely credible.

Following this broad rather than technical treatment of residential architecture prior to 1900, which forms the main part of the book, he cites the high level of literacy and the sensitive humanism in the architecture of such men as Sullivan, Wright, Elmslie, Purcell, Greene and Greene, Maybeck and Gill of the Chicago, Prairie and California Schools. Their relative influences are well traced and he places the Chicago architects at the crux of American development. In a rather curious summary he shows the germ of their destruction in "mechanization in the Oak Park manner".

This is a well written book weaving economic, social and idealistic justification for artistic trends into a narrative of craftsmanship distinctively and almost humorously American. Its single detriment lies in being less thorough in presenting photographs and analysis of the residences and furniture of the Prairie School than for any comparable era, classic or Victorian. The fact remains that an analysis of the Prairie School is usually either written by a "devotee" of the period or treated as a minor aspect in the American panorama.

Reviewed by Marilyn Whittlesey Hasbrouck



WALTER BURLEY GRIFFIN, by James Birrell. University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, Australia 1964. 203 pp. illustrated, \$11.75.

When speaking of Walter Burley Griffin in his book, *Australia's Home*, in 1952, Australian architect Robin Boyd wrote, "He was well-known for his chunky and geometric ornament, but his importance lay in the power with which he manipulated space." In giving us a book on Griffin and his work, University of Queensland Planner - Architect James Birrell attempts to describe and illustrate some of this power and how it was brought to bear on spaces of all sizes and scales.

Walter Griffin, unique among the Prairie School architects, was a planner and landscape architect as well as a master manipulator of architectural space. While his early works like the Carter house of 1910 in Evanston, Illinois establish him among the foremost exponents of the Prairie Style, it is his more original contributions both in housing and planning of the "domestic community", starting with the Melson house of 1912 in Mason City, Iowa, and his plans for the surrounding Rock Crest-Rock Glen neighborhood that give promise of the special direction that his work was to take in Australia. The chunky ornament with its Mayan overtones serves to articulate his heavier masses and more "volumetric" approach to space, which is the special quality of his work. He built at Mason City in stone and cast concrete, and later in Sydney his Castlecraig houses again took up the theme. His approach was much more that of interlocking

rather than flowing spaces, and his late projects like that for a maharajah's palace of 1936, done during his period in India, have the preoccupation with volumes and geometries which occupy many young American architects today.

But it is in his sense of the hierarchy of elements in the city in which he excels as a planner. In his mind the street pattern, though a bit devious, was graded as to width and speed and visual comfort according to type. The house, almost submerged in his luxuriant landscape, was massed with its neighbors to create the proper scale and rhythm. These subtleties, still largely unknown in most suburbs, both Australian and American, gave to his work its special coherence and to his spaces their power. Mr. Birrell's valuable book does not do enough, perhaps, to explore these qualities, but they are there in the projects of which he writes. This book, I hope, will be but the beginning of an assessment of Griffin's small body of completed works and his many projects, and it is perhaps lucky that the task be started in Australia, which he loved and where he struggled to build his best work. The few articles on his work written in America have been preoccupied with the relation of his buildings here to those of Sullivan, his ideal during his college days, or to those of his employer, Frank Lloyd Wright. He learned from both these men, but he had his own special talents and the great architect's ability to make his buildings, as a former Rector of Griffin's largest Australian commission, Newman College, University of Melbourne, perceived "... ever new, right down the Ages!"

Reviewed by Robert W. Peters

Preview

The first issue of Volume II of THE PRAIRIE SCHOOL REVIEW will be devoted to the work of Purcell and Elmslie. David Gebhard will serve as guest editor in presenting a significant sample of this important firm. Dr. Gebhard will draw from the archive of Purcell and Elmslie material that he collected during preparation of his doctoral thesis at the University of Minnesota.

To be reviewed . . .

Landscape Artist in America

Leonard K. Eaton

The Japanese Influence in America

Clay Lancaster

Several short reviews will also be included.

Letters to the Editors

Sirs:

Here is a belated word of praise for your PRAIRIE SCHOOL REVIEW and the related publications of your Press. As Sponsor the the HABS Chicago Project II, 1964, I congratulate you on your latest number, "The Winslow House", largely illustrated by drawings and photographs made by our Project. You have accompanied them by valuable explanatory material and with the interesting "Gage Panels" article describing Henry Dubin's foresight in saving Sullivan's ironwork for deposit at U. of Illinois and the Art Institute.

I have just seen, through your kindness, the Press's latest reissue, "The Work of Frank Lloyd Wright", by my old friend Robert C. Spencer, Jr. Written for the Architectural Review in 1900, it is authoritative and perhaps the earliest appreciation of Wright's work. I hope all his admirers, and they are legion, will acquire and read it. The reproductions of the superb drawings of the Oak Park Studio and the Heller and Husser houses, made in the Wright office, are alone worth the price.

Earl H. Reed, F.A.I.A.
HABS, Chicago

Sirs:

I have been most interested in THE PRAIRIE SCHOOL REVIEW since it started, having grown up in Evanston near many buildings of this type. We lived near the James Patton home by Maher, a photo of which was included in your first issue and knew well his beautiful Patton gymnasium, now demolished . . . (a Griffin house) was owned by my mother. It was (and is) a two family dwelling, with a studio-library and roof terraces on the top floor. It was constructed about 1909 of poured concrete and stuccoed hollow tile. Across the street are two of the seven houses in the neighborhood which were owned and remodelled by my uncle, Dr. Alfred Hebert, aided by Walter Griffin. Dr. Hebert was a good friend of Mr. Wright, and as Mr. Wright's chief draftsman at the time, Mr. Griffin was asked to help Dr. Hebert with these projects. These alterations were largely tours de force, but are of interest.

Your remarkable second issue, devoted to the work of Guenzel and Drummond, prompts me to suggest that you devote a similar issue to Walter Griffin's Evanston houses . . .

My very best wishes for continued success.

John H. Howe
Taliesin Associated Architects

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JOHNSON WAX PRAIRIE, WIS. 1936-39

Ed. note: The thumbnail sketches of Prairie School furniture on this page and elsewhere are all the work of Chicago architect Raymond S. Chocholek.

