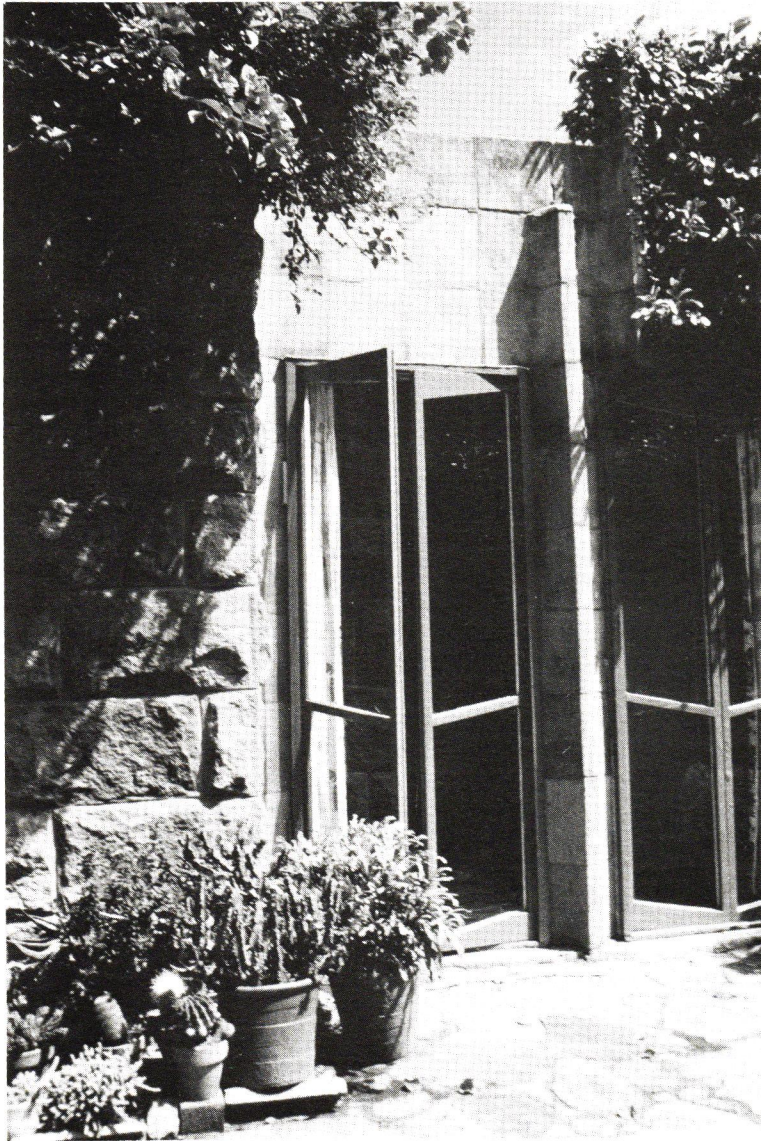


The
**PRAIRIE
SCHOOL**
Review

Volume VIII, Number 3

Third Quarter, 1971

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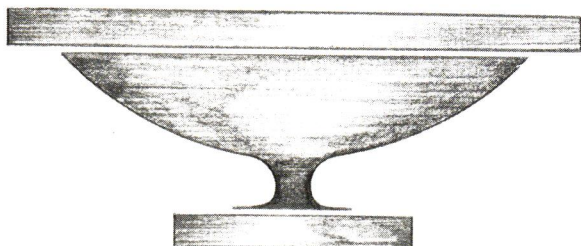
ABOVE:

An exterior detail of the A. F. Duncan house designed by Griffin in 1933. Photo by the author.

COVER:

Exterior view of the A. E. Creswick house of 1926. Photo courtesy of Sun-News Pictorial, Melbourne.

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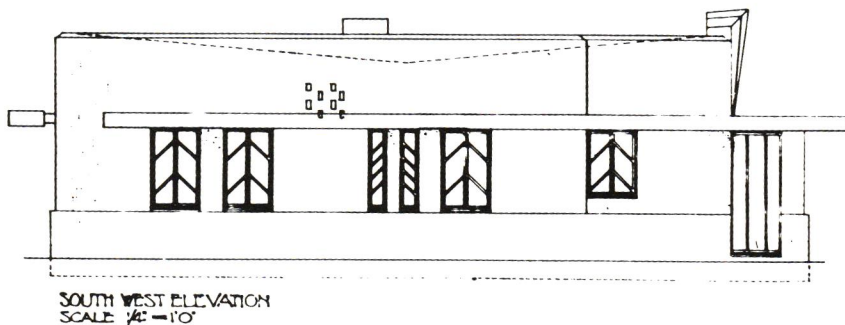
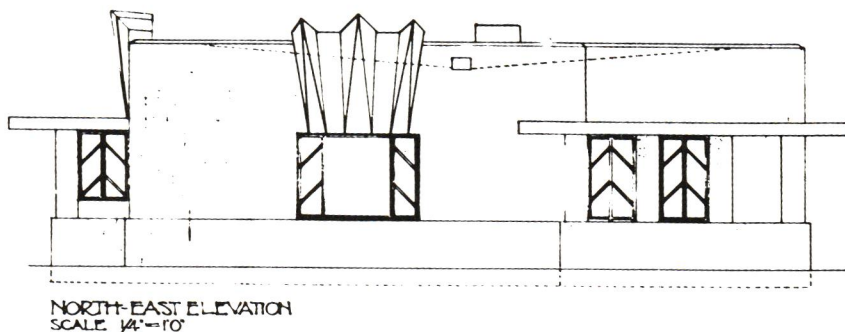
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These elevations are from the contract drawings for the C. H. Cheong house of 1921. Furnished through the courtesy of the Willoughby Council.

From the EDITORS

It was with a great deal of satisfaction that we finished the two issues on Richard Bock and sent them to our subscribers a few months ago. We felt that they revealed a facet of the Prairie School not previously dealt with in detail, and the wealth of photographs available presented us with the pleasant task of using only those which were most appropriate. Today we received the following note from a subscriber accompanied by the return of both issues containing the Bock articles:

Please cancel subscription.

You were great, but you're scratchin' now.

*After the initial shock, the humor of the situation revived us. The writer was a recent subscriber who had purchased the back issues on Wright from our stock, and we believe that he was reached through an advertisement in the **Architectural Forum** of a about a year ago. Apparently, he is from the architectural world rather than the scholarly world. Don't misunderstand — many of our subscribers are architects with successful practices doing some fine contemporary buildings. Repeatedly they have told us how **The Prairie School Review** broadened their view of architecture — how they may have worked directly for Wright, had been influenced by him, or sometimes even alienated by him. But now they saw his early work in a much larger sense. In brief, they see that Wright was not alone, rather, he was the leader of a movement.*

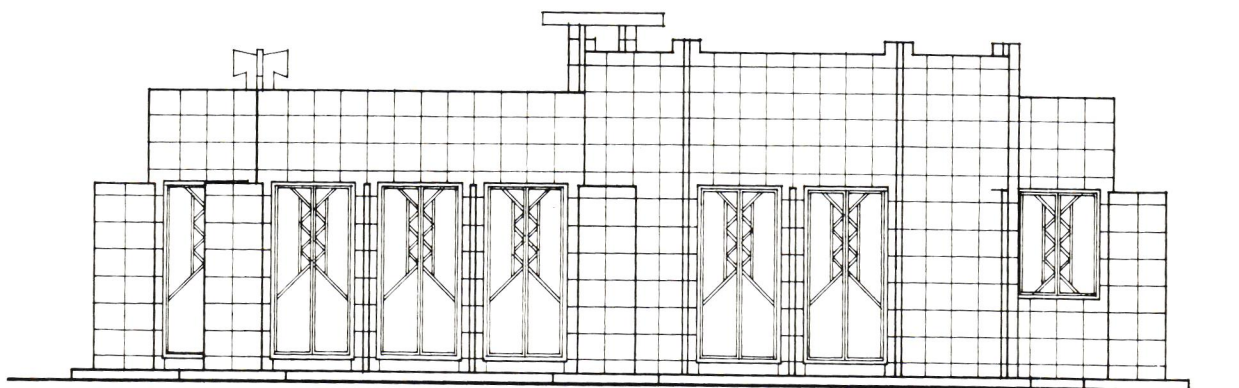
We have never denied that Sullivan and Wright were the epitomy of the Prairie School; genius stands out in any visual comparison. But, hagiolatry is not the answer for anyone interested in reality. Our aim is still that set forth in the editorial in our first issue — a study of the work of Sullivan and Wright and their contemporaries as an historical movement — a phenomenon paralleled in literature, particularly poetry, and to a lesser degree, the other arts, in the midwest around the turn of the century.

*Our point is that the architectural present cannot be appreciated without an understanding of its roots. To historians this is an axiom, but to architects it must be presented graphically — one of the reasons we go to such lengths to augment articles with photographs and drawings in a manner which the **Journal of The Society of Architectural Historians** cannot afford and should not attempt with their different audience. We are the link between the architect and the historian.*

This seems self evident — so the humor enters in. Evidently we have failed to reach this person. He does not understand that we are not merely Wright worshipers. His note comes at a time when we are hard pressed to choose between numerous excellent articles on hand, few dealing directly with Wright or Sullivan. Their content indicates that we have reached our goal. Anyone who thinks that Wright was alone or that his or any genius springs full blown from the head of Zeus has a sad misunderstanding of creativity and its continuity.

Certainly, we are occasionally going to present some obscure, possibly second rate, interpretive men who were inspired by the forms and beauty of the Prairie School, but were unable to grasp its essence. But they were and will remain a part of the scene — the ferment of the midwest from 1890 to 1915. The same sort of stirring can be found in architecture today.

Any artist who worships only Rembrandt is indeed deprived. The richness of the world of European painting is lost to him. The experienced Art historian knows this. Why can't we have that kind of perspective in architecture? Wright deserves his pinnacle, but how high would it have been without those who shored up its foundation and maintained the superstructure? M. H.



Creswick house

CASTLECRAG: A Physical and Social Planning Experiment

by Donald L. Johnson

The author is presently a Lecturer in Fine Arts at Flinders University in Bedford Park, South Australia. This paper was prepared while he was Associate Professor of Architecture at Washington State University. Prior to that Professor Johnson was at the University of Adelaide in Australia where he did the bulk of his research on Walter Burley Griffin.

If Walter Burley Griffin wished to be remembered by only one of his achievements there is every reason to believe it would not be Canberra, the international competition he won in 1912 for the design of Australia's capital city, but his own Castlecrag. Castlecrag is an Australian suburban community north of Sydney, New South Wales, designed and quite literally built by Griffin. In material and spiritual essence it embodies Griffin's ideals: it is his testament. He spent nearly fifteen years of his life infusing Castlecrag with his beliefs in archi-

tecture, landscape design and city or land planning as he preferred to define it. Perhaps more important, he was applying ideals of community and social life.

A search begun soon after his arrival in Australia in 1914 ended in 1919 with the selection of 640 acres of land, the original size of the subdivision located on Middle Harbour, "about four miles north of Circular Quay,"¹ Sydney. The land was 1 "Sydney Building Scheme," *Real Property Annual*, Melbourne, 10, 1921, p. 66.

owned by an absentee landlord in England and when Griffin made his offer it was readily accepted.² To raise money for the purchase the Greater Sydney Development Association (hereafter referred to as GSDA) was formed. Shares of two types were available. Type A, which carried ten votes each, were kept in Griffin's possession. Type B, with one vote each, were sold primarily to people of Griffin's choice. Among those who were shareholders in GSDA were a few employees from his office and some selected friends and clients. Griffin maintained complete supervision over GSDA (he appointed himself Managing Director) and over the development of Castlecrag. Not all shareholders were happy with this sample of single authority and some challenged the corporate structure in court, but the composition of GSDA remained unchanged.

The land itself is rather typical of the Sydney north shore. Middle Harbour is one of three branches to Port Jackson and, as Griffin observed, "possesses in fullest measure the qualities that have made Sydney one of the most admired ports in the world-intimate charm of land-locked water, rocky headlands, and wooded coves."³ The subdivision occupied all or portions of three of the four major promontories on the west coast of Middle Harbour when in 1928 the community had finally increased its area to about 750 acres.

Griffin's explanation of his approach to the planning and landscape, although in his peculiar stilted style, is rather well outlined in an article written in retrospect. Of all his writing it is the clearest exposition of his thoughts on the political and planning structure of Castlecrag and therefore residential planning in general.

The motive of the suburban development . . . has been the permanent preservation of the pristine loveliness of some five miles of remnant of the rockbound woodland coves, through the vigilance of numerous interested owners and appreciative rangers . . .

The whole of the shores, the predominant heights, the caves and sculptural rocks are embraced in a connected system of local reserves, which separate and screen the lots apart, at the garden fronts. In the same way the roadside and junction groves and thickets screen and make

private their street fronts. Thus, in addition to the site individually occupied by a self-selected nature lover, there is a reserve on two sides, over which, as a contiguous owner, he has an interest through the local Parks Committee of each neighbourhood in which the control of these areas will all ultimately be vested.

At present one Committee administers the Castlecrag Reserves — collecting the 10/-per year provided for the covenant from each abutting lot for the expenses of upkeep and improvement. Nearly two thousand native trees and shrubs have been planted by this means. As the Castlecrag plans provide for general segregation of pedestrian from vehicular traffic, these connected reserves will eventually be provided with woodland shortcut paths and steps with lighting, in contradistinction to the circuitous driveways as required by the gradients, where the land rises in ledges to 330 feet above the tide-water.

The common proprietary interest in the adjacent play space, for the children particularly, of each neighbourhood of homes surrounding such an area, fills a want, and restores a corrective in the social life of a great city, which has been a most important factor of the more healthy country communities . . .

Not the least important factor in the conservation of nature here is, however, the covenant-controlled housing to prevent obtrusive or obstructive buildings and enclosures.⁴

The most natural use of the land and the selection of indigenous plants distinguishes the Prairie School of Landscape Architecture exemplified by the two Chicago landscape architects, Jens Jensen and, of course, Griffin.⁵ Other significant aspects of Castlecrag are as he points out, the method of siting the houses for view and the reserved, naturally landscaped space behind the house lots or at the harbor shore or interspersed about the subdivision. "Twenty-eight recreation reserves and ornamental parks . . . become the property of all the residents of Castlecrag under their immediate control for their

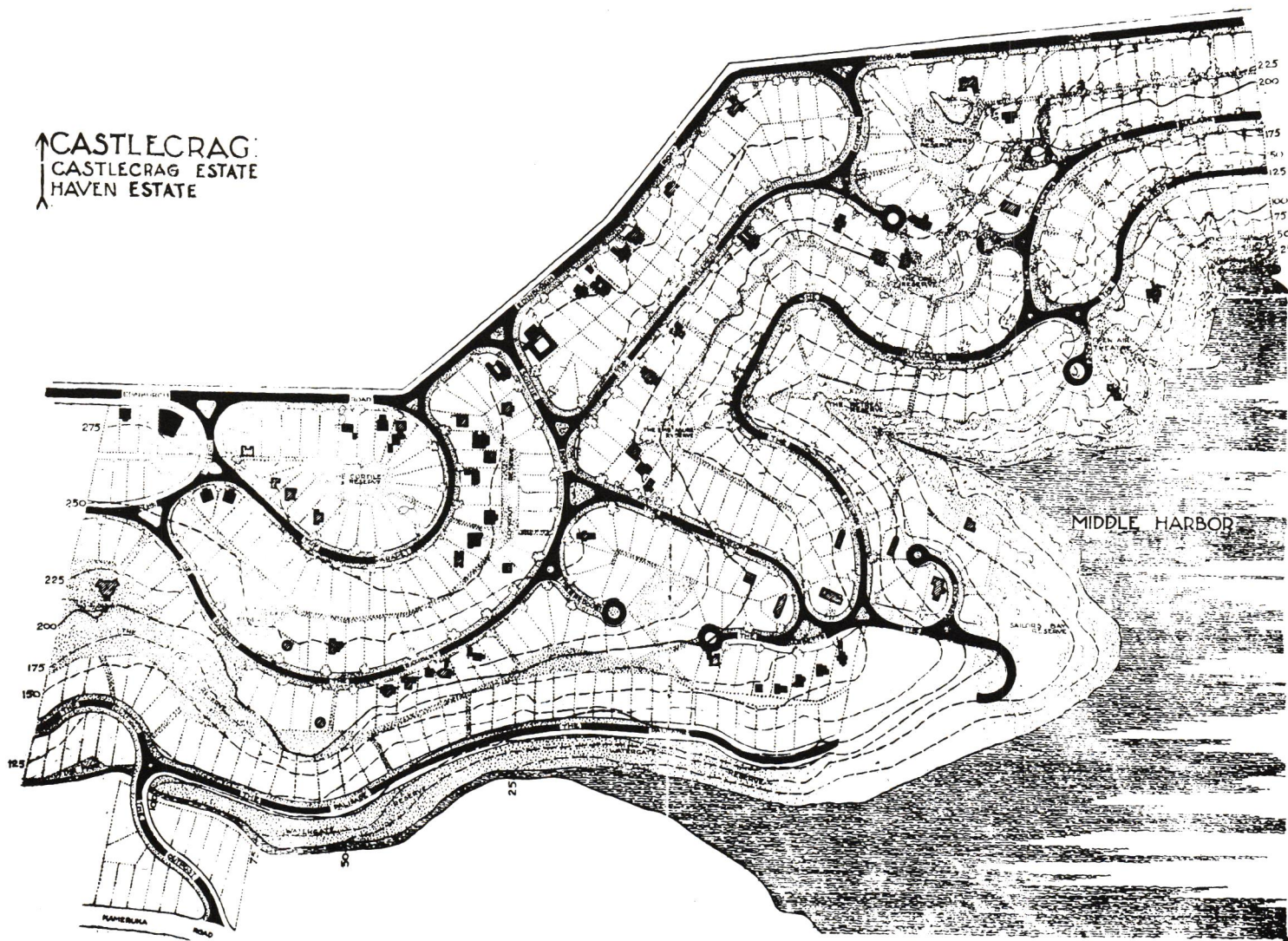
4 Walter Burley Griffin, "Occupational Conservation," *Australian Wild Life*, Sidney, I, October, 1935, p. 24. Griffin was Honorary Treasurer of the Australian Wild Life Preservation Society.

5 As there was a Prairie School of Architecture, so was there also a Prairie School of Landscape Architecture, cf. Leonard K. Eaton, *Landscape Artist in America*, Chicago, 1964, on the work of Jens Jensen. The idea of a unique "school" was first suggested by Wilhelm Miller, *The Prairie Spirit in Landscape Gardening*, Urbana, 1915. According to Miller, Griffin was one of the founders of the so called school.

2 Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Deans and Mr. Edward Billson. The Deans both worked for Walter Burley Griffin in the 1920's and 1930's. Mr. Billson worked for Griffin beginning in 1917 and was his first Australian employee.

3 Walter Burley Griffin, "Picturesque Waterside Suburb," *Australian Home Builder*, Melbourne, 1, August, 1922, p. 51.

CASTLECRAG:
CASTLECRAG ESTATE
HAVEN ESTATE



Castlecrag Site Plan, c. 1932. Not all of the buildings located on this plan were constructed nor were all proposals designed by Walter Burley Griffin. Plan courtesy of Mr. Edgar Deans.

own enjoyment.”⁶ And of course no fences. Castlecrag is not a superblock and does not use cul-de-sacs exclusively, but the emphasis on segregation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic and homes oriented to the internal recreation spaces is explicit in the plan. Castlecrag pre-dates Radburn by eight years while acknowledging a debt to the English garden city movement.

The original subdivision on the southern-most peninsula was about ninety acres in size and named Castlecrag. On the site a large rock out-cropping called Edinburgh Castle was the inspiration for some of the names of roads and open spaces. Roads were named Rampart, Redoubt and Outpost. Open spaces were named Turret, the Keep, Merlon, and

Embrasure. Two later and equally large subdivisions, Covecrag and Castlecove, were proposed for location on the two promontories north of Castlecrag, but not realized. A small bit of land at the tip of Castlecrag was named Castel Haven. All are commonly referred to as Castlecrag. Plans for all these developments were similar to or extensions of the original plan which was accomplished during 1919-20. Construction of roads and survey of lots began almost immediately in 1920.

Griffin was taking a partial gamble on a residential development on the north shore. There were ferry boats plying Port Jackson but a bridge was the key to its success. Other factors sealed its fate as a successful financial venture. Griffin had difficulty, often no success, in obtaining bank loans for his unorthodox house designs and there was the depression. By 1935 only about twenty-one houses had been commissioned for Griffin to design.⁷ But a

6 Walter Burley Griffin, *Castlecrag*, (GSDA publicity brochure, c. 1932), p. 1. The text is more than likely by Walter Burley Griffin. It has some very good photographs of the landscape and buildings at Castlecrag.

7 Only about thirteen houses of Walter Burley Griffin's design were built prior to 1937. A sales office and store building, both of nondescript design, were also built. After his death, Griffin's assistant Eric Nicholls designed a few more houses for the site, some of which were built.

bridge was the important factor in undertaking the proposition. Bridging Sydney Harbour had been under consideration for at least forty years including an underwater tunnel proposed in 1913. The probability of a bridge in the near future was not an unreasonable assumption, for in fact, construction bids were called for in 1922. It was a slow, lazy process. Construction did not start until 1926 and the bridge was not opened until March 1932⁸: too late to influence prospects at Castlecrag.⁹

Castlecrag was not only an experiment in suburban development, it was an experiment in community living. But a country club it was not. The philosophy and political thoughts of Walter and Marion Griffin¹⁰ were the dominating influence on life at Castlecrag. There was a community social center (a building for the purpose was eventually built after Griffin's death), a neighborhood circle which met every month and in which everyone participated, and an open air theater (Haven Estate Theater) in a small valley with a natural amphitheater near Barricade cul-de-sac. A large, flat stone outcropping was used for a stage and stones for tiered seating. Plays were produced by the residents. In the 1930's Mr. and Mrs. Eric Nicholls, (he was an architect and Griffin's only associate) and Mrs. Griffin started a school based on Rudolph Steiner's anthroposophical writings. Some of the plays were also concerned with anthroposophical concepts of the theater as an important aspect of spiritual communication. A community hospital was built on the southeast corner of Edinburgh and Sortie Port by a resident, Dr. Rivett. Community life was carefully planned and cared for. With restrictive physical covenants (e.g., all building designs were to be approved by Griffin) and the overseeing philosophy of the Griffins and later the Nicholls too, Castlecrag was indeed a unique community.

The architecture at Castlecrag played a tertiary role to the community and landscape. In Griffin's own words, "the buildings must be subordinate to the landscape."¹¹ It is apparent that the architecture

was no more than a series of habitable elements in the landscape, the houses private, personal places in specific proximity to the total community and equal to every facet of the environment. It was a special community by the sea for people devoted to understanding and enjoying what they believed was a natural relationship with the land. In searching for an architecture to best express this relationship and proximity Griffin evolved some fascinating designs.

In studying the architecture at Castlecrag three factors become apparent. One: Castlecrag was for the average family of small, steady income with no children. The lot sizes are one indication, averaging about 40 x 120 feet. The house designs are another indication. Some were built for their future occupants while others were speculative projects initiated by shareholders. All the houses are small, almost cottages, with few extra conveniences and never with pretensions. Two: only two materials predominate; sandstone quarried on the site and Griffin's own knitlock structural system. Knitlock was a method of wall construction using interlocking concrete masonry building tiles. It was devised by Griffin in 1917¹² and he used it in a number of his house designs. And three: the architectural designs are distinctive to Castlecrag and not found outside the community. Griffin's house designs outside Castlecrag were always larger, they were invariably stucco (alone or in combination) and they were similar to most of the Prairie School designs of preceding years executed by Griffin and his contemporaries in America.

Although tempting, it would be difficult to classify or categorize the Castlecrag houses. Too many of the buildings and projects would then be atypical. Some were of both stone and knitlock or stone and stucco. Most had concrete floors, some had concrete roofs, some tile, some corrugated iron and some knitlock tile. And fenestration was varied. Some houses were just unique unto themselves. There was a small, round house project of 1929 for J. L. Symington to have been built of stone and coffered concrete under a flat roof. It was to sit as a great stone mass risen from the earth. While a few of the houses have undergone extreme changes through renovation and/or expansion, there are a number of Griffin designed houses still standing in Castlecrag which remain relatively unchanged since initial construction. It seems appropriate to study these for there is not only the opportunity to look at the

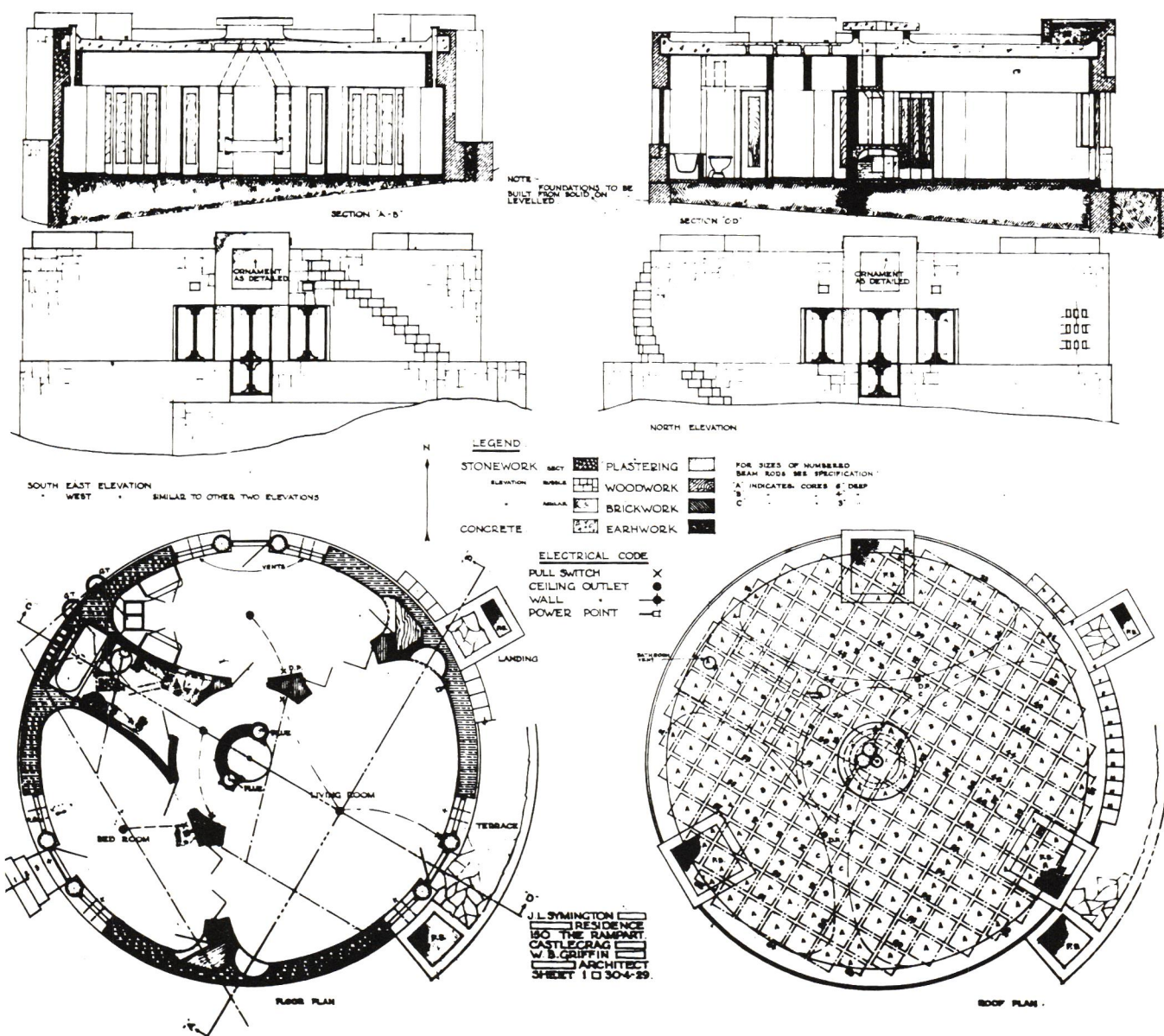
8 George A. Taylor, "The Sydney Harbour Bridge," *The Australasian Engineer*, Sidney, XXXII, March, 1932, p. 3-31. The magazine covered the various proposals from c. 1909 until 1932.

9 The GSDA made only nominal profits when it sold Castlecrag in the 1950's (Interview with E. Billson who was the last GSDA president).

10 Mrs. Griffin was an architect and her work prior to marriage is presented in David T. Van Zanten's "The Early Work of Marion Mahony Griffin," *The Prairie School Review*, III, Second Quarter, 1966, p. 5-22.

11 As quoted by Mrs. Edgar Deans. See also, Roy Wilson, "Fashions in Architecture," *Fashion & Society*, Melbourne, V, December, 1929, p. 58-61.

12 For a more complete discussion of knitlock, see Donald Leslie Johnson, "Notes on W. B. Griffin's 'Knitlock' and His Architectural Projects for Canberra," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, XXIX, May, 1970, p. 188-193.



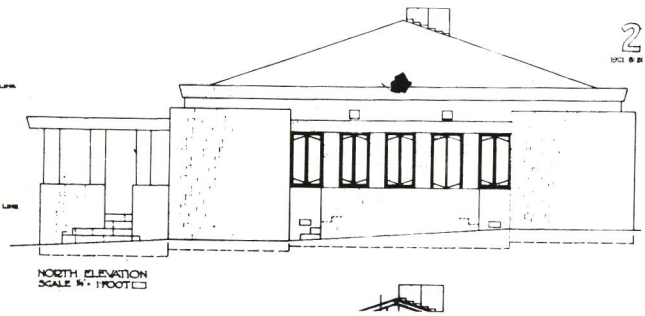
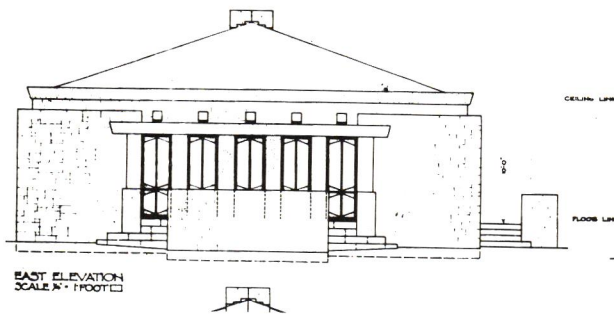
plans¹³ but empirically study the houses and their sites.¹⁴

13 Material in the possession of the Willoughby Council, in which Castlecrag is located, was kindly made available to this author.

14 The author would like to thank Mrs. E. T. Claridge at 2 Barbette, Castlecrag, Mr. Richard Apperly, Lecturer at the University of New South Wales, and Mr. David Saunders, Senior Lecturer at Sydney University for their kind assistance.

Working drawings of the J. L. Symington house, 1929. It remained only a project. Plans courtesy of the Willoughby Council.

Fortunately there are two groups of houses which give us some idea of how Griffin wanted to site the buildings. The first constructed Castlecrag houses form the major group. It surmounts a prominent knoll while the other later group sits on



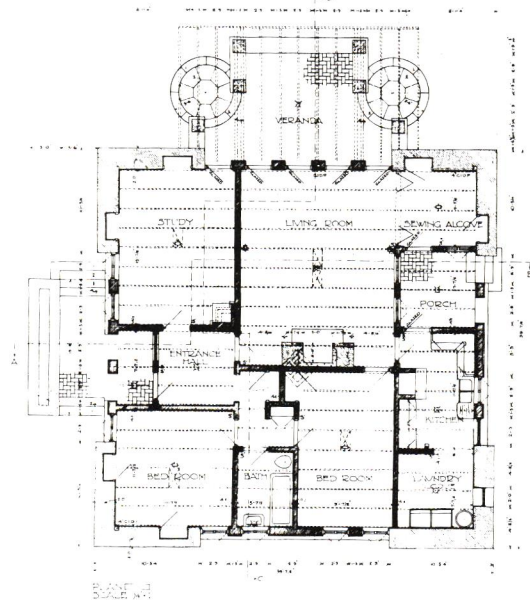
Elliot Johnson house, 1921. Working drawings showing the elevations used in the contract drawings. Courtesy Willoughby Council.

an edge of the peninsula. The first group contained Griffin's own house at 8 Parapet.¹⁵ Flanking this house by one lot to the left or north is a house designed for Sir Elliot Johnson at 4 Parapet. To the south a house designed for C. W. Moon at 12 Parapet. All three were designed in 1921. Immediately adjacent is a house designed for Mr. C. H. Cheong in about 1922 at 14 Parapet. (A similar house was built for King O'Malley, Minister of Home Affairs when Griffin won the Canberra competition, on Edinburgh Road also in about 1922, now site of the hospital.) The siting of the group is directed to the Eastern view of Middle Harbour less than a quarter of a mile beyond and two hundred and fifty feet below. In fact, one can see the North Heads of Port Jackson at the Pacific Ocean. The Parapet follows the curve of the knoll and the houses have a staggered set back. Car access is on the street side while the view side is considered the 'front' of the house, rather novel for the period of its development. Pedestrians walk to the side or front thus gaining a view of the scene below before entering the houses each of which has a large expanse of glass to the harbor.

The second group has a staggered set-back along The Barbette which runs East and West and rises to the West. The T. R. Wilson House at 2 Barbette, designed in 1929, is nearest the road while the A. E. Creswick House at 4 Barbette, called "The House of Seven Lanterns," and designed in 1926 is set back further with the A. F. Duncan House at 8 Barbette further yet. This staggering, and a difference of at least fifty feet in elevation (some 150 feet) of the roads, preserves one of Griffin's most cherished landscape elements — the view to the Harbor and beyond.

The Parapet group is of stone quarried on the site. The resultant aesthetic is a homogenous blend with earth landscape. The stone on the houses,

¹⁵ Current addresses are used. In James Birrell, *Walter Burley Griffin*, Brisbane, 1964, the then current (1963) owner's names were used, therefore continuity is difficult.

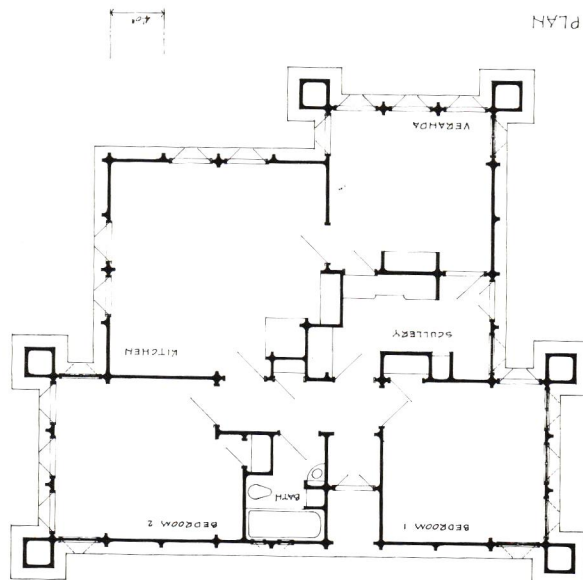


Elliot Johnson house of 1921. This plan portion of the contract drawings shows the decidedly different approach to planning that Griffin developed in Australia in contrast to his earlier houses in the United States. Plan courtesy of the Willoughby Council.

especially Griffin's, is massive, some near three feet in length with an interior of plaster. The exposed ceiling beams originally stained have been removed.

The Moon House, was the residence of Eric Nicholls when he moved from Melbourne (where he was in charge of Griffin's office) to Castlecrag in the early 1930's. It was called "The House of Gables," a rather loose recognition of the heavily articulated ribbon of windows with their bold triangular forms over and under the casements. Originally the forms may have appeared as large white crystals on the stone surface, but now they are pink. The house is barely recognizable through expansion outward and up. The triangular forms, here exploited, were used by Griffin rather more modestly over the entry of his Stinson Memorial Library in 1913 and his own projected house for Trier Center, Winnetka, Illinois, of 1911-13 and a number of other projects.

The Wilson House is a marvelous exposition in material, light and space. It is a small house with a



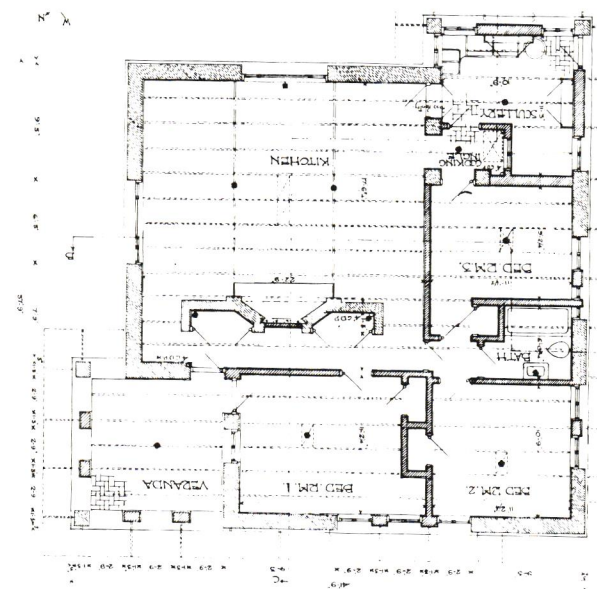
Drawing of the plan for the A. E. Creswick house, 1926. Prepared from the contract drawings.

mated what Griffin would have expected of a cottage in the Castlecrag landscape by the 1960's.

Griffin's own house has undergone a series of changes and additions in a most sensitive manner by its present owners, Dr. and Mrs. H. J. Daley. They have endeavored to preserve as much of the house as possible and still meet their own needs and views on what *their* home must be. The original house was rectangular with a bold stone facade to the counterpoint of white stucco columns and window treatment, both relatively flush to the wall, and surrounding a rather closed plan.

A mixture of rough ashlar on the house and dressed stone on the porch with immense keystone and voussoir distinguishes the Cheong house. An earlier, more sophisticated use of the enlarged stone or rock hewn house designed by Griffin prior to his Castlecrag period, and Newman College, Melbourne, in 1915. The house plans at Castlecrag have many precedents early in his career¹⁶ but open planning at its best is displayed in the Castlecrag house project.

On Edinburgh Road is the T. Felsted House, an "artium villa" designed in 1923-24. The plan¹⁶ See H. V. von Holst, *Modern American Homes*, Chicago, 1913, plate 2 *et seq.*, showing some typical Griffin American plans of 1909-1911 that were carried to his Australian work. Materials, structural method and proportion changed in later years but not Griffin's idea of an open plan. For an excellent discussion of the Melson house and other houses in Mason City, Iowa, see Robert E. McCoy, "Rock Crest/Rock Glen Prairie Planning in Iowa", *The Prairie School Review*, IV, Third Quarter, 1968, p. 5-39.



The C. H. Cheong house, 1921. This is the plan portion of the contract drawings prepared by Walter Burley Griffin. Courtesy of the Willoughby Council.

recalls but is only similar to the S. R. Salter House in Toorak, Victoria, of one year earlier. The court of the Felsted House, now enclosed, is the main circulation space in the absence of a corridor. The external expression is completely different from the Salter House. The Felsted House is knitlock resting on a stone base with a heavy fascia on an extended eave.¹⁷ It is precisely developed horizontally between eave and stone with the wall as a ribbon moving between the two. The Felsted and Salter houses are truly fine examples of modern architecture in the 1920's and of Griffin at his best.

With these examples and the previous discussion the whole of the physical planning of Castlecrag as envisioned by Griffin becomes relatively clear. Stone, landscape and house were one. In Griffin's words:

The buildings throughout Castlecrag are of the native stone . . . with windows in batteries protected with over-hanging trellises and climbing plants. Most of the houses have flat concrete roofs, which best suit the tiers of cliffs and provide flower terraces of creepers for the prospects from the successive levels above them.¹⁸

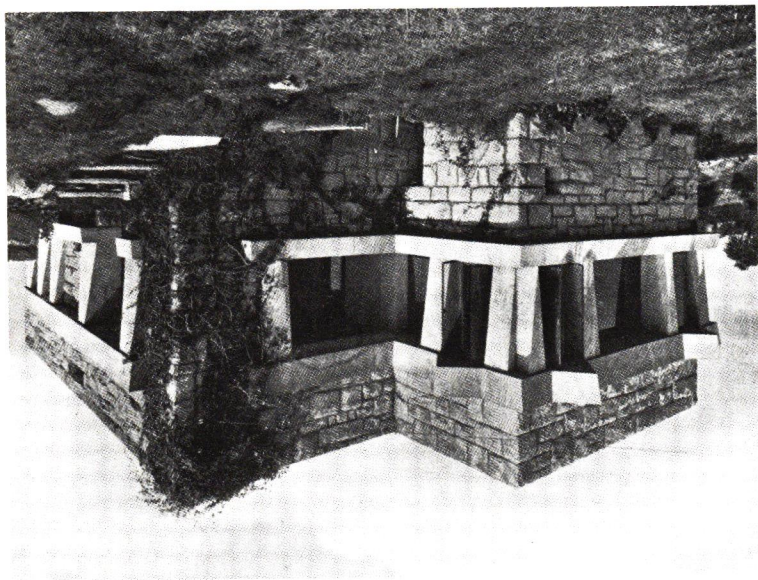
The houses were to blend with the landscape with roofs the extensions of the rocky ledges.¹⁹ A roof. The roof of the Felsted house, originally of knitlock

18 Griffin, "Picturresque," p. 52.
19 Cf. Cooper, Nora, "Creating a New Type of Suburb in Australia," *Australian Home Beautiful*, Melbourne, VII, October, 1929, p. 58.

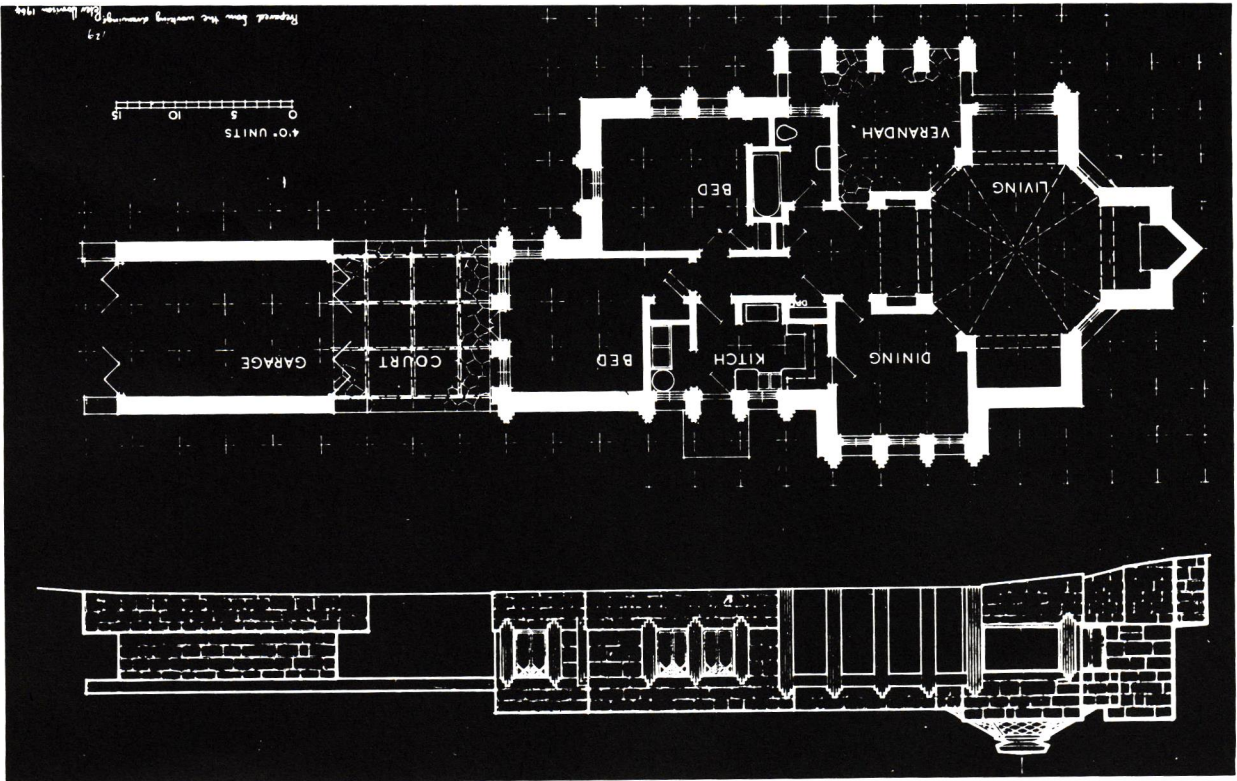
definite but distorted axis on or leading to the living room. This alcoved room is small yet gracious in its quality of north light obtained from a clerestory over the hall with morning light to the view, and high windows to the afternoon sun. The garage forms part of the long edge on approaching a small entry porch overlooking the view. The hall is a low (less than seven feet) tight space which gives a distinct feeling of the quasi-domed living room being much larger than its actual dimensions. The interior is plaster with cove lighting continuous at door head height at the periphery of the dome.

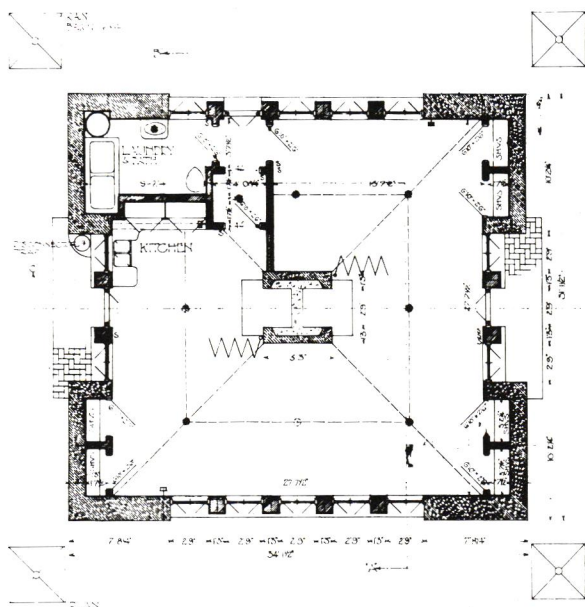
Next door, The House of Seven Lanterns has its distinctive lanterns formed by structural segments of knittlock perched on the parapet. It is an unassuming house with bold corner elements and is completely constructed of the knittlock system, although one of the least successful of his knittlock houses. Further up The Barbette, the Duncan House is an excellent blend of knittlock and stone. It is twenty-four feet square yet spatially extends beyond its walls with three-quarter glazed doors. The corners are of stone (one containing the fireplace) with knittlock between. The house was designed to meet the needs of Mr. and Mrs. A. F. Duncan in 1933. They lived in some of the Castlecrag houses and participated in community activities before deciding to build their house. They are, therefore, familiar with the plans and aspirations of Walter and Marion for the community. Although partially modified by an addition, the Duncan's have very closely approxi-

An exterior view of the C. W. Moon house, done in 1921. Photo courtesy Sun-News Pictorial, Melbourne.



Plan and elevation of Griffin's house designed for T. R. Wilson in 1929. These drawings were prepared by Peter Harrison from the contract drawings and are used with his permission.

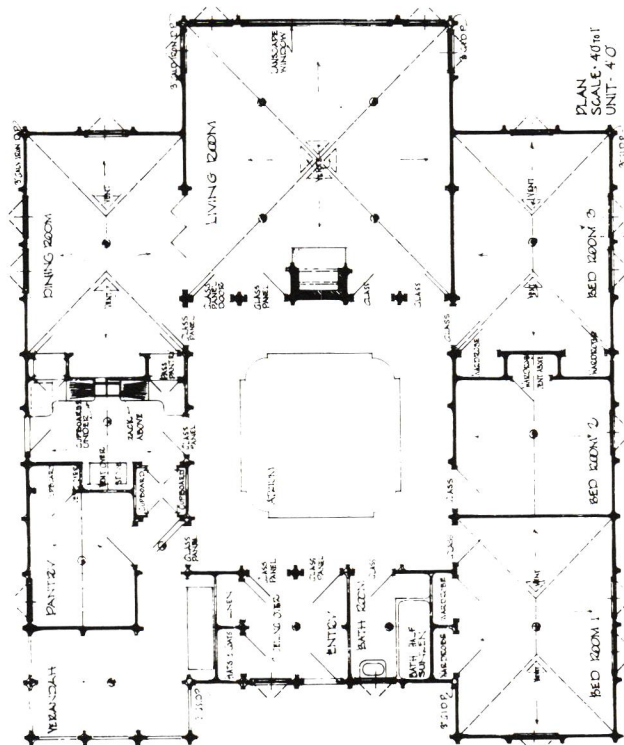




Project for an unbuilt Castlecrag house. Courtesy of the Willoughby Council.

few houses at selected points were to compliment, particularly those along Edinburgh Road which was the edge to other suburban developments. But the emphasis was on the landscape. The Duncans recall that almost every day Griffin would come by their house with a young tree, a bulb or shrub to plant, or he would be blasting rock for a road or clearing one

The T. Felsted house, 1923-24. Exterior view courtesy of the National Library, Canberra.

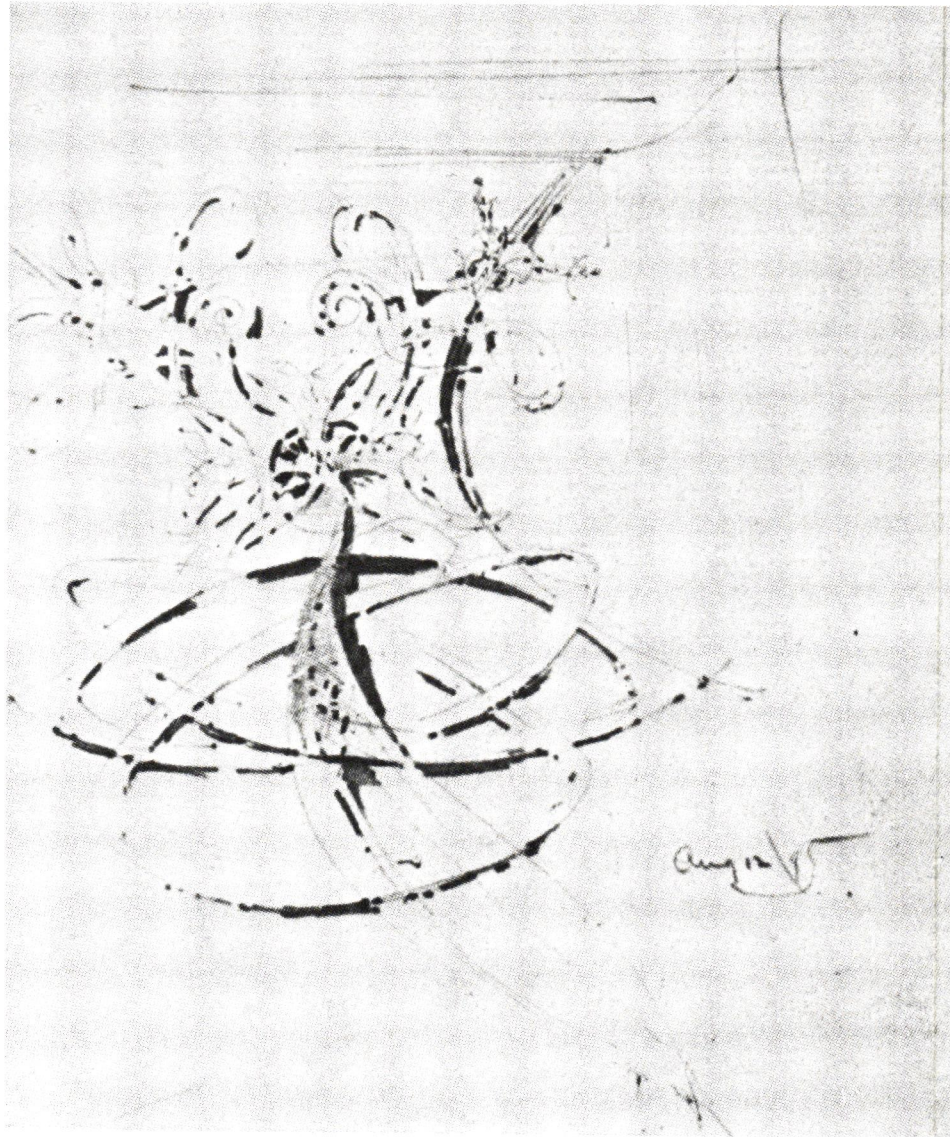


Plan for the T. Felsted house, 1923-23. Courtesy Willoughby Council.

of the reserves or parklands. He was building a dream.

He left Castlecrag to work at Lucknow, India, in 1935 and died there during February 1937. He suffered internal injuries and complications from a fall at Castlecrag while fighting a night bush fire²⁰ which threatened to destroy the landscape.

20 Marion Mahony Griffin, "Magic of America," typescript, New York Historical Society, c. 1949, Sec. I, p. 8.



Book Review

GENIUS AND THE MOBOCRACY, by Frank Lloyd Wright. Horizon Press, 1971, 247 pp. cloth, \$20.00. Enlarged edition included 39 drawings by Sullivan and 2 by Wright from the original edition; 19 unpublished drawings by Sullivan and 1 unpublished by Wright plus 54 photos; 2 essays on Wright by Sullivan.

"...the work-life of a great master, Louis Sullivan, and of the pencil in his hand — myself." — F. L. W.

Louis Sullivan would have liked this book. In spite of its faults, which are many, he would have liked it. It is a book by his most famous, his most controversial, his most successful disciple. It is a book with a made up word in its title, a word Sullivan would have understood and approved of. *Mobocracy*. Especially today Sullivan would have approved of this book here in Chicago. The Chicago

he made his home. The Chicago where he invented architecture, or at least invented architecture as we know it today. The Chicago where some say emptiness prevails. Not all is emptiness though, for there would be no John Hancock, no Time-Life Building, no Civic Center; indeed, it is doubtful if Mies would have ever practiced in Chicago had it not have been for Louis H. Sullivan and his disciple, colleague, and in this case, biographer, Frank Lloyd Wright.

"...given a novel problem of that moment — like the troublesome sky-scraper — his fine mind instantly saw its chief characteristic. Aware of its nature he got its real sense. It was tall!"

Page 75 — *Genius and the Mobocracy*

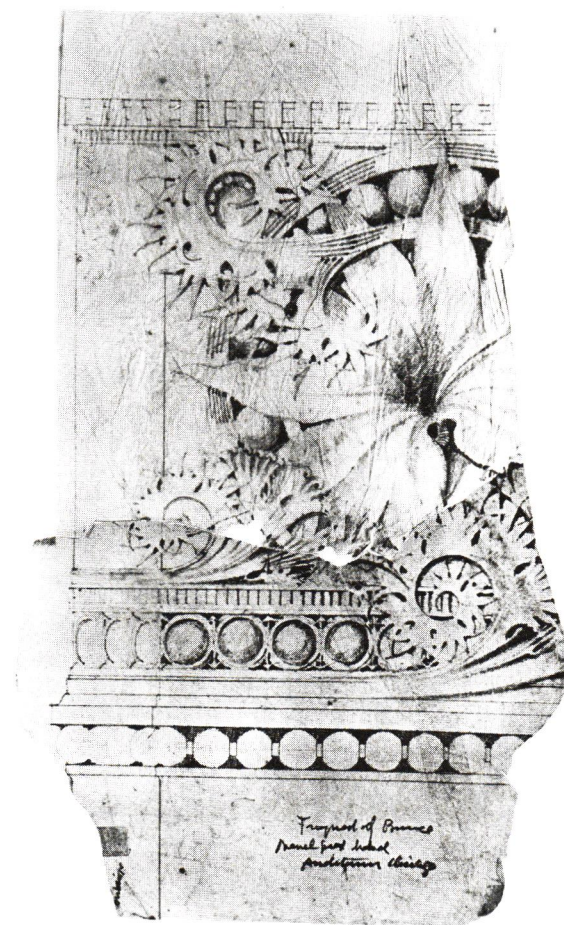
It is not all by Wright, this book. The publishers have seen fit to add, almost as appendices, two articles by Sullivan on Wright, both concerning the

Imperial Hotel. One written just after, and the other some time after, the mighty earthquake from which both Wright and Sullivan claimed the structure emerged "undamaged". In truth, it sustained considerable damage and was eventually demolished partially because of the failure of its highly touted but totally unsatisfactory foundations. True, the building did "float" on a sea of mud, but up to four feet of differential settlement in various parts of a building can hardly be acceptable. The building's real significance was in its forms or rather in its overall architectonic character, and that is another story. These articles add little. The addition of a substantial number of photographs and drawings, on the other hand, are a major contribution to the new edition.

The present volume contains some of the finest examples of Sullivan's ornamental drawings extant, many of which were transformed into three dimensional pieces to grace his structures. Not all, but most. I suspect that some drawings so credited may not be Sullivan's but by his long time associate, George Grant Elmslie, or by Frank Lloyd Wright. The most glaring example is the case of a single drawing shown twice. The drawing illustrated on page 169 and captioned, "Study, Undated" is actually the top half of the same drawing shown on page 65 and identified as "Ornament detail. Drawing by Frank Lloyd Wright. Auditorium Building, Chicago. 1887-89." Both of these drawings, or rather both halves, are almost certainly by Wright, as their style would indicate, although an examination of the executed ornament, a newel post for the Auditorium which is still in place, shows the final piece to be much more Sullivanesque. Wright's *leiber meister* apparently kept a keen eye on the modeler who prepared the final work detailed by his young assistant. This writer is indebted to Professor Paul E. Sprague, the undisputed authority on Sullivan's ornament, for clarifying this point.

One must not be overly anxious to credit Wright with being Sullivan. For he was, in his own words, merely "the pencil in the master's hand". This was true for about six years; for George Elmslie, of course, it was much longer. Both men became extraordinarily proficient in rendering ornament similar to that of Sullivan, but neither ever *became* Sullivan. Neither would have nor could have done what they did in later years without their apprenticeship to the master. This is not to say that Wright would not have been the great architect he was. He would have taken a somewhat different route to the same end. Elmslie? Who knows?

We can and will nitpick a bit about some of the captions, such as the "Monogram design" on page



Above is shown the illustration from page 65 (bottom) and the drawing from page 169 (top) from *Genius and the Mobocracy*. They are the same drawing torn in half. Both were undoubtedly done by Frank Lloyd Wright after the initial sketch by Louis Sullivan. Photo by Paul E. Sprague.

182 which was in reality a design for a medallion actually executed for the University of Michigan and later adapted as a Centennial Medal for the Chicago Chapter of the American Institute of Architects in 1969. On that same page, the drawing of a "Study for clock, National Farmers' Bank, Owatonna, Minnesota, 1907," was drawn by George Grant Elmslie.

Genius and the Mobocracy. What does it mean and why review a book first issued more than 20 years ago, and then only after it having been in preparation for a quarter century? Twenty five years of thought before the words came to Wright. Many of those words repeating what had been said before and which have been said by Wright in other books published in the interim, but never quite in the context as in this volume. We review it because it is as significant today as when it was first published, but more important, because today we are able to reflect and realize that Wright really was right, and those who ruled architecture in Sullivan's last years, the mobocracy, were wrong. Sullivan did know what

he was saying as well as what he was drawing and building. Not that he built much in the last 20 years of his life. Who was there to be his client? The day of the big merchant prince of the late 19th century was past, the days of the patron of the kind that Wright was so able to charm were gone too, even if Sullivan's atrocious temper and personality would have permitted him to enjoy their favor. We review this book today because it is time to review it, time to say what should have, but could not have, been said about it when it was first written. There is a time for everything and the time for these words is now.

*"For everything there is an appointed time;
And there is a time for every purpose under the
heavens:
A time to be born, and a time to die;
A time for planting, and a time for uprooting;
A time to slay, and a time to heal;
A time to tear down, and a time to rebuild; . . .
What does the maker gain from the work which he
has done?"*

*The Book of Ecclesiastes,
Chapter 3, Verses 1, 2, 3 & 9*

What was Wright saying when he wrote this book 22 years ago? Sullivan was dead, we all were still mourning him; the AIA had done its tardy duty by awarding him its coveted gold medal, albeit 20 years after his too early demise in his 68th year, attended only by Wright, his little henna haired milliner, and those few fellow members of the Cliff Dwellers Club who had arranged for his livelihood during those last torturous years. Wright wrote these words at a time when American architecture had not yet recovered from the depressing eclecticism of the period following the first World War. The architecture of the 20's was hardly of great merit, the current craze for *art deco* notwithstanding. (Some of the work of Holabird and Root can and should be excepted from these comments.) Wright's own work was at its lowest point during that era of what is remembered primarily for the only other art form, excepting modern architecture, invented in this country of ours, Jazz. The flapper was queen, and after 1924, the king was dead. The thirties had no money with which to build, the forties left little after spending nearly all our energies on the second war to end wars, and we all know how we have wasted our resources and misguided our priorities in recent history. As a nation we were then and had been since Sullivan's death ruled by a mobocracy insofar as architecture was concerned. But, in Chicago, we have gone two separate ways.

First, we have built. We have built big. We have built well. We have built as Sullivan would have built. There is no city in the world which can compare with Chicago when it comes to greatness in architecture of the past 20 years. For that matter, there is no city in the world which can compare with Chicago in architecture for the last 20 years of the 19th century. What happened in between is another story, mentioned above but best forgotten.

*"Big crude Chicago — destined to become the most
beautiful American City!"*

Page 58 — Genius and the Mobocracy

Where else can one see a structure as pure as the Chicago Civic Center with its mighty spans of rusted blue bronze steel, the very symbol of strength and Sullivanesque democracy? Where else would the city government accept the building of an art form so daring and controversial and splendid as an original by Picasso, an avowed communist, to sit in front of its proudest civic structure? Where else would the federal government commission the finest living architect in the world to design its mid-continent center of operations and then name it for the Senator of the opposition party? Where else would one expect one of the greatest of all buildings to be built, the greatest exposition hall of all, in the worst of all locations, our splendid lakefront, and then permit it to be named for the leading critic of the local government! Where else but in Chicago? Where else but here where we still see the buildings of Sullivan and his contemporaries standing tall and proud among their later contemporaries?

The Monadnock by John Wellborn Root stands next to that Federal Center named for Everett McKinley Dirksen; Adler and Sullivan's Stock Exchange which stood on La Salle Street fell amid the cries for her demolition by the very persons who contribute most heavily to the coffers of the cities leaders. Let us not confuse or deceive ourselves; Sullivan's last and perhaps his finest commercial structure in Chicago, The Chicago Stock Exchange Building, was destroyed solely through the greed of man, the mobocracy. It was spared long enough for a highly qualified Cabinet level architectural committee to examine it in depth and recommend its designation as a National Historic Landmark and thus be forever sacrosanct. Still it fell. From its rubble we *must* finally learn our lesson. No further desecration of our cities heritage can be permitted. Man is permitted to err, but he who sees his own error and corrects it is the tallest and strongest of men.

We in Chicago seem to have an irresistible urge to destroy our heritage in the name of progress. Where else could the director of the major downtown businessmen's association stand before a cabinet level committee and declare that "these dirty old buildings have no place in downtown Chicago" when referring to Adler and Sullivan's Stock Exchange Building?

"I have heard those who were most indebted to the master deny him the loudest, and even those who would honor him most, distort, and so, torture his memory."

Page 21 — *Genius and the Mobocracy*

It is this second thing that is so hard to understand and which Sullivan would not have understood. Why must we destroy to have progress? Progress is not measured solely in the number of new buildings, plazas, and expressways we construct. It is not measured in the number of neighborhoods we destroy in order to build cribs of key hole apartments in which to store our poor only to release them to collect their welfare checks. It is this that the Mobocracy represents. It is this that Wright was trying to convey when he wrote this book. He never was able to express himself in a manner that we could understand when there was time to help ourselves, and perhaps now it is too late. But we must try. Through architecture we must try. We must continue to build as Sullivan would have built had he been permitted to do so. Democratically. The Mobocracy must not prevail. Democracy has no political party, it has no color, it has no creed. It meant something to Sullivan which we have never tried to understand. Now we must understand it or watch our city, and other cities, die.

Democracy to Sullivan meant more than most of us think of it today. Much more and different too. It meant that every seat in the theater was as good as every other seat, every apartment in the building was as good as every other apartment, every office in the business block was as good as every other office. So what if one was appointed finer than another; so what if one seat was in silk and another in burlap; the basic *idea* was equality in performance, in use, in value to the user. Every man, every woman, every child was to have an equal opportunity to see, be, and have what was his through the right of *being* a human being on this earth. Architecture is the art closest to all of us. It is with us constantly. We live in it, eat in it, love in it, and die in it. Through architecture we can become really *human* beings, but only if that architecture is designed for human *being*. This was and is Sullivan's democracy.

"When men do understand themselves they may dedicate themselves to causes — they will never copy effects because then they will have their own, but by no short-cut. By becoming a self evolving human being."

Page 24 — *Genius and the Mobocracy*

Sullivan thought first of the building and the people who would use it. He said "form follows function" and it is not for us to examine this statement in depth here. He meant simply that architecture must serve man in the manner intended by the client and more important, by society. He went further than to merely invent forms and subdivision of spaces, which is really what architecture is; he also had the good sense to realize the structure of architecture should have an exuberance, a gaiety, a beauty of its own. Thus he brought his own special ornament. It is by this ornament that Sullivan is, alas, too often remembered. Not that it was not magnificent, it was, but alas, because we overlook the way it was integrated into the structures which it was a part of.

"of-the-thing-not-on-it," . . .

Page 77 — *Genius and the Mobocracy*

Too often we save fragments of Sullivan's great buildings and destroy the buildings themselves. If we should have to make the choice, we should do the reverse! The ornament could be duplicated. The buildings cannot.

All of the illustrated drawings in this book, except the two credited to Wright, are now in the Avery library of Columbia University in New York City. One of *the* great architectural libraries of the world, but for God's sake, it is in NEW YORK! Why, oh why did we give up these last remnants of one of our own to Manhattan isle? For the same reason that Sullivan was able to build most of his buildings in Chicago. Money. Dollars. Finance. But, no money could be found in the business world to buy these bits and pieces of priceless memorabilia which is nearly all that remains of Sullivan's early and most creative period. Instead, we built buildings, some good, others not so good. Some in the right places, some in the wrong.

It's too late now, and we do have a few bits and pieces of Sullivan here and there in Chicago, even some of his buildings still stand. So maybe it is time to review this book once more, and see what this great man did, see the pencil lines so casually but carefully drawn so long ago. Perhaps there is still time to realize that Chicago is where modern

architecture began, where it still is growing and where we have a duty and an obligation to save the best of the best. All of the landmark commercial buildings in downtown Chicago which deserve saving amount to perhaps one half of one per cent of the total, and every one of them is a useful usable building. Look up, Chicagoans, be proud of what you see.

So, we have had our say, a review of a book reviewed many times before, a review which became a platform. From this platform we may reach those few people in this city of ours who make the decisions that affect us, our children, and our children's children. To them we repeat, look up, be proud of what you see, but save something for your sons to remember from whence they came.

Yes, I'm sure Frank Lloyd Wright would have approved of the reissue of this, his only book on Sullivan, and Sullivan would have thought that perhaps there was still a chance to escape from rule by the mobocracy if someone, the right one, took time to read the book, and then took time to understand what he had read. Sullivan would have liked this book.

Reviewed by Wilbert R. Hasbrouck, AIA

Letter to the Editors

Sirs:

In regard to my book review of *The Pope-Leighey House* (PSR First Quarter 1971) I would like to clarify several points. The Herbert Jacobs house has 2 bedrooms and a study—not three bedrooms as I stated. The gravity heating system was used in most, but not all, of the Usonian houses. Sometimes the later Usonians took advantage of the low cost and cooling potential of the warm air furnace rather than the more expensive but completely unobtrusive gravity heating system. The house in Bethesda, Maryland, which Wright designed for his son, is a case in point.

In general, the Standard Detail sheet was used in most of the Usonian houses up to 1940, but a survey of the working drawings in the Taliesin archives would be the only way to pin point which ones. After 1940 the variations of the Usonian model desired by Wright caused the standard details to be superseded by a whole range of details which were constantly being added to by Wright's fertile imagination. "I am interested in the exception that proves the rule", he said.

Don Kalc, Chairman
Department of Environmental Design
School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Preview

The Fourth Quarter of Volume VIII of *The Prairie School Review* will trace the work of William Wells, a little known architect who practised in the manner of Sullivan in Oklahoma. Ronald Ramsey prepared the paper under Adolph Placzek at Columbia University.

Mr. Paul Sprague will contribute a major essay reviewing the book:

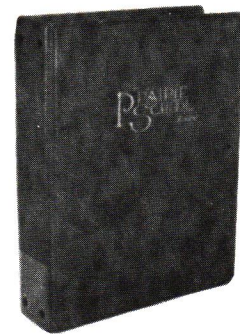
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H. Allen Brooks

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