



FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT 1869-1959

With the passing of Frank Lloyd Wright, American architecture has lost its one authentic giant. In sheer magnitude of accomplishment, no American approaches him. With a courage rare among mortals, he fought for three-quarters of a century first to establish, and then to defend, an original body of architectural principles. On these grounds alone he would deserve a brave man's funeral. But the matter goes deeper than that. For time has shown that Wright was not merely courageous: he was also, within broad limits, entirely correct. Contemporary American architecture stands very largely upon foundations he supplied. And this larger fact entitles him to a hero's rites.

Wright's work, like his personality, was never neutral: it may well have made as many enemies as it did friends. But surely no one, now that he has left us, can deny him his splendid scale. To measure this, he will inevitably be compared to those other three great figures of modern international architecture with whom he so long and so unwillingly shared the spotlight. But the comparisons, unless we are careful, will be meaningless. For although he was only from 15 to 20 years older than Le Corbusier, Mies, and Gropius, he was not really their contemporary. A relatively small difference in age marked the difference not merely of generations but of epochs. These younger men stood not beside him but upon his shoulders, for, by the time these men were ready to begin their first buildings, Wright's earlier work had already done much to prepare the world for them.

Wright was born (incredible as it seems for a man who lived to see rockets sent beyond the moon) only 43 years after the death of Thomas Jefferson! To have lived and worked so long would, by itself, have set him apart. Not one but several generations of architects have matured within the shadow of his work. For the younger men, at least, he was thus both a historic force and a living presence. Yet in all his basic attitudes, he remained a nineteenth-century man, much closer to Jefferson than to Eisenhower. It is this fact—and not merely his great age—which

makes it difficult to take just measure of the man.

Much that might have seemed willful, arbitrary, or obscure in Wright will cease to seem so if only we remember how different were his standards from those of present-day America. Actually, many of his apparent eccentricities stemmed from a sturdy, nineteenth-century consistency. He was an anarchist like Thoreau, an idealist like Emerson, a humanist like Whitman, an iconoclast like Twain. He detested regimentation, whether Moscow's or Madison Avenue's, and fought it wherever it touched him. He believed in love and therefore ended his loveless first marriage in much the same fashion as Emerson had given up his pulpit after the death of his first wife. He had believed in American democracy but, as he saw it sink into modern mediocrity, he denounced it, no matter how mighty its organs of power and opinion. He challenged ugliness, no matter how profitable. He hated war, *all* war, and said so. He based himself upon these old-fashioned virtues; and these gave to his actions a prickly consistency which led him into collision, decade after decade, with that whole apparatus of government, law, army, and church which the English so pungently call "The Establishment."

His nineteenth-century origins also explain other attitudes in the man. The farm background of his Wisconsin childhood gave him his love of nature, his uncanny sense of site and landscape. It probably also explains his distrust of the city and the standards of urban life in general. He admired the deep and wordless knowledge of farm life; but this led him to a distrust of scholarship and higher education which was simply parochial. Whatever it denied him, the engineering school at the University of Wisconsin gave him the mathematical basis for his brilliant structural design.

Wright always insisted upon his absolute independence from the esthetic forces of his times. He seemed to consider it an affront to his integrity as a designer to suggest that he might be influenced by his contemporaries. "Influence" was for him synonymous with "plagiarism." He had spent so many

arduous years fashioning his own idiom of expression that he could not tolerate the suggestion of a connection, no matter how remote or indirect, with the men around him. He denied it. But he was, like all really great artists, extremely sensitive to the world around him. Verbally, he might deny the influence of Sullivan, of the Japanese and *L'Art Nouveau*, of Cubism and *de Stijl*, of Indian and pre-Columbian art. Architecturally, his buildings prove the contrary. Like a seismograph, his work did register every significant tremor in the world of art. But unlike a seismograph, his great creative talent transformed these stimuli into forms peculiarly his own.

Nor was the miracle of Wright's response to these stimuli exclusively a matter of esthetics. Knotty technical problems were also involved and Wright's mastery of them establishes the uniqueness of his contribution. The process is very clear in the lovely Millard and Ennis houses which belong to his so-called "Mayan" period. The shining gravity of the Mayan temple sprang from its sculpture-encrusted limestone masonry. Wright could not have "copied" these, even had he wanted to. The budget would not have permitted either carved sculpture or limestone, and the building codes of a California often shaken by earthquakes would have frowned on rubble masonry walls. Instead, Wright turns directly to his cheapest material—concrete—and fabricates it into its cheapest form—cast block. Some of these are plain; some are cast into geometric patterns which, for all their basic simplicity, give a rich and intricate tracery when assembled into the wall. And the whole is made earthquake-resistant by an integral lattice of steel reinforcing bars.

The apparently effortless way in which Wright repeatedly resolved such problems lends an air of deceptive simplicity to his solutions. Actually, he had demonstrated this capacity to absorb technological advance and to convert it into new esthetic discoveries very early in his career. When all his colleagues were going to great lengths to conceal their electric lighting, steam heat, and steel frames, in

traditional forms, Wright was using them as a means of escape from the prison house of eclecticism. Out of them he created new plans, new profiles, new forms. For him, steel meant the hovering cantilevers and flowing window walls of the Robie house. Central heat meant the open plan, and panel heating made possible the floor-to-ceiling casements which dissolved the barrier between indoors and out. Electricity made possible entirely new concepts of both lighting and fixtures. Out of technical advance Wright makes esthetic invention: in this sense, he is the inventor of the modern American house.

This artistic prescience won him a small circle of friends and clients and a steadily expanding influence internationally. But it also brought him into headlong and chronic collision with powerful forces in his own society. In him, the keepers of official art detected a dangerous iconoclast, and they managed to ostracize him for decades on end. He was ostentatiously ignored by governmental bodies at every level—municipal, county, and state; and though he was decorated by the Emperor of Japan and made a citizen of Florence, he, like Dante, was never recognized by his own national government. In the face of this ostracism, unwilling and unable to surrender his artistic and philosophical aims, Wright was often isolated and alone.

There is, of course, nothing especially novel in a great artist's being ignored by his period. He is usually canonized only when very old or (better yet) safely dead. What was unusual was Wright's response to ostracism. He seemed actually to thrive on it. He became a guerilla fighter in the artistic underground. His headquarters were the esthetic *maquis*, and from this he would sally forth to raid the keepers of official art, to attack with great zest the Blimps and Plushbottoms of his times. There is no denying he was good at it. He had a sort of genius at publicity, as many organizations, including his own state of Wisconsin, learned at their expense. He was not always polite in these skirmishes and sometimes he was wrong. But there was, goodness knows, justification enough for his anger. He lived

to see embassies, academies, state capitols, and world's fairs awarded to men who, whatever else they were, were certainly not his peers. Since the orbit of his private life seldom carried him to those golf courses and clubrooms where such commissions are often awarded, Wright was dogged by the *fait accompli*. Survive it he might, and did, but he could not and would not let it go undenounced.

He wrote and spoke fluently and he loved the limelight. These circumstances sometimes involved him in controversies in which he had no business being. And yet, if we plot the whole course of Wright's long battle for organic architecture, we will not be able to deny its astonishing consistency. Few men have fought with more unflinching, unyielding commitment to principle: marriage, children, bank account, reputation—none of these outweighed his commitment to his art. What these principles were he tried his best to make clear to his fellow Americans. That is why he wrote so many books; that is why, in later years, he stood before so many microphones and TV cameras. But a verbal exposition of architectural principles can never be fully satisfactory, even in the hands of a disciplined verbalist—and this Wright never was. His style was lush, unpruned, a thunderous mixture of Whitman and Carlyle. Sometimes it was very perceptive, as in the wonderful essay on the Japanese print. Sometimes it was laced with wit ("If you see a picture in which perhaps a cow is looking out at you, so real, so life-like, don't buy the picture: *rather buy the cow*"), but it was often obscure. He himself did not edit his writing and no one else was allowed to.

Hence it is to his buildings, rather than his writings, that we must turn for the clearest exposition of his principles. Here there is little possibility of misunderstanding. Already, in that first great constellation of buildings which is inscribed between the Larkin (1904) and the Midway Gardens (1914), his principles are set forth with electrifying precision. They announce a new vocabulary of form, a new palette of color and texture, a new attitude toward both nature and man which parallels the

exactly contemporary experiments of Cézanne and Picasso. The fact that these works of art have still the power to move us so, after half a century, is the best possible proof of the prescience of the artists, the validity of their principles.

It is strange indeed that men who should have known better could have misunderstood these principles, could have denounced them as un-American: for a more authentic American than Wright has never lived. His strengths and his weaknesses are ours. His artistic declaration of independence was, at the esthetic level, the exact equivalent of our noblest social and cultural perspectives: the maximum development of the individual in a new kind of society—free of the fetters of the past, of the hierarchy of kings and clergy, of hereditary power and privilege. Just as the Bill of Rights denies them, so Wright's architecture rejects all their iconography of caste, power, and privilege. His houses—even the largest and most expensive of them—are democratic in spirit, just as Monticello, for all its elegance, is also democratic in spirit. The analogy is not accidental. For Wright not only greatly admired Jefferson; like him, he was persuaded that democracy was the forcing bed of genius, talent, and ability. Its function was to produce for each generation a cadre of true leaders. As the terrifying organs of power closed down on mid-century America, this kind of social order seemed increasingly Utopian. But esthetically Wright's philosophy was certainly successful, producing some of the most beautiful houses America had ever seen—a beauty which the world could recognize as uniquely American even if Americans themselves could not.

The personal lives of all great figures are subjected to a greater scrutiny than those of lesser men. Frank Lloyd Wright had his full share of such attention and this often led to clamorous headlines. Yet if we examine the circumstances, we find they usually involve his trying to lead a private life in the way he thought it must be lived. We might not always accept his standards, but we can only respect the candor and courage with which he acted upon



TALIESIN NORTH: PHOTO BY RICHARD MILLER

them. Because his society so often placed fetters upon actions which he knew to be both necessary and moral, he felt compelled to hew out for himself a private kingdom of behavior. By any objective measure, this kingdom had its irrational dimensions. It had some strangely feudal aspects—his relationship with his students, with his workmen, and with his admirers and the merely curious who came in increasing numbers to gaze at him at work. If toward them he sometimes seemed both arrogant and angry, his dilemma must be understood. Like all artists, Wright needed an audience; yet this audience devoured his time, his energies, his patience. So, on occasion, he lashed out at it with what seemed to be arrogance but was actually more a kind of incredulous exasperation, on the part of a brave man who dared to be himself, at men who allowed themselves to be intimidated. He loved young people and was generous with his time to them, yet he was not a great teacher and knew it. (He once put it this way: he had hoped to be the source, the fountainhead, of a great river of design. Instead, people merely copied him—"they drove 2-inch galvanized

pipes into me and siphoned off what they needed," was the way he put it.)

Yet the physical expression of Wright's private kingdom took the form of two of the loveliest houses in the world. To the two Taliesins, in Arizona and Wisconsin, he brought real splendor; the excitement of a presence larger than life; a touch both passionate and gentle; a composition at once lyrical and strong. No one who had the privilege of visiting the Taliesins when Wright was in residence there could have failed to have felt himself ensconced in a special kind of oasis, in which the raw and hostile forces of surrounding life had somehow been reorganized into a landscape of blessed peace and plenty. In these two wonderful houses, of all the wonderful buildings he designed, we can most clearly see the sort of world his genius would have built for us Americans, had we but fully used it.

Frank Lloyd Wright, in leaving us, has bequeathed us an architecture as much enriched and deepened as was the English language upon the death of William Shakespeare. Whether we know it or not, we are all of us his debtors.

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

"I bequeath my soul to God. . . . For my name and memory, I leave it to men's charitable speeches, and to foreign nations, and the next age." —FRANCIS BACON

We mourn with you the death of the world's greatest architect. He, who almost singlehanded, a half century and more ago, created an architecture of the twentieth century; an American architecture of which we are all rightfully proud. His monument is assured in the great buildings which outlive him.
PHILIP JOHNSON *New York City*

Death came to Frank Lloyd Wright on the twentieth anniversary of the opening of the administration center he designed for us. It has been said that no business building in this century more surely combined originality, beauty, and functional values. This and other buildings he designed for us, including the Johnson Research Tower, mark the man himself as an authentic original in our time. I believe the fame he achieved in his long and vigorous life will increase with the years and that his influence on future generations as a thinker as well as an architect will be profound.
H. F. JOHNSON *Racine, Wis.*

Farewell to this genius of architecture. This is the great man whose essential truth is in his buildings and his writings. His is the greatest influence on architecture to truth and beauty; his the influence on man to richness and liveliness of spirit. Farewell.
ANSHEN & ALLEN *San Francisco*

I admire in Wright's work the development of Sullivan's principles in new and varied forms, his persistent spirit of revolt against the dangers of a modern academicism and the limitations imposed by rigid doctrines. Above all I admire the full enjoyment of life expressed

in his best works and writings, and it is this side of Wright that may have the best and most enduring influence on the younger generations.

JOSE LUIS SERT *Cambridge, Mass.*

A greater influence on students, architects, clients, and people could not have been put in one lifetime.
A. QUINCY JONES *Los Angeles*

When history sifts down to its short list of lasting names of this century, Frank Lloyd Wright will be on that list. Little did Pope Julius the Second suspect that his greatest claim to fame was his quarrels with Michelangelo. It is to the discredit of our business and government not to have given Wright greater opportunities, and our profession will bear the brand of not recognizing him as "the architect of the century." We are still too close to him, and it is difficult to distinguish between the great message he, in his concept of architecture, has given us and the personal style which should remain his own. As time goes by, his contribution will ring clearer and become part of the architecture of generations to come.

EERO SAARINEN *Bloomfield Hills, Mich.*

For Italian architects Wright was not only the greatest living genius but also the incarnation of ideals which make being an architect worth-while. The antifascist fight coincided for us with a growing passion for Wright's architecture, because it stood for individual freedom and democratic courage. He was the only creator we could compare with the greatest masters of

Italy's past. We loved and honored him. Now we feel desperate, for a modern architectural culture seems inconceivable without him. In Venice University I spent an entire day with the students going over his buildings, reading passages from his books, and listening to recordings of his speeches. He seemed to be living among us as he will forever. We share our American colleagues' grief, for Wright was the world's greatest architect of all times.

BRUNO ZEVI *Rome, Italy*

Frank Lloyd Wright will be remembered as a champion of the human spirit against the conformities of our era. His valiant spirit will redeem our architecture.
JOSEPH HUDNUT *Dover, Mass.*

A fine and good man has passed on. He was a genius not only of the building art of America but also in his life and art in general. He has in his creations showed a passion for humanity. His forms in art will surely retain their greatness more than 100 years ahead. Personally I have lost a real friend.

ALVAR AALTO *Helsinki, Finland*

Frank Lloyd Wright was a great architect who early used free forms which made for the interior flow of space. Further he used daylight sources as a painter does a palette of colors which means that all directions and all locations in a room are in repose.

WILLIAM W. WURSTER *Berkley, Calif.*

Frank Lloyd Wright was a distinguished architect as to form and shape and design, of course. But his

contribution to our day and time transcended any such technical accomplishment. He gave meaning to what we call the free spirit of man. He showed that in a material endeavor we can give recognition and tribute to an Almighty Being. He had a fine sense of appreciation of the dignity of man, the foundation of human understanding and brotherhood.

ALBERT M. GREENFIELD *Philadelphia*

I consider Frank Lloyd Wright the greatest creative architect in history. The masterpieces of architecture of the past were ultimate perfection of architectural styles that had been explored for a century or more. In his case he created an entirely new architecture full-blown, the mark of true creative genius unprecedented in history. All contemporary architecture is beholden to him for guidance and inspiration. I was honored to have him for a friend the past 25 years, and cherish the memory of his wit, wisdom, and human qualities.

EDWARD D. STONE *New York City*

Honorable tributes followed by calculated oblivion are but part of what is in store for the work of Frank Lloyd Wright. Wrecking crews are ready for his fame as for his structures. But it will be very hard to eradicate Wright's seed concept, "Architecture I know to be A Great Spirit." From this a new architecture will grow.

EDGAR KAUFMANN *New York City*

The demise of Frank Lloyd Wright brings to mind the tremendous contribution that this great man made to American and world architecture. The world is far richer for the fact of his having been born. He was controversial only because he was so brilliant and traveled in a world for which there were no charts. We will continue to realize dividends from his brilliance as a designer, but also for the reasons of the

depth and erudition of his philosophy. Just as the Greeks, the Romans, and the great cities of the Renaissance in Europe continue to reap dividends from their original conceivers, so are we earning profits in our own way of life and heritage for all years to come.

WILLIAM ZECKENDORF *New York*

In a period of specialist constrictions and nationalist conformities his lifework has expressed the full gamut of the *human* scale, from mathematics to poetry, from pure form to pure feeling, from the regional to the planetary, from the personal to the cosmic. In an age intimidated by its successes and depressed by a series of disasters, he awakens, by his still confident example, a sense of the fullest *human* possibilities. What Wright has achieved as an individual in isolated buildings, conceived in "the nature of materials," our whole community, if it takes fire from his creativity, may eventually achieve in common designs growing more fully out of "the nature of man."

LEWIS MUMFORD *Amenia, N. Y.*

He contributed to the enlightenment of mankind. If anyone could build up the emotional and spiritual quality of our technical age it was he. His life and his ideas are of unsurpassed entity; his buildings are organisms of radiating intensity. As the greatest inspirer in architecture within a century, he fought incessantly against mediocrity, conformism, and the depreciation of the individual. His genius will be for many generations a bright example of integrity and highest achievement.

W. M. MOSER *Zurich, Switzerland*

In his undiminishing power he resembles a giant tree in a wide landscape which year after year attains a more noble crown.

LUDWIG MIES VAN DER ROHE *Chicago*

Frank Lloyd Wright's works will stand as his monument for centuries to come. Those of us who are privileged to live and to work in homes and buildings of his design are indeed fortunate. He never looked back but always ahead to the future. He was always young and has been a great inspiration to all who have really known him.

HAROLD C. PRICE *Bartlesville, Okla.*

Somehow Frank Lloyd Wright's death has stung us because his vitality appeared to have no bounds and no end. With all his irritating ways—irritating perhaps because of our own unconfessed guilt—he stood as the most precious of all symbols: that of independence of thought and action in an age of conformity.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI *Cambridge, Mass.*

Frank Lloyd Wright has impressed the whole civilized world with his architecture. While I was president of Florida Southern College, where he has his largest project, I found people coming from many nations to see his works.

Wright was aware that we not only live in our environment but we likewise live by means of it and because of it. Therefore the whole purpose of his efforts was to design buildings that would do something to those who lived and worked in them. He never lost his interest in learning how people lived in his houses. He claimed that they quarreled less and loved each other more.

The best word that I can think of to describe Wright's architecture is the word *human*. While one is in his buildings one feels more, sees more, and lives more.

LUDD M. SPIVEY *Palm Beach, Fla.*

Wright gives insight to learn that nature has no style, that nature is the greatest teacher of all. The ideas of Wright are the facets of this single thought.

LOUIS I. KAHN *Philadelphia*

Fifty years ago my thesis on graduation dwelt on the growing influence of the Chicago school and its leaders: Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright survived Sullivan and became recognized during these 50 years as the greatest architectural genius of his time, an innovator, a man of courage, one of the great.

JOHN WELLBORN ROOT *Chicago*

At the occasion of the bestowal of the Gold Medal of the City of Florence upon Frank Lloyd Wright—a medal which had never before been given to a foreigner—Carlo Lodovico Ragghianti gave the address. A Tuscan proudly jealous of Italy's contribution to architecture, he said, "Just as Dante initiated a new era in Western Civilization by the creation of a new language, so has Frank Lloyd Wright given architecture a new language and changed the appearance of cities throughout the world." We are all of us, it seems to me, far from understanding the 70 years of Wright's significance and importance to the architecture of environment, organic architecture as to materials, function, and style. However, we begin to "feel" the necessity for his Broadacre City—the humanization of structure and the creation of an environmental architecture for democracy—as the machine, the highway, and the box manufacturer are about to take over in the sprawling metropolis.

OSKAR STONOROV *Philadelphia*

For 50 years he was a stirring ideal for us, as he had become for many more when he had finally reached the high and long mountain ridge of his career. The faith I had in him and through him in humanely conceived forms set into the landscape was one of the very things which brought me to this country, more than a third of a century ago. There was tragic loneliness for him in spite of so many stimulated and devoted souls.

RICHARD NEUTRA *Los Angeles*

Frank Lloyd Wright was very well known and admired in Europe long before he was recognized in his country. The Robie house in Chicago and the Larkin building in Buffalo were fundamentally new architectural milestones which focused attention on this independent artistic expression of the New World. Influence of his early work has been traced in Holland, Belgium, and also in Germany. But, vice versa, also Wright's works of later years show signs of his influence from the European movement. His romantic and explosive handwriting, however strong, prevails in all his building. His superb if somewhat upsetting showmanship has helped to bring the cause of architecture into the public consciousness. A great man and artist has left us.

WALTER GROPIUS *Waltham, Mass.*

In the death of Frank Lloyd Wright it is not the loss of a great old man that we should most regret, but the disappearance of one who had been a great young man.

In paying our tribute to the spectacular achievements and projects of Wright's latter years we should not let ourselves lose sight of the fact (as Wright was often very humanly inclined to let us) that the substantial base of his influence on world architecture had been realized over 45 years ago. In the celebration of such work as the S. C. Johnson Laboratory at Racine, Falling Water, the Price Tower and the V. C. Morris shop in San Francisco, it should not be forgotten that the Robie house in Chicago was completed in 1909, the same year Wright went to Germany to supervise the publication of a portfolio of his work in response to European interest in it. And, as J. J. P. Oud, the Dutch architect, wrote in a special Wright issue of *Wendigen* in 1925, "the time when the adoration of Wright's work by his colleagues on this [the European] side of the Atlantic had reached its culminating point, European architec-

ture itself was in a state of ferment, and cubism was born."—That is to say, between 1909 and 1914.

An American artist who made his basic contribution to American and European architecture before his 45th year and who could continue to surprise and provoke by gestures and virtuosity until his 90th is a vitality for which we should be grateful. In this, Frank Lloyd Wright stood as one of the great world figures in contemporary art and probably America's greatest.

JAMES J. SWEENEY *New York*

Frank Lloyd Wright was a unique character—artist, innovator, inventor, actor. He was born in the Fountain of Youth and bathed in it happily for 90 years. He cultivated the art of throwing vitriol in impassive faces to arouse attention. His own lively boyish interest in everything and everybody led him into fields he knew little about, such as large-scale metropolitan planning, but even there he was the sworn enemy of smugness and complacency. He never had a doubt of his inspiration, and, whether we comprehend or subscribe to his organic and other somewhat bizarre theories or not, he gave his profession a new life when the engineers had almost taken it over. Since it meant so much to him, it is too bad he did not live to see the Guggenheim Museum dedicated, but he will, in any event, be remembered for other and more enduring works.

ROBERT MOSES *New York City*

... provocative, controversial, stimulating. He is probably at this moment telling St. Peter how to redesign the "Pearly Gates."

ROBERT DOWLING *New York City*

The desire of people in the industry to comment on Wright has been so overwhelming that only a portion of the tributes received by FORUM could be presented above. More will appear in the June issue which will also include a comprehensive review of Wright's work, old and new.—ED.