

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

ARCHITECT

February 20 - May 10, 1994

For Immediate Release

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT A Biography

Frank Lloyd Wright's enduring involvement with landscape was formed in the rolling hills of southern Wisconsin, where he was born in 1867. Wright's mother encouraged his creative skills at an early age by introducing him to the "kindergarten gifts," or special toy blocks, designed by German educator Friedrich Froebel. She raised her son in an extended Welsh immigrant family steeped in a tradition of nineteenth-century romantic idealism and liberalism.

In his late teens, Wright studied draftsmanship in the Engineering School of the University of Wisconsin, Madison. In 1888, he was hired as an apprentice architect by the successful Chicago firm of Adler and Sullivan, where he stayed until 1893. Despite his lack of formal training as an architect, Wright's talent was quickly appreciated. He soon became Sullivan's assistant, and Sullivan his mentor. Ultimately Wright was given his own design assignments, including the James Charnley House, Chicago (1891-92).

In 1889, Wright married Catherine Lee Tobin, with whom he had six children, and built a Shingle Style house in the Chicago suburb of Oak Park. Four years later, he established his own practice. During the 1890s, while Wright was working on domestic commissions, his search for an American architecture resulted in the horizontal composition, simplified planar forms, and open plans that culminated in the Prairie House in 1900.

- more -

The first decade of the twentieth century saw the maturing of Wright's architectural abilities and the expansion of his professional practice. The Robie House, Oak Park (1908-10), is the quintessential example of Wright's architecture in this period. He also extended the principles of the Prairie House to public architecture with the Larkin Company Administration Building, Buffalo (1902-06; demolished 1950), and Unity Temple, Oak Park (1905-08).

In 1909, Wright shocked Chicago society by leaving his family and his practice, and sailing for Europe with Mamah Borthwick Cheney, the wife of a client and friend. In Berlin, Wright prepared an edition of drawings of his works to date, published by Ernst Wasmuth in 1910. Upon returning home with Mrs. Cheney, Wright designed and began construction of their country house, Taliesin, Spring Green, Wisconsin (1911), notable for its intimate relationship with the surrounding landscape. During the construction of Midway Gardens, Chicago (1913-14; demolished 1929), Taliesin was partially destroyed in a tragic fire set by a servant to hide the murder of Mrs. Cheney and six other people.

Despite the completion of the Imperial Hotel (1912-23; demolished 1968), the 1920s were a low period in Wright's fortunes, with few commissions, a failed second marriage, to Miriam Noel, and increasing professional isolation. In 1928, however, he married Olgivanna Hinzenberg, inaugurating renewed stability and growth in his life. In 1932 he founded an architectural school, the Taliesin Fellowship, and began designing its winter quarters, Taliesin West, Scottsdale, Arizona (1937-38 and later). Also in 1932, Wright's work was featured in the ground-breaking MODERN ARCHITECTURE, INTERNATIONAL

EXHIBITION, at The Museum of Modern Art.

Two of Wright's most famous buildings -- the Edgar J. Kaufmann House, Fallingwater, Mill Run, Pennsylvania (1934-37), and the S.C. Johnson & Son, Inc., Administration Building, Racine, Wisconsin (1936-39) -- were built when the architect was in his seventies. At this time, Wright also immersed himself in projects embodying his vision of a landscape extended by the automobile, exemplified by Broadacre City (1934-35, revised until 1959) and his Usonian houses, perhaps best represented by the Herbert Jacobs House, Madison (1936-37).

In the remaining decades of his life, Wright reemerged as a major architectural figure. His work was the subject of retrospectives at The Museum of Modern Art (1940) and at the Palazzo Strozzi, Florence (1951). At the same time, he was receiving numerous commissions for big urban projects, including the Pittsburgh Point Park Civic Center (1947; unbuilt); Price Tower, Bartlesville, Oklahoma (1952-56); and the Marin County Civic Center (1957-62 and later) in California. He proposed the Mile High Skyscraper (1956, project) and supervised construction of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (1943-59). The Guggenheim's famous spiral originated in designs of the early 1940s, and its daring cantilevering challenged poured-concrete technology. Wright also designed highly original roadside projects and evolved solutions for the architectural demands of newly suburban domestic, civic, and religious life. At his death in 1959, at the age of ninety-one, Wright's practice was booming. His former apprentices formed Taliesin Associated Architects to complete his projects.

- more -

"Wright was a key player in the development of modern architecture, yet constantly at odds with it," writes Anthony Alofsin, architectural historian, University of Texas, Austin, in the catalogue accompanying **FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT: ARCHITECT**. His work of the 1890s and 1900s influenced the early thinking of European modern architects, but he rejected the International Style they developed, and maintained an independent course throughout his career. His designs established the very image of the postwar American house, anticipating the new suburban landscape created by the automobile.

Throughout his life, Wright lectured, wrote, and published. A few of his published works are *The Art and Craft of the Machine* (1901), *The Japanese Print: An Interpretation* (1912), *Two Lectures on Architecture* (1931), *The Disappearing City* (1932), *An Autobiography* (1932), *An Organic Architecture* (1939), *Genius and The Mobocracy* (1949), *The Future of Architecture* (1953), *The Natural House* (1954), and *A Testament* (1957).

1.1
February 1994