could be meant to incarnate the conscience of the world. Granting that the last problem is as difficult as any a modern architect has had to face, is there anything in the nature of modern architecture itself which contributes to the difficulty? It is probable that there is.

Remember that the skyscraper was born of business needs for more office space for less money on less land, that the skyscraper evolved in a series of business buildings at a time which had a firm faith in technology as something which could give nearly everyone a better life if technology were given a chance. Our architecture really is a portrait of us, and it shows some clear characteristics inherited from the generation before the Depression. We have inherited the architectural vocabulary of their optimistic industrial civilization, and cannot force that vocabulary to take on quite different symbolic meanings. It is not just the United Nations buildings which seem to lack spiritual content: we do not build very many convincing churches either. We certainly cannot do everything, but we do do some things well. Architecturally this is a rewarding time to live in, perhaps more so than any time since the eighteenth century.

Further Resources

BOOKS

WEBSITES


Introduction
Frank Lloyd Wright was part of a group of architects known as the Prairie School, founded by his mentor, architect Louis Sullivan. This group rejected the older European models of design. Prairie School style houses, popular from the turn of the century into the 1920s, were originally designed to blend into a prairie landscape and usually featured low-pitched roofs, horizontal lines, and open interiors. Wright’s designs had become popular in
the 1910s and 1920s. He was gaining recognition as an architectural genius, but he was already moving on from the Prairie School group, whom he found cliquish and limiting. “Organic architecture,” his own conception of combining form and function, became his guiding principal. In his designs, Wright took into consideration the site of the building as well as the times in which it was being built, creating a harmony among all the different human and natural elements.

Wright traveled to Germany in 1910 and published two books that changed the course of European architecture. In the teens, Wright began studying earthquake principles, and, having determined that a flexible structure was the only one that could survive such a disaster, in 1922 he completed the Imperial Hotel for a Japanese group. The following year, the structure survived both a fire and an earthquake. During the Great Depression, Wright wrote his autobiography. In the late 1930s, he began taking apprentices at the rebuilt Taliesin and in Taliesin West in Arizona, training a new generation of American architects. He was by then building houses in what he called the Usonian style. (The name Usonian was meant to conjure images of the United States.) In the 1940s, he began experimenting with arcs and circular buildings oriented to allow for sunlight in the design. He also developed the first of his plans for a museum to exhibit Solomon Guggenheim’s collection, though wartime shortages would delay actual building until the 1950s.

Significance
Frank Lloyd Wright’s organic architecture was in many ways directly opposed to the spare, exposed nature of Bauhaus architecture. Organic architecture was based on his belief that architecture was an organic part of human life and should be incorporated into society in order to link people together and allow them to evolve. His philosophy of architecture was political—he conceived it as the art of a democracy—and it was national, specifically American in style. It was also spiritual. Using his concept, he developed some of the most radical and controversial buildings of the twentieth century. With Bauhaus styles so popular and with an overwhelming trend of conformity in the United States in the 1950s, it might seem that radical designs like Wright’s would have fallen out of fashion. However, Wright was a recognized master, and his architecture continued to achieve respect. Indeed, American architects were influential worldwide in the 1950s, and experts agree that Wright was the architect with the most lasting influence of the period. His use of “open” floor plans, carports, and living rooms contributed directly to house designs still in use today.

Two of Wright’s most famous buildings were completed in the 1950s, when Wright was in his eighties. In the early part of the decade, he began work on the Price Tower (1953–1956), a skyscraper in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. Normally more interested in works that stayed closer to the ground, like much of nature, Wright was posed with a challenge when designing a skyscraper. Thus, his natural inspiration came from the tree. He originally designed the building in 1929, as the St. Mark’s tower, but it was not built until the 1950s. Wright’s Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (1956–1959) was designed with a continuing spiraling ramp wound around the inside of the building to allow the ideal setting for art viewing. The design was controversial, both because New Yorkers couldn’t decide exactly what it looked like, and because its arcing shape contrasted enormously with the rest of rectangular Manhattan.

Primary Source
“Frank Lloyd Wright Talks of His Art” [excerpt]

SYNOPSIS: In this excerpt, Wright discusses his early days as an architect and describes some of his guiding principals, including organic architecture. He takes a dig at Bauhaus architecture, claiming that exposing the underlying structure of a building is “indecent exposure.” He also discusses the process of designing the Imperial Hotel in the 1920s, defends
the Guggenheim’s revolutionary design, and affirms that architecture is art.

Around 1909, Kuno Francke, German exchange Professor of Esthetics at Harvard, heard of those Prairie Houses and he came to investigate. He saw one and got my name as the architect; he saw another and got the same name. Finally he came to the Oak Park studio and stayed three days. He felt something was being created which was being wasted on my country and he tried to persuade me to go to Germany. He told me Germany was ready for what I had. But I had no intention of going: I didn’t speak German and I wasn’t sure I wanted to work for the Germans. I liked my own people.

But nine months later the Wasmuth publishing house said they wanted to publish all my work if I would come to supervise it. The portfolio appeared in 1910. It changed the course of architecture in Europe. Europe was ready for it.

But the principles of construction that made the countenance of that architecture what it was, seem never to have been grasped. Louis Sullivan, “Lieber Meister,” and I used to talk of it as organic, and this concept of architecture—both ridiculed and admired—was the result of these principles.

Organic architecture is distinguished from the facade-making which passes for modern architecture today, as you can see in our home, Taliesen West. Organic architecture believes in the destruction of what the so-called International Style has maintained as the box. We had a feeling that since the nature of social life was a profession of freedom, there should be a free expression in building. The box was merely an inhibition and a constraint. All architecture had been the box—a decorated box, or a box with its lid exaggerated or a box with pilasters, but always a box.

And the box did not fulfill the possibilities of steel and glass. Steel—the new material—allowed tensile strength. Now you could make the building tough with tensile strength. If the idea was to do away with the box, here was the means.

There now came the cantilever. You could put the load under the center of the beam or you could reduce the span between the corners by moving the supports inward and leaving the corner open. In that single circumstance—what I suppose would be called engineering—came the opportunity to destroy the box. Now the walls could be merely screens and the corners could be knocked out. Man could look out of the corner where he had never looked before.

What could happen horizontally could also happen to the vertical corner. The essential nature of the box could be eliminated. Walls could be screens independent of each other; the open plan appeared naturally the relationship of inhabitants to the outside became more intimate; landscape and building became one, more harmonious; and instead of a separate thing set up independently of landscape and site, the building with landscape and site became inevitably one. So the life of the individual was broadened and enriched by the new concept of architecture, by light and freedom of space.

And another thought at that time was that the proper scale for a building was the human being, the human scale “Grandomania,” as I called it then and still do, seemed intended to give man an inferiority complex; “monumentality” was so he could be reduced by the systems of authority.

But instead of understanding the principle involved in organic architecture, what went around the world was the corner window and the cantilever—without any sense of the release of space which had inspired them. Architects who thought they were modern concentrated on the box and the exposure of structure. Why should you always expose structure? I call it “indecent exposure.”

Here, in the Larkin Building in Buffalo in 1904, was the first great assertion that the machine in the artist’s hands is a great tool and will give works of art. But only if it is in the hands of the creative artist. The speech I made about the machine in 1901 at Hull House, pointing out the machine could be used for freedom and to emancipate the artist from the petty structural deceit of making things seem what they are not well. . . .

It is an interesting item that I, an architect supposed to be concerned with the esthetic sense of the building, should have invented the hung wall for the w.c. (easier to clean, under), and adopted many other innovations like the glass door, steel furniture, air conditioning and radiant or “gravity heat.” Nearly every technological innovation used today was suggested in the Larkin Building in 1904.

The Unity Temple of 1906 was reinforced concrete. It was the first building to come complete as architecture from forms cast. The idea of the reality of the building as the space within had found tangible expression. I was quite pleased with myself in the Unity Temple. I thought I was prophetic and had made a statement bound to re-create the world of architecture.
The significance was the emphasis on what is called the third dimension. It is not thickness, but depth, a sense of space. All this added up to a new dispensation as to what might constitute the life of a building. It could parallel the life of the free individual.

What they call non-objective art—in Kandinsky and Mondrian and Leger—can be seen in patterns we designed for the Midway Gardens in 1912. Such as in this detail of a mural called “City by the Sea”: But we had been making such abstract designs for fifteen years. This principle of design was natural, inevitable for us. Whether in glass or textile or whatever, it is based on the straight-line technique of the T-square and the triangle. It was inherent in the Froebel system of kindergarten training given me by my mother for I built many designs and buildings on the kitchen table out of the geometric forms of those playthings. Out of this came the straight-line patterns that are used today in textiles, linoleums and so on. But it grew out of my own limitations, by way of the T-square and the triangle and the compass.

Now in 1914 came an expedition from Japan looking for an architect to build their new Imperial Hotel. They came around the world by way of Europe and on their way to America they heard my name and knew the German publication of my work. They heard the name again and again in Europe and decided to look me up. They saw the buildings and said, “Well, not Japanese, not at all, but will look well in Japan.”

Thereupon, I spent six years on studies of earthquake conditions. It never left my consciousness. And we solved the problem of the menace of the quake by concluding that rigidity couldn’t be the answer, and that flexibility and resiliency must be the answer. So we built [a] building [that] could flex and return to normal. And it did withstand the great quakes.

But also for the first time in the history of Japan a foreigner had taken off his hat to her culture and tried to build with Western technology without losing what was precious and beautiful in her own culture. The Imperial Hotel had not only to withstand the
earthquake but also to be worthy to stand without annoyance and insolence in Japan.

There was the conviction that under modern conditions the telephone, the car, the airplane man must make use of the technological developments to make them a human blessing instead of a disadvantage. Even the detail shows Broadacres City project of 1932 as the expansion of humanity by way of man’s own prowess. . . .

My father a preacher and a minister taught me to regard a symphony as an edifice of sound. And ever since, as I listen to Bach and Beethoven and Mozart, I have watched the builder build and learned many valuable things from music another phase of understanding nature.

And as a preparation for organic architecture a knowledge derived from nature, not only observation but constant association with the elements of nature well, these are the basis of an architectural education.

The first expression of the tree-like, mast structure was in a project for St Marks-in-the-Bouwerie in 1923. The skyscraper was indeed the product of modern technology, but it was not suitable if it increased congestion, which it inevitably would unless it could stand free in the country. There was one which was a feature of Broadacre City so these from the city wouldn’t feel lost in that vision of the country, and the Johnson Tower is another such. But it was an idea that had to wait over thirty years for full realization. Here it is shown in a drawing at the bottom of the page. But it is actually being built now by H. C. Price in Bartlesville, Okla. The total weight of the building will be about 6.10 of the conventional structure of the Rockefeller Center type, due to the construction of cantilever and continuity. Now the skyscraper will come into its own on the rolling plains of Oklahoma.

The proposed new building for the Guggenheim Museum which you see in my drawing at the top of the page, is the latest sense of organic architecture. Here we are not building a cellular composition of compartments, but one where all is one great space on a single continuous floor.

The eye encounters no abrupt change, but is gently led and treated as if at the edge of the shore watching an unbreaking wave or is that too fancy a phrase.

You ask what I would advise a young man going into architecture. Well in my new book there is a lecture I gave in Chicago in 1931 and these are the things I told him concerning ways and means.

To forget the architectures of the world except as something good in their way and in their time, not to go into architecture to get a living unless they loved it as a principle at work, to beware of architectural school except as an exponent of engineering, to go into the field to see the machines and methods at work that make modern buildings.

“Naughty Nautilus”
Build thee more stately mansion, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
. . . Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast . . . .
—Oliver Wendell Holmes, The Chambered Nautilus

For the better part of his 84 years, Frank Lloyd Wright, the grand, infuriating and tireless old nautilus of U.S. architecture, has built ever more amazing mansion, put ever vaster domes over such projects as a mortuary in San Francisco, a chapel for Florida Southern College, a laboratory tower for Johnson’s Wax. When the Guggenheim Foundation asked him in 1945 to build an art museum for Manhattan’s upper Fifth Avenue, he designed what might be taken as a monument to himself. It would be shaped, he said, “like the chambered nautilus.” The picture gallery would consist of a quarter-mile ramp, slowly rising in a spiral to a height of 72 ft. where it would culminate in a huge dome.

The Guggenheim Foundation accepted his design (cost: $2,000,000), but New York City authorities prosaically declared that the museum would violate building laws: among other things, the building’s 6-ft. overhang was against regulations. Last week Wright, who has described the building code as being “for fools,” showed up at a hearing in Manhattan. He grandly agreed to eliminate the overhang, made plans to appeal the other objections.

Later, he explained his position: “Here is one floor for one building, going indefinitely up. There is no building just like this.” It is “democratic” in design, unlike the “fascist” pattern of the usual skyscrapers, said he. “This building is neither Communist nor Socialist, but characteristic of the new aristocracy born of freedom to maintain it. The reactionary . . . will not really like it.”

I said they should immediately form the habit of thinking “why” concerning effects challenge every feature, learn to distinguish the curious from the beautiful and get the habit of analysis.

I told them to “think in simples” as my old master used to say meaning to reduce the whole to its arts. And to abandon as poison the American idea of the “quick turnover,” to avoid getting into practice “half-baked” and to take time to prepare even ten years.

The physician can bury his mistakes, but the architect can only advise his client to plant wines so they should go as far as possible from horse to build their first buildings. I said also to regard it just as desirable to build a chicken-house as a cathedral quality is what counts. And to stay out of architectural competitions, except as a novice and to beware of the “shopper for plans.” In architecture the job should find the man. And to keep their own ideal of honesty so high that they would never quite be able to reach it.

What the American people have to learn is that architecture is the great mother art the art behind which all the others are definitely, distinctly and inevitably related. Until the time comes that when we speak of Art we immediately think of buildings, we will have no culture of our own.

Further Resources

BOOKS


WEBSITES


Nonfiction work

By: Claire McCardell
Date: 1956


About the Author: Claire McCardell, a leading fashion designer during the 1940s and 1950s, was born in Frederick, Maryland, in 1905. She graduated from Parsons School of Design in New York in 1928 and began her career as a model and assistant designer in 1929. McCardell lived an active life style, traveling, golfing, and skiing and understood the need for a minor revolution in women’s fashions. She came to be known as the pioneer of women’s sportswear forforging lines of women’s clothes that were comfortable and allowed for easy movement, while maintaining clean lines and a sense of fashion. She was also a pioneer in her rejection of European models of fashion, creating a uniquely American style of casual dress. Some of her most popular items were her wrap-around sashes, pedal pushers, and mix-and-match separates. McCardell died in 1958.

Introduction

Clothing designers in the 1950s catered largely to women, changing their styles annually to ensure that consumers would continue buying new clothes, even if the old ones were still perfectly serviceable. In the early part of the decade, fashion design was marketed with the rigid gender roles that were in place in the postwar United States. Although they had been temporarily included in the work force during World War II (1939–1945), society expected them to return home to their “appropriate places” after its conclusion. In order to maintain that “appropriate place”, a women had to support several gender stereotypes, among them that of women as happy homemakers, and that of women having perfect figures. Magazines, billboards, and the television all showed women with hourglass figures, wearing perfectly tailored dresses, and cheerfully performing household tasks. Very few women maintained jobs outside of their homes, and society held them to rigid expectations as well, especially in the area of clothing, where they were expected to dress...