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Fallingwater
Mill Run, Pennsylvania
Frank Lloyd Wright



"I go to nature every day for inspiration in the day's work. I follow in building the principles which nature has used in its domain."

— **Frank Lloyd Wright**

Nature provides a refuge whose elements hold symbolic meaning. Rock provides permanence. Water is both restorative and transformative. The walls of our homes contain us. Each prevails in its own domain and combining them is a creation myth. Fallingwater is such a myth, and these photographs sing its vision. But to live there, you must add cold rock, damp air, and the incessant noise of the stream. Perhaps it's best known as a story.

While creating this chapter I had a dream, and, as always, I dive back into my dreams. I dreamt of moving through the woods as trees sent stripes of light and shade across me. Shadows advanced and retreated as I shifted my focus to red hues in the distance. I could see fires were approaching. I drove my jeep to high ground, crossed a small lake in an iron boat, and disembarked above a tall cliff to look down on the fires down below. Forest fires don't climb tall cliffs, but they cannot be underestimated.

"Wright remains a perplexing, compelling, nearly superhuman presence to architects and students alike—part deity, part eccentric old man, part brilliant and innovative designer."

— **Paul Goldberger** (1983, 310)



“The writings of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman shaped the American psyche of the time and its response to nature. In addition to being influenced by figures from literature and philosophy, Wright’s architectural thinking was also shaped by Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879) and John Ruskin (1819-1900), both of whom held nature-based beliefs, promoted honesty in materials, and felt that a spiritual or moral imperative was required in design.”

— **Josephine Louise Vaughan** (2017, 44)

Professor of Architecture

“The materials used inside are the same as those used outside, creating a continuity of surfaces and materials that unifies the composition. This feature is reinforced in key places by the actual intrusion of an element from the exterior. The walls and piers are stone; the ceiling, forming the underside of the upper slab, is plastered and painted the same color as the parapets. The floor is covered in flagstone similar in color and texture to the stones in the bed of the stream. The flagstone floors are waxed, except for the upper part of a boulder used in the foundations of the house. Emerging in its raw, natural state as the base of the living room fireplace, its role in anchoring the house is both literal and figurative.”

— from *The 20th-Century Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, Nomination to the World Heritage List* by the United States of America (2016)

Revised 2019



“Frank L. Wright had the notion of movement through his architecture always in mind. His characteristic low entrances were intended to give us a sense of compression, to make the sensation as you move into a larger space beyond the entrance all the more dramatic... Wright was nothing if not cinematic, and he designed always with an awareness of how people would move through his buildings and a desire to control that movement as best he could, like a director pacing the story as it unfolds.”

— **Paul Goldberger**

“To Wright, architecture was never an outside form that contained space. Rather it was the space within that was the true architectural reality. The exterior should be merely an expression of it.”

— **Elizabeth Gordon** (1959, 262) Editor, House Beautiful magazine

“Form follows function—that has been misunderstood. Form and function should be one, joined in a spiritual union.”

— **Frank Lloyd Wright**



“Everything was related to something else; a room was a series of spaces, each to be lit and defined until you suddenly found yourself in another major expanse or room. A piece of music with its themes and passages. One could spend hours defining and accenting shapes, both negative and positive.

— **Ezra Stoller** (2017ES01.03343)

“I think it was when Wright watched us work with whatever lights I had, sometimes for hours before I made an exposure, that he was won over to the idea that perhaps I was different from so many of the other photographers whom he had observed.”

— **Ezra Stoller** (2017ES01.03343)

“While I had seen photographs of this house, it was only exposure to the real thing that brought home how great a creation it was. I hoped to could communicate it to the people who were to see my photographs. In a way, the photographing of Fallingwater encapsulates all of the problems of the photography of great architecture.

— **Ezra Stoller** (2017es01.03437)



“Never more apt was a comparison to architecture to music. Here was a work presenting an overwhelming grand motif which is repeated and reinforced in many ways and by means of many leitmotifs. To be understood and enjoyed and appreciated, one of these sub-themes must be seen, sensed, and understood. What we have before us is a symphony, which is an experience in time. To show but one photograph, as is so often done of Fallingwater, is like presenting one line of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony.”
— **Ezra Stoller** (2017es01.03437)

“But, aside from making the photographs available, what control has the photographer over the presentation of his work? — in over 50 years of photographing, not once have I been asked to participate in the final presentation.”
— **Ezra Stoller** (2017es01.03437)



“Mr. Wright never commissioned photographers and I didn’t expect payment from him. But I was careful with my copyrights. Wright, however, assumed that pictures of his work were his. Once, after someone informed him that giving my pictures away violated my copyrights, Wright phoned me in a fury and bellowed, “Sue me, I enjoy being sued!” I didn’t, of course, and he was generally pretty careful to have those who wanted to use my pictures contact me for permission. But I was a little shaken, not being sure that, in theory, he wasn’t right. Not only about the photographs, but the job itself. But that was Mr. Wright’s power.
— **Ezra Stoller** (2017es01.03458)

“Wright was surprised with the amount of trouble I took to rearrange the furniture and set up the light for the interior photographs. He was also impressed that I did not stop my work more in order to listen to his pronouncements.”
— **Ezra Stoller** (2017es01.03458)

“A couple of times I remember him starting to show me where the best camera position was and bumping into the camera which was already there.”
— **Ezra Stoller** (2017es01.05130)



“Frank Lloyd Wright won’t allow the magazines to publish photos of his work unless they are taken by Stoller, and I think you can be almost as temperamental as the ‘old man’.”

— **Leonard Currie**, founding dean of the new College of Architecture and Art at the University of Illinois, in a letter to Jorge Arango, June 17, 1952 (2017es01.03897)

“By the time Frank Lloyd Wright was through with a client, that client had been subjected to a complete esthetic education. It’s much like the relationship between a psychiatrist and a patient: at some point, the client really gets to think the practitioner is God. These are the problems of being an architect, and the reason why I’m a photographer.”

— **Ezra Stoller** (2017es01.04383)

“Immediately upon entering from the lush, natural world of the woods and stream, one encounters the hearth, a dining area, and a living room. One feels welcome, comforted, at home, at peace. And yet the expanse of windows brings the woods, hills, and stream almost inside. Wright was conscious of the effect of design on one’s mood and sense of well-being, and he used design and structure to evoke the desired reactions: Stimulus/response.”

— **Dale Hartley** (2017) psychologist



“Because I’ve always felt very strongly that architecture was more than a set of individual spaces, I always tried to make my photographs as a series, attempting to show the continuity and the inter-relationship of the spaces. I almost always imposed a discipline on my assignments so that somehow one photograph would relate to another.

“This is especially apparent in the series on Fallingwater which I made on my own with no outside interference. The viewpoint of every photograph appears in the preceding one of the series. Of course, the pictures were never shown in this manner and early on I learned to be philosophical in the face of ‘editing.’”
— **Ezra Stoller** (2017es01.04826)



“And his hypnotic power was not limited to people's educational, financial or social level—nor to their religion or sex. His taste, intelligence, imagination, personality, and communicative powers overwhelmed all, and they literally worshiped him, though some were a little ashamed of their complete capitulation. I recall clients wanting to know what writers he read, what food he favored, and what music he listened to.

“And speaking of music, I recall listening to a Beethoven recording with Wright when he said, in a bemused sort of way, ‘Beethoven, now there’s a man whose genius, I am willing to admit, was equal to mine.’ Of course, the remark was accompanied by a most disarming grin. He did love music and constantly spoke of architecture in musical terms.

“The word, whether spoken or written, was a fondness of Wright’s. He seemed to have inherited that Welsh gift for the rolling phrase, and, in this, he reminded me of John L. Lewis. Sometimes it didn’t matter so much what the message was, so long as the medium was effective. Of course, shock value was important, and he’d catch you off guard with, ‘Roosevelt (FDR), the greatest butcher since Napoleon.’ Abraham Lincoln was another one of his peeves, one of his acolytes will have to explain why.”

— **Ezra Stoller** (2017es01.05133)



"Some of those evening sessions alone with Mr. W. were tremendously rewarding, as when he made patterns on the table with match sticks. 'See that's good... not so good... Ah, that's better! It's like a dance...' and he'd hum a few bars of music to accompany the flow of the design. I, of course being young and not too cognizant of what a treasure I was being exposed to, was always impatient to get back to my camera, but he'd take me around, expanding on the stick designs, and would point with his cane to details, explaining them and often saying, 'Now that has to be redone,' when something bothered him.

"I realized then what a lonely position a genius is in. Nowhere to turn for help. No one's judgment you could trust. He had pushed the solution so far beyond what anyone else would have, that when he had to face the final compromise, no one was anywhere in sight. No wonder he had so little patience for the work of other architects when one considers how he could have resolved those problems.

"On the other hand, when in the course of one of our evening conversations, I had the temerity to ask that, in view of all the marvelous environments and the examples of how even simple things should be done, why was it that there were almost no people emerging from Taliesin to do work of a like nature. For once, Wright's vaunted arrogance broke down. He said simply, 'They don't stay long enough.' "

— **Ezra Stoller**, March 1986 (2017es01.05136)



“The work of this great master revealed an architectural world of unexpected force and clarity of language, and also a disconcerting richness of form. Here finally was a master builder, drawing upon the veritable fountainhead of architecture, who with true originality lifted his architectural creations into the light. Here again, at last, genuine organic architecture flowered.”

— **Ludwig Mies van der Rohe** (1946)

“The Wright plan is an image of modern man, caught up in constant change and flow, holding on, if he feels he must, to whatever seems solid, but no longer regarding himself as the center of the world... The axes are like country crossroads in the boundless prairie, or like Bingham’s long rafts sliding down out of the picture under the continuous sky on the stream of the river, or like Huck and Jim on the Mississippi, where they find comfort only while floating onward together through the mists and where all turns to nightmare whenever they touch the shore.”

— **Vincent Scully** (1960, 18)



“In 1994, engineering student John Paul Huguley, using newly available computer technology, undertook an analysis of the master terrace cantilever and determined that the cantilevers were over-stressed and probably had been so from the beginning.”

— from *The 20th-Century Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, Nomination to the World Heritage List by the United States of America* (2016) Revised 2019

“Wright’s absolute certainty, his grandiose pretension, would seem to make him the last man for an age so skeptical of the grand gesture and so consumed by a sense of irony as ours. Wright liked to say that early in life he had to choose ‘between honest arrogance and hypocritical humility,’ and no one ever doubted on which side he ended up. Yet within all that determined bluster, there was such a dazzling sense of invention that one cannot but look upon it in awe.”

— **Paul Goldberger** (1994) *New York Times Magazine*



“Looking back almost [three quarters] of a century, one still marvels at the singularity of Fallingwater. It appeared as a mutation sprung into existence. Fallingwater still stands out as a unique achievement in the career of a distinguished architect, and it would also seem that in 1936 nothing in Frank Lloyd Wright’s previous work had prepared one to expect it.”

— **Bernard Hoesli** (2005, p. 204) architect and apprentice to Le Corbusier.

“The pattern of reality is super geometric, casting a spell or a charm over any geometry, and is such a spell in itself. Yes, so it seems to me as I draw with T-square, triangle, and scale. That is what it means to be an artist—to seize the essence brooding everywhere in everything, just behind aspect.”

— **Frank Lloyd Wright** (1957, 157)



“One evening we sat there. He had come back from England, where he’d been given this medal. The Queen had congratulated him. Well, it was absolutely contrary to everything he stood for. Yet he was so proud. What sort of insecurity, I wondered, drives this man? And so it is with architects.”

— **Ezra Stoller** (2017ES01.03343)



