

Frank Lloyd Wright essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“ The greatest artist this country has ever produced seems to at last be coming into his own. America’s other great artists—our painters, sculptors, composers—don’t really rank with the tops of all time. They’re not Rembrandt or Michelangelo or Beethoven. Wright alone has that standing.”
(Robert Campbell)

One of America’s most influential and imaginative architects was Frank Lloyd Wright. Throughout his 70 year career, Wright has not only designed nearly a thousand structures, but he has explored the ideas of living space, landscape, and the relationship between architecture and community. Frank Lloyd Wright left behind a legacy of beautiful houses and buildings, an American style of architecture, and an example of what it means to live life based on the way things should be, not the way they are. He created some of the most monumental and intimate spaces in America. He designed everything: banks and resorts, office buildings and churches, a filling station and a synagogue, a beer garden and an art museum. Frank Lloyd Wright’s life truly was a work of art.

Wright was born on June 8, 1867, in Richland Center, Wisconsin. His early influences include his clergyman father’s playing of Bach and Beethoven and his mother’s gift of geometric blocks. Growing up, Wright spent much of his summers at a farm owned by his uncles; here, his favorite pastime was building forts out of hay and mud. In 1882, at the age of 15, he entered the University of Wisconsin as a special student, studying engineering because the school had no course in architecture. Wright left Madison in 1887 to work as a draftsman in Chicago. Wright worked for several architectural offices until he finally found a job with the most skillful architect of the Mid-West,

Louis Sullivan, soon becoming Sullivan's chief assistant. Wright was assigned most of the firm's designing of houses, and to pay his many debts he designed for private clients in his spare time. Sullivan disapproved, and Wright set up his own office, which was located in Oak Park. Just before his twenty-second birthday, in 1889, Wright married Catherine Lee Tobin, the daughter of a wealthy businessman, and together with Sullivan as his former employer, she gave him the cultural background he lacked; she gave him social polish as well.

Now, as an independent architect, Wright became the leader of a style known as the Prairie School, which is described as houses with low-pitched roofs and extended lines that blend into the landscape. Between the year of 1903-1906, Wright began using more modern materials, such as concrete. In 1904, he designed the strong, practical Larkin building in Buffalo, New York. In 1905, Wright left the United States for the first time to travel to Japan for three months. In 1911, feeling too restricted by building primarily suburban structures, Wright began the construction of his new home and studio, located on his uncle's Wisconsin farm, called Taliesin (Welsh for 'shining brow'). "No house should ever be on a hill or on anything. It should be of the hill. Belonging to it. Hill and house should live together each the happier for the other." (Frank Lloyd Wright, pg. 96) In 1909, the first phase of Wright's career ended sadly, when he left his lover, Mamah Borthwick Chaney, the wife of a former client, and his five children alone at Taliesin. That day, a crazed servant murdered Mrs. Chaney and six others, also setting a fire that destroyed much of Taliesin. This incident caused a setback in his career for a short period of time. In 1916, Wright traveled back to Japan where he would

spend much of the next six years. He designed the Imperial Hotel, in Tokyo, floating the structure on an underlying sea of mud. Frank Lloyd Wright returned to the United States in 1922, he was in his mid-50's, and facing one of the most difficult times in his life. Having long been separated from his first wife, Catherine Lee Tobin, Wright divorced her in 1922; the following year, he would enter into a brief, disastrous marriage with Miriam Noel. Meanwhile, he found himself with little work and few clients. In 1923, he suffered the death of his mother, and in 1924, the death of his former employer and mentor, Louis Sullivan died, and Miriam left him. In the years between the separation and the final divorce, her behavior became increasingly erratic and disturbed; her accusations cause a lot of bad publicity for Wright, even leading to his brief arrest in 1926 on charges so violating the Mann Act. (The charges were related to his association with a new lover, Olgivanna Milanoff, who was threatened with deportation from the United States.) Another fire destroyed the Taliesin living quarters in 1925 (though without the loss of lives that had marked the earlier destruction in 1914). Wright's financial problems were so severe that his creditors foreclosed on Taliesin in 1926 and evicted him from his home in 1927. "Architecture is that great living creative spirit which from generation, to generation, from age, to age, proceeds, persists, creates, according to the nature of man, and his circumstances they change. That is architecture." (Frank Lloyd Wright pg. 106)

Despite these troubles, Wright worked strenuously throughout the decade. In August 1928, he married Olgivanna Milanoff, who was to provide extraordinary support for the rest of his life. Later, in 1928; he regained

possession of Taliesin. Wright had begun to work on An Autobiography in 1928; the publication of its first version in 1932, along with his other writings, revealed a clear and complex theory of architecture. In October 1932, a little more than ten years after his return from Japan, Wright founded a fellowship for young architects at Taliesin. It was to be an ideal community, emphasizing work and study that corresponded with Wright's work of that time. Designs for new commissions showed his creative powers to be as strong as ever, and Wright entered

the most productive phase of his career, with designs for Broadacre City, "Fallingwater," the S. C. Johnson and Son Administration Building and the Usonian house. The ideas that Wright conceived between 1922-1932 formed the basis for much of his later work. Whenever Wright faced personal dilemmas, he always seemed to emerge with wonderful new architecture. From 1936 to the end of his life, Frank Lloyd Wright produced work constantly. Within those years, Wright purchased 800 acres of land in Arizona to build Taliesin West, he received the gold medal of the American Institute of Architecture, finished the final plan of the Guggenheim Museum, was awarded an honorary doctorate from Yale University, and founded the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation. Frank Lloyd Wright died on April 9, 1959, in Phoenix Arizona, during one of the greatest stages of his lifetime.

Throughout his lifetime, Frank Lloyd Wright not only changed many of the "design rules" of his time, but he also changed the face of architecture all over the world. His passion for this craft was so strong that it was visible in all of his work, and still lives on today. "...having a good start, not only do I fully intend to be the greatest architect who has yet lived, but fully intend to

be the greatest architect who will ever live. Yes, I intend to be the greatest architect of all time." (Frank Lloyd Wright pg. 203) Frank Lloyd Wright will forever be remembered as one of the greatest artists to have lived.