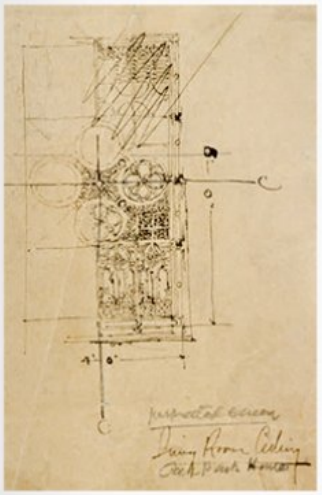
Introduction



Perforated screen, dining room ceiling in the Frank Lloyd Wright House, Oak Park, Illinois, 1889
Wright maintained that this dining room lighting fixture was the first example of indirect lighting.

Opposite page:
Library in the Frank Lloyd Wright Studio, Oak Park, Illinois, 1897
It was here that Wright showed his clients their drawings, the room being well lit by both daylight and incandescent fixtures.

In 1895, Nathan G. Moore, a prominent Chicago attorney and Oak Park neighbor of architect Frank Lloyd Wright, came into Wright's Schiller Building office and asked him to design a house. He had one important stipulation: "Now we want you to build our house, but I don't want you to give us anything like that house you did for Winslow. I don't want to go down the backstreets to my morning train to avoid being laughed at."[1] To understand the sensation made by that one home, tucked quietly away in a sedate, wooded suburb, we must consider the architecture in the United States at that time; and in particular, the architecture of Chicago and its environs.

The architecture of the United States at the turn of the century – 1895 to 1905 – was, at best, a collection of eclectic styles, with hardly one relating in any way or sense to the ideal of the nation in which it was built. This was an era which regarded architecture as an application of fashions and styles, unrelated to structure or construction techniques. Yet it was also a time when the entire construction industry was undergoing revolutionary changes. New materials were emerging, and new methods of handling the older materials were being developed at the same time. But the architecture being designed reflected little if anything of those new methods and materials.

The Chicago Fair of 1893, the Columbian Exposition, was a supreme case in point. On the one hand, Louis Sullivan claimed that the Exposition "put American architecture behind for at least 50 years"[2]; while on the other hand, Daniel Burnham, a fashionable Chicago architect of the time, lauded the fair as an example of what the Americans would want to build. He told Wright, when urging him to go to the Beaux-Arts in Paris, "The Fair, Frank, is going to have a great influence in our country. The American people have seen the Classics on a grand scale for the first time."[3]

The young architect, just starting his own practice with the William H. Winslow house (and Burnham said of that work: "A gentleman's home, from grade to coping.") replied, "No, there is Louis Sullivan ... And if John Root were alive I don't believe he would feel that way about it. Richardson I am sure never would." Burnham further argued, "Frank, the Fair should have shown you that Sullivan and Richardson are well enough in their way, but their way won't prevail – architecture is going the other way."[4] And of course, it was. It is ironical to realize that the date of that architectural disaster of 1893 coincides with the date at which Frank Lloyd Wright opened his private architectural practice, after nearly seven years spent in the office of Adler and Sullivan, in Chicago.

Richardson, Sullivan, and Wright. The progression of these three architects has been cited over and over again as the progression of an American architecture from classicism towards a new ideal. Richardson was certainly steeped in a Romanesque tradition, but his work still bears a remarkably masculine, truly American, virility and strength of its own. Sullivan, the poet, the designing partner of the Chicago firm Adler and Sullivan, made the tall building truly tall, not just piling up massive masonry boxes. In his work, the tall, long, accentuated vertical line gave birth to the true aesthetic expression of the skyscraper.

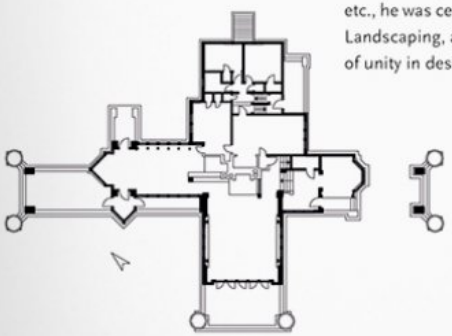
1902–1903 · Ward W. Willits House

Highland Park, Illinois

Above:
Street view

Opposite page:
Dining room with original furniture

Below:
Plan, first floor



On a more spacious suburban lot is the house of Ward W. Willits. Built of cement stucco, its white surfaces are accentuated by dark stained wood trim. The plan is cruciform, the living room, dining room and reception areas separated by architectural features rather than walls and doors. As with the Dana house, the fireplace is focal to the plan, with built-in seats around it. More and more, in his early work, Wright experimented with furniture of his own design. He found, to his dismay, that when the new house was ready for the clients to move in, they brought with them the furniture of their previous dwelling. By incorporating built-in bookcases, seating, sideboards, cupboards, etc., he was certain that the basic interior, at least, would blend with his overall design. Landscaping, as well, was designed along with the building to further achieve a sense of unity in design.

1935–1939 ▸ Edgar J. Kaufmann House

"Fallingwater" ▸ Mill Run, Pennsylvania

Plan

In a talk to the Taliesin Fellowship Frank Lloyd Wright said of this house for Edgar J. Kaufmann, "Fallingwater is a great blessing – one of the great blessings to be experienced here on earth. I think nothing yet ever equaled the coordination, sympathetic expression of the great principle of repose where forest and stream and rock and all the elements of structure are combined so quietly that really you listen not to any noise whatsoever although the music of the stream is there. But you listen to Fallingwater the way you listen to the quiet of the country..." What the building achieves with perhaps more drama than any other single private residence is the placement of man in relation to nature. This important aspect of man and the landscape was deeply rooted in Wright. Fallingwater is famous the world over, principally as it is seen in photographs, from below the cascades looking up towards the cantilevered balconies and terraces. What Wright did in this house is to put the occupants in a close relationship to the glen, the trees, the foliage, and wild flowers. Wherever one is within the building, the glory of the natural surrounding is accentuated, brought in, and made a component part of daily life. The main floor affords views in three directions, with terraces leading out in two: one terrace opens upstream, the other projects over the rocks and cascades. Each bedroom on the level above has its own terrace, and the study and gallery-bedroom on the third level have access, likewise, to yet another outdoor terrace.

All the vertical elements of the house are constructed of native stone, with "stick-outs" or slightly projected stones to give a more sculptural quality to the stone masses. All horizontal elements are poured concrete. The floors throughout are paved in stone, the same as the walls, and the woodwork is a sap grain walnut, executed at an extremely fine level of craftsmanship. A semi-circular covered walk joins the main house to the guest house further up the hill.

Living room

Opposite page:
View from below cascades

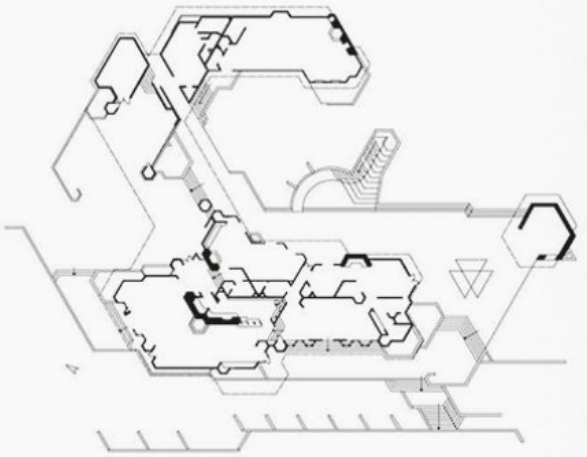
1935–1937 · Paul and Jean Hanna House

"Honeycomb House" ▸ Stanford, California

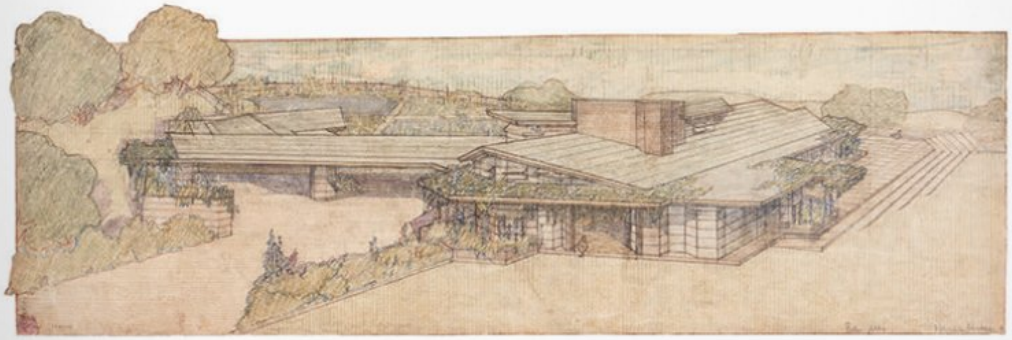
Opposite page:
Living room

In his continuing quest to find a more flexible plan form, one that would result likewise in more flexible interior space, Wright found the hexagon, and the hexagonal unit, more desirable than either the square or rectangle. In its first application at the house for Paul R. and Jean Hanna the hexagonal unit provides the basis for the plan. The house itself is not a hexagon, but has a free-flowing plan with wider angles (120 degrees) than the usual 90 degrees. Being a prototype, the project required a great number of architectural drawings to develop the scheme and then to produce a set of working drawings that could be easily understood by contractor and workmen.

Plan



Perspective



1937–1959 ▸ Taliesin West

Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio
▸ Scottsdale, Arizona

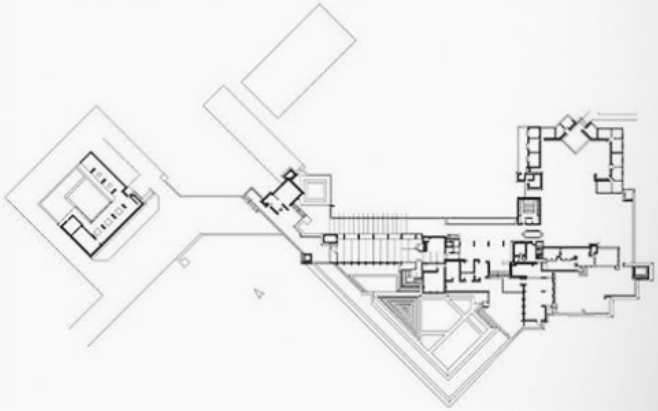
Ever since his first long-term stay in Arizona in 1929, Wright was anxious to return to this region of the Sonoran desert in order to escape the intensely cold winters of Wisconsin. Finally, in 1937, he and his wife made a trip to Phoenix in search of land. Out on the desert north of Phoenix, up against the McDowell Mountain range, they discovered property which he described as "a look over the rim of the world." The designs for the new buildings came quickly out of Wright's fertile imagination. As he sat making designs for the various buildings that would form the complex, stone and sand were gathered, the ground made ready, and wooden forms erected for making the masonry walls. The overhead structure, inspired by its use in Ocatillo ten years earlier, was a truss-work of redwood beams, with white canvas stretched over wooden frames and inserted between the sloping beams. Eventually he sought to make it more permanent, bringing in glass and steel and transforming its original "camp-like" aspect to one of more durability.

Light tower at the entrance court

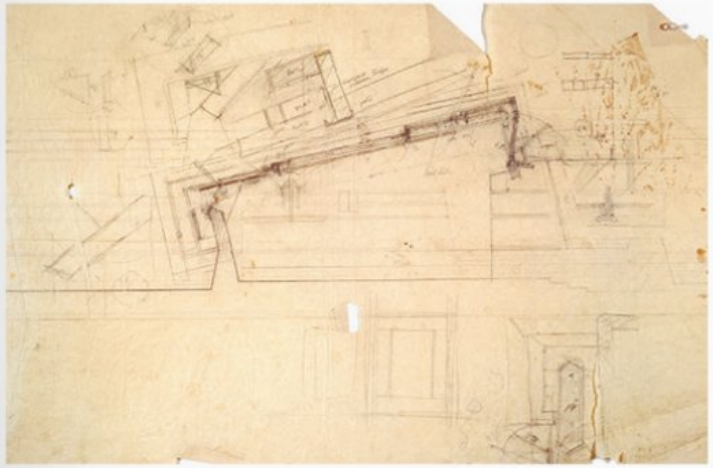
Opposite page:
Drafting room south side
Drafting room seen across the triangular pool with the dining room on the right. The wood beams of drafting room carry framed panels of white canvas. On the ground level, additional frames provide canopies for outdoor dining in the desert sun.

Sun Trap living room in the detached residence for Wright's daughter
This is the site of the Wrights' residence before Taliesin West was built. Originally, this was a series of three "Sleeping Boxes," each made of wood and canvas with a bed, table, and wardrobe. These were grouped around a partially enclosed terrace with a large fireplace at one end. The original fireplace was later incorporated into Wright's design for his daughter's residence, seen here in the photograph.

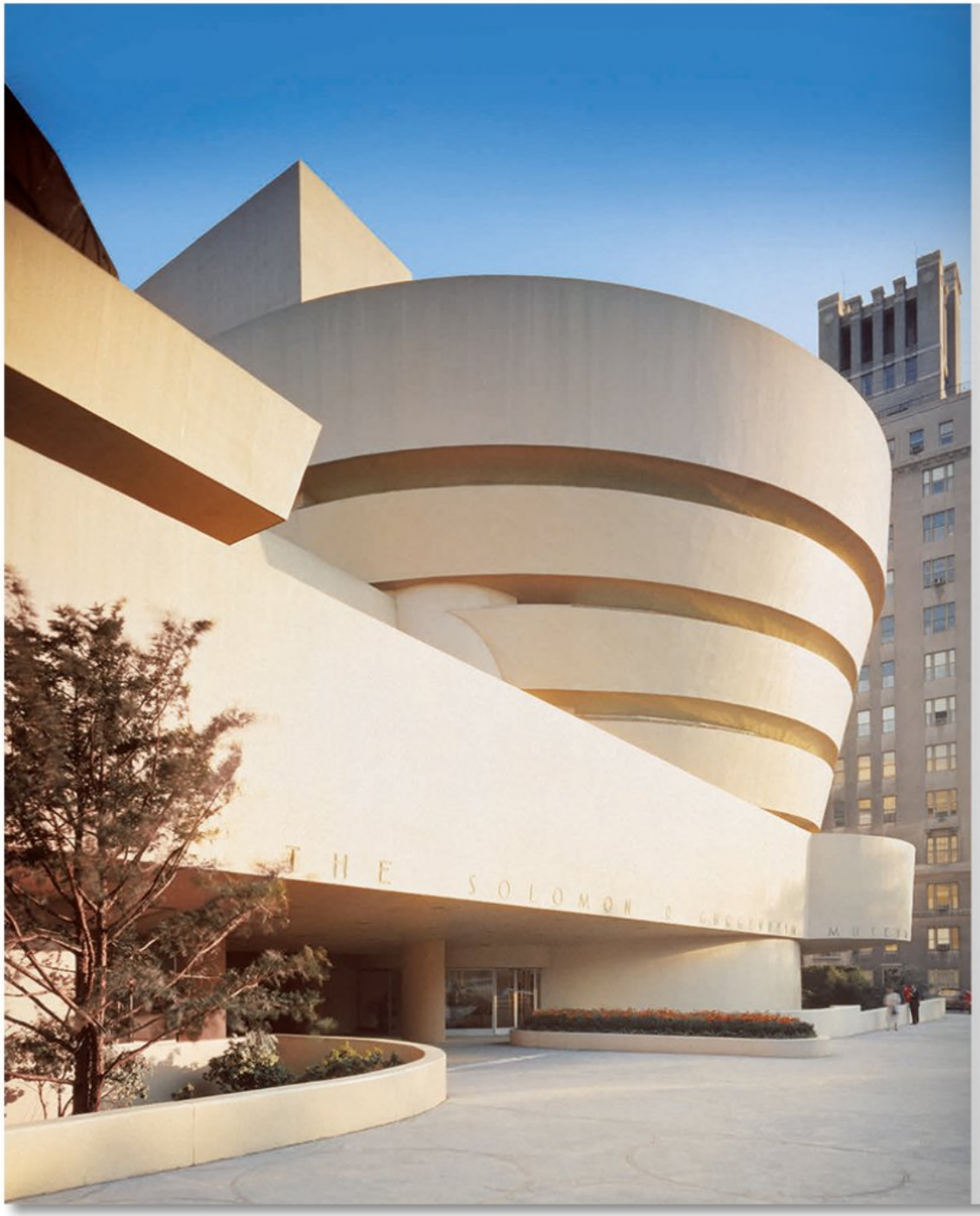
Plan



Drafting room interior



Garden room section



1943–1959 · Guggenheim Museum

New York, New York

Opposite page:
Street view

When asked why he chose the ramp, instead of level floors in the conventional stack, Wright explained that he felt the museum-goer would find it far more convenient to enter the building, take the elevator to the top ramp, gradually descend around an open court, always have the option, as the ramp touched the elevator stack at each level, to either go back, or skip down to further levels, and finally, at the end of the exhibition, he would find himself on the ground floor, near the exit. Wright further reasoned that in so many conventional museums, the public traverses long galleries of exhibitions only to have to retrace its steps to get back to the beginning in order to leave. Guggenheim was overwhelmed with this concept of an ascending spiral, and supported the project until his death in 1949. The building underwent many delays from 1943 to 1956, due to changes in site conditions, building codes, the museum's own change of its program, and to the rising costs of materials and construction. But finally, on August 16, 1956, ground was broken and construction begun. When Wright died in

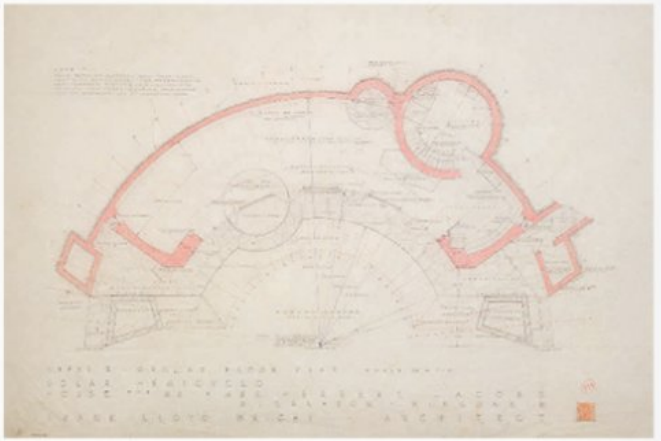
Frank Lloyd Wright inspects construction of the Guggenheim Museum in New York, 1957.

1944–1948 ▸ Herbert Jacobs House #2

"Solar Hemicycle" ▸ Middleton, Wisconsin

Opposite page:
Living room

First floor plan



View towards entry
The house is entered through a tunnel that penetrates the berm on the north side of the house. Seen above on the right is the circular mass that contains the stairs and utilities on the ground floor, with stairs and bathroom on the mezzanine level. To the left and right of this mass are the high windows of the mezzanine bedrooms.

For a house in the northern climate, Wright devised a scheme that he named "Solar Hemicycle." The building for Herbert Jacobs is designed on a hemicycle plan, with earth piled up against the northern wall, in a berm, for insulation, with the southern wall composed of two-story glass windows and doors to bring in the sun's warmth in winter. The southern overhang is designed so that in summer shade is cast upon the glass, while in winter, the glass faces directly into the desired warmth of the sunshine, thus taking advantage of the elliptical solar path. The balcony, which contains the bedrooms, is hung from the ceiling rafters above by means of steel rods coming down through the partitions and locking into the floor beams. In this way, the space on the ground floor is altogether freed from any supports for the upper floor.