

AN HISTORICAL EXAMINATION OF SHELTER AND REFUGE AS PREVAILING
PRINCIPLES IN FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT'S RESIDENTIAL DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

Early American architecture was primarily based on imitations of European design. Frank Lloyd Wright ushered in the first era of original American residential architecture based on his understanding that such imitation fell short of meeting the needs of modern America, for the borrowed styles did not correctly address the age-old design principles of shelter and refuge. Wright's overwhelming success as a residential architect was due in large part to his ability to adapt those principles to modern and distinct American ideology and landscapes.

This paper traces the prevailing origins and characteristics of pre-Wright American residential architecture, and examines why it was generally ill-suited for the young nation. It explains that emphasizing shelter and refuge as key design components allowed Wright to perfect his theory of organic architecture. His most enduring designs accentuate this theory, and it continues to influence American residential design.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In its most obvious and basic form a house is a place of shelter from the elements and of refuge from danger and discomfort, but any house of consequence is so much more than just shelter. There are many reasons other than shelter for a person to want a home: comfort, hospitality, storage of possessions, pride, to have a place for family to gather and know one another, to display one's wealth or power, to create or conform to styles and trends. Our homes express our humanness. Architecture, Frank Lloyd Wright believed, is "the very body of civilization" (Wright, "To the Young" 246). Wright asserted that "architecture is life; or at least the truest record of life as it was lived in the world yesterday, as it is lived today or ever will be lived... [it is] the Great Spirit" (Wright, "What is Architecture?" 277).

Our homes do not merely distinguish us from brute beasts, but also classify and rank us among our own and other human societies. The careful design of homes may, in fact, not only preserve culture, but create culture and identity. Residential architecture served as a metaphor for America's Founding Fathers who asserted they were "architects of democracy" and "builders of a nation" (Faherty 2). President Lincoln utilized the metaphor of house-building repeatedly during his run for office and his embattled tenure. He famously stated, "a house divided against itself cannot stand," and when discussing the development of the nation and the precariousness of the Union he frequently employed metaphors of framing, construction, and remodeling (Faherty 3-4). These apt

metaphors reflected this understanding: “We may design buildings...but once designed, they build us” (Faherty 4). Frank Lloyd Wright asserted that living in a correct home “affects your conduct” much like being well-dressed does (Wright, “The Grammar” 296). Thomas Jefferson, a lifelong dabbler in the art, believed that correct architectural practices could “frame and inculcate appropriate behavior” (Faherty 25), and he was very much concerned with the quality and design of American homes and their ability to form the emerging American identity. Part of that American identity is the inclination to be overly concerned with justifying oneself to others. Americans expect their homes to explain them, to speak on their behalf, to represent their idealized selves to the public, and “reflect [their] personal aesthetic” (Faherty 31). If houses tell their story, either they will shape homes to fit their narrative, or the homes will shape them and dictate the narrative (Faherty 9, 21). This is a great deal to expect from a home, and much of the pre-Wright American residential design, based on European influences, was unsuccessful because it was unable to balance these varied expectations of a home.

This imbalance was due in part to the fact that early American residential design was not American made. Once the colonists could devote attention and resources to the character and quality of their homes and the statement their homes made about them, they borrowed heavily from the residential design of their countries of emigration. European architecture has always influenced American design and was adopted even when it fit poorly within the newly emerging nation and its unique landscape. Frank Lloyd Wright rejected the idea that European design was appropriate for American residential architecture. He saw little value in houses whose layouts were layers of boxes within

boxes, with cramped attics and dark basements. He believed the habitual reliance on European design failed to meet American needs because of differing culture and traditions, personal values, landscapes, availability of resources, local population densities, and relationships with nature. Wright did not believe that simply adopting classical design would successfully carry out the American character building and artistic expression that only the art of architecture could accomplish. In his opinion such design strayed too far from addressing the natural human patterns of behavior, which prioritized shelter and refuge. He wanted the American spirit—with all its individuality, restlessness and striving—to be fostered and nurtured within the walls of the homes he designed. He knew all that architecture was capable of and responsible for (even the humble middle class residence), and knew perfectly well that architecture must rise to the challenge. He sought to establish a new and original American architecture, one that found the perfect balance between a house as both the medium through which its residents offer meaning to society, and as a place within which to be protected and hidden from society.

As Wright developed and perfected his theories of *organic architecture* and *the integrity of buildings*, the age-old design concepts of shelter and refuge became the prevailing and fundamental drivers in his design, and he recognized that emphasizing them could provide the architectural balance he sought. What he accomplished during his residential career was the creation of homes that provide a strong sense of shelter and refuge, both real and perceived, based on his understanding that no other architectural ideals could possibly be achieved without them: no amount of grandeur, or height, or symmetry, or high-end finishes, or square footage—no other features, no matter how

prominent or expensive—will make up for their absence. While adapting those principles to the true needs of the modern American he made their presence more harmonious than they had been in borrowed European designs. This resulted in incredibly successful designs. Those who lived in these houses, humble as some of them were, generally felt their homes were peaceful and empowering structures.

The following chapters will define shelter and refuge as architectural principles and archetypes, explore their application in European design, and explain the European influence on early American residential design. Throughout this paper the terms *shelter* and *refuge* may be used interchangeably, as both refer to protection; however, where necessary to specify a difference, shelter should be understood to mean protection from the elements, and refuge to mean protection from enemies. It should also be understood that references to prevailing trends or styles in “residential design” or “American residential design” are intended to mean the homes of the middle class and wealthy, those with the means to afford a preoccupation with residential design. Wright’s development as an architect will be briefly explored including his rejection of European design for Americans. An examination of several of his successful designs will reveal how his most organic houses were those with prominent features of shelter and refuge in harmony with the surroundings, and therefore, with their occupants. His theories were so appealing they remain in wide use today, and their application can be seen in award-winning and popular modern American residential design.

CHAPTER 2

SHELTER AND REFUGE AS HISTORICAL HUMAN
PATTERNS AND ARCHITECTURAL
ARCHETYPES

In 1977 a group of architects and students based in Berkeley, California, and led by Christopher Alexander, published a groundbreaking book on architecture and city planning. *A Pattern Language*, one tome of a multi-part work, explained “the underlying patterns of behavior and form that shape experience” (Susanka 3), and how human experience drives the design of buildings and cities. The authors contended that identifying, labeling, and defining these 253 patterns of behavior and form provided people with a consciousness and a shared language by which they could create built spaces that were natural, comfortable, and human; the implication being that most built spaces lacked those qualities. They found that “many of the patterns...are archetypal—so deep, so deeply rooted in the nature of things, that it seems likely that they will be a part of human nature, and human action, as much in five hundred years, as they are today” (Alexander et al. xvii).

Several of the most prominent patterns and archetypes in the book deal with the principles of shelter and refuge and the idea that humans need their buildings to provide these in both subtle and obvious ways. Alexander and his team identified these archetypes as follows: a sheltering roof, prominent stone fireplaces, enclosures and partial enclosures, privacy, safety and security, a wall to put one’s back against, a high vantage point or lookout, unbroken sightlines, a sense of belonging, freedom of

interaction, rooms built to human proportions, a connection to the ground, access to nature, and sunshine. The practical application of these principles and the feelings thereby created are treated in *A Pattern Language*, quite convincingly, as fundamental human needs. They assert humans have always been compelled to create spaces that provide for these needs. Architect and author Mark Gelernter echoes this sentiment as he writes in *A History of American Architecture: Buildings in Their Cultural and Technological Context*: “Given similar human activities in need of shelter and support...designers everywhere were more likely than not to develop similar architectural ideas (34).

Gelernter’s theory of architecture is supported by history and scholarship. For safety and security ancient cities all over the world built protective walls and high lookout towers. The Anasazi of the American southwest made use of the naturally high vantage points and the difficult-to-access “open faced caves of...canyon walls” to protect them (Gelernter 24). The “fortified dwelling,” was the central architectural feature of the European Feudal system; a castle or manor that could offer protection for the entire interdependent village (Gelernter 18). These sometimes included such shelter and refuge features as moats, drawbridges, and extensive layers of gates, gatehouses, and murder holes. Defensive windows were small slits allowing a defender to shoot an arrow through, but preventing most attackers from doing the same (Kaufmann and Kaufmann 31-32, 36).

The need for shelter and refuge was rather practical and obvious in ancient times, but although the typical American home does not feature a moat or an only-by-canyon-

wall approach, modern society has not eliminated these instincts in us. *A Pattern Language* validates some of the subtler elements of shelter and refuge as equally important to human experience in the built environment. Those include safety in numbers, the safety the group or community provides to its members, the desire for built spaces to help us sort ourselves into groups, and the general sense of well-being that close contact with nature provides. Ancient Roman architect and engineer Vitruvius wrote about the ability of built spaces to foster and strengthen society and relationships in his *De Architectura (The Ten Books on Architecture)*: “It was the discovery of fire that originally gave rise to the coming together of men, to the deliberative assembly, and to social intercourse. And so, as they kept coming together in greater numbers into one place, finding themselves naturally gifted beyond the other animals...they began ... to construct shelters” (Book II, Chapter I, Page 2). He goes on to explain the importance of private and public spaces in homes, and lays out what is appropriate in residential design based on the differing social classes and societal expectations and duties.

Early American colonists were not ignorant to the shelter and refuge requirements of their homes. Out of necessity their earliest buildings were thick-walled cabins and protective forts, settlements packed tightly together for strength in numbers against attackers and the elements. And it would have been quite difficult for the early American colonists to avoid the influence of European architecture as they set about building their own homes, even if they wished to. They were content to borrow architectural styles and trends from Europe so much so that, with rare exception, there were no significant early American dwellings that did not show the heavy mark of European influence. The

passage of time did little to lessen Europe's influence, and well over one hundred years after establishing itself as an independent and new nation, Americans still had no distinctive architectural style of their own. Thomas Jefferson expressed serious concerns over this, as he believed buildings, both private and public, had the ability to shape human culture, and he wanted to see the young country developing its own unique identity and culture. Frank Lloyd Wright would be exasperated by the reliance on European design, and rage against it. He was certain that "attempts to use forms borrowed from cultures and conditions other than one's own [would] end ...with total loss of inherent relation of Art and Architecture to the soul-life of the People" (Wright, "The Sovereignty" 90). In later chapters the uniqueness of the American ethos will be explored and the successful attempts by Wright to design uniquely American homes, but first one must understand the European traditions that were so influential on the design of early American homes.

Historical Patterns and the Western Traditions of Shelter and Refuge in Architecture: Ancient Greece and Rome

The architecture of Western Civilization has always been heavily influenced by ancient Greece and Rome. The Greeks were concerned with order, symmetry and rationality, but also with art and sensory perception. Democratic ideals were reflected in their design principles, but there was a predominance of temple building and vast public spaces in their cities. These buildings were well suited for rows and rows of columns and decorative entablatures. The Greeks "codified the rules of design" and they built to last—

in stone (Gelernter 12). As a great world power the Romans became magnificent builders of walls and roads. They favored order, straight lines, and the arches and domes they learned from the Egyptians. The ancient Greek and Roman contributions “comprised what we now call the Classical language of architecture” (Gelernter 13-14). Table 1 lists common applications within classic architecture of the design principles shelter and refuge.

Table 1. Shelter and Refuge as Design Elements, pre-Wright: Classic/Traditional, Ancient Greek and Roman

Shelter and Refuge as Design Elements, pre-Wright Classic/Traditional: Ancient Greek and Roman	
Element	Application
<p>SHELTER An escape from nature; conquering nature</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sheltering Roof 2. Prominent Stone Fireplaces 3. Enclosures/Partial Enclosures 	<p>Palaces, temples, pyramids, statues and monuments, vast public spaces, highways, order and symmetry</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Domes, arches, pillars, entablatures, shallow roof pitch for Mediterranean climate (Gelernter 15) 2. The only kind of fireplaces until the cast iron stove 3. Gated entrances; courtyard at the center of the house forcing a view of fabricated nature; fountains, potted plants, a sliver of sky
<p>REFUGE An escape from one's enemies</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Displays of Power 2. Safety, Security, A Wall to Put One's Back Against 3. High Vantage Point, Lookout, Unbroken Sightlines 4. Privacy 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Palaces, temples, pyramids, statues and monuments, vast public spaces, highways, order and symmetry 2. City walls, garden walls, gates 3. Lookout towers; walkways along walls 4. Interior courtyards inside walls; gates, city walls; servants'/slaves' quarters, separation from the lower classes, the rabble; to be protected from the congestion of the dirty street and the crowds of people

(Note: Table created by the author of this thesis.)

Historical Patterns and the Western Traditions
of Shelter and Refuge in Architecture:
Medieval Architectural Style

With the fall of the Roman Empire the Middle Ages saw European life shifting back to the countryside and the feudal system, and the style of architecture shifted as well. For a number of reasons, the style of Medieval feudal Europe made sense and was predominantly adopted by American builders, with regional adaptations for climate and resource availability. It was not just the design and layout of individual houses, but also of “land use, town layouts, and building construction” (Gelernter 64). Early Jamestown, Virginia, with its crop economy, indentured servants, and slaves working large shares of land, much resembled an English Feudal society. “Like the manor house in Medieval Europe, the [American Southern] plantation owner’s house became the center of a small community of farm buildings and housing for the workers,” plantations being “largely self-sufficient and substitute[s] for towns” (Gelernter 56). Eventually they would become symbols of great wealth and status, but first plantation homes were “traditional, medieval, English half-timbered dwellings” (Gelernter 56).

In the Medieval tradition of Northern Europe, most homes were generally modest in size, practical to the intended use, and designed and built by the resident. The steeply pitched roof is a convention of Medieval building practices, allowing residents to withstand winter more comfortably than in the designs of their Roman conquerors (Gelernter 14-15). The influence of the Christian Church was as important on architectural design as the Feudal System. Steering away from domes and perfect arches, the church designed buildings to be tall and pointy, reaching to the heavens and standing

out in towns as the most prominent buildings (Gelernter 17). Christian churches were the new public spaces and meeting houses. The ways shelter and refuge were being implemented had begun to vary from the classical applications, as expressed in Table 2.

Table 2. Shelter and Refuge as Design Elements, pre-Wright: Medieval Era

Shelter and Refuge as Design Elements, pre-Wright Medieval Era	
Element	Application
<p>SHELTER An escape from nature; conquering nature</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sheltering Roof 2. Prominent Stone Fireplaces 3. Enclosures/Partial Enclosures 	<p>Churches, Manors/Castles, Modest Homes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pitched or lean-to roofs so rain/snow slide off; Animals brought in from the cold, living in the lower floor w/ family above 2. Frequently in the center of the home 3. Courtyards and modest homes inside castle walls; Gates, city walls, moats; dog trot style
<p>REFUGE An escape from one's enemies</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Displays of Power 2. Safety, Security, A Wall to Put One's Back Against 3. High Vantage Point, Lookout, Unbroken Sightlines 4. Privacy 	<p>Representing the heavenly world as more important than the natural world</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cathedrals, gates, city walls, moats, steep and tall roofs 2. Lookout towers with small archery windows walkways along walls, tall castles 3. Lookout towers with small archery windows walkways along walls, tall castles 4. Small windows, separation from the servants by floors or wings of the home; courtyards inside castle walls; ladies' parlors; numerous small rooms within a larger home

(Note: Table created by the author of this thesis.)

The largest and most impressive medieval residences were manor homes or castles with defensive corner towers, symbolic and literal evidence of protection, power, and refuge. More modest homes in the medieval style had to forgo the corner towers, and focus instead on the large, central hall (Gelernter 55). In fact, the smallest and simplest

early American homes—the common log cabin being a typical example—were nothing but a large hall with a stone fireplace, onto which a parlor and hallways could later be added (Gelernter 57). The Southern dog-trot style house has its roots here as well, and features a porch-style platform onto which two small enclosures are placed, sharing a roof (Smith 25-26). Although not the only reason, this habit of building just enough for now and then adding on later was one reason the boxes-within-a-box floor plan was so typical in pre-Wright residential architecture.

The rich had always built to last and built with stone, preferring whenever possible a “massive masonry core” for its stability and impregnability, but in Medieval England, when wood became scarce and expensive and the Feudal system declined, even the English middle classes began to build with masonry (Gelernter 55). In the American colonies timber was plentiful and it would be some time before the average American made residential masonry construction a priority, some time before most “who could afford it ... aspired to construct more substantial houses that expressed their status as lords of the manor in a new land...and naturally emulated the image of small manor houses in England, with brick construction, steep roofs and prominent chimneys” (Gelernter 57). Meanwhile, even those buildings that were styled almost perfectly after British buildings were built more cheaply and less substantially than their English counterparts. Often Americans were more concerned with quick shelter than with long-lasting shelter, and “unlike in many parts of southeastern England, [in America] old buildings [were] not so thick on the ground in those areas settled by Europeans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries” (Lounsbury 19). The Chesapeake Bay area has

“little to show from its first century of settlement,” and in the Hudson and Delaware Valleys nothing survives “from the first Dutch and Swedish settlements” (Lounsbury 19-20). Even the earliest plantation homes in the warm, humid climates of Virginia and farther south were built of wood and wont to rot (Gelernter 57). In an otherwise wooden structure the only masonry was often the stone fireplace, which proved very effective at heating an entire hall when built in the middle of it. Stairways were utterly practical, unobtrusive, and were often tucked next to or even encircling the chimney, out of the way of prominent view (Gelernter 57, 60-61).

Historical Patterns and the Western Traditions of Shelter and Refuge in Architecture: the Renaissance and Classicism

The Renaissance in Europe ushered in a new world view, emphasizing the classic ideals of ancient Greece and Rome, the diminished power of the Roman Catholic Church, the rise of the potential of the individual, and a code of gentility stressing “refinement in all manners” and appearances over substance (Gelernter 38). Frank Lloyd Wright would later blame architecture’s fall from a high estate on the “men of Florence [who] patched together fragments of the art of Greece and Rome” to manufacture a style (Wright, “In the Cause” 193), and he claimed that the promise of the Renaissance—“what was seemingly a great gain”—was really a huge step backward in art and culture, “eventually serv[ing] only to bind [men] senselessly to tradition” (Wright, “The Sovereignty” 89). Wright shared the opinion of Victor Hugo, and recalls in his biography being influenced by the work *Notre Dame de Paris*, in which Hugo called the Renaissance “that setting

sun Europe mistook for dawn” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 78). Nevertheless, the architectural style ushered in by the Renaissance and dominating European style was broadly referred to as Classicism.

As far as residential architecture is concerned, the strict Classicism of the Italian Renaissance had very little influence in the American colonies that tended to follow the English more closely. The English had taken the ornament and elaboration of Baroque in a more moderate direction, so the English Baroque or Georgian Era was born. It was these Georgian style houses that “rapidly filled the American British Colonies in the eighteenth century” (Gelernter 66, 68-73). Georgian style houses were rectangular and symmetrical, featuring masonry block construction, a bifurcated entrance on the long side, hipped roofs, sash windows, and a balustrade encircling the upper roof platform. They were exacting in their symmetry, two rooms deep with a long corridor separating the depths, and featured large central halls as impressive entryways with a grand parlor behind (Gelernter 75-82). Shelter and refuge were attempted through displays of wealth and style.

The American Interpretation of European Architectural Styles: from Medieval to Muddled as the Code of Gentility Arrives in America

While Medieval architecture was once popular and fitting for Americans, success and prosperity, shifts in politics and philosophy, new approaches to land use, and the burgeoning unique American identity all caused Americans to reconsider what their homes could and should do for them. During the last decade of the seventeenth century,

while Americans were embracing the English Baroque and Georgian styles as well as the “European concept of gentility,” the tradition of sharing and grazing a public commons began to fall out of fashion. “Settlers now preferred to scatter their houses farther apart, each on a contiguous piece of land, rather than to cluster their houses around the meeting house...[and] the feudal conceptions of land and community eventually disappeared altogether” (Gelernter 79).

Life in the American South demonstrated these two shifts best. The Virginian planters’ homes already served as the center of the self-sufficient community that was their plantation, and “was pretty certain to have the stamp of [their] social and semi-public life, and to have provision for the coming and going of many persons” (Smith 18). In their eagerness to follow the fashions of England they progressed “from log houses to white pillars” (Smith 33), and their functional wood farmhouses were soon replaced by large stone manors in the English Baroque and Georgian styles, which became the standard to which America’s upper class aspired (Gelernter 82). During this time, Americans began making nonsensical decisions pertaining to the design of their homes in the name of style, fashion, and a code of genteel behavior “which stressed refined manners” (Gelernter 74). To be seen conforming to this code and to witness it in others was important in polite society. Consequently “the design of one’s house became an essential component in the performance of these rituals” (Gelernter 74).

For example, guests could expect to be welcomed into not only a formal parlor, but possibly also a music room, a ladies’ parlor, and a library, rooms all designed for a single and specific activity (Smith 33). Americans of modest means seeking

respectability and upward mobility did their best to follow suit, and “even the lowliest of houses eventually set aside a large proportion of the house as a [rarely used, formal] parlor” (Gelernter 79). These early iterations were referred to as *polite houses*, indicating “specialized rooms set aside for new forms of entertaining” (Lounsbury 56). Public rooms began to be situated not only on the main floor, but on the upper floor as well. The once utilitarian stairway became a grand, classical stair hall, a “public processional route between the two floors” that filled the center of the building and displayed art, finery, and a gallery of doors to other rooms (Gelernter 75, 82). A grand stairway “bespoke the...increasing importance of second-floor chambers” and therefore the owner’s wealth and importance (Lounsbury 55). Greeting guests from the top of such a staircase was “a visible marker of social distinction” and power (Faherty 31). Descending such a staircase provided the ultimate opportunity to see and be seen. It was not uncommon for a stair hall to be the largest and most lavishly furnished room in the house, Colonel George H. Young’s Waverly Place, Lowndes County, Mississippi, 1858, being a prime example (Smith 93). It featured two curving staircases symmetrically spiraling in opposite directions. This redundancy provided extravagant access to the additional three stories above, and the stair hall offered ground-floor glimpses of the luxurious upper rooms.

To make room for the impressive stair hall the fireplaces in these southern manor homes were moved to the ends of the buildings rather than the center, and the warm climate of the American South permitted this, as in Clifton Place, Maury County, Tennessee, 1832 (Smith 75). Excepting the central stair hall, all ten rooms have a fireplace located on an exterior wall, and none share heat with an adjacent space. To

follow the trends, Northerners did the same, although their winters made it rather impractical and inefficient to do so. Other fashionable adaptations to Northern homes relied on building techniques to make their wooden structures look as if they were built of stone or brick, mimicking the look of the wealthy (Gelernter 83-84). Everywhere form was taking precedence over function, and large comfortable spaces were broken into many smaller boxes to impress visitors and high society. Table 3 indicates how the design principles of shelter and refuge were applied in the English Baroque/Georgian era.

Table 3. Shelter and Refuge as Design Elements, pre-Wright: English Baroque/Georgian Influence

Shelter and Refuge as Design Elements, pre-Wright English Baroque/Georgian Influence	
Element	Application
<p>SHELTER An escape from nature; conquering nature</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sheltering Roof 2. Prominent Stone Fireplaces 3. Enclosures/Partial Enclosures 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pitched (sometimes low-pitched) roofs overhanging porches to block strong southern sun 2. Placement is determined by style rather than maximum effectiveness/function 3. Large interiors broken into a series of small rooms for specialized activities; porches
<p>REFUGE An escape from one's enemies</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Displays of Power 2. Safety, Security, A Wall to Put One's Back Against 3. High Vantage Point, Lookout, Unbroken Sightlines 4. Privacy 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Great heights and tall ceilings; large homes with many rooms with specific uses; grand central stair halls; fine furnishings and ornamentation; long driveways emphasizing a "grand reveal" or extravagant first impression 2. Masonry construction; building sites on hilltops or facing riverbanks 3. Building sites on hilltops or facing riverbanks; long driveways/approaches allowing extended notice of approaching visitors; multiple large windows; a roof platform with balustrade 4. Interior spaces made of many small rooms

(Note: Table created by the author of this thesis.)

These were the patterns, traditions and trends that were prominent in pre-wright residential American architecture. Although the definitions of shelter and refuge had morphed over time and those changes were reflected in architectural trends, it would still be some time before the uniqueness of the American identity and landscape had any influence on trends.

CHAPTER 3

AMERICAN IDENTITY AS A HOUSE

For a time, many were content with the architectural status quo in America, and they continued to adopt the styles of Europe, being in no rush to develop their own “indigenous conceptions of higher culture” (Gelernter 78). J. Frazer Smith writes in *White Pillars* of the “great national pride and ambition” from 1776-1830, an important period in American architecture (19). Lacking the gravitas of ancient, historically important cities and structures, mimicry was one way Americans created and displayed their own importance. Smith writes:

The winning of independence from Great Britain was followed by the erection of public buildings designed to be as impressive as possible...[and] the style which best embodied the young nation’s ideals was the classic temple...Therefore many an American who knew no formal rules of architecture vaguely associated the grandeur of the tall columns on his courthouse or his home with the glory of the political commonwealth of which he was a citizen. It fitted his conception of democracy that a successful man’s house should resemble the Parthenon or, at least, the state capitol. (19)

Professor Duncan Faherty, in his book *Remodeling the Nation: The Architecture of American Identity, 1776-1858*, demonstrates that early metaphorical language regarding the birth of the nation regularly and intentionally included extensive imagery

portraying the new country as a domestic building. The founding fathers considered themselves “architects of democracy” (Faherty 2); Lincoln spoke of the impending Civil War as an attack on our “house,” and of the seceding states as “renovators intent on a radical alteration of its design...[making] damaging alterations” (Faherty 2-3); houses symbolized the “wellspring of national identity” (Faherty 5). Professor Faherty explains that, “In the absence of ancient customs or structures, the foundational unit of community construction, the house, became the means by which the nation conceptualized its own history...the design and construction of houses became a locus for debating broadly shared concerns about cultural development” (7).

Washington and Jefferson understood the importance of the metaphor of the domestic building, and their own grand homes—straddling the line between past and present—were designed not only to live in, but also, in the absence of important civic structures, to instruct Americans how to be citizens, to “structure republican thought” (Faherty 8). For Washington and Jefferson, creating houses that honored the American spirit was not just an attempt to distinguish America stylistically from Europe, but a matter of national importance and survival, because “the citizenry of the emerging nation would be framed by the houses they occupied” (Faherty 36). Therefore, both were preoccupied with the design and construction of their estates, and understood they would be interpreted by the public as “expressions of their visions for American cultural development. This burden weighed on [them]...and informed the design choices they made about their respective homes” (Faherty 15-16). Both incorporated elements of traditional architecture to varying degrees of success.

Mount Vernon was the home of a man forced to live in the public eye as the model American. It was a Virginia planter's manor, a "monument, like all other eighteenth-century plantation homes, to wealth and slavery...[and] Washington struggled to find ways to moderate the 'visual impact' of these realities" (Faherty 16). The approach from the road, and features such as the grand staircase and lavish entrance hall, dark wood paneling, and decorative embellishments, signified "not Washington's democratic ethos but his commitment to hierarchy" and aristocratic ideals (Faherty 19). Mt. Vernon's interior was a "design that bespoke not equality but separation" (Faherty 20). The home literally had two faces, for the riverside entrance emphasized a different narrative and opened to an unconventional and unadorned long piazza. From this entrance one could not see the slave quarters, suggesting a more democratic expectation for the residents and guests. The piazza was furnished with simple wooden chairs in a loose arrangement with equal seating advantages and views. Washington's home, like the young nation, was both eighteenth-century Virginia planter and humble everyman (Faherty 19-23).

An ardent student of architecture, Jefferson felt pressures similar to Washington's. He believed in the power of the built space to not only gauge "social, economic, and cultural change" (Lounsbury 17), but also to drive those changes, and he strived to influence architectural practices in such a way as to shape the American character and the democratic spirit (Faherty 25, 31). He was involved at a very hands-on and inventive level in the construction of his estate, and Monticello was always a work in progress. His foyer was an anomaly, a museum of Americana in which visitors could marvel at the

flora and fauna of the vast American landscape, Native American objects, and taxidermy of unusual animals from the Rocky Mountains (Faherty 33). His “exhibits underscored the predominant role nature was playing in the formation of American identity, and his foyer charged visitors to appreciate how American natural history was transforming received aesthetic values” (Faherty 35).

Mt. Vernon and Monticello were “tangible expressions...of personal independence...[and] public expressions of their [owners’] visions for American cultural development” (Faherty 15-16). Jefferson’s vision was clearer and something about which he wrote and spoke of often. To him, there was honor and integrity in building a fine home, curating it carefully over the years, and passing it down to posterity. John Ruskin wrote in the *Seven Lamps of Architecture* that a man’s house should be a temple, and thought it,

an evil sign of a people when their houses are built to last for one generation only... when men build in the hope of leaving the places they have built...[T]here is a sanctity in a good man's house which cannot be renewed in every tenement that rises on its ruins: ...good men would generally feel this; and...having spent their lives happily and honorably, they would be grieved at the close of them to think that the place of their earthly abode...be swept away, as soon as there was room made for them in the grave; that no respect was to be shown to it, no affection felt for it, no good to be drawn from it by their children. (171)

Jefferson agreed with Ruskin, stating “homes worth inheriting and inhabiting would promote stability in ways no constitution could effect [sic]” (Faherty 27). Deep roots

mattered to Jefferson, and simply staying put on a piece of land was a form of shelter and refuge. He bemoaned cheap and temporary homes and thought they contributed to the alarming migratory patterns of American development. His concerns were not baseless. Americans were restless, always “lighting out for new territories” and pushing farther into the frontier (Faherty 84). “Colonists set as much store in moving on as in laying down deep roots in a particular locale” (Lounsbury 18). While some considered this untethered lifestyle of westward expansion ideal, Jefferson feared it would “condemn the Republic to an eternity of new beginning” (Faherty 25). This restlessness was something the Virginian planters did not understand.

Not every American could live as Jefferson and Washington did, nor did they all particularly want to be gentlemen farmers studying architecture, tied to the land, with enormous responsibility, patiently building wealth over decades on an isolated and expensive plantation. Still, Jefferson feared, and later Frank Lloyd Wright agreed, that in “neglecting the way architecture shapes culture, Americans were replicating ... endless mistakes” (Faherty 24). It would be Wright, though, who would correctly understand and embrace the unique and emerging American culture, and who would be able to express and protect it through architecture. Wright would understand the definition of the American spirit begins with open land, that openness and vastness resulting in an even greater need for architecture to provide a sense of shelter and refuge, even if only perceived or purely emotional.

America would never completely wean itself from the culture and values of Europe, and for generations people simply kept building in the ways they were used to,

without articulating what they needed from and valued in a home. Frank Lloyd Wright developed the opinion that the entire nation had moved into someone else's house, preventing America from being entirely independent. The homes of Washington and Jefferson made early strides toward reflecting an American identity, but still relied heavily on the European aristocratic past and ideals. These aristocratic ideals emphasized impracticality, falseness, and restrictiveness. They were in contrast with democratic ideals, and did nothing to "reflect and encode [the] emerging American sensibilities" of restlessness, individuality, social mobility, and independence (Faherty 6).

Of course, this borrowed architecture did meet the obvious needs of shelter and refuge for Americans; their homes kept them warm and safe, and allowed them to maintain their social status and acceptance from their various social groups. It was becoming apparent, though, that there was no European style that matched America's sensibilities or its less obvious needs of shelter and refuge, and Americans would not feel entirely at ease in their homes until these subtler manifestations of shelter and refuge were addressed. Frank Lloyd Wright was born into and trained in this world of contrast. He set out to glorify the American way of life through his original designs, and would create homes that honored and emphasized the strong archetypal patterns of shelter and refuge in a uniquely American way.

CHAPTER 4

THE EMERGENCE OF FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT
AND THE AMERICAN STYLE

Born in 1867 into a Wisconsin family of independent and stern Welsh immigrants, Frank Lloyd Wright was groomed from an early age to be an architect, and he became one of “the most popular and most celebrated architects of [the twentieth] century” (Levine xiii). Many Americans who cannot list another architect by name generally know at least something about Frank Lloyd Wright. It is an understatement to say he had a unique and strong personality. His mother nurtured the extreme confidence and domineering demeanor which helped him achieve tremendous success. He was an exacting perfectionist and incredibly hard worker, yet was a stubborn and unsuccessful student “who disdained all schools and professional organizations” (Levine xiv). In the opening chapters of the audiobook-biography *Frank Lloyd Wright*, author Ada Louise Huxtable summarized him this way: he was larger than life, stubborn and arrogant, flamboyant and proud, and usually living above his means. He was full of contradictions. An advocate of “honest arrogance over hypocritical humility” (Huxtable Ch. 2), he frequently lied about his age and his education, and shrugged off significant mistakes or problems in some of his designs. He was charming and charismatic, but could be insulting and incredibly difficult to work with. He was an outcast but not a hermit, and while he claimed not to care about others’ opinions of him, he desired a life of high style and social success. According to Huxtable, home and “the solidness of family life” were

of utmost importance to him (Ch. 2), yet he divorced the mother of his children when he made a client's wife his mistress, and wrote in his own autobiography that he "hated the sound of the word *papa* [emphasis in the original]" (Wright, *An Autobiography* 113). At times, he was revered and practically worshipped, but was also despised and even mocked by many. Neil Levine writes that at the time of the publication of his 1996 book *The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright*, most serious studies of Wright had largely fallen out of fashion at architectural schools (xiii).

Yet Wright persists. He maintains a place among the greatest architects in part because of the sheer volume of his work over the course of his long and productive life. "He built more than four hundred buildings and designed at least twice as many more," not only in America but all over the world (Levine xv). More importantly, though, Wright is still significant because his very best designs were residences that appealed to people in a way no other homes could, and "expressed the way that they wished to live" (Sergeant 14). He was preoccupied with the "uses and needs of a man," and with the potential of carefully constructed buildings to address those uses and needs (Sergeant 12). He believed one of America's most pressing needs was to develop a unique and distinct culture of its own, and he worked from the premise "we must know better the here and know of our own life in its Time and Place" (Wright, "Roots" 28). Wright considered architecture quite closely connected to sociology and psychology, writing "building a building is building the lives of the workers and dwellers in the building," and he hoped to be the architect most successful at building American lives (Sergeant 12).

Early in his career he worked in Chicago, first for Joseph Lyman Silsbee where he specialized in “the Shingle Style mixture of Queen Anne and Colonial” architecture, and “gained considerable light on practical needs of the American dwelling” (Levine 3; Wright, *An Autobiography* 110). He then moved to the firm of Dankmar Adler and Louis H. Sullivan where he gained extensive experience and was quickly promoted to primary draftsman for many residential consignments. Sullivan would be his greatest mentor and the progenitor of his eventual theory of organic architecture (Levine 8). The next few years brought marriage and children, the design and construction of his own home in Oak Park, Illinois, 1889-1890, additional design opportunities, and an eventual termination from Adler and Sullivan. He would forevermore work for himself.

As a young man, he had already become so confident in the importance of his “goal of creating an indigenous architecture in radically personal and provincial terms, totally independent of the academic traditions and institutions of the East Coast and Europe,” that he turned down an all-expenses-paid offer from D.H. Burnham for formal architectural training in Paris and Rome (Levine 7). This refusal was shocking to the establishment, but Wright did not regret it, observing “it has always been the idea of our people that culture came from abroad...They didn’t want to hear of its developing here in the tall grasses of the western prairies” (Sergeant 12). He feared accepting Burnham’s offer would only dull his natural instincts and make it even harder to design American homes appropriate for American culture and landscapes. Wright claimed Classical European design could never meet the needs of Americans, and until American architects broke from the habits of the past they would always be underserving and even sabotaging

their clients. In his “Roots” essay, Wright explained, “I saw the architect as savior of the culture of modern American society; his services the mainspring of any future cultural life in America,” and the only hope of preventing continued senseless conformity and mediocrity (28).

Defining American Culture

In his speeches and essays Wright frequently expresses great reverence for and confidence in American democracy and the potential of the typical man, in part because of his studies of enlightenment philosophers and writers (Secret 60). As the American begins to grasp the “higher sense of his own soul” (Wright, “Roots” 23), Wright believed, his dignity and immense possibility begin to shape his culture:

No longer a tool of power or of a monarch or of any exterior authority, a man not bowed down to sacrificial mysticism but man free...ruled by conscience and increasingly cultured intelligence...gradually coming awake to power even greater than man’s primitive power because it is power of the spirit. A new ideal of civilization arises...new interpretations of old power...so Art and Architecture...must be new. (Wright, “Roots” 23)

Unquestioned devotion to classic forms and styles was delaying the development of an authentic American architecture for this new time and place. It was “outworn but desperate reliance upon a dated formal professionalism: the Classic” (Wright, “Roots” 26). The result, Wright explained, was that “human life itself was being cheated”

(Wright, “Roots” 26). He had no respect for ornament and sentimentality in design (Wright, *An Autobiography* 92), and held a “hatred of the pilaster, the column for its own sake, the entablature, the cornice; in short all the architectural paraphernalia of the Renaissance...*Art can be no restatement* [emphasis in the original]” (Wright, “Roots” 21). He pointed to the “disaster” and “travesty” that was the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago and the Beaux Arts-style White City built for the occasion. This was a “senseless reversion” (Wright, “Roots” 29), and a “fateful year in the culture of these United States” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 123) that set American architecture back fifty years (Huxtable Ch. 4). The Shingle Style—which he learned while a young draftsman in Chicago, and elements of which can be seen in his own Oak Park home—was considered by some to be an American style, but was really a melding of Queen Anne, English Baroque, and Colonial designs. Typically extravagant and showy, excessively large, “elaborate in their composition and prolific in their contours” (Seligmann 56-58), with excessive ornamentation and disparate parts, isolated and dominant on the landscape, Shingle Style homes would not suit the “practical needs of the American dwelling” (Levine 3).

He admitted he could have made a good living by simply modifying classic designs with an element or two specific to the client or the site, but he did not wish to make a hypocritical career out of, for instance, tacking porches onto Tudor-style homes (Wright, *An Autobiography* 129). He had learned to appreciate the “value of the plain surface,” and thought that because a true culture has no need for excess it should eliminate the inappropriate in everything (Wright, *An Autobiography* 110, 58). He was

heading toward a cleaner, leaner, more minimal design on the road to empowering the individual, the resident, and the client (Wright, “To the Young” 243).

While Americans of means clung to their borrowed culture and the traditions of Europe, they were also butting up against the new realities of America’s Industrial Age and the rise of the machine, further contributing to their architectural identity crisis. On the one hand, by living in homes they did not design they were adopting culture that was someone else’s. As Duncan Faherty explains in *Remodeling the Nation*, “a preexisting house shapes the behavior of individuals who end up inhabiting someone else’s designs” (49). On the other hand, they were behaving very much like Americans, obsessed with science, technology, capitalism, and progress for the sake of progress. Wright wrote about American “infatuation with science and sentimentality concerning the past...[and that American] capitalism ...[and its] profit system tended to encourage low forms of avaricious expansion. American culture, such as it was, wore a false face...wanton denials of humanity were made by machine power” (Wright, “Roots” 34-35). The rise of the machine age taught Americans to ignore their instincts. American progress and technology were no longer the tools, but the master. Wright felt technology was cluttering the beautiful country landscapes with telegraph and telephone wires, and,

all our buildings, public and private, even churches, were senseless commitments to some kind of expediency instead of the new significances of freedom we so much needed...false fancy fronts hung with glaring signs as one trod along the miles of every urban sidewalk...inextricable confusion. Trimmings and embellishments of trimmings pressed on the

eye everywhere, made rampant by the casual taste of any ignoramus...

Man, thus caricatured by himself—nature thus violated—invaded even the national forest parks by a clumsy rusticity false to nature and so to architecture. The environment of civilized mankind was everywhere insulted by such willful stupidity. (Wright, “Roots” 27)

Wright concluded that trying to exist in this contradiction between habitual nostalgia and a faith in modern progress would never lead to an honest, indigenous architecture. These were not surface issues or questions of taste and style, nor a call for uniqueness for the sake of uniqueness. “Lack of culture means what it has always meant: ignoble civilization and therefore imminent downfall” (Wright, “Democracy” 262). Answering the American culture question might prevent such a downfall.

Frank Lloyd Wright placed extreme value on individuality and freedom, and thought the opportunity for every individual to freely pursue the fulfilment of his potential was one of the best promises of the American experiment. “Individuality is the most precious thing in life, after all,” and “the essential innate character of the man” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 233, 465). Without individuality, the American could not maintain his dignity, and defending both were crucial for the success of real democracy (Wright, *An Autobiography* 331; Wright, “In the Cause” 194).

America had become a country of adventurers and entrepreneurs, increasingly populated by people who understood that nowhere else were they so free to succeed. The general lack of aristocratic feelings and obligations led to increased desire for meaning and personal power, “power never dreamed of until [one] thus began to live as a free

man” in the wide-open spaces of the expansive country (Wright, “Democracy” 266). The trade-off for the desire to explore and to begin again elsewhere was restlessness. Americans in general were ungrounded. Duncan Faherty, when considering the consequences of “rampant rootlessness,” asserted the patterns of living were driven by the “restlessness of the early national period” (86-87). Too many Americans did not have “a refuge for the expanding spirit of man the individual” (Wright, “Democracy” 264). Too few had inherited a *genius loci*, or strong sense of the protective spirit of a place, as Wright had inherited from his mother (Secret 53).

Wright believed once Americans felt they were safe, free, powerful individuals, with a meaningful purpose and connection to a place, then a renewed ability to see the organic in everything and to trust their natural instincts would thrive. Democracy would thrive. They would shun the idea of keeping up with the neighbors. They would seek out comfort in their homes rather than luxury, or the mere impression of luxury. They would want to be surrounded by honest, natural materials and by objects that are beautiful in their simplicity (Wright, “Democracy” 270).

It is apparent from his essays, speeches, and emerging body of work that Wright was arriving at a profound conclusion. He seemed to believe architects could only properly reflect and nurture American culture if their designs did the following things: honor individual dignity and freedom, celebrate and encourage democracy, respect the spirit of exploration but also soothe restless stirrings and encourage deep roots, allow men to feel powerful and significant, and reassure their most basic instincts. Overall, the designs must be honest and beautiful, accepting the truth about American life now rather

than a romanticized past. He would use this realization to perfect his best architectural theory.

The education curriculum of his early childhood had impressed upon him the predominance of symmetry, unity, and patterns in nature's laws (MacCormac 124-128). In his essay "To the Young Man in Architecture," Wright explained that he saw little use in the study of the great buildings of previous generations "except as you look within them for such working of principle as made them new in the order of their own day...Principles are universal" (235, 243). Having identified the guiding ideals, his predictable next step was to identify patterns and unifying principles that would create and support those ideals, and ultimately serve as the foundations for his best work.

Patterns of Nature and Human Behavior as They Relate to the Principles of Architecture

In 1935, Wright was approaching a professional zenith. He had traveled the world and studied the architecture of other cultures, for good and bad. The construction of his new family home and workplace, Taliesin, Hillside, WI, 1911, had provided him an opportunity to test many of his developing theories of organic architecture. He was becoming close friends with E. J. Kaufmann, for whom he was building one of the most famous and recognizable homes in the world. The Kaufmann House, Mill Run, PA, 1934-37, would be more commonly known as Fallingwater, for the way its multiple cantilevered decks and roofs extended and stepped down over the waterfall on which it was built. In April of 1935 Wright gave a speech at the Industrial Arts Exposition at

Rockefeller Center where he remarked, “As everyone knows, we live in economic, aesthetic and moral chaos for the reason that American life has achieved no organic form” (Hoffman 14). He had been working for the better part of three decades perfecting the theory that would be his solution to America’s lack of organic form.

Some of Wright’s earliest conceptions of his emerging theory of organic architecture were reactionary to the typical home being built on the prairie of the Chicago suburbs, that he wrote, “I lied about everything. It had no sense of Unity at all nor any such sense of space as should belong to a free man among a free people in a free country. It was stuck up and stuck on...wherever it happened to be...a box, too, cut full of holes to let in light and air, an especially ugly one to get in and out of” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 139). His frustration with modern design manifested itself in a “yearning for...a new sense of simplicity as ‘organic’” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 139). He was inspired by the horizontal line of the prairie, the heat emanating from warm stone, broad vistas, and the sense of enclosure and protection offered by a low overhang. He “liked the *sense of shelter* in the look of a building [emphasis in the original]” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 142). He stressed that simplicity should not be mistaken as mere plainness or automatic elimination of detail or content, but understood as “a perfectly realized part of some organic whole” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 144).

In this sense, his theory was difficult to quantify. While he believed a “new architecture was a fundamental necessity...it seemed impossible for architecture to rise without deeper knowledge of the poetic principle involved” (Wright, “Roots” 35). He frequently wrote about the “sense” or “the sound of the within as Reality,” and believed,

like poetry, that an approach to architecture which responded to that which was “within” was sound philosophy (Wright, *An Autobiography* 336-337; Wright, “The New” 326).

On the other hand, his theory was quite straightforward and logical. Organic architecture is “the necessary outgrowth of indigenous conditions” (Levine 8). It assumes that “a kind of natural law” supported by “rational analysis” and the “emotional meaning attached to their functions” will dictate the forms of a building, and result in a building with integrity (Levine 8). Wright, as quoted in John Sergeant’s book *Frank Lloyd Wright’s Usonian Houses*, further explains it this way: “In organic architecture the ground itself predetermines all features; the climate modifies them; available means limit them; function shapes them” (160). In other words, the organic architect turns toward nature for direction, and responds to the patterns and principles that the natural world and the natural man follow for themselves.

Wright was creating a pattern language long before the Berkeley crowd, one based on natural environments and habits as well as current culture. Wright did not have so much a “particular style or manner of building...but an attitude, a principle, a general approach to the making of an environment” (Levine xiii), and his early years involved “a continuing search for a coherent architectural language” (Seligmann 64). In 1909 he briefly lived in Italy and saw that in contrast to the machine-driven modernist movement of the time, in Italy “architecture and nature were brought together in a remarkable union” following an “underlying system of order” (Levine 71). His time there helped him see the humble homes of the Italian countryside were in harmony with the “environment and with the habits of the people” in a way that made them significantly

more appealing and nurturing than the Renaissance monuments and fancy structures built to impress (Levine 71). He wrote, “No really Italian building seems ill at ease in Italy” (Wright, “The Sovereignty” 86).

He spent time in Japan and saw there a similar relationship between the habits and values of the people and their buildings. He deeply respected the Japanese aesthetic and appreciated their clean, spare, orderly homes. The human-sized proportions of the rooms were natural, sensible, and soothing to him. He studied for hours the way the low ceilings and unfixed, screen-like walls contributed to the general sense of well-being one experienced inside the rooms. He delighted in the comfort of being heated from beneath while bathing, and the ease with which the building grew out of its natural environment. Every element of the built space was meaningful and appropriate, and felt uncontrived. The success of Japanese design strengthened his conviction that form and function are one, neither follows the other (Wright, *An Autobiography* 196-197; 342). Form itself is a natural pattern. In writing about the character of form he explained “true form is always organic in character. It is really nature pattern” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 380).

Wright was working within the natural and human patterns of architecture more effectively than any other American architect before him. Although Wright predates the 1977 work *A Pattern Language*—written to overcome architectural problems which are “deeply rooted in the nature of things” (Alexander et al. xvii)—it is clear he was well aware of the nature of man’s relationship to buildings, and was solving architectural problems many decades before *A Pattern Language* became popular. In fact, the authors relied on Wright’s work as examples of the patterns they were trying to explain

(Alexander et al. 665-666). He understood that “an underlying system of order [not a set of rules] gave to all structures...a common language of form appropriate to the natural setting” (Levine 71), and he understood that patterns in nature were comforting to people.

New Forms for Ancient Meanings

Wright concluded that architecture for the unique American culture of his time would be honest, beautiful, natural, and simple. It would honor individual dignity and freedom, encourage democracy, help the restless feel rooted, make men feel powerful and significant, and foster awareness of their most basic instincts. Honoring “the essential unity of things,” he had searched among the patterns of nature and human behavior to clarify the best elements of design for such homes, and to perfect his theory of organic architecture (Secrest 59).

He discovered the elements most suitable for his objectives were primarily those ancient elements of shelter and refuge: a strong sense of enclosure, privacy, prominent stone fireplaces, unbroken, horizontal sight lines, and harmony with nature and the daily rhythms of life. He would, of course, modernize their implementation, creating “new forms for ancient meanings,” as the following chapters explore (McCarter, “The Integrated” 337). His designs, which emphasized shelter and refuge, bore little resemblance to the European-style homes of early America. This thrilled his clients. Wright’s “coherent architectural language” when put into practice revealed to people what they should have already understood instinctively but could not, due to the constraints of style and tradition, or from suppressing their natural instincts (Seligmann

64). Whether or not everyone knew they were “living in chaos,” as Wright had claimed, his theory of organic architecture and its emphasis on shelter and refuge offered the solution to the chaos (Hoffman 14).

CHAPTER 5

SHELTER AND REFUGE IN FRANK
LLOYD WRIGHT'S WORK

Wright's democratic ideals and desire to create uniquely American homes aided him as he perfected his theories of organic architecture. He wished to break free of traditional styles of architecture by more closely working within the universal and timeless patterns of human behavior and principles of architecture, principles applied specifically to the homeowner, the moment in time, and the site. Principles of design emphasizing shelter and refuge (in both obvious and subtle ways) became primary elements in his successful modern residential designs. He urged architectural apprentices to consider a man's home a "consecrated space wherein he seeks *refuge*, recreation, and repose for body but especially for mind [emphasis added]" (Wright, "To the Young" 242). He wrote that it was folly to think of a man's home as his castle, which was superfluous and aristocratic. The goal, he said, was to create homes that were:

every man's...sphere in space—his appropriate place to live in spaciousness. On his own sunlit sward or in wood or strand enhancing all other homes. No less but more than ever this manly home a refuge for the expanding spirit of man the individual...In his own home thus the...citizen would be not only impregnable. He would be inviolate.

(Wright, "Democracy" 264)

If these things could be accomplished, if he could indeed adapt universal and timeless principles for his own time, he could reframe for Americans what it meant to feel that a home was a place of shelter and refuge.

Prior to Wright's professional breakthrough, American architecture typically treated elements of shelter and refuge as reflected in Table 3.

Table 3. Shelter and Refuge as Design Elements, pre-Wright: English Baroque/Georgian Influence

Shelter and Refuge as Design Elements, pre-Wright English Baroque/Georgian Influence	
Element	Application
<p>SHELTER An escape from nature; conquering nature</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sheltering Roof 2. Prominent Stone Fireplaces 3. Enclosures/Partial Enclosures 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pitched; sometimes low-pitched roofs overhanging porches to block strong southern sun 2. Placement is determined by style rather than maximum effectiveness/function 3. Large interiors broken into a series of small rooms for specialized activities; porches
<p>REFUGE An escape from one's enemies</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Displays of Power 2. Safety, Security, A Wall to Put One's Back Against 3. High Vantage Point, Lookout, Unbroken Sightlines 4. Privacy 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Great heights and tall ceilings; large homes with many rooms with specific uses; grand central stair halls; fine furnishings and ornamentation; long driveways emphasizing a "grand reveal" or extravagant first impression 2. Masonry construction; building sites on hilltops or facing riverbanks; 3. Building sites on hilltops or facing riverbanks; long driveways/approaches allowing extended notice of approaching visitors; multiple large windows; a roof platform with balustrade 4. Interior spaces made of many small rooms

(Note: Table created by the author of this thesis.)

Wright's disdain for many of these applications and stylistic treatments, and his desire for buildings to have natural integrity, would lead to a drastic shift in how shelter and refuge

would be addressed in the modern American home. In his essay “The New Architecture: Principles,” Wright attempts a modern interpretation of shelter:

Shelter...becomes more than ever significant in character and important as a feature. Shelter is still a strange disorder when reduced to a flat lid...Organic architecture sees shelter not only as a quality of space but of spirit, and the prime factor in any concept of building man into his environment as a legitimate feature of it. (317-319)

Sheltering Roof

Wright insisted shelter is an “Inherent Human Factor” (Wright, “The New” 317). He was committed to creating a strong “sense of shelter” in a home, and first and foremost, “represented this concept in the low sheltering roof” (Gwendolyn Wright 105), believing highly “visible roofs were expensive and unnecessary” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 491). Table 4 compares his application of shelter as a design principle to the previous and prevailing applications.

Table 4. Sheltering Roof: A Comparison of Elements and Applications

Shelter and Refuge: natural patterns and universal principles	Shelter and Refuge as design elements, pre-Wright	Shelter and Refuge as design elements in Wright’s work
Sheltering Roof	Usually tall and steeply- pitched roofs which overhang porches to block strong southern sun	Low pitched roofs which extend far out over porches, sometimes cantilevered; Carports and long, low roofs emphasize the horizontal line low to the ground

(Note: Table created by the author of this thesis.)

Wright only partially agreed with the assertion made in *A Pattern Language* about the proper role of a roof. He agreed with this much: “the roof plays a primal role in our lives. The most primitive buildings are nothing but a roof...The whole feeling of shelter comes from the fact that the roof *surrounds* people at the same time that it covers them” (Alexander et al. 570-572). Alexander and team departed from Wright in their preference for steeply pitched, traditional roofs, and the eaves created by them under which people lived and slept. Wright rejected the trend for tall and tight buildings, “sooty fingers in the sky...gabled to madness,” and felt the “first thing to do was to get rid of the attic and, therefore, of the dormer and of the useless heights” (Wright, “Prairie” 40). This rejection would bring the roof low and emphasize the horizontal line so, particularly in his beloved Midwest, roofs would “associate with the ground and become natural to [their] prairie site” (Wright, “Prairie” 43). He theorized that “the horizontal planes in buildings, those planes parallel to earth, identify themselves with the ground—make the building belong to the ground,” increasing the sense of a stable home that could not easily be toppled (Wright, *An Autobiography* 140).

His solution for surrounding and protecting residents with a roof, rather than just capping a building, was to extend the roof even farther over the patios or porches than was common. His Prairie Style homes emphasized “heavy sheltering, roofs” (Wright, “Prairie” 38). The Willits House, Highland Park, IL, 1902-1903, the “first true Prairie House” (Seligmann 80), provides an excellent example of Wright’s treatment of a low sheltering roof:

The...broader horizontal roof extends from the open porch of the dining room on the left to the porte-cochere adjoining the entrance hall on the right, reinforcing the sense of dynamic space...the low base of the porch/porte-cochere, stretched laterally between “out-reaching” piers...continues around the front of the house to form the girding parapet of the open terrace. (Levine 31)

The Robie House, Chicago, IL, 1908-1910, probably the masterpiece of his Prairie Style designs, provides an even more striking example of the sheltering roof. The house is:

at first difficult to read as anything more specific and definitive than an image of shelter-as-such...all is seemingly reduced to roofs suspended above volumes... “out-reaching” spaces are girded by staggered brick parapets and bridges floating just below the overhanging, cantilevered roofs...a heightened sense of privacy ... is further dramatized by the hovering roof plane extending well beyond the edges of the enclosed space. (Levine 53-54)

When referring to the sheltering roof of his own home Taliesin, he wrote, “there were few dead roof-spaces overhead, and the broad eaves so sheltered the windows that they were safely left open to the sweeping, soft air of the rain” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 174).

The world famous Fallingwater employs numerous sheltering, low, horizontal roofs and trellises. The decks and patios of upper floors serve as the protruding roofs for lower floors. Trellises extend from the house into the rock cliff providing a “roof” over

the driveway, and in most places the ceiling is no higher than seven feet one inch (Hoffman 39, 42). Some of Wright's Usonian style homes are noteworthy for their low, broad, sheltering roofs. The Hanna House, Palo Alto, CA, 1936-37, was described in *House Beautiful* as "essentially a roof poised lightly above a two-level, paved terrace on the side of the hill" (Sergeant 32). The exterior of the Rosenbaum House, Florence, AL, 1939, had an "almost overpowering horizontality," the "carport, a 20-ft cantilever utilizing concealed steelwork" (Sergeant 42). Cantilevers were a common feature in the Usonian houses, allowing rooms to extend ever farther from the interior walls into nature where they created "broad sheltered walks" (Sergeant 51, 54). In a more detailed explanation of his Usonian ideal, he described those roofs as "shelter gratifying to the sense of shelter because of the generous eaves" (Wright, *An Autobiography* 492).

Prominent Stone Fireplaces

"There is no substitute for fire...But the traditional fireplace is nearly obsolete, and new ones are often added to homes as 'luxury items'. Perhaps this explains why these showpiece fireplaces are always so badly located" (Alexander et al. 839). So opens Pattern #181 of *A Pattern Language*, which concludes with the recommendation that fireplaces be situated in common spaces to provide "a natural focus for talk and dreams and thought" (Alexander et al. 842). Duncan Faherty analyzes a short story by Nathaniel Hawthorne titled "Fire-Worship," which delves deeply into the primacy of a proper hearth. Hawthorne believed fireplaces were necessary for their "ability to foster contact with elemental forces" (Faherty 179). Iron stoves and other heating innovations were an

unwelcome “revolution in social and domestic life” (Faherty 179). Iron stoves, Hawthorne warned, put Americans “in danger of losing their connections with the natural world ... [and hastened] a breakdown of domestic intimacy” (Faherty 179). The American building style which favored relocating fireplaces to the impractical ends of houses rather than the centers had literally caused people to turn their backs on one another, so Wright approached the design element of a prominent, stone fireplace differently from his immediate predecessors, as expressed in Table 5.

Table 5. Prominent Stone Fireplaces: A Comparison of Elements and Applications

Shelter and Refuge: natural patterns and universal principles	Shelter and Refuge as design elements, pre-Wright	Shelter and Refuge as design elements in Wright’s work
Prominent Stone Fireplaces	Placement is determined by the style of a grand stair hall, rather than maximum effectiveness or function	Placement emphasizes heating efficiency and strong sense of comfort, security, and being rooted to the ground

(Note: Table created by the author of this thesis)

Writing about the design of his Prairie houses, he said he preferred, rather than several tall, skinny chimneys:

a broad generous one, or at most two, these kept low down on gently sloping roofs... The big fireplace below, inside, became now a place for a real fire, justified the great size of this chimney outside. A real fireplace at that time was extraordinary. There were then “mantels” instead... The “mantel” was an insult to comfort, but the integral fireplace became an

important part of the building itself...It refreshed me to see the fire
burning deep in the masonry of the house itself. (Wright, "Prairie" 42)

Of his own Taliesin he wrote, "The chimneys of the great stone fireplaces rose heavily through all, wherever there was a gathering place within, and there were many such places. They showed great rock-faces over deep openings inside. Outside they were strong, quiet, rectangular rock-masses bespeaking strength and comfort within" (Wright, *An Autobiography* 171). The drafting room for the apprentices at Taliesin West, Scottsdale, AZ, 1937, featured a fireplace wall (Levine 271).

His preference for a centrally located fireplace was in part due to the social and spiritual nature of sitting around a fire, and he incorporated inglenooks (a recessed seating area built in on either side of large fireplace hearth) into many of his designs to facilitate that. His own Oak Park home has a prominent inglenook fireplace, as does the George Blossom House, Chicago, IL, 1892, and the Winslow House, River Forest, IL, 1893-94 (Seligmann 61, 65; Levine 18). His Usonian houses less frequently featured a strict inglenook, but often contained built-in benches or sofas very near the fireplace, and often at the height of the hearth making them seem all one continuous surface. For Wright, the fireplace and chimney anchored the home to the ground. It was "sacred character [at] the center—the hearth as altar" (McCarter, "The Integrated" 317).

He also preferred a centrally located fireplace for its common-sense quality; the fire could more effectively heat the home if it were centrally located, or at the very least, sharing a wall between adjacent rooms. He preferred a fireplace in the middle of his "pinwheel" plans, allowing for the rooms to project from and be anchored by the central

mass of stone (Seligmann 61). He had no interest in the over-stylized central stair halls that had banished the fireplace to the far ends of American homes. The Robie House and the Cheney House, Oak Park IL, 1903-04, are excellent examples of both a centrally located fireplace and built-in fireside seating. The Herbert Johnson House, Racine, WI, 1909, included “a tall central chimney stack with five fireplaces on four sides divid[ing the] roomy vertical central living space into four spaces for the various domestic functions” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 476). Nearly every Usonian house followed this requirement of his: each home “must have...a fireplace in it” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 492).

Enclosures and Partial Enclosures

In addition to his use of inglenooks, and low ceilings and roofs, other aspects of Wright’s work indicated he was building to address the human preference for a sense of enclosure (McCarter, “The Integrated” 300). A sense of enclosure was another pattern of behavior that Wright clearly understood, even before it would be articulated in *A Pattern Language*, as follows:

The fact that people feel more comfortable in a space which is at least partly enclosed is hard to explain...in the smaller outdoor spaces—gardens, parks, walks, plazas—enclosure does, for some reason, seem to create a feeling of security. It seems likely that the need for enclosure goes back to our most primitive instincts.... To be comfortable, a person wants

a certain amount of enclosure around him and his work—but not too much. (Alexander et al. 520-521)

During his time in Italy, Wright sketched a house for himself and his mistress that included elements of enclosure. Though never built, it had an L-shaped plan to partially surround a courtyard, and was designed with a “solid wall to the street, as...most of the other villas in Fiesole” (Levine 69). He had learned in Japan that organic houses had courtyards enclosed by garden walls and outbuildings. The sliding partitions of the Japanese house allowed for a quick reconfiguration and the enclosure or partial enclosure of a much larger space (Wright, *An Autobiography* 196). His rules for Usonian design included the expectation that when building on a corner lot, the house would be “planned to wrap around two sides of the garden,” an L-shaped plan that turns its back to the busy street and its best part toward privacy, toward its own outdoor room (Wright, *An Autobiography* 492).

The popular box-within-a box style houses did not instinctively resonate with their inhabitants. Small rooms with small windows are claustrophobic. Attics and basements felt like caves to Wright. Utilizing metal and glass, he built walls that had the spirit of screens, creating “an enclosure of space affording protection against storm or heat only when needed” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 141). His designs offered many creative possibilities for his clients to feel their homes wrapped around them comfortably, and Table 6 compares how his methods differed from the architectural options preceding him.

Table 6. Enclosures and Partial Enclosures: A Comparison of Elements and Applications

Shelter and Refuge: natural patterns and universal principles	Shelter and Refuge as design elements, pre-Wright	Shelter and Refuge as design elements in Wright's work
Enclosures/Partial Enclosures	Large interiors broken into a series of small rooms for specialized activities; porches	L shaped houses which create outdoor "rooms"; carports; low ceilings minimizing a feeling of exposure

(Note: Table created by the author of this thesis)

Displays of Power

Above all else Frank Lloyd Wright wanted freedom and power over his own life, and he assumed most people felt the same. "The soul of that new life we are fond of calling American is liberty: liberty tolerant and so sincere that it must see all free or itself suffer. This freedom is the highest American ideal" (Wright, "To the Young" 240). He was driven to succeed and stand out, but was not a physically imposing man, and he despised situations and settings that made him feel small and insignificant. He was predictably unimpressed by the typical displays of power common in American architecture, as summarized in Table 7.

Table 7. Displays of Power: A Comparison of Elements and Applications

Shelter and Refuge: natural patterns and universal principles	Shelter and Refuge as design elements, pre-Wright	Shelter and Refuge as design elements in Wright's work
Displays of Power	Great heights and tall ceilings; large homes with many rooms with specific uses; grand central stair halls; fine furnishings and ornamentation; long driveways emphasizing a "grand reveal" or extravagant first impression	Not emphasized in obvious ways; comfort and personalization are luxurious and naturally empowering elements; built to make men feel significant and fully conscious; foster dignity and a sense of freedom

(Note: Table created by the author of this thesis)

His stubbornness, his work ethic, and his faith in his own creative abilities sustained him and allowed him to live and work in homes and locations that empowered him inwardly. He believed organic architecture could create those same situations for the average American, and by designing to support individual dignity, the public good would be served. “Freedom at home,” he wrote, “makes all men doubly democratic in spirit” (Wright, “Democracy” 270).

His prominent stone fireplace hearths were designed to empower, “at the center of his houses, with their crouching stance, hulking mass, and low mantels combined with the low ceiling to make the occupants feel taller, more in command of the space and vistas they could see beyond the low overhanging eaves” (McCarter, “The Integrated” 304). Wright’s treatment of displays of power, though, was more often than not rather nebulous and based on perception and feeling. It is more about what he avoided than what he included. For Wright, the design elements that empowered a man began with dignity and pride in his environment, which helped clarify one’s significance and meaning. A home was not simply a place to store one’s things, but a tool to help one accomplish his life’s purpose. This could not be done if one were constantly fussing about his home, or worrying about impressing the neighbors. He explains this beautifully in an analogy comparing being well-dressed to being well-housed:

We all know the feeling we have when we are well-dressed and like the consciousness that results from it. It affects our conduct, and you should have the same feeling regarding the home you live in. It has a salutary effect morally...If you feel yourself becomingly housed...when you are

conscious that the house is right and is honestly becoming to you, and feel you are living in it beautifully, you need no longer be concerned about it. It is no tax upon your conduct, nor nag upon your self-respect, because it is featuring you as you like to see yourself. (Wright, “Integrity” 296)

The home had to be honest if it were to be empowering. Anything that seemed wasteful, useless, or authoritarian had to go. He rejected the Code of Gentility, useless heights, fake styles, pointless and expensive adornments, and any material masquerading as something it was not. These things would clutter and confuse the mind. He convinced people that small homes could be luxurious homes; square footage was far less important than the comfort and the usefulness of space and the objects within it, and their “spiritual integration with everyday life” (Wright, “Democracy” 269).

Frank Lloyd Wright coined the term “Usonia” and used it to mean a utopian America (Wright, *An Autobiography* 128). His Usonian design period was born from the premise that the country’s “chief obstacle to...the moderate-cost house problem is the fact that our people do not really know how to live” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 489). He built personalized homes with natural materials that were entirely useful, sensible, and livable, in “pattern[s] for more simplified and, at the same time, more gracious living” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 489).

Safety, Security, and a Wall to Put One’s Back Against

An innate sense of self-protection causes people to avoid whenever possible unnecessary exposure or being caught by surprise. *A Pattern Language* addresses and

clarifies this design element: “Outdoors, people always try to find a spot where they can have their backs protected, looking out toward some larger opening, beyond the space immediately in front of them” (Alexander et al. 558). The principle is explained further: “You feel more comfortable in a workspace if there is a wall behind you. If your back is exposed you feel vulnerable—you can never tell if someone is looking at you, or if someone is coming toward you from behind” (Alexander et al. 848).

Although for modern Americans this problem is usually more perceived than actual, the very feeling of overexposure is unsettling. People feel anxious if their backs are not protected, either from real threats or from surprises. Wright experienced this when going through a public and prolonged divorce and its subsequent professional fallout. He wrote, “My mother, foreseeing the plight I would be in, had bought the low hill on which Taliesin now stands and she offered it to me now as a refuge...I began to build Taliesin *to get my back against a wall* and fight for what I saw I had to fight [emphasis added]” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 167). Table 8 compares the literal and perceived ways his designs addressed this particular element of shelter and refuge.

Table 8. Safety, Security, A Wall to Put One’s Back Against: A Comparison of Elements and Applications

Shelter and Refuge: natural patterns and universal principles	Shelter and Refuge as design elements, pre-Wright	Shelter and Refuge as design elements in Wright’s work
Safety, Security, A Wall to Put One’s Back Against	Masonry construction; building sites on hilltops or facing riverbanks; long driveways/approaches	Masonry construction; building sites nestled into hilltops and low to the ground; helping the restless feel rooted

(Note: Table created by the author of this thesis)

The popular inglenook fireplace addresses an obvious application of this element of design in that it allows one to literally put his back against a wall with his face close to the fire. Wright's Usonian homes frequently fronted their busy streets with a heavy, solid (sometimes masonry) wall, allowing all inside the sense they need only survey and scan in one general direction for any threat. Fallingwater provides several examples of this design element used effectively. The side of the house nearest the driveway and farthest from the river is comprised of thick walls, with almost no windows. An opposite wall is made almost entirely of windows, framing the view to the outside. The design allows the occupant to stand with his back against the wall, not far from the fireplace, and see across the expansive living area to the outside (Levine 232-234). The bedrooms, and the third story gallery used as a bedroom, were designed so the sleeper was nestled against the stone wall and able to easily scan the adjacent terraces from bed (Hoffman 59, 89). The main room of the Malcolm Willey House, Minneapolis, MN, 1932-34, has a similar design. Within it, occupants can feel protected from behind by the large fireplace wall and look out past the terrace into the yard (Levine 223). Another particularly striking example of this design element is found in Taliesin West. The view through the loggia to the terrace and into the desert give the impression of standing at the back of a cave to survey the vast opening in the distance and any threat it might contain (Levine 285).

Another way Wright honored this element of refuge was to avoid building homes on the tops of hills, where at any time one might feel he has at least one, if not three, weak or unprotected sides. Instead he carved building sites *into* the hills, nestled low to the ground, protected from the strongest gales, following the contour of the hillside.

Approaching the design of Taliesin he wrote, “I knew well by now that no house should ever be *on* any hill or *on* anything. It should be *of* the hill, belonging to it, so hill and house could live together each the happier for the other [emphasis in the original]” (Wright, “Taliesin” 173). Here, the figurative wall against which to put one’s back was the mass of the mountain itself. One’s focus and defensive attention could be minimized accordingly and directed in a more manageable way.

His never-built apartments St. Mark’s-in-the-Bouwerie Towers were designed with this element of refuge in mind. He wrote about the design’s emphasis on the feeling of having a rock wall at one’s back. The four apartments on each floor all backed up toward each other and against the heavy masonry walls, found only at the center and interior of the building. At least two glass exterior walls could then be framed for each apartment, so the living spaces “all look outward” (Wright, “St. Mark’s” 276).

Designing to address the universal desire people have to feel their backs are protected, giving them a territorial advantage, also addressed a more uniquely American issue. American restlessness was in part due to the desire to see what was over the next hill, what lay in the distance at the horizon, and somehow be a part of it. An elevated, hillside vantage point could give a resident a tantalizing glimpse of the expansive territory beyond, but the heavy wall at his back would foster an important connection to the house and to the ground. A good house “connects the earth boundness and rootedness of a man or a woman to their physical connection to the earth...Our lives become satisfactory to the extent that we are rooted...the extent to which our physical world is itself rooted and connected to the earth” (Alexander et al. 787). Wright, like Thomas

Jefferson, believed in establishing deep roots in order to nurture one's potential (Levine 2). A home that felt safe and strong, and soothed restlessness, would offer a family deep roots.

A Vantage Point, a Lookout, Unbroken Sightlines, and Privacy

The American home was, as Wright wrote, the new “humane stronghold,” and “vistas of the landscape” had to be integrated into the house as they were crucial to a sense of shelter and refuge (Wright, “Democracy” 264, 266). He departed from the American architecture before him in that he felt unnecessary heights were not the best way to approach this element of design. He designed so that “freedom of floor space and elimination of useless heights” did more to contribute to reassuring comfort than crows nests and widows walks (Wright, *An Autobiography* 145). Christopher Alexander and his architectural team concurred, stating that although “the instinct to climb up to some high place, from which you can look down and survey your world, seems to be a fundamental instinct,” anxiety, mental illness, and “social alienation [are] created by the height of buildings” (Alexander et al. 316, 116). The ante-bellum Southern plantation owner chose his home site in part for “its elevation, from where he might see and be seen” (Smith 18), but Wright’s approach to creating homes with a vantage point, a lookout, and unbroken sightlines was quite different from his predecessors, and had little to do with great heights. Table 9 summarizes his approach.

Table 9. A Vantage Point, a Lookout, Unbroken Sightlines, and Privacy: A Comparison of Elements and Applications

Shelter and Refuge: natural patterns and universal principles	Shelter and Refuge as design elements, pre-Wright	Shelter and Refuge as design elements in Wright's work
High Vantage Point, Lookout, Unbroken Sightlines	Building sites on hilltops or facing riverbanks; long driveways/approaches; multiple large windows; an upper roof platform with balustrade	Long interior sightlines; open floorplans, corner windows, views to comforting nature scenes; emphasis on horizontal planes; terraces with half walls allowing the resident to look down on the street without being seen
Privacy	Interior spaces made of many small rooms	Privacy from the street view.

(Note: Table created by the author of this thesis)

Wright knew that although great heights might give people the advantage of seeing without being seen, they were unnecessary. Large patios and terraces with strategically placed half-walls would work as well or better, serving as inviting spaces that are “high enough to give people a vantage point, and low enough to put them in action” (Alexander et al. 604). Max Jacobson, Murray Silverstein, and Barbara Winslow’s *Patterns of Home* cites Wright’s early Chicago houses as excellent examples of principles they called Refuge and Outlook:

Wright placed the main level of his houses on the second story, well above street level, and set the rooms back from a low-walled patio or terrace overlooking the sidewalk. This arrangement allowed the occupants of the house to venture out on to the patio from inside and to overlook the street life without being seen by passersby. (Jacobson et al. 208)

The Robie House may be Wright’s very best example of combining elements of a vantage point or lookout, unbroken sightlines, and privacy. Its wide terraces removed just

one story from the street, and its long, low roofs overhanging those terraces, make it easy for a person to stand against an exterior wall, shaded and completely unnoticed while easily observing and eavesdropping on the activity of the sidewalk and street. The main terrace of the Cheney House provides a similar opportunity. The terraces of Fallingwater and their half-walls also show this approach to refuge, with the added benefit of the surrounding forest and river creating an additional sense of protection and lookout.

Wright designed open floorplans with long interior sightlines. He was one of the first modern architects to champion the open floorplan, or great room, and included this expectation in his perfected directives for the Usonian home. “We must have a big living room with as much vista ...as we can afford... [and a] convenient cooking and dining space adjacent to if not a part of the living room” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 492). With his liberal use of the corner window, the sightline could then continue into the yard or garden. “A radical liberation of space all over the world today, is the corner window” (Wright, “The Destruction” 285). The Freeman House, Los Angeles, 1924-25, the George Barton House, Buffalo, NY, 1903, and Fallingwater all feature excellent examples of the corner window extending sightlines.

Harmony with Nature

To create correct buildings for contemporary America, Wright focused on classic principles of shelter and refuge as design elements, adapting them for the American lifestyle and landscapes. He determined that his efforts were incomplete unless he emphasized two additional, subtler aspects of shelter and refuge: modern Americans

needed buildings that fostered harmony with nature and harmony with the rhythms of daily life, both public and private.

Wright was an admirer of the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, and especially inspired by his essay “Nature.” Like Emerson he wished to learn from nature rather than dominate and subdue it. The goal of the union of nature and the self was a fairly radical idea, but would become a key component in Wright’s designs, for “nature was Wright’s constant preoccupation” (Levine xvii). He worked as if in tune to the pattern of behavior that “in some way, which is hard to express, people are able to be more whole in the presence of nature, are able to go deeper into themselves, and are somehow able to draw sustaining energy from the life of plants and trees and water” (Alexander et al. 806). In contrast to what he considered the “stupid sentimentalities of our Victorian past” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 351), he approached architecture’s relationship to the sustaining energy of nature quite differently from his predecessors, as seen in Table 10.

Table 10. Living with Nature: A Comparison of Elements and Applications

Shelter and Refuge: natural patterns and universal principles	Shelter and Refuge as design elements, pre-Wright	Shelter and Refuge as design elements in Wright’s work
Living within Nature	Emphasis on an escape from nature; to represent the conquering of nature	Emphasis on living harmoniously within nature; living honestly, beautifully, simply; honoring instinct; to blend in unnoticed in the landscape; use of natural, local materials

(Note: Table created by the author of this thesis.)

In his autobiography, he compared the modern human condition to that of prehistoric man, and wrote that what he was attempting was a departure from living in caves like the “savage animals ‘holing in’ for protection.” Modern man was moving into the trees, “out into the light...living in air and sunlight... extended vistas...spaciousness, and integrity” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 339). There was beauty in every growing thing, and “significant character in the harmonious order we call nature” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 139). He used local and natural materials whenever possible, designed the house to follow the contours of the land, and avoided unnatural pretensions. If built properly to capture the natural breezes, rooms had no need for air conditioning. Double hung windows were like Guillotines, never fully opening, so only casement windows which swing wide would do. Sameness-no-matter-the-setting or shipping prefabricated homes cross country were an affront to integrity.

Both Taliesin and Taliesin West were prime examples of building in harmony with nature and, by extension, being protected and strengthened by it. The residents were living close to the ground in the sense that each home was really a small, somewhat self-sufficient community, with gardens, bunkhouses, offices, and repair shops. In harmony with the cycles of nature, one home was for summer living, and the other was a winter haven. He had a special affinity for the landscapes of Wisconsin and wrote:

Taliesin was a house of the North. The whole was low, wide and snug, a broad shelter seeking fellowship with its surroundings. A house that could open to the breezes of summer and become like an open camp if need be. With spring came music on the roofs...Taliesin's order was such that

when all was clean and in place its countenance beamed, wore a happy smile of well-being and welcome for all. It was intensely human. (Wright, *An Autobiography* 174)

He described it as a place in which nature defined the dwelling. The sandy color of the locally quarried stones, and the stone terraces, steppes, and courts, shaded with broad eaves blended in seamlessly with their environment (Huxtable Ch. 6).

In his design of Taliesin West, he looked to the primitive for inspiration, to “the values of those who lived simply with nature” (Huxtable Ch. 10). He had created a diagonal design and had sited the main house to diverge from the contours of the land to maximize the view of distant mountains, that he believed had spiritual importance to the ancient inhabitants of the area (Levine 269). Using the local rock for a primary construction material, his wife commented that the construction of the house “looked like something we had been excavating, not building” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 454). To be at the site was to be at the “top of the world looking over the universe at sunrise...light and air bathing all the worlds of creation in all the color there ever was” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 453). Sunlight would be an important element in Taliesin West. The drafting room and living quarters were built to take full advantage of the morning sun (Levine 265). Effortless connection to the outdoors and natural light were the new guidelines for modern living.

Supporting the pattern of behavior and design that “it is a fundamental...necessity [for] every building [to have] at least once place...where people can be still within the building, but in touch with the people and the scene outside” (Alexander et al. 778),

wherever he could Wright liked to create rooms that blurred the lines between indoor and outdoor. The slant and roof of the drafting room for the Taliesin West apprentices created the impression that it was “as much outdoor as indoor...providing shelter without a sense of enclosure” (Levine 271). The Usonian houses were designed to have as much “vista and garden coming in” as could be afforded (Wright, *An Autobiography* 492).

But nothing compared to the dramatic Fallingwater perched into and over a forest waterfall, giving the house the effect of a sophisticated treehouse. The house incorporated skylights, fountains, and large boulders protruding into the floors. The bedrooms were intentionally small “intended to function virtually as antechambers to their respective terraces,” urging the occupants to sleep with the doors wide open (Hoffman 59). In all aspects there was “the incorporation of a key feature of the landscape...the hill [or]...the stream and falls” (Levine 241).

Harmony with the Daily Rhythms of Life: Living within Society

As much as Wright revered the individual spirit and the genius of the individual man working in freedom and integrity, he was not a hermit. He lived in and was influenced by society. “Public and professional matrices significantly affected his development as an architect...Place mattered. By this he implied more than simply natural surroundings; he meant as well urban social life and the public exchange of ideas” (Gwendolyn Wright 102). Wright knew that American individuality and restlessness makes it harder to achieve a sense of shelter and refuge at home. Our tendency to leave home and light out West means leaving society, making us vulnerable. Duncan Faherty studied this concept

in *Remodeling the Nation*, noting that the works of early American authors Edgar Allen Poe and Charles Brockden Brown addressed this vulnerability. Both were concerned that “outside the safety of a settled community, disconnected American men dwell in a state of constant flux...[and] risk dissolution” (Faherty 60). Social stability, an important element of refuge, could be improved by residential design.

The importance Wright placed on the principles of shelter and refuge as design elements “did not represent an aversion to public life or a lack of interest in settings designed for public activities...instead Wright distinctly understood the close interrelation between the public and private, between inside and outside the home” (Gwendolyn Wright 105). His methods to achieve this close interrelation reflected the changing American habits and lifestyles. For example, as biographer Ada Huxtable wrote, the changes in domestic American life included changing roles for women, less formality in daily life, and a rapidly decreasing reliance on live-in servants (Huxtable Ch. 10). Families such as the Robies were asking for features in contrast to the Victorian home and manners of the turn of the century. Greeting guests in a formal entry and then only allowing them access to a front parlor and large formal dining room, never letting them “set foot in the part of the house where the family lives day to day...[was] the cultural and architectural straightjacket that Wright was chucking when he designed” for them (Thompson, “Wright’s Robie” 1). Contemporary life needed a contemporary home, “open and filled with light, yet private, with spaces where family members could spend time together, and alone...[welcoming] visitors into the spaces where [the family] lived,” or taking advantage of views of nature (Thompson, “Wright’s Robie” 1).

These changes meant a formal dining room and a servants' wing were outdated and unnecessary. There was an increasing desire for families to entertain and relax on patios and in outdoor rooms, and to have the option to work in a home office. The appeal of these changes and their challenges energized Wright (Huxtable Ch. 10), and his buildings “manifest[ed] the actual social facts of the situation” rather than tradition (Alexander et al. 471). In Table 11, traditional architectural attempts to influence how people interact with or exclude themselves from others are compared to Wright's approaches.

Table 11. Living within Society: A Comparison of Elements and Applications

Shelter and Refuge: natural patterns and universal principles	Shelter and Refuge as design elements, pre-Wright	Shelter and Refuge as design elements in Wright's work
Living within Society	Emphasis on protection from the congestion of the dirty street and the crowds of people; to be separated from the servants, the lower classes, the rabble	Emphasis on protection from wildness of men; self-sufficiency (servants are rare); living democratically with one's neighbors, but still safe from surprise

(Note: Table created by the author of this thesis.)

Wright clearly preferred the country life for himself, and feared that fast-growing, haphazard cities were making men “less civilized” (Wright, “The City” 255-257). He believed a properly planned suburb could alleviate some of this social decline, and he and his design team developed extensive plans for such a society in his never-built Broadacre City proposal. “The fundamental unit of Broadacre City was the single-family house” (Levine 222). The primacy of the automobile was an integral part of the plans as was the intention that every family would have no less than an acre on which to build and increase their self-sufficiency, “reintegrating life in the United States on the model of

Taliesin” (Levine 221). Wright never had the opportunity to build out an entire community, but the project was evidence he was very much concerned with the relationships and social interactions fostered through thoughtful city planning. He theorized that the Broadacre resident would be rewarded with “refuge...in the free city...[having] fresh opportunity to have and to hold his own shelter secure by his own effort in his own atmosphere, free to go, stay or come” (Wright, “Democracy” 267).

Living in harmony with society includes the freedom to choose one’s level of involvement in society, and to withdraw when privacy seems more of a refuge than safety in numbers. Even though the rhythms of contemporary life had changed, the need for architecture to provide both public and private spaces was unchanged. This is a fundamental human pattern of behavior, as explained in *A Pattern Language*, and below:

In a complex social fabric, human relations are inevitably subtle. It is essential that each person feels free to make connections or not, to move or not, to talk or not, to change the situation or not, according to his judgment. If the physical environment inhibits him and reduces his freedom of action, it will prevent him from doing the best he can to keep healing and improving the social situations he is in as he sees fit.

(Alexander et al. 628)

That principle of harmony with society as a form of refuge is the same even when scaled down to the individual home. Good houses “contain a balance and variety of private and common spaces...Good houses have magnetic communal areas where people are drawn together and, connected to them at a variety of scales, rooms and places where

they can be alone” (Jacobson et al. 179). The application of several of the previously examined elements of shelter and refuge already address how a home can offer both public and private spaces. A vantage point at a sensible height with views to the outside will allow people to observe or involve themselves in the action on the sidewalk as they chose. Unbroken sightlines and open floorplans encourage interaction among the family inside the home, making the common areas “the heart and soul of the activity” (Alexander et al. 613). Enclosures and partial enclosures give options to residents to retreat from the crowd. “Wright constructed a hierarchy of public, private, and service space, giving spatial form to this hierarchy in plan, interior volume, and exterior form” (McCarter, “The Integrated” 319).

The Usonian houses, while not the only examples of living in harmony with the daily rhythms of life and society, were some of the best. They were, for starters, relatively small and cozy. Wright was well-aware Americans typically adhere to the bigger-is-better ideology. That “mere size seems to captivate” understandably frustrated him (Wright, *An Autobiography* 553), since the patterns of human behavior argue “the more monolithic the building is, the more it prevents people from being personal, and from making human contact with the other people in the building” (Alexander et al. 470). Wright’s Usonians were an attempt to reject “the overblown practice, still current in America, of setting a miniaturized planation house on an infinitesimal and unusable lawn” (Sergeant 16). Their sensible size contributed to their affordability, allowing the average middle-class American to live in a natural home with organic integrity, created to meet his needs and patterns of behavior—a democratic idea indeed.

In addition to their manageable size, they frequently included home offices, allowing work life and family life to more naturally coexist at home (Alexander et al. 53). It was not yet standard for modest homes to offer such an amenity, but the Herbert Jacobs House, Madison, WI, 1936-37, and the Malcolm Willey House (the precursor to the true Usonian), both feature a home office or study with an exterior door opening toward the garden (Wright, "Democracy" 263, 265). In addition to terrace and garden access, the Rosenbaum House's small study has its own fireplace (Sergeant 43).

Many of his homes were built with communal terraces and decks, but the best also included private terraces adjacent to a bedroom or study, Fallingwater being the most obvious example, in which every sleeping area has close access to a private deck (Hoffman 18). Other examples of a mix of private and social spaces include: the semi-open kitchens of the Usonian homes (acknowledging the dual role of cook as host), the fireplace corners and inglenooks set on the edges of large living rooms, and Fallingwater's private staircase leading to the plunge pool. Fallingwater most seamlessly incorporated the elements of design encouraging engagement with others while respecting privacy— in fact, the "entire house would be a matter of balance...between outflowing space and close sanctuary" (Hoffman 34-35).

Finally, Wright believed that his planned communities and the houses he designed for them would strengthen democracy. Living there, such a person would:

naturally inculcate high ideals in others by practicing them himself. He would insist upon opportunity for others to do no less...[knowing] all this so well the citizen would practice this knowledge instinctively in his every

public act, not only to the benefit of others who come in contact with him but to gratify something deep in his very nature. (Wright, “Democracy” 264)

The Undeniable Appeal of Building for Shelter and Refuge

Wright’s best designs provided comfort and ease of living, and a naturalness that previous architecture was not providing for most Americans. For the first time a home could be more than just a container in which a person sat and stored his things. By carefully studying the behavior of Americans and their unique spirit, he honored and shaped American culture through his organic architecture. At its core, organic architecture adapted timeless and essential principles of shelter and refuge. People felt strong and safe living in his designs. This comfort was the only luxury they needed. He gave them a sense of power and dignity they did not feel in other designs, and they loved him for it. Wright wrote:

All my clients have testified to the joy and satisfaction they get from their own particular building, believing theirs to be the best house I have built, as indeed it is for them. Their experience with the sincere try for the organic in character—the honest experiment made in their behalf—has opened a new world to and for them...and my clients are a cross-section of the distinctly better type of American...most of them with an esthetic sense of their own, many of them artistic, accomplished, and most of them traveled. (Wright, *An Autobiography* 450)

Herbert and Katherine Jacobs commissioned what would be known as the first truly Usonian home. They would write a book about how building with Wright and living in his design changed their lives, and when their family outgrew the first home, they commissioned a second larger one. The 2002 buyers of the Malcom Willey House, who spent five years restoring it, said, “the house is the epitome of shelter, not just because of the masonry walls but also due to the visceral sense of protection that comes from the deep, extending eaves and the sloping ceiling of the living room...The Willey House makes us feel like we are harbored within a primal shelter” (Thompson, “Willey” 1). In his autobiography Wright shared, “two houses were bought back again by the same people who had built them and sold them, because they said they could not feel at home in any other” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 253). Author John Sergeant relates his sensory experience when visiting several Usonian homes:

I found them to be homes that air conditioned themselves, for the... building shaded, lit, and insulated itself. These houses expressed a warmth and naturalness for which I was totally unprepared. I had come into contact with an architectural ability that I sensed had generated the relationships with trees and contours and twists and turns, all of which gave me such enjoyment. I also found built-in seats where the building made me pause. I found soft lighting from within the fabric, and above all an extraordinary flowing, contained, and varied sense of space...[varying] in materials and siting to suit their localities. (12)

Wright's entire body of work did not necessarily emphasize shelter and refuge to the extent these few famous residences did, so this time was likely the apex of his residential career. Unsurprisingly, those incredibly livable homes inspire modern residential architects even today, and the beauty and livability of their designs, a few of which are examined in the next chapter, can be traced to a continued reliance on emphasizing the principles of shelter and refuge modeled so perfectly by Wright.

CHAPTER 6

WRIGHT'S CONTINUING INFLUENCE ON MODERN
AMERICAN RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE

Wright's Usonian homes were the precursor to the ubiquitous American Ranch-style House, so one might argue that all the post-war American suburbs were inspired by Wright's work. Although there are unlimited variations, the Ranch-style House commonly addresses shelter and refuge within a single-story plan with a low roof and wide eaves, an L-shaped design creating an "outdoor room" in the backyard, sliding glass patio doors to encourage activity outside, open floor plans with long interior sightlines, and bedrooms grouped in a more private wing of the house. They were so common for so long that many do not understand Wright's hand in their popularity. Other imitations of Wright, however, are very intentional. Architect Stephen Jaskowiak, and his firm West Studio in Elmhurst, IL, established in 1986, have based their entire practice on the inspiration of "Frank Lloyd Wright and the Chicago Prairie School of Architecture" (*Prairie* 1).

The feature story in the September 2016 issue of the magazine *Log Cabin Homes* is "High Country Homage," a glossy spread announcing "Wright's influence on modern architecture remains strong," as demonstrated by the construction of a spacious home in Bozeman, Montana (Haskew 37). In addition to its more heavy-handed Prairie Style decor, such as the stained glass and wrought iron Tree of Life details throughout, the spacious home does include several elements of shelter and refuge that became second

nature to Wright. The home has two prominent, heavy, stone fireplaces: the first is located near the center of the home's interior, in the open great room; the second is double-sided, fronting both the master bedroom and the covered back patio. The patio is a true outdoor room, with walls on three sides, enclosing occupants protectively near the house and the fire while directing the view outward, under a long, low, sheltering roof in one main direction. The patio is easily accessible from the main living and dining areas of the home and from all the first-floor bedrooms, encouraging easy flow between the indoors and the outdoors, and pulling focus to the views of the nearby mountains and pond. In the master bedroom, the bed backs up to a massive custom headboard. The occupant can recline near the fire, with his back solidly protected, and train his gaze to look out into the property beyond. Though the headboard itself is not stone, stone is a prominent material for both exterior and interior walls. "The pattern of the masonry on the exterior makes [the] home stand out...Kootenai stone has been set with a band of Frontier stone at four-foot intervals to create a more horizontal effect" (Haskew 39).

A commission of architect Celeste Robbins was featured in the June 2008 issue of *Architectural Digest*. She designed a Wright-inspired "classically modern house" in Jackson, Wyoming (Turrentine 181). The reddish-brown brick of the exterior and the horizontality of the interior wood trims and finishes are strikingly similar to the Rosenbaum House and the first Herbert Jacobs House. The clients wanted the house to "blend in with the landscape...with [some] flat roofs extending into dramatic eaves that nod to Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie style" (Turrentine 185). The interior colors are taken from the "protean natural canvas, emphasizing the blues, greens, and earth colors

that predominate in the vistas” (Turrentine 206). The home features a broad, stone fireplace on an interior wall in the open-plan great room, and two others on terraces. One outdoor room terrace is enclosed on three sides, one is a sun deck, and one is a partially enclosed motor court. Extensive window walls, including corner windows, maximize sightlines and views into nature. Bedrooms are offered privacy by their location in a wing far from the common areas, accessed by a long, light-filled passageway.

Lori Ryker and Bret Nave designed a contemporary Wyoming frontier house with many of the approaches to shelter and refuge that Wright modernized. First and foremost, the house engages with the landscape. “We took our cues,” they explain, “from the rock formations and their varied colors. The exterior forms were shaped by our thinking about the interiors, and we strove to make them an integral part of this wild and beautiful landscape” (Webb 113). In his essay, “In the Nature of Materials: A Philosophy,” Wright had defended the undeniable blurring in organic architecture between inside and outside. He wrote, “We have no longer an outside as outside. We have no longer an outside and an inside as two separate things” (Wright, “In the Nature” 347). The Ryker-Nave House, featured in the February/March 2009 issue of *Western Interiors*, emphasizes most of the modern applications of shelter and refuge, but none more so than the blurring of outside and inside. “The edgy spaces of the house embrace the great outdoors” (Webb 113). The north wall of the open concept kitchen-dining-living room is a glass NanaWall Systems wall: sectional glass doors that fold up, opening the entire room to the outdoors. The master bedroom has a private deck and

“there is an un-railed roof deck above the guest room” (Webb 116). The exterior, with its low, sloping roofs, is designed to mimic the nearby cliffs and rock formations, a mix of “light and dark materials referenc[ing] the ridges and the shadows in the surrounding landscape” (Webb 121). Three decks in total and ample windows, including clerestory windows, also emphasize the indoor-outdoor appeal of this home.

Another way the designers emphasized a strong sense of shelter and refuge is the “wall of rammed earth, fifty-two feet long and two feet thick...on the south face of the house” (Webb 116). A rock wall-to-put-one’s-back-against seems to rise out of the earth and run the length of the common rooms. Two prominent masonry fireplaces are situated in central locations to maximize heating efficiency and provide a counterpoint for all the glass in the walls. The one-story home, nestled low to the ground, is actually a small compound of buildings laid out in an L-shape, connected by decks and walkways, creating outdoor rooms. The entire structure sits at a slight elevation above its closest neighbors, separated by a half-mile private drive. Private spaces include the detached guest suite and the detached home gym. This home has all the modernized, Americanized, Wright-inspired elements of an indigenous structure providing shelter and refuge.

A Seattle couple hired architect Jim McLaughlin to design a home in Ketchum, Idaho, “that would be contemporary yet wholly appropriate to its mountain setting” (Sanchez 112). McLaughlin, preferring to design homes that respond, “to the aesthetics of their surroundings ...excavated 25 feet into the hillside, so the structure seems almost to spring from the rock, with deep overhangs that protect from sun and snow and a roof

with a reverse slope,” a roof with far less pitch than is common in the area (Sanchez 112). The side view of the home and its cantilevered decks does indeed give the impression it is *of the hill*, not on the hill, in much the same way Taliesin is nestled into a hillside. In this home,

the transition from outside to inside is notably fluid...Everywhere are expanses of glass to take in those views—of nearby Baldy Mountain and miles of unspoiled land. There are no window coverings in the great room...to merge the inside and outside so seamlessly that you [lose] track of whether you [are] in or outside the house. (Sanchez 114-116)

The wall-width sliding doors from the great room to the main terrace facilitate this blending of the outside and inside.

Although they are located on exterior walls, the home boasts two heavy stone fireplaces and extensive exterior stone work. The sense of stability and connectedness to the ground is palpable. Acknowledging the need guests might have to “escape to their own place...in a house full of people,” all the bedrooms are located far from the common areas, and have access to adjoining terraces (Sanchez 118). This house allows its residents to be as involved or removed from society as they see fit. “Here, it’s as if we’re in the middle of nowhere, yet we’re close enough to be somewhere in a very short period of time. We’re far away and yet close in,” explains the owner (Sanchez 118). Featured in the October 2006 issue of *Architectural Digest*, the story of the Ketchum house and the related photographs are so impressive it might be easy to miss the small advertisement on page 224, listing for sale an original Frank Lloyd Wright house (The

Arthur Heurtley House, Oak Park, IL, 1902). Promoted there as one of the “best-preserved...and restored” of his Prairie Style houses, the asking price was \$4.9 million.

Not all of Wright’s imitators are millionaires. In November 2005, the *Better Homes and Gardens* feature story was “America’s Best New Home, Built to Live, Work, and Play.” The company surveyed 60,000 readers, and then twenty miles north of Atlanta built what it touted was a sensible suburban home that was affordable, livable, and would grow as the family grew. It was “more than just a place to hang your hat—it’s a foundation for a better life” (Frederick 205). Unsurprisingly it featured many of the elements of shelter and refuge that Wright had made popular.

The efforts to make the future residents feel they would be living-in-nature were admirable. The covered front porch is a proper outdoor room, one side of which features a slatted wood wall, offering its sitting areas privacy but also views to the street and sidewalk. The slatted screens “connect the space to the outdoors while adding a *sense of enclosure*. That dual function [giving] the option to observe street life from a *removed vantage point*, or to *engage neighbors* and passersby [emphasis added]” (Frederick 226). Around back is a large covered porch, with a folding glass wall to the open great room and folding screen walls from the deck to the yard. They believed they were taking a “new approach to outdoor spaces, making them bona fide rooms, not just seasonal amenities...a cluster of areas—from a covered porch with movable screens to a roomy open-air deck—so homeowners can enjoy the outdoors any time of year” (Frederick 220). The Wright-inspired terminology continues throughout the article’s description of this home:

An unbroken line of sight from the front door to the rear deck, guided by alternating bands of oak and limestone flooring, blurs the distinction between indoors and out. Five exterior doors permit easy transition between the interior and exterior...corner windows in every room to further connect the indoor-outdoor boundaries [emphasis added].

(Frederick 209)

Most noticeable is the flat roof with its generous eaves overhanging porches and walkways. At a glance the exterior looks very much like many of the Wright exteriors, with an emphasis on horizontal lines. Inside, the first floor features a kitchen-centric open design with long interior sightlines. From the kitchen one could see the other three common living areas in their entirety. The “absence of walls between the kitchen and surrounding rooms allows sunlight to flood in” (Frederick 215). In contrast to all the openness, the bedrooms maintained privacy, as they were all located upstairs. The living room fireplace, although not a massive stone structure in the center of the living space, was wood burning.

One of the marketing taglines for this home was “A Home for All Stages.” The design addressed the desire for people to be able to settle into a neighborhood, put down deep roots, build what they could afford for now, and then add on as their needs changed over many years. The first stage of the plan was a two bedroom, one and a half bath home. By enclosing the breezeway between the garage and house and adding square footage above as well, the house could evolve to stage two, and accommodate more children, a home office, and a hobby space. The final stage included plans by which to

transform the downstairs office and hobby room into a main-level bedroom and bath, for aging parents or those who could no longer climb stairs (Frederick 190-195). A home that would adapt as the family needed it to, Wright predicted, would foster a sense of connectedness to the site making the residents feel rooted, and would encourage people to invest well in a personalized home with integrity, secure in the knowledge they would not have to move again in a few short years:

Following [his] firsthand experience with the development of houses that can change as their occupants change in Oak Park and Taliesin, Wright planned his later Usonian houses with additions in mind, understanding that this offered him an opportunity to continue to improve and perfect the design even after it was built. (McCarter, "The Integrated" 295)

The sense of refuge and comfort such an adaptable home could provide is a chief reason it is so appealing.

These homes provide just a small sampling of the ways modern architects are following Wright's example. The most livable homes, modest or grand, acknowledge the necessity of addressing shelter and refuge in a modern way that respects modern living. The best examples bear little to no resemblance to the pre-Wright residences and their heavy European influence.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The Lloyd Joneses of Wisconsin had a family motto carved into the mantels of their fireplaces: “Truth against the world.” To be a free thinker, a non-conformist, to live as one’s conscience decreed, was “truth against the world” (Secret 8, 38). In his autobiography, Frank Lloyd Wright recalled his move from the firm of Adler and Sullivan into his own Chicago office. He lettered his name on the door and then considered including his family motto. “*Truth Against the World* is a heavy standard [emphasis in the original],” he recalled. “A flagrant banner. I had left it off the door. But it was sitting there inside” (Wright, *An Autobiography* 125).

Wright was a complicated man, an often-difficult celebrity with a huge ego. He was proud of his family motto and it is easy, when thinking of him, to assume the most important part of it must have been “against the world.” To be sure, he often found himself in that position; however, as Wright clarified his theory of organic architecture, and found a way to honor, through design, the American Everyman he admired, he found himself in the position of cultural interpreter. Frank Lloyd Wright became the person first capable of helping modern Americans understand and express what they really needed from their homes. He was most successful as an architect when he focused on the “truth” part of his family motto—revealing truth *for* the world and on behalf of the world.

He interpreted what the history of civilization was telling him about how mankind manages to live among mankind. He trusted these truths, these universal principles,

proving through his work that “principles act to order architecture” (McCarter, “The Integrated” 286). In his essay “The Integrated Ideal,” Robert McCarter eloquently summarizes Wright’s genius:

Some may believe that Wright’s work is not relevant to us today, that mankind’s situation changes and therefore mankind changes. Indeed, many contemporary concepts of space and inhabitation exhibit an unsettling spiritual vacuity; space is formed and generated not by the life of mankind but by forces of economic production thinly disguised as fashion and heavily armed with “theory.” Wright’s buildings are an indictment of...our incessant style-changes...all indicative of an almost complete absence of principles and ideals. Wright’s buildings...remind us that the nature of mankind remains the same. (336)

That shelter and refuge—both literal and perceived—are prevailing principles in successful residential design was not necessarily a mystery to be revealed. Every society in the history of mankind has instinctively known this, and unless they ignored the reality of their time and place, or irrationally imitated others, they generally built to meet these needs in the way that best fit their “here and now.” America struggled with this until Wright reminded us of the truth.

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