



The question was asked about my own house last week, so I brought in a couple slides to show you. Next week I will bring in the quarter scale model.



Last week we started this course touching on the Enlightenment and the scientific age that began to rationalize nature in the 17th century. Today's lecture on FLW's Prairie style, I will begin with a brief introduction to **Romanticism** and the spirit of **individual subjectivity** as realized through the **emotions** and the natural world, which took hold in the 19th century influencing Wright's childhood development.

When Wright was born in 1867, only 1/4 of Americans lived in cities, by the end of his life at the end of the 1950s (1959), it was almost 3/4. The world was modernizing as a result of **industrialization and the shift from an agrarian based economy to a manufactured one**. And, although Wright embraced the new machine processes, celebrating the new materials they afforded (concrete, glass, steel, laminated wood), his heart was on the side of nature and the freedom of the individual, the creative spirit. The arc of Wright's life and his work embodied the **Romantic hero, who elevated society through his innovations and vision**.

In reaction to the Enlightenment's Universal Man, the application of a single set of standards to nature, Romanticism focused on the **differences of national and ethnic cultures** - the Japanese culture the one that interested Wright.



10:10

In 1905 (38 yrs old), Wright made his first trip to Japan, traveling to many islands and towns to see in the native setting what intrigued him in 1893 Japanese Pavilion. "Becoming more closely acquainted with things Japanese, I saw the native home in Japan as **a supreme study in elimination** – not only of dirt but the elimination of the insignificant. So, the Japanese house naturally fascinated me and I would spend

hours **taking it all to pieces and putting it together again**. I saw nothing meaningless in the Japanese home and could find very little added in the way of ornament because all ornament as we call it, they get, out of the way the necessary things are done or by bringing out and polishing the beauty of the simple materials they used in making the building. Again, you see, a kind of cleanliness.



“At last I found one country on earth where **simplicity, as natural, is supreme**. The floors of these Japanese homes are made to live on – to sleep on and eat from, to kneel upon soft silken mats and meditate upon. On which to play the flute, or to make love.



“Nothing is allowed to stand long as a fixture upon the sacred floors of any Japanese home. Everything the family uses is designed to be removed when not in use and be carefully put in its proper place. It is so designed and made. Beautiful to use only when appropriate and use only at the right moment. Even the partitions dividing the floor spaces are **made removable for cleaning**. Another libation to the Shinto god of cleanliness.



“And strangely enough, I found this ancient Japanese dwelling to be a perfect example of the modern standardizing I had myself been working out. The floor mats, removable for cleaning, are **all three feet by six feet**. The size and shape of all the houses are both determined by these mats. The sliding partitions all occur at the unit lines of the mats. And they all speak of a nine, sixteen or thirty-six mat house, as the case may be.



“For pleasure in all this human affair you **couldn't tell where the garden leaves off** and the garden begins. I soon ceased to try, too delighted with the problem to solve it. There are some things so perfect that nothing justifies such curiosity. By heaven, here was a house used by those who made it with just that naturalness with which a turtle uses his shell.



“We in the **West couldn't live in Japanese houses** and we shouldn't. But we could live in houses disciplined by an ideal at least as high and fine as this one of theirs – if we went about it for a half century or so.”



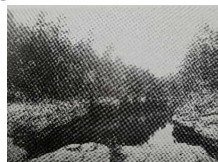
10:20

In 1890, Wright oversaw the construction of the Transportation building for the Chicago World's Fair (26 yrs old). He believed the **neoclassicist Beaux Arts** style of the fair's buildings was a setback to the independent architectural movement just getting underway in Chicago, a movement that believed an honest reflection of a building's **ornament should reflect the structure and function of a building**, declaring its purpose.

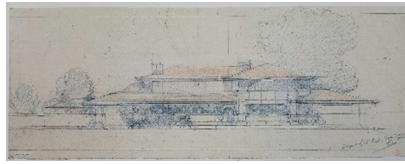


The dominate line of **classicism is the vertical column**, an abstraction of the tree, a forest of trees when in a series. But, classicism in the Beaux Arts, the vertical line had become the **man standing up against nature**. Europe had become overcrowded, overrunning nature, trees had been deforested to build cities.

The dominate line of **nature is the horizontal horizon**, the open landscape of the American prairie. Nature was Mother Earth, the ground plane extending endlessly to the horizon. As a boy, Wright worked on his uncle's farm every summer, keeping him in touch with the soil and found that **nature was a teacher** with answers to questions that theoretical learning could not explain as well.

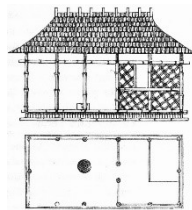


Wright said, "**Read the grammar of the earth in a particle of stone!** Stone is the frame on which the earth is modeled, and wherever it crops out - there the architect may sit and learn... the principles that shaped stone as it lies, or as it rises and remains to be **sculpted by winds and tides - there sleeps form.**"



A long low roofline and a broad low horizontal line have the suggestion of strength and repose, because of their sympathy with the earth. And as such, appeals strongly to man a creature of the earth. In the Prairie house, Wright more than any other architect, captured this **primal need for a connection with the earth**.

The **horizontal line** was both **the line of shelter**, which associated the building with the ground, and the **line of freedom**, which extended unbounded into the landscape.



When Wright arrived in Chicago (1887), many of the progressive architects were proponents of **Gottfried Semper's Four Elements of Architecture** (1851).

The **hearth** was the sacred symbol of civilization, the embryo that transformed wandering nomads into social settlements. Around the hearth, three other elements were created to protect it from the hostile elements of nature: the **roof** from the rain, the wickerwork **enclosure** from the winds, and the **mound** from floods.



Several years after the publication of his ideas in the local journal, the Inland Architect, the Japanese Pavilion came along at the World's Fair and in the minds of "all the progressives of the young Chicago school of architects" the pavilion embodied Semper's four elements: the **shrine at the heart of the Japanese temple** was the symbolic hearth, which was protected by the **broad spreading roof**, the non-structural **sliding screen walls** woven with paper over a wood frame grid, and raised off the ground by an **elevated platform**.



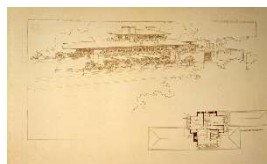
When Wright developed his concept for the Prairie house in 1901, with the publication of **A House in a Prairie Town** (Feb.1901), he described it by the same four elements outlined by Semper and illustrated by the pavilion, treating the **fireplace at the heart** of a house as a domestic shrine, the **broad overhanging roof**, the **screen of windows** woven with patchwork of stain glass, and the **elevated low base** defined by the continuous horizontal walls extending into the landscape.



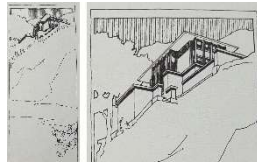
10:45

In 1909 (42 yrs old) he abandoned his family and practice, as his father had done, and left for Europe with his mistress, a former client (Mrs. Cheney). He met with Berlin's greatest art publisher **Ernst Wasmuth, to publish a portfolio of his work** to date. Rented a villa in Florence to re-draft his Prairie houses over the next two years, preparing for publication in 1911. 500 prints were sold by the publisher in Europe, making him the most widely discussed architect in Europe.

Wright returned home to Wisconsin with a second set of 500 prints. However, a **1914 fire destroyed all but a few dozen**, which showed burn marks and water damage. Realizing his mistake keeping them all in one location, he distributed the remaining sets to the apprentices working in his office at the time. One of those plates of the house for a Prairie town, I brought in for you to see during the break. (25"x16" lithograph on woven paper, from estate of Blaine & Hulda Drake)



As a long time collector of Japanese woodblock prints (since 1<sup>st</sup> Japan trip in 1905), Wright tried to approximate a similar aesthetic in the portfolio. Each of the plates, showing a **perspective in a natural landscape**, line utilized to its fullest – from a **reduction to a minimum of only the essential**, to the **intricate delineation of detail**.



As in his architecture, the drawings were as much about the **space created between the lines**, the **compositional framing on the page**, as it was about the lines themselves. Each drawing was **a complete story** of each house, that also stood alone as an art object.



Japanese prints were the only decorative art, aside from his own ornament, that he tolerated in his buildings. "If Japanese prints were to be deducted from my education, I don't know what direction the whole might have taken. The gospel of **elimination of the insignificant** preached by the print came home to me in architecture."

(1934 Christmas card given to Edgar Kaufman from Wright, **surimono print**)

[ 10 MINUTE BREAK ]

11:05



In 1915 (48 yrs old) he was commissioned to design the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, where he went and stayed until 1921 (54 yrs old) to oversee the construction. While in Japan, he received a book as a gift from the Japanese Ambassador, **The Book of Tea**. In that book was a passage, which changed Wright understanding of space:

“Only in vacuum lay the truly essential. The reality of a room, for instance, is to be found in the **vacant space enclosed by the roof and walls**, not in the roof and walls themselves.”

Classical architecture had been great masses or blocks of building material, sculpted and ornamented into shape on the inside and out. But, this Japanese concept of space took architecture entirely away from sculpture, away from painting, the building was used to create interior space, to be lived in. Architectural space was that living going on within this space of light and shadow.



That living was reflected in the Japanese pavilion's central hall, where the four rooms were defined by their functional use: a **reception area** (tsugi-no-ma), a private **sitting area** (jodan-no-ma), a **dining area** (kon-no-ma), and a **writing/library area** (shosai).

We can trace the evolution of the entry into the Prairie house, by examining the arrangement of these three rooms in the Japanese Pavilion.

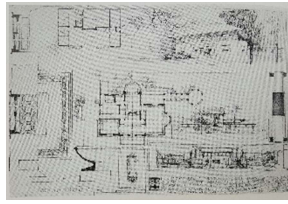


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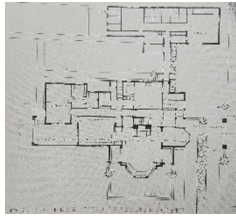
The pavilion was approached by crossing a bridge to the garden island in the lagoon, following a meandering path that leads to the front elevation of the central hall. Although this was **Wright's first introduction to Japanese siting** of buildings within the landscape, it was not that far off from the original temple.



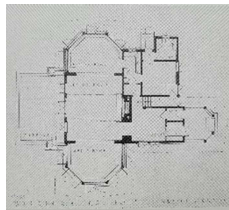
The **Byōdō-in (bee-yo-doe-ing) temple**, approached from the north **through the garden, across a bridge onto the island** where the Phoenix bird has landed, to arrive at the center of the house, **entering facing the shrine** displayed against the back wall of the central hall.



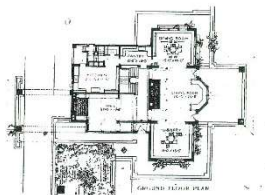
In Wright's first house influenced by his experience with the Japanese pavilion, the **Winslow house of 1893** has a **central approach symmetrically placed on the street**, entering **the central hall displaying the hearth creating the back wall, flanked by the two rooms** on the left and right. He also introduces a side entry under the porte cochere, which slips past the library to enter against the hearth.



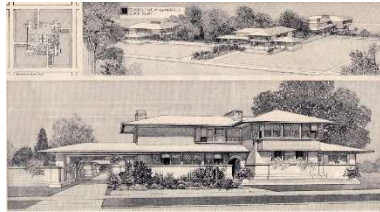
In the **Bradley house of 1900**, Wright **breaks from symmetry and places the formal entry under the porte cochere**, making **turns up steps to arrive from the side** flanking room, with a **view along the axis of the three rooms**, the hearth to the side.



With the **Hickox house, also in 1900**, Wright turns the tripartite rooms 90 degrees, **no longer classically facing the street** and thereby **enters from behind the central hall** when arriving from the porte cochere on the side of the house. This presents a **view through the central hall out across the exterior terrace**, before turning to take in the **cross view along the axis established by the central hall and two flanking rooms**, now for the first time **formally pairing the dining room and music room at opposite ends of the primary living space**.



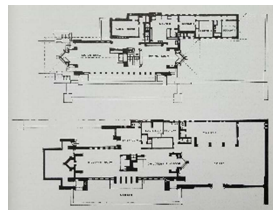
This leads to the publication of his **Prairie concept in 1901**, with the tripartite rooms again turned 90 degrees from the street, permitting the formal entry to face the street while arriving behind the hearth when entering the central living space with a view out across the exterior terrace.



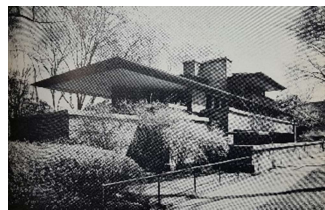
This arrangement affords two key points in the Prairie house, allows the house to be **elongated along the length of the street, emphasizing the continuous horizontal line**, while also affording the **view across the landscape prairie along the same axis**. Precisely the same framed perspective found in the central hall of the Japanese temple looking out across the gardens.



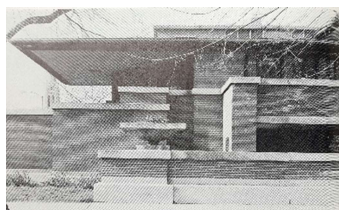
In this scheme he also **introduces the library/drawing** to counterbalance the dining room to flank the central living space, a reference to the reading/writing room of the Japanese **Shoin (show-in) room** found in the **Ginkakuji (gene-kah-coo-gee) temple**.

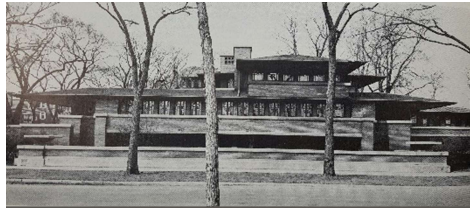


The entry takes its final turn with the **Robie house in 1909**, the formal entry is hidden in the back of the house, tucked away from view, which affords the **elongated front elevation along the street to be uninterrupted** by an entry door.



The dramatic horizontal line growing from the ground in the base walls is repeated as a horizontal plane in the daring **cantilevers of the projecting roof**. Reinforced at a smaller, more subtle scale by the elongated roman brick with red mortar only in the vertical joints, so each brick course reads as continuous horizontal bands.





He also **elevates the formal living spaces off the ground floor**, onto the piano nobile or second floor, finally realizing the raised floor of the Japanese pavilion, as well as Semper's elevated mound.



Finally, the tripartite rooms of the earlier prairie houses, taken from the room configuration of the halls in the Japanese temples, is combined into a **single open plan, continuous space, orientated along the same elongated axis** of the house and street.

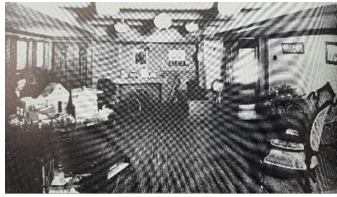


The central hall room of the Japanese pavilion that contained the shrine, has materialized into the hearth, enlarged to become the central element anchoring of the house. The flanking rooms, living and dining rooms, have become the two ends of **a singular, uninterrupted space without walls**, flowing around the central hearth.



The **exterior walls have been replaced with a band of doors** that line the entire length, just as the Japanese shoji screens that open to the outdoors, **dissolving any clear division between interior and exterior**. In the case of the Japanese, this was to **maintain a connection with the natural** gardens. In the case of the Robie house, this is to maintain a connection with open expanse of the natural prairie.

And, at the two ends, he introduces the **corner window**, wrapping the view around as in the Japanese pavilion.



## INTERLOCKING BLOCKS

Mother learned of Friedrich Froebel, the inventor of kindergarten (taught through creative play: to experience objects, colors, textures, cause and effect), at the Philadelphia's Centennial Exposition in 1876.

**interlocking combinations** of material and form in plan and volume, patterns developing sequentially in **referential play of scale**,

## PLASTICITY

Plasticity in the sequencing of space (mise en scene) flowing together; continuity between ceiling and wall; continuity between interior and exterior. (p.129)

**material plasticity**, **not limited by inherent** properties, homogeneity **without grain**,

## HORIZONTAL

The Prairie house was an extension of the earth, which was a natural architecture that grew upward from the ground.

Continuous horizontal band set at the head of the doors, was carried around the walls of the rooms. All the openings in the walls were below this line, with walls above extended to the ceiling.

The Prairie house was set upon a projecting base, a **horizontal line** of uninterrupted wall as a base course rising just below the roof, where it opened to a continuous series of windows capped by a low spreading roof with projecting eaves to impart the essential look of **shelter**.

Black wood posts and beams.

Low pitched gable roofs, with deep overhangs.

Low ceilings carried inside, contrasted with high ceilings in public rooms.

White plaster panels between darkened framework.

Intimate relationship between house and nature.

Open interior spaces, divided by sliding screens.

Separated from the garden by transparent and translucent sliding panels.

Modular organization of rectangular volumes.

Continuous horizontal line, set at the door header.

Entry gate, through garden, turns, steps, water features, entry revealed.