



FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT IN ARIZONA

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FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT'S contribution to architecture is too broad, too deep, and too omnifarious to be easily explained, and yet anyone who has a passing familiarity with it can instantly recognize his work. More than a style, it is a suite of principles – peppered, for good measure, by uniquely Wrightian idiosyncracies.

He broke the box, casting off the concept of architecture as container, instead shaping buildings to express the spaces inside them, and later creating forms that approached the expressiveness of pure sculpture. He manipulated interior space to create mood and drama. He put geometry to dazzling work, taking a basic theme of a building – wedge, triangle, circle – and spinning out its ornamentation as variations on that theme. He grasped the liberating possibilities of the twentieth century's new structural materials, steel and concrete, more thoroughly than his more formally educated contemporaries. He believed that materials should express themselves boldly and honestly.

Most importantly of all, he envisioned buildings as creations that should embrace – and be embraced by – the landscape, not foreign objects to be imposed on their sites. The color, texture, and topography of the land; and the orientation and quality of the sunlight, should deeply inform every building's design. This he considered a matter of morality rather than a mere aesthetic philosophy, and he endlessly proselytized it – he was the son and grandson of preachers, after all – to a world that saw him variously as inspiring, brilliant, exasperating, and out of touch with reality.

In the end, though, there are the buildings – amazing creations to be savored and learned from.

I have experienced a handful of magical moments in architecture, when a man-made environment gave me an unforgettable emotional shiver, and one of them occurred while visiting the drafting studio at Taliesin West more than twenty years ago. The original canvas roof had long since been replaced with translucent acrylic for better durability and insulation, but the effect of the diffused natural light was still just as Wright intended. A fluffy cloud drifted across the sun, and the mood of the room suddenly darkened, like one of those unexpected and ominous major-to-minor key changes in a Schubert piano sonata. My mood shifted too, suddenly introspective. Why, I wondered for some time afterward, would one want

a quality of light that changed with the weather, the time of day and even the season, in a work room? Well, maybe because work *should* be affected by emotion and a connection to the cadences of nature. We are not machines.