

SUMMER 2000
VOL. 11 NO. 3

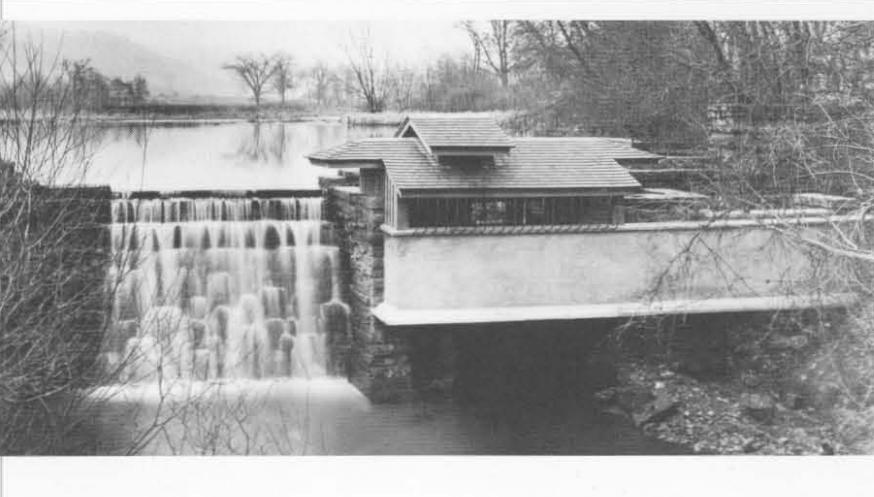
QUARTERLY

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT:
ARCHITECT OF LANDSCAPE

FRANK
LLOYD
WRIGHT

®

CONTENTS



Introduction	3
Frank Lloyd Wright: Architect of Landscape <i>by Anne Whiston Spirn</i>	4
Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation News	26
Books	27
Taliesin Architects.....	28
Wright Sites/Events Information	30

COVER PHOTO: *Taliesin, Spring Green, Wisconsin, 1993.* The Birdwalk—a long, narrow protruding balcony added to the living room porch in 1953—provides dramatic views of the Taliesin estate. Photo © Paul Rocheleau. Photo, opposite page, © Roger Straus III, from the soon-to-be-released book, *Wright on Wright*.



FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT QUARTERLY

Summer 2000

Published by The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation
Taliesin West, Scottsdale, AZ 85261

Editor: Suzette Lucas
Assistant Editor: Dan Bitenc
Copyeditor: Alice Urban
Designer: Robert Miller

Board of Trustees

Hamilton McRae III, Chairman, Paradise Valley, AZ
Dr. H. Nicholas Muller III, CEO and President
Effi Maria Casey, Scottsdale, AZ
E. Thomas Casey, Scottsdale, AZ
David E. Dodge, Scottsdale, AZ
Gary K. Herberger, Paradise Valley, AZ
Jeanne Lind Herberger, Paradise Valley, AZ
David O. Justice, Oak Park, IL
Charles Montooth, Spring Green, WI
Minerva Houston Montooth, Scottsdale, AZ
George A. Nelson, Madison, WI
Stephen Nemtin, Scottsdale, AZ
Scott William Petersen, Chicago, IL
Harold Price, Laguna Beach, CA
Arnold Roy, Scottsdale, AZ
Joan Smith, Washington, D.C.
Elke Vormfelde, Scottsdale, AZ
Eric Lloyd Wright, Malibu, CA

Taliesin Council

Harold Price, Chairman, Laguna Beach, CA
Aaron G. Green, San Francisco, CA
Elizabeth Wright Ingraham, Colorado Springs, CO
Hamilton McRae, Paradise Valley, AZ
Thomas Monaghan, Ann Arbor, MI
Michael Riddle, Scottsdale, AZ
Donald Schaberg, Okemos, MI
Vernon Swaback, Phoenix, AZ
Edgar Tafel, New York, NY
Mae Sue Talley, Washington, D.C.
Virginia Ullman, Phoenix, AZ

Suzette Lucas, Director of External Affairs

The *Frank Lloyd Wright Quarterly*
is published four times a year
in January, April, July and October.

The *Quarterly* is a member benefit for the
Foundation's support groups,
The Frank Lloyd Wright Association
The Frank Lloyd Wright Society

To find out more about membership contact:

The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation
External Affairs Office
Taliesin West
Scottsdale, AZ 85261-4430
(480) 860-2700
www.franklloydwright.org

FRANK LLOYD

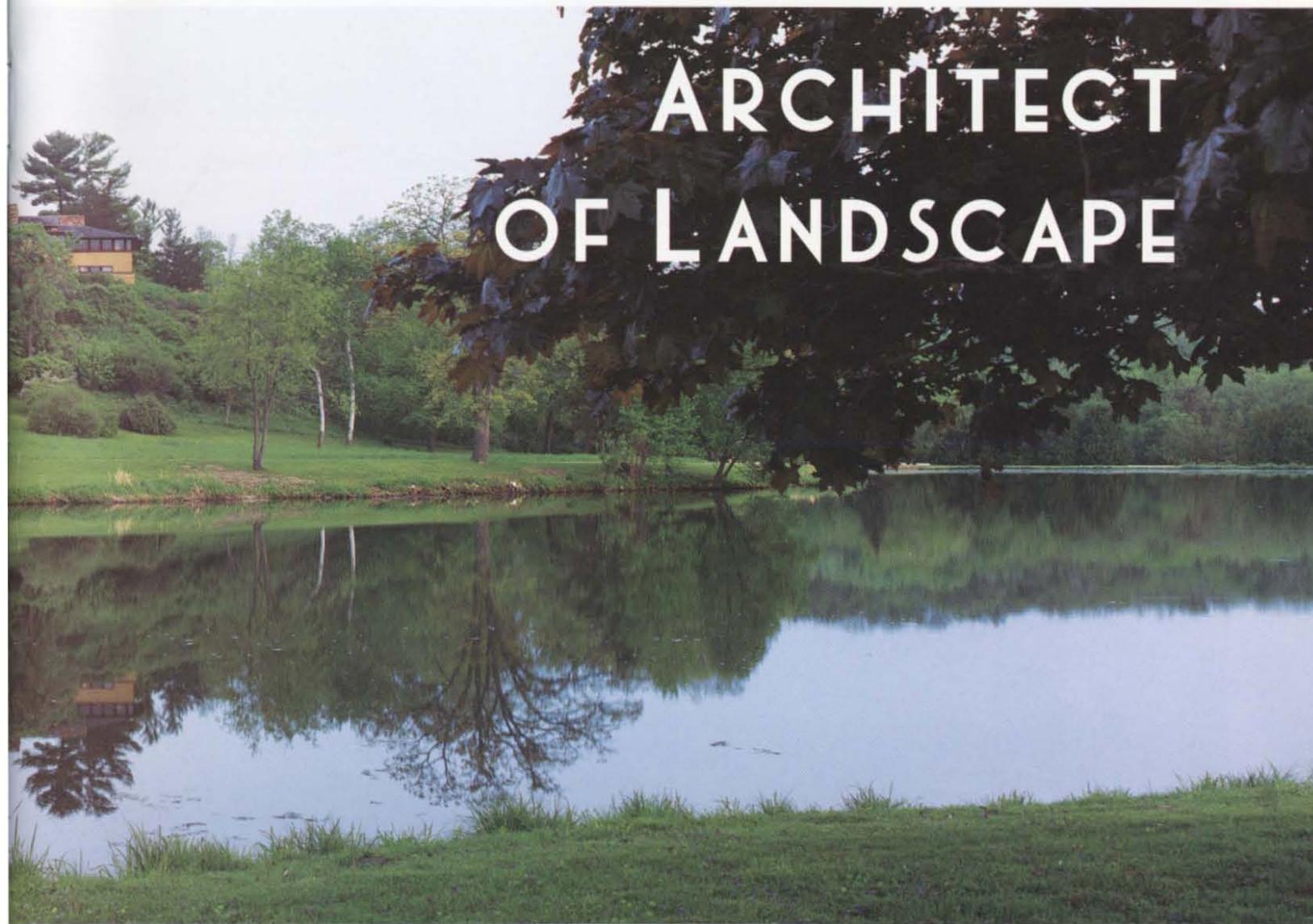


Although the name Taliesin is most often associated with the personal residence of Frank Lloyd Wright, the term also applies to the entire 600-acre property located in the Jones Valley near Spring Green, Wisconsin. Other buildings located on the estate are Hillside Home School, Midway Farm, Tan-y-deri, and the Romeo and Juliet Windmill. In addition to the main residence (pictured above in a 1998 photo) the other buildings, landscaped grounds, roads, dam, and pond are all part of Wright's overall architectural composition. Photo © Roger Straus III. (Inset) Frank Lloyd Wright and his wife, Olgivanna, at Taliesin during the 1950s. Photo courtesy Frank Lloyd Wright Archives.



Y D W R I G H T :

THE ARCHITECT OF LANDSCAPE



By Anne Whiston Spirn

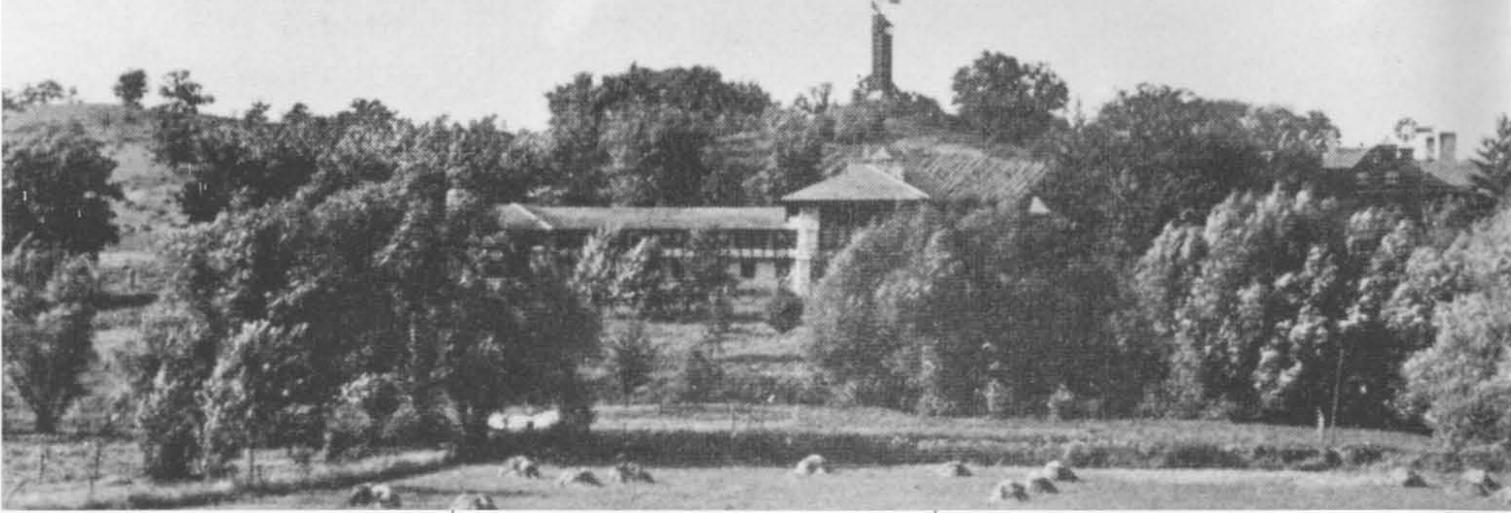
Writings, drawings, and built work all testify to Frank Lloyd Wright's lifelong passion for nature and landscape. He wrote dozens of essays on the subject, more than any other architect, living or dead. He was a keen observer of natural form and an experienced architect of landscape. Hundreds of drawings display his interest and insight: rhododendron and pine cap-

tured in a few pencil strokes, plans covered with detailed notes on planting and grading, sections showing deft modifications to terrain. Like the Japanese landscapes he admired, some of Wright's greatest works were large compositions of buildings and gardens, roads and waterways, fields and groves.

Despite the centrality of nature and landscape to Wright's life and work, there is little written on his landscape compositions, certainly no comprehensive or definitive treat-

ment, and few seminal works, with the result that his landscape compositions are frequently misunderstood. What accounts for the puzzling void and the persistent misreadings in studies of such a great architect? The answer lies in the complexity of the subjects—in the nature of landscape, in the nature of Wright.

Landscapes are both given and built; they are phenomena of nature and products of culture. Landscapes comprise rivers, hills, trees, buildings, and roads. Scales and bound-



Wright's ancestors settled the Jones Valley where he would later establish Taliesin. By the time this photo was taken in 1902, Wright had designed the Romeo and Juliet Windmill, center, on top of hill, and the second building, foreground, for the Hillside Home School, founded by his aunts.

In 1948 Wright supervises apprentices working the farmland at Taliesin. All photos courtesy Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, except where noted.

aries are fluid; a small garden is a landscape; so is a valley. The hill garden at Taliesin, with its grassy mound, trees, walls, and steps, is a landscape; so is the complex of house, terraces, courtyards, and gardens all built into and around the hill, as is the larger Jones Valley, with its buildings, roads, fields, groves, streams, ponds, and hills. Jones Valley, in turn, is but a small part of the even larger landscape of the Wisconsin River Valley, with its rivers, forests, towns, and highways. Seen thus, landscapes and buildings are continuous, not contiguous. A landscape resists perception as an

object or even "an expanse of scenery seen by the eye in one view," a typical dictionary definition. Landscapes are dynamic and evolving, not static, their surface the sum of processes—water flow, plant growth, human dwelling. Landscape is the material context within which we live: the habitats we humans share with other organisms, the places we shape to express our ideas and values.

In modern use, the words "landscape" and "nature" are often employed interchangeably. But nature is an idea, not a place; an idea, moreover, for which many cultures have no single name or notion. Many critics have interpreted Wright's statements about nature in light of the word's modern use, and this has led them to mistake his reverence for nature as deference to landscape. Wright consistently capitalized "Nature," but never "landscape."

Wright's understanding of nature was grounded in his family's Emersonian philosophy; he was steeped from early childhood in countless quotations, discussions, and sermons drawn from Emerson's writings. Wright's knowledge of landscape came from experience; observing and shaping landscapes were part of everyday life from the time he plowed, planted, hoed, and harvested fields as a boy, to when as a man he terraced hillsides, planted gardens and groves, dammed streams to generate power and make lakes and waterfalls, laid out contours for



plowing that traced curving landforms, and selected sites for Sunday picnics. Such philosophy and experiences were a central part of the life he designed for and shared with Taliesin's apprentices from 1932 until his death in 1959.

What Wright said and wrote about nature and landscape and what he actually did were complex

and sometimes seem contradictory. Without a clear-eyed comparison to the built, his texts have served mostly to confuse. Were one dealing with another architect, one might attribute his apparent inconsistencies to a superficial appreciation of nature and landscape. This was certainly not the case with Wright. Given his background, one must see Wright's

Hillside Home School with the Hillside Studio addition appears in the left foreground in this 1955 aerial photo of the Taliesin estate. The Wisconsin River can be seen in the distance, across County Highway C.





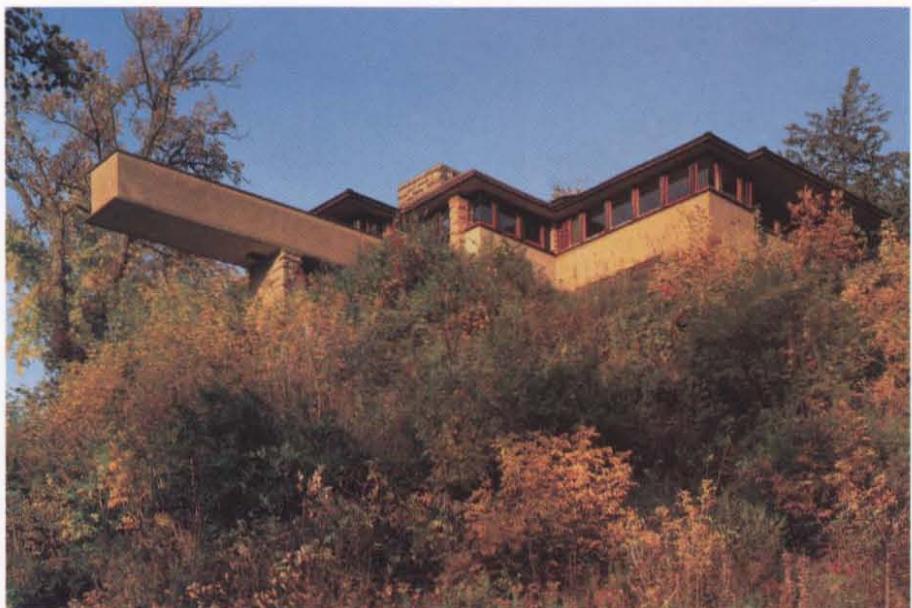
landscapes as deliberate constructions. Apparent contradictions between texts and works are clues to Wright's priorities and intentions, to the evolution of his ideas, or to ways that our own assumptions and perceptions may differ from his. Wright wrote many texts over half a century (1894-1959) for different purposes (self-expression, self-promotion, self-justification, teaching). While numerous themes remained constant throughout his career, certain important ideas and their application to landscape design developed over time.

The key to understanding Wright's approach to landscape design (including his grand, unrealized projects of the 1920s) lies in the landscapes where he made his home and exerted continuous influence for decades: the Jones Valley of southern Wisconsin and the desert of central Arizona. He was born to the first and chose the second; the two must be seen together, as he experienced them, the one in contrast to and clarifying the other. Hundreds of photographs spanning nearly sixty years document his engagement with these landscapes. Dozens of quick sketches and plans covered with scribbled notes are windows into his thinking about these places across the years. These images enable us to assess what he actually did, year by year, to follow the dialogue between built landscapes and texts, to identify the principles that guided the work.

"Truth in Beauty": Unifying Jones Valley

Any account of Frank Lloyd Wright and landscape must begin with the place where Wright's autobiography begins and ends—the Jones Valley, near Spring Green, Wisconsin. One cannot overemphasize the significance of this place for Wright. It was his home, school, laboratory, touchstone.

Comparing views of the valley a century or more ago with the same



views today, one is struck by the contrast between rough and smooth, by how profiles of landforms have been rounded and ordered. The landscape appears sculpted, and indeed it is. A grove of trees rounds off the angular top of Midway Hill; rows of curving crops accentuate the landform. Gone are a host of buildings and fences that once stood down in the valley along the main road; only buildings designed by Wright himself remain in view along the western slopes. Just as eighteenth-century English landowners embellished their estates—planting groves, damming streams to form lakes, moving whole villages, building landmarks to guide the gaze—Wright

(Opposite page) Water features are an integral part of the landscape at Taliesin including this small pond outside of the garden room of the house. Photo © Jim Wildeman. (Above) The soaring Birdwalk, added to Taliesin in 1953, provides a dramatic view of the valley and, looking back, a rare perspective on the house itself. Photo © Paul Rocheleau. (Bottom) In 1948 Wright and his wife, Olgivanna, stroll near the Romeo and Juliet Windmill on the Taliesin estate.

transformed Jones Valley into a celebration of the landscape of southwestern Wisconsin and the cultural heritage of his mother and her family. Wright would certainly have agreed with landscape architect Humphrey Repton (1752-1818) who asserted that "to improve the scenery of a





10-A

country, and to display its native beauties with advantage" is an art; Repton's three principles—utility, proportion, and unity—were among Wright's own.

The Lloyd Jones family arrived in the valley in 1856. They found a long valley enclosed by parallel, lobed ridges of flat-bedded limestone and sandstone that formed smaller valleys within the larger whole. A stream flowed through the valley and out into the broad floodplain of the Wisconsin River. The Lloyd Jones family planted crops and built a homestead near where the Hillside Home School buildings now stand. From the home farm at Hillside, they gradually expanded their holdings. By the time Frank Lloyd Wright spent summers on his Uncle James's farm, in the 1870s and 1880s, his grandparents, uncles, and aunts owned and farmed much of the valley. Wright began to shape the valley through commissions for family members well before he began Taliesin in 1911: Unity Chapel (1886); buildings for his aunts' Hillside Home School (1887)(1902); the Romeo and Juliet windmill (1896); and Tan-y-deri (1907), the house for his sister Jane.

From 1911, when his mother purchased just over thirty-one acres for

him, Wright quickly extended the scope of his interventions to the land itself: clearing trees and brush, planting gardens and groves, damming the stream, and grading roads. He expanded his holdings whenever possible, gradually consolidating many small farms into one large estate. By the time of his death in 1959, the Taliesin Fellowship—the residential community of architects and apprentices living at Taliesin and Taliesin West—controlled about three thousand acres within and beyond the valley. Over the course of half a century, from 1911 to 1959, Wright reshaped the valley to conform to his ideals and those of his family, giving form to their Emersonian philosophy and their motto—unity. Wright said in his 1932 autobiography that while his family had stressed the "beauty of truth," they had neglected the "truth of beauty," and he set out to redress that failure. The glory of Taliesin as it ultimately evolved was in the whole landscape of hills and valleys, buildings and roads, fields, gardens, and groves, the disparate elements unified in a sweeping composition. By 1959, his words of 1932 were no longer an exaggeration: "I saw it all, and planted it all."

Wright took an extraordinary series of photographs of the valley



around 1900, a decade before he began Taliesin. The photographs presented his aunts' boarding school to prospective students and their families. Several show building interiors, but most depict outdoor play and the surrounding valley. These images, when compared to a succession of photographs taken by others from 1912 to 1959, form a benchmark from which to assess how he changed the landscape. Two of them are especially fine, including one of the ponds below the Hillside Home School where the composition is reminiscent of Japanese prints and Wright's own drawings of this time

(fig. 10-A). The other is particularly important, for it depicts the hill now occupied by Taliesin, with Midway Hill beyond (fig. 11-A). Wright shot three views of this hill (actually the end of a ridge), all from a vantage not visible from the school or even from his family's lands. All other views are closer to the school or within its view. The perspective and number of these images from 1900 demonstrate Wright's interest in the site ten years before its purchase. The quality of the photograph reproduced here reveals the affinity Wright felt for the place. The other two images are useful as context and

Frank Lloyd Wright took these three photographs around 1900. (Opposite page) 10-A: A view of the skating pond and Jones Valley, looking east from below Hillside Home School near Unity Chapel. Whi (x3) 47173. (Top this page) 11-A: A view of two hills showing the future site of Taliesin, at right, with Midway Hill in the background, from County Highway C near the present entrance to Taliesin. Whi (x3) 47172. (Bottom this page) 11-B: A view of the Jones Valley, looking northwest from near the current intersection of Highway 23 and County Highway T. Midway Hill is at far left, Taliesin Hill at center. Whi (x3) 52391. Three photos courtesy State Historical Society of Wisconsin.



11 - A



11 - B

points from which to assess subsequent change; together they comprise a panorama of the valley from south to north and show several buildings that Wright later tore down or moved (the southwestern portion is illustrated in fig. 11-B).

In 1900, there were a few trees in the ridgeline pasture and second-growth trees and shrubs on the steep, north- and east-facing slopes where Wright built his house, Taliesin, ten years later. A soil survey of 1914 identified the soils on the property: the most fertile land was on the valley floor and lowest slopes (now under cultivation or underwater); the high ground was rough and stony, the weathered rock crumbly, the soil highly erodible. The report recommended cultivating the gently sloping, lower land and warned that most of the remaining land should be used as pasture or, where slopes were steep, kept as woods. Wright ultimately managed the landscape in keeping with these recommendations, particularly as he gained agricultural experience (figs. 12-A, 12-B, 19-A, 19-B). He built his house on a band of rough, stony land just below the hilltop—the least fertile soil on his property—and retained the woods on steep slopes below. Wright also knew from experience how cold the exposed ridgelines were in winter, how hot the valley bottom could be in summer, and how cool the breezy upper slopes were, especially under the shade of trees. That “no house should ever be on any hill . . . {it} should be of the hill” is a principle well known to farmers. (Yet this statement by Wright in his autobiography must be taken with a grain of salt; Wright did build atop the hill here—the tower and dining room—and elsewhere.)

(Top) 12-A: Striped gardens of vegetables and flowers along contours near Hillside, 1940s. (Center) 12-B: Frank Lloyd Wright's Farm Plan, 1920s-30s. (Bottom) Midway Farm, 1970s.



From the edge of this ridge near the end of Jones Valley, where Wright built his home, there were sweeping views of the Wisconsin River, Tower Hill, and distant hills across the broad, level floor of the ancient river's flood plain. There were also more enclosed views within the smaller valley, up to Uncle James's farm and the family chapel, and back to Romeo and Juliet above Hillside. Windows framed these prospects: the living room provided a series of square views panning north-northwest to south-southeast, from Wisconsin River to Unity Chapel; Wright's bedroom/study looked out toward Hillside, a view of rolling hills punctuated by Romeo and Juliet. As Wright wrote in *Architectural Forum* in January 1938, "Landscape seen through the openings of the building thus placed and proportioned has greater charm than when seen independent of the architecture. Architecture properly studied in relation to the natural features surrounding it is a great clarifier and developer of the beauty of the landscape."

Wright shaped landscapes as scenes framed by windows and designed buildings to be seen as part of a landscape. Views of the surrounding landscape from within Taliesin house were as artfully composed, as carefully selected as the Japanese paintings and prints on the walls. The clerestory windows in the studio (now the office) frame a view of the hilltop much like a long scroll punctuated by slender, vertical mullions: the outline of the knoll, the tree in the tea circle, and the sky beyond. In the loggia, the correspondence between framed views of the landscape outside and of Japanese landscape paintings hung on the walls inside is deliberate and explicit. In 1914, the windows of the loggia were set in frames whose top and bottom were continuations of those of the Japanese landscape painting on the adjacent wall. In 1925, the



Views of the surrounding landscape from inside the Taliesin house were artfully composed as seen in these three images taken in the 1990s from, above, Wright's study and bedroom; left, the loggia; and below, the garden room. Bottom photo © Jim Wildeman.





(Left) 14-A: Hill garden and tea circle with fields beyond, 1911-12. Photo by Henry Feumann. (Center) 14-B: View of hill garden and tea circle, 1934-37. Photo courtesy State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Howe Collection, Whi (x3) 52627. (Bottom) 14-C: View of hill garden, late 1930s. Photo courtesy State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Howe Collection, Whi (x3) 52628.

windows of the loggia were replaced by a series of long, narrow, glass doors—like a Japanese screen—that frame a view of the hills across the valley: Bryn Mawr, Bryn Canol, and Bryn Bach, all named by his grandparents. Wright fitted inner shutters made from a lacquer screen of teak with gold-colored glass of a rosy cast like the gold backdrop of a Japanese painting. The wood frames blocked the balcony and roof overhang from view when the doors were closed. Art and life, landscape and building, all merge here.



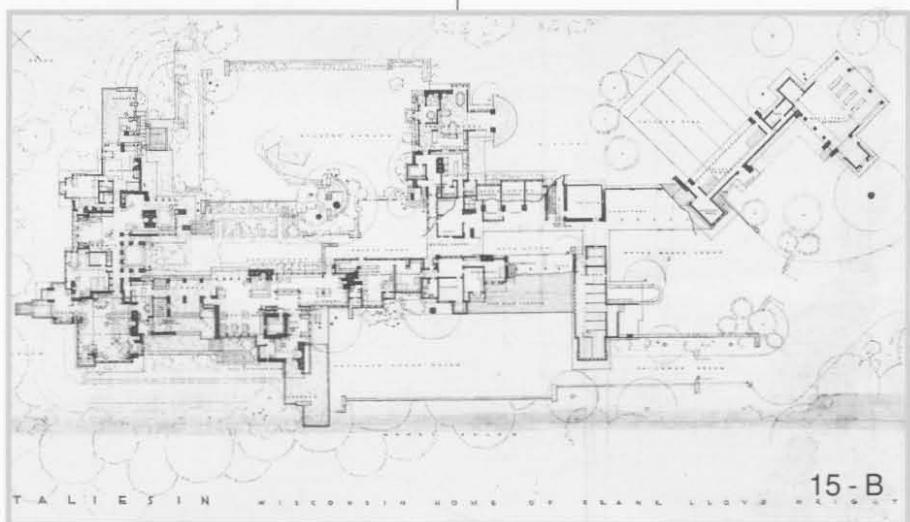
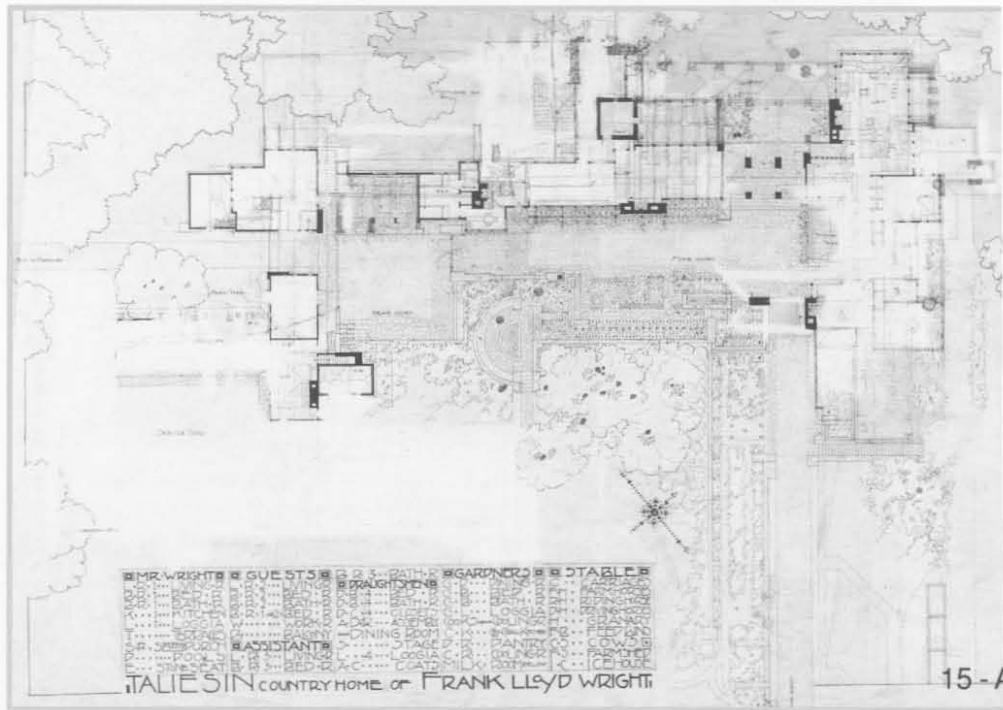
Taliesin—“shining brow”—is an apt name for this place where building, landscape, and life are united. The English word “brow” links landform and human face; it originally referred to eyebrow and only later to landform. The brow of a hill, according to *Oxford English Dictionary*, is its “projecting edge . . . standing over a precipice.” At Taliesin, the buildings rest on a notch cut into the hillside and jut out over the steep slopes below to form the brow. Perched terraces and garden “rooms” were a distinctive part of Taliesin from the outset, as was the entrance drive up a long, steep slope. Originally, carriages and cars drove up the entrance road—retaining wall and hill on the left—through a porte-cochere, took a sharp turn into an intimate, walled court between buildings and hill—the drive flanked by flowers—then



out another gate into a square court-yard (fig. 15-A). When Wright later rerouted the entrance road down-slope of the buildings, the basic configuration and character of the inner courts remained the same and persists today; the farmyard was elaborated as a work court and an upper motor court (fig. 15-B). The tea circle and hill garden also appear in photographs of Taliesin from 1912 and early plans and drawings (fig. 14-A). The prospects they afford are counterpoints to the refuge provided by the courts.

Many features of Taliesin's buildings and gardens resemble photographs, attributed to Wright, of Fiesole, Italy, in 1910 and match his reminiscences in *An Autobiography*: walking up "the hill road" with his mistress, Mamah Borthwick Cheney, into a narrow street bordered by walls, walking in "the high-walled garden that lay alongside the cottage," and sitting near a "little fountain." One senses Wright strove to build Mamah's life into the gardens at Taliesin as well as the house; the suite of walled courts, tea circle, and hill garden embody memories of their short, shared life.

Notwithstanding the undeniable connections to Wright's Italian experience, the courts and gardens at Taliesin bear a strong resemblance to the work of Gertrude Jekyll in the vocabulary of flower borders, walls, steps, and pools and the geometry of their structure (figs. 14-A, 15-A). Wright was familiar with Jekyll's work. He read *Home and Garden* in 1900, the year it was published, and said it was a book "that should be in every library," for it exemplified his own approach to landscape design. Jekyll opened *Home and Garden* with a description of her newly built house. The site was near her childhood home, the house built of "sand-stone that grows in our hills," its oak beams cut from trees along a nearby land she remembered admiring when



she was young. This text must have resonated deeply in Wright, who was photographing Jones Valley about that time and perhaps thinking already of the home and garden he would build there.

Debts to English and Italian gardens and landscapes do not diminish Wright's achievement at Taliesin. His genius lay in assimilating diverse traditions, exploiting them for his own ends, blending them in a fresh expression that was undeniably his own. As he said himself, "The New in art is always formed out of the Old."

(Top) 15-A: Plan of Taliesin by Frank Lloyd Wright, ca. 1912. (Bottom) 15-B: Plan of Taliesin, ca. 1925. Both images © Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation.

The tea circle is a pivotal place that negotiates a graceful transition between the lower courts and the hill garden. Like that of the courts, the form of the tea circle was established early and has remained relatively constant since 1912. One can see it as an exedra, a semi-circular niche with a bench, and appreciate its relation to similar essays of steps, niches, and benches in Italian and English gardens; perhaps there is also a bit of the Japanese in the turn and turn again movement as one mounts and descends. It was sometimes referred to as the "council ring," suggesting a link to Jens Jensen's council rings, gathering places defined by circles of stones around a campfire. In the tea circle, instead of fire at the center, there was once "a spring or fountain that welled up into a pool at the center of the circle." All of these influences may have come into play, but Wright transformed them into this wonderful place, so shady and breezy on a hot summer's day, a delight to the eye, to the body in movement.

Taking tea in the tea circle became a daily ritual at Taliesin from the 1930s if not before: "The four o'clock tea bell brings the Fellowship together for a welcomed respite from the day's work. Cooling sounds of ice rattling in tall glasses fall on ear as we climb the steps to the circular stone bench the 'council ring.'" Wright knew how to enjoy a garden.

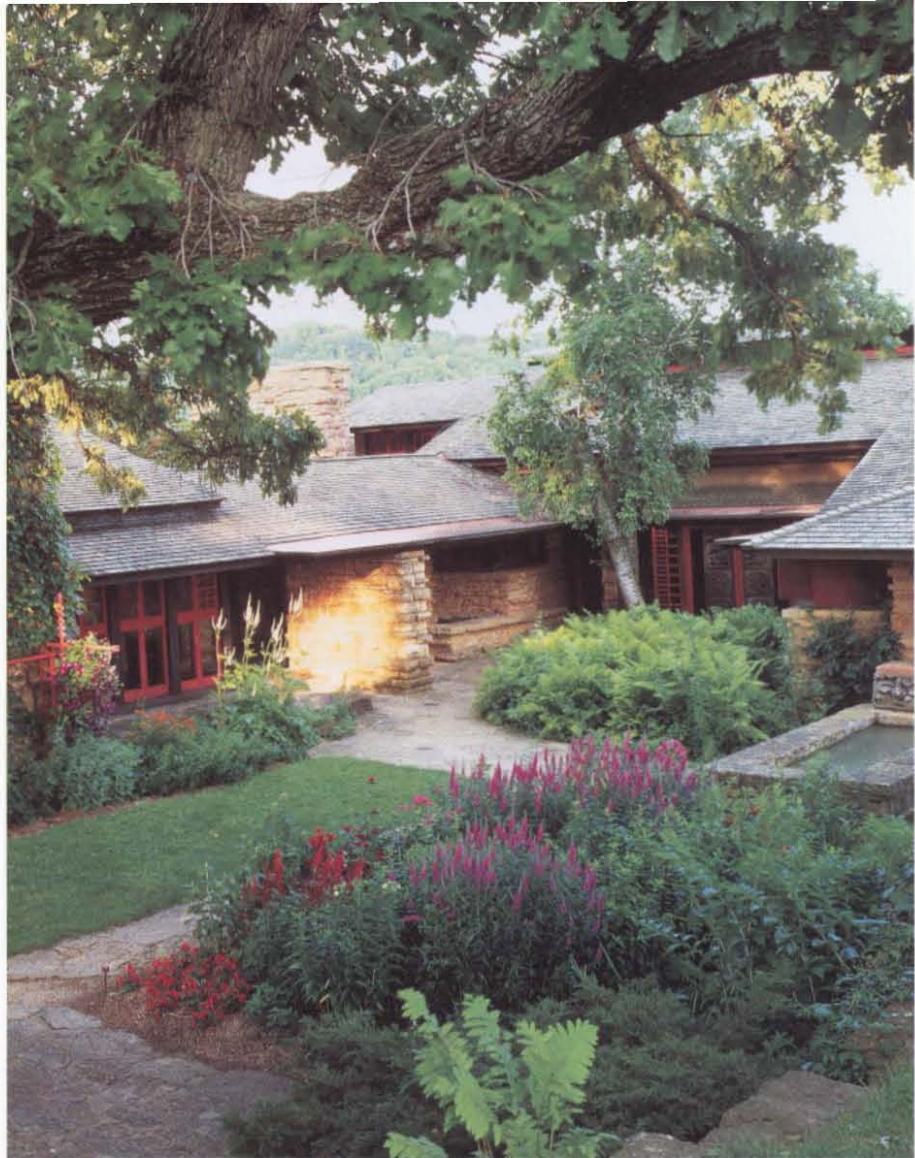
Unlike the tea circle and lower courts, the hill garden changed radically over time. It is completely misleading to say, as many critics have, that Wright "preserved" the hill or left it "undisturbed," for he transformed it from rough pasture in a grove of trees into an open, rounded mound. In fact, it is not really a hilltop so much as the lowest end of a long ridgeline (fig. 11-B). Wright made it seem like the top of a hill by concealing the higher portion of the ridge with a wing of buildings and by directing the gaze southward to where the slope falls away beyond the garden wall. By the late 1930s, the profile of the hill garden was a

smooth curve covered with soft, closely clipped grass (fig. 14-C). Originally, the ridge was flatter on top, its form less perfectly round; this is clearly visible in a photograph of 1912, before the steps were built from tea circle to "hilltop." Another photograph from approximately the same time shows the hill garden as a grove of trees with rough grass underneath—much like the pasture it had been (fig. 14-A). Gradually the trees disappeared, all remnants of the stumps were removed, and the long grass was replaced with turf. Wright inserted cut stones into the turf—an idealized version of limestone ledges—and rounded and smoothed the landform into a representation, an abstraction of a hilltop (fig. 14-B, 14-C). This was typical of how he rounded off the valley as a whole through a gradual simplification of the given form. Ironically, like much of the rest of the landscape Wright graded and planted, the mounded slope and ledges of the hill garden have often been seen as naturally



occurring rather than constructed. Even many of the apprentices who arrived after the mid-1940s assumed that the ledges and smooth terrain had just always been there. Like the browhouse, the hill garden embodies a correspondence between human body and landform—a round mound, like a breast or pregnant woman's swelling belly, enclosed by angular walls of stone and surmounted by the tower with dovecote. Given Wright's belief in the symbolism of forms—described in his 1912 writings, "The Japanese Print"—and the association of doves with love and devotion, it seems reasonable to read the circular mound as feminine and the square enclosure as masculine. It can be further interpreted as a memorial to Mamah and Mother, as representing the fertility of the valley embraced by the lover, son, architect.

The wall surrounding the hill garden sets it off from the surrounding landscape. There was a distinct difference between the two from at least the 1920s; rough meadow of long



grasses grew right up to the wall and was juxtaposed to the clipped grass within the enclosure. Abstraction of landscape features and juxtaposition of the wild and the domesticated were strategies Wright frequently employed later; in fact they became signal characteristics of his landscapes from the 1920s on, including the unbuilt projects of that decade, such as Doheny Ranch and San Marcos in the Desert. He built the cantilevered terrace outside his bedroom/study just below the hilltop in 1937 (fig. 18-A) at about the same time he was also designing Fallingwater. Here also, the built is juxtaposed to the wild. The terrace juts out over the wooded slope below, affording views over the lake, across the valley to the chapel and the farm, where he used to stay as a boy, and back beyond Midway across the hill to

(Opposite) The hill garden at Taliesin changed radically over time. Wright transformed it from a rough pasture in a grove of trees into an open, rounded mound. Photo © Roger Straus III. (Top) The wings of the house, on the right, and the studio, on the left, wrap around an intimate garden courtyard. Photo © Judith Bromley. Both photos taken in the 1990s.



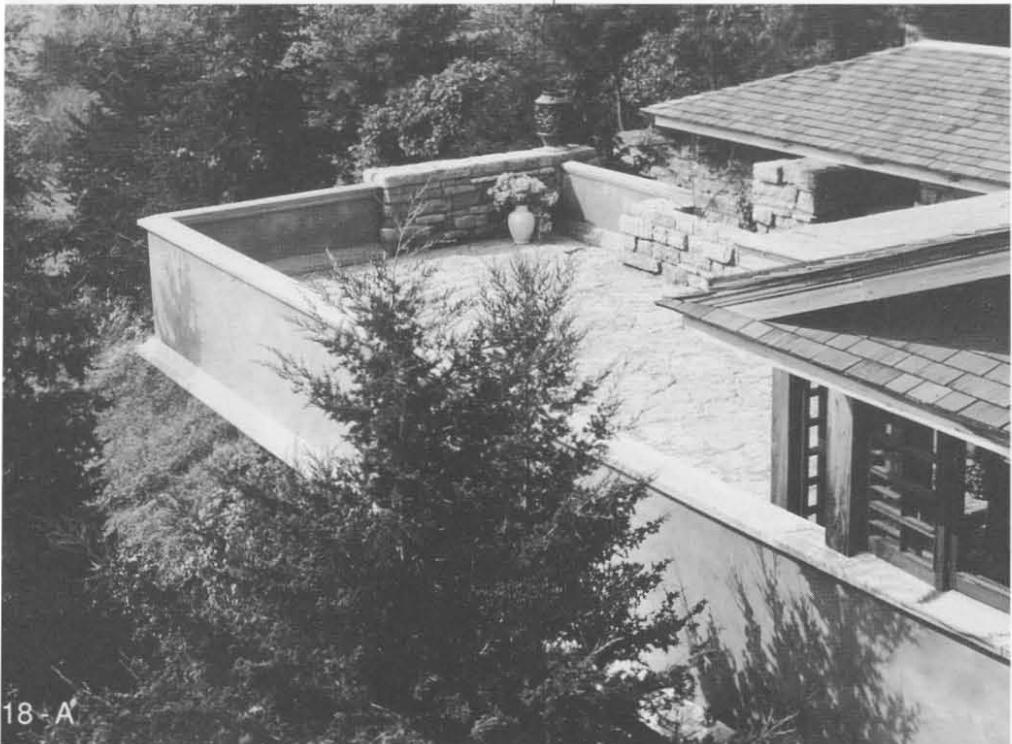
(Below, top) 18-A: The terrace outside Wright's study is cantilevered over the wild, wooded landscape below. 1938-51. Courtesy State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Howe Collection, Whi (x3) 48219. (Bottom) 18-B: Cisterns and grid of gardens on slopes below Taliesin, after 1914. Courtesy Frank Lloyd Wright Archives.

Romeo and Juliet and Tan-y-deri. This elevated prospect gives one a sense of comfortable control, like lord of the manor, over all one surveys.

In his autobiography Wright said that Taliesin was planned as "a garden and a farm behind a workshop and a home." Outside the wall on the southwest-facing slope, Wright planted a large orchard and vineyard. These remain today, though the vineyard is much smaller. The S-shaped stone retaining wall on the southeast-facing slope once incorporated cisterns to irrigate the gardens

below, laid out in a grid; they are depicted in a photograph and on drawings of about 1912 (figs. 15-A, 18-B). Apparently the gridded gardens were designed to present a colorful pattern, for people reportedly drove by just to look at them. This was a poor location for gardens and for such a layout; the slope was steep and the soil too erodible. The gridded gardens soon disappeared and were replaced by grass and trees; the cisterns remain (although they were no longer operative by the late 1930s). Grapevines and vegetable gardens were planted later in long, straight rows more or less aligned along the contours (figs. 12-B, 19-B). Vegetable and flower gardens were moved finally to a field near Hillside, where crops and flowers were planted in colorful, curving bands like contour lines (fig. 12-A). By the late 1930s Wright employed contour plowing for the farm fields. This must have appealed to him as a way to fuse patterns of work and landforms, for he celebrated the way agricultural labor shaped the land: "The entire field is become a linear pattern—a plan of routine. Work." According to Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, director of the Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Wright had the contoured plow lines recalibrated every few years, and not just for aesthetic reasons; he was adamant about not losing soil. Whenever the ground was regraded, as around the newly built upper dam in 1947, strips of sod were cut from the pasture and laid out along the graded slopes, and then bare soil in between was seeded with grass. Cornelia Brierly, an early Wright apprentice, recalls that professors from the University of Wisconsin brought their students to see Wright's contour planting. "He laid it all out; it was beautiful," she said.

The lower hills in the valley are generally rounded and rolling. Where the rock crops out, at Midway, for example, the hills tend



18-A



18-B

to be more ragged. This is quite clear in winter; as the sun moves behind Midway, light comes through the trees and silhouettes their branches, revealing the ground plane as a pyramidal mass. Wright rounded off Midway Hill by permitting trees to grow up on the side facing Taliesin in the 1950s. The result was a convex form, in contrast to the original, straighter slopes, which were eroded and rocky; he left open the rounder form facing Hillside and behind. Just above Midway, the croplines and the road curve with the land-form.

Various plans depict the landscape as it existed and as Wright envisioned it might be: "Garden planning at Taliesin is done in the same way as building planning. Using a large map of the farm and a box of colored pencils, the entire garden layout is planted." Successive site plans delineate fields and allocate crops among them; Wright reviewed and revised the plans periodically. An early plan, published in 1913, features a "water garden," orchards, vineyard, reservoir, and the gridded gardens. Notes on this plan show that Wright conceived plantations on a grand scale: "1000 barberry (1/3 dwarf), 1000 hawthornes, 1000 plums (assorted), 100 weeping willows, 500 rosa rugosa, 500 white pines." Wright later used a survey of 1920 as a base for several plans that seem to fall roughly into three time periods: 1920s-30s, 1930s-40s, 1940s-50s (fig. 12-B).

With the arrival in 1932 of the first apprentices, Wright had the labor force to work on an expanded scale commensurate with his vision. Later plans are covered with notes on what existed ("Quack grass patch covered up with tar paper") and what could be, drawn changes to roads, and written instructions regarding things to do ("take out fence, use this fence elsewhere," "clear away brush leaving only good-



19-A



19-B

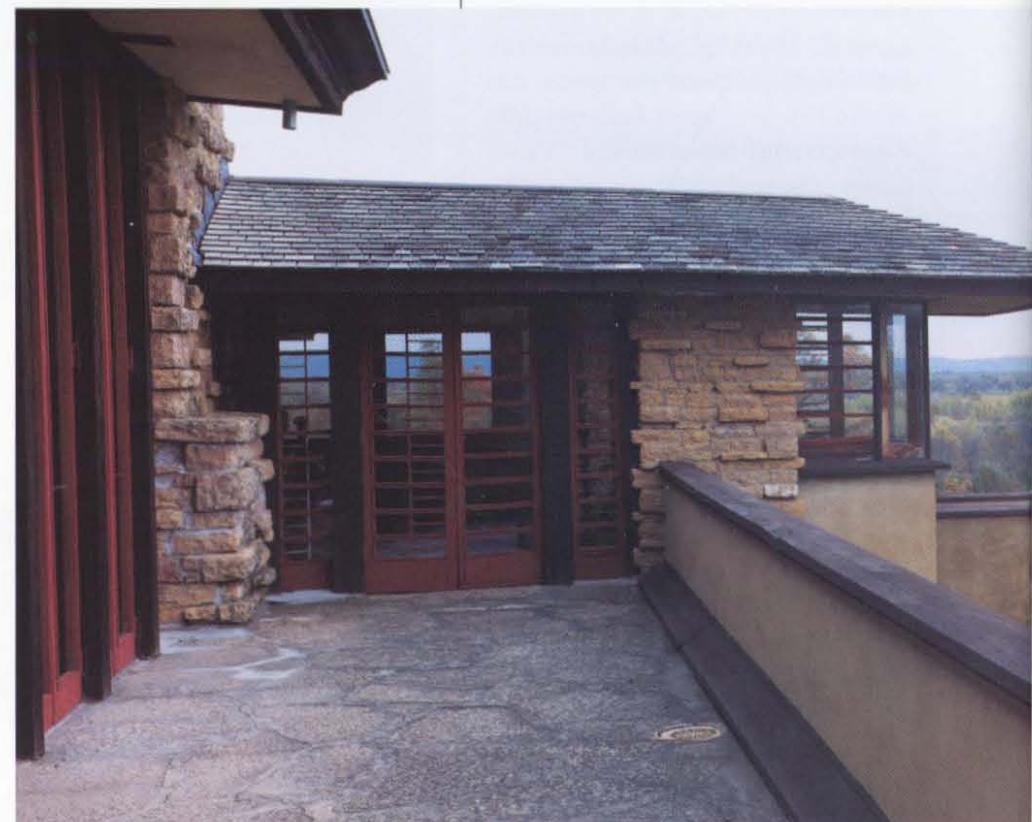
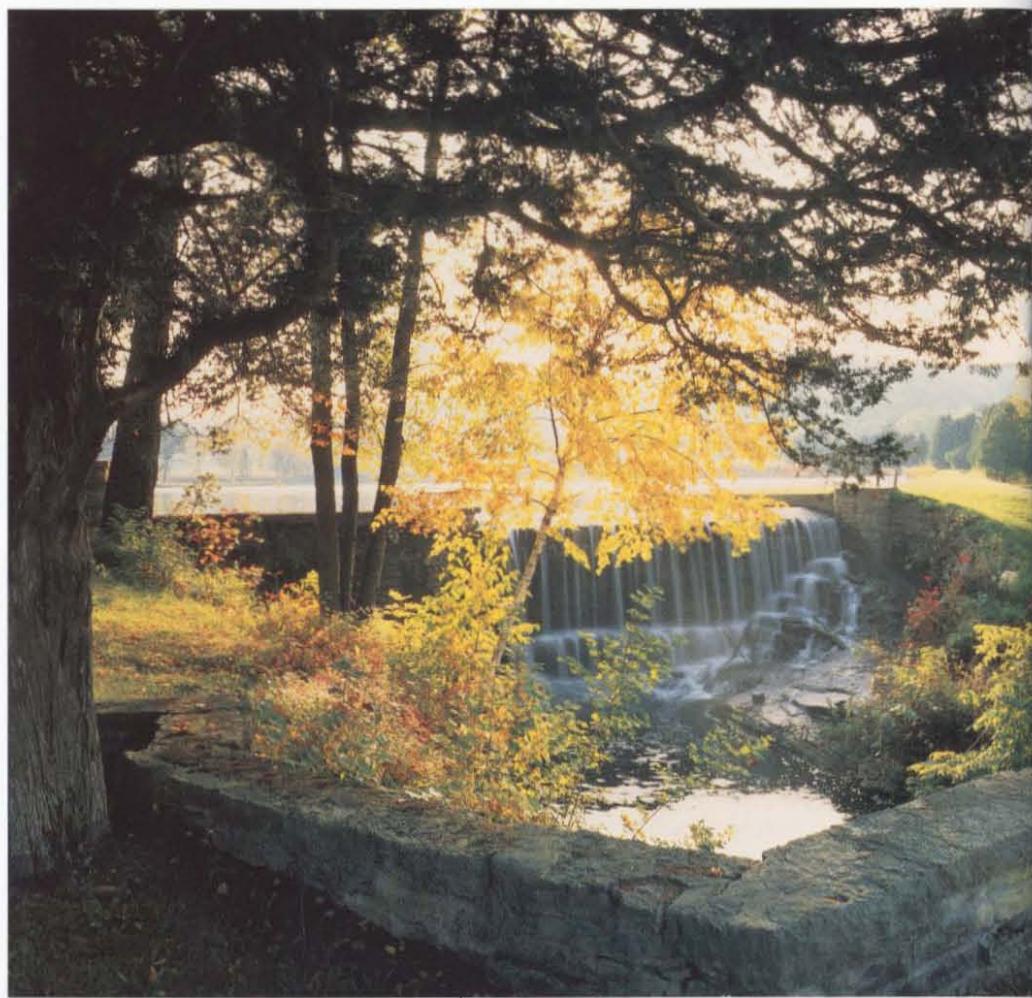
sized tree," "tear down old school," "zinnias everywhere . . . transplant wild grape vines about stone-work and chimneys...hollyhocks around walls and fences." A plan from the 1940s-50s shows the shores of the upper lake, an expanded lower lake, and new construction at Midway including the row of triangular pig-houses along "Pork Avenue."

Reviewing these plans and photographs, reading Wright's descriptions of farming activities, one cannot help but wonder if there has ever been a farmer quite like Frank Lloyd Wright. In fact, Wright had a role model very close to home. His Uncle Jenkin Lloyd Jones had long pursued

(Images on this page ©Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation.) The buildings, roads, and fields depicted in Wright's 1920s-30s FARM PLAN drawing (fig. 12-B) relate closely to photographs from the 1920s and early 1930s (figs. 19-A, 19-B). The photograph in figure 19-A shows the Taliesin landscape in the 1920s after the entrance road from Route 23 was built; curved fields bounded by fences match the shapes on the plan. The plan also shows the two enormous areas on the hillside behind Taliesin planted in the long, straight lines of the vineyard (shown with crosses) and a single vegetable or fruit—asparagus, onions, raspberries (shown as colored lines). The rows are visible in the aerial photograph (fig. 19-B), as are the rounded shapes of fields.

a similar approach to farming and landscape design on his summer retreat down the road from Taliesin at Tower Hill. From 1895 to 1915, Uncle Jenkin delivered a series of sermons on topics such as plowing, sowing, weeding, reaping, tree planting, reforestation, road making, and barn building, which he collected under the title "The Gospel of the Farm." The language of the sermons bears a marked resemblance to Wright's discussion of the same topics in his autobiography. Jenkin calls the cow "a minister of the beautiful as well as the useful" and reminds his readers of the "famous" dictum: "Treat your cow as though she were a lady." The pasture shown on Taliesin farm plans seems tailored to illustrate Jenkin's sermon: a long broad promenade for horses and cows in curvilinear spaces between fields, winding around the hill along lake and stream, where the animals formed "a glittering decoration of the fields and meadows as they moved."

Wright drew and redrew alternative road alignments on plans and aerial photos. The entrance drive was changed several times to match reconstructions of the house; the one constant was falling water as part of the entry sequence. When the main entrance was changed again from Route C to Route 23 in about 1937, Wright insisted that everyone use it: "We all had to come in that way," recalled John deKoven Hill, an early apprentice. Wright insisted that the roadsides be carefully maintained. His attention to the alignment and appearance of the roads reflected his fascination with automobiles and movement and his concerns for revealing landform and shaping a beautiful scene. "Mr. Wright loved to operate the road grader," said Brierly. "It was terribly bumpy, smoothing out the ruts and gravel. Mrs. Wright didn't like him to, but he did anyway."

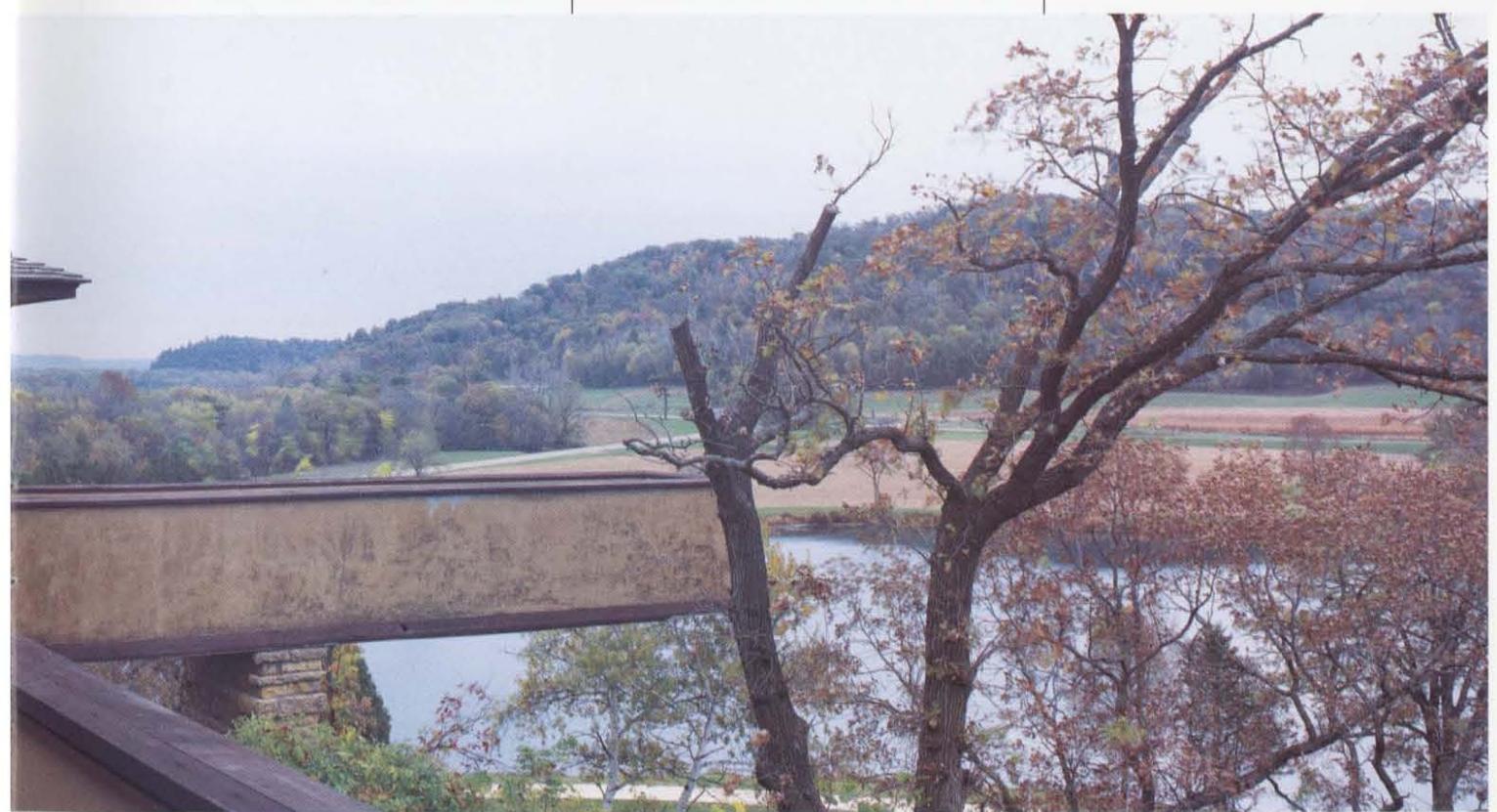


Over the course of many years, Wright constructed a series of dams to create ponds and falling water at Taliesin. The main entrance road, seen behind the birdwalk in the bottom image, passes a waterfall, opposite page. The photo in the center of this page was taken from the valley between Taliesin and Midway Farm. The photo of Wright was taken in the 1950s, the other photos were taken in 1998.



Photo credits: Opposite, waterfall, photo © Judith Bromley.

Center and bottom, photos © Roger Straus III. Left, photo by Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, courtesy Frank Lloyd Wright Archives.





Wright had a fascination and much experience with dams, ponds, and falling water. The dam below Taliesin was always a significant feature and served several functions. Wright noted in his autobiography that the dam raised "the water in the Valley to within sight of Taliesin," creating a lake that mirrored the clouds and bounced light from the sky back up to the windows of the house. Water from below the falls was sent "by hydraulic ram, up to a big stone reservoir built into the higher hill, just behind and beyond the hilltop garden, to come down again into the fountains and go on down to the vegetable gardens on the slopes below the house." Into the 1940s, water falling over the dam powered the generator that produced electricity for the Taliesin complex; a generator house once sat alongside the dam. Dam and waterfall were among the first things visitors saw as they turned off the road and proceeded through the gate and up the hill to the house. In 1947 another dam was constructed upstream from the first to form an upper lake below Midway; a road led through the gate on Route 23 and over a bridge below the waterfall over the upper dam. The lakes and dams required constant maintenance and frequent draining, regrading, and rebuilding. The water features evolved from meandering pools in the early water garden to two lakes after the upper dam was built in 1947. Over the years, Wright regraded and reshaped the shorelines and lake bottoms (see the lake under reconstruction in fig. 19-B). He also built and rebuilt the lower dam. Many versions are depicted in snapshots and postcards:

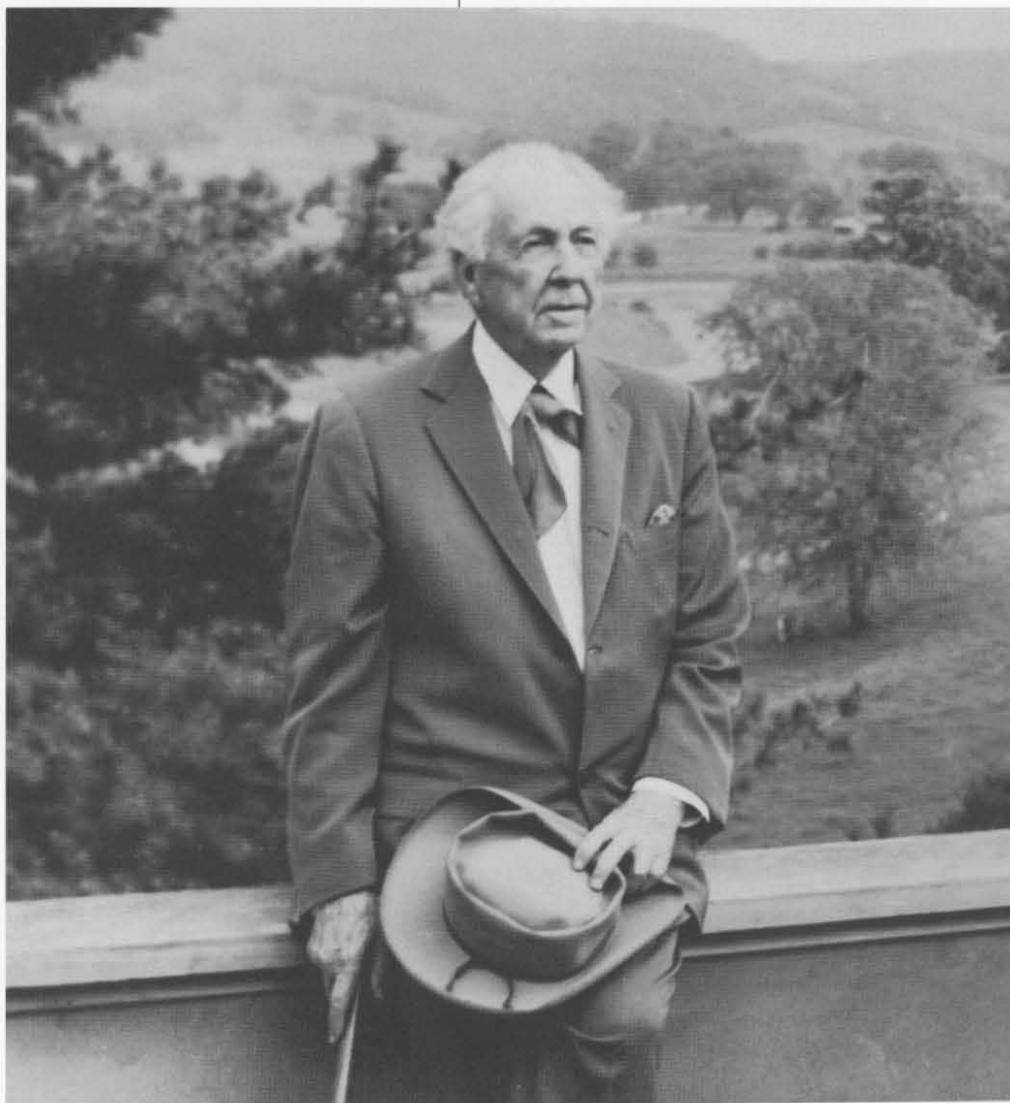
(Opposite) Water from the dam powered a generator that produced electricity for the Taliesin complex until the 1940s. This 1925 photo shows the hydro house constructed to house the generator. Photo courtesy Frank Lloyd Wright Archives.

an early dam, low and narrow; later dams, higher and broader; a sheet of water flowing smoothly over a curved lip into the water below; a cascade splashing over stepped rocks; a combination of cascade on one side and sheet flow over the main fall. Wright explored dams for years before the culmination of building/waterfall at Fallingwater in 1936. In his plans for the Strong automobile objective of 1924-25, he included a dam with a smooth sheet of water falling from its lip (strikingly similar to the waterfall in the famous drawing of Fallingwater), even though it would have entailed pumping water to the hilltop site.

Wright gradually enlarged his estate, which enabled him to further

shape the views from his windows and from the roads approaching Taliesin. He bought property whenever he could, then destroyed the existing structures and replanted the land. "He burned a tavern, and people were furious!" Brierly recalled. Wright bought the pig farm on the corner of Routes C and 23, tore down the buildings, and installed a vast field of red petunias in the triangular intersection. He designed a snack bar overlooking the Wisconsin River that could be reached by an

Frank Lloyd Wright pauses for a photo on the terrace outside the loggia in 1955. The road seen in the background leads to Midway Farm and on to Hillside Home School. Photo by John Engstead.



overpass (Taliesin Viaduct) on horseback or on foot. By the early 1950s, the Taliesin property extended all the way down Route 23 along the Wisconsin River to the intersection of Route 14; Wright planted three pine groves, one at each point of the huge triangle at the intersection and considered installing a sign that read "Taliesin Parkway—3 miles." Wright may have been sentimental about the valley where his family settled, but he held no such feelings for the structures they built. In 1933 he ordered apprentices to tear down the barn of the Hillside Home School and salvage the materials for reuse; he issued the same instructions nearly twenty years later, when he had

them dismantle the 1887 Hillside Home School building.

Wright intended that Taliesin be "self-sustaining if not self-sufficient . . . its own light-plant, fuel yard, transportation and water system," providing "shelter, food, clothes, and even entertainment." A principal tenet of the Taliesin Fellowship was learning through doing, and apprentices spent hours each day working on the estate: they grew food, made wine, cooked, cut firewood, built and rebuilt structures and gardens. Kevin Lynch, who later became a theorist of urban design and planning, described his experience while at Taliesin in 1937: "The new apprentice must learn how to handle

a tall bundle of cornstalks, or how to cut a green oak plank, or how to translate a drawing for a building, or how to lay plaster, or even the most efficient method of scraping oatmeal from a pot . . . It is the attempt to grasp the new ideal of hard work, of creative activity, of 'learning by doing,' of enthusiastic cooperation in solving common problems, that makes the life of the new apprentice so full and so fascinating here."

The ideal of sustainability at Taliesin was never fully realized there; despite Wright's aversion to cities, it was urban activities and populations (for example, fees for lectures and architectural commissions) that always supported Taliesin. As



the Fellowship grew, winter posed an additional challenge to sustainability—fuel for all the fireplaces and boilers that heated the residences and studio came from the woods. In 1934 apprentice Eugene Masselink wrote that cutting the firewood necessary to heat the buildings and studio all winter threatened to obliterate the woods around Taliesin. Early that summer, Wright announced the next winter would be spent in Arizona.

The Fall issue of the QUARTERLY will continue this essay with the focus on Taliesin West and a summary of Wright's principles of landscape design.

Anne Whiston Spirn is Professor of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This article is an excerpt from her chapter in Frank Lloyd Wright: Designs for an American Landscape, 1922-1932, edited by David De Long (Harry N. Abrams and Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1996).

Wisconsin winters posed a series of challenges for Wright and the Taliesin Fellowship. By 1934 there was concern that cutting enough firewood to heat the buildings would obliterate the woods around Taliesin. In fact, the woods remain intact as seen in this 1998 photo of the Taliesin estate. Photo © Roger Straus III.

