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Source: *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (Jun., 1985), pp. 296-310

Published by: [College Art Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3050913>

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Frank Lloyd Wright and the Imperial Hotel: A Postscript

Kathryn Smith

Frank Lloyd Wright wrote so convincingly of the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo that until now it has seemed unnecessary to elaborate on his account. Valuable as it has proven to be, Wright did not concern himself with the dates and details necessary to weave together a historical sequence of events. Important issues that have remained obscure include the preliminary discussions between Wright and the hotel management; the sequence of events in design and construction including numerous delays, postponements, and crises; and the circumstances under which the building was finally completed and Wright returned home.¹ The story of the Imperial Hotel is a dramatic one and when the complete outline of events is revealed, Wright's achievement emerges as even more remarkable than has formerly been believed.

The background for Wright's invitation to come to Tokyo can be found in the opening up of Japan to the West that had occurred during the late nineteenth century. The arrival of Westerners, thanks to increased trade with both Europe and the United States, necessitated the provision of suitable and comfortable accommodations of a type generally unavailable in Japan at that time. It was the expressed purpose of the then-emperor Meiji to encourage ties with the West and as a result, numerous changes in man-

ners were initiated in imitation of European and American ways. In 1887, at the instigation of the Imperial government, a group of prominent businessmen was brought together by two distinguished citizens, Ei'ichi Shibusawa (1840-1931) and Kihachiro Okura (1837-1928), for the purpose of building Japan's first Western-style hotel. The site chosen was 15,000 square feet of leased land in the center of downtown Tokyo, close to the Imperial Palace. The group formed a joint-stock partnership called The Imperial Hotel and capitalized it at 260,000 yen (\$130,000). The building was begun in 1888 under the supervision of two German architects, but was completed by Yuzuru Watanabe of the construction office of the Home Ministry.² The first guests were received in November, 1890. The three-story structure (Fig. 1) of wood, brick, and plaster, was designed in the French Second Empire style. In addition to the guest rooms, the hotel included a ballroom, dining room, billiard room, lounge, smoking room, and reading room. Until the opening of its successor thirty-two years later, it was the most luxurious hotel in Japan and over time established itself as one of the leading social centers in Tokyo.

During its first years of operation, the hotel often remained unfilled. Although this was disappointing finan-

I would like to thank Mrs. Frank Lloyd Wright and the Frank Lloyd Wright Memorial Foundation for permission to reproduce and quote from unpublished material by Frank Lloyd Wright, and Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer and the members of the Taliesin Fellowship for their assistance during my research. With the exception of the Darwin D. Martin correspondence or as otherwise noted, all letters to or from Wright quoted in this paper are from the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation. The Martin correspondence is owned jointly by the Department of Special Collections (M355), Stanford University Libraries (hereafter Wright-Martin Papers, Stanford), and the University Archives (MS22), State University of New York at Buffalo (hereafter Wright-Martin Papers, Buffalo). The collection is divided chronologically, SUNY-Buffalo holding originals dated 1902-1914 and Stanford those from 1915-1935. Photocopies of the other institution's originals are available at each location. My research was conducted at Stanford. Robert Sweeney generously provided numerous unpublished citations gathered for a forthcoming revised edition of his *Frank Lloyd Wright, An Annotated Bibliography*, Los Angeles, 1978. Both his book and the citations from his continuing research have contributed invaluable to the substance of this article. I am also grateful to Edgar Kaufmann, Jr.; Henry-Russell Hitchcock; Virginia Kazor, Hollyhock House; Julia Meech-Pekarik, Metropolitan Museum of Art; Carol A. Rudisell, Stanford University Libraries; Ichiro Inumaru, Imperial Hotel; Jenny Wolfe Schwing; and Paul Hanle.

¹ This was pointed out as recently as 1980 by Robert Reitherman writing in the *AIA Journal*, "It is symptomatic of this building's story that there are conflicting reports concerning such a basic point (as whether or not the concrete was reinforced) . . . The more one examines the story of the Imperial Hotel, the more vague and contradictory the historical record

becomes . . . There is even some confusion in the literature concerning the year in which the earthquake occurred." Reitherman, 45-46. This article is intended as a chronology of historical events and as such does not attempt a definitive discussion of the Imperial Hotel. Critical issues such as an analysis of the building's expressive form and detail and an exposition of its structure require studies that could not be encompassed in this article. An evaluation of the building's structure is an especially complicated matter. Most important, Wright's explanations of the structure have been challenged by contemporary engineers; see Reitherman, 42-46 and 70, and Bennett, 6. In addition, Wright acknowledged that changes made on site during construction were so extensive that the surviving drawings no longer accurately reflect the structure as it was built. When the building was demolished in 1967, detailed photographs of the structure were taken. They are reproduced along with a Japanese text by Nobumichi Akashi, *Frank Lloyd Wright in Imperial Hotel*, Tokyo, 1972. Conflicting data also exists as to who assisted Wright in the engineering. Although Wright as architect must be credited with the design, the involvement of others is in question. Among those who must be considered are Julius Floto, a Chicago structural engineer (Floto, 122); Samuel A. Lewis, a Chicago mechanical engineer (Bennett, 6); and R. M. Schindler, the Viennese architect, employed by Wright between 1918 and 1921 (Esther McCoy, *Five California Architects*, New York, 1960, 167). However, because of the significant changes made on site, it is difficult to determine how much any of these individuals contributed to the final building. And to complicate matters further, it would be necessary to assess the contribution of Paul Mueller, the on-site builder, who had extensive experience with similar soil conditions in Chicago.

² The Imperial Hotel, 6.

cially, the original purpose of the venture was more diplomatic than it was commercial. The hotel represented Japan's entry into the international community and as such served as an important symbol. In the years that followed, business gradually increased as the result of political events: the Sino-Japanese war (1894-95), the annexation of the Philippines by the United States (1902), and the Russo-Japanese war (1904-05). The result was an increased awareness of Japan in the West, and thus the flow of tourists as well as businessmen increased until, by 1906, the Imperial Hotel was in need of additional rooms. The hotel expanded by erecting the Annex, a two-story frame building containing forty rooms, directly behind the original building, and by acquiring an existing hotel, the Metropole, some distance away. In the next few years, transportation links were improved to Europe, with the Trans-Siberian railroad, and across the Pacific with the expansion of steamship lines. In 1910, the Metropole could no longer function as a hotel and was closed. At this time the idea first arose of replacing the outmoded nineteenth-century Imperial Hotel with a new, larger, and more modern building.

Frank Lloyd Wright was recommended for the job the following year. The person responsible for the introduction was Frederick W. Gookin, a prominent Chicago banker, whose expertise in the field of Japanese prints made him one of the nation's foremost authorities.³ Gookin had known Wright for some years, since their mutual passion for Oriental art, especially woodblock prints, brought them together frequently. In 1908, they had collaborated on an exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago (Fig. 2).⁴ Gookin served as curator; Wright designed the installation.

Gookin had heard about the proposal to construct a new building for the Imperial Hotel no later than the first half of 1911.⁵ He mentioned the job to Wright and inquired whether he would be interested. When Wright responded favorably, Gookin sent off a long letter to Aisaku Hayashi, General Manager of the Hotel, informing him that he had found the right architect for the job. By the beginning of October, Gookin had received a reply from Tokyo. "Many thanks," Hayashi wrote, "for your opinion of Mr. Wright. I shall write him shortly after completing a rough plan according to my idea. If he would not be too radical and



1 Imperial Hotel, Tokyo, 1890, destroyed 1922 (photo: Imperial Hotel)

would work under reasonable terms he would be the first one."⁶ Gookin, who was at that moment in New York cataloguing and mounting the Japanese art collections of the Public Library and the Metropolitan Museum, immediately sent off a letter to Wright with the good news. Gookin noted that he presumed Wright would soon hear directly from Hayashi, adding, "I sincerely hope this may lead to your getting the commission."⁷ It seems certain that Gookin, familiar with Wright's talents both as an architect and as a connoisseur of Japanese art, believed that he was on that basis the ideal person to design the new Imperial Hotel. "Somehow it seems to me that this would be a great opportunity to do a stunning thing," Gookin explained. "Would it not be possible to retain the feeling and spirit of Japanese architecture and yet construct a building that would be comfortable according to standards and requirements of travellers from the rest of the world? If you would do this you would build a building that would be an object lesson to Japanese and Europeans and Americans alike. And I believe it can be done."⁸

Wright's knowledge of and sympathy with Japanese art was a major reason why he had been proposed as the de-

³ Gookin, like Wright, was an amateur collector; however, after his retirement in 1900 he became a professional when he was hired by numerous collectors and museums in the Midwest and the East to curate their Japanese print collections. He worked closely with the well-known Chicago collector Clarence Buckingham, and became the first curator of Japanese prints at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1913 when Buckingham gave his collection to that institution. Wright had sold prints to Buckingham some years before and Gookin had acted as Buckingham's advisor. (*Who's Who in Chicago — The Book of Chicagoans*, Chicago, 1926, 347; "F. W. Gookin Dies, Oriental Scholar," *New York Times*, January 19, 1936; Wright to Darwin D. Martin, December 2, 1910, Wright-Martin Papers, Buffalo.

⁴ Kostka, 7.

⁵ There is no record of how Gookin became aware of the proposal to build a new hotel. It is possible that he had known Aisaku Hayashi for

many years. Hayashi, like Gookin and Wright, had a close connection with and abiding interest in Oriental art. He had served as the assistant manager of the New York office of Yamanaka & Co., dealers in Japanese and Chinese art objects. It is not known when he began this position; however, he left it in 1909 and returned to Japan where he became manager of the Imperial Hotel. "Manager of Hotel Resigns Position," *Japan Advertiser*, April 20, 1922, 1.

⁶ Hayashi's letter has not survived; this quotation appears in Gookin to Wright, October 6, 1911. This letter seems to refute the widely cited conjecture that Wright and Hayashi had known each other in New York. It now seems likely that it was Gookin, rather than Wright, who had met Hayashi at Yamanaka & Co.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*



2 Frank Lloyd Wright, Installation of Japanese print exhibition at Art Institute of Chicago, 1908 (courtesy Art Institute)

signer of the new hotel.⁹ Although his interest in Japanese art can be dated well before the turn of the century, it was not until about 1902 that he began to collect Japanese prints.¹⁰ And when Wright chose to make his first trip outside the United States in 1905, it was not to Europe as one would have predicted, but to Japan. After an intense period of work, which was highlighted by the construction of two major buildings in Buffalo, New York — the Darwin D. Martin House and the Larkin Administration Building — Wright decided to take a long vacation to rest. He was accompanied by his wife, Catherine, and two former clients, Mr. and Mrs. Ward Willits of Highland Park, Illinois. They embarked at Vancouver on February 21 aboard the Canadian Pacific steamship *Empress of China*.¹¹ This first trip lasted about three months. During their stay, they were to see Japan (Fig. 3) as it had been depicted in the prints of Hiroshige and Utamaro, before the rapid Westernization of the intervening decades. The Wrights returned on the *Empress of India*, disembarking in Vancouver and returning to Oak Park on May 14, 1905.¹² As a result of this trip, Wright's status as a collector improved appreciably. While in Japan, he had taken the opportunity to shop for prints of a quality and quantity unavailable in the United States. One year after his return, the Art Institute acknowledged the importance of his collection by exhib-

iting his Hiroshige prints. This occasion also marks the first appearance in print of Wright's ideas on Japanese woodblocks.¹³

The news from Gookin regarding Hayashi's interest in him as a candidate for architect of the new hotel coincided almost exactly with Wright's permanent departure from Oak Park in 1911 and his move to newly built quarters at Spring Green, Wisconsin. His withdrawal had been prompted by his decision to leave his family to be free to live with Mamah Borthwick Cheney, an Oak Park woman with whom he had fallen in love. Between 1909 and 1910, he and Mrs. Cheney spent a year together in Europe. The publicity set off a wave of scandal that rocked both Wright's practice and his family. While waiting to hear from Japan, he was completing his new home, Taliesin. Here he and Mamah Borthwick, who had returned to her maiden name after her divorce, were starting a new life together.

Wright was corresponding with the Imperial Hotel by 1912; but discussion was postponed at the death of Emperor Meiji on July 30. When communication resumed, it was decided that Wright would go to Tokyo to discuss the job in person, travelling with Mamah Borthwick. "I am sailing for Japan tomorrow," Wright wrote Darwin Martin on January 10, 1913, "in search of the commission of consulting architect for the new Imperial Hotel, which the government is to build and operate. I have been in touch for some time — almost six months. The Mikado's death postponed affairs and I now have the tip to come on. The building is to cost seven million dollars — the finest hotel in the world. Of course I may not get it then again I may — it would mean forty or fifty thousand dollars and a couple of years employment if I did — so wish me luck."¹⁴

While in Tokyo, Hayashi informed Wright of the requirements for the new building and showed him the site (Fig. 4), a rectangular plot of land contiguous to the old hotel on the west and facing Hibiya Park on the east.¹⁵ The property, adjacent to the Imperial Palace, was the location of the residence of the Home Minister, which was to be removed. During his stay, Wright drew up preliminary plans (Fig. 5), examined the soil conditions, and made sug-

⁹ It seemed also to have played a major part in Wright's securing the job for himself and in building support for his ideas. The fact that Hayashi and an influential Board member, Kihachiro Okura, all shared with Wright an interest in aesthetics, affected the character of the new hotel and assured its realization over the sometimes conflicting proposals of the more business-oriented board members.

¹⁰ Wright to Martin, n.d. (ca. 1908), Wright-Martin Papers, Buffalo.

¹¹ Wright to Jane Porter, February 21, 1905.

¹² I am indebted to Donald Kalec of the Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio for this information. The ship, the line, the place of origin, and the destination appeared on a portion of a packing crate used as a support under a piano placed in a wall of the playroom of Wright's Oak Park house. Kalec confirms that this remodeling occurred prior to 1910. It is thus possible to conclude that this crate contained art objects that Wright was shipping home on his return in 1905. The date was noted in the *Oak Park Reporter - Argus*, May 20, 1905, 4.

¹³ Wright essay in *Hiroshige: An Exhibition of Colour Prints from the Collection of Frank Lloyd Wright*, Chicago, March 29, 1906.

¹⁴ Wright to Martin, January 10, 1913, Wright-Martin Papers, Buffalo.

¹⁵ Prior to the 17th century, the entire area adjacent to the Imperial Palace (at that time, the castle of the shogun) was under water. It was part of the so-called "Hibiya Inlet," an extension of what is today Tokyo Bay. Between 1590 and 1606, during the early stages of the settlement of the city, known then as Edo, the inlet was completely filled in and an elaborate system of moats and canals was built throughout the region extending out from the castle. These changes in the topography resulted in the difficult soil conditions which were to prove such a problem in the design and construction of the new building. Wright found eight feet of soil covering approximately sixty feet of liquid mud, which he nicknamed "cheese," with ground water extending within two feet of the surface. I am grateful to Henry Smith of the History Department of the University of California at Santa Barbara for information on the site's history.

gestions regarding building materials.¹⁶ After a visit of about four months, he returned to the United States in May.

"The planning of the Imperial Hotel is 'up to me' finally—," Wright announced to Martin on June 11.¹⁷ Wright's confident declaration ignored the formal steps that would involve another three years. Although Hayashi was directing the planning of the new building, he was subject to the final authorization of the Hotel's Board of Directors. It was necessary for Wright to develop the preliminary plans to present to the Board for their final approval. During this stage, Wright received the large commission for the Midway Gardens; before this building was finished, he was engulfed in the greatest tragedy of his life, the murder of Mamah Borthwick and several others and a fire at Taliesin on August 15, 1914. Another year and a half would elapse before final approval would be given for the hotel. It is likely that circumstances in Tokyo contributed to the delay, as well as Wright's own troubles.

By 1915, a decision had been made that Hayashi would travel to the United States. The purpose of this trip seems to have been twofold. It served as an opportunity for Hayashi to tour the best hotels in major American cities in order to refine the requirements for his new building. Secondly, Hayashi intended to stay at Taliesin for several weeks to examine Wright's developed scheme thoroughly. While in the Midwest, Hayashi would be able to view a number of Wright's buildings firsthand. "As America has furnished most of the models from which the modern Japan has copied," Hayashi recalled, "and, moreover, as that country is my second home, being the land where I spent my early years, it was but natural that I should seek in that land for material for elaboration and completion of my plan. Accordingly I took an American trip with the result that I had been enabled to observe and study most advantageously plans and systems on which hotels in that country are built and maintained. From the Pacific coast to the Atlantic I went through in every detail over the method and management of American hotels, which had given me a knowledge of inestimable value broadening my views and ripening my plan."¹⁸

The Japanese party, which was made up of Hayashi, his wife, Takako, and the Tokyo architect Tori Yoshitake, departed for America by December 1915 or January 1916.¹⁹ By February, they had arrived at Taliesin (Fig. 6) where



3 Wright, photograph taken in Japan, 1905 (photo: Frank Lloyd Wright Home & Studio Foundation, Oak Park, Illinois)

they spent several weeks going over details of the plan. Hayashi was pleased with what he saw and planned to return to Tokyo to present the drawings to the Hotel Board.²⁰ Confident of approval, Wright informed Martin on February 28, "I am not going to Japan for at least a year and then only for a few months at a time to keep in touch with the progress of the work — which will not start for ten or twelve months at least."²¹ Hayashi and his party returned to Japan on March 25, departing San Francisco on the *Tenyo Maru*, which docked in Yokohama on April 14.²²

Despite Wright's predictions, he was preparing to leave for Japan before the end of the year. After six years, the project was officially underway when the Board made a decision to accept Wright as their architect.²³ He was honored in Chicago at a banquet which also served as a farewell party; a few days later, Wright departed for Japan. He was accompanied by Miriam Noel, his companion since shortly after the Taliesin tragedy, and his son, John; they took an automobile with them, a Country Club Overland. On December 28, 1916, they sailed out of Vancouver on board the Canadian Pacific steamship *Empress of Asia*, for

¹⁶ This appears evident in a letter from Hayashi to Wright dated August, 1913, "Things must keep you quite busy, but hope something will come of the Hotel plan. Please see that the concrete facing exposed all sort of weather such as we have in this part of the world will stand the test of time, and is practical. I have been getting several inquiries from manufacturers in America to whom I have referred you. The ground question is not settled, but there is every hope of deciding before long."

¹⁷ Wright to Martin, June 11, 1913, Wright-Martin Papers, Buffalo.

¹⁸ "An Acknowledgement," *Hotel Monthly*, xxiv, June, 1916, 82. I am indebted to Robert Sweeney, who provided this obscure reference, which clarifies the meaning of Wright's assertion that he received the Imperial Hotel job after Hayashi had completed a tour in search of the ideal

building.

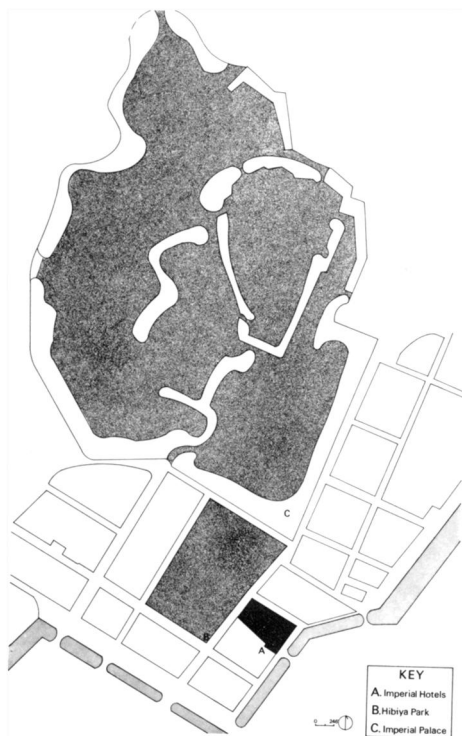
¹⁹ "Hotel Man Returns From American Trip," *Japan Advertiser*, April 15, 1916, 10. The article notes that Yoshitake "is taking a big part in making the plans for the new hotel." It is probable that his role was confined to the formulation of the program and perhaps to an interpretation of Japanese building methods and other practical matters.

²⁰ Sherman Booth to Darwin D. Martin, March 1, 1916, Wright-Martin Papers, Stanford.

²¹ Wright to Martin, February 28, 1916, *ibid*.

²² "Social and General," *Japan Advertiser*, April 14, 1916, 5.

²³ Booth to Martin, December 30, 1916, Wright-Martin Papers, Stanford. Booth notes that Wright had been paid \$8000 for the preliminary drawings.

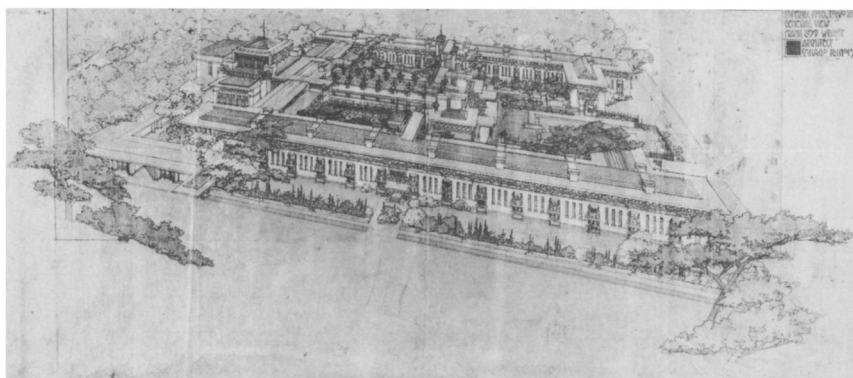


4 Map of Imperial Hotel and surrounding area, Tokyo (drawing, Jenny Schwing; photo, author)

a thirteen-day crossing to Yokohama.²⁴ Upon their arrival on January 9, 1917, they were met at the dock by Hayashi, who escorted them the eighteen miles to Tokyo.

The purpose of Wright's visit was to begin preparations for construction — to examine the site thoroughly, make test borings, arrange for acquisition and manufacture of materials, and hire draftsmen to prepare working drawings. Wright spent four months in Japan in 1917, and when he was ready to return home in April, it was agreed that John would stay behind. The preparation of the working drawings would take place at Taliesin with the assistance of Japanese draftsmen. On April 21, Wright embarked at Yokohama on the Canadian Pacific steamship *Empress of Asia*, on a twelve-day sailing bound for Vancouver. He arrived back at Taliesin on May 17.²⁵

For more than a year Wright remained in the States producing the working drawings, in addition to ongoing and new work at home. He was assisted during this phase by



5 Wright, Imperial Hotel, Tokyo, 1913-14, perspective (copyright Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, 1962)

Arato Endo and another Japanese draftsman who is recorded only as Tatsura. Wright was also becoming more deeply involved in collecting Oriental art (Fig. 7), especially Japanese prints. His contact with Tokyo began about a year following his return from Europe and subsequent break with his old life in Oak Park. This was a period of increased financial crisis for Wright, who began to deal in prints to supplement his income. In Japan he had greater opportunities to purchase rare woodblock prints which he could bring home to sell to collectors and museums. "I tried to increase my fee," Wright explained, "by mixing my brains with my money, buying things I knew the quality and value of, — cheap — hoping to realize a good profit on them when I came back —."²⁶

Throughout the teens and twenties, Wright used his expanding Japanese print collection as collateral to obtain substantial loans from rich former clients such as Darwin Martin and Francis Little, or simply as a source of income from sales, to such collectors as William Spaulding of Boston or such museums as the Metropolitan in New York. His association with the Imperial Hotel brought him into contact with Hiromichi Shugio, who was a member of the Imperial government art commission. With his guidance Wright was able to view prints the ordinary American collector would never see. On the negative side, however, as Wright's investment grew, often involving most of his commission from the hotel and, at times, more than his collector-clients had allotted, he became the victim of forgers who passed fakes on to him, or authentic prints that had been surreptitiously reworked. During these years, Wright

²⁴ "Here to Build Hotel," *Japan Advertiser*, January 10, 1917, 1; Wright, 1946, 96-97; Wright (1932, 1943), 1977, 226. Wright preferred the Canadian Pacific Railway as his transportation to the Orient. He could take a direct train between Chicago and Vancouver, which along with Seattle and San Francisco, was one of the three West Coast departure points for Japan. In addition, the CPR steamships made the crossing faster than any other line, averaging ten to thirteen days at sea instead of fifteen to nineteen. In addition to Wright's obvious need to waste as little time as possible, he also suffered from seasickness. Ships departing from the northernmost ports such as Vancouver or Seattle made faster time than those leaving from San Francisco. Wright preferred the faster route.

²⁵ Wright favored the months of February, March, and April in Tokyo,

often departing shortly after the annual spring festivity, the Imperial Garden Party, held during the height of the cherry blossom season. "Social and General," *Japan Advertiser*, April 20 and 21, 1917. Returning on the same ship was his fellow Chicago architect Howard Van Doren Shaw, who was completing a tour of China and Japan. "Tokyo Should Hold To Her Old Traditions in Architecture," *Japan Advertiser*, April 21, 1917, 1.

²⁶ Wright to Martin, August 20, 1922, Wright-Martin Papers, Stanford. For a discussion of one aspect of Wright's activity as a dealer, see Julia Meech-Pekarik, "Frank Lloyd Wright and Japanese Prints," *Frank Lloyd Wright at The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York, 1982, 48-56 and *idem*, *Frank Lloyd Wright and Japanese Prints: The Collection of Mrs. Avery Coonley*, Washington, D.C., 1983, 3-11.

6 Takako Hayashi in living room, Taliesin, 1916 (photo: Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation)



7 Frank Lloyd Wright, Taliesin II, 1914-24, interior showing Wright's Oriental collection, Spring Green, Wisconsin (photo: Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation)

alternated among the roles of architect, recognized art collector, and major print dealer. In November, 1917, seven months after returning from his most recent trip to Japan, he was accorded an exhibition of his collection by the Arts Club in Chicago. The following summer, he was deep in negotiations with the Metropolitan Museum over the sale of a substantial group of prints. Over the next few years, his activity as an art dealer would grow until it almost rivaled his work as an architect.

Amid the negotiations with the Metropolitan in 1918, Wright was booking passage for Japan. Plans had been made in Tokyo to begin clearing the site at the end of September, in preparation for construction which was to commence that fall. Opening-day ceremonies were scheduled for two years later, in the fall of 1920. The building was to be constructed with a combination of traditional and industrial materials — brick, stone, steel, and reinforced concrete. The structure was designed to respond to the difficult soil conditions and the threat of earthquake, an ever-present danger in Japan. The design called for free-floating foundations consisting of rows of shallow concrete piles driven into the soft mud. The reinforced concrete slabs of the floors rested on the piles as a tray rests on a waiter's fingers.²⁷ The Company had capitalized the hotel at 2,000,000 yen, but an additional large sum was set aside for equipment and furnishings.²⁸ To begin supervision of the construction, Wright set sail from Seattle with Miriam Noel on October 30, 1918. They departed on board the Nippon Yusen Kaisha steamship *Fushimi Maru*, arriving in Yokohama eighteen days later, on November 17, amid Armistice celebrations.²⁹

The opening months of 1919 passed and construction still loomed far in the future. Although Hayashi announced in late February that building would commence "before the cherry blossoms have whitened the ground and been blown away," at the end of May the site was still being cleared.³⁰ Writing to Louis Sullivan in April Wright complained of the slowness that characterized work in Japan; but despite the lack of progress, he informed Martin in June that he had been working very hard for the past six months.³¹ Perhaps the unfavorable conditions contributed to Wright's becoming ill for three weeks in late July and early August with what he described as an "oriental malady."³² After recovering from his illness and with construction at last underway, Wright returned to the United States in September.

He had been away two months short of a year, and numerous personal and professional matters were pressing at

²⁷ Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *In the Nature of Materials, The Buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright, 1887-1941* New York, (1942), 1973, 68.

²⁸ "Soon Begin New Imperial Hotel," *Japan Advertiser*, September 19, 1918, 1.

²⁹ "Social and General," *Japanese Advertiser*, November 16, 1918; *Japan Advertiser*, November 19, 1918. Although Wright employed the veteran Chicago builder Paul Mueller as contractor, no mention has been found of the date of his arrival in Tokyo. Wright's two Japanese assistants stayed behind in the United States for six weeks touring the sights and visiting Wright buildings, finally departing from San Francisco on December 12 and arriving in Yokohama on the 29th. Louis Sullivan notes in a letter to

Wright of November 4, 1918 that the names of Wright's assistants were Fujikura and Endo. Arato Endo to R. M. Schindler, February 2, 1919, R. M. Schindler Collection, Art Galleries, University of California, Santa Barbara. Frank Lloyd Wright, *Letters to Architects*, selected and with a commentary by Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, Fresno, 1984, 11.

³⁰ "To Break Ground For New Hotel," *Japan Advertiser*, February 26, 1919, 1; "Social and General," *Japan Advertiser*, May 31, 1919, 5.

³¹ Wright to Louis Sullivan, April 30, 1919; Wright to Martin, June 9, 1919, Wright-Martin Papers, Stanford.

³² Wright to Martin, August 8, 1919, *ibid*.

home. One of the most important was the commission for a theater to be built in Los Angeles for the oil heiress Aline Barnsdall. In July she had purchased a large site in Hollywood and was anxious for Wright to begin work on the plans and construction. He stopped over in Los Angeles between Seattle and Taliesin to meet with her.³³ Although Barnsdall hoped that Wright had returned home to work on her buildings, his first concern was leaving for the East Coast where he could sell a large group of Japanese prints he had brought back. After dropping in on a former draftsman, Antonin Raymond, in New York, and persuading him to come to work in Tokyo, Wright returned to Taliesin to plan for Barnsdall's property. His stay was hectic, and after only three months in the States, he was again sailing for Japan. With Raymond and his wife and Miriam Noel, he boarded the Nippon Yusen Kaisha steamship *Suwa Maru*, which pulled out of Seattle on December 16, 1919. After a stopover at Victoria, the boat docked in Yokohama on New Year's Eve.³⁴

Upon arrival in Tokyo, Wright was immediately greeted with bad news. Just four days before his boat docked, the Annex of the 1890 hotel had completely burned to the ground.³⁵ In addition to the obvious financial loss, the Hotel was suffering from a desperate shortage of rooms. Almost ten years had elapsed since the need for a new hotel had arisen and the demand in 1920 was far greater than it had been in 1910. Although construction was at last underway, with the foundation well along, the work was behind schedule. In light of these considerations, the management decided almost immediately that the Annex would be rebuilt as a modern facility. Wright was asked to execute the design. Speed in this instance was of the greatest importance. The drawings (Figs. 8-10) were completed within the first ten days of Wright's return.

When compared to the larger building that Wright had been designing for seven years, the Annex was a simple yet elegant building. In conformity with its temporary purpose, the Annex was constructed of wood frame and plaster and was more reminiscent in its details of Wright's own Taliesin than the elaborately ornamented building under construction to the east. It was located just south of the old hotel and was connected to it by a corridor. Square in plan, the building wrapped around an interior garden. It

was two stories high, containing about forty-nine rooms, six suites consisting of a sitting room, two bedrooms, and a bath, and four similar suites, each with a penthouse-bedroom. In addition, there were lounges (Fig. 11) on both the first and the second floors. Wright, who had maintained rooms in the hotel, took the opportunity to design an apartment for himself on the second floor in the northeast corner (Figs. 12-16). "In my particular nook in Tokyo," Wright recalled, "was a small living room with a fireplace — fire always burning — balcony filled with dwarf-trees and flowers, bedroom with balcony and bath, a small dining room where meals were served from the hotel. All were on the main floor of the apartment. But a narrow stair led up from the entrance way to a commodious studio-bedroom built as penthouse above the roof. I slept there and had set up my drawing board where I could work disturbing no one and tumble into bed when tired out."³⁶ Several features of the building were novel. Electrical heating units, for instance, hung down low from the ceiling and radiated heat into the room (Figs. 13-14). The bathrooms were especially noteworthy for the wall-hung toilet, exposed pipes (which could also serve as towel racks, the hot water pipe heating the towel dry), and handcrafted copper basin and bathtub (Fig. 16).

Wright had not been back in Japan a month before he was taken critically ill. His condition was so serious that his seventy-eight-year-old mother, Anna, decided to make the long Pacific crossing to be with him. She sailed out of Vancouver on February 19 with Dr. Luff, a woman physician, on the *Empress of Asia*, arriving in Yokohama on March 2.³⁷ By the time of her arrival, the foundation of the new hotel had been finished. Although the completion date was now pushed forward to 1921, the management was encouraged that the Annex was nearing opening day (Fig. 17). On April 25, the first rooms were available for occupancy. A tremendous effort on the part of the Wright office (Fig. 18) had brought about completion within four months of the fire.³⁸

By the spring of 1920 it was at last possible to predict a definite completion date for the new building (Fig. 19). It was announced that the opening day would be November 3, 1921, commemorating the birthday of the late Emperor Meiji, under whose reign the plans for the structure had

³³ Arato Endo to R. M. Schindler, September, 1919 (as in n. 29). Clarence Thomas to Wright, September 27, 1919; *Baraboo Weekly News*, October 9, 1919.

³⁴ Wright to Aline Barnsdall, December 9, 1919; Antonin Raymond, *An Autobiography*, Rutland, Vt., and Tokyo, 1973, 65; *Japan Advertiser*, December 31, 1919.

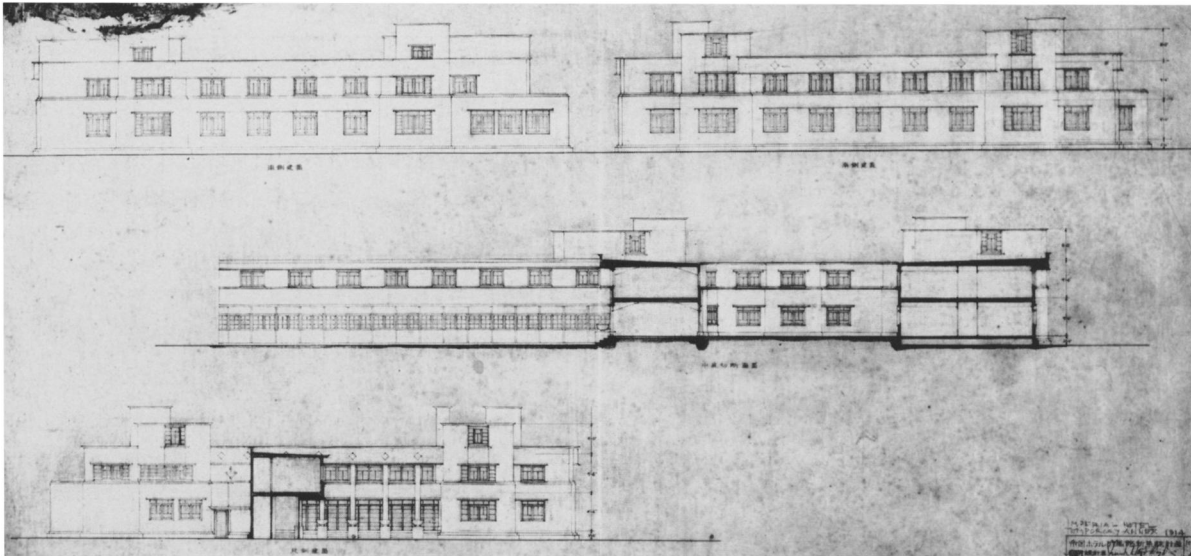
³⁵ "Imperial Hotel Annex Goes Up in Smoke — Loss Placed At Over A Million Yen," *Japan Advertiser*, December 28, 1919, 1.

³⁶ Wright (1932, 1943), 1977, 227. It is not possible to be definite in describing the completed Annex since no photographs have survived except of the interior of Wright's apartment. It is possible that changes took place during construction. For instance, details of Wright's apartment (Rooms 111-13 on the second-floor plan), do not correspond exactly with the

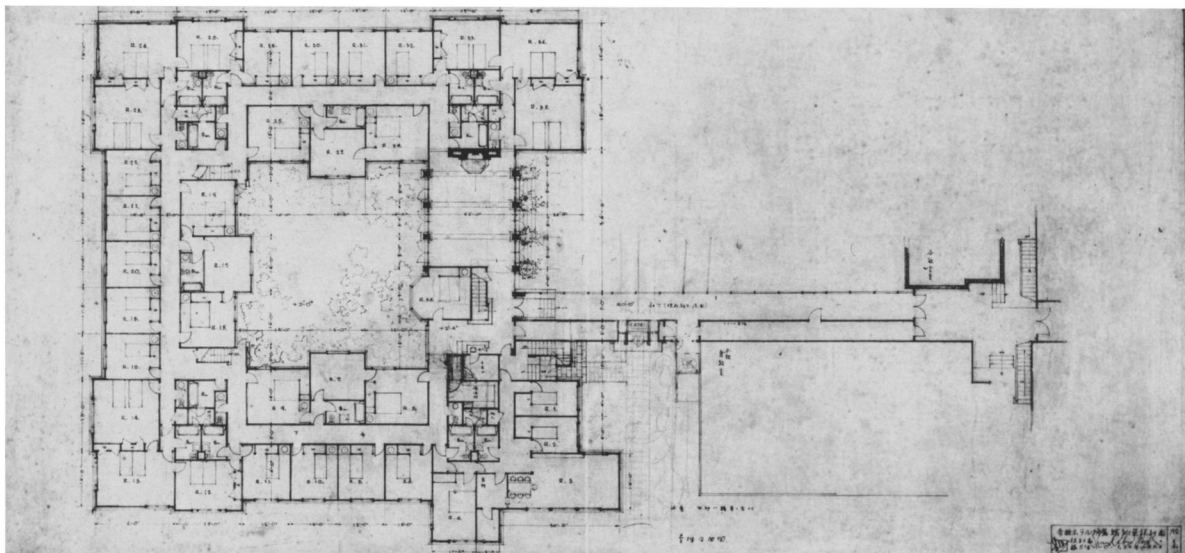
working drawings. A bedroom in Wright's apartment (Room 113) is illustrated in H. T. Wijdeveld, ed., *The Work of Frank Lloyd Wright* (1925), New York, 1965, pls. 128-129.

³⁷ Anna Lloyd Wright to Jane Porter, February 19, 1920, Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, Scottsdale, Arizona. *Weekly Home News*, February 19, 1920; *Japan Advertiser*, March 3, 1920; "Tokyo Hotels Are Filled To Capacity," *Japan Advertiser*, March 4, 1920. The *Weekly Home News* mentioned that Wright's mother had intended to accompany him in December, but her health had not permitted it.

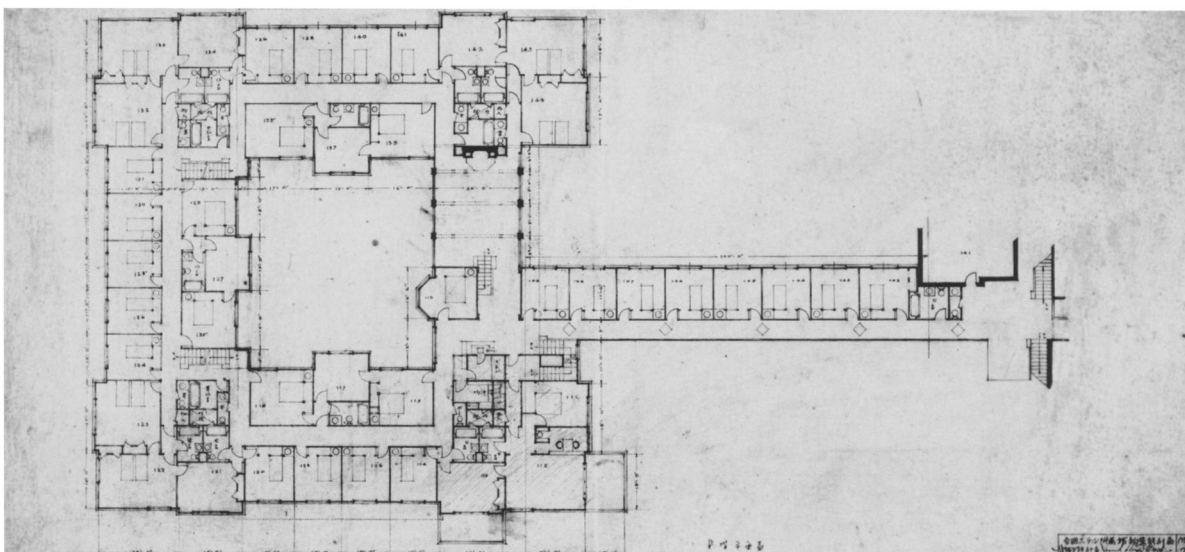
³⁸ Arato Endo to R. M. Schindler, April 27, 1920 (as in n. 29). Darwin Martin wrote to Alfred MacArthur on April 22, 1920 (Wright-Martin Papers, Stanford) that Dr. Luff had returned from Japan leaving Wright's mother there because he had suffered a relapse.



8 Wright, Imperial Hotel Annex, Tokyo, 1920, elevations (copyright Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation 1982)



9 Wright, Imperial Hotel Annex, Tokyo, 1920, first-floor plan (copyright Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation 1982)



10 Wright, Imperial Hotel Annex, Tokyo, 1920, second-floor plan (copyright Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation 1982)



11 Wright, Imperial Hotel Annex, Tokyo, 1920, lounge, destroyed 1923 (photo: Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation)



14 Studio-bedroom in Wright's apartment, destroyed 1923 (photo: Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation)



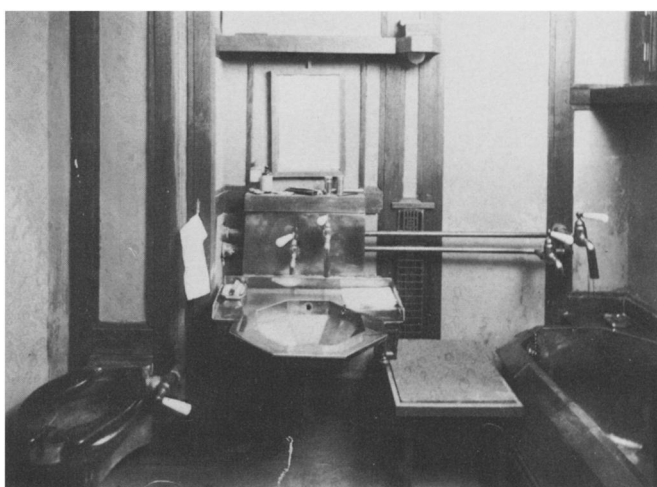
12 Wright, Imperial Hotel Annex, Tokyo, 1920, living room in Wright's apartment, destroyed 1923 (photo: Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation)



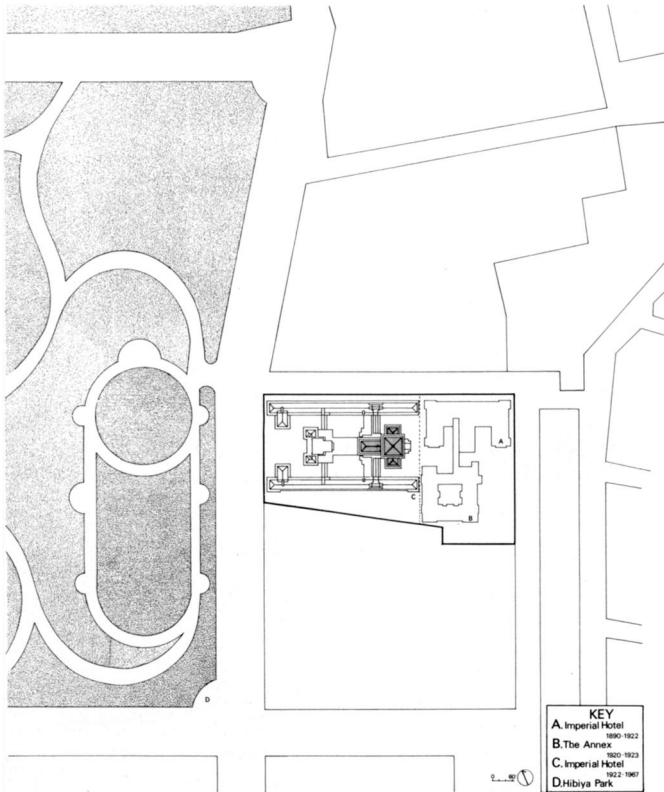
15 Studio-bedroom in Wright's apartment (photo: Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation)



13 Living room in Wright's apartment (photo: Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation)



16 Bathroom in Wright's apartment, destroyed 1923 (photo: Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation)



17 Map of site of Imperial Hotel buildings, Tokyo (drawing, Jenny Schwing; photo, author)



18 Aisaku Hayashi's party for Wright and his staff, Tokyo, 1920 (photo: Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation)

been initiated.³⁹ With work underway on the superstructure of the building, Wright was able to find time by the end of June to return to the United States to attend to the Barnsdall project. By July 1, he was back in Los Angeles for a week inspecting the progress on the initial phase of construction on Barnsdall's own residence on Olive Hill.⁴⁰

During the summer of 1920, the strain of the Imperial Hotel commission was becoming apparent. When he ac-

cepted the job, Wright believed that construction would take two years, of which only a few months would be spent in Japan. Instead, the two years had passed, most of which Wright spent in Tokyo, and only the foundation had been completed, leaving the greater part to be done. The demands of this schedule, including his numerous transoceanic voyages and accompanying bouts of seasickness, the unrelenting pursuit by Miss Barnsdall, who required his attention when he did return home, and his frequent trips to the East Coast to sell Japanese prints, were taking their toll. Wright longed to spend a restful summer in the comfortable surroundings of his familiar Taliesin, but it proved impossible. Miss Barnsdall, feeling unfairly neglected, was growing more impatient as the months passed. She believed that Wright had returned to the United States solely to work on her project and insisted that he come out to California to meet with her. Wright reluctantly left Wisconsin in August to spend a couple of weeks in Los Angeles.⁴¹ At the end of his visit, Miss Barnsdall had more than doubled the scope of her project, to include a self-contained theatrical community living and working on Olive Hill. Her enthusiasm was now running high, and she wanted all the plans completed and ready for construction before Wright returned to Tokyo in November. Back at Taliesin, while work proceeded on the Olive Hill drawings, Wright also spent part of his time meeting with buyers of Japanese prints. In October, a crisis occurred at Olive Hill, completely shutting down construction there, and necessitating another trip to California. Wright postponed his departure for Japan until December, giving the Barnsdall job as his reason. Conditions on Olive Hill were chaotic and required his presence up until a few days before sailing.⁴² After a demanding five and a half months in the States, Wright sailed out of Vancouver on December 16, 1920, accompanied by his assistant, William E. Smith, on the *Empress of Asia* (Fig. 20). At the same time he made arrangements to ship a Cadillac to Japan for his friend Hayashi. The boat docked in Yokohama twelve days later on December 28.⁴³

Wright's final years in Japan were to prove increasingly difficult. During the more than two years since he arrived to begin supervision, he had been ill both years and had spent the Christmas holidays away from home. It had been seven years since the murders at Taliesin, which had preceded his relationship with Miriam Noel. Their life together continued his defiance of American social convention which had begun with his break from Oak Park ten years before. His association with Miriam Noel was stormy and draining. The strain of these years is evident in a letter to his daughter, Catherine, and her husband, Kenneth Baxter, on

³⁹ "New Imperial Hotel Will Be Completed in November, 1921," *Japan Advertiser*, May 14, 1920, 4.

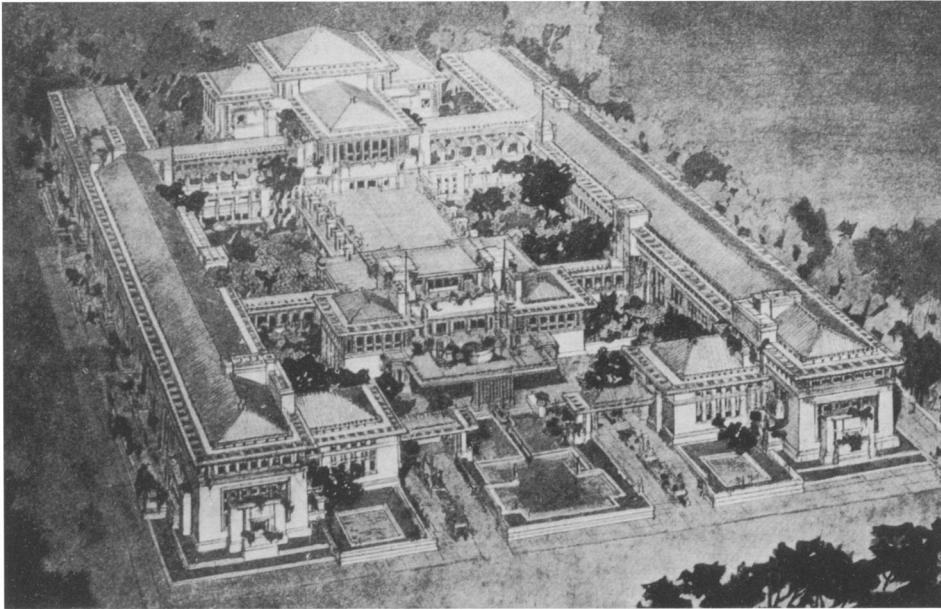
⁴⁰ Memorandum by Wright, n.d. (ca. August, 1920); *Baraboo Weekly News*, July 15, 1920.

⁴¹ Wright to Martin, August 11, 1920, Wright-Martin Papers, Stanford.

⁴² Sophie Pauline Gibling to parents, ca. October 20, 1920, ca. October

28, 1920, and December 9, 1920; Aline Barnsdall to Wright, October 22, 1920; Wright to Martin, October 31, 1920, Wright-Martin Papers, Stanford.

⁴³ Smith's arrival was noted in "Social and General," *Japan Advertiser*, December 30, 1920. Although no mention is made of Wright, it is safe to assume he and Smith traveled together. Reference to Hayashi's Cadillac was made by Wright in a letter to Schindler, June 23, 1921.



19 Wright, Imperial Hotel, Tokyo, 1920, perspective (copyright Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, 1942)

February 7, 1921. "It was," he wrote, "a rather lonely Christmas and New Year's this year. Christmas and New Year's used to be so lively and full of everything from candy to grief — that of late years I rather dread it for its lack of little children. I hope all is going well — with the business and the house. Particularly the house. Not many people nowadays have one — or have the art of making one. Sometimes I think the good old fashioned house is a thing of the past in America. . . ." Of his life in Tokyo, he explained, "I am never very well here but my Welsh ire will wear through — never fear. My work is very hard — intense concentration and immense responsibility — I would like to rest at Taliesin more than I have done these five years past. Especially has this last year been strenuous with the Los Angeles work coming in on the new Imperial work. Once upon a time I never could strike the bottom of my physical resources — but now I find that very grey hair and *fifty-three years* — indicate something that I will have to pay attention to — in this climate — which is the worst in the world I believe —."⁴⁴

In spite of Wright's fatigue and the state of his spirits, he pushed on toward the scheduled date of the formal opening in the fall. In addition to the modern technology that was being used in the pouring of the concrete, extensive handicraft was going into the cut stone, which was being carved on the site, making the area across from Hibiya Park one of the busiest places in Tokyo (Figs. 21-22). By the latter part of April, 1921, it was evident that some parts of the building were much farther along than others, as work began on the third and final story of the north wing.

"While the south wing of the new building may not be finished on schedule time," the builder, Paul Mueller, predicted, "it is practically certain that unless unforeseen difficulties arise we will be able to turn over the main building and the north wing for the formal opening on schedule time. We have 350 men at work on the building every day now, and we expect to get the number raised to 500 before long. All we want now is to continue as the hotel is going at the present time; if we do we will be able to finish in good time."⁴⁵

Shortly after this announcement, Wright made plans to return to the United States for a very short trip to supervise the completion of the Barnsdall residence and two smaller houses from the master plan. The work had been proceeding for the past six months under the supervision of R. M. Schindler. Miss Barnsdall had gone off to Europe, turning her authority over to her business manager. She had grown highly suspicious and distrustful of Wright, and as a result, she had left a check with strict instructions that it would be the last. The buildings had to be completed within the agreed-upon amount. Wright arrived in Los Angeles in late May, and by early June he had departed for Wisconsin.⁴⁶ He spent the first weeks of his return in a whirlwind of telegrams between Los Angeles and Taliesin, attempting to get cooperation to finish the Olive Hill buildings. After taking out two weeks in early July to go to New York, probably to sell Japanese prints, he returned to Los Angeles to oversee the finishing details on Olive Hill. Then, after this strenuous year of work in Tokyo and Los Angeles, Wright took his most leisurely trip across the Pacific. On

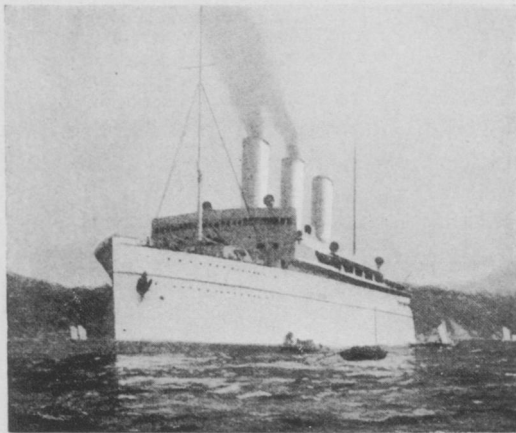
⁴⁴ Wright to Catherine and Kenneth Baxter, February 7, 1921, from a photocopy in the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

⁴⁵ "Work Is Begun On Hotel's Top Story," *Japan Advertiser*, April 24, 1921.

⁴⁶ Wright was at Taliesin by the second week of June. Sophie Pauline Gibling to parents, June 5, 1921; Wright to Schindler, June 19, 1921.

EYES WHICH DO NOT SEE

101



THE "EMPRESS OF ASIA" (CANADIAN PACIFIC)

"Architecture is the masterly, correct and magnificent play of masses brought together in light."

that the entire world is absorbed in this dominating necessity. Machines will lead to a new order both of work and of leisure. Entire cities have to be constructed, or reconstructed, in order to provide a minimum of comfort, for if this is delayed too long, there may be a disturbance of the balance of society. Society is an unstable thing and is cracking under the confusion caused by fifty years of progress which have changed the face of the world more than the last six centuries have done.

The time is ripe for construction, not for foolery.

20 *Empress of Asia*, ill. in Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture*, 1st ed. 1923 (written between 1917 and 1922)

July 30, 1921, he and Miriam Noel departed from San Francisco on the maiden voyage of the Pacific Mail steamship *Empire State*, stopping in Honolulu and arriving in Yokohama on August 15.⁴⁷

As November 3 approached, the date of the scheduled formal opening in Tokyo, it was apparent the hotel would not be ready. Schindler, Wright's assistant in Los Angeles, was waiting to hear whether Wright would tell him to come on to Tokyo. In October, the month he was to leave, Schindler reported to his friend Richard Neutra that "... the work was interrupted after the completion of the first part. . . ."⁴⁸ Tension was mounting at the Hotel

as the opening day passed and costs continued to rise.⁴⁹ On November 19, a couple of weeks after the anniversary of the late Emperor's birthday, Schindler wrote Neutra, "Well, our trip to Japan fell through. Just received a letter from Wright which says he is not willing to start much other work in Japan after the hotel. The climate makes him sick and the conditions are not particularly favorable. He writes that he will return in the spring and looks forward to starting something new here."⁵⁰

The months between the passing of the scheduled opening and Wright's final departure were probably the most trying of his entire stay in Japan. Criticism of the new building's design and of Wright as its architect was mounting with delays continuing and costs rising. In addition to this strain at the site, Wright was facing other personal and professional defeats in the fall of 1921. Work had come to a halt in Hollywood because Miss Barnsdall refused to proceed with the next phase of the master plan until Wright completed his work in Japan and returned to America for good. He also had received a severe blow to his finances because of his dealings in Japanese prints. A telegram from New York had arrived informing him that the last group of prints he had sold were almost worthless because they had been reworked. As a result, Wright, eager to make restitution, found himself in need of money.⁵¹ He cabled Miss Barnsdall to act magnanimously and settle his past-due fees.⁵²

The strain between Wright and the Hotel Board in the opening months of 1922 was at its height. Various members were suggesting that details of the building should be eliminated to lower the cost and speed the completion. Wright received strong support from Hayashi and, more important, from Baron Okura, a rich and influential member, who was in sympathy with the design; but the worst was yet to come. On April 16, 1922, the first Imperial Hotel burned to the ground. The damage included the death of one guest, destruction of property totaling one million yen, and with the exception of the limited facilities of Wright's Annex, the loss of the Hotel's accommodations and services. Speculation immediately began to circulate that the Imperial Hotel would close. "I expect to have the entire new building completed and ready for occupancy by May 15," Wright declared immediately, "but if the necessary help can be procured it may be possible to finish one wing of the building within two weeks."⁵³

The day after the fire the Hotel Board met and came to some hard decisions. They moved to put major effort into

⁴⁸ Esther McCoy, *Vienna to Los Angeles: Two Journeys, Letters Between R. M. Schindler and Richard Neutra*, Santa Monica, 1979, 137.

⁴⁹ One writer maintains that costs were climbing due to corruption on the part of the Japanese. Kirishiki, 135.

⁵⁰ McCoy (as in n. 48), 138.

⁵¹ Antique Japanese woodblock prints were printed with some "fugitive" dyes or colors that fade easily when exposed to light. The rarity and value of these prints are partly determined by the brilliance of their color. A New York collector, Howard Mansfield, had informed Wright that the color in the prints he had purchased had been "improved." Meech-Pekarik,

1982 (as in n. 26), 54-55, places this incident in 1920; however, a letter from Sophie Pauline Gibling to her parents, November 11, 1921, pinpoints it in 1921.

⁵² Wright to Schindler, September 12, 1921; Wright to Barnsdall, September 12, 1921. At exactly the same moment, Louis Sullivan made a desperate request for a cash loan. Despite his own situation, Wright sent Sullivan \$200. Sullivan to Schindler, September 8, 1921, in McCoy (as in n. 48), 147.

⁵³ "Imperial Hotel Burns — One Person Dead," *Japan Advertiser*, April 17, 1922, 1.

pushing the new hotel through to completion. By that time, Wright had revised his prediction and now stated that the north wing and central section would be open on May 25. Furniture for the rooms was practically finished, plumbing had been installed, and the carpets had arrived and were ready to be laid. All rooms in the central section were nearly complete except the kitchen and the banquet hall. High-power electric lights were being installed on the site so that work could continue night and day, and the work force was being at least doubled in size. The Board had decided to close the Hotel, but guests still in the Annex requested that it remain open.⁵⁴

A few days after the fire, both of Wright's strongest supporters on the Board resigned. Baron Okura as President and Hayashi as Manager explained that they felt obligated to assume responsibility for the damage to the hotel and its guests. Refusing to allow just two members to be singled out, the entire Board resigned. By the first week of May, an entire new Board had been elected, composed primarily of the sons of the former members. Hayashi's resignation as Manager had been accepted, but he had been asked to continue to supervise the completion of the new building and the continuation of service in the Annex until a replacement could be hired. He and Okura and the former members of the Board were asked to join an advisory board. A new opening date, July 2, 1922, had been set to accommodate the reunion of the class of 1881 of the United States Naval Academy.⁵⁵

During this crisis, another dramatic event took place to alter opinions regarding the new building. On April 26, ten days after the fire, Tokyo was struck by the most severe earthquake in thirty years. Wright, working in the north wing at the time, ran out at the sound of a crash. Fearing that the large banquet hall section had collapsed, he emerged to see that the brick chimneys of the old hotel, left standing in the charred ruins, had fallen.⁵⁶ With the new building completely intact, Wright's design had faced its test and survived.

The final days leading up to the arrival of the Annapolis class of 1881 were unequalled in Japan in speed of construction. The day before the opening, it was reported that,

A thousand workmen for a thousand hours are to win their race against an American Navy transport, a race in which the distance is not physical, but that of time,

for a large section of the new Imperial Hotel will be completed, furnished and carefully swept. . . . It will have been 1,000 hours from the time the *Henderson* cleared the Hampton Roads when she docks at Yokohama at noon tomorrow . . . Although the lobby, dining room, many bedrooms and some other parts of the hotel will be completed . . . , Mr. Wright sees the unfinished work and regrets it. That the efforts of the workmen are appreciated will be shown tonight when the hotel management is to be their host at a dinner on the roof of the new building. A thousand bottles of sake will be drunk to the honor of the new Imperial Hotel. . . . The dinner will take the place of the *joto-shiki*, a Shinto ceremony which should be held when the roof is erected over any building put up in Japan.⁵⁷

On July 2, 1922 the north wing and the partially completed central section of the hotel opened as scheduled. The new manager, H.K.S. Yamaguchi, credited the accomplishment to Wright. Although a number of the public rooms and the entire south wing remained closed, Mueller estimated that they would be completed in six weeks. This work could be done under Arato Endo's supervision, since the south wing was a duplicate of the north. Wright made plans to return home, with the expectation that Mueller would follow in August at the completion of the remainder of the building. After a number of tributes and ceremonies (Fig. 23) which Wright recalled movingly in his autobiography, he and Miriam Noel left Yokohama on the Pacific steamship *President McKinley* on July 22, 1922. They arrived in Seattle via Victoria, B.C. on August 1.⁵⁸ Wright would never see Japan again.

A few weeks after reaching home Wright reflected on what surely must have been one of the greatest adventures of his life. "My experience in the building of the great building in Japan," he wrote his friend and former client, Darwin Martin, "has taught me how difficult of realization my ideal in Architecture is. I had to come to close grips with everything in the field as the whole affair including furniture was made by my own workmen 'on the job.' I realize how inadequate my superintendence has always been — how rash I was to aim so high and how much my clients had to give in patience and forbearance to get the thing which in the beginning they did not really want — perhaps."⁵⁹

Although separated by thousands of miles and an ocean,

⁵⁴ "Imperial Hotel May Use Limited Annex Facilities," *Japan Advertiser*, April 18, 1922, 12.

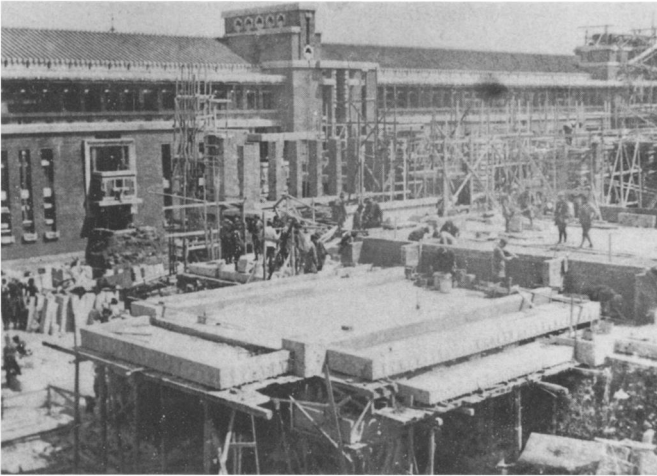
⁵⁵ "Manager of Hotel Resigns Position," *Japan Advertiser*, April 20, 1922, 1; "Hotel Board Quits Because of Blaze," *Japan Advertiser*, April 21, 1922, 1 and 10; "New Board Elected For Imperial Hotel," *Japan Advertiser*, May 9, 1922, 1. It has been speculated that Okura and Hayashi resigned because the Hotel was on the verge of closing because of delays in the construction of the Wright building. Kirishiki, 136.

⁵⁶ "Four Persons Dead; Million Yen Damage is Caused By Quake," *Japan Advertiser*, April 27, 1922, 1; Wright (1932, 1943), 1977, 244.

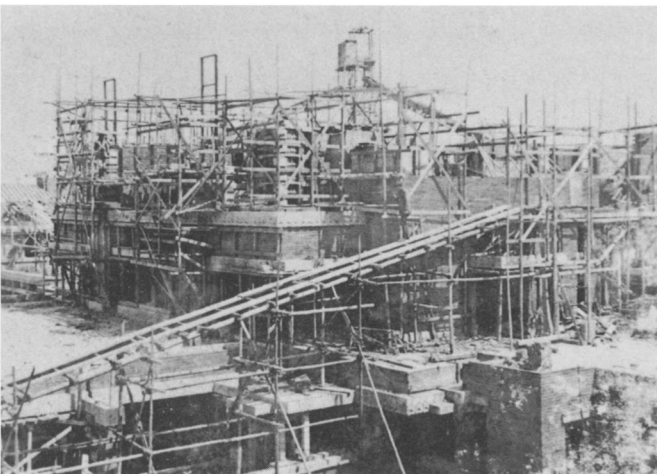
⁵⁷ "Thousand Men Win 1000-Day Race In Building Hotel Wing," *Japan Advertiser*, July 1, 1922, 1.

⁵⁸ "Enthusiastic And Cordial Welcome Is Given Members Of U.S. Naval Class Party," *Japan Advertiser*, July 3, 1922, 1-2; "Opening Tiffen Served In New Hotel Dining Room," *Japan Advertiser*, July 4, 1922, 2; "Hotel Architect Will Sail For U.S. July 22," *Japan Advertiser*, July 20, 1922, 1. The amount of time Wright spent in Japan is still open to question. In a letter to Martin on his return, August 20, 1922, he states that he spent fifty-one months in Japan. My evidence accounts for thirty-nine months between 1916 and 1922, with an additional seven months in 1905 and 1913 for a total of forty-six. However, he had written in 1932 that he had spent one thousand and nine days in Tokyo which equals thirty-three and a half months. Wright (1932, 1943), 1977, 248.

⁵⁹ Wright to Martin, August 20, 1922, Wright-Martin Papers, Stanford.



21 Wright, Imperial Hotel, Tokyo, in construction, 1921 (photo: Imperial Hotel)

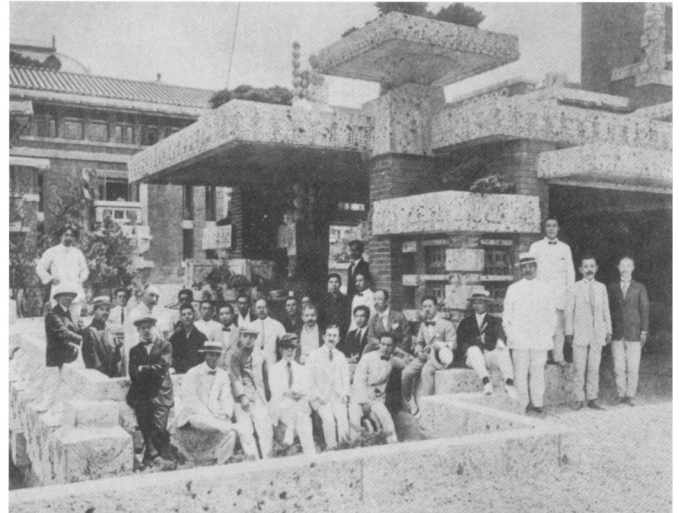


22 Wright, Imperial Hotel, Tokyo, in construction, 1921 (photo: Imperial Hotel)

Wright remained committed to the fate and reputation of the Imperial Hotel. He was outraged when he read "A Building That Is Wrong" by the San Francisco architect Louis Mullgardt, which appeared in the November *Architect & Engineer*. For seven pages, Mullgardt itemized the points that led him to conclude that Wright's design was "... a monstrous thing of supposedly antique influence, but really prehistoric in plan, design, structure, decoration and state of decay." In summation, he declared, "The errors are so numerous and flagrant that it may be said this structure should never have been built."⁶⁰ Wright remained concerned, as he wrote to Louis Sullivan in March, 1923, that the Hotel should receive critical support in architectural magazines which could be sent on to Japan to influence opinion. He mentioned that he was looking forward to Sul-

⁶⁰ Louis Christian Mullgardt, "A Building That Is Wrong," *Architect & Engineer*, LXXI, November, 1922, 81 and 86.

⁶¹ Wright to Sullivan, March, 1923; Louis Sullivan, "Concerning the Im-



23 Wright and staff in front of Imperial Hotel, 1922 (photo: Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation)

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1916												
1917												
1918												
1919												
1920												
1921												
1922												

■■■■ JAPAN

24 Chart of Frank Lloyd Wright's time in the United States and Japan (drawing, Jenny Schwing; photo, author)

livan's article in the *Architectural Record*; but as the months passed, Wright, who had moved to Los Angeles to establish a new practice, became involved in his work.⁶¹

Instead of six weeks, the completion of the south wing took over a year. The occasion of the opening of the entire building was to be celebrated on September 1, 1923 at an official luncheon arranged by the new manager, Tetsuzo Inumaru. The time had come when it would be possible to determine whether Wright's building would succeed or fail. Ironically, opening day and the most important day in the history of the building were one and the same. Just a few minutes before the luncheon, Tokyo was hit by the Great Kanto Earthquake, the most severe Japanese earthquake in the twentieth century. Within the next twenty-four hours, the city was subject not only to continuous after-shocks,

perial Hotel, Tokyo, Japan," *Architectural Record*, LIII, April, 1923, 332-52. Kameki Tsuchiura, a former draftsman in Wright's Tokyo office, joined him in Los Angeles in 1923.

but fires, flashes of light, unexplainable gusts of wind, and changes in the oxygen content of the air caused by the massive and violent conflagration that followed the quake. Although the Imperial Hotel suffered some damage, none of the dire predictions of its critics came true. The building stood and almost immediately became the unofficial center for emergency relief. In the weeks that followed, the hotel served as a home for refugees, dispensed free meals to thousands of homeless, and became the headquarters for foreign embassies, public utilities, and the Japanese press. Within a matter of days, the hotel became an object of praise for Japanese and foreigners alike and Wright was hailed as its architect.⁶²

One immediate effect of the earthquake was that almost all means of communication was cut off between Tokyo, Yokohama, and the rest of the world. Some information was being relayed by the Japanese press to foreign newspapers. Wright read about the earthquake in Los Angeles. It was reported that the hotel had been destroyed, but Wright refused to believe it. Finally, on September 13, the now legendary telegram arrived from Baron Okura assuring him that the hotel had survived. It was followed shortly after by one from Hayashi which read, "Imperial stands square and straight. Congratulations."

In the months that followed, Wright gained a measure of fame as a result of the dramatic events in Tokyo. The experience of the Imperial Hotel had brought him widespread public recognition for his work as an architect, not for the intimate details of his personal life. Although it was probably not until the publication of *Fallingwater* thirteen years later that Wright would receive the national attention he was seeking, the Imperial Hotel and the Kanto earthquake did what the Wasmuth portfolio had not. After years of being ignored by the Chicagoan A.N. Marquis, the compiler of *Who's Who in America*, it was only a few months after the earthquake that Wright received notice that he was to be included. On the form requesting information, in answer to the question, "What have you done that is

worthy of special mention?" Wright wrote, "The Imperial Hotel of Tokyo, Japan and 176 other Buildings of Note."⁶³

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⁶² "The Imperial Hotel In An Emergency by T. Inumaru," *Japan Advertiser*, January 24, 1924, 3; Noel F. Busch, *Two Minutes to Noon*, New

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⁶³ The Kelmescott Gallery, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, Chicago, n.d., 55.