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Publisher: Routledge

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The Journal of Architecture

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rjar20>

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Adriana Irigoyen ^a

^a Rua Professor Antonio Volponi S-148 , Pederneiras, São Paulo, 17280-000, Brazil

Published online: 08 Dec 2010.

To cite this article: Adriana Irigoyen (2000) Frank Lloyd Wright in Brazil, The Journal of Architecture, 5:2, 137-157, DOI: [10.1080/136023600408683](https://doi.org/10.1080/136023600408683)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/136023600408683>

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Frank Lloyd Wright in Brazil

Adriana Irigoyen

*Rua Professor Antonio Volponi S-148, Pederneiras
17280-000, S o Paulo, Brazil*

Frank Lloyd Wright sailed into Rio de Janeiro in October 1931, after the Pan-American Union of Architects asked him to be on the jury of the International Competition for the Columbus Lighthouse in Santo Domingo. His visit has been seen as secondary and is scarcely mentioned in the historiography of modern Brazilian architecture.

His stay was given wide press coverage, with interviews and front-page headlines, and several tributes were arranged. During his 23-day stay in Rio, the city's leading newspapers vigorously spread his innovative ideas, reflecting the feelings of many young people who saw Wright's theories as potentially a source of inspiration for their own careers. He lectured on his theories and attended the inauguration of one of the first modern houses in the city.

But not all was admiration for the master. Architects trained in the Beaux Arts tradition, whose doctrines had inspired the creation of the local National School of Fine Arts, rejected innovation and saw Wright as an enemy to be conquered so as to avoid the contamination of new generations.

Without any doubt, the presence of Wright in Rio could be included among the factors that contributed to the consolidation of modern architecture in Brazil.

Introduction

Modern Brazilian architecture was quick to achieve fame internationally. Already in 1943, as part of President Franklin Roosevelt's 'Good Neighbor' policy, MoMA had organised the exhibition 'Brazil Builds'. In the book he wrote to accompany the exhibition, Philip Goodwin placed emphasis on the new architectural concepts then being consolidated in Brazil, particularly in Rio de Janeiro.¹

In those days young architects of Rio de Janeiro, then the capital of Brazil, were most interested in innovative techniques and design, consequently they adopted the doctrine and work of Le Corbusier as their architectural bible. Buildings

proclaimed the influence of Le Corbusier and the world was shown the image of a modern nation.

The historiography of modern Brazilian architecture contributed to the consolidation of a hegemonic narrative around the Rio de Janeiro School as the leading paradigm for the country's architecture. There was certainly crucial progress for genuinely Brazilian modern architecture with the international repercussions caused by works such as the Ministry of Education and Health building (1936) by Lucio Costa, in collaboration with Oscar Niemeyer, Affonso Eduardo Reidy, Jorge Moreira, Carlos Le o and Ernani Vasconcellos (with Le Corbusier himself also involved in an advisory

capacity), and Brazil's Pavilion at the New York World Fair (1938), by Costa and Niemeyer. However, the preference for Le Corbusier, who visited the country on three occasions (1929, 1936 and 1962), sidelined other kinds of architecture that were not part of this prevailing trend. Such was the dominance of this movement that it tended to write off anything not directly related to the key figures of this new era.

From this point of view, it is easy to understand why Frank Lloyd Wright's trip to Rio de Janeiro in 1931 failed to make any lasting impression. His visit has been seen as secondary and is scarcely mentioned in the historiography of modern Brazilian architecture.

Wright in Rio

Frank Lloyd Wright sailed into Rio de Janeiro on board the *American Legion* in October 1931, after the Pan-American Union of Architects asked him to be on the jury of the International Competition for the Columbus Lighthouse in Santo Domingo.

His stay was given wide press coverage (Figs 1 and 2), with interviews and front-page headlines, and several tributes were arranged. During his stay in Rio (from Friday 2 to Saturday 24 October), the city's leading newspapers *Correio da Manhã* and *O Globo* vigorously spread his innovative ideas, reflecting the feelings of many young people who saw Wright's theories as potentially a source of inspiration for their own careers. But not all was admiration for the master. Architects trained in the Beaux Arts tradition whose doctrines had inspired the creation of the local National School of Fine Arts (Escola Nacional de Bellas Artes–ENBA, Fig. 3)

rejected innovation and saw Wright as an enemy to be conquered so as to avoid the contamination of new generations.

A year before Wright's visit, Getúlio Vargas had come to power in the revolution of 1930. His authoritarian government, against a backdrop of incipient industrialisation in Brazil, officially adopted modern architecture as a national emblem. From the political and cultural viewpoints, Rio de Janeiro was a hothouse of progress with the Graf Zeppelin regularly flying in over Guanabara Bay (Fig. 4). The city's mountainous profile gained a new element: the statue of Christ the Redeemer (known as Cristo Redentor), an Art Deco monument designed by French architect Paul Landowski and unveiled in October 1931, during Wright's stay (Fig. 5). It seemed that the sky was the limit for Brazil after the revolution of 1930, as the nation searched for its roots in the past and, at the same time, sought ways of ensuring a successful future for the new nation.

Nevertheless, disorder reigned at the ENBA where Lucio Costa had been appointed director by the new revolutionary government in December 1930. In his new position, he was endeavouring to reform the syllabus, in an attempt to integrate art with new building technologies. However, Costa had lost his position after an open confrontation between traditionalists and moderns. He proposed hiring 'modern' teachers such as Gregori Warchavchik, Alexandre Buddeus, Celso Antônio and Leo Putz, but the Beaux Arts traditionalists rejected his proposal. On the other hand, students were delighted with these new faculty members; perhaps they were aware of the transcendent nature of the initiative,



Figure 1. 'Columbus Lighthouse Competition', *O Globo*, October 2 1931, p. 3. (From Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.)

Figure 2. Frank Lloyd Wright by a local artist. (From: Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.)

which may surely be considered a landmark in the development of modern architecture in Brazil. A student strike broke out when the reform was blocked and it went on for the entire duration of Wright's sojourn in Brazil.

Such was the context of his visit and the heated rivalry that has to be taken into consideration when we look at the role Wright played. On October 13, at the invitation of the ENBA Student Council, Wright lectured on his theories on new trends in architecture. The tone of the welcoming speeches was a faithful reflection of the predominant mood among the students:

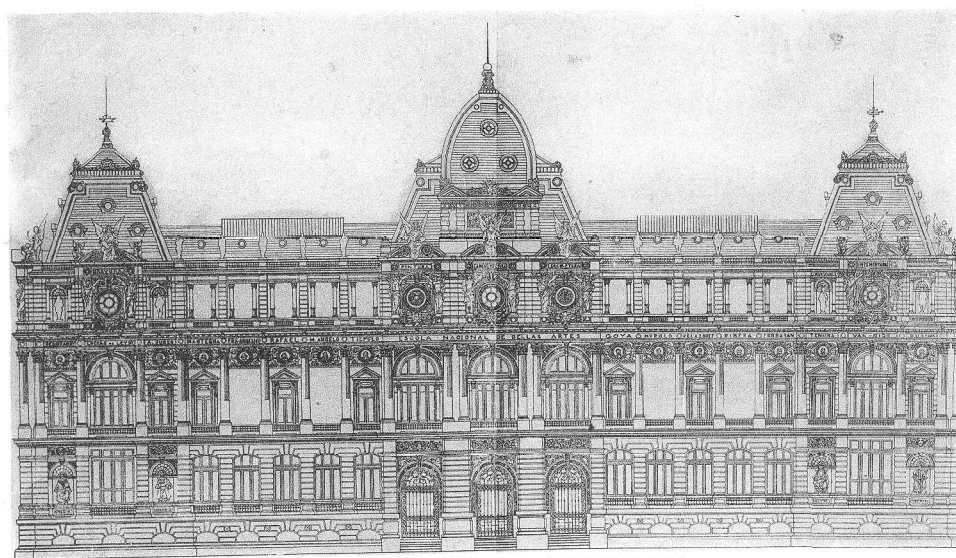
At a time in which we are vigorously struggling to join the current of progress that today's architecture calls for, the School of Fine

Arts Student Council, imbued with the enthusiasm and conviction that behooves champions of just and grandiose causes, takes great pleasure in introducing Frank Lloyd Wright, a forefather of the ideas now being discussed. His presence here among architecture students in Brazil brings a great encouragement to them and a certainty that they shall overcome.²

During the lecture, Wright deliberately incited confrontation by stating,

the same spirit that created the best forms of the past also makes today's forms. Lifestyles change as conditions evolve in the course of time . . . We cannot go on repeating the old forms come what may. For this reason, our road must be one of rebellion.³

Figure 3. Escola Nacional de Bellas Artes (ENBA) in Rio de Janeiro (the National School of Fine Arts).



Edition de la Mission Brésilienne de Propagande - Paris

BRÉSIL. - Rio de Janeiro. — Avenue Centrale. - Ecole nationale des Beaux-Arts

Wright had taken the side of the students on arriving and his enthusiasm for their cause swelled. Young people had always been his favourite audience and the causes that he deemed just further reinforced his natural fighting spirit, forged in a family of Unitarian preachers whose motto was 'Truth against the world'. The author of the report also seems to be a follower of the new ideas for which he expresses his enthusiasm, since without them 'we would be stuck with the Beaux Arts style and other anachronisms.'⁴

The questions from the audience reflected the conflict. The new ENBA director who replaced Costa, Archimedes Memória, himself one of the

most combative members of the group opposed to reform, seized the opportunity to ask Wright how beauty was to be recognised. Wright did not view this as a suitable question and, with his customary arrogance, corrected him: 'You should ask yourself how to recognise what is reasonable.' And he went on:

Man is entitled to harmony in modern life. By basing ourselves on that right (harmony) we will have the foundation (the essence) of the modern. The way of reaching this truth is the study of materials and tools and, especially, the rational knowledge of nature.

Memória came in to counter this assertion. 'How



Figure 4. Graf Zeppelin arriving in Rio de Janeiro.

can one teach students the difference between old and modern form?’ and Wright replied ‘Starting from the function and working toward form’. Memória disagreed and insisted that some architects started from the opposite premise. Wright put an end to the discussion: ‘That is putting the cart before the horse.’⁵

Young people were already looking for a way in which modern architecture could be expressed. This was shown in a question from one of the students who asked Wright about the alternatives open to Brazil. Should it copy foreign modernism or try to

create a style suited to its own needs? Wright had no hesitation in replying. As he saw it, the nature of materials and forms of life were unequivocally obliged to express themselves. He wondered about ‘the’ style that ought to emerge from our modern way of living with its new machines, instead of ‘a’ style that had been imposed on it. He explained his ideas on growth ‘from the inside outward’ in architectural work. And, for the first time before a Brazilian audience, he introduced the notion of organic architecture that, in his opinion, could offer a whole range of approaches and solutions.

Figure 5. Rio de Janeiro in the 1930s;
Cristo Redentor.

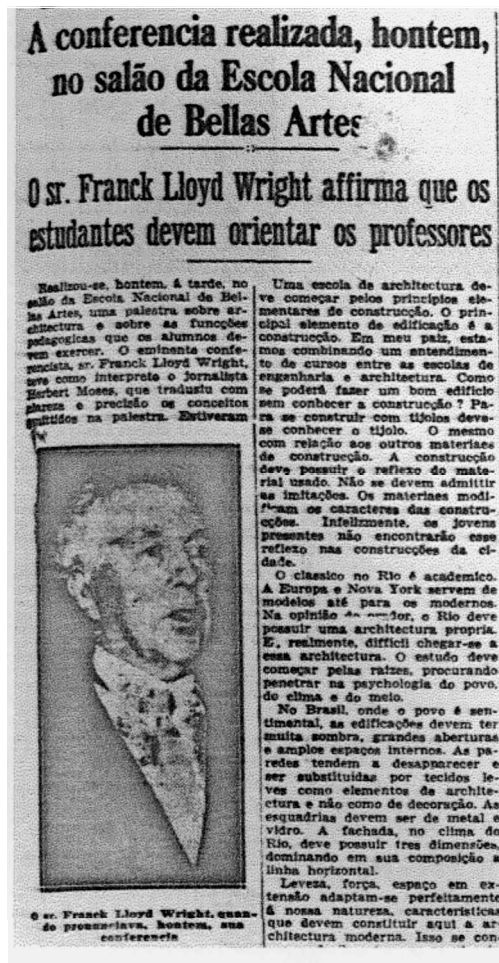


Throughout the report one can perceive the tense atmosphere involving teachers and students, the clash of ideas between those in favour of the Beaux Arts focus and those who wished to keep abreast of the times or, in other words, between the *Grand Prix de Rome* and the *Modern Bauformen*. The conflicts between old-guard teachers and pro-reform students went on. Four students were arrested by order of Archimedes Memória but the Student Council intervened and they were soon released.⁶

On October 21 Wright gave another lecture at the ENBA, prompting students to show the way to their teachers. He ratified his support for the student

strike and again attacked the Beaux Arts style, setting it in contrast with architecture as a manifestation of life that expressed the character of a people and their way of living (Fig. 6). Like all foreigners, he felt obliged to state his opinion on the city and its architectural potential. Wright was quick to say that Rio de Janeiro called for an architecture of its own. One had to go back to the roots and understand the thinking of its inhabitants, its climate, its environment. 'Brazilians,' he said, 'are emotive people who need buildings with plenty of shade, large openings and wide internal spaces... Building fa ades should possess three dimensions, with the horizontal line dominating the composition.' As a supporter of the teaching of principles, Wright never treated form as a dogma and he concluded his second lecture with a categorical statement: 'We should not transplant the architecture of another people; rather we should create an organic architecture reaching up from the ground toward the light source. This is modern architecture.'⁷

O Globo newspaper published an interview with Wright (Fig. 7) under the heading 'A vision of tomorrow's art'.⁸ In response to a question, the architect again said that no buildings in Rio should be higher than seven storeys, since the 'superb and inimitable' mountains took the place of towering buildings. Asked about the characteristic features of modern architecture, his answer veered towards absolute ambiguity: 'There is, it is true, a modernist tendency that evolves toward the architecture of the future. It will never ignore the environment and will therefore be more authentic and more significant.'⁹ Obviously, Wright was not going to pass up a chance to take up the cudgels against the



Academy again. By this time he was aware that the press was enthusiastically on his side. And he contemptuously pointed out: 'They are concerned with composition, not with real creation.'¹⁰

Since the only available record of Wright's lectures in Rio de Janeiro are the reports in *O Globo* and *Correio da Manhã*, we shall have to content ourselves with an analysis of his theoretical position in order to distinguish the essential points on which he may have talked to his Brazilian audience. Wright himself offers a key to this in the course of his interview by referring to the programme of lectures he had just given at Princeton University that was almost certainly rehearsed for use in Brazil. The series known as Modern Architecture (or the Kahn lectures) was presented in May 1930, a year before his South American trip.¹¹ With the programme outline fresh in his memory, Wright may well have 'recycled' its main formulations. Moreover, this was a habit of his. A perusal of his writings reveals many remarkably similar texts under different titles, so it would hardly be surprising if Wright had taken along a 'kit' of ready-to-use lectures. Although the reason for the trip was a competition of no great importance, he knew that he would find an audience in Rio de Janeiro that would not miss an opportunity to hear his ideas.

The occasion could hardly have been more propitious. The strike at the ENBA provided the ideal medium for the flourishing of new ideas. The issues that were at the core of Wright's concerns were sure to find fertile ground. On the other hand, both at Princeton and ENBA, the audience consisted mostly of students – his favourite audience – a fact that reinforces the idea that he may well have adapted the Kahn lectures for use in Rio. Wright's approach may also be verified in the previous texts that, in turn, had been the basis for the Princeton

Figure 6.
'Yesterday's lecture at Escola Nacional de Bellas Artes'. *Correio da Manhã*, October 22 1931, p. 3.
(From: Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.)

Figure 7(a). Front page of *O Globo*, October 17 1931.

(b). Detail of the interview with Frank Lloyd Wright. (From: Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.)



course of lectures. His more transcendent writings included *The Art and Craft of the Machine* (1901), *Ausgeführte bauten und entwürfe von Frank Lloyd Wright* (1908), and the series *In the Cause of Architecture* (1908–1914–1925). They feature issues such as organic architecture, composition from the inside outward, the third dimension, style, the nature of materials, and abstraction, which appear as constants in the Wrightian universe.

There were six Princeton lectures: *Machines, Materials and Men; Style in Industry; The Death of the Comice; The Cardboard House; The Tyranny of*

the Skyscraper, and *The City*. The last two purely and simply posit the disappearance of the city and the redistribution of its inhabitants to rural areas (ideas later synthesised in Broadacre, the city of wide open spaces). Except for his references to skyscrapers as a negative element for Rio de Janeiro, Wright does not seem to have referred to his controversial conceptions of urban design during his stay in Brazil. The focus during his visit, as already detailed, remained within the boundaries of the opposition between the Beaux Arts tradition and modern architecture, the discussion having centered on architectural issues. Consequently, it is in the first four lectures that we

may identify the material used in the Rio de Janeiro course.

In *Machines, Materials and Men* Wright reformulated his legendary lecture of 1901, *The Art and Craft of the Machine*, and again attacked mass production as an instrument for making 'cheap imitations' reproduced *ad nauseam*. But this time he went beyond mere criticism. As a diligent student and lover of Japanese culture after spending much time there during the construction of the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, he now proposed that the Japanese experience could be the model for an alternative culture opposed to the hegemony of the machine. This would emphasise compatibility with nature, respect for the intrinsic features of materials, harmonious decoration and elimination of the superfluous, while not forgetting modulation and standardisation, as themes that had been dear to the international modern movement since the times of the art/industry controversy between Van de Velde and Muthesius. The nature of material, the third dimension and unified decoration formed a 'trinity spurned' according to Wright. It is also interesting to notice that Wright encouraged the rebellious spirit of the young students, as he would later at the ENBA. 'I am here to support the rebellion of the modern spirit,' he said at Princeton.

In his second lecture, Wright insisted on the generic character of the concept of style, in opposition to 'style' in the academic sense. On this occasion he formulated a definition of 'organic' structures as all those whose parts are organised in an integrated way. The concept was introduced in the first lecture in the ENBA and featured promi-

nently in the *Correio da Manhã* reports. Over time, the term became a synonym for Wright's architecture, although his attempts to define it would only add to the confusion over its exact meaning.

Just as *The Death Of The Cornice* is an attack on the Academy, *The Cardboard House* opened fire against *la machine à habiter* as it enumerates the guidelines the author adopted to attain organic simplicity:

First – To reduce the number of necessary parts of the house and the separate rooms to a minimum, and make all come together as enclosed space – divided in such a way that light, air and view permeate the whole with a sense of unity;

Second – To associate the building as a whole with its site by extension and emphasis of the planes parallel to the ground;

Third – To eliminate the room as a box and the house as another by making all walls enclosing screens;

Fourth – To get the unwholesome basement up out of the ground . . . as a low pedestal for the living portion of the home;

Fifth – To harmonise all necessary openings with human proportions and make them occur naturally in the scheme of the whole building;

Sixth – To eliminate combinations of different materials in favor of mono-material . . . , to use no ornament that did not come out of the nature of materials (geometrical or straight lines were natural for machinery);

Seventh – To incorporate all heating, lighting, plumbing so that these systems became constituent parts of the building itself;

Eighth – To incorporate furnishing;

Ninth – To eliminate the decorator.

In view of the main topics tackled at Princeton, Wright probably provided his Brazilian audience with abundant material for discussion. Through a rhetorical offensive – against the Beaux Arts style or the International Style – he built his own version of modernity and, in so doing, fired both tempers and controversies. Probably among those attending Wright's lectures were most of the future leading figures in modern Brazilian architecture, namely Affonso Reidy, Luiz Nunes, Milton Roberto, Ernani de Vasconcelos, Jorge Moreira, and others. Wright's lectures served to encourage the students' fighting spirit in the conflict with the Academy and, at the same time, provoked reflection in relation to the way forward. Not that it was a matter of imitating Wright or copying European architecture indiscriminately. His language laid the bases for a third way, posing an alternative suited to the society, the climate, and the native landscape.

Wright gave his last lecture two days before leaving, this time at the Palace Hotel that served as headquarters for the Association of Brazilian Artists. After the stormy sessions at the ENBA, this event was probably very peaceful and without incident. We may surmise that the audience consisted exclusively of younger professionals and students, free from the scrutiny of academic faculty members.

Wright's departure was far from putting an end to the controversy. As late as 1933, echoes of his visit continued to feature in the press:

When Wright visited Brazil over a year ago, he made no attempt to conceal his surprise at the

lack of architectural design that he observed in every city and, mainly, his amazement on finding that when architects did intervene, their work clashed with the needs posed by the natural environment in Brazil. Styles imported from other eras cluttered our fa ades, in a pitiable confrontation with the land itself.

So this comment from a great American architect and philosopher was certainly an appropriate one and it made a vivid impression on certain young architects. The ideal of a modern architecture for Brazil, one directly suited to the country's climate, shorn of superfluous decoration or stylistic concern, had inspired the renovating movement headed by Lúcio Costa at ENBA.¹²

Nevertheless Frank Lloyd Wright's lectures did not make the 'official' record. Whereas Le Corbusier's 1929 lectures 'served to focalise the architect's role and posed new directions,' the presence of Wright, on the other hand, is remembered as 'a social and diplomatic event.'¹³

In his autobiographical text *The invited guest: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*, Wright tells a lively story of his trip to South America, a few excerpts from which are worth quoting:

We were on the way to South America . . . The old half-freighter pushed up to the great pier at Rio in early morning – that wonderful harbor at sunrise! There were a lot of boys (students, I thought) climbing on board. They surrounded us. Only one (and a half, say) spoke English.

They were a delegation from some seven



Figure 8.
Copacabana Palace
Hotel in the early
1930s.

hundred or more students of Brazil Belles Artes [sic], out on what they called a strike. The institution was modeled by and on the French, of course. Latins for the latins. The Beaux-Arts professors of the Belles Artes had ruled me out altogether by banning my books and forbidding magazines on modern architecture in their library, together with all of my kind. The youths were a delegation sent by the student body to ask me for help. Would I help?

I would.

'Look out', said Saarinen. 'This is a revolutionary country – first thing you know SSSKKK he drew his finger across his throat – and it will be all over with you.'

'Never mind', I said. 'Come on. Get in and help'. He stood on the sidelines, however. But I was soon in over my head.

My head still on my shoulders I met Herbert Moses, editor of *El Globo* [sic], one of Rio's leading newspapers, and soon I learned how to make a speech in a foreign tongue. Moses was not only remarkably intelligent, but also (as an experienced editor) remarkably articulate. I filled him up with the point of view. He was enthusiastic.

The first meeting with the enemy was in the old hall of the Belles Artes. The Beaux-Arts dignitaries, myself, and the handsome president of the University of Brazil presiding... The meeting began with Latinesque

formalities. The President offered a welcome, a professor or two chimed in. My turn – but without waiting for me to speak, bedlam broke.

When they let go a little I got *El Globo* by the arm and, standing the way, would tell him in a sentence or two what I wanted to say. He would put it over to the young rebels with such effect that they would go wild.

The Latins love to go wild.

I gave them all I could – pleaded their cause as the future of Brazil. If Brazil was to have a future, how could she deny her youth the advanced thought of the world whether or not her elders disagreed with that thought . . .

And then the masses of youngsters . . . picked me up and carried me down the street, called a taxi, and sent me off to the Copacabana with all on board who could stick . . .

Well, the Belles Artes strike began to turn on the heat. I don't remember where or how many times I spoke, or how many articles I wrote for *El Globo* and *El Manha*, the leading newspapers of Brazil.

The boys would come after me and I would go, and Herbert Moses would 'interpret' – if that is what he did. He became firmly eloquent – I suspect he frequently put more into me than I had put into him. I met the 'modern' professors the boys wanted. They were good architects and excellent men. The authorities were very negligent or else indulgent because they didn't arrest me, but finally they did arrest one of the coveted professors who spoke alongside me – Araújo . . .¹⁴

The Columbus Memorial Lighthouse Competition

Wright had travelled to Brazil to judge a competition, not for a lecture series. Rio de Janeiro was the venue for the final round of an international competition for the construction of a lighthouse-monument in honour of Christopher Columbus, to be erected in Santo Domingo (the capital of the Dominican Republic).¹⁵ During the first stage, held in Madrid in 1929, ten works had been qualified, from 455 entries.

On the jury were Albert Kelsey (delegate of the Pan-American Union), Horacio Acosta y Lara (representing Latin America), Wright (North America) and Eliel Saarinen (Europe). Also judging the competition were the Brazilians Nestor E. de Figueiredo (president of the Central Institute of Architects), Adolfo Morales de los Rios, José Cortez, Cypriano Lopes, Edgard Vianna, Leonidas Vargas Dantas, and the above-mentioned Archimedes Memória, the ENBA principal and a ferocious enemy of the modern.¹⁶

At the end of two weeks of deliberations, on October 17 the awards were announced in the presence of President Getulio Vargas. The winner was J. L. Gleave, from Nottingham, England, and in second place were Donald Nelson (New York) and Edgard Lynch (Paris), while the third prize went to a Spanish team formed by Joaquín Vaqueros Palacios and Luis Moya Blanco. Fourth place was taken by Théo Lescher, Paul Andrieu, Georges Défontaine and Maurice Gauthier (New York).¹⁷

The jury records clearly reflect Wright's influence. The winning project, in the form of a cross (one of his favoured shapes), was chosen for its

horizontal dimension and its simplicity, and the choice justified on the grounds of 'originality, symbolic audacity, and innovative technique'. In the opinion of Acosta y Lara

the many visitors to the lighthouse-monument will feel the wonderful sense of mystery hovering over the soul of humanity at that time, having left behind the Middle Ages but not yet being accustomed to the illumination of the Renaissance. The epoch of Columbus will be faithfully reproduced in the great cross pieces, with the sky and the never-ending walls as perspective. By night, this admirable effect will provide brightness in the form of a cross. The cross was the synthesis of the spirit of the time.¹⁸

According to the minutes published on the front page of *O Globo* (Fig. 9), 'expressions of the new construction methods that are characteristic of our twentieth century'¹⁹ were markedly absent. There was also a comment on the winning submission:

... the project, making wonderful use of light, has movement, simplicity and force that are worthy of the great immortal monuments. This project is symbolic, although not to the extent that the symbolism competes with the simple beauty of the architectural work. Seen from the air or from the surrounding area, its sheer mass constitutes a basic feature of this work, one worthy of the persevering courage and the faith of the great explorer being celebrated. The cross-shaped ramp, reflecting and absorbing light, will be truly impressive from the interior and pleasantly cool in a tropical climate. The whole synthesises idea and unity



Figure 9. Front page of *O Globo*, October 16 1931. Press coverage of the Columbus Lighthouse Competition (right hand columns). (From: Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.)

and, through a certain and reasonable vigour, avoids the trite craze for height ...²⁰

The Taliesin West files conserve Wright's original notes, in which he recorded his impressions of the competition. He wrote:

Except in the employment of one great modern resource – light – among the ten designs submitted in this competition none express what previous civilizations with such resources as they had could not have better expressed. New resources in construction characterising our twentieth century are absent.

But, one design does take refuge in a directness, simplicity and force worthy of the great monuments of the ages. The design is symbolic but not to the point where symbolism has interfered with the simple beauty of the design as architecture. Its symbolism is integral.

Seen from the air or from the ground the simple mass becomes an elemental feature, in character worthy of the courage of the great discoverer it commemorates.

The whole has idea, unity and force and avoids the dull craze and the trite erection of the 'post'. In this design may be seen the fact that dignity of architectural conception is not bound up with 'height'. Construction is simple and cost probably within programming limitations.²¹

It is clear that Wright's notes, written in his room at the Copacabana Palace Hotel (Fig. 8), were literally transcribed into the jury minutes. At the very least, he had a major influence over the rest of the jury. Perhaps he was just as persuasive with the students as with his colleagues on the jury. Wright's scepticism in relation to competitions was already notorious and shortly before his trip to Brazil, in one of two lectures at the Art Institute of Chicago, he addressed young architects in the following terms:

Enter no architectural competition under any circumstances. No competition ever gave the world anything worth having in architecture. The jury itself is a picked average. The first thing done by a jury is to go through all the designs and throw out the best and the worst ones so, as an average, it can average upon the average.²²

Wright may well have accepted the invitation to travel to Rio simply in order to flee from the severity of winter in Taliesin and spend some time in an exotic land. 'It is a long journey with a beautiful objective which I do not like to take without sharing with Mrs. Wright. I do not know how expensive the trip is. I imagine it would be beyond our means,'²³ he comments in a letter to L. S. Rowe, head of the Pan-American Union, with the undisguised aim of getting a second fare paid. His autobiography confirms the suspicion:

The affair Columbus took a back seat although we finally did judge the show . . . I wrote the opinion and the other judges politely concurred – not looking for argument. What was the use, anyway? A young Englishman got the prize and deserved it. The whole mass of entries, with a half-dozen exceptions, was a bad form of grandomania and wonderful draftmanship. Like most competitions it was all in vain.²⁴

Understandably, Wright lost interest in the Columbus Lighthouse and relegated it to almost anecdotal status. Not only did he sense the minimal transcendence of the competition, but his attention focused on the chance of 'converting' a group of enthusiastic youths to the architecture of the future and this surely became the most important aspect of his stay in Brazil. In his autobiography, Wright remembers his time in Rio:

Olgivanna and I hardly touched the ground during our stay. We went from place to place with a grand set of fellows and their handsome wives. We weekendend at Petropolis, bathed on the beach before the Copacabana,

rode in the suburbs and along the marvellous Rio waterfront dominated by curious mountain silhouettes. Kelsey must have hated me for it all – because what had it to do with the competition for the Columbus Memorial?²⁵

The members of the jury took part in innumerable extra-academic activities. The profusion of partying and excursions was no surprise for Wright. In a letter dated August 10, 1931, Kelsey had anticipated this: '... knowing the Latins, I feel sure there will be some formal entertaining, and hope that you will be able to stay on in order to enjoy it.'²⁶ Some years later, Wright was to write: 'Ah the Rio de Janeirians are a fiery, gallant folk. I never thought I would ever love the Latins so much.'²⁷ Nevertheless, Wright never lost sight of his real mission. Attending a diplomatic banquet at the Hotel Gloria as a guest of the ambassador of the Dominican Republic, Wright advised Rio de Janeiro to avoid having buildings that competed with the surrounding mountains. And at a lunch organised by the Brazilian Institute of Architects, he caused a sensation with a vehement speech in defence of the cause of the ENBA students, 'did all he could to get the backing of the only professional organisation [of architects] for those idealistic youth who would in the future constitute the driving force in Brazilian culture.'²⁸

The 'modern house'

During his stay in Rio, Wright attended the inauguration of the 'modern house' (Fig. 10), built for Mr William Nordschild by architect Gregori Warchavchik, who is considered one of the precursors of modern Brazilian architecture. Born in

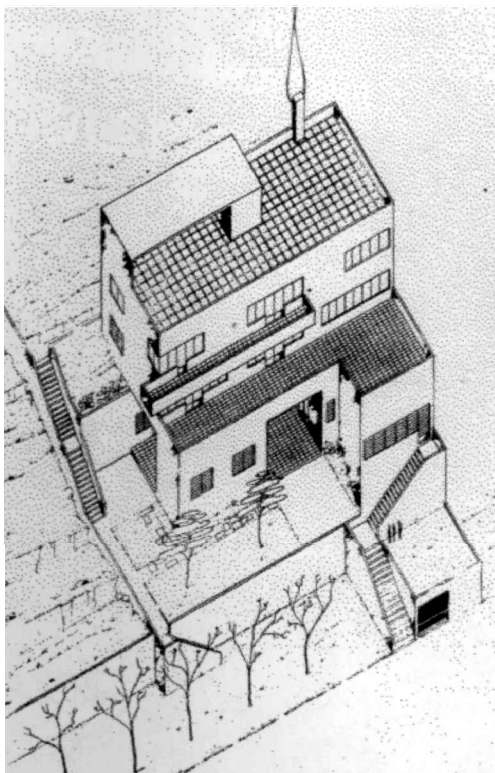
Russia, graduated from the National Institute of Fine Arts of Rome, he settled in Brazil in 1923. His work pioneered the introduction of the international modern language whose ideals he untiringly divulged through writings and manifestos and in 1929, after a visit to Brazil, Le Corbusier had suggested to Giedion that Warchavchik be named the CIAM's Latin American representative.

Wright's visit to the house on Rua Toneleros has, perhaps, been the only aspect of his trip that the historiography of Brazilian modern architecture has actually touched on – although not all that is said about it is true and it has always been approached in a purely descriptive and resolutely anecdotal way. However, there are several as-yet-untapped sources that may shed some light on several aspects of the episode.

If one is to believe the press reports, Wright was surprised to come across a building like this in Copacabana, one so 'adapted to the climate and avoiding the usual forms, almost creating a Brazilian architecture.'²⁹ The report also attributes the following statement to Wright: 'With a little effort and imagination, directed on the path along which Mr. Gregori is moving, Brazil could have its own modern and rational architecture.'³⁰ It is hard to believe that this was Wright's real opinion and it was surely just a way of being polite to his hosts (Figs. 11 and 12).

Wright's visit to the house in Copacabana is, perhaps, the best example of how the frequent repetition of a few inaccurate statements has become an accepted and unchallenged truth. For the allusions to Wright's visit in most of the literature in Brazil are on these lines.

Figure 10.
Nordschild house.
Gregori Warchavchik,
Rio de Janeiro, 1931.



Geraldo Ferraz, in his book *Warchavchik e a introdução da nova arquitetura no Brasil: 1925 a 1940* (Warchavchik and the Introduction of the New Architecture to Brazil: 1925 to 1940) tells us that:

Every evening for two weeks, under the illustrious chairmanship of Frank Lloyd Wright, there were meetings at the Nordschild house with Warchavchik, Lucio Costa and the young architects and students who were to set up

the architectural renovation movement in Brazil. In these discussions as a whole, with their lively emulation of ideas and discovery of shared ideas and aspirations and companionship, there was born the body of men that in the future would forge modern architecture in Brazil. It was there that the initial cell functioned.³¹

However, this modernist house was only opened for exhibition on October 22 and Wright left Brazil on the 24. A luncheon in his honour was held by the Institute of Architects on the 23 and, in the evening, he gave the last of his lectures at the Association of Brazilian Artists. Therefore, Wright could have visited the house only on the opening day, as shown by the photograph of him together with Costa and Warchavchik on the terrace of the Nordschild house (Fig. 13). Ferraz's information surely belongs to the category of fantasy, myth and wishful thinking. Undoubtedly the tale does lend an air of romanticism to the origins of modern Brazilian architecture with clandestine meetings and an air of cells taking part in a revolutionary conspiracy.

Moreover, Paulo Santos, in *Quatro séculos de arquitetura* (Four centuries of architecture), devotes two pages to Wright's visit, mentioning a few passages from *An Autobiography*, and confirms Ferraz's tale: 'There, almost every day, he taught students – among them Lúcio Costa and Alcides Rocha Miranda, Jorge Moreira, Ernani de Vasconcelos, and João Lourenço'.³² It was perhaps understandable that the facts should be polished up in an attempt to legitimate origins with the supposed 'approval' of Wright. But was this neces-

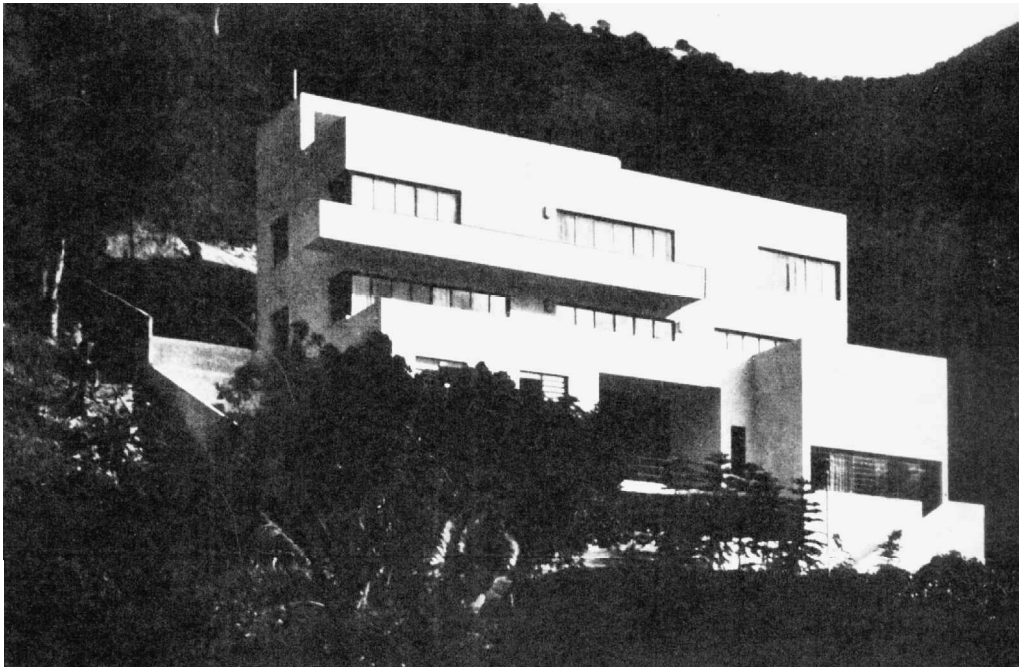
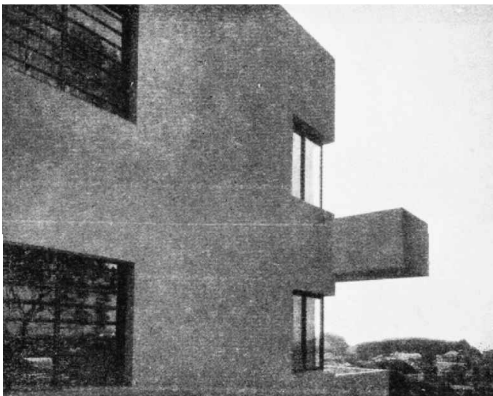


Figure 11–12.
Nordschild house.
Gregori Warchavchik,
Rio de Janeiro, 1931.



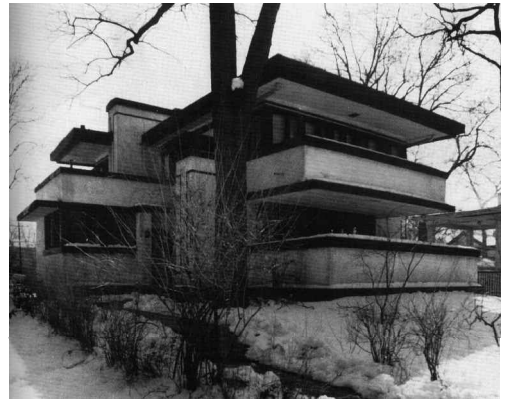
sary? Brazil, like other countries on the American continent (including the United States), was very sensitive to outside opinion. The virtue of self-confidence is only attained after great exertion.

In reporting Wright's appraisal of the house, Geraldo Ferraz has Wright expressing his admiration at 'the rational layout, the way the house blends into the landscape, and even of a detail, a cantilever.'³³ Santos takes this further by writing that:

The bare geometricism of the house impressed the great architect so much that, on returning to the United States and designing one of his

Figure 13. Lúcio Costa, Frank Lloyd Wright and Gregori Warchavchik at the inauguration of the 'modern house'.

Figure 14. Gale house. Frank Lloyd Wright, Oak Park, 1904–9.



most famous residences, Fallingwater, he used – for the first time in his career – a white prism-shaped balcony inspired by the house in Rio.³⁴

In fact, Wright had been experimenting with similar reinforced concrete structures since the beginning of the century, as may be seen in the Gale house (Fig. 14; Oak Park 1904–9). Wright did not use white in any of these houses, but 'tones of the land and of autumn leaves'.³⁵

Architect Alcides Rocha Miranda was a student at the ENBA at the time and remembers accompanying Wright to the house on Toneleros:

We called Warchavchik and took a taxi to Copacabana. Wright got out and looked at the house positioned on a slope. He was impressed by a balcony and remarked: 'If I were you, I would have a bigger outcrop here, I think the surface is very flat'. Then he looked over the neighbouring houses and changed his mind. 'Listen, professor, you are right to keep things very simple. Keep to this path'.³⁶

In Miranda's opinion, Wright's influence in Brazil was not as great as it might have been because 'people want the absolute negation of what has gone before'.³⁷ This has to do with a fixation, found throughout the Americas, in countries doomed to be both modern and everlasting admirers of prestigious European models.

Frank Lloyd Wright himself mentions his experience in Brazil in several of his writings and does away with a number of incidents found in the 'official' historians' version. In *For all may raise the*

flowers now for all have got the seed, an article written in 1932 about the famous Modern Architecture: International Exhibition at the MoMa, organised by Henry Russel-Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, Wright warned of the twin threats of Eclecticism and the International Style coming from Europe. As Wright saw it, internationalism was just an updated Eclecticism, associated with the culture of the ready-made and intense self-promotion. He referred to his experience in Rio, where he encountered the strike at the ENBA.

These students wanted to go forward instead of backward, and the Beaux-Arts armchairs couldn't allow that . . . These high-spirited young people were regarding 'the formula' as it had found its way there overseas by way of a Russian working for a German on the tropical mountain-side, at Copacabana. A good 'internationalist' example. As good as any. These young people were regarding it proudly but uneasily. Something was out of the 'drawing'.

In tropical sunshine, the flat-faced hard-head was glaring shamelessly at a high-spirited romantic people regardless of climate or environment, and they were trying to see it, whole, as the right thing . . .

The students had gathered there and invited me to tell them if that was 'modern architecture'.

I said the equivocal term meant that it was, probably did. But it wasn't architecture at all where they were concerned, because it ignored their natures, their climate, and the character of their environment.

A cheer went up, and smiles broke out. They were relieved. As I told them why, in more detail, the sky cleared for a moment.

But propaganda is at work on them, too. They have no models otherwise. They have no one directly to stimulate their imaginations along lines natural to them, unless Lúcio Costa or Araújo.

What are they to do?³⁸

Wright thought that copying a formula would be a dishonour for the country's architecture. The right road was to learn principles. This was the basis of his own architecture, and this was the concept that he attempted to pass on to the young architects in Rio de Janeiro.

This was not a creative period for Wright, who had been relegated to ostracism after the Prairie Houses period and had had no new building commissioned after the 1929 stock-exchange crash. He was considered a mere precursor of the modern movement ('the best architect of the nineteenth century,' according to Philip Johnson). His most recent work, such as the textile blocks houses in Los Angeles (Ennis, Freeman, Millard and Storer), had only served to intensify rejection of him by the more purist architects. His architecture could boast several master works as objects of study, although none of them recent. So it was only understandable that young architects should show greater interest in the more flamboyant work coming from Europe.

But the remarkable fascination that Wright's teachings held for his Brazilian audience turned out to be quite fruitful. Without any doubt, the presence of Wright in Rio, the impasse at the ENBA

and the prestige of Costa, and Warchavchik's experiment (not to mention the opportune co-operation of the local press), could all be included among the factors that combined in the consolidation of modern architecture in Brazil. The greater or lesser importance to be accorded to each one of these factors is a matter of opinion.

Notes and references

1. Philip L. Goodwin, *Brazil Builds. Architecture new and old 1652–1942* (New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1943).
2. 'Uma palestra sobre os novos rumos da arquitetura' (A lecture on the new course for architecture), *Correio da Manhã*, 14 October 1931, p. 1.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. 'O farol de Colombo, guia dos navegadores do mar e do céu, será eternamente um voto de paz entre os corações americanos e uma afirmação de justiça e solidariedade humanas' (The Columbus lighthouse, a guide for navigators of sea and sky, will be an eternal vow of peace between the hearts of Americans and an assertion of justice and human solidarity). *Correio da Manhã*, October 18 1931, p. 3.
7. 'A conferência realizada ontem, no salão da Escola Nacional de Bellas Artes' (Yesterday's lecture at Escola Nacional de Bellas Artes), *Correio da Manhã*, October 22 1931, p. 3.
8. 'Visionando a arte de amanhã' (A vision of tomorrow's art), *O Globo*, October 17 1931, p. 1.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. Frank Lloyd Wright, 'Modern Architecture, being the Kahn Lectures' in Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer (ed.), *Frank Lloyd Wright collected writings* (New York, Rizzoli/The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, 1992), vol. 2, pp. 19–79.
12. Geraldo Ferraz, *Warchavchik e a introdução da nova arquitetura no Brasil: 1925 a 1940*. (São Paulo, Museu de Arte de São Paulo, 1965), pp. 157–170.
13. Adolfo Morales de los Rios Filho, 'O ensino artístico'. *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro*, 265 (1964), p. 62.
14. Frank Lloyd Wright (1994). 'An autobiography. Book five: form' in Brooks Pfeiffer (ed.), *op. cit.* (1994), vol. 4, pp. 208–10.
This text is the first to mention Araújo, whom Wright quoted in his autobiography. The reference is to Pedro Luís Correia de Araújo (painter, drawer and professor of Fine Arts), a passionate supporter of renovation at the old ENBA. He himself had unsuccessfully attempted to bring in new thinking in 1929, on his return from a prolonged stay in Paris, where he had been in close contact with the European artistic avant garde.
Araújo published several articles in support of the strike at the ENBA in the press. So the fact that he incurred the animosity of the establishment was hardly surprising.
15. Wright received an honorarium of US\$ 1000 for serving on the Jury, as well as travelling expenses.
16. 'O concurso internacional do farol de Colombo' (The international competition for the Columbus lighthouse), *Correio da Manhã*, October 17 1931, p. 3.
17. 'O farol de Colombo' (The Columbus lighthouse), *O Globo*, October 17 1931, p. 2.
18. 'Depois de um acontecimento memorável' (After a memorable event), *O Globo*, October 17 1931, p. 1.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. Notes by Frank Lloyd Wright on paper with the letter-head of the Copacabana Palace hotel, October 1931.

22. Frank Lloyd Wright, 'To the young man in architecture' in Brooks Pfeiffer (ed.), *op. cit.* vol.2, p. 101.
23. Letter from Wright to L.S. Rowe, July 28, 1931. Los Angeles, The Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities (P011A06).
24. Frank Lloyd Wright (1994). 'An autobiography. Book five: form'. In Brooks Pfeiffer, ed. *op. cit.*, vol.4, p. 210.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Letter from Albert Kelsey to Wright, August 10, 1931. Los Angeles, The Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities (K005C08).
27. Frank Lloyd Wright, 'An autobiography. Book five: form' in Brooks Pfeiffer (ed.), *op. cit.*, vol.4, p. 210.
28. 'Mais uma vez a palavra de Lloyd Wright sobre os problemas maiores da arquitetura' (More from Lloyd Wright on the main problems facing architecture), *O Globo*, October 10 1931, p. 2.
29. 'A exposição da casa moderna' (The Modern House Exhibition), *Correio da Manhã*, October 23 1931, p. 3.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Ferraz, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
32. Paulo Santos, *Quatro séculos de arquitetura* (Four centuries of architecture). (Barra do Piraí, Fundação Educacional Rosemar Pimentel, 1977), pp. 119–20.
33. Ferraz, *op. cit.*
34. Santos, *op. cit.*
35. In his well-known essay *In the cause of architecture* (1908), Wright formulated six basic principles. The fourth states that colours should follow the 'soft, warm, optimistic tones of the land and autumn leaves' rather than 'pessimistic reds, blues or grays'.
36. Leila Coelho Frota, *Alcides Rocha Miranda: caminho de um arquiteto* (Rio de Janeiro, UFRJ, 1993), p. 15.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
38. Frank Lloyd Wright, 'For all may raise the flowers now for all have got the seed' in Brooks Pfeiffer (ed.), *op. cit.* (1993), vol.3, pp. 118–19.