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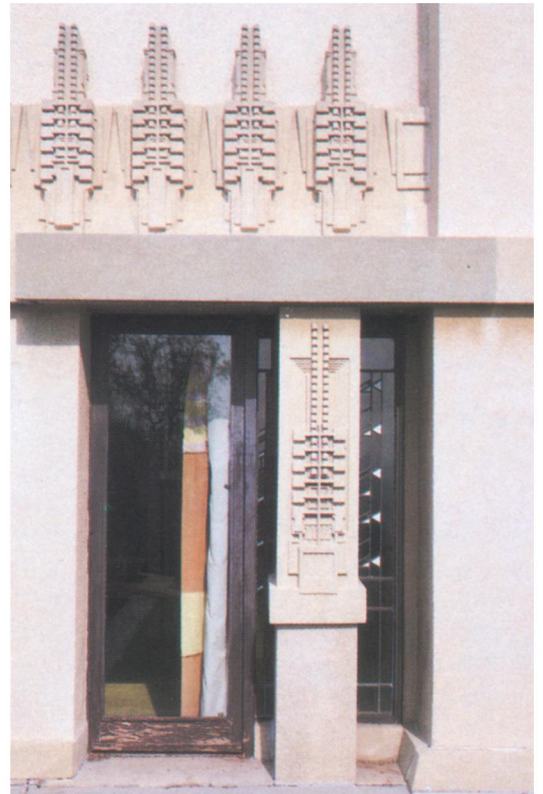
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Frank Lloyd Wright's Hollyhock House

Clockwise from top left:
Hollyhock Flower. Frank
Lloyd Wright. *Hollyhock
House* (exterior detail), Los
Angeles, California, 1919-
1921. Photo by Anita Bunn.

Frank Lloyd Wright.
Hollyhock House (courtyard
staircase to roof), Los
Angeles, California, 1919-
1921. Photo by Anita Bunn.
Frank Lloyd Wright. *Dining
Room Chair for Hollyhock
House*, Los Angeles,
California, 1919-1921.
Photo by Anita Bunn.



FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT'S HOLLYHOCK HOUSE

Los Angeles, California, 1919-1921

BY CARLA FANTOZZI, INA BORENZWEIG, KRISTEN ELLIOTT

OVERVIEW

Over the past century, Los Angeles has been visited by many internationally respected architects who have left their mark on the city's landscape. Frank Lloyd Wright was among those architects, and Hollyhock House was his first Los Angeles project. This 1920s house was commissioned by Aline Barnsdall, a wealthy oil heiress, as part of her vision to create a dramatic arts community on Olive Hill in Hollywood. The original plans for the complex included Hollyhock House (Aline Barnsdall's private residence), two guest houses, a theater, a Director's House, theater company apartments, a movie theater, artists' studios and shops. Construction occurred between 1919 and 1921 and, of the proposed buildings, only Hollyhock House and two guest houses, Residences A and B, were completed.

In 1927 Aline Barnsdall gave Hollyhock House and 11 of the original property's 36 acres to the City of Los Angeles to be used as a public park and arts facility in memory of her father, Theodore Barnsdall. Today, surrounded by a modern theater, galleries, and art studios, Hollyhock House comes closer than ever before to realizing its original purpose as the centerpiece of a functioning arts complex.

Over the years, Hollyhock House has gone through a number of structural and cosmetic changes including a 1946 remodel overseen by Frank Lloyd Wright. In 1974, rehabilitation, improvements and repairs helped to restore much of the buildings' original appearance. Efforts to maintain the original designs of Frank Lloyd Wright remain a continuing goal of the city's Cultural Affairs Department.

Architecturally, Hollyhock House's low, land-sweeping garden walls, horizontal bands of windows, and outstretched roofline carry over from Frank Lloyd Wright's previous "Prairie Style" homes of the midwest. Although scholars have cited additional influences of Japanese, Egyptian, and Mayan architectural styles, Wright himself

described Hollyhock House as typifying "California Romanza," a free interpretation of Southern California's natural beauty. Wright brought the surrounding environment into the house design by including rooms that open up to courtyards, rooftop terraces throughout that are connected to bedrooms, an enclosed pergola that leads from one wing of the house to the other, and skylights and clerestories to draw in the natural sunlight. The home and site are integrally joined together.

The ideal of integration between spaces was one of Wright's unique qualities as an architect. Other homes at the turn of the century were typically designed as a series of tiny, box-like rooms with narrow doorways connecting them. Wright pioneered the concept of an "open floor plan." With one large room or a fireplace as the central axis point, Wright built rooms off this, spiraling on several sides. He widened doorways, sometimes eliminating them completely, allowing built-in screens or furniture arrangements to define and separate one room from another. Because of Wright's influence, most homes today are built with some form of an open floor plan, allowing freer traffic flow and open air spaces.

Wright's passion for beauty and unity in design transcended the structure of the building. He preferred to design all of the interior details in order to achieve a sense of visual harmony throughout the building environment. For Aline Barnsdall's home, Wright designed draperies, carpeting, stained glass windows, lighting fixtures, several pieces of furniture, and an impressive abstract bas-relief composition for the living room fireplace. These details, made of many different materials and each serving a different function, are unified by repetition of a single theme—geometric abstractions from Miss Barnsdall's favorite flower, the hollyhock. Its presence is felt everywhere.

Between 1919 and 1921, Wright spent several months

each year in Tokyo, Japan, designing and overseeing the construction of the Imperial Hotel. Consequently, Wright was rarely on-site to supervise Barnsdall's Olive Hill project. Aline Barnsdall herself was frequently traveling and absent from the site. This situation resulted in a strained relationship between architect and client. Because of delays in construction and cost over-runs, the second floor was not completed until 1924. In 1946, Frank Lloyd Wright returned to Hollyhock House with his son Lloyd to repair and remodel the house.

Situated on the highest point on Olive Hill, Hollyhock House embodies the architectural ideals and principles of Frank Lloyd Wright and fulfills the dream of Aline Barnsdall for an active arts facility for the citizens of Los Angeles.

Like it or leave it. There stands Hollyhock House in Hollywood—conceived and desired as a California Romanza. No, not so domestic as the popular neo-Spanish of the region, but comfortable to live in well, with true pride in itself. Yes, Hollyhock House is a very proud house. (Frank Lloyd Wright. *An Autobiography*. Horizon Press, New York, 1932. p. 254.)

INTRODUCTION

The lessons which have been included here address aspects of Wright's work in domestic architectural design. His commercial structures as well as his homes possessed a sense of unity in design which Wright achieved through the use of pattern and repetition of forms. The first lesson explores how a single theme is repeated and transformed throughout the Hollyhock House. Wright is recognized for his graphic design as an artist as well as an architect. The second lesson is a study of the bas-relief composition, designed by Wright as the focal point of the Hollyhock House living room. The third lesson focuses on the concept of organic architecture as it applies to the building of Hollyhock House. Many have noted a similarity between Wright's Los Angeles projects of the 1920s and temples of the Ancient Maya. The final lesson develops a comparison between Mayan architecture and Frank Lloyd Wright's interpretation of these classic forms.

Although the lessons are directed respectively to primary, middle and finally secondary students, all of the subject matter can be adjusted for any grade level. Each lesson is directed toward a specific image; however, teachers and students may find any of the additional images relevant to their lesson as well. After all, Frank Lloyd Wright stressed unity in architectural design.

ABSTRACTING NATURE HOLLYHOCK FLOWER

Frank Lloyd Wright *Hollyhock House* (exterior detail) Los Angeles, California, 1919-1921

Hollyhock House (courtyard staircase to roof) Los Angeles, California, 1919-1921

Dining Room Chair for Hollyhock House Los Angeles, California, 1919-1921

Design for Living Room Rug Hollyhock House, Los Angeles, California, 1919-1921 copyright 1986 FL Wright Foundation

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

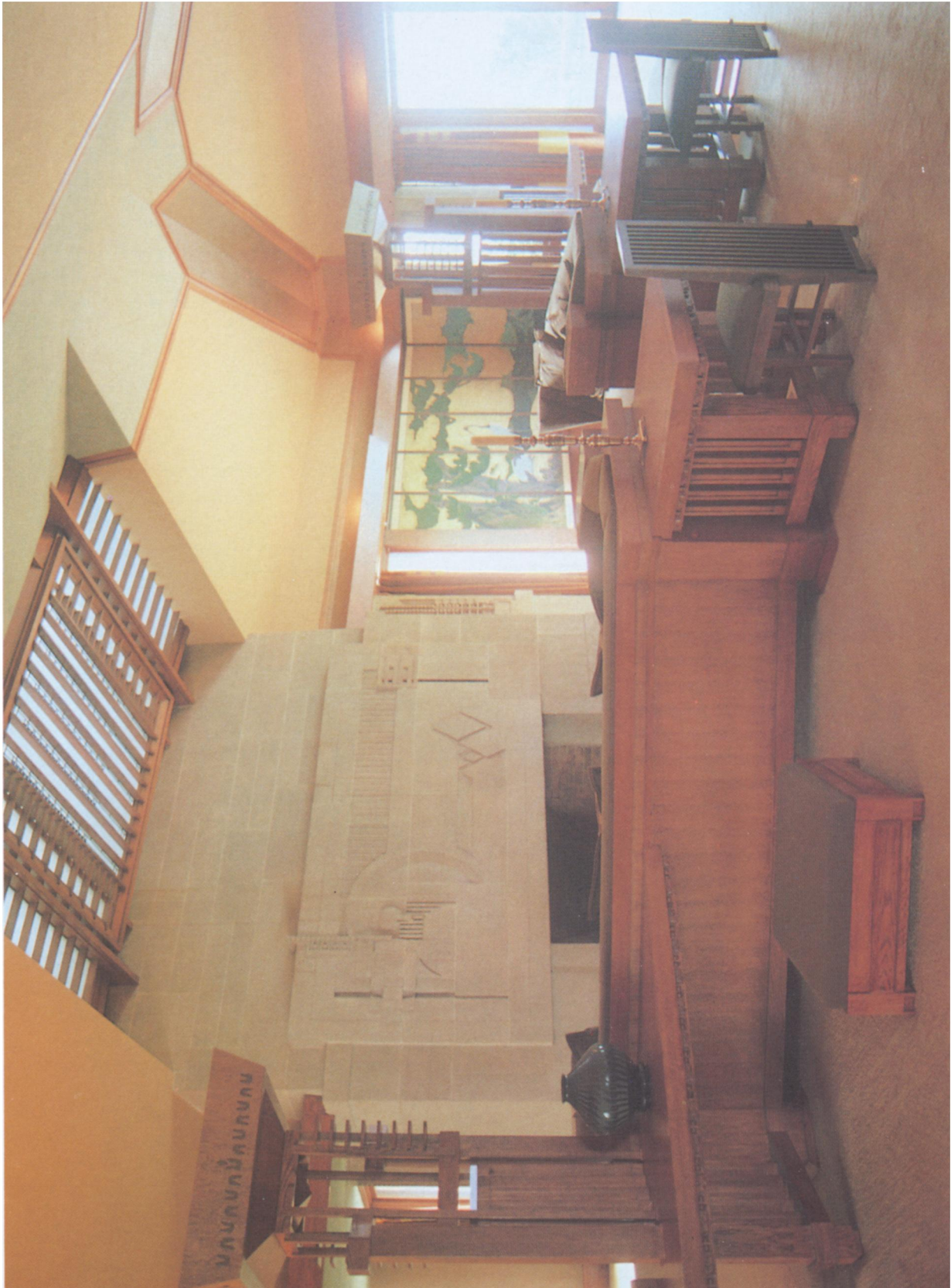
- 1) identify motifs, patterns, and variations in nature
- 2) identify design elements from nature in the photographs of decorative motifs at Hollyhock House
- 3) learn about geometric abstraction by creating their own compositions.

BACKGROUND

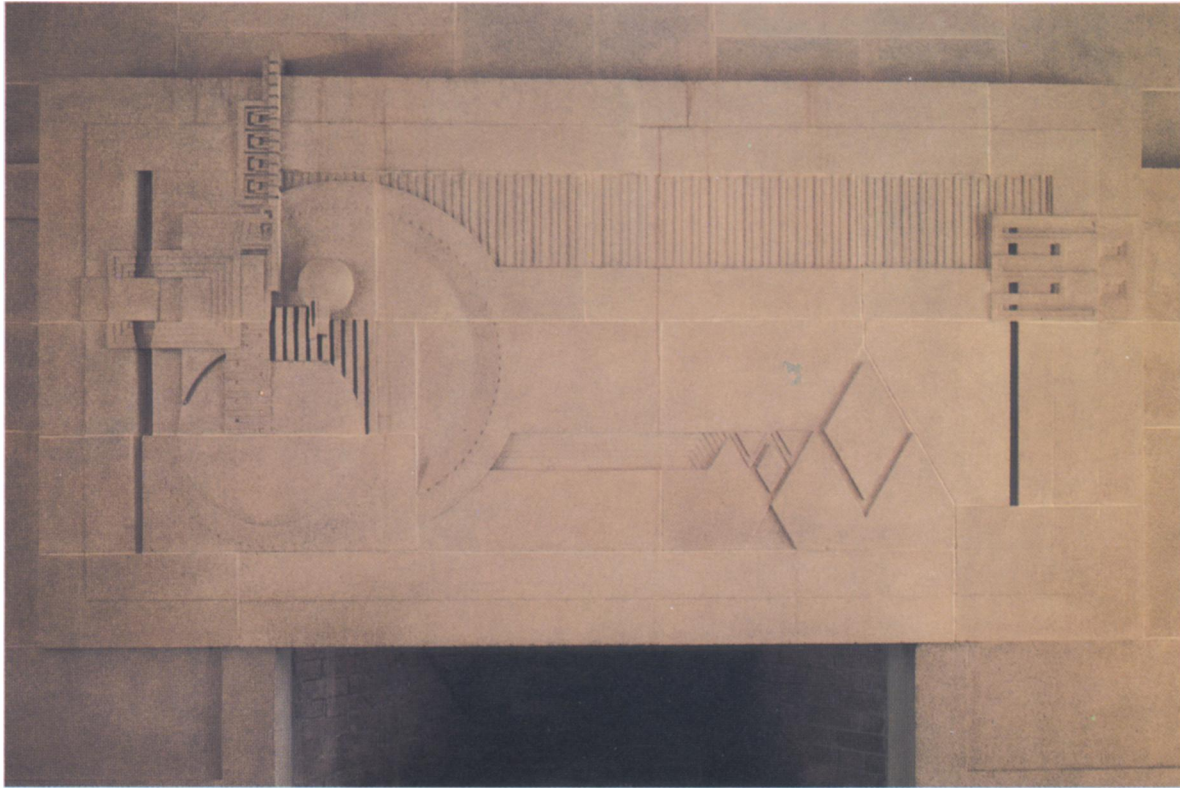
From the beginning of his architectural career, Wright's designs were based upon the pure forms of geometry:

squares, circles, triangles, diamonds, hexagons, rectangles, etc. Another significant trait of Wright's design style is a reference to *nature*. Wright created abstractions of natural elements using geometric shapes. These abstractions were incorporated into the decorative and ornamental elements of his architectural designs. Images of nature as well as natural materials permeate his structures.

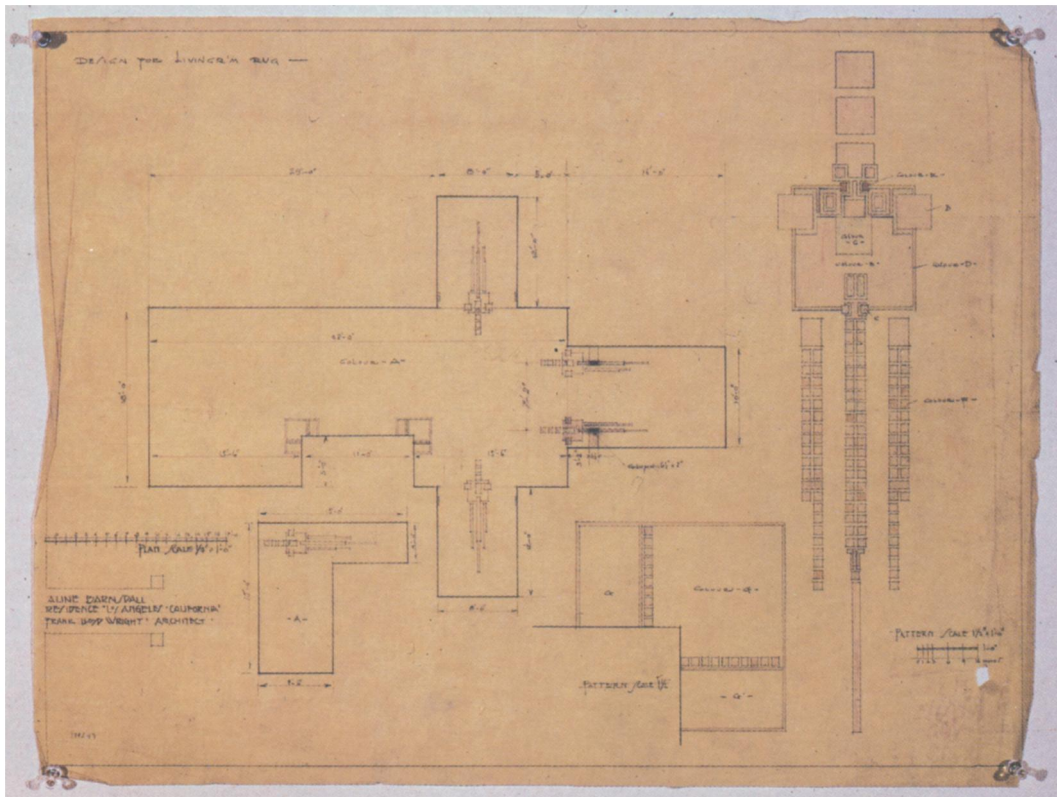
At Hollyhock House, a geometric abstraction of the hollyhock flower, the favorite flower of the house's owner, Aline Barnsdall, is used throughout the house. The motif appears in subtle variations of size, composition, repetition,



Frank Lloyd Wright. *Hollyhock House* (view of living room), Los Angeles, California, 1919-1921. Photo by Anita Bunn.



Above: Frank Lloyd Wright.
Hollyhock House (fireplace
 detail), Los Angeles,
 California, 1919-1921. Photo
 by Anita Bunn.
 Left: Frank Lloyd Wright.
Design for Living Room Rug.
Hollyhock House, Los
 Angeles, California, 1919-
 1921. copyright 1986
 FL Wright Foundation.



and material. The examples shown here are made of concrete, wood and textile.

In addition to variations in color, geometry, repetition, and form, Wright was also deeply influenced by the beauty of variation manifested in music. He described a symphony as “an edifice of sound.” Musical variation can easily be related to variations of motifs used in Hollyhock House.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Have students focus on a photograph of a real hollyhock flower. Identify the different parts of the plant (long stem, large curved leaves, open flowers, buds, seedpods, color ...). Identify the other objects on the page. What colors, shapes, materials did Wright use in his designs?

Although they are abstract forms, in what ways did Wright reflect the forms of nature which inspired them? What design elements are repeated throughout all the designs? What else does any one of the images remind you of?

Why do you think Wright used many variations on one design throughout the house?

Why do you think Wright used abstract designs instead of using more realistic ones? Would you have done the same? Why or why not?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Present a variety of natural objects (or photos), such as leaves, trees, bushes, mountains, shells, etc. Have students select one. Distribute colored paper that has been cut into geometric shapes. Have the students create an abstraction of their chosen images using the paper shapes. Once they are satisfied with one basic abstraction, have the students create two variations. This activity can be done individually or in pairs.

Have classmates guess which natural object inspired each student's abstraction and point out how the geometric elements and patterns relate to the original object.

BAS-RELIEF

Frank Lloyd Wright *Hollyhock House* (fireplace detail) Los Angeles, California, 1919-1921

Hollyhock House (view of living room) Los Angeles, California, 1919-1921

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- 1) learn the meaning of the term bas-relief
- 2) identify basic design elements found in the bas-relief at Hollyhock House
- 3) design their own bas-relief by using elements from Frank Lloyd Wright's composition.

BACKGROUND

Throughout his buildings, both residential and commercial, Wright created a sense of unity by incorporating common design elements within each building's utilitarian objects such as doors, cabinetry, furniture, windows and floor and wall surfaces. In some cases, Wright would add elements that were purely ornamental. The bas-relief sculpture in Hollyhock House's living room is one example of Wright's talent for creating fine art as part of architecture.

Wright created a focus for the open space of the living room by drawing on all the natural elements—earth, air, fire and water—integrating them at the fireplace and hearth.

Wright felt this was the very heart of a home, where family would gather. Historically the hearth was at the center of most dwellings, representing the source of heat, light, and nourishment. In the Hollyhock House, Wright surrounded his massive fireplace with a shallow moat and placed a skylight overhead to represent the elements of water and air respectively. On the facade of the fireplace, Wright chose to cast his bas-relief sculpture from concrete—a mixture of the earth's minerals.

The abstract design has been interpreted in many ways. Some consider it to be a variation of the house's floorplan. When touring the house, one can identify common design forms which appear in furniture and other rooms. Although Wright himself offered no single explanation of the bas-relief, his son, Lloyd Wright, maintained that it depicts “Aline Barnsdall as an Indian princess, seated on her throne, (on the left) surveying her lands—the desert mesas.” (from Kathryn Smith's “Frank Lloyd Wright, Hollyhock House, and Olive Hill, 1919-1924,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* #38 [March 1979], pp. 15-33.)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Have students focus on the image of the hearth bas-relief. What shapes are repeated in the design? How do they vary? Do some parts appear to be carved out of the concrete? How can you tell?

Introduce the term *bas-relief* sculpture. The term *relief* refers to a sculpture that is not free standing, but is instead attached to or partially submerged in a supporting surface (i.e. a wall, a door, a plaque).

High reliefs are sculptures that are almost removed from the background. Frank Lloyd Wright's composition is an example of *bas-relief* (low-relief), which is slightly raised or recessed from the background surface.

What do you think the relief represents?

What other images does the bas-relief remind you of?

After eliciting suggestions from students, read Lloyd Wright's interpretation out loud. What would be a good title for this work of art?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Using graph paper and pencils, have the students sketch a portion of the bas-relief design, then add their own elements to embellish the design. They may also eliminate existing elements or choose to change the composition from horizontal to vertical orientation.

To add depth to their bas-relief, have students glue on elements of cardboard or foam core to the graph paper surface. Unify the relief by spray painting over the entire surface when the composition is complete.

ORGANIC ARCHITECTURE

Frank Lloyd Wright *Hollyhock House* (view of living room) Los Angeles, California, 1919-1921

Hollyhock House (view of west facade) Los Angeles, California, 1919-1921

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- 1) discuss the term *organic architecture*
- 2) identify the principles of organic architecture which define Frank Lloyd Wright's work by examining a photograph of the living room and west facade of Hollyhock House.

BACKGROUND

Frank Lloyd Wright believed architecture was the natural link between humankind and the environment. Throughout his long career, he wrote and lectured about organic architecture, hoping his philosophies would then be a guide for future generations of architects.

Organic architecture is primarily concerned with *nature*, *materials*, *building*, and *site*, and the people who will occupy the buildings. Wright cited *nature* as a strong influence on his work. He believed that nature provided many creative possibilities for the architect. All the elements of art could be found in nature: form, color, texture, and pattern. Nature also provides the materials to be employed in organic architecture. Wright advocated the use of *natural materials* such as wood, concrete, and glass, all of which have been used extensively in the Hollyhock House. According to Wright, materials in a building should be simple—that is, only a few materials

should be used and no material should be disguised as any other. Wood is wood and should not be made to look like any other materials, such as marble.

In organic architecture, *building and site* have a special relationship. The building becomes part of the site and the site is enhanced aesthetically by the building. The building grows from the site, as a flower or tree grows from the earth.

Other principles of organic architecture are exemplified by Hollyhock House, such as *space*, *proportion*, and *scale* and *ornamentation*. Wright wanted *space* within a house to flow freely; rooms should not be like boxes. He opened walls, raised ceilings and lowered floors, creating variety, dramatic effect and movement from space to space and room to room.

When designing a building, Wright felt that *proportion and scale* should be based on the human body. People should feel comfortable with their surroundings. Wright also encouraged the use of built-in furniture to create a "total design." *Ornamentation* when used in organic architecture (and it is used extensively in Hollyhock House) should be an integral part of the material, be it concrete, wood or glass.

Hollyhock House illustrates many of Frank Lloyd Wright's principles of organic architecture, but not even Wright was able to meet all his own criteria in every building he designed.



Top: Frank Lloyd Wright. *Hollyhock House* (view of west facade), Los Angeles, California, 1919-1921. Photo by Anita Bunn.

Below: Governor's Palace, Uxmal (Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico). 10th Century, Mayan Period. Photo by Jean Bannigan.

Hollyhock House is a facility of the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

List the basic elements of organic architecture as they appear in the background information. Have the students refer to this list as they examine the photographs of the west facade and living room of Hollyhock House.

Have students describe what they see, including materials, size, colors, site, lighting, etc. Which principles of organic architecture apply to the facade? Which principles apply to the living room? Hollyhock House is situated on the crown of Olive Hill in Hollywood. How do the *building and site* complement each other? What *materials* were used in the living room? How has Frank Lloyd Wright been honest in his use of *materials*? How do the *materials* work together—enhance each other? What has Wright done with the space: ceiling, floors? In order to enter the living room, you have to go down one step. Why? How does the furniture change the space? How does Wright bring *nature* into the room? Does Wright use *ornament* in the living room? Where? Is the ornamentation organic? Why? Can you tell anything about *proportion and scale* of the building? What? If not, what would help you to find out?

Frank Lloyd Wright wanted the principle of organic architecture to guide future architects. His ideas have had a profound influence on modern architecture. Have students discuss buildings or houses in their area which meet the criteria of organic architecture. Remember, even Frank Lloyd Wright could not encompass all principles in his buildings. Use your school as an example: what elements of organic architecture exist in your classroom? What changes could be made to create a more organic school site?

If possible, show photographs or slides of other Wright buildings such as Fallingwater, Taliesin, or one of the Prairie houses (Robie House, Coonley House, etc.). How do these buildings epitomize Frank Lloyd Wright's principles of organic architecture? Discuss site, materials, etc.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Have students design a building or room that exemplifies the principles of organic architecture with the purpose of using it as a teaching aid for younger students. Each student should prepare a brief lesson to accompany his/her design.

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT AND THE MAYA

Frank Lloyd Wright *Hollyhock House* (view of west facade) Los Angeles, California, 1919-1921
Governor's Palace Uxmal (on the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico) 10th Century, Mayan Period

OBJECTIVES

The students will observe that Hollyhock House is related to Mayan Architecture in three ways:

- a) city planning and site
- b) building structure
- c) ornamentation

BACKGROUND

Although Frank Lloyd Wright denied the influence of any architectural style on his own work, one can observe direct associations with architecture of other cultures. For him, Japanese, Native American, Pre-Columbian cultures (predominantly the Mayan) and others contained universal motifs. His designs of the teens and '20's seem to have synthesized these influences, creating an architectural language that differed from his earlier Prairie Style.

As a young man, Wright became familiar with the 1880-82 exhibition of photographer Desirée Charnay, who had documented Mayan ruins. He also visited the World

Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 where 10,000 square feet of Mayan ruins had been recreated in plaster-of-paris. Included were portions of the nunnery at Uxmal, selected structures of Chichen Itza and the Arch of Labna. Later in life, Wright admitted to a childhood admiration for Mayan architecture, having seen books on the excavation of Mayan sites.

In Wright's search for an *organic* American architecture, Mayan architecture offered a great resource. Just as Wright related his architecture to nature, the Maya created pyramids that represented mountains, plazas depicting bodies of water and "trees" made of stone, monolithic sculptures called stelae.

In three aspects Frank Lloyd Wright most directly reflected the impact of Mayan architecture: city and site planning, building structure, and ornamentation. He abstracted and modified these aspects to suit his own needs. But he also rejected aspects of Mayan architecture, such as their bold use of color, for his more subdued natural tones.

Within Mayan cities, important buildings such as palaces were situated around plazas, and, in most cases, Mayan temples were placed at the top of a hill. The Barnsdall project for Olive Hill is similar to the Mayan city layout with the main residence for Aline Barnsdall, Hollyhock House, set at the top of Olive Hill like a temple.

The closest visual similarity between Hollyhock House and Mayan structures is the slanted mansard-like roof. Mayan builders formed both pyramid shaped and mansard-like roof tops by placing stones further inward until reaching a peak or flat roof line. At Hollyhock House, Wright used wood and stucco construction to create a similar effect that was much lighter with hollow interior vaulted spaces.

Both the Maya and Wright emphasized horizontal lines in their architecture. The Maya carved bold geometric patterns into their walls in horizontal bands. At Hollyhock House, Wright used bands of concrete sculpture, based on abstractions of the hollyhock flower, to form a baseline for the roof, emphasizing the horizontal. The Maya also carved freestanding stone monuments, called stelae. At Hollyhock House, Wright used his abstracted hollyhock sculpture to achieve the effect of stelae and they are placed at significant promontory-like locations in the building.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What similarities are there between the Governor's Place and the west facade of Hollyhock House? What kind of ornamentation is used on both buildings? Can you tell what materials the buildings are made of? If so, what are they? What types of shapes do these buildings share? Are there any buildings in your neighborhood that remind you of these buildings? In what ways? How are the buildings' shapes, materials and ornamentation related to their massive structure? Which adjectives would you use to describe these buildings: heavy or weightless, sprawling or monolithic? Why? What do these buildings look like they should be used for? Why? What kind of setting would be best for these buildings? Could you imagine these buildings next to a skyscraper? Would it seem out of place? If so, why? What if these buildings were made out of bricks or logs or another material? How would it change their appearance? Compare your own house or a house in your neighborhood with these buildings. How are the elements different? Are there any buildings in your neighborhood that have architectural decoration carved into the building in horizontal bands? If so,

what kind of designs are they? Would you like to live in the Hollyhock House? Is it inviting to you? Why or why not? How about the Governor's Palace? Do you think this style of architecture is appropriate to a house? Why or why not?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Have the students document in writing, drawings, and/or photographs elements in their own built environment that relate to their brief study of Mayan architectural elements, i.e., city planning and site, building structure, and ornamentation.
2. Have students research the everyday life and religion of the Maya in order to understand the meanings and purpose of their architectural ornamentation.
3. Have students develop their own bands of geometric ornament based on natural abstraction, as Wright did, or personal iconography, as did the Maya, for their own houses.

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