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To cite this article: Barry Byrne (1963) On Frank Lloyd Wright and His Atelier, Journal of Architectural Education, 18:1, 3-6, DOI: [10.1080/00472239.1963.11102184](https://doi.org/10.1080/00472239.1963.11102184)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00472239.1963.11102184>



Published online: 08 Dec 2015.



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by Barry Byrne

The ACSA, by definition, and most of the readers of this journal, by vocation, are committed to the academical kind of architectural education. Yet there still exists another kind, older than any school of architecture—the pupil-apprentice system. Few living architects are as well qualified to speak for this system, both by experience of it and by subsequent achievement in architectural practice, as Mr Byrne.

While the purpose of this article is to state the case for the apprentice type of architectural training I received in the Oak Park studio of Frank Lloyd Wright, I am faced with the fact, inherent in the circumstances, that I must perforce write overmuch about myself as pupil in relationship to Mr Wright as master. The situation in the studio, as it affected those of us who came there to work and to learn by working, was a uniform one, and I can truthfully state that my status and my apparent worth (qualified as that was by the fact that on entering I possessed only the rudiments of drafting ability) soon put me on the level of those who had come from the Armour Tech and University of Illinois Schools of Architecture, and on that of the one man out of post-graduate school at Harvard, who had the finishing gloss of a year in Vienna under Otto Wagner. It may be that I possessed some advantage over these seemingly better equipped pupils in that I was not encumbered with matter I had to ignore or, if possible, discard.

When I entered the studio in the late spring of 1902, Mr Wright, in accepting me as an apprentice, was careful to state that I could expect little attention from him. As I had no exaggerated idea of my own worth I was in no way dismayed or deterred by this perfectly reasonable statement. I accepted it as being only what was to be expected, because it accorded with what I already knew—namely, that if I advanced in knowledge and skill it would be through my own effort. I am, however, indebted to his then principal assistants William Drummond and Walter Burley Griffin (the latter to be at a later period my partner associate) for their counsel and assistance in my starting days at the studio.

I have no reason, then, to complain because during my first year at the studio Mr Wright gave me no attention, condescending or of any other kind. It may be indicative of his erroneous view of me that an early Christmas present from him was a copy of Maeterlinck's "Treasure of the Humble." I now know that he had mistaken my natural, Catholic-derived sense of hierarchy and of my temporarily low position in it for the virtue of humility, which I admire but cannot honestly claim for myself. It is also a curious fact, but one that will be understandable to those who have known Mr Wright, that this view of me as the undemanding "small boy," instanced in his autobiography,¹ persisted for years. It did, I am sure, distort his view of me on the two much later occa-

¹ Frank Lloyd Wright, "An Autobiography," pp. 236-237. *Ed*

sions when he invited me to return to him with the status of associate rather than of pupil-draftsman.

While I was art columnist for the review *America*, I wrote for it a rather lyrical account of my early impressions of the studio and of Wright himself, who was very completely reflected in the environment he created. I still feel that lyricism fitted the scene and the personality as I knew them. To me life at the studio savored, not of dream but rather of the realization of a higher order of things. It was a happy place and the many years that have passed since I entered it have not greatly reduced my sense of it as a rare thing in my life. As for teaching, in the ordinarily accepted sense of the word, there was none. It was a true atelier where one learned, if one had the capacity, by working on the buildings that Mr Wright designed. I have often been asked: "How then did you learn to design, if Mr Wright did all the designing?" The answer will be clear to anyone who worked under this master, who designed his buildings primarily in plan, with massing and details, as finally arrived at, completely coordinated with the plan. Although Mr Wright is sometimes pictured as studying his compositions in perspective, this was not his way when I worked under him. The designs he made existed primarily in those greatest of his contributions to a living architecture, his incomparable building plans. The value of his exterior massing and details derived from their appearance of inevitability and from the fact of their indisputable rightness as expressions of the plan.

Endowed as he was with an unerring sense of the third dimension, Mr Wright, in the period between 1902 and 1909 when I was in the studio, always arrived at his designs in plan and elevation, the last usually the determining one upon which perspectives were based. In the later years of my tutelage, and when projects were turned over to me to develop into working drawings, the original Wright-made studies would come into my hands with the plan established and the main theme of the exterior design clearly defined in elevation. The development of all implied but not delineated portions of the project then became the problem of the student draftsman, subject to the master's approval and often to his correction.

Out of the problem this presented to persons like myself there developed, as might be expected, an awareness of that important but too often overlooked matter, esthetic relationship. In Frank Lloyd Wright's designing of architecture the matter of right relationship was of infinite

importance; his insistence upon such relationship and his achievement of it link his architecture with the great architectures of the past—just as the failure to achieve it must forever separate much of current designing from the great tradition. It was the pupils' work, therefore, to develop the undelineated portions of Mr Wright's designs into well-related parts of the total conception. When I consider the artistic integrity of the designs to which we sought to relate our developments, I can only regard the training this gave me as basic to whatever I have since been able to do in design as a practicing architect. The value inherent in this sense of relationship was a basic one and related not only to the forms Mr Wright initiated, but to any forms one might feel impelled to use on independent ventures. This was a conclusion at which I arrived early in my studio days, and one which I knew promised well as a basis for whatever inventiveness in architecture time and my blood-derived instinct might generate in me. And the concept of right relationship was to become so much a part of me that the awe-stricken days I spent in and around the Cathedral of Our Lady of Chartres with Alfonso Iannelli were illumined and made profitable to me by the apprehended truth that came to me in my days with Wright. For in Chartres again was manifested to me the infinite variety within unity that my experience under the great master Frank Lloyd Wright showed as a possibility in any and all architecture, when rightly based and developed.

In discussing the Wright studio and the training received there, I can of course speak only for myself. Whether others saw beyond his highly personal style to the factors on which I decided it was based is not a question I can answer. Of course it is a truism that what a student, in pursuit of any kind of knowledge, brings with him to the laboratory or lecture hall pretty much determines the intellectual or artistic profit that will accrue to him. I very much doubt that any system of education can possibly modify this basic essential individualism, though the machine-like giantism and arrogant assumptions associated with the American educational system implicitly deny it, while fostering a pseudo-intellectual caste system. It is an unfortunate fact that the valid criticisms of this machine-process education by Robert Maynard Hutchins have not affected a change in it.

It was as an effective rejection of the corresponding machine-like giantism in architecture that the high standards of the Wright studio were most important in the training of the student. That

studio, as I knew it, was an oasis in a desert inhabited by architectural marauders who issued from the fastness of their hundred-draftsmen offices to capture "the important commissions." Occasionally lukewarm studio apprentices were lured away by the high salary bait dangled from the marauders' bastions, but never were those who defected of enough consequence to constitute a loss to architecture. The majority became so imbued with the basic, all-determining idea that the production of architecture resulted from the operation of a single talent-endowed personage that such temptations had no power over them. Furthermore, when the studio apprentices left, it was in most cases to establish their own practices, preferring the freedom and integrity of humble professional status to the servitude and degrading compromise usual, then and now, in large-scale architectural emporiums, where building design is a merchandised commodity.

Since neither artistic talent nor individuality in architectural design is ever the result of teaching, the value of an architectural training must lie in the imparted knowledge of basic design techniques and in the standards of personal and architectural integrity acquired by the student. If the student acquires these in his training it will be no mean acquisition, and there will be, granted that he has talent, a possibility that maturity and hard work will produce that rare thing, an architect. I say "rare" because fashion-mongering addicts of architectural publications only succeed in becoming architectural couturiers, a type now appallingly prevalent. This brings to mind one other happy condition in the Wright Oak Park studio: The apprentices rarely saw architectural publications in it. So that source of pernicious infection was happily avoided.

A well-known architectural theoretician and former educator² has recently stated in the correspondence columns of the *AIA Journal* that the students in training at Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin atelier were doing no more than producing designs in Wright's personal style. This leads me to wonder if he is aware of any architectural school that betters this condition. I certainly am not. In fact, what is produced in most schools is of such an indifferent quality that I can only expect the Taliesin product to be better. While I have no connection with any schools of architecture, it has been my fate to act as judge in a number of Lercaro-Spaeth architectural award competitions, established to stimulate creativity in church design in our schools. As the entries were countrywide, it seems reasonable to assume that they were typical of the generality of architectural school work. Nothing appeared that showed any

grasp of the fundamentals on which an architecture might be based; nor was there any evidence of independent approach to the problems of design involved in the expression of practical and psychological functions. In the designs submitted there was, on the other hand, every sign of diligent perusal of current architectural publications, and a not too tasteful rendering of the architectural clichés shown in them and associated with that architectural delirium termed modernism. While none appeared, I must say that Wright-inspired designs, or for contrast designs by pupils of Mies van der Rohe, would have lessened the dreariness of those incidents in my working life.

It is an ironic situation that what started out as a valid and valuable crusade for a vital architecture, inspired and directed by Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright, should now, thanks to the influence of the talented Europeans who later took up the cause and gave it a revolutionary character, have resulted in a fashionable so-called "style." I sincerely believe that the American adventure would have saved us from our present deplorable architectural condition if it had developed in its own way and had not been deflected by the invasion of European concepts. As Joseph Conrad has stated, it is a characteristic of revolutions that the initial idealists are always supplanted by those who are merely exploiters of the situation.

When I visited Europe and the Bauhaus in the early 'twenties the new architecture there, as I have told in the *Benedictine Quarterly Review*,³ was germinating in an atmosphere of revolution. The American movement had none of the characteristics of a revolution. On the contrary, it was well rooted in American life. Even in obvious ways (as in the Wright plans) it found its basis in ordinary living and building arrangements. It was an indigenous, healthy plant. But that could only count against it with our orchidaceous, provincial-minded sophisticates, who found in the New York Museum of Modern Art a suitable center for their Europeanizing efforts. Our architects, and our schools of architecture, unfortunately adopted the Europeanized variant as publicized by Philip Johnson and others. As a consequence we are now in the hands of the exploiters of that European architectural revolution.

Small wonder that Wright, with his affinity for our American folkways, should have found our wholesale retreat from our native and natural situation a revolting spectacle. Much that he said in attacking the European-derived work may have seemed excessive. In actual fact the lamentable architectural condition we now face, and live with, bears out and amply justifies his jeremiads. In his case also, while the prophet was in truth latterly

² Walter Gropius, whose letter is printed again on pp 14 of this issue. *Editor*

³ Summer 1954 issue

greatly honored in his own country, that came about only as a result of the preceding European acclaim, which assured American architects that, the applause having reached such a volume, it was safe to join in. The final image of this great per-

sonage was a sadly distorted one, reflecting publicity values of the kind exploited in the Luce publications while the innate value of the great architect and—even more important—of his message was almost totally obscured.

The Place of Science in Architectural Education

by Henry J. Cowan, University of Sydney

Discussion of the part that building science should play in the education of architects, and of the way in which it should be taught, is too often bedeviled by the prejudices described in the diagnosis of the ills of architectural education (whose author still remains anonymous at the time of going to press) that appeared in the March issue of this journal. Professor Cowan writes from the vantage-ground of a university which actually has a Department of Architectural Science, of which he is Head. Since this article was written, in 1961, the University of Sydney has taken a step further in introducing the degree of Master of Building Science, with a curriculum designed for the common post-professional training of architects, physicists and civil, mechanical and electrical engineers, in the scientific aspects of the design of buildings.

The investigation of the technical problems of building on an extensive scale by scientific methods is comparatively new. Throughout the ages buildings have been erected by traditional methods which evolved relatively slowly, and technical problems were largely solved by a process of trial and error. In the past labor costs were relatively low, and economy in the use of material was not generally a vital factor in design. Today the rising standard of living and the consequent rise in wage rates has increased the cost of building much more than the cost of other commodities and emphasised the importance of the rational employment of materials. The growth of industry, and the consequent growth of big cities, has created a need for factories, office buildings and

hospitals which require specialized equipment and services. The concentration of large populations in relatively small areas has made it necessary to build high, and structure has become a dominant factor.

If the technological age has created many new problems for the architect, it has also placed at his disposal new materials and new techniques. Moreover, the architect need no longer rely entirely on his own technical knowledge in the design of buildings, but he can call on various technical consultants to advise him.

Scientific Problems of the Architect

Today's architect in his professional practice therefore faces four main scientific problems:

- 1 Largely because of the changing cost structure of the building industry, new materials and methods are constantly being developed. Their use creates problems (ie, moisture penetration of heat insulation) which must be solved by scientific enquiry because the speed of development does not permit a gradual evolution of new methods. The architect must be able to interpret the results of scientific tests, and he may sometimes have to initiate them.

- 2 The increasing height and span of buildings and the need for stringent economy in the use of materials calls for more precise methods of structural design. Although the architect normally retains a structural consultant for all but the simpler work, the structure is an integral part of the architectural concept, and the architect must