

THIS IS AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE

by FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

FIRST of all, what does "architecture" mean, what does the word *architect* mean?

The prefix arch, (as in archbishop) means the top. It means way up above everything, really "master." Now, *itect*: (i.e. *technician, technology*) means know-how, knowing the way and the means. Thus, "architect."—there you have "the master of the know-how."

Isn't it strange, boys and girls, isn't it a little strange that things that are fundamental, elemental, often escape you in your educational adventure? (And you've escaped nearly everything else, I imagine, in much the same way!)

What is architecture, anyway? What does architecture mean to you? Is it, like the meaning of the word, also something you take for granted? An architect builds buildings, doesn't he? He is supposed to know why he builds those buildings. He is supposed to do something in the design and construction of those buildings that makes them eloquent of their purpose, that makes them features of their site so that they grace it and do not *disgrace* it. In other words, it's a great mother art—architecture. And for five hundred years, of course, as you know, architecture has been more or less a cliché, more or less an exterior, not true to conditions, not true to life. The American people got their first impressive view of the classic at the Columbian Exposition, where the Museum of Science and Industry was called the Art Building. It was filled with paintings and sculpture and it came straight over from the Beaux Arts, where all of the architecture that we knew anything about in America—where the architects themselves had come from I don't suppose we had a real important architect in those days who was not a Beaux Arts graduate. He came from the Beaux Arts, and

therefore he was inoculated with the major axis and the minor axis and the temple forms and the columns and all that—he came over here furnished to give to America what all the other civilizations and all the other cultures of the world had had. But somehow that didn't square in my mind or in the mind of Louis Sullivan, in the mind of Dan Adler and a few other people at that time, with this Declaration of Independence. We had declared something new in the world, and that was—what? *The sovereignty of the individual*, And *that* was a very brave thing in a government to do.

When all this architecture that we had to draw upon, if we were going to go on building buildings in the old way, were monarchic; they were all the product of authority, none of them were the children or the expression of freedom, freedom of spirit, freedom of soul. So we were up against, as I saw it, the necessity for a culture of our own, an expression of our own, worthy of the greatest gift of ground the world has ever seen anywhere—most beautiful, most extensive, and filled with riches beyond imagination. No nation ever inherited such material wealth as we inherited. So what to do with it?

We had no means of doing anything with it except as we tried to make over or in some way modify the old patterns, patterns of an old life and an old civilization not at all like ours. So something had to be born from within the man. Something had to be born—a *new spirit*—and you had nothing to go by except principle.

Now principle never changes. The expressions of principle do. Like morals, you see. Morality and ethics have only this in common: that in morals you're endeavoring to apply the principles of ethics and they may be very far wrong, and morals are no surer than the classic architecture was surer, or principle. In fact morals are oftentimes not on speaking terms with ethics. So here was this proposition (let's call it a proposition): *how were we going to satisfy the conditions of this new life?* Here's the machine, here's quality now available, here are certain things that a new tool the world hadn't seen before could do very well—could do better than it could be done by hand. But still all we had for a pattern with which to do those things was what had been done by hand. So, first of all, the machine began imitating in architecture those things which had been

Frank Lloyd Wright is perhaps the world's leading architect. He is a man of definite opinions. Recently he spoke to a seminar of over a thousand high school students in Chicago, the birthplace of the force we know as American architecture. Here are his challenging words.

BILLION DOLLAR PACKAGE:

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folding cartons. There they sit on thousands of shelves, easy to handle, simple to carry, handy to use—and irresistible!

The Silent Salesman

Supermarkets no longer need persuasive counter salesmen. All they need is room for effective product display. The box, the carton, the package has become the modern phenomenon—the silent salesman!

Each product sells itself. At the point of sale the clincher is the package. By the color, design and message on the box the housewife is moved to buy. This has produced a revolution in merchandising.

That's why this is called a "packaging era." Advertising must recognize it. Advertising in newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, etc., provide the background, set the stage, but the package clinches the sale. When you enter a supermarket to look for a desired product you are faced with the product and its competitors, side by side. Which do you buy? Which recalls the advertising, reiterates its persuasiveness?

This decision confronts men as well as women shoppers. No longer is it true that women compose 85 per cent of America's shoppers, for men are daily cutting increasingly into this stronghold of the housewife. The new packaging trends have made shopping pleasant and easy. And the male member of the household is getting into the act. Teen-agers and adolescents, too. Small wonder super markets are booming. Though only five per cent of food stores, they do 52 per cent of America's retail food business.

Thirty-Eight Cartons a Week per Family

Just how important the carton is to you is the whopping fact that the average family uses 38 cartons every week. Over 100 billion folding cartons are manufactured annually in 594 plants in this country alone.

What packaging can do for a competitive product is sharply illustrated by what happened to one of the country's leading cigarettes. Recently it switched from a conventional paper package to a folding carton and in nine months its sales increased 5000 times!

A towel manufacturer put his goods in an attractive box and sales jumped 14 per cent. Produce sales jumped 30 per cent in one market when it was put into windowed cartons. Hardware, textiles, toys and machinery now pop into stores in packages—finding new markets, and new retail outlets. Every manufacturer in industries that deal with the consumer is re-checking his entire retailing set-up.

Where did it all start? The first product to be packaged on a major scale was Uneeda Biscuits in the 90's. The cracker-barrel philosophers at the general store were indignant when the proprietor brought out his biscuits neatly packaged in a folding carton, preventing spoilage, theft and breakage. Sales of fresh, crisp and appetizing Uneeda crackers boomed.

Soon other manufacturers became package-conscious. Among the first to follow were the cereal makers. Cooked dry cereals such as corn flakes and shredded wheat suddenly appeared on shelves, pre-packaged, weighed and untouched by human hands. An even more attractive feature was that housewives could now turn in the box tops and get desirable premiums.

Next came sugar and flour and cornstarch. Packaging

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HIGH SCHOOL ART EDUCATION:

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about their function and value as art expression. We cannot talk about art in experience and allow students' art activities to become completely removed from daily life. The art program, for the high school especially, should include many opportunities to understand art as creative living.

The art program in the senior high school should be wide enough in scope to orient students seeking vocations in art. If all art mediums are not available for the students to explore, discussions about them can be conducted to apprise young students of a possible future in art. If the program is developed to meet the individual and social needs of the students, vocations in art become obvious as the art program develops. Talented students should be given special counseling in terms of additional art training after their senior high school career ends.

We must remember that art experiences in school are not primarily to train artists but people. They offer all students the opportunity to learn to live creatively, and so to become mature, expressive persons. ▲

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and we used the steel as beams and we used it as posts and we used all that sort of thing, just as though we were using wood. But here's Roebbing coming along and other minds that are based on principle—elemental thinkers—and Roebbing said that steel is strongest as a strand. You've got the properties of steel, property used in construction in the strand like the spider, spinning. And there lies the secret of what steel can do for modern times. It can give indefinite lightness of span.

Now all these elemental things are inherent in the nature of architecture today, and you must study nature. And nature doesn't mean out of doors, you know—nature doesn't mean horses and cows and streams and storms only; that's just one little element. Nature means the essential significant life of the thing, whatever the thing is. This thumb of mine, what's the nature of the thumb? Why is this nail on the thumb? It's the "why," the questioning concerned with the very life and character of whatever is, that is the study of nature. Now there's no architect possible for future use or who is able to in the least reckon with these terrific impulses released by the facilities of machinery and modern science, who can interpret them in terms of beauty, until he has mastered and become a master in the realm of the study of nature. That's why I think we made a great mistake when we took the capital "n" off Nature and put it only on God. Putting it on God is all right—leave it there, because God is the great mysterious motivator of what we call nature, and it has been said often by philosophers, that nature is the will of God. I prefer to say that nature is the only body of God that we shall ever see, if we wish to know the truth concerning anything, we'll find it in the nature of that thing. Now we've had great philosophers who were masters of what we call human nature; we've had great poets, and this is a matter for the poet: I think the nature of nature lies, so far as our grasp on it or our intimacy with it is concerned, in a matter of our learning from our great poets.

Of course when we made this great declaration in the face of the world, of a new integrity that was going to come out of the freedom of the individual to be greatly himself, we had no religion to go with it, don't you see. The

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done by hand. Well, they soon looked pretty dead and pretty tough and not worthy of man's time or a second look. So someone had to devise ways and means of building whereby the machine could render even more beautifully than ever before the nature of the material, the nature of steel.

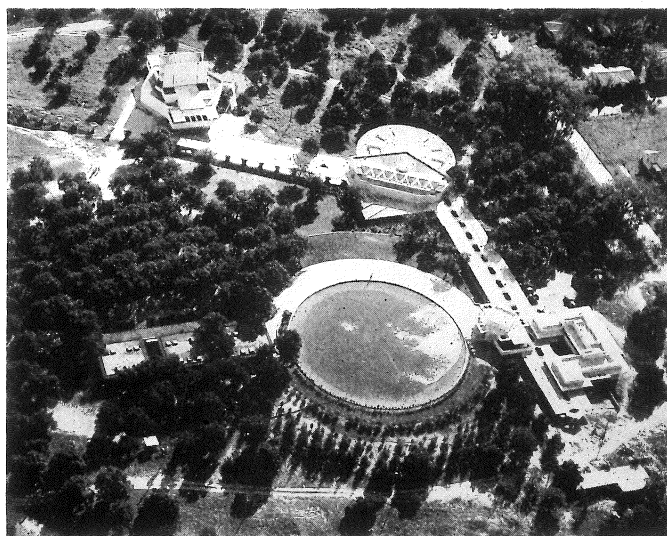
We didn't understand anything; we were taking everything on faith, by cliché, until we began to dig in and find out what the nature of these things really amounted to, architecturally—how to express wood as wood, for example.

Here comes the stature of the human being. Here comes the nature of the human being. For the first time we began to build according to a human scale, a scale of the human being, of the individual—a new scale. The old grandomania of the past aimed only to give humanity an inferiority complex. That *was* the aim, of course and the result of Gothic architecture. The old classic style was much the same—to make a man feel small. And he was small in those days; the individual didn't amount to much.

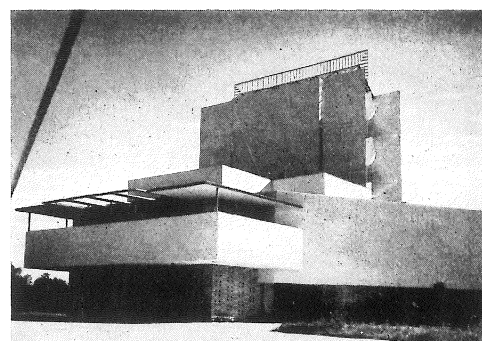
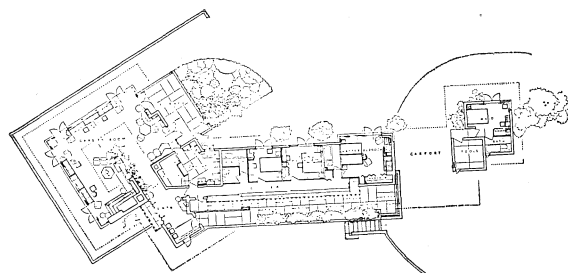
But now that changed. Here in America the individual did amount to a great deal. So we took the scale of the human being as the new scale—just as now we have to give up that scale in place of feet and inches. We're now at a and take the speed scale, and use the time scale point where we've got to give up almost all of the old things to which we subscribed and start anew again.

Steel and tension. Well, now, all these new things like glass have properties. Steel has a property. Now, of course, when we first got steel there was nothing to do. We had been using lumber, we had beams and we had posts, and so we rolled the steel into lumber shapes

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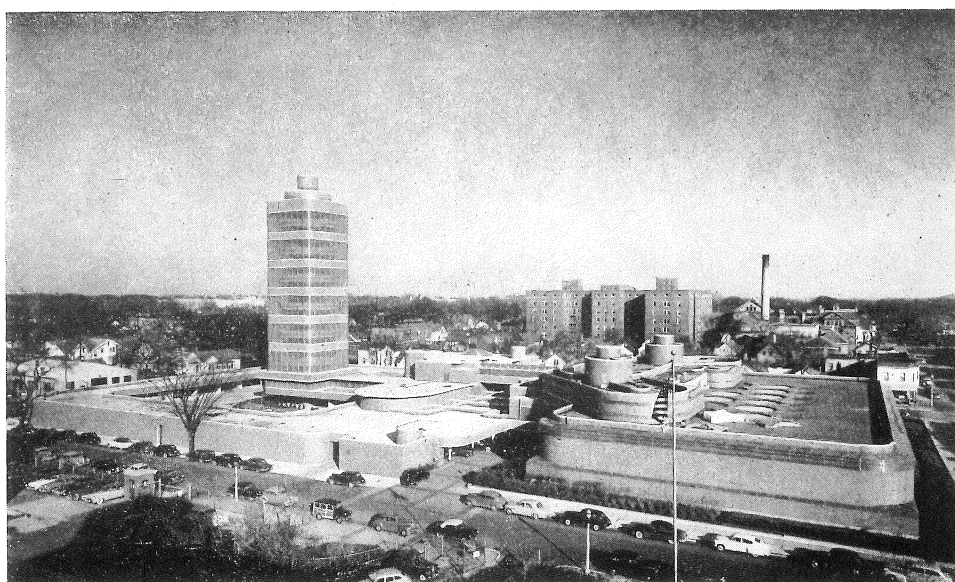


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THE ARCHITECTURE OF
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