

This copper urn is embossed with an ornamental pattern of circles and squares emblematic of the decorative motifs Wright used early in his career. It is one of the few decorative objects designed by Wright to be included in a number of his residential and commercial interiors from the 1890s to the 1940s, including the Dana House (1902–04) in Springfield, Illinois, and the V. C. Morris Gift Shop (1948–49) in San Francisco, both on view in this gallery. As Wright’s ornamental systems evolved, becoming increasingly integral to his architectural designs, he produced decorative objects in limited numbers for specific projects.

Urn from Waller  
House (CH2017.290)

Concrete blocks distinguished by their diagonal ornamental pattern and pieces of inset colored glass decorated the sculpted surfaces of Midway Gardens’ arcades and belvedere. This was one of Wright’s first experiments with concrete blocks, which he would later systematize in the textile-block houses of the 1920s and the Usonian Automatic projects of the 1950s, on view in the exhibition’s Building Systems gallery.

Sculpted block,  
Midway (1831.2012)

Despite embracing “The Art and Craft of the Machine,” as the title of his famous 1901 speech and essay proposed, Wright had a difficult relationship with factory production. His first attempt to design household objects for industrial manufacture, without a specific house in mind, was a set of glassware for Holland’s Leerdam Glasfabriek (Glass factory), but almost none of the products proved suitable for mass production.

Leerdam glass  
(3003.023)

During the 1950s, Wright designed a “Taliesin Line” of fabrics that included linens, curtains, tablecloths, bedspreads, and wallpapers to be manufactured by Schumacher and Company, a popular producer of decorative textiles. “And now Frank Lloyd Wright designs home furnishings you can buy!” proclaimed the November 1955 issue of *House Beautiful*, adding, “Mr. Wright believes that soft goods in a room can be a means of liveliness and color, and of individuality, especially where architectural character is somewhat lacking.” The Taliesin Line was instigated by Elizabeth Gordon, the magazine’s editor, and René Carillo, director of Schumacher’s merchandising. Wright designed some of the textiles himself and supervised the development of other designs from elements of his architecture by staff at Schumacher and apprentices in the Taliesin Fellowship.

Schumacher  
Catalogue

In contrast to traditional Japanese inns with tatami-based rooms, the Imperial Hotel provided beds, chairs, and other Western conveniences to its guests. Wright carefully designed all aspects of the interior, including fabrics, furniture, china, rugs, and murals, such that their combination would produce a total work of art. The shape of the perforated terracotta blocks, which were imbedded with glass and integrated into the walls of the hotel to form built-in light columns, resembles the overall form of the hotel itself.

Chairs, china,  
tapestries, blocks

The presentation of Wright's audacious project for a mile-high skyscraper was as much the culmination of decades of studying a new method of high-rise construction as it was a publicity gesture meant to reclaim his position as a leading force in Chicago architecture. Assembled here is material from the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation Archives that records the various stages of this gesture, from Wright's press conference at Chicago's Hotel Sherman, to the mounting of an exhibition showing the origins of the idea of the taproot skyscraper in one of his earliest designs, a windmill on his family estate in Wisconsin, to the fundraising dinner held after the press conference, to Mayor Richard J. Daley's declaration of Frank Lloyd Wright Day in Chicago. A few of the most sensational headlines from the widespread press coverage are displayed here, alongside correspondence on the occasion. The Czech émigré engineer Jaroslav Joseph Polivka played an important role in the Mile-High, as he did in other unrealized projects by Wright displayed here: a bridge for San Francisco Bay and a grandstand for the Belmont Park racetrack in New York. Publicity and novel design went hand in hand for Wright.

Lead in text for entire case

This photograph shows Wright putting the finishing touches on the great perspective drawing of the Mile-High in the drafting room at Taliesin in Wisconsin a few days before the press conference unveiling the design in Chicago. The drawing is on view in this gallery.

PH6007.025

Wright consulted the Czech émigré engineer Jaroslav Joseph Polivka on the structural requirements of his proposed mile-high tower (Polivka had already solved key problems in the design of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum [1943–59]). Here, Polivka sketched some ideas for Wright on a napkin. Polivka's archives also contain sheet after sheet of detailed calculations.

2017.129

A 22-foot-high reproduction of a large colorful perspective drawing of The Mile-High Illinois tower set on Chicago's Gold Coast, on view on the opposite wall, was the centerpiece of Wright's press conference announcing his proposal for a skyscraper of unprecedented height. Wright's ambivalence toward the traditional city is reflected in the fact that most of existing Chicago is here replaced by verdant fields. A second possible Wright tower—the Golden Beacon—appears on the horizon.

5617.002A <is this  
FLW.PH.5639.001?>

An exhibition of Wright's work—for which Wright and his apprentices produced this catalogue—accompanied his press conference unveiling the Mile-High design and highlights in particular his long involvement with the innovative taproot structural principle, whereby floors are cantilevered from a single central mast anchored deep in the ground. This he traced all the way back to one of his very first completed works, the Romeo and Juliet Windmill Tower for the Hillside Home School at Spring Green, Wisconsin, where a diamond-shaped element provided rigidity to the tower's design.

EX1047.032.006

One of Wright's earliest designs was a windmill for his family's estate at Taliesin, commissioned by his two aunts, who also commissioned the Hillside Home School (later the Taliesin Fellowship building and drawing studio). Wright included images of the windmill in the exhibition that accompanied his Mile-High press conference in Chicago, showing the origins of some of the structural ideas that blossomed a half century later in his tallest tower design to date. The octagonal-shaped tower was coupled—hence the name—with a diamond-shaped windmill that provided structural support. The chevron-like design recurs in the relationship of the asymmetrical core to the gradually tapering shape of the Mile-High.

Romeo and Juliet –  
(9607.003)

Preserved in the archive are scores of telegrams sent to Wright congratulating him on the honors that were bestowed on him as he unveiled the Mile-High at a \$25-a-plate fundraising dinner for the Taliesin Fellowship. Here are telegrams from the Spanish engineer Eduardo Torroja, one of the names cited on Wright's Mile-High drawing; Harold C. Price, the client for the recently completed H. C. Price Company Tower in Bartlesville, Oklahoma (the model is on view in this exhibition); and Douglas Haskell, the influential architecture editor.

Telegrams (Torroja,  
Price, Haskell)

Letters of both admiration and dismay arrived in Wright's mailbox as the press coverage of the Mile-High spread from Chicago to both coasts. Those that have been preserved include one from an admiring high school student and one from a crestfallen homemaker who admits to finding that her hero has prostituted himself to the machine of publicity, betraying his core principles in the pursuit of an outsize ego.

Letters

Wright appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine in January 1938, only the third architect to enjoy this honor and the first to have his portrait juxtaposed with an image of his work, a drawing of Fallingwater (on view in this exhibition). With the publicity he had received for the stunning engineering feat of Fallingwater (1934–37), a house cantilevered over a waterfall in western Pennsylvania, Wright was back in the limelight and was celebrated as an American design genius; two years later The Museum of Modern Art dedicated a large exhibition to Wright in its new building on West 53rd Street.

2017.362 Time  
Magazine

In 1946, Wright told journalists that those who distrusted the engineering of his great cantilevered terraces on Fallingwater, in Pennsylvania, were “damn fools,” like all engineers. Polivka, who had trained in engineering in Prague and was in private practice in San Francisco at the time, wrote a letter of admiration to Wright and sought to explain that he, himself an engineer, shared some of the architect’s skepticism about the profession. A terse telegram invited, or almost ordered, Polivka to visit Taliesin West. Years of friendship and collaboration ensued, as Polivka helped with calculations for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Mile-High skyscraper, and the Belmont racetrack project, shown on the wall behind you. And it was Polivka who brought the Spanish engineer Eduardo Torroja to visit Wright; together they traveled to see Wright’s V. C. Morris Gift Shop in San Francisco.

FLW and Polivka

In this snapshot, Polivka points proudly to his name on Wright’s drawing of the Mile-High during a visit to Taliesin West, in Arizona.

2017.130 Polivka in  
front of Mile High.

In 1950, Polivka introduced the great Spanish engineer Eduardo Torroja (1899–1961) to Wright. Polivka took snapshots of a trip Torroja and others made to San Francisco, Polivka’s adopted home; this photograph records the group’s visit to Wright’s V. C. Morris Gift Shop, featured in the section on ornament in this exhibition.

2017.131

Even as Wright reimagined Chicago as a city dominated by a few super-tall skyscrapers but otherwise given over to a prairie landscape, he also designed urban projects—many of them megastructures, such as this one for Monona Terrace, which integrated transportation and infrastructure with public and commercial programs—with the intention of revitalizing urban cores and engaging with the preexisting city and its surroundings. As this magical night view of his project for Madison, the state capital of Wisconsin, demonstrates, Wright envisioned these spaces as lively community and civic centers. The project was realized decades after Wright’s death; the large-scale model he conceived in 1955 is exhibited in the next gallery (to your right).

Madison (Monona  
Terrace) (5632.001)

In the 1930s, motorized transport was transforming the food industry, and there was also growing interest in roadside markets as a means of connecting newly mobile consumers with fresh, locally sourced food. Wright's terraced pyramid structure—a veritable temple of consumerism constructed of copper, glass, and reinforced concrete—offered motorists a combination of farm produce, leisure facilities, and variegated merchandise. A traffic-flow system around the exterior accommodated deliveries from nearby Little Farms and connected shoppers with valet parking and a gas station.

Wayside Market, 1932

While working on the Little Farms project, Wright and the first fee-paying apprentices at Taliesin were living the experience of sustainable, small-scale agriculture. As part of the Fellowship program, manual labor on the land was combined with architectural and environmental studies. Wright took his part alongside the apprentices—whether on the potato planter, hand-racking hay, or in the drawing studio—reliving his childhood experience of working on his Uncle James's farm.

Apprentices farming  
at Taliesin

This sketch for the Quadruple Block Plan, the major innovation in Wright's early urbanism, formed the basis of his design for the project "A Home in a Prairie Town," published in the *Ladies' Home Journal* in February 1901. The accompanying text makes it clear that the plan for the four houses as a group came first and determined the design of the individual houses. The handwritten note on the half-plan drawing begins by saying, "The plan is arranged on the assumption that the community interests are of greater value to the whole." The Quadruple Block Plan is a square in which all four houses become corner houses, each with an exclusive street entrance. The rotational pinwheeling around a shared central garden and four-part stable assures privacy for each house while creating a community focus.

Quadruple Block Plan  
for Ladies' Home  
Journal (0309.001)

Wright produced this general plan and aerial perspective for a publication documenting a competition organized by the City Club of Chicago for the design of an entire neighborhood of five thousand people. In his scheme, structures for municipal services, shopping, entertainment, education, recreation, and apartments face the streetcar line leading downtown. A park zigzags through the sixteen-acre development, passing through the area of Quadruple Block Plans (shown in gray) containing single-, two-, and four-family houses. The original perspective drawing that accompanied this group of works on paper is sadly lost.

Scheme of  
Development for a  
Quarter-Section of  
Chicago CH2017.330

This page from *King's Views of New York, 1908–1909* presents a futuristic vision of a New York City of skyscrapers connected by pedestrian bridges high above an avenue. Featuring multiple levels of elevated sidewalks and mass-transit lines, it is one of the earliest and arguably the most celebrated examples of the concept of a multilevel city, which would become characteristic of urban thinking in the United States and Europe in the 1920s. While clearly less fantastic, Wright's design for the Skyscraper Regulation project (1926), not unlike others of the time by Harvey Wiley Corbett, Edward H. Bennett, Le Corbusier, and Ludwig Hilberseimer, reflects a similar idea for dealing with traffic congestion in the modern metropolis.

Moses King

Isabelle R. Martin and her husband, Darwin D. Martin, commissioned one of Wright's grandest houses, built in Buffalo, New York, in 1903–06. In this carefully staged photograph, she poses between a Japanese print and an arrangement of dried local flowers, thus juxtaposing imported and native expressions of nature. Like Wright, the Martins were keenly interested in Japanese culture and collected woodblock prints, or *ukiyo-e*, from the Edo period (1615–1868). The taste extended to the design of their garden. Asian plants—such as Japanese iris, hollyhock, chrysanthemum, and peony, which appear often in the woodblock prints—were planted in the Martins' garden and at other projects from this period.

Photo of Isabelle  
Martin (CH2017.289)

This handwritten list of plants is for the gardens at the Coonley House in Riverside, Illinois. Jens Jensen designed the gardens, but rather than the strident horticultural nativism he was known to espouse, this list includes native and exotic species, notably Japanese quince (*Chaenomeles speciosa*) and Oriental poppies (*Papaver orientale*). The Coonleys, who also collected Japanese prints, were engaged with horticulture and the nature conservation movement that emerged in the years around 1900. Queene Ferry Coonley was the daughter of D. M. Ferry, founder of the world's largest seed company. Few such lists have survived in the archive.

Coonley, handwritten  
planting list  
(0803.000)

Coonley House,  
photos of exterior and  
interior (0803.0129,  
0803.0026, and  
0803.xxxx)

Jens Jensen, an early advocate of naturalistic landscapes and a pioneer environmentalist, designed the gardens for the Coonley House in Riverside, Illinois, which featured a mixture of native and imported species, as well as a vegetable garden. A grove of native birch trees and ferns, sited in the front of the house, was echoed on the interior in the murals designed by George Mann Niedecken. The repetition of plant motifs—whether living or ornamental, outside or inside—was characteristic of Wright’s synthesizing approach, his creation of a “total work of art.”

The flower of the hollyhock plant (*Althea rosea*) inspired the ornament and interior decoration of the Barnsdall House in Los Angeles, earning it the nickname the “Hollyhock House.” The client, Aline Barnsdall, favored this plant because she associated it with her home in the Midwest. Hollyhock was commonly used in prairie gardens, including many of Wright’s projects, but the widely naturalized species originated in Asia. The handwritten inscription on this photograph says “Desert Abstraction.” The title appears to refer to the geometries of the hollyhock motif, but also the species’ position as an alien transplant, a kind of abstraction within the desert ecology of California.

Hollyhock House,  
photo (1705.026)

When Wright redesigned and reprinted *The House Beautiful* in 1896–98, he included photogravures of dried prairie grasses, showing his engagement with common indigenous plants. Wright was highly critical of formal gardens that relied on hothouse plants laid out in symmetrical architectonic plans, a style enjoying some popularity at the time. The “weeds” seen here are elevated from their natural habitats. The photogravures show vertical cropping and negative space evocative of the Japanese prints Wright admired and collected. Such combinations of ordinary plants in exotic settings point to the complexity of discourses surrounding so-called native plants and landscapes during these years.

House Beautiful,  
photogravures  
(CH2017.181)

As this pamphlet notes, the Imperial Hotel “is neither of the East nor of the West, but might fittingly be called a blending of the ideals of the two civilizations.” Printed entirely in English, the pamphlet appeals to guests from abroad. From the Japanese perspective, Wright’s Imperial Hotel followed in the more than forty-year history of providing accommodations in a consciously Western architectural idiom for foreign visitors. In contrast to traditional Japanese inns with tatami-based rooms, the Western hotel provided guests with beds and chairs.

“Jewel of the Orient”  
CH2017.167

For public buildings such as Midway Gardens and the Imperial Hotel, Wright developed highly symmetrical schemes, a departure from his prairie houses of the first decade of the twentieth century, which were noted for their dynamic, asymmetrical, and often pinwheeling plans. This early sketch for the hotel shows a basic massing of parallel wings surrounding a central forecourt, which creates a sense of ceremonial entry.

Imperial Hotel, Tokyo  
FLW.DR.1509.015

“What a glory it is to see the Imperial standing amidst the ashes of the whole city!” exclaimed the Japanese architect Arata Endo in a letter to Wright that is dated September 8, 1920, although it appears to describe the Great Kanto Earthquake that struck Tokyo in 1923, leveling much of the city. Endo, twenty-two years Wright’s junior, had been chief draftsman on the Imperial Hotel, which famously survived the earthquake with minimal damage. Here he addresses Wright with the salutation “lieber Meister” (dear master), which Wright used for his own mentor, Louis Sullivan. Endo went on to design other buildings in Japan that owe a debt to his experience designing with Wright.

Arata Endo, letter to  
Frank Lloyd Wright  
FLW.PE.1033.022

FRANK  
LLOYD  
WRIGHT

—

EXTENDED  
LABELS

Imperial Hotel, Tokyo  
FLW.PH.1509.049

Imperial Hotel general manager Aisaku Hayashi and his wife visited Wright at Taliesin, Wisconsin, in February 1916 to discuss the hotel commission following the enthronement of Emperor Taisho in November 1915.

Wright decorated his own house and studio in Oak Park with Navajo rugs and sculptures of American Indians, and he commissioned the Italian painter Orlando Giannini to paint brightly colored murals depicting indigenous peoples in the master bedroom. On one wall, an American Indian man peers out over the plains, shading his eyes with his hand. On the opposite wall, an American Indian woman stands holding a water jug.

Photos of FLW Home & Studio (FLW. PH.9t506.012, FLW. PH.8901.018, CH2017.301, FLW. PH.8901.033)

In the 1890s, popular Arts and Crafts journals such as *The Craftsman*, *House Beautiful*, and *Brush and Pencil* frequently advertised American Indian wares and encouraged readers to decorate their homes with Navajo rugs, pottery, pillows, textiles, and other native-inspired merchandise. The simple geometric patterns adorning many of these products were praised for their supposed authenticity and closeness to nature.

The Craftsman

Wright and a number of his clients were early collectors of Hermon Atkins MacNeil's popular sculptures depicting American Indians. MacNeil's piece *A Primitive Chant to the Great Spirit* appears in the Winslow House, in River Forest, Illinois (1893-94), Wright's first independent commission, and again in his perspective drawings of the Dana House, in Springfield, Illinois (1902-04). MacNeil's model was Black Pipe, a Sioux man and "show Indian," as they were called at the time, who had performed in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show during the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago.

The Winslow House photo (FLW. PH.9305.007) + Dana House

Wright designed and constructed a wooden totem pole for a private garden court at Taliesin West. Totem poles were created by American Indians of the Pacific Northwest, far from the deserts of Arizona, to mark ancestral histories and material wealth and cannot be read without extensive knowledge of the families they represent. Nevertheless, totem poles, along with Navajo rugs, tipis, and Plains headdresses, became fixtures in twentieth-century summer camps, where Woodcraft Boys, Camp Fire Girls, and other youth groups imitated out-of-door activities and nature study associated with American Indians as a means of escape from modern industrial life.

Totem pole photo + Ocatilla + Taliesin interiors

Wright's design for the practice teaching school at Hampton, Virginia, adapted the Rosenwald school program's Plan 10A, one of numerous standardized templates that the program used to facilitate the design and construction of large numbers of school buildings. Plan 10A provided for regular classrooms, recitation rooms, a small library, and an auditorium. Wright retained most of the original 10A plan; however, he moved the large auditorium from the front of the original plan to the rear in order to create a courtyard for exercise and play.

Rosenwald School  
Plan 10A  
LN2017.251

In 1913, Julius Rosenwald, co-owner of Chicago's Sears, Roebuck and Co., started an ambitious collaboration with Booker T. Washington, famed principal of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama, to fund the construction of schools in African American communities throughout the South. Washington's educational initiative of industrial training for African Americans spread across the country, influencing the curriculum in schools at all levels. Its popularity made him the most powerful African American leader at the turn of the twentieth century.

Photograph of Julius  
Rosenwald and  
Booker T. Washington  
LN2017.253

For the Rosenwald School's rugged stone exterior walls, Wright proposed using a technique he called "a la Flagg," adapted from the architect Ernest Flagg, a Beaux-Arts-trained New York architect. Flagg had developed a technique he called "mosaic rubble"—outlined in this publication—that used a combination of fieldstone and concrete to minimize the use of formwork and scaffolding in construction, thus making it inexpensive and non-labor-intensive. Flagg used versions of this method for cottages on his own estate on Staten Island in the early 1920s.

Flagg's Small Houses:  
Their Economic  
Design and  
Construction  
CH2017.149

This print of Unity Temple is one of some one hundred lithographs that compose Wright's most ambitious publication of his drawings, the *Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe von Frank Lloyd Wright* (Buildings and designs of Frank Lloyd Wright), also known as the Wasmuth portfolio, after the name of its Berlin publisher. Printed in Germany in 1910 while Wright was on an extended sojourn in Europe, the portfolio documents the major works of his career to date. The lithographs recall Japanese prints in their composition, and many are detailed with gold ink and pale ink washes. The plates were copied from photographs of the built projects or from renderings, such as this print of Unity Temple after the original drawing by Marion Mahony, on view in the first gallery of this exhibition. The Wasmuth portfolio has been credited with disseminating Wright's architectural innovations throughout Europe, positioning Wright at the head of an emerging avant-garde that soon included figures such as Mies van der Rohe.

Wasmuth plate (Unity Temple 300330971. Ixiii)

This presentation drawing by Birch Burdette Long shows the rendering style that emerged in Wright's Oak Park studio around 1900. Compositions often recalled those of Japanese prints, which Wright admired and collected, and special attention was paid to the treatment of foliage. Wright often employed licensed architects to work in his Oak Park studio, an unusual practice at the time. Long's monogram can be seen in the lower left corner.

Thomas House (FLW. DR.0106.001)

Wright's hand is evident in this sketch for a studio addition to his house in Oak Park. The borders are covered with annotations, calculations, and notes in his handwriting, while the straight edges and rectilinear geometries signal the emergence of his Prairie Style of architecture. Wright claimed that by nature he tended to the linear and rectangular—preferring the T square and the triangle as drafting tools—rather than the curvilinear forms of Louis Sullivan, his former employer and mentor.

Home & Studio sketch  
(FLW.DR.9506.002)

In 1930, Wright's studio adopted a severe black-on-white style of drawing that re-presented some of Wright's earlier masterworks, such as the Larkin Building, in Buffalo, New York (1902–06), as modernist visions on par with those of the International Style. They were used to illustrate a series of lectures titled "Modern Architecture" that Wright gave at Princeton University and were reproduced in an accompanying publication. The drawings subsequently toured Europe. This campaign of drawings, books, and exhibitions marked one of many publicity battles waged by Wright against European modernism, in which he tried both to undermine the movement and to position himself at its helm.

Larkin Building  
(0403.002)

The prospectus for the American System-Built Houses was a veritable advertisement for Wright and his theories on architecture, democracy, and the machine. Its audience was working- and middle-class consumers. It positions Wright as the pioneer of an original American architecture who applied his genius to the invention of an “AMERICAN SYSTEM” that could produce affordable and beautiful houses. Combining Wright’s simplified designs with factory production, these houses could be built by “ordinary labor under ordinary conditions” at a cost ten to twenty percent less than conventionally built homes. “He has used commercial engines to your advantage—used them for you, not against you,” proclaims the text.

ASB catalogue (FLW.  
SP.1082.109)

This small town house, one of the many American System-Built designs, demonstrates Wright’s ambition to create a building system that would bridge house and community, the individual and the social whole. In 1930 Wright was asked to give a series of lectures titled “Modern Architecture” at Princeton University, one of which was titled “The City.” Wright recycled this drawing to illustrate his argument, captioning it “Small Town Hall.” The conflation of the home with the urban realm, private and public, demonstrates his commitment to local, democratic exchange.

“Small Town Hall”  
(1506.006)

In the early 1920s, when he was working primarily in California, Wright began experimenting with concrete construction systems. As these patent studies demonstrate, Wright envisioned a system of concrete blocks to be cast with semicircular channels around their perimeters. Once the blocks were assembled, these channels were to be filled with reinforcing steel rods and then with grout. The blocks were to be erected in double layers—creating identical faces for the exterior facade and the interior walls—with a cavity in-between to provide insulation. This process got rid of the mortar joint, which Wright argued would eliminate skilled labor and thus reduce construction costs. Wright attempted to patent his invention, even hiring a Los Angeles patent lawyer, but was unsuccessful.

Block House,  
blueprints (2111.001  
and 2111.002)

Beverly and Gerald Tonkens, of Cincinnati, engaged Wright's grandson and Taliesin apprentice Eric Lloyd Wright to supervise the construction of their house by a local contractor using the twelve standard blocks of the Usonian Automatic system. Though billed as "automatic," the system was complex, and most homeowners relied, to some extent, on professionals to realize their do-it-yourself ambitions.

Usonian Automatic  
photos

This farm unit combines five elements—living quarters, garage, packing station, stable and pens, and greenhouse with mushroom cellar—in an open, but compact, cross-shaped design centered on a cylindrical silo. The standardized parts were designed to be cost-effective and built around the healthy coexistence of people, livestock, crops, and machinery. The whole was like a living organism in which fresh produce from field and garden was either processed for dispatch via the packing area or brought directly into the farmhouse for eating. Wright conceived the plan as a flexible composite that could be modified for various terrains and combinations of crops and livestock.

Model of Little Farm  
Unit, 1932 {optional}

An earth-hugging layout fuses farm with landscape to create an effect both intimate and expansive. Schematic renderings of livestock in the pens reflect Wright's sense of the animals' colors and shapes as a form of mobile decoration, creating shifting patterns in the landscape. This was one of five illustrations that Davidson, Wright's partner on the Little Farms project, commissioned for "The Diary of Mary, a Little Farmer's Wife," a fictitious journal that he wrote in 1932 and printed in a small run to publicize their idea.

Perspective view Little  
Farm Unit

"I have been steadily developing the Little Farms-Davidson Market idea," wrote Davidson excitedly to his friend Wright in January 1932, adding, "This will be a long letter, because I want to get you 'thinking out' your indispensable contributions to the plan." These two carefully annotated layouts sent with the letter demonstrate the extent to which Davidson had developed detailed plans by the time he first contacted Wright about the project. Davidson, one of a new breed of "efficiency experts" who specialized in inventory control and the physical planning of retail and warehouse operations, was in his element planning the market hall.

Davidson plans, 1932

This plan reflects Wright's commitment to sustaining a balanced ecology by means of a diversified pattern of cultivation and respect for the natural contours of the land. Such an approach suggested an antidote to the ravages of chemical exhaustion and wind and water erosion that were threatening large portions of the country, especially the Great Plains, at this time.

Taliesin Cropping plan

This design, featuring the productive landscape surrounding the red barns at Taliesin, synthesizes the rhythms of agricultural planting and the colors of varied crops into an abstract composition. The view from above reflects the widespread use of aerial photography at the time to illustrate agricultural bulletins and the popular press.

Mural Design, Taliesin

In a letter to Wright sent from Germany in June 1932, the cultural critic Lewis Mumford drew Wright's attention to a farm designed by Hugo Häring, near Lübeck, "which would have delighted you." Häring's organic design and the way he wrote about architecture as an expression of materials, place, and human activities had much in common with the Little Farms Wright was developing.

Hugo Haring farm  
design

The design of this poster communicates the industrial uniformity and systematization of farming in the Soviet Union. The consolidation of landholdings and labor into collective farms was a keystone of Joseph Stalin's First Five-Year Plan, of 1928–32, and involved the importation of large numbers of American-made tractors. The rapid industrialization of Soviet agriculture on a massive scale was widely publicized in the United States, and Wright visited several collective farms during a trip to the USSR in June 1937 to attend the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Architects in Moscow.

Klutsis poster

“You been reading the papers lately? You know, back to the land—all that sort of stuff. Sounds like the only answer,” suggests the film's lead character, John Sims, an urban salesman struggling to make ends meet. King Vidor's idealistic drama about a collective farm and its growth as a community of the unemployed was inspired by press headlines during the Great Depression. Filmed in the early 1930s, the “back to the land” narrative echoes Wright's personal experience of the economic downturn, including his attempts to revive the family farm at Taliesin and his vision of Little Farms spreading across the United States.

Our Daily Bread ,  
Director King Vidor  
(Viking Productions,  
1934)

Beall designed this poster for the Rural Electrification Administration, an agency created in 1935 under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal program at a time when only ten percent of rural dwellers had electricity. Farm relief had been a central concern for Roosevelt since his days as governor of New York from 1928 to 1932. When Davidson first proposed his combination of Little Farms and roadside markets to Wright, his friend's immediate response was, “Get to Franklin Roosevelt with your plan—tell him I am with you.” In the years that followed, Davidson made strenuous attempts to align the project with New Deal priorities such as rural electrification.

Lester Beall poster

This unassuming drawing represents Wright's first venture in urban planning. Commissioned by Charles E. Roberts to design twenty-two houses for a block in a developing area of Chicago's inner-ring western suburbs, Wright responded by rethinking how houses should relate to one another and to the surrounding streets. A hand-rendered grid in red ink defines the property. Lot lines, house plans, and an interior garden/courtyard are lightly indicated in pencil. The grid echoes the larger city grid, while the central open space replaces the typical alley, creating a novel relation between individual dwellings. The angled connection of the corner houses to the central court reveals the importance Wright attached to establishing a shared sense of communal space.

Development Plan for  
Charles E. Roberts,  
(9705.006)

This delicate perspective shows one of six groups of four houses in Wright's redesign of his 1896 scheme for Oak Park based on the Quadruple Block Plan. Each group was separated from the others by internal streets and pedestrian walks that provided access to all the properties. Either during the process of redesign or after his client, Charles E. Roberts, canceled the project, Wright further developed the idea in a series of plans for blocks ranging in size from four to thirty-two houses. The plan, on the left, shows how the planted pedestrian walkway could be turned into a private street that led to shared stables.

Development Plan for  
Charles E. Roberts,  
(0309.022/0019.007)  
+ 0309.003 finished  
plan

This sketch—which details two full city blocks and two partial blocks of a nine-block area of downtown Chicago, as well as a partial elevation—was intended to serve as a template for mitigating the congestion of the modern city. All the elements of the final design—including the multilevel street system, the spacing of the towers and their restriction to corner lots, and the open internal courts—are clearly indicated. The right-hand side of the sheet is filled with notes in Wright's hand describing uses, dimensions, setbacks, and relationships between buildings, streets, alleys, parking, and vehicular and pedestrian traffic. A note on the upper right says, "Zoning law and Set back ordinances carried to a logical conclusion." In the lower right, next to Wright's signature, is the legend "SKYSCRAPER REGULATION. AUGMENTING THE GRIDIRON. REMODELING OF THE CITY—JAN. 1926," to which is appended, "Beyond these provisions the city should spread out."

Skyscraper  
Regulation, Chicago.  
Project, 1926.  
(2603.004)

This sectional cut illustrates the interior of two city blocks separated by a ten-lane street divided by a median strip. Skyscrapers rise from the corners of the eight-story perimeter-block buildings, which surround an interior court on the left and an alley on the right. Raised above two levels of parking, the court permits the occupants of the surrounding apartments, hotel rooms, and offices to congregate in restaurants and cafes secluded from the street traffic. Tunnels, streets, and skywalks separate circulation paths in a multilevel matrix that evokes futuristic visions of the city, which Wright shared with traditionalist and modernist architects in both the United States and Europe.

Skyscraper  
Regulation, Chicago.  
Project, 1926.  
(2603.004)

This 1955 model articulates the spatial and urbanistic strategies that Wright used in his design for the Madison Civic Center, which was intended to complete the mall connected to the State Capitol. The megastructure is cantilevered over Lake Monona and integrates transportation, parking, an auditorium, government offices, courtrooms, and a jail. Because its main programmatic elements are under a semicircular street-level terrace that echoes the auditorium shape within, the civic center becomes a public forum with the lake as backdrop and the city as foreground. Concerts, dining, parking, promenading, and gazing at the city and its natural surroundings would all be part of a new idea of the civic center as a gathering place and a spectacle. Here Wright anticipated the call for a new monumentality made in the 1940s by the major historian and critic of modern architecture Sigfried Giedion and others—one that would revitalize the public sphere without relying on the traditional materials and forms of classical monumentality. Wright revised the project numerous times. It is the only one of his urban designs to have been constructed, though in a greatly reduced and diluted version, as the Monona Terrace Community and Convention Center, by Taliesin Architects, in 1989–97.

Madison (Monona  
Terrace) Civic Center,  
Madison, Wisconsin.  
Project, 1938-59.  
MODEL

“The city goes to the lake,” proclaims an inscription on this perspective drawing for Monona Terrace, which includes roadways and parking for automobiles and three “waterdomes” fed by lake water. Beneath this street-level terrace were to be an auditorium, additional parking, government offices, courtrooms, and a jail, with the entire structure cantilevered over Lake Monona. Submerging the main programmatic elements beneath the terrace preserved views of the lake, while the driveways and parking accommodated motorists on pleasure drives and alleviated congestion in downtown Madison.

Madison (Monona Terrace) Civic Center, (0309.002)

The Madison Civic Center (later Monona Terrace Civic Center) was designed to complete the mall connected to the State Capitol. Wright’s conceptual sketch delineates how the mall expands into a broad semicircle, linking the downtown, dominated by the Greek-cross-shaped State Capitol, to Lake Monona. Its three domes mark the center’s auditorium and city and county courthouses and echo the Capitol’s geometry.

Madison Civic Center, Madison, (3909.005)

The section drawing reveals how the reinforced concrete structure’s lower decks, cantilevered over the lake, accommodate the complex program, which integrates transportation, parking, an auditorium, government offices, courtrooms, and a jail.

Madison (Monona Terrace) Section

This design, which Wright called Crystal Heights and dated 1939, is generally referred to as Crystal City and was actually created in 1940. With its combination of twenty-five interconnected apartment and apartment-hotel towers, major shopping center, entertainment complex, and five levels of parking beneath a raised public terrace, the ten-acre superblock development is an early example of a “city within the city.” It was hailed as Washington’s answer to New York’s recently completed Rockefeller Center. The site, along upscale Connecticut Avenue, at the edge of downtown Washington, D.C., is now occupied in part by the Washington Hilton Hotel.

Crystal City,  
Washington, D.C.,  
1940. Project.  
(4016.001/4016.004)

The Point Park Civic Center commission came from Edgar J. Kaufmann, Wright’s client for Fallingwater (1934–39). A major player in the effort to redevelop Pittsburgh’s derelict downtown, Kaufmann was disappointed in the studies for a simple park and traffic interchange proposed by the official team of local architects and engineers and asked Wright for a counter-project. This preliminary sketch by Wright is drawn over the official team’s plan. Wright’s colored pencil additions show his proposed circular civic center and his planned bridges and connections to the rest of the city. Most striking is the main circular element, which was cut out from the existing print, drawn over, and then taped back in place.

Point Park Civic  
Center, Pittsburgh.  
Project, 1947.  
Preliminary sketch  
(4836.035)

The drawings for the Pittsburgh project are some of the largest and most complex produced by Wright's office. This aerial perspective shows the 250-foot-high ziggurat-shaped atrium surrounded by a spiral roadway linked to the north and south shores by multilevel bridges. The nearly 4 1/2-mile-long reinforced-concrete ramp provides automobile access to the various venues, including an opera house, convention center and exhibition hall, cinemas, theaters, parking facilities, and flexible sports stadium for baseball, hockey, and football at the top. The ramp itself features fast-food kiosks, newsstands, and stalls selling gadgets and books.

Point Park Civic  
Center, Pittsburgh.  
(4821.003)

The section and plan for Point Park Civic Center, Pittsburgh, help visualize the interior functions of the site. One of the most interesting and important aspects of the design was the populist intention to appeal to a wide spectrum of users, from those who would go to the opera to those who would go to a baseball game. Meant to revitalize the heart of the city by joining it to the surrounding suburbs, the center offered not just highbrow "cultural" events, as Wright put it, but, equally, "entertainment for the urban multitudes."

Point Park Civic  
Center, Pittsburgh.  
Project, 1947.  
4821.005

In 1957, Wright, along with a number of "starchitects" including Alvar Aalto, Le Corbusier, and Walter Gropius, was commissioned to design a signature building in Baghdad as part of an Iraqi government program to bring Western architecture to the capital city. Although asked only to design an opera house, Wright expanded the program into an entire cultural center—including a university, two museums, a zoo, and various recreational facilities—and moved the site to an island in the Tigris River. Taking as his cue the original eighth-century Round City of al-Mansur, Wright transposed its circular form from the northern part of the city to the south so that it could serve as a new urban node for the area. Wright's project, like most of the others, was canceled after the revolution of 1958.

Plan for Greater  
Baghdad, Iraq. Project,  
(5733.008)

At age twenty, Wright applied for a job in the office of Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan, which was emerging as one of the most prominent firms in late nineteenth-century Chicago. Wright presented Sullivan with an example of his own work, a residential design influenced by the shingled Queen Anne style prevalent at the time. Wright was hired and remained with Adler and Sullivan for five years, working on many of the firm's commissions for private houses. He would always refer to Sullivan as *lieber Meister*, "dear master" in German.

8701.001

This colored perspective drawing for Wright's first independent commission after leaving the office of Adler and Sullivan emphasizes the verdant suburban setting and the volumetrics of a house still marked by a very formal symmetry.

9305.013

Made in 1905, the same year that Wright first visited Japan, this rendering of a house for the shores of Lake Michigan in Racine has an unusual format that clearly shows the influence of the Japanese scrolls and prints with which Wright was enamored. The paneled approach to the house's exterior walls also reflects Wright's interest in traditional Japanese wooden architecture.

0506.003

This rendering of one of Wright's first major non-residential commissions is the work of Marion Mahony, one of the first women to be awarded an architecture degree in the United States. Mahony shared Wright's admiration for Japanese graphics, as is evident in the oblique perspective view framed by trees that break the picture plane. Mahony was to have a major influence on the drawing style of Wright and other members of his studio.

0611.003 Unity  
Temple.

This visionary project would have been Wright's most ambitious exploration of the textile-block system he developed in California in the 1920s. Terraced into the hillsides were numerous concrete-block houses, linked together by roadways, tunnels, and bridges of the same material. No two houses were alike, demonstrating the nearly endless formal variations possible with the blocks. While the sharp angular view upward to the house and the decentering of the building in the upper section of the sheet continue Wright's Japanese-inspired drawing style, the more feathery and striated treatment of the foliage is typical of this moment in the evolution of his presentation drawings.

2104.004

One of Wright's earliest experiments with a building developed entirely from circular forms, this unusual project for Sugarloaf Mountain in Maryland called for a spiral ramped road leading to an elevated observatory. The interior of this building was to house a planetarium. The project is often seen as a forerunner of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, built two decades later.

2505.039.

The bold design of a house over a waterfall for Pittsburgh department store magnate Edgar Kaufmann put Wright back in the public eye at a moment when he was increasingly anxious that his fame had faded. This drawing landed Wright on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1938—he was only the third architect ever to receive that honor—and was also displayed that same year in an exhibition at MoMA devoted solely to his unprecedented house design.

3602.004

At the same time that Wright developed plans for an administration building for the Johnson Wax company of Racine, Wisconsin, he also designed a lavish house for the company's president on an estate outside of town. If the newly completed Fallingwater hovered dramatically above a stream, Wingspread, as its name suggests, spread itself out in wings from a great central fireplace and ziggurat-shaped two-story living hall. The house hugged the ground even as it set up a spiraling composition.

3703.001.

This panoramic bird's-eye view of Taliesin West exemplifies the intimate relationship between the features of the natural landscape and Wright's development of new ways of planning during the 1930s. Taliesin West was developed in the desert hills outside Scottsdale, on a site Wright found after several years of wintering with apprentices in Arizona. From 1938 Taliesin was both Wright's second home and the winter setting of the Taliesin Fellowship, a unique school he founded to teach his architectural philosophy and design approach.

3803.003

Burton Tremaine, a publisher who was also a patron of experimental modern architecture, commissioned Wright to design a visitor's center for Sunset Crater National Monument in Arizona. Intended to be constructed of desert masonry, not unlike Taliesin West, Wright's Meteor Crater Inn, as he called it, extended out over the edge of the crater, affording vertiginous views of its nearly one-mile diameter. Tremaine also commissioned designs from others, including the Brazilian architect/landscape design team of Oscar Niemeyer and Roberto Burle Marx. Neither their project nor Wright's was built.

4822.001.

Designed for a dramatic site just off the Grand Canal in Venice, this building for a foundation established in honor of a young Italian architect, who had hoped to work with Wright before his untimely death, was never built. Nonetheless, Wright's work was widely admired and influential in postwar Italy.

5306.002

Wright's unrealized design for the Calico textile mills, one of the oldest cotton processing facilities in Ahmedabad, India, features a blank facade. The densely layered surface reads as a veritable textile, an association immediately identified with the client but one that also points to Wright's own interest in processes of weaving and his textile-block construction systems.

Sarabhai Calico Mills  
Store, India  
(4508.001)

One of Wright's few realized works in New York, this car showroom had a ramp system reminiscent of the contemporaneous Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. Prominently located at 56th Street and Park Avenue, it was demolished in 2013.

5622.003

Throughout his life, Wright developed his ideas of an urbanism of dispersal or decentralization made possible by new forms of transportation. The ideas at play here go back to his dramatic proposal for the hypothetical Broadacre City (1929–35).

5825.004

Constructed in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, three years before Wright's death, the H. C. Price Company Tower is one of just two realized examples of the architect's seminal taproot construction system, whereby the floors are cantilevered from a hollow concrete core driven deep into the ground, not unlike the taproot of a plant. Wright had first experimented with this novel structural solution in his unrealized project for St. Mark's Tower in New York (1927–29), but the taproot would reach its apotheosis in Wright's 1956 designs for a mile-high skyscraper that he proposed to construct in Chicago.

1868.2012.

At Florida Southern College, Wright developed a large-scale plan based on dynamic diagonal organizing lines. Connecting the various buildings on the campus were covered walkways that passed on the diagonal through groves of orange trees, creating an interplay between rectilinear geometries and thirty- and sixty-degree angles. Built over a number of years, the campus included several concrete-block buildings erected by the students with assistance from Taliesin fellows as an early experiment with do-it-yourself construction systems. Only a part of the grand scheme was realized as first projected.

3805.002

In this rare photographic album documenting the Imperial Hotel, read from right to left like traditional Japanese books, Wright added his own notations, more extensive foliage, and sketches of architectural details. Red markings on the plan precisely indicate the positions where the photographs reproduced in the publication—dynamically framed scenes that recall the Japanese prints Wright collected and admired—were taken. The book is all the more valuable in that it was printed just a month before the Great Kanto Earthquake destroyed so much of Tokyo on September 1, 1923. The hotel survived with relatively minimal damage.

Teikoku Hoteru  
FLW.PM.1025.088

By the turn of the century there were numerous collectors and dealers specializing in the growing market for Japanese prints. Wright, both collector and sometime dealer, wrote an important book on the subject. Boston was one of the centers of *American Japonisme*, the name given to the Western fascination, starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, with Japanese art and culture. Wright designed this print gallery for William Spaulding, one of his associates in the Japanese print trade, for the exhibition of Spaulding's print collection. Wright designed the entire space—composing the cabinets, picture rails, fabrics, plaster for the walls, carpets, and the remarkably minimal square chairs—to accommodate the particularities of displaying the medium. The gallery was never realized, and Spaulding donated his collection to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 1921.

Japanese Print Gallery  
for William Spaulding,  
Boston. Project  
FLW.DR.1902.004

The massing of Wright's preliminary scheme for the U.S. Embassy Building in Tokyo forms a central forecourt akin to that of his Imperial Hotel and synthesizes western and eastern forms. In the end, the U.S. Embassy Building (1923–31) was designed by Antonin Raymond, who had arrived in Japan at the end of 1919 to work on Wright's Imperial Hotel.

U.S. Embassy Building,  
project, Tokyo, Japan  
FLW.DR.1406.002

The paneled facades in this project for a hotel evoke Wright's admiration for Japanese traditional wooden architecture, while the drawing's composition echoes the style of Wright's beloved Japanese prints. The dramatic setting of the building over a waterfall anticipates Wright's later masterwork Fallingwater (Kaufmann House) (1934–37), on view in this exhibition.

Odawara Hotel,  
project, Odawara,  
Japan  
FLW.DR.1706.003

Wright's Imperial Hotel led to other commissions in Japan, although few, other than this school, were built. This wood-frame school is scaled to small children to create an intimate atmosphere for learning. The school still stands in excellent condition in fast-changing Tokyo.

Jiyu Gakuen School,  
Tokyo  
FLW.DR.2101.012

This preliminary scheme for the hotel, depicted in a bird's-eye perspective, shows a central complex with two wings that enclose a courtyard in front of the building. The highly symmetrical building parti, which recalls Japanese temples as well as Beaux-Arts palatial types, is countered by the asymmetrical composition of the drawing itself, evocative of the Japanese prints Wright collected. Wright initially presented this design at the 1914 annual Chicago Architectural Club exhibition, alongside Japanese prints and ikebana flower arrangements. Also on display was Wright's design for Midway Gardens (1913–14), an entertainment complex in Chicago (on view here in the adjacent gallery), whose symmetrical composition and interior courtyard echoed that of the hotel.

Imperial Hotel, Tokyo  
Initial unbuilt scheme  
FLW.DR.1409.042

Stepped pyramidal roofs reminiscent of early Mesopotamian ziggurats as well as Japanese pyramidal roof forms, which Wright photographed during his 1905 trip to Japan, dominate this early scheme for the hotel.

Imperial Hotel, Tokyo  
Initial unbuilt scheme  
FLW.DR.1409.031

In this preliminary scheme for the Imperial Hotel, Wright overtly refers to Japanese temple architecture in the form of the dominant roof with upturned eaves and pagoda-like stair towers. Wright had returned from his earlier trip to Japan in 1905 with scores of his own photographs of Japanese traditional architecture, including temples and pagodas.

Imperial Hotel, Tokyo  
Initial unbuilt scheme  
FLW.DR.1409.053

Interspersed throughout this polychrome decorative design is Oya tuff, a volcanic stone unique to Japan that added a porous texture to Wright's compositions for ornamented columns, capstones, and bases. For the monumental Imperial Hotel, Wright advocated the prominent use of some 60,000 cubic feet of this material, normally reserved for everyday needs such as sidewalk paving and common building faces.

1509.005 – Stone carving and polychrome decorations

The 285 hotel rooms comprised only half of the ambitious program at the Imperial Hotel. Wright's design called for a 1000-person theater with a revolving stage; a terraced cabaret with table seating for 300 people and room for dancing; an extensive dining room; and a grand cross-axial promenade. Capping the whole was a top-floor ballroom and banquet hall called the Peacock Room, visible on the upper-left of this drawing. Wright played off the peacock theme in mural and rug designs for the space.

1509.650 – Longitudinal section showing Peacock room

In his 1923–24 designs for a clubhouse and gateway for the Nakoma Country Club, a golf resort in Madison, Wisconsin, Wright appropriated American Indian forms in ways that raise troubling questions about attitudes toward indigenous peoples in the early twentieth century. The roofline of the clubhouse resembles a series of tipis. Standing in reflecting pools at the entrance to the club are sculptures of an American Indian man and woman. Wright described the pair as a “study in harmonious contrasts,” the male being “rectilinear,” “dominant,” and “aggressive,” while the female is “curvilinear” and “submissive,” with “brimming bowl and children symbolic of domestic virtue.” The project demonstrates the racial and gender stereotypes that underlie such cultural references.

Key object, Nakoma Country Club - FLW. DR.2405.012

In Wright’s design for the Nakoma Country Club, the pyramidal, tent-like volumes of the clubhouse roof evoke tipi forms. On this drawing, the large assembly room at the center of the complex is annotated as “high tipi,” while picnic tables, protected by umbrellas that echo the same tipi motif, are labeled “wigwam” and “tepee” (a variant spelling of “tipi”). Although Wright uses the terms interchangeably, tipis are conical, portable, and prevalent in the Great Plains, whereas wigwams are domed, permanent, and found primarily in the Northeast and Great Lakes region. By conflating the two, Wright perpetuates a generic “Indian” identity constructed by non-native Americans rather than engaging with a specific form of American Indian architecture.

Nakoma Country Club, perspective (Library of Congress, CH2017.484)

Wright originally intended to decorate the interior of the clubhouse with animal symbols borrowed from the twelve clans of the Winnebago tribe, a design feature that would have added a degree of specificity to his American Indian references, since Winnebago peoples once inhabited the land around Madison. The central hearth inside the tipi reads as a campfire but also recalls Wright's own residential designs, which often anchor an open interior plan around a central fireplace.

Nakoma, interior (Aust Family)

Wright designed monumental sculptures for the reflecting pools at the entrance to the clubhouse drive: an eighteen-foot-tall male named Nakomis and a sixteen-foot-tall female named Nakoma. Nakomis is teaching his son to shoot an arrow at the sun, a rite of manhood that captured the imagination of many non-native artists. Two children accompany Nakoma: a daughter at her side and a small child on her back. Wright depicts Nakomis wearing a Plains headdress and Nakoma holding pottery associated with the Pueblo peoples of the Southwest, collapsing the cultural specificities of American Indians into a generic symbol of "Indian" identity.

Nakoma and Nakomi  
(Woman and Warrior) –  
2405.004 and  
2405.008

The two winged figures depicted in this sculptural frieze for the Bogk House recall, in their blocky, geometric forms, Mayan and Aztec motifs, while their wings resemble the eagle imagery prominent in the Pueblo Eagle Dance. The Eagle Dance was one of the most popular ceremonial dances performed at the 1915 Panama-California Exposition in San Diego, which Wright attended and where he encountered theories positing that contemporary American Indians were descendants of a venerable, ancient American civilization.

Bogk House mural

The educator Booker T. Washington and his fellow African American teachers at Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute developed a guide that would be followed by rural communities who wanted to build the early Rosenwald schools. The guide offered instructions for how to build everything from the schoolhouse itself to the blackboards to the landscaping around the school. Rich in details, the book elevated the quality of construction and the learning environment for children. The Julius Rosenwald Fund would go on to produce similar guides.

The Negro Rural  
School and Its  
Relation to the  
Community  
CH2017.495

The Rosenwald School program typically required African American communities to contribute their own monies to construct new schools, with the local school board and Rosenwald providing the rest of the funding. That black Americans had to pay for part of their schools is a stark reminder of the unequal distribution of state education monies under Jim Crow segregation. For a new school in Welsh, Louisiana, for example, the local school board donated five lots for construction, the Rosenwald Fund donated \$300, and African American residents raised \$1100. Despite such injustices, the Rosenwald School program was enormously successful and brought black and white citizens together in an effort to build better schools for African American children. The Rosenwald Fund would dispatch agents to work with local communities and school boards to ensure that each new school building met the standards of construction and design stipulated by the grant.

JACKSON DAVIS  
(American, 1882–1947)

Pioneering female photographer Frances Benjamin Johnston documented several progressive educational institutions over the course of her career. In 1899, she began her monumental series recording the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, which included the teacher-training Whittier School. Wright would later propose to replace the old wood-frame Whittier School with his new, innovative Rosenwald School.

Southern Waterfront

Lawrence's epic Migration Series narrates the journey to northern cities taken by African American families as they escaped the South's inhumane sharecropping farm system and threats of racially motivated violence. While many black Americans imagined that urban life would be infinitely better than a meager rural existence, the segregation, poverty, and indifference they encountered in the North only proved to be a different version of Jim Crow. Nevertheless, the educational system in the North, with more funding and oversight, meant that the schools were superior to their southern counterparts. Lawrence received a Rosenwald grant for this work.

In the North the Negro  
had better  
educational facilities

In 1923 Wright designed a community theater and playhouse for Aline Barnsdall's arts compound around the Hollyhock (Barnsdall) House (1918–21). Wright's scheme—which imaginatively combines spaces for theatrical and dance performance, study, swimming, and play into one educational experience—demonstrates many of the experiments in educational spaces and construction practices that would later reappear in his Rosenwald School design.

Aline Barnsdall  
Kindergarten, Los  
Angeles, CA  
FLW.DR.2301.007  
plan

Wright's career-long interest in adapting handicraft methods to modern production techniques can be seen in this perspective view of the playhouse, which shows the structure's mass of intersecting rhomboids clad in "textile blocks"—Wright's innovative concrete block system with which he began experimenting in the early 1920s—rising from the hillside. Produced on-site, these blocks minimized skilled labor and, when stacked, created tapestry-like wall patterns. Wright would continue his investigations into simple, low-cost masonry construction techniques in his design for the Rosenwald School at Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, which he imagined would serve as a model for the program.

Aline Barnsdall  
Kindergarten, Los  
Angeles, CA  
FLW.DR.2301.008  
perspective

In 1926 Wright proposed four field houses, called the Kindersymphonies, for a competition for Oak Park, Illinois. Although the pavilions shared the same plan for playrooms and wading pools, Wright composed different exterior configurations for them using a palette of gabled roofs, windows, and candy-striped columns. The construction of playgrounds and recreation centers in the early twentieth century was part of a broad shift in educational thinking that emphasized active, hands-on learning, physical education, and public health.

Oak Park Playground  
Association  
Playhouses, project,  
Oak Park, IL  
FLW.DR.2601.009

With this design, Wright merged architecture, landscape, learning, and physical fitness into an inventive proposal that would have transformed the typical Rosenwald School. At the center of the school was a pool and a patio for outdoor recreation that stimulated a “physical culture” critical for children’s educational advancement. A large auditorium and theater provided spaces for group learning and performance, while classrooms, recitation rooms, and a library occupied the two wings surrounding the central court. Wright disliked the conventional appearance of Rosenwald School designs, so he proposed a novel combination of fieldstone, concrete, shingles, and cypress boards stained bright colors. The masonry construction was intended to be low-cost and easy to build, allowing communities and students to construct their own schools. The project’s radical departure from Rosenwald standard practices was one reason it was never constructed. On the bottom of the drawing, Wright explains that the school was “N.B. (Never built, Not ‘Colonial’.)”

Rosenwald  
Foundation School,  
project  
FLW.DR.2904.001

This faint pencil sketch on tracing paper—the only surviving drawing of Wright’s Rosenwald plan—reveals that his design closely followed the plan of the 10A model Rosenwald School. The front of the school hosted the administrative functions of the office and the library. Six classrooms and four recitation rooms were divided between two wings. Wright pushed the auditorium, renamed the Little Theater, from the front to the rear of the building, where it enclosed a courtyard patio with a pool.

Rosenwald  
Foundation School,  
project, La Jolla, CA  
FLW.DR.2904.002

After briefly studying engineering at the University of Wisconsin, Wright joined the architectural firm of Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan, pioneers in steel-framed skyscraper construction. He was soon promoted to the position of head draftsman, working for nearly half a decade under Sullivan as “a good pencil in the Master’s hand,” in Wright’s words. Sullivan was renowned for his personal brand of curvilinear, abstract ornament, an organic system that Wright internalized during these years. Although Wright would go on to create his own system of design based on rectilinear geometries, Sullivan remained his beloved mentor, or *lieber Meister* (dear master), as Wright called him.

Sullivan doors  
(CH2017.281)

The drawings Wright produced shortly after establishing his independent practice in 1893 show him engaging with prevailing architectural styles and studio practices as he searched for his own artistic identity. His competition entry for the Milwaukee Public Library and Museum used a neoclassical design vocabulary and relied on principles of symmetry and axial relations. The Moore House in Oak Park is a Tudor design, with steeply pitched gable roofs, elaborate masonry chimneys, and decorative half-timbering. In the drawing for alterations to the Waller House, originally designed by John Root, another prominent Chicago architect, Wright used red and purple inks to indicate the original house and the changes, respectively, a common practice in Chicago at this time.

Cluster of early work  
(Milwaukee Library  
9306.001, Nathan  
Moore 9503.018, and  
Waller House  
9902.002)

Marion Mahony, one of the first licensed women architects in the United States, was Wright's most talented renderer in the Oak Park Studio. Her compositions, evocative of Japanese prints in their dynamic framing, negative space, and landscape features that break the picture plane, became the paradigm for which Wright's early drawings are known. On the lower right of this rare drawing that bears her signature, she notes that the drawing is "after Hiroshige," a master of Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints.

DeRhodes House,  
Marion Mahony

The organizational grid was prevalent in drawings produced by the Taliesin Fellowship, a school and studio Wright established in 1932. Earlier in his career, Wright had employed trained architects, but apprentices at Taliesin paid tuition and had limited experience with architectural design. The grid system was easier for students to learn, as dimensions are determined by the relationship of parts to the grid. The system also required fewer drawings to be made per project, allowing Wright's studio to produce more projects overall.

Neil's House  
(5020.031)

Drawings for the Rogers Lacy Hotel, an unrealized project for Dallas that anticipated the atrium hotel by several decades, demonstrate how Wright and his apprentices worked together to produce architectural projects. Wright first drew the conceptual design of the hotel. He extended the paper several times as the scale of the tower increased and pasted a smaller sketch over a hole in the center to indicate a change to the design. From this singular drawing, his apprentices gathered all the information necessary to execute plans, elevations, sections, and perspectives, including this rendering, drawn exclusively by John H. Howe, one of Wright's most talented apprentices.

Rogers Lacy Hotel  
(4606.031 and  
4606.001)

The honeycomb floor pattern of the Hanna House is one example of Wright's experiments with diagonal planning, where a hexagonal module organizes the space rather than a grid. Wright believed the hexagon was more natural than a square or a right angle, so he found this form particularly appropriate for dramatic landscapes with rugged terrain. John H. Howe, the head draftsman at Taliesin, learned to make working drawings by practicing on the Hanna House designs.

Hanna House  
(3701.010)

On July 8, 1917, the Richards Company of Milwaukee ran a full-page advertisement in the Sunday edition of the *Chicago Tribune* to market the American System-Built Houses designed by Wright, "America's greatest architect." At the bottom of the ad was a list of builders around Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana who could deliver the product represented in the perspective drawing at the top. Richards hoped to compete with Sears, Roebuck and Co.'s mail-order houses by capitalizing on Wright's name and signature architectural style. Licensing only preselected contractors was one way to guarantee that the final product was indeed a Wright house.

Chicago Tribune Ad  
(1506.162)

Collaborating with Arthur L. Richards, a real estate developer and industrialist, provided Wright the opportunity to pursue his interest in designs based on machine work. Wright worked with factories owned by Richards to mass-produce building components for the American System-Built Houses, such as windows, mullions, doors, sash details, and interior elements, which lowered costs by minimizing the amount of skilled carpentry required on the construction site. These components were designed to be consistent across all the American System-Built Houses, thus branding them as products that belonged to Wright's much-coveted style. Their reproducibility required Wright to position himself as the author of a system, as indicated on the lower-right-hand corner of every drawing: "patent applied for." Wright's practice oversaw the production of one thousand drawings of the system, though only about two dozen houses were built.

American System-  
Built (grid)

This detail sheet for the Jacobs House demonstrates Wright's shift away from factory production toward skilled craftsmanship during the 1930s, even as he continued to aspire to build affordable housing. Conventional construction hides rough work under layers of sheathing and molding, but the walls of the Jacobs House exposed essential details, which showcased the master carpentry required to execute such designs. Skilled labor was more affordable during the Depression, but it was the founding of the Taliesin Fellowship in 1932 that ultimately provided Wright with free trained labor with which to execute such exacting designs. The total fee for the Jacobs House was just \$5,500.

Jacobs House, detail  
sheet (3702.018)

The details of the Jacobs House evolved into the grammar of many of the compact, modestly priced dwellings that Wright called Usonian houses, which he summarized in one drawing called the "Standard Detail Sheet." New apprentices learned architecture by tracing the standard details, integrating them into houses they designed for the Taliesin Fellowship, and acting as general contractors overseeing construction. This pedagogical strategy combining learning and working transformed Taliesin into a full-service operation that always pointed back to Wright. The Standard Detail Sheet was an instrument for controlling and replicating the design process as a way to advance Wright's signature style and authorship rather than mass-producing building components, as in the American System-Built Houses.

Standard Detail sheet  
(3813.011)

The Millard House, known as La Miniatura, was the first concrete-block house that Wright built. The construction system was a hybrid of concrete blocks, primarily on the perimeter walls, and standard structural components on the interior, such as wooden studs, plaster, and a skeletal concrete frame. Although technically primitive, the integration of architecture and nature in this project is remarkable. Wright located the house at the bottom of a ravine on Alice Millard's property, adding a pool to a gully that otherwise would have been dry. The patterns on the concrete blocks respond to the shifting patterns of the surrounding eucalyptus trees, while the concrete mix used to cast the blocks incorporated decomposed granite from the site, binding together architecture and nature even at the molecular level.

La Miniatura  
(240.1981)

The Ennis House was the last and largest of the concrete-block houses that Wright built in southern California. The "textile blocks," as Wright called them—in reference to their interweaving of concrete and steel reinforcing rods, not unlike the warp and weft of a loom—allowed him to transform amorphous concrete into an articulated tectonic surface. The concept of a rigid, woven membrane, however reliant on traditional structural support, also allowed Wright to experiment with scale. House and retaining walls are nearly indistinguishable, stitched across the hilly site and serving multiple functions, such as roadways for access, water catchment, and terraced gardens for soil conservation. The open-ended weaving system had the potential to unite individual components with the whole, a construction system seemingly analogous to Wright's democratic social politics.

Ennis House  
(2401.003)

This axonometric, published in *The Natural House* in 1954, illustrates Wright's concept for the Usonian Automatic system, which consisted of concrete blocks reinforced with steel rods running through vertical and horizontal joints, not unlike the way a textile is woven on a loom. Wright intended that anyone could use the system, as its basic principle—weaving—required little in the way of skilled labor, expertise, or advanced technology. Users would themselves cast the concrete blocks using soil from their own property as aggregate. As he explained, “automatic” meant that individuals could use this system to build their own houses—a do-it-yourself process. Despite its self-evident simplicity, most homeowners hired contractors or Wright's apprentices to oversee construction.

Usonian Automatic  
axonometric (5612.114)

The Usonian Automatic system was standardized, consisting of just twelve variants of cast-concrete blocks, which included those for walls, roof, and fascia, and perforated corner blocks with glass inserts. It was a simplified, streamlined version of the concrete-block system Wright had introduced in the 1920s. Those early experiments had been expensive and complicated to construct, however much Wright claimed the system eliminated skilled labor. The simplicity of the Usonian Automatic system, Wright hoped, would make it user-friendly and therefore truly do-it-yourself. Wright had become increasingly skeptical about the machine and its effects on society. The Usonian Automatics harnessed the spirit of the machine, rather than industrial modes of production, to advance democracy. It was a system capable of endless reproduction and, in theory, accessible to anyone.

Usonian Automatics  
for Walter Bimson  
(grid; 5612)

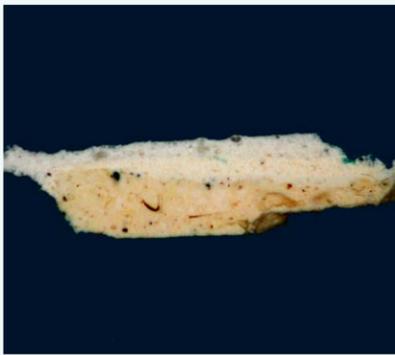
The physical deterioration of the St. Mark's model was severe: half of its cardboard floors and walls were missing, and what remained was acidified, discolored, and embrittled, causing warping and separation of the intact pieces. Such severe loss calls into question the very practice of conservation. Extensive restoration introduces new materials and hands that compromise the physical integrity of the object, but prioritizing the original materials—usually expressed as a lack of action—risks further deterioration. As a compromise, the model has been partially restored. One corner of the refurbished model was left untouched in its found state, so that Wright's now-restored original vision for the project is in tension with the object's own history.

Chicago Tribune Ad  
(1506.162)

This model of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, which represents an early version of the project for a smaller site than the one ultimately used for the building at 89th Street, is in excellent condition. Conservators determined that the model had undergone earlier restoration work. Indeed, photographs of an even earlier iteration of the model show a smaller building with right-angled spirals and an observatory. It had been thought that this first model was destroyed, but radiographs of the spiral reveal that the original form, which had been damaged in transit from New York to Taliesin in 1947, was used as a skeleton for the new model, updated to reflect changes in Wright's design.

Guggenheim Model

Cross-sectional analysis of a tiny chip of paint removed from the model and viewed under magnification revealed that the model was once a color closer to beige or ochre. Close inspection of the model's interior confirmed this discovery. Underneath the miniature works of art that Wright installed on the walls is a darker gray color, suggesting that the model was repainted white at some time during its life. The brightening of the model followed the gradual whitening of the actual museum, which itself had once been beige, as demonstrated in historic photographs and in Wright's signature approving a specific color on a paint brochure. Rather than risking an invasive restoration procedure, a virtual restoration was produced using high-resolution photographs, in which the model was recolored with image-editing software to create an approximation of how it would have looked in 1947.



Solomon R. Guggenheim  
Museum. Cross section of a  
paint chip from the model.  
Photo by Ellen Moody / MoMA  
Conservation Department

Guggenheim paint  
chips + paint  
brochure

Wright often abstracted from natural forms, a process he called “conventionalization,” to arrive at his geometric ornamental patterns. The Dana House, in Springfield, Illinois, is unified by a sumac-tree pattern that appears extensively both inside and on the exterior, in stained glass windows, lighting fixtures, mural paintings, and copper friezes. The house is in intimate dialogue with nature, even as it offers shelter from the elements. This perspective drawing depicts Wright’s early design for a copper urn; placed on the central table, it anchors the microcosm of the natural world that surrounds it. The actual urn is on view here, in a vitrine to the right.

Dana House  
perspective  
(CH2017.753)

The floating bubbles depicted in this mural design for the tavern at the Midway Gardens entertainment complex ostensibly represent the effervescence of sparkling drinks or swirls of smoke from cigars consumed on the premises. The rectangular cutaway in the drawing was to be occupied by a cigar stand. Midway Gardens was demolished in 1929, just fifteen years after opening, due to financial collapse—a victim of Prohibition. Its concrete forms and ornamental systems were thrown into Lake Michigan to support a breakwater, but Wright often reused the theme of suspended globes in different ways in future designs—evidence of the ongoing suppression and return of certain ornamental motifs in his practice.

Midway Gardens  
mural (key object –  
1401.008)

Midway Gardens, a grand entertainment complex in Chicago, was Wright's most elaborately ornamented project before the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, on view in the adjacent gallery. He designed a series of decorative finials to crown the main towers that were positioned among the building's terraces and installed tall electric-light needles to orient visitors arriving by car at night. These vertical markers, which Wright amplified with suspended balloons that echoed the interior decoration, were intended to replace a conventional marquee. Wright was critical of the accessories, gadgets, and billboards that were commonly attached to the entrances of department stores, hotels, and theaters in the early twentieth century as electric lighting became widespread because such devices were not integral to the architecture.

Midway Gardens,  
perspective  
(1401.007)

In the series of covers that he designed for *Liberty* magazine in 1926–27, Wright explored two-dimensional graphic design. Many of these were abstractions of landscapes that Wright had encountered, such as the desert, and incorporated a temporal dimension through their monthly and seasonal monikers. *Liberty* magazine rejected the covers, but their patterns resurfaced in other designs by Wright, as well as in new mediums, as seen in the colorful linoleum mosaics displayed in the nearby case, which were produced by Charles Morgan, a Chicago architect and artist.

September  
Abstractions, the  
Desert (670.1983)

In “The Jeweler’s Window,” Wright expanded his process of “conventionalization,” which typically involved abstracting from natural forms, to include man-made commercial objects. Necklaces and pendants are suspended inside the shop window, penetrating its base to indicate that we, the spectators, are inside the window with the merchandise, not outside looking in. Close inspection reveals that some of the products are not handcrafted jewels but raw precious stones that Wright has depicted as circles, squares, and triangles. The window is thus transformed into a geological section, signaling, perhaps, that the origins of bodily adornment lie with the earth and natural ecologies.

Jewelry Window,  
design for Liberty  
Magazine (2709.001)

This presentation drawing, adapted from one of Wright’s *Liberty* magazine covers, called “March Balloons,” demonstrates a reciprocal relationship with the architect’s carpet design for the David Wright House, Phoenix (1950–51), seen adjacent, in which the pneumatic circles of the original design appear to have deflated and landed on the carpet, spreading around the tables, seats, and circular columns of the living room. Wright signed his name to “March Balloons” on the long side of the sheet, which makes the orientation ambiguous, suggesting a possible turn from the vertical format of the original journal cover to the horizontal layout of the carpet.

March Balloons  
(2604.003)

Wright's expanded practice of ornament—encompassing the natural and commercial worlds, in two and three dimensions—reached its most integral architectural expression in the V. C. Morris Gift Shop. Urns overflowing with plants and a pendant chandelier are suspended from the circular “clouds” of the Plexiglas ceiling, the whole hovering above the transparent hemispherical bowls on the ground floor, some of which were filled with water and contained fish and aquatic plants. Motifs from projects past—Midway Gardens, “March Balloons,” and “The Jeweler’s Window”—coexist with emergent visions in a sort of terrarium that contains earth, sky, and sea.

V.C. Morris, section  
(4824.010)

Customers entered the shop through a vaulted tunnel, which Wright thought would pique the curiosity of pedestrians confronted with the otherwise impenetrable facade. A spiral ramp, evocative of Wright's design for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City, designed during the same period, is the fulcrum of the interior space.

V.C. Morris, plan  
(4824.006)

Concealing the otherworldly interior of the V. C. Morris Gift Shop from the street is an intentionally blank facade, punctuated only by the radial archway of the entrance and small, translucent glass squares containing electric bulbs for nighttime illumination. The two-dimensional, graphic quality of the elevation anticipates its adaptation for stationery, on view to the left, which is embossed with the semicircular arch and thus unmistakably carries the signature of the architect even as it prominently bears the name of the client.

V.C. Morris façade  
(4824.008)

The client specifically requested that Wright design a table for the display of jewelry, as documented in a letter to Wright, on the back of which the architect drew a sketch of a table set on casters, with a rotating glass top, swivel side shelves, and removable trays. The circular, dynamic object served as a conceptual model for the interior of the shop, which similarly centered on rotational geometries and movement.

V.C. Morris, study for a table (4824.070)

In this church design, the circle-and-cross pattern of the floor plan is quoted in various scales in all the decorative features of the interior, from the chancel railings to the painted icons.

Greek Annunciation Church, plan and elevation (5611.001)

The ornamentation of the altar screen in the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church features variations of the circle-and-cross motif found in the floor plan, here presented at contrasting scales. The screen separating the sanctuary from the elevated chancel and the auditorium can be opened and closed, periodically revealing and veiling the religious rituals being performed behind it.

Greek Annunciation Church, altar screen (5611.049)

The colorful design intended for the stained glass windows of the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church was a departure from the traditional iconography of Greek Orthodox churches in its degree of abstraction. The design centers on a religious figure framed by circular ornamental patterns, which convert features of the landscape, such as mountains, clouds, and waves, into the same geometric motifs found in Wright's floor plan and altar screen.

Greek Annunciation Church, stained glass (1910.276)

This highly diagrammatic planting plan indicates plant species and quantities in great detail, proposing a garden design consisting of scores of native and non-native bulbs, perennials, biennials, and flowering shrubs and trees to be planted in a half-circle around the east porch of the Martin House in Buffalo, New York. The wedge of the Floricycle represents a unit that is to be replicated around the garden eleven times, with half units at either end. The exotic species called for here raise questions about Wright's relationship to the Prairie School of landscape design, a movement committed to the use of indigenous plants, with which Wright is often associated. The variety and profusion of plants produced a living wall that screened the veranda from the street. The Floricycle planting was carried out gradually between 1906 and 1913.

Floricycle (0405.011)

The semicircular garden feature appears in an early sketch by Wright, but the exuberant flowering planting scheme seen here was developed by Walter Burley Griffin, a landscape architect and one of Wright's most talented associates in the Oak Park studio, where he worked from 1901 to 1906. Griffin's handwritten notations call for dense plantings of native and exotic plant species, an inclusive approach that encouraged diversity in the American domesticated landscape and promoted the naturalization of foreign plants, termed "ecological cosmopolitanism" by historians.

Griffin, Darwin Martin House (CH2017.783)

The red staghorn sumac featured in this mural design by Niedecken for the Dana House in Springfield, Illinois, exemplifies the ways in which Wright and his associates used local, native species of plants in architectural and interior decorative details. Long considered a weed, the sumac gained popularity among landscape designers at the turn of the century due to its striking autumnal colors and because of its association with the regionally distinctive prairie. The sumac motif was also used for the stained glass of the Dana House, visually linking both living and artificial elements of the design.

Niedecken mural,  
Dana House  
(9905.033)

In this undated graphic design, Wright abstracts the Midwest prairie topography into a logo for the Friends of Our Native Landscape (FONL), an environmentalist group founded in 1913 by the landscape architect Jens Jensen. The prairie is represented as a horizontal line, together with the moon, a flowering tree, groupings of dried weeds and seedpods, and an ancient Indian swastika. With the goal of conserving endangered landscapes, FONL conducted ecological surveys, lobbied public officials, and hosted prairie walks to raise awareness. Members and officers of FONL included many of Wright's clients and friends, such as Sherman Booth, Avery and Queene Coonley, the author Hamlin Garland, and Augusta Rosenwald, wife of the philanthropist Julius Rosenwald.

Jensen graphic  
(4110.008)

Wright explained the symbolism of this composition for a logo for the Friends of Our Native Landscape, an environmentalist group founded by Jens Jensen, in lengthy notations written directly on the preliminary sketch. The prairie is fundamental "because Jensen and I love it!" Weeds and seedpods are likened to readymade decorations. He describes the ancient Indian swastika as an earth symbol but also relates it to the displacement of Native Americans from their ancestral lands and to his friend Hamlin Garland, an author and supporter of Native American rights. These interpretations reveal that Wright and Jensen shared an interest in the ecology of the Midwest but also suggest that this landscape was politically contested territory.

Jensen graphic,  
preliminary sketch  
(4110.001)

Wright designed this residence for Sherman Booth in Glencoe, Illinois, using the abstract geometries and horizontal planes characteristic of his Prairie-Style houses, so named for their purported association with the Midwest landscape. The expansive prairies of the region were mythologized at this time to represent openness and freedom in American democracy. Decorating the entrance to the bridge are, paradoxically enough, hollyhocks, an Asian species naturalized all over the country—assimilated, one could say, to many local environments. Biological metaphors centering on native and non-native plants were expressions of larger social and political concerns like immigration and race, suggesting that even nature is politicized.

Sherman Booth,  
perspective (1118.001)

Jensen designed the elaborate gardens for the Booth estate in Glencoe, Illinois. An open meadow called “The Clearing” punctuates densely planted cliffs, bluffs, and ravines. South of the vegetable garden, the irregularly shaped swimming pool lined with stratified rock is characteristic of Jensen’s “prairie rivers,” which recalled the long-evaporated riverbeds of the preindustrial prairie. Two campfire areas, or “council rings” as Jensen called them, derived from Native American and pioneer rituals, provided space for outdoor gatherings and served as symbols of American identity.

Jensen, Sherman  
Booth, planting plan  
(CH2017.187)t

Bridges, roadways, railway stations, and other infrastructures were proposed for the Booth property to provide access to its beautiful yet challenging topography of ravines and bluffs. Booth's original vision also included a nature preserve, which would have required a reforestation project to recreate the landscape that had been cleared for farming. The intersection of the natural world and man-made technologies demonstrates the degree to which seemingly natural landscapes are, in fact, constructed environments. Ultimately, Booth developed the property in a more conventional way as the Ravine Bluffs Development. Wright constructed the Sylvan Road Bridge, together with one railway waiting station and three sculptural street markers.

Ravine Bluffs Bridge  
(1505.001)

An amusement park, to be located on Wolf Lake, south of Chicago, was one of Wright's earliest experiments in environmental planning. Wright proposed to dredge the lake, forge connections to commuter railroads, construct a circular causeway into a neighboring waterway, and dig a canal linking the lake to nearby Lake Michigan to accommodate large excursion boats. He imagined the ambitious program—with concessions, gaming, boating, and a bandstand—housed in a megastructure composed according to Beaux-Arts principles of symmetry and axial relationships, demonstrating the degree to which Wright was still influenced by the neoclassical 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

Wolf Lake (9510.016)

Wright endeavored to create a cooling microclimate amid the arid desert landscape in this project for Death Valley, California. A system of corbeled concrete walls integrates roadways, buildings, and an irrigation system into the surrounding topography. Imported water enables the cultivation of alfalfa and other crops in an environment otherwise unsuited to agriculture, creating a cooling effect in the process. Irrigation was fundamental to the development of the American Southwest, though today such strategies have come under scrutiny for their adverse environmental effects.

A.M. Johnson  
Compound and  
Shrine (2306.001)

Wright's project for the San Marcos resort hotel in Arizona was one of his most ambitious environmental planning projects. The design consists of a massive complex of terraced rooms interwoven with cooling gardens, plunge pools, and fountains. The compound straddles an existing arroyo, a steep-sided gully carved by running water, which Wright transforms into an entrance drive to the hotel. Wright claimed that the saguaro cactus, pictured in the foreground of this perspective, was the inspiration for San Marcos.

San Marcos,  
perspective  
(2704.049)

The structure of San Marcos was intended to capture and redirect large amounts of water—the same water lost during flash floods generated by the Southwest's occasional but torrential winter rainstorms, which carved the arroyo on the property over the centuries—in order to create pools for recreation. These waters were to be channeled underneath the hotel, presumably feeding its plunge pools, gardens, and fountains, and then emptied outside the front to form a waterfall. Critics doubt the feasibility of Wright's scheme, but the idea is remarkable for how it attempts to productively harness and recycle runoff water, arguably advancing a more sustainable source than one provided by irrigation systems.

San Marcos, aerial  
perspective  
(2704.048)

This topographic plan illustrates the complex engineering required to negotiate the steep elevation changes of the arroyo while integrating San Marcos into the landscape. That the hotel was to be built almost entirely out of patterned concrete blocks—not only the foundations indicated here, but also interior and exterior finishes, structural floors, and ceilings—suggests that San Marcos would have functioned like a dam, holding back and channeling the water that had carved the arroyo through erosion. Wright was fascinated with dams, evidenced by his experiments with hydroelectricity at Taliesin.

San Marcos, plan  
(2704.091)

Various cacti, rock formations, and lichen are distilled into their essential organizing forms in these applied pattern studies, demonstrating the generative relationship between nature and architecture in Wright's practice. According to Wright, the cellular structure of desert plants, for example, offered lessons in economical construction. Believing the artist should approximate nature through a process of conventionalization or abstraction—seeking underlying geometries rather than outward forms—Wright incorporated such pattern studies into his educational approach at the Taliesin Fellowship. Eugene Masselink, one of Wright's most talented apprentices, drew these examples.

Applied Pattern  
Studies

Mies van der Rohe's dramatic perspective for a tall all-glass office building on a triangular site in central Berlin was a response to a competition held by a land developer in the German capital in 1921. The project was never built, but the drawing was frequently exhibited and published and helped establish Mies's fame as an avant-garde architect. Wright seems to have responded to Mies's design, notably with his 1923–25 project for a glass-wrapped skyscraper for the National Life Insurance Company. In 1947 Mies made a photographic blow-up of this drawing a centerpiece of his first monographic exhibition at MoMA.

1005.1965 Mies,  
Friedrichstrasse

Wright had welcomed Mies van der Rohe's arrival in Chicago in 1938, but there is evidence suggesting that Wright was resentful of Mies's growing fame and the claim increasingly made by critics that the German émigré was the leader of a "Second Chicago School of Architecture." In 1947 Mies proposed an unprecedentedly open space for a convention center, in which a horizontal sweep of vast dimensions would be uninterrupted by any vertical supports. As Mies mastered a new art of expansive horizontality, Wright renewed his studies of structurally daring height.

572.1963  
Conventional Hall

Louis Sullivan, whom Wright called his *lieber Meister* (dear master), designed some of the most highly regarded tall buildings of the 1890s, during the very years when Wright was an employee in the office of Dankmar Adler and Sullivan. On his Mile-High drawing, Wright credits Sullivan as the designer "who first made the tall building tall" by expressing the great uninterrupted sweep of its vertical lines, as seen in this powerful sketch on Sullivan's letterhead.

2017.122

This section drawing of Wright's proposed tower reveals the structural system of the "taproot," or central mast, anchored in the ground to a depth that is roughly equivalent to the overall height of the Empire State Building. Then the world's tallest building, the Empire State is depicted alongside previous structures to hold that title—the Great Pyramid of Giza, the Washington Monument, and the Eiffel Tower—all of which are dwarfed by the Mile-High. The top half of the drawing is dominated by a type of genealogy, a list of distinguished engineer-designers whose accomplishments made Wright's daring proposal possible, with Wright positioned as their heir. Wright also provides a succinct description of the benefits of his statistic-breaking project.

5617.001 Mile High

In this perspective drawing, Wright inserts his imagined mile-high skyscraper into the lakefront area of Chicago, which he transforms into a green landscape, rendering obsolete many of the city's older, densely packed towers. The Mile-High becomes a singular object, in dialogue only with another Wright proposal: a tower called the Golden Beacon, visible in the background. The city becomes a garden landscape with huge towers housing populations greater than that of many American cities in the 1950s.

5617.002 Mile High  
perspective

In 1947 Polivka invited Wright to collaborate on a proposal for a bridge connecting San Francisco and Oakland that was being planned in order to relieve traffic on the Bay Bridge. For the next two years they worked on an innovative design for a “butterfly wing bridge,” hoping to achieve the largest span to date in prestressed reinforced concrete. Its helix-like plan would allow for an interchange midway across the bay crossing, where green space would not only enable the bridge to touch down on piers but would also permit motorists to visit a destination park.

4921.002

The hollow center of Polivka and Wright’s bridge piers allowed them to imagine threading a train system through the structure. Plans to build a new regional rail system—later called Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART)—would be developed from the late 1950s.

4921.009 (section)

Inspired by the great cantilevered concrete canopy of the Spanish engineer Eduardo Torroja’s Zarzuela Hippodrome in Madrid (1934–35), illustrated in Torroja’s *Philosophy of Structure*, which had recently been translated into English by Jaroslav Polivka, Wright proposed this design for a viewing stand for the racetrack at Belmont Park on Long Island. The client was Harry F. Guggenheim, a nephew of Solomon R. Guggenheim, for whom Wright had designed the museum.

DR56.16.014  
<FLW.DR.5616.014>

A group of employees from the pharmaceuticals company Upjohn commissioned Wright to design a subdivision on a tract of jointly purchased land. Wright's unusual design consisted of forty-two circular lots 200 feet (61 meters) in diameter spread across low hills and connected by winding roadways. The individual lots are joined in groups of two or three by smaller, numbered circles indicating choices to be made between them. Wright intended that each member would select one lot from these smaller groups, with unselected lots added to other common lands such as ponds, gardens, fields, and orchards. In this way, the final plan was determined by successive decisions, with the client participating in the design process, and had countless possible variations.

4828.001 Galesburg  
Country Homes, first  
master plan (March  
1947)

The dendriform columns of the workroom that Wright devised for the Johnson Wax company building— one of the great forerunners of the open-plan office—taper toward the floor, allowing space to flow around them. Their ample circular crowns, more like lily pads than capitals, are separated from one another even as they stand clear of the ceiling above. Not only is the whole space created by packing a grid of circles inside a perimeter wall, but the desks and chairs echo these circular geometries, responding to the movements of the seated worker on a swiveling seat. Here the combination of a regular grid and forms that imply visual movement even as they accommodate actual movement establishes a theme that would increasingly dominate Wright's radical approach to creating space with curvilinear forms.

3601.006 Johnson  
Wax Administration  
Building, cut-away  
sectional perspective  
(1936)

Created for a Hollywood film artist, this residential design, one of Wright's first circular houses, consists entirely of circles and arcs organized atop a governing planning grid. Intended for a site on the coast just south of Los Angeles, the house would have commanded spectacular views of the Pacific Ocean. Wright's design maximized the view, and took advantage of the pleasant climate of southern California, by eliminating enclosing walls. "We have no longer an outside and an inside as two separate things," Wright would declare. "Now the outside may come inside, and the inside may and does go outside. They are of each other."

3807.003 Ralph Jester, unbuilt project, presentation plan (1938)

In this layout Wright developed a dynamic site plan through the juxtaposition of strong geometries with the curves of the roadway. Circular lots with four houses clustered at the center, resembling a cloverleaf, form the basic geometric pattern. Within each cluster, individual units face away from each other to allow for privacy within a community setting.

4203.007 US Defense Worker's Housing project known as "Cloverleaf," Pittsfield, MA, unbuilt, aerial rendering (1941-2)

Designed for a site overlooking the Rio Grande Valley, this house was organized around two centers selected from the grid survey points. One of these, nestled against a rocky outcropping, defines a series of concentric arcs that form the driveway, an enclosed private garden, and the living and bedroom wing of the house. The other, located out in space toward the vista, establishes a complementary series of arcs that define the kitchen and service wing surrounding a courtyard and pool. The tension between the two competing centers further activates the dynamic, circular composition.

4202.002 Lloyd Burlingham House, unbuilt project, early layout study (1941)  
4202.001 rendering

In these leaded-glass ornamental windows for the Coonley Playhouse, the orthogonal grid is used with an openness and flexibility that allows a free spatial association of small confetti-like glass squares and colored circles of various sizes that resemble clusters of rising balloons.

1201.006 Coonley Playhouse and kindergarten, and colored glass window (1911)

This design, begun just as Wright started working on the first design for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, is governed by a single center divided into two halves. The house itself occupies one half of the circle, which is completed by a hemicycle of low plantings. The main floor of the house looks out across a sunken garden that reciprocates the daily path of the sun toward the prairie horizon that was visible when the house was built. Inside and outside are brought together in a dramatic new unity. Here Wright was a pioneer in building with the land for thermal efficiency, joining the growing number of people interested in solar energy.

4812.002 Herbert Jacobs House, "solar hemicycle" (1943)  
Wright's second house design for Jacobs

In this design for a house for a Mexican businessman, Raúl Baillères, Wright used circular geometries to engage the spectacular natural setting of Acapulco Bay. The house was intended to sit above the coastline on the south edge of the bay, looking out across its expanse to the curving beach and surrounding low mountains. It was to be composed of a continuous series of drives, fountains, pools, buildings, terraces, and ramps cascading down the hillside, anchored by a seventy-foot-diameter shallow concrete dome defining an open-air patio. The design integrates details and features of the existing landscape into a fluid and moving interpretation of a stunning natural location.

5202.014 Raul Bailleres House project, Acapulco Bay, Mexico, unbuilt, elevations (1952)  
5202.016 floor plan  
5202.017 aerial rendering  
5252.018 cut away section perspective

Wright presented this unsolicited design to Liliane Kaufmann perhaps as a complement to Fallingwater, which he had built for her husband fifteen years earlier. With nary a straight line in the composition, it speaks of a progressive and moving relationship to the natural world. In the plan, a loosely defined, expanding series of circles serves as the setting for a rapidly changing set of curving and crescent-shaped building forms that seem to dance through the landscape. On the lower right of the drawing, Wright renders what appears to be the iconic modernist Desert House that Richard Neutra—who had briefly worked with Wright and who by this time was associated with the International Style of architecture against which Wright railed—built for Edgar Kaufmann several years earlier.

5111.001 Edgar and Liliane Kaufmann “Boulder House,” project, unbuilt, Palm Springs, CA (1950), aerial rendering

This is the first of several designs Wright made for Vere and Lillian Morris, proprietors of the V. C. Morris Gift Shop, on view in the section on ornament in this exhibition, for a spectacular cliffside site in San Francisco overlooking the Golden Gate strait. The house appears suspended above the ocean, anchored from the entrance promenade and rooftop garden, which themselves project beyond a retaining wall and over the water. The rising spiral of the house, which climbs upward from the waves in a series of alternating floor plates, is reminiscent of those Wright used a few years later for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (1943–59). One of the most daring designs of the twentieth century, this version was abandoned due to concerns with the geological stability of the rock underpinnings of the cliff itself.

4303.001 V. C. Morris House project, “Seacliff,” unbuilt (1945) entry perspective  
4303.004 perspective from the sea  
WHS 26496 early study sketch