

The Museum of Modern Art

MAJOR RETROSPECTIVE OF FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT DELVES INTO ARCHIVES TO PRESENT FRESH PERSPECTIVES ON THE RENOWNED ARCHITECT'S PRACTICE

Exhibition Presents Nearly 400 Objects from the Frank Lloyd Wright Archives in New York to Mark the 150th Anniversary of Wright's Birth

Frank Lloyd Wright at 150: Unpacking the Archive

June 12–October 1, 2017

Floor Three, Exhibition Galleries

Press Preview: Thursday, June 8, 2017, 9:30 to 11:30 a.m., with remarks to follow

NEW YORK, May 24, 2017—With *Frank Lloyd Wright at 150: Unpacking the Archive*, on view from June 12 to October 1, 2017, The Museum of Modern Art presents a major exhibition that critically engages the multifaceted practice of Frank Lloyd Wright (American, 1867–1959), one of the most prolific and renowned architects of the 20th century. A radical designer and intellectual, Wright embraced new technologies and materials, pioneered do-it-yourself construction systems and avant-garde experimentation, and advanced original theories with regards to nature, urban planning, and social politics. Marking the 150th anniversary of the American architect's birth on June 8, 1867, the exhibition comprises nearly 400 works made from the 1890s through the 1950s, including architectural drawings, models, building fragments, films, television broadcasts, print media, furniture, tableware, textiles, paintings, photographs, and scrapbooks, along with a number of works that have rarely or never been publicly exhibited. *Frank Lloyd Wright at 150: Unpacking the Archive* is presented by MoMA in collaboration with the Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York, and organized by Barry Bergdoll, Curator, Department of Architecture and Design, The Museum of Modern Art, and the Meyer Schapiro Professor of Art History and Archaeology, Columbia University; with Jennifer Gray, Project Research Assistant, Department of Architecture and Design, The Museum of Modern Art.

In a career spanning seven decades, Wright designed more than 1,000 buildings and realized over 500. Ever concerned with posterity, Wright preserved most of his drawings—despite some tragic losses to fires—to form an archive that he hoped would perpetuate his architectural philosophy, first as a tool in the production of architecture in the Taliesin Fellowship, an apprenticeship program he founded in the 1930s at his studio-residences in Wisconsin and Arizona, and subsequently as an academic resource for outside researchers. Progressively catalogued and opened to specialists by The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, the archive was jointly acquired by The Museum of Modern Art and Avery Architectural & Fine

Arts Library at Columbia University in 2012. This exhibition celebrates this pioneering collaboration and the new accessibility of the collection to both scholars and the public.

Unpacking the Archive refers to the monumental task of moving 55,000 drawings, 300,000 sheets of correspondence, 125,000 photographs, and 2,700 manuscripts, as well as models, films, building fragments, and other materials. It also refers to the work of interpretation and the close examination of projects that in some cases have received little attention. For this exhibition, a group of scholars and a museum conservator were invited to “unpack”—contextualize, ask questions about, and otherwise explore—an object or cluster of objects of their choosing. Their processes of discovery are recorded in a series of short films that introduce the thematic sections of the exhibition. The questions posed illuminate the complex historical periods through which Wright lived, from the late 19th century, marked by optimism, through the Great Depression of the 1930s, to the decades following World War II, when the United States experienced great demographic and economic growth. Each scholarly inquiry offers insights at once historical and contemporary in resonance, touching on issues that include landscape and environmental concerns, the relationship of industry to daily life, questions of race, class, and social democracy, and the expanding power of mass media in forming reputations and opinions.

Frank Lloyd Wright at 150 is organized around a central chronological spine highlighting many of Wright’s major projects, which will be illustrated with some of his finest drawings and include key works such as Unity Temple (1905–08), Fallingwater (1934–37), the Johnson Wax Administration Building (1936–39), and the Marin County Civic Center (1957–70). Unfolding from this orienting spine are 12 subsections, covering themes both familiar and little explored, that highlight for visitors the process of discovery undertaken by invited scholars, historians, architects, and art conservators.

Reframing the Imperial Hotel

Ken Oshima (University of Washington)

The Imperial Hotel in Tokyo (1913–23) was one of Wright’s most ambitious projects, a monumental building with Western services, Japanese protocol for Imperial visits, and integrated gardens, which famously survived the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. The central object in this section is Wright’s personal copy of a very rare illustrated book on the Imperial Hotel building published shortly after its completion, which Wright annotated with sketches and visual enhancements. It is an unparalleled opportunity to see this now-demolished masterpiece as it originally stood. It is displayed alongside a dozen of the nearly 1,100 drawings of the Imperial Hotel that exist in the archive, as well as original furniture, textiles, and tableware from the hotel, which together demonstrate the attention Wright paid to every detail of the hotel design in an attempt to make an integrated work of art.

Ornament

Spyros Papapetros (Princeton University)

Famously, modernist architects advocated the elimination of decoration from buildings, yet ornamentation persists throughout Wright’s design work in a great variety of forms. Beginning with Midway Gardens (1913–14), an elaborately decorated entertainment complex in

Chicago, this section traces the transformation of ornament across decorative artifacts and architectural relics, including a copper urn, textiles, mosaics, murals, stained glass doors, and concrete blocks. Wright envisioned these fragments as parts of an integrated whole, as demonstrated in projects such as the V.C. Morris Store in San Francisco (1948–49) and the Greek Orthodox Church in Milwaukee (1955–61). He also experimented with commercial designs, including a line of glassware for the Dutch firm Leerdam Glasfabriek, covers for *Liberty* magazine, and a “Taliesin Line” of fabrics for F. Schumacher and Co.

Ecologies and Landscapes

Therese O’Malley (National Gallery, Washington, DC) and Jennifer Gray (MoMA)

From his early celebration of the prairie landscapes of the Midwest to his experiments with living in harmony with the Sonoran desert of the Southwest, Wright explored the most varied terrains and ecosystems. Two rarely studied drawings in the exhibition offer new insights. A planting plan, called the “Floricycle,” for the Darwin Martin House in Buffalo, New York (1903–06), reveals a surprising mixture of native and exotic plants, raising questions about Wright’s dedication to regional landscapes and indigenous plants. While an undated graphic design for the Friends of Our Native Landscape, an environmentalist group founded by prominent landscape designer Jens Jensen, invites reflection on Wright’s views on the conservation versus transformation of sites. Following from these provocations is a selection of projects in which Wright attempts to integrate architecture and the natural world, including an estate for Sherman Booth that negotiated deep ravines and escarpments, and his monumental project for San Marcos-in-the-Desert, represented in the exhibition with presentation drawings and a large-scale watercolor depicting the complex from the air.

Little Farms Unit

Juliet Kinchin (MoMA)

A little-known model of an experimental farm that Wright designed in 1932–33 reveals how the architect utilized back-to-the-land strategies during the Great Depression, with the goal of allowing people to lead independent, productive lives and derive sustenance—both physical and spiritual—from nature. Photographs, cropping plans, and drawings demonstrate that these “Little Farms” were part of an ambitious farm-to-market system. Poster designs and films complement these materials and draw connections between Wright’s ambitions and New Deal programs initiated by President Roosevelt, as well as Soviet programs for industrializing agricultural production.

Nakoma Country Club

Elizabeth Hawley (CUNY Graduate Center)

Wright was keenly interested in American Indian culture, especially in the opening decades of the 20th century, when native culture was widely celebrated as an authentic expression of American identity. This section centers on an unrealized project for the Nakoma Country Club near Madison, Wisconsin (1923), in which Wright appropriated native architectural forms, such as wigwams and tipis, and also designed figurative sculptures depicting American Indians. Archival photographs reveal that he collected native artifacts and even designed and built a totem pole, now lost, at Taliesin West, his residence and studio in Arizona. Together,

the projects demonstrate how Wright's interest in American Indian imagery existed in tension with prevailing racial stereotypes and imperialist strategies.

Rosenwald School

Mabel Wilson (Columbia University)

While Wright explored the relationship between learning and educational spaces throughout his career, this section of the exhibition explores a little-known design Wright drew up in 1928 for the Rosenwald Foundation, for a model school building for African American children. Created by Julius Rosenwald, a co-owner of Sears, Roebuck & Company in Chicago, the Rosenwald Foundation's focus on arts and education among African Americans included an ambitious project to subsidize the construction of rural schools throughout the South. Wright's design reoriented this program of schools for the segregated South from traditional clapboard schoolhouses to innovative buildings that the students were intended to help build, making hands-on labor an integral part of education. The project, begun in 1928, never progressed beyond the schematic stage.

Drawing in the Studio

Janet Parks (Avery Drawings & Archives, Columbia University)

Wright's architectural drawings, some of the most renowned of the 20th century, are remarkable for their artistic quality and signature style. Yet most of them were produced by the ever-changing cast of draftsmen, students, and apprentices working in his studios, many of whom left their own imprint on Wright's legacy. This section analyzes Wright's drawings for clues to how his practice operated, the personalities involved, and the processes and materials employed at various times.

Before Wright established an independent practice, early work shows him drawing in the style of his mentor, Louis Sullivan. The Japanese-inspired compositions of Marion Mahony, one of the first licensed female architects in the US and Wright's most talented renderer in the Oak Park studio, is seen in a rare drawing that bears her signature.

Reading "Mile-High"

Barry Bergdoll (MoMA and Columbia University)

Wright's proposal for a mile-high skyscraper—for which there was neither commission nor client—commanded headlines when he released his design in a press conference at Chicago's Sherman Hotel on October 16, 1956. Despite his unprecedented ambitions—even today, the tallest building in the world, in Dubai, is only a half-mile high—Wright's "mile-high" proposal has never occupied a large place in architectural history. Nor has the possible meaning of the inscriptions that occupy the upper half of one of Wright's super-tall drawings of the project been "unpacked." This drawing is shown in the exhibition alongside archival photographs, brochures, letters, and telegrams documenting the 1956 press conference and the public's reaction to it.

The proposed tower culminated in seven stories of television studios, even as Wright was himself becoming something of a TV personality, first as a mystery guest on the *What's My Line?* game show (June 3, 1956) and then as a guest on *The Mike Wallace Interview*

(September 1 and 2, 1957). Clips from these appearances are included in the galleries. This section explores how Wright was aiming for a place in the new media of publicity, and a place in history.

Urbanism

Neil Levine (Harvard University)

This section is anchored by Wright's Skyscraper Regulation project for a nine-block area of downtown Chicago (1926), which reveals the broad reach of his ideas about the city and serves as a window into his career-long efforts in urban design. Intended to relieve the congestion caused by unchecked skyscraper development and by massive increases in vehicular traffic, the city grid is opened up to create internal courtyards with underground parking, while raised sidewalks separate pedestrians from cars and trucks.

Between 1896 and 1913, Wright conceived a radically new method of subdivision allowing groupings of houses to preserve an unprecedented degree of privacy while creating a sense of community. In the final decades of his career, he turned to the design of civic centers, cultural centers, and mixed-use development that revitalized the heart of the city in an era dominated by the automobile and suburb. The exhibition includes several of these large projects, often megastructures incorporating roadways and parking, designed for Madison, Pittsburgh, Washington, DC, and Baghdad.

Building Systems

Matthew Skjonsberg (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology) and Michael Osman (University of California, Los Angeles)

Though Wright's name is often equated with spectacularly singular residential designs, this section examines his engagement with industry in various ways to design lower-cost houses that would be affordable to middle-class Americans. The American System-Built Houses designed in 1915–17 utilized a wood-based system that relied on factory-produced components, mail-order distribution techniques, and licensed contractors to ensure an affordable, high-quality product. By the early 1950s, Wright developed a do-it-yourself process called the Usonian Automatic system that enabled individuals to build their own houses using self-cast concrete blocks. The competing systems, which used entirely different materials and modes of production, bracket decades in which Wright responded to the shifting economic and labor conditions of the Depression and postwar periods by alternatively embracing mass production and handicraft to advance both his architectural brand and his democratic vision.

Circular Geometries

Michael Desmond (Louisiana State University)

Wright was continually in search of systems of design that could both control all elements of structure and space harmonically and serve as a generator of form. From the 1930s, he moved from orthogonal grids of angular forms to more dynamic organizational systems based on circles and arcs to engage and shape perceptions of the landscape. Starting from the unusual approach of laying out a suburban division of land for residential development with a series of tangent circles in a project for Galesburg, Michigan (1946–49), this section traces the evolution of the architect's circular planning. These experiments culminated in Wright's

residential designs for Raúl Baillères, a circular house that engaged the broad sweep of Acapulco Bay in Mexico, and V.C. Morris, a spiral structure clinging to a precipice overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

New York Models Conserved

Ellen Moody (MoMA)

Wright often used meticulously detailed building models as publicity tools to persuade clients and as props in staged photographs, and they were central to his organization of museum exhibitions of his work. Made of light wood and cardboard painted in bright colors, the models were easy to transport but inherently fragile. They were frequently repaired and bear traces of their travels and travails. The exhibition features two newly restored models for projects for Manhattan: St. Mark's Tower (1927–29) and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (1943–59). MoMA conservator Ellen Moody conducted extensive archival research and closely investigated the models' physical fabric through discussions with experts and curatorial staff, X-rays, paint analysis, and the employment of various digital technologies. These conservation processes are documented in videos in the galleries, demonstrating the spectrum of approaches possible in contemporary conservation practice and revealing new insights into the working methods of the architect and his studio.

SPONSORSHIP:

The exhibition is made possible by Hyundai Card.

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Paint provided by Farrow & Ball.

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PUBLICATION:

The exhibition is accompanied by a major publication, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Unpacking the Archive*, edited by Barry Bergdoll and Jennifer Gray and with essays by Michael Desmond, Carole Ann Fabian, Elizabeth S. Hawley, Juliet Kinchin, Neil Levine, Ellen Moody, Therese O'Malley, Ken Tadashi Oshima, Michael Osman, Spyros Papapetros, Janet Parks, Matthew Skjonsberg, David Smiley, and Mabel O. Wilson. Structured as a series of inquiries into the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation Archives, it is a collection of 16 scholarly explorations rather than a master narrative. Each essay “unpacks” a key object from the archive—interpreting and contextualizing it, tracing its meanings and connections, and juxtaposing it with other works—and opens Wright's work to fresh questioning, interpretation, and debate. 256 pages, 274 illustrations. Hardcover, \$65. ISBN: 978-1-63345-026-4. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and available at MoMA stores and online at store.moma.org. Distributed to the trade through ARTBOOK|D.A.P. in the United States and Canada and through Thames & Hudson outside the United States and Canada.

MoMA STUDIO:

The People's Studio: Design, Experiment, Build

June 12–October 1, 2017

Information is available in the Frank Lloyd Wright press kit or at

<https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3835>

TALKS, WORKSHOPS, CLASSES, AND PUBLIC PROGRAMMING:

Information is available in the Frank Lloyd Wright press kit or at <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1660>

RELATED EXHIBITIONS:

Living in America: Frank Lloyd Wright, Harlem and Modern Housing

September 9–December 17, 2017

Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University

In fall 2017, to celebrate the joint acquisition of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation Archives by The Museum of Modern Art and Columbia University's Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, the Wallach Art Gallery is partnering with Columbia's Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture to present *Living in America: Frank Lloyd Wright, Harlem and Modern Housing*, which will consider Wright's well-known designs for Broadacre City and other largely suburban housing projects in dialogue with important housing projects in Harlem, designed simultaneously. The Wallach Art Gallery's exhibition will overlap and be presented in correlation with *Frank Lloyd Wright at 150: Unpacking the Archive*.

Frank Lloyd Wright: Publishing the Self

Through June 30, 2017

The Museum of Modern Art, Mezzanine, Education and Research Center

Throughout his prolific, dramatic career, Frank Lloyd Wright mobilized communications media with great skill to manifest a distinctive persona, promote his work, influence public opinion, and start a school, leaving a legacy of documentation that continues to be examined over a century after his birth. In conjunction with [Frank Lloyd Wright at 150: Unpacking the Archive](#), this exhibition examines print publications by and about Wright in the MoMA Library and Architecture and Design collections. Examples range from a portfolio that influenced the first generation of European modernist architects to house plans commissioned for magazines to promotional material for Wright's school, Taliesin, to his six-volume autobiography. These items tell a story of identity-making, organized around themes such as self-definition, self-promotion, and self-reflection. *Organized by Jennifer Tobias, Reader Services Librarian.*

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Public Information:

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