Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan

Curriculum Guide for the
2021 East Asia in the Upper Midwest Teaching Initiative



EAST ASIA
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Wright's Place in American Culture

Themes

- Japan in the context of Wright's career
- Wright's major architectural contributions
- The role of chance in Wright's relationship with Japan

As a child, Frank Wright's mother had given him a set of educational toys developed by Friedrich Froebel that included wood blocks and paper for construction that Wright later credited as having a major influence on his sense of design. Although, according to Wright, his mother had decided before he was even born that he would go into architecture, there were no obvious signs in his rural Wisconsin upbringing that he would eventually become America's—and arguably the world's—most famous modern architect.

When Wright was 12, his family moved from Richland Center to Madison, where he attended high school. The young Wright spent his summers on his uncle Jenkin Lloyd Jones' farm near Spring Green, on land that would later become the site of his home, and school, Taliesin. In 1885 Wright graduated high school and spent two semesters studying civil engineering at the University of Wisconsin, leaving in the spring of 1887 without receiving a degree in order to move to Chicago.

It was during his time at university that Wright met the architect Joseph Silsbee, who was working on two buildings for Wright's uncle, the Unitarian Minister Jenkin Lloyd Jones, All Souls Church in Chicago and Unity Chapel in Helena Valley, Wisconsin. During 1885 and 1886, Wright assisted with the construction of the Chapel, and it was to join Silsbee's office that Wright left Madison for Chicago in 1887 (Figures 1 and 2).



1. Jenkin Lloyd Jones (1843-1918)
Source: Wisconsin Historical Society
https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM30399



2. Unity Chapel, Wyoming, WI, 1886
Source: Wisconsin Historical Society
https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/NationalRegister/NR1791

Joseph Silsbee was a competent, but by no means an exceptional architect, and yet Wright's chance encounter with this individual would fundamentally affect his relationship with Japan, and thence the

trajectory of his entire career. It was not *what*, so much as *who* Silsbee knew that would make that critical difference. When the young Frank Wright joined Joseph Silsbee's office early in 1887, he was going to work for the cousin of the world's leading Western authority on Japanese art at the time, Ernest Fenollosa. The significance of that personal connection, not just for Wright's view of Japanese culture but also design in general, will be discussed in detail in Unit 2 (Figures 3-5).



3. Joseph Lyman Silsbee (1848–1913)
Source: Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Lyman_Silsbee



4. Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959)
Source: Wisconsin Historical Society
https://wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM3403



5. Ernest Francisco Fenollosa (1853-1908)
Source: Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernest_Fenollosa

Wright only spent a year at Silsbee's office before departing for one of Chicago's leading architectural practices specializing in high-rise buildings, Adler and Sullivan. It was during this period that Wright came to share Louis Sullivan's dream of a distinct *American* architecture, independent of styles imported from Europe, as well as the notion of "organic" architecture. As Unit 3 will show, however, their practical interpretations of these shared ideals differed in important ways.

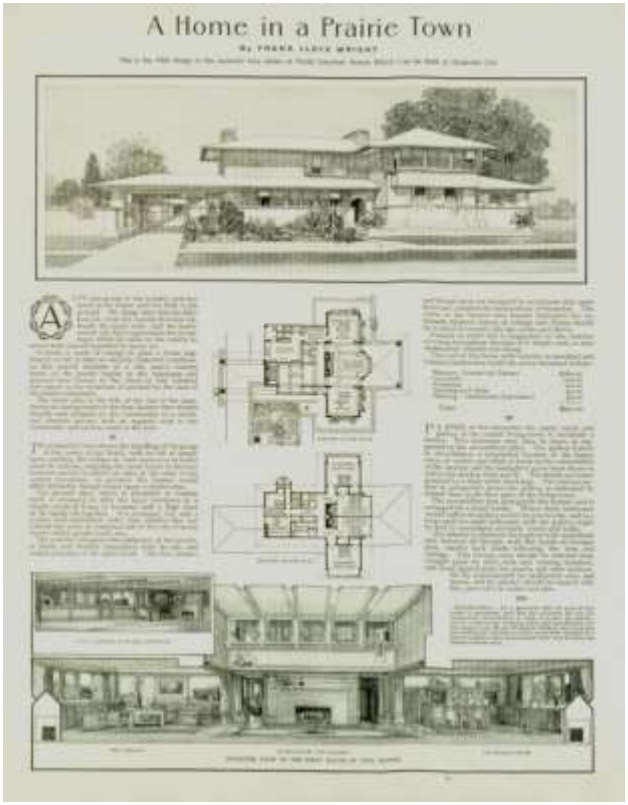
Early in 1893, Sullivan and Wright fell out over residential jobs Wright had been doing outside of the Adler and Sullivan office, and Wright left to establish his own practice, first in downtown Chicago, and later next to his new home in Oak Park. Within a year Wright had completed the William Winslow House, widely considered the prototype of what would become the "Prairie House" (Figure 6).



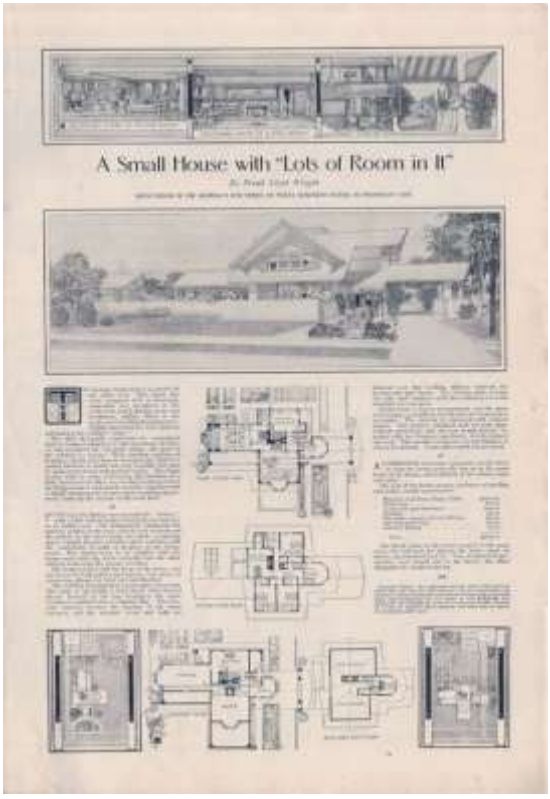
6. William Winslow House, River Forest, IL, 1893
Source: Hedrich Blessing Collection / Chicago History Museum / Getty Images
https://www.thoughtco.com/frank-lloyd-wright-first-prairie-houses-177549

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The Prairie House differed radically from conventional homes of the period, which generally conformed to imported styles imported such as the Victorian and the new Queen Anne style. Its innovations were summed up in the "Home in a Prairie Town" project Wright designed in 1901 and published in the *Ladies Home Journal*. Externally, the new house was low lying, reflecting the long horizontal lines of the Prairie. Internally, apart from the kitchen, the first floor plan was largely open, in contrast to the "boxing of boxes" Wright described in traditional homes of the time, and the core was a free-standing hearth, symbolizing the fixed center of the family (Figures 7, 8).



7. "A Home in a Prairie Town,"
Ladies Home Journal, February 1901
Source: Visions of Wright
https://visionsofwright.wordpress.com/2015/05/29/home-in-a-prairie-town-1901/



8. "A Small House with Lots of Room in It,"
Ladies Home Journal, July 1901
Source: Visions of Wright
https://visionsofwright.wordpress.com/2015/05/29/home-in-a-prairie-town-1901/

The most iconic public building Wright designed during the 20 years he lived in Oak Park was the nearby Unity Temple, which as a reinforced concrete structure was a radical departure from tradition, and which actually had an important part of its inspiration in a traditional Japanese building Wright had seen on his first visit to Japan in April 1905 (Figure 9).

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9. Unity Temple, Oak Park, IL, 1907
Source: Landmarks Illinois
http://www.landmarks.org/unity-temple/

After his departure from Oak Park under a social cloud in 1910, Wright spent a year in Italy preparing drawings for the 1911 Wasmuth publication of his work before returning to build a new home on family land near Spring Green, Wisconsin.[1] It was after this that Wright began experimenting with the possibilities of precast concrete for houses, producing a series of Textile Block Houses in the suburbs of Los Angeles, CA (Figure 10). It was also during this time that he began negotiations on his first overseas project, the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, which led him to make multiple Pacific crossings from 1912 onward. In all, Wright would spend a total of more than three years in Japan supervising construction of the new hotel. He left Japan for the last time in 1922 with the project massively over budget and one wing of the building still incomplete. These problems were largely forgotten the following September, however, when the Imperial came through the Great Kanto earthquake largely undamaged because of its innovative "floating raft" foundation system (Figure 11).



10. Millard House, Pasadena, CA, 1923
Source: Architecture as an Art of Living
https://architectureasliving art.tumblr.com/post/52383495400/frank-lloyd-wright-millard-house-pasadena-ca-usa



11. Imperial Hotel, Tokyo, Japan, 1923
Source: Dezeen
https://www.dezeen.com/2017/06/15/imperial-hotel-tokyo-japan-frank-lloyd-wright-150th-anniversary/

[1] Wright had left his family for the wife of a former client, Mamah Borthwick Cheney, and while in Italy, he prepared the drawings for the Wasmuth publication of his work in Berlin.

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In the 1930s, during the Great Depression and at an age when most thought he had retired, Wright reinvented his architecture once again. In the space of five years he created a radical proposal for the replanning of America based on rural farmsteads, Broadacre City (Figure 12), together with a second residential prototype, the Usonian House, that reflected the new car-based nature of American society (Figure 13).



12. Broadacre City, Project, 1932
Source: Arquiscopio
https://arquiscopio.com/archivo/2013/08/10/broadacre-city/?lang=en



13. Pope Leighey House, Alexandru, VA, 1941
Source: National Trust for Historic Preservation
https://savingplaces.org/stories/pope-leighey-house-prepares-for-frank-lloyd-wrights-150th-birthday#.X-a51OB7J28

Wright was in his early 70s when he created his two most famous works, Fallingwater, an outrageously daring weekend house overhanging a rural Pennsylvania stream for the Pittsburgh department store magnate Edgar Kaufmann, and the even more futuristic Guggenheim Museum in New York City (Figures 14, 15).



14. Edgar Kaufmann House, Mill Run, PA, 1936
Source: Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fallingwater



15. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY, 1959
Source: ArchDaily
https://www.archdaily.com/60392/ad-classics-solomon-r-guggenheim-museum-frank-lloyd-wright

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In an extraordinary career spanning more than seven decades, from leaving Madison in 1887 to his death in 1959, Wright reinvented the American home, twice, and forever changed public and professional perceptions of what architecture could be. His buildings reflected many of the technological and cultural transformations that occurred in the transition from the Victorian to the modern era, in particular the change from a domestic servant-based society in the 1890s to an automated one in the 1930s. To this day Wright remains the only American architect to have a popular song, Paul Simon's "So Long, Frank Lloyd Wright," and a series of postage stamps created in his honor (Figures 16–23).



16-23. Frank Lloyd Wright Commemorative Stamps

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Unit 1 • Japanism

Themes:

- Wright's interest in Japan in a wider cultural context
- How Wright's view of Japan differed from the popular norm

The late-nineteenth-century Anglo-American vogue for things Japanese known as 'Japanism'[2] was related to the general heightening of European and American interest in decorative design during the second half of the nineteenth century stemming from the Aesthetic Movement.[3] Boston had been a natural leader in the absorption and development of ideas from the British Aesthetic Movement, and early American interest in oriental art was similarly centered on the old clipper ports of Boston and Philadelphia.

In Europe, popular awareness of Japan was still a new phenomenon in the middle of the nineteenth century, pre-dated by a fascination with China that had been flourishing for more than two hundred years. The exclusion policy of successive Japanese shoguns had effectively isolated Japan from the outside world since the 1630s. As a consequence, relatively few Japanese products had reached the West before Commodore Matthew Perry of the US Navy finally forced the Tokugawa government to open some Japanese ports to foreign vessels in 1854.

The artistic benefits of the re-opening of Japan in the 1850s were felt most immediately in Europe, where the initiation of *Japonisme* is generally credited to the young French graphic artist Felix Bracquemond who is reputed to have first come across a copy of the print artist Katsushika Hokusai's *Manga* in Paris in 1856. The *Manga*, a multi-volume series of sketchbooks published over the final four decades of Hokusai's long career, consisted of line illustrations of every conceivable kind of natural and man-made object in Japan. They were to have a major impact in the West, not only on the work of many of its leading artists but also on early Western perceptions of Japan.[4]

In response to a growing popular interest in Japan stimulated by the Japanese presence at the London Exhibition of 1862, and at the subsequent Paris and Vienna Expositions of 1867 and 1873, by the mid-1870s a steady flow of Japanese artefacts had begun arriving in the capitals of Europe. In Paris, especially, these objects were quickly seized upon by an unusual concentration of young artists actively

[2] The French word *Japonisme* was coined in 1872 by the art critic Philippe Burty (1830-1890) who used it to describe the enthusiasm for Japanese artefacts that had developed in Paris during the 1860s. See Philippe Burty, "Japonisme: I," *La Renaissance litteraire et artistique* 4 (May 1872): 25-26; idem, "Japonism," *The Academy* 8, no. 170 (7 August 1875): 150-51. Burty subsequently described the equivalent English term 'Japanism' as "a new word coined to designate a new field of study, artistic, historic and ethnographic." See Philippe Burty, "Felix Buhot, Painter and Etcher," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 76, no. 453 (February 1888): 334.

[3] Since the Aesthetic Movement was not based on any formal organization or official manifesto and encompassed a huge range of artistic activity—from highbrow literature to popular wallpaper designs—it tends to defy simple definition. However, in its widest sense the term describes the general heightening of interest in the purely aesthetic qualities of artefacts—'art for art's sake'—which emerged in Britain during the 1850s and flourished, primarily in Britain and America, until the mid-1880s. For a good account of its philosophical origins and leading protagonists, see Robin Spencer, *The Aesthetic Movement: Theory and Practice* (London: Studio Vista; and New York: E. P. Dutton, 1972).

[4] The *Manga* were also a valuable source of information on traditional Japanese architecture, and Frank Lloyd Wright himself is known to have owned several volumes of this unique catalog of traditional Japanese life, as he confirmed this during a talk at Taliesin in 1950, when he remarked: "Those little books over there show you how far the man carried it. . . . The Manga is the drawing of everything in the world." "The Japanese Print Party," tape transcript, Taliesin, 20 September 1950. © FLWF.

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looking for novel subjects and new modes of expression; the bold compositions and striking colors of the woodblock print making it a particular source of fascination.

One of the first artists in Europe to respond to this influx of Japanese artefacts was actually an American. The young James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) had developed an interest in things Japanese while living in Paris during the 1850s, and such was their novelty at this stage that Japanese objects, including woodblock prints, appeared in several of his early paintings (Figure 24).[5] His pattern of development—from a use of prints as a source of subject matter, to eventual absorption of their aesthetic principles—was to be repeated in the work of many of the other leading painters in Paris, including, amongst others, Manet, Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, Gauguin, and Vincent van Gogh (Figures 25, 26).



24. James McNeill Whistler, Caprice in Purple and Gold, 1864.
Source: Wikimedia Commons
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:James_McNeill_Whistler_-_Caprice_in_Purple_and_Gold_-_The_Golden_Screen_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg



25. Utagawa Hiroshige: The Residence with Plum Trees at Kameido, 1857, Vincent Van Gogh, Japonaiserie, Flowering Plum Tree, 1887
Source: Wikimedia Commons
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hiroshige_Van_Gogh_1.JPG



26. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, The Divan Japonais, 1892
Source: Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Divan_du_Monde

The artistic side of Anglo-American Japanism did not really come into its own until at least a decade after its French counterpart. Most artists in Britain received their first significant experience of Japanese art at the London Exhibition of 1862. Soon after, however, several members of the South Kensington group were turning their attention to this new source of inspiration.[6] Some of the furniture designs of the architect designer Edward Godwin, for example, were even advertised as "Anglo-Japanese" (Figure 27).

[5] On Whistler's Japanism and its impact on his own work, see John Sandberg, "'Japonisme' and Whistler," *Burlington Magazine* 106, no. 740 (November 1964): 500-7.

[6] For a good illustration of the role played by Japanese art in the Aesthetic Movement, see the Fine Art Society, *The Aesthetic Movement and the Cult of Japan,* exhibition catalog, eds. Robin Spencer *et al.* (London: The Fine Art Society, 1972). On British Japanism generally see Tomoko Sato and Toshio Watanabe, eds., *Japan and Britain: An Aesthetic Dialogue 1850-1930,* exhibition catalog (London: Lund Humphries, The Barbican Art Gallery, London, The Setagaya Museum, Tokyo, 1991). On the influence of Japanese art on the South Kensington group in particular, see the chapter on "The Japanese Taste," in Elizabeth Aslin, *The Aesthetic Movement: Prelude to Art Nouveau* (London: Elek Books, 1969), reprinted ed. (London: Ferndale Editions, 1981), 79-96.

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27. Edward William Godwin, Sideboard, 1867–1870
Source: Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sideboard_(Edward_William_Godwin)

The New York-based artist John La Farge was one of the first Americans to begin collecting Japanese art, having developed an interest in woodblock prints from as early as 1858 during a period of study in Paris.[7] La Farge was especially impressed with the decorative qualities of Japanese graphic art, particularly the work of nineteenth-century print artists such as Hokusai and Utagawa Hiroshige. As in Europe, early American interest in Japanese art was mainly restricted to a small group of artists and specialist collectors in the major cities,[8] but the Japanese exhibit at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876 changed everything. It came as a revelation to most Americans;[9] and its two Japanese buildings were to have a particularly lasting impact, having remained after the Exposition as permanent gifts to the city of Philadelphia (Figure 28).



28. Japanese House, Philadelphia, PA, 1876
Source: ResearchGate
https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-Japanese-pavilion-from-The-Centennial-Exposition-Described-and-Illustrated-by-J-S_fig29_237528383

The impact of the Japanese exhibit at the Centennial Exposition was immediate, appearing in the domestic decor of well-to-do town houses from Philadelphia to Boston, and even in the form of complete

[7] Henry Adams has suggested that La Farge may even have pre-dated Felix Bracquemond in his collecting of Japanese art. See Henry Adams, "John La Farge's Discovery of Japanese Art: A New Perspective on the Origins of *Japonisme*," *Art Bulletin* 67, no. 3 (September 1985): 449-85. Coincidently, La Farge's wife was the grandniece of Commodore Matthew Perry. On the relationship between La Farge's work and Japanese art, and an extensive bibliography on his career, see Patricia Joan Lefor, "John La Farge and Japan: An Instance of Oriental Influence in American Art," PhD diss. Northwestern University, 1978.

[8] On the development of Japanism in American pictorial art, see Julia Meech and Gabriel P. Weisberg, *Japonisme Comes to America: The Japanese Impact on the Graphic Arts 1876-1925*, exhibition catalog (New York: Harry N. Abrams, The Jane Voorhees Zimmeli Art Museum, Rutgers University, The State University of New Jersey, 1990). This also contains a good section on Wright, pages 191-200.

[9] See Thomas Corwin Mendenhall, "Autobiographical Notes," (1904), vol. 4, 102, unpublished manuscript, as quoted in Lawrence W. Chisolm, *Fenollosa: The Far East and American Culture* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1963), 36.

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vacation homes at several of the fashionable East Coast resorts.[10] Its impact was summed up by the zoologist and Japan scholar Edward S. Morse,[11] who, a decade after the Exposition, recalled: "The Japanese exhibit at the Centennial exposition in Philadelphia came to us as a new revelation; and the charming onslaught of that unrivalled display completed the victory. It was then that the Japanese craze took firm hold of us."[12]

Subsequently a number of Japanese gardens containing authentic Japanese buildings were constructed in the United States, the first was designed for the 1894 California Midwinter Exposition in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. This was followed by the Japanese garden created in St Louis for 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, and in 1915 in Presidio Park, San Francisco, as part of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition.

Some of the early efforts to combine Japanese and American built forms involved juxtapositions of distinct styles rather than genuine syntheses, as exemplified in the Arthur Knapp house of 1897 (Figure 29).[13] The work of the brothers Charles and Henry Greene is probably the most famously "Japanese-influenced" American architecture of the period around the turn of the century. The Greenes made no secret of their admiration for Japanese art and architecture, and in some of their early designs in particular even employed several overtly Japanese motifs, but their style was as much Arts and Crafts as it was Japanese (Figure 30).[14]



29. Ralph Adams Cram, Arthur Knapp House, Fall River, MA, 1897
Source: Old House Dreams
https://www.oldhousedreams.com/2011/03/31/1897-japanese-fall-river-ma/



30. Greene and Greene, David Gamble House, Pasadena, CA, 1908
Source: Old House Online
https://www.oldhouseonline.com/interiors-and-decor/japanese-influence-greene-greene

[10] The Japanese buildings at the Centennial Exposition were described in Anon., "Japanese Work at the Centennial Grounds," *American Architect and Building News* 1 (12 February 1876): 55-56. The architectural impact of these structures is discussed by Clay Lancaster in "Japanese Buildings in the United States before 1900: Their Influence upon American Domestic Architecture," *Art Bulletin* 35, no. 3 (September 1953), 217-25. For a more extensive account, see idem, *The Japanese Influence in America* (New York: Walton Rawls, 1963), and reprinted 2nd ed. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1983), 37-50, which remains the single most comprehensive study of Japanese influence on American architecture.

[11] Morse had been appointed the first Professor of Zoology at the newly founded Tokyo Imperial University in 1877, and the following year had recruited his fellow American Mendenhall for the post of Professor of Physics at Tokyo.

[12] Edward S. Morse, *Japanese Homes and Their Surroundings* (1886), reprinted ed. (Rutland, VT, and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1972), Preface, xxxvii.

[13] See Ralph Adams Cram, "An Architectural Experiment," *Architectural Record* 8, no. 1 (July-September 1898): 82-91. Cram took advice on Japanese details from no less an authority than Edward Morse. On Knapp's recommendation Cram was later invited to prepare a design for the new parliament building in Tokyo. See Ralph Adams Cram, *My Life in Architecture* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1936), 98-100. Although his parliament scheme was not built, Cram's four-month visit to Japan in 1898 did lead to the book *Impressions of Japanese Architecture and the Allied Arts* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Co., 1905). The Knapp house is discussed, together with the parliament project, in Clay Lancaster, *The Japanese Influence in America* (1983 ed.), 70-72.

[14] According to Clay Lancaster, the Greenes were impressed with the Japanese exhibit at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. See Clay Lancaster, *The Japanese Influence in America* (1983 ed.), 109. On the parallels between the Greenes' work and Scandinavian and Alpine timber lodges, see Reyner Banham's introduction to Randell L. Makinson, *Greene & Greene: Architecture as a Fine Art* (Salt Lake City, UT, and Santa Barbara, CA: Peregrine Smith Inc., 1977), 20.

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Despite the fascination with Japanese art among American elites by the end of the 19th century, the popular American image of Japan was still largely informed by the myth of an unspoiled garden paradise.[15] The appetite for tales of this mysterious 'oriental Eden' was encouraged by exaggerated reports of the relatively few westerners to have visited Japan at the time, as Edward Morse later recalled:

> Naturally great curiosity was awakened to know more about the social life of this remarkable people. . . . In response to the popular demand, book after book appeared; but with some noteworthy exceptions they repeated the same information. . . . Imaginary dangers were conjured up; a wild guess at the ethnical enigma, erroneous conceptions of Japanese character and customs. . . . [16]

Even after more accurate information about modern Japan eventually become available, the Western public tended to be far more interested in the quaint images of the early Edo period (1603-1868) presented in the curios which the Japanese had begun to produce specifically for foreign consumption; as the Japan scholar Edward Morse confirmed in 1886:

> Within twenty years there has gradually appeared in our country a variety of Japanese objects conspicuous for their novelty and beauty,—lacquers, pottery and porcelain, forms in wood and metal, curious shaped boxes, quaint ivory carvings, fabrics in cloth and paper, and a number of other objects as perplexing in their purpose as the inscriptions which they often bore. . . . Slowly our methods of decoration became imbued with these ways so new to us, yet so many centuries old to the people among whom these arts had originated. . . .
>
> The more intelligent among our collectors soon recognized that the objects from Japan divided themselves into two groups,—the one represented by a few objects having great intrinsic merit, with a refinement and reserve of decoration; the other group, characterized by a more florid display and less delicacy of treatment, forming by far the larger number, consisting chiefly of forms in pottery, porcelain, lacquer and metal work. These last were made by the Japanese expressly for the foreign market, many of them having no place in their economy, and with few exceptions being altogether too gaudy and violent to suit the Japanese taste. Our country became flooded with them; even the village grocery displayed them side by side with articles manufactured at home for the same class of customers, and equally out of place in the greater marts of the country.[17]

The popular image of Japan in the West during the late nineteenth century, then, tended towards a highly idealized picture of its recent feudal past. Frank Lloyd Wright was by no means immune to this kind of romantic vision, particularly when it was presented in the form of the woodblock print. There was also another, quite different, aspect to American appreciation of Japanese art, however, that would fundamentally differentiate Wright's approach from the popular norm.

During the 1870s many foreign academics and professionals had been invited to Japan to teach at the various new government schools established during the early years of the Meiji administration. Among this

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[15] For a good account of early Western perceptions of Japan, see Jean-Pierre Lehman, *The Image of Japan: From Feudal Isolation to World Power, 1850-1905* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1978), also Toshio Yokoyama, *Japan in the Victorian Mind: A Study of Stereotyped Images of a Nation, 1850-80* (London: St Anthony's College, Oxford, and Macmillan, 1987). One of the most influential of the early Western accounts of Japan was the American missionary William Elliot Griffis's *The Mikado's Empire*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1876). For a fascinating juxtaposition of Griffis's essentially Christian perspective on Japanese culture with the scientific and poetic approaches taken by Edward Morse and the writer Lafcadio Hearn respectively, see Robert A. Rosenstone, *Mirror in the Shrine: American Encounters with Meiji Japan* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[16] Morse, *Japanese Homes and Their Surroundings* (1886), reprinted 1972 ed, Preface, xxxviii.

[17] Ibid., Preface, xxxv-xxxvii.

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group was the American scientist Edward Morse—who had initially gone to Japan to carry out independent fieldwork—but while there accepted the chair of zoology at the newly founded Tokyo Imperial University. Though he was primarily a natural scientist, Morse's interests were diverse and he became an authority on Far Eastern ceramics, an expertise which eventually led to his becoming Keeper of Pottery at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.[18] The best-known product of Morse's three periods of research in Japan between 1877 and 1883, however, was a minutely detailed study of the middle-class Japanese dwelling, *Japanese Homes and Their Surroundings* (1886)[19], which would become the standard English text on Japanese domestic architecture.

Shortly after his appointment at the Imperial University, Morse recommended his young Salem neighbor the Harvard trained philosopher Ernest Fenollosa for the position of Professor of Philosophy and Political Economy at Tokyo.[20] Like Morse, soon after taking up his post, Fenollosa's interest turned to Japanese culture, and with the aid of his students Okakura Kakuzo and Nagao Ariga, he soon became one of the leading Western authorities on Japanese art.[21]

Fenollosa's crusade to reawaken Japanese interest in their traditional art was to play a major part in preventing its disappearance from Japan's educational system in the face of the general tide of westernization that was sweeping through Japan at the time. After returning to the United States in 1890 to take charge of the new Japanese department at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Fenollosa embarked on a similar campaign to enlighten his own people on what he believed to be the universal aesthetic ideals exemplified by traditional Japanese art. Fenollosa's 'synthetic' theory, which derived primarily from an analysis of Far Eastern examples, was eventually turned into a practical course of art instruction by his assistant and eventual successor at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the painter and art teacher Arthur Dow; Dow wrote the book *Composition* (1899), which had a major impact on the teaching of art in American schools during the early twentieth century.[22]

Following Fenollosa's return to America, his former student Kakuzo Okakura[23] was made director of the newly founded Tokyo Fine Art School, the government art college that had been organized largely on Fenollosa's recommendations. Okakura would eventually become Japan's foremost art historian, and after successfully drawing Japanese attention to the value of their traditional arts he later proceeded to join in the task of educating the West on the principles underlying oriental art, becoming an adviser on Chinese and Japanese art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1904, and publishing several popular books on Far Eastern aesthetics aimed at foreign readers, most notably the *Book of Tea* (1906), which Frank Lloyd Wright was fond of quoting.[24]

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[18] The Far Eastern pottery collection at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts was based largely on Morse's extensive holdings of Japanese and Korean examples. Morse's other major collection, of everyday Japanese artefacts from the Meiji era, is housed at the Peabody Museum of Salem, Massachusetts, together with his personal papers. For a detailed account of his career, see Dorothy G. Wayman, *Edward Sylvester Morse: A Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942). On Morse's activities in Japan, see his own *Japan Day by Day,* 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1917). Also see the Peabody Museum of Salem and Shogakukan Inc., *Japan, through the Eyes of E. S. Morse*, exhibition catalog (Tokyo: Shogakukan Publishing Co., 1989).

[19] Edward S. Morse, *Japanese Homes and Their Surroundings* (Boston: Ticknor and Co., 1886).

[20] On Ernest Fenollosa's career, see Lawrence Chisolm, *Fenollosa: The Far East and American Culture* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1963), and Seiichi Yamaguchi, *Ernest Francisco Fenollosa: A Life Devoted to the Advocacy of Japanese Culture*, 2 vols. (Tokyo: Sanseido, 1982). For Fenollosa seen in the context of the general intellectual milieu of Boston in the early 1890s, see Van Wyck Brooks, *Fenollosa and His Circle: With Other Essays in Biography* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1962), which charts Fenollosa's connections with Edward Morse, John La Farge, and other Boston notables such as Henry Adams and Isabella Gardner.

[21] Fenollosa was assisted in his surveys of temple art by several of his Japanese colleagues, notably his former students Kakuzo Okakura and Nagao Ariga.

[22] Arthur Wesley Dow, *Composition: A Series of Exercises Selected from a New System of Art Education* (Boston: J. M. Bowles, 1899). On Dow's career, see Frederick C. Moffatt's *Arthur Wesley Dow (1857-1922)* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977).

[23] On Okakura's career, see Yasuko Horioka, *The Life of Kakuzo—Author of the Book of Tea* (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1964).

[24] Okakura's two most important English publications on Far Eastern aesthetics were: Kakuzo [printed as Kakasu] Okakura, *The Ideals of the East: With Special Reference to the Art of Japan* (London: John Murray, 1903), and idem, *The Book of Tea* (Boston: Fox, Duffield and Co., 1906).

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This small circle of scholars centered on Tokyo Imperial University and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts—Morse, Fenollosa, Dow, and Okakura—represented the leading edge of Japanese art scholarship in America at the turn of the century; and significantly the young Frank Lloyd Wright was personally connected with one of the members of this elite group.

Fenollosa and Wright's first employer Joseph Silsbee had actually grown up together as close neighbors in Salem, Massachusetts, from where they had both gone on to Harvard, although by the time Fenollosa arrived in Cambridge to take up his studies in philosophy in the autumn of 1870, his slightly older cousin had already graduated and moved down the road to begin his architectural training at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.[25] This little-known family connection effectively gave Wright a personal link with the leading figures of Japanese-art scholarship in America from the very beginning of his architectural career, and not only does this appear to explain many of his particular views on Japanese art and architecture, but much more importantly it also seems to cast new light on his approach to his own work.

In late 1885 the Japanese Ministry of Education had appointed Ernest Fenollosa, with Okakura and the respected painter Hogai Kano (1828-1888),[26] to a commission charged with examining the future of art education in Japan. On the basis of their report, in late September 1886, Fenollosa and Okakura were decorated for their services to Japanese art by the Emperor Meiji himself, and a few days later, on October 1st, they left Yokohama for America, together with the government's Director of the Bureau of Colleges, Baron Arata Hamao (1849-1925),[27] as members of an Imperial Fine Arts Commission on a fact-finding tour of Western art institutions.

Whether Wright actually met Fenollosa remains uncertain, but by the early 1890s he was clearly well aware of his work, and indeed even appears to have obtained his very first prints from him, having recalled in 1917:

> When I first saw a fine print about twenty-five years ago it was an intoxicating thing. At that time Ernest Fenollosa was doing his best to persuade the Japanese people not to wantonly destroy their works of art. In their craze for European civilization they had made bon-fires of priceless treasures. In a fury of shame and contempt for what they were -- they glorified in sacrificing them ruthlessly in honour of what they imagined our culture to be. . . . Fenollosa, the American, did more than anyone else to stem the tide of this folly. On one of his journeys home he brought many beautiful prints, those I made mine were the narrow tall decorative form hashirakake -- these I appreciate today even more than I did then.
>
> These first prints had a large share I am sure in vulgarising the Renaissance for me.[28]

During the two decades between his initial contact with Joseph Silsbee and his first visit to Japan in 1905, then, Wright had had ample opportunity to become familiar with Ernest Fenollosa's ideas. Perhaps most significantly for Wright, Fenollosa regarded architecture as the mother art and saw its future as crucial

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[25] Silsbee received his bachelor's degree from Harvard in 1869 and immediately moved on to MIT for three years of architectural study. On his education and architectural career, see Henry A. Withey and Elsie Rathburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)* (Los Angeles: Hennessey and Ingalls, 1970), 554-55, also Susan Karr Sorell, "Silsbee: The Evolution of a Personal Style," *Prairie School Review* 7, no. 4 (Fourth Quarter 1970): 5-13. Fenollosa entered Harvard in the autumn of 1870 and after graduating in 1874 he stayed on for a further three years, initially on a two-year Parker Fellowship in philosophy and then at the Unitarian Divinity School before finally withdrawing in January 1877. See Chisolm, *Fenollosa: The Far East and American Culture*, 21-32.

[26] It was originally intended that Hogai Kano should be the first director of the Tokyo Fine Art School, but he died shortly before its establishment in 1888.

[27] Arata Hamao was instrumental in the founding of Tokyo Imperial University in 1877. He was also closely involved with the organization of the new Tokyo Fine Art School in 1889, and in 1897 became Minister of Education.

[28] Wright, "The Print and the Renaissance," manuscript, Taliesin, 15 November 1917. © FLWF.

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to the development of all the other media. In his official report to the Japanese Ministry of Education on the findings of the Imperial Fine Arts Commission, for example, Fenollosa had declared that "the future of architecture is to determine largely the scope of Japan's art."[29] Fenollosa was convinced that for Japan the way forward architecturally lay within her own traditions,[30] and to this effect he warned in his report: "There is great harm in introducing into Japan foreign architectural forms and decorative forms since these are already in decay and chaos, and it is Japan's prerogative to show the way out by producing better."[31] When it came to Western architecture Fenollosa was equally certain that the future lay in the United States rather than in Europe. However, significantly he felt that Japanese techniques of timber construction could play a useful role in America, and even suggested in his report that it was probable that American architects were "about to introduce Japanese style for wooden buildings."[32]

Fenollosa's view was clear, then, American architects should forget about Europe, and if they had to look abroad for inspiration, they would do well to study the traditional timber buildings of Japan. Such definite ideas on the future of American architecture, coming as they did from a respected figure like Fenollosa, would have made a considerable impression on a nineteen-year-old draughtsman just setting out on his career. Indeed, it seems that Fenollosa's fierce criticism of European architecture,[33] coupled with his enthusiastic praise for traditional Japanese buildings, might well have been a factor in encouraging the young Wright to turn his back on Europe at an early stage and look instead to Japan for inspiration.

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[29] Ernest Francisco Fenollosa, "Report of Fine Arts Commission," manuscript [n.d., ca. 1887], bMS. Am 1759.2 (86), typescript copy, 9. Compositions by Ernest Francisco Fenollosa 1853-1908, the Ernest G. Stillman Papers, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

[30] In his 1887 report to the Japanese Ministry of Education, for example, Fenollosa was especially severe in his appraisal of Renaissance architecture, having declared: "… the only style of architecture which Europe has developed in modern times is the Renaissance imitation of the classic, which is degenerate in form, incapable of further development, and crushing to originality." Fenollosa, "Report of Fine Arts Commission," 5.

[31] Ibid., 9.

[32] Ibid., 6. Fenollosa suggested in similar vein: "… American architects are most eager to introduce Japanese products into their work. …" Ibid.

[33] In his report to the Ministry of Education, for example, Fenollosa had declared: "… the great evil of European architectural practice is the separation of the two functions of 'construction' and 'decoration.'" Ibid.

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Unit 2 • Wright's Windows on Japan

Themes:

- The particular channels that shaped Wright's understanding of Japanese art and architecture
- Ernest Fenollosa combined two of Wright's passions: Japanese art and organic form

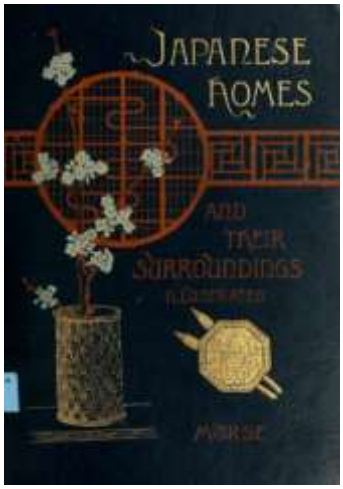
Although Frank Lloyd Wright was well aware of the impact Japanese art had had on American artists by the mid-1880s and he was also by no means immune to the kind of romanticism which characterized popular Japanism, his particular interpretation of Japanese art and architecture also differed from the norm in being underpinned with the ideas of the Boston-based Japanologists, Edward Morse, Ernest Fenollosa, Arthur Dow, and Okakura Kakuzo. This unit examines some of the specific channels through which Wright saw Japan, and their apparent impact on his own work.

Edward Morse and *Japanese Homes*

Through his early knowledge of Ernest Fenollosa, it seems likely that Wright would also have been aware of his equally well-known colleague Edward Morse (Figure 31). If anything, Morse would have been of even greater interest since he was the author of what at the time was as the most authoritative English account of Japanese domestic architecture. *Japanese Homes and Their Surroundings* (Figure 32) had been praised by architects and Japan specialists alike following its publication in 1886, including by Wright's close friend and fellow Chicago Japanese print collector, Frederick Gookin.[34]



31. Edward Sylvester Morse (1838-1925)
Source: Peabody Museum, Salem, MA



32. Morse, Japanese Homes and Their Surroundings, 1886
Source: RIBA Architecture.com
https://www.architecture.com/image-library/RIBApix/image-information/poster/cover-of-japanese-homes-and-their-surroundings/posterid/RIBA18740.html

[34] Letter from Frederick Gookin to Edward Morse, 4 April 1886, the Edward S. Morse Papers, the Phillips Library, Peabody Museum of Salem, Massachusetts.

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Morse particularly praised the Japanese dwelling for its straightforward appropriateness to the particular way of life which it served, having commented in the early pages of *Japanese Homes*: "Whether the Japanese house is right or wrong in its plan and construction, it answers admirably the purposes for which it was intended."[35] Although the idea of the honest use of materials toward appropriate ends had become a common theme in Western architectural theory by the end of the nineteenth century, in his own description of the Japanese dwelling Wright similarly focused on its 'truthfulness,' which he directly contrasted with the typical American home of the time, declaring: ". . . the Japanese dwelling is in every bone and fibre of its structure honest and our dwellings are not honest."[36] There are many such parallels between Wright's descriptions of the Japanese house and those given by Morse. More importantly, a number of the positive features of the Japanese dwelling highlighted by Morse were to reappear in Wright's description of the new Prairie House.

Morse laid particular emphasis on the many familiar features which were absent from the Japanese home, and in the process he identified what would appear to have been one of the main reasons for most previous Western accounts of Japanese architecture having tended to neglect the ordinary house, suggesting:

> An American finds it difficult indeed to consider such a structure as a dwelling, when so many features are absent that go to make up a dwelling at home,—no doors or windows such as he had been familiar with; no attic or cellar; no chimneys, and within no fire-place, and of course no customary mantle; no permanently enclosed rooms; and as for furniture, no beds or tables, chairs or similar articles—at least, so it appears at first sight.[37]

Wright's description of the Japanese house similarly emphasized its apparent 'elimination' of many common Western features, and it was a characteristic of which he whole-heartedly approved, having recalled in his autobiography how he saw the ordinary Japanese home as "a supreme study in elimination—not only of dirt but the elimination, too, of the insignificant."[38] It may have been more than coincidental, then, that the Prairie House also differed from the more typical American home of the time primarily through its *elimination* of many familiar features (Figure 33).

[35] Edward Morse, *Japanese Homes and Their Surroundings* (1972 ed.), 12.
[36] Wright, *An Autobiography* (1932), rev. and enl. ed. (London: Faber and Faber, and Hyperion Press, 1945), 179.
[37] Morse, *Japanese Homes* (1972 ed.), 7.
[38] Wright, *An Autobiography* (1938 ed.), 196.

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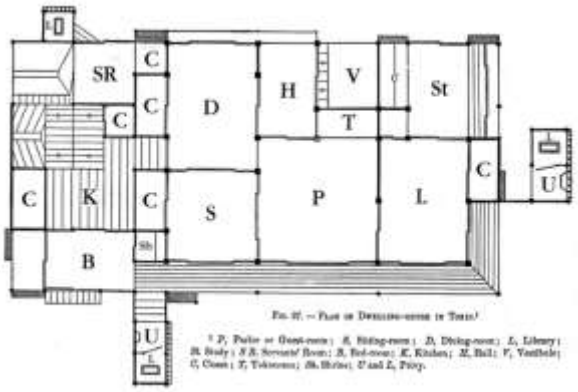
Edward Morse's descriptions of the Japanese house *Japanese Homes*, (1886).	**Wright's descriptions of the Prairie House** *An Autobiography* (1938 ed.).
"One of the surprising features that strike a foreigner as he becomes acquainted with the Japanese house is the entire absence of so many things that with us clutter the closets, or make squirrel-nests of the attic." (pp. 195–96)	"The first thing to do in building the new house was to get rid of the attic...." (p. 138)
"The almost entire absence of swinging doors is at once noticeable." (p. 111)	"Scores of unnecessary doors disappeared and no end of partition.... Thus an end to the cluttered house. Fewer doors; fewer window holes, though much greater window area...." (p. 141)
"There is no cellar or excavation beneath the house, ... the inmates are never troubled by the noisome air of the cellar, which, as we have said, too often infects our houses at home." (pp. 15–16)	"Next, get rid of the unwholesome basement, entirely, yes absolutely...." (p. 138)
"The first thing that impresses one on entering a Japanese house is the small size and low stud of the rooms." (p. 108)	"Taking a human being for my 'scale' I brought the whole house down in height to fit a normal one – ergo, 5' 8" tall, say." (p. 139)

33. Comparison of Edward Morse's descriptions of the traditional Japanese dwelling and Wright's description of the new Prairie House.
Source: Kevin Nute, Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan, 1993

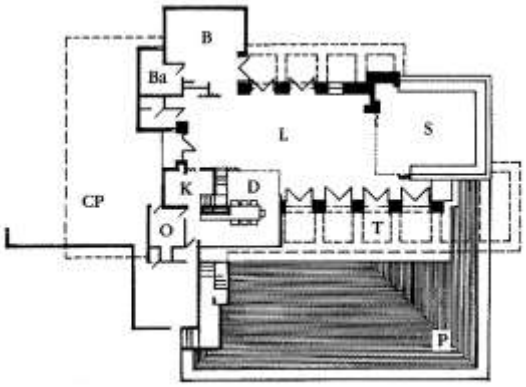
Morse had noted how the traditional Japanese post-and-beam system of construction had all but dispensed with load-bearing partitions, and he was enthusiastic over the freedom which this permitted in allowing the main living areas of the house to be converted into a single large space if required, having explained how the sliding screens could be completely removed "throwing a number of rooms into one great apartment."[39] An idea very similar to this characterization of the Japanese home as essentially one large space divided only by non-structural screens was to become a central feature in Wright's account of "Building the New House," in which he explained: ". . . I declared the whole lower floor as one room. . . . Then I screened off various portions of the big room for certain domestic purposes like dining, reading, receiving callers."[40] Indeed, later in his career Wright seems to have taken Morse's suggestion quite literally, having apparently removed the *fusuma* screens from one of the Japanese house plans illustrated in *Japanese Homes* to create the single 'big room' of the 1938 *Life* house project (Figures 34, 35).[41]

[39] Morse, *Japanese Homes* (1972 ed.), 7.
[40] Wright, *An Autobiography* (1945 ed.), 129.
[41] See Wright's "House for a Family of $5000-$6000 Income," *Life* 5 (26 September 1938): 60-61.

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34. "Dwelling in Tokio" Morse, Japanese Homes and Their Surroundings, 1886
Source: Kevin Nute, Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan, 1993



35. Wright," House for a Family of $5,000-6000 Income," Life magazine, September 1938
Source: Kevin Nute, Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan, 1993

Morse contrasted the openness of the Japanese house with its Western counterpart, having commented in *Japanese Homes*: "If there is no attempt at architectural display in the dwelling houses of Japan the traveler is at least spared those miserable experiences he so often encounters in his own country, where to a few houses of good taste he is sure to pass hundreds of perforated wooden boxes. . . ."[42] This could, perhaps, have been the source of Wright's similar characterization of the typical American home of the time as a "box in which only a limited number of holes were to be punched."[43] More importantly, it may have encouraged Wright's subsequent 'destruction' of that box in the form of the Prairie House, in which it was his declared aim to "eliminate the rooms as boxes and the house itself as another boxing of boxes."[44]

In several of his sketches Morse illustrated how, by withdrawing the *shoji*, the Japanese home and its adjacent garden could be made to seem almost continuous. Wright openly admired this particular characteristic of the Japanese dwelling, having delighted in the fact that it was impossible to tell precisely "where the garden leaves off and the garden begins."[45] It may be significant, then, that Wright later stated that one of the primary objectives of the Prairie House was "to bring the outside world into the house, and let the inside of the house go outside."[46]

As the most detailed source of information on Japanese domestic architecture available to Wright prior to his first visit to Japan, then, it seems that *Japanese Homes* might well have exercised a formative influence on his perception of the Japanese house—to the extent that by the time he finally saw the real thing in 1905 many of his views on the subject may well have already been firmly established. This which would help to explain why several of its characteristics appear to have been present in his own houses before his first visit to Japan itself.

[42] Morse, *Japanese Homes* (1972 ed.), 48.
[43] Wright, *An Autobiography* (1938 ed.), 139.
[44] Ibid., 142.
[45] Ibid., 197.
[46] Ibid., 139.

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Kakuzo Okakura and the Japanese Pavilion in Chicago

The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago was to prove a watershed in Wright's relationship with Japan, not only apparently providing him with his first direct experience of Japanese buildings but also bringing to Chicago several of America's leading authorities on Japanese art, including Edward Morse and Ernest Fenollosa, who served as official judges at the Exposition on the pottery and fine-arts juries respectively.



36. The Japanese Pavilion, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893.
Source: Appelbaum, Stanley. The Chicago World's Fair of 1893: A Photographic Record. New York: Dover Publications, 1980.

Fenollosa also served as an adviser on the Japanese fine-art exhibit,[47] the prime mover behind this display having been his former student Kakuzo Okakura, who was also responsible for the catalog describing the Japanese pavilion itself, the Ho-o-den, or Phoenix Hall (Figures 36–39). In a speech delivered at the opening of the Exposition, Fenollosa paid tribute to his absent friend as the guiding hand behind the Japanese exhibit:

> Candor compels one first of all to say that to Mr. Kakuzo Okakura, the director of the Fine Arts Academy, more than to any other one man, is the credit for this wonderful Japanese exhibit due. The wise touch of his advice is everywhere felt, from the architectural casket which reproduces the interesting proportions and decorations of the Biodoin temple at Uji, founded in the eleventh century, to the new departures in shape and glaze of the humblest pottery.[48]

[47] Although he was not listed as a commissioner, according to Lawrence Chisolm, the Harvard-educated diplomat Kentaro Kaneko (1853-1942), who had known Fenollosa since the late 1870s, worked with him on the Japanese fine-art exhibit at Chicago. See Chisolm, *Fenollosa: The Far East and American Culture*, 135, note 6. Kaneko is probably best known for his role in the Treaty of Portsmouth which brought the Russo-Japanese War to a conclusion in the summer of 1905.

[48] Ernest Francisco Fenollosa, "Japan's Future Position in the World's Art," address delivered at the Chicago World's Fair, May 1893, manuscript, bMs Am 1759.2 (45). Compositions by Ernest Francisco Fenollosa 1853-1908, the Ernest G. Stillman Papers, the Houghton Library, Harvard, quotation as reprinted in Ernest Francisco Fenollosa, "Contemporary Japanese Art: with Examples from the Chicago Exhibit," *Century Illustrated Magazine* 46, no. 4 (August 1893): 580.

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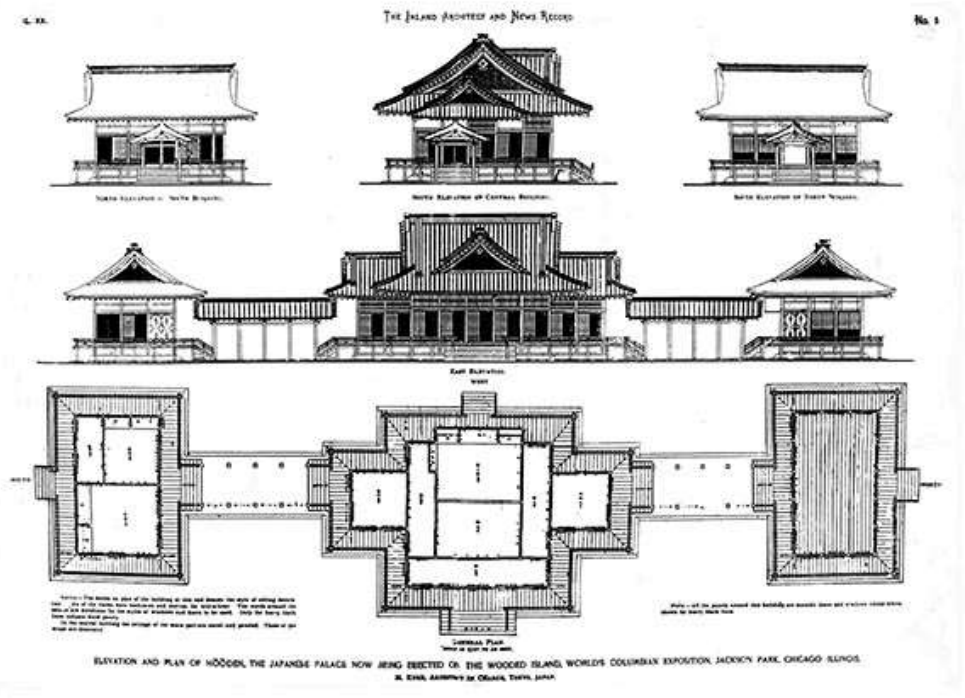


37. Kakuzo Okakura, 1862-1913
Source: Wikiquote
https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Okakura_Kakuz%C5%8D



38. Kakuzo Okakura, Description of the Ho-o-den, 1893.
Source: Internet Archive
https://archive.org/details/hoodenphoenixhal00okak

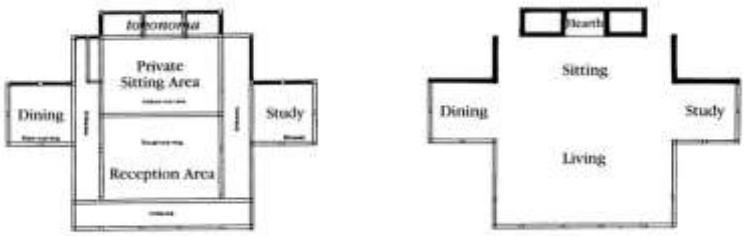
By the time the Exposition opened on May 1, 1893, the Japanese pavilion would already have been familiar to many local architects via the *Inland Architect*, the main Chicago-based architectural journal serving the Midwest, which had devoted two extensive articles to the Ho-o-den during the winter of 1892-3. These articles, written by the local architect Peter Bonnett Wight (1838-1925) who acted as an adviser on several of the foreign pavilions at the Exposition, included detailed drawings of the Ho-o-den (Figure 39).



39. Drawings of the Japanese Pavilion, The Inland Architect and News Record, December 1892
Source: The Inland Architect and News Record, December 1892

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The plan of the Ho-o-den's central hall consisted of four main spaces: the *jodannoma*, a private sitting area which was separated by a change of level from the *tsuginoma*, where guests were received; the *shosai*, a study or library; and the *konnoma*, a food-serving room. The central hall of the Ho-o-den and the program for the American family dwelling, then, accommodated broadly similar domestic functions, and each element of the Japanese arrangement appears to have quite logically given rise to its Western equivalent in Wright's Prairie House plan: the *jodannoma* becoming a sitting area directly in front of the hearth, which had replaced the *tokonoma*; the *tsuginoma* becoming a general living area; the *konnoma* a dining room; and the *shosai*, a study or library (Figures 40, 41).[49]



40, 41. Comparison of the central hall of the Ho-o-den and the generic layout of the Prairie House. Source: Kevin Nute, Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan, 1993

Under normal circumstances the various spaces of the central hall of the Ho-o-den were separated by *fusuma* screens. During the World's Fair, however, several of these had been removed in order to allow visitors a better view of the interiors from the surrounding verandah, since they were not permitted to enter the *tatami*-covered rooms themselves. From this point, it required only a relatively short step to imagine all the internal divisions removed, leaving one 'big room' serving serval different functions. And this was apparently not lost on Wright, who later described this characteristic as one of the primary features of the new Prairie House:

> Dwellings of that period were 'cut-up,' advisedly and completely, with the grim determination that should go with any cutting process. The 'interiors' consisted of boxes beside or inside other boxes, called *rooms*. All boxes inside a complicated boxing. Each domestic 'function' was properly box to box. I could see little sense in this inhibition, this cellular sequestration that implied ancestors familiar with the cells of penal institutions, except for the privacy of bedrooms on the upper floor. They were perhaps all right as 'sleeping boxes.' So I declared the whole lower floor as one room, cutting off the kitchen as a laboratory, putting servants' sleeping and living quarters next to it, semi-detached, on the ground floor, screening various portions in the big room, for certain domestic purposes -- like dining or reading, or receiving a formal caller. There were no plans like these in existence at the time. . . .[50]

[49] The Western equivalents of the various spaces in the central hall of the Ho-o-den had actually been clearly set out—albeit not entirely accurately—by Peter Wight in one of his articles in the *Inland Architect*, where he explained: "The main building contains . . . a reception hall, sitting-room, study and dressing-room. . . ." P. B. Wight, "Japanese Architecture in Chicago: Part II," *Inland Architect and News Record* 20, no. 6 (January 1893): 61.

[50] Wright, *Modern Architecture, Being the Kahn Lectures for 1930* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1931), as reprinted in *Frank Lloyd Wright: Writings and Buildings*, selected by Edgar Kaufmann and Ben Raeburn (New York: Horizon Press, 1960), 43-44.

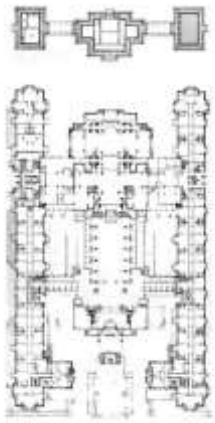
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True, there were no plans precisely like that of the early Prairie House at the time. Yet one only had to remove the *fusuma* from the central hall of the Ho-o-den in order to produce something very similar.

The Japanese craftsmen who built the Ho-o-den were a select group, from the newly formed construction firm of Okura and Company, which had been founded specifically for the project by Kihachiro Okura, a wealthy Tokyo businessman and art connoisseur. This was the same man who three decades later would personally sponsor the latter stages of building the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, and it seems the classical plan of the hotel may even have derived from the pavilion in Chicago, which remained on its island site in south Chicago until 1944 (Figures 42–44).



42. The Japanese Pavilion, Chicago, in 1893
Source: Okakura, Illustrated Description of the Ho-o-den, 1893



43, 44. Comparison of the plans of the Ho-o-den, and Wright's Imperial Hotel.
Source: Kevin Nute

Ernest Fenollosa and the Japanese Print

Wright freely acknowledged that his early view of Japan was based largely on the romanticized images presented in woodblock prints, having explained, "Ever since I discovered the print Japan had appealed to me as the most romantic, artistic, nature-inspired country on earth."[51] Wright even described judging his own work in Japan directly against these idealized images of the Edo era, recalling how "Yedo [Edo-period Tokyo] was a presence always in which to search for the invaluable record of that time, in the print: a window through which I looked upon my own work. A byroad by which I saw it."[52] And as if to emphasize this deliberate merging of art and reality, when recounting his experiences in Tokyo, Wright slipped effortlessly from prints to autobiography and back again, enthusing nostalgically:

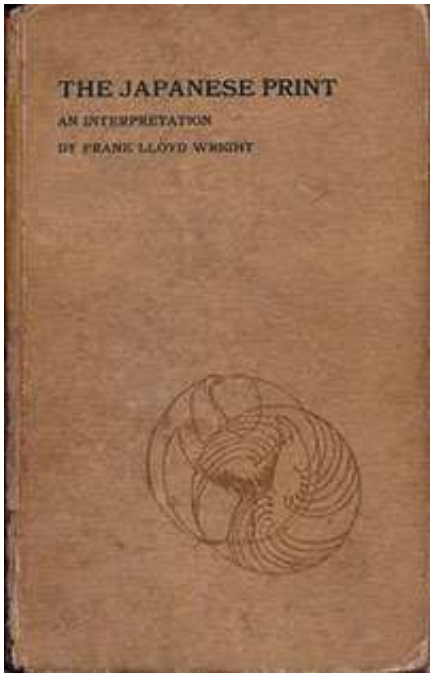
> Come with me on a journey within this journey in search of the print. Let us see Yedo as the prints saw it and as Yedo saw the prints.[53]

[51] Wright, *An Autobiography* (1977 ed.), 217.
[52] Ibid., 235-36.
[53] Wright, *An Autobiography* (1938 ed.), 205.

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> Just as Harunobu, Kiyonaga and Utamaro, Shunsho and Shigemasa faithfully recorded it, that the world might never lose it. Again exclaim—'It is all just like the prints!'[54]

Apart from providing the basis of his romanticized image of Japan, the print was also to exercise a powerful influence on Wright's concept of art. In fact he declared that it was "something upon which a whole *philosophy* of Art might be constructed,"[55] and although ostensibly a treatise on the woodblock print, his 1912 book *The Japanese Print*[56] was a vehicle for just such a general aesthetic theory (Figure 45).[57]



45. Wright, The Japanese Print: An Interpretation 1912
Source: The Wright Library
http://www.steinerag.com/flw/Books/Japanese.htm



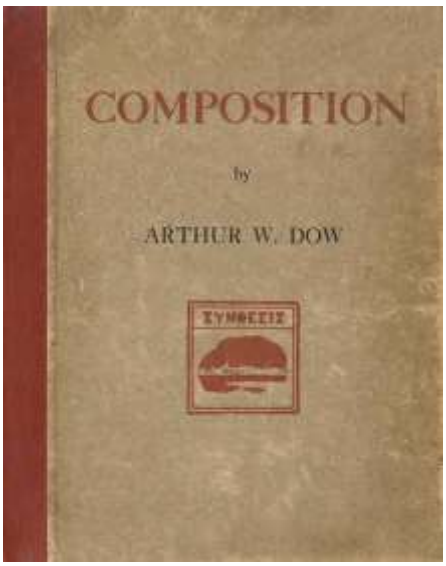
46. Ernest Fenollosa, "The Nature of Fine Art, I," The Lotos, March 1896
Source: Cambridge University Library

[54] Ibid., 210, the Japanese names refer to famous woodblock print artists.
[55] Wright, "The Print and the Renaissance," manuscript, Taliesin, 15 November 1917. © FLWF.
[56] Wright, *The Japanese Print: An Interpretation* (Chicago: The Ralph Fletcher Seymour Co., 1912).
[57] Robert Twombly has suggested: "*The Japanese Print* was an extended metaphor to some extent for political, but more immediately for architectural, activity. It was clear that in analyzing printmakers Wright was actually describing his own methods of work and his own architectural objectives. . . . This short but neglected book was one of his most coherent statements of the function of art and of the principles upon which his own work was based." *Frank Lloyd Wright: His Life and His Architecture* (New York, Chichester, Brisbane, Toronto, and Singapore: John Wiley, 1979), 151. Also see Robert Kostka, "The Japanese Print," *Prairie School Review* 4, no. 4 (Fourth Quarter 1967): 27-29, which reviews both the 1912 and 1967 editions of Wright's book.

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47. Arthur Wesley Dow (1857-1922)
Source: Smithsonian
https://www.si.edu/object/AAADCD_coll_209750



48. Composition, 1899
Source: WorthPoint
https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/1899-arthur-wesley-dow-composition-1927375693

Wright suggested that his approach to the print was from a "purely aesthetic viewpoint,"[58] having earlier explained the meaning of this phrase, in which he wrote: "By the purely aesthetic view-point I mean the point of view of the man who sees in the thing that which is its soul, its simple truth, and sees it in such terms of form, line, sound or color as to reveal its life. . . ."[59] Wright appears to have been interpreting the formal beauty of the woodblock print in essentially the same metaphysical terms which had been central to Ernest Fenollosa's analysis of Japanese art in general. Wright's awareness of Fenollosa's philosophy of art is further suggested by his description of the 'decorative' quality of the prints, in which he explained:

> In this wedding of color and gracious form, we have finally what we call a good decoration. The ultimate of a Japanese print will be measured by the extent to which it distils, or rather exhales, this precious quality, called 'decorative.' We as a people do not quite understand what that means and are apt to use the term slightingly as compared with art which has supposedly some other and greater mission. I for myself don't know exactly what other mission it legitimately could have, but I am sure of this at least -- that the rhythmic play of parts, the poise and balance, the repose that these qualities attain to and impart and which together constitute what we call good decoration, are really the very life of all art whatsoever. . . .[60]

Wright's comment concerning the negative connotations that had become wrongly associated with the word decorative could almost have been a paraphrasing of Fenollosa, who had made the same point: that

[58] Wright suggested: "It [the print] is especially valuable because, in order to comprehend it at all, we must take a viewpoint which to us as a people, and in particular to our artists—is unfamiliar,—the purely aesthetic viewpoint." *The Japanese Print* (1912 ed.), 3.
[59] Wright, "Reply to Mr. Sturgis's Criticism," *In the Cause of Architecture* (Buffalo, NY: April 1909), as reprinted in Jack Quinan, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Larkin Building: Myth and Fact* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 1987), Appendix L, 168.
[60] Wright, *The Japanese Print* (1912 ed.), 20-21.

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this term had become falsely devalued in the West after it had been separated from mainstream pictorial art to become synonymous merely with ornament. In his 1896 essay on "The Nature of Fine Art,"[61] (Figure 46) Fenollosa had explained:

> This false employment of the word *decorative*, has crept into our language, only because, in the depth of our degradation at the middle of this century, we made the astounding discovery that full oil paintings in shadow and perspective were not the best sort of ornament to put upon our saucers and cups. We found that we must try, if we could, in our ornament to get a little farther away from the literalness of nature, and employ some of the more trivial graces of beautiful line and color. Because, then, of this retrograde motion from the cusp of representation, we have come to confound the supreme quality of art with the implied apology which we make for its use.[62]

Fenollosa and his colleague at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur Dow (Figure 47), believed that Western art depicted reality too literally, and praised Japanese art because even its representational images had an abstract quality to them. Dow had explained in his art textbook *Composition* (Figure 48), "The Japanese know of no such divisions as Representative and Decorative; they conceive of painting as the art of two dimensions; an art in which roundness and nature-imitation are subordinate to the *flat* relations. As in pre-Renaissance times in Europe, the education of the Japanese artist is founded upon composition."[63] Dow proposed that this purely formal quality should be restored to its proper place in contemporary pictorial art, having argued:

> The modern arbitrary division of Painting into Representative and Decorative has tended to put into the background that which we here call Composition, and to bring forward nature-imitating as a substitute. . . .
>
> In the world's art epochs there was no such division. Every work of space-art was regarded as primarily an *arrangement*, with Beauty as its *raison d'etre*. Even a portrait was first of all a composition, with the facts and the truth subordinate to the greater idea of a beauty of aesthetic structure.[64]

For Wright, like Fenollosa and Dow, the primary appeal of Japanese art stemmed from its purely formal quality of 'wholeness,' as he explained in his commentary on the print: "Japanese art is a thoroughly structural Art; fundamentally so in any and every medium. . . . The word structure is here used to designate an organic form, an organization in a very definite manner of parts or elements into a larger unity,— a vital whole."[65] Wright was of the view that the visual appeal of the woodblock print in particular was based on a simple underlying geometric structure,[66] the presence of which had been confirmed for him by some of Hokusai's drawing textbooks, as he explained in *The Japanese Print*:

---

[61] Ernest Fenollosa, "The Nature of Fine Art, I," *The Lotos* 9, no. 9 (March 1896): 663-73. "The Nature of Fine Art, II," *The Lotos* 9, no. 10 (April 1896): 753-62.

[62] Fenollosa, "The Nature of Fine Art, II," *The Lotos* 9, no. 10 (April 1896): 759.

[63] Dow, *Composition* (1899 ed.), 60.

[64] Ibid., 24.

[65] Wright, *The Japanese Print* (1912 ed.), 5-6.

[66] Wright actually drew this underlying geometric structure on several of his own prints, some examples of which can be seen in the Van Vleck Collection at the University of Wisconsin's Chazen Museum of Art in Madison. On this topic, see Narciso Menocal, "Form and Content in Frank Lloyd Wright's Tree of Life Window," *Elvehjem Museum of Art Bulletin* (1983-84): 26, and Julia Meech-Pekarik, "Frank Lloyd Wright's Other Passion," in *The Nature of Frank Lloyd Wright*, eds., Carol Bolon, Robert Nelson, and Linda Seidel Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 143-45. On the geometric structure of Hiroshige's prints in particular, see Roger Keyes, "Hidden Geometry and the Appreciation of Japanese Woodblock Prints in the West," in *Essays on Japanese Art Presented to Jack Hillier,* ed. Matthi Forrer (London: Robert G. Sawers Publications, 1982), 69-76.

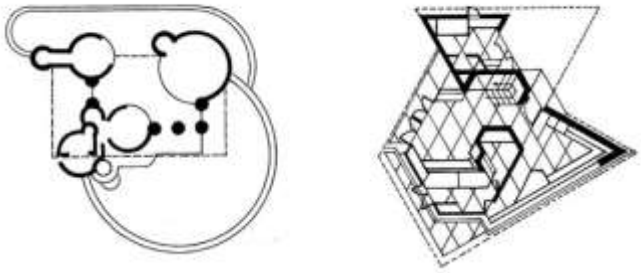
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> Each humble masterpiece asserts its magic of invisible perfection. Yet, this mystery is reduced by Japanese masters to its scientific elements, as exemplified by certain pages of textbooks by Hokusai, wherein the structural diagrams are clearly given, and transformation to material objects shown progressively step by step.[67]

The books in question were apparently *Ryakuga Haya-oshie* (1812–15),[68] a series of drawing textbooks in which Hokusai illustrated how complicated natural forms could be built up from simple mechanical shapes (Figures 49, 50). These diagrams, suggesting as they did, the reverse process—of organic forms being reduced to simple geometric units—seem to have made a particular impression on Wright, described this process of geometric abstraction as one of 'conventionalization.'[69] Wright apparently saw this principle as applying directly to his own discipline, having explained in his account of the print how, "In design, that element which we call its structure is primarily the pure form, as arranged or fashioned and grouped to 'build' the Idea. . . ."[70] (Figures 51, 52).



49, 50. Katsushika Hokusai, Ryakuga Haya-oshie, 1812-15
Source: The British Museum



51, 52. Plans of Wright's Jester House project, 1938, and Boomer House, Phoenix AZ, PA, 1953
Source: Kevin Nute, Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan, 1993

[67] Wright, *The Japanese Print* (1912 ed.), 16.

[68] In this connection, it may be significant that the Chicago philanthropist and art collector Martin Ryerson (1856-1932), who was well known to Wright, had one of the largest collections of Japanese printed books anywhere outside of Japan, numbering well over a thousand volumes. Many of these, including several copies of Hokusai's *Ryakuga Haya-oshie,* were donated to the Art Institute of Chicago in 1916 and 1932, and are still held by the library at the Art Institute which bears Ryerson's name.

[69] Wright explained: "Egypt thus knew the lotus, and translated the flower to the dignified stone forms of her architecture. Such was the lotus conventionalized. . . . The lotus gained thus imperishable significance; for the life-principle in the flower is translated—transmuted to terms of building stone to idealize a real need. This is conventionalization. It is reality because it is poetry." *The Japanese Print*, (1912 ed.), 33-34. Owen Jones had used the term 'conventionalise' to describe the same geometric abstraction of natural forms. See *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856), reprinted ed. (London: Studio Editions, 1986), 22-23.

[70] Wright, *The Japanese Print* (1912 ed.), 6.

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Besides their influence on his approach to design, the prints also had a direct impact on Wright's renderings, which he freely acknowledged.[71] He was especially fond of Hiroshige's distinctive series of vertical prints, *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*. Like Hiroshige, Wright frequently used tree trunks and foliage as inner frames with which to effectively deny the actual frame of the picture and so create the illusion that the viewer is occupying the same space as the subject—as in the famous Wasmuth renderings of the Winslow house and Unity Temple for example (Figures 53–56). As if to confirm the source of this inner-framing device, on a rendering of the 1906 De Rhodes house drawn by his talented delineator Marion Mahony, Wright openly acknowledged his debt to Hiroshige, having inscribed the drawing with the caption: "Drawn by Mahony, After F.LL.W and Hiroshige."

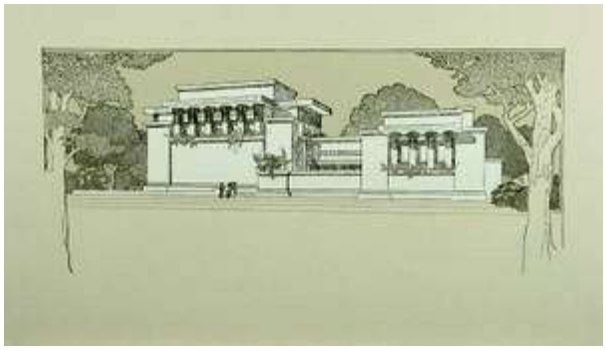




53. Foliage used as an inner frame in Utagawa Hiroshige's "Yatsumi Bridge," One Hundred Famous Views of Edo, 1856

54. Rendering of the Winslow House, 1910
Source: Modern Design
http://www.moderndesign.org/2006/09/frank-lloyd-wright-winslow.html





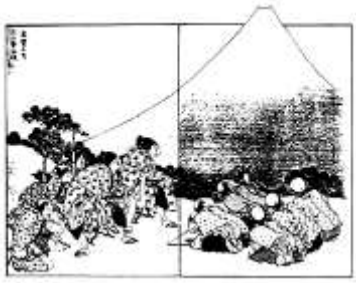
55. View framing using tree trunks in Utagawa Hiroshige's "Maple Trees at Mama," One Hundred Famous Views of Edo, 1857

56. Rendering of Unity Temple, 1910
Source: Frank Lloyd Wright Wasmuth Gallery
http://www.moderndesign.org/2006/09/frank-lloyd-wright-winslow.html

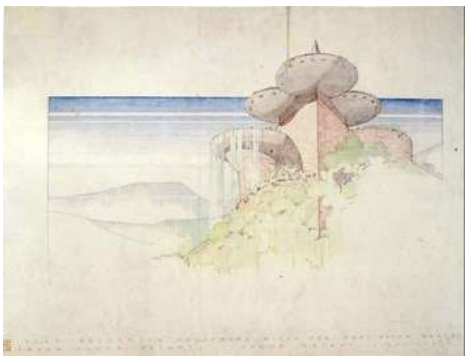
More importantly, the idea of denying the rectilinear frame seems to have influenced the way in which Wright actually conceived architectural spaces, similar inner-framing elements having been employed in several of his interiors, apparently in order to achieve the equivalent effect of negating the conventional *three-dimensional* frame: the room (Figures 57–63). Indeed, for Wright there would appear to have been a direct link between the breaking down of the two-dimensional picture frame and his destruction of the conventional Western 'box' to create a similar sense of continuous space.

[71] For a particularly perceptive discussion of the influence of the prints on Wright's renderings, see Arthur Drexler, ed., *The Drawings of Frank Lloyd Wright*, 7-16, to which I have frequently referred. Also see Julia Meech and Gabriel P. Weisberg, *Japonisme Comes to America: The Japanese Impact on the Graphic Arts 1876-1925*, 191-200.

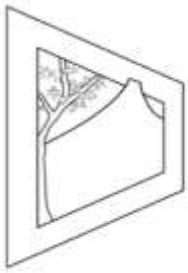
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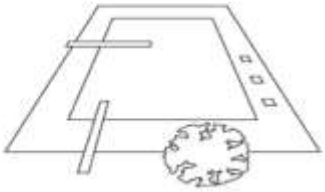
57. Katsushika Hokusai: "The Manifestation of the Peak," One Hundred Views of Mt Fuji, 1834
Source: Ryerson Library



58. Rendering of the Huntington Hartford resort project, 1947
Source: The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation







59–61. Breaking the frame in woodblock prints, Wright's renderings and building plans
Source: Kevin Nute and Jake Weber



62. Integrated tree, William Winslow Stable, River Forest, IL, 1893
Source: http://rubens.anu.edu.au
http://rubens.anu.edu.au/htdocs/laserdisk/0231/23193.JPG



63. Integrated boulder, Edgar Kaufmann House, Mill Run, PA, 1936
Source: Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

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If the print as a form was invaluable to Wright, then its contents would appear to have been at least equally important. The nineteenth-century prints in particular viewed like a veritable catalog of Japanese architecture, illustrating everything from entire temple complexes right down to domestic carpentry details. As with all their subjects, the prints depicted these built forms in a highly simplified style bordering on abstraction, a characteristic which would probably have made them all the more attractive to Wright. In fact, these simplified architectural forms could well have been of more immediate value to him than direct experience of the complicated originals which they represented, and may even have encouraged him to apply a similar process of abstraction to some of the buildings which he subsequently encountered in Japan.

Apart from being highly simplified, the buildings in the prints were also frequently shown in dramatic natural settings, which again may have influenced Wright's own apparent preference for unusual, often precipitous, sites. Hiroshige's print "Agematsu," depicting a Shinto shrine overhanging the famous Ono waterfall in Nagano Prefecture, for example, might have influenced the similarly precarious siting of Fallingwater (Figures 64, 65).[72]



64. Utagawa Hiroshige, Agematsu, The Sixty-nine Stations of the Kiso Highway, 1838
Source: University of Wisconsin-Madison
https://ukiyo-e.org/image/chazen/1980_1178



65. Rendering of the Kaufmann House, Mill Run, PA, 1936
Source: The Frank Lloyd Foundation

Besides their aesthetic and directly architectural lessons, Wright was also keenly aware of the financial value of the prints. He had actually sold prints from an early stage as a source of additional income with which to subsidize his own collecting,[73] and this eventually became a business in itself as he began buying on behalf of third parties, most famously during his 1913 visit to Tokyo when he purchased prints on an unprecedented scale, primarily for the wealthy Boston-based collectors William and John Spaulding.[74]

---

[72] Mark Girouard has similarly compared the siting of Fallingwater to Hokusai's view of the same waterfall: "Ono Falls," from the series *A Journey to the Waterfalls of all the Provinces* (ca. 1831-32). See Edgar Kaufmann, Jr, *Fallingwater: A Frank Lloyd Wright Country House* (London: The Architectural Press, 1986), Introduction, 22-23.

[73] The most detailed accounts of Wright's print collecting activities are to be found in Julia Meech-Pekarik's "Frank Lloyd Wright and Japanese Prints," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 40, no. 2 (Fall 1982): 48-57, and idem, "Frank Lloyd Wright's Other Passion," *The Nature of Frank Lloyd Wright*, eds. Bolon, Nelson, and Seidel, 125-53.

[74] Wright later recalled the apparently casual beginning of his print-dealing career: "Learning from Frederick Gookin of my extraordinary collection of actor prints, Mr Spaulding came to my office in Orchestra Hall to see a group I had brought in for my own pleasure. Delighted with the portfolio of one hundred prints he offered me ten thousand dollars for them. At the time it was a fair price. For a number of reasons I accepted…." *An Autobiography* (1977 ed.), 551. Most of the prints which Wright bought in 1913 ended up with the Spauldings, and subsequently formed the core of the huge collection now at the Boston Museum of Fine

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At various times Wright's collecting of prints proved to be both an important source of income and an expensive indulgence, while at the same time bringing him unusual personal connections, which were to prove essential to his architectural career. As well as shaping many of his preconceptions of Japan itself, the prints also provided Wright with a rich source of graphic techniques and several novel architectural ideas. However, perhaps most importantly of all, as an *independently pleasing aesthetic whole* which made *honest use of natural materials* to *express everyday life*, the print embodied three key components of Wright's concept of the organic art form.

Japan Itself

When Wright set foot on Japanese soil for the first time in early March 1905, he carried with him a host of preconceptions, many deriving from the romantic images depicted in the woodblock prints which he had been collecting for over a decade. In fact, the rapidly modernizing Meiji Japan which greeted him and the world illustrated in the prints were in many respects very different, but for Wright they seem to have been essentially one and the same. Even in the face of what must have been plentiful evidence that Japan was fast becoming an industrialized nation, these idealized images of its recent feudal past seem to have colored his whole perception of the country (Figures 66, 67).



66. Utagawa Hiroshige, Kinryuzan Temple, Asakusa, One Hundred Famous Views of Edo, 1856
Source: Brooklyn Museum
https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/49880

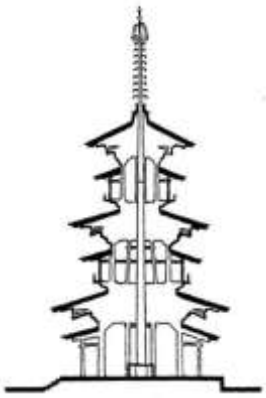


67. Wright's 1905 photograph of the temple of Chion-in, Kyoto
Source: The Frank Lloyd Wright Trust

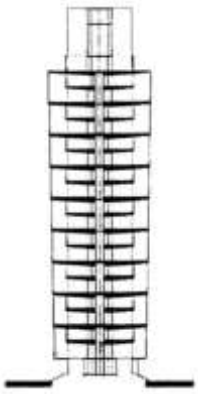
Arts. Sadly, during the Great Depression Wright was forced to sell a large part of his own holdings. In 1926 the Bank of Wisconsin took possession of many of his prints when it foreclosed on the mortgage on Taliesin, and the following year Wright was obliged to auction several hundred of these prints in New York, writing the introduction to the sale catalogue himself. A year later, the bank sold over 4,000 of Wright's prints to Edward Van Vleck, a professor at the University of Wisconsin; and following Wright's death in 1959, his executors were obliged to dispose of much of what remained in order to ensure the future of Taliesin.

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While Wright's first visit to Japan was ostensibly 'in pursuit of the print,'[75] architectural sightseeing also formed a large part of his itinerary. During his time in the Kyoto area, Wright would almost certainly have visited the nearby city of Nara, and as Clay Lancaster first pointed out, the unusual, staggered section of the east pagoda of Yakushi-ji temple, on the southern outskirts of this ancient capital, seems to have made a particular impression on him,[76] having apparently provided the inspiration for the 1929 St Mark's Tower project (Figures 68, 69).



68. Section of Yakushi-ji pagoda, ca. 730 (after Clay Lancaster)
Source: Kevin Nute



69. Section of the St Mark's Tower project, 1929
Source: Kevin Nute

Shortly before the end of his first visit to Japan, in late April 1905, Wright made the popular tourist pilgrimage to the mountain resort of Nikko, three hours north of Tokyo, where hotel records unearthed by Masami Tanigawa indicate that he stayed at the prestigious Kanaya Hotel from 23 to 26 April.[77] The main attractions of Nikko are its famous mausolea, the Tosho-gu (1617) and the Taiyu-in-byo (1653), in which the Tokugawa shoguns Ieyasu (1543-1616) and his grandson Iemitsu (1604-1651) were interred as *gongen*, or deified spirits (Figure 70).

[75] See Wright, *An Autobiography* (1977 ed.), 217-18.

[76] See Clay Lancaster, *The Japanese Influence in America*, 162. There were originally twin pagodas at Yakushi-ji, but the west one was destroyed by fire during the sixteenth century and was only rebuilt after Wright's time in Japan. Wright's contemporary, Ralph Adams Cram, had been greatly impressed with the pagoda at Yakushi-ji, having described it as "one of the most daring, original and yet successful works of architecture in Japan." See Ralph Adams Cram, *Impressions of Japanese Architecture and the Allied Arts* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Co., 1905), 37-38. Cram's book, primarily a photographic survey of temples and shrines, did not appear until after Wright's first visit to Japan in 1905, although it was subsequently reviewed by his print collecting colleague Frederick Gookin. See Frederick W. Gookin, "Japanese Architecture and the Allied Arts," *The Dial* (Chicago) 40, no. 474 (16 March 1906): 192.

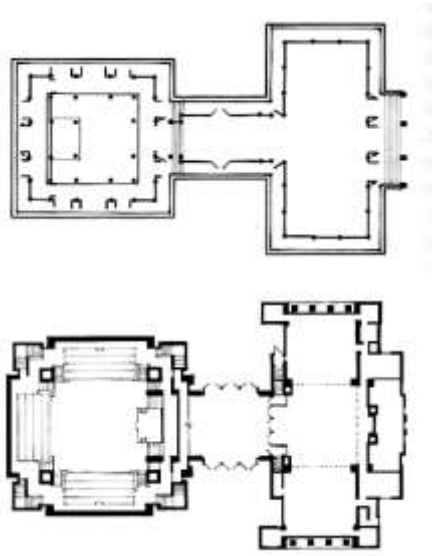
[77] Wright was sufficiently impressed to return to Nikko, and to the Kanaya Hotel, in December 1918. See Masami Tanigawa, "Kanaya Hoteru Register Book ni Mirareru Wright no Toushiku Kiroku" [Evidence of Wright's Stay from Examination of the Kanaya Hotel Register Book], *Architectural Institute of Japan Hokkaido Branch Research Bulletin,* no. 42 (March 1975): 251-54.

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70. The Taiyu-in-byo, Nikko, Japan, 1653
Source: Kevin Nute

Within a month of visiting Nikko Wright and his wife were back in Oak Park, where, three weeks later, their local Unitarian church was struck by lightning and burned to the ground.[78] Through Catherine, who had taught Sunday school at the church, and his own uncle, the Reverend Jenkin Lloyd Jones, Wright had good connections with the Unitarian elders, and although there was apparently a limited competition, it was no surprise when he was invited to prepare proposals for a replacement building. The resulting plan, which Wright presented to the church committee in early September, bore a marked resemblance to the *gongen*-style forms which he had seen at Nikko a few months earlier (Figures 71, 72).[79]



71, 72. Comparison of the plans of the Nikko Taiyu-in and Unity Temple
Source: Kevin Nute, inspired by Masami Tanigawa

[78] The Wrights' return from Japan was announced in their local paper, the *Oak Park Reporter* [Oak Park, IL], 20 May 1905, 4. The destruction of the Unitarian church took place three weeks later in the early morning of Sunday 4 June, and was reported in "Unity Church Fire," *Oak Leaves* [Oak Park, IL], 10 June 1905: 1.

[79] I am indebted to Masami Tanigawa for first pointing out this similarity to me in June 1987. Wright's appointment as architect for the new church was reported in *Oak Leaves* [Oak Park, IL], 16 September 1905, 13. He subsequently presented slides and a plaster model of the proposed building to about seventy-five of the churchmen on 31 January 1906. See "Unity Church Men See Plans," *Oak Leaves* [Oak Park, IL], 3 February 1906, 12. A few weeks later the new church design was featured again. See "Unity Plans Unique," *Oak Leaves* [Oak Park, IL], 24 February 1906, 3.

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Wright gained immeasurably from the time which he spent in Japan, not least through the thousands of prints which he purchased there. As with the prints, Japanese buildings appear to have provided Wright with a rich source of formal inspiration, as well as tangible proof of several 'organic' principles, perhaps most importantly the sympathetic integration of the natural and the man-made. Indeed, Wright seems to have been particularly impressed by the fact that many of the structures which he saw in Japan appeared to be virtually continuous with their surroundings. It was surely no coincidence, then, that his observation that Japanese buildings "like the rocks and trees grew in their places"[80] could have been equally well applied to many of his own mature domestic designs.

Wright openly admired the intimate relationship between the Japanese house and its garden, and as many writers have suggested, this sense of continuity with the landscape is clearly one of the most important characteristics which his work shares with traditional Japanese architecture. In a similar way, the huge projecting roof canopies of many of the temple buildings enable them to interpenetrate with their surrounding space in essentially the same kind of mutually interlocking relationship which seems to have lain at the core of Wright's concept of 'organic' structure, as he would appear to have been acknowledging when he explained: "In organic building nothing is complete in itself but is only complete as the part is merged into the larger expression of the whole. Something of this had begun to find its way into many Oriental buildings."[81] Indeed, perhaps more than any other single idea, in its architecture and its gardens, if not in its very social structure, for Wright Japan itself seems to have embodied the notion of a mutually interdependent 'organic' environment, in which each apparently separate entity is in fact dependent on its neighbors, both for its meaning and for its very existence.

[80] Wright, "The Print and the Renaissance," manuscript, Taliesin, 15 November 1917. © FLWF.

[81] Wright, *The Future of Architecture* (New York: Horizon Press, 1953), reprinted ed. (New York, and Scarborough, Ontario: Meridian, 1970), 66.

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Unit 3 • Organic Form

Themes:

- The history of analogies between made and living things
- The functional and aesthetic interpretations of the organic whole
- How the aesthetic interpretation influenced Wright's own work

Analogies between the forms of living things and made artifacts are almost as old as philosophy. In the West, they can be traced as far back as ancient Greece, and from the beginning they appear to have encompassed both an appreciation of the visual composition of living bodies and their fitness for practical purposes. The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates, for example, interpreted the appeal of living forms in distinctly functional terms:

> You think do you that good is one thing and beautiful another? Don't you know that …. It is in relation to the same things that men's bodies look beautiful and good, namely in relation to those things for which they are useful.[82]

The Socratic concept of functional beauty can be traced through history right down to 20th century architecture,[83] and it was an important part of the notion of organic architecture proposed by Frank Lloyd Wright's early mentor Louis Sullivan. Early analogies with living things also focused on their purely formal qualities, however, as coherent wholes composed of distinct parts. Socrates' student Plato, for example, saw the ordering principles exhibited in the forms of living things as a suitable model for artistic composition, and declared that "every discourse ought to be constructed like a living organism, having its own body, head and feet."[84] This purely formal appreciation of the organic whole was inherited by the 18th century German philosopher Immanuel Kant, and via Ernest Fenollosa, seems to have had a powerful effect on Frank Lloyd Wright's interpretation of the organic that served to form an important distinction between Wright's concept of organic architecture and the functional interpretation of his mentor Louis Sullivan.

The first use of the term "organic" in relation artistic forms has been attributed to the English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who in 1830 drew a distinction between mechanic and organic forms of composition which was later taken up by the influential American writer and critic Ralph Waldo Emerson.[85] It appears to have been Emerson's friend, the sculptor Horatio Greenough, however, who in 1840 first applied the term "organic" to architecture and gave it a new, functional interpretation:

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[82] Socrates, *Xenophon: Memorabilia and Oeconomicus*, Trans. E. Marchant (London: Heinemann, 1923, Vol. III, 5, 6.

[83] Appreciation of the functional nature of living forms can be traced from antiquity in the writings of numerous architects and critics. See for example, Edward De Zurko, *Origins of Functionalist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957).

[84] Plato, "Phaedrus," 264 BCE, as quoted by S. H. Butcher in *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art with a Critical Text and Translation of "The Poetics"* (London: Macmillan, 1895) 177. Having been central to Greek and Renaissance thought, the concept of aesthetic wholeness found its way into nineteenth-century American architectural theory primarily through the writings of Coleridge and Emerson and their interpretations of the German Romantics. On these links, see Donald Drew Egbert, "The Idea of Organic Expression and American Architecture," in *Evolutionary Thought in America*, ed. Stow Persons (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; and London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 336-96.

[85] See *Coleridge's Essays and Lectures on Shakespeare*, ed. Ernst Rhys (London: J.M. Dent, 1907), 46, and Vivian Hopkins, *Spires of Form: A Study of Emerson's Aesthetic Theory* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1965), 14, 78.

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> The edifices in whose construction the principles of architecture are developed may be classified as "organic" if formed to meet the wants of their occupants, or "monumental" if addressed to the sympathies, faith or the taste of people.[86]

At the same time, architectural theorists in Europe began to take an interest in ideas emerging from the new science of biology, in particular the notions of evolution and species classification. The French architect and theorist Eugene Viollet-le-Duc was one of the first to use such analogies in 1854, and the German architectural writer Gottfried Semper likewise used a system of classification derived from biology to describe styles of art.[87]

The notion of "organic evolution" was to have the greatest impact on architecture. The first American architect to use such an analogy appears to have been Leopold Eidlitz, who in 1881 described the development of Gothic architecture in evolutionary terms, and suggested: "In nature forms are the outcome of environment. Environment determines function, and forms are the result of function."[88]

Analogies between building design and the way living organisms were adapted to their particular environments became common among late 19th century architects, and in the United States this was combined with a plea for a new, genuinely indigenous architecture independent of Europe. This idea was especially popular in the booming city of Chicago, which following the fire that devasted its downtown in 1877 was rapidly developing a new building type, the tall office building, using the recently introduced technologies of steel frames and mechanical elevators.

As Frank Lloyd Wright later explained, it was his mentor, Louis Sullivan, who seems to have first combined the previously separate notions of "organic" and indigenous American architecture:

> The ideal of an organic architecture for America was touched upon by Richardson and Root [John Welborn Root 1850-1891]…but was developing consciously twenty eight years ago in the practice of Adler and Sullivan when I went to work in their office.[89]

Sullivan interpreted the organic form primarily as an expression of specific functions, an idea apparently derived from his reading of the English sociologist Herbert Spencer's understanding of evolution, in which the formal differentiation of the parts of organisms was seen as a result of their adaptation to differing functions:

> A FUNCTION to each organ and each organ to its own function, is the law of all organization. To do its work well, an apparatus must possess special fitness for that work; and this implies unfitness for any other work.[90]

Apparently inspired by this essentially functional explanation of the causes of organic development, in his *Kindergarten Chats* Sullivan argued:

> If we call a building a form, then there should be a function, a purpose, a reason for each building, a definite explainable relation between the form, the development of each building, and the causes that

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[86] Horatio Greenough, "American Architecture," *Form and Function, Remarks on Art by Horatio Greenough*, ed. Harold A. Small (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1947), 64, 65.

[87] See Philip Steadman in *The Evolution of Designs: Biological Analogy in Architecture and the Applied Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 67.

[88] Leopold Eidlitz, *The Nature and Function of Art, More Especially of Architecture* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1881), 358, as quoted by Philip Steadman in *The Evolution of Designs: Biological Analogy in Architecture and the Applied Arts,* 58.

[89] Frank Lloyd Wright, "In the Cause of Architecture," *The Architectural Record*, May 1914, as quoted in *Frank Lloyd Wright: An American Architecture*, ed, E. Kaufmann (New York: Horizon, 1955), 65.

[90] Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics* (1892), abridged and revised; together *with The Man Against the State* (New York: Appleton, 1893), 121.

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> bring it into that particular shape; and…the building, to be good architecture, must, first of all, clearly correspond with its function….[91]

Sullivan's interpretation of organic form was summed up in his often quoted statement "…form ever follows function,"[92] which had a major influence on 20th century modern architecture:

> . . . if a building is properly designed, one should be able with a little attention, to read through that building to the reason for that building. . . .
> . . . Consequently each part must clearly express its function that the function can be read through the part.[93]

In fact, even if perfect adaptation to function were practically achievable in a building, it would almost certainly not be widely appreciated, since this would require a detailed knowledge of the internal functions of buildings unavailable to most casual observers. The three distinct zones reflecting changes of internal function are clearly visible in Sullivan's office buildings, for example, but without knowing those functions in detail the "fitness" of these forms is impossible to judge (Figure 73).



73. Adler and Sullivan, Guaranty Building, Buffalo, New York, 1896
Source: Wikimedia
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prudential_buffalo_louis_sullivan.jpg

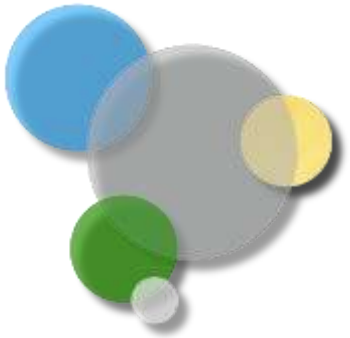
[91] Louis H. Sullivan, *Kindergarten Chats and Other Writings* (1947), reprinted ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1979), 46.
[92] Louis H. Sullivan, "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered," *Lippincott's Magazine* (March 1896): 409.
[93] Sullivan, *Kindergarten Chats*, 47.

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While Wright would have been well aware of Sullivan's functional explanation of the appeal of the organic form, he appears to have differed fundamentally from his mentor in his own interpretation, preferring to suggest not that form was a *result* of function, but rather that in living organisms and organic architecture the two were fully integrated. The source of this critical difference seems to have lain in the quite different analysis of the appeal of organic forms made by Immanuel Kant.

As Kant had pointed out a century before Herbert Spencer's functional interpretation of the organic form, our appreciation of objects is by no means always based on an assessment of their suitability for a known purpose. Kant argued that as long as a form appears generally "purposive," that is, coherent or ordered, it isn't necessary to know its actual purpose to be able to appreciate it purely as a form, irrespective of function. Kant explained that the organic form was uniquely appealing in this respect, because its parts were not only functionally but also formally interdependent, making it an inherently pleasing visual whole, regardless of any knowledge of its functions.[94]

In the same month that Louis Sullivan published his influential interpretation of the Tall Office Building based on Herbert Spencer's functionalist ideas, Wright's other major early influence, Ernest Fenollosa published his own, purely formal explanation of the appeal of the organic whole, based on Kant's notion of aesthetic judgement. "The Nature of Fine Art" argued that all art, regardless of content, needed to be based on a coherent formal idea, and that the organic form, in which all the parts are interdependent represented the ideal model (Figure 74).[95]



74. Diagrammatic representation of an interdependent organic whole
Source: Kevin Nute

Fenollosa singled out Japanese art in particular as a prime example of organic form, and Wright's own account of the Japanese print, published in 1912, repeated Fenollosa's essentially Kantian aesthetic interpretation of the appeal of its organic form.[96] For Wright, the initial means of bringing this quality of organic interdependence of parts into his own work seems have come in the form of a series of two-dimensional interlocking patterns illustrated in a graphic interpretation of Fenollosa's ideas published in 1899 by his former colleague at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur Dow.

In his Introduction to *Composition*,[97] Dow described how he was using primarily Japanese examples to illustrate what he and Fenollosa considered to be universal aesthetic principles.[98] From his studies of Japanese

[94] See J. H. Bernard. trans., *Kant's Kritik of Judgement* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1892), 277, 280.

[95] Ernest Fenollosa, "The Nature of Fine Art: I," *The Lotos* 9, no. 9 (March 1896): 663-73. "The Nature of Fine Art: II," *The Lotos* 9, no. 10 (April 1896): 753-62.

[96] See Ernest Fenollosa, "The Lessons of Japanese Art," manuscript, Nov. 1891, bMS Am 1759.2 (54), 15, Compositions by Ernest Francisco Fenollosa 1853-1908, the Ernest G. Stillman Papers, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University, and Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Japanese Print: An Interpretation* (Chicago: Ralph Fletcher-Seymour, 1912).

[97] Arthur Wesley Dow, *Composition, A Series of Exercises Selected from a New System of Art Education* (Boston: J.M. Bowles, 1899).

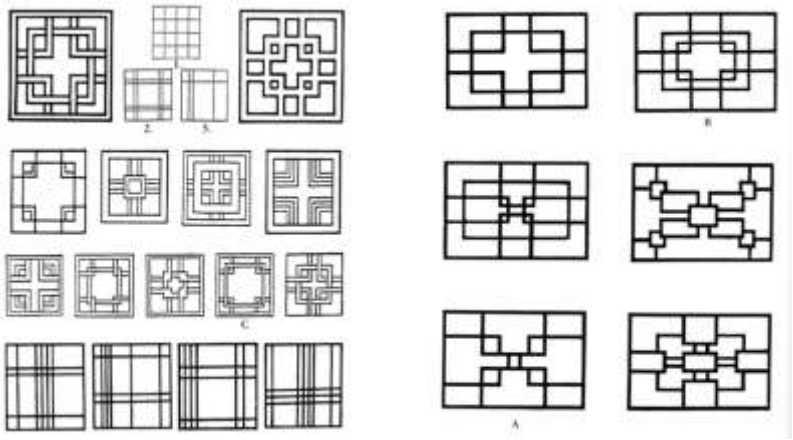
[98] Dow explained: "He [Fenollosa] had had exceptional opportunities for a critical knowledge of both Eastern and Western art, and as a result of his research and comparisons, guided by a brilliant mind's clear grasp of fundamental ideas, had gained a new conception of art itself. He believed Music to be, in a sense, the key to the other fine arts, since its essence is pure beauty; that

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art, Fenollosa had come to the conclusion that the quality of organic wholeness was essential to all the arts. Dow took this up as a central theme in *Composition*, where he illustrated the concept in the form of a series of simple two-dimensional patterns, or 'organic" line-ideas, which, while having no obvious practical purpose, displayed an aesthetically pleasing balance of differentiation and interdependence of parts characteristic of the organic whole (Figures 74, 75).

> Every part of a work of art has something to say. If one part is made so prominent that others have no reason for being there, the art is gone. So in this case; if one line asserts itself to the detriment of the others, there is discord. There may be many or few lines, but each must have its part in the whole. In a word, wholeness is essential to beauty; it distinguishes Music from Noise.[99]

Dow chose to express the interdependence of the parts of the organic whole visually in the form of interlock, and this device would later become central to Wright's "organic" decorative designs and architectural plans (Figures 75–81).

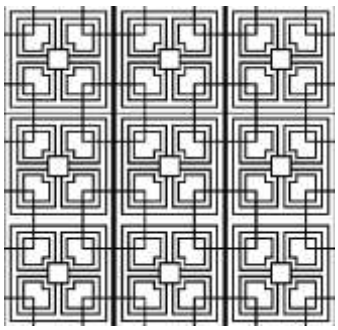


75, 76. Interlocking Organic Line Ideas, Arthur Dow, Composition 1899
Source: Arthur Dow, Composition 1899

space-art may be called 'visual music,' and may be criticised and studied from this point of view. Following this new conception, he had constructed an art-educational system radically different from those whose corner-stone is Realism. Its leading thought is the expression of Beauty, not Representation. I at once felt the truth and reasonableness of his position, and after much preparation in adapting these new methods to practical use, I began teaching a class in Boston, with Professor Fenollosa's co-operation. Here for the first time in this country, Japanese art materials were used for educational purposes." Dow, *Composition* (1899), 5.

[99] Ibid., 38. Fenollosa had earlier made the same point: that it was the aesthetic quality of wholeness which differentiated music from mere noise. See Ernest Fenollosa, "The Lessons of Japanese Art," 15.

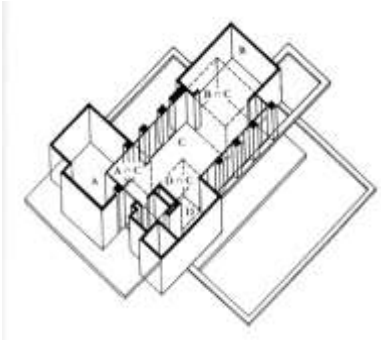
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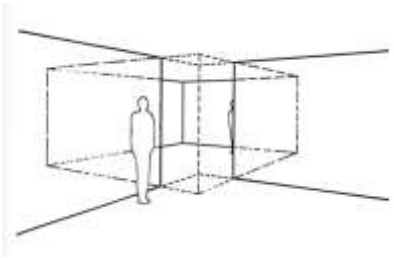
77. Interlocking Square Pattern, John Storer House, Los Angeles, CA, 1923
Source: Lightwave Laser
https://lightwavelaser.com/trivet/frank-lloyd-wright-storer-house-block-trivet



78. John Storer House, Los Angeles, CA, 1923
Source: Los Angeles Love Affair
https://losangelesloveaffair.wordpress.com/tag/frank-lloyd-wright-storer-house/



79. Interlocking spaces, Life house project, 1938
Source: Kevin Nute



80. Interlocking of interior spaces
Source: Kevin Nute



81. Interlocking of interior and exterior space, Samuel Freeman House, Los Angeles, CA, 1923
Source: James Brendan Butler
https://www.pinterest.com/pin/282883038797395 65/

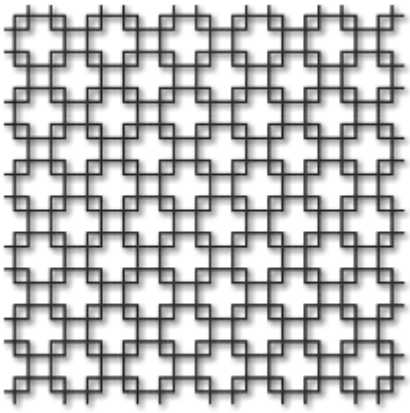
Over the course of his long career, Wright described a host of other positive architectural attributes as "organic," including the expression of materials, place and of democracy,[100] but its primary characteristic, deriving from Kant via Fenollosa and Dow, would appear to have been the visible interdependence of parts (Figures 82, 83).

[100] The social interpretation of the organic form appears to have stemmed primarily from Herbert Spencer's analogy between the organism and society. Wright, for example, drew a parallel between the 'organic' and the 'democratic' form on the basis that each expressed the individual part to the maximum extent consistent with the unity of the whole, having suggested: ". . . our ideal is Democracy, the highest possible expression of the individual as a unit not inconsistent with a harmonious whole." In relation to his 'organic' plan forms he explained similarly: "The plans are as a rule much more articulate than is the school product of the Beaux Arts. The individuality of the various functions of the various features is more highly developed. . . ." Wright, "In the Cause of Architecture," *Architectural Record* 23, no. 3 (March 1908), as reprinted in Frederick Gutheim, ed., *In the Cause of Architecture: Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York: Architectural Record and McGraw-Hill, 1975), 56, 58.

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82. Wright demonstrating interdependence, 1953
Source: Pedro E. Guerrero



83. Diagrammatic representation of a mutually interdependent environment
Source: Kevin Nute

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Unit 4 • Learning from the "Other"

Themes:

- Wright's responses to Japanese architecture in a cultural context
- The notion of cultural appropriation

According to the early 19th century philosopher Hegel, our identity is created in our own mind, and an important part of making both the individual and collective self is the notion of the "other."[101] In the middle of the 19th century, geography and history combined to make Japan the West's ideal "other." A better mirror could hardly have been invented than an island nation at the opposite end of the globe, which, to add to its aura of mystery, had deliberately isolated itself from the outside world for more two and a half centuries. In fact, Japan was so remote that almost anything could be said of it in the West without fear of contradiction by fact.

The "other" is—by definition—distinct from the self. Only differences matter, and these are generally seen as either inferior or superior to the self. The first Western accounts of Japanese buildings conformed to the first category.[102] In 1861, for example, Lieutenant James Johnston of the US Navy, set the tone for many subsequent accounts when he declared that "Architecture is not known among them as an art. Their temples, palaces and dwellings, being all low and temporary structures, generally of wood—the frequency of earthquakes preventing them from bestowing the care and expense upon their buildings which they would otherwise do."[103] Two years later, the British diplomat Rutherford Alcock was similarly dismissive, again lamenting the lack of building height and permanent materials, and offering a questionable combination of geotechnical and bacteriological explanations: "They have no architecture. They live on a volcanic soil, the surface of which is affected with a tertian ague ["marsh fever"], thus denying the first conditions of the builder, a stable foundation, and imposing a law of construction fatal to all architectural pretensions or excellence."[104]

The next group of English publications on Japanese architecture was more accepting of Japanese architecture as different but in its own way the equal of the West. In 1905, for example, the American architect Ralph Adams Cram suggested that: "Japanese architecture is seen to be one of the great styles of the world. In no respect is it lacking in those qualities which have made Greek, Medieval, and Early Renaissance architecture immortal: as these differ among themselves, so does the architecture of Japan differ from them, yet with them it remains logical, ethnic, perfect in development."[105]

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[101] See, for example, Philip J. Kain, *Hegel and the Other: A Study of the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005), 39-59.

[102] On early Western responses to Japanese architecture, see Beate Löffler, "The Perpetual Other: Japanese Architecture in the Western Imagination," *The International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity*, 3, no 3 (2015): 88–112.

[103] James Johnston, *China and Japan: Being a Narrative of the Cruise of the U.S. Steam-Frigate Powhatan*, in the 1857, '58, '59, and '60 (Charles Desilver, Philadelphia: 1861), 405, as quoted by Ellen Roberts in "Japanism and Aestheticism in Tiffany's Bella Apartment Rooms," *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, Spring/Summer 2006: 47.

[104] Sir Rutherford Alcock, *The Capital of the Tycoon* (New York: Harper and Brothers,1863), 240, 243. Even 15 years later, Alcock was equally dismissive when he stated that "In architecture, the Japanese, like their neighbors the Chinese, have produced scarcely anything—not even as much, indeed, as the latter, for these may claim the pagoda as a creation of their own …" Sir Rutherford Alcock, *Art and Art Industries in Japan* (London: Virtue and Co., 1878), 15.

[105] Ralph Adams Cram, *Impressions of Japanese Architecture and the Allied Arts* (New York: Baker & Taylor Co., 1905), 29. Kakuzo Okakura, for one, appreciated Cram's commentary more than previous ones, having commented that "To European architects

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If the "other" appears to have superior features, then self tends to want to acquire them, and, as Hegel explained, this was a particular characteristic of the 19th century European mindset.[106] One means of effectively taking possession of something is to claim it as your own. Ernest Fenollosa and Frank Lloyd Wright, for example, both effectively attempted to do this by describing Japanese art and architecture as "organic," an idea deeply rooted in *Western* philosophy, which Wright even considered his personal invention when it came to architecture.

In the 1930s, European architects beginning with the German Bruno Taut similarly claimed traditional Japanese architecture as a reflection of their own "modernist" principles of functionalism and minimalism. Taut was unapologetic in explaining that he was only concerned with what Japan *shared* with the rest of the architectural world, and not in what made it uniquely Japanese: "The general public thinks Japan interesting because she is decidedly different, and it seeks and finds the very things which are least interesting to the architect because of their local significance."[107]

Such interpretations of Japanese art and architecture in terms of supposedly "universal" Western ideas was a clear instance of ethnocentrism that ignored the local characteristics that actually differentiate cultures. To assume that the products of another culture reflect one's own principles is—if not a form of cultural colonialism—then certainly an example of indirect "cultural appropriation."

The most direct means of acquiring the other, however, is to physically take possession of it, which what the US had effectively been doing with the array of authentic Japanese buildings and gardens built mostly by the Japanese at a series of international expositions held on American soil during the last three decades of the 19th century. Structures such as the Japanese Dwelling at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition and the Phoenix Hall at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, for example, played a key role in encouraging American architects in particular to attempt to recreate "Japanese style" buildings of their own.[108] Initially, at least, such imitations by foreign architects would probably have been considered harmless, and even flattering by most Japanese, as confirmation that Japanese culture was admired internationally. Subsequent reuses of Japanese architectural forms by American architects were both more subtle and, from a cultural perspective, more complex.

Regarded as harmless by some, the practice of reusing forms and ideas derived from other cultures is condemned by others as disrespectful and damaging to cultural identity (Malik, 2017, Tempest, 2017).[109] Susan Scafidi, author of one of the first studies to examine this issue from a legal perspective, has defined cultural appropriation as:

> Taking intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artifacts from someone else's culture without permission. This can include unauthorized use of another culture's dance, dress, music, language, folklore, cuisine, traditional medicine, religious symbols, etc. It's most likely to be

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brought up on the traditions of stone and brick construction, our Japanese method of building with wood and bamboo seems scarcely worthy to be ranked as architecture. It is but quite recently that a competent student of Western architecture has recognised and paid tribute to the remarkable perfection of our great temples." *The Book of Tea* (1906), (New York: Dover Publications, 1964), 30.

106 Hegel, *The Philosophy of Mind, as quoted in Hegel and the Other*, 53.

107 Bruno Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture* (Tokyo: Kokusai Shinkokai, 1939), 9, 10.

108 See Clay Lancaster, *The Japanese Influence in America* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1962).

109 Kenan Malik, "In Defense of Cultural Appropriation." *The New York Times*, June 14, 2017: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/14/opinion/in-defense-of-cultural-appropriation.html. Tempest Bradford, "Cultural Appropriation is, in Fact, Indefensible," NPR, June 28, 2017. https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/06/28/533818685/culturalappropriation-is-in-fact-indefensible.

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> harmful when the source community is a minority group that has been oppressed or exploited in other ways or when the object of appropriation is particularly sensitive, e.g. sacred objects.[110]

As many have pointed out, there is a long tradition of cultures learning from one another to the general betterment of civilization. Writers such as Richard Rogers and Christopher DeGroot, for example, argue that cross fertilization has always been a key part of cultural development (Rogers, 2006, DeGroot 2018). Without contact with China, for instance, the rest of the world would have been denied early access to an array of life-changing innovations, from paper to the compass and the mechanical clock. While these were technological rather than cultural ideas, China's language and art were also absorbed by many of its neighbors. Far from feeling threatened by these adoptions, however, many Chinese seem to regard them with a sense of pride. As the clearly dominant partner in most of these relationships, Chinese cultural identity was never in danger, and as several writers have suggested, the relative power of those involved in the cross-cultural reuse of ideas is central to gauging its potential harm.[111]

At the other extreme, the reuse of a culture's sacred symbols for profane purposes seems highly likely to offend, particularly if they are debased in the process. The adoption of the swastika—an ancient religious symbol of good fortune in South and East Asia—as a representation of 20th century Aryan nationalism, for example, irreparably damaged the image of this form in the minds of many.[112] Depending on the circumstances, then, the reuse of ideas derived from other cultures can range from benign interpretation to banal or potentially grotesque distortion.

Potential harm to a culture or its members would seem to be a central to defining what constitutes cultural misappropriation, and there appear to be two main ways in which such harm might occur: *loss* or *offense*. Loss could involve anything from potential income to cultural identity, for example, while offense might stem from the simple knowledge that ideas had been used without permission or acknowledgement.

Two characteristics seem to emerge for the reuse of forms or ideas derived from another culture to potentially cause harm, either to a culture itself or to its members. For either of these to occur, a form or idea would need to be both *culturally significant* in its original context and also *recognizable* as deriving from that source in its new context. Stated the other way around, neither the identity of a culture nor the feelings of its members could reasonably be claimed to have been harmed in any serious way by the reuse of a form that was either not culturally significant, or, alternatively, unrecognizable in its new context.

Neither Culturally Significant nor Immediately Recognizable

The model home Wright designed for *Life* magazine in 1938 appears to have been at least partially inspired by a Japanese house plan illustrated in Edward Morse's *Japanese Homes and Their Surroundings*. The parallel is most apparent if Morse's Japanese plan is compared with Wright's *Life* plan as it was eventually built in 1939 in the form of the Bernard Schwartz house (Figures 84, 85).

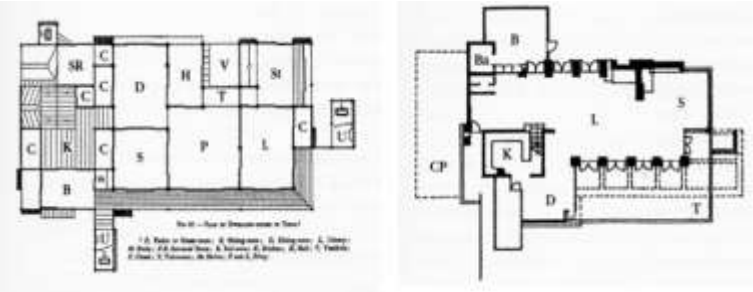
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[110] Susan Scafidi, *Who Owns Culture? Appropriation and Authenticity in American Law* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press).

[111] Jarune Uwujaren, "The Difference Between Cultural Exchange and Cultural Appropriation," Everyday Feminism, September 30, 2013. https://everydayfeminism.com/2013/09/cultural-exchange-and-cultural-appropriation. Rivka Galchen, and Anna Holmes, "What Distinguishes Cultural Exchange from Cultural Appropriation?" *New York Times,* une 8, 2017: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/08/books/review/bookends-cultural-appropriation.html.

[112] Lorraine Boissoneault, "The Man Who Brought the Swastika to Germany, and How the Nazis Stole it." Smithsonian.com, April 6, 2017: https://www.smithsonianmag.com/ history/man-who-brought-swastika-germany-and-how-nazis-stole-it-180962812.

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84, 85. Edward Morse's Dwelling in Tokio and Wright's Schwartz House, 1939
Source: Kevin Nute

The Morse plan would surely not have been considered culturally significant in Japan, however, and most Japanese would have been hard pressed to recognize it as having originated in Japan.

Culturally Significant but Not Immediately Recognizable

Although the shrines at Nikko are famous throughout Japan and can certainly be considered culturally significant, again it seems unlikely that many Japanese would recognize anything from their own culture in the external forms of Unity Temple (Figures 86, 87).

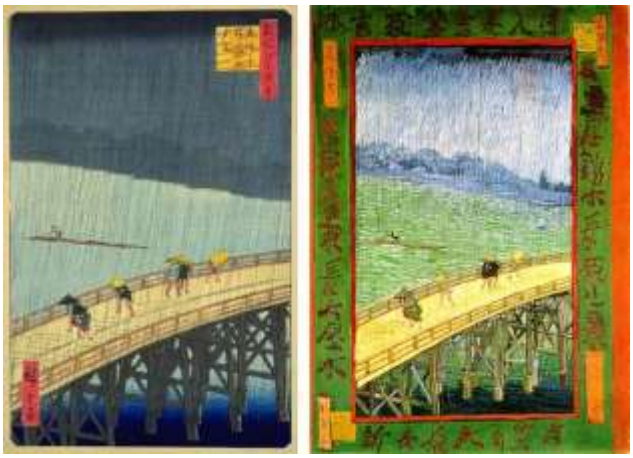


86. 87. The Nikko Taiyu-in, 1653, and Wright's Unity Temple, 1907
Source: Kevin Nute and Ook Park Public Library

Not Culturally Significant but Immediately Recognizable

The particular Japanese woodblock prints recreated in some of Vincent Van Gogh's early paintings, for example, would not have been considered representative of Japanese culture. Indeed, in Japan itself the prints were not treated as genuine art until well into the 20th century, but these scenes would certainly have been recognizable by most Japanese. Indeed, Van Gogh openly acknowledged their sources in the titles of these works and even attempted to replicate the Japanese text on some (Figures 88, 89).

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88, 89. Utagawa Himshige, Sudden Shower over Shin-Ohashi Bridge, 1857, and Vincent Van Gogh's version, 1887
Source: Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sudden_Shower_over_Shin-%C5%8Chashi_bridge_and_Atake

Both Culturally Significant and Immediately Recognizable

The swastika was an ancient religious symbol found throughout Eurasia and is still a symbol of divinity and well-being in several Indian religions. During the early 20th century, it has also become popular in the West as a sign of good fortune and was on everything from commercial products to military insignia (Figures 90–97).[113]



90, 91. Jain swastika (India) and Buddhist manji (Japan)
Source: hafsite.org
https://www.hinduamerican.org/blog/10-things-you-need-to-know-about-the-swastika/



92–95. 19th Century Western commercial uses of the swastika.
Source: hafsite.org
https://www.hinduamerican.org/blog/10-things-you-need-to-know-about-the-swastika/

[113] See Mukti Jain Campion, "How the world loved the swastika—until Hitler stole it," *BBC Magazine*, October 2014: https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-29644591.

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96. Early 20th United States military insignia.
Source: Steven Heller
https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-29644591



97. Nazi Hakenkreuz, 1930s
Source: Hugo Jaeger, LIFE archives/Getty Images
https://www.life.com/history/a-brutal-pageantry-the-third-reichs-myth-making-machinery-in-color/

In this case there is little question over either the cultural significance of the form in its original context or of its recognizability in the new one. Each of these examples would seem to be potentially harmful not only to cultural sensitivities but also identity. Not *all* cases of culturally significant forms being recognizably reused by a different culture necessarily harm the original culture, however. When that cultural is dominant, its identity and that of its members are unlikely to be seriously harmed by the adoption of its forms by others. Indeed, it seems much more likely to be the other way around, as indigenous cultures are often undermined by the adoption of elements of global popular culture.

It could be argued that only members of an originating culture are really in a position to judge whether or not a particular form is culturally significant. But even leaving aside the question of cultural significance, it seems that few people, including most Japanese, would have immediately recognized the forms of any of Wright's buildings as Japanese in origin, suggesting that their reuse posed little threat to either Japanese feelings or identity.

There remains the ethical issue of whether or not it was proper for Wright to use these forms—with or without the awareness of the Japanese—and even if it was, whether he should have acknowledged his sources. It is difficult to imagine who might have been in a position to have given him "permission" for the reuse of such forms, but acknowledging his sources was clearly within Wright's control, and, initially at least, he chose not to do so, apparently because he feared it would have diminished his originality in the minds of many.[114] Yet in abstracting the underlying forms of several Japanese buildings, Wright appears to have found an effective way of absorbing the essence of the other without diluting its identity or compromising his own.

[114] Wright later hinted that he felt bad about this, describing Japan as "the great insulted." See Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Future of Architecture* (1970 ed.), 110.

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The Wider Lessons of Wright's Relationship with Japan

Themes:

- What Wright derived from Japan
- The notion of originality
- What we can learn from Wright's relationship with Japan

From his apparent reuse of the plans and sections of several Japanese buildings it seems clear that Wright was engaged in something other than simply adopting Japanese forms as found. His use of underlying plans and sections appears to have been highly selective and generally, although not always, underpinned by a logical analogy. He also subjected these forms to a process of geometrical simplification, after which it is doubtful whether they could be described as 'Japanese' any longer.

These examples may tell us as much about Wright's approach to existing forms in general as they do about his particular use of *Japanese* forms. If the terms 'religion' and 'Christianity' are replaced by the words 'architecture' and 'organic architecture' respectively, Wright's attitude to architectural history would seem to have been encapsulated in his summing up of the design of Unity Temple, when, via Pastor Johonnot, he explained: "Informed by the same spirit which characterized the ancient temples, this structure typifies the thought that 'while religions are many, religion is one,' and that the vital power and superiority of Christianity consists in its ability to absorb, perfect, and use whatever was good in all preceding forms of religion."[115]

While Wright's perception of Japan's traditional art and architecture reflected the romantic aspect of popular 19th century Japanism, as well as several ideas which were central to the Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts movements, it also differed significantly from the norm, primarily by being underpinned with the ideas of the Boston Japanologists, Edward Morse, Ernest Fenollosa, Arthur Dow, and Kakuzo Okakura. In fact, the views of this group appear to have exercised a major influence not only on Wright's interpretation of Japanese art and architecture but also on his approach to his own work.

As well as shaping Wright's early image of the Japanese house, for example, Edward Morse's critical analysis of the middle-class Japanese dwelling also seems to have had a direct impact on the form of the Prairie House, and particularly its 'elimination' of several familiar features of the more typical American home of the time, including many doors and partitions. The idea of the home as basically one large room was apparently reinforced for Wright by the central hall of the Ho-o-den; the open structure of which appears to have assisted him in his escape from the more conventional Western notion of architecture as essentially a load-bearing box, and whose unusual marriage of the religious and the domestic may have encouraged him, initially at least, to treat the dwelling as a form of 'temple' to traditional family life, based around the 'altar' of a central communal hearth.

Ernest Fenollosa's aesthetic interpretation of Japanese pictorial art not only appears to have influenced Wright's appreciation of the woodblock print but also his attitude to his own work, having apparently encouraged him to view the creation of a visibly interdependent whole as taking precedence over the expression of function. This approach was reinforced by Arthur Dow's graphic interpretation of Fenollosa's aesthetic theory, which seems to have led Wright to regard each phase of his own work—from the plan drawing to the rendering and decorative motif—as first and foremost a visually interdependent

[115] Rodney J. Johonnot, *The New Edifice of Unity Church. Oak Park, Illinois, Frank Lloyd Wright, Architect. Descriptive and Historical Matter by Dr. Rodney F. Johonnot, Pastor* (Oak Park, IL: The New Unity Church Club, June 1906), reprinted ed. (Oak Park, IL: Oak Park Unitarian Universalist Church, 1984), 16.

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whole, irrespective of content. Indeed, Dow's interlocking "organic" line-ideas may have provided the basis for several of Wright's earliest plans, and in the process, possibly the inspiration for the interpenetrating spaces that became a hallmark of his work.

The concept of organic form had been widely interpreted in relation to art and architecture well before Wright himself came to it in the late 1880s, and his own use of the term actually embraced several quite distinct ideas. Since Wright himself rarely made it clear which particular interpretation he was employing at any given moment, his use of the word "organic" has often appeared to be so all-embracing as to lack any definite meaning at all. Essentially, however, it seems to have encompassed the following main ideas, each of which had a considerable history in its own right: the concept of functional adaptation; the idea of environmental adaptation; the notion of aesthetic wholeness expressed as interdependence; and a social or, more specifically, democratic interpretation.

While Wright's introduction to the concept of organic form has generally been attributed to Louis Sullivan—and indeed Wright himself implied as much—precisely how, and from whom, Wright came to derive these various interpretations of the idea remains a subject of discussion. However, what matters for our present purposes is that for Wright, at least, most of these 'organic' characteristics would seem to have been exemplified in the traditional art and architecture of Japan.

This was certainly the case with the concepts of functional and environmental adaptation, Wright having expressly praised the Japanese house and the woodblock print for their honest use of materials toward appropriate ends. And, likewise, he openly admired the way in which many Japanese buildings were so well adapted to their physical surroundings that they appeared almost to merge with the landscape.

When Wright described the woodblock print as organic, he seems to have meant primarily that it was an aesthetically pleasing whole in itself, irrespective of its rational content. In fact, this kind of aesthetic, or 'eye-minded,'[116] viewpoint seems to have characterized Wright's perception of Japan in general. And in its stress on the organic whole as a formal rather than rational idea, it appears that Ernest Fenollosa's interpretation of Japanese art may well have had an influence on this approach, and thence, indirectly, on an important difference in emphasis between Wright's view of the organic form as a visually interdependent whole and Louis Sullivan's interpretation of it as an expression of differing functions.

For Wright, like Fenollosa, it was the wider implications of Japanese art which made it of such significance: as specific proof of *universal* ideals. In the case of the woodblock print, for example, this included not just beauty, in the form of aesthetic wholeness, but also truth, expressed as functional honesty, as well as moral goodness achieved through the 'democratic' reflection of everyday life.

Yet, while Wright's work shared several of its 'organic' ideals in common with traditional Japanese art and architecture, it was in no sense Japanese, as he himself had always insisted, perhaps most effectively when he explained: "It cannot truthfully be said, however, that organic architecture was derived from the Orient. We have our own way of putting these elemental (so ancient) ideals into practical effect."[117] Indeed, in being primarily concerned with emphasizing *space* as a continuous entity, Wright's mature work was actually distinct from both the Western tradition of enclosing space *and* the Japanese approach of marking its intervals. Apart from a shared sense of continuity between interior and exterior, spatially Wright's work seems to have shared as much in common with the woodblock print as with Japanese architecture. The challenging of the separation between real and pictorial space in the prints seems to have encouraged a similar approach, not just in Wright's renderings but also his architectural plans.

While Wright's work cannot be said to have been Japanese in direct sense, he does seem to have derived several underlying forms from individual Japanese buildings, and undoubtedly learned from the Japanese respect for the natural patterns with materials. Towards the end of his career Wright came close to acknowledging his formal, as well as philosophical, debt to Japan, when he admitted:

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[116] This was Wright's self-description. See Wright, *An Autobiography* (1977 ed.), 87.

[117] Wright, *The Natural House* (New York: Horizon Press, 1954), reprinted ed. (London: Pitman and Sons, 1971), 219.

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> Artists, even great ones, are singularly ungrateful to sources of inspiration—among lesser artists ingratitude amounts to phobia. No sooner does the lesser artist receive a lesson or perceive an idea or even receive the objects of art from another source, than he soon becomes anxious to forget the suggestion, conceal the facts, or, if impossible to do this, to minimize, by detraction, the 'gift.' And as culture expands, we soon, too soon, deny outright the original sources of our inspiration as a suspected reproach to our own superiority. This you may quite generally find in the modern art world. At this moment in our development Japan particularly is thus the 'great insulted.' Cowardly evasion seems unworthy of great artists or great causes, and certainly is no manner in which to approach great matter for the future. Ignorance of origins is no virtue—nor to keep fresh thought ill-advised concerning them.[118]

Like many others, Wright seems to have feared that few would have understood that the bringing together of previously existing but *unconnected* concepts and forms actually lies at the very core of the creative act. As an artist, then, it was neither Wright's place nor his intention to *invent* entirely new concepts, or indeed completely *new* forms. The essence of his art lay in bringing these elements together, to create what Vincent Scully described as new unities,[119] and it is precisely in this synthesis of concept and form, in the unique art-idea, that we find his true originality.[120]

Although he apparently digested several of its specific architectural forms, Japan would seem to have served Wright primarily as a kind of 'magnifying mirror,' on to which he projected many of his own 'organic' principles, and *from* which he received these ideals back with a sense of enhanced credibility. Like so many westerners both before and since, Wright appears to have seen in Japan essentially what he *wanted* to see. And in his case, this was a standard of organic character so well developed that he simply could not resist the temptation, not to copy it, but to try to live up to it.

Potential Implications for Discussion

> Cultural differences, rather like differences in temperature or electrical potential, seem naturally to encourage flows, in this case, of ideas.
>
> Long-established ideas in one culture can serve as a source of innovation in another.
>
> It is possible to derive ideas from other cultures without undermining identity.
>
> The "other" is not only a primary means of *identifying* the self, but also of *developing* it.

118 Wright, *The Future of Architecture* (1970 ed.), 110.

119 Vincent Scully identified Wright's "capacity to 'condense' existing forms into a 'new unity'" as one of his greatest strengths. See *The Nature of Frank Lloyd Wright,* eds. Bolon, Nelson, and Seidel, Introduction, xviii.

120 Kant, for example, defined genius in terms of 'original intuition,' having suggested: "... genius is a *talent* for producing that for which no definite rule can be given; it is not a mere aptitude for what can be learnt by a rule. Hence *originality* must be its first property." Kant, as quoted in *Kant's Kritik of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard, 189.

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