



NUMBER 13, MARCH 20, 2000

An Agenda for the Taliesin Fellows Alumni

The Taliesin Fellows are now established as a part of Taliesin, with an administrator appointed by The FLLW Foundation to monitor and direct the future of the organization.

No specific program has been announced for the organization and we publish here a number of suggestions for implementing participation of former apprentices. Goals to be established include reasonable independence for the Taliesin Fellows as well as for the *Journal of the Taliesin Fellows*, an independent *Newsletter*, and development of a network for organic architecture which would include an alliance with existing organizations and web sites.

Mark Calendars

April 9

The Hollyhock House Restoration Committee will hold a party at Hollyhock House 3-6 pm, April 9 as a benefit for the upcoming restoration of this FLLW masterpiece. An exhibition of Frank Lloyd Wright, Lloyd Wright, and Eric Lloyd Wright as well as a retrospective featuring photography of Julius Shulman and A. Anthony Aguilar will be included on the program. There will be live music and cocktails. Call 323-769-5667 (24 hours) to order tickets (\$75) by April 3.

April 22

NorCal Fellows will meet at Midglen April 22 at 2 pm for a spring get-together. Lois Davidson Gottlieb, apprenticed at Taliesin in 1948-49 will present her highly commended video "Building a Dream: A Family Affair" which relates the story of her design and construction of a 10,000 s.f. organic house for her son's family in Northern Virginia. Refreshments will be served. A donation of five dollars is requested.

June 10

In celebration of Frank Lloyd Wright's birthday we plan our annual meeting for 2 pm, June 10 at Midglen. We are hoping to arrange for a visit to the restored Hanna house on this occasion. We will keep you advised.

And maybe we'll do a patio pizza party.

ALL ORGANIZATIONS dedicated to the furthering the principles of Frank Lloyd Wright should be invited to participate in a summit meeting at Taliesin to discuss a coordinated agenda, setting forth goals and establishing committees to study and develop future programs.

STUDENTS should become a part of the organization since they represent the long-range future of organic architecture, and their relationship with the Fellows should be set out specifically.

MEMBERSHIP in the alumni organization should include not only former apprentices but be open to all interested parties as a way of expanding the effectiveness of both the goals of Taliesin and the Taliesin Fellows.

THE JOURNAL should continue with two issues a year and with selection of the editor by the Fellows with approval of the Foundation. The scope of the *Journal* and of the *FLLW Quarterly* should be clear with the *Journal* focusing on the work of former apprentices as well as the work of the Taliesin Architects and the *Quarterly* continuing to publish historical and archival materials. The eventual merging of the publications as the definitive voice of organic architecture for the world should be discussed.

FUNDING for the *Journal* should come mainly from subscribers and members of the Taliesin Fellows with a Foundation subsidy when required. The teaching resources of the Fellows could compensate when subsidy is required and this resource could enhance the educational program of the FLLW School by enlarging the scope of student experience.

A NEWSLETTER of the Taliesin Fellows should be established to provide an open forum for membership, not only a bulletin board, and it should maintain independence without censorship to express members' and contributors' views, interaction, critiques and arguments. Publication should be on a materials-available basis and at least twice or three times a year. The editor should be selected by the Fellows with approval of the Foundation.

A GLOBAL WEB NETWORK should be established to include links to all existing FLLW web sites for the benefit of the public at large.



bill patrick

We await the developments of the new FLLW Foundation-Taliesin Fellows alliance to see what the future will bring.

We have yet to see the impact of Arthur Dyson as the new dean of the school and also what CEO Nick Muller envisions specifically as the goals of the alumni Fellows. As outlined in suggestions for an agenda (front page) the Fellows as alumni might make a contribution to the school as experienced teachers as well as future financial support through fundraising in the traditional academic role of alumni. Sadly, the Fellows as a group are traditionally not "well-heeled". Whether this comes from selfish independence or lack of dedication to the world mission is difficult to assess. In any case it is mostly an aging group which seems to sit and wait, busy with their individual endeavors. Even our *Newsletter* is engaged in a struggle seeking contributors and materials for publication.

Currently the Fellows funding is derived from subscriptions to the *Journal*, and there is little if any surplus. The Fellows, like Taliesin, like the FLLW Conservancy seem to hold their mailing list as a proprietary secret, a circumstance that separates rather than cooperates in the greater mission of furthering the philosophy of FLLW.

We are all engaged in one endeavor; our separate views should offer diversity and at the same time join in leading the world to organic architecture.

Let's hear from you!

We are seeking materials for publication in future **Newsletters**.

Our intention is to expand our readership and to remain a true independent voice for organic architecture.

Commentary, stories, essays, drawings, and items about what you are currently doing will be welcome.



FURTHERING THE PRINCIPLES OF FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

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Letters

Editor:

The T.A.'s article in the (FLLW) **Quarterly**, Vol. 11, No. 1, is the straw that broke the camel's back.

I have seen (in) the past issues of the **Quarterly** how the TAs have "crapped" up the designs and corrupted the ideals of FLLW, i.e., the Rattenbury house in Hawaii stolen from the Jacobs house; a golf club in Hawaii based on the Arthur Miller project, and there is the Pfeiffer house stolen from the Jester project.

And now this, the corruption of the American system. Well this kind of moral behavior is just too true of the American systems (proposal).

What gives the TAs the moral or legal authority to loot the legacy of FLLW. I see the TA's as the equivalent of the pharaohs tomb robbers.

Only Frank Lloyd Wright had the ethical and legal rights to change, improve (or) diminish his designs, to present his variation of a design to as many prospective clients as he wanted to.

But certainly not the TAs (They're) all a sorry lot of plagiarizing camp followers.

Regrets, Donald Palmer
Daly City, CA

REVIEW

by Henry Herold

WILLIAM ADAIR BERNOUDY, ARCHITECT



Bringing the Legacy of Frank Lloyd Wright to St. Louis

University of Missouri Press, November 1999

William Adair Bernoudy was one of the original 1932 members of the Taliesin Fellowship. He was at Taliesin for three years. This new biography is by Osmund Overby, professor of Art History at the University of Missouri with photography by Sam Fentress and a forward by Gyo Obata of HOC which acknowledges Bernoudy's

Curtis Besinger 1914-1999

Curtis Besinger, apprenticed at Taliesin from 1939 to 1955, died in Lawrence, Kansas, from complications of pneumonia and Parkinson's disease on December 12, 1999.

Besinger graduated from Kansas University in 1936 and eventually became a senior apprentice to Frank Lloyd Wright, and one of the leaders in the Taliesin Fellowship. He wrote and published in 1997 the story of his years at Taliesin entitled "Working with Mr. Wright" in which he detailed life in the Fellowship and the day to day experience as one of Wright's senior draftsmen.

After leaving Taliesin (his reasons are recounted in his book) he became a faculty member at Kansas University until his retirement in 1984. He was associated with the Fritz and Fabi Benedict architectural practice in Aspen, CO, and was technical editor and architectural consultant for **House Beautiful** magazine in the 1950s and '60s.

Besinger became an early champion of architectural preservation in Kansas and was instrumental in forming the Frank Lloyd Wright Collection at KU, one of the major repositories of Wright material in the United States.

Many apprentices will remember Besinger's helpfulness in mastering the techniques of drafting and in the guidance received on construction projects.

contribution to residential architecture in the St. Louis area. Bernoudy's widow, Gertrude, established the Bernoudy Foundation for Cultural Endowments which funded the book's production.

Overby's book has successfully fulfilled Gertrude Bernoudy's intention to tell of Bernoudy's origins, life in the Fellowship, and his architectural achievements. There are many insights into the early formative years of the Fellowship and its day to day life. Bernoudy's work of nearly 100 residences was indigenous to the St. Louis area. His materials were usually recycled used brick, sandblasted for patina with raked horizontal joints, composite shingles for the low pitched roofs, copper sheet metal, and

. . . In Passing

John Benton 1942-2000

John Benton, one of the early members of the Taliesin Fellows Los Angeles and a director of the organization died from lung cancer and complications February 16.

Benton was a board member of the Frank Lloyd Wright Conservancy which organized to assist owners of Wright houses in maintenance and fostering continuing public awareness of organic architecture. He was an active supporter of the Fellows organization from its founding and served as treasurer on the board of directors for several years.

Though never having studied as an apprentice at Taliesin he was a close friend in his youth with Brandoch Peters, son of Wes Peters, whom he came to know during the family's visits to Arizona. Wes Peters designed a spectacular seaview house for Benton in Malibu, California in 1977. Benton acted as contractor.

He held a master's degree from Cambridge University and was fascinated with the relationship of Wright to Ralph Waldo Emerson. He researched Emerson as one of the seminal inspirations for Wright's ongoing interest in nature and organic design. The most recent issue of the **JTF** was edited by Benson and purported to develop the powerful influence of Emerson on Wright.

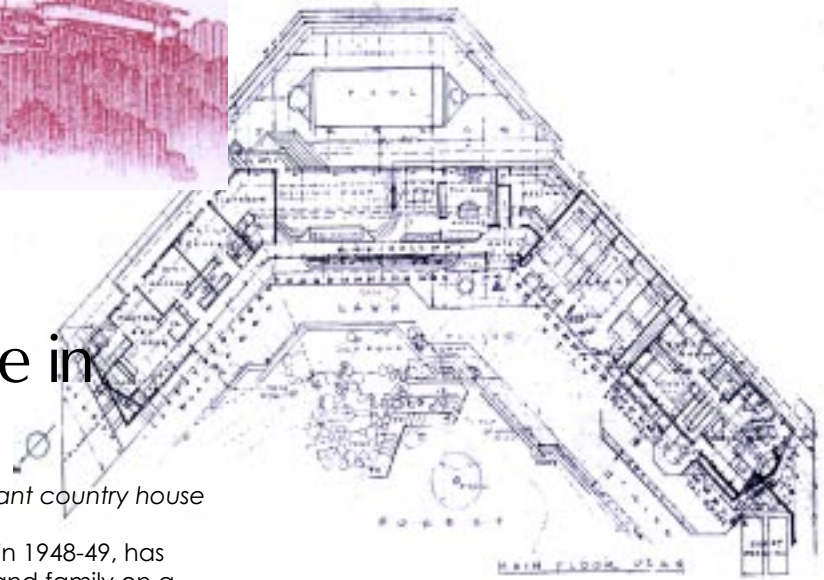
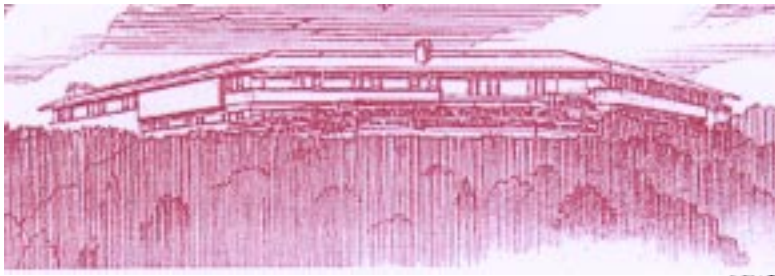
Benton's family were owners of the Encyclopedia Britannica and he served as one of the directors of the corporation.

fascias of canted boards with dentils.

Over half of Bernoudy's architectural career was in partnership with Edward Mutrux who taught architectural design at Washington University. Their partnership dissolved in 1965 and the practice continued as Bernoudy Associates until his death in 1988.

This volume beautifully presents the total work of one of Wright's outstanding apprentices and is highly recommended.

Henry Herold, architect, was a long-time friend of William Bernoudy, and was apprenticed at Taliesin 1951-53. He lives in Tiburon.



Organic Architecture in Northern Virginia

Lois Davidson Gottlieb designs an elegant country house

Lois Davidson Gottlieb, apprenticed at Taliesin in 1948-49, has designed an extensive house for her son Mark and family on a five-acre wooded site in Fairfax, Virginia. A 10,000 s.f. project that took more than four and half years in its execution was supervised daily by the designer. The day to day progress of the work was recorded and assembled into a video documenting the story of the project—"Building a Dream—A Family Affair". Her son Mark, an inventor of hi-tech consumer products, his wife Sharon, and four children were all involved in the creation of the house.

The design is based on a four foot square module which is angled to follow the contour of the sloping southerly wooded site and provides two levels of living space complete with shop, work-rooms and guest accommodations.

Gottlieb developed the design interpreting the philosophy of Wright. "Architecture is a synthesis of client's desires with the site and materials," she maintains. She has completed residential designs in California, Washington, Idaho and Virginia in the course of her fifty years as an architectural designer.

The materials used here featured glulam bents on an 8 foot interval which span the entire cross-width of the 250 long structure and provide a continuous ridge skylight. Brick masonry is used throughout together with "Weatherall" flexible stucco. Concrete walls were formed with plastic ICE blocks which are left in place and provide insulation for the exterior walls. "The structure itself is exposed and forms the interest and ornamentation in this architecture," Gottlieb points out.

The "Video Librarian," a video review guide publication for libraries, awarded the video three stars stating that the Gottlieb design "documents construction of a custom home God might build...if he had a lot of money. . . not the gizmo-cluttered Microsoft Mansion being built by Big Brother Bill, but an ecologically elegant FLLW-inspired domicile in Northern Virginia."

Gottlieb will present her video at the upcoming meeting of the Norcal Fellows April 22 at Midglen. An exhibition of her work as well as tours of the Fairfax Virginia house will be featured at a Washington D.C. AIA presentation in May. She lives and works in San Francisco.



photos by the designer

The Source of Art and Architecture -- Design through the Abstraction of Nature

by Milton Stricker

All great art, architecture, and science have their roots and inspiration in nature. Nature radiates form, rhythm, movement, sound, and spiritual energy. Organic design is the selection of natural elements from nature and it is the artist that transforms this energy into art structure through a process of abstraction.



The Grand Canyon

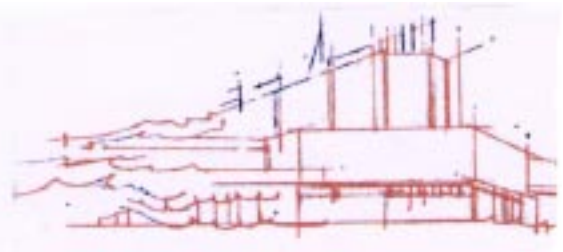
*I am seeing a landscape of vast extent,
always drifting, certain and uncertain.
The canyon is empty,
it has everything.
Lines suggesting more lines,
predictable and unpredictable.
Lines suggesting forms,
perceptible and imperceptible.
Wind suggesting motion,
visible and invisible.
Sounds suggesting words,
audible and inaudible.
But I search for a fixed form,
that I can visualize, it shifts.*

*Taking me to another direction
into new areas of beauty.
Leaving me behind and ahead,
where to begin, when to stop.
Nothing stands still for me,
yet I look for more inspiration.
Searching for an element,
to build a structure to infinity.
The clouds suddenly part, the sun radiates
on a brilliant abstract element.
The source of an unfolding concept,
for art, architecture, poetry, music, or science.*

Nature's shifting combinations of topography, sun, wind, and sound radiate natural energy into dynamic design suggestions. These suggestions are complex, multi-faceted, and constantly changing to create irregular and unpredictable concepts for art structure. As the abstraction process progresses it explodes into multiple ideas for organic design. This natural energy represents the highest potential for translation into visible and invisible works of art.



nature phenomena . . .



to design phenomena

These Grand Canyon River raft sketches demonstrate a simple beginning method for organic design through abstraction.

Milton Stricker, architect, was apprenticed at Taliesin in 1951. He lives and works in Seattle.

bits and pieces

by archie tekker

Aaron Green

Norcal member Aaron Green, FAIA, reports on an exciting new commission to design an entire new school project near Greensboro, North Carolina.

He was invited to make a study along with more than a dozen other design firms for a private "junior college" to be built on a hundred acre site in the North Carolina hills. The sponsors contacted the AIA for a list of architects specializing in school design. 17 names were provided (with the chairman's firm at the top of the list). Eschewing participation in a "competition" Green, nevertheless, decided to submit his project idea.

The AIA nominees were passed over and Green's design was chosen for what may be more than a 100 million dollar project. No budget has been stipulated, nor special criteria for the design.

Although Green has never designed a college campus, his approach was one of human scale in relation to harmony with the site. Instead of monumental institutional structures he proposed many small buildings on the wooded landscape—an environmental approach.

Green got the job and now is into the working drawings phase. He is currently asking for competent help. We expect to present some sketches in our next newsletter.

◦ *Sensitive clients grasp a master's touch!*

Taliesin Architects— The Anointed?

Responses from disappointment to outrage are reaching us about the design proposals of the Taliesin Architects Ltd. to make use of FLLW's 1911 American System-built Houses for a new project in Atlantic City and elsewhere. Many former apprentices see the presentation as plagiarism and "watered down" imitation of the early work of FLLW.

Indeed, the renderings shown in the winter issue of the **Quarterly** are at best mediocre copies of Wright designs and should be characterized as "Wrightish," lacking

real inspiration or originality. While they proudly proclaim their expanding architectural business, there is growing resentment for the quality of work that bears the FLLW connection under the banner of Taliesin Architects, Ltd.

Wright's intention, often expressed, was not imitation of effects, but inspiration seeking the essence.

◦ *Sadly the product of Mrs. Wright's anointed with their apparent license to use the archives as they will is starting to look a bit short of its promise.*

Architectural Integrity?



As seen in
the LA
Weekly
November
19-25, 1999

"THE FACADE OF THE NEW VENETIAN RESORT HOTEL Casino in Las Vegas, the latest casino to feature a "fine art" theme is a pastiche of Venice, Italy's most famous architectural monuments - all crammed together. The casino imported an architectural historian from Venice to oversee the construction of the building while craftsmen labored for months in the heat of suburban Vegas churning out a horde of faux-marble statuary, sculpted in Styrofoam, coated with fiberglass. The interior of the casino is a conglomeration of "faithful reproductions" of Venice's most esteemed artists from the Golden Age with, for the first time ever in a casino, serious contemporary art. One thing you won't see in Vegas-Venice is statues blackened by years of pollution and pigeons, or murky canals filled with sewage. Everything here is brand spankin' new."

By Jeffrey Vallance

◦ *The architecture is by former Taliesin apprentice and Fellows Director Don Fairweather. The budget was \$1,250,000,000. The price of integrity?*

The Preacher

by Frank Laraway

During the last year in the life of Frank Lloyd Wright, it would seem that he was quite aware that his days were numbered and that he wished to leave his apprentices with all that he had learned and his ideas about greater concepts of society, art, and architecture.

One Sunday morning, just after our usual formal breakfast in the foyer of Taliesin West, he was apparently able to break away from Mrs. Wright's protective care and came rambling past the kitchen into the drafting studio. As always, he was beautifully dressed in one of his white linen suits with pork-pie hat and gloves. He always had a contrasting colored tie and handkerchief to ornament his attire. He dressed with the same principles of design, color and ornament that he put into his architecture.

As some of us stood with our backs to the fire we could hear him coming from afar, cane tapping on the concrete floors and then clearing his throat. He had just given us one of his usual Sunday morning sermons on the nature of art - that birds' nests were not architecture, lacking the "spirit of man" for their creation; the machine - that it should never control the architect but used in his hands could bring architecture to a new level; the engineer - he must never control the design process and must be but a slide rule for the architect; that it was the beginnings, the edges and the ends that most counted in our dress and architecture - not what was in between.

He seemed to deliberately move into the sunken area in front of the fireplace and make himself open to conversation. Avoiding the usual, nervous pleasantries which seemed inappropriate, I brashly asked, "Mr. Wright, what do you think of the work of Mies Van der Rohe?"

Without hesitation he answered, "The only thing decent that he ever did was the Barcelona Pavilion and he copied me on that." "Well then, whose work do you like?" I followed. "I like some of what Bruce Goff is doing and there is Nervi."

This confirmed my own feelings about Mies and Nervi, but I was a bit perplexed about his affection for Goff for I eventually found that although he worshipped Wright at first, he had rebelled against his constraining unit system of design. He was also an "outside-in" designer, an artist-sculptor like Corbusier whose works were sculptural for the purpose of outside effects. While he used nature as inspiration, he did not abstract either forms or principles in the way that Wright did. His work was totally free of constraints or formalistic principle. I would later learn that Mr. Wright did question him severely about the "little bit of everything" that was in the design of the Joe Price House in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. The house was the work of an artist, not an architect, full of hundreds of disconnected effects from coal, shattered smelter glass, hand-placed sequin designs on glass, stone, concrete, hanging silvered-plastic, windows cut in the walls abstractly - everything for the avant-garde shopper in aesthetic tricks.

But our conversation did move to the practical. "I have had at times, to turn down clients because they sought to use me as their draftsman. I pick my clients well. Guess you boys won't be able to do that and make a living." Why Mr. Wright did not mention some of his more faithful follow-



ers such as Green, Jones, Hill, BVesinger, DeLong et al practicing outside the Fellowship I cannot even speculate.

He continued with his more practical "you boys" discussion about clients and collaboration with other architects. He went into some detail about his negative experiences with the design and execution of the Biltmore Hotel down in the valley nearby. In the years that have since gone by and coping with clients and architects of my own, I was struck by how right he was about what we would face later in architectural practices of our own.

On another occasion during the regular week, I encountered him near the fountain between Gene's office and the studio where he had been doing his usual morning office work and now was going to his design work.

"Mr. Wright, why is that you place the wood dentils along the fascias of the roof edge about the buildings here at Taliesin West. Why is this ornament integral and not merely applied just as the revivalist designers do?"

"Nature is intrinsically romantic. See how she also ornaments her works with flowers. Her ornamentation is integral to her very being. It is integral for it cannot be whole without it. Organic ornament is the extra aesthetic delight which takes mere building into the realm of true architecture."

I was not fully satisfied with the justification of ornament but it has seeped into me over the years nevertheless. But he was trying to help us as to what we might eventually face and to think more philosophically about beauty.

From one of the older apprentices I eventually learned that Mr. Wright early on attempted to have the Sunday morning events occur in his little Unitarian Church there in the Wisconsin River valley perhaps like he had experienced church there as a child. Perhaps it was that many of his apprentices did not share his Unitarian beliefs even about unity or a god that was known to him only through nature and the teaching of the great prophets such as Jesus and those of oriental religions.

Yet our Sunday morning breakfasts were perhaps a more evolutionary adaptation of his original family church services. It was he now, that gave the sermon taking over the torch handed down to him from his Unitarian minister grandfather, then uncles and even his own converted father. He disdained his own father for leaving his mother, yet it was his ministry and practice of serious music that so shaped his own attitudes. He was a very religious man in his own terms.

He was a social philosopher, an educator, teacher, engineer, visionary technologist, a musician, an architect and lastly, a preacher. I am saddened yet thankful that not only did I have the opportunity to hear his last sermons during our weekend breakfasts in the desert, but that I recognize them as having been religious events where great ideas were presented.

Frank Laraway, architect, was apprenticed at Taliesin in 1958-59. He is a regular contributor to the Newsletter. He lives and works in Silverhill, Alabama

Taliesin Reflections

“Kitchen helper, carpentry and two poached eggs”

by Earl Nisbet

It seemed upon my arrival at Taliesin in the early spring of 1951 that every three weeks I would be scheduled as a kitchen helper at Hillside. I didn't question that fact, but as each weekly work list came out, I found myself favored for kitchen duty over other apprentices. Some apprentices seemed never to be designated for kitchen help. Of course, I thought, as the newest apprentice I was probably expected to do more in a relatively non-thinking job.

Wes Peters soon learned that I had worked as a carpenter building three houses before I came to Taliesin and I was soon assigned to carpentry work. My first part of the year went like this: kitchen and carpentry, kitchen and carpentry. I was assigned to work on the new birdwalk at Taliesin with Steve Oyakawa and Jackson Wong. We were to complete it before the scheduled trek to the desert.

In the desert camp I still was assigned for kitchen duty more often than I had expected. Besides the kitchen job I found myself at the handle end of a shovel for a week at a time, digging holes in the desert to bury the garbage and refuse that I collected from the kitchen and various places.

One day in the early afternoon, as I was cleaning and drying pots, Mrs. Wright walked up to me, and without even a hello, said “You're not afraid of me are you Earl?” Without hesitation I answered, “Why no, Mrs. Wright, should I be?” She suddenly had a funny look on her face, and without an answer of any kind, she turned and walked away. That was the only time I ever found her without a comment. I didn't know if that changed her thinking about me, but three weeks later, when I saw my name on the work list, I discovered I was assigned to the family kitchen. I liked the thought of the change immediately.

The first morning on the new job I met with Kay Davidson about an hour before Mr. and Mrs Wright were to get up. Kay sent me to Mr. Wright's bedroom to build a large fire so his room would have some warmth before he dressed. I was not prepared for what I saw. No one clued me about anything— just build a large fire. A table lamp, some distance from Mr. Wright's bed was already on and dimly I saw Mr. Wright lying in bed. I moved a little closer and noticed his blankets were pulled down from the top revealing his “long johns”. His mouth was slightly open, but he did not move. I could not see his chest rise and fall at all. I froze. I thought he had passed away in his sleep—and on my first day on the job! I nearly panicked in fright, but then I heard a faint breathing sound. Relieved, I built a huge fire and left the room.

I set the table for the family, and when breakfast was nearly ready, I returned to Mr. Wright's room. Kay had instructed not to wake Mr. Wright abruptly, but to tend to the fire and talk to him gently till he awoke. Soon he stirred and asked who was in the room with him. “Earl, Mr. Wright,” I answered. “Oh yes,” he replied, and off I went, happy that he was all right.

I made toast while Kay was finishing some poached eggs that were made in a special cup pan. I thought they should be placed on the toast as my mother did when she made poached eggs in a similar pan, but Kay said Mrs. Wright wanted them on the side with potatoes and parsley. Kay handed me the breakfast plates. About three steps into the alcove I tripped on one of the floor stones and fell forward towards the table with two plates of poached eggs. The one for Mrs. Wright, struck first and landed straight up. The plate for Mr. Wright hit hardest and the two poached eggs slid across the table toward him. He stopped them with his hand and I thought I was finished as an apprentice. I looked over at Mrs. Wright who wordlessly glared at me. Mr. Wright asked me if I was all right. “Yes,” I responded, and as I was about to take his plate back to the kitchen, he picked up the errant eggs and placed them on his plate. Over Mrs. Wright's protest he said, “Mother, these will do just fine.”

I really thought I would be reassigned to kitchen helper the next day, but for the rest of the time I was at Taliesin I continued to serve in the family dining room.



Steve and Earl



Two poached to go