

“Alumni” Fellows —A Done Deal

NUMBER 12, NOVEMBER 25, 1999

The Board of Directors of the Taliesin Fellows, sans two or three members, have concluded and approved a new status for Taliesin Fellows as a part of the Taliesin Organization (The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation).

At a joint meeting at Taliesin West on November 9, 1999, Nick Muller, CEO of the Frank Lloyd Foundation, and Art Dyson, newly appointed dean of the FLLW School of Architecture, representing Taliesin, and the Directors of the Taliesin Fellows agreed to establish the Taliesin Fellows as an alumni association of the school.

June Hill, a current staff member of the Foundation will head the new alumni office as administrator. The office will be quartered at Taliesin West. It was estimated that this assignment would require about 15 hours a week. Details of the organization and the objectives of the organization will be developed by the new head in conjunction with the Foundation and the Fellows. Taliesin Fellows will continue to publish, with Foundation backing, the Journal of the Taliesin Fellows two or three times a year and a Fellows Newsletter will be established with Paul Bogart, former president of the Fellows as editor. The Newsletter will be published at least twice a year and will cover current events and commentary not included in the more archival style of the Quarterly which currently features in its latest issue an article on Emerson and FLLW by Tom Beeby, originally delivered as an address to the FLLW Conservancy two years ago in Buffalo. Beeby is an architect and teaches at Yale part time. John Benton of the Fellows Board served as editor of the current issue.

Funding the cost of publishing has not been solved as yet, and professional editing may become a necessity to produce the Journal. Currently an issue of the Journal may run to \$10,000 including mailing and distribution. As suggested here more than a year ago, eventually the merging of the Journal with the FLLW Quarterly would create the most powerful and encompassing means of continuing both the history of Taliesin and the work of the “Alumni” fellows as the best means for delivering the philosophy of Wright. An invitation was considered to include the FLLW Conservancy which publishes a Bulletin directed towards the maintenance and preservation of Wright designed homes of member owners. The Conservancy holds an annual meeting in various cities; this year the conference was in Phoenix and Taliesin West. The Conservancy may be considering establishing its headquarters at Taliesin as well, leading to the eventual quartering of all entities under the Taliesin umbrella.

It was estimated that the cost to produce a newsletter might come to \$2000 or perhaps \$3000 for two color work. Funding for this endeavor remains to be worked out. Production cost for the NorCal Newsletter using a Mac G3 computer and Epson color printer is under \$200 per issue based on present distribution.

Day 2 - Year 2000

Taliesin Fellows Northern California are invited to welcome the new millennium at Henry Herold's digs at 6 Marsh Road, Tiburon, from 3 to 6 on Sunday, January 2, 2000.

Join us for this portentous moment in time. We are determined to remain plugged in!

Call 415-435-1849 to confirm.

and for next year
We are checking out a visit by the NorCal Fellows to the newly restored Hanna House at Stanford.

critics corner . . .



bill patrick

Things to remember before Y2K. . .

Last chance to pay your dues for 1999 — not that they will be forgiven — and a chance to pay your way into the new millennium. Send your \$40 check to Treasurer Bob Beharka, 1515 Paradise Lane, Los Banos CA 93635.

He knows who you are!

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FURTHERING THE PRINCIPLES OF FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

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The future of the Taliesin Fellows is arriving bit by bit. Often discussed and even proposed amongst much debate, the establishment of the Fellows as an alumni body of Taliesin has finally arrived with almost unanimous agreement by the Los Angeles directors.

Reservations by those who have not supported the proposal seem largely based on the apprehension of the loss of autonomy. The Taliesin Fellows organization was formed as a totally separate entity from Taliesin, even including the possibility of voicing criticism of Taliesin as it became during and after the aegis of Mrs. Wright (though in print nothing much every appeared on this subject).

But the organization failed to find ways of expansion of income in support of publishing the Journal, and it has been operating on a skimpy budget that has left each issue not only in doubt financially, but with no professional editorial director. Volunteers have undertaken this huge task, and to their credit have managed to publish several of the latest issues. (See Archie Tekker's comment in this Newsletter).

The bottom line is that the Taliesin Fellows become an entity of Taliesin, as its alumni organization. There remain the unanswered matters of editorial autonomy of the Journal and newsletter, and the future program to be undertaken by the Fellows. We stand on the side of editorial freedom despite the power of the purse strings; and we would expect Taliesin to respect that.

All of this will require some earnest discussion. Nick Muller has floated the balloon of a publication from Taliesin that includes all: The Archival Wright as represented by the Quarterly, the work of the Taliesin Architects, the Journal of the Taliesin Fellows, and perhaps the Bulletin of the FLLW Conservancy. As he said earlier, this is a daunting challenge.

It is a worthy endeavor.

Post-modern -- Monuments of Excess

An Essay by Milton Stricker

During the '70s the International Style's technological and intellectual extremes led to the birth of the post-modern movement. As the public became bored with the "glass box", architects produced designs that remained obedient to the minimalist doctrines of the Bauhaus International Style by decorating the same old box with fake classical details.

Post-modern philosophical theories gradually slipped into the mainstream of art and architecture, their ideas disseminated by the ruling art and architectural elite. Pretentious designs created without regard for human needs and utility became the basis for art and architecture. Unlike the youth culture of drugs, sex, and rock, the post-modern movement was academia driven with pompous gibberish professing new ideas for the old box.

The AT&T building better known as the "Chippendale" is the most famous post-modern design, because it was Philip Johnson's permissive slip to the profession to create nonsense. The grandiose and pointless gestures of postmodern architecture created a new dishonesty and soon post-modern became known as "Shopping Mall" architecture. Johnson's peers will be surprised to learn of his past anti-Semitic writings and support of the Nazi Party.

Post-Modern philosophical theory against universal truths of nature and reason lead to a series of philosophical theories: structuralism, constructionism, deconstructionism. The Bauhaus/International Style through post-modernism was eventually transformed into the present International Eclectic Movement.

Post-modernism - post-structuralism - deconstructionism according to which objectivity is impossible, meaning is self-contradictory, and reality is socially constructed. They can state any absurdity - they are part of the secular catechism of our age. Post-modern is both period labels and terms of abuse; baroque, gothic, rococo, deconstructed - largely unrelated to aesthetics.

Steve Pinker
How the Mind Works

Art structures of crumpled sheet metal, soup cans, mechanical hammering men, and digitized fruit become high art when the art world says they are. Post-modern theory carries the seeds of its own destruction, and, like the Bauhaus/International style, fails again for the same lack of human, natural, and scientific reason. The traditional definition of architecture, "create order from disorder", has been inverted to "create disorder from order."

That is where we are today.

*They builded a tower to shiver the sky
and wrench the stars apart.
Till the Devil grunted behind the bricks:
"It is striking, but is it art?"
The stone was dropped by the
quarry -side and the idle
derrick swung.
While each man talked of the
aims of art, and each in an
alien tongue.*

Rudyard Kipling

The biggest problem of today's architectural thinkers is not their ideology but their lack of one. Post-modernists want nothing (anything) at all: not Bauhaus, not International, not Organic, and certainly not Reason.

The philosophical post-modernists, a rebel crew milling beneath the black flag of anarchy, challenge the very foundations of science and traditional philosophy ... and ultimately standing for nothing, they are in the worst of all possible worlds.

Edward O. Wilson
Back From Chaos

Modern architecture cannot continue as art or literary theory. Post-modern is the ultimate antithesis of natural reason. The goals and truths of organic architecture are timeless: beauty, unity, common sense, environment, time, place and man.

The assumptions of the Enlightenment -- about unity of all know-

ledge -- about the potential for human progress - were displaced by post-modern skepticism about the possibility of real knowledge and about the existence of objective truth. But now, the promise of the Enlightenment is being renewed. The great branches of learning will draw closer--revealing an order that underlies everything.

Edward O. Wilson, Social Scientist

It is time for the architectural establishment to recognize the tremendous damage it has wrought upon American Architecture with the International Eclectic Movement.

Neil Levine, Author



Art museum, Spain - design by Gehry



Art museum, Seattle - design by Gehry



Water Tower, Kansas - Design by Tornado

Architect Milton Stricker, Taliesin apprentice in 1951, is a director of the Taliesin Fellows, and has contributed to the Newsletter in previous issues. He lives and works in Seattle.

The Resurrection

by Frank Laraway

As older apprentices sat there drawing, facing the oversized stone fireplace at the end of the studio, at first they paid no attention to that familiar sound of the cane tapping on the entry flagstone. But when the tap echoed from a more hollow wooden floor and there was that old familiar clearing-of-the throat, they reflexively rose from their stools in respect. Some scrambled to hide the parallel bars, the radios the lettering machines and sought to quiet the “whistlers” - - but they did not bother or could not conceal the many electronics off to the sides.



Portrait by
Patricia D. Laraway

But they need not fear anyway. He would not come back even if he could for he did not believe in miracles, holy ghosts or resurrections. But if he did, what would he say? What might he think as he looked over their shoulders at their working drawings now devoid of color, mechanically lettered and drawn? Would he figure out the computerized symbolism for notes and information occurring elsewhere? Would he even know what he was looking at as his eyes turned to see the monitors, the keyboards, scanners and printers away from the drawing area?

“So this is what architecture is all about today?” Perhaps that would be all that he might say. His old idea of welcoming in new forms of design and technology in a new environment might seem to let it all fit in. Perhaps the new “graphics” and the new instruments of the drafting room would not offend his always liberal and open mind.

But woe unto us if instead there boiled up in him one of his fits of righteous anger, his “lesser side” came out and that cane came flailing at the monitor screens. There might be an upsetting of the tables of the graphic changers in his studio-temple. There might come a swearing, snarling that, “Machines shall never rule in my house, only an enlightened Man can bring forth Organic beauty and order, never The Machine.”

Yet instead, he might sit upon his lambskin at his old Oak Park board, back to the fireplace, drinking it all in with calmness, marveling at the new technology, graphics and welcome the many changes.

Architect Frank Laraway, apprenticed at Taliesin in 1958-59, has contributed to earlier issues of the Newsletter. He lives and works in Silverhill, Alabama.

bits and pieces

by archie tekker

Number 25 - TJF

"Ralph Waldo Emerson, Wright, and the Unity Temple" comprises the entire new issue, Number 25, JTF. Fall 1999.

Although authorship is never identified in the piece, it is presumed to have been John Benton, Director from Malibu. The article is by Tom Beeby, an architect and former dean at Yale, who presented it at the FLLW Conservancy meeting two years ago. This rather long piece attempts to show the derivation and inspiration of Wright's work and philosophy from Emerson, particularly from his essay of the 1830s called **Nature**.

Benton deserves credit for publishing this rather interest-

ing treatise, but it is pretty dry stuff (only a reflected ceiling plan of Unity Temple is included) and it is difficult to connect with the Fellows mission of furthering the principles of Frank Lloyd Wright. This sort of academic archival musing is best left to the Frank Lloyd Quarterly. The Journal should be of the Fellows and for the Fellows (and their supporters) and their connection to Wright, not where Wright came from and whence his inspiration no matter how intriguing.

The delivered work of Wright is our basis for being — "What a man does. . ." We are becoming more and more academic all the time. Where are these Fellows taking this mission?

A Taliesin Reflection

by Earl Nisbet

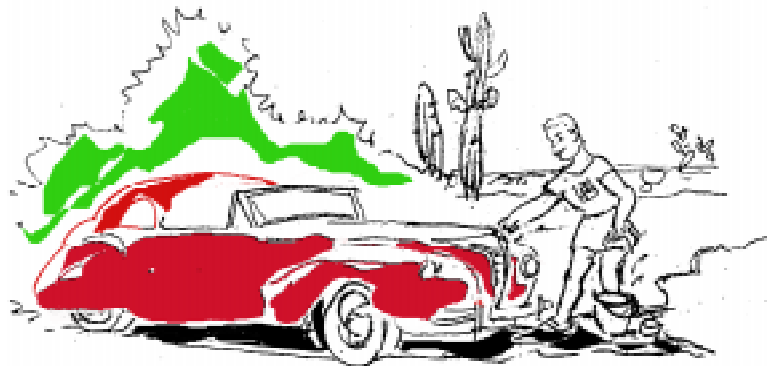
It was early in 1951 when I first came to Taliesin, in Spring Green, and the first apprentices I got to know were Bill and Barbara Morrison. They, having lived in Tiburon, and I coming from the peninsula, the three of us were interested in cars. We had much to talk about; Bill found out that I had overhauled engines, transmissions and automobile rear-ends, as well as tuned engines before arriving at Taliesin. In his talks with Wes Peters he mentioned my automobile background and immediately Wes put me in charge of Mr. and Mrs. Wright's vehicles.

I had a field day checking the fluids, topping off when necessary, and running the engines so they were always ready to take Mr. or Mrs. Wright where they wanted to go. Once in awhile I was asked to take the cars into Madison for special service, which was a nice change for me on those few occasions. In the fall, all the vehicles were ready for the caravan trip to the desert, and off we went.

We had only been at Taliesin West a couple of weeks when, after gassing Mr. Wright's re-designed "Cherokee Red" Lincoln, and since I didn't have much to do that particular day, I decided to wax the car as it seemed so dull. I didn't know it at the time, but Mr. Wright wanted his "Cherokee Red" cars to have a satin finish, especially in the desert.

When I got finished with the polishing job, it shone like hell. Later I learned that when Mr. Wright saw it, he went into a rage. Wes came looking for me, and when he found out that I had done it on my own, he told Mr. Wright, that it was an accident as I had not known that he didn't want his cars waxed.

I was glad not to have been in Mr. Wright's sights that day, but he did give me funny looks after that for awhile.



bill patrick

Earl Nisbet was apprenticed at Taliesin in 1951-1952. He is on the board of directors of Taliesin Fellows, Northern California. He lives and works in Aptos, CA.

When Past is Future: Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin Legacy Continues

A first-hand report on the Pittsburgh Conference by Bradley Ray Storrer

Jerry Morosco, Taliesin Fellows vice-president and secretary, organized the events in Pittsburgh June 23-27. It was a smashing success! Work of former FLLW apprentices ran as a continuous slide show, but the primary thrust of the exhibit was an attempt to present the experience of being an apprentice through the years from 1932 to the present with exhibits by students from Carnegie Mellon School of Architecture and the FLLW School of Architecture. I thought it a good representation of life in the Fellowship and what apprenticeship meant.

At another venue the work of Peter Berndtson and Cornelia Brierly, apprentices of the 30's was mounted. Though knowing Cornelia and being familiar with her later work, the architectural efforts with her husband were not known to me. The exhibit included drawings, photographs, models and some of Cornelia's furniture.

On a walking tour I discovered Richardson's Allegheny Court House and listened to a lecture by James F. O'Corman entitled "**Kindred Spirits: The Architecture of Henry Hobson Richardson and Frank Lloyd Wright**". About two great architects, the talk was interesting, but I found the connection a little weak.

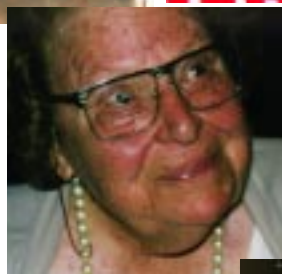
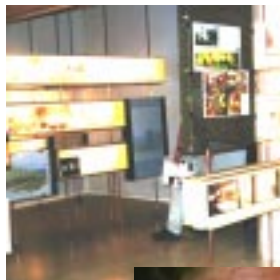
A tour of two fine houses by Peter and Cornelia (the Giles and Miller residences), Fallingwater, and Kentuck Knob occupied a full day Wednesday, June 23. Both the Miller and the Giles residence were beautifully sited on large suburban lots, but the Giles house, built for a steel company executive, had a larger budget. Craftsmanship and well-executed details were a delight.

Thursday (June 24) included a discussion of Pittsburgh's architectural legacy by Franklin Toker, a University of Pittsburgh professor. Charles Rosenblum, Assistant Professor of the University Art Department gave a talk, "**Precedent and Principal: The Architecture of Peter Berndtson and Cornelia Brierly**". This was a much expanded version of his article in the spring 1999 issue of the **FLLW QUARTERLY**. (Though some Fellows criticize the extensive involvement of academia in our events, we must realize that these academics are documenting the work of many apprentices, a task few others are likely to undertake.) Rosenblum, who wrote his master's thesis on Aaron Green and Wright in San Francisco is now documenting apprentice work in a forthcoming book. The highlight of a tour of Richardson's work

was his small Emmanuel Episcopal Church across the Allegheny river. It was completed in 1886. The exterior, rather than Richardson's usual exuberant stone, was brick—but what marvelous brick! If you haven't seen this building, do so on your next visit to Pittsburgh. Bruce Pfeiffer told me this was one of the few buildings in Pittsburgh that Wright liked to visit.

There was an opening reception at the Grand Concourse, an historic landmark train station across the Monongahela from downtown Pittsburgh. Many of the fellows enjoyed dinner organized by director Larry Brink in

Eric & Mary Wright at Kentuck Knob



Brierly



Morosco

the restaurant that occupies the main lobby space of the former station.

Session II began with a talk by Myron A. Marty, co-author with his wife, Shirley, on "**Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin Fellowship**". Newly published, the book is the result of interviews with apprentices at Taliesin, so the views of many of us who left the fellowship are not included. In a later conversation with Marty, he explained he is working on a second volume which will concentrate on those who left the fellowship to avoid Mrs. Wright's domination and manipulation of apprentices' lives. I think we need this kind of documentation.

"From Generation to Generation", a Taliesin Fellows panel discussion moderated by Bill Mims with Cornelia Brierly, Eric Lloyd Wright, Tom Olson, Susan Jacobs Lockhart and Peter Rott focused on the evolution of the Fellowship and its continuing work. The morning session concluded with a discussion of the current work of Taliesin Architects by Tony Putman. Tony always speaks well, but not all of the Taliesin designed architecture

comes off with the same aplomb.

I enjoyed an afternoon tour of the work of Peter and Cornelia, but found that many of the houses had "grown" too much. Young owners, becoming more affluent and needing more space than they could originally afford, made too many additions, and the clarity of the original plan was lost. However, I particularly remember a house of post and panel construction utilizing Cemesto panels. I had been intrigued with this material in the 50's, and I noted at the exhibition that Peter made frequent use of it.

Friday evening's gala at the Carnegie Museum began with Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer's keynote address, "**Olgivanna Lloyd Wright: Her Life, Her Words, Her Work**". I did not look forward to this lecture, but found it quite enjoyable. Bruce read from Mrs. Wright's unpublished (and unfinished) autobiography, which only covered the years before she met Wright. Pfeiffer is currently working on a biography of Mrs. Wright. A cocktail reception in the balcony of the Hall of Sculpture followed with dinner in the grand foyer.

The Saturday Session began with a discussion by Tobias Guggenheimer on the architecture of the apprentices followed by a symposium which was to address different approaches to architectural education but failed to do so, in my opinion. The Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture, since its accreditation, seems to be not much different from, say, Carnegie Mellon. While certain features—many important—of early fellowship life remain, academia has invaded, and if accreditation is to continue, may well conquer. Hopefully, this will change with Arthur Dyson's appointment as the new dean at Taliesin.

An exhibit of the work of apprentices in the allied arts, Val M. Cox, Heloise Crista, and Susan Jacobs Lockhart, was mounted at the La Fond Gallery. Wright was always interested in the allied arts and crafts, and it is appropriate that the Fellows recognize the efforts of those who do not become architects.

So, what did these days in Pittsburgh mean to me? I found a greater emphasis on apprentice work and on the Fellowship than in previous conferences. It is easy to arrange an event around Mr. Wright and his work, but more important to focus on the work of those who further his architectural ideals. Pittsburgh did that, but was hardly a perfect event. It was entirely too expensive. How on earth should Pittsburgh be a more expensive city than San Francisco? My greatest disappointment, however, was that so few Fellows from California attended, missing an excellent conference.

Brad Storrer is on the board of directors of Taliesin Fellows. He lives in Altadena, CA.