

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT'S TALIESIN

(Including quotes by Frank Lloyd Wright from *An Autobiography*)

Taliesin was Frank Lloyd Wright's home, workshop and architectural laboratory for 48 years (1911-1959). Nestled on the brow of a hill near Spring Green, Wisconsin (about forty miles west of Madison), it commands a sweeping view of the valley settled by Wright's Welsh ancestors in the mid- 1800's.

Architects, historians and architecture critics alike have praised Taliesin as a masterwork and a triumph of design. Robert Campbell, Pulitzer Prize-winning architecture critic, called it the "greatest single building in America." The *New York Times* described it as a "stunning collage of Wright's ideas magnificently composed." In 1976 Taliesin was designated a National Historic Landmark, the highest honor bestowed on historic properties by the federal government.

In 1904, Wright's mother Anna Lloyd Wright purchased the land on which Taliesin stands. It was a familiar site to Wright who played there as a boy during summer visits to his Uncle James' farm. Wright loved the hill and knew instinctively that any building built on the hill would destroy it. "I knew well by now no house should ever be on any hill or on anything. It should be of the hill, belonging to it," Wright said.

As was the custom of Wright's ancestors, he named his home calling it Taliesin (Tally ES in). "Taliesin was the name of a Welsh poet. A druid-bard or singer of songs who sang to Wales the glories of Fine Art. Literally the Welsh word means 'shining brow,'" Wright said.

Thus Taliesin became a "shining brow" for the hill, its many wings and terraces reaching out along the crest or brow of the hill, embracing the site rather than overpowering it. Wright again, "Stone stepped up like ledges on the hill, and flung long arms in any direction that brought the house to the ground."

Often described as more of a "hill village" than a house, the sprawling 37,000-square-foot complex grew to include living quarters, guest rooms, apartments, a drafting studio and office, a complete working farm, orchards, berry patches, vineyards, kitchen gardens and a hydro-electric plant.

"Yes, Taliesin should be a garden and a farm behind a workshop and a home. I saw it all, and planted it all, and laid the foundation of the herd, flocks, stable, and fowls as I laid the foundation of the house," Wright said. It "was to be a complete living unit genuine in point of comfort and beauty, yes, from pig to proprietor."

Wright chose native yellow limestone quarried nearby as the basic building material for Taliesin and devised a method of laying up the stone that simulated the stratified layers in which it was found naturally in the quarry. "Taliesin was to be a combination of stone and wood as they met in the aspect of the hills around about. The lines of the hills were the lines of the roofs. The slopes of the hills their slopes.

On the inside, Wright trimmed the naturally colored plaster walls with cypress. The floors were made of waxed cypress or stone. "The whole was all supremely natural. The rooms went up into the roof, tent-like, and were ribanded overhead with marking-strips of waxed, soft wood. The house was set so sun came through the openings into every room sometime during the day," Wright said.

Three years after Taliesin was built, a fire started by a servant destroyed the living quarters of Taliesin. Seven people died in the tragic event, including Mamah Borthwick Cheney, the woman for whom Wright built Taliesin. After the fire, Wright moved into a back bedroom next to the studio and began almost immediately to reconstruct Taliesin. Not all had been destroyed; workshops, farm buildings and the studio were spared. By the end of 1915, Taliesin II, as Wright called it, was nearly complete.

Over the next few years, Wright spent much of his time in Tokyo supervising the construction of the Imperial Hotel and in California working on several residential designs. After 1924, Taliesin again became the center of Wright's life and activity.

In 1925, tragedy struck once more when another fire broke out due to faulty wiring. Again, Wright began to rebuild. As he did the first time, Wright incorporated parts of the earlier structure into the new construction.

"The limestone piers, walls, and fireplaces of Taliesin II had turned red and crumbled in the fire, but I saved many stones not destroyed, so dyed by fire, and built them together with the fragments of great sculpture I had raked from the ashes into the new walls adding a richness to them unknown before. Whereas the previous buildings had grown by addition, all could now be spontaneously born."

Until his death in 1959, Frank Lloyd Wright never stopped adding to or changing Taliesin. It was his principal residence and the longest ongoing architectural project of his career. Thus, Taliesin may be the most complete embodiment of what Wright thought and how he lived.

Taliesin is the heart of a complex of buildings Wright designed for his family on the 600-acre estate. The other Taliesin estate buildings are the Romeo and Juliet Windmill (1896), Hillside Home School (1902, studio addition 1932, theater 1952), Tan-y-deri House (1907), the Midway Farms (1930s and 1940s), and the Riverview Terrace Restaurant (1953).

In partnership with Taliesin's owner, the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, the private, non-profit Taliesin Preservation, Inc. works to preserve Wright's Wisconsin property and its six major buildings. In 1993, Taliesin Preservation purchased the Riverview Terrace Restaurant and reopened it as the Frank Lloyd Wright Visitor Center, returning it to the use Wright intended, as a gateway to the Taliesin estate.