

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Taliesin West

and/or common Taliesin in the Desert; Taliesin on the Maricopa Mesa

2. Location

street & number 1-3/4 miles north of the intersection of Shea Blvd. and 108th Street not for publication

city, town Scottsdale vicinity of congressional district 4

state Arizona code 04 county Maricopa code 013

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name See continuation sheet.

street & number

city, town vicinity of state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Maricopa County Courthouse

street & number 111 South Third Avenue

city, town Phoenix state Arizona

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title National Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1977 federal state county local

depository for survey records 440 G Street, NW

city, town Washington state DC

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Summary

Taliesin West is a complex of low-slung buildings designed by Frank Lloyd Wright as winter living and working quarters for his family and for the students of the Taliesin Fellowship, his school of architecture. It is on the western slope of the desert foothills of the McDowell Mountains, at the eastern edge of Scottsdale. Although some additions and changes have been made in the complex, all the central portions of it reflect Wright's design handiwork and were built under his direction by the apprentices of the Fellowship. Those elements and structures that have been added by the Fellowship since his death have been executed in a manner sympathetic to the key portions completed during his lifetime.

General Characterization

Taliesin West is perhaps easier to characterize than to describe precisely in architectural terms. Wright himself felt this, "Our Arizona camp is something one can't describe and just doesn't care to talk about."¹ Perhaps characterization is, in this instance, more important. Individual rooms can hardly be considered without reference to the overall plan and to the carefully merged landscaping, terracing, and furnishings, which lessen the distinction between indoors and outdoors. These features of the property have prompted one critic to describe Taliesin West as a "progressive spatial experience: a series of events in landscape and terracing, with alternation of tight and loose and dark and bright spaces."²

Taliesin West is constructed largely of the varicolored volcanic rock peculiar to its site. The rocks were set in wooden forms and bound with a special mix of cement and desert sand, sometimes dubbed "desert concrete," to form the massive walls and substructural elements which are among the structures' most distinctive features. Wright's design intention was to integrate the structures with the landscape and to preserve as much of the desert environment as possible. In this regard, he was successful enough to encourage architectural critic William Marlin to write that Taliesin West "grew out of the landscape as if rooted there for centuries."³

Decorative touches on the exteriors of the buildings also reflect Wright's concern for merging the structures with the land. The muted Cherokee red paint used on many details was selected for this reason, with an allusion to the work of a plant physiologist in whose writings Mr. Wright had found statements about the color red as the "one life-giving color in creation."⁴ The beams and rafters which form the massive timber frames that are the supporting elements of the sloping roofs are rough-sawn redwood. The redwood is decorated to give the dotted-line effect Wright regarded as characteristic of the native saguaro cactus. In this manner, the redwood, although an imported material, harmonizes with the natural surroundings and the native materials that form key elements of the structures. Even the road leading into the complex is carefully blended into the contour of the landscape, in order not to appear as a scar on the land.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1937-38

Builder/Architect Frank Lloyd Wright

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Summary

Taliesin West, which has been often acclaimed one of Frank Lloyd Wright's architectural masterpieces, was one of the first major works during the last quarter-century of his life, a period which has been termed his "Second Golden Age." It is also highly significant as his winter home and office during this period and the winter headquarters of his architectural school-community, the Taliesin Fellowship. In Taliesin West and its complement, Taliesin (North) in Wisconsin, where Wright lived after 1911 and where he and the Fellowship summered after the completion of Taliesin West, Wright's educational theories and vision of society, as well as his architectural concepts, are thoroughly expressed.

Frank Lloyd Wright: A Biographical Note

In a biographical statement on the life and career of Frank Lloyd Wright, it is helpful to make some use of Wright's own words, for, as G. E. Kidder Smith has written, Wright by "talent and tongue," became the best-known architect of his time.¹ It seems appropriate to introduce him as he introduced Mies Van der Rohe at the latter's inaugural banquet as director of the Armour Institution:

The evening was interminable and the speeches were successions of platitudes about the greatness of America and about the greatness of the country's institutions in general and her architecture in particular. Mr. Wright, never one to abide empty flattery or listen patiently to anyone else's lectures, walked up to the microphone when he was called at last to introduce Mies. He looked at the audience, said simply, "I give you Mies," and strode off.²

Wright's succinctness in that instance is commendable, but, rather than guiding this discussion, will serve only to illustrate his impatience with meaningless convention, a dominant theme in his career. Along with certain other qualities of his character, this trait must be treated in a somewhat impressionistic fashion. An ordinary biographical summary is inadequate. The extraordinary length and versatility of his career, the large number of buildings he designed, his role as spokesman for a particular point of view about architecture and society, and the candor with which he expressed himself are all significant elements that deserve more extensive treatment. His life is, furthermore, imbued with an almost legendary quality that has aroused both exceptional praise and severe condemnation. He has served as the model for the leading character in at least one novel (and a film based on it), in addition to numerous biographies, and, by force of character, has served as a touchstone of inspiration for several generations in his own profession and others.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 620 (est.)

Quadrangle name Sawik Mountain

Quadrangle scale 1: 24,000

UMT References

A	<u>1</u> <u>2</u>	<u>4</u> <u>2</u> <u>0</u> <u>9</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u>	<u>3</u> <u>7</u> <u>1</u> <u>9</u> <u>2</u> <u>4</u> <u>0</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing

B	<u>1</u> <u>2</u>	<u>4</u> <u>2</u> <u>3</u> <u>8</u> <u>9</u> <u>0</u>	<u>3</u> <u>7</u> <u>1</u> <u>9</u> <u>2</u> <u>4</u> <u>0</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing

C	<u>1</u> <u>2</u>	<u>4</u> <u>2</u> <u>3</u> <u>8</u> <u>9</u> <u>0</u>	<u>3</u> <u>7</u> <u>1</u> <u>8</u> <u>7</u> <u>5</u> <u>0</u>
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D	<u>1</u> <u>2</u>	<u>4</u> <u>2</u> <u>2</u> <u>1</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u>	<u>3</u> <u>7</u> <u>1</u> <u>7</u> <u>7</u> <u>0</u> <u>0</u>
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E	<u>1</u> <u>2</u>	<u>4</u> <u>2</u> <u>1</u> <u>3</u> <u>3</u> <u>0</u>	<u>3</u> <u>7</u> <u>1</u> <u>7</u> <u>7</u> <u>0</u> <u>0</u>
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F	<u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>
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G	<u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>
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H	<u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>
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Verbal boundary description and justification

See continuation sheet.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title James H. Charleton

organization Division of History, National Park Service date February 12, 1982

street & number 1100 L Street, NW telephone (202) 523-5165

city or town Washington state DC 20240

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title	date
-------	------

For NPS use only
 I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

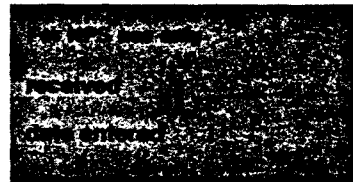
Chief of Registration

date

date

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General Plan of Taliesin West

An articulate general description of Taliesin West in its setting has been given by Vincent Scully. It can serve as a preface to a more detailed explanation of the placement of the property's components:

In its plan--defined both by its hard-shadowed, concrete masses and by their opposite in the spread, tent-like canvas ceiling--the movement is directed along a strong set of axes and reflex diagonals like an abstracted dry river of space. It runs behind the great redwood trusses of the drafting room, cut off from the desert, until at last the building mass splits and the desert is seen again, empty and vast, now framed and given dimension by the architectural forms. To the left was Wright's own two-winged Usonian house, enclosed in a secret green garden against the emptiness and with its own fire deep in its heart. Behind, however, exactly on the cross axis toward the empty space, rises the great gullied mass of a mountain, which spreads its arms around the encampment below it. The movement toward the continuity of landscape space is thus stabilized and given its opposite by the fixed, looming, and protecting mountain form.⁵

Scully goes on to note a resemblance in the plan of Taliesin West to that of ancient Cretan architecture, with which he believes Wright was well acquainted:

It is a fact that all Cretan palace sites directed the main axes of their central courtyards exactly toward a sacred mountain peak, which contained a cave shrine of the Minoan goddess of the earth. The sacred mountains were invariably cleft and horned, a good deal like Wright's mountain here.⁶

This intriguing comparison, which is worthy of further analysis, appears to reveal Wright's familiarity with one of the less traditional sources of architectural inspiration. Wright's admiration for Oriental, especially Japanese, architecture and aesthetics is better known, and likewise is worthy of further elaboration.

Details of the Plan of Taliesin West

From the renowned Entrance Sign, or Monument (ca. 1953), at the main highway, the approach road to Taliesin West leads into the Entrance Court, which is directly in front of the Shops, one of the original elements constructed at Taliesin West in 1937-38. The Shops are aligned on an east-west axis. To the rear of the Shops, the Men's Locker Room (1953 and 1972) and the Student Lounge (1980) have been added.

The main, or longitudinal, axis of the complex strikes out generally southeast at a 60-degree angle from the front facade of the Shops. Along this main axis, to the right, is the principal complex of Taliesin West; to the left, and on an axis parallel with the Shops, is the Office, which

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dates from 1938. Mr. Wright used this structure as his business office. Set back slightly from the Office, but along the same east-west axis, is the Theater (1951), next to which has been joined the Pavilion (1956 and 1964). To the rear of this group are attached the Planning Library (1964 and 1976), additional Shops (1964), and the Storage Rooms (also 1964).

The central building group is essentially in the form of a cross with a large inverted equilateral triangle attached by its base to the central axis, or long arm of the cross, which runs northwest-southeast. Occupying the greater part of the triangle are the Indian Rock, Lawn, and Sunset Terraces. The central axis is a straight walk, partially covered by a pergola, or arbor. To the south of the walk, and adjacent and parallel to it, in the base of the triangle, is the rectangular Drafting Studio, or Work Room, which has a capacity of 60 desks. The rooms immediately adjacent to the southeast of the Drafting Studio are the Kitchen and its Annex. To the east of the Kitchen is the Dining Room, a long room also aligned parallel to the main axis.

Beyond the Dining Room, but not opening directly from it, are the Apartment of Mr. and Mrs. Wright (1938), and other Apartments added in 1957, 1970, and 1972, as well as the Infirmary (1972). To the southwest in front of the Wrights' Apartment is the Garden Room, another of the original rooms.

At a right angle to the principal axis and northeast of the Wrights' Apartment is the Apprentices' Court, constructed in 1938-41, an open space surrounded by quarters for the apprentices. In the southwest corner of Apprentices' Court is the Cinema (1938).

Elements removed from the main complex are the Sun Cottage (Wright's original "Suntrap" Cottage of 1937, which was enlarged in 1948) and its Atrium and East Wing (1962), east of the main complex; the circular Pfeiffer House, designed by Wright in 1938, but not constructed until 1972; the Cottage (1962-79); and the hexagonal Women's Dormitory (1962).

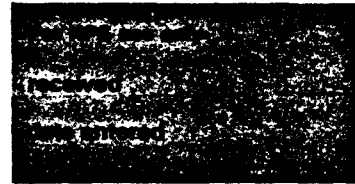
A museum, still in the planning stage, will house Mr. Wright's collection of drawings, papers, and correspondence and facilitate their preservation and study by scholars and students.

Alterations

As is evident from the description of the plan of Taliesin West immediately preceding, Frank Lloyd Wright altered details and added to Taliesin West, from the time of the construction of its principal components, in 1937-38, until his death in 1959. Since that time, alterations of form to the existing structures have, in general, been minor, although later additions have been made to some of the structures on the facades away from the central area of the complex, and a few buildings have been added in areas remote from the main grouping. In the interest of durability, however, materials in the early portions have been modified. These changes began during Wright's lifetime. The major modification

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in materials involves the canvas originally used for roofing and windows. Wright had intended the canvas to be stored each year, during the Fellowship's absence at Taliesin in Wisconsin. Although the canvas provided the intended light and spaciousness, seasonal use proved untenable, because the Fellowship's stays at Taliesin West grew longer and longer. The canvas wore out quickly, being prone to leaks and decay when in constant use. Thus, beginning in 1945, after Mrs. Wright's urging, the canvas was replaced with translucent plastic and glass.

Wright had come to view this change in a positive light. For example, when he wrote to Pittsburgh Plate Glass in 1945, he stated:

The camp when thus converted from canvas overhead to glass will not only be a bewilderingly beautiful thing, of which we may all be justly proud, but glass will have invaded the desert spaces in a way and on a scale not seen before.

Current Condition

Since Mr. Wright's death in 1959, Taliesin has continued, under the direction of Mrs. Wright, who serves as President of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, and through the operating divisions of the Foundation, the Taliesin Associated Architects and the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture.

Thus, Taliesin West is still the home of Mrs. Wright and continues to be both an architectural office and a school of architecture. It likewise preserves both its physical aspects and the air of community that was envisioned for it at its conception.

Because Taliesin West is a living institution that serves the functions for which Wright built it, experimentation with new architectural concepts is an important part of its educational program. These projects are, however, tried out in designated areas outside the precincts of the original buildings.

Conducted tours of Taliesin West are open to the public by appointment.

Larger Setting

The larger setting, beyond the recommended boundaries, has undergone fairly extreme change since the time of the construction of Taliesin West. Suburban growth in the general area has been extraordinary, although land leased or owned by the Foundation preserves the immediate desert setting and has been little impinged thus far. The nearest intrusive elements within the vicinity of the complex are aboveground high-tension power lines which run through the southwest portion of the leased acreage, and the canal of the Central Arizona Project, constructed by the Bureau of Reclamation in the 1970s, roughly parallel to the power lines.

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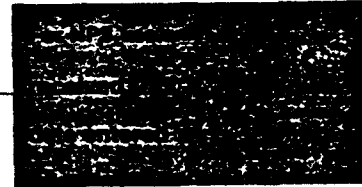
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Of these intrusions, the power transmission lines are the more visible from Taliesin West. The Bureau of Reclamation has revegetated the path of the canal and has put a bridge across it to allow access to the complex along Wright's original road. The bridge's design generally conforms to the building style of the central complex and the Entrance Sign.

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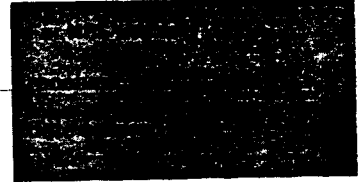
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FOOTNOTES: Description

1. Frank Lloyd Wright, cited in Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, "Out of the Desert's Mystery," American Institute of Architects Journal, May 1973, p. 54.
2. Paul Heyer, Architects on Architecture (New York, Walker and Company, 1966), p. 204.
3. William Marlin, "Arizona's Desert Despoilers," Christian Science Monitor (and syndicated newspapers), May 1977.
4. Architectural Forum, 68, 3 (January 1938). Cited in unpaginated portion of special retrospective issue on Wright's work of the previous decade.
5. Vincent Scully, Jr., Frank Lloyd Wright (New York: George Braziller, 1960), pp. 28-29.
6. Ibid.
7. Frank Lloyd Wright, Letter to Pittsburgh Plate Glass, cited in Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, p. 55.

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The noted architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock wrote of Wright, near the end of the latter's life, in 1958: "In creative power, in productivity, and over the forty years and more since 1910, in influence, Wright overshadows all other American architects of his generation."³ The popular press likewise firmly affixed to him the label, "America's greatest architect." Some have been even less restrained in his praise. "The man who is the world's greatest architect, today, yesterday and perhaps forever," wrote one reader of Architectural Forum.⁴ Another characterized his work as "having the imaginative quality which distinguishes architecture from engineering and building."⁵ Even the author of one of the more critical recent biographies of Wright has written "that to award him honors would be like giving God a medal for designing the Grand Canyon."⁶

On the other hand, Wright has never lacked for detractors, perhaps largely because of his disregard for and criticism of architectural convention and conventional architects. Typical of the attitude of his opponents is a letter to the editor that appeared following the 1938 special issue of The Architectural Forum devoted to Wright's work of the previous decade. "Who is out of step? Mr. Wright or the rest of the architectural world?" the writer inquired, and went on to rail at "the tendency to view Mr. Wright as the Messiah." The editor's response to the letter from which those quotes are excised is a useful guide for this discussion:

Mr. Wright's influence is philosophical and literary as well as architectural. His architecture provokes admiration or disdain, but always controversy. Not controversial, however, is his influence.⁷

Among the reasons that Wright was so influential, in addition to the imaginative, sometimes unconventional, flavor of his designs, is that his activity transcended the usual bonds of the architect-client relationship. Not the least element causing him to loom large in the public's eye was his extensive lecturing and writing. His writing was not restricted to professional journals. From the time his first articles in the Ladies' Home Journal appeared in 1901, he published in popular magazines, Sunday newspaper supplements, and the like.⁸ His lecturing likewise was not confined to academic forums, but took place in public lecture halls and on radio and television as well as in more formal settings. Part of the zest for architecture that he aroused in the public was no doubt due to the fact that he proposed to design for persons of modest means as well as for the wealthy:

Regard it as just as desirable to build a chicken-house as to build a cathedral. The size of the project means little in art, beyond the money-matter. It is the quality of character that really counts. Character may be large in the little or little in the large.⁹

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Wright's philosophy and educational methods, as well as his designs, continue to spark debate. Perhaps this is because many of his ideas strike very contemporary chords. Only two isolated examples will be cited. Jonathan Barnett has noted that Wright's unbuilt plan for "Broadacre City," to which he devoted an extraordinary effort, addressed the issue of suburban sprawl in a coordinated way, essentially by placing work places close to residences. Barnett feels that most popular architects, especially those embracing the International Style, have ignored the impact of the automobile on society, with disastrous results for modern city life. He feels that "Wright's views about our society and cities take on new meaning in the midst of urban chaos."¹⁰

Another of Wright's concepts that is popular with many is one with fundamental social and governmental implications. It is the concept of human scale that he had in mind when he planned "Broadacre City:

Little farms, little homes for industry, little factories, little schools, a little university going to the people mostly by way of their interest in the ground, little laboratories.¹¹

Taliesin West: Historical Background

One of the more detailed scholarly treatments of Wright's career, by Grant Manson, divides the seven decades of his professional life into three somewhat arbitrary periods. The "First Golden Age" (to 1910) was distinguished for the "Prairie Houses" in the Chicago area. The second period, dubbed "The Lean, Lost Years" (1910 to 1935), a designation arising from the relative lack of clients, was nevertheless a time when Wright produced certain memorable works, including the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, and founded the Taliesin Fellowship. The last period, the "Second Golden Age," beginning about 1936, was a period in which he enjoyed both extraordinary productivity and popularity.¹²

Taliesin West (1937-38) dates from the beginning of the Second Golden Age, following the foundation of the Taliesin Fellowship and its apprentice system in 1932. Wright's work had long benefited from the work of assistants, but his later efforts were, somewhat more than before, facilitated by the use of the apprentices. By their training, they understood his plans and his philosophy and were permitted to oversee the execution of projects. As well as serving as a creative stimulus to him, the Fellowship was both part of his plan to influence architectural education and, thus, architecture, and at the same time somewhat freed him to participate more fully in the accessory activities he felt necessary to achieve that mission. For, although Wright produced many notable works in the last quarter-century of his life, he placed as much, if not more, time and attention on "the place and character of architecture in modern life than in any way to practice it."¹³

Frank Lloyd Wright first came to Arizona in 1927 to participate in the design of the Arizona Biltmore Hotel and Cottages in Phoenix. He returned the next year to plan a resort hotel near Chandler. In the latter year, he and a small group of associates constructed as their headquarters an unusual desert camp (Ocatilla), near the proposed hotel site. In the construction

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of the camp, Wright experimented with board and canvas and sought to blend the structure into the desert environment, anticipating what he would do at Taliesin West. The Chandler Hotel commission, however, was cancelled as a result of the client's losses in 1929 stock market crash, and the Ocatilla camp was abandoned.

By the time Wright returned to winter in Arizona in 1935-36, he had begun the Taliesin Fellowship, at Taliesin in Wisconsin. The Foundation, formally established in 1932, was set up as a unique architectural school-office, attached to his residence. Wright had at least two motives for establishing a new winter headquarters at such a great distance from his home base. His health was one consideration. Second, as he put it:

To live indoors with the Fellowship during a northern winter would be hard on the Fellowship and hard on us. We are an outdoor outfit...¹⁴

After two winters at a rented ranch, Wright found a site northeast of Scottsdale that seemed suitable for the permanent winter quarters he wished to develop. He purchased some 800 acres at \$3.50 an acre, and then invested a considerably larger sum in finding water. Beginning then in 1937, he spent the greater part of every winter, generally from November to April, at Taliesin West.

Taliesin in Wisconsin was retained as summer quarters. Although other names were suggested for the Arizona camp, Taliesin, the name already affixed to the headquarters in Wisconsin, was the final choice. The name of a semi-legendary Welsh bard, it means, in translation, "shining brow." The placement of both Taliesins on sloping flanks of hills or elevations, equivalent to the "foreheads" of human beings, accounts for the name.

Wright's application of his organic architectural principles to the site of Taliesin West is stated in the following passage:

The plans were inspired by the character and beauty of that wonderful site. Just imagine what it would be like on top of the world looking over the universe at sunrise or at sunset with clear sky in between. Light and air bathing all the worlds of creation in all the color there ever was--all the shapes and outlines ever devised--neither let nor hindrance to imagination--nothing to imagine--all beyond the reach of the finite mind. Well, that was our place on the mesa and our buildings had to fit in. It was a new world to us and cleared the slate of the pastoral loveliness of our place in south Wisconsin. Instead came an esthetic, even ascetic, idealization of space, of breadth and height and of strange firm forms, a sweep that was a spiritual cathartic for Time if indeed Time continued to exist.¹⁵

Taliesin West began as a collection of tents and wooden frameworks with canvas roofs that the students of the Fellowship, under Wright's direction, built themselves. Drafting tables were set up in the open and the design and construction proceeded on the spot.

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Taliesin West was from the beginning planned to be a practical living and working complex for Wright and his students, and was intended to incorporate his architectural principles. (Selected examples of how these principles were applied at Taliesin West are included under Description.) The buildings and their landscaping were to be in harmony with the environment, through the use of appropriate form and native materials. They were to be in human scale, which accounts for the size of the rooms and the relatively low ceilings. Walled gardens, arbored walkways, and intimate terraces would offer privacy, while other spots in the complex were aligned to offer vistas of the desert landscape.

Wright's concern for the environment did not end on the exterior. He abhorred interior walls and box-shaped rooms, and the artificial segregation of the outside from the interior of structures. The abundant natural light of Arizona would flood in through the canvas roofs and windows of Taliesin West. To further mingle interior and exterior, similar native materials were used both on the exteriors and for interior decoration, such as in the fireplaces. Wright also designed furnishings that he felt were in harmony with the surroundings.

Over the succeeding two decades, Wright continued to experiment at Taliesin West, adding to and somewhat changing the original scheme. He did not conceive of the place as ever becoming a museum complex, but rather as a continuing architectural laboratory. Though he designed many other important buildings before his death in 1959, the Taliesins rank among the most significant of his later works, for they are not only in themselves an architectural expression of the "full maturity of his genius,"¹⁶ but also are his homes and the prime scene of his creative labors in later life and his experiments in architectural education and "organic living."

Taliesin West as the Wrights' Home

The Wrights first used a temporary "cabin," dubbed the "Suntrap." This structure, enlarged in 1948, is now known as the "Sun Cottage." The principal apartment in the main complex was first occupied by the Wrights in 1941. Used by Mr. Wright until his death in 1959, it still serves as the residence of Mrs. Wright.

After the construction of Taliesin West, the Wrights divided their time between Arizona and Wisconsin, but spent more and more time at Taliesin West. The principal exceptions to this pattern were stays in communities where major commissions were under construction, such as at the Plaza Hotel in New York City during the construction of the Guggenheim Museum.

The Taliesins as Architecture School and Social Laboratory

The two Taliesins are the laboratory community for Wright's ideas about architecture, education, and society in general. These concepts, while they relate to city planning and civics in a very broad sense, have been integrated into the development of the Taliesins and are reflected in their materials, design, and operation.

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The Taliesins show Wright not only as an architect, but also as an educational reformer and a social visionary. They are "an embodiment of his life-long vision of organic architecture,"¹⁷ but also display "organic living." He designed, although he was fated never able to build The Living City, but within his nearly self-sufficient community of architects and architect-apprentices he was able to put his theories into practice. At their heart was a concept he felt applicable to all aspects of society:

I am speaking of this new movement, tonight, as the ideal of a life organic, of buildings as organic, of an economic system truly organic. A statesman would be a great architect in this sense of knowing life at its best to be organic. I am speaking to you, therefore, of a great humane ideal.¹⁸

The Taliesins are, then, in essence, the microcosm of his Usonian* community, what some might deem a Utopian experiment.

Wright's reasons for founding the Fellowship and the theoretical blueprint for it are rather fully stated in lectures he gave at Princeton in 1930 and the Chicago Art Institute in 1931, just before the Fellowship got under way in 1932. A more fully developed account, including statements on how the Fellowship was developing in practice at the two Taliesins and a fairly complete explanation of organic architecture, is given in his London lectures of 1939.¹⁹

Wright viewed architecture and architectural education as both reflective of the faults of society and in part responsible for society's miserable condition:

Were it not for our current popular education, we should be miles along the road toward the realization in that idea of perhaps the greatest architecture the world has ever seen and probably the grandest expression of human life, too, the world has ever seen. But that realization cannot take place except by inches, little by little, overcoming the cultural lag, the educational tenets of yesterday imposed upon life today.²⁰

Wright's rather radical critique of education and society extended to what he felt were economic and political roots for the evils of cities:

There in the beauty of vernal countryside today they might so easily have on liberal terms anything a great city has to give them except the gregarious pressures of humanity upon humanity, and such excesses of the herd instinct as are there inevitable. But, tragic as it all is, we must face the fact that even the United States of America now no longer owns its own ground. Its ground has gone into the hands of brokers, banks, insurance companies and other money-lending institutions of our country, until today to find any true popular ownership of ground is rare indeed unless we can get it back again to the people by some such plan as Broadacre City presents.²¹

*Usonia is a term Wright borrowed from British novelist Samuel Butler to describe the United States of America.

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How did Wright propose to achieve reforms in architecture and society? He saw no practical way to begin other than through an institutional setting:

The machine, as it exists in every important trade, should without delay be put, by way of capable artist interpreters, into student hands--for them, at first, to play with and, later, with which to work. Reluctantly I admit that to put the machine, as the modern tool of a great civilization, to any extent into the hands of a body of young students, means some kind of school--and naturally such school would be called an art school, but one in which the fine arts would be not only allied to the industries they serve, but would stand there at the center of an industrial hive of characteristic industry as inspiration and influence in design-problems.²²

The Taliesin Fellowship, from the beginning, thus operated differently than the usual architectural school or firm, although it became both of these. The comprehensive character of Wright's concepts for the Taliesins can be demonstrated by the extent to which he welcomed artistic and esthetic endeavors of many sorts. Along with the architectural apprentices his first prospectus envisioned that workers in "music, painting, sculpture, drama, motion, and philosophy" and their apprentices would be part of Taliesin, as well as "technical advisors" in crafts and "leaders in thought." Activities that were to be encouraged included such pursuits as furniture design and manufacture, weaving, and other handicrafts, and photography, printing, and music.²³

To some extent, this integration of arts and crafts with architecture was a feature of other institutions, such as the Werkbund and Bauhaus in Germany and Eliel Saarinen's postgraduate workshop for architects in Michigan. The activity at these locations may have spurred Wright to develop his own school. The other institutions were, however, as Wright's apprentice Edgar Tafel expresses it, "country clubs" by comparison.²⁴ One critic has commented that "Wright had embarked on a new approach to the training of architects, a holistic annealing of personality."²⁵

Education at Taliesin included a healthy dose of learning by doing. The apprentices built the buildings Wright designed. Wright also assigned areas where they could experiment:

Having ground they should make a plan and working drawings for the work they want to do and the way they want to do it. Somebody should give them that piece of ground... . The boys should then go out on that ground and inspired by it--build. And during the building while scheming and scheming while building, meantime designing and drawing, learn something actual with the sweat of the learning on their sun-tanned brows. That, I take it, may not be "education" but it would be culture. And culture is far better--now.²⁶

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The dignity of all labor, as well as the necessity of practical architectural experience, was also stressed. The program of the Taliesins required that the apprentices perform manual labor: cooking, waiting on tables, and other tasks to help meet the needs of the community. The Wrights were very serious about this approach. Edgar Tafel, for example, spent his first day at Taliesin whitewashing two bathrooms.²⁷

Wright also had a special concept of the role of teacher that helps to explain the manner in which the Fellowship developed:

I'm no teacher. Never wanted to teach, and don't believe in teaching an art. A science, yes; business, of course; but an art cannot be taught. You can only inculcate it. You can be an exemplar. You may be able to create an atmosphere in which it can grow. But I suppose I being exemplar would be called a teacher in spite of myself. So go ahead, call me a teacher.²⁸

The Taliesin Fellowship continues to the present. It has developed into two organizations: the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture and the Taliesin Associated Architects. The school continues to educate apprentice architects in a manner similar in all its fundamentals to that developed by Mr. Wright. Taliesin Associated Architects, a continuation of his architectural practice, serves clients in designing buildings based on his ideas and principles. The main offices of both organizations are at Taliesin West, although Taliesin in Wisconsin is still used in the summer months.

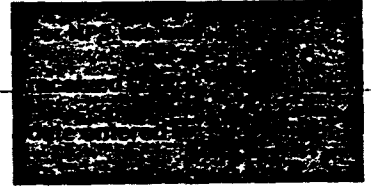
Taliesin West as Architectural Masterwork

Although Wright's later career has not yet been the object of quite as intense a treatment as his earlier work has received from historians, Taliesin West is viewed by many as one of his masterworks. This opinion has been expressed by a variety of individual scholars and, in at least one recent instance, by an organized body that polled noted authorities.

These appraisals are often couched in superlative terms. "At peace with its surroundings, but a creative gesture of the highest order," is the characterization of Dennis Sharp in A Visual History of Twentieth-Century Architecture.²⁹ G. E. Kidder Smith regards Taliesin West as "an early harbinger of a regional culture completely abreast of the most advanced and successful contemporary trends in building designs and techniques."³⁰

Among the awards that Taliesin West has received, attesting to its stature in the minds of many contemporary architects, is the 25-Year Award of the American Institute of Architects (1973). Pietro Belluschi, chairman of the committee that presented the award, expressed his sentiments as follows:

The years have not diminished the elemental quality of Taliesin West. More than other works by the master, it shows how to grasp the mood of the land and transform it into a place of harmony and beauty.³¹

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nother significant appraisal of Taliesin West's rank in architecture is the standing that it attained in the 1976 poll by the American Institute of Architects of 46 prominent architects, historians, and critics, who were asked to select up to 20 structures most important during the United States' 200 years of national existence. Taliesin West, along with five other buildings by Frank Lloyd Wright, achieved the final list, which was expanded, for publication, to include 32 buildings.³² Architect Vincent Kling, for whom the Taliesins were the first choice, stated, in his response to the poll, that they are: "Definitive examples of America's master architect. They embody everything Wright preached."³³

Comparative Context

Wright's career and work at present are commemorated by seven National Historic Landmarks. Before concluding that this may be an excessive number to represent a single architect, several factors should be considered: the phenomenal length of Wright's career and the sheer quantity of his production; the comparative recognition that has been given to other prominent architects and to individuals in other fields of endeavor; and the place of Taliesin West in relation to the seven properties already designated and to the relative character and duration of their connections with him.

If there is over-representation, it would seem to be of the field of architecture rather than of Wright. Perhaps this apparent imbalance in favor of architecture and similar activities is inevitable. Even highly significant figures in many fields can often be aptly represented only by one or two structures, such as residences, laboratories, and offices. Most of the Presidents are good examples of this pattern. Architects, engineers, landscape planners, urban designers, and artists, on the other hand, are not limited to such connections, though they probably are entitled to recognition for them, but also produce a considerable number of structures or works used by others. Certainly, because they design tangible products, they do more to change the physical environment than the usual political leader, scientist, or teacher, to whose labors the surroundings are more incidental and for whose careers few intact settings generally survive.

Other major architects have also been honored with multiple National Historic Landmarks. For example, ten of Louis Sullivan's works have been recognized, five by Henry Hobson Richardson, four by William Strickland, and three by Daniel Burnham and John W. Root. In comparing these individuals with Wright, it should be stressed that Richardson and Sullivan, for example, had:

brief periods of mature production, hardly more than fifteen years in either case, [which] must be measured [against] the remarkably long career of Frank Lloyd Wright... [thus] Despite his relative inactivity as regards executed work in the late twenties and early thirties, his career--perhaps one had better say his careers--are three times as long as Richardson's or Sullivan's and the roster of his major buildings comparably more extensive.³⁴

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In addition to their chronological spread, from 1889 to 1959, the sheer number of structures for which Wright was responsible, their geographic dispersion, and their stylistic diversity complicate the problem of selecting suitable representatives. Regarding this aspect of his work, Vincent Scully has written:

In the end he built almost everywhere in North America without relinquishing the attempt to celebrate in architectural form the specific landscapes with which he happened to be involved.³⁵

One index of Wright's works, embracing a total of 433 structures, includes projects in 37 States, Canada, Japan, and Egypt.³⁶ Wright, in his last years, used a figure upward of 500 for his total production.³⁷ In either case, even allowing for those structures that have been demolished, this is a formidable collection of work. Furthermore, in applying his principles of "organic architecture," he made specific efforts to suit design and materials to the individual sites, and thus his projects appear in many shapes, sizes, and materials.

Following Manson's often-used division of Wright's career into periods, four Illinois properties prominent in the "Prairie Style" of the "First Golden Age" have been designated National Historic Landmarks. These are the Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio (1889-98), Unity Temple (1906), and the Robie and Coonley Houses (1907-9). The only National Historic Landmark building from his middle years is Taliesin in Wisconsin, the core of which dates from 1925. The beginning of the "Second Golden Age," in which Taliesin West falls, is represented by Fallingwater, Pa. (1936) and Johnson's Wax, Wis. (1936-39).

Of these seven National Historic Landmark structures, two were home-studio combinations designed and used by Wright for long periods. The first part of the Frank Lloyd Wright Home, in Oak Park, was constructed in 1889 and, with many additions, remained his home until 1910. Taliesin, in Wisconsin, originally built in 1911, has twice burned; in its third incarnation (sometimes termed Taliesin III), it dates essentially from 1925 and after. He used it until his death in 1959, although after the construction of Taliesin West, it was headquarters during summers only.

Conclusion

In 1979, in requesting that Taliesin West be considered for designation as a National Historic Landmark, Mrs. Olgivanna Lloyd Wright described the property as "the home, office, and school of architecture designed by my husband." Later in the same letter she stated:

I believe that the two Taliesins, both of which were built by my husband, should be considered together as a unique expression of his work and that the Landmark designation be extended to Taliesin West, as it has been to Taliesin in Wisconsin.*

*See Letter, Mrs. Olgivanna Lloyd Wright to Chris Delaporte, Director, Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, May 22, 1979, appended to this nomination.

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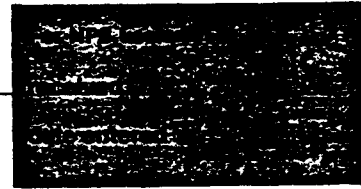


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This is the most compelling rationale, overall, for the significance of Taliesin West. It is the complement of Taliesin in Wisconsin. These companion properties together represent the work and theories of Wright's last decades. In themselves, they illustrate Frank Lloyd Wright as a master architect, but, just as importantly, by virtue of their multiple functions, they are the properties most intimately associated with his later life and practice. They have not become museums or structures diverted to alternative uses. This continuity adds to their merit. The Taliesins are a living institution that continue Wright's work and methods in their outward forms and maintain his spirit in their sense of community.

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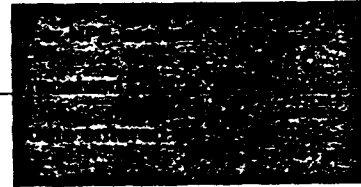
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FOOTNOTES: Significance

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20. Frank Lloyd Wright, The Future of Architecture, p. 262.
21. Ibid., p. 263.
22. Ibid., p. 270.
23. Edgar Tafel, p. 137, citing the prospectus of the Fellowship.
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32. Mary E. Osman, "Highlights of American Architecture, 1776-1976," American Institute of Architects Journal, 65, 7 (July 1976), pp. 88-158.
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34. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, "Foreword," in Grant Carpenter Manson, Frank Lloyd Wright to 1910, The First Golden Age (New York, Reinhold, 1958), p. vii.
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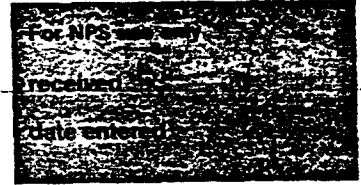
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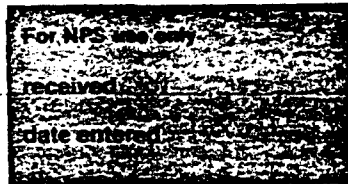
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Verbal Boundary Description and Justification

The area proposed for National Historic Landmark designation consists of the two parcels of land sketched on the accompanying USGS quadrangle map. This is a lesser area than that included within the National Register of Historic Places (also indicated on the map).

This lesser boundary is generally justified by the inclusion within it of those historic resources that are deemed to be nationally significant: i.e., the complex of structures, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, at Taliesin West; their immediate desert-mountain side setting; and the major portion of the private access road (also designed by Mr. Wright) that leads, from its beginning at the public highway (Shea Boulevard), to the buildings of Taliesin West.

The altered portion of the original roadway that has been intersected by the canal of the Central Arizona Project and the rights-of-way of recent power lines in the vicinity has been excluded. The eastern edge of these modern features defines the northwest-southwest boundary of the main portion of the nominated area.

Continuation of the boundary generally east is determined essentially by line-of-sight downslope from the structures. The mountain heights above Taliesin West are included, as part of its unique desert foothill setting. For sake of convenience on the east and north, section lines, rather than precise contours, are followed.

Although this proposed boundary does not include all the land that is now or has at some point in the past been under the ownership of the Foundation or leased by it from the State of Arizona, it does include the desert-mountain setting vital to the resource.

(It should be noted that the proposed boundaries are identical to those proposed by Mr. Charles Montooth, on behalf of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, in a letter to the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, October 31, 1980. A copy of his letter is appended to this nomination.)