

Robie House: A Modern Home Tour Fact Sheet

The Robie House: A Modern Home tour fact sheet is not a script. It presents a series of structured talking points to help interpreters develop their own tours of the house. A set route through the house is provided, along with suggested timing. In order to ensure the fluid operation of tours at Robie House, the standard tour must be kept to 45 minutes in length.

More information is provided than can be included in a 45-minute tour, so select key points, depending on the interest of your group.

The purpose of these training materials is to provide factual information that serves as a backbone for the tour that you develop. Your own reference reading will also provide useful information. The goal of training is to help volunteers create tours that are fact based, but very importantly, tours that are your own. You must feel comfortable and relate information that you are confident is reliable and that you have selected to share in your own words.

Text in *italics* is supplementary material for selected use if you wish.

Here are guidelines for timing your tour.

These times include the logistics of moving your group to the next stop.

OUTDOOR AND INTERIOR GROUND FLOOR

15 minutes

- Stop 1: Courtyard
- Stop 2: Exterior – Corner of Woodlawn and 58th
- Stop 3: Entrance
- Stop 4: Entry Hall
- Stop 5: Billiard Room

MAIN FLOOR (upper hall, living and dining rooms)

15 minutes

- Stop 6: Upper Hall
- Stop 7: Living Room
- Stop 8: Dining Room

3rd FLOOR BEDROOMS and PLAYROOM / CONCLUSION

15 minutes

- Stop 9: Primary Bedroom
- Stop 10: Playroom/Conclusion

Total time: 45 minutes

Stop 1: Courtyard Introduction

▪ Introduce yourself

“Welcome to the Frederick C. Robie House. My name is _____, and I am a volunteer interpreter with the Frank Lloyd Wright Trust. The Trust is a Chicago-based not-for-profit organization that preserves and operates a network of historic Wright sites in the Chicago area.”

- Completed in 1910, Frank Lloyd Wright’s Robie House is an iconic American building and a masterpiece of international 20th century architecture.
- It was in Chicago during the first decade of the 20th century that Frank Lloyd Wright pioneered a distinctly modern and uniquely American form of architecture, the Prairie style. Characterized by dramatic horizontal lines and masses, Wright’s Prairie buildings evoke the flat, expansive landscape of the Midwest prairie.
- The Robie House is the greatest of Wright’s Prairie houses. Wright called the building “a cornerstone of modern architecture.”
- Wright’s clients were Frederick and Lora Robie. Robie was a 30-year-old businessman, and his wife Lora was a recent graduate of the University of Chicago. In 1908, the Robies commissioned Wright to design a new, modern home for their young family. The plan of the house is two sliding rectangular wings. A projecting west wing contains the family common room and the east wing included the servants’ quarters and garage that you see here.
- Robie had a passion for modern technology. He and Wright shared a love of the automobile. The home’s built-in three-car garage was a highly unusual feature in 1908 and demonstrates how both men considered the car as an essential element of modern life.

Stop 2: Corner of Woodlawn and 58th

The Robie House is in bold contrast to the more box-like traditional houses of the Hyde Park neighborhood—like those across Woodlawn Avenue.

Exterior Form and Materials

- In his design of the Robie House, Wright removes the traditional basement, creating ground floor activity rooms. This elevates the main floor featuring the primary living and dining rooms above street level, and allows for living spaces with increased light, air, view, and privacy. The bedrooms are on the third floor

and wrap around the substantial chimney.

- You can see from this viewpoint how the Robie House sits low to the ground, even though it is three stories. Built on a lot approximately 60 feet wide by 180 feet long, the house is defined by an overriding sense of horizontality. Bands of brick and limestone anchor the building to the ground, while expansive roofs with generous eaves project a sense of shelter.
- The horizontality of the building is emphasized at every level of the design. Horizontal courses of limestone run below the balconies and along the ground. The exterior of the house is clad in Roman brick. These bricks are thinner and longer than traditional bricks. The vertical joints in the mortar are flush with the face of the brick and tinted red. This creates continuous horizontal bands of mortar on the exterior.
- The simple exterior of the house consists of earth-toned natural materials that are exposed and lack any surface decoration.

Structural Steel

- The sweeping spans of the Robie House are made possible by Wright's use of structural steel. Steel-frame construction revolutionized building design in Chicago in the late-nineteenth century. The city became famous for its pioneering designs for modern tall office buildings. But steel had not been used in residential architecture until Robie House.
- At the Robie House, steel allows for the remarkable open plan of the interior and Wright's extensive use of glass. Steel supports the dramatic cantilevered roof of the west porch. A cantilever is a projecting horizontal beam that is supported at only one end. At its furthest point the cantilevered roof of the west porch extends 20 feet from the building.

Nature

- The west porch is raised above street level, affording privacy from passersby. The porch allows direct access to the Living Room of the house. There are balconies on all four sides of Robie House that connect the interior of the house to the world of nature outside.
- Nature was a constant influence on Wright's work. Wright designed his buildings in harmony with nature to enrich the lives of those who lived or worked within.

- The autumnal colors of brick, limestone, clay roof tiles, and copper gutters all suggest the palette of the prairie. Wright lines each level of the building with planters and large geometric urns—incorporating plant-life into the very structure of the building.

Stop 3: Entrance

- Although the long façade of Robie House faces south, the entrance to the house is quietly located around the far side of the west porch, causing visitors to turn as they approach the front door. This indirect access is characteristic of Japanese architecture.
- Wright had a lifelong fascination with Japan. He first experienced Japanese architecture at the Japan pavilion of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, which was located just one mile east of Robie House.
- In 1905 Wright traveled to Japan for the first time and returned with a deep appreciation for all Japanese arts. He collected Japanese prints and organized print exhibitions at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1906 and 1908.
- The approach to the home entrance is a tile walkway with a wall along the south side and a defined landscape area along the north side. The visitor proceeds into an enclosed garden that evokes the informal gardens of Japan.
- The height of the entrance area to the house is lowered under the balcony above. This area is the same height as the room inside. The design unites outdoors and indoors into one space, a device of Japanese architecture. The home's entrance is private and intimate rather than a public space.

Stop 4: Interior Entry Hall

- The entry hall is a compressed space with textured walls of copper coloration and leaded glass windows and doors with ochre design patterns suggesting the floral forms of nature encircling the space.
- Robie House is a public museum accredited by the Association of American Museums. **Like all museums, we ask that you do not touch anything - walls, surfaces, furniture - as we walk through the house.**
- The entrance hall establishes the design themes for the interior. The dark

woodwork and built-in seating, like the exterior of the house, affirms the unpretentious beauty of natural materials. Carpet woven for the room incorporates architectural design elements that create a simple modern effect.

- The Robie House windows are among the most complex of Wright's leaded glass compositions. The ground floor of the house includes clear glass windows with dense diagonal patterns and multi-colored glass with elongated diamond and diagonal patterns. Wright's windows combine clear glass with touches of colored glass, so that you are invited to look through the window into the space beyond.
- The magnificent original, leaded-glass front door was destroyed in student riots of the 1960s, and this exact replica was installed during the Trust's 2018 interior restoration of the house.

Stop 5: Billiard Room

- The original Robie House plan labeled this space a billiard room. However, it never served that purpose. A contemporary house plan would more accurately describe this as a family room.
- With its raised ceiling the Billiard Room feels expansive compared to the entrance hall. In the ceiling Wright reveals the form of structural steel beams. They become an integrated element in the design. The space between the beams is left uncovered rather than being hidden inside the ceiling structure, contributing to the overall room height. Capturing this typically lost space is one of the ways that Wright limits the overall height of the Robie House and further amplifies its horizontality.
- As we saw on the exterior of the building, Wright's choice of color palette and materials suggest the world of nature. The walls of the Billiard Room are painted in warm autumnal colors; subtle yellows, ochers, and pinks, applied in layers to the highly textured plaster. The materials have an inherently organic quality to them.
- The original flooring throughout this entire level of the house was a concrete-like material called magnesite. As part of the 2018 restoration, the Trust installed a new magnesite floor, matching the color and texture of the missing original. The warm, earth tones of the magnesite harmonize with the wall colors and the brick of the fireplace. Note how Wright uses the same Roman brick for the fireplace that is found on the exterior of the house.
- We will visit the playroom later on the tour. As we move upstairs, Wright turns

you on your path to the living area upstairs.

- Wright controls your experience. The narrow ascent to the main level affords exciting glimpses of the spaces above through pierced wood screens. You are constantly drawn forward and outward as you move through this house.

LEAD THE GROUP UP THE CENTRAL STAIRCASE TO THE UPPER HALL.

Stop 6: Upper Hall

- The Upper Hall is another transitional space on the path to the light-filled main living area of the Robie House.
- The small space is rich in architectural detailing. Spanning the ceiling, wood panels carved with geometric designs are installed over laylights that cast dappled light.
- Built-in bookcases with leaded glass doors line the north wall and are original to the house, while the built-in cabinets and wood partition opposite have been recreated. The door ahead opens to a balcony above the home's front door, drawing you toward the natural outdoor light beyond.
- Electric lighting was installed throughout the house, and Wright designed several different types of light fixtures. These brass wall sconces are exceptionally refined in their geometric design. Wright carefully considered the abstract design their light would cast.
- This sconce, installed in the front hall adjacent to the living room, is original. Other sconces throughout the house are exact replicas copied from this original by local craftsmen. There are a total of 26 replica sconces. They required three years to complete.

Stop 7: Living Room

- This light-filled space at the heart of the Robie House is one of the great masterpieces of 20th century architecture and design. It is breathtaking in its simplicity—a single room comprising a living and dining space divided by a central chimney but connected by a continuous span of leaded glass doors and windows.

- Balconies and terraces open on all four sides of the main floor, allowing indoor and outdoor spaces to flow together as in Japanese residential architecture, which Wright had studied during his 1905 trip to Japan.
- Simple oak moldings delineate the walls and ceiling, while along the dropped edge of the ceiling electrified globe fixtures project into the room. In addition to the brass wall sconces and carved laylight grilles, these globe fixtures contribute to the complex lighting scheme in the house, which masterfully balances natural and incandescent light.

Open Plan

- This space exemplifies Wright's open plan. In traditional American houses of the 19th century, interior space was divided into contained rooms dedicated to specialized functions – the parlor, the library, the dining room. Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie style simplified residential buildings, opening interior spaces and creating a flexible, modern living environment.
- Wright's innovative open-plan in the Robie House established a new direction for architecture in the 20th century and anticipates the rectangular plan, glass-walled, mid-century modern homes forty years later.

Fireplace and inglenook

- In all Wright's homes, the hearth was the center of family life. The large scale of this fireplace and the Inglenook, which was reconstructed from original photographs, underlines the luxurious size of the 9,000 sq. ft. home. The opening above the fireplace unites the main floor as one room, but this design required that the flue be divided into two shafts.

Glass

- The living room and dining room of Robie House are visually united into one continuous space by a 47-foot span of 24 leaded-glass doors opening to a narrow balcony that extends across the length of the south façade.
- The expanse of glass is made possible by Wright's use of structural steel. Concealed steel beams in the ceilings and floors allow this main level to remain open and uninterrupted by solid walls.
- Wright called his windows "light screens," and the concept drew inspiration from Japanese *fusuma* sliding doors that connect interior and exterior space. The

flattened diamond shapes and diagonal geometries in the glass suggest abstracted plant forms, but also echo the plan and form of the building. Compare the geometric designs of the glass with the angled window bay at the end of the room, or the patterns in the rug.

- There are 176 doors and windows with leaded glass designs in Robie House, more than in any other house he built.

Organic Architecture:

- In 1908 Wright wrote *In the Cause of Architecture*, in which he defined his philosophy of Organic Design. Every element of the design should be conceived as part of a unified vision for a building. Interior and exterior forms and materials, fixtures, colors and furnishings relate to and complement each other as parts of a single organic whole.

LEAD THE GROUP VIA THE SOUTH CORRIDOR INTO THE DINING ROOM.

Stop 8: Dining Room

- Wright and his studio designed built-in and freestanding furniture for Robie House. The original dining set for Robie House is at the Smart Museum of Art on this campus. One of the original dining chairs is on view upstairs.
- Over the course of his career Frank Lloyd Wright designed many different building types, from churches to office buildings, but it is Wright's residential work that was the core of his architecture practice. The Prairie houses of 1900-1910, culminating with Robie House, featured open plans, integral furniture, and simple construction techniques and materials. They define the phase of Wright's career that established him as one of America's greatest architects.
- During the construction phase of Robie House, Wright traveled to Europe to work with his publisher on the first monograph of his work. Published in 1911, it was called the *Wasmuth Portfolio* and included 100 lithographs of plans and perspective renderings comprising the buildings of his Chicago years, concluding with Robie House.
- Marion Mahoney, Wright's talented studio associate, was responsible for over half of the delicately rendered images evoking the style of Japanese landscape prints. Mahoney worked on Robie House during construction when Wright was in Europe.

- When the *Wasmuth Portfolio* began to circulate among European architecture offices, it was Robie House that captured the imagination of European modernists. Austrian architects Rudolph Schindler and Richard Neutra came to America in the hope of working with Wright.
- Robie House set Frank Lloyd Wright on an international stage of modernism, and its reputation continued to increase over the years.

Stop 9: Third Floor Primary Bedroom and Children's Bedrooms

- The family bedrooms – a primary bedroom and bathroom, two children's bedrooms, and a hall bathroom – are located on the third floor. Wright called this level "the belvedere," an architectural term for a site that commands beautiful views. Generously proportioned exterior planters included a sprinkling system to water flowering plants under the deep roof overhang. Casement windows swung open above the plants, providing cross-ventilation throughout the floor during warm Chicago summers.
- Today the 3rd floor functions as a gallery space where the Frank Lloyd Wright Trust displays original furniture. You are welcome to explore the rooms and view the current exhibition.
- See PowerPoint presentation #3 for details on individual furniture pieces on display.

GATHER THE GROUP IN THE PRIMARY BEDROOM AND EXPLAIN THE EXHIBITION BRIEFLY. ALLOW A FEW MINUTES FOR PEOPLE TO CIRCULATE AND VIEW THE 3RD FLOOR.

BEFORE LEADING THE GROUP DOWNSTAIRS, EXPLAIN THAT YOU WILL BE HEADING TO THE FIRST FLOOR AND THAT VISITORS WILL BE ABLE TO STEP IN AND VIEW THE GUEST BEDROOM, WHICH IS FURNISHED WITH ORIGINAL FURNITURE DESIGNED BY WRIGHT AND BY GEORGE MANN NIEDECKEN.

APPOINT SOMEONE TO BE LAST.

WHEN YOU GET TO THE LANDING OF THE SERVANTS' STAIRWAY, PAUSE UNTIL THE FIRST FEW PEOPLE IN THE GROUP HAVE SEEN THE GUEST BEDROOM.

CONTINUE DOWN THE SERVANTS' STAIRWAY INTO THE ENTRANCE HALL AND OPEN THE DOOR TO THE PLAYROOM.

STAND IN THE HALL AND DIRECT YOUR GROUP INTO THE PLAYROOM, MAKING SURE THAT THE PERSON YOU ASSIGNED TO BE LAST IS STILL LAST.

CLOSE THE PLAYROOM DOOR BEHIND YOU.

Stop 10: Playroom/Conclusion

- This room is the children's playroom. Frederick and Lora Robie had two young children, a son Frederick and daughter Lorraine.
- The Playroom provides direct access into the gated courtyard, creating an interior and exterior play space for the children. Note the small inglenook fireplace that echoes the grand inglenook on the main level.

Conclusion

- Robie House is the last and most important of Wright's Prairie Houses. In the decades that followed its completion, its architectural reputation continued to grow.
- In 1926 Robie House was purchased by the Chicago Theological Seminary, who owned it for the next 30 years, using it for classrooms and a dormitory.
- They attempted to demolish it twice, first in 1941. The onset of WWII delayed that effort. Again in 1957 they attempted demolition. This time Wright himself and an international community of architects rallied to save it.
- In 1957 Robie House was purchased by a New York developer, who donated it to the University in 1963.
- In 1997 the University concluded a perpetual agreement with the Frank Lloyd Wright Trust to be the steward and operator of the badly depleted house. The Trust restored Robie House and has operated it as a public museum for 25 years.

Notice the two plaques above the fireplace in this room.

- In 1963 Robie House was named a National Historic Landmark in the history of the United States. This award carries legal protections to the property. Frank Lloyd Wright lobbied twice during his lifetime to save Robie House from

demolition. By this award, the National Park Service protects the property from demolition.

- In 2019, Frederick C. Robie House was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list as a single inscription with seven other Wright sites. These sites summarize his career and span the country east to west. The other sites are: The Guggenheim Museum NYC, Fallingwater in Pennsylvania, Robie House and Unity Temple in Chicago, Taliesin and the Herbert and Katherine Jacobs House in Wisconsin, Taliesin West in Arizona, and Hollyhock House in Los Angeles.
- The World Heritage inscription places Frank Lloyd Wright on an international stage of cultural distinction. It is an international honor. It does not carry any additional protections to the Landmark status and is also administered by the U.S. National Park Service.
- Conceived as a total work of art in which all the elements combine in one unified vision, Robie House represents an original and complete reinterpretation of American domestic architecture.
- In 1957, architectural writers and critics named Robie House “The House of the Century.” They stated, "Without this house, much of modern architecture as we know it today might not exist."
- Robie House is the consummate expression of Prairie style and the beginning of American modern architecture.

DEPENDING ON THE TIME AVAILABLE, INVITE THE GROUP TO ASK QUESTIONS.

BE MINDFUL OF THE TIME.

IF THERE ARE A LOT OF QUESTIONS, YOU CAN INVITE PEOPLE TO TALK FURTHER IN THE COURTYARD.

CONCLUDE WITH A STATEMENT THAT ENCOURAGES FURTHER ENGAGEMENT WITH THE TRUST: Thank you for your visit to Robie House. To learn more about the Trust's other historic Wright sites and programs, along with membership, visit our museum shop and information center or our website flwright.org

DIRECT YOUR GROUP TO EXIT EITHER VIA THE VESTIBULE OR INTO THE COURTYARD. WAIT UNTIL EVERYONE HAS LEFT AND THEN STEP INTO THE COURTYARD TO RETURN BAGS ETC. FROM THE STORAGE LOCKERS.

Supplemental Information

Supplemental information is included for use as necessary.

Additional background on the Arts and Crafts movement:

The Arts and Crafts Movement was one of the most influential design movements of modern times. It began in Europe in the second half of the 19th century and spread to Britain and America.

Fueled by concern over the detrimental effects of industrialization on design, craftsmanship and the lives of workers, the movement established a new set of principles for living and working. In contrast to the factories and mass production of the industrial age, it emphasized social reform through new workshop practices, and promoted original, innovative designs rather than revivals of historic styles. Arts and Crafts objects were produced in all media: metalwork, ceramics, glass, textiles, and furniture, while architecture typically provided the context for these objects.

Wright was one of a generation of visionary designers, including Charles Rennie Mackintosh in Scotland, C. F. A. Voysey in England, and the Vienna Secessionists in Austria, that absorbed the lessons of the British Arts and Crafts movement as they worked to create a modern architecture for their respective countries.

These designers held common beliefs that a building should be considered as a total work of art, that design should be dictated by function, that local styles of architecture and local materials should be respected, that new buildings should integrate with the surrounding landscape, and that freedom from historical styles was essential. Their work would shape the course of architecture and design in the 20th century.

*Wright's exposure to the international scene came through multiple sources. International Expositions, held in Chicago in 1893, and St. Louis in 1904, provided Wright with two important points of contact with contemporary design movements in Europe. International design ideals were disseminated in America through journals such as *The Craftsman*, *House Beautiful*, and *Ladies Home Journal*, as well as through clubs and societies that sponsored lectures and programs. Wright's personal acquaintance with leading designers and theorists, such as the English designer C. R. Ashbee, were also important factors that shaped his early career.*

The Arts and Crafts movement provided a powerful impetus to Frank Lloyd Wright's architectural principles. The architect was a charter member of the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society, founded in 1897 at Hull House. While Wright supported the group's handcrafted works and annual exhibitions, he believed the machine could be an invaluable tool in the hand of the artist.

*Wright's lecture, *The Art and Craft of the Machine*, was presented at Hull House in*

March 1901. In his address, Wright diverged from the British Arts and Crafts movement, championing the machine, and urging artists and craftsmen to embrace modern technology in their work.

Additional background on Wright and Japan:

A pioneer collector of Japanese prints, Wright's lifelong interest in the art and culture of Japan was sparked early in his career. In contrast to many of his contemporaries in the United States who adopted European architectural styles in their work, Wright viewed Japan and its culture as an aesthetic model for his architecture.

Wright's first physical encounter with Japanese architecture came in 1893 at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. There he visited the Japanese pavilion, a recreation of the Ho-o-den (Phoenix Hall), an 11th century Buddhist temple near Kyoto, within which were created different kinds of traditional Japanese interiors.

Wright traveled to Japan in 1905, with his wife Catherine, and his clients Ward and Cecilia Willits. While abroad the architect invested heavily in Japanese prints. The following year, Wright mounted an exhibition of his Japanese prints, works by Hiroshige, at the Art Institute of Chicago. Wright participated in a second, larger exhibition at the Art Institute in 1908, in collaboration with some of the foremost collectors in the US.

In 1911, as Wright worked to rebuild his architecture practice in Chicago after a year abroad in Europe, he was recommended as a potential designer for the new Imperial Hotel in Tokyo. Wright's longstanding interest in Japan would be instrumental in his securing the commission for the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo in 1913. For six tumultuous years, from 1917 to 1923, he struggled to complete the enormous commission of the Imperial Hotel, one of the landmark designs of his career.

Additional background on the Robie House and Organic Architecture:

In 1908, the year that the Robie House entered his Studio, Frank Lloyd Wright published his seminal essay, "In the Cause of Architecture." In the essay, Wright defines a set of principles that would become the basis of his Organic Architecture. Throughout his 70-year career, this philosophy of design was present consistently in Wright's oeuvre and the scope of its meaning mirrored the development of his architecture.

A building, according to Wright, should possess simplicity and repose. These qualities could be achieved in the following ways. Wright believed that the plan of a house should be simplified to contain the minimal number of rooms. He identified the living room as the most important of all spaces in the house. In addition, "openings should occur as integral features of the structure and form, if possible, its natural ornamentation. An

excessive use of ornament should be avoided."

Furniture and fixtures should be designed as integral features of the building. A building should "appear to grow easily from its site" and harmonize with its surroundings, which in the case of the Midwest prairie implied, "gently sloping roofs, low proportions, quiet skylines, suppressed, heavysset chimneys and sheltering overhangs, low terraces and outreaching walls sequestering private gardens." In Wright's vision for the modern house, colors should harmonize with nature, and draw influence "from the woods and fields." In accordance with these principles, the natural qualities of materials, "of wood, plaster, brick, or stone" should be respected.

Frederick C. Robie House exemplifies the principles laid out by Wright in his essay.

Conceived as a complete work of art in which all the elements combine in one unified vision, the Robie House represents an original, complete reinterpretation of American domestic architecture. In its sensitive handling of materials, remarkable attention to interior detailing, and integrated treatment of ornament, the building exhibits a fundamental respect for nature as the source of all architectural form. Wright's innovative treatment of open-plan living spaces in the Robie House established a new direction for 20th century architecture. The expansive living space at the heart of the Robie House presents a new sense of freedom and openness designed for the American family, and reflective of a modern, democratic American society.

Wright's enduring legacy of Organic Architecture, as presented in the Robie House, is a highly innovative approach to architecture that abandoned European influences to create a purely American form in harmony with man and nature, fully integrated with all its constituent parts, and embodying American society from the inside out.

Additional background on the significance of the Robie House in Wright's career:

Over the course of his long career Frank Lloyd Wright designed many different building types, from churches to office buildings, but it is Wright's residential work that was the core of his architecture practice.

The Prairie houses of 1900-1910 were created for the middle class and designed in harmony with the Midwest landscape. Featuring innovative open plans, integral furniture, and simple construction techniques and materials they define the first major phase of Wright's career. The Prairie period included significant works of architecture such as the Ward Willits House, Highland Park, Illinois (1901), the Arthur B. Heurtley House, Oak Park, Illinois (1901-02), Unity Temple, Oak Park, Illinois (1905-07), culminating in the iconic Frederick C. Robie House, Chicago, Illinois (1908-10). The core principles of Wright's design philosophy outlined in the Robie House would shape Wright's architecture throughout his long career.

Following a year abroad in Europe from 1909 to 1910, Wright returned to the US and restarted his architecture practice with a Studio in Spring Green, Wisconsin, and offices in Chicago, Illinois through 1918.

Building on the work of his Prairie period, and inspired by his time in Europe, Wright's architecture entered a new phase defined by a pronounced interest in Primitivism and the use of complex patterns. Major works during this period include Midway Gardens in Chicago, Illinois (1913-14) and the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, Japan (1917-23).

Wright's interest in pattern was further explored in the houses he designed for California in the 1920s. Using a unique construction process, which Wright called his "textile block system" the California residences were built with precast concrete blocks, featuring elaborate organic decoration inspired by ancient Mayan architecture of the Americas. Examples include the Storer and Ennis houses in Los Angeles, California (1923 and 1924).

The mid-20s and the early 30s were lean years for Wright, as the architect struggled to regain the success of his early career. His Usonian houses, which emerged in the 1930s, grew out of the principles defined during his Prairie period, and provided a flexible model for affordable American homes. Built examples range from the modest Pope-Leighey House, Falls Church, Virginia (1939), to large and elaborate versions such as the Glare House in Lake Forest, Illinois (1951).

In the late 1930s a series of major buildings including the Johnson Wax Administration Building (1936) in Racine, Wisconsin, and Fallingwater in Bear Run, Pennsylvania (1938), reinvigorated Wright's career and brought renewed national and international recognition.

Until his death in 1959, Wright remained prolific. His continuing ambition to improve American society through architecture can be seen in large-scale conceptual projects such as Broadacre City (1930s), a utopian city inspired by America's agrarian past, and visionary designs for the Mile-High Illinois skyscraper (1956) and his master plan for Baghdad, Iraq (1957-58).

In 1943, in his late 70s, Wright began one of his most important commissions, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. The inverted ziggurat of reinforced concrete was one of Wright's most public and celebrated commissions. The museum was dedicated in the fall of 1959, six months after Wright's death at the age of 91.

Despite the successes of his late career, the Robie House stands as one of Wright's most iconic buildings. It represents a defining moment in the architect's career. Over the course of the 20th century, the house has been singled out repeatedly in exhibitions and publications as one of Wright's most important buildings, and one of the most significant structures of the 20th Century. Wright's open architectural plan and design innovation had a pervasive influence on leading architects and architecture of the 20th century, including Rudolph Schindler and Richard Neutra who worked for Wright, but

also Eero Saarinen, Louis Kahn, Philip Johnson and others of the next generation.

Recognizing the Robie House as a critical development in his career, Wright himself declared the building to be “a source of world-wide architectural inspiration,” and “a cornerstone of modern architecture.”

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