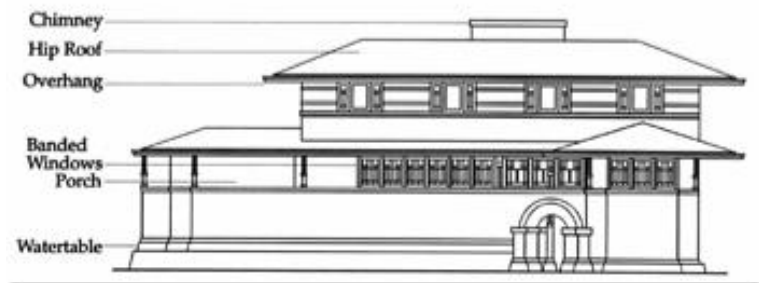


PRAIRIE STYLE (1900–1920s)



Prairie Style

The Prairie School included a group of architects in the Midwest led by Frank Lloyd Wright. These designers consciously rejected the popular idea of reviving past styles and sought to create a truly American architectural style that combined utility and beauty as well as reflecting the natural surroundings. The typically asymmetrical Prairie style house included: low-pitched hipped or flat roofs with wide, projecting (or cantilevered) overhangs that reflect the horizontal lines of the Midwestern prairie; central broad chimneys; ribbon windows (often with leaded art glass); and lack of extraneous ornamentation.

Wright outlines the objectives of the Prairie style as follows:

- To reduce the number of necessary parts of the house and make all come together as enclosed space—so divided that light, air and vista permeated the whole with a sense of unity.
- To associate the building as a whole with its site by extension and emphasis on the planes parallel to the ground, but keeping the floors off the best part of the site.
- To eliminate the room as a box and the house as another box by making all walls enclosing screens. Make all house proportions more literally human, with less wasted space in structure.
- To get the unwholesome basement up out of the ground. To harmonize all necessary openings to 'outside' or to 'inside' with good human proportions and make them occur naturally. The room as such was now the essential architectural expression and there were to be no holes cut in walls as holes are cut in a box, because this is not in keeping with the ideas of 'plastic.'

There are six characteristics of a mature Prairie style house:

Cross-axial planning. Wings project outward from a central fireplace and terminate in porches and terraces that relate the house to the site.

Horizontal emphasis. The horizontal is emphasized by wide overhangs and further reinforced by wood or limestone strips that mark the division between the stories and vaguely echo the exposed timbers of English Tudor-style and Japanese houses.

Geometric forms. Crisp geometric forms impart a sculptural quality enhanced by the interplay of apparent voids and solids created by the studied placement of the glazed areas.

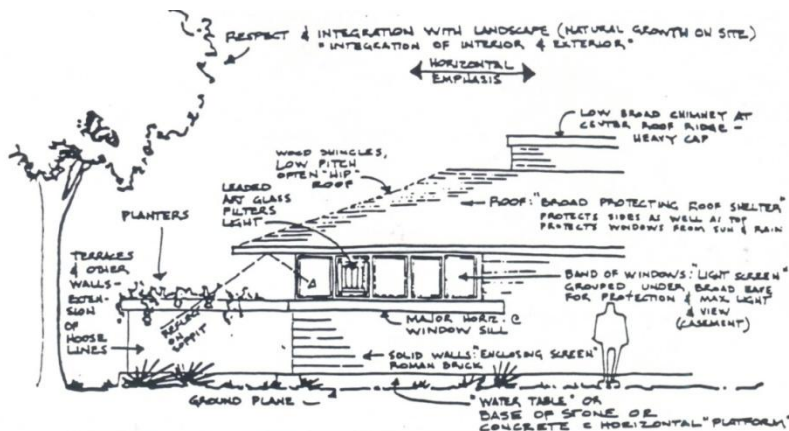
Ribbon windows. Windows are grouped in a series with continuous heads and sills forming a band broken only by narrow mullions.

Limited exterior materials. Exterior wall coverings include: stucco with inserts of heavy wood bands, brick courses projected or recessed or, on a rare occasion, horizontal board and batten. Ornament is not applied and usually is restricted to patterns of leaded glass in the windows.

Interior horizontal emphasis. Activity areas are not separated from each other by the enclosure of four walls. Instead, the entire floor is one large, irregularly shaped room with high cabinets, a fireplace, a sunken floor, a raised ceiling, or some barrier (occasionally even a wall) identifying and separating the spaces set aside for different purposes. Materials are chosen for their natural beauty. Wood is rarely painted. Stone is left unpolished. Furniture is built in, wherever possible.

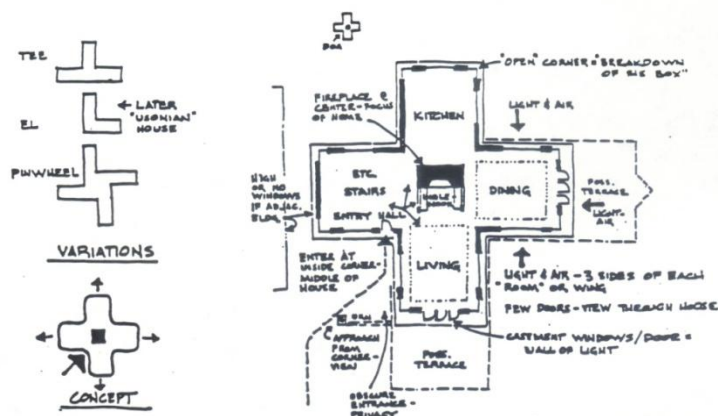
The Prairie style declined after the break in construction during World War I and the post-war financial setback. Meanwhile the rise of popular magazines like *House Beautiful*, *Ladies Home Journal* and *House and Garden* influenced homeowners' tastes by exposing them to the decorative possibilities of historic designs. Space and surfaces of Prairie houses, which, ironically, were published earlier by such magazines, did not lend themselves well to decoration. Hence the style was rejected in favor of those offering more opportunities for historic interpretation.

PRAIRIE SCHOOL FEATURES IN ELEVATION (1900-1925)



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PRAIRIE SCHOOL FLOOR PLANS



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