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The Wright Space: Pattern And Meaning In Frank Lloyd Wright's Houses



Synopsis

"In both early and late life," write Grant Hildebrand, 'Wright had an enormous number of domestic clients. ... They came to his drawing board in droves, and, having seen through to completion their adventure with him, they were, by and large, ecstatic about what they got. ...Many of these clients subsequently returned to Wright for another house, and sometimes more than one...."Yet few houses of equal fame have embodied more conspicuous faults. Many of Wright's plans defy reasonable furniture arrangements, many frustrate even the storage of reasonable and treasured possessions. In many cases severe problems afflict the architectural fabric: leaking roofs, unserviceable detailing, even structural inadequacies. ...There were problems of personality as well. ...Many of Wright's clients found him arrogant, careless, slow, and misleading, and were not by any means always amused by his temperament. And there are more vague and subjective difficulties, for the sheer power of these houses as dramatic exercises in space and form can intimidate the...acts of ordinary daily life: how does one have a casual conversation in the Robie house dining room, or hang a cherished delicate picture in a Usonian?"If, then, these houses lacked so many of the usual aspects of satisfaction, why were they built with such profusion, and valued so highly?In this book thirty-three of Wright's domestic buildings, including all of the major houses on which his significance depends, are analyzed in detail in terms of their spatial characteristics. Fireplaces, seating, ceiling form, glazing, terraces, and roof overhangs are seen to follow a repetitive organization or pattern characterized by complementary juxtapositions of what the English geographer Jay Appleton calls "prospect" (a condition in which one can see over a considerable distance) and "refuge" (a place where one can hide). According to Appleton's theory of landscape aesthetics, this juxtaposition offers the ability to see without being seen (or to hunt successfully without being, in turn, successfully hunted) and thus, eons ago, had survival value. But such a condition must have been sought, originally, because it was intrinsically pleasurable to our species. Hildebrand finds a striking correlation in Wright's houses. Wright's pattern of prospect and refuge, to which are added similarly derived qualities of complexity and order, is shown to be unique in domestic architecture to the degree to which it provides these preferred characteristics, suggesting why -- in spite of serious drawbacks -- his houses were built and valued by so many clients. The text of the book is enhanced by photographs, plans, and by nine exquisitely drawn diagrams of key dwellings specially prepared by William Hook. Addressed to architects, landscape architects, architectural historians, environmental psychologists, anthropologists, philosophers of aesthetics, and the lay public with an interest in these subjects, *The Wright Space*, is essential reading for anyone who has ever lived in, looked at, or studied Frank Lloyd Wright's remarkable houses.

Book Information

Paperback: 192 pages

Publisher: University of Washington Press; Reprint edition (July 1, 1991)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0295971088

ISBN-13: 978-0295971087

Product Dimensions: 0.8 x 10.2 x 9.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.3 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars 8 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #387,328 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #98 in [Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Home Improvement & Design > Small Homes & Cottages](#) #334 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Architecture > Individual Architects & Firms](#) #415 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Architecture > Buildings > Residential](#)

Customer Reviews

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Grant Hildebrand is Professor of Architecture and Art History at the University of Washington, Seattle, and the author of "The Wright Space: Pattern and Meaning in Frank Lloyd Wright's Houses" (1991).

Highly recommend: The ONE book that explained, rationally, the atavistic source of my emotional response to FLW's architecture: <https://www.amazon.com/Wright-Space-Pattern-Meaning-Wrights/dp/0295971088>

If interested in getting beyond the inane blah blah blah of most "architectural criticism (ahem!)", do yourself a favor. Read this book.

In this superb book, Hildebrand attempts no less than a definitive explanation of the method used by

Wright to weave his architectural magic. Using the theories of "prospect and refuge" & "order and complexity" he sets out to establish what he calls the "pattern" that reveals itself in Wright's residential designs. Backed by detailed exposition, plans, diagrams and photos of specific examples he convincingly does just that: present the "pattern" that, to a greater or lesser degree, permeates Wright's work. Also covered are various detail items which are often, though with a lesser frequency, present. To the serious student of Wright's organic architecture, this book is an indispensable resource.

Excellent book and service !

This is a great book, giving insight into Wright's designs. Good pictures of details of some of his houses that are not found in other sources and really nice 3D exploded views of some of the more important ones.

Hildebrand really puts you into a selection of Wright's built spaces; you can imagine what it is like to move through and experience the changing spaces (height, length, turns) in several of Wright's famous houses, even if you've not visited in person. Hildebrand's extended discussion --and demonstration through stunning "3D" exploded diagrams-- of the primordial concepts of Refuge/shelter (those dark fireplace cores and inglenooks) and Prospect/outlook (distant elevated windows) applied to buildings dating to different stages of Wright's practice is most original and convincing. Author's scholarly prose is serviceable rather than equally soaring. Highly useful small plans (newly corrected and with compass indications!) and evocative B/W photographs supplement those amazing diagrams by Wm. Hook.

Four antithetic concepts: prospect/refuge and complexity/order from Appleton's book taken to describe Wright's houses. All in a boringly polite, restrained and repetitive academic language. Appleton's concepts are so powerful that get half a book just pointing them over and over by example, without adding much depth to the conversation, as I discovered. The only possible argument against that is that there isn't any depth there to be added besides the revelation of the pattern itself. It's a Zen slap. Maybe. But Zen slaps are shorter than 200p. Another thing that I found amusing was the pattern analysis of Mario Botta's house in Stabio, which resulted more or less in the conclusion that it follows the Wright pattern. Now this really had me question the effectiveness of the author's method for detecting pleasurable settings :) Now for the good things: the author

researched quite a lot of material to get this book done, and as a result, there's a lot historical details that I found very interesting. Also some of the more lyrical, emotional descriptions are revealing (e.g. that of Fallingwater). The introductory chapters are quite revealing too. Also, there's an attempt to link Wright's emotional periods with evolution and preferences over prospect or refuge in its work. Too bad academics these days have to research a 4 pages full of interdisciplinary bibliography to get the required assets for their credibility in the academic world. The market certainly doesn't require that much of an effort. Normal people will just agree with you or not. My 2 cents.

Superb book with great insights into recurring design strategies that extended throughout his career. As a Frank Lloyd Wright homeowner and architect with extensive Wright research and visits to his other residential projects, I can attest to the power of the design strategies articulated in this book. The book is well written with beautiful illustrations. The only shortcoming of the book is the contemporary examples in the back of the book which pale in comparison to the great architectural works by Mr. Wright. All things considered this book is highly recommended for Wright enthusiasts and architects.

Wright's buildings are some of the most appealing in history. Why? Hildebrand applies a landscape theory developed by Jay Appleton (books also available on .com) - our early ancestors sought homesites high in the qualities of PROSPECT (ability to survey the surroundings) and REFUGE (protection from environmental and other threats), and thus we are programmed to find these qualities appealing. Wright's large windows, sheltering eaves, solid stone, welcoming hearth, etc., are rich in Prospect and Refuge which give the subconscious signal "This is a great homesite!" (Also see A PATTERN LANGUAGE, by Alexander, for more patterns underlying architectural appeal).

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