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Frank Lloyd Wright versus America

The 1930s

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Note

1. Reprinted from Baker Brownell, *The Human Community* (New York, 1950), pp. 235–237, with the kind permission of Harper & Row. The rather romanticized overtones to Brownell's analysis resulted, in one case, in his asking, "Did not Wordsworth commune with Nature, and Frank Lloyd Wright with his beloved bricks and stones?" And later, with pseudo-Oriental insight, Brownell observed that "the brick in its simple way may experience Frank Lloyd Wright, even as Wright on his part experiences the brick" (p. 241).

Appendix C "To the young Man in Architecture—a Challenge," by Frank Lloyd Wright¹

I have taken over the writing and editing of the January ARCHITECTURAL FORUM.

I turned editor partly because Howard Myers came to Taliesin and asked me to—partly because I felt the time had come to restate a few fundamentals which are strangely missing from the contemporary scene.

The days and nights and the long hours I have put into the making of this issue are important only to me. But important to you are the months and years that went into the making of these buildings whose plans and photographs this issue brings you for the first time with critical text.

This ARCHITECTURAL FORUM is the first and only record in print of what we have come to call the modern movement, from its inception to its present interpretation. Some of the buildings shown as examples were built more than forty years ago. Some were recently completed. They were produced under a wide variety of circumstances—both social and economic, and for clients from West to East.

Together they show the basic principles which give vitality and integrity to such architecture as we have. Here in some 100-odd pages of plates, text and plans, you will see architecture as indigenous to America as the earth from which it springs, just as here you will see the futility and dishonesty of trying to transplant to America an architectural veneer which finds its roots in God knows where or what.

* * *

It is a sense of the whole that is lacking in the "modern" buildings I have seen, and in this issue we are concerned with that sense of the whole which alone is radical. There is more beauty in a fine

ground plan itself than in almost any of its consequences. So plot plans and structural plans have been given due place in this issue as of first importance.

Many of the houses demonstrate the folly of imagining that a true and beautiful house must employ synthetics or steel to be “modern” or go to the factory to be economical. Glass? Yes, the modern house must use glass liberally. Otherwise it may be a simple wood house under a sheet of copper.

* * *

I would rather solve the small house problem than build anything else I can think of (except the modern theatre). But where is a better small house to come from while Government housing itself is only perpetuating the old stupidities? I do not believe it will come from current education, from big business or by way of smart advertising experts. It must come from common sense—a pattern for more simple and at the same time more gracious living.

To give the little Jacobs family a sensible house with benefit of the industrial advantages of our era, we must do more than plant for them another little imitation of a mansion.

And so in the January FORUM I have shown a \$5500 house—a house with a new sense of space and light and freedom. And this house has no visible roof; no plague-spot of an old-fashioned basement (a steam-warmed concrete mat four inches thick laid directly on the ground over gravel filling is better); no radiators or light fixtures, no painting, no interior trim, no plastering, no gutters, no down-spout, no garage (a carport will do as cars are made today).

In the January FORUM I have also shown a plan for a skyscraper with each floor proceeding outward as a cantilever slab from a concrete core to an enclosing shell of glass and copper—the only urban skyscraper fit for human habitation.

I have shown an office building designed to be as inspiring a place to work in as any cathedral ever was in which to worship—a building which becomes, by way of long glass tubing, crystal, where crystal (either translucent or transparent) is most appropriate.

I have shown my own Taliesin, a house of the North. I have shown a house designed for living down in a glen of a mountain stream. I have shown a house for the rolling prairie, and a home for Texas (Texas needs a Texas house). I have shown a house for California, a house for the desert.

* * *

My purpose and hope in presenting this material in the ARCHITECTURAL FORUM is to promote discussion and rekindle enthusiasm for an honest American architecture. After months of work on this January issue I am more convinced than ever that this work should prove of value, particularly to the younger architects, who are America's last line of defense.

Here is a challenge; may I see it answered in three dimensions across the country.

Faithfully,

[signed] Frank Lloyd Wright

Frank Lloyd Wright

TALIESIN: SPRING GREEN: WISCONSIN: January 10th, 1938

Note

1. A two-page broadsheet probably published and distributed by *Architectural Forum*, reprinted here from a copy in the Willcox papers, University of Oregon. The need for concision heightened the critical, architectural, and design sense and character of his verbal presentation perhaps better than the contents of the magazine itself. The last line begs commissions. It should be noted that the splendid 1938 and 1948 issues of *Architectural Forum* devoted to Wright's work were, as put by Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, part of editor Howard Myers's "effort, work, and constant campaigning" presumably to place Wright's work before the architectural public. Pfeiffer says that Wright and Myers often visited and the "deep bond that arose between the two men strengthened with the passing of time" (F. L. Wright 1984, p. 153).

Appendix D Observations by Leonard Reissman

The Visionary The disenchantment with industrial society emerged in one of three ways, depending upon the value placed on industrialism and the social change thought to be needed. (1) Reaction against it all by which industrialism was entirely, if naively, discredited. The machine, the factory, and the city were considered to be beyond salvation in that they could not add anything worthwhile to society. In a reaction against industrialism the tightly comforting security of medievalism was