Frank Lloyd Wright and the Art of the Plan

Few would dispute Frank Lloyd Wright’s standing as the greatest American architect of the twentieth century. And yet certain aspects of his architecture have curiously managed to defy critical analysis, such as a penetrating and developed understanding of his architectural plan organizations and their meaning (one important exception being Richard MacCormac’s essay “The Anatomy of Wright’s Aesthetic.” Wright’s architecture and his attention to the “art of the plan” has typically been overshadowed by the man, a promethean figure unwilling to acknowledge his debt to the very architectural culture from which he emerged. The sources of his work--the very origins of
his thought--are often veiled in the shroud of nineteenth century Romanticism, which inspired his work and yet simultaneously made that work less accessible in general.

The objective of this course will be to examine the work of Frank Lloyd Wright less from a traditional historical point of view than from a typological vantage point precisely in an attempt to let his architecture do the “talking.” We will especially focus on his plan organizations, themes and counter themes, from both a practical and aesthetic point of view. His work, then, will be considered according to architectural plan principles, which animate them. Wright’s building will be studied in terms of a typology developed around his domestic, “congregational,” and tower projects. The common formal-spatial links, which bind all three parallel streams will be emphasized in an attempt to connect them by the principles of which Wright so often spoke. “Organic” and “Democratic” will be tested against building form itself for possible relationships and meaning. The Prairie House and its counterpart, the Usonian House, will be examined both in terms of symbolic meaning and formal and spatial themes.

Topics will include:

Influences and Origins
  Froebel Games
  Academic Planning
  Owen Jones
  Louis Sullivan

Congregational Space, non-domestic architecture
  Larkin Building, Unity Temple, Johnson Wax Office Building, Guggenheim Museum

Domestic Space, cruciform plan and domestic architecture
  Willits House, Cheney House, Robie House
  Textile Block Houses, Fallingwater, Usonian Houses

The Tower
  Romeo and Juliet Windmill, St. Mark’s Tower, Price Tower

Site Planning Themes
  Taliesin East and Taliesin West

Patterns, Photography and Portraiture

Decorative Schemes and Relevance to the Plan