Fact Sheet

Explore Frank Lloyd Wright’s Influential Prairie-Style
New Exhibit at The SC Johnson Gallery: At Home with Frank Lloyd Wright

The Prairie Houses
Architecture fans can explore Frank Lloyd Wright’s transformative Prairie-Style designs at a new, free gallery now open on SC Johnson’s historic Wright-designed campus. Prairie Houses is the debut exhibit at The SC Johnson Gallery: At Home with Frank Lloyd Wright which showcases a rotating selection of Wright’s designs and artifacts and explores the legendary architect’s influence on families and the American home.

During the early 20th century, Wright developed a philosophical foundation for his work based on how people connect with nature. This notion shaped his highly influential Prairie-Style homes from 1899-1909, which established his reputation as a world-famous architect. Of this period, the architect said:

“I loved the prairie by instinct as a great simplicity – the trees, flowers, sky itself, thrilling by contrast. I had an idea that the horizontal planes in buildings, those planes parallel to earth, identify themselves with the ground – make the building belong to the ground. And at this time I saw a house, primarily, as livable interior space under ample shelter. I liked the sense of shelter in the look of the building. The house began to associate with the ground and become natural to its prairie site.”

Elements of the Prairie-Style – The Exterior
- House walls started at the ground on a cement or stone foundation that looked like a low platform under the building. This detail is a feature which can be seen specifically in Wright’s Ward Willits house located in Highland Park, Ill.
- Floor slabs were stiffened and extended as cantilevers over centered supports as a waiter’s tray rests upon his upturned hand. This principle is also evident in the projecting roofs.
- Prairie-Style homes do not have typical “foundation planting” – that is – the tradition of planting bushes and shrubs up against the basement walls as they emerge from the ground.
- Windows were previously treated as holes cut into the walls. Instead, Wright designed them as a continuous band of light, with out-swinging casement windows, as opposed to the typical double hung or “guillotine” windows.
- On the upper level, the broad, low roof extended out over the out-swinging windows for protection from the elements.
- Ledged glass windows and doors, and the relocation in many instances of the main living area to the second level, added an element of privacy from people passing by outside.
- Roofs were gently sloping or flat.
- The underside of projecting roofs on the bedroom level was usually light in color to create glow of reflected light that brightened the upper rooms.
- Overhangs had double value: shelter and protection for the walls of the house, as well as diffusion of reflected light for the upper story through a long series of windows.

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Elements of the Prairie-Style – The Interior

- Elimination of the attic and basement.
  - The attic was, at that time – the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries – generally reserved for the house staff, hot in summer and cold in winter. Wright moved the servants’ quarters to the ground level near the kitchen.
  - With the elimination of the damp and dark basement, the ground level then became the space for the heating, laundry and storage.
- The placement of the main living level on the second floor provided an extended view out over what was then the Midwest prairie.
- Gradually Wright designed the living room and dining room as one continuous space – free from partitions and doors – what later became known as the “open plan.”
- Wright used materials each in accord with its nature: stone as stone, brick as brick, wood as wood. No painting or wallpaper, nothing applied that was not in its natural state.
- Generous broad chimneys and fireplaces.

Decorating the Prairie-Style Home

- The Prairie-Style was so new and unique that Wright’s clients were even involved in seeing the birth of a new domestic style of architecture.
- In the hope of preventing his clients from placing their old Victorian furniture in their Prairie-Style homes, Wright began designing furniture for the homes.
- Rather than windows hung with traditional drapery fabric, Wright designed leaded glass (iridized glass and zinc came) windows in order to bring additional color into the interiors, and also to provide a sense of privacy.
- Furniture was designed to be a natural part of the whole building. Leaded glass windows were treated as light screens of color and geometric patterns to enhance the interiors throughout.

Prairie-Style Artifacts Highlights

- Reception chair, Frank Lloyd Wright Studio, 1895, Oak Park, Ill.
- Library Table, Edward C. Waller House, remodel, 1899, River Forest, Ill.
- Slant-back dining chair, Hillside Home School, 1902, Spring Green, Wis.
- Hanging lamp, William R. Heath House, 1903, Buffalo, N.Y.
- Flag and Balloon Window (architect’s sample window), Coonley Playhouse, 1912, Riverside, Ill.
- Weed-holder, 1895

The Wright Destination

Located in Racine, Wis., a visit to SC Johnson offers a unique opportunity to see a number of architectural gems. The city sits within the 220-mile span between Oak Park, Ill., and Spring Green, Wis. Additional works of architectural importance in this area include:

- Wingspread, the home Wright designed for the Johnson family in 1937, in Racine, Wis.
- Taliesin, Frank Lloyd Wright’s home and architectural laboratory in Spring Green, Wis.
- The Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio in Oak Park, Ill.
- The Robie House in Chicago
- American System-Built homes in the Burnham Street Historic District, Milwaukee
- The Jacobs House in Madison, Wis.
Visit SC Johnson
To celebrate The Gallery opening, SC Johnson has expanded hours for visitors. SC Johnson offers three tour programs which run from 1 hour to 3.5 hours. Tours are on Fridays and Saturdays and are all free of charge. They include:

- **The Legacies Tour (3.5 hours)** – SC Johnson's headquarters is home to remarkable legacies by inspired leaders. In this in-depth, 3.5-hour tour, explore the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Administration Building as well as the award-winning Foster + Partners-designed Fortaleza Hall with the Spirit of Carnaúba airplane soaring at its heart. See Sam Johnson's acclaimed film *Carnaúba: A Son’s Memoir*, with its enduring family message, and enjoy the Academy Award-winning documentary *To Be Alive!* This tour also includes *The SC Johnson Gallery: At Home with Frank Lloyd Wright*.

- **The Landmarks Tour (2 hours)** – Designed in 1936, the Administration Building was the first project that Frank Lloyd Wright designed for SC Johnson. Renowned for its unique dendriform columns, open concept half-acre of workspace, circular “bird cage” elevators and 43 miles of glass tubing, this landmark is celebrated as one of the top 25 buildings of the 20th century. In this 2-hour tour, explore the Administration Building and visit the award-winning Foster + Partners-designed Fortaleza Hall. Then, enjoy *The SC Johnson Gallery: At Home with Frank Lloyd Wright*.

- **The Gallery Tour (1 hour)** – The 1-hour Gallery Tour is designed for those who want to focus on the new SC Johnson Gallery and its debut exhibit.

*The Lily Pad*, a unique gift shop featuring exclusive SC Johnson memorabilia and Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired items, is open in conjunction with all tours.

For more information on tours to the SC Johnson campus, please call (262) 260-2154, email Tours@scj.com, or use the online scheduling tool at www.scjohnson.com/visit

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