Frank Lloyd Wright and the Bauhaus

There are many different ways of expressing yourself as an artist. I myself enjoy working with and observing three-dimensional works of art. I appreciate the fact that a person can analyze a work from all angles of a sculpture or three-dimensional piece rather than a painting or drawing which only contain a single dimension. Architecture is just that, but instead of looking at it from just the outside, at all angles, one gets the chance of looking at it from all angles of the inside as well. It is amazing because two amazing pieces of work come together as one. Architecture is all around us. It is in a sense an innate part of us because it helps shape who we become as a person and what we have been and are as a society.

Architecture dates back to the earliest of times. As people have developed the architecture has enhanced from small huts that were covered in wattle and daub and corbelled vaults to skeletal structured skyscrapers made out of steel and glass. Frank Lloyd Wright and the Bauhaus are two very prominent and historical names in the field of architecture. I feel that when people see these names they may not at first make an instant connection other then the obvious architecture link. But, as one begins to study and look at the works of Frank Lloyd Wright and the Bauhaus, there are several similarities. Throughout this paper, I am going to compare and contrasting the works of
Frank Lloyd Wright and the Bauhaus. When I refer to the Bauhaus, I will be comparing
Frank Lloyd Wright to several members of the Bauhaus as well as the ideas of the school
and the movement that came from it.

To get the full meaning of both Mr. Wright and the Bauhaus’s work, I feel that it
is important to get some history and background information on them. So, to start things
off I would like to talk about the history of Frank Lloyd Wright. He was born on June 8,
1867, in Richland Center Wisconsin. His father William was a musician and a Unitarian
faith preacher. His mother, Anna, had great hopes for Frank as an Architect; when Frank
was a young baby, she would hang pictures of famous buildings in his nursery (Miller).

When Frank was around the age of eighteen he studied civil engineering at the
University of Wisconsin for a short period of time. He quickly moved to Chicago where
he began working at J. Lymann Sisbee’s architectural firm. Frank soon landed a job as a
draftsman at a firm called Adler and Sullivan. Here was the perfect place to learn his
trade. At this firm, he had the responsibility of being in charge of residential designs. IT
was this experience that helped to grow as an architect. Throughout his life, he had many
different design periods, which led to him creating an art school to expand his and others'
knowledge. Frank died on April 9, 1959 at the age of ninety-two. Never having retired,
he now lays in a graveyard at Unity Chapel, which is considered by many to be his first
building (Miller).

The History of the Bauhaus is not that of single person but of a school. In 1919,
Walter Gropius founded an art and design school in Weimar, Germany. Gropius founded
the school by combining Weimar Arts and Crafts School with the Weimar Art Academy.
It was named Bauhaus because it means “House of building,” and it focused around rebuilding the country after World War I in order to try to form a new social order. The Bauhaus taught the artists to recognize their social order in the community and taught the community return to respect and support the artist (Bauhaus).

In architecture, the Bauhaus focused on using modern innovations, artistic work, and well-designed creations. They focused on using Classical principles but without using more was necessary for the structure. In a sense, they focused on a theory of "less is more" to put it simply. The theory rejected ornamentation on the building such as sculptures, eaves, and cornices (Bauhaus).

The school reached its peak from 1920 to 1928 during the interim between WWI and WWII. During this time, the school’s major goals were to, “[e]ncourage craftsman and artists to collaborate, to elevate the status of crafts, and to maintain relations with industry and craft leaders in order to eventually become independent of the government control,” (Bauhaus).

In the late 1920s the school suffered some major blows. First of all, the school was forced to move to Dessau in 1925, and only three years later, Walter Gropius left his position as the leader. Hannes Meyer replaced Gropius, although he was under-qualified, and moved the school to Berlin, turning the school private academy in the process. Glory eventually returned to the Bauhaus, but only for a year, when Ludwig Mies van der Rohe took control in 1932, but the Nazis shut down the school in 1933. After the Bauhaus was forced to close, many of the artists and architects fled to the United States to live and work. Among the names, two are most prominent: Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies
van der Rohe. Even though the Bauhaus had spread the style still lives, it is no longer call
the Bauhaus style; it is referred to as the International style (Bauhaus).

The single most important characteristic that gives an architect his/her identity is
his/her own personal taste for design. One of the most fundamental beliefs held by the
Bauhaus design was by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Although the belief had been around
since the beginning of the Bauhaus, Mies van der Rohe clearly explained and practiced
the maxim that, "[l]ess is more," (Stokstand 1099). He had a passion for finding the
simplest form of structure, proportion and details. A great example of this passion is the
interior of the Pavilion in Barcelona. He exemplifies this belief by using slender piers to
support the floor and ceiling slabs, and large slabs of glass are used as walls or basically
just dividers to separate a one large room (Stokstand 1099). The interior was very similar
to the exterior of Mies van der Rohe buildings; they were basically a metal skeletal
structure made up of purely functional lines with mostly glass exterior and flat roofs
(Zelanski 399). This is exemplified in his design of the Seagram building on Park
Avenue in New York (Ludwig, mowa 94). The Maxim and practice became widely know
all over the world as the International style. This style was driven by thought of bringing
the world together as a whole after all the turmoil of World War I which had split the
world apart. (Zelanksi 399).

I feel The Bauhaus really achieved what they wanted after the school had closed
because as the architects began to disperse, the International style traveled around the
world with them, truly becoming international. I feel the style spread so quickly and
easily because it was a simple idea and would fit in any society because of the lack of
ornamentation and the use of new materials. This style was not just done by Ludwig but by the entire movement.

Frank Lloyd Wright also expressed an oneness in his design, but Mr. Wright's oneness was with nature rather than the world. Mr. Wright felt that nature and buildings fit well with each other. He intended his building to be a part of the nature. Mr. Wright said, “That the ground was more important than anything man would make out of it or put upon it,” (Hoffman 3). He was so in love with the nature that he rejected cities and even convinced a woman in California to not build on a treeless site that she already bought but built on another site that had two eucalyptus trees. He basically felt that the building should not affect nature but the nature should have an affect on the building (Hoffman 5). This style was called organic architecture, and it is shown in almost all of his work. A great example of this is his prairie style design; which the Robie House of Chicago demonstrates. To create this oneness with nature, he makes an overall horizontal feel to the house just like the planes. He uses extremely long bricks and has a flat roof that extends out past the structure of the house; the house in general is low to the ground and elongated. Inside the house, to show the openness of the planes he allowed one room to flow into another room, only separated by dividing walls (Brommer 527).

One of his most famous pieces, the Kaufmann House also shows this and is often referred to as Falling Water. This house extends over a small waterfall in Bear Run, Pennsylvania. He expresses his Organic architecture by the Cantilevered terraces that stretch over the stream. It is these terraces that look very similar and flow well with the water and rocks underneath the water. Also, the rocks make the house blend in with like
the stones underneath the waterfall (Brommer 526-27).

Many times when a person walks into a house it is not at all what they had expected. To clarify the outside of the building gives a certain feel to the design. Often when a person walks into the house they get a totally different feel than the exterior suggests because either the furniture is not in compliance with the outside or the actual interior does not resemble it. Both the Bauhaus movement and Frank Lloyd Wright believed that the exterior should match up with the interior in both design and furniture. Frank Lloyd Wright obviously had the same theme in the interior of his buildings as he did in the exterior of the building. As I said before that Mr. Wright is an Organic Architect and he truly demonstrates this in his interior by showing relationship to the exterior and the nature around it. One example that shows this is a cantilever holding up a lamp in Mr. Wright’s home in Oak Park. The cantilever fits in with the exterior because the exterior is in relation with the trees around the site, and the cantilever holding the lamp symbolizes a tree branch coming out of the wall of the house (Hoffman 41). R.M. Schindler explained that Mr. Wright was a master of incorporating the idea of nature into his interior as seen in his designs which have different floor levels and directions change, and shadows become as important as light, similar to the change in direction, shadows and light in forest. For example, in his house at Taliesin, the fireplace sent beams of light much like the sun peeking through trees of the forest (49). The Robie House emulates long open plains in the exterior design as well as the interior of the house by allowing one room to flow into another room separated only by dividing walls (Brommer 527).
This Organic theme of structure fitting into nature and how everything should connect goes all the way down to the furniture in the house. In the Robie House, the dining room table is extremely elongated. The chairs are very angular with long backs, designed to resemble the flat land of the Chicago area (Stokstand 1086-1087).

For the Bauhaus, it was similar to as Frank Lloyd Wright in the belief that exterior and interior should be related. One of the very first principles of the Bauhaus or International Style, was architecture is a volume not a mass. They demonstrated this by using the skeleton structure made of steel rather then using anything else that created a load barring wall. This technique did not only have an effect on the exterior but on the interior as well. This technique allowed them more space in the interior of the buildings. Now they could have free-flowing open floors with max space and flexibility to create which complemented the idea of, “Less is more,” (Stokstand 194). A great example of this idea of the need for a relationship between the outside and the inside is shown in Walter Gropius’s design of The Dessau Labour Exchange; the exterior is a circular shaped building with no ornamentations. Since the exterior of the building has a circular feel to it, the interior of the building does as well. The walls of the interior are arched, and the lights hanging down from the ceiling are circular. In regard to color, it is much of the same theme; the outside of the building is created with bricks painted white with dark doors and the interior reflecting the same design (Gropius 84). The Bauhaus or International style did this all the way down to the furniture. For example, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe designed a chair that would have fit well in many of his buildings. His armchair was very classy and unornamented. “Its frame of polished bent tubular steel for
legs and armrests was highly innovative at the time” (Zelanksi 370). This chair could have fit in any building he built because just like his chair, his buildings are also unornamented and classy.

If some people heard that one could compare the Bauhaus and Frank Lloyd Wright, they would probably argue that there are no similarities because they are almost complete opposites. One argument is that Frank Lloyd Wright is very ornamentational in order to express his Organic architecture, and the Bauhaus is completely against this. But, I want to explain that there is a similarity in the “[l]ess is more,” statement with Frank Lloyd Wright and the Bauhaus. As previously stated the Bauhaus principle is based on no ornamentation but rather using modern materials to create their design. With these modern materials, they focused on classical design (Bauhaus). What they ended up with was the International style. The connection of this to Frank Lloyd Wright is in the fact that they used only what they needed to make the building and that is exactly what Frank Lloyd Wright did in his Usonian house design. This house was made for the society that had just overcome the Great Depression. Frank Lloyd Wright made the Usonian house at low cost that would only take eight thousand dollars for someone to own. He did this by using only what was needed to make the house. For example, the bedrooms, kitchens, and bathrooms were made just for their specific purpose and nothing else. The biggest rooms in the houses were the living rooms because that was where Mr. Wright believed most of the interaction took place. These houses were furnished with built in furniture and utilities (Rohre). Even though Mr. Wright built these with a low budget and on a small scale, they were as uniquely built as the Kaufmann house (Scully 27).
While there are many similarities between the two architects, I would like to take a moment to explain how the Bauhaus and Frank Lloyd Wright are in total contrast of each other. The Bauhaus had one period which developed the international style that focused around three main ideas which are, “‘[t]he conception of architecture as volume rather than mass,’ ‘[r]egularity rather than symmetry as the chief means of ordering design,’ and ‘arbitrary applied decoration,’” which is best summarized by Ludwig Meis van der Rohe statement of, “[l]ess is more” (Stokstand 1094). Although the Bauhaus really only had one style, I think that many of the architects that were part of the school incorporated other architects’ ideas in addition to the international style. For example, Gropius built something similar to the Mason City Bank that Wright had built and Meis used the Wrightian cross axis for a house plan that was originally designed by Mr. Wright (Scully 23).

Unlike the Bauhaus, many artists or architect are influenced by many things and change, developing new periods. Much like Pablo Picasso, Frank Lloyd Wright evolved from one period to the next, but Mr. Wright kept his main idea about Organic architecture. Often Mr. Wright focused his designs around the nature that he lived in or what it was like in the society at the time. Early his is career he started out with the prairie style. From 1893 to 1901, Frank Lloyd Wright built 49 buildings that were focused on this style. He developed this style because he was an Organic architect and, because he lived in the Chicago area, he felt the prairie style was best suited for the area (Miller). This Prairie style period is composed of buildings that were typically flat and low houses with was very rectangular shape. They also were usually very long
(Stokstand 1086-1087). One of his houses that express this long, flat look of the prairies, other then the Robie House, is the Coonley House Riverside, which is in Illinois (Lloyd 22-23).

Another period that I would like to discuss is his Usonian style period. It was developed because of the lack of money after the country began to recover from the Depression. This style of house was, “[l]aid out in a rectangular module on a floating concrete slab with hot water pipes laid in it” (Scully 27). Many of the rooms were connected. The exterior wall was made with no post, basically meaning there were just an interior wall and exterior wall. This method seemed to keep heat in and helped keep the cost down (Scully 27).

Along with this, Frank developed several styles from other groups of people; a few of them are the Japanese and Native American culture. The Japanese were the most influential to Mr. Wright. Throughout his work, he represented a Japanese touch. In his prairie style, he uses a low-sloped roof that extend way past the house which was common of Japanese buildings and would also sign his house with a red stamp with his name on it (Brommer 527). The Japanese influenced him so much that he moved there for a short time and built the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo. During his time in Japan, Mr. Wright began to pick up many of the Japanese ideas and methods of architecture (Miller). One of his most notable buildings of this Japanese influence is the Johnson Wax Company office building in Racine, Wisconsin. The Laboratory tower was designed much like the Japanese had to deal with the structure of tall building to withstand the earthquakes. What Frank Lloyd Wright did was made a cylinder tower that supported
itself at the center core of the building. This allowed for the tower to sway without cracking (Adams).

Through the 1910s to the late 1920s, Mr. Wright went into a drought of architectural design. He had lost his hold in the suburban designs and was looking for something new. After Mr. Wright had read book by D.H. Lawrence about how the white man had been came to American and has taken the spirit away from the Native Americans, he felt that he could show respect to the Natives though his architecture. He began to make much of his work to resemble the pre-Columbian architectures of America. His buildings resembled to the ancient Mayan temples. For example, the A.D. German Warehouse is very similar to the Temple of the two Lintels at Chichen Itza. He did this by using solid brick blocks on the outside with three narrow slits that go vertical on the building. Also, there is a concrete design at the top that which resembles this ancient temple. Frank Lloyd Wright did not do this to just one building but copied the look of many different ancient structures during this time period (Scully 24).

The rise of Modern period was around the 20th century. During this time, architects were focused on breaking away from the old. They primarily focused on using new technology and materials to build (Brommer 524). After doing research on both the Frank Lloyd Wright and the Bauhaus I think it is obvious to say that both are innovators and helped pave the way to Modernism. For the Bauhaus house, which was designed by Walter Gropius, he contributed to the movement by using modern materials such as glass and concrete. This is shown in the actual Bauhaus in Dessau, Germany. On this building, much of one side was covered in glass (Brommer 528). As the movement progressed and
the Bauhaus broke up and expanded to the U.S., Ludwig Mies van der Rohe contributed his beautiful designs of skeletal structured, glass covered skyscrapers to the movement of modernism (Brommer 524). A great example of this influence was his design of the Lake Shore apartments in Chicago (Drexler 88). He made these two building by setting them at right angles to each other. He used slight detailing on the windows and dark colored metal to simplify his work. To add rhythm to the build Meis van der Rohe made every fourth metal division a little bit wider then the ones in the middle (Brommer 524).

Frank Lloyd Wright did not contribute just a few ideas to modern architecture, but rather he could be considered a part of it all and really helped give birth to it. I say this because he started his career working for Louis Sullivan, who was one of the earliest to use steel construction, and moved into his own styles, using the structural works that he learned early in his career. Two of his most famous works that show his evolved style with Modern characteristics are in his design of the Guggenheim Museum in New York City and the Kaufmann house, “Falling Water” (Brommer 530, 525). In the Kaufmann house, Mr. Wright shows his organic architecture by using like material to blind the surrounding of the woods and the creek and using the modern materials to create a similar design of his European colleague Richard Neutra. The structure that influenced him was the cantilevers and the steel frames of Neutra’s design of Lovell House (Scully 26).

After comparing and contrasting many of the Bauhaus, International style, and Frank Lloyd Wright’s work, I have several opinions about both. I feel that the Bauhaus principles and ideas at the time were genius. They could not have come into play at a
better of time than between World War I and then break up and spread out at the beginning of World War II. Their maxim of “[l]ess is more” helps to keep the focus on International aspect. I feel that if they had begun to use ornamentation on their work then it would have made it have some sort national feel to it. They created high structures that people of the time would have never dreamed of building before. With the use of the steel skeleton structure, they defiantly reached new heights. But, after looking at several of their works, I feel it can become boring looking at the non-ornamentation over and over. To me, it is not interesting to look at a building like the Seagram building. It simply looks like one massive sheet of glass that goes straight up. I would prefer to see some buildings with some curves and ornamentation on it. I feel that after you see one skyscraper from the outside you have pretty much seen them all. That is why I feel that Frank Lloyd Wright’s designs were much more interesting to observe and to study.

To further this statement, I would first look at his organic designs. I agree with him that the structure of the building should blend in with the ground around it, a belief I believe most people hold. For example, I think if you asked someone if a log cabin would look good on a lot without trees, they would probably say it would not fit there. I feel that Frank Lloyd Wright took this one step further. He began to use the material around the site to add to the building. For example, at his Taliesin house in Arizona, he used the rocks from the area to make the house. He also designed his house to make it feel like you were in the nature itself. After looking at several pictures of his sites, I notice that his buildings flow, move, and change levels and directions to make a person feel like they are in a woods or the surrounding nature. This is seen in several pictures of
his Talesin house in Wisconsin. The Midaway court really shows how there are small paths and different directions to demonstrate this nature feel. On top of that, the house has several trees and plants on the site (Hoffman 47).

With this idea of Organic architecture, no two designs could be exactly the same. Because of this, I think that is why Mr. Wright had several different influences. Not only did Mr. Wright get the influences of the day from other countries such as Japan and Europe but also he looked back at ancient architecture of the Native civilizations and combined them with his own style. This made him a better architect by challenging him to come up with new ideas and designs to fit the site.

Compared to the Bauhaus, Frank Lloyd Wright’s designs seemed to have a warmer more inviting feel to them. For example, the solid glass and concrete buildings, of the Bauhaus’s design, like the Pupils’ Hostel and Atelier Building seems to have a dull, cold feeling them. Lack of ornamentations and the dark colors creates this, as well as the very geometric shape (Gropius 48). On the other hand I think that Frank Lloyd Wright’s design first get the attention of the view and then draw them in because of the interesting shapes. For example, in the Guggenheim design the spiraling cone seems appealing to and invites viewers to step inside and see what the rest of the building looks like. Another example of this is “Falling Water” because it is obvious that the viewer’s attention is already attracted to the stream from the outside of the house and one can not help to wonder what the falling water of the stream looks like from the large windows that are on top of the concrete cantilever.

The theory behind this paper was developed out of the love for architecture. I
enjoy learning about modern architecture because it has been all around me. Some of the most famous works of modern architecture are just a few hours away, in Chicago. Before beginning this paper, I had great appreciation for both the movements of Frank Lloyd Wright and the Bauhaus and wanted to investigate them further. After studying the two styles, I found that they are both completely opposite styles from architecture of each other in the general sense, but both were in the modern area also have many similarities. Some of the similarities that they have led to yet more contrast with in them. I have made comparisons of the overall style, number of periods, the fact that they both have a desire for oneness, the relationship to the exterior and the interior, and the fact that both the leaders of the Bauhaus and Frank Lloyd Wright have paved the way for Modernism in architecture. After studying them I have come to the realization that I enjoy looking at Frank Lloyd Wright’s work much more than the semi-boring designs of the Bauhaus or International Style, but I have mutual enjoyment of their theory and reasons to their designs.
Bibliography


<http://wwar.com/masters/movemnts/bauhaus_school.html>


