

TDTCOUK FLW #5

In this Friday's installment of TDT's College of Useless Knowledge FLW Lecture Series, we take a brief respite from our rigorous studies of architectural theory & will instead take a lighter look at some little known trivia & factoids on the life, work & family of FLW.

Registrars note: A reminder that after this week there are only 3 sessions left in the semester. For those of you wishing to sign up for our next series, "TDT Explains Quantum Physics", the class is filling up fast so register soon.

Due to last week's anonymous & rather unseemly allegations of academic improprieties (aka cheating) we will not have an extra credit question this week. As usual, the rest of you chronic whiners, slackers & underachievers have ruined it for the one outstanding pupil who was seeking nothing more than to better himself.

- Two of FLW's sons followed the family business & became architects. A grandson, Eric Lloyd Wright, is also an architect & still practices in Malibu, California. All have followed the old man's organic principles.
- One of Wright's sons, John Lloyd Wright (Eric's father) invented Lincoln Logs in 1918. They were named not in honor of the 16th President as many people believe but for FLW's original middle name. They were hugely popular when introduced, went out of favor after the depression & then had a big resurgence in the 1950's (still have mine). John Lloyd Wright's other child; Elizabeth Ingraham is also an architect in Colorado.
- FLW's son, Lloyd Wright, was the architect for the original Hollywood Bowl band-shell & amphitheater in 1919. The world famous concert venue has been modified several times over the years, but was recently completely renovated to restore it to Lloyd Wright's original vision.
- FLW was the first to butt sheets of glass together at the corners of buildings, with no mullions or other visible means of support, in order to open the interior space & create unbroken views.
- FLW invented concrete block although not exactly as it is used today, he called it a Textile Block System. Building wooden forms to pour concrete took a long time, required highly skilled carpentry labor, wasted a tremendous amount of wood & then took still more time to remove the forms. Wright's idea was to have decorative precast hollow units that could be laid up quickly by semi-skilled masons & then have the cavities filled with steel bars & concrete which would cure into a monolithic wall. Contractors later dropped the decorative element & began taking the short cut of not filling the cores which remains the most common usage for concrete block today.
- Today's ubiquitous ranch house that dominated the American landscape in the 50's, 60's & 70's is a bastardization of FLW's long, low Prairie Style house.
- FLW was the first to include a dedicated storage space for automobiles as an attachment to a home & coined the term carport.
- Tom Monaghan, the billionaire founder of Domino's & one time Detroit Tigers owner, is the nation's preeminent collector of FLW memorabilia. He was almost single handedly responsible for the resurgence in interest in FLW's work in the early 1980's when his rapidly expanding pizza chain made him fabulously wealthy. He bought up most of the FLW houses, furniture, art glass windows & other salvaged parts & caused the prices for such items to reach astronomical levels. In 1990 he paid \$1.6 million (US) for an oak dining room table & chairs that FLW designed for an 1899 Chicago home. At its height his collection was valued at over \$30 million. It got so absurd at one point that

people began stripping elements out of FLW houses because the value of the components far outweighed the home's market value. When he learned that his passion was having this effect on the remaining Wright structures, Monaghan stopped buying & the market quickly cooled. Domino's headquarters building near Ann Arbor appears to be about a mile long & is a prototypical Prairie design. Monaghan's personal office is a Wright wonderland filled with Wright artifacts & original Wright furnishings that is unrivaled by any museum. He also bought a Lake Michigan island & began construction of a multi million dollar Prairie style mansion based on an unbuilt FLW design. About 3/4 of the way thru the construction, Monaghan had a religious epiphany, began to feel guilty about his lavish lifestyle & stopped construction on the home. It remains partially finished today.

- FLW was the first to create what has evolved today into the open office. The 1904 Larkin Soap Building in Buffalo, NY placed all the management team in open workstations on the first floor with all the support personnel arranged in open workstations on balconied floors above that all opened to a central light filled atrium. This groundbreaking building had several other firsts including:

The first building in the US to be air conditioned.

Now the standard for commercial restrooms, it was the first building to have wall hung toilets & toilet partitions to make floor cleaning easier.

The first building to have office furniture made of steel instead of wood.

The first building to have double pane insulated glass windows.

The first building to have stairs built as separate enclosed towers & pushed to the corners of a building both to improve the circulation but mostly to provide a safe means of emergency egress. This is now the standard for high-rise office buildings & why so many were able to escape from the World Trade Center.

- Frank Lloyd Wright never attended architecture school. He studied engineering at the University of Wisconsin for a couple of semesters; beginning at the age of 16, but never received any degree. He did not even graduate from high school.

- Under current education & licensing regulations, FLW would not be able to practice architecture today. The same applies to several other famous architects who along with Wright are considered the masters of modern architecture.

- Wright was fired from his first job as a draftsman/architect for the great Louis Sullivan in Chicago for moonlighting house designs on the side.

- In 1991 Architectural Record magazine published a list of the world's 100 most significant buildings. Twelve of them were by FLW.

- Wright was the first architect to use the new material, poured in place concrete, in his 1905 Unity Temple in Oak Park.

- Unity Temple was among the first, if not the first, building in the US to employ a forced hot air heating system.

- Frank Lloyd Wright's great-great-grandfather, Jenkin Jones, was the founder of the Unitarian

Church in 1726.

- Art Garfunkel planned to be an architect & studied at Columbia before the music thing took off. Paul Simon, wrote a song on their Bridge Over Troubled Water album called So Long Frank Lloyd Wright. The song is not totally about FLW. It's really a homage to Art, in which Paul calls Art FLW as a disguised compliment. It's kind of a song within a song. Their musical & personal differences would break them up shortly after the album's release so this was Paul's secret goodbye to his long time friend & partner. Artie was not aware of the double entendre at the time the song was recorded & Paul only told him the real story later after the album was released.

"I remember Frank Lloyd Wright, all of the nights we'd harmonize till dawn..... I never laughed so long, so long, so long."

At the very end of the song you can hear Paul saying, very softly, "So long already Artie."

- Following in his father's musical footsteps, FLW was a very accomplished pianist.
- Anne Baxter the famous stage & screen actress of the 40's & 50's was FLW's granddaughter. One of her daughters is a famous Interior Designer in Atlanta.
- Hurricane Katrina totally destroyed two FLW designed homes in Ocean Springs, Mississippi.
- During his lifetime FLW designed almost 1,200 structures, 532 of them were built. By comparison, most architects would consider 200 built projects to be a fabulously successful career.
- Long before movie stars or sports figures even thought of leveraging their fame with product endorsement deals, FLW designed & marketed several lines of furniture for Henredon, a collection of fabrics for Schumacher & a line of paints for Martin Senour.
- In 1956 FLW proposed a 528 floor skyscraper for Chicago that was a mile tall. The drawing of the tower was itself 26 feet long. Considered ridiculous & unbuildable at the time, a building currently under construction in Dubai will be over half a mile tall & is reminiscent of FLW's Mile High Tower.
- Wright pioneered the use of radiant heating by placing copper tubing inside concrete floor slabs & pumping heated water through the tubing.
- The 1943 bestseller book & 1949 hit movie, The Fountainhead by Ayn Rand, is allegedly loosely based on FLW & his life as an uncompromising individualist. Flush with cash from the success of her book, Rand commissioned FLW to design a home for her in 1947 but it was never constructed.
- FLW was born in June. Besides FLW at least a dozen more of the world's most renowned architects were also born in June. Must be something about that September air.