

THE FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 2 NUMBER 1
FIRST QUARTER 1979

F. C. BOGK HOUSE MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

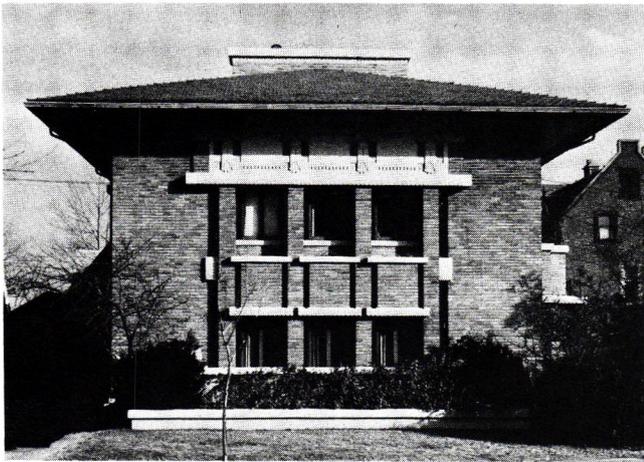
*Harriet Riddle
Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

This article was written by Harriet Riddle of Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1939. She was a friend of the Bogk family and is now friends with the present owners of the house, the Elsners who kindly passed the manuscript on to the Editor.

After visiting her friend Mrs. Avery Coonley in her charming new home designed and constructed by Frank Lloyd Wright, Mrs. Frederick G. Bogk of Milwaukee decided that she, too, wanted Mr. Wright to design her home. The Coonley house, low and spread out, with beautiful fusion of the garden and house, is an inspiration to anyone. In 1917, therefore, Mr. and Mrs. Bogk began their new home a block west of Lake Michigan. The first design submitted by Mr. Wright was what his clients wanted except for one major change: instead of a flat roof which made the house resemble a mausoleum, a typical tile roof with a five and a half foot cornice was added. With the exception of the insertion of windows on the south end of the living room, a second story over the living room, a basement and an attic, and a garage attached to the house so space above it could be used for a maid's room, the plans were accepted.

Unfortunately, the construction of this house was under way during the war. One by one, the young competent workmen went away to war, and when older men were taken on, work was retarded because they were unfamiliar with modern construction. Even more inconvenient was the fact that Mr. Wright was at work on the Imperial Hotel in Japan at the same time. He tried to give instructions by cable, but now and then he came to the United States for a month or so to catch up the threads of his commissions. Naturally, the transportation of materials was most difficult in a time when the country was more interested in transporting men and war supplies. The tile for the roof, for instance, weighed thirty-five thousand pounds, and it took several months to get it all to Milwaukee. The walnut and gum wood, moreover, being rather rare for woodwork, involved great expense in transportation. Also, the house is almost solid concrete with a brick veneer, both inside and out, and the transportation of these materials was a problem. Expense cannot be spared, however, when only the best of construction materials is being used.

Calling himself a functionalist seems odd when you consider that Mr. Wright originally eliminated the attic and the "unwholesome basement"¹ in the Bogk house. But Mrs. Bogk refused to be inconvenienced by lack of a place for her laundry tubs, her washing machine, and oil furnace. She wished, moreover, a good dry place for her trunks



Front Elevation (looking east) of the Bogk House taken in 1975. Photo courtesy Thomas A. Heinz.

and extra furniture. Wanting, therefore, to keep his contract, Mr. Wright was forced to comply with her wishes by putting in the two features which he calls "useless heights."² The remainder of the house is entirely typical. He declared the "whole lower floor as one room, cutting off the kitchen as a laboratory."³ Then the one room was partitioned off for various domestic purposes — dining, living, and receiving callers. Thus the interior became more spacious. This idea of spaciousness was carried to the windows which he decided were to be of casement type. Since they swing out, he felt that now the house was more associated with the out of doors. Here is where Mr. Wright's love of Nature interferes with his realism and functionalism, because of all the impractical types of windows, the casement is almost the worst. In summer, the flies collect on the screen, and in order to close the window, the screen must be opened, and in come the flies.

So that the house would be organic in nature, Mr. Wright naturally wanted to design all the furniture and equipment to make them all one with the building. After letting him design a table or two, however, Mrs. Bogk decided that they were too severe, so she called on Mr. George Niedecken of Milwaukee, a man who had worked with Mr. Wright several times and who knew his ideas and inclinations. He designed and decorated all the furniture with beautiful feeling, so that it would harmonize with the house. The dining room furniture, especially, looks as though it had grown with the house. It is solid walnut, rather a light color, on rectilinear lines but with the geometric decoration that Mr. Wright's lacked. The draperies are a light rust shade matching the simple geometric design of rust and green on the

beige rugs. Mrs. Bogk had originally ordered Austrian Woolen rugs, but due to the war in Europe, it was impossible for her to get them. Instead, she had some carpets made in the United States which were very appropriate. The design is only in spots, and each design is slightly different in shape and size. As for the furniture in the living room, it has walnut legs and is upholstered in green-blues and rusts. The lighting fixtures were made in Milwaukee by William MacArthur, and are small pagodas, three of different lengths in a group, suspended from the ceiling. Two groups hang one in each of two corners. All extra space in the room has been filled in with book cases.

By the time Mr. and Mrs. Bogk finished the decoration of the first floor, they were unable to afford elaborate furnishings for the second floor. The cost of the entire house had been so much more than they had anticipated that they concentrated their efforts only on the wallpaper, which was made to order in Milwaukee. It is of a fairylike Japanese design, made in strips four feet wide. In one of the bedrooms, the furniture is handpainted in the same design as the wallpaper. This is the only bedroom done in the same vein as the house. Whereas the first floor woodwork and trim is walnut, the second floor is trimmed with gum wood — a seldom-used elastic wood. Although I do not know the advantages of this wood, I do know that it is used in a cover for the radiator and in twenty-one years it has not warped from the heat.

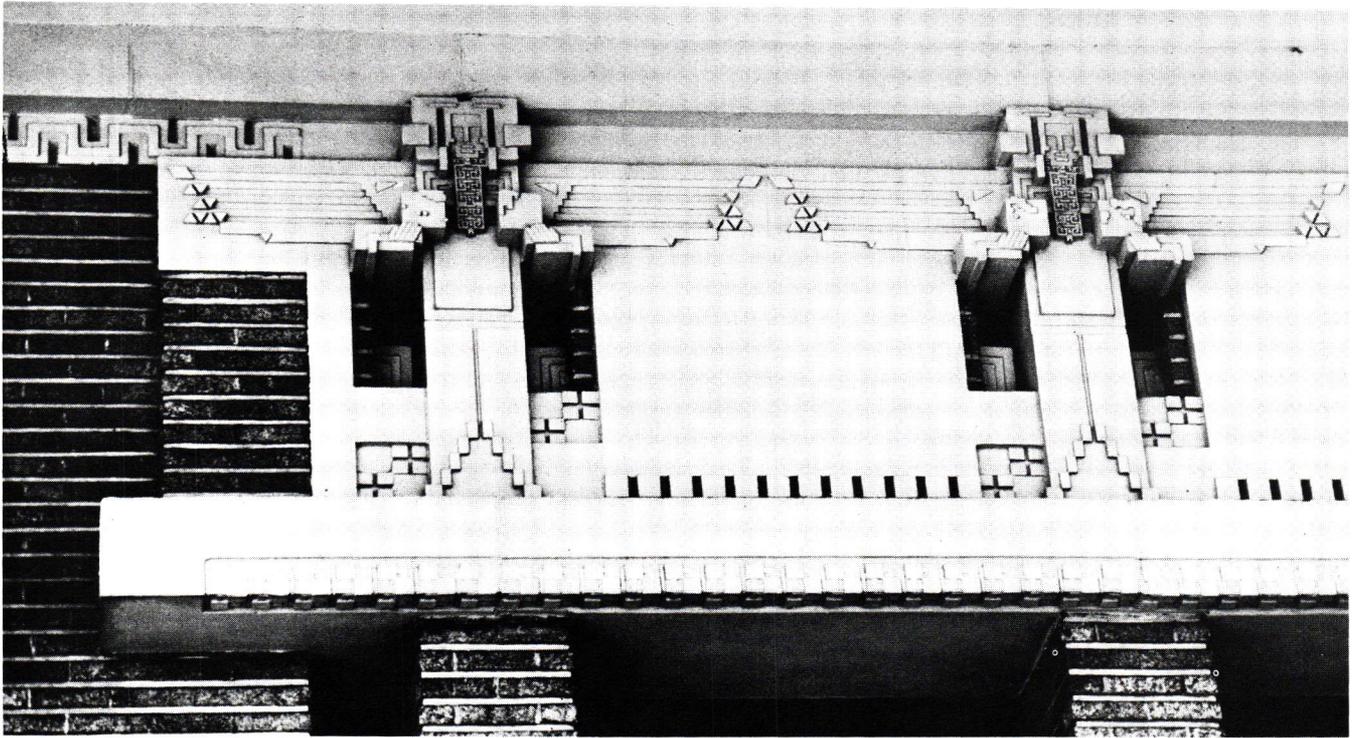
The decoration on the outside of the Bogk house is a simple, geometric design, cast in the concrete. This decoration is found only on the lintel of the windows on the street side of the house, and on the outside of the sun porch. Here, on either side of the windows, are long narrow panes of amber stained glass. The pieces are so small, however, that they are most difficult to clean. The decoration above the second story windows on the front of the house is sculpture, cast in slabs of concrete. But these slabs are so small that they cannot be seen from a distance. Otherwise, the decoration on the outside is the concrete rectilinear lines of the construction carried from the inside to the outside.

Since the tile roof weighs thirty-five thousand pounds, it necessitated very solid walls. The house is made of ferro concrete faced with brick — all stretchers, which is perfectly solid since the concrete is underneath. This brick faced concrete is also carried to the inside in the pillars and in the fireplace which is the main partition in the house. It starts in the middle of the basement and goes straight through the house to the chimney. The chimney is entirely typical of Mr. Wright's style because it is low and very broad, emphasizing the horizontal effect, since it slopes up gently, with an eave spread of five and a half feet. Two more strong horizontals are the broad lintel above the second story and the low, generous porch on the

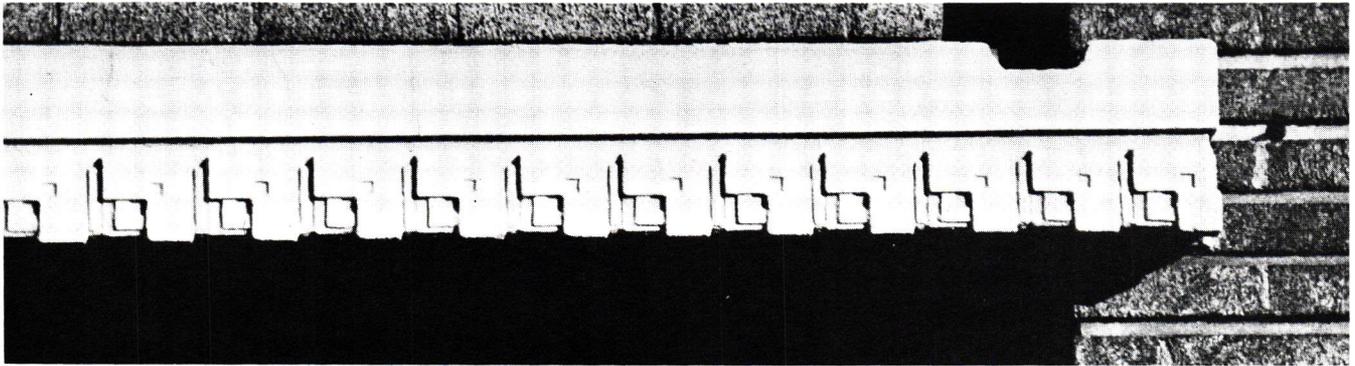
¹ Wright, Frank Lloyd, *An Autobiography of Frank Lloyd Wright*, page 142

² *Ibid.* page 138

³ *Ibid.* page 141



Terra Cotta ornament under eave. Photo courtesy Thomas A. Heinz.



Detail of cast stone above first floor windows. Photo courtesy Thomas A. Heinz.



Interior of living room with built-ins. Photo courtesy Thomas A. Heinz.

street side. In fact, the second story concrete lintel runs around the whole house. Mr. Wright's favorite word, next to "integral," was "horizontal." He liked to stress it because it made the house "grip the whole to Earth."⁴ Today, however, Mr. Wright has changed his tune somewhat. For a time he emphasized the horizontal of the earth to the *vertical* lines of the house, but in his very latest productions, he seems to have gone back to the horizontal. Right now Frank Lloyd Wright has production going "full blast." At last, it seems, the country is finally giving him "a chance to live his life and do his work in the creative manner of his own design."⁵ He has, moreover, formed the *Taliesin Fellowship*, whereby some thirty apprentices live and work with him at Spring Green, Wisconsin.⁶

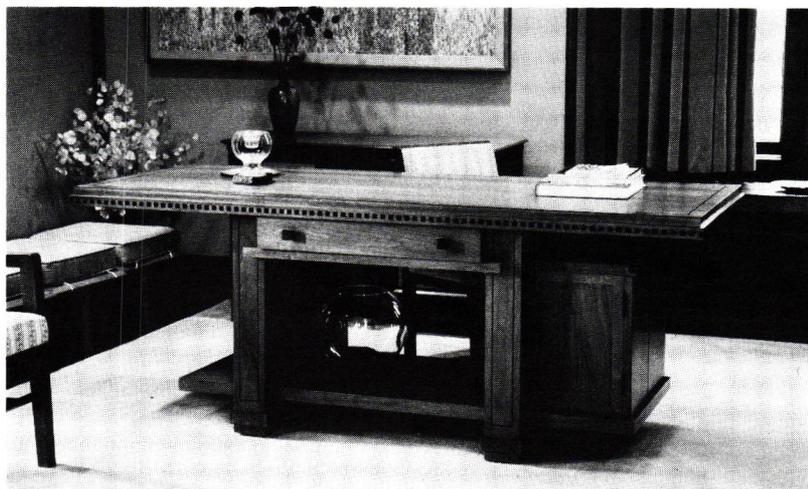
Frank Lloyd Wright was a precursor of modernism. As early as 1903, he thought of windows as connectives to window-spaces. He was the first to use the cornerwise or wrap-around window so popular in modernistic architecture. Also in 1903, Mr. Wright built a skyscraper model in cantilevers of glass and metal, more modern than anything ever dreamed of at that time. In 1923, he designed a block square glittering copper and glass skyscraper for National Life Insurance Company, still fifty years ahead of the Empire State Building. He also did pioneer work in air-conditioning, metal furnishing, and fireproofing. Today he is working on a new heating system that will eliminate radiators by letting heated floors distribute their warmth evenly.⁷

Recognized as a prophet, genius, and master-builder, Frank Lloyd Wright today lives at Taliesin III with his wife, Ogilvanna, her daughter, Svetlana, and their daughter in pigtails, Iovanna. They work and play in perfect harmony with the apprentices and their wives. They picnic, attend their own theatre, which shows the best foreign and American movies, and do all the necessary chores at Taliesin. In winter, the Fellowship moves to Arizona where work continues.⁸ At Taliesin, then, Mr. Wright reveals his passion for the fully rounded life and his hatred of specialization.⁹

In his architecture, too, this passion is shown in the way he wishes to do all of the building himself – design, decoration, furnishing, plumbing, heating, and lighting. But his life is carefree and happy and it seems to me that Mr. Wright should now be doing his very finest designing and building. His work is more acceptable now, too, since it is not as eccentric and far ahead in every way as it was twenty years ago. In relation to the prevailing styles of the period, the Bogk house was peculiar. People parked in front, walked around it and gaped at it.

With a few impracticalities removed, I think the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright is both logical and natural. It is a place to live – of human size and for human comfort. His architecture is non-historic and altogether original. As for beauty, some of Wright's constructions could be called beautiful, but the majority, to my opinion, are ugly to look at. I do not understand why, for when a construction blends with Nature, makes use of it, and harmonizes with it, it should be more beautiful. It may be, then, that his architecture is so original and so entirely different from what we have always known, that we are inclined to call it ugly because we are uninitiated and ignorant. On the other hand, I did think the Bogk house was utterly charming in every way. In conclusion, I have found a poem written by Mr. Wright in his youth. It very well describes the way he works with no thought of the material gain. This "Work Song" hangs in the drafting room at Taliesin.

"I'll work
As I'll think
As I am!
No thought of Fashion or Sham
Nor for Fortune the Jade
Serve vile Gods-of-Trade
My Thought as beseemeth a Man
My Thought
Thought that beseemeth the Man."¹⁰ ■



⁴ Ibid. page 140.

⁵ Levin, Meyer, *Master Builder*, Coronet page 169.

⁶ Ibid. page 174.

⁷ Ibid. page 183.

⁸ Ibid. page 177.

⁹ Ibid. page 181.

¹⁰ Ibid. page 177.

Inlaid wood table in living room, notable for asymmetrical construction and symmetrical appearance. Photo courtesy Thomas A. Heinz.