

IN THE CAUSE OF ARCHITECTURE

BY FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

IX. THE TERMS

ENOUGH, by now, has been said of materials to show direction and suggest how far the study of their natures may go. We have glanced at certain major aspects of the more obvious of building-materials only, because these studies are not intended to do more than fire the imagination of the young architect and suggest to him a few uses and effects that have proved helpful in my own work. The subject has neither bottom, sides nor top, if one would try to exhaust "the nature of materials"! How little consideration the modern architect has yet really given them. Opportunity has languished in consequence and is waiting, still.

Perhaps these articles have been guilty of "poetic" interpretation now and then, turning these "materials" over and over in the hand. The imagination has caught the light on them, in them as well, and tried to fix a ray or two of their significance in the sympathetic mind.

POETRY, POETIC, ROMANTIC, IDEAL.

These words now indicate disease or crime because a past century failed with them and gave us the *language* of form—instead of the significant form itself.

So if we are not to fall into the category of "language" ourselves, I owe an explanation of the meaning of these words, for I shall continue to use them.

It has been common practice among artists to apply the terms qualifying one art to another art—say, those of Music to Architecture or vice-versa. This may be done because certain qualities in each are common to all. It may be helpful to make comparisons between them to bring out particular significance, as our English vocabulary is poor at best in all the words we have with which to express shadings of

qualities or of our feeling in dealing with qualities.

We can hack away at the thing with our body-terms and get the subject anywhere or nowhere except misunderstood.

Nor do we speak a common tongue in the use we have come to make of these main words. We may pack into each of them more or less, and differently, than another would dream of doing, or could do. So it is well to clean them up—for now we are going to write about the uses and purposes of "materials" in creating this thing we name Architecture.

"Poetry of Form," for instance, is a phrase that will now make almost any sensible man sick.

The word "poetry" is a dangerous word to use, and for good reason. Carl Sandburg once said to me,—"Why do you use the words 'poetry,' 'beauty,' 'truth' or 'ideal' any more? Why don't you just get down to tacks and talk about boards and nails and barn doors?"

Good advice. And I think that is what I should do. But I won't, unless I can get an equivalent by doing so. That equivalent is exactly what I cannot get. Those words—romance, poetry, beauty, truth, ideal—are not precious words—nor should they be *specious* words. They are elemental human symbols and we must be brought back again to respect for them by using them significantly if we use them at all, or go to jail.

Well, then—our lot being cast with a hod of mortar, some bricks or stone or concrete and the Machine, we shall talk of the thing we are going to do with these things in the terms that are sensible enough when we speak of the horse-hair, cat-gut, fine wood, brass and keys, the "things" that make up the modern orchestra. By the way, that

orchestra is New. Our possibilities in building with the Machine are New in just the same sense.

Although Architecture is a greater art than Music (if one art can be greater than another) this architect has always secretly envied Bach, Beethoven and the great Masters of Music. They lifted their batons after great and painful concentration on creation and soared into the execution of their designs with a hundred willing minds—the orchestra—and that means a thousand fingers quick to perform every detail of the precise effect the Master wanted.

What a resource!

And what facility they were afforded by forms—they made them—moving according to mood from fugue to sonata, from sonata to concerto—and from them all to the melodic grandeur and completeness of the symphony.

I suppose it is well that no architect has anything like it nor can ever get it.

But as a small boy, long after I had been put to bed, I used to lie and listen to my father playing Beethoven—for whose music he had conceived a passion—playing far into the night. To my young mind it all spoke a language that stirred me strangely, and I've since learned it was the language, beyond all words, of the human heart.

To me, architecture is just as much an affair of the human heart.

And it is to architecture in this sense that we are addressing ourselves. We are pleading here in that cause.

What, then, is Poetry of Form?

The term has become a red rag or a reproachful tag to architects at home and abroad. And, too, it is something that clients would rather not hear about. For all clients are, to some degree, infected by this contact with architects. And some of the best among them fall ill with Neo-Spanish that was itself Neo-Italian or some kind of Renaissance of the Renaissance, or linger along Quasi-Italian, or eventually die outright of Tudor or Colonial.

It is a new form of the plague—"this poison of good taste," as Lewis Mumford has precisely called it. This "poison" has cursed America for generations to come. And this happened to the good people who spoke the language of "Poetry of Form" and hopefully sought the "Romantic" when they became clients.

"Poetry of Form," in this romantic, popular sense, has not only cost wasted billions in money but has done spiritual harm beyond reckoning to the America of the future. But the fact remains that America wanted it and sought it. The failure is less significant than the fact.

So instead of speaking of "Poetry of Form" in buildings, perhaps, after all, we would do better to say simply the natural building, naturally built, native to the region.

Such a building would be sure to be all that Poetry of Form should imply, and would mean a building as beautiful on its site as the region itself.

And that word ROMANCE, Romantic or Romanza, got itself born in literature a century ago. Later Novalis and his kind chose the blue flower as its symbol. Their Romance was rather an escape from life than any realization of the idealization of it. As the word is popularly or commonly used today, it is still something fanciful, unlike life. At least it is something exotic. "Romance" is used as a word to indicate escape from the pressure of the facts of life into a realm of the beyond—a beyond each one fashions for himself or for others as he will—or may—dream.

But in music the Romanza is only a free form or freedom to make one's own form. A musician's sense of proportion is all that governs him in it. The mysterious remains just enough a haunting quality in a whole so organic as to lose all tangible evidence of how it was made—and the organic whole lives in the harmonies of feeling expressed in sound. Translate "sounds and the ear" to "forms and the eye" and a Romanza,

even, seems reasonable enough, too, in architecture.

And now that word IDEAL.

The IDEAL building? Why, only that building which is all one can imagine as desirable in every way.

And POETRY? Why, the poetry in anything is only the song at the heart of it—and in the nature of it.

Gather together the harmonies that inhere in the nature of something or anything whatsoever, and project those inner harmonies into some tangible "objective" or outward form of human use or understanding, and you will have Poetry. You will have something of the song that aches in the heart of all of us for release.

Any of these Arts called "Fine" are POETIC by nature. And to be poetic, truly, does not mean to escape from life but *does* mean *life raised to intense significance and higher power*.

POETRY, therefore, is the great potential need of human kind.

We hunger for POETRY naturally as we do for sunlight, fresh air and fruits, if we are normal human beings.

To be potentially poetic in architecture, then, means—to create a building free in form (we are using the word Romanza) that takes what is harmonious in the nature of existing conditions inside the thing and outside it and with sentiment—(beware of sentimentality)—bring it all out into some visible form that expresses those inner harmonies perfectly, *outwardly*, whatever the shape it may take.

In this visible shape or form you will see not only what was harmonious in the existing conditions inside and outside and around about the building, but you will also see, in this sentiment of the architect, a quality added from the architect himself—because this ultimate form inevitably would be *his* sense of BEAUTY living now for you in these known and visible terms of his work.

These words—Poetry, Romance, Ideal—

used in proper sense—and I believe I have given them proper expression and interpretation here—are indispensable tools in getting understood when talking of creation.

At any rate, I shall use them, always in the sense I have just given them.

And there is need of another term to express a new sense of an eternal quality in creation.

Need, really, of a new dimension?

Either a new dimension to think with or a new sense of an old one.

We have heard of the fourth dimension frequently, of late, to meet this need. Why a fourth dimension, when we so little understand the possibilities of what we already use as the three dimensions?

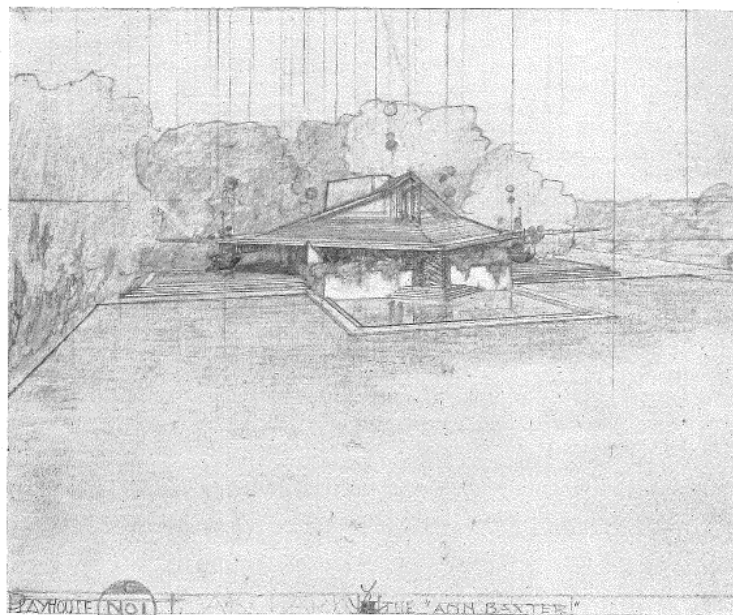
If we make the first two (length and width) into one, as really they are both merely surface, and then add the third (thickness) as the second, thus getting mass, we will have an empty place as third in which to put this new sense as the missing dimension I shall describe. Thus comes in the third dimension about which I have talked a good deal and written somewhat.

Or suppose we arrive at it another way by simply giving spiritual interpretation to the three dimensions we already use. Say length (the first dimension) becomes continuity, width (the second dimension) becomes that breadth of which we speak when we refer to the measure of some great man's mind or a great prospect. Then thickness (the third dimension) becomes "depth" and we give to that word, "depth," the meaning we give to it when we speak of the "profound," the organic, the integral—again we have the third dimension.

We reach the missing dimension either way, but reach it we must.

For it is necessary to find some term that will make it easy to express this missing quality in discussing creation and reaching within for understanding.

But why say fourth dimension when, by properly interpreting the three we already have and by giving them the higher sig-



KINDER-SYMPHONY—PLAYHOUSE IN OAK PARK, ILLINOIS
ONE OF A GROUP OF BUILDINGS FOR THE PLAYGROUND BOARD OF OAK PARK, ILLINOIS
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nificance which is theirs by nature, we may be spared the confusion of more mere numbers?

This, then, is what I mean by the third dimension. Either an interpretation of the physical third, an interpretation that signifies this quality of "at-onceness" or integral nature in anything or everything. Or, arrive at it by naming the three dimensions as now used as actually but two, adding the third as a new concept of organic-integrity, or more properly speaking, as that *quality* that makes anything of the thing and never on it.

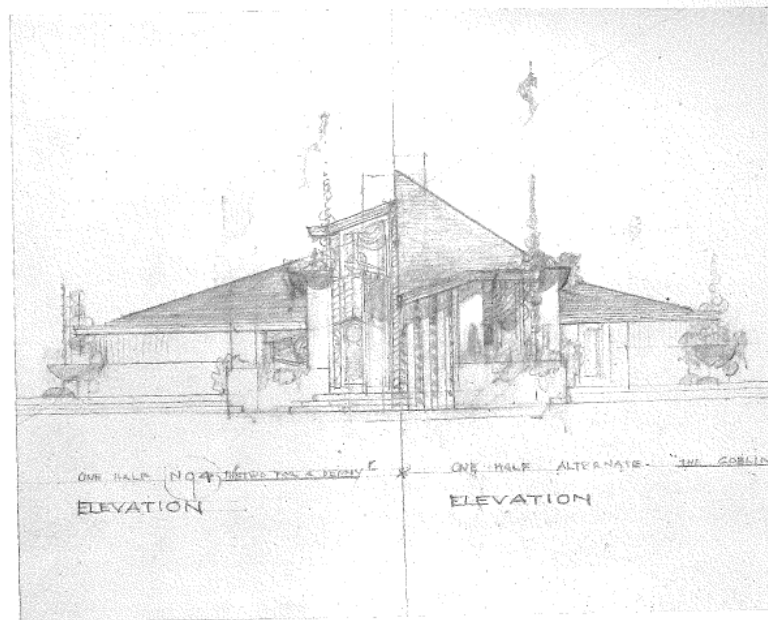
Thus came the new conception of architecture as interior-space finding utilization and enclosure as its "members"—as archi-

ture. The *within* is thus made concrete realization in form.

This is the *integral* concept of building for which I have pleaded, am still pleading and will continue to plead, instead of the earlier one—beautiful but less great—in which a block of building material was sculptured, punctured, and ornamented into architecture.

In this matter of supplying the needed term as the third dimension I may be found guilty of making a language of my own to fit my necessity.

Perhaps that is true—although it seems obvious enough to me that the quality lacking in the thought of our modern world where creation is concerned, is simply ex-



KINDER-SYMPHONY—PLAYHOUSES IN OAK PARK, ILLINOIS
BUILDINGS DESIGNED FOR THE PLAYGROUND BOARD OF OAK PARK, ILLINOIS
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pressed in this way. I should be thankful for a better, more evident expression of this subjective element.

If I could find it I should be among the first to use it.

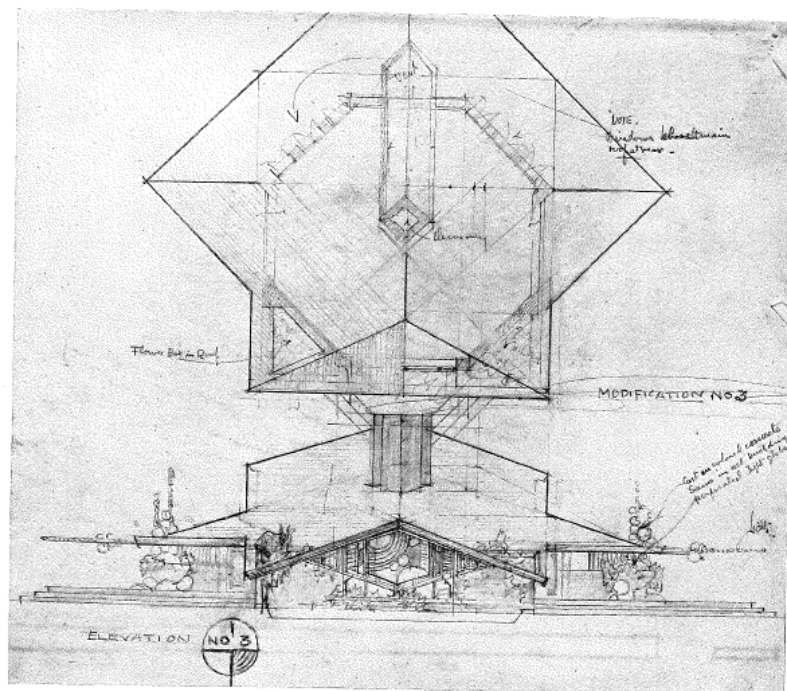
Until then I can only write and speak of this essence of all creative endeavor, objectively, as the third dimension. And here in this matter will be found the essential difference between what is only modern and what is truly new.

The pictorial age in which we live will no longer be satisfied to have the picture continue without this interior significance expressed in integral form. Two dimensions have characterized the work of the past centuries and two-dimension thought and work

is still modern, it seems. Is it too much to hope that the coming century will be one in which this element of the third dimension—this demand for organic significance—will characterize all the pictures that go to make up the main picture, which will be then tremendous with integrity and pregnant with new beauty?

Now, there are certain things as hard as nails, as pointed as tacks, as flat as a barn door that go to make up the technique of creation in this deepened, enlivened, more potential sense.

Since we now have materials in our hands to work with as elements, it is method that I now want to write about, believing that if I can make even the beginning of the



KINDER-SYMPHONY—A PLAYHOUSE IN OAK PARK, ILLINOIS
ELEVATION OF PLAYHOUSE NO. 3 AND MODIFICATIONS MADE ABOVE MAIN ROOF
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matter of making true, significant buildings a little more clear, I shall have rendered real service. I would much rather build than write about building, but when I am not building, I will write about building—or the significance of those buildings I have already built.

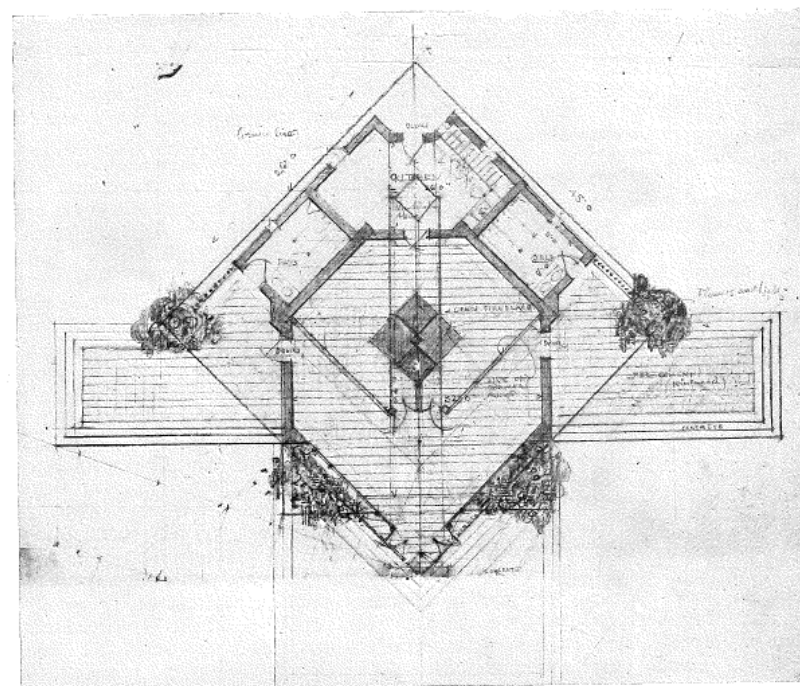
The conception of the room *within*, the interior spaces of the building to be conserved, expressed and made living as architecture—the architecture of the *within*—that is precisely what we are driving at, all along. And this new quality of thought in architecture, the third dimension, let us say, enters into every move that is made to

make it—enters into the use of every material; enters the working of every method we shall use or can use. It will characterize every form that results naturally from this integral interpretation of architecture in its demand upon us for integrity of means to ends—for integrity of the each in all and of the all in all in whatever we do—yes, from pig to proprietor, from a chicken-house to a cathedral.

One more word is indispensable to get the essence of this matter of creation visible on the surface.

That word is PRINCIPLE.

In an earlier paper, there is an attempt to



KINDER-SYMPHONY—PLAYHOUSES IN OAK PARK, ILLINOIS
GROUND PLAN. THE SAME GROUND PLAN WAS USED IN ALL FOUR BUILDINGS
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define character and to throw some light on the vexed matter of style!

Principle is the working scheme, or the scheme at work in character, style, integrity, truth or beauty. It is not a motif but a means. We might say principle is the law that governs the production of any one or all of them.

The principle of anything is the law that works its being.

Natural law is principle, or the other way around, as you please. Our application of what we understand of principle is mostly expedient, seldom a genuine working of principle. That is all that is the matter with

us. Principle is the tool with which the architect must consciously work to be a safe man or get great effects in his work.

He may be an artist—that is, he may be sentient to his finger-tips and be merely artistic without this command of principle, or, let us say, without this noble submission to its command, never knowing the command when seen or heard or "sensed."

In command of principle or commanded by it, only so is the artist potential in creation.

This miserable assumption of virtues, though one has them not, may be expedient but it is all the hell there is attached to this

affair of getting spirit materialized in works that gratify supremely human desires—we might say, getting the Beautiful born. And then have someone pop up and say with a sneer, "Yes, but what is beauty?" as though beauty were a commodity like soap, cheese or tobacco.

Well, yes. Here, in beauty, is another word to stumble over or mumble with in this age of the pragmatic "expedient" which, after all, is only an experiment.

But, now we have them all in a row—Poetry, Romantic, Ideal, Beauty—faithful mistresses of principle which we may now name Truth. And "Integrity," "Character," "Style," are attributes, merely, of the working of the master—Principle.

What is Beauty? And Keats' "Ode to a Grecian Urn" answers—"Truth, Beauty—Beauty, Truth."

Obviously, the gifted boy was right, but the nature of either is no nearer for his statement—in the case of the young architect who wants to build something that is both true and lovely. Before we get out of this, that word "love" and the word "joy," too, will get in, I feel sure. Here they are at this moment. Very well, let them in to the distinguished company they know so well. And then let us ask them for help.

"Art is the evidence of man's joy in his work," man has said. And that love is the motivating power in creation we all know by experience.

We are talking about creating or about creations, and this motivation, "Love," is essential to any conception of it—to any beginning of it.

Conceive, then, in love, and work with principle, and what men call Beauty will be the evidence of your joy in your work. After the purity and intensity of your desire or love, then, according to the degree that you have got command of Principle or willingly obey its commands, that materialization of spirit will appear in your work in earthly form—and men will call it Beauty.

Look about you at earthly forms! Trees,

flowers, the reactions to one another of the elements in sky, earth and sea. All are merely effects of the working of definite principles with definite "materials"—which are really only elements in the creative hand.

The "design" of this in the altogether is too large in pattern to be yet comprehended by man, yet for our purposes in all or in each, we may find the evidence we seek of method in creation.

Method in creation?

It is there most certainly. Principle is at work continually in this school for architects—working there with simple materials and never-failing *ideas* of form. The form is a consequence of the principle at work. It would seem that no proper excuse for "making" anything ugly need ever be accepted from an architect—with all this *prima facie* evidence surrounding him, evident even in his own fingers as he writes or draws. He may study forms, "types" constructed by the infallible working of interior principles in this common school. What escapes us is the original idea or ultimate purpose.

This urge to create the beautiful for love of the beautiful is an inheritance. Enough for us that because of the inheritance we have carved out for ourselves with imagination, this higher realm of Beauty.

With imagination, then, let us try to learn the method of working principle with such simple elements as are everywhere put into our hands as materials. Love in our hearts—passion, yes, is essential to success, as our motif.

Now having done our best to light up these words and discuss the relationship existing between them, we will go on to talk of those matters, as hard as nails, as pointed as tacks, as flat as a barn-door, that are involved in the method—of creation.

Love no one can give. Assuming that inspiration is in the heart, we can show facts and performances with materials according to Principle that will be helpful to others in relation to method in creation.