

TALIESIN IN THE MID-1980'S: A RECOLLECTION

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On my first visit to Taliesin in the mid-1980s I had the good fortune of getting to spend an evening in the house by myself. Mrs. Wright was at Taliesin West, and Richard Carney, secretary (and later CEO) of the Foundation, kindly allowed me to spend the night in a guest room. At the time I was a doctoral student conducting research for my dissertation, and I had been working in the archives in Arizona. The day had been glorious: Frances Nemtin and some of the apprentices had been tending the gardens around the great oak at the tea circle. The air was clear, and fall was still only a whisper over the hills and forests that filled the distant views.

When everyone had left for the day, I sat quietly in each room of the main house absorbing the spirit of the place. I could feel the changes to the house's fabric since Wright's death. Some of them detracted from the cohesion of earlier times, but the house and its surroundings resonated overall with harmony. The stone piers along the hallway of the bedroom wing had the same stone as found on the exterior, uniting inside and outside. Everywhere the textures of materials delighted hand and eye—something absent in most glass box modernist houses. The color palette brought every surface to life. The whole ensemble exuded sensuality with sculpture and artefacts and comfortable furnishings throughout. Many books were on little shelves, some from the Hillside Home School, others from Wright's library collected over decades. Their subjects ranged from symbolist theater to horticulture. The objects within each room told stories that meant something to the Wrights.

The intimacy and small scale of the living room and the bedrooms made, however, the strongest impression on me. Photographers' wide angle shots mislead us—the living room ceiling soars but the space is perfectly proportioned and human-scaled. The Wrights' own bedroom was a balanced composition, delicate yet functional, comforting within and still giving views without. It was clear to me that shelter, mythic presence, and primordial landscape combined to make Taliesin one of the great country houses in America. Content and happy, I slept that night in a modest room in the dairy wing. The visit was a magic moment I have always treasured.

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11/25/19