

Preservation Decisions at Taliesin East

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Figure 1. Looking down onto main residence courtyard. Apartments and studio at the left and the main residence at the center.

Taliesin East, as it exists today, is a six-hundred acre estate located in Iowa County, across the Wisconsin River from Spring Green, Wisconsin. The property is significant because of its strong connection to Frank Lloyd Wright. He spent time there as a child, settled there in 1911, and maintained a home and school at the site until his death in 1959.¹ Taliesin East poses difficult questions to preservationists at every turn. The buildings are registered as

¹ Neil Levine, "The Story of Taliesin: Wright's First Natural House," in *Wright Studies, Vol. 1* ed. Narciso G. Menocal (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 2 – 27.

a National Historic Landmark and the site depends on tour revenue to fund necessary maintenance and preservation. However, the site also continues to house the fellows who worked with Wright, and students who aim to learn in Wright's legacy. The visitors and residents of Taliesin often partake in an awkward exchange. At best, they reconcile the shared spaces. Residents carefully avoid tour groups and close windows to peeking eyes. Tourists heed warnings not to bother students or access areas of the estate where guests might be staying. Taliesin's caretakers and inhabitants work to maintain a constant balance, reconciling Taliesin's role as museum and productive workplace. Legal decisions in the 1980s and 1990s led to the prioritization of the preservation of Taliesin's physical fabric, compromising important aspects of its remaining community and narrative. In this paper, I will discuss preservation just after Wright's death, the formation of Taliesin Preservation Incorporated, and how the successful preservation of Taliesin will warrant nuanced approaches from preservationists and the student and fellows alike.

The site is managed as landscape and a collection of buildings, constituting Frank Lloyd Wright's residence and studio, a number of houses and cottages, a school, farm, and undeveloped land. The property is owned by the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation who also own Taliesin West in Scottsdale, Arizona. The Foundation oversees the FLW School of Architecture, and its students split their time between the Wisconsin and Arizona campuses.² In 1932, Wright and his third wife Olgivanna formed the Taliesin Fellowship, which would morph into the School of Architecture.³ The Fellowship consisted of young architects, students, and their families who migrated to Wright's farmstead to learn from a master. The fellows were offered room, board, and instruction from Wright in exchange for their intellectual and physical labor. Fellows tended the farm, were tasked with construction projects, and travelled to oversee Wright's projects in other parts of the country. In the years between 1932 and 1959, Wright built up a small, isolated community of apprentice architects. At his home in Wisconsin, his apprentices helped in the construction, reconstruction, and innumerable modifications of the estate's buildings. Taliesin as a collection of buildings is often likened to his built sketchbook, a place for experimentation and exploration.

² "Historic Legacy," Taliesin, Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture. Web. Accessed at: <http://www.taliesin.edu/history.html>

³ "Historic Legacy," Taliesin, Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture. Web. Accessed at: <http://www.taliesin.edu/history.html>

Preservation: After Wright

Frank Lloyd Wright died in 1959, yet he left behind a community of students and architects composing the Taliesin Fellowship and school. Upon his death, formal ownership the Wisconsin and Arizona homes passed to the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, organized by Wright himself in 1940.⁴ The Foundation states as their goal to “preserve and steward Taliesin, Taliesin West, and the Taliesin collection.”⁵ The group is headquartered in Arizona, far from the older Wisconsin residence, yet maintains staff at both properties. The Foundation was put in place to hold formal ownership of the properties, run the Fellowship and school, and maintain the archive of Wright’s work.⁶ Olgivanna served as president of the Foundation and also maintained her residence at both Taliesin and Taliesin West until her death in 1985. Between 1959 and 1985, she made a number of interior modifications to the Wisconsin house, including the addition of lights, reconfiguration of the floorplan, and change in furniture, wall finishes, and floor finishes. Photos from the 1960s through the 1980s document a house that was largely different than the one Wright himself occupied. However, even though she changed the physical fabric of the Taliesin residence, Olgivanna maintained the traditions of a life at Taliesin, continuing the entrenched social calendar of past decades. In typical tradition, she employed student labor when making modifications to the house, including the demolition of the Wright-designed interior features. Ultimately, Olgivanna’s modifications to the house were largely aesthetic and by the time of her death, in 1985, the house was in obvious decline.

Even before Olgivanna’s death, Taliesin garnered attention from the national preservation community. In 1972, a planner from the Wisconsin state historic preservation office completed a national register nomination for the estate.⁷ In 1975, a similar evaluation was completed by a representative from the National Park Service,⁸ and by the end of January 1976, the property was listed as a National Historic Landmark and a National Historic Landmark District.⁹ Four years later, an NPS reconnaissance survey noted how the structures were deteriorating at an alarming

⁴ “The Foundation” Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation. Web. Accessed at: <http://www.franklloydwright.org/foundation/index.html>

⁵ “The Foundation” Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation. Web. Accessed at: <http://www.franklloydwright.org/foundation/index.html>

⁶ Terry Greene, “Is Wright wronged by his offspring?” *Chicago Tribune* 24 May, 1987. Proquest.

⁷ Jeffrey M. Dean, “Taliesin” National Register of Historic Places Inventory, Nomination Form, 1972

⁸ Carolyn Pitts, “Taliesin” National Register of Historic Places Inventory, Nomination Form, 1975

⁹ Ed Treleven, “U.S. Grant will hasten Taliesin Restoration\$1.15 Million Must be Matched for Repairs, *Wisconsin State Journal*, May 19, 1999, 1A.

rate, pointing out a need to mitigate the threats, especially a lack of winter maintenance, when the structures were unoccupied.¹⁰ Tangible concern for the property seems to have built slowly, and the state of Wisconsin finally intervened in 1988.

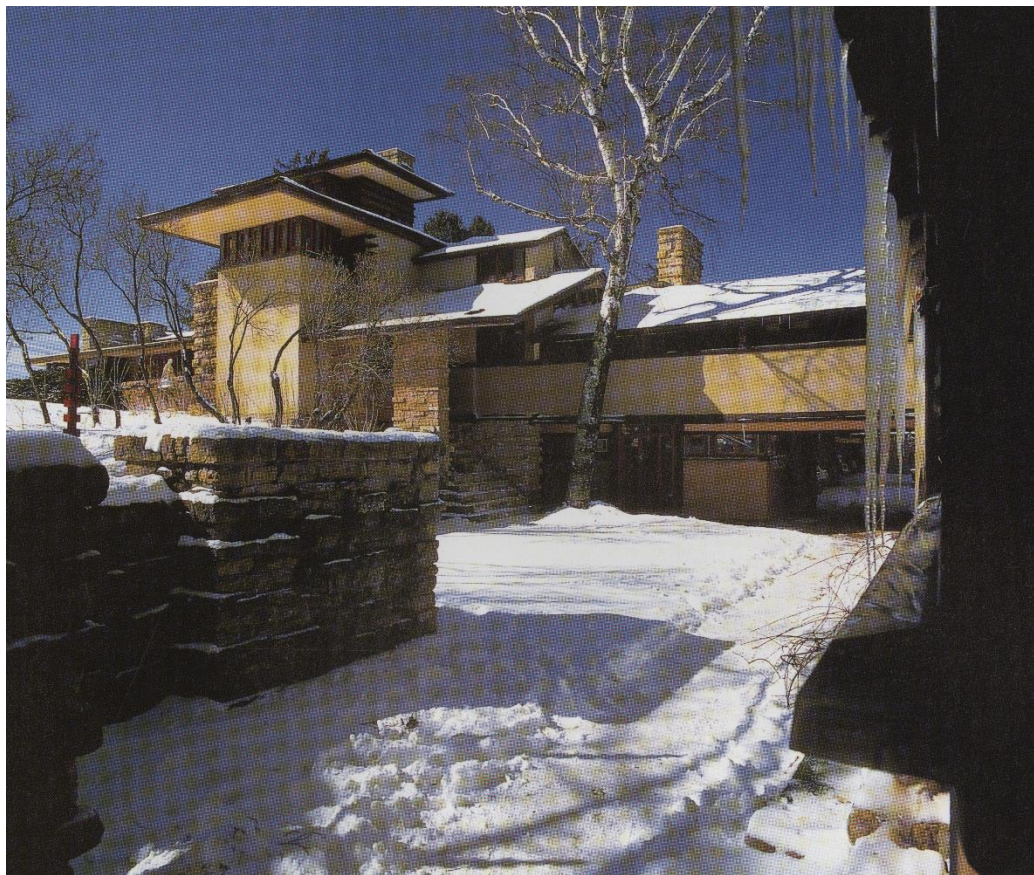


Figure 2. View of the Hill Wing, Taliesin Main Residence, Winter, 1997

Governor Tommy Thompson signed the first of two executive orders in 1988, calling for the creation of a commission, to decide the future of Taliesin. The order mandated that the commission would have a maximum of thirty members, including the director of the state historical society, and various professionals in preservation, architecture, and planning. Eventually, Thompson appointed 27 representatives to the Commission, including architects, preservationists, politicians, his own wife, four members of the Taliesin Fellowship, and the CEO of the

¹⁰ “Prepared statement of Jerry L. Rogers, Associate Director, National Park Service, Department of the Interior on S.150”, *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Public Lands, National Parks and Forests of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources United States Senate 103rd Congress*, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994), 87.

Foundation.¹¹ They were tasked with overseeing a survey of the property, preparing a program of public access to the estate, organizing an administrative body, and estimating the costs of operation and potential revenue sources. Notably, Thompson's executive order called for the creation of a solution "consistent with the mission Frank Lloyd Wright established when he created the Taliesin fellowship and the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation."¹² From the beginnings of this preservation gaze, the goals of the Commission were contradictory. It was well-known among the fellows that Wright would not have wanted regular public access at his home and school. Already, the Commission's discussion would necessitate compromise in the treatment of the estate, especially if it was to prioritize public interpretation.

In March of 1989, the Commission published a report on their findings. The Commission supported increased accessibility to the site, as a revenue source to preserve the physical character of the buildings. Aligning with the executive order, the report suggested the development of a visitor's center, implementation of regular tour schedule, and the creation of a separate entity in charge of preservation and interpretation. In 1990, a non-profit, Taliesin Preservation Incorporated (TPI) was established to oversee the conservation of the buildings and manage public tours.¹³ The Foundation was to maintain ownership of the properties, and the Fellowship could continue occupancy and normal use of the buildings, including school functions, and the housing of students, faculty, and guests. In 1992, a robust and regular tour schedule was put in place, replacing the inexpensive, relatively unadvertised tour program of the Foundation.¹⁴

Preservation: Taliesin Preservation Incorporated

Reiterating the executive order, TPI's policy from 1990 through today highlights a balance in the future uses of Taliesin. TPI's outlined goals immediately address the balance between museum and community functions. Goal one, "preservation," reads "to preserve, restore, and maintain the integrity of the Taliesin Estate, as created by Frank

¹¹ "Taliesin, Governor's Commission on," *State of Wisconsin 1989 – 1990 Blue Book*, (Madison: Department of Administration, Document Sales, 1989).

¹² State of Wisconsin Office of the Governor, "Executive Order 45," received 28 June 1988.

¹³ "Prepared Statement of Hon. Herbert Kohl, U.S. Senator from Wisconsin," *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Public Lands, National Parks and Forests of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources United States Senate 103rd Congress*, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994), 2.

¹⁴ Terry Greene, "Is Wright wronged by his offspring?" *Chicago Tribune* 24 May, 1987. Proquest.

Lloyd Wright (1867 - 1959), and as it existed in the last decade of his life, with a preference for the year 1959.” The second goal, “use,” addresses the community function of the site, reading “To encourage and facilitate public access to the Taliesin Estate and the Visitor Center,” and additionally, “To continue FLLWF (Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation) activities, program, and events and Taliesin as initiated by Mr. and Mrs. Wright, the Taliesin Fellowship, the architectural practice, archives and the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture, enabling the vital life within Taliesin to continue through evolution and growth.”¹⁵

The legislation of the late 1980s marks a distinct turn in Taliesin’s treatment and use. Today, the Foundation and Fellowship, and TPI are still grappling with the balances established almost three decades ago. Up until 1990, Taliesin lacked any formal preservation measures. Through the tradition of constant modification, the buildings were maintained by Mr. and Mrs. Wright and the Fellowship. The creation of TPI, and the opening of Taliesin to tours introduced a new stakeholder, the public audience. To secure funding to survive, Taliesin, as an isolated community, was forced to look outward to the secretary’s standards for preservation; measures that largely contradicted the building’s previous tradition of maintenance and change.



Figure 3. Tour group near Hillside Home School.

¹⁵ Taliesin Preservation Incorporated, “Taliesin Preservation Policy,” Unpublished document.

The creation of TPI and the Fellowship's loss control happened within the context of Wright's 1980s legacy. Alongside concerns over Taliesin's fabric, the Fellowship itself was receiving criticism for its own work, especially the use of Wright's un-built designs. Through the 1980s, the Foundation oversaw work of the Fellowship as well as a practicing architecture firm, Taliesin Associated Architects and a development firm, the Taliesin Gates Company.¹⁶ Taliesin Associated Architects continued Wright's organic design principles, yet were criticized for commoditizing the work of their teacher, turning his architecture into a commercialized "style." Historian and preservationist, James Marston Fitch, said of the firm, "What they're doing is exploiting the fame and prestige of the old man."¹⁷ Regardless of the actual authenticity of Taliesin Associated's work, the creation of TPI aligned with public disapproval of the organization, which may have justified the transfer of control away from the Foundation.

The late 1980s mark the beginning of serious funding pushes for the maintenance and restoration of the estate's buildings. In 1991, the National Park Service reported to Congress that Taliesin held first priority for preservation work,¹⁸ prompting the allocation of funds from the state's coffers. Late in 1992, the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA) financed eight million dollars in loans for TPI to use in Taliesin's preservation efforts; money from business development revenue bonds.¹⁹ State politicians saw this as an opportunity to multiply funding, and the Taliesin Preservation Act was drafted. Presented to the United States Senate in July of 1993, the bill called for federal funds to match state and private funding for Taliesin. The Act would authorize up to eight million dollars, but each federal dollar would need to be matched by *both* State and private funding. So, for every federal dollar granted, TPI would have needed to secure one dollar of state funding *and* one dollar of private funding.²⁰

¹⁶ Terry Greene, "Is Wright wronged by his offspring?" *Chicago Tribune* 24 May, 1987. Proquest.

¹⁷ Greene, "Is Wright wronged by his offspring?" *Chicago Tribune* 24 May, 1987. Proquest.

¹⁸ "Prepared Statement of Hon. Scott Klug, U.S. Representative from Wisconsin," *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Public Lands, National Parks and Forests of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources United States Senate 103rd Congress*, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994), 6.

¹⁹ "Prepared Statement of Hon. Scott Klug, U.S. Representative from Wisconsin," *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Public Lands, National Parks and Forests of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources United States Senate 103rd Congress*, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994), 6.

²⁰ "103rd Congress, 2nd Session, S.150 in the House of Representatives, June 21, 1994 Referred to the Committee on National Resources, An Act To provide for assistance in the preservation of Taliesin in the State of Wisconsin, and for other purposes," Accessed at <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/103/s150>

At the congressional hearing, four people spoke in favor of the bill's passage; Senator Herb Kohl, who had served as a chairperson for the governor's commission, U.S Representative Scott Klug, Jerry L. Rogers, Associate Director of the National Park Service, and Robert Burley, Executive Director of Taliesin Preservation Incorporated.²¹ All three members spoke emphatically about the national significance of the site, placing special emphasis on its public use. In his opening statement, Senator Herb Kohl stated that the goal of TPI was to preserve Taliesin and create an environment for an international audience.²² Additionally, Kohl discussed the newfound interpretation measures as a response to physical deterioration. If not for its decline, the site would not have garnered such a push for a new, public audience. Rogers said, "We believe that this type of arrangement [referring to the Taliesin Preservation Act] is consistent with what the Congress had in mind when it enacted the Historic Sites Act of 1935."²³ His reference, again, places emphasis on Taliesin as a site for the nation's public, and emphasizes the involvement of the Secretary in its restoration work.²⁴ Representative Klug was the only speaker to mention the site's continued use as a school and architectural practice. He affirms a need to carry on Taliesin's programs, noting how the power of imagination and vision in a "living monument" might inspire children to develop their talents.²⁵ Throughout the hearing, the speakers walk a fine line between private ownership and federal assistance. The NPS spoke in favor of the provision of federal funds, yet never considered taking over ownership or management of the site.

The Taliesin Preservation Act was passed by the Senate, sent to the House, but ultimately never passed. TPI settled for the 8 million dollars originally set aside by WHEDA, mobilized by an executive order from 1993, that deemed Taliesin a "cultural and architecture landmark," therefore eligible for state assistance, in the form of a loan.²⁶

²¹ *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Public Lands, National Parks and Forests of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources United States Senate 103rd Congress*, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994).

²² "Prepared Statement of Hon. Herbert Kohl, U.S. Senator from Wisconsin," *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Public Lands, National Parks and Forests of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources United States Senate 103rd Congress*, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994), 2.

²³ Prepared Statement of Hon. Herbert Kohl, U.S. Senator from Wisconsin," *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Public Lands, National Parks and Forests of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources United States Senate 103rd Congress*, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994), 2.

²⁴ National Park Service, "Historic Sites Act, Federal Historic Preservation Laws (2006)." Accessed at: http://www.nps.gov/history/local-law/fhpl_histsites.pdf

²⁵ "Prepared Statement of Hon. Scott Klug, U.S. Representative from Wisconsin," *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Public Lands, National Parks and Forests of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources United States Senate 103rd Congress*, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994), 6.

²⁶ State of Wisconsin Office of the Governor, "Executive Order 183," received 29 April 1993.

Over the next six years, TPI used 7.6 million of the 8 million dollars²⁷ to carry out restoration work such as the drafting of historic structure reports, exterior restorations, apartment rehabilitations, and reconstructions of exterior terraces and courts.²⁸ These first projects served a variety of needs. Some of the restorations would be seen directly by tour visitors, while work such as the apartment rehabilitation would only directly benefit Taliesin's occupants, likely never becoming accessible to the public. By 1999, TPI had only paid 1.1 million of the 7.6 million dollar loan. In May of 1999, the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee voted to forgive the remaining 6.5 million dollar balance, on the grounds that Taliesin should remain open for public benefit.²⁹

Thompson's creation of a committee on Taliesin in 1988 drastically changed the treatment of the property. The Commission shifted the emphasis of the site toward the maintenance of the physical fabric for public benefit. The creation of revenue-producing tour programs drained some control from the Foundation, Fellowship, and therefore Taliesin's inhabitants. The legislation aimed to save the buildings, but it also put a new set of restrictions on the site, and a slew of work, namely interpreting and restoring the property to secretary standards. Cost estimates rose exponentially through tens of millions of dollars. Unfortunately, however, TPI and the Foundation still shared the burden of funding. The Foundation, as the owner and occupant of the property, often publicly endorsed the acquisition of funding. In turn, the acquisition of state and federal money often coincided with the Foundation's loss of control. In some ways these decisions split the preservation goals. Because of the shared burden of funding, maintaining the physical fabric often coincided with the loss of Taliesin's strength as a community.

Assessing Significance

As drafted in 1989, TPI holds 1959 to be the date of primary significance for the fabric of the Taliesin estate. However, dating exact significance of the physical fabric proves to be consistently shaky ground. The significance of Taliesin as a home, studio, and school depends on its rich history of change. Preservation decisions are inevitably clouded by the assessment of the site's many phases of development. The main house was originally conceived as a

²⁷ Associated Press. "Taliesin Behind on Loan Payment Wright's Estate Isn't Attracting As Many Tourists as Was Expected," *Wisconsin State Journal*, February 5, 1999, 1C.

²⁸ Taliesin Preservation Inc., "Complete Projects," Accessed at: <http://www.taliesinpreservation.org/preservation/preservation-projects/completed-projects>.

²⁹ Ed Treleven, "U.S. Grant will Hasten Taliesin Restoration \$1.15 Million Must be Matched for Repairs," May 19, 1999, 1A.

private residence and escape from Chicago. It grew in a piecemeal fashion after 1911, and large swaths of it were destroyed by fires in 1914 and 1925. And the house is only one small piece of the property. Other pieces of the estate date back even further, constituting some of Wright's early experiments in structure, house design, and even his childhood memories. When acquainted with the site, historians could likely find significance at Taliesin in every decade from 1890 through 1960. Taliesin was constantly rebuilt, modified, destroyed, or updated, producing a dynamic place. Neil Levine says of Taliesin, "Taliesin collapses past and present history into a complex representation of place. At once house, farm, studio, workshop, school, and family seat, it is a complete expression of Wright's integration of architecture and nature. But even more than that, Taliesin was intended from its outset to tell a story with a specifically autobiographical meaning, forming an image of Wright's personal life woven into the fabric of his family's land."³⁰

While the physical character of Taliesin was always shifting, the Fellowship has held a presence at Taliesin since 1932, when Wright and Olgivanna invited international architects to join them at Taliesin. They created the Taliesin Fellowship, soon after known as the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture.³¹ Fellows served as students, teachers, craftspeople, and farmhands at Taliesin. The School of Architecture's current website recounts the story of the early Fellowship, stating, "The apprentices quarried the stone and burned limestone and sifted sand from the adjacent Wisconsin River to make mortar. They cut trees and sawed them into dimensional lumber, and along with the masonry, built the large studio . . . that still serves as the center of learning on the Spring Green campus and as an active architectural studio. The apprentices worked on all aspects of life at Taliesin, developing a largely self-sufficient school and community that operated successfully with a very low budget."³² Especially during the lull in Wright's commissions during the Great Depression, students and fellows were put to work tending to the farm tasks and making modifications to the house. Often, the students had no training or experience in construction. They were commonly put in charge of constructing masonry walls or building complex wooden structures, and were often limited to local, cheap, or readily available materials.

³⁰ Neil Levine, *The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 76.

³¹ "Historic Legacy," Taliesin, Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture. Web. Accessed at: <http://www.taliesin.edu/history.html>

³² "Historic Legacy," Taliesin, Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture. Web. Accessed at: <http://www.taliesin.edu/history.html>



Figure 4. Wright and an unidentified man in the main residence drafting studio. C. 1957-58

As his working studio, the Fellowship was responsible for a large portion of Wright's work. The Fellows crafted presentation drawings for Wright's most important commissions, served as construction managers in the field, overseeing the implementation of Wright's designs. As time passed, students either left to begin their own practices, or stayed on as teachers for the next generation of students.³³ The school developed a model that could be continued through the generations. Subsequent generations provided the labor and drafting power for the older members of the Fellowship. Students traded their hard work for an education with a master of modern architecture. With this intensive live-work model came an elaborate social life. The school developed rich traditions, often centered around Wright, including lavish formal dinners, concerts at the Hillside school's theater, and movie nights with Wright-chosen films to be followed by academic discussion. The School of Architecture operated on this model through Wright's death in 1959, and in some ways, still operates on this model.

³³ "Historic Legacy," Taliesin, Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture. Web. Accessed at: <http://www.taliesin.edu/history.html>

Notably, members of the original Fellowship were offered lifetime accommodation at Taliesin, in exchange for continued work and contribution to the school. Today, the last of the original fellows still hold a prominent place within the community. They serve on decision committees, holding veto power over decisions of the Foundation,³⁴ and also play a role in daily life, participating in daily meals and helping to plan the social events. Seen as a source of expertise, the remaining fellows provide a strong connection to Wright's lifestyle, design philosophy, and Taliesin as a historic place. Guaranteed housing, and having made Taliesin their home, a few of the people that arrived at Taliesin in the 1940s will live out the rest of their lives in residence there. Minverva Montooth, who arrived in the 1940s, spends her time catching up with students, and helping to plan the social functions at Taliesin. The old residents are hesitant to give up the live-work community model, and even the men and women well into their 80s play a part in decorating and planning for the monthly formal dinners.



Figure 5. Wright, Olgivanna, and party attendees at the Taliesin pond, September 1951.

When the commission chose a period of the significance of 1959, the Fellowship felt that this was an oversimplification of the site. The majority of Commissioners felt that 1959 allowed the inclusion of the largest

³⁴ "Let Taliesin Streamline Management Structure; The Taliesin Fellowship Should Give Up its Veto Power Over Management Decisions To Let the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation do What's Best for the Future." *Wisconsin State Journal*. April 18, 2005, A6.

number Wright and Fellowship designs. Many of the extant structures were modified by Wright through the 1940s, and some were not built until the decade. The 1959 period of significance would also mandate undoing all of Olgivanna's modifications. As 1988 discussions continued, the remaining fellows disagreed with the solidification of just one time, as a betrayal to the real significance of Taliesin. Matthew Kiell, writing for the Chicago Tribune, interviewed a number of Fellows and staff members. Richard Carney managing trustee of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation said of the estate, "The only thing that's permanent at Taliesin is change." Charles Montooth, fellowship and commission member, said "For those of us who were here in Mr. Wright's time, who came to Taliesin in 1945, the whole spirit was moving and changing and redoing. The idea of freezing it in time is just not acceptable. Mr. and Mrs. Wright didn't want Taliesin to be a museum."³⁵

This living quality of Taliesin rang true with a number of residents. J.T. Elbracht, a staff member was quoted by Kiell two years earlier, "Being at Taliesin is not a job. It's a life. Working and socializing and living all mesh as one." Montooth also discusses how it was important that Taliesin *remained* a productive workplace. He spoke on behalf of the Fellowship when he said, "They want the publicity, the good relations with the public, but fear that if visitor traffic increases significantly these working and living spaces would be largely lost." Marshal Erdman, a Madison-based architect and friend of Wright is quoted in the article, warning about the precariousness of state involvement at Taliesin. Erdman is quoted, "We must have public assistance, but how do you maintain that without giving up the independence of Taliesin to the state? We don't want to turn it over to the state to administer it as a museum. With reason, the Taliesin people are reluctant to subjugate themselves to the state. Yet the fellowship will have to give up some autonomy."³⁶ Three years after the Chicago Tribune published Kiell's article, daily tours were being held at the Taliesin estate. By the mid-1990s, TPI ran a gift shop, restaurant, tour program, all headquartered in a Wright-designed building across the street from the estate.

³⁵ Matthew Kiell, "Restoring the Wright Stuff: The drive to fix up the architect's crumbling Wisconsin estate is a labor of love – and love-hate," *Chicago Tribune*, June 4, 1989, SM30.

³⁶ Kiell, "Restoring the Wright Stuff: The drive to fix up the architect's crumbling Wisconsin estate is a labor of love – and love-hate," SM30.

Preservation Approaches

Acting as a middle man between the Taliesin residents and the visiting public, TPI seeks to reconcile the needs of each group. TPI takes a nuanced approach to questions of preservation, picking apart each space and heavily considering its current use. The primary method through which TPI supports both museum functions and continued community use is by the establishment of zones. In 1990, TPI developed a Preservation Zoning Plan to distinguish between uses and subsequent treatments at the estate. Within the land and buildings controlled by both the Foundation and TPI, there are five zoning distinctions that determine treatment; primary significance (zone 1), secondary significance (zone 2), utility and non-significant (zone 3), management zone: viewshed critical (zone 4A), management zone: viewshed non-critical (zone 4B). Zone classification is determined by a combination of factors, including traditional use, design intention, and integrity of the space.³⁷

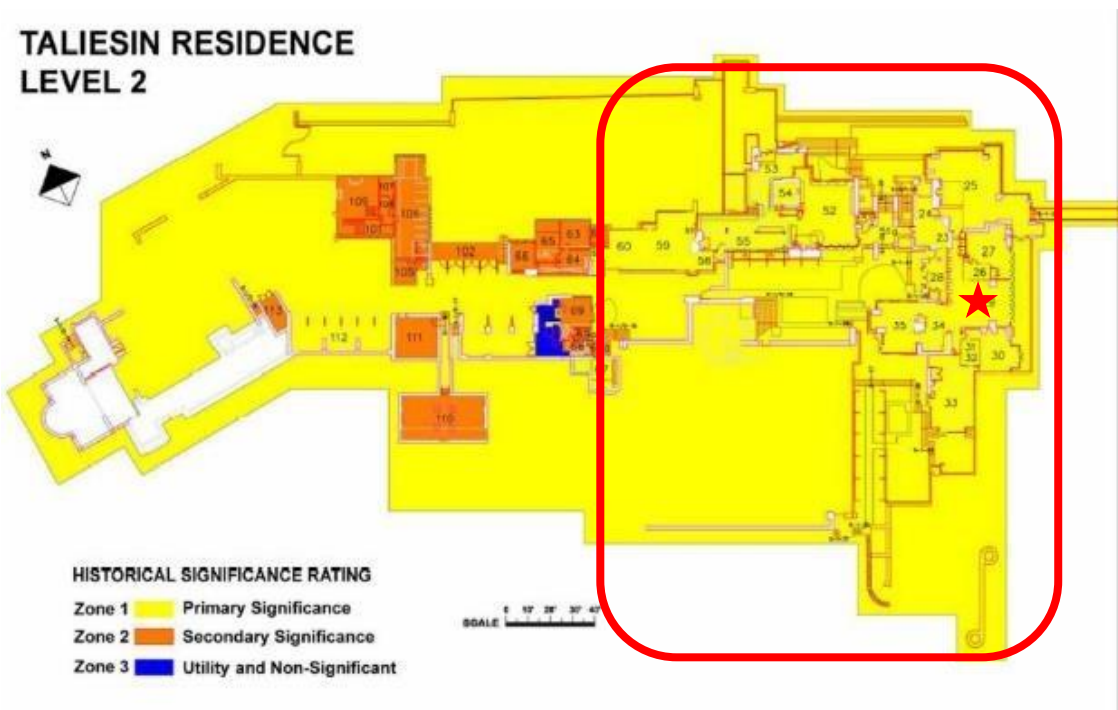


Figure 6. Significance diagram of main residence, level two. Indoor tour area shown within the large red rectangle, all primarily significant. Blue loggia, pictured below, indicated by the red star.

³⁷ Taliesin Preservation Incorporated, “Taliesin Preservation Policy,” Attachment D, unpublished.

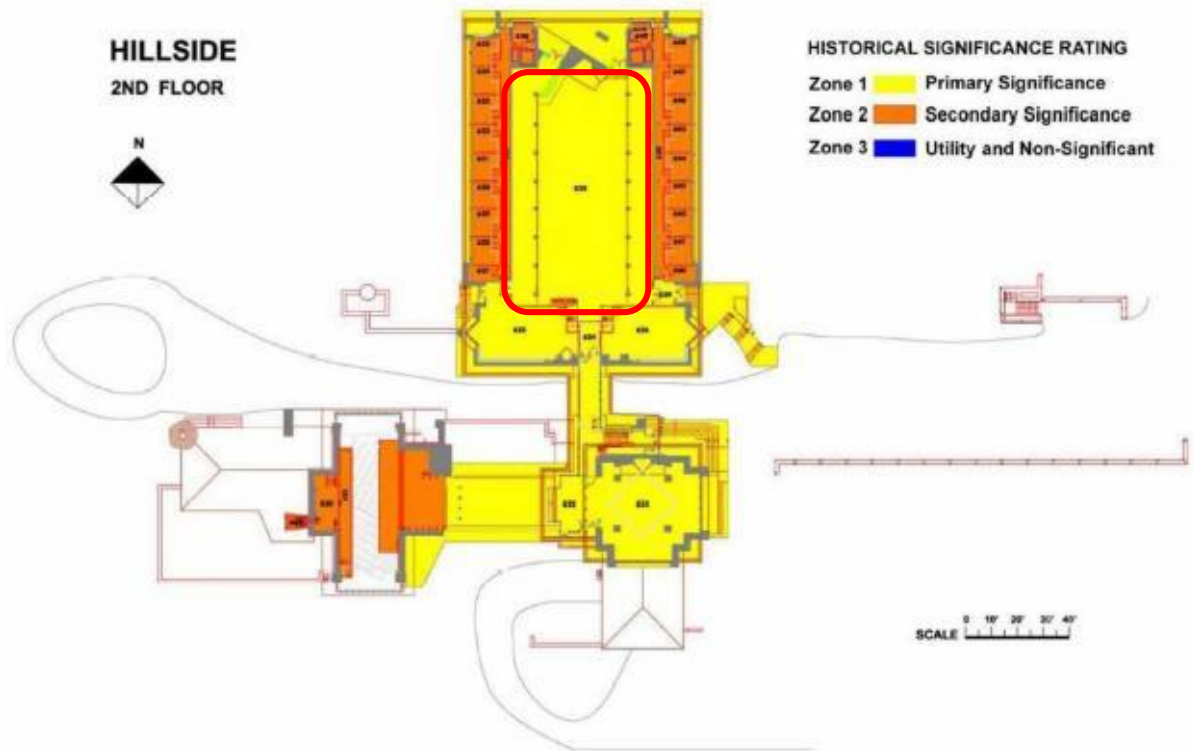


Figure 7. Second floor of Hillside Home School, current home of the School of Architecture. Drafting studio, pictured below, shown in the red rectangle.

Zones of primary significance include the exteriors of all buildings, and interior spaces which “reflect the life and works of Frank Lloyd Wright,” especially those extant during the period of significance.” Examples of primary significance spaces include the main floor of the house and the Hillside drafting studio. Secondary significance is characterized by non-significant features (which can still be Wright designed), spaces that lack integrity and reconstruction is impossible, and spaces traditionally used as private spaces (i.e. student bedrooms and bathrooms). Classification as secondary significance prioritizes replication of original features, but allows non-historic methods, materials, and designs when adaptive-reuse is deemed “necessary.” Utility and non-significant designation justifies extensive changes or total replacement, and the viewshed non-critical management zone can considering new land development. Finally, viewshed critical management zones must remained undeveloped and features can be modified or maintained to the appearance of Wright’s time with a preference for 1959.³⁸

³⁸ TPI, “Taliesin Preservation Policy,” Attachment D.

Notably, the zone classifications do not correspond directly with their day-to-day treatment. For instance, both the Hillside drafting studio and rooms of the main house are considered to be zones of primary significance. The house rooms are arranged to appear as close to 1950s photographs as possible. Tourists wearing protective shoe coverings pass through the main house rooms multiple times per day. Docents warn that the artifacts are priceless, and nothing is to be touched or photographed. In contrast, the Hillside drafting studio is still the center of student life. The desks have all been equipped with power connections, and students work on computer renderings, models, and drawings in the “significant” space. While the tourists are told not to touch the house’s furniture, students in the drafting studio often spill drinks onto the floor.

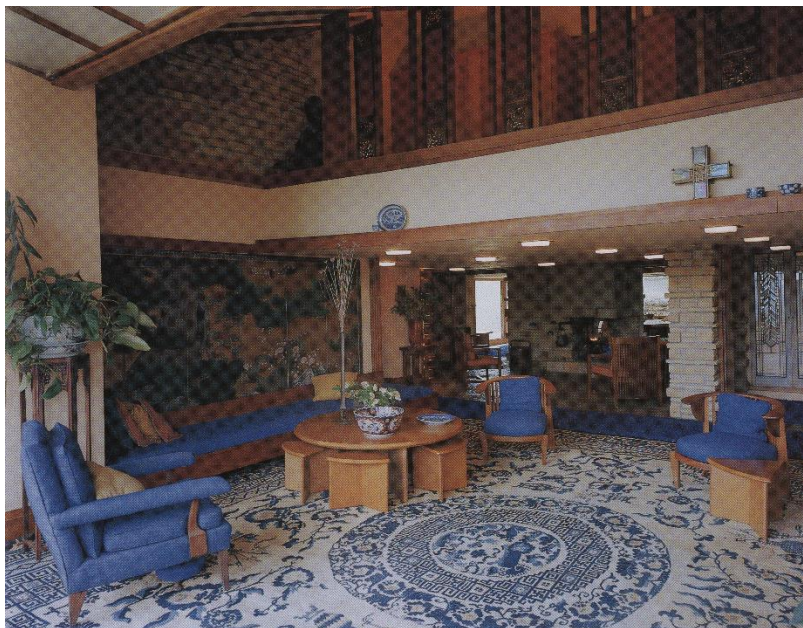


Figure 8. Blue Loggia, primary residence. Stop on the tours of the estate. Docents pay special mind to keep visitors away from artifacts and furniture.



Figure 9. Drafting Studio at Hillside. Note the cutting boards, models, and student supplies spread throughout the room. Often, events are held at the fireplace seen at the far end of the room.

TPI's nuanced approach considers each case individually. And often, there are no easy answers to the preservation questions. In June 1998, four years after the unsuccessful Taliesin Preservation Act, a massive oak, known as the tea circle oak, fell in a summer thunderstorm. The tree damaged a part of Wright's studio, adjacent to the main house. The community (preservation and otherwise) mourned the loss of the oak equally with the damage of the studio.³⁹ The tea circle oak served as well-known gathering place for the Fellowship since its founding. The preservation team was able to leverage insurance money to repair the roof, and because much of the material needed to be replaced, they seized the opportunity to complete some much needed repairs and stabilization measures.⁴⁰ Today, the docents mention the reconstruction of the now-pristine studio and the space serves as a secure gallery space for art exhibitions as well as year-round office space for some of the Foundation's year-round staff.

³⁹ John Welsh, "Ancient Oak Lands on Taliesin Tree Was the Last of Three That Were Vital Part of Wright's Design," *Wisconsin State Journal*, June 20, 1998, 1A.

⁴⁰ Taliesin Preservation Inc., "Complete Projects," Accessed at: <http://www.taliesinpreservation.org/preservation/preservation-projects/completed-projects>.



Figure 10. Courtyard at Taliesin, showing the last tea circle oak, now gone, upper left. 1997.

In contrast, other preservation decisions prove to be more controversial. 1999 was a good year for Taliesin. TPI received a 1.15 million dollar matching grant from Save America's Treasures.⁴¹ A few weeks later, the state legislature voted to absolve Taliesin of its remaining debt.⁴² In turn, Taliesin began a slow and steady campaign of preservation work. In 2004, repairs were done on the foundations of the main residence, whereby traditional stone foundations were replaced with modern concrete footings. John Eifler, a Chicago-based architect in charge of the repairs, insisted that they were necessary to keep the house from sliding down the hill. While TPI reluctantly agreed to the necessity of the repair, they also expressed concern that the preservation work compromised the site's integrity. Jim Erickson, Taliesin's current estate manager expressed concern over the changing fabric when he said, "What we're going to learn about Taliesin isn't on the surface, it's buried in the layers of Taliesin because it's an evolutionary

⁴¹ Ed Treleven, "U.S. Grant will hasten Taliesin Restoration \$1.15 Million Must be Matched for Repairs, *Wisconsin State Journal*, May 19, 1999, 1A.

⁴² Thomas W. Still, "Preserving Taliesin A Gift for Millenium," *Wisconsin State Journal*. May 30, 1999, 3B.

building. The story of Taliesin is embedded in the building.”⁴³ The concern in this stabilization project uncovers a very real worry of those who know Taliesin best; the concern that the preservation of its physical fabric will compromise important pieces of its narrative.



Figure 11. Taliesin main residence seen from drive below, after foundation stabilization.

Future Preservation Efforts

Taliesin’s role as both a public heritage site and a home for an independent community are often at odds with each other. The 1980s decision to prioritize the preservation of the site’s physical fabric hindered the daily functions of its community by stripping away its autonomy. The enormous cost of repairing and maintaining the Taliesin estate constitutes a huge burden on TPI and Foundation alike. The school’s leadership, plagued by decades of previous repair work and changing education accreditation frameworks struggles to keep the program running. And while TPI seeks nuanced and specific approaches, it is easy to forget that the existing community of the Fellowship provides a strong link to the memory and the legacy that the conservation projects aim to protect. Successful projects of TPI will foster both the preservation of physical fabric and the continued use of the site as a community hub. MoMA and Avery Library’s recent acquisition of the Wright archive is symptomatic of this conflict, as the collection was likely relinquished in exchange for much needed capital to keep the Foundation and school running.⁴⁴ While this was an

⁴³ Susan Lampert Smith, “Is it Saving or Wrecking Wright’s Gem?; Restoring Taliesin,” *Wisconsin State Journal*. February 22, 2004, A1.

⁴⁴ Sonja Haller, “Wright’s archives net millions, records indicate,” *Arizona Republic*, November 11, 2013, A.1.

incredibly difficult decision to make, the exchange can also be seen as a vehicle for the Foundation to sustain itself and preserve both its physical structures and function as an educational community. And, just as NPS documentation turned the public gaze towards Taliesin in the 1980s, the recent UNESCO nomination of Wright's work will again attract attention to the Wisconsin estate. With any luck, the new decisions will reach a balance between the preservation of Taliesin's tangible fabric and intangible community, especially when they rely heavily on one another.

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