



THE MASTER'S TOUCH



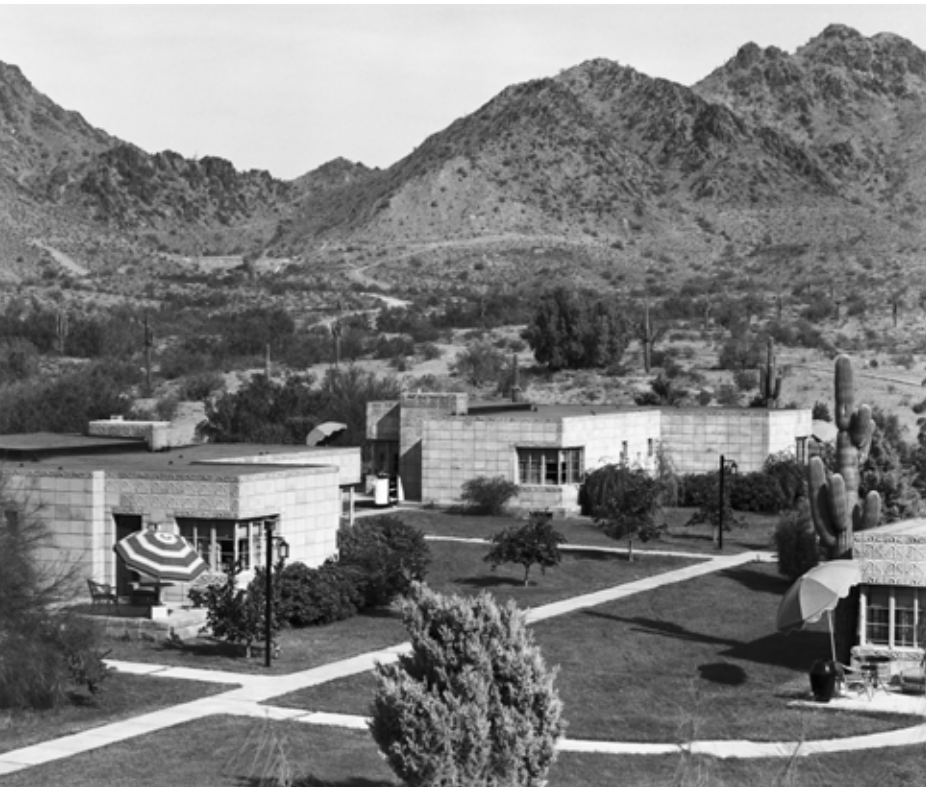
CELEBRATING FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT'S 150TH ANNIVERSARY

BY GEORGE GEARY

Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959) is widely acknowledged as a giant of 20th century American architecture. During his lifetime, he designed almost 1,200 works, including houses, churches, schools, museums, hotels, and office buildings. Of these, 511 were projects completed, and more than 433 remain today.

His own output was certainly prolific, but his influence on other architects extends even further. Perhaps nowhere is that influence more apparent than at the Arizona Biltmore, where his philosophy that, "A house is more a home by being a work of Art" is in clear evidence.

The Biltmore itself is a work of art, as are its component parts. The resort exhibits so many elements of the "Wright" look and design it is hard to say what is the work of the student, Albert Chase McArthur, and what is the work of the master.



GENESIS OF A GEM

In 1914, Wright headed west from Taliesin, his home in Wisconsin. In Los Angeles, he set about designing and building homes such as the historic Hollyhock House and La Miniatura, before setting off by boat across the Pacific to Japan. There, he orchestrated the infamous Imperial Hotel in Tokyo. It was during these years that Wright created his signature “textile block,” concrete poured into wooden molds over steel mesh (for strength), with striking patterns on the surface. It would be this very “block” that led him to Arizona.

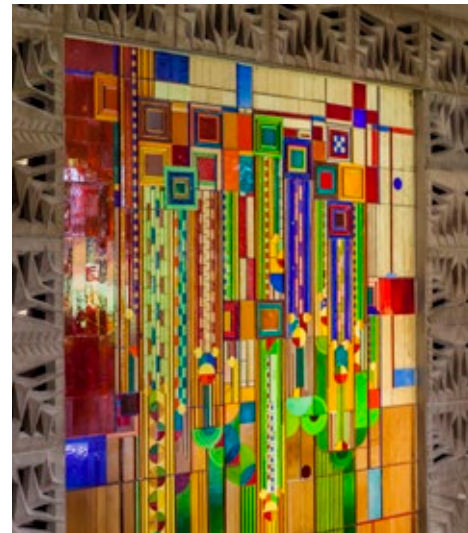
In 1928, Wright traveled to Phoenix, where McArthur and his brothers had raised funds to create the Arizona Biltmore. As McArthur planned on incorporating Wright’s textile block system to create a stunning exterior for the resort, he offered to pay Wright a licensing fee.

In Phoenix — still mostly a dusty farm town and retreat for those with lung ailments — Wright served as a consultant on the Arizona Biltmore project. But he and McArthur soon fell into conflict. While Wright’s artistic and structural influence can be seen throughout the property — the layout and details are similar to the Imperial Hotel, and the decorative cottages a nod to La Miniatura — he only lasted four months on the job.

The Arizona Biltmore was the final building where the decorative block system was used. Still, the Arizona landscape itself had imprinted upon his soul. “There could be nothing more inspiring to an architect on this earth than [this] spot of pure Arizona desert,” he exclaimed upon exploring the area’s natural beauty. Wright had found another mesmerizing landscape for his organic architecture.

ELEMENTS OF HISTORY

Just inside the Arizona Biltmore’s main entrance, guests encounter the large stained glass art framed in Biltmore Blocks and backlit to emphasize the vibrant colors. While

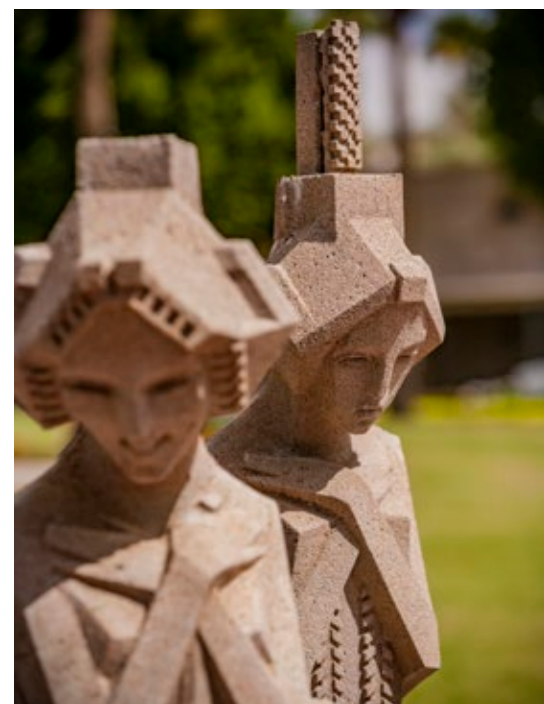


appearing to fit seamlessly in with the design and décor, the glass is not original to the resort. It was commissioned by Wright’s wife in 1973 based on his 1920 sketch, “Saguaro Forms and Cactus Flowers” for *Liberty Magazine*. It is another example of how timeless his designs are.

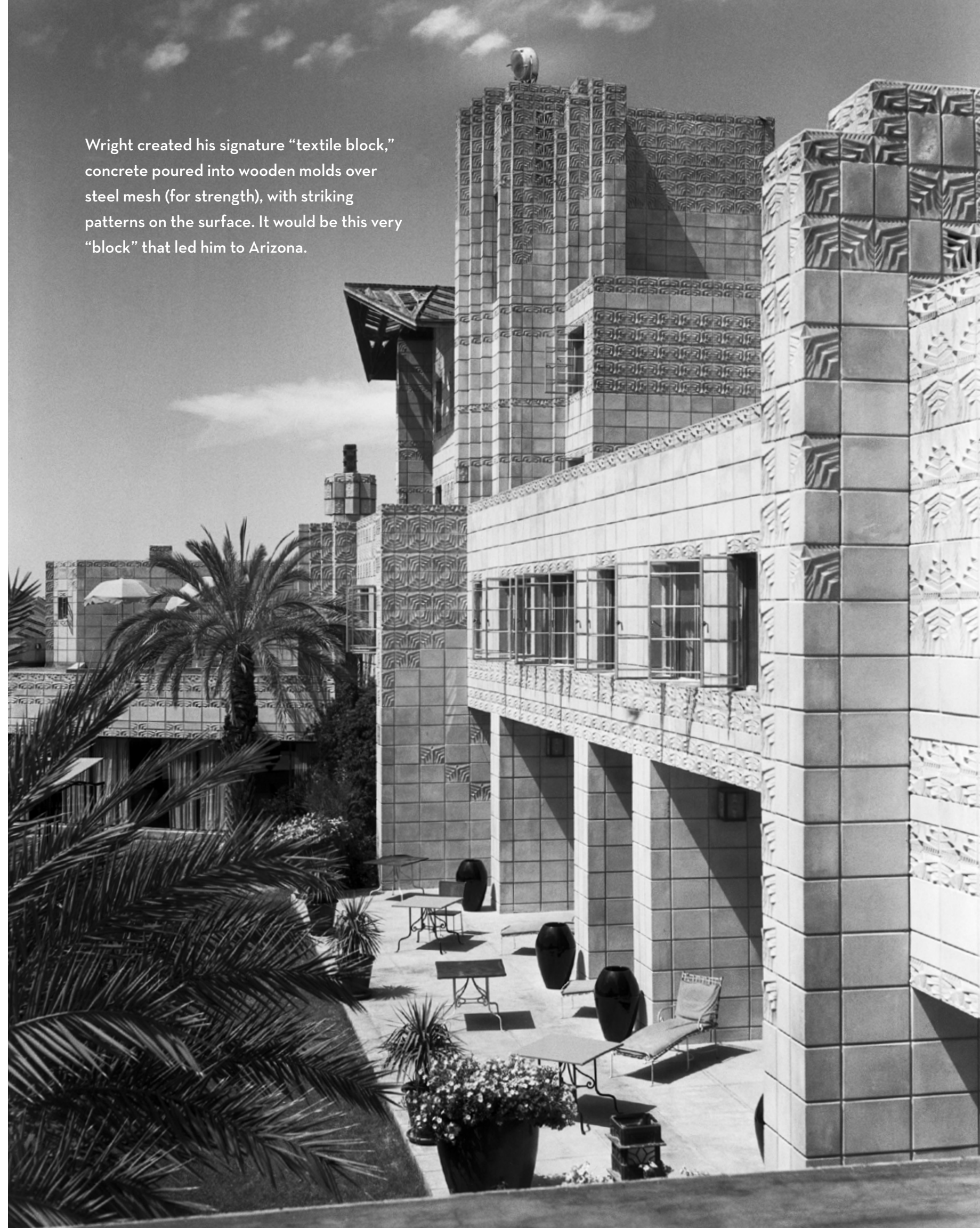
Outside, close to the entrance, are two replicas of Wright’s 1914 “Sprites,” and you will find them in groups of two around the property. The Sprites were originally made for Midway Gardens, an indoor/outdoor entertainment complex in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago. The Gardens were adorned with concrete figures designed by Wright and sculpted by Italian artist Alfonso Ianelli.

When Midway Gardens was demolished, these figures were thought to be lost forever. There are many stories about the disappearance of the Sprites, but two of the original Sprites were ultimately found and installed at Taliesin West outside the Wright’s living quarters.

In 1985, at the request of Mrs. Wright, molds were made from the originals and six copies were poured and given to the Arizona Biltmore, where they stand today. Each Sprite stands six feet tall and weighs over 450 pounds.



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For the house's walls at Taliesin West, Wright and his team of apprentices used colorful rocks with cement mixed with sand from the surrounding mountains to reflect and complement the desert's hues and textures. The site became a vortex for architectural experimentation and education without a formal program.



BEYOND THE RESORT

It wasn't until 1937 that Wright, then 70 years old and suffering from pneumonia, returned to the desert on orders from his doctor, who advised him to spend winters in the desert heat instead of battling the bitter cold of Wisconsin. With his third wife, Olgivanna, he discovered a site at the foot of the McDowell Mountains, north of Scottsdale, where the ancient Hohokam tribe once lived in harmony with nature.

He ultimately purchased around 600 acres, and set his mind and heart to building Taliesin West. For his personal Sonoran desert home, Wright envisioned more of a camp than an estate. He wanted it to blend into its natural surroundings, rather than conquering it.

For the house's walls, Wright and his team of apprentices used colorful rocks

with cement mixed with sand from the surrounding mountains to reflect and complement the desert's hues and textures. The site became a vortex for architectural experimentation and education without a formal program. Each winter, Wright, his family, and apprentices played music under the stars, and tended the gardens, all while building Wright's "organic architecture" masterpiece from the ground up.

Taliesin's angles mimicked those of the mountains. Reflecting pools let the sky kiss the ground. The main rooms served as communal dining space and a stage for entertaining. A trip to Taliesin West became a coveted invitation, as once again Wright had created something magical from his mind's wellspring of innovation. And, similar to all of his homes, it was always in a state of evolution.

Wright created breezeways within buildings to capture a wind effect and cool down the area by 10 to 15 degrees.



Stuart Graff, Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation president and CEO, emphasizes that the impact the architect had on Arizona began with dismissing the traditional thick adobe-style buildings with small windows. Instead, Wright created breezeways within buildings to capture a wind effect and cool down the area by 10 to 15 degrees.

He built rooflines jetting off the concrete masonry walls, thus creating shading and protecting the inside of the home from the harsh afternoon sun. He incorporated decorative concrete masonry blocks to support a covered drive through, a porte cochere, providing shade for cars and another breezeway. Bricks as planter boxes and decorative purposes were typical in all his buildings.

“Frank Lloyd Wright was the first environmentalist and diversity employer,” Graff says. “At a time when segregation was enforced and many ethnicities and religions were discriminated against, as well as women, FLW hired the most skilled person for the job, no matter their race, religion, or sex.”

Nowadays, Taliesin West is a National Historic Landmark and home of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation and the School of Architecture at Taliesin.

Wright died in Arizona on April 9, 1959, at the age of 91, but his legacy survives through his work at Taliesin West. At this intersection of nature, art, and architecture, students and scholars gather to learn and carry on Wright’s ideologies, along with pursuing their own work; it is also a place where visitors have a chance to wander through the iconic home and brilliant mind of Frank Lloyd Wright. ●



CELEBRATING THE MASTER

Taliesin West is celebrating the 150th anniversary of Wright with many special events and activities throughout the year. Tours are given daily. For more information, visit FrankLloydWright.org or FLW150.com.



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