

## **Design Context and History- Week 6.**

### **Revision notes for lecture given by Malachy Mc Garrigle.**

#### **Topic Areas-**

1. Early European and United States Modern movement.
2. Louis Sullivan and the Chicago School.
3. Frank Lloyd Wright.

#### **1. Early European and United States Modern movement.**

Emerged out of a historical background which included the Industrial revolution and various movements such as Arts and Crafts in England, Art Nouveau in France , and others such as Jugendstil and the Vienna Secession.

These movements wanted to break free of the constraints of the past.

“ Art outside the confines of academic tradition “

They were against conservatism and the bias towards historicism . In some ways echoing the approach of the Impressionists in painting .

“ Decorate Construction but never construct decoration “

New developments in reinforced concrete , steel and glass were not to go unnoticed and they were also to be influences on the new generations of architects.

Peter Behrens – a major figure in early European modernism as he is seen as the world’s first industrial designer through role as artistic consultant to AEG.

Le Corbusier , Mies Van Der Rohe and Walter Gropius who was the first director of the Bauhaus school all worked for him .

BAUHAUS- A school, a philosophy and almost a way of life

“ architecture for the workers “ unity of art and technology , fine and applied arts , with the design process seen as a team effort.

Design legacies- Flat roofs , facades . structural expression and honesty.

Buildings seen as almost “ functional machines “

The darkness of the wars and their aftermaths also saw designers seeking to utilise Health light openness and honesty with the suns rays being employed to help achieve these goals.

Modernism- more an attitude than a style .

Modern Movement- architects in some ways reacting to the darkness of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century world wars where Europe contrived to rip itself apart not once but twice.

Devised a clean cut white architecture which seemed to reflect the stream lined clean ocean liners which would sail the world off away from the darkness of war in the trenches.

In fact the first international meeting of the main protagonists in the Modern movement CIAM was actually held on a ship in 1928.

It was therefore common to see buildings given elements such as balconies and echo the long horizontal form of the large ocean liners.

It is ironic perhaps that an architectural movement and style pre-occupied by buildings for the masses to shape a fairer world would end up being most recognised as a symbol of corporate America and Global Capitalism .

## **2. Louis Sullivan and the Chicago School.**

Louis Sullivan is often referred to as the “ father of the skyscraper “ and he trained at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Ecole De Beaux Arts in Paris. He is perhaps a kind of link between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century ideas and architectural sensibilities.

Did not approve of the approach of the World Expo held in Chicago to celebrate the centenary of Columbus discovery of America ( World Colombiam Exposition ) He felt it was too retro and backward looking in stylistic terms and that it had set back architectural thinking by years.

One of his essays actually coined the phrase “ form follows function “

He believed a buildings exterior should express its true construction and structure although he was not beyond breaking his own rules in some buildings such as the Wainwright building where not all the vertical elements hide true steel columns behind and there is no real reason that the corners should really be thicker than the other masonry vertical columns.

Frank Lloyd Wright worked in his office , called him Leiber Meister and despite eventual differences apparently never stopped admiring him.

Chicago School- scholars refer to a first and a second but it is the first that was the real ground breaking movement and not just in America. Some people debate if there actually was a real school of thought anyway as there were so many diverse approaches and styles.

A kind of Chicago equivalent of Peter Behrens in that a lot of eminent future architects worked for him was William Le Baron Jenney. This man was an innovator who noticed how the people of the Philippines framed up their

houses with bamboo and then clad them with vines and thought a similar approach could be applied with the emerging modern versions of materials such as steel and glass. He designed and built the Home Life Insurance building which was one of the first steel framed buildings ever and set a precedent for future skyscrapers. Even though a mill was framed in steel in England way back in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the method was not adopted or seem for the breakthrough it was until the work of Jenney.

The great fire in Chicago of 1871 was devastating but provided opportunities for rebuilding and the steel that the railways ran on also brought the steel and other materials that would be so important to the rebuilding of the city.

Indeed 1890's Chicago was a boomtown and architects such as Burnham and Root, Adler and Sullivan, Le Barron Jenney and others such as Frank Lloyd Wright helped establish the city as an Architectural mecca and test bed for new innovations and ideas. The city is extremely proud and aware of this aspect of its heritage and it is and extremely architecturally conscious metropolis.

The pioneering use of new technologies helped establish the notion of a "Chicago School" In this case the first.

Buildings of the era displayed a variety of styles and technologies such as steel frame construction with masonry cladding.

Large glazed areas.

Limited exterior decoration.

Use of elements of the classical column such as the base, shaft and capitol to help articulate a tall building and express the different stories.

Chicago window- admits light, provides ventilation, sometimes provided in form of an oriel or bay.

#### **4. Frank Lloyd Wright .**

A man who was seen by some as an arrogant egotist but who designed some 1000 structures and completed 500 of which a substantial body of work remains and have protected status under American heritage programmes.

He had a design philosophy of organic architecture where buildings co-exist in harmony with humanity and the environment.

His career spans many styles and eras and he travelled widely in Europe and Japan, influencing many and absorbing into his own designs many

aspects of the architecture he encountered. Designed furniture, light fittings and windows for many of his seminal buildings.

Developed the Prairie School of architecture movement as well as the Usonian home concept, his vision of urban living in the United States.

Early bootleg houses he designed whilst moonlighting from Louis Sullivan's office were in Queen Anne, Colonial Revivalist styles but still managed innovations such as horizontal window bands, open floor plans and simple geometric massing, some of his later hallmarks.

Prairie houses- Winslow House, many of the Oak Park projects. Robie House and Coonly house are seen as icons of this style.

Robie House- revolution in domestic architecture. open plan rooms, deep eaves and massive cantilevers. Horizontal emphasis helped by use of long shallow Roman bricks. Garage incorporated into the house.

Johnson Wax building. – Designed when many thought Wright well past his sell by date. It's a tour de force and a futuristic response to office work spaces and managed to shake up not just modern office design but modern architecture itself. Amazing spaces created under the concrete lily pad columns whose structural abilities were questioned by local authorities but verified by practical onsite demonstration.

Fallingwater- an amazing house dug right into the rocks with huge cantilevers echoing the sites' outcrops which seem to defy gravity. The fact that he may have designed it in a couple of hours whilst the client was on his way only adds to the legend of a truly amazing response to a site which is undeniably modern yet respectful of the location. Inside and outside flow seamlessly. The design may have its flaws but some 80 years later, it still retains the power to stun and yet allow visitors to appreciate a work of genius.

Other notable buildings by Frank Lloyd Wright.

Larkin Building, Unity Temple Chicago, Meeting House Madison Wisconsin, Taliesin East and West. Wingspread House, Guggenheim Museum, Willey House Minneapolis which unites elements of both the Prairie and later Usonian works.