

# Martin House Complex

## Fact Sheet

# **Biography of Frank Lloyd Wright**



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Frank Lloyd Wright was born in June, 1867, in Richland Center, Wisconsin. His mother decided he should become an architect when he was still very young. She hung pictures of famous European cathedrals in his room and bought him the Froebel system of gifts, part of an early kindergarten method of learning through constructive play.

Wright spent part of his youth working on his uncle's farm in Wisconsin. He attended the University of Wisconsin for only about a year. His first venture into architecture was when he assisted with the design of a chapel being built by the architect J. L. Silsbee for Wright's uncle, a prominent Unitarian preacher.

In 1887, with \$7.00 in his pocket, Wright set out for Chicago to seek his fortune. He immediately found a job with Silsbee and soon afterward moved on to the firm of Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan, prominent Chicago architects, known for designing some of the country's first skyscrapers. Wright soon became the head draftsman for the firm. He was primarily responsible for the firm's domestic designs (private homes) and, beginning in 1889, he designed a home for his family and, later, a studio for his private architectural practice in Oak Park, Illinois.

It was in Wright's Oak Park studio that most of his famous Prairie style houses were designed, including the Darwin Martin complex in Buffalo, New York. Wright and Martin met for the first time in 1902, and their professional and personal relationship would endure for over thirty years (until Martin died in 1935). Darwin Martin was, in many respects, Wright's most important and loyal patron.

During the years 1909-1910, Frank Lloyd Wright spent most of his time in Europe. There, he published a large collection of his work called the Wasmuth

Portfolio; this monograph on Wright's work included the Martin House complex and the Larkin building, and was highly influential to European modernist architects of the time. Upon his return to the United States, Wright lived in a home he had designed for himself in Spring Green, Wisconsin, which he named "Taliesin".

From 1916 to 1922, Wright spent large amounts of time in Japan working on the famous Imperial Hotel. Because of its unique free-floating foundation, this hotel was one of the few buildings that survived the huge Tokyo earthquake of 1923, confirming Wright's reputation as a highly regarded international architect.

Wright was a prolific architect, designing over one thousand structures. About forty percent of these were actually built, including the famous Unity Temple in Oak Park, Illinois, the Robie House in Chicago, the textile block houses in Los Angeles, Fallingwater in Bear Run, Pennsylvania, and the Johnson Wax Building in Racine, Wisconsin. Later in his career, Wright began designing houses that he thought any person could afford to live in; he called these his "Usonian Houses" and many can still be found today in many areas of the country. Wright's last masterpiece, the Guggenheim Museum in New York City, was still under construction when Wright died in 1959.

Frank Lloyd Wright was a man of enormous confidence and charm and he possessed talent to match. He is considered by many to be a genius—the greatest American architect of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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