

DESIGN INTENT AND CONFLICTS OF OWNERSHIP: CAN A NEW VISION RESCUE TALIESIN EAST?

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How is it that a place highly-visited, never forgotten, actively-used, and under no pressures from external development became one of the most threatened historic places? The presentation will explore the restoration master planning process for a place that is a cultural landmark, a school, a residence, a place for fellowship and apprenticeship, a place in crisis.

THE PROGRESSION OF Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin East from an evolving experiment to a decaying relic provides an example of a discursive space and insight into the concept of ownership. A recently-submitted master plan for Taliesin's buildings and landscape intends to preserve the architect's home in the remote bluffs above the Wisconsin River near Spring Green, WI. Its current state reflects how tensions which underlie the challenge of interpreting design intent can threaten the only thing capable of representing the architect's work. The presentation will explore this discursive relationship between a cultural landmark and an occupied, living landscape through historic notes, drawings, and photographs. The goal is to question how to interpret the role of design intent in the cultural representation of Taliesin.

Noted by Anne Spirn as "Architect of Landscape", Taliesin once represented Wright's interpretation of Nature as something cultivated by the culture which possessed it. During his life, Taliesin's landscape represented an evolving cultural understanding of the interplay of domesticity with Nature, of contemporary architectural ingenuity with indigenous materials. Taliesin constantly changed. It survived two major fires, and additions were often made. Upon Frank Lloyd Wright's death, an entirely different cultural view—that of his widow Olgivanna—transformed the estate from a representative landscape into an idyllic landscape. Upon Olgivanna's death, no one remained so bold as to submit the site to another cultural view; its evolution ceased. Since then, Taliesin has been falling into a state of disrepair. Now, after an anonymous generous donation, a preservation master plan began to solidify actions needed to stabilize one of America's greatest cultural landmarks, preserving the vision of Frank Lloyd Wright. This plan is not without

its opponents. Its acceptance and implementation will be dependent upon how sensitive it is to the contested role Taliesin plays: as a national treasure, as a school, as a place for fellowship, families, and apprenticeship.

Taliesin's historical significance has not been overlooked. It remains a critical element of architectural inspiration, serving as the center point of study in the roots of organic architecture. Taliesin has been open for tours, operates as an architectural school, and is home to the families of fellows and apprentices who follow Wright's unique tradition of architecture. Nonetheless, after its 1976 dedication as a National Historic Landmark, Taliesin was placed on the most endangered places by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1999. How is it that a place highly-visited, never forgotten, actively-used, and under no pressures from external development became one of the most threatened historic places? Loss of ownership has threatened Taliesin to a critical condition and preservation is dependent upon the establishment of a vision to guide changes of this living, historic site. The presentation will review how the master plan attempts to capture the goals of historic preservation by being sensitive to the cultural representation of Frank Lloyd Wright's vision of Taliesin as can be found through historic photographs, text, and existing traces on site that remain from the past.

REFERENCES

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