



We devoted the second issue of Ecospirit to discussions of the ecosophical meanings in the works of musician Paul Winter and the photographer Ansel Adams. This issue explores two other artists, the poet Walt Whitman and the architect Frank Lloyd Wright. To both, all nature, including human nature, was sacred. They differed only in their focus. Whitman viewed the human body as sacred. Wright viewed human shelter as sacred.

Both artists saw their art as rooted in nature. Wright said that "A building is a plant, subject to the same laws on high and deep within that the plant is subject to." Whitman said that "of the spirit of life in visible forms--of the spirit of the seed growing out of the ground...of this is the spirit of this man's poetry." Both considered the study of nature as essential to true art. For Wright, "the study of nature is the only study for an architect or any other artist." Whitman claimed that "from the study of the universe is drawn...the law of the requisites of a grand poem."

Both artists felt themselves a part of nature. Whitman began one poem, "As I ebb'd with the ocean of life." Elsewhere he said, "I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass. My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air." Wright advised the owner of the Fallingwater house, "I want you to live with the waterfall, not just look at it, but for it to become an integral part of your lives."

Beyond these similarities is the direct influence that Whitman had on Wright. In An Autobiography, Wright claims to have been influenced extensively by "Whitman and Emerson." One is struck by the similarities between Wright's freeing of architecture from "boxes within boxes" and Whitman's unrhymed and unmeasured stanzas; between Wright's free-flowing space and Whitman's free-verse. Whole sections of Wright's autobiography bear the influence of Whitman:

He would dawn now as the day, and studious experiences began in swarming insect life, in the warm living breath of fern beds. In the marvel of mosses. In leaf-mold.

In the damp grasses under bare feet.

In the strange life going on in them.

There was the feel of mud between the toes and burning sand under feet, the cool, fresh grass in the open slopes.

He knew where the lady-slippers grew and why, where to find yellow ones and where those rare ones, white and purple, were hidden.

He could lead you surely to where Jack-in-the-pulpit stood in the deep shade of the wood; to wild strawberries in the sunny clearings of the hills, to watercress in the cool streams flowing from hillside springs.

The trees stood in it all like various beautiful buildings, of more different kinds than all the architecture of the world. Some day this boy was to learn that the secret of all styles in architecture was the same secret that gave character to the trees.

-- Paul Larson

WHITMAN'S ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY

by Donald St. John

Walt Whitman's spirituality of the earth is intimately linked with his spirituality of the body. There can be no adequate appreciation of the sacredness of the earth that ignores or rejects the sacredness of the body. "If anything is sacred," Whitman says, "the human body is sacred. The man's body is sacred and the woman's body" (S.B.E.,6,8).¹ Just as the goodness of creation is present in every creature so it is with the human body: "Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be less familiar than the rest" (S.O.M.,3). Not only the parts of the body, but its vital instincts and desires are good: "I believe in the flesh and the appetites, Seeing, hearing, feeling, are miracles, and each part and tag of me is a miracle" (S.O.M.,24). Whitman exuberantly proclaims: "Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touch'd from, The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer, The head more than churches, bibles, and all the creeds (S.O.M.,24).

In these considerations one must remember that for Whitman the soul is intimately united with the body. Dualistic religious interpretations set up a hierarchy in which the soul is elevated as the spiritual and real essence of the individual and the body is denigrated as being merely material and ultimately unreal. Whitman rejects such a hierarchy and considers body and soul as equals. "Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul. Lack one lacks both, and the unseen is prov'd by the seen" (S.O.M.,3).

For Whitman, the soul is the source of the body's eroticism. In Section 5 of "Song of Myself," the poet indicates that this insight occurred suddenly in one powerful experience. He begins by addressing the soul: "I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you, And you must not be abased to the other." He then invites the soul to "Loafe with me on the grass, loose the stop from your throat, Not words, not music or rhyme I want, not custom or lecture, not even the best, Only the lull I like, the hum of your valved throat." The soul is the beloved who is invited to lay on the grass and loafe with the lover, the body. Whitman then bids the soul remember their first union (perhaps for Whitman a reminiscence of a powerful sexual experience):

I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning,
How you settled your head athwart my hips
and gently turn'd over upon me,
And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone,
and plunged your tongue to my bare-stript heart,
And reach'd till you felt my beard, and reach'd till
you held my feet.

Here the soul is pictured as taking possession of the body, ravishing it and spreading a warm excitement from head to foot. The soul's union with the body eroticizes the whole person and leads to a wider self-transcending union with God, humanity and nature.

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge
that pass all the argument of the earth,
And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,

And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the
women my sisters and lovers,
And that a kelson of the creation is love,
And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,
And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,
And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder,
mullein and poke-weed. (S.O.M.,5)

Rather than dissolution of all differences in this communion, Whitman sees clearly the limitless array of leaves, brown ants, wells, mossy scabs, heap'd stones and plants.

The erotic nature of the union between body and soul gives Whitman further insight into the nature of the cosmos from gravitational to sexual attraction:

I am he that aches with amorous love;
Does the earth gravitate?
Does not all matter, aching, attract all matter?
So the body of me to all I meet ("I am he that aches with love")

To a man, a woman's magnetism is fierce, electrical and cosmic:

This is the female-form,
A divine nimbus exhales from it head to foot,
It attracts with a fierce undeniable attraction,
I am drawn by its breath as if I were no more than a
helpless vapor...
Mad filaments, ungovernable shoots play out of it. (S.B.E.,5)

Through such contacts, the electrical energy of life surges through the poet who in turn becomes a transformer, permitting "to speak out at every hazard, Nature without check with original energy" (S.O.M.,1). The poet becomes sensitized to the inner energies in the movements of earth and sky. In an especially lovely passage, Whitman describes such a revelation:

I am he that walks with the tender and growing night,
I call to the earth and sea half-held by the night.
Press close bare-bosom'd night--press close magnetic nourishing
night!
Night of south winds--night of the large few stars!
Still nodding night--mad naked summer night.
Smile O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth!
Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees! ...
Far-swooping elbow'd earth--rich apple-blossom'd earth!
Smile, for your lover comes.
Prodigal, you have given me love--therefore I to you give love!
O unspeakable passionate love (S.O.M.,21).

A sexuality that is rooted in the sexuality of the Earth, shares its primordial innocence. "Earth of chaste love, life that is only life after love, The body of my love, the body of the woman I love, the body of the man, the body of the earth ("Spontaneous Me"). Whitman's spirituality is not the spirituality of the "fallen" who associate sexuality and eroticism with guilt and sin, but the spirituality of a New Adam and a New Eve. Sexual passion is not a sign of a loss of unity with the natural and divine, but a means for attaining such union.

Hierarchies of soul/body, male/female and humanity/nature foster conflict and domination. It is through a union within and between these levels that true fulfillment and understanding can be attained.

We two, how long we were fool'd,
Now transmuted, we swiftly escape as Nature escapes,
We are Nature, long have we been absent, but now we return,
We become plants, trunks, foliage, roots, bark,
We are bedded in the ground, we are rocks,
We are oaks, we grow in the openings side by side,
We browse, we are two fishes swimming in the sea together,
We are what locust blossoms are, we drop scent around the
lanes morning and evenings,
We are also the coarse smut of beasts, vegetables, minerals,
We are two predatory hawks, we soar above and look down,
We are two resplendent suns, we it is who balance ourselves
orbic and stellar, we are as two comets,
We prowl fang'd and four-footed in the woods, we spring
on prey,
We are seas mingling, we are two of those cheerful waves
rolling over each other and interwetting each other.
We are what the atmosphere is, transparent, receptive,
pervious, impervious,
We are snow, rain, cold, darkness, we are each product
and influence of the globe,
We have circled and circled till we have arrived home again,
we two,
We have voided all but freedom and all but our joy
("We Two How Long Fool'd").

In and through the earth, humans become aware of their deeper identity. In and through the human, the earth becomes aware of its own spirituality. Human growth in self-awareness is meant to be simultaneously a growth in the earth's awareness of itself. This dialectic is built into the child and unfolds into a broad ecological consciousness if not frustrated or misguided by society. The human community itself is a part of the earth community and is meant to cooperate with the earth in educating the human. This natural intent of the planet can be seen in the self-transcending dynamics of the child:

There was a child went forth every day,
And the first object he look'd upon, that object
he became,
And that object became part of him for the day or a
certain part of the day,
Or for many years or stretching cycles of years (C.W.F.).

This capacity for intersubjective communion is the essence of ecological spirituality. As the eco-self develops, the sense of isolation and aloneness is replaced by the sense of belonging to a community of beings. Simultaneous with a feeling of oneness with the diversity of beings comes a sense of unique place:

I resist anything better than my own diversity. . .
And am not stuck up, and am in my place.
The moth and fish-eggs in their place.
The bright suns I see and the dark suns I do not see are
in their place (S.O.M.,16).

Because the self can become other and the other enter into and help form the self, there is no hierarchy between the human and the natural and no basis for or benefit from rejecting some being and accepting others. Just as every part of the body is a miracle and worthy of respect, so every being that forms the earth body is the subject of praise, admiration and celebration:

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work
of the stars,
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and
the egg of the wren,
And the tree-toad is a chef d'oeuvre for the highest,
And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven,
And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery,
And the cow crunching with depress'd head surpasses any statue,
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels
(S.O.M.,31).

If humans are those beings in whom the earth becomes aware of itself, they cannot pass judgment on the value of its creatures according to human standards. This attitude allows humans to be accessible to the revelations and messages of meaning that are contained in the complex web of existence. The eco-self intuits these diverse meanings and by absorbing them discovers its own meaning and place. Such revelations may happen when one is struck by the glance of an animal or hears the eerie call of migrating geese.

Oxen that rattle the yoke and chain or halt in the leafy shade,
what is that you express in your eyes?
It seems to me more than all the print I have read in my life...
The wild gander leads his flock through the cool night,
Ya-honk he says, and sounds it down to me like an invitation,
The pert may suppose it meaningless,
but I listening close,
Find its purpose and place up there toward the wintry sky
(S.O.M.,13)

The diversity of life-forms and even the basic structures of the planet provide nourishment and wisdom to the human spirit. Such wisdom comes not from books or lectures, but is given in the very processes of life. These are the primordial and indispensable sources of all communication, including poetry. The poet must be "the caresser of life" before being its interpreter. Only in mutual caress can one learn the basic language of existence.

Were you thinking that those were the words, those upright
lines? those curves, angles, dots?
No, those are not the words, the substantial words are in
the ground and sea,
They are in the air, they are in you
Human bodies are words, myriad of words. . .
Air, soil, water, fire -- those are words
I myself am a word with them -- my qualities interpenetrate
with theirs -- (S.R.E.,1).

This mutual interpenetration forms the complex web of the earth's spiritual life. The spiritual life of the human is inextricably linked with the variety and richness of the earth. One grows in spirituality by "taking in" the earth emphatically and thereby releasing its inner energy:

Only the kernel of every object nourishes;
Where is he that tears off the husks for you and me? (S.O.R.,6).

The workmanship of souls is by those inaudible words of the earth,
The masters know the earth's words and use them more than
audible words. . . to her children the words of the
eloquent dumb mother never fail . . . (S.R.E.,1).

The earth not only nourishes and shapes the inner life, it also sets the standards for all human enterprise. In a century where the extinction of species and the disruption of the processes of the ecosphere threaten the planet, Whitman's call for ecological wisdom is prophetic.

. . . there is no greatness or power that does not emulate
those of the earth,
There can be no theory of any account unless it corroborate
the theory of the earth,
No politics, song, religion, behavior, or what not, is of
account unless it compare with the amplitude of the
earth,
Unless it face the exactness, vitality, impartiality,
rectitude of the earth (S.R.E.,3).

It was, then, in the earth process that Whitman found healing and hope, purpose and meaning. His was a genuine earth wisdom, i.e., ecosophy. Not only did he see the wisdom of the earth manifested all about him, but he realized that humans are called upon to participate in this wisdom. It is a wisdom that heals the divisions between body and soul, man and woman, humankind and nature, and, finally, science and religion. "Faith, very old, now scared away by science, must be restored, brought back by the same power that caused her to depart" (Preface, 1872). Just as poetry must now expand to take in the grandeur of nature revealed by contemporary science, so must spirituality. This new vision, however, will be different from the old because "deeper, wider, higher than ever." Perhaps science's "principal service," Whitman suggests, is to prepare the way for "the new theology -- heir of the West -- Lusty and loving, and wondrous beautiful" (Preface, 1872). The struggle to attain this new "wondrous beautiful" vision is of crucial importance for our age. In this, as in many things, Walt Whitman is an indispensable guide.

¹All quotations are from the 1891 edition of Leaves of Grass.
Abbreviated titles of individual poems are as follows:

C.W.F. "A child Went Forth"
S.B.E. "I Sing the Body Electric"
S.O.M. "Song of Myself"
S.R.E. "A Song of the Rolling Earth"

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THE "FALLINGWATER" EXPERIENCE: FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT'S ECOSOPHY

by Louis H. Rosenberger

In 1936, at the height of the American Depression, construction began on a very special home which, when completed three years later, was destined to become a symbol of humankind's ability to live in harmony with the earth and its natural forces.

The house was built on a 2000-acre tract of land situated in the ruggedly beautiful Laurel Highlands region of southwestern Pennsylvania. The land's owners were the wealthy and socially-prominent Kaufmann family of Pittsburgh, who had used the site as a rustic retreat from the pressures of city life. The Kaufmanns were in love with the place and visited it frequently during the summer months. They loved the rolling hills covered with hardwood trees, hemlock, native mountain laurel and rhododendron. Their favorite place on the property was a picnic site located at the edge of huge boulders adjoining the crest of a waterfall on Bear Run. After a picnic above the falls, the family and their guests enjoyed invigorating swims in the cool, dark waters below the falls. As evening approached they took long walks in the tranquility of the forest before returning at twilight to their cottages upstream from the falls.

As the Kaufmanns grew older, they yearned more and more for their summer residence at Bear Run. A decision was finally made to build a permanent residence with all the modern conveniences and suitable for year-round occupancy. The family architect was called in for consultation. His name was Frank Lloyd Wright.

On a beautiful spring day in 1936, Frank Lloyd Wright visited the site at Bear Run to take mental notes on its geographic and aesthetic features. Three weeks later he sent the Kaufmanns his preliminary sketches for the home. The Kaufmanns were so delighted that they gave him carte blanche in his desire to keep the design alterations to an absolute minimum.

As construction proceeded, the Kaufmanns began referring to the house as "the house on Bear Run." Wright, who had made frequent visits to the construction site, referred to it as "Fallingwater." The Kaufmanns took the hint and Wright's name stuck. It was a

romantic and poetic title for a work which would become Wright's masterpiece, the magnum opus of his architectural career and design philosophy. More importantly, it has since become a symbol of a humankind, sure of its rightful place in the universe and learning to work with the forces of the planet which sustain it.

Fallingwater is a complex building which can be appreciated on many levels. To art historians the house represents a brilliant example of sheer artistic genius. Some say that its cumulative effect compares to the best of human creative spirit, represented, for example, by Michelangelo's "David." Structural and civil engineers are fascinated by its (once) revolutionary use of parapets and cantilevers which allowed masses of poured-concrete flooring and terraces to be thrust, seemingly unsupported, high over the waterfall below. Persons who study the nature of creative-thinking appreciate Fallingwater as an example of mental activity of the very highest order. Others appreciate it as the work of a rebel who was even considered a bit crazy by many of his contemporaries.

Wright took some chances with his Fallingwater design. His critics claimed that the huge cantilevers, for instance, would fall into Bear Run at any time, taking the Kaufmanns and their guests with them. They were wrong. The cantilevers have moved only a fraction of an inch in forty-five years. Wright's critics underestimated his knowledge of structural forces (he was trained as an engineer). With normal maintenance the cantilevers should last another fifty-five years, which was Wright's projected life-span for the house.

Wright's innovations in building construction were grounded in his design philosophy. What were by others seen as reckless gambles were to Wright in conformity with his philosophy of "organic architecture." In a romantic and rhapsodic style, he defends and promotes his ideas throughout literally volumes of writings. Appearing again and again in these works is the phrase "grows from within." This captures the essence of Wright's vision. Architecture is organic when it "grows from within" its natural setting and remains a part of it.

Frank Lloyd Wright's philosophy of organic architecture grows out of his own life. Wright grew up in southern Wisconsin, a

four-season farmland, rich in fertile soil, rolling hills, clear streams and long, low prairies. Wright senior was a second-generation Welsh-American who was a part-time Unitarian minister and full-time farmer. The primary income, what there was of it, came from the farm. A strict believer in the value of the "work ethic," he worked hard on the farm and demanded the same from his wife and children. Young Frank Lloyd learned that hard work was necessary for survival. He also learned, like most farmer's children, that a love and respect for the land must suffuse the hard work. If the land took work, it also gave in return, nurturing those who did not take it for granted. Growing up in such an environment, Frank Lloyd Wright developed a religious-like respect for the land and for the opportunities it provided for meaningful living.

Wright not only worked on the family land, he studied it. He was particularly interested in how things grew and made numerous sketches of trees and other forms of vegetation. Often he sketched roots, making notes on how they supported a plant. Wright was learning how a thing grows from within, with each of its parts supporting and contributing to the whole. He was studying the unity of nature and learning about its balances and rhythms. Most important, he was learning the limits of the natural order and how to design structures respecting those limits. Years later, as an adult and an architect, Wright would use this knowledge to design buildings which blended with nature and its rhythms rather than work against them. Wright's buildings teach humility, reminding the human species that it is a guest of nature and not its sovereign.

Fallingwater represents organic architecture at its best. Wright, who in later years became jealous of the praise heaped upon the house, went on to describe the last hundred or so of his two-thousand house designs as being, "better than Fallingwater." The fact is, however, that Fallingwater remains his most remarkable and beautiful building.

One memorable weekend twenty years ago, I took off from college studies, armed with my required advance reservation ticket from the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (administrators of the Fallingwater site). I drove the length of Pennsylvania and into the Laurel Highlands where I saw a sign pointing

to the "Kaufmann House on Bear Run, 'Fallingwater'." Parking my car up-hill from the Bear Run ravine, I joined my group and proceeded down the gravel road leading to the house.

After all these years the impressions I had of the house are as vivid as ever. The cantilevered floors, terraces and trellises, surprised me by their delicacy. Despite their enormous weight, they give me a sense that the building was suspended above its surroundings rather than being shoved into it. While most buildings invade their natural setting, Fallingwater seems to be saying, "I was designed to be comfortable and friendly with my natural host."

That feeling of comfort and friendliness is not limited to the house's exterior. Indeed, Wright designed his buildings in such a way that the interior and exterior were extensions of each other. They existed as a totally unified "whole." The first stop on the tour of the building's interior shows just how complete this unity is. The living room with its massive flagstone fireplace is the structural center of the house. The fireplace unit--its base cemented over boulders beneath it--serves as the counter-balance for all the cantilevers which thrust outward in several directions at once, carrying the weight of the living room, kitchen, bathrooms, and two levels of bedrooms with them.

There is a story connected with the beautiful fireplace. During Wright's initial visit to the site, Edgar Kaufmann, Jr. pointed to the spot where he and the family had enjoyed their picnics--near boulders just above the falls. Wright made a mental note. Weeks later when the Kaufmanns received their preliminary sketches they were delighted both by the fact that the boulders were the centerpiece of the house and that two of the boulders extended into the flagstone flooring from beneath to form a hearth for the fireplace.

The fireplace embodies Wright's philosophy. First, the entire house "grows from within" it, as dictated by organic architecture. It forms the structural support for the whole house and even the three bedrooms are structurally connected to it and contain their own fireplace.

Second, the fireplace is a symbol of the fragile nature of the human species and its dependence on natural forces for survival.

This significance is rooted in Wright's own personal experience. When Frank Lloyd was sixteen, his father left the family to seek other employment. Times for the Wright family became extremely hard. Although Mrs. Wright had to run the farm herself, the more physical work was done by young Frank. His major job during those bitterly cold Wisconsin winters was to chop and store the wood which served as the only source of heat for the large farmhouse. Frank was to keep the fireplaces going throughout the long winters. In later years he would describe how the family spent their winter evenings reading, playing games or just sitting in front of the large living room fireplace. In light of the despair associated with the desertion of the father, the fireplace provided both physical warmth and a sense of security to the remaining family unit. That bittersweet mixture of despair and warmth in the fatherless home compelled Wright to make fireplaces a secure fixture in each of his home designs.

Taking a tour through Fallingwater makes one sharply aware of Wright's reverence for the often delicate relationship that exists between humankind and nature. The exterior features of the house, as mentioned before, are dynamic and exciting. Perhaps in Wright's mind they serve as a complement to the power and raw energy of the waterfall below. The interior, by contrast, is incredibly warm and friendly. Native walnut is used for the architectural trim. Although stained, it is deliberately left without paint or varnish so as not to detract from its natural charm. Waxed native flagstone provides the interior's flooring. Corners and room supports, all structurally connected to the fireplace unit and cantilevers, are also flagstone--laid edge to edge for a beautifully rugged effect. The primary lighting system throughout the house is also unique and "natural," for Wright was the first architect to use fluorescent lighting concealed in the ceilings of each room (concealed lighting was just one of his many design innovations). The subdued light emanating from this indirect source adds to the house's warmth and feeling of tranquility. In fact, the entire house has a quality of nurturing about it. The rooms seem to say, "Observe the natural world outside. Watch it through my beautiful windows. Listen to its sounds from the patios on a warm summer day. Hear the wind howling on cold, winter nights. Keep the fireplace roaring and sit by its warmth. You are a part of that wild world

outside, but inside my strong walls you are warm and comfortable and safe."

Fallingwater, like all of Wright's buildings, likes vegetation. Plants are artfully arranged everywhere within and around the building. Some plants are even encouraged to grow over the building, with native rhododendron and mountain laurel competing for choice locations on and over the flagstone walls and concrete terraces, enveloping them with their beauty and freshness. The house seems to love them. When a large oak tree "interfered" with a terrace overhang, Wright simply ordered the contractor to cut a hole for it rather than cut down the tree. In a related instance, the contractor complained to Wright that a small rivulet on the hill immediately behind the house was making for slippery walking and driving on the service road below it. However, rather than enclose the rivulet in underground pipes, which is what the contractor had in mind, Wright designed a beautiful flagstone spillway leading to a small flagstone pool which, in turn, led the stream happily on its way to Bear Run. Details such as these are everywhere in and around Fallingwater and become an integral part of its beauty.

The Fallingwater house, like all of Wright's structures, including his famous Prairie houses designed earlier in the century, embody a philosophy whose central theme is a profound respect for humankind and for its right to live in harmony with nature. Fallingwater is a blend of creativity, rationality and sensuality (all Wright houses had a sensual quality to them), based on Wright's premise that people enjoy their dwelling more if it teaches them the values of working and playing and loving within the limitations of a natural order. His buildings were symbols of the healthy nurturing that nature provides its creatures. The family in a Wright home would "grow from within" the home which, in turn, grew from within its natural setting.

Frank Lloyd Wright was the first architect of our time who recognized the positive social, economic, and even moral implications in the design of buildings "laid gently into the belly of the earth," buildings which flowed with nature rather than working against it. Ecosophers who study this great man's homes will be pleased to learn that they are, and shall continue to be, symbols of how humankind should live in its real home--the planet earth.

Information and sources:

"Fallingwater" c/o The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, 204 Fifth Ave., Pittsburgh, PA.

The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, Taliesin Associated Architects, Taliesin West, Scottsdale, Arizona.

The Allentown Art Museum, Allentown, PA. (contains portion of a Wright home in the Prairie School style.)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 5th Ave. at 85th St., NYC (contains a full interior of a Prairie Style home.)

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