

**Historic Significance and Integrity Assessment Report for
Listing Taliesin West Complex on the Scottsdale Historic Register**

Taliesin West Complex
12621 N Frank Lloyd Wright Blvd, Scottsdale 85252
Case Numbers 6-HP-2005 and 21-ZN-2005

Historic Context:

Criterion A: Development of Arts Colonies in Scottsdale, AZ

The development of arts colonies and tourist accommodations in Scottsdale and around the Valley proved to have an important influence on Scottsdale's culture and its economic and physical growth. The Depression saw an influx of artists and architects into the town and nearby communities; many of whom were encouraged by President Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration (WPA), which established programs to put people back to work.

The development of tourist accommodations in the Valley also influenced the direction of Scottsdale's growth as a community. The famed Arizona Biltmore resort and two other grand resorts debuted in 1929 to establish the Valley as a premier destination for winter visitors from the nation's wealthy and elite. Frank Lloyd Wright, an architect from Wisconsin, came to stay for a number of winters at the Jokake Inn built in 1922 at the base of Camelback Mountain. Like other early visitors to the Valley for work or pleasure, Wright was lured to establish a home here.

The warm climate and desert beauty of the Valley inspired many artists to "put on canvas the color, bright sunlight, deep shadow, and vast distances of desert and mountain." Desert scenery also influenced the built environment as resident architects established a style of organic and low profile forms, used indigenous materials, and worked with natural colors. The aesthetic and design of their buildings blended with the desert's features and functioned well in the climate. Other local artisans brought desert motifs, textures, and colors to their sculpture, leatherwork, silver goods, and textiles intended for sale to tourists during the winter months.¹

Criterion B: Association with the Person of Frank Lloyd Wright

The remarkable length and breadth of Frank Lloyd Wright's career, the large number of buildings he designed, his outspoken positions on the role of architecture and design in society, and his profound influence on the field of architecture and related areas makes Wright one of the preeminent artisans of the 20th century. His life has achieved an almost legendary quality as the subject of international acclaim and severe condemnation throughout numerous biographies and volumes dedicated to his work. His buildings have inspired generations of students, and continue to do so.²

¹ City of Scottsdale Historic Preservation Office, "Historic Significance and Integrity Assessment Report for Listing Cattle Track Complex on the Scottsdale Historic Register" (Scottsdale, AZ.: City of Scottsdale Historic Preservation Office, Nd.), 1.

² Taliesin West National Register Nomination (Scottsdale, AZ.: City of Scottsdale Historic Preservation Office, 1984), 6.

Criterion C: Example of the Work of Master Embodying High Artistic Values.

Taliesin West is viewed by many as one of Frank Lloyd Wright's masterworks from his Second Golden Age (1936-1959). Many scholars and the press have repeated this appraisal, and in 1973 the American Institute of Architects awarded the building the 25-year award. A 1976 pole by the American Institute of Architects named Taliesin West and five other Wright buildings among the thirty two most important during the United States' 200 years of experience. The Taliesin complex embodies many of Wright's architectural principles: use of natural light, integration of the structures into the landscape, use of local materials, merged indoor/outdoor spaces, and open interior spaces.³

Description:

The Taliesin complex is located just north of the intersection of Frank Lloyd Wright Boulevard and Cactus Road in Scottsdale, AZ at the foot of the southwest slope of the McDowell Mountains in the Sonoran Desert. The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation is the current owner of the complex and the surrounding eleven contiguous parcels of gently sloping to mountainous native desert landscape. The Foundation owned approximately 492 total acres at Taliesin West in Scottsdale. City designation extends only to the "historic core" of the site, which is defined as those buildings constructed during the lifetime of Mr. Wright, 1937-1958, and consists of 10.5886+/- acres containing the buildings and adjacent open space views that are historically and architecturally significant to the complex. The recommended HP boundary is a portion of the 160.1 acre Parcel 217-22-002 and all of a .03 acre Parcel 217-22-002B containing the Kiva Theatre.

As described by the Frank Lloyd Wright foundation on their website, "Taliesin West is a free architectural composition over a 16-foot square unit system, rotating at 45 degrees on itself and gently cascading down the slope of the site."⁴ The site plan itself emphasizes strong axes and diagonals, with many significant buildings set at a 45-degree angle to the entrance drive on a northwest-southeast axis. The terraces and a pool to the south and west of the main studio/kitchen/dining building continue the triangular site plan, based on an isosceles triangle with a right angle at the southwestern point of the terrace, and establish a cross axis for the complex. Structures built after the initial construction of Taliesin, including housing built by apprentices, are informally placed irregularly and at a distance from the original core buildings.⁵

The plan and setting of Taliesin West reflects Wright's belief in unifying the built environment with the landscape. The complex itself is set at the base of a mountain, reflecting the meaning of the facility's Welsh name, "shining brow." The approach to the site winds through the desert landscape, and ends at a straight entrance drive divided by a landscaped median that was realigned under Wright's direction in 1958. This final drive is parallel to one side of the triangular site plan for the building complex and begins with a large stone monolith in the median leading to the graveled entrance court, flanked on three sides by walls. Wright's design echoes the "rugged natural geometry" of the mountain backdrop through the use of a geometric layout with fifteen-degree sloping walls and roofs on the structures that produces a three dimensional perspective.

³ Ibid, 7, 8.

⁴ Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, *Taliesin West History*, 2005,

<http://www.franklloydwright.org/index.cfm?section=tour&action=display&id=24> (10 October 2005).

⁵ Deborah Abele to Arnold Roy, 2005; City of Scottsdale Historic Preservation Office, "Boundary Review for Taliesin West Local Designation," 2005; Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, *Taliesin West History*, 2005.

Taliesin West is largely constructed from the varicolored volcanic rock native to the site, which gives the appearance that the building is a part of its environment. To construct the massive walls and structural elements that are the building's most prominent features, stone was set into forms and bound with a special mix of cement and desert sand called "desert concrete." Building massing, stair placement, contrasting materials and colors, and the interplay of light and shadow likewise complement the facility's natural surroundings. Decorative elements on the exterior also lend to the organic feel of the site. Muted Cherokee red paint, which Wright felt was a "life-giving color,"⁶ was used on many of the details. Some now call this color 'Taliesin Red'. The rough-sawn redwood beams and rafters form massive wooden frames that support the sloping roofs, and are decorated with a dotted line effect to suggest the native saguaro cactus. Fluidity between indoor and outdoor spaces in the original design completes the union between man-made artifice and nature.⁷

The early or original buildings and spaces constructed during the life of Wright, and constituting the historic core, consist of: Wright's Office and adjacent entry tower (1939), the Shops (1939), the Drafting Studio (1939, with later structural alterations), Kiva Cinema/Theatre (1938), Walkway with Pergola on the central axis (1939), Kitchen and Kitchen Annex (1939), the Dining Room (1939) and Guest Quarters (1941) above Kitchen and dining area with adjacent tower element and bridge across walkway, the Sunset Terrace (1939), the Garden Room (1938) and the Wright's Living Quarters (1940), Apprentice Court and Apartments (1941 with numerous later additions/alterations), Sun Cottage (1948, with later additions/alterations), the Water Tower (1946), Cabaret Theater (1951), Music Pavilion (1956, rebuilt in 1964 after a fire), Apprentice's Court and later additions (1938-1941), and the Realigned Entrance Drive and plating of the Citrus Grove (1958).

From the parking lot, the first building encountered after passing the large tower near the entry is Wright's Office (area 1). Built of sloping concrete and stone walls and covered with a translucent roof supported by exposed wood and steel beams, this building served as Wright's business office, reception room, and part-time drafting studio. As one of the first buildings constructed, the office served as the "dominate architectural theme for the complex," and embodies many of the character defining features of the site. From the office, a broad concrete terrace extends from the northwest to southeast to form the central axis of the complex. The walk is divided into sixteen-foot units, covered by a wooden Pergola, and further divided into smaller geometrical patterns.⁸

The Drafting Studio, Kitchen and Kitchen Annex, and Dining Room form a group of interconnected buildings, and serve as the core of the complex (area 2). Guest Quarters were constructed on the second floor in 1941. The Studio features a similar roof to that of the Office and is rectilinear in shape, 96x30. A fireplace is placed at one end, while a stone and concrete vault is placed at the other, helping to anchor the structure. The space accommodates sixty drafting desks for students of the Taliesin fellowship. Behind the fireplace is the central kitchen, which is connected to the Dining Room, as well as a pantry and breezeway. Initially constructed as an open space, Wright enclosed the Dining Room to form the current 40x28 foot space. An apartment and what is now called the Board Room are to the southwest and abut the kitchen. A prominent 1939 Bell Tower separates the dining area from the studio along the northeast façade of these interconnected spaces.

⁶ Taliesin West National Register Nomination, 1.

⁷ Taliesin West National Register Nomination, 1; Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, 2005,

⁸ Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, 2005; Note: all descriptions of complex on pages 3 and 4 based on this source.

A covered breezeway to the southeast separates these more public or community spaces from the more private living spaces in other areas of the complex to the east and southeast.

The Sunset Terrace (area 3) is a formal triangular outdoor space adjacent to the central buildings and central axis for the site plan. The two sides of the terrace come together at a right angle at a point to the southwest. This end of the triangle represents the prow of a ship in the desert and illustrates the meaning of the Welsh name for the complex, 'shining brow'. People can view the desert valley below from this point and, turning around, can view the main interconnected building complex with the McDowell Mountains in the background. The original canvas 'sails' on the roof of the Studio were replaced with more durable materials so visitors today must use their imagination to see the ship in the desert. The open breezeway through the middle of the main building provides one approach to the Sunset Terrace. Visitors can also walk south from the entrance court along the west side of the triangle to get to the viewpoint at the end of this terrace.

The Garden Room (area 4) is considered to be the showpiece of Taliesin West. Wright designed, built, and continually remodeled this space during his lifetime. The 56x34 room is a spacious and well-lit space with a low ceiling. The room is adjacent to the breezeway and overlooks a garden on the east and to the horizon on the south. A large fireplace dominates one end of the room, and a 10x12 foot patio is placed at the opposite end forming a small alcove. Beyond the alcove are a small bar, restrooms, pantry, and kitchen.

A suite of rooms, including the Wright's Living Quarters (area 5), arranged in an 114x20 foot wing adjoins this space. A prominent Water Tower is adjacent to the central axis of the complex and sits to the northeast of the Garden Room and Living Quarters. Additional living spaces, staff apartments and offices were added to this southeast wing of the main complex after Wright's death 1959.

The Kiva or Hogan Theater (area 6) lies in a separate building adjacent to the central axis of the complex and forms one side of the Apprentice's Court. It has a simple kiva-like rectangular door. The building is constructed of desert masonry walls that support a desert stone roof, and features only one small window and a fireplace. The space has served a variety of functions including as a theater, concert hall, apprentice lounge, library, storage, and currently as a classroom and conference room. A concrete stone bridge connects the Kiva to the second-story apartments above the dining room and adjacent to the water tower.

Briefly before WWII, Wright's apprentices moved from tents to a grouping of small rooms around a courtyard to the east of the main buildings called the Apprentice's Court (area 7). Each small room featured a fireplace and canvas flaps that opened to the desert. The courtyard is intact but adjacent living areas have been altered or added onto by the residents of Apprentice Court over time and the original canvas has been replaced with more durable materials.

The Shops (area 8) was located at the western end of the camp and features a simple square plan with roofed areas opening into a sunlit yard. The desert masonry walls are vertical with narrow openings for decoration and ventilation. The southern wall of the shop area forms one side of the entrance court that visitors first encounter when coming in the realigned 1958 drive from the south.

The half-sunken Cabaret Theater (area 9) extends from Wright's Office into the desert, and was originally called the "Stone Gallery." The building's walls, ceiling, and interior benches are of

reinforced concrete and desert stone. Removable wooden flaps at the entrance gallery may be positioned to open the room to an enclosed garden. At the far end of the building is a large fireplace and projection booth. The sunken position of the Cabaret Theater results in the building exhibiting a comparably lower profile to that of the other structures of Taliesin West.

The Music Pavilion (area 10) is notable in that Wright varied from the 16 foot unit he used throughout the complex in order to accommodate seating in the hall. The structure, rebuilt in 1964 after a fire, is a steel-reinforced building with a roof of rigid-steel frames and translucent plastic. When constructed, Wright attempted to keep the Music Pavilion low enough so that the mountain backdrop could be seen from the main drive. The Pavilion hosts a wide variety of meetings, performances, and exhibitions.

The Citrus Grove (area 11), located on a broad patio between the Music Pavilion and the Kiva Theatre, was part of Wright's site plan for the complex and was one of the last parts of his plan to be improved. The Entrance Drive (area 12) was realigned to include a vertical stone monolith and a landscaped median dividing the drive. The 1958 Citrus Grove and Realigned Entrance Drive were the final Taliesin West improvements overseen by Wright during his lifetime.

The Sun Cottage (area 13) is located where the Wright's first lived at Taliesin West. The structure is freestanding and is located at a short walk through the desert to the east of the main complex of buildings. The original 1938 temporary "cabin" lived in by the Wright's was called the "suntrap". This living area was expanded to the south in 1948 and is renamed the "Sun Cottage." An open air Atrium was later added to the east and was used for dances or other community functions. The area was enclosed in 1962 to form what is now a studio for apprentices. An East Wing of apartments was added in 1962 as well.

History:

Like many from the Midwest, Frank Lloyd Wright began visiting Arizona in the winter months in the late 1920s. In 1927 Wright came to Arizona to participate in the design of the Arizona Biltmore Hotel and Cottages in Phoenix, as a consulting architect. The year after, Wright met Dr. Alexander J. Chandler who commissioned him to design a luxury resort in Chandler, AZ to be called San Marcos-in-the-Desert. Setting up camp ten miles outside of town at a site Wright called Ocatilla, the architect and his apprentices developed many of the ideas and techniques that would later be fully expressed at Taliesin West. However, the stock market crash of 1929 doomed the planned resort, and the Ocatilla camp was abandoned.⁹

In 1937 Wright purchased land for what would be the winter quarters of his office and his Taliesin Fellowship of apprentices formed in 1932, although Taliesin in Spring Green, Wisconsin would still serve as the group's summer headquarters. Constructed beginning in 1937 and 1938, Taliesin West represents one of Wright's masterworks during what Grant Manson describes as Wright's "Second Golden Age," which began in 1936 after his initial success with his "Prairie Houses" in the Chicago area and a period of relative inactivity.¹⁰

⁹ Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, "The Lure of the Desert," *Frank Lloyd Wright Quarterly* 10:4 (Fall 1999), 3, 5-6; Taliesin West National Register Nomination, 2-3.

¹⁰ Taliesin West National Register Nomination, 1-2.

Initially the complex began as a collection of tents and wooden frame buildings with canvas roofs that students of the fellowship constructed under the guidance of Wright. Drafting tables were set up in the open desert, and construction proceeded on the spot. From the beginning Taliesin was envisioned as a practical working and living space that would embody all of Wright's architectural principals: interior and exterior harmony with the environment, human scale, and incorporation of intimate spaces. Plans emphasized the integration of indoor and outdoor spaces through the incorporation of patios and an open interior design; diffusion of natural light through canvas roofs; and incorporation of natural materials such as the stone and sand found at the site that formed the massive walls and expansive patios that dominate the design. Initial construction at the site was completed in 1938.¹¹

Over the next two decades, Wright and his family came to spend increasing amounts of time at his western encampment, and he and his students constantly experimented with different techniques and materials. According to the National Register Nomination completed in 1974, Wright "did not conceive of the place as ever becoming a museum complex, but rather as a continuing architectural laboratory."¹² After his death in 1959, Wright's apprentices continued their master's constant experimentation at the site under the supervision of Wright's widow, Olgivanna Wright, and later William Wesley Peters. New buildings, or additions to older buildings, have been added to accommodate the changing needs of the fellowship and to meet the organizations continuing mission of education, preservation, and architectural excellence.¹³

Significance:

The Taliesin complex is significant as an example of a masterwork of architecture, and as the winter residence, school, and office of the influential architect Frank Lloyd Wright. The site also speaks to larger themes associated with the development of art and architecture in Scottsdale and the region.

Taliesin West as the Wrights' Home

Initially, the Wrights lived in a temporary "cabin" on the Taliesin site called the "suntrap." This building was expanded in 1948 and is now called the "Sun Cottage." The Wright's apartment in the main complex, the Living Quarters, was first occupied in 1941. The Wrights generally divided their time between Arizona and Wisconsin, with the exception of when Mr. Wright supervised major commissions in person as in the case of the Guggenheim Museum in New York City. Mrs. Wright continued to live at Taliesin West after her husband's death in 1959 until her own in 1985.¹⁴

The Taliesin West as an Arts and Architecture Community

Taliesin West and Taliesin Wisconsin both served as laboratory communities for Wright's ideas about architecture, education, and society in general. While these concepts only relate broadly to city planning and architecture, they were none-the-less central to Wright's design efforts and are incorporated into Taliesin West. To Wright, architecture was both reflective of society's ills and a cause of them, which he felt could be solved through intelligent and harmonious design and interdependent living. Wright conceived Taliesin West as a miniature of his "Usonian community,"

¹¹ Ibid, 2-3.

¹² Ibid, 4.

¹³ Ibid, 4; Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, 2005.

¹⁴ Taliesin West National Register Nomination, 4.

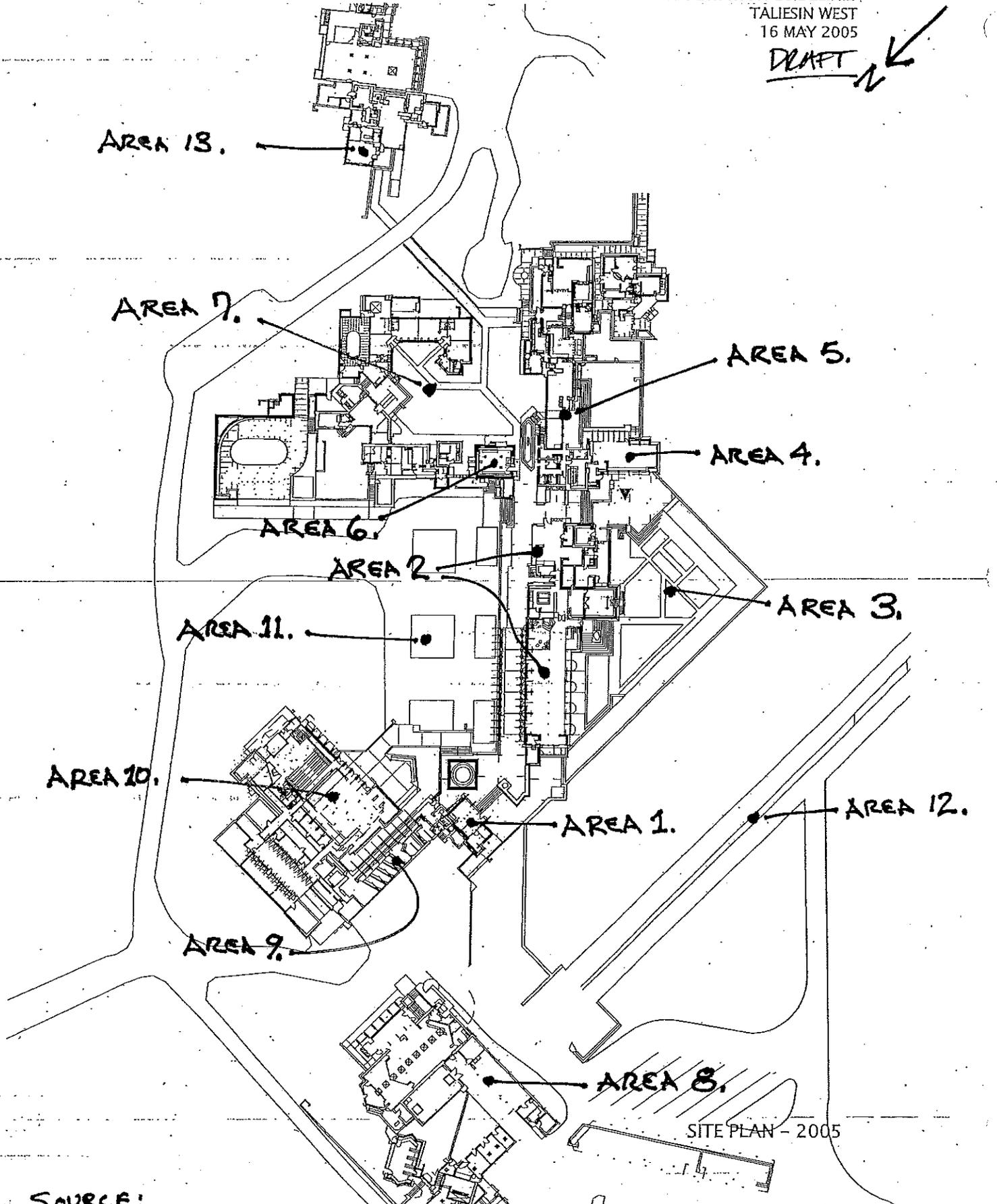
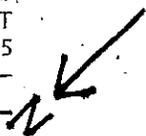
or self-sufficient living city. Apprentices were expected to not only learn the principles of design, but also to build and experiment with their own buildings. Likewise, they were to contribute to the community by performing manual labor such as cooking and cleaning. Wright also welcomed a variety of artistic and aesthetic endeavors including music, painting, sculpture, drama, and philosophy, which are seen by his provision of spaces at Taliesin for these activities. This holistic approach to society, design, and the arts is continued today through the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation and the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture.

Taliesin West as an Architectural Masterwork

Taliesin West has been recognized as one of the U.S.'s and Wright's greatest masterworks during his Second Golden Age by academia, the press, and the public. The complex is honored not only by placement on the State of Arizona Historic Register and the federal National Register of Historic Places, but it has also been declared a National Landmark, a designation achieved by less than 10% of the sites and buildings placed on the National Register. This distinction marks Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin West as a place with national significance to American architecture, culture, and art.¹⁵

¹⁵ Taliesin West National Landmark Nomination (Scottsdale, AZ.: City of Scottsdale Historic Preservation Office, Nd.), 1; Taliesin West National Register Nomination, 1.

DRAFT



SITE PLAN - 2005

SOURCE:

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TALLESIN WEST SCOTTSDALE, AZ

