

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

BEYOND ARCHITECTURE

HOW ONE ARCHITECT RESHAPED MODERN DESIGN



“THE MISSION OF AN ARCHITECT IS
TO HELP PEOPLE UNDERSTAND HOW
TO MAKE LIFE MORE BEAUTIFUL, THE
WORLD A BETTER ONE FOR LIVING
IN, AND TO GIVE REASON, RHYME,
AND MEANING TO LIFE.”

- FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT, 1957

Frank Lloyd Wright: Beyond Architecture

Emma Daffner
GDES-210 | Spring 2026



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INTRODUCTION

Growing up, Frank Lloyd Wright was one of my biggest inspirations. So much so that I wanted to be an architect, just like him. I used to draw floor plans and build Minecraft houses. I even had my own business cards (architecture was spelt wrong). 5th grade me has big dreams. Then I learned that being an architect involves more than simply drawing floorplans; it involves math, physics, and lots of other subjects I wasn't ready for.

Now, I'm 20-years-old and have no plans of being an architect. However, Frank Lloyd Wright is still one of my biggest inspirations. This time though, for different reasons. Despite being a world-renowned architect, Frank Lloyd Wright was a designer; one who continues to influence almost 70 years after his death. As a Public Relations major and Marketing and Graphic/Visual Communication Design double minor, I see design everywhere. Design is key to how humans see the world. So, who is Frank Lloyd Wright and how did he influence design, beyond architecture?



ABOUT FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

American Architect (1867-1959)

Frank Lloyd Wright was born June 8, 1867, in Richland Center, Wisconsin. His family frequently moved, but eventually settled in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1878. In 1887, Wright left Madison for Chicago, working with two architecture firms before working directly under the prestigious Louis Sullivan for six years.

In 1889, Wright married Catherine Lee Tobin. Shortly after, he would build his first house: a modest residence reminiscent of the East Coast shingle style with its prominent roof gable. It reflected Wright's experimentation with geometric shapes and volumes. Wright would leave Sullivan's firm in 1893; it is unclear whether he quit or was fired, and he opened his own office.



Wright was determined to create a distinctly American architecture and created what became known as the Prairie Style: low-pitched roofs, deep overhangs, no attics or basements, and generally long rows of casement windows that further emphasized the horizontal theme.

Later in life, Wright built Taliesin West in Scottsdale, Arizona, as a permanent winter residence and the home of the Taliesin Fellowship. Also during this time, Wright made a comeback in the world of architecture, commissioning the S.C. Johnson and Son Company Administration Building, Fallingwater, and the Herbert Jacobs House, the first executed "Usonian" house.

Frank Lloyd Wright died on April 9, 1959, just two months shy of his 92nd birthday.

"WE ARE ALL HERE TO DEVELOP
A LIFE MORE

BEAUTIFUL,
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OF OUR OWN SENSE OF PRIDE
& JOY THAN
EVER BEFORE IN THE WORLD."

- FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT, 1957

DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

Design for Democracy:

Wright wanted to provide his clients with environments that were not only functional but also “eloquent and humane.” He pursued architecture for everyman, the common man, rather than every man.

Integrity and Connection:

Wright believed that architecture could be transformative. Therefore, he devoted his life to creating styles that would enhance society’s well-being. He believed architecture was about protecting and nourishing the lives of those within buildings.

Nature’s Principles and Structures:

Wright believed that a truly organic building developed from within outwards and was in harmony with its time, place, and inhabitants. “In organic architecture then, it is quite possible to consider the building as one thing, its furnishings another and its setting and environment still another,” Wright said.

Material and Machine:

Wright embraced new technologies and tactics. He was consistently pushing the boundaries of his field.

Architecture as the Great Mother Art:

Wright sought a consistent expression of unity and devoted his life to promoting architecture as “the great mother art, behind which all others are definitely, distinctly and inevitably related.” He drew inspiration from the Japanese idea of a culture in which every object, human, and action were integrated so as to make an entire civilization a work of art. Wright believed in the beauty of architecture and sought to create affordable architecture so that every man, woman, and child could live a beautiful life.

CORE DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Geometry:

Squares, circles, and triangles as foundation forms

Abstraction:

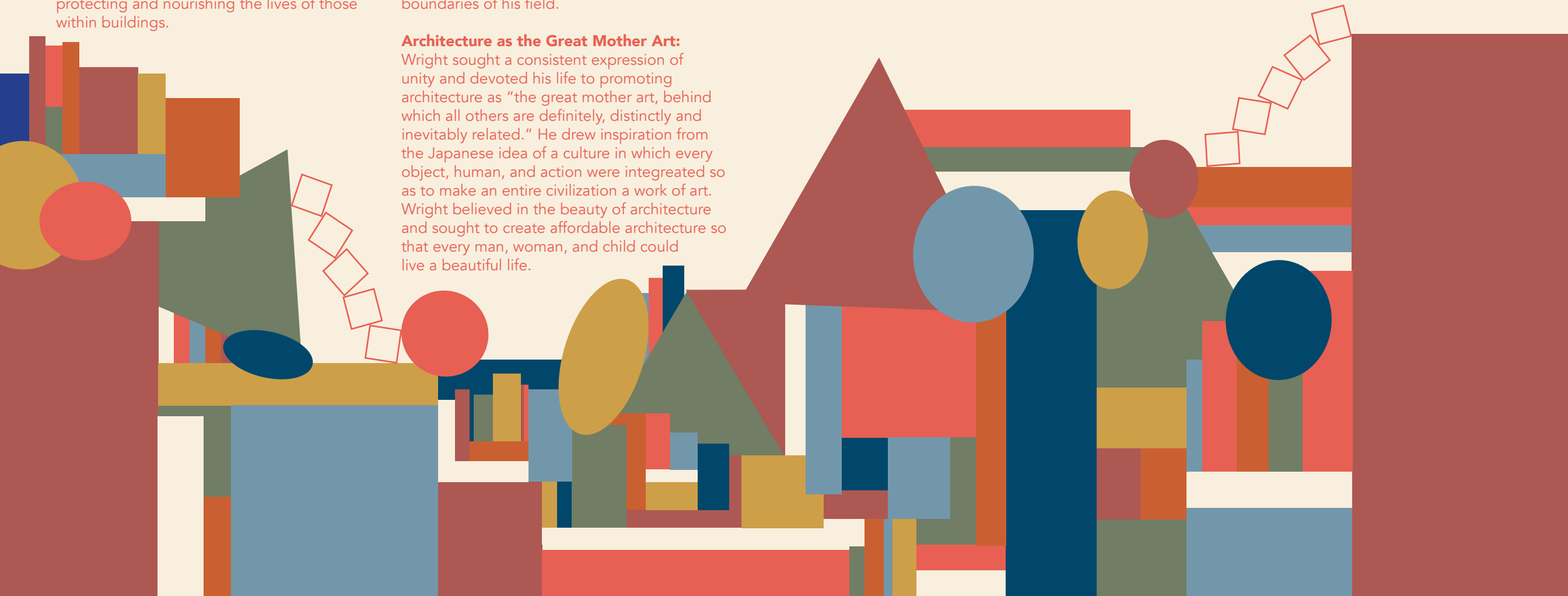
Simplifying nature into visual patterns

Organic Design:

Harmony between human design and nature

Unity:

Everything connected into one system





Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio



Falling Water



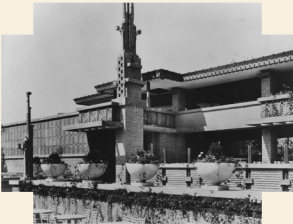
Inside Taliesin West



S.C. Johnson
Administrative Complex



Solomon R.
Guggenheim Museum



Midway Gardens



Herbert Jacobs House



WRIGHT AS A GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Frank Lloyd Wright was an experimental graphic designer as much as he was a groundbreaking architect. He was unafraid to experiment with ideas that had not yet been developed in American society. These ideas endure in today's design culture.

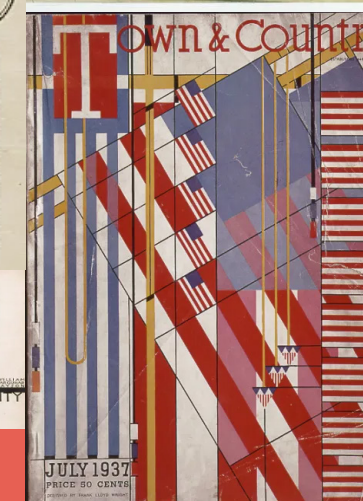
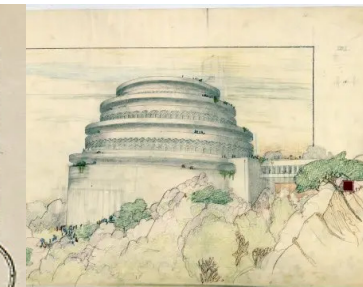
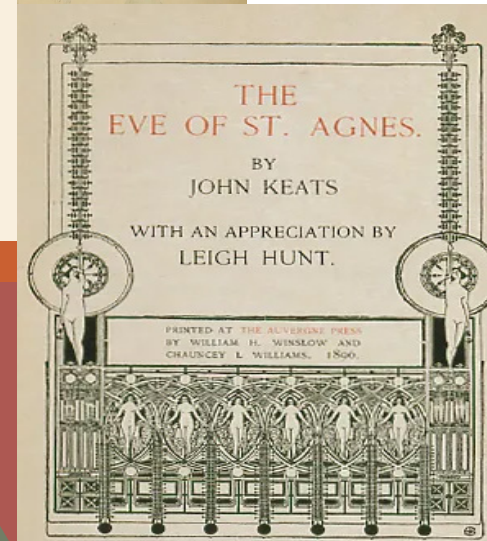
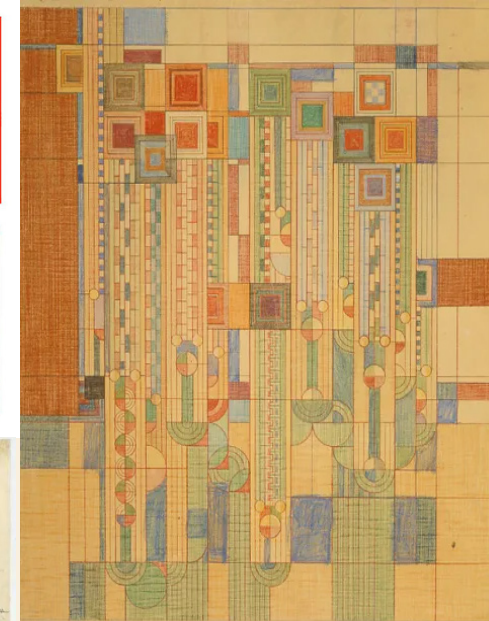
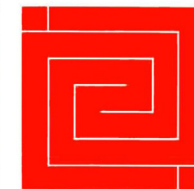
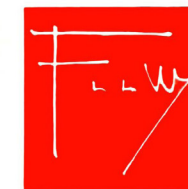
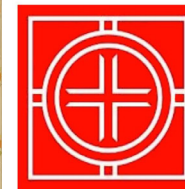
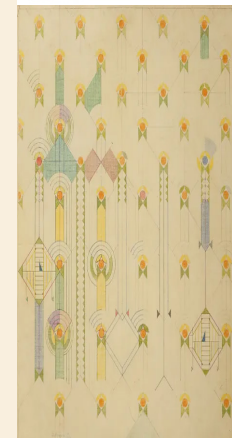
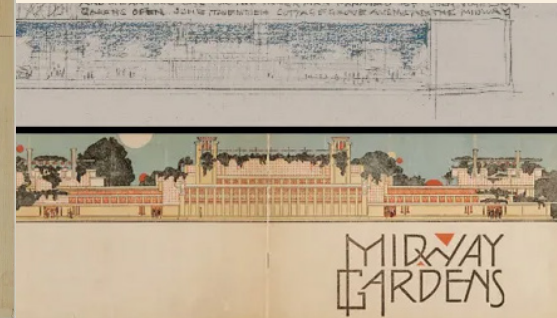
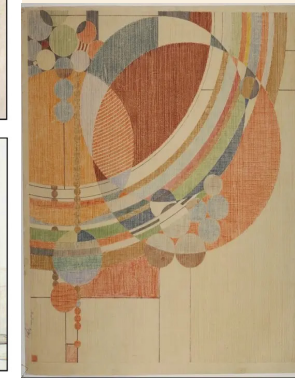
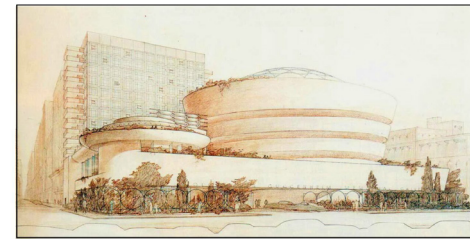
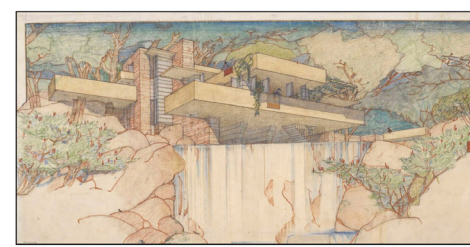
Beyond architecture, Wright contributed to design with furniture, posters, brochures, typography, murals, and book and magazine covers.

Wright used geometry, abstraction, and the reflex in design. These tactics prevent predictability in patterns.

As a kid, Wright used Froebel geometric blocks to explore the geometric shapes of the square, triangle, and circle (as well as their three-dimensional variants) as a geometric lexicon form with which to interpret nature. This became what he called the grammar of the building.

Wright also became interested in Ukiyo-e "flattened" compositions, or the Japanese woodblock print. The elements of these prints were treated as pure abstract form.

Finally, Wright used bold shapes and patterns, experimenting in his projects. He frequently used repetition and modular systems. He also preferred to have a more abstract than realistic perspective.



INFLUENCE ON MODERN DESIGN

Jonathan Adler:

Jonathan Adler is a potter, designer, and author who is heavily influenced by Wright’s visuals—particularly the horizontal gestures and the idea of buildings as sculptural objects. Additionally, Adler was drawn to how Wright wasn’t afraid to break the rules and create his own rulebook, paving the way for outside-the-box thinkers.



Reform Lamp
By Jonathan Adler



Michael Bierut:

“No house should ever be on a hill or on anything. It should be of the hill. Belonging to it. Hill and house should live together each the happier for the other.” - Frank Lloyd Wright

Michael Bierut, partner at Pentagram, graphic designer, design critic, and educator, whose work is in the permanent collections of museums, felt compelled by Wright’s philosophy. He wanted to understand the nature of materials and use them honestly and respectfully, much like Wright did.

The interplay between materials and site resonated with Bierut and with his projects; he strives to find that moment of magic that every manmade thing has the potential to evoke. Bierut believes the power of design is not merely a piece of sculpture, but the fulfillment of a functional request. Someone wanted a house and Wright did it in a way that fills us today with awe. Bierut was also a driving force behind the film Helvetica.



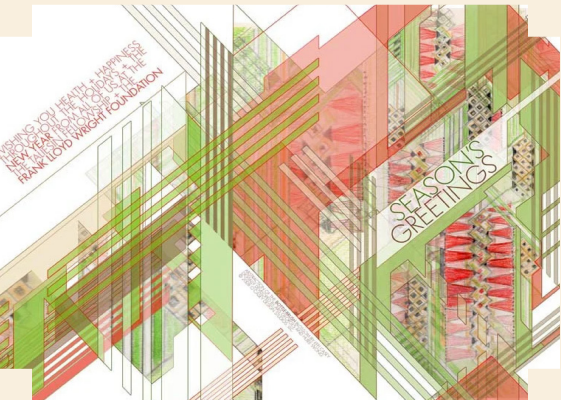
Inner City Infill By Michael Bierut



Frank Lloyd Wright Quarterly Magazine
designed by Neeta Patel



Artwork by Colette Vermeulen



Remix of abstraction of the Bottlebrush Blossom
by Aris Georges for a Frank Lloyd Wright
Foundation holiday greeting card

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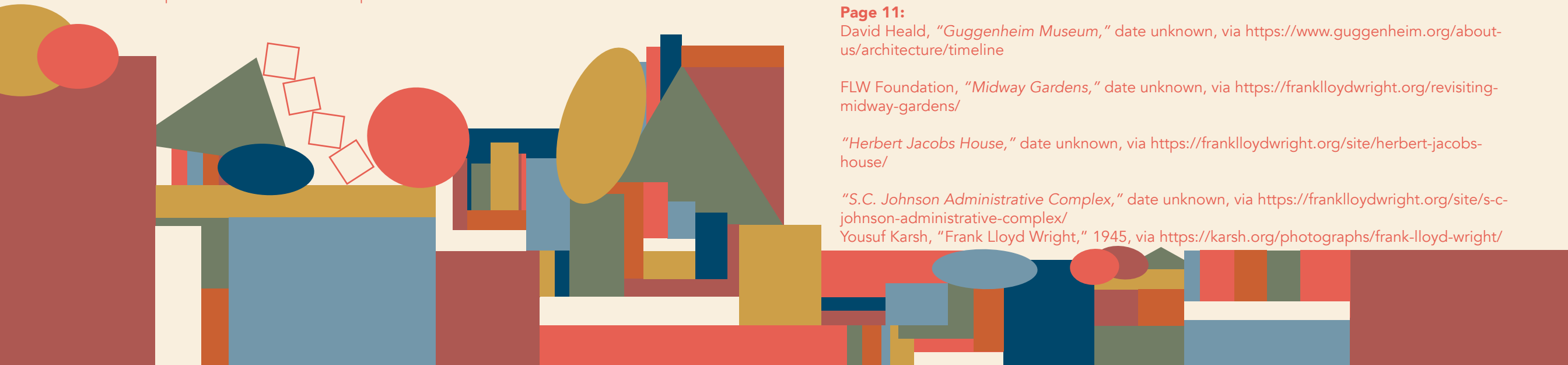


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IF YOU INVEST IN BEAUTY, IT
WILL REMAIN WITH YOU ALL
THE DAYS OF YOUR LIFE.”

- FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

