



The Japanese Print  
as a Lens to Understanding  
Wright's Organic Space:  
**The *Miegakure* Effect**

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The Japanese woodblock print played a significant role in Frank Lloyd Wright's developing sense of organic architecture. Wright's analysis of the Japanese print reveals clues to his own idea of the organic. Furthermore, the spatial construction of the print is key to understanding the spatial depth Wright claimed for his own architecture and why he felt his organic space was distinct from that of the European Modernist architects of the early twentieth century. This article compares Wright's designs with Edo-period landscape prints, in conjunction with Wright's primary texts, to present this case.

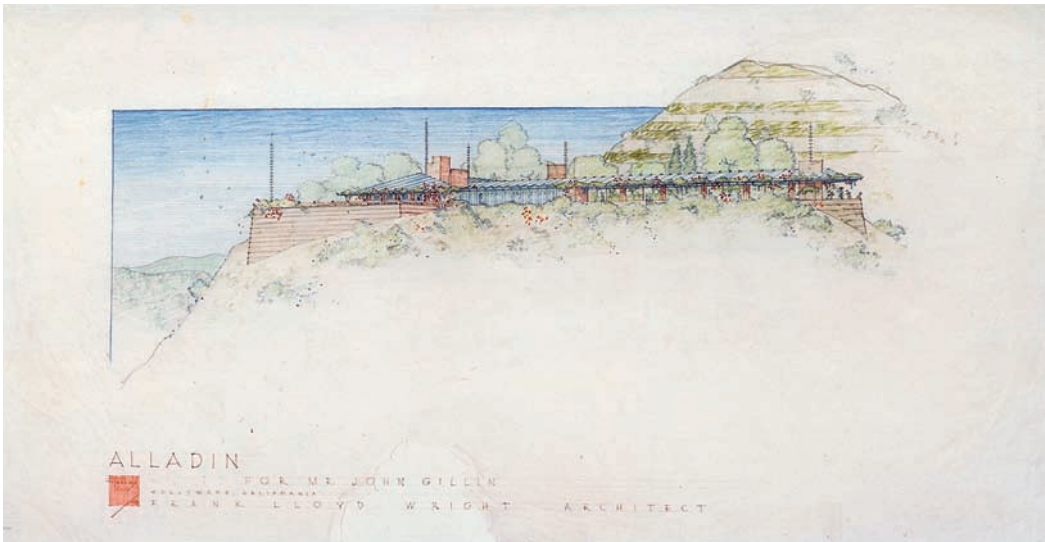
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9. (Previous page)  
Frank Lloyd Wright,  
Bernard Schwartz  
house, 1939, Two Rivers,  
Wisconsin.

Photo courtesy of George Hall.

Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959) was fascinated with the “unpretentious” Japanese woodblock print that came to play a significant role in his developing sense of organic architecture.<sup>1</sup> Wright's analysis of the print reveals clues about what he meant by organic space, and about why his version of spatial construction was distinct from that of the European Modernist architects who were claiming their own revolution of space. The spatial construction of the Japanese print is key to understanding the spatial depth in Wright's architecture. I will show this connection both through Wright's primary texts and through a comparison of Wright's architecture with certain landscape prints by Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858) and Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849).

Long before his first trip to Japan in 1905 “in pursuit of the print”, Wright was exposed to Japanese art. He wrote of “finding collateral evidence” for the idea of the elimination of the insignificant in the Japanese print when he was 23 years old.<sup>2</sup> He also wrote of his exposure to the Japanese Ho-o-den pavilion at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago; his passion for Japanese art continued long after his final trip to Japan in 1922. Wright's frame of reference for Japan reflected many of the Western biases of his time, the American and Western Europeans perception of Japan as the distant and romanticised other, viewing subjects in the prints with a near-mythological status. More specifically, Wright shared many of the views of the early American historian of Japanese art, Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908), who helped found the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. Wright admired Fenollosa's views



1.  
Frank Lloyd Wright, Gillin House, 'Alladin', 1950

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and wrote in 1917 that he had acquired his first Japanese woodblock prints from him, especially the *hashirakake* (tall and narrow pillar print) format, on one of Fenollosa's visits to the United States.<sup>3</sup> However, Kevin Nute has provided evidence of even earlier exposure to Japan, beginning on Wright's first employment in Chicago with Joseph Lyman Silsbee in 1887.<sup>4</sup> Silsbee was a second cousin to Ernest Fenollosa. It is known that Fenollosa lectured frequently in Chicago and often stayed with his cousin Silsbee on these trips. Fenollosa was active in Chicago again in 1895 before leaving for Japan.<sup>5</sup>

Fenollosa's work with Okakura Tenshin (1863–1913) in Tokyo to restore the appreciation of Japan's own traditional art influenced Wright's own understanding of Japanese art, resulting in Wright's focus on pre-Meiji-era art as a collector and dealer. That Wright, who saw himself as the forerunner of architectural modernism, chose to reject Japan's modern art and instead look to pre-Meiji traditional art underlies his theory of organic architecture and its stance in opposition to the rising avant-garde European Modernism. Fenollosa, who had majored in the idealist philosophy of Hegel

at Harvard before moving to Japan, felt that Japanese art reached beyond the veil of mere appearances in order to convey the universal idea. Fenollosa felt that Japanese art did not aim at realistic representation but aimed through abstracted forms to express a more pure underlying meaning. This tendency to abstraction may reveal Wright's preference for Edo-period prints rather than the later, more naturalistic *shin hanga* (new print) period. Abstraction was necessary to separate out the 'accidental' from the essential, which Wright referred to as the print's 'elimination of the insignificant'. Wright believed the Japanese print had an inner organic integrity that constituted "the fundamental law of beauty".<sup>6</sup> He also saw in the aesthetic conventions of the Japanese landscape print how the contour line, figure ground, and layered planes produced the perception of three-dimensional space within its two-dimensional medium. Wright would apply this principle to amplify physical three-dimensional architectural space into what he saw as a higher dimension of spatial expression, which he referred to as organic space.

Wright, also an accomplished print dealer, used his prints decoratively to adorn his own homes and as a teaching aid for his students. On various occasions, such as during his print parties, he would present a series of prints and teach his apprentices from them. Later in his life, at a Taliesin print party in 1957, Wright reminisced:

I remember when I first met the Japanese prints. That art had a great influence on my feeling and thinking. Japanese architecture—nothing at all. But when I saw that print and I saw the elimination of the insignificant and simplicity of vision, together with the sense of rhythm and the importance of design, I began to see nature in a totally different way.<sup>7</sup>

## Comparison of Rendering Style

A comparison between Edo-period Japanese landscape prints with Wright's own renderings can provide us with an insight into his working methods (figs 1 and 2). In Wright's coloured pencil rendering of the Alladin project (fig. 1), he has broken through the pictorial frame in a manner similar to Hiroshige (fig. 2), opening the space breaking beyond the boundaries of the print. Wright's landscape is primarily a two-dimensional planar construct primarily, much like Hiroshige's landscape, although Wright rendered the building itself in perspective construction. Wright had claimed that Hokusai and Hiroshige exaggerated their proportions of Mount Fuji to be truer to the underlying ideal rather than to present a literalist representation. Although the Gillin house in Dallas Texas sits on a very modest hill, Wright idealised and exaggerated the vertical dimension of the topography for aesthetic effect. Edo-period Japanese artists felt that the expression of the idea was of a higher value than a mere depiction of realism.

The scholar of Japanese art Timon Screech relates what Tani Buncho (1763–1841) wrote to Matsudaira Sadanobu:

I used to have a large number of Western pictures in my collection, but I tend to find them... short on real meaning (*imi*). When you try to appreciate a Western picture on a profound level you always feel there is something lacking.<sup>8</sup>

This thought is congruent with Wright's concept of the elimination of the insignificant. Missing are shade, shadow, and elaborate texture, and anything that could distract from the integrated whole where idea and expression, form, and content merge. Going further than Hiroshige, Wright dissolved the border down to two edges of the sky and his signature red square in the lower-left corner. The rest of the drawing fades onto the background of paper space in a manner closer to the form of traditional Japanese art than to the linear perspective, the window-frame technique of the Western Renaissance that Wright criticised. It is tempting to compare renderings from Wright with *shin hanga* (new print) rather than with Edo-period prints because of the latter's use of Western perspective. However, *shin hanga* generally portrayed a complete and comprehensive framework of linear perspective, as if the scene were traced from a photograph. Wright's rendering style placed the perspective construction of the building within a flat, layered, two-dimensional landscape so that it could not be mistaken for a literal representation of the scene, but rather an abstracted one that better emphasised the 'Idea' of the design. Wright often used the word 'Idea' to reflect his connections with idealist thinkers and writers, including the Transcendentalists Emerson and Thoreau.



2.  
Utagawa Hiroshige, Hara:  
*Mount Fuji in the morning,*  
from the series *The fifty-*  
*three stations of the Tokaido*  
*road.* c. 1833–34.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

However, Wright aimed at something more than a mere two-dimensional correlation with the Japanese print. As indicated in his comment about the print (quoted previously in this paper), he suggested the woodblock print offered a way of seeing rather than just being something to be looked at—as something to look *through* or *by*. This kind of perception would have a stronger and more lasting effect than stylistic influences alone. The philosopher Robert Schwartz in his article ‘The power of pictures’ makes the claim that pictures “not only shape our perception of the world: they can and do play an important role in making it”.<sup>9</sup> Schwartz uses the example of Pablo Picasso’s portrait of Gertrude Stein (1905), where Picasso claimed that the portrait would be seen eventually as an accurate representation of Stein even if, in the beginning, it was thought to look nothing like her. Similarly, by his own admission, Wright’s engagement and romance with the Japanese print would shape his own perception of space and nature.

Much of the appeal of Frank Lloyd Wright’s architecture comes from his mastery of spatial articulation, of ‘breaking the box’, and from his ability to conceive of complex, flowing, three-dimensional spaces. Wright’s form of spatial construction is better understood through the lens of the pre-Meiji

era Japanese print than through reductionist Modernist narratives, such as the interior open (so-called ‘universal’) space of Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969). To Wright, International Style architecture, with its free plans and open space, was apparently missing something substantive. Late in Wright’s career, he wrote of European Modernist architecture:

This modern-architecture we see as a negation in two dimensions. An improvement? Yes, but with too little evidence of the depths of the architecture conceived according to Principle, built from inside outward as organism. The tranquil emphasis on space as the reality of the building is mostly missing. To sum up, organic architecture sees the third dimension never as weight or mere thickness, but always as depth. Depth an element of space; the third (or thickness) dimension transformed to a space dimension.<sup>10</sup>

The missing element Wright indicated has to do with a certain sense of depth. If European Modernism was missing something spatially, he felt that something was to be found in the Japanese print. At a Taliesin print party in 1950, Wright spoke of the Japanese

print's power both to inform perception and to amplify spatial depth through what he understood as a dimensional transformation:

So here you have a new way of looking at the landscape. And the landscape has never seemed the same to me since I became familiar with the print. You're continually seeing differently; you're seeing, eliminating. You're seeing, arranging. You're seeing, I don't know exactly how to put it. Not in three dimensions, certainly, and yet perhaps that is the element of the third dimension made manifest by two.<sup>11</sup>

Along with this emergent third dimension in the print, Wright provided further clues to the type of spatial construction he read in them:

Hiroshige did, with a sense of space, very much what we have been doing with it in our architecture. Here you get a sense of tremendous, limitless space. Instead of something confined within a picture.... On what is your attention focused? Nothing!<sup>12</sup>

Here, Wright specifically makes the connection between the spatial construction of the Edo-period print and his own architectural space. What Hiroshige was doing in two-dimensional art, Wright translated into the third dimension, into architectural space. Wright contrasted the idea of Hiroshige's limitless space with Western linear perspective and its fixed and limiting vanishing point. Here, Wright continues his dialogue with his students.

See how simply they get in three planes; they rendered all this sense of distance, there is no lack of perspective here, as you'll notice. They're supposed not to have known perspective. They

knew all they wanted of it — they didn't want much of it. Because perspective introduced an element which was not necessary to their feeling for beauty.<sup>13</sup>

Hiroshige's print (fig. 2) uses a system of layered planes to represent depth without reliance on one- or two-point perspectives. Wright had this to say in *The Japanese print: an interpretation*:

...a picture should be no imitation of anything, no pretended hole in the wall through which you glimpse a story about something.... The message of the Japanese print is to educate us spiritually for all time beyond such banality.<sup>14</sup>

## Clues from Gestalt Theory

A Gestalt analysis of the flat, layered planes of the Japanese print seems particularly appropriate given that analysis' emphasis on line, plane, contour, and figure-ground, including the explanatory power it provides in correlating three-dimensional perception within a two-dimensional framework. I also apply this method to examples of Wright's own three-dimensional architectural space. Gestalt is the German word for *form* or *shape*; Gestalt is a theory of the mind that maintains that the whole has a reality of its own, independent of the parts, and the idea that vision is not a mechanical recording of elements but rather the apprehension of significant structural patterns. The Gestalt effect is the ability of our minds to generate whole forms when perceiving elemental percepts, such as lines, points, curves, and planes. The perceptual theorist, Rudolf Arnheim (1904–2007), described how three-dimensional perception of space is reduced to a two-dimensional projection on the retina

and then interpreted by the brain. Depth perception follows when two-dimensional contours occlude other figures in the mind's completion of incomplete shapes.<sup>15</sup> The figure-ground relationship is the basis of this layered, or planar, system of perception.<sup>16</sup>

As an example, Hiroshige's 'Kiyozumi mountain' print (fig. 3) presents a composition with background, middle ground, and foreground elements with spatial depth produced by what Arnheim refers to as frontal planes and figure-ground relationships. Lacking is the Western system of linear perspective, yet the eye recognises which areas of the print are foreground and background immediately because the contour lines and their associated planes occlude other areas that are perceived to be behind them. Here is Wright's limitless space, as the viewpoint is not constricted to a single focal point as in Western perspective construction. Also evident is what Wright referred to as the elimination of the insignificant. The spatial interplay of the hills is achieved simply with a strong contour line and flat planes of green colour. Even though this print uses *bokashi* (gradation of colours), chiaroscuro, shade, shadow, and texturing are missing. Wright also referred to the skill of the Japanese artist in the art of suggestion—employing minimal

means, such as a careful and poetic contour line, to be the referent for a composition completed in the viewer's imagination.

In addition to Hiroshige, Hokusai was another of Wright's favourite artists. Hokusai, perhaps more so than Hiroshige, exemplified Wright's idea of the Japanese artist who brought out the inner essence of the subject rather than aiming at photographic realism.<sup>17</sup> The eight prints of Hokusai's series, *Shokoku taki meguri* (*A tour of Japanese waterfalls*) published in 1833, represent a particularly imaginative period in the artist's work when he was in his mid-70s (fig. 4). While the Amida waterfall in this series is better known and is a stronger example of pure symbolic abstraction, the print in figure 4 reveals important spatial connections to be made. These representations of real places are far from literal depictions of the waterfalls, yet they distil significant characteristics from reality.<sup>18</sup> As Wright stated:

The use of color, always in the flat—that is, without chiaroscuro—plays a wonderful but natural part in the production of this art and is responsible for its charm. It is a means grasped and understood as perfectly as the rhythm of form and line, and it is made in its way as significant. It affords a means of emphasising and differentiating the forms themselves, at the same time that it is itself an element of the pattern.<sup>19</sup>

The Hokusai print (fig. 4), like the Hiroshige print, is composed of flat planar layers that build up the visual space. These layers themselves are dependent on crisp contour lines and flat colour to depict an overlapping progression of space. This very compressed series of spaces begins at the stylised cloud form (*kumogata*) on the lower left and ascends through the roadside tea houses with their

3-  
Utagawa Hiroshige,  
*Kiyozumi mountain in Awa province, from the series Wrestling matches between mountains and seas*. 1858.  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



4.  
 Katsushika Hokusai,  
 'Tokaido Sakanoshita kiyotaki  
 Kannon' (The Kannon of the  
 pure waterfall at Sakanoshita  
 on the Tokaido road) from  
 the series *Shokoku taki  
 meguri* (A tour of waterfalls in  
 various provinces). 1832.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



intimate spaces revealed under overlapping thatched roofs. The steep trail is momentarily concealed, then exposed with its travellers and is finally fully revealed at the apex of the cave and waterfall. This print is particularly evocative of the strongly layered and spatially intimate type of spaces for which Wright is best known.

Wright's depiction of the hall, dining room and gallery at the Dana house (fig. 5) built in Springfield, IL, in 1902 is indicative of this type of space. Wright chose to show this space not from the formal and symmetrically located viewpoint from within it but from just outside of it, from which additional spatial layering and depth are perceived. The entrance to these three spaces is framed by the entrance steps and by the surrounding doorway, including the vertical sculpture by sculptor Richard Bock arising above the brick half-wall. This entrance forces a view down then up to spaces partially occluded by architectural elements defining the spatial planes. The prominent central location of the nearer balcony in the rendering is

inexplicable except as an occlusion device to divert one's view both downward and upward to more important spaces that are largely hidden from view. This device has the effect of setting up a dynamic progression through space and reinforces the idea of a continuity of interconnected spaces rather than of a classical partitioning.

## Spatial Character Analysed

Common to Hokusai's 'Kannon waterfall', the Dana house, and most of Wright's buildings is the progression of space through a form of concealing and revealing. A Japanese term for this concealing and revealing is *miegakure*. Occluding planes create invisible areas, which are revealed on progression through the space. This revelation occurs in a physical, three-dimensional space, but it can be implied in a two-dimensional print. There is a simultaneous, partial revealing and hiding of elements and spaces, which intentionally leads the eye dynamically through the print's space. This effect can also be seen in the following examples by Hiroshige, in which one can recognise the layered planes and occlusion of spaces (figs 6 and 7).

Arrows show a diagram of *miegakure* — the zig-zag pattern of spatial revealing — which are highlighted in figure 8. I will turn now to the concept of *miegakure*, and Wright's perception and use of this Japanese means of describing depth of space in his design for the Schwartz house.

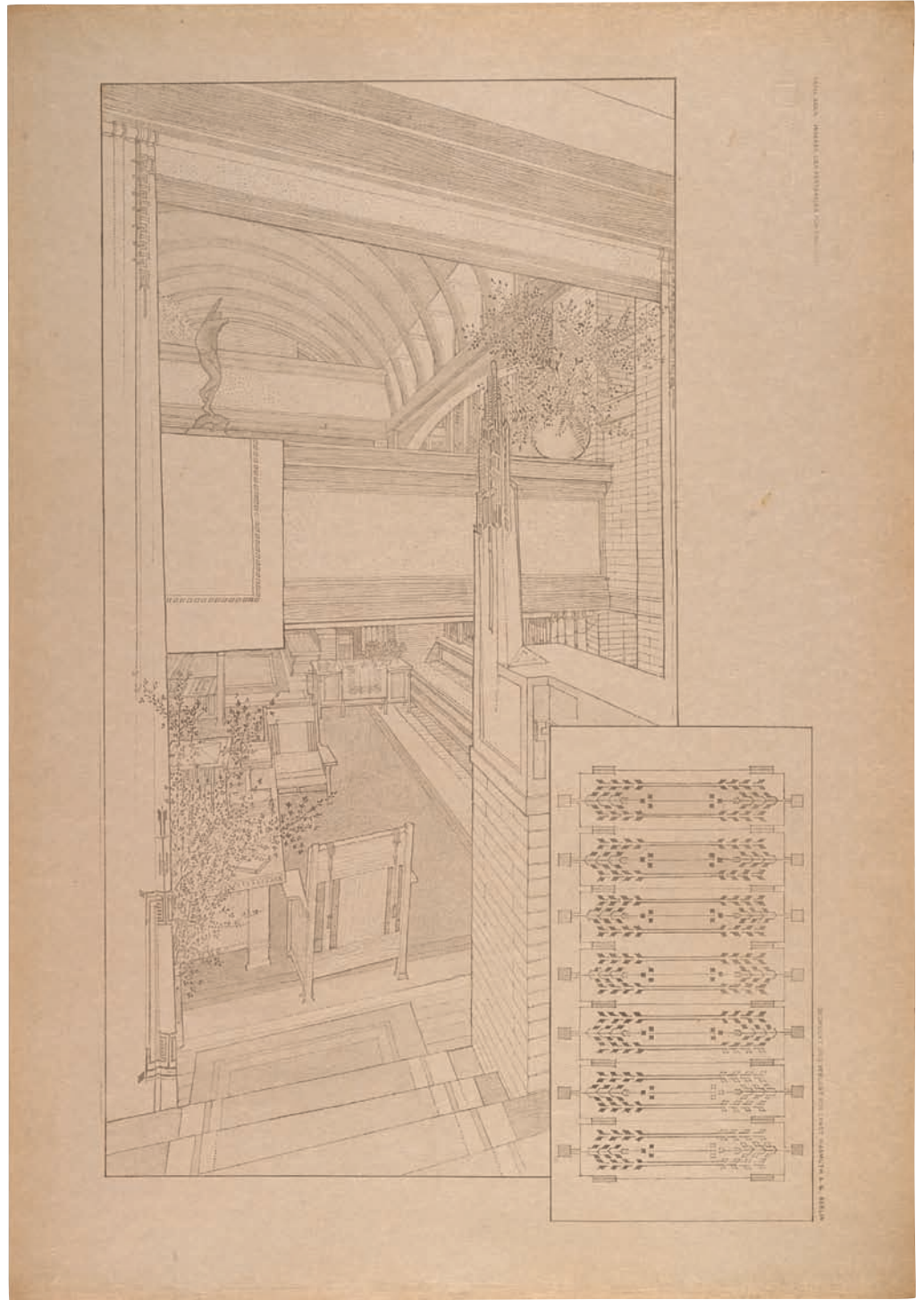
The Bernard Schwartz home is one of Wright's Usonian style homes built in Two Rivers, Wisconsin (fig. 9, see page 31). Wright used the word *Usonian* to refer to the United States instead of the word *American*, and to his homes designed from about 1937 onward which were his New World expression of an indigenous organic architecture. These homes typically eliminated the basement and attic, provided carports instead of garages, had



5.

Frank Lloyd Wright,  
Rendering of the hall and  
gallery at the Susan Dana  
Lawrence home for the  
Wasmuth portfolio, 1910.

The Frank Lloyd Wright  
Foundation Archives (The  
Museum of Modern Art | Avery  
Architectural & Fine Arts Library,  
Columbia University, New York)





6.  
 Utagawa Hiroshige: 'Mt. Arima in Settsu Province. No. 16' from the series *Mountains and seas in a wrestling tournament*. 1858. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

flat or low-pitched roofs, and were intended for middle-class budgets. The Usonian era of Wright's work followed after his earlier Prairie style period, most often for wealthy clients, which typically expressed long horizontal lines, hip roofs, more open plans, corner windows, and extensive detail and trim work. While an earlier Prairie-era example would look more stylistically similar to the traditional Japanese home, I have chosen a Usonian example to force a comparison with underlying spatial construction rather than surface similarities. I have applied principles from Rudolf Arnheim to provide additional insight on whether the jump from two dimensions to the third dimension seems viable, as claimed by Wright, and how it is achieved.

The photo in figure 11 is taken from the Schwartz house entry foyer looking down into the living room and sanctum area (see fig. 10 for reference). This view reveals the largest interior expanse of the interior of the house from one single viewpoint. In figure 12, I overlaid coloured planar elements to emphasise the principle of flat planes in occlusion. Despite the one-point perspective evident here, Wright introduced interruptions to the linear progression using planar elements perpendicular to the line

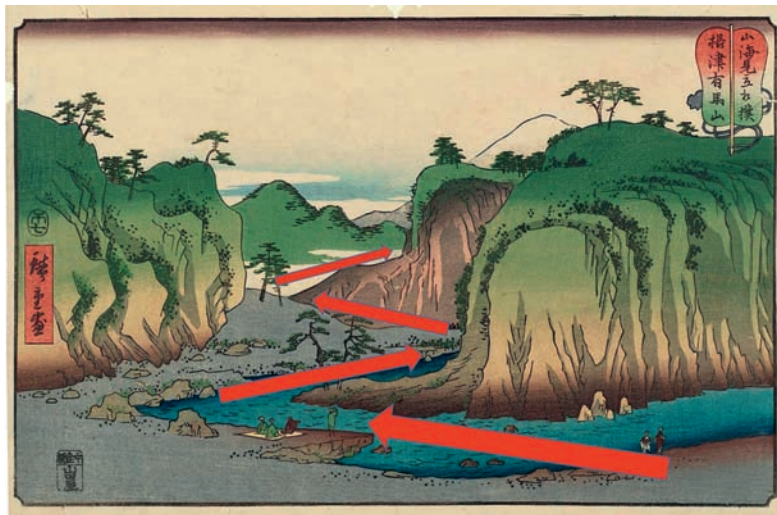
of vision, which produce an enhanced depth effect through figure to ground relationships and planar overlap. In fact, these work independently of any linear perspective so that the Gestalt effects amplify the sense of depth. While Wright stated that Japanese artists had no need for linear perspective, he also knew that they often introduced elements of this perspective in later Edo-period landscapes. An example of this strategy is seen in the *Surugacho* print by Hiroshige (fig. 13), where strong foreshortening and linear perspective in the merchant street give way to the flat planar spatial construction of the clouded Mount Fuji, the print's symbolic centre. The artists creating these types of hybrid prints do not appear concerned with the lack of unified perspective construction throughout the entire image, revealing the priority given to artistic and symbolic effect.

In the Schwartz house, planar overlap occurs not only with the use of vertical brick piers but also through the low overhead cypress ceiling in the foyer that gives way to the higher plane of the raised living room ceiling (figs 11 and 12). This change in level, characteristic of Wright's compression and expansion of space, serves to occlude a portion of the higher plane and thus accentuate the depth effect between the two ceiling planes.



7.  
Coloured layers added by the author to define planes in Utagawa Hiroshige: 'Mt. Arima in Settsu province. No. 16' from the series *Mountains and seas in a wrestling tournament*. 1858.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



8.  
Arrows indicating *miegakure* added by the author to Utagawa Hiroshige: 'Mt. Arima in Settsu province. No. 16' from the series *Mountains and seas in a wrestling tournament*. 1858.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

This is particularly effective in Wright's buildings, even when the actual difference in ceiling height is minimal.

Although Wright created areas of spatial occlusion in the Schwartz house, the subdivided space retains its continuity. From the vantage point of the foyer, one can see the main living room, with a glimpse of the dining space to the right just beyond the brick pier at the stair, and a partial view of the sanctum at the far end. Ironically, even though the home has an abundance of glass connecting it to the garden, due to this occlusion, very little can be seen from this primary view. Light washes into the space from behind the brick planes, hinting at exterior space without actually revealing it. The space is

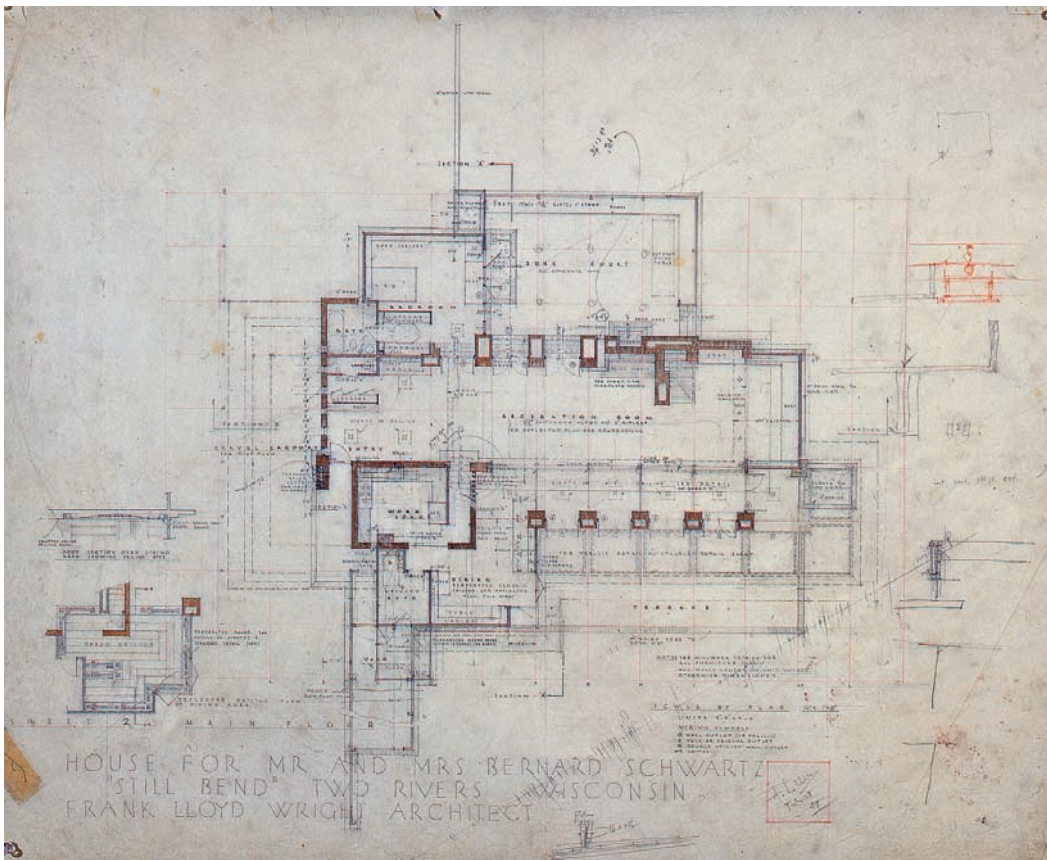
designed to be experienced as a sequential progression, revealing itself as brick piers and walls give way to otherwise hidden views onto the outside gardens. Compare this (fig. 14) with the Mt. Arima print (fig. 8) for a similar expression of *miegakure*. The sense of depth is enhanced, a depth within an interconnected, continuous space. While the style of architecture here has changed, the spatial construction is similar to the style of the Dana house, discussed above.

While the Schwartz house is not overtly Japanese in styling, underlying structures of spatial composition, including the notion of hiding and revealing are similar to those of the Japanese landscape prints. The Japanese print produced depth effects in two dimensions

without reliance on linear perspective. Wright utilised this principle in three-dimensional architectural space using framing elements, contour lines, and occlusion planes that amplified the experience of depth in his architecture. At the same time, these design techniques heightened the sequentially concealed and revealed spaces that invite and draw the participant in and through his architecture, through the *miegakure* effect. While Wright's architectural styles and geometric ordering systems varied widely throughout his long career, this characteristic manipulation of space can be seen throughout his work, whether residential or commercial. This characteristic manipulation also addresses the originality of Wright's space—Wright claimed that his organic space was different from European architects' modern space.<sup>20</sup> To Wright the architects' work lacked a certain depth of space, even though they emphasised open space. Their open, universal

space, which Wright referred to as negation, lacked the necessary depth cues created by architectural framing elements strategically arranged to differentiate space and amplify the sense of depth. If the two-dimensional print could create a sense of three-dimensional space, how would one describe a three-dimensional space thus amplified? Wright seemed to be struggling to express this concept as he stated:

Today, around the circumference of architectural thought, basic error still exists concerning the new concept I have stated of the good old third dimension—usually seen as thickness, weight, a solid. Sublimated by organic architecture, it is interpreted as depth. The depth-dimension—really a fourth now—the sense of space.... Witness organic architecture<sup>21</sup>



10.  
Frank Lloyd Wright, *Life*  
house, 1939, Floor plan.

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Whilst Wright was not always precise in his language, he described his organic space as transcending the third dimension into the fourth, which parallels the idea of the way the print, drawn in the second dimension, could create a sense of the third dimension. While the language of this fourth dimension seems more metaphorical or analogical than geometrical, Wright was clearly trying to express a certain quality of three-dimensional, inhabitable space distinguished from more ordinary or non-organic space. Were it not for the fact that Wright explicitly distinguished his form of space from the European Modernists, it would be easy to mistake Wright's organic space as the simple destruction of the box and the consequent creation of an open continuous space—something both Wright and the Modernists share. Wright's spatial construction did not simply seek the open, reductive space of Modernism but an inner depth of space that he claimed Modernism lacked, space that needed definition through layering, boundaries, and framing. This spatial framing, also present in the Edo-period Japanese print, has become a signature of Wright's conception of space. Wright not only stated his kinship with the Japanese print, but both his drawings and his built architectural spaces reveal a common use of layered, occluded, and framed spaces that add depth and richness to his organic architecture, learned not from his Modernist contemporaries but through traditional Japanese art.



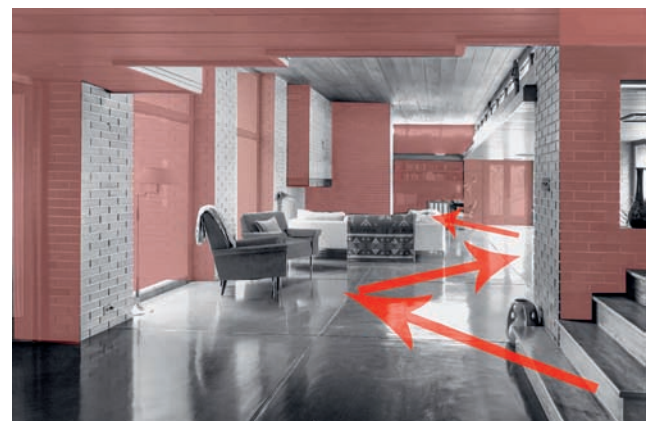
11.  
Frank Lloyd Wright, Bernard Schwartz house, living room seen from foyer.

Photo by author.



12.  
Frank Lloyd Wright, Bernard Schwartz house, planar overlay.

Photo by author.



14.  
Frank Lloyd Wright, Bernard Schwartz house, spatial sequence overlay

Photo by author.



13.

Utagawa Hiroshige,  
'Surugacho, no. 8' from the  
series *One hundred views of  
famous places in Edo*. 1856.

Chazen Museum of Art, University  
of Wisconsin-Madison, Bequest of  
John H. Van Vleck, 1980.1586

## NOTES

- 1 Wright, F.L. *The Japanese print: an interpretation*, Horizon Press, New York 1967, p. 13. Originally published in 1912. His full quote is, “The unpretentious colored woodcut of Japan, a thing of significant graven lines on delicate paper which has kissed the color from carved and variously tinted wooden blocks, is helpful in the practice of the fine arts and may be construed with profit in other life concerns as great. It is a lesson especially valuable to the West, because, in order to comprehend it at all, we must take a viewpoint unfamiliar to us as a people, and in particular to our artists—the purely aesthetic viewpoint”. Wright then describes this art as a thoroughly structural art and says that the beginning of structure is geometry. Structure here is defined by Wright as an organic form in a very definite matter of parts formed into a larger unity. This resulting ‘pure form’ builds the Idea of the thing, which is an architectural principle, he states.
- 2 Wright, *op. cit.* (1967), p. 91. Wright was often not very accurate in his recollection of dates. There is the added issue of him using his claimed birth year of 1869 instead of his actual birth year of 1867. Thus, this would bring his exposure to 1890 or 1892. In this text, he also states that his first trip to Japan was “in pursuit of the print”.
- 3 Wright, F.L. and B.B. Pfeiffer, ‘The print and the Renaissance’, in: *Collected writings*, vol. 1, Rizzoli, New York & Scottsdale 1992, p. 149. Here Wright tells of this first exposure to the print and Fenollosa as being “about 25 years” prior to this writing in 1917. This would bring the date to about 1892. If this date is true, then Fenollosa would have been residing in Boston at the time, employed at the Museum of Fine Arts.
- 4 Nute, K., *Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan: The role of traditional Japanese art and architecture in the work of Frank Lloyd Wright*, Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York 1993, p. 22.
- 5 Additional evidence of this connection is found through Frederick Gookin (1853–1936), a well-known collector of Japanese prints and also a friend of Wright. Gookin was associated with Ernest Fenollosa, Edward Morse, John La Large, and other notable scholars, and collectors of Japanese art.
- 6 Wright, *op. cit.* (1967), p. 28.
- 7 Meech, J., *Frank Lloyd Wright and the art of Japan: The architect’s other passion*. Japan Society and Harry N. Abrams, New York 2001, p. 21.
- 8 Screech, T., ‘The meaning of Western perspective in Edo popular culture’, in: *Archives of Asian art*, vol. 47, 1994, p. 60.
- 9 Schwartz, R., ‘The power of pictures’, in: *Journal of philosophy*, vol. 82, 1985, pp. 711–720.
- 10 Wright, F.L., *A Testament*, Horizon Press, New York 1957, p. 130.
- 11 Unpublished transcript of Japanese print party at Taliesin, September 20, 1950. CR.7, ‘Frank Lloyd Wright at showing of Japanese prints’, p. 7. (Courtesy of Margo Stipe, Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation).
- 12 Meech-Pekarik, J., ‘Frank Lloyd Wright and Japanese prints’, in: *The metropolitan museum of art bulletin*, new series, vol. 40, no. 2, Autumn 1982, p. 47.
- 13 Unpublished transcript of Japanese print party, *op. cit.*, (1950), p. 10.
- 14 Wright, *op. cit.* (1967), p. 32.
- 15 Arnheim, R., *Art and visual perception: a psychology of the creative eye*. University of California Press, Berkeley 1974, pp. 247–248. Here, Arnheim states that all of our three-dimensional perception of space is ultimately reduced into a “two-dimensional projection on the retina. This does not mean that visual experience is primarily two-dimensional. The basic principle of depth perception derives from the law of simplicity and indicates that a pattern will appear three-dimensional when it can be seen as the projection of a three-dimensional situation that is structurally simpler than the two-dimensional one. As long as the contours touch or cross but do not interrupt one another the spatial effect is absent or weak. However, when one of the components actually cuts off a part of the other, the perceptual urge to see a superposition becomes compelling because it serves to complete the incomplete shape”.
- 16 Arnheim, *op. cit.*, p. 248. Arnheim gives a further description of how overlapping planes create depth. “Two-dimensionality as a system of frontal planes is represented in its most elementary form by the figure-ground relation. No more than two planes are considered. One of them has to occupy more space than the other and in fact, has to be boundless; the directly visible part of the other has to be smaller and confined by a rim. One of them lies in front of the other. One is the figure, the other the ground”.
- 17 Wright saw these two artists as the finest examples of the landscape print genre. Wright provides a further glimpse into his understanding of their work when stating: “Hokusai was the greatest interpreter of the spirit of Japanese life in Japanese landscape; Hiroshige the most truthfully simple presenter of its lineaments and people as he saw and loved them.... The one was a great artist in his handling of “nature”; the other a simple poet satisfied to present it as he felt it. Both were valuable cultural assets beyond anything of a similar nature elsewhere in the world. Both were native sons preserving a record of a vanishing world within this world which they loved and understood, and which by the narrow margin of their work alone has appeared before us to teach us our own way forward—at what seems a period of chaos, of mere photographic ideas of form leading nowhere.” Wright, *op. cit.* (1967), pp. 86–87.
- 18 In this series by Hokusai, the least representative depiction by Hokusai is the Ono waterfall on the Kiso Road. Hokusai may not have visited the waterfall in person and possibly relied on a tourist guide.
- 19 Wright, *op. cit.* (1967), p. 24.
- 20 Wright, *op. cit.* (1967), p. 130.
- 21 Pfeiffer, B.B., *The essential Frank Lloyd Wright: critical writings on architecture*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2008, p. 408.