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FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT'S GRAYCLIFF HOUSE
Sansui Shakkei in New York

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ABSTRACT
Wright's Eastern culture, ingrained through his prints and Japan's travels, emerges singularly during a time of personal, professional, and financial crisis in the Graycliff House summer residence (1926-1929). The treatment of its exterior spaces relies on the application of the concept of borrowed landscape, or Shakkei, researched by Fenollosa and Conder at the dawn of the new 20th century. This marked the beginning of the transition from Prairie Houses to Usonian Houses, seeking a natural representation, integral to the site, the environment, and the lives of its inhabitants.

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1. Introduction

The 21st century has immersed us in the world of images as a key tool for transforming the way we understand and relate to reality. It is not merely a representation, but a tool that shapes our perception, influences our thinking, and allows us to interpret the complexity of the world in a different way than we did before. As a mediator of reality, it reflects both objectivity and the way in which the world is interpreted, stimulating the way we perceive, analyze, and conceptualize our environment. Images stimulate the creative process and allow us to think about reality in a different way, being deeply influenced by our cultural context, previous experiences, and education.

Almost a year before his death, Frank Lloyd Wright visited Graycliff House in the spring of 1958. This was the summer residence of Mr. and Mrs. Martin, built almost thirty years earlier between 1926 and 1929 in the town of Derby in Erie County (New York), twenty miles from the city of Buffalo.

On his last visit, he expressed his great displeasure when he saw that the Piarist Fathers, as the new owners, had carried out major renovations, including a chapel that "*obstructed the framed view of the* lake" (Mahoney, 2009), a circumstance that probably brought back memories of four particular situations.

Firstly, a year earlier in March 1957, the Chicago Daily Tribune published the decision by Chicago Theological Seminary to demolish the house that Wright had designed and built in Chicago between 1908 and 1910, the Robie House. The new owners intended to build a student residence on the site. This religious institution had owned the building since 1926, the same year that the Martins had contacted Wright to commission a summer house, the future Graycliff House. At the age of 89, Wright arrived in Chicago to defend the value and recognition of his architecture, declaring, "To destroy it would be like destroying a valuable sculpture or a beautiful painting" (Wright, 1957). The relevance of the Robie House found strong support from the public and the specialized press, including Architectural Record. This magazine launched a solid campaign, publishing that the Robie House had long been considered a masterpiece of Wright's Prairie Houses (Kaufmann, 1957). The result of all these actions was the suspension of the demolition plans and the comprehensive conservation and restoration of the house through the Committee for the Preservation of Robie, created in 1962, with important members of civil society and influential international academics and architects, including Siegfried Giedion, Bertrand Goldberg, Walter Gropius, Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., Lewis Mumford, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and William Wurster (Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy, 2019). In 1963, it was listed as a National Historic Landmark, became part of the National Register of Historic Places in 1966, and in 2016, it was one of eight works by Wright recognized on UNESCO's World Heritage List, marking the beginning of the recognition of his architecture and the American Modern Movement as a historic stage in human history.

The Robie House was Wright's first work to receive public recognition of its need for protection, becoming the source of new demands for other similar situations. At the same time, Dr. Martin's summer residential complex also underwent a long period of modifications, neglect, and partial losses until 1976, when it was owned by the State University of New York at Buffalo (SUNY). At that time, the University wanted to donate the residential complex to a state mental health center. From that moment on, it began a journey similar to that of the Robie House, with the establishment in 1997 of Graycliff Conservancy INC, a non-profit organization created to acquire, preserve, and restore Graycliff House. In 1998, it was listed as a New York State Historic Landmark, forming part of the National Register of Historic Places in the Historic Building category.

Secondly, in Buffalo, Dr. Martin had been involved in a number of important architectural projects, including the Larkin Company administrative building (1903-1906), which disappeared in 1950, and the Martins' own main residence in the city (1904-1909). In 1963, it was listed as a National Historic Landmark and has been part of the National Register of Historic Places since 1966. Wright always considered the Larkin building to be important, as it had earned him clear international recognition in the history of modern architecture since the early 20th century, as

Hitchcock pointed out when he compared it to Berlage's Amsterdam Stock Exchange (1897-1909), Behrens' AEG (1908-1909), and Wagner's Post Office Savings Bank (1903-1911) (Hitchcock, 1929).

Finally, Dr. Martin was not only a client, but also a loyal friend, confidant, and guarantor.

Beyond the particular sequence of events, Graycliff House was built at a very difficult time for Wright, both personally and professionally, in the second half of the 1920s, with very few commissions and four years after his return from Tokyo, bearing in mind the latest cultural stimuli he had received from Eastern aesthetics through the images of woodblock prints and photographs he took on his first visit to Japan in 1905.

The way in which the image expresses itself influences the construction of our gaze and our imaginations. Paintings, drawings, engravings, and cameras end up expressing a society, and we must turn to them in order to unravel the possible origin of its cultural actions.

2. Methodology

The methodology followed is structured into three sections. Firstly, the survey and research of existing documentation on Graycliff House. Analysis of architectural decisions, correspondence and telegrams between the property owner and the architect, and graphic documents, photographs, and transcripts of oral histories from family members, all of which are held in the *Frank Lloyd Wright - Darwin D. Martin Collection* at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

On the other hand, the study of documentation produced by the Graycliff Conservancy INC. institution, which includes all the architectural projects developed in their different phases and actions undertaken.

Finally, fieldwork carried out on site at Graycliff House during the preparation of the research project referred to below.

All of this work is accompanied by a detailed review of publications and articles on the important architectural literature that exists on Wright's work and thinking.

3. Objectives

The introduction highlights the importance of the image in relation to Wright's historical sequence and his overlapping relationship with Japanese culture, and how this came to the fore when he was commissioned to design Graycliff House between 1926 and 1929.

This time frame symbolizes Wright's personal, financial, and professional turmoil, characterized by uncertainty and perhaps transition in the face of the difficulties that concentrated in this period. The Martins' response helped him cope with the situation in all aspects, and it was perhaps during these moments of crisis that reminiscences of his vocation and admiration for Japanese garden design theories surfaced, given the necessary layout of the interior spaces of Graycliff House.

This article aims to explore both the special relationship with Dr. Martin and its architectural consequences, as well as how ideas may have influenced the final result of Graycliff House, seeking to investigate its architectural mechanisms and instruments.

It is not so much a question of distinguishing the architectural reality of the buildings as of discerning and recognizing whether there was a specific plan from the outset of the project and what the origins of this architectural approach might have been.

4. Graycliff House

4.1. Wright in the 1920s

After Wright's return to the United States in 1923, once the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo (1913-1923) had been completed, he found himself in a difficult personal situation, repeating the architect's always tumultuous and controversial life, although on this occasion it was accompanied by significant financial difficulties.

In November 1925, his third traveling companion and second wife, Maud Miriam Noel (Miriam), filed for divorce. At this time, he was accompanied by the dancer Olga Ivanovna

Lazarovic Milanoff (Olgivanna), his fourth partner and third wife, who would remain with him until his death in 1959, after marrying her in 1928. Olgivanna was separated from Russian architect Vlademar Hinzenberg, who had moved to Chicago in 1924, founding the Taliesin Fellowship and Taliesin School of Architecture and Allied Arts with Wright in 1932 (Boyle, 2013). Adding to this complex situation was the birth of his daughter with Olgivanna on December 2, 1925, outside of marriage. Six months later, as they were not married, the couple was arrested in Minnesota on charges of violating the Mann Act, a charge that was later dropped (Twombly, 1991).

Wright's complex personal life was once again brought to the fore by painful episodes he had experienced in the past, making him the subject of ruthless recrimination in the tabloid press. At this point, memories of his first separation from Catherine Tobin (Kitty) and his six children came flooding back, after he fled to Europe with his lover and client's wife Martha Borthwick (Mamah) in 1909. In 1914, Mamah is brutally murdered along with her two children (from her marriage to Edwin Cheney) and three other people by the butler of Taliesin I (Spring Green, Wisconsin), who also sets fire to the building. This turbulent relationship had an extraordinary social impact and undoubtedly led to a decline in professional commissions, a circumstance that was repeated eleven years later, with similar personal and public consequences.

The private situation was aggravated by harsh financial realities. In 1925, he went bankrupt, and in April of the same year, another fire broke out at Taliesin II (Wright, 1943), after Taliesin I had been rebuilt in 1915 (Drennan, 2007). As a result, in September 1926, the Wisconsin bank foreclosed on an existing mortgage against Taliesin, ordering Wright in January 1927 to sell part of his collection of Japanese works and, a year later, in January 1928, to abandon Taliesin, as his studio, school, home, and refuge for almost twenty years had to be auctioned off.

4.2. Wright and the Martins

The timing of the commission and construction of the Martins' new summer home accurately reflects Wright's complex personal circumstances and dramatic financial situation.

Darwin Denice Martin (1865-1935), a resident of Buffalo since 1879, devoted his entire professional career to Larkin Co. and its predecessor, JD Larkin & Co., from 1878. He was its director in 1892 and secretary in 1893, until his voluntary retirement in 1925. In 1889, he married Isabelle Reidpath, and they were the parents of Dorothy Reidpath Martin, who married James Forsyth Foster, Jr., and Darwin Reidpath Martin (Wilner, 1931).

Martin met Wright in the early 20th century, when he became not only a client but also an admirer, friend, and guarantor, earning his friendship through mutual respect. This special relationship lasted for thirty-three years, until his death in 1935.

After Wright returned from Japan, he had very few commissions, so it is no coincidence that Dr. Martin tried to help him with this new job in 1926. In addition to financial assistance, he also helped him resolve his financial situation prior to the auction of Taliesin II. His financial expertise encouraged him to devise a plan to rescue Wright in 1925, both Taliesin II and his friend's overall financial situation. Martin suggested the creation of a company called *Frank Lloyd Wright Incorporated*, a legal entity that would free him from certain financial responsibilities. With this strategy, he managed to recover ownership of Taliesin through the nd even begin its final reconstruction as Taliesin III in late 1928.

In 1926, Martin commissioned him to design a simple summer residence on the shores of Lake Erie in Derby, New York, which would eventually be called Graycliff House. Wright had already worked for Dr. Martin twenty years earlier in Buffalo. On the one hand, there was the residential complex of his own home, the Martin House (1902-1909), and on the other, the Larkin Soap Company building (1903-1906). Wright also designed other buildings encouraged by Dr. Martin, demonstrating the important trust he placed in him as a client. These were commissions for properties linked to the Larkin Soap Company, such as the houses for employees in 1907 (not built), the William R. Heath House (1902-1904), the Walter V. Davidson House (1908), and the house commissioned in 1923 for his daughter Dorothy and her future son-in-law, James Foster, in Buffalo (not built). Dr. Martin's last commission was a family mausoleum in Buffalo's Forest Lawn

Cemetery, designed between 1926 and 1928, although it was never built due to the Wall Street Crash of 1929. In 2004, it was finally completed under the name Mausoleum of the Blue Sky.

The work mentioned above, the long-standing relationship, and the favors done for each other give us a glimpse of the intense bond forged over almost thirty years of mutual trust between Dr. Martin and Wright. Only in this way can we understand why, in September 1929, when Dr. Martin requested a new floor in the Graycliff building and Wright refused to do so, he finally gave in and declared, "You know, of course, that I would do anything I could for you. If you want to change the lake house, I'll do it... Normally, I would refuse to be part of such a procedure, but this will be the first exception" (Mahoney, 2009).

This surprising disciplinary surrender can only be justified by the reasons given, sanctioned by Wright himself when he told Aline Barnsdall in 1935, "D.D. Martin, my best and most helpful friend, died a week ago of a stroke. The news reached me just as Olgivanna and I were going to Buffalo to see him" (Mahoney, 2009).

4.3. Wright and Graycliff

Mr. Martin retired from the Larkin Soap Company in 1925 as one of the wealthiest executives in the United States. A few months later, in early 1926, they decided to build a modest summer home, but this time it was his wife who approached Wright. This circumstance would shape subsequent events, with Isabelle as the client and Darwin as her representative in the extensive correspondence with Wright. This clearly indicated that the project had to conform to her wishes and be built for "her comfort and enjoyment", particularly in terms of natural lighting, given her vision problems (Mahoney, 2009).

Initially, she requested the recovery of the sketch developed for an old small summer house initiative (1909) in Bay Beach, Ontario (Canada). Two weeks later, they gave up and decided to stay near Buffalo.

Buffalo was one of the great industrial cities of the United States during the 19th century, being the world's largest grain port via the Erie Canal and its proximity to the Great Lakes, and later, the country's second largest railway hub. From the 1880s onwards, hydroelectric power harnessed from the Niagara River and the nearby Niagara Falls fueled industry and the city, turning it into the City of Light as the first American urban center to have widespread electric street lighting, as could be experienced at the Pan-American Exposition world fair in 1901. At that time, it was the eighth largest city in the United States, after New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Boston, Baltimore, and Cleveland (Gibson, 1998). Until the second decade of the 20th century, many prominent companies settled there, making it the main destination for thousands of pioneers on their way to the western United States.

On April 19, 1926, Dr. Martin purchased a plot of land southwest of the city in Derby, on a steep cliff overlooking Lake Erie. This area was beginning to be colonized by Buffalo's high society with large summer residences, sheltered by the optimistic 1920s " " decade and the exclusivity of the natural environment. The wealthy and influential business families Rumsey, Fenton, Kellogg, and Larkins would be his new summer neighbors (Wilner, 1931)

Two weeks later, Darwin issued two main instructions. First, he conveyed both the urgency and the direction of the architectural solution. Time is of the essence, and he asks for rapid execution so that it can be occupied as soon as possible. It is a simple two-story house, whose proportions can be guessed at (short axis perpendicular to the lake and long axis parallel), on a flat site on a high cliff, specifying its location, as a 100-foot strip must be left free from the edge. Secondly, he refers to a project built by architect Frank E. Newman, published in the October 1913 issue of Architectural Record, the E.W. Russel house in Greenwich, Connecticut, a suggestion that not only points to a possible architectural solution that "illustrates our idea of a floor plan", but also denotes the deep trust they had, difficult to understand, in Wright's personality and idiosyncrasies (Mahoney, 2009).

The work progressed rapidly, and in May 1926, two preliminary designs were submitted with clearly different spatial layouts. One featured a gabled roof, while the other had a double-height main hall similar to the concept developed in Taliesin III. This dilemma was resolved when the

Martins decided on the gabled roof design. Although the building designs were progressing, there was still no evidence of an overall plan for the layout of the interior of the plot. Wright confirmed the existence of a main volume, at which point he described the unique feature of the house that "connects the house to the lake", making it its "front garden or playground". He also indicates that there is a depressed area in the ground and stairs leading down to the lake (Mahoney, 2009).

This approach and description clearly reveal the decision to create a firm horizontal composition linked to the presence of a floor from which the building seems to rise, actively marrying the main house and its surroundings through the incorporation and construction of a new system of partial perceptions that enhance the natural values of the site.

The correspondence and telegrams continued for another four months and were full of suggestions, corrections, and alternatives. Of particular note among these was the solution proposed for the main entrance to the house, consisting of a covered carriage porch supported by two columns and the cladding of certain walls with stone. After an exchange of letters, the Martins, who were not in favor of this alternative, finally gave in to Wright's proposals (Figure 1)

However, it was not until September 1927, when construction was well advanced, that the layout of the interior of the plot became clear. A colored plan shows the general layout and arrangement of the residential complex, almost in its entirety. The drawing shows four buildings: the main house, a garage with an apartment on the first floor (designed in late 1926), a small boiler room (Heat Hut) (specifically requested by Mr. Martin in April 1927 in order to minimize the risk of fire), and the outline of a guest pavilion, reported by Wright next to the garage, as well as a tennis court.

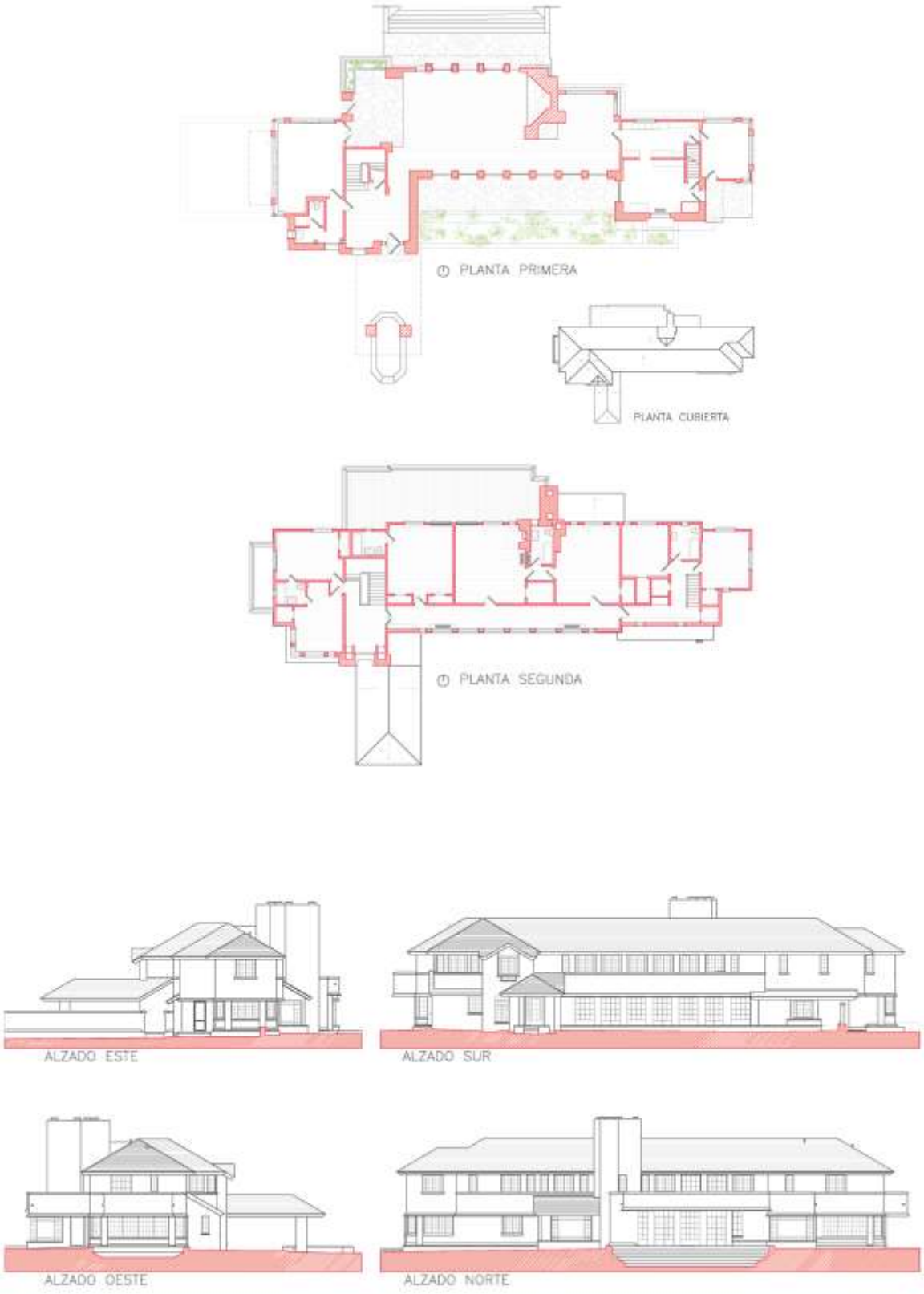
Construction began a year later, at a time when Wright was in the midst of legal difficulties, so he requested to relinquish the project in favor of his son John Lloyd Wright, a request that was flatly denied by Dr. Martin, who took charge again in November.

On July 20, 1928, the residence opened, and on October 15, Martin informed Wright of the name chosen for the residential complex, suggested by a guest, as "GrayCliff" after the gray shale cliff, with which it would go down in the history of modern American architecture.

From the fall of 1928 onwards, new correspondence between them confirms the start of work on installing features on the plot, landscaping, planting trees (elms and pines), and deciding on outdoor paths.

Although Wright continued to work on other requests from the Martins, such as the possible addition of a third floor for guests, a gardener's cottage, tools, etc., the situation was cut short by the Stock Market Crash of 1929, which led to the decline of the property and ended with the death of Mr. Martin in 1935.

Figure 1. Complete plot of Graycliff House



Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

4.4. Wright, Fenollosa, and Conder

In the mid-19th century, Japan began to abandon the foreign policy of isolation it had suffered since the 17th century, during the Edo period known as *Sakoku*. The ostracism in which it had

remained ended in 1853, when the United States Navy arrived on its coast with the aim of establishing diplomatic relations and trade agreements, leading to its opening up to the world powers. The Meiji administration and its new foreign policy began to invite and hire international professors and specialists in order to incorporate them into the new government academic structures and institutions in the 1870s. Among others, we focus our attention on two key figures, the American historian, philosopher, and poet Ernest Francisco Fenollosa (1853-1908) and the British architect Josiah Conder (1852-1920).

Fenollosa's father, Manuel Francisco Fenollosa del Pino, was from Malaga and at the age of 14 joined the United States Navy as a musician, settling permanently in Salem, Massachusetts, where he married Mary Silsbee, aunt of architect Joseph Lyman Silsbee (Cabeza, 2022).

Fenollosa first arrived in Japan in 1887 through the mediation of biologist Edward Sylvester Morse (1838-1925), as a professor of philosophy and later of Aesthetic Ideas at Tokyo's first university, the Imperial University. As a translator, his contract was renewed and in 1886 he was transferred to the Office of the Commissioner of Fine Arts, reporting directly to the Emperor's Ministry for the conservation of works of art.

His extensive academic training in philosophy and art, exported from the East Coast, enabled him to contribute his vision of democratic society and the fine arts. This cultural disposition was sensitive to the "Emersonian belief in the democratization of art as a means of social development," a central theme of the American Aesthetic Movement of the last quarter of the 19th century. The consistent transcendentalist attitude of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman crossed the American border through Fenollosa, extending the concept of "democratic aestheticism" beyond the Boston artistic community (Nute, 1993).

Under this criterion, Fenollosa developed an intense academic activity in Japan alongside his enormous and fruitful work of research, interpretation, and dissemination of Japanese arts in the West, which allowed him to achieve Japanese recognition by being named Imperial Commissioner of the Arts. Upon his return to the United States, he was appointed curator of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston between 1890 and 1896, before returning to Japan. This campaign definitively spread knowledge of Eastern culture, leading him to be considered the founder of modern Japanese art history and aesthetics, with a multitude of important publications, including his posthumous work *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, published in 1912, which had a definitive influence on Western avant-garde art.

There is a certain consensus on how Wright became involved in Japanese arts. Quinan (2020) and Nute (1991) acknowledge that regardless of his encounter with the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, when the young Wright was in Alder and Sullivan's office, six years earlier he may have had contact with Fenollosa while working with architect Joseph Lyman Silsbee (1848-1913) shortly after arriving in Chicago in 1887. At that time, Silsbee's house was full of Japanese art (Manson, 1958), undoubtedly influenced by his cousin Fenollosa. However, this first encounter with Japanese art may have been earlier, given that his relationship with Silsbee began two years earlier in 1885, when he worked on the Wright family temple and the chapel for his uncle Jenkin Lloyd Jones in Wisconsin (Nute, 1991).

Having established this intense contact, Wright published a work on *ukiyo-e* entitled *The Japanese Print, An Interpretation* in 1912, referring to Fenollosa's authority with his two books *The Masters of Ukiyo-e* and *History of Ukiyo-e* (Wright, 1912). Five years later, in 1917, he wrote an unpublished essay on Fenollosa's Japanese prints, in which he acknowledged having seen a Japanese print for the first time "*about twenty-five years ago*," which roughly coincides with its presence in Silsbee's office (Pfeiffer, 1992). In that essay, he declares his closeness to Fenollosa when he states, "On one of his trips (Fenollosa's) home, he brought back many beautiful prints ; I kept these[1]. They were of the narrow decorative type "Hashira kake," and I appreciate them even more today than I did then" (Nute, 1991).

He refers to this again in his *An Autobiography* and deliberately highlights the relationship they had: "A young American at that time helped to save many of the proofs of their great (Japanese)

[1] Emphasized by the author.

culture from this indiscriminate destruction. His name was Ernest Fenollosa," confirming not only his acquaintance but also the relationship Wright had with his fellow scholar (Wright, 1943).

Josiah Conder (1852-1920) was a British architect who was the first foreign professor of architecture at the Kōbu Daigakkō Imperial College from 1876 to 1884, which was founded in 1873. His passion and dedication to Japanese architecture and gardens were rewarded when he was appointed president of the Japanese Architects Association, founded in 1887 (Vogel, 2016).

Conder published as a member of the Royal Institute of British Architects (FRIBA) and at that time had titles such as *The Flowers of Japan and the Art of Floral Arrangement*; *Japanese Costumes*; *Japanese Armour*; *Notes on Japanese Architecture* and *Further Notes on Japanese Architecture and Domestic Architecture in Japan*. However, it was not until *Landscape Gardening in Japan* in 1893 that the important research carried out on the origin and situation of Japanese gardens was recognized.

As revealed in the book's preface, it completes and expands on *Flowers of Japan and the Art of Floral Arrangement*, continuing the research begun with the article in which he first presented the theory of Japanese garden composition in 1886, entitled *The Art of Landscape Gardening in Japan* (Conder, 1893).

The presence of Fenollosa's postulates in Wright's work is clear in his own literary production, but not so in Conder's, a circumstance that would take us beyond the scope of this article. However, some of the postulates of his research may seek complicity with Graycliff House, especially given Wright's significant situation mentioned above and his recent arrival from Japan.

5. Analysis and results

The descriptive sequence presented above allows us to indicate that Wright not only has a deep understanding of Japanese cultural expressions, but also recognizes a seminal harmony with his organic architectural approach, a circumstance he even reveals in his *An Autobiography* when he states:

> The search for Japanese prints was always present. And the mysterious and wonderful Edo to explore. The print is more autobiographical than one might imagine. If Japanese prints had been excluded from my education, I don't know what direction everything would have taken. (Wright, 1943, p.183)

In 1905, Wright traveled to Japan accompanied by his wife Kitty and his clients Wilitis, with the intention of acquiring woodblock prints, visiting mainly traditional natural or artificial gardens, as evidenced by the photo album he made collecting the scenes he observed. Curiously, he chose photography as a means of architectural representation, avoiding drawings despite his graphic mastery (Birk, 1996).

Smith sees this trip as a turning point in Wright's approach to landscape design (Smith, 2008). As we have seen, he was aware of Fenollosa's work, but it is also likely that at that time he was familiar with Conder's book *Landscape Gardening in Japan*. Despite this, it is unreasonable to believe that Wright was interested in the literal interpretation of any of the five types of Japanese gardens identified by the British architect. However, their aesthetic principles and the deep connection with nature they displayed may well have influenced him . The structural system on which Japanese art is based, understood as inner essence, is what allows Wright to decide that neither imitation nor realism are the goal of his expressions, but rather the ability to convey a more abstract reality that underlies their appearance. With this criterion, can relate this internal structure to organic form, where a defined synthesis of elements constitutes a unity within a higher whole (Meech, 2001).

Once the initial appreciation for the exoticism of the Japanese garden has been overcome, the geometric essence in natural forms is represented through abstraction, in what Alofsin (2008) understood as "quality of abstraction".

Under the approach put forward and continuing with Smith, the principles that Wright began to develop and apply after 1905 allowed him to conceive of the garden landscape surrounding his buildings as a natural ideal; to integrate the building into the outside world, extending the garden

into the surrounding environment through the use of *Shakkei* or borrowed landscape; introduce water features to link the site to the outside world; and conceive the visual ensemble as the particular enclosure of the site (Smith, 2008).

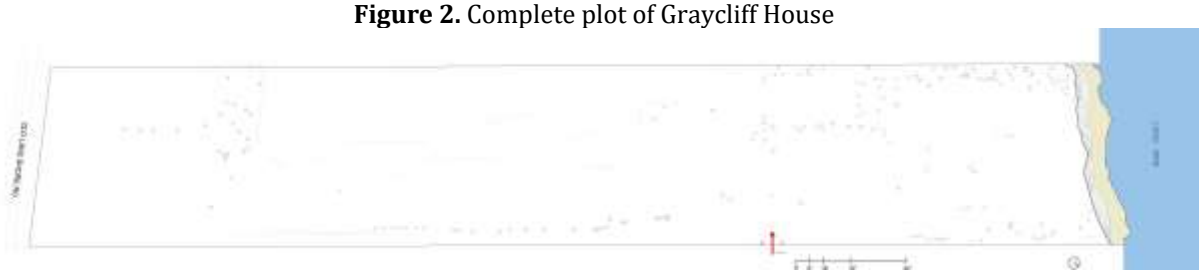
Based on this theoretical framework, we develop the following reflections, following Conder's text *Landscape Gardening in Japan* with the aim of exploring the idea of integration between architecture and nature achieved at Graycliff House. In any case, Graycliff's intimate relationship with its landscape setting, as in Taliesin, is novel in Wright's work. Leaving behind the Prairie Houses, the path to the Usonian Houses begins, where nature focuses Wright's architectural ideas. The Graycliff summer residence is a refuge and home for the Martin family members. To paraphrase Levine (1996) when describing Taliesin, Graycliff is a "family dwelling, a complete expression of Wright's integration of architecture and nature".

By reinterpreting analogy as a method of approximation, we can avoid the difficult-to-stop process that would lead us permanently from one analogy to another. Things can be fundamentally similar in function, form, or contiguity if we are able to establish some kind of relationship or link. These similarities, whether easy or complex to decipher, allow for analysis under scientific criteria. Opposites and equals establish the limits of similarity with architectural terminology that is already commonplace: exclusions, differences, appearances, coincidences, and even mimesis, reflecting formal or visual analogy as a mere relationship between forms. But there is also the mimesis of the idea, an analogy capable of relating form to concept, without descending into the Platonic consideration that distinguishes good mimesis from false mimesis, such as those of the idea and those of creating images, respectively, to explain his theory of knowledge (Plato, 1970).

Understanding the analogy of the idea as a criterion of interpretation brings us closer to a more metaphorical and therefore interpretative content, moving us away from the instrumentalization of architectural language in its physical or formal condition (Sola and González, 2019).

The Graycliff House plot is set in an extraordinary natural environment, on a steep cliff overlooking Lake Erie. It has an approximate area of 3.5 hectares in a rectangular shape with a main northwest orientation. However, originally, the northern third (bordering the lake) was accessed from the east via a right of way across the adjacent property (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Complete plot of Graycliff House



Source: Own elaboration, 2025

This is a plot on the cliffs of slate schist and Tichenor limestone overlying eroded slate, near the mouth of Eigteenmile Creek. The spectacular nature of the site, 70 feet above the lake, is limited only by the verticality of the forest masses on either side and the horizontality of the lake's surface, with Canada as a backdrop to the northwest, as the main elements of the natural environment.

The site demands a clear architectural approach, one that seeks to enhance its natural conditions and serve the functional program. We propose focusing on the presence of water as a determining natural element in the interpretation of the site.

As we have seen, both the historical sequence of the project and the execution of the works describe a dizzying pace and changing conditions. Despite this, all these modifications and changes will ultimately be disciplined by the single architectural thought of Wright's genuine approach.

Beginning as a modest summer residence, Wright developed a series of initiatives by consensus, complicating the functional program until it reached the status of a residential complex, perhaps recalling the situation that occurred at the Martin House in Buffalo. Three

buildings were constructed, but five were planned, an initiative that was cut short by the Crash of 1929.

Work began in 1926 with the garage and chauffeur's apartment (No. 1), continuing with the main house (No. 3), which was built simultaneously with an outdoor boiler room, the Heat Hut (No. 2), a building linked to the service area that occupies the dihedral freed up by the other two buildings. The original project envisaged access to the lake beach via a symmetrical staircase system, the shape and position of which changed over time. Figure 3

In September 1927, Wright sent a color plan showing the complete set of buildings, which included ideas for the treatment of the outdoor spaces. The plan includes sketches of unbuilt parts, reflecting the lively work and debate with Mr. and Mrs. Martin. It shows a guest pavilion adjacent to the garage and a tennis court to the west, which ends up filling the northern third of the original plot.

Figure 3. Complete plot of Graycliff House

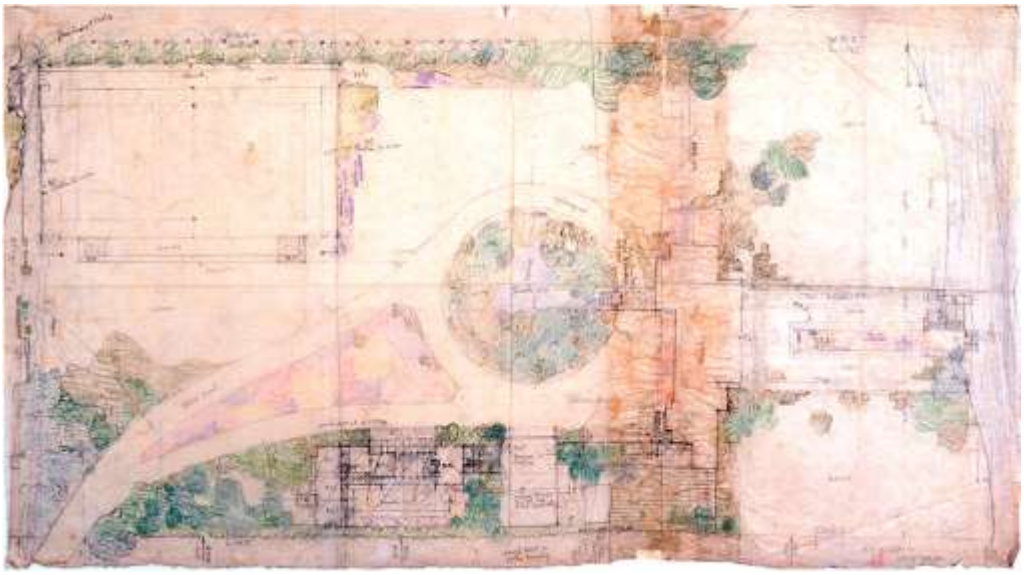
Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

This document is the most valuable tool for exploring Wright's interpretation of the site, a circumstance full of nuances and qualities, which we will now analyze (Figure 4).

The layout of the complex proposes an initial system of east-west bands that organize the buildings and the space of the plot, appropriating the entire setting. The first is defined to the north by the edge of the cliff, facing the lake with a width of 100 feet dictated by Dr. Martin. The space is structured by a rectangular pool that assumes the transverse axis and compositionally symmetrical from the interior of the living room to the north. Today, this idea is formally maintained, although its aquatic function has been replaced by a flower bed. The second band is occupied by the main residence. The building opens up on the ground floor in the form of a bridge span in the living room spaces, allowing complete transparency and the presence of Lake Erie from the south (Figure 5 and Figure 6).

Finally, the rest of the plot is developed to the south, with a water pond with a naturalized perimeter inside the circular driveway, which tangentially reaches the interior of the carriage porch, where the entrance to the house is located. Inside the porch, a stream of water feeds the pond.

Figure 4. Wright's 1927 plan



Source: Courtesy of Graycliff Conservancy INC.

Figure 5. South view of the main house.

Source: Own elaboration, 2020

Figure 6. North view of the main house.

Source: Own elaboration, 2020

This brief description highlights the main aspects of the landscaping project, which we will introduce in terms of an analogy with the idea of a Japanese garden. The aesthetic principles of Oriental art are closely linked to Wright's purpose. His compositional and abstractive abilities stimulate an approach that, starting from the general, specifies the particular, filling the variety of decisions taken with unity and intention.

If the term *Sansui* defines the natural or artificial views of an ideal Japanese landscape, with the combination of its orography (mountains, cliffs, etc.), trees, and water, the use of *Shakkei*, or borrowed landscape, sanctions the place with its outside world, conceiving the complete visual ensemble as the particular setting of the enclosure .

Based on the classic reference of the landscape at Lake Seiko (China), surrounded by high hills and cliffs and with a waterfall cascading from the rocks in several falls, Conder proposes Hill Gardens (*T'suktyama-miwa*) as the model for the most complete gardens, suitable for important areas in front of prominent buildings (Conder, 1893).

In Chapter XII, *Garden Composition,* of the book, plate XXV*, Diagram of Hill Garden*, *Finished Style*, identifies the elements and their different relative positions, hills, stones, groups of trees, ponds, waterfalls, bridges, and islands (Conder, 1893). We present this redrawn plate with the intention of focusing on the elements that qualify water and its form (Figure 7).

Conder's engraving shows an artificial lake marked by the irregularity of its shore and the presence of a group of stones scattered and strategically placed. In the background, a stepped waterfall draws attention, silhouetted against the mountains as a scenic backdrop of nature.

At Graycliff House, access to the plot is via a road that leads to a roundabout located on the imperceptible axis of symmetry of the plot (south-north), marked in green. This virtual axis forms the underlying structure beneath other appearances and organizes four compositional elements: the perfectly geometric circle, the irregularly shaped pond in its center, the carriage porch, and a stepped waterfall (Figure 8).

Figure 7. Redrawing of plate XXV by Conder

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

Figure 8. View of the pond located to the south of the house

Source: Own elaboration, 2020.

The pond is shaped like a small natural lake with a curvilinear and random edge, without any symmetry, forming a geometry that clearly resembles nature. Its bottom is equally irregular, without any parallelism with the surface of the water it contains. The shape is as imprecise as it is

natural, being constructed from stones of different sizes, shapes, and colors, as Wright established on September 12, 1927, when he prescribed that "the circle must be sunk throughout its development 2'... Open the center... and fill it with water with groups of colored rocks" (Mahoney, 2009).

The carriage porch rises vertically with two stone columns, marking the focus of the axis of symmetry and emphasizing the entrance to the house.

The stepped waterfall introduces the movement of water from an octagonal basin, close to the columns of the carriage porch. Its fall onto the axis perfects the symmetry of the porch, which acts as an architectural grotto and backdrop, before beginning its journey southward, feeding the small artificial lake and awakening the senses with the vibrant sound and freshness of the flowing water (Figure 9).

Figure 9. View of the stepped waterfall in the carriage porch

Source: Own elaboration, 2020.

The shape of this pool is pronounced towards the west, enhancing the view of Lake Erie, with both realities facing each other: Lake Erie in the background and to the west, and the artificial lake in the foreground.

The landscape and building are designed together, integrating the site with the surrounding natural landscape. *Shakkei* (borrowed landscape) is used to incorporate Lake Erie into the composition, establishing a clear and uninterrupted view of the horizon. As a result, the main house becomes the frame through which the most important element can be seen: Lake Erie, integrating the building with the surrounding natural environment.

The staging of an original natural setting awakens the imagination of the Japanese ideal of a Hill Garden, a new artificial lake that contrasts with the natural Lake Erie.

6. Conclusions

Graycliff House represents the development of some of Wright's main ideas about architecture and landscape, which are fundamental to understanding its importance. The elements that define Graycliff, with its spectacular location on a cliff above Lake Erie, together with the developments he originally conceived, involve the juxtaposition of a building against the great mass of water of the lake. We find ourselves at the moment of transition from the Prairie Houses to the Usonian Houses. Wright describes the Usonian ideal, stating:

> The Usonian house, then, aspires to be a natural representation, integral with the place; integral with the environment; integral with the life of its inhabitants. A house integral with the nature of materials—where glass is used as glass, stone as stone, wood as wood—and all the elements of the environment are integrated into the house and pass through it. In this new integrity, once there, those who inhabit it will take root and grow, and above all, belong by nature to the nature of their being. (Kaufmann and Raeburn, 1974, p.273)

A linear attitude is not applicable from the application of simple visual analogy given the "wandering nature of influence, like a slow flow that accumulates the remains of image and word" (Alofsin, 2008). Image and word to clarify that the "truth of meaning is not the same as the truth of facts", as historian White discovers when reflecting on the nature of his discipline (Ruiz-Domenec, 2024). An image that rediscovers the expressive possibilities of the 19th century in Conder's engraving.

Wright applies the appeal of gardens not in their formal literalness, but in the deeper condition of the quality of their abstraction, arousing an excited resonance with modern Western sensibilities from the last third of the 19th century to the present. The treatments of form, color, and internal structure provide bold, flat surfaces through dynamic, asymmetrical compositions that we associate with modern visual culture.

Nute (1993) intuits that Wright benefited greatly both from his time in Japan and from the thousands of prints he acquired. This experience would provide him with a *"rich source of formal inspiration*" and the consolidation of several organic principles, such as "the harmonious integration of the natural and the artificial". From this point of view, his Eastern cultural experience allowed him to conclude that Japanese buildings were "like rocks and trees growing in their places".

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