



7 THINGS FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT, ONE OF THE MOST ICONIC AMERICAN ARCHITECTS, GOT WRONG ABOUT DESIGN

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“It takes a brave soul to buy one of Wright's houses,” says Chicago-based architect John Eifler.

He should know: He’s renovated 23 of them.

Frank Lloyd Wright is widely considered the greatest modern American architect. And for good reason — Wright imbued his structures with natural light and pioneered innovative, open floor plans that forever changed the way people thought about housing and architecture. Plus, Wright, who would've turned 150 years old on June 8, was a prolific designer. He worked on more than 400 buildings, and no two are exactly alike.

But nobody’s perfect. Innovation almost always comes at a cost.

Here are seven things Wright got wrong about design.

1) His roofs weren’t properly supported.

2) Many buildings leaked.



Hollyhock House in Los Angeles, California

Joshua White

Jeffrey Herr, the curator of Hollyhock House in LA, says the striking building had several flaws from the get-go.

“The roof design itself had some interesting design issues that almost guaranteed water penetration,” he explains.

Hollyhock House has undergone many renovations throughout its 90 years, the most recent of which cost \$4.5 million. Herr estimates the total cost of upkeep since it was built likely totals around \$20 million. But he's emphatic that the cost has been worth it.

“There is no other architect that has ever done anything like Hollyhock House. There isn't any other structure like it either in his oeuvre or in anybody else's,” Herr says.

3) Concrete foundations were often too weak.

4) Wright didn't fully consider future maintenance or upkeep.

5) The buildings wasted lots of energy.

6) Wright's drainage systems weren't always up to the task.

Gunny Harboe has led the renovation of Unity Temple, one of Wright's only designs for a religious space. The building is considered a masterpiece, and has been nominated to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site, along with Hollyhock House and eight other Wright buildings.

“One of the big problems at Unity Temple has been the fact that the internal drainage system was undersized,” Harboe says. “It was never really big enough to accommodate the amount of water that wanted to go through it.”

Jeffrey Herr says the drainage system in Hollyhock House also had to be replaced.

7) Wright prioritized aesthetics above all else.

Wright did not always adhere to the principle that form follows function. Creating buildings that are now considered works of art meant that practical boundaries had to be pushed.

And, though architects of today would most likely be criticized for that, those who know Wright's work almost universally agree that he shouldn't be blamed for adhering so stubbornly to his visions.

“He was thinking of new materials and new ways of putting things together — that's what has really impressed me now that I've worked on so many,” John Eifler says. “I can never assume I know how something's made.”

Jeffrey Herr and Gunny Harboe also agree that Wright's genius justified his design mistakes.

“It's about futuristic thinking. The design is the most important aspect,” Jeffrey Herr says. “And it's amazing design.”