

8 Buildings by Frank Lloyd Wright Added to UNESCO World Heritage List

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Fallingwater (completed in 1939), Wright's house in western Pennsylvania designed for Pittsburgh department-store owner Edgar J. Kaufmann. Gene J. Puskar/AP

1. Benjamin Schneider

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Eight Wright buildings, located around the country, are the first American works of modern architecture that UNESCO deems “of outstanding universal value.”

Buildings designed by the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright are now in the same class as the Taj Mahal and the Great Wall of China, according to UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization).

UNESCO voted Sunday in Baku, Azerbaijan, to designate eight buildings by Wright a World Heritage Site. The vote marks the first time that the UN agency has recognized examples of U.S. modern architecture. (European modernist Le Corbusier is already represented on the World Heritage list.)



Exterior, Frederick C. Robie House (Frank Lloyd Wright, 1908-10), Chicago. (Courtesy of Frank Lloyd Wright Trust. Photographer: James Caulfield)

The Wright buildings—listed collectively as “The 20th Century Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright”—dot the country and represent several phases of his long and storied career. They include the Guggenheim Museum in New York City, Fallingwater in Pennsylvania, and Hollyhock House in Los Angeles; in Wisconsin, the Herbert and Katherine Jacobs House and Wright’s home and studio, Taliesin; Arizona’s Taliesin West; and in the Chicago area, Unity Temple and the Robie House.

“This designation makes clear that Wright has a prominent place on the stage of world architecture,” said Celeste Adams, CEO of the Frank Lloyd Wright Trust, a nonprofit that helps preserve and educate the public about Wright sites in greater Chicago. Adams added that the designation “places the cultural achievement of America with the cultural monuments of other world civilizations.”



Sanctuary, Unity Temple (Frank Lloyd Wright, 1905-8), Oak Park, Illinois. (Courtesy of Frank Lloyd Wright Trust. Photographer: James Caulfield)

In a [press release](#), UNESCO wrote that the selection of buildings is meant to celebrate Wright's concept of "organic architecture," including open floor plans, "a blurring of the boundaries between exterior and interior and the unprecedented use of materials such as steel and concrete." Wright's buildings are the 24th UNESCO World Heritage Site in the U.S., joining more than 1,100 sites around the world.

The listing is the culmination of a more than 15-year effort to get UNESCO recognition for Wright's work, an effort led by the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy. Four hundred forty-nine Wright-designed buildings were whittled down to eight in order to best capture his design philosophy, as well as to meet the criteria of the UNESCO selection committee. In 2016, the nomination was revised to exclude two late works, the Marin County Civic Center in San Rafael, California, and Price Tower in Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

The final list "is a representative group of his works that span coast to coast and reflect the overall career of Frank Lloyd Wright," Adams said. "Like Picasso, Frank Lloyd Wright went through many different phases in his creative life."



Hollyhock House (1919-21), pictured in 2017. (Kit Leong/Shutterstock)

The Hollyhock House in Los Angeles, that city's first UNESCO World Heritage Site, represents one of those transitions. After developing the Prairie style in the Midwest—epitomized by the Robie House—Wright came to the West Coast to escape personal problems back home and explore new regional influences. At the Hollyhock House, completed in 1921, Wright prominently featured Mayan design elements and alluded to California's distinctive Spanish Revival style. The house underwent an extensive restoration in 2015 and today forms the heart of the Barnsdall Art Park.

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Fallingwater in Bear Run, Pennsylvania, is probably Wright's most famous house. Built atop a waterfall, the house includes a number of cantilevered terraces anchored to a massive, central stone chimney, echoing the rocky landscape surrounding it. Wright was inspired by the harmony between the built environment and nature in Japanese architecture.



The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (completed in 1959) in New York City. (Brendan McDermid/Reuters)

The cylindrical, spiraling Guggenheim Museum at the heart of Manhattan's Museum Mile completely revolutionized museum design, confidently proclaiming that "architecture does not have to lie down and play dead in front of art," in the words of architecture critic Paul Goldberger. On the occasion of its 50th anniversary, Goldberger called the Guggenheim "the progenitor of every architecturally assertive museum since," including the Frank Gehry-designed Guggenheim in Bilbao, Spain, which is often credited with super-charging the trend of starchitect-designed museums. Wright would not live to see the impact of his creation: He died six months before the museum's 1959 opening.

Now that Wright's place in world heritage is assured, organizations dedicated to his legacy, such as the Frank Lloyd Wright Trust, are turning their attention to a more fickle crowd: the youth. A big part of Adams's work in the future is getting the next generation excited about Wright's works, she said. "Out of the experience of young people visiting these sites, being inspired by them, and learning this philosophy, we hope to inspire the architects and designers of the future."

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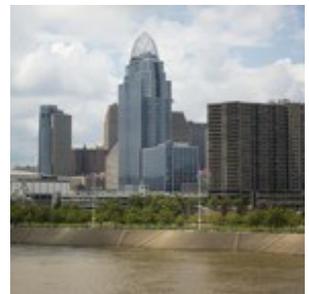
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