General Information

Source: NBC Today Show  Resource Type: Video News Report
Creator: Bryant Gumbel  Copyright: NBCUniversal Media, LLC.
Event Date: 06/08/1992  Clip Length 00:06:50
Air/Publish Date: 06/08/1992  Copyright Date: 1992

Description

NBC's Bryant Gumbel takes a look at the creative legacy of architect Frank Lloyd Wright which includes the Guggenheim Museum and Falling Water in Pennsylvania. An interview with film-maker Joel Silver explores the organic nature of Wright's work.

Keywords


Citation

MLA

APA

CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE
Profile of Architect Frank Lloyd Wright and His Works

BRYANT GUMBEL, co-host:

One hundred and twenty five years ago in a small town in Wisconsin, Frank Lloyd Wright was born. Not known for humility, Wright once identified himself in court as the world's greatest architect. He may have just been that. He was a visionary and treated architecture as art. And although he died 33 years ago, Wright's influence on architecture and interior design is as immediate and as vibrant as ever.

Unidentified Man #1: I call that goosebump time. We'd be down underneath this magnificent structure and the--the falls. And it's just, wow, goosebump time.

Unidentified Woman: The great thing about Wright's houses is that they--they show us a way to live in a more dignified and civilized fashion. He tried to make you very keenly aware of nature.

Unidentified Man #2: He felt that an architect's work was a sacred mission to give mankind a beautiful situation in which to live, work, study, whatever.

GUMBEL: Wright began his career at the age of 19. By the time he died at 92, he'd created more than a thousand structures, from chicken coops to skyscrapers. But he was primarily a home builder. Early in his career, Wright designed the first truly American home, the prairie home, built for the flat Midwestern landscape.

Ms. DORIS BLUMENTHAL (Home Owner): Walking into the house, we weren't prepared for the beauty of the home. Especially when we went inside. The first thing we saw was the door. And we were stunned by that front door. He put so much of his creative genius into his homes.

Mr. FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT (File footage): If the thing is successful, the architect's efforts, you can't imagine that house anywhere than right where it is. It's a part of its environment and it graces its environment rather than disgraces it.

GUMBEL: Wright called his style organic architecture. The homes he built mirrored the environment in which he built them. Case in point, Fallingwater in Pennsylvania.

Ms. LINDA WAGNER (Curator, Fallingwater): The house imitates the—the cliff of the waterfall in its very design with terraces hanging out over the waterfalls just like another rock face as you go up the hill.

GUMBEL: Wright's most radical idea concerned space.

Ms. WAGNER: The living room is one great space, which was very new. He saw no need to have separate rooms for these functions of dining, conversation and study. And he wanted everything to flow one into the other.

GUMBEL: Wright called it the open plan, a precursor to today's family room. His innovations also included indirect lighting, windows in place of walls, and simply styled furniture which he built differently for each home.

Mr. WRIGHT (File footage): That was entirely contrary to everything I believed in. And if I was right, they were wrong. Why should they treat me kindly? There was a question at one time, I suppose, of their survival or mine.
Mr. TOM SCHMIDT (Director, Fallingwater): He inspired people. He could be angry. He could be temperamental. But he was a vortex of living energy. We could hardly keep up with him.

Mr. BRUCE PFEIFFER (Frank Lloyd Wright Archives): He had a very long career, a very productive career; under each stage of that career, he broke new ground in his field. And he was like Picasso in that he invented new forms, came up with new ideas and concepts.

GUMBEL: The Guggenheim Museum was his final achievement. Completed after his death, it is like Wright, an American original.

Wright built homes from coast to coast, and movie producer Joel Silver is in the enviable position of owning one on each coast. This morning he's at his eastern place, Auld Brass, a plantation home built by Wright in Yemassee, South Carolina.

Joel, how you doing? Good morning.

Mr. JOEL SILVER: How you doing, Bryant? How's it going?

GUMBEL: I'm all right. Auld Brass is the second home of Frank Lloyd Wright's that you purchased. How far back does your fascination with him go?

Mr. SILVER: I don't know. When I--when I first went to California, I became really obsessed with seeing his buildings and seeing what he did. And I kind of hoped if I ever made enough money in the movie business, I'd be able to at least live in one of them or maybe more if I got really lucky.

GUMBEL: Yeah. I'm somehow--I--I find this very fascinating because you and I have--have talked several times over the years. You've produced a lot of very popular movies, yet you've always refused to do an interview that was movie-related. Now you are willing to do one for Frank Lloyd Wright. Why?

Mr. SILVER: I don't know. I--I kind of think my movies should kind of speak for themselves, you know. And this last weekend "Lethal Weapon 3" passed $100 million so I kind of feel real good about that. But I—I really am proud of the work that we've done with the Frank--with the Frank Lloyd Wright houses. And I mean, architecture is a very expensive hobby. So, and it's very time-consuming and very frustrating. Almost like making movies.

GUMBEL: Yeah. Why are you so passionate about his work?

Mr. SILVER: He's just--was so good. He was the best at what he did. And, you know, I mean, it's--there--it's not possible to really explain what it's like living in these houses. You really have to do it. I mean, every day something happens that you see something or you notice something that you didn't really notice before. I mean, the houses are almost always in motion, which is pretty exciting.

GUMBEL: Yeah. How--Auld Brass is--is a plantation home. It is--it is very different from--from anything Wright did before or after. To your mind what makes it so unusual?

Mr. SILVER: Well, I mean, it's--the whole nature of Auld Brass is--is so much--it personifies what organic architecture is really about. I mean, the only building that Wright ever built that looked like Auld Brass is Auld Brass because it's the only time he built in an environment like this situation. The--the house is all--the walls are 80-degree angles and that's because the oak trees in the--in the area here all grow at 80-degree angles. So--so Wright placed the dwelling in the middle of this grove of oak trees so that it really fit in perfectly with the environment and with the--and with the--innate with nature.

GUMBEL: And I understand each of the windows is strategically placed?
Mr. SILVER: Well, I mean, you have views from every window that are spectacular. And--and the whole attitude of it is--is just designed to--to work within the organic nature of the--of--of the site and--and of the--the area, the low country where we are in South Carolina.

GUMBEL: Yeah. I--I understand you are undertaking a very expensive renovation which includes building structures that--that Wright designed but never built?

Mr. SILVER: It's--it's, you know, Auld Brass is unique in that there was a complete plan here for--for many, many structures. It was a multiuse facility like a resort, a working farm. He--he really, you know, went for it down here. And there's a lot of--as a matter of fact, the—the file has over 150 drawings in it. So I mean, I could really build here until they bury me. I could keep on going. But I got to keep having hit movies so that I can keep, you know, keep working here.

GUMBEL: As--as you've said, it's an expensive hobby. Would you buy another one if it came available?

Mr. SILVER: God, I got to stop somewhere. I mean, you know--what, do you have something for me, Bryant?

GUMBEL: No, no, no. Not just yet, Joel. But it's nice to be able to get you in front of a microphone for once.

Mr. SILVER: Well, it's--it's nice to see you and nice to talk to you.

GUMBEL: Hey, take care of yourself, will you?

Mr. SILVER: So long, guy.