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The Nevada Museum of Art was inspired by architect Frank Lloyd Wright, and the museum is hosting an exhibit of his work as well.

By Scott Sady, AP Photo

# Frank Lloyd Wright works exhibited in museum he inspired

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Enlarge By Scott Sady, AP Photo

More than 100 original objects are on display, including furniture, metal work, textiles, drawings and publications from the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation.

By Scott Sonner, Associated Press Writer

RENO — Will Bruder likes to think that Frank Lloyd Wright would feel at home in the Nevada Museum of Art.

The most famous architect in American history inspired a generation of architects, including Bruder, who grew up in Wright's home state of Wisconsin and designed the Reno museum that is hosting the exhibit "Frank Lloyd Wright and the House Beautiful" through July 20.

"It is a building very much about the idea of form and materials and function and place coming together in a poetic way," Bruder said.

From the slivers of light that advance through the grand

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atrium's skylights to the cutouts that frame views of the Sierra Nevada from the rooftop sculpture garden, Wright's influences are felt throughout the black steel building Bruder built in the image of the rock outcroppings that dot the rugged landscape of the Black Rock Desert 120 miles north.

"His buildings always grew from the outside in and the inside out. They were buildings of their time and striving to use technology of their time to be timeless markers of culture and space," said Bruder, who also designed the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art in Arizona, the Madison Central Library in Wisconsin and the Portland Main Library in Maine.

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"The idea of daylight, the whole idea of how you view art and how you move and choreograph people through an art experience, through a museum, they do have that commonality," he said.

Wright called his style "organic architecture," designs that brought nature indoors with wide-open living spaces and natural materials. The task of portraying his work within the confines of museum walls fell to Miriam Stanton, the exhibition coordinator.

"Inserting Frank Lloyd Wright objects and ideas into a Will Bruder building is an interesting prospect," Stanton said.

Fortunately, she said, Bruder's design incorporated temporary, moveable walls that can be adjusted for a wide variety of layouts.

"I'm very thankful that Will Bruder gave us an open slate. It gives us a chance to decide where Frank Lloyd Wright would want a wall and where he would not. And Frank Lloyd Wright avoided walls at all costs," Stanton said.

The exhibit showcases Wright's efforts to create harmony between architectural structure and interior design in the context of the modern American lifestyle, said Virginia Terry Boyd, the curator of the traveling exhibit who is a professor and chair of the Textiles and Design program at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

"The legacy of Frank Lloyd Wright is a quality way of life," Boyd said about the man who designed hundreds of homes, schools, offices, churches and museums during a career that spanned 70 years until he died in 1959.

Before him, American architecture was almost exclusively "a response to Europe," Boyd said.

"He looked at the way Americans lived in the very early 20th century. He decided Americans have different, unique ways they live. He wanted to enhance their way of life. It was a very contemporary idea — to use homes to nourish ourselves.

"The exhibit tries to show how he materialized that."

More than 100 original objects are on display, including furniture, metal work, textiles, drawings and publications from the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation.

Dozens of photographs of home interiors document his departure from the traditional Victorian house divided into floors and individual rooms.

"He was saying that we live informally, we move around. A house should be opened up to dine and have a living room all in one space," Boyd said.

A dining room set with tall-backed wooden chairs on display represents such an arrangement in the dining room of

the Frederick Dobie House built in 1908 in Chicago.

"He creates a space within a space. The chairs help do that," Boyd said.

Photos of the Jean Paul Hanna House (1936), Stanford, Calif., and William and Mary Palmer House (1950), Ann Arbor, Mich., demonstrate the expansiveness of the main living quarters.

"You walk into spaces and they just open up," Boyd said.

In arranging the exhibit, Stanton said she tried to imitate that experience by using a narrow entry way followed by corners "so you have to turn your entire body to come upon a new view."

"Coming around a corner you get a sense of freeing, a feeling of opening," she said.

The exhibit is part of the five-year-old museum's "Art and Environment" series.

"We are trying to bring a contemporary spin to how his ideas are being used today," said Amy Oppio, the museum's deputy director.

It is divided into three sections — examples of the modern interior designs Wright used to reflect the American spirit, his use of furnishings and architectural elements to define the space and, lastly, his sometimes controversial efforts to bring his ideas to the homes of average Americans.

Besides Wright's fixation with the way light reflected and moved around a structure, he liked to use large modular furniture so we could "make our own space ... configure and shape your box," Boyd said.

A pencil and color blueprint on display shows the abstract design of the carpet already included in the drawing for the David Wright House he built in 1950 in Phoenix, Ariz.

"For most designers and architects, the carpet is the last thing they design. But to him, there was no difference between a structural idea and visual. He would draw in the furniture and chairs," Boyd said.

"His language is a language of abstraction and geometry. Whether you are talking about carpet or windows, they are all patterned, quite elaborate, not minimalism. It is geometric veneer — abstract, linear, geometric, aesthetic."

The exhibit closes with a look at Wright's later years when he'd become internationally known and turned his attention to making his ideas affordable to working Americans.

Boyd finds it telling that his advertisement on display for prefabricated homes in the Chicago Tribune in 1917 trumpeted, "You can own an American home," not "You can own a Frank Lloyd Wright house."

Later, he increased the use of contemporary fabrics to frame walls and started working directly with furniture, textile and fabric manufacturers. His relationship with manufacturers drew swift criticism from the architectural community, she said, especially after the Ladies Home Journal featured a spread on his "Prairie House."

"They said, 'Oh my God, here's our best architect designing furniture that is selling at Macy's,'" Boyd recalled. "But he had a very close relationship with media and he wanted to get his ideas out."

Bruder, who estimates he has seen 95% of Wright's portfolio in person, became aware of the architect at an early age. Growing up in suburban Milwaukee, Wis., he decided by about the fifth grade he probably wanted to be an architect.

"I was always making things. My father was a fireman but also a cabinetmaker so I was always around the idea of making things," he said.

Bruder remembers when he was 12, in 1959, Wright's circular-designed Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church was being constructed less than two miles from his home. It was one of Wright's last commissions and he died before its groundbreaking.

Bruder used to ride his bicycle across two-way streets he wasn't supposed to cross to watch it take shape.

"It made a lasting impression," he said.

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