

Exploration 12

The Wright Idea: Using the Words of Frank Lloyd Wright to Understand Space

Use Frank Lloyd Wright quotes about his architecture to look at buildings in the area. We've also included a few quotes from transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose writings were read and appreciated by Wright.

Materials:

- Copies of the Frank Lloyd Wright quotes
- Copies of floorplans
- Overhead projector
- Kraft paper
- Shower curtain
- Permanent marker
- Water markers
- Digital camera, cell phone with camera capability, or Polaroid camera
- Something to write and draw on
- Glue
- Scissors
- Something to write or draw with

Objective:

Using a plan of a building, students will apply their understanding of the sense of space(s) by affixing quotes from Wright and Emerson, etc., to corresponding spaces within the building; and transform their sense of space to images of the corresponding places.

Standards:

- Arts: NA-VA 1, 2, 6
- English: NS-ENG 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12
- Science: NS 1, 3, 4, 6
- Social Studies: NSS-G 1, 5, 6

Procedures:

- Make an overhead transparency of the plans of Fallingwater or any building. Project them as large as you can on Kraft paper. Trace it. Have students affix their Wright quotes to the spaces that they feel represent the spirit of the quote and the space in which they experience it. Ask students to explain their choices and placement.

- As a variation, put a clear or light colored shower curtain up on the wall and project the plan on it. Trace the plan in permanent marker. Use this as a base map on which students can write the quotes in water marker and affix photos or notes to it. At the conclusion of the lesson, the shower curtain can be rinsed of the water marker and dried and stored to use again and again!
- Have the students read the quotes before they visit one of the sites. Ask them to take digital images/photos that are representative of the quotes during their visit. When you return to the classroom, create a slideshow or PowerPoint of the photos with the quotes superimposed on top of the images. Discuss.
- Have students use their cell phones, digital camera, or Polaroid to take photos as they visit a site. Ask them to take pictures of what resonates with them. When you return to the classroom, give them the list of Wright quotes and ask them to choose or match a quote to their photo. Ask them to write their own quote about architecture. Next, ask them to make a photomontage of images and quotes. You can then collect these to make a slide show or PowerPoint to share with the whole class to discuss.
- Ask each student to write a piece of guided imagery that describes the experience of a space that the class has visited. Have the class close their eyes and "experience" the space as the author reads his/her description. After all descriptions have been read, discuss the similarities and differences. Are there any spaces that "feel" the same? Are there any spaces that "feel" differently to different people? Ask students to compare and contrast, referring back to Wright's quotes.
- As an alternative to the above, ask each student to draw, or make a collage, of what he/she sees in his/her "mind's eye" after listening to a classmate read a piece of guided imagery. Display the representations and ask other class members to match them with the appropriate guided imageries.
- Have students discuss their favorite space that they visit in the context of Wright's architecture. Use the quotes as a springboard for discussion or essays. Using their own words, have students describe the space to others.

- Give the students the quotes before you visit the site and discuss what they mean. Ask them to imagine the architecture that relates to them. They can take photos which show that feeling, draw a sketch of their idea, or write about what that space would be like. As they tour a site, have them relate those spaces to Wright's ideas. Have them compare and contrast their original ideas of the quotes to the experience of the quotes at the site. Ask how two different spaces can be represented by the same quote. Ask how they could change a space at the site to better represent the quote.

The Wright Words – and more!

Frank Lloyd Wright wrote volumes on his own architecture. The best current source for Wright's writings is a 5-volume compilation, Frank Lloyd Wright Collected Writings, edited by Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer. You'll find great ideas for essay topics, discussion points, or bring them along when you visit buildings in the Laurel Highlands for discussion.

Organic architecture is an architecture from within outward, in which *entity* is an ideal....Organic means intrinsic – in the philosophic sense, entity – wherever the whole is to the part as the part is to the whole and where the nature of the materials, the nature of the purpose, the *nature* of the entire performance, becomes clear as a necessity. Out of that *nature* comes what character in any particular situation you can give to the building as a creative artist.

1953 interview with Hugh Downs

We try to put into that house a sense of unity – of the altogether that makes it a part of the site. If the thing is successful... you can't imagine that house anywhere than right where it is. It is a gracious part of its environment. It graces its environment, rather than disgraces it.

1953 interview with Hugh Downs

My sense of wall was no longer the side of a box. It was the enclosure of space affording protection against the storm or heat only when needed. But it was also to bring the outside world into the house and let the inside of the house go outside.

1936

Furnishings should be consistent in design and construction, and used with style as an extension in the sense of the building which they "furnish." Whenever possible, all should be natural. The sure reward for maintaining these simple features of architectural integrity is great serenity.

A Testament, 1957

I see this extended horizontal line as the true earth-line of human life, indicative of freedom. Always.

An Autobiography, 1943

An idea (probably rooted in instinct) that shelter should be the essential look of any dwelling, put the low spreading roof, flat or hipped or low-gabled with generously projecting eaves, over the whole. I began to see a building not as a cave but as broad shelter in the open, related to vista; vista without and vista within. You may see in these various feelings all taking the same direction, that I was an American, child of the ground and of space, welcoming spaciousness as a modern human need, as well as learning to see it as the natural human opportunity.

1936

But in this land of ours, richest on earth, in old and new materials, the architect must exercise well-trained imagination to see in each material, either natural or compounded, its own inherent style. All materials may be beautiful, their beauty depending much or entirely upon how well they are used by the architect.

An Autobiography, 1932

I had an idea (it still seems to be my own) that planes parallel to the earth in buildings identify themselves with the ground, do most to make the buildings belong to the ground.

1936

Before this, by way of innate sense of comfort, had come the idea that the size of the human scale should fix every proportion of a dwelling or of anything in it. Human scale was true building scale. Why not, then, the scale fixing the proportions of all buildings whatsoever? What other scale could I use? This was not a canon taught to me by anyone. So I accommodated heights in the new buildings to no exaggerated order nor to impress the beholder (I hated grandomania then as much as I hate it now) but only to comfort the human being.

1936

The corner-window is indicative of an idea conceived, early in my work, that the box is a Fascist symbol, and the architecture of freedom and democracy needed something basically better than the box. So I started to destroy the box as a building. Well, the corner-window came in as all the comprehension that was ever given to that act of destruction of the box. The light now came in where it had never come in before and vision went out. You had screens for walls instead of box walls – here the walls vanished as walls, the box vanished as a box.

1953 interview with Hugh Downs

There in a beautiful forest was a solid, high rock-ledge rising beside a waterfall, and the natural thing seemed to be to cantilever the house from that rock-bank over the falling water....Then came (of course) Mr. Kaufmann's love for the beautiful site. He loved the site where the house was built and liked to listen to the waterfall. So that was the prime motive in the design. I think you can hear the waterfall when you look at the design. At least it is there, and he lives intimately with the thing he loves.

1953 interview with Hugh Downs

The land is the simplest form of architecture.
Building upon the land is as natural to man as to other animals, birds,
or insects. In so far as he was more than an animal his building
became what we call architecture.
Looking back..., what then is architecture?
It is man and more.
It is man in possession of his earth. It is the only true record of him
where his possession of earth is concerned.
While he was true to the earth his architecture was creative.

The Future of Architecture, 1953

My prescription for a modern house: first, pick a good site. Pick that
one at the most difficult site – pick a site no one wants – but pick one
that has features making for character; trees, individuality, a fault of
some kind in the realtor mind. Then standing on that site, look about
you so that you see what has charm. What is the reason you want to
build there? Find out. Then building your house that so that you may
still look from where you stood upon all that charmed you and lose
nothing of what you saw before the house was built but see no more.
Architectural association accentuates the character of landscape if the
architecture is right.

1938

But a construction was needed where floors would not be carried
between walls...Why not then carry the floors the way a waiter carries
his tray, on upraised arm and fingers at the center – balancing the
load? All supports centered under the floor slabs like that instead of
using the slabs on the walls at their edges as is usually the case? This
meant the cantilever, as I had found it by now.

1955

Classic architecture was all fixation-of-the-fixture. Yes, entirely so.
Now why not let walls, ceilings, floors become seen as component
parts of each other, their surfaces flowing into one another, getting
continuity out of it all or into it all, eliminating any fixture or appliance
whatsoever, as Louis Sullivan eliminated background in his ornament
in favor of an integral whole.

1931

Architecture is the triumph of human imagination over materials, methods and men, to put man into possession of his own earth.

Architectural Forum, 1938

Weather is omnipresent and buildings must be left out in the rain. Shelter is dedicated to these elements. So much so that almost all other features of design tend to lead one another to this important feature, shelter, and its component shade....By shade, charm has been added to character; style to comfort; significance to form.

A Testament, 1955

There is a similarity of vision in creation between Music and Architecture. Only the nature of the materials differ.

An Autobiography, 1943

What architectural beauty I see I know has grown from within outward- out of the necessities and character of the indweller and whatever additional beauty of this kind is destined to be produced will be preceded by a like unconscious beauty of life.

Henry David Thoreau

Man's works must lie in the bosom of Nature, cottages be buried in trees, or under vines and moss, like rocks, that they may not outrage the landscape.

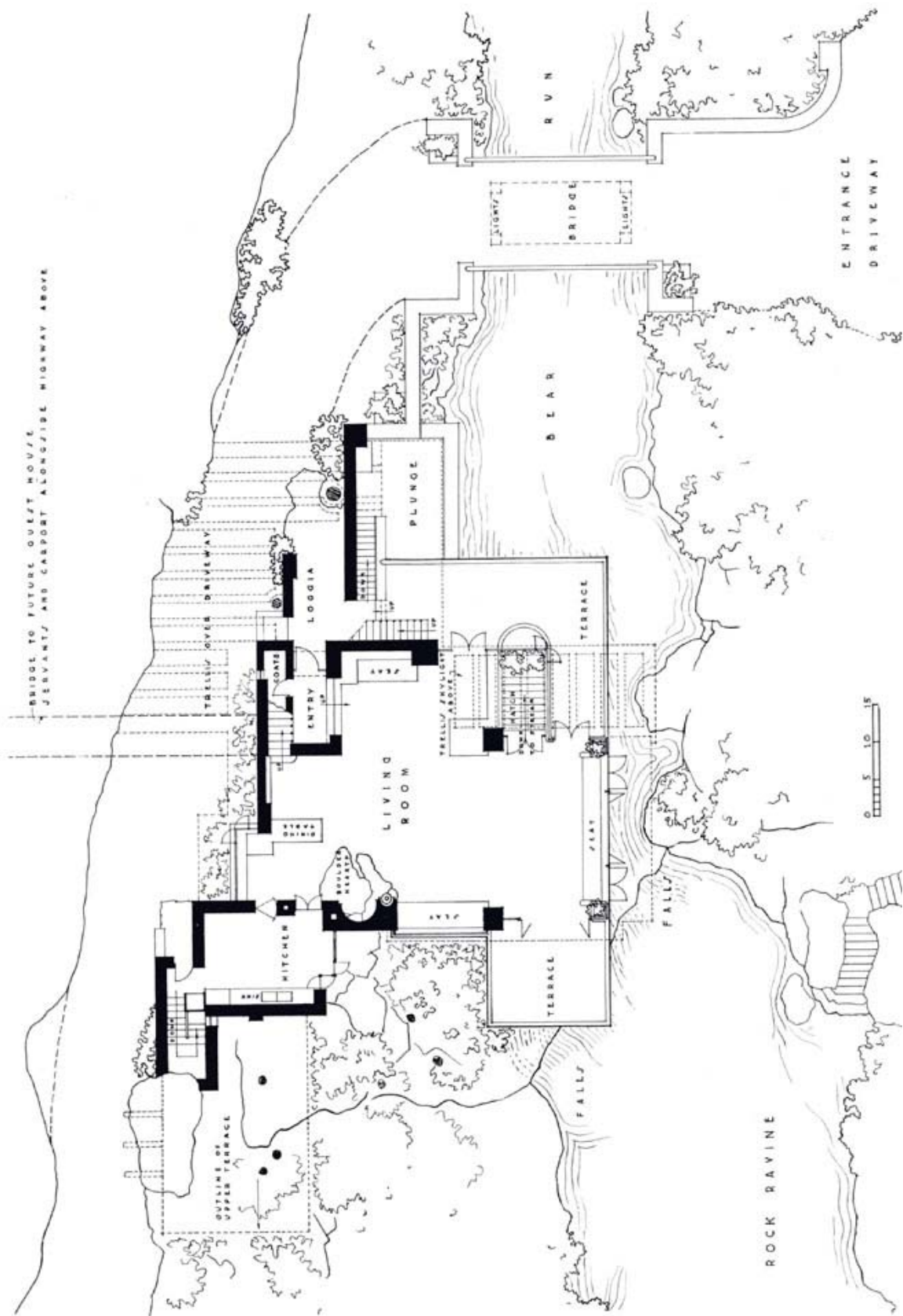
Henry David Thoreau

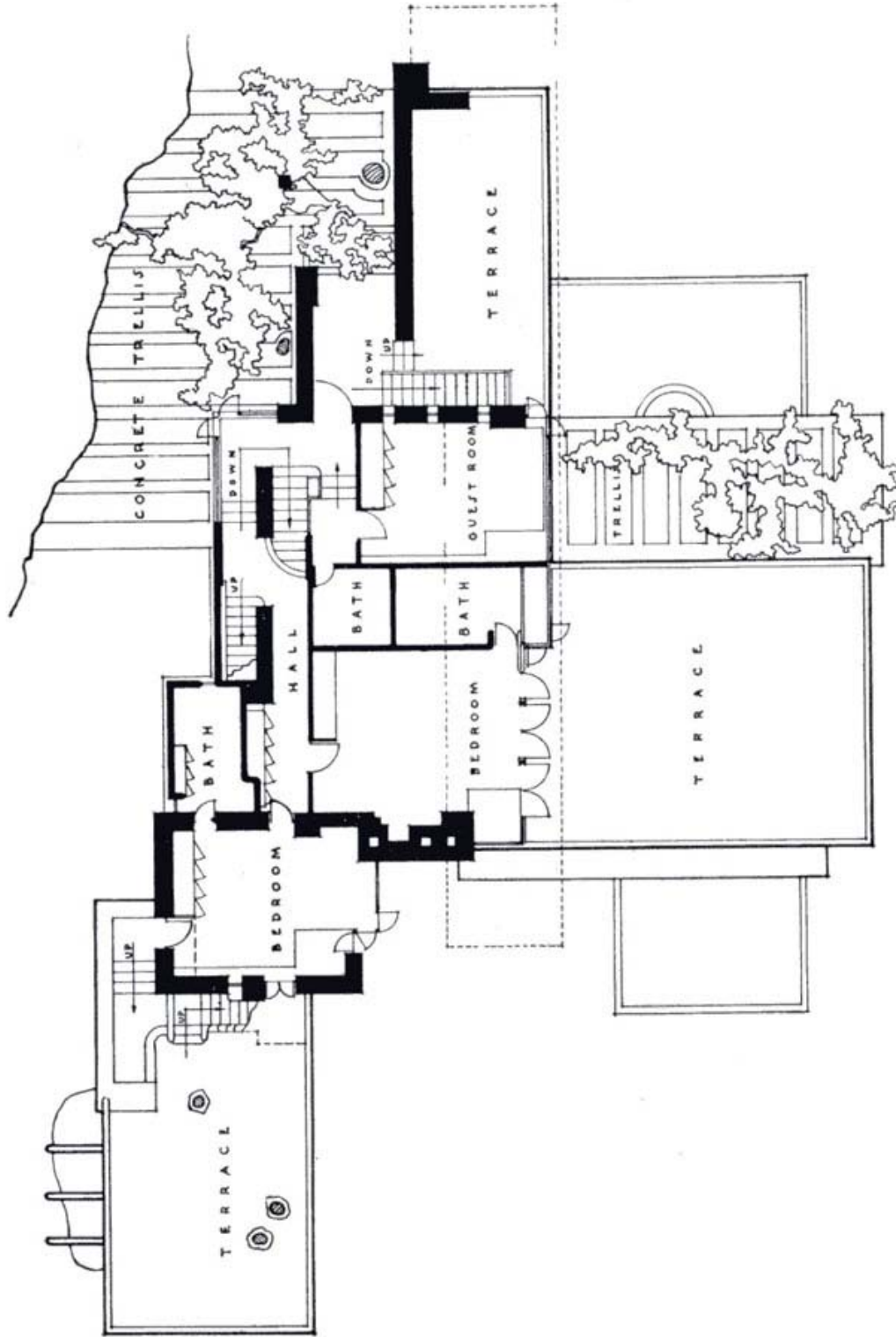
The pleasure a palace or a temple gives the eye is, that an order and method has been communicated to stones, so that they speak and geometrize, become tender or sublime with expression. Beauty is the moment of transition, as if the form were just ready to flow into other forms.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

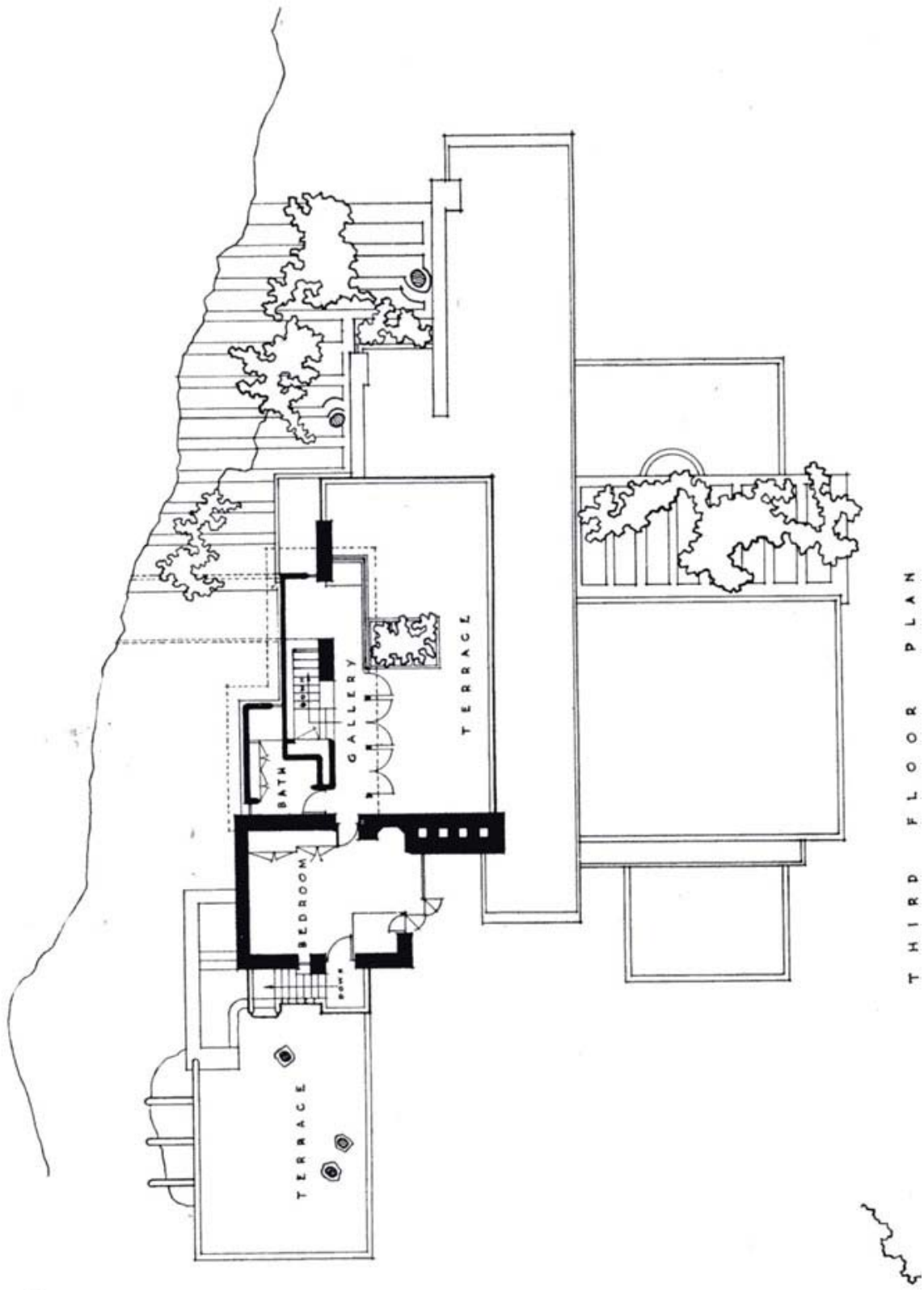
Who are you, indeed, who would talk or sing to America? Have you studied out the land, its idioms, and men? Have you learned the physiology, phrenology, politics, geography, pride, freedom, friendship of the land?

Walt Whitman





S E C O N D F L O O R P L A N



T H I R D F L O O R P L A N