Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Taliesin West

Elisa Leonelli · Tuesday, May 6th, 2025

One of my goals for traveling to the Phoenix Scottsdale area was to visit Taliesin West, the multi structure complex built by Frank Lloyd Wright starting in 1937, where he lived and worked during winters, with his fellowship for architectural students, until his death in 1959.

Wright's office

Pictured above is Wright's office, where he would meet clients and review drawings on the low drafting table.

I first learnt about this influential architect in 1973 from my photography teacher Edmund Teske, who in 1936 lived at Taliesin East in Spring Green, Wisconsin. In 1976 Teske invited his former students to visit the Hollyhock House, in Hollywood's Barnsdall Park. Read my article "Edmund Teske: Art Photography." You may still book a tour today after many renovations, so I did. Click here for my photos and info.

Hollyhock House © Elisa Leonelli 1986

Taliesin West, Hollyhock House, Fallingwater and Guggenheim Museum are 3 of the 8 buildings designed by Frank Lloyd Wright that were inscribed as UNESCO World Heritage sites.

See drawings of New York’s Solomon Guggenheim displayed in the drafting studio

Drafting studio

We booked an audio tour for an early Monday morning, and the narration guided us to explore this spectacular expanse of buildings, laying horizontally below the McDowell mountains. You may follow it yourself by downloading the free app. The tour costs $44, a Behind-the-Scenes tour is $90, but we were happy to support this non-profit foundation.

Triangular Pool

We learnt the four tenets of Frank Lloyd Wright's organic architecture, that should fit together seamlessly with its environment: space, site, material, democracy, and we were pointed to examples of each. Wright stated that Nature was his church.

The shape of the triangular pool echoes the peak of the mountains behind it.

Garden Room

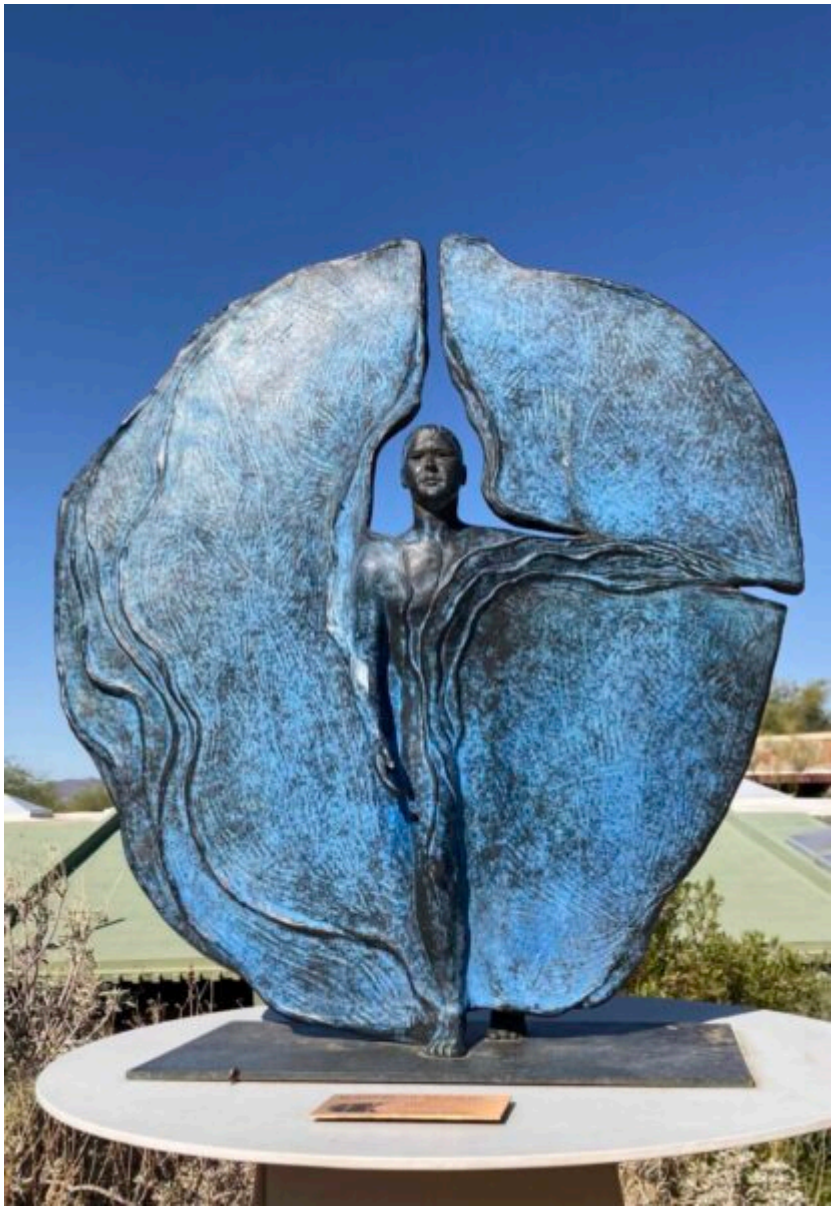
The garden room is a large space for social gatherings, it has windows that were only later fitted with glass, a canvas ceiling that lets in soft light, tables, seating areas, a fireplace.

Taliesin wing chair

The furniture was also designed by Wright, see the angular wing chair.

Chinese screen

On a wall of the adjacent sitting room hangs a large 19th century Chinese screen called “Hundred Flower Offerings for Longevity.”

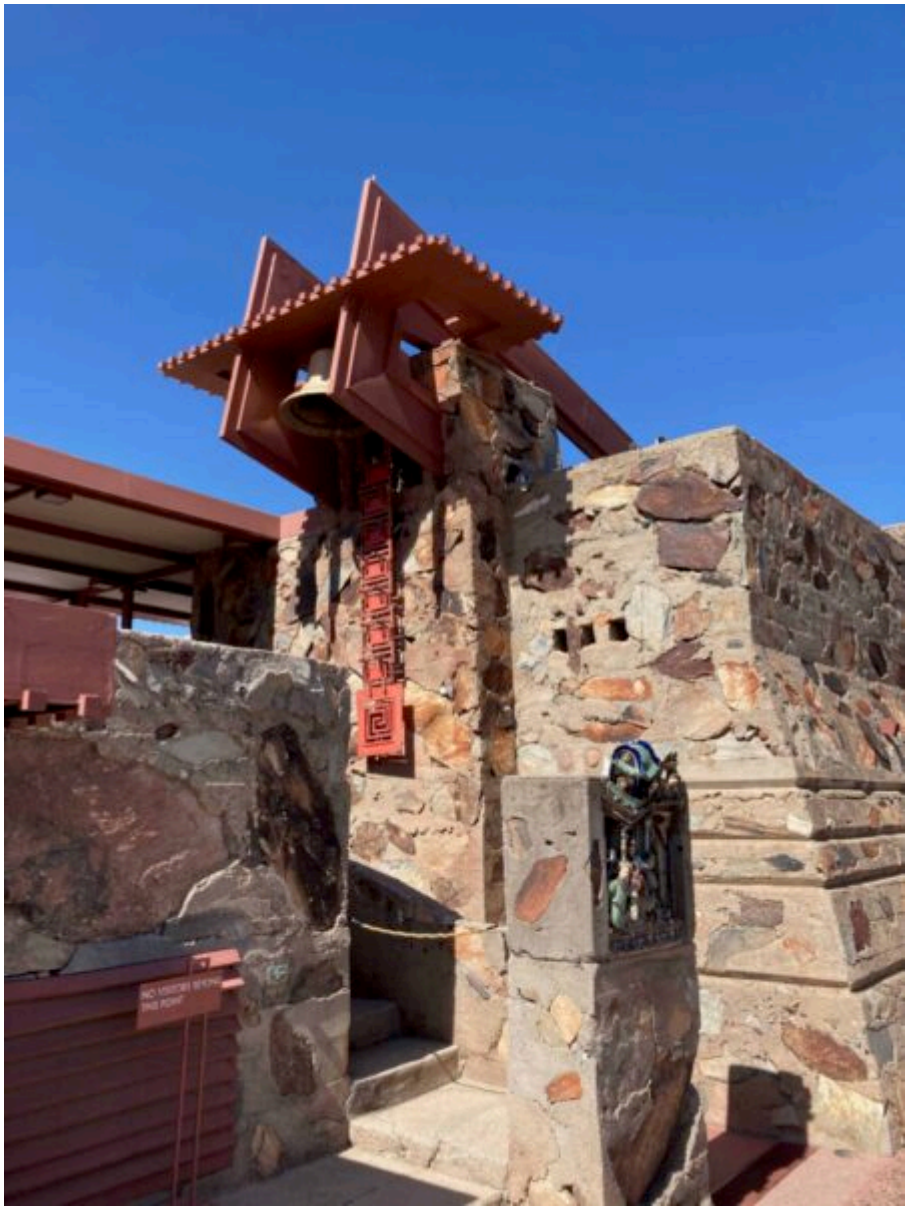


Being in the Moment by Heloise Crista

Many artworks are spread throughout the ground. Near the entrance we admired this bronze sculpture by Heloise Crista, “Being in the Moment.”

Kiva

The Kiva room is most unusual because it’s dark like a cave. It was conceived that way to project movies. It was used to store items during the summer, when the Taliesin Fellowship moved back East to escape the desert heat.



Bell Tower

Under the bell tower, that called students for meals, you can clearly see the local stone materials employed to build the walls.

Cabaret Dinner Theatre

The Cabaret Theater was built in 1950 to host community evenings of movies, performances, music, dining and dancing.

Arizona Biltmore, Phoenix

The Arizona Biltmore was not designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, but it was during its construction in 1927 that the master first visited the area to consult with his former draftsman, Albert Chase MacArthur, who was the architect.

Sprite statue-Taliesin West

In the garden of the hotel, are several sprite statues like those located at Taliesin West. They represent guardians of the earth from Greek Mythology.

For an overview of Frank Lloyd Wright's life and work, watch the documentary by Ken Burns on PBS.

Read here my article on Phoenix and Scottsdale.

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