



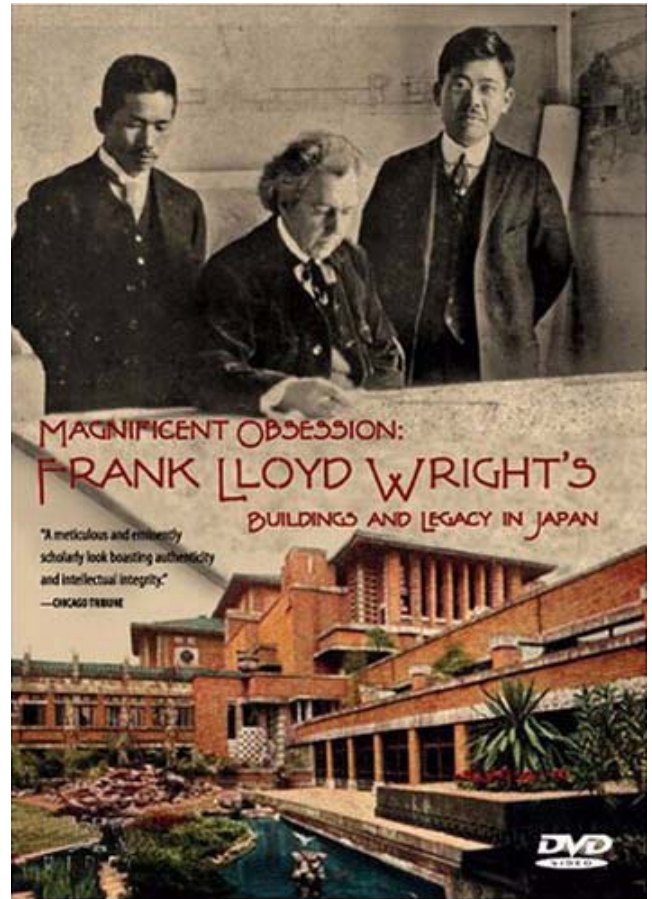
Even the casual fan of Frank Lloyd Wright knows that the great American architect was deeply indebted to Japan for its aesthetic inspirations. But few realize the debt runs both ways.

During the six years he lived parttime in Tokyo, from 1917-1922, Wright designed some 14 buildings and left another, equally significant, legacy: his transformative effect on the men who helped him build the Imperial Hotel. Many of them went on to create their own masterpieces, to alter Japan's cityscapes and mentor a new generation of architects.

Magnificent Obsession is the first documentary to focus exclusively on Wright's "great living creative spirit" in the only country outside America in which he lived and worked — illuminating the one remaining aspect of Wright's career that had remained obscure.

Wright designed for Japan an embassy, a school, two hotels and a temporary hotel annex, a commercial-residential complex, a theater, an official residence for the prime minister and six private residences (among other buildings that may have been designed, but records have been lost). Of these, six were built: the Imperial Hotel and Annex, the Jiyu Gakuen School, the Aisaku Hayashi House, the Arinobu Fukuhara House and the Tazaemon Yamamura House.

Magnificent Obsession explores these lasting monuments to Wright's genius, as well as examining the careers and work of his Japanese apprentices and emulators. The documentary traces Wright's magnificent obsession with Japan — and Japan's with the great architect — from approximately 1890 to 2004, featuring historic and new film footage, hundreds of rare and unpublished photos, drawings and plans, and extensive interviews with Wright specialists and the descendents of his Japanese colleagues.



PRODUCED, DIRECTED, PHOTOGRAPHED AND EDITED BY: Karen Severns and Koichi Mori

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WITH: Donald Richie as the voice of Frank Lloyd Wright; *MUSIC DIRECTOR:* Curtis James Patterson

Copyright 2005 Karen Severns/Koichi Mori US and Japan; Color & B/W Full Screen 126 minutes; All-Zone NTSC DVD



Ordering The DVD

The *Magnificent Obsession* DVD (SRP: \$29.95 US) can be ordered directly from Prairie Multimedia, Inc.

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Wright In Japan

Frank Lloyd Wright's fascination with Japan began with ukiyo-e woodblock prints in the late 1880s and spanned his entire lifetime. When the 37-year-old architect made his very first trip outside America, in 1905, it was not to Europe — that mecca of Western architecture — but to Japan. With his wife Catherine and another couple, he spent two months touring natural and historical landmarks from Nikko all the way down to Takamatsu. Wright was able to maintain his idealized image of Old Japan throughout the visit, despite the country's wholesale rush to modernize, calling it “the most romantic, most beautiful” nation on earth.

Wright always credited Japan's arts, and not its architecture, with inspiring his work. But while in the Japanese countryside, he could not have helped absorbing the vernacular of the temples, shrines and homes: the hip-gabled roofs; the gigantic overhanging eaves; the endless tatami mats; the fusuma and shoji panels used to reshape rooms; the union of interior and exterior spaces. In these traditional structures, he found confirmation of the organic design principles he had been developing for a decade.

The Wrights returned home as Japanophiles. Within a year, Wright mounted his first ukiyo-e show at the Art Institute of Chicago. For the next two decades, much of his income would be from the thousands of prints that passed through his hands.

Prompted by Frederick Gookin, a friend and fellow Japanese print dealer, Wright began a vigorous pursuit of the contract to build Tokyo's new Imperial Hotel in late 1911. The first golden age of his career had recently drawn to a close with several years of personal upheavals; when his mistress was brutally murdered in 1914, Japan seemed an even more alluring refuge from the public condemnation at home. Finally, after years of project delays and several trans-Pacific crossings, Wright took up temporary residence in Tokyo in January 1917.

Over the six tumultuous years he lived off and on in Tokyo, Wright poured his prodigious creativity into the Imperial Hotel project. It would remain, as the many decades of his career passed, his largest and most complex design. He also designed at least a dozen other buildings for Japan, including an embassy, a school, a hotel and a temporary hotel annex, a theater, a commercial-residential complex and seven residences. Of these, six were built: the Imperial Hotel and Annex, the Jiyu Gakuen School, the Aisaku Hayashi House, the Arinobu Fukuhara House and the Tazaemon Yamamura House. Only the school and Yamamura House survive, along with portions of the Imperial and Hayashi House.

But Wright left another, equally significant, legacy in Japan: his transformative effect on the men who helped him build the Imperial Hotel. Many of them went on to create their own masterpieces, to alter Japan's cityscapes and mentor a new generation of pioneering architects. Among these were his righthand man, Arata Endo, the first architect to share credit with the master; Antonin Raymond, the Czech-born “violent evolutionary” who led Japan's modernist movement during his 43 years in the country; Kameki and Nobu Tsuchiura, who followed Wright to Los Angeles and stayed with him for two years; Yoshiya Tanoue, Takehiko Okami, Eizo Sugawara, Muraji Shimomoto, Taro Amano and their professional progeny.

Wright In Japan text written by Karen Severns Copyright 2006.

Testaments

It is a wonderful film and a revelation on my grandfather's connection to Japan. I never knew how extensive it was.

ERIC LLOYD WRIGHT, Grandson and Architect

In telling the Japanese side of the story, Severns and Mori have clarified an important, little-known phase in the architect's work.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM, Chicago Reader

A meticulous and eminently scholarly look at Frank Lloyd Wright's Japanese projects and colleagues... boasting authenticity and intellectual integrity.

SID SMITH, Chicago Tribune

Intently educational, this highly detailed documentary examines the Japanese episode of Wright's career. Most impressive is the influence on Japanese disciples who continued designing buildings with their interpretations of Wright's aesthetic.

BILL STAMET, Chicago Sun-Times

One of the great strengths of this documentary is its unusually thorough treatment of the contributions made by the architects who worked with Wright on the Imperial Hotel and other Japanese projects.

JONATHAN REYNOLDS, Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians