

communiqué /press release**For immediate release****CCA to Reconstruct Five Visionary Projects, Designed to
Build a New Relationship Between Americans and Their Land****Second Exhibition in *The American Century* Series Examines Crucial but
Little-Known Projects by American Architecture's Central Figure, Frank
Lloyd Wright**

Montréal, 18 June 1996 — A revolutionary approach to the relationship between building and landscape, which shaped them together according to peculiarly American ideals, is the subject of the second exhibition in the Canadian Center for Architecture's series ***The American Century, Frank Lloyd Wright: Designs for an American Landscape, 1922-1932***, on view at the CCA from 18 June to 29 September 1996. In this exhibition, curated for the CCA by David G. De Long, Professor of Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, the CCA has reconstructed five unbuilt, visionary projects that imagined nothing less than a new American landscape, integrating terrain, architecture, and the automobile on a vast scale.

Second Year of the CCA's Multi-Year series *The American Century****Frank Lloyd Wright: Designs for an American Landscape, 1922-1932***

launches the second year of CCA's major series ***The American Century***. It will be followed this fall by the exhibition ***Viewing Olmsted: Photographs by Robert Burley, Lee Friedlander, and Geoffrey James***. Together, these exhibitions reconsider two bold proposals for realizing the American dream – politically, socially, and architecturally – through a massive reworking of the interplay between built and natural landscapes. Organized by Phyllis Lambert, Director of the CCA, the multi-year series of exhibitions ***The American Century*** seeks to cast a fresh eye on critical aspects of modern America's architectural culture – its promises and disappointments, its roots and offshoots, its unparalleled worldwide impact.

"By pairing Wright and Olmsted," Lambert states, "CCA is inviting reflection on two very different approaches to city and landscape. Where Wright moved the city to the wilderness, Olmsted brought the wilderness to the city. Both, however, were interested in the peculiarly American equation between open space and social health. In reconstructing the one proposition and revisiting the other, we hope to challenge current thinking on this critical issue, and to extend our debate on the American Century."

The American Landscape and the Challenge of the Automobile: Frank Lloyd Wright in the Twenties

According to Nicholas Olsberg, Chief Curator of the CCA, ***Frank Lloyd Wright: Designs for an American Landscape, 1922-1932*** "looks at a cluster of issues that are critical to an understanding of American architectural culture in the first half of the 20th century, when the automobile was an opportunity rather than a threat. Looking back at these projects, we may feel we missed out on some imaginative ways to make the best of the automobile. Wright was imagining new ways of moving through the landscape, which he intended to shape just for that purpose, proposing a new relationship between building and the land. The research that went into this exhibition, along with the reconstruction of the projects, reveals as never before how Wright envisioned rearranging the terrain on an immense scale – not only settling a building in sympathy with the land, but actually completing the work of nature."

"Wright came to shape the land as a parent shapes a child," comments David G. De Long, "not to suppress inherent qualities, but to reveal and enhance them." The exhibition offers visitors the excitement of seeing, in the drawings themselves, how Wright sought out the underlying structure in a landscape, discovering and enhancing its geometric elements. His buildings would not only echo the landscape but also shape and unify it. Profoundly sympathetic to an Emersonian belief in the spirituality of nature, "Wright resisted the detached, deliberately neutral geometries of modernist architecture," De Long explains, "seeking instead to achieve a universal meaning through attachment to place."

Original Drawings, Models, and Computer Animations Bring Projects to Life

The exhibition – the first to use original materials to examine a single theme in Wright's work – features more than 150 original drawings for the boldly imaginative projects. Drawings on loan from the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation and the Library of Congress (co-organisers of the exhibition with the CCA) are reunited with drawings from other repositories and collections, including those of the CCA. Many of these drawings are on display for the first time.

In addition, the CCA exhibits five newly commissioned, three-dimensional models by architect George Ranalli. Each is an analytic reconstruction of how a project might have looked in its site. Computer animations of three of the projects, shown on video monitors, suggests how people might have experienced these projects and their landscapes while moving through them by automobile or seaplane – an all-important facet of Wright's designs.

The Doheny Ranch Development

The first of the projects, conceived in 1923, was a speculative scheme for a suburban development to be built on the Doheny Ranch, a long, narrow parcel of open land that lay at the base of the Santa Monica Mountains, in what is today Beverly Hills. Wright envisioned the entire Doheny project as a cohesive architectural landscape, with buildings and roadways joined so persuasively to the site's steep, undulating ridges as to enlarge the grandeur of the natural setting. The Doheny project proposed an image of the residential development as a single, integrated structure. It also heralded, perhaps for the first time, the potential of the automobile to shape the built environment in a positive way.

Lake Tahoe Summer Colony

During the summer of 1923, Wright embarked upon a second speculative venture, this one for a summer resort colony on Emerald Bay at Lake Tahoe, California. Cabins nestled into the wooded slopes were designed in an unprecedented grammar of steeply angled shapes, which seemed to amplify the inherent qualities of the mountains. This mainland development would have been connected by a thousand-foot pier to the focal point of the project: an inn built over Emerald Bay itself, adjacent to Fannette Island. Supported on pontoon-like piers and enclosing water courts within its clusters, the inn, like the mainland cabins, would have had pitched roofs, rows of dormers, and massive chimneys appropriate to the image of a mountain lodge. In addition, Wright proposed to create

floating cabins for the inn: barges, each richly embellished with decorative elements, which would have allowed visitors to move freely about the bay in a constantly changing configuration.

The A.M. Johnson Desert Compound

The third of Wright's projects, designed in 1923–24, was a residential compound for insurance tycoon A.M. Johnson, to be built along Grapevine Canyon, overlooking the northern end of Death Valley. Wright envisioned a series of corbeled concrete-block walls that stretched almost a thousand feet across the site, incorporating existing buildings into a single composition that embanked the low hill on one side and bridged north over a ravine to a second hill farther within the canyon. Wright sited the main house so it would look directly down Grapevine Canyon toward Death Valley, using his composition to reinforce the larger frame of the surrounding mountains. To replace the original road that meandered along the rim of the valley, he proposed constructing an angled embankment leading straight toward an opening within the lower wall of the main building, where the road was to run under the bridge element and up the ravine. There it would have joined with a secondary road, which was to ramp up around a central pool and back through the house itself to a platform projecting on the north, affording a dramatic view down the canyon. The massive, angled buildings of the compound were to rise from unified terraces that linked the desert with the mountains. Channels of water flowing from within the complex gave special prominence to the intertwined roadways.

The Gordon Strong Automobile Objective

The Gordon Strong Automobile Objective (1925), designed for Sugarloaf Mountain in Maryland, took both its purpose and its shape from the movement of the automobile through the landscape. Designed at the request of real-estate speculator and auto enthusiast Gordon Strong, the Objective was to be a recreational destination for motorists taking short trips from Washington, DC, and Baltimore. Wright responded to the request by envisioning a monumental, circular building constructed of concrete, which would have created a new summit for Sugarloaf Mountain. Motorists would have driven up the outside of the building on a spiral ramp, from which they would get constantly changing views of the countryside below; the down ramp would have run inside the building, where Wright proposed constructing the parking garage, along with amenities such as a dance hall, an

auditorium, and a planetarium. This project – Wright's first to use circular geometries to shape an entire plan – was the forerunner of his design for the Guggenheim Museum, and perhaps his ultimate celebration of the automobile's power to generate new patterns of leisure and living.

San Marcos-in-the-Desert

Of the five projects in the exhibition, the one that came closest to being realized was San Marcos-in-the-Desert (1928–29), a resort hotel in Chandler, Arizona. The hotel was to have been a luxury resort owned by Alexander J. Chandler, who had opened the San Marcos Hotel near Phoenix a few years earlier. Situated at the base of the Salt River Mountains, the resort would have offered a foreground view of a broad, flat plain, with hills bordering each side; a wide gap between these hills would have opened the view to the greater desert beyond. Automobiles would have approached up, then under, the building along the diagonal line of a natural ravine. As in the A.M. Johnson Compound, the building was to bridge this ravine, joining separate parts of the land into a single composition. Flowing pools of water parallel to the line of the ravine would have made the building itself seem a source of water. From this central core, long, low wings, containing private suites, would have stretched out on each side, terracing the natural slope of the hills. The angles of the existing contours – indeed, the desert setting itself – suggested triangular shapes to Wright, which he would have built with his recently developed textile-block method. Augmenting the desert's natural light by means of sweeping, unified terraces, Wright's design would have imparted an element of cosmic scale to his shaping of the landscape. Plans for constructing San Marcos-in-the-Desert were going forward when the stock market crash put an end to the project.

Accompanying Exhibition Reveals the Context for Wright's Projects

At the same time as it exhibits ***Frank Lloyd Wright: Designs for an American Landscape,***

1922–1932, the CCA presents a smaller exhibition, ***"The Horizontal Line of Freedom": City, Road, and Country in North America, 1917–1939.*** Drawing on bibliographic materials, the exhibition offers a background to Wright's five projects, as well as his utopian plan of 1932 for Broadacre City.

Introduced in 1908, the Model T Ford brought the automobile to the masses, offering a freedom of movement unfettered by the railway schedule. By the 1920s, the family car was an established element of American culture. Parkways provided easy access to picnic sites and resorts; more ambitious highways linked rural and urban populations, breaking down the barriers between the two, until the idea of suburbia had all but blurred the distinctions. By documenting these developments, **"The Horizontal Line of Freedom": City, Road, and Country in North America, 1917–1939** establishes the contextual reality behind Wright's projects: the automobile, instrument of democracy, would be a vehicle for social change.

Major Catalogue and Booklet Accompany the Exhibition

In conjunction with the exhibition, Harry N. Abrams, Inc. publishes a major catalogue, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Designs for an American Landscape, 1922–1932*. In addition to essays by David G. De Long and Anne Whiston Spirn, the catalogue includes a chronology, compiled by Robert Sweeney, of Frank Lloyd Wright's life and work for the decade covered by the exhibition. C. Ford Peatross has assembled a portfolio illustrating representations of the automobile and roadway for the period 1922–1932. The 208-page book, featuring 179 illustrations (including 93 plates in full color), is available in a paperback edition (priced at \$39.95 Canadian) and in a hardcover edition from Harry N. Abrams (priced at \$59.95) at the CCA Bookstore.

The CCA publishes also a bilingual booklet in French and English discussing the principal ideas in ***Frank Lloyd Wright: Designs for an American Landscape, 1922–1932*** and introducing the series of hypothetical study models developed by architect George Ranalli expressly for the exhibition. Priced at \$12.95 (Canadian), the booklet is sold at the CCA Bookstore.

Public Programs to Include Lecture, Film Series, and Guided Tours

The CCA marks the opening of the exhibition with a lecture by curator David G. De Long, to be held at 5:45 pm in the Théâtre Paul-Desmarais on Tuesday, 18 June 1996. Also in the theatre, the CCA presents a four-part film series, organized in collaboration with the Cinémathèque québécoise. The series, which screens on Thursday evenings at 6:00 pm from 4 to 25 July inclusively, surveys the ways in which filmmakers have represented

American architecture and architects : 4 July,

The City (Steiner and Van Dyke/USA, 1939, 43 min) and **Mur, Murs** (Varda/France, 1980, 58 min.); 11 July, **The Magnificent Amberson** (Welles/USA, 1942, 88 min.); 18 July, **Alphaville** (Godard/France, 1965, 100 min.); and 25 July, **Blade Runner** (Scott/USA, 1982, 120 min.).

Guided tours introducing the exhibition's main themes are offered to the public on Thursday evenings at 7:30 pm and Saturday afternoons at 3:30 from 11 July to 21 September. Reservations are not required. Exhibition tours may also be organized during regular museum hours for groups of 10 or more who book at least two weeks in advance. Private group tours may be arranged by calling (514) 939-7000, extension 2504.

Frank Lloyd Wright: Designs for an American Landscape, 1922-1932 will be on view at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC, from 14 November 1996 to 15 February 1997.

The exhibition is organized jointly by the Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal; the Library of Congress, Washington, DC; and the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, Scottsdale, Arizona. Ford Peatross of the Library of Congress and Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer of The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation were instrumental in initiating the exhibition with Nicholas Olsberg of the CCA. The Frank Lloyd Wright Archives are the source of some 100 drawings. New York architect George Ranalli built the three-dimensional models of the projects. John Danahy of the Centre for Landscape Research of the University of Toronto created the computer-animated video models. In addition to essays by David G. De Long and Ann Whiston Spirn in the catalogue, Robert Sweeney compiled the chronology of Frank Lloyd Wright's life and work during the decade covered by the exhibition.

The series *The American Century* is supported by a grant from the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts.