



Call for papers

Conference

Frank Lloyd Wright's legacy in France: transmissions, appropriations, hybridizations

Laboratoire HiCSA / Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne
Laboratoire AHTTEP / École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Paris-La Villette

Paris

**Galerie Colbert-INHA and ENSA de Paris-La Villette
March 17 and 18, 2026**

Calendar

- Call for papers: June 2025
- Return of proposals: September 30, 2025
- Acceptance of proposals: October 28, 2025
- Symposium: March 17 and 18, 2026
 - March 17: University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Galerie Colbert-INHA
 - March 18: ENSA de Paris-La Villette
- September 2026: submission of texts for publication

Organizing Committee

Sophie Descat (ENSA Paris-La Villette), Eléonore Marantz (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne), Catherine Maumi (ENSA Paris-La Villette).

Scientific Committee

Barry Bergdoll (Columbia University), Pippo Ciorra (MAXXI, Rome), Sophie Descat (ENSA Paris-La Villette), Antoine Fily (La Sapienza University, Rome/LRA, ENSA Toulouse), François Giustiniani (Archives départementales Hautes-Pyrénées), Isabelle Gournay (University of Maryland), Gilles-Antoine Langlois (ENSA Paris-Val de Seine), Caroline Maniaque (ENSA Normandie), Eléonore Marantz (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne), Bruno Marchand (EPFL), Gilles Marseille (Université de Lorraine), Claude Massu (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne), Catherine Maumi (ENSA Paris-La Villette), Mélina Ramondenc (ENSA Grenoble).

Arguments

This conference is intended our knowledge of a still unknown part of French architectural production of the second half of the twentieth century, a prolific period for architecture, but of which certain aspects remain to be explored and questioned, particularly approaches and proposals outside the mainstream.

The theme of Wright's legacy, of its transmission and reappropriation in France, stems from several observations: over the past fifteen years, pioneering studies have been carried out on architects who have claimed, in various ways, their attachment to the work of the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright's work itself has also undergone a necessary critical and historiographical renewal¹. Monographs have been published, master's theses and doctoral dissertations defended, archives classified, and buildings protected as heritage. These numerous initiatives have highlighted the French figures of "another modernity"², sometimes presented in the specialized press, as an "unknown France"³.

Nevertheless, no attempt of shared reflexion to go beyond the assumption of singular trajectories, often deeply rooted in specific regional contexts (Île-de-France, Brittany, South-West, or Provence⁴), has yet been made. One of the objectives of this conference is to try to bring out a more collective history, to link the particular and the general, to raise more transversal questions, to reconsider an architectural production which, in certain respects, strongly interacts with our own contemporaneity, including in its most striking paradoxes.⁵

In January 2017, in a lecture at the Musée d'Orsay, the architectural historian Jean-Louis Cohen partially sketched out the contours of the subject. He evoked the multiple paths initiated by the reception of Wright's work in Europe, and the way it feeded the approaches of architects who wished to design and build differently, from Italy to the Soviet Union. Cohen mentioned, without going into detail, the specific case of a "late French Wrightism, the history of which needs to be written"⁶. The purpose of this conference is to contribute to analyze it. Can we sketch out a chronology of Wright's reception in France, and identify the actors and the modalities of this reception? Is it possible to identify a common ground in the way French architects have built on this heritage? Can we gain a better understanding of their own architectural production, whose conservation is now sometimes threatened, by paying a more collective attention to it?

¹ Particularly since the exhibition "Frank Lloyd Wright 150: Unpacking the Archive", organized at MoMA in New York under the direction of Barry Bergdoll in 2017, at the time of the 150th anniversary of the architect's birth. In correlation, two series of conferences were held in France at the Musée d'Orsay and the Université de Lorraine in Nancy.

² Indeed, several publications have this name in their titles: Anne-Laure Sol (ed.), *Hervé Baley et Dominique Zimbacca architectes, pour une autre modernité*, Lyon, Lieux-dits, 2018; Jocelyn Lermé and Didier Sabarros, *Edmond Lay, une autre modernité 1930-2019*, Toulouse, Collection Archives d'architectes en Occitanie, 2021.

³ Patrice Goulet and Gilles Ehrmann, "France inconnue 1", *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, n°229, October 1983, p.2-87 and "France inconnue 2", *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, n°230, December 1983, p.2-93.

⁴ For example, architects from Brittany Bernard Guillouët (1929-2022), Claude Petton (1934-2003) and Erwan Le Berre (1936-2010) were the first to be studied by Daniel Le Couédic, who proposed to call them "naturalist-modernists" - "Influences et emprunts dans l'architecture identitaire bretonne du XXe siècle", *Mémoires de la Société d'histoire et d'archéologie de Bretagne*, n°81, 2003, p.295-315. They have since been the subject of more in-depth monographic studies: Baptiste Bridelance, *Claude Petton, une conscience bretonne portée par une pensée américaine*, PhD thesis in Architecture supervised by Richard Klein, Université de Lille, 2023; Christophe Guillouët, Daniel Le Couédic, Jean-Louis Violeau, *Bernard Guillouët. Une vie d'architecture*, Châteaulin, Locus Solus, 2024.

⁵ One of these is the ecological and environmental injunctions that we are trying to resolve, again and again, by resorting to technological innovation.

⁶ Jean-Louis Cohen, "Les lectures de Frank Lloyd Wright, de l'Atlantique à l'Oural", January 19, 2017, Musée d'Orsay, online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=28HzyunIzHU>. See also by the same author, "Wright et la France, une découverte tardive", *Projets et réalisations de Frank Lloyd Wright*, Paris, Herscher, 1986, p.5-14.

Several epistemological prisms can be profitably invested: cultural transfers, inherently connected to the topic⁷, but also architect's training, their material culture, the history of perceptions or of construction, or even the more recent questions linked to environmental history, which can lead us to consider the artifacts themselves as actors⁸ ... the list is not exhaustive. Various kind of methodological investigations can also be developed, including, for example, using testimonies from students, collaborators, clients or users, which allows us to reexamine texts, archives and buildings.

Different interpretations of the term "organic", used by Wright himself to define his conceptual approach⁹, have sometimes complicated the analysis of his own production, as well as the one of the architects who refer to him. Nevertheless, considered in its literal translation into French ("biological"), the notion invites to think about certain characteristics claimed by "Wrightian" architects: "natural" integration into a site and a context; architecture seen as an (organic) process comparable to the growth of a plant reaching towards the light; a fluid spatiality, thought out from the inside out; a "plastic simplicity" inseparable from the materiality and structural specificities of materials; a continuity of design from the constructive detail to the furniture elements; the conception of an architecture taking into account, without *a priori* standardization, of all the events of life, on the scale of the individual and the human group. In this sense, an hypothesis can be formulated: what are the issues of "Wrightian" architects's production? Does this correspond to a specific moment in architectural history, when the knowledge and expertise of the master builder were closely linked? Is there a hierarchy between the attention given to processes on the one hand, and objects on the other, or do they interact to form a coherent whole?

Topics to consider

The following topics may be used as basis for proposals, but they are not restrictive, and the papers can be more cross-disciplinary or discuss related topics.

- *Looking for a legacy: connections, modes of transmission and appropriation*

The first axis focuses on the figures who establish connections, and on modes of transmission and appropriation of Wright's work.

The reception of Wright's work in France began in the 1910s. It experienced a first intensive episode during the interwar period, followed by another after the Second World War: articles devoted to Wright in the specialized press and major national dailies, French translations of his books (from 1955 onwards), the hosting at the École des Beaux-Arts, in the spring of 1952, of the major European retrospective exhibition, "Sixty Years of Living Architecture", coordinated by the architect himself¹⁰. In 1977, the École spéciale d'architecture repeated the experience with a new exhibition, traveling from Naples to Vienna via Paris and Helsinki¹¹. In correlation, French architecture students, and recent graduates, went on numerous and varied learning trips

⁷ Michel Espagne, "La notion de transfert culturel", *Revue Sciences/Lettres*, [En ligne], 1 | 2013: <https://journals.openedition.org/rs/219>.

⁸ Peter Burke, "Le tournant naturel", *Qu'est-ce-que l'histoire culturelle*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2022, p.233-236.

⁹ Particularly noteworthy are the article "In the Cause of Architecture", published in March 1908 in *The Architectural Record*, and the book *An Organic Architecture. The Architecture of Democracy*, published in 1939, which brings together the ideas he had been developing since the 1890s.

¹⁰ Kathryn Smith, *Wright on exhibit. Frank Lloyd Wright's Architectural Exhibitions*, Princeton, Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2017.

¹¹ On this occasion, over 300 drawings were exhibited and a richly illustrated catalog published: Alberto Izzo and Camillo Gubitosi, *Frank Lloyd Wright. Dessins. 1887-1959*, Paris, École spéciale d'architecture, 1977.

to the United States. Considered both as investigations and adventures¹², they allowed French architects to meet the Master or his "disciples" (e.g. Bruce Goff, Herbert Greene, Georges Lautner), or to observe and experiment an architecture not to be reduced only to its representations.

What are French architects looking for when they focus on Wright's architecture, despite the time, the geographical and the cultural gap? Why were some students coming from Beaux-Arts studios (Louis Arretche, Jean Faugeron, Georges-Henri Pingusson and even Noël Lemaesquier,) or a little later, from Hervé Baley's "Sens et espace" workshop at the École spéciale d'architecture¹³, particularly interested in Wright's work? What were the motivations for this intellectual and formal quest? Is it supported by an editorial and critical climate giving Frank Lloyd Wright an increasing a place in French historiography? What are the specific features of these transfers and appropriations? Are they linked to Wright's great interest in Japanese architecture, both learned and vernacular¹⁴. In certain respects, does this precedent facilitate the transmission and re-appropriation of his work, despite the fact it was particularly rooted in an American culture and a way of life?

- Revisiting Organic architecture

The second topic of the conference examines the conceptual approach of French architects who claim to be Frank Lloyd Wright's followers, whether in their practice or in their more theoretical positioning. The objective is to analyze how French architects appropriated, « surpassed » or diverted Wright's legacy.

In reality, despite a strong aptitude for theoretical and critical reflection, the French "organic" architects often put forward a taste for the mastery of geometry, understood as a means of fuelling a creative process open to spatialities incorporating sequences and thresholds, unexpected fluidities and perspectives, and seemingly contradictory volumetric assemblages. Often justified by the quest for a sensitive experience and fruitful links between architecture and its environment, their research has fostered the genesis of unprecedented architectural forms, sometimes expressionist to the point of weirdness. Are there links between their work and Frank Lloyd Wright's approach? What do they retain from Wright's geometry and space? What issues and forms of re-appropriation guide their own approach?

In addition to a narrative approach to architecture¹⁵, Wright also relied on intuitive and poetic - in the original sense of the word – design procedure. This aspect seems to be shared by French architects claiming to be Wright's followers. How do they consider and describe the sensations of the body moving in space? In which programs are they most attentive to this sensitive experience? How do they experiment and justify this conceptual approach, attentive to the human being and his environment?

- Construction as experimentation

A third topic considers the notion of experimentation, from design to completion, examining both the materiality of architecture and the dynamics of project implementation.

¹² Caroline Maniaque, "Le voyage américain et la scène wrightienne 1950-1970", in Anne-Marie Sol (ed.), *op. cit.* note 2, p.26-35.

¹³ Those who have taken this course describe it as a seminal experience. Examples include Iwona Buczkowska, François and Philippe-Alain Riou (Atelier Art-Trait-Design), Jean-Pierre Campredon and Annick Lombardet (Atelier Cantercel).

¹⁴ Kevin Nute, *Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan. The role of traditional Japanese art and architecture in the work of Frank Lloyd Wright*, London, E & FN Spon, 1993 (repr. Routledge, 2000).

¹⁵ Daniel Treiber, *Frank Lloyd Wright. Five approaches*, Marseille, Parenthèses, 2020.

The aim is to analyze the economy of "non-standard" projects of French organic architects, who seem to have singularly resisted to the long and heroic history of innovation that is still ours today¹⁶. Without rejecting typical materials of modernity, such as concrete and glass, they combined them with others, mainly stone and wood, in an approach often described as craftsmanlike.

Did the French architects follow the example of Frank Lloyd Wright's work site practice, where the craftsmen themselves expressed what they had learned from the architect¹⁷? What do we know about the architectural implementation processes of French "organics"? What about their relationship with the clients, and also with people that manufactured and built? How did they invest the building site?

In line with the above considerations, this theme invites analysis of the supposedly pioneering and experimental nature of the approaches of French architects who claimed to be followers of Wright, as well as their current status, often attributed to them, as precursors of ecological architecture.

How to submit proposals

Proposals for papers, in French or English, must be no more than 500 words long, and include a title and a short biography of the speaker. They must describe the current state of the question on the subject, the method of investigation, and the sources and data used. The submitted file should be named as follows NAME_Firstname_wright2026.

Proposals, in french or in english, should be sent **before September 30, 2025** to these three email addresses:

eleonore.marantz@univ-paris1.fr

sophie.descat@paris-lavillette.archi.fr

catherine.maumi@paris-lavillette.archi.fr

¹⁶ On this subject, see n°20, 2024, of *Cahiers de la recherche architecturale, urbaine et paysagère*, "Penser la technique à l'ère du dérèglement global", edited by Roberta Morelli and Jean Souviron.

¹⁷ "What we learned from Frank Lloyd Wright", *House and Home*, February 1959, quoted by Catherine Maumi, *Broadacre City. The New Frontier*, Paris, Éditions de La Villette, 2015, p.102-103.