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ARCHIE TEATER'S STUDIO

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Archie Teater, a prolific Idaho artist, and his wife Patricia, divided their time between Jackson Hole, Wyoming and Archie's native home of Hagerman, Idaho. Seeking a permanent home in Idaho where Archie felt the most inspired, the Teaters decided to construct a studio where they could live and further develop their artistic talents; Archie as a landscape painter, and Patricia as an accomplished ceramicist. With the desire to construct a studio/home that could add to the architectural integrity of Idaho, Patricia Teater contacted Frank Lloyd Wright at Taliesin West in 1951. She explained that she and her husband wanted to "build a spot of interest to humanity" (Henry Whiting, Teater's Knoll, 2). Wright agreed to design the project. The resulting structure "appear[s] to grow easily from its site and [is] shaped to harmonize with its surroundings" (Whiting, 6). This comment made by Wright in 1908, expressing his idea of organic architecture in his Prairie Houses, is also applicable to the Teater Studio because of the structure's connection with the natural environment.

Teater's Knoll, located on a bluff high above the Snake River, just outside Bliss, Idaho "fits its Snake River Canyon setting through the use of Oakley Stone and through its low, angular massing" (Jennifer Attebery, Building Idaho, 138, caption). These ideas are typical of Frank Lloyd Wright buildings. Wright developed an architectural design scheme that incorporated site, environment, and local building materials, thus creating a harmony between the natural and built environment spheres.

Placed along the edge of the canyon, Oakley stone roots the building into the ground, providing a natural break between land and human-made structure. The roof rises slowly from a height of seven feet at the carport to more than twenty feet at the north end of the structure. The mammoth fireplace, also constructed of Oakley stone, thrusts upward from the center of the roof line and is surrounded by clerestory lighting. These features complement the rough canyon with its varying levels and forms.

The diamond scheme design in the red concrete flooring throughout the studio sets the mood and theme for the entire structure.

"The Archie Teater Studio, with its floor plan based on

the parallelogram, is characteristic of some of Wright's later residential work. By the late 1930's and early 1940's, the architect designed walls which were connected at 60 or 120 degree angles. These provided dynamic interior spaces. The angles, when carried through the floor plan for the Teater Studio, combined to form a diamond grid pattern which was troweled into the concrete floor. This grid pattern . . . defines the spaces within the studio. It also offered innovative interior areas which provided feelings of intimacy and grandeur" (Whiting, 5).

The exposed structural beams, dining table, service areas, bookshelves, recessed lighting, window moldings, and virtually everything within the home, and the exterior, follow the diamond-grid scheme. One of Wright's most famous quotes, "a part is to the whole, as a whole is to the part" is exemplified in this structure; all components of the building and site are incorporated into one harmonious relationship.

The blueprints for the Teater Studio were completed in 1953.

Once construction of the project had begun, Patricia Teater's strong and uncooperative personality hindered the construction process. The firing of several contractors, a lawsuit and subsequent courtroom battle delayed construction work considerably; the studio was finally completed in 1957.

Within a few years, the Teaters began to stay away from Teater's Knoll; they devoted their time to extensive traveling to promote Archie's paintings. Eventually, the Teaters constructed another studio in California, abandoning Teater's Knoll altogether by the mid-1970's. Henry Whiting, in Teater's Knoll, implies that Patricia forced Archie to leave the studio. Whiting writes that the new studio did not evoke the same feelings in Archie as did Teater's Knoll. Near his death in 1977, Archie wanted to return to Teater's Knoll to spend the last days of his life, however, he was never able to return, possibly due to Patricia's insistence (Whiting 116).

In the early 1980's, Henry Whiting, a long time student of Frank Lloyd Wright's architectural legacy, purchased the studio and rehabilitated it to its former peaceful elegance. In the rehabilitation process, Whiting removed the anti-Wrightian elements the Teaters incorporated into the structure. The Teaters had placed a pink steel column in front of the fireplace, and used triangular antenna poles at two points on the exterior of the house for structural support. In addition to these changes, Whiting redesigned the kitchen and bath to enlarge each of the spaces. Despite these rather drastic changes to Wright's original design, they have little or no effect upon the form of tight angles following the diamond-grid pattern. These changes only improve the space, making it more habitable without destroying Wright's design. Furthermore, in keeping with the

original design, Whiting rehired the original stonemason on the project to connect the patio and west foundation wall with a newly constructed "bunkhouse" farther down the canyon. The end result is a tight, narrow passageway and set of stairs, suddenly opening up at the "bunkhouse," with a dramatic view of the Snake River Canyon.

Today the site is overgrown with trees and low-lying vegetation, hiding the house, and tucking it even more into its environment. Whereas the building seems as if it has been a longtime companion with its site, even melting into the landscape, the surrounding structures, mobile homes and farm buildings have no respect or regard for the natural environment.

The Idaho architectural milieu would not be the same without this example of organic architecture; a home that enhances Southwest Idaho's landscape, rather than scarring it.

By Joe Siebel