

Building the Good Life: The Intersection of Architecture and Political Thought
Hayden Redelman, Class of 2024

My research this summer investigated the relationship between the work of the architect (i.e. the built environment) and the lives and actions they facilitate. Omnipresent in modern life, buildings become constitutive of the environment many of us most frequently inhabit. Reflecting on even the most mundane of experiences at Bowdoin (e.g. the accessibility of the Smith Union ramp, the conversational intimacy of a Moulton Union Dark Room booth), the constructed environment is not neutral; it seemingly favors, facilitates, argues for certain choices. The question then arises: how does one investigate the life facilitated by a building?

The work of the 20th Century Moderns were identified as especially ripe for such an investigation due to their intended break from social and historical conventions towards a new way of living. While originally intended to investigate Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, and Frank Lloyd Wright, the extensive writings, lectures, and essays of Wright proved rich enough to narrow in on. I gravitated towards his domestic spaces, allowing for an investigation of his views on the family unit, the role of work, and the privacy of the individual.

Political Theory and Architecture provided indispensable for forming the paradigm through which Wright would be interpreted. Their work stems from the premise that architecture is not merely a backdrop to political life but a political force in its own right. As the author of *From a Carpenter's Workshop to a Living City*, Wright greatly steered the direction of the project (Bell and Zack). Two questions led the remainder of the summer: 1.) what is the life Wright strives to facilitate, and 2.) how does the form of his work do so?

Living the Living City and *From a Carpenter's Workshop to a Living City* are both autobiographies. Ultimately, I decided to narrow in on his Usonian homes, buildings designed to be attainable for the average American. Specifically, I narrowed in on the Jacobs House, the archetypal Usonian. Having toured the Miller House by Eero Saarinen earlier in the summer, I opted to build a comparison of the two, serving to clarify the architectural decisions of both designers. The relationship between the two houses was closely studied.

References

Bell, Duncan, and Bernardo Zacka, eds. *Political Theory and Architecture* London ; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022.