



The trunk of the original Frank Lloyd Wright Tea Circle Oak can be seen just behind the second Tea Circle Oak.

Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation

The Frank Lloyd Wright Tea Circle Oaks

Spring Green

Frank Lloyd Wright, one of the world's great architects, felt the natural surroundings of a home or building should be integrated into the overall design of the structure. Though not physically tall, Wright was a towering figure in his genius, and perhaps he identified with a mighty white oak growing on the site he chose for his own home near Spring Green in Sauk County. Some have called Taliesin—the sprawling complex that includes workshops, training ground, farm, recreational haven and living quarters—Wright's finest achievement. He constructed the Tea Circle around two old oaks. There, on warm afternoons while tea was served, Wright would con-

verse with the students who had come to Taliesin to live, work and learn from the master. This practice continues today with the present Fellowship members, even though Wright is gone.

Wright died at 90 in April 1959 at his Arizona winter home and headquarters. Back in Wisconsin soon afterwards, a bolt of lightning shattered the larger Tea Circle Oak beyond saving. However, the smaller oak that had started life under the spreading canopy of the larger tree quickly filled out to replace the Tea Circle Oak that had been hit. The second oak thrived, its canopy eventually extending outward in a diameter of over 100 feet, providing shade and inspiration for the next generation of architects at Taliesin. Tragically, the second original Tea Circle Oak was blown over by a devastating windstorm in 1998. With straight-line winds of over 80 miles per hour, the storm toppled about 15 trees on the estate, including the remaining Tea Circle Oak, which snapped at

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Second Tea Circle Oak

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the base and fell onto the roof above Mr. Wright's studio. R. Bruce Allison and his tree company crew had the daunting task of removing it limb by limb from the building. Many of the remaining original Wright understudies at Taliesin mourned the loss of the tree. Then, with characteristic perseverance and determination, they arranged to have a new oak planted to carry on the tradition. As a symbolic and actual replacement, it seems to embody the spirit of the place, which Wright determinedly rebuilt twice after disastrous fires.

During almost 50 years as master of Taliesin, Wright was often photographed under the older oak with visiting dignitaries who came to pay homage to the greatness of his original architectural achievements, or to visit the magnificent home itself. The name *Taliesin* is Welsh and means *shining brow*, and indeed the house, integrated in organic wholeness with the landscape, curves like a brow on the side of

the hill. Wright made its prairie house style famous, and it truly belongs among the rolling green hills and oak openings of southern Wisconsin.

It is natural to compare Wright to an oak. A man of great strength and will, he survived devastating per-



Second Tea Circle Oak, fallen in 1998

Taliesin Preservation, Inc.

sonal tragedies, an often indifferent or hostile public, and a challenging press. However, he is now generally recognized as a creative genius. He designed more than 600 buildings, pioneered a completely new concept called organic architecture and developed numerous innovations that would be followed for years to come. Perhaps only a man as strong as an oak could withstand the setbacks he endured while never losing the confidence in his own ideas and abilities that enabled him to forge ahead in spite of indifference or criticism.

Sources: Aubrey Banks, Arizona, Spring Green
John Hill, Arizona, Spring Green
Doug Hadley, Taliesin