

HOLLYHOCK HOUSE

A UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE

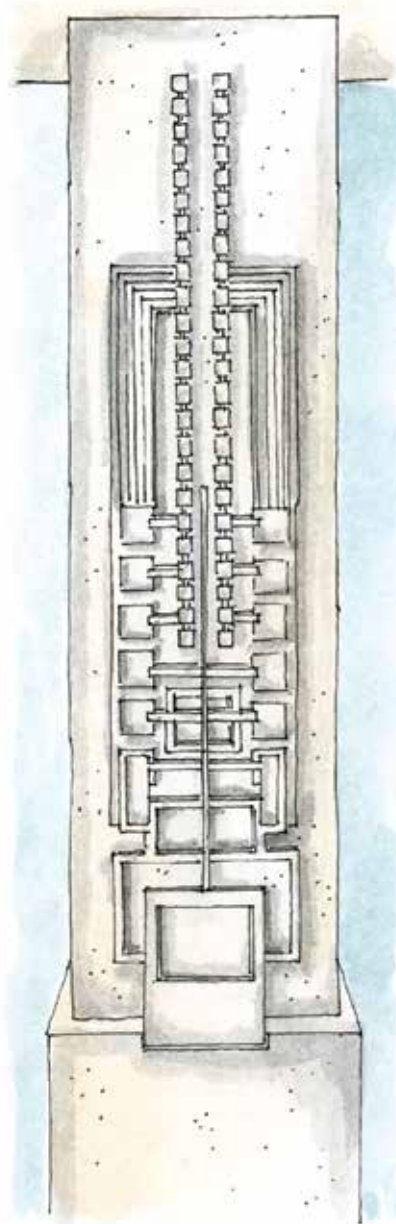


DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS
City of Los Angeles



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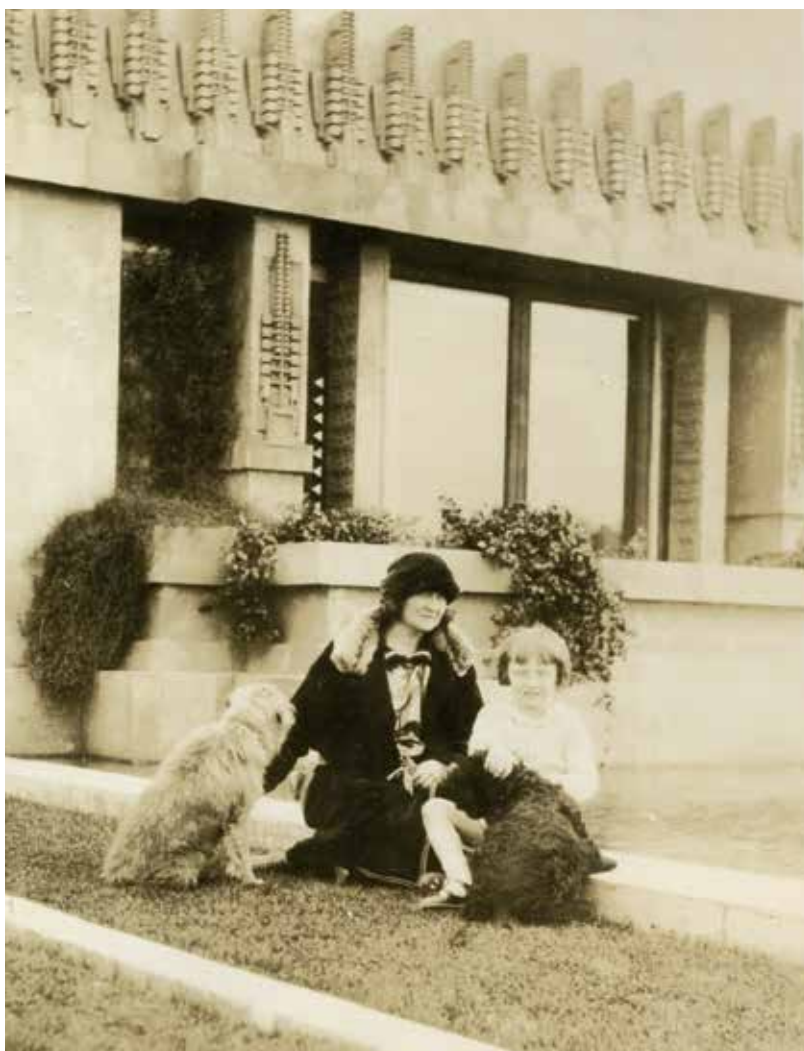
TOUR GUIDE



Hollyhock House was Frank Lloyd Wright's first Los Angeles commission and an ode to California—its freedom and natural beauty. Built between 1919 and 1921 for Aline Barnsdall, the house introduced young architects Rudolph Schindler and Richard Neutra to Los Angeles. It is a harbinger of California Modernism, which came to include celebrated homes by all three visionaries that continue to impact the direction of residential design.

Aline Barnsdall (1882–1946), an oil heiress, commissioned the house as the centerpiece of a cultural arts complex on Olive Hill, which was to include a major theater, cinema, artist residences, and commercial shops. For Hollyhock House—her personal residence—Barnsdall asked Wright to incorporate her favorite flower, the hollyhock, into the home's design.

Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959), one of the most influential architects of the 20th century, was already famous by 1915 when Barnsdall approached him to build a theater for her experimental stage productions. The project provided Wright with an escape from the Chicago area as well as the personal scandals and tragedies that had befallen him there. He established an office in Los Angeles and divided his time between California and Japan, where he was building the Imperial Hotel.



Aline Barnsdall with her daughter, Betty, at Hollyhock House, c. 1923. Courtesy of David Devine and Michael Devine.

The architect and client only partially realized Barnsdall's visionary plan for a thriving art park in East Hollywood, which was then little more than a patchwork of citrus farms surrounding the nascent film industry. Wright built just Hollyhock House and two guest houses. However, under municipal ownership, the park today has grown into a vibrant arts campus with the addition of a gallery, a theater, and art centers, all operated by the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA).



Frank Lloyd Wright touring a visitor at Hollyhock House, c. 1950.

Olive Hill

Hollyhock House dominates its hilltop location—a departure from the usual conventions of Wright’s organic architecture, wherein a structure is integrated into the landscape. The garden walls, however, anchor the house to its site.

Barnsdall purchased the 36-acre property in 1919 to create a destination for arts in the city. Planted with olive trees, the hill had dazzling views of the Los Angeles basin but was relatively remote, located on Hollywood’s eastern edge and far north of Los Angeles’s bustling downtown.

Entrance

Typical of Frank Lloyd Wright's residential designs, the entrance to Hollyhock House is not immediately visible, signaling that this is a private space. One must travel through a long pergola (or covered passageway) before reaching the home's imposing front doors. Only once inside does the space open up, producing a sense of compression and then release.

The cast-concrete doors weigh about 250 pounds each. The mass and unusual material create a monumental impression, as if entering a sacred space or ancient temple.

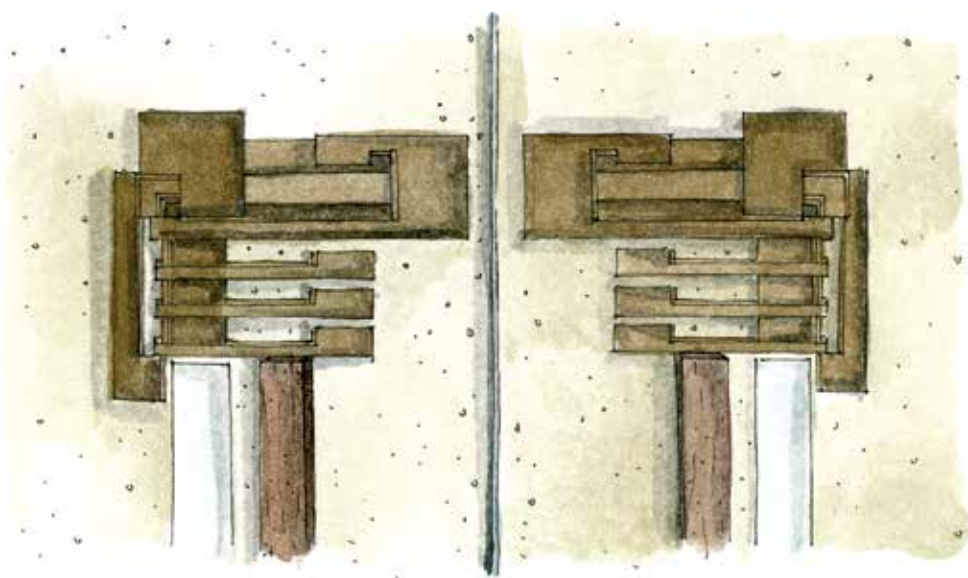
Foyer

Rejecting traditional conventions of domestic architecture, Frank Lloyd Wright created a foyer (or entry hall) open to the adjacent rooms. Subtle structural cues define the space. The ceiling remains low in the entrance and hall, rising in the rooms themselves to provide a sense of openness as one transitions out of the hallway. Wood trim on the ceiling marks the end of the foyer and the beginning of the loggia ahead, itself a low-ceilinged passage. These design elements are typical of Wright's architecture, which have freer, more open floor plans.

To the left, up a short flight of stairs, is the dining room. To the right, filtered by a wood grille, is the adjoining music room. Beyond that are glimpses of the home's most dramatic interior space, the living room. These vistas present a series of inviting options to a person entering the house and create a sense of informality in the main entertaining spaces.

Front Door Locks

The handles and locks—which are cleverly disguised behind sliding brass covers—were designed by Rudolph Schindler (1887–1953). The Vienna-born Schindler moved to the United States in 1914 with hopes of working for Frank Lloyd Wright, and three years later he had secured a position in the architect's Chicago office. In 1920, Wright sent Schindler to Los Angeles to oversee construction of Hollyhock House, replacing Wright's son Lloyd. Schindler continued to work on modifications to the house even after Barnsdall fired Wright in 1921.



Basement Access

In 1946, Lloyd Wright (1890–1978), Frank Lloyd Wright's son, replaced an original first-floor powder room with a staircase to the basement, where he installed new restrooms now used by staff.

Dining Room

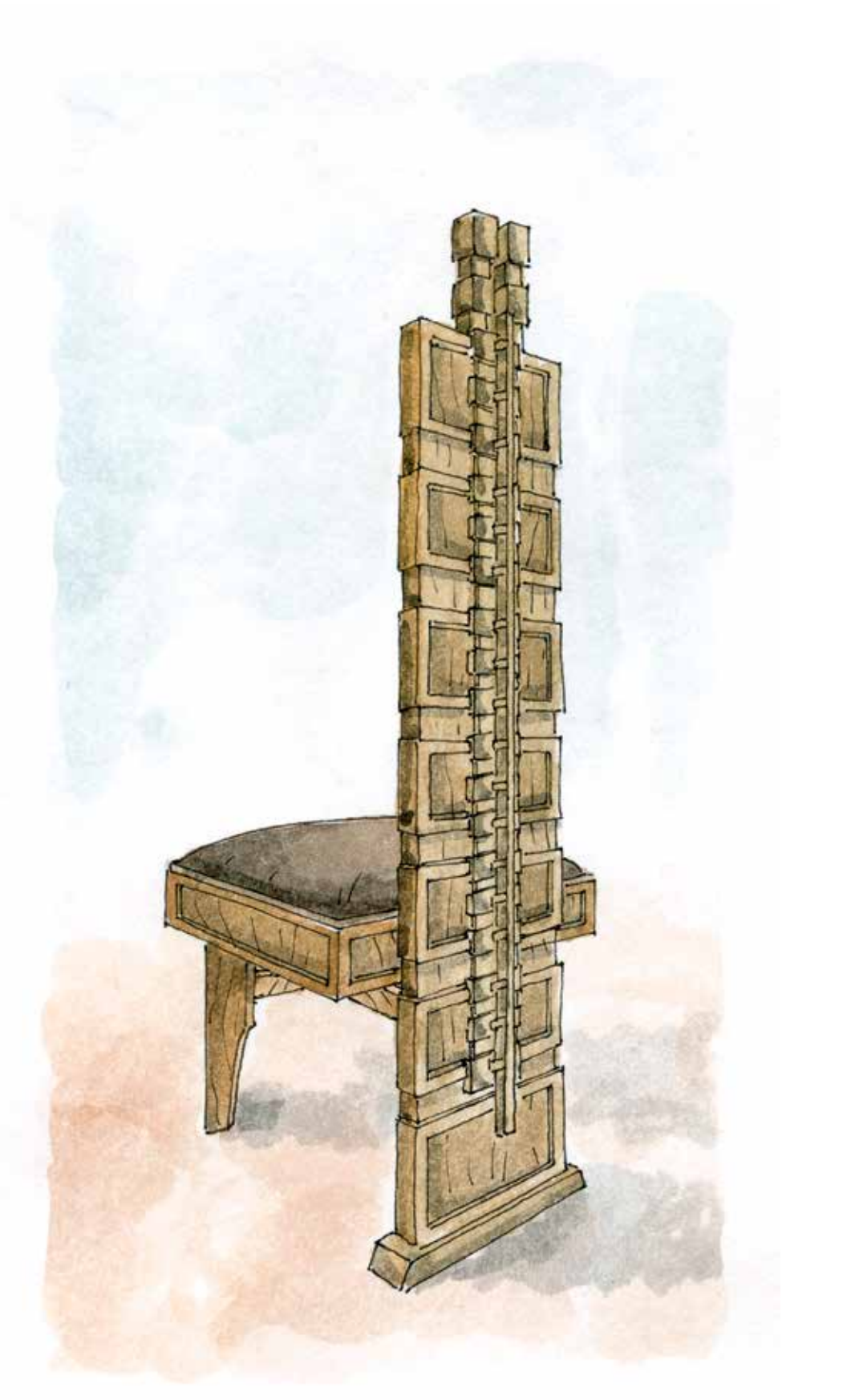
The dining room—with its warm wood surfaces, hipped ceiling, and art glass windows—possesses many features typical of Frank Lloyd Wright's famed Prairie style houses. However, here he created a less formal open space where moldings and a shift in ceiling height are all that distinguish the dining area from the kitchen pathway.

The chairs and table are original Wright designs exclusive to the house. They were built locally of tropical hardwood and reflect variations on the hollyhock motif used throughout the home. Wright often designed furniture for his commissions, even specifying finishes, fabrics, and placement as part of his desire to create a complete and harmonious environment. At Hollyhock House, Barnsdall and Wright differed over plans for the interior and compromised by Wright furnishing only the dining room and living room. Therefore, not all of the architect's designs for Hollyhock House were executed.

Chairs

Wright favored high-backed chairs in his dining room designs. Standing tall, they create an enclosed, intimate space for dining within the larger room. Here the chairs, gathered around a hexagonal table, feature an abstraction of the hollyhock that looks like vertebra and echoes the body of the person seated.

Barker Bros., a Los Angeles manufacturer and retailer, produced Wright's custom furniture for the house. Just the dining room set and a few chairs and tables survive from the original commission; other furnishings have been carefully reproduced.



Light Fixture

Wright did not design the light fixture. He had originally proposed incorporating light panels with art glass into the ceiling above the dining area. However, Barnsdall instead opted to install a hanging fixture, like those popular in Europe. It has been recreated based on photographs of the 1920s interior, along with the wood ceiling mount likely designed by Rudolph Schindler.



Art Glass

Wright created 130 art glass windows for the house, of which approximately 100 originals survive. Others have been painstakingly replicated from photographs and drawings. Hollyhock House is one of the last residences for which Wright designed a complete art glass scheme. His other Los Angeles projects were to include simple plate glass windows.

The dining room windows are set low on the wall so as to allow one best to appreciate the garden views while seated at the table.



Kitchen

In 1946, Lloyd Wright remodeled the kitchen to appear as it does today. The original design is known only through a single incomplete plan. The space included a separate pantry that one would pass through to access the kitchen.

The remodeled room features solid mahogany countertops and a high-end custom stove, an upgrade from the original design with its maple and pine woodwork. Lloyd Wright favored clean, modern lines, which can be seen in the kitchen design and particularly in his introduction of the large horizontal and angled beams.

Imperial Hotel China

While building Hollyhock House, Wright was also working on the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo (1915–1923). The high-profile project kept the architect away from Los Angeles for long periods and divided his attentions to the frustration of Barnsdall, who was traveling extensively herself.

Wright designed not only the Imperial Hotel but also its furnishings, including these dishes for the cabaret (or dinner theater). With their intersecting circles and lines, the patterns relate to motifs used at Hollyhock House, particularly the sculpture above the fireplace and the patio pool.



Servants' Area

Beyond the kitchen, the servants' quarters included two small bedrooms, a bathroom, and a living space. Wright designed the simple finishes with economy in mind. Walls were painted rather than colorfully plastered, and trim was constructed of inexpensive pine. Today the area is used for staff offices.

A basement runs under the north wing of the house. It was intended for laundry and storage and is accessed by a stairwell between the kitchen and servants' rooms. Typical of large homes in the early 20th century, service areas were generally clustered together to allow staff to easily move between the spaces.



Music Room

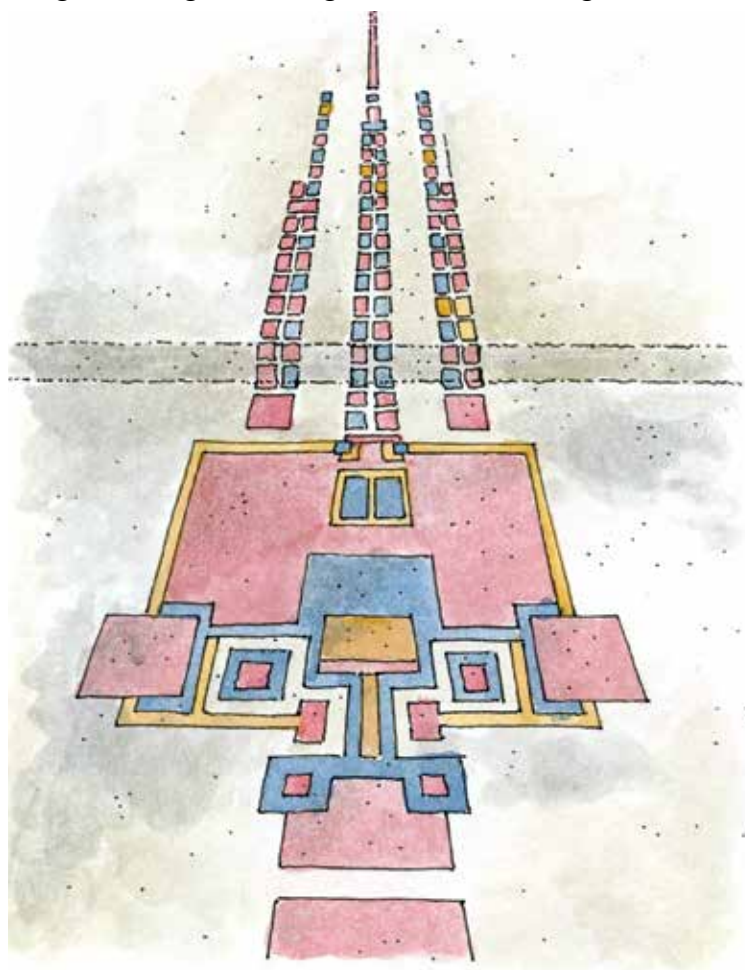
Frank Lloyd Wright long saw a link between music and architecture. He grew up listening to his father play Beethoven and included music rooms in many of his residences. At Hollyhock House the connection manifested itself directly in the design, which Wright characterized as a “California Romanza.” Using the musical term for free form—romanza—the architect captured the commission’s creative potential, given—as he described—“a radical client like Aline Barnsdall, a site like Olive Hill, a climate like California, [and] an architect head on for freedom.”

Few details survive that document the music room’s furnishings. It likely would have contained a piano as well as a cabinet for the latest playback technology—a gramophone. The Victrola record player and piano on display are from the period but not original to the house. The tall cabinets were added by Wright’s son Lloyd as part of later renovations.

Carpet

Extending from the living room into the music room, loggia, and reading alcove, the Wright-designed carpet emphasizes Hollyhock House's open floor plan. The hollyhock motif, done in shades of blue, mulberry, and gold, echoes those seen in the room's custom furniture. Leading New York decorating firm W. & J. Sloane created the rug after months of corresponding with the architect to ensure that the pattern "shall come forward, forming spots of brilliance."

The original carpet was severely damaged and replaced early in the house's history. In 2005, carpet manufacturer Edward Fields made this rug based on Wright's design drawings, letters, and telegrams.



Living Room

According to Frank Lloyd Wright, “Miss Barnsdall wanted no ordinary home, for she was no ordinary woman.”

Here he created a theatrical house, a fitting centerpiece for Aline Barnsdall’s planned arts complex. The living room was the home’s largest and most dramatic space with a spectacular vista and monumental fireplace integrating all four classical elements—fire, earth, air, and water.

The room exemplifies Wright’s design philosophy in which architecture, furniture, textiles, and objects come together to create a unified artistic whole. The custom-designed sofas and furnishings are made of oak, a material favored by Wright and other Arts and Crafts designers. The original sofas were removed from the house but recreated in 1990 as part of ongoing restoration efforts.

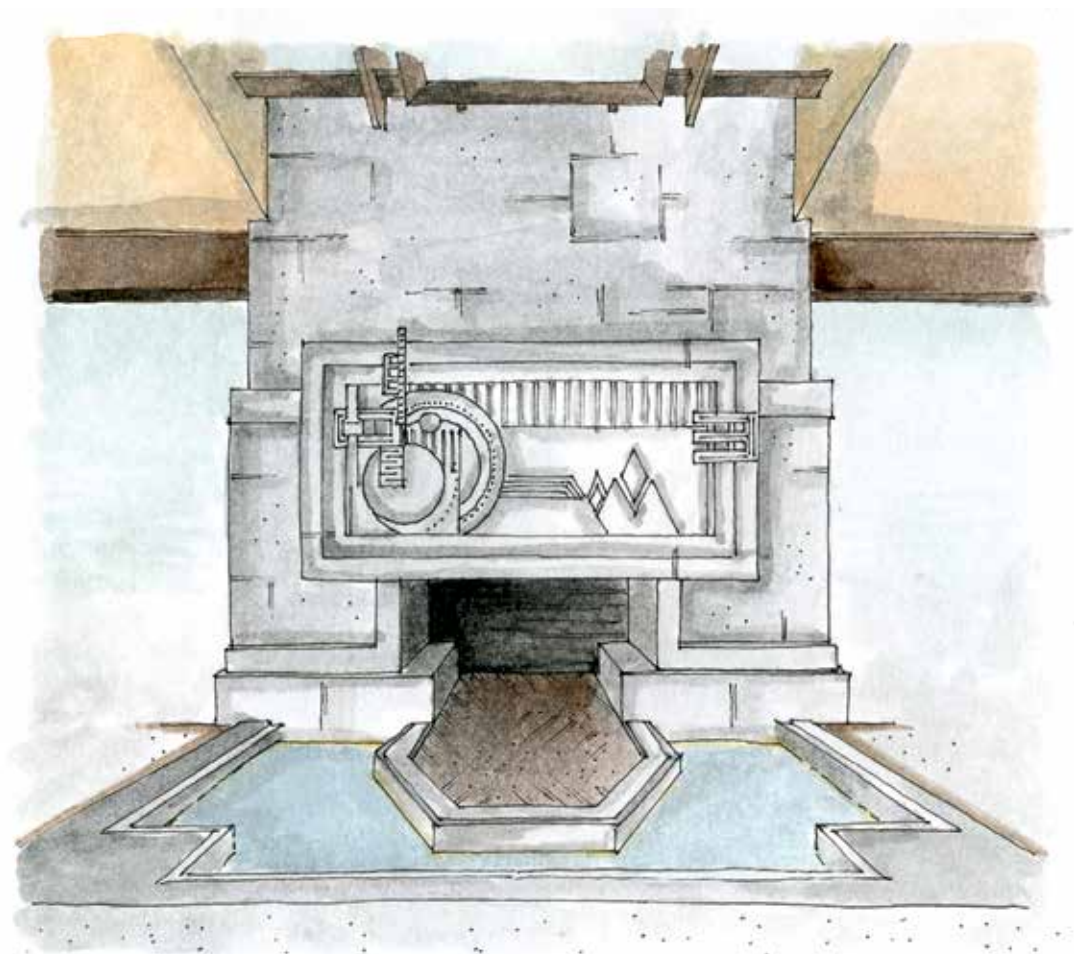
A different set of Japanese screens was originally in the room. The pair currently on view have been installed since at least 1925 and match the description of screens in Barnsdall’s collection. Decorative objects on display have been added based on 1920s photographs of the room.



Living room. Photo by Viroque Baker, c. 1925. Courtesy of Clare Graham.



Reading alcove. Photo by Viroque Baker, c. 1925. Courtesy of Clare Graham.



Bas-Relief

Wright believed the hearth was a home's symbolic center, and his residential designs reflected its importance. Here the monumental fireplace boasts a spectacular bas-relief sculpture that features geometric abstractions of the hollyhock and other forms seen in the house. Constructed of seventeen individual cast concrete blocks, the relief adds to Wright's unified design with dramatic effect that goes beyond merely hanging a painting over the fireplace.

Fireplace Design

At Hollyhock House, Wright experimented with a new design element—water. It originally ran through the house, linking the patio pool with another on the west façade. The water would have surfaced in the living room and was integral to the design of the show-stopping fire place. Oversized sofas faced this focal point like a stage, where—with striking cast stone, art glass overhead, and a moat around the hearth—fire, earth, air, and water came together.

Unfortunately, the fireplace pool did not work properly and was disconnected shortly after the home's completion. Nevertheless, it anticipates the inclusion of water in Wright's most famous house, Fallingwater (1935).

Loggia

Frank Lloyd Wright is best known for creating buildings that respond to their natural environment. In California, he embraced the new landscape and potential for indoor-outdoor living afforded to him by the region's mild Mediterranean climate. Hollyhock House was designed to be half house and half garden. Every major interior room has an exterior counterpart or direct access to the outdoors. Wright also designed the rooftop terraces as outdoor living spaces. The loggia (or porch) is a key transitional space that bridges the home's living room and its exterior equivalent, the patio.

Two large planters and a wall of folding doors bring the outside in. The room's stucco and decorative moldings extend beyond the plate glass windows into the patio area, dissolving the traditional boundaries between indoor and outdoor spaces.

Three Dancing Nymphs

Barnsdall, an avid art collector, purchased the 1st century Roman relief in 1921. She described it as “... the thing I love most, except for my relatives” and placed the marble sculpture prominently in the loggia atop two tables designed by Wright. The original relief belongs to the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. The plaster replica here was created in 2016 through 3D scanning and computer numerical controlled (CNC) milling.



Patio

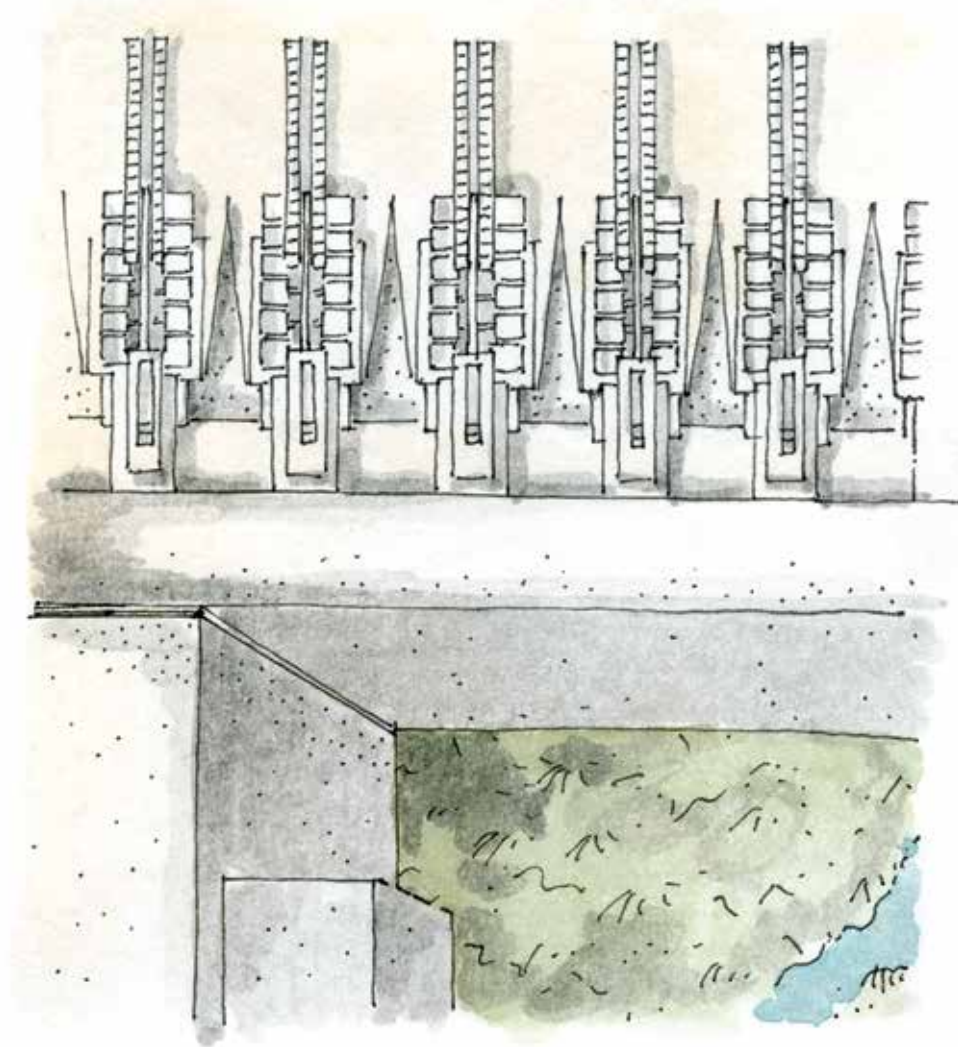
According to Frank Lloyd Wright, “Hollyhock House was to be a natural house ... native to the region of California.” The inner courtyard, typical of Spanish colonial style homes, allowed for the year-round outdoor living so associated with the region. Wright did not copy Spanish motifs but accepted the style’s general forms. The patio here, surrounded by the house on all four sides, functioned as an outdoor room. Its proportions match that of the massive living room, and in the 1920s Barnsdall had wrought-iron and wicker furniture on the lawn.

The hemispheric steps around the central pool evoke the tiered seating of Greek amphitheaters, a fitting reference for Hollyhock House, the centerpiece of Aline Barnsdall’s theater and arts complex.

Pool

The semicircular pool originally fed a stream that connected to the fireplace moat via an underground pipe and then continued to another pool on the west side of the house. At the center of this pool, the statue of a dancing faun is a replica of a famous Roman bronze excavated in Pompeii.





Art Stone

California captivated both Wright and Barnsdall. Here Wright had the opportunity to develop a new regional expression, which broke from the acclaimed Prairie style he had developed in the Midwest.

Instead of duplicating Los Angeles' Spanish Colonial revival architecture, Wright looked instead to pre-Hispanic structures. He evoked rather than imitated Maya architecture with his design of Hollyhock House. The pronounced slope of the upper walls resembles that of the Palace at Palenque, in Southern Mexico. The cast-concrete ornamentation relates to the dense patterning of Maya façades that Wright admired.

Throughout the house, Wright created stylized representations of the hollyhock plant, including the colonnade capitals and the frieze along the second-floor façade. This upstairs portion of the house includes a passageway to rooms at both ends of the hall, plus luggage storage, a dressing room, and bathrooms. The house itself is constructed of hollow-clay blocks with a stucco coating.

Study

A cultured and educated woman, Aline Barnsdall had an extensive book collection. Frank Lloyd Wright designed the study as a sanctuary for her intellectual pursuits.

Although separated by a wall, the private study mirrors the proportions of the music room as part of the home's symmetrical floor plan, where the living room and patio form a central axis. Barnsdall did not own the books and artwork on display now, but they date from the 1920s or earlier and represent her interests in art and literature.

Lloyd Wright designed the three nesting tables around 1946 during a major renovation of the house. At this time he had removed the bookshelves but in 1975 reinstalled them to match his father's original design. Nevertheless, the wall color is based on the 1946 shade, the earliest documented paint layer.

Woodblock Print

Famed Japanese artist Utagawa Hiroshige created this woodblock print, *Awa, Naruto no fuha* (Wind and waves at Naruto, Awa Province), around 1829. While not originally owned by Barnsdall or Wright, this print is of the type collected by both, and illustrates their shared interest in Asian art. Wright began buying woodblock prints during his first trip to Japan in 1905. Like many Americans in the early 20th century, he was fascinated by Japanese culture.



Breakfast Room

Frank Lloyd Wright designed the breakfast room and its terrace with related proportions. For Aline Barnsdall's garden house, every indoor space generally had a corresponding outdoor one. The principal is best illustrated here in this light-filled room while looking out at the terrace, itself a "room" that merely lacks a roof and upper walls. Bands of cast concrete appear both inside and out. Wright occasionally referred to this space as a conservatory, and it would have been a fitting sunroom for plants with its south-facing windows, ample natural light, and direct garden access.

Original plans for the room show a built-in table and cabinets on the east wall. Located next to the two guest bedrooms, the space would have been an informal dining area for morning meals or tea taken by guests or by Barnsdall and her daughter.

Paint Layers In The Hall

In a letter to Wright, Aline Barnsdall expressed her desire to have the home's interiors not "*look green but ... feel green as a background for the rich hollyhock and rose reds.*" Over nearly a century, Hollyhock House's colored surfaces had been painted over in shades of beige. Here one can see the many layers of paint that have now been partially removed to expose the original plaster color and texture, as well as the hollow-clay tile wall. Green pigment was mixed directly into the plaster, and a surface coating included brass shavings that shimmered in the light.



Gallery

Originally this space included two guest bedrooms, each with its own bathroom. Both bedrooms had access to the south terrace through a small, shared hallway. The lines on the floor approximate the location of the original walls, which were removed in 1927 to create the exhibition gallery much as it is seen today.

After Aline Barnsdall fired Frank Lloyd Wright in 1921, she started making arrangements to give the house and hilltop to the City of Los Angeles. She was disappointed that construction plans had stalled for the theater, and the house alone did not satisfy her. The City accepted her gift in 1927 and, at Barnsdall's recommendation, welcomed the California Art Club to establish its headquarters here with a fifteen-year lease. Club members exhibited artwork throughout the house, but this gallery provided a dedicated space for display. The club's plans for additional renovations stalled due to the lack of funds, so the house has retained its essentially domestic character.

Pergola

The pergola served as the primary passageway to the home's private spaces, which originally included bedroom suites for guests, Aline Barnsdall, and her daughter. It also functioned as a buffer, creating a clear division between public and private areas in the house.

The pergola has undergone significant transformations. The large doorway on the south wall was added in 1946, but in 1921 this transitional area would have had only small windows along the upper portion of the long solid wall. It functioned as a semi-outdoor space, mirroring the outdoor colonnade just across the patio. Overseeing renovations and restorations to the house, Lloyd Wright had the roof removed and later replaced. As a result, the wood elements have been modified, but the room's general proportions are intact.

Guānyīn Sculpture

In 1921, the marble sculpture of Guānyīn (the Goddess of Mercy) greeted visitors on their arrival to Hollyhock House from a niche at the beginning of the entry pergola. It has been moved inside for reasons of security and preservation. Frank Lloyd Wright and Aline Barnsdall both had interests in Asian art, and Wright often collected pieces for his clients. However, we don't know where Barnsdall bought this particular Buddhist sculpture.



Terrace Staircase

Wright designed pairs of finials to demark the exterior staircases to the home's numerous roof terraces. Like Pueblo architecture of the American Southwest, the flat roofs provided a functional alternative to the red-tile ones popular on Spanish colonial style homes.



Child's Bedroom

Born on August 19, 1917, Betty Barnsdall was four years old when Hollyhock House was completed. Her mother named her "Aline Elizabeth" but favored the nickname "Sugartop," given her light blonde hair. Breaking from societal norms of the time, Barnsdall raised Betty on her own. Frank Lloyd Wright designed this unconventional residence as a home for Aline Barnsdall and her daughter.

Betty's room was located directly below that of her mother. It included a sun porch, dressing room, and its own bath, which was connected to the nursemaid's bedroom. Wright did not fully realize his plans for this space or Barnsdall's bedroom upstairs. Here he had proposed a panel above the fireplace depicting balloons and the moon in blue, orange, and gold, which was never completed. The walls were likely painted pink around 1975.

Dressing Room

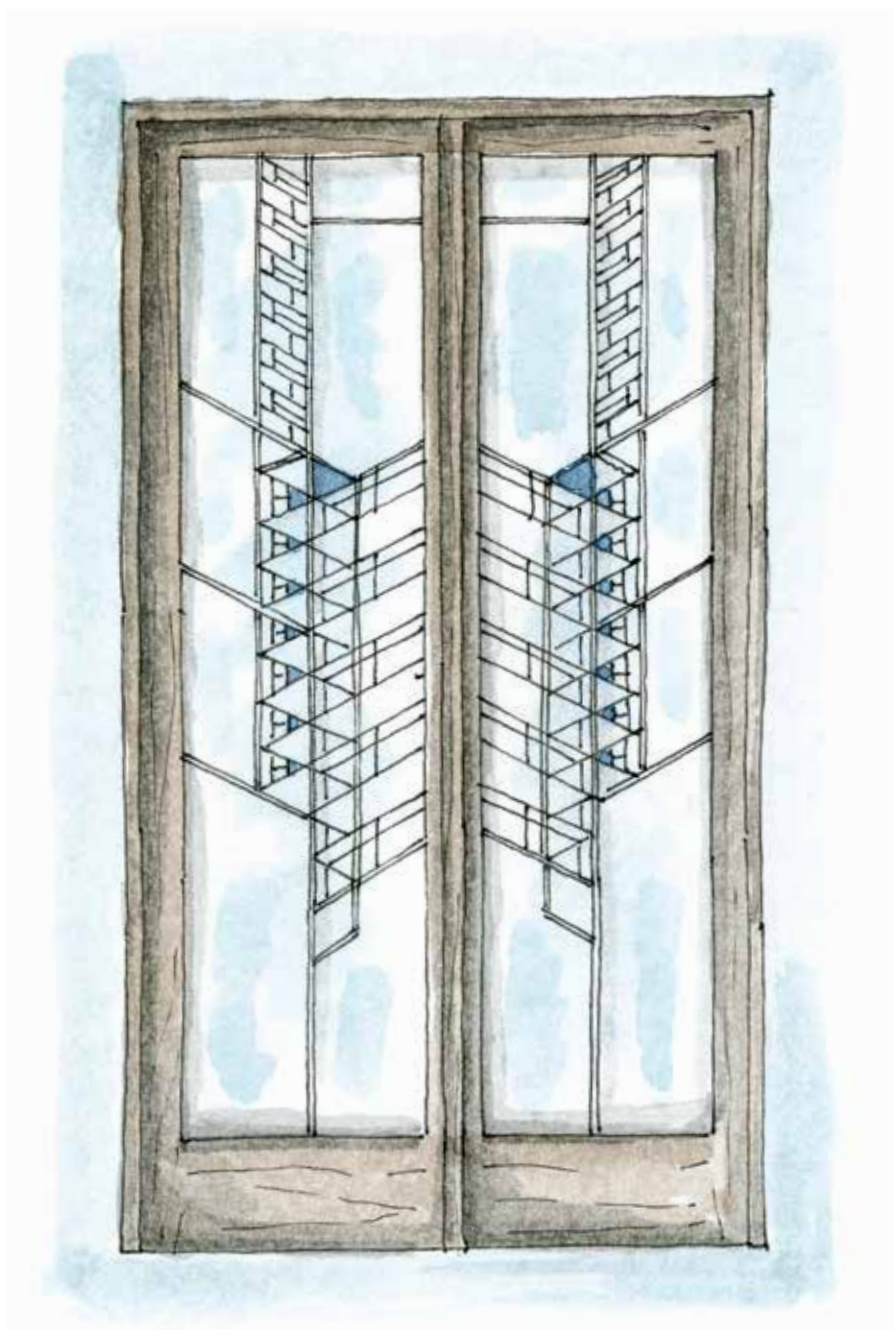
Separated from the bedroom by a partition, the dressing room provided privacy as well as storage for Betty's clothes and belongings. The windows here tie in with those of Barnsdall's own bedroom upstairs, forming vertical bands of art glass that span the two-story bay.

Bathroom

The suite of rooms designed for Betty included a private bedroom for her nursemaid. That space has a door into the hallway as well as one here at the far end of the bathroom. Much of the tile in this room is original, as is the wall-mounted toilet. The sink has been replaced, and the walls have been repainted many times.

Sunporch

This enclosed porch would have been a secure place for Betty to play and an alternative to the adjacent terrace yard. In subsequent years, it has been significantly modified. Steel beams were added for structural stability, and Lloyd Wright created new art glass for the west side to match the windows facing east.





Owner's bedroom as finished by Rudolph Schindler, 1925.
Photo by Viroque Baker, c. 1925.



Owner's bedroom renovated by Lloyd Wright for the Olive Hill Foundation, c. 1946.
Original living room chairs, tables, and ottomans were moved into this space in the 1940s.

Owner's Bedroom

Aline Barnsdall's bedroom was not yet finished when she fired Frank Lloyd Wright in 1921. On the occasion she stayed overnight, Barnsdall used one of the downstairs guest bedrooms. Four years later, she enlisted Rudolph Schindler to complete the upstairs space, which the architect did using finishes that matched Wright's general design of the room and house (for which he had overseen construction).

In 1946, wealthy benefactor Dorothy Clune Murray established the Olive Hill Foundation to restore Hollyhock House after it had fallen into disrepair. Working in collaboration with his father, Lloyd Wright oversaw the extensive rehabilitation of the structure. In the owner's bedroom, he removed the wood paneling, sleeping porch partition, and even the window that Schindler had designed. The Olive Hill Foundation then used this bedroom as a men's lounge, and the women's lounge was located downstairs in the child's bedroom.

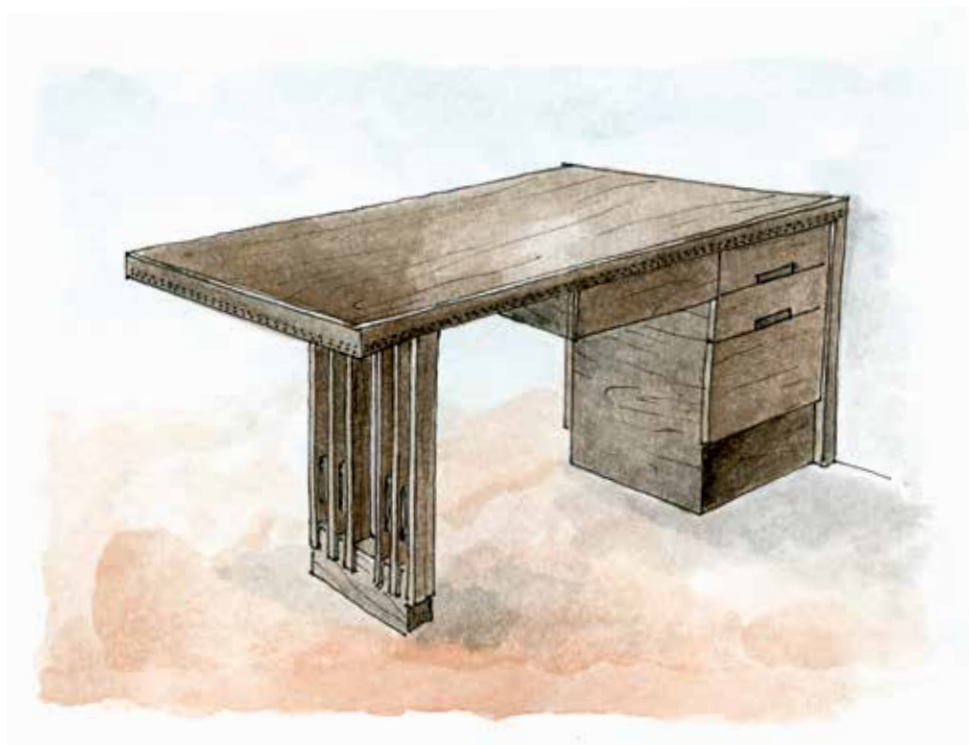
Sleeping Porch

To take advantage of California's mild climate, Wright designed Barnsdall's bedroom with a sleeping porch. The architect had originally proposed a slightly larger area into which one would step down, differing from the space seen today. It would have had a built-in bed and side table against a partition screen. With fair weather, the art glass windows could remain open (with fly screens in place) to allow for fresh evening breezes. After Wright had broken from the project, Schindler created a spindled partition, but his design of the sleeping-porch area did not include a bed.



Desk

Lloyd Wright designed the desk here in the 1940s for the Olive Hill Foundation. It is one of at least three large desks that he made for the foundation's headquarters at Hollyhock House. The decorative spindles of the table leg were repurposed from the sleeping porch screen that Schindler had designed for the room in 1925, which Lloyd Wright removed during his renovations.



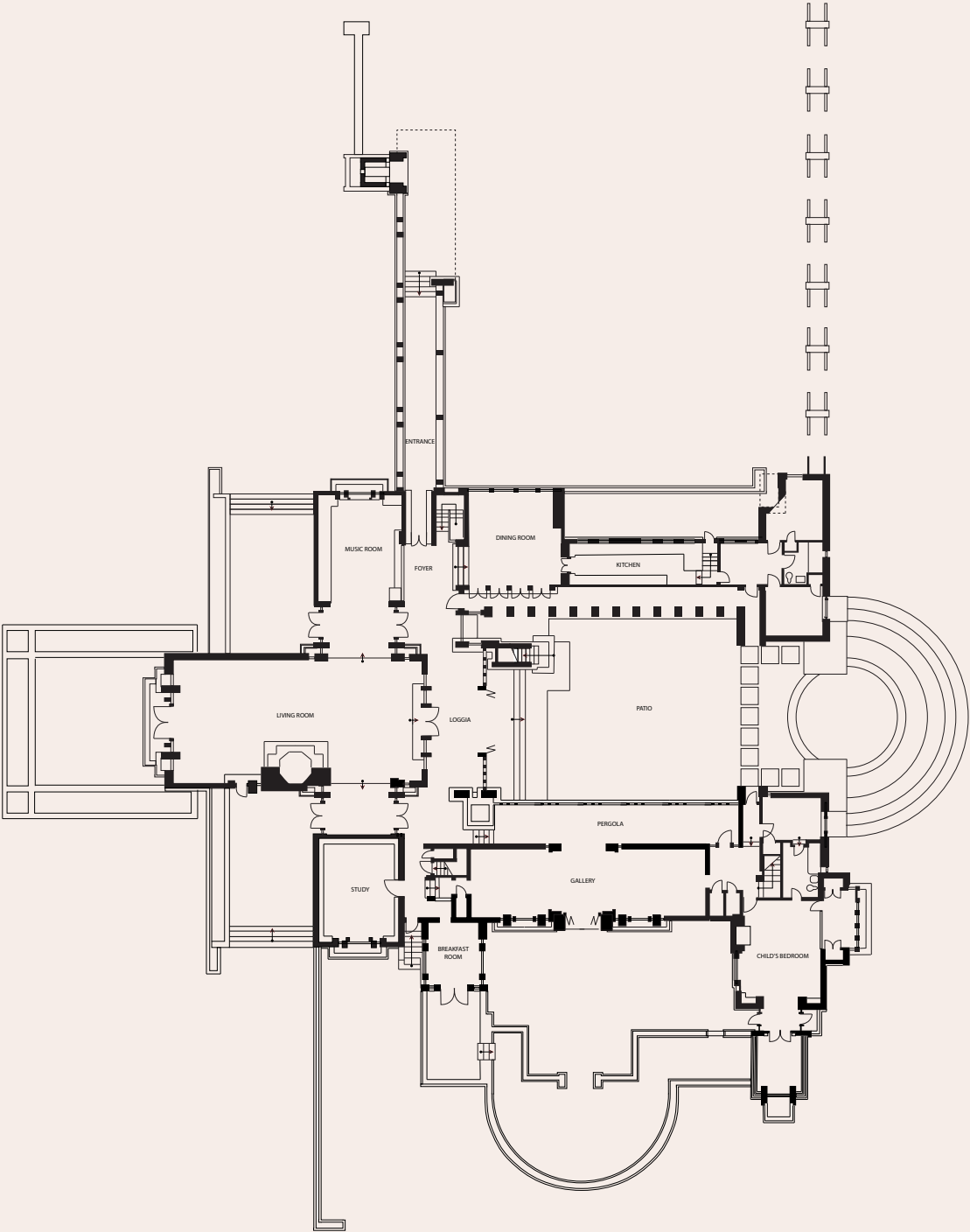
Time Line

- 1919** Aline Barnsdall purchased Olive Hill (36 acres) for \$300,000.
- 1919 - 1921** Hollyhock House constructed (planned cost: \$50,000; actual cost: approximately \$150,000).
- 1927** Hollyhock House and 11 acres donated by Aline Barnsdall to City of Los Angeles as an art park honoring her late father, Theodore Barnsdall.
- 1927 - 1942** California Art Club used Hollyhock House as its headquarters.
- 1942 - 1946** Hollyhock House sat vacant.
- 1946 - 1948** Hollyhock House rehabilitation financed by Dorothy Clune Murray, who established the Olive Hill Foundation at Hollyhock House until 1956.
- 1954** Residence B, a Frank Lloyd Wright-designed guest house, was demolished.
- 1954** Frank Lloyd Wright-designed temporary art gallery constructed to host the exhibition *Frank Lloyd Wright: Sixty Years of Living Architecture*. It was demolished in 1969.

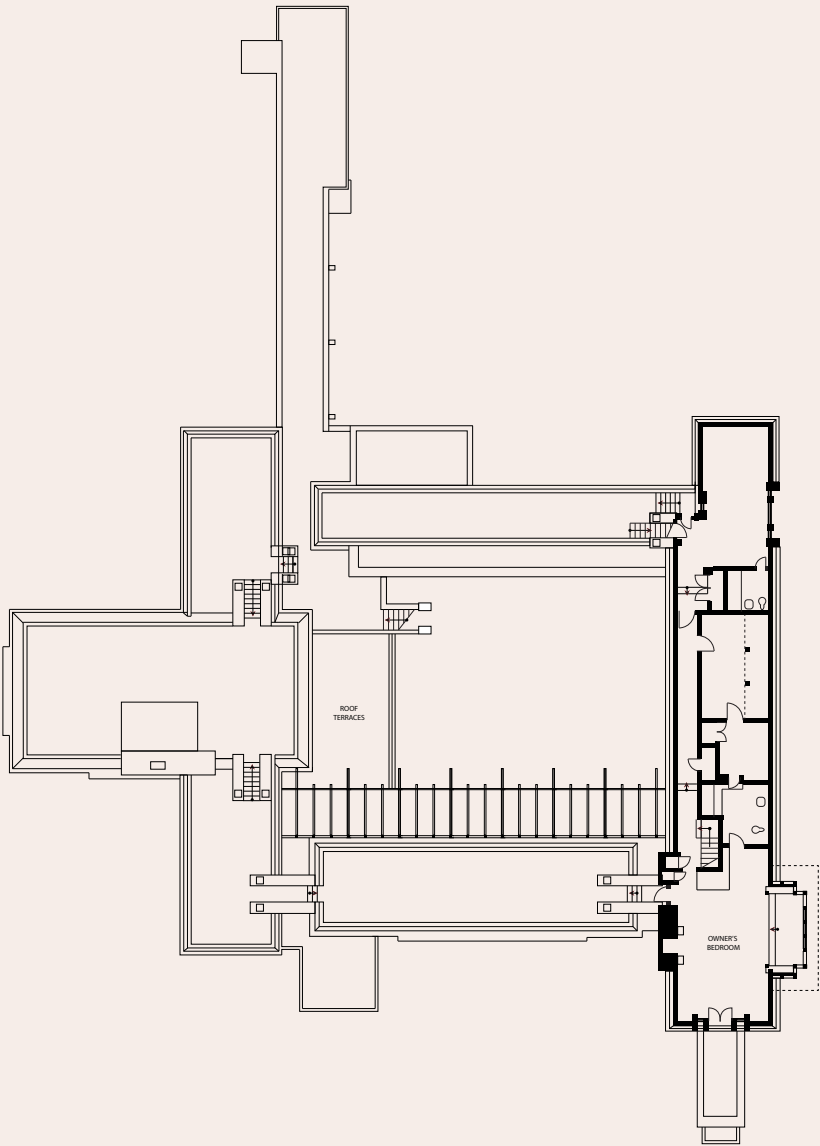
- 1967** Barnsdall Junior Arts Center constructed (architects Hunter and Benedict with Kahn, Farrell and Associates).
- 1971** Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery constructed (architects Wehmueeller and Stephens).
- 1974 - 1976** Hollyhock House underwent a major restoration by the City of Los Angeles.
- 1976** Hollyhock House opened to the public as a house museum.
- 2010 - 2014** Hollyhock House restored with \$4.36 million in funding from the City of Los Angeles, California Cultural and Historical Endowment, and the National Park Service.
- 2016** City of Los Angeles begins restoration of Residence A, the remaining Frank Lloyd Wright-designed guest house.
- 2019** Hollyhock House inscribed on United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage List as part of "The 20th-Century Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright."

Room Layout

1st Floor



2nd Floor



ROOM LAYOUT

HOLLYHOCK HOUSE

Hollyhock House is owned by the City of Los Angeles, operated by the Department of Cultural Affairs, and administered with the assistance of the Department of Recreation and Parks and the General Services Department. The Barnsdall Art Park Foundation supports capital improvements projects and programming.

Visitors wishing to further explore, support, and connect with Barnsdall Park and its history are encouraged to visit culturela.org.



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Barnsdall
ART PARK FOUNDATION

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Front cover, top Aline Barnsdall's daughter, Betty, and a friend on the west lawn at Hollyhock House, c. 1923. Courtesy of David Devine and Michael Devine.

Front cover, bottom Living room at Hollyhock House, c. 1921. Courtesy of Hollyhock House.

Text by Abbey Chamberlain Brach

Design by Jessica Fleischmann of Still Room

Illustrations by Adam Charlap Hyman
of Charlap Hyman & Herrero

Floor plans courtesy of AVA Inclusivity, Inc. and
created by Karyl Newman

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for their dedication to Hollyhock House.