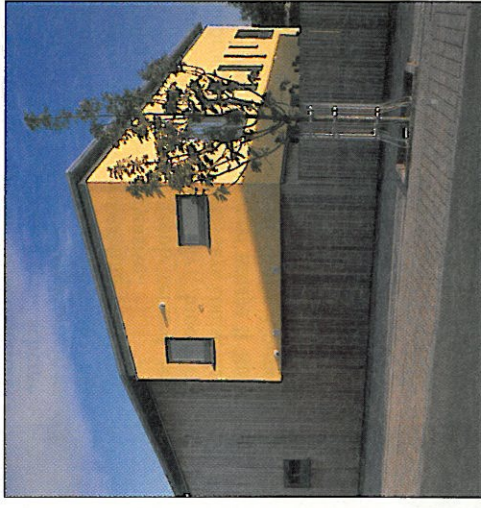


FRAMES



Left: Graham Square, Glasgow by McKeown Alexander for Molendinar Park Housing Association; **Right: Inchyre Place, Grangemouth** by Page & Park for Loretto Housing Association.



Anatomy of the House is an interesting exhibition marred by rigid categorisation, writes Peter Wilson

Nothing to write home about

Anatomy of the House, which has just opened at Glasgow's Lighthouse, is the first of three annual touring exhibitions "informed" by the aims of the Scottish Executive's Architecture Policy.

Graven Images' design for the show, intended to tour Scotland, makes a virtue of its mobility. Six parallel, aluminium-framed walls on wheels form its conceptual heart with each wall having a door-sized cut-out in its centre, the repetition of which creates an enfilade of openings through which one is invited to proceed.

As each implied threshold is crossed, another of the five categories into which Scotland's domestic architectural history has been curatorially separated is revealed. Croft, Castle, Settlement, Urban and Suburban are each represented by six historical and four contemporary examples, with one recent case-study in each zone highlighted and

augmented by a model and a video of the architect and client. Despite the simplicity of the design and the large-scale graphics, however, this is an exhibition whose text demands the visitor's attention if its content is to be fully understood.

Passing through the opening in the introductory wall, the second facade offers historical background to the croft to the left and a short introduction on the right. Having absorbed this, the visitor turns through 180 degrees to face the case-study information – project data, description, materials' sample panel, photographs, a plan, an exploded isometric drawing, a model, the aforementioned video and a quirky computer-generated mnemonic. To the right are photographs and short descriptions of three other contemporary examples. This same arrangement of information is used for each thematic group. As the carriage for the

curatorial message, this is a crisp, well-engineered production and one that demands a parallel level of quality from the exhibition's content.

After a brief walk through, however, the visitor can only be struck by the anomaly of the title. Anatomy suggests dissection and analysis, but the space of 12 display panels is inadequate to strip bare 5,000 years of housing development, and hence the need to organise the information into simplified categories. This is where things become difficult – history is not easily broken down into equal bite-sized chunks.

The croft, for example, begins with the earliest existing house at Knap of Howar on Orkney (2,500BC) then jumps 4,000 years to a 15th century turf-roofed house. The mental leap to fit post-war prefabricated houses into this category only becomes possible when one accepts that this is not, after all, rigorous typological

only barely alludes to recent speculative housing, but of the four contemporary models presented, only two have been built and are hardly tested as solutions. Are these really being offered as alternatives to the depredations of the volume housebuilder?

Being neither celebratory, didactic nor polemical, the Anatomy of the House finds some difficulty in exploring on its final wall what the future might hold. It will be intriguing to see whether, with rather more research and development time available, the next two exhibitions responding to the Scottish Executive's architectural policy will add to our body of knowledge (with related publications) and respond more forcibly to the issues and challenges affecting architecture in Scotland today.

Anatomy of the House, until May 26, The Lighthouse, 11 Mitchell Lane, Glasgow. Tel: 0141 221 7979.

How did such an enduring epistolary friendship, one that lasted 30 years, between Frank Lloyd Wright, a world-renowned architect nearing 60, and Lewis Mumford, a cultural critic half his age, come about?

It is odd that there is little, or nothing, of the exalted elder disparaging or patronising the young Turk. Theirs really was a relationship based on mutual respect. Wright thought Mumford was: "The most valuable critic our country has – a mind of Emersonian quality – with true creative power," while Mumford regarded Wright as "one of the great architectural geniuses".

The "correspondence" of this new book's title surely signifies more than a simple exchange of letters; the two certainly had their disagreements. Indeed, one was to last for more than a decade. In a fascinating thread that runs through *Thirty Years of Correspondence*, Wright is always imploring Mumford to travel to see him, often exasperated at Mumford's steadfast deferral or demurral usually via claims of illness. Wright just couldn't see that Mumford had to keep his critical distance. The two only met a few times in New York, where Mumford lived. Residing at Taliesin, Wisconsin and later at Taliesin West in Arizona,

Letters of credit

Frank Lloyd Wright and the critic Lewis Mumford's 30-year correspondence reveals an unlikely relationship based on mutual respect, says Chris Hall

Wright, so far from the action in New York, was no doubt glad to have someone championing his cause while everyone else was blinded by one of his bêtes noires, the International Style.

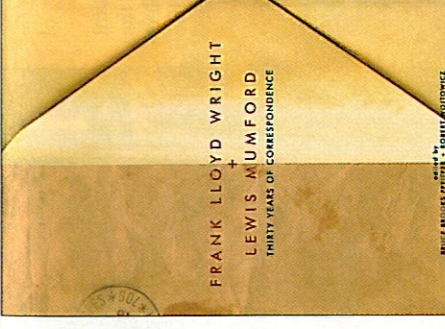
One of the many pleasures of the book is the period vernacular – "swell", "ballyhoo" and so forth. Although no doubt highly informal by the standards of the day – it was "FLW" and "Lewis" early on – Wright's prose sometimes contains slightly mannered aphorisms: "Any man will learn as much from his enemies as from his friends."

There is a lot of to-ing and fro-ing about Wright's absence from the 1933 Chicago World's Fair because of his perceived inability

to work with others. Mumford writes a piece in the *New Republic* castigating Wright's omission: "*Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark could not be a more comical performance."

Wright informs Raymond Hood, a co-nominator on the fair's architectural commission, that "if you feel I would spoil your party – (it is noised around you do feel that way) – why that is your affair... But if the Fair shows itself as Modern Architecture and is to be sold as such to the American Public... then over my dead body, say I." Wright replies in a later letter that "Your plea of guilt puts me, where frankly, I now prefer to belong – outside."

Luckily for Wright, Mumford



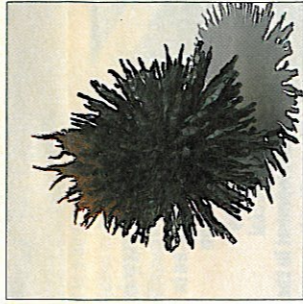
tirade against Wright's "moral callousness" with: "You have become a living corpse: a spreader of active corruption. You dishonour all the generous impulses you once ennobled. Be silent! lest you bring upon yourself some greater shame."

Wright replies in kind, but with regret: "Goodbye, Lewis, I shall read your 'brief' in the *New Yorker* with shame. I shall read it knowing your real opinion is worthless whatever you may write."

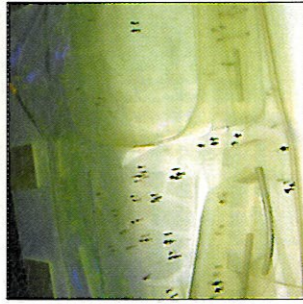
Although after some 10 years of silence between one another they claimed to have buried the hatchet, this angry exchange was to linger, certainly in the mind of Wright's widow, Olgivanna, who wrote a short letter to Mumford on the occasion of Wright's death in 1959. "Thank you for your letter – your words are good. I wish there were more of them to Frank himself when he was alive – he felt badly over your relationship. It is sad that so often death opens the eyes of the living."

Frank Lloyd Wright & Lewis Mumford: Thirty Years of Correspondence, edited by Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer and Robert Wojtowicz, 294pp, b&w illus, HB, £19.95.

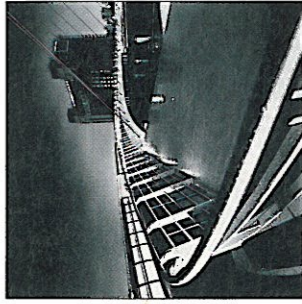
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Sarajevo Concert Hall Competition winner and finalists at the School of Architecture, University of North London, Holloway Rd, London, from March 11 to 21. Tel: 020 7607 2789.



Baltic: A Vision on Emulsion Etienne Clement photographs the transformation of the Gateshead grain warehouse at the RIBA, 66 Portland Place, London, until March 14. Tel: 020 7580 5533.