

VISIONARIES IN SUBURBIA: GRIFFIN HOUSES IN THE SYDNEY LANDSCAPE

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Thank you to the WBG Society for inviting me to launch this wonderful addition to the ever expanding resources of knowledge about a truly remarkable couple – Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin.

I've just returned yesterday from a two week trip to USA visiting sites designed by another legendary American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. I was delighted to find that in Chicago I'd been booked in to stay at a Wright house converted to a B&B, right next door to the recently renamed MMG park on the lakeside; and even more pleased to visit Marion's family home nearby.

As many of you will know, Marion was Frank's first employee, and she was also the first woman architect registered in Illinois, working as a delineator in FLW's Oak Park studio from 1894 and she eventually headed up the office. Walter worked also worked there, between 1901 and 1905, when he set up his own practice, where Marion joined him in 1909, apparently much to Frank's displeasure, although he was off on his first trip to Japan by then.

So many of the FLW buildings I've visited in recent days were reminiscent of the Griffins' work in Castlecrag, the open planning, indoor /outdoor spaces, designs integrated with nature – they had learned much from the man still referred to as "The Master" by members of the Taliesin Fellowship.

The Griffins however became visionaries in a very different landscape to the prairies of the mid-west and the hills of Hollywood. The Griffins conceived and implemented an entire city plan – Canberra – not without frustration and bitterness, but leaving a permanent legacy that we as Australians must cherish, protect and celebrate.

In Castlecrag the Griffins conceived and developed an entire suburban peninsular, designed with nature, streetscapes in harmony with the topography, vegetation and watercourses, delivering building sites and open spaces of remarkable integrity and community benefit. In the mid 1920s the Griffins also began designing houses here – houses that are the very models of magical, flexible spaces that we seek today for small, affordable houses. Castlecrag has grown from these beginnings, though unfortunately not with as many of the homes the Griffins hoped would populate its curving streets.

The book we are here to celebrate this evening provides us with yet more insights into the lives and work of this extraordinary couple.

It's a book that rewards many readings – at first glance it's very hard not to be seduced by the wonderful photo selection – so many previously unpublished or rarely seen. My personal favourite is the close up of a smiling Walter resting in a garden chair with his hair being cheekily

ruffled by the Maddox ladies. This enchanting couple, about whom we have read so much, continue to be brought to greater life and interest by pictures like these. The wonderful collection of Herman Junge's photos are especially engaging – what a resource these will be to scholars and historians ahead.

The texts reveal careful research by a range of eminent authors, edited by accomplished Griffin specialist Anne Watson. These provide new glimpses into the Griffins' achievements, but also into their friendships and their community engagement, their very particular world.

The splendid book provides us with 16 chapters on houses in Castlecrag and 6 houses built elsewhere in Sydney, all bountifully illustrated and described. Anne then examines 14 unbuilt projects – such a loss we never saw these gems.

North Sydney historian Ian Hoskins' introduction to the Sydney the Griffins lived in admirably sets the context for the entire book, and Bob McKillop and Scott Robertson's final bookend chapter on the Griffin legacy leaves us in awe of the energy, stamina and brilliance of these two remarkable Americans.

How lucky we were to have the Griffins here in Sydney for two decades, Visionaries in Suburbia, visionaries in architecture and city place making.

And how fortunate we are to have their achievements so well researched and recorded by the guiding hand of Anne Watson, and evident in the beautiful book design crafted by Adrienne Kabos.

Congratulations to all those involved in making this book a reality – the authors, the designers, the publishers, whose persistence and patience has been rewarded in this wonderful project.

The introduction mentions the many, many contributors that make such a book possible, too many to single out, all have contributed hours of research and writing to this book.

So we thank the sub-committee and all the sponsors who made the idea of this book into a reality: Adrienne and John Kabos, Andrew Kirk, Bob and Kerry McKillop, Scott Robertson, Geoffrey Sherington, Michael Thomson, Akky van Ogtrop, James Weirick and of course, Anne Watson.

I feel greatly honoured to be invited to launch this delightful opus, and do so now, with warm congratulations to everyone who made it possible, and with the guaranteed endorsement that it's the very book you need if you are lucky enough to live in Castlecrag, if you are interested in architecture, planning and cultural exchange, or just starting your Christmas shopping.

I have great pleasure to declare *Visionaries in Suburbia*, officially launched and celebrated.

My thanks to the Griffin Society for the organisation of this evening's event, and the wonderful work you do to celebrate and protect the work of Walter and Marion Griffin.