

# Looks Like NIMBY's are In Good Company, Think Frank Lloyd Wright

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That was over a century ago! Echoes of his sentiments are familiar to anyone on either side of the development struggle in Los Angeles.

While this blocking-out action denied him daylight and a favorite view of the then-wide open prairie, it reinforced his rigid sense of simplicity that would be memorialized in his design philosophy, making him an icon of [Prairie School Architecture](#), a style that utilizes horizontal lines with a flat or gently sloping roofline, and a fenestration of horizontal bands of windows. Wright also brought a holistic approach to his buildings, making sure that the structure integrated with the landscape and that the restrained interiors matched the exterior feel. Many see a Japanese feel to his work, and they are right.

As Wright explained it, there was a Japanese influence on his [design theory](#), saying “the (Japanese woodblock prints) art had a great influence on my feeling and thinking...When I saw the print and I saw the elimination of the insignificant and simplicity of vision, together with the sense of rhythm and the importance of design, I began to see nature in a totally different way.”

So, what's this got to do with Los Angeles, home of legendary conflicts between neighborhood activists who fear the politico-developer axis that is trying to reshape the city and rationalize increased density?

The answer is Hollyhock House. Every once in a while, there's a feel-good story about land use that does not involve so-called Nimbyism or ruthless developers. A story like that of [Hollyhock House](#) the City-owned Frank Lloyd Wright house that has recently undergone extensive renovation. Last year, it attracted over 20,000 visitors to its hilltop location in Barnsdall Park. As it approaches its 100th anniversary (it was built between 1919 and 1921) not enough people take the time to visit and enjoy this cultural resource. It is an incredibly designed house, a great representation of Wright's work, sitting on a hilltop, surrounded by plenty of open space in the middle of a rapidly growing city.

In 1927, Aline Barnsdall gave Hollyhock House and eleven surrounding acres to the City of Los Angeles for use as a public art park in memory of her father, Theodore Barnsdall. The park, that expanded to thirty-six acres, sits in the heart of Hollywood, with Hollyhock House at its hilltop center. The house (named after Aline Barnsdall's favorite flower) has been designated a National Historic Landmark, a Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument, and is on the National Register of Historic Places in Los Angeles.

An oil fortune heiress, Aline Barnsdall met Frank Lloyd Wright in Chicago, where she was active in theater enterprises, and he was working as an architect. She was impressed by his works, and commissioned him to design what became Hollyhock House. It would be Wright's first Los Angeles project. Normally a stickler for detail and close observation and supervision of his work, Wright was, simultaneous to designing Hollyhock House, called to Tokyo to design what became one of his many legendary buildings, the Imperial Hotel.

Wright was often absent during the actual construction of Hollyhock House, due to the demands of his then-major commission, the [Imperial Hotel](#). While away in Tokyo, Wright delegated responsibility for completing Hollyhock House to a pair of acolytes who would soon become renowned: [Rudolph Schindler](#) and son [Lloyd Wright](#).

Barnsdall Park/Hollyhock House is now under the jurisdiction of the Department of Recreation and Parks Commission, with responsibilities for its care and maintenance divided between the Cultural Affairs Department and the General Services Department.

Centered in an "art park", Hollyhock House is a quiet retreat where you can either shut out the city and enjoy three dozen acres of nature and beauty -- itself a luxury in a crowded city -- or gaze across the cityscape and reflect on how different it will be in coming years, as the demand for density shows no signs of letting up. You may think that Wright might have expected the arcadian view to last forever or wonder if, like he did with his house in Chicago, he might have wanted to erect a barrier (maybe a tall fence or wall) to shut out progress and freeze his Hollyhock House in space and time.

What adds to the allure of Hollyhock House, besides its high level of taste and craftsmanship, the beautiful natural setting and alluring history, is the collaboration of what were to become three highly accomplished architects: Frank Lloyd Wright, Rudolph Schindler, and Lloyd Wright. A fitting combination for Hollywood, where it takes an army to make a movie. Like any Hollywood creation, it's only as successful as the audience it attracts. There's plenty of room for many more viewers of this creation.

*(Tim Deegan is a long-time resident and community leader in the Miracle Mile, who has served as board chair at the Mid City West Community Council and on the board of the Miracle Mile Civic Coalition. Tim can be reached at [timdeegan2015@gmail.com](mailto:timdeegan2015@gmail.com).) Edited for CityWatch by Linda Abrams.*

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