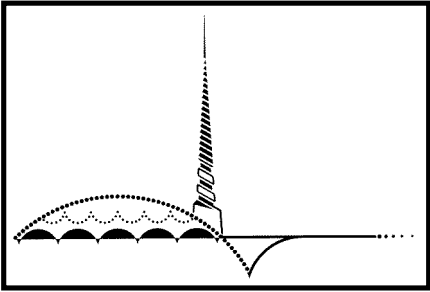


# MARIN COUNTY CIVIC CENTER ARCHITECTURAL OVERVIEW & SELF-GUIDED TOUR

## MARIN COUNTY CIVIC CENTER "ARCHITECTURE FOR DEMOCRACY"



Welcome to the Marin County Civic Center (MCCC), a national and state-designated historic landmark. MCCC was the last building designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, the internationally acclaimed architect who has been described as "one of the

most creative architectural geniuses of all time" and "the most original architect the United States has ever produced".

Frank Lloyd Wright died April 9, 1959, at the age of 92, and unfortunately did not see his vision completed. However, Taliesin, Senior Architect Wesley Peters and San Francisco Bay Area Taliesin Architect and Wright's protégé, Aaron Green, directed the completion. (Taliesin is the prestigious Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture, which was originally established in 1932 by Wright at his Springfield, Wisconsin residence and later expanded to Taliesin West in Arizona.)

## ARCHITECTURAL OVERVIEW

The MCCC Administration and Hall of Justice buildings exemplify the way Wright's architecture works in harmony with the landscape. The long, horizontal buildings gracefully link the crowns of three separate hills.

Wright favored an earthy, natural palette of color and materials, as shown in the custom-colored composition tile floors and walkways, and the terrazzo stairs. The innovative barrel-arched roof is an alluring blue that blends with the natural hues of the sky, while the walls are saturated in sand beige.

In these buildings, Wright first applied many features that are now considered commonplace, but during his day were ahead of their time. Notice how the atriums run down the center of

each building and widen as they rise from ground floor level to create an illusion of upward spiraling ramps. This also creates narrower walkways on the upper floors, where there is less foot traffic, and allows light to fill the lower levels. Employees and visitors alike have the pleasure of looking inward to the planted, sky-lit malls, or outward to green trees and hills. Wright himself designed the beautiful landscaping for the atriums.

Each building abounds with detail. Take a closer look at the intricate grillwork, accents and appliquéés that follow the "flow of pattern" carefully orchestrated by Wright.

Balconies extend along the outside of both buildings, and decorative arches create a sense of gentle rhythm. Inside, glass and panel partitions separate the walkways around the atrium from office spaces to produce an airy, spacious effect. The first and third floors feature imaginative art exhibits that contribute to the overall aesthetic harmony of the interior.

The central architectural focus for the building is the striking 80-foot diameter dome with its 172-foot, slender gold spire. The spire creates a dramatic, visual punctuation mark, breaking the horizontal plane of the two buildings. As another example of Wright's architectural genius, the spire was actually an exhaust outlet for the building's furnace and was also designed as a radio tower, which has since been replaced by newer technology.

## ADMINISTRATION

The four-story administration wing, completed in 1962, is 584 feet long, with office bays that are 26 feet wide on one side and 40 feet on the other. The structure houses the County's administrative, financial and community services departments, as well as the Marin County Library administration office, the Anne T. Kent California History Room, and the library's Civic Center branch. All office spaces in the administration wing have at least one source of natural light, either from outside windows or from skylights in the mall.

## HALL OF JUSTICE

Finished in 1969, the Hall of Justice is 880 feet long with over 40-foot wide bays on both sides of the building. Distinctive concepts are incorporated into the design of its courtrooms, jury rooms, judges' chambers and general judicial space. This building houses county offices, including the courts, Sheriff, District Attorney, County Clerk, Recorder and the Café.

## BEGIN YOUR TOUR IN THE CIVIC CENTER CAFÉ

The Civic Center Cafeteria is open to the public and provides a welcoming and serene place to eat lunch or enjoy a cup of coffee. Observe how the subdued, indirect light creates a warm and relaxed atmosphere in this area. Take a moment to enjoy the lovely view, framed by the elaborate architectural grillwork.

Note: there are vending machines offering packaged foods and cold and hot drinks.

**Exit through the glass doors onto the fountain patio and pond area.**

This area exemplifies Wright's belief that work environments should be places of beauty, as the pond's symmetrical design creates the impression of blending into infinity. Using re-circulated water and cleverly camouflaging the heating and cooling systems, the pond also is home to a family of endearing ducks, which returns here to their very special home each spring.

The gold spheres, as seen from the patio, outline the entire interior and exterior rooflines. They create the effect of rhythmic unity and reveal Asian influences that Wright displayed in his work. They remind many admirers of gently falling raindrops, or a luminous string of pearls.

As you stroll around the garden, you have an excellent vantage point for viewing the renowned gold spire. The spire also gained prominence after being featured in two science fiction films, *Gattaca* and George Lucas' *THX 1138*. The structures on the planet Naboo in the *Star Wars* films were also based on the designs of the MCCC buildings.

**Be sure to enjoy the panoramic views from this location.**

**Return through the Cafe and turn right as you exit into the hallway. Take the elevator at the north end of the Cafe (#5 or #6) down to the court floor – Floor C.**

**You will have to go through security to access the courtrooms.**

## COURTROOMS—HALL OF JUSTICE

Note the Civic Center's circular theme used throughout the lobby.

The circular courtrooms represented the first break with traditional courtroom design in more than 100 years, and have been copied elsewhere in this country and abroad. Spectators sit in curved rows and curved tables serve the attorneys and their clients. A lectern in the middle of the well permits the judge and jurors a clear view of the witnesses and attorneys.

You may enter a courtroom quietly to view the proceedings.

**Continue your tour by taking the elevator up to the first floor and turn left through the Art Gallery and the glass doors.**

## THE CIVIC CENTER SITE MODEL

shows Wright's original plan for the entire complex, including buildings that were never constructed. Notice that the skylights over the malls were not part of the original plan, but were later added for protection from the weather.

Now take the elevator (#3) up to the third floor of the Administration wing. Turn right and proceed into the Art Gallery and lobby of the Board of Supervisors Chambers.

## BOARD OF SUPERVISORS CHAMBERS & ART GALLERY

The Marin Arts Council designs art exhibits for this lobby and the gallery area on the first floor.

The Board Chambers are composed of one semi-circular room, which can be divided by a folding partition into two soundproof chambers for the Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission. The flexibility of Wright's innovative design accommodates changing needs for public participation.

**To continue your tour, take elevator #3 up to the fourth floor. You will exit in the library.**

## LIBRARY

The MCCC Branch Library is housed under the extraordinary 80-foot diameter dome. Note Wright's resourceful use of indirect lighting, and his radiated stack placement designed for easy accessibility.

Adjacent to the library is the Anne T. Kent California History Room, a research facility that preserves items of historic importance, including an extensive collection of information about Frank Lloyd Wright and the Marin County Civic Center.

**Exit the library into the fourth floor mall walkway to a more current model of the complex.**

Aaron Green, Fellow of the American Institute of Architects (FAIA), suggested that the concept for the underground county jail should complement Wright's original building design. Completed in 1994, the jail is embedded into the hillside at the end of the Hall of Justice wing. This location makes it possible to transport prisoners into the court areas through an unobtrusive tunnel.

**Continue to the end of the hallway and out into the 4th floor garden.**

This is the hill on which Frank Lloyd Wright first viewed the site and stated, "I'll bridge these hills with graceful arches..." The goal of the County landscapers is to gradually grow a thriving garden of drought-resistant and native plants.

Take the path up the hill for a spectacular vantage point of the dramatic roofline.

**Walking back along the mall, take the # 1 elevator on your left, or the stairs on your right, to return to the main entrance gates on the first floor.**

On the opposite side of the escalator you will see the plaque with the red FLLW (Frank Lloyd Wright) insignia, which designates the Marin County Civic Center as an official Frank Lloyd Wright building.

As you go out through the exquisite red and gold gates, you will notice wall plaques, one on the left and one on the right, designating this building as a State and National Historic Landmark. Turn right and walk a short distance down the hill, then take the path up to the Scenic Overlook (also known as the Supervisors' Deck, just outside their chambers). The columns here are reminiscent of origami, again showing the Asian, specifically Japanese, influence in Wright's architecture. This is another vantage point for pictures of the roofline and an up-close look at the spire.

**We hope you have enjoyed your time at the Marin County Civic Center. Docent-led tours are available every Friday at 10:30 a.m., leaving from the Civic Center Cafe, Rm. 233. Cost is \$12 per person. Advance tickets are required. Groups of 10 or more may arrange a private docent tour by calling the Visitor Services Office at 415.473.3762.**

The Marin Center complex is located on Civic Center Drive and Avenue of the Flags. These buildings are only open during events.

## MARIN CENTER

The Marin Center complex features the 2000-seat Marin Veterans' Memorial Auditorium, the 22,500 square foot Exhibit Hall, 300-seat Showcase Theater, and the 80-acre fairgrounds. Gardens, outdoor pavilions and a 14-acre lagoon with an island are included in the landscaped fairgrounds.

Marin Center hosts an active year-round calendar of performing arts, lectures, musical theater, films, recitals, conferences and festivals. It's also site of the annual Marin County Fair over the Fourth of July weekend, which has become a favorite Bay Area family tradition.

The buildings were designed after Frank Lloyd Wright's death by Taliesin architects.

## FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

"...We know that the good building is not the one that hurts the landscape, but is one that makes the landscape more beautiful than it was before that building was built. In Marin County you have one of the most beautiful landscapes I have seen, and I am proud to make the buildings of this County characteristic of the beauty of the County."

Today, and for generations to come, everyone who passes through this remarkable architectural wonder are grateful to Frank Lloyd Wright for his breathtaking vision and inspired gift to Marin County.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT  
WWW.MARINCENTER.ORG.**

**Thank you for taking our tour  
and we look forward to seeing you again!**