

















*The Architecture of Bruce Goff,  
1904-1982. Design for  
the Continuous Present*

edición de Pauline Saliga y Mary Woolever

Catálogo de la exposición, Nueva York-Munich, The Art Institute of Chicago Press-Prestel-Verlag, 1995, 199 pp., ils.

por

PETER KRIEGER

“Bruce Goff is one of the twentieth-century America’s visionary architects. Over his long career, Goff designed buildings of remarkable form and unusual materials. His close relationship with his clients gave him the freedom to explore his theories of organic and ‘absolute’ architecture.” This short description on the back cover of the exhibition catalogue tries to attract attention to an architect who fulfilled a distinguished US-American “vision, fantasy, and utopia.” Overshadowed by his father-figure Frank Lloyd Wright—from whom he soon freed himself—Bruce Goff is nowadays reconsidered as an architectural personality who developed his creative works beyond any “style”, “camp” or trend. The great masters Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright advised Goff early in his career not to attend any architectural school so that his imaginative potential remained unspoiled by imitations. Trained in an architect’s office at the age of 14 (!), the non-academic and inspiring pragmatist later, with his increasing success, became a teacher at the School of Architecture at the University of Oklahoma. The authors of the catalogue consi-

der that this period as an architectural educator, from 1947 to 1955, to be the most intense phase of Goff’s work. At that time Bruce Goff succeeded in mixing diverse formal inspirations from Sullivan, Mendelsohn, Neutra, even Gaudí, into a very specific and personal expression of architecture. Led by the credo not to accept functional (not functionalistic) limits, yet well aware of prefabricated building systems, Goff convinced many private clients to risk “phantastic” architectural creations. Those clients who enabled Goff to realize his proposals reached a certain sudden popularity. In 1947 *Life* magazine published an article on Goff’s Ledbetter House in Norman, Oklahoma, showing more than 15,000 visitors eager to see the new “American” outlook which stood in contrast to the mainstream of stereotypical and simplistic neo-colonial styles. Flowing spaces, hard contrasts of cristaline structures and opaque serpentine stone walls, metal roofs, integrated bassins and plants constituted a new image of the modern US-American country-house lifestyle which was received even in Western Europe. Goff’s “sophisticated folk art” (David G. de Long) for rich and broadminded clients did not claim to be a model for the mass-production of single family houses nor was he interested in any local or regional references. Perhaps the deconstructionist architects might claim Bruce Goff as a precursor for their style concept. But even if his buildings and drawings fulfill the wishes of some deconstructionist genealogy, Bruce Goff is an important figure in the architecture of our century, as the exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago shows. The catalogue—an excellently designed book with stimulating essays—accompanies an exhibition based



on the Goff Archives at the Art Institute. Color prints, photographs and a list of works make this book more than a substitu-

te for those who were not able to see the original drawings at the Chicago exhibition (from June 8 to September 4).