Frank Lloyd Wright and the Cantilever:  
Preserving Significance of an Architect, His Innovation, and Achieving the Organic 

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Of Frank Lloyd Wright’s principles for organic architecture, one of the most profound would have to be the use of the cantilever. With this outward-reaching aesthetic Wright was able to compose a visible connection with nature and it is in this element that he was also able to fully express a new way of thinking about architecture. Also among his principles of organic design is the expression of the true nature of materials. He strove to find honesty in all elements of structure, again as a connection to the organic and to the traditional ideas of load and support.

The case studies described in this paper, the Tomek House in Chicago, Illinois, the Kaufmann House (Fallingwater) located in Mill Run, Pennsylvania, and the Herbert F. Johnson House (Wingspread) in Racine, Wisconsin, are some of Frank Lloyd Wright’s greatest design achievements, but they do not come without fault. The failures of his designs are widely known, but are not widely understood. They are often overlooked in academic discourse, and are dismissed by professionals as little more than design incompetence. But those who know his work most intimately, the architects, engineers and conservators whose job it is to repair and restore these landmarks of American Architecture, reveal a deeper understanding of Frank Lloyd Wright’s intentions than any scholar or historian has been able to describe.
The structure and failure of these houses play an integral role in the understanding of the thinking and designs of Frank Lloyd Wright. This paper will show that this is a significant aspect of these designs, and therefore, must be preserved. This paper will also show that this aspect can be preserved as part of the interpretation and experience of the structures without interfering with the original design intentions. Rather, preserving the failure can become a reflection on them.