

# FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

on the West Coast

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Frank Lloyd Wright's buildings in the Midwest and on the East Coast have been well documented, but his work on the West Coast has not been thoroughly covered in print until now. Between 1909 and 1959, Wright designed a total of 36 structures on 28 sites up and down the West Coast, from Seattle to Southern California, of which 34 still stand. These include well-known structures such as the Marin County Civic Center and Hollyhock House in Los Angeles, and many lesser-known gems such as the 1909 Stewart House near Santa Barbara.

With nearly 200 new color photographs by veteran architectural photographer Joel Puliatti, and 44 archival images (many of which have never been seen in print before), this comprehensive survey of Wright's West Coast legacy features extensive background information on the clients' relationships with Wright, including insights gleaned from correspondence with the original owners and interviews with many of the current owners.

Mark Anthony Wilson  
Photography by Joel Puliatti

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT on the West Coast Wilson & Puliatti



"This authoritative survey of Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture on the West Coast is a major contribution to the work of America's greatest architect. Mark Wilson's meticulous text, together with Joel Puliatti's superb photographs, make the buildings come alive."

—PETER SELZ, PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF MODERN ART,  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

"This first new book since 1999 to discuss Frank Lloyd Wright's West Coast work includes interesting stories about the original clients updated with engaging commentary by present owners. The photographs are worthy of careful study."

—LARRY A. WOODIN, FORMER PRESIDENT,  
FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT BUILDING CONSERVANCY

"Was [Wright's] healthy ego justified in his work? A thousand times over. What does it matter when it is the work that lives on?"

—T. C. BOYLE, AUTHOR OF *THE WOMEN*  
AND OWNER OF THE STEWART HOUSE (CHAPTER 1)



MARK ANTHONY WILSON is an architectural historian who has been writing and teaching about architecture for more than thirty-five

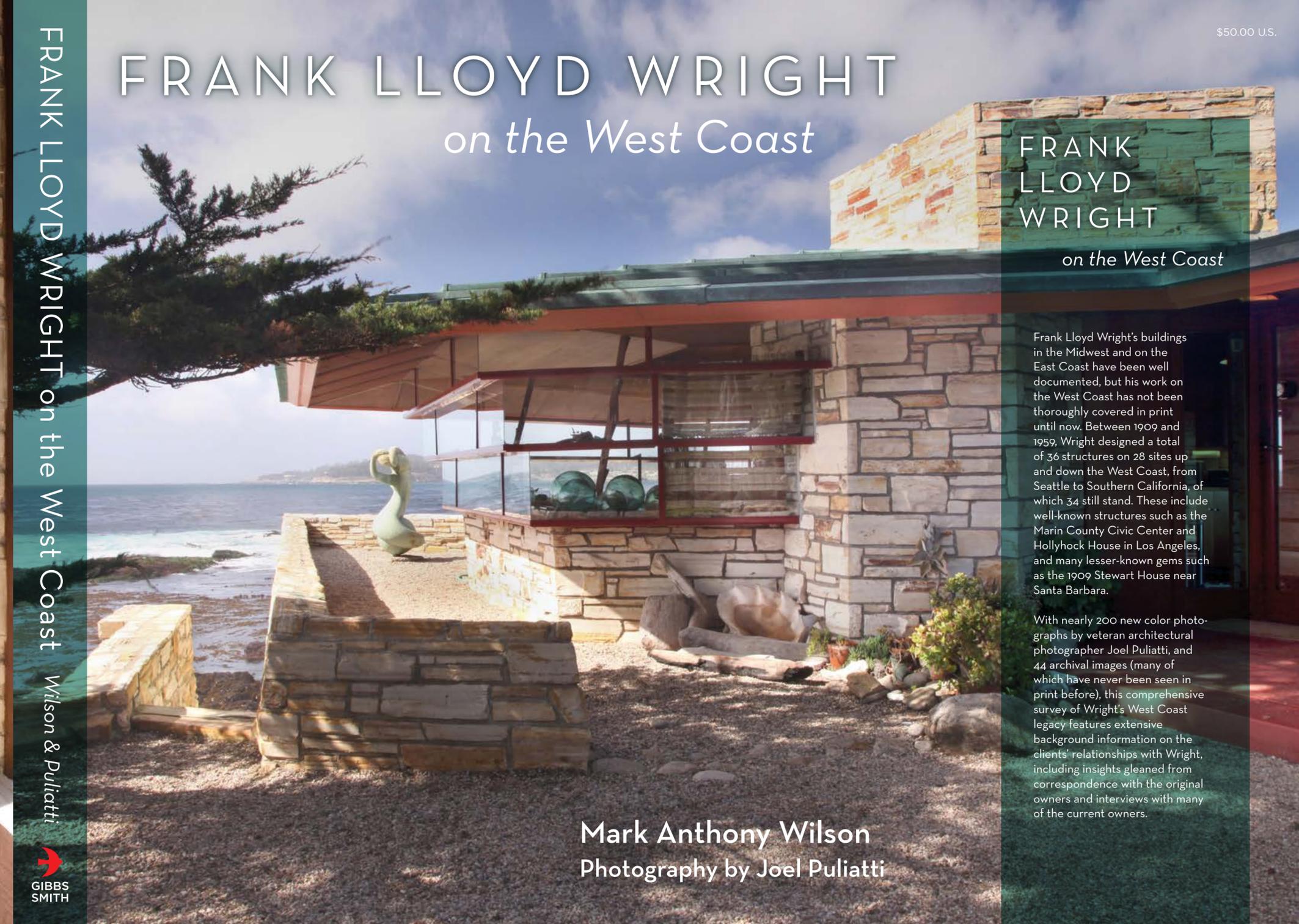
years. He holds a B.A. in history from UC Berkeley and an M.A. in history and media from California State University, East Bay. He has written four previous books about architecture, including *Julia Morgan: Architect of Beauty* (Gibbs Smith, 2007) and *Bernard Maybeck: Architect of Elegance* (Gibbs Smith, 2011). His articles have appeared in the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *USA Today*, and elsewhere. Mark lives in Berkeley, California, with his wife, Ann, and his daughter, Elena.



The son of a fashion illustrator and a Sicilian pizza maker, JOEL PULIATTI's interest in art was nurtured by his mother from his earliest years

and has sustained him through life's vicissitudes. Joel graduated from the Parsons School of Design with a degree in illustration. He has a passion for creating custom books filled with portraits of people and the environments they love, and has been published nationally as an architectural and fine art photographer. Joel lives in San Francisco with his wife, Olivia Teter, and his daughters, Jacqueline and Sophia.

Front and back cover images by Joel Puliatti  
Front: Walker House, Carmel, California, detail of south side.  
Back: Storer House, Los Angeles, living room from balcony.  
Jacket design by Kurt Wahlner



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## CHAPTER 1

# A PRAIRIE AMONG THE PALMS

## The Stewart House, Santa Barbara, 1909

*I see him as one of the original hippies, a touchstone figure who brought us out from behind the walls of closed-in rooms and back into the embrace of nature.”*

— T. C. Boyle, author, on Frank Lloyd Wright’s legacy, 2013

By 1909, at the age of 42, Frank Lloyd Wright had earned a solid reputation as America’s most innovative architect. During his 16 years of private practice he had created an impressive body of work in dozens of cities across the Midwest and the Northeast, and his articles and essays on architectural theory had gained the respect of architects and critics on both sides of the Atlantic. His design for the Prairie-style Robie House in Chicago three years earlier was hailed as the prototype for twentieth-century residences. Yet in the fall of that year, Wright risked everything he had achieved by running off to Europe with Mamah Cheney, the wife of one of his clients, leaving behind his wife and six children. But shortly before he left, he completed the design for his first building on the West Coast, the George Stewart House in Santa Barbara, California. This house remains standing today nearly as he designed it, and is the only example of Wright’s Prairie-style houses ever built on the West Coast.

The George Stewart House is located at 196 Hot Springs Road, near the intersection with Summit Road, in Montecito, a forested, upscale enclave just south of Santa Barbara. It was a small, rural town in 1909, when it was known to locals as “the fashionable neighborhood of Santa Barbara.”<sup>1</sup> Today it boasts many impressive residences by such distinguished twentieth-century architects as Bernard Maybeck, Gardner Dailey, Richard Neutra, and George Washington Smith. At that time, the city of Santa Barbara was already famous for its historic Spanish Colonial town center and

the clusters of towering palm trees along its coastline. The city was experiencing a major boom in the early years of the twentieth century, as people built both primary residences and vacation homes there. The population of the city nearly doubled between 1900 and 1910, growing from 6,587 to nearly 12,000 residents.<sup>2</sup>

George Stewart was a Scottish immigrant who worked as an accountant in Seattle before moving to Fresno, where his family owned orchards and a vineyard. In 1909 he decided he wanted to build a vacation home near the coast, and chose a five-acre lot in Montecito to build it on. His wife, Emily, wrote to Frank Lloyd Wright about designing their getaway home, after seeing articles about his Prairie-style homes in several magazines. He agreed to design for them a “summer cottage,” as his plans would be labeled, since he needed money for his then secret plan to move to Europe with Mamah Cheney.<sup>3</sup> Wright never visited the site, since he was preoccupied with preparations for his trip at that time. Nonetheless, he produced a complete set of working drawings, which included a gardener’s cottage, stables, and a work shed. Wright considered his design for the Stewart House to be important enough to include a large perspective drawing of it in his Wasmuth portfolio, the collection of his plans and drawings that he and Mamah Cheney brought with them to Europe, to be published in Germany as a book about his work. The Stewarts would alter Wright’s plans a bit, by enclosing an open-air porch on the west end of the ground floor before moving in, and by extending the first-floor bedroom wing and adding a half bath in 1930. They also constructed a guesthouse at the rear of the lot in the 1920s.<sup>4</sup>

FACING: Stewart House, Santa Barbara (1909)

