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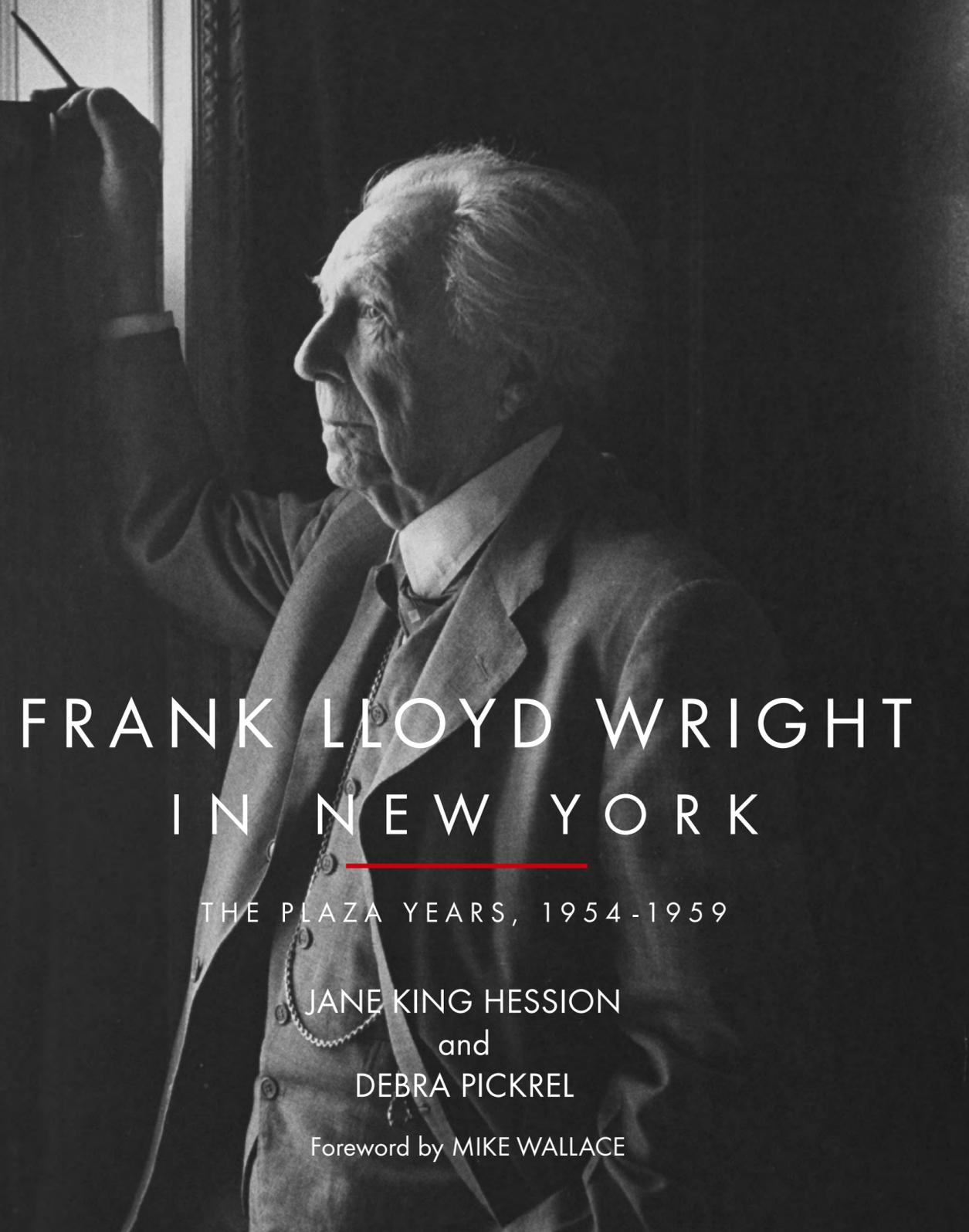
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FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT IN NEW YORK

HESSION and PICKREL



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THE PLAZA YEARS, 1954-1959

JANE KING HESSION
and
DEBRA PICKREL

Foreword by MIKE WALLACE

\$29.95 U.S.

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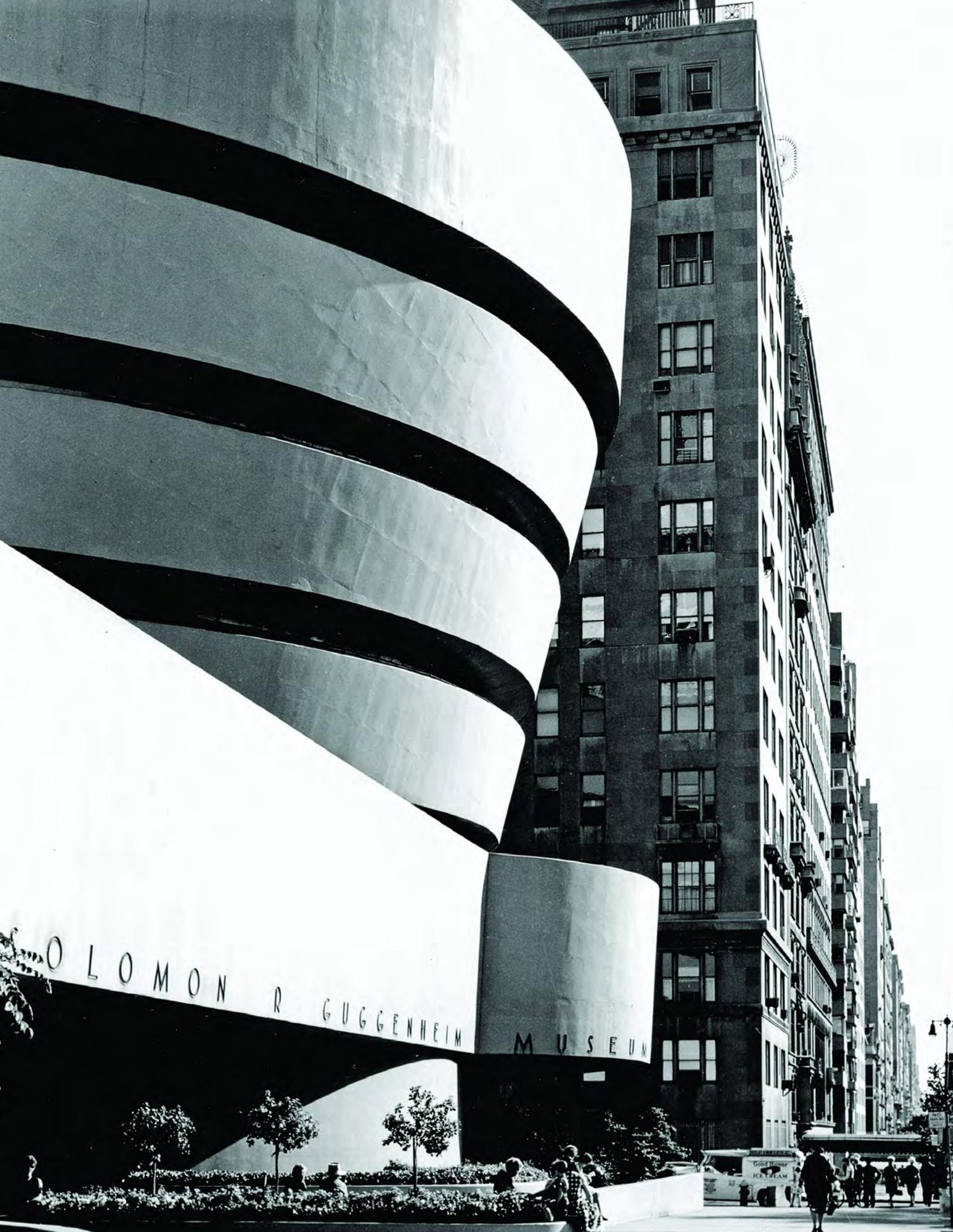
Frank Lloyd Wright in New York: The Plaza Years, 1954-1959 examines the momentous five-year period when one of the world's greatest architects and one of the world's greatest cities dynamically coexisted. Authors Jane King Hession and Debra Pickrel bring each of these unequalled characters to life, exploring the fascinating contradiction between Wright's often-voiced disdain of New York and his pride and pleasure in living in a great Manhattan landmark: the Plaza Hotel. From his suite, or "Taliesin East," as it became known, Wright negotiated—with varying measures of creativity, cooperation, and combat—an astonishing array of exchanges with the city's architects, artists, journalists, editors, publishers, designers, celebrities, power brokers, and bureaucrats. Most significantly, he shepherded the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (1943-1959), his New York masterwork, to near completion from these sumptuous quarters. Explore the sophistication and vigor of Wright's final years, a time when he was an architect of legend and a bona fide celebrity, and New York was basking in postwar prosperity.



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" T A L I E S I N E A S T " AT HOME AND WORK IN NEW YORK

*"This is the Old Diamond Jim Brady suite.
It's the best part of New York."*

Frank Lloyd Wright, *The New Yorker*, June 16, 1956

There were few finer views in New York at mid-century than the panorama from Frank Lloyd Wright's second-floor corner suite at the Plaza Hotel. Beyond its tall arched windows facing Fifth Avenue and Central Park South, the city's premier green space, Central Park, stretched north in one unbroken 843-acre swath. Along the east side of the park stood several of New York's prestigious residences and great cultural institutions, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Frick Collection, and "Millionaires' Row," once home to a procession of opulent turn-of-the-century mansions built by some of the city's wealthiest families. To the south, fashionable department stores and chic shops marched toward midtown. Although it was not visible from the suite, thirty blocks to the north on Fifth Avenue, between East Eighty-Eighth and East Eighty-Ninth streets, stood the site upon which the Guggenheim Museum would soon begin to rise.

Stunning views aside, the Plaza was an ideal location for Wright's New York home base. The hotel's peerless address and tradition of excellence were well suited to his rarified personal tastes and exacting standards. Above all, the Plaza was regarded by many as the finest hotel in a city of splendid hotels, and Wright had great affection for the building. "He admired its grand style and felt very much at home in this atmosphere, so very different from his own two Taliesins," noted Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, director of the Frank Lloyd Wright Archives and a former Taliesin apprentice.¹ "It was his favorite place in New York."²

Aerial view of New York looking south along Fifth Avenue showing the Plaza Hotel, lower right, on the southeast edge of Central Park.



SUITE DEALS: WRITING AND RECORDING

The West Forty-Second Street office of Wright's publisher, Ben Raeburn of Horizon Press, was within walking distance of the Plaza. During the 1950s, Wright was not only a busy architect but also a prolific author who produced six books for the press: *The Future of Architecture* (1953), *The Natural House* (1954), *An American Architecture* (1955), *The Story of the Tower* (1956), *A Testament* (1957), and *The Living City* (1958).

Raeburn, "one of the legendary publishing figures in New York" known for recognizing aspiring authors before they acquired fame, became interested in Wright in the 1930s after reading his autobiography, which he regarded as "one of the great books in literature."⁵⁹ He had firsthand experience with Wright's work as well; the architect designed the Rebhuhn House (1937) in Great Neck, New York, for Raeburn's aunt and uncle.⁶⁰

In 1952, Raeburn wrote to Wright about publishing the architect's books. A few days later, at 6:30 a.m. on a Sunday morning, Wright phoned the publisher and invited him to breakfast—thirty minutes later—at his Plaza suite. When Raeburn miraculously arrived on time, Wright asked: "Ben, can you give me one good reason why I should let you publish me instead of the big boys on Fifth Avenue with the big apparatus who are after me?" He answered, "No, but I think I know your work better than you do." Wright replied, "I believe you," and the deal was sealed.⁶¹

According to Raeburn, Wright was "the humblest author I have ever worked with, grateful for any criticism, full of humor, quick to consider every suggestion towards clarity—he was the very opposite of his public legend."⁶² In addition to his editorial duties, Raeburn often fielded requests for interviews and meetings with the architect including a June 5, 1956, sound recording session in the Plaza suite that resulted in *Frank Lloyd Wright . . . on Record*. Raeburn posed questions to Wright during the interview for Caedmon Records, a respected producer of spoken word audio.⁶³ He was also protective of the aging architect, who "hardly ever said no" to requests for his time. To the best of his ability, Raeburn tried "never to let anybody tire [Wright]."⁶⁴

Horizon published seventeen books by or about Wright during his lifetime and after his death, including a revised edition of *An Autobiography* (1977), first published in 1932 and later reissued in an expanded version in 1943.⁶⁵ Not completely satisfied with either earlier edition, Wright continued to tinker with the autobiography text for the last sixteen years of his life. Although he often read revised passages aloud to Raeburn in a process the publisher likened to "hearing him think," the architect always kept his handwritten annotations to himself. Shortly before Wright's death, Raeburn recalled: "He picked the treasure up and handed it to me, sixteen years of work, saying only, 'Here, Ben, it's yours.'"⁶⁶



Wright, with architect Jeffrey Ellis Aronin, in the suite. Aronin holds a copy of *An American Architecture*, which Wright authored for Horizon Press in 1955. A Japanese woodblock print from Wright's extensive collection is seen on the wall to his left.