



GRIFFIN'S IDEAS AND PRINCIPLES

Introductory Note: Griffin was an innovative thinker on architecture, design, landscaping and town planning as well as being a prolific writer and speechmaker. He was a pioneer in advocating a set of central principles to provide a solid platform upon which good modern architecture could develop. He absorbed powerful ideas from some of the masters of architecture and design and then adapted them by recognising that what he called the three “*outdoor arts*” – architecture, town planning and landscape architecture – were highly related and that their interconnectedness should heavily influence the work of progressive architects. His early fame, resulting from winning the international Canberra design competition, certainly gave him a wide stage from which to promote his thinking to architectural professionals, politicians and bureaucrats.

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Quite early in his career Griffin distilled several central principles to which he adhered throughout his professional life. Very briefly, these are:

- A building should respect its entire landscape and be thoughtfully and sensitively integrated into it.
- Houses should be designed with a high regard for nature and the needs and collective interests of the local community.
- Being part of the landscape requires emphasis on the use of local organic materials, colours and textures.
- Solving architectural problems should always involve fresh thinking rather than the habitual use of customary approaches and techniques. In particular, the architect should be up-to-date and aware of the benefits of using new materials and technologies.
- Every design should be tailored to the specific need, especially rejecting traditional and derivative architectural “styles”.
- Good design however should not be assessed solely on its utility. Intangible factors such as the viewers’ attitudes, emotions and even spiritual responses can be favourably and powerfully affected by the creative handling of colour, texture, space, light and symbolism.

Many books examine this non-tangible aspect of Griffin’s professional life, the most thorough of which was written by his grand-nephew Dustin Griffin. Having 474 pages and 71 pieces of writing on 10 themes, It provides “*unparalleled access to the thoughts of one of modernist architecture’s leading figures*”. [1]

Often considered wildly radical at the time, ideas such as these can provide an excellent guide in deciding what constitutes good architecture, landscaping, town planning and community building. Increasingly, academics, historians and professionals in these disciplines respect Griffin for the principles he expounded. It is likely that his most significant legacy will be from the continuing relevance, utility and importance of these ideas rather than from his extant or planned buildings.

Footnotes:

1. “*The Writings of Walter Burley Griffin*” Dustin Griffin (Ed.) 2008. Cambridge University Press