



THE PROFESSIONAL LIVES OF THE GRIFFINS

The relationship between Walter Burley Griffin and his wife Marion Mahony Griffin began in Chicago where they were both professional architects during what is recognised as one of the most stimulating and creative periods in the development of modern architecture. Marion worked in the office of Frank Lloyd Wright for 14 years; she is now accredited with being a critically important driving force behind Wright's success. Walter also worked there briefly in 1902 before setting up his own very successful practice. Most of Walter's work in America was residential, including the design of a number of outstanding residential communities, and his role as an important Prairie School architect is increasingly recognised.

In 1912, in a collaborative effort relying heavily on Marion's presentational drawings, Griffin won the international competition to design Canberra, the capital city of the newly formed federation of Australia. The following year he came to Australia as its Director of Design and Construction. He was 36 and she 41 years old. While immersed in a seven-year struggle over Canberra with the local politicians and bureaucrats, the Griffins lived in Melbourne and worked on some important and highly-acclaimed commissions including Melbourne University's Newman College, the Capitol Theatre and the Cafe Australia.

In 1919 Griffin formed the Greater Sydney Development Association (GSDA) and resigned all his Canberra responsibilities. The following year, backed by prominent Melbourne businessmen and politicians, he secured an option over a large area of the Castlecrag, MiddleCove and Castle Cove peninsulas which extend into Middle Harbour some ten kilometres north of the central city. Griffin described himself as a landscape architect and his manifest intention was not to be a profit-seeking property developer but rather to demonstrate how to develop and build model suburbs in harmony with the Australian bushland and local topography.

In 1935, after only modest success in Castlecrag, Griffin accepted an invitation to visit India to design the Lucknow University Library. Still regarded as an esteemed architect, he was given many commissions - some highly prestigious. In the following year, Marion joined him, leaving his local professional partner, Eric Nicholls, to run the Australian practice. Some 100 projects were designed in India but only five were built and none remains. Griffin died there in 1937 from surgical complications, aged 60.

Marion soon returned to Castlecrag but during the next year moved permanently to the American Midwest where she produced her magnum opus, *Magic of America*. This revealed her views on what she described as their four "battles": *Empirical* (India), *Federal* (Canberra), *Municipal* (Castlecrag) and *Individual* (US Midwest). She died in Chicago in 1961, aged 90.

(This information was adapted from material on the Castlecrag Progress Association website. For the link to that site or for access to more detailed biographies of both Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin see the [Books & Media](#) and [Links](#) sections.)