

Tru Vue at Taliesin

By: Ryan Hewson, Collection and Preservation Project Manager

In 1911, Frank Lloyd Wright began his home, Taliesin, in Spring Green, Wisconsin. Taliesin, a Welsh word meaning “shining brow,” acknowledges its perch on the brow of a stately hill. This hill captivated Wright as a teenager working on the surrounding farms of his Welsh maternal relatives, the Lloyd-Joneses. Wright intended Taliesin to be his home, studio, and a working farm. Today, the Taliesin Estate totals 600 acres with five Wright-designed structures and waterfall.

As part of the ongoing preservation of the buildings at Taliesin, the Blue Loggia has been off limits to tours for over 20 years due to structural and collection concerns. Recently, the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, in partnership with Taliesin Preservation Incorporated (TPI), completed a three-year restoration of the Loggia and the adjoining exterior terrace. This is momentous as it again allows residents and visitors access to this special space.



“Pine with Cherry Blossoms and Birds” after conservation.
Photo courtesy Studio TKM

A major component of that project includes the conservation and reinstallation of the historic Japanese screen painting, “Pine with Cherry Blossoms and Birds,” a work in the style of seventeenth century artist Kano Yasunobu. The influence of Japanese art on the drawings, architecture and decorative arts of Frank Lloyd Wright is well documented. While Wright included Japanese screens and other works of Asian art in a number of his most remarkable residential works, it is within Taliesin that Japanese and Chinese paintings were most abundant and most carefully integrated.

Surveys of the Japanese and Chinese paintings begun some years ago showed that they were becoming markedly compromised in condition, appearance and potential longevity, necessitating the removal of some of them to storage. T.K. McClintock, director of Studio TKM in Somerville, Massachusetts, is donating the services to conserve the paintings in celebration of their long-standing relationship with the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation. To protect “Pine with Cherry Blossoms and Birds” from exposure and visitor traffic, McClintock recommended TruVue® Optium® Acrylic Glazing, a shatter and abrasion

resistant, anti-static, anti-reflective material that filters up to 99 percent of damaging UV light. Facilitating a partnership between Tru Vue and the Foundation, this collaborative effort has resulted in the secure reinstallation of the conserved work after 60 years in storage. The eight additional screens will also be conserved and reinstalled under the protective filter of Tru Vue Optium Acrylic.

These decorative elements are a key historic feature of Taliesin. When the conservation is complete, visitors, students and scholars can admire and study the pieces as they were intended to be enjoyed and experienced. The anti-reflective coating of Tru Vue Optium Acrylic erases the boundary between the artwork and the viewer. Optium allows the screens to be presented without distraction of glare and with an intimacy suited to Wright’s home.

The display of original screens has long been problematic because of the unique and challenging environment of Taliesin itself. Frank Lloyd Wright adapted a strategy of accommodation when the paintings he wished to mount on the walls could not be maintained in their original formats. Panels of folding screens that became separated from their original format were displayed with decorative strips between them, or removed from the panels altogether, and mounted onto individual wooden panels. Throughout Taliesin, these panels and the paintings that remained as folding screens were secured to the walls and visually integrated by the use of moldings with the same profile and of the same material that were used elsewhere in the room.

The historic hanging method was deemed unsuitable, as the painting was adhered to plywood panels that were then attached directly to the wall surfaces. In the original



Photo of completed installation. Photo courtesy Ryan Hewson, Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation.

installation, Wright placed 1 3/4-inch wide cypress battens between each of the six panels. Historic photos, while helpful in understanding the general dimensions and appearance, provided very little information on the actual hanging of the piece, which seems at best haphazard.

In restoring the Loggia, the Collections and Exhibitions team decided to use this screen, which photographs document occupied this space in the 1940s and 1950s. Historic photos primarily by Maynard Parker and Pedro Guerrero were used to inform the restoration efforts. As it was the architect's home most drawings were finished at the end of cane and not recorded for posterity. The main pieces of evidence we have to work with are historic photos, oral histories, and evidence in the building itself (finishes or structure).

After conservation, the painting was remounted to the original plywood panels as there were slight differences in the configuration that were thought worthwhile to maintain. In addition, the material Wright used was representative of a material that was available at that time to accommodate the format of the separated panels against the wall, and the mounting format could be made "archival" by building up the surface with the traditional layers of a Japanese screen using calcium carbonate impregnated paper.

Once the decision was made to encapsulate the work, many different options for incorporating the glazing were explored in two-dimensional and three-dimensional computer models. The preservation team worked with Studio TKM to find the best solution for interpreting of Wright's intent and providing adequate protection for the piece itself. One of the most important pieces of this installation were the custom made Z clips that were conceived by Studio TKM, designed by the Taliesin preservation team, and executed by Custom Metals of Madison Wisconsin.

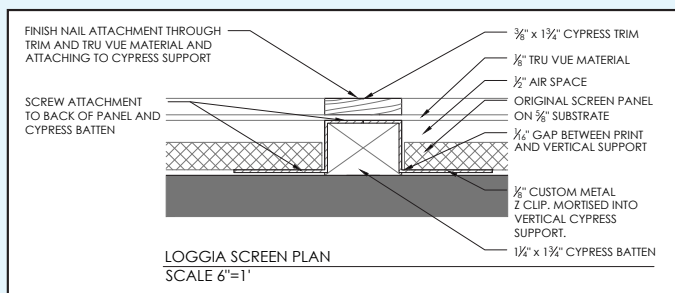
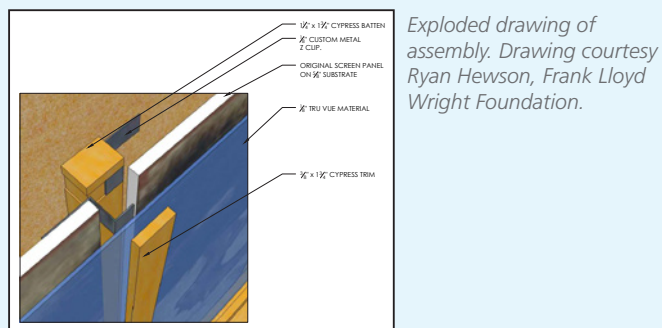
The two drawings detail the standard components of the assembly and the dimensions of the pieces of the assembly. A 3/8-inch air space was added at the back to help alleviate any issues as a result of the out of plumb condition of the existing wall. A 1/2-inch of air space was provided between the Tru Vue glazing material and the painting panels to keep the acrylic from touching the artwork, even if a visitor or resident were to lean directly on to the acrylic. The museum-quality, non-reflective glazing offers the perfect solution for protecting these pieces, allowing Wright's interior design wizardry to be showcased again.

Jim Erickson, Taliesin Estate Manager, noted, "The importance of these paintings to the understanding of Taliesin, and the influence on and artistic vision of the architect, has always been appreciated by members of the Taliesin community and by scholars of both Frank Lloyd Wright and Japanese art who were aware of the collection. Frank Lloyd Wright was a critical link between the first generation of collector scholars and later generations of amateurs and connoisseurs of Japanese paintings and prints."



Ryan Hewson serves as the Collections and Preservation Project Manager at Taliesin in Wisconsin. He is responsible for overseeing the art and decorative design collection in Wisconsin as well as providing architectural support for the preservation effort at Taliesin. Hewson has been at Taliesin for eight years, five of these as a member of the preservation office. Prior to this, he spent three years at the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture and received his Masters of Architecture in October 2008. He currently is working toward architectural licensure in Wisconsin.

Learn more about Taliesin and the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation at www.taliesin.edu and www.franklloydwright.org



Detail drawing of encapsulation assembly. Drawing courtesy Ryan Hewson, Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation.

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