

How far do you agree with Frank Lloyd Wright, that architecture is the truest record of life as it was lived in the world yesterday, as it is lived today, or ever will be lived?

A culture is always identified by its architecture; buildings and monuments, used as a function and a medium of expression of the life that so exists. Beyond this, it has been recognised for its people, their beliefs, the rulers or the government. While great kingdoms are like stories that may fade into oblivion, just like the long list of conquests, treaties and rulers that they may boast of, it is the works of architecture that have stood eternally, as a living and permanent record of the times and the achievements of yore.

Circa 2013, buildings, houses and other modern day advancements in technology reflect how modern architecture has transcended and evolved through time. Consequentially, the tomorrow would continue to be the truest record of life and such architectural pursuits. Frank Lloyd Wright has indeed spoken a truth that can be validated, for the past and present, and most likely, for the apparent future.

The Louvre Palace, in Paris, France aptly illustrates Wright's thought. As a sign of evolution of architecture, its respective rulers transformed the building to suit its times. It was formerly a royal palace with its origins dating back to the medieval period. Built as a fortress, it later became the dwelling of François I, in 1527, who transformed this fortress into an Italian Renaissance style palace; a building following the classical style of architecture, organized around the Cour Carré (Square Courtyard). The second round of renovations, in the 17th century, restricted the aesthetics of the building, to French Baroque architecture.

In front of this majestic structure that underwent a series of architectural upheavals, is the Pyramide du Louvre, built by I.M. Pei, which is a modern building made out of glass, steel and cable, and serves as an entrance to the large reception hall beneath. The two feats of architectural design – the Louvre and the Pyramide du Louvre - have contrasting styles. The museum in its classical form and the pyramid in the modern form of architecture, illustrate the vast difference between the two time periods, the design, materials and the processes, the old and the new, the ancient and the modern.

Here, we must mention one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of India from the 15th century; Hampi. The opulent capital of the grand erstwhile empire of Vijayanagara, Hampi is now a village in the northern Karnataka state of India. The site is significant for its historical and architectural complexities. The largest enclosure in Hampi includes the two major platform structures, a temple, an underground chamber and many other interesting elements. Hampi highlights the fusion of the Hindu and Muslim architecture.

The walls of the Virupaksha Temple in Hampi are carved with frescoes, depicting processions of horses, elephants, dancing girls and soldiers attired in splendid armour, which were all regular features in the Vijayanagara kingdom of that time. Hampi was well known for its bazars in the days gone by, when merchants from all over the world collected here to show off their wares. These marketplaces weren't like roadside shops, but well-planned areas, paved with stones, with residences for merchants as well as stables for their mounts. Interestingly, it is through the architecture and carvings on these walls, that the history of this

lost marvel has finally come to knowledge. These very bazars now serve as poor outlets for the roadside hawkers to sell from and as a roof to live under, far from the rich bustling markets of its time. Though not as large or magnificent a shop or a dwelling; it is still a contrast that has stood true as a record of its time, both in the past and in the present.

Houses which have been the most basic architectural manifestations have always illustrated the ways of its inhabitants and the climatic conditions, right from the flat-roofed houses in desert regions of Rajasthan, to the `elevated on bamboo' ones in Assam, both in the extremes of the Indian subcontinent.

To a layman architecture may seem as a less-than-perfect indicator of life. But contradictory to that, from this picture drawn of magnificent monuments, age-old townships and simple dwellings, architecture truly documents life as it was lived and will always be, and upholds Wright's quote strongly. After all, "Buildings are not just brick and marble but windows into the soul".

Citations

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- "Buildings are not just brick and marble but windows into the soul" - Damen, History and Civilization, 2008.