

Exhibit Designers- Clever Ideas through World Observations

...By Larry Kulchawik

I have just returned from a visit to the Chicago Art Institute. The Institute featured a special showing of a long lost Dutch design magazine called *Wendingen*. This 1920 issue featured Frank Lloyd Wright and was titled 'Our Most Distinguished Outcast'. Although Mr. Wright was a brilliant designer, he was terribly arrogant and had just left his wife and children in the US to move to Europe with the wife of his client. The Europeans were not so shocked about his personal life or his arrogance, they simply admired his approach to architecture. Nevertheless, he went on to greatness, and it occurred to me how much I had forgotten about him over the years, or did I?



caption: El Lissitzky. *Wendingen* v. 4 no. 11 (Frank Lloyd Wright), 1921.

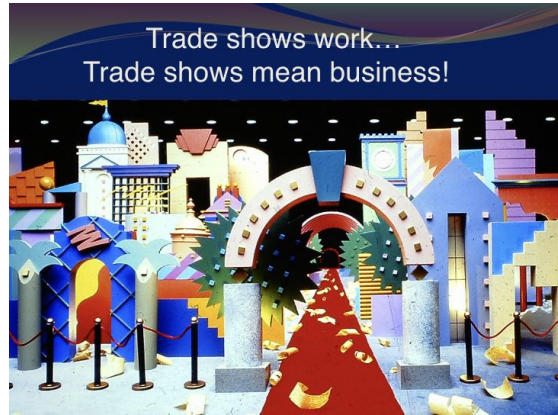
Design Magazine cover of *Wendingen*

Growing up on the south side of Chicago, and not certain I would go on to college, I attended a vocational high school-Chicago Vocational HS. I majored in architecture, learned a lot about the style and methods of Frank Lloyd Wright, and was encouraged to go on to college and study architecture and design. I earned a bachelor's degree in design at Southern Illinois University. While at SIU, a brilliant design thinker named Buckminster Fuller was on staff as a teaching professor. I was fascinated by his thinking, his philosophies, and his thought process, but upon graduation I realized-what am I going to do now? I started by designing store windows for a department store called Goldblatt's, and then fortunately, I fumbled upon an unknown job profession called exhibit designer. What was that? Lo and behold, 45 years later, I look back on my journey of good fortune with its never ending discoveries and now realize how the bits and pieces I remembered about Frank Lloyd Wright and Buckminster Fuller years ago surfaced to have a significant meaning to what I was now doing. Every exhibit design is conceived from scratch. There was no favored design style, it all depended on the likes of the customer and his/her people. Exhibit design is about selling a company's brand during a three day trade show period. Exhibits are not like buildings that stand forever. I enjoyed the deadlines for the completion of an exhibit design and the feeling of joy to see your exhibit idea fabricated and installed on a trade show floor. More importantly, that it worked for the customer. No two exhibit designs were the same. Not exactly architecture as we think it, but nevertheless exhibits are a structure used for a temporary period to attract attention and create a working space to sell.

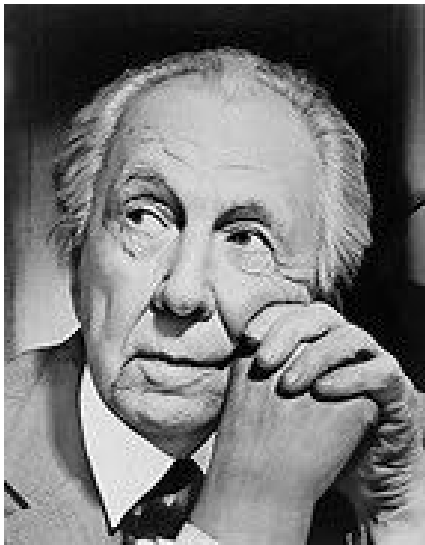
Frank Lloyd Wright's simple and organic design thoughts, as well as his philosophy to 'do more with less', applied greatly to exhibit design and fabrication methods. Buckminster Fuller (designer of the geodesic dome) and his 'spaceship earth' thinking also applied greatly to the one world marketplace that the trade show industry is evolving to be today.



Bucky Fuller- 1967 World's Fair-Montreal- Man and His World Exhibit



As our industry continues to evolve post covid, what other thought provoking designer/thinkers of the past can we learn from and apply their thinking to exhibit design? Most people in this industry have discovered the career 'trade show marketing' by accident. We borrow exhibit design ideas from what we observe outside the world of exhibit design. Exhibit architecture for face to face marketing at trade shows, within a controlled environment, is the design arena we are speaking about here. For the future, technology and digital thinking will blend in with the exhibit design. Where will exhibit designer ideas come from in the future? What a cool way to make a living. Dream on!



Frank Lloyd Wright



Fallinwater House-1935