



POLITECNICO
DI TORINO

Honors thesis

MASTER OF SCIENCE COURSE IN
ARCHITECTURE CONSTRUCTION CITY

Abstract

**Usonia, a community built with Frank Lloyd Wright.
Preservation and enhancement proposals
for the architectural heritage.**

Tutor

Emanuele Morezzi

by

Sara Giaveno

Assistant Supervisor

Paolo Mellano

Annalisa Dameri

David G. De Long

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The thesis aims to offer an historical and archival overview of the postwar suburban community called Usonia Homes that was planned by Frank Lloyd Wright at Pleasantville (Westchester County, New York).

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Wright recognized the chance to fulfill some principles of his Broadacre City vision, a suburban model able to satisfy the housing market requests. In this context Wright produced development planning projects in strong opposition to the common postwar way adopted to shape suburbia.

Usonia Homes distinguishes itself from the other suburban models by the presence of the highest number of Wright's design principles adopted, such as the circular parcels of one acre each and the low cost single family house called *Usonian house*.

The thesis aims to unveil the Usonia unique case of residential design, which analysis was deepened starting from a theoretical background founded on the study of literature and specialist magazines. The research was enriched also by an accurate analysis of Wright's drawings developed at the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library (Columbia University, New York); and by a land survey at the Usonia site during which it was possible to collect all the information needed to define the characteristics of the architectural heritage. The land survey had also a key role in discovering the strategies adopted to preserve the Usonian houses, and it was supported also by the direct testimony of the founder of the community, Mr Roland Reisley. Through this research it was possible to define an historiographical account on which it was grounded the conclusive purpose of the thesis that consists in design guidelines able to preserve the Usonia testimony and to enhance the knowledge of the site that results today scarcely famed.

The enhancement project consists in the creation of the Usonia Cultural Path, a thematic way starting from the Pleasantville metro station and developing into the Usonia community. The purpose is to inform tourists about the existence of site through a special signage system; and to promote a slow and public mobility in order to facilitate the way to visit the site. Within Usonia, the Cultural Path is enriched by historical and recreational features on which are grounded the two levels of the enhancement project: a "static" museum function, and a "dynamic" recreational function.

The first level of the enhancement project consists in the creation of a museum dedicated to Usonia and characterized by a widespread organization in the site, with the aim to conduct the tourists to discover the historical stages of the community while visiting its architectural heritage. In fact, the various information concerning the history are hosted along the Cultural Path within various Usonian houses which were chosen due to their symbolic value or because they resulted empty.

The second level concerns the assignment of a recreational function to the parcels of land that result unused or void of their original function. This purpose takes root in the analysis of the design strategies that Wright

suggested within the Usonia original plan, which due to various events were not realized. The aim is to propose a solution in compliance with Wright's guidelines but able at the same time to satisfy the contemporary needs. Wright, as instance, identified the northern part of the plan as suitable to found a Community Building that was never realized, thus the purpose is to allocate there an Usonia Welcome Center able to include some features of the Taliesin West and Spring Green campus. Therefore, part of the building will be destined to reception facilities and the other part to spaces for educational activities. Moreover, the unused parcels that Wright identified as useful for common activities will create the structure of a network built by public spaces and destined to laboratory and experimentation on the field. In conclusion, through these two levels interplay the desired objective is the enhancement of the site and the protection of its valuable architectural heritage.

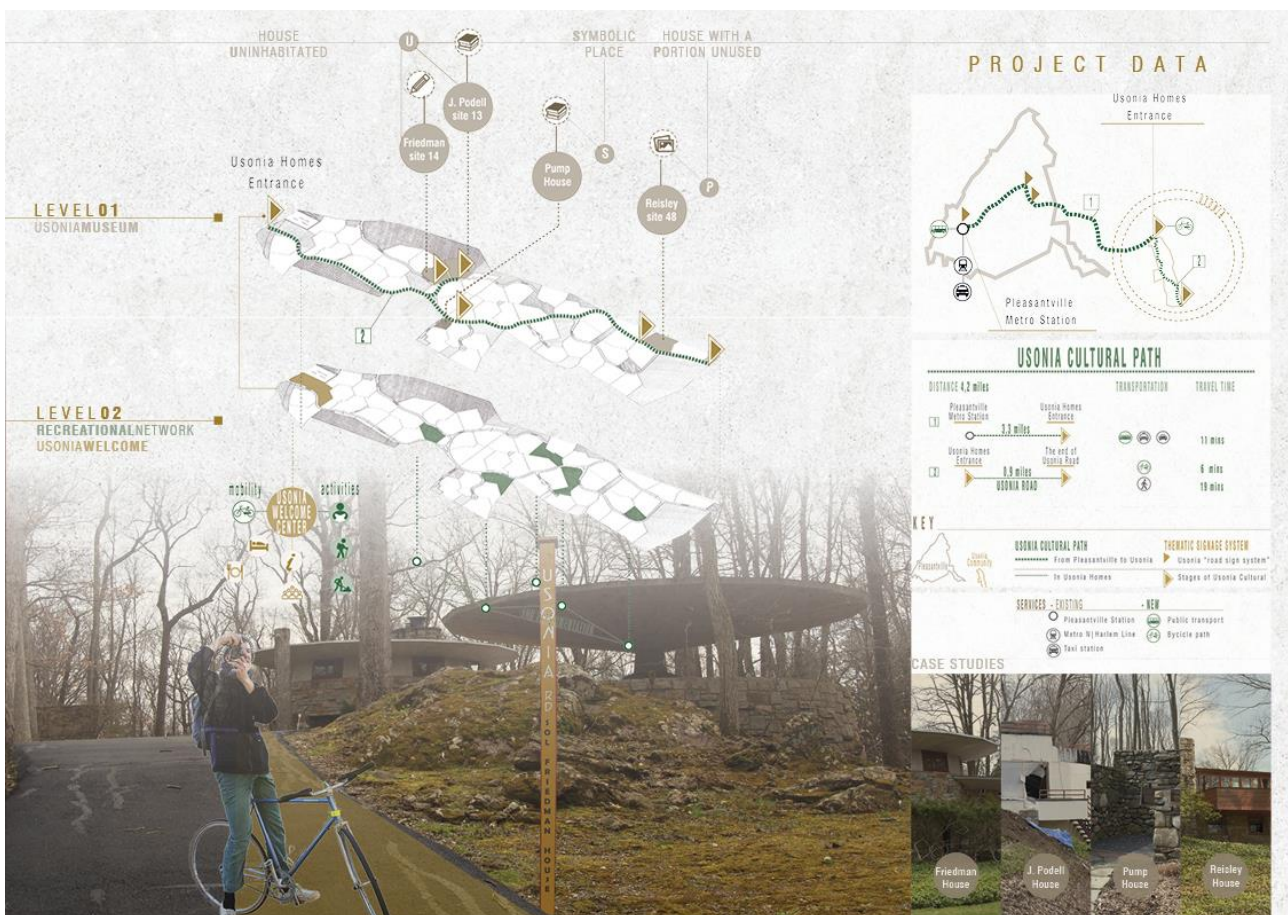


Fig. 1 Portion of the enhancement project for Usonia Homes.

For further information please contact:
Sara Giaveno, giavenosara@gmail.com