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The Natural House

Nov 20 2004
Western Mail



Anne Owen Taylor continues the diary of the restoration of her family farm in Carmarthenshire and looks to Frank Lloyd Wright for some inspiration

GENEALOGY is rapidly taking over from house prices as the hot dinner party topic. If you are descended from a long-established West Wales farming family I can save you a bit of research time - I'm probably your sixth cousin twice removed.

Farming families had a habit of marrying each other. There weren't many love matches but every marriage was a menage a trois - husband, wife and the land. The women did a lot more of the physical farm work than their English counterparts so the first question from a prospective bridegroom would be "How big are her biceps?" while the prospective bride would be thinking " How big is his acreage?"

I'm researching a possible connection with one of America's most famous farm boys at the moment - the flawed genius, Frank Lloyd Wright.

Lloyd Wright's maternal grandparents came from Llandysul and his Welsh background was a strong influence on him. He rejected their moralistic and conservative attitudes but admired their individualism and some aspects of their Unitarian Non-Conformist faith especially the importance they placed on the natural world.



I think he would have approved of Cefnmeurig's location. The house emerges gently from the foundation rock into the southern sunlight and is virtually invisible to the eye on three sides. He wouldn't have undertaken a restoration project, he would have knocked the building down and started again on the same site.

The sash windows are considerably more than 40 years old and I'm really pleased that we have been able to repair them. This wouldn't have been possible if we hadn't used a sympathetic builder who employs a skilled joiner. Replacement windows would have given the front of the house a dull-eyed, flat appearance.

Frank Lloyd Wright was an interior designer as well as an architect and believed the interior space was more important than the outer shell of a building. This partly explains why he did not seem too concerned by the criticism that his roofs had a tendency to leak. "Move the chair"; Wright told a client when he phoned to complain that the rain leaked through the roof.

Thankfully, soggy dinners are not something I will have to worry about , as we decided to replace the roof.

In true Frank Lloyd Wright style, Andy Bradshaw, the interior designer and I have been thinking about how we are going to use the interior space at Cefnmeurig to best suit the needs of guests and how to create an environment that serves to enhance the visitors' stay in West Wales. Andy is in the process of coming up with a flexible design that allows the guests to socialise as a group but will also include quiet corners to enable people to do their own thing in peace.

The kitchen will be an informal but warm and welcoming space with a wood-burning stove, slate floor and light oak units and table and chairs and perhaps some built-in seating around the stove in the old Welsh farmhouse style.

The dining room will be much more formal; walls will be in pale turquoise embossed with silver blocking and a huge dining table flanked with large upholstered chairs in grey embroidered fabric will dominate. A large chandelier will be the main light source.

Andy is very sensitive to my wish that pictures, wall hangings and accessories should only be used if they have some relevance to the building, my family's involvement with the farm or some local connection. The Wales Tourist Board calls this concept "Sense of Place" and Frank Lloyd Wright would have called it "Integrity".

This "Integrity" sometimes went a little too far and he had been known to design the gowns for his client's wife to ensure that she fitted in properly with the rest of his design. We have our own designer dress; a red velvet party dress that was made for my mother in the 1930s by a peripatetic dressmaker, Mrs McCoy. This will be mounted in a large shadow box and hung in the dining room.

Frank Lloyd Wright scandalised polite American society with his extra-marital affairs and his belief in free love. I'm sure he wouldn't have battered an eye-lid if he had stumbled across the couple involved in a bit of acreage assessment in a Cefnmeurig field, last summer. In fact he might have been very impressed with their respect for the Countryside Code; after being disturbed, the man carefully shut the farm gate before he pulled his trousers up.

Contact Anne Owen Taylor on 029 2089 9280 or info@visitwestwales.com Website: www.visitwestwales.com Follow the day-to-day progress of Cefnmeurig's restoration on the weblog: [http:// visitwestwales.blogspot.com](http://visitwestwales.blogspot.com)

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