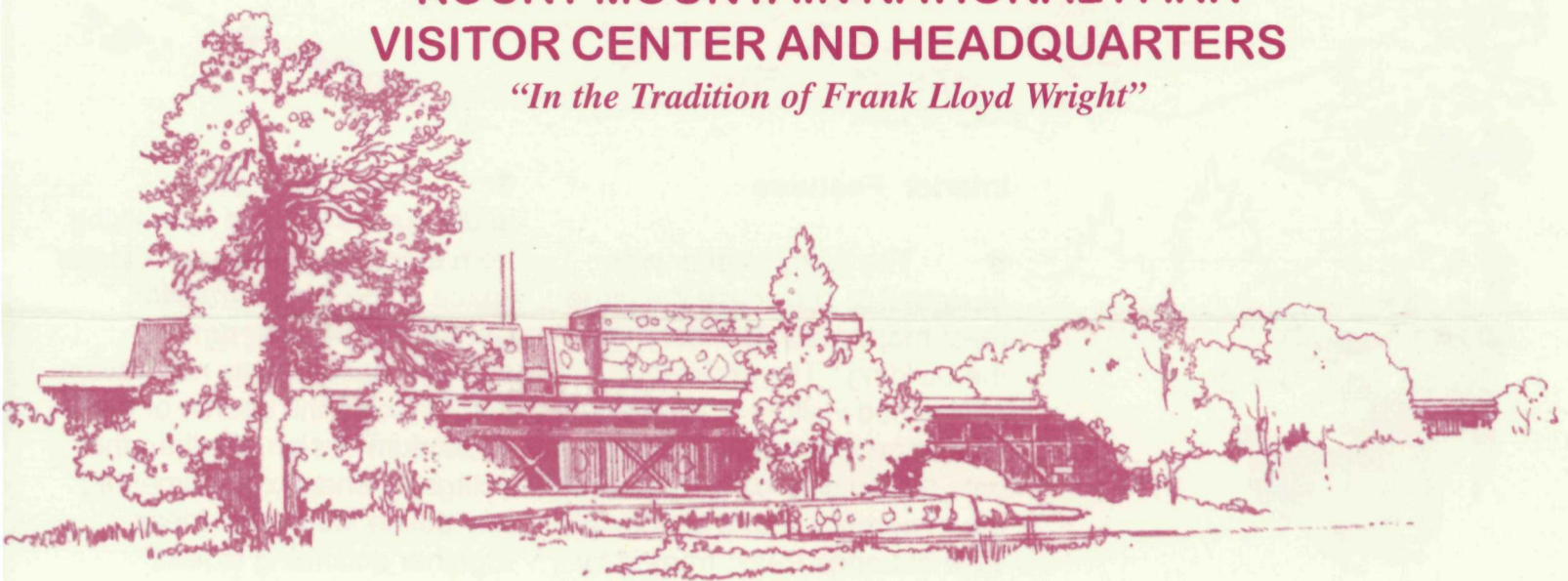


## ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK VISITOR CENTER AND HEADQUARTERS

*"In the Tradition of Frank Lloyd Wright"*



If you've guessed that there is something special about the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center building, you're right. Gracefully nestled into the surrounding landscape, the structure showcases the principles of America's premier 20th century architect, Frank Lloyd Wright. The building, constructed in 1965-1966, was designed by

Taliesin Associates, the architectural group founded by Wright to realize and extend his design philosophies.

### The "Wright Stuff"

*"Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature. It will never fail you."*

- Frank Lloyd Wright

Those familiar with Frank Lloyd Wright designs will easily recognize his influence on this structure. His philosophy, which he termed "organic architecture," sought to blend buildings with their surroundings, drawing inspiration from nature while providing an ideal environment for living and working. Nature was Wright's most inspirational force. His respect for nature was expressed in abstract designs that were harmonious with the landscape.

Wright wanted to develop a style of architecture that was purely American. In 1885, as he began his career, he studied American society and its relationship with the natural world. He saw America as informal and independent. Rejecting the formal, box-like structures of the day, Wright created a style to fit America's character and landscapes. His designs included wide open living spaces—a style that changed American architecture.

### Exterior Construction and Design of the Park Visitor Center Headquarters Building

■ Several exterior features show that the building is linked to the master architect. The long horizontal roofline, the projecting rock walls, ample use of glass and natural rock, and the way in which the building appears to grow from the site are clues easily recognized by Wright aficionados.

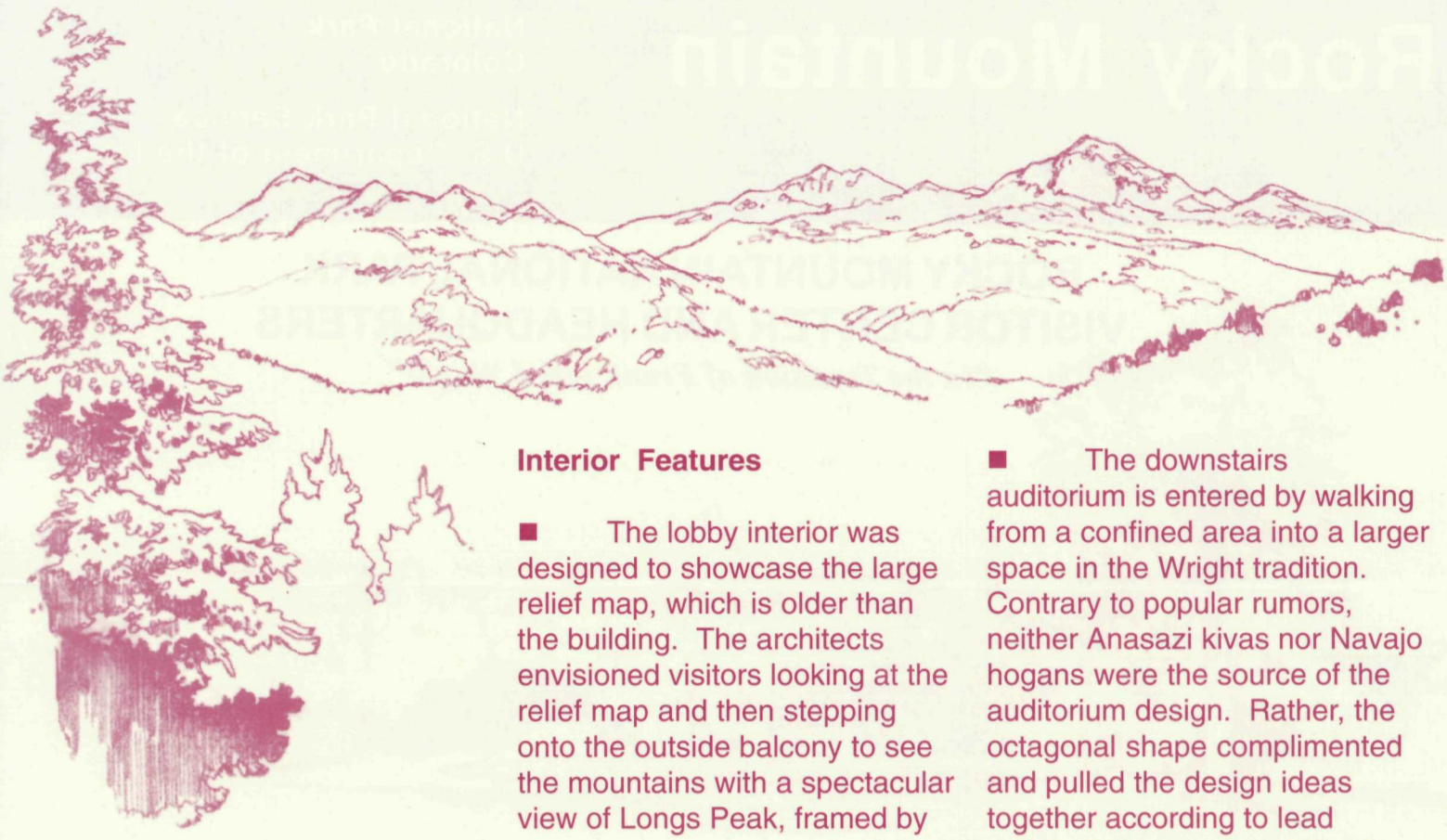
■ The native sandstone that envelopes the exterior came from an old federal quarry near Lyons, Colorado. Taliesin architects were delighted to find

these sandstone rocks which had been quarried in the late 1800s because they had acquired lichens and an aged patina. The warm color of the rock accented the bark of the surrounding ponderosa pines.

Huge frames were constructed on site to serve as forms for the rock panels. Sandstone slabs and aggregate rock backed with steel rods and concrete were laid in the forms. Large cranes lifted the panels into place. One hundred one panels of various sizes and shapes were hoisted and carefully positioned. The largest, weighing 65,000 pounds, frames the front interior entry.

■ The choice of *Cor-Ten* steel for the supporting truss system proved an inspired choice. The unfinished surface of the steel was sandblasted to remove its rustproof patina and then it was allowed to weather naturally. It oxidized into the rich brown and purple shades that blend well with the sandstone and the surrounding landscape.

■ Large beams and stamped plates of weathered *Cor-Ten* steel form a collage of jagged triangles reminiscent of the surrounding mountain vistas. A triangular motif is stamped into the steel fascia of the building.



*Wright ideas permeate our architectural world. Open floor plans, family rooms, garden rooms, decks, carports, and ample glass windows are Wright contributions. His designs favored long horizontal roofs with sheltering overhangs, protruding walls, and cantilevers. His colors, textures, shapes, and materials were chosen to blend with the natural setting. Expanses of glass, which he called "light panels," connected the interior to nature and mimicked the soft natural light of the outdoors. Wright also liked contrasts—rough rock next to glass, small entrances opening into large spaces, and light areas next to dark ones. These principles are apparent in the the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center Headquarters building—an invaluable aesthetic resource. This is the only Wright/Taliesin structure preserved within a National Park.*

### Interior Features

■ The lobby interior was designed to showcase the large relief map, which is older than the building. The architects envisioned visitors looking at the relief map and then stepping onto the outside balcony to see the mountains with a spectacular view of Longs Peak, framed by pines.

■ Walls of windows provide natural lighting and impressive views of the forest and mountains. A skylight window above the lobby frames a view of Deer Mountain.

■ Notice the interesting shape of lobby. The angularity of the room, ceiling, and information desk were designed to provoke thought. Notice also that the external triangular motif is repeated in the stamped fascia that houses the lobby's indirect lighting.

■ Terrazzo floors, which Wright used during the 40s and 50s, occur throughout the building. Terrazzo is extremely durable but was very labor intensive to create. First a concrete layer was poured, then bronze seams were layed, followed by a poured mixture of cement resin and stone chips. High-powered cutters and sanders were used to finish the floors to a smooth polish.

■ The downstairs auditorium is entered by walking from a confined area into a larger space in the Wright tradition. Contrary to popular rumors, neither Anasazi kivas nor Navajo hogans were the source of the auditorium design. Rather, the octagonal shape complimented and pulled the design ideas together according to lead architect Casey. A rock fireplace adds to the ambience of the interior, intended to give the room a feeling of warmth on cool winter evenings.

■ Pure Wright structures always included Wright-designed furniture and fixtures. The pinkish walls and orange color scheme were part of the design. A compliment of furnishings for the building included 40 orange benches for the auditorium and lobby seating, orange draperies, trash containers, and planters.

There is something special about the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center Headquarters building! Because of the building's connection to Frank Lloyd Wright, the National Park Service is dedicated to preserving its original design elements. The building is listed on the National Historic Register.

