

HOMEBODY

I am interested in the concept of home and what home is to me as a physical place, a feeling, or a person. I am drawn to that subject as a manifestation of a whole slew of emotions about being away from my “home” in the traditional sense, feeling less at home in my own body, and trying to reflect on where I truly feel at home. These concepts all came together when I read an old horoscope by Blythe Baird: “Sagittarius, you are someone’s home.” I want to know what it means to “be a home” for someone...if it is possible to be a home for someone without fundamentally changing yourself.

The main qualities of a home are safety, comfort, and unconditional acceptance. Safety relates to blankets, being swaddled. To cover someone with a blanket shows a degree of vulnerability as well as intimacy. Building off of that, I wove a blanket.

Tactile art has always been something I have been interested in. Weaving is not only a way of incorporating the self into the art, it is also a cathartic experience. In a woven textile, every shape, color, or texture reflects back on the weaver and, in that sense, this blanket is a self-portrait.

The blanket becomes a home to someone. Wrapped in a blanket, you are surrounded by softness, warmth, and safety. If I were to be a home for someone, this is all I could hope they experience.

Simone

Homebody: an exploration of what makes a home

Simone



The topic of home has been coming up a lot recently within myself and my art. This past summer I examined the concept of one's body as a home by making a short film, and through my research, I have continued to examine that idea as well as concepts of intimacy and the vulnerability of bedrooms. What makes a home a home? How we change ourselves to become homes for other people?

One of my favorite horoscopes pertaining to the concept of *home* is from June, 2014: "Sagittarius, you are someone's home."¹ That horoscope really resonates with me. Initially I thought this sentiment was really sweet, yet it also connotes self-sacrifice. A home should be a space of comfort, safety, and protection. What does it mean to be someone's home? Can a person provide for other people unconditionally with no ill effect to themselves? Can you be a home to someone if you don't feel like a home to yourself? Is there any way to be someone's home without changing yourself? When I ask myself where I feel most at home or who I feel most at home with, it is hard to pinpoint an answer.

Nostalgically, it's easy to say that I felt most at home at age 10 in Elena Graziani's living room, I spent so much time there that I'm sure I could've called it a second home, but now it is as foreign as the living room of a stranger. Would I feel at home there now? No. Maybe I felt at home with certain people at a point, but don't anymore; do they still count? Do these homes exist in a suspended state, only in memory?

Nowhere was more like home than summer camp between freshman and sophomore year, Liza's bedroom before a school dance, Saskia's house at lunchtime. No one was more like home than my group of friends on the eve of my 15th birthday, Alice on a rainy June day, Maria and Angela on a Thursday night under a full moon. All of these homes are fleeting spaces or states of mind. All of these homes are temporary. The only permanent home you will ever have is your own body, and you have to be your own home first and foremost, before you can be anyone else's. In that sense, my idea of home is an intangible entity; it is more of a state of mind than a place.

If I had to define what a physical home is to me, it would be a space where one feels entirely comfortable, a space that you can exist in in your entirety without question. Home is where you can go back to at the end of a day and feel safe, regardless of what the day has held. That idea of home as a safe and comfortable space has usually been in temporary spaces for me. I've never felt more at home than at summer camps, precollege programs, or weekends by myself on the couch in my house. Home is a temporal space that only exists under the right conditions and while I love my house, it doesn't always feel like home.

Being away from my "home" in the traditional sense for this extended period of time wasn't as hard as I thought it would be. I thought I would miss my house a lot more than I do. The places I find myself missing aren't what I would consider home; the park near my house, the Art Institute, the train, and the Cermak grocery store on Halsted. I miss some people and I miss the familiarity of the city, but I have never been homesick. If anything, I feel more at home here. I remember lying in my bed on the night we laid the ground rules of our semester, completely overwhelmed because there had never been a place or community where I had felt I had the freedom to be completely myself without any obligation to my past selves or fear of judgment. Being here and away from "home" in the traditional sense has made me realize that home is not so much a physical place as it is the people around me. When I returned to my school at home to visit over the Thanksgiving break, I was shocked by how little it felt like home to me. The

¹ Baird, Blythe. "June Horoscopes." *Blythe Brooklyn Baird*. 12 May 2014. Web. 14 Nov. 2016.

familiarity was there but even that waned as the day went on. So much had changed without me there that it didn't feel like the space I'd known for 14 years. New walls were put up, new freshmen wandered the halls, parts of the school that had been under construction for the past year were open now, and the experience was disorienting. My school had been a space I knew like the back of my hand, and in the sense of familiarity and a small community of friends who I love, it was a home. Going back and finding so much to be unfamiliar and changed made it feel less like a home. I felt like one of the new freshmen, trying to get my bearings, despite having been a student there since preschool. That change in my school displayed the temporary nature of home perfectly. Where I might have felt at home there just a year ago, going back to visit I felt like a freshmen and a graduated senior simultaneously. The pool of people I knew shrunk considerably with the graduation of last year's seniors and the influx of new freshmen filled the school with unfamiliar faces. I needed help navigating the unfamiliar hallways. The change, although jarring, was inevitable. No place can be your home forever, and if it hadn't changed now, my school still would've changed at some point. Places that no longer exist within the school building remain a home in my memories. My eighth grade locker, Mr. Wildman's room, the big buckeye tree, stairwells and hallways all decimated by the passage of time still existing in a fragmented form in my mind, and that is enough. They are still homes despite no longer existing physically.

In contrast to my ephemeral, and for the most part non-physical, definition of a home, the construction of a house can play a huge role in what makes it into a home for its inhabitants. How a house is built speaks volumes about its inhabitants and how they live: How much storage a home has can speak to what its inhabitants need to store, how many bedrooms can show the literal number of inhabitants and their relationships to each other, do they sleep in the same room? In the same bed? So much can be read into the layout of a house and what it contains. Traditional Victorian homes contained box-like rooms with little natural light², providing a degree of separation between each room and the outside world.



Figure 1. A traditional victorian home, exterior.

² Huxtable, Ada Louise. *Frank Lloyd Wright*. New York: Lipper/Viking, 2004. Print.

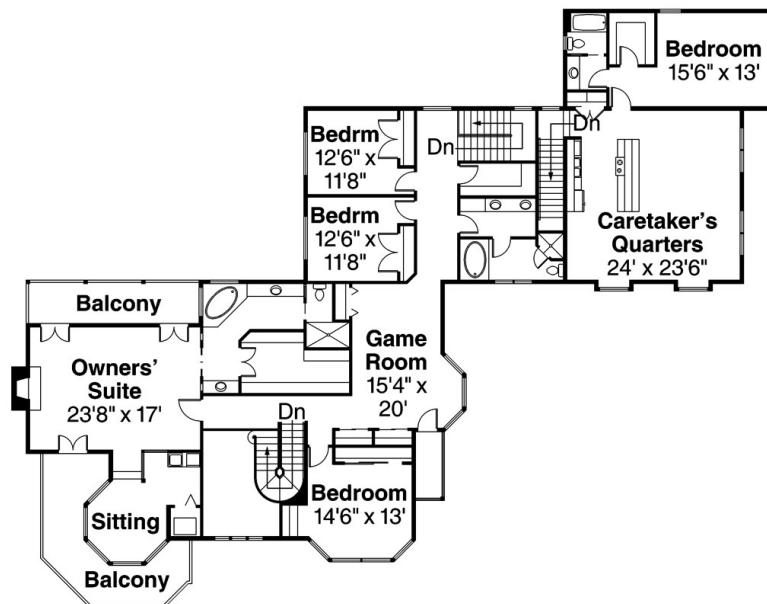


Figure 2. A floor plan of a traditional Victorian home.

Architect Frank Lloyd Wright challenged those architectural concepts and sought to eliminate that separation between rooms. Wright also designed his homes to fit the needs of each family he was commissioned by. In lieu of the tall boxy Victorian style houses that were the norm of the time, Wright was building low to the ground, open homes where each room flowed into the next with the needs of the family in mind.

When most other buildings were climbing upwards in the era of the skyscraper and industrialization, Wright sought to make homes that were one with their surroundings, igniting the Prairie School movement of architecture³. Each house Wright designed was designed for the

³ Huxtable. *Frank Lloyd Wright*.

needs of the family, intending to make their lives as easily functional and elegant as possible. Wright's homes strive to be practical and at home within the landscape than their Victorian predecessors while also maintaining a degree of sophistication.

Figure 3. Frank Lloyd Wright's Frederick C. Robie house exterior



Figure 4. The floor plan for Frank Lloyd Wright's Frederick C. Robie house

Wright's signature touches, such as the sloping roofs and overhangs present on his Prairie style homes caught on in the years following their inception. By the 1950s, such features were the norm in many newly built suburbs⁴.

By destroying the mold of the typical American home, Wright had inadvertently created a new mold that would continue to spread through American suburbs following the end of WWII. A prime example of this is Levittown, NY, a suburb built to ease the housing shortage after WWII. Levittown was created using the assembly-line model pioneered by Henry Ford to build houses⁵. The houses in Levittown took a few pages from Wright in their construction, with the majority being low to the ground, with the sloping roofs and overhangs present in the Prairie school style of design⁶. In trying to create homes tailored to the individual, Wright inadvertently provided inspiration for the mass-produced homes of the future. If you think about your own house, chances are it was built for someone other than you and the people who you inhabit the space with. Few people are able to have their house designed around them and their family's needs. Most of us are living in houses either built for other people or built as a part of a large scale development, like a housing development in a suburb or an apartment building. But how do we make these spaces into homes for ourselves? Do they become homes through decor (individualization), other inhabitants (family, roommates, pets), memories or associations (nostalgia)? All of the above?

⁴ Baer, Geoffrey. "10 Homes That Changed America." *10 That Changed America*. Prod. Dan Protess. PBS, Chicago, Illinois. 5 Apr. 2016. *10 That Changed America*. Web. 9 Nov. 2016.

⁵ Baer, Geoffrey. "10 Towns That Changed America." *10 That Changed America*. Prod. Dan Prostess. PBS, Chicago, Illinois, 19 Apr. 2016. *10 That Changed America*. Web. 9 Nov. 2016.

1 B3.
6 Ibid

Frank Lloyd Wright built himself a home in Wisconsin in 1911 for himself, his mother, and mistress, Mamah Borthwick. The home, called Taliesin, was meant as a country refuge for Wright (and Mamah Borthwick), harkening back to Wright's childhood summers working on his uncle's farm⁷. While his wife and children remained in their home in Oak Park, Wright built himself a home, an homage to the Wisconsin landscape nestled in the flat planes of paleozoic plateau. And the space remained a home to Wright, even after Borthwick, her two children, and four others were murdered there in 1914 leaving Taliesin burnt to the ground and marred by loss⁸. Wright was undeterred and rebuilt Taliesin, and later Taliesin West. Taliesin was such a home to Wright that he refused to let its physical incarnation go.

Going back to my previous questions of the meaning of being someone's home (Can you be a home to someone if you don't feel like a home to yourself? Is there anyway to be someone's home without changing yourself?) - I don't know if I am anyone's home, and maybe that is how the horoscope was meant to be read, you are someone's home simply by existing in your entirety, every aspect of you is comforting, safe, and protects someone, without you even knowing it. There are a handful of people that I could see being my home. Friends who I love with my whole heart and who I feel safe and protected with. In that sense, the phrase "Home is where the heart is" is especially apt. A home is with those you love the most, wherever they may be.

⁷ Huxtable. *Frank Lloyd Wright*.

⁸ Ibid.

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Figure 4. Frank Lloyd Wright Preservation Trust. *Frederick C. Robie House Ground Level Floor Plan*. Digital image. *Frank Lloyd Wright Trust Digital Image Collection*. Frank Lloyd Wright Trust Digital Image Collection, Web. 4 Dec. 2016.

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