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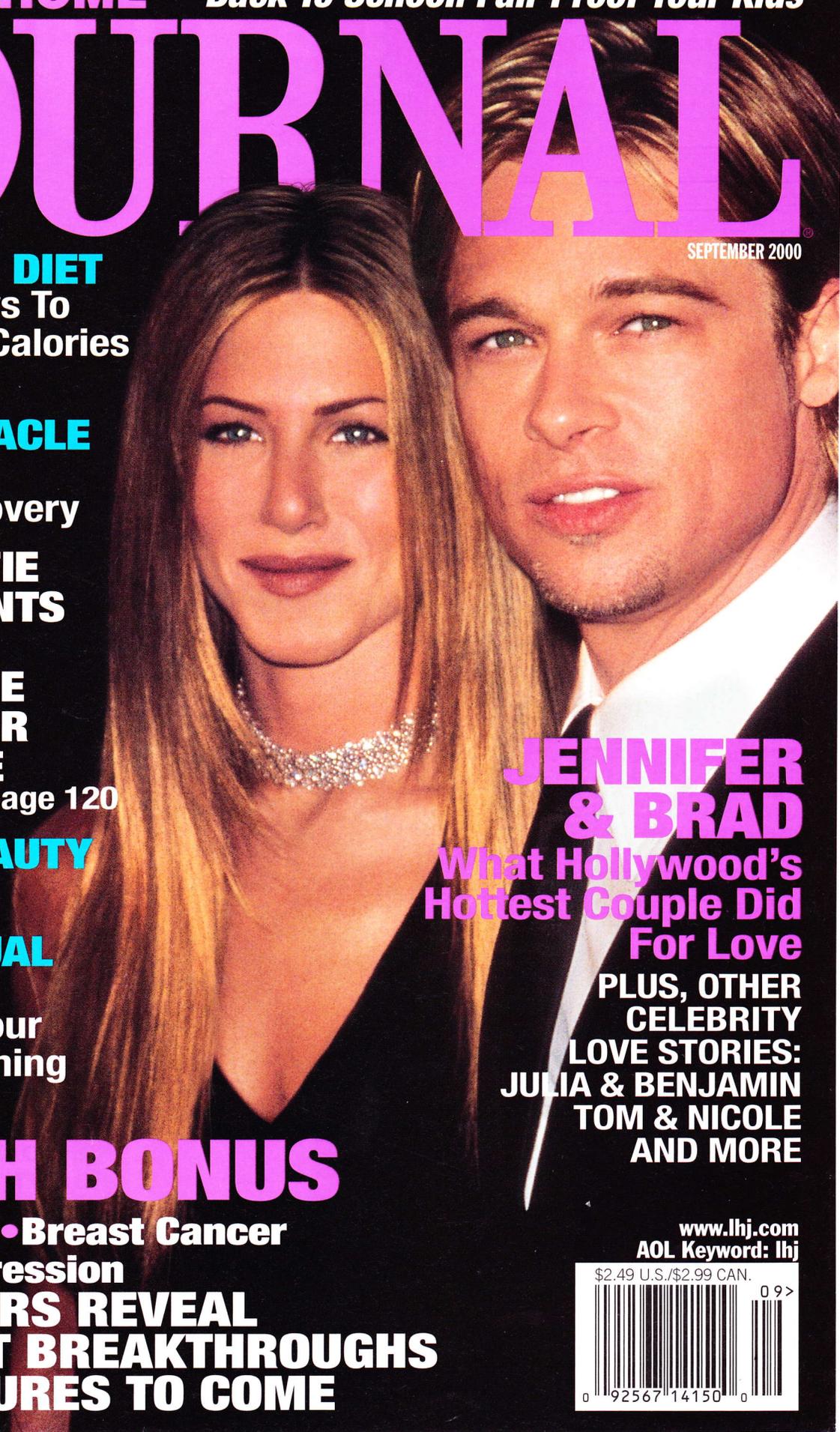
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## TRAVEL JOURNAL

### Oak Park: The Wright Place to Spend a Day

No matter how much you already know about architect Frank Lloyd Wright, your knowledge is guaranteed to increase after an afternoon's walk in one Chicago suburb, thanks to the concentration of his major works there.

Oak Park, Illinois (ten miles west of downtown Chicago), boasts more Frank Lloyd Wright buildings than any other community in the world: twenty-five in all. The suburb is especially rich in examples—by Wright and others—of the revolutionary Prairie style, considered the first truly American form of modern architecture.

Widely regarded as our nation's pre-eminent architect, Wright lived and worked in his Oak Park home and studio from 1889 to 1909. During this period, he developed his boldly original Prairie designs, known for horizontal, earth-hugging lines and nature-hued colors that mirrored the Midwestern prairie landscape.

There's no wrong way to enjoy a Wright-filled afternoon in Oak Park. However, an ideal starting point is the **Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio**, open to the public via guided tours. The building has been meticulously restored to its 1909 appearance.

One of the best loved rooms is the delightful playroom that Wright fashioned for his six children. It has been said that everything Wright was capable of architecturally, he did in this room, with its barrel-vaulted ceiling, balcony stage, decorative skylight, *Arabian Nights*-inspired mural and even a suspended grand piano.

In the National Historic District surrounding the Home and Studio, you can view over a dozen Wright-designed residences and other notable homes on a guided walking tour or on your own. The Foundation's audio tour, suitable for Wright aficionados and novices alike, lets you set your own pace through this lovely, tree-lined neighborhood. The informative tape points out a handful of Victorian homes to help contrast Wright's

innovative designs with the architecture of the day. Since these homes are privately owned, viewing is strictly from outside.

You can also study the exterior of Wright's **Unity Temple**, completed in 1908 for the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Oak Park. But leave time for the self-directed interior tour, using a pamphlet prepared by the Unity Temple Restoration Foundation. Stroll through the spacious meeting room, or pause to meditate in the sanctuary with its awe-inspiring art glass ceiling, earth-tone colors and other signature Wright details.

Unity Temple is Wright's last remaining public building in the Prairie style, the structure the architect called "my little jewel box." Although the building is situated on a busy street and constructed of more than one hundred tons of poured reinforced concrete, the interior casts a serene, ethereal spell.

If you haven't tired of doing the Wright thing at this point, grab a field guide at the Home and Studio's Ginkgo Tree Bookshop and embark on your own driving tour of over a dozen additional Wright homes in other parts of Oak Park and the adjoining suburb of River Forest.

True Wrightophiles will not feel their pilgrimage is complete without a visit to **Robie House** on the University of Chicago's campus, south of downtown Chicago and a forty-five-minute drive from Oak Park.

Just as the Home and Studio marks the evolution of Wright's Prairie style, Robie House marks its pinnacle. Wright himself proclaimed it "the cornerstone of modern architecture." Completed in 1910, its radical Prairie architecture shocked Chicagoans, but today draws visitors from around the world. This architectural gem is currently a work in progress, with restoration projected for completion in 2007.

For information, call the Unity Temple Restoration Foundation at 708-383-8873; the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation (which manages Robie House and the Home and Studio) at 708-848-1976 ([www.wrightplus.org](http://www.wrightplus.org)); or the Oak Park Visitors Center at 708-848-1500. —Marya Smith

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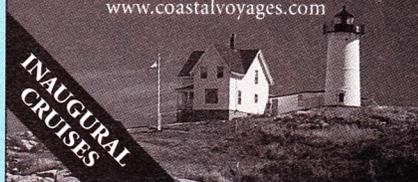
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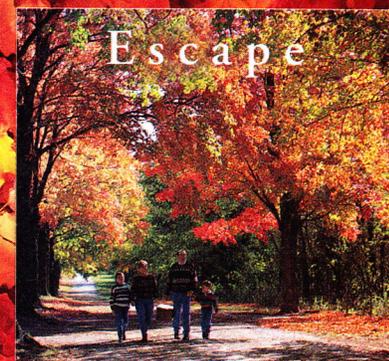
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