



FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT
(1867 - 1959)



BY DIANNA STAMPFER

Unother architect in the country holds the level of recognition and prominence as Frank Lloyd Wright. Born in 1867, he undoubtedly is the most noted American architect and interior designer of the 20th Century.

The Wisconsin-born Wright spent a significant portion of his adult years in the Chicago suburbs of Oak Park, where a collection of his homes remain a testament to his unique modern style. Although these styles developed over time from his Prairie School movement to the concept of the Usonian home, Wright maintained an organic approach to his designs – taking the lay of the land into serious consideration when creating the perfect juxtaposition of home and nature.

Building a home wasn't just assembling the floors, walls and roofs, for the overly-eccentric Wright, it also meant designing all the furniture, accessories and even wardrobes for the homeowners to wear during their open house unveilings. Wright demanded and was given – sometimes with reluctance – complete control on his projects, from start to finish.

During his esteemed career, Wright designed more than 1,000 projects – about half of which were built – including homes, museums and office buildings. Michigan boasts more than 70 of these historic icons, including two "colonies" of four homes each found in Kalamazoo and Galesburg, four in Okefenokee, several in the Detroit area, many along the Lake Michigan shore (including a cluster of seven north of Muskegon), and others scattered around the state.

Among the most noted Wright works in Michigan are the Affleck House in Bloomfield Hills, the Meyer May House in Grand Rapids, and the Palmer House in Ann Arbor.

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AFFLECK HOUSE PHOTO PROVIDED BY LTU

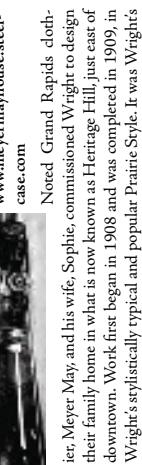
Completed in 1941, this Bloomfield Hills home sprawls for some 2,250 square feet, yet is considered one of Wright's smallest commissions in terms of actual size. Known as a "raised Usonian" home, its style was meant to appeal to the "everyday" American with average income and was built for a mere \$19,000.



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY STEELECASE

Meyer May House

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True to Wright's form, the house was designed to fit the unique and typically uninhabitable lot. As such, sleeping spaces are recessed into the ground, while the living area, kitchen and sunroom cantilever over a ravine. Throughout the house, Wright's trademark polished concrete floors contain a radiant heating system. Outside, the home boasts a cypress and red brick facade, tucked into the banks of the lot.

Gregor S. and Elizabeth B. Affleck commissioned Wright to build their home in Southwest Michigan and it remained in their family until it was donated to Lawrence Technological University (LTU) in 1978 by their children, Mary Ann Lutomska and the late Gregor P. Affleck. LTU maintains the home as an educational resource and it is a proud addition to its College of Architecture and Design.

In 1990, interior and exterior surfaces were restored – thanks to the contribution of donor – as part of the first round of restoration efforts. In 2009, two LTU students majoring in architecture and construction management were given the unique opportunity to live in the house while working on additional projects to keep the home historically sound. Earlier this summer LTU received a grant for students to recreate furniture for the home. Such reproductions will complement the interior renovations.

The Affleck House holds both state and national status as a Registered Historic Place. The Michigan Society of Architects has also proclaimed the home to be one of the 50 most significant structures in the state. It is open for tours, with prior appointments, although tours may be limited significantly during the restoration period.

The two-story T-plan home is constructed of pale Roman brick, with large roof overhangs and an abundance of art glass windows and skylights to let in plenty of natural light. Unique features to the home include iridescent strips of gold art glass placed in the horizontal grooves of both brick fireplaces and a pastel mural of hollyhocks, which wraps around a dividing wall between the living and dining rooms.

After May passed away in 1936, the house sat vacant for six years before selling in 1942. Just a few years later, it sold again and carports and additional entrances were added, compromising the integrity of what Wright had designed and subsequently built.

The Steelecase Corporation purchased the home in 1985 and began the undaunting task of restoring it to its original grandeur – which included the demolition of all non-original additions. In just two years, the project was complete and the public was first invited to

Opening the Door to Wright Homes in Michigan

Sitting on three lots (two acres) at the end of quiet dirt road cul-de-sac, it is one of the finest, last residential masterpieces of Wright's design. Tucked into a narrow ridge of hills, the Palmer House is surrounded by a lush informal garden. A quaint and tranquil Japanese-inspired Tea House, built in the mid 1960s, sits at the bottom of a slight ravine providing a place for quiet contemplation and meditation.

Resembling an equilateral triangle, the 2,000-square-foot geometric house boasts long roofs with wood shingles and copper flashing, the deep overhangs jutting out over the brick and cypress sided home. The cantilever extending over the terrace is said to be the most dramatic feature of the house, although every nook and cranny of the home is dramatic in its own way. From massive chimney and fireplace in the living room to the band of bird-shaped windows that encircle the house, every element claims Wright's master design.

The home – which has no 90 degree corners – has three wings arranged off the main entrance, as well as a large terrace off the living room and even a basement – something Mary Palmer demanded and received, despite Wright's opinion on the matter.

It is often said that "the Palmer house exemplifies Wright's open, American organic architecture in which all parts are related to the whole and are linked to the environment in an adaption of form to nature." Many also believe it is Ann Arbor's most architecturally significant home.

The Palmer family owned the home until 2009, when it was purchased by Jeffrey and Kathryn Schow, a San Francisco patent attorney – was born and raised in Michigan and graduated from the University of Michigan. The couple first noticed the Palmer House during visits to the nearby Nichols Arboretum and it sparked in them an interest in Wright-designed homes. So, when the Palmer House went up for sale, it seemed a dream come true for them to own a piece of history and share it with others who admire Wright's work.

Touring a Frank Lloyd Wright-designed home is a unique treat, spending the night in one is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The Palmer House now operates as a vacation rental available for \$300-\$400 per night (with a two night minimum) or \$2,000 per week. With three bedrooms and two bathrooms, it can accommodate up to six guests. The home is also available for corporate retreats, meetings and social functions.

During his career, Wright authored 20 books and many articles, and was a frequent lecturer throughout the United States and Europe. There are an unlimited number of books focused on the works of Wright – from pocket guides to thick coffee table books, and even novels based on his unconventional life. Award-winning documentary filmmaker Ken Burns even produced a PBS piece on Wright, which provides considerable insight into this master of modern architecture.

Wright passed away in 1959 at the age of 91, after a colorful and fulfilling life. He left behind a legacy like no other, including active preservation and enthusiast groups such as the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation and the Frank Lloyd Wright Preservation Trust. His esteemed Taliesen School of Architecture maintains operations in Spring Green, Wisconsin and Scottsdale, Arizona. □

For more information on Frank Lloyd Wright:
Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation • www.franklloydwright.org
Frank Lloyd Wright Preservation Trust • www.flw.org

Dianne Stampfle has long been fascinated by the craftsmanship of Frank Lloyd Wright and just recently began researching his historic homes in Michigan.

tour this magnificent Wright home – which is now furnished with a mixture of original pieces, reproductions of original pieces and period arts and crafts style items. Today, the Meyer May House is recognized as the most completely restored of Wright's homes.

The Meyer May House is listed with both the State and National Register of Historic Places, is a contributing building to the Heritage Hill Historic District and was protected by the City of Grand Rapids' historic preservation ordinance of 1973 – thus protecting it for future generations.

Free tours of the Meyer May House are offered Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 10am to 2pm and Sundays from 1-5pm (excluding major holidays), year round. The last tour starts one hour prior to closing.

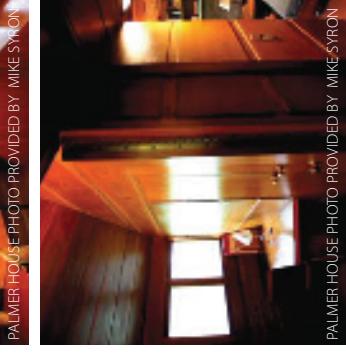
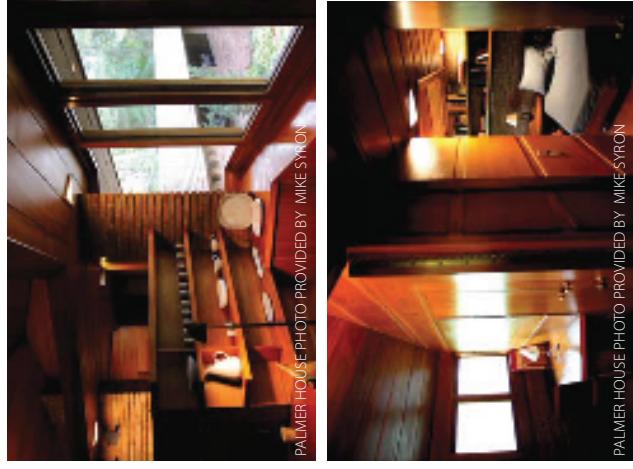
(PHOTO BY MIKE SYRON)

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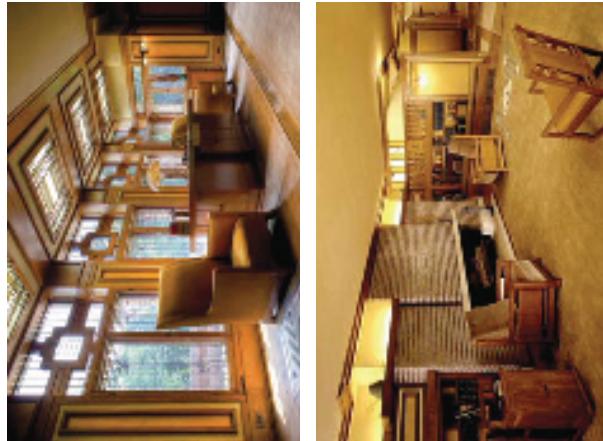
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PALMER HOUSE PHOTO PROVIDED BY MIKE SYRON



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One of the finest later works by Wright was the home he designed and built for University of Michigan economics professor William Palmer, and his wife Mary, in 1952.





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- George Gerts House,
"Bridge Cottage" Whitehall (1902)
- Mrs. Thomas H. Gale
Cottage and Duplicates Whitehall (1905)
- Meyer May House Grand Rapids (1909)
- J. H. Amberg House Grand Rapids (1909)
- Ernest Vosburgh House
Grand Beach (1916)
- Joseph J. Bagley House
Grand Beach (1916)
- W. S. Carr House Grand Beach (1916)
- Abby Beecher Roberts House,
"Deertrack," Marquette (1936)
- Goetsch-Winkler House, Okemos (1940)
- Affleck House, Bloomfield Hills (1940)
- Carlton David Wall House,
"Snowflake," Plymouth (1941)
- Melvyn Maxwell Smith House,
Bloomfield Hills (1946)
- Amy Alpaugh House, Northport (1947)
- David Weisblat House, Galesburg (1948)
- Eric Pratt House, Galesburg (1948)
- Samuel Eppstein House, Galesburg (1948)
- Robert Levin House, Kalamazoo (19480)
- Ward McCartney House,
Kalamazoo (1949)
- Eric Brown House, Kalamazoo (1949)
- Robert D. Winn House,
Kalamazoo (1950)
- Erling P. Brauner House, Okemos (1948)
- James Edwards House, Okemos (1949)
- Howard Anthony House,
Benton Harbor (1949)
- Donald Schaberg House, Okemos (1950)
- William Palmer House, Ann Arbor (1950)
- Roy Wetmore Service Station Remodeling,
Ferndale (1951)
- Lewis Goddard House, Plymouth, (1953)
- Dorothy H. Turkel House, Detroit, (1955)
- Carl Schultz House, St Joseph (1957)