

HOUSE FOUR: The House on a Waterfall—Fallingwater, Edgar J. Kaufmann House, Mill Run, Pennsylvania. 1935–37

Frank Lloyd Wright (American, 1867–1959)



IMAGE 16: View from downstream. 1992. Photo: Paul Rocheleau. © 1992, Paul Rocheleau



IMAGE 17: Living Room. 1992. Photo: Paul Rocheleau. © 1992, Paul Rocheleau



IMAGE 18: Model. 1984. Acrylic, wood, metal, expanded polystyrene, and paint, 40½ x 71½ x 47¾" (102.8 x 181.6 x 121 cm). Modelmakers: Paul Bonfilio, with Joseph Zelvin, Larry List, and Edith Randel. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Best Products Company Architecture Fund. © 2004 Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



IMAGE 19: Desk. 1936–39. Wood and painted metal. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase. Lily Auchincloss Fund

ABOUT FALLINGWATER

The architect Frank Lloyd Wright designed this house in 1935–37. Its name, Fallingwater, was derived from the waterfall running under the house. Fallingwater is located in Bear Run, Pennsylvania, and was a weekend retreat for the Pittsburgh department-store magnate Edgar J. Kaufmann and his family. The Kaufmann's had often enjoyed picnics on a large rock near the top of a waterfall on their property, and Wright decided that this point was the ideal location for the house. Through the use of different types of *cantilevers*, the architect built the three-story house right over the rocks and water. Its stone flooring

echoes the rocky landscape upon which it was built, and a staircase descends directly over the water. Wright designed most of the furniture for Fallingwater, which the Kaufmann family combined with their own pieces.

Fallingwater embodies Wright's design philosophy, which emphasizes the harmony between nature, man, and architecture. He once stated that "a building should grow easily from its site and be shaped to harmonize with its surroundings."⁸ Fallingwater also reflects Wright's interest in various architectural styles (particularly Japanese architecture) and different types of building materials. Wright often incorporated in his structures materials such as limestone and sandstone, which are commonly found in southwest Wisconsin, where Wright was born and raised. Wright's experimentation with materials and specific design motifs sometimes caused him unexpected problems. For instance, his use of horizontal, rather than traditional, angled roofs caused snow to accumulate in winter, which then melted and leaked into the houses. But Wright also incorporated design choices that were very effective. He always tried to select a site that would enable the house to receive full sunlight for at least part of the day. His buildings are also quite sturdy. Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., remembers that during a rare tornado in western Pennsylvania, in 1956, Fallingwater did not collapse.

The Kaufmann family often entertained at Fallingwater, and Albert Einstein was one of many notable guests. The family used the house as a weekend retreat until 1963, when, upon his father's request, Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., placed the house and the surrounding property under the care of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, in order to open the house to the public as a museum.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Look closely at Images 16 through 18. How would you describe this house (for instance, what sorts of textures and shapes do you see)? Do you notice any other interesting features about this house? How would you compare it to other houses you have seen?**
- **Look at the setting around the house. Describe the natural setting in detail.**

ABOUT FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

Born in 1867, Frank Lloyd Wright knew early on that he would become an architect. He was initially raised in a small farming community in Richland Center, Wisconsin. However, Wright's family relocated often as his father, a man of many trades, continuously looked for steady work around the country. Wright spent most of his summers on his maternal family's Wisconsin farm, where he developed a strong appreciation for nature.

In 1887, Wright moved to Chicago after studying architecture at the University of Wisconsin. He began working as a draftsman for Louis Sullivan, who was renowned at the time for his skyscraper designs. Early on in his career, Wright focused on designing homes for clients in the Midwest; these early designs, referred to as "Prairie Style," featured homes with gardens, and layouts of rooms in simple, geometric formations.

During his career, Wright expanded the scope of his work to include designs for churches, hotels, museums, office buildings, a synagogue, and furniture (see Image 19). He was extremely detail-oriented, sometimes even designing clothing for his clients that he insisted they wear in order to match the house. Projects included a church called Unity Temple, in Illinois; the Imperial Hotel, in Tokyo, Japan; and the Guggenheim Museum, in New York. The Iraqi government once commissioned Wright to design an opera house in Baghdad, but it was never built.

Wright also established a school in Arizona called the Taliesin Fellowship, where apprentices paid a fee to live and work with Wright. Their schedule included four hours a day of manual labor, from farming to preparing meals, along with working on the design of new

8. Anthony Alofsin, in *Frank Lloyd Wright: Architect*, 33.

buildings and restoring old ones. At Taliesin, Wright met Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., who introduced Wright to his father, leading to the commission of Fallingwater in 1934.

Wright died in Arizona, in 1959.

RESEARCH PROJECTS

1. Frank Lloyd Wright and Japanese Architecture

Traditional Japanese architecture was a major influence on Frank Lloyd Wright's work. Using the bibliographic and online resources in this guide, research and compare Fallingwater to a traditional Japanese home. Describe the similarities and differences between the two. Consider the building materials, the structural differences, and the geographical conditions. Learn more about other design influences in Wright's work. What were they, and why and how did Wright incorporate them? Present your ideas in an essay.

2. Usonia

Frank Lloyd Wright was a harsh critic of International Style (see Houses Three and Five). Its emphasis on modern technology and machine-made materials offended his own design philosophy, which centered on the use of natural materials, such as wood, and on the importance of craft. In response to International Style, Wright developed an ideal that he called "Usonia," which stands for the United States of North America. The Usonian philosophy advocated rural living, particularly homes and buildings representing prairie life, such as farmhouses and gas stations.

Have your students conduct research to learn more about Usonia. What do you think of Wright's reaction to International Style? Write a short paper with your response.

PROJECT EXTENSION

Hold a debate in which two teams present arguments supporting and opposing International Style and Wright's Usonian vision.

GLOSSARY

Cantilever: A cantilever is a bar or beam whose weight is supported at one end. An example of a cantilevered structure is a balcony. One way of demonstrating a cantilever is to stand with your arm extended, balancing a book on your forearm.