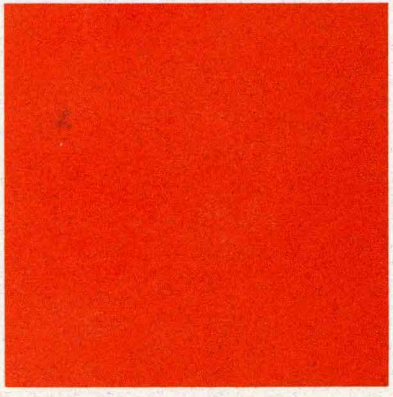


Cedar Rock — The Walter Residence — Quasqueton, Iowa

Designed by Frank Lloyd Wright

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WALTER RESIDENCE

When Lowell Walter, a wealthy Iowa businessman, died August 1981, he and his wife Agnes, left Cedar Rock, their dream home, to the people of Iowa. The impressive home, which sits on a limestone bluff overlooking a bend in the Wapsipinicon River near Quasqueton in Buchanan County, was designed by the famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright.

The Walter residence was the first house Frank Lloyd Wright designed in Iowa after the economic depression of the 1930's. Lowell Walter contacted Wright in 1942 about designing a house for a beautiful site on the Wapsipinicon River where Lowell had spent time in his youth. Wright had a reverence for the landscape and no doubt it was the striking beauty of the site, as well as the opportunities which wealthy clients like the Walters afforded, that interested him in the project. Plans for the house appeared in the "Ladies Home Journal" in 1945. However, it was not until materials became available after World War II that construction began in 1948. The house was completed in 1950 and the unique construction and quality materials ran into considerable money.

The Walter house is one of the most complete designs Frank Lloyd Wright had the opportunity to create. Nearly every aspect of the residence bears Wright's imprint. He designed the furniture, selected the carpets, chose the draperies, and even picked out the accessories.

Lowell Walter was born and raised in Quasqueton before going to Des Moines in 1913 at age 17. There, he married Agnes Nielsen, a native of Humboldt, Iowa. For 27 years, they owned and operated the Iowa Road Builders Company. They sold the company in 1944 and invested in Buchanan County farm land, a holding of 18 farms, more than 5,000 acres. The Walters maintained a house in Des Moines where they lived in winter, and resided at Cedar Rock most of the rest of the year.

The Walters were justifiably proud of Cedar Rock. Very little has been altered in the house since its construction; the structure and furnishings are in good condition. The Walters have assured preservation of the residence by providing a trust fund for the perpetual maintenance of the property.

Garden Room

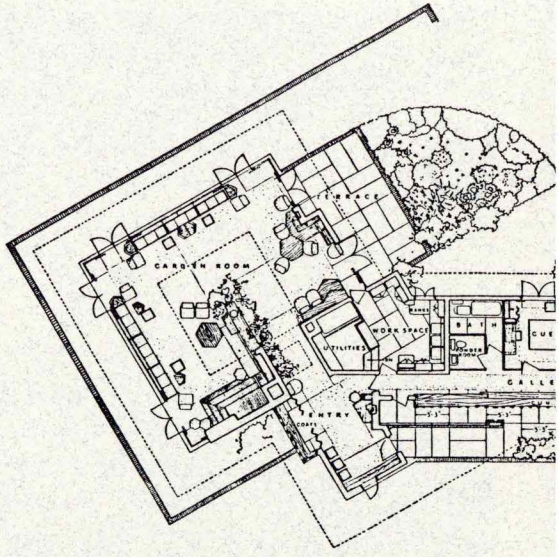
DESCRIPTION OF THE RESIDENCE

The Walter house is an example of a simplified style of house Frank Lloyd Wright developed and called "Usonian". While more lavish than most Usonian homes, the Walter house embodies the essential Usonian concepts of living simply and close to nature. The plan for the Walter house follows the characteristic "tadpole" form, typical of Wright's Usonian homes — the bedroom wing of the house constituting the tail of the tadpole and the living/dining room the head. The house is one story and the overall length is about 150 feet.

The roof and floor of the house are concrete; the walls are brick, glass, and walnut. Walnut is the only wood used in the house — the horizontal board and batten paneling is solid walnut, as are the kitchen cabinets and furniture. The house has no plaster, no basement, and no attic. The entire house is built on a grid plan with sides five feet, three inches, per square. Everything is either a full unit or a half grid unit in size.

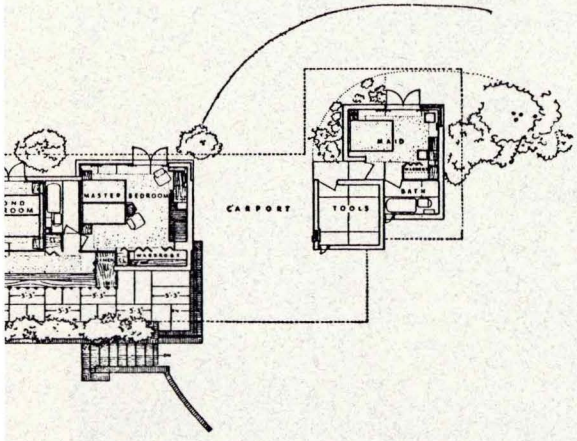
Everything about the Walter residence is compact and efficient — everything, that is, but the combination living/dining room which Wright called "the Garden Room". The Garden Room covers more than 900 square feet and has a fireplace which can hold five-foot logs. This large living space is skillfully divided by a built-in buffet and dining table, a built-in divan, and a large planted area filled with tropical plants from which the Garden Room derives its name. Vistas of the landscape were important to Wright and the view through the Garden Room's three glass walls of the river and wooded valley is breathtaking. Glass doors open directly from living areas to ground-level terraces.

Natural light fills the house. Broad overhangs with upturned edges soften sunlight and shade the glass walls. There are openings in the overhangs covered with vines for summer shade;



in the winter, the warming sunlight streams through. Clerestory windows, or skylights, are incorporated in every room to brighten interior spaces and release hot air trapped near the ceiling. Recessed artificial lighting creates the effect of natural light, even at night. For dramatic effect, Wright placed chunks of colored glass in lighted openings in the brick walls. The house is designed to function effectively with natural ventilation. There is no air conditioning and the house remains quite comfortable in summer.

The kitchen, or "work space" as Wright referred to it, is located just off the Garden Room. The work space is small but modern and functionally efficient. The high ceiling and skylight is designed to allow cooking heat and odors to rise and escape.



The bedroom wing contains three bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a powder room. The hallway, or "gallery" as Wright called it, runs the entire length of the bedroom wing and is lined with built-in walnut shelves and cabinets for convenient storage. The bedrooms have built-in walnut wardrobes and dressing tables. The master bedroom has its own fireplace. The bathrooms are of interest because of their unique pullman-type fixtures with sink, toilet, and bathtub incorporated into one compact unit. Apparently Wright did not find this design satisfactory because it is used in no other house he designed. The maid's room is of design similar to the bedrooms and bathrooms in the main house. Connecting the main house and maid's quarters is an extension of the main roof which serves as a carport for two vehicles.

All furniture, as well as built-in features, were designed by Wright to compliment the house's architecture. The consistency of the furniture design and materials used throughout the house strengthens the overall aesthetic impact of the house.

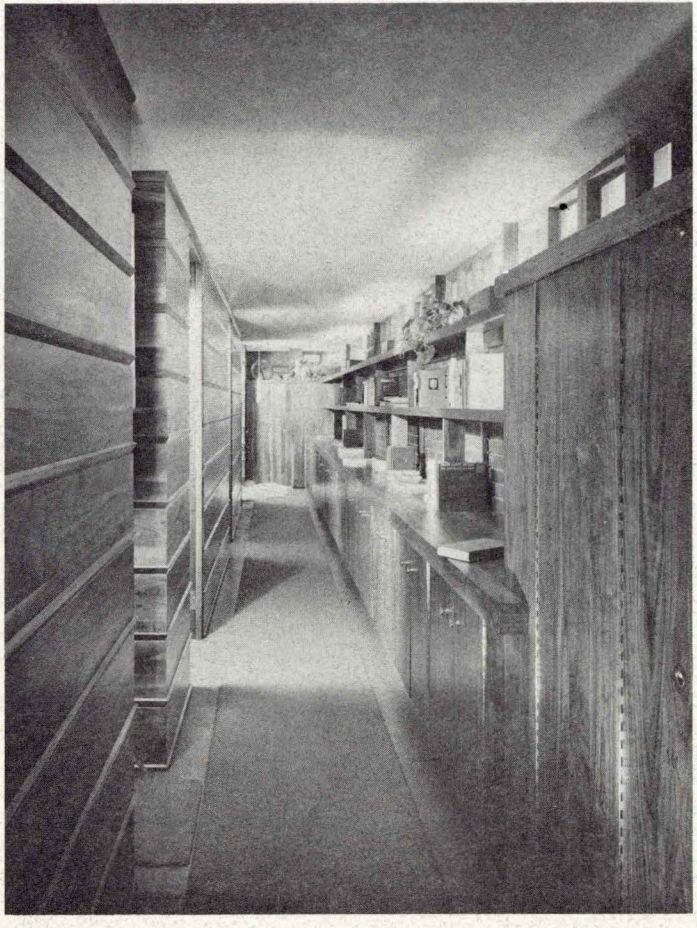
The house is heated by hot water distributed through wrought iron pipes, lying in crushed stone beneath the concrete floor panels. Wright's "gravity heating" system is a common feature of his Usonian homes.

The house's architecture is strongly influenced by horizontal lines which Wright felt reflected midwestern prairie landforms. The long, low structure is skillfully integrated into the landscape. The flat roof and broad overhangs are profoundly horizontal. The ceiling height in much of the house is only seven feet, three inches and the furniture Wright designed is lower to the floor than normal. Even subtle details, such as emphasizing the horizontal mortar joints of the brickwork by leaving them white, while coloring the mortar of the vertical joints to match the bricks, accentuates the horizontal design.

In addition to the house, the wooded eleven-acre site contains a river pavillion, a council fire, and an entrance gate, all designed by Wright.

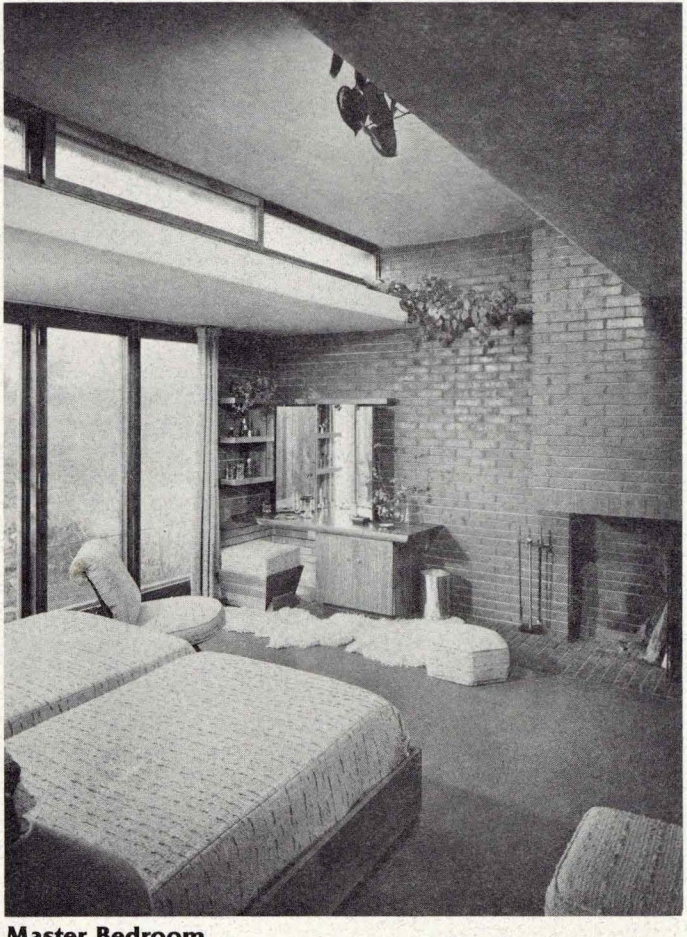
Down the hill from the house, the river pavillion dramatically spans an enormous boulder at the river's edge. Built of the same materials as the house, the two-story pavillion contains storage space for a boat reached from the water by means of a ramp, a guest room with a fireplace, a minimal kitchenette, bathroom, and screened-in porch.

On the knoll above the house is a "council fire", an area enclosed by a low, semi-circular wall focusing on an outdoor hearth. One gathering known to have used this ritual site was Wright and his apprentices following completion of the house. The council fire was also used for annual barbeques Lowell Walter organized for his farm hands.

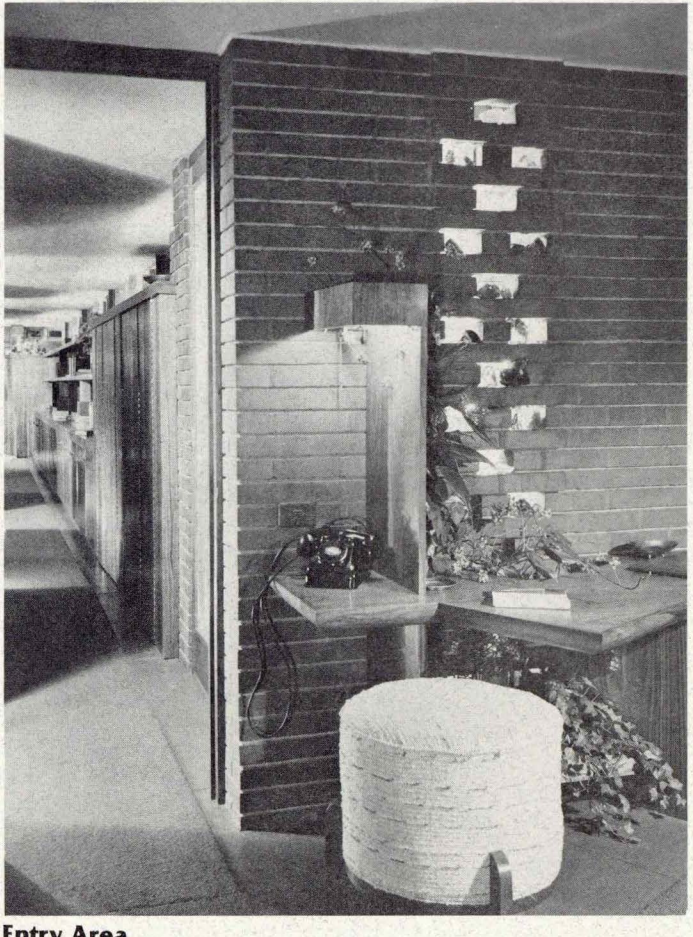


Gallery

Garden Room/Entry Hall



Master Bedroom



Entry Area

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT AND THE USONIAN IDEAL

"Every great architect is — necessarily — a great poet" — Frank Lloyd Wright, 1939.

Frank Lloyd Wright is recognized as one of America's great architects. He is often associated with the Prairie School of architecture, organic design, and Usonian houses.

Wright was born in Richland Center, Wisconsin, studied civil engineering at the University of Wisconsin, and worked under architect Louis Sullivan in Chicago for five years before going into independent practice in 1895.

By 1900, the Prairie School style of architecture was mature and Frank Lloyd Wright, at age 33, was its chief practitioner. This early period of his career was known as his "Oak Park period", referring to the location of his practice and his many residential commissions in the suburban Oak Park area near Chicago. Notable projects of this period include the Willitts house, Chicago; the Heurtley house, Oak Park; the Unity Temple, Oak Park; the Martin house, Buffalo, New York; and the Robie house, Chicago.

The Prairie School style of Wright is characterized by wide, low roofs, continuous window bands, main rooms which flow together, and integration of interior and exterior spaces. The Prairie style is founded very directly on the climate, landforms, and lifestyle of the midwestern region of the United States. The buildings are abstractions of midwestern landforms, strongly horizontal, with simple, geometric forms enlivened by special ornament. Flat or gently-pitched roofs, and low proportions echo the silhouette of the landscape. Environmentally appropriate, the buildings are designed with elevations oriented for natural ventilation and heat, with deep overhangs shielding against sun and snow. The materials include brick and wood, terra cotta and stucco, to steel and concrete. Materials are used in an honest and natural manner.

During the period from 1909-1935, there was a hiatus in Wright's career; a period of personal tragedy, long absences from home while working on the Imperial Hotel in Japan, and legal and financial pressures. It is during this period that Wright built a house and school on family lands near Spring Green, Wisconsin. Wright called this house Taliesin, a Welsh name translated literally "shining brow". The house, which was never quite completed because of Wright's ceaseless alterations and additions, is considered by some to be his greatest work. Owing to the economic hardships of the economic depression of the 1930's, Wright turned his attention from serving clients to training students. In 1932, Wright established the Taliesin fellowship which accepted trainees to work as architectural apprentices. It is one of Wright's more notable Taliesin fellows, John De Koven Hill, who personally supervised construction of the Walter house at Quasqueton for Wright.

Within the stability of rural Wisconsin, surrounded by the masterful architectural creation of Taliesin, Wright, in the mid-1930's, began to develop a simplified American house by reworking the basic principles from his earlier work. He called the new type of house that evolved "Usonian", from the name he said Samuel Butler gave the

United States. The Usonian houses were clearly a response to the more efficient American lifestyle which had evolved out of the Great Depression.

The seven houses Wright designed in Iowa from 1945 to 1956 all possess features of the Usonian house type in its broadest definition. All but the Douglas Grant house in Cedar Rapids are on one floor. Floors are concrete, carefully finished, and given a dark red color. Heat is distributed by hot water pipes imbedded in the floor. Main living areas include dining tables and fireplaces. Glass doors allow living areas to open directly to ground-level terraces. Cars are parked next to the house under cover, but not completely closed by walls. A generally low, extended roofline settles easily over building and surrounding landscape.

The Usonian houses were intended for simple living in harmony with nature, at a cost people of average means could afford. The first Jacobs house, Madison, Wisconsin, and the Goetsh-Winkler house, Okemos, Michigan, are good examples of low-cost Usonian houses.

Wright set out, in the Usonian houses, to eliminate all that was unnecessary. He wrote in his book, *The Natural House,* "First thing in building the new house, get rid of the attic, therefore the dormer. Get rid of the useless false heights below it. Next, get rid of the unwholesome basement..." He also advocated eliminating unnecessary walls and likewise unnecessary interior doors. Wright felt enclosed garages were also unnecessary. He wanted no radiators, no interior trim, no light fixtures hanging from the ceiling, no bric-a-brac, no plastering, no paint, and no gutters and downspouts. Wright felt that furniture should be simple and integrated into the design of the house.

Wright sought a more organic form of architecture. He believed the Usonian house should grow out of the site like a tree. Wright wrote, "The Usonian house, then, aims to be a natural performance, one that is integral to site; integral to environment; integral to the life of the inhabitants. A house integral with the nature of materials — wherein glass is used as glass, stone as stone, wood as wood — and all the elements of environment go into and throughout the house. Into this new integrity, once there, those who live in it will take root and grow. And most of all, belonging by nature to the nature of its being."

Wright lived a productive and creative life. He died at age 91 on April 29, 1959, less than ten years following the completion of the Walter residence at Quasqueton.

Text adapted from the following sources:

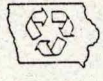
The Prairie School in Iowa, Richard Wilson and Sidney Robinson, 1977.
Frank Lloyd Wright, A Biography, Finis Farr, 1961.
The Natural House, Frank Lloyd Wright, 1954.
Manuscript for Public Tour of the Walter Residence, 1950.
Architectural photographs by Ezra Stoller

The Walter Residence and the Visitor Center are open to the public free of charge. Hours: Tuesday - Sunday (Closed Monday), May 1 through October 31, from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The Visitor Center contains information and displays about the life and work of Frank Lloyd Wright.

Call (319) 934-3572 for information on special group residence tours and visitor center activities. Managed by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Wallace Office Building, 900 East Grand, Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0034



Printed on Recycled Paper