



Photo by CHRISTOPHER LITTLE, Courtesy of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

FALLINGWATER

A Home Embedded in Nature

Written by: **Sara Mullins**

You can look at photos or watch videos of it. You can read about it. But nothing can really prepare you for your first, breathtaking glimpse of Fallingwater. A house built over a waterfall??

It's not quite what Edgar and Liliane Kaufmann had in mind when they hired noted architect Frank Lloyd Wright to build a vacation house at their beloved mountain retreat in southwestern Pennsylvania. They had expected a site allowing them a great view of Bear Run waterfalls on their property, but when Wright presented his drawings showing the house perched above them, he said he wanted to make the continuous sound of the waterfalls an integral part of their daily lives rather than just an occasional view.

Fortunately, the Kaufmanns were game, thanks to their trust in Wright's creative vision, keen interest in contemporary art and design, and deep love of nature. As owners of the upscale, successful Kaufmann's Department Store in Pittsburgh, the family could afford its \$155,000 price tag even during the depths of the Great Depression. Now designated as a National Historic Landmark, it is lauded as an icon of contemporary architecture, designed by America's most famous architect.

Edgar Kaufmann was familiar with Wright's work. But it was his son, Edgar jr. (his preferred spelling), whose passion for the arts sparked the creation of Fallingwater. Edgar and Liliane Kaufmann first met Wright when they visited



Left: The living room at Fallingwater, looking south — interior furnishings designed by Frank Lloyd Wright as well as the architecture.

Inset: The hatch to the West Terrace (also opens to the stream and waterfall below).

Photos by ROBERT P. RUSCHAK, Courtesy of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy



Edgar jr. at Taliesin, a school established by Wright and his wife Olgivanna to foster artistic growth. Edgar jr. had intended to pursue painting professionally in New York City after several years of study in Europe, but after reading Wright's book, "An Autobiography," he joined the Taliesin Fellowship for six months before returning home to work in the family business. Meanwhile, his parents and Wright had developed a rapport that resulted in their selecting Wright to design their dream vacation home.

Fallingwater exemplifies Wright's concept of an "organic architecture" that integrates structures with their natural

surroundings, with the intention of re-establishing people's connection with nature. Three cantilevered concrete trays connected to a large central chimney core built with layers of irregular stone slabs mirror the numerous rock outcroppings found in the waterfalls and surrounding terrain. Within the house, glass serves as a permeable wall surface allowing a visual flow between inside and outside by day and becoming invisible at night. Wright's choice of "Cherokee Red" paint for the home's metal railings, shelves and window frames offers a touch of the Southwest within a spacious, flowing interior space of plaster walls, wood framework, and stone slab floors. The primary house was completed after construction lasting from 1936–1937, and a guest house followed in 1939.

The Kaufmanns spent as much time as possible at Fallingwater for the remaining years of their lives. Edgar jr.'s visits were less frequent after he left the family business in 1940 to embark on a new career working with the Department of Industrial Design in New York City's Museum of Modern Art (MOMA). In 1955, Edgar jr. inherited Fallingwater after both parents had passed away. After leaving MOMA that year, he continued to enjoy the family retreat until 1963, when his concerns regarding the home's future prompted him to entrust the house and several hundred acres surrounding it to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy in accordance with his late father's wishes.



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Fallingwater blends into all aspects of the landscape as shown in this Spring view of the west elevation of the house.

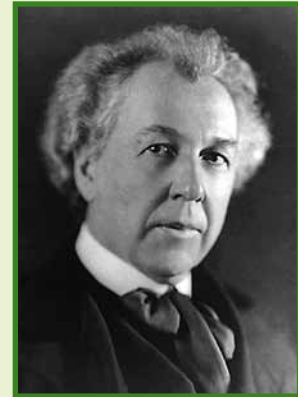
The Conservancy began to offer public tours in 1964, and Edgar jr. became a frequent visitor. He became renowned as an authority on Frank Lloyd Wright as an adjunct professor of Art and Architecture at Columbia University. He died in 1989.

“Over the years since it was built, Fallingwater has grown ever more famous and admired, a textbook example of modern architecture at its best. By its very intensity it is a public resource, not a private indulgence.” Edgar Kaufmann, jr.

Today the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy continues its mission to protect and maintain “exceptional places,” both man-made and natural, and has welcomed more than 5.5 million visitors from around the world to Fallingwater. Guided hour-long house tours are available daily until December 3 — except Wednesdays — between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Special tours include an In-Depth Tour, Focus Tour ending with a private luncheon and a Brunch Tour available most weekends from May through September. Tickets must be purchased in advance because of space limitations. Children under six and pets are not permitted on tours. Visitors should allow about two hours for their visit, dress for outdoor weather and wear walking shoes. Getting to Fallingwater requires a half-mile walk along a gravel path from the Visitors Center, where visitors can find information, restrooms, a museum store, a café and exhibitions on display in the Speyer Gallery.

“It’s a place of renewal,” says Clinton Piper, the museum programs assistant for Fallingwater. “Fallingwater expresses Wright’s desire to go to nature for inspiration and peace. For the Kaufmanns, it was a place to escape from the city. A sense of renewal is still an important part of the visitor experience today.”

Happy 150th Birthday, **Frank Lloyd Wright!**



2017 is the year of **Frank Lloyd Wright’s 150th birthday**, and the Conservancy is throwing a year-long birthday celebration to honor his legacy. Events include a special exhibition open all year, *Wright for Wright: The Experimental Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Homes*, and a series of four lectures as follows:

- **What is Organic Architecture, Anyway?**
— June 15, July 20 and August 17
- **Playing with Architecture: The Froebel Gifts & Frank Lloyd Wright**
— June 22, August 3 and August 31
- **A Total Work of Art: The Interiors of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Homes**
— July 6 and August 24
- **Living, Working, Experimenting: The Homes of Frank Lloyd Wright**
— August 10

Visitors will have a chance to celebrate with their taste buds by sampling some of Wright’s favorite recipes — including his signature birthday cake featuring chocolate, strawberries and walnuts — at the Fallingwater Café. For more information, visit **www.fallingwater.org**, call **724-329-8501**, or follow Fallingwater via **Facebook, Twitter** or **Instagram**.