

BACKGROUND ON FALLINGWATER

Fallingwater is recognized as one of Frank Lloyd Wright's most acclaimed works. In a 1991 poll of members of the American Institute of Architects, it was voted "the best all-time work of American architecture." It is a supreme example of Wright's concept of organic architecture, which promotes harmony between people and nature through design so well integrated with its site that buildings, furnishings, and surroundings become part of a unified, interrelated composition. Wright embraced modern technology to achieve this, designing spaces for living that expressed architecturally the expansive freedom of the American frontier.

For Fallingwater, designed in 1935 for the Edgar J. Kaufmann family of Pittsburgh, Wright responded to the family's love for a waterfall on Bear Run, a rushing mountain stream. Inspired by a natural pattern established by its rock ledges, Wright placed the house over the falls in a series of cantilevered concrete "trays" anchored to masonry walls made of the same Pottsville sandstone as the natural rock ledges. Although the house rises over 30' above the falls, strong horizontal lines and low ceilings help maintain a sheltering effect. Almost as much floor space is taken up by outdoor terraces as indoor rooms.

Construction began in 1936 and ended with the completion of the guest house in 1939. The Kaufmann family (Edgar Kaufmann, Sr., Liliane Kaufmann, and their son, Edgar Kaufmann, jr.) used Fallingwater in all seasons as a weekend or vacation home until the 1950s, when their son inherited it. Edgar Kaufmann, jr., by then a Curator at New York's Museum of Modern Art, continued to use Fallingwater until he entrusted it to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy in 1963. His gift was lauded by the architectural community as a commendable act of preservation during a time in which many Wright-designed buildings were being demolished or in serious states of disrepair.

Fallingwater is the only great Wright house open to the public with its setting, original furnishings, and artwork intact. Almost all of the original Wright-designed furnishings are still in place. Fine art, textiles, objets d'art, books, and furnishings collected by the Kaufmann family are on view and represent the eclectic tastes of a sophisticated, world-traveled family. Included in the collections are works by Audubon, Tiffany, Diego Rivera, Picasso, Jacques Lipchitz, Richmond Barthe, and woodblock prints by Japanese artists Hiroshige and Hokusai - gifts from Frank Lloyd Wright to the Kaufmanns.

Even before its completion, Fallingwater was instantly acclaimed a masterpiece. It appeared on the cover of **Time** magazine behind a portrait of Frank Lloyd Wright in January 1938. Its romantic association with a natural waterfall captivated the American public. The architectural world took note of Wright's bold use of cantilever construction to achieve that association. However, Wright's vision for the cantilevers was not fulfilled in reality. From the time of construction, the main and second level cantilevers gradually deflected up to 7" from level, due largely to insufficient steel reinforcing in the main level beams. In 2002, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy strengthened the structure by adding post-tensioning steel cables to most of the main level beams and some of the joists. While the historic deflection has not been corrected, the main house is again self-supporting and future deflection has been prevented.

Fallingwater has been named a National Historic Landmark, a Pennsylvania Commonwealth Treasure for 2000, and is part of the federal Save America's Treasures preservation project. Fallingwater has greeted over 4 million visitors since opening to the public in 1964.