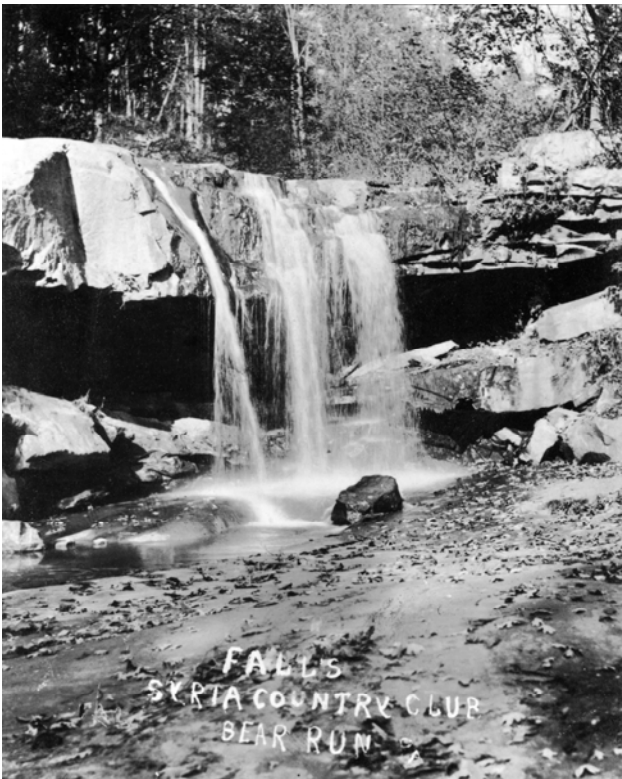


Building Fallingwater

When Wright first visited the Bear Run property, he was shown areas suitable for a new house, including the falls with its several cascades and large, smooth rock surface for basking. The dynamic rush of the stream, the thrusting ledges, and the break in the terrain with abruptly disjointed levels of trees and plants impressed him. The family's fondness for the falls made it natural to consider a site nearby, and Wright asked for a contour map of the area with larger trees and boulders marked on it. Probably almost at once Wright saw the terrain-break as an invitation for an architectural element linking the upper and lower levels in a new harmony without altering the forms of nature.



Once given the contour, Wright located a house anchored in the rock next to the falls, jutting over the stream and counterweighted by massing at the back. A road with a small bridge crossing the stream already ran below a steep cliff; keeping this, Wright oriented the house to the southeast, as he preferred, extending floors in horizontal bands that echoed rock ledges. The house would hover serenely over the water. Power and

telephone lines, water and waste pipes were at hand and could be augmented.

Just uphill in a quarry on the property, native Pottsville sandstone was available to compliment the reinforced concrete Wright had in mind for the cantilevered floors. With these materials, he needed glass, framed to give pattern and rhythm to the outlook; finally, the chosen trio of materials called for bright, warm coloring to offset the deep grays of the stone and visually inert concrete.

In a house designed for people to live in, these material components and effects would subserve a whole that, inside and out, must be intimate, informal, yet the main living area must be ample. The spaces, sheltered at the rear, would open toward and flow into the space of the wooded valley. The eye of the indweller would be guided outward by low ceilings toward nature, not upward to a grand interior. Light would come from several sides to provide a balanced ambience, and the house and its setting would be interwoven, vibrant with the changing daylight and the seasons' variations.

The clients welcomed Wright's ideas, though they were surprised to think of living over, rather than looking at, the falls. As architect and clients became better acquainted, adjustments were made to the design. The daring cantilevers and crisp window frames were basic, but Wright refined some details of the concrete like the rounded horizontal edges used throughout. Edgar J. Kaufmann suggested that, where glass met stone, there be no vertical metal frame but a caulked slot, thus the continuity of inner and outer stone surface would be more evident. He also asked that the living room hearth, the top of a natural boulder rising from the earth, be left irregularly rough instead of cut smooth to the floor.

Mrs. Kaufmann asked for, and readily got, a plunge pool next to the house and an outside stairs from pool to bedroom to save wet

traipsing through the main room. She also was the one to question the extensive carpeting and set of floor lamps proposed for the main room, and the formal armchairs at the dining table, all inconsistent with the casual life to be lived there. The tone of the interiors was adjusted accordingly.

The Kaufmanns' son proposed fluorescent light strips along the windows of the main room, which would illuminate the continuity of inner and outer surfaces at night. He also suggested clean-cut foam rubber for long, cantilevered built-in seating and for the free seating elements as well. Both fluorescent lamps and foam rubber were novelties at the time.

In these and other instances the family modulated Fallingwater without affecting the grand concept and expert design of Frank Lloyd Wright. Despite a reputation for imposing his will on clients, with the Kaufmanns he was amenable, perhaps because he felt his architecture was actively appreciated. When it came to paintings and sculpture in and around the house he was equally adaptable. The oriental art paralleled his own taste, but some other works did not; yet he advised on their placement in relation to the architecture and to nature, always to the advantage of art.

It wasn't until September of 1935 that Wright produced any drawings - and even that may have been prompted by a surprise visit from Edgar Kaufmann, Sr. On a business trip in nearby Milwaukee, Kaufmann called Wright and told him he would be at Taliesin in a few hours to see the plans for the new country house. Wright had nothing on paper. Summoning the help of apprentices Bob Mosher and Edgar Tafel, Wright sat down at the drawing table and produced several preliminary sketches for the house, surprisingly complete and almost exactly what was built at Bear Run. When Kaufmann arrived, Wright greeted him with "*E.J., we've been expecting you.*" And thus began the design and creation of Fallingwater.

The Kaufmanns were unprepared for Wright's placing the house directly above the

waterfall, instead of facing it, but readily accepted the architect's designs almost without change. Wright had recognized the attraction the waterfall had for his clients, and wanted them "*to live with the waterfall, not just to look at it, but for it to become an integral part of your lives.*" Years later, in an interview with NBC commentator Hugh Downs, Wright recalled the source of his design:

"There in a beautiful forest was a solid, high rock ledge rising beside a waterfall, and the natural thing seemed to be to cantilever the house from that rock bank over the falling water.... Then came (of course) Mr. Kaufmann's love for the beautiful site. He loved the site where the house was built and liked to listen to the waterfall. So that was a prime motive in the design. I think that you can hear the waterfall when you look at the design. At least it is there, and he lives intimately with the thing he loves."

Construction began in the summer of 1936 with the bridge over the stream, placed exactly where an old wooden bridge had been. However, the local stonemasons were unaccustomed to laying stone in the rough, shifting manner Wright specified, and the new bridge was torn down and later re-built. Work on the main house commenced with the vertical stone walls and four piers, which rise from the stream and support the first level cantilever. Next, the first floor slab was poured, the stone walls laid up to the second level, and by December, most of the stonework had been laid up and all three levels plus the roof slab had been poured.



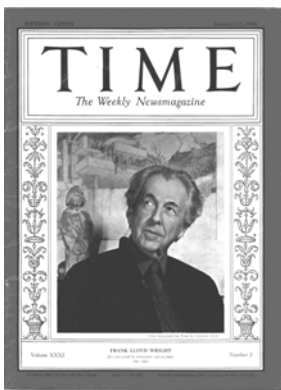
The work was not proceeding without difficulties, however. Acting out of caution, Kaufmann had ordered his department store engineers to check on the stability of the

new structure. Countless reports came back to him, warning that the building was not strong enough to withstand floods, that the cantilevers were too large and too heavy, and that the cracks that appeared in the parapets were indicative of structural failure.

In addition, without contacting Wright, Kaufmann had authorized the use of heavier steel bars to reinforce the first floor slab. And to top it off, the framework for this slab was built at true level, and had deflected off level when the concrete was poured. Such were the difficulties in communication that Bob Mosher was relieved of his duties as site supervisor and called back to Taliesin.

Kaufmann and Wright occasionally exchanged strong words during the construction of Fallingwater, but eventually, Kaufmann came to place his trust in Wright's engineering. Although the parapet cracks worried him for the rest of his life, and he continued to have the house tested, Kaufmann ultimately buried his engineers' reports in a wall to the east of the dining table.

The Kaufmanns began to use Fallingwater in the fall of 1937, the floors, window walls, and furnishings having been completed during that year. Following Wright's color scheme of gold, red, and neutral, the Kaufmanns selected their own upholstery fabrics and other textiles.



Then, in January of 1938, Fallingwater entered the public imagination all at once. The **Architectural Forum** issue of January 1938 was entirely devoted to the works of Frank Lloyd Wright, with 12 pages on Fallingwater. Images of

Fallingwater appeared in **Life** magazine and on the cover of **Time** magazine, both published in January. A photographic exhibit about Fallingwater opened at the Museum of Modern Art that month. Among

the first visitors to the house were Bauhaus designers Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer.

Wright's plans for the guest house and service wing were finished in May of 1938, but the Kaufmanns asked that they be revised. Construction of the guest house and service wing began in February of 1939, and was completed in the fall of that year.

As the Kaufmanns began to use Fallingwater on weekends and vacations, they realized that the house had become an inseparable part of their enjoyment of Bear Run, even enhancing the quality of their lives there. The revitalizing and refreshing forces of nature were now integrated into their daily patterns of eating, sleeping, relaxing, and entertaining - whether inside or outside. As Lilliane Kaufmann once wrote Wright, "*Living in a house built by you has been my one education....*"

A NEW HOUSE BY FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

ON BEAR RUN
PENNSYLVANIA



THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART - NEW YORK - 1938

They continued to use Fallingwater until Lilliane's death in 1952, and Edgar Sr.'s death three years later. The house then passed to Edgar jr, by then living in New York City, who used it and maintained it until 1963, when he gave it to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.