

The Family

The Edgar J. Kaufmann family of Pittsburgh were more than the department store owners who commissioned a masterpiece from Frank Lloyd Wright. Edgar Kaufmann, Sr., his wife Liliane, and their son, Edgar Kaufmann, jr. [sic] were unique individuals, each committed to the ideals of living in harmony with nature, and of the value that good design brings to everyday life. This sensibility led them to Frank Lloyd Wright, and they remained Wright's patrons and friends throughout their lives.

Kaufmann's Department Store has been a Pittsburgh institution since the 1870s, originally a men's store owned by four Kaufmann brothers. Under Edgar Kaufmann, Sr.'s leadership from 1919 until 1955, the store became known for its innovative retail spaces and its commitment to modern American design. Kaufmann used the store to help promote Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture and collaborated with the Museum of Modern Art to bring good design ideas to western Pennsylvania.

Edgar Kaufmann, Sr., son of one of the four original Kaufmann brothers, married his first cousin, Lillian Sarah Kaufmann, in 1909. Their son, Edgar Kaufmann, jr., was born in 1910. Pittsburgh natives, the Kaufmanns were world-traveled, led very active social lives in Pittsburgh, and were committed to the life and vitality of the city. President of Kaufmann's Department store, Edgar Kaufmann Sr. was also very active in Pittsburgh city planning. Liliane established Kaufmann's elegant Vendome Shops, and devoted herself to public health, serving as President of Montefiore Hospital for 9 years. Edgar Kaufmann jr. became a Frank Lloyd Wright scholar, a Curator at the Museum of Modern Art, and taught at Columbia University. However, what gave balance to their hectic lives was the ability to get away from it all – to get back to nature: especially at Fallingwater. Liliane Kaufmann died in 1952, Edgar Kaufmann Sr. died in 1955, and their son died in 1989, after having given Fallingwater to Western Pennsylvania Conservancy in 1963.

