

Turn back the clock in Chicago suburb of Oak Park

BY DOUG JOHNSON
STAFF WRITER

If you're seeking a low-impact weekend and like looking at and touring vintage homes, consider a trip to the old Chicago suburb of Oak Park.

Here you'll find wide, tree-lined streets and old, lovingly restored and maintained homes.

Here, also, is the legacy of America's greatest architect, Frank Lloyd Wright.

Oak Park and nearby River Forest offer a remarkable variety of homes done in the Prairie style, the architectural design made famous by Wright and several other Chicago architects. Wright was the acknowledged master of the Prairie house.

The style is "among the more short-lived styles having flourished and declined in the years between 1900 and 1910" according to Virginia and Lee McAlester's "A Field Guide to American Houses" (Knopf, 1997). Their book has extensive drawings and photos of all types of American homes from pre-colonial to present.

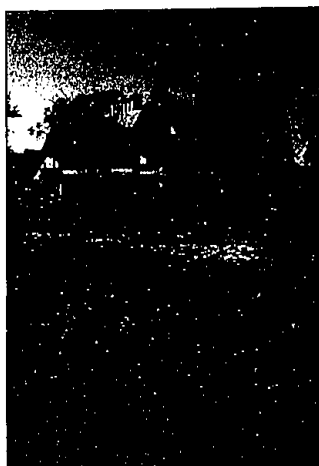
The 1893 Winslow House in River Forest was probably the first Prairie house.

These houses emphasized horizontal lines mimicking the flat, horizontalness of the American prairie west of Chicago. Also, Prairie houses often have massive square porch supports, flat chimneys, low-pitched, hipped roofs, ribbons of windows tucked under the ultra-wide eaves, and hidden entries.

To the first-time visitor to Oak Park, the Wright houses may seem "modernistic" but in fact some of them are more than 100 years old.

Here's a summary of details about an architectural and historic tour of Oak Park:

■ Call the Ginkgo Tree Bookshop at the Wright home and studio and pay \$4 for the "Architectural Guide Map" and have them mail it to you. The excellent map contains clear photos and addresses of all Wright homes and all other architecturally significant homes in Oak Park. You will immediately see how little walking there actually is to be able to see many Wright homes and Unity Temple, his first public building. Phone (708) 848-1606.



Spectacular: Tours of the Moore-Dugal house have been suspended due to a death in the family. The home has been open on weekends for tourists.

848-1606.

■ The Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio Foundation maintains his home and studio and offers daily tours. They also offer walking tours of nearby streets. Tour hours are 11 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. daily and every 15 minutes from 11 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. on weekends. Weekend reservations are suggested. Tours are prompt. Phone (708) 848-1978.

■ Each May, the foundation sponsors inside tours of several Wright homes. The 26th annual Wright Plus Housewalk tour in 2000 will be May 20, and you will be permitted to tour 10 homes.

■ You can see 14 Wright homes' exteriors in a short mini-tour near the Wright home. Some of the first homes you see on the self-guided tour are Queen Anne designs, and others date after 1900 are Prairie style. ■ One interesting "Wright event" Oak Park visitors might try, to fully steep themselves in details of Wright's architecture and life, is an overnight stay at Cheney House, a bed and breakfast establishment.

Cheney House, 520 North East Avenue, is one of the Wright houses in Oak Park and is about four blocks from his home/studio.

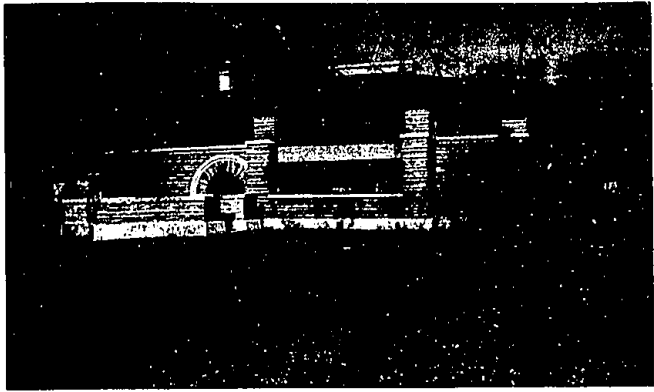
It may even seem romantic to stay in one of the two-room suites given the history of Cheney House.

A recent documentary about Wright on Public Television revisited the famous details. An architectural commission for electrical engineer Edwin Cheney led to a love affair between Wright and Mamah Borthwick Cheney, the engineer's wife. Cheney and Wright left their families for a year in Europe in 1909.

This part of his life ended five years later when Mrs. Cheney and her children were killed by an insane servant at Wright's retreat in Wisconsin. Their "free love" relationship scandalized Oak Park and the nation.

Rooms at Cheney House are \$155 a night and include a continental breakfast. The home has been owned by Chicago attorney Dale Smirl and his wife for 22 years. Call (708) 524-2067 for reservations.

The red brick Cheney House



Modernistic: This red brick house near the Wright home/studio looks like a recent addition to the area, but it was built in 1902.



No tourists: A careful reader can see a "no tourism" sign in this house's window, indicating not everyone in Oak Park likes visitors looking over these beautiful homes.

has many typical Wright details: a large overhanging hip roof, hidden front entry, bands of windows tucked under the eaves and a stone sill surrounding the structure.

■ The magnificent, high-gabled Moore-Dugal home very near the Wright home and studio has been offering inside tours

until recently; a death in the family has stopped these tours, offered on Saturday and Sundays April through October. Local inquiry with the Oak Park Visitors Center is recommended as it handles the tour tickets; (708) 848-1600. Just walking around the edges of the fenced property is worth the short walk

from the studio center. ■ Under the Ginkgo Tree Bed and Breakfast, 300 N. Kenilworth, Oak Park is a Queen Anne Victorian home built around 1890, air conditioned, with a wraparound front porch. It is just one block from the Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio. Savor a light breakfast in the elegant dining room or bright homey kitchen; weather permitting, breakfast is served on the veranda. Phone (708) 524-2327.

■ Several other famous people are from Oak Park: Ray Kroc, founder of McDonald's, Edgar Rice Burroughs, creator of Tarzan, Ernest Hemingway, psychologist Carl Rogers and TV star Bob Newhart. Hemingway's birthplace home and museum, two separate facilities, can be toured. Phone (708) 848-2222 for information on either. This past summer the city hosted a gala celebration of the life and times of Hemingway on the 100th anniversary of his birth.

Oak Park is a turn-of-the-century gem. Going back in time 100 years seems particularly appropriate as we move into the 21st century.



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