

TRAVEL

2 Wright homes are spectacular

BY ANNETTE KINGSBURY
STAFF WRITER
akingsbury@ecce.com

When you ask an artist to build you a house, you can probably expect a few quirks and a few arguments over which takes precedence, artistic vision or livability.

And when the artist was architect Frank Lloyd Wright, clients didn't win those arguments very often. If two Pennsylvania homes are any clue, clients might not have expected much of a kitchen, spacious bedrooms or convenient storage space. They could expect to pour a fortune into the materials, a few structural problems—and a home unlike anyplace else on earth.

In the countryside of western Pennsylvania, just seven miles apart, fans of the late (1867–1959) icon of American architecture can tour two homes created at very different times in Wright's long career. Fallingwater, located in Mill Run and completed during the Depression when Wright had little work, has been owned since 1963 by the Western Pennsylvania Land Conservancy. Kentucky Knob, completed in 1956 in Chalk Hill, has been owned since 1986 by Lord Peter Palumbo, an English businessman and art dealer.

Both houses are built into hillside back into the woods with spectacular views. Touring them invites the question: What must it have been like to live here? It's a pleasant question to consider.

Fallingwater was created as a weekend retreat for Pittsburgh department store magnate Edgar Kaufmann and his wife Lilliane.

Entry: Kentucky Knob's entry is cocoon-like.

If you go...

Getting there: Fallingwater and Kentucky Knob are about 1.5 hours southeast of Pittsburgh. Both are open to the public daily April through November and less frequently in winter. Reservations are strongly suggested (required in winter).
Information: Call Kentucky Knob at (724) 329-1901 or Fallingwater at (724) 329-8501 for reservations or more information, or visit www.paconserve.org and kentuckynob.com.

Then son, Edgar Jr., donated it to the Conservancy after their deaths.

Fallingwater is considered the realization of Wright's dream of building a house where man would live entirely in harmony with his natural surroundings, rather than altering the surroundings to accommodate him. Edgar Kaufmann Sr. discovered the site while horseback-riding and asked Wright to build a house that would allow the family a view of the waterfall. Instead, Wright built the house over the waterfall, including a suspended staircase that descends to the water via a "bathtub" window, as well as several cantilevered "ledges" that thrust you out into the trees.

Back story

The story goes that Wright visited the site, then designed the house—literally—to sit upon five huge boulders, left where they were found. The boulders provide the support that allows for a three-story glass corner wall and a house that still seems to hover above the stream. The house was flooded in 1956 but survived structurally intact.

It's an engineering marvel stacked over five levels that, though considered Wright's masterpiece, has been controversial right from the beginning. Wright and Kaufmann traded insults over the amount of reinforcing required for the cantilevered concrete "trays." The trays have been plagued with cracking and sagging, but latter-day

critics have said that Wright was just so far ahead of his time that the technology just wasn't there yet to accommodate his genius.

Even if you accept that it's technically flawed, Fallingwater is stunning. Wright himself said of it, "You listen to Fallingwater the way you listen to the quiet of the country."

Kentucky Knob was built nearly 20 years later, near the end of Wright's long career. It was built for Bernardino and Isaac Newton Hagen, who owned a dairy business in nearby Uniontown and were seeking a retreat from city life.

Hagen had business connections with Kaufmann and visited Fallingwater when it was still a private residence. Those visits led him and his wife to ask Wright to build them a house, but on a much more modest budget. Kaufmann initially contacted Wright for the Hagens, and Kentucky Knob is sometimes referred to as a child of Fallingwater.

Kentucky Knob's living spaces are all on one floor and of a much more human scale than Fallingwater, though it's constructed in a hexagonal rather than square form, creating many oddly shaped rooms. Wright considered the house the "deluxe" model of his budget-conscious Usonian homes, homes designed for middle-class Americans. It's small but jewel-like, with all the interiors in red cypress.

Here again there were structural disagreements. Wright was said to be furious when he was told by a workman on the site that he hadn't incorporated enough support for the asymmetrical roof. But he agreed to the change.

Wright situated both houses so that you can begin to appreciate his work even before you set foot inside. Long, tree-lined, sloping approaches deliberately bring the visitor in slowly, the better to build the excitement and appreciation for the master.

"I went, I saw and I was conquered," Palumbo said of his first sight of Kentucky Knob.

Both homes also have in common their use of natural materials, quarried on site, and Wright's ability to bring the outdoors in through low sight lines and extensive windows. Both also employ narrow passageways and small kitchens and bedrooms. (At Kentucky Knob, beds had to be installed before the master bedroom was completed, it's that tight.)

Though he considered every detail, including furnishings, Wright concentrated the pizzazz into the common spaces, such as living rooms, and exteriors.

For lovers of great homes, visiting Fallingwater and Kentucky Knob is inspiring. You'll never look at your own surroundings the same way again.

Because of the number of levels it occupies, Fallingwater is not handicap accessible. It includes a lot of steps and visitors are advised to wear comfortable shoes. It's also a bit of a hike from the entrance to the house, and can be crowded. An on-site visitors center, including a lunch room and gift shop, provides a few amenities.



Falling water: Though five stories tall with an even taller central chimney, Fallingwater has a decidedly horizontal feel. This is the view from downstream.

Budget

BATH TUB LINERS

Quality Bathliners at a Budget Price!

SUPER

Factory Warehouse Sale!

ALL STYLES ON SALE!
I WEEK ONLY!
Sale price good at time of estimate

LIMITED QUANTITIES AVAILABLE
I WEEK ONLY!
Sale price good at time of estimate

FREE IN HOME ESTIMATES

CALL TOLL FREE: 1-800-BATH TUB

See Us in the Yellow Pages

Visit Our Beautiful Showrooms... OPEN SUNDAY 11-5

25170 John R. • Madison Heights • 248-546-8300

Ann Arbor 734-266-6200 Lincoln Park 734-827-2233 Toledo 313-382-8100 Grosse Pointe 419-866-4211 Dearborn 313-882-4454 313-561-7789

Improve your home and your loan.

HOME EQUITY LINE OF CREDIT

4.00%^{APR}

Don't let home improvements take a major bite out of your budget. A Standard Federal Bank Home Equity Loan gives you one of the best rates around, plus you pay no closing costs* and your interest may be tax deductible.**

And it comes with a built-in bonus: A \$50 Gift Card for The Home Depot* when you make a draw at closing of \$10,000 or more***. So nail down a great rate and more. Visit any Standard Federal location or call 1-877-732-8240. Standard Federal Bank. A new way to get there.™

*The APR is based on the highest Prime Rate as published in the "Money Rates" section of The Wall Street Journal on the last publishing day of the calendar month immediately preceding the billing cycle. On January 31, 2002, Prime was 4.75% and the Annual Percentage Rate (APR) for Standard Federal's Home Equity Line of Credit products varied between 4.00% and 7.75%, depending on your approved creditworthiness and product. Prime is a variable rate, so as it changes, the APR on your account will change. The maximum APR is 21%. A balloon payment will result at the end of the ten-year draw period. Standard Federal's Home Equity Lines of Credit are limited to government-owned, 1-4 unit principal family residences and are subject to no less than a second lien position on your property. You must carry insurance on the property that secures this loan. Flood insurance required if necessary. There is a \$50 annual fee after the first year if you are not a Credit Enhancer member. Closing costs paid by Standard Federal Bank are limited to appraisal, title insurance, flood certification, and recording, and any additional fees or conditions imposed by the City, state, or county that the subject property is located in will be the borrower's responsibility.

**Consult your tax adviser concerning the deductibility of interest.

***Upon making an initial draw of \$10,000 or more at closing on your new Standard Federal Home Equity Line of Credit, or upon closing on your new Standard Federal Fixed Rate Home Equity Loan of \$10,000 or more, you will receive a Gift Card for The Home Depot worth \$50. Limit of one Gift Card per borrower at credit. Offer requires 3.0% APR. Additional restrictions may apply. The Gift Card may be considered income for tax purposes. The Home Depot® is a registered trademark of Home Depot U.S.A., Inc. Standard Federal Bank is not affiliated with The Home Depot.

Standard Federal Bank
Member ABA AMRO Group
standardfederalbank.com

Member FDIC
©2002 Standard Federal Bank, Inc.

Standard Federal