

Seeking Mr. Wright

The utopian vision of one of America's greatest architects lives on in the Mid-Atlantic region.

By the early 20th century, Frank Lloyd Wright, one of America's most prolific architects, had gained international fame for his Prairie House homes, with their low-pitched roofs and open floor plans.

At the same time, Wright was becoming increasingly interested in urban planning and designing inexpensive homes on a massive scale. In 1936, he developed a series of homes he called Usonian, a term he used for the United States of North America. Environmentally friendly, Usonian homes had no attics, no basements and cantilevered overhangs for solar heating and natural cooling. But public interest was tepid.

That is until Wright designed one of his greatest masterpieces, a private house known as Fallingwater.

Though not Usonian, Fallingwater features many similar design characteristics, including low, flat rooflines; multiple windows for natural lighting; and the integration of indoor and outdoor space. Dramatically cantilevered over an active waterfall, concrete terraces give the home the appearance of floating above the water. And at 5,330 square feet with a construction cost of \$155,000, it was anything but small or inexpensive.

Located in Mill Run, Pennsylvania, about one hour southwest of Pittsburgh, Fallingwater has been called "the best all-time work of American architecture" by the American Institute of Architects, and in 1976, it became a National Historic Landmark.

About seven miles south of Fallingwater

is Kentuck Knob, built in 1956. Constructed of tidewater red cypress, glass and 800 tons of native sandstone, and featuring a copper roof, the home represents Wright's dedication to organic architecture. Recessed into the side of the Kentuck Knob mountain summit, it offers sweeping views of the Youghiogheny River Gorge and surrounding area.

One of the last private homes ever designed by Wright, Kentuck Knob was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2000.

For the ultimate Wright experience, visitors to western Pennsylvania can now spend the night in a Usonian home. The Duncan House, which opened in 2007, is one of only six Wright homes in the U.S. that offer overnight lodging. Originally located in Lisle, Illinois, the prefabricated house was destined for destruction, when in 2004, the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy stepped in to save it. The house was in storage for two years until a suitable site was found for it just 15 miles from Fallingwater and 30 miles from Kentuck Knob.

A must-see for visitors to the lower Mid-Atlantic is the Pope-Leighey House in Alexandria, Virginia. Constructed in 1940, the home, which was originally located in Falls Church, Virginia, is a textbook example of Wright's Usonian period.

The 1,200-square-foot, five-room house, built for a reasonable cost of \$7,000, features an open floor plan, reverse board-and-batten sandwich walls and cantilevered flat roofs. Inside, the home was completed with plywood furniture built to Wright's specifications.

Wright passed away in 1959, but his innovative approach to design still resonates with people worldwide. And with some of his greatest masterpieces just a short drive away, isn't it time you took a road trip with Mr. Wright?

—Rebecca L. Rhoades



ROBERT P. RUSCHAK, COURTESY OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA CONSERVANCY.

For more information:

Fallingwater

Regular tours available daily, except Wednesdays, mid-March through Thanksgiving weekend 10 a.m.–4 p.m.
724/329-8501

fallingwater.org

Kentuck Knob

April–November tours available on the hour Wednesday noon–4 p.m. and other days 10 a.m.–4 p.m. December–March tours available weather permitting.
724/329-1901

kentuckknob.com

Duncan House

Sleeps six. Overnight stays are \$425 plus tax for up to three people. Additional people, add \$50 per person. Two-night minimum is required.

877/833-STAY (7829)

polymathpark.com/duncan.asp

Pope-Leighey House

Open March–December 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Tours available on the half-hour with the last tour at 4 p.m.

popeleighey1940.org

703/780-4000