

Open Wright Oak Park Home

BY LARRY FREDERICK

A house built on the midwestern prairie should blend with the flat landscape and melt into its surroundings, students of architecture agree.

It should, in short, harmonize with its environment. Its design should be determined only by its location and its purpose—a secure recluse for man.

Gave Wright Ideas

These ideas are common today, but in the 1890s, they were radical and considered by most as ridiculous. They were the ideas that gave America a different architecture, and that were to make a Frank Lloyd Wright house a treasure to be preserved.

Of the Wright homes dotting the Chicago area, few have been preserved for contribution to American culture. Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Nooker, owners of the famous architect's first home at 951 Chicago av., Oak Park, thought this deplorable.

Last month the Nookers—after 15 years' work and thousands of dollars for restoration—opened Wright's first home to the public. So far, the response has been enthusiastic.

It was here in the rambling 25-room, 6-fireplace bungalow that Wright lived for 19 years. Here he fathered six children by his first wife, Catherine Tobin, whom he married when he was 21 and she was 19 years old.

Built in Two Stages

The home was built in two stages between 1889 and 1895, yet visitors today marvel at its modern post-World War II design.

When Wright moved in with his newlywed wife, he was still a student of the famous Chicago skyscraper architect Louis Sullivan, who instilled in him

his radical ideas of design.

As the first of a latter series of "prairie homes," the Oak Park masterpiece shows the germs of most of Wright's ideas. "You can see Wright flowering out here," said Mrs. Nooker. "The home is a good chart of his progress in design and intent."

Horizontal planes at different levels, overhanging eaves, rough walls, and a dazzling array of lines and shapes dominate the exterior. Inside, Wright was clearly at war with both sterility and gaudiness.

The result is a graceful, harmonizing simplicity.

Traditional flat walls are dissected into strips of horizontally organized surfaces. Traditional plain ceilings are groomed with woodwork arranged in flowing straight-line designs. Windows are used liberally and at endless levels.

Has Paradoxical Effect

The two most fascinating rooms are the upstairs' 2-story playroom and the studio study, the latter Wright's favorite room.

The studio is remarkable for

its paradoxical effect of smallness and spaciousness. Actually a room little more than 15 feet square, it gives a sense of vastness to the beholders.

"Wright was a genius," Mrs. Nooker said. "He knew it. Many people found him arrogant and unfriendly, but he wasn't. When we talked with him, we found him warm and congenial."

Tours of the house conducted by student architects are given daily, except Mondays and Tuesdays, from 11 a. m. to 5 p. m.



CHILDREN'S ROOM—Frank Lloyd Wright added this two-story playroom for his children to his Oak Park home in 1895. The mural, painted by a commissioned artist following Wright's design, shows the genie and fisherman from a story in "Thousand and One Nights."