



Wright Here in Florida

Spring House...Frank Lloyd Wright's Only Florida Designed Home

By: Richard Stanley Farneski

*Photo by Byrd Lewis Mashburn
Courtesy of Spring House Institute*

Without a doubt, one of the greatest architectural minds of the 20th century, Frank Lloyd Wright and his design ideology, often referred to as “organic architecture,” inspired structures and furniture which cast a lasting impact on contemporary lifestyles.

His works integrate culture, art, architecture and the landscape. Recognized for his architectural feats, Frank Lloyd Wright is respected and renowned for his interior design efforts, such as stained glass windows and uniquely styled furniture of the era. As well, he penned over 20 books, hundreds of articles and traveled throughout the United States and Europe, lecturing to designers and business people.

Wright’s vision encompassed contemporary and visionary structures, educational institutions, high-rise buildings, houses of worship, museums, and hotels. Acknowledged as a master of architectural design, his furniture

design garners worldwide acclaim as he sought to establish an affinity between the exterior and interior of the structure. Wright’s focus on geometric forms and intersecting planes in his design fostered a similar style in his furniture design.

Frank Lloyd Wright’s foresight includes iconic homes such as Fallingwater in Mill Run, Pennsylvania, the Robie House in Chicago, Illinois, and Taliesin, in Spring Green, Wisconsin. While many of Frank Lloyd Wright’s accomplishments dot the American landscape, one of his best-kept secrets, the “Lewis Spring House,” is a gem. It is quietly located in Leon County, Florida, west of the state capital in Tallahassee.

The Lewis Spring House is the only private residence designed by Frank Lloyd Wright built in Florida. Its origin is traced back to 1950, when Clifton and George Lewis approached Frank Lloyd Wright at Florida Southern College in Lakeland, Florida. They asked Mr.

Wright if he would design a home for their large family. He agreed, advising them, "Go find your ground, not on a lot." Their quest for an appropriate land tract ended a year later. They acquired a five-acre forest landscape with a natural spring, hence the name 'Spring House,' that fed nearby Lake Jackson.

Wright's ideology concentrates on integrating exterior and interior, structure and surroundings, architecture and ornament resulting in a complete unit. He commented in 1910, "To thus make of a dwelling place a complete work of art... this is the modern American opportunity."

An unorthodox, pod-shaped residence, it is one of only two homes of this style ever to be designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Plans for Lewis Spring House took hold,

with blueprints and specifications completed in 1952. Its design, a passive solar hemicycle style, represents Frank Lloyd Wright's final stylistic design phase. The design uses intersecting and concentric circles. It allows elevations to remain similar to his other notable designs, which emphasizes a linear image.

The initial call for bids did not generate an estimate from a residential contractor for the home's construction. Frank Lloyd Wright's representative, Nils Schweizer helped George Lewis locate an established local contractor in 1954. Collaborating with Ernest Daffin, an architect and family friend of the Lewises, Nils found Jack Culpepper. Culpepper, a local contractor agreed to build Frank Lloyd Wright's design, for George Lewis.



*Photo by Krystyn Pecora.
Courtesy of Spring House Institute*



Photos Courtesy of Spring House Institute
 Photo by Byrd Lewis Mashburn

The Lewis Family
 Photo by Byrd Lewis Mashburn

The home is constructed atop a poured concrete base, anchored by subterranean pilings.

The poured concrete contains a red pigment, giving the first floor an impressive architectural flair. Unpainted "Ocala" limestone/concrete block rise as the first floor walls. Cost overruns because of unplanned subterranean pilings would eliminate a reflecting pool and terrace wall, air-conditioning, and some of the furniture designed by Wright. The Lewis family moved in just before 1955.

Frank Lloyd Wright brings together the architectural styling, and the structural integrity of the Spring House blending it with the surrounding forest, into a masterpiece that is on National Register of Historic Places. The Lewis Spring House was designated as one of America's 11

Most Endangered Historic Places® by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 2014.

Wright's interior design is attributed to his vision of structural design of his buildings. His infinite creativity serves as a foundation for contemporary design. Interior elements of Frank Lloyd Wright included stained glass windows, wall fixtures, lighting and furniture. His designs would find a new path from

its arts & crafts foundation, as he ventured into designs which used industrial concrete blocks.

Lewis Spring House has an especially long

expanse of the built-in wooden bench seating so often a part of Frank Lloyd Wright's designs.



Photo by Alan Spector
 Courtesy of Spring House Institute



It is constructed of tidewater red cypress, a Florida native tree and a favorite wood of George Lewis and Mr. Wright's. The bench has a plywood sitting base. George, with Clifton's middle brother, Tom Byrd Van Brunt, built the beautiful seating as Mr. Wright designed it, along the west wall of the home before the family moved in. Clifton said they took it up and put it back down many times because George wanted it exactly as, and where, Wright designed it. His built-in seating is his trademark.

Frank Lloyd Wright designed the dining room table for the Lewises and is one of his greatest furniture creations. The vintage table is slated to undergo restoration to reflect its original appearance. It is constructed out of 2" x 2" strips of

tidewater red cypress doweled and glued. It's recessed into the Ocala block wall of the core of the house, leading into the round kitchen.

He believed the dining room table should serve as a symbolic core of the family unit, bringing the members together. Free standing tables and chairs supported his underlying vision of open and free-flowing space. He's designed over 300 chairs, with each design receiving intimate attention to detail that were suited for their interior setting. This included the flooring, carpeting, wall and light fixtures and desks. "Every chair must be designed for the building it will be in," remarked Frank Lloyd Wright.

*Photo by Alan Spector
Courtesy of Spring House Institute*

Virtually every Frank Lloyd Wright designed furniture or interior accessory commands respect as an antique collectible. Frank Lloyd Wright designed furniture is in high demand with architectural design aficionados and collectors.

"Wherein the house aims to be a natural performance, one that is integral to site; integral to environment; integral to the life of the inhabitants. A house integral with the nature of materials, wherein glass is used as glass, stone as stone, wood as wood and all the elements of the environment go into and throughout the house. Into this new integrity, once there, those who live in it will take root and grow. And most of all belonging by nature to the nature of its being."

Frank Lloyd Wright

*Photo by Stuart Rochford
Courtesy of Spring House Institute*

While many see an artistic creation resulting from a paint brush, the Lewis Spring House is an example of Florida art, created by hammers, trowels, organic materials and Frank Lloyd Wright's creative mind.

He would pass on April 9, 1959 at the age of 91, never seeing one of his greatest unheralded accomplishments.

The Lewis Spring House is located at 3117 Okeehoopkee Road in Leon County, Florida.

It is under the care of Spring House Institute, Inc., which is raising funds to acquire the Lewis Spring House to restore and preserve its original architecture and vintage furniture. Additional information about the Lewis Spring House is available at www.preservespringhouse.org.

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