



Fallingwater

**A Visit to the Frank Lloyd Wright-Designed Home
on December 27, 2003**

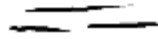
by [Albert Fried-Cassorla](#)

I *loved* my visit to Fallingwater. And I think that if you like great and imaginative architecture, you will too!

At the very least, it's a gorgeous melding of architecture and natural beauty.

This is the story of my long-anticipated visit, spiced with photos, some interesting facts I've accumulated

along the way... and bunches of unsolicited opinions!





The Classic View *This shot was taken at a designated spot on an icy trail across the stream from the house.*

Fallingwater is a national architectural shrine -- the most widely admired modern American home and one of the ten best-known buildings in the world.

In my opinion, it deserves this fabulous renown. I like the sweeping planes of each cantilevered floor and extended patio. These beige projections look lovely when visually merged with the 20' waterfall and stream that pass below. This merger is best viewed at a distance -- in particular from a spot the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy designates as "the View."



Looking downstream. The staircase was under construction, hence the wrapping.

The home was built for the Pittsburgh department store magnate, Edgar Kauffman, in the 1930's at cost of approximately \$150,000. The home's construction gave new life to the career of Frank Lloyd Wright, who was considered by any at the time to have been surpassed in talents and achievements by Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius.



Landing showing the main living room.

This house, when completed in the 1930's, instantly appeared on the cover of *Time Magazine* and was immediately world-famous.

The photos on this web page mainly show the exteriors, because photos of the interiors are prohibited on the short 45-minute tour that I took. A two-hour tour is available by appointment, and interior photos are permitted then.



***Passageway.** A road passes under the house.*

But I think the exterior is where most of the action lies. Cantilevering is the essential technique that makes Fallingwater possible. This refers to the rooting of one end of a structural plane in a rigid substance (a hillside and boulders in this case), which enables a large portion of this plane to be suspended in air.

Wright tried to avoid posts and pillars that would interfere with openness, and I saw none of those supports in my visit.



***Snow** adds great luster to this view.*

The Kauffmans wanted to be able to see their beloved waterfall at Bear Run at all times in their new home. They had picnicked on that spot many times.

So guess what they couldn't see all from inside Fallingwater?

Yes, the waterfall was not visible!



***Trapezoidal shapes** and deep red window trimmings, plus beige cement and dramatic angles -- all help make Fallingwater the design success that it is. Icicles add seasonal trimming!*

Now if *I* had paid a record sum for a new home and could not see the darned waterfall, I'd be pretty upset.

Wouldn't you?

But Wright told "EJ" that he wanted him to live with the waterfall not in view of it (or some similar phrase).

Anyhow, the net result of Wright's creation has pleased 140,000 visitors a year. And the waterfall can be heard if not seen throughout the building and its landings.



Caption And continued

Our guide emphasized that this is a building meant to let the outdoors in.

The Kauffmans loved to hike and be outdoors and this home reflects their bent.

Wright claimed to be not only the world's best architect but the greatest of all time. He believed that honest arrogance is better than false humility. Clearly, he had plenty of the former!



Wintry and cool... but lovely

In a way, this colossal egotism may have been necessary to create a vision as elaborate, detailed and unified as this one.

I believe that Wright was the model for the principal character in Ayn Rand's novel, *The Fountainhead*. In a way, because of this, Wright stands, for some people, as an exemplar of capitalism at its most successful. Maybe so.



Golden sunlight sprays glitter on the stream and windows

But another way of taking his achievements is that an artist needs to have:

1. a grand vision
2. the confidence to see it through
3. a source of funds, or a benefactor

Wright brought these three factors together beautifully, and we are all the beneficiaries.

We saw Fallingwater in winter. I'm sure it is lovely in other seasons too, but in winter, the sight lines of the edifice are clearest. The air is nippy and the trees and rocks are etched in splendid white snow.



Among the rhododendrons

The interiors are color-coordinated and use native sandstone and rock in the floors and walls. Wright designed cushions, chairs, windows and more that make you feel his grand vision down to small and clever details that I won't go into here.... apart from noting his selected North Carolina walnut-veneered plywood. This wood is lovely and structurally strong and it is used throughout the house.

Wright believed that his use of structural concrete would enable the house to stand for all time. But "Wright was wrong" in this point and it had to be strengthened this year -- 2002 --with tensioning wires that run along old steel beams. But they are not visible and do not mar the experience.

Plan your visit in advance! You won't want to get shut out after making a possibly long journey. It's five hours west of Philadelphia and then 45 minutes south.

Reservations are possible, and I would encourage them.

Here is an excellent link for you:

<http://www.wpconline.org/fallingwaterhome.htm>