INTRODUCTION TO ROBIE HOUSE TOUR INTERPRETATION

The Robie House Tour as described in this section of the Volunteer Manual is considered the STANDARD CORE TOUR in terms of tour mechanics and content.

Overview of Tour Mechanics

The following outline is intended to be a basic guideline for you to follow while putting together your tour. It is not intended to be memorized and repeated verbatim. The tour has been structured to highlight the points necessary to achieving the Preservation Trust’s mission.

The interpretation of the Robie House is designed to emphasize the architectural significance of the building. Robie House received its landmark status by virtue of its architectural merit; the Frank Lloyd Wright Preservation Trust operates the building as an architectural house museum; thus, an interpretation of the building should stress its architectural significance with less emphasis on past owners and events that happened within its walls.

This tour outline is not the last word on the house—our knowledge and understanding of the house are constantly evolving, and our interpretation of the building will change accordingly. The building itself will change over the course of the restoration, as elements appear or disappear, sometimes temporarily and sometimes permanently. The restoration of Robie House, while occurring over several years, is a one-time occurrence; make a point of discussing it on your tour, and let visitors know that in many cases they are seeing aspects of Robie House that will not be visible after the restoration is complete.
Lastly, while this tour outline, the supplemental materials, and your training are major resources in the preparation of your tour, you are encouraged—even expected—to interpret the house to the public. This means that you should explore the building, its architecture, and its history in an effort to better interpret the house to the public. There are many materials on-site that are accessible for research purposes; in addition to the numerous resources available at the Research Center of the Frank Lloyd Wright Preservation Trust in Oak Park (the Research Center is open by appointment except in August). You may contact research center staff by emailing research@gowright.org. Feel free to ask Preservation Trust staff to see the available materials or to ask for recommendations as to where to find the information in which you are interested.

The tour outline is arranged by the “stops” on the tour route, of which there are eleven. Listed below each stop are two or three points that must be discussed at that stop. These points are then explained in further detail below.
**Introduction** [after the film ends, and as you introduce yourself]

**The Client**

- The Frederick C. Robie House, built between 1909 and 1910, was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright for Frederick Carleton Robie.

- Born in 1879, Frederick C. Robie was an assistant manager of his father’s manufacturing company, Excelsior Supply, which manufactured parts for sewing machines, shoe factories, and, later, bicycles. Robie was an automobile enthusiast who enjoyed creating his own experimental designs, including the pedal powered “Robie Cycle Car.”

- Robie purchased the lot in 1908 for $13,500. Later that year he commissioned Frank Lloyd Wright to design this house.

- Robie was married to Lora Robie, an early graduate of the University of Chicago. By the time the house was complete in 1910, they had a young son (Fred Jr.) and infant daughter (Lorraine).

- The house was built on the south side of Chicago in the Hyde Park neighborhood, near the University of Chicago. The long narrow structure occupies a corner site to the campus, facing south toward the former Midway Plaisance of the 1893 Columbian Exposition, a block away.

**The Architect**

- Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959) was one of the most prolific and influential architects of the 20th century.

- In 1893, after having worked for the great Chicago architect Louis Sullivan (Adler & Sullivan), Wright established his own private practice in Oak Park.

- Wright rose to prominence through his contribution to the first indigenous American style of architecture, the Prairie style. The Prairie Style was a rich attempt by a bold and pioneering group of mid-western architects to devise a uniquely American architecture, inspired by the flat, open vistas of the Midwest prairie landscape. While honoring the design achievements of the past, this was a unique and ambitious compositional style without obvious reference to the historical styles of old Europe typically favored at the time.
Other Collaborators on Robie House

In 1909, Wright was offered the opportunity by the Ernst Wasmuth Company to publish his work in Germany. The result is the now legendary “Wasmuth” portfolios, which introduced Wright’s work to Europe and influenced a new generation of young European architects. When Wright left Chicago for Europe in September of 1909, he had a substantial workload. At least 30 projects were in the office, more than half under construction. The Robie House was in that category.

There were four other individuals who collaborated with Wright to complete the Robie House. These include the interior architect, George Mann Niedecken, the building contractor, Harrison B. Barnard, the architect Hermann von Holst, and Wright’s studio assistant, the architect, Marion Mahony. Significant information on each of these individuals can be found in Robie House — History and Architecture section of the volunteer manual.

Despite Wright’s departure the work done at the Robie House, was executed almost exactly as Wright’s plans designated. The house was completed in the spring of 1910. By May of that year the Robies occupied the house.

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ROBIE HOUSE

(Stand outside of the garage courtyard)

STOP 1: COURTYARD

(Stand under the eaves, away from the bookshop entrance.)
Wright’s career spanned a period of almost seven decades, during which time he witnessed profound changes in how Americans used their homes. The immensity of change is perhaps best exemplified by the technological advances in transport. Wright’s early houses typically featured stables to house horses and carriages. The attached three-car garage is one of the earliest of its kind. In the early 1900s, the automobile was still a great novelty. It was rare for a family to own one car, much less to have room for three. All three bays featured large, swing-out doors with art glass windows.

**Restoration:** The walls of the courtyard had been lowered and reconfigured. The walls were restored to their original design. The large courtyard gates that you see today were recreated based on Wright’s original designs.

*(Always describe the route to the next stop and make sure the way is clear before you cross 58th St. Ask guests to look both ways: to the left for cars and both directions for bicycles.)*

**STOP 2: 58TH STREET VIEW OF ROBIE HOUSE ELEVATION**

*(Stand across the street from Robie House, on the sidewalk or on the Graduate School of Business terrace.)*

*What Is the Prairie Style?*

The Prairie Houses of 1895 to 1910 are among Wright’s greatest design legacies. They represent the first truly original American form of architecture. Prior to Wright’s innovations the overriding aesthetic influence on domestic architecture came from Europe. The Prairie style in turn is a uniquely American architecture,
inspired by the flat, open vistas of the Midwest prairie landscape.

In his Prairie Houses, Wright abandoned the traditional arrangement of space found within contemporary domestic architecture – that is a basement, then main floor, private rooms above, and concluding with an attic. At the Robie House there is no basement in the traditional sense of the word. The main floor is raised above a ground floor basement allowing for greater views and increased privacy. The top story, where the bedrooms are located, caps the structure. Wright has eliminated the steeply pitched roof that traditionally housed the attic. The steep roof has been replaced with a broad, sheltering, low pitched one with generously projecting eaves that extend out over the walls of the house. The attic would typically serve as accommodation for servants. Wright places the servants’ wing on the main level of the house, close to the kitchen, above the three car garage.

**Organic Architecture**

The Prairie Houses reflect an all-encompassing philosophy that Wright termed “Organic Architecture.” By this Wright meant that buildings should be suited to their environment and a product of their place, purpose and time. First developed in 1894, when Wright was establishing his own architectural practice, this design philosophy would inform Wright’s entire career.

Three key principles of Wright’s philosophy listed below are helpful in understanding the Prairie style:

**Unity:** Each building Wright designed was conceived as an integral whole - from site to structure, interior and exterior, furniture, ornament and architecture, each element was connected. Take note of the exterior of the building. Numerous aspects of the structure - the consistent use of simple materials, the dominant horizontal emphasis, and the basic geometry of the building - will recur on the interior.

**Nature:** Nature was a crucial element of Wright’s organic architecture.

Wright believed that a building should relate harmoniously to its environment. The buildings Wright designed during the early part of his career were specifically influenced by the expansive landscape of America’s Midwest – the Prairie. The architecture of the Robie House is defined by dramatic horizontal lines and masses that evoke the landscape of the prairie. They give the appearance of a lower profile which reinforces the unity between the house and its site.

Wright exhibited a mastery of and respect for natural materials early on in his career.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, stone, brick, and wood had traditionally been covered, painted and plastered to suit any fashion or taste. Wright’s work
with these materials always reflected what he perceived as most natural to them.

Additionally Wright uses natural foliage and flowers for decoration on the exterior of the house, incorporating plant-life into the very structure of the building. As Wright stated, “a building should appear to grow from its site.”

**Ornamentation:** In his Prairie Houses Wright typically avoided pictorial representation, subject matter, or motifs. Organic architecture demanded a unity of the ornament with the building. Wright understood that there was an aesthetic appeal in architecture beyond the appeal of applied ornamentation. Planes and volumes, solids and voids, all combine to create interesting visual symmetries, juxtapositions, and rhythms, both outside and inside Robie House.

**Art glass:** Wright redefined the nature and role of decorative stained glass. Prior to Wright’s innovations stained glass windows were treated much like paintings, rather than an integral part of the design of the house. Wright replaced the opaque pictorial imagery of contemporaries such as Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933) and John la Farge (1835-1910) with translucent bands of windows. Called “Light-screens” by Wright, the windows organize the viewer’s visual experience of the natural world beyond the confines of the building’s interior. Conversely, since the glass pieces do not constitute a single plane, they tend to inhibit views into the building and thus provide its inhabitants with additional privacy. On the exterior, the iridized glass appears to be a rainbow of warm chroma, from golden yellow and amber to red-purples, hues that harmonize with the iron flecked exterior brickwork.

**Urns and planters:** In tandem with the long planters that run the length of the main floor, balcony, bedroom level, and west porch, the urns provided decorative accents while simultaneously reinforcing the integral relationship between the structure and nature. The urns comprise basic geometric forms—circle, square, cross- establishing a motif that is repeated throughout the interior of the house.

**Cornice:** The copper “cornice” that encircles the roof of the building is another example of Wright’s use of integrated ornament. This cornice is essentially an elaborate gutter: instead of simply adding a gutter or concealing it within the soffit, Wright creates a copper cornice which houses the gutter and covers a portion of the soffit as well. This copper roofline becomes a striking visual element on the exterior of the building and, at the same time, serves a functional purpose.

**Restoration:** The majority of the building exterior was historically intact but with a non-original clay tile roof. Historically accurate clay shingles were installed on the roof, replacing the existing modern clay tiles. The original copper gutters were restored to improve functionality. The gutters had developed a green patina which was treated to restore the original finish.
STOP 3: 58TH STREET AND WOODLAWN AVENUE

(Stand on the 58th and Woodlawn SE corner closest to the Booth School. Watch for pedestrians and be aware of loud noise that will prohibit your guests from hearing you.)

The Site

Lot Size: The site at 5757 Woodlawn Avenue was also a factor in both the design of the house and its relationship to the natural environment. The lot is three times longer than it is wide—60 feet wide and 180 feet long. The elongated design of the building is partly a response to the spatial constraints of the lot.

Southern Exposure: The predominantly southern exposure of the house was also a response to the site. At the time the house was built, there was no development between 58th Street and the Midway Plaisance. Wright situated the house to take advantage of the unobstructed view to the south.

Exterior Details: Wright further emphasizes the horizontality of the building with striking cantilevers in which the building terminates on the second floor. A cantilever is a projecting horizontal beam that is supported at only one end. Wright embraces the use of steel to construct these cantilevers. The development of structural steel had revolutionized architecture in the waning years of the nineteenth century, allowing for the construction of multistoried steel frame office buildings that defined the Chicago School of architecture. The Robie house is typically credited as the first use of steel beam cantilevers in a residential building.
The span of the cantilevered roof is 17 feet 5 inches from the supporting brick piers, and 10 feet 8 inches from the prow.

Note the front porch of the house—the houses along Woodlawn Avenue are set back 35 feet from the west lot line, whereas Robie House, via the front porch, comes quite close to the lot line. This gives the house an imposing aspect; it is nearly impossible to see onto the porch itself, protecting the privacy of those sitting on the porch.

STOP 4: THE FRONT DOOR

*(Stand in the small courtyard outside the front door of Robie House.)*

**Significance of the Route:** At the Robie House the entrance is found at the end of a long concrete path accessed from the west side of the site, against the inner lot line. Wright’s mature Prairie houses typically featured a long, complex entry. Our journey to reach the entrance illustrates an essential element of Wright’s design philosophy - the complex way in which architectural space is experienced. Consider how Wright has brought us to this point, forcing us to engage with the plan and design of the house.

**The Last Exterior Stop:** All of the major exterior elements are featured at this last exterior stop—the projecting porch, the sheltering eaves of the roof, the planters, and art glass windows. Wright leaves us with a final summary of the exterior features before we enter the house.

**Public and Private:** A low retaining wall frames the entrance court which is paved in concrete with a central mat of red quarry tiles. The red tiles continue eastward and under a balcony, where a wide door provides access to the entrance hall. The concealed and recessed front entrance reinforces the sense of refuge the house provides as well as its air of privacy and impenetrability. As one arrives at the front door, however, one is “embraced” by the house: the low north wall extending to the street, the front porch, and the projecting balcony all combine to enclose this spot on the exterior. The guest bedroom porch creates a lowered ceiling plane, which in turn creates a transitional space—the transition from outside to inside. This compression of space also acts to draw one into the entry room of the house. This technique is one that Wright used throughout his career.

**Exterior Details:** On the exterior of the house, Wright employs Roman brick which contributes to the horizontality of the house. The bricks are thinner and longer than traditional bricks. The vertical joints in the mortar are barely apparent, filled with red mortar flush with the face of the brick. The horizontal white mortar joints in turn are deeply raked. Wright specified Pennsylvania Iron Spot Brick, which has a mottled earth tone color scattered with black iron spots. The color of the iron
STOP 5: ENTRY HALL

(Stand on the second stairway step facing your group.)

**Transitional Space**: The low ceiling before the front door marked the transition between the exterior and the interior. The low ceiling in the entry hall indicates a transitional space within the building.

The entrance hall, with its wooden screens, red oak furniture, moldings and cabinetry and art glass windows and doors, establishes the decorative themes for the residence. Keep these elements in mind as you tour the house. You will see that Wright has created a fully integrated space where all elements – exterior shell, windows, interior finishes, lighting, concealed heating, and furniture – were conceived as a unified composition.

On the interior of the house, Wright employed a natural color palette. He advised taking inspiration from the woods and fields, and the soft, warm tones of earths and autumn leaves for color schemes. The sanded plaster walls of the entrance hall were originally a warm, welcoming beige color.
**Restoration:** Over time the original finishes of the house have suffered and today many layers of paint on the walls have obscured the original texture and finishes.

The floor of the ground level of the house was originally magnesite. Magnesite is a durable cement-like flooring material typically containing a compound of magnesium, carbon, and oxygen. When mixed with sawdust or wood-flour and a coloring pigment, it hardens within a few hours to produce a dense, stone-like material. In the Robie House, the magnesite was a salmon color, with a deep red border (approximately three inches wide) about a foot away from the wall.

The original magnesite was found to contain asbestos. The flooring needed to be removed by an asbestos abatement team. A replacement floor will be installed to recreate the original appearance of the ground floor.

The floor is covered with a reproduction woven wool rug with a dark brown border enclosing a beige central field, decorated with motifs in gray, red and off-white accents that rhythmically repeat approximately every three feet. The pattern echoes the rectangular footprint of the house itself. The original rug was designed by Wright’s acquaintance, the interior architect George Mann Niedecken.

**Closet:** The servants’ staircase is concealed behind the coat closet. The grillwork is both decorative and functional, providing ventilation to the closet.

The period photograph displayed here, shows the hall in 1916. Historic photographs of the residence, taken in 1910 and 1916 present a substantial visual inventory of the original furnishings created for the Robie House. The hall was lightly furnished with a spindled pier table, oak tall back chairs upholstered in leather, and small tables called taborets. Many of these furniture pieces survive in the collection of the Smart Museum on the campus of the University of Chicago. The Preservation Trust and the Smart Museum will collaborate to return surviving furnishings to the Robie House where possible.

The children’s playroom, where you watched the orientation film, and the billiard room open to either side of the hall through leaded glass doors. Wright did not design furniture for these spaces and period photographs reveal how incongruous the Victorian furniture of the Wilbur family looks in Wright’s carefully conceived interior. The billiard room and playroom were private spaces used by the family. The art glass doors help provide a level of privacy for the family spaces. On our present route we are experiencing the house as a formal guest of the Robie family would.

*(If asked why the billiard room is not on the tour explain that of all the rooms of the house the billiard room has suffered most in terms of condition)*
A central staircase leads to the primary living spaces on the second story. As we head upstairs consider how Wright manipulates space to further build expectation for the visitor’s final arrival at the main floor of the house. Wright delays the arrival on the main floor with a half-turn stairway. As you climb the stairs Wright provides glimpses of the main floor through oak lattice screens that shield a full view of the main living area.

(Appoint a last person so you know everyone is upstairs.)

STOP 6: UPPER HALL

(Stand near the remaining original sconce. Wait until your group has gathered within the space before you begin to describe the hall.)

Wright continues to delay the arrival at the main living space with another transitional space, a hall at the top of the stairs. By prolonging the transition between the small, dark space of the lower entry hall to the light-filled open plan of the living and dining rooms, Wright emphasizes the contrast between these areas.

Despite its small scale the hall is densely detailed. A built-in bookcase featuring five tall doors of clear leaded glass stood at the north wall. The bookcase will be rebuilt to its original design.
Lighting was always an important part of Wright’s architectural schemes. The soffited perimeter edges of the ceiling are covered with pierced lay grilles, hiding indirect illumination. These removable wood screens were originally covered with translucent glass, so that light would shine gently through. Wright experimented with artificial illumination in several of his homes from 1895 onward, installing recessed lighting above the dining table in his own home in place of a traditional chandelier. The lighting was set behind a jig-sawed wooden ceiling grille, thus becoming part of the architecture.

Light fixtures play an integral role in Wright’s interiors. Wright would often incorporate wall sconces that followed the motif of the interior theme. There were three major type of light fixtures used in the Robie house. The sconce here in the hall is one of two surviving examples of this model used at the Robie House. It features a geometric perforated cover plate with a pattern visible from either below or above. The pattern of diagonal geometries subtly echoes the prow-shaped bays at each end of the great double room and relates to the patterns found in the art glass windows. Consider how Wright brings pattern to the plain plaster walls through the use of light and shadow. The deep golden tonality of the bronze is typical of Wright’s palette.

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**STOP 7: LIVING ROOM**

(Allow your group to move into the open space of the living room. Stand near the fireplace facing your group. Encourage them to move around in the living room to experience it from different positions)
In contrast to the circuitous route one takes to arrive at the main floor – the ‘hidden’ entrance to the house, the low, dark entrance hall, and the half-turn stairway – the main floor of the house is an exceedingly inviting, open space. The “single room” forms virtually the entire main floor of the house. It stretches out to contain a continuous living and dining space.

Consider the houses featured in the orientation film and the stark difference between those interiors and the Robie House. Prior to Wright’s innovations the public spaces of residential architecture were clearly delineated – the parlor, the music room, the dining room, the library etc. Each room was a box enclosed by its four walls, floor and ceiling. In the Robie House Wright has allocated the majority of interior space to this expansive ‘living’ space conceived as heart of the house. This is a multi-functional, unconfined space, featuring zones for relaxing, conversation or dining.

**Chimney Mass/Fireplace:** The focal point of Wright’s Prairie interiors was the fireplace. The central chimney provides both a physical and emotional core to the house. Here Wright employs the same Roman brick used on the exterior of the house, reinforcing the bond between interior and exterior space. The mantel is concrete, flanked by a brick face and columns. In his design of the fireplace Wright breaches the solid mass of the chimney by diverting the flues to the side piers. This action creates a vista between the horizontal brick courses over the stairway and into the dining area; an incredible manipulation of space that unites the whole floor while simultaneously allowing the living room and dining room to retain their independence and privacy. The firebox and hearth are stepped down into the floor, allowing the hearth to appear as a pool of fire when lit. The 1910 photograph of the living room looking east to the fireplace shows how a monumental inglenook originally framed the left side of the hearth area, screening the pathway from the upper hall into the living room. The wall that forms a backrest for the seat features an oak screen of similar design to those used on the main stair from the entrance hall. The restoration of the living room will recreate this structure.
Art Glass: The art glass windows introduced in the entrance hall on the ground level are used to full effect on the main level of the house. Glass was critical to Wright's new approach to space. Glass enabled his goal of the "destruction of the box," by opening the enclosed volume of space defined by the perimeter exterior walls of then contemporary houses and internal rooms closed within walls and ceilings.

While the north wall is opened through the inclusion of five large casement windows, Wright opens the entire south wall with windows that form an open, architectural frieze of ornament. The windows feature a pattern of flattened diamond shapes and diagonal geometries that evoke plant forms in their design while subtly echoing the prow-shaped bays at each end of the great double room.

The 175 art glass windows in the Robie House are an integral part of the design of the house. The windows are made of polished clear plate glass and machine-rolled colored glass, with copper-plated zinc caming. The panels are used as interior and exterior doors, as well as operable single-casement and stationary windows in the house and garage. Their presence is fundamental to the building's significance as an architectural masterpiece.

Restoration: As part of the restoration all of the art glass windows and doors will be conserved. Seven art glass panels have been removed from the house at various points and are now in the collection of the Smart Museum. Certain missing
windows will be returned to the house while others will be recreated.

**Lighting:** The main level of the house relies on both natural and artificial lighting. The art glass designs, while unusually intricate, allow plenty of sunlight into the rooms. The beam elements in the ceiling terminate in opaque glass globes set into square wood sconces that project into the ceiling volumes. The form of the sconces – a sphere framed by a cross, framed by a square – repeats the design elements of the large planters found on the exterior of the house.
**Furnishings:** Period photographs taken in 1910 and 196 reveal several important furniture pieces designed specifically for the room. The living area was originally furnished with a sofa featuring a cantilevered frame that replicated the extended roof line over the prow. The symmetrically balanced sofa, with its broad, flat cantilevered arms and deep upholstery, provided comfortable seating for two. The sweep of the cantilevered ledges eliminated the need for side and back tables. The wood was oak, stained in a medium, golden brown, and the russet upholstery had two boxed seat cushions, with high crowns, and two back pillows filled with feathers.

In addition to the sofa, pairs of oak high back chairs, upholstered in leather, faced each course of windows. The chairs were complimented by oak tabourets, small furniture pieces that served as both moveable tables and an extra form of seating. Several library tables with cabinets and shelves were arranged in the room.

One of the most important decorative pieces for the Robie living room was table lamp with an art glass shade. The lamp was removed from the house by Mrs. Taylor and is now in a private collection. The lamp was large and architectonic in form. The shade featured broad “eaves” that echoed the sheltering roof of the Robie House. The color scheme of the lamp was carefully planned to be in keeping with the setting inside the house.

The large area rug, attached to the perimeters of the wood floor, features a beige ground with intermittent pattern abstractions. A modulated border extended along the length of both longitudinal walls, with different patterns predominant in the living area and dining area. The patterns were articulated fragments of Wright’s light screen designs in toned and tinted red, white, green and gold.

**Mechanical Systems:** The mechanical systems in the house are an integral part of its design. Wright, more than any of his contemporaries, sought to take the benefits of technology and mechanization and integrate them into his buildings.

**Heating:** The abundance of art glass windows, which have little or no capacity for insulation, makes it difficult to heat the main level. Wright combats this with radiators (either forced air or steam) installed just below the windows or doors to warm the cold drafts that come in through the windows. Vents in the floor in front of the south windows had radiators below them in the playroom and billiard room.

**Cooling:** Art glass windows all open outward, allowing for ample cross-ventilation.
STOP 8: DINING ROOM

(Stand near the entrance to the back hallway, not in the prow.)

Wright considered the domestic furniture and decorative arts of his Prairie Houses as an important part of the whole composition. Wright wrote of his interiors in the introduction to the Wasmuth Portfolio:

They are all mere structural details in the completeness, heating apparatus, light fixtures, the very chairs, tables, [and] cabinets ... are of the building itself... Floor coverings and hangings are of the house as the plaster on the walls or the tiles on the roof.

The dining room space was defined primarily through its furnishings.

**Built-ins:** Traditional freestanding furniture consumed significant space and was often at odds with Wright’s tightly integrated interiors. The creation of furniture pieces that were incorporated into the overall floor plan helped open up the space and unify the design. In the dining area of the Robie House the north wall is recessed to incorporate a large built-in storage unit that includes two vertical units and six horizontal cabinets. Wright added further storage space with the inclusion of the built-in cabinets against the staircase.

**Restoration:** Both of the built-in pieces seen today are reproductions of the originals.

**Freestanding furniture:** Period photographs reveal two closely aligned areas for family meals and formal entertaining. A formal rectangular table for six crossed was set across the width of the room and an informal family area with a small square table for four was set in the sheltered recess of the angled prow. While this
arrangement may seem redundant, it was used by Wright on several previous commissions.

The furniture creates a temporary, intimate space within the larger room. This spatial effect is achieved through the design of the furniture. In the formal dining table, the heavy legs extend above the table top and terminate in electrified glass light fixtures. Wright incorporates small ceramic planters beneath the light fixtures, in reference to the large stone urns on the exterior of the house. The lengthy extension of the straight chair backs creates a secondary environment within the room, sheltering those seated at the table. This same model designed by Wright was adapted in a number of other residences including the Darwin Martin House in Buffalo (1905), the Boynton House of Rochester (1908), and the May House of Grand Rapids (1909).

STOP 9: GUEST BEDROOM

(Due to the small scale of the guest room, an overview will be provided in the dining room, prior to moving the group to the kitchen. Stand near the entrance to the back hallway.)

Originally, a curtain would have hung in the entrance to the hallway. The nail holes are visible in the door frame. Passing through this curtain would have marked the transition from the public spaces of the house to the private spaces: the family’s bedrooms are up the stairs, while the servants’ quarters are beyond the kitchen. A guest bedroom and bathroom are found off the living space.

Robie’s son Fred Jr. would later recall that the guest bedroom had been requested by his father who could foresee a time that his parents might live at the house. Shortly after Robie’s father died in 1909, his mother came to live with the family and used this room.

Restoration: The interior finishes and fixtures to the room have been restored closely to their original appearance, and provide a sense of Wright’s original vision for the interiors. The period photograph on display shows the bedroom as it appeared in 1916. The Niedecken-Wallbridge Company provided the furniture along with bedspreads for all of the bedrooms. The mirrored dresser and double bed display details that mimic the prow shape found in the plan of the Robie House. The original double bed is in the collection of the Smart Museum on the campus of the University of Chicago.

(Describe in detail the route you will take guests to get from the dining room to the guest room. Appoint a last person and lead your group. Stand on the step leading into the kitchen to direct the group into the bedroom. As group members begin to leave the room, make them aware of the step to ensure that no one trips.)
STOP 10: KITCHEN

(Gather the group in the kitchen.)

The kitchen had been modified multiple times to keep up with changing uses for the house and to counteract heavy use. The 1916 photographs of the kitchen show glossy sanitary surfaces on the walls, floor and ceiling. They also indicate original lighting, utilities, cabinetry, furnishings, and the ice cabinet. With the exception of the three wall and four base oak cabinets on the east wall, all of the original apparatus had been removed: the stove, the oven, the counters, the sink, the drawers, the ice cabinet, the radiator, the free-standing work table, the light fixtures, and the south wall cabinetry and all been removed. Today the kitchen island and sink cabinetry are reconstructions.

The smooth walls and ceiling were of Keene cement plaster, specified in the original plans. This was generally considered more sanitary, because it was easier to clean than textured plaster. The north wall is covered in original glossy white enamel brick, which although crazed is in good condition and generally clean. Based on the 1916 photograph it is assumed that the original flooring was a patterned linoleum.

Beyond are the kitchen, are the servants’ quarters which include a dining room, two bedrooms and a bathroom. All of the service elements of the house are contained within this part of the building, which is located above the garage. Unlike many contemporary designs that relegated servants to the attic of a building, Wright brought the service staff onto the main floor.

The stairs from the main level to the ground level were used by the servants—the stairs lead to the closet in the entry hall (the door to the playroom at the bottom of the stairs was added later).

(Direct your group out the back servants’ stairs and follow them down to the courtyard to end your tour.)
STOP 11: CONCLUSION

(Stand under the eaves, away from the bookshop entrance)

- With the publication of the substantial Wasmuth portfolio in 1911, Wright’s work was introduced to a generation of European architects. The subsequent influence of the architect’s work on important figures of the Modern Movement such as Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe has been well documented.

- Wright himself recognized Robie House as his best work and twice fought to defend it from demolition, the only time he ever took such an action on behalf of one of his buildings.

- Robie House is a city, state, and national landmark. In February 1960, Robie House was declared an architectural landmark by the Commission on Chicago Architectural Landmarks. In 1963, Robie House is the first building in the United States to be declared a National Historic Landmark based solely on its architectural merit, rather than on the significance of who lived there, or what happened at the site.

- The American Institute of Architects has declared Robie House one of the ten most significant structures of the 20th century.

- The three defining achievements of Wright’s career are Robie House, Chicago, 1908-10; Fallingwater, Bear Run, Pennsylvania, 1936-39; and the Guggenheim Museum, New York City, 1943-59. Robie House will always remain historically, artistically, and culturally important.

(Thank your group and conclude your tour by inviting a further relationship with the Preservation Trust: visit the Home and Studio in Oak Park; visit the Museum Shop; become a member; volunteer; visit our website - GoWright.org to learn about our other programs and tour)