

FREDERICK C. ROBIE HOUSE FAQ

Frequently asked questions and answers by room/stop. Consider this supplemental information - no need to add as content to your tours.

GARAGE

- The mechanic's pit was in the west stall of the garage.¹

GARAGE COURTYARD

- The obscure glass window between the door to the playroom and door to shop restroom vestibule is where coal for the furnace was deposited into the coal storage room. The short hallway between the playroom and shop restrooms was originally part of the coal storage room.²
- The brick wall around the garage courtyard was lowered to match the height of the play yard wall sometime after the house ceased to be used as a home. It was returned to its original height and reproduction gates fabricated during the restoration. Original brick from the courtyard and alley sides of the wall was removed and reinstalled on the raised wall facing 58th street so that side matches the house from the street. The slightly different colored brick in the courtyard is new.³
- There was originally a low iron gate where the chain blocks access from the courtyard to the play yard. A matching gate was located at the bottom of the exterior stairs from the front entrance court to the front porch.⁴
- Wright's office is not known to have provided a landscape plan specifying what plants were to be installed at the Robie House.⁵

FRONT PORCH

- Below the west prow windows there are several openings in the wall where bricks are left out. These are fresh air intakes for the modern air conditioning system and are not original to the house.⁶

RECEPTION ROOM

- The recess in the wall near the coat room originally held an intercom panel.⁷

BILLIARD ROOM

- The pipes at the back of the fireplaces and in some cases on the floor of the hearths were for the gas fire starters. The original kitchen stove was gas, so gas was always present in the house.⁸
- Despite the built-in safe, there is no record of any owner using this room as an office. Both the Robie and Wilbur families used it as a family room.
- There was a fabric curtain directly in front of the built-in safe, as seen in the Wilbur era photo.⁹

LIVING/DINING AREA

- Wright did not state the origin of the Robie House art glass window theme, and their fabricator remains unknown. Donald Hoffman speculated that their design derives from the plan of the house.¹⁰
- The spring-loaded cabinet catches in each corner of the windows originally held wood-framed screens in place. The screen frames were later hinged.¹¹
- The eyebolts at the bottom of the casement windows and the long hooks on the exterior were used to hold the windows in an open position.¹²
- Sometime after the house ceased to be used as a home radiators were added to the south side of the living/dining room below the windows at the far sides of the doors to the balcony; these were later removed. The round patches in the wood floor are where the radiator pipes came up from below.¹³

BUTLER'S PANTRY

- There was originally a sink below the window in the butler's pantry.¹⁴

GUEST ROOM HALLWAY

- The 12-button switch on the wall originally controlled lights in the living & dining areas. The laylights, globe lights and sconces could be controlled independent of each other.¹⁵ Less than half of the 12 switches are still in use today.
- The two stacked toggle switches at the bottom of the stairs to the third floor are battery switches. They likely powered the telephone and intercom.¹⁶

PRIMARY BEDROOM

- The two rectangular outlines in the ceiling next to the bathroom door are access panels for the modern air conditioning system. They are not original to the house.¹⁷
- The small, fixed panes of glass below the south facing windows provide "grow space" for the exterior planters. The operational sash above swings out over the top of the plants.¹⁸
- Each bedroom on this floor is missing one of its art glass windows. The windows were removed years ago to facilitate the installation of window air conditioners. The windows still exist and are stored at the Smart Museum of Art.¹⁹
- The brick mass of the chimney is L-shaped where it exits the roof, and some of the bricks are left out of south side of the L. The L conforms to the walls of Mr. Robie's closet and is part of the attic ventilation system.²⁰

BATHROOMS

- Bathroom fixtures are salvaged period originals that closely match Wright's original specifications.²¹

KITCHEN

- The clear windows in the kitchen and staff dining room were always clear. Only the window behind the stove had art glass, because it was the only one that could be seen from Woodlawn when the house was constructed.²²
- Only the cabinetry that backs up to the interior servant's stair is original; all the rest was recreated during the restoration.²³

PLAYROOM

- The door from the playroom to the restrooms at the back of the shop is not original. Entrance to both the laundry room (where bathrooms are) and garage was from separate exterior doors.²⁴

GENERAL

- The Robie house cost \$60,000 including the land and furniture. The Taylors paid \$50,000 for it and the Wilbur family an unknown amount. The Seminary paid \$90,000 and sold it to William Zeckendorf of Webb & Knapp for \$125,000.²⁵
- Three houses to the north of Robie were demolished to make way for the Seminary's dormitory: the Goodman House immediately to the north, the Zeta Beta Tau Fraternity, and the Phi Delta Theta Fraternity House at 5747 Woodlawn.²⁶
- To see the extent of the Smart Museum of Art's Robie House furniture collection, type Robie, Niedecken and Frank Lloyd Wright individually in the "search collection" box on the museum's website.²⁷
- The tile for the restored roof was provided by the Ludowicki Tile Company of Ohio. The company began its US operation in 1893 and installed the original "Huntington" tile roof.²⁸
- According to Frederic Robie Jr, Wright went to St Louis to select the Roman brick with its dark iron spots, originally specified as "Collinsville 110 A Roman Dark".²⁹
- The span of the two fifteen-inch-deep steel channel beams (c-shaped) that support the roof over the living & dining areas is 86'-9". It is not a single channel, but rather multiple channels bolted together.³⁰

¹ Robie House floor plan prepared by FLW

² Robie House floor plan prepared by FLW

³ 1957 photos; Robie House conservation management plan p. 38

⁴ FLW's Robie House, Donald Hoffman, p. 44; Robie House conservation management plan, p. 26

⁵ FLW's Robie House, Donald Hoffman, p.33 & 55

⁶ Historic photos (no openings) & current observation

⁷ FLW's Robie House, Donald Hoffman, p. 49

⁸ Physical evidence; FLW's Robie House, Donald Hoffman, p. 82

⁹ FLW's Robie House, Donald Hoffman, p.52

¹⁰ FLW's Robie House, Donald Hoffman, p. 51

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- ¹¹ Physical evidence; Robie House conservation management plan, p. 99
- ¹² Physical evidence
- ¹³ FLW's Robie House, Donald Hoffman, p. 32; 1957 photos
- ¹⁴ Robie House floor plan prepared by FLW
- ¹⁵ Physical evidence
- ¹⁶ 1919 The Protective Electrical Supply Company catalog, p. 559
- ¹⁷ Physical evidence
- ¹⁸ Physical evidence, use at other homes of era for same intent
- ¹⁹ 1957 photos, Smart Museum of Art collection
- ²⁰ Robie House conservation management plan p. 54
- ²¹ Robie House conservation management plan p. 109
- ²² Wilbur photos, physical observation
- ²³ Robie House conservation management plan
- ²⁴ Robie House floor plan prepared by FLW; Robie House conservation management plan
- ²⁵ Robie House conservation management plan p. 29, 30, 32
- ²⁶ March 25, 1957 letter from Estelle Horn (the Committee to preserve The Robie House) to Henry Russel Hitchcock
- ²⁷ Smart Museum of Art Website (<https://smartcollection.uchicago.edu/collections>)
- ²⁸ September 13, 2024, 1:15PM Private Robie House Tour led by Briar Owens, Robie House conservation management plan, p. 96
- ²⁹ FLW's Robie House, Donald Hoffman, p.42; Robie House conservation management plan, p. 98
- ³⁰ Robie House conservation management plan, p. 51