

Stop 1: Introduction (Courtyard)

- The Frederick C. Robie House was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright for Frederick Carleton Robie. Mr. Robie was about 30 years old when he commissioned Frank Lloyd Wright to build this home in 1908.
- Robie was a businessman & inventor who was moving upward in society as he managed his father's manufacturing company & came into his own wealth. He was president of the Excelsior Supply Co., which manufactured sewing machine & bicycle parts.
- The Robie House was completed in 1910. It is a three level structure with 6 bedrooms, 4.5 baths, & an attached 3 car garage. 9,063 Square Feet
- Wright had made a name for himself designing homes for upper middle class clients in a new, strictly American style that had come to be known as the Prairie style
- We are going to focus not only on the expressive organic architecture of the Robie House, but also on how the house represents change – architectural change, social change, & design change.
- The house itself illustrates the movement in the early 20th century away from Victorian style living – prescribed living spaces, restricted clothing, & rigid social roles – to a new modern style of living, with open space, personal freedom, & fluid social interaction.
- Wright, also a fan of technology & cars, designed a 3-car garage for Mr. Robie. This was one of the first known attached 3-car garages. Wright incorporated Mr. Robie's love for innovation, machines, & cars into the design at the Robie House. The garage here featured a mechanic's bay in the floor as well as an interior car wash.
- Even in the private garage courtyard, Wright paid attention to every single architectural detail. He designed 2 large gates that acted as buffers to the entry of the garage, increasing privacy & intimacy within the design.
- The gates echo the art glass, but are executed in steel. These gates & the exterior wall contribute to the sense of safety & security for his family that Mr. Robie requested for his home.

Stop 2: 58th & Woodlawn

- From this vantage point, one can see how unusual Robie House is in relation to the houses in the neighborhood. Some of the houses along Woodlawn Avenue between 57th & 58th streets are close contemporaries of the Robie House.
- Here we can see many of the Prairie Style elements that Wright & his colleagues had been developing for over a decade. The building has:
 - Long, horizontal lines emphasizing its connection to the surrounding prairie
 - A central hearth
 - The incorporation of nature into the building & design (notice urns & planters)
 - Art glass windows & doors
 - Ornament integrated into the design both on exterior & interior (ornament is not just applied)
 - Cantilevered roofs extending over the building – cantilevers stretch over open space without support by weighting the base of the cantilever to the structure.
 - Wright's use of steel in the building allows for the dramatic reach of the Robie House cantilevers, with steel supporting the ceilings of the first and second floors, & the third floor from below. The building itself is dependent on the interior steel

- frame.
- This building is a **study in contrast**: it provides shelter & safety behind its massive horizontal walls - & it is an observatory, allowing the family to look out onto the street through the screens of art glass.
- It **blends the indoors & outdoors** from many vantage points & it creates public & private spaces in unique ways.
- What's really important about this architecture is how it **functioned** – how it **shaped the way people lived within the home**.
- Architectural features that are important to the Prairie style become more evident. Wright used **Roman Brick**, which is longer & narrower than the traditional Chicago common brick that was used in many late 19th century structures.
- Wright emphasizes the horizontal lines with the brick by using a contrasting color in the horizontal mortar & by shading the vertical grout the color of the brick
- **Cantilevers** are used to separate the space, creating a division between the overhangs & the interior.

Stop 3: West Porch – (Invite group to sit on the ledge)

- The west porch features a **cantilevered** overhang extending **17.5** feet past the edge of the building, creating a sheltered exterior space.
- A Hyde Park ordinance required every house be set **35 feet back** from the West lot line. Wright worked around this restriction by extending the porch out from the home, providing the Robies with more living space. It is nearly impossible to see onto the porch itself from the street, giving those sitting on it privacy.
- Notice the **golden color** of the soffits. They reflect the colors of the art glass windows & lighten the overhangs – otherwise they would recede into shadow.

Stop 4: Front Door

- Here in the Robie House, the **front door** is concealed under the overhang in order for you to investigate the entry & the process of entering the space. Wright created this space to be low & dark in order to create a more **dramatic impact** as you enter the building & to communicate the **feeling of shelter**.
- Wright wanted you to experience his architecture **from the outside in**, allowing you to respond personally to architecture, nature, & space & how it all works together.
- By setting the front door so far back from the street & entirely out of view, Wright makes the house seem private & almost **impenetrable**. As you approach the front door, however, you are **"embraced"** by the house: the low north wall extending to the street, the front porch, & the projecting balcony all combine to enclose this spot to the exterior
- Rules
 - There is no smoking, eating, drinking, or chewing gum within the museum.
 - Please turn off all cell phones & other electronic devices.
 - Do not touch the walls, furnishings, or artifacts.
 - Please stay with our group throughout the tour.

Stop 5: Entry Hall

- This entry hall has elements linking it to the classic [Victorian foyer](#) – not a lot of furniture, rooms on either side, & a large staircase, but Wright's design has an entirely different feel.
- He uses this strictly as an intermediary space. He keeps the ceiling height here the same as the outdoor overhang, to maintain the [sense of transition](#).
- There is a sense of intimacy in this room, aided by this compressed ceiling. The room is only [6 feet, 10 inches high](#), the lowest ceiling in the home. Wright [opens up the room horizontally](#) with 2 large grilles on either side of the main stairwell.
- This allows the eye to see into the other ground floor spaces while panes of glass between the wooden slats ensure the rooms remain [private & sheltered](#). There are 2 art glass doors that lead to the Billiards Room & Playroom.
- These doors allowed the [option of privacy](#) within each space. The [art glass gives a hint](#) of what is to come upstairs & provides built-in ornamentation & allows the space to flow even when the doors are closed.
- As the Robies' visitors would arrive, they could freshen up in the powder room (a modern innovation) & store their coats & belongings in the closet, ventilated with a wooden screen to maintain freshness.

Stop 6: Billiards Room

- In the architectural drawings for the Robie House, this was specified as a Billiards room, a [place for the man of the house](#) to entertain & keep a separate space from the rest of his domestic life.
- We do not know how the Robies used the space, but its architecture gives us [clues](#) into both [its function & connections](#) to the [home as a whole](#).
- [Visible architectural details](#) such as the [steel](#) c-channel beams create a visual rhythm you'll find echoed on the main floor. It also reveals the structure of the building to the occupant, which Wright advocated as [truth in architecture](#).
- The use of steel at the Robie House is important because it is one of the first times Wright used it as the main structural component in residential design.
- Let's talk about the [steel & glass](#) for a minute. Wright was using these materials both to make the building more useful & to emphasize & dramatize its appearance.
- A decade after the Robie House was completed; these materials became the [basic elements of Modern architecture](#). Beginning in the early 1920's, European architects were building streamlined Modern residences out of high quality, expensive materials; they used large areas of glass & open floor plans – all made possible by the structural steel frame of the building.
- These architectural features [reflected social changes](#) taking place at the time: a new openness in living & the breakdown of social hierarchies.
- There are [unique details that define this space](#). The [built-in](#) bookshelves created a private space which could have been used as a reading area.
- There is also a [vault](#) in this area, one of 2 safes in the house which provide security for the occupants without disrupting Wright's design.
- The [solid masonry fireplace](#) at the east end of the room echoes the massing of the exterior & the unique brickwork & is one of the 3 fireplaces which compose the central hearth & core of the home.

- Wright designed the [art glass windows](#) on this floor with the idea of [maximum privacy](#). He
- places the most intricate art glass design toward the bottom of the window. The interplay of
- glass & design allows occupants to look out while making it difficult to see in.

Stop 7: Children's Playroom (Take Group though South hallway)

- The hallway that runs along the south side of the floor leads directly into an enclosed yard for
- the Robie children. The [art glass doors open](#) onto a concrete porch that would have originally
- been surrounded by a grassy play area.
- Mr. Robie stated that he wanted a [street-level playroom](#) for the children to give them easy
- access to the outdoors while still keeping them within the safety of the home's walls.
- So here we are in a separate playroom for the Robie children. In [Victorian homes](#), activities
- such as reading, playing & sewing took place in the private family spaces. Wright's designs
- moved these activities out of the private spaces of the home into open public spaces that
- might also include visitors.
- [Children](#) were becoming an important part of the family unit rather than being raised primarily
- by nannies, nurses, & governesses. This is evident in Wright's design in this room, where the
- architectural elements are designed to a [smaller scale](#) in order to allow the children's
- enjoyment of their own space, which was outside of their bedroom. Notice in particular the
- fireplace & the height of the bench.
- A [magnesite](#) floor composed of magnesium, carbon, & oxygen plus sawdust & pigment
- was placed throughout the ground floor. It is durable, cement-like flooring that could withstand
- daily activity while remaining a part of the integrated decorative scheme. The salmon color,
- with a Cherokee red border about 1 inch wide and a foot from the wall, defines the space with
- a subtle accent. The surface is excellent for riding tricycles.
- So on this ground level of the house, there is a [clear distinction of space](#) – three different
- rooms, with different & unique functions, both connected & separate. As we head up the
- stairs, notice how on the main level Wright blends three distinct spaces into one cohesive
- design.

Transition to Upper Entry Hall

- As you go up the main staircase of the home, you keep turning left, essentially [reversing the](#)
- [path](#) that you took walking to the front door. The compressed space of the entry hall begins to
- expand as the ceiling rises in height & glimpses of the main floor become visible through the
- wooden grilles surrounding the stairway.
- But the repeated turn bring you to yet another transitional space before actually entering the
- living area.

Stop 8: Upper Entry Hall

- Velvet curtains, called [portieres](#), could have closed off the entries into the main rooms of this
- level, leaving you in a close space with built-in shelving & large laylights – but also with an art
- glass door that keeps the space open & light. The [profusion of design elements](#) here
- foreshadows "[the generous & noble scale](#)" of the living room to come.
- The [lighting sconce](#) seen on this wall was used by Wright in several of his commissions with
- slight variations. The fixture was [1 of 3](#) means of artificially lighting the public spaces of the
- main floor. It is the only original that remains. The others you see are reproductions.

- It has a complex chevron patterned top panel & frosted glass globe, so it is an [artwork in its own right](#). It's beautiful during the day, but the piece really comes alive in the evening as the
- lighted globe casts intricate geometric patterns of shadow & light on the surrounding walls &
- ceiling.

Stop 9: Living Room

- The living room [opens both outward & upward](#), drawing you back toward the outdoors as soon as you enter. Both the west porch & south balcony doors open out to nature while simultaneously bringing it indoors.
- The rows of windows & doors along both sides of the room create [cross-ventilation](#), a feature that became important in the designs of early 20th century homes as the movement of air & temperature control became important facets of home comfort.
- The [174](#) art glass doors & windows throughout the house reflect 2 of Wright's most important architectural innovations; the incorporation of nature & the creation of a sense of privacy while allowing abundant air & natural light into the space.
- In order to create Wright's complex designs, the [caming](#) which held together pieces of art glass had to be versatile & sturdy. To this end, Wright promoted a [new process of creating art glass](#) that used copper electroplated to zinc as opposed to the traditional cast lead. This created stronger comes, thus allowing a wider variety of came widths with which to express his pattern.
- The room itself contains [no solid walls](#), merely a combination of windows, doors, & the central hearth that Wright considered the heart of the home. The [triangular elements](#) in the art glass design echo the three-dimensional triangle in the prow at the west end.
- Remember the visible beams in the ceiling downstairs? The [molding](#) along this ceiling mimics that steel in a more refined way.
- The [design of the rugs](#) in the entry hall & main floor of the home provide visual interest. The colors are meant to complement the art glass & wall colors while standing alone as a design element. The patterns used in the rugs echo the design of the complete structure.
- This was truly a [multi-purpose room](#). Think about all the separate spaces the Victorians had – parlor, sitting room, sewing room, & more. All of those functions can be performed here.
- The space is clearly a dramatic public room easily used by guests, but it is also a comfortable & inviting space for family members to gather & relax.
- The [inglenook](#) (restored) creates a private space in an open area – a room within a room.
- The concept of [flexible living space](#) is illustrated in the furnishings designed for the space as well. The large library table had numerous uses as did the couch with cantilevered ends – they are clearly side tables, but they also reflect the design of the house.
- All of the details in this room are part of Wright's use of [integrated design](#).
- Let's move along again through a narrow space which opens into a larger, more dramatic one.

Stop 10: Dining Room

- The [furniture](#) of the Robie House was designed by Wright with George Mann [Niedecken](#).
- The furniture here is another example of [integrated design](#); Wright designed these furnishings

- specifically for this space. Niedecken was contracted to complete their design & execution.
- The space features [many built-in furniture pieces](#), such as the buffet, several shelves, & cabinets. Wright used these for storage instead of large free-standing pieces, allowing for more open space within the rooms.
- The walls' texture reflects the natural light & transforms the rooms' colors throughout the day.
- These are the [actual colors](#) of the [1910 color scheme](#).
- There are several different [lighting fixtures](#) that Wright used at the Robie House. In this space, we have intricate wooden grilles with frosted glass above. They shed a soft diffused light through frosted glass, bringing a natural organic element into this artificial lighting scheme.
- The [globe lights](#) on the lower ceiling extend throughout the whole floor & provide a visual rhythm as well as light. The [design of the globe lights](#) reflects Wright's personal logo – a cross within a circle within a square.
- 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 (forced air or steam) installed below the windows or doors to warm the cold drafts that come in from the outside. Vents in the floor in front of the south windows had a hot water pipe running below to radiate heat upward – not terribly effective.
- The dining room was both a [public & a private space](#). The Robies dined here as a family, often taking their meals at a square table in the prow.
- The formal dining [table](#) creates an intimate dining experience with tall-back chairs & large lanterns on all 4 corners creating interior "walls", creating a room within a room.
- The Robie House featured [many technological innovations](#). The home had an intercom system, automatic plant sprinklers, & a central vacuum system.
- Throughout the home there were nozzles in the walls into which the servants could plug a portable hose. This eased the [vacuuming](#), making the typical heavy, upright cleaner unnecessary.
- [Evidence](#) of 2 of these nozzles has been found here in the dining room & in the main stair hallway. These kinds of innovations would eventually lessen the need for domestic help.
- We are now moving into the spaces of the home that were [truly private](#).

Stop 11: Primary Bedroom

- The bedroom level of the home, which Wright called the belvedere, or beautiful view, was the [most intimate & private area](#) of the home.
- The family [sleeping quarters](#) were meant to convey a sense of retreat. You were sheltered by the wide eaves of the roof yet the planters brought nature in.
- Wright felt that [attics & basements](#) were a waste of valuable space, & therefore, extended the ceilings of these rooms to the roof line.
- The [tented ceilings](#) create a sense of openness. Here in the master bedroom is the tallest ceiling in the home at [11 feet](#). This greatly contrasts to the low ceiling of the entry hall.
- The [master bedroom](#) has a number of [conveniences](#), including a fireplace, private bath with needle head shower, dressing room with mirrored wardrobe & closet with an art glass door

- leading to a small balcony.
- The rooms feature [drawers sunk into the walls](#) for storage & windows in the closets to provide air & light into typically dark, musty spaces.
- Notice the [corner windows](#). Notice how the piers separating the windows are very narrow – Wright is attempting to make the vertical lines disappear. He creates a panoramic view with the opening of the corner windows – [25 years later, at Fallingwater](#); he has perfected the technology to the point where there is no vertical at all.
- The [Robie family](#) consisted of Mr. Frederick C. Robie, his wife Lora Hieronymous, & their 2 children, both very young when living in the home.
- Mrs. Robie went to the [1893 World's Columbian Exposition](#) with her father, at which point she decided to attend the University of Chicago.
- The Robies [married](#) a few years after she graduated, but the school was an important part of her development. Mrs. Robie shared her husband's fondness for technology as she was one of the [first women in Illinois to have her driver's license](#).
- Inside the home, families were looking to [technology & new products](#) to help with the demands of housekeeping. Inventions like the vacuum cleaner & washing machine meant people could spend less time on housecleaning tasks but be more productive.
- So [homes became more mechanized](#). Families could purchase new-fangled appliances & systems to help them maintain their homes. Household work was no longer just for domestic help, but it became deskilled – now anyone can do it! – & newer fabrics & clothing styles simplified laundry & virtually eliminated ironing.
- [Wright's architecture responded to the changing society](#). This was especially evident here at the Robie House.
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Peek into guest bedroom: (On the way Down)

- The [view from this room](#) provides a great setting to witness Wright's design, indicating the balance between private & public. Since this room faces onto the balcony that hangs over the exterior entry courtyard, it is well protected from public view.
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- This is the only bedroom for which the Robies had [custom-designed furniture](#) installed. The linens in the room were ordered by Niedecken & some were hand embroidered by his wife.

Stop 12: Kitchen

- Wright called this the ["working department"](#) of the home. The kitchen & servants' areas were meant as functional areas in which the family's domestic staff could perform their daily duties.
- The Robies employed [2 Swedish servants](#): Hilda Pearson, the cook, & Olga Johnson, the second girl. Swedish girls were considered highly desirable servants; as an immigrant group, Swedes had a high literacy rate & made a concerted effort to speak, read, & write English.
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- [Hilda's duties](#) included cooking, dish-washing, & laundry (which was on the ground level where the public restrooms are now) – anything that was hard on the hands.
- [Olga served the food](#), cleaned bedrooms & public rooms, opened & closed windows, answered the door, & other duties requested by the family. They generally worked

- about 15 hours a day & up to 11 hours on days off (1 or 2 afternoons or evenings per week).
- The Robies also hired a nurse, Mrs. Casey, to care for their 2 small children, Sunny & Lorraine.
- The Robies were considerate of their servants. The family often ate in the breakfast nook because it was “easier on the cook.”
- Guests often came up the exterior stairs to the west porch to enter the home through the doors at the prow, since they knew that the servants worked & lived on the second level.
- The kitchen features built-in cabinetry along the walls & a central island. This space was larger than Wright’s typical kitchen, but the Robies loved entertaining, so Wright designed a flexible space that could be used to prepare food for both large parties & small family meals.
- The glazed brick behind the stove provided fire safety; the icebox allows a large space for food storage. The room was designed with access to the dining room, guest room, & entry hall, without having to intrude upon any private, family space.
- In the original design plans, Wright indicated a solid wall between the servant’s stairway leading to the entry & the hallway to the guest room. Robie had the design altered so servants could access the guest room if his ailing mother would have to live with the family, which she eventually did.

Indicate servants’ quarters down the hall

- This area of the home extends over the attached garage. The space included a servant dining area, 2 bedrooms, & a bathroom.
- Art glass windows were considered unnecessary, except where they would be visible from the street. But this means the servants have art glass in their bedrooms & bathroom, because they open to the garage courtyard.
- The walls in the servant area are smooth plaster, indicating simpler construction than in the family areas of the home.
- The servants’ dining room features clear windows along three of the room’s four walls. The north & south windows provide views outside while the interior windows open up the space & connect the kitchen & dining room.
- Down the hallway, each of the servants has a private bedroom with a shared bath between. Although smaller & less ornate than the rooms of the family, these spaces feature art glass windows & ceilings raised to the roofline as we saw on the third level.
- The bathroom has a claw foot tub, sink, & toilet, all the conveniences of a modern bathroom. However, as we saw in the family quarters, the rest of the bathrooms feature hygienic innovations of the early 20th century such as tile floors & built-in tubs.
- Note the intercom system in the hallway, allowing the Robie family to reach the servants at any time. This was a common feature in larger homes, as a convenience for the family members.
- While this was considered the servants’ private space, it is clear the needs of the family overrode those of the domestic staff. They were always on call.

Allow the guests to walk down the hall & see the servants’ quarters & reconvene in the kitchen

Have Guests head down Maids Staircase into courtyard

Stop 12: Garage Courtyard (Conclusion)

- **Total cost** for the Robie House was \$60,000 dollars. (Furnished) Average US wage was 400-500 dollars per year.
- **Timeline for the Robie house.** How it has progressed ownership over the years
- At the Robie House, Wright designed a home that took into consideration the **wants, needs, &**
- **philosophies of his clients and incorporated technology & modern ideas** into the home that transformed
- the space & the public & private functions into what Mr. Robie himself called **"the most ideal**
- **place in the world."**