Looking for Usonia: preserving Frank Lloyd Wright's post-1935 residential designs as generators of cultural landscapes

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Looking for Usonia: Preserving Frank Lloyd Wright's post-1935 residential designs as generators of cultural landscapes

by

William Randall Brown

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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This is to certify that the master's thesis of

William Randall Brown

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University
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ABSTRACT

Frank Lloyd Wright’s Usonian houses, relatively modest single-family residences built between 1935 and 1964, pose unique challenges for 21st century preservationists. First, while often individually and locally celebrated, they are diffused across the U.S. landscape. As such, they are less likely to be collectively recognized as objects of study, cultural significance, and/or economic development. Second, their geographical distribution prevents fully leveraging proven preservation tools such as historic district designations. Third, their modest physical scales place them at risk for demolition or removal in favor of more spacious and luxurious residences.

This research posits that a preserved Usonian house can be regarded as an object that both represents and generates social discourse. These discourses, sets of beliefs and assumptions regarding the geography, history, politics, and economics surrounding an object, make up a cultural landscape. Once its component discourses are identified, a cultural landscape can be altered to better focus a given object toward a desired goal. In the case of a historical house, for example, such an effort could result in improved educational or interpretative programming, marketing outreach, and/or community relations.

This research involves the case study investigation of eight Usonian structures currently preserved as house museums or vacation rentals, and, based on the opinions and experiences of stakeholders and caretakers of these properties, generates a set of recommended practices for the preservation of similar sites.
INTRODUCTION

In November 2000, preservationists in western Oregon were given short notice of a pending eviction. Purchasers of a historic riverside property with a scenic mountain view planned to tear the house down to make room for a more modern structure. The house was the Conrad Edward and Evelyn Gordon house (5.217), a small single-level residence designed by the celebrated American architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959). When both local and national preservationists intervened, the owners agreed to allow the house to be moved to another site, provided the move occur within 90 days. The house was subsequently deconstructed in early 2001 with only three days to spare, and re-located and reconstructed a year later near a municipally owned arboretum for use as a house museum.

In addition to increased land values, the 4,300-square-foot William A. Glasner house (5.109), one of Wright’s earlier, Prairie style works, was reported to be in danger of demolition, after one developer determined it to be potentially more profitable to build a 10,000-square-foot McMansion in order to keep up with the neighborhood. “It’s a $1 million house in a $5 million neighborhood,” complained owner Xerxe Bothe. Further, Bothe estimated that he could alone realize $450,000 from the sale of Wright’s original “Tree of Life” art glass windows. In this case, the house’s parts were potentially worth more than the house kept whole.

In March 2004, Pennsylvanian Tim Baacke offered to relocate the similarly threatened Duncan House (5.407.2) in Lislie, Illinois, to a botanical garden in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. The house is one of only 11 prefabricated homes Wright designed in cooperation with the Marshall Erdman Company of Madison, Wisconsin. Plans called for the house to serve as an educational center on 20th century architecture and design in Johnstown, in order to capitalize on the nearby presence and tourism draw of Wright’s iconic Fallingwater in Mill Run, Pennsylvania; as well as and Kentuck Knob, another smaller residence open as a house museum in Chalk Hill, Pennsylvania. Allegedly,

1 Blair Kamin, Chicago Tribune, Feb. 23, 2003, 1
however, the Duncan house plans were put on hiatus as area stakeholders objected to the artificial creation of another Wright site in the region. In June 2006, the Duncan house is still awaiting relocation.

In illustrating some of the tough challenges faced by those who would preserve 20th century residential architecture, each of these examples also invites a more abstract discussion of how to balance economic and cultural values of a historic property. In the case of the Gordon house, the new property owners valued the economic value of the land more than the cultural value of preserving a historic property in its original location. In the case of the Glasner house, the cultural value of the house as a whole was potentially less than the market value of its land combined with the sales value of its component parts. In the Duncan example, the economic benefit of the property as tourist attraction was valued more highly than the costs of purchasing the property and relocating it.

While there may be no easy formula to reconcile economic and non-economic values, there is common ground upon which to consider each simultaneously, in order to both better understand current conditions and to better influence future actions. This common ground exists metaphorically in the confluence of meanings surrounding an object: A red rubber ball, taken geometrically, for example, is a sphere; taken financially, is a 50-cent purchase; and, taken to the park, is a highly desirable toy for one’s canine companion. This common ground, however, may also manifest physically, through the use of the object: The same rubber ball, kept by that same canine friend, may quickly lose its usefulness if chewed into pieces; kept in a gutter over winter, may lose its flexibility; and, finally, kept unused in a cool dry place, may become a treasured antique.

Exchange a house for the red rubber ball, and the overarching question bounces into view: How does changing the function of a object—here, a structure designed as to serve as a residence—potentially change the perceptions, constituencies, economics, and even physical environments surrounding that object?
The purpose of this thesis is to explore this question through the qualitative study of eight architect-designed houses, built from 1939 to 1964, and now owned, managed and maintained to serve other-than-residential purposes. Specifically, the purpose of this work is to qualitatively explore the ways in which eight organizations own, manage, and maintain Wright’s Usonian residences; to discuss these houses in terms of the historic, political, and economic landscapes of which each is a part; and, ultimately, to extract from these case studies recommendations for others pursuing the preservation of structures similar in type, scale, or vintage. The result should be applicable not only to the preservation of other works by Frank Lloyd Wright, but of many of his contemporaries and apprentices, whether or not under a Usonian flag.

Related outcomes of this research, then, include not only a summary of the “state of Usonia,” or least the publicly accessible residential portion thereof, as well as a list of concrete “best practices” techniques currently in use and under development by these preservation organizations. It is not, however, the intention of this author to rank or rate the individual efforts organizations participating in this study. Different approaches, orientations, purposes and ownership may require different approaches. Rather, the system presented here is an attempt to quantify admittedly qualitative data, and to better assess the validity of the landscape concept to the general discussion of preservation.

This paper uses the index system of built Wright designs developed by William Allin Storrer. The “Storrer number” for each property discussed appears parenthetically upon first or other appropriate reference. While certainly not the only way to catalog Wright’s designs, Storrer’s catalog method was selected because of its focus on built projects, rather than on design drawings that may or may not have been realized.

Following a brief overview of publications and organizations relevant to the preservation of Frank Lloyd Wright’s designs, this paper discusses how his Usonian residential projects may be justified, defined, and identified as a study population. Related to this effort, this paper discusses how
and why the terms “Usonian,” “democratic,” and “organic” were used nearly interchangeably by the architect.

After introducing the concepts of historic preservation and cultural landscape, and proposing a discursive method for its study, the paper then explores eight examples of Usonian houses that are preserved in uses other than primary residences. Finally, as previously indicated, the recommendations presented following these case studies are intended for application to other preservation efforts focused on mid-20th century residential properties, whether or not designed by Wright.
LITERATURE REVIEW

There are two or three indispensable works for architecture enthusiasts who wish to personally visit or view Wright's work. The first of these is Storrer’s The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright: A Complete Catalog, originally published in 1974 and currently in its third edition, a travel-friendly if not pocket-sized 2002 version. Storrer has continually updated and repackaged his work, including in multimedia formats. This includes his 1993 Frank Lloyd Wright Companion, which duplicates much of the content of his “catalog,” but adds as-built floor plan schematics for every Wright project. The “companion” was republished as a CD-ROM in 2003; it is this version that was used as handy reference in discussing the layouts of the case study houses.

In 2005, Thomas A. Heinz published the similarly useful Frank Lloyd Wright Field Guide. Organized geographically and indexed by the “opus” numbers assigned by Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation archivist Bruce Brooks Pfiiffer, Heinz’s work presents every Wright design as a potential object for visiting or viewing. Heinz does caution readers, however, “the majority of these properties are privately owned and the owners’ rights should be respected accordingly.”

Storrer’s work locates properties by street address and by latitudinal-longitudinal coordinates. Heinz’s work locates properties by street address, a small map, and by Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates. Armed with either or both of these books, even the least intrepid explorer should be pointed in the Wright direction.

First published in 1991, and periodically re-issued by various publishers, Wright Sites lists more than 50 Wright-designed structures that are accessible to the public, and includes in its descriptions travel directions and hours of operation. The most current edition is the fourth, published by Princeton Architectural Press in June 2001. In similar behavior to that of birdwatchers, this book is often carried by Wright enthusiasts both as a reference and as a lifelong checklist of sites successfully spotted.

2 Thomas A. Heinz 14
Academic research specific to the Usonian houses is more limited than that focused on Wright’s earlier, Prairie style work. John Sergeant’s *Frank Lloyd Wright’s Usonian Houses: The Case for Organic Architecture* seems the only work to solely focus on Usonian homes as an archetype. Alvin Rosenbaum, who grew up in one of the homes later explored as a case study in this paper, wrote *Usonia: Frank Lloyd Wright’s Design for America*, which ably places both the Usonian type and his family’s house into regional, national and Wrightian contexts. Whether in books, magazine articles, or self-published memoirs, the first-person writings of Usonian homeowners are not uncommon, but are not always as generally applicable. Books about specific Usonian houses, often incorporating a mix of Wright philosophy, owner biography, and restoration history are more likely to be helpful for those researching historic preservation. Examples of this include architect John Eifler and author Kristin Visser’s *Frank Lloyd Wright’s Seth Peterson Cottage: Rescuing a Lost Masterwork*, which describes the 1992 reconstruction of a small Wisconsin Usonian as a vacation rental property.

Two books regard specific collective projects related to the Usonian house type. Wright homeowner Ronald Reisley helped write *Usonia, New York: Building a Community with Frank Lloyd Wright*, which describes a cooperative real estate development with which Wright was involved from the late 1930s mid-1950s. Doug Moe and Alice D’Alessio’s *Uncommon Sense: The Life of Marshall Erdman* describes in part the Wisconsin builder’s partnership with Wright to develop and realize a prefabricated house concept.

Finally, Charles E. and Berdeana Aguar’s *Wrightscapes* definitively addresses Wright’s designs from a landscape architecture perspective, a key component in assessing the effects and efficacy of Usonian houses as built environments.

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3 A 1984 paperback edition is titled *Frank Lloyd Wright’s Usonian Houses: Designs for Moderate Cost One-Family Homes*. 
In the realm of human endeavors, there seems a confusing wealth of organizations dedicated to preservation of Wright's legacy, in whole or in part. The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation is based in Scottsdale, Arizona. The non-profit foundation, established in 1940, was endowed by Wright with all of his past and future designs, drawings, writings, and personal property including his homes, Taliesin in Spring Green, Wisconsin, and Taliesin West, Scottsdale, Arizona. The foundation also comprises the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture (FLLWSA), an accredited undergraduate and graduate degree-granting institution; and the for-profit Taliesin Architects, a practicing architectural firm.

Equally important to the topic of Usonian preservation is the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy (FLWBC), a non-profit organization based in Chicago, Illinois, charged with preventing demolition of any Wright-designed structure. The group comprises many Wright homeowners, in addition to experts and professionals interested in Wright's life and work.

Less relevant to Usonian research, but still present on the Wrightian landscape, are the Frank Lloyd Wright Preservation Trust, which oversees management of the architect's Oak Park Home and Studio (S.002-S.004A), and the Frederick C. Robie House (S.127), as house museums. Both properties are co-stewardships with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, a national organization dedicated to preserving historically significant sites.
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The State of Usonia

After considering the examples of the Gordon and Duncan houses, one observes that conditions do not seem to have changed considerably from 1964, when interstate highway construction threatened the Pope-Leighey House (S.268), the tenth explicitly labeled “Usonian” house. The Eastern Virginia structure was subsequently relocated and reconstructed not once, but twice: The first time to land owned and administered by the National Trust for Historic Preservation; and the second to correct for soil stability on that same site. The highway, ironically, was never built.

The Pope-Leighey house was the first successfully preserved Usonian structure made available to the public, and the Gordon house one of the more recent. There are now approximately 13 such sites in the United States. These houses, relatively modest single-family residences built between 1935 and 1964, pose unique challenges for 21st century preservationists. First, while often individually and locally celebrated, they are diffused across the U.S. landscape. As such, they are less likely to be collectively recognized as objects of study, cultural significance, and/or economic development. Second, their geographical distribution prevents fully leveraging proven preservation tools such as historic district designations. Third, their modest physical scales place them at risk for demolition or removal in favor of more spacious and luxurious residences.

While less studied, recognized or appreciated than other Wright designs, however, they are representative of a continuing popular interest in affordable, simplified, and human-scale residential architecture. Starting in 1998, for example, architect and author Sarah Susanka used Wright’s Usonian houses as inspiration for her best-selling series of consumer-market design books on the “Not So Big House,” of which there are now five related titles. Author Diana Maddex notably

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4 Of the 17 Wright projects recognized by the American Institute of Architects in 1966, for example, none is a Usonian house. See “Frank Lloyd Wright and the 17 Plaques,” Progressive Architecture, September 1966, 59-60.
5 Sarah Susanka 178-181

For academic purposes, the Usonian houses present a unique opportunity for study. Not only do they represent a road less studied, but also a middle ground somewhere between mass-produced objects and individual works of art, numerous enough to be a significant population in their own right. Further, that they are found widely dispersed across the United States is as much blessing as it is curse, since a larger study population may mitigate local variations. Finally, a homogenous Usonian study population labeled with the Frank Lloyd Wright brand name removes the variable of considering the relative value of one architect's works versus another's.

**A brief history of Usonia**

The vocabulary Wright used to describe his intentions and ideas was often richly layered in implied and multiple meanings, his language kept mutable to reflect and respond to the constant evolution of his ideas. Words such as “democratic,” “natural,” and “organic,” when used by Wright, are at once simple and complex, concrete and abstract, in repose and in motion.

The word “Usonia” is similarly slippery. Wright credited the novelist Samuel Butler with creating the term, but the word does not appear in any work by that author, including *Erewhon*, the alleged source of Wright’s inspiration. It has also been suggested that Wright took the word from a 1910 proposal to designate the United States as the “United States of North America” or “USONA,” to preclude confusion with the then-newly formed Union of South Africa.

Whatever the origin, however, after partially coining the cryptic “Usonia,” Wright proceeded to invest it with a sense of the romantic landscape, of technological progress, and of the self-actualized individual. That it echoes the sound (and possibly the meaning) of the word “utopia”—a

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6 John Sergeant *Usonian Houses: Designs for Moderate Cost One-Family Homes* 16
7 Sergeant 16
word originating from Thomas More’s 1516 tale of an ideal society, and rooted in Greek for “no-place”—is appropriate. Usonia was a democratic setting—to say “country” would be to unnecessarily limit the concept in time and space—in which to place Broadacre City, Wright’s vision of the ideal metropolitan city-society, in which a citizenry interconnected by transportation and communication technology is also afforded privacy, leisure, and space.

Usonia was also a convenient brand name, a label immediately identifiable with Frank Lloyd Wright. Broadacre City was first proposed in 1939, and was continually updated until Wright’s death. The concept was also the background upon which all of Wright’s work was to be judged, and the environment in which his work was to be ideally placed. Drawings and models of the Broadacre concept were continually populated with Wright’s designs—built and unbuilt—for houses, apartment buildings, and office towers.

The Usonian house relates to Wright’s Broadacre City both as a physical representation of the city plan, and as a metaphor for the individual’s place within society and nature. “The grid on which Broadacre City was laid out followed closely the grid of these first Usonian houses, the first scaled to a landscape, the latter to a building site,” writes Rosenbaum. “The zones for Broadacre City activities—traffic, education, recreation, community gatherings, commerce—are reflected in the layout of the Usonian home, with a distinct car parking arrangement and with gathering places distinct from private or sleeping spaces, food preparation and other work spaces delineated from areas for social intercourse.”

James Dougherty makes a similar comparison on a more metaphysical level. Just as the individual finds shelter and meaning in the Usonian home, he argues, the individual also finds shelter and meaning in Usonian society. Residential and social architecture are one in the same: “The integrity of Broadacres is the integrity of its single citizens (and of the family, in Wright’s view the

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8 Alvin Rosenbaum 167; also Mark B. Lapping 18
9 Rosenbaum, 139
only natural institution). Nevertheless, Wright’s utopia is not completely atomistic: the individual
does find his place in larger social forms. [...] In Wright’s neoplatonic world too, the integrated
human being is contained within its two isomorphs, the Usonian house and the Usonian state. It is in
this correspondential sense that the Usonian house, sensitively designed to complement the family it
houses, can be seen as the ‘exemplar’ of the Usonian state.”

Usonian design was to come in multiple forms, but the earliest and smallest were the Usonian
houses built prior to World War II. With these homes, Wright sought to address two equally
significant design problems: to develop a prototype that could be applied universally across a
geographic and political landscape, and to invent a “kit of parts” that could be infinitely reconfigured
and assembled like a Model T Ford automobile.¹ The defining elements of Usonian design are open
to some interpretation, because while Usonian designs were of one genus—one operable definition of
genus, after all, connotes an ability to cross-pollinate or interbreed—evolution also requires mutation.
While seeking to address the small-house problem, Wright continually experimented with new
materials, methods, and designs. As in the natural world, not all new variations are successful.

The first Usonian houses Wright designed—Sergeant calls these “kit” Usonians—can be
generally described as single-storied and flat-roofed one- or two-bedroom houses. Primary
characteristics include a materials palette limited to two or three materials (cypress wood, brick, and
concrete are likely examples); an open floor plan based on a modular rectangular, triangular, or
hexagonal grid often expressed in surface of

the hydronically heated concrete slab floor
(Wright’s “gravity heating” system); and
monolithic board-and-batten wall construction
for both exterior and interior walls. (These last

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<td>Limited materials palette</td>
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<td>Modular grid floor plan</td>
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<td>Radiant “gravity” heat</td>
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<td>Slab-on-grade; no basement</td>
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<td>Board-and-batten “sandwich” walls</td>
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¹ James Dougherty 245, 246
¹¹ Rosenbaum 167
were built with horizontal planks attached to a vertically run or panelized core, and contains no air space. Insulative value came from the materials themselves.) Secondary characteristics include a small kitchen—Wright labeled these as “work spaces”—often at the nexus of the public and private areas of the home; a dining area implied between the work space and main living area; the presence of a carport; and the absence of a basement.

Sergeant categorizes Usonian designs into five forms: Polliwog, an L- or T-shaped plan in which public and private areas intersect; Diagonal, in which that intersection takes place at an angle, suggesting a wing; In-line, similar to the basic Polliwog but within a smaller external perimeter, and in which public and private areas are on-axis with each other; Hexagonal, based on a six-sided module; and Raised, in which the single-level house is suspended into a ravine or similar topography using masonry piers.

Sergeant further notes, however, how Wright’s use of the Usonian label later expanded beyond the architect’s original design problem of affordable, universal house design. “After World War II, when Wright moved on from board and batten and brickwork construction, all his houses were called Usonian,” he writes. “However, within its original meaning was a rationale for the ‘small house problem.’”

Based upon a list authored by Taliesin archivist Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, Sergeant tallies the total number of low-cost, pre-World War II “kit” Usonians at 26, with another such 31 designs unrealized.

If regarded as genus and not species, “Usonian” design can be argued to encompass most of Wright’s post-Prairie residential work. Using the general physical characteristics previously introduced, there were 136 such residences built between 1935 and 1959. This count includes species such as the “kit” Usonians of 1936-1945; the concrete-block Usonian Automatics of 1954-1955; and the prefabricated Marshall Erdman houses of 1956-1960. It also includes seven “solar hemicycle” and

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12 Sergeant 40
13 Sergeant 22
14 Sergeant 40
other curvilinear houses, the first example of which was the second Herbert Jacobs residence (S.283), built 1944. Many experts, including Sergeant, include these houses within the universe of Usonian design family tree, a different genus stemming from a shared ancestry.

**The evolution of Usonian design**

Any discussion of Wright’s work must be planted in the central focus of his architecture, the desire to create an architecture he described variously as “natural” and “organic.” As with the word “Usonian,” these terms are continually refined and redefined in Wright’s speeches and writings. Adding to the complexity of interpretation, these three words in particular seem to overlap with one another; a discussion of one seems naturally to require a discussion of the others.

Wright constantly sought to connect his architecture with the natural world. His designs take inspiration from the patterns and forms found in nature. His floor plans visually and physically connect the inhabitant to the outdoors, or to other interior spaces, without creating an artificial sense of enclosure. Further, the plans themselves may represent structures or patterns found in nature. His materials are evocative of nature: Brick, stone, and concrete stand in for earth, for example, and unpainted wood for plant life. The hearth houses fire at the center of the home, and glass both conducts and manifests light.

Wright integrates all of these “natural” factors into unified design, in which the smallest detail integrates naturally into the structure as a whole. This is analogous to the fact that genetic blueprints contained within a DNA molecule describe the plans for an entire being, rather than a specific kind of cell. “A plan thus became ornamental, and an ornament might well look like a plan,” writes Donald Hoffman. “A small fixture could easily become as articulated as the plan of a major building.”

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15 Donald Hoffman, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Architecture and Nature*, 43
An extension of Wright’s organic philosophy was that his later residential designs were meant to grow and change over time, a fact often ignored by commentators who wish to point out the architect’s supposedly dictatorial manner. The Rosenbaum house, for example, nearly trebled in size starting with a 1948 addition (S.267A) designed by Wright himself. Another 1939 “kit” Usonian, the Charles Sondern (S.279) house, was similarly remodeled by Wright for its new owners in 1948 (S.307).

All of this, Wright grounds in the landscape. He orients the structure to optimize connections to sun and wind. He integrates the design, whenever possible, into the surrounding topography.

Charles and Berdeana Aguar present nine guidelines for what they describe as “Wrightscapes.” The first of these principles reads in part: “1) The residence was designed to meet the needs of specific client and site […] (2) The residence was oriented to take advantage of natural factors inherent to the site […] (3) There is a perceived (if not actual) interrelationship with the Nature of the site […] (4) The natural landscape has been preserved […]” 16

Rosenbaum even finds evidence of Wright’s organic design principles in such pedestrian details as slab foundations and non-existent basements. “The integration of site and structure was fundamental to organic principles,” he writes. “As the indoor-outdoor qualities of Usonian houses glorified nature, their construction method sought the least invasion of it.” 17

While Wright was certainly working with such concepts in his Prairie-school designs, the overt infusion of democracy—of a democratic component—started only in their Usonian counterparts. For Storrer and others, evidence of the democratic nature of Usonian design is apparent in how Wright came to address the kitchen. The servants’ quarters and fully staffed cooking spaces of the Prairie home were replaced by a smaller “workspace” from which the house could be monitored, administered, and served by the homeowner herself. Placing all living areas on one level was a

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16 Aguar, Charles E. and Berdeana Aguar foreward
17 Rosenbaum 191
similar great equalizer. Thus, Storrer describes the alterations required to change a Prairie floor plan into a more Usonian form: “The first basic was to take the bedrooms down from a second floor and place them, too, on the ground. This formed one wing of the house, for this was the quiet part of living and had to be separated from the noisy part, the living room. Separate it with the traffic, kitchen (now called workspace), and dining areas, all placed as compactly as possible exactly between the living room and the bedrooms!”

For Wright, the many layers of meaning contained within “natural” and “organic” were wrapped together under the term “Usonian.” Writes Sergeant: “Wright made ‘Usonian’ as much his word as he did ‘organic,’ and indeed, the two came to mean much the same to him. ‘Usonia’ was his name for the reformed American society [...] ‘Organic’ referred to the way in which this change was going to occur.”

Although Wright’s affordable organic design did not arrive on the shores of Usonia fully formed and walking upright, a review of its phylogeny shows a quick evolution in the years preceding the 1936 construction of the first Jacobs residence. This time followed a period in which Wright built few mostly non-residential structures, and seemed to be searching for new architectural direction. Sergeant detects hints of what was to become Usonian design in the open floor plans of Wright’s California textile-block houses, which themselves stemmed from some Prairie designs that similarly merged dining and living areas. Storrer even suggests that Usonian design more accurately dates from the textile-block designs of the 1920s, rather than the commonly accepted 1936 Jacobs plan. Still, he writes, “One can understand why historians and critics place the start of Usonia in 1936, not only for the manifesto Wright wrote about what it constituted to be Usonian, but because these small

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18 William Allin Storrer, The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright: A Complete Catalog, XIX
19 Sergeant 16
20 Sergeant 23
post-Depression houses were so different from anything America had experienced as architecture. Not that the California block houses were not equally different.\(^{21}\)

Rosenbaum writes the first Usonian house plan—in his definition, one featuring a small kitchen workspace adjacent to living room and dining area—was a prefabricated sheet-steel farmhouse commissioned by Walter V. Davidson in February 1932.\(^ {22}\) Although unbuilt, this “Little Farms Unit” was to become an equally unrealized farm manager’s residence at the Herbert F. Johnson 1934 “Wingspread” estate; a “Zoned House for City, Suburb, and Country” that same year in the pages of Taliesin magazine; and, in 1935, the “Subsistence Homestead” of the Wright’s first Broadacre City proposal.

Barbara Kingsbury and others\(^ {23}\) trace the Usonian lineage from an unbuilt 1934 house design for Louise Hoult of Wichita, Kansas. Writing to Sergeant, for example, Wright apprentice John Howe indicated that the construction of the Louise and Charles Hoult house was to be board-and-batten, a method determined by the clients’ involvement in the lumber business.\(^ {24}\) Board-and-batten construction appeared again in Wright’s unbuilt 1935-36 design for the Robert D. Lusk house in Huron, South Dakota (near Mount Rushmore), here described by Sergeant: “The beautiful perspectives of the house show clearly the board and batten construction of all later Usonians, as well as two features that were not repeated: the ‘saw toothed’ monopitch rooflights that were to break the flat roofline and the highly articulated chimneys and brick masses, which projected in a more expressionist manner than subsequent Usonians, where increasing horizontality and subservient chimney masses became the norm.”\(^ {25}\) Note that, in both the Hoult and Lusk designs, board-and-batten wall construction was considered a primary characteristic of the Usonian form. The Hoult house was the first instance of the “standard detail sheet,” which described for builders elements that made up a

\(^{21}\) Storrer XVIII; XIX  
\(^{22}\) Rosenbaum 133  
\(^{23}\) Rosenbaum 136-137  
\(^{24}\) Sergeant 23  
\(^{25}\) Sergeant 23-24
Usonian house. These details included, among other things, the standard window and sash, the standard board and batten, the interior partition, and the exterior wall.

Board-and-batten walls were not to be found in the Dean Willey (S. 229) house of 1934, nicknamed “The Garden Wall.” However, the house is generally recognized as the bridge built between Wright’s Prairie-style and Usonian designs. While noting that, unlike the Usonian homes, the Willey house relies on radiators rather than in-floor radiant heat, Sergeant writes that it does exhibit other Usonian characteristics: “This house, with its angled wide eaves, hipped roof, internally battened ceiling, and symmetrical planting boxes, makes a fascinating link between the Prairie houses on one hand, and the Usonians on the other, which it evokes in its untouched materials (cypress and brick), simple fireplace, brick-covered floormat, and prototype livingroom-bedroom ‘tail’ plan.”

By 1950, writes Rosenbaum, Wright abandoned the “kit” aesthetic, after realizing that his niche was to provide for those “falling into the solid middle of the middle third” of incomes. In no small part, this decision was driven by the lending practices of the day, in which banks would not lend on new construction considered to be so individualized to one person that the design would have little value upon resale. Still, in evolving toward designs that featured masonry rather than wooden exterior walls, most of Wright’s more upscale post-war designs emulated the spirit, if not the letter, of the original low-cost Usonians. Writes Storrrer: “Usonia was not limited to cheap board-and-batten type designs. It was an architecture for a democratic America. Wright’s basic approach to materials was to tell his clients to buy the best that they could afford. Thus, red Tidewater cypress was preferred over mahogany, which was preferred over redwood; masonry was preferred for exterior walls over wood, stone over brick; textile block was highly rated, but plain concrete block was not.”

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26 Rosenbaum 136
27 Gordon Chadwick 66
28 Sergeant 23
29 Rosenbaum 186
30 Storrrer 343
However resigned to working for the clients who could best finance his designs, Wright would still revisit the affordable small house problem twice more, revising methods and materials: Once, with prefabricated “Usonian Automatics” concrete-block homes inspired by his original California textile-block house, and named to suggest the alleged ease by which homeowners could build their own homes; once with a design for the Marshal Erdman Company, a design featuring prefabricated structure and pre-assembled utilities. These efforts, intended to cut costs and simplify construction, proved unsuccessful in terms of affordability.  

The historical significance of the Usonian house may be assessed in its relation to the development of the American single-family dwelling during the late 20th century, and in its relevance to Wright’s Broadacre City as an ideal and partially realized context for his work. Wright sprinkled Usonian houses across the nation as a means by which to catalyze interest in his Broadacre City proposals. He also attempted numerous neighborhood developments (a 1939 group of houses in Okemos and Galesburg, Michigan; Parkwyn Village, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1948-1950; and “Usonia Homes” of Pleasantville, New York, 1948-1951) that were partial samplers of his larger Broadacre tapestry. If Usonia is a utopia, it is one realized enough to have left behind ruins. Writes Dougherty:

[Usonia] is, as the word utopia reminds us, nowhere. But, as Plato told Glaucon, this is not to say it does not exist. It exists in a twelve-foot-square model in a quiet studio in Wisconsin. It exists in the forty or fifty “exemplars” of Wright’s Usonian buildings—for we must remember that in his concentric imagination the house in the microcosm of the city, exhibiting the city’s qualities on a scale that is easy to comprehend. Primarily, though, it exists as utopia always does, as an articulated vision of truth and integrity […] Broadacres is the communal form that Wright created to mediate between the patterns of Nature and the architecture of the Soul.

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31 Rosenbaum 183
32 Some sources call this planned cooperative community for a group of Michigan professors “Usonia II,” others use the term for the Pleasantville, New York development. Similarly confused nomenclature is to be found in the term “Usonia I,” which was apparently used by Wright to describe both Taliesin (Storrer catalog, 269) and the Jacobs I kit Usonian (www.usonian1.com).
33 Dougherty 256
Stylistically as well as politically, the Usonian house broke new ground, achieving a universal, mass-marketable, customizable approach to creating an architecture for America. "It is important to understand," writes Rosenbaum, "that before the Usonian house, there was no middle-class, middle-income house that could be considered to possess a style that was not part of another tradition." Beginning with the Wiley house, he continues, Wright "moved away from regionalism to the achievement of a generic concept, a house for all seasons in all American places, its variations based on the needs and personalities of its occupants and the particularities of its site, but seemingly not on the past traditions of its place."34

Whether as a house for all seasons, or as an articulation of a uniquely American architecture, or as a partly realized form of urban plan by a master architect, Wright’s Usonian homes are worthy of preservation, individually and collectively.

Preserving Usonia

According to the U.S. Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, which in 1995 unofficially amended the secretary’s Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation, officially published in 1983, the act of preservation is defined as "[… ] the act or process of applying measures necessary to sustain the existing form, integrity, and materials of an historic property. Work, including preliminary measures to protect and stabilize the property, generally focuses upon the ongoing maintenance and repair of historic materials and features rather than extensive replacement and new construction. […]"35

There are three treatment strategies of preserving a historic property: restoration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction. Restoration involves the accurate depiction of the "form, features, and character of a property as it appeared at a particular period of time by means of the removal of

34 Rosenbaum 127
35 www.cr.nps.gov/local-law/arch_stnds_10.htm
features from other periods in its history and reconstruction of missing features from the restoration period. [...]"^{36}

Rehabilitation makes possible "[...] a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values." In some circles, rehabilitation might also be labeled as "adaptive reuse."

Reconstruction is the most potentially invasive and possibly speculative strategy. By the Department of Interior's currently operative definition, reconstruction is "the act or process of depicting, by means of new construction, the form, features, and detailing of a non-surviving site, landscape, building, structure, or object for the purpose of replicating its appearance at a specific period of time and in its historic location." With the exception of the stipulation of historic location, this definition would seem to include the possibility of relocating a historic structure to another site.

Relocation of a building is generally not recommended in Secretary's Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings discussion of "building site" preservation.^{37} Partly because of this, and partly out of a desire to test questions relating to the connection of building and site, two case studies of relocated properties was included in this research. While it is important to remember that no such guidelines existed when one of these, the Pope-Leighey house, was first at risk, the fact that relocation was a preservation method of last resort was not lost on preservationists at the time. "One might view its rescue and relocation as neither success nor failure," Terry Burst Morton wrote in 1967. "It would have been a complete success if it had been possible to work out a solution to save the house on its original site; it would have been a failure if it had been crumbled by

^{36} [URL: www.cr.nps.gov/local-law/arch_stnds_10.htm]
^{37} Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation & Illustrated Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings, reprinted 1979; 69
the highway bulldozer. A historic structure has its greatest value in its original setting, and relocation never will be the ideal solution for preservation."

Toward a Cultural Landscape

Wright famously commented that the house should not be on the hill; it should be of the hill. Inspired by such organic principles, the following set of case studies is premised on the idea of landscapes, both physical and metaphorical, as the best means for understanding a preservation effort. Too often, discussions of preservation focus solely on the nuts-and-bolts techniques of specific materials restoration, or on the philosophical challenges inherent in any act of historic interpretation. In comparison, the central questions of this paper involve those of use, ownership and management of historic properties. By grounding this discussion in the activities of various types of organizations, each engaged in the preservation of a similar type of structure, the author intends to generate a set of concrete, comprehensive and universal recommendations for managing preserved properties.

In his article "The Place of Landscape, A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting an American Scene," geographer Richard H. Schein proposes a brief conceptual framework for the exploration of a cultural landscape: a set of geographically spatial relationships that can be explored by considering the role of landscape in social and cultural reproduction, as well as understanding that landscape within wider social and cultural contexts. Schein argues that cultural landscape is scaleable, in that the concept may be fluidly and seamlessly focused on site, neighborhood, national and global levels. The concept is also capable of incorporating a temporal component.

Schein’s article is helpful in its brief restatement of the genealogy of cultural landscape, as well as its articulate presentation of a dialectic approach to its study. Most notable given the subject

38 Terry Burst Morton, Prairie School Review, 21
39 From Wright’s autobiography: “No house should ever be on a hill or on anything. It should be of the hill. Belonging to it. Hill and house should live together each the happier for the other.”
40 Richard A. Schein 660
41 Schein 662
of preserving Usonian residences, however, is his subsequent application of his framework to the suburban neighborhood of Ashland Park, near Lexington, Kentucky.

The dialectic approach posits that a landscape may be described as a node of multiple discourses of meaning; that each of these discourses may involve variously harmonious rules, values and assumptions; that each may, as discourse materialized, both be represented by and result in physical changes to a landscape. In his Ashland Park example, Schein explores the suburb as seen through the filter of six discourses: landscape architecture, insurance mapping, zoning, historic preservation, neighborhood associations, and economic consumption.

In considering the question of preserving Usonian residences, the cultural landscape concept is useful in that it allows an architectural object—a house—to be intellectually located at the nexus of interacting and interrelated belief systems. Questions involving differing concepts of value—historical, economic, political—may be considered, but do not have to be fully resolved. Further, the Usonian house can be seen not as a preserved artifact, unchanged in space or time, but as an object that represents, focuses, and motivates ongoing human activity.

By interviewing organizations dedicated to the preservation of eight Usonian homes across the United States, the author sought first to identify discourses commonly present in those efforts. Four categories of discourse, each comprising five lines of inquiry, were subsequently identified: geographic, historical, political, and economic. Each of these categories is briefly presented here:

**Geographic discourses relate to the location of the object in space.** Common geographic discourses included those related to signage and accessibility. How an object is labeled is inherently a question of authority: Who owns the object, and what is the object’s purpose as represented by its owner? Accessibility regards who is allowed to visit or view the object. Physical barriers such as fences may be intentionally erected for security purposes, for example, or placed there unintentionally, through a lack of effort to facilitate access by persons with physical disabilities. Given questions about how a property is presented in the context of the World Wide Web,
particularly via on-line mapping and route-planning resources, such physical "gatekeeping" factors may also have virtual counterparts. Finally, there are questions regarding how a site may have been physically altered from the time of its original construction, and how a site may now physically connect with other properties.

**Historical discourses relate to the location of the object in time.** These discourses involve the interpretation of history surrounding the house-as-architectural-object, including discussions of the architect's biography; the lives and lifestyles of past owners; the history of the U.S. preservation groups, particularly the current owner-organization; the history of suburban forms, particularly if the site directly relates to Wright's own Broadacre City proposals; and, finally, the past and present evolution of organic architecture. History, as the saying goes, is written by the victor; any matter of history is itself defined from a position of authority. Evidenced by the continued popularity of his work (quantified by souvenir sales, book imprints, and even, one supposes, numbers of preserved properties), Wright still inspires something akin to a cult of celebrity, of myth-making and myth-maintenance and not just a little myth-marketing.

It is common for house museums to present historical interpretations in keeping with a specific date in a past owner's life. The house is then ideally restored and/or furnished relative to this date. The common interpretation of Wright's clients, however, is that they gave themselves and their homes over to the architect, who specified nearly every detail of their lives in the home. While this interpretation is itself part of the Wright myth—Wright's clients could also be seen to be risk-takers, pioneers who may have directly had a hand in the making of their homes, or, at least, bucked a banking system that often declined financing unfamiliar house design. Regardless of one's interpretation, the discourses present in a site's past ownership are certain to involve considerations of the architect-client relationship.

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This is explicit in the National Park Service's definition of "restoration," discussed earlier.
The preservation of an object by an organization is an event that crystallizes a moment in that group’s own history, and catalyzes the organization into further action. A corresponding discourse involves not only the perception of what objects are important or worthy enough to preserve, but how that perception evolves over time. Yesterday’s trash is today’s treasure, often not because of a change in inherent value, but because perceptions themselves have changed.

The Usonian house was intended by Wright to be a suburban object, a residence built on not less than one acre of land. Wright’s Broadacre City concepts represented an attempt to advocate a particular direction in city-suburban planning. As previously discussed, each Usonian house—indeed, each Wright design, whether residential or commercial—can be seen as an articulation of Wright’s vision for suburban America. As such, the discourse presents the conflict between past and present forms of suburbia, and between Wright’s proposal for improvement.

Finally, the form and function of Wright’s “organic architecture” would be today described as “green” or “sustainable” design. As such, they may be central in advocating the use of alternative designs and materials to achieve social and environmental objectives. Usonian houses can be regarded not only as a past attempts to achieve such ends, but as examples very much present in today’s discussions of ecological responsibility.

Political discourses relate to the location of the object within aggregations of stakeholders. Many constituencies and communities may organize around the house-as-object. While each of these may focus on differing facets of the house’s existence, each is demonstrably vested in the house’s continued use and operation. One such group is neighboring property owners, who seek to maintain and improve quality of life in their neighborhoods and the economic value of their individual homes. Evidence of neighborhood involvement in a preserved object might be found in the actions of a neighborhood or homeowners association, or in those of individual neighbors. Other neighborhood connections may be codified through zoning ordinances, which are intended to permit
only certain activities on a property; and the designation of a site as a historic place, which may carry with it some degree of recognition and protection.

Other political aggregations include: local governments, which seek not only to optimize taxation, but also to promote quality of life, stability and security; arts and education organizations, which seek in various ways to promote an intellectual quality of life; and, finally, preservation groups, whether those specifically focused on the preservation of Wright’s legacy or reputation, or groups generally focused on the preservation of historical structures. The discourse present in each example involves the potential conversations among groups with differing values and objectives, and the conflicts compromises that may result from each interaction.

Economic discourses relate to the location of the object within flows of capital. These discourses involve often-quantifiable metrics such as visitation rates; tax generation; the creation of symbiotic business relationships; salaries paid; and property values. Visitation can be an indicator of factors such as ease of travel to the site and proximity to other Frank Lloyd Wright sites. Tax generation relates to the economic values government places upon activities such as the sale of goods and services. One example of the latter would be the “pillow” tax levied on hotel guests. The formal connections of businesses activities provide evidence of a potential economic multiplier effect within a community; the premise being that a preserved object may, in fact, support multiple businesses, including groundskeeping, custodial, security, souvenir sales and other services. The employment of staff also relates to the object’s capacity to generate and multiply income within a community. Finally, property value can be seen as highly problematic, given disparate measures of economic value, including appraised and assessed value. Appraisal experts develop estimates of potential a sale (market) value by considering factors such as: the condition of a property, neighborhood and regional trends, and architectural name-brand cachet. In the case of a Usonian house, an appraisal would be

43 In 1996, the first year that it was open to the public, the I.N. Hagan house (aka “Kentuck Knob”) attracted approximately 14,000 visitors, approximately 10 percent of visitors to nearby Fallingwater. Architectural Digest March 1997, 18
based on the potential sale value of similarly functional houses in a given location, plus a "Wright-premium" that reflects its historic value. Assessed value is the taxable value of a property. In the absence of an available appraisal, assessed value was used as a potential point of comparison among case studies.

**METHODOLOGY**

As previously discussed, defining the Usonian universe is slightly problematic. Storrer, for example, lists the textile block houses dating 1923-1935 as "Early Usonian," noting that Wright first used the Usonian label to describe 1923's Alice Millard house (S.214), also known as "La Miniatura." The latter fact, however, proves a distraction in this discussion, as the property in question is not small enough nor does it conform to Sergeant's description of Usonian typology. While acknowledging Wright's return to concrete masonry as a cost-saving measure in his "Usonian Automatics" of 1955-1959, the Usonian Automatics share more lineages with the original "kit" Usonians than the textile-block houses.

All "Usonians" are variously successful attempts toward achieving affordable and human-scale residential architecture in harmony with nature; using building techniques potentially within the reach of the owners themselves; and usually incorporating three design elements: rectilinear grid open floor plans, gravity heat systems, and board-and-batten wall constructions. The kit Usonians can be regarded as the first fully realized articulation of these parameters, without wholly separating the textile block houses from the Usonian ancestral tree. All other Usonian designs relate in some way to this archetype, even the problematic children such as the seven solar hemicycle houses, which are arguably Usonian but for a circular floor plan module; and the previously mentioned Usonian Automatics, 11 projects in which Wright abandoned near the end of his life wood wall construction

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44 Donna Butler interview
45 Storrer 219
for standardized concrete block. More generally, it also allows for inclusion of post-War-World-II
Usonian designs that evolved away from strict Usonian characteristics. Wright, as noted previously,
for example, evolved away from board-and-batten construction when brick masonry proved more
affordable than wood construction.

This more expansive universe of Usonians allows consideration of questions of historic value
in terms of how the house relates to its “Usonian-ness.” In part, engaging in such a discussion may
also help assess works after Wright’s death, to include Usonian designs by his apprentices, as well as
contemporaneous constructions of Wright house designs licensed by the Frank Lloyd Wright
foundation and/or built by Taliesin Associates.

Including those completed in the years immediately following his death in 1956, Wright
designed and built more than 140 residences on or after 1936. Of these, a number of larger-scaled
projects do not meet Wright’s stated purpose of providing affordable housing. These include such
iconic mansions as Lilane S. and Edgar J. Kaufman’s modernistic “Fallingwater” (S.233), built 1936;
and the Jean S. and Paul R. Hanna’s “Honeycomb” house (S.235), also built 1936, a “Usonian
structure”46 according to Storrer, but one that comprises 4,825 square feet47; and Herbert F. Johnson’s
“Wingspread” (S.238), which Wright called the last of his Prairie houses, built 1937. Wright’s own
Taliesin (S.241) and Taliesin West (S.246) also do not readily fit the Usonian mold. A handful of
Wright-designed residences have also been destroyed, demolished or dismantled since 1936.

Using the typology and rationale previously established in this paper, there are 136
“Usonian” residences remaining today. Of these, 13 are regularly open to the public, serving in other
applications other than that of privately owned or long-term residences. Most of these are house
museums, properties engaged in the historical interpretation of the original owner-occupants, and the
work of Frank Lloyd Wright. Another, smaller set of Usonian properties, however, is available for

46 Storrer 238
47 Heinz 35
rental by the public for two or more days at a time. The first example of such property is likely the Seth Peterson Cottage, a 900-square-foot residence reconstructed on its original site, now adjacent to a Wisconsin state park. Administered by the non-profit Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy, managed by Sand County Services Company, and located on Wisconsin state park land, the cottage opened in 1992 as a vacation rental. Three more have since followed suit.  

Table 2: Preserved Usonians accessible to the public, in ascending chronological order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Storrer No.</th>
<th>House name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Current Owner</th>
<th>Design year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S.267</td>
<td>Rosenbaum</td>
<td>Florence, AL</td>
<td>Museum on public land</td>
<td>City of Florence, AL</td>
<td>1939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.268</td>
<td>Pope-Leighey</td>
<td>Mount Vernon, VA</td>
<td>Relocation</td>
<td>National Trust for Historic Preservation</td>
<td>1939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.271</td>
<td>Schwartz</td>
<td>Two Rivers, WI</td>
<td>Vacation rental</td>
<td>Michael Ditmer, et al</td>
<td>1939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.274</td>
<td>Affleck</td>
<td>Bloomfield Hills, MI</td>
<td>Museum on private land</td>
<td>Lawrence Institute of Technology</td>
<td>1940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.284</td>
<td>Walter</td>
<td>Quasqueton, IA</td>
<td>Museum on public land</td>
<td>Iowa Department of Natural Resources</td>
<td>1945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.311</td>
<td>Weltzheimer-Johnston</td>
<td>Oberlin, OH</td>
<td>Museum on private land</td>
<td>Oberlin College, Oberlin, OH</td>
<td>1948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.323</td>
<td>Haynes</td>
<td>Fort Wayne, IN</td>
<td>Vacation rental</td>
<td>Haynes House LLC</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.333</td>
<td>Zimmerman</td>
<td>Manchester, NH</td>
<td>Museum on private land</td>
<td>Currier Museum of Art</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.340</td>
<td>Kraus</td>
<td>Kirkwood, MO</td>
<td>Museum on public land</td>
<td>St. Louis County, MO</td>
<td>1951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.365</td>
<td>Penfield</td>
<td>Willoughby Hills</td>
<td>Vacation rental</td>
<td>Paul Penfield family</td>
<td>1953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.377</td>
<td>I.N. Hagan</td>
<td>Chalkhill, PA</td>
<td>Museum on private land</td>
<td>Lord Peter Palumbo</td>
<td>1954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.419</td>
<td>Gordon</td>
<td>Silverton, OR</td>
<td>Relocation</td>
<td>City of Silverton, OR</td>
<td>1956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.430</td>
<td>Seth Peterson Cottage</td>
<td>Lake Delton, WI</td>
<td>Vacation rental</td>
<td>Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy</td>
<td>1958</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notably, the 1901 Prairie-style Ward Winfield Willets (S.054) house in Springfield, Ohio, opened as a bed and breakfast in 2005. There are also occasionally Internet mentions of other Wright designs available for rent, to include a hemicycle property in Hawaii, built under license from the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation. The first Kit Usonian, the Jacobs I house in Madison, Wisconsin, may also be available for monthly rental. See: www.usonia1.com.
Each of these sites was considered for inclusion in this thesis research, with an objective of generating not less than two case studies per category to promote internal validity within the overall research. Geographic variety across the following four categories was also an objective: house museum on private land; house museum on public land; house museum reconstructed and relocated to another, non-original site; and vacation rental.

In some cases, organizations declined to participate in the study. Others failed to respond to telephone and/or e-mail queries. A total of eight case studies were subsequently developed, presented here alphabetically within each category:

**House museums on private land.** The Weltzheimer-Johnson House (S.311) is owned by Oberlin College, a liberal arts institution in Oberlin, Ohio, and was, until the late 1990, used in part as a long-term residence for visiting scholars and dignitaries. The house continues to serve this function in an occasional overnight capacity only. The Zimmerman House (S.333) is owned by the Currier Art Museum, Manchester, New Hampshire.

**House museums on public land.** Located in the St. Louis suburb of Kirkwood, Missouri, the Kraus House (S.340) is owned by the County of St. Louis, and leased to a non-profit organization tasked with its maintenance, management and preservation. The Rosenbaum House (S.267) is one of five historic properties owned and administered by the municipal Department of Parks and Museums in Florence, Alabama.

**House museums, relocated.** To further consider the potential effects of a house-as-object placed upon the physical landscape, as well as the implications of Wright’s alleged practices that his designs included specific considerations regarding siting and orientation; a separate category for relocated properties was also included. As introduced earlier, the Gordon House (S.419) was relocated in 2001 to a municipally owned arboretum in Silverton, Oregon. On the opposite coast, and co-located on the Woodlawn Plantation in Mount Vernon, Virginia, the Pope-Leighey House (S.268) is owned and administered by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Relocated in 1964 due to
threatened highway construction, and again in 1996 due to regarding project on the Woodlawn site, the house is the first example of a preservation effort focused on a Usonian house.

**Vacation rentals.** The Schwartz House (S.271) is a property available for two-day and weekly rentals located in Two Rivers, Wisconsin. Similarly, the Haynes House (S.323) in Fort Wayne, Indiana, was made available for rental starting in 2005.

One or more contacts at each site were interviewed regarding the maintenance, management and preservation practices on their respective sites. Once these interviews were conducted and roughly aggregated, four distinct sets of discursive phenomena emerged: geographic, historical, political, and economic factors represented by and in a property.

Further, each of these sets presented five specific discourses upon which qualitative comparisons could be made. A set of four matrices, developed through the case study interviews as a means of ensuring efficient data capture, was also found to be helpful for both summarization and analysis. Following eight case studies narratives, these matrices appear as Tables 3 through 5 starting on page 67.
CASE STUDIES: HOUSE MUSEUMS ON PRIVATE LAND

No. 1: The Professor’s Usonian
(Weltzheimer-Johnson house)

The Weltzheimer-Johnson house (S.311) is an L-plan Usonian house located in Oberlin, Ohio, population 8,139. The house was purchased in 1968 by Ellen H. Johnson, a professor of art at Oberlin College, a 173-year-old liberal arts institution that today boasts a student enrollment of 2,800. Along with professor Althena Tacha, she restored the house to its original footprint and interior configuration.49

Through a grant from the Buckeye Trust, Oberlin College was able to purchase the property and to establish a small maintenance endowment. Johnson subsequently transferred ownership to the Oberlin College Allen Memorial Museum of Art (AMAM) in 1980, and remained living in the house until her death in 1992.50

Similar to the relationship of the Zimmerman house to the Currier Museum of Art in Manchester, New Hampshire, the AMAM regards the Weltzheimer-Johnson house as an important part of its collections. Unlike the Currier, however, the AMAM serves both public and academic mission. Museum staff members are employees of the college, and some fulfill both teaching and administrative roles. The museum directorship, for example, is a tenured position with the option of teaching.

“[The Weltzheimer-Johnson house has] been a wonderful resource for Oberlin College that has not been very well known, and not well understood,” says house museum manager Palli Davis. “I think that comes from not only the quietness of this college town, but the very residential nature of this building.” Davis, who took the job in 2005, hopes to infuse the house museum with an informal, interactive interpretative programming. “I’ve been trying to think of it as a study-living room, so that when people visit, it’s not the just the straight 45-minute tour,” she says. “Instead, they’ll be more

49 Storrer 314
50 Allen Memorial Art Museum bulletin 39
deeply engaged in a conversational kind of atmosphere. That would give it more of the spirit of its residential history."

In addition to reworking how tours are conducted, Davis plans to regularly open the house to students and members of the public for unstructured time. Her objective is to eventually open the house during Allen museum hours, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, with additional evening hours.

"Experiencing the house at nighttime is a crucial element," she says. "Normally, people only get that opportunity when they’ve come for a special program and forked down a $100 a plate or something like that. We’re just a common Frank Lloyd Wright house—a wonderful, ordinary Usonian house, and I really want to keep that nature."

The Weltzheimer-Johnson house is located within a few blocks of campus in a stable residential neighborhood. As a component of the museum, the house may receive groundskeeping, maintenance and other support from the college’s facilities planning and construction department. Although not located on campus, the house is identified with signage in keeping and style of other campus buildings.

The house is located on the largest plot of land in its neighborhood, with both an orchard and open-space "meadow" adjacent. The latter was briefly used as an art installation site in the 1990s, says Davis. The work by Robert Smithson was later relocated closer to the Allen museum itself. "It was enough out of context that no one could figure out what it was. It looked a little like fencing," says Davis. "I regret that [it was removed], because I think that would’ve been a wonderful nod to the last owner." Davis also plans to revisit with neighbors whether the meadow could be maintained.

Four other Wright designs currently under private ownership are located near Oberlin. One of these, the Louis Penfield house (S.365) in Willoughby Hills, is available to the public as a vacation rental. "We get most everyone who rents that home down here at least for a daytrip, because it’s so close," says Davis. The other nearby private residences are the Rubin (S.343), Dobkins (S.362), and Feimen (S.371) houses in Canton.
Matterially, the Weltzheimer-Johnson house emphasizes brick masonry more than board-and-batten wall construction. The wood used is Redwood on plywood. Storrer speculates that the final fascia design, which features an abstraction of circles on a branch, may have symbolized the original apple orchard on the property.\textsuperscript{51} The fascia boards uniquely incorporate croquet balls, which Davis speculates may have been factory seconds from a woodturning business near Wright’s hometown of Spring Green, Wisconsin. Historically relating the property to other Wright designs, Sergeant specifically uses the Weltzheimer to illustrate the post-WWII evolution of the Usonian construction:

Close repeats of original Usonians, such as [...] the Weltzheimer house of 1948 in Oberlin, Ohio, illustrate what took place. The plan forms of the Jacobs or the Rosenbaum houses were executed in a construction technique that increasingly substituted masonry for board and batten walling. A decorated notched fascia board made its appearance, and the intention of dry assembly or off-site fabrication was forgotten.\textsuperscript{52}

The geography of the site was fundamentally changed by the house’s third owner, William Gaeuman, a land developer and speculator who subdivided the original property in 1966.\textsuperscript{53} As part of this subdivision, the new street of Woodhaven Place was established on the house’s north side, effectively reorienting the house to its previously private elevation. Gaeuman installed a new driveway connecting to the equally new Woodhaven Place, a cul-de-sac, and sought to eliminate the house’s original access to Morgan Street. Davis reports that the museum may request through city and postal officials to once again identify the house using the Morgan Street address. Internet mapping services in particular direct visitors to the Woodhaven Place address, the “wrong” side of the house, potentially causing traffic problems on the residential street.

Johnson was able to purchase the property to the front of the house, as well as the orchard, preserving a portion of the original views to and from the house.

\textsuperscript{51} Storrer 314
\textsuperscript{52} Sergeant 86
\textsuperscript{53} Allen Memorial Art Museum bulletin 31
The house was also insensitively remodeled by its second and third owners, including such items as painting out wood and interior brick surfaces with white paint. The work was subsequently reversed by Johnson.

With its historical link to a popular professor of art, the college’s connection with the Weltzheimer-Johnson is well established. While it is not an immediate objective, Davis hopes to one day emulate the professor’s use of the house to educate and entertain students, perhaps by scheduling a regular arts discussion event, salon, or Chautauqua. Davis would also like to see the original barbecue pit area, which was planned but never built, installed as an outdoor classroom. “Instead of a pit, I’d want a raised table,” says Davis. “I find that visiting professors [from other universities conducting annual visits with architectural students], for example, spend a lot of time looking at the house from the outside with their students, but there’s no place for them to lay their plans. It would also double as a relaxing, informal picnic area.”

Notably, the house will be featured in a planned 2007 modernist house tour, an inaugural event for a developing county preservation group.

Politically, the house is closely linked both with the college and Allen museum organizations. Davis plans to maintain the tradition of using the house for overnight use by distinguished visitors to the arts department, and to schedule public events featuring members of the college’s music conservatory. She anticipates further community connections will be made through the college’s new masters of education program, through which she hopes to generate model arts and history curricula for use by visiting school groups. The house will also be used in a pilot humanities summer residency program for high school youth in summer 2007.

The house-to-college relationship is problematic in matters of fund-raising and labor-negotiation. Allen museum staff members are currently exploring how best to conduct future fundraising, to include possible efforts specifically focused on the house itself. Davis says that any such efforts will potentially expand the visibility and outreach of the museum itself.
The house museum requires more funding in order to reconstruct missing furniture, both built-in and individual pieces. Davis is currently working with the college to determine whether the school’s labor agreements might require some of this work to be done by the college’s carpentry staff.

Neighborhood appreciation days at the house invite the nearby community to directly and regularly experience the house (the annual event includes croquet on the lawn, a reference to the house’s unique fascia board designs), as well as to thank neighbors for tolerating any inconveniences caused by the visiting public.

The house organization employs a private custodial service. College facilities personnel typically perform groundskeeping and maintenance. The museum typically contracts out any specialized restoration work, such as tuckpointing and other masonry projects. On-site events are not obligated to use campus food services, but using those services is an option. “This town entertains a lot in professors’ homes,” says Davis, “so there are a number of catering services have grown up with the idea that they’d be working out of private kitchens.” Interestingly, a proposal in the 1990s called for remodeling the Weltzheimer-Johnson house to make a more efficient catering kitchen. “I think they’ve pretty well jinxed that,” says Davis, who agrees with the decision to keep the kitchen as it is. “I think it belies the informality of the owners, at least the owners who held it the longest. They were very informal, and I’d hate to see black-tie events here.”
No. 2: The White-gloved Usonian (Zimmerman house)

The Dr. Isadore J. and Lucille Zimmerman house (S.333) is a 1,667-square-foot in-line plan Usonian house located in Manchester, New Hampshire, population 107,006. Sergeant notes the Zimmerman as one of two extremely elongated in-line Usonian floor plans. After building the house in 1952, the arts-minded owners made preparations to donate the house to the Currier Gallery of Art (now the Currier Museum of Art) as early as 1969. The house was transferred to museum ownership along with an endowment following the deaths of Isadore in 1984 and Lucille in 1988, and was opened to the public as a house museum in 1990.

Construction materials include red-glazed brick, upland Georgian cypress trim (a less-expensive alternative to the Tidewater cypress Wright usually specified), and a flat terra-cotta roof. Notably, at the time of its construction, the interior concrete floor surface was troweled with Colorundum, a non-slip, unpainted aggregate. Sometime before its transfer to museum ownership, the roof was replaced with asphalt shingles and a forced-air heating system installed. Heinz notes the Zimmerman house features an unusual ribbon of windows set into custom concrete block along the house’s public elevation. He further notes that the Zimmerman landscape plan was one of few with which Wright was directly involved during the Usonian period.

The Currier, in keeping with its focus on American and European fine and decorative arts, regards the Zimmerman house as a prized component of its collection of American and European fine and decorative arts. Illustrative of this curatorial orientation, Zimmerman house tour guides wear the traditional white glove traditionally favored by museum professionals. “Everything in the Zimmerman house—the whole building, the site, the contents, everything that Doctor and Mrs. Zimmerman gave to the museum—is part of what is called in museum parlance the ‘permanent

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54 Sergeant 86
55 Storrer catalog, 337
56 Heinz 443
57 Heinz 443
collection," says house museum director Hetty Startup. "Everything in the house has an accession number, and it's considered integral to the rest of the collections, of both European and American decorative arts, paintings and sculptures." She says, "The way it's characterized in the museum, slightly tongue-in-cheek, is that it's our largest outdoor sculpture."

The Zimmerman house is never represented as a separate entity, property or organization. Tours are offered by reservation offered Mondays, Thursdays, Fridays and weekends, and take approximately 90 minutes. Visitors meet in a dedicated orientation space at the museum, and are driven to and from the Zimmerman site in a 13-person shuttle van. The trip takes approximately 10 minutes each way.

The Zimmerman house is located in a currently stable residential neighborhood that is not experiencing in-fill, teardown remodeling, or other real estate market pressures. The house was listed on the National Registry of Historic Places in 1979. Surrounding properties include the Zimmerman's first Manchester home, a Colonial revival house. While the latter structure is privately owned, and not open to the public, tours of the Zimmerman house regularly drive past the more traditional home to help illustrate the lifestyle changes required by Usonian occupancy.

Notably, the privately owned Kalil house (S.387), a Usonian Automatic built five years after the Zimmerman house, is located only four houses down the street. Overzealous Wright enthusiasts have upon rare occasion caused minor damage to neighbors' landscaping as they maneuvered for photographs of the Kalil property. The museum has responded by strongly discouraging Zimmerman house visitors from walking the half block to the Kalil residence, a design that differs from the Zimmerman house in its use of concrete block construction for both walls and ceilings.

"There are all sorts of verbal reminders in place to respect others' privacy," says Startup, "but I do think that there's a sort of quite powerful sense out there that Wright's architecture is somehow there for everyone to enjoy, sometimes at any cost. It's just a questions of pushing back the wave, particularly when we're dealing with the zealots and pilgrims, as we call them, who are often very
determined to have photography and access and all sorts of considerations that might not be appropriate." Startup says that she can count on two hands the number of times she has had to assuage neighborhood concerns. Incidents are resolved on a case-by-case basis, there being no formal neighborhood association in place. "Some of our neighbors are actually Zimmerman house docents," notes Startup, "which is probably the best buy-in you can have."

In terms of physical landscape, the Currier takes great care to preserve the Zimmerman house's place in a residential context. No signage marks or directs the public to the site itself. As specified in a municipal zoning variance granted to the museum so that the house might be made accessible to tours, Currier staff members are not allowed to even release the street address of the Zimmerman house. This despite the fact the address is published elsewhere, including on the Internet.

The limitations on the property are seen by staff as an advantage in the historical interpretation of the site. "Visitors see [the house] as if the Zimmermans still live there," says Startup. "It's not as if there's a parking garage or ticket booth or public restrooms on-site that have turned it into something else. People still feel that it's a privately owned home, even though the original owners aren't there anymore."

Historically, the Zimmerman house relates to Wright's career as an example of the continued progression of Usonian construction, including experimentation with materials such as Colorundum. Notably, the house was featured in a September 1956 issue of House and Home, the headline promising readers "32 simple and basic design ideas" for home designs.\(^{58}\) It also relates to local and regional arts history, given its past and current ownership.

When possible, the Currier connects visiting and permanent exhibitions to the presence of its Wright-designed house. A recent featured exhibition focused on American design, for example, provided patrons with an opportunity to relate Wright with a number of contemporaries, including Charles and Ray Eames. "I think that was a good example of playing the house off of some of the

\(^{58}\) See Sergeant 156
artifacts we have available here,” Startup says. “Often, there are times when you think that there aren’t connections, and you realize suddenly that there are.” The Currier has not yet hosted an exhibition specific to Frank Lloyd Wright, although Startup says the museum is actively looking for such opportunities. Scheduling, as well as funding, can be problematic.

While the relationship between the Currier and the house museum should be considered a net-plus, the Zimmerman house is admittedly limited by this relationship in developing any “friends” organization or similar coalition. “Because the house is part of the museum, we really don’t want a Zimmerman house group fighting for resources and programming with the museum itself,” says Startup. Politically, then, the Zimmerman house may be less directly connected to arts, cultural, and historical organizations than other preserved Usonian structures.

Economic activities, such as gift shop sales and administration, are also located the museum. Fundraising or other special events that involve food service typically take place in neighboring homes. The Currier’s website does market an “architecture weekend getaway” clever headlined “from Victorian to Usonian.” Patrons tour the Zimmerman house, and later dine at Cotton, “an eclectic American bistro in the heart of Manchester’s millyard.” Guests can also visit the Millyard museum before bedding down at the Ash Street Inn, a bed-and-breakfast located in a restored 1885 Victorian house.

The Zimmerman house is “very leanly staffed,” says Startup. In addition to her full-time position, the house employs three part-time positions, one of which is a security guard and shuttle van driver. A custodial contractor vacuums the house once a week. A partnership with the University of New Hampshire Extension Service provides the services of the master gardener program.

Startup recognizes formal museum traditions may seem slightly out of place to those more familiar with a casual or customer-driven approach. She recalls one patron’s frustration given her inability to provide the street address of the Zimmerman site over the telephone. “He was very irritated that we were somehow bound by something that was different than the world of the Internet.”
The two things are not the same,” she says. “The same kind of analogy could be made as to why people can’t sit on the furniture in the Zimmerman house […]”

“There are other owners of other Frank Lloyd Wright houses who let people sit on the furniture, who say that’s the only way that you can experience a Frank Lloyd Wright house: at any time of day to just sit there and let the architecture come to you,” she says. “I’m very enamored of that philosophical notion, but it’s not one that’s consistent with what the museum is trying to do in terms of preservation.”

The museum, she says, must juggle the issue of preserving Wright’s legacy with that of making his architecture accessible. “You just hope that those goals are not mutually exclusive.”
CASE STUDIES: HOUSE MUSEUMS ON PUBLIC LAND

No. 3: The Artist’s Usonian (Kraus house)

The 19,000-square-foot Russell W.M. and Ruth Kraus house (5.340) was built 1951 in the St. Louis suburb of Kirkwood, population 27,324. Originally owning some 40 acres, artist and gentleman farmer Kraus had gradually sold off parts of the property to be subdivided by developers.

Developers continued to be interested in the 10.5 acres Kraus continued to own following the death of his wife in 1992. At that time, Kraus contacted Judith Bettendorf, who had in the later 1980s expressed an interesting purchasing the house as a residence. When Bettendorf realized the house would be too small for her family, she contacted St. Louis County Director of Parks and Recreation Bob Hall about the possibility of the land as a public amenity. In 1995, Bettendorf helped organize a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of the house.

“Developers even came to us, asking that if we took on the house, they would build around us,” says Joane Kohn, chairman of the board and executive director for the organization, now named The Frank Lloyd Wright House at Ebsworth Park (FLWHEP). “We refused that. We felt that if we couldn’t have the land, we didn’t want the house. I think that goes back to Frank Lloyd Wright’s Usonian houses, that they are part of the land.”

In January 2001, for a sum of $1.7 million, Kraus sold the house, its contents, related memorabilia and the remaining 10.5 acres to the non-profit organization. The groups then donated the house to the County of St. Louis for use as a public park. The park is named in memory of the parents of St. Louis businessman Barney Ebsworth, who donated $1 million toward the acquisition of the Kraus property.

Today, the county is responsible for the mowing grass, trimming trees and plowing snow as applicable. The FLWEP leases the house and property on a 50-year agreement, renewable four times up to a total of 200 years, and administers the house as a museum focused on architecture and design. The group modeled its efforts based partly on the example of the 98-acre Laumeir Sculpture Park,
donated to St. Louis County in 1968. In its research, the FLWEP found that the 17-member Laumeir board of directors, a group of private citizens, had no direct influence over the executive director, who was an employee of the county. "We found they really did not have a contract, and that consequently, there was not a clear delineation of authority—or responsibility," says Joanne Kohn, chairman of the FLWEP board of directors and executive director for the house museum.

"In order to make [our] partnership work, the director of parks and recreation is a voting member of the [FLWEP] board," says Kohn. "So we have set it up as a mutual partnership, even though we are basically responsible for taking care of the whole house and everything connected to the house."

The house is built on a triangular module, unique for an in-line Usonian. In addition to the "gallery" passage typical of all Usonians, the original owner's art studio is located just off the entry. The structure is neatly tucked into the hill, in accordance with Wright's oft-quoted position that no house should be on the hill; it should be of the hill. The house is located in a wooded area called Sugar Creek. "If you drive down into the area, you can't see many houses," says Kohn. "You can't see the Kraus house from the road, for example. All of a sudden, you're in something like a little forest."

The park is closed during winter months, and after periods of rainfall that wash out the long and narrow gravel drive up to the house. "Mr. Kraus would just park at the bottom of the hill and walk up," Kohn says. The FLWEP has recently matched $50,000 to a $200,000 challenge grant to redesign and reconstruct the area, in part to allow for better fire department access. "Our problem is, how do we change the road to comply with the fire code [...] while still preserving the intimate nature of the house?"

59 Storrer, The Frank Lloyd Wright Companion, Kraus (S.340) entry
The FLWEP currently maintains a list of approximately 300 donor members, down from 800 in the initial year. “As people saw that we had saved and restored the house, I think they cut back,” says Kohn. “For some people, it may have been more of a one-time gift.”

“One of our focuses now is to broaden the membership, to educate people that this is a privately run house, and the government is not giving us tax dollars. We depend on private donations to run the house,” Kohn says.

In addition to house tours by appointment, the FLWEP annually conducts a fundraiser event in early June to commemorate Wright’s birthday. An art exhibit is installed within the house, often thematically paired with one or more speaking presentations made in a tent outside of the house. More than 125 people typically attend the event. Attendees are shuttled from the parking lot of a nearby church.

The FLWEP group has in the past considered offering the house for overnight or special events rental. “We’ve had a lot of such requests, but we just can’t do it,” says Kohn. “We just don’t have the parking.”

A tool storage space comprising a portion of the carport has been converted into a small interpretive room, administrative area, and gift shop. Long-range plans potentially call for the construction of an on-site visitor center, separate from the house. Such a building would ideally offer about 12 parking spaces, as well as space for interpretive, administrative and other functions.
No. 4: The Southern Usonian (Rosenbaum house)

The Stanley and Mildred Rosenbaum residence (S.267), designed in 1939, was originally built as a 1,540-square-foot L-shaped Usonian. In 1948, the house was expanded with a 1,084-square-foot addition (S.267A) also designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. The house is now owned by the City of Florence, Alabama, population 35,852, where it is one of five house museums administered by the municipal Department of Museums.

“We hit all time periods with our museum system,” says Mary Nicely, program coordinator for the City of Florence Department of Museums. Other city museums include the Indian Mound and Museum, which chronicles pre-historic peoples in the region; Pope’s Tavern, a stagecoach stop for Andrew Jackson on his way to the Battle of New Orleans; and the W.C. Handy home, a log cabin that was the boyhood home of the “father of the blues.” The Kennedy-Douglass Center for the Arts, the department’s fifth property, serves as the department’s offices and education space.

The Rosenbaum house is the only Frank Lloyd Wright design built in the state of Alabama. “There are Wright enthusiasts who travel to every Wright site they possibly can,” says Nicely. “It pulls people into Florence, but we’ve had people tell us that the only reason they’ve come into Alabama is to see the site. They might have been vacationing up in Tennessee, for example, and decided that, ‘You know, Florence isn’t that far.’ It’s going to be quite a boon, I think.”

One of the original owners was the son of Louis Rosenbaum, an owner of movie theaters in Florence, Sheffield, and Tuscumbia. (Together, these cities comprise the Muscle Shoals area of the Tennessee Valley.) After a Harvard education, Stanley Rosenbaum returned to the area to assist in the management of the theater business, and ran a literary magazine in his spare time. He eventually joined the faculty at what is now the University of North Alabama, Florence. He died in 1983.

Mildred Rosenbaum lived in the house until shortly before the city acquired the property in 1999.

Construction of the Rosenbaum house took place at the same time as the implementation of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), a New Deal agency created to control flooding and provide
hydroelectric power to a seven-state region. The city of Florence is located on a lake created between two dams on the Tennessee River; the Rosenbaum living room and original bedrooms overlook the river.

The 1948 addition created a courtyard bordered by two new spaces, a guest room and a dormitory for two children. The outdoor space is now a Japanese garden, as is connected by a walkway to the street side of the house. Using this walkway, persons with disabilities could feasibly access the Japanese garden and adjacent dormitory; the latter is now used for any larger interior gatherings. "If we do have any type of small event there, we usually utilize what we call the dorm room, the play room," explains Nicely. "It's the largest free space, and we've intentionally kept that open. There are a few items of furniture, but they're often pushed over to the side, like they probably would have been when the boys actually utilized the space as a playroom."

The house was placed on the national register in 1978. Sergeant calls the Rosenbaum house "the purest example of the Usonian. It incorporates detailing improvements and combines all the standard elements in a mature and spatially varied interior." Further, he notes the 1948 addition was provides the first evidence of Wright's willingness to have his Usonian designs be changed over time. "It thus became the first Usonian to be radically altered, something which owners of Wright houses were loath to do, but which he himself always saw as potentially inherent in an organic building." The house remains in a residential neighborhood with immediate adjacencies to business areas, conditions relatively unchanged from its original context. Writes Alvin Rosenbaum, who grew up in the house:

In and around Florence there were perhaps three kinds of houses: solid mansions and smaller houses made of brick; wooden houses with clapboards and wide porches, often occupied by families who rented; and unpainted, dogtrot shacks with tin roofs, usually set well off on the road, insubstantial, seeming temporary places for tenants who grew cotton and vegetables. The Rosenbaum house did not fit into any of these categories, but synthesized qualities of all

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60 Sergeant 42
61 Sergeant 42
three. At the edge of town on the threshold of the countryside, the house is not part of either the country or the town, but it relates to both.\textsuperscript{62}

This mixed-use location offers certain advantages to the operation of the house as a museum. For example, in an effort to minimize tour traffic on residential streets, the museum shares approximately 15 parking spaces with the nearby Florence City Board of Education.

The structure was restored in 1970 by Taliesin Associated Architects, and acquired by the City of Florence in 1999 for $75,000. A $600,000 restoration was funded through a previously enacted 1-cent sales tax for municipal capital improvements. Despite the 1970 renovation, the house was in poor shape in 1999. “We knew that there were termites in parts of the house, but, during the restoration, it turned out that they had pretty well worked through the entire structure,” Nicely says. “You’ve got the all construction, of course, the cypress board-and-batten wall ... but you’ve also got that inner core of pine, to which the panels are screwed to either side. Cypress is termite-resistant, but pine is a choice food for termites. They could not have been happier.”

After the 1999, the house opened in 2002 as a house museum. Although the house is open for tours Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., the lack of a permanent staff has hindered programming efforts. Docent training and special events planning are currently on hold, for example, pending the successful recruitment of a full-time site administrator. The Rosenbaum house would be the only departmental property to employ such an administrator; part-time curators manage the city’s other historical properties. The city contracts with a private lawn service provider for all of the museum properties. The city Department of Urban Forestry addresses tree trimming and other periodic groundskeeping maintenance.

Although the museum is not fully staffed, the site has already notably served as a centerpiece for cultural and other events. In July 2002, for example, the University of North Alabama-Florence’s symphony played an outdoor concert on the property. “The terracing of the riverside yard is almost a

\textsuperscript{62} Rosenbaum 16
natural amphitheater,” says Nicely. In April 2005, the site served as a meeting place for the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy Board of Directors spring retreat.

Nothing, however, seems to compare to another of the first events held at the site. To thank the citizens of Florence for restoring the house, Nicely says, the department in August 2002 hosted a two-and-a-half-day “Walk Wright In” event. More than 4,000 people toured the house in one weekend. “It was a constant snaking of people,” she says. “One going down the hallway, the other squeezing past back up the hallway, coming in through the street side entry, through the house, and out the dorm doors.”
CASE STUDIES: HOUSE MUSEUMS, RELOCATED

No. 5: The Garden Usonian (Gordon house)

The Conrad Edward and Evelyn Gordon house (S.419) is a 2,200-square-foot concrete-block two-story Usonian originally built in Aurora, Oregon (population 655). The T-shaped house design, completed in 1964, is based on the same September 1938 Life magazine article from which the Bernard Schwartz house (S.271) in Two Rivers, Wisconsin, was built in 1939.

In 2001, the Gordon house was relocated 24 miles away to Silverton, Oregon (population 7,414), and is now located on the property of Oregon Gardens, a municipally owned arboretum on 80 acres featuring 20 specialty gardens. The only Frank Lloyd Wright design in the state of Oregon, the Gordon house has been open to the public as a house museum since March 2002. As an education center and tourist attraction, the Gordon house seems uniquely situated to facilitate understanding of environmental issues, landscape architecture, and even, given its ownership history, the textile arts.

Created through a partnership of the City of Silverton and what was to become the Oregon Garden Federation, work on the gardens began in 1994, and culminated in with a grand opening celebration in June 2002. “We consider ourselves, if not part of the entity, at least part of the ambiance of Oregon Gardens,” says Elsa Coleman, chairperson for the Gordon House Conservancy board of directors. Coleman also sits on the Oregon Gardens board. With many of the issues related to relocating the house now resolved, Coleman says the conservancy’s focus is shifting from restoration, to programming and operations.

In 2005, Oregon Gardens went into receivership. On April 1, 2006, management of the property was taken over by the privately owned Moonstone Hotel Properties of Cambria, California. The company manages 10 properties, most if not all of which target the garden enthusiast market. Plans call for groundbreaking on a low-rise hotel operation on the Oregon Garden property later in 2006, with completion scheduled in 2007.
The receivership caused Gordon house managers to ensure that all operations for the co-located sites, including previously shared groundskeeping, bookkeeping, and marketing, were sufficiently made separate. Efforts have recently been made to establish a Gordon House website separate from that of the arboretum. The Gordon house was otherwise unaffected by the Oregon Garden receivership.

The Gordon house is protected by a preservation easement that requires the structure and site to remain unchanged. Despite its relocation, the house was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2004.

The Gordon House and Oregon Gardens share a parking lot. Prior to the receivership, the public could purchase tickets valid for admission to both properties, a practice that may be reinstated in the future.

Designed in 1956, the house was notably built and completed in 1964, years after Wright’s 1959 death. Construction was overseen by Taliesin Associated Architects and Portland architect Burton Goodrich, a former Taliesin apprentice. The house is concrete block rather than board-and-batten; all of the concrete block was replaced in relocating the house.

The house connects to its new environs most notably as the Oregon Gardens’ twenty-first specialty garden, arguably the only one that speaks to the creation of a period-style garden. The house is visible from the access road to the Oregon Gardens.

Historically, the house is challenged by the fact of its relocation. The original site was a 22-acre parcel with a half-mile of Willamette River access on the west, the homestead on a 550-acre farm with dramatic views eastward toward Mount Hood. “We couldn’t move the river nor the view of the mountain,” says Coleman, “but the [relocated] house was specifically sited on south-north coordinates. One of the reasons for doing that was Wright’s use of sunlight and shadows, so that was effectively recreated.”
A landscape master plan was developed using seed money and volunteer labor from the Oregon State Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc. "The master plan emulates the original site, although with a few changes," says Coleman. "For example, junipers used to line the driveway, but junipers don’t do well on the new site. So another kind of evergreen was selected."

The story of the original homeowners blends well with that of Wright. It is somewhat romantic, in fact, to think that Wright would revisit an older, arguably more purely "Usonian" design in his last years, in order to give a hardworking couple their dream home.63 Writes Larry Woodin: "Wright was probably drawn to this couple, as he sometime referred fondly to ‘democracy in overalls’ and always appreciated lifestyles indicating an affinity for the land, growing one’s crops, etc. Evelyn, a graduate of Mills College (a noted liberal arts school), had a sophisticated interest in the arts, and Conrad, an active farmer managing hundreds of acres, was certainly a ‘man of the land.’"64

The house as museum is interpreted as of its 1964 conditions. Special events at the house often derive their themes from the lives of the original owners. Evelyn Gordon, for example, was a weaver (a fact which caused Wright to accommodate a loom at hearthside), inspiring various quilting, weaving, and textile-related exhibits and shows. The interpretive date of 1964 serves as a catalyst for a vintage car show held annually at the Gordon house to commemorate Wright’s birthday, an event that would no doubt be appreciated by Wright, given his enthusiasm for automobiles.

A coalition of stakeholders coalesced around the threatened demolition of the Gordon house in 2001, including: Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy (FLWBC), EcoHome Foundation, Portland American Institute of Architects, the Oregon Historical Preservation League, the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, and others.65

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63 Heinz 20, notes that Evelyn had dreamt of a Wright-designed home since getting married in the late 1920s.
64 Larry Woodin 1
65 Woodin 14
Regarding the house’s preservation, it is notable that the house stood vacant for more than four years following the 1997 death of Evelyn Gordon. Woodin writes that Ed Gordon, the executor for the estate, had hoped that someone would purchase the property would restore the family house and subdivide the balance into riverfront residential estates. The property was originally listed for $3.3 million dollars, but Gordon was twice forced to lower the price, particularly given county authorities’ refusal to change the land’s agricultural zoning. The property was eventually sold to a local couple, David and Carey Smith, for $1.1 million dollars. The Smiths subsequently applied to remove the house from the county’s list of historic structures, which alerted parties interested in its preservation.66

Elements of the coalition that successfully relocated the structure are still to be found on the Gordon House Conservancy board of directors. The political base surrounding the house is further expanded with the alliance, if you will, with the Oregon Garden Foundation. In February 2001, approximately 1,000 people visited the gardens as pieces of the house arrived on site for the first time. Staff at the time estimated that 80 percent of those visitors knew nothing about the existence of Oregon Gardens. Coleman says that similar successes should be possible in the future, as the gardens come out of receivership. “I believe there’s a symbiotic relationship between the two, and that we’ll see that emerge again,” she says.

Coleman is also interested in formalizing partnerships with other area preservation and architecture interests. The Bosco-Milligan Foundation and Center of Portland, for example, advocates and educates architectural preservation and salvage topics through its Architectural Heritage Center. She also notes the nearby Mount Angel Monastery Library, a 1970 design by Alvar Aalto, and the main street of historic Silverton as architecturally or historically notable sites with which the Gordon house could be allied.

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66 Woodin 14
While the mission of the Gordon House Conservancy is one of education, its presence adjacent to what appears as a tourist destination. The house museum employs one full-time manager and two part-time employees. As discussed earlier, all outsourced services are separate from those of the Oregon Gardens.

Both the Gordon House and the Oregon Garden offer rental spaces for weddings and other special events. The Gordon house can host sit-down dinners of 36 people, and receptions of 50 people. If weather during a reception allows the doors to the terrace to be opened, an additional 30 people can be accommodated. In addition to other special events, the Gordon House Conservancy also regularly hosts teas, which include a lunch and house tour.

There is no gift shop on the Gordon house property, although there is one in the Oregon Gardens visitor center. The Gordon house does not receive funds from these sales. Ticket sales for the house and gardens are currently separate.
No. 6: The Well-traveled Usonian (Pope-Leighey house)

The 1,200-square-foot Loren B. Pope house (S.268) was built between 1940 and 1941 in Falls Church, Virginia. The tenth, original Usonian, the basic L-shaped house was sold to the Robert and Majorie Folsom Leighey in 1946. Reflecting its ownership history, the house is typically referred to as the Pope-Leighey house.

In 1963, shortly after Robert's death, interstate highway construction threatened the Pope-Leighey house with demolition. Majorie Leighey subsequently donated the house to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which in 1964 relocated the house onto the property of its Woodlawn Plantation location in Mount Vernon, Virginia, population 28,582. Approximately 21,000 people annually visit the combined site: 10,000 through guided tours, and the remainder through special events and programs.

The history of the Pope-Leighey house since 1964 is equally as important as its affiliation with Wright. The house is the first example of a Usonian preserved with the objective of making it accessible and available to the public, and is more broadly linked to a moment in the 1960s in which there was renewed interest in preservation issues. Indeed, the acquisition by the National Trust predates such landmarks as the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation.

By the terms of her agreement with the National Trust, Leighey returned to live in the relocated house in 1969, following work as a teaching missionary in Japan. According to Storrer, Leighey noted numerous differences in the relocated house, including changes in floor materials and other details, and cracking in the floor and foundation.
The house was relocated again in 1996 to correct problems caused by shifting of the marine clay soil. The house was moved to more solid ground approximately 30 feet away. Critics observe the house was not oriented in keeping with its original site.67

While sharing a parking lot, and within walking distance of the Woodlawn Plantation, the two houses are not directly visible to each other. The National Trust uses the proximity of the two structures to contrast housing and lifestyles separated roughly 100 years. Ticket and gift shop sales, as well as food preparation and service, is located in the two hyphens off the original Woodlawn structure.

In a story common with other Wright clients, Loren Pope first contacted Wright after hearing the architect speak and reading his 1948 biography. At the time, Pope was a copy editor for the Washington Evening Star, with a weekly paycheck of $50. In a letter introducing himself to the architect in Wisconsin, Pope eloquently and briefly inquired whether Wright would design an affordable house, one that would cost less than $6,000. Wright is reported to have replied by letter within two weeks: “Dear Loren, of course I will give you a house.”

During the Christmas season, the National Trust often interprets the house during the Popes’ ownership during World War II, displaying ration cards and other Pope family memorabilia. Most of its interpretive programming focuses on the lifestyle made possible by a Usonian structure, a topic enhanced by the easy comparison to the plantation house just up the hill. The two house museums are separated by 100 years, as well as significant changes in American households. “Living in a 1,200-square-foot house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright six or seven years after the Great Depression was like a dream to the people who lived in the house,” says area architect Steve Reiss, AIA, who volunteers at the Pope-Leighey house. “Many of the population at the time may not have even had indoor plumbing. To all of a sudden find themselves living in this odd, beautiful, small house was, again, almost like a dream.”

67 Storrer, The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright: A Complete Catalog, 270
Politically, the house is connected with a network of historic properties managed by the National Trust, as well as the collective expertise, experience, and interest of that organization. In addition to the 45-minute house tours offered daily by a staff of 11 docents, a series of monthly in-depth “Tech Talk” tours serves the particularly dedicated Frank Lloyd Wright enthusiast, as well as an audience of building and design professionals. The three-hour seminar fulfills continuing education unit (CEU) requirements for the America Institute of Architects under the “health, safety, and welfare” category.

Reiss, who coordinates the Tech Talk program, estimates that of approximately 50 Frank Lloyd Wright sites accessible to the public, only around 10 offer an in-depth tour. After a quick overview of Wright’s career up to his marriage to Olgivana Wright and the establishment of the Taliesin fellowship, the Pope-Leighey Tech Talk tour focuses on the period between the Great Depression and World War II. “I always introduce myself as an architect who wants to talk about the design of the house,” says Reiss. “There are hundreds of books about Wright’s lifestyle, and how many wives he had, and other things that he did. All that is important to read to understand Wright, but what I’m here to explore is the design concepts, how Wright executed them, and how important they are in your life today.”

The Pope-Leighey and Woodlawn Plantation sites in combination host more than 20 weddings a year. Both historic houses are open for guided tours during wedding events. “Last year, we had a group of people enjoy the house so much that they wouldn’t go up to the reception,” says Stacy Hawkins, special events coordinator for the site. “The bride wasn’t too happy.”

The plantation house features a large garden area used for larger gatherings, but, starting in 2006, the staff is specifically focusing on renting the Pope-Leighey house for weeknight corporate events. “It’s a place where people can do a meet-and-greet, a place to do an employee thank-you or retirement, or perhaps just meet new clients,” she says. A May 2006 event, co-sponsored with local caterers and tent rental businesses, helped kick-off the marketing effort. Plans call for the property to
be available for such rentals Tuesdays and Thursdays, from approximately 6 to 8:30 p.m. “If we could do it weekly, we would be thrilled,” says Hawkins.
CASE STUDIES: VACATION RENTALS

No. 7: The Hoosier Usonian (Haynes house)

The 1,340-square-foot John Haynes house (S.323) is a T-shaped Usonian located in a Fort Wayne, Indiana, population 219,435. Owned by banker Rich Herber since May 2004, the property has been offered for overnight and weekly rentals since November 2005.

For Herber, renting out the house is an opportunity to offer other people a chance to experience first-hand Frank Lloyd Wright’s mastery over space. Wintertime, he says, is full of potential surprises. “You’re in bed, taking a nap or something, and wake up to find the board-and-batten walls are just glowing, like they’re almost on fire,” he says. “When that happened to me the first time, I wondered just what was going on. I found that the sun was setting on the far side of the house, the western side, and was shining through the great room, down the gallery, and into the master bedroom.”

“It was perfectly oriented so that when the sun set, it would shine all 40 feet through the entire house,” he says. “It’s stuff like that, where you could explain it, but it’s better to experience it.”

Originally built in 1950 for a Fort Wayne insurance agent with a growing family, the property saw a number of owners until purchased by architect John H. Shoaff. Shoaff lived in the house for approximately 30 years, making only minor changes and repairs. The original floor plan featured three bedrooms and a music room. Shoaff later converted two children’s bedrooms into a single drafting room.

Herber toured the house while on a 2004 business trip to the Fort Wayne area. He mentioned to the listing agent (who was, coincidentally, also the daughter of original owner John Haynes), that, if he owned the house, he would restore it. “About two weeks later, I got a call from Alex Haynes,” Herber says. “She told me that someone else had made an offer on the house, and that they wanted to build a garage around back, build an addition onto it, and do all this work that was not in a Frank Lloyd Wright style.”
Herber now uses the house as a secondary residence every other month. “I have no idea why I bought it, but the idea of a rental is not so much of a business, and more to have the house support itself financially,” he says. “Why leave the house sit unoccupied, when other people can enjoy it, and the money would go back into the restoration?”

With the help of his master-carpenter father, throughout the summer of 2004 Herber reconstructed the original furniture designs for the house, after acquiring drawings and one-time rights to do so from the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation. Owners in the 1960s had discarded the furniture, which Herber estimates would have had a current value from $200,000 to $300,000. The Herbers even built some designs not originally realized by the Haynes family, including some built-in desks. “It wasn’t uncommon for some of the furniture not to have been built, because sometime Frank Lloyd Wright’s clients were so broke after building the house that they couldn’t afford the furniture.”

Herber says that the property’s use as a rental influenced the decision to realize all the furniture. “If I lived here full-time and it wasn’t a rental, I wouldn’t have built the hassocks,” he says. “I would have bought chairs.”

“But, since it was a rental, I’m trying to be as authentic as possible. That’s why I did it the way I did it, so that people could experience Frank Lloyd Wright 100 percent, rather than just my way of living comfortably.”

The house is marketed through a website that receives approximately 600 user visits a month. The house rents for $275 a night with a two-night minimum. Up to four people occupy the house. A local property manager, the son of Charles Sipe, the carpenter who in 1951 supervised the Haynes house construction, oversees maintenance and groundskeeping.

The Haynes house notably features an asymmetrically gabled roof. Materially, the house is constructed of Tidewater cypress and red brick. Herber observes that other Usonian homeowners at the time tended toward less expensive alternatives such as mahogany and cinder block.
Taliesin apprentice Jack Howe was to have overseen the Haynes project, but construction under Charles Sipe was completed before Howe was available. An oversight in record keeping at Taliesin resulted, causing the Haynes house to disappear from rosters of built Wrightian projects until the 1970s. "Between 1952 and the 1970s, it didn’t get any exposure at all. No magazines or anything," says Herber. "If you pick up a book on Frank Lloyd Wright houses from that time, the house will never be featured in it ... Even Storrer’s book, in his old editions, the house is not even there."

A similar lack of exposure haunts the house to this day. Herber expresses concerns that the local community does not seem to recognize the house as a cultural or economic asset. Inspired by the example of the Zimmerman house in Manchester, New Hampshire, which is owned and administered by the Currier Museum of Art, he contacted the Fort Wayne Museum of Art, to little response. The Haynes house website does mention local businesses, and Herber takes pains to point out the house’s proximities to restaurants and shopping venues. "People and organizations in Fort Wayne don’t give a damn about the house," says Herber. "Even the contractors who have worked on it ... When I bought the house, I had to get it appraised, and the appraiser didn’t even know who Frank Lloyd Wright was," he says.

Local exposure, however, is just one of part of the equation. The best test of success is the ability to draw visitors to the site. Guests who have rented the Haynes house include many who have traveled long distances just for the experience. Still, Herber is sanguine about his potential long-term success in preserving the house. "I still think it’s real estate, and what matters is ‘location, location, location,’ in the end," he says. "If I built this house near Fallingwater, I think it would do well as a rental. But it’s a niche business, and a lot of people may not want to go to Fort Wayne ..."
No. 8: The Riverside Usonian (Schwartz house)

Designed based on a September 1938 Life magazine article featuring a Wright design “for a family of $5,000 to $6,000 income,” the 3,000-square-foot Bernard Schwartz house in Two Rivers, Wisconsin is notable for its two-story T-shaped floor plan. As a multilevel structure, it seems to be slightly at odds with the Usonian typography, although it is also decidedly similar to the later concrete-block Gordon house (S.419) now in Silverton, Oregon.

Now owned by a group of four private citizens, the Schwartz house is available for two-day and weekly rentals. Rates are $295 a night Sunday through Thursday; $350 a night Fridays and Saturdays. There is a two-night minimum stay.

The Schwartz house had been for sale for approximately 10 years before couples Michael Ditmer and Lisa Proechel, and Terry Records and Jason Nordhougen, made an offer to purchase the property. The seller had other offers, but seemed attracted to the group’s intentions. “We’d originally mentioned that we not only wanted to restore the house, but that part of our plan to do that was to make the house available as an overnight rental, or vacation rental, to be able to have the capital to do such restoration.”

Ditmer describes Records and Nordhougen as silent partners in the informal ownership arrangement. Records and Nordhougen own a number of vacation properties through a previously established business, Circle NR Vacation Homes. Lisa works for Circle NR. In addition to funding restoration and maintenance efforts by renting out the property, Ditmer says the group is equally motivated to educate people about organic architecture “by sharing an experience beyond what an hour-and-a-half tour can provide.”

The property required nine months of restoration work before opening to the public June 2004. Major problems areas included a leaky roof, which was replaced entirely. The face of the chimney brick was spalling off, caused by moisture infiltration. The exterior of the chimney was rebuilt, and many of the bricks along the perimeter of the house replaced.
The restoration did not incorporate amenities or upgrades specific to the house’s use as a vacation rental. Plumbing and lighting fixtures were not updated in the restoration. Previous owners had remodeled only the kitchen space; there, a cabinet panel camouflages a dishwasher.

Storrer notes that the house is sited to optimize the views east and south from the house toward the river.\(^{68}\) The house is located six miles west of Lake Michigan. The house features board-and-batten cypress, in addition to brick masonry. Heinz describes both the interior and exterior materials as “red brick and brown wood,” creating in his opinion a “striking contrast.”\(^{69}\)

Recognizing the need for good neighborly relations, Ditmer and Proechel took pains to introduce themselves, and to inform surrounding property owners of their plans for the property. “We went out of our way to invite the neighbors over for cocktail parties and get-togethers,” says Ditmer. “One neighbor, who we consider a good friend, is 80-years-old and a pilot. He keeps an eye on things. The original caretakers and cleaning person are also neighbors. He’s a police officer, so we feel we have built-in security.”

Although the house is currently available for public tour by appointment only, plans call for regular monthly public tour dates. The house is occasionally used for larger events, such as fundraisers for the organizations such as the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy and Wright in Wisconsin. Parking for such events takes place on neighborhood streets. “Those are one-time things, like anyone else in the neighborhood having a party.”

Ditmer takes pride in building ties to the local business community. “Lisa and I use the house and are out there a lot,” he says. “We’re really the public face of the house. We go out of our way to send people to local business, and to shop there ourselves. I buy most of my clothes, for example, at the local department store.” He also enjoys recommending to guests favorite restaurants, and makes sure that restaurant owners know to expect the referrals.

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\(^{68}\) Storrer 273
\(^{69}\) Heinz 141
### Table 3: Case study results, geographic discourses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>House Museum: Private Land</th>
<th>House Museum: Public Land</th>
<th>House Museum: Relocated</th>
<th>Vacation rental</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weltzheimer-Johnson</strong></td>
<td><strong>Zimmerman</strong></td>
<td><strong>Kraus</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rosenbaum</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signage</td>
<td>Museum does not identify house with signage, or discuss street address with public.</td>
<td>Small sign in &quot;National Park Service&quot; style.</td>
<td>City of Florence identification on site; mentions Wright but does not say &quot;house museum.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical changes to original lot</td>
<td>1960s-era developer subdivided original lot, reorienting house to a new street.</td>
<td>House remains in viable residential neighborhood.</td>
<td>Although located what is now a public park, house is situated in a viable residential neighborhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyber-space issues</td>
<td>Internet mapping services direct visitors to the private side of house, potentially clogging residential streets.</td>
<td>Museum’s prohibition against discussing street addresses confuses Internet-savvy patrons.</td>
<td>House establishing separate website presence after Oregon Gardens receivership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access issues</td>
<td>Original driveway is covered in grass; driveway to carport allows access to single parking space.</td>
<td>House and shuttle van pose accessibility limitations. Interpretive area at museum.</td>
<td>Sidewalk around to private side of house. Original owner able to negotiate interior with wheelchair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links to other sites</td>
<td>House is within walking distance of the Oberlin College campus.</td>
<td>House is 10-minute shuttle van drive from Currier Art Museum. Nearby Kalil residence attracts some Wright pilgrims.</td>
<td>House is co-located with 80-acre Oregon Gardens and future garden-themed low-rise hotel.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **None**
- Vacation rental

- Could put in temporary ramps for wheelchair users.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4: Case study results, historical discourses</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>House Museum: Private Land</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welzheim-DJohnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relation to Wright</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Croquet ball&quot; facade board may indicate business relationship between Wright and a spring green, W. woodturning business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relation to local history/owning group</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique relationship to college, art department, and museum. Site sometimes required to comply with college labor agreements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relation to organic design</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening hours allows visiting public to experience site as a home; sometime used as overnight accommodation for college VIPs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relation to neighborhood / city planning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner in 1960s developed surrounding lands, encroaching on house site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relation to preservation groups</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Friends&quot; organization established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Museum: Private Land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weltzheimer-Johnson</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zoning effects</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listed on NRHP? Historic district?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relation to neighborhood</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relation to local gov'ts</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relation to arts/education efforts</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schwartz</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No zoning variance required with use as rental.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Case study results, political discourses
Table 6: Case study results, economic discourses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tourism appeal</th>
<th>Local business links</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Taxes (eg. sales, payroll, hotel)</th>
<th>Property values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>House Museum: Private Land</strong></td>
<td>Guests at Penfield vacation rental often daytrip to site; temporary Cleveland art museum closure may generate more visitation to Oberlin.</td>
<td>Catered events are rarely held, but never directly on site; website advertises B&amp;B package including house tour.</td>
<td>Gift shop at Currier museum.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>House Museum: Public Land</strong></td>
<td>Approximately 4,000 people annually.</td>
<td>Volunteer labor only; executive director, two part-time docent coordinators; tour guides.</td>
<td>Small gift sales area in converted tool shed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>House Museum: Relocated</strong></td>
<td>Anecdotally draws people to visit the state of Alabama.</td>
<td>City currently looking to hire full-time site administrator; other city museums have only part-time curators.</td>
<td>1-cent sales tax paid for $600,000 house restoration.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vacation rental</strong></td>
<td>About 200 nights in 2005.</td>
<td>One full-time house manager; part of Oberlin Art Dept.; volunteer docents.</td>
<td>No gift shop on house site; Oregon Garden gift shop does sell Wright-related goods, but money does not go to house.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **House Museum: Private Land** | Approximately 4,000 people annually. | One full-time house manager, part of Oberlin Art Dept.; volunteer docents. | Gift shop at Currier museum. |  |
| **House Museum: Public Land** | 13,000 to 14,000 visitors since opening in 2001. | Volunteer labor only; executive director, two part-time docent coordinators; tour guides. | Small gift sales area in converted tool shed. |  |
| **House Museum: Relocated** | Anecdotally draws people to visit the state of Alabama. | City currently looking to hire full-time site administrator; other city museums have only part-time curators. | 1-cent sales tax paid for $600,000 house restoration. |  |
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ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Cultural landscape as a preservation tool

Viewed as part of a cultural landscape, the lowly Usonian house becomes a virtual Tower of Babel. By listening to the discourses surrounding it, some foreign and some familiar, we are better able to understand not only what it represents from the past, but how it influences the present.

Preservationists should not only use the concept of cultural landscape in their assessment of historical significance, but in their efforts to make the preservation of a given house more relevant to others.

Cultural landscape, while it potentially enriches the professional lives of preservationists, might too easily be labeled an unnecessarily intellectual exercise in the dirty day-to-day work of preservation. To address this concern, the preceding application of cultural landscape to a population of Usonian houses was focused on helping others identify ways in which they could work—and, indeed, may already be working—with educational, governmental, business and other entities to better promote and preserve a 20th century residential property. Identifying successful programming and practices in one Usonian house may also encourage similar efforts on other sites, whether Usonian or not.

Yet, even as an unseen foundation for preservation work, the framework of a cultural landscape significantly and practically reveals the act of preservation as a process—an ongoing discourse among various “communities.” Many of the sources interviewed for these case studies spoke of the challenge of maintaining community interest and visitation beyond the initial acquisition, protection and preservation of a property. After crystallizing around the cause of saving a threatened structure, however, public interest and focus predictably falls away and moves on to other subjects. Preservationists recognize that, once a building is “preserved,” problems of funding and maintenance are never-ending.
By placing each community's participation in a larger yet still locally relevant context, cultural landscape may be a tool through which the active interest of historical, arts, educational, political, business, and other leaders might be engaged and maintained. Granted, the concept might require translation into the language and terminology of each community. Business leaders, for example, might still be more interested in spreadsheets and economic data, while arts and education leaders might be more receptive to appeals made in less quantifiable terms. Preservationists should not hesitate to place their conversations with each community within the context of a larger cultural landscape, so that each community might be better made to understand the real and continuous effects of their efforts—and their roles within a larger confederation of communities, centered on the process of preserving an architectural object.

Best practices

By exploring the practices of eight organizations engaged in the preservation of Usonian houses, viewing each house as a focus of multiple discourses on a cultural landscape, the following 10 recommendations were generated:

Get technical. Volunteers at the Pope-Leighey house in Mount Vernon, Virginia, recognized that a significant number of visitors wanted information more detailed than what was available on their regular house tour. The resulting Tech Tour program, offered monthly, not only serves an audience of passionate Wright enthusiasts, but also architects, builders, and other professionals who may be able to implement some of Wright's tenets in their own work. The American Institute of Architects even offers its members continuing education credits for participating in the program.

Experiences preferred. Communicating all aspects of a Wright site—including Wright's history, design principles, client relationships, use of materials—is a difficult task for tour guides, particularly given the lack of interpretive space at most Usonian sites. Visitors are usually left with a limited time, time that is highly structured within a tour setting. Where possible, visitors should be
allowed unstructured time to experience house at all times of day and season. The manager of the Weltzheimer-Johnson house, for example, opens the house weekly as a study space for Oberlin College students and professors, and for the visiting public. She also plans to open the house evening hours once or twice a week. Vacation rental properties, while perhaps lacking chances to communicate in-depth information about Wright, past owners, or local history, do provide visitors with unparalleled opportunity to directly experience the advantages and disadvantages of Wright’s designs.

**Put your house on tour.** Participate in or create historic house/site tours, whether themed on local history, arts, or architecture. The manager of the Weltzheimer-Johnson house, for example, plans to enter the site in an Oberlin-area tour of modernist 20th century houses. Managers at the Gordon house are actively pursuing partnerships with a Portland, Oregon-area preservationist organization.

**Check the maps.** Magazines, books and Internet resources may all purport to direct visitors to historical sites. When possible, site managers should validate the accuracy of these directions, and ask for editorial changes as appropriate. In the case of the Weltzheimer-Johnson house, some World Wide Web mapping services are confused by a street constructed in the 1960s, and direct visitors to the “wrong” side of the Usonian house. One possible solution lies not with technology, but with the postal service: Revert to the house’s original, 1948 street address.

**Look for a sign.** Signage, a seemingly pedestrian element on the landscape, is perhaps the most important means of communicating the ownership and purpose of a preserved property. In the case of most preserved Usonians, an essential piece of information is the affiliation with the Frank Lloyd Wright brand name. Staff at the Pope-Leighey house report an increase in visitor traffic following the installation of a highway signage. Although it is not technically on campus, the Weltzheimer-Johnson house is identified with signage similar in design to that of all Oberlin College facilities. In the city of Florence, Alabama, the Rosenbaum house is labeled with a sign that identifies
it as municipal property, although “Frank Lloyd Wright’s Rosenbaum House” notably fails to explicitly mention its function as a museum.

**Make your preservation someone else’s business.** Regardless of whether a property is a house museum or vacation rental, make efforts to communicate its presence as an economic advantage for the community. Seek connections to local service providers, including groundskeepers and custodians, caterers and equipment rental companies, innkeepers and hoteliers, and events planners—people who can leverage a historic property to bring real jobs and real dollars into a community. Staff at the Pope-Leighey house regularly attend the meetings of area chambers of commerce, tourism and visitor bureaus, and other business-centered organizations. Where possible, attempt to quantify other economic benefits, such as sales, salaries, and hotel nights stayed, a house may generate for a community. Make sure that local businesses know you’re sending them business, too. The respective owners of the vacation rental Schwartz and Haynes houses recommend area restaurants and other venues to their guests.

**Look for other interpretations.** As a historic site, a house can help tell the story of its architect, its owners, and its community. Every year, the Pope-Leighey house features a “Christmas during World War II” theme, brought to life with some of the original owner’s possessions. The Gordon house uses its interpretative target date of 1964 as inspiration for an annual classic car show; and its original owner’s interest in weaving as impetus for a number of textile arts events. As part of a system of municipal museums, the Rosenbaum house seems ideally situated to help visitors understand the Florence, Alabama area from pre-history to present-day. The story of the original owners suggests other thematic possibilities for interpreting the mid-20th century, including: the experience of Jewish people in the South, the evolution of the movie-theater business, and the role of the Tennessee Valley Authority in developing the Muscle Shoals region.

**Be a good neighbor.** Before converting the property into a vacation rental, the new owners of the Schwartz house made sure to have the neighbors over for drinks to make introductions and to
discuss their intentions. The manager of Oberlin College’s Weltzheimer-Johnson house conducts an annual “neighborhood appreciation day,” complete with lawn games inspired by the house’s croquet-ball fascia boards. Curators at the Currier Museum of Art’s Zimmerman house take pains to ask patrons not to disturb the owners of nearby homes, including those of a nearby Wright-designed private residence. Some volunteer docents even live in the same neighborhood as the Zimmerman house, and are able to monitor the property outside of tour hours.

Get with the Wright people. Networking with organizations such as the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation and Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy provides not only expert and professional resources, but also potential exposure to groups of card-carrying Wright enthusiasts. Many sites administrators exchange brochures, newsletters, and other information, to market their properties by word-of-docent.

Make your efforts public. A historic house should be listed on local and national rolls of historic places. Such designations often carry with them variously effective protections against demolition or alteration. Most other strategies involve donating certain rights or the property itself to a public or non-profit entity. These include: donating the property to the public as a park (Kraus house); donating the property to a non-profit entity such as a school (Weltzheimer-Johnson house), museum (Zimmerman house), or preservation group (Pope-Leighey house); and selling the property to a government (Rosenbaum house); and establishing a preservation easement (Gordon house).

Future research

This research effort was intended to create an intellectual framework upon which small-scale historic preservation efforts could be based, as well as to generate a set of recommended practices for such projects. Given this focus on stakeholder experiences and applications, future research could focus on implementing some of these practices in maintenance, management and preservation of a given residential property. Ideally, such a structure would be one of the Wright Usonian. However, these
practices should also be applicable to other smaller 20th century residences, whether or not designed by Wright.

This recommendation reflects the idea that discursive analysis carries an inherent call to action, that by identifying the geographic, historical, political, and economic forces at work in and on a site, one can better seek to focus those forces toward a particular objective. Examples of potential candidate properties range from the organic architecture of Wrightian apprentices Bruce Goff and Jack Howe, to the sleeker designs of his contemporaries such as Mies van der Rohe, to designs intended for mass production such as the Lustron-brand prefabricated metal houses of the late 1940s.

Any site-specific focus should focus on generating quantifiable data regarding the various ways in which a property might be valued by a community, particularly in terms of economic valuation. Underlying research questions this thesis was intended to answer, regarding such economic factors as property taxes, sales taxes, and job creation, were in the end addressed only briefly and anecdotally. In retrospect, the survey of eight cases did not seem to easily lend itself to direct comparisons of locally determined economic values, nor do the small scales involved—house, neighborhood, city—generate levels of economic activity that are readily and routinely captured as matter of public record. A site-specific effort might include, then, active work on site and over time, surveying people regarding their economic activities related to their visits. Data regarding appraised, assessed, and market values of a property might also be more readily generated—and made more relevant—comparisons to valuations of surrounding properties, or other properties within a neighborhood or municipality.

The two most probably variable factors in future applications of this research are those of location and historical significance, the former as it affects available valuations, funding, and resources; and the latter a function of the relative historical importance of a building’s designer. Whether a given architect’s work is celebrated nationally, recognized regionally, or noted only
locally, however, it should be possible to build a preservation effort upon a foundation of cultural landscape.

By focusing on a specific site or sites, and resolving further discussions of economic and historical valuations, further research regarding the applications of cultural landscape to house preservation might also be expected to generate examples of how best to translate cultural landscape to differing stakeholder communities. Potential products could include slide presentations, charts, and other tools used to communicate cultural landscape concepts to various preservation audiences engaged in historical, political, and economic discourses.

Looking for Usonia

Related to the idea that preservation is a process, the house-as-preserved-object can itself be seen as a catalyst for change. At first, the idea seems contradictory to the preservationist’s usual objective. An object worthy of preservation, it is assumed, should remain unchanged. Once, however, the preserved object is revealed to lay within the context a cultural landscape, the object can be seen as ever-changing; in constant dialogue between past and present, economic and political, even the physical and metaphysical. The idea of an unchanging object is one that is built on sand.

Even practically minded preservationists, then, would do well to actively engage in the various discourses identified in this research, and to attempt to make these conversations more harmonious with one another. Such harmony, however, requires that everyone sing from the proverbial same sheet of music. The preservationist’s role, always one part impresario and one part conductor, must expand to include that of composer.

Rather than stand as cold and quiet requiems to the memory of Frank Lloyd Wright and his clients, or one-note fragments of some larger, Lost Broadacre Symphony, Usonian houses are best regarded as jazz compositions, full of interwoven themes and improvised techniques, music to be made in the moment and of the moment. Educational and interpretative programming, economic
development and partnerships, and the active involvement of diverse stakeholders, can all be orchestrated to focus attention on the future of Usonia. In a sense, each Usonian house can be seen as generating a cultural neighborhood, variations on themes first established by Wright, but resonating to present-day. Listen, and the questions can be heard: Where is democracy to be found in our architecture and our city planning? Where is there affordable housing to be found for American families? Where are there environmentally responsible means and methods of construction? Where is Usonia?
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