



SHOW-ME
Homes



The Frank Lloyd Wright home in Kirkwood is a prime example of the architect's style incorporating organic architecture and a bond between site and structure. The home is situated in a thicket of persimmon trees.

Gateway TO WRIGHT

A Frank Lloyd Wright home showcases organic architecture in St. Louis.

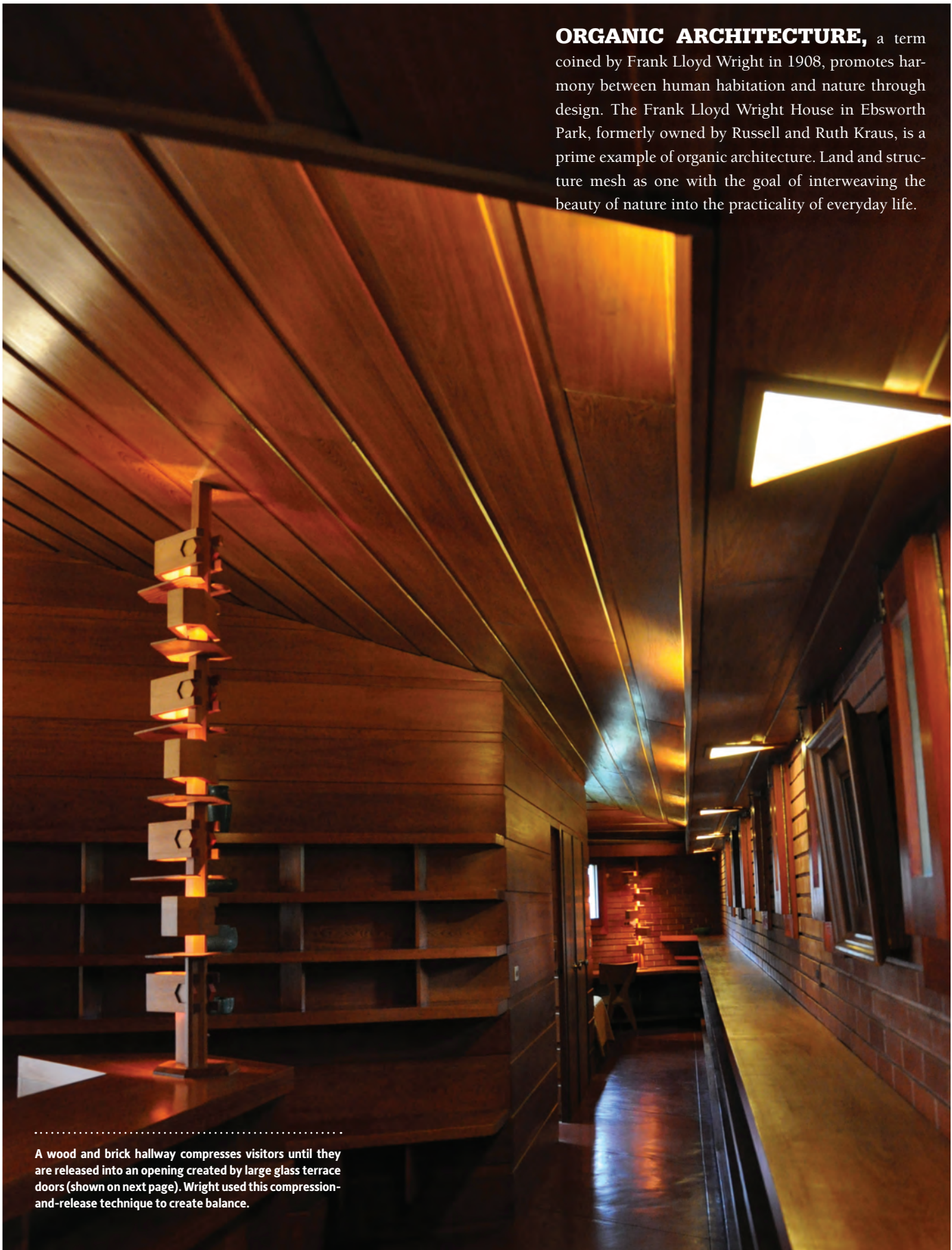
Although the former owner, Russell Kraus, had Wright's original blueprints, he was never able to carry out plans for the gate. A year ago, the home's nonprofit manager, using Wright's original design, had the gate built and installed.



STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHEREE K. NIELSEN



ORGANIC ARCHITECTURE, a term coined by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1908, promotes harmony between human habitation and nature through design. The Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park, formerly owned by Russell and Ruth Kraus, is a prime example of organic architecture. Land and structure mesh as one with the goal of interweaving the beauty of nature into the practicality of everyday life.



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A wood and brick hallway compresses visitors until they are released into an opening created by large glass terrace doors (shown on next page). Wright used this compression-and-release technique to create balance.



Wright took inspiration from Japanese design with this table and chair set. The home's former owner was a stained glass artist, and he designed the terrace doors.

Horizontality, simplicity, and monumentality are three architectural principles that inspired Wright during visits to Japan. Evident in the home's rake joints, the brick's recessed mortar emphasizes the horizontal line of the home. "Wright envisioned the structure paralleling and nestling into the earth," says Joanne Kohn, board chairman for the home.

Around the late 1930s, Wright started designing Usonian homes. These were small, one-story dwellings with radiant-floor heating, flat roofs, and motor courts of natural materials for those of modest or middle income.

After World War II, Russell, a multi-faceted artist, began searching for a suburban home to live in with his wife, Ruth. He purchased a 3.6-acre tract with a persimmon grove and an additional half-acre tract within Kirkwood city limits. After the initial land purchases, Russell considered several architects to design his home. His search ended when he read in *The Washington Star* that newspaperman Loren Pope commissioned Frank Lloyd Wright to design and build a home in Falls Church, Virginia, for the meager price of \$3,500. (Pope also received a loan from the *Star* for the

exact amount.) This went against the popular belief that Wright was a rich man's architect.

With high hopes, Russell penned a letter to Wright stating, "I now feel like a man



A hexagon-shaped light table, believed to be the only one designed by Wright, was used for cutting stained glass.

who suddenly holds in his embrace the woman who for years he could only worship from afar."

He received an acceptance response. This would be the first of five Wright-designed Missouri buildings. Russell signed a contract

to purchase the home, but he spent considerably more than the original price of \$3,500. The final completion amount is unknown.

Keeping Russell's needs in mind, the home's floor plans consisted of two intersecting parallelograms. The equilateral parallelogram (or diamond module) defined the home's geometry with natural building materials, sharply angled bricks, and brick retaining walls.

A strong visual connection between interior and exterior was key in Wright's Usonian homes. Wright and Russell situated the home in the persimmon grove. Terrace doors faced west for tree views and comfortable breezes. Natural tidewater red cypress and brick was used throughout.

Groundbreaking occurred in April 1952, but there were several construction delays. No one could supply the special angled brick for the building corners—until Ruth found an old building in St. Louis with similar products and convinced Alton Brick to make a special mold. Then Russell and Ruth faced more obstacles: a depleted supply of cypress wood, surrounding land getting purchased by others, and illness. Although the couple moved in New Year's Day



FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT AROUND MISSOURI

The master architect *designed several more homes in our state. Some are private residences and are not open for public viewing.*

- **Community Christian Church, open to the public**
4601 Main Street, Kansas City
www.community-christian.org/building.htm
- **Sondern-Adler House, Belleview Avenue, Kansas City**
- **Frank Bott Residence, Briarcliff Road, Kansas City**
- **Theodore A. Pappas House**
Mason Ridge Road, Town and Country

The Krauses used cypress in the home but substituted plyboard for the modular furniture to keep costs down. The dividers in the bookcases align with the lines of the floor plan.

1956, the home's interior would take more than ten years to finish completely, primarily due to financial issues.

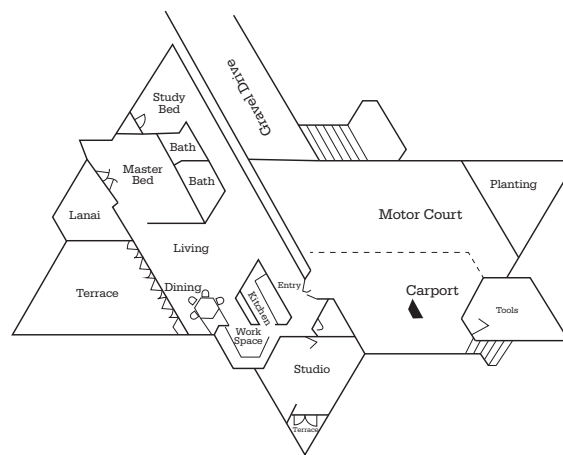
Wright's use of the "compression and release" technique created balance in the home. A narrow cypress and brick hallway welcomes you in the compression stage. Then, when you turn the corner, you are "released" to see artistic glass terrace doors connecting the home's interior to the outdoors.

The concrete red-hued floor gives way to the dominating unit of the parallelogram in the Usonian home. This geometric shape and its components of triangles and hexagons are carried over to the modular furniture as well.

Nothing in Wright's design or concept of interior home-decorating was extraneous. The house itself was the decoration. No extras were needed.

The open living room and central hearth exemplified Wright's idea of family interaction. The adjacent kitchen, in full view of the family room, is perfect for

supervising children. Interior steel reinforcement supports the cantilevered hearth. Interesting patterns from recessed and three-dimensional lamps reflect off the ceiling, creating a soothing ambience. Even the beds



Wright designed the St. Louis home to consist of two intersecting parallelograms. This gave the home a strong geometry to be complemented by organic building materials.

match the unique geometry of the house.

Wright didn't believe in attics, basements, or air conditioning, but he did provide ample storage with two walls of closets in the

master bedroom. Russell waited until Wright's passing in 1959 to install air conditioning.

Ruth passed in 1992, and Russell lived there until 2001. He passed away in 2009. The home, acreage, and contents were purchased by the Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park and donated to St. Louis County, which leased it back to the nonprofit.

The nonprofit manages the house and its restoration. The newest addition is a Cherokee Red iron entrance gate built by Eureka Forge from Wright's original plans.

Tours are available Wednesdays through Sundays by appointment. The mission and vision of the Frank Lloyd Wright House is to preserve the home and grounds and serve as an educational tool relating to Wright's architecture and design.

With no space wasted and seamless designs, many regard Wright as a green architect and a man before his time.

www.ebsworthpark.org
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