

SPOTLIGHT ON

Laurent House, Rockford

WRIGHT OF WAY: ILLINOIS' FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT TRAIL

By Kit Bernardi

Just as RV campers love to live surrounded by nature's beauty, so did renowned Prairie Style architect Frank Lloyd Wright. On Illinois' Frank Lloyd Wright Trail, you can learn about the American architect and how nature inspired his buildings and interior designs. This roughly 200-mile architectural trail incorporates 13 Wright-designed homes and public buildings open for public tours, some of which are National Historic Landmarks and considered the most significant buildings during his seven-decade career.

A pleasant mix of highway and two-lane roads, Illinois' Frank Lloyd Wright Trail stretches from the city of Rockford near the Wisconsin-Illinois border to Springfield, Illinois, the state's capital city.

In addition to the Wright sites, the route's cities and small towns brim with Abraham Lincoln history, Route 66 lore, and Midwest rural charm. From north to south, these key buildings on Illinois' Frank Lloyd Wright Trail illustrate the evolution of his architectural designs.

Laurent House, Rockford

The only solar hemicycle home in Illinois and one of only a few worldwide, this preserved, single-level residence of Kenneth and Phyllis Laurent is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Wright was 85 years old in 1952 when the crescent-shaped house was completed for military veteran Laurent who used a wheelchair.

Visionary for its time, Wright's accessible Usonian home has six rooms. On weekends, guided tours highlight the fish pond, carport, banquettes, hassocks tucked under geometric-shaped tables, and radiant-heated, poured concrete floors. A 50-foot curved window wall frames tranquil woodland views.

Frederick C. Robie House, Chicago

Completed in 1910, Robie House is located in the Hyde Park neighborhood and is Wright's Prairie style masterpiece which significantly influenced 20th century modern architectural design.

Tour guides lead visitors through the impeccably restored, sprawling home's entry hall, living room, dining room, children's playroom, kitchen, guest bedroom and master suite. The 175 iridescent, leaded art-glass windows and doors allow plentiful natural light in while also shielding the rooms' interiors from street views. The steel-beam constructed cantilevered roof stretches twenty feet beyond the exterior's Roman brick walls.

The Rookery Building Lobby, Chicago

In 1905, early in his career, Wright redesigned the lobby of one of Chicago's first skyscrapers called The Rookery Building. Constructed in 1888, the brick structure is 11 stories.

Considered one of Wright's most dramatic interiors, the white marble and a clear glass roof transformed the space into a light court.

Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio, Oak Park

The architect's Oak Park home and studio is 11 miles west of downtown Chicago, and anchors the Frank Lloyd Wright Historic District, named for having the world's single greatest concentration of residences designed by Prairie School architects, all within walking distance of one another. From 1889 to 1909, Wright lived and worked here developing what later became known as the distinctly American architectural design called Prairie Style. Guided tours highlight the style's signature features, such as inglenook recessed fireplaces, open interior spaces composed of low horizontal lines, geometric-patterned art glass and overhanging eaves on low-pitched or flat roofs.

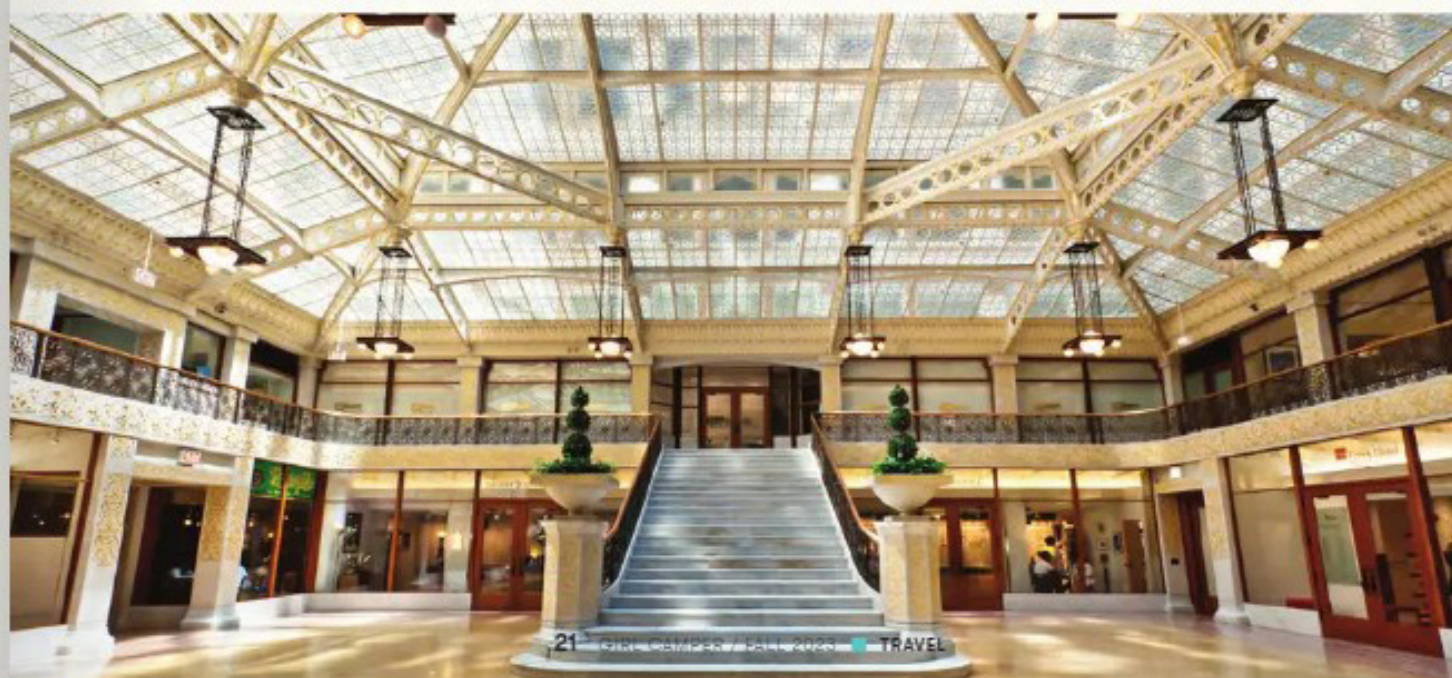
Unity Temple, Oak Park

Constructed of poured concrete in 1908, Unity Temple is considered one of the world's first modern buildings. It's also one of the country's earliest public buildings; the last surviving public building from Wright's Prairie period; part of Oak Park's Frank Lloyd Wright Historic District; and one of the Wright UNESCO World Heritage Listed structures.

Unity Temple Restoration Foundation hosts guided tours, cultural events, concerts, and architecture lectures. Executive Director Heidi Ruehle, says, "Despite it being 115 years old, this modern building's architecture feels contemporary."



Frederick C. Robie House, Chicago



The Rookery Light Court, Chicago



B. Harley House Interior, Kankakee



Dana-Thomas House, Springfield

The striking, restored house of worship is half religious sanctuary, half secular social community space. From the outside, it looks like intersecting concrete cubes with decorative piers framing high windows all capped by an extended, flat roof.

B. Harley-Bradley House, Kankakee

This home on the Kankakee River's banks is called Wright's "first Prairie House design," according to Robert Bohlmann, executive director of Wright in Kankakee. "Finished in 1901, it revolutionized American architecture," he says. "Wright's long, low, horizontal building design that seemed to grow up from its site was unlike anything construction crews had ever built before."

The two-story home's design elements soon became integral to Prairie Style, with bands of geometric art glass casement windows framing panoramic views and clever, space-saving built-in cabinetry.

Dana-Thomas House, Springfield

Like a time capsule, this 35-room residence showcases original Prairie Style architectural and interior design elements that Wright created in 1902 specifically for this building.



Arthur B. Heurtley House, Oak Park

Springfield socialite, suffragette, and education advocate Susan Lawrence Dana and her mother Mary hired Wright to remodel their Italianate home. They put no budgetary constraints on the young, upstart architect. Jennifer Caldwell from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, which maintains the home, says, "This was an early project in Wright's portfolio, so you can see throughout the home how he is challenging himself and experimenting with different design elements while keeping in mind that the owners wanted to open their space up to the community." Wright designed more than 100 pieces of custom furniture and 550 original art glass elements including windows, doors, lamps, and lay light panels, you can still see today.

RESOURCES

For Wright-centric, self-guided Illinois regional road trip itineraries and campgrounds near Wright sites, visit enjoyillinois.com. You can also find information on the Frank Lloyd Wright Trust website.