

NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM

blueprints



Volume XXIV, No. 3 Summer 2006



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the world
we build
for ourselves—**

**from our homes,
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in architecture, design, engineering,
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Frank Lloyd Wright's Tower on the Prairie

THE WORD "GENIUS" IS OFTEN USED TOO casually, but it seems to be quite legitimately applied to Frank Lloyd Wright. In a career spanning nearly three quarters of a century, Wright was at the vanguard of dramatic theoretical, technological, and stylistic shifts in architecture—not just once, but several times. While he designed buildings all across the country and even overseas, he maintained a strong affinity for the vast American prairie, where he was born and spent most of his life. Understandably, therefore, many of Wright's most famous buildings were insistently horizontal, reflecting the broad and relatively flat expanse of the Midwestern terrain.

One striking exception to that rule is the Price Tower, in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, completed 50 years ago and recently restored to its full glory. It is Wright's only true skyscraper that was actually executed (the S.C. Johnson Research Tower in Racine, Wisconsin, seems too small to qualify for that term, and Wright's proposed Mile-High Skyscraper remains an unbuilt fantasy, though I would not be surprised to see an equally tall structure under way in Dubai any day now).

The Price Tower is unique not only within Wright's oeuvre of completed works, but also in the history of tall buildings. A masterful composition of vertical and horizontal elements, it is a soaring form that nonetheless manages to seem firmly rooted to the land. It stands as a rebuke to the dominant threads in the history of modern skyscrapers—richly colored, textured, and faceted, with a dynamic, pinwheel plan, the tower contrasts sharply with the boxy International Style skyscrapers that punctuate most American skylines. In a sense, it represents the road not taken in the design of modern towers.

This unusual and fascinating building is the subject of an exhibition titled *Prairie Skyscraper: Frank Lloyd Wright's Price Tower*, which is on view at the National Building Museum through September 17. Organized by the Price Tower Arts Center, which owns—and occupies part of—the building, the exhibition delves into the history of the tower's design. It includes drawings, photographs, original furniture, correspondence between Wright and his client, and samples of the building's architectural ornament. The exhibition itself was designed by the firm of Zaha Hadid Architects, which has also designed a proposed addition to the Price Tower Arts Center. Both in the exhibition and in the proposed expansion, Hadid's characteristic sharp angles and dynamic forms masterfully play off of the geometry of the original building.

I want to thank the sponsors who made the presentation of the exhibition at the National Building Museum possible. The Copper Development Association is our lead sponsor, and there's a good reason for the association's enthusiasm for the show: much of the Price Tower's distinct character derives from the beautiful green patina of the copper panels and louvers that line its façades. We also received major support from Mr. C.J. Silas of Bartlesville, who is chairman of the board of the Price Tower Arts Center. Finally, we are grateful to Restore Media, LLC for its sponsorship of a private opening reception for the show.

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Chase W. Rynd

Protecting the Wright Legacy

I recently had the opportunity to serve as a member of the team that reviewed the operations of the Frank Lloyd Wright Preservation Trust for renewal of its accreditation by the American Association of Museums. The trust manages Wright's Home and Studio in Oak Park, Illinois, and the famed Frederick C. Robie House on the University of Chicago campus, both of which are National Historic Landmarks that are open to the public.

Participation in accreditation visits to other institutions is always an enlightening experience for museum professionals. Through such activities, I and the Museum overall establish and strengthen connections with other organizations that often prove valuable in our efforts to organize engaging exhibitions and programs.

Chase W. Rynd

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The Summer of Wright

The *Prairie Skyscraper* exhibition is one element in a series of initiatives at the National Building Museum that we have grouped together under the heading “The Summer of Wright.” Lectures, films, and family activities addressing Wrightian themes complement the exhibition. I encourage you to check the Museum’s website or the monthly Calendar of Events for details regarding this related programming.

This issue of *Blueprints* is another element of “The Summer of Wright.” The Price Tower was designed and built in the 1950s, when Wright was already in his 80s but still working as actively as ever. During this period, even as he was focusing much of his energy on high-profile public and institutional projects such as the Guggenheim Museum and the Marin County Government Center, Wright never stopped designing single-family houses. In this issue you will find articles related to several of Wright’s residential works, focusing on two of the three private houses he designed for the Washington area.



Included is an interview with Loren Pope, who commissioned Wright to design a modest structure now known as the Pope-Leighey House. Pope, who is now 96, clearly recalls many details about the design and construction process and his relationship with Wright. The second major piece is an article about the relatively little-known Marden House, which was designed for an extraordinary Washington couple and is now owned by AOL co-founder James Kimsey, who was also interviewed for this issue. A short, first-hand piece by Avery Faulker, a Washington-area architect whose grandparents commissioned one of Wright’s most famous houses, rounds out the focus on the residential work of the man many people consider to be the greatest American architect in history. •

top / Price Tower at night.
© Christian M. Korab/ Korab Photo, 2003.
Courtesy of Price Tower Arts Center.

right / Price Tower commissary table and stools, 1956.
Courtesy of Price Tower Arts Center.



Chase W. Rynd
Executive Director

The Pope-Leighey House

An Interview with Loren Pope

by Steven M. Reiss, AIA

IN 1939, A YOUNG JOURNALIST NAMED LOREN POPE wrote a three-page letter to Frank Lloyd Wright asking him to design a house for his family. Pope said that he had one-and-a-third acres of land in Falls Church, Virginia, and could afford to spend \$5,000. Wright accepted the job, and went on to create a house that was later praised by Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., son of the couple who commissioned Wright's famous Fallingwater, as the architect's "greatest legacy to the nation." It was one of Wright's first "Usonian" houses, his vision of affordable living for the "family of moderate income."

In the 65 years since its completion, the Pope-Leighey House—named after its two private owners—has been dismantled and moved twice, once to avoid the construction of Interstate 66 and once because of subsurface soil problems, yet it still looks as contemporary and welcoming as it did when the Popes moved in, in March 1941. It now stands on a wooded site ten miles south of Old Town Alexandria, on a 2,000-acre estate once owned by George Washington.

The story of the design, construction and lasting legacy of the Pope-Leighey House is one of a confluence of the lives of two people, 50 years apart in age, but kindred spirits with a shared philosophy of life. Loren Pope fit the profile of the perfect Wright client: creative, searching for truth, and someone who had already read Wright's *An Autobiography*.

Wright was 72 years old, experiencing a renaissance of recognition and significant commissions as he entered the most prolific period of his career, having recently completed the Jacobs House, Fallingwater, and the Johnson Wax Administration Building, to name a few. Pope was 28 years old, newly married and living above Ware's Drugstore in Falls Church, Virginia.



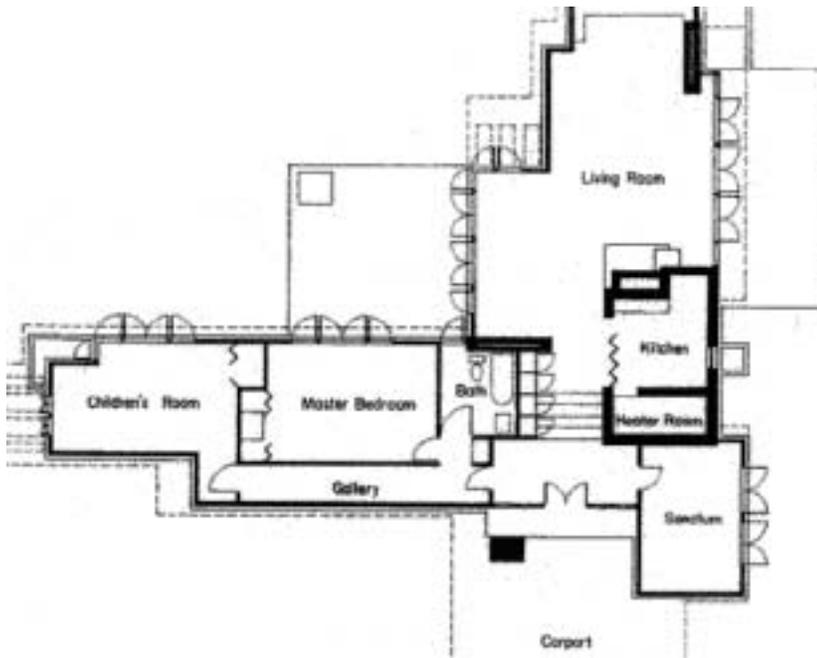
Loren Pope in front of the Pope-Leighey House. Photo courtesy of Loren Pope.

Today, Loren Pope is 96 years old and can vividly recall the events leading up to his first meeting with Wright, the euphoria of watching the master develop his design, a construction process that attracted curious visitors from around the area and, most importantly, his life-long relationship with Wright, as well as with Gordon Chadwick, the Taliesin apprentice assigned to the project, and Howard Rickert, the young Vienna, Virginia, carpenter who constructed the house.

I recently met with Loren to talk about his house.

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Steven Reiss, AIA, coordinates the monthly technical tours of the Pope-Leighey House and is a former chairman of HNTB Architecture.



Floor plan of the Pope-Leighey House.
Courtesy of Woodlawn Plantation.

Steven Reiss: How did you first hear about Frank Lloyd Wright?

Loren Pope: I was working at my first newspaper job for the *Washington Evening Star* and just out of college, when my boss suggested I look up a kindred maverick thinker and architect, Frank Lloyd Wright. I did some initial research and found Wright's Wasmuth papers. The sepia tone of the drawings did not appeal to me so I didn't do any further reading. In January 1938, a *Time* magazine article again sparked my interest in Wright and his recently published *An Autobiography*. I borrowed the book from the library, returned it the next day, bought my own copy and soaked up every chapter two and three times before going on to the next. Long before the book was finished, the light had become dazzling and I was a true believer. From *An Autobiography* on, my bride and I stopped thinking about the picket-fence Cape Cod we had initially planned to build.

SR: Do you remember the first time you met him?

LP: Later in 1938, Wright was in D.C. to discuss his design of Crystal Heights, a complex [never built] which would have included the largest building in the District. He gave a presentation to the Association of Federal Architects at the Hay-Adams Hotel. I went with my friend Ed Rowan, who headed up the New Deal

art program, and our wives. After Wright's speech I gathered up the nerve to ask if he might someday consider creating a house for me. He replied that he built them only for people like me — "people who deserved them." He added that he never built houses for real estate men or subdividers, of which I was neither.

SR: How did you get up the nerve to write him a letter asking him to design your house?

LP: Faith filters out fear (and some error). I was making the grand sum of \$50 a week working as a copy editor and living above Ware's Drugstore in Falls Church, newly married. With the encouragement and urging of my friend, Ed, I decided that no matter how busy or important, the master would listen to someone who wanted one of his works so much. I wrote and rewrote the letter at least half a dozen times. When I finally dropped it in the mailbox, I felt that I had poured out my heart as best I could and that he would listen to me. I included along with it a map of the site, contours, and trees. It was a letter that no man with a normal ego could ignore.

SR: How did you begin your letter?

LP: "Dear Mr. Wright, There are certain things a man wants during life, and of life. Material things and things of the spirit. The writer has one fervent wish that includes both. It is a house created by you."

SR: And how did Mr. Wright respond?

LP: Every day I would go to the East Falls Church post office. Finally after three weeks I received a buff-colored envelope with a red logo in the corner. Inside was a thin and terse reply. "Dear Loren Pope, Of course I'm ready to give you a house."

SR: Your first meeting with Wright in Taliesin — can you describe it?

LP: Yes, en route I had an exciting bonus. In Madison, Wisconsin, I had an opportunity to see the first Usonian house and the model for mine. It was built for newspaperman Herbert Jacobs. When I walked in the door, the thrill of actually finding myself in the kind of Wright house that I would have given me goose bumps. The floor was red concrete with carpets made of flax, the walls were 11-inch-wide cypress

boards and three-inch-wide pine battens. The doors went around the corners with no supports and the dining and living areas flowed into each other around the brick fireplace. In the flesh it was all warm and inviting, as a dream house should be. A Wright apprentice picked me up at the Jacobs house to take me to Taliesin. When I entered the house, the photographs I'd pored over could not prepare me for the vision of beauty I walked into. Ceiling lines soared. Rich, colorful rugs covered most of the waxed stone floor. There was a fire in the great stone fireplace, Japanese screens in green and gold and elegant Wright-designed furniture. All was warmed in the glow of concealed lighting and bathed in soft music.

I shook the master's hand and greeted Mrs. Wright. Much of the conversation before dinner was about his autobiography. Dinner was served by several of his apprentices and although I am interested in food, I have no recollection of the menu. It seems most of the conversation was about the New Deal. Wright had strong opinions but he was a willing listener and a charming host.

The next morning we had an oatmeal breakfast eaten on Wright-designed china which sat on Wright-designed place mats. After breakfast we walked down to the great drafting room where 30 or more apprentices were working at their drafting tables, drawing and making models of projects. We reached Mr. Wright's drafting table, which was near a large stone fireplace, and there was the top sheet of the plans for my house, labeled "House for Loren Pope, East Falls Church, Virginia."



He described the drawings to me. First the floor plans and how a person coming into the living area would see not wall meeting ceiling but surprisingly, a lacy ribbon of clerestory windows with cutout designs around the top of the whole space. The walls seemed to be only screens, barely separating the inside from the outside. The house was L-shaped with a low brick-paved entry. Outside, a cantilevered carport floated over the driveway. Inside the house on the right were rooms labeled "sanctum" and "workshop" and, to the left, was a long gallery with bedrooms. Straight ahead and down five steps soared the open area of fireplace, dining, and living areas. An open kitchen was off to one side. A line of French doors opened inward, on the right, into an extension of the living room floor. It just flowed out into the grass. The roof floated over the entire space supported by only three brick masses.

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above / Historic photograph of the living and dining areas.
Courtesy of Woodlawn Plantation.

below left / Living area and library of the Pope-Leighey House.
Photo by Steve Reiss.



above / Under-floor heating pipes during construction.
Courtesy of Woodlawn Plantation.

below / Historic photograph of the exterior.
Courtesy of Woodlawn Plantation.

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SR: And your reaction to his sketches?

LP: I thought Mr. Wright was a genius as he described the house to me.

SR: Did he indicate what effect he was trying to achieve with his design?

LP: Years later he was quoted as saying, "What I was aiming for was the sense of a happy, cloudless day."

SR: How did you afford the house?

LP: Every lending agency I went to was afraid of loaning me money for the house. In fact, the retired diplomat who ran the East Falls Church Savings and Loan Association tried to counsel me, "Loren, this house would be a white elephant." My last resort was the *Evening Star*, which financed homes for its employees. The *Star* offered to lend me \$5,700, to be taken out of my pay at \$12 a week.

Around that same time Mr. Wright called to say the house he had shown me would be too expensive and he would have to rework it. That meant the workshop had to come out and the sanctum shrunk.

[Note: The initial size of the house, 1,800 square feet, was eventually reduced to 1,200.]

SR: Tell me about the apprentice that Mr. Wright assigned to your house.

LP: Gordon Chadwick was a 26-year old graduate architect from Princeton who had been working with Mr. Wright as an apprentice for two years. Another Usonian house was to be built at the same time in Baltimore for Joseph Euchtman and both jobs were to be handled by Gordon. I was to provide room and board and give him \$25 a week, half of what I was making. The Usonian houses used no stock materials, so doors, windows and so on had to be made on site. Gordon bought a carload of second-grade red tidewater Cyprus from the Florida everglades so he could pick out the knot-free boards of the same shade for the houses and still save money.

To keep the costs down on the Usonian houses Wright often had his apprentice act as the general contractor. So Gordon also had to get separate contracts for the concrete work, and masonry, the plumbing and electrical work and of course the carpentry.

SR: And who was the house's carpenter?

LP: Howard Rickert from Vienna, Virginia, was the master carpenter who built our house. He was one of the few men who understood what it was all about. After one careful study of the blueprints, he became enthusiastic saying, "This house is logical."

SR: Describe the house.

LP: It is a big small house for a small family. It is L-shaped, one-story on two levels because the lot slopes, with a living room eleven-and-a-half feet high, with a red-colored concrete floor, which also is a radiant heater by virtue of the hot water pipes underneath. The house has brick supporting piers and cypress walls.

For light, ventilation, and decoration, the house has a patterned ribbon of clerestory windows between the top of the wall and the ceiling. You can sit by the fireplace at night and see the stars. There is no paint or plaster, and no masking of any material. The finish, both outside and in, is clear wax, a treatment that complements the beauties of brick and wood. The house gives you a sense of protection, but never of being closed in, and of leading you on beyond where your eyes can see. The honest use of materials satisfies the urge you feel when you think you would like to have a log cabin or a rustic hide-out in the mountains. Altogether, it is a soft, warm symphony of charm.

SR: How did the neighbors react to the house as it was being built?

LP: With curiosity. People would just walk onto the property and watch the construction. Architects would come by and try to pick up any sets of drawings lying around.

SR: How much did the house cost?

LP: About \$7,000, including Wright's fees. [Note: Wright's standard fee was 10 percent of the construction cost.] What we got was an extraordinary house for an ordinary price. And what's more, our house came completely furnished: carpets, furniture, stove and so forth, all for just about the cost of an ordinary one.

SR: What type of contact did you have with Wright during construction? Did he visit the house?

LP: He visited the house several times. During one trip he said that the house was costing me too much and he never asked for the remainder of his fee. He felt it was one of his best Usonian houses and actually wanted to name the house “Touchstone.”

SR: What was it like living in the house?

LP: The house gave us pleasure day and night. Each morning, the big window that took up most of the outside bedroom wall enabled us to enjoy the lawn and the magnificent tulip poplar outside the living room and the woods beyond. The sun would shine through the leaves and the clerestories created dancing patterns of light and shadow as it moved across the walls. Even on a cloudy day the house never looked cold or drab, it was so open, the wood and brick so warm and rich. Just being there simply made us feel fulfilled and happy and proud, day after day. To us, it had a presence and a character.

Dinner became a relaxing time to enjoy with my little family. Then when it got dark we could sit by the fireplace and see the stars, or have coffee outside and enjoy our dramatic Japanese lantern. The whole effect was a lift for our souls.

SR: There are numerous stories about Mr. Wright’s “control” of his projects. Did you experience this with your house?

LP: People often asked if Mr. Wright dictated matters of decor, what kind of dishes we should use or whether we should follow a certain lifestyle. He did not, usually. But there was a case with a magnolia tree I’d planted in front of the carport. Soon it grew above roof level. I was bringing him out to the house. The instant I turned onto our road he spotted the offending magnolia and exclaimed, “What are you trying to do Loren, ruin this place?” So the next day I cut it down.

Another time, I had placed four or five rows of the brick patio outside the dining area, using a 30-inch mason’s level. It was not the most professional of jobs. He looked it over and said, “Loren, use a string.” So I tore out what I had done and



used a string. The next time he came, he approved, especially the square opening I’d made at the outside corner for an azalea.

SR: Why did you move after only six years?

LP: When we sold the house in 1946 to move to a 365-acre farm in Loudon County, our plan was to build a larger Wright house. Mr. Wright came out and picked out the site (of course the most difficult on which to build), but we had cut our ties with the city (and its paychecks) and a Wright house on a farming and free-lance writing income became academic. Years later in 1959 when I did have a steady paycheck, I discussed another design for a house with Mr. Wright who was staying in New York working on the Guggenheim Museum; but Wright simply didn’t live long enough for us to get our wish.

For many years I’ve been away from the house more than I’ve been there, but spiritually I’ve never left the house. Living in the house has affected my whole life. •

above / Pope-Leighey House at dusk.
Courtesy of Woodlawn Plantation.

Loren Pope is completing a book on the Pope-Leighey house which he hopes to publish later this year. Mr. Pope has also recently completed an updated edition of his best-selling book, Colleges That Change Lives: 40 Schools You Should Know About Even If You’re Not a Straight-A Student. A companion publication, Looking Beyond the Ivy League: Finding the College That’s Right for You, has also been published by Mr. Pope.

No Ordinary Clients

The Story of Luis and Ethel Marden

by Martin Moeller

FAMED FOR HIS BRILLIANCE AND ECCENTRICITY, Frank Lloyd Wright seemed to attract clients who were extraordinary in their own right. It would be impossible, of course, to state definitively which of his clients was the most fascinating, but there can be little doubt that Luis and Ethel Marden, of McLean, Virginia, would be prime candidates for that distinction. Anyone lucky enough to have met the Mardens could recount numerous tales of their improbable exploits: how Luis personally discovered the wreck of the infamous H.M.S. Bounty, for instance; or how Ethel set the women's record for underwater diving; or how the two of them fearlessly challenged the academic establishment by declaring that the long-accepted account of Christopher Columbus's first journey to the New World was all wrong, and that he actually made his initial landing far away from where most experts believed.

Luis Marden, who died in 2003 at the age of 90, has been called "the epitome of the Geographic man." The epithet alludes not only to his 64-year career as a writer, photographer, and senior editor with *National Geographic* magazine, but also to his intrepid spirit, his insatiable curiosity, and his vast knowledge spanning a wide range of disciplines.

Born in Chelsea, Massachusetts, to Italian parents, Luis was originally named Annibale Luigi Paragallo. As a teenager, he became proficient in five languages, learned Egyptian hieroglyphics, and wrote a book called *Color Photography for the Miniature Camera*, which may have been the first ever published on the topic of 35mm color photography. He was soon invited to host a radio program about photography, a position that led to his name change—the station owners thought his name was too difficult for his audience to understand (although one wonders now if they simply felt it was too "ethnic" given the

above / Exterior view, with Potomac River at right.

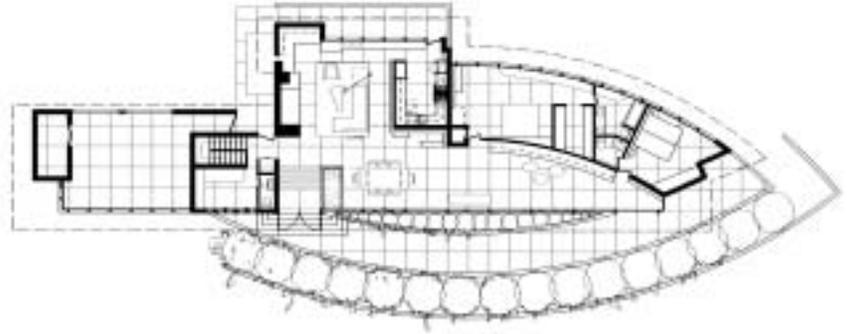
Photo by Robert C. Lautman, courtesy of Lautman Photography.



prejudices of the era), so he chose “Luis,” as a variation on the nickname “Louis,” which he already used, and then picked the surname “Marden” at random out of a telephone book.

Luis moved to Washington in 1934, when he was only 21 years old, to accept a job with *National Geographic*. Despite his youth, he almost immediately had a profound influence on the character and reputation of the magazine, thanks to his introduction of the use of lightweight, 35mm cameras and Kodachrome film, which provided richer color than the film the magazine had used previously. Later, his many notable achievements in various areas brought added luster to the magazine. While exploring with Jacques-Yves Cousteau (who became a life-long friend of the Mardens), Luis developed innovative techniques for underwater photography, and thus introduced the magazine’s readers to images of a heretofore unknown submarine world. He even had the distinction of having both a species of orchid (*Epistephium mardenii*, which he discovered while on assignment in Brazil) and a sea flea (a parasite that lives on lobsters) named after him.

The biography of Luis’s wife, Ethel, who now lives in an assisted-care facility in Arlington, Virginia, is equally remarkable. Born in Texas, she studied both mathematics and English, and as a young woman moved to Washington, where she got a job with the Federal Communications Commission. She was considering pursuing a doctorate in mathematics when she was offered the opportunity to join the National Bureau of Standards to work on the development of one of the earliest true computers. Like her husband, Ethel held a pilot’s license. She also loved sports cars, and in her heyday, she could be seen zipping around the Washington area in her MG (she later owned an Austin Healey and a Jaguar). In an interview conducted as part of the Frank Lloyd Wright Archives’ Oral History Program in 2001, she said, “I admire anybody who has done something for the first time... anyone who has been a pioneer in something.” It is hardly surprising that she and Luis enjoyed each other’s profound respect, nor that both would find themselves drawn to a larger-than-life figure such as Frank Lloyd Wright.



The Mardens married in 1939, just one day after Luis returned from an extended trip to South America, where he had been working on a series of articles for the magazine. They settled into a new apartment, but soon began to discuss the idea of commissioning Wright to design a house for them. In March of 1940, Luis wrote the first of several letters of inquiry to Wright, but the architect was enjoying one of the busiest periods of his career, and even though he soon accepted the commission, it was more than ten years before he was able to begin the design of the Mardens’ house, and nearly twenty years before its construction was complete.

When Luis first wrote to the architect, the Mardens did not yet own a piece of land on which to build their dream house, but in 1944, while fishing along the banks of the Potomac—it was wartime, and they did not have enough gasoline ration coupons to drive to a preferred fishing spot along the Shenandoah—the couple became entranced by a site on the Virginia side of the river just above Little Falls. The next day, they called a real estate agent and learned that a property in that area was for sale, and they bought it shortly thereafter.

Finally, in 1952, Wright produced a design for the Mardens’ house. Because he was so busy with high-profile projects such as the Guggenheim Museum in New York, and advancing age made it increasingly difficult for him to travel, Wright had worked primarily from topographical maps of the Mardens’ property (on his sole visit to the site before construction began, Wright had been unable to reach the main viewpoint because the terrain was too steep for him to negotiate). When the



top / Main floor plan.

Courtesy of Richard Williams Architects.

above / Frank Lloyd Wright examining joints in the concrete block at the Marden House.

Courtesy of the Estate of Mr. & Mrs. Luis Marden.



top / Living area, showing clerestory windows with ornamental screens. Photo by Robert C. Lautman, courtesy of Lautman Photography.

above / View of the main living area, looking toward the fireplace. Photo by Robert C. Lautman, courtesy of Lautman Photography.

Mardens received the architect's initial drawings, Luis was quite displeased with the design. It was apparent that Wright had merely recycled a scheme for one of his somewhat formulaic "football" houses — a term referring to the shape of the plan — and only slightly adapted it to fit the site overlooking the Potomac. In the interview for the Wright Archives, Ethel explained that the design "would have been fine on the prairie . . . but it wasn't suitable at all for our place because it didn't take advantage of the river." This initial design had rooms on one side and a serene pond and a terrace on the other. Ethel added, "[M]y husband was indignant and wrote Mr. Wright and said it was ridiculous to put a placid lily pond above a roaring cataract. And we didn't hear from Mr. Wright for a while after that."

Wright had appointed his apprentice Bob Beharka to oversee the Marden project, and it was he who gingerly presented the clients' specific concerns to the architect. Grudgingly, Wright agreed to eliminate the "placid lily pond," and to honor the Mardens' request for a "straight glass wall" overlooking the river. Once construction was well under way, Wright visited the site again. This time, he was able to reach the viewpoint, and upon doing so, freely admitted, "I had no idea it was so dramatic."

By then however, major changes to the design were no longer possible. Miraculously, despite what would seem to be a significant lapse in the architect's understanding of the site, the completed house nonetheless appears to be well integrated into its landscape and takes excellent advantage of the spectacular views to the rapids below.

In April 1959, as their house was nearing completion, the Mardens traveled to Phoenix for a conference, and while there, Ethel decided to visit Wright's compound at Taliesin West. Wright sent word that he was unable to join Ethel for lunch because of another appointment. Ethel later learned that the appointment had been with his doctor; Wright died on April 9, two months short of his 92nd birthday. The Mardens moved into their house on May 31.

Over the next four decades, Luis and Ethel enjoyed their home to the fullest. They dubbed the house "Fontinalis," a Latin term meaning roughly "at the spring" or "by the stream." Not coincidentally, *Salvelinus fontinalis* is the formal Latin name for the brook trout, which was the Mardens' favorite fish. As much as they loved the house, they rarely entertained, and indeed were reluctant to have visitors in general. Friends of the Mardens generally attribute this to the fact that the house was always so cluttered with diving equipment, books, and countless souvenirs from their explorations. Given Wright's insistence on orderliness, they may have been slightly embarrassed to be using the house so vigorously. As a result of the Mardens' desire for privacy, their house remained one of Wright's lesser-known works.

In 1998, Luis, who had developed Parkinson's Disease, moved to a nursing home. Ethel remained in the house, but she realized that the time was approaching when she and her husband would have to come to terms with the fate of their beloved house once neither of them could live there. In prosperous Washington, there were plenty of people who could afford to buy such a house. But who among these prospects would be willing and able to provide the proper stewardship for such a landmark?

Eugene Smith, a retired banker and executor of the Mardens' estate, was aware that James V. Kimsey, co-founder of the company that became America Online (AOL), had bought the property next door to the Marden house and was building a palatial new residence for himself. When Smith ran into Ted Leonsis, another AOL executive at a party, he took advantage of the opportunity and asked Leonsis to approach Kimsey to see if he had any interest in acquiring the Marden house. Kimsey's positive response came quickly, and in 2000, the purchase went through.

Kimsey knew that he would need a talented and knowledgeable team to oversee the restoration of the Marden house. He asked a number of people for recommendations, and one name kept coming up: Bailey C. Adams, of Adams General Contractors, Inc., in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Adams already knew the house well; he had met Luis Marden a number of years earlier when he was looking for some rare Brazilian rosewood for a project on which he was working. As in so many areas, Luis had expertise in tropical woods, and was able to advise Adams on obtaining the wood he wanted. Kimsey interviewed Adams and concluded that he was the ideal person to handle the complex project. Richard Williams Architects served as preservation and interior architects, while



above / View from the Marden House toward the rapids of the Potomac River.

Photo by Robert C. Lautman, courtesy of Lautman Photography.

below left / Living and dining areas.

Photo by Robert C. Lautman, courtesy of Lautman Photography.

Robin Rose, co-owner of the Cantilever art and design gallery in Bethesda, and Daniel Donnelly, who owns an eponymous shop in Alexandria, consulted on furniture and upholstery.

The results of the team's efforts speak for themselves. The restored house is simultaneously authentic and fresh. Kitchen appliances have been upgraded, and a copper roof replaced the original tar covering, but on the whole, the building has been faithfully restored. Period furniture, though much of it is not original to the house, fits comfortably. The interior is inviting and livable.

Now that the project is finished, Kimsey is making good use of Wright's work as a guesthouse and as an unparalleled venue for entertaining. It is not open to the public, but thanks to Kimsey, everyone can now at least get a glimpse of this residence through photographs such as those that accompany this article, which convey the house's warmth, elegance, and timeless beauty.

Luis Marden supposedly once declared that "One lifetime isn't enough." Fortunately for those who admire the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, however, the Marden house has now embarked on its second life. •



The Marden House: An Interview with James Kimsey



above / Living area, with bookshelves at left.

Photo by Robert C. Lautman, courtesy of Lautman Photography.

Martin Moeller: How did your purchase of the Marden House come about?

James Kimsey: The Marden House is hard by my house. Every morning when I shave I'm looking out my window at that house, which has been a constant reminder that I needed to do something with it. When attorneys for the Mardens approached me to buy the house, Luis had moved into an assisted-living facility, Ethel was still living in the house, and they were both in their nineties. Given the amount of money that a house on the river costs, and given the amenities that were in that house, there was a concern that whoever would buy it wouldn't really live in it, so how would that work? The fact that I happened to live next door, and built a monument to wretched excess, which was my own house, made me the clear and logical buyer for it. So before the [high-tech] bubble burst, I said, "Sure, I'll buy it." "And can Mrs. Marden live in it?," they asked. "Sure," I said.

I never saw the inside of the house until maybe six months to a year after I bought it. I went over to meet Ethel Marden, who I figured to be a very frail woman in her nineties, and instead I met this very robust woman who showed me around, and ended up taking my house manager and me to lunch at the Cosmos Club.

MM: The Mardens themselves were clearly an extraordinary couple – as fascinating as Wright himself. In what ways did the house reflect their character?

JK: I think if you did some kind of Freudian study on the gene pool of Wright's clients, the graphs would look different from those of normal folks. I never met Luis Marden, and I'm sorry that I didn't get to know him a bit, but Ethel is really interesting. She held the women's

underwater diving record at one point. They were buddies with Jacques Cousteau — there's a picture of him that Luis took while diving. Philippe Cousteau, Jacques's grandson, spent a lot of his young childhood in the Marden house.

The house was full of stuff when I walked in for the first time. I could tell that Ethel went to some trouble to tidy it up to greet me, but the place was still packed with stuff. Not a square inch of anything didn't have stuff on it. Now, we have put her husband's picture up, and have some of his possessions still on display, so while it's clearly a monument to Frank Lloyd Wright, I think secondarily it's a monument to the Mardens.

We also kept a lot of Luis's books, so just looking at the library he left, and walking around the house, there is always some little quirk to dig down into. I came across a picture of me in Vietnam — the Mardens had put it in a Frank Lloyd Wright frame. I don't even remember that picture! It's me sitting with an AK-47 reading a *Playboy*. It was 1965. A 41-year-old picture of me — it was rather shocking when I saw it. They had found it somewhere.

It's fascinating to see how this couple lived in this house for almost 50 years — you can really just see how it worked for them.

MM: After you bought the Marden House, were you besieged by preservationists and Wright aficionados eager to tell you what to do with it?

JK: The article in *The Washington Post* [August 21, 2005] made it sound as if I had this Greek chorus behind me, but nobody ever sat me down and lectured me about the house. Some people actually even said they had ideas of how I could change it. But if I renovated and changed it, over time, it would lessen its value — and I don't mean monetary value. It would be a Frank Lloyd Wright house modified to suit my taste. Well, nobody cares about my taste. They all care about Frank Lloyd Wright. So I made a very conscious decision that I should restore it.

This became clear to me when I would go over there and I would say, "Maybe I should turn the garage into a bedroom, or maybe I should take this closet out and put in a window or cut a hole in this wall,"

and there were gasps of horror that I would even contemplate changing a line of a Frank Lloyd Wright work. This was probably a binary decision—either I would restore it faithfully, or I would screw with it and risk the ire of a whole Frank Lloyd Wright cadre. Well, the thing of it was, what’s the point of having a Frank Lloyd Wright house if it’s not a true Frank Lloyd Wright house?

So other than taking off the tar-and-gravel roof and putting the copper roof on, which I think was aesthetically good for me, because that’s what I look at every morning when I shave, there have been very few changes. Friends gave me some cute metal birdhouses for the house, there’s been some general landscaping to brighten it up with flowers, but mostly it’s faithfully restored and I’m very happy with it. Obviously I have added some electronic stuff that Wright couldn’t have conceived of. I put a TV in, but it’s behind a cabinet. We had to find one that fit the cabinetry, which we did.

MM: Were you a Wright fan before you undertook this project?

JK: I certainly knew who Frank Lloyd Wright was, and had a sense that he was the inspiration for Howard Roark in *The Fountainhead*. This guy’s always been kind of fascinating to me, but I wasn’t an addict. I made it a point to go to a couple of exhibitions about Wright’s work—it was kind of interesting to see his stuff. Now I’m beginning to understand the cult that surrounds Frank Lloyd Wright. I am going up this summer sometime to see Fallingwater, which I’ve never seen. I’ve seen the Pope-Leighey House. I did deliberately go to Taliesin West when I was out in Arizona, and I’m glad I did because I spent the whole day there. They were very nice to me, showed me around, and took a lot of time. Proximity has made me appreciate the Marden house, and though I wasn’t involved hands-on in much of the restoration process, I found myself wanting to go over and see it more and more, and put in my two-cents’ worth here and there, but it was really in a delicate mode.

MM: How did you find Bailey Adams, the contractor who oversaw the restoration?

JK: References, word of mouth. A number of people said, “If you’re going to do that, here’s the guy who ought to do it.” I met him, he made a proposal, and clearly he was the most knowledgeable. I think for him it was more than just a job.

MM: How are you using the house, now that the renovation is done? Have you had a chance simply to enjoy it?

JK: I have special dinners over there. I’ve had some quiet time—an hour here and there—and sometimes I’ll be like Squire Worthy and walk the properties. It’s not a consuming passion of mine, but owning a Frank Lloyd Wright house is pretty cool, I have to say. Somebody I know was explaining my life to someone who didn’t know me, and he went through the whole litany of explanations and ended up saying that I have a Frank Lloyd Wright house, and the other guy looked at me and said, “Okay, that does it. Nobody has a Frank Lloyd Wright house!”

Actually the first guest to spend the night there was Patti Austin, the singer, who said it was a Zen experience for her. She lived there for about a week. You do get a different feeling when you’re in that house—certainly different from being in my house. As I’m sure you know, *Taliesin* [the name of Wright’s compound in Wisconsin] is Welsh for “shining brow,” and he loved to build on the brows of hills. The Marden House is sited that way, and it is so arranged as to really bring the river into the house. In pictures, you can see that expanse of glass that sits right on Little Falls, though you really have to see it first-hand to appreciate what Wright did. In short, for me, it’s been a joy, as it was for the Mardens. They had a wine cellar down in the basement with a little plaque on the door that said *Hic habitat felicitas*—“Here resides happiness.” •



above / Living area.
Photo by Robert C. Lautman, courtesy of
Lautman Photography.

“Coonley” and “Wright”



by Avery Coonley Faulkner

Avery Coonley Faulkner is an architect with a long career in the Washington area.

THE AVERY COONLEY HOUSE, in Riverside, Illinois, was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and completed in 1908. The Coonleys, who were my grandparents, had spent considerable time going to architectural exhibitions at the Chicago Art Institute and to libraries before asking Wright to be their architect.

The design process was long but interesting and involved a large residence, a caretaker's house, and a stable with living quarters above. Mr. Wright and my grandfather struggled, at times, over costs, but the architect was creative and my grandmother was clearly impressed with his brilliant and unique approach to space, decoration, lighting, and a host of other issues which took time and money to resolve. The two men referred to one another by their last names: my grandfather was “Coonley” and the architect was “Wright.” This may have been typical for that era in the Midwest.

My grandfather had horses to pull a carriage which was used for many purposes including trips to the train station for the commute to work in Chicago. As the house neared completion, my grandfather telephoned the architect to say that he needed a large carriage step at the front entrance in order for guests to be able to step down from a carriage. At a meeting the next afternoon, Wright said, “Now listen, Coonley, I think you should live in this house for a year and, if at the end of the year you still want the carriage step, I'll design the most beautiful step you've ever seen.” He went on to describe special precast concrete planters that would be included and other amenities. When he finished, my grandfather said, “Let me tell you something, Wright. I want that carriage step now, but if, at the end of the year, I don't like it, I promise I'll have it removed.” Wright left in some anger but, in a few weeks, the drawings for an elaborate arrival step, complete with planters, were delivered and it was constructed.

Avery Coonley waited patiently for exactly a year and then telephoned the architect, saying, “Wright, I think you were right about the step, and I'm ready to tear it out. I just wondered if you'd like to see it before it goes.” Wright took the train to Riverside the next day and pleaded with “Coonley” not to remove it. When Mr. Wright left, my grandfather, who was a hurdler in college, bounded up the steps to the now famous second floor living room with howls of laughter and his first genuine sense of victory! •

above / Coonley House.
Courtesy The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation,
Talesin West, Scottsdale, AZ.

Bridge Basics Recognized by AAM

The National Building Museum's new *Bridge Basics Program Kit*, a self-contained educational curriculum package using bridge design as a tool for learning about math and other subjects, received an honorable mention in the Educational Resources category of the 2006 Museum Publications Design Competition of the American Association of Museums (AAM). The other winners in this category for 2006 were the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Based on the popular *Bridge Basics* program that has been offered at the Museum for a number of years, the kit presents bridges as structural solutions to specific design problems, and introduces students to basic bridge types such as truss, beam, arch, cable-stayed, and suspension. Students work in teams to build model bridges that address hypothetical transportation problems while balancing issues of aesthetics, geography, materials, and cost. The kit contains everything a teacher needs to conduct activities for students in grades five through nine.



The *Bridge Basics Program Kit* is available to educators across the country through the Museum's website, www.nbm.org. The cost is \$110 per kit, with a ten percent discount for teachers. The kit has been produced in partnership with the Construction Industry Round Table.

Museum Hosts 2006 Cherry Blossom Festival

by Sarah Rice

The annual National Cherry Blossom Festival® is a veritable rite of spring, celebrating Washington's famous Japanese cherry trees and their delicate flowers. This past March 25, for the first time, the National Building Museum hosted the opening ceremonies for the festival, as part of an all-day family-oriented event that offered an array of activities based in part on the Museum's popular Origami Architecture programs from previous years. The result was a highly successful festival that drew nearly 6,300 people to the Museum, the fourth highest attendance for a single-day event in the institution's history.

Presented in cooperation with the National Cherry Blossom Festival organization and managed by Linder and Associates, an event planning firm, the program included various design-oriented activities, such as one in which children created miniature Japanese-style gardens. One long-time Museum volunteer reported that this particular program generated an unprecedented number of compliments from excited parents.

The event also attracted a great deal of local media attention. WRC-Channel 4 did a story about the festival on the previous day, and WJLA-Channel 7 had a live video feed from the opening ceremony. Local cable news outlets covered the event extensively, and *The Washington Post* and other print media also ran prominent stories.

The Museum thanks all of the volunteers and participants who made this wonderful family festival possible.



above / National Cherry Blossom Festival® Family Day and Opening Ceremony co-presented at the National Building Museum on Saturday, March 25, 2006. Photo by F.T. Eyre.

by Bryna Lipper

Liquid Stone: Read All About It (in English or French!)



In response to enthusiastic public demand, a catalog based on the Museum's recent exhibition *Liquid Stone: New Architecture in Concrete* has been published by Princeton Architectural Press. Martin Moeller, senior vice president and curator at the National Building Museum, says the catalog is an "exploration of how a common and seemingly banal material—concrete—can be used to create poetic and seductive structures." Moeller served as both the exhibition curator and co-editor for the publication.

The book includes descriptive text, photographs, and drawings of all of the contemporary architectural projects in the exhibition, which ran from June 2004 to January 2006. It also features information about virtually all of the new technologies and products that appeared in the show. In addition, the book contains several essays by prominent historians, architects, and engineers with expertise in concrete design and technology. These essays expand upon the content of a symposium hosted by the School of Architecture at Princeton University in October 2004. Jean-Louis Cohen, of the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University, coordinated the symposium, which was directly inspired by the *Liquid Stone* exhibition. Cohen also co-edited the catalog with Moeller.

The *Liquid Stone* book was published simultaneously in French under the title *Architectures du béton: Nouvelles vagues, nouvelles recherches*, by Editions Le Moniteur press, through a cooperative agreement with Princeton Architectural Press. The French version of the book debuted at the opening of an exhibition called *Bétons: étonnez-vous!* (which roughly translates as "Concrete; Surprise Yourself!") at the Musée des Arts et Métiers in Paris. The French exhibition includes a number of models and material samples that also appeared in *Liquid Stone*, and which are on loan to the Musée from the National Building Museum.

The catalog is available through the Museum Shop. Publication was made possible by funding from Lafarge, the exhibition's sole sponsor.

New Trustees

The newest member of the National Building Museum Board of Trustees is **HOLLIS S. McLOUGHLIN**, who is senior vice president and chief of staff at Freddie Mac (the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation). Prior to joining Freddie Mac, he was chief operating officer of the Hardware Corporation of America, and later, of ISR Solutions. He also served as an assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of the Treasury from 1989 to 1993. A graduate of Harvard College, McLoughlin has served on the boards of the National Gallery of Art, the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation, and the Metropolitan Club of Washington, DC.

The Museum also recently welcomed several new *ex officio* trustees:

DIRK KEMPTHORNE was confirmed as the 49th secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior in May of this year. Before his appointment to the president's Cabinet, Kempthorne was twice elected governor of Idaho. He also served one term in the U.S. Senate, before which he was mayor of the City of Boise.

Also in May, **LURITA ALEXIS DOAN** was confirmed as the 18th administrator of the U.S. General Services Administration, making her the first woman to serve as the agency's chief executive. She was previously president, CEO, and sole owner of a technology company that she founded in 1990.

CHRISTINE MCENTEE became executive vice president/CEO of The American Institute of Architects in February 2006. Formerly CEO of the American College of Cardiology, McEntee also worked with the American Hospital Association. She holds degrees in nursing and health administration.

DAVID L. WINSTEAD was appointed as the commissioner of the Public Buildings Service of the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) on October 3, 2005. Before joining GSA, he was a partner with the law firm of Holland and Knight LLP, and previously served as the State of Maryland's Secretary of Transportation. Winstead holds a bachelor's degree from Denison University, a Master of Business Administration from Columbia University, and a Juris Doctorate from the Catholic University of America.



Hollis S. McLoughlin

Thank You!

The Museum thanks the following individuals, companies, associations and agencies for gifts of \$250 or more received from December 2005 through May 2006. These generous gifts provide essential support for the Museum's exhibitions, education programs, and endowment funds. Some of the contributions listed below are in partial fulfillment of larger pledges.

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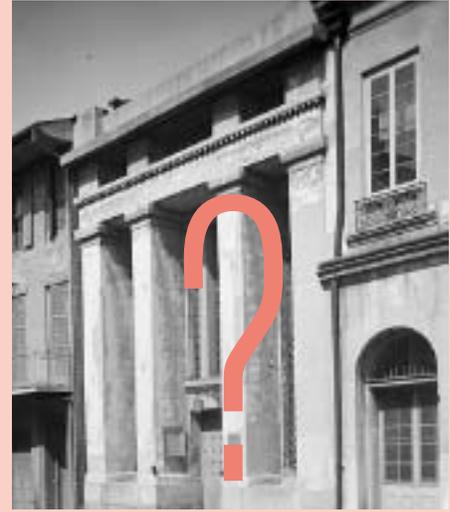
Mystery Building



above / Manhattan Building
 Photo: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Historic American Buildings Survey, HABS ILL. 16-CHIG, 53-2, Harold Allen, photographer

THE MYSTERY BUILDING from the Winter 2005–06 issue was the Manhattan Building, which is actually in Chicago. Designed by William LeBaron Jenney, and completed in 1891, it was one of the earliest tall buildings supported entirely by a steel structural frame. A set of decorative elevator shaft grills from the building, removed during a renovation, is on view in the Museum’s ongoing exhibition *Cityscapes Revealed: Highlights from the Collection*.

The Manhattan Building was correctly identified by: Karla Barber, of Lansing, Michigan; Erin Blake, of Washington, DC; Gregory Boshart, of McLean, Virginia; John Morris Dixon, of Old Greenwich, Connecticut; Wilbert R. Hasbrouck, of Chicago (whose firm worked on the renovation of the Manhattan Building in the 1980s); Eric Jenkins, of Washington, DC; Kyle Johnson, of Brooklyn, New York; Mike Larson and Jerry Maready, of Washington, DC; Lawrence Eric Levine, of New Castle, Delaware; and former National Building Museum staff member Michelle



Rinehart. Two respondents pointed out that critics have not always viewed the building favorably. One (now outdated) edition of *Chicago’s Famous Buildings* dismissed the design of the Manhattan Building as “not particularly impressive,” thanks to the profusion of materials and bays that “produce an effect of disunity.” Current opinions of the structure are generally more favorable.

This issue’s Mystery Building boasts a bold, Greek Revival façade. Can you name the building, its architects, and its location? Send responses to:

Mystery Building, National Building Museum, 401 F Street NW, Washington, DC 20001

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current exhibitions

Prairie Skyscraper: Frank Lloyd Wright's Price Tower

through September 17, 2006

The only true skyscraper designed by Wright that was actually constructed, the Price Tower is a glimmering jewel of a building. The exhibition includes original drawings, fascinating samples of correspondence between Wright and the project's client, furniture, and a large model of the tower.

The Green House: New Directions in Sustainable Architecture and Design

through June 3, 2007

The second in a series of major National Building Museum exhibitions on sustainable design, *The Green House* begins with a full-scale, furnished replica of an environmentally-friendly house. Also featured are photographs and models of exemplary houses and apartment buildings from around the world, plus a resource room with many examples of materials that are both green and attractive.

Cityscapes Revealed: Highlights from the Collection

Long-term

The first exhibition presenting a cross-section of items from the Museum's own collection, including drawings, photographs, material samples, and artifacts from National Historic Landmarks.

Washington: Symbol and City

Long-term

A seminal exhibition about the complex city that the Museum calls home. Spectacular, large-scale historic and contemporary models give visitors an intimate understanding of the city's past and possible future.

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Blueprints is the quarterly journal of the National Building Museum. Subscriptions are a benefit of Museum membership.

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ISSN 0742-0552

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