

Looking for Mr. Wright

**Frank Lloyd Wright's 30-year-old experimental
"Usonian" house is built for the first time.**

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT WAS A designing genius, an architect who was not afraid to experiment with materials and shapes, who merged function with aesthetics, who dared his contemporaries to follow.

His vision has been captured in an exhibition that is now touring the country at selected museums. The main attraction of the show, entitled "In The Realm of Ideas," was a full-scale 1,800-square-foot replica of the experimental "Usonian Automatic House" designed by Wright but never before built.

The house was intended as a home most Americans could afford to own (in the 1950s, it would have sold for \$10,000 to \$20,000, according to Wright) and could be built by most homeowners.

Wright originally designed interlocking



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12" x 18" building blocks handmade at the jobsite, but such cement blocks would be too heavy and cumbersome to move around the country in the tour. Instead, the show's sponsors turned to a unique load-bearing panel whose routed details and architectural coating echo Wright's design, developed by Dryvit Systems, Inc., of West Warwick, RI.

A newspaper account of the house described the Dryvit system this way: "The construction system consists of 4-foot panels made of laminated wafer boards with a polystyrene core and covered with a rich cement-like material on the inside and out. The panels lock together to form the house's walls, floors and ceilings."

Tom Casey, an architect for Taliesin Associated Architects, which is affiliated with the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture in Scottsdale, AZ, said the panels were strong enough to withstand the weight of a 4,000-pound forklift driven over them.

The custom architectural finish was donated by Dryvit while the company's Arizona distributor, Ora Hopper & Son, provided labor and technical supervision for the application.

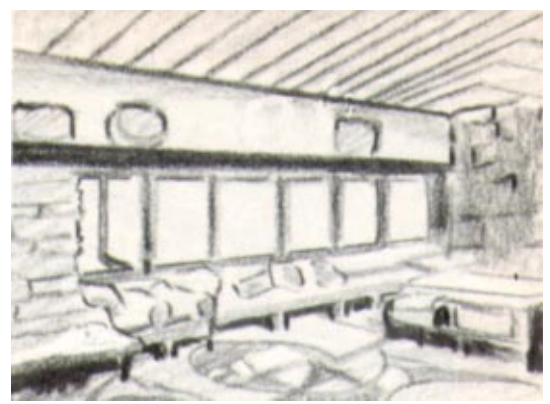
A collapsible version of the Usonian Automatic House ("Usonian" stands for United States of America, and "Automatic" means easy to put together), with its three bedrooms and two baths, cost \$300,000 to construct for the tour. Contemporary style furnishings including furniture, lighting and bathroom and kitchen fixtures, were donated by manufacturers for display in the house.

The primary living areas (kitchen, living room, dining room and terrace) run together without dividing walls for ease of construction and a pleasant openness that focuses attention on a central fireplace. Predominant colors are the mauves, oranges, and browns of the Southwest desert.

Dryvit created a special material and process called the “Frank Lloyd Wright finish,” and donated the 100-percent acrylic chemicals needed to blend with desert sand to create the hand-troweled finish.

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When the exhibit opened in January 1988 at the Dallas Museum of Art, about 50,000 people viewed the house. From there, the exhibit went to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC where more than 200,000 people toured it.



The Usonian was also a hit at its most recent stop, the Center for Fine Arts in Miami. From there, the schedule is as follows: Chicago, Museum of Science and Industry, June 8 to September 4, 1989; Bellevue, WA, Art Museum, early October to Dec. 15, 1989; Marin County, CA, February to April, 1990; San Diego Museum of Arts, June to August, 1990, and Scottsdale, AZ, Center for the Arts, December 1990 to March, 1991.

When the show’s tour is ended, the Usonian itself is to be placed on permanent display in Scottsdale. 