

## **TDTCOUK FLW #4**

In this Friday's installment of TDT's College of Useless Knowledge FLW Lecture Series, we look at the fact & fiction of Frank Lloyd Wright in Kentucky.

Registrar's note: Will the owner of the Dymaxion Car please report to the parking lot, your headlight is on!

This week's extra credit goes to the first person to correctly identify the owner of the above vehicle.

Thirty-six states around the country are lucky enough to have FLW buildings & almost all of those have more than one. Our future host state of Pennsylvania has four. Kentucky unfortunately only has one structure that was designed by the hand of FLW although local myth says otherwise.

Onboard an ocean-liner bound for Europe in 1909, FLW struck up a conversation with a fellow passenger. The passenger was the Reverend Jesse R. Ziegler, a Presbyterian minister from Frankfort, Kentucky. The reason for Wright's venture to Europe is part of the first of many controversies in Wright's life, but more on that later in our final class of the term on the day of our own bon-voyage.

Wright was not a fan of shipboard travel but in those days there was no option. Wright suffered severe seasickness throughout the journey & spent most of the trip in his cabin or the infirmary. This makes it all the more coincidental that he had the chance encounter with a small town Kentucky preacher & that the two were able to spend enough time together for Ziegler to offer & Wright to accept a design commission.

Information on the relationship between FLW & the Ziegler's & exactly how the house design progressed is sketchy since Wright lived in Europe the entire time it was being designed & built. From recounts of the architects at the Taliesin Fellowship at Spring Green, FLW sent design sketches back to the states & his junior architects prepared the working drawings & sent them back for Wright's approval. After a few rounds of oceanic back & forth, the drawings were finalized & construction began. One of Wright's associates supervised the construction & there is no evidence that FLW himself ever visited the site during its construction or after its completion. The supervising architect only made a couple of visits himself, leaving the interpretation of the design & oversight of the construction to the local contractor who corresponded with Taliesin mostly by phone & mail.

The house is located just a couple of blocks from the front of the Capital at 509 Shelby Street & is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It's a fairly simple two-story Prairie Style home that was purported to be fireproof. It's a wood frame house with stucco exterior, hardwood flooring, tons of built-in casework, doors & loads of other interior trim. I'm not sure how all this wood was supposed to have been fireproof but this was the very same year that the White Star Line was building a big boat in Ireland that was supposed to be unsinkable. It was an age of faith in technology that would soon be proven unfounded. The total cost of the house & lot was approximately \$5,000 (how the heck did a preacher come up with 5K in 1909).

The exterior is a simple cubic form w/ multiple horizontal wood trim bands giving it the traditional Prairie style horizontality. The beauty of the house is the spectacular interior of the first floor. Unlike virtually every other house being built at the time, the height of the Victorian craze, Wright employed his open plan concept with the public spaces flowing seamlessly from one into the other. Commonplace & totally accepted today, at the time of this home's design it was unheard of & revolutionary. All the Victorians were filled with box after box placed next to each other & stacked on top of each other. Wright's said he wanted to "destroy the box" & "define the spaces without enclosing them." This idea that he would use throughout his career has evolved into today's Great

Room.

Like most Wright homes, this one features built in sideboards, buffets, grillwork & lots of quarter sawn oak banding. There are dozens of FLW signature leaded art glass doors & windows throughout the first floor which flood the house with natural light. Strategically placed balcony knee walls & the houses setting high above the street level maintain the interior privacy. The interior also features custom light fixtures, door hardware & other specially designed pieces by the master.

Contrary to popular belief, the Kaden Tower (formerly the Lincoln Income Building) was not designed by FLW but does have a FLW pedigree. This is the building that sets along the right side of the Watterson Expressway as you drive toward the Louisville Airport. Over the years the building has been called many unflattering names including the wedding cake building, the pink monstrosity, the doily building, the concrete Kleenex box, the ugliest building in Louisville & a few others not suitable for coed education.

William Wesley Peters was the first Wright apprentice when Wright began the Taliesin Fellowship. Peters became FLW's right hand man for the rest of Wright's life & remained extremely loyal to Wright, his ideals & his family for the entirety of Peter's life. Peters assisted in the engineering & construction of many of Wright's most famous works including Fallingwater, the Guggenheim Museum & the Johnson Wax administration building. A structural engineer by training, Peters made many of Wright's grand designs buildable. His contributions to the legacy of FLW cannot be overstated.

Peters was so close to the Wright family that he married one of Wright's adopted daughters. After she was killed in a car crash & in a very strange turn of events, Peters was briefly married to Joseph Stalin's daughter (where the heck do you hang out to meet Joseph Stalin's daughter).

After Wright's death, Peters was the Chief Architect of Taliesin Architects, Wright's architectural practice that is still managed by the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation. That practice continues to this day to further Wright's philosophies, & they actually design buildings using Wright's principles & also assist clients wishing to construct one of Wright's unbuilt designs.

The Kaden Tower was actually designed by Peters in 1965 with the Taliesin Architects but is based on a conceptual design of Wright's for a 1940's hotel in India that was never realized. The lacy concrete screening was supposed to have resembled a Japanese lantern especially after dark when the interior lighting makes the latticework glow from behind. Although the building exhibits many of Wright touches & design concepts, it is not a Wright building.

Peters was also working thru Taliesin Architects when he designed the Norton Center for the Arts on the Centre College campus in 1973. This is another building frequently credited to Wright & while is certainly bears many of his themes; it is not a true Wright.