

Why to consider publishing “Making Wright Right”.

I first saw this house in person in August of 1962 when we moved from Boston to Madison Wisconsin as my father was to be a history professor at the University of Wisconsin – Madison. I was 10 when the family moved in and 28 when we moved the last of the plants out leaving the house empty in 1980. The radiant floor had broken with the install of a new more efficient boiler and the house became unlivable. There were a variety of occupations during those years. The last, at that time, was a group of adults which had replaced years of student renters.

Two years later I was ousted from a month-to-month rental which was “supposed” to take a long time to sell. I was a year out of school with a BS in Computer Science and was relatively financially ok. It was early spring, and I knew the solar would get me through ok, so I moved back into the abandoned family home.

This book is about what love for a house for what it had been and what it could be again. So, I took on the project of making the house what it had always been meant to be if not built with a \$10,000 budget. As mentioned in my book, I knew where all the bodies were buried regarding house issues.

I carefully took photographic records and during the Covid pandemic finally completed 35mm slide restorations and multiple trips through the story itself. The combination of the 140 photos and the story itself is significant. It really is a good story.

So, as I look for a publisher, I must remark and counter the first brush offs.

I first went to Smithsonian Books and received an understandable turn down when after submitting after my first submission never got there and I resubmitted and was told:

“We found the project interesting, but ultimately decided that your manuscript is not a good fit for Smithsonian Books at this time. We think the book would be better served by a publisher that focuses on architectural books. We have published architectural topics before, but they tend to be limited to our museums or geographic area. We do not have enough of the market share in this topic to do well by your work. There is much to admire in the piece, and we are confident you will find a home for it elsewhere.”

This was a reasonable reply, so I did as they suggested and randomly picked a noted architectural publisher who reacted to me thusly:

“We think that there are enough FLW remodel books in the market, it is an over-saturated Wright market. The photography also would need to be improved, therefore, to be considered for publication we would need some level of subvention and/ or production budget support in order to launch a book of this type.”

This was not a reasonable reply. Yes, the photos are not perfect, but at 300 DPI with cropping and shrinking from 8x10(about), and some more Photoshop adjustments in conjunction with the publisher,

they will be quite impressive matched with the story. It is not like we can go back to 1982 and 1985 and reshoot the restoration.

Let us address first the reference to this being just a “FLW remodel book”.

This was not a fancy design with an unlimited budget as many of the famous Frank Lloyd Wright (FLW) commissions were. It had only double the budget as the first Wright usonian house had at \$10,000 and was the third house designed for Herbert and Katherine Jacobs and the first Wright design built after WWII.

Cost always being a push from the Jacobs to Wright, they decided against the second design. This is probably the only farmhouse that Wright ever designed.

I know many things including the constant unannounced visits from all over the world which somehow placed the house on their architectural tours of the US without placing it on ours (Jacobs, Taylors and Moores).

Lets us move past that. With around 20 FLW buildings listed as ***National Designated Landmarks by the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service***, only 15 are FLW houses excluding his own with it's studio. Two of these are Jacobs 1, the first FLW Usonian home and Jacobs 2, the first FLW Solarhemicycle home. As a side, both homes are published with early photos in the Jacobs' book “Building With Frank Lloyd Wright”, and that book, though out of print, still has an active life on eBay.

I'd like to quote the National Park's plaque presented upon the designation and now displayed at the property:

“The Herbert and Katherine Jacobs second house possesses national significance as the first house to be built under architect Frank Lloyd Wright's concept of the “Solar Hemicycle”. Based on arcs, radii, and circles, the house's design includes a floor-to-roof glass wall oriented toward the sun and an earth berm to protect three sides from winter winds. Wright's experimentation with passive solar design predates the “energy crisis” of the 1970s by 30 years and is uniquely and beautifully expressed in this house.”

Later the designation talked about “*Significance and Justification*”, they say:

“When compared to all other work by Frank Lloyd Wright, his second house for Herbert and Katherine Jacobs stands out for a number of reasons, foremost among which is its uniqueness at the time. There was no other building like it by Wright. Although aspects of it can be traced to earlier buildings by Wright, the way the architect combined these and other features produced a house without a peer. He designed an unbuilt house in 1942 for Lloyd Burlingham at El Paso with a plan that consisted of two interpenetrating arcs of circles. He proposed a system for erecting walls of earth to a group of persons to build a community near Detroit with their own labor in 1942. These were never built. In 1938, Wright proposed another house for Ralph Jester that remained a conceptual project until erected at Taliesen West in the 1970s. It consisted of circular rooms arranged around a covered terrace. While these were preludes, the concept for what Wright called the “Solar Hemicycle” first took shape in the second Jacobs house built between 1946-48. A number of other houses and buildings were projected and built along hemi-cycle lines indicating the impact of this design on his later work.”

Later they add:

“Wright did extract the idea of making houses in the form of arcs of a circle from the second Jacobs house—though it is more likely he went back to the Lloyd Burlingham design for inspiration—but in none of them did he also incorporate the solar elements—the berm, the two story wall of glass and the south facing glass front. He designed a house in 1950 that was built by Thomas Keys at Rochester, Minnesota, and had a berm on three sides but was clearly not intended to be a solar house.

There were other houses built following hemicycle lines. “These include the Marting house in Akron, Ohio, of 1947, the Meyer house in Galesburg, Michigan, of 1948,⁶ the Laurent house in Rockford, Illinois, of 1949, and the Pearce house in Bradbury, California, of 1950.”⁷ Although not solar, these other attempts “demonstrate Wright’s growing interest in a flowing architecture, free from the right angle. This development continued through the reflex curves of his 1953 design for his son, Robert Llewelyn, in Bethesda, Maryland, and the 1950 ramped spiral house for his other son, David, in Phoenix, Arizona, on to the Guggenheim Museum.”

The Jacobs II design remained original probably because the house was so complete in itself that even Wright found it difficult to modulate the design for subsequent clients.”

OH, did I mention it is an incredible story with fascinating pictures? This is not a normal house as it has significant stone structure. However this is indeed a deconstruction reconstruction. If this were a “normal” house, it would have been a down to the studs both externally AND internally.

Thank you for reading this far. Please continue.

The full landmark submission is linked at the bottom along with a small list of corrections