



The Gordon House Designed by Frank Lloyd Wright

The Gordon House is the only house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in Oregon and is the only Wright building in the Pacific Northwest open to the public. The Gordon House Conservancy oversees the continuing restoration and operation of the house as a public museum opened in March 2002. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

“An idea is salvation by imagination.” Frank Lloyd Wright

When the house was saved from demolition in the winter of 2001, and The Oregon Garden in Silverton selected as its new site, the house was moved in sections from Wilsonville, Oregon, in record time by March 11, 2001. The Oregon Garden is a showcase for the integration of facilities with surroundings, a concept advocated by Frank Lloyd Wright. The wetlands are an environmental model that uses Silverton’s treated wastewater as The Garden’s irrigation source and, in turn, serves as a haven for plants and wildlife.

The Gordon House, built in 1963 for Evelyn and Conrad Gordon, is a prime example of Wright’s “Usonian” architecture which he began designing in the 1930’s. In 1938, *Life* magazine commissioned Frank Lloyd Wright and several other leading architects to design “Eight Houses for Modern Living.” The homes were featured in the September 26, 1938, issue. Wright described his home, designed for middle-income families, as a Little Private Club. “Space,” he said, “is characteristic of this free pattern for a freer life than you could possibly live in the conventional house.” Wright called its style “Usonian,” his word for “United States of North America.” These houses were designed with simpler, more economical construction costs, frequently combining living and dining rooms into one area.

Before moving the house from Wilsonville to Silverton, the interior wood paneling, built-in furniture, doors, cabinets and shelves were painstakingly removed, packaged and marked to assure an accurate restoration. The roof section was removed after which the upper story was cut from the lower. The concrete red floor, many of the concrete blocks that made up the walls, and the interior shower tiles could not be saved.

Through extensive coordination with the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy, the building was sited in the exact solar orientation as the original house. Matching the grades of the original site house required a complex system of footing drains and waterproofing to protect the building from the significant ground water encountered. The same radiant heat system designed by Frank Lloyd Wright but with upgraded piping was installed. The signature red concrete floor was precisely reconstructed to match the 7-foot module, another common element of Wright’s Usonian design. To meet current code, seismic reinforcement was introduced in a manner that does not affect the design and appearance of the house. The roof and upper level of the house were positioned above the foundation and held in place as the missing concrete walls were built to meet the upper level. When the section was lowered, it was one-sixteenth of an inch true to line. Thus, many of the challenges were met through the creativity and hard work of the moving and reassembly teams.

Preserving this house in an ancient oak grove in The Garden with views of rolling hills will continue Wright’s tradition of creating an intimate relationship between the built and the natural environment.

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