

TDTCOUK FLW #1

OK, since there seems to be at least a modicum of interest in the subject, here's the next in our FLW lecture series from TDT's College of Useless Knowledge.

Edgar Kaufman was the patriarch of a Pittsburgh family run department store chain & a very wealthy man. The Kaufman stores were still in existence until just recently when they were assimilated into the Rich's/Lazarus/Goldsmith chain.

Edgar's eldest son was a socialite, bon vivant, architect wannabe & a devotee of FLW. He even studied briefly at the FLW school at Taliesin West in Arizona.

The Kaufman family had for many years picnicked & camped on a vast wooded retreat they owned in rural southwest Pennsylvania. Their favorite site on the whole property was a rock outcropping directly across from a small but beautiful waterfall. They would have groups of friends up for weekends & eventually constructed some primitive storage sheds & sleeping shelters near the falls. They frequently waded & swam in the Bear Run stream above & below the falls.

When Mr. Kaufman Sr. decided they should build a more permanent summer structure on the property, young Edgar insisted his dad consider no other than FLW as the architect. A meeting was arranged, the two hit it off immediately & it was decided that FLW was the man for the job. Edgar gave FLW a basic outline of what they envisioned which included the fact that the summer house would have a breathtaking view of the waterfall from across the ravine along with a budget of \$20,000. Although the final cost was never revealed it has been estimated at between \$90,000 to \$100,000 & worth every penny. Mr. Wright's design fees eventually totaled around \$8,000.

Mr. Wright returned to his studio with a hefty deposit check & the best of intentions of starting immediately on the design. One thing led to another & other more serious civic architectural projects steered FLW's attention away from the simple summer cottage. Several months passed as Edgar frequently called FLW to check on the progress & was repeatedly assured that sketches would soon be forthcoming. After about a year of stalling, Mr. Kaufman grew increasingly annoyed. Early one morning Mr. Wright received a phone call from Edgar stating that he had just arrived at the Madison train depot & would be driving out to FLW's summer home in Spring Green, Wisconsin. In 1934 this was a several hour drive.

Having not drawn the first line on paper, FLW summoned his students around him. As the young disciples sharpened pencils, removed discarded sketches, fetched coffee & otherwise waited on their master hand & foot, FLW commenced to delineate the floor plans, elevations & sections of the home as if he had the entire working drawings stored in his head. As one of his apprentices put it, "the design flowed from his head down his arm & onto the paper as if directly from God". He produced sketch after sketch, colored pencil renderings, site plans, interior cabinetry sketches, & on & on for a solid hour & a half. At that point Mr. Wright's secretary buzzed her boss to let him know Edgar was just then turning up the long drive.

FLW sprung to his feet & rushed to the lobby to greet his guest & patron. "Edgar my dear friend, it's so good to see you, we been waiting for you, we're so glad you could finally make it". FLW ushered Edgar into his private office where the students had arranged the dozens of hand sketches into a logical presentation. Mr. Wright immediately dove into the presentation of the design as if they had been planning it for weeks. As he spoke the students in the main drafting room continued to flesh out FLW's rough sketches adding details, color, & notations in their boss's style. When Mr. Wright & Edgar returned from a quick lunch in town (MB & I ate at the very same table a couple of years ago)

FLW dove into a whole new batch of sketches that the students had prepared & mounted in his office, having never seen them before.

There it was in all its glory the most famous private residence, & to many, the most famous structure of the modern world, envisioned, designed, drafted & sold all in less than three hours. Totally incomprehensible!

Edgar's only protest was at the fact that FLW had sited the house directly on top of the waterfall instead of across from it. FLW explained, "Edgar I want you to live with the waterfall, not just to look at it, but for it to become an integral part of your lives". Truer words were never spoken.

After a little convincing from FLW, Edgar approved the preliminary sketches in their entirety. It was decided that construction would begin the next spring & although the two exchanged many classic & heated letters throughout the construction process, they remained the closest of friends & the most ardent of mutual admirers until FLW's death in 1959. Nearing the end of his own life Edgar said "taking care of Fallingwater was a challenge, enjoying it was a reward. Seasons & then years rolled on; I continued to rely on the rhythm, peace & stimulus of weekends at Bear Run. Fallingwater revealed the profundity of Wright's genius more & more the longer I lived with it. How easy it has become to take these luxuries of body & spirit for granted, as inalienable privileges".

Although the architecture might not be as revolutionary or as world renowned, I never visit Dharma & Greg's cottage at Weque that I don't think of the decades of family & friends that have given life to both of these simple summer cottages. They may be architecturally worlds apart but in many respects they fulfill the same human need of familial connection across the generations. Hey..... I'm not always just a smart-ass.

This is the only FLW designed structure in the world that remains totally intact with its site, structure & interior furnishings 100% as Wright designed them. It is virtually exactly the same as when the Kaufman family moved in in late 1935.

Class dismissed.

Can't wait to share this secret gem of my life with my close personal friends.