

Lamorinda OUR HOMES

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Frank Lloyd Wright House in Orinda a Structural Symphony

By Laurie Snyder

"No house should ever be on a hill or on anything. It should be of the hill. Belonging to it. Hill and house should live together each the happier for each other." – Frank Lloyd Wright



"Buildings, too, are children of the Earth and Sun." – Frank Lloyd Wright

Photo Ohlen Alexander

It is alchemy. It is water becoming wine. It is transcendence – that intense moment of mindfulness when you are one with all that is around you – and hear the whisper of something greater than yourself.

"It" is Lamorinda's Wright-Buehler House and Gardens in Orinda, and it is unlike any other Frank Lloyd Wright House experi-

ence anywhere, say Wright scholars.

The first thing noticeable upon arrival is the size of the main house. It seems *small*. A fairly nondescript cinder block structure, it is dwarfed by a stand of old growth redwoods, silent sentinels atop a sharply sloping creek bank, swaddled in lush ivy groundcover.

But as visitors make their way through the close hallway into the

living room, the experience is so astonishing that it paralyzes. A subtly lit, slanted, gold leaf-covered ceiling sweeps from a position just barely above the visitor's head up across the octagonal space. The windows, designed to eliminate structural intrusions, simultaneously lengthen until reaching a one-and-one-half story visually explosive wall of glass.

The effect propels the mind for-

ward across a Zen koi pond out to the formal, massive Japanese garden on the property's south lawn. Said a recent visiting Chinese architect, "You could start your own religion in this home."

The History

"That ceiling grabs all of the light and holds it," explains Arthur Dyson, dean emeritus of the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture who first worked with Wright as a Taliesin apprentice. The use of gold leaf and other design techniques, he says, were heavily influenced by Wright's time in Japan.

Lighting from "unexpected sources," is "filtered and thrown from the planters up and down from the soffit while the lights on the back of the banquette seating shoot up, not down." And because that seating faces the fireplace, "you're also seeing the flames dance. It's luminescent," Dyson says. The dining room, with its own abundant glass, further intensifies the effect.

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