

## Reversing Decades of Decay in a Wright Masterwork

**Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House—built in 1910 for a bicycle manufacturer—was a stunning leap from Victorian to modern. It is the only one of Wright's designs whose demolition he fought to prevent.**

Though designated a national historic landmark in 1963, decay and neglect had taken their toll and, by 1999, the house was at the point of structural compromise. Now, thanks in part to a grant from the National Park Service-administered Save America's Treasures program, visitors will experience the place as Frederick C. Robie did.

The grant—to help repair a badly deteriorated roof, probably the greatest threat—is part of a 10-year, \$8 million restoration organized by the Frank Lloyd Wright Preservation Trust.

The University of Chicago owns the house, which leases it to the trust, the site manager. The trust raises funds, oversees restoration, and runs the house as a museum.

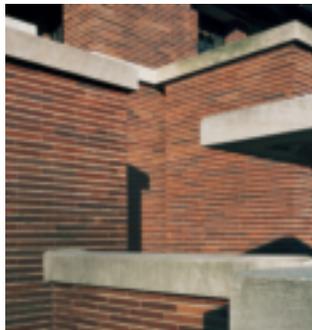
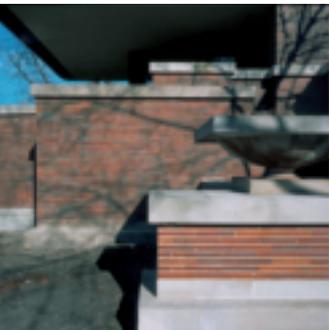
Characterized by a series of overlapping planes—echoing the flat midwestern landscape—the Robie house recedes from the street in stages. The effect, common in Wright's work, particularly suited a client who wanted privacy.

The flat roof exacerbated what the grant application called “substantial and pervasive” water damage. “We had major problems,” says house manager Janet Van Delft. Ice dams in the gutters were particularly destructive. Water worked its way under the roof shingles and penetrated the

The most pressing threat eliminated, the next step is restoring the interior. Once the money is raised, conservators will begin restoring original fixtures, built-in furnishings, and other details.

During the restoration, the house has been open to the 30,000 visitors who annually admire a design that revolutionized domestic architecture, pre-saging styles later in the century.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation, the state of Illinois, the Pritzker Foundation, and numerous others also donated funds for the restoration.



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**Above: Intersecting planes. Right: Receding from the street to claim a sense of privacy.**

interior, threatening plaster, molding, doors, windows, and 174 panels of art glass. Water coursed down the exterior walls and damaged the brickwork.

Work began in spring 2002 following the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Preservation, a condition of the grant. Crews repaired termite and water damage to the roof framing and reinforced the steel members that were part of the original construction. They installed a modern waterproof membrane beneath new, historically accurate clay shingles, some of which had to be custom made. Plaster soffits were repaired and painted the original ochre, a copper exterior cornice was restored, chimneys were repointed, and the attic got a new ventilation system.

ALL PHOTOS FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT PRESERVATION TRUST

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