



Wright On My Street

by Terry Andrues

Frank Lloyd Wright Jr. was one of Southern California's most talented architects for most of the 20th century. Frank Lloyd Wright designed structures that pushed the boundaries of conventional architecture and pioneered the use of innovative materials. The work of Wright Jr. had a lower public profile, however. The buildings he created are often just as beautiful and visionary as his father's but they did not receive the tent pole publicity of the senior Wright's biggest projects.

Known as Lloyd Wright to lessen the confusion between him and his flamboyant father, he designed dozens of homes for the rich and famous in and around Los Angeles. Many of his clients were entertainment figures, especially musicians such as superstar violinist Jascha Heifetz and Oscar-winning film composer Alfred Newman.

There are several beautiful and distinctive Lloyd Wright homes in Altadena. To see one for the first time is a memorable experience

because you wonder how such a striking, elemental building could appear suddenly in a block of traditional homes.

There are several Lloyd Wright homes in Altadena.

That's what happened to me when I moved into my Altadena neighborhood in 1986. Just a few doors down, I spotted a bold, angular building behind a thick growth of foliage. Its vaulted roof line and large picture windows set it far apart from anything in the area. Having once toured a Lloyd Wright house near JPL, I thought he could have designed this little gem too. Right on my street. What a great surprise!

The house belonged to a distinguished older man with white hair who frequently walked past my house. One morning I introduced myself as his new neighbor and asked him if he lived in a Lloyd Wright house. He smiled broadly and seemed pleased that a perfect stranger would ask that question.

"How did you know that?" he asked. "You're right. Lloyd Wright designed it for me and my wife after the war." And so I met Allan H. Dorland, owner of Lloyd Wright's Dorland House. For a very memorable half hour, he told me the story of how a man who was not rich or famous got one of the best architects in America to design his home.

Mr. Dorland told me that he served in the Navy during WWII. After the war, he was able to secure a loan for a lot on Morada Street where he hoped to build a house for his family. He had been a teacher before the war and now he was Assistant Principal at Eliot Junior High School on Lake Avenue.

"I was looking for an architect when I spoke to a friend who had hired Lloyd Wright to build her home on Rubio Street (the Lubsen House)," said Dorland. "When I asked her if he might design a house for me, she said I should ask him myself. She would arrange an introduction." And she did. Dorland spoke to Wright, and he agreed to look at the site to see if it was suitable for one of his homes.



Want to learn more about Allan Dorland? Come in and listen to his oral history interview.

“I thought there was no way this was going to work,” Dorland said. “I worked at a public school and didn’t have a lot of money. I was paying \$30 per month for the lot and it would be a while before it was paid off. It seemed like a long shot that Wright would take the job.”

“He came to inspect the property on one of those beautiful fall days we get in Altadena. The air was crystal clear and you could see every detail on the mountains. He walked all around the site and kept admiring the view. Finally, he walked over to me and said he would do it; but he had to have complete control on the design. I was to contact him after the lot was paid off and he would begin.”



Dorland said it took many months to pay off the lot. He called Wright again, hoping he had not become too busy to take on the project. “I wasn’t even sure he remembered me but he did,” said Dorland. “He told me to come to his office in 90 days and he would have the plans ready.”

Dorland said he was nervous when, three months later, he drove to the west Los Angeles studio that Lloyd Wright shared with his father. It was the big day. He would finally get to see the plans for his new house.

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“I was led into a special room to view the presentation,” Dorland said. “It was all very dramatic. The lights were low and the plans were covered by a velvet drape. Mr. Wright removed the drape with a flourish and I was floored. It was nothing like I had envisioned. I thought it was a terrible design. I knew I couldn’t say that, so I just bit my tongue and told him it was great.”

Dorland’s dissatisfaction did not last long. He said the more he looked at the design, the more he admired it. Now he began the search for a builder. Dorland said he interviewed several contractors, but they were all too expensive. Finally, he found one in Arcadia who would build the house for a much lower rate because he was interested in getting more of Wright’s work.

And so, in 1949, Lloyd Wright Project #189 rose on a humble lot in Altadena with a beautiful view of the San Gabriel Mountains. Dorland said that Wright also designed some furniture for the house and he later provided plans for a small addition and a pool. In the excellent book, *Lloyd Wright: the Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright Jr.* by Alan Weintraub (ISBN 0-8109-3996-7), the Dorland House is described as Wright's "prototype for compact, affordable single-family housing."

Mr. Dorland quickly grew to love the house, as expressed by a letter he sent to Wright soon after it was completed: "We have been living in your beautiful house nearly seven weeks and are still finding new and interesting views. It isn't like living. It's like being on vacation."

