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Frank Lloyd Wright: Architecture of the Interior

BY ROBIN MILLER | ROMILLER@THEADVOCATE.COM MAY 1, 2017 - 7:30 PM



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This Frank Lloyd Wright chair, designed for his Larkin Building in Buffalo, New York, is the centerpiece of the West Baton Rouge Museum's exhibit. The chair is part of the local collection of Steve and Connie Diniz.

Robin Miller

The story behind the story is always fascinating.

The story being told at the West Baton Rouge Museum is about Frank Lloyd Wright's attention to interior detail, which included his furniture designs.

And the nucleus for this show is a chair he created for the Larkin Building, a Wright masterpiece designed in 1903 for the Larkin Soap Co. in Buffalo, New York.

The chair, as captured in a photo book of the building, was one of many surrounding a table. The book is included in this traveling show, "Frank Lloyd Wright: Architecture of the Interior," running through June 4 at the museum.

But this chair didn't come to the museum from New York. It was discovered in Denham Springs, along with three others, in the collection of Steve Diniz.

Diniz's interest in Wright began in childhood and was rekindled when he designed his first home in the 1990s.

"He tells the story of how Connie (his wife) called him from a thrift shop in Denham Springs and said, 'They have a set of those weird chairs that you like here,' " says museum director Julie Rose. "He told her not to leave, that he was coming straight there. They were chairs from the Larkin Building, and he bought them for a steal."

No one knows how the chairs ended up in Denham Springs, but Rose is happy one made it to the museum to complement the show, which also features reproductions of Wright's interior drawings and local collectors' reproduction furniture pieces officially approved by the Wright estate.

"This is definitely our centerpiece," Rose says of the chair. "It ties the exhibit together."

Adding local flavor to the show is furniture by Baton Rouge craftsman Ford Thomas, whose work has been exhibited nationally and published in national and international periodicals.

"It has a Frank Lloyd Wright aesthetic," says Rose of the four pieces Thomas loaned for the show.

Wright reproduction pieces from the collection of John and June Gonce also are included, and the show is complemented by a separate exhibit, "Stained Glass by Paul Dufour and Sam Corso of Dufour-Corso Studios" in the museum's glassed breezeway.

The traveling Wright exhibit was organized by International Arts & Artists in Washington, D.C., in cooperation with The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation of Scottsdale, Arizona. It specifically explores the design of Wright's houses, particularly the visual character of interior space and objects, and how they complete the big picture.

Wright, who was born in 1867 and died in 1959, saw the American lifestyle change during his seven-decade career, evolving from the formality of the Victorian period to an informal consumer-based ideology.

"Wright was determined to design a house reflecting a uniquely American way of living as it evolved," the exhibit's introductory label explains. "Rejecting the styles of the past, Wright used a vocabulary of abstraction and geometry based on forms found in nature to create a contemporary visual language in his architecture and design."

The show is Rose's last as the museum's director. She left at the end of April to become director of the Johns Hopkins University Museum system's Homewood Museum in Baltimore. Curator Angelique Bergeron will take the director's position.

Frank Lloyd Wright: Architecture of the Interior

WHEN: 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday; 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday. Through June 4.

WHERE: West Baton Rouge Museum, 845 N. Jefferson Ave., Port Allen

ADMISSION: \$4; \$2 for age 62 and older, students, AAA members and military plus tax.

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