



## **City of Phoenix**

**Planning & Development Department  
Historic Preservation Office**

**Staff Report: Z-24-12-6  
Revised September 18, 2012**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Z-24-12-6 is a request to establish Historic Preservation-Landmark (HP-L) overlay zoning for the property known as the David & Gladys Wright House located at 5212 East Exeter Boulevard approximately 310 feet north of the northeast corner of Exeter Boulevard and Rubicon Avenue. A map and photos of the subject property are attached.

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that rezoning request Z-24-12-6 be approved.

### **BACKGROUND**

Constructed between 1951 and 1952, the subject property was designed by renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright for his son, David, and daughter-in-law, Gladys, who were living in Phoenix. David & Gladys Wright purchased the property in January 1951. At that time it was a five-acre lot with frontage on both Rubicon Avenue and Exeter Boulevard. The property was annexed into the city of Phoenix in 1961 along with a large portion of the Arcadia neighborhood. The original five-acre lot was split into three smaller lots when two new homes were constructed along Exeter Boulevard in 1968 and 1972.

Shortly after the City of Phoenix Historic Preservation Office was established, staff identified the David & Gladys Wright House and the other Frank Lloyd Wright-designed houses in Phoenix as potentially eligible for historic designation. In 2006, the Historic Preservation Commission added "Frank Lloyd Wright Buildings" as a future designation item on the annual Historic Property Survey & Designation Plan. However, due to budget cuts and the enactment of Proposition 207, the plan was scaled back and no designations of Frank Lloyd Wright-designed buildings have occurred yet.

David and Gladys Wright continued to live in their home until David died in 1997 at the age of 102 and Gladys passed away in 2008 at the age of 104. They both outlived their only son, David, who died at 49 years of age. In 2009, three granddaughters sold the house for \$2.8 million to JT Morning Glory Enterprises LP, who apparently intended to

restore and live in the house. However, the property was re-sold earlier this year to current owner 8081 Meridian LLC this year for \$1.8 million.

On May 17, 2012, 8081 Meridian LLC filed an application to split the lot into two parcels, with the new parcel line located where the house currently stands. The lot split was conditionally approved by the Planning & Development Department on June 5, 2012.

Around the same time, the Historic Preservation Office was contacted by the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy which expressed concern about the possible demolition of the house. The Mayor's Office contacted 8081 Meridian LLC and persuaded the owners to delay demolition to see if an alternative could be found.

Meanwhile, on June 12, 2012, the Planning Commission voted to initiate HP-L overlay zoning for the property. There is now a temporary stay of demolition until the City Council makes a final decision on the rezoning application.

## **LANDMARK DESIGNATION**

The rationale for HP-L overlay zoning is explained in Section 808 of the City of Phoenix Zoning Ordinance:

A classification of historic preservation zoning, landmark, is created to recognize that there are some historic properties that possess historic or architectural significance, integrity, distinctive visual character and quality that is a level of exceptional significance among historic properties. Designation by this category gives public recognition of the importance of these properties.

Section 803 of the Zoning Ordinance defines a landmark as:

A structure or site which contains an outstanding or unique example of an architectural style, which contains or is associated with a major historic event or activity, which contains important, intact archaeological resources, which is a site or structure of unique visual quality and identification, or which is a site of general historic or cultural recognition by the community. A landmark shall also meet all criteria for designation as an HP District (as set forth in Section 807.D and 807.E).

The Ordinance further states that landmark designation can occur for a property already within an HP District or in conjunction with designation as an HP District and that the review and hearing procedures are the same as for regular HP designation. The only exception is that with landmark designation the HP Commission is required to adopt a set of findings documenting the uniqueness and significance of the subject building or site.

If HP-L zoning is approved, the property will be subject to a three-year stay of demolition per Section 813 of the Zoning Ordinance. Exterior alterations to the property that require a building permit will be subject to historic preservation design standards as set forth in Section 812 of the Zoning Ordinance. The property will also be eligible to receive financial incentives for preservation, such as Historic Preservation Bond funds, if they are available.

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

The subject property qualifies for landmark designation under three of the five categories listed in Section 803 of the Zoning Ordinance:

- # 1 – Outstanding or unique example of an architectural style*
- # 4 – A site or structure of unique visual quality and identification*
- # 5 – A site of general historic or cultural recognition by the community*

Simply put, the David & Gladys Wright House is the most significant work within the city of Phoenix by the most significant architect in American history.

From 1928 until his death in 1959, Frank Lloyd Wright spent much of his life in Arizona. His first job in the state was as a consultant for the Arizona Biltmore assisting architect Albert Chase McArthur with the formation of the Biltmore “textile blocks.” In 1929, Wright established a desert camp called “Ocatillo” south of Phoenix, near the town of Chandler. By 1938, he had established a permanent winter studio known as Taliesin West at the base of the McDowell Mountains north of Scottsdale. He spent every winter in Arizona until he died on April 9, 1959, at St. Joseph’s Hospital in Phoenix at the age of 91.

For all the time Frank Lloyd Wright spent in Arizona, there are very few examples of his work in the state. Not counting his work on the Biltmore, Wright designed 14 buildings or complexes in Arizona that were constructed during his lifetime or after. Two of the completed works, Ocatillo and the Pauson House, have been demolished, and another, the Pieper House, has been modified so much that it is now hardly recognizable as Wright’s work. A fourth, the Lykes House, existed only in rough sketch form when Wright died—the design was completed by Taliesin Fellowship architect John Rattenbury—so it cannot be solely credited to Wright. A fifth structure, a spire Wright designed for a new Arizona State Capitol building, appeared in a north Scottsdale shopping strip in 2002, far from its intended location at Papago Park. Another 25 Arizona projects were not built either because their clients ran into financial difficulties or didn’t like what Wright offered them.

That leaves just nine structures still standing today that were solely Wright’s work—Taliesin West, Grady Gammage Auditorium, First Christian Church, and six residences.

Only five of the nine structures are within the Phoenix city limits (the remaining structures are in Tempe, Scottsdale or Paradise Valley). The five structures are:

1. Raymond Carlson House, 1950;
2. Benjamin Adelman House, 1951;
3. David & Gladys Wright House, 1951-1952;
4. Jorgine Boomer House, 1953; and
5. First Christian Church, 6750 North 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, designed 1950, built 1971;

Of the four residences, the David & Gladys Wright House is the most unique. While many of Frank Lloyd Wright's houses are similar to one another, the circular design of this building clearly sets it apart. It's a precursor to one his most famous works, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City. It's also one of his most personal buildings, having been designed for his son, and is one of approximately 30 structures that bears Wright's red signature tile, designating the house as a work that is completely of his design, including cabinetry and other furnishings.

When Frank Lloyd Wright first created the design in 1950, he named it "How to Live in the Southwest." At the time, the property was a large flat tract of land surrounded by citrus trees, with scenic Camelback Mountain in the distance. From ground level the view of the mountains was obstructed by the citrus groves, and Wright felt that it was imperative for a house in that location to be up off the ground and raised to a level from which the mountain could be seen. Although the citrus is now largely gone, the mountain can still be seen clearly over the neighboring homes.

Elevating the house also created a shade garden through which breezes could circulate and help cool the house above. The house was accessible by a wide ramp that wrapped around the house and was partially planted in flower gardens. A small plunge pool was located near the base of the ramp.

Because David Wright was a sales representative for a concrete block company, block was selected as the primary building material. Yet the house feels more sculptural than industrial, as was the case with the textile block houses in southern California and the Arizona Biltmore. Even the spacious concrete piers that support the elevated house have a graceful quality. A custom concrete block frieze circles the entire house and completes the design.

Despite the block construction, the house does have wooden soffits and window frames and the roof is metal. Philippine mahogany was used for the ceilings, woodwork, cabinets and furniture. The floor is concrete; the architect designed an artistic rug to cover the living room floor although the rug is now gone.

The David Wright House is widely recognized by the architectural community as a significant property. It was included in *A Guide to the Architecture of Metro Phoenix*,

published in 1983 by the Central Arizona Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. It has been featured in numerous publications including *The Wright Style*, *The Decorative Designs of Frank Lloyd Wright*, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Furnishings*, *Frank Lloyd Wright: American Architect for the Twentieth Century*, *Frank Lloyd Wright Drawings: Masterworks from the Frank Lloyd Wright Archives*, and *Frank Lloyd Wright in Arizona*. The house is considered by many historians and architectural critics to be one of Frank Lloyd Wright's 20 most significant works. It came solidly in the middle of his last and most productive phase and is one of the most resolved of his circular or spiral designs—often compared to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City. The iconic building makes a strong statement about the relationship of building to site, particularly in the desert Southwest.

### **ADDITIONAL CRITERIA**

According to Section 807.D of the Zoning Ordinance, in addition to the significance requirement, the property must also be at least 50 years old, or have achieved significance within the past 50 years if it is of exceptional importance. The property must also possess sufficient integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association to convey its significance. In this case, the building was constructed between 1950 and 1952, thus meeting the age requirement. It also has very good historic integrity with only a few minor modifications.

Section 807.E further states that, when applying the evaluation criteria in Section 807.D, the boundaries of a historic district should be drawn as carefully as possible to ensure that:

1. The district contains documented historic, architectural, archaeological or natural resources;
2. The district boundaries coincide with documented historic boundaries such as early roadways, canals, subdivision plats or property lines;
3. Other district boundaries coincide with logical physical or manmade features and reflect recognized neighborhood or area boundaries; and
4. Other non-historic resources or vacant land is included where necessary to create appropriate boundaries to assist in meeting the criteria in Section 807.D.

In this case, the proposed boundaries are based on a survey of the property that was completed in 2009 (MCR 1040-22). The boundaries include only the Wright House parcel and none of the adjoining lots.

### **CONCLUSION**

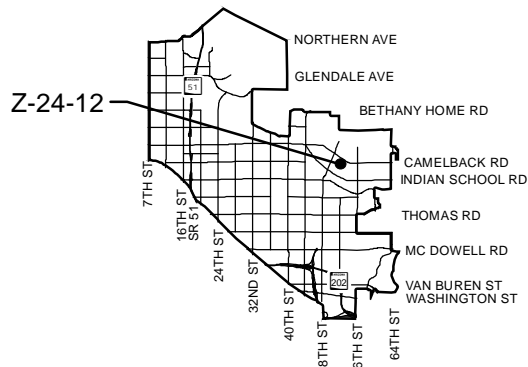
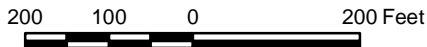
The rezoning request Z-24-12-6 to establish Historic Preservation-Landmark (HP-L) overlay zoning for the subject property should be approved for the following reasons:

1. The property meets the requirements for landmark designation set forth in Section 808 of the Zoning Ordinance;
2. The property also meets the eligibility criteria for age and integrity set forth in Section 807.D; and
3. The proposed boundaries meet the eligibility criteria outlined in Section 807.E.

Staff recommends that this report be adopted as the set of findings documenting the uniqueness and significance of the subject building or site.

Attachments:

Sketch Map  
Aerial Photo  
Building Photos  
Original Drawings



CITY OF PHOENIX PLANNING DEPARTMENT  
**CAMELBACK EAST VILLAGE**  
 CITY COUNCIL DISTRICT: 6

<b>APPLICANT'S NAME:</b> City of Phoenix Planning Commission		<b>REQUESTED CHANGE:</b>	
<b>APPLICATION NO.:</b> Z-24-12		<b>FROM:</b> RE-35 ACSPD, (2.45 a. c.)	
<small>GROSS AREA INCLUDING 1/2 STREET AND ALLEY DEDICATION IS APPROX.</small> <b>2.45 Acres</b>		<b>TO:</b> RE-35 HP-L ACSPD, (2.45 a. c.)	
<b>MULTIPLES PERMITTED</b>		<b>CONVENTIONAL OPTION</b>	
<small>DATE:</small> 07/13/12 <small>REVISION DATES:</small>		<small>AERIAL PHOTO &amp; QUARTER SEC. NO.:</small> Q17-40 <small>ZONING MAP:</small> H-11	
<b>* Maximum Units Allowed with P.R.D. Bonus</b>		<b>* UNITS P.R.D. OPTION</b>	



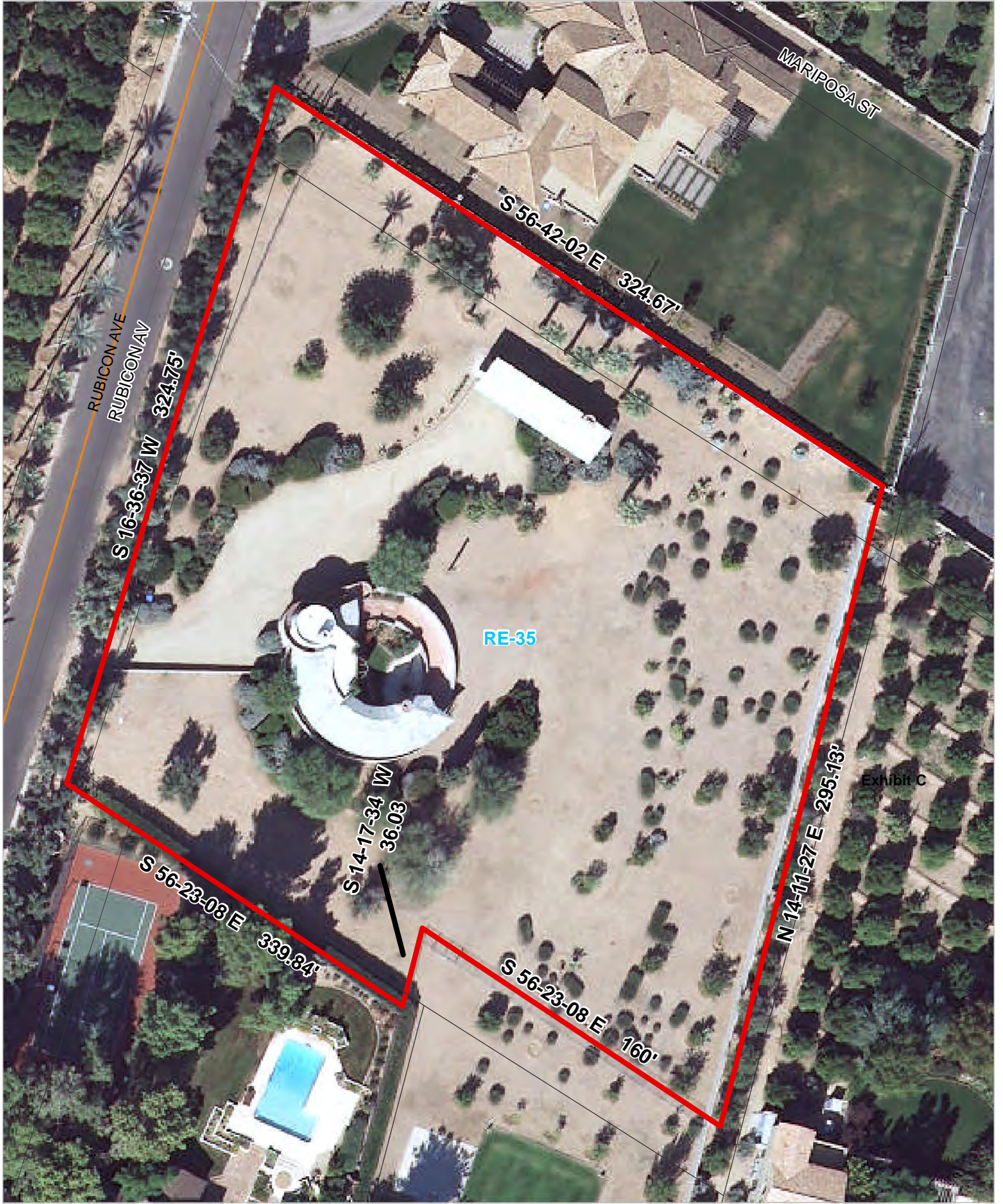


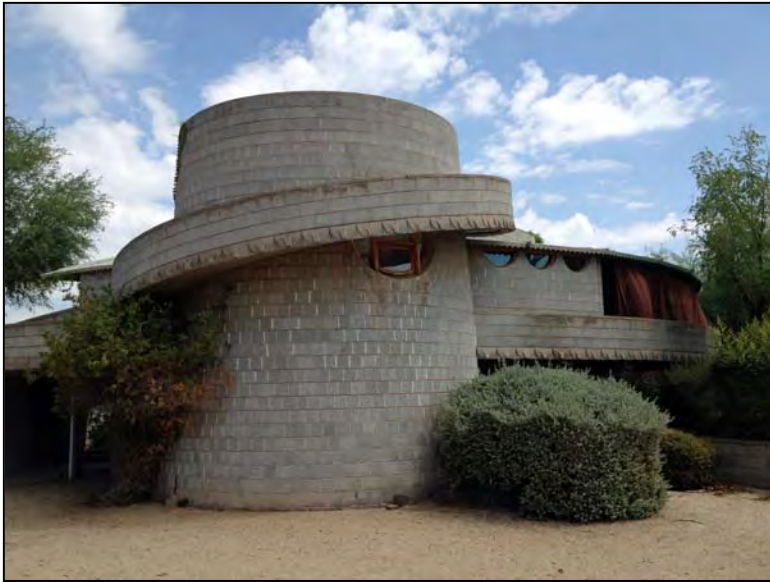
Exhibit C

**5212 E EXETER BLVD  
DEFINED BY SURVEY  
IN BOOK 1040 PAGE 22 MCR**



# David & Gladys Wright House

5212 East Exeter Boulevard



**Photo 1.** West side (front) of house



**Photo 2.** North side of house



**Photo 3.** East side of house



**Photo 4.** South side of house



## David & Gladys Wright House

5212 East Exeter Boulevard



**Photo 5.** View of Camelback Mountain from ramp leading to second story



**Photo 6.** View of bedroom wing from ramp leading to second story



**Photo 7.** Main entrance to house at top of ramp



**Photo 8.** Frank Lloyd Wright signature in red tile next to front entrance.



# David & Gladys Wright House

5212 East Exeter Boulevard



**Photo 9.** View of Camelback Mountain from roof deck



**Photo 10.** View of living room from main entrance



**Photo 11.** Master bedroom



**Photo 12.** View of living room from bedroom wing



**David & Gladys Wright House**  
5212 East Exeter Boulevard



**Photo 13.** Bedroom



**Photo 14.** Bathroom



**Photo 15.** Kitchen



**Photo 16.** Carport and guest house

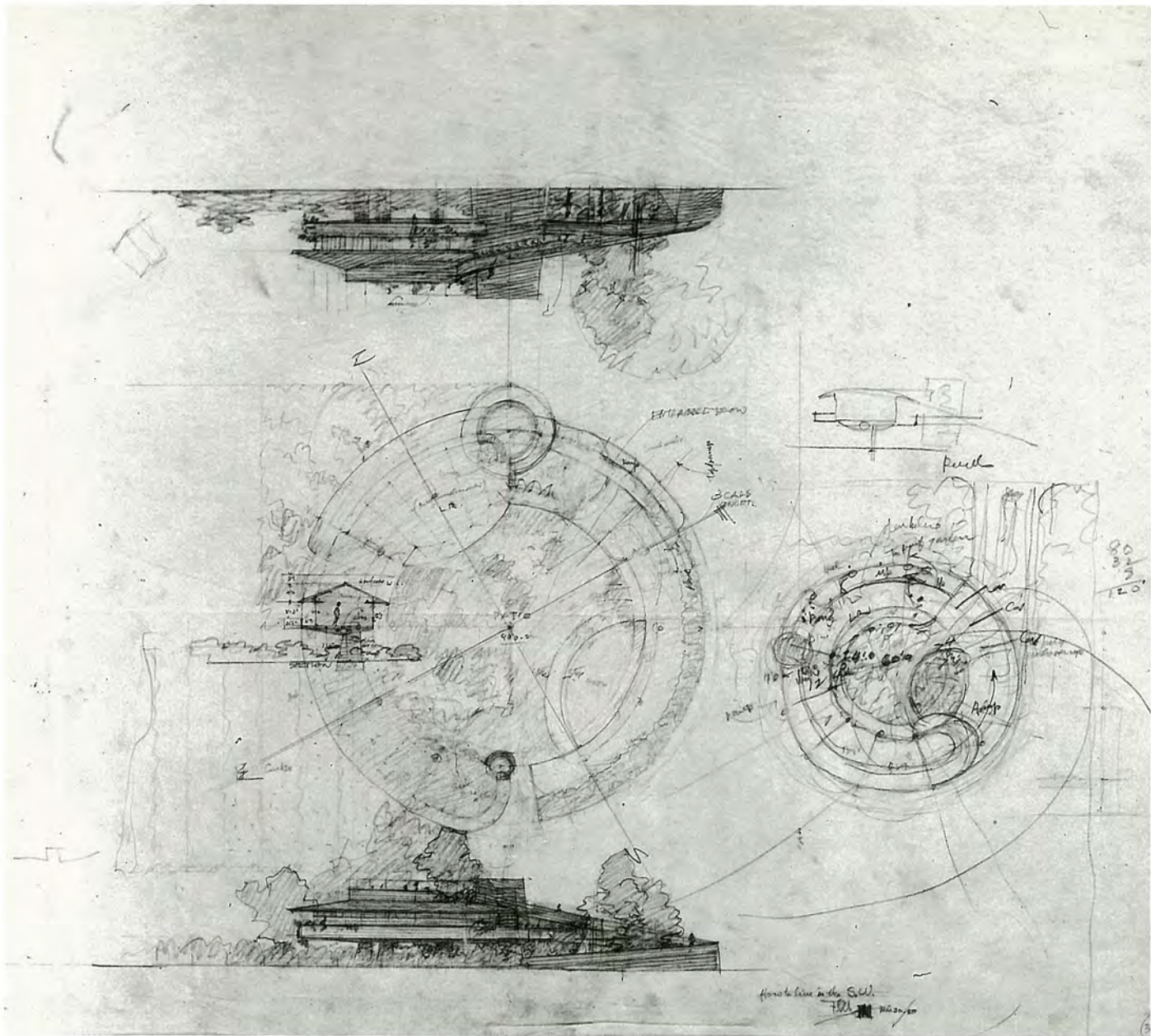


**Photo 17.** Guest house interior

The following sketches are from *Frank Lloyd Wright Drawings:  
Masterworks from the Frank Lloyd Wright Archives*  
by Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, published in 1990  
by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York.

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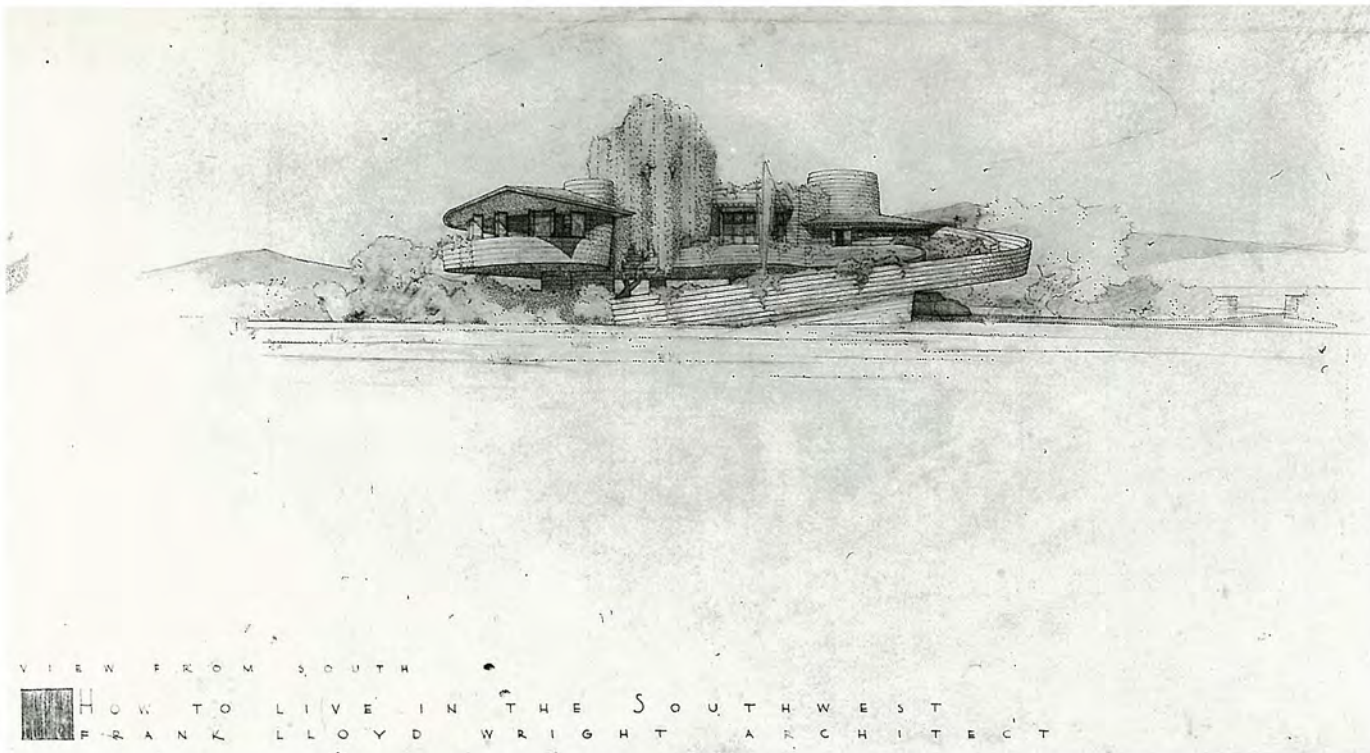




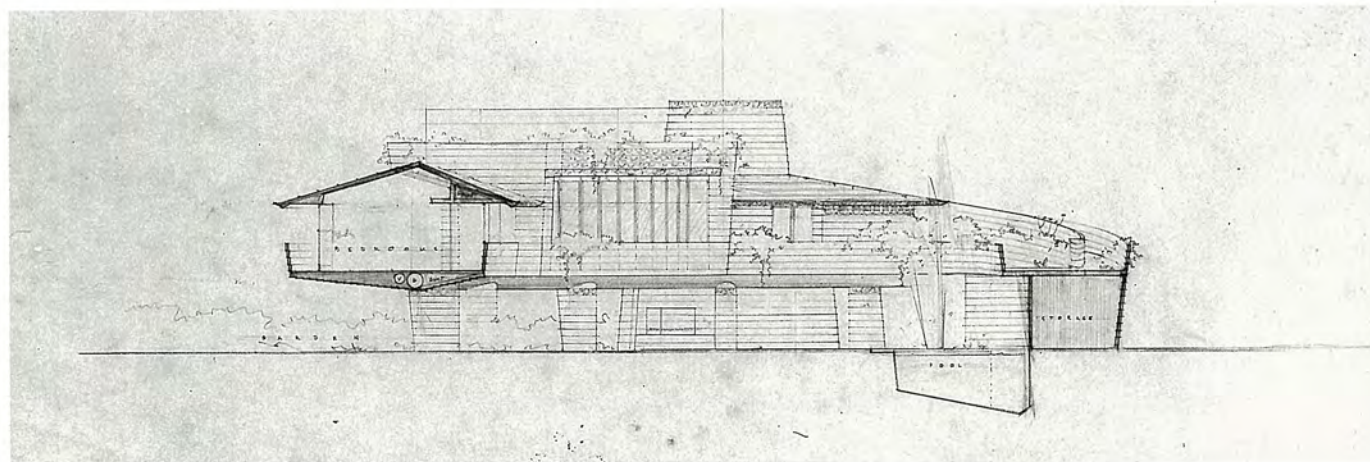
"How to Live in the Southwest," David Wright House,

Phoenix, Arizona. 1950. Plan, section, and elevation. Pencil and color pencil on tracing paper, 46 x 30". FLLW FDN# 5011.001

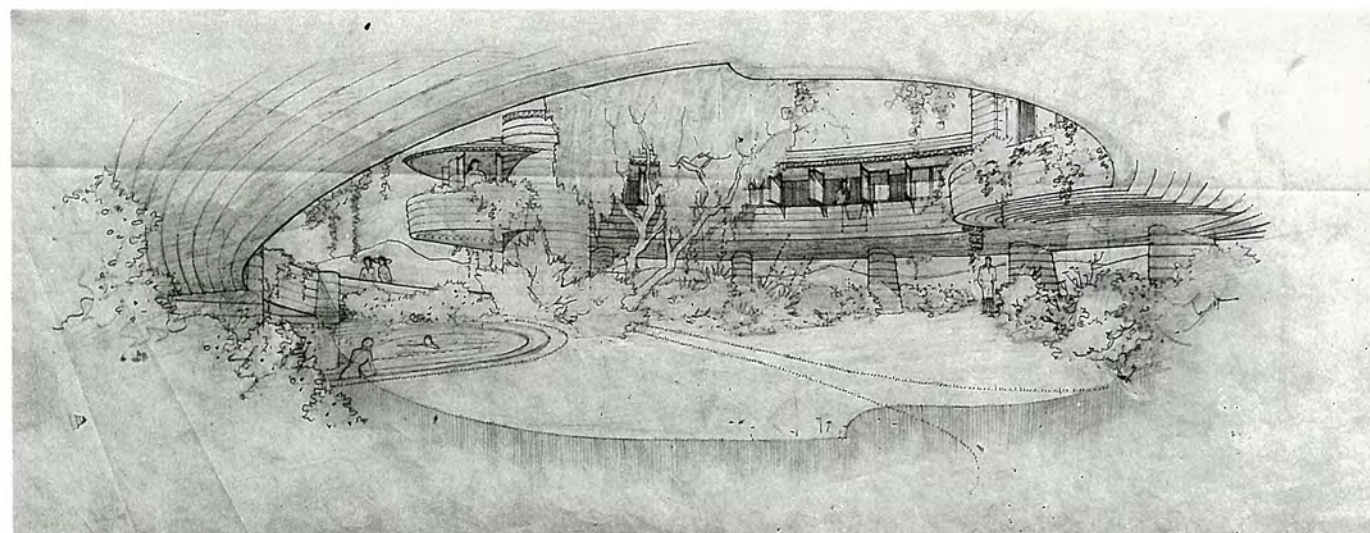




"How to Live in the Southwest," David Wright House,  
Phoenix, Arizona. 1950. PERSPECTIVE. PENCIL ON TRACING PAPER, 36 X 23". FLLW FDN # 5030.003



"How to Live in the Southwest," David Wright House,  
Phoenix, Arizona. 1950. ELEVATION. PENCIL AND SEPIA INK ON TRACING PAPER, 36 X 18". FLLW FDN # 5011.002



"How to Live in the Southwest," David Wright House,  
Phoenix, Arizona. 1950. PERSPECTIVE. PENCIL ON TRACING PAPER, 36 X 14". FLLW FDN # 5030.005