



Wright-Designed Boathouse Opens in N.Y.

Boathouse Designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1905 Opens to Public in Buffalo, N.Y.

By **CAROLYN THOMPSON**

The Associated Press

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A boathouse designed by Frank Lloyd Wright opened to the public Friday on the city's waterfront, more than 100 years after it was conceived and nearly 50 years after the architect's death.

Wright designed the rowing boathouse for the University of Wisconsin at the informal request of a student friend, but the university passed on it. Some Buffalo oarsmen made building it their mission after coming across the plans during a conference of Wright scholars 10 years ago.

"This is such a spectacular design, and it always amazes me that it was designed in 1905," said Ted Marks, an oarsman who helped form Frank Lloyd Wright's Rowing Boathouse Corp. to raise money and oversee the project.

The two-story structure has quarter-sawn red oak doors and trim and second-floor diamond-paned windows beneath a cantilevered roof. Wright, who died in 1959, redrew his plan in 1930 to change the original stucco exterior to concrete.

"This is really a piece of modern architecture that still looks modern, even though it was modern 102 years ago," Marks, the corporation's president, said.

The boathouse also raises the city's number of Wright works, which already bring architectural tourists to the city. Others include the Darwin Martin House, Graycliff Estate and Blue-Sky Mausoleum.

After getting permission and architect Anthony Puttnam, a Wright apprentice to build the boathouse, the corporation raised \$5.5 million from donors. Among the largest was television writer and producer Tom Fontana, who grew up in Buffalo in a rowing family. The boathouse will be called The Charles and Marie Fontana Boathouse after his mother and father, who coached for decades.

"I know my father would have been especially proud to have been here to know that his legacy to the rowing community of Buffalo will continue," Fontana said.

He persuaded Hollywood friends including Mary Tyler Moore, Blythe Danner and Grant Tinker to join television producer Diane English and newsman Tim Russert, both Buffalo natives, in contributing to the cause.

Except for its location on the Niagara River, with the Peace Bridge to Canada as a backdrop, the boathouse was built exactly as drawn though planners toyed with the idea of widening the lower-level

doors to better accommodate the shells.

"There was no way in the design that we could do so without compromising the design, so the architect wouldn't let us do it," Marks said, "so the solution was that when you carry your boats in and out you have to cant them so that the rigging and the full width of the boat clears the doorway."

Wright included his design in the Wasmuth portfolio, published in Berlin in 1910, and a 1930 touring exhibition.

"It's very much in the Prairie style, but it's also beyond the Prairie style because it's the first time Wright lowered the hip roof and made it a flat slab roof," said Sharon Courtin, executive director of the boathouse corporation. "It has a much more modern feel to it than a lot of his other Prairie architecture of the same era."

The West Side Rowing Club, one of the nation's oldest and largest clubs, will run some of its programs from the new 5,000-square-foot space and expand its youth program for high school students.

On the Net:

Rowing Boathouse: <http://www.wrightsboathouse.org>

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