

# WRIGHT AT HOME IN GRAND RAPIDS

By Dianna Stampfler



**P**erched on the northeast corner of Madison and Logan streets in the Heritage Hill District, behind a well-manicured bordering hedge, sits one of Grand Rapids' most unique homes. This gem is known as the Meyer May House, after clothier Meyer May who, in 1908, commissioned acclaimed Chicago architect Frank Lloyd Wright to design and build this 3,600-square-foot prairie-style family dwelling.

With distinct horizontal lines, creamy layered brick and colorful stained glass windows, the fortress-looking house features a full basement and two floors in a T-shaped configuration. Entering off the back driveway (sans garage), the intimate stairway winds around to the first floor where the true impact of Wright's design comes to life.

It's hard for the eyes to decide where to focus first. The living room boasts a massive fireplace, built-in bookshelves and custom furniture. The highlight of the dining room is a 10-seat table with

corner planter lamps and high-back chairs. A floral watercolor mural wraps the dividing wall between the foyer and the dining room, while towering windows at every turn bring views of nature inside. The front door opens onto a large covered veranda, oddly void of steps or access to the yard.

Upstairs, the bedrooms, sitting room and hallway are found under four-sided vaulted ceilings reminiscent of the inside of a tent, giving air to the space. Servants' rooms are located at the back of the house, where staff would have been close enough to care for the Mays' children.

After May died in 1936, the home sat vacant before being sold in 1942 and again in 1945, during which time the original integrity of the house was jeopardized. A carport was added to the back of the house, and structural changes in the foyer included the covering of the delicate mural. Steelcase, the local office furniture company, purchased the home in 1985 and began the process of restoring the landmark to its original grandeur. That meant tracking down,



## THE WRIGHT STUFF

Free guided tours of the Meyer May House are offered from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. every Tuesday and Thursday and from 1-4 p.m. on Sunday. [meyermayhouse.steelcase.com](http://meyermayhouse.steelcase.com)

While in the area be sure to walk through Heritage Hill, Grand Rapids' oldest residential neighborhood and one of the largest urban historic districts in the U.S., with nearly 60 unique architectural styles represented. The Heritage Hill Weekend Tour of Homes, traditionally held in May, has been postponed. Check the website for possible rescheduling in 2020. [heritagehillweb.org](http://heritagehillweb.org)

## ALSO IN MICHIGAN

During his career Wright built 31 homes in Michigan, and a handful are open for tours or overnight stays.

The Affleck House in Bloomfield Hills, built in 1941 for Elizabeth and Gregor S. Affleck, was the first Wright-designed home built in Metro Detroit. The 2,359-square-foot Usonian-style home was donated in 1978 by the Affleck children to Lawrence Technological University. Its College of Architecture and Design uses it as an educational and inspirational resource. Listed with the National Register of Historic Places, the Affleck House is open for seasonal, monthly tours. [affleckhouse.org](http://affleckhouse.org)

Check into these Wright homes through short-term vacation rental companies:

- ◊ Eppstein House, Galesburg
- ◊ Gale Cottage, Whitehall
- ◊ Meyer House, Galesburg
- ◊ Palmer House, Ann Arbor

repairing or recreating the roof, furniture, wall coverings and flooring, earning the Meyer May House recognition as one of the state's top architectural treasures.

Grand Rapids resident Ben Darcie has been fascinated with Wright since researching the architect for a high school assignment. He recently satisfied his curiosity about the Meyer May House on one of the free guided tours of what is regarded as the most extensively restored Wright home.

"I've spent the last 15 years of my life obsessing over his work, and in turn, exploring others, but there's just something about Wright," Darcie notes. "Originality, ingenuity, instinct? I've pondered it for years and have never quite been able to put my finger on his essence. Maybe that is the beauty of it." *em*

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