

Landmarks Commission Lamp—August 12, 2013

The Lamp House, its siting, landscape and hardscape, and its views of Madison's lakes and cityscape are an intentional ensemble and work of art by one of the twentieth century's greatest artists, Frank Lloyd Wright. A recent show at the Guggenheim and a mammoth 1994 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art demonstrate that the international art world considers him a genius in architecture as well as landscape architecture, planning, typography and design—of furniture, fabric, glassware, china, and decorative objects. What da Vinci is to Florence, Michelangelo to Vatican City, and Rembrandt to Amsterdam, Frank Lloyd Wright is to Madison. The Landmarks Commission can help put Madison on the international art map—something the city's museums can never do. The commission can help guarantee that Wright's intentions for the Lamp House and its environs suffer no more depredation, but are preserved as an integrated work of art, the core of a major, income-generating tourist attraction that could last hundreds of years. If the proposals at hand meet Madison's planning guidelines, then the guidelines and plans should be altered, not Wright's realized designs.

Among Wright's works, the Lamp House, built in 1903, has not received high marks owing to the loss of its roof garden in 1911, the addition of paint on the

exterior, the loss of its fenced enclosures, unsympathetic landscaping, the deterioration of its surroundings, and the loss of its views to the southeast.

Its assets are these: First, a revolutionary floor plan that was publicized, copied, and used around the country for decades. Second, a revolutionary landscape and hardscape plan by which Wright intentionally and deliberately placed the house at the rear of a complex parcel, requiring numerous retaining walls and terraces. No other central urban work by Wright has been so elaborately and painstakingly sited and landscaped. Third, like the landscaping also an unusual asset, to accommodate his client's interests in Madison and boating, Wright incorporated the existing viewshed into this design—a viewshed that includes both lakes, elements of the downtown district, and the East Side. These views enabled his handicapped, lifelong best friend, Robert M. Lamp, to enjoy the city from a bower on his roof, enjoy sunlight in all his rooms, and enjoy his suburban-like retreat a block and a half from the Capitol Park.

Now Madison has the opportunity to assure that art lovers from around the world also can enjoy and learn from this house and its siting and landscaping. The city can set things in motion by retaining the buildings surrounding the Lamp House—integral elements to Wright's design—and reject the proposals both for an sunlight-inhibiting apartment complex to its rear and for the destruction of the

houses Wright incorporated into this design. May the sun continue to shine on the Lamp House.

Jack Holzhueter, August 13, 2013