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A COTTAGE FOR ALL SEASONS

By Anne Rooney

Editor's Note: Anne Rooney is a writer who's enjoyed several stays at the Seth Peterson Cottage. She takes inspiration from her own visits and the memories of other people who have stayed at the cottage.

The Seth Peterson Cottage, one of the last commissions of iconic architect Frank Lloyd Wright, is a cherished touchstone that my husband and I share — a refuge in which we are an integral part of the glorious nature that surrounds us.

One winter morning, Rich and I awoke there to the graceful ballet of giant snowflakes tumbling among the tall pines outside our wall of windows. Another foot of pristine new powder lay on the ground.

The daily soap opera at the bird feeder entertained us with epic battles in which squirrels of every color struggled for dominance on the ground, while, in the air above, a flying circus of birds zoomed in and out

like a flight pattern at a busy airport.

Our pulses slowed to the steady rhythm of the setting sun through the trees over Mirror Lake.

No newspapers, telephone calls, internet or television intrude. This private oasis in nature is ours. Every time we gingerly wind our way around the final curve of the entrance lane, the jewel box of stone, wood and glass that is the Seth Peterson Cottage stuns us anew.

Nowadays the cottage is frequently rented several months, if not years, in advance. Its guestbook reveals the enthusiastic and often intimate impressions of admirers from around the

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WRITINGS

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LINDAL CEDAR HOMES RE-IMAGINES THE SETH PETERSON COTTAGE FOR NEW SERIES

By Brian R. Hannan

In developing her master's degree thesis at the School of Architecture at Taliesin (SOAT), Trina Lindal looked to Frank Lloyd Wright, the school's founder, and his late-in-life work for inspiration.

"What are the essential Usonian elements?" Lindal wondered.

"How do we respect that but also create a home for modern living?"

Answering those questions led Lindal and collaborating architect Aris Georges, a former Taliesin fellow and SOAT instructor, to create the Imagine Series. Seattle-based Lindal Cedar Homes launched it this past June in response to a licensing agreement proposal from the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation. Lindal is a granddaughter of company founder Sir Walter Lindal, a pioneer in building prefabricated homes, and a daughter of Bob Lindal, the current president and CEO.

The Imagine Series consists of

seven homes inspired by Wright's Usonian designs and design principles. The lineup includes what Lindal describes as "translations" of the Seth Peterson Cottage (Mirror Lake); the Bachman-Wilson House (Crystal Springs); the Gordon House (Silverton); the Jacobs I House (Madison); and the Penfield House (Willoughby) — as well as two Lindal-original homes, the Highland Park and the Mesquite.

Stuart Graff, president and CEO of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation underscores that distinction. "While the houses are all inspired by Wright's designs," he said, "very importantly, we didn't want to replicate Wright's work. A 'Frank Lloyd Wright house' is a Frank Lloyd Wright house."

Accordingly, Lindal and the foundation were guided by what Graff describes as the "intellectual underpinnings of a Usonian. How do you take a small space and make it feel like a big space by

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

By Kermit Traska

At the Seth Peterson Cottage, magic is in the air. Only magic could draw thousands of people throughout the years, some to stay in the cottage or others to view it during a monthly open house.

Having had the opportunity to lead tours of the cottage, I watch people's eyes as they approach the structure and enter the space. Watching people as they take in the outward appearance and experience interior space is almost transfixing.

Our family has been associated with the cottage through the years of restoration, the early years when there weren't many reservations and more recently when it takes a cancellation in order to get a nights stay. As such we have become very familiar with all of the aspects of the cottage.

Many of the things we have come to know and may take for granted are new and fascinating for a first-time visitor. As they take in the magic of the site, they intently listen to stories about Frank Lloyd Wright, Peterson, the saving of the cottage and people who have stayed there.

This issue of our newsletter contains two submissions by people that have experienced the magic of the Seth Peterson Cottage. Each took it upon themselves to submit the information they thought others might also enjoy. And we hope you enjoy the articles.

The magic continues in the excerpts from our guest book. Each one trying to put in words their own connection to the magic that exists within and around the cottage. The magic goes on!

The volunteers of the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy work hard to maintain the magic that surrounds the cottage.

The board of directors meets quarterly to provide guidance and direction. Board members and volunteers lead the monthly open house tours.

Extra effort is directed to the spring work week and special projects throughout the year. The result is an architectural work of art where people can enjoy its magic for years to come.

Please help us provide the magic of the Peterson cottage by joining or renewing your membership in the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy. Let's keep the magic happening!

MIRROR LAKE ASSOCIATION UPDATE

By Mark Blakeslee, President

It has been a busy summer for the Mirror Lake Association (MLA) and the Mirror Lake Management District (MLMD).

Conserving and protecting Mirror Lake and the surrounding area is our mission. Our members do that every year! We start in the spring by picking up litter on all the roadways that circle Mirror Lake.

Throughout the summer we operate the Clean Boat, Clean Water program. This is a program where our members spend more than 200 hours greeting every boater that goes in and comes out of the lake at the Mirror Lake State Park boat launch. They not only check boats and trailers for hitchhiking invasive species, they also educate the people on them too. An invasive species can be aquatic animals, snails, insects or plants. Mirror Lake is clean of many of the major invasive species that plague other lakes throughout Wisconsin, and we work to keep it that way.

We continued our many years of harvesting aquatic plants. As a lake whose water source is from a creek that flows through farm land, we have a lot of phosphorous entering the lake that promotes vegetative growth. We do the harvesting to improve the health of the lake and to create a better more appealing recreational waterway.

Many of our lake property owners volunteered this summer to participate in a tick survey conducted by University of Wisconsin — Madison CDC-sponsored vector-borne disease staff. The survey's intent was to identify deer tick nymphs with Lyme disease and how human behaviors and activities impact their exposure to ticks. If you'd like more information on this research or how to prevent tick bites, please email me at the address below, and I will send you that information.

As always, I'd love to hear your feedback. If you have any thoughts, comments or concerns, please call me at (608) 575-4652 or send an email to markblakeslee57@gmail.com.

MIRROR LAKE STATE PARK REPORT

By Ryder Will, Park Supervisor

We are wrapping up another busy season at Mirror Lake State Park.

This year was not the best for us as we saw everything from extreme heat to heavy rain and storms and the worst mosquito levels anyone can recall. It seemed all those issues occurred on the weekends as well, driving down the numbers of our visitors.

Even with all that Mother Nature threw at us, our staff did an excellent job providing wonderful experiences for hundreds of thousands of visitors. The one constant working in state parks is that you never know what to expect next.

Most of our seasonal staff has left for the year, either returning to school or slowing down from their "retirement job." While we are down some staff, we will remain busy with campers as we often fill on the nice fall weekends. We will also have several special events including the annual S'more Fun Trail Run, Halloween Hike and our two winter candlelight ski/snowshoe events. Between our staff and a dedicated group of volunteers, we strive to provide memorable visits throughout the year.

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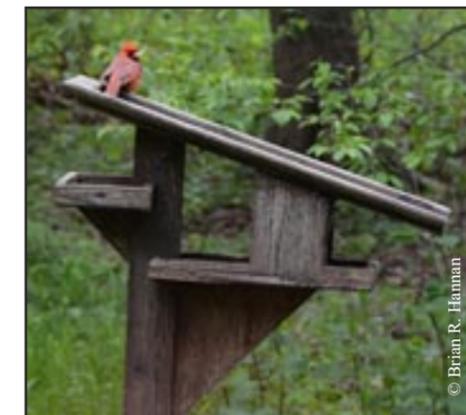
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ALL SEASONS

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world. Guests often describe being deeply touched by its tender history. Stories of surprise 60th birthday gifts, 50th anniversary celebrations and romantic marriage proposals are woven throughout its pages. Entries tell of Scrabble games played in a summer thunderstorm and champagne enjoyed in front of a roaring fire with Duke Ellington providing musical accompaniment.

The guestbook paints memories of fresh-baked cherry pies, eagle spottings, fishing in Mirror Lake and sunset canoe excursions to the nearby 1950s supper club, Ishnala. One young man penned a moving note of gratitude to his parents for sharing the cottage experience with him as a high school graduation gift, inspiring him for a career as an architect.

One entry in the guestbook stands out among the rest for its deeply personal and heartfelt connection to the cottage's history: "Thank you, Uncle Seth, for

acting upon your dream of a life here. I love you. Your nephew Will"

That we are even able to enjoy the beauty and serenity of the cottage is itself a poignant reminder of life's twists and sometimes tragic, turns. As a high school student in the 1950s, Peterson often traveled by train from Madison to Chicago, where, in suburban Oak Park, he admired the early 20th century Prairie Style architecture first made famous by Wright, a fellow Wisconsin native. In 1958, after a stint in the Army, the young Peterson convinced his 90-year-old idol to design a cottage for him and his fiancée on a small plot of land that he had purchased on Mirror Lake, near the Wisconsin Dells.

The architectural drawings were completed in April 1959, shortly before Wright's death.

Construction began that summer and continued into the fall and winter. Peterson himself participated in some aspects of the construction, even staying overnight at the construction site in a sleeping bag in front of the fireplace.

Unfortunately, personal despair from a broken engagement and drained finances overwhelmed the young Peterson, who took his own life just as the cottage was nearing completion in 1960.

Two years later, his parents sold the property to a Milwaukee family, who in turn sold it to the state of Wisconsin as an extension of the newly created Mirror Lake State Park. Park officials were unable to find a purpose for it and yet were unwilling to demolish it, assuming that it likely had some historical value as one of the last designs of native son Wright. It soon fell into decay.

In 1988 a group of local citizens formed a conservancy to raise funds to restore it to its original beauty. After an extensive multiyear restoration, the cottage was dedicated in 1992 as a masterful interpretation of what Wright first termed "organic architecture."

Organic architecture promotes harmony between building and nature through design approaches so sympathetic with its site that the structure, interior furnishings and environment



© Brian R. Hamman

blend into a unified whole.

The massive metal gate to the property, a Wright-inspired design in his signature Cherokee Red, beckons guests in and sends them along the gravel entrance road aglow with amber lanterns. Wisconsin red sandstone, Douglas fir and glass weave together seamlessly into an integrated structure that appears to have burst out of the ground as a single element. The soaring 12-foot ceiling, which floats above a wall of glass and

stone on one side of the main living area, gently slopes down to the tiny bedroom. The giant stone hearth serves as an interior focus, one that provides its guests warmth and intimacy on a chilly winter evening.

Throughout the span of our pilgrimages there, our unique memories, in addition to the spectacular woodland setting and its astonishing design, have christened the Peterson cottage as a sacred spot for us. At sunset on the evening of our second wedding anniversary, we reaffirmed our deep love and commitment to each other outside on the sandstone terrace at the edge of the bluff.

We've slow-danced in the dark to the Benny Goodman Quartet's rendition of "Moonglow," illuminated only by the glow of the actual moon and stars outside. We've cuddled at dawn on a brilliant autumn morning, the oaks and birches outside our window glowing golden in the sunrise. We've canoed — and once capsized — on the lovely solitude of Mirror Lake.

We've delighted in sharing our special sanctuary with close family and friends who traveled from Chicago to celebrate Rich's 70th birthday. The cool October drizzle outside did nothing to dampen our joyful spirits, made warm by the roaring fire, jazz on the CD player and the love of those dear to us. Hosting a party in this exquisite space felt like a holy consecration of Rich's eighth decade.

There is no doubt that although neither Wright nor Peterson lived long enough to experience its wonder, the many who have visited have discovered joy, peace, renewal and celebration here.

One guest described in the guest book a 20th wedding anniversary: "Back home in the city," she wrote, "nature, other than the wind and its rain or snow, never really speaks loudly enough to be heard over the clangor of city folk. So our brief stay here has been such a sharp contrast. As if Wright knew our pulse, our spiritual wavelength. It's as if the splendid vista of these grand windows make one look not out, but in...." 

FROM THE GUESTBOOK

"...(W)e have thoroughly been at peace here in the little cabin in the woods and toasted both Frank Lloyd Wright and Seth Peterson on the anniversary of their births, marveling in the forces of nature that brought these two together to create a space of harmony and tranquility!" — *Dick & Connie*

"As I look out the window at the placid lake among the fall trees, I feel refreshed and ready to return to my music. Although we were here for one day, it has been a refuge. A peaceful place to talk and enjoy the beauty of this building, nature and life!" — *Laura & Brad*

"Only the Seth Peterson Cottage belongs on this spot; the Seth Peterson Cottage belongs nowhere else. Nature's design and man's design are perfectly harmonized. You can see it when you are not looking, you can hear it when you are not listening; most of all, you can feel it, you know it. It is right; it is Wright." — *Linda & Randy*

"Having grown up in Racine, Wisconsin, with several Wright-designed homes and buildings around me, his architecture fascinated me. And now having spent two days within a home he designed, a dream of mine has been fulfilled. The cottage is truly remarkable, the setting is spectacular and the memories made are forever." — *Sue & Les, Oro Valley, Arizona*

"What a jewel. How fortunate to be able to relax in a place like this. On a lake like this. Amazing light and reflections. Our days ended with sunset paddling and conversations with the owls. Our thanks to those who accomplished this amazing restoration!" — *David & Athena*

"...(C)oming here gave us the opportunity to recharge, to set aside distractions and be refreshed by things that really matter. Being open to the house ... let us see things as they are and not be bothered by things as they could be. And things are good. It's a gift to be here." — *Kristen & Keith*

RE-IMAGINES

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(leading viewers') eyes in different directions, by connecting strongly to the outside world? How can these principles be deeply embodied in a house designed for contemporary dwellers and meeting contemporary needs?"

For Lindal, the Peterson cottage proved to be an obvious choice — both for its Usonian *bona fides* and also for its aesthetic as "that little cabin in the woods that people associate with Lindal."

The Lindal translation of the Peterson cottage closely resembles Wright's original. Notable differences include post-and-beam construction on Lindal's 5-foot, 4-inch grid and the absence of mitred glass in the corners of the front window bank. The Mirror Lake is slightly larger at 958 square feet.



Graff predicts the Mirror Lake will be well-received. "There's a lot of love for the Peterson cottage in the Wright community," he said.

"Maybe a few people who stay there will, in turn, decide they love it so much they want to embrace the design — and they can go out and buy the kit. It's a heckuva souvenir, if you will."

Note: *The Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy does not endorse Lindal Cedar Homes' Imagine Series.* 



LIBRARY BORROWS PETERSON COTTAGE DESIGN

"(My daughter) Kristi had been wanting to put in her yard a 'Take a Book, Leave a Book' house. Her husband Tom surprised her with his replica of the Seth Peterson

Cottage. It is stunning. I know he spent hours working on this. Needless to say she was surprised and thrilled." — *Sandra Carrington, Hager City, Wisconsin*

NOMINATIONS SOUGHT FOR 2019 VISSER AWARD

The deadline for applications for the 2019 Kristin Visser Historical Preservation Award is March 15, 2019.

The award, given by the directors of the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy, is presented every other year to an individual or organization in recognition of past work in historical preservation of a Frank Lloyd Wright or Prairie School building in Wisconsin or a contiguous state. In general, buildings constructed between 1900 and 1925 are given preference, and the restoration work shall have been substantially completed within the two calendar years previous to the year of application. The 2019 award will be given for work done during 2017 and 2018.

The award is in the amount of \$5,000. Applicants are asked to support their applications with a statement fully describing the restoration project, including its state of completion, a supporting statement from the building contractor and/or architect, a letter or letters of support from scholars and/or working professionals familiar with the project, photographic evidence of work completed and any other supporting materi-



Kristin Visser

als. Applications will be judged by members of the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy and outside experts/scholars.

The award recipient will be announced on April 15, 2019, and the award presented on June 10, 2019.

The award is named in honor of Kristin Visser, who was instrumental in the restoration of the Seth Peterson Cottage and a tireless worker on its behalf. She is the author of "Frank Lloyd Wright and the Prairie School in Wisconsin," and, with John Eifler, A.I.A., "Frank Lloyd Wright's Seth Peterson Cottage: Rescuing a Lost Masterwork." Visser, a planner for the Wisconsin State Department of Natural Resources, died in 1998 at the age of 48.

The Seth Peterson Cottage is Wright's final Wisconsin commission (1958) and, at only 880 square feet, one of his smallest. It was rescued from ruin by the concerted efforts of a local group of lakeshore property owners, spearheaded

by Audrey Laatsch, and restored through a public/private partnership effort.

The inaugural award was given in 2007 to Steve Sikora and Lynette Erickson-Sikora, for their work in restoring the Willey House, in Minneapolis.

The 2009 award was granted to Paul A. Harding and Cheryl Harding, for their work in restoring the Davenport House, in River Forest, Illinois.

The 2011 award was presented to Mary Arnold and Henry St. Maurice for their work on the E. Clarke Arnold Residence in Columbus, Wisconsin.

The 2013 award was presented to Frank Lloyd Wright Wisconsin for the restoration of the B-1 American System-Built home in Milwaukee.

The 2015 award was given to John Eifler and Bonnie Phoenix for the restoration of the Ross house in Glencoe, Illinois.

The 2017 award was given posthumously to Gene Szymczak for his restoration of the Thomas P. Hardy House in Racine, Wisconsin.

Send applications to: Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy, 400 Viking Drive, Reedsburg, WI 53959-1466. Questions? SethPetersonCottage@gmail.com. 

MIRROR LAKE STATE PARK REPORT

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One off-season project that we are particularly excited about is the construction of a new storage shed here in the park. For many years the Mirror Lake Management District has operated a weed harvest on the lake. Harvesting lake weeds keeps the lake open for navigation and removes unpleasant aquatic plants to improve the health and appearance of the lake. The weed harvester works throughout the summer thanks to the efforts of the district, town of Delton and the Mirror Lake Association. Particular thanks are due to Jerry Collins as the primary coordinator and operator of the harvester. Without the work of the harvester the lake would quickly fill with unwanted vegetation and the user experience would be significantly affected.

With such a significant investment in the harvester, the dis-

trict has long wanted to provide for safe and secure off-season storage. The harvester itself is a large piece of equipment and somewhat difficult to transport. For those reasons, it has been stored at the park, unfortunately outside. Now, through the generous support of many individuals and organizations that care for Mirror Lake, the district was able to fund the construction of a large storage shed with room for the harvester, as well as space for storage of material and equipment for the park, district, Friends of Mirror Lake and the lake association.

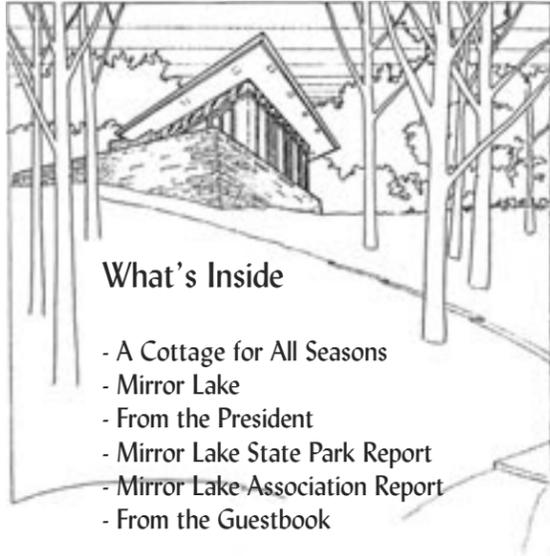
While storage sheds are not particularly glamorous or exciting (particularly to those readers with an architecture or design background), this building will meet vital storage and operational needs.

This building project is another splendid example of the cooperation that exists between so many organizations and individuals that care about Mirror Lake. We should all be proud to be a part of the story of Mirror Lake State Park. 

WRITINGS

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What's Inside

- A Cottage for All Seasons
- Mirror Lake
- From the President
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- Mirror Lake Association Report
- From the Guestbook

Want to learn more about Frank Lloyd Wright's work in Wisconsin? Visit WrightInWisconsin.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Seth Peterson Cottage Open House and Guided Tour

- Nov. 11 1 to 3:30 p.m. \$5
- Dec. 9 1 to 3:30 p.m. \$5
- Jan. 13 1 to 3:30 p.m. \$5
- Feb. 10 1 to 3:30 p.m. \$5
- March 10 1 to 3:30 p.m. \$5
- April 14 1 to 3:30 p.m. \$5
- May 12 1 to 3:30 p.m. \$5

Conservancy members receive free admission and 10 percent off cottage merchandise.

Annual Meeting & Volunteer Recognition

- 4:15 p.m. Dec. 9. RSVP by sending an e-mail to sethpetersoncottage@gmail.com. The meeting will last approximately one hour. After, we'll have social time and dinner — and decorate the Christmas tree.

✓ Visitors find touring the cottage a great way to spend a Sunday afternoon. Take a scenic drive and experience firsthand this restored Frank Lloyd Wright-designed home

during the open house tours held each month.

For more information about the cottage, visit us online at SethPeterson.org.

Seth Peterson Cottage

E9982 Fern Dell Road
Lake Delton, Wisconsin

