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STYLE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY E. ANTHONY VALAINIS

BY ALICIA GARCEAU

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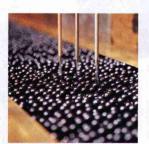
After Frank Lloyd Wright built

his first major public work in 1903, the Larkin Building in Buffalo, New York, one critic proclaimed it "extremely ugly" and a "monster of awkwardness." Wright's innovative designs, especially his Prairie Style homes, startled many people at first.

Pedestrians in the Chatham Arch neighborhood who catch a glimpse of the Prairie Style house on Park Avenue might be startled too, but only because the home is unlike any other in the downtown area. The striking 4,700-square-foot home designed by Reid Bobrick and built by Ursella David riffs on many of Wright's principles, notably the low roof, horizontal lines, open floor plan and connection to the earth.

The three-bedroom home has all the usual upscale perks: media room, exercise room, expansive wet bar, McMansion-sized walk-in closets. But the showstopper is a two-story living room with a pair of stackedstone fireplaces and a glass-walled atrium featuring a fountain. The sound of water trickling and the warm glow of fire link the home's interior with the outdoors. "Wright was about incorporating elements of nature into his buildings-water, earth, fire and air," Bobrick says. "There are always elemental things going on in this home."

The designer worked with what he calls the Prairie vocabulary of materials, choosing stone, slate, granite, marble and wood, which dictated the home's neutral color palette. Another integral element of the style is the use of built-ins, which inspired a long built-in sofa on one side of the living area and a matching banquette, for dining, on the other side.





Although the home's design is rooted in Chicago's Prairie Style, the homeowners, Greg and Lisa Larkin (no relation to Wright's Larkin Building), are as Hoosier as they come: He's the director of corporate health services for Eli Lilly; she was the 1970 Indiana State Fair Queen. Today Lisa is Marian College's director of health services.

Greg's fascination with Wright's designs goes way back-he was born in Oak Park, Illinois, where Wright's home and studio are located, and as a young child, he lived in a Prairie Style home designed by a Wright associate. After the Larkins' son, Nick, left for the Naval Academy, the couple decided to sell their house on Eagle Creek Reservoir and look for a spot on which to build a Wright-inspired home.

"Where we had looked was more of a wooded area in keeping with some of the Frank Lloyd Wright homes we had seen," says Lisa. "But that was the kind of location we were coming from. We thought if we were going to build again, why not change the entire environment?"

A narrow urban parcel located just a half-block from bustling Mass Ave, the Chatham Arch lot was radically different from the Larkins' Eagle Creek setting. The site proved a great location, but Prairie Style homes are typically found on large, suburban, wooded lots, so part of Bobrick's task in designing was to diminish the house's exterior bulk-quite a challenge on a 30-foot-wide lot. The Larkins were undaunted. "We had an opportunity to build a standalone home downtown-that kind of lot isn't very available anymore," says Greg. "We liked the idea of being in a neighborhood that's diverse, comfortable and accepting."

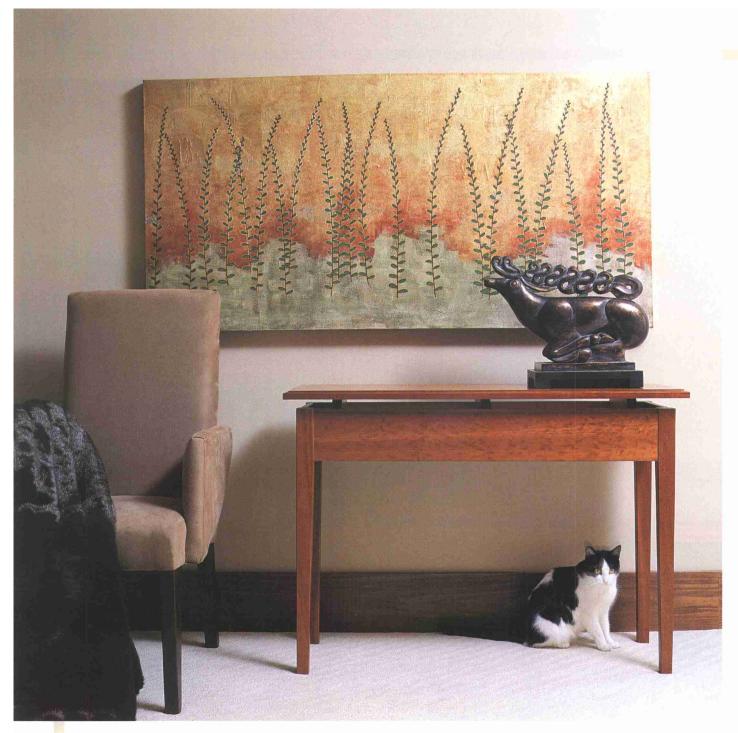












LINEAR THINKING
Inside and out, the house has strong horizontal lines. To further complement the Prairie concept, the Larkins commissioned the painting in the master suite by Indianapolis artist Susan Hodgins. Outside, the basic themes continue—strong sense of geometry, clever use of built-ins. With the lot only a few feet wider than the house, the Larkins traded a lawn for container gardens and a terrace.





