



“Savor cottage life as Frank Lloyd Wright envisioned it”

Legendary architect Frank Lloyd Wright turned the idea of a woodsy cabin inside out, creating an earthy modern hideaway in the Wisconsin forest

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT, I THINK, WOULD HAVE APPROVED. Navigating a long, wooded drive last winter, I found his 1958 Seth Peterson Cottage in Wisconsin mantled in 2 feet of fresh and undisturbed snow. Of all the adornments of the season—holiday lights, wreaths, garlands—snow is probably the only addition to a Wright-designed house that the nature-loving architect would have blessed. >

WRITER ELAINE GLUSAC and her husband and son have a snowball fight in front of the Seth Peterson Cottage in Wisconsin's Mirror Lake State Park.



BOTH THE MASSIVE STONE FIREPLACE and the flagstone floors with radiant heat (also part of Wright's original design) warm the cabin. Even the fireside chairs exemplify the architect's signature style.

My family—husband Dave and 7-year-old son Seth and I—felt fortunate to have the keys to such a special place, one of the few Frank Lloyd Wright homes available for rent. Based on remarks recorded in its guest book, the fully furnished cottage plays host to fans of design and nature.

In the Seth Peterson they get both. The Wisconsin-born Wright, father of the Prairie School of architecture, is famed for using indigenous materials such as stone and wood as often and as openly as possible. Seth Peterson himself grew up near Wright's Spring Green home, Taliesin (see "Field Trips," page 55), about 45 miles southwest of here, and later commissioned the architect to build him a modest 880-square-foot cottage near this forested Wisconsin Dells resort region. It cost \$26,000 in 1958, but Peterson died before it was completed, beginning a dark chapter in the house's history. Another owner lived here until 1966, when the state purchased it as part of Mirror Lake State Park, boarded it up, and left it to the elements, seemingly forgotten. Some 20 years later, local resident Audrey Laatsch campaigned to save the home—by then overgrown, vandalized, and rotting—which led to its 1992 restoration.

"Because the house is so small, it illustrates Wright's principles in a way that is easy to understand," says Claire Barnett, president of the nonprofit Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy. "You can sit in the living room with your back to the brick wall, feeling all safe and secure while experiencing the >



WINDOWS WRAP ONE SIDE of the stone-and-wood Seth Peterson Cottage, connecting the locally harvested materials with their natural setting.

“A stay at the Seth Peterson

openness of the outdoors. It's really a wonderful paradox.”

But a stay at the Seth Peterson is truly about never leaving the bluff-top, forested perch. After cross-country skiing in the woods and building a Nordic snowman outside the cottage, we were chased indoors by the cold. The wood-framed, wraparound windows visually brought our surroundings in as we gathered around the enormous sandstone fireplace to toast marshmallows. Even the bedroom (the cottage sleeps four with a pull-out sofa bed in the living room) capitalizes on views through eye-level windows that ring the room. A modern refrigerator and stove update the tiny but fully equipped kitchen.

“I like how it's alone in the woods,” says our son through frosty breath, regarding the house during a family moonlit walk, snow crunching beneath our boots. The warm fir cabin resembles a lantern at night, aglow from within, radiating through its expansive panes. Seth Peterson is a cottage for all seasons, but the still of winter elicits Wright's earthy intentions most clearly. ■



BYWAYS COTTAGE FOR RENT

HOME AWAY FROM HOME

About 50 miles northwest of Madison, Wisconsin, the cottage is in the heart of Wright country, with the architect's home, Taliesin, an hour's drive away.

YOUR HOST

■ **SETH PETERSON COTTAGE**, 800/822-7768 or sethpeterson.org

THE SETTING

A pristine canopy of hardwoods and pines shades the forest floor, likely covered in white during the winter. Cross-country ski trails abound among the gently rolling hills. It's the quiet side of the Wisconsin Dells, and the best of the North Woods magic lies just beyond the iced eaves.

THE COST

\$225 per weeknight, \$275 per weekend night December through March and \$275 per night April through November, plus a \$30 handling fee

WHAT'S COTTAGE?

It embodies everything we strive for—efficient use of space, an open feel, connection to the outdoors, use of local materials, and a prime spot in a classic setting. And style? It's Frank Lloyd Wright, for goodness' sake.

FIELD TRIPS

TALIESIN, 877/588-7900 or taliesinpreservation.org. No stay in the Seth Peterson Cottage is complete without a visit to Spring Green and Wright's former home, now a preserved estate and education center. A variety of tours, offered May through October, will illuminate details often overlooked in his genius.

UNITARIAN MEETING HOUSE, 608/233-9774 or fuzmadison.org. Wright's 1951 design was functional and personal—the

architect attended this Unitarian Society in Madison. Members of the original congregation, also known as "The Stonehauleders," transported limestone from a quarry 30 miles away to build the structure.

THE DEL-BAR L, D \$\$-\$\$\$, 866/868-1061 or del-bar.com.

Wright protégé James Dresser helped design and renovate this nearly 70-year-old log cabin into a bistro that fits into Wright country. Steak and seafood make up the fare along with an extensive wine list.

MONONA TERRACE COMMUNITY AND

CONVENTION CENTER, 608/261-4000 or mononaterace.com.

The City of Madison denied Wright's plan for a community center all the way to his death. But in the 1990s the City wanted to revamp the downtown area, so leaders revisited the formerly controversial plans. Completed in 1997, the center now acts as a landmark on Monona Lake, with a bike/pedestrian path, guided and self-led tours, and a café.

WISCONSIN DELLS, 800/223-3557 or wisdells.com. Towering sandstone bluff formations have long made "the Dells" a worthwhile destination on the Wisconsin River. Cross-country trails are popular this time of year, or for a change of pace, try the area's 200-plus waterslides—this is the "Waterpark Capital of the World," and many of the parks are indoors (and heated to 85 degrees) for wintertime plunges.

MIRROR LAKE STATE PARK, 608/254-2333 or mirrorlakewisconsin.com. Twenty miles of groomed cross-country ski trails cut through the oak and pine forests mixed with prairie. The Turtleville Loop trail passes across from the Seth Peterson Cottage driveway. Park admission is \$10 for out-of-staters, \$7 for Wisconsin residents,

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\$\$-\$\$\$ reflects entrée costs of \$10-\$20+