Innovation and Artistry

The Affleck House is built on an L-shaped plan on three levels. One end is anchored into the ground, while the other end, the boldly cantilevered living area and terrace, hangs over the ravine taking advantage of the natural scenery. The living area consists of the entry, dining room, living room, and music room. The dining room is located next to the “workroom,” which was Wright’s idea of the modern kitchen. The kitchen opens into the living area, an innovative feature.

Notable Features
- 2,350 square feet on 2.3 acres of land
- $19,000 to build; with Wright furniture, $26,000. The original 13 furniture units, such as tables, chairs, and sofas, were all constructed of three-ply plywood.
- Built by contractor Harold Turner
- Three bedrooms, with three and a half baths
- Oriented to the sun, with many windows and skylights and views of the woods
- Design based on a four-by-four-foot modular grid for laying out the plan of interior partitions, furniture, rugs, and cabinets
- 600 feet of built-in shelves
- Six-foot high fireplace holds three five-foot vertical logs
- Indirect fluorescent lighting, a rarity in American homes at the time
- Several lights and windows bear a stylized “A” for Affleck
- All floors are pigmented cement and enclose the radiant heating system, a novel feature at the time
- Planter box “light well” looks down on a pool below and functions as a natural air conditioner. A window in the light well can be opened to pull air cooled by the pool into the house.
- Interior walls are ¾ inch plywood sandwiched between horizontally laid overlapping (ship-lapped) tidewater Cypress planks
- No nails were used, only brass screws, with heads aligned to the grain of the wood
- Interior door panel hinges disappear when doors are closed, leaving only doorknobs visible
- All corners are mitered
- Vertical joints in the brick and wood stripes are dyed to add to the overall feeling of width and spaciousness.
- Exterior is brick and tidewater Cypress

Today, the University and the College of Architecture and Design use the home as a study center to inspire new generations of architects, and as a site for business and educational symposia, receptions, retreats, and very special events.

For More Information

Tours
For more information about Lawrence Tech’s Affleck House, visit www.ltu.edu/affleck_house/index.asp. For information on tours or hosting events, call 248.204.2300 or email advancement@ltu.edu.

Donations
The Friends of Frank Lloyd Wright Affleck House, a nonprofit organization founded in 1982, works to support the renovation and continual improvement of the house. If you are interested in making a donation or becoming a part of restoring this Wright legacy, call 248.204.2300.

“Affleck House is both a unique item among Wright’s architectural output, and an important representative of a particular line of developmental thought.”

Historian William A. Storrer
The first Frank Lloyd Wright-designed house to be built in the Detroit metropolitan area, Lawrence Technological University’s Affleck House represents one of the finest examples in the world of the architect’s Usonian style, the last great period of Wright’s career. Completed in 1941, the house was placed on the Michigan Register of Historic Places in 1978 and the National Register of Historic Places in 1985. The Michigan Society of Architects includes the house among Michigan’s 50 most significant structures.

Built by Gregor S. and Elizabeth B. Affleck, the house was donated to Lawrence Tech in 1978 by their children, Mary Ann Affleck Lutomski and Gregor P. Affleck, for use as a teaching resource for the University’s College of Architecture and Design faculty and students. Over the years, architecture students have lived in the house to provide access to the public, give tours, and advance the University’s research and restoration efforts.

Wright and the Affleck family

Gregor and Elizabeth Affleck decided to commission Wright to design their home after seeing drawings of Wright’s Fallingwater residence in Pennsylvania. According to a 1940 article, the Afflecks wrote Wright, “We have seen the other houses and we don’t like them and we like yours.” They wanted something different.

Gregor Affleck had grown up near Frank Lloyd Wright in Spring Green, Wisconsin, and was acquainted with the Wright family. A chemical engineer who graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1919, Affleck came to the Detroit area to work in the automotive industry, where he invented a fast-drying paint that is still in use today.

Wright told the couple to “find a site that no one else can build anything on.” The Afflecks found a heavily wooded, hilly area along Woodward Ave. in the city of Bloomfield Hills. A subdivision had been planned for the area, but the lots wouldn’t sell because of the terrain, which included a ravine and an artesian spring at its crest. Water from the spring flowed across the site to a pond near the road. Wright’s innovative design received significant media attention while still under construction. Progressive Architecture published a four-page spread on the house, with photographs, in October 1940, and a model of the house was shown as part of a major retrospective of Wright’s work at the Museum of Modern Art in 1940–41.

The Afflecks raised their family and lived happily in their house for over three decades until their deaths, Elizabeth in 1973 and Gregor in 1974. They were conscientious stewards of their Wright home and readily welcomed visitors – which were many. In the late 1970s, their son, Gregor, estimated that his parents’ visitors registry contained nearly 10,000 names, while their daughter, Mary Ann, recalled, “As I was growing up that was probably the biggest drawback; we could never sleep in on Saturday mornings because of the likelihood that someone would want to see the bedrooms – and mother insisted the rooms be spotless. I think we had people visit from almost every country.”

Wright himself visited when he was in town, and the Affleck children became favorites of his. Gregor spent a year and a half at Taliesen West and Mary Ann was a houseguest of the Wrights.

Usonian Houses

Frank Lloyd Wright devoted the last two decades of his life to creating Usonian houses. An extension of the principles he first developed in his Prairie-style residences of the early 1900s, Wright’s Usonian homes were designed to exist in harmony with nature and meet the need for low-cost housing for the average American. "The Usonians achieved their inexpensiveness through prefabricated parts, paring the house down to basics, and using a new method for constructing walls," explains Dale Allen Gyure, architectural historian and Lawrence Tech associate professor of architecture. "Conceived as an antidote to the social and economic realities of the Great Depression, 18 Usonian houses were built between 1939 and 1941. The Usonian program eventually produced over 100 houses before Wright’s death in 1959."