

Frank Lloyd Wright's Hollyhock House Reopens to Public After \$4.4M Restoration

<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/frank-lloyd-wrights-hollyhock-house-779150>

The Hollywood Reporter Says:



"Turn the world on its side and everything loose will end up in Los Angeles." — Frank Lloyd Wright.

As you stand at the entrance to Frank Lloyd Wright's Hollyhock House located in Barnsdall Art Park, the Hollywood sign and Griffith Observatory peer down from the hills. They are iconic images of the City of Angels, but so too is Wright's recently restored residential masterwork. After \$4.4 million spent over six years, Hollyhock House, the only Frank Lloyd Wright property you can visit in Los Angeles, is once again open to the public.

Though many people would prefer it not be known (including Bill Maher, and probably Wright himself) the house was used in the 1989 film *Cannibal Women in the Avocado Jungle of Death*, in which Maher starred alongside Shannon Tweed. The exterior suggests a Mayan temple and though film shoots are no longer allowed, this

house-museum has garnered respect not only for its renovation and imperious design, but Hollyhock is now on a tentative list of the first modern architecture nominations from the United States as a UNESCO world heritage site.

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A UNESCO nomination would certainly bring validation to Los Angeles, which constantly fights against perceptions it is a cultural wasteland. “We’re not as Philistine as we’re made out to be,” says Jeffery Herr, curator for Hollyhock House. Wright’s initial plan included a home for owner Aline Barnsdall, a theater, a director’s house, a dormitory for actors, studios for artists, shops and a motion picture theater. Most of that never materialized. Barnsdall, a Pennsylvania oil heiress who wanted to produce theater in her own venue, purchased a 36-acre site known as Olive Hill in 1919 and commissioned Wright to build a theater where she could produce avant-garde plays. “The house is unconventional, built for an unconventional client,” says Herr, who toured THR through the house on opening day. “It’s disorienting and at the same time it mystifies people.”

A long rectangular tunnel leads you up to the formidable cast concrete doors which are not all welcoming. To your left is a small triangular metal plate, a tiny doorbell dead center. It seems completely out of place given the cold imposing concrete structure. But like much of Hollyhock, it is indicative of the playful use of volume and scale that Wright seemed to find amusing.



The hollyhock flower was Barnsdall's favorite so Wright crafted an abstract symmetrical block version of the flower used throughout the exterior and interiors including furnishings. It's no secret that Barnsdall barely lived in the house and when visiting L.A. most often stayed at the Biltmore rather than her one-off Mayan temple. Yes, she fired Wright because of cost overruns; yes, he was difficult — a childish genius of whom you forgave his faults because he exuded copious inspiration and creativity.

But restoring an iconic house from a nearly mythic architect isn't easy. The restoration was like "detective work," Herr says. He had to rely on mangled, faded architectural blueprints and old photos as clues to what Wright had originally envisioned. The recently completed restoration is important, as visitors are now able to experience the house in much of its original hand crafted elegance. Floors, windows, doors, decorative molding, and long-forgotten paint colors have been recreated. Gone are the sliding glass doors leading away from the living room, which were erroneously installed during the 1970s renovation, something that Wright would have abhorred. In its place are the correct wood accordion doors, which add an angled depth and historical accuracy. Even exposed screw heads reflect the original work in spite of their seemingly unfinished state. Water intrusion has always been one of the hallmarks of Wright's design failures. In this case the hollow clay tiles covered with stucco that formed the building blocks were not the issue, nor Hollyhock's flat roof; no, it was 90 years of clogged drains both inside and outside the home that proved to be the culprit.

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Architectural failings aside, the house is a wonder of design, space, light and shadow and Art Deco imagery. The bas relief fireplace made of cast concrete blocks is the central unifying image, one that can't be ignored, though Wright never interpreted its meaning. "It's a theatrical statement," says Herr, a modernist landscape commanding the living area. Flanked by oak sofas with verdant green pillows designed to take in the stage, and a three foot pool at the foot of the fireplace with a skylight above, it ties in the classic and spiritual four elements: earth, water, fire and air. Yes, Wright designed all the furniture and you notice the library, living and dining areas are comprised of very precise angles on his designs including the chairs. Having sat in several of Wright's original chairs, I can personally tell you they were never designed for comfort, but were set pieces for the theatre of any Wright home. Formerly tours were docent lead, but Herr has abandoned that formula in favor of "self guided;" allowing people to spend as much time as they want ambling about. Docents are on hand to answer questions and each room has handheld notes, almost like a theatre program, that give the specifics of each room. But the advantage of allowing people time to meander though Hollyhock is that there truly is a sense of discovery. Perhaps someday the remaining 60 percent of the house that is still

unseen and unrestored might get its due. For now one of the most creative West Coast residences is accessible in which to bask in the revelation that is Frank Lloyd Wright.

“Walk Wright In” tours run Thursday through Sunday, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Last admission is 3:15 p.m. Cost: \$7 for adults, \$3 for students and seniors (www.barnsdall.org).