

JULY 2014

Interiors & sources[®] | Excellence in Commercial Design



The Emil Bach House



Morgante Wilson Architects and Harboe Architects breathe new life—and a new hospitality purpose—into one of Frank Lloyd Wright's treasured late Prairie-style homes.



Tucked away in Rogers Park, Chicago sits an architectural gem called the Emil Bach House. Originally built in 1915, the building is one of a short series of cubic, geometric, slab-roofed homes designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in the early twentieth century. It was designated a Chicago Landmark and entered into the National Register of Historic Places in the late 1970s. This May, the Emil Bach House made its debut as a private event space and a luxury guesthouse—one of few Wright homes made available for overnight guests. The house was purchased in 2010 by Tawani Enterprises, a company committed to restoring properties to their historical accuracy and design authenticity. They brought in Harboe Architects, led by Gunny Harboe, FAIA, to complete a full restoration with painstaking attention to detail—going so far as to source products and materials from the same manufacturers used in the original construction in 1915 when available.

"The focus of the restoration was to remove the later enclosure of the sun deck and screen porch, reapply the original stucco to the exterior and restore the brick masonry and concrete exterior elements," said Harboe. "We also restored deteriorated exterior woodwork and applied authentic surface finishes inside and out." Harboe's team also replicated built-in furniture that had been removed by previous owners, and added some bells and whistles for a modern traveler, such as a geothermal heating and cooling system. Morgante Wilson Architects joined the project after restoration was complete, and took on the difficult task of furnishing a 100-year-old historic treasure in a style that would be suitable for a modern hospitality environment. "I felt like we needed to keep the architecture pure, almost like a very beautiful piece of art. The house is a piece of art, and it's a very historical piece that's kind of perfect," said Elissa Morgante, AIA, principal at Morgante

Wilson Architects. "We didn't want to clutter it." Living and dining areas are accented with well-curated and sparingly appointed objects and furnishings juxtaposed to highlight the history, architecture, and craftsmanship of Wright, creating a unique dialogue between modern design, then and now. Custom designed pieces by Morgante Wilson Architects are placed minimally throughout the house to augment the new functional demands on the property as a B&B and a special event venue. "I wanted the design of the interiors to be seen in juxtaposition to the cutting edge prairie style aesthetic Frank Lloyd Wright was developing, but also demonstrate that iconic design, from whatever era, can work in harmony, because good design imbues inherent character," said Morgante. "Whether it is furniture or architecture, good design can be appreciated, utilized, and enjoyed forever." Guided tours of the Bach House will be offered every Wednesday through September 24, 2014. Tickets and information are available at www.flwright.org and 312-994-4000.

Designers of the furniture pieces selected for Emil Bach House include Gerrit Rietveld (Utrecht Armchair, 1935), Osvaldo Borsani (Dining Table, 1950s), Inga Sempé (Ruché Sofa, 2010), Pierre Paulin (Anda Chair, 2009), and Modernica (The Case Study Daybed, 1999). Each shares Wright's vision of efficient scale and strong geometric design. The fabrics and color palette of blues/greens is a play on nature by bringing the outdoors in and acknowledging the beautiful hues and textures of Lake Michigan just steps away. The artwork procured for the house is by locally based artists, keeping close roots to the Chicago address of the Emil Bach House and to the center of Frank Lloyd Wright's most famous works.