

Sowden House
5121 Franklin Avenue
Los Angeles
Los Angeles County

HABS No. CA-1940

HABS
CAL,
19-LOSAN,
69-

PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SOWDEN HOUSE

HABS No. CA-1940

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69-

Location: 5121 Franklin Avenue, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California.

Present Owner: Mrs. E. G. Mazur, 6626 Franklin Avenue, Los Angeles, Dr. and Mrs. Harold Mazur, 4821 Los Feliz, Los Angeles.

Present Occupant: Unoccupied.

Present Use: Residence.

Significance: This house, designed by Lloyd Wright in 1926, is built around a central court which originally contained an elaborate fountain. The house is entered through a cavelike opening whose textured concrete units create a striking contrast to the planar surfaces flanking it. These blocks are repeated in the central court.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1926.
2. Architect: Lloyd Wright.
3. Original and subsequent owners:

1926	John Sowden
1930	Ruth Rand Barnett
1936	Milton Blazier, Jr.
1944	Romayne Goldsmith
1945	George H. and Andree Hodel
1950	Helen Fitzpatrick
1951	The Mazurs

Legal description: Book 5589, page 8, Parcel 1, Lot 20, Tract 3369; and 25 feet on E. end of Lots 4, 5 and 6 of Tract 2099 (Site is 100 ft. by 175 ft.)

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers:

W. W. Moore, Contractor

Chevy Chase Staff and Stone Co.: textured concrete block, under direction of Mr. Paolie.

5. Original plan and construction: Rectangular plan (64' by 125' around a closed 22' by 68' court) with a rectangular court at center, with all rooms opening directly or by way of a corridor onto the court. Originally, there was 32' long pool in the court, now filled in. In the pool were a pair of concrete-block pylons forming a water organ. The material is reinforced concrete block and stucco over a lathed wood frame. Originally, colored stones filled the openings in the concrete blocks in the court; these have been removed.
6. Alterations and additions: 1969: Removal of some of entrance steps with widening of Franklin, Avenue. No architects, dates unavailable: planter box on stairs from street removed; pylons and pool removed in court; colored stones removed from pierced concrete block. Changes have been made in the kitchen and in the bathroom.

Prepared by: Esther McCoy
July 1968

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General statement:

1. Architectural character: The Sowden House, designed by Lloyd Wright in 1928, is a city residence built around a central court which originally contained an elaborate fountain. The house is entered through a cavelike opening whose textured concrete units create a striking contrast to the planar surfaces flanking it. These blocks are repeated in the central court. The two principal rooms terminate the major axis of the house--the living room at the front, the studio at the rear.
2. Condition of fabric: Fair. The house is structurally sound although there are areas revealing deterioration of the materials, especially with regard to the textured concrete units. The interior court has been neglected and has become overgrown with vegetation. The fountain mentioned above has long since disappeared.

B. Detailed Description of the Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: 64' east to west; 125' north to south. There is one principal level. At the front (south) of the house there is a partial basement. The plan is basically rectangular, with the rooms situated around the courtyard.
2. Foundations: 8" reinforced concrete; concrete footing 1'-4" wide.

3. Wall construction, finish, color: 2" x 4" stud wall construction with members 16" o.c.--carried on 4" x 6" wood sills on concrete foundation. Metal lath and plaster. Exterior stucco finish in brownish tone. Reinforced concrete structural frames form the "cathedral" ceilings of studios and living room.
4. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: Entrance slab at the southern front to the house, 39'-4" away from the front of the house. Stairs up to the south front, which has an impressive cavern-like entrance passage. The entrance is on axis, but the path of entry beyond that point is indirect to the right.

There is a terrace in the central court.

5. Chimneys: A 14" x 16" flue is located on the west wall near the south corner of the house; it is finished flush with the parapet. An 8" x 12" flue is also located on the west wall just north of the midpoint. It also is finished flush with the parapet.

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Entrance passage is controlled through the use of a copper gate which has chevron-like plates on vertical bars. The front door is located atop the stairway, which is to the right upon passing through the gate. This door measures 3' x 6'-8" and has a glass light.

Sliding doors provide for passage from the courtyard to the corridor and also into the rooms of the house. They have 5 lights by 2 lights and are the same as those mentioned for interior doors.

There are sliding doors to the rear court in the northeast corner of the house. They have screen panels.

The side door (west) is 2'-8" x 7'-8".

- b. Windows: Casement windows (on east side of house), double hung, and hopper type windows are used. On the east and west side of the house the windows were originally covered with trellis screens. Skylights provide light into some of the interior spaces. There are large glass walls on the north and south sides of the living room, and on the south side of the studio.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Hip roof behind parapet walls. It is constructed of 2" x 4" rafters with 1" x 8" bracing. The red sand composition roofing is laid atop 7/8" sheathing.
- b. Cornice, eaves: There is a plaster parapet rising about 2'-0" above the roof at the wall. 4" downspouts are used.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: Skylights are the only forms to rise above the roof except for the forms of the living room and studio, which peak above the primary roof level.

C. Detailed Description of the Interior:

1. Plans: Entrance is at the south end of the building on axis. After passing through the front gate, a sharp right turn is made to the stairs. Entrance is atop that stairway.

The main floor is composed of a central courtyard with the living room at the southern end and the studio at the northern end. Corridors flank the court, providing passage to the rear of the house and also providing access to the rooms opening off of them. Both corridors are single-loaded with the rooms between the passage and the exterior walls. The inner side of the corridor opens onto the court. The entrance door is at the south end of the corridor on the east side of the court. Down the corridor, opening to the right are bedroom #1 with its private bath, bedroom #2, bathrooms, bedroom #3, bedroom #4, and bedroom #5. A darkroom terminated the corridor. A small courtyard is located on the north side of bedroom #5 and is accessible from it.

In the southwest corner of the house, adjacent to an opening from the living room, is the library. To the north of that room is the dining room. The western corridor begins at the northern side of this room. Adjacent to the dining room is the pantry, followed by the kitchen and the screened porch (the side entry). The corridor continues past the servants' quarters to the garage. The servants' quarters has a hall paralleling the main passage and provided access to the two servants' rooms and bath.

There is a partial basement below the living room on the south and in the southern portion of the eastern wing. Neither is finished as a useable space.

2. Stairways: 23 risers provide access to the front entrance gate of the house. These stairs are presently being altered due to the widening of Franklin Avenue and some of them are being removed. Beyond the gate, 28 risers in a scissor type stairway provide access to the front door at the upper level. Both these stairways are composed of concrete tile treads.

There are six 4" risers from the patio to the studio floor level, and two 4" risers all around the court. In addition, stairs are located at the ends of the corridors on the north side.

3. Flooring: 1-1/2" oak flooring is used in all rooms except for 5-1/4" oak flooring in the living room, library, dining room, and studio; and asphalt tile in the kitchen and pantry; and concrete tile in the two major corridors (15" square with the corners off).
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster; the bathroom has yellow ceramic tiles.
5. Doorways and doors: Solid wood doors in wood frames without face moldings. They are 2'-5" to 2'-8" x 6'-8" x 1-1/3" thick.

Sliding pocket doors with 5 x 2 lights (13-1/2" x 14-1/2") are used for access into the major bedroom (#2) as well as between the corridor and the courtyard.

6. Special decorative features, trim and cabinet work: The master bedroom (#2) has wood paneling on the west wall and has a heavy wood cornice. There are built-in shelves and cabinets in the library, as well as built in shelves and bureaus in the closets.

The doors have strap hinges and brass door knobs and lock plates. The front door thumb latch is also of brass.

A major decorative motif is the textured concrete block units. They are employed on all the courtyard piers and in the studio and living room. They are also used on the exterior of the house around the main entrance. The pylons in the courtyard stood 25'-4" high and also used the textured blocks.

There is a decorative skylight in the bathroom and in the dining room.

7. Mechanical equipment: There is a forced air furnace in the basement which is reinforced throughout the house by unit heaters.

There is a working fireplace in the library, on the west wall. An incinerator is located on the screen porch near the west center of the house.

The bathroom fixtures are standard, with the exception of the built in tub in the bathroom between bedrooms #2 and #3.

Lighting--coffered lighting in the living room, light panels are used in conjunction with the skylights in the dining room, bathroom and around the library fireplace.

D. Site and Surroundings

1. General setting: The house is located on the north side of Franklin Avenue, somewhat elevated above the street level. The main entrance is centered on the south facade. This, and the living room cavern-like form above it, are the only penetrations on the south facade. The house is inwardly oriented.
2. Historic landscape design: Originally, there was a planter box on axis with the house, with stairways on either side and merging behind it.

The hillside was covered with ivy.

Prepared by: Robert C. Giebner
Project Supervisor
Southern California Project II
August 1969

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Primary Sources:

Lloyd Wright, architect, 855 N. Doheny Dr., Los Angeles: original drawings in his possession; information on changes in house.

Dr. and Mrs. Harold Mazur, owners, 4821 Los Feliz Blvd., Los Angeles, California: some information on change of ownership.

Hall of Records and Assessor's Office, Los Angeles Civic Center: legal description.

B. Secondary Sources:

"Lloyd Wright," Esther McCoy, Arts & Architecture, Los Angeles, October 1966, Vol. 83, No. 9, pp. 22-26.

Guide to Architecture in Southern California, Gebhard-Winter, Los Angeles Co. Museum, 1965.

1868-1968: Architecture in California, David Gebhard, U.C. Santa Barbara, catalogue, 1968, p. 75.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Southern California Coordinating Committee for Historic Preservation. This is the HABS-Southern California Project II, and was undertaken in 1969.