

Martin House Fact Sheet

Furnishings

Whenever circumstances allowed, Frank Lloyd Wright liked to design the furnishings and fixtures for a house as well as the spaces of the house itself. This was in keeping with his concepts of “organic architecture”—that a house shouldn’t be a series of neutral boxes that you would fill up with stuff brought from your previous home. Rather, he saw furniture, carpeting, lighting fixtures and decorative objects as an integral part of a comprehensive design for living. This idea can also be seen in the work of designers of the Arts & Crafts movement, and in the work of other Modern architects and interior designers.

With a virtually unlimited budget, Frank Lloyd Wright designed about 50 pieces of custom furniture for the Martin House, including chairs, tables, couches, plant stands, cabinetry, a grandfather clock, a piano case and a master bedroom suite. Darwin Martin and Wright referred to the group of custom furnishings for the Martin House as the *tout ensemble* (roughly translated as “total group”) He also designed eight varieties of light fixture for the Martin House complex. Moreover, Wright provided a master plan to indicate where all the furnishings should be placed, and another drawing showing the overall layout of area rugs. Wright’s attention to detail in the project was such that he even designed the clothesline poles for the yard between the Martin House and Carriage house.

Barrel Chairs

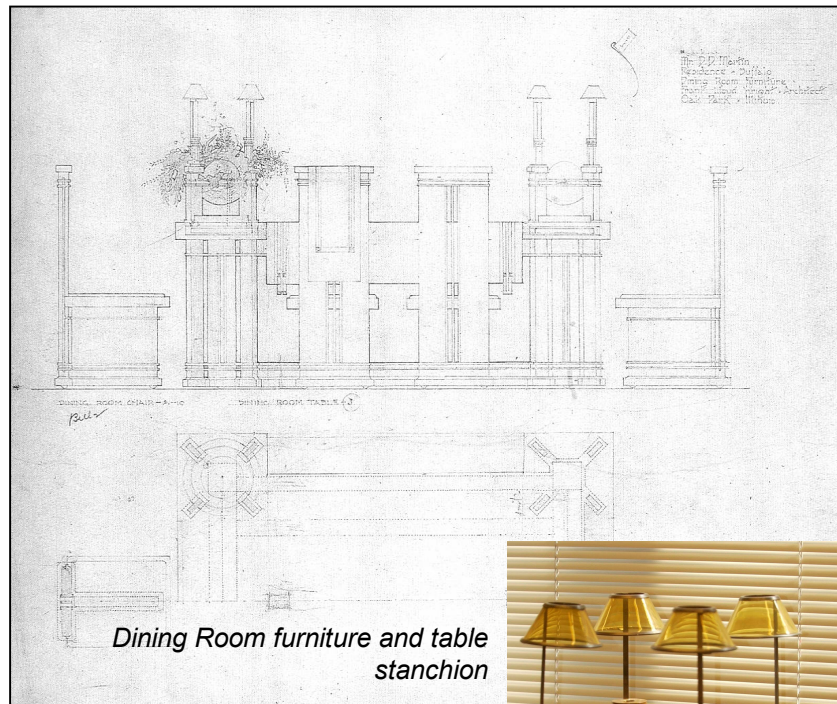
One of the most well-known furnishings from the Martin House is the “barrel” chair, named for its generally cylindrical form. A complex but particularly comfortable design (unlike many other Wright chairs), this chair made its debut in the Martin House; the design was later adapted for use in various other Wright commissions. Wright specified eight barrel chairs for the Martin House furnishing plan; they were shown in the Living room, Library and Reception room.

Dining Table and Stanchions



A barrel chair from the Martin House Reception Room

Wright designed a suite of dining room furniture for the Martin House: an “I” shaped table with elaborate corner stanchions, a beautiful, built-in buffet with art glass doors, and a set of 10 – 12 dining chairs (Wright specified 12, but we don’t know if the full set was produced). Wright’s concept of the dining room and its furnishings was that it should be a room-within-a-room—a quiet, distraction-free enclave for the ritual of family dining.



The table’s corner stanchions were combination lighting and planter units that originally stood on the four projecting corners of the table. Wright was attempting to bring greenery and light directly to the table, but all indications are that this design was not very successful; the Martins removed the stanchions soon after receiving the table, as they found them to be impediments to serving and conversation.

The dining chair design represents the culmination of a long design process between Wright and the Martins. Wright had originally proposed more unusual, three-legged chairs, but the Martins objected to the “boardy-ness” of their solid backs, and the potential peril to sitters posed by this tripod design. The Martins insisted that Wright “lighten-up” the design with a spindle-backed construction and more conventional four-legged support, resulting in the chairs that were ultimately built.

Bedroom Furniture

As with the dining room, Wright designed furnishings for the Martins’ master bedroom to be a central, multifunctional unit: conjoined twin beds, a wardrobe at the head of the bed, and blanket chest with bench top at the foot. With no obvious place to situate

a bedstead against a wall in the room, the unit was built into the very center of the space, connected at the headboard to a frieze rail that spanned the room.

Isabelle Martin may have disliked the angular, hard-edged quality of this master bedroom suite, as she later moved into a different bedroom just down the hall.

Non-Wrightian Furnishings

The Martins complemented their Wright-designed furniture with other fine furnishings from well-known designers of the day. They had a group of low, spindle-backed chairs and a tea table made by Gustav Stickley, a leading Arts & Crafts furniture producer based in Syracuse, NY. There was also an outstanding group of four floor lamps with glass shades made by Louis Comfort Tiffany of New York.

The décor was accented by two dozen Japanese woodblock prints, specified and sold to the Martins by Wright. Wright felt that the aesthetic of these prints was the best fit to complement his interiors.



Tiffany floor lamps