



# Westhope: More than a House

by Clint Baxter

## In a quiet Tulsa neighborhood,

just south of 36<sup>th</sup> and Birmingham, is a house designed and built by one of the most innovative and brilliant architects in American history—a house that soared far over budget, took 4 years to build, was designed to the desires of the architect and not the client and, when finished, leaked. The man who commissioned it to be built by his cousin, Frank Lloyd Wright, hated it.

That man was the editor of the *Tulsa Tribune*, Richard Lloyd Jones. The house, “Westhope.”

Westhope was commissioned shortly after Jones acquired four acres of land on the “outskirts” of Tulsa. The Lloyd Joneses were fiercely loyal to family, and, when one was in need, the others answered the call as a solemn duty. Jones had supported Wright, who was frequently broke, in the past. Reportedly, when he had once visited Jones in Chicago, Wright asked for train fare back home. Jones gave him the fare, and Wright returned an hour later with a beautiful new Japanese print he had just

bought, and asked again for the train fare.

They had a relationship of professional respect and admiration, but were politically opposites, and frequently argued. Jones began talking to Wright about building a house on the land outside of Tulsa, and, after some heated letters exchanged, still made it clear that he was serious about having the home built. He knew that Wright was not doing well financially and wanted to help him get back on his feet. Jones expected a wood and stucco ranch, something that would fit the landscape.

Frank instead designed the house using the textile blocks he had been experimenting with at the time, and an evolving scheme of windows, horizontal and spaced in his previous projects, vertical and brought together into one wall of glass for Westhope. Jones disapproved of the textile blocks. A friend told Jones that he had a home built using textile blocks in the desert without issue, but when implemented on another in Ohio, they let moisture in, leaving the house damp most of the year. Wright used the blocks in spite of Jones’s concerns, and, to this day, it’s reported that Westhope’s dampness and moisture stems from water sweating through the building material.

Wright’s original proposition to Jones was for an 8500 square foot house that

would cost around \$65,000. Jones wanted it built by 1928. The house was not completed until 1931 and cost around \$80,000. Other mistakes were made, such as an over-confident Wright believing that a topographical survey of the site wasn’t necessary, and later realizing that a ten foot drop in the land would require the redesign of a whole section of the floor plan:

Once finished, the flat roof, typical of and pioneered by Wright, immediately developed leaks. Jones had roofers apply another surface, but it did no good. Finally, in frustration, he called Wright long distance and said, “Damn it, Frank! It’s leaking on my desk,” to which Wright replied, “Richard, why don’t you move your desk?”

Out of loyalty, one man helped the other, and received something he didn’t want and did not cherish. Out of need, one man accepted charity, but did not let it dictate his work. And what we’re left with is Westhope, here in Tulsa. A treasure that leaks. As Mrs. Jones said, “Well, this is what we get for a leaving a work of art out in the rain.”

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