



# CYPRESS

Enhances 75-Year-Old Home Plan by Frank Lloyd Wright

Originally designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1939, the newly constructed Usonian House at Florida Southern College in Lakeland, Fla., is the latest masterpiece to highlight the famed architect's affinity for cypress.

Remarkably, Florida Southern College has the largest concentration of Wright-designed buildings in the world. During his lifetime, 12 projects of the architect's original 20-building master plan for the campus were completed. This residence, built in late 2013 to serve as a visitor's center, was part of that plan and one of several Usonian-style homes originally designed to accommodate live-in professors.

At the height of the Great Depression, Wright envisioned the Usonian-style home concept as a way to construct simple, affordable homes for American families, emphasizing the use of locally sourced brick, wood and other natural materials. Although 60 Wright-designed Usonian homes can be found across the U.S., the new one at the college is the first of this particular home plan ever to be built.

Architect M. Jeffrey Baker of Mesick, Cohen, Wilson, Baker Architects in Albany, N.Y., who oversaw construction of the house, said, "The only finished wood Wright used on the campus was cypress. He specified the material in many projects throughout his lifetime and it was a signature trademark of his Usonian homes throughout the country."





And while Wright's 75-year-old blueprints for this Usonian House did not directly specify building materials, Baker said, "We simply followed the materials and details he used in the other homes and across the campus. Without question, cypress was the historically accurate material to use."

After working with cypress, Baker and his team grew to understand Wright's enthusiasm for how the wood performs and looks. "Cypress is readily available in various sizes and lengths, it mills easily, and accepts a variety of finishes," he explained. "It also is resistant to insect infestation, which of course, is very important in Florida."

Tom Sharrett, a woodworker at Demoss Cabinetry, whose shop custom-milled 10,000 board feet of cypress for the project, is an advocate as well. "Cypress is an easy wood to shape and sand," he said. "We used it anywhere a finished wood product was required, including all of the interior ceilings, plank walls, built-in cabinets, tables, benches, trim, and even light fixtures. The exterior features cypress soffit and fascia, window and door frames, pergolas, and doors."

Project leader Baker sums it up best. "When we constructed the Usonian House, we expected it to be remembered for the exquisite use of Wright's signature 'textile' blocks, which are indeed remarkable. But we were unprepared for the warmth the cypress added to the feeling of the spaces. And when people comment on the beauty of the house, they never fail to mention the cypress."

For more information on building with cypress, please visit the Southern Cypress Manufacturers Association at [www.CypressInfo.org](http://www.CypressInfo.org).



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