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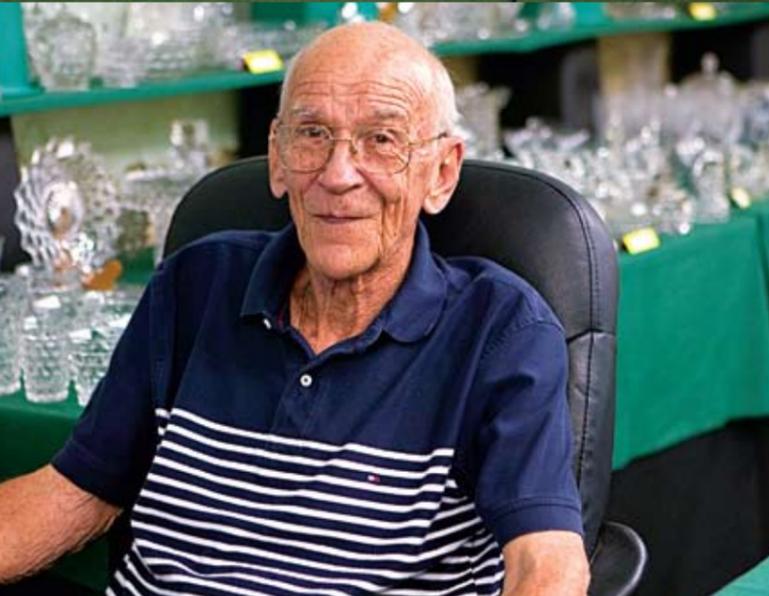
“Origami in concrete” is how restoration architect Jeffrey Baker describes Wright’s Pfeiffer Chapel. The steps leading up to it (opposite) have the same angular lines.



child of the sun

A pillar of American architecture, Frank Lloyd Wright left an unparalleled legacy. But few know of his connection — and contribution — to Florida. At Florida Southern College in Lakeland, a short drive from several of the state’s gateways, the largest single-site collection of his work draws visitors from around the globe. Given its recent designation as an endangered historic site, a massive campaign to restore the structures has reignited a passion and celebration of this functional art — and a reason to visit this charming town. We set up the ultimate day trip complete with lunch, espresso and a string of unique antique shops.

STORY CAROLINA A. MIRANDA PHOTOGRAPHY JON WHITTLE



Nestled on a hillside in the center of the state sits a low-lying, one-story building designed by the masterful architect Frank Lloyd Wright. The Raulerson Building — at Florida Southern College (FSC) in Lakeland, of all places — is a long, flat structure, barely seven feet tall, with a thin, horizontal roof trimmed in oxidized copper. Attached to its southern end is a buff-colored portico made of poured concrete. Gaze at the structure from a distance and it barely hovers above the horizon. On a dreary day its earth-tone palette makes it indistinguishable from the landscape surrounding it.

But everything changes when the sun comes out.

Wright embossed a zigzag pattern into the roof trim and carved horizontal lines into the esplanade's wide supports. When Florida's sunlight illuminates these features, the building sparkles with the ritual precision of a Mayan temple. No wonder he called his campus "Child of the Sun." "It's like walking into a work of art," says FSC president Anne Kerr. "There's a sense of awe every time you enter his buildings."

The Raulerson Building is just one of a dozen Frank Lloyd Wright structures at FSC, the world's largest single-site collection of the iconic architect's buildings. These include administrative offices,

classroom buildings, a circular library (now a visitors center) and the only Wright planetarium in existence. There are also two magnificent chapels, one of which is still furnished with the original plywood pews that Wright also designed. Most significant to Floridians and the millions who visit the state each year is that Wright, who was maniacal about working in harmony with the landscape, paid plenty of tribute to Florida. Hand-hewn bricks are molded from raw materials that include indigenous sand and crushed coquina shells. Connecting the buildings are one-and-a-half miles of covered walkways that take their visual cues from one of the state's foremost industries: Each pillar mimics the style and placement of a citrus tree, a reference to the groves that once blanketed the area.

For decades, these buildings — designed by Wright in the '30s and constructed from 1938 to 1958 — have existed below the mainstream architectural radar. They're not listed in the catalog of masterworks and, for much of their history, have received little attention from the cultural press. Until now.

Interest soared last year when the World Monument Fund placed Wright's buildings on its list of the 100 most endangered sites.

PHOTOGRAPHY TIME/LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES (TOP RIGHT)

A LEISURELY DAY IN LAKELAND

Visitors can view the Wright-designed Florida Southern College campus (863.680.4444, flsouth.ern.edu/flwctr) at any time, but you'll have a far richer experience — and greater access — if you take one of the 90-minute, docent-led tours given twice a day on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

After visiting FSC, explore downtown Lakeland, home to a collection of immaculately kept early 20th-century architecture.

LUNCH SPOT The Terrace Grille (863.688.0800, terracehotel.com) at the Terrace Hotel is in a beautifully maintained Mediterranean-Revival building from 1924. Clad in white linens and oversized mirrors, this airy eatery serves quiche with a crust that crumbles to the touch.

SHOP & STROLL Antique shops flank downtown's narrow streets. For a bonanza of large pieces, such as late 19th-century mahogany servers and art

deco armoires, pop into Thom Downs Antiques (863.688.3269, thomdownsantiques.com) on the northern end. Lovers of early 20th-century Americana should visit Lloyds of Lakeland (863.682.2787, lloydslakeland.com), while glassware aficionados can go to Reflections of the Past (863.682.0349), full of tidy shelves that glisten with pristine examples of pale Depression-era glass. **PERK UP** Refuel with a vigorous cappuccino at Black

& Brew (863.682.1210, blackandbrew.com), a popular, brick-lined café overlooking Munn Park in the town center.

SEE The Polk Museum of Art (863.688.7743, polkmuseumofart.org), less than a five-minute drive from downtown, has a fine collection of European decorative arts and pre-Columbian pottery as well as Japanese block prints, a tradition that greatly appealed to the masterful Frank Lloyd Wright.

Clockwise from top left: Anne Pfeiffer Chapel, the tallest building in Wright's master plan; a vintage shot of the campus; inside the old Roux Library; Wright's cutout eaves; FSC president Anne Kerr; Key lime pie at Terrace Grille; Danforth's original pews; Raleigh Petteway, Lakeland native and owner of Reflections of the Past.



THE RECENT restorations HAVE CALLED ATTENTION TO ONE OF THE STATE'S MOST important architectural SITES.

Unfortunately the buildings are showing their age. Cracked bricks, sagging roofs and a number of architecturally unsympathetic additions that were made over the years (such as a massive ventilation system atop the once demure Polk County Science Building) have prompted preservationists, FSC and state officials, and even locals, to rally to save them.

All eyes are now on FSC as it embarks on an ambitious restoration project that could cost upwards of \$50 million and take more than a decade to complete. These efforts will not be simple. A crack on a historic building isn't fixed with a layer of spackle and paint. The chemical composition of the materials has to be studied; the original master plan has to be consulted; and historians have to research the exact shade of paint used on each and every element. "If something is damaged," says president Kerr of the arduous task at hand, "it has to be fixed the way a painting is fixed."

But there's already plenty to see in this lovely corner of Central Florida.

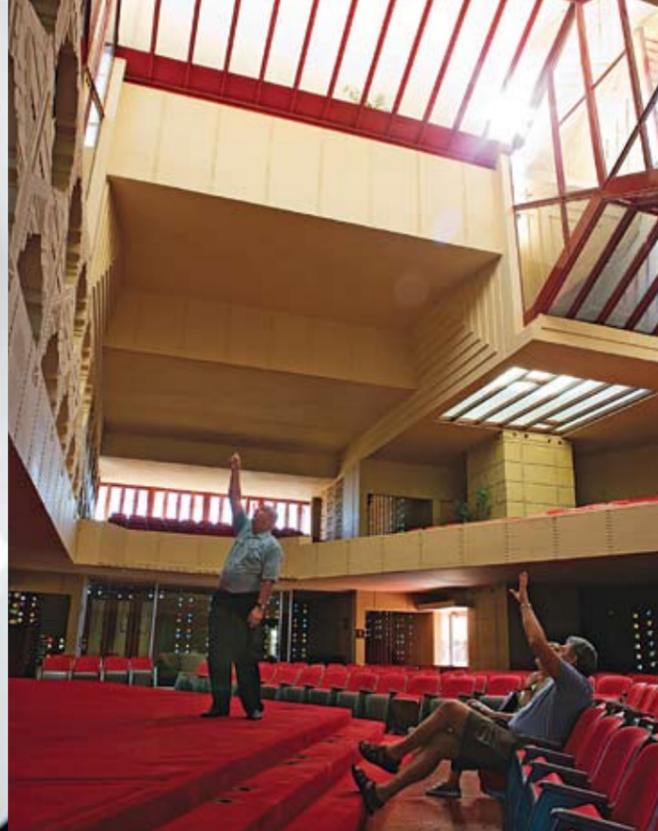
With a \$1.6 million grant from the state, the college renovated the esplanades. Previously, the covered walkways were, literally, crumbling. "I used to wake up at night, worrying that the esplanades would fall on a student," says Kerr. But now they've been completely retooled and stand proudly under a bright layer of cream-colored paint. Through various public and private donations, the school also has rebuilt Wright's Water Dome, a circular fountain that served as the center point of his original design. Now the campus puts on elaborate water shows four times a day, a treat for the 20,000 visitors who flock to the campus to tour the buildings annually. These restored elements alone make a day trip to FSC worthwhile.

A GREATER GOOD

These recent restorations have called attention to a set of buildings that are not only significant as one of the state's most important architectural sites, but for what they represent within Wright's storied career. The campus is an enduring tribute to his mission of creating an organic American style in which structures acknowledge — and are inspired by — their distinct settings. "This architecture represents the laws of harmony and rhythm," Wright told FSC students during a speech in 1950. "It's like a little green shoot growing in a concrete pavement." James G. Rogers Jr., an FSC art history professor who recently co-authored the pictorial history, *The Buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright at Florida Southern College*, says he is continuously awed at the way in which Wright's design sits so gracefully on the gently sloping hillside, which lies in view of a lake. "He lays them down on the natural flow of the landscape," he points out. "And all of the buildings relate to each other in the most natural way."

Email and espresso at Black & Brew, vintage glass at Lloyd's of Lakeland, studying notes against the Polk County Science Building. Danforth Chapel's windows, the only use of leaded stained glass on campus (opposite).





PHOTOGRAPHY MARVIN KONER/CORBIS (TOP RIGHT)



LAKELAND IS one hour FROM ORLANDO AND TAMPA, MAKING IT AN EASY day trip FOR ANYONE LIVING IN OR VISITING central florida.

Central Florida is an unlikely setting for such a monumental architectural gathering. Most of Wright's structures are clustered around large urban centers in Illinois, California, New York and Wisconsin. When Wright accepted his commission here in the 1930s, Lakeland was known principally as the spring training site of the Detroit Tigers — and not much else. "It's off the beaten track," says Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, a former Wright apprentice who serves as the director of Wright's archive in Scottsdale, Arizona. "I remember driving there in 1953, and I really had to concentrate on how to find Lakeland."

The restored Water Dome is turned on four times daily for 30 to 60 minutes at a time. Opposite, clockwise from top left: Locals lunch in town at Terrace Grille, the dapper Frank Lloyd Wright in 1958, Pfeiffer Chapel bathed in natural light, Terrace Grille's quiche of the day.

For architecture buffs or anyone simply interested in observing a piece of history, this is far from true today. Lakeland is a mere one hour or so from Orlando and the Tampa Bay area, and only an hour and a half from Sarasota, making a look at these secret gems an easy day trip for anyone living in or visiting Central Florida.

As for why Wright himself came to Lakeland, it certainly wasn't for the money. In 1938, when FSC president Ludd Spivey approached the architect about "building a great education temple in

Florida," the school's coffers were practically empty. Throughout the Depression, Spivey had accepted items like chickens and rabbits as tuition from students unable to pay with any other means. In his meeting with Wright, Spivey laid this out: "I have no money with which to build the modern American campus, but if you'll design the buildings, I'll work night and day to raise the means." At the time, Wright was at his peak, having just been lauded on the cover of *Time* for his design of the Fallingwater residence in Pennsylvania. He didn't need a commission where the paychecks were iffy. But to everyone's surprise, he accepted the job.

For Wright the campus design may have been an attempt to understand a much larger ambition. Towards the end of his career, he became intrigued with city planning. In the 1950s he produced a design for an expansive development in the heart of Baghdad that was never realized. Florida Southern College was an opportunity for him to shape an environment that would touch the lives of future Americans as they shuffled to classes and plotted their futures. "Wright dreamed of designing a city," says Kerr. "This campus is a microcosm of that."

In Florida he created not just a building, but a comprehensive campus where young minds could grow and learn. "There's no question that this was a labor of love," adds Rogers. And it's one that's just beginning to garner the attention it so rightly deserves.