



Campers enjoy the primary seating in the living room. The low wood seat runs the entire length of the west wall. AIMEE HILLS

Lessons in architecture

Spring House tour brings vision home for campers

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As a child, Frank Lloyd Wright played with building blocks and gazed at the walls of his nursery decorated with engravings of buildings. He went on to become one of the most iconic architects in American and world history. Perhaps it was his early exploration of structures that determined his life's trajectory.

Local youngsters may be setting their own constructive career path thanks to MoLab, Inc. This nonprofit organization hosts Camp Spark – Igniting Knowledge! which focuses on different themes throughout the summer. The architecture and design session has proven to be popular with campers.

Twenty rising sixth-eighth graders worked on art projects, building activities and design challenges, such as a friendly competition to create the tallest, free-standing structure. "They were given a budget of \$50 they could spend on various materials," explained Aimee Hills, camp director and co-founder of MoLab, Inc. "They were judged on originality, height, aesthetics, strength and how it would withstand an earthquake and high winds."

Campers also got an opportunity to build interiors and exteriors in the virtual world using SketchUp. "It's what real architects use," said Hills. "It's education software so it's free and user friendly, even for beginners." In addition to making models and renderings, campers also learned about Frank



Byrd Lewis Mashburn gives campers a tour of her childhood home, Lewis Spring House.

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Lloyd Wright and his contributions to architecture and design.

Led by the camp's instructor Michael Mezich, participants studied Wright's spaces and learned that he often designed complementary furniture to occupy his interiors. Campers took inspiration from that practice and, using only cardboard, created a chair in two hours that could hold their body weight. "All of them accomplished it and one group even did a toilet," laughed Hills.

The pinnacle of the camp was a tour of Lewis Spring House, the only private residence Wright designed that was built in Florida. In 1950, George and Clifton Lewis asked Wright to design a home for them. They chose an idyllic, five-acre parcel in Leon County that featured a natural spring. Construction on the home was completed in 1954 and the Lewis family moved in.

Campers were given a tour by Byrd Lewis Mashburn, the daughter of George and Clifton Lewis. She said children are her favorite visitors because "they're the most fun." Mashburn grew up at Lewis Spring House with her parents and three brothers, and volunteers as the president of Spring House Institute, Inc. This nonprofit was established to save the building for the benefit of the public.

"So many people, young or not, don't know who Frank Lloyd Wright is, in relation to architecture around the world and American history. This is a good and unusual example of his work."

Payton Worley loves to build things and she was impressed by Lewis Spring House. "It has a lot of openings that are different than a regular house," the 12-year-old said. "It's cool and I didn't know it existed."

"The space is very nature integrated and really peaceful," noted 12-year-old Seigi Powell. He believes this feeling is achieved through "the giant glass windows that look right into the forest" and the generous use of curves in the space. "Spheres, circles and anything round is soothing," he said.

Seigi also noticed that Wright considered the furnishings in Lewis Spring House as he did in so many of his spaces. "The couches are really low down so you feel comfortable and protected," he said. "And then you walk out into the open space with the high ceiling and the wide windows and you feel free."



Byrd Lewis Mashburn and campers look out from the second-story overhang. AMEE HILL



The east garden façade of the house is composed almost entirely of a curtain wall of fixed plate glass.

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The master bedroom has a circular hooded fireplace. AMANDA THOMPSON

cool to merge different cultures and have them incorporated into design. That's one of the aspects of art."

Mashburn is glad to provide children with the opportunity to get up close and personal with one of Wright's creations. "Whether they remember his name or not, they got something they hadn't had before and it may do something for

them. It opens people up, even me, in a lot of ways."

"The reason I do these tours is because the house needs work," Mashburn said. "For it to stay here, we need to raise the money to restore it for the public so when they come here, they get to see what the house was intended to be. It will be amazing for Tallahassee. We can't do it by ourselves, we need people to know about it."

The guiding philosophy of Spring House Institute, Inc. is a continuation of Clifton and George Lewis' original vision. With help from individuals and organizations like MoLab, Inc., young people can continue to learn about the buildings that make their communities unique. By doing so, the next generation is empowered to take care of their architectural treasures like Lewis Spring House.

You can tour Lewis Spring House every second Sunday of the month from 2-4 p.m. Tickets are \$15 and children under 12 can tour for free. For more details and to learn about personal tours available by appointment, visit www.preservespringhouse.org.

Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Assistant Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).