# American System-Built Homes - Model B1

**Frank Lloyd Wright, Architect**

Frank Lloyd Wright® is widely regarded as the 20th century’s greatest architect. Between 1915 and 1917 Wright designed a series of standardized “system-built” homes, known as the “American System-Built Homes.” A one-of-a-kind cluster of six American System-Built Homes was constructed and still stands on West Burnham Street in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

## About the building:

**Address:** 2714 West Burnham Street  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53215

**Architect:** Frank Lloyd Wright  
Born June 8, 1867, Richland Center, WI  
Died April 9, 1959

**Construction Started:** October 1915  
**Construction Complete:** July 5, 1916

**Original Cost:** $3,000

**Square Footage:** Approximately 800 sq. ft.

**Construction:** Wood, Balloon Frame

**Original Developer:** Arthur L. Richards

**Floor Plan:**  
- Living Room  
- Kitchen with Breakfast  
- Bedroom 1  
- Bedroom 2

**Designations:** National Register of Historic Places  
Wisconsin Register of Historic Places  
City of Milwaukee Historic District

## Notable Facts:

- A total of 13 American System-Built Homes are known to have been constructed in the United States. 2714 West Burnham is the only known example of Model B1.

- The American System-Built Homes project is an early example of prefabricated housing. The “system” involved cutting the lumber and other materials in a mill or factory, to be brought to the site for assembly. This system would save material waste and a substantial fraction of the wages paid to skilled tradesmen.

- America’s entry into World War I halted the sale and development of these homes. Building materials were diverted to wartime needs. Also, Wright began extensive travel to Japan as to work on the Imperial Hotel project in Tokyo.

- The homes were marketed through builders who would meet prospective buyers in their offices. An advertisement in the March 4, 1917 edition of the Chicago Tribune states, “The American System of home building enables you to secure homes — correct and charming in design, perfect in taste and intelligent in arrangement — putting at your command the services of Frank Lloyd Wright, America’s foremost creative architect — without extra cost.”

- The Frank Lloyd Wright Archives at Taliesin in Scottsdale, Arizona holds more than 960 drawings and sketches for the American System-Built Homes - more than any other Wright project.

- Recent visitors to 2714 West Burnham travelled from Japan (3 groups), Austria, Australia, Czechoslovakia, Russia, United Kingdom, and most states of the USA.

## Significance:

“The Historic Preservation Institute at the School of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee has long been an advocate for these very special homes, undertaking a Master Plan for all six buildings and providing ongoing documentation to aid the restoration process. The buildings are a unique part of Milwaukee’s architectural heritage and we must do everything we can to restore them... I have no hesitation in adding the voice of the school to applaud and encourage your work.”  

-- Robert Greenstreet, Dean of the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee's School of Architecture and Urban Planning

“Throughout his long career, Frank Lloyd Wright strove passionately to design affordable housing. The American System-Built Homes stand as his first major accomplishment in this regard, recording a fulfillment of a long-standing American dream. The preservation of Model B-1 is critical as a testament to his long quest, and to the quest of American society itself.”  

-- David G. De Long, Emeritus Professor of Architecture, University of Pennsylvania

“A model for how architects can deal with space and light and movement and for how to rethink the affordable home.”  

-- Nicholas Olsberg, Historian and former director of the Canadian Centre for Architecture

www.WrightInMilwaukee.org
Burnham Street Project Goals:

To preserve and protect these important examples of the American System-Built Homes designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Phase 1 of the project is the restoration of 2714 West Burnham.

To create an interpretative Frank Lloyd Wright house museum with regularly scheduled tours and public access.

To provide a full range of learning experiences for elementary, high school and architectural students, and architects, building professionals, academics, and the general public. 2714 will act as a working classroom. Research for this project was done in collaboration with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, School of Architecture and Urban Planning (SARUP).

To stimulate the continued restoration of the entire block of six houses, and support the comprehensive neighborhood revitalization already underway.

Exterior Restoration Project:

Restoration Architect: Uihlein-Wilson Architects
General Contractor: Beyer Construction
Conservation Consultant: Nikos Varakulas
(assisted by University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee SARUP students & faculty)
Phase I Restoration Budget: $411,000
Owners Representative: Michael Lilek (volunteer)
c/o Shining Brow Software
10437 Innovation Drive, Suite 259
Wauwatosa, WI 53226
Telephone 414-258-3400
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Project/Building Owner:

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