



Kessler House History

15 Tower Drive | Maplewood NJ

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OCT 17 1964

TALIESIN
ASSOC. ARCHITECTS

Mr. William Wesley Peters, Chief Architect
Frank Lloyd Wright Center
Taliesin Associated Architects
Phoenix, Arizona

Dear Mr. Peters:

I have been a great admirer and believer in the works and philosophies of Frank Lloyd Wright for many years. I have always dreamt of the day that I might be in a position where I could live in a home that was created in the true Frank Lloyd Wright tradition.

I have just purchased 2 1/2 lovely acres in one of the most beautiful residential sections in Maplewood, New Jersey, and here I hope to build my dream house.

Can you possibly recommend a competent architect who is schooled in the Frank Lloyd Wright Association in the New York or New Jersey area that could undertake this situation for me. It is going to be a rather large undertaking and if you could possibly suggest someone to me, I would be most indebted to you.

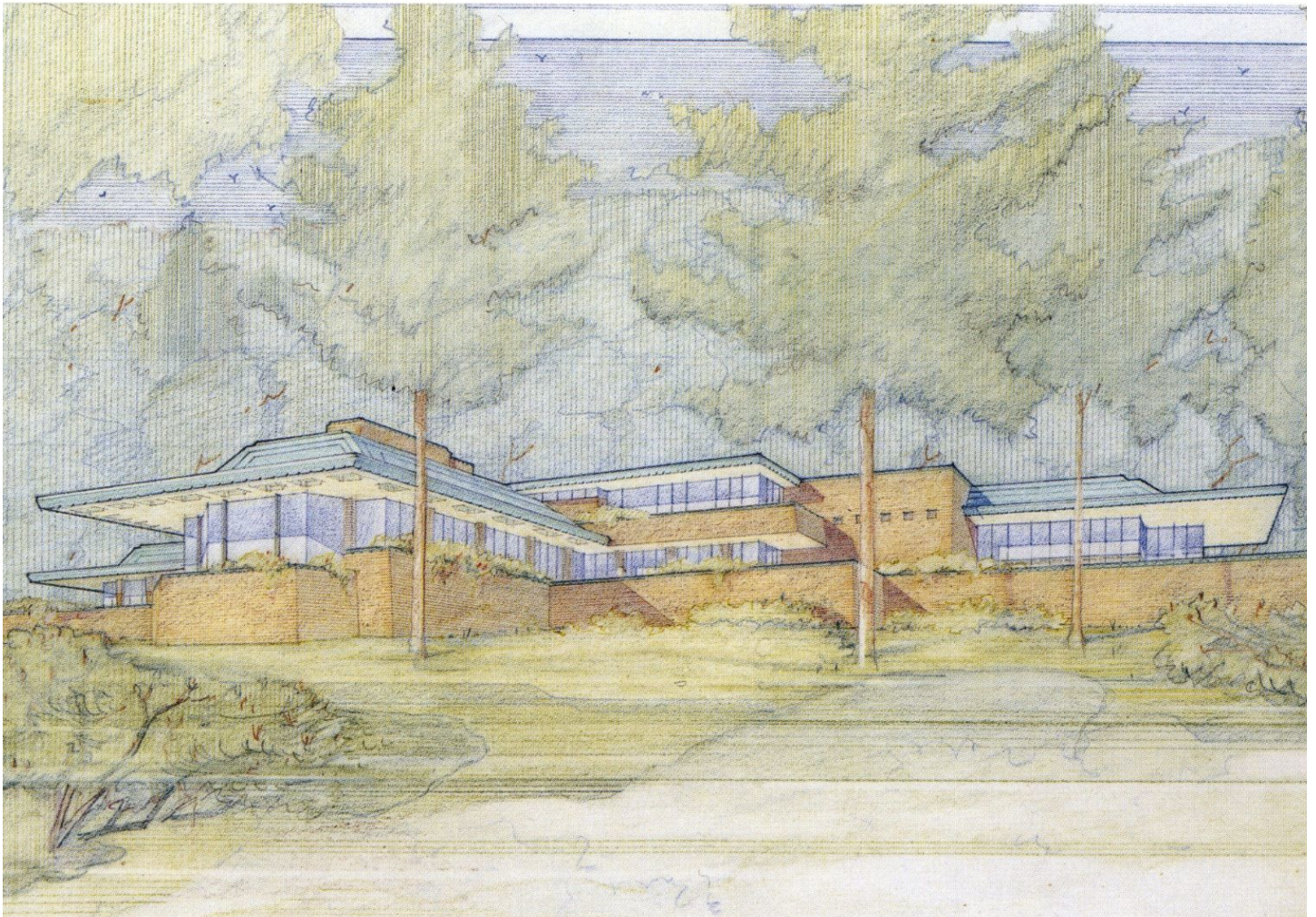
Hoping to hear from you in the near future, I remain,

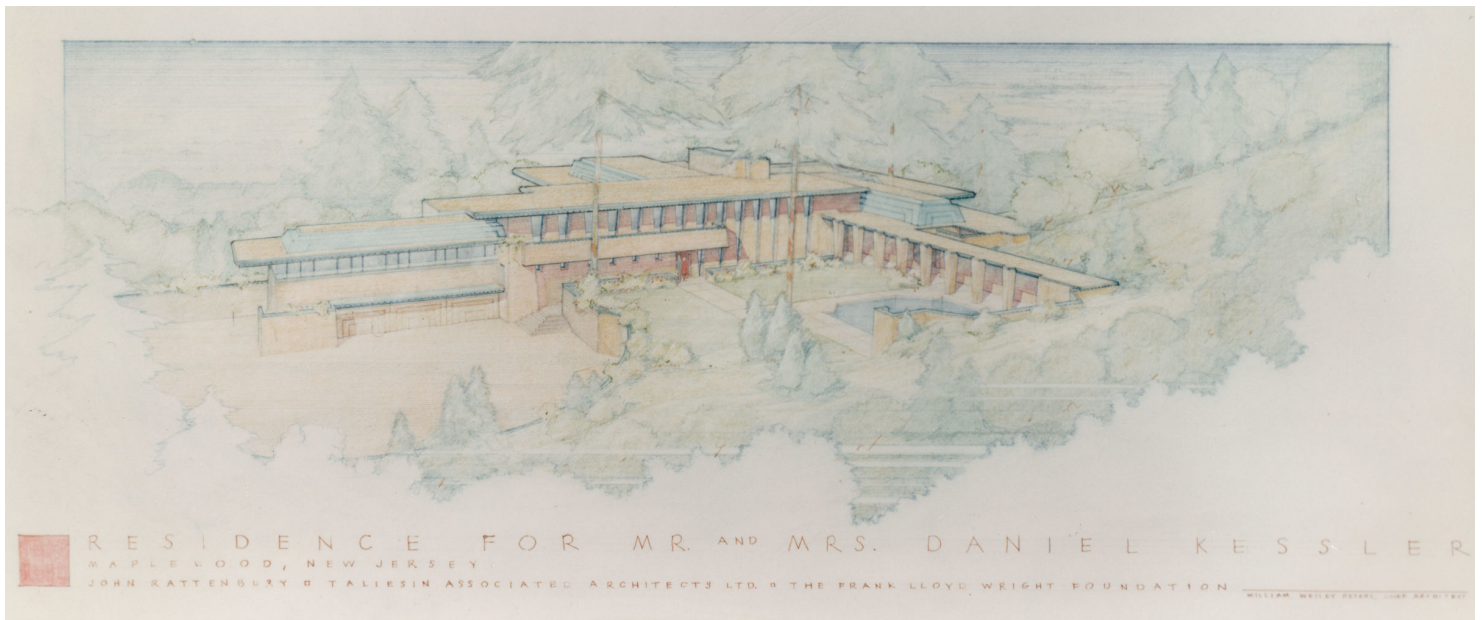
Very truly yours,

Daniel Kessler
Daniel Kessler
Executive Vice President

The Kessler House

John Rattenbury and the team at Taliesin Architects custom-designed every aspect of this mid-century modern, organic gem---even the lighting, furniture, and cabinetry. On nearly two acres of park-like grounds, the Kessler House features buff-colored Roman brick, terrazzo and teak parquet floors, teak-paneled walls and ceilings, floor-to-ceiling windows, 7 bedrooms, 8 full and 2 half baths, 5 terraces and balconies, and 36 skylights. According to Rattenbury, "The workmanship was outstanding, and the entire house was built like a Swiss watch."



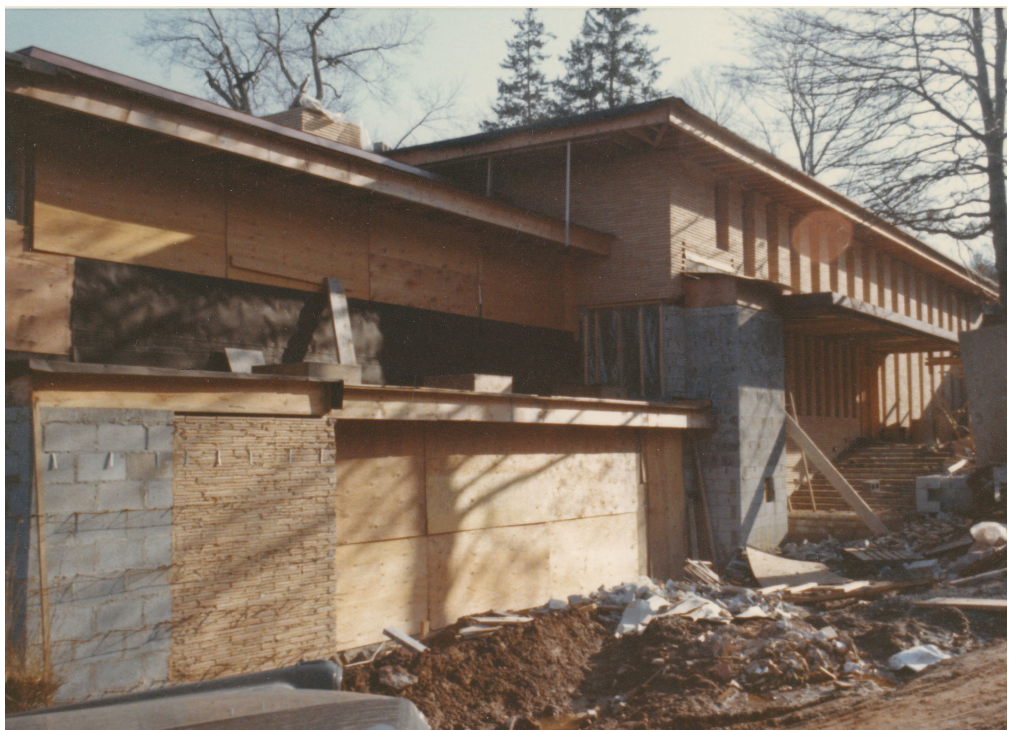


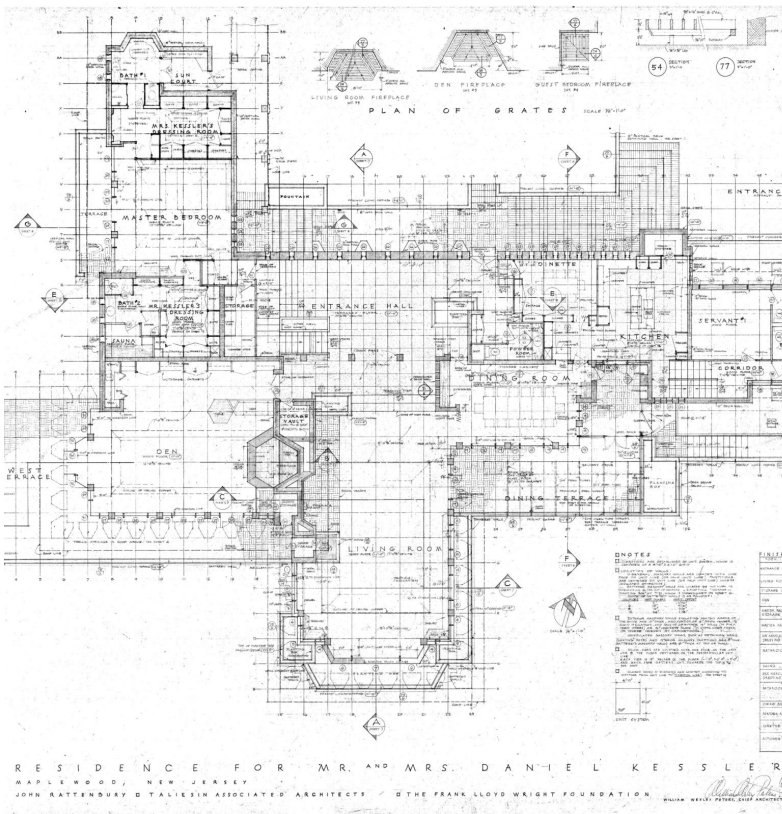
The Kessler Family

The Kesslers---Dan and Helene and children Bruce, Rona Sue, and Mark---lived in a small house on Warner Road in Maplewood. After three years looking for a suitable house in or around Maplewood, Helene gave Dan the green light to build his dream house on the largest residential property in Maplewood.

Dan was a fan of Frank Lloyd Wright. According to Helene, Dan went to college with Edgar Kaufman, Jr., and his love of Wright's designs sprang from spending weekends with Edgar at Fallingwater, the Kaufman's Wright-designed country home in southwestern Pennsylvania. Dan was president of Unishops, a large chain of discount department stores, while the Kessler House was under construction.

The family moved into their new home in February 1968, but Dan died in 1969 at age 43. Helene raised Bruce, Rona Sue, and Mark in the Kessler House.



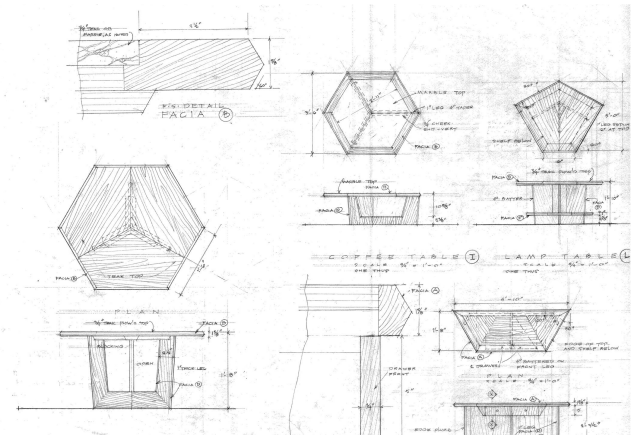


Rattenbury, Hill, & Taliesin Architects

John Rattenbury joined the Taliesin Fellowship, a group of apprentices and associates to Frank Lloyd Wright, in 1950 at age 21. In his 69 years in the fellowship, he rose from apprentice to fellow (working at Wright's side) to architect at Taliesin Architects (the firm that carried on Wright's work) and Dean of the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture. He designed country clubs, resorts, community centers, hotels, conference centers, and other commercial buildings. Rattenbury's dozens of private residences include the Kessler House, his first commission. Rattenbury published two books on architecture, and his "House For Life" was *Life* magazine's '97 Dream House.

John deKoven Hill designed the custom furniture and cabinets of the Kessler House and selected other original furniture, fabrics and carpets. He was also responsible for the color schemes. (Olgivanna Lloyd Wright consulted on the interior color schemes, as she did on all her late-husband's houses.) Hill joined the Taliesin fellowship as an apprentice in June 1938, and rose to become one of Wright's most valued associates. He oversaw the construction of 69 Wright homes, and he designed the interiors and furnishings in 20 of them. He also designed the interiors of the Pearl Palace in Teheran, Iran, and the Mercedes Benz showroom on Park Avenue. For ten years, Hill served as architectural editor and editorial director of *House Beautiful* magazine.

Taliesin Architects operated from 1959 until 2003. In the early years, the firm completed Wright's projects such as the Guggenheim Museum, the Marin County Civic Center, and the Gammage Memorial Auditorium. Taliesin Architects ultimately designed over 1,300 projects worldwide. Principal architects included Wesley Peters, John Rattenbury, and Charles Montooth. Taliesin's architects also trained generations of architects in Frank Lloyd Wright's style. The School of Architecture at Taliesin continues this mission.



Furniture

Built-in cabinetry and furniture are part of the Kessler House's unique design. Rooms throughout the house feature built-in storage cabinets, bars, dressers, desks, and bookshelves in teak. The stand-alone pieces---hassocks, benches, dining room table and chairs, coffee and side tables, and even the platform beds---are also crafted of teak.

The design team at Taliesin Architects also selected mid-century modern pieces by leading designers of the period. Harvey Probber, a leader in American modern furniture design in the 1950s and 1960s, designed the curved sofa, upholstered chairs, and ottomans in the living room. The six armchairs---four around the poker table and two in the office---are a midcentury Danish modern teak design by Finn Juhl who introduced Danish modern design to America.

Some of the Kessler House's original pieces are now missing. The table and chairs in the breakfast area and the desk chairs in the bedrooms are examples of midcentury modern replacement pieces.





Art

On a trip to Japan in the summer of 1967, Rattenbury shopped at dozens of art galleries and curio shops in Tokyo and Kyoto to decorate the Kessler House with distinctive pieces of fine art. The 3,000 pounds of artwork that he shipped to New Jersey included sculptures, folding screens, hanging scrolls, and wood carved planters. In the spring of 1968, the Kesslers asked about the wooden warrior in the entrance hall. Rattenbury explained, "The determined fellow outside your den is one of the Shi Tenno (four guardian kings). This antique Zochō Ten (Virudhaka) came from the Nara Prefect Temple and was carved in the Miromachi period (1334-1567 A.D.), so he is probably 500-600 years old."





The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel

The Kessler House features prominently in the third season of the Emmy-Award-winning series *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* on Amazon Prime.

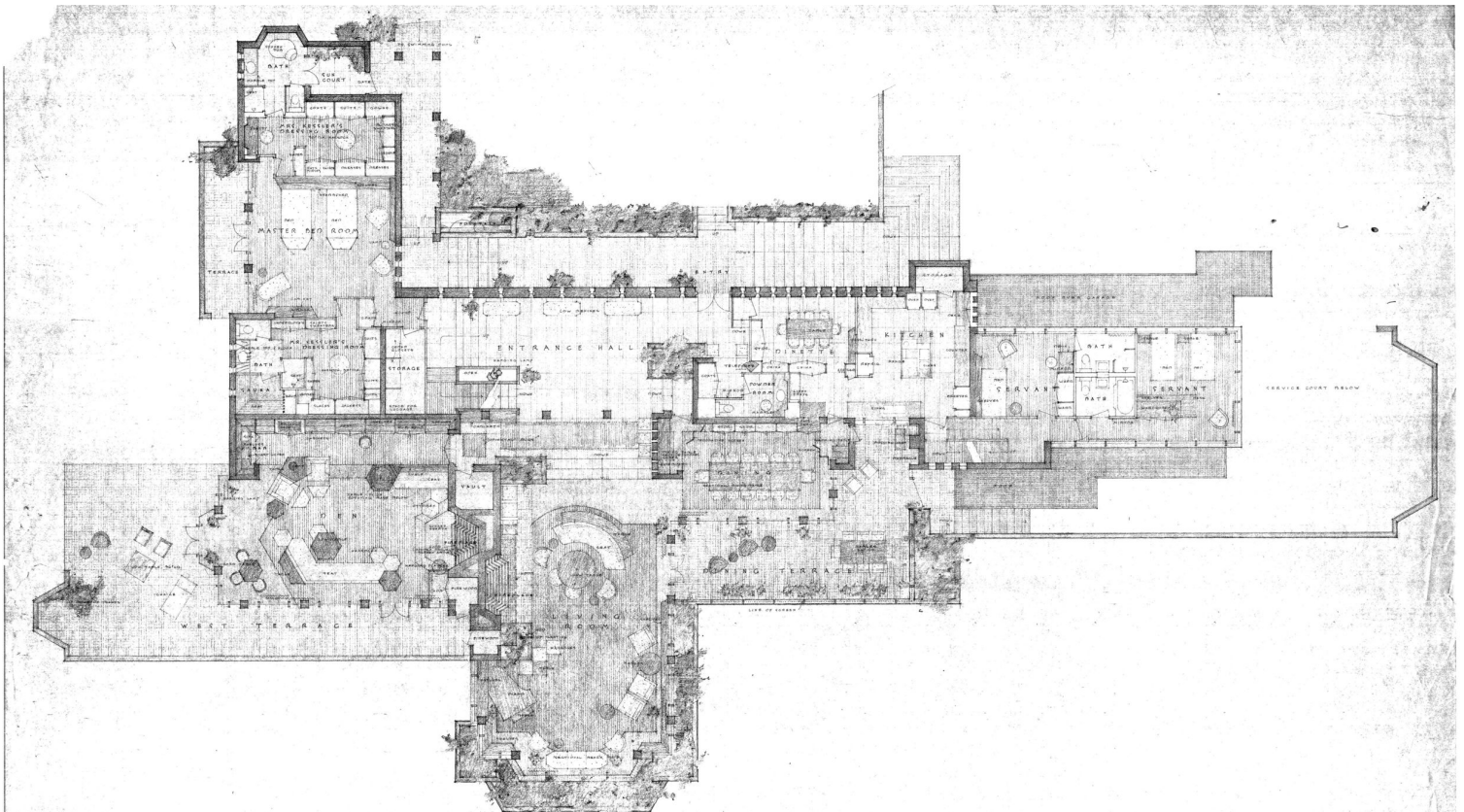
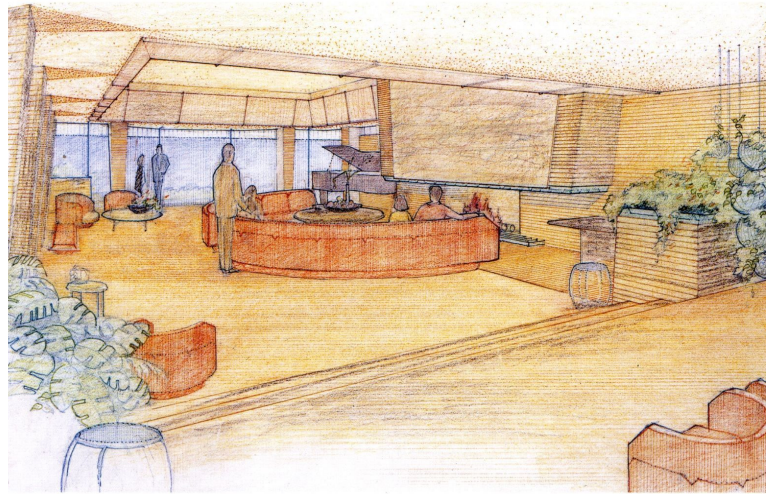
After five days of preparation, shooting took place on one long day in late-July 2019. The crew transformed the living room and entrance hall of the Kessler House into the set of "Miami After Dark," a fictional late-night talk show modeled after Hugh Hefner's "Playboy's Penthouse," which premiered in October 1959. The Kessler House's dining room provided off-camera space for Midge (Rachael Brosnahan) and the crew of "Miami After Dark." Production Designer Bill Groom and decorators Ellen Christiansen and Susan Kaufman recreated the spaces' colors and fabrics from original samples and vintage photos of the Kessler House.

The scene includes a live band, scores of actors playing glamorous young partygoers, famous characters from the period, and lots of smoking and drinking. Lenny Bruce (Luke Kirby) appears as a guest on "Miami After Dark" and draws Midge from off camera into the show. Much of the dialogue of the 6.5-minute scene takes place in front of the fire on the curved sofa.



Documents & Samples

Archived with the Kessler House are its drawings, specifications, correspondence, and fabric and tile samples. These and other Kessler House records of Taliesin Architects are also stored in the Frank Lloyd Wright Archives at Columbia University's Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library. All Taliesin Architects' papers on the house are owned jointly by the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, Columbia University, and the Museum of Modern Art.



Benjamin H. Garrison
Realtor/Sales Associate
Cell: 917-940-3158
Ben.Garrison@cbmoves.com
Office: 973-378-8300

Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage | 145 Maplewood Ave | Maplewood, NJ 07040 | 973-378-8300

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