THE WINTON GUEST HOUSE

Relocation Prospectus
University of St. Thomas
2014

Prepared by Christine Madrid French
November 2014
Synopsis

The Winton Guest House, designed by world-renowned architect Frank Gehry in 1987 and located on the former Gainey Conference Center of the University of St. Thomas (St. Thomas), must be relocated by the end of August 2016 due to a change in ownership of the Gainey campus (see map at end of packet). Moving the structure should begin by June 2015 to accommodate the Minnesota seasonal calendar and meet the deadline.

The Winton Guest House was moved from its original site in Orono, Minnesota in 2009. At that time, St. Thomas completed a total restoration of the building and installed an exhibition about the architect and this structure.

The University of St. Thomas invites interested parties (both private and non-profit) to submit letters of interest for the relocation of the guest house to a new site. Prospective ownership proposals are also welcome as well as proposals from historic preservation organizations. There are no restrictions on the geographic relocation of the house. New owners may transfer the structure out of state, or internationally, but St. Thomas prefers that the building remain in Minnesota. At this time, there are no easements, preservation restrictions, or local/state/national historic designations in regards to the Winton Guest House.

Letters of interest may be sent to the following by January 15, 2015:
ATTN: Dr. Victoria Young
Department of Art History, University of St. Thomas
2115 Summit Avenue, Mail 57P
St. Paul, Minnesota 55105

More details, photographs, and architectural plans of the structure are available.
Please contact:
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The history of the Winton Guest House and the story of the first move are available at:
http://art.stthomas.edu/gehry
Winton Guest House

By the Numbers

• **Square footage:** Total gross building area is 2,021 square feet. 1,060 gross living area on the first floor plus 309-square-foot garage. The loft is 76.5 square feet.

• **Number of rooms:** Eight. Living room tower, two bedrooms, kitchen, fireplace room, two bathrooms, and loft space.

• **Heaviest piece:** 80 tons. The curving, stone bedroom is sheathed with Northern Pink Buff-colored, dolomitic limestone from the Vetter Stone quarry near Mankato, Minnesota.

• **Tallest piece:** 35 feet. The central tower is sheathed in Colorklad black metal. This piece was lowered and laid horizontally for the move in 2009.

• **Appraisal:** $4,500,000. In December, 2007, the Inghram Company of Chicago, Illinois, completed a market value appraisal of the structure for then owner Kirtland C. Woodhouse. The final report analyzed the structure as “an architectural masterpiece and work of art.”

View of garage, loft, living room tower, and limestone bedroom (left to right).
Images/Floorplan/Section

Exterior view showing limestone bedroom, brick fireplace room, living room tower, and metal-clad bedroom (left to right).

Exterior view of metal-clad bedroom, living room tower, and reconstructed garage (left to right).
View of loft, living room tower, and limestone bedroom (above). View of fireplace room (below).
Inside the living room tower with central skylight.
Plywood on bathroom walls.

Limestone bedroom.

Stairs to loft and down to basement.
Architectural Significance

• The Winton Guest House (WGH) is a rare residential work, one of a small number of homes designed by Frank Gehry over the last sixty years. Gehry began the design of the building in 1983 and completed the structure in 1987. The WGH is an early Gehry design that set the stage for the architect’s work in the 1990s, when he achieved his worldwide fame.

• The WGH is one of four designs by the world-renowned architect in the state of Minnesota (two commissions for the Weismann Art Museum at the University of Minnesota, 1993 with a 2011 addition; “Standing Glass Fish,” displayed at the Walker Art Center, completed in 1986; and the Winton Guest House). Only California, New York, and Maryland have more buildings/structures designed by Gehry. Minnesota stewards more Gehry designs than France or Spain, home to the famous Guggenheim Museum Bilbao.

• The house is composed of six separate, geometric spaces arranged as a pinwheel around a 35-foot-tall central tower and living room. Each space is a “one-room building,” according to Gehry, composed to create a “metaphor for cities,” and a “village of buildings.”

• The “house as a village” concept was part of an urban prototype developed by Gehry at his own home in Santa Monica, California, utilizing multiple materials and projecting planes to create a series of dramatically shaped interior areas.

• The house was donated to the University of St. Thomas as a work of art by Kirt Woodhouse. Indeed, the building presents as a sculptural piece, with no boxes, wiring, or other utilities visible on the exterior of the structure.

• The main inspiration for the design of the home came from the artist Giorgio Morandi and his series of bottle paintings. Gehry cites these works (and “villages of bottles”) as his muse for the “one-room building” concept. Gehry also credits architect Philip Johnson with articulating this idea in structures, particularly at Johnson’s own residence, “The Glass House,” in New Canaan, Connecticut.

• The original owners furnished the 2,300-square-foot space simply with Thonet bentwood chairs, pale linen carpeting, a comfortable variety of pillows in the fireplace room, and white chenille bedspreads. They hung abstract, all-white paintings by artist Robert Ryman on the walls and displayed one of Gehry’s Formica fish-form lamps.

• Over the years, many guests have stayed in the house. Visiting artists have found it inspirational. Mike and Penny Winton have themselves lodged in the guest house, as did Gehry, who found that from the bed in the metal bedroom he could look through the window to the window of the fireplace room where a perfectly framed fire was able to be seen – a wonderful but completely unplanned vision.

• Winner of the first House & Garden Design Award for Architecture (1987).

• Winner American Institute of Architects’ Honor Award (1988), the AIA’s highest recognition of design excellence.

• Noted in “Best of 87,” Time magazine design section (1987).
Frank Gehry, architect

Frank Owen Gehry was born in Toronto on February 28, 1929. His family moved to Los Angeles eighteen years later, where he obtained a degree in architecture from the University of Southern California in 1954. From 1956 to 1957 he studied city planning at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard. Upon his return to Los Angeles he worked with several firms, including Hideo Sasaki, Pereira & Luckman, Victor Gruen & Associates, and André Remondet, before founding Frank Gehry and Associates in 1962. His architectural notoriety took an upturn in 1978 when he remodeled his own home, a modest bungalow in Santa Monica, with industrial materials including chain link fencing, corrugated metal, wire reinforced glass, and plywood.

Frank Gehry was no stranger to Minnesota before the project with the Wintons began. His time at Victor Gruen & Associates placed him on the design team for the Southdale Mall in Edina (1952-1956). Gehry got to know members of the Dayton family of Dayton’s department stores (patrons of Southdale), and through them he met Walker Art Center director Martin Friedman and his wife Mildred (Mickey), the Walker’s design curator. Gehry also spent time in Minnesota with his artist friends who were showing at the Walker Art Center and elsewhere.

When the Wintons found Gehry in the early 1980s, he had yet to become a household name. But by the end of that decade, Gehry’s architecture had drawn critical acclaim. In 1989 he won the Pritzker Prize, the highest international honor an architect can receive. In a letter of congratulations Penny Winton wrote to Gehry, “Mike and I agree with all good things said about you and applaud all awards. We say ‘We knew him when…’”

Gehry’s most famous works were still ahead of him; the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Bilbao, Spain (1997), the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, CA, (2003), and the residential tower at 8 Spruce Street in New York City (2010).

--Text by Dr. Victoria M. Young, University of St. Thomas
Moving the House

2007-2011

• The University of St. Thomas agreed to accept the gift of the home from Kirt Woodhouse in 2007, with the understanding that the structure had to be moved.

• The house was moved 110-miles to the south, from Lake Minnetonka to Owatonna, Minnesota.

• Preparing the house and executing the move took four years.

• The structure was split into eight pieces for the move, which took place in the evening hours.

2014-2015

• Stubbs Building Movers relocated the home in 2009-2011. Larry Stubbs has provided an initial estimate of $750,000 to $900,000 to move and re-erect the structure in St. Paul, Minnesota (a distance of 70 miles).

• Planning and execution of this move is expected to occupy a shorter time frame if the same moving company is contracted for the work. In 2007, the average amount of time to move each piece was two days. New stewards may use their own moving company or contact Stubbs Building Movers.

• Preparing the structure for the move must begin by June 2015 to ensure compliance with the expiration date of August 2016.
Current Location

*Gainey Conference Center, Owatonna, Minnesota*