

SEP 30 1988

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in **Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms** (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "NA" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Paul J. and Ida Trier House
other names/site number Paul J. and Ida Trier House

2. Location

street & number 6880 N.W. Beaver Drive | | not for publication
city, town Johnston | | vicinity
state Iowa code 19 county Polk code 153 zip code 50131

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	1	0 buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	—	— sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	—	— structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	—	— objects
		1	0 Total

Name of Related multiple property listing: Iowa Usonian Houses by Frank Lloyd Wright
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet, section _____ page _____.

James J. ... DSHPO
Signature of certifying official
Bureau of Historic Preservation
State or Federal agency and bureau
Sept 23, 1988
Date

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet National Register criteria.
 See continuation sheet, section _____ page _____.

Signature of commenting or other official
Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 - See continuation sheet, section ___ page ___
- determined eligible for the National Register.
 - See continuation sheet, section ___ page ___
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

July 2 1991 11/9/88

Signature of the Keeper Date

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(enter categories from instructions)
Domestic-Single Dwelling

Current Functions
(enter categories from instructions)
Domestic-Single Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)
Wrightian

Materials
(enter categories from instructions)
foundation Ceramic Tile
walls Ceramic Tile, Glass
roof Asphalt
other Concrete, Brick

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

See continuation sheet, section 7 page 2

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D
 Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance
(enter categories from instructions)
Architecture

Period of Significance Significant Dates
1958 1958

Cultural Affiliation
N.A.

Significant Person
N.A.

Architect/Builder
Wright, Frank Lloyd

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above. See continuation sheet, section 8 page 2

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CFN-259-1116

Description

The last of the Frank Lloyd Wright Iowa Usonian is the Trier house. Replicating, as does the Sunday house, many features of the 1953 Usonian Exhibition House, the Trier house well represents Wright's late Usonian style.

The Paul J. Trier house is located in Polk County, in central Iowa, just north of Des Moines in the town of Johnston. The two-acre site is on a rise of land which, despite surrounding residential development, maintains expansive southern views of the countryside and distant Des Moines. When the Trier house was built in 1958, this area was rural farmland. In selecting the site, the Trier family followed Mr. Wright's advice to "go as far out as you can get." (Wright, p. 139) Mr. Wright's warning that others would follow proved to be quite true. The rural gravel road to the city was soon paved and through the years new houses have sprung up along its entire length from Des Moines to the Trier house and beyond.

Although the surrounding area has filled in with residential development, the Trier house possesses nearly complete privacy. The house is sited with its back to the street on the north side, opening on the south side to a large lawn and to the view beyond. The house is further shielded by the established landscaping; the mature trees and shrubs on the site have all been planted since the house was built.

The Trier house is set diagonally on its site. The original property was actually only one acre, but a second acre to the south was later purchased by Dr. and Mrs. Trier. The land falls gently to the south.

The design of the Trier house is based upon the 1953 Usonian Exhibition House which was built on the latter site of the Wright-designed Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City. The 1953 house accompanied the museum's exhibit "Sixty Years of Living Architecture: The Work of Frank Lloyd Wright." Like the Sunday house, the very floor plan of the Trier house is derived from the plan of the 1953 exhibit. There are differences: Trier house, overall, is larger than the exhibit house; it has extra bedrooms, a utility room, a carport area, and a shop that were unnecessary in the exhibit house, and it has a later added playroom and large storage area; but the original plan is still that of the Usonian exhibit.

In plan, the grid dimension of both the exhibition house and the Trier house is 4'-0" x 4'-0". Both were oriented the same: the length of each house oriented east-west, with bedrooms and main living spaces open to the south. In both plans the kitchen is the high-ceilinged, masonry-walled core of the house, located between the living room-dining room space and the bedroom wing. The core of the Trier house includes a utility room, and the kitchen is one 4'-0" bay narrower than the kitchen of the exhibition house, but it is essentially the same design, with a similar layout and similar windows in the exterior wall opening out over a similar raised planter.

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The living room of the Trier house is a remarkable copy of the living room of the 1953 Exhibition House. The Trier living room is smaller, one bay shorter in length and two bays narrower, but at a smaller scale it appears to have the same proportions as the exhibit's living room. The Trier living room has a similar glass wall to the south with tall pairs of glass doors opening to a terrace; similar clerestory windows to the north and east; and a similar lowered ceiling deck along the north wall. Under the lowered deck there is a built-in couch with built-in tables and shelves similar to the exhibition house, and the dining table of the Trier house is located in the same place, in plan, as was the dining table of the exhibition house. This dining table, attached to an interior masonry wall at the west end of the living room, has dining chairs which appear to be identical to those of the exhibit. Finally, the huge fireplace in the Trier living room is nearly identical to that of the exhibit prototype.

In the private bedroom wing of the Trier house, the plan continues to follow the plan of the earlier exhibition house. From the entry, the gallery of the Trier house, lined with tall cabinets and a narrow window band, leads past the children's bedrooms to the master bedroom. In this wing, where the exhibition house had one child's bedroom three bays wide, the Trier house has been expanded to eight bays with three bedrooms. At the end of the gallery, the arrangement of the master bedroom is nearly identical to the exhibit. The room has a similar bathroom, similar glass doors opening to a south terrace, even an identical planter at this corner of the house. The laundry area in both plans is very conveniently located at the end of the gallery. In the Trier house it is closed off by folding doors.

The main entrance to the Trier house is located in approximately the same place as was the main entrance of the exhibition house; it is on the north side of the house between the living room and the gallery. With the Trier house the entrance door is actually turned 90' from the north wall of the living room, placed at the intersection of the dominant east-west portion of the house and the perpendicular north wing. Unlike the Walter, Miller, Lamberson, Alsop, and Sunday houses, with the Trier house there is no separation of main entrance and service entrance.

Like the Sunday house, the Trier house has had later additions. As originally built, the playroom of the north wing was the open carport; the present carport and the 12'-0" extension of the shop were added in 1967 when the playroom was enclosed. The playroom addition was planned by Mr. Wright and is detailed in the 1957 working drawings. Dr. and Mrs. Trier commissioned the Taliesin Associated Architects to complete the plans for this work in 1967. A rendered site plan of the Trier house dated October 21, 1965, and signed by William Wesley Peters, has been framed and now hangs in the entry of the house.

The playroom is a step down from the entry. It is an ordinary room with a ceiling height of just over 7'-0". Glass doors on the west side open to a small terrace. Construction of this addition was not as skillfully completed as it was in the original house. During the author's interview, Mrs. Trier could recall the incompetence of the builder hired to do this work, but could not recall his name.

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The elaborate site plan drawn by the Taliesin Associated Architects shows the playroom, shop, and carport additions which were built in 1967. Also shown are several features which were never built. Unbuilt features include a trellis area in front of the playroom, between the new carport and the main entrance; a tool house at the east property line, with a long brick retaining wall extending from the tool house, along the property line, to the southeast corner of the lot; a small summer house in that southeast corner; a path of stepping stones lined with flower beds leading back to the house from the summer house; and, along the path, near the summer house, a fountain.

According to Mrs. Trier, after her rejection of the first Usonian Automatic plans, Mr. Wright's design for the wood and masonry house was accepted with few alterations. From their research of other Frank Lloyd Wright houses in the region, the Triers had gained this advice: "All the owners told us to listen to Mr. Wright and follow his directions, even if we disagreed at first . . . They said he always turned out to be right." (quoted in Caringer)

Minor revisions which were made in the original design included the addition of an extra 4'-0" bay in the bedroom wing and the redesign of the living room's south glass wall. The extra width in the bedroom wing allowed the children's quarters, originally planned as one large room, to be enlarged and divided into two smaller rooms. The very small study was built according to the original design. In the living room, where there are now fixed windows sandwiched in decorative perforated boards and set at 45° angles between the glass doors, there were originally planned floor-to-ceiling bookcases (Figure 56). Although the bookcases were revised for reasons of expense, the resulting quality of light and sense of the outdoors in this room was obviously enhanced. It was for similar reasons of expense that the playroom was planned as a later addition, as it was for reasons of expense that the summer house and other features of the 1967 site plan were never built.

Although the Triers were advised by other owners of Usonian houses not to alter Mr. Wright's designs, they were also advised not to install the radiant "gravity" heat system typical of these homes. "We learned from other owners of Wright homes in the Midwest that the radiant heat . . . was just not efficient enough to provide comfort during the coldest winter weather." (quoted in Caringer)

Following this advice from other owners, the Triers had a forced air heating system installed in their house. Actually, the Trier house has three furnaces with registers generally in the floor and ductwork located below the slab. Two of the furnaces are in the utility room, one heating the main living spaces and the other heating the bedroom wing. The third furnace is located in the shop and heats the north wing.

The materials of the Trier house are clay tile blocks and large red bricks, concrete, Philippine mahogany, glass, and plaster. The interior is finished as simply as the exterior. Specific materials and details which the Trier house shares with the

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1953 Usonian Exhibition House include the distinctive denticulated wood fascia; the window "shutters" of geometrically patterned perforated boards; and flush, finished plywood interior partition walls.

The low, flat-roofed Trier house is a very typical Usonian house built of simple materials, naturally expressed, in a horizontal composition. The house is in sympathy with the land and well oriented on the site. It opens wide to the outdoors, maintains privacy from its neighbors, and masterfully captures and controls the sun's lights. In a design that is compact and efficient without becoming confining, the qualities of both shelter and spaciousness have been beautifully realized.

The original walls of the Trier house, those dating from the 1958 construction, are built of 4" x 12" hollow clay tile blocks. The tile block walls have a bold appearance compared to the standard brick walls of the Walter house, the Oskaloosa houses, and the Sunday house; the deep red color of the clay tile blocks is more uniform, and the surface texture is smoother. The original walls are cavity walls; insulation was omitted to save cost. The walls of the 1967 addition are of brick. The special bricks of the addition are the same size as the clay tile blocks and closely matched in color.

Throughout the Trier house the masonry is laid in running bond. The mortar is an uneven red color, horizontal joints are raked and vertical joints are flush. Exposed foundation walls are of clay tile block or brick and are indistinguishable from the main walls. Window sills, planters, and the low retaining wall along the east side of the living room terrace are all finished with a simple rowlock course. The masonry masses at either end of the living room, that is, the walls of the fire place and of the kitchen-utility core, are similarly finished with a rowlock course; the same at the north end of the shop where the brick walls extend above the cover of the roof.

With the exception of the slate-finished floor in the kitchen, the finished floor of the original 1958 house is a continuous red-colored concrete slab. The concrete floor slab continues from the interior to the exterior at the living room and master bedroom terraces. The terrace of the master bedroom is on grade; the living room terrace is raised, due to the contour of the site, and steps beautifully down to the lawn. The terraces connect the indoor spaces with the outdoors. The continuous floor slab, continuous ceilings-roof soffits, and the wide glass walls of the Trier house allow a connection with the outdoors which is flowing and unbroken. To reduce building cost, only the exterior sections of the floor slab were etched with the 4'-0" x 4'-0" grid, while this detail, unfortunately, was not continued inside.

The concrete floor slab of the Trier house also continues beyond the main entrance, here to an ample entrance approach area outside the front door. The slab at the entrance area is raised two low steps above the surface of the driveway. From inside the entry, the concrete floor steps down into the playroom addition. Wall to

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wall carpet in this room covers a natural gray-colored concrete floor slab. A terrace on the west side of the playroom is of the same uncolored concrete, but has been painted red. This terrace is approximately 2" lower than the interior playroom floor slab.

Each of the three terrace of the Trier house has a different character. The playroom terrace, shaded and protected by the landscaping, is simple and very private. With this terrace the sense of flowing connection between indoors and outdoors is comparatively weak, and the panted finish of the concrete is quite unsuccessful. The master bedroom terrace, while it is open to the south lawn and distant views, is the most intimate. This terrace is set into the south wall of the bedroom wing and is protected by a deep, low roof overhang; it is a pleasant extension of the master bedroom. Ther terrace of the living room is a splendid place, protected by the deep roof overhang yet open and sunny. Raised, it is more formal than the on-grade terraces. As a transition between the living room and the lawn, it expands the perceived size of the living room and brings the outdoors in.

The flat roofs of the Trier house are basically of wood construction, with steel supporting the length of the living room deck, the projection of the entry, and the carport. There are two roof levels. The higher roof of the living room is continuous with the roof of the kitchen and utility room; the lower roofs of the bedroom wing, the north wing, and the low ceiling deck in the living room are all continuous. The roofs are insulated, and protected by built-up roofing. While the original roofing has been replaced at least once, there have been serious problems with the roofs of this house. The wide, denticulated mahogany roof fascia of the Trier house are identical to the roof fascia of the Sunday house.

Unlike the Sunday house with its wood-finished ceilings and soffits, the ceilings and soffits of the Trier house are finished with the plastered drywall. The soffits are continuous with the ceilings, the color is off-white. Ceiling heights in the Trier house are a low 6'-8" in the bedroom wing, just over 7'-0" in the playroom and shop, and 10'-8" in the living room, kitchen, and utility room. In the ceiling of the kitchen there is a large, fixed skylight which brightens the room with natural light. There is a similar skylight in the shop, and a third, smaller skylight in the windowless bathroom off the entrance area.

The original rooms of the Trier house were designed to take full advantage of natural light. The length of the living room, the bedrooms, and the kitchen all face south; these rooms are shaded in summer by the roofs' deep overhangs, filled with welcomed sunshine in the winter when the sun is lower in the sky. The south-facing glass walls of the living room and master bedroom bring in light and give each of these two rooms a sense of openness which defies their small size. The band of windows running the length of the study and children's bedrooms simlarly opens up these small rooms in a way that conventional punched windows could not. In the gallery, the continuous band of windows allows natural light into what could otherwise be a long dark hall.

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Natural ventilation was also well planned in the Trier house. The operable windows of the bedrooms and the operable windows of the gallery allow for cross-ventilation in this wing of the house. In the living room, cross-ventilation is provided by the three pairs of doors to the south and the operable windows of the tall north clerestory. An opportunity to provide cross-ventilation and better natural lighting, was missed in the playroom addition when the east wall of this room was designed without windows.

All of the windows and glass doors in the Trier house were built of Philippine mahogany. The operable windows of the kitchen, the study and children's bedrooms, and the small windows of the bathrooms and west living room wall are each casements. Mitered glass corners occur in the master bedroom and in the clerestory of the living room. The perforated "shutters" of the gallery windows and fixed living room windows are a characteristic Usonian detail, a Frank Lloyd Wright signature; they filter the light and become a simple decorative element in the design.

The lighting system throughout the Trier house includes down lights, similar to those of the Sunday house, recessed in the ceilings, with fluorescent lights concealed in the low ceiling deck of the living room providing additional indirect light in that room. Supplementing natural ventilation, the Trier house has central air conditioning in the bedroom wing, and a small unit air conditioner in the playroom. A common owner's complaint with the houses in this study, which Mrs. Trier was one to voice, is that a house opened to natural ventilation is also opened to the dirt and dust of the outside air, making the house more difficult to keep clean.

Inside the Trier house, the flush wood of the interior partition walls is Philippine mahogany. The wall panels are made of standard 4'-0"-wide sheets of plywood which have a veneer of mahogany. The furnishings throughout the Trier house are similarly built of mahogany and mahogany veneer plywood. Built-in furniture in this house includes the couch, the end-tables, dining table, and shelves in the living room; the tall storage cabinets which line the gallery; wardrobes, desks, and shelves in the bedrooms; and a built-in couch, cabinets, and shelves in the playroom. A common Usonian detail, the brass piano-type hinges, have been used in the Trier house for the furniture of the living room, gallery, and playroom.

Frank Lloyd Wright-designed furniture is now in high demand with collectors, and Mrs. Trier has sold all but one of the original Wright-designed chairs from her home. Dr. Trier built the original chairs, and the Trier's son, using the same plans, has built Mrs. Trier's now replacements.

One of the most outstanding features of the Trier house is the great fireplace in the living room. Only the living room of the Miller house is smaller than the living room of the Trier house, yet the fireplace of the Trier house is one of the largest in this study. As with the other fireplaces, this fireplace is integral with the structure of the house, built of the same clay tile blocks as the walls. The Trier

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fireplace has a simple cantilever design; the height of the opening is at approximately 5'-0"; the great brick hearth is at floor level. The Trier fireplace has unusual beauty and drama, and a sense of solidity, permanence, and protection.

Completing the interior, the upholstery, rugs, drapes, and accessories of the Trier house were not selected by the architect, although for an additional fee this service was available. The Triers followed a general suggestion that fabrics have a coarse texture and that colors be earthy.

Likewise, there was no original landscaping plan for the exterior, simply the advice from the architect to plant trees and shrubs in natural, random groupings. The first one-acre lot is well landscaped, the second acre to the south has been left open. The drive and parking area in front of the Trier house, which was originally surfaced with gravel, is now paved with asphalt.

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Significance

Wright's last commissioned work in Iowa, this house is representative of the master's late Usonian style. Design is very directly derived from the design of the 1953 Usonian Exhibition House, which was built on the latter site of the Wright-designed Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City and was featured in Wright's 1954 The Natural House. A 1967 addition designed by William Wesley Peters, well known architect of the Taliesin Associated Architects, follows Wright's original intentions. Published in various Frank Lloyd Wright catalogues, this house has drawn publicity and visitors (local to international) since the initial groundbreaking. House and grounds today are of continuing interest to architectural scholars, photographers, and historians.

The Trier House, being one of only seven Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian houses in Iowa, is an important example of Wright's work in this state; the house embodies the mid-20th century American ideals of free and simple living, in touch with nature, for the family of moderate means. The Trier House is further significant as a near copy of the 1953 Usonian Exhibition House which defined the style of Mr. Wright's late residential work and represented what may be considered the culmination of Wright's lifework.

For today's student of architecture, possibly the greatest lessons which this house offers are in the character of the spaces and the relationship of the house to its site. Construction methods, materials, and detailing may change, but the essence of Wright's simple, honest, integral architecture is still valid; ". . . spaciousness and sunlight, human scale, warmth and solidity, a feeling of shelter, and a sense of the outdoors" are certainly still desirable qualities in the 1980s, and a study of Wright's work reveals how these qualities have been brought to life. (Wright, p. 118) The concepts of building economy and efficiency, humanly effected, are also still valid and observable in Wright's work.

The late Dr. Trier, who was a radiologist at the Veteran's Hospital in Des Moines, was a lifelong art enthusiast and an admirer of Frank Lloyd Wright. Dr. and Mrs. Trier were originally from Wisconsin and had known of Mr. Wright's work long before they commissioned the architect to design their house. The Triers had been particularly inspired by The Natural House and visited many of Wright's houses in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. In commissioning this house, Dr. Trier reasoned that while he could never be a collector of \$40,000 paintings or sculptures, a Frank Lloyd Wright house was a \$40,000 master's work which he could afford. Dr. and Mrs. Trier raised their three children in this house. Mrs. Trier now lives alone in the house.

It was 1956 when the Triers first contacted Mr. Wright concerning the design of their home. Despite rapidly rising construction costs, Dr. and Mrs. Trier expressed a desire to build a house for not more than \$25,000. Not long after contacting Mr. Wright, the Triers were sent plans for a concrete block house, likely a Usonian

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Automatic. But a block house was not what these clients had anticipated, and the plans were returned. The Triers felt that the block house, with its screens of small windows and enclosing character, was inappropriate both for them and for their site. Visits to the Spring Green Taliesin followed this initial correspondence, and designs for the present brick and wood house were soon developed.

Mrs. Trier, in recalling her visits to Taliesin, has said of Mr. Wright, "He didn't visit our site; he had stopped going out to sites because of his age. So we took photographs and had a survey done for him. He was very gracious and full of charm." Mrs. Trier specifically remembered Wright calling her and Dr. Trier "perchers," because of the high, wide open site they had selected. (quoted in Caringer, Des Moines Tribune)

Of the Trier house, Wilson and Robinson have written in The Prairie School in Iowa that John Howe, Mr. Wright's assistant at Taliesin, "carried out the design under Wright's direction." (p. 74) While this information seems most reasonable, it is important to note that of the five or six visits the Triers made to Taliesin, Wright conducted all but one of the meetings. Mrs. Trier did recall meeting with John Howe and also recalled a young apprentice who worked on the drawings. There was no Taliesin construction supervisor for this project nor, according to Mrs. Trier, any site visits by Mr. Howe. Final working drawings are dated from July of 1957 and were initialed by Mr. Wright.

The builders hired by Dr. and Mrs. Trier were a local contractor, Mr. Paul Smith, and an architect-builder from Nebraska, Mr. Hays. Smith acted as the general contractor and Hays, who actually made a couple of trips to Spring Green to consult with the architects, appears to have fulfilled the roles of builder and architect's supervisor. Construction of the Trier house was begun in May 1958, and the family moved into the house a short six months later. Dr. Trier, who visited the building site every day during construction, later built the home's Wright-designed furnishings. The final construction cost was \$41,200 plus the cost of the land and the cost of constructing a well.

Mrs. Trier has said of her Frank Lloyd Wright house, "It was a big adventure when we built it, and it's still exciting to me . . . I'm very proud of this house It's part of me and my children." (quoted in Caringer)

In conclusion, the Trier house in Johnston, being one of only seven Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian houses in Iowa, is an important example of Wright's work in this state; the house embodies the mid-20th century American ideals of free and simple living, in touch with nature, for the family of moderate means. The Trier house is further significant as a near copy of the 1953 Usonian Exhibition House which defined the style of Mr. Wright's late residential work and represented what may be considered the culmination of Wright's lifework.

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Wilson, Richard Guy and Sidney K. Robinson, The Prairie School in Iowa, 1977, p. 74.

Frank Lloyd Wright, The Natural House (New York: Horizon Press, 1954), p. 139.

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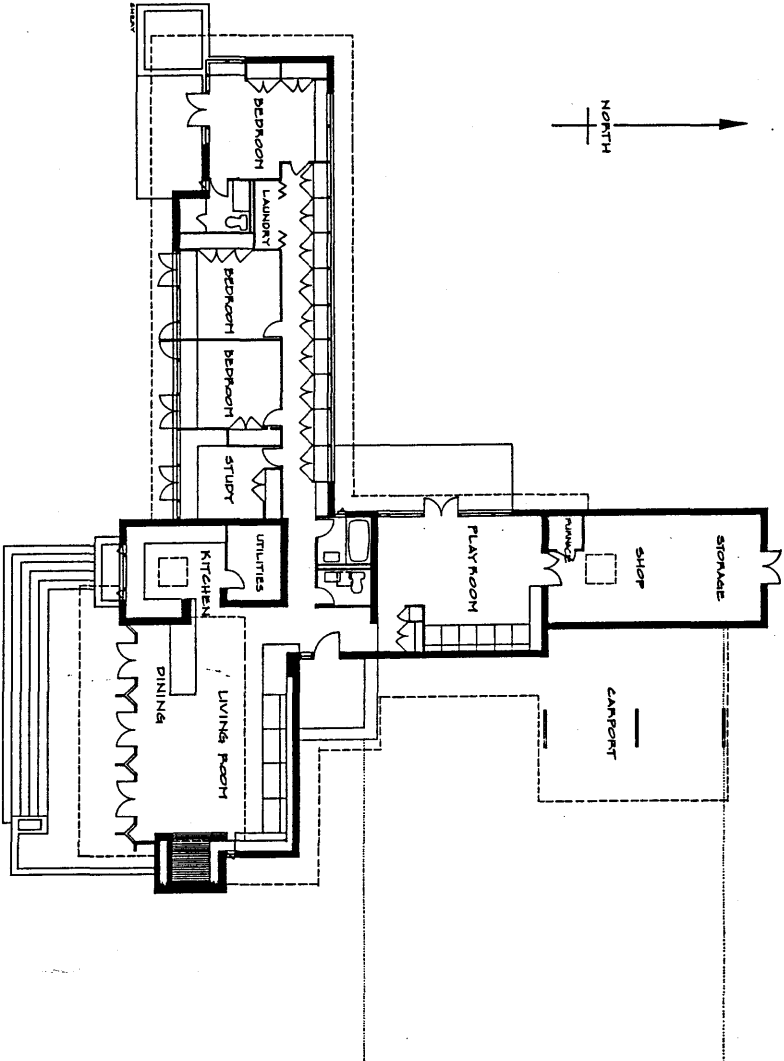
Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property consists of Colburn Heights, Section 12.

Boundary Justification

The boundary described above contains 2 acres and consists of the Trier House and its surrounding acreage. It is being nominated in its entirety because site was an integral part of usonian design in terms of Wright's philosophy of living in harmony with nature.

TRIER HOUSE, JOHNSTON, IOWA.



from Frank Lloyd Wright's Iowa American
University of Washington Master's Thesis
by Nina B. Franke