

The Tierce House in Tuscaloosa



Mem Tierce II wrote the following description¹ of her family house:

The house I grew up in is a wonderful old home on Pinehurst Drive. The front of the house is on Pinehurst Drive, the rear on 17th Avenue and the side on University Avenue. It is located midway between downtown Tuscaloosa and the University of Alabama. The outside design is Prairie School made famous by Frank Lloyd Wright with the inside totally different. It is patterned after the old Southern Greek Revival Mansions.

The house has more than 6,000 sq. ft. on the two main floors not including the basement, the 3rd floor or the front porch which is over 100 feet long. The porch floor is terrazzo marble and is raised about 10 feet above the yard. This was a great place for parties, everything from skating to dances. The north end of the porch ends in the portico. Having been built in 1915 when cars were smaller than they were in the 1950's, my father had to widen the opening.

The main entrance is by double doors to the entrance hall which is lined with Corinthian columns. The three tiered steps to the 2nd floor are at the rear of the entrance hall. Under the wide mid-landing is the entrance to the sunken library and there is a bathroom underneath the steps on the bottom floor. The landing over the library was reinforced with steel I-beams to cover the long span.

Double mahogany pocket doors on each side of the entrance hall open into the main living room on your right and the sitting room on your left. This room is adjacent to the sun porch and also joins the playroom through double doors. When all the double doors were open, the result was a very large area, perfect for entertaining. The dining room can be entered via the hallway or through the music room. Next are the butlers' pantry, kitchen, elevator and the servants' stairs.

The second floor consists of five bedrooms, three baths and a small sitting room. All the baths have very large tubs and the master bath has a shower with dual controls. One set was like a normal shower, the other was for shower heads that came from the side so one could shower without wetting their hair. The master bedroom has an intercom to the butlers' pantry. This room is large enough to be furnished with two full size beds. The whole house has a central vacuum system. Remember, this house was built in 1915! The third floor has one large room with a bath and two small rooms on one end. It was rumored this was a ballroom, but it had been used as an apartment in the past. The basement is fairly small and contains the central vacuum system, the furnace, the laundry room and the cooling system for the refrigerator.

All the walls and ceilings of the main floor are plaster covered with molding and wall sconces. Each room's pattern varies in depth and intricacy. The home was designed by D. O. Wildin, an renowned architect of the time. He designed several buildings at the University and downtown.

Is the Tierce house a "prairie house"?

¹ Online at http://tierce.us/1816_tierce.htm.

It's your turn to determine whether the Tierce house can be classified as a prairie house according to Frank Lloyd Wright's criteria. Prairie houses usually include the following features:

- Low-pitched roof
- Overhanging eaves
- Horizontal lines
- Central chimney
- Open floor plan
- Clerestory windows

Observe the Tierce house for these features. Which ones does it include? Explain.

What other features of the Tierce house make it more or less like a prairie house?

What materials were used to build the Tierce house? Why?
