



Fallingwater Rising: Frank Lloyd Wright, E. J. Kaufmann, and America's Most Extraordinary House

Franklin Toker

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Fallingwater Rising is a biography not of a person but of the most famous house of the twentieth century. Scholars and the public have long extolled the house that Frank Lloyd Wright perched over a Pennsylvania waterfall in 1937, but the full story has never been told.

When he got the commission to design the house, Wright was nearing seventy, his youth and his early fame long gone. It was the Depression, and Wright had no work in sight. Into his orbit stepped Edgar J. Kaufmann, a Pittsburgh department-store mogul—"the smartest retailer in America"—and a philanthropist with the burning ambition to build a world-famous work of architecture. It was an unlikely collaboration: the Jewish merchant who had little concern for modern architecture and the brilliant modernist who was leery of Jews. But the two men collaborated to produce an extraordinary building of lasting architectural significance that brought international fame to them both and confirmed Wright's position as the greatest architect of the twentieth century.

Fallingwater Rising is also an enthralling family drama, involving Kaufmann, his beautiful cousin/wife, Liliane, and their son, Edgar Jr., whose own role in the creation of Fallingwater and its ongoing reputation is central to the story. Involving such key figures of the 1930s as Frida Kahlo, Albert Einstein, Henry R. Luce, William Randolph Hearst, Ayn Rand, and Franklin Roosevelt, *Fallingwater Rising* shows us how E. J. Kaufmann's house became not just Wright's masterpiece but a fundamental icon of American life.

One of the pleasures of the book is its rich evocation of the upper-crust society of Pittsburgh—Carnegie, Frick, the Mellons—a society that was socially reactionary but luxury-loving and baronial in its tastes, hobbies, and sexual attitudes (Kaufmann had so many mistresses that his store issued them distinctive charge plates they could use without paying).

Franklin Toker has been studying Fallingwater for eighteen years. No one but he could have given us this compelling saga of the most famous private house in the world and the dramatic personal story of the fascinating people who made and used it.

A major contribution to both architectural and social history.



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