

Unit 4 World Architecture Case study + design: Farnsworth House

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For my second and final case study, I will review in great detail the famous Farnsworth house by the German-American architect Mies van der Rohe. Built in 1951 for the client Dr. Edith Farnsworth on River road in Springfield, Illinois, this is a minimalistic, modern, mainly glass house. The structure is built of steel, laminated glass, and Roman travertine on the floor and deck. The house is built near a large river and surrounded by a large grove of trees. As for the house's architecture, there is quite a lot to say despite there not being a whole lot to see. Two parallel planes of the house and porch compliment one another well by adding a level of separation from the house while still being a part of nature. I was drawn to this house by a curiosity about myself. I usually prefer more soft, round, smooth architecture, but I found this house very attractive and I wanted to know why. How could such a rigid, simple house be an acceptable place to live? Buildings of this style are meant to represent order, organization, refinement. Not exactly what you would consider homey in the traditional sense. It may be because the contrast it offers to it's natural surroundings. I can't help but be somewhat drawn to make the connection to falling water, as both houses are near, or in falling water's case, on top of a river, both are shaded by trees, both are long, assymetrical buildings, and both blend in (somewhat) while still making a statement. (*fig. 1*)



Figure 1

As the old saying goes “*people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones*”, my worries would be a bit different were I to live there. One possible downside to living in a house built primarily of glass is a feeling of being exposed. Even though Edith’s abode is situated within a large 7 acre property, feelings of a lack of privacy seem likely. This and the fact that the large glass windows would make the inside of the house heat up and hard to cool during the summer, as well as being difficult to heat during the winter. Glass is a very poor insulator

The floor plan of the house is two short parallel slabs raised above the ground with three fourths of the main house slab being enclosed for living space. There is an inner island within the house holds two bathrooms on both the north and south sides of the island, a fireplace in the middle of the east side. There are two beds but you could consider both areas near them to be separate bedrooms. Overall the space is well managed and movable. (*fig. 2*)

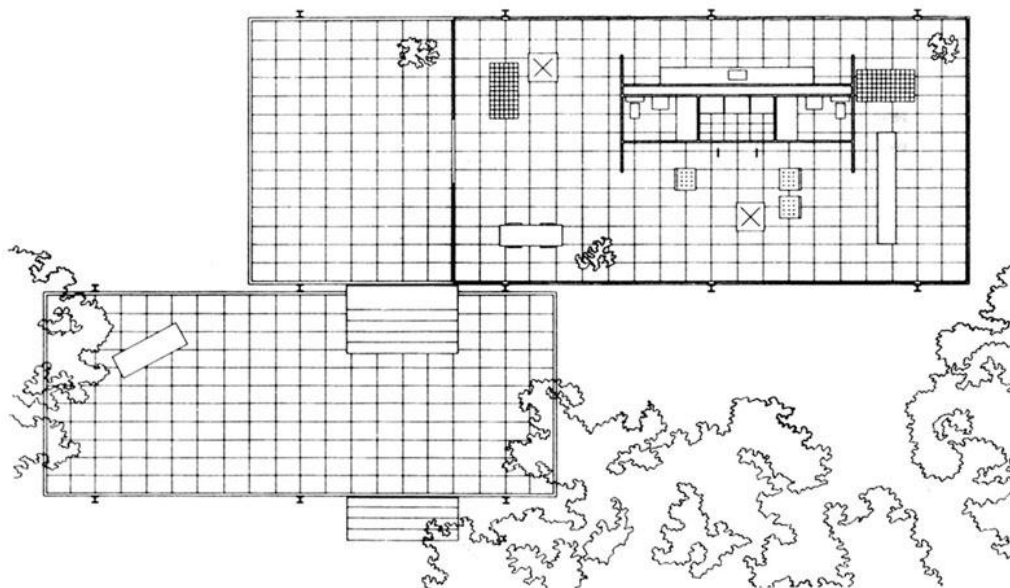


Figure 2

In a somewhat Japanese fashion, the building and landscape are balanced with one another and don't get in the way. No trees were cut down and no clearings were made for this house to be built. It is very much a "green" design. As mentioned before, the design lacks a feeling of privacy, and the lack of defined interior walls limits the livability of this house to about 1-2 people, possibly more if all related, but like falling water this is a vacation home. Similar to a small (or large, depending on what you prefer) studio apartment, there is much more freedom to move around your furnishings as opposed to Wright's falling water, where most of the furniture is permanently built into the structure. This would by most people's standards be considered a modern house

To build a building like this today would most likely be in the price range of \$300,000 – \$1,000,000. Building the house itself doesn't look like too hard of an endeavor to be honest. The real problem lies with trying to fit the air conditioning, plumbing, and electric through conduits in the already thin floor while not getting in the way of the supporting beams. The whole building looks as if you copy and pasted a single section of an apartment building and pasted it in the middle of a forest.

Scale: human, comfortable

Context: near a river in a small forest

Proportion: shorter than most nearby trees and not disruptive

Balance: symmetrical house with connected parallel porch to add a bit of asymmetry

Symbolism: refinement, peace, wealth

Color: primarily white

Texture: steel, laminated glass plates, Roman travertine, wooden interior island

Architectural Style: international, modern

Architectural Inspiration: possibly falling water

Function: a private vacation home

Design in MC.

To be able to get a better understanding of what the house would look like inside and out, I made a small remodel in minecraft while adding my own design to avoid plagiarism. I added a half circle near the front of the house, a small garden by the door, and a pond that starts under the front porch that connects to the nearby river basin. The first picture below is a real life photo (*fig. 3*), the rest are renders in Minecraft (*fig. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8*)

Figure 3



Figure 4

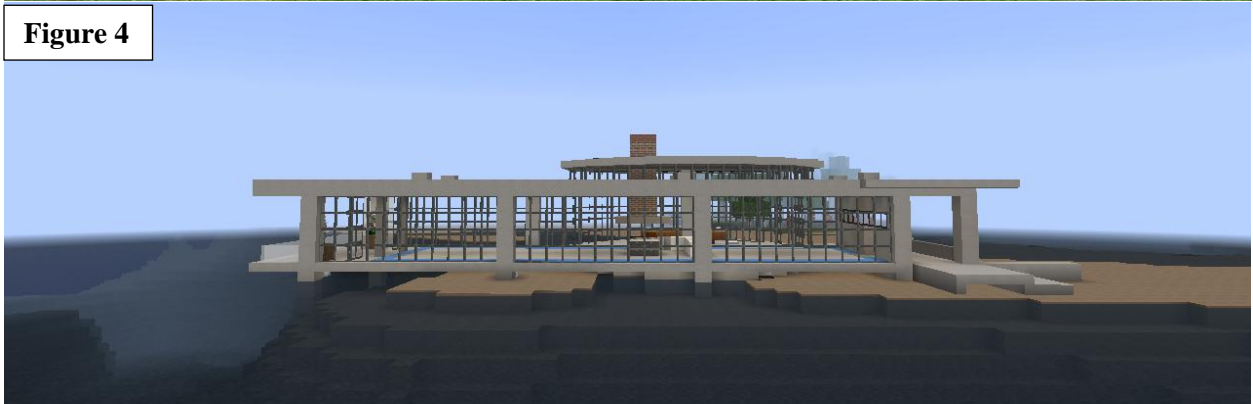


Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Bibliography

- “Farnsworthhouse” *Farnsworth*, National Trust for Historic Preservation, <http://farnsworthhouse.org/> Accessed: May 5, 2015
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- “Farnsworth House” *Miessociety*, Illinois Institute of Technology <http://www.miessociety.org/legacy/projects/farnsworth-house/> Accessed: May 5, 2015

MC Remake designed, modeled, and built by Joseph J. Wunderlich © 2015



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