



THIS HISTORIC PORTRAIT OF FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT WAS TAKEN BY PEDRO E. GUERRERO, THE

WRITTEN BY DAVID M. BROWN

MY FAVORITE PEDRO GUERRERO IMAGE OF FRANK LLOYD Wright depicts Wright in Manhattan, NY, for the 1953-1954 exhibition of his work: "Sixty Years of Living Architecture." He is on the site of the future Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, which would open in 1959, just six months after Wright's death. Porkpie hat on his head, cane by his side, and stiff-collar suited, he is backed to Guerrero, who has come up on him at tea break. The octogenarian master, munching a scone, is pondering a model of the San Francisco Call Building, as his teapot and teacup wait on the table to his left. Behind the Call model is a large picture of the Larkin Administration Building in Buffalo. Commissioned in 1911, the building for the San Francisco Call was never built, and the Larkin, for all of its historic importance and architectural strength that would have lived centuries, had been torn down in 1950 — despite local and national protest. The Larkin's 24-inch steel beams now shore up West Virginia coal mines, its bricks and stone help fill the Ohio Basin, and the site is a parking lot that all Buffaloes can rightly be proud of.

For the last 20 years of Wright's life, Pedro E. Guerrero served as

his personal photographer, and Guerrero's images, in some cases, are the only known representations of certain Wright concepts and projects. With close friend and editor, Dixie Legler, Guerrero lives in Florence, a small town of 6,000 in Southern Arizona. He owns the historic Suter House at Pinal and 9th Street, a home that entered the National Register of Historic Places in 1974. When Guerrero moved here, he practically returned home: He was born in nearby Casa Grande 89 years ago in a shack that his dad, a lumberyard foreman, had built for \$300. When his dad was transferred to Mesa, three weeks after Pedro Jr. was born, he traded the house and some chickens for a Model T and packed up the family.

In first grade, Pedro noticed a beam of light from a hole left by a missing lock to the boy's restroom. It projected images onto the walls, ceiling, and floor. "The room was transformed into a camera obscura," he remembers. "It was a vivid moment for me." His first camera came as a graduation award for the best art student at Mesa High School. "These were segregated schools, of course," Guerrero remembers. As he says in his book: "[W]e were not permitted to

From top: Wright designed this house for his son, Robert Lewellyn Wright, in 1953; this photo was taken by Guerrero in 1959. Guerrero captured the angles and shadows at the entrance to Taliesin West in this photograph, which first appeared in the 1940 exhibit of Wright's work at MoMA in New York City. Wright designed this house for another son, David, in Phoenix, AZ; the photo was taken in 1953 for *House and Home* magazine, but was never published. All images © Pedro E. Guerrero.



ONLY PHOTOGRAPHER GRANTED FULL-TIME ACCESS TO THE LEGENDARY ARCHITECT AND HIS WORK



PEDRO E. GUERRERO
A PHOTOGRAPHER'S JOURNEY



Pedro's memoirs are being published by Princeton Architectural Press in a new book, *Pedro E. Guerrero: A Photographer's Journey*. The 224-page hardcover features 190 photographs in both color and black and white. And a documentary film by Suzanne D. Johnson, founder of Gnosis, Ltd., entitled "Pedro E. Guerrero: The Portrait of an Image-Maker" is now available at www.gnosisltd.org or 480.488.2691



Keneji Domoto, an architect and former apprentice to Wright, snapped this photo of Wright and Guerrero in Pleasantville, NY in 1949.



The writer's favorite Guerrero image of Wright. Both images © Pedro E. Guerrero.

swim in the municipal pool and we were to sit only on the left side of the movie theater, the section designated for Mexicans, blacks, and the occasional Pima Indian."

Guerrero left Mesa on his 20th birthday for the Art Center School of Design in L.A. and took photography because the art classes were closed. He left after two years. Once home, his father suggested he meet Wright at Taliesin West, under construction in the desert outside Scottsdale. His dad had met Wright in 1928, having made a road sign for Ocatilla, Wright's tent city in what is now Chandler. The architect responded to Pedro's letters: "Come anytime."

In the winter of 1939, Guerrero drove out to Taliesin West along dusty roads more suited to cows than cars. After a brief interview and a look at his work, Wright liked "Pete" immediately:

"Do you have architectural experience?" he asked me. 'No,' I replied. 'I'll teach you,' he said."

Wright made him a photographic apprentice at Taliesin, and his

name helped the young photographer obtain commissions from *House and Garden*, *Vogue*, and *Harpers Bazaar*. He took pictures of noted architects including Marcel Breuer and Phillip Johnson as well as artists Alexander Calder and Louise Nevelson.

"Guerrero stood behind the camera but did not put himself in front of it," wrote Bernard Michael Boyle in an introduction to his photos. In a circa-1940 shot of the just-built Taliesin West, Guerrero perfectly expressed what Wright liked best about his work: an understanding and delight in form, angles, and light and the ability to capture architectural images without dramatizing them or "entering" into them. (See this image on the previous page.)

In March, 1959, Guerrero left Arizona to process film from a shoot at Taliesin West. He writes in his new book: "On April 9, 1959, while on assignment in Delaware, I received word that Mr. Wright had died. It had been just three weeks since our walk in the desert. He had seemed indestructible. I thought he would live forever." ■