



INSIDE THE LONG-CLOSED UPSTAIRS OF FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT'S FAMED HOLLYHOCK HOUSE

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http://laist.com/2017/06/08/hollyhock_upstairs.php#photo-2



(Photo by Jakob Layman/LAist)

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Despite being one of the city's most iconic buildings, the upstairs portions of Frank Lloyd Wright's famed Hollyhock House in Barnsdall Park (read about Hollyhock's history [here](#)) have been off limits to the public since the building reopened in 2015 because they don't meet handicap accessibility regulations. The 1921 Mayan Revival-style architectural masterwork was designed in 1919—seven decades before the landmark passage of the Americans with

Disabilities Act, which requires that public buildings be handicap-accessible. This created quite a conundrum for the Department of Cultural Affairs, which manages the house. Because of Hollyhock's landmark status, the structure can't be retrofitted to make it more accessible—and because parts of the structure are therefore not in ADA compliance, they remain off limits to all visitors.

SLIDESHOW



"Because its a National Historic Landmark and architectural icon with historical significance, you are unable to make alterations. You can't widen the doorway. You can't eliminate steps. There are just no physical workarounds," Hollyhock House curator Jeffrey Herr told LAist. "When we reopened in 2015, we had been unable to find an acceptable way to meet these requirements, so we were obligated to rope off any area that a wheelchair could not access, which meant that more than 50 percent of the house could not be entered."

Hollyhock House, which became a public museum in the late 1970s, after undergoing a city-led renovation, has enormous architectural significance. It's currently under consideration for the UNESCO World Heritage List (which includes Stonehenge and the Taj Mahal), and was the first home that Wright built in Southern California. According Herr, "it's also the first house of his second period—he's moving past his Prairie style and into a more modern phase."



(Photo by Joshua White)

Having so much of the house off limits to the public was, according to Herr, "unsatisfactory for the visitor, whether you're an architectural fan—a Frank Lloyd Wright-o-phile—or just the curious public." He and his team worked diligently to try and come up with a solution that would not only meet but exceed the requirements, and "make it a model for historic houses."

In the end, they came up with an extremely modern way of increasing access to the historic structure: virtual reality. In April, the Los Angeles City Council approved \$133,000 in funding to create an online virtual reality tour of Hollyhock House, which will provide "virtual access to previously inaccessible areas of the location to visitors with disabilities" through both an on-site virtual reality tour and remotely through a web browser, according to a city report. And by providing full wheelchair access, albeit virtually, Hollyhock will meet the ADA requirements and be able to open up the upstairs to any visitors who wish to see it. "Once we have this in place, we'll be able to open the entire house," Herr said.

The online component will also allow fans from across the globe to "visit" the house. "The video project will make the amazing historic landmark accessible to more people than ever before, shattering the notion of limited access due to challenges because of its unusual design or obstacles inside the structure," Councilmember Mitch O'Farrell said in a statement.

According to Herr, the virtual reality application being created will allow wheelchair-bound visitors "to visually go to those [upstairs] rooms." The application will also allow users to interact in real-time with upstairs visitors. "For instance, if you have an able-bodied companion, you'll be to, in real-time, talk about that room with that companion via this app," Herr explained. "This will be a huge boon to both people with disabilities and everyone else."

The tour will expand the accessible area of Hollyhock House by 210%, according to the report. The upstairs is not yet open to the public as the VR application is still in the works, but in the meantime Hollyhock House was kind enough to let LAist tour the upstairs, which is documented in the photos above. The project is expected to be completed sometime this year.

Hollyhock House is located at 4800 Hollywood Boulevard at Barnsdall Park. Thursday - Sunday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.