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SPIRAL
IN STONE

THE
BAVINGER
HOUSE

THE Bavinger House AND LIGHTING

by H. ROICE NELSON, JR.

Bill Bavinger grew up in a house without walls. I had the opportunity to see this castle when I went to Mickey Edward's funeral. Bill's father is a very celebrated modern artist who was Chairman of the Art Department at the University of Oklahoma in Norman for many years. He, like Ken Turner, painted light. Unlike Ken Turner, his paintings are not tied to the reality we see every day, rather they are tied to the eternities. When Bill was three years old his father started to build their house. The architect was Bruce Goff, Chairman of the Department of Architecture at the university, and one of the few architects whom one can speak of in the same breath as his mentor Frank Lloyd Wright (page 455 of *Many Masks: A Life of Frank Lloyd Wright*, by Brendan Gill). The house is built around an oil well drill stem pipe. There are wires which hold up the roof as it winds around the 100+ foot tall pipe like a spiral sea shell. The weight of the roof is counter-balanced by a bridge over a large ravine to the south. As you walk up to the front door there is this ravine, and the associated pond to the right, a mirror glass wall reflecting the trees and the vegetation, and an 80 foot vertical castle turret wall of natural stone and chunks of glass. The house blends into the environment so well it looks like it is not there on photographs I took during my visit.

There are no rooms in the house. As you walk in the front door you see a large cavern, not unlike a lighted cave, with windows looking out and providing natural light. There is a stream running through the middle of the house with a dozen large trained goldfish. The kitchen is off to the right and the dining room sets in the center of the main castle turret. It was easy to sit in the dining room and imagine a young Bill and a younger Bob rock climbing the wall. There are several beautiful metamorphic rose quartz rocks cemented into the wall and floor. To the left is a social area, with a circular yellow carpeted bench. Adjacent to this is a spiral staircase which goes up to the pods where people sleep. Each pod is made of rebar steel and hangs from the ceiling. They have spherical bases and in-laid waterbeds level with the floor. There is a curtain which can be drawn around each pod for privacy.

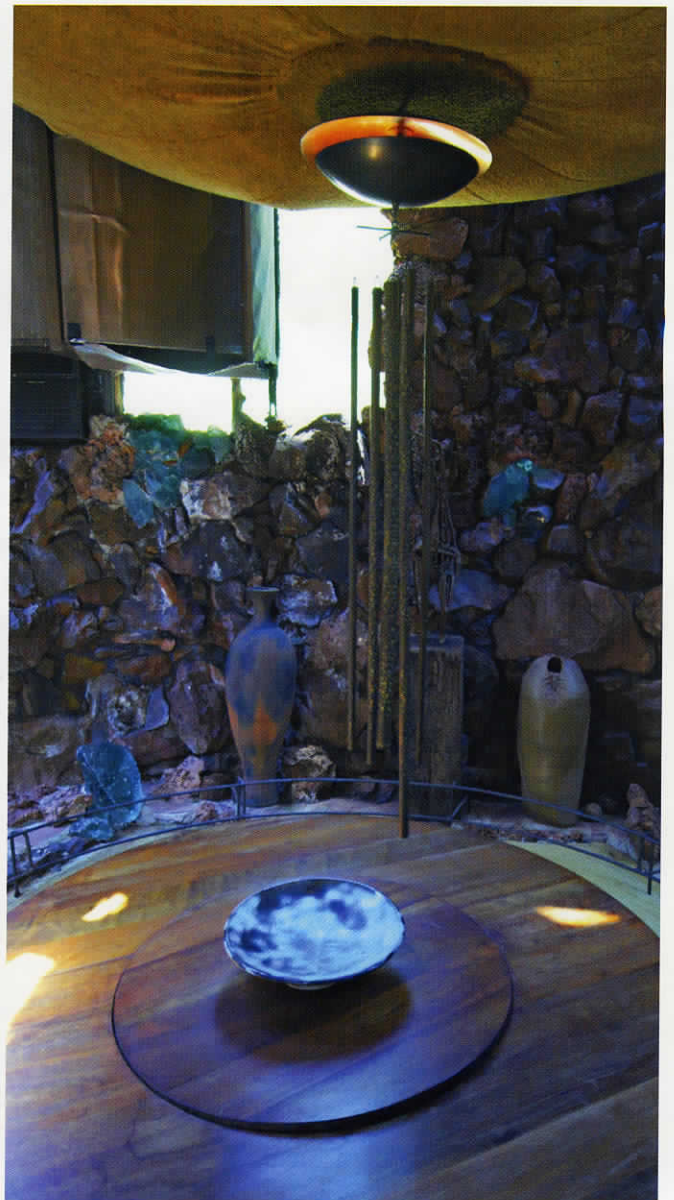
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ABOVE: Exterior detail view of tower.

OPPOSITE: Interior view.

Both photos © Anthony Thompson.



LEFT TOP: Interior detail view.

LEFT BOTTOM: Interior detail view.

RIGHT: Interior detail view.

BOTTOM: Interior detail view.

OPPOSITE LEFT: Interior detail view.


OPPOSITE RIGHT: Interior detail looking out window.

RIGHT photo © Lynn Rostchil;
All other photos shown
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The only door inside the house is in front of the toilet, like the door in a public restroom. This door is across the hall from a door opening out onto the bridge across the ravine. At the top of the spiral is Bill's room. There are two large sheets of glass and the top of the stone spiral. Being in this room was like being outside. Bill talked about the lightning storms and how it was like the lightning was in the room with him. He also said during the winter there would be a couple of inches of ice form on the inside of large glass walls and it was like sleeping outside.

I could go on and on about the house, the lot, the large rock with a fountain under it which makes it look like it is floating in water, the Stonehenge type structures, the paper bag pottery Bill's mom Nancy made, etc. However, I won't. Rather I will ask you all to remember Arcosanti, sixty miles north of Phoenix. Paolo Soleri visited the Bavinger House before he did a lot of his writing and work, and it is obvious a lot of his concepts were influenced by what he saw in Norman, Oklahoma. 

H. Roice Nelson, Jr. wrote this as part of a larger essay in 1998. Bob Bavinger was his mentor and friend. Nelson, of Cedar City, Utah, is an explorer and a principal in both entrepreneurial and technical roles in the oil and gas and mineral exploration industries. He has spent the last decade developing technologies to map geology based on lightning strikes interaction with telluric earth currents.



TOP LEFT: Interior detail view.

TOP RIGHT: Interior detail view.

BOTTOM: Interior detail view.

OPPOSITE TOP: Interior detail view.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Interior detail view.

Opposite top photo
© Howard Alan; All other photos
shown © Anthony Thompson.





TOP: Exterior view.

BOTTOM LEFT: Exterior detail view of skylight.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Exterior detail view of tower.

OPPOSITE: Exterior detail view of skylight.

All photos © Lynn Rostchil.

