Frank Lloyd Wright dedicated his final years to creating Usonian Style homes. Affleck House is one of the architect’s finest examples of this style. It is a simplified, more modest version of his Prairie-style design.

While one end of the house seems to defy gravity with large cantilevers, the other end is firmly anchored to the ground. Materials complement each other rather than compete, evoking a sense of peace.

**Building Relationships**

**Affleck House provides another tie between LTU and BAC Local 1 | by Tom Ward**

Nature effortlessly creates dynamic landscapes that connect us with our spirit, perhaps the simple beauty or the harmonious relationship between the materials is what moves and inspires us.

“Our Architecture I know to be a great spirit”.

– Frank Lloyd Wright

Viewing a Wright home for the first time, you instantly get it. The Affleck house is an excellent example of a harmonious relationship between nature and structure. The house speaks to you like an impossible landscape, then draws you inside.

Exquisite simplicity best describes it. The interior is an extension of the exterior. The feel is organic and consists of the same four basic materials used throughout the home: brick, cypress, concrete and glass. After taking in the extraordinary attention to detail, the contrasting madness, such as the tunnel one would have to crawl through to get to the laundry room, takes a bit longer to understand.

Wright ensured that very little time was spent in spaces that did not enrich the inhabitants’ lives. The preferred way to enter the laundry room is through a lower level exterior door. Yes, you would have to step outside into nature, then down a flight of stairs to enter the basement.

As you step outside and take in the fresh air, the beautiful wooded view and the soft sounds of nature, your mundane task becomes anything but ordinary.

The Gregor and Elizabeth Affleck house in Bloomfield Hills, MI was donated to Lawrence Technological University (LTU) by the owners’ children in 1978 and added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1985. It has been used as a teaching resource for the University’s College of Architecture and Design faculty and students. At times, students have lived in the house to provide access to the public, give tours and advance research and restoration efforts.

**Masonry Craftsmanship**

It has been said that masonry has changed more in the past forty years than ever before. Historically, the craft has been handed down from generation to generation and entirely learned in the field. Today, our masons hone their skills and knowledge over a four-year apprenticeship including nearly 500 hours of continuing education and related training.

While many of their hard skills are still developed in the field, their technical knowledge of today’s complex wall systems, codes and techniques are learned in the classroom and in the hands-on training lab. If we want to ensure that the best building product known to mankind will endure, we must ensure the contractors and craftworkers installing masonry are qualified.

**So what does this have to do with the Affleck House?**

For close to a decade, the International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers (BAC) has held a masonry camp for architectural students from LTU, one of four Michigan universities with an architecture program. The event has grown over the years and is well received. Students obtain practical experience and understanding of the craft at five hands-on stations including bricklaying, flashing, rain screen wall, restoration and terrazzo installation. This event is a favorite of industry professionals who volunteer their time to make it memorable for the students.

Masonry Camp is a fun way for the masonry industry to contribute and to enhance the educational experience for our future architects.

One of the highest priorities of BAC is to strengthen our relationship with the design community.

After attending a Mason Contractors’ Association meeting in 2011, a contractor asked if the BAC would be interested in performing volunteer restoration work on a famous house.

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The goal was to develop a stain that matched the brick color. This stain was then used to re-color the vertical head joints of the brickwork, creating the horizontality of scale found in Wright’s designs. John Hogan, manager of field operations for Nawkaw Mideast, custom-developed the color and opacity of the stain on site. Once approved by the architect, the staining proceeded, with each head joint being stained by hand.

When he told me that LTU had been looking for years for help, I was in a bit of disbelief that they did not think to ask us earlier, based on our relationship through Masonry Camp. The fact that those caring for the property did not know who we are was an opportunity, or some may say, a problem.

We met with the Affleck House Restoration Council and two opportunities arose. Not only was this a fantastic opportunity to volunteer and give back, it was a perfect vehicle to connect with and enhance our relationship with the local design community. The outpouring of support by BAC Local 1 members and industry suppliers was overwhelming. A phased project, contractors, apprentices and journeymen with all levels of experience donated time and talent to restoring an exterior stair tower. Additional contributions have expanded the scope of the masonry restoration, ensuring LTU will be able use and showcase Affleck House well into the future.

**Harmonious Relationship**  This noble craft of masonry deserves our very best. To that end, we will continue to dedicate our lives promoting masonry and raising the bar in the industry that has given society so much. Like the relationship between a Wright home and nature, the relationship of mason and architect should be fluid and harmonious.
Thanks to the material/equipment donors, workforce volunteers and special thanks to LTU for this opportunity.

COMPANIES | ORGANIZATIONS
Bricklayers & Allied Craftworkers
Local 1
Cathedral Stone Products
Gibraltar National
Grunwell-Cashero
International Masonry Institute
Leidal & Hart | National Block
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The stair tower had two issues. A drain failed at the base of the wall. Improper drainage at the upper level kept soil within the footings saturated. Repeated freeze-thaw cycles caused the lower, unreinforced concrete wall to buckle and fail. The solution: rebuild and anchor reinforced concrete masonry units, fully grouted with self-consolidating grout.

Note: planks pictured above beam were used to shield volunteers from intense sun and 100º+ heat.

Trusted to restore landmarks such as the Frank Lloyd Wright Affleck House.
Repointing requires highly skilled craftworkers knowledgeable in mortar analysis, selection and use of specialized techniques for removing mortar without damaging the surrounding masonry. Joint preparation is critical to ensure an adequate bond between new mortar and existing brickwork. Other critical points include minimum depth to be removed, removal of any loose material or dust, wetting of masonry prior to repointing and pre-hydrating mortar before use. Varieties of methods are used when tooling the joint to achieve an aged look to match the surrounding masonry.

Tom Ward began his career in masonry in 1991, working through the ranks from mason to lead project foreman. His goal in both roles has always been safety, quality workmanship and customer satisfaction. He has served on a prominent mason contractor’s quality steering team and has produced several Best Practices for the company. He is an instructor for International Masonry Institute’s Detroit training center, an OSHA outreach trainer, MIM certified in the Principles of Masonry Technology and currently serves as training director and apprentice coordinator for the Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers Local 1. With the same passion and principles used in the field, he now brings training and education to both apprentices and journeymen of the Trowel Trades. tom.ward@bricklayers.org | 586.757.6658

Adjacent to the upper stairway is access to the lower elevation. Brick was laid directly on the unsupported concrete stairs, which had settled nearly 2", causing damage to the surrounding masonry. Complete removal and replacement was required, the new masonry now rests on proper footings. As much original brick as possible was reused. New brick filled in the rest.

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