

Another famous architect in our midst

Tales of Earlier Days

By Bob Dewel

Last week's story related the Taliesen tragedy of 1914, including the miraculous escape of Herbert Fritz from the Taliesen inferno. AS this budding young architect matured, he selected a wife from the residents of nearby Wyoming Valley, south of Spring Green. Among their progeny was a pretty maiden named Barbara. She will shared the honors with her husband, James Dresser, in today's story

Barbara Fritz' remembers well a day in November, 1940. A new generation of students now studied at Taliesen II. Though the students from the school were commonly seen in the area, one of the men seemed particularly handsome as he galloped his steed through the front gate of the Fritz family front yard that November day.

Maybe she'd seen him before, as she was a frequent visitor to Taliesen, but today was different. So different, so magic, that in three months she had become Mrs. James Dresser, wife of the budding young architect. Giving the bride away was Frank Lloyd Wright himself.

Time has taken its toll, and recently, after 64 harmonious years, James passed away in Lake Delton. I was lucky enough to obtain an interview with his wife Barbara recently, and learned of the significant life of James Dresser. It's a success story which Barbara shared with the noted architect.

So often it is true that no one is a hero in their home town, We were astonished to learn of Dresser's success in Midwestern architecture, though he and Barbara have lived among us in the Delton area for a few decades. This was not always so, for Barbara reports that his work took them to cities such s Phoenix, Minneapolis, Green Bay, Madison, and even Tennessee, location of the two million dollar Tommy Bartlett water show which he resigned.

A crowning achievement was the Minnesota Pavilion for the New Your World's Fair of 1965-65. The highly striking building was designed so that it could be reassembled, and exists today as a ski lodge Michigan. In Lake Geneva in 1955, James designed the innovative lakeside Library, and also the furniture. Beloit's Gonstead Clinic design is his also.

Dresser also designed round buildings, such as the Hoffman printing company, and also round homes. One especially large round house was featured in Look Magazine in April, 1951 showing a round kitchen, with an overhead shot of Barbara looking up to the camera in the



James and Barara Dresser's home in Lake Delton. Dresser's design, of course.



center of the kitchen. Other shots show the couple reclining in the very large round living room. The Dressers were often featured with Home of the Month in "The Wisconsin Architect".

Barbara often operated a gift shop in some of their locations, and in later years ran the Robot Connection shop at the entrance to Robot World in Lake Delton, another Dresser project. In fact Lake Delton abounds with James Dressers designs, starting with Jimmie's Del Bar, and most recently Fields at the Wilderness.

Our two stories have covered the 99 years between the escape of Barbara's father-to-be from the Taliesen murders in 1914 and her husband James Dresser's' death in 2011. Barbara Dresser now resides in Baraboo at the Oak Park Place with her Sheltie Collie "Ditto", a dozen or more scrapbooks and many mementos from her interesting life.



The Lake Geneva Wisconsin Public Library, a James Dresser design