

# SATISFACTION WITH TOURS OF A FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT BUILDING

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## ABSTRACT

Visitors to the Gordon House by Frank Lloyd Wright were asked to complete a survey about their experience at the House. Included in the instrument were questions about previous experience with house museums and with Frank Lloyd Wright buildings, about their expectations of the House, and about their overall satisfaction with their visit. By means of cross tabulations, correlations, and ANOVA, relationships to consumer satisfaction were compared against several factors including two of the most commonly studied antecedents, level of involvement and the disconfirmation of expectations. These two antecedents, however, were found to have little or no predictive value. Cross tabulations and correlations showed that the level of satisfaction with the greeter and docent, the amount of time spent in the House, and the rating given the appearance of the house, however, had significant positive effects on overall satisfaction. The findings of this study are discussed and implications suggested for the management of tourist sites.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

A reawakening of interest in American history, especially in Midwestern and Western U.S. history, has manifested itself recently in many forms, one of which is tourism and travel within the United States. In the state of Oregon tourists have been traveling recently to the one building in the state designed by Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959), the Gordon House. The new owners of this property made application in 2000 for a permit to raze it because they wanted to build their dream house. Fortunately, the architect hired to design the new house alerted the architectural community that the Gordon House was about to be

destroyed. A dramatic last-minute campaign by architects, designers, and historians saved the house from demolition. This *ad hoc* group found funding and loans and arranged to divide the House into four parts and move it 25 miles away to a demonstration garden open to the public. It was then re-built and opened to the public in 2002.

Frank Lloyd Wright died 44 years ago, but public interest in his buildings and unbuilt designs is still high (Storrer, 1993). His associates and disciples at Taliesin Fellowship near Phoenix and at Taliesin in Wisconsin still practice architecture in the style established by Wright in the early and mid-twentieth century. Both of these Wright architecture firms host thousands of visitors each year, as do most tourist sites in the United States designed by Wright that are open to the public.

In the year since it was opened, the Gordon House, now at the Oregon Garden in Silverton, Oregon, has hosted more than 26,000 visitors who paid for self-guided or docent-led tours. In addition, many more visitors have walked along the path around the House to view it from the outside. These visitors have come from more than 45 states and 14 foreign countries.

The Gordon House, designed by Wright for Conrad and Evelyn Gordon in 1956 but not built until 1964, five years after Wright's death, is considered one of the best examples of the genre Wright named Usonian (for United States of North America). These houses, featured in an article in *Life* magazine in 1938, were designed of inexpensive and native materials and were intended for families of moderate income, at the time considered to be \$5,000-\$6,000 per year. Of course, most clients who hired Wright to design a home for them had much higher incomes. Because of a limited farm income, Mr. Gordon wrote a letter to Mr. Wright after receiving the initial plan for his house and requested that Wright cut the cost of the house by 25%, which Wright did by means of reducing the square footage and removing some details (Woodin 2002).

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One group, the Gordon House Conservancy Board, oversees fund-raising and administers the interiors and furnishings, the interior and exterior refurbishing and maintenance, and the landscaping. But it is the responsibility of the Director of the House and the Oregon Garden Board to provide visitor amenities, publicize tours of the House, and arrange special events, meetings, and conferences.

As overseers of the Gordon House, the Board of the Oregon Garden requested the visitor survey reported herein. The Board studied the results of this survey carefully for indications of aspects of the tours and of the House itself that could be improved, such as adding more furniture, repairing the wood siding and interior trim, improving the signage, improving the landscaping, and expanding the scope and time of the docent tours.

The Board had already determined that a delicate balance must be struck between the amount of visitor traffic that the House can support without degrading the structure, surfaces and floors, on one hand, and increasing income from tours by increasing patronage or increasing the entry fees, on the other. A disadvantage of raising the cost of the tours is that experiencing one of Wright's Usonian houses would be available only to those willing and able to spend more money.

One of the goals of the extensive educational program developed by the Board is to provide low-cost tours for school groups and other organizations. In the brief existence of the House at the Oregon Garden, the volunteer docents have provided, among other special services, tours in German, tours for blind visitors, and special tours for architecture and interior design students from universities in the area.

### **Previous Research**

Satisfaction with the built environment has been addressed in several studies, including one exploring disconfirmation of expectations (Caughey, et al. 1998) and one studying level of involvement (Caughey, et al. 1995); but visitor satisfaction with tours of buildings is an area not well studied. A search of the literature about house

museums yields published work about maintenance, publicity, docent training, and preparation of buildings for public use (Coleman 1933; Wiederhold 2000); but little has been reported about visitor satisfaction with the tour experience and with the buildings themselves.

Interest in studying leisure activities and the consumers thereof has increased as marketing of those services has become more common. Recent studies have addressed consumer reaction to tours of a natural area open to the public (Webb and Hassall 2002) and the various motivations of seniors who travel for pleasure (Astic and Muller 1999). Pioneering work on level of involvement has been done and then further refined by Zaichkowsky (1985, 1994), among others, and was recently explored again by Celuch and Taylor (1999). Williams and Anderson (1999) explored consumer delight as performance, and they explored the concept that delight may result from product/service performance, an issue alluded to in the responses of some subjects in the present study. It has often been observed that satisfaction with goods cannot be measured in the same ways as satisfaction with services. Several scholars conducted research about those differences, and early observations about many of those differences were made by Zeithaml (1981).

The present objective was to examine the effect of expectations and level of involvement on the satisfaction of visitors to the Gordon House. The preliminary proposition explored was that the visitors' expectations and level of involvement would be related to their overall satisfaction with their visit. The general goal of the study was to apply satisfaction theory to the built environment, specifically to the Gordon House by Frank Lloyd Wright.

### **Research Hypotheses**

In addition to exploring the relation between overall satisfaction and level of involvement, and overall satisfaction and the disconfirmation of expectations, the researchers developed several hypotheses:

H1: If visitors reported positive expectations

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of their visit, they would report greater overall satisfaction with their experience at the Gordon House.

H2: If visitors indicated a relatively high level of involvement (5 or 6 on an adjusted scale of 1-6), they would report a greater level of overall satisfaction.

H3: If visitors came exclusively to see the House, rather than to see the Garden, or the Garden and the House, they would report a greater level of overall satisfaction with their visit.

H4: Visitors who reported a greater level of satisfaction with their volunteer docent would report a greater level of overall satisfaction.

## METHOD

### Instrument

A survey instrument (See Appendix) consisting of 17 questions and 6 demographic items was administered to visitors to the Gordon House by volunteer greeters during late August and early September 2002. One hundred fifty eight valid questionnaires resulted. One hundred subjects were rewarded with a coupon for a Marion berry smoothie from the snack bar nearby. Written informed consent was obtained from all respondents.

### Sample

Of the 158 respondents, 58.22% (n=92) were women and 38.60% (n=61) were men, with 3.16% (n=5) not responding. The ages of the respondents were: 24 and under --4.43% (n=7); 25-34 years-- 9.49% (n=15); 35-44 years-- 7.59% (n=12); 45-54 years-- 22.15% (n=35); 55-64 years-- 30.37% (n=48); and 65 and over-- 21.52% (n=34). The educational level of the respondents was reported as follows: high school -- 11.39% (n=18); some college -- 25.94% (n=41); college degree -- 30.37% (n=48); advanced degree -- 27.21% (n=43); and no reply -- 5.06% (n=8).

### Analysis

For the purposes of this study, expectations were operationalized as expectations either positive, neutral, or negative, expressed about the exterior and about the interior of the House. To measure true expectations, this survey could have been administered to visitors before they saw the House, but that was not feasible. There was a great deal of publicity about the grand opening of the Gordon House both in print and on TV, so some visitors would have had expectations about it based on the media coverage. In order to analyze the results, researchers formed a variable based on the responses to the two open-ended questions about expectations. Respondents' answers to question four, about the exterior, and five, about the interior, were coded by researchers as positive (3) if they expressed positive expectations (e.g. "Hoped it would be in a lovely setting like most Wright houses."), neutral (2) if they expressed neither positive or negative expectations (e.g. "I didn't really know what to expect."), or negative (1) if they expressed negative expectations (e.g. "I expected some degree of age and decay."). Coding by researchers was completed separately and the few points of incongruence were discussed and resolved. Final coding was unanimous.

To measure level of involvement, responses to three questions were considered. Variable three, level of involvement, was obtained by combining responses to questions eight, ("Have you visited other house museums?"), nine ("Have you visited any other buildings designed by Frank Lloyd Wright?"), and ten ("Have you visited the Gordon House before?"). Responses were coded as positive (2), or negative (1). Responses to these three questions were given equal weight and were collapsed into a single variable. It may be expected that question nine would be given more weight since respondents would have to travel much farther to answer positively, therefore they could be considered more involved. However, their involvement is likely more with the cult of personality around Wright, rather than involvement with a modest personal home. Additionally, at the time of the study the condition of the newly opened Gordon House did not

compare favorably with that of other Wright buildings that have been long time public attractions.

Independent variables used were as follows:

Variable 1: responses to an open ended questions about visitor expectation of the exterior and interior of the House from questions four and five, coded as a range from 6 (positive responses to both questions) to 2 (negative responses to both questions)

Variable 2: responses about visitor involvement from responses to questions 8, 9, and 10, coded as a range from 3 ("no" to all three questions) to 6 ("yes" to all three questions)

Variable 3: responses about visitor involvement from question 15, about the attraction visitors came to see, coded as 3 (the Garden), 2 (the House), or 1(both)

Variable 4: responses to question on visitor satisfaction with docent, from question 7, coded as responses from 1 ("Not at all satisfied"), through 5 ("Very satisfied")

Cross tabulations were completed to give researchers a summary of the data between the levels of overall satisfaction and the independent variables. Table 1 gives the result.

Pearson Correlation was computed to examine the relationships between the independent variables 1, 2, 4 and overall satisfaction. An alpha level of  $p=.05$  was used for all tests. See Table 2.

An ANOVA was computed to test the difference in means of satisfaction between the groups of those who came to see the Garden ( $M=3.60$ ,  $s=1.106$ ), the House ( $M=4.13$ ,  $s=1.100$ ) or both ( $M=4.26$ ,  $s=0.931$ ) in Variable 3. There was a significant difference among the three groups,  $F(2,155) = 6.416$ ,  $p=.002$ . However, a post hoc Bonferroni comparison showed that while the difference between those who came to see the Garden and those who came to see both Garden and House was significant ( $p=.002$ ), there was no significant difference between those who came to

see the House and either those who came to see the Garden ( $p=1.00$ ), or those who came to see the Garden and the House ( $p=.125$ ).

Additional study variables were compared to overall satisfaction as follows:

Variable 5: responses to time spent in the House, from question 14, coded as number of minutes visitor reported

Variable 6: responses to question on visitor satisfaction with greeter, from question 6, coded as "Not at all satisfied," (1), through "Very satisfied," (5)

Variable 7: responses to question on the likelihood that visitor would return to the House, from question 11, coded as "Not at all likely," (1), through "Extremely likely," (5)

Variable 8: responses to question on visitor rating of the general appearance of the House, from question 13, coded as "Not good" (1), through "Very good" (5)

Pearson Correlation was computed to test the strength of the relationships between the independent variables 5 through 8 and overall satisfaction. An alpha level of  $p=.05$  was used for these tests. See Table 3.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Significant correlations with overall satisfaction were found for five variables as follows:

Variable 4: the level of satisfaction visitors reported with the docent, ( $r=.453$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $n=147$ )

Variable 5: amount of time visitors reported they spent in the House ( $r=.462$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $n=155$ ).

Variable 6: the level of satisfaction they reported with the greeter ( $r=.444$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $n=156$ ).

**Table 1**  
**Crosstabulation of Levels of Overall Satisfaction with Variables 1 through 4**

		Overall Satisfaction					
		1	2	3	4	5	Total
V1- Expect.	1	0	1	1	3	4	9
	2	0	0	2	4	3	9
	3	3	1	7	10	10	31
	4	0	0	2	4	4	10
	5	0	0	1	3	2	6
	6	1	3	6	12	25	47
Total		4	5	19	36	48	112
V2- Involv.	3	1	2	0	1	3	7
	4	0	2	8	10	28	48
	5	4	1	12	31	29	77
	6	0	2	9	7	8	26
Total		5	7	29	49	68	158
V3- Involv.	1	3	3	10	18	8	42
	2	0	3	3	5	12	23
	3	2	1	16	26	48	93
Total		5	7	29	49	68	158
V4- Sat. Doc.	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
	2	0	1	0	0	0	1
	3	1	3	3	3	1	11
	4	0	0	7	15	6	28
	5	2	2	14	30	59	107
Total		4	6	24	48	66	148

**Table 2**  
**Correlation of Overall Satisfaction and Variables 1, 2, and 4**

Overall Satisfaction	V1	V2	V4
Pearson Correlation	.115	-.089	.453*
Significance (2-tailed)	.228	.266	.000
N	157	157	147

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

**Table 3**  
**Correlation of Overall Satisfaction and Variables 5 through 8**

Overall Satisfaction	V5	V6	V7	V8
Pearson Correlation	.462*	.444*	.400*	.373*
Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	155	157	155	154

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

Variable 7: the likelihood that they would return to the House ( $r=.400$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $n=155$ ).

Variable 8: their rating of the general appearance of the House ( $r=.373$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $n=154$ ).

Some hypotheses were supported, while others were not.

H1: If visitors reported positive expectations, they would report greater overall satisfaction with their experience at the Gordon House. The results of this study, however, indicate that positive expectations were not predictive of overall satisfaction. No significant relationship was shown by correlation between overall satisfaction and the six categories of expectations ( $r=.115$ ,  $p=.228$ ,  $n=157$ ). Therefore this hypothesis was not supported.

H2: If visitors indicated a relatively high level of involvement (5 or 6 on an adjusted scale of 1-6), they would report a greater level of satisfaction. Twenty-six respondents indicated a high level of involvement (6 on the adjusted scale), and 77 indicated a level of 5, for a total of 103. No significant correlation was observed between overall satisfaction and the combined involvement variable ( $r=-.089$ ,  $p=.266$ ,  $n=157$ ). However, the overall reported level of involvement was rather high. H2, however, was not supported.

H3: If visitors came to see the House, rather than to see the Garden, they would report a greater level of overall satisfaction with their visit. Twenty-three respondents came to see only the Gordon House, 42 came to see the Oregon Garden, and 93 came to see both the House and Garden. There was no significant difference between those who came to see the House and either those who came to see the Garden ( $p=1.00$ ), or those who came to see the garden and the House ( $p=.125$ ). Therefore, H3 was not supported.

H4: Visitors who reported a greater level of satisfaction with their volunteer docent would report a greater level of overall satisfaction than those who reported a lower level of satisfaction. One hundred seven respondents reported that they were very satisfied (4 or 5 on a scale of 1-5) with the docent. There was a positive relationship ( $r=.462$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $n=147$ ) between the respondents' overall satisfaction and their satisfaction with the docent. Therefore, H4 was supported.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

It cannot be concluded from the present findings that expectations or level of involvement had a relationship to visitors' overall satisfaction with their experience at the Gordon House. However, certain implications for the management of this and other tourist sites emerged. The quality and preparation of the volunteer docents and greeters, the amount of time visitors spend in the

House, the type of tour taken, and the rating given the general appearance of the House all appeared to have relationships to visitors' overall satisfaction.

Suggestions for further research include measuring visitors' expectations about the House before they see it. Another useful question to be included in future instruments would be the extent to which respondents are involved with architecture in general, including previous study and hobby-level interest, as well as profession. In addition, in an effort to aid the Board of the Oregon Garden and similar organizations in their future marketing efforts, the professions of visitors could be surveyed.

The need for more such tourist sites of architecturally significant buildings throughout the United States is increasing. Most house museums and other voluntary education activities emphasize the education of children. With the recent elimination of most arts programs in public schools, special tours such as this one are becoming more important in the education of youth. Because the present study took place during summer, no school groups visited. But surveying members of tour groups from schools, retirement homes, and similar organizations could improve future experiences for groups. In addition, longitudinal studies could examine the relationship to exposure to the work of famous architects and children's future involvement with the built environment and historic preservation, or even their eventual career decisions.

The results of the present study contribute to consumer satisfaction literature by providing a new application of two of the common antecedents of satisfaction, level of involvement and expectations.

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## APPENDIX GORDON HOUSE SURVEY

1. How did you find out about the Gordon House? Check all that apply.

- friend  
 newspaper  
 sign in Oregon Garden

Oregon Garden mailer  
 other

2. Are you visiting the Gordon House as a member of an organized tour group?

Yes  No

3. How many people are in your party today including yourself? \_\_\_\_\_

4. What were your expectations about the exterior of the Gordon House before you saw it? (Please explain)

5. What were your expectations about the interior of the Gordon House after you saw the exterior? (Please explain)

6. Satisfied with your volunteer greeter at the door? Circle one number.

Not at all satisfied \_\_\_\_\_ Very satisfied  
 1      2      3      4      5

7. Satisfied with the volunteer docent? Circle one number.

Not at all satisfied \_\_\_\_\_ Very satisfied  
 1      2      3      4      5

8. Have you visited any other house museums?

Yes  No

9. Have you visited any other buildings designed by Frank Lloyd Wright?

Yes  No

10. Have you visited the Gordon House before?

Yes  No

11. What is the likelihood that you will ever return to the Gordon House? Please circle one number.

Not at all likely \_\_\_\_\_ Extremely likely  
 1      2      3      4      5

12. What is the likelihood that you would bring friends here? Please circle one number.

Not at all likely \_\_\_\_\_ Extremely likely  
 1      2      3      4      5

13. How would you rate the following:

Not good    Very good

General appearance of the House?    1   2   3   4   5

The light?    1   2   3   4   5

Other? Specify \_\_\_\_\_ 1   2   3   4   5

14. Approximately how much time did you spend at the House? \_\_\_\_\_ minutes

15. Did you come mainly to see the Garden?

The House?  Both? \_\_\_\_\_

16. Will your visit today have included time in the Oregon Garden?

Yes  No

17. Overall, how satisfied were you with your experience at the Gordon House? Circle one number.

Not at all satisfied \_\_\_\_\_ Very satisfied  
 1      2      3      4      5

Demographics:

Hometown \_\_\_\_\_

Gender M  F

What is your age group?

24 & under \_\_\_\_\_ 25-34 \_\_\_\_\_

35-44 \_\_\_\_\_ 45-54 \_\_\_\_\_

55-64 \_\_\_\_\_ 65+ \_\_\_\_\_

Level of education:

High school \_\_\_\_\_

Some college \_\_\_\_\_

College degree \_\_\_\_\_

Advanced degree \_\_\_\_\_

How many miles did you travel to get here?

\_\_\_\_\_ miles

Which tour did you take: Check one of the following:

Guided tour \_\_\_\_\_

Self-guided \_\_\_\_\_

Exterior only \_\_\_\_\_

Other comments:

Thank you for your time.