We sometimes have big to-dos at our house. And often people have questions about the house, but it's so busy that we can't answer them all. So here are answers to some common questions. Like This house is really cool. Who designed it? Was it Frank Lloyd Wright? Or, from the person who a slightly anxious look and who is gently rocking from one foot to the other: Is there another bathroom?

Important things first. There are three bathrooms.

- At the top of the steps on the right.
- At the bottom of the steps on the right.

Also important: the interior doors of the house have little knobs. If you twist them they will just fall off in your hand and you will not get into or out of the bathroom. Just pull on them or push on them. The designer decided to use lightweight louvered interior doors that don't support real doorknobs, as part of the open design of the house. They do improve the air circulation in the house.

This is just one of many unique features of this house, so let's talk about the architect.

The house wasn't designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. But it was designed by one of his students, Pittsburgh architect Lorene Lamar Shannon. She built it in 1980 both for her personal home and her architect's office. And in 1990 she did a complete remodel of the kitchen.

If you're looking for a perfect kitchen design, you should check out the blueprint above. In his best-selling book The Design of Everyday Things, Donald Norman trashed current kitchen design. And every problem he identified in the book is fixed in this kitchen design. Check it out, particularly the "garages" for electric appliances, with AC outlets embedded in wood trim throughout the kitchen.

If you look out the windows on the west side of the house, and across the ravine a bit to the left, you'll see another interesting house; it was designed by another of Frank Lloyd Wright's students.

Frank Lloyd Wright's internationally famous design for nearby Fallingwater ("the most important building architecture of the 20th century") was for the extremely-wealthy Kaufmanns. Ms. Shannon, however was designing and paying for this house. It was for her to live in, to work in, and to show how good design and natural materials to make a great house without it costing and arm and two legs. She and her friends also did much of the work on the house herself; we have...
Keith’s Beef Stew for 30 people:
· 18 Medium-big potatoes, peeled and diced; or an equivalent amount of unpeeled but diced new potatoes
· 18 Carrots, peeled and sliced
· 4 Medium Onions, peeled and sliced (or an equivalent of pearl onions)
· 4 large or 10 small cans Stewed Tomatoes
· ~7 lb. raw Stew Beef
· 10 tablespoons of butter
· 10 squares Worcestershire Sauce
· 5 tsp fresh-ground Horseradish
· 5 Sprinklings of Black Pepper
· 10 squirts ketchup
· 3 bottles red wine
· 10 dashes Adobo
· 25 Beef Bouillon Cubes
· 10 squares Worcestershire Sauce
· 5 dashes Adobo
· 5 tsp fresh-ground Horseradish
· 5 splashes hot sauce
· 1.25 cups flour

Add canned tomatoes and then carrots and potatoes first, then everything else except for the flour. Add water to cover. Cook at about 275-300 degrees for 12-24 hours (usually about 18 is right). I use an 18-quart (4.5 gallon) Nesco roaster. Add water as needed to cover everything.

Delays cooking and adding the meat for 3-4 hours works best, otherwise the meat may disintegrate. Put 5 tbsp butter and some sea salt and half the meat in large saucepan, brown for 15-20’, stirring occasionally. Add to Nesco roaster. Repeat with the remaining butter and beef.

At the very end, sift in the flour slowly to thicken. I just stir the very top liquid layer to avoid mashing up the chunks in the stew. Be patient; for such a large batch, sifting and mixing the flour slowly to avoid flour lumps takes about 15 minutes.

We bought the house and moved there in 2001. Ms. Shannon had been ill for a while and then died. The house had been vacant and on the market for a couple of years, and was not in particularly good shape. We decided it was interesting enough that we took it on as a renovation project. Since we’ve put what seems like massive amounts of time, money, and electrical and carpentry skills into it and we are paying for all of her initial cost-cutting shortcuts. Consider a few examples.

If you look at the ceilings, they’re tongue-and-groove spruce (softwood) ship planking. And these boards were also the floors throughout the first and second floor were now splinterly, and were nailed to the concrete of the fireplace/chimney.

Despite this and many other problems, and all of the work still left to do, it’s great house.

Some of the most interesting features of the house are in the Great Room:

· It’s two and a half stories high, and is 18x35 feet, which is pretty big for a house made essentially of just wood and stone.
· The western wall is all windows. It has a great view over a wooded ravine. In the evening, the setting sun’s rays fill the space with bright gold.
· To create this enormous space, she cheated. If you look at the eastern side of the room, you’ll see the catwalk that connects the two second-story bedrooms. In a conventional house, those load-bearing joists across the room would be enclosed in a wall. But Ms. Shannon put a catwalk on the joists, making a much larger open space.
· The fireplace is concrete faced with the same local Collier Stone Quarry sandy limestone that’s used on other outside surfaces of the house. The fireplace/chimney starts in the basement. It’s about 4 stories high, and it’s 12’8” wide overall. The fireplace opening is about 6 feet wide; it draws very well. After an evening fire, the stones radiate heat throughout most of the night.
· On the back side of the Great Room fireplace is a smaller fireplace in the master bedroom; it also draws very well. And when someone has the flu, lying in bed in front of the fireplace can be quite comforting.

Despite all the renovation costs and hassles, we’re all still happy to live in the house. Kudos to Laurene Lamar Shannon.