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Selected Houses

THE HOUSES IN this section have been selected in order to illustrate the different architectural styles in which Rogers was proficient, as well as the differing circumstances of each commission. The houses date from the late 1920s into the late 1930s, and all were designed for the Winter Park area.

Rogers House

1929

By the late 1920s Gamble Rogers had completed several residential designs through his father's firm. Some of these were in the Daytona Beach area, while others were in Winter Park and just north, in Fern Park. In 1929 Rogers took advantage of a unique business opportunity that resulted in the design of his own house. The house he designed for himself and his new bride, Evelyn, on Bear Island, now known as the Isle of Sicily, would be the catalyst for his architectural career in Winter Park.

This modest 1,800-square-foot house, which Rogers always referred to as his "cottage," was significant for several reasons. It was the first house to be built on the newly developed island, and the printed publicity the house received, as well as word-of-mouth interest, was a boost to Rogers' career. The house was also an example of the architect's skillful use of the French Provincial style of architecture as adapted to the Florida climate.

The story of how Rogers succeeded in securing the first lot on the Isle of Sicily and the subsequent construction of his cottage is best related by the architect himself, who memorialized the event in writing:

> After the collapse of the [Florida building] boom in the fall of 1925, building construction fell off to no more work than was necessary to finish work in progress. Land sales were zero and those

Plate 22. Rogers house, lakeside facade. Courtesy of RLF.

developers whose land and improvements were paid for could count themselves lucky.

The Isle of Sicily, so called by the developers, was originally a swampy island of about twelve acres in Lake Maitland. It was bought during the boom by Bob Hughes, whom I guess you would call a capitalist, Fred Wallich, an architect, and Judge Hackney, a retired winter visitor. These gentlemen filled the low land with sand pumped from the lake, paved a narrow road from Maitland Avenue, and built a wooden bridge spanning the 20 foot cut from the mainland. All this was in the period from late 1924 to about 1926. By the time the work was complete, the boom had collapsed and as the saying went then, you couldn't give land away.

When I first came to Winter Park to live, in 1928, I met Hughes and Wallich and although the island was only a sand spit with no living tree on it higher than my waist, I saw great possibilities in it. I told them that if they would give me an acre lot, I would lay out no more than twelve lots on the island and build a small house there for myself which would "stop the traffic." The only qualification was that I would be able to get electricity to the property. This was essential, since there were no utilities at all on the island.

They agreed, so I called Bob Orrell, a friend from Daytona Beach who owned a Sikorsky amphibian airplane, and asked him to fly me over the island so I could photograph it (with my limited funds, a twelve-acre survey was out of reach). I laid out a three hundred foot baseline on the white sand with black roofing felt and took sufficient photographs so I could plot the island within reasonable scale. The result was that the owners deeded me a centrally located lot, 165 feet wide, extending water to water, a depth of about 160 feet.

Although the house [Rogers' cottage] was published in seven architectural magazines and one book, it did not do as well for the developers as we had hoped—the second house was not sold until seven years later to Mr. and Mrs. Paul Burress, now the Tiedtke House.[1]

Rogers named his cottage "Four Winds," probably in reference to the breezes that the house enjoyed from all sides because of the openness of the island. According to Rogers' son Jack, the architect had chosen to build his home in the French Provincial style after he and Evelyn had seen a similar home on a trip to Macon, Georgia.[2] Of the more than one

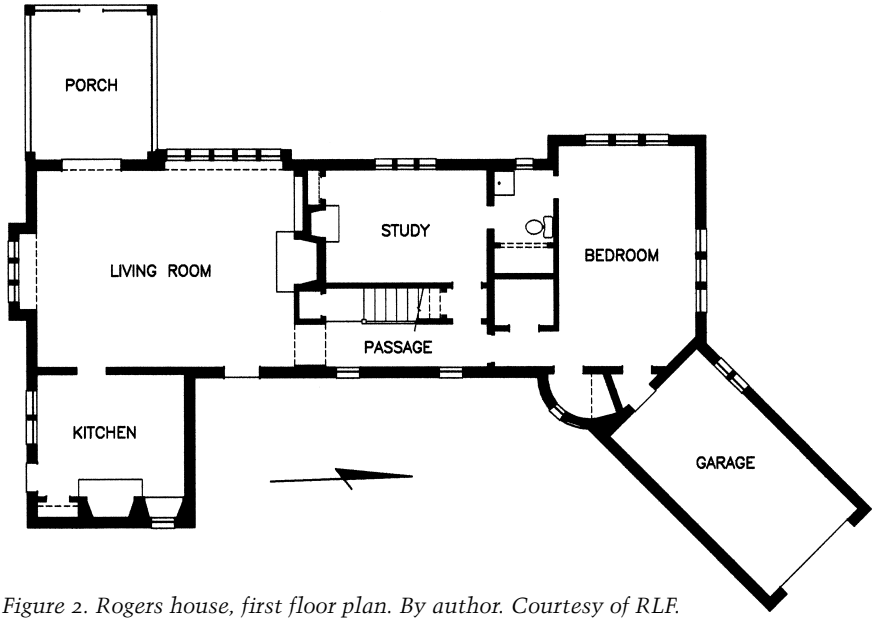

Figure 2. Rogers house, first floor plan. By author. Courtesy of RLF.

hundred homes Rogers designed in the Winter Park area, very few were built in the French Provincial style, although he stated on several occasions that the style was his personal favorite. Many of Rogers' clients came to him with a predetermined style for their houses, but when he was given a free hand, his admiration of the picturesque quality inherent in the French Provincial prevailed in his own home.

While the architect may have admired the style as seen elsewhere, the plan was clearly of his own design. In fact, the plan for the Victor N. Camp house, constructed about a year earlier in Ormond Beach, and Rogers' own floor plan are not unrelated. Both are essentially T-shaped plans featuring an entrance into the main living-room space, with the kitchen and dining alcove and master bedroom on the first floor, and guest bedrooms above. In his own house Rogers changed the location of the staircase from its tucked-away position in the Camp house to a more public area in the front hallway, or passage. Where Camp had two bedrooms on the first floor, Rogers used one space for a bedroom and the other as a study. Another difference in the plans was the addition of a turret at the north end of the long axis of the house to facilitate the angled transition into the canted garage space. Rogers also exposed roof framing in his own house rather than using the conventional flat ceil-

ings of the Camp house. Perhaps in developing the efficient floor plan for the Camp house, the architect became so enamored of it that he used it as the basis for his own home with only a few minor alterations (fig. 2). (See plate 10.)

Four Winds was a small house by today's standards. The first floor consisted of one bedroom and one bathroom, a kitchen, living room, study, garage, and screened porch. From the street, the house appeared to be only one story in height, but Rogers had taken advantage of the very steep side-facing gable roof space by including a small second story, which consisted of a bedroom, bathroom, and dressing room. The house also had three fireplaces, two large ones in the rustic, Colonial-style kitchen and the living room and a smaller one in the study.

Photographs of the original kitchen were often included in publications about the house and show the space to be evocative of another era. The large cooking fireplace was flanked by a deeply recessed window on one side and a plank door on the other. A flat stone hearth fronted the fireplace opening, and a large wooden beam spanned the top of the opening, serving as the fireplace lintel and extending to serve as the sill of the flanking window. A built-in wooden bench was located on one side of the kitchen, and dark wooden beams were exposed along the ceiling. Other accoutrements included large cooking pots, cast-iron pans, candlesticks, and a lantern. The dark space could have been drawn from any number of eighteenth- or nineteenth-century French country farmhouses, and it is assumed that is what the architect intended. Adding to the authenticity of the space was the fact that the house had no heating system other than the fireplaces.

The two facades of the house, the street facade and the lake facade, were different in their use of fenestration. The building was sited to take advantage of the views of Lake Maitland from the living room, study, and master bedroom—all spaces on the west side of the house. Thus, the lakeside elevation included large groupings of windows, a shed dormer, and a screened porch. The street-side facade, however, featured only a few single casement windows. The "closed" nature of the facade was a technique that had its roots in many of the European revival styles popular at the time. Usually, the historical precedents were closed to busy streets on one side, but opened on the rear to gardens or courtyards. In Rogers' case, though the street was not very busy, the closed nature of the facade provided a good amount of privacy from any passersby (pl. 13). The rear facade, however, exhibited a much more open and less formal nature with its many windows and door openings (fig. 3).