

## Print Article



**Pedro E. Guerrero**  
*Yale Skating Rink, 1958*  
Eero Saarinen, architect



**Pedro E. Guerrero**  
*Edward Durell Stone Townhouse, 1957*  
New York, N.Y. 1956  
Edward Durell Stone, architect

## Pedro E. Guerrero

# PHOTOGRAPHS OF MODERN LIFE

by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

I wrote the following essay a few years ago for a limited edition book of photographs by **Pedro E. Guerrero**, put out by Cattletrack Press in Scottsdale. The publication was designed to celebrate not only Guerrero's scintillating talent, but also his improbable success as the son of a sign painter from Mesa, whose grandparents were Mexican immigrants. Born in Casa Grande in 1917, Guerrero still remembers the humiliating notices prohibiting Mexicans from using public swimming pools in his neighborhood.

Guerrero's photographs are now on view in "Pedro E. Guerrero: Photographs of Modern Life," Apr. 5-25, 2012, at the Julius Shulman Institute at Woodbury University in Hollywood. I thought I would reprint this essay to draw fresh attention to this talented photographer who, now 94 still overflows with the charm that made it possible for him to work with some of the most particular, even irascible, pioneers of modern art and architecture: Frank Lloyd Wright, Alexander Calder and Louise Nevelson.

Over the past decade, the interest in architectural photography has grown in tandem with a renewed appreciation for modern architecture of the 20th century. Guerrero deserves recognition for his work in this field if only for his extensive collaborations with **Frank Lloyd Wright**. Guerrero possessed a



**Pedro E. Guerrero**  
*United Church of Rowayton, 1962*  
 Rowayton, Conn. 1962  
 Joseph P. Salerno, architect



**Pedro E. Guerrero**  
*Picnic #1, 1940*  
 Taliesin East, Spring Green, Wisc.  
 courtesy Edward Cella  
 Art+Architecture



**Pedro E. Guerrero**  
*Stormy Sky over Drafting Room,*  
 1940  
 Taliesin West, Scottsdale, Ariz.,  
 1937-1959  
 Frank Lloyd Wright, architect  
 courtesy Edward Cella  
 Art+Architecture

special talent for capturing the sculptural aspects of great architecture. More important, his and Wright's symbiotic relationship resulted in photographs that uniquely reflect Wright's opinions on the ways in which his buildings should be seen. Instead of details, he favored pictures of the entire structure. He told Guerrero, "I want to see it from terminus to terminus, or at least give me a connection from one part of the building to another so that I can see that it's my building."

A bonus, in Wright's opinion, was the fact that he and Guerrero were nearly the same height, about five foot seven. The architect instructed Guerrero to avoid bird's eye or worm's eye views. "We shouldn't have any trouble," he said. "Your eye level is close enough to mine." This remark reassured Guerrero, who wondered if he was too short to be an architectural photographer. "Don't think of yourself as short," insisted the diminutive Wright. "Think of anyone taller than you as a weed. I do."

Over the course of two decades, 1939 to 1959, Guerrero documented Wright's many projects, including the architect's primary residence, Taliesin in Spring Green, Wisc., his Usonian homes throughout the country, and dozens of other works. Yet, the photographs with most profound meaning for both Guerrero and Wright were taken at the radical, 600-acre development of Taliesin West on the northern edge of Scottsdale. It was there that Guerrero was accepted as Wright's staff photographer.

Just 22 years old, on summer break from studies at Art Center School (now Art Center College of Design) in Pasadena, Guerrero found himself thrown into a world of discipline and creativity beyond anything he had ever experienced. A native of Casa Grande, Ariz., Guerrero was grateful to the demanding and irascible architect for both his kindnesses and his criticisms.

During his first two years there, Guerrero had unprecedented access to the architect. He not only made extremely significant photographs of Wright, he chronicled the activities of the fellowship at work and at play. Guerrero also documented the actual building process at Taliesin West in all of its improbable and original stages, when the angular



**Pedro E. Guerrero**  
*Robert Lewellyn Wright House, 1959*  
 Bethesda, Md., 1953  
 Frank Lloyd Wright, architect



**Pedro E. Guerrero**  
*George Sturges House, 1947*  
 Los Angeles, Ca., 1939  
 Frank Lloyd Wright, architect  
 courtesy Edward Cella  
 Art+Architecture



**Pedro E. Guerrero**  
*Frank Lloyd Wright Demonstrates Organic Architecture, 1953*  
 Plaza Hotel, New York

buildings did not have windows and the apprentices lived in tents on the desert floor. He chronicled their caravan of cars making its way from Arizona to Wisconsin and the picnics at Taliesin after they arrived. He became an insider in Wright's well-guarded world.

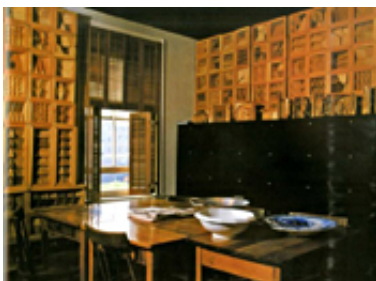
Wright grew fond of Guerrero, who was excited to become an apprentice; then he enlisted to fight in World War II. After the war, Guerrero resumed taking photographs for Wright, often working for little or no pay. The architect insisted that Guerrero return to Taliesin West to photograph it again in 1959, just a few days before the architect died. Countless photographers took pictures of Wright's buildings and even more people count Wright as a mentor, but Guerrero developed a relationship with the architect that was more than unusually warm. In Guerrero's presence, Wright was both calm and intensely focused. His portraits capture the architect's clarity of vision.

After the war, Guerrero settled in Manhattan, where, for much of his life, he operated as a commercial photographer. An editor at *Look* magazine, John Peters, quipped that Guerrero might be the most important figure produced by Wright. Thanks to the support of legendary art director Alexei Brodovich, *Harper's Bazaar* editor Carmel Snow gave him numerous assignments on the subject of design. As a result, he photographed interiors as well as buildings designed by architects **Marcel Breuer**, **Philip Johnson** and **Edward Durell Stone**. Guerrero, however, remained indebted to Wright for teaching him a way of seeing as well as a way of living. It was only after Wright's demise that there was room in Guerrero's life for another figure of such stature: **Alexander Calder**.

Guerrero was living with his wife and four children in New Canaan, Conn., when, in 1963, *House and Garden's* editor assigned him the task of photographing Calder and his wife Louisa in the kitchen of their black clapboard Roxbury house. While Guerrero had never deviated from calling his mentor Mr. Wright, the more informal Calder insisted that the photographer use his nickname of Sandy. Wright wore suits but Calder preferred work shirts and jeans. The Calder kitchen turned out to be too bohemian for the magazine but Guerrero



**Pedro E. Guerrero**  
*Calder Studio*  
Roxbury, Conn., 1963



**Pedro E. Guerrero**  
*Louise Nevelson House*  
Joe Salerno, architect  
Greenwich Village, N.Y.  
1977



**Pedro E. Guerrero**  
*Self-Portrait, Manhattan studio,*  
1950

recognized the potential for a book. He returned to the Calder's home repeatedly and even went to the south of France to photograph two different houses.

The artist and his wife are candid and at ease in his pictures. Guerrero did not try to enhance the cluttered interiors but simply presented them as the lifestyles of two intelligent and free-thinking people. The artist known for his monumental stabiles and mobiles is presented as a husband and father, as a homebody who makes trivets and cooking pots, who affixes new wire handles to broken teacups. Until Calder died in 1976, Guerrero photographed his environments as a form of surrogate portraiture. He noticed a singular difference between his two friends. "Mr. Wright said, 'Give me the luxuries, and I'll do without the necessities.' Sandy wouldn't buy anything that he could make himself. He made the necessities, and they became luxuries."

Having proved himself an amenable figure to Wright and Calder, Guerrero was prepared for one of the greatest of divas, **Louise Nevelson**. In 1977, though a celebrated artist, she felt neglected by the art establishment. Photographs by Guerrero for a book as well as a catalogue for her forthcoming exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art were most welcome. Guerrero established enough of a rapport to spend significant time in the three buildings that she used for her studio and home in New York's Little Italy neighborhood. As Guerrero put it, "Louisa's workplace completely contradicted Mr. Wright's 'Form and Function are one' and Calder's 'Function follows form'. . . . In Louisa's world there was no functional intent, just spontaneity and mystery."

There is no doubt about Guerrero's technical prowess as a photographer of architecture or his ability to capture the essence of creative people in their own surroundings. As editor and author Martin Filler wrote, "Few photographers have recorded the environments of more than one modern master as thoroughly and perceptively as Pedro Guerrero."

Yet, his photographs demonstrate another gift as well, the gift for friendship. Guerrero inspired trust among these rarified characters because he is trustworthy, an asset much prized by the famous architect and two artists. He transcended the usual

limits of commercial photography to make pictures that were as helpful to his sitters as they were to him.

The 91-year-old Guerrero now lives in Florence, Ariz., where his Mexican grandparents settled in the mid-19th century. After 50 years in a modern house in New Canaan, he thrives in an old adobe structure in the center of the erstwhile mining town. He is comfortable in the quiet milieu, since he travels when things get too quiet. He has hung up his cameras but he still has the engaging personality that grants people permission to be themselves. He can review the portfolio of his life and be satisfied.

"Pedro E. Guerrero: Photographs of Modern Life," Apr. 5-25, 2012, at the Julius Shulman Institute at Woodbury University, 6518 Hollywood Boulevard, Los Angeles, Ca. 90028.

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