

Dr. Center was a prominent physician and surgeon who came to Quincy in 1896. One of the first to have offices in the Dodd Building at Fifth and Maine, he was also on the Blessing Hospital staff. In 1935 he became president of the Illinois State Medical Society.

The Center House was designed at a great turning point in young architect Ernest Wood's career. After several years of designing in Chatten's late Queen Anne manner, Wood was beginning to attach historical detail to simple rectangular volumes. Within a few years his practice would acquire two clear branches, one pushing rectilinear design in a bare-bones Prairie School direction, the other resurrecting a variety of ornamental schemes in the service of scholarly period designs. But in 1906 those paths had not yet diverged; the rectangle was still encumbered with history.

Particularly striking in the Center House design is the juxtaposition of wide, chimney-like brick piers and a neo-Georgian balustrade on the verandah. The second floor offers a similar anachronism, a simply framed pair of windows flanked by wood panels in the form of pilasters. But holding all of this together is a masterful treatment of the main elevation. An absolutely symmetrical second story rises from a ground floor that seems at first to be curiously skewed by the placement of the entry near the west end; but balance is skillfully achieved by extending the porch in the opposite direction to wrap the southeast corner.

The round-arched front doorway could be another vestige of historicism, but an equally likely source is Frank Lloyd Wright's use of broadly arched entries for a number of his pioneering Prairie School designs in suburban Chicago, suggesting that Wood had become directly aware of Wright's work, though he did not yet grasp all of its implications. The living room fireplace also has an arched opening, though it is in the more common segmental form and is surmounted with an egg-and-dart molding of long historic use.