

## Col. Springs Builds His Office

All of his life, Elliott White Springs did things differently from anyone else.

He loved to surprise people and was a great tinkerer. Any project that he undertook was bound to be intriguing. That's why people in this area - 15,000 of them - flocked into Fort Mill June 16, 1952. They went to see Col. Springs' latest creation, his new executive office building.

For more than 20 years, Springs had lived in Fort Mill and commuted to his office in Lancaster. Back problems and boredom spurred him to build near his home. It would not be an ordinary office building.

All of Springs' projects had a certain prerequisites - they had to be unlike any other and they had to be fun. According to Springs, he thought of the design he wanted in 1936 when he went to Europe to look at a new circular loom that had been developed there. He rejected the loom but was so impressed by the new I.G. Farben building in Germany that he told himself that this would be the basis of the office building he wanted.

In 1936, Springs determined to have an office building that had "oval and circular and polygonal walls covered with rare wood...a continuous elevator and indirect lighting." Springs returned to the United States on the dirigible Hindenburg. He was fascinated with the lounge "which had the windows set at an angle of 45 degrees so the passengers could look below."

Springs decided to combine the elements he liked from the I.G. Farben building and the Hindenburg. When he got home, Springs told his chief engineer, E.L. Scruggs, what he wanted and that he was to top the I.G. Farben building, which was then thought of as the most modern and attractive office building in the world. Scruggs was told to take the time he needed in selecting a site, and to forget the cost.

Springs chose Frank Lloyd Wright as the architect, but World War II interrupted and Wright was no longer available.

The site chosen was alongside the first Springs mill and across the street from his grandfather White's old home. He toyed with the idea of a three-story building that put the president's office on a circular elevator, which would allow him to press a button and move down to a lower level cafeteria or a third floor director's room.

That didn't work out but he ended up with the most unusual desk anyone could imagine. His desk had a panel of buttons that resembled a flight panel and when he pressed a button, a parquet walnut conference table capable of seating 18 people would rise up to the level of the desk. There were elaborate safety devices.

By remote control from his desk, Springs could operate wall panels, open and close draperies, control a television, radio, motion picture projector, telephone signals, a vibrating chair, etc. A 120-foot photo mural circled the space above the windows. The mural showed the entire length of the Springs-owned Lancaster and Chester railway system.

While the president's office got the bulk of the publicity, there were a lot of other unusual features. For one thing, the walls were suspended from the roof instead of vice versa. The building is wider at the top than at the bottom. Soundproof ceiling panels, aluminum sash windows, and inside walls with movable partitions were among the

modern features. Teak floors and no end of other rare woods and fine building materials made it a beautiful building.

At that point, according to Springs, his money ran out. What to do for furnishing? He recalled that when there was a World War I aviator, he had helped the British squadron furnishing the mess hall with materials that were salvaged from wrecked airplanes. He decided to convert old cotton mill machinery into furniture.

Springs had sofas made from looms, lamps made of spindles, shuttles, bobbins, quills and diesel crankshafts, and table legs and desks were made of odd assorted pieces of junk machinery topped off with rare wood surfaces.

The walls were covered with burlap, hat racks were made of old spinning wheels and loom crankshafts. And so it went. No one had more fun with the new office building than Col. Springs. And he got the publicity he wanted, too.

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