

BassamFellows

LIGHT WITHOUT REFLECTION

BassamFellows reissues
the 1953 Philip Johnson and
Richard Kelly floor lamp



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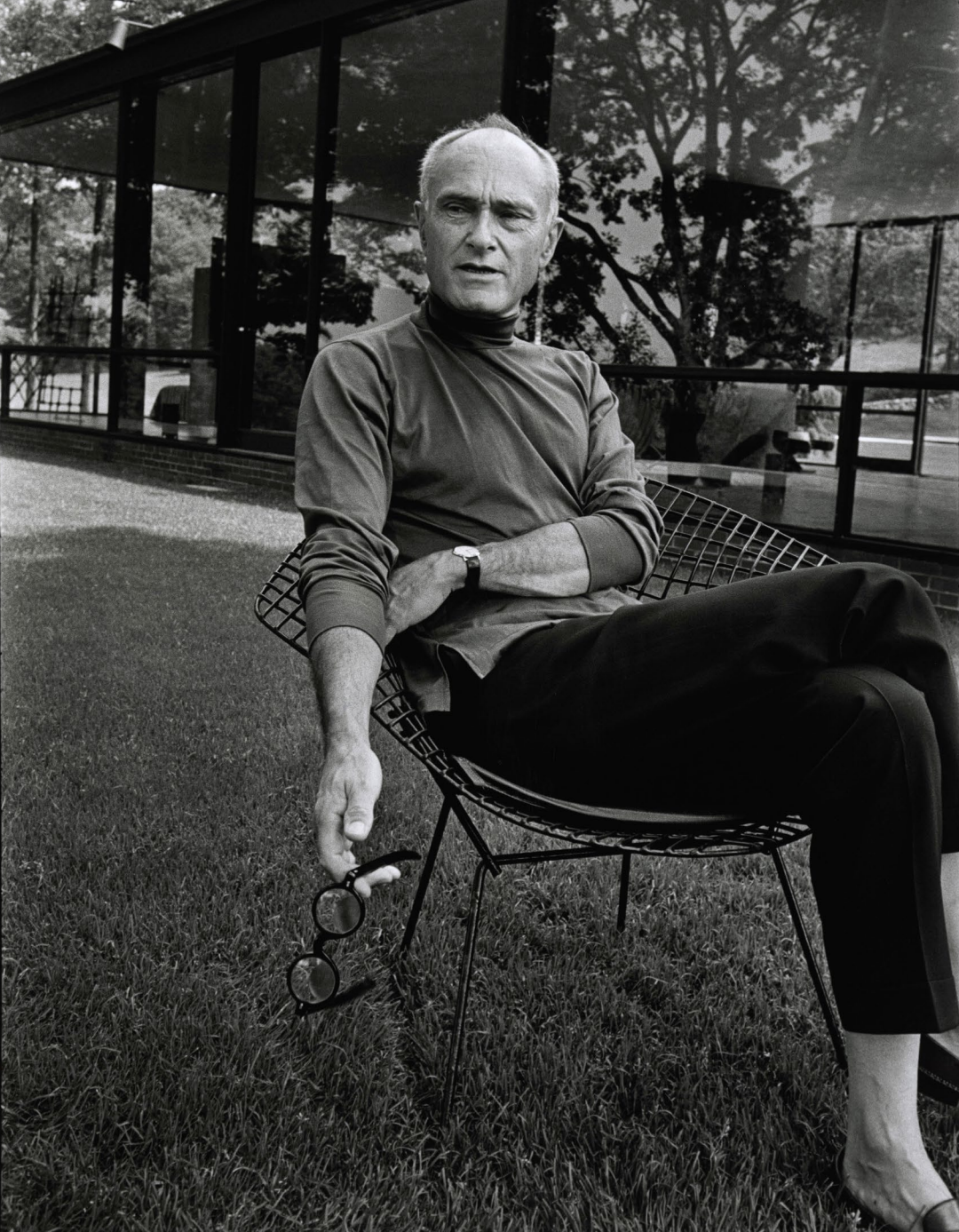
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When Philip Johnson collaborated with Richard Kelly to create a light for the Glass House in the 1950s, the resulting design became a significant part of some of the century's most notable private interiors. It was a revolutionary approach to lighting a room, within a radical new form of architecture. The lamp had a purity of form and function that made it fit harmoniously within these new spaces. It also conjured a soft, sensual mood. This year BassamFellows reissues this iconic floor lamp, which has been out of production since 1967.



The Glass House. 2025.
Reissue of Johnson/Kelly Floor Lamp.
Shown in Satin Stainless Steel.



New Canaan, Connecticut. 1964.
Architect Philip Johnson sitting outside
his "Glass House" designed in 1949.
Photo: Bruce Davidson/Magnum Photos.

When the Glass House was completed in 1949, the sightlines from Philip Johnson's transparent pavilion transformed the way people experienced architecture. Both outside and inside this glass box, everything was visible—from the shifting colors of the surrounding woodlands to the iconic daybed designed by Johnson's mentor, Mies van der Rohe. It was a radical and refreshing way to live.

But when night fell, the absence of interior walls and the home's transparency presented a unique challenge. The living area was defined only by a rug and an arrangement of furniture, not by partitions, and traditional lighting simply didn't work. Also, the reflective glass created a conundrum, like trying to take a photograph in a mirror.

Initially Johnson lived with a tall candelabra lamp but found this unsatisfactory. Seeking a better solution, he collaborated with lighting designer Richard Kelly. Drawing on his experience in stage lighting, Kelly helped design a lamp that turned the conventional approach on its head.

Instead of overhead lighting, the lamp featured a concealed, high-powered bulb positioned near the floor. Its light was directed upward, then reflected downward by the underside of a conical shade. The result was a soft, warm pool of light that gently illuminated the seating area—without casting harsh reflections on the glass walls.

More than a fixture, the lamp was like a small piece of architecture within the larger structure. It was also fitted with a dimmer, allowing Johnson to precisely control the light levels and maintain the delicate balance between interior and exterior.



The Glass House. 2025.

In 1979, Johnson explained how important Kelly, who had died two years earlier, was to his work. "He was my guru—the man who taught me the importance of lighting. When I first moved into the Glass House, there was no light other than the sun. You can imagine the problem with reflections. If you had one bulb, you saw six. When it got dark outside, there wasn't anything a lighting man could do, or so I thought. Richard founded the art of residential lighting the day he designed the lighting for the Glass House. He realized there was no other place to put the lights but the floor."



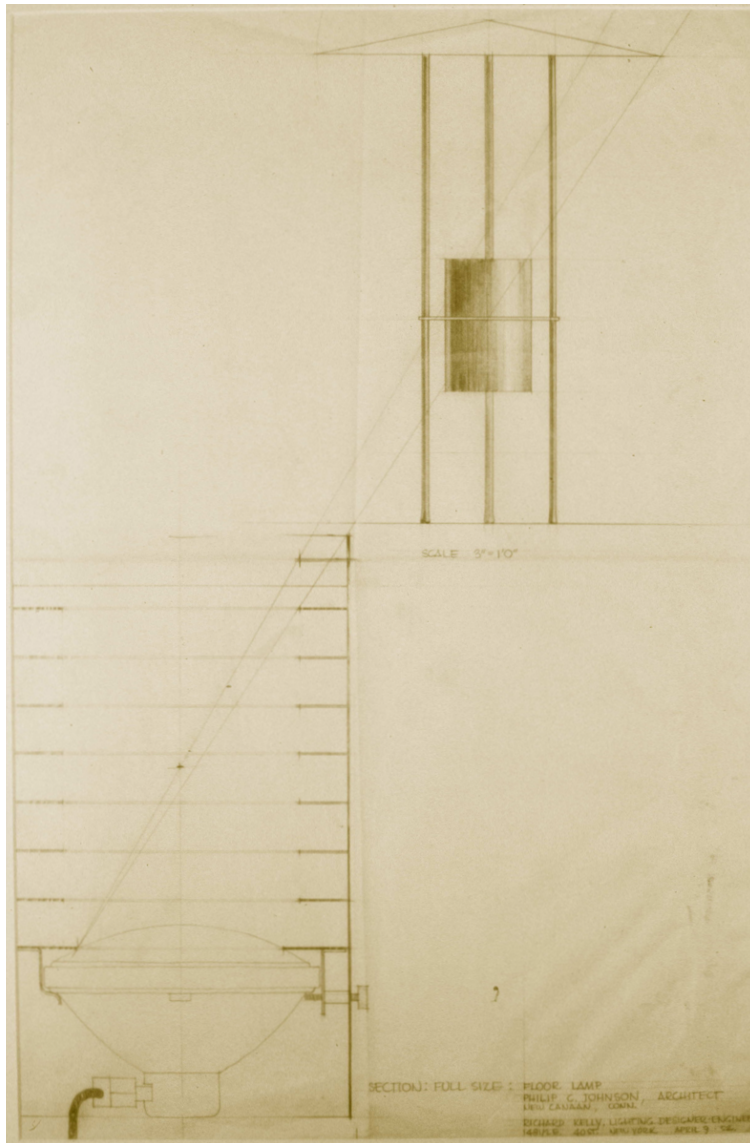
Following spread: The Glass House. 2025.
Daybed, Wood Frame Lounge Chairs,
and Plank Coffee Table by BassamFellows.
Reissue of Johnson/Kelly Floor Lamp,
Satin Stainless Steel.

Light without Reflection

Johnson and Kelly's concept was part of a holistic, scenographic approach to the lighting of an environment. The light that the floor lamp created was the perfect example of what Kelly called 'focal glow.' It was the essential contrast to 'ambient luminescence'—essentially background lighting—and 'play of brilliants,' which he described as "Times Square at night." For Kelly, all three elements had to be part of a scene to make it dynamic. 'Focal glow' was, he said, "The follow spot on the modern stage. It is the pool of light at your favorite reading chair. It is the shaft of sunshine that warms the end of the valley. It is candlelight on the face, and a flashlight on a stair ... Focal glow draws attention, pulls together diverse parts, sells merchandise, separates the important from the unimportant, helps people see."







The first drawing of the floor lamp was made and signed in 1952, with production by Edison Price commencing the following year. Initially, the core bronze canister, topped with an aluminum cone—its inner surface treated with reflective white—came with three legs, but this proved unstable, necessitating a refinement of the concept. Relatively few of the original lamps were produced before the design changed to four legs in 1954. It was this version, in uncolored bronze, that Johnson gifted to MoMA, where it remains in the permanent collection as Object 265.1958.a-b (curiously given the impossible date of 1950). Other versions were manufactured with the bronze coated in colored enamel, including blue, yellow, red and black variants.

Original drawing of Floor Lamp.
Three leg version. 1952.
Detail of floor dimmer, reissue.



Johnson's relationship with both Edison Price and Richard Kelly was a major part of his overarching vision. When The Four Seasons restaurant opened in the Seagram Building in 1959, it was a harmonious shared vision from Johnson and the building's architect Mies van der Rohe. Price provided the recessed light fixtures that bathed the overwhelming dimensions of the room in soft light, while Kelly shaped the overall concept for how the building's architecture and its spaces would be illuminated. By bringing facets of stage lighting into the realm of architecture, he challenged perceptions of what lighting for buildings could be, using light-reflecting curtains and sculptures to create something that hadn't been seen before.

Above: The Class House. 1964. Andy Warhol, David Whitney, Philip Johnson, Dr. John Dalton, and Robert A.M. Stern. Photo: David McCabe.
Right: The Four Seasons Restaurant. Photo: Francois Dischinger.





Light without Reflection

The floor lamp from the Glass House would go on to appear in interiors commissioned by some of the most significant art collectors of the era. The lamp sat next to towering achievements of the abstract expressionism and minimalist art movements, as well as key contemporary sculptures. It went into the home of William A. M. Burden, the longtime president of the Museum of Modern Art, who oversaw the expansion of MoMA in the 1950s and 1960s. It was also placed into the Tremaine Estate Glass Barn in Madison, Connecticut, and the Davis House in Minneapolis. Although the lamp hadn't yet been designed when Johnson created the guest house for Blanche Rockefeller in 1950, it would soon be introduced to this space. Indeed, Johnson would end up living there in 1971 with his partner, art dealer David Whitney, using the home to display a rotating selection from their art collection, including works by Roy Lichtenstein and Frank Stella.

The Rockefeller Guest House. 1950.



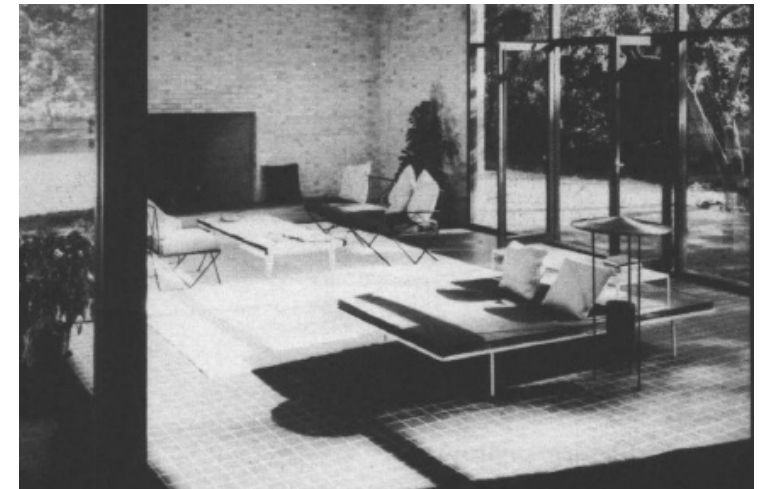


A Philip Johnson and Richard Kelly floor lamp was later added to the house that Johnson designed for Richard and Geraldine Hodgson in New Canaan, Connecticut, between 1950 and 1951. While the original lamp moved with the Hodgsons, the house itself would eventually inspire the design's revival.

Today, the home belongs to Craig Bassam and Scott Fellows. Shortly after moving in, they began exploring the possibility of licensing and reintroducing the lamp into production. Living with the piece in one of the spaces it was originally created for reminded them of just how exceptionally well it works.

By eliminating overhead lighting and minimizing interior reflections, the lamp allows the eye to focus on the architecture and the surrounding gardens. Its effect is subtly theatrical—part of an ensemble that shapes the ambiance of a room without dominating it.

Simply put, the Johnson and Kelly floor lamp remains one of the most modern—and brilliantly conceived—lighting designs ever created.



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The Johnson/Kelly Floor Lamp is an original and authentic design manufactured by BassamFellows under license and authorization from The Glass House, The National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Estate of Richard Kelly.



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