

Modern Design to Be Spotlighted in Two-Part Show

The Schlumberger building was designed by the esteemed architect Philip Johnson in 1951 and completed in 1952.

By Rosemary Feitelberg on June 22, 2021



Items from Bassam Fellows' Plaza collection.
Photos Courtesy of Bassam Fellows.

MODERNIZING THE HOME OFFICE: Home life was the only life for millions during the pandemic, and a new two-part exhibition takes a closer look at the work of designers Craig Bassam and Scott Fellows. Presented by R & Company and BassamFellows, the doubleheader examines the pair's ongoing dialogue with the history of Modernist furniture, art and architecture.

The first exhibition "Carve, Curve, Cane," debuted Tuesday at R & Company's New York outpost at 82 Franklin Street and the second one, "Modern in Your Life: Design and Art at the Schlumberger Building," will open July 9 at the recently restored building of the same name in Ridgefield, Conn.

The Schlumberger Research Center Administration Building was the first nonresidential building that esteemed architect Philip Johnson designed in 1951 and completed in 1952. Annette Schlumberger (the sister of art collector and philanthropist Dominique de Menil) and her husband Henri Doll commissioned the building after visiting Johnson's "Glass House" in nearby New Canaan. The Ridgefield location is now home to BassamFellows.

Along with Johnson, the original design team was made up of lighting designer Richard Kelly, landscape designer James Fanning and interior designer Florence Knoll. After Schlumberger was unable to find a buyer for several years, the town of Ridgefield bought the property in 2012 in order to control its development. Over time, BassamFellows lined up a long-term lease from the town and started a restoration project that involved preserving the original use of the building as executive office space with slight upgrades to bring the building up to current code and add needed service. The rectangular plan consists of perimeter offices that are organized around an open-air landscaped courtyard and a glass-enclosed conference room and library.

Reservations are suggested for the Franklin Street show, which runs through September, and they are required for the Ridgefield one, which wraps up at the end of August. Visitors will get a closer look at the interplay of design, architecture and art. Work from Arne Jacobsen, Greta Magnusson, Josef Albers, John McCracken, Finn Juhl, Jens Risom, Olga Lee and Pipsan Saarinen Swanson will be in the mix in the Schlumberger building. There will also be a work by László Moholy-Nagy from Marcel Breuer's estate that has not been shown publicly before.

Bassam and Fellows started their design company in Switzerland and later relocated to the U.S. They are known for a "Craftsman Modern" philosophy. The just-opened exhibit in New York will examine the materiality of BassamFellows' practice and how it infuses the principles of Modernism. A Jean Arp sculpture is paired with work by Prabhavathi Meppayil.

The next installment of the exhibit at the company's headquarters will display designs from the studio with historical works from R & Company's collection of design that is being curated by James Zemaitis and art that is being curated by Erica Barrish.