

## Tour a Rare Philip Johnson Building in Connecticut this Summer

Two exhibitions by BassamFellows prove that modernist design still deserves a closer look.

BY OLIVIA HOSKEN

JUL 14, 2021



Craig Bassam and Scott Fellows are the type of people who can talk for hours about the proper chair—the appropriate amount of depth and cushion, how it positions the body for sitting, the best seating for an office versus home, or even a cocktail party. “You don’t want to be with a bunch of people you don’t know very well, trying to balance an appetizer and a drink, while awkwardly sinking into a massive bed-like sofa,” says Bassam, as we survey one of two exhibitions he and Fellows have put on this summer: *Carve, Curve, Cane* at R&Company in Manhattan and *Modern in your Life* at their office, the Schlumberger Administration Building in Ridgefield, Connecticut.



**The BassamFellows office is housed in the former Schlumberger Research Center Administration Building by architect Philip Johnson in Ridgefield, CT.**

MICHAEL BIONDO

This isn't prosaic archispeak, in their new exhibitions, Bassam and Fellows are consumed with chairs, some made by their eponymous studio BassamFellows, and others by midcentury giants, including Marcel Breuer, Charles and Ray Eames, Corbusier. But the studied approach applies to everything in their craftsman modern oeuvre, including the Schlumberger Building, which was designed by Philip Johnson in the 1950s—think of it as the Apple campus of its day. It took eight years for the duo to acquire the building from the city, and then they set about restoring it, from sourcing tile from the original quarry in France (although it had been long-closed), to rescuing an original Florence Knoll table that had been used as a construction surface in the basement. Now finished, they are opening the building to the public with *Modern in Your Life*, inspired by the seminal Museum of Modern Art *Good Design* exhibitions curated by Johnson in 1951 and 55.





**A mix of midcentury modern and BassamFellows furniture on display at the Bassam Fellows office.**

MICHAEL BIONDO

It brings together modernist furniture and paintings by Josef Albers, Eero Saarinen, and Jens Risom, “There is a shared philosophy with these historical pieces, and what we do today,” said Fellows.

“These were beautiful, but everyday household goods and many of them would have been in the modern houses of Connecticut in the ‘50s, ‘60s, and ‘70s. We wanted to bring it all together to show how it juxtaposes with BassamFellows pieces.



**New furniture from BassamFellows is on display at R&Company in their show, *Carve, Curve, Cane*.**

JOE KRAMM, COURTESY R&COMPANY

In a time where midcentury design has been usurped and distorted by big box stores, the shows are a reminder that there is still a lot to learn from the modernists, particularly when it comes to thinking about how we live and work today (and a very good argument for the return of private offices). *Modern in Your Life* in Ridgefield, Connecticut is by appointment only through September 4, and *Carve, Curve, Cane* at R&Company at 82 Franklin in New York will be up through August 27