

Philip Johnson

Architect (1906 – 2005)



Johnson was born in Cleveland and attended the Hackley School in Tarrytown before entering Harvard. Johnson interrupted his education in Cambridge with several extended trips to Europe, where he became increasingly fascinated with modern architecture.

In 1928, Johnson met with architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, who was at the time designing the German Pavilion for the Barcelona Exhibition of 1929. The meeting was a revelation for Johnson and formed the basis for a lifelong relationship of both collaboration and competition. In 1930, he founded the Department of Architecture and Design at The Museum of Modern Art.

Touring Europe more comprehensively with his friends Alfred H. Barr, Jr. and HENRY-RUSSELL HITCHCOCK (whom he later sponsored for membership in the Century) to examine firsthand recent trends in architecture, the three assembled their discoveries as the landmark 1932 show *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922* at the Museum of Modern Art. The show was profoundly influential and is seen as *the* introduction of such pivotal architects as Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and Mies van der Rohe to an American audience.

Johnson arranged for Le Corbusier's first visit to the United States in 1935, then worked to bring both Mies and Marcel Breuer to the U.S. as émigrés. When World War II broke out, he enlisted in the Army, serving a couple of self-admittedly undistinguished years in uniform. Johnson returned to the Harvard Graduate School for architecture afterwards.

Johnson's early influence as a practicing architect was his embracing the International Style à la Mies for his masterpiece, the Glass House (1949), designed as his own residence in New Canaan, Connecticut, a profoundly influential work.

In 1956, Johnson joined Mies as the associate architect for the 39-story Seagram Building. This collaboration resulted in the remarkable bronze-and-glass tower on Park Avenue, whose strength of proportion, elegance of material, and formal rigor led *The New York Times* to judge it the most important building of the 20th century.

Completion of the Seagram Building marked a shift in Johnson's career. His practice grew as projects came in from the public realm—such as coordinating the master plan of Lincoln Center and designing the New York State Theater. By far his most productive period was from 1967 to 1991 when Johnson collaborated with JOHN BURGEE. Johnson was awarded an American Institute of Architects Gold Medal in 1978 and the first Pritzker Prize for Architecture in 1979.

He died in January 2005, a member of the Century for five decades.

