

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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U.S. | NEW YORK | NY CULTURE

The Four Seasons, Home of the Power Lunch, Has a Garage Sale

The public sale, offered by Wright auction house on July 26, is estimated to bring in \$700,000



Julian Niccolini, co-owner of the Four Seasons restaurant, sits outside the entrance on a bench designed by Johnny Swing, one of the items to be auctioned July 26. *PHOTO: MARK ABRAMSON FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

By **ANDY BATTAGLIA**

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Last weekend, the Four Seasons closed its doors after more than 50 years. Next week, its guts head to auction.

If only those banquettes could talk.

Since 1959, power brokers, dignitaries, celebrities and arts types came to the restaurant to dine, dish and deal in the restaurant's hushed ambience. On the night President John F. Kennedy was serenaded by Marilyn Monroe for his birthday at Madison Square Garden, he ducked in for "a quiet beer and a turkey sandwich," according to an essay in the auction catalog.

The rooms, designed by the architects Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson, mixed minimalist restraint with tasteful extravagance. Located in the glass-and-steel Seagram building in Midtown, they have long been considered by design aficionados a temple of high modernism.

On July 26, Wright, an auction house specializing in 20th-century design, will offer a public sale, estimated to bring in \$700,000, that will feature items small and large, designed by van der Rohe, Johnson and others—from brandy snifters and ashtrays to the sign at the entrance.

“It’s a rich expression of minimalist modern but in a very luxe version,” said Richard Wright, president of the auction house.

At a preview in the former restaurant space on Wednesday, longtime owners Alex von Bidder and Julian Niccolini prowled among the furniture, tableware and utensils, now accompanied by auction labels. Breaking into tears, Mr. Niccolini said, “It’s all about the memories.”

On the block:



Lot 220: Philip Johnson Associates' three-sided banquette and table 32 from the Grill Room is estimated to sell for between \$3,000 and \$5,000. *PHOTO: WRIGHT*

Philip Johnson Associates

Three-sided banquette and table 32 from the Grill Room

Table 32, surrounded by a stark but accommodating three-sided banquette, was the prime location in the Grill Room where architect Philip Johnson held court in a designed environment that counts among his greatest achievements. As architecture critic Paul Goldberger wrote in the auction catalog, about an era when fine-dining was still dominated by baroque ornamentation and old-world airs, Johnson “set out to do nothing less than re-imagine the idea of an elegant restaurant for the modern era.”



Lot 121: Bar stools from the Grill Room by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe with Philip Johnson are estimated to fetch between \$5,000 and \$7,000 for the pair. *PHOTO: WRIGHT*

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe with Philip Johnson

Bar stools from the Grill Room, pair

These minimalist stools propped up visitors to the Grill Room bar, with sight-lines across a famous room for which the term “power lunch” was coined. Richard Wright, president of the auction house selling the Four Seasons items, said of his visits there: “I always felt like a voyeur.”

Garth and Ada Louise Huxtable

Breadbaskets, set of two

Ada Louise Huxtable, best-known as an architecture critic, and her industrial-designer husband Garth created these unusually footed bread bowls in nickel silver that, decades later, shows signs of wear. About the lived-in condition, which applies to most items in the auction, Mr. Wright said, “Of course they have patina and light scratches all over—they have this kind of life about them.”



Lot 272: The set of two Garth and Ada Louise Huxtable breadbaskets could sell for between \$1,000 and \$1,500. *PHOTO: WRIGHT*

Eero



Lot 127: Eero Saarinen Custom Tulip table is estimated to sell for between \$5,000 and \$7,000. *PHOTO: WRIGHT*

Saarinen

Custom Tulip table from the bar of the Grill Room

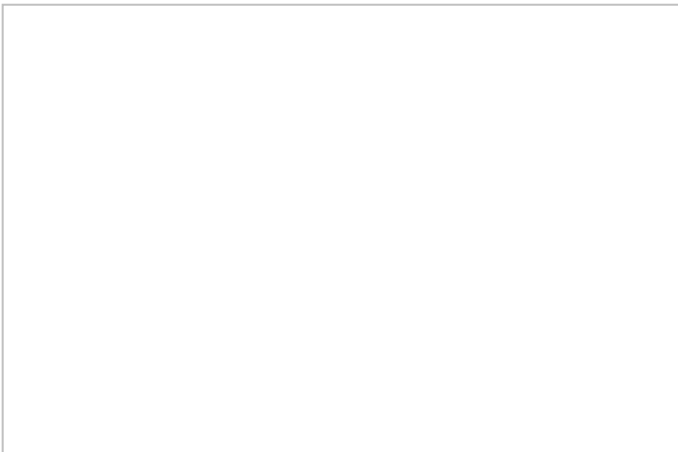
This variation of Eero Saarinen’s line of Tulip tables and chairs, notable in the mid-century for their curves and slender stems, was custom-made for the Four Seasons with polished bronze tops. Positioned in the Grill Room bar, they reflected the famous metal-chain window curtains that cover floor-to-ceiling glass and appear to cascade upward. The effect: what Vanity Fair editor Graydon Carter, in his catalog essay, described as the Four Seasons’ “shimmering miracle of light, murmur and quiet power.”

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