

LETTER FROM L.A.

A selection of images by artist James Welling of Philip Johnson's Glass House, on view through March 6 in Los Angeles

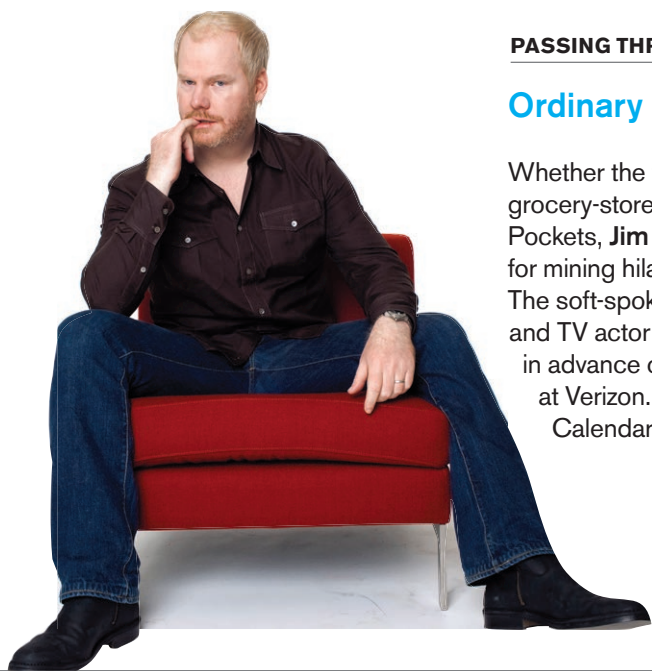
## Through a Glass Brightly

What happens when you plunk one of the country's most inventive photographers in front of one of America's most famous houses? Its glass walls explode in a prism of colors, the grass turns brilliant red or blue, and Houston architectural icon Philip Johnson's 1952 Glass House looks like an abstract painting—maybe Rothko, with a splash of Mary Heilman.

James Welling's Glass House series—saluting Johnson's famous Connecticut project in images created with various color filters set in front of a digital camera—makes its U.S. debut at L.A.'s Regen Projects gallery this month. Some other pics in the show feature a smaller out-building, the 1962 column-heavy Lake Pavilion, a postmodern folly that's as playful as the Glass House is pristine. "I'm pretty sure Johnson did acid trips or smoked pot in there," says Welling, whose work has been shown in Houston at Inman Gallery and Texas Gallery, "because it is a very trippy place."

Welling, 58, became interested in Johnson, who practically conjured the Houston skyline from his drawing table, after observing him in the 1980s. The artist and UCLA professor was then a preparator at New York's MoMA, where Johnson founded the design department. "He would come [in] impeccably dressed, extremely natty in his pinstripe suit. Of course, I was too lowly to talk with him."

Johnson, whose work was also the focus of two photography books by local artist-physician Valentin Gertsman, drew plans for Williams Tower, University of St. Thomas' Chapel of St. Basil and many other Houston landmarks. But it's his Glass House that remains his best-known structure worldwide. "It's an incredibly beautiful house," says Welling. "But after you go to the Glass House and go back to your own mid-century house, it looks like a dump." —*Jori Finkel, with additional reporting by Peter Barnes*



### PASSING THROUGH

#### Ordinary People

Whether the topic is escalators, grocery-store samples or Hot Pockets, **Jim Gaffigan** has a talent for mining hilarity from the inane. The soft-spoken stand-up comedian and TV actor shared a few insights in advance of his Feb. 12 show at Verizon. For more details, see Calendar. —*PB*

Gaffigan hits Houston's Verizon Wireless Theater Feb. 12.

*Does writing stand-up make you hungry or what?* I'm an observational guy who wants to discuss things that are universal. So that leads to me writing jokes about ketchup—which sounds boring, but there's a familiarity everyone feels with it. *You filmed your last Comedy Central special in Austin. Do Texas audiences treat you well?* Most definitely. For some reason, whenever I film in Texas there's an atmosphere of "we're going to have a good time, but we're used to live entertainment." Know what I mean? Some places [audiences are] like, "I've never even seen someone on stage." *Having been a guest on both shows, Conan or Leno?* Conan is really so good at his job; he has a real knack for it. And certainly, by no fault of Jay's ... Conan. I feel bad because I think Conan is so incredibly talented, and one of the great comedic minds of our generation. *Do people confuse you with Philip Seymour Hoffman?* They have, and they still do. It's a gift in a way, to keep my ego in check. People say, "I think you're so talented. You really have a gift." Thank you very much. "You were great in *Pirate Radio*." Well, thank you.