



*Mountain Village Residence,
Lighting Design by Robert Singer & Associates*

“Having a vision for what you want is not enough...Vision without execution is hallucination.” ~Thomas Edison

Light is the principle mode through which we experience architecture and the designed environment. It is the key element that defines space. Lighting is both an art and a science, demanding a trained eye and the knowledge of physical techniques to achieve its magic.

Richard Kelly’s three elements of light impacts are still used today as the design for modern architectural lighting. It is the artful control of focal glow, ambient luminescence, and play of brilliants that make it easier to see, make safer surroundings, and stimulate the spirit.

“Focal glow is the campfire of all time.” ~Richard Kelly

The first layer of light is focal glow, which draws attention. Where that light is focused determines what is important. There can be a number of focal points increasing the attention of the composition.

Ambient luminescence, the second basic element of light, produces shadowless illumination. It consists of graded washes suggesting freedom of space. Minimizing form and bulk, it is restful and reassuring.

“Ambient luminescence is the uninterrupted light of a snowy morning in the open country.” ~Richard Kelly

Finally we have the play of brilliants which entertains the eye and stimulates the body and spirit. It can be both exiting and distracting, awakening curiosity and quickening the appetite.

“Play of brilliants is Times Square at night.” ~Richard Kelly

The art of lighting design can be imagined like a painter. Like layers in a painting, first major highlights are visualized, then you add graded washes of varying luminosity, and finally the sharp details to dazzle the eye.

A pioneer of architectural lighting, Richard Kelly illuminated some of the twentieth century’s most iconic buildings such as, the Glass House, Seagram Building and Kimbell Art Museum. His design strategy was simple and effective, yet revolutionary for his time and has strongly influenced modern architecture. He transformed lighting design into a respected profession.

In 1958, Richard Kelly wrote: “Lighting is such a large part of the visual arts–architecture, most of all–that I’m sure the best we can do today will be inadequate tomorrow. I can logically project a great many techniques in lighting to improve people’s lives or to make a house more beautiful, but it’s all theory until we have the record of experience, which we are only beginning to write.”

Kelly’s principles of light energy impact have stood the test of time. He was not only interested in light and its sensory experience, but in the application of his

principles of illumination. He saw a need to improve architectural light to improve the perception and experience of our surroundings. It is difficult to imagine what architectural lighting would look like today without his lasting contribution.

“They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself.” ~Andy Warhol



By Robert Singer, IALD, IES, President RSA