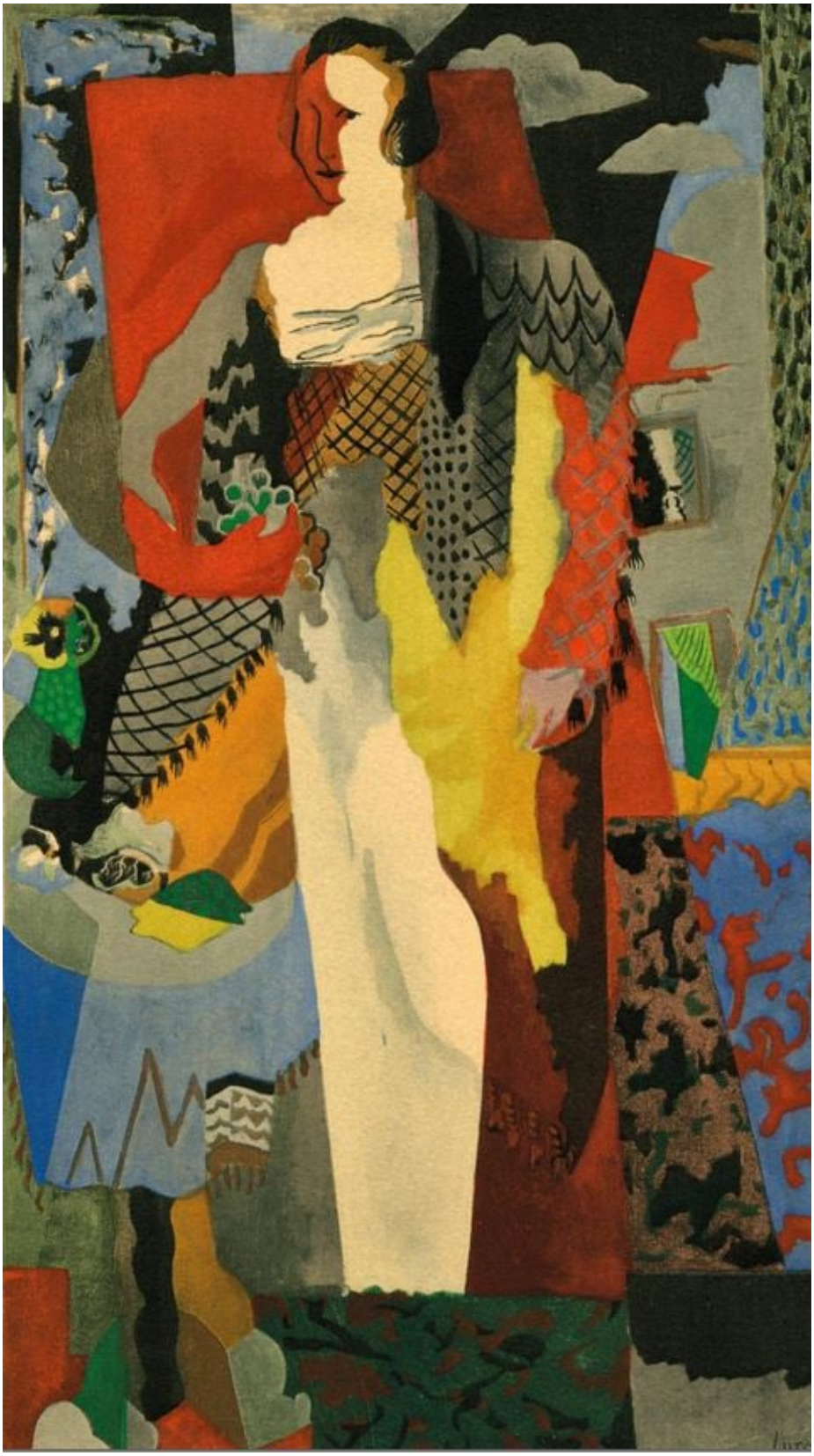
Returning to the Glass House, Paris

by Loren Stephens (January 2025)



Portrait of Annie Dalsace (Jean Lurcat)

Almost a century after it was built, the Glass House is one of

the hottest tickets in Paris. Even if you are lucky enough to get a ticket for the public tour, it’s likely that you’ll have to wait up to six months or more to get in. I have been there on four occasions, not as a tourist but as a guest of its original owners.

One of the most iconic private residences of the twentieth century, the Maison de Verre (the Glass House) sits in a spacious courtyard off the Rue Saint-Guillaume in the Saint Germain district of Paris within walking distance of Les Deux Magots and the Café de Flore. Built between 1929 and 1932, the house was commissioned by Dr. Jean Dalsace and his wife Annie Bernheim Dalsace with three purposes in mind: as a residence for family members; as a salon where Left wing artists, writers and composers gathered to talk about their work and politics (Jean Dalsace was an avowed Communist until he left the party after World War II); and as the medical offices of Dr. Dalsace, which were located on the bottom floor of the building. Patients entered through a private door separated from the residence and the ladies waited while looking out at a Japanese garden through large windows that served as the back wall for the entire house. There was a brass plate on the front door with buzzers “médecins, visites, and services.”

During the war, Annie and Jean abandoned the house—as Jews they joined the Resistance and headed toward the Pyrenees which was a base of operations. Upon their return, the house was left intact by the Nazis. The Dalsaces put all their valuable possessions in storage, hidden from the marauders.

The Dalsaces were among my grandparents' closest friends—Jean and my grandfather, Dr. Isidor Rubin, were both obstetricians and gynecologists, sharing their many innovations with one another and forging a friendship that lasted for many years. Annie and Jean extended their friendship to my parents whenever they were in Paris, and to my sister and me. This essay recalls what I specifically remember returning to the Maison de Verre on four separate occasions. They were a rare privilege and a look into the lives of two extraordinary French visionaries.

The site on which the House of Glass sits with its cobblestone courtyard includes an adjacent eighteenth century mansion that served as residence for their daughter, Aline, and her husband Dr. Pierre Vellay who joined Dr. Dalsace's practice after he and Aline married.[1]

The two buildings and the property were purchased by Annie's father for her and her husband. Mr. Bernheim was a fabulously successful real estate developer, who collected art including works by Cezanne, Monet, Manet and others. Mr. Bernheim adored Annie to distraction.[2] Whatever she wanted she got and this particular site was what she wanted despite its quirks. With some of the money her father gave her, she supported Jean in his medical training and the early years of their marriage. He became one of Paris' well-recognized, honored and skilled physicians, promoting family planning and innovative methods of childbirth shunning anesthesia whenever possible.

The Dalsaces intended to tear down the central building on the site but were unable to do so because an elderly woman occupied the top floor and refused to move. A virulent anti-Semite, she probably enjoyed making things difficult for the Dalsaces but they were not to be dissuaded from building the house of their imagination and dreams. Therefore, the Maison de Verre would have to slip beneath the top floor apartment; contractors were instructed not to disturb the woman living on the top floor. She lived there until her death when some of the Dalsace/Vellay family members moved into the apartment, shunning the lower rooms which never felt cozy and warm. It was a cabinet of curiosities – to be admired for its extraordinary inventiveness but rarely comfortable.

Annie Dalsace had impeccable taste, having been exposed to art from an early age. She engaged the set designer and furniture maker, Pierre Chareau to design the house with very specific directions. Not comfortable in the role of architect, Chareau hired Dutch architect Bernard Bijvoet and the metal craftsman Louis Dalbet to fabricate the large, exposed, steel columns

painted a red orange, to hide any rusting over time, and iron grids that held the windows in place. The house exposed its innards: electrical wiring, plumbing, and so forth with the idea that a house is made up of many parts. It is said that when someone flushed a toilet on the second floor the gushing water echoed throughout the salon. It must have made for a strange interruption in the midst of a concert by Darius Milhaud, one of the frequent guests. Chareau borrowed theatrical tricks from his part-time work as a set designer—now you see it, now you don't—to create his masterpiece, filling the house with gorgeous, handcrafted furniture in the finest of wood and fabrics of his design, all to Annie's specifications.

Every piece of furniture had its place in the sumptuous salon with its white rubber floor to muffle the sound that might have disturbed the patients below; carpeting was too mundane. Annie wanted something innovative, without giving any thought as to how to clean the white rubber with its little bubbles that caught dirt whenever someone had the audacity to enter with muddy shoes. The white rubber was seen more often in showrooms than residences. One wall of the salon had floor to ceiling books that could be reached by a rolling ladder. Jean was a prodigious reader interested in everything from law (which he studied) to medicine; to humanism; and whatever else piqued his curiosity. Many of the pieces of furniture were covered in Jean Lurcat tapestry, with designs of flora and fauna that were in juxtaposition to the steel and glass.

The front wall of the house was built with Nevada glass blocks fitting into the iron grid—a material that had been invented only six months before construction started on the house. At night, an outside spotlight aimed its beam against the blocks turning the house into a Japanese lantern. During the day the gray Paris light filtered in, softening the edges of some of the harsher materials. No one had ever seen anything quite like this and the use of glass blocks and glass as a building

material became fashionable years later. Philip Johnson's Glass house and the work of Mies van der Rohe come to mind. The house, at nightfall, when the light turns the glass blocks a soft yellow looks like a honeycomb.

When the Glass House was finished and journalists were given a peek into the public rooms there was the anticipated joke about "People in glass houses," etc.) I don't know the French translation, but Annie and Jean ignored these predictable remarks. Years later it was referred to as a marvel of construction.

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My grandparents, Sylvia and Dr. Isidor Rubin spent many enjoyable meals together, and Jean and my grandfather discussed their pursuits in the privacy of Jean's office. My grandfather's invention—tubal insufflation to ascertain blockage in the fallopian tubes—and Jean's commitment to family planning and natural childbirth were passions they shared. Jean is quoted as saying not only to my grandfather but in public that "In a union contracted by true love the real danger is monotony and the boredom that can result … It is easier to be a lover than a husband. Monotony must be avoided at all costs.")[3] This novel way of thinking brings up an interesting question: whether Jean and Annie had their own liaisons. Two people so stunningly beautiful with a wide circle of friends, temptation must have been dangling in front of them for the taking. In my grandparents' case, my grandmother kept my grandfather on a very short leash. Furthermore, he owed a lot to my grandmother for financing his early medical studies and his practice introducing him to many Manhattan well-heeled women and artists and writers. (My grandfather's patients included Georgia O'Keeffe's sister, the American ambassador to Cuba, and Edna St. Vincent Millay among many.)

My grandfather's most-often-repeated phrase to his worried

patients who were having trouble getting pregnant: “Go on a trip with your husband. Relax and you will probably become pregnant.” What is true of both doctors is that their services ran the gamut of interrupting pregnancies, to helping them along. Both doctors emphasized the connection between emotions and pregnancy.

I have a photograph of the Dalsaces and the Rubins before World War II. Annie is in the foreground wearing a chic dress and a black fur stole tied loosely around her shoulders. She has on a close-fitting hat tilted slightly making her look a bit naughty. She has a slight smile. Perhaps she is flirting with the camera. Wearing black leather gloves and holding a cloche purse she reminds me a bit of Edith Piaf. Her husband Jean is standing behind her resting his head lightly on her shoulder. He’s wearing a dark suit and fashionable silk tie, his trim figure hidden by Annie. His thick dark brown hair and aquiline features contribute to his stunningly handsome face and demeanor. [4]

My grandfather and grandmother (Orthodox Jews) stand on either side of them. My grandfather on the left wears a made to order light gray suit. His face is slightly obscured by his tortoise framed glasses and his hair is turning gray. My grandmother separated from him on the right wears a black suit with a tasseled white blouse. Like Annie she also wears a hat (Women were not considered well-dressed if they did not.) and white kid gloves. Unsmiling she looks like a nun ready to take a ruler to the hands of an obstreperous boy instructing him to say twenty “Hail Marys.” As a Jew, perhaps this is a stretch of the imagination, but as I study her face, so stern in comparison to Annie’s, this is what comes to mind.

Behind the two couples is a building with colonnades. There is no hint of where they might have been in Paris or traveling together somewhere before the storm clouds of the war drove Jews into hiding. Jean and Annie joined the Resistance heading toward the Pyrenees. They could have come to the United States

with my grandfather's sponsorship but they chose to stay in Europe to protect the country they loved and the extraordinary life they had created for themselves. Although they were secular Jews, they were targeted by the Nazis who ran rampant over the city occupying luxurious houses and stripping them of their contents. For some reason, the Maison de Verre remained intact, and most of their possessions were put in storage, but surely the Dalsaces were on lists—both because of their religion and their membership in the communist party. After the war, the Dalsaces hosted gatherings of the Association of Doctors Against War and Fascism, as well as meetings in support of peace.

Annie and Jean extended their affection for my grandparents to my mother, Carol, who was about the same age as their daughter Aline Vellay, and to my sister and me whenever we were in Paris. My first introduction to Annie was when I was ten or eleven years old in 1955. We took a taxi from our hotel and arrived at 31 Rue Saint-Guillaume. The driver hesitated because there was a do not park sign adjacent to the heavy oak doors that opened to the street on one side and a courtyard on the other. After paying the driver my mother got out and punched in the doors' secret code, which must also have somehow alerted Annie that we had arrived. My sister and I tumbled out of the taxi anxious to meet Annie and see her magical house as my mother had described it. She had been there on several trips to Paris as a guest of the Dalsaces.

The House's circular front door set into a track swung open to a large staircase at the top of which stood a petite, gracious, and chic woman, Annie Dalsace. As I remember she clapped her hands like a child seeing the three of us. Behind her were the glass blocks nestled into an iron grid, letting in the noonday light. The house was unseeingly warm, and after hugging us she pulled a lever which opened windows along the glass bricks to let in whatever scarce breeze there was outside. It was two or three days after Bastille Day, July 14,

when the air is usually hot and heavy in Paris.

Annie gave us a brief tour of the main open floor of the house, with its white floor, floor to ceiling library, and the gorgeous armchairs covered in Lurçat tapestries alongside which were cocktail tables, attached to the chairs, that swung in and out to accommodate guests. The height of the salon was two storeys, and the acoustics were made to enhance the sound of musical performances. As a ten-year-old girl, the room seemed to me to be the largest space I had ever seen in a private residence, diminishing my height even more than in reality.

We followed Annie to her private sitting room. It was decorated in feminine fabrics and overlooked the Japanese garden. She pointed out a pull-down ladder which one might find for access to an attic, but in this case led to her bedroom on the floor above. It is rumored that she claimed, “It is my way of escaping my terrible mother-in-law when she visits us and I can stand her no longer.” I can’t swear to the verity of this. At one point she picked up a stereoscope “I haven’t looked at these slides in years.” Putting one into the gadget she gasped as if recognizing the person but did not mention a name or event. It was one of the many secrets she kept to herself. Who was it I wondered that moved her so deeply? Annie had a reputation of being distant and cold, but that was only in front of people she didn’t know. For those within her intimate circle she was warm and loving, especially to my grandparents, my mother, sister and me.

The upstairs bedrooms and bathrooms were off limits to us.

We sat down in the dining room at the heavy table that had belonged to her beloved father, Mr. Bernheim. The proportions of the room were designed with its low ceiling to accommodate the large nineteenth century table and chairs, but it could seat no more than ten people suggesting that their social gatherings were shaped around cocktails and hors d’oeuvres rather than fancy sit down dinners.

Annie looked at her watch and went into the kitchen to tell the cook to serve lunch. It was at that point I noticed Annie had a limp. I would later learn from my mother that this was an injury suffered during the war. Of course, she would not speak of it to us and managed to camouflage it with skirts that were longer than fashionable but on her looked elegant and totally appropriate. It was 1955 and women’s clothing was going through many changes with the availability of fabrics that had been scarce during the war.

Lunch was a beautiful fresh *salade verte* with vinaigrette dressing, followed by a cheese souffle timed perfectly with a slightly browned crown, and then my mother's favorite French dessert, *fraises de bois* (wild strawberries) served with whipped cream.

My sister and I spoke a little French, having had private lessons, but my mother spoke quite well, although not as well as she thought. She was fluent in German and had studied French and Italian during her aspirational years to become an opera singer, a dream that fell by the wayside. Had she listened to those who encouraged her, rather than those who criticized her, our childhood and teenage years might have been much happier. Mother was a frustrated performer. In her declining years she admitted that she had often thought of moving to Paris after my father died prematurely when he was just fifty-two, but hesitated because she didn't want to abandon us. We would probably have enjoyed the separation, but it was one of those roads not taken. She remained a widow for the rest of her life finding fault with any man who showed an interest in her. She used to say, "I don't want to be a nurse or a purse." It might have been an excuse, no man matching the intelligence and stunning looks of my tall, athletic father with his wry sense of humor and his patience.

When my father arrived in Paris my mother was thrilled to turn over the responsibility of us to him – we went south to the Italian lake country with Annie and Jean for a few days of swimming, playing tennis and eating pasta, pasta and more pasta. After dinner we'd watch television with the other hotel guests – usually an American western translated into French or Italian. My father and Jean got along famously as my father was a chemist, and the two men had many topics to share. Like Jean, my father was a voracious reader and was fascinated by European politics and the effects of the War. The main concern of the French at that moment was the Algerian war and what to do with immigrants. Jean was all in favor of opening the doors to those who could provide labor.

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When I finished my sophomore year of college in June 1963, my

grandmother asked me to join her for a trip to Paris, Israel, and London. My grandfather died in 1954 while in London giving a lecture to a roomful of gynecologists and obstetricians. She needed a companion, and who better to ask than her nineteen-year-old eldest grandchild? She might also have had in mind to find me a British husband, a symbol of success among Jewish Americans. She succeeded in locating a barrister. His brother was a member of the House of Lords and he was an acknowledged expert in silver, as well as a successful attorney. After a few dates I rejected him to my grandmother's consternation. She never let me forget this. In her mind anyone else I fell in love with (including my first husband) were second rate.

Could I turn down a free trip to Europe? Absolutely not. But as my father drove me to Idlewild International Airport he said, "Do you know what you are doing? Six weeks with Grandmother Sylvia. How are you going to avoid one of her explosions?" I said she needed me to negotiate the details of the trip more than I needed her and it turned out to be true. She promised me that we would visit the Dalsaces at the House of Glass. They had extended her an invitation the moment they heard she was coming.

We stood at the semi-circular glass door leading up the enormous staircase. Waiting for Annie to signal us to make the climb, I looked to my left and caught sight of the beautiful oil on canvas portrait of Annie by Jean Lurçat, a family friend. Dressed in what looked to be a costume of patchwork colors and patterns, she is holding a bunch of grapes (a symbol of hospitality). Her face is half hidden in shadow, a suggestion that this was a woman with secrets to keep.[5] I helped my grandmother climb the stairs, as Annie waited for us, bathed in light.

My grandmother and Annie spoke English so I was able to follow their chatter. Talk of their daughters, their husbands' work, and my grandmother's gratitude for Jean's nomination of my grandfather to the National Order of the Legion of Honor,

France’s highest honor for civil and military accomplishments. She was extremely proud of this honorific and wore the Legion of Honor pendant when she was in the mood to impress someone which was frequent. After my grandmother died, my mother inherited this bijou. Had my mother not been buried in a pine box according to the Orthodox Jewish tradition, wearing no embellishments (even a gold wedding ring), I’m sure she would have worn the pendant. It now sits in my sister’s jewelry box, but she has never worn it. She wants to be known as an accomplished artist, not as the granddaughter of a member of France’s Legion of Honor.

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Three years later after I graduated college, my sister and I who were twenty and twenty-one flew to Paris without my parents and then on to Italy and Greece. I planned the trip using as my guide Arthur Frommer’s *Europe on Five Dollars a Day*. We mostly stuck to this budget, surprisingly, since my sister and I liked nothing better than to buy pretty clothes, especially in Paris. Annie invited us for lunch at the Maison de Verre, and we enthusiastically accepted. She had hardly changed, although she was sixty-six at the time, her face still unlined and her figure as trim as I remembered it. She flitted about the salon and dining room like a delicate butterfly, so happy to see us. Lunch was a repeat of the soufflé and fraises de bois. I don’t remember much about our visit, but when it came time for us to leave for the train station bound for Venice, Annie insisted on driving us. She hailed a porter, and then stood on the platform after kissing us goodbye, to make sure we got onto the right train. As I looked out the window, I thought she was crying. Two years later, at sixty-eight, she was gone. Maybe she knew she was ill, but she never mentioned it to us.

I briefly thought about the future of the Maison de Verre, who would live there, if the family would sell it. And then it disappeared from my consciousness although the house gained

enormous attention in architectural books, and architectural classes for its innovative use of unusual industrial materials. It was treated like a work of art signed by the artisans who crafted it. Its fame only grew as the years went by. But generally, it was a well-kept secret, except for those students and practitioners in the field of residential design until the twenty years after it left the hands of the Dalsace family. Pierre Chareau only designed one more house—this one in the Hamptons for Robert Motherwell, and then he more or less disappeared into obscurity. He needed a patron like Annie to promote his unique talent since he was unable to do so for himself. [6]

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Nine months or so after the *Charlie Hebdo* terrorist attack in Paris, my sister, my husband (brave soul stuck between my sister and me) and I planned a trip to Italy and then on to Paris. I was assigned to take care of most of the logistics as I love doing this. I made a reservation at the Relais Christine on the Left Bank in the Saint-Germain district and via telephone with the hotel concierge went through a list of must see sites in order that he buy tickets for the three of us. It was Paris Fashion week, 2015, and I anticipated that everything worth seeing would be crowded. My list included a side trip to Giverny (Monet's home) a chamber music concert at Sainte-Chapelle with its magnificent stained glass windows; an exhibit of Niki de Saint Phalle at the Galerie Mitterrand; and dinners at local restaurants including the Bouquiniste, owned by Guy Savoy and across the street from Laperouse, one of Paris's oldest restaurants referred to as "the House of Pleasures." The one destination on my list we were unable to visit was the Picasso Museum which was undergoing a major reconstruction. We visited the Musee d'Orsay but stayed away from the Louvre.

About three weeks before we were to leave, I ran across an article in the *New York Times* referring to the purchase of the

Maison de Verre in 2006 by Robert Rubin (no relation to my grandparents). He was an investment banker at Goldman Sachs and served as the 70th U.S. Secretary of the Treasury during the Clinton administration. A serious student of art and architecture he decided to acquire iconic residences around the world, eclipsing his collection of classic cars. Can you imagine someone collecting houses? And of course, one of the grand prizes—the Maison de Verre—on a par with Frank Lloyd Wright's Falling Water in Pennsylvania; Philip Johnson's Glass House in Connecticut; and Richard Neutra's Kaufman House in Palm Springs.

He negotiated with the family which included keeping some of the artifacts; and allowed Aline Vellay, the Dalsaces' daughter, to live in the top floor apartment since she had moved out of the adjacent maison to make room for the next generation of the Vellay family. Rubin decided that he and his family would live part of the year in the Glass House and on occasion allow architecture, interior design, and engineering students to tour the property, with the exception of the upstairs family bedrooms and bathrooms as well as the kitchen.

I immediately wrote to Mr. Rubin's foundation. I told him that we were neither engineers, architects, or interior designers, but close family friends of Annie and Dr. Jean Dalsace through my grandparents. I received an immediate response suggesting a date, time, and the secret code to the heavy oak doors that hid the Maison de Verre from the street. The timing fit perfectly with the schedule that we had planned in advance.

On the day of our visit, we waited outside in front of the heavy oak doors which suddenly swung open allowing our small group entry into the courtyard. It was all exactly as I remembered it, the cobblestone parking area, the eighteenth century maison; and in front of us the Glass House, which was unlit. Fortunately, it was only a gray day with just a hint of rain so I anticipated that we would see most of what was

arranged for us on the tour.

Our tour guide led us to the wide staircase that opened to the main salon. As we all clustered at the bottom of the stairs, he told a story about Annie Dalsace, saying that when guests arrived, she stood at the top step with the light from the glass blocks behind her, much as an actress would make her grand entrance on to a stage. He said that she enjoyed the theatricality of this as she waited for her guests to climb the stairs. My sister and I looked at one another. This was apocryphal. The truth was that she felt awkward descending the stairs which exaggerated her limp. There must have been times when her wartime injury was painful. We wondered where the guide had gotten this story, and how many other white lies he might unknowingly tell the group. We didn't want to interrupt him and followed him into the salon where he demonstrated the levered windows that allowed a breeze into the large room. I remember Annie doing the same thing on a hot July afternoon. The partially empty salon was a disappointment. What came to mind was the painting by Marcel Duchamp, "The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors." Many of the exquisite pieces of furniture designed by Chareau, covered in tapestries by Lurçat were gone, as well as the paintings by Picasso, de Chirico which rested on an easel in front of the bookshelves and other luminaries of the 1930s and 40s. Perhaps they had been sold off, were somewhere in storage, or distributed to the members of the family.

The guide's main thesis about the design of the house was its resemblance to a stage set, with scrims and beaded curtains opening and closing to reveal Chareau's inventions. The white rubber matting was still there, and someone had arranged a bouquet of flowers to bring some life into the space, but the people who had inhabited it were all gone, or so we thought. When we were taken down to the medical offices on the floor below the salon, one of the examination rooms had a table displaying various gynecological instruments and a perfectly

pressed lab coat that hung on a rack like props in a stage set just waiting for the actors to appear.

At the end of the tour, my sister mentioned to the guide that we knew the Dalsaces and were thrilled to have seen the house. Compliments always help and he offered us some startling information: that Aline Vellay, the daughter of Annie and Jean Dalsace, currently occupied the upstairs apartment (the one that had been lived in by the anti-Semitic woman who made the construction of the house a nightmare). He said, “Her caregiver usually takes her out at about this time every day. Perhaps you can catch her.”

We waited in the courtyard taking pictures with the glass block wall behind us. And then we saw a middle-aged woman pushing a wheelchair in which sat a white haired petite woman with a blanket across her lap. My sister who spoke fluent French ran over to her and said, “Aline, I am the granddaughter of Sylvia and Isidor Rubin. We have just taken a tour of the house.” She burst into tears and reached out to hug my sister. She was so overcome that she couldn’t speak for a minute or two, and then in perfect English, said “And how is your mother?”

“I’m afraid she passed away in 2005. I am here with my sister Loren and her husband.”

“This is too much to take in all at once. I would like you to visit me upstairs. Are you available tomorrow afternoon for coffee? I don’t have too many visitors these days except for the family. Who remembers an old lady?”

We immediately accepted her invitation, assuring her that would be there at two pm on the dot. “I will have my son give you a call to confirm everything,” she said. “I don’t always feel so well.”

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We stopped at a macaron shop in the Marais district so we would not be empty handed when we visited Aline. Her son, Marc Vellay, gave us the secret code and as before the oak doors swung open. Aline's caretaker waited for us at the entrance to the apartment which in the three times I had been to the Maison de Verre I had never seen. I was so excited to spend time with Aline and exchange a few stories about her parents and my grandparents. I am a ghostwriter and love to collect stories of people's lives. Now it was my turn to learn more about our family and the Dalsaces.

Aline was sitting in a comfortable chair. The apartment was packed with paintings and furniture that I remembered. Her caregiver hovered over her, and at a signal brought in a coffee service. She was delighted to receive the macarons, but instead offered us some cake that had been baked in her oven. The room was filled with the aroma of just baked cake. Unlike the rest of the house, her salon had standard windows that overlooked the courtyard below. It was small by comparison with the open-plan rooms below which barely suited the many objects that had been brought upstairs: the Lurçat side chairs, the curved fawn velvet sofa, and many valuable paintings, some of which I recognized from earlier visits to see Annie. It must have been a comfort to her to have so many reminders of people no longer living. She told us that her granddaughter Dominique sometimes lived in the house next door, complaining that the Maison de Verre was difficult to inhabit with its "surprises."

Aline told us of her relationship with my grandfather, whom she greatly admired. "I was living in New York at the time taking courses on segregation at Columbia University. It was 1950 I believe. My father nominated your grandfather to the Legion of Honor. In order to qualify he had to submit his papers. He asked me to translate them into French which I did, and as you know he was accepted. My father was thrilled that IC Rubin earned this honor."

She took a breath and a small bite of the cake and then continued, “I went south to see for myself how segregation affected the population. On one occasion, I got on a bus. A Negro lady was sitting in the back. To the shock and astonishment of the other passengers I sat down next to her. It was hard to accept such discrimination. Do you know that the Nazis studied segregation laws in the United States as they put their plans against the Jews into motion? They wanted to learn how we “legally” separated the Negroes, what laws were passed.”

I asked Aline about the rise in anti-Semitism in France as elsewhere in Europe quoting the old canard, “When Paris sneezes everyone catches a cold.” I referred to the Charlie Hebdo bombing which had taken place in January 2015. Its effects were obvious. Synagogues were heavily guarded, and when we attended the concert at Sainte-Chapelle, our bags were inspected, which would never have happened before.

She sat in her chair, looked around the room at the beautiful bouquets of flowers (was it her birthday?) and said, “It’s all right.” She did not elaborate. It might have been too difficult a topic to address, and it seemed she inherited her mother’s habit of hiding secrets.

Aline was quick to change the subject. “You know, I loved your grandfather very much. He and his wife were extremely cordial to me while I was a student in New York. I always admired the wonderful relationship he and my father had with one another. From time to time, he’d repeat jokes that the two of them shared about their métier. I remember your grandfather repeating this joke: “A doctor was having an affair with one of his patients. She sat across from him in a beautiful dress. His nurse announced that his wife had arrived. Startled he said, “Quick, get undressed!” They both got a good laugh out of this joke.” Not to be outdone, my father offered this joke: “An ophthalmologist was being honored by a huge painting of the inside of an eye hung in the main entrance of a hospital.

Looking at it, one of the doctors said, “Good thing he wasn’t a gynecologist.”

Aline, mildly chuckling, took a sip of coffee and another bite of cake. Picking up the box of macarons, she said “You were very kind to bring me these. I think it is time for me to rest.”

I asked, “Aline may I take your photograph?”

“No, unlike my mother who never saw a camera she didn’t like or a painter’s brush she didn’t encourage, I am uncomfortable. Rather I’d be happy for you to take a few pictures sitting on the Lurcat sofa. You can send them to me now that you have my address.”

We then thanked Annie for seeing us, and she kissed us goodbye. Again, I saw tears roll down her cheeks. We both knew that this would probably be the last time we would see one another unless God granted all of us more years.

In 2021, I read about an auction at Christie’s Paris of 116 lots of objects and paintings owned by the family: works by Juan Gris, Fernand Léger, Henri Matisse, Joan Miro, Giorgio de Chirico, and Georges Braque, some of which we had seen in Aline’s apartment, all examples of the exquisite taste of two people who were trendsetters of the twentieth century.[7] Buyers from the United States and France clamored to see and to buy these pieces, and in a recent spread in *Architectural Digest* I recognized two high backed armchairs in a Lurçat tapestry sitting in a McMansion in Florida that had once held pride of place in the grand salon of the Maison de Verre.

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The House of Glass is a combination of man and machine—a unique example of 20th century modernism. Its furniture, painting and tapestries, as well as its Japanese garden and glass blocks a surprise to the eye of any visitor who was

there while the Dalsaces were alive—their sophistication and refined taste a wonder.

The walnut grand piano sits quiet now; Annie must have played it at one time in addition to the visiting virtuosos; the library ladder leans against the bookshelves where Jean searched for a book. The tapestry furniture where my grandparents and many other guests enjoyed stimulating conversation is mostly gone. The House feels empty. I am sure that Robert Rubin and his family are good custodians, but they did not put their heart and soul into the House. I am reminded of a line from Shakespeare's sonnet, "Upon those boughs which shake against the cold, Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang."

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[1]For a fascinating essay on the Glass House, read "The Ghost of the Glass House," by then staff writer, Adam Gopnik, in the May 1, 1994 issue of the *New Yorker*. He never had the pleasure of meeting Annie and Dr. Jean Dalsace.
[2] Ibid, p. 12.
[3] Ibid, p.29
[4] Dr. IC Rubin, 1883-1954; Sylvia Rubin, 1892-1976; Dr. Jean Dalsace, 1895-1970; Annie Dalsace, 1896-1968.
[5] *Portrait d'Annie Dalsace*, 1923. The painting was donated to by her grandchildren in 2022 to the Centre Pompidou, Paris.
[6] For an indepth understanding of Pierre Chareau, read *Pierre Chareau: Architect and Craftsman 1893-1953*, Rizzoli, by Marc Vellay.
[7] The exhibition can be viewed on youtube under the title, Annie and Jean D'Alsace: the collection of la Maison de verre. Christie' s Paris. October 2021.

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Loren Stephens is the president of ghostwriting company Write Wisdom. She has twice been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and the memoir *Paris Nights: My Year at the Moulin Rouge*, by Cliff Simon with Loren Stephens, was named by Kirkus as one of the best titles issued by an independent press. Her debut novel, *All Sorrows Can Be Borne*, was published by Rarebird in 2021 and 2023. Her essays and short stories have appeared in *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, MacGuffin, the *Montreal Literary Journal*, and the *New Plains Review* to name a few. She is currently taking French lessons to navigate Paris more efficiently.

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