

ORAL HISTORY OF GORDON BUNSHAFT

Interviewed by Betty J. Blum

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Chicago Architects Oral History Project
Ernest R. Graham Study Center for Architectural Drawings
Department of Architecture
The Art Institute of Chicago
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PREFACE

I met with Gordon Bunshaft in his home in New York City where we recorded his memoirs on April 4, 5, 6, and 7, 1989. Despite his often-quoted declaration that “I like my architecture to speak for *me*,” Gordon cooperatively shared ten hours of recollections about his long and distinguished career. However, his architecture does indeed speak for him. His oeuvre is marked by a plethora of landmark and award-winning buildings, and he is the recipient of the coveted Pritzker Architecture Prize.

Influenced in his youth to become an architect, Bunshaft pursued his training with a clear sense of determination and direction, and his career as chief design partner at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill for forty-two years with excellence and importance. His perception and interpretation of mentors Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier, coupled with his own sense of perfection, soundness, and poetic vision, have earned for him the mantle of the leading exponent of modern architecture.

Our sessions were recorded on six 90-minute and one 60-minute cassette, which have been transcribed and reviewed by both Gordon and me. Corrections were made in order to clarify and amplify Gordon’s thoughts and ideas. The transcript has been minimally edited to maintain the flow, tone, and spirit of the original narrative. Gordon took great care to recount his experiences with candor and an extraordinary attention to detail, for which I thank him. His firsthand account makes a significant contribution to a more complete understanding of the events and personalities of his time, for which future scholars will thank him.

Gordon’s career has been well documented in English and foreign language architectural journals and in the recently published monograph *Gordon Bunshaft*

of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (1988) Those interested are urged to read both the monograph and this oral history for a more comprehensive understanding of Bunshaft and his work.

Gordon Bunshaft's oral history has been sponsored by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, the premier architectural firm among those who have changed the shape of the twentieth-century urban landscape and whose reputation Gordon Bunshaft helped establish. SOM deserves appreciation for their support of this oral history program that seeks to document, through eyewitness accounts, the recent national and international architectural past.

For their contributions in bringing this document to completion, thanks go to Amy Linenthal, our editor, and to Joan Cameron, our transcriber.

Betty J. Blum
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Betty J. Blum
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Gordon Bunshaft

Blum: Today is April 4, 1989, and I'm with Gordon Bunshaft in his home in New York City. He was educated at MIT, where he received his bachelor's and master's degrees, and was awarded a Rotch Traveling Fellowship, which took him to Europe for a year and a half. His career with SOM [Skidmore, Owings and Merrill] began in 1937, and he remained there for forty-two years until he retired in 1979. In the literature he has been called "the leading exponent of modern architecture." He has been identified as the architect who made a reputation for SOM. He's had a distinguished career. Mr. Bunshaft, will you tell us where it all began? Why did you select architecture for your career?

Bunshaft: Perhaps the most important thing that ever happened to me was that I was born on May 9, 1909, with parents who had just come from Russia a year before I was born. Most of the rest of the period up until the time I graduated from MIT was made possible

through the devotion and determination of my father and mother that I should have the opportunity to get a full education in the country they had just become a part of. It was their devotion and their dedication and encouragement that made life relatively easy for me the first twenty-five years of life. My father, David, and my mother, Yetta, were both Bunshafts before marriage. They were first cousins. They were poor when they arrived, but my father worked very hard and saved money and eventually sent me through MIT as if I were the son of a very rich man. He lost most of his money in 1929 in the stock crash through ignorance of the market, but, at that time, I was already a year at MIT, and I wasn't even aware that he had lost money. In fact, he bought me a very nice Chevrolet convertible my sophomore year. So, I have my parents to thank for most of this. I'll jump a bit by saying that the fortunate thing that I was born at that time was that the timing was perfect, because when I returned from the army after the Second World War in 1946 or early 1947, I had already had a few years of practice at SOM. I already had two degrees from MIT and a Rotch Traveling Fellowship, which gave one complete freedom to travel any place in the world, and, with a classmate of mine, we covered all of Europe and a bit of North Africa. I'd worked for Skidmore up until the war started. So, in 1947, I was

thirty-seven years old, and the United States, especially in New York, was starting on a building boom. Clients wanted modern architecture, and here I was at the right age, excited about modern, and fortunate enough to join Skidmore, Owings and Merrill in 1937 when it consisted of [Nat] Owings in Chicago and [Louis] Skidmore in New York with a couple of men. Skid had gotten work at the New York World's Fair of 1939, and I joined the firm in 1937. From there, the firm had no place but to go up. By the time I got back from sitting on my butt on Avenue Kleber in the chief engineer's office of the U.S. Army—a very non-military job—everything was set to go, and I was the right age. That's the point of my being excited about having been born in 1909.

Blum: That's the introduction we should have put on.

Bunshaft: Yes. That's why when I was listening to you reciting all that, I felt what I'm talking about. Anyhow, so we go on. Now we can go back anywhere you want.

Blum: Can we step back for just a minute?

Bunshaft: Yes, let's go back. I'd like to make this quite thorough.

Blum: If I miss something, you tell me.

Bunshaft: Don't worry about it. You don't know me.

Blum: What was your father's work?

Bunshaft: My mother and father came from some little town in the Ukraine, a small village of Jewish people. He was part of the Jewish community there. My father eventually worked for a German who bought eggs for export to Germany. He must have been sixteen or seventeen or eighteen years old. He used to travel with this man. My father was only educated in the Jewish rituals, but he spoke Russian. He got a wonderful education traveling with this man all over Russia. So he got into the egg business. When he came here in 1908, like all immigrants, a brother of his was already here. He met him and took care of my father and mother in New York. He got a job working for some egg man in Buffalo. How he got there, I don't know. The egg business was not selling eggs. It was buying eggs and breaking them and putting them into thirty-pound cans that were sold to big bakers. In fact, a good

deal of them were frozen for the winter. That was his business. It wasn't much of a business. But the Jewish families of that period when they came over, they had something in common with the Chinese. Whatever they made, they saved a part of it, regardless of whether they made two dollars a week or a hundred dollars a week. That was one characteristic of them. The other was they knew their lack of education, and I think all of them at that period were devoted—my mother and father devoted their entire life to raising myself and my sister, who was ten years younger. Their own pleasures never occurred to them. It's quite a contrast to what we have going on today. That's why quite a few children of that generation, and I suppose the next generation, in general, developed much more than what's going on today. It was the family and the devotion to education.

Blum: Is this something that you realized as you were growing up?

Bunshaft: No, I didn't feel anything. I had no awareness of that. I just grew up with my father and mother and later my sister. We lived in a little neighborhood with streets where the boys got together and stuff. You weren't thinking that your parents were doing anything extraordinary. You didn't have brains enough at that

age to think of that. It's only retrospect. I didn't think of it even when I finished MIT or when I came back from traveling.

Blum: But somehow you must have sensed that among your family values, education and your education were very important to your parents.

Bunshaft: No, I wasn't aware of that. I did what everybody was doing going to school. I didn't work hard at school.

Blum: You did not?

Bunshaft: No, I went to Public School No. 45 in Buffalo, and I was an average student, very average.

Blum: Were you interested in drawing?

Bunshaft: Now we come to why I eventually ended up in architecture, and that's very, very simple. I was born in what I think you'd call today a slum. My father and mother had just been here a short time, and he was making five dollars a week. I was born at midnight. For my first twenty years, my birthday was May 8,

because that's when my mother remembers it. But I guess I wasn't born until after midnight, and the doctor recorded it May 9. So when I went to get a birth certificate to get a driver's license, I found out about May 9. The doctor that took care of us until I moved to 55 Manchester Street was named Dr. Kovenocki—I can't spell it—a Russian Jew and evidently a wonderful man. I was sickly when I was young, and I had diphtheria a couple of times. The second time I must have been eight years old, something like that. I guess like any kid you make little drawings of a house or something. Any kid does that. You don't have to be a potential architect. He saw them and he said to my mother, "He should be an architect." I don't think my mother knew what that meant, and later on I didn't either. That's one reason for it. The other reason is when we moved to 55 Manchester Street, which was a nicer neighborhood, my father thought I ought to learn to play the violin like every good Jewish boy. So I took violin lessons from a man, Mr. Davidson, an Englishman. He lived in a nice old house, and he taught violin on the ground floor and his wife taught piano on the second floor. I used to go there, and I played the violin for him for about eight or nine years, but I wasn't any good and I didn't like exercises, so I just played pieces. He didn't care. He humored me along. But to cut it all short—I don't know

if I'm being long-winded, but I'll go on. He had two sons. I never met them, but he spoke of them often. They were at a place called MIT, which I didn't know at that time whether it was plumber academy or a college or what it was. My uncle, the one that had received my mother and father, was living in Boston. He had moved to Boston, and he was married and he had children. We used to visit him. So I knew it was in Cambridge and all that. I guess I was sort of slow in school because I was sick a lot. I didn't finish elementary school, I think, until I was fifteen, and I finished high school at nineteen. Most kids were seventeen. I must have been around twelve or so when I decided to be an architect and go to MIT for these two big reasons. And I always tell the story to young students of architecture—in my case, ignorance was bliss. The young people today know so damn much about what's going on in the world, so they're confused as to what they want to do. I have two nieces who have changed course about three times. They've been in school eight years changing courses. But I didn't, and so it was sort of through ignorance that I picked that. I couldn't draw. I never could draw well, but in the seventh grade I had a nice teacher and I got the catalog for MIT for entrance requirements. They required college boards, and they required physics and chemistry and four years of math and the state

required biology. So she made out my curriculum for the four years of high school.

Blum: In the seventh grade?

Bunshaft: Yes. She was a very nice woman. I don't know her name. She was a blond. She made out these four years, and I just took it like that. I started taking college boards in my sophomore year. I took them right through. Of course, I was never up in the high top nineties and ninety-five and all that. There were people there who were averaging ninety-five. I was probably in the low eighties. I was not a mingler. I think I said in the book [Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, by Carol Herselle Krinsky. New York: Architectural History Foundation, and Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1988] I was sort of a sissy. I didn't mingle. When I was in public school, you took manual training, which was playing around with wood. When I moved to the high school, which was a block away, after school I used to go over and putter around in the manual training place. The teacher there let me. Eventually I set up a little woodworking place down in the basement of our house. With my allowance I'd buy Stanley tools. I was not a boy who ran around with the guys and got into trouble or chased

girls. You could say I was a sissy or kind of a jerk. Anyhow, that's how it was. After four years, I got into MIT. What I was pretty good at was math, and what I was terrible at was English and French. I avoided public speaking. In fact, at MIT we had public speaking. I wouldn't do was forty-five. My English, I think, I just passed, but I got very high grades in science and math. The fellow students up in the nineties, when I said I was going to MIT, they practically laughed in my face—how can a jerk like this get in, you know. “You don't take drawing?” I said, “No, it's not required.” But I got in. There are many courses at MIT, something like eighteen courses or different fields. Architecture was Course Four. It's the oldest architectural school in the country. They don't take the courses that the rest of the students take, which are physics and chemistry and calculus. We didn't have to take those three. If we had, I would have flunked out. I did take calculus.

Blum: Well, calculus would have been okay.

Bunshaft: No, I had a hell of a time with it. I just didn't know what they were talking about. Anyhow, I entered there, and I took French and everything. After a while, the French teacher said, “I don't know how you got in. I looked at your record and you got a forty-

five.” We used to be seated alphabetically. There was a French-American named Baxter, who was raised in France but he had American parents or one of them was. So he used to help me do my homework and all that. This teacher used to say, “How come you get A’s and B’s on your homework and get a thirty on your exams?” Anyhow, at that time, it was the first year they changed the architectural course from four years to five. The entering class was about forty architectural students. Today, the architectural school at Columbia I think has a hundred and fifty coming in.

Blum: These were also Depression years.

Bunshaft: 1928 was just before the Depression, but I went through the Depression. I wasn’t aware of it. In the courses in architecture, you started real design of buildings and things in your second year. The first year you did classical orders and you took a lot of other courses. Do you know Boston at all?

Blum: A little.

Bunshaft: MIT architectural school was close to Copley Square. That’s where MIT started, but now the main school is over in

Cambridge, so we sometimes had to go over there for courses. We were thought of as the pansies by the engineers over there, and we thought of them as hayseeds, you know. Most of the people at that time who went to MIT to take engineering of various kinds were really fanatically dedicated to their fields. I think the entire class of 1928, all the courses, was eight hundred, and in the first term they busted about three hundred. They used to be quite liberal in taking in, and then they'd flunk on physics and chemistry and calculus.

Blum: So they reduced it by about fifty percent.

Bunshaft: Terrific reduction.

Blum: You're suggesting there was perhaps a competition or a conflict between those students who were engineers or hoping to be architects.

Bunshaft: No, they were two different types. Architecture at that time was a Beaux Arts system and was about aesthetics. They were two different types of people. It was not serious. This was like kidding around—nothing like now where two factions get out and beat

each other up.

Blum: I'm not suggesting that. I'm just saying there were two different directions.

Bunshaft: I knew hardly anybody except in the architectural school. Nobody over there.

Blum: Did you have to take engineering courses?

Bunshaft: Well, we took structure. Most of the courses we had to take across the way were like English and French. In fact, they sent me a photostat years after with all my grades for every year. It was interesting. But the architects were interested mainly in the design course. You worked in a big studio, like a big drafting room. Each person had a place, and they gave you problems—what they called “nine-hour sketch problems”—on a Monday or something. Then they had problems where you did a preliminary idea, and you'd work on that for four weeks. You'd have to stay to that crazy idea whether it was good or not and develop it. You got crits from your teachers. They'd come around, and depending how good they were, they would say something

or do something or sketch something. That was the entire life. The other courses were something you had to get over that you paid no attention to, except architectural history. They called it architectural history, but it was art and architecture. You took that for five years, three classes a week.

Blum: But it was a history course?

Bunshaft: It started off with the formation of the earth as they knew it then, and, after five years, this old German teacher got up to the Renaissance. He covered everything—painting, sculpture, everything.

Blum: What kind of a text was used?

Bunshaft: We didn't use anything special. When I entered the architectural school at MIT, I think a year or two later they put up a painting of four professors who had been there forty years in architecture. One was a fellow who taught freehand drawing. And from that man—his name was Brown—came some very important etchers and others. Taylor Arms, did you ever hear of him? Our history professor was another.

Blum: Yes, I did. Joshua Taylor Arms?

Bunshaft: Yes, I believe. He was taught by Brown. A fellow named Sam Chamberlain, who did some wonderful sketches. In fact, Skidmore, when he was on the Rotch Traveling Fellowship, used to hold the ladder for him when he was measuring for a building. Samuel Chamberlain used to teach us watercolors when he visited MIT. There were some very good men. Brown was a famous man. Our German historian would go to Germany every summer to learn more. Then there was a fellow named Gardner who was sort of the administrator or the dean of the school. I've forgotten who the fourth was. So it was a pretty good school. But after you got into the second year, the whole life was design. About four or five of us sort of got friendly. They were from all walks of life, but they were all interested in design. We hung around together.

Blum: Who were they?

Bunshaft: Well, the one name that stands out who is still a close friend of mine is a man named Leon Hyzen. He was from the Boston area.

I've forgotten who the others were. John Mihnos was another. Oh, there were a whole bunch. We stuck together throughout the five years. We got so we didn't care what our grades were in design as long as we were better. We wanted to be the best of us five.

Blum: It was the five of you against the class.

Bunshaft: No, it was just five of us who wanted to be the best, and we wanted, of course, to be the top of the class. But not against. That word didn't exist. We were in a period where Prohibition was kicked out around 1932 or something like that. Ecole des Beaux Arts, which was the main teaching system at that time in the United States, you associated that with *la vie bohème*, Bohemian life. So, I think all architects became Bohemians in a way, and that was one way—drinking and eating. We were, as I said, in the old part of Boston, so we never ate in any cafeterias. We'd go to Chinatown or some German bierstube or some little Russian restaurant. We were living not a typical college life. We were living a little better than that. In Prohibition days, I never had a drink until I was a sophomore, and that consisted of diluted alcohol with salt. Anyhow, we used to drink. We had a four-week problem, and we'd loaf the first two weeks. We had parties and

things. Then we'd work day and night. When we were serious, I used to have a habit of getting up early—I still have it—and I'd be at school at seven in the morning, because it was quiet and you could draw and do whatever you wanted. But unfortunately, by eleven I was tired. It was that sort of life. The Ecole des Beaux Arts in France was exactly the same thing. I niggered—the word “niggered” means to help or be of assistance. When I did go on the Rotch and landed in Paris, I remember niggering for some American who was doing a project at the Ecole. It's the same system—Bohemian life. That carried through to architects as they got older and got prosperous. Chicago's the best example of it. You ever hear of the Tavern Club?

Blum: Yes.

Bunshaft: That was nothing in the olden days except an architect's hangout for good drinking and partying. The club was created by—what's the big firm that used to be in Chicago?

Blum: Holabird and Root?

Bunshaft: Yes. That's in their building. They designed the building. Samuel

Marx did all the interiors and lived there. His wife wanted to move to New York and he refused for ten years. He would miss his luncheons at the Tavern Club. It was a great institution. In fact, this Bohemian thing carried on in Chicago amongst the older architects long after it ceased in New York. So, anyhow, we're getting way off the track.

Blum: Just as an aside, do you know how the Tavern Club came into being?

Bunshaft: No, I don't. But I think it started when they built that building.

Blum: I had heard that it was a spin-off of people from the Cliff Dwellers who really wanted to drink, who wanted their whiskey and it was at that time.

Bunshaft: I think I've heard that, too. Most of the architects in the 1930s and 1940s, and I suppose earlier in the 1920s, in Chicago, were all la boheme and they all hung around the Tavern Club if they had enough money. Owings and a guy named Shaw.

Blum: Alfred Shaw?

Bunshaft: Yes. They were two big drunkards. Even Mies was a member.

Blum: Of the Tavern Club?

Bunshaft: He gave a dinner for my wife and myself once. He was an old friend of mine. Anyhow, where are we? We're back at school.

Blum: Well, can we go back for one moment? Something occurs to me that you've said, going back to these incidents why you selected architecture. You mention seemingly separate incidents that sort of propelled you in this direction.

Bunshaft: Well, there were two. There was no profound thinking. See, you must remember my parents had no opinions about schools and they knew nothing about it.

Blum: Did they know what an architect was and did?

Bunshaft: I left out a little part. My father on Sundays had nothing to do. He used to like to go and see ordinary houses under construction. These were all sorts of two-family houses, one on top of each

other. He used to take me along, and so maybe that had a subconscious influence. But I could have chosen anything. They would have not had any opinion about it.

Blum: Architecture seems like a non-traditional choice for a Jewish man.

Bunshaft: Absolutely. But as I look back, I think I was an odd duck—I'm not being modest—as far as being a regular guy. A regular guy didn't spend his high-school evenings and weekends—not every time, but quite a bit—making furniture. That's what I did, what I told you about this manual training. And eventually I built a workbench, and I had a complete tool set and all that. I made furniture for our house, some of it. Before I went to college, I made furniture, including a bed and cabinets and all that. With my allowance, I'd go to buy lumber. So I was not a Boy Scout type of fellow or any other kind of fellow. I didn't go out with girls. I don't think I kissed a girl until I was about twenty-two. My father used to worry that I didn't drink. He was a regular man, my father. In fact, my sophomore year—this was Prohibition—we lived in Buffalo, which is just across from Canada. They used to smuggle a lot of first-class liquor. He gave me about eight bottles to go to MIT—Drambuie, cognac and scotch and all sorts of

things. He didn't know what they were, but neither did I. I had a whole cabinet full. I didn't use it for quite a while.

Blum: You were probably very popular during Prohibition.

Bunshaft: No, I didn't use it much. I didn't know what it was until I got introduced to it by a friend of mine. The first drink I had was raw alcohol, lemon and salt. That's a Mexican drink. So, anyhow, what was your question?

Blum: Well, I asked you whether early on this was an unusual career choice for a Jewish man.

Bunshaft: It wasn't unusual for me because I didn't know any other.

Blum: But you seemed to be so determined. By seventh grade you were already fulfilling the college-entrance requirements.

Bunshaft: I think I wasn't aware of it, but I think what has helped me for the rest of my life was sort of logic, common sense, and doing it. I didn't hesitate. I never hesitated. I never thought about it, but I had no other thing to think of, and I don't say it that profoundly,

but as I look back it must have been that simple: “I’ll be an architect and I’ll go to MIT because I like my violin teacher.” There wasn’t any discussion or intellectual discussion at all. I made up my mind to do that—and it wasn’t made by any profound thing. I guess I’d been looking at buildings and things and I’d been making furniture. You could say it was a subconscious direction. I didn’t know really too much of what architecture is except for building. After that I never had to think what I was going to do until I came back from the Rotch. I didn’t have to decide a goddamn thing. I set that in seventh grade, and I went through MIT and I was fortunate enough to win the Rotch. When I came back it was then I had to do something, find a job. My father supported me all through college, including after I got through in 1935. I finished in 1933, a bachelor’s. In 1934, I finished a master’s, but they had then added a thesis that was to be done after this. I decided to try to get a job. This was 1934 in Boston. You couldn’t get a job. In fact, for students, some architects used to make them bring pencils and they worked for nothing. I was a big shot. I got five dollars a week, and I had this Chevrolet convertible, and I got a job with a fellow named Harold Field Kellogg. It’s amazing I remember this. Usually I can’t remember my own name. Harold Field Kellogg. He was a real Bohemian. He

lived on Commonwealth Avenue in a big townhouse. He didn't have a dime, I guess, and he had a couple of sons. The drafting room was in the living room. He was altering one part of an old hotel, the Hotel Vendome on Commonwealth. They were going to put in a restaurant down below. I worked on that. I puttered around with him from June until the following spring. My father was supporting me. I used to drive Kellogg around. He didn't have a car, and I think *I* spent more on gas than he paid me. And then the Rotch the following year in 1935. The Rotch Scholarship, you know what it is?

Blum: Well, what I think it is, yes. Explain it.

Bunshaft: Well, I'm having a good time. The Rotch is one of the nicest things they ever thought up. Two sisters created the Rotch in honor of their father, who was not an architect but evidently interested in it, by giving fifty thousand dollars to set up a fund, the income from which would give architecture students the chance to travel. They set that up. I was the fiftieth winner, so it must have been set up around 1885 or even earlier. That scholarship was open to graduates of schools in Massachusetts who had had one year of work in Massachusetts, I think, or an

architectural man who's had eight years' experience. So in order to take it, you had to have one year of experience. Old Kellogg wrote a letter for me saying that even though I'd only been with him nine months, I'd worked so much overtime it was the equivalent of a year, which was a goddamn lie. So I took the Rotch.

Blum: What did you have to do to compete for the Rotch?

Bunshaft: You had to have those credentials. You had a twenty-four hour sketch in which you showed a design in a very preliminary way that you then spent two weeks developing into a final design en loge, meaning no helpers. They all cheated. Leon Hyzen, my close friend, and I were in it the same year, and we made a deal we wouldn't cheat, wouldn't have helpers. We did it, and there would only be about eight or ten people competing because it was restricted to Massachusetts.

Blum: Everyone was given the same problem?

Bunshaft: Yes, the title and a rough outline of what the owner would want. I left out an important thing about MIT. During the period we were

there, we had Dean Emerson. He was really the epitome of old New England, but a very nice man, very nice. He used to give scholarships privately to students. He lived at Brattle Street in Cambridge in a house that was built in sixteen-something. The competition was essentially between Harvard students and MIT students. I won it the first time I took it. A lot of people took it several years in a row. Leon Hyzen won it the next year and met me in Europe. Anyhow, that's what the Rotch is. It's without question one of the most successful ones, especially in the early years. The man that did the Lincoln Memorial was a Rotch. They were all important. In the generation before me, Wally Harrison, Ralph Walker, Louis Skidmore, Bill Hartmann.

[Tape 1: Side 2]

Bunshaft: Am I doodling too much?

Blum: No, you are not. You're pre-empting every question I can think of.

Bunshaft: You know I'm old, and I can reminisce for the next ten years.

Blum: Please.

Bunshaft: So that's what the Rotch was.

Blum: Did you have any obligation after winning the Rotch and being awarded the three thousand dollars—enough theoretically to travel for two years—to send back any sketches, any reports, anything of that sort?

Bunshaft: Oh, yes. Yes.

Blum: What was your obligation for taking this?

Bunshaft: It was very simple. They said you could travel wherever you wanted to. They expected you to look at architecture, of course, and they expected you to send them written reports every two or three months. Everybody did sketches. The first Rotch winner, a man named Blackall, was secretary of the Rotch when I won it. He'd been secretary for fifty years. He and his wife were very nice. I, at that time, had a little apartment in Cambridge. I didn't know it at the time I got the apartment, but he was living in the

same building. Some people after I won it kidded me. Anyhow, I visited them after, and his wife would tell stories of the marital problems of Rotch winners. She knew all of them. Some of them were married, some went around the world. Bill Hartmann went to India and all that. It was very informal. You didn't get the three thousand. You got a letter of credit of seven hundred and fifty, and you could write for another letter of credit. They would leave them with banks wherever you wanted. I once sat in Milan with fifty cents waiting for bank to open on a Monday. Skidmore won it. Did I mention that?

Blum: Yes.

Bunshaft: In fact, he's the one who used to hold the ladder for Sam Chamberlain when Sam would be measuring. He was a Rotch, and Sam was, of course, much older. The Rotch was a wonderful thing. I left out another one of our group names: Frank Faillace, Italian of descent. His father was a doctor. There was another scholarship at MIT for architects, the MIT Traveling Scholarship, for one year.

Blum: Did you win that?

Bunshaft: No. When I won the Rotch I hadn't finished my thesis yet. I finished my master's in 1934, but during the year of 1934-1935, I was working for Kellogg and I was also supposed to be doing my thesis. But I won the Rotch in April, so I really got to work and finished my thesis. I got my master's in June, and Frank and I sailed in July to Europe. There was this old building and Professor Gardner, who ran the whole thing and his secretary, who we were all pally with. One day I got a notice in 1935 after winning the Rotch. I got an announcement that I had received the MIT Traveling Scholarship, which never entered my head. MIT wouldn't give you that if you had the Rotch. So I took the letter to the secretary, and she looked at it and she didn't know. She took it to Gardner. Well, to cut it all short, it must have been a blunder, but they wouldn't take it back. A few weeks later, Faillace got the MIT scholarship with the money. So I had an honorary MIT Traveling Scholarship.

Blum: Without money.

Bunshaft: Of course. So I traveled with Frank Faillace for nine months. We went all over Europe, all over. It was not traveling like today. We

went to Granada for a week. We never traveled two days here and two days there.

Blum: Well, as much as I could pick up from various sources—correct me if I’ve picked up something incorrect—you went to Sweden.

Blum: Well, I’ll give you the itinerary if you’d like it.

Blum: Oh, please.

Bunshaft: We arrived in the summertime. Oh, I can give you day by day. I’ve forgotten the name of the boat. We took the boat train to Paris, and we knew we’d be met by Professor [Lawrence B.] Anderson, who was a Paris Prize-winner who had gone to MIT and who had come back and was our critic in our fifth year. We had become drinking friends after that year of 1934 to 1935. We all became pretty good friends. He met us, and it was July 13, 1936, a Saturday, I think. He took us around. Well, I won’t go into it. We could go on forever.

Blum: Please.

Bunshaft: We met in the afternoon, and he took us to a pension where we stayed. This was on the Left Bank, where the Ecole des Beaux Arts is. The first meal we had he took us to Brasserie Lipp. Do you know that place? This was in the days of Deux Magots—you know that café?

Blum: Yes.

Bunshaft: That in those days was the architects' hangout, the students at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and architects who came to Paris. That was their hangout. Earlier it was the painters and things. It was only a block away from the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Anyhow, I thought to myself the first night, "What the hell am I doing here having a hot dog, Brasserie Lipp sausage with sauerkraut?"

Blum: That was really Bohemian.

Bunshaft: Now, I've been going to Paris on buildings we've been doing in, say, Brussels or England and we've traveled a lot, and I always end up in Paris. I look forward to eating there every time.

Blum: Watching the world go by.

Bunshaft: Well, you sat in the back room. Anyhow, it took me about thirty years before the proprietor knew me.

Blum: Same proprietor for thirty years?

Bunshaft: Well, it's the same family, the same man. In fact, in 1985 I saw him, and he greeted me like an old friend. You know, I only come there two or three times a year, but we were there last year and he's dead. But his son, who I didn't think knew us, greeted us like we were old friends. My wife's [Nina Bunshaft] got character with that knob. I guess it helps to remember her. Anyhow, where were we?

Blum: You were in Paris the first night. You were talking about your itinerary.

Bunshaft: Well, from Paris I'll be brief. The first trip we took north. I think we went to Belgium, Holland and North Germany, Bremen and things like that. Then we went up by boat train to Copenhagen.

Emerson had recommended taking the canal boat trip across Sweden. I don't know if you know it, but you have Denmark here and then there's water and then there's Sweden. Goteborg, I think, is the town in Sweden. You go across through twenty-six locks. This is a little canal. Maybe the boat's twenty feet wide and the canal's twenty-four feet. It's a small boat. You can look out your porthole and see a cow chewing cud. That took three days. You go through a big lake in the middle. So that's how we went to Stockholm. From Stockholm, I think we must have come back to Germany then to Paris. That's our first foray. We made Paris our headquarters. By that time it was getting kind of fall-like, and we went south. How these things worked in those days was when we were at the Deux Magots, you'd see people on different scholarships. There was someone at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and some traveling from different schools, and you'd bull about itineraries, and you'd get lists of all the pensions.

Blum: I have a question. What did you seek out in these places? The question remains for me, and I'm missing a link somewhere. You were trained in the Beaux Arts system.

Bunshaft: That's not quite correct. Let's get down to it. I'll make a simple

statement. The most education we got is from each other in this group.

Blum: The five of you.

Bunshaft: And the library. We, of course, learned how to draw. We learned history, and we got some good crits. But this was a period of transition. Anderson was teaching in my master's year. They were all going to sort of French Modern, Modern.

Blum: But you say it's French Modern.

Bunshaft: Well, it's sort of like art nouveau, maybe. I don't know what you call it. But we, as students, were looking in the library. I wasn't, but my pals were. I used to wait for them to bring the books up and then I'd look at them. We were looking at Le Corbusier. Le Corbusier, in my opinion, was the person who created worldwide modern architecture as a standard through his books. Most of it was projects not built. Some were built. The Bauhaus was there, too. When I say worldwide, I'm not talking about the United States. All the southern countries all through the world were all concrete countries, and Le Corbusier's stuff came to them

naturally. [Oscar] Niemeyer did a building. He could never have done that building without having—he didn't study with Le Corbusier, but he had his books.

Blum: Le Corbusier's writings.

Bunshaft: Le Corbusier is the main teacher. Like Mrs. [Carol] Krinsky kept saying, "Well, this is like..." You're seeing an exercise on them. Your first drafts were so ridiculous. Historians have a habit of finding a source. This building must have come from this one, you know. A source, which sort of proved everybody copied. That may have been true in the Renaissance. Every time she referred to some building, she referred to either the Salvation Army Building by Corbu or the Swiss Pavilion. I said, "That's nonsense. What you should say at the beginning is that everything that every young architect did was influenced by Le Corbusier, period. You don't have to repeat it." You know what I'm saying? He was the main teacher of modern architecture through his books. Then, of course, Mies had a more sophisticated thing, but that came later. Mies didn't publish as early as Le Corbusier and also Mies didn't blossom really until he came to this country. Mies was the Mondrian of architecture, and

Le Corbusier was the Picasso. That's very simple.

Blum: That's a wonderful comparison.

Bunshaft: Mondrian was a very disciplined, limited man, but a perfectionist, and that's exactly what Mies was. So where were we? When we went to Europe, we went to look, to admire old buildings. In fact, there wasn't much to see in the way of modern. We saw it in Rotterdam. We saw the Van Nelle factory, which was a very important thing. That's covered in the book. And we went to see something by [Willem Marinus] Dudok, who wasn't very good, in brick. The reason you went to Stockholm was to see the town hall, which was not very modern but relatively. When I was in school the first few years, we always had some chapel or some church or something to do. I was a Romanesque man. I loved primitive things—archaic. I never felt close to anything Renaissance, but I admired Romanesque. As far as what the Rotch did for me—well, it must have done a lot of things, but the main thing as far as architecture is that great buildings are basically simple and all usually built out of one material. A town had a quarry one place, and that's how they built it. The great buildings of the world that have endured don't have any gingerbread.

There's no superficial, arbitrary. The Chartres Cathedral you could say is full of gingerbread, but that isn't true. The structure is very clear. The enrichment of it, that's a tradition of that period. A church had to have saints and whatnot. That's what I learned there.

Blum: Is that a realization that led you to modern architecture or was it social conditions or demands?

Bunshaft: I'm not a profound guy. I've never been an intellectual about architecture. I think what led every young man to modern architecture is that he's young and he wants to do what's new. There's no profound discussion about whether he wants to be a traditionalist or a modernist. It wasn't that in the air at all. The world in the 1930s and 1940s had an air of going ahead. In fact, I think any young man, unless he's something peculiar or he comes from...

Blum: You were trained in a very traditional way.

Bunshaft: Only for part of the time. In the first place, let's get that straight.

Blum: I was talking about MIT.

Bunshaft: Let's get that straight. Architecture, let's say, is the whole alphabet, A to X-Y-Z. As far as schooling goes, it's A-B-C. There are twenty-three more letters or something. So the word "training" sounds profound, but it isn't. You're just getting awakened to it.

Blum: While you were in school, did you read Le Corbusier's *Toward a New Architecture*?

Bunshaft: I don't read books. I mean, I read a lot of novels and things, or biographies, but I very seldom read architectural books at all or art books. I look at the pictures or the drawings.

Blum: Is that how you became aware of Le Corbusier's work, through journals or books?

Bunshaft: Books. He used to publish these early Le Corbusier books in the late 1920s and early 1930s. They were the most exciting things. His style of drawing, his style of presenting was very

contemporary. There was something—it was a new revelation. There was no discussion whether we should do this or carry on doing classical.

Blum: During the years you spent in school, there were some important events architecturally that happened.

Bunshaft: What?

Blum: Well, one was the construction of the Barcelona Pavilion that...

Bunshaft: I don't think I was aware of that. I wasn't aware of the Swiss Pavilion or the Salvation Army until we got to Paris and some of the guys said, "You ought to go and see it."

Blum: Well, those had only been built. The Barcelona Pavilion was late in the 1920s.

Bunshaft: I know they were already built, but I wasn't aware of them.

Blum: What about the 1933-1934 Century of Progress in Chicago?

Bunshaft: I went there with my mother. It was just a big world's fair. You see, you're trying to get me to say that I—not "you're trying to get me" but you think that some guy that's twenty-four years old...

Blum: You were almost graduating with your bachelor's.

Bunshaft: I didn't think about any of this stuff. I went and saw it, and there was nothing there to get excited about as far as I was concerned. It was a bunch of gingerbread.

Blum: Did you see the "House of Tomorrow" that George Fred Keck designed?

Bunshaft: I wasn't aware of it. When I went to work for Skidmore, Owings and Merrill in New York, you know Skidmore was in charge of design of the Chicago World's Fair. You know all that, so I'll skip that.

Blum: Please repeat it, because it means something.

Bunshaft: Okay. I'll tell you how the firm started. We can wander around. Skidmore worked for Cram and Ferguson, an old Gothic firm in Boston, a big firm. At night he would go to the Boston Architectural Club, which was where draftsmen and people who were working could take design problems, and the teachers from Harvard and MIT would come and crit them. Skid went there. So did Wally Harrison. It was a great institution, the Boston Architectural Club. It's still going. These people could take a problem that if they won it, they'd get a year at MIT or Harvard. Skid won it and went to MIT. I think he went there a couple of years. Then when he'd been working for about eight years, he won the Rotch and he went to Europe. While he was in Europe sitting on his butt in Deux Magots café, Raymond Hood was over there. I don't know what year this is. It must have been around 1930. He got acquainted with Skid and told Skid that when he came back to come out to see Hood, who was in charge of the Fair. The Chicago World's Fair when it first started, I think there was a man named General [Rufus] Dawes who was the administrator of it all. He hired only New York architects. The Board of Design of the Chicago World's Fair were all New York architects. I don't know why. Hood was the head man. So Skidmore came back and went out to Chicago and got a job. He

was the design draftsman or junior designer for this board. I think shortly after that, Mr. Dawes fired the whole damned New York group, and there was no architectural board. This little guy, Skidmore, reviewed all the designs that were presented for the World's Fair by companies. Do you know this story?

Blum: No, I don't know this part of it. I didn't realize there was this...

Bunshaft: I had a picture, but I can't find it. When Skidmore returned, got off the boat in New York, somebody took a picture. He was wearing a derby, had a waxed moustache, which he kept all his life, and a cane and he was wearing a raccoon coat or something. He was funny. This little guy with this waxed moustache sitting in some drafting room responsible for what other architects did for most of the buildings. I suppose the master plan must have been done before because he didn't do that. As a result, Skidmore got to know a lot of people of these commercial companies—Westinghouse, Heinz, all of those. After the Fair, they were going to do the Museum of Science and Industry or get it going. Skid was hired to go to study the one in Munich. When Skid was on the Rotch, he met a young lady named Eloise Owings. They came back together, and she introduced him to her

brother, Nat Owings, who was working as a draftsman for some big firm in New York that was doing the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. Skid married Eloise. Skid went on to get the job from Hood, and Skidmore got Owings a job. Owings leaves out the small print, but he didn't work on the design of the World's Fair. He sold space in the amusement area to companies.

Blum: Concessions?

Bunshaft: Concessions. Yes, a salesman. He had nothing to do with design. He wasn't a designer. These are facts. This isn't him writing a book. Anyhow, so that's how Skid got acquainted. As I say, afterward Skid went to Munich and on his way back he ran into Owings, who had married a prominent social girl named [Emily] Otis, and they were on their honeymoon. They were both at some railroad station near London. This was 1935. They decided they would go into business together when they got back.

Blum: This was after the 1933-1934 Century of Progress.

Bunshaft: Yes, this is 1935.

Blum: Well, I think that tradition has it and also Nat Owings's book has it that he and Skidmore met at the World's Fair, but you're suggesting that they met prior to that?

Bunshaft: They didn't meet at all. What I'm telling you right now—Skid met Eloise Owings when he was on that Rotch. When he came back, they came back together. They weren't married. He met Owings in New York when Owings was working as a draftsman at the Waldorf Astoria.

Blum: Did Owings come to have his job at the World's Fair because of Skidmore?

Bunshaft: I think he must have been without a job, and Skidmore got him a job—this is now some time later—got him a job at the World's Fair a couple of years before it opened selling exhibit space. You might wonder how I know all this, because it was before my time. When the firm started in New York, Skid liked to drink. He liked company, and we were a small group. At the time I was hired—well, I'll go in sequence. After they decided to become partners at the railroad station, they came back—I even know the details, but I won't tell it. They opened a little office and they had

nothing to do, because Owings had a couple of friends they did some interiors for—you know, selected wallpaper. They were doing nothing much. All the stories go that Skidmore, Owings and Merrill opened in Chicago. They literally may have opened, but their success started with what I'm about to tell you. It wasn't in Chicago. The firm legally became a partnership in 1936. In 1986 we had a fiftieth reunion, fiftieth celebration. I don't know what time of year. They had a young lawyer who was [Marshall] Gross Sampsell. He worked out the partnership for them. I mention him because he's the man who's responsible for the creation of what the firm became. He's a marvelous human being.

Blum: You mean the legal structure?

Bunshaft: Well, he was more than a legal guy. He was a great human being. I could keep you here for ten days. But, anyhow, I just mention this so you'll remember he's at the beginning. They had nothing to do. In the spring of 1937—I don't know how Skidmore and Owings got word of it—there was a building that Raymond Hood did in New York, the American Radiator Building, a black building on 40th Street facing the park. American Radiator occupied it and they were going to take a lower level, a basement,

and make it additional exhibit space for their products. So Skidmore and Owings decided that Skid would go to New York and see if he could get the job. In 1936, it was really still the Depression in architecture. And Skid came down. I think he came in on Friday and went to see this man or he went to see him Saturday morning. This man was sort of impressed, and he asked if Skidmore had an office in New York, and Skidmore said yes. This man said, "If you can bring in a proposal on your New York stationery, I'll give you the job Monday morning." So Skid went to see friends of his, Scott and Teegen. They're two people that had a firm. Otto Teegen was a friend of Skid's through Paris. Scott and Teegen were employees of a great architect named Joseph Urban. I don't know if you ever heard of him.

Blum: Yes, as a matter of fact, in Owings's book, he claims that the firm whose space they used was Urban and Teegen, not Scott and Teegen. I wonder what that discrepancy was.

Bunshaft: Joseph Urban was an architect from Austria of the Hoffmann school and evidently a hot shot because at the age of nineteen, he was designing a palace for some Egyptian king. He came here and he was evidently quite a figure. He became a close friend of

Ziegfeld. The Ziegfeld Theatre in this city was done by Joseph Urban and Urban's daughter did all the murals. He did the famous restaurant in the park. He was quite a man, and the only man that I knew of that Frank Lloyd Wright liked very much. When he died, Scott and Teegen, who were working for him, took over. They were not the kind of guys to get jobs, and they were doing nothing in this office when Skidmore borrowed it. This office was at 5 East 57th. Owings wasn't there. Also he wanted to get in Urban's name but not tell a long story. So Teegen found some printer and they printed stationery Saturday afternoon and submitted the proposal and got the job. Walking up that day or the next day, somebody said to Skidmore, "Well, you got here in a hurry," and he turned and Ralph Walker—do you know who he is?

Blum: I know his name.

Bunshaft: He said, "You got here in a hurry." And Skid said, "What are you talking about?" Walker was then head of the New York World's Fair Design Board.

Blum: For 1939?

Bunshaft: 1939. He said, "We wrote you and asked if you'd come and be a consultant to our board," at two hundred dollars a day or something like that. So Skid stayed. During the period, he was there for about a week, all these people whose designs he had to approve were coming in to get a space for a building or whatever it was, including the H.J. Heinz Company. The New York architects woke up that Skid was getting jobs away from them, so they fired him. That's how the firm started. The firm started with the New York World's Fair. They did about nineteen different projects, all of them lousy except maybe one.

Blum: There was one that wasn't

Bunshaft: The Venezuelan Pavilion. Owings got one from the Swift people out in Chicago. The firm's volume of work, reputation and all that came from New York. The only thing that was started there in Chicago was just one hole-in-the-wall office and two men saying they'll be partners. The firm didn't get alive in Chicago to any stature at all until about 1950 or later when they did the glass building for Inland Steel. Even for that one I had to come out

there. The client insisted I be the designer of it. I went to a meeting, but I didn't design it. I appeared, and Walter Netsch eventually did it.

Blum: There is some confusion about who did that building, whether it was Bruce Graham or Walter Netsch.

Bunshaft: I could bore you with stories. Leigh Block's brother Joseph Block, who was the head man, is a much nicer man. Leigh was sort of a dilettante but a great art collector. He insisted that I be the designer. At the first meeting, the Chicago office had made a little plastic model of it. Pure plastic, just a little toy. There was no metal or anything. Just scratch lines for floors, and they liked it. I had to present it. The second meeting I didn't go to. Oh, I think I did. The second meeting they started showing the design, the metalwork. There was very little metalwork on that. It was mostly glass. Leigh Block said, "God, what a relief! I thought you meant to make it all glass!"

Blum: Did you design?

Bunshaft: I had no part in the design. I just went for eyewash. I didn't want

to be in. At that time, they got confidence in Walter Netsch, and that's all there is to it. I never went again. Never. He did it. Walter Netsch did that building. Bruce had nothing to do with it. So, I just told you how the firm started. The reason I know all this is, as I started to say, Skidmore used to love to have a drink after work and to talk or if we traveled together, he would tell stories about all these things. He wasn't the kind of guy that was writing for the press or anything, like Owings did. Owings was a brilliant salesman. That's the wrong word. He was brilliant at getting work, and Skidmore was sort of shy at getting work. But after Skidmore got a job, the client became a member of the family, mainly through them having to take home Skid when he was drunk. There was a period where you weren't drinking with the chairman of the board of a company. You were drinking with a vice president.

Blum: You were pointing out the difference between Nat and Skid.

Bunshaft: I should say that Skid became friendly and jolly when he had a few drinks. Owings, on the other hand, became belligerent. So they were different natures. That's not important. I don't want to give a picture that they were drunkards. But socially Skid was

more relaxed when he had a drink or two.

Blum: Well, Nat had a problem with drinking later in life.

Bunshaft: Well, he ended up with quite a problem. Anyhow, to illustrate this question of clients becoming close friends of his, it was responsible really for what happened to the firm after the World's Fair. During the World's Fair, Skidmore did the big exhibit in a building that Robert Moses built for the city of New York, and Skidmore did the exhibit and became a buddy of Robert Moses. Not a close buddy, but somehow Robert Moses liked him. That's number one, and as a result of that, after the Fair, which was the only thing going on in New York in 1937, 1938, 1939, there was a start of public housing. Moses, I think, got Skidmore a project to do. That stemmed from the World's Fair of 1939. The other thing that came out of the World's Fair was that we did a building for Westinghouse. The general manager of that building was a man named Wilson, who worked for Westinghouse. After the Fair, it turned out that he had a patent on a continuous plug-in for base outlets, electrical outlets. As a result of that, he eventually was hired by a non-profit organization called the Pierce Foundation, which was exploring building prefabricated houses out of

plywood. Wilson went with this foundation, and one of the things they needed was an architect. Wilson, being a good friend of Skidmore's, Skidmore and Owings were selected to be advisors to the Pierce Foundation.

Blum: By that time it was Skidmore, Owings and Merrill?

Bunshaft: To get that straight, during the World's Fair the firm was Skidmore, Owings, John Moss Associates. John Moss was a man who had worked for Walter Dorwin Teague, and he was very gifted at renderings, especially with an airbrush. He was an attractive man. In fact, he hired me—he and Skid did. Skidmore made him an associate. I guess that's the only way he could get him out of Teague's office. The firm was nothing. You had Skidmore, Owings, but Skid was kind of a designer of sorts, but not much, and Owings was none. Owings couldn't draw water. So that's how the firm started in New York. Afterwards, after the fair, John Moss disappeared. I mean, the thing broke up. The firm was Skidmore and Owings.

Blum: How did John Merrill come to be an associate?

Bunshaft: We're now in around 1940, and federal public housing is starting up. I'm guessing at this part. There was a firm in Chicago of architects who were getting some of this public housing. So Owings got one of the partners in that firm—I don't know if he was partner or not, but he wasn't on the letterhead though he may have been a partner—by the name of John Merrill to come and join Skidmore, Owings. And it was made Skidmore, Owings and Merrill.

Blum: Do you know the Chicago firm that John Merrill was with?

Bunshaft: No. The only thing I know is that they did the Chicago Club. They were the architects for altering the Chicago Club after one pier broke down.

[Tape 2: Side 1]

Blum: You were talking about how John Merrill came to be.

Bunshaft: He was with the firm that had done the second phase of the Chicago Club, and he was a very nice man. He went to MIT. He took Course 4A, which was architectural engineering, but he was

brought into the firm, as I understand it, to help get public housing in Chicago.

Blum: So that is how it became Skidmore, Owings and Merrill.

Bunshaft: That's how it started. It didn't become that. He wasn't a real partner, and I don't know what arrangement he had, but they used the name of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill for the purpose, I guess Owings thought, of getting public housing. Now, this is around 1940. One of the early jobs Chicago got was designing a presidential suite in the Stevens Hotel on the twenty-fifth floor.

Blum: I know you were involved in that because Ambrose Richardson wrote a little essay that was published several years ago that describes the time in Chicago with you.

Bunshaft: It was a wonderful time.

Blum: Could we, before we begin that, go back to your travel in Europe for just a brief revisit?

Bunshaft: Sure. Oh, yes, I started to Spain and then we came back and I didn't...

Blum: You were about to talk about your southern trip.

Bunshaft: Oh, yes. That's a good idea. We got our whole itinerary from a couple of men who had just come back from Spain. We followed their itinerary and their pensions and we spent two months in Spain. We did the real classical tour. On the way down, we stopped in Poitiers in France, which has one of the most beautiful Romanesque church facades in the world. We stopped at a couple other places—Cahors. We went up into the Basque country. We entered Spain at San Sebastian.

Blum: You said you entered Spain through San Sebastian, but since then you went and got your itinerary, a little diary that you have.

Bunshaft: Let me go on with this. You can later on ask questions. You can ask questions about Germany or something.

Blum: I will. You said you entered Spain in San Sebastian.

Bunshaft: We didn't think too much of San Sebastian. Then we went to Burgos, which has got a wonderful cathedral. From there, Valladolid, Salamanca, Avila, and Segovia. Segovia was really fabulous and so was Avila.

Blum: You say it was fabulous. What was fabulous?

Bunshaft: Segovia has a chateau on a point up on a cliff. It's dramatic from below, and it has a great church. It's just the whole spirit of it. Now, this is in a period that has nothing as we know travel today. About five years ago, we spent a day in Segovia. When Frank [Faillace] and I went there, we spent perhaps a week or almost a week. We would go and look at a building or two, and then we'd have lunch and we might go to a café and play dominoes or something. We were living there. We weren't going in high-class places, but we were just citizens in ordinary cafés. Even though we didn't speak the language, we really lived at the tempo of the people of the community—as I look back on it, the tempo of the town itself. We weren't tourists rushing around.

Blum: So you were able to absorb more of the flavor.

Bunshaft: We weren't conscious of it. I might add what we got in the habit of doing when we arrived. We always traveled by train. That's all there was and usually second- or third-class. When we'd get off in the town, we'd go to a tobacco shop or whatever general shop that sold postcards—these brown postcards—and we'd look at all of them to see the buildings we wanted to go and look at. We bought the cards. When I came home, I must have had a couple of thousand, which I've given to the Avery Library. They were our guide. We had not much else. I did buy some Baedekers. If we liked the town, we'd stay there a while. The postcards were our guides, and we lived in each town. Avila was impressive. We also did watercolors and sometimes drawings. I did a pretty good one of Avila. Avila is a walled town with these great big circular things thrusting out from the wall.

Blum: Buttresses?

Bunshaft: Not buttresses. They're really great big curved towers where the people firing on top could get out and get different angles. They are still there.

Blum: Of your whole Spain journey, what stands out in your mind?

Bunshaft: I would say Seville, the cathedral, and, of course, the Alhambra in Granada.

Blum: For what reasons? What was special about those buildings?

Bunshaft: Well, the cathedral in Seville is really a grand, tremendous, dramatic interior. It really has something unique. In Spanish churches, I would say that's one of the great things. Then there's the palace of the Arabs, I guess, but that wasn't as important. Of course, the Alhambra is a world of poetry. We spent Christmas in Gibraltar. After Christmas we went to Granada to the Alhambra. There were little pensions that were almost part of the Alhambra. We stayed there for a week. We used to wander around in the grounds of the Alhambra and the Generalife up above. You'd have to be a pretty dumb cluck to not walk in and be impressed by the quality of the atmosphere. I don't know if you know the Lion Court or pictures of the Lion. I remember the thing that struck me the most later on—I remember writing the report—was that the Arabs use very little water, but they make it musical with a feeling of freshness. I wrote that after I'd been in Rome where all the water roars.

Blum: That's an interesting observation.

Bunshaft: They have lots of water, and it roars. They're all over the city. It's quite wonderful, but it contrasts with this delicacy, and the blank walls and the richness.

Blum: Before you saw, for instance, the Lion Court, had you seen photographs of it other than the postcards?

Bunshaft: I doubt it. I don't think we even saw postcards there. All Europe was sort of a surprise. Like Paris—I didn't like it when I first came there. We used to get out early, and the city had a sour, damp smell to it. We lived in the old part. We didn't see much of the new part except where we lived, we'd walk up across the bridge and through the Louvre up to the opera house, because that's where American Express was where we got mail. So we didn't know Paris too much. But now, over the years, I think it's without question the greatest city in the world. There's nothing even close—all thanks to Baron Haussmann.

Blum: What about the directness, the structure of the Gothic churches? Did that strike you as being direct and honest—things you talked

about in modern architecture?

Bunshaft: The first time I went in Notre Dame—I'm not, I guess, as sensitive as some people are. When something really knocks me over, I become aware of it. There are only two or three things that I've ever seen that really I could feel shivers. One of them was Notre Dame. The first time I went in it was dark and it was everything that you imagine in a church. It was mysterious. It was brilliant. The rose windows in there are unbelievable when there are lights on them. The other time we were in Assisi—St. Francis of Assisi, you know. They have a church there. I guess it's the church of St. Francis. It has a lower church under it. There are two churches, one on top of the other. The lower one is like a basement, you might say. That lower church has these very low barrel vaults intercepting. It's not more than fifteen feet high in the high point with short columns. There was an altar with tall, thin white candles—I went in there and that's the second time I had the shivers. That was really religious. St. Peter's is like going in a set of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. There's no religious quality, just colossal. In fact, it's so big you're not aware of it. You cannot appreciate the size of it. The St. Francis of Assisi lower church is how the two churches at the Air Force Academy [Colorado] came

about. The U.S. military normally builds three churches—one for Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. We all thought it ought to be combined into one structure somehow. I remembered Assisi, the population works out. Of the twenty-five hundred cadets, two-thirds of them are Protestants. I think it was something like fifteen hundred Protestants, six hundred Catholics and a couple of hundred miscellaneous Jews and things. Because I had seen that, I suggested we make the lower church Catholic, a small little church at one end under the big church above. Because of the grades, we could do it.

Blum: Was this a conscious association?

Bunshaft: Oh, hell, yes. That's one not subconscious. That took quite a bit of doing for the Air Force to sell that to the chaplains of the Catholic church, because it was smaller and would be below.

Blum: But that really must have made a remarkable impression on you to have carried it with you until the time when you had an opportunity to use it.

Bunshaft: I could have seen that without having any chills. It could have been a crummy thing underneath. The basic idea is quite sensible if you happen to remember it.

Blum: But it stayed with you, and you brought it out at another time in another place.

Bunshaft: Well, let me make my main speech about what an architect should see.

Blum: Okay. You're still traveling in Europe.

Bunshaft: Well, I'm digressing right here for a moment. I believe, and I've told it to anybody who will listen to me, that an architect should see as many things that are designed or have designs, whether they're natural, paintings, sculpture, graphics, architecture. All these things he should see as much as he can. He should spend as much time in a museum looking at great art as looking at buildings. My elementary theory is that our brain, a computer, absorbs all this whether we're aware of it or not. When you get down to doing some work, the more you see, the more this computer may throw out. You don't say, "I want to do the

cathedral at Chartres,” you’ll just subconsciously have more choices than you would if your computer was half-empty because you didn’t see anything but architecture. I think it is like that. I don’t think you can rationalize like historians like to do—the influence. It may have been some nice poster you saw that may have more to do with the design of some element of a building than all the buildings you’ve seen. I don’t know how it happens. There’s two things: seeing a lot of things and then knowing how to see them. I’ll digress. I was fortunate in having a good friend named Henry Moore, my wife and I. He made me wake up to the fact when he said all his life as he worked and worked, he began to see more and more. In other words, if he looked at a tree forty years ago, he didn’t see as much about that tree as he did forty years later. An architect’s trained and an artist is trained in shades and shadows. When I look at something, I can see the shape of the shadow and what causes it. A layman doesn’t see that. He just sees it as a circular tree. Henry sort of felt his eyes were finally getting sharp after sixty years.

Blum: Do you think it’s a matter of training your perception?

Bunshaft: It's a matter of having an intensity and learning as you keep seeing. You may not know what you're looking for at first. Later on, you get to know. I don't know. I consider my eyes very ordinary compared to a man like Moore or a lot of them. A lot of them see a great many things and pick the part they like to emphasize, and it may be a distorted-looking thing to the layman, but it's what he thinks is the essence. So, that's two parts. One, seeing a lot so the computer's got a stock of junk in there, and the other one is learning how to see. That I've never worked at.

Blum: But maybe what historians are doing is sort of simplifying a rather profound process.

Bunshaft: No, they are doing nothing. Architectural historians don't give a damn thing about twentieth-century architecture. They're trained in a procedure of where it comes from. Now, that would hold true if you're comparing two palaces in Florence done twenty years apart. You could see where Michelangelo took a few little moldings from somebody else or something like that. You can see the evolution of a structural system in the case of Gothic. From Romanesque, you wouldn't have to be too bright if you're an engineer to be able to date which one came first because of the

thinning of structure or something like that. The architectural historians are trained in facades. They don't talk about a building. They talk about the pattern of a facade, which has nothing to do with it, with the main purpose of architecture. The architectural critics in general and architecture historians never think of it. Carol [Krinsky] did after I got going. Buildings are built for people who are going to use them, and nobody ever talks about whether those people are happy or working well or enjoying it. All the architectural criticism is all about how the facade doesn't unify with the neighborhood or it unifies with the neighborhood. Nothing's mentioned about what somebody built the whole damn building for. Follow me?

Blum: I do, and I am hard pressed to release the idea that you saw this lower church in St. Francis of Assisi and you carried the idea with you to bring it out in another time, another place. It was part of your vocabulary.

Bunshaft: Oh, let me begin. That's just one of hundreds, millions of...

Blum: It was the idea of it.

Bunshaft: That's so simple. I don't know why the lower church of St. Francis of Assisi was built. I think it was built because they perhaps needed two places for service. The idea had nothing of two religions or anything like that.

Blum: Was the first one built and then the second one built?

Bunshaft: It was all built as one building. Oh, no, no. I guess in the tradition, you call it a crypt. But it wasn't a crypt. It had an altar and all that, but it would be a crypt in the jargon. No, it was built at one time. There was never a roof on it. The main one could be entered from this side, and the land sloped off so you could enter the lower one from this side. It's elementary. Sure, I learned, but it's nothing complicated. It's just a simple principle. We didn't follow the forms of it at all.

Blum: No, no. Just the idea of it.

Bunshaft: Well, there are millions of things. Well, let's get on.

Blum: You're still in Europe. You haven't mentioned Germany.

Bunshaft: I think I'm sorry I found this [diary]. Did I say Salamanca was great?

Blum: Yes.

Bunshaft: Segovia is the place I was describing before with the cathedral. That's a five-plus. The one place that Frank [Faillace] and I went to see from Madrid was the Escorial. I don't know if you know anything about it, but it's a tremendous thing built by this one king who was kind of religious, and it's all out of a gray granite, rough. It's the most dreary damn thing I've ever been in. We went in there, and we only went about a third of the way and turned around and came back. I did the same thing with my wife about thirty years later. We went in, and it's just cold.

Blum: So your first impression really lasted? It was confirmed.

Bunshaft: Well, I don't know. I guess if you went on, you'd see something, but it's a very cold place, not typical of Spain. Seville, of course, was very nice.

Blum: Were there any modern structures at all in Spain?

Bunshaft: There was no modern in that part of the world. The only modern we looked at was in the North. I don't recall any modern in Germany and none in Spain and none in Southern France. None. There wasn't anything. There wasn't anything in Paris except Le Corbusier's things.

Blum: Did you at that time see the Swiss Pavilion?

Bunshaft: Oh, yes. We saw the Swiss Pavilion and we saw the Salvation Army Building. I didn't think much of either at that time.

Blum: Did you see any of his villas like Villa Stein?

Bunshaft: No.

Blum: Didn't see any of his residential buildings?

Bunshaft: No. We didn't see everything in the world because we took it kind of easy.

Blum: In Germany, did you see...?

Bunshaft: There was nothing in Germany.

Blum: In 1933, the Bauhaus—the school—closed.

Bunshaft: In Germany we didn't go to Stuttgart. We didn't go there.

Blum: The Weissenhoff, the housing exhibition.

Bunshaft: That's right. We didn't go there. In Berlin, we were there when Hitler was really... We were there in 1935. That's when Hitler was in power, of course, which is a time when Mussolini's son-in-law came to meet. We went to see that. We went to see the designs for the Olympics that the great Nazi architect [Albert Speer]...

Blum: Hitler's architect?

Bunshaft: Well, anyhow, you know. There's been a book written about it. Well, we went to see it, and he showed us around. I remember we looked at big models and stuff. We didn't pay much attention. I

didn't even notice him, but I think it was the man that became very famous.

Blum: How did that impress you?

Bunshaft: Nothing much. It was very big. You see, we were in a transition. We really didn't know real modern or understand. We may have been in love with Le Corbusier, but we didn't really know what it was. All we knew was that it was simple and white and rectilinear and it had stilts. We were not really serious, because we hadn't built a building. We didn't know enough about it.

Blum: How did you feel when you finally saw something Le Corbusier did, like the Swiss Pavilion or Salvation Army?

Bunshaft: I told you. We weren't impressed at all. I thought it was peculiar.

Blum: Did that set up a contradiction in you?

Bunshaft: No, it didn't set up anything. I just went on. You seem to think somebody's having a great philosophical thing. You can't imagine people just living casually.

Blum: No, I just know how I felt this morning when the taxi pulled up to your building after seeing it in print.

Bunshaft: I know, but you're a different personality. You're a different person and a different age than I was. You maybe get affected by things. I don't get excited, and I'm trying to give you a picture of a semi-educated guy on contemporary architecture, modern architecture. There may have been others who sat there and drew it and admired it and thought it was wonderful. To me, at that time, I thought Le Corbusier was way out. The ground floor that opened on stilts was all right, but he had some photo murals or something that were, I thought, weird. The Salvation Army had some complexity. Besides the big glass facade, it had a pavilion and some other entrances. It looked very complex, which is what he wanted to do aesthetically. Now, I saw both these places during the war.

Blum: Again.

Bunshaft: Yes. I sat in Avenue Kleber in the chief engineer's office of the Headquarters of the Corps of Engineers. Well, I'll wander around—there was a magazine called *Architecture and Techniques*.

One of the writers there got in touch with the chief engineer's office and said that they'd like to invite the architects in the chief engineer's office to take a tour of modern buildings in Paris.

Blum: This was during the war, your second visit to Paris?

Bunshaft: During the war. There wasn't a war in Avenue Kleber, but there was a war going on. It turned out I was the only one listed as an architect. There were lots of architects sitting around me, but they listed as engineers because they thought that was the only way they could get into the engineers. Anyhow, we took a group of English civilians with us and American enlisted men, all architects, and we provided the five-ton truck with a black driver, and the French architect brought along Auguste Perret. You know who he is?

Blum: Yes.

Bunshaft: He was quite old, and he sat up in the front with this black driver, and the Frenchman sat with us on the floor of the truck.

Blum: From the magazine?

Bunshaft: Yes, a French magazine. He was a very nice fellow. We went to see buildings by Perret.

Blum: All his concrete work?

Bunshaft: Yes. He had a beard and stuff. It wasn't much, and I said afterwards, "Let's go and take a look at Le Corbusier's two buildings." Auguste Perret had been a friend of Corbu, but they'd had a fight and neither of them would have anything to do with each other. This guy said, "I won't go," in French.

Blum: Didn't Le Corbusier work for him?

Bunshaft: Yes, I think so. But Perret was not really a great modern compared to Le Corbusier. He didn't want to go. Finally he reluctantly agreed to go. He had the best time of all.

Blum: What happened?

Bunshaft: We came to the Salvation Army Building, and it has one facade of the building which is about six or seven stories, all glass. I think it faces south. That didn't work. It was not air conditioned. It was

just a furnace. They built a block wall about three feet back from this glass wall and put openings like ordinary windows in the block wall so that people would get light but they wouldn't get this radiating heat. So that, of course, destroyed the building. Then some of the horizontal metal coverings for the glass were hanging out in the air. They were falling off. It was the shabbiest goddamn thing you ever saw. Of course, Perret blossomed out.

Blum: And the building was only about twenty years old.

Bunshaft: I guess so. It hadn't been taken care of. See, all the things that Le Corbusier drew and all this glass, none of it worked because you can't do that without air conditioning, and air conditioning was not available. The whole theory of everything he did, if air conditioning hadn't have come along, would never have worked. Even Mr. Richard Meier, who I like and I know him quite well, has done houses. He did one house that steps down on a lake. There's a wonderful picture of it, and it faces the sun and it's not air conditioned. It's been for sale now for several years. The owner couldn't live there. You can't have glass without air conditioning.

Blum: Well, you know, Adler and Sullivan had devised some sort of air-cooled system before the turn of the century.

Bunshaft: Oh, that had air go by ice or something. That's like having about ten gallons of liquor and you want to sweeten it and you put a teaspoon of sugar in it. That's all. That doesn't do anything.

Blum: It doesn't work.

Bunshaft: No. The Salvation Army Building and the Swiss Pavilion were sort of shabby, but the Swiss Pavilion's a beautiful building.

Blum: Well, he had done a mural in that and designed the furniture.

Bunshaft: He changed it. It originally was a photographic enlargement. The second time it was a painting.

Blum: You say you didn't respond very well the first time. What happened the second time?

Bunshaft: Oh, I thought the Swiss Pavilion was wonderful. As a Le Corbusier building, it's too complicated. The bottom parts don't

work. It's in a very restricted site.

Blum: You're talking about the Salvation Army?

Bunshaft: Salvation Army. The whole damn thing doesn't work. It's just big rooms with beds, and then to have one wall of glass and these pavilions coming in is a very complex thing. It's sculptural, but it doesn't have any purpose. Through this architect with the magazine—we became good friends—he took me to visit Le Corbusier.

Blum: In your book you mentioned an André Buxan.

Bunshaft: That's it. You've got a good memory. He's been to this country with his wife. We've seen each other, but not for the last twenty years.

Blum: Had he worked with Le Corbusier?

Bunshaft: No, but he was in the magazine business. He was a reporter, shall we say, for the magazine. We went to see Le Corbusier.

Blum: When you were there during your army service?

Bunshaft: Yes, I went to see him, and I guess that's the first time I met him. He was painting. During the war there was nothing doing, so he was painting a great deal and doing a little carving. This was his own house, and it's been published. It has a little spiral stair to the roof. His wife was there, but she never came out. She was an alcoholic, I believe. We were going through the house, and he painted in earlier days with Ozenfant, a painter. Some of them you couldn't tell apart. He had a nice big painting in the corner, and Buxan said, "Ah, Ozenfant!" And Le Corbusier said, "No, c'est moi!" I became friends with him and I used to visit him. The officers used to get a ration of about six or seven bottles of liquor free a month that they'd taken from the Germans, and cigarettes. I didn't smoke cigarettes, so I used to take him a cognac and cigarettes for his wife. I'd see him quite often. I never saw his wife.

Blum: He was also supposed to have been a prolific smoker and then gave it up at some point. What was he like? He seems to be such an enigma in everything one reads.

Bunshaft: I don't speak French, you know.

Blum: Did he speak English at all?

Bunshaft: No, not much.

Blum: How did you communicate?

Bunshaft: I spoke a couple of restaurant words. He must have spoken a little English. I spoke a little French. He was painting away. During the war, he really got serious about painting and did his own things. In one of the visits—I'll show you two—he gave me some paintings.

Blum: We broke for just one minute to walk out into the hall to look at some sketches that you had framed. You said during the war when you visited Le Corbusier he proposed to you that you select some.

Bunshaft: No, no. He just said, "You can have a couple of these."

Blum: And you selected the two that you have.

Bunshaft: They're nothing. They're little pieces of tracing paper, you know. I mounted them. You know, a lot of artists do that—scraps.

Blum: Have you ever looked at your sketches in terms of any of his sculpture or paintings and related them in any way?

Bunshaft: No, not that I know of. Well, to continue with Le Corbusier, I sat in Paris, I guess, for over a year in this office. In May of 1945 the Germans surrendered. The first art exhibition in Paris after the German surrender was in Place Vendôme, Galerie Dvorin, an exhibition of Jean Dubuffet, the first exhibition of Jean Dubuffet's work, which I thought was interesting although I wasn't much involved in art at that time at all. I never thought of buying art, but there was a nice little sketch that they wanted the equivalent of sixty dollars for. I'd heard that you don't pay what they offer. I offered thirty, and, of course, I didn't get it. About ten years ago I tried to get it, and it was then up to sixty thousand.

Blum: Was it the same sketch?

Bunshaft: Yes. The next exhibition at this gallery was a show of the paintings of Le Corbusier, and I went to see it. It was very good. I

thought, “Well, maybe I can buy one of the paintings from Le Corbusier and leave out the dealer commission.” I went to see Le Corbusier on that theme, and he said no, he wouldn’t do that. He said the dealer has to be a part of it, which was very honorable. So I didn’t get anything. That’s Le Corbusier. I saw him later in New York when he was working on the U. N. He asked me to draw for him, and I said, “I’d like to, but I’m supposed to be taking care of a few people in our office. I’ll send over a good draftsman.” “Oh,” he said, “you’re a big shot.” I said, “No.” So, I’ve known him. I think he’s a Frenchman, although he’s Swiss. When I went to see Chandigarh in India with my wife and Isamu Noguchi, we went up from Delhi and we arrived there and Le Corbusier was there for his annual inspection of progress at Chandigarh. We had a very nice time.

Blum: Was he as private a person as he’s said to be?

Bunshaft: Well, as I say, I don’t speak enough French. The two men I mentioned—Dubuffet and Le Corbusier—are difficult people. They’re extremely bright and I think if I spoke French I probably wouldn’t have been able to chat with them much because they’re on an abstract level, especially Dubuffet. Le Corbusier I don’t

know enough about. I think he was a very gifted man. He wanted to be recognized not as an architect. He wanted to be recognized as an architect, painter, and sculptor. He wanted to be a Michelangelo. No question about that. Anybody will tell you that. In the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Arthur Drexler tried to arrange to have a show of his work, and he put a few conditions on it.

Blum: Le Corbusier did?

Bunshaft: Yes. One, that the museum would buy a painting of his. Two, that he would be paid for allowing the exhibit.

[Tape 2: Side 2]

Blum: Today is April 5, 1989, and I'm with Gordon Bunshaft again for our second session. Yesterday, we talked about things in the early portion of what you did, and in doing so, there were several things that were missed. One of the things that I would like to ask about is when you were in Europe on your traveling scholarship, did you do to London? Did you meet Gropius?

Bunshaft: Oh, yes. I'd been in Europe a year, and the next Rotch winner was my friend and classmate, Leon Hyzen. When he came over in June or July of 1936, I met him in Paris. We went around a bit in Paris. Oh, I think it was much later than July. I'm sorry—I think it must have been in the early fall, because I met him in Paris and we went around in Paris together for a while. I was really on the end of my trip, so it must have been quite late—perhaps in September or October. From there, I was planning to go to London and go home. That would have meant that I had been in Europe eighteen months. When we went to London, Leon Hyzen had a letter of introduction to Walter Gropius, who was living in London at that time. I think [Marcel] Breuer was living there, too. I'm not sure, but the reason I mention that, there was a marvelous exhibit of a huge project designed by Breuer. It didn't go ahead, but it was perhaps one of the most beautiful modern compositions I'd seen. We went to visit Gropius, and he was very cordial to us. He asked us if we thought America was ready for his kind of architecture. I think he was being very nice considering our knowledge of what was going on in the States or anything. We told him we thought it was.

Blum: Did you know enough about the Bauhaus and what he proposed?

Bunshaft: Not much. I knew very little about the Bauhaus. I knew very little about him. I'd heard enough, a little. As I found out later, he was being asked by [Joseph] Hudnut to come to Harvard and that's why he asked the question. The only amusing thing is he took us to lunch. We were walking along, and I, to make small talk, said, "English food is pretty terrible." He turned around and started in another direction. Evidently he was going to some ordinary joint, and, when I said that, he took us to a better one. That's all I remember of it except that he was very cordial.

Blum: Did you really believe that America was ready for his kind of architecture?

Bunshaft: Either my memory's bad or I didn't take anything too seriously at that stage of my life. You say, "Did I really..." I was for modern, so as far as I was concerned, anybody who could spread it was fine. As it turned out, we both said, "Sure it's ready." That was based on just being nice. We weren't based on any goddamn facts. As it turned out, it was a very good thing that he did go, because he brought Breuer with him. Gropius was the dean of the

Harvard School of Architecture. Gropius was a very good talker and had great principles of what modern architecture should be, what modern anything should be. But I don't think he could design a doorknob. I think Breuer was the great designer. I think the Bauhaus, the buildings which are credited to Gropius, I think there must have been an assistant who was damn good. I've never seen any distinguished architecture of Gropius since. His own house, I'm sure Breuer designed it. Breuer turned out to be not only, of course, a very important architect, but a magnificent teacher—probably the best architectural design teacher certainly in the first half of the century and maybe in the whole century. The reason I say that is he turned out during the war period students who were great designers. The reason I know that is when I came back to SOM in New York and we started getting more and more work and had more and more people, we had three or four of his pupils, and they were really marvelous. Joe Johansen and a couple of the men who became part of—what the hell is that group up in Boston of four or five architects, Gropius disciples?

Blum: TAC?

Bunshaft: The Architects Collaborative. Two of them were in our office, and they left later to go form this thing. Architects Collaborative was literally quite a collaboration. I think they eventually married each other's wives and things like that. Maybe they didn't go through with the marriage. Anyhow, it was quite a collaboration. But the main point was that Breuer was a wonderful teacher, and he was loved by all his alumni. If you talk to any person that was at school when Breuer was teaching, they almost speak with the reverence as though he was sort of a demigod. They loved him. He was, I guess, a very easygoing man. I never knew him well. The main point about Gropius is Breuer.

Blum: When you were in Europe in the 1930s, Hitler had already started marching. Were you aware of the atmosphere? What was the atmosphere that you sensed?

Bunshaft: Well, the atmosphere in Europe to two ordinary guys traveling around, you weren't aware of anything except when you got to Berlin.

Blum: What was the atmosphere there?

Bunshaft: Let me see now. This was in 1935. Hitler was there. They were designing the Olympic stadiums. If you walked around the streets, you were not aware of troops marching and all that stuff. You didn't see any of that. That must have come later. You wouldn't have known anything about anybody like Hitler if you just lived in the city. Everybody was just like they were anywhere else. I stayed in a pension, and one of the old members of the pension, a guy who lived in the pension a long time, used to get on the phone and talk Russian all the time. You could hear him, "Da, da." While we were there—I was with Frank Faillace—we heard that the son-in-law of Mussolini was making an official call on Hitler. So we went around to see the arrival and stuff. It was a small crowd. There was nobody there—maybe fifty people when he drove in to wherever the building was. That was the only thing. I don't think anybody thought of Hitler as a monster at that moment. Nothing had happened up until then. It all happened later. In that we didn't speak German, there was no way we could be aware of what was going on in Berlin. I don't know my history that well, but all I know is that visually you had no awareness of anything special. We went to the museums, we went to the Kurfurstendamm. I guess you'd say the country was more prosperous than it was ten years earlier. Of course, I was not too

current. We didn't read the newspapers.

Blum: Being Jewish, did you have any sensitivity perhaps to what was happening?

Bunshaft: No, I've never had any sensitivity about being a Jew all my life. Never. Essentially because all my mature life has been spent at Skidmore, Owings and Merrill and in that firm—I don't know whether it was deliberate or just the nature of the people—there was never any question of whether you're Jewish, Chinese, black, green, purple or whatever it was. If you had something on the ball, you had a future. I also didn't live with a close relationship with fellow Jews. I made no effort. I don't believe in any religion. I think it's a crutch to avoid thinking about dying, so I never believed any of that. Somehow I mingled with the architects that I knew, the people. It never entered my head that there weren't many architects that were Jewish. I wasn't even capable of it. Of course, I didn't know about the stock crash. Well, the best one I didn't know about was when the Hindenburg blew up. We didn't read the papers. I didn't know about it for a week after it happened, and only accidentally then. I think that's true of a lot of students in those days. Maybe today everybody is politically and

socially aware of more. But we lived a life of just architecture. It was a different world. That's about the best way to describe it. Maybe I'm a freak, but I don't know.

Blum: When you left Europe, you came back to the States and you looked for a job in 1936.

Bunshaft: No, I didn't look for a job. I came back, and I had a slight guilty feeling that I didn't spend the full two years, which was what was customary at that time.

Blum: Why didn't you spend the full two years?

Bunshaft: Two reasons. One, costs were starting to go up a bit in Europe—very little. Secondly, at the time I won it, I had some personal debts—I don't know to who—of about four hundred dollars, so when I got the first seven hundred and fifty, I paid off the debts and I went to Europe. Also we lived fairly comfortably although we used to try to live on five dollars a day, which included pension, liquor, food and all that. Well, in those days, cognac was worth about twelve cents a drink. I used that, and I think a meal must have been eight or nine francs. It must have

been more than eight or nine francs. I think we had fifteen francs to the dollar. So I came home and went directly to Buffalo and didn't announce it to anybody. I met an architect, a fellow tennis player, who studied architecture and he had a job in some architect's office and he got me a job there. We worked on the design of a colonial house. I think I got twenty-five dollars a week. I worked there for about three or four months.

Blum: What did you do?

Bunshaft: I was sort of a draftsman. I remember we were doing a little porch on this house with little round columns in the corner. A draftsman. It was a small office. I got home around November and I worked at this job with my friend Melvin Morris, who had been at Harvard when I was at MIT. I don't know how I have this memory for names. Now I can't remember somebody I met last night. In April I told him I was leaving and going to New York. He thought I was crazy, giving up this lucrative job. So I went to New York.

Blum: What prompted you to make that decision?

Bunshaft: I didn't want to stay in Buffalo and draw columns. New York is where the action is. This was very simple. I went to New York. I had three or four hundred dollars and I went around to see only Rotch winners. I went to see Ralph Walker, and as I look back at it, he was very nice. He came out, which is unusual for a senior partner to bother with employment. He said he was glad to meet me but they had no work and he couldn't do anything for me.

Blum: This was 1936?

Bunshaft: No, spring of 1937. There wasn't any work. None. Then I went to see Wally Harrison. The main point of this story is Walker said, "You know, I'm a Rotch winner, too." I said, "I know." I went to see Wally Harrison, who was a Rotch winner, and he didn't say anything about being a Rotch winner, but he said he had no work.

Blum: Did you know he had been?

Bunshaft: Yes, I did. He was in Rockefeller Center on the second floor. I went up a couple floors to see Ed Stone, who was also a Rotch winner.

Blum: Why did you decide you were only going to call on Rotch winners?

Bunshaft: Because I was a Rotch winner, and I thought they might tend to be kinder to a Rotch winner. It's very simple. Also they were more or less prominent, better firms, shall we say. I went to see Ed Stone. I don't know if you know anything about him, but he's from the South and a very friendly guy and a very heavy drinker. He had the same problem as Owings. The only two real drunks that I know were Owings and Stone, who cured themselves. They were the only ones that I know. Anyhow, Stone was not up to that stage yet. Stone greeted me cordially. He said, "God, I have a project. I've just been given a project to design a hotel in Honolulu. Unfortunately I just hired somebody." We talked and he said, "Call me tomorrow. I'll see what I can do." He was going to try to get out of the other hiring. I called him from a saloon in Times Square, and he said, "I decided to hire both of you." At the time, he didn't have ten cents in the bank. I came to work for him. He was the first man I worked for in New York.

Blum What was his office like?

Bunshaft: He had a secretary who was dedicated, and he had this one man he hired.

Blum: Do you remember who that was?

Bunshaft: I think it was a guy named Maurice Kleinman, who I knew in Paris who had been a Paris Prize-winner. You know what that is?

Blum: Yes.

Bunshaft: From the United States. I think that was him. He had nobody else.

Blum: Just the three of you and a secretary?

Bunshaft: Well, we hadn't arrived yet. There was another man sitting there using Ed Stone's office. I guess they had a few little puttery jobs or something. He was called Morris Ketchum. Later on he was a fairly successful architect. So the two of us arrived, and Ed Stone had a small space, about twice the size of this room here. Rockefeller Center had empty spaces, and he had been involved

in Rockefeller Center. Well, so had Wally. Ed Stone had designed the interior of the Radio City Music Hall. They gave him adjoining space, which was just a door and a big room with pure white plaster on it. Ed Stone put in three drafting boards there. I had one. I was the designer.

Blum: The title.

Bunshaft: He didn't know if I could design a doorknob. Maurice Kleinman was the draftsman. Ed hired a man who knew how to make working drawings, Ted Nelson. That was the group that was going to work on the hotel. At that time, Ed Stone was doing the Museum of Modern Art. There was a man who was a trustee of the museum, Philip Goodwin, from an old family that had a marvelous collection and he was a gentleman architect. He was doing the working drawings. At that stage, I guess the design was sort of pretty well set and he was doing working drawings. Ed Stone must have had a couple of men in the old small office. He must have one or two, because they were drawing on the museum. Ed was restudying the main elevation of what you see now. It was all kept secret because this poor guy up there was making working drawings of some design, and Ed was changing

it. The big change was that he wanted a big staircase to be on the front of the building. At the time, it was on the backside, on the garden side. He wanted it on the front side so he could have a great big window showing the stair. They had studies going on. I had nothing to do with it. They'd stick them up on these nice white walls. He would call up Max Abramovitz and various architects in the building to bull about it. Alfred Barr would come in. They ended up, I guess, moving the stair but they ended up using two translucent layers of glass with fiberglass in between, which was a joke, for that whole facade that you see. After the building was built, they built a solid wall behind it because they could not hang pictures on a glass wall. Well, anyhow, that's what was going on. I worked for Ed—I'm getting too detailed.

Blum: May I ask you something? Did you know at the time that Mies van der Rohe had submitted drawings for the museum?

Bunshaft: No, he never submitted anything.

Blum: Or he was in touch with Alfred Barr about that project?

Bunshaft: No. I didn't know anything about it then, but I've read since that Alfred Barr proposed to the board of trustees that they hire Mies. He had met Mies in Europe, and I guess he thought a great deal of him, but the board would have nothing to do with it. That's as far as it ever went. No drawings, nothing. I read that later. I can tell you why Mies came here, but, anyhow, we're now .

Blum: You're in Ed Stone's office.

Bunshaft: I worked there on this hotel. The man who was promoting it was a man that spent most of his life in the 21 Club, but he had an interesting idea of having the access to the rooms—this was right on the beach—and having the circulation sort of a half-level down, so all the movement of people was on the water side. The rooms had little loges where they could sit and see the water. The people walking by them didn't see in and they didn't see them. It was a nice idea. When the working drawings were about done, this promoter also knew Jock Whitney, and this promoter was going to build a small house for Jock Whitney in one corner of the site. So Jock Whitney used to come in. When the drawings were all done, this promoter disappeared and Ed Stone didn't get paid or anything.

Blum: And the project was never built?

Bunshaft: Yes. Ed called me in a couple days after the announcement and said, "Gordon, I don't have any work for you. I think I have to let you go. I can get you a job somewhere else. What do you think?" Like a child, I said, "I'd like to stay here." He had no work. I came back later and said, "No, I guess I'd better go," and he got me a job at Raymond Loewy's.

Blum: The designer.

Bunshaft: Industrial designer. I didn't like it there. Raymond Loewy was a phony. He'd put a gold line on a cigarette or on a railroad train, and he'd get a fee for it. It was a very casual place.

Blum: What was his office like?

Bunshaft: Well, they used to have tea dancing around ten in the morning. Very casual.

Blum: Was it a large office?

Bunshaft: It had about twenty or thirty people. It didn't do architecture. It did interiors and products. I was there about two or three months. I think Maurice Kleinman got a job there, too. Stone fired him, too.

Blum: What did you do besides tea dance at ten.

Bunshaft: I don't remember what I did. I just hung around there for three months. Then I went and saw Ed and I said, "I can't stand it there." He said, "Okay. I'll call my friend Skidmore. He's got work. You can go and see him." So he did, and I went. Before I went, Maurice Kleinman said, "I know where there's a wonderful job where you can get work, but I'm not going to tell you. I'm going to go after it." I found out later he had gone to Skidmore's. On the Paris Prize, when you're over there you do big projects, or at least big drawings. Huge drawings, renderings and all that stuff. He had evidently gone to Skidmore with these goddamn big things that Skidmore wouldn't even unroll. I went, I guess, a few days later. I was interviewed by John Moss—I think I told you about him—who was interested in photography and Skidmore. I showed them photographs. On the Rotch, you're

supposed to do sketches, you're supposed to do measure drawings and photographs—whatever you want. I was not good at sketching, although some of the things that I gave to Avery don't look so bad now. I did measure drawings and I did a lot of photographs. So that's what I showed them—photographs of things that I liked. Anyhow, they hired me and they asked me how much I was getting said, "I'm getting thirty-five now, but I want forty." I got it, and I went to work for them. That was in, I think, August of 1937. The office had opened in, I think, April or May.

Blum: This was right after it opened in Chicago? It seems within months.

Bunshaft: The firm formed a partnership in 1936. I don't know what the hell they opened, but they must have had an office.

Blum: And you described the job that brought them to New York was American Radiator. You know, you keep saying, "I can't draw, I couldn't draw"...

Bunshaft: Not in the true sense, not real drawing.

Blum: ...and yet everywhere you went, you were the designer.

Bunshaft: Yes, but designing has nothing to do with drawing.

Blum: Can you explain the difference to me?

Bunshaft: The word “drawing” means you can be an etcher, you can do sketches. Designing a building involves... Just take, for example, a major building. One of the big country buildings we did is Connecticut General. I used to go to meetings, and Bill Brown, who was an administrative partner, we were both close on that. We had people writing a program, trying to find out from the owner what he was going to do with his people and how many people he had and what each group did and how the material or paper moved. We spent at least six months with just that. Not a goddamn bit of drawing. Making diagrams showing relationships. What we found out in those six months is that in an insurance company there’s a key group of executives that make all the policies and things. From then on, there’s paper that moves from one procedure to another. It’s nothing but a light industry of moving documents for review or for preparation from one group to another. It calls for large areas for moving these papers.

Blum: And you as a designer sit there...

Bunshaft: Wait a minute. I just want to forget the designer, Chinaman or anything. I want to tell you about how you go about doing a building properly. The program led to a plan that was a huge, horizontal low building, three floors. This building was to house two thousand people. The owner, the top man, was a brilliant man—Frazar Wilde, one of the great figures. When he hired us he said he wanted a building that would be built for three thousand, so there would be a one-thousand person expansion in it without having to do additional building. He wanted a building that was the most economical building you could build, providing that you included thirty years of maintenance in that economy. So what you did was build an expensive building—the cost initially. There was no paint in this building. It was all Formica and things like that. He was a brilliant man. As I say, we used to meet with the owner and all that, and this development from a program to diagrams to suddenly a plan with courtyards to give light. Nobody was farther than thirty feet from glass, and all those things—all intelligent thinking, logical thinking. It has nothing to do with aesthetics. Fundamentally, a building has to work. Now, there are a lot of buildings by great architects that don't work at

all. The Guggenheim is a disaster. It is no more a museum than I am Napoleon. So that's our approach, and it's the approach, I think, of most architects. You don't design by saying, "I'll build a box or I'll build a cube or a dome." It comes from this rational, logical thinking. We worked on those plans. We on our own were doing elevations and models to see how it would fit on the site. We aesthetically were getting involved in how to build it, what materials. It was a magnificent two-hundred-and-fifty-acre site. We wanted to have a building where the people just felt part of the site. So those were criteria, logical criteria, of why the building is what it is. We established a clear span of sixty feet. Up until that time, most buildings had columns every twenty or twenty-five feet. Columns are a nuisance because they destroy flexibility and also take up space and affect the layout of desks and things. This is all just thinking again. We went all through that with the owner in developing plans. We never showed him what it looked like, never. Another thing about our approach, especially mine, is the owner is a joint part of the venture. When we got Banque Lambert, I told the mother who was the Baroness Lambert, "Hiring an architect is like getting married for four years without sex." That's what it is. It's a close relationship. When the chemistry works between people, it's a marvelous experience.

Frazar Wilde and our office—he somehow liked me—worked. We got along beautifully. That doesn't mean he agreed with everything. He would raise intelligent questions and we would try to answer them or do studies to see what could be done. After a year of all this, we brought them a complete finished model of how the whole thing would look, site and all. This glass building and all that. In that they had gone through the planning, it just seemed natural to them. It was approved in about two minutes.

Blum: Wasn't that a unique situation where you had all of this time to negotiate, to understand where the...

Bunshaft: No, not negotiate. It wasn't a negotiation. We worked together, collaborated. Negotiate sounds like two opposite sides.

Blum: No, I didn't mean that.

Bunshaft: I know. The whole point is collaboration. Every building that SOM does—I don't know about every building. Every building that I've been involved in, the main purpose of that building is for the people using it.

Blum: If there's ever a difference where the person's commissioning it...

Bunshaft: There are differences in our own office. For example, one partner—I'm not going to mention his name. As I say, we always worked as two partners on a job, a design partner and administrator, for the beginning at least. The working chemistry between the two men was very important. The best buildings I did with an administrative partner named Bill Brown, because he and I were both interested in doing good architecture. Now, there was another partner in the office. Sometimes we were assigned and we agreed to work together. His philosophy was "give the client what he wants." When I say "what he wants," I don't mean about function. Certainly it has to function. But aesthetically, if we give him what he wants, he doesn't need an architect. An architect should contribute and come up with something that is better and that he realizes is much better than what he has preconceived, maybe. Some clients don't have any preconception. This is an illustration of differences of how you work. This partner, who is a very fine man, believed in that, and I couldn't work with him. It might have been decided by all of us that I'd be on that job with him, but after a while, I'd get off it. All the jobs in

this book [Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill] are jobs that I controlled completely. Of the thirty-eight, I think I was both the partner and administrative partner on seventeen of them towards the end. That was because I had an associate partner who was a close friend of mine who took care of all this paperwork. I didn't do it, but you didn't need a partner to do it. Anyhow, you get an idea. People think of architects like they think of painters and sculptors—as being creative.

Blum: That's true.

Bunshaft: Creativity is a small part of it. In my book, logical thinking and getting a good solution for what the client's people are going to do on it, a good solution for the site, whether it's a country or city site, and selection of materials and things, and a concept that's exciting. But behind it all is logic. That's why, in my opinion, postmodern junk that's being built is a joke. It's arbitrary and hasn't a damn thing to do with our times. It's an insult to history, because the people who do this postmodern stuff don't really know. I'd rather have them do a real period piece than do a half-assed—and it's dead now, thank God. Like your Mr. [Stanley] Tigerman—I wouldn't even call him an architect. I think he's

nothing but a charlatan. He may believe in all that junk, but there's no rationale for it. All great architecture though all history from Persia to Egypt to anyplace, the great structures are all logical for their use and for the structural method and for their materials. There's no arbitrary whimsy.

Blum: And you think that's what postmodernism was all about.

Bunshaft: I don't think it, it's a fact. What makes a guy get up one morning and suddenly decide to do Italiano columns and stuff in a plaza in New Orleans. If that isn't arbitrary. I think you're a postmodernist, and I think the guy that runs that department is postmodern.

Blum: John [Zukowsky]?

Bunshaft: And I think that book [Chicago Architecture, 1872-1922: Birth of a Metropolis]—I'm not a very delicate man, I guess—that book on Chicago is a disgrace to Chicago.

Blum: Which one?

Bunshaft: The big one you gave me.

Blum: Why do you think that?

Bunshaft: I think it must have made the people in France who saw that show think Chicago is a glorified warehouse.

Blum: What do you think is the difference between the essays in the book and the way it presents Chicago?

Bunshaft: I don't read essays. I'm talking about the pictures.

Blum: What is the difference? Where do you think the book or the exhibition fall short?

Bunshaft: In 1988, publishing a book on junk done in 1890, if you look through the book pictorially, they all look the same. They're horrible pictures to begin with.

Blum: That's all that has survived.

Bunshaft: Oh, go on. There are better pictures. All the architecture had a warehouse appearance, whether it was Carson, Pirie, Scott.... Even Sullivan's Auditorium was important only for one thing, that it broke from traditional architecture, from doing columns and classical architecture. But as a piece of architecture, it's a goddamn ugly mess. It is. It is ugly in any historical sense. If you look at all the buildings in Paris which are period pieces, every one of them has, most of them have, proportion, has contrast, has all sorts of things. What this book represents is a clumsy heaviness, and to put on the cover... What's the name of that?

Blum: The Wrigley Building.

Bunshaft: It's probably one of the ugliest buildings in the world. And if some postmodern guy can say that's beautiful, he doesn't know about anything. Forgetting period stuff, the proportions are awkward, the tower relationship—elementary composition and proportions and relationships are totally absent.

Blum: Do you think those buildings themselves, when they were built, had any significance at all?

Bunshaft: None at all. I think in that whole period architects were just hacks. Hacks trying to take a new requirement of a tall building .

[Tape 3: Side 1]

Blum: When you joined the SOM office, you said “hired by John Moss.”

Bunshaft: And Skidmore

Blum: And Skidmore. You came into the office as a designer.

Bunshaft: Yes.

Blum: Nat Owings in his book talks about “Skid’s boys.”

Bunshaft: The “Skid boys” are the four of us that I’m talking about. He’s not talking about the first week. He’s talking about the early years.

Blum: When you joined them in 1937, who else was there?

Bunshaft: Well, when I was hired, Skidmore had this office. His secretary, Mrs. Goldstein, had been the secretary for Joseph Urban ever

since she was a young girl, and she was probably fifty at that time. She thought Skidmore and his people were terrible intruders into this beautiful world of Joseph Urban. When I came to work there, Skid had hired John Moss. I told about that. He had hired a fellow named Robert Cutler, who had won some competition for a design of a pavilion at the New York World's Fair—you know, a student project. He was there, and then there was some funny little fellow who was supposed to be good at the technicalities of exhibits, electrical and scientific exhibits. There may have been another person, and I was the fourth.

Blum: Was William Brown there?

Bunshaft: No.

Blum: He was not there yet.

Bunshaft: Cutler was the first man of the four people that were hired, and I came next. Now, Skid had several jobs going on the World's Fair. I was put on a building for the Wonder Bread Bakery. Skid told me they wanted to show the whole baking process, and they thought it would be good in a circular building so people would

walk around and come out where they came in. I would say at that time I believed in modern but I didn't know anything about it. I went to work with freehand and charcoal. I had this idea of some sloping wall up on the facade, so I got some clay that you use to make models, and I was making this model. Skid came up to me and said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm making this model. I can't visualize it." He said, "That's not necessary." There was a phone out there in case somebody called him. The phone rang and he got on it. My life's been full of luck. He got on it, and after a while, he hung up. He said, "The Wonder people just called me and they thought they'd like to see a study model." Anyhow, that's how it went along. I worked on buildings, and Skid started hiring more people. The only amusing thing the first couple of weeks is that we had a big room and there were three sort of cubicles on one side. One was for Scott, one for Teegen, and one for John Moss. Skid sat in Urban's office. I didn't realize it, but in those days when I'd work away I'd whistle. I can't imagine why. After about a week, Skid came up to me and he said, "You got to stop whistling. You're driving Teegen crazy." He was a very nice man. Anyhow, we worked away. At that time, this was not architecture. Skid would come in and say, "We have the building for Standard Brands. They want to see a model in

four days.” We didn’t even have a plan. We started making drawings, and Skid had a man come in who was good at making thin cardboard models. He would come in at night, and we’d start stuffing things together without a drawing. It was just unbelievable. There was no design, no nothing. It was just World’s Fair junk.

Blum: Was a model a successful way to visualize a building?

Bunshaft: If you had something, if you had a plan and some drawings and you wanted to study it. In fact, later on we never made sketches. We made work models for ourselves, tons of them. But, at that point, these were models that were made and drawn and shown to the client, and we would work all night. This man that came in to make them was a fellow named Walter Severinghaus. He was one of the four.

Blum: You were the designer of the Venezuelan Pavilion.

Bunshaft: That comes later.

Blum: I thought it was in the 1939 World’s Fair.

Bunshaft: It comes later in the story of the World's Fair business. There were nineteen projects going on. John Moss was making renderings of buildings just from dreams. He had no plan, no building. He'd just make a sketch and then he'd start with his air brush and make pretty pictures. It was just like advertising rather than architecture because there was a great rush and we had a lot of work. This went on from 1937 into 1938, and the office was getting crowded. It was a small office, so Skid rented a floor below that was empty. He called me in one day. At that time we had the Venezuela project from the Venezuelan government. He called me in and he said, "I've decided to do the Venezuela project downstairs." At that time he had hired Ted Nelson as job captain, out of Stone's office, who was a good man. He was going to do the working drawings on the Venezuelan Building and I was to design it. We had an in-house engineer, a funny, wonderful, sweet man. He was going to be on that floor. Skid came in to me and said, "You're going to be in charge, but I'm not going to tell anybody," so I went down there and ran it. One of the men who was working, doing a sheet on the main staircase of the Venezuelan Pavilion, was a fellow named Bill Brown. That's how I got to know him. We did the pavilion. The Fair was a

madhouse of building, too. For example, the Standard Brands was being built by a big contracting firm in New York. They were so understaffed on other projects that they almost had to abandon this one. One of the draftsmen on our floor, a fellow named Green, I think, went out and supervised the construction. Not supervised—instructed the workmen how to build it. He didn't know much, but he knew more than they did. It was that kind of nuttiness.

Blum: It sounds like it was just kind of thrown together. What do you feel the impact of the 1939 World's Fair was?

Bunshaft: As far as I'm concerned, both Fairs, both 1933 and 1939, were a pile of junk and they had no influence on anything. They were stage sets. The 1893 Fair in Chicago was a classical stage front. That had influence. As an example, Albright Museum in Buffalo, done by a good Buffalo architect, is a cold crib of that Fair. One of the influences that Fair had is they must have had a lot of Porches of Maidens. You know the Porch of the Maidens on the Acropolis?

Blum: Yes.

Bunshaft: I believe the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, which was built after the Fair, has something like about fourteen Porches of Maidens in various places. The Albright has two of them. That became a decoration that you applied. But I don't think the New York Fair had anything to do with modern. It had nothing to do with the Mies or Le Corbusier modern. This was blank-wall modern. It had nothing to do with the real movement of architecture. Absolutely nothing.

Blum: By this time Gropius was here?

Bunshaft: Now, just slow down. Gropius gets off a plane in 1938 or 1939. That doesn't tip the world over. This Fair was being drawn and designed in 1937, 1938. Gropius had nothing to do with the Fair. He just arrived. I might as well give you my major speech.

Blum: Okay.

Bunshaft: The year 1946-1947 is important for architects and for the United States. To explain, I will begin with the crash of 1929 and the Depression of the 1930s, which eliminated most of the

architectural firms either through old age or through lack of business. There were some that hung on. The only thing that was happening, I think, in 1930, 1932 may have been Rockefeller Center. There was nothing happening in the country. So what happened was the elimination of all the classical architects, small and medium. The second thing that happened is that young architects in school—I don't know about the West, but in the East or at MIT and Harvard—the students were turning to Le Corbusier's books. Anything that was modern. I would guess the students forced the faculty to come up to the white walls and simpleness of French modern at that time. I don't know if you call it art nouveau or what the hell you'd call it. In the fifteen years until you get to 1947, there was the development of young architects interested in modern because, being young, they wanted to be advanced. And there were the books of Le Corbusier. There wasn't much on Mies published, I don't think, but if it was, they were excited about it. Anything contemporary. I don't know where the Bauhaus was at that time, but that doesn't mean it may not have influence in books at that time. I doubt it. So the removal of old-time guys, the arrival of young architects—Breuer was turning out a batch during the war of real good architects. You take a man like me who got through with

school and travel around 1936, when I went to work in 1937, I worked for five years and then I went in the army. In those five years I learned something about architecture as well as my travels and so forth. So when I came home from the army, I must have been around thirty-seven. I got married when I was thirty-three. When I came home, I was really primed to do something. I had a little knowledge of practical work, although the five years at Skidmore were no real buildings. They were World's Fair or Stevens Hotel. I think the first building that was semi-real was the Hostess House that was made out of wood. I did that in Chicago just before going into the army in 1942. We had a wonderful time on that. So in 1947, here you had these young men ready to go—a lot of them ready, a lot of them just getting into offices—and you had this boom of clients wanting to build buildings. It was easily more of a Golden Age than the Italian Renaissance with the Medicis. When I say clients, they were mostly corporations. The heads of them were men who wanted to build something that they'd be proud to have representing their company, whether it was a bank or whatever. In the corporations in those days, the head man was personally involved and personally building himself a palace for his people that would not only represent his company, but his personal pleasure. They were the new Medicis,

and there were many of them. The only thing that I find hard to explain, although I don't think it's too hard, is these people never questioned doing a modern building. They accepted modern architecture. There was never any selling of a modern building. I guess they wouldn't have come to us if there were. They would have gone to somebody else. I think the reason for that is that they wanted their company to be progressive. For example, take David Rockefeller and the Chase [Manhattan Bank]. He lives in a Georgian environment. When he and [John] McCloy, who was then his boss, came to us to do Chase, there was no question of it being modern. Chase is an aluminum/glass building. Just to illustrate, in one of the meetings when we were developing the overall plan, the question came of what materials to use to cover the exterior of the columns and beams. I had planned to show the Executive Building Committee stainless and aluminum. Incidentally, Owings had nothing to do with any design in the New York office. He ran the Chicago office. The only time he came to New York was to help Skid get a job or they may have had meetings about finance. But he had nothing to do with design in the New York office except for one project, Chase, which he got. I wasn't there, but I was told he put on a magnificent presentation, and when he got through there was no question we

had the job. I'll digress. The reason he was so good was that he said we didn't want to do a building, we wanted to do a study of the whole of lower Manhattan and then do a building to fit with it, which was big stuff and they were impressed by it. Also the reason he was in it was David Rockefeller's wife and Owings' wife at that time were close friends.

Blum: Emily?

Bunshaft: Not Emily. His present wife.

Blum: Margaret.

Bunshaft: Yes. So what we had here in 1946-47, in my opinion, especially in New York, were the greatest opportunities that any architects have ever had in the history of time. That's why I say I thank my father and mother for having had me born in 1909, because it was the greatest period. I was very lucky.

Blum: Did you know when you joined SOM in 1937 that it was an office that was committed to modern architecture?

Bunshaft: They weren't committed to anything.

Blum: They just took jobs as they occurred. Where did this direction come from then?

Bunshaft: To get a picture of the late 1930s and somebody starting an office in 1936, there was only one commitment: to get enough jobs to have eating money. That was the only commitment. Anybody who says otherwise is full of baloney. The World's Fairs, which the firm really started on, of course had to be this zippity idea. You can call it shallow modern, shallow or superficial.

Blum: Temporary.

Bunshaft: Not temporary—that's flattering—the superficial tone of the design of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill was started, I'm sorry to say, by me. I never thought of anything else. I went through classical training at MIT the first few years. It would no more enter my head to do a traditional thing or a semi-traditional—I wouldn't have anything to do with it. It wasn't a question of deciding. It was just like a question that you go and eat at nine

and twelve and eight. There was no discussion or intellectualizing about it.

Blum: Did the availability of new materials have anything to do with this?

Bunshaft: Listen, you don't need any new materials to do a good building.

Blum: Well, no one did a steel building in 1890.

Bunshaft: Yes, but I'm talking about my time. We had steel. We had everything. There were a lot of refinements that we forced upon the industry and research, but we had all the ingredients to make a first-class building. The Van Nelle factory was built in the 1920s. It's still perhaps one of the most contemporary buildings in the world. Those men really understood the precision of modern architecture.

Blum: This was something you saw when you were in Europe?

Bunshaft: Yes, it was built. Of course, Le Corbusier built them. The Van Nelle was a factory. It was all glass. I don't know how they got

along with temperatures. Le Corbusier built modern buildings that didn't work because he didn't have the technology of air conditioning. But we had all that in 1947. We had all the tools. As I say, you didn't think about it.

Blum: It just happened somehow. Forces and you just sort of came together.

Bunshaft: No, don't philosophize forces. It was just natural after the war. These three things came together at the right time. Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, when history is written in future centuries, will probably be not the greatest creative architects of this century, but will be the most important of this century because they didn't anticipate, had nothing, no philosophy. Owings says he visualizes, but he had no more an idea of what it was—they had brains enough to go with the times and to be ahead of them in service. The firm had one basic thing—I think all the people involved were all sound, logical thinkers. They were not dreamers. SOM exists today because they could service the needs of the building public. Half the jobs they get nobody else could do. They don't have the organization to do it. They grew with the times. They were always there to grow. Also I mentioned to you

this lawyer...

Blum: Gross Sampsell.

Bunshaft: He's the one that made possible our becoming partners partially. The format of this partnership and associate partners and participants developed that makes it a continuing, growing organization. The firm is hungry for talent. If there's talent, he can move up the ladder, and there's no head man. Nobody believes that, and as soon as Bruce [Graham] leaves, there'll never be another head man.

Blum: It's been described as not a pyramid, but a lot of little pyramids.

Bunshaft: It's a pyramid with a flat top, but it's a pyramid. They had a fiftieth anniversary in Chicago for all the people sharing in the profits. That includes partners, associate partners, and participants nationally. There were three hundred people there. That's why it succeeds. The firm is flexible. Let's get back. Where were we?

Blum: You were in New York. However, in 1939 after the Fair in New York, you went to Chicago.

Bunshaft: I went to Chicago to do a broken-down presidential suite in the top floor of the Stevens Hotel. Now, a suite is nothing but furniture and decor, and I don't think any of us knew much about it. Owings had gotten the job, and I guess the first thing they had already done was to take out all the structure of individual windows and make a long window about twenty-five feet long—this clear view of the lake. It was still under construction and I don't know what the hell I did to it. I don't remember doing anything. I went up there to look at it, and that's where I learned one thing.

Blum: What?

Bunshaft: At that height, if you look out on the lake—this long gray glass wall—the lake is generally gray looking. So this was nothing but a great big sheet of gray. Not a thing to interrupt it. The lake is ugly to look at straight on. Where it's beautiful is at the Drake Hotel where you look up the shore and you see apartments and composition. Looking out, this was so pure you could have

pasted a gray piece of paper twenty-five feet long and it would look just the same. Anyhow, that's what I worked on. I was planning to stay only a month or so. Shortly after that, I think we got the Hostess House. That's what kept me there.

Blum: Hostess House was Great Lakes. You know, I gave you a copy of what Ambrose Richardson wrote, and he writes in a rather detailed account of what he remembers of your coming to Chicago and the Stevens Hotel job.

Bunshaft: I was supposed to be the head of design.

Blum: He said that these wonderful air-brushed drawings arrived, and it included not only a picture window, a huge window, but it had curved walls...

Bunshaft: What is he talking about?

Blum: About the Stevens Hotel presidential suite.

Bunshaft: I don't remember any of that.

Blum: New light fixtures.

Bunshaft: I don't remember any of it. I really don't. I don't know what the hell I did, if anything.

Blum: Well, he said these drawings arrived and then you arrived.

Bunshaft: Well, those were drawings maybe Owings had done.

Blum: He said they came from New York, beautifully airbrushed.

Bunshaft: Well, that may have been. Maybe John Moss was still there, because he was the only one who did air brush. I don't remember it. I can't answer you.

Blum: Well, he said you came and with you came a whole new idea of what a modern interior was all about.

Bunshaft: Well, I'm glad he's got memory of that. All I remember about coming there is that the designers were in a little cubicle with a little window. There were four guys in there, and there was a table for me. I faced the window and there were these four. I met

them, and I didn't know them from Adam. I started to draw and at about ten o'clock I looked up and the room was empty. That's when I realized this custom of going for coffee. That hadn't occurred in New York yet, and I never joined it. We got to be great friends.

Blum: Who were the four guys who were there when you arrived other than Ambrose?

Bunshaft: Well, I'm guessing. I think Harry Weese, Matt Lapota, and maybe Ambrose. I don't remember the fourth name. We became a wonderful little group. Every Sunday we would go out on trips. We went to see really a great modern building done by some architect in Chicago, a young man who won it in a competition [William Ganster]. I think it was a tuberculosis building or something like that. It was a very, very modern building.

Blum: In Waukegan—way out in one of the suburbs?

Bunshaft: Yes. I think this man was so young that he didn't have an office. He had tied in with [William] Pereira. Pereira years later tried to claim it. We went to see that, and that building was really the first

contemporary building I saw in this country. This man was good.
I don't know what ever happened to him.

Blum: He's still alive.

Bunshaft: Do you know the man who did it?

Blum: Yes, I do. I can't think of his name.

Bunshaft: I think he was influenced a little bit by the tuberculosis hospital that [Alvar] Aalto did. That was the best thing Aalto ever did. When he went to this folk art, he wasn't so good in my opinion.

Blum: But you went out to see that building.

Bunshaft: One weekend we went to that. One week we went see Wright. What's the place called?

Blum: Taliesin.

Bunshaft: Taliesin East. Well, the one out in Arizona must be West.

Blum: East. I just never knew it had any name.

Bunshaft: It was never used. It was just Taliesin. I guess it's just Taliesin. The other one's Taliesin West. We met Wright.

Blum: How did you arrange an introduction to him?

Bunshaft: Well, we just went on a Sunday. I think we went and somebody knew somebody, one of the students there. We went into the drafting building, which was totally separate from his house. There were drawings on the wall by Wright of various house designs. Some of them were all circles, some were all triangles, some were all squares. The drafting room was run by Wright's son-in-law. I don't know his name.

Blum: Wes Peters?

Bunshaft: Yes. He was a student at MIT when I was there. I think he got kicked out for incompetence. So, he was there, but I didn't speak with him. One of the young draftsmen showed us around. I said, "Why are some drawings circles, some triangles? It seems sort of arbitrary. How does that come about?" He said, "Well, it depends

how Wright feels when he gets up in the morning.” I said, “That doesn’t sound right.” He said, “I think I better get Wright to answer you.” So he went wherever he did and got Wright. Wright came back. We didn’t talk about architecture. We talked about the coming election between [Wendell] Willkie and—I’ve forgotten who he was running against. Everybody was excited about Willkie. This was the presidential election. It must have been 1940. I guess he was running against Roosevelt. There were parades in Chicago with Willkie. We never talked about anything else. I saw the house. I read Wright’s autobiography a long time ago, and I had a classmate at MIT who was crazy about Wright’s work. All he did was Wright sort of things. He didn’t do well in school because nobody liked Wright. After he got his bachelor’s he went out to study with Wright.

Blum: Who was this?

Bunshaft: I don’t know his name. I can’t remember it. He was really a serious sort of Westerner, a very nice man, a bit slow. He went out and about a year later he wrote us a note, and he said, “Since I’ve been here, all I’ve been doing is working in the fields. If I ever find Wright bending over, I’m going to kick his ass.” That’s the

summary of what Wright did to everybody. He exploited. He didn't teach anybody anything. He used them as servants. Their wives waited on his dining table.

Blum: You said before when we were not on tape that you felt Wright had no influence.

Bunshaft: He had one influence and a very important one. I'll give you my impression. He was influenced by the Viennese School—[Josef] Hoffmann and that whole group. All his books and everything had that format, that decorative touch that was in the Viennese School. But what he influenced is the open plan of the house. That was his contribution. That had a great influence in Europe. If it hadn't been for that open plan, I wonder if Mies van der Rohe would have done the Tugendhat House. The Tugendhat House is the epitome of an open plan. So, Wright may consider this small potatoes, but that's his basic contribution. The aesthetics of his architecture, the prairie architecture, didn't affect this country at all. Two or three lonely guys did funny things. It didn't influence the world, either. But his early book, which was sort of a la Viennese with his plans and things, influenced the Germans, I'm sure.

Blum: The Wasmuth portfolio?

Bunshaft: The book?

Blum: Yes, it's a large format.

Bunshaft: It's beautiful. The reason I know about it is Wright gave two of them to Joseph Urban with great dedications in them. This office that Skid sat in was a conference room and a library and Urban's office. The walls were lined with books. Instead of a book being on painted shelves, there were red little satin pads that the books lay on, a beautiful touch. There were two of these Wright books in the library. I worked on Mrs. Goldstein for about three years trying to get her to let me have one of them. She almost was going to give me one, but she changed her mind.

Blum: So you met Wright. When you were in Chicago, did you meet Mies? Mies came here in 1938.

Bunshaft: Well, you know I did. When I was in the office in 1940, I guess the only work I did that I can remember was this restaurant and the Hostess House. Ambrose one day, as I started to tell you, asked

me if I'd like to have lunch with Mies. It was a Friday, and we went and had lunch. I think there were a couple of other people there. Mies, as I learned later, was a very shy man unless he had about three or four martinis. We had martinis, and we had quite a lunch and quite a liquid lunch. Afterwards, he asked me if I'd like to see this house that he had designed spanning a river out west.

Blum: The Farnsworth House

Bunshaft: No, no. This was I think in Nebraska. It's a magnificent house. I said, "Sure," and we went back to the Art Institute. He was up in the attic of that building. He had this wooden model. He came to this country—I'm not going to be correct on names now—because of a Mrs. Resor and her husband [Stanley] who owned Lord and Thomas, one of the great advertising agencies. They were then the biggest. She was connected a little bit with the Museum of Modern Art. Other people had tried to get Mies to come to the U.S. and do a house for them, but he wouldn't do it. One day he got a call from Mrs. Resor, who was in Paris. I think Mies told me this. She said that she had this place in Nebraska or some marvelous place with mountains and valleys, and she had a stream on this property and she wanted him to do a house. At the

same time, Mies had been invited to head up the Armour Institute, and he decided to come to the States. Well, I heard this from other people. The two men that met him were former American pupils of his for a short time at the Bauhaus. They were [Sill] Priestley and...

Blum: John Barney Rodgers?

Bunshaft: Yes. They, of course, ended up being in SOM, both of them. They met him and brought him to Chicago. Mies told me the story that Mrs. Resor took him out to her site. I think the Rockefellers have a whole area there, too.

Blum: Isn't it in Wyoming?

Bunshaft: Yes, you are right. She hadn't mentioned to him what follows. When he got there, he said, there was a stream and there was a house being built on one side of this stream. She had somebody design the house there. She was hoping that Mies would add to it and make it something. Mies said, "You must destroy the house." It wasn't finished yet. "You must destroy it. I can't do anything." She said the neighbors—about five thousand acres away; it's big

land—would find it extravagant to throw something away, not that she didn't have the money. He finally agreed he'd do one design adding a wing to it and another one of what he would recommend. He did a rectilinear box spanning the river, this stream, which probably was forty feet wide. The house rested on each bank and spanned the stream like a bridge, a rectangle, and on the width of the stream it was glass on both sides of the house so you looked up and down the stream. He had a magnificent model that I saw that afternoon. The whole thing was out of wood. It was out of planks three inches thick and twelve inches wide, and that was the module—planks which were put together with splines inside. The outside was vertical planks. The floors and ceilings, all the joints of all the planks, met like a piece of jewelry. It was fabulous, and the model was beautiful, but Mrs. Resor didn't do the house. She didn't like his addition. Anyhow, we had a wonderful afternoon. I think we must have met again. I'm not sure, but either that time or the next time, he said, "I would be very happy if you would form an atelier at night for young draftsmen, and I'll crit them." Like the Boston Architectural School, that was done a lot.

Blum: Did that ever materialize?

Bunshaft: I told him I couldn't do that. I was only out here temporarily, and I was hoping any moment to go back to New York. But I felt it was a great honor he asked me. That's all that happened there.

Blum: Did he speak English well at that time?

Bunshaft: Yes.

Blum: And it was in English that you conversed?

Bunshaft: I don't know any German. We became pretty good friends. I'll just finish off Mies. When I was with Skidmore in 1937 and 1938, a man named Hans Knoll came in to see me. He was a young man from Stuttgart, and, as I learned later, his father was in the furniture business. He came over to sell a no-sag spring design for a seat. I saw him, and I said, "We're not in the furniture business. We're not involved. We buy chairs, but we're not involved in springs." Anyhow, that's how I met him. We became good friends with Hans, very close, and with Florence Schust Knoll, his wife. I would guess it must have been after the war,

Hans got involved with Mies in doing the Mies chairs, the Barcelona chair. He invited Nina and me to Sunday lunch with Mies. We had lunch at the Oak Room in the Plaza. That was a lunch! Mies could really drink. My success with Stone, I forgot to mention, and with Skidmore and people like Mies is that I could drink, too. And I did. I liked it. But that lunch, he had three or four martinis and then Hans ordered champagne, and afterwards we went back to our apartment—in this building, but not this one; it was at the other end—and it was about then four or five. I said, “What would you like to drink, Mies?” I’d had enough. He said, “I’ll have a martini.”

[Tape 3: Side 2]

Bunshaft: Another thing he liked was Steinhaegers, which is a Bremen drink. It’s sort of like very powerful plain liquor. You drink it with a beer chaser. By the time he left, he was pretty potted. It was in the wintertime, and we took him down to the train. This Steinhaegers stuff comes in a little vertical pottery crock. I put a little bottle of that in his big winter coat. He told me when he got off the train the next morning, he didn’t understand what the hell it was doing there. He didn’t know what the hell was going on.

He was a wonderful man. We were very good friends. I saw him a couple years before he died. He had us to dinner, and he couldn't drink then. It was really embarrassing. There was nothing to talk about. He was a very shy man. We looked at all the Klees he had. That's enough on Mies.

Blum: What did you think of his vision for IIT, for a new concept in education for the campus plan?

Bunshaft: I think Mies was a really great architect, and he built three or four magnificent buildings: the Tugendhat House, the Barcelona Pavilion, and the greatest office building built at any time, his Seagrams Building. The Seagrams Building was the result of years of refinement of detail, without a client, without a building. You know what I mean? I think he got too many commissions afterwards and they got a little repetitious. I think he was a man that should have built few buildings, and, of course, those three he built are so wonderful and will endure. There are very few architects who have three great buildings. His life if he hadn't come to the States would have ended up with not much. He belonged to the United States because the United States at that time especially was essentially a steel construction country. That

was what he was really geared for. Germany is not a steel construction country. You think of the Krupp works, but we did buildings there. They don't know anything about big steel. As I say, he was the Mondrian of architecture, and those are his three masterpieces. What did you ask me?

Blum: His approach to teaching, which was quite different.

Bunshaft: As far as his teaching, I think it produced nothing except a bunch of architects who could imitate him, and it's fortunate they did in Chicago where they imitated him literally. The turning of the corner became the Bible. The man that could turn the corner with the proper mullions was a master. I think it was very limiting. I find Illinois Tech an ugly affair, barren.

Blum: The campus itself?

Bunshaft: Barren. The buildings are barren. I think they're partially barren because there was very little money. He had no choice but to do that. A few of them don't work with all this glass.

Blum: What about Crown Hall? That's supposed to be the jewel in the

crown of the campus.

Bunshaft: I don't think it's anything. It's just a big room. That must be hot in the summer. See, it gets to be a cult where the precision drawing of the elevation and the relationship of this mullion to that one and the little base in the stairs, if you can do it pure, then it's supposed to be a work of art. But it isn't. It's dull. Myron Goldsmith is the perfect pupil of that. He worked on one phase of an airport we're doing in Jeddah. Most of it never went ahead. He couldn't do anything. When he got away from Mies, he had no design ability at all. So, I think the teaching of Mies, it was good that it happened in Chicago and it was good for Chicago. But I think his influence was more important than his teaching. His books and his buildings certainly influenced any number of people, whether it was Corbu—you know, somebody likes to say Lever House is Corbu. Another guy says it's Mies because it has thin mullions. And they're both full of baloney. It's modern and probably influenced by Corbu's pilotis and things, period. But it's an insult to Le Corbusier. He would do a much more interesting building than Lever. So that's my feeling about Mies. I loved Mies as a man, and I think he was really a great human being. I think Le Corbusier was difficult, but probably intellectually more

complex than Mies.

Blum: Mies came to Chicago, [László] Moholy-Nagy came to Chicago. Did you meet him at all when you were in Chicago?

Bunshaft: I went with a girl at Wellesley for about four years. I chased her around for about ten years, and I never could make up my mind whether I wanted to marry her, and she never made up her mind. But she was in Chicago at the time I was in Chicago. She was going to Moholy's school and she took me through the school.

Blum: But they were integrating the arts.

Bunshaft: Maybe, they weren't integrating. They were doing graphics and china and stuff. That was not architecture. They didn't do any architectural project. Moholy wasn't an architect or didn't pretend to be. He was an artist, and he's known for his paintings and his outlook on art and his method of evolving—in fact, he would be called an industrial designer. That was his real forte. And that's what he was at the Bauhaus.

Blum: This was the concept that he brought here and tried to create.

Bunshaft: Yes. It was exactly that, and it had nothing to do with architecture.

Blum: There were architecture students that came through the Institute of Design, that studied at the Institute of Design. What about some of the other work that SOM did while you were in Chicago?

Bunshaft: There was a job from the navy that had to be done in a hurry. It had a budgetary limitation. We went to work on it. There were two separate rooms, one for design and one for working drawings, and I had to make sure this was really coordinated. We all moved into one room. They were teaching me how the details were done, because the wood things, all the things related all the way around. We had a wonderful group. It wasn't built when I left. It was just going out for bids.

Blum: How is it that SOM was able to garner this large commission?

Bunshaft: It wasn't large. It was a little building.

Blum: Great Lakes? They did many buildings.

Bunshaft: It was just one little building.

Blum: I thought they did more than one building.

Bunshaft: Maybe they did some later, but when you talk Hostess House, I'm talking about one building. I don't know anything else that happened afterwards. If they got anything else afterwards, it was because they were satisfied with this first one.

Blum: That was perhaps the most important thing you did in Chicago?

Bunshaft: Up until that time.

Blum: Now, you stayed in Chicago until you entered military service in 1942. You were in the Corps of Engineers?

Bunshaft: No. As a reserve from MIT, I was a captain in the coast artillery. Architects weren't engineers, so the only thing they could place them in was the coast artillery. I expected to be called up, but they never called me. I thought they would eventually. At that time, the New York office had a job with the Signal Corps installing in

existing buildings information centers where people all over the Eastern area of the U.S. were doing volunteer work looking for airplanes and then they'd report them to these centers, and these centers would put them on a big map chart. Then they'd decide whether it was an enemy or a U.S. airplane. Skidmore had this job of altering existing buildings. They were mostly on the seventh or eighth floors, so they'd be in the safest part in case of a bombing. They had about five or six of them up and down the coast. The colonel who ran it—Skid and he were drinking pals by then. I told Skid I'd like to go on active duty. I didn't want to go in the coast artillery. So the colonel ordered me up, and I went into military service in the Signal Corps. Our offices were in a telephone building down on 14th Street, and my billet was the Hotel New Yorker on 34th and 7th Avenue. That was my introduction to the war. Later, our headquarters moved out to Mitchell Field on Long Island. Then somebody told me they needed coast artillery men, not for coast artillery, but for some sort of artillery. They were going to call up the ones that had been transferred. I walked into Colonel [Harold] Talbot and told him I wanted to be transferred to the engineers where I belonged. He said, "I can get you over near Flushing." There was a place called Fort Totten, a little peninsula with a charming campus. That was

the headquarters of some engineering section for this part of the country. I was transferred, and I moved there. In that headquarters, the officers club had been designed by Robert E. Lee. I don't know how long I was there. I was there at the end of 1942, and in December I got married to Nina. We had a little apartment in Bayside. Three months later I was sent overseas on Priority Two, which was the highest priority you could be sent over on next to the president. There were six officers from the colonels down, and we all went to London on a general plane. At MIT they gave courses. I mean, you took drilling and stuff, but that was over in the main campus and the architects were excused from that. So I was no more a military man than you are. We got rushed over to London. Nobody knew why, except there was a rumor we were going to go with an assault division. We got to London. We reported to the chief engineer of the whole U.S. forces. Do you know London? Well, there's Upper Brook Street, which is right near Grovesnor Square. That's where the American embassy is. On Upper Brook Street, there were many townhouses. The military occupied them all, but you could never tell from the outside. So you'd go from one building to another with little steps. We reported there, and they didn't know anything about us. They didn't know what the hell to do with us.

We weren't needed, so they put us in the headquarters. I worked for another colonel. I sat on my butt in London. They had blackouts there at night. You had to grope your way around. I arrived about a week before the V-bombs started coming. They could either give you a place to stay as a captain or they'd give you four pounds a day and you could find your own place. I found for four pounds a day I could stay in a hotel on Picadilly, facing Green Park. It was reserved for colonels, but if I paid four pounds, I could stay there, so I had a room there. About a week after, these V-bombs started coming over. These are the V-1's, and you could see them. You saw them coming. They were very slow.

Blum: You said they were V-bombs?

Bunshaft: V-bombs, yes, the things that did a lot of damage to London. They carried a lot of ordinary explosive. When they went over a building, the building would vibrate. Of course, everybody was supposed to be down in cellars. They may not be going over you, but if you heard them, there'd be a pause. Dead silence. Then the explosion. So when you heard that pause, you were wondering whether it was near or far. Later on, they came with V-2 bombs. The first night I was there, I was near Green Park and Hyde Park,

which were full of anti-aircraft guns. They didn't hit anything, but they were firing like mad. Immediately the next day when they found these V-bombs were coming, they moved all the artillery to the coast to catch them before they got to London.

Blum: What were you doing?

Bunshaft: Writing letters. I was working for a colonel who was supposed to be putting out manuals of how to build temporary hospitals in France when we got there and how to build camps. They made up lists of materials to request from the United States. They had a drafting room with about ten people, some enlisted men, some English civilians. He was a lieutenant colonel and he had about three captains around him and one major. That was to build up his staff. I had nothing to do. I did nothing. Maybe write a letter once a week to the advanced chief engineer's office, which I think they used in their bathroom. I was there about a year.

Blum: And you went to France as well?

Bunshaft: Oh, I went to France twenty-nine days after the landing in Normandy.

Blum: Did you then have some hospital work to do or was it all desk work?

Bunshaft: Same thing. I was not in the war at all. None of these men had anything to do. There were combat engineers who built bridges and stuff. But this was the headquarters. We only wrote papers. This headquarters when it moved to France, which was scattered in London. Do you know Paris?

Blum: Yes.

Bunshaft: The Arc de Triomphe—one of the immediate avenues off of it is Avenue Kleber. It had some prosperous big townhouses. I believe they were owned by wealthy Jewish people. They had been occupied by the Germans, and we moved in and used their furniture. When you'd open a drawer, you'd pick up matches from places in Paris that had been left there by the Germans. Across the street was the Hotel Majestic, which became our mess hall. It was a very good, big place. In fact, it had been the British

headquarters in the First World War. This headquarters moved finally, not just the engineers. It was the medical, all the support services for the fighting men. It consisted of six thousand officers and fifteen thousand enlisted men, and about half of them were doing nothing. When we got to France, we stayed in a camp for a couple of nights. They built a temporary camp, but Patton and those boys had advanced so much, Paris was liberated, so we went to Paris. I came over on Priority Two in the general's plane from New York to London. From London to Paris, most people came over in all sorts of little boats. I don't know why, I don't know who came with me, but I crossed the Channel in a newly built troop ship that had been designed to take officers and men to India. I had a stateroom like I was going to New York.

Blum: What was your rank?

Bunshaft: Captain. That's nothing. It was just comic. In Paris we had a billet in a hotel. Avenue Kleber goes from the Arc de Triomphe to the Museum of Modern Art down at the end where you stand on a plaza and look at the Eiffel Tower across the river. We lived on Avenue Benjamin Franklin, but we had no heat. It was very cold, a very cold winter.

Blum: But you did take advantage of that time to meet Le Corbusier and that we did talk about yesterday.

Bunshaft: Oh, that's minor. Let's get on.

Blum: Was there anything in your military service that furthered your career in architecture?

Bunshaft: No, no, no. It had nothing to do with architecture. It was just four years gone.

Blum: And you were out of the army in 1947, and you came to work at SOM.

Bunshaft: Yes. At the rate you're going, we'll be about thirty cassettes. Go ahead. What's next.

Blum: Was there any question that you would come back to SOM?

Bunshaft: Oh, no.

Blum: You were just sure you were going to return?

Bunshaft: Oh, we all knew that.

Blum: But you also said that you were slated to come back to Chicago.

Bunshaft: I wasn't slated. I agreed to it in order to get the hell out of the army a few months early. I told you earlier how Skidmore's relationship with people started the firm growing. I think I told you about this man at Westinghouse who was able to get Skidmore on the Pierce Foundation, and, therefore, SOM became involved in prefab housing. I didn't finish that story. This is now during the war. The Pierce Foundation work was done prior—some of it—but it continued afterwards. At that time, down south somewhere there was an atomic bomb plant being built. You must know about Fermi's experiments under the stadium. As I understand it, Owings had something to do with patching up something there. In New York, we knew nothing about any of it. It was all kept secret. But there was a huge plant being built in the South somewhere under General "somebody" for atomic bombs. They were going to have about ten miles from this plant a town for the people to live in that were going to work in this plant. They were developing the atomic bomb. The firm that was designing this atomic plant was a big engineering firm in

Boston. I can't think of their name. They did it. They were then asked to start designing the town. They were asked to design a house, and they did a house. When the government authorities went to look at it, they were kind of surprised. This firm in Boston mostly did industrial work. They weren't really architects. They were engineers. A very famous firm. When they went to look at this house, they were surprised to find that they had urinals in the bathrooms. These people had never done a house, so they were fired from the town. I don't know how it came about, but the government got in touch with the Pierce Foundation, and, as a result, Skidmore, Owings got the job of doing the town of Oak Ridge [Tennessee], all from the Westinghouse World's Fair Building, direct human relations.

Blum: Were you in any way involved with Oak Ridge?

Bunshaft: I was in the army. I had nothing to do with it. I tell this about how the firm grew from human relations and, in some cases, happy clients. So they did that, and it put them into the big time during the war.

Blum: Now when you came back to the New York office...

Bunshaft: I came back. I told you the story about the Chicago party and so forth. They had a project for Ohio State in Columbus, Ohio, to do a master plan for a teaching medical center. Mr. Hartmann, who had been in the army in the advanced corps of engineers who we used to write letters to, had become a lieutenant colonel. I ended up a major. This was a parting gift. I was not military. Hartmann evidently had gotten in touch with Skidmore. He had won the Rotch and he wanted to see if Skid would hire him by mail. Skid wrote me and asked me if I knew anything about him. I said, "No, I didn't." That's how I knew he was up there, and it didn't make any difference because Skid had already hired him. He was in the New York office when I came to work. He was working on a famous cancer center here.

Blum: Sloan-Kettering?

Bunshaft: Yes. Whenever you hear that name, you know it's people in there for cancer. They were going to build an additional building for research. Hartmann was working on that, I think as a designer. The office also had a hotel in Cincinnati—the Terrace Plaza Hotel. I had nothing to do with either of those. Bill Brown was running the Terrace Plaza Hotel.

Blum: I think the first large project that shows up in your career after your return to New York...

Bunshaft: Lever House.

Blum: ...is the Manhattan House

Bunshaft: The Manhattan House project came about through the fact that an architectural firm named [Albert] Mayer and [Julian] Whittlesey had convinced the New York Life Insurance Company to buy a city block in Manhattan between 65th and 66th Street and Third Avenue and Second Avenue. This site had been used as a car-barn site for streetcars when streetcars were pulled by cable, and the city was selling it. New York Life bought it after Mayer and Whittlesey had made some sketches conforming to the zoning in that part of the city. That consisted of having on the avenues two eighteen- or twenty-story buildings facing the avenues, and one building in the middle of the block in the middle of a park twelve stories high, because that was the restriction even though it was set back for the zoning at that time. The New York Life people evidently, as best we can tell, thought that Mayer Whittlesey were experts on apartment houses because they had built some for

themselves. But they weren't, evidently, excited about their kind of architecture, and they asked Skidmore, Owings and Merrill to see if we could work out a joint venture with Mayer and Whittlesey. We proceeded to work together. The first thing we did was start by working apart. We decided that we would like to develop a scheme of our own, and just see what we could do even though we weren't super experts on apartment planning. We eventually came up with a scheme. The site between 65th and 66th is two hundred feet, and the streets on 65th and 66th are sixty feet wide. We discovered that if we gave forty feet of the land facing 66th Street, that would make 66th Street a hundred feet wide and we could go up twenty stories if we faced on a hundred-foot-wide street. So we came up with the plan that was built of one huge building twenty stories high with five wings sticking out to the north and five to the south. New York Life turned the forty feet over to the city, which made it a separate road so that 66th could have two-way traffic between Third and Second. Of course, the New York Life people who we dealt with, their vice president of housing and their staff architect, didn't tell us that they thought it was wonderful or anything, but they recommended we both make a presentation—Mayer Whittlesey and ourselves—of the two schemes, each defending his own

scheme to the board, which we did. I made the presentation and showed that the most desirable apartments in that block would be the apartments above the twelfth floor in the middle of the block, away from all the traffic. Those would be the best, and, of course, they didn't exist in the other scheme, where the great bulk of the apartments were on the noisy avenues. I gave other facts and whatnot, and it was approved. I found out later that the vice president in charge and the architect had recommended our scheme and that the board already had approved it and the meeting was eyewash. It was obvious we had the right scheme. After that, we took over all the design and Mayer Whittlesey made the working drawings and put in the little planning refinements of the things that so-called luxury apartments should have. It worked out fine. Albert Mayer was an intellectual, a scholar and not a great designer, but a very great man, and wealthy. He was such a fascinating man that while he was in the army in India for the U.S., he became friends of [Jawaharlal] Nehru, and Nehru hired him to do the master plan for Chandigarh. It would have gone ahead if Mayer's young designer, who was very brilliant, hadn't been killed in Egypt in an airplane accident. Later on Le Corbusier took over.

Blum: Was there any thought at the time that this was a borderline neighborhood and you were putting in luxury apartments into this neighborhood in such density?

Bunshaft: To my knowledge, there was nothing. It was a free site, and the insurance companies at that time—both New York and Metropolitan—were into housing. Housing was, they thought, the thing. They changed their mind quickly when Metropolitan Life built some high-rise apartments in Los Angeles and they stood empty because all the people in Los Angeles wanted to be on the ground. That stopped the whole insurance company business in housing. It stopped dead.

Blum: But in 1950 this was built. Was this immediately desirable?

Bunshaft: You're goddamn right.

Blum: Did you move in here right away?

Bunshaft: When this building was going up, I lived in the Village. My wife and I came, and we had an idea of having a one-bedroom apartment on the southeast corner of the building, which had a

view up downtown and a view of the river from a high floor. We had to walk up, because the building was just a structure. We were up about the twelfth floor on the way up, and we ran into the office manager of the building who was going to run it. We told him what we were doing. He said, "Don't bother. That whole stack is rented." The building was rented before it was finished. We moved in an apartment facing Second Avenue when the building was built in 1950. We've been here thirty-nine years. After about three years there, the noise was terrific from the avenue and the trucks. We moved to this apartment in the middle of the building.

Blum: You said the center apartments would be the most desirable anyway in your rationale to...

Bunshaft: Yes, high up. This is a through apartment. This living room used to have a wall in the dining room/living room. We made it one room. So that's how it came about. Well, I'm going to cover Lever fully, and then we're going to speed it up. I'm going to try to be as factual as I can as I understood it. Lever House started, as far as SOM was concerned, with a consulting management engineer who lived in Chicago whose name I cannot remember, who was

evidently a casual friend of Nat Owings. This engineer told Nat that the Lever Company, which had its headquarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was thinking of moving to Chicago and building a headquarters building. I'm not sure if he knew then, but I think he gave the impression that the site was diagonally across from the Drake Hotel. It was a site that had a famous mansion on it, and that's all I know about that. I guess that this engineer who was a consultant to the Lever Company offered to take Nat to meet Mr. Charles Luckman, who was then head of the company in Cambridge. Owings told me he took along with him a small toy plastic rectangle, a little box. It could have been like the size of a pack of playing cards, but just plastic with some little lines on it for floors. They went to see Luckman. I don't know what happened there. I guess they got along, and that was the end of that. The next thing that happened, as far as I'm concerned or as far as I know, Luckman, I believe, had decided to come to New York instead of Chicago, and they had a site where it is now. That land belongs to the Goelet family. All I know is that Luckman asked Skidmore, Owings and Merrill to meet him at his apartment in the Waldorf Towers to discuss the possibility of doing a building. I don't know if anything happened in between, but I'm just telling you what I really know. I don't know

if I was a partner yet. I guess I had just been made a partner. Skid and Nat took me along. I think they took me along because they thought, I don't know, maybe Luckman might think me compatible or Luckman, being Jewish, might think I'm Jewish or something. I don't know why they took me, but I didn't say a damn thing in the meeting. In that meeting, Owings and Skidmore did all the talking, and Luckman offered the job of doing an office building for a thousand people, and it should be a distinguished building. Of course, the firm wanted it very much and Luckman knew it. He offered a fee that was much lower than it should have been, but Skidmore and Nat accepted it. He also put a condition that Raymond Loewy would do the interiors. That's how we got the job.

Blum: I'm sure you know that in Nat Owings' book, he takes responsibility or claims that there were several features of the existing building for which he was responsible.

Bunshaft: What existing building? You mean the building that was built?

Blum: Yes.

Bunshaft: I understand what he says. His is more dreamy than Luckman's articles. I'm just going to tell you what happened when we go through this thing. I'm sick myself of these goddamn liars.

Blum: I'm glad you're setting the record straight.

Bunshaft: I don't want to talk about it now. Let me go on with my sequence. So we got the job. We also got the job of doing a research lab for Lever in Jersey across on the Hudson. It's opposite perhaps 140th Street in New York on the Hudson. That we got pretty soon, because when we went up, Bill Brown and I were the partners running the job. Skid was the senior partner, but after getting the job, my recollection is Bill and I went up. Maybe Skid went up the first time to see Luckman. Luckman explained that this whole thing had to be kept secret because if the employees in Cambridge knew, there would be chaos. They'd be looking for jobs, they'd be disturbed. That's why they gave us the research lab so that our coming to Cambridge would be that we were up there for the research labs. We got a third job. He wanted to be in New York at a certain time as their lease was up in the building they were in. It was a building right next to MIT. It's now the MIT School of Business Affairs. He wanted to be in New York at a

certain time, and he had rented a building at 59th and Park. They had a number of floors. The executive offices temporarily were going to be in that building. He had gotten hold of a building downtown for bulk clerical people, so he'd move his people down there as the new Lever House wouldn't be built in time. So we had to make drawings altering some old warehouse and some old building...

[Tape 4: Side 1]

Bunshaft: So, anyhow, those things went on. I mean, I didn't bother with this alteration business. Bill Brown had people taking care of that. We started on design. They gave us a program that led to the design. They said they wanted a building for a thousand people, and they would like offices. The clerical was distributed throughout, so the building didn't have to have huge floors, but they wanted one big floor for certain departments that had to be together on one floor. I don't think it was computers then. They weren't sure if they needed one big floor or two, also they wanted a cafeteria for the staff, so we went to work on this sample program. The first thing you do on a site is find out the zoning limitations, the air space you can't intrude on, and how big a

building you could build on that site. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Blum: I do. I have an idea.

Bunshaft: The tower allowance in those days was that you go up only eighty-five feet on the side streets. On an avenue, you could go up to the equivalent of about ten or twelve floors, and then you met the set-back. If you wanted a tower above that, it could only be twenty-five percent of the site. There were certain air slopes. We wanted to build a glass building. We wanted to be as avant-garde as possible. Twenty-five percent of the site produced a floor, I think, of seventy-five hundred square feet. In those days, the big floors weren't thought big, but this was small even then. The whole site produced about thirty thousand, and we had a hole in it for the big floor. Of course, we wanted something new, so we put it on stilts. Now, the location of the tower from left to right as you face it from Park Avenue, is set by the zoning to a degree. We couldn't have moved it farther north aesthetically because of the envelope. We could have moved it maybe to the middle, but that we didn't want. We wanted to have some asymmetry. So that's how it developed. Then they said they thought they needed two

big floors, and we made that and it was awful. That's one time we tried to talk them out of it. That's how it came about. Luckman was already in New York at the time when we got into study models. We showed him a preliminary study model maybe this big.

Blum: About eighteen inches?

Bunshaft: Yes. Just what we have now, but just mass, an open ground floor, no stores. He wanted a building to identify Lever. They were not interested in making bucks out of stores or renting extra space. They didn't want extra space, nothing was said about stores. But we showed him one of these models, and he liked it. Then a few days later he came back for another meeting. Skid in the meantime said to me, "You'll never get away without stores. It's crazy." I said, "Well, it's the whole goddamn design." He said, "You've got to put in stores," so I put them in and Luckman came over. Here's his only contribution. He said, "What happened to it? What's that stuff in the bottom, Skidmore?" He said, "Stores. You've got to have them." He said, "You've ruined the whole design," and that was his major contribution. If he'd have gone along with that, the building would have been nothing. Lever got

the twenty-fifth AIA [American Institute of Architects] Award, and the AIA magazine had a story about me in it. I credited Luckman with eliminating the stores. I also said he was fired during the course of the design of the building. He wasn't fired for the building. He was fired because the company was losing money. So, he wrote a great big reply, which the magazine published. He told what he envisioned—he envisioned this building. He no more envisioned it than you did twenty years ago. You ought to read the article to find out what liars are. AIA published it. They wanted me to respond, and I said, "I'm not going to get involved with that liar." One of the weaknesses of the scheme in my mind and perhaps in serious architecture is that by having a tower at right angles to the street, you expose the adjoining buildings, the side walls, the ugly stuff, and the empty space in between, the back yards. That bothered me, so we made a model one day of what you could build by facing a thick twelve-story building on Park Avenue. On Park Avenue it would have been maybe a hundred and eighty, and it could have been a hundred feet thick. That would take a block, just one block, very much like the buildings that had been on Park Avenue. I had that made just to wander around and see whether that would hide the adjoining buildings. You wouldn't go to the property wall. You'd

have a space in between, so a lot of people working in the building would be looking at those junky walls. It was not even worth considering. At the time I was looking at this, Owings happened to be in the office and came down. I showed him what we were doing, and he said, "Well, I like this," the one that we had shown Luckman. I said, "So do I." That's all he ever had to do with that building except getting the job. Nothing more. He writes like he decided the design. He writes that he proposed an underground garage. That was something the owner had in the initial program. He writes about the open ground floor—he doesn't call it a "plaza." He calls it a "garden" or a "park". I've forgotten the third thing.

Blum: Turning the building perpendicular to the street.

Bunshaft: That's what we had had approved before Owings came to New York. He stopped at a man's desk who did contribute who was working on it. I'll tell you about him. I said I was concerned a little about an old party wall and I tried this block. He said, "Oh, I like this one here." Luckman had already agreed to it. I couldn't lie like that. When we started this Carol Krinsky book, she's suspicious, I guess, that people tend to brag or exaggerate. She

wouldn't believe what I said. She would believe what she read in some magazine that interviewed somebody or other or interviewed me and got it wrong. It took her about four months to wake up that I was telling her the truth. In the three people that contributed to the job was Owings, which is very important, who got it. At MIT there was an old French professor, the head man, who said there were three important things about doing a building. There is, one, getting the job, two, getting the job, and, three, getting the job. So Owings has that credit. The second one is Luckman throwing out this idea of Skid's of putting stores in, which some clients would have insisted on to make money out of it. And third was a man who was the design assistant to me, Manny Turano. He's in the book. He made some beautiful drawings of the proportions and the mullion system and all that. The fourth was, of course, all through this, Bill Brown. We worked together. Bill headed up the research of being able to build a glass skin. It's rather primitive compared to what we can do today. It forced the glass industry to develop a spandrel glass and to find and get designed an outside window washer. That was the first real one that worked in the world. Bill Brown, jointly with me, was the major person that handled the whole project. That's about as close as I can come to the whole story, and I'm the

only one that's been all through it. It's unbelievable.

Blum: Were you satisfied with what finally materialized?

Bunshaft: Oh, I thought I was in seventh heaven that we did it. That, as far as I'm concerned, was the first real building. I don't consider an apartment house made out of bricks as a great building. That was the first really contemporary building. Manhattan House is semi-contemporary. That was the first major one.

Blum: Well, it took awards, and the critics picked it up right away. In spite of what you say about the critics, they all liked this building. Someone even called it "the eighth wonder of the world."

Bunshaft: As far as I'm concerned, the most respected architectural critic who ever existed in my lifetime was a man named Lewis Mumford.

Blum: Wasn't he was the one who called it "the eighth wonder of the world"?

Bunshaft: He didn't call it that, but he wrote a fabulous article. Fabulous in the sense that he went through the interview and covered the whole building completely. He talked as much about the functions of the interior as he did about the exterior. It was what you'd call top-notch architectural criticism. Even if he had disliked it, he went through it thoroughly. There's no architectural critic today who writes like that or thinks like that. So, that was great.

Blum: And it was given an award again twenty-five years later. It made a landmark of Lever House.

Bunshaft: It's the only landmark of a building in New York where the architect's still alive.

Blum: Is that right?

Bunshaft: Sure it is.

Blum: It needed what? How many years?

Bunshaft: Thirty years. They're waiting for Pepsi-Cola. They're going to

give that immediately as soon as it's thirty years. They're supposed to be giving it to the Manufacturers Trust, Hanover Trust building down on 43rd. Anyhow, let's go.

Blum: You've had time now, more than thirty years, to reconsider some of the criticism that architectural critics and maybe the whole thinking came up with. One is breaking of the street line. How do you feel about that now? At the time, it seemed like it was certainly the appropriate thing to do. What about now?

Bunshaft: You're talking about breaking up the street line or having a building be compatible with its neighbors, the two things simultaneously. Let's just take that site. At the time we did the building, there was no new building on the avenue except one at 57th and Park, a low twelve-story office building of limestone, more or less the same mass as all the huge apartment buildings along Park. All the buildings were built, filling the entire site on the outside, with huge courts inside where you drove in and got off at your various apartments. It was really luxurious. All these apartments were twelve, fourteen, sixteen rooms. These buildings at the time Lever was being built were obsolete. Nobody could get servants. I feel like I'm talking to the critics who just got out of

their diapers. If we had built to conform or to keep the line of Park Avenue, our building would have been out of keeping in about five years after it was finished, because everything else on the avenue changed.

Blum: Wasn't it due to Lever House that so much changed?

Bunshaft: No! That's stupid. Excuse me for saying that.

Blum: All right.

Bunshaft: It's due to the fact that buildings on it were valuable land and they were empty and the need for office space was beginning. The city of New York started at Wall Street and moved up and came to Rockefeller Center. The next move they could make was on to Park Avenue. That would have happened if there would have been no Lever. In France they would have converted the apartments to some broken-down office space and kept the facade, but not in the U.S. Let's just stick to what I just said. It's ridiculous. New York is a city that's alive and it's changing. It's like human beings. People live and then they die and a baby's born and it grows up. Buildings don't stay forever unless the

goddamn historical people preserve every junky building in the city, as that book of yours on Chicago illustrates. So that's the answer for that. The first critic saying that it put a hole in the avenue but justified Seagrams because it was a nice hole was a guy named [Vincent] Scully, who teaches at Yale. Scully has a little vendetta with me, and I don't care for him. It came about through my insulting him one time or he thought he was insulted. He's been giving his class in architectural history. It starts off with beating up the Beinecke Library. It's gotten so that the freshmen laugh at his lecture. The main point of this changing the face of Park Avenue is that it was inevitable that face would change.

Blum: Lever House and the Seagrams Buildings both are thought to be primarily responsible for changing.

Bunshaft: They aren't changing. The reason the other buildings were built is because there was a need for them and there was empty land. It had nothing to do with Seagrams. That's just school stuff.

Blum: I wasn't talking about the look of the avenue. They were responsible primarily for changing the zoning laws, the 1916

stepped zoning laws.

Bunshaft: No, nothing at all. Nothing. Nothing at all.

Blum: How did that change come about then?

Bunshaft: What change?

Blum: The change in the 1916 zoning law where if you gave so much ground space you could then build higher.

Bunshaft: The real zoning allowed if you had a thirty percent plaza you could get—if we were building on the Lever House site now, they would allow for that neighborhood a building fifteen times the area of the site. If you created thirty percent of the site for a plaza, you could go up to eighteen times the area of the site. That's the law that was passed in 1961. That's just the mildest thing about it. That zoning law is what's created this mess of New York City. Up to that time, the only tall buildings could be facing avenues and the high part could only go back a hundred feet on the side streets. The side streets were zoned for eight- and ten-story buildings, or six. That law permitted the side streets to be used

like the avenues. If you owned enough property between 56th and 57th or 55th and 56th in the middle of the block, and they zoned that for fifteen times, you could put up a big tower on a side street, and that's what's happened. The Solow Building, 9 West 57th. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Blum: Yes, I do.

Bunshaft: That building could only be built as a result of the new zoning, the 1961 zoning. If everybody built their property on the middle of Manhattan to the legal volumes allowed, there wouldn't be room enough in the streets for the public to use for walking, and forget about cars. It was the craziest thing ever done. The Solow Building should never have been a building that big, even though that's a wide avenue, but the law allowed it. An architect can't say to the client, "You can't do it."

Blum: Another building that you were responsible for that followed soon after Lever House was Manufacturers Hanover Bank. Would you like to say anything about Manufacturers Hanover? That was the second building in 1954 that brought a lot of attention not only to SOM but to you.

Bunshaft: I know. Well, Manufacturers Hanover came about... It's covered in the book. Manufacturers Trust, at that time, had a new president who had been given a set of complete working drawings for a branch bank on 43rd and 5th Avenue, which had been turned over to him by the previous president. Evidently, he didn't think much of it. He asked his good friend, Lew Crandall, who was on the board of Manufacturers, and one of the biggest contracting firms in the city, what he should do. Crandall called me and said that he had this set of drawings. We were friends because Crandall built Lever House, the Fuller Company. He said, "I'm going to send over a set of drawings for a bank. I want you to look at it and see if you can save at least the structural drawings and make a decent design out of it." So he sent them over, and what this design consisted of was the facade on 5th Avenue, which was one solid block, sixty feet high and a hundred feet wide, of granite with a door in it. The north side along 43rd was glass. It was awful. I looked at it, and I called Lew. He expected me to spend a day or two. I called him back and said, "Look, if you're going to do a new bank, saving a few engineering drawings that will limit exploring a good building is ridiculous. If you want a good building, you have to start new." So he spoke to Hap Flanagan, and Hap hired us. He was the first of many future

clients that became close friends of ours. He was a marvelous person. We had a wonderful time working with him. My wife and I would go down to see progress of the building at night, and we'd find him with his wife wandering around. He was a real charmer. He said to me once, "If this doesn't work"—because it was quite a change to an all-glass bank—"we'll both have to leave town." Anyhow, it worked. He had wonderful opening parties, and their business rapidly expanded and he was very pleased.

Blum: And Lewis Mumford called it the "Crystal Lantern, more gorgeous at night than during the day." What about the screen by [Harry] Bertolia? Was that the first time there was art along with the architecture?

Bunshaft: Well, in the course of doing the building, there was a lot of art. It was the first building where we talked clients into using art up in the executive floors, although there was an interior woman who was involved in it, too. I knew Bertolia through some exhibits of his work through Hans Knoll. In fact, Hans Knoll gave me a small Bertolia for Christmas. Bertolia was a very nice man and we hired him, and he did a good job. I want to get off it.

Blum: You did talk a great deal about how the collaboration worked between SOM and Connecticut General, which was your next big success. Chase followed that. With the Connecticut General commission, [Isamu] Noguchi did work. How did you come to select him?

Bunshaft: With Connecticut General, we had quite a collaboration. We were the architects. The Knoll Furniture Company in which Florence Knoll was the designer was doing the interior furnishings, which consisted on one level of a great many employee services such as lounges, cafeterias, game rooms, etc., which led out onto a terrace. The whole building scheme was based on four large inner courtyards, which had to be landscaped or designed, and the terrace to the south leading out from the glassed-in lounges and card rooms had to be designed. I thought immediately of Isamu Noguchi, who's both a great sculptor and has a tremendous knowledge and a sensitivity for gardening and the use of rock, water, sand, and grass. I first met Noguchi when I went to see him about doing a design for the ground floor of Lever House. I got the owner to pay Noguchi a fee for doing the study, and Noguchi did a beautiful design consisting of the entire plaza and the lobby, and it included fountains, sculpture, greenery, seats,

etc. It was a very beautiful, abstract design that filled the north portion of the plaza and the south portion. Unfortunately, the Lever people liked it, but the company was hard up for money at that time and couldn't go ahead with it. So that was my first dealing with Noguchi. I knew about his work. I'd seen it many years before, and he was hired to do these courts and this terrace in collaboration with the pattern that was being developed in the lounges so that the whole thing reads as one total design—all, of course, working with us. In the course of it, we thought there was a nice place on this terrace for a major piece of sculpture. Frazar Wilde, who was head of Connecticut General, agreed to have Noguchi do a study for that plaza. He didn't have a great deal of money, so Noguchi had the idea of having it cut, not carving it, in cubistic sort of chunks right at a granite quarry nearby. Within a hundred miles there was a nice granite quarry. He had the idea of having, I think, a mother, father and child. Both Noguchi and I thought it should be a certain size, but after he did a small study, we thought we ought to make a mock-up out of plywood, full-sized, of these three pieces. We also thought we ought to have two different sizes: one seventeen and one fifteen feet high, or something like that. That was done. We had the two sets brought out on this terrace, which wasn't finished, but it was there. We

stood up one of the sets, and whether it was the big or the little one, it didn't look very good. It didn't belong. It wasn't the piece itself, but somehow it didn't belong at that point. As we looked, we looked across the pond that we'd created. There was a little swell there, and Noguchi said, "Why don't we take it over there and try it?" I've forgotten whether Noguchi said that or Frazar Wilde or I. I don't remember. We got a truck and took it over and put it on the grass, and the big one looked beautiful there. It was nice looking from the terrace, so our joint wisdom of placing the sculpture on the terrace didn't work, but doing it by actually moving it around did. It is very hard to determine the proper size of a sculpture for where it's going and sometimes the best placement for it. That's how it came about.

Blum: Did you often follow the procedure of building full-scale models just to try them out or was that unusual?

Bunshaft: I don't think we did it much after that. We made full-scale parts of buildings sometimes. The Moore at the Banque Lambert in Brussels was a piece that Moore had done in plaster and was about to have cast in Berlin. He thought it would be big enough for the plaza at the Banque Lambert, and he said, "Well, I'll paint

up the plaster to look like bronze and instead of taking it directly to Berlin, we'll take it to Brussels and then Berlin." He did, and I came with him to Brussels to look at it. His men had just put it up. We were pretty good friends, and he looked at it and I looked at it. He said, "The building's too strong. It makes that sculpture look puny." I said, "Henry, it's not big enough, but it's better than nothing. Let's tell the client we want it."

Blum: And that's the way the Moore came about?

Bunshaft: Yes.

Blum: Was this always a collaboration between sculptor and you?

Bunshaft: Well, I've been interested in art. I've promoted a lot of art in architecture. My whole life is doing architecture, and if I have money, we buy art.

Blum: At the Chase, was it your idea to organize a committee to have an on-going collection program?

Bunshaft: No, not quite like that, but I think the Chase art program is

perhaps one of the nicest things a corporation's done about art.
I'd like to tell that story.

Blum: Please.

Bunshaft: While the big building was being designed, Chase took over the lower floors of a building being built on Park and 55th Street. It was to be a branch bank. We influenced the architect who was building the whole building to give us the big banking floor and so forth. That had some executive offices up on the fourth floor to take care of the VP's who were meeting important clients who didn't want to go all the way down to Wall Street. So the fourth floor was an entertainment/business place. That's where we proposed art first to Chase. We selected art and brought it into the office. [John] McCloy, who was then head of the bank, and David [Rockefeller], who was going to be the next head, came and they picked things and we went ahead. The executive floor has a lot of art, including a very big Sam Francis. At the end of completion of that, Walt [Severinghaus] and I had a meeting up there with David and McCloy, and they said they'd like us to think about an art program for the main building. Up until that time, art had been mainly used in the executive offices. In a report to them, I

proposed, number one, that they have art of all kinds—posters, everything—throughout the building for their people to see and enjoy. Number two was that their own people ate in the building and they had a big cafeteria with a tremendous lounge. This is a hell of a big building. In that lounge, which was very big, an area would be devoted as a museum that would be tied in to the traveling shows of small museums. My thesis was that employees had Blue Cross, Blue Shield, and all these benefits, that it would be nice if they had some education on art, aesthetics. One way is to have it throughout the spaces, and the other way is to see current things going on. The American Association of Art has traveling shows. The third thing was that as the art they had acquired greater financial importance, they might give pieces away to museums in the cities of correspondent banks that they wanted to be nice to. From the money they would gain, they would use that to buy new art, younger art, so over the years the art in the building would be changing. A major piece of sculpture in the plaza was required. We met with McCloy and David and they read our report and thought it was fine. They said our estimates were probably low. We estimated five hundred thousand dollars, of which seventy-five thousand was for the plaza sculpture. That was a long time ago. Then David got the

idea of forming a committee. It was not ours. He's an expert at organizing things. He got Alfred Barr, James Sweeney, a fellow named Hale from the Metropolitan, Perry Rathborn from Boston, and me and David. Barr wanted Dorothy Miller, his assistant, to be on it. She wasn't supposed to be on the committee. She was just supposed to be his assistant, but she ended up being on the committee. We went on a program of buying while the building was being built. Every month or every two months, Davis Allen, who was in charge of the interim work on Chase, and I would go around the galleries and find things and have them sent down to these meetings. Dorothy Miller and the other members, if they saw something they thought appropriate, sent it down. When we met, there would perhaps be a hundred items to go through. They had it set up like a museum. They brought in the pictures and the six or seven of us would talk a bit, and then we'd vote. I think we could vote three, two or one—three being the highest. If a painting got eleven points, it was in. That's how they kept accumulating. When the building finished and they moved in, David did a very smart thing. He took one area and made it what he called an art store, and executives could come down and pick out the paintings they wanted for their offices. CBS didn't do that. They put in the paintings they thought appropriate, whether the

guy liked it or not. Then in public areas, David Rockefeller and his wife and Davis Allen would go around and hang things. They continued this program and right now they're still going with the committee. I was on a committee for fifteen years afterwards. It's going on now, and they still continue to purchase, and their annual budgets are something like three or four million a year, and they have something like twelve or fifteen thousand objects, which are in their branches and offices all over the world.

Blum: Did they, in fact, institute this little space for a museum?

Bunshaft: No, they didn't do that. They sold a Gottlieb. That's all they ever did. But this art has been plastered all over the world. Graphics and all that. They had a big party for the twenty-fifth anniversary of this program and had a big book published on the collection. Okay, that covers Chase.

Blum: After Chase...

Bunshaft: From this Chase thing, it's how corporations got into collecting art. It became the fashion, whether the head man knew a Chinese pot from an Arab's head skull. It became the fashion, and that I

am against. In the case of Chase, David is a collector himself, and there are other people devoted, but then it became the fashion.

Blum: Well, now IBM has a little gallery, and lots of corporate headquarters have little galleries.

Bunshaft: Paine and Webber, they all have. Not galleries. I'm talking about collecting for their office spaces.

Blum: Well, they also have these little gallery areas.

Bunshaft: Well, that's because they have lobby space they don't know what to do with.

Blum: With Lever House, Manufacturers Hanover Trust, Connecticut General, and Chase, the critics all knew your work. Whether SOM wanted anonymous coverage or not, the critics knew your work. How did you feel about them identifying you when the policy of the firm was supposed to be no identification?

Bunshaft: Well, you know, when you say “policy,” it sounds like a law. It was the effort of the firm. I think I’d like to cover this now. The press would not accept it. Take Lever House. Bill Brown played a great, important part of it. But they would not mention him. They only wanted what I used to call “the decorator,” the designer. They wouldn’t accept anything else. It was a difficult battle. In my case, it was these three other partners. I didn’t want to hurt their feelings, and I couldn’t avoid what was going on. I rather liked it. I’m not trying to say I’m a saint. But there was nothing I could do about it. It caused some real trouble. There was a big article in Newsweek, I think, about the firm. They came to see me, and I said some things, and right after that I went to Europe. I didn’t see the article.

[Tape 4: Side 2]

Bunshaft: I got a telegram from Walt Severinghaus saying that the firm’s partners were terribly upset about an article in Newsweek. They were so concerned they wanted to see me as soon as I got home. That was an ominous sort of telegram. I don’t know whether I’d seen the article or whether they sent me a copy, but the essence of it was I sort of casually said, “Well, I do the design, and the rest of

them do all the work, all the other partners carry it out.” You know, like I’m the prima donna and they’re slaves. Not quite like that, but it was bad. Owings earlier had once seriously tried to fire me, and Skid wouldn’t let him. But this time, the partners of my own group—we were closely knit—asked me to leave when I got home over this remark.

Blum: Had you been misquoted?

Bunshaft: No, I think I said what they probably said. I wouldn’t say misquoted. I was sort of casual, and I sort of said something like, “Well, I do the design and the rest of them carry it out.” I don’t know. It was stupid. I wasn’t misquoted. This was the final blow of this publicity business with the partners. They knew that the magazines wouldn’t mention them, but, nevertheless, they didn’t like it. Now, it’s just the opposite. So, that’s been a problem. They got reconciled to it. That’s the only stupid one I did. The reputation now is that I’ve been trying to explain that I’m part of a team, and I really believe that. I think I’ve told you before I don’t believe any man who sits alone can create architecture. It’s a team effort. There just happens to be some man that has to make a decision on things, that’s all.

Blum: But I think everyone, historians included, understands that a building doesn't get built by one man.

Bunshaft: I know, but they only want to talk about one man.

Blum: Well, supposedly that's the man with the creative idea.

Bunshaft: Oh, creative nothing. They have the idea that I tried to explain to you that a creative idea comes out of some brilliant, imaginary mind. It doesn't. It comes out of the sweat that I took you through in Connecticut General. That's how it comes out. You add something to it, which is your architectural training and a certain amount of imagination or a concept. The only building that I think has a major concept that's unique and my own is the [National Commercial Bank] in Jeddah. And that is rationalized, not just whimsy, those great big holes. That's why I think that's my best building. It is a totally new approach to solving an office building in an extremely hot and dry climate. I'll cover the building right now while I'm hot, and I'll get it over with.

Blum: Okay. This was done in 1983 in Saudi Arabia.

Bunshaft: This was the first office building in a place that's unlivable. If it weren't for air conditioning, there wouldn't be any Saudi Arabia. The average temperature is close to a hundred. It's dusty and unpleasant. In an office building, there are a lot of people inside it, and you like to have glass so they can enjoy the view. The only solutions that were usually done were to take an office building in New York and put all sorts of sun shade louvers on the outside or cantilevered canopies and vertical things to keep the sun out. It's the same building except with blindfolds. I thought that was a half-baked solution. How can you come at a fundamental one that would give you a view and protection and no glare and no direct sunlight? That's what the building is. Do you understand that building?

Blum: I understand that it has been termed "zoned."

Bunshaft: That's words.

Blum: But it's seven or nine floors in a section, each one with a window.

Bunshaft: No, that isn't the point of it. Let me see if I can find it. [goes through book] Here's the whole thing. This is a solid block—no windows on there at all. That's that outside base. This in here is this opening here. When you look at this, you can't see the V-shaped windows in there. This is not the nicest side, because it only has one hole. This side has two holes. There's no light on here. The light comes in this courtyard. It hits the glass hardly at all. This is only about this high. There's the sun coming in. It doesn't hit the glass here. This place has a view out this way, this has a view out this way, and in that this is dark gray glass, people in here can look at that and that's a mirror and they can see out here. But that's a detail. What we've done, this is a "V," an equilateral triangle. There are three columns in here. So we go up this high with this shape here. We can take that and turn it so that we can flop this over, and turn it so that this one here is facing that way and this one's facing this way. But the same structure. In that, we get different views and we get the sun protection. This was supposed to be gardens. There were supposed to be gardens in the air, but they wouldn't buy big trees. They're restricted on water there. There's no water, so they can't water them so there are not any real plants there, but this is designed with gardens in

the air. That produces quite a unique building. The whole exterior seems to be solid stone. On this side there's openings that give them light. That's a concept that's unique. That's what I call a concept to solve a certain problem.

Blum: But you put all these things together, and that's what came out of it.

Bunshaft: Yes, but they're based on technical logic, rationale.

Blum: But it's still a new form.

Bunshaft: Yes, based on exploring. You wouldn't say a physicist is creative. You'd say he's brilliant and groping and finding a solution. Or a chemist—you wouldn't say he's creative. I don't think you'd call a chemist creative, would you?

Blum: Probably not.

Bunshaft: Well, they're as creative as what you people try to say about architecture. This is nothing but digging and thinking. Creative to me is a guy painting who feels his way through and then he sees

something beautiful and he stops. This all has to do with rationale.

Blum: Maybe it's just the romantic idea people have of what an architect does.

Bunshaft: That's right. That's what I'm blabbering about. Philip [Johnson] does whimsy. When he was in the discipline of Mies, he did Mies. You have to have convictions of what you're doing. I've never had any doubts about modern architecture.

Blum: You've never seen the National Commercial Bank in the flesh.

Bunshaft: No, but I've seen enough pictures of it. I think if I saw it, I'd be more impressed, because my experience has been that whenever I've seen a building we've worked on, it's always much bigger than I imagined and much more impressive. You know, you're looking at models one-twentieth the size or something or pictures. So there's an experience. This one has a certain tragedy to it.

Blum: What is that? You said this is your best building.

Bunshaft: Oh, without question, because of what I've just said and also that it works well and it's unique. Lever is a fine building, but it's in the discipline of the whole modern movement of Le Corbusier. This is not in anybody's discipline. This is a unique solution for a unique part of the world.

Blum: Did you think Lever House in 1952 was a unique solution for its time?

Bunshaft: I didn't think there was anything unique in Lever House. We just did the best we could. You didn't think about it. We weren't inventing any new things out of it. The U. N. was being built—the same glass wall. We improved a little on it.

Blum: You said there was a tragedy to this building [National Commercial Bank], there was a tragic accident.

Bunshaft: Yes. When I left, this design relationship... See this property? When the bank started, this piece of land was supposed to belong

to the city, and the mayor gave this to the bank, providing they'd build underground public parking. The scheme we had had a great big garden here with fountains, and this entrance here—this building faced this way. This building was like this.

Blum: That was the triangular building.

Bunshaft: Yes, and then the circle was here. We had an underground garage—this part for bank customers and this part for employees and this a public park underneath. It was a beautiful park. The Red Sea is right here. This was on this side so that hole looked up the Red Sea and another one looked down. The working drawings were complete when I left. Shortly afterwards, a Saudi prince—you know, there are about two thousand of them—said this land belonged to him, and evidently it did. He claimed it and built a crummy little building. This plan had to be flipped and all sorts of things. It cost a year's delay and a million dollars to flip this. Volume III on SOM has the original site plan.

Blum: Could we look at it a little later?

Bunshaft: Yes, let's go on.

Blum: You did another building, and this was a completely innovative, new solution, in Saudi Arabia: the Haj Terminal. It seemed to refer to existing forms in the desert. These buildings were done within two years of each other, but from a very different point of view.

Bunshaft: A completely different program.

Blum: Explain that, please.

Bunshaft: We were hired to do the entire airport there. On the site they had, they had planned ten years earlier to have an air terminal like, say, Kennedy, which Ed Stone had designed, but they had never gone ahead. They were building that terminal finally after ten years, but they had this huge site and that terminal would be for international travel. They wanted to build a headquarters for maintenance and so forth for the Saudi Airline, and they wanted to build a military airfield for training ground crew staff. That had to have airplanes. Then there'd have to be a small terminal for the king. The king and queen have a separate terminal. That's

how the English used to have it, and in the railroad station were separate rooms for them to wait. They wanted a major terminal to take care of the million or two million people that came to the Haj every year. They would come for a week, and that million would arrive maybe within a week.

Blum: To go to Mecca?

Bunshaft: Yes. These were from all over the world. We did all the things that I described, but the Haj was the only thing built. For the rest, the working drawings were done and were abandoned for whatever reason they had. The only thing they did was finish Stone's terminal. Now, let's talk about this.

Blum: This begins on page 314 of your book.

Bunshaft: The Haj Terminal was to provide for twenty plane positions simultaneously the size of 747s. Each one of these units has two plane positions from this big apron here. There are ten of these. Now, the building itself that they go into to be processed—immigration and so forth—is only a tiny part of this. This is a roof plan. The rest under this roof, which is this, is for

people to wait for buses that are going to take them to Mecca. They can eat there, they can do their laundry, they sell things, they wash, etc. It's a bazaar, and here it is here. Each one of these things is ten acres. These roofs cover one hundred acres.

Blum: That sounds like an enormous space. I have no concept of it.

Bunshaft: This form you think is familiar, they're fastened to these huge columns. This is not a column, this is a column. This is sixty feet up above the ground where this tent starts. On this tent, each one of these is a hundred and fifty feet by a hundred and fifty feet. Four of these would cover this whole block. This is sixty feet from the ground, so this is equivalent of about a twelve, thirteen story building. A traditional tent has a post in the middle, and then you put canvas down and tack it to the ground. This has no post in the middle. The posts are on the corners. This may give you an idea of how it is. I'll use the word tent. These tents are fastened here, and from these columns there are cables that hold this center ring in space. This is before it's fastened. This was during construction. This canvas is fastened to that ring. In other words, instead of a pole, we have a ring in space suspended from the four columns and pulled tight so it doesn't move, and we have

this cloth coming and fastening to it. This engineering-wise is perhaps one of the most unique things built in our world as far as architecture. It couldn't have happened except for the following. This material has tremendous tensile strength. It's a fiberglass tensile-strength material, just available recently before this thing was built, which was some time ago. This is also coated with DuPont Teflon. So this material is translucent, but keeps out about eighty percent of the heat, reflects it out. Do you follow me?

Blum: Yes.

Bunshaft: This is a shelter from that brilliant sun that would kill these people if they were left exposed without a roof in this bazaar. It's an outdoor bazaar with a roof on it to keep the sun away from them, and it's built up high so air can circulate. In fact, we have things there to make the air circulate. You understand what this is all about?

Blum: Yes, I do. Did you feel the tent form...

Bunshaft: Let me tell you something. I'm just leading up to all this tent business. This is as technical a thing as you can get. Fazlur Khan is a brilliant engineer and how this started is this. The firm had this job, and they spent some time programming what goes on in this space and what it's for. In other words, it's a great big active bazaar. People may stay here twenty-four or thirty-six hours before their buses are ready or they come back to wait for their planes. They need toilets, they need a place to buy tickets, they do trading. Some of them arrive on a 747 who never wore shoes and never saw a toilet in their life. They come here in a 747. They are people who in olden days used to walk to Saudi Arabia and Mecca. The mission to Haj meant a good chance you'd never come back alive. When they're at the religious things, they walk around a week with heads uncovered. Anyhow, this part of the whole project came into the office. I was not involved in it at the beginning. Gordon Wildermuth, a partner, got the job. They started working on it and they did the program. These tent things—I don't know whether you can see these little dots here.

Blum: Yes.

Bunshaft: There's a building with this tent over it. The terminal building for these airplanes is underneath and it has one of these modules covering it. When they started out, I'd never even looked at the project. It took them some time to get a program and get the scale of how big it would have to be. Then they started working on how to provide some shade without building a building. The designer got the idea of circular mushrooms—you know, a center column spreading to a roof sixty feet in diameter of concrete. The mushrooms had different heights, and covered each other a little, but there were voids for rain to come in. They don't get much rain, but when they do, they get a flood. They puttered around with this circular thing. Very pretty. Like looking at water lilies, except it would have taken thousands of them to fill a hundred acres. They were floundering around, and I don't know what was going on. Then another partner got on it, and he had the idea of taking these sixty-foot diameter forms and having them made out of this fiberglass cloth with tension like an umbrella. But he was kind of casual and lazy, so Gordon Wildermuth came to me and said, "I'd like you to take over the complete design of the whole project. We're getting nowhere." I said, "Okay." I meant taking over everything on the master plan. For example, the air terminals for the Saudi Airlines maintenance was being done in

Chicago. Myron Goldsmith was working on it. But it was under me theoretically. So I got into this Haj thing. I'd heard about this fiberglass tensile material. This German architect had done some of this work. At the Brussels World's Fair he had a building with this material. It wasn't Teflon, but tensile-strength material. But no matter what shape his took, it was always a tent because the post was in the middle and fastened to the ground on the edges.

Blum: Where did you get the idea to take that post away?

Bunshaft: It already had been sort of established that each one of these units for two airplanes would be four hundred and fifty feet across and about a thousand feet long. I had the idea, "Let's use this material and cables and span four hundred and fifty feet with one huge set of cables and fiberglass." We had Faz [Khan] come, and he said that was technically impossible because the columns would have been a half a mile high to hold it. We sat in my office, and we agreed to a module of one hundred and fifty feet by one hundred and fifty feet. That's the whole thing—the ring supported the cables to the columns to make the thing soar. You can't appreciate this. You have to see it. No photograph does it. This takes the hot air out. These funny things here are things to move the air.

Blum: The posts—for air circulation?

Bunshaft: No, to move it, to blow air. The air doesn't move there much. So it's to keep the air moving, and it's also the lighting of the underside of the fiberglass at night. At night this whole thing would glow seen from the air. In the daytime, you have the light coming through, but no heat. This is an exhaust system for the hot air to go out, that hole up above.

Blum: So was this a collaboration between you and Faz Khan and other unnamed people?

Bunshaft: Not other unnamed. The people that really made this work is Owens Corning. They had to do the final engineering and erecting of this. This had to be put in one piece and erected. All these had to be tensioned up at the same time. At the end of every four hundred feet there's a double pair of columns because the cables going over here would pull this column over because it couldn't take the load—there's nothing pulling it this way. All the columns inside have forces pulling both ways. So the reason this thing you mentioned of a tent irritates me is it came about

through engineering—an architectural idea of covering big space having these things go up like a dome instead of tent, which is nothing. This was to be the sense of a dome. Each bay is like a dome or arches of a cathedral. Faz Khan always made a speech like we wanted to recall the tents of Saudi Arabia—it was good eyewash. They're all Nomads, those Saudis. They had a lumpy black tent with several posts. He always tried to give the impression that it came just like you said, but that's nothing. It just happens to be a coincidence that it has the shape like that, but it's not a tent. You follow me?

Blum: If I understand what you've said, you've said that it was the material itself that permitted this form.

Bunshaft: There are two things that made this possible: the development of the material and advanced computers. This is one of the most complex things to calculate, and without advance computers, this could never have happened. Faz told me that.

Blum: Was he the one that did the computer calculations?

Bunshaft: Oh, no. He had thirty or forty people working on it. When we made our final engineering drawings, they were considered by Owens Corning as preliminary. They held the full responsibility to make this work. Building it, too. A tremendous project of having a little “tent” that’s covering a hundred and fifty by a hundred and fifty. Try putting that on your bed.

Blum: We have jumped around in terms of the chronology, but it strikes me at this moment that this afternoon we talked about Lever House in 1952 and now something in 1983. Thirty years were between those projects. What was the big difference that you observed in those thirty years of your career?

Bunshaft: I don’t know about a big difference. The biggest change in my own personal outlook is we did precision buildings like Lever or Chase or Pepsi-Cola or whatever it is—you know, metal and glass. And Connecticut General. But the big change occurred when we did the Emhart Building. It’s a little building that floats. The big change there was we went to concrete. We wanted a building that would float, and we therefore needed sort of these mushroom columns or tree columns underneath, and that could only be done in concrete, which gives you more flexibility. So

from then on, we got involved with concrete, and that gives you different design aesthetics, a different weight of elements. So the buildings from then on, like Banque Lambert, were all concrete. Banque Lambert was a very sophisticated concrete and my own house is concreted. So there was a change in the aesthetics, not deliberate or thought out. Going from one material to another, you do a different solution. We got into big spans for office spaces. We did a building in Des Moines where there were hundred-foot spans. We integrated the mechanical with it, and those were technical developments that led to what I felt was an interesting design. That was further explored on American Can which had sixty-foot spans and had the exposed duct works that were aesthetically right and served as light fixtures, acoustics and air conditioning. SOM was pretty good at developing the latest techniques into use in the buildings.

Blum: And exploiting or using new materials.

Bunshaft: New systems or materials. There aren't so many new materials, but there are new systems.

Blum: It seems to me from a layman's point of view that Banque Lambert was a new form. It seemed to have the cage that didn't exist before.

Bunshaft: There's a building where we were hired because Baron Lambert, a young man, liked Manufacturers Bank. He was hoping to get a glass building.

Blum: But he got something very different.

Bunshaft: Also when we were finally hired, they only had half the block that you see the building built on. He wanted us to design a building for that half a block. Now, that block happens to face the king's palace and it's on a major avenue. It would have been ugly. He said you couldn't take the other half because right next door to the half he had, the IBM of Europe, Bull Company, was building a building for themselves. On the corner was a traditional bar that everybody liked. He said, "We'll never get it." Also when we were hired his own bank would only use half of the half a block. The rest would be for rental. For our first presentation, I came with two models, just a block model, one of half a block and one of the whole block. The mother thought the

whole block was beautiful. Leon walked in and said, “That’s impossible!” The builder, a friend of the family, said, “You know, it would be cheaper to build the whole block. You’d have more space with less cost per square foot.” Nothing was resolved that day. It went on. But we finally built the whole block. We were building the first part of it while they had to find another piece of property and build a building for the Bull so the Bull Building could be torn down, which wasn’t finished yet. We finally finished the whole project. Now I come to what you were talking about—the aesthetics. This is how it happened. When we finally showed a finished model of exterior design, they were disappointed. He was. He thought he was getting a glass building. We used a structural module of five feet. We just made all those structural, those columns. They held up the building. Normally you’d have columns every twenty feet. Those are precast, and the purpose of it was to recall the scale of the surrounding buildings. In Europe, buildings aren’t often torn down. It’s different than Park Avenue. So, to recall the scale and also to make a richly designed building... When you look close at that pin, it’s a stainless steel pin. It was a great engineering solution. In the big square, the Grand Place in Brussels, there’s a Palais de Roi, an old palace of the king. It’s just a little facade. It

has columns closely spaced—not as close as ours, but that kind of rhythm. That had nothing to do with our doing it, but I used it explaining. When the building was completed, Baron Leon Lambert was very pleased. Since then we have become close friends, and before I retired, we had a design to double the building behind it, and now it's being built that way.

Blum: Did you also help him acquire an art collection?

Bunshaft: Well, his mother had an art collection. This penthouse in this project was really his mother's, and it was used for business. We were hired at lunch, not in this building, and they did a lot of business at lunch. They had the greatest chef in Europe. They're related to the Rothschilds, so the house wine was Mouton Rothschild. The penthouse was her bailiwick. Half that floor was for her, the other half was dining rooms for executives. The apartment was about twelve thousand square feet.

Blum: Oh!

Bunshaft: That's a little apartment. They could have a party for two or three hundred, and if they wanted a bigger one, they could open up the

executive half and have the whole floor. I think the opening was six hundred people up there. There were two kitchens: one for the apartment and one for the executives. The kitchen for the apartment had hidden above it a penthouse with about eight rooms for servants. It was really a formal life. She died before the building was complete. He was a bachelor. Well, he was actually a homosexual. He was a very brilliant man, Baron Lambert. He didn't want to get involved. He didn't know anything about art. Nina and I were pretty good friends with him, and we talked him into it. His mother's collection had the right names but they were not top quality. They weren't great. But he started on modern, and we traveled together. We went to the Venice Biennale with him and bought art. We went to Paris with him. He bought three Giacomettis in New York from Pierre Matisse that I talked him into buying to put in his foyer. They cost seventy-five thousand dollars for three of them. The week he died they were auctioned off for nine-and-a-half million, the three of them, and today they're worth about sixteen million.

Blum: Where did you develop your connoisseur's eye?

Bunshaft: I'm not a connoisseur. I think I told you about seeing a lot of things. I don't know. In architectural school you're trained to see a little. Through freehand drawing, you're trained a bit to see things that maybe my ordinary eye would not have seen if I hadn't taken drawing. You know what I'm saying?

Blum: Yes.

Bunshaft: So that may help. My wife and I never buy anything without both of us agreeing that we should have it.

Blum: Do you ever make mistakes?

Bunshaft: Oh, sure, I suppose. Not major ones. And we're not avant-garde. We don't buy the way-out stuff now. Nina and I have always bought things we like. Sidney Janis used to keep telling me, "Gordon, you ought to buy this Pollock." I said, "Sidney, we're not going to buy anything we don't like, and we don't like Pollock. If we're stupid, we're stupid." We've bought maybe some things we've given away that we didn't think were very good after we had them a while. The things we first bought and the things we first liked—Léger was an architect's painter really.

And Miro, who we both love. And Dubuffet who was a person whose work you either love or hate. At first we disliked it, but we bought one in the 1950s and we love it, and now we have a lot of them. He became a good friend of ours. The best thing that happened to us in the art world was we ended up with what I would consider two great friends: Henry Moore and Jean Dubuffet. That was the most flattering compliment I've ever received in my life—those men feeling kind to me, considering I'm not an intellectual. I'm just straightforward. That's the most important thing—more important than this book or any Pritzker or anything else. I consider these men really brilliant. We didn't make any big scenes about it. Henry is totally unaffected, he's not pompous. He was very nice, a wonderful human being. He was truly fond of me, because I know everybody that ever went there said he always talked about me when they said they came from America. That's what I thought was important.

Blum: You said Dubuffet spoke on an abstract level.

Bunshaft: Oh, I don't know what he spoke, but he was a great intellect and his writings are very complex. The reason we got along was I don't speak French much and he speaks little English, so we

never got into anything except the weather and things like that. He was crazy about the Solow Building, and I gave him a little model of it.

[Tape 5: Side 1]

Blum: Today is April 6, 1989, and this is my third session with Gordon Bunshaft. Yesterday we began to talk about some of your monumental projects, such as Banque Lambert, and today perhaps we could continue that. Would you comment on the Beinecke Library at Yale University? That preceded the Banque Lambert by two years.

Bunshaft: I think so. Well, there are, I guess, three other buildings that some consider as monumental. In fact, one of them was being built when there was a strong student/teacher revolution against monumentality, like it was a dirty word. They felt that architects should be doing slum clearance projects and helping poor people fix up their shacks. Certainly that help should be carried out, but not by architects. It should be carried out by government agencies and social workers. But, anyhow, I will talk a bit about three jobs where the clients were very interesting, the first one being the

Beinecke Library. It started with Paul Rudolph calling me one afternoon and asking if I would be willing to be on a small group of four architects to do a competition to get the commission to do the Beinecke Rare Book Library. I remember two of the other architects. One was Eero Saarinen, who was doing work at Yale, and Ed Stone. I can't remember the fourth. I believe it was Paul Rudolph's idea of having this competition. He had convinced the Yale University officials that was a good way to select an architect. I told Paul immediately that I would have no part of it, that is not the way to do a good building. I explained that when you do a competition, you're given a two- or three-page program of what is to be in this building, and from that, without talking to any of the people who are going to use it, you do a solution. Say you're lucky and you win the competition. You then start to talk and work with the people who are going to use the building, and the design that you submitted has been selected, but you know it doesn't work because of what you've learned in getting acquainted with the people. So you start making alterations, and the ultimate thing is a compromise. I believe one of the most important things in doing a building is writing a program, and that program entails almost living with the people who are going to use the building, finding out how they hope to work in it, and

not listening to their solutions but listening to their needs. With that data you start a building, so that getting a program on a piece of paper is silly. He was quite upset. The man that he reported to was the provost at Yale. I'm sorry I can't remember his name, but he was a very nice man. I asked Paul if he'd mind if I talked directly to the provost, and he said, "No, go ahead," but he was kind of upset. So I called this provost. I'd never had any dealings with Yale, and I had assumed that the provost of a place like that would be a pretty scholarly fellow. But when I got him on the phone, he talked direct and simple and I felt very comfortable talking to him. I told him what I told Paul, and when I got through, he said, "Well, you're not the only one that's against this form of selecting an architect. The chairman of the building committee of the Yale trustees was in this morning, and he heard about this competition, and he said, 'If Yale hasn't got brains enough to select an architect, they shouldn't build a building.'" He said it in that language. I said, "Well, I'm glad to hear that." He said, "Why don't you submit your material to me, and we'll see what goes on from there." This chairman of the building committee was a marvelous man. I don't remember his name, but he was a great football player at Yale and was one of the key members of the board of trustees. Well, we submitted everything,

and we didn't hear anything for three or four weeks. One day I got a call from Mr. Lew Crandall of the Fuller Construction Company. Mr. Crandall was, you might say, Mr. Builder in New York at that time. He was the man with the greatest stature and a great, famous construction firm, the Fuller Company. He had done Lever House and he had done the bank at 43rd and Fifth Avenue, so we were friends. He said, "Gordon, I hear you'd like to do the Beinecke Library at Yale." I said, "That's right." I was surprised to hear from him. He said, "Well, the Beinecke brothers are sitting here in my office, and they've been asking me about you. I think you have the job, but don't say anything." A week later I got a call from the provost, who turned out to be a very nice man, telling me I had the job. Now, how does this all come about? There were three Beinecke brothers. At the time we were involved, one was dead. These Beinecke brothers, their father had owned the Fuller Company, and these brothers both were going to Yale: Fritz and Edward. Edward was the main one, the older one. These two had married two sisters whose father had the S & H Stamps Company, a small little business. These two Beineckes, after they married the daughters, got into it and made it what it is today. They're terribly wealthy. But coming back to their father who owned the Fuller Company, Ed Beinecke evidently was

raising a little hell at Yale and not doing very well in school. His father brought him in and said, "You're leaving Yale. You're going to go and work on the Plaza Hotel," which they were building. He went there as a timekeeper. I believe at the time Lew called me, they still had a financial interest in the Fuller Company, so they went to their friend and asked him his opinion. There was a great president at Yale at that time, a young man who started all this building at Yale and a very good friend of Eero Saarinen. I can't think of his name. I'm sure Yale had decided to have me, and the normal procedure would be for a university to decide who they want, and then they would get the approval of the donor who's financing it. I would guess that's what happened. The donors didn't know me from Adam, so they went to talk to Crandall.

Blum: Did they have any of your work, any of your drawings to base that on?

Bunshaft: Yale did. We had a full submission there, but I don't know whether it was given to them. I suppose it was. So we had the job. At that time Eero was doing a major dormitory at Yale, which is quite well known. Rudolph was doing the Art and Architecture

Building. I had my first meeting with the Beineckes, who were charming old men. Their life interest was books, and they gave a great deal of money to the Stirling Library, which was the main library at Yale. I can't remember his name, but the chief librarian was a magnificent man and a charmer. The Beineckes used to give him a million or two every year. They each had collections. One of the Beineckes had a collection of American authors. They had special collections, so they were involved in rare books. The Stirling Library was bursting at the seams, and it had the rare books section in one part of it. The librarian wanted to move that into a separate building so that Stirling could expand. The rare book and manuscript collection at Yale was quite extensive and had to have an important place. So he convinced the Beineckes to go ahead and build a new library. My first meeting was with the two brothers up in their apartment in the Waldorf Towers, and they were charming. As soon as we got the job I started thinking about a rare book library, and there isn't much to know about it. What it is is a huge vault, a secure place with tremendous humidity and temperature control and stacking of books. In addition to that, there's some offices for curators, there's a reading room for a few scholars, and some exhibit space for little books and stuff. I knew where the site was. It was where it's built

now. It's diagonally opposite the Stirling. In fact, there's an underground tunnel connecting the two. I had a rough concept of a design for this important site before I went to meet the Beineckes. I happen to love books, especially bindings and things, and I thought it ought to be a treasure house and it ought to express that by having a large number of beautiful books displayed behind glass. You have to have a separation because of humidity control between people and books. I had this rough idea, and it turned out—I hadn't heard that—but they wanted this building to be a symbol of the humanities. So, when I went to them, I had the vague idea of making the exhibit end of it important, and the books not in little cases, but a great bulk in the building. Anyhow, when I went to them, we sat down and they said what they wanted is something like the Houghton Library at Harvard, where the rare books are kept. It consists of small seventeenth-century rooms for books of the seventeenth century and so forth. This is all rare books, a series of small period rooms, charming thing. I think at the time, they were talking three million dollars for a building. We sat and talked, and as we talked I started telling them some of my thoughts about the library. They sort of understood it a little bit. Then they wanted to show me what their interests were, and they brought out catalogs of their

collections—seven volumes, you know. It was like old guys showing off. It was very pleasant. When I left, at the door they said, “There’s one thing we want to make sure you understand. We don’t want anything like the Houghton Library.” Anyhow, we worked on it and we just developed the design that you see. Fuller was doing the estimating and dealing with the Beineckes as far as money, and we finally presented the design to them one morning. We had a model made exactly like it’s built now, except the entire model, the original hope was to make it out of onyx. The structure would be covered with onyx and these big panels would be translucent onyx. It came from my seeing what I thought was onyx in a Renaissance-type palace in Istanbul. It was designed by an Italian, a late palace. That model lit up, and it was a fabulous model. It was made out of real onyx shaved down to less than an eighth of inch. I’m being long winded, but I’ll cut it short. Ed came in and sat down. This was ten in the morning. He said, “Mr. Bunshaft, do you have any whiskey in the office?” I knew he had a bad heart, and I said, “Oh, my God, he isn’t going to even make the meeting.” We don’t have liquor in the office. We sent out for a pint, and he sipped the small drink through the whole meeting. It was for his heart really. They loved the model. I don’t know if we told them the estimate, but I think Fuller did. It

was eight million. From then on it was a beautiful affair.

Blum: Where did the idea of this translucent material with the light shining through come from?

Bunshaft: The whole idea of onyx, as I mentioned, is because books cannot be exposed to direct sunlight. Actually what this model looked like in some respect was a treasure casket. It's held up by four corner columns. The whole pattern of the exterior is a structural truss. The one facade must be two hundred feet long—a hundred and eighty feet, I think. There are only columns in the corners, so the whole thing is a truss like a bridge. I had the idea from the very beginning of onyx because that admits soft light, but no sunlight, so it's like being in a cathedral. In ancient times, they used two materials, onyx and alabaster, for small windows. The marble people told me alabaster would disappear in water, that it would dissolve.

Blum: You mean with rain?

Bunshaft: Yes. It couldn't be used. If I start this story, it will take two hours. What I'd seen in this palace—it was not an Arabic palace. It was done by an Italian in the seventeenth or eighteenth century for a sultan. At the end of it was the harem, and at the end of that was a huge bathroom, a room about the size of our living room with a slight divider—one for going to the toilet, where they used a hole in the floor, and the other was for bathing. Have you ever seen Egyptian vases—we have one in the living room—where they're tan-ish with little white lines? I thought it was translucent onyx. That's what this material was. You could call it a tan marble with little white streaks. The floors and walls of this were all that material. At the ceiling there was a dome made out of the material, and instead of putting pieces of glass or something, they put thin sheets of onyx and the light came through that. I don't know when this was done. In the 1950s wasn't it, the Beinecke?

Blum: 1963.

Bunshaft: I went to Egypt twice. To cut it short, this was not onyx. This was alabaster. I didn't know that at the time. The model we made had onyx from Peru, and we didn't know enough about it, but onyx is found as boulders of different sizes. Marble and alabaster are

quarried in blocks. It's solid. At the time we started getting serious after it was approved getting onyx for this building, the Peruvians promised they could do it, but they couldn't do it. We wanted big sheets, eight feet by eight feet, and we wanted a lot of them. You can't find enough boulders. The boulders vary in color and all that. In fact, all the white ones are reserved for the Vatican. We spent two years looking for onyx. At that time DeGaulle was fighting in Algeria, the Algerians were revolting. I had an idea that onyx came from Carthage or something like that. It ended up that we had the American ambassador to France requesting the French government to send troops to clear an area where there was a quarry of onyx. The quarry was owned by a Belgium company. We approached this Belgium company, and they said it was impossible. They had sent a man down to see the condition of the quarry with six soldiers to protect him, and they had to leave. There was too much fighting. So we then approached the French government, and they replied they couldn't do anything about it, but to try to make that area neutral would be to recognize that the Algerian revolt existed.

Blum: This library became an international incident.

Bunshaft: Well, we eventually gave up on onyx. I went to France to see about getting thick special glass that would be translucent and interesting in texture. But they couldn't make it either. Then an old man from the Vermont Marble Company, which was about a hundred or two hundred miles away, said he thought there was a strata of white marble that was translucent. We went there, and that's what we got. Have you been to the Beinecke?

Blum: No, I've just seen the photographs.

Bunshaft: When the sun pours in, it's quite nice with the rich books.

Blum: The photographs of the interior with the light coming through are just stunning.

Bunshaft: We went to Egypt twice, and I'm trying to remember which time this was. There they have alabaster. When you go to Egypt, Cairo, everybody's selling ashtrays and everything in all sorts of alabaster. There they have an alabaster mosque. That's tan like I talked about with white. It's like marble. They have columns

fifteen feet high in one piece. The whole building is covered in onyx. It does rain there once in a great while, so this melting business is baloney. It might have been different here, but there they do get rain once in a while. It took me a while to wake up to my history. The quarry for this alabaster is about seventy miles from Cairo, and they've been quarrying there since 3000 B.C., the same quarry area. At that time when it was built, the Turks controlled all of Egypt and Israel, and they got the alabaster from this ancient quarry.

Blum: But this was your inspiration, the way that glowed.

Bunshaft: Yes. They also have it in old churches. Before glass they used translucent marbles and alabaster and onyx during the Byzantine times.

Blum: It certainly is a unique creation.

Bunshaft: The reason for doing it, besides the aesthetics, is to protect the books and also get light in.

Blum: You mean to filter the light?

Bunshaft: Yes. The normal thing is to build a solid building. Anyhow, that's enough on the Beinecke.

Blum: How do you respond to the critics who say it doesn't fit in, it's out of context.

Bunshaft: The problem with fitting in at Yale is that this is part of one block, and on that block is the university president's offices, which are in light gray limestone, and then there's a big student center in the background with lots of columns. It's off-white. I think it's limestone. Then next to it is a little Greek sort of enclosed temple, which is a secret club. All in whites and grays on that block. Across the Street behind the Beinecke if you're in the plaza and looking at it is the law school, which is done in old English or Gothic red brick and wood. At Yale, some buildings are colonial, brick with white trim, and some are sort of Gothic. There's a big dormitory near the main mall street with the exterior either English Gothic or college Gothic, and the inside huge courts are Georgian, brick with white windows. On the outside, the little windows are all metal leaded. The architect wanted colonial. He

was good at that, but he had to make the facade relate to some other building. So some of the rooms in there have colonial windows and old English in the same room.

Blum: How do you feel about that?

Bunshaft: Well, it's stupid. But coming back to Yale, when we had it onyx, which was tan, it would have been a happy transition between the reddish brown of the background and these buildings that were facing. But we couldn't get it. We originally had the exterior of those steel frames—on the inside they're covered with a special precast concrete. On the outside we had them covered in the same precast concrete, those X's. The Beineckes said they thought it ought to be granite. They didn't want any concrete. [Alfred Whitney] Griswold was the president of Yale, a very nice guy. They went to him and they said, "Do you mind if we make the exterior structure granite? It's going to cost us a million three hundred thousand dollars for it." Griswold said, "Oh, of course, if you want to." They paid for it.

Blum: Were they completely satisfied with the result?

Bunshaft: Oh, they were in heaven.

Blum: Were you?

Bunshaft: Yes, I am. The main critic of it was a man named [Vincent] Scully. He was critical of it because I had embarrassed him at a Yale architecture jury.

Blum: What was his main objection to the building?

Bunshaft: I don't know. I think I mentioned before, he's a kind of excitable guy and he lectures with great excitement. Well, I'll waste all this time.

Blum: You're not wasting it

Bunshaft: Paul Rudolph asked me to be on a thesis jury at Yale, a student's thesis jury. So I came up there and Scully was on that jury and a couple of architects. I hadn't been on a jury in years. The way they ran it at Yale is something. The man that had the thesis got up and explained it, and the jury sat and looked at it. Behind us was practically the whole class listening to us. These jurors really

beat up the students, asked tough questions and made them feel like they flunked. They were really very rough on them. I didn't say much. The other architects on it were calm, but they asked tough questions.

Blum: I think the person is supposed to defend their solution.

Bunshaft: Yes. We came to some fellow with a church. We were sitting there, just a small group and a lot of students behind. Some of the architects said something about it, and then Scully got up and started screaming at this kid. He was very excitable. He was shouting and asking, "Why this? Why this? Why this? This doesn't seem right! Why this?" If I were a student, I would have thought I was flunking, kicked out of school. I sat there, and I said to Scully, "What are you shouting about?" I could have shot him with a cannon. He stopped dead, sat down, and never opened his mouth again. He was, of course, embarrassed in front of the student body. So that took care of our relationship. I don't like him. I think he's full of baloney. He was tooting modern and now he toots postmodern. He's given, I understand, violent lectures against it, but it doesn't bother me.

Blum: He's an institution there. He's been there forever.

Bunshaft: I know. That doesn't impress me. The building is for scholars, and they're closely supervised while they're there. We have a big reading room, but there's only three or four people ever in there and under constant watch because even decent scholars get tempted to take out a little print or something. Pages disappear. It was only open during the work-week. I don't know if they included Saturday or not. There were so many people coming to see the building that it's now open seven days a week—the exhibit area, which is above ground. I was there once about four years afterwards. There was a receptionist there who I guess had been there a long time. The time I came, she greeted me like I was the eighth wonder of the world, and she said, "Could you do me a favor?" I guess we'd given her a piece of this marble from Vermont, and it had been handled so long it had turned yellow and it was wearing out. She said, "Could you give me another piece of this?" What I'm saying is the public is crazy about it. There are people who go to Yale just to see the building.

Blum: And the way you describe it, it has to work for the preservation and conservation of the books.

Bunshaft: The building outside looks kind of cold. I'm really not crazy about the white marble because it's too cold, but we had no choice if we wanted translucency. If I had known that what I was dreaming about was alabaster, and if we could have had proper tests taken to find out if it could stand water, that building would have been a dream. We would have covered the structure with the same thing. In other words, these X's would have been covered with a marble. It would be opaque because it would be stuck against it, and it would be all in one material. I doubt if it would stand up to the weather of the United States. If it did, it would have been wonderful. But to come back to the main thing, I think perhaps this will be a building that will be associated with me more than any building I have designed, and it's going to be there a long time. I don't know if that means it's great, but in the long haul a building becomes important by the judgment of future generations.

Blum: Do you think public acceptance is more important than your own peer acceptance such as an AIA award or something like that?

Bunshaft: Let me tell you the order I think. The first two are about the same. I think when a building is done, the client initially is happy. If

he's happy after he's been there three or four years—when I say client, I mean the head man I work with—and the people in there are happy, and the best judgment of that is if it's maintained meticulously. That means pride is involved. That's the most important thing of all, without question. The second most important thing for me and the thing that's given me the greatest pleasure in my whole architectural life is that most of my clients were people I liked and they liked me and they've become lifelong friends. That is something that's unusual, and it's wonderful.

Blum: That's curious to hear you say that, because reading Carol Krinsky's book...

Bunshaft: That comes across in there.

Blum: Yes, it does, but apparently, according to her and obviously directly from you to her...

Bunshaft: Most everything in the book is directly from me.

Blum: Yes. But you started out shy with clients.

Bunshaft: As I told you earlier I never had to think about my career until I got through traveling. Then I came to New York and I got into Skidmore's. At the end of the first week I was in New York—I don't think I was gifted in judging—I said, "I'm going to stay with this outfit. It's growing, and I'm going to be a designer." I worked at that all my life. One of the reasons I thought I'd be a designer and stay with that firm was I had the feeling in those times, the early 1930s, that architecture was a gentleman's profession and that they were all club members and they got work at clubs. And it was a great deal like that. I figured the way I am and being Jewish and stuff—although that didn't enter into it—that I wasn't geared for getting jobs. That's why I decided to stay there.

Blum: So SOM was a perfect situation for you.

Bunshaft: SOM could only go one way: up.

Blum: Well, you also said that Nat Owings had this gift of getting clients.

Bunshaft: Yes, but that came years later. Skidmore got the real clients, the

World's Fair. I was going to say at the end of the thing that there are three or four important things if one wants to achieve something in any profession. That's having a certain amount of brains, intelligence, and sticking to your chosen field, being dedicated to it, and, of course, working hard. But the main ingredient is still luck.

Blum: Is that what you think your career is?

Bunshaft: Take Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, it's pure luck. If Skidmore hadn't have been involved in the Fair in Chicago and from that happening to meet so-and-so and so forth, it all happened. It's just luck. They didn't take the luck and spit in its face. They didn't know it was luck, but they had brains and perseverance and they wanted to make a living. They were not interested in shaking any architecture history. Nobody was in that time. As far as I'm concerned, I was lucky I had brains enough to stay there. I got friends in there a few years later who had ideas they could do better somewhere else. They were complex and they thought they ought to grow, so they left and they've ended up being nothing. Leon Hyzen, an old friend, was in the office, but he left to do something he thought would be better for him, but it wasn't. Oh,

God, luck is an important thing.

Blum: But you say they used their opportunities.

Bunshaft: As far as getting along with clients, at first I was pretty outspoken no matter whether it was Skidmore, Owings or a client. Skid used to be careful of who they let me in with. When the Lever people came over from England and fired Luckman and the next day said they wanted to see the model, we thought that was the end of it—the old conservative English would never go ahead with this. Skid kept me out of the meeting. He figured I'm sort of outspoken and I might say the wrong thing. In the early years, Skid got the work and Bill Brown and I would do it. No other partner got work. But in the early years, just to illustrate, one of our earliest clients was the H.J. Heinz Company. Skidmore had rejected their exhibit in Chicago, but afterwards the old man came to see Skidmore and we did the interiors of a building that the Heinz Company bought from the World's Fair. Jack Heinz, his son, who was my age, and I became good friends. So as a result I did the design and administration work with the help of an assistant administrator.

Blum: In the 1950s you did their vinegar plant. We just looked through the list of your projects in your book to show that you were the administrative partner. While we were just on a pause off tape, you said that it was because of the Beinecke that Mrs. Johnson thought that you would be the right person for the Johnson Library. How did that come about?

Bunshaft: I'm going to be all night. Again, Bob Cutler, Robert Cutler, a partner of mine, got a call one day...

[Tape 5: Side 2]

Bunshaft: ...got a call one day from an Austin [Texas] architect by the name of Max Brooks asking Cutler if he thought I would be interested in being considered as an architect for the LBJ Library that was to be built at the University of Texas in Austin.

Blum: Well?

Bunshaft: Of course, Cutler said... I don't know if he said, "Of course he would," or he said, "I'll talk to him." I think he said, "I'll talk to him." And when he talked to me, of course I said yes. This is

really strange, because Brooks was at MIT in the master's class where there are architects from other schools. He came from Texas, but he was taking his master's at MIT, and I was on my year of doing my thesis. I had finished my master's year. So I knew him a little bit, and I don't understand why he didn't call me direct. It turned out later he was a very nice man. To cut it short, Cutler reported that I'd be very honored to have it. I guess I called Brooks, and not much later I received a telegram to come to Austin to meet with the president.

Blum: President Johnson?

Bunshaft: Yes. This was a telegram from the chairman of the board of trustees of the University of Texas, W. W. Heath. He was a lawyer and an elderly man and very kind. When I arrived in Austin, I saw Brooks, and Mr. Heath's office happens to be right next door, but he was a very important man politically and legally, and an old, old friend of the Johnsons. It turned out Max Brooks was also a friend of the Johnsons. He had done work for them, and his wife and Mrs. Johnson were pals. That's how it is in Texas. They said, "We're going to drive out to the ranch," which was about forty miles away, I think, "and have lunch and then come back." So we

went out there. This house that Johnson lived in was very ordinary with a living room about this size. A very ordinary place. They had built sort of a rectilinear wing on it, which was his office. This office was one big room about the size of our living room, and there were three or four desks there for people working and the president had a desk in the corner. It was just a big open room. We arrived a little before lunch and went into lunch. That was a long room and it had a big table, and the whole staff and everybody ate there, including Mrs. Johnson and the president. Mrs. Johnson was at one end, and I was at Mrs. Johnson's right. We had lunch and I chatted with Mrs. Johnson. Johnson was quite a character. He was a very brilliant man and a very educated man, but he also played the part of a kind of a raw fellow.

Blum: Texas cowboy.

Bunshaft: He took the soup dish to his mouth, you know. But underneath he's a very bright man. We had lunch, and after lunch he said, "Let's go for a ride around the ranch." Brooks was there and so was—I can't think of it. We got in a Lincoln, and the president drove. Mrs. Johnson was in the middle in the front, and I was on

her right. Brooks and Mr. Heath were in the back. We drove around looking at the cattle and things, and then we drove into some town and he talked about this town. Before that, though, he was building a prefab on his property, and we went in there and he was proposing to put a window in one wall of a bedroom. I said, "If you do that, you won't have any place for a bed. You ought to put it over here." He said, "No, we're going to put it there." So that's how I started.

Blum: He was his own architect.

Bunshaft: Yes. Well, we rode around. We went to look at a building that he had been involved in when he was with some other agency. It was precast. Then we finally went to the house where he was born, which was then a museum. In that they had a Victrola record player. We had one in my father and mother's house. There was a woman there taking care of it, and we had drinks. This was about five o'clock. Up to that time, when I was in the car, she talked with me, but he never said anything. I thought to myself, "He's trying to figure out whether I'm some pansy decorator or a man." I'm sure he was listening to see what sort of man I was.

Blum: Was she discussing the possibility of building the library with you?

Bunshaft: Nothing about buildings. People don't do that.

Blum: She was just chatting?

Bunshaft: Yes, just what's going on. Then we had drinks. He sat down and then he started talking really to me—what he hoped, what he was trying to convey and what his work was and what he'd like to see this building be such that it could tell what his efforts were.

Blum: What were some of the things that he told you?

Bunshaft: He did a great many good things, you know. He started all sorts of welfare, for instance, that the present government's trying to get rid of. It was that sort of thing. He talked at great length, and by that time it was getting to be six or seven o'clock. When we got back in the car, she said, "Why don't you all stay for dinner?" and we stayed for dinner. He had a chair in his living room, one of these things where the feet come up. It's very ugly.

Blum: A Barcolounger?

Bunshaft: Yes. Ugly as hell. He sat down in that after dinner, and there were some other chairs like that. I didn't sit in them. He read out loud a major story on him in *Life* magazine that was very critical of him, and he read the whole thing out loud. I thought that was marvelous.

Blum: It was story time

Bunshaft: No, mean marvelous reading an article that was critical of him out loud. He got through and he said, "It's not too bad after all." When we got ready to leave, he left me and went into this office. He came back with a little book about that area of the country, which he had dedicated to me, but he misspelled my name. So we left at ten o'clock that night. Brooks and Heath couldn't get over it. We spent a day there, you know.

Blum: Did you have the job when you left?

Bunshaft: No.

Blum: Was he convinced that you were the man he wanted when you left?

Bunshaft: We never talked about the job.

Blum: No, but there must have been a non-verbal kind of communication that took place.

Bunshaft: No, he made no commitment. We were just being sociable, and he was just trying to find out, I guess. We went back to town. This was on a Friday, and I guess the next day I flew back to New York. Monday morning Max Brooks called Mrs. Johnson because he was very close to her, you know, and she was not as formal. He said, "Do you know what the president's decided about the architect?" She said, "No. Why don't you call him?" Now, here's a husband and wife living in a place that's about the size of this apartment except it's two floors. They sleep in the same bed. They hadn't talked about it or she didn't know. So Max called the president and the president said, "Go ahead with Bunshaft." So Max had to call Mrs. Johnson back and tell her. Then I found out that what had happened is that Max had recommended several architects to be considered. He'd have to. I don't know who they

were. She went to see their work. She's the one who traveled, and she went to see their work at each site. As far as I'm concerned, she went to Yale. I don't know where else she went, but she did go to Lincoln Center. At Lincoln Center we did the building that's known as the Beaumont Building. It's a building that [Eero] Saarinen and myself worked together, and she went there and was escorted around by one of the very close friends of the Johnsons, a man named Frank Stanton who was president of CBS for about thirty years and who was a friend of mine and who is a very brilliant man. The two people that made CBS are [William] Paley, who owned the company and who was the chairman of the board, and Frank Stanton, who created the whole quality of CBS. He was a nut on graphics and aesthetics. He's a collector and a marvelous person. As I said, he knew the Johnsons. He and his wife used to go down to Washington and visit the Johnsons after they'd call them some evening and have them come down to dinner. He took her around, and she asked him who he'd hire if it was his choice, and he said, "Gordon Bunshaft." So it was stacked, you might say. But she herself personally likes the Beinecke because it's rich. The thing about the Beinecke that's interesting is the outside is cold and severe, and you walk inside and it's very warm and rich. Everybody loves to go into a great

space. That's what makes cathedrals the richest thing that people love to see. That's what makes the National Gallery that [I.M.] Pei did—the great room inside doesn't do a thing, but it's very dramatic and a great open space. That's what the public likes. However, I didn't think of the public. Ours isn't that size and also it's got a big bulk in the middle. But great spaces if they're handsomely done are what can give an emotional experience to people. I've had ladies write me about the Beinecke that they just shivered when they saw it. That's why I think that's what people like.

Blum: Well, I think that's communicated even by photographs, which is rather unusual.

Bunshaft: Not quite.

Blum: But you got the commission for the Johnson Librar...

Bunshaft: We went ahead, and we were associated with Max Brooks.

Blum: But in designing it, thinking it through, who was going to use it... It was to house his personal papers, is that correct?

Bunshaft: First comes the program. Well, the first thing is to try to find out what a presidential library is.

Blum: What is it?

Bunshaft: What it is is a storage place for all his papers. In this case, thirty million pieces of paper. They may cover thank-you notes or confidential super stuff, and they're kept in box files. At that time, I think there were two or three presidential libraries built: Roosevelt's, which was at his home, and that was done like a house and it's very well liked by the public. Then there was Truman's, which was awful. I don't think Hoover had one. Eisenhower's was in some isolated place and nothing. But they were places for exhibiting memorabilia the president had and for storing his papers for scholars to come to do research. Also it was kind of a monument to the president. The only one that really worked, and that's because of his personality, was Roosevelt's. He had it built near his home as best as I can tell in the same sort of domestic scale, and his memorabilia—boat models and all sorts of things—were charming. I understand it's a very pleasant experience to go there. Truman's was on a highway, and the

building looked like it could be a small office building for some company selling Pepsi-Cola or something. Eisenhower's I didn't go to, but I saw pictures of it. Just nothing.

Blum: In Kansas.

Bunshaft: See, the papers can't be exposed. They have to be stored. In Truman's library, the biggest thing is the reproduction of the oval room, his oval room that he was in and the color it was and the furniture. That's all that there is to see.

Blum: Where is that?

Bunshaft: Missouri. The presidential libraries are staffed and run by the National Archives because it's really an archive. The first thing that happened is I met a man who had been head of the National Archives and was retired. He was a friend of Mrs. Johnson from Texas. He was supposed to write a program for the Johnson Library. We were going around together, and we took a trip to the Truman Library. The day we got there, Johnson was arriving in a couple of hours. He was going to give the first health card to Truman. It was number one of the new act that he had passed. So

the whole place was full of cables going in for television and all that, and Truman was being shunted around. Truman's own office was very nice. The president has an office when he's alive in there. His was nice because it was piled with books. He was a tremendous reader. It wasn't sloppy, you know, but it was human. We took a plane from there to Texas and on that plane we wrote the program for the size of the storage space. He wrote the whole program and then we floundered around with all the figures.

Blum: What was unique about the program that expressed Johnson as opposed to, say, Roosevelt or Truman?

Bunshaft: You don't do any expression when you're talking with an archivist about how many service areas they need, how many offices they need. That's what a program is. It doesn't get into any abstraction of expressing the president.

Blum: Did it ever at any level?

Bunshaft: Why would it? No. The only time it got into that was when they were doing exhibits. We hired Arthur Drexler to do them. I think

in the first meeting we had with the president we were just doing the Johnson Library Building that you now see. We had a meeting down in the lower level of the White House, and we had set up a model and drawings. Johnson had a couple of secretaries who had been with him a long time and sort of seemed to think they knew what he might like and they'd like to be briefed before he saw anything. We didn't do that. This meeting started in the morning with a group from the University of Texas who were financing this project and Max Brooks and myself and these two secretaries who had been in early and I had shown them the model a little and Mrs. Johnson. We had a study model of what you now see, roughly. A study model of that building. I believe that President Johnson was a very strong human being. I think he thought the country needed to be active in helping the poor and housing and things like that. He worked at it, and he was able to get it through. I think he was a powerful man, and the site was the dramatic one end of a long axis of the campus up on a little mound. It called for a building of some size. Considering the site and considering the relationship to the other buildings in the area and this axis, that building couldn't be any little low cozy affair. All the presidential libraries that I'd seen or read about, the papers, the archives were in a vault. The public never even knew

it was there. I felt that the public ought to be aware of these boxes—thirty million documents in thousands of boxes. In essence, it was the same thing as the Beinecke Library. Most rare book libraries had their books not visible, the great bulk of them. Just a few rare ones or odd ones in cases that they changed every three years. I wanted to do the same thing to emphasize what the building was for as we did in the Beinecke. So that called for a great room. Also, storage of the books was all above ground, and the lower levels were used for all the services of the building and a thousand-seat auditorium and a podium as well as a small auditorium. The top floor was for scholarly research and for the staff of the building, including the presidential office and reception areas. That had the view, or the president had the view, and the others were placed around a courtyard open to the sky. That was the program where I think we built six stories of book stacks and had them all glassed in, and had the boxes all red with gold presidential seals on them. It made a rich pattern. We had this huge room which housed some of these exhibits. We presented that basic scheme and a simple model sort of amateurishly made—it wasn't real skilled—and some drawings. Mrs. Johnson listened and she didn't say anything. I had the feeling she didn't know what was going on. I brought along a

little viewer where you look in the top and you get a view, sort of in the scale of a human being, of the scale of the size of the model. You get views as if you were on the street looking at this large building. It's a proportionate thing. These two secretaries were fascinated. Well, anyhow, around eleven-thirty or so, the president came in with two men. They were talking about what they were going to tell the press about something. He said to me, "Mr. Bunshaft, I have two or three minutes. Tell me what you can." So the drawings were over here and the model was here, and I went through it very quickly, rushing him back and forth. I forgot about this viewer and the secretary said, "Show the president this viewer." I explained the building in about two or three or four minutes. He listened and listened. Then he turned around—there was a pretty good-sized group there then—and he started bulling about some other matters. He must have spent ten minutes bulling about some politics or something. I tell this story because it's interesting. So that was the end of that.

Blum: What was his response to what you showed him?

Bunshaft: Nothing. I'll tell you later. I had the feeling he liked it, but I don't think he said it then. Before I went down to Washington, I showed the models to Frank Stanton, because I knew he would be involved. We were friends, so I showed it to him. Sure enough, Frank and his wife were invited down for dinner the day after my meeting with the president—just the four of them. Frank briefed his wife on what the building was about. She's a very bright woman. The model had been removed immediately after our meeting because of some use of that room. It was stored somewhere. It was taken out of the building, I think. That's important. So they had dinner and then the president was walking along with Mrs. Stanton. He was telling her about the design of this building. The reason of this whole story is he told it as if he had been studying it for two years. He described to Mrs. Stanton exactly what Frank described, who really knew it. I don't know if he said he liked it or not, but he described it after seeing it for only a short time. The next day Frank called me and told me this. I called these secretaries. I said, "Are you sure the president didn't go back and look at it?" She said, "No, he couldn't have. It was taken away." I told her about it. So this president was very alert. That's the purpose of that story. Anyhow, we proceeded. After that meeting, I guess the Texans felt pretty satisfied. I think

they gave me the impression Mrs. Johnson was confused, but they had the feeling that the president was happy. At the time we were given the Johnson project, I think they had six million dollars for it or something like that. We went to lunch and at lunch these Texans said, "Well, we're going to give you another project at the university. There's going to be a Johnson School of Public Affairs. We have the greatest book collection of the Southwest and another collection of Central American books." The president of the university was a major collector, believed in collecting. The University of Texas had tons of money. They owned oil wells, and this man—I've forgotten his name—became one of the major purchasers of rare books at auctions. So when they added this whole big program that morning, they raised the budget to eleven-and-a-half million. As it turned out, it was very fortunate and I think they knew it. Six million wasn't enough money for the Johnson Library and the money they added was probably more than enough for the other project. We never even estimated the thing separately. Anyhow, it went ahead and was approved. Even at the first meeting, I had travertine stone from Rome, and the president said, "I can't do that. I'm restricting." At that time, Congress had passed a law that you couldn't use imported marbles unless they were five percent less than buying

it in America. He mentioned that. That was not important. It ended up travertine.

Blum: Oh, how did that happen?

Bunshaft: Because of the price. I can't go through the whole process. We did the design in New York, and the working drawings were done in Brooks' office with our job captain there, Leon Moed, who is now a partner and did a marvelous job. And it was built and dedicated in a tremendous party. Texas gives big parties. It was a big barbecue party. The night before the official opening, Max Brooks and I gave a party for our people and invited the president and his wife. We weren't sure they'd show up, but they showed up. The president came up to me and said—I wish I could repeat it, but the essence of it was that he said, "I was very smart. I did one thing right—to leave you alone and let you do what you want because it's turned out beautifully." It was much better said than that, but that was the essence of it. In fact, I'd forgotten all about it, but the Avery had an exhibition, you know, of all my papers that I gave them, and it was very nicely done in cases. An archivist can tie in pictures and documents. In their case they had a letter the president wrote me after the building was built. I

don't remember it. It was really a eulogy. I was really amazed when I read it. I'd forgotten all about it. But I think that covers the Johnson Library.

Blum: Here was a client/architect relationship that...

Bunshaft: Well, it wasn't that. That kind of relationship that I talked about before is not this. This is a client that leaves you alone.

Blum: It's a different kind.

Bunshaft: He was respectful, but it was not a close intimacy. You don't get close with a president. He's too busy. There were many, many meetings in the White House. They always used what they called, I think, the Lincoln Room, on these exhibits. Mrs. Johnson had a fancy committee on that of Frank Stanton and various other people, and Arthur Drexler and I would go to the meetings and there would be great discussions of what these exhibits should symbolize. How can we show this philosophy or this policy and so forth? Many meetings, and she was always unsure about everything.

Blum: Was that just gobbledegook? To you to see something “symbolized”?

Bunshaft: It ended up being gobbledegook. It ended up like anything—you show objects. You can’t show visually what a social program does. You can have things that illustrate it or something. There was a lot of talk, very nice. In those meetings, Johnson would pop in. I think the first meeting we had on that subject Johnson popped in, and he came back later with three little books for me. I ended up with about eight or nine little books, all dedicated with different spellings.

Blum: For you, what was the big difference between the Beinecke Library and this library? They both seemed to have similar programs but different.

Bunshaft: Oh, no, no. In the first place, the sites were totally different. This is in a park. This is a big piece of land, and it had some magnificent live oaks. Entirely different, entirely different. The only thing common to them was the storage of books or documents. The whole thing was entirely different. This was

designed for huge public visitors. One or two don't come around, especially in Texas. This had parking for five hundred cars. That long building behind it with these different libraries and offices was as far as we were concerned a fence to hide the parking behind. You came in from an expressway and there was space for five hundred cars, because everybody came by car.

Blum: So they fulfilled very different needs.

Bunshaft: At that time, there was this anti-monumental... Not quite. It came a little later. I took Ada Louise Huxtable out there and we stayed overnight in an inn near there. I took her to see it at twilight.

Blum: What was her comment?

Bunshaft: She wrote an article that's quite a eulogy. She thought it was marvelous. She may regret it now, but what she wrote couldn't have been better. It's a monument. I wasn't trying not to make a monument. It's a monumental building because a presidential library should express the importance of a president and his papers.

Blum: You said before that you were involved in the design of your book, written by Carol Krinsky. On the dust jacket you used a drawing from the Johnson Library. Why did you select that?

Bunshaft: Because it fit. It made a good design for the cover.

Blum: Just strictly visual purposes?

Bunshaft: Yes. I had no building that I thought would make a nice silhouette for a book cover. That's how it was conceived. That's the facade. It may be wider than this, but that's why I did it. We tried it in different colors. This isn't the right color we had. The printer went wrong.

Blum: You've described the president as one type of client, you described the Beinecke brothers as another type of client. What's your preference?

Bunshaft: I have no preference. You can like to eat chicken, beef, and tongue. It depends on the day you have them.

Blum: What's easiest for you?

Bunshaft: You know what I'm trying to say? I think it's nonsense—what's the best. There's no such thing as the best.

Blum: Well, what's easiest for you?

Bunshaft: You mean dealing with a client?

Blum: No, having a client. If you could pick a type of client, what would be your preference?

Bunshaft: I couldn't pick out a type of client I'd like to have. Let's say I picked out some diagram for what a client should be and I had ten like that. It would be awful. It's the variety. You learn from dealing with different kinds of people. The main thing between a client and an architect is, one, that you're dealing with the top man involved in this project, and, two, he's personally interested in it, and, three, the client and the architect respect each other fundamentally. They may disagree on lots of issues and have some pretty good arguments, but if it's on mutual respect and

mutual competence that each can offer something, a great building will come out of it. A better building will come out of it than if you had a good architect and a client that's lousy. A client sometimes contributes to something. Not in aesthetics, but in function or some comment he thinks about or he thinks it's too coarse. Architects aren't gods. They make mistakes. Sometimes the mistakes may endure if nobody interferes.

Blum: You have said that the most difficult client you ever had was the client you had for the [Sheldon] Solow building. Why was that?

Bunshaft: He's a good friend of mine now. He was difficult because he was a promoter. He wasn't building something for his own use. But he was unusual in these promoter types in that he wanted a fine building. But his nature is to explore, not to make a decision. If you tell him, "We have to know whether you like this or this today," you'll be lucky if he'll answer you in a week. He thinks that by puttering around and exploring, maybe he'll get something better. He drove me up the wall when we did the building because he's indecisive. Also I have no respect for promoters. We had never worked for promoters until then. We worked for people who were going to be the owners of the

building.

Blum: So how did you resolve this?

Bunshaft: He also had a reputation of not paying bills and not being very straightforward. He came into the office when I was on vacation, and the partners debated about doing it because they didn't want to get involved with anybody who might be shady. They finally decided to do it and they finally decided that I was to do the job. I came up with the design you see now, which he eventually approved.

Blum: This is the slope-sided building.

Bunshaft: Yes. The big thing is that the ends of the building are solid, so there's no corner office with two views. He liked the design, but he worried about not having the corner office, so he checked with real estate people. All the real estate people said, "You won't be able to rent a building that doesn't have corner offices for the presidents." I told him that was a lot of junk. In our office we had a line of six partners' offices, and the corner office, which had two glass walls, we flipped a coin and the partner that lost got that

office. It isn't good because there's no wall space. Anyhow, on his thing, he wouldn't make up his mind to approve the design because of this concern and these men advising him. Aesthetically, I think he was crazy about it. I didn't treat him kindly. I was very rude to him.

Blum: How long did you work with him—him being indecisive and you waiting for answers?

Bunshaft: He was also a liar, but I didn't know at the time.

Blum: Well, was it years?

Bunshaft: At one point we were starting to make drawings, and I said, "Sheldon, if you don't tell me what you're going to do in the next two days, we're going to stop work. I'm going to Europe and we're not going to have this decision floundering around."

Blum: So that got him to...

Bunshaft: He agreed to do it. As it turned out, it was an asset not having corner windows. He's a difficult man, and I've had fights with

him even as a friend, but he's extremely bright and very dedicated to collecting modern art and African art and has fabulous collections thanks to that building and a couple of others. That building earns him about five or six million a year.

Blum: So he got what he wanted.

Bunshaft: He's a bright man.

Blum: Did you get what you wanted out of it?

Bunshaft: Well, I didn't want anything out of it the way you say it. I'm very pleased with the design. That design came about because of zoning regulations. Let's say this is 57th Street and this is 58th Street. This building goes through this way and it's long that way. Let's say that's the property line. You can go up eighty-five feet because these are narrower streets. Then you can have your next floors set-back. From then on in, there's an angle plane so one can make wedding cakes like that. But if you go to a tower—at the time Lever was built, the tower could be twenty-five percent of the area of the site. At the time this was done, it was forty percent. That tower can cut through this plane, so you can make a tower

forty percent of the area, and that depends on the length divided, you know. This site was fifteen times the area of the site, the number of square feet in here and all the way up. That determined the top. Now, that's pretty ugly.

[Tape 6: Side 1]

Blum: Today is April 7, 1989, and this is my fourth session with Gordon Bunshaft. As you suggested, one of the things we have not covered in your career was a factory. In 1974 you did the Philip Morris factory in Richmond, Virginia. How did that all come about?

Bunshaft: I've been involved with two factories. At the very beginning, after the war, we did the Heinz Vinegar Plant building in Pittsburgh with a huge warehouse part of it. That was very simple, but it turned out to be quite exciting. As to the Philip Morris project, it started off in a wonderful way and in my mind the end result was also equally wonderful. It started out that one day around noontime I got a call from the Philip Morris Company out of the blue. It turned out their headquarters were on Park and about 40th Street. A Mr. [Clifford Henry] Goldsmith said they would

like to have Skidmore, Owings and Merrill make a presentation to their board. I'm sorry, it wasn't noon. It was in the morning about nine-thirty. He said that they were interviewing architects for a very large cigarette-manufacturing plant outside of Richmond, Virginia, and would we be interested? I said, "Well, I'll be glad to be there." He said, "Well, we'd like you to come by here about three-thirty this afternoon." Normally for preparation for a presentation of a major project you make a very complete show. Usually you take quite a few days to do it. I said, "Fine, I'll be there." I scurried around and I decided to show slides. That's all we could do. I tried to find the person who handled the slide machine, and they were away. I got one of the young designers to run the slide machine, and I put the slides together. Whenever I presented to a client, I only presented buildings I had done so I could really talk about them. I picked out Lever, Manufacturers, Connecticut General, Beinecke—all the buildings that I thought a great deal of. He said you'd have a half-hour to an hour. We had a slide machine that was very old. You put one slide in at a time. One slide, then you'd have another one and you'd slide it back. The case had gotten a little broken, so we had a rope around it. It was really a broken-down affair. We showed up at three-thirty. This was a full board meeting. It wasn't any committee or

anything. There were about fifteen people in there including the chairman of the board. I came in with my young fellow and introduced myself. They saw me with this broken-down machine and they said, "You know, we have a projection room here," you know, a fine one. I said, "No, I'd like to just put this on the table here." We put it on the table. We darkened the room and started off. I think they asked me a few questions before, and I told them we had never done any cigarette-manufacturing buildings. Then I started with Lever House and I said, "We had never done an office building before this one." Then for Manufacturers I said, "This was the first bank we did." This was the truth. I went on with that theme. Of course, Connecticut General was the first country site. I spoke about the work I did with the clients with great pride. You know what I'm saying? It was very friendly. The meeting ended, and they said they'd let us know. They're a young group. The top of that company at that time were really relatively young and really on the ball. Anyhow, the next morning they called and said, "You have the job." Now, much later I found out they had set up a committee to interview architects. The man we eventually worked with at Philip Morris—you might say he was the owner's project manager, who dealt with us in getting data and all sorts of information—was a

very nice man and he was on that committee. They interviewed about thirty architects, and I guess they cut it down to about five or six who had presented to the full board the day before they called me. The board didn't like any of them, and they didn't know what the hell to do. I don't know how our name came up. Maybe Goldsmith suggested it. He was the vice president in charge of that building. Those presentations were elaborate by these fellows. The presentations are quite something. In fact, now they have movies. [Eero] Saarinen made a fabulous presentation.

Blum: Was he one of the presenters there?

Bunshaft: No, no. I don't have any idea who they were. The chairman of the board was Mr. [Joseph F.] Cullman. It was his family's company. I've forgotten the name of the second man, but he had a favorite architect who was a friend of his because he had done his house. I can't think of his name. I don't know if he was interviewed or not. Anyhow, we got the job, and we went to work on it.

Blum: What did you know about cigarette-manufacturing plants at the time?

Bunshaft: Nothing. You don't have to know anything. That's where the program comes in. We went through all their factories. They had a couple of places in Richmond that were medieval. We saw how it worked, and they were unhappy with it because it was built with lots of columns. Cigarette-manufacturing machines are tremendous things. They keep changing every few years. They keep increasing the amount of cigarettes. This plant can make a hundred billion cigarettes a year. I don't know how many millions a day these machines make. It's unbelievable. We went around to all these plants and learned. The company was trying to figure out what kind of plant. Their head engineer wanted a plant, a multi-level project, where you moved the tobacco to the top floor and then gravity processed it down in different stages, which is as old as the hills. No matter what it was, if you were making pickles, you moved up the raw product and let it drop down. Some of them didn't know what they wanted. We did all kinds of schemes after we got a program and the size they wanted. The amount of cigarette-making machines they wanted is what determined the size of that big room. What actually happened is before the building was done, they were buying a different kind of machine, but because we had this tremendous free space, it would give you tremendous flexibility. So we went

through multi-story and low buildings and the parking business and all that. In the process, the first thing you get is a cake about this round and about that high of tremendously pressed tobacco. It looks like a tremendous barrel with wood staves. That has to be fumigated to kill all the bugs and from there it goes into different aging processes. All this material comes to the machine—the tobacco, the cigarette paper, the tubes that hold it, the cartons and all that come there through either high-speed tubes or by conveyors. There's no human being involved. Then we got this concept. There has to be tremendous humidity control. They think that tobacco is expensive, and if the room is dry, the tobacco in moving will powder so that it has to be in a humidified space and tolerable for people. All those sorts of things. Goldsmith was our boss really, but there was another man higher than him who had worked as a person in the plant at a machine. He wanted to have something done about making life pleasanter for the people. We gave them a very pleasant place.

Blum: How did you do that?

Bunshaft: With the plant. We proposed this clear span of two hundred feet by a thousand. They liked it. They thought it might be expensive, so we did a scheme with a center line of columns. We cut it in half. Our scheme, what we wanted, would have cost two or three million more, but they went ahead with the open floor, because they wanted flexibility. They didn't skimp. We had a marvelous relationship.

Blum: Did you have a lot of input by the people you were working with?

Bunshaft: What do you mean? What people I'm working with? The clients?

Blum: Yes, the clients

Bunshaft: On technical matters or the functioning, yes. I think we spent close to a year programming and trying different schemes. When we finally got this scheme, then they were checking it against all sorts of things, and there were quite a few complications. These cakes of tobacco arrive and they're stored in warehouses until they're needed. In the olden days they were one or two on top of each other. But what was happening in storage in the whole

business—not just cigarettes—is this system almost like book stacks. These were stored eight high. Instead of having these fork-lift trucks, they had a vertical lift that was eighty feet high that moved on tracks. That had a fork that picked up the tobacco and took it up to the bin and shoved it in there. It was all automatic, so that changed the character of the storage building. That was the kind of research they were doing on equipment. As far as the aesthetics of the building and the landscaping, they were very nice. Now, we didn't do it like a factory. We did it like a building. That's why it looks like that.

Blum: Describe the difference that you built into this one.

Bunshaft: A factory is usually a place that is designed to fit the manufacturing equipment. Not much effort is made for the workmen. In the olden days, they used to have skylights. But they're dark and have concrete floors. It was a plant mainly to protect the equipment and make enough light for the workmen to see what they were doing. It had a cafeteria if it was isolated and some industrial toilets. It was an entirely different world. Now, the difference between this and an auto plant or any other plant is that these people aren't doing labor. They're just supervising the

machines. If the machine gets clogged, they stop it and correct it. In other words, it's more like a white-collar job. They're not real tough people like car makers. But the previous places that Philip Morris built or anybody else were more factory in character—columns everywhere and concrete floors and miles from any windows. They were big bulk buildings and they were multi-story so you couldn't tell whether it was snowing or what outside.

Blum: Now this had floor-to-ceiling glass?

Bunshaft: Thirty feet high. You can look in the picture.

Blum: And gardens and greenery on either side.

Bunshaft: Yes. Five gardens of sixty by a hundred and fifty feet on either side, heavily landscaped, and this is in Richmond where things grow.

Blum: Many of your projects had landscaping and gardens. Was the landscaping done by a division of SOM or did you hire outside landscapers?

Bunshaft: Connecticut General was done by a woman, an employee in our office. She was a good landscape designer. She was also cantankerous. The only one she'd listen to was me. I used to holler louder than her. I can't think of her name, but she was very good. She did that. Philip Morris was done, in my opinion, by one of the great landscape firms. I'll think of it. They did a good job. This had a big reflecting pond in front. As Carol [Krinsky] said, when you go through the entrance gate off a highway, she said she was just shocked. She suddenly found herself in a very peaceful park. I don't think you looked at that picture carefully. We have a huge oval pool with fountains and lots of landscaping. There's no factory that has that. I would say this is a palace for people to work in. It's a workman's palace, and not in the Russian sense either. The reason it was accepted that way is that the Philip Morris people were young people, and they wanted to do something that they'd be proud of and that would work and that would make their people happy. They got that double. Carol was there. She called the union boss before she went and talked to employees and all of that. This was after I suppose at least ten years. She said they were just eulogistic. You don't see a factory with carpeting all over or polished maple floors and the natural as well as bright electric lighting. The only thing we couldn't

solve is the noise. These machines make a tremendous amount of noise, and the people working near the machines have to wear earmuffs. The federal government has rules on that. We have it all acoustical inside. There are very few people who have been down to see it because of this idea of cigarettes being a dirty thing, you know. Maybe they are.

Blum: Or unhealthy.

Bunshaft: Yes. Maybe they are, but we made a nice place for them to work. Philip Morris at the end of this—totally unrelated to this—started getting involved in sponsoring art exhibitions. They had a public relations firm for them who recommended it. The man who was the president, really the guy who ran the place, was interested in art, and he's now, I think, the president or the chairman of the board of Lincoln Center. They got into art. The reason I mentioned that is they sponsored quite a few exhibitions at the Whitney [Museum], and three or four years after the Philip Morris plant was running, I used to get invited to the Whitney events that Philip Morris sponsored. They were sponsoring a lot of them. One of them was a black-tie, a big party. Goldsmith was there, the vice president. By then he was president of Philip

Morris, USA. We came up and chatted and he was always cordial, and he turned to a group of people and said, “This is the man that made me president of USA.” That factory was so successful that he was promoted. It was very nice of him to say it. They are making a fortune on this plant. It works on three eight-hour shifts.

Blum: Did Philip Morris have an art collection that was anywhere visible in the factory?

Bunshaft: Nothing, no. They don’t have any now either. The public relations people have a little art advisory committee of employees. We did all the furnishings for the building, everything. They sent down a woman who started buying local watercolors and things for the office spaces, which are not much, but the theory was to be local to be friendly.

Blum: You said you did all the furnishings for Philip Morris.

Bunshaft: We did it for everything after we did Chase—in all the buildings after that.

- Blum: Were you ever involved in the design of any of the furniture?
- Bunshaft: Interiors was under me, so I overlooked it. I didn't sit down and design furniture, but the furniture in this living room was the criteria for the firm for the first two years. Those black cabinets with the stainless and that little handle you haven't noticed I developed for this apartment. It became a standard in the whole industry. Those sorts of things. You know, I wasn't somebody who could sit around and select fabrics, etc. I had a lot of work.
- Blum: Besides, you had experience as a young man building furniture for your own home.
- Bunshaft: No, but that was period junk. That has nothing to do with it. Designing furniture is not difficult as far as tables and cabinets. A chair is very difficult to design and do a good one.
- Blum: In your office, I realize you worked with clients, with programs...
- Bunshaft: I worked with people in the office mainly.

Blum: How did you mesh with other people who were carrying out some of the things you told them? How did that all work?

Bunshaft: For an architect, these meetings and clients are only a tiny part of his time. In the office in building a big building, you're having meetings with the consulting engineers from outside who come in. There are meetings all the time going on coordinating. You have a senior designer working under you. He has five or six designers. At the proper stage you have working drawings being made with a job captain. He has a crew maybe of ten on a big job. Then you have your engineers. In New York a great many times they're outside firms. Now, for this stuff in the development, you have bull sessions about it.

Blum: You have bull sessions, they go back, they put it on paper.

Bunshaft: These people come in and see me. The design comes in. We talk about doing some rough sketches and I give them an idea and they go and work rough sketches trying to develop maybe five or six ideas. The senior designer with one other comes in and we bull about it. Stick them up on the wall and throw out all of them or keep one. That's the whole process.

Blum: Do you ever commit anything to paper to give them to take back?

Bunshaft: I do rough sketches, very rough. The rough things have a basic idea. That's why I told you at the beginning that drawing's of no importance. You have some rough idea in your mind, and you can make it on any old sheet of paper. It looks silly, but it shows what we're talking about. They go and develop it, and maybe when they develop it, we find it's crazy or it doesn't work or it's poor proportions or it's not good enough. There's a tremendous amount of sweating to come up with a scheme.

Blum: But ultimately you have the final say over everything that happens.

Bunshaft: Let's take the Jeddah Bank. As I told you, when we got the job, they were vague about what they needed. It was an office building. They didn't know quite how big it was and they wanted a banking room and they wanted proper parking. We had this site which was vague even. They didn't have a real legal definition of it. I, alone, started to think that this was the time to make an effort to do something that was not just an office

building with louvers on it. I pondered around. I did square buildings. See, I've been to quite a few Arab places, and the Arab world is a blank wall. In fact, the streets in Europe in some places—like in parts of Paris—you go down a street and they're only blank walls, and they're shabby with a door every once in a while. I remember once when I was a student somebody took me to a grand party at somebody's house. When we got there, it was an ordinary little street with a blank wall. We walked through that door and there were gardens and a palace down there. In the Arab world, it's more so. In the Arab world a street is only a means of communication. That's why it's very narrow because most people walk. There's no showing off of where you're living. Your home is interior. That's why they all had a court in the middle and the rooms all fronted on it. Their system, of course, is much better than ours where we build a house and the front entrance is grass and trees. Out in East Hampton, they think the front of our house is where you approach it. That's a blank wall in our house. On the other side it's all glass looking out on a pond and a big lawn. They call that the back. That's because everybody thinks you ought to have—you know, people fancy up their lawns to show off. That's not the way the world works. So that blank wall is one thing, and the second thing is water and this

interior court. That's what this building ended up. These interior courts ended up great big triangles. You know what the size of those little black holes is? It's a hundred feet wide and a hundred feet high and it's a triangle.

Blum: The scale is hard to imagine.

Bunshaft: That's right. Each one has seven office floors in it.

Blum: I understand it, but I can't visualize the scale. But you played around with drawings and doodles and whatever?

Bunshaft: I played around and then I had a senior designer, a very nice fellow I mentioned in the book, not on the basic idea but developing it. He made some sketches and then we sat, the two of us, and bulled about it freehand, and suddenly we started getting something—very sloppy, but architects can read sketches. You don't have to have fancy drawings. We tried making a square building with a hole on one side. Then we came to this triangular one and this circle to fit the site, the circle being the garage. The triangle one I thought about to get the direct light off the glass and to create a garden in the air. It's sort of a courtyard in the air,

a three-sided courtyard. He drew it and then we decided how thick it had to be to work as office space. In looking at it, where the glass is, you have to have columns. We decided to have just three columns: one on each of these long sides and one at that point. In order to keep these pure, all the elevators and toilets are a separate unit. He came back and said, "You know, with these three columns, we can have some floors facing this way and some floors facing this other way. Excuse me—I thought of it last night. Here's the building.

Blum: Oh. This is a little metal model.

Bunshaft: The client was so pleased with this building that he wanted three or four hundred of these things to give to friends and clients. We made some out of plastic thinking five hundred would be expensive. No, no, he wanted...

Blum: This is metal.

Bunshaft: This is bronze.

Blum: And it's about five inches tall? It's a little hand model.

Bunshaft: Here it is here. This is the side where the entrance is. This space behind here is a bank. Here is this "V". This here is all glass.

Blum: Oh, yes. I see the light coming from the top.

Bunshaft: It's from this side. Not from the top, it's coming from this side. Do you see that?

Blum: Oh, yes. I do. I see.

Bunshaft: What this shows is that this plane here, this wall here and this wall here are the same. Here's light coming from here. There are three columns here. This hole doesn't go to the bottom. This banking room down in here has a skylight, and this is solid so you don't have it here. In theory you get some light in a little dome in here. But this open space in here turned out to be marvelous because this acts as a chimney and the hot air that comes in here and goes on the glass goes up and exhausts the three outdoor courts.

Blum: Is this the service tower?

Bunshaft: These are the elevators and toilets.

Blum: All right, if this is the service tower, in some ways it reminds me of what happened at Inland Steel and the Crown Zellerbach in San Francisco, to have a separate service tower.

Bunshaft: That's been done a lot. They did it for the same reason as this. In the case of Inland Steel, the building's a rectangle and it's clear span and they didn't want anything to interrupt it. If the building gets real big, say, forty thousand or thirty thousand square feet, the elevators have to go in the middle because the building gets so thick that you have dark space in there. But in this case, where this is only forty-five feet—this building is not inexpensive because everybody has light and view.

Blum: And all of these ideas as you describe the interaction between you and your senior designer came from an exchange between you? One development led to another?

Bunshaft: Yes, but the main guiding thing was trying to do a building for a hot climate. That was the target. Actually, I sketched this in the end. He never had any shapes. We tried different things. We didn't know what the hell we were doing. What you do is flounder and then suddenly sometimes by yourself you get it. Like a painter smearing around on a canvas. He's getting nowhere and suddenly after a month—an abstract painter, I mean. Then that's just the beginning. That's just the diagram. Then what is it going to be built out of, what material and what details? In most architectural offices, a design partner or design head or whatever you want to call him works on the basic scheme but he doesn't follow through usually down into the furniture selection or the fabrics or the doorknobs or the hardware. On any building I work on, I go through all of it. This building is perfection as to details. This is an Arab country so a lot of architects go into all sorts of domes and Arabic motifs. This has none of that, but it has Arabic character. There's a marble floor on the top floor that's all done in an Arabic pattern of interlocking pieces, very delicately done, but it's there.

Blum: In the beginning, say, in the 1950s when you were the design partner was the system the same or over the years did it change?

Bunshaft: As far as I'm concerned, we did the same thing all the time. We worked together. There was no change in the system.

Blum: So you always had the final say and the different departments carried it out.

Bunshaft: Not me—any design partner had it. Somebody had to decide. That system is used probably universally. I would say the only difference between our period and today is that the design people are kept quite separate from the people doing working drawings. During my time, the senior designer after we settled something spent a lot of time making sure the working drawing people knew what it was supposed to be. They worked side by side. In Chicago, Walter Netsch carried it even farther. He had them all work together, and the designers made working drawings and so forth. He had a small atelier.

Blum: It is said and has been written that when Nat Owings was in the Chicago, he would give two design teams the same problem and

in that way he thought .

Bunshaft: That's just baloney. He may have done that once or something, but that has nothing to do with the firm. Nothing at all.

Blum: But that was a method that he used in the beginning apparently or so it's written.

Bunshaft: In the beginning, in the first three or four years of, shall we say, the same period as Ambrose [Richardson] talks about the fact that...

Blum: 1939 and 1940.

Bunshaft: ...there weren't any designers in the firm in Chicago. There weren't any real buildings to do. They were doing little alterations if you read it carefully. There weren't any buildings. The biggest thing he did was enclosing a paper-processing factory. It's nothing but one huge machine. It starts at one end with whatever the stuff is and comes out the other end as paper. It's a humidity-control problem. He got that job because the people were friends, too. Ambrose came at night and made it.

That's nothing but a box enclosing a machine. There's no function in there at all outside of that. The reason it's a glass block is that they didn't want it to be dark in there. They wanted it humidity controlled so this non-paper can suddenly become paper.

Blum: In your book you talk about Manufacturers Hanover Trust as coming out of a competition between young people in the office.

Bunshaft: Yes, Skid did that a couple of times. This is before any program. They got a branch bank. This was cheap stuff, if you want to really know. There were three or four young designers in the firm and he said, "If you fellows want to work on the weekend, if you want to do a sketch for a bank, I'll give a prize of fifty dollars to the winner." So he got four fellows working a whole weekend coming up with an idea for fifty dollars. Charlie Hughes, who was a very nice man—Charles Evans Hughes II—his grandfather was the chief justice.

Blum: And he's the one who came up with the...

Bunshaft: With a rough idea of a glass box. We would have done a glass box because that was the thing to do.

Blum: It seemed consistent with what you had just done two years ago.

Bunshaft: Sure, we were all for glass. Then Skid said to me, "You take it over." I had assumed Charlie Hughes was going to work on it. He wasn't on it. It turned out that we had a job of headquarters for Ford in Dearborn, and he was put on that by Skid.

Blum: Hughes?

Bunshaft: Yes, he was put on that so he never worked on the bank. He became a friend of mine.

Blum: You were with the New York office, and you're very strong about the importance of the New York office.

Bunshaft: I'm not strong about it. They're just plain facts.

Blum: How would you describe the relationship between other offices...?

Bunshaft: There weren't any other then except Chicago.

Blum: Well, but now there are, and over the thirty years they've come and gone and developed and done some interesting things.

Bunshaft: The Chicago office didn't have a real designer until Walter Netsch developed into one, and then shortly afterwards, Bruce Graham. There was nobody of any consequence. The thing you don't understand and I guess nobody wants to talk about, this story about Ambrose is so sweet about Owings being... Owings was very impressive. But he was a bastard to the people. He was not kind to his staff there. God, he drank, you know, a little bit, and he was a very rough guy. They mention two men in there—[Al] Eiseman, who was sort of the senior man in the office. He was a sort of cynical, half-assed know-it-all, who walked around with his cigarette sagging. That gives you an idea. Owings used to beat him up. Then there was a guy named Carl Anderson, who was what I would call the chief draftsman of a real office. And, God, Owings beat him up.

Blum: When people talk about Owings, people who perhaps feel more kindly to him...

Bunshaft: Not kindly—they don't know. Not kindly. They haven't been in there.

Blum: Well, some people who have been in there have...

Bunshaft: Who? Tell me who they are.

Blum: Well, Jim Hammond, for one, from Chicago.

Bunshaft: Jim Hammond was kicked out of the firm, wasn't he? Or he left. Is he still in practice?

Blum: He left, but he worked with Owings or in close proximity with him, and one thing...He has died.

Bunshaft: Oh, he died. Most of these people are like Ambrose. They want to be nice. Forget anything I said. Just to give you some facts... Owings ran the Chicago office. When I came back from the army—you heard the story about the party and stuff—I ended up in New York. When I came back and started working, there were two important designers in the office at that moment. One was Bill Hartmann, a new fellow but a nice man. He was a designer.

He designed Sloan-Kettering. And there was a Paris Prize-winner named Landefeld, who was a close friend of Skidmore's. I didn't have any title. I just went to work. I was really working for about a month or two on this big Ohio State Medical Center, and I never dealt with Bill Hartmann or Landefeld much. We were friendly. Landefeld quit a month after that. He saw the handwriting on the wall or whatever it was. Hartmann decided to go to the Chicago office, and he ceased being a designer. He went there. Hartmann was all right. There were other partners there—Jack Rodgers, Owings—but he took him to California and he beat the hell out of him.

Blum: Wait. Jack Rodgers was in New York?

Bunshaft: Chicago. There's another partner there who was a very nice man. These were grown-up, mature men.

[Tape 6: Side 2]

Blum: One thing that I've heard about Owings, regardless of how disagreeable or brutal he was—and I understand he was brutal with many people—is that he had a great talent, you said, for

getting clients, but I've also heard that he had a great talent for spotting talented young designers and giving them a chance to create. How do you respond to that?

Bunshaft: That's baloney. Baloney. Nat was a bum, for Christ's sake. Back in 1937, he had been married for I don't know how many years—three or four?

Blum: To Emily [Otis].

Bunshaft: Yes. I mean, back in 1940 he had been married eight years. He had twins and another child. He was carrying on with a woman who was really a hot potato, and she was married to one of the pretty well-known architects in Chicago. Owings would come in with his briefcase, the thick briefcases that fold up with a handle, when he was going to have a date with her at the Palmer House. It was so packed, the pajamas were sticking out. He was screwing around all over the place. I met this girl. I was a bachelor. I tried to date her. She said, "What are you talking about?" She was interested but she said, "I'm your boss's girl." Her husband might be sitting at the Tavern Club two seats away. He was a bohemian, Owings. I'll tell you something. Why did Skidmore retire after

only about fifteen years of the firm?

Blum: Well, according to Nat, he had ulcers and health problems. I can only tell you what I've read. Is that true?

Bunshaft: Skid was a very easy-going guy, very bright and tricky enough to get work, but a very pleasant guy and if he had a few drinks, he was very cordial. He was never mean. He couldn't have been nicer to me and the four partners who grew up with him. Skid was the man who had the insight in finding people. The first four partners were us that Skid had picked. There were no partners from Chicago. Owings picked John Merrill, and that story in there is all wrong because he's got in there that John Merrill was on the housing commission. He wasn't on the housing commission. It was an architectural firm that did housing.

Blum: You're talking about Ambrose's article?

Bunshaft: Yes. That was Owings' great pick, and there's a terrible story. Owings picked him because he thought he could get housing. The firm that John Merrill was with was a firm that did a lot of housing, but Merrill just did the work. He didn't know anything

about how to get the job, just like I didn't. You follow me? Nat Owings hired him, and he sat in the same office that Nat did in the corner, and he sat there. For the two years I was there—I think he came in a little after I did—the poor man sat there and had nothing to do. Owings would let him just sit. He'd be sitting there still if it hadn't been for Oak Ridge [Tennessee]. At Oak Ridge he became the head of it. He was an engineer. They put Merrill on the stationery, but I don't even know if he got paid. He became an associate partner when the four of us became associate partners in 1946. He became a partner when we became partners in 1949. You understand?

Blum: Yes.

Bunshaft: The first partners in the firm were the four of us and John Merrill.

Blum: And that was in 1949?

Bunshaft: Yes. I think Hartmann was put in later. So, I'm not exaggerating. You wouldn't make four partners in New York and none in Chicago. What I tried to do is point this out because this myth that Skidmore, Owings and Merrill grew in Chicago is crap. It

doesn't matter. Skidmore, Owings and Merrill started in Chicago, but the growth was in New York. In fact, Skid used to say, and it was true, that anything new starts in New York and moves west ten years later. And he was absolutely right. The Chicago development of new office buildings was ten years later almost to the dot. Now, about Skidmore—why he left. I think Skidmore—somebody wrote it besides me—and Nat, if they'd been in the same office, would not have survived personally. Nat was domineering and very bossy. Skid didn't want anybody to boss him, but also he was not trying to be bossy. What happened when the office was going and New York was really prospering, Nat would come—I knew nothing about it—there, and they'd have meetings, Skid and Nat. When he left, Skid would always be sort of mad and depressed. I think he tried to dictate stuff to Skid. He was a real extrovert. My feeling was that Skid hated Nat.

Blum: He was also married to his sister.

Bunshaft: Yes, I know. That complicated it. The sister must have had a problem of whose side she was on. She was not a silent one. She was involved in these things, I'm sure. She was very bright and very nice. When Skid left, he left fundamentally because of two

reasons. By that time we had been partners from 1949, and we were all—the four of us. None of them may have said it. I'm the only one who'll say it in a very brutal way. We stuck together on anything about money or anything about one or the other. I said we succeeded because we had a common enemy, and that common enemy was Skidmore and Owings. We were going to take over, goddamn it, and by the time Skid got ready to leave—we were aggressive people, each in our different way. Severinghaus in a gentle way, and so forth. Skid left and the last year before he left, he'd come in and he'd have nothing to do except read the Times, because we weren't going to him to ask him questions and we were running things. He wasn't going to meetings. He was in on Lever at the beginning, the first meetings up until those rough models. After that, the client never saw him. It was Bill Brown and myself. We were in our good years, you know.

Blum: But you were also doing the work.

Bunshaft: Yes. I was doing my work until I left the firm. Nobody was letting me read the newspaper. Anyhow, Skid left for two reasons. He really didn't have much to do. I think he had a fear. In those days

there was a certain amount of talk going around about fifty-year-olds having heart attacks, and it's still true. He had nothing to do. I think he was delighted to get out of Owings's clutches. I think those were all the reasons why he retired.

Blum: But did he really have ulcers or not?

Bunshaft: Oh, he had ulcers a long time.

Blum: Did he really drink or not?

Bunshaft: He was never a drunkard like Nat, who had to have it. You know, a real drunkard is when he has it in the morning. Skid was a social drinker, but he'd get drunk at night. But he never touched it to keep going. A lot of architects are drinkers. Everybody did it.

Blum: Does it strike you as it strikes me that so many people who are architects also drank a lot to the point where it was a problem for them?

Bunshaft: There weren't many that I knew with a problem, but it was the simple word *la vie bohème*. A lot of architects have been to France,

and *la vie bohème* was to live and have a ball and drink. Some of them, I guess, got fairly—I used to do some pretty heavy drinking. Skid and myself and some of the other partners would end up quite a few evenings at the Oak Room and have dinner and drinks and then go home and have drinks. You were potted. You were not a drunkard, because you got up in the morning and felt awful and went to work. You didn't get up in the morning and take a drink. That's where Owings eventually got to. He was a total drunkard many years later.

Blum: It certainly was a problem for him later on.

Bunshaft: It wasn't a problem. You say problem like a—he was as drunk as you can be. He wasn't in the firm. He was still listed, but he didn't do anything. The San Francisco office didn't know what to do about it. He wasn't involved in anything. He might come in and stumble around and go out. He was a problem because he was getting drunk in prominent places. He belonged to one of the best clubs. I think they threw him out in San Francisco. The final thing was when they found him lying on the floor in an elevator. His second wife [Margaret Owings], a very nice person, tried very hard to keep him on the wagon. She couldn't do it. I don't know if

she ever threatened to leave him. The elevator episode put him in a cure hospital. It must be a marvelous place, because it cured him. You know how they cured him? They gave him a drink on the hour: one whiskey, one beer, one wine, one whiskey, one wine, one beer. He got so sick of it that cured him of it. But that isn't what cures you. What cures you is you have to have the will to stop. You cannot touch anything with alcohol in it. There are only three people that I know of who ever succeeded. That was Owings, Ed Stone—he did it because he was chasing a second or third wife, a little Italian babe. She said, “Nothing doing with me until you stop drinking.” And he did. He used to drink coffee. He found out he could have just as good a time with people at a party with just drinking coffee.

Blum: But they also had to have the courage and willpower to do that.

Bunshaft: This woman supplied it, because he wanted her very badly. Owings, I think, when he was cured realized he was at the bottom of the pot. He did a remarkable job of staying cured. In his latter years, he was a very brilliant man and he was involved in things his wife had really gotten into, environment and land use. His last years were when he was really an important and decent man and

he was working in Washington.

Blum: He was on the Pennsylvania Avenue Commission. If you say New York is where it was happening, it was the important office and other offices followed?

Bunshaft: Let me give you another example. You know, the AIA in the olden days gave Honor Awards—they still do—for buildings. The firm, close to 1975 or so, had maybe eleven or twelve Honor Awards. Originally, with Honor Awards there was only one given a year. Later on they started giving four or five and then mentions and stuff. But there were about eleven. I don't know when that was. There's more now. Of those eleven, I think there were two from the rest of the firm.

Blum: And nine from New York?

Bunshaft: Nine for buildings I did.

Blum: Yes, for buildings you did.

Bunshaft: And now in this book, twelve of those buildings have had Honor Awards. Not that I think much of the AIA. Those two happened in the latter part between 1937 and 1975. Not only was the New York office doing the work, but it was creating the reputation that the firm has enjoyed. It wasn't done in Chicago. It did that in Chicago later.

Blum: Now you had meetings with your partners from all offices twice a year. Was there a sharing of ideas?

Bunshaft: Architectural design was never discussed. That isn't something you discuss. Each partner has his own convictions and you don't talk about that. What those meetings consisted of were financial reports and deciding to introduce new things or this or that and the voting on new partners and things like that. It was all business. We didn't share design amongst the designers in any one office.

Blum: Was it protected property?

Bunshaft: No, each man did his thing. If he was good, and even if he wasn't good, he had to have enough confidence that he thought he was

better than anybody in the office. So who was he going to talk to. So it isn't a team effort. The team effort is a group of various people on different functions working together. There's no team effort by categories.

Blum: You became a partner in 1949. Today I understand it takes between twelve and fifteen years for people to rise to a partnership. You were sort of in on the ground floor, as you described it.

Bunshaft: Well, if you say I was there in 1937, then that's twelve years there, with four years away.

Blum: Yes, that's right.

Bunshaft: The firm now has another gimmick. The story Ambrose [Richardson] tells is when he first was hired he could get a dollar a day and Owings told him he'd work for about nine hours or he could get ten dollars a week. So Ambrose took the ten dollars because he'd get an extra dollar. But the first week he worked twenty hours, so he was getting a half a dollar. That's sort of what happened. Then he tells that instead of paying overtime, they'd

let them have a meal, dinner. I'll tell you a story about the New York office. I started in the fall and the firm had started in the spring. We were working day and night. These crazy models were being pasted together, and Skid would come in at nine o'clock and at ten o'clock run in, grab the model and show it to a client. He never said even thank you. We were not getting any overtime or anything, but nobody cared. It was the period of being happy and lucky to have work. I think around Christmas time, Owings came to New York and Skid was going to give an office party with probably about ten people, including the office boy, at a French restaurant on West 56th Street.

Blum: Brussels?

Bunshaft: Oh, no, I mean a little dump of a French restaurant.

Blum: Owings talks about Brussels Restaurant.

Bunshaft: That was my home. No, that's where you took clients. This firm was just beginning. It was a place you went for seventy cents for dinner, which was very good. We went there, and one of the newest men hired was a fellow named Bigelow. He was from an

old Boston family and he had been at Harvard and had been a great hockey player. He was a big fellow with a big square chin, very nice. He and I got along. I don't know what he did. I've forgotten. We came to this restaurant which is a twenty-foot thing, and Skid said, "We're having it up in a private room on the fourth floor." We went up there and we sat and Bigelow said, "Where are the drinks?" Skid said, "Oh, we're going to have wine." Well, you never have a Christmas party without drinks. I don't think everybody was there yet, so Bigelow said, "I'm going downstairs and get a drink. You want to come, Bun?" I said, "Sure," and we went downstairs. We got in the corner of the bar, and pretty soon everybody was down there. We were drinking away on empty stomachs. Owings was down there and Skid. Bigelow started ranting at Owings and everything was four-letter words. He called him everything you could think of, Owings and Skidmore, for exploiting us and never even getting a thank-you note. He didn't say he thought this, he kept saying "Bunshaft and I think you're a bunch of this and that" and all that. There was quite a lot of drinking, and after a while Owings said, "Let Bunshaft speak for himself." That's all I remember. We never did eat. I lived on East 58th Street near First Avenue and Skid lived on First Avenue and 58th Street. Owings was staying with him. I

don't know where Bigelow lived. The four of us walked out and they were going to take us home. I hope you've got a good strong stomach. Skid got in and as he leaned forward, he puked all over the seat. Just awful. He got in and sat in it. The rest of us got in and we went home. Bigelow stayed with me on a cot or something. We got up in the morning, and, oh, boy, we had headaches. We didn't think there was any sense in going to the office. It couldn't have been nastier. But we eventually went, and there was never a word said about anything. The funniest thing was the office boy was found in a subway train about three in the morning without his pants. Immediately overtime started. They were frightened because if we left them, they'd be in the soup.

Blum: Well, in Chicago they paid with meals and in New York they paid with money.

Bunshaft: It didn't matter.

Blum: You know, something occurred to me when you were talking about all this drinking, and I wonder if it wasn't maybe your generation and the generation of those you worked with who came through Prohibition, and maybe that was something that set

it up as a desirable thing.

Bunshaft: Well, I think that was true in the whole population. That may have been partially true, but it was also this bohemian business.

Blum: Maybe the combination of both made a big contribution.

Bunshaft: And that carried on in Chicago. That's what made the Tavern Club a sacred institution. In New York, business got serious and architecture got to be a business. It got to be organized and you had to be quite professional in your presentations. The thirties was the transition between the gentleman architect—most architects were not people with backgrounds like Skid and Nat or me or anybody else. In the olden days, they were all of the upper class at least in the East, and they were club men and they were all pals. You didn't get Chase by making a presentation. You got Chase because David Rockefeller was an old club friend of yours. The thirties changed that, and the forties brought in people on the ball.

Blum: It also brought the government in as a client to some firms.

Bunshaft: That client was a pain in the ass.

Blum: They sure gave big jobs. They did big projects. So the government was a new type of client.

Bunshaft: The two biggest jobs the firm ever got we got automatically. One was Oak Ridge, which was nothing distinguished, but it was done. The Air Force Academy, which had a very serious group of architects competing for it—that was Saarinen, Becket, Wally Harrison. I was not involved in the presentation, but there was Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. They invited, I guess, four or five of the architects. There were probably many more that applied. This was a colossal job at that time. At that time it was in the hundreds of millions, but today it would probably be a billion, the Air Force Academy. They were all invited down to make a presentation in Washington to the generals and the Secretary of the Air Force. The secretary of air, Harold Talbot, was the client. He was a humdinger. Everybody made their presentations. I guess Skid and Nat both spoke. Saarinen had been out to the site. The site was fifteen thousand acres in the foothills of the

mountains in Colorado Springs. Later on I saw it. It was beautiful. Eero had even selected where the academy ought to be built. The presentation was made, and the secretary of air didn't sit in the committee. They were just doing it for him. But after everybody on the committee had heard it, I guess they reported to the secretary. After a while, the secretary told Skidmore we had the job. He offered to fly Skid back to New York because he too was going there. He really was a New Yorker. This man was an attractive businessman. On the flight he said, "There were two people that influenced my decision to hire your firm. Do you think you could guess any of them?" Skid said, "Well, one I would guess is Mrs. Talbot," who was chairman of a hospital we did, "and I think she was pleased." Talbot said, "You're right." Skid said, "I can't guess the other one," so Talbot told him. The story is that the second person who influenced him was the chairman of Connecticut General, Frazar Wilde. Frazar Wilde was sort of an old New England type, but he was respected by many important people. David Rockefeller thought he was a genius. Evidently Talbot thought well of Frazar Wilde. How did Wilde influence him? When we were doing the Connecticut General job, at that time there was lots of talk about bomb-proof shelters against the atomic bomb. Old Frazar wanted everything on this

project, so he raised the question with us of providing underground protection. We did studies, and we recommended they do nothing. At the next meeting Frazar said okay. But what he had done was call his old Air Force friend Talbot and ask his opinion of whether they should do anything. Talbot said, "No, do nothing." But in the course of discussion, Frazar, who was in love with us, told Talbot how wonderful we were. Not me. He used the word "Skidmore, Owings and Merrill." That's how we got that job.

Blum: Didn't you come from New York to Chicago to work on some of the planning stages of the Academy?

Bunshaft: I was involved in the early days of the project for about a year.

Blum: You said that the two largest jobs that Skidmore, Owings and Merrill got were Oak Ridge and the other was the Air Force Academy. Were prefab dwellings, materials, method of construction ever considered in either of these large projects?

Bunshaft: Wait a minute. In those days, the prefab research that the Pierce Foundation did never materialized. Now there are more serious

attempts. Well, now you have prefab trailer houses. That's prefab in a sense, but it's geared to the size of the road.

Blum: Did the idea of prefabrication ever...?

Bunshaft: You asked about both projects. Oak Ridge I don't know, but I think there was no time. This was a hell of a hurried project. This was built probably conventionally, maybe with plywood, but not in a factory. Prefab means in a factory. They had to build this housing in absolutely no time.

Blum: It also means fast site construction, doesn't it?

Bunshaft: When you have a site, you can build an ordinary house. You just need labor and materials. If you're trying to develop a prefab house, the development takes longer than the time to build the whole town. You have to develop process and machinery. Now, in the Air Force, it's just a silly question, because that's a monument, and prefab is for houses. You don't prefab a marble-coated structure. You know what I'm saying? With prefab, the research was done only on domestic architecture. Wood, tin, or something. The buildings we're talking about are massive

structures where with the structure and the spans, there's no such thing as prefab for that. There are elements of it, like the skin may be prefab units. But that's not prefabbing. That's just a manufacturing process. You don't understand. Prefab was never in any important building because each building is designed differently.

Blum: Well, as an idea and not related to a specific project.

Bunshaft: No. The research in prefab was always based for houses. There's been prefab research going on for years by different companies that think they can make money on houses. And contractors themselves have prefabricated parts. Prefab means doing it in a factory, so parts are prefabricated. In fact, the only thing that I've read in a big building that's prefab, was done by [Richard] Rogers, the architect in London who did Lloyd's, which is a metal building. He had bathroom units hanging outside. These were prefabricated. The whole interior, the whole unit was made in a factory, toilets and pipes and all that. But that's just one item.

Blum: Skidmore, Owings and Merrill in recent articles have been said to have gone from individual creativity to anonymous.

Bunshaft: I don't know what the hell that is. That's some guy writing. What is he trying to say? I don't know what it means.

Blum: Well, several writers have said that Skidmore at one time was really very creative and each building was individual and today it's like they're being stamped out with a very anonymous quality. Do you think there's any merit to that?

Bunshaft: What I would say about Skidmore is that in earlier days, there was more time spent and the projects were not as many and there were some people who were really serious about doing a fine building. Today, there are two or three offices, and they're all doing a great deal of office buildings. That's about the only thing that's being done. Each office is going off in its own direction, just the opposite of what these people said. In the New York City office, you have David Childs—who in my book is not even an architect, he's a planner—doing postmodern. He's doing buildings that look like they were built in 1920. It's probably the sort of architecture you like or your group likes. In the same

office, there are two or three other partners doing modern. Each partner is doing it a little differently. In Chicago, the same thing's happening. The London office is full of Chicago people. It's a big office. They're doing traditional and modern, both in the same office. So, that person doesn't know what the hell he's talking about. They're doing good work, they're not doing great work.

Blum: Well, maybe that was implied in what this was all about.

Bunshaft: No, that was not implied. They haven't done a great building. There's a fellow in Chicago, Smith I think his name is.

Blum: Adrian Smith.

Bunshaft: He did a building in one of the Arab countries that's very good. And the competition for the Chicago public library? My, God, I think Chicago deserves what they got, which is probably the most hideous building. It would have been disapproved of in the olden days as being vulgar. The old library's better looking. What Smith did was equally ugly. More traditional, but ugly traditional. They don't even understand proportion. Now this is one man doing two styles. He says he'll do any kind of style.

Blum: Adrian Smith?

Bunshaft: Yes.

Blum: Did you think there was a good design in that competition?

Bunshaft: The only one that was semi-modern was the Chicago architect that did the United Airlines building at Chicago.

Blum: Helmut Jahn.

Bunshaft: Yes. His was sort of good but it was too fussy for me, but it was at least twentieth century, and so was the design of the Canadian architect.

Blum: Arthur Erickson?

Bunshaft: Yes. But the one that won is the vulgarest thing. If they build it like that, it really... That book is very appropriate for it.

Blum: Tom Beeby's design.

Bunshaft: I don't give a damn what his name is. He isn't anything. Postmodern is going to be called one of the ugliest periods in the twentieth century in the United States.

Blum: Well, I think taste has moved beyond that.

Bunshaft: It has nothing to do with taste.

Blum: You were a member of the AIA, you were a fellow of the AIA. In your opinion, is the AIA an important or significant organization for architects?

Bunshaft: I just want to figure out how nasty I can really make it.

Blum: Is that your answer?

Bunshaft: No. I think the AIA has become a trade union, working for conventions and putting out material, though I suppose a good many of the members may find help in the junk they write. It's written for the most mediocre architects in the country. It's

written for a trade rather than a profession. They keep talking about design in their headlines, but they do nothing about the incompetence of about ninety percent of the profession of architecture in the United States as far as design goes. There are many architects who can put a building together that won't leak, but they can't put one together that will be handsome and an addition to the aesthetics of wherever they build it.

Blum: Have you ever served on any of their committees?

Bunshaft: I've been to an AIA convention twice. Once when Skidmore got the medal and once when Lever House got the twenty-fifth thing. I wouldn't go to one if they gave me a medal. I think they're nothing. It really is a trade thing, and it only produces a lot of fees that are absorbed by a bunch of jerks who sit in Washington.

Blum: Why were you a member then?

Bunshaft: I wanted to quit. I really did want to quit. In fact, several of us wanted to quit. We thought, well, the hell with it. Just pay no attention to it.

Blum: In 1963 you were elected to membership of the Fine Arts Commission in Washington.

Bunshaft: That's a different story.

Blum: How did it happen that you were proposed as a member of that Commission?

Bunshaft: The Fine Arts Commission is not about how I became a member, but how the group became members. I'm going to be long. The Fine Arts Commission is made up of, I think, seven people that are selected by the president of the United States. It was set up in the fashion so that each came in at a different time and served for four years. After that he served if the president didn't select a replacement or if the president reappointed him. They were staggered so there'd never be seven completely new members. That was the way it was until Truman came along, and Truman wanted a second-floor sort of porch on the White House. The Fine Arts Commission at that time turned him down. So he was so damn mad he wouldn't appoint anybody to it, and they all ran out of their terms but they weren't reappointed. They just waited for the replacement. They could all be kicked out at one time.

Now, between Truman, who came next? Kennedy?

Blum: Eisenhower?

Bunshaft: Eisenhower. I don't know what Eisenhower did. I don't think he did anything or he may have appointed a whole new set. But when Kennedy came in, they were all men who had run out of their four years and hadn't been reappointed or anything, so that the whole commission could be started over if he wanted to. That's the situation. Kennedy had a very good friend named Sill Walton. Walton lived in Washington. He had been a newspaper correspondent, but I don't know what he was doing, but he had a nice old Victorian house that he inherited in the old town of Washington.

Blum: Georgetown?

Bunshaft: Yes. In fact, when Kennedy was elected and he came to Washington, he stayed with Walton for a few days until the previous president moved out of the White House. Kennedy wanted to do something about architecture. I guess Walton had talked to him. I don't know where he came, but he wanted to do

something about architecture and art. His first trial balloon about doing something about architecture involved the secretary of air who had a new building being built. It's the building behind the Hirshhorn Museum, that big white building that was about to be furnished and the question of interiors came up. The Secretary of the Air Force then was Najeeb Hallaby. He was a friend of Kennedy's, too.

[Tape 7: Side 1]

Bunshaft: Normally, the General Services would send over old standard furniture. This was a big building with his offices and all. Kennedy talked Hallaby into having an art-advisory committee to oversee some designers they had hired to suggest for modern. That committee was selected by Bill Walton. That committee consisted of Aline Saarinen; Mrs. Douglas, who was the wife a previous Secretary of the Air Force who was interested in landscape, very nice; Henry Dreyfuss, the industrial designer; Sill Walton; and myself. I don't know who else. I don't know where Walton got me. There was somebody else. Before we got into the interiors of the Air Administration Building, the secretary was responsible for Dulles Airport [Washington, D.C.] that Eero

[Saarinen] had done. He had died by then, but the building was being built. I guess the previous secretary, James Douglas, had hired Raymond Loewy's office to do the restaurant. That was very important. I don't know whose idea it was, but they were going to break it up into seven little areas. You could eat food of seven different nations. It wasn't that big. It had one kitchen cooking seven styles. In our first meeting, we sat there while Loewy's people made a formal presentation, and it was awful. After that we told Hallaby he ought to fire them. He was kind of shocked, and we said it in plain English. It ended up that he agreed to fire Loewy, and then he said who should they hire? We said Saarinen's office. Saarinen's office had this wonderful interior designer who's become famous since. I can't think of his name. He does very beautiful metal chairs and things for Knoll. Anyhow, he's quite a designer. That was done. Kennedy decided to clean house and get a modern group on the Fine Arts Commission. Aline Saarinen and I from this first committee went into the Fine Arts Commission. The first ones were Aline Saarinen and myself, a landscape architect from Boston, who is Japanese.

Blum: Sasaki?

Bunshaft: Yes. And Roszak, a sculptor.

Blum: Theodore Roszak.

Bunshaft: And Sill Walton and an architect who was a pal of Kennedy's who was doing the square behind the White House [Jack Warnecke]. He was doing some brick buildings to tie in with that square. He became quite successful in California. Anyhow, that's how we were chosen. I think we have to quit right this minute on this subject because I have to eat and I have to be ready at one o'clock.

Blum: Okay.

Bunshaft: So, that's how the Fine Arts got to be a contemporary group.

Blum: Can I ask the last question?

Bunshaft: Sure.

Blum: Writers have given you all sorts of credit for all sorts of things. They criticized your work in all sorts of ways. What would you

say that your contribution to architecture for the thirty, forty years you practiced has been?

Bunshaft: I think it would be silly of me to try to say what I think it's been. I leave that to other people. All I know is I try to do the best I can with the personality good or bad that I have. The simplest thing I can say is I'm very pleased with what I did with my life. I think it was due to several things. One, that I had a dedicated family that saw that I had every opportunity to learn and be educated. Two, that I think I had a fairly sound mind that was not too poetic but had a good deal of logic. And, three, that I lived at the right time as far as architecture was concerned. There are probably more reasons, but perhaps the most important thing of all is that I persevered stubbornly on what I believed. Last, and probably more important than any of them is that I was very lucky.

Blum: Is there any message you have for the next generation of architects?

Bunshaft: I just made that message. As far as architects, I've said this to many young architects. If you really think you want to be an architect and are prepared to dedicate yourself fully to it and

make it your number one priority next to your wife or girlfriend and are convinced that's what you want to do, and if you have some brains and if you have a lot of luck, you'll have a grand experience.

Blum: Thank you very much.

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Education: Massachusetts Institute of Technology B. Arch. 1933, M. Arch. 1935
Awarded the MIT Honorary Traveling Fellowship, 1935
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Experience: Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, New York, 1937-1942, 1946-1979

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Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts
Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut
President's Commission of the Fine Arts, 1963-1972
Trustee, Museum of Modern Art, New York, since 1975

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Medal of Honor, New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects
Chancellor Norton Medal, University of Buffalo

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