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Oral history interview with Arcangelo
Cascieri, 1972 November 21-1974 January
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Archangelo Cascieri on November 21, 1972 and January 24, 1974. The interview took place in Arlington, Massachusetts, and was conducted by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. This is a rough transcription that may include typographical errors.

Interview

November 21, 1972

ROBERT BROWN: This is an interview with Arcangelo Cascieri in his studio in Arlington, Massachusetts, and it's Tuesday, November 21, 1972.

I'd like to begin by asking you, if you will, to perhaps comment on how it all got started. What really led you into what you're doing today, which is carving a wooden figure, having first modeled it in plaster? Can you explain something of childhood, of other influences that have led to this career?

ARCANGELO CASCIERI: Well, I don't have any fabulous kind of entry into this career, actually. My father was looking for a place for me to learn a trade, and it was costly here, and he had a friend who worked near him, and he knew he was looking for an apprentice, so -- his name was John Kirchmayer. He was probably one of the -- he was the foremost sculptor in this area in wood at that time, and he came from Germany. He was a Bavarian.

Actually, I was lucky -- what you see me doing now is what I started with.

MR. BROWN: And what Kirchmayer was doing was something you were apprenticed to learn?

MR. CASCIERI: Yes. I actually started learning what sculpture was, yes.

MR. BROWN: How old were you then?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, I was -- think back --

MR. BROWN: Were you a teenager?

MR. CASCIERI: I was 18, and actually, I was through with my apprenticeship in 1922. That's 50 years ago.

MR. BROWN: How long were you apprenticed with Kirchmayer?

MR. CASCIERI: Four years.

MR. BROWN: Four years.

MR. CASCIERI: And I was his last apprentice, and when he died, he left me his tools, actually, so -- probably because I used to go and see him when he was ill, saw him just before he died, so he left me his studio.

MR. BROWN: When you came to Kirchmayer, had you already had any study of art?

MR. CASCIERI: No.

MR. BROWN: School?

MR. CASCIERI: No.

MR. BROWN: What -- what did you -- what sort of employment had you had before that, up to that point?

MR. CASCIERI: I had, you know, gone to school, and I had done some drawing but not anything that people would rave about. So, I started right in there and went to school, other schools that had evening classes in art and drawing; at night I was studying. That way I was getting it in the studio all day long.

MR. BROWN: Did you find that worked pretty well?

MR. CASCIERI: Yes, I always thought it was a very good way to learn, actually. Probably that's why I was so able to put together the work-study program.

MR. BROWN: With the Architectural Center [Boston Architectural Center].

MR. CASCIERI: The Architectural Center in Boston, yes. But --

MR. BROWN: What do you think you basically learned from Kirchmayer? Was it --

MR. CASCIERI: Well, actually, I learned how to handle, how to carve, and he was one of the most able persons, and in the beginning, he'd be working on a big block, and he'd say, well, saw here, knock a piece of that off --

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASCIERI: -- and then if he had deep holes to dig, he'd give you a tool and say, here, dig this hole out.

MR. BROWN: In other words, do the preliminary work for him.

MR. CASCIERI: Well, sort of -- very, very preliminary -- something like cutting this figure out, leaving about an inch so you wouldn't endanger where he was going to work, and in that way, little by little, over four years, I -- well, we first worked on ornaments, too, you know. So, I could carve ornament or lettering or do anything.

In other words, I could cover -- cover the whole gamut of sculpture, rather than just be able to do this.

MR. BROWN: Did he let you do ornaments and lettering --

MR. CASCIERI: Yes, right, sure.

MR. BROWN: -- before he would let you do figures?

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah, that's the preliminary step. That was the usual procedure in those days, even in school. You went to an art school and you drew ornaments for a while --

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: -- from casts, and then you began to draw a figure, then you draw from life, and then -- then you began to make models. That was really the technique in teaching in those days, when I began, in every school. There are many schools around Boston -- sculpture and drawing and capable artists.

MR. BROWN: But Kirchmayer didn't carry you through that, did he?

MR. CASCIERI: No.

MR. BROWN: He gave you work to do when you arrived there.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah. Well --

MR. BROWN: Who were the teachers?

MR. CASCIERI: In the studio, there was probably -- at that time, there were 15 or 16 men --

MR. BROWN: Oh, really.

MR. CASCIERI: -- and they all were very capable. As you know, the -- the artist always had people that worked with him to do other things --

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: -- and through them, why you'd learn how to draw and how to -- drawing was the first thing. You had to draw what you carved. So, therefore, you -- when a piece of carving was being done, you would have to draw it first.

MR. BROWN: You mean you would have an idea in mind, and then you would draw it on paper?

MR. CASCIERI: Or they would give you something to look at and say, here, draw this.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: For instance, there were men in the studio who had worked in France and England. One, in

particular, was one a special carver. He could -- he had repaired some of Grinling Gibbons' things in the cathedral there.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

MR. CASCIERI: So, he knew Grinling Gibbons very well, and to do carving of that kind was kind of an achievement, so I'd get a photograph in a book and go to the museum and find a piece of art that you wanted to do of that nature and draw it first, and then begin to carve it.

MR. BROWN: But this was not on your own time, though, was it?

MR. CASCIERI: No. That was the regular -- you weren't allowed to practice. No, you weren't doing work for them until, I don't know, two or three years after you started.

MR. BROWN: He was partly your teacher, then.

MR. CASCIERI: Yes. That's right.

MR. BROWN: Well, did your father contract with Kirchmayer?

MR. CASCIERI: No. They gave me four dollars a week, and you sort of did the chores, run errands, things like that. It was really schooling. It wasn't anything else.

MR. BROWN: Had your parents been in art at all? What were they --

MR. CASCIERI: My father was kind of a cabinet-maker, you know.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

MR. CASCIERI: He'd gone to school. My mother was just -- she was a wonderful housekeeper and a superb cook. That was her station in life in those days, you know, the woman would take care of the house and be happy for it. My father had had the schooling --

MR. BROWN: Where was this?

MR. CASCIERI: Well -- it's a little hamlet up there, at the foot of the Appenine Mountains and it's still there.

MR. BROWN: Do you remember that at all? Because you were born over there.

MR. CASCIERI: Just a little bit, but I went back about three years ago. My home is still there, and there's some relatives who were granted it and getting some income from it.

MR. BROWN: Do you think your father's training in -- as a cabinet-maker -- did it -- did he let you help him?

MR. CASCIERI: No. No, I wasn't old enough.

MR. BROWN: Even when you were 17 or 18?

MR. CASCIERI: No, because when he -- when I was 17 or 18, he was in this country --

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: -- and of course, he couldn't speak good English. So, he had to be satisfied with working as a carpenter on jobs where other Italians were working there.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I see. He couldn't be out on his own as he could have been in Italy --

MR. CASCIERI: No, that's right.

MR. BROWN: -- as a cabinet-maker.

MR. CASCIERI: In Italy, he was on his own.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: Here he was never on his own. He just, as I say, worked on buildings, doing whatever a carpenter would be doing in those days. So, I actually started from scratch in the art, and as I said, it was just accident.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. CASCIERI: Well, I worked in a shoe factory for a couple of years.

MR. BROWN: Was this here around Boston?

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah. There was a shoe factory in -- in Boston, in east Boston, that made children's shoes, and I worked in the shipping room. It used to pack crates and put the stencils on them.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: That was the first job, before I --

MR. BROWN: -- before you went to Kirchmayer.

MR. CASCIERI: Right.

MR. BROWN: You were determined to stay with Kirchmayer? You really enjoyed it.

MR. CASCIERI: Oh, yes. Actually, I had opportunities to go to work for another sculptor, who was the head of the casting studio. I don't know what kept me from doing it except my stubbornness, you know. I didn't want to go there, and I felt that I learned more by staying with Kirchmayer, because I went to study in the evenings, modeling.

MR. BROWN: Who was he?

MR. CASCIERI: His name was [Ernest] Pellegrini.

MR. BROWN: Pellegrini.

MR. CASCIERI: He had -- Kirchmayer was a rugged Bavarian, big hands, tall, big mustache. Pellegrini was just the opposite, a very -- sentimental looking fellow -- and he was brought up in -- in the academy in Rome, and he'd had his training as a sculptor in Rome, and he was a sort of renaissance kind of person who worked in that very delicate, where Kirchmayer's stuff was old and strong, vigorous. If he made -- it wouldn't be like a gothic, he didn't copy it, he made his own kind of, what do you call it, American Gothic.

MR. BROWN: He did a lot of work for Ralph Adams Cram?

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah. He was actually the only one around that they liked who worked in the job.

MR. BROWN: What did he know of -- of authentic Middle Ages sculpture?

MR. CASCIERI: Good question.

MR. BROWN: Had he looked at it closely, or did he simply look at it and then --

MR. CASCIERI: No, I think he --

MR. BROWN: -- develop his own style?

MR. CASCIERI: I think he was -- I think he was one of those that came up, you know, and knew -- had seen what was around him in Germany, but I don't think he ever went into a really research kind of thing.

In fact, when St. John the Divine came along, I was perhaps the only one that had seen the total picture of gothic architecture and sculpture, and so, I went into it. The others -- the others only knew this -- what they had caught up in the apprenticeship, and they had never seen, for instance, the simple kind of gothic, the early gothic that was very simple.

They knew only the flamboyant sort of gothic or Renaissance that came -- you know, the 18th century, 19th century, the early 19th century.

They -- this Italian named Giacone, who is now dead -- he had been in Italy, so he knew the really fine Renaissance. He knew of the really fine English work, because he worked in England.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: He could carve French -- French Louis XV-XVI as if he --

MR. BROWN: This is a man in the -- in the --

MR. CASCIERI: -- in the studio --

MR. BROWN: -- in the studio. G-i-a-c-o-n-e?

Kirchmayer then developed his own very powerful style.

MR. CASCIERI: That's right, but he -- he developed it from what he saw in his early childhood, and growing-up period before he came here, what he saw around where he was, and -- but he was an artist. You know, he was just inventive, imaginative, and he did all kinds of things, the work that he did. It wasn't like --

MR. BROWN: Did he stress that to you, too? How did he say you should go about getting a strong figure?

I notice here you carved a fairly large form on this figure.

MR. CASCIERI: Well, he -- all he did was try to tell you that you shouldn't make things, don't be finicky, make it strong.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASCIERI: That's the way -- whenever he came and looked at your work, he'd take a tool and he'd make a big cut to show you how you could simplify it.

MR. BROWN: Oh. At first, could you be that bold, or were you a bit too refined?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, you get -- you're a little bit afraid, you know.

MR. BROWN: Yes. It's probably rather unsettling to have him take a big tool --

MR. CASCIERI: I remember one of the First nativity scenes that I made; I hadn't gone too much into sculpture then, so it was kind of naive. If I had it today, it could pass as one sculpture. And he kept that. I don't know why. Perhaps because it was one of the first things I did.

I don't know what he did with it. Maybe -- I think somebody saw it and wanted it, and he gave it to them, later on, never gave it back to me.

MR. BROWN: Was that his privilege, though, wasn't it?

MR. CASCIERI: Oh, sure.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

How long did you work there? What was the day's routine?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, I worked, in those days -- it was five 8-hour days and Saturday.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASCIERI: And on Saturday, it was usually spent cleaning up the studio.

MR. BROWN: There must have been times when you had to work a lot of overtime, when there was a rush to get something finished.

MR. CASCIERI: There wasn't too much overtime. Just Saturdays.

MR. BROWN: Was he a pretty well organized person?

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah, I would say he was. He had -- again, he had no children, but he had a wonderful woman that adored him, you know.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: She cooked and made things for him. He lived very humbly then with no pretensions. I remember doing errands, and she always gave me some cookies.

So, it was an interesting experience, but the Pellegrini episode was just as interesting because of -- he was, as I said, a different character, and so much different that it was a kind of a contrast -- but when I chose -- I chose

more the Kirchmayer approach, because Kirchmayer was a -- Pellegrini was an artist, there's no question about that.

But it didn't seem -- I didn't lean that way. I leant more towards the strong, personal kind of things that Kirchmayer worked with.

MR. BROWN: Well, most of the things he was working on were for architecture in one way or another, weren't they?

MR. CASCIERI: Yes. And in those days, in those days, there were many exhibits, you know. There was a place on Park Street that had exhibits, and he always had his work there all the time.

MR. BROWN: It was a place that exhibited sculpture particularly?

MR. CASCIERI: Yes, sculpture. Sculpture, stained glass. The Arts and Crafts.

MR. BROWN: The Arts and Crafts?

MR. CASCIERI: They used to be on Park Street.

MR. BROWN: What sort of colleagues did you have? Did you -- when you were with Kirchmayer? Were there -- did you have close associations --

MR. CASCIERI: Well, there was -- there were two or three people that were apprenticed before I was there. This Italian I told you about. There was a Norwegian, and there were two or three Englishmen there.

MR. BROWN: Were these all men who had apprenticed with Kirchmayer?

MR. CASCIERI: No, they came from their -- [inaudible]

MR. BROWN: Oh, I see. Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: They were accomplished carvers before they came to Kirchmayer. So, I had the benefit of seeing a variety of people -- in their own way.

In those days, as you know, the form of work that was being done was -- was related to the traditional style of one kind of another, and therefore, I had the opportunity of seeing work of all periods and all styles actually being done by experts.

I don't think you could get an education like that in school in 10 years.

MR. BROWN: No. You mean one group would be working, say, on one commission and one on another.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah, right. You know, there would be -- maybe there would be some French furniture or French -- which in those days was very common.

MR. BROWN: And Kirchmayer would do that sort of thing.

MR. CASCIERI: Well, he would -- he would supervise.

MR. BROWN: Yes. I mean his men would carve --

MR. CASCIERI: Yes. Giaccone, he was quite in vogue.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: And Gibbons -- there was a tremendous amount of Gibbons. There's some work in St. Paul's Cathedral, unless it's been taken away. The Reredos there was done in the studio, and I worked on it.

MR. BROWN: Oh, really.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: On Tremont Street in Boston.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah. That's in the Gibbons -- in the Gibbons style.

MR. BROWN: Did you enjoy doing this work where you imitated a style?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, in those days, you know, you -- that was quite a thing, but later on, I'd get a piece of my own. I just --

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: That was a learning period.

MR. BROWN: Well, for example, this man, Giacone -- was he considered very clever in his ability to imitate --

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: -- French and English and Italian styles?

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah, because they would -- they needed people like that. You know, they needed people --

[Interruption in recording.]

MR. CASCIERI: It followed the same pattern that was going on in this studio. It was a process that was similar to what was going on in this studio, excepting they did have history, you know. They went into it deeper.

Well, I -- I did that by myself. I spent time -- that's why, when the St. John the Divine came along, when it came to the capitals or laying out the vaults, I knew all about them.

MR. BROWN: From having studied on your own while you were an apprentice.

MR. CASCIERI: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Did this come along through the Kirchmayer firm, then, the St. John the Divine?

MR. CASCIERI: It came to that studio, yes, and I actually was the principal -- let's see -- modeler and sculptor at that time.

MR. BROWN: Oh. At what point -- what year was that, the mid-'20s or so?

MR. CASCIERI: Mid-'20s. Yeah. A great deal of work was being done at St. John the Divine at that time.

MR. BROWN: So, this was the -- actually the W.C. Roth Company by that time?

MR. CASCIERI: W.F. Ross, yes.

MR. BROWN: Oh, Ross.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Kirchmayer was dead by then. Is that right?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, he had retired.

MR. BROWN: He had retired.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: But that was a pretty fast rise, wasn't it, for you? You were still quite -- very young to be head of --

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah, I was --

MR. BROWN: -- modeling.

MR. CASCIERI: -- very young, but there was a foreman in the room. But he had never gone much further than what he got in the shop --

MR. BROWN: Oh.

MR. CASCIERI: -- and a little study, so that some of the things that came along, the drawings, were almost muted to him.

MR. BROWN: You mean of a new style or a new way --

MR. CASCIERI: Not new style. In St. John the Divine they insisted that it be like the things they were looking at

or copying.

MR. BROWN: Oh. They weren't able to translate it very well.

MR. CASCIERI: Well, they hadn't done that sort of thing.

MR. BROWN: They were used to copying a certain man's way of drawing.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASCIERI: So, that gave me an opportunity to step in, Like laying out the vaults; the foreman knew that. He could -- he knew how to read a drawing and put it together but when it came for instance to Gothic it wasn't like what they'd been doing in the shop. They said, well, maybe it isn't gothic, but it was.

MR. BROWN: And you had to make certain that they did this work.

MR. CASCIERI: Well, yeah, I was -- that's how the opportunity --

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASCIERI: That's how I was able to step into that opportunity.

MR. BROWN: Were you working closely at that point with the architect, then?

MR. CASCIERI: The architect. It was always the architect, you know -- Cram was alive at the time.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: -- and Mr. Cleveland was the other -- very interesting. He's dead now too.

MR. BROWN: But would they come over -- or you'd go over the drawings with them very closely.

MR. CASCIERI: Go over the drawings and make models, and they'd come look at them. That's what we did, made models from limestone.

MR. BROWN: Did you feel, after you'd been with Kirchmayer -- by 1922 -- you'd finished your apprenticeship. Did you feel at that point, then, that you were an artist?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, I never felt, you know -- I wished I was a little more that way. I just worked.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASCIERI: I did -- I did feel a little sometimes that -- felt that due credit wasn't given, but it came in time. It told itself.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

MR. CASCIERI: The people who came there would know that I was working on things and I'd have photographs of the work.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. You could prove what you were responsible for in this collaborative -- the nature of the work is collaborative, though, isn't it, to some extent.

MR. CASCIERI: It was to some extent.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: Well, I would make, say, the design of the bosses and crockets: for instance the capitals; the capitals have the crockets; and then if there were 15-odd -- somebody else would come along and reproduce them or duplicate them. In fact, one of the things that I innovated the capital. Cram used it in his book.

MR. BROWN: Oh, really.

MR. CASCIERI: -- one of the capitals at St. John the Divine. They didn't design that one. I really -- they designed the structure -- but the decoration, I thought it was one of the good ones. It was very simple.

MR. BROWN: Did you feel that these architects or wood carvers -- could do a very good job at designing gothic

architectural decoration?

MR. CASCIERI: The architects? Well, some of them --

MR. BROWN: They could get it from the book --

MR. CASCIERI: They got it from the book, but then it depends on who -- Cleveland for instance knew it very well.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: They had a fellow named Fletcher that -- very capable interpreter of drawing. All you had to do was follow his drawings.

MR. BROWN: I understand.

MR. CASCIERI: Not everyone.

MR. BROWN: Yes. Did they know the nature, though, of wood or of limestone sufficiently --

MR. CASCIERI: Well, sometimes they fell down on that.

MR. BROWN: Sometimes they'd have you do things that were really unsuitable?

MR. CASCIERI: Yes. And I felt there were many times -- having worked for Kirchmayer -- they were getting pretty fine -- the place the work was going, if you know what I mean -- could have been stronger and bolder.

MR. BROWN: But this work mostly had to carry a number of feet, didn't it, being a church.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah, right. In other words, sometimes they forgot that part.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASCIERI: But the real good ones took that in consideration.

MR. BROWN: How was Cram to work with? Was he an even-tempered person, or how would you describe him?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, he wasn't -- I think he was kind of a showman, you know. He liked to impress you. He always had this cane with him -- look at things and make a quick criticism, that's it.

MR. BROWN: Did you think he was a pretty able person? Could you tell? Or do you think you were too young to know?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, I feel that perhaps I was a little young, but I thought he was an able person. There was one time out of that office, the only thing that came out of it was English Gothic, then St. John the Divine came along and they started to dig in and later on, they did a couple of things that were related to the Spanish.

MR. BROWN: In the same church or you mean other commissions?

MR. CASCIERI: Other commissions. There was St. James Church in New York.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: That's a very sort of Spanish kind of gothic. I did work there on the reardos.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. And this is when you were with the -- this is at W.F. Ross Company?

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Who was Ross? Was he just a -- was he a sculptor himself?

MR. CASCIERI: No, he was a cabinet-maker, you know, and he did -- wood sculpture was always related --

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: -- and there was also stone-carving; things that Kirchmayer supervised and part of the studio and there again, I had the opportunity of learning how to cast in plaster and learned how to carve in stone. I could -- I guess I could cast a 12 feet spread. Well, the eagle -- the eagle on the Springfield bridge was cast in concrete, but I modeled that with some help; made the mold it was cast from on the bridge, and that was -- you know, it took two years out of my time -- it was a very bold kind of eagle. It wasn't -- so, that's why I said the training in

that studio -- it would take three courses in any university to get it.

MR. BROWN: Was this also, you think, why you say that you simply thought of using -- you think of yourself as doing your work rather than as an artist --

MR. CASCIERI: Well --

MR. BROWN: Do you see it as simply the product?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, I think an artist is a worker, and I just never make a distinction.

MR. BROWN: When I asked you that question originally, you thought of a -- a very practical person or a dreamer.

MR. CASCIERI: No. In reading about the -- you know, the artists of different periods, they were common, ordinary people that had all their frustrations and emotional -- they weren't -- I think the pseudo-artist has come on the scene in this country, where these people have to wear funny clothes. The artists in Michelangelo's times -- they just wore what the person wore in those days.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: They didn't go around and distinguish -- they wore the academic gown --

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASCIERI: -- you know, the laborer wore the short kind of thing and they wore the long ones, but that was the every-day dress. It wasn't --

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: -- a kind of a fancy dress -- so, somebody would say, oh, there's an artist going by. You know, they were part of the scene. I always thought of the artist as part of the scene. In fact, I think creativeness is not peculiarly related to artists.

Science has creative people, and they're related to artists. Their creativeness is sent in a different direction.

I remember, as a boy, I used to stand in front of a locomotive and wonder how a person could really imagine and put this thing together, and it always gave me a great respect for all people. I never distinguished -- I never separate an artist from the rest of the group. It's a cliché that's come about, but I never felt that way. I felt, well, if I started doing that, you know, I could have started doing carpenter work. So --

MR. BROWN: Yeah. You didn't think --

MR. CASCIERI: Maybe it's naive to think that way, but I always felt that.

MR. BROWN: When you went to art school, weren't there some people who took themselves -- as very special people?

MR. CASCIERI: Well --

MR. BROWN: Or were there many like that? Were most of your contemporaries simply interested in learning a skill in something, a profession?

MR. CASCIERI: I think they were -- there weren't as many of them as -- like today.

MR. BROWN: Who taught you at the art -- at the Massachusetts School of Art? What was his attitude toward art? Was he very much like Kirchmayer in the way he taught you?

MR. CASCIERI: I think he was looking for -- you know, this idea of seeing the whole thing first. You know, he -- if you liked drawing he'd come over and he'd say, well, look -- look at the -- look at the shape, you know, this is the form, you know.

MR. BROWN: The larger things.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah.

Well, I feel that -- see, in those days, the art field was still related to the -- the period before where it was just part of a lifestyle. Everybody was part of it. It was not a separate kind of thing.

I think the great difference between that strand or that flow or that similarity that tied this whole thing together in those days were the office and the school say in architecture.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: -- the studio and the school and sculpture or painting were doing the same thing. There wasn't -- there wasn't a big break in it.

In other words, they were both using the same idiom, you know. At one time, even Cram said, if you want to design a country church, look at the English Gothic, you know. So, we see these things just that way.

But now, it's become an individual --

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. CASCIERI: -- kind of pattern, where everybody is just doing his own thing, and the philosophy is that, that they're special, no one does this but me. In those days, it wasn't quite that way. They all worked for lifestyle or something that they did, because it was part of their life.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: But now the artist sits by and says, well, this is me, whether you like it or not.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. You seem to imply it's the earlier way you prefer.

MR. CASCIERI: No, I don't. I just said we've flown into a different period, you know, and I can see that, and --

MR. BROWN: Do you think it's hurt or helped the quality of work, the different attitude, the separation?

MR. CASCIERI: I think it's hurt. There is really no -- there isn't that feeling that you've got to have this thing, you know today. The art -- let's say art in relation to our life, in this country, is a very small -- small in relation to art in the life of other people in other countries.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: The ratio -- I don't know -- has it gotten to -- they expected it to get to one dollar per capita by 1970, but I don't know whether they've reached that yet or not. That's this country, but it's more or less all over the world, that the artist has just become a person --

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

MR. CASCIERI: -- doing a thing. It doesn't relate to the other artist that's over there doing his thing. Well, is it good or is it bad? I don't know. I think that it's because the world is -- there's no period that lasts. Nothing lasts in our time.

We're a fast-moving kind of era. We just do something today, and next week it's dead.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASCIERI: The galleries expect artists to produce things every -- every three weeks, every month, you know.

The other thing that's come on the scene -- in those days, the artist worked for a client.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: Now, he works and puts his things up --

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: -- for somebody to look at, perhaps buy one if they like it. That, again, to me -- if art is a part of life -- it's a much stronger kind of thing than if you just have to do it for your own good.

MR. BROWN: You're saying this is too impersonal, where you paint and it goes up on a wall.

MR. CASCIERI: Right.

MR. BROWN: What happens with you when you're dealing with a client? Is there a give and take that you find

essential?

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah, you have -- you have this give and take. It was the same with the artist of the 15th century who had a problem with his client.

MR. BROWN: Are there clients that are especially memorable that you could describe, whether from your early days? Say, at St. John the Divine. Were there any particular --

MR. CASCIERI: Well, St. John the Divine worked mostly with the architect.

MR. BROWN: You worked through Cram.

MR. CASCIERI: Through Cram, yes. Cleveland got to like what I did. That brought other work, and he, in turn -- somebody would ask him who he thinks could do this work for me, he'd recommend --

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASCIERI: For instance, Mr. Lord, Isidore Lord of Desmond & Lord wanted to do a church once in his lifetime, and in this parish, they were going to build a church which is at the foot of Boston College.

Well, he didn't know who could -- he said he wanted a church. He wanted to do it in sort of a fresh gothic feeling, but he didn't want it just like gothic, and he asked who he thought -- so he recommended me, and that church at Blake Street -- mostly work that came from the studio. I was head of it, and worked -- men worked with me, but I designed even the little bits of ormolu. I designed the patterns for people to work from, and all the sculpture.

Later on, we kept doing figures, and my partner did one or two, but most of the figures there are sculptures, things I did.

MR. BROWN: So, you were generally able to originate ideas on a project.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah. In 1942, I did quite a few abstracts, you know.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASCIERI: But they seemed to me so empty, because you had to look for people that might like them.

MR. BROWN: You thought they were so empty, you said?

MR. CASCIERI: Empty, because they weren't --

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASCIERI: People weren't going to use them.

MR. BROWN: What did you do them for? Yourself?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, I just did them for exhibition, yes. I still have them.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

MR. CASCIERI: I had given them to a museum. There was an exhibition of the New England Sculptors Society, and I exhibited them there, Graduate School of Design, the School of Architecture, at that time it was called, at Harvard.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASCIERI: So, I had a lot of fun of doing them. You know, I think they're good, but I would think a lot more of them if somebody had them and was using them, you see, because I think art is dead unless you have the receiver. In other words, the artist makes it, but he doesn't make it just for himself. He makes it because he wants somebody else to have it and enjoy it.

MR. BROWN: You couldn't have an abstract sculpture that, say, you worked out with a client.

MR. CASCIERI: No.

MR. BROWN: You could do that.

MR. CASCIERI: You could do that, yeah. Oh, we've done it, you know. In the studio, we've done several things that are abstract.

MR. BROWN: But to simply do something and then put it out in the world is going to miss the mark. It's not going to find a recipient.

MR. CASCIERI: Well, it may, you know. Sure. I meant that there was this strong feeling that -- it is part of life.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

MR. CASCIERI: I think if you just pick out, say, a hundred people on the street, in a thickly settled area, and ask them whether they'd like to have a piece of art or an automobile, they would say an automobile.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. CASCIERI: In the period when this art was created, everybody worked it. They worked together, and the community wanted it, as well as the artists wanted to make it, is to me a more healthy situation.

But we're living in that kind of a period now. Maybe it's a rebirth, you know. I mean --

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASCIERI: -- we haven't got to the point where --

MR. BROWN: Why would it be healthy if art was better integrated with life? What would be healthy about that?

MR. CASCIERI: There would be a purpose behind it besides just making a piece of art for yourself. I think the community or the participation of all people, the necessity of it makes it a part of life.

You know, today you hear this phrase very often, well, the price is too high, so we'll take off this piece of -- this mural here. We'll take that off or this piece of sculpture that's here. We don't need that, it doesn't do anything.

MR. BROWN: Because they don't want it to do anything.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah, right. Well, the cost of this project became too high.

So, the first thing they take off to reduce the price is anything to do with refinement of some kind or other. That's common practice. That's done every day of the week on a project.

MR. BROWN: And it wasn't so much the case when you were first working.

MR. CASCIERI: No, there was the feeling that we really needed it, you know. You know, the people gave these things, because they wanted it to be a memorial for them or for other people to see, you know.

MR. BROWN: Well, how does that work with -- let's say the sculpture in St. John the Divine -- how does it relate to life?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, people use -- people use it, and they see it all the time. You don't have to go to a museum to see it.

MR. BROWN: It's there.

MR. CASCIERI: It's there.

MR. BROWN: Very accessible.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah. And it -- it's supposed to inspire people to, you know -- to finer things.

MR. BROWN: I mean, it has a specific -- it can produce a specific reaction in the viewer.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: As opposed, say, to an abstraction, which might not.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah. People go all over the world and all they do is look at the beautiful things that are done -- done centuries before, you know, way back 2,000 years, and why do they do that? It's kind of a -- I use the word "pseudo," because they go there, spend all their vacation looking at these things, then they come home and it doesn't seem that they need it at all.

MR. BROWN: You mean there's nothing around them to indicate a --

MR. CASCIERI: No.

MR. BROWN: -- sensitivity.

MR. CASCIERI: That's right. So, maybe they go to look at these things because it's the thing to do.

MR. BROWN: Is beauty the most important standard for you when you know you've made a good piece of work?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, we have to define beauty, because we were talking about that not too long ago. I don't remember where, but you know, beauty is, to me, many things to many people. Yes, I think beauty -- to achieve beauty -- it's like achieving peace and tranquility, you know. It's one of the finer things.

MR. BROWN: Would you say that was a principle thing that kept you going when you were a young man, trying to create beautiful things?

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah, I would say that. I used to try to do beautiful things, of course, with what I had to work with. I always remember some of the things -- it may be just a fairy tale, but the Greek sculptor was asked why he had finished the back of the figure so well. They were only going to see the front. He said, "Well, the angels could see it."

The work that was done in the cathedrals -- most people were aiming to make a beautiful house of God and they did it as well as they could and it's fantastic the things that they did. I was always an inquisitive free-wheeler as far as education goes. I was going to study about Greek plays. I don't know why. I just had a feeling I wanted to know something about Greek plays. Then I'd go and see them.

At that time, when I was growing up, I could go to plays, probably five of them going on in a week, you know, Shakespeare. Once a professor asked me why I didn't want to take all the things I was supposed to take. I said because I don't think I need them.

I just wanted to take the things I like and enjoy and get something from, and in a crazy way, I picked out things that were always part of my existence.

MR. BROWN: When you were an apprentice with Kirchmayer, you weren't thinking just in terms of learning how to do a job well.

MR. CASCIERI: No.

MR. BROWN: You were thinking in terms of beauty.

MR. CASCIERI: Right. Well, I thought it was wonderful. That was the art in those days, when it came to the architectural world. That was the art of the architectural world, you know, to know about Romanesque and Byzantine and -- and French styles and English.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: That was right.

MR. BROWN: Did you ever feel limited by that?

MR. CASCIERI: No, because that was the world.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

MR. CASCIERI: You know, but when I started to think about abstracts, I did those abstracts because I wanted to and it was interesting to do something, and it was, again, in the process of simplifying as much as I could. It was the refining and simplifying, was one of the -- I think, one of the most difficult processes, because it's like poetry. You try to say something in a few words. It's a much greater task and requires a lot more imagination than if you are writing things literally, explaining things in many words, which is also another art form, but the poetry is the peak of word usage and I feel that simplicity in any area is the peak of that area.

MR. BROWN: You were taught, too, weren't you --

MR. CASCIERI: Well, I get a little bit out of here and a little bit out of there but I always felt that kind of philosophy was the best.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Did you have a lot of opposition to this?

MR. CASCIERI: Yes. Because most of the -- say, the work of the people who worked in the studio in those days -- they were more concerned with the things that came after the 16th century, which is very intricate.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASCIERI: You know, they would look at something simple and say, well, that's -- they would say that's awful. Instead it was somewhat ahead of what they were doing.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

MR. CASCIERI: But they were trained to use tools, you know. They were geniuses at using tools, at making tools.

MR. BROWN: And therefore, they admired intricacy for its own sake.

MR. CASCIERI: Intricacy was one of the great achievements. But you know, after all this time and training, I was swooped out of that. I carved some Gibbons panels just like those things in England in St. Paul's Cathedral there -- I knew it. I could do it. But I kept saying there must be something else to this and then I started to read and I found creative people that did these things -- I compare the Egyptians with the Greeks and the Greeks with the Romans and the Romans with the Renaissance and the cathedrals with the Renaissance, where everybody says isn't the Renaissance beautiful, I kept saying the cathedrals are much more beautiful.

MR. BROWN: I see you were a rebel against the taste of the times, too.

MR. CASCIERI: I just felt that the spirit of the thing was very important, and to me, the Renaissance had so much realism connected with it, that the spiritual part got dissipated.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASCIERI: In other words, they were trying to do reality.

MR. BROWN: So, when you did that imitation of Grinling Gibbons for the St. Paul's Cathedral --

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: -- you felt you were -- nothing much of the creationism or creating.

MR. CASCIERI: No. Just putting things together, getting value of light and shade.

MR. BROWN: Did you work from flowers and nuts and things or just from looking at photographs of Gibbons?

MR. CASCIERI: Both. I could do it without even looking at the book.

MR. BROWN: You could look at a still life and translate that into wood.

MR. CASCIERI: I did a piece that's in Harvard University, in one of their English rooms -- I don't remember what house. I think it's the Elliot House, and I don't think you could tell that from the original and it's a copy.

MR. BROWN: But this work you found deadening, did you?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, after a while.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASCIERI: In the beginning, I thought it was the same as the ones in the studio, but after a while [inaudible]

[Pause.]

MR. CASCIERI: See, the outside of the thing is very simple, and this is the inside of the cloak and you get a texture here. You've got two things. It sort of makes a foil for the figure itself, also puts some color, the light playing on that gives you a little bit of --

MR. BROWN: -- a different color, absolutely.

MR. CASCIERI: You can see here the plain side.

MR. BROWN: You've been going for at least a half-hour or so that we've been here --

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: -- pecking out these little small pieces of --

MR. CASCIERI: Right. I just take the little tool --

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: Lots of times people say, you know, what kind of a tool do you use for making -- I say we just use tools. You know, actually, when you're working, you pick up the tool that you think you want to do the job.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASCIERI: Tomorrow, I'm going to pick a different tool to do that same job. There's no such thing as a tool -- there is a tool -- that you can get in there with --

MR. BROWN: There's several of them, are there?

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah, there's several.

MR. BROWN: You look out here in your work bench --

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah. I've been thinking about texture, and I thought that this is about what I want, so I chose this tool, but I need one -- one to go in there -- it's like this, only it's a bent one.

[Inaudible conversation.]

MR. BROWN: What you do is you know what you need and --

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah, you know what you need and you look for it --

[Inaudible conversation.]

MR. BROWN: Of course, this -- this is fine detail work, but it's really a very large area, isn't it? This figure of the Madonna is to be seen from a great distance.

[Inaudible conversation.]

MR. CASCIERI: That's right.

[Inaudible conversation.]

MR. BROWN: About seven feet high.

MR. CASCIERI: I've had -- this is a treacherous piece of oak. The grains in some areas change every inch. In other words, they go like this, especially right here.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: Every bit of that has to be -- and this piece here especially.

MR. BROWN: Well, now you've marked it off. It almost looks like -- put together now.

MR. CASCIERI: It is. The reason for that is if you -- you could never dry a piece of wood like this.

MR. BROWN: You'd have great cracks and twists and so forth developing. So, this is completely dry before it's laminated.

MR. CASCIERI: Yes. 6% And two inches is the general thickness -- you can dry that fairly well. You don't have to worry too much.

MR. BROWN: Did you have this control of material when you started out, when you first started -- or was it even better then?

MR. CASCIERI: No, we had better wood.

MR. BROWN: Better wood, huh?

MR. CASCIERI: Oak has been depleted, our forests. You know, I could say this, that if they gave Kirchmayer this

piece of oak, he probably would send it back. But you can't send it back today. The color is all right. It's the texture of the wood.

When I was growing up, the white oak was beautiful, you know, straight grain white oak.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

Well, now you've already, by this point, blocked out the -- not only the general form but something of the spirit that you wanted to express.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah, right. This is almost finished.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. The last thing you're doing are some of these light and dark grains?

MR. CASCIERI: I left it to the end because of -- if I left those fingers exposed I might break them.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: So, before I get through with it, I take all that out and finish the back.

MR. BROWN: These textural effects and props there, these are the last things you do?

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah. Well, yes.

MR. BROWN: There are not many people doing this sort of thing now, are there? Very few?

MR. CASCIERI: Not too many. Very few, that's right. It's not enough. Again, it's not -- not part of our life anymore.

MR. BROWN: You mean this very careful work that you are doing for a client.

MR. CASCIERI: I'll tell you why this is being done this way. I'd rather do much simpler things but there was a figure made for them many years ago that I did and it was this nature. Actually this one is simpler. You couldn't get any further away from this as they go together.

I have a little thing I did 30 years ago, a scale model and they wouldn't let me make it. It's very simple. It's just plain. It was for a school building and I wanted to make this very abstract thing. They didn't want it simplifying. It was to be portraits of a boy and girl from the school.

Do you see that? It was to be a war memorial for World War I -- after World War I in Belleau Woods in France.

MR. BROWN: Yes. And you did the modeling of that.

MR. CASCIERI: Notice even then, I was simplifying things.

MR. BROWN: You preferred, let's say, earlier gothic to the later, whereas, you know, most of your contemporaries preferred the late gothic and the Renaissance.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah. Well, they went to what we call the Fellini Renaissance, which is the 19th century.

MR. BROWN: Oh, yes, yes. Uh-huh. Very literal kind of; sort of a tour de force.

MR. CASCIERI: That's, to me, much nicer quality, very simple.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

[Interruption in recording.]

January 24, 1974

MR. BROWN: This is January 24, 1974. We've been talking about your early apprenticeship and talked about your way of sculpture when we met out at the studio, and this time I'd like to, if you could, talk something about your education at the Boston Architectural -- is it called the Architectural Center?

MR. CASCIERI: [Inaudible.]

MR. BROWN: What was that place like then?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, it was -- the club was a place where people of all crafts and arts met. You know, one of the

first things that intrigued me when I went down there was the watercolor drawing of a plane and in it were characters like Michelangelo. He was represented by Kirchmayer, who -- who I studied with, and that intrigued me, that all these people that I knew were in there [inaudible].

Actually the reason I went there was I wanted to find out more about sculpture. I felt that there was really something more to be learned about sculpture than we were being taught in the traditional schools.

So, I went there to find out its relation to architecture, because I always felt sculpture was related to architecture, and I started studying some architecture. Apparently I was made for it, because they took a group of us students who entered that year, and Professor Gardner from MIT gave us a project to do, first year project, and if we showed excellent imagination and technical abilities, we would then be placed in second year.

So, I was one of those to get by with just that one problem, the first year.

MR. BROWN: What was the problem?

MR. CASCIERI: It was a garden gate, the usual problems they gave at that time, the garden gate with a wall, terrace wall, and you know, urns and valances and capitals etc.

MR. BROWN: For you, was it something you had learned from doing this work, or was it something you already knew how to do?

MR. BROWN: Well, I didn't know the architectural part, but I knew enough about it because I had been working with it, you see, and I knew the actual -- the actual things, you know, and so, we did this problem, and I remember one of the celebrities -- I was in the same class with Ed Stone [phonetic]. So, I got to know him right there.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

MR. CASCIERI: So, in four years, we did the five-year curriculum.

MR. BROWN: Was Ed Stone a very good student?

MR. CASCIERI: Yes, he was -- he was a very sensitive kind. He still keeps that kind of quality that he had, you know, lucky to get that kind of work to do.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. How about yourself? Did you like it? Did you do this after work? Was this an evening school?

MR. CASCIERI: It was an evening school, yeah. It was totally an evening school, and -- but we had the professor -- Professor Gardner was a teacher that taught first year, then, and I had him -- well, I just had him for that one problem, but then we went on to second and third year, which was under the Beaux Arts system and we had teachers and professors from Harvard and MIT.

Now, in fourth and fifth year, we had the same professors that were at Harvard and MIT, and they would -- they enjoyed coming there and having us do excellent work and showed the fellows that they had all day long that we could do as well as they could just by going nights.

I mean, it was sort of an interesting pattern, because the work of the three schools were judged together. So, I always felt that I went to MIT and Harvard.

They were all brought to MIT or to Harvard --

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

MR. CASCIERI: -- and they chose the best ones and they were sent to New York.

MR. BROWN: A competition --

MR. CASCIERI: Well, it's the Beaux Arts -- Beaux Arts -- was always Beaux Arts work -- the Beaux Arts system -- I would say two-thirds of the schools in the country belonged to it, and all the problems were written by the system, and all the schools did the problems, and the juries -- the final juries were held in New York.

So, each school selected the ones they thought would get good marks in New York, sent them to New York.

MR. BROWN: Could you describe something of the system, at least the -- some of the key parts of it, that you remember?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, I remember that it was a very traditional kind of teaching, you know. All you had to do -- our old memorial library at the Center holds all the books we needed to study, and we were -- they would actually send you to -- they would say design a court house with a dark corridor: Greek dark or Roman dark, you know.

So, all you had to do was go and get the Despuis [phonetic] with the very beautiful renderings and work on them, and of course, at that time, you had to really render -- you know -- hundreds of washes to make a nice photographic rendering.

Then we went on to color. Color was used in the more elaborate things, like when they gave us theaters to do, and they said -- do it in the Moorish style -- you get the Moorish books and you get the colors and the character of the ornament. It was teaching by what had been done -- and the only thing we put in is the way we arranged things.

MR. BROWN: Did most of you accept that?

MR. CASCIERI: At that time, yeah, but I felt you know, I still felt there must be something else to this, and when Dr. [Walter] Gropius came from Germany in 1937, it was like a breath of fresh air, you know. I came in to listen to him, and he was saying almost the things I was thinking, and so, we got along very well.

MR. BROWN: What were some of the things that you were thinking?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, I was thinking that -- that -- in my own naive way, I said the Romans did something like the Greeks, but they didn't really copy them; they represented their own power and kind of people they were, and they didn't copy Egyptians.

So, why should we be doing, you know, the same thing that they did so many hundreds of years ago, and finally, Herman Gropius came here and -- well, here's your problem, go ahead and work it out any way you want. Well, that's what I was thinking about, and I kept on with the school.

You know, with all respect, the profession supported the school, there's no question about that, and you had to keep in good grace with them, you know, and still, you had to look ahead and try to -- so, our path of change was much slower than Harvard.

Gropius went to Harvard or Hunt [phonetic]; after he went to Harvard and cleaned out the whole area. He just didn't want the students to see any of the traditional things. I didn't think it was a good idea, but I -- I kept to some areas of architecture when I took over the school, and I felt history was very important and that students should know history.

MR. BROWN: Yes. When you were a student, though, it was -- the profession itself was entirely historical, too.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah, it was a traditional kind of profession. That's what I'm saying. Even at this time that I'm talking about, 1937, there was still -- Gropius was not liked. You know, they just despised him, almost, which was kind of too bad because you have to listen to new directions; but I'd get along fine with him.

I think he felt that I was in sympathy and I always had a very excellent relationship.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

MR. CASCIERI: So, from then on, the path of change for us was change a little and try to reason with the authorities, why we were changing, and it was just about that time that they asked me if I wanted to be in charge of the school.

MR. BROWN: This was in the middle '30s, 1935?

MR. CASCIERI: '37-'8.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

MR. CASCIERI: And I said yes, because I saw a chance to -- we had good friends -- there was a Mr. Alta [phonetic] from -- he came twice a week from Andover. He was a professor. He taught in Chicago, and he was a product of MIT, the traditional school, much further back than I was, and he wasn't about to change. He never changed.

He left this planet without changing his ideas too much. He just kept making fun of the new people.

MR. BROWN: What did the traditionalists -- what did they see that was -- did they think there was something

lacking in --

MR. CASCIERI: Well, they felt that -- look at it, it's just like a barn, you know. He always used the word "barn." You know, at that time, it wasn't that easy to change, because there weren't any good teachers, and Gropius -- you had to wait four years, and the first -- some of the first people who came out of his courses at Harvard, one of them was [Hugh] Stubbins and I asked him to come and teach at the Center.

Well, Stubbins came to teach at the Center. When he gets to these juries -- and we had to invite people like [inaudible] first-year instructor and Stubbins was taking care of second year, we still tried to hold onto to some of the connections at MIT and Harvard, but he would present the students problems and Alta would make remarks -- well, what's this chicken coop architecture anyway, you know. If you saw some of Stubbins early houses they had this very theme.

MR. BROWN: Now, you were a sculptor when you went to the school in '26.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah, I went to school -- I graduated in '26.

MR. BROWN: Graduated in '26. After you'd been through the school, did you think that architecture would be a part of your future career, because you'd had also an active time still working for commercial firms.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah, that's right. No, I felt that perhaps I could use what I learned there in sculpture, which I already -- you know, I had a pretty good --

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

MR. CASCIERI: -- position.

MR. BROWN: Well, you were with the William Ross Company --

MR. CASCIERI: Right.

MR. BROWN: -- in Cambridge from 1923 to 1941.

MR. CASCIERI: Right.

MR. BROWN: And what was your -- what did you do there? Was it anything different from what you'd done in your earlier career?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, till '41, yeah. In the '40s, I was doing some -- I had my furniture at home which was quite new and I did a series of abstracts that time.

MR. BROWN: But before that, you had not.

MR. CASCIERI: But before that, there was, you know, like St. John the Divine and Riverside Church.

MR. BROWN: These larger --

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah. And there were -- there were -- I was actually -- I held the position of top sculptor in the studio.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

MR. CASCIERI: And also, the fact that I studied architecture -- I knew more about these cathedrals, the character things that were in them, and the -- well, the general architectural forms, which we had to -- I made many models of -- of the intersection of arches and the -- the vault, which I could never have done if I hadn't studied architecture, and no one in that -- in that place could have done it.

MR. BROWN: In the Ross studio.

MR. CASCIERI: Right. I had -- that was all thrown at me, and I was able to do it. Before -- you know, before that, in the studio, the stuff they did was kind of mediocre copies of gothic. It wasn't real good gothic. It wasn't real good Renaissance.

It was nearer what we call a fellow named Fellini did this kind of a Renaissance that had a lot of little lumps in the leaves, and there was more -- more related to techniques, you know. The French reliefs kept getting more and more in the technical area instead of really artistic and sensitive things, and I always saw that, and I was never -- as a boy, I was intrigued by, you know, the use of tools, and I used to do these slick things, but as I went on, I got less and less intrigued by it, and I started to look into the real things when I studied architecture and I

saw that these people had never seen a real gothic leaf. They only had looked at these things that they knew from the 19th century, which, you know, the 19th century was a gothic kind of period in almost every direction.

MR. BROWN: They were already part of machine life.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah, that's right. Well, they used a machine to advantage. There was miles of --

MR. BROWN: When you were with this firm, doing Riverside Church, St. John the Divine, both in New York, did you feel that -- was it still just a heyday of initiative and traditional architecture?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, it was still -- in those big projects, it was, yeah, because you know, Allen & Collins did the Riverside Church. Willis was sort of a key member. You know, he was --

MR. BROWN: Key member of your firm?

MR. CASCIERI: No, no. He was a key member of Allen & Collins, the architects. They were the architects of Riverside Church.

Well, he was very devoted to France. In fact, he went over there and joined the Lafayette Escadrille and served in there as an officer. This was long before America went into the second World War.

MR. BROWN: And he carried this over into his --

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah, he did. When he came back, he was in charge of the Riverside thing you know and he wanted things to be as near to the [inaudible] and I had a lot of fun because there wasn't any control. We didn't make drawings. He just said, here, we want the archangels or the angels of apocalypse up here on the tower or on the choir stalls just to represent Psalm 103 on the ends. I enjoyed it, because in a strange way, you know, some of the things I did there on these things are being paraded as modern things now. They were very archaic you know.

MR. BROWN: What were you taking as your model at that time?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, I looked into Chartres and things like that to look at just what they did, but the others never did that. They kept -- in the 19th century kind of things --

MR. BROWN: Was it pretty discouraging, then, when you worked for the Ross firm, that no --

MR. CASCIERI: Well, it wasn't, because I had my way, in a way. I just had to please the architect. It wasn't discouraging, because there was a foreman -- they have to have a foreman to take care of the -- the administrative parts, and I didn't care too much.

MR. BROWN: You also, at this time -- you said that you were involved with the group of wood carvers here in Boston, the WPA [Work Projects Administration] involvement.

MR. CASCIERI: Luckily, you know, I never went into the WPA projects, but these carvers that went in there, it was -- you know, it gave them a chance to do these things that they were doing.

MR. BROWN: Which ones are these?

MR. CASCIERI: The carvers -- they had a wood carvers organization.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: Well, people in this organization were given work to do, and they did. I call them office framers and they had no imagination. There was nobody there that had any real --

MR. BROWN: Were these men who had been workmen in firms?

MR. CASCIERI: No, they were strict carvers. They were some of the best people for handling tools.

MR. BROWN: And they didn't go to work, say, as architectural sculptors or in frame shops?

MR. CASCIERI: They were working in frame shops, furniture shops, doing like gothic moldings or medallions in the classic, they were very capable workmen. You'd call them craftsmen, but you could never list them as artists, because out of the whole bunch, the only one that I would ever list as an artist -- and he didn't list himself as an artist -- was this fellow named Giacone, and he had been in Europe, worked in Italy, he'd worked in France, and he even worked in England, doing restoration on Grinling Gibbons, and he knew Grinling Gibbons, you know, he knew all these styles because the French stuff he could do it with his eyes shut, because he -- he

worked right in the -- in other words, he hadn't just come out of Italy and come here, and he was one of the best carvers in the group.

MR. BROWN: They were technically superb.

MR. CASCIERI: These fellows never got into the WPA. They always -- the firms that had them tried to hold onto them you see.

MR. BROWN: The same happened with you.

MR. CASCIERI: Right. I never got into it. I was one of the youngest ones, but I never had to get into it, because I could model and I could carve, you know, and I could cast. I was good at casting.

MR. BROWN: Well, by the '30s, did the profession of wood carver or stone sculptor in the traditional way -- did it seem endangered?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, it was -- you could see that it was getting less and less.

MR. BROWN: Mainly for economic reasons or --

MR. CASCIERI: In Europe, the change was happening, and I guess it was affecting every place, but in here, you know, it didn't -- the really drastic changes didn't happen until after the '40s. But each year, you could see a lessening of it you know. The furniture shops were going full speed all the time. Those places were carrying on the same as ever. There are still some in reproductions.

MR. BROWN: Were you doing any architectural work before you came to the -- to head the Architectural Center?

MR. CASCIERI: No. Only, you know, in the studio, what I -- the parts I designed that went with sculpture.

MR. BROWN: Well, you also, at this time, worked with them. Did you do some private teaching?

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah, right.

MR. BROWN: -- in the late '20s.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: What kind of people did you get as students? What were you teaching?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, it was the beginning of these -- what I call adult education kind of performance.

MR. BROWN: You taught at some institutions or schools.

MR. CASCIERI: There was a school called Craft Center in Boston, and there were very few young people in it, you know, mostly older kind of people, and I always felt that if you're going to learn to do something, you have to learn how to treat the tools that you're doing it with and know how to sharpen them and they wanted me to stay there, but it didn't suit me. There wasn't a motivation of people. They thought I was wonderful and a true vocation, but they wanted somebody to be there that could show them how to make the cuts, and I could do more in 10 minutes -- if I'd spent 10 minutes with each one, I'd do more than they did the whole night.

MR. BROWN: They weren't people who wanted to get into something --

MR. CASCIERI: No, they weren't -- there were very few like that in it. But then I was called up to Putney, Vermont. The Putney School was going to have a thing of arts and crafts.

MR. BROWN: When was this? About 1930 or so?

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah. It was just before the second World War, in the middle '30s, and I was considering it. I thought, well, maybe it's a good thing, it's young boys, high school age, and I was trying to figure a way of having -- going up there for a couple of days and then working in the studio, and I went up there, and I found that they wanted me to be a nursemaid. Well, I wasn't up to teaching that kind of a class.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASCIERI: So, I said no although the pay was fabulous in relation to what they were paying [inaudible], but I -- I said no. I don't know why I say these things, but I said no, and then -- then I had an interesting experience. A friend of mine, who I met -- he was from the Midwest, and he came here with his wife, studying. Did I say this before?

MR. BROWN: I don't know.

MR. CASCIERI: Well, you can throw it out. Studying at Harvard. He was ill, and I got to meet him, because somebody thought I should go up and say hello to him, cheer him up, and I did, and we became real friends.

So, when he got better, they moved to New London, Connecticut. He got a job teaching at the New London Junior College, and they used to invite me down on weekends, and one weekend, they invited me down, and the president of the college was there, and we were discussing education.

Well, when I came home that weekend, a couple of days after, I got a letter from my friend saying that the president would like me to come down and teach a course in design, if I would, and would I consider it?

So, I -- I went down, and I was pretty bold about things, and I said, well, I'd like to teach, but I -- I don't care about exams and I don't care about grades, and I'll give them an evaluation --

[Interruption in recording.]

MR. CASCIERI: So, I was always aware of the frustrations of exams and grades made for the students, even as early as that, 1940, and I -- you know, I was -- I had been in charge of the Center School for two or three years, and I said I would go down on that kind of basis.

I would evaluate the students, and you know -- so, he said yes, and I was surprised and he said that was fine. So, I went down and I taught.

I taught for two years, and then the war came along. When the war came along, most of these young men -- they sort of cleaned out the school.

MR. BROWN: How did the system work without grades?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, they liked me, and I liked them, and I used to look at everything they did. That was the only difference. I didn't have to give them tests. All these problems that they did, I looked at them, took them home with me weekends, and I used to tell them you're doing pretty good or you're not doing pretty good, you ought to do a little more of this, and --

MR. BROWN: You said earlier, when you were with the Ross studio, that you didn't like administrative work --

MR. CASCIERI: That's right.

MR. BROWN: -- and you also had to disappointment teaching when you looked into Putney and earlier in the '20s, the adult education, and then in 1935 or so, you come to the Boston Architectural Center, and very soon, you become dean there.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: How come?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, how come? You see the spirit of this place was different. These were all motivated students who wanted to study architecture. So, it was quite different than any other school, and I felt I would never have any money to give people, because I never made too much.

I felt this was a way I could at least give to these young people a chance to study at a low cost, and I offered my time, and -- but it was rewarding, because these students did want to study different kinds of things.

We had a grading system at that time. It was mention, First mention, place, then I guess they gave half mentions too, but it was an abstract kind of marking system. Then it went to pass and high pass.

MR. BROWN: Was the curriculum modeled on other architectural schools? Was there a connection when you came in?

MR. CASCIERI: This is what happened. The curriculum was design, structure, history, but as the years went on with the consensus of the education committee, we kept adding to the curriculum, and when Dean Worcester [phonetic], who just died, came to Boston --

MR. BROWN: To MIT.

MR. CASCIERI: -- at MIT, yeah, to be dean of MIT, we went to see him, because I used to go and say hello to all the deans that came in, the new ones, and every year, we see them to establish our relation and get people to

come teach.

So, I went to see Dean Worcester, with the president of the Center. It seems to me I said this before, but I don't know.

MR. BROWN: No, I don't think so.

MR. CASCIERI: All right. With the president of the Center. And he -- the first thing he said to us, he'd heard the stories you know that the school is a traditional school and things like that and he said, well, I don't know if I want to have anything to do with an old fogey school.

So, there was quiet for a minute -- and so, then I said you've heard these rumors, and some of it is true. I said but that isn't true about what we feel. We're trying to reestablish new directions and we are doing them with the idea that we have to teach the profession on the outside, too, because that's the only support we have, is the profession.

MR. BROWN: This is about when? Early '40s?

MR. CASCIERI: In the '40s. When he actually found out when he was dean.

So, I said we have to sort of keep one hand up as a guard and try to create new directions with the other hand, and I said we've just been talking about a curriculum, establishing a new curriculum that's quite different than what we've been using so far, and he said, well, if that's the way you feel, he says I'll help you do it.

So, I said fine. He said you go and set up your curriculum, come back to me, we'll talk it over, and then we'll see if we can get it going.

So, we spent the whole summer, education committee, in meetings, one after the other. We set up this curriculum, which was areas of study like technical areas, historical areas, design, and you know, humanities.

So, we went to him, and we had this talk -- it was patterned after the school, you know -- we set up this new curriculum, and you know, the content was similar to what the school was doing, design and history, structure, and I kept adding more of the science things to the school. There was no humanities when I first took over and I added humanities, and I added a course in history, which was never discontinued.

MR. BROWN: This was similar to -- you mean similar to other schools of architecture.

MR. CASCIERI: Yes, it was a similar pattern.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

MR. CASCIERI: And Dean Worcester came and talked about it because they respected him. So, he came and taught for two years.

He taught the upper classes for two years to help us get the curriculum off the ground.

MR. BROWN: Did you have a lot to do with this, with good will? Was it doing well?

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah. It was just that meeting -- we just changed his idea about the school. He just presumed that it was a good school.

MR. BROWN: You must be a pretty persuasive person.

MR. CASCIERI: I always used the term that I'm a good beggar for other people.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible] a number of architects with a large reputation teaching there, didn't you?

MR. CASCIERI: Oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: You mentioned Professor Gropius -- he comes in 1937 --

MR. CASCIERI: He came --

MR. BROWN: Did he ever directly involve himself?

MR. CASCIERI: Only through lectures.

MR. BROWN: Only in lectures.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: What was the purpose of the lectures?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, he would come and talk about the new directions in architecture and why and the human need should be satisfied and it should be satisfied in the way we need to satisfy it today and trying to show a connection between the old and the new, which was what I was interested in, and we should do the same thing, what we're doing, in our own way.

MR. BROWN: Was he received pretty warmly by --

MR. CASCIERI: Yes. Oh, yeah. The students liked him, you know.

MR. BROWN: But the profession didn't always, did they?

MR. CASCIERI: The profession didn't.

MR. BROWN: Could you describe him? What was he like? How did he come across to you?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, to me, from the outset, I felt he was a -- and he was thinking of a human being, and he had been in a country where they had to do things quick after the war, to reconstruct after the first World War, and he'd had a lot of experience, and he worked with a bunch of people who were artists. He brought the Bauhaus that was filled with top kind of people. That's what an architect should be.

MR. BROWN: You tried to get this to happen at the Art Center.

MR. CASCIERI: Well, little by little we put it in.

MR. BROWN: Was he interested in the students at the Center?

MR. CASCIERI: He was interested in the students. In fact Morse Payne you know is probably the only one that doesn't have a college degree to his name, and Gropius pulled him into his office quite early.

MR. BROWN: He came out of the Center.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah. And then I think one of the first jobs that he worked with him closely was the embassy at Athens. Morse Payne worked with him very closely and he became a member of the firm.

MR. BROWN: Was some of the interest in the students at the Center on the part of these men from Harvard and the established architects because these are people who have to work and then go to school only at night?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, they were quite interested in any one. You see the school is fortunately situated, and whenever there was some leading person from Europe or anywhere came across, we had no trouble -- I had no trouble in getting them to come -- they'd heard about the character of the Center and what we were doing.

I had no trouble getting them to come and at least give a lecture, sometimes two.

MR. BROWN: Could you describe some of these people and some of these occasions?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, I remember a fellow, Atkins [phonetic] -- he was an Englishman -- that taught in the Architectural Association, London at that time, and that school was quite closely related to us. He came here, and he sat -- there was a history lecture going on.

He was quite a historian, and he was interested in the Renaissance period.

After the lecture, he came up and said, well, I'd like to help you in teaching this if you'll have me and he told me who he was. He enjoyed a few years while he was here, teaching at Harvard and MIT, but then [Willem Marinus] Dudok, you know the Dutch architect -- they just felt that they were at home in the school.

It was like their kind of school, and some of them came there through the Boston Society of Architects. Sometimes the Boston Society of Architects got them. Sometimes we asked them.

MR. BROWN: The Boston Society being the sponsor --

MR. CASCIERI: They were always part of the Center. You know, they held their meetings there.

MR. BROWN: What did the Europeans--Dudok, Saarinen, Arkins--what did they like about the Center?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, they liked the school, because the school reminded them of their European kind of philosophy of teaching that they had to work in Amsterdam. You know they require that you worked in the academy, and those are the kind of things -- and they felt that we had a very healthy kind of system.

That was one of the things, and the other was the fact that these students were studying at night, and they were glad to come and tell them their philosophy, which they did.

MR. BROWN: Were most of these pretty articulate men?

MR. CASCIERI: Oh, yes, they were. They're all very articulate, you know.

You get a fellow like Adio, well, he used to come -- he wasn't well organized. He had slides in his pocket, and he took a bunch of slides out and laid them on the table and wondered what to do with them; not very systematically organized, but -- at the time he came to the Center, he had become famous with the hospital he had designed in Finland, a very great man who told about his works, but then, you know, you asked about these men.

Frank Lloyd Wright had just refused giving a lecture -- to give a lecture at Harvard, and I wrote him a letter -- actually, between you and me, I didn't think I'd get an answer to it, but I wrote him and explained the school, and I got an answer from him very quickly.

He said, "Well, next time I'm in Boston, you get your students together and I will come talk to them" and I'd listened to all his talks when he came to Boston, you know, and I was fascinated by what he was saying.

Again, he was saying the right things, the kind of things that seemed to me to be correct. You know, we -- we have to move ahead and do things our own way, and he came, and of course, all the students from Harvard and MIT came. The floor almost caved in at the Center, at the old Center.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

MR. CASCIERI: He gave his talk, and he said I'd like to go up in the attic and I said, "Well, of course." He went around, and we have a big picture of Louis Sullivan, and of course, that warmed him up quite a bit, to see that in the attic and I said that thing is always there, we didn't just put it up because you came in, and he realized that because he could see that. You saw a different kind of a man than when he was lecturing in the hall with these front row of architects ready to throw rocks at him. He could throw them back.

MR. BROWN: There were a lot of architects in that day who would.

MR. CASCIERI: Well, you're talking about C. Howard Walker. C. Howard Walker used to go right up front and attack him, and he was able to throw back.

MR. BROWN: Do you remember any of the encounters that he had with these people?

MR. CASCIERI: Only that, you know -- he just told them that they should wake up, that the world is going around, and there were new things being done, and --

MR. BROWN: When he was in the atelier though, he was a different person.

MR. CASCIERI: He was, yeah, warm with his students, and you know, everybody said, oh, he's a very arrogant, egotistical kind of fellow but when he was with the students he wasn't, and one of our students went to study with him, you know, too, you know, and he must have got a little bit of feeling about the school from him, too, because he went from our school -- he had two years with us, and went to study [inaudible].

Well, he -- that's his philosophy of teaching, through work-study. As you know, he actually ran a whole apprenticeship system, similar to the European one, where the apprentice paid him.

Of course, he took care of them. He fed them and took them to places and housed them, but they paid him, just like the school. They didn't call it school. It was just a work-study program, and that was our program. So, that intrigued him, you see.

Well, you know, we had a lot of great people. Take Buckminster Fuller. The first lectures he ever gave -- it was on -- on invitation from me to come talk to our students, and he came year after year, with his little package of models, and he would sit there, and the students would stay right till the last minute; wouldn't start going home. They'd all be sitting there. It was just as full at midnight as they were when he started about 7 o'clock.

MR. BROWN: What would he talk about then: these early lectures?

MR. CASCIERI: He talked about the geodesic dome, which, you know, he had just begun to put together and he'd done an actual house. The philosophy. He was always a philosopher.

It's amazing the way he can just stand there and talk and the stuff just flows out of him. He was a great man and nobody wanted to listen to him, but you see, little by little -- maybe it was his students' influences.

MR. BROWN: The students wanted to listen to him, didn't they?

MR. CASCIERI: Oh, yes.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. CASCIERI: Adults didn't and professors. But little by little -- whether it was the influence of the students who would come to us to listen.

They started inviting him to MIT for a semester of lectures, and all of a sudden he became bigger and bigger, and his name got into magazines, and when he came to us -- well, they knew that, you know, he'd written a book, *Nine Chains to the Moon* [1938], and they knew him for what he had done, but he was out in the Midwest.

But then he started to bloom like a budding flower, and he came more and more, and he would have liked to come -- keep coming to our school, but he -- the time didn't allow it. He was getting older, you know.

MR. BROWN: You mentioned the motivation of students at the Architectural Center. Did this have a lot of bearing on [inaudible]?

MR. CASCIERI: That's the other thing. They sensed these students.

MR. BROWN: Was it the same in the '30s as it is now?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, I think it was more in the '30s. I think there is too much of the credit-conscious student now. I'm afraid something has happened. We've gotten bigger, but that tremendous spirit was there you know. It isn't as evident now as it was.

MR. BROWN: What was the spirit in the '30s?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, these people really -- they came there because they wanted to study architecture. They'd spend weekends, nights, and work like mad all the way through, and when there was a lecture, they were all there, you know.

Now, you have to drag them to the -- to the place, you see. There was a deep motivation. You know, you get a large number of students like we have now, and many of them have degrees, and they've been conscious, credit conscious for 15 years, or 17, and they're a different tribe, you know, not the kind that just go in there, and this was like a bit of gold for them, because they keep saying when you meet them now that, like Morse Payne said, "I would never be in the position I'm in if it wasn't for your school, you know." So, that is the difference, a stronger kind of real motivation.

MR. BROWN: What teachers did you have then, in the late -- in the '30s and in the '40s.

MR. CASCIERI: You know, the '30s was the weak period, because you know, change came, and we went, there weren't too many people out at Harvard, and what I -- what I did --

MR. BROWN: Stubbins was one of the First.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah. Well, I went to the deans of MIT and Harvard, and I said, now, we know we don't have too many people that have time to teach, how about sending people from the master class, for instance the people who studied under Gropius and the people who have studied under Carlu at MIT, and they thought it was a great idea, and that's what they did.

That's how the connection with Gropius was that he would send his top students to teach. That was the second phase or the beginning of this tremendous volunteer that comes from graduates now --

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: But at that time, you had to take them -- the ones who were really in the graduating year, so they were almost graduates. They were people who had their first degree and were in graduate school, ready to graduate that year, and it was kind of a process.

Some of them went on in teaching, just with the little experience they got in the school, but Dean Worcester sent [Ralph] Rapson, who was one of the professors there, to teach for two or three more years, and Rapson was a very motivated teacher. If we had teachers like that -- it was wonderful.

The students just stayed with him, and he stayed with the students.

MR. BROWN: Before, earlier, when you were in school they had all been professors, hadn't they?

MR. CASCIERI: Right.

MR. BROWN: But in the --

MR. CASCIERI: In other words, I could say I went to Harvard and MIT. You had the benefit of those people.

MR. BROWN: But when Gropius came in to Harvard, when this change came about, many of the other professors did not want to be involved with these students?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, partly that and partly that they didn't have the time. They were attached to a lot of more energetic things. They started doing work outside. The old professors didn't. They just -- Hafner [phonetic] -- I didn't know of any projects that he had that he worked on while he was teaching. He just taught. He was a professor.

And I decided to become more interested in architectural education. That's how I stayed on.

MR. BROWN: You did not retain your interest in doing architecture yourself.

MR. CASCIERI: No. No, I had a brother that was an architect, but no, I decided to stay in architecture. Well, to learn what I could on sculpture.

MR. BROWN: Yes and a good deal of that was architectural sculpture.

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah. When -- when the studio sculptors say "architectural sculpture," looking down their nose, I just asked them if they ever looked at Michelangelo's work or the Greek sculpture, and of course, they'd say yes. I'd say, well, what do you think that is?

MR. BROWN: Now, as an administrator, what was your life like as an administrator? You've talked about it somewhat, but at the Architectural Center.

MR. CASCIERI: Well, the only administrating -- you know, being head of the school, I was chairman of the education committee, and I was the sole head of the school until we took on a director, which was 1967. So, up to that time, I was --

MR. BROWN: You were the -- you were also the liaison between the teachers and students and the sponsoring Boston Society.

MR. CASCIERI: Right.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. CASCIERI: I was the whole thing.

MR. BROWN: How was that worked out? Were there any great difficulties in the early days?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, you had to be -- I would say you had to be a little diplomatic. I always got on with them. I didn't step on their toes. Little by little, I began to tell them "look, there are changes" and then you could see some of them beginning to look at these buildings that Mies van der Rohe and Gropius were putting up and they started to try to copy little bits of it and so it was easy to tell them and they started to hire students who came from the school and they began to see the new things.

MR. BROWN: Who was active in the Boston School of Architects.

MR. CASCIERI: You mean now?

MR. BROWN: Well, then, let's say. Who was active, say, in the '30s and '40s?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, most of the architects -- there were a few that were, you know, around here, the Boston architects, were all active. The old and new. They were kind of an aristocratic kind of thing.

They took a kind of a dip at one time, because during the Depression, you know, when they felt the pinch too much, they began to call draftsmen in and have them work, say, for two days, and then say, well, I'm sorry, we don't have any more to do.

So, when this happened, the -- the draftsmen decided, well, they've got to have a little better agreement about how much they're going to pay them.

So, they didn't call it a union, but they started -- they started what was called the Massachusetts State Association of Architects, and they battled and were interested in State things. In fact, they took the AIA [American Institute of Architects] chapter away from the Boston Society of Architects for a few years.

They went to Washington and said, well, look, we're doing all this, and we'd like to be the chapter of the AIA. The others are just -- they call it a club, you know, old people's club, and the AIA listened, and the chapter was taken from the BSA and given to the hands of the MSAA.

MR. BROWN: Were the Boston Society of Architects [inaudible] an older membership at that time?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, it was an aristocratic --

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: -- and of course, the ones that had belonged to several separate organizations -- which they didn't want to call a union -- was a younger group, and they had to get a living, and they -- but they asked one of the old fellows in the Boston Society to be their president. The first president was Chandler, who was an old, fine gentleman in the Boston Society. You probably knew him.

MR. BROWN: But the -- these men -- this was part of an aristocratic club --

MR. CASCIERI: Well, there was an aristocracy of architecture, yes, I would say that.

MR. BROWN: There was sort of a gulf between them because a lot of the students came from a poor background.

MR. CASCIERI: It wasn't that. They felt they wanted to help these people. It was kind of a strange thing. I feel that they were naturally an aristocratic group that had philanthropic ideas, you know, and wanted to do what they could to help. This Chandler was a wonderful person. He brought everything together.

You know, the whole thing is, is their means were just very oriented towards old things and they didn't move very much. The young people wanted to move, they're saying something's going on here, we have to get on the wagon.

But at the same time, there was a union that was coming into Boston, and it had some -- a union of draftsmen they were trying to make, and they were trying to take all of them over but the ones who worked for architects, nobody gave into them. They formed the State Association of Architects.

But the others, from engineering offices -- they were successful. They established the way a kind of union is formed, and that was -- that was happening at the time that these young people decided to form the Massachusetts State Association.

MR. BROWN: The older architects wouldn't have thought of that.

MR. CASCIERI: No.

MR. BROWN: It was not very gentlemanly.

MR. CASCIERI: Well, they knew what was happening, but they didn't know what to do about it. These fellows did it. They just formed this other organization.

MR. BROWN: Now, what did someone like Gropius, who had lived through hard times and so forth, think when he saw what was happening here? Was he sympathetic to the young people?

MR. CASCIERI: Well, he was more sympathetic to the young people, I'm sure, because the other people had kicked him in the shins, so to speak. Maybe I shouldn't use that kind of language but they had rebuffed him.

MR. BROWN: Well, at the school, was there any tension created by this at the Architectural Center?

MR. CASCIERI: No, because he knew -- he knew from me that we were on his side.

MR. BROWN: Yes. I mean, with your -- the Boston Society of Architects, was there any tension?

MR. CASCIERI: No. That's what I mean. I was always able to keep them in --

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASCIERI: -- because I had one foot in the old and one foot in the new.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. CASCIERI: I knew all the old ones, because we'd had them in the school, and you know, had been in the meetings, and the new fellows were coming up, and they liked the school, and they liked what we were doing. So, we had a good relation.

MR. BROWN: After the second World War, were there any major changes occurring in the way you ran the school or the way it ran?

MR. CASCIERI: The curriculum -- we got more students right away, you know, almost from zero, it went up to 200.

MR. BROWN: This was subsidized -- the G.I. Bill.

MR. CASCIERI: G.I. Bill. And you know, we were just swamped, and right away, we had to make provisions to take care of a lot of students rather than just the few we had.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

MR. CASCIERI: When you think of the little house they had down here --

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASCIERI: -- 200 was more than 600 as in this building we have now.

MR. BROWN: Things began to become more and more complicated to administrate?

MR. CASCIERI: It became more complex, yeah. It became more complex. We started to find -- find ways of formulating records so we'd have them. We never kept any records of anybody except a little card that said the years you were there and if you'd gone from first to second year.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. CASCIERI: It's true. But now we had records and that was all started in a meager way, because I didn't have an office force. The office force came after the '60s. I had -- during the first years of my time, I just had a part-time secretary, and there was a secretary at the Center that kept all of the records, and we used to keep them in written form. It's amazing how much you can put in a simple form if you want to.

MR. BROWN: Right.

When did you find the need or did you feel the need -- that you needed larger quarters in the --

MR. CASCIERI: Well, we found the need.

MR. BROWN: -- right away, in the '40s --

MR. CASCIERI: You know, it's a strange thing. We asked the profession what they felt about it and we looked at a lot of buildings and I was the one they looked at to say is this alright and we looked at churches and we looked at houses on Commonwealth Avenue and I said to myself that this doesn't seem right, you know.

Finally, after years of search, we found this community carriage house on Hereford. It was very convenient. There was space in there and right away you could go in and do anything you want.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

MR. CASCIERI: And so, we were able to get it for very little money and it was just before things started to go crazy.

MR. BROWN: This is, what, in 1950?

MR. CASCIERI: No, no. It was in the '60s.

MR. BROWN: Till then you were still in your small --

MR. CASCIERI: No, we were still down there. So that we got the building, and then they started to talk, shall we renovate it? In fact, a couple of the young people we brought up from the Center were architects and made some drawings for the renovations. But then they looked at the building and said if we renovate you will have problems on your hands always, fixing this and fixing that. One of the walls had quite a bulge in it, had guide flaws in it on the top floor.

So, we decided to look at it and the cost of renovating was so tremendous that we said let's look at a new building and they had a competition, and the competition -- you probably know about that, or you can find --

MR. BROWN: No, I'd like to hear it from you.

MR. CASCIERI: Well, the competition was given out and run under the rules of AIA, and about 250 people applied. Of those, 90 finished.

The competition was open to former students, former teachers, anywhere in the world, and then architects who were in the State of Massachusetts, and the -- Professor Vaughner [phonetic] was the -- you know, the organizer and leader of the thing and the program was written after much struggle, and the building was built to house and have places for 200 students, you know, to have separate benches and that's going by the board, they don't care about working in the school the way they used to in the olden days.

MR. BROWN: They're not there much are they?

MR. CASCIERI: They're not there as much as they used to be.

Well, the competition was juried by, there was the Dean [phonetic] of Harvard and Lipinsky [phonetic] from MIT; Rapson from University of Minnesota and myself, and then there was Jon Lawrence [phonetic] representing the Boston Society, an engineer, LeMercier [phonetic], and of course, Vaughner [phonetic]. That was the jury.

I think we chose the right one. It's amazing, when you get a bunch of projects together. The ramifications some of them get into and how they waste space.

[Inaudible conversation.]

MR. CASCIERI: We chose the simple one. No, we only had in mind making it a more comfortable place to work, and also, well, to keep up with -- keep abreast -- the students always kept abreast of the new movements. It happens for some reason or another, like ducks get in and swim.

MR. BROWN: You mean in design of the building, keep abreast of --

MR. CASCIERI: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: -- new ideas.

MR. CASCIERI: New ideas. I think, as far as structure and the design of the building, probably it is one of the better contemporary buildings, still. Yes, we wanted that.

Well, you asked me about my education -

[END OF RECORDING.]

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