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Minoru Yamasaki interview, [ca. 1959 Aug.]

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Transcript

Preface

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH MINORU YAMASAKI AUGUST 1959 INTERVIEWER: VIRGINIA HARRIMAN

On the occasion of an exhibition of models of buildings he designed, at the Detroit Institute of Arts. Original interview for Lector.

Interview

VH: VIRGINIA HARRIMAN

MY: MINORU YAMASAKI

VH: Well, I think the first thing, it would be fine if you would just talk about your philosophy of architecture, if you would. You probably have some special ideas about it. Could you explain that in capsule form? I mean if you could start as if I weren't here and just start talking about that, that would be good. Maybe we could incorporate that in the tape.

MY: How will you do this? Will you edit it later?

VH: With some limitations. The less editing will probably make it more useful. If you could just start talking and talk for a minute or so about what you think.

MY: We could have a trial run.

VH: Oh, well, you can go ahead and I can interrupt you -- or rather you can ask me questions. That's all right. We can cut those things, yes. Just start talking.

MY: All right. Fine. I suppose that my attitude toward architecture has changed very much in the past five or six years. But I think that the basic change occurred during this trip that I took around the world in 1954 when I realized that architecture as we were practicing it-- not necessarily the way that I was practicing it -- but the way that society was practicing it -- was inadequate in a sense, and that it did not bring us the kind of experience as people that we ought to make available to ourselves. Now this was fairly evident to me in going through the old buildings. In this tour around the world I was not interested in contemporary buildings because I had seen contemporary buildings actually until they came out of my ears in a sense. And so I decided that I wanted to go back and find out what happened in the older buildings, you see. And once I got started on this idea of looking at older buildings to try to gain from them the qualities that we might instill in our architecture then I got very excited, you see. And so I started with the cathedrals and then I went to Italy and looked at the Renaissance, which is very thrilling to me, like the squares in Rome, or even the older squares such as exist in Venice, the Piazza San Marco. And I kept realizing that these qualities that we see in the older architecture, such as the play of sun and shadow, which is something that was in a sense neglected in our modern architecture was vitally necessary to the total experience of man in this environment. Other qualities that I thought were terribly significant were the texture, of course, ornamentation, which in a sense also enabled the building to be alive with the sun. And silhouettes against the sky which I felt were vitally necessary to our sense of aspiration in buildings. In other words, when you see a New England church steeple against the blue sky, this is a very exciting kind of experience because it somehow brings about an aspirational quality, a sense of reaching for something which is terribly important to our mundane way of life. I felt that the silhouette as expressed in the European buildings and particularly in Indian buildings was very essential in a sense to our irregular skylines. Now our skylines are irregular but unstudied and consequently chaotic. Whereas if we studied our skylines we would be able to bring this sensation of aspiration and much more easily so because we have many different kinds of buildings which give us different kinds of silhouettes in our cities. I felt that one of the most important qualities in this study of mine was the sense of surprise that I found in Japan. And by surprise I mean that as we moved from one area to another -- or this happens even in Rome, for instance, where you walk through a narrow street and into a courtyard and suddenly the whole scene opened up and the greatest excitement because you had not expected this. It was a very thrilling thing in an artificial environment. In Japan this is very carefully thought up. And as you walk through the temples, for instance -- and I can think of a particular temple -- where you come out of the chaotic city, and the Japanese cities are much more chaotic than the European or American cities, and then you suddenly come to the peaceful courtyard of the temple, and then from there you take off your shoes and walk through the dark temple and you come, in this particular instance, into a white gravel courtyard with a few stones placed beautifully and a forest, in a sense, as background. And this tremendous sense of peace and, though surprise may not be the correct word, was a totally unexpected quality that was

very delightful -- and somehow reassuring in our society -- or to find in a society such as ours. And then to go on and find the next courtyard filled with planting and the leaves against the sky and a totally different quality. And then to find the next one flooded with water was a very lovely experience and in our very regimented society where we are too prone to make things exactly alike and to have classrooms or factory spaces or offices for miles the same, fluorescent lighting for five or six or seven or eight hundred feet on center forever, I feel that this quality of surprise, the man-made instilling of delight is a terribly important consideration and one that we must think very deeply about to bring about the kind of environment which would be exciting for us. So, in a sense, more than just these qualities I think that the thing I've thought about most in architecture in the past years is that architecture should be based on human experience, on the need for delight, sometimes for excitement. But whatever it is that the human being should somehow form an environment in which people can find a delightful, wonderful way of life. And this, I think, can be so enhanced by architecture -- obviously you don't accomplish it all by architecture -- but nevertheless through architecture I think it becomes much easier if the architecture is thoughtful. And so consequently I feel that what we architects must think of is architecture as a result of human experience. And if we don't do this, then architecture becomes an abstract form, or a technique, or a clever device, or sculpture, of whatever it may be, which is only expressing your individual desire as an artist. Which is valid to a point. But nevertheless, since architecture is for all of us, and since we all participate in building it, I think that the role of the architect is somewhat more responsible than the individual artist and that he must think about the experience of people as he uses the building. In other words, if there are surprises, delight, or if he can gain a few fleeting moments of delight in some way, then this is a terribly important aspiration or delight, as I say, is a terribly important thing for us to accomplish in architecture. And I think this is possibly what we have been trying to do in our office. You know, the Museum, the Institute project that we're working on, I think this possibly is the most vivid example of how we base the scheme on what we thought of as human experience. When Dr. Richardson and I first talked about this, we talked about what should happen in a building such as this which is dedicated to the arts. Though we realized the practical aspects, so to speak, of such a building, we directed our attention, so to speak, to the experience of a man who comes to the building. Now the way I started to really think about this building was somehow like this: I had experienced so many instances in various museums around the country where I was tired because I had gone through so many galleries, and after having seen what I had wanted to see, I had to sort of find my way through many galleries, and I was bored and tired, or I was insecure because -- not really insecure, but in a sense insecure because I had a sense of being lost, and this happens to everyone; and consequently I think it's terribly important to have a point of reference in any building, to be able to find one's way very easily. But if this can be done in a beautiful way -- a point of reference can be established in a beautiful way instead of a practical way -- this is obviously much better. This was one thing. We know that the Institute is used far more in winter than it is in summer. And Detroit in winter is a rather unpleasant place, as we know. So when we hit this idea of large courts, the outdoor courts over an acre each in size where there could be beautiful gardens, where there would be fountains and music perhaps and beautiful sculpture and flowers, bougainvillea in January when there is snow and ice outside, this would be a delightful place to come, to begin with. Then, if we could orient the galleries so you would only pass through a few galleries at a time and then back into the garden, then there would always be this point of reference, you see. And, after having talked to Dr. Richardson and the rest of your staff, it was really very easy to see that we could divide the galleries into groups so that you can always come back and rest and find your way again in this rather delightful space and here would be fountains going and flowers blooming, brilliant-colored flowers, in the middle of winter. So this then could be a total human experience rather than just going to see a painting, for instance, you see. So in each problem that we tackled, and sometimes we're not able to do so because the budget is limited and we have to provide so many square feet of office space, for instance, for a corporation, so then the only means of delight that we can find is some exterior facade or interior spaces. But much more thrilling to us is this finding a scheme which can be more than just a fine-formed building, something that is fun to be in -- that enhances life. And I think this we can accomplish in our day much better than any of the historical eras because we have so much more flexibility in our tools. And so I think this is terribly important for all of us to think about, to somehow bring about a framework, an environment for society which involves mankind in this delightful experience within an artificial environment. And then I think architecture becomes suddenly much more important than, say, an art form that you look at from the street. So I think this is in a sense the basis of our search. If you like . . . I don't know how else to express a philosophy. Is that all right now?

VH: That's fine. I didn't want to interrupt you.

MY: This is the model of the Conservatory of Music for Oberlin College. As you know, Oberlin has one of the very fine conservatories in the country. And we felt that we ought to be able to bring about in physical terms the quality of teaching that goes on behind the walls. And so we were very serious about this project. The Conservatory is divided into three basic sections. One is the teaching area, teaching studio area. One is the rehearsal area. And the final part is the practice area.

VH: In looking at the model, could you . . . ?

MY: It's very obvious.

VH: It's very obvious?

MY: Yes.

VH: Could you say, for example, in your next sentence that such and such area at the left of the model, the other area in the middle . . . ?

MY: All right. Yes, I will. The teaching building obviously is the core of the school. It's symbolic of the Conservatory because here is where the faculty has direct contact with the students. And the teaching area, therefore, we felt should be represented on Tappan Square. This site borders on this town square which is a very large square, heavily treed. The trees are large trees with massive trunks and very vertical. And, as you look through the woods in a sense, you somehow glimpse the buildings around the square. For this reason we felt that the teaching studio should be a rather monumental front on the square. We also felt that expressing verticality was terribly important to be sympathetic with the trees through which you always see the building. We felt that a white building would be very right for the square because of the dark tree trunks. So the teaching unit consequently stands on the square as the expression of the Conservatory. Directly behind the teaching unit is the rehearsal section which is a one-storied section and which has rehearsal halls, a library, accessory rooms, and a concert hall. The concert hall is used -- it has 600 seats -- and is used for the concerts of faculty and students and visiting musicians. Then finally at the back, at the very back, is the practice building. It has many small cubicles in which the students practice. The experience of the building as such -- since this was in a sense a very functional building because it has to be acoustically absolutely correct and consequently is much more difficult than other buildings. The transmission of sound, for instance, has to be denied from one room to the other. The acoustics of the concert hall shape the concert hall. There are certain undeniable factors. We cannot just depend on aesthetic reasons in a sense to create the spaces for the building. Since we had a limited lot, we divided these areas and then separated them as well as possible with gardens and tried to place the corridors in such a way so that you would have glimpses of the gardens as you travel from one area to the other.

VH: Could you say what the material of the building is? Could you start your sentence with, "This building is made of . . . ?

MY: Yes. This building is made of precast concrete completely but it is the precast concrete which shows up in many of the buildings which we are doing now. It is white cement with quartz aggregate. Quartz aggregate will be 90 percent of the surface so that it is a very easily maintained surface and also gives a sparkling characteristic to the material.

VH: Could you say something about the . . . It seems to me I saw in the picture of that building an unusual facade decorative quality. Isn't that the one that seems to have a patterned surface? Could you start out saying that the grill or the . . . "We're interested in grills" or . . . could you describe that?

MY: It isn't a grill really.

VH: Whatever it is. Unusual facade.

MY: Let me finish the garden first.

VH: Okay.

MY: The interesting thing about Oberlin College as it differs from other more urban schools or universities is that it is a walking campus. Everyone walks from class to class. Everyone walks at night to a concert. So that we had to think in terms of a walking population rather than an automobile-transported population. So there are little qualities in the building which might be interesting in that, for instance, as you approach the concert hall, let's say that you are going to a concert, you walk up and you look at the garden first and then you walk into the theatre rather than come to a canopy and go directly into the concert hall. These are things I think again which try to reflect this quality of experience that we're talking about. As regards the facade, many of the buildings that we are doing today reflect this belief in more richness in architecture, the delight of sun and shadow. Consequently this building has a very strongly molded facade which is structurally very valid. The exterior wall is a bearing wall and the elements are precast in 40-foot lengths as single posts with some -- well I'm not sure of the number, but I believe it's about 180 -- make the facade of the building just by being placed together. I don't know whether this sentence that I'm going to say now is in its right context but I want to say it anyway and then you can put it where you want to. One of the problems with this architecture that has been going on, this modern architecture which is the porcelain, enamel, glass, aluminum for the facade, is that, in a sense, the manufacturer has complete control of the facade. In other words, we are in a sense a slave to the machine. The manufacturer produces so many yards of porcelain, enamel, or aluminum extrusions, or glass of a particular shape and, since it's less costly to buy in stock, then the tendency is to build buildings of this kind. So what happens is that our total environment then becomes a slave to the machine. By using the precast concrete, suddenly the architect is again in charge. The cause of the economy in concrete is the fact that the material is

very inexpensive per pound. And if we use a form 50 times, for instance, then the form has paid for itself. Consequently we are able to get the quality and form of building which we desire as such. And the architect then can express himself. And this may sound as though the architect were somewhat chagrined at the whole process and that he was not able to assert himself and therefore he's disappointed. But this isn't true. That all art forms it's very necessary for the human being to be able to express themselves. And if they have any really good thoughts, they ought to come out somehow sensitively through a technique that's possible within the economic ability of man to produce this. So it's very important for the architect in a society to be able to express himself because responsible architects then will try to produce a lovely environment for man. And this is the reason why I like precast concrete. I believe that precast concrete is a means by which architectural expression can again become a valid and important part of the activity of man.

VH: Could we . . . the only thing that worries me is that I have just this one roll of tape.

MY: Oh.

VH: Altogether it's 45 and 45 minutes, two times, double sides. So I mean . . .

MY: I'm going to slow?

VH: Could we move on to the next building so we have something that applies to each one and, if necessary, maybe later we could come back and get more? But I'm just worried about not having any more tape tonight, you know. I mean you have so much to say -- I would have brought more tape. Most people can't express themselves as well as you do.

MY: I don't express myself very well.

VH: You do very well.

MY: Let's talk about the Gas Company because this is my favorite job. The Gas Company -- the Michigan Consolidated Gas Company -- I like to call it, model is a very important building for us, both because we feel that the site is one of the most important in the city of Detroit, that it is in the middle of the civic center and it has this marvelous view of the river. But beyond that, the Administration of the Gas Company has expressed itself -- or rather the leaders of the Gas Company have said that they would like to build a building of which the people of Detroit can be very proud, and which the people of Detroit can enjoy. I think this is very important because I doubt very much whether many corporate heads have this kind of attitude about their activities. And, since the gas Company people have taken a very responsible attitude, and it's evidence enough in that they have picked a very expensive site which was -- I shouldn't say that really -- I'd like to cut that one . . .

VH: Okay.

MY: They picked a very important site -- that's what I'd like to say -- a very important site.

VH: You'd best say that over again because . . .

MY: Yes. All right. That the Gas Company executives picked an important site and then expressed themselves in this way. Consequently, just beyond the very size of the building, which is obviously a large building and therefore it's perhaps easier for an architect to express himself in a large building -- I don't know whether it's easier or more difficult -- but anyway it's more of a challenge. But beyond that, the very attitude of the Gas Company executives and the validity of the site somehow made this a terribly important building to us. Moreover, this is the first high building which has been built in Detroit in some years. We have examples of high buildings which have been built in New York. But none of the high buildings which have been built in New York have expressed these qualities of richness which we have been thinking about for some time. So we wanted to attempt a high building, a building which would have this quality of richness and yet have the sense of aspiration that I think a tall building should have, a sense of soaring upwards, a verticality which I think is the thrilling thing about a high building for the average person, the man on the street. As he looks at a high building, I think that if he can have the sense of upwardness, this perhaps replaces to a degree the feeling of aspiration that the man had in the medieval days when he walked into a cathedral, you see, the sense of aspiration. And because we do not have any counterpart of this quality, I think it's quite a challenge to try to gain a sense of aspiration. So we deliberately stressed the vertical and by breaking the horizontal by this shape of window we have, we strengthen our vertical. Seagram's, for instance, has five-foot on center windows. Our windows are half of that -- two-foot four. And the reason for that is again a stronger sense of verticality. We wanted a very simple building, a building that in a sense would be appealing in its simplicity. We wanted a classic look and yet we wanted a quality of richness which would be enjoyable as the sun played on its surface. We would like to introduce a beautiful fountain in the building and we have talked to both Mr. McElvenny and Mr. Daley about this and they are very interested in somehow having a fine fountain here. What we would like to do they are willing - - no, I should say they are willing to dedicate the first floor to the public, which I think is wonderful. Because

most corporate executives want to use the first floor for gain of some kind or other, you see. And therefore, we would like to make the first floor a very lovely place where, first of all, you can enjoy this lovely view of the river. But beyond that we would like to have a quality of loveliness which is difficult to find in a downtown building. I don't know whether we'll be able to achieve this or not, but we're certainly going to try. We want more than anything else to have many things happen in this building. For instance, tall buildings as a rule have forgotten about night lighting. We are very much interested in night lighting and consequently have a scheme of lighting which should be very enjoyable to all the people of Detroit. The way the top of the building lights in two sections with a band of white and then the tower -- the penthouse -- which will be many colors, should be enjoyable. We would like to light the fountain at night so that it's interesting and dramatic. Mr. McElvenny has suggested that we take these two areas of light at the top and use red and green at Christmas, for instance. Which would be fun. And we think of lighting the whole building red, white and blue during the Fourth of July when all the fireworks are going on. And, although this might sound terribly corny, I think if it's done subtly it can be very enjoyable. We would like to use colored lights within the lobby in a refined way. We want to bring about the enjoyment that technology has brought about in a very subtle way throughout this whole building. This project is a very important one for the United States. I have a great love for it, I suppose, because of the kind of challenge that it represents to us as a people. This is a World Agricultural Fair and it is terribly important for India because India faces the possibility of having insufficient food in a few years. The population is growing tremendously and they have not advanced their agricultural methods or expanded their agriculture in any way to be able to cope with this increase in population. Consequently, this Agricultural Fair then is probably the most important thing that India has done for some time, first of all, because they hope through this Fair to gain help and friendship from other countries and, moreover, to interest their farmers in new methods which would advance agriculture within the country.

VH: Is the Fair a temporary thing or a permanent thing?

MY: The Fair is temporary and it will be on from December 11 this year for two and a half months. With us are participating Red China, Russia, Great Britain, and others. But obviously the reason why we are going all out is because of, let's say, the threat of what Russia and Red China might do. Russia and Red China would have a very strong story to tell. By their collective farms and by their Five-Year Plans, they have been able to increase their agricultural product manyfold. And this would be a very powerful argument to the Indian farmer. Moreover . . .

VH: I noticed in the model quite a few rather unusual forms, some sort of almost minaret-shaped domes and so forth. Could you talk a little bit about the actual shaping of the Trade Fair Building as you have designed it and what possible sources of inspiration . . . what you were trying to do with the design?

MY: Well, I have to give this little background.

VH: Oh, yes, sure.

MY: It seems obvious that Russia and Red China will do what Russia did, for instance, at Brussels where they put up a tremendous pavilion. They had tremendous machines and had strong propaganda about their Five-Year Plans, etc., you see. And this I presume would be very convincing to some of the Indian people. However, India is a democracy and they deeply believe in democracy and we feel that it would not be good to overwhelm them with propaganda. So we are taking a totally different tack. But, before I go into this tack, I might say that I found that, though the Brussels building that we built was very beautiful, I felt that it was not a good exhibit building because the exhibits were somewhat lost. And even the German pavilion which is a very beautiful building was very bad from an exhibit standpoint because the person who came to the building only could see outside and the exhibits were somewhat lost. The view outside was much more important than the exhibits. So consequently we had to think of two things. We had to think of a very friendly and gentle approach and an appeal to the intelligence of the Indian. Which is very high. And also to his artistic impulses. In other words, any nation which loves the Taj Mahal as much as they do would love anything that was beautiful, we would think. So consequently we started out with this scheme of having a variety of experiences. First of all we started out, as you can see in this model, with a ramp and a fence beyond which you can only see the domes. The fence would be ten feet high and the domes would be, we hope, intriguing to the people outside so that it would draw the people to our pavilion. Also the ramp is perhaps a way of drawing more people because, if the ramp were filled, a line always draws more people. So we thought in these terms. And then once you go beyond the fence then you enter these terrazzo platforms. You stand on these terrazzo platforms. Around you is this body of water. In the water are fountains so that there are fountains gushing sort of all over the place. And then there are flowers all around. So above we have the domes and below we have the water and the fountains. And here is the place where we would say that you are welcome to the United States, that we are happy to have you here, that we really think we're the same kind of people, and we want to tell you how we have improved our agriculture and how we have gone from an undeveloped type of farming to a very developed type of farming which produces a tremendous amount per acre. So this is the kind of introduction and we hope that it will be beautiful and fun. The domes we placed there because we thought it would have an appeal to the Indian who has lived in Delhi which is

surrounded by domes which were at one time white, blue and gold. And if we could recall this quality and yet do it in our technological way, in our terms, we thought this would be a very appealing thing. Now then, leaving this area, we go on to the exhibit building -- which is a totally enclosed building with all artificial lighting. And there we will play up the displays, the exhibits very strongly. There we hope to have a very intense educational process, so to speak, where the Indian farmer would learn about what we were like 50 years ago, what our farmers were like, and how through research and technology, through fertilizing, through irrigation, all the improvements that we've made in farming. And how . . . for instance, we've gathered wheat from all over the world and taken the best qualities of wheat and combined them into the fine wheat that we produce today. And these elements we would tell, we hope, in very convincing terms within this building. So the exhibits in this . . .

[END OF SIDE 1] [SIDE 2]

MY: Well, after this period of intensive education then of where the viewers are completely inside the building, then we bring them out to another area and there we have the county fair, the American county fair. Now the name of our total exhibit is called Mala U.S.A., "Mala" meaning "fair" in Indian. And the Indians do have a county fair which is similar to our county fair. So we would like to show them what our county fairs are like and there we have colorful tents under which we will have prize corn, prize beefs, or whatever, hooked rugs, and so forth, jams and jellies, the products that are displayed in the general county fair. Also, outside we have a demonstration area where we can demonstrate equipment and the equipment will be selected so that it can be within the means of the Indian farmer, small equipment, tractors and so forth. This equipment would be left in this area and the Indian farmer would be able to go out and run them himself, and there would also be demonstrations. And just beyond this part, since we have neglected the children altogether, we have a carnival area where we have a carousel, and a ferris wheel, and a fun house. So, after being then outside for some time, the viewer again goes inside into a building. In this building we talk about marketing and processing and we show the Indian farmer what we do about processing and preserving food, and also how we market products. Incidentally, earlier we had talked about dissemination of information which was a terribly important part of this whole process. Then, after leaving this marketing building, this period of intensive education, we come on to another garden where we hope that you would have a sense of delight. Then we have a theatre area where there could be demonstrations of the fun that the American farmer might have. There might be square dancing, and rock and roll, and also there might be movies about farm life. And then finally we go into the atomic energy area which is the future of farming, and there we talk about what might happen to farming through atomic energy. And finally then we come back into the garden again and there we say we're happy to have had you here; we hope you enjoyed yourself, goodbye. So what we have tried to do here is to have a series of different kinds of experience so that each would be a surprise and would be a total experience for the Indian farmer who comes to the fair, both to learn and also to have fun. Whereas, if he goes into an overbearing building, then I'm sure that he goes away, like I did at Brussels, rather hating the whole thing. So we hope that by this method that we will encourage the Indian farmer to gain some of our deep beliefs in gaining a better way of life through democracy. I guess that's all on the Fair.

VH: Yes. What's the next building on the list that most appeals to you? Why don't you talk about whatever it is.

MY: Well, let's talk about the St. Louis Air Terminal, shall we? This model is the St. Louis Air Terminal Building at Lambert Field. Being the gateway to a large city, St. Louis, I had felt from the very beginning that somehow this building should symbolize this sense of being a gateway. And, after examining many air terminal buildings throughout the country, I found myself very disappointed and went to Grand Central Station and realized that at Grand Central you had a sense of welcoming, this great high room somehow gave you the sense of arrival to an important city. So we wanted to gain this great space concept, and this building was initiated with the idea in mind of having great space. Beyond that, the air transportation industry as such has to be extremely flexible. It has grown, doubled, tripled, and quadrupled in a very short period, within the past decade. Consequently all air terminal buildings must be able to be expanded readily and must have this characteristic of looking like a complete building at each stage. And this is why we chose this unit construction so that we have three sections now and then we will add a fourth and a fifth and perhaps a sixth. I hope at some point we stop. But in each stage it will look like a complete building. The shell we chose because this was a very simple way to span a great space and also it gave us the kind of interior that we wished. This is a concrete shell which is three and a half inches thick and spans 120 feet each way and has these large ribs, however, at the back. There are several things wrong with the building. I don't like the way it comes down to the ground at the back. I realize now that we should have expressed the strong corners of the building in the rear facade, also in the front; but it's less conspicuous in the front since the ground is at the first floor level. But at the rear where it is three stories high it is very conspicuous and makes me very unhappy. There are other things that I learned from this building which to me are very interesting. I found that in working on the canopy, for instance, I realized that it would be interesting if we had some kind of an arched canopy. But scurrying between Detroit and St. Louis I wasn't able to find a real satisfactory solution for this idea that I had, and consequently went to a flat canopy which is normal and which is possibly modern, the "modern" thing to do. But now I know that it is very important that all buildings should be consistent, that this is the quality of the Gothic cathedral, for instance, that we like. That there is consistency completely through the building. And if we do not have this consistency then the building

lacks, and I look at the canopy, for instance, out in front and I feel very sad about the canopy. So what we have tried to do in our later buildings is to try to be completely consistent, as a painter is consistent or as a sculptor is consistent. Architecture also must be very consistent.

VH: Could you define that "consistency" a little more? It isn't a simple sort of consistency, just repetition, it's a little . . . some kind of integral . . .

MY: Yes. In other words, each piece of the building must look as though it was designed for that particular building. It must be consistent with the theme of the building. And if it is not, if we use a solution because it happens to be a particular cliché or an obvious way of doing something, then it looks like so many of our . . . the whole building falls apart. And so many of our buildings have this fault. If you look at the buildings, you'll find that one part looks as if it was designed by one man, and you go around and look at another facade and it looks as if it was designed by another man, you see. And a building must be like a human being. It must have a wholeness about it, something that is very important. And I think that this is something that we realize as we work on many buildings.

VH: Wasn't there one building there that you said there was an interesting story about?

MY: Oh, yes. The Benjamin Franklin Junior High School is a building which we do not have a model of, but we do have photographs. This building was a very interesting experience for me. At the time we started this design we had finished two other junior high schools and somehow had found them lacking, or I had found them lacking. So I happen to have a daughter who was of junior high school age at this time. And I watched her. I realized that she had changed very much from her elementary period. In other words, when she was in elementary school she was very much more interested in her teachers. And her conversation when she came home was much more about her teacher than about friends or about her studies. But suddenly, she abandoned all this and became very interested in her friends. And this, of course, accounts for the during-high-school-age telephone calls that are a problem of all parents. But knowing this, I talked to the superintendent of schools and asked him: "Shouldn't we somehow use this idea? Shouldn't we then enhance this by providing the students with a place to meet which is a valid and enjoyable place rather than to let them meet in locker-filled halls, for instance, where they get knocked down if they stand in the way, or sneaking off in a corner or a doorway and having quick snatches of conversation?" He thought, yes, this is very true, that if we could somehow increase the experience of the students by not only having valid academic studies but if the association with his or her friends was somehow looked upon -- was somehow encouraged by the school, then this should be a better total experience for the child. In the earlier schools I should say we had lounges here and there. But the lounges never worked because they're always in the wrong place. When the student wants to go to the lounge, they are too far away because all of these are one-story schools and there's a great deal of walking that goes on. So in this particular scheme, we gathered all the academic rooms together and we made blocks of homerooms. There are four blocks of homerooms where the academic studies go on. And then we took what I call the "activity" studies, such as homemaking, art, band, shop, gymnasium, -- library happens to be an all-school activity -- administration, and placed them all along one . . . all in one building, a separate building. And then we took the corridor which we had to have in this building and widened it. And where the locker-filled corridor that you find in a normal school is 12 feet wide, we made this 17 feet wide and we put a skylight over the whole corridor -- the whole space rather. So this then becomes a very pleasant space immediately. Then we took these "activity" classrooms, like the shop, and art, and homemaking, and so forth, and put large windows in these from the corridor and put display cases on the side -- in the glass rather. Then we put colorful signs which look like store signs on each. Art would have a great sign "ART" in color, and so forth. Then down the middle we put benches and display cases so that they would interrupt the flow of students, so that the students would go up and down either side and then it becomes a sidewalk, you see. And we called this "Main Street." So this is the Main Street or the public square of the school. Now, as the student goes from homeroom to gym, or homeroom to the library, or homeroom to shop, or homeroom to cafeteria, he always passes through this space. So they meet the whole student body in this space. This is the natural meeting space. You see, the student never goes from homeroom to homeroom. He always goes from homeroom to one of these rooms, you see. So this becomes the public square of the school. And this has worked very well. We are doing another junior high school for the same city and they asked that we put the "Main Street" in the second junior high school. But I feel that architecture, if we can make more valid our experiences in life, then it becomes somehow more significant than if we just do beautiful walls and windows. Okay?

VH: Yes. Why don't you choose another one?

MY: Let's talk about the Wayne Education Building. The Wayne Education Building was the first classroom building that we have done on the Wayne campus. And it was a very much different problem from the McGregor Building which, though the McGregor Building was a wonderful problem to work on, it was not the usual problem which faces one when one works on a university campus. Normally, you work on classroom buildings and there is less money to spend, and so forth, more rigid requirements. So we wanted to do a building that somehow kept the spirit of the building that we had started -- of the direction that we had started on the Wayne Campus,

which was the McGregor Building, and yet would come in at the square-foot price that the University wanted it to come in at. And so we chose this system of building which was a totally precast building. Only the central core of the building is poured in place -- concrete. And the rest of the building, the beams, the floors, the walls, everything, is precast. And will be fabricated in a shop elsewhere and brought on the site and just erected. Which is in line with the way that I think buildings should be built. Because, in this kind of climate, it is ridiculous for us to building buildings outdoors in the winter, for instance. We should build all the parts in the shop, made by machine, and we should bring them in to the site. And this is the future of building. So this was one point that we wanted to prove in this building. Beyond that, we wanted a kind of facade which would give us a quality of enrichment and excitement that would somehow balance the McGregor building which is across the street. So we worked out the system of "trees." And if you look at the model -- each column we call a "tree," and each column has brackets at each floor -- it has 3 floors, and the brackets then would hold the slab which bears against the column. And in this particular instance these "trees" are being cast in Dearborn and they will be precast out of this white aggregate surface of concrete in one piece 40 feet high and there will be 120 of these casts and when they are erected they will make the facade of the building which I think is great fun and it proved out to be very valid because the cost of the building is in line with all the other buildings on the campus. The Gothic quality of the building then is not because -- I like the Gothic arch, I'll be frank to admit -- but it has a valid reason for being. In other words, the brackets form the Gothic arch. I have been asked whether the repetition of the elements bothers me. And I am not sure. I'll tell you . . . I'll be sure when the building is finished. But I hope that it will come off. Let's see now.

VH: Yama, a number of your buildings seem to have in their shape -- you mentioned the Gothic arch, for instance -- they often seem to have a certain feeling of a past period about them. They have a quality, a decorative quality or something, that sometimes makes you think of another style, more likely Gothic or Oriental, than of Renaissance. But I wonder if you have any conscious feelings about the art of the past.

MY: You mean do I deliberately do . . . ? Yes, I think I do. In other words, I have no truck for anyone who goes out and does an eclectic building. I don't believe in this at all. I certainly would not take at any time and do a Gothic building, for instance, or copy a classic building. But if there is delight in the buildings of the past because they have this richness, for one thing, this enjoyment of shape and shadow, this silhouette, this variety of shapes, why should we in our age of technology, for instance, where the products that we have on the supermarket shelves or the five-and-ten shelves are of every form that you can think of, and all machine-made, why should we limit ourselves to a rectangular architecture? This makes no sense at all. We have machines that can do anything for us. The only thing that we have to be careful about is to have restraint and to have sensitive and serene buildings. I feel this is very important for us to have serene buildings because our civilization is chaotic as it is, you see; our whole machine age has brought about a chaos that has to be somehow counterbalanced, I think. And I think that the environment is one very strong way to counterbalance the chaotic nature of our life. And so I believe that the buildings should be very serene. But on the other hand, if we try to achieve serenity by only having rectangles around us, then this could be very boring. I think that a room filled with Mondrians would be really quite boring. I respect Mondrian as a sensitive man but I think that I would not like my life's experience to be only Mondrian. So consequently I think it's very important for us to learn from the past about the qualities that we seek in architecture. And the fact that some of the forms that I am now using have been used in the past bothers me not at all because I arrive at the form through a technological method. In other words, as long as I am convinced that I am true to technology, which I think is terribly important in our times, because unless we can express our technology, since technology is in a sense the backbone of our way of life in producing the physical elements of our living, then we must absolutely adhere to this technology. We cannot use handmade methods, for instance, in producing a building. If we do, then we're reverting, in a sense, you see. So I test all the buildings that I do by asking myself whether this building was possible, could have been built 50 years ago or a hundred years ago. I test myself deliberately this way. And I try very carefully to take the products, to take our buildings and in each instance make a very serious study of production because I don't believe that we can . . . I believe that we must understand the economy of the situation. Because, if we understand how a building is to be produced and we find a way that it can be more simply produced, then obviously we are contributing to building better buildings more easily. And this is a very important thing. So consequently I want to do two things, or three things really. I want to do very useful buildings and I would like to find a method of producing these buildings through our technology because I think that this is the only way that we will gain wonderful environment easily in the future. And, finally, these buildings must be totally beautiful. So these are in a sense the rules which we lay down to do buildings. So, if our buildings happen to use a form which was used in Gothic buildings, I am not bothered about it. And sometimes I'm criticized. But I think that if those who criticize us will look at the reason why the shape is this, well then, I think that they would not object so strenuously. For instance, at Oberlin the windows are pointed at top and bottom. By doing this . . . we are interested in rubber glazing in this building. In rubber glazing when you have a rectangular corner, a square corner, then you have to vulcanize at this corner, and vulcanizing is an expensive part of rubber glazing. The per-foot cost of rubber glazing is very low. But, when you vulcanize often, then it's very expensive. So consequently, if you have a window which is rectangular, you have four vulcanizings. Whereas when you have a pointed window top and bottom, you have two vulcanizings, you see. So technologically this becomes more

valid. Just because the international style decided that the rectangle was the symbol of modern architecture, I'm not convinced, you see. And I feel that we in our society should not be held by any such myth; that we should do everything we can to gain a delight and joy in our society with all the available parts of the palette.

VH: Have you felt any particular qualities in Japanese architecture, particularly Japanese houses, which appeal to you?

MY: Yes. Japanese architecture is very much copied in this country and in Europe. And we are told that it's a great influence for modern architecture. If you examine this, I think that you will find that it's the mechanics of Japanese architecture that have been thought of as the direct influence upon our architecture. In other words, such things as the simple use of post and beam which is used in our structures, or the integration of house and garden. But I don't believe that this is the part of Japanese architecture -- though I think this is very good and wonderful and I think all of us like to integrate our house and garden and the post and beam obviously is a very fine thing to copy -- I don't believe this is the quality of Japanese architecture which is the most important. I believe that Japanese architecture . . . in fact I think that this exists perhaps more in Asiatic architecture or Indian architecture and Japanese architecture than it does in any European architecture, and that is this quality of serenity. I think that . . . I am not an authority on Zen Buddhism but I know that the Zen monks in Japan deliberately sought this quality of serenity in this garden, in this place where they could meditate in a sense, where man could have the world around him in quiet and meditation and have meditation. So this quality of serenity is this seeking of balance somehow in architecture. It existed in Greek architecture, but I don't believe in any other European architecture. And this is very impressive to me. I'll give you a paper that I wrote on this, that I gave in New York. But I think that we can learn much from this because I think that though we cannot have this totally simple architecture that the Japanese can have; that so often we attempt to be histrionic in our architecture. We try to do stunts. We try to make buildings . . . we try to build buildings which, for lack of a better word, let's say, are streamlined. We build buildings which are terribly restless. And buildings don't go anywhere. They shouldn't be restless. And you have to visit a building every day. And this quality of being restless can be very detrimental, I believe, to people. I feel that our environment generally should be very quiet and restful and that people should be able to exert themselves, in other words, express themselves. In other words, if the environment is too noisy then perhaps a man becomes nothing. Whereas in a quiet background the person becomes the whole person. It's so in color, for instance. If you have white walls, human beings look better in a room than if you have red walls. Though periodically we must have excitement. Broadways are fine at times. And exciting buildings are fine periodically. I don't think that an airport building should be a particularly peaceful building. But, generally speaking, the buildings that are needed by our society must be serene buildings. So I think that this quality of Japanese architecture should be very thoroughly studied by modern architects.

VH: Do your buildings usually provide spaces which are appropriate for a display of art objects on their walls, for example? Very often I have heard the complaint that modern buildings sometimes leave no areas where you can display books or art objects which you might very well want to see and be in contact with. How do you feel about the presence of such extraneous . . . ?

MY: I have been criticized rather strenuously by painters and sculptors for not incorporating their work in our buildings. We have done so. Lee De Sell, for instance, did the doors in McGregor. But I have fairly strong feelings about this. I feel, first of all, that we are in an experimental time where we are trying to do machine-made buildings in a sense, machine-made building I admit which are richer perhaps at least in my attempts than others, but nevertheless they are machine-made buildings. And to incorporate into this machine-made building handmade sculpture is a very difficult thing to do. And it would take an extremely able sculptor to do this. You see, you just can't pick just anyone to incorporate his work into such a space. Now as far as murals are concerned, I almost dread the idea of attempting a space. For instance, in McGregor, I just can't imagine what a painter would do with a mural in McGregor. This bothers me tremendously. I like sculpture in gardens. The sculpture court that we did in McGregor obviously needs sculpture and I would like some really wonderful sculptor to do a fine piece for it. And we are working on this at the moment. But, nevertheless, the idea of incorporating sculpture into architecture at this time is a difficult thing to do. Whereas, in the Renaissance or in the Medieval architecture all the architecture was hand-made; it was hand-carved. Consequently an extension of this into sculpture was relatively easy. And I don't think that we can simply say that we must include sculpture or painting as a part of our architecture. I think it's up to the painters and sculptors to find a way in which they can be compatible with our buildings. And I think they are beginning to do so by such devices as the doors at McGregor and by Bertioia screens, or whatever, though I don't believe that they are fully mature examples. And what a really tremendous sculptor would do, I don't know. And I wonder whether it isn't the lesser sculptor and the lesser painter who really worries about this situation? I find so often that within these buildings which we do there are rooms in which we can have a lovely painting and the painting is the most important thing in the room. It is the room which would please me very much. But I don't see why we have to take a central hall, for instance, and use in it a sculpture or painting. I think it detracts, somehow. I feel that the painting ought to be looked at as a very important object. It shouldn't be lost within the architecture. Nor should the architecture be confused by the painting or sculpture. And so far I have not found a real answer for this. And so consequently I

avoid it.

VH: Do you like the Oriental idea, the Japanese idea, of keeping the art objects for the most part stored away except when . . . ?

MY: Yes, very much. Yes, very much. And I like the idea of change. Because I don't see why we should hang a painting on the wall and then just not think of it anymore because it's there like a piece of furniture. This is not right. I think it's much better to bring it out at times and think about it and love it and then put it away.

VH: Did we miss any buildings?

MY: Oh, yes.

VH: Let's see, Parke Davis.

MY: Daran.

VH: Do you want to say a few words about the ones we missed.

MY: There's a whole lot . . . a whole series of them.

VH: How about the Parke Davis Building?

MY: When are you going away?

VH: Not until the first week in August.

MY: August 6th or 7th, you said?

VH: Mhmm. We should be able to do something

MY: I have two weeks after I get back, you see. And I'm going to be away Monday and Tuesday after I get back, so we might be able to do more if you'd like to do this.

VH: I'll see what the technical possibilities are of the editing and the quality, and so forth. That's the important

MY: Otherwise, maybe I can give you written material.

VH: Maybe so. That would help. I think we've got a lot here already that we can take out, if it's suitable, you know; if it's technically usable. I think it will work very well.

MY: Again I say to you that I'm not . . . I'm sure that someone else could state this much more easily than I do.

VH: Oh, no. I like to have your comments. I think that's very good. Tell me, there is one photograph at least, isn't there, of a house? And could you say something about your feelings about building houses? Your present emphasis on . . . ?

MY: Why don't we do a house? Is that what you're asking?

VH: Yes. You mentioned . . . comment on your whole attitude toward houses.

MY: I don't know whether I want to say that publicly. If you turn off the machine, I'll tell you.

VH: We won't record it then. All right. But it is principally, as you mentioned before, that you just don't want to get involved . . . ?

MY: Well, why don't you turn off the machine and we'll talk about it? I have had to limit myself in a sense to what I am physically able to do. I can't do everything obviously although sometimes I know that all of us wish that we could. So I have decided very pointedly in a sense to limit myself to buildings which are used by many people. And in these buildings I would like to, as much as I am able to, impart a sense of beauty. I feel that we have neglected this aspect of life for so long and that if many of us work for this today when we are changing from the materialistic society that we have been to one which is interested in the cultural aspects of life more, if we intensely try to contribute to this area, then our world is going to be a better world. And where can it count most than in public buildings? And therefore I try to stay away from commissions which limit me to private areas. Now that sounds like too much for one person to do, I'm sure, but I think that we have to follow our own beliefs.

VH: Could you say a few words about anything especially interesting about the Daran Air Terminal? Were there any amusing stories or any particular problems that . . . ?

MY: Yes, the Daran Air Terminal is a terminal which is to be given by the United States government to the Kingdom of Arabia. It is to be built on a desert, as all of Arabia is. While I was there the temperature was 130 degrees. It's a very difficult place in which to build buildings. So what we had hoped to do was to be able to precast the whole building outside the country and to just simply erect it in Arabia. And I am not sure yet how the contractor is going to do this, but the building is under construction. I don't believe he has still decided how he will do the superstructure of the building. There was a deliberate attempt to set a Moorish character or Arabian character in the building because we felt that an Arabian building should look Arabic. Curiously enough, 99% of the buildings in Arabia are patterned after European modern buildings -- and very bad patterns. So that the rather Arabian-looking building that we are constructing will be all by itself in Arabia. But interestingly enough, the King and the principal leaders of Arabia were delighted with the fact that we had designed an Arabian-looking building. The Arabian look was very easy to obtain because, if the structural process is examined, it is built of a system of rigid frames which form this Arabic arch and the panels will be precast in pieces and the design on the surface are stiffening ribs to the panels. So this is a very logical system of construction. In contrast to the St. Louis Terminal, the international terminal has totally different requirements because of the fact that you have the customs spaces -- I'm trying to think of the . . . you have a variety of small spaces which are necessary to the terminal, such as transit. The transit people have to wait in a small space, you have a transit waiting room, you have a transit dining room, you have a customs room, and so forth. It's not possible to have a large space as in St. Louis. The control affects the design very much. This is why we chose the 40 by 40 bay rather than a great shell, for instance. The very interesting thing I think about this terminal is the fact that the domestic terminal is very much smaller than the international terminal. But since the domestic terminal is used by Arabs and the international terminal mostly by Americans, since a ramp goes there, it became very important to have equal entrances to these contrasting sides of the terminal. And so we solved this by having an oasis in the middle of the building. You drive into the oasis and so the entrances look equal.

VH: We just made it.

[END OF TAPE]