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Oral history interview with Wendell Castle,
1981 June 3-December 12

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Wendell Castle on June 3, August 13 and 15, and December 12, 1981. The interview took place in Scottsville, NY, and was conducted by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

[Reel 1, Side A.] [Side B blank.]

[Note: The transcription draft was made using 30-minute cassettes duplicated from the original reel-to-reel tapes. One of these tapes was wound incorrectly, resulting in an out-of-order interview. This final draft follows the order of the original interview.]

WENDELL CASTLE: As I say, I did have some talent. I did do more drawing than the average child. All little kids draw, but when you get up a little older, kids begin to draw a little less, and I drew but never had any help, any lessons or anything.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this in a small, quite a small town?

MR. CASTLE: A town of a couple thousand.

MR. BROWN: Couple thousand.

MR. CASTLE: Holten, Kansas.

MR. BROWN: Holten.

MR. CASTLE: But I moved in the sixth grade to a slightly larger town. They didn't have any art classes either, but they did have a shop class in the seventh grade. That's the closest thing I had to an art class. I had what I consider now to be a good shop class in the seventh grade--and I made some furniture in the seventh grade. I never made any again until I was 28.

MR. BROWN: But you took it at that time.

MR. CASTLE: I liked it.

MR. BROWN: As you look back, you liked it in the seventh grade?

MR. CASTLE: Oh, yeah, I liked it a lot and excelled in it, but no one, including the teacher, I think, ever gave any thought to anybody pursuing that as a career, beyond being an industrial arts teacher. That was the only direction that anyone ever mentioned to me that if you had an interest in making things out of wood the possible career options were industrial arts teacher or manual training teacher, I think they called it then. That didn't interest me.

MR. BROWN: What were your family's--they had goals for you? Were they a middle-class family?

MR. CASTLE: It was assumed that I would go to college. You know, my mother and father had both gone to college, and it was assumed that I would go to college. I don't think I ever knew what I wanted to be.

MR. BROWN: Did they have any art interest, as you look back? Your mother or your father?

MR. CASTLE: No. They didn't have any artistic ability. My grandmother on my father's side probably had some artistic ability. Never had a chance to do much with it. She did a lot of sort of I don't know what you would call it, when you make a picture by stitching--

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah. Needlework or--

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, a type of it--but invented her own.

MR. BROWN: Things that she did--

MR. CASTLE: The things she did weren't from a kit. They were native, folk art kind of things, but she had some

talent for that. But I can't think of anybody else in my family. So the thought of any art career, of course, never entered anybody's mind, including my own.

MR. BROWN: Were you encouraged in your studies and all, and were you a pretty good student?

MR. CASTLE: No, very average student. I didn't really get any good grades until I was in college, and even then not in the beginning. Late in college I had good grades. I just had very average grades.

MR. BROWN: But you had a good childhood. You liked it. Very happy childhood?

MR. CASTLE: No, I'd say it's sort of somewhere in the middle. I wouldn't say it was happy and I wouldn't say it was unhappy. Then my problem was that and probably still is that I'm really not going to put a whole lot of effort into something unless I'm absolutely sure I'm going to do real well at it. And I don't think I was ever sure of that, of anything, until I got into art. Because, I don't know, I'm just not a--I guess I'm not a hard worker in that sense. I think I've worked hard now, put in lots of hours, but until I was sure that I was going to be good at it, it just didn't seem like any effort was worth it.

MR. BROWN: When did you go to college?

MR. CASTLE: Right out of high school in 1951.

MR. BROWN: You went to the University of Kansas?

MR. CASTLE: No. I went to a school called Baker University. I think because of my lack of direction and commitment to any particular field, I was encouraged by--well, it's a church related school. It's a Methodist school, and some other people from my home town had gone to that school, and my parents thought that would be a nice place to go. I think that they thought it was safe there, so I was encouraged to go there. And not having any particular direction in mind, went there, not even knowing what I wanted to take.

I ended up in engineering. Of course, I don't know why. And probably had about all C's, not much motivation in going to school, although I liked college. I liked being in college.

MR. BROWN: You were pretty sociable?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I wasn't in the beginning, but I ended up in a fraternity, which was very helpful in making me sociable, which I probably wouldn't have been otherwise, and that's probably an advantage of going to a small school. It's more difficult for somebody to be an outsider because you get included a little more. So that was probably a lucky move there, being in a fraternity that did a lot of sociable things. In fact, that's probably the first time I got sort of roped into doing artistic things, because fraternities would have parties and somebody had to do the decoration or have a float, and I had a little bit of interest there, so I got pushed into that. [They laugh.] And did well at that. Won some prizes, I remember. Floats and decorations for the fraternity. And then I changed to business, which in your freshman year doesn't mean much of a change. This particular school everybody takes more or less the same thing. I think the only engineering subject I had at all was some math. And stayed at that school one semester the second year. The second semester this--no, I came back the second year, I had no major, and took an art course, and the art instructor--well, that was the first time I guess that I'd ever been the best in the class at something before I knew it. And he encouraged me to change schools and go to a school that had a good art program. And the University of Kansas has the biggest art program in Kansas. The Kansas City Art Institute in retrospect it would have been a better place to go, but nobody mentioned that and I wasn't too big about researching things. Plus it probably would have been too expensive. I couldn't have afforded it anyway. University of Kansas, being a Kansas resident, was cheap, cheaper than Baker. I mean, I went to a bigger and better school for less money. And it was close. So second semester of my sophomore year I changed schools and got into--well, really not an art program. Because my parents weren't very happy about that move at all.

MR. BROWN: Really? Did they think that you might go down the drain there?

MR. CASTLE: No, art being--

MR. BROWN: Oh, art.

MR. CASTLE: Well, two things. They weren't real happy about me going to the University of Kansas for two reasons, one they--there's two big schools in Kansas. There's Kansas State and there's Kansas University, and they're like rivals. And my parents both went to Kansas State, so they would have been quite happy if I'd gone to Kansas State; that would have been okay. But going to Kansas University was not so great. Plus taking art. So I ended up with kind of a compromise situation, to take industrial design, which was in the art school and an art program, but yet in my parents' eyes it led to employment, because you were kind of like an engineer or you

were kind of like somebody who worked in industry, and that all kind of seemed okay.

MR. BROWN: In fact, how did you find the program?

MR. CASTLE: It was all right. I liked it. I mean, it had enough art in it and enough drawing that I liked it fine.

MR. BROWN: What was a program in industrial design? You mentioned drawing and all, but did they start out with--with what?

MR. CASTLE: Well, it was nine tenths an art program. You had to take one or two math courses and an engineering drawing course, and they made you take a few shop courses--engineering type shop courses, which of course I liked fine, too. So I liked all the program.

MR. BROWN: What was an engineering type shop course? What would you do in that?

MR. CASTLE: Well, they made you take a foundry shop, a sheet metal shop, and a wood shop. In fact, I'd be interested in seeing my grades now. As I remember, I did terrible in the wood part and did well in the others. I think that's because it was not the kind of program--it was like an industrial arts thing. There was nothing creative about it at all. You just kind of went in and did what project they told you to do. It was a one-hour course. It was like a waste of time really.

MR. BROWN: Wasn't enough time and you weren't--

MR. CASTLE: It wasn't set up for anybody to learn anything other than the names of the tools, and a few things. You didn't really learn anything.

MR. BROWN: But what in the industrial design program did you really take to?

MR. CASTLE: Well, in the end what I ended up taking to is the fact that the industrial design program had a shop. But that didn't happen in the beginning. In the beginning I took to the drawing courses. I loved all the drawing courses anything from nature drawing to mechanical drawing. All those--I excelled in the drawing courses. And I took all of my electives all through about the first--well, it made my college years--It made me take five years to get a degree because the first year was totally wasted. So it was like starting all over again. But I got credit for my English and history and a few things like that, so I ended up having to go to college five years, which meant I had extra time. There was no way I could do it in--well, I probably could have done it in four, but I didn't try. So I had a lot of extra time and I took all the drawing courses. And the art department there at that time I think it still is, I'm not sure was divided in two parts: what they considered the design department and what they considered the fine arts department. And for some strange reason sculpture was in the design department. [Laughs.] But industrial design that's industrial design, interior design, graphic design, illustration, ceramics, silversmithing those were the only two crafts--no, they had weaving. Three craft courses. They were all in the design department. Printmaking and painting were the fine arts department. But you could go back and forth, so I took all of my electives in the fine arts department. So I got figure drawing and watercolor and all those kind of things, so I had a lot of that a lot more than any of the other industrial design people.

MR. BROWN: Was much of it well taught as you look back?

MR. CASTLE: The drawing was well taught. Had I been more knowledgeable about what was going on in the field of art, I probably wouldn't have been happy with the drawing because it was old-fashioned, academic drawing. But it was exactly the right thing as far as I'm concerned.

MR. BROWN: Oh, you mean, you studied simple volumes or even work with plaster casts?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, you'd draw from--they had an antique drawing course, is what they called it. The room was filled with plaster casts of all the Greek statues, and you'd go in and draw. And that's a fabulous course. That all got tossed out. Very shortly after I finished, that was considered to be antique and that stuff was all thrown away.

MR. BROWN: Now I've heard a number of other artists exclaim that such courses were very good. Why do you think that antique drawing course was?

MR. CASTLE: I think those things are somewhat easier to draw than drawing from life. They pick up shadows and shape. You can see the shapes because of the way they'll pick up shadows. And you can go to it anytime you want to.

MR. BROWN: That's right. It's not moving.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, they're interesting things to draw: nice fabric folds and things, and the faces and are

interesting faces, and the lighting's always real nice on them, you know, mostly plaster color. Other than that, I don't know why they'd be good to draw.

MR. BROWN: Originally, I guess they were thought to be exceptionally beautiful forms.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, well, I don't think that meant anything to me. I think it's just a good practice--I thought of drawing as practice learning how to draw.

MR. BROWN: And would you carry your drawing to a high state of finish?

MR. CASTLE: Not by the standards that people do today with taking drawing to a photo realism looknot that far. In fact, I was better at the shorter term drawings. I tended to ruin them if I spent--I could put it down and get the essence of the drawing rather quickly. And didn't excel so much if I had to take it to a photo look.

MR. BROWN: And the same applied in nature drawing or life drawing as well, where the subject was not as stationary?

MR. CASTLE: Well, no, we went to--they had a--now what was that one called? We'd go to the Natural Science Museum and draw all the stuffed birds, all that kind of stuff. And as far as I'm concerned that was a good course. And then there was--what was the other drawing called, where they do--the drawing course where they set up still life. We didn't get any sympathy or any credit for being creative. They wanted the drawing to look like it was supposed to, look like what you were drawing.

MR. BROWN: And that was okay with you. That was the--

MR. CASTLE: Well, at that time I didn't know.

MR. BROWN: --acceptable goal.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, I liked it. And, yeah, I didn't know any different kind of drawing existed. So I was real happy with that. And particularly happy with it because I could do it.

MR. BROWN: This would've been the first time then that you were doing very well. You were excelling.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, I mean suddenly I was getting A's in school.

MR. BROWN: Did you in your figure drawing have quick sketches, where you had to force yourself--

MR. CASTLE: Real quick, like thirty seconds, stuff like that.

MR. BROWN: You could get the essence and then--

MR. CASTLE: Yeah. I could do that real well. I've sort of lost it now. It's been--it has to do--it's a frame of mind, and I could get back in it I'm sure, but I've done figure drawing a little bit in recent times and I'm not as good at it as I was then. But I think it's just kind of getting your mind set around it and everybody else is doing it. Now I feel self-conscious because I'm usually doing it in a group of students and I feel like I'm the teacher. And I think it puts you in a different--you're not able to do it then.

MR. BROWN: I know what you mean. As you look back, all that drawing you took was a very good means of training that you later applied?

MR. CASTLE: I mean, that's what I think I got out of school, learning to draw. But learning to draw is learning to visualize; it's kind of the same thing. There's sort of--there was also the industrial design type of drawing we had, too, which was learning western perspective, and how to visualize things, and how to make flashy renderings.

MR. BROWN: So that others can see how they were supposed to work.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, so the two worked together. Like one is being able to draw what's in your head and make it look real, and the other thing is drawing what you see, being able to make it look real. And they're awful close to the same thing.

MR. BROWN: Well, most of what you had to do at Kansas was drawing what you see, wasn't it?

MR. CASTLE: In the courses, except for this three-dimensional--not 3-D, the perspective drawing course.

MR. BROWN: Where then you could use your imaginationI mean, within limits.

MR. CASTLE: Well, actually in the course we didn't even use our imagination then. What the course was

supposed to teach you to do was to design your own washing machine or automobile or whatever, and those were of course drawings you made up.

MR. BROWN: So when--you finished your undergraduate program in '56 or so?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I had an interruption in the middle. At that time the Korean War was on, and I had gotten--when I went to college I'd gotten a four-year deferment. I only had a four-year deferment. And it was going to take me five years to finish college. So I decided that it'd be better to go into the army not after four years of college with one left, but after three. And what was happening at that time was that--more or less what happened as soon as you got--you kept getting drafted, but you could take your draft notice to the school registrar who would then write your draft board and saying you were a full-time student, and then you would be exempt from the draft for a certain length of time. Well, I got drafted once and I just didn't do that. I said I'm just let them draft me. So I let them draft me after three years of college. And so I was almost two years in the army.

MR. BROWN: Was that wasted time for you, as you look at it?

MR. CASTLE: Well, part of it. But I ended up with a year of that in Germany, so the year in Germany was not wasted.

MR. BROWN: Why is that?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I did a lot of drawing. I ended up getting--I was given a job as a messenger/clerk and sent to Germany as a messenger/clerk at a place where they had a job for two messenger/clerks, but had a hundred of them there, so you didn't do anything. And I happened to found out that the battalion artist every battalion had an artist there was leaving, and managed to get that job as battalion artist. So I spent almost a year in Germany as battalion artist, which was a real nice job. You see, nobody knew what a battalion artist was supposed to they didn't really need an artist so you'd make an illustration or two for the battalion newspaper, or you'd make signs for the mess hall, or decorate the officer's club for a party. And it wasn't any real artwork, but it was a good thing. And I ended up going around drawing a lot, just from landscape drawings and stuff. Plus it was just interesting to be in Germany.

MR. BROWN: But you were able to keep your sensitivity, your drawing going?

MR. CASTLE: The second year I got--yeah, the first year I don't think I got anything accomplished. It was a total waste of time, but the second year I got--you know, I'd get out for several hours of drawing a week, which isn't bad. It's better what than what I'm doing right now actually as far as going out and doing still life drawing. I get in several hours a week but not still life.

MR. BROWN: And you find that that's the sort of thing that disciplines you and helps you keep seeing?

MR. CASTLE: Um hmm, yeah.

MR. BROWN: And then when you came back to Kansas, was that about '56 or '7 you came back to the university?

MR. CASTLE: Um hmm, yeah.

MR. BROWN: And you just went and resumed your--

MR. CASTLE: I resumed my--

MR. BROWN: For two more years.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Well, then did you leave the university after those two years?

MR. CASTLE: No, I didn't. Well, actually I did. I took a job when I graduated, as an industrial designer in Orlando, Florida, under very strange conditions. A fellow I'd gotten real friendly with in the army who also came back and went to Kansas University, a really brilliant guy was interested in being involved in the space program, and there had been a lecturer on campus from a government project in Florida that was involved in space research that this guy had met, and became friendly with, and got offered a job. Because he graduated at the same time I did. And this guy, named Dr. T.C. Helby, was one of these German scientist types, and I was a bit suspicious of him, whether he was for real or not. He had a very--

[Knock on the door.] Yeah?

But anyway, I ended up--well, he was putting together a team, a research team, for a project that they had

government money for, to do research on the feasibility of a moon--it was a moon base project. I'm not sure whether you call it feasibility, but anyway they were doing research.

MR. BROWN: In the real early stages.

MR. CASTLE: Well, no, they hadn't even gotten a mouse off the ground yet.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, that's right.

MR. CASTLE: This was pretty early. They were shooting up rockets but, you know, they weren't getting very high and most of them were going right into the ocean. And it wasn't anything I had that much interest in, but I really never figured out what I wanted to do when I graduated anyway, and so they offered me a job because they figured they could use a designer on this project. They had a budget, I guess, you know, just--he could have anybody he wanted to hire he could justify. Never really figured out why they wanted me to be on this thing, but I ended up doing nothing but illustrations really. I did illustration work.

MR. BROWN: This was about 1957, '58?

MR. CASTLE: No, this is fifty--this is '58. So I moved to Florida to Orlando to work on this thing, but I didn't stay very long because it just didn't make any sense to me, all this stuff. So--

MR. BROWN: So you went back?

MR. CASTLE: I didn't--well, actually by the time I graduated, I'd already decided I didn't really want to be an industrial designer. I had learned enough about it at that point to--well, I think what had happened--I should back up.

What had happened is another elective I had to take--you had to take a craft elective as an industrial designer, too, and I took silversmithing, and I really liked that enough that I even at one point considered being a silversmith, but then decided I didn't really want to be a silversmith. But I'd been introduced to the fact of designing, and making and selling had been introduced to me at that point.

MR. BROWN: And this was just a one-term course?

MR. CASTLE: Well, it was required one term, and I took an extra one. Like I said, because of having an extra year in school to meet some of my requirements--like my industrial design, I had to have four years of industrial design. There was no way I could accelerate those courses, even though I was ahead in English and some history and things. So I had extra time, and I even stayed some summers and went to--I took a lot of extra--I have enough college credits to have a doctor's degree. I got my doctor's degree honorarily [laughs], but I do have enough college credits for that; I took so many extra things.

MR. BROWN: Who taught silversmithing, do you recall?

MR. CASTLE: Carlisle Smith. Who is pretty good. That department turned out good people, several of which are well-known silversmiths today: Bob Ebendorf and [L.] Brent Kington, another one or two. They turned out some top silversmiths, who are all in the east now, but--

MR. BROWN: But you had something of a gift for that, did you?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, I did very well at that. Also, another fellow who taught was a second man under Carlisle Smith named Monty Montgomery--I think his real name's George who was very helpful to me. He was a younger teacher, and he was involved in silversmithing. Really encouraged me in the silversmithing and encouraged me in my drawing thought I did interesting drawings. He was one of the faculty who was--even though I never had a course from him, he probably had as much influence on me as any instructor I had.

MR. BROWN: Was it the way he taught? Is that what did it?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I never had a class from him. He just was interested. He just had a lot of interest in what I was doing.

MR. BROWN: And he'd come around to you?

MR. CASTLE: Come around and offer a lot of encouragement.

MR. BROWN: What sort of things were you able to do in that short time? Flatware? Raised anything?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, I raised--

MR. BROWN: What kind of style were they working in?

MR. CASTLE: Oh, what I did was not very creative, I'll have to say. Some people did pretty well. I think Montgomery's things were pretty good, now I look back. What I did was not all that great. But I didn't take enough that I was more concerned with technique, but got involved in, you know, soldering and fabrication, some forging, raising, casting. Did all those things. Made a lot of rings. God, I even had a little ring business going making fraternity rings.

But anyway, by the time I graduated I wasn't real hot on being an industrial designer, because I knew at that point what you did was go work in an office and end up drawing handles on a washing machine by the hundreds. And there was no reason that they would even make any of those handles. I just knew that was going to be frustrating.

MR. BROWN: Be very confining.

MR. CASTLE: That you weren't going to get to start out at the top. You weren't going to be designing automobiles or anything. You were going to be designing knobs on the front of stereos. So I just really never looked for a job in industrial design. This one that I got, got offered me. I wasn't really going to make any effort to find one. In fact, I'm not really sure what I intended to do at that point. I guess I intended just to hang around school a little longer. But anyway I didn't really like the job in Florida all that much, although it was a comfortable job and paid well.

MR. BROWN: You got a job where? At Florida, you say?

MR. CASTLE: What's that?

MR. BROWN: You got a job--which job was this?

MR. CASTLE: In Orlando, Florida.

MR. BROWN: Oh, the Florida job.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: That's where I went after graduating, with my undergraduate degree.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. CASTLE: I got a B.F.A. undergraduate degree, and immediately after graduation went to Florida. But after three months there I thought that job was pretty silly. And since I wasn't particularly interested in space, it really just seemed to me that they were--all the stuff that they did didn't make any sense at all. And I still think maybe it didn't make any sense. [Laughs.] Because they were doing this research on--there was a psychologist on the team and, oh, a few other people, research people. They were trying to figure out, if you send somebody to a moonbase how long could they stay? How many people would be there? Could there be males and females? What would they do? What would the place look like? And all this other stuff.

MR. BROWN: It was too pie-in-the-sky for you.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah. Yeah, I was more interested in something that meant something, that was real. So I decided to just go back to school. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: What, and get, would you get a graduate degree?

MR. CASTLE: To get a--I had been offered actually when I graduated a graduate assistantship, and somehow I still got it. It didn't get taken by somebody else. I don't know why it didn't. Which really meant I could go to school for free because I had the GI Bill too, so I actually ended up making a little money going to school, because they give me a half-time teaching job. And so I could teach, and I was going to teach drawing, which would turn out to be a real good thing because I really learned how to do perspective drawing and explain it. I taught perspective drawing to freshmen, and I also taught a basic design course, which was a kind of silly course. Learning what color goes with what other color and what shape. But there was a textbook that I was told to follow, so I didn't have to think the course out. Didn't really believe in that course. I believed in the drawing course.

MR. BROWN: Did you enjoy teaching?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I really liked that.

MR. BROWN: What is it about teaching that you liked?

MR. CASTLE: I don't know. It was a fair amount of work at the time, but I liked it better than anything else I guess, what the other options were. You didn't have to work very many hours a week, and it was rewarding, doing something that I found interesting.

MR. CASTLE: I don't know. This worked out pretty well. But I went back and started a master's degree in industrial design. I don't know why I did that.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, because you weren't too keen on it.

MR. CASTLE: But I guess that's where the graduate assistantship was, that's why. But after one semester I got it switched into sculpture. Because they were in the same department, I could keep teaching industrial design to people. Only industrial design people took that perspective drawing course, that's who took it. So I just kept teaching that, but I got switched into sculpture, which worked a lot better. Again, I didn't have anything particularly in mind that I wanted to do with it but.. ..

MR. BROWN: Did you know something about their program there in sculpture?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: You did know.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, I had been in close contact with it, so I knew exactly what it was.

MR. BROWN: What was it like at that time, their sculpture--

MR. CASTLE: It had one very unusual aspect. The University of Kansas sculpture department was the first college in this country that had a foundry--bronze-casting foundry and that aspect interested me, so I got involved in bronze casting. A fellow named Eldon Teft was the sculpture teacher, with another sculptor there named "Poco" Frazier, Bernard Poco Frazier, who was sculptor-in-residence. He didn't actually teach any courses. They were both left over from the WPA sculpture days.

MR. BROWN: They just kind of stayed on, or what?

MR. CASTLE: Well, no, I mean that's their style. That's where they sort of left off--where their creative activity got them. Eldon Taft had worked with Loreda. No, I'm sorry, it was the other way around. Poco Frazier had worked with Loreda Taft in Chicago. So he was into climbing up on the side of big granite buildings and carving a covered wagon and horses pulling it, and all that kind of stuff. Amazing in the terms of the technical, enormous size of some of his pieces. He was quite an amazing guy. He didn't make very interesting shapes, but he could manage to do quite amazing things. Eldon Taft's specialty was portrait work and casting in bronze. I think that's probably why the foundry got built, so he could cast his portraits, because he'd do portraits of all the benefactors of the university and that sort of stuff.

MR. BROWN: Were they fairly good?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, they had a nice quality. He would do--I don't know what style you'd call that, where you ball clay up in tiny balls, stick it on, and do all the modeling by addition. So you're never cutting back in form. You don't know any name for that way of working?

MR. BROWN: [Shakes head no.]

MR. CASTLE: He was good at that.

MR. BROWN: It sort of worked a little like Jacob Epstein's things.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, so that everybody had a bad complexion. But he could catch the look of people real well. But he was open-minded enough that you could do whatever you wanted to in the classes. And they had fairly good equipment.

MR. BROWN: In fact, what sort of things did you do?

MR. CASTLE: A little of everything.

MR. BROWN: You were very inventive, or did you do portraits, or reliefs?

MR. CASTLE: Everything. I did portraits, and I guess from his lead I got a few commissions even. Did fairly well in portraits. Not that style. I could never get into the style that he--I liked to push the clay around with a clay tool. I didn't like that additive method, but I could do realistic portraits and did some of those for commission.

Worked with wood in an additive way then as--actually Poco Frazier was the guy who introduced me to bent laminations. He was doing some work in bent laminations, and he knew I was doing some work in wood. Suggested that at one point. I'd been working just with logs, taking a chainsaw and cutting them up and putting them together in different ways.

[Audio break.]

MR. BROWN: So you--

MR. CASTLE: I didn't do anything that could be considered very significant, but I did a fair amount of volume. I loved to work and I worked hard and did a lot, and I got some local awards in shows and things. But what I was doing was going all over the place with different kinds of forms. I was doing some abstract work, some realistic figure work, and some real abstract figure work that hardly looked like a figure at all. Carving wood, casting bronze, and welding steel. Didn't do any stone carving.

MR. BROWN: You were really given a free hand, then, to learn technique and style.

MR. CASTLE: You could really--yeah, you really weren't--in the graduate program it was totally unstructured. They didn't give you any assignments or ask for any deadlines just gave you a review now and then. And because I was working hard and turning out a lot of stuff, I got good reviews.

MR. BROWN: Where did your awareness of, say, contemporary sculpture come from? Looking at the art magazines?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, well, I had access to Art in America, Art News, and whatever there was at the time. I forget now the magazines. So, you know, people always see who'd been big in the fifties: William Chadwick, Reg Butler, Henry Moore--English sculptors. American sculptors like David Smith, [Theodore] Roszak, [Jacques] Lipchitz--I don't know, all the work that was happening in the '50s, I was aware of that kind of work.

MR. BROWN: And you'd give it a try or something like that?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, I sort of gave it a try, all these various things. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: How long were you in the sculpture program?

MR. CASTLE: It was a two year program.

MR. BROWN: Did you exhibit at this time?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: You mentioned this Kansas Designer Craftsman Show. Was this something you would have been involved with?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, that was actually not sculpture, though. That was a crafts show. But at the same time I was beginning to get interested in furniture at this same period and made a few pieces. Even though I left the industrial design department and went to the sculpture department, because of being a faculty I got to have the key so I could use the industrial design shop, which is a nicer shop if you wanted to make any furniture in.

MR. BROWN: What do you think prompted you to make furniture?

MR. CASTLE: I really don't know exactly. In sculpture I had made a piece--I was piecing together odd shapes of wood, an abstract kind of form that had a horizontal piece that you could sit on.

[Audio break.]

MR. CASTLE: I got a fair amount of mileage out of that piece. I entered it in a few shows. It was one of these hybrid pieces, which was neither furniture nor sculpture. But that was like in--this was like 1961 when those hybrid things didn't exist like they do now. They're all over the place.

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah. Was this from a laminated wood?

MR. CASTLE: No, it was pieced together. Joinery. And in some ways it was closer to what I'm interested in right

now. It had ivory inlays on it, which is exactly what I'm just about to do again. I haven't done it since.

MR. BROWN: A sense of the luxury and the different textures, probably?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I think it came about through a practical--since the horizontal bar I spoke of is too high to put your feet on the floor, I incorporated a foot rest in it, and it had like crutches to put your arms in. Well, like, I inlaid the footrest with ivory. That gave it--that thing echoes; is it going? [referring to the tape recorder.] So it [the footrest] wouldn't wear. And then I guess I had the ivory. I put it a few other places, decoratively, on the piece. It was walnut and ivory. It was a nice combination. But it had some presence, the piece, and it was a--I remember I think the first show, it was in the--the Nelson Art Gallery in Kansas City has a jurored show every year. I got that piece in that show.

MR. BROWN: As sculpture?

MR. CASTLE: As sculpture. Yeah, they didn't have a craft section. And then a year later the piece was in a show in New York as furniture at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts. And I'm getting ahead of myself in time then, but that piece got a fair amount of notice then, so I got a lot of--that's the kind of first piece that had any importance, in leading in a direction. But it didn't--I guess I didn't take the lead the way I should have at that point. What it suggested to me at the time was that perhaps furniture was interesting. So then, of course, I went to the library and looked up furniture books to see what other people were doing in furniture. And of course most of the books you looked at this was '61 were actually books from the late '50s, and any book that said what's the latest thing going on in furniture, it was Scandinavian furniture. That was the thing that was going on in furniture with a few other things of American contract furniture like Herman Miller and Knoll [Associates] were doing.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

MR. CASTLE: Some people were doing some good work for them, so I got slightly interested in Scandinavian furniture, and my work digressed really then, because I actually made a few pieces that were highly derivative of Scandinavian furniture. That direction was dropped very shortly.

MR. BROWN: Why do you suppose you did it?

MR. CASTLE: I don't know. I suddenly--I think I tend to react whenever something going--and I don't know why I didn't take--well, I guess the sculpture direction, that was pretty far out. Perhaps I wasn't quite capable of realizing the ramifications of that one yet. It was like nobody was doing that, and I wasn't able to read into that piece those possibilities. What I read into it was out of wood you can make some kind of interesting things that are furniture, and I thought the Scandinavian furniture, some of it like Finn Juhl and Hans [Venyur] was quite sculptural and quite beautiful, and that perhaps that kind of vocabulary could lead to some interesting forms. And so I made a few pieces that way, that were made not knowing much about cabinet making, but trying to make--I tried my best to make them more or less right, and they weren't bad. But that direction was a dead end, and I realized that very quickly that they were doing it and had been doing it for years and really were better at it and way ahead of what I could do.

So then after about three or four of those I got back to where the Scribe Stool--that's what I called that--

MR. BROWN: That walnut/ivory piece.

MR. CASTLE: --that walnut/ivory piece. Got back to those kind of forms and made a coffee table and another chair, that was more like a chair, that carried on those kind of forms. They were forms--best be described as unrelated to structure kind of forms, with rather than leg going from the table down to the floor in the most direct manner, these took very indirect ways of getting there. And not--and that I worked with the rest of the time in Kansas. There weren't too many more pieces like that. Probably in Kansas there were--it was only at most 10 pieces of furniture three of which, as I remember now, had this interesting direction where they were probably more sculptural than functional.

MR. BROWN: Did you exhibit those?

MR. CASTLE: In the Kansas Designer Craftsman's Show, I exhibited a number of these pieces, including the Scandinavian ones, even.

MR. BROWN: What kind of reactions were you getting to these pieces?

MR. CASTLE: Fairly good, actually. I don't know why. I ended up even selling some of them. Of course, they were pretty cheap. I can't remember what they were, but--

MR. BROWN: But you were pretty excited about maybe continuing, particularly in a more sculpturesque direction?

MR. CASTLE: I was interested in continuing furniture in the sculptural direction, but I had a terrible problem, which is still a problem I suppose for some people. But I felt that that was like an inferior artistic activity. And that bothered me quite a bit.

MR. BROWN: Making furniture.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, even though I had sort of done in a sense better at that than I had at the--in terms of a meaningful direction into something that was really unique and not--those pieces weren't derivative of anything. And any of the sculpture work I had done you could say was derivative of this or that person. But in spite of that, I really felt like I really wanted to be a sculptor, and I think it was more because in the hierarchy of art forms, that was a higher art form. I can't think of any other reason why, because I think I must have been able to analyze my work at that point and realize that in furniture I had--maybe I wasn't able to realize that.

I had also at this same time met the first actual woodworker-sculptor or whatever you want to call him. I met Wharton Esherick at this point. Some time--I can't remember--some time during graduate school about--I'd say--I said I was in graduate--I was there three years in grad school, not two. It was a two-year program, but because of teaching I was there three years. I was there '59, '60, and '61; three years in the graduate program. I think it was in '59--yeah, in the spring of '59, yeah, that I met Wharton Esherick. Not really met him, but I was at his place. I don't think he was too happy to see me, but a roommate of mine and I, a fellow named Cooper Woodring, who was an industrial designer, had gone to New York during spring vacation. Some of his relatives lived all up and down the coast several places in Connecticut and in Massachusetts and Delaware. We went a bunch of places. And I had remembered I think I was the one that was interested in the artists, not him, that [Alexander] Calder lived in Roxbury, Connecticut, and from looking at the map where we were going to go, we were going to go right back by Roxbury, Connecticut. And I don't think I had the guts to drop in on an artist, but this very friend of mine, even he was more of an industrial designer, he had more guts than I did. He [inaudible] and said, "Let's go see him," and we did. And he was very friendly and invited us in for a glass of wine, and showed us all around his studio, and we spent quite a long time there.

And then I wanted to see Wharton Esherick. I knew about him, because I had found out about him through a book called Shaping America's Products by Don Wallance [New York: Reinhold, 1956], that I had read--the graduate program had a reading seminar. You had to read one book a week and make a report, kind of a verbal report. And I had read about both George Nakashima and Wharton Esherick, but we were going to be in Philadelphia and Esherick didn't live far from Philadelphia, so again, stupidly, not knowing what the protocol is on these, dropped in on somebody without announcing ourselves, and he was not happy to see anybody. And we did not get a tour, but we saw a little.

MR. BROWN: It was a pretty exciting feeling?

MR. CASTLE: Pretty exciting. What I saw was really exciting.

MR. BROWN: Why?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I'd never seen, up until that point and I knew about people making sculpture and making a living by it, but I'd never heard of anybody or knew of anybody who made furniture of a very unusual nature and actually made a living at it, and it was their life. And he'd made an environment for himself that was a sculpture, even. And he practically lived in a sculpture. And that was all new to me. And that impressed me a lot, even though I'd had very little contact with him other than--we got in the door and we got to see a few things, but we weren't really--

MR. BROWN: It was very impressive.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, it was very brief, but impressive.

MR. BROWN: So that's where you were at about the time you left, you graduated from--

MR. CASTLE: Well, this was a year or so before graduation. Somebody's--these things take a while to soak in, for me. I don't respond to these things, like, quickly. But anyway that was my first contact with somebody who did something that was very unusual and unique, had their own form, made this furniture, and sold it, and lived by what he made.

MR. BROWN: So you were in a quandary by the time you were leaving graduate school? You still had this, a little bit of this hierarchical--

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, I still had a problem with thinking I really ought to be a sculptor, and it really wasn't until several years later that I resolved that. I mean, I spent a year in New York City after leaving Kansas with really dealing with that problem.

MR. BROWN: Working?

MR. CASTLE: No. In 19--I guess it was '61, after graduating with my master's. Actually, I didn't graduate yet. I finished all the coursework. I had not written my thesis. But anyway, I had finished all the coursework. I got married at the end of that school year to a gal who was an opera singer who had a job with the City Center Opera Company in New York, so she made the living.

MR. BROWN: So you'd met her in Kansas.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, and so I had moved to New York City and I didn't have a job. I got a studio and worked in the studio. She made enough money to live on, barely. It was not a great existence. But I spent a year in New York City working on my own with a lot of time to go to galleries and see a lot of things.

MR. BROWN: But you didn't have a lot of equipment or anything?

MR. CASTLE: No, I had enough that I could work though. I had a little bit.

MR. BROWN: To do some carving and modeling?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah. I had a few power tools, a small joiner, drill press, a little band saw, some hand tools. I had a welding outfit. I still couldn't decide what I wanted to do, but wood was sort of forced on me at that point, because I was a little better equipped there than I was with anything else. Bronze casting, of course--that was out of the question. Welding didn't--I didn't get anything out of welding, so that was not--so I was sort of left with nothing to do but work with wood, and it was sort of half furniture, half sculpture at that point. And the furniture I got some encouragement from Paul Smith at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts then.

MR. BROWN: Who had already shown your piece, your earlier piece.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah. Yeah, because I went there, and they knew who I was, because I'd been in the show, which was nice, and--not that they could do much for me. But America House [Gallery, New York] existed then, and that, I was offered the option of, possibility of, showing some in the America House, so I sort of had a sales outlet for my furniture in New York, but I wasn't really prepared to make furniture quite yet, but I did make a few pieces. But not much good work happened that year at all. And I can't think of a single thing that was really very good.

MR. BROWN: It was probably a very formative year though.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I learned what was happening in New York City. Got to spend lots of time in the museums and really see a lot of shows.

MR. BROWN: But things were gelling in you, probably, that you weren't even aware of.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, I was drawing, and generating ideas, but I wasn't really--couldn't get it together at all. And I could see that there was just no way that I was going to be able to make a living at this, either with the sculpture or the furniture. Neither one was--about the best chance I had for selling any sculpture was if you put a lampshade on it and called it a lamp. You know, I just wasn't getting anything going with it. And in--it was probably in like March or April, after having been there almost nine months, that I decided, well, I only had one alternative. I've got to get a job. And the only kind of job that would make any sense would be a teaching job, so I could still do some work. So I hadn't any more than gone to the public library and gotten a list of all the schools that taught art in the East--I'd already decided that's where the art scene was--I wanted to stay in the East, and had drafted a letter, but not sent any letters, when I got a letter offering me a job from RIT [Rochester Institute of Technology]; well, offering me an interview for a job, I should say, teaching furniture, which I really didn't know anything about at all. But it turned out that at that time the Museum of Contemporary Crafts and the School for American Craftsmen were quite closely knit, and America House, too, were quite closely tied together. So of course the first place that the School for American Craftsmen dean, the first person they consulted, was the director of the Museum of Contemporary Crafts [Paul Smith]. Well, luckily, I had been making some contact there, and as it turned out, that they had--I never got--I don't know the full story--I'm not sure anybody will ever have it on record, but Tage Frid and Michael Harms [?] had been let go for what reason I really don't know. The reason I was given was that they really wanted some new life in the department. They wanted to--they thought the furniture was too sort of Danish looking and that they wanted something new to happen, and they had determined it's a two-man department that one of those people ought to be a sculptor. Well, I fit the bill perfectly because I'm probably the only sculptor they could come up with who'd been making furniture. And Bill Keyser they hired at the same time, so it didn't really seem to matter that I really didn't know how to do woodworking because he did. So it seemed they thought that was a good arrangement, and it turned out to be a pretty good arrangement. So I got that job.

MR. BROWN: And you came out for an interview then, of course.

MR. CASTLE: I flew up for an interview and got offered the job at an enormous salary of like \$6,500, which for me was just like a fortune.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. But the school appealed to you?

MR. CASTLE: No, I didn't like the school at all. I couldn't even believe that they'd call that a "college."

MR. BROWN: Why, the quarters were fairly primitive?

MR. CASTLE: Well, coming from the University of Kansas, which is a beautiful school--it looks like--you know, if you looked in the encyclopedia under "college," you know, the picture would look like a college. RIT didn't look like a college. And the library was like a warehouse with a few books in it. It really wasn't my idea. But the situation within the School for American Craftsman, though, was good. I mean, I was impressed with the dean and the other departments and the facilities.

MR. BROWN: The dean was Harold Brennan.

MR. CASTLE: Harold Brennan. I liked him and I liked Frans Wildenhain, what was happening there. Silversmithing seemed to be doing something. Wood, it all looked like Danish furniture. But the facilities impressed me. They had all this equipment, beautiful, they had all these nice workbenches and tools, and they offered me a private space to work in. So in spite of not being very impressed with RIT, because it didn't seem like my idea of a college, within the scope of American Craftsman, though, that was very impressive. I liked that. And that's exactly what it was, too, that RIT at that time was not like a college that I was used to.

MR. BROWN: It was more like, what, a technical school or--it was heavily a commuter place?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, I guess so. It just really didn't have a campus. Although I got to like it. After spending some time there I really--I got to like it a lot. But in the beginning it just didn't--you know, having a library in an old warehouse building and this and that you know, it didn't seem--it wasn't very classy.

MR. BROWN: So what really told you was what Brennan said he wanted here.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, they were looking for exactly what I was. I didn't have to pretend to be anything I wasn't. And the chance to work--they really encouraged the faculty to work on their own work. Offered me a studio space of own to work in. You know, it was just like, you know, a real good deal, and I really was not very impressed with Rochester, but I thought, Well, can't beat this for a year or two, so--

MR. BROWN: Did you bring the opera singer out there?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah. Well, that worked out all right for her, too, because the Eastman School of Music offered her a graduate assistantship, so she worked on her Master's and taught at the Eastman School of Music. And actually for three years it worked fine for her, but then in three years she didn't want to be in Rochester anymore after she got her Master's. And I think I did more working than spending time at home anyway. I really got into making furniture. So it just didn't work out careerwise for us to get along at all. And so she went to New York and I stayed and I'm still here.

MR. BROWN: You got into your work so much--that first year, what would you--did you--

MR. CASTLE: Well, it was like being like a kid turned loose in a candy store. Because here you had the--you know, in New York even just finding a board to work with was a big deal, and all of a sudden there was just an enormous warehouse of boards there, and all you do is write down what you take. And all these tools, you know, free--what I considered then to be top quality tools. Now, when you get into tools there's top quality and there's better quality, but, you know, a quite adequate shop.

And a teaching schedule that wasn't bad: three days a week. Three consecutive days, that left me the nice bulk of time to work and I got into working. I worked every night, and my work really just fell together then really very quickly. After floundering about the first--well, I still had the sculpture problem. I still--decided I was--I'd agreed to come teach within the furniture department, but I didn't agree to make any furniture. And I really didn't--it was not my intention at that time to be very interested in making furniture. But I felt I had to make a contribution because I--there was a lot that I could do with the students in terms of form and all, and that's what they wanted me to do, so I felt I could handle the job. And I really came in and started making sculpture.

MR. CASTLE: --like I could just turn it out at incredible speed because I had good facilities to work with and all.

MR. BROWN: This wood sculpture?

MR. CASTLE: Wood sculpture. Then I concentrated on wood. I forgot everything else. I wasn't going to do any--

MR. BROWN: This was carving for the most part? Were you already, were you getting into--

MR. CASTLE: Well, laminating and carving.

MR. BROWN: Oh, laminating you only began here? This is where you began laminating?

MR. CASTLE: No, I had done it in Kansas.

MR. BROWN: You had.

MR. CASTLE: But rather crudely because of not having any good tools. But I did stack laminating in Kansas. But not being able to plane the boards very well, not having a planer, the result was pretty crude. And now with the good tools I could get a good slick result.

MR. BROWN: What was it that attracted you to lamination as opposed to carving?

MR. CASTLE: Not wanting to deal with solid logs that are going to crack and split unpredictably on you, plus the fact you can't find one the shape you want.

MR. BROWN: In lamination you can engineer the stresses and instability?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, you can more or less get the log any shape you want it.

MR. BROWN: You make the log, in effect.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, because you make it. And if you do it properly it's not going to crack on you. It'll stay together. Plus you have choice of all kinds of wood and grain direction, and you have a lot of control. But I worked mostly figurative the first year.

MR. BROWN: You mean figurative sculpture?

MR. CASTLE: Figurative sculpture. There's still one piece in existence in somebody's home here. I'd sold a big Icarus figure, which had some--I guess the strongest influence at that time would be Leonard Baskin's work. Kind of fat figures. But they were laminated in a very different way, pieced together.

MR. BROWN: During that first year did you show? Beyond say a faculty show or something?

MR. CASTLE: Actually, I didn't have any success showing any of that work at all. Except--well, I should take that back. I didn't have any success with juried shows. The local--well, the best gallery in Rochester at the time was the Schumann Gallery, and Jackie Schumann did express interest in that work. She's about the only one. Because when I entered a local show here, in Buffalo and Syracuse--they all had juried shows: the Everson [Museum of Art] in Syracuse, the Rochester Memorial Art Gallery, and the Albright-Knox [Art Gallery] in Buffalo had juried shows. And I'd get rejected got rejected from all of those.

[Reel 1, side B, is blank.]

[Reel 2, side A.]

MR. BROWN: Second interview with Wendell Castle, on August 13, 1981, Robert Brown interviewing.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I was saying this is a standard statement that I've written and given to lots of people, and I used it for, oh, seven or eight years maybe in various forms.

MR. BROWN: Well, listen, let's go into that.

[Audio break.]

MR. CASTLE: --in this last paragraph here how I got started. And that's how I got started. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: Yeah, you were--we did go over that a little bit, how--

MR. CASTLE: And that's actually where I started in teaching then, too. I started where I was.

MR. BROWN: Which was really in sculpture.

MR. CASTLE: --and where I thought at the time I could make a valuable contribution to the field, because Harold

Brennan at the School for American Craftsmen, at the time I was hired, had felt that the Danish sort of look and tradition that was happening in the woodworking at the School for American Craftsmen wasn't going to lead where he thought it should go. It seemed to be stagnant to him. And that he thought that somebody who had a sculptural background would be good in that field, and I got chosen for that job.

MR. BROWN: How did you happen to get the job? Didn't you--you had a piece shown in New York, didn't you?

MR. CASTLE: Right.

MR. BROWN: Did Brennan see it there?

MR. CASTLE: Right, I was in a show. I believe it was called Young Americans, and I had a piece in that show that got quite a lot of publicity, and I had been in contact with Paul Smith and--oh, what's his name? Dick--I can't think of his name. The guy who was director before Paul Smith, David--.

MR. BROWN: Oh, Campbell.

MR. CASTLE: Campbell. Been in contact with them and shown them my work and tried to promote myself.

MR. BROWN: But at this point there wasn't too much work, was there?

MR. CASTLE: No, there wasn't very much, but--

MR. BROWN: This was about '61 or so?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm, '61.

MR. BROWN: What they saw they were enthusiastic about, were they?

MR. CASTLE: Umm, yes and no.

MR. BROWN: What was Campbell like, by the way? Did you get to talk with him?

MR. CASTLE: Oh, yeah, met him lots of times.

MR. BROWN: Because he was a--

MR. CASTLE: Paul Smith was the assistant at that time. Campbell was the director and Paul was the assistant director and so--there was some other show that I was in, and one that I wanted to be in and I didn't get in. I can't remember the names now, but anyway, I heard of shows coming up, and one I brought pictures of my work in, and it was not real well received, but I think they both found it interesting because it wasn't what was being done. It did fall outside the vocabulary that was being used by everybody else. And the Young Americans show was jurored by somebody else, and I did get in that and the press liked my piece a lot.

MR. BROWN: What was the piece?

MR. CASTLE: Scribe Stool, which was sort of a not terribly useful, slightly usable piece of furniture, more sculptural than furniture. But--

MR. BROWN: Something like we see here or this poster?

MR. CASTLE: No, actually very thin members, quite different. But anyway when Harold Brennan--since the School for American Craftsmen was directly connected with the museum at that point, part of the American Crafts Council, in speaking with Campbell and Paul Smith and perhaps Mrs. [Aileen Osborne] Webb, too. Mrs. Webb had also bought one of my earlier pieces herself, and had put some of the others in America House, so between the three of them I think when he had the idea in his head that he would like somebody with a sculptural approach, I was the one doing that whether they liked it or not really. Mrs. Webb I think did. She'd actually bought one.

MR. BROWN: What was Campbell like? Was he an enthusiast or was he rather reserved?

MR. CASTLE: Well, he wasn't an enthusiast. He didn't bubble over or get excited. I'd say he's reserved. Very pleasant. I remember he was very warm and open. I could see him when I would go in. He was accessible. I don't remember too much about him.

MR. BROWN: And you were living in New York, weren't you, for about a year?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm, I was living there at that time.

MR. BROWN: You were making pieces there, as much as you could.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm, a few. I didn't have much of a shop.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: But I think maybe I got that recommendation maybe partly by default because I was the only person that met that bill.

MR. BROWN: For Brennan.

MR. CASTLE: For Brennan. I was a sculptor making furniture.

MR. BROWN: Did he ever talk with you about what did he think the shortcomings of conventional, contemporary furniture design were?

MR. CASTLE: Well, that not enough design went into the program at RIT. They were just--there really wasn't--they really weren't designing furniture. They were just sort of making variations on existing themes, and design might mean making an arm longer or shorter and or changing the position on a handle. And I'd gone through an industrial design program, so design didn't mean that to me. I really meant thinking the thing through from scratch. So I had a pretty fair background in addition to the sculptural idea. I did have a good foundation in doing design work in a sort of logical way, you know, to develop it through drawing, engineering drawing, and had some little bit of engineering background.

MR. BROWN: Not in any detail, but in industrial design perhaps you're given a problem, a general function that something must accomplish. Do you have to start from scratch?

MR. CASTLE: Well, industrial--well, it could be any of those. Industrial design programs vary a lot, and at the time, in the program I was in, didn't really have a specialty. We tended to do appliances for some reason. It could be washing machines, or mix master, or electric shaver, those kind of things. And you really didn't get into exactly how the mechanics worked, except that it had to be reasonable that it could possibly work. You more or less designed the look of the piece. But sometimes the look could take rather drastic changes from the normal. That was certainly considered to be one of the options that you were to investigate. You know, the motor had always gone in a traditional place; it may not have to be there.

MR. BROWN: Was your department at Kansas unusual in that respect at that time?

MR. CASTLE: No.

MR. BROWN: Allowing you a lot of latitude?

MR. CASTLE: I don't that it was that unusual. I think it was a fairly good department, but I don't know that it was exceptional. It didn't have that reputation anyway. I think places like Cranbrook [Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI] and Pratt [Institute, New York] and a few other places had the reputation as being top-notch industrial design departments.

MR. BROWN: So this background gave you the habit of not excluding any form from your thinking?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, so I'd gotten some background in that, through that industrial design, that you don't have to assume that things, just because they looked that way in the past, that they have to continue to look that way. That they could change and they could change drastically without sacrificing the function.

MR. BROWN: But you did have to think of the function as well as the industrial design.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, you had to have a--although we didn't, as I said, design the mechanics of the piece, we'd end up making models, but they weren't working models. There had to be reasonable--there had to be some space left where the mechanics would go in some reasonable fashion, because you were asked that question, how was it going to work, and you had to have some answers.

MR. BROWN: Of course when you then went into sculpture, which you did can you refresh me for just the last part of the time you were Kansas?

MR. CASTLE: Um hmm, yeah, the last two years I was there was in sculpture, and I dropped the industrial design.

MR. BROWN: And you did welding as well as carving, what was it?

MR. CASTLE: And bronze cast--and modeling.

MR. BROWN: Okay, but there, function played little part.

MR. CASTLE: There wasn't any consideration for function.

MR. BROWN: Simply the limits of the material and the fabrication.

MR. CASTLE: It was just developing form. So I had a portfolio that included industrial design work, portrait sculpture work, and furniture plus even painting and drawing.

MR. BROWN: What about--you wanted to go back and further describe some of those people who were teachers in Kansas, and also some of the fellow students. You'd mentioned earlier, I guess in drawing or painting, Raymond Eastwood. Did you want to say anything more about the--

MR. CASTLE: Well, I'm drawing some blanks on the names. There was Bob Sudlow.

MR. BROWN: What did he teach?

MR. CASTLE: Painting and watercolor and some drawing courses. I know there was a fellow named Bob Green, too, but I don't think I ever had him as a teacher. I knew him.

MR. BROWN: You've mentioned, I think--who was the teacher in sculpture?

MR. CASTLE: Taft. Eldon Taft. He was my actual teacher. There was also another sculptor in residence who was around, Bernard Frazier, Bernard Poco Frazier.

MR. BROWN: Poco?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm, a nickname. Forgot how he got the nickname.

MR. BROWN: And he did friezes and various things around the campus, didn't he?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. He did, and there's quite a bit of his work around.

MR. BROWN: But most people--both of those left you sort of on your own, did they?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, they didn't really offer much in the way of trying to be a leader in leading you into a vocabulary of form, or into much of anything really. They pretty much left you on your own. You didn't--they really weren't like teachers in a way. You had to ask them a question.

MR. BROWN: Then they'd come out.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. But mostly the questions were of a technical nature. Taft was a rather good modeler, and had I been more interested in that I might have, you know, probably had a lot to learn from him. But I really wasn't that interested, particularly, in the way he worked. It seemed the time would be too slow.

MR. BROWN: You were a quick learner of techniques--

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: --and methods and all. You were galloping through those, weren't you, pretty well?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, I could almost learn those just by watching somebody else.

MR. BROWN: Then you found you'd made a piece of furniture, or did you deliberately set out to do that? I think you treated it as a piece of sculpture, didn't you?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, originally that--that Scribe Stool was made in Kansas that was shown in New York. And another piece similar. There are actually two of those.

MR. BROWN: Did you show, I think you said you did, in the Kansas Designer Craftsman Show while you were still out there?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. BROWN: And you exhibited those pieces?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. I don't think either one of those were exhibited in the Kansas Designer Craftsman Show. I'm not sure. I was in the Kansas Designer Craftsman Show a couple or three times.

MR. BROWN: Was that a pretty important show out there?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: It was in, where? In Kansas City?

MR. CASTLE: No, it was at KU [Kansas University], the Kansas Designer Craftsman Show. There's also a show at the Nelson Art Gallery.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

MR. CASTLE: What do they call it? Can't even think of the name of it. A juried show every year. And I entered that several years, but I think I only got in it once out of the times that I entered. And that was the Scribe Stool. I did get that in. That was shown in Kansas City.

MR. BROWN: But before you left did you have some pretty good criticism, from the Kansas area, of your work?

MR. CASTLE: I don't think criticism's the right word. [Laughs.] I think they could have been more critical, but encouragement. I think I got a lot of encouragement from Taft and from Frazier and fellow students.

MR. BROWN: You wanted to mention a few of those fellow students, I think. A fellow named Krebs.

MR. CASTLE: Rockne Krebs, who was a few years behind me, so he and I weren't like good friends, but he was in the school at the same time I was. Someone who was at the same level at the same time is Tal Streeter. He does quite well with his work, teaches in the SUNY [State University of New York] system at Purchase. And we were close to being at the same time. I think he might have been one year ahead of me.

MR. BROWN: Do those fellows and you stand out from the, among the more prominent students?

MR. CASTLE: Well, Rockne Krebs didn't, because he was still like a junior when I left, so he hadn't done anything extraordinary. Streeter did unusually well. He's the first person I had seen that had a consistent body of work. Everybody else, including myself, was all over the place, you know, would weld, then maybe cast something in bronze, and then carve something in wood, and maybe even do a figure and then an abstract. Kind of all over the place. Everybody did that except for Streeter.

MR. BROWN: Instead, what was he--

MR. CASTLE: He had one vocabulary he used. He was working with pipes, welding pipes together. And that's all he did. It seemed a little silly at the time, but later I understood that he had a little better grasp on what people wanted to see in New York than any of the rest of us. I'm not sure how he got that insight.

MR. BROWN: Did you think also he was a little more mature?

MR. CASTLE: I suppose he was.

MR. BROWN: He wasn't simply mature in the marketing sense, but in terms of his own creativity.

MR. CASTLE: Because no one in Kansas had ever suggested that there was any particular integrity or anything that would be thought of as being more advanced by having a body of work that was more or less the same. But as soon as he got to New York, found out that's what people in New York wanted to see.

MR. BROWN: What a predictable body?

MR. CASTLE: They really found it very confusing to look at somebody's portfolio and see a portrait head and then see say an abstract wall relief, say a bronze, and then a wood carving, and then a piece of furniture. That was just--they thought that nobody had, that I didn't have any sort of consistency in my work at all.

MR. BROWN: And you brought all that.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: I mean, when you arrived.

MR. CASTLE: And in Kansas no one had suggested there that any other way was anything other than normal, since most everybody was doing more or less that same thing not the furniture part, but the vocabulary would be all over the place except for Streeter's.

[Audio break.]

MR. BROWN: Well, when you're talking about this vocabulary, I mean people were all over the place with the exception of Tal Streeter. But possibly that was a teaching device? They wanted you to experience as many things as possible? That was the time of life to do it?

MR. CASTLE: Well, probably they thought of it that way, but I think there were totally out of touch with what was going on in New York City, what a gallery would like to see. I just don't think they had a clue that neither one of the instructors had ever been to a New York gallery with his work to try to promote it. And evidently none of the recent graduates had been either, to bring back the word.

MR. BROWN: Do you think that--was art education connected at all with this?

MR. CASTLE: No, art education was a separate department.

MR. BROWN: Because it smacks a bit of that, where--

MR. CASTLE: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: --they're prodded through every media.

MR. CASTLE: No, it wasn't that. I think it was just like an older approach that was really left over from the thirties, and that perhaps this New York way of looking at things was something newer than that.

MR. BROWN: You said to me earlier that you felt in some ways it might have been a good thing that you were at Kansas sort at the end of that older academic era.

MR. CASTLE: Oh, yeah, I'm glad I was, for the drawing part, before the academic system had sort of fallen apart, when you still took antique drawing and nature drawing and--I don't think they ever dropped figure drawing, but they dropped a lot of those drawing courses later, the ones that seemed pretty antique, particularly antique drawing where we drew from plaster casts, and it was called "antique drawing." And nature drawing and composition drawing and watercolor and those kind of courses got dropped in favor of courses that had a creative emphasis.

MR. BROWN: What was the value in these imitative drawing courses?

MR. CASTLE: Skill. Developing skill. Developing your eyes to see, and be able to tell whether your drawing on your paper was really the same as what you were looking at. Which really boils down to developing that kind of a skill.

MR. BROWN: Pretty important. Well, then about '61 or so, Harold Brennan, who was then dean here at the School for American Craftsmen, saw your work at the Crafts Council, at the America House.

MR. CASTLE: Both places.

MR. BROWN: In New York. And what? Would he have you up here to talk with him?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, at that time--I've never really known, heard the complete correct story, but I believe that Tage Frid was let go. Why, I really never exactly figured out. Doesn't seem like "because you got tired of Danish modern" was quite a good enough reason. And Michael Harms, who was the other teacher at the time, resigned in sympathy, because he didn't like the idea of letting Tage Frid go.

MR. BROWN: Well, Frid was a very prominent woodworker.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm, yeah. And he had a big legacy going all around here with graduates running businesses and everything else. So it's hard to say exactly what happened. I really don't know whether there was some personality problems between Brennan and Frid. I don't know.

MR. BROWN: But at any rate were you brought up here by Brennan to interview?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. But the story I was told is they just felt like they wanted a change in the department and they really wanted to get some more inventive, creative kinds of things going there and that Frid's background in Danish furniture produced a certain look, which they had thought had been there long enough. That was the story I got. And maybe it is the true story, but it seems like to me that firing him's a rather strong way to do that.

MR. BROWN: Why not simply bring in someone like yourself in addition?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: Keep him?

MR. CASTLE: I don't know. But anyway, they didn't seem there--Harold Brennan, who had the total authority to--this time it was before faculty got consulted on these matters, I think. I think that Harold Brennan had a hundred percent say in this position. And there were two positions open, the whole, the entire woodshop because Michael Harms had resigned, too.

MR. BROWN: And what did Michael Harms--what was his--

MR. CASTLE: His is an English background. Now why--looking back on it from what I know about English woodworking now which I knew nothing about then, and now I do know a little about why he didn't exert a stronger influence, I don't know, except that maybe Tage Frid's influence, him being there first, and being strong--I don't know. But anyway his influence didn't appear to show up in finished pieces particularly.

MR. BROWN: Wherein would the English influence have lain if he had?

MR. CASTLE: Well, from what I know of English influence now, and I have an English cabinetmaker downstairs--I'm not sure what Michael Harms's background is though, so maybe he's not a true English cabinetmaker. But that they're really incredibly good. The English cabinetmaking tradition is very strong, and really the proper way to making things. Very, very interested in high-quality workmanship, use of high-quality materials, down to spacing of dovetails, sort of. An English spacing of dovetails even is different from Danish. Different ways of putting things together than the Danish. And in the hierarchy of cabinetmaking, I'd put English considerably above Danish cabinetmaking. I mean, I'd put French and then English cabinetmaking, which reached its height in the 18th century, but continued on, and in some places it's still alive today even at a very high level. I didn't know anything about that in 1962. I wouldn't have had a clue about any of this.

MR. BROWN: But you might speculate that at that time the Danish was in vogue.

MR. CASTLE: Well, the Danish influence--

MR. BROWN: That had the reputation for some reason.

MR. CASTLE: Well, the Danish in the furniture industry, there was a strong influence. There were Danish furniture being sold all over the place. So Tage Frid was riding on a real high then because that was just the thing everybody wanted.

MR. BROWN: It was their design, their look, wasn't it?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. And of course he grew up with that. And so--

MR. BROWN: Were you brought up here by Brennan to look around first and interview?

MR. CASTLE: I was brought up for an interview. Flew up, met the other members of the faculty. In fact, I remember Franz the best.

MR. BROWN: Franz Wildenhain, yeah.

MR. CASTLE: Because, in spite of his age, I really thought he was a student, because he was dressed like a student and working. He was in the shop working. [Laughs.] And after being introduced to him, I went and I said, you know, who was he? You know, because they didn't introduce him as a faculty, just said something like, "I'd like you to meet Franz Wildenhain. And he said, "Oh, he's the teacher." [Laughs.] I just assumed he was an older student. He had jeans, tennis shoes on. I remember him very clearly. I mean, he actually did look quite young. He aged an awful lot in the last ten years. He looked pretty young until ten years ago. He really didn't look his age. And I met--

MR. BROWN: You were shown the shop?

MR. CASTLE: You know, Hans Christianson was there; I met him. And Don Bernowski, and the other jewelry teacher, he was only there one year. He's left now. Can't even remember his name. He was a resident teaching jewelry there. They've gone through a lot of jewelry teachers. They have real problems in the jewelry department.

MR. BROWN: Are they too easily nabbed by industry?

MR. CASTLE: No. Too easily problems come up with Hans Christensen.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I see; there's conflict.

MR. CASTLE: There always seems to be conflicts in that department. I think they've solved it now, but for quite a few years--

MR. BROWN: Was Christensen the head of goldsmithing and jewelry?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, he's had the senior position. And the other person ended up with a problem each time.

MR. BROWN: But when you were there being interviewed, was everyone rather friendly?

MR. CASTLE: Oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: --and curious about you?

MR. CASTLE: I don't know about curious, but everybody was very friendly. I liked everyone that I met, and I liked the woodshop. Well, I liked the School for American Craftsmen a lot. Hated RIT. I thought it was the poorest excuse for a college I could imagine.

MR. BROWN: What was it like then? It wasn't--

MR. CASTLE: Well, it didn't look like a college. You know, coming from the Midwest, I was used to Midwest schools, you know. I'd been to University of Nebraska, and University of Colorado, University of Missouri, and, you know, to those kind of schools. That was my idea of a school.

MR. BROWN: And what did RIT look like?

MR. CASTLE: Didn't look like a school. Looked like just downtown industrial buildings. But the School for American Craftsmen had a very nice feeling.

MR. BROWN: That was in the stables, wasn't it? Or older buildings?

MR. CASTLE: Well, a mansion, connected to a stable in the back, and some other additions to it. Had a real nice-- it was old and a bit rundown, but it had an awfully nice feeling about it.

MR. BROWN: Of course that school had been there only about 10 or 12 years when you came up. So the woodworking shop looked good?

MR. CASTLE: Well, at the time it's the best equipped shop I'd ever seen, you know, it was like a utopian situation.

MR. BROWN: And I wanted to get to that because you hadn't spent that much time making furniture or being around woodworking shops.

MR. CASTLE: No.

MR. BROWN: And did you discuss this with Brennan?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I didn't--I don't think I played up my weaknesses, but I didn't try to pretend I knew what I didn't know either. You know, he knew I had no formal training in woodworking; I'd picked it up on my own. I don't think that he was able to or didn't try to look at my work in a critical way and really see how poorly it was made. Not poorly from a craftsman's standpoint, but poorly from a standpoint of proper construction.

MR. BROWN: What do you mean by that? Do you mean just instability?

MR. CASTLE: Well, there's really a proper way to put things together in order to defeat the hygroscopic nature of wood, is what woodworking is really all about. That I of course knew nothing about. And I had worked in a vocabulary that actually got around some of those problems fairly well in a roundabout way.

MR. BROWN: You're talking about the physical properties of wood.

MR. CASTLE: I'd really denied the physical properties of wood in many things.

MR. BROWN: You did say that your craft was good.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, technically, you know, if I'd put something together, it fit. You know, if I made a curve it was a smooth curve.

MR. BROWN: But the future of the piece was--

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: --you weren't able to master yet. I mean, the future--

MR. CASTLE: That's right, the future would be--although those early pieces have survived amazingly well, considering there was no regard whatsoever for the proper way to put wood together. But I never got any criticism from Brennan about that and--

MR. BROWN: He didn't bring in some woodworker to ask you technical questions to make sure he was getting someone who could--

MR. CASTLE: No. See, the woodworking faculty really had no--I was introduced to them. Mike Harms and Tage Frid were very pleasant to me.

MR. BROWN: Oh, they were there.

MR. CASTLE: They were there. The school year wasn't over yet. See, I came up during the year that they had not finished. And they were very pleasant, but they had no say in my hiring whatsoever. So they of course asked no pointed questions. They only asked questions of a rather informal nature, just sort of being friendly. And I thought they were both unusually friendly, given the awkward circumstances. And Bill Keyser was hired at the same time. I couldn't say which one of us was hired first. I really don't know. It was awful close to the same time. Either he had just been there for an interview, or whether he'd just been hired, I'm not sure.

MR. BROWN: Now what was Keyser's background?

MR. CASTLE: He graduated from RIT.

MR. BROWN: But in woodworking?

MR. CASTLE: In woodworking.

MR. BROWN: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: The year before. He'd been out of school one year.

MR. BROWN: Oh. Maybe Brennan should have thought there was a guy that was trained under Frid and--

MR. CASTLE: Yeah. So I think that Brennan had the technical part covered.

MR. BROWN: Right, with Keyser.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, he could continue what he felt was high quality workmanship and the proper way to do things. I think he thought it was covered. And that my position was to bring in some new designs.

MR. BROWN: Did he talk to you about what he had in mind for you?

MR. CASTLE: Not of any great detail, no. He never outlined that, although that's the impression I got left with. And I think I took that a bit too seriously, but--

MR. BROWN: What, that you had an open mandate?

MR. CASTLE: That I could really go out and try to get designs out of the students.

MR. BROWN: Now you really had done very little if any teaching, had you?

MR. CASTLE: No, I had taught for two years in Kansas as a graduate assistant half time.

MR. BROWN: In design.

MR. CASTLE: Taught a design course and a drawing course for two years.

MR. BROWN: Okay. So what was your attitude toward teaching when you came up? You were hired then for the fall of '61 or '62 here?

MR. CASTLE: '62. I came in the summer because they didn't--[telephone rings]. I'll bet they're out there loading wood still. They won't hear--

[Audio break.]

MR. BROWN: When you first got here, how did you think you were going to teach?

MR. CASTLE: I'm sure I came in--I was very different than anybody else in the school at that time, because I'd come from--well, I didn't feel at all comfortable with the casual approach that happened at the time. For example, I mentioned about Franz. You couldn't tell which one was the teacher. You know, I'd always come from a school where the teacher was dressed up, and with a formal position, and there was, you know, not sir, but certainly never first-name basis with your teacher. It was "Mr." so and so and "Miss," and you could always walk in the classroom and spot the teacher. In Kansas I never knew of a situation where you couldn't, and all the sudden here was a situation where you couldn't tell the teacher from the classroom, because they had on the same old grubby clothes. And I felt awkward about the--well, right off in the first class there were students older than I was, and there wasn't any--there really never was--I mean, I felt funny about that situation, and so I started dressing for class, which I think really bothered everybody. But when it bothered everybody, it made me more determined to do it. Like I'd wear a tie to class, but I wore things that it wouldn't hurt, so I went right ahead and worked, and I didn't try to stay away from the sawdust or anything, but I always wore a tie a shirt and a tie and a sportcoat, which I'd take off, of course. [Laughs.] It was real odd. Nobody else ever did that. Except Harold Brennan always had a tie on, but nobody else ever did. But I sort of felt like I had to set myself apart.

MR. BROWN: Were you pretty confident when you began teaching?

MR. CASTLE: No, I don't think I was confident at all.

MR. BROWN: So maybe that's why you--

MR. CASTLE: But that was probably part of it. But I kept that up. I never stopped that. For eight years I never changed that position.

MR. BROWN: What do you suppose kept you from dressing--

MR. CASTLE: But gradually everyone else changed. By the end of the eight years, at least half the faculty was wearing coats and ties. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: Oh, really?

MR. CASTLE: But I enjoyed it. I mean, it meant something to me. You know, I'd worked in my shop in grubby clothes and on a teaching day, I sort of felt like I was in a position, made me feel like I was in a senior position. I could put on a clean shirt and a tie and went off to teach which made a different day than a day when I was in the shop.

MR. BROWN: What did you teach those first years?

MR. CASTLE: Well, the part that I, of course, felt competent with was design teaching design, teaching people to draw. Started, initiated a drawing course which nobody had really been doing any drawing before which was not very successful because it was hard to keep people at it and make them do it.

MR. BROWN: Oh, really?

MR. CASTLE: Well, you know--

MR. BROWN: You mean they were inclined to run back to the bench--

MR. CASTLE: Run back to the shop. Couldn't make it serious enough. But the situation did improve. People did get better at drawing.

MR. BROWN: Was this drawing such as you'd had at Kansas?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: Drawing from objects, from nature?

MR. CASTLE: I mean, the nature of drawing before I came would be like a little sort of a plan and elevation on the back of an envelope, and "Here's what I'm gonna make," and then you'd develop it into an engineering drawing as much as necessary. And one idea--and if you got one idea for a chair, that's it, you go make it. And the approach that I had learned to work with and I still feel that I haven't changed my opinion on this a bit that you develop a whole lot of ideas and then make a selection from those. And you don't make, you don't pick your first one and run with it which everybody had done until that point.

MR. BROWN: You think that before you came, so far as you could tell, it was more of an artisan's workshop?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: They had one workable form for each type of furniture.

MR. CASTLE: Well, they'd worked in the standard Danish vocabulary, which was published all over the place, so you had easy access to--and plus you'd go into the furniture stores and look. They worked in that vocabulary.

MR. BROWN: And that's the well, you copy.

MR. CASTLE: There's a few exceptions. There were a few people in the program that did something different than that. They got--

MR. BROWN: What about Keyser? Had he?

MR. CASTLE: Not very much different, no. His was bad. I can only--

MR. BROWN: He was mainly a technician.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, he had no art background. He's developed some art background since. He had no art background at that time. But I can remember one student well, I didn't know him as a student Tom Muir Wilson, who later switched to being a photographer. But he had gone through the woodworking program, but he'd come from some other school and had some design background. His furniture was not Danish. You know, there were a few students that came in from other places with disciplines. But if you started right there, you got nothing but Danish. They only got these little in--you know, a little surge of something else now and then that a student would bring from other background.

MR. BROWN: Were you able to get them to stop fabricating furniture for a bit and begin drawing? You said they kept wanting to run back to the workbench.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, but that worked. You know, gradually people saw the virtue in putting down designs. I think that got through to people.

MR. BROWN: Did they strike you as pretty gifted students, potentially they could design? Or some of them just limited?

MR. CASTLE: Actually the first group was fairly gifted, that we had. I think it was an awkward time for them, because they were in the middle of this program changing and some were a bit confused by it. But there were some pretty gifted ones right there at the first.

MR. BROWN: Was it a four-year program at that point?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: And you were to do what? The design side mainly, or how was it divided between you and Keyser?

MR. CASTLE: Well, that was sort of an informal division that I was more or less involved with design although we taught at different times, so we both had to teach everything. I never did any demonstrations of a technical nature and I wasn't capable. So when it came to show them how to use the saw or whatever he showed all that. But then I would get caught up in it some, too, because somebody missed it or something and--like you observed a minute ago, I did catch on fast. I mean, by the middle of the first year, I mean, I had a pretty good idea what was going on with technical things.

MR. BROWN: Was there a curriculum that you had to follow? Did Brennan set one down more or less?

MR. CASTLE: There was more or less one. It was awfully loose and I don't know who set it down. It was very loose.

MR. BROWN: But you begin with drawing and basic fabrication of things?

MR. CASTLE: We didn't actually make great changes in the curriculum. We only made great changes in the way they approached that curriculum. They still made more or less the same projects, put a great deal heavier emphasis on the design, which had been--it had been put on before. They said they were putting it on, but of course it was a different kind of design. It was not true design starting from zero. It was, like I explained--

MR. BROWN: Leading to that one mode. But in your first year would they just do, get into turning or anything of that sort?

MR. CASTLE: Oh, yeah. They got into the machine work rather quickly. Certain things that had been established there weren't changed. For example, there was a tool locker with a full complement of tools that was checked

out to the student at the beginning of the year, and those were their hand tools to work with. And you went through a brief period in the beginning with working with the hand tools, and then got onto machines rather quickly. Within a month or so you were working with the machines and you were gradually introduced to the, you know--the more dangerous machines were the last you'd get introduced to. And by some time in the first year, I don't even remember when, you were using everything, and the projects just got more and more complex. And students turned out pretty decent furniture.

But I think what happened is that I took the design part much too seriously and was really looking for really inventive things, you know? I took this whole thing so seriously that I thought and I really haven't changed my opinion but that furniture really was an art form, and that furniture could be just as important as sculpture. And this is where I think I was confused. I really have not straightened out until recently, and I hope I've straightened that out now. It's not confusing whether furniture is sculpture or not. And I always said I didn't have it confused and I said furniture, that--what I've always said, and I still say, is that furniture is not sculpture, but it can be the same thing as sculpture. But my personal approach was to make my pieces look very much like sculpture. And I did an awful lot of work, and my studio was in the first year right in the school. I was provided with a studio within the first--well, right after the first year my work was progressing pretty well and I got my own studio, but it was only a block away. So the students had awfully close contact with my work, and I think I presented far too strong an image about what it is I was looking for by seeing my work.

MR. BROWN: You began to see some imitation?

MR. CASTLE: And then the imitation--it didn't happen instantly, not so much the first year. But by the second year there began to be imitation, because I was approaching it at that time with the idea that furniture should take on new form, and you shouldn't just--that redesigning furniture didn't just mean moving a leg over or making it longer or shorter. It means looking at the function of the piece and completely redesigning it from scratch. And the approach I was taking was to try to make it sculptural, and sculptural to me meant then that it looked like what sculpture of the time looked like, and what contemporary sculpture might look like or could look like or looked like some people made it look like.

MR. BROWN: Which sculptures, for example, of that time might you have--

MR. CASTLE: Well, I think there's some Henry Moore, [Jean] Arp. I don't know, a few other people, but--

MR. BROWN: In your technique were you into lamination by then, laminating them?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm, yeah. And it seemed to me that, having learned a little bit about the nature of putting wood together, not a lot--that the traditional ways were rather limiting in your vocabulary, and if you really wanted to develop your vocabulary and expand it that you needed some other ways of working with wood and lamination was another way.

MR. BROWN: What recommended it, would you say?

MR. CASTLE: Nothing recommended it. I mean, I recommended it.

MR. BROWN: No, no, I mean, why did you stick with it? Did it seem extremely flexible?

MR. CASTLE: Oh, I enjoyed it. It was extremely flexible. I mean, the form possibilities were--and since I was interested in sculpture, carving became a very important. So I became more or less a carver. I'd laminate up a form and carve it.

MR. BROWN: What is there in lamination that allows that? I mean, this may be in a sort of, it's obvious, but maybe you could say. What is there about that physical form of laminated layers that allows all this?

MR. CASTLE: Well, as opposed to a solid wood piece, which is the other alternative, you really can't dry a solid wood piece of any size. It's going to crack on you in drying, plus you're limited by how big a piece you can get. You really don't get pieces of certain shapes or certain kinds of wood or whatever. So by laminating, you can laminate any size you want and you've defeated this drying problem because the wood's already been dried and cut up in little thin pieces. It's easy to dry. Put it back together, it's dry, and put back together pretty thoughtfully. You have to be careful about how you put it back together. It's pretty good as far as staying together goes.

MR. BROWN: You can vary the grains?

MR. CASTLE: Well, you don't--try to keep them all the same is what you do.

MR. BROWN: Can you vary the thickness of the lamin, the laminae or whatever they're called?

MR. CASTLE: No. You really need to keep them all the same, and the thinner the better. And, you know, I learned a lot about it over the years and got pretty good at it.

MR. BROWN: And the hardness of the wood. You could choose different wood?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm, yeah.

MR. BROWN: I mean within, say, a given stack of layers you could vary the hardness?

MR. CASTLE: But I was just developing this technique. It developed quickly, because once I had access to the machines--I had already been exploring it before I came to RIT, but rather crudely because I didn't have access. It's a high technology technique. You need machinery.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I was going to ask if there are realms of engineering in prototypes and so forth which you might have seen, where lamination figures, doesn't it, in nautical and aeronautical--

MR. CASTLE: But by high technology I just mean the machine.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, sophisticated, and you had that at the school.

MR. CASTLE: And you had it. Takes a lot of work out of it, makes it easy, and insures its staying together. So I was very excited because my work could suddenly progress very quickly you know, having these tools available and having plenty of clamps and stuff so, you know, I was excited about it, and I think that my excitement about it certainly showed, and I was certainly glad to talk to everybody who'd listen. But the work came out looking like mine.

MR. BROWN: The work of your students?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: What did you do about that?

MR. CASTLE: Which really wasn't what I wanted. What I wanted them to do was to be adventuresome, and to design from zero, and to try to create new forms. I didn't really want it looking like mine, and it did just every single time, with fairly few exceptions. And there was--this sort of--oh, when you have critiques, for example--now like I keep saying I took my position too seriously. I should not have played on this point so much, that I thought design was so important, it was more important than the technical part. That if a piece was wonderfully made, if it was ugly, what was the point? You know, and if it looked just like one you'd get at Sears, the fact that it was solid wood and had proper joinery, it still didn't mean anything, you know. What meant something was making a work of art, and something that had an important form, and that was the point I kept pounding on. So when it would come critique time, I would be very concerned about those points. And Keyser held the other end of the thing, and he'd say, "Well, you've got to have sound construction, you've got to put the thing together right." And it was a pretty good relationship, and it worked pretty well, so there was some balance. Some people made some things that were a little more traditional, well-made, proper construction, and some went a little further out. A fair balance for a couple of years there, and I kept beating the same point and he kept beating the same point.

MR. BROWN: You would do this at the critiques.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: These were performed in front of the students then?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: Did you all--one did not try to beat the other down?

MR. CASTLE: No, but we'd both make our points.

MR. BROWN: Keyser.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, we'd--but Keyser became bored with his point of view, because he became more interested in sculpture as things progressed. He got interested in sculpture. So that point of view gradually just sort of--he just didn't feel like going after it anymore, I guess you'd say, and so there was only this one. And there's that--so the situation began to change then, and it--actually at the time it didn't bother me. I mean, I didn't really give it much thought. I didn't realize what was happening. It just seemed like that maybe design was becoming more important. You know, I thought it was a good sign. I didn't really realize that it was sort of happening at the

expense of something. But what I continued to see happening was work that looked like mine.

MR. BROWN: That was what was taking place then, as they began less, continued less regard for the technical side for the design, it was your design.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm, and I had--my vocabulary had expanded to take in some things that were not just laminated but construction, too. I had some forms that were constructed forms. But in all cases the students seemed to follow my vocabulary, and even then I wasn't so bothered. I thought, "Well, while you're in school, the work may look like this. As soon as the student gets out and gets on his own, he'll get his own thing going." But then when enough years went by and the students actually got out and on their own and I saw several years out of school, what I thought was a better student still doing exactly the same thing, I began to think things were going wrong and that something was wrong with this approach.

And it just wasn't working, but I didn't really know quite what to do. I couldn't put my finger--like I can look back now, I think I can put my finger on a number of things that went wrong. It's just like that point I just made about Kaiser backing off the technical part, which was one of the earlier things that went wrong. But I think the biggest thing, the biggest problem that I am responsible for, was assuming that artist/craftsman was the one and only way to approach it that you needed to be a master of making pieces. And I never really did tolerate shoddy workmanship. I just wasn't so concerned about--I was more concerned about the design. And someone who excelled at technical things and had no art ability, I thought really didn't belong in the program. This is an art program; we're in an art school and that the activity really is a designer/craftsman activity, and that--I kept assuming that this one person was capable of both these things, and sort of forcing people into thinking the same thing that you had to design and that you were sort of incomplete craftsmen if you weren't able to design the things you made. And I think that's probably the biggest fallacy, and that continues right today. There's no change in that policy over there. What that produces is some people who really didn't really have any real ability to design, but yet really had a good feeling for working with wood, are forced into being designers, forced into thinking they're designers and the stuff they make is just terrible. [Telephone rings.]

[Audio break.]

MR. BROWN: But while you were at the school you never quite solved that dilemma?

MR. CASTLE: No, I didn't really, didn't solve it at all. I just really felt there was a big problem. And mainly because I sort of assumed what worked for me was being pretty successful would work for anybody else that I took an artist's approach. I made things and sold them and just sort of made the assumption that that was a good workable way to do things, that I designed them and made them and sold them through shops and galleries, and got in some shows gotten some commissions and--

MR. BROWN: But what tipped you off that something was wrong among your students or former students, particularly was that their stuff was not growing in design, it was remaining sort of pretty much your own?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I saw so much derivative work. And that at the time I thought to myself, "Well, I'm just presenting too much of an image to follow, and that I maybe can just--you know, I'll be better off if I wasn't teaching it." And didn't really think I had to do anything about it that just not teaching woodworking would be enough. Not to present this--you know, I keep presenting an idea here "I do it, and you do it and you'll be successful too" if I stop presenting that picture, that maybe the whole thing would straighten itself out. I mean, looking back at it now I see the problem was much, you know a lot more problems. That's only part of the problem. I mean, because my ideas have changed in the ten years since then, so I see many other problems. I mean, I see lots of real basic problems with the whole education. One thing it seems inconceivable to me now that someone can go through four years of school and not really learn anything about furniture I mean, in a historical way. Do not really have a furniture history course. They all had an art history course, and they were shown a Sheridan table and a Hepplewhite, but not a real history of furniture where you really learned about it.

MR. BROWN: What good would that do the furniture designer?

MR. CASTLE: Well, at the time I thought it wouldn't do any good. I wasn't concerned. I was concerned--I would have rather seen a course at the time in 20th-century sculpture. I thought that would have done more good. But now looking back at it I think that that would have caused more confusion. A few really talented people might have come through with some real good work, but the majority are going to get lost with that approach.

MR. BROWN: What would they gain from the historical?

MR. CASTLE: Well, a sound basis of the understanding of how furniture has developed for the last two thousand years, and there's a fairly logical development which I didn't even know about at the time myself. Mostly, I didn't think old furniture looked very interesting. It was only later when I've looked a little closer and with more educated eyes that I have found old furniture to be interesting, and to in many cases be extraordinary and

baffling beyond belief, and all kinds of other things that I didn't know anything about at the time and wasn't even concerned with.

MR. BROWN: But you couldn't very well at that time have conveyed any of that.

MR. CASTLE: No, I didn't have any knowledge of that either.

MR. BROWN: You wouldn't have had slides and books to show them. You would have--

MR. CASTLE: No, I wasn't concerned with it. I was concerned with sculpture and art.

MR. BROWN: And you feel that was too much for the majority of your students to handle.

MR. CASTLE: Yes. A few I think could handle that approach, but the majority couldn't handle that approach, because they're missing what furniture's about. And furniture is about furniture, and sculpture's about sculpture, and mixing the two together can cause a great deal of confusion. [Telephone rings.] Boy, this is ridiculous, everybody's--

[Audio break.]

MR. CASTLE: I'm becoming more and more aware of the fact that there's a real kind of funny ground here, when furniture may be disguising itself as art or sculpture, or sculpture disguising itself as furniture, which is the same thing. And when you're in this middle ground between the two--which is a whole thing I started, this whole business, and I kept claiming mine was art, but usable as furniture. And I was fighting a battle with museums and things, in a sense, to have it accepted as sculpture. And there was some headway in that enough to make me encouraged that was on the right path. I've decided since then that that is a battle you could never win, because it really isn't the same as sculpture. There's a different kind of--I think--not that there's any hierarchy, that furniture is not a lower art form than sculpture, but it's different. It's not sculpture and to be an art activity it needn't look at all like sculpture, I've decided. It can look exactly like furniture.

MR. BROWN: What do you mean by--maybe we'd better try to pin it down, because that's probably what you should have done in the '60s with your students. What do you mean by being exactly like furniture?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I felt in the '60s that the only way to have art furniture is furniture that took on new form. If it looked just like furniture, then that really wasn't accomplishing anything.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Just be repetition or a slight variations of what had already been done.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. And I sort of categorically just denied that whole approach, in favor of the sculptural approach when the form of the furniture took on what would generally be described as looking more like sculpture than furniture. Oh, not that it was unrecognizable as furniture. You still would recognize a chair as a chair or a table as a table. And thinking that there's a--keep doing this and showing it, and it's going to be accepted as a form of sculpture, and thought of equally by museum curators and so on, and be shown in galleries just like painting or sculpture. And like I said there was enough encouragement in the '60s that it was being accepted to make me think this was a right, that I was on the right track, and I was a leader, in that mine was getting accepted first. But that really never got total acceptance. Still, there would be a lot of major museums who would really not put furniture in the sculpture room. They would put it in the furniture room. I mean, the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York], for example. They have a piece of mine, and it's shown with 20th-century decorative art. Some institutions, like the Whitney [Museum of Art, New York], wouldn't show any, because they don't--they're not going to show any furniture.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: And mine's furniture. I mean I've had this--I know Tom Armstrong and had a discussion with him. He's pretty open. He likes my work. He's bought it personally. But says his curators won't you know, don't think of it that way there. Sculpture is sculpture by the definitions that Artforum and those kind of people would--

MR. BROWN: Sit or write at a piece of sculpture?

MR. CASTLE: It's not art then, if you can use it. And his staff all thinks that way and he's--

MR. BROWN: At the time you must have thought that was pretty ludicrous.

MR. CASTLE: You know, I thought they'd come around. Some directors and some curators did come around to accepting crafts, and that's fine, not that they shouldn't. But I think they're presenting the--the crafts are presenting themselves a problem when they're disguising themselves as art and sort of denying the function, denying what it really is, and pretending to be something else.

MR. BROWN: Do you feel you ever went that far?

MR. CASTLE: I never thought of it that way, but I think that some people thought of it that way, and it's certainly possible to think of it that way. You could look at a lot of my pieces and say, "Well, it's pretending to be sculpture. It's really a chair, but it's disguising itself as a piece of sculpture."

MR. BROWN: But it could still be a chair and still function as a chair.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I thought so.

MR. BROWN: It's perhaps simply coincidentally like some sculpture.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I thought that was the way. But I guess my first clue--well, I avoided the problem of teaching furniture because I left that teaching job.

MR. BROWN: What in 1970 or so?

MR. CASTLE: 1970. And I sort of thought I didn't really--I just concerned my own work, and my own work went right on. It didn't change any. And I had just--I just wasn't concerned with the teaching of furniture anymore. I taught sculpture. I thought that sort of let me off the hook. But what I ended up getting was--some sculpture students who knew I made furniture kept wanting to make furniture. So I ended up still having the problem to a lesser degree.

I guess my first sort of introduction to a different way of looking at this thing was two trips to England, and through John Makepeace's work. The first time I went, about five years ago, I was very confused with what was going on there. He had a staff of people who were just extraordinary craftsmen better than any I'd ever seen. They were making furniture, putting it together better than anything I'd ever seen. Take them forever to do it. Putting just an extraordinary amount of time into making something, and picking the materials so carefully, picking just the right boards. Which seemed to me a totally uneconomical and impractical approach. I really couldn't understand how you could put this much time into those aspects of the work. His designs weren't bad. They fell somewhere in the middle between tradition and being sculpture, although they weren't anywhere near as sculptural as mine, but they weren't traditional either.

MR. BROWN: Now what do you mean by sculptural? I meant to ask you much earlier.

MR. CASTLE: Well, not looking like furniture. Appearing to be from some certain views and not realizing its functional, thinking of it as actually a piece of sculpture.

MR. BROWN: An object, a three-dimensional object.

MR. CASTLE: A three-dimensional object, and not a piece of furniture. I mean, none of them looked like that. And I think occasionally my work did look like that. Occasionally my work, say from certain angles or for certain views or not being in use, you wouldn't realize what it is.

MR. BROWN: So your first reaction, however, to make Makepeace's, seeing his work, was you were amazed--

MR. CASTLE: Well, I liked it.

MR. BROWN: You liked it, but it was in the end--

MR. CASTLE: But I thought it was absolutely impractical, and he got high prices for it. And I went back again visited him two years later and he was of course doing the same thing doing it better even. And some of the projects underway were so extraordinary in terms of the amount of work that went into them. .. a chair he was making of macassar ebony, which is like the most expensive wood you can get, and stringing a seat in nickel wire, was--I was there for two weeks visiting, and the guy, one craftsman, would spend--you know, didn't even finish the seat in two weeks. But then I also began to do a fair amount of reading, by this time, about furniture and began to learn about the English tradition for working, which I had not realized before. Began to understand what's happening with the Cotswald tradition. I didn't know anything about that at that time, and that Grimson and Barnsley had gone off into the Cotswalds and started making furniture by hand of extraordinarily high quality.

MR. BROWN: These were design-trained people who'd gone off into the Cotswalds.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, they had some design training, but had money, so they didn't have to worry about supporting themselves, and were making furniture of extraordinary quality. And Edward Barnsley is still alive today. He's too old to work I think, but his shop's still not--you look at it as rather old-fashioned now, but there's a certain quality about it that's just extraordinary, and I began to realize that there's art and workmanship. And

that the art isn't all in the appearance of the piece. There's a great deal of art just in the workmanship.

MR. BROWN: By art you don't mean merely skill. You mean aesthetics?

MR. CASTLE: Well, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Design important.

MR. CASTLE: It's hard for to people to seemuch harder to see than the form of a piece. Even--you know, I also began to do a fair amount of reading about the history of furniture, and that all started because I got interested in these trompe l'oeil carvings. And in order to make those effective, I found out that I couldn't possibly use my own furniture. That negated the whole thing. It didn't work. That's like putting a sculpture on a sculpture. You had to use a traditional form to put the trompe l'oeil carving on. So in order to find some of those, I began going through the history books and reading about them, and we began making them and looked at them with a whole new way of looking at them once you'd made one. Once you'd done a ball and claw foot, you looked at it differently, and you really understood the differences between all the different balls and claw footsthat there were just vast differences in qualities of ball and claw foot. And how different they could be, how much art there could be just in that, in the sensitivity with which that's done. And the sensitivity with which little things could be done in a piece, that there--

MR. BROWN: Because the ball and claw after all is a design element. It's not a functional element.

MR. CASTLE: I mean I had thought a ball and claw was a ball and claw. When you start looking at all the different ones--

MR. BROWN: When you--you would also though look at certain technical refinements and see sensitivity--

MR. CASTLE: Oh, yeah, that, too. The ball and claw's an obvious one.

MR. BROWN: That's a design element practically, isn't it?

MR. CASTLE: Well, it is, but I mean I'd sort of assumed the ball and claw was a ball and claw, and I knew there were the three basic kinds the Rhode Island one, and the New York one, the Philadelphia one, and those are pretty recognizable. But then even beyond that there's enormous amounts of quality differences.

MR. CASTLE: --how well it's done. And that can become an art right there. And how a thing's put together can become artful. I mean the spacing of the dovetails, and just the way the joinery's placed around a piece, the selection of the wood. All these fine points which Makepeace was working on, because he came right out of the English tradition.

MR. BROWN: But formerly had not been of importance in your mind.

MR. CASTLE: Hm mm. I'd been interested in the three-dimensional aspect of the furniture. That what you see, what you grasp, the presence of the piecethat was where it was all at. That the piece'd grab you. You'd see it and you'd say, "Wow! Isn't that unusual?"

MR. BROWN: But not the quality of the wood or the fabrication?

MR. CASTLE: Well, to a lesser degree. Not that the wood could be--

MR. BROWN: But that it isn't a primary--

MR. CASTLE: It's not a primary consideration.

MR. BROWN: Nor was the way you put things together.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. Adequately put together was fine. Because you were really interested in the sculptural, three-dimensional presence of the piece that it would have power and dignity and movement, and all the things that sculpture would be concerned with.

MR. BROWN: This trompe l'oeil phase then came in in the mid-'70s. You then pushed away from what was chiefly laminated, fairly free form, freer forms?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. Well, a friend of mine, Steven Hogman--a Canadian craftsman, super craftsman, super artist--and I were discussing this recently, and he's into, and I wouldn't say research, but quite a lot of reading about left-brain/right-brain activity, and he thinks, and maybe he's right, that my writing a book about lamination has switched it from a right-brain activity to a left-brain activity, and now I've totally lost interest in it

as a result.

MR. BROWN: In the writing.

MR. CASTLE: In the writing, once it becomes all--

MR. BROWN: You've gotten your fill of it.

MR. CASTLE: I mean, I'd just done it.

MR. BROWN: You're purged of it.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: You told me earlier this summer that you felt you'd so articulated the potential in the various forms in the lamination that it became dead for you, became--

MR. CASTLE: Well, I did--

MR. BROWN: --too predictable.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, it did. And so I think I was like ripe, ready for something new to happen, and it grew out of the trompe l'oeil pieces, the interest in older furniture, but what it's had is a great affect upon what I think the education of woodworkers should be. Because I think--you know, it took me a long time to get around to it, and took me a long time to understand what the French and English tradition is in working with wood and how that differs from the American craft movement. And in most people's eyes it's old-fashioned, backward looking, that I think it's generally considered that the American craft movement is far in advance of any other country. And mostly I think it actually is, but in the furniture part I sort of think that that's not entirely true. It just appears to be that way. That when I--I'm backing up here, but I wanted to cover this. When I began to be interested in furniture everybody looks for the leaders, see what they're doing. The leaders were people like George Nakashima and Sam Maloof. Those were the two leaders in the '50s when I first looked, late fifties.

MR. BROWN: Wharton Esherick then?

MR. CASTLE: Wharton Esherick, too. Yeah, right. Wharton Esherick, I forgot about him. Well, really, now that I'm having a very good understanding of traditional working with wood, none of those people have a clue how to work with wood. Nakashima to an extent. Within the Japanese tradition, there's a certain amount of sound tradition there, but not a very high level of it. That none of those people really have a clue about what fine furniture is about, how it's made and what it's made out of, in their work. Well, I assumed that here's the leaders. These people know what they're doing, and it's only more recently that, you know, I just had to face the fact that none of them really put things together in a way that by the French or English tradition would be considered proper.

MR. BROWN: Would you say that like you in your earlier phase, were they more concerned with sculptural form?

MR. CASTLE: Oh, no, they're all naive about it, just the same--

MR. BROWN: Or sculpture?

MR. CASTLE: Well, no.

MR. BROWN: Naive in terms of technique?

MR. CASTLE: Naive in terms of--no, none of those people with the exception of Esherick were interested in sculpture. They worked--I mean Maloof started out with an interest in the Scandinavian look, which was the dominant look at the time, and naive craftsmen just put them together in a way that seemed logical to a guy who had pretty good sense of understanding how things went together. I mean, he had a pretty good understanding, but it's not the not sound way. It's sort of sensible in a naive way, and Nakashima's vocabulary is built out of, in a way that doesn't present itself with very many technical things to solve. Esherick really didn't put things together in a proper way at all had a set of what would be considered I think by my standards right now a rather layman's understanding of what joinery does.

MR. BROWN: And the forms of each of these men were by no means as sculptural as yours had been.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. So I mean idea ended up that these people and myself have been the leaders for the last 15, 20 years. Everybody else has sort of followed along. With nobody in this country it's actually a few little changes right now really looking to the European tradition to find out what fine woodworking is about.

MR. BROWN: And in terms of design, following more or less one of you four men.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. It all--

MR. BROWN: The same thing that you found happened to you at the School for American Craftsmen has happened with any of those other people.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: To the extent they've taught.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. And that would cover the bulk of the vocabulary in the field.

MR. BROWN: And in your own--you mentioned earlier I don't know if it's a term you used, to kind of, when you were teaching and stressing design, you'd say you want to create important forms. Would you use probably words like that?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I wouldn't--I'd still say "important form," but I think right now, why I'm trying to--this is actually the first time I've really tried to articulate this, because these are relatively new ideas that have become only sort of articulatable in the last six months. I haven't done any writing on this subject, and I've actually been wanting to write down what I think went wrong with the education, with the approach of the free sculptural approach, and what I think is going to work better about a sound basis in historical approach. Let me see--I keep backing up, but one of the things I saw going wrong was that when I saw students--how do I put this? I thought that anybody that had a sound basis in woodworking first and then trying to develop themselves as a designer, of being so bound up in the tradition, in the do's and don'ts that they were incapable of making that move. I saw that happening. But now I think it happened for a reason different than--but I still see that happening. For example, just recently, when last year--we took three students in our program last September who were second-year students. They had gone one year to Leed's design workshop in Massachusetts, which gives their students a firm technical foundation, no real design work although they say they are. They really pass out the plans, and then if you want to be creative you change the handles or the legs or something. And I knew that's what they were doing; it wasn't a surprise, but I didn't realize what happens with that. What happens with that I saw happening then when they came here, and we said, "Well, you design from scratch here; we're not handing out anything," They were really lost. They didn't really understand what part went first, how you fit this into that. They made drawings of pieces that were inaccurate, and everything else, so it wasn't the fact that didn't have the mental capacity to imagine the pieces, they didn't really have this sort of mechanical ability to do it, to make that transition, whereas even students that work on very simple things which we had our students design everything they make, but we greatly restricted their vocabulary, so they design simply did get on rather quickly to making this transition from a drawing, even if the drawing had errors in it, to be able to make a piece that didn't have any errors in it. Because they'd spot the errors, where the students who made the assumptions the drawings were right were incapable of understanding the drawings might have errors.

And so there's a little more to it than just the difference between designing the furniture and not designing it. There's another aspect in there, and it's understanding the proper order of putting things together when you come up with a form that you have not made before.

MR. BROWN: In the design stage--

MR. CASTLE: In the design stage.

MR. BROWN: --the proper form, or order of putting things together. In your design--

MR. CASTLE: So the design stage plays a much more important part. I mean, I might have agreed with somebody a year ago who said, "Well, if this guy has no intention of being a designer why should he bother? Just keep him on the technical stuff." And I would have agreed. I said, "Yeah, that's true. Why bother him?" Well, now I wouldn't agree for a minute with that approach.

MR. BROWN: He has to know how to--

MR. CASTLE: He has--even if he's going to be a terrible designer and the designs look ugly, he's got to know how to do it anyway because it makes you understand the proper thinking process that gets you from an idea on paper into a mechanical drawing into the finished piece through these processes. Otherwise, there's no way of making that transition properly from the drawing. Even if we're not concerned about how beautiful it is, he's still got to make it.

MR. BROWN: You have to make that mechanical drawing. You have to have that stage?

MR. CASTLE: Well, you've got to be able to get from the thumbnail sketch to understand that three-

dimensionally, understanding how one part fits into another, which you'd make first, and all these various procedures and orders of procedures, to get from that to the mechanical drawing, and then you really can't even assume your mechanical drawing is correct and follow it blindly. You have to pick an order out of that, not to get yourself into a spot. What can you assume to be correct, for sure? What is doubtful? You learn to work with this. There's a whole way of working that let's you--particularly when the form of the piece becomes unusual. A real straightforward, simple piece, you know, probably doesn't matter. As the form gets more complicated, this process becomes more and more important. Anybody's who's even going to be just a technical craftsman has to go through the design process. And you just don't, you just don't expect him to get terribly good at it, at the actual making of a beautiful object on paper, but he gets good at translating that through the various aspects and--it's awfully hard to articulate.

MR. BROWN: If such a person say, highly skilled but with no design sense doesn't go through these steps, the thumbnail sketch--

MR. CASTLE: He can only make from the traditional vocabulary.

MR. BROWN: Repetition, too.

MR. CASTLE: He can do variations on those themes. Which I think Tage Frid is that kind of craftsman. He can make things that are in a certain kind of vocabulary and make them fine, no problem, but you place him with a different vocabulary and he would be very lost. Where the person with the design background would have that understanding of this thing I'm not able to articulate, which is in between the design and making. There's a big area there, that when you don't have any experience with this kind of a thing, you're able to get there anyway.

MR. BROWN: So design's sort of a pathfinder.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, I think I'm--

MR. BROWN: Lays things open, does it?

MR. CASTLE: I mean, I'm good at that, and sort of assumed it to be a natural thing. So it never was any problem for me to take a sketch, no matter how funny looking it was, and figure out a way to make it in a fairly logical manner, and get there rather efficiently. And the students who I worked with at RIT always could do it, too. I mean, I never had any experience with anybody who got out of the, who was totally admitted [sic] from the design area. It's only when I had some. So, see, I used to assume if you were trained technically that automatically meant that you were so bound up in that vocabulary you could never make these so-called arty pieces or whatever.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: Well, that's not really exactly what happens. It's only because you've never had any experience with the design stage, and you can't just suddenly say, "Okay, now, you've finished your technical training design." They're not capable of designing. They don't know anything about it. That's why they can't design. It's not that the technical vocabulary was so confining that it made them incapable. That wasn't the reason. See, I had the wrong reason for it.

MR. BROWN: You thought that that's why you wanted to push that away?

MR. CASTLE: So I figured you had to get rid of that in order to open up. And it appeared that it worked. And it did, but for the wrong reason. It did work. They were able to make--the students were able to make this transition from drawings to finished pieces pretty comfortably, not many problems there, but I didn't know they could have done it with the traditional vocabulary and still done it had they had the design training along with it.

MR. BROWN: And you now feel that the traditional vocabulary is extremely important.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: The technical vocabulary.

MR. CASTLE: And I now feel it's not going to prevent you from being creative later on. It's not going to prevent you from doing imaginative things.

MR. BROWN: Do you feel that by the late sixties your students at RIT were getting short shrift on the technical side?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: And even Keyser as you said had--

MR. CASTLE: Well, Keyser had backed off a bit because he didn't want that position. I don't blame him. Looked like here I was the artist, and he didn't want to be the technician.

MR. BROWN: So at least you had enhanced--I mean the training in design was pretty good, as you were just saying.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: They'd learned to think freely and all.

MR. CASTLE: They could think freely, and they could get from sketch to finished product.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: But they were mostly ugly.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, and imitative, you said.

MR. CASTLE: And imitative. But they could do that.

MR. BROWN: Did you ever get around that problem? Have you put your finger on how to overcome the student being the imitator of the teacher.

MR. CASTLE: Well, we've overcome it here in our school maybe in a way that's too heavy handed. But, I mean, we place the restrictions on the problem each time we give one that sort of eliminates a lot of those pitfalls.

MR. BROWN: How do you do that? By excluding something--

MR. CASTLE: Excluding certain kinds of forms. But, I mean, it won't work all the way. I mean, eventually as a student becomes more and more advanced, they get more and more freedom. But hopefully by that time they have such a nice foundation to work from that they'll have many more options open.

MR. BROWN: I was going to ask that. If someone gets more and more experience in designing, shouldn't they in most cases, if they're gifted in design, gradually drift further and further away from the prototype, from say the design style of their master?

MR. CASTLE: Hope so, yeah. As I said, I didn't actually worry so much about that at RIT in those days. I thought they'd get out of it.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: And I thought they'd work themselves out of it. It's only like when saw students out of the school, and then even teaching, and then their students' work even looked alike, that I began to worry.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

MR. CASTLE: It took a fair amount of years before I began to worry about that. And, like I said, I didn't even face the problem then. I just quit teaching. I didn't try to solve the problem. I just didn't want to be a part of it anymore.

MR. BROWN: You felt you were bringing out this--

MR. CASTLE: I was bringing--I was contributing to something I didn't want to contribute to. I thought it was all ugly, the furniture that was being made, and just didn't want to be a part of it. Is it twelve o'clock?

[Audio break.]

MR. CASTLE: I just wanted to say something about lamination. The technique was kind of a problem because it was the thing that--whenever students laminated, their work tended to look more like mine. I think I spoke earlier that there were other kinds of forms and other ways of working that I worked with, too, and even those were copied. But the obvious one, the one everyone associated with and picked right out, was the stack-laminated pieces. And I did try to control that a bit at RIT by trying to hold back on that a bit.

MR. BROWN: Why do you suppose that imitativeness happened particularly with the laminated work?

MR. CASTLE: Well, it isn't the nature of the lamination, because the lamination has no inherent form, but I think

maybe the organic form is the most obvious one, and the one that's the easiest to associate with at least I felt so anyway and I think other people maybe felt the same way. They felt that it tied in with art form, it tied in with nature, tied in with some other forms of furniture a little. But I had already sort of been working with vocabulary for so long that I had pretty much covered that one, and so it made it very difficult for anybody working organically in laminated forms for their work not to look like mine. It's like I sort of--well, it was like in the west when you go out in the 1880s and they let you put as much fence around your territory as you can and it's yours. You know, I'd sort of put of a lot of fence around territory, and I'd been very productive and gotten a fair amount of publicity, so I had pretty much sort of used that vocabulary up in a sense.

MR. BROWN: The students were pretty self-conscious, were they, about what they were trying to do? So by looking at your high production, reading about the publicity you were getting, kind of overwhelmed them at that stage.

MR. CASTLE: Well, they said that's what they wanted to do. I mean, you'd even get students dressing like me.

MR. BROWN: What, the tie?

MR. CASTLE: Not so much that, but I mean other aspects. I mean, I always wore cowboy boots, for example. And in 1962 nobody in Rochester wore cowboy boots. I was the only person doing that. I still do that today in the winter. I don't wear them in the summer, but in those days I wore it year round. I didn't wear anything but cowboy boots. And the first thing you know the students were all wearing cowboy boots. It's different today. It's become fashionable.

MR. BROWN: One thing I wanted to ask you, lamination was your best-known technique in the sixties, but what were some of the others you were teaching at that time?

MR. CASTLE: Well, they weren't--

MR. BROWN: I don't think you did say much.

MR. CASTLE: No, there were techniques that I couldn't really associate and say they were mine. I hadn't really developed that stacking technique. I didn't invent it, but I really did develop it and turn it into a way of making furniture, and it was my technique. And other forms of lamination for example, bent lamination that I worked with, too. But that was certainly far more in the public domain, because that had been around for a long time. And then of course traditional joinery can't be associated with anybody.

MR. BROWN: No.

MR. CASTLE: And I didn't work with all those other things, too, because I really--I consciously was really trying to expand my vocabulary. I sort of felt--I had a conscious feeling that I wanted to cover a lot of area, and that I sort of felt like it had to be done quickly. And I think maybe I had this idea in my mind that I really did want to get all this stuff and have it so that I could associate with it and say this was my area of forms.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Stake out a very large turf.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, I staked out a large turf real early, before anybody else was touching those kind of things. And I guess that was good as far as furthering my reputation goes, but it kind of hurt the students because it didn't leave so much for them which at the time it didn't occur to me that there weren't other areas to go into. And I still don't think that that should be the problem that it is. There's more forms besides organic forms. And today there's some people doing some good stuff today, too, now and then. But it seems after doing this for eighteen years, and only just a few students have been able to use lamination in a way that they could associate with their own personal vocabulary. It's happened so few times. I mean, I don't quite know what to think about that. I'm not ready to have an opinion on that. But to back up and get where I started this was, I did try to control it a bit by not letting anybody just laminate whenever they felt like it. And it was considered a more advanced technique, and it was for people who had developed further. But there's still a lot of them wanted to do it. And I guess one of the thoughts I had when I quit teaching that would sort of stop it, because Bill Keyser really wasn't interested in that technique.

MR. BROWN: He going to stay on with the teaching there, wasn't he?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. So I thought that would sort of--and it did as far as RIT was concerned. RIT, almost, I mean, no lamination happens there. It really just--but then it immediately began to happen other places a whole lot more.

MR. BROWN: As some of your students or people that knew of your work--

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, through students, through exhibitions, and, you know, the word had really gotten around by

the late sixties. So by '68, '69, '70, you really began to see it all over, even in places that I couldn't directly pinpoint how it would happen.

MR. BROWN: Did you part from RIT with sort of mixed feelings about that place? Was it changing at that point as well? Isn't that about the time they started moving into their new campus?

MR. CASTLE: It made an enormous change. And in a way that helped me--

MR. BROWN: The dean was leaving about then--

MR. CASTLE: Well, my decisions--it made this decision easy, actually. I had been bothered by this for a couple of years previous to this, and I probably wouldn't have really gotten off my ass and done anything about it so drastically as quit, except that certain other things like the move to the new campus and the changing of deans sort of made it easier.

MR. BROWN: Hmm. Because you could tell it was going to be an entirely different sort of place?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, I taught one semester on new campus and--was it one semester? No, one year on the new campus, and really didn't like it probably because I was spoiled by the old School for American Craftsmen and didn't really want to adjust to a situation that I suppose was economically what they had to do. The situation--I suppose you probably know all about this, but at the old School for American Craftsmen was what I consider a rather utopian craft situation. I've never seen anything as good before or since. I think I came in at the very best time. I think then the school was at its greatest around 1962. And it stayed. I think it went up to about you know, the way I see it up to '62, and it hung in there for a few years, and maybe not much change between '62 and '68. Those were good years.

MR. BROWN: What made it so good during those six or so years?

MR. CASTLE: Well, the--actually a few things changed. But it was a subsidized program. It was almost unrealistic in terms of the cost. That Mrs. Webb's money was going in, and--the School for American Craftsmen had its own building, and the dean was Harold Brennan, who was chairman of the School for American Craftsmen and dean of the whole fine arts department. Well, the School for American Craftsmen was his baby, and it got preferential treatment.

MR. BROWN: There was an art school as well?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, the art school, which was much larger and everything else, didn't really get--I mean, we got better treatment. We had better teaching schedules, we got better pay, had access to supplies and equipment, and our budgets with buying things was better. It really got preferred treatment. And then the one thing it did get that the other part of the school didn't get at all, and I think Mrs. Webb was probably picking up the bill for this one, is that the school supplied all the materials. And that was silver in the silver department, and wood in the wood department. Not just sort of commonplace wood; it was every kind of wood. When I came in there--it began to deteriorate a little bit because the costs of wood started going up, but when I came we had rosewood and teak and fancy veneers and everything there. Partly because of my lack of interest in fancy woods and partly because of the cost of them going up, the fancy woods got discontinued in a few years, but it was incredible in 1962. The student could go right in the lumber rack and pick out Brazilian rosewood and didn't have to pay a cent for it. And the deal was that they did have to pay if they took it home, though, and the thought behind it was that no student should be limited because of his inability to pay for materials, and in building pieces, and the thought was that if the student can't afford to buy it, the school can sell it and get its money back. And that sort of worked. Periodically the school would have a sale. But the school would always come up short, because if a student took out a board and ruined it, or a project never got finished--

MR. BROWN: For every piece they were able to sell--

MR. CASTLE: So the material that went into the piece didn't really represent what the costs were.

MR. BROWN: And weren't the charges at those sales fairly nominal, too?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. Students kept track of the material that went into the piece, and those records were on file and you could look and see this piece cost so much. And if the students didn't take it after X number of years, I think they had a couple of years after they graduated if they didn't pick it up, it was sold. In these sales people would knock down each other to get to them, because you sold it by the lumber bill. And the lumber--

[Reel 2, side B.]

[Note: The quality of this recording is substantially lower than that of the previous tapes.]

MR. BROWN: Another effect of those sales was that to further increase the awareness of the Rochester community and the skills?

MR. CASTLE: That may have been it.

MR. BROWN: They were already pretty excited by it?

MR. CASTLE: The sales began to diminish. They had been more prominent before I came. I'm not sure why. The furniture always seemed to beor maybe I just remember it the thing that people were fighting after the most. You really didn't get. I was going to say you didn't get much silver. I can't remember the silver whether there was silver in those sales or not. I remember ceramics, I remember furniture, in those sales. But for some reason either the students started buying it all and partly as a result of--there had to be a little more controls over the lumber. They began to say the students still got their lumber free, but that we had to control it a little more, so I don't know. For some reason there was fewer of those as the years went along.

MR. BROWN: Now when you came, did you exhibit or sell through Shop One [Rochester, NY] at all?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: Now that was managed or owned by several others who'd been here a bit longer, weren't they?

MR. CASTLE: Tage [Frid] had sold out his share when he left Rochester, and so it was Franz [Wildenhain] and Ronnie.

MR. BROWN: Ron Pearson?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: He was still here or he was here occasionally?

MR. CASTLE: He was still here. He didn't leave until 1971.

MR. BROWN: And he was teaching, too, wasn't he?

MR. CASTLE: No.

MR. BROWN: No.

MR. CASTLE: No, he hadn't taught after '62. He taught sometime earlier than that. But I'd say a couple of years before that he did teach, but in 1962 he wasn't teaching and he never taught again after that.

MR. BROWN: What do you remember about Shop One? What was it like when you first came here? How did it impress you?

MR. CASTLE: Well, it wasn't particularly impressive physically, but the quality of what they sold was certainly impressive. It was in the top of a carriage house that was just slightly seedy, in a very seedy neighborhood, but a neighborhood that was actually quite charming, and I liked the downtown RIT campus. In fact, that's just what I was talking about, that move business. They had very good quality work for sale, a wide range, and they had collected not just Rochester work. It was from all over the country.

MR. BROWN: Did you start exhibiting there within a year of your coming?

MR. CASTLE: I'd say it probably was about a year, mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: How were your things received?

MR. CASTLE: Fairly well. At that time I was still in a position of trying to decide what I should, whether I wanted to make any furniture or whether I wanted to make sculpture. So I was also showing at the Schumann Gallery, which was a fine arts gallery, at the same time.

MR. BROWN: Here in Rochester?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. Which was a very good gallery for Rochester, which lasted for five or six years. Jackie Schumann ran it, and she was very good. She had a good eye, and did a nearly New York kind of job with it.

MR. BROWN: Your work was still indefinite then.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: Some of it people could say "that's sculpture, that's not furniture."

MR. CASTLE: Well, there were a little more--it was perhaps a little clearer when you saw it then and less clear in my mind, because I was making sculpture on one hand, and the sculpture was figurative then. And then I was making furniture, and the furniture looked like furniture. I was working--the first pieces I did were using a bent lamination technique quite a bit, and they tended to look--they were light and put together with joinery. And they were sort of exaggerated furniture forms. They weren't in traditional furniture form, but yet they looked like furniture.

MR. BROWN: You, meanwhile, were picking up techniques in joinery and all this--

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: --sort of frantically or--

MR. CASTLE: No.

MR. BROWN: --extremely interested? You were very confident were you, in where you were going and intrigued by the prospects?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, it was easy to pick up the techniques to get to that level.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: I've found since then that the next level up in techniques is much more difficult. But to get to that sort of pretty reasonable level of confidence was pretty, was real easy. The next level up to just absolutely superior craftsmanship was quite difficult.

MR. BROWN: And that's taken you a long time.

MR. CASTLE: I mean, I'm working on that right now.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, you mentioned something of it in the mid-seventies when you went to John Makepeace's place.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, and that's a different. That's better craftsmanship.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. And this is really giving you your current impulse to perfect your craftsmanship?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: But the old--were there in those days comparisons made between your craftsmanship and that which had preceded you here, where you mentioned the Danish modern refinements where technique was practically everything. Or were people simply seemingly excited by your coming here?

MR. CASTLE: Well, my workmanship was up that, was equal to that. I don't think that I could say it was better, but it was equal to.

MR. BROWN: Your forms looked much different of course than anything they'd seen before, right?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm, very much different.

MR. BROWN: And was the Rochester public quite sophisticated and flexible?

MR. CASTLE: Oh, I got pretty good acceptance on it. You know, I'd get articles in the paper and I was getting national press pretty regularly from say 1963. I don't think I had any national press in '62 with the exception of the Young Americans Show in New York.

MR. BROWN: Now that was shown by what?

MR. CASTLE: The Museum of Contemporary Crafts.

MR. BROWN: And that was an important--

MR. CASTLE: Well, it was the first important show I was in.

MR. BROWN: --landmark for you?

MR. CASTLE: It was a national competition that the press picked up on. There was quite a bit of publicity on it.

MR. BROWN: What were some of the other important shows you had in those years?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I had a one-man show at Shop One within a year of my coming to Rochester, probably '63. I'd have to check that date.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, you thought it was about '63.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah. And I guess the first time I got a big show out of town was at Dartmouth, perhaps a year later than that, the next year. It was the first sort of large show out of Rochester.

MR. BROWN: And what response was there to that?

MR. CASTLE: I really have no idea, because I never even saw the show. Just sent the pieces off.

MR. BROWN: Then you were showing at the Schumann Gallery here?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: Lee Nordness in New York City.

MR. CASTLE: That would have come a couple--that would have come later. I don't think I would have been in Lee Nordness before about '65, '66. '66 probably. Maybe I shouldn't get into Lee Nordness. That's an interesting topic, too, but we didn't finish the--we were talking about the School for American Craftsman.

MR. BROWN: Oh, let's do get back to that, then get back to some of your shows.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, because Lee Nordness's Gallery had quite an influence on crafts, I think.

MR. BROWN: Okay, well, we'll get back to that. Well, now then what else can we talk about, about the school?

MR. CASTLE: Well, we were just--I was just starting to talk about the changes that immediately took place when the School for American Craftsman moved to the new campus.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

MR. CASTLE: Although they were sort of coming. We could sort of see the budgets weren't going to be as good. And things like the School for American Craftsman having its own gallery, with control over its own gallery--we could really put up a show in there anytime we wanted. Well, the fact that we had to work with the other faculty, but--for example, I wanted to have a show of the woodworking students during the year, I could just organize it and put that up, and there was even some budget money to paint the place and buy props and build--in the new campus there is one gallery for everybody: for the photographers, the design department, and the School for American Craftsman. That was no longer going to have its own building. It had an awfully nice identity because of being in one building. And that the students in the various departments had a nice interaction because you had to go--in order to get from the ceramics shop to the gallery, you had to walk through the wood shop. And the wood shop was sort of in the middle of the building, the ceramics in the back, jewelry on top, and so on. So when coffee break time came, the coffee machine was in the basement for everybody. It was like a family. The faculty were constantly seeing each others' students from the various departments, and they were very small, the departments, around twelve students in each department, and two faculty for twelve students, which didn't really didn't teach at the same time. We had three-day teaching schedules, and we'd overlap on Wednesdays, so on Wednesdays you have double faculty. But one teacher for 12 students is very good, and then on Wednesdays when you had two teachers for 12 students, that was extraordinary. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: So the students were working more or less half their week with you and half their week with Bill Keyser?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: And would he carry things in a certain way and you in another, or would they have two different projects going?

MR. CASTLE: No, just one project.

MR. BROWN: Did that usually mesh together pretty well?

MR. CASTLE: We would have to grade jointly. I don't know. We didn't seem to have very serious problems with

that. Jewelry had serious problems with that one.

MR. BROWN: Oh, did it? There was a constant turnover over of people in the jewelry department.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. And it was because of that of having to come to decisions about students, that sometimes they would not agree on.

MR. BROWN: Was this part of Brennan's thinking perhaps to have this two-people--

MR. CASTLE: I imagine that was his setup. He set it up that way. And it seemed to work all right. I thought it very peculiar when I came, but it didn't really seem to ever present very serious problems.

MR. BROWN: Too, you and Keyser sort of complemented one another.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, we didn't seem to have too much trouble agreeing on what grade a student should get. At least I don't remember any serious problems there anyway.

MR. BROWN: But in other areas there sometimes were?

MR. CASTLE: There were some serious problems in jewelry, I know.

MR. BROWN: What was this? A problem of taste, or the kind of forms they felt they should be making?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I mean it would be so extreme that one--in jewelry, I can remember at least one case where one of them wanted to give a student an F and the other one wanted to give it an A. They were just absolutely at opposite ends.

MR. BROWN: Wow. [Laughs.]

MR. CASTLE: One of them wanted to kick it out and the other one thought it was great.

MR. BROWN: Did Brennan himself ever kind of talk to you people informally about what his intentions were?

MR. CASTLE: Well, we had very frequent faculty meetings, but they weren't generally of a very philosophical nature. They were more or less practical matters.

MR. BROWN: Sort of nuts and bolts--

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: --of how to get something changed--

MR. CASTLE: And there really weren't should have been conversations of a more philosophical nature of where the school was going. That never happened. The whole planning for the School for American Craftsman, the new building, I think was sort of a bad episode.

MR. BROWN: How did that arrive? Did that happen independently of--

MR. CASTLE: Well, it was particularly bad for Brennan. Being the dean of fine arts and in the position of he should have been the authority on art was not consulted about the art on the new campus.

MR. BROWN: Who did they consult? Outsiders?

MR. CASTLE: Well, the architects had their input. I think they had the strongest input. And the Board of Directors. And one of the board of directors was an art collector, a guy named Stern. A local who has quite an art collection. He had a big input.

MR. BROWN: Is he a Rochester art collector?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. He was going to give money for art, so he had the biggest input. And Brennan really never--Brennan had all these ideas about how he going to have the faculty all get commissions. And it sort of--the architects entertained the idea, I think maybe just to humor everybody, and a couple of them did pan out. Keyser did get one.

MR. BROWN: You mean a commission for the school, for the new--

MR. CASTLE: For the new facility.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: But it sort of--a couple of them worked out, but the architects sort of did it, you know, not giving you a very good spot, and not comparing in the budgets for those commissions, were just fractional compared to what they were spending on other things that they were picking. They would spend \$100,000 on a Jose Rivera and then give Keyser \$7,000 to do a mural that's twice as big as a Jose Rivera. And, you know, it was a very bad scene, and Brennan just didn't really seem to have any authority, and he should have been the authority, I felt at least should have gotten his say in those kind of matters. He was the dean of fine arts. And when it came down to even working with your spaces, that we had very little say in the faculty on what we wanted in terms of the space, and where we wanted it and what we wanted in it. They sort of only token would they pay any attention to you at all.

MR. BROWN: And yet, on the other hand, they apparently didn't consult with other craftsmen who at least could have told them what they wanted?

MR. CASTLE: No, so I really almost hated the building before it was made. Because I didn't get anything that I thought was important. I thought the layout was not the way it should be, and they really just did really dumb things. Like, for example, the wood storage area was underneath the shop. And it had been that way at the old campus, I guess. In spite of what we said, they didn't believe what we said; they saw it that way. That was because in an old building there was no place else. We had to crawl down a ladder into a basement and stick boards up through a hole. Well, in the new campus they put it below too, and after fighting them on it, that there was no place else they could put it, well, we ended up with the same thing: a hole in the floor to pass boards up through. But nobody ever told me or anybody else that the ceiling was 25 foot high there. Well, boards aren't 25 foot long. You can't hand them up anyway.

MR. BROWN: So it was a helluva problem, huh?

MR. CASTLE: Well, you've got to take the boards out. You've got to go around and walk up a flight of stairs and around. You know, just really stupid. It's all over the planning; the whole place was just--

MR. BROWN: It sounds as though it was a rather arrogant architectural plan. Some moneyed collectors having a great deal of say in wanting, say, big-name sculpture. You mentioned Rivera.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. Yeah, there's a Henry Moore, and you know he spent big bucks on that. And then some of the people I felt--you know, I felt I should have gotten a commission. There was--Keyser should have and did. Wasn't paid properly for it. And other local artists should have had--not local people who were involved in the school should have had, been involved in the art of the school. They did have an art program, an art budget, and they did end up getting a fair amount. But the selection was done very poorly, and the placement was poorly placed. They have actually a few good pieces.

MR. BROWN: Did Brennan retire then, about the time of the move?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. Wildenhain never got his commission either.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, he was to have had one, wasn't he?

MR. CASTLE: He was supposed to have had one of those. And he ended up getting his like a year ago. They really saw the shortcoming there. They sort of fit him into an awful situation, a dark hallway where you can't even see the piece. But he did end up getting one just a few years before his death. About ten years later than it should have been.

MR. BROWN: Well, can I get back a little bit to your colleagues there at the school. You mentioned how informal it was, how you walked through each other's shops and the like. Maybe you can you characterize some of them that you knew in the '60s? You've talked a bit about Bill Keyser--

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: --that you worked you meshed together quite well. Who were some of the others you got to know particularly closely?

MR. CASTLE: Well, my situation and Keyser's situation began to deteriorate. It didn't stay as good. We began to have some problems, and it was really I think my fault, because it really wasn't a fair situation that he got into that I tended to get preferential treatment because I was getting the limelight. My work was getting a lot of publicity and--I mean, I think I was a little blind to that at the time, didn't really realize what I was doing. When people would come there, they would come to see me. And I was getting invited to the exhibits and I was getting the credit, which wasn't quite a fair situation. And that situation began to get a little awkward.

MR. BROWN: So there were tensions there in the end.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, so there began to be tensions in the late '60s, that weren't there in the middle, early '60s. Because I was really just out--I was really hustling, and I had been doing pretty well at it, and his work just wasn't getting any publicity.

MR. BROWN: But you said last time you feel it's essential to hustle. If you've got something you're excited about and you want people to know about it.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I would never--I would even now, knowing what people's feelings are involved, I wouldn't have changed that aspect. I just would have probably tried to separate it from the school more.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Did you have patrons and writers and stuff were coming into the school itself?

MR. CASTLE: Well, but see the school wanted that.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. CASTLE: Brennan encouraged that. Anytime there's publicity, he encouraged the mentioning of the school, and it became like, you know, I got real well known in the school, and Keyser didn't. But he wanted the people, he wanted collectors coming to the school. He wanted architects coming to the school. He wanted that which is good. I just didn't handle it quite right. I'm not sure exactly what I should have done differently.

MR. BROWN: But you were naive at the time maybe about his feelings?

MR. CASTLE: And I didn't really realize--I didn't realize it until it was sort of too late, that his feelings were being hurt.

MR. BROWN: He didn't speak out.

MR. CASTLE: He never said anything.

MR. BROWN: Was he a rather reticent fellow anyway?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, I think so, yeah. But the other faculty members--well, I always felt I think probably closest to Franz.

MR. BROWN: Really? Why do you suppose that?

MR. CASTLE: And socially he was the only faculty member I saw beyond the sort of faculty functions where everybody was. We had a fair amount of faculty functions. Like Bernowski lived on a farm, and he'd have the SAC [School for American CraftsmanEd.] faculty out probably once a year. Brennan'd have the SAC faculty out maybe once every other year. There'd be various--and the Shop 1 openings would bring the SAC faculty together frequently to my house after an opening because I lived near the Shop 1, and I'd always say, "Anybody want to over to my house after the opening?" And the SAC faculty would be part of that group. So we saw each other, the SAC faculty, socially fairly frequently. But outside of those situations Franz is probably the only one I saw. Would actually invite him over or invite me over.

MR. BROWN: What do you suppose there was there that--

MR. CASTLE: Actually, Hobart would have a function once in a while, too.

MR. BROWN: Hobart Toles.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: Would these be, if not formal, at least sort of light talk mainly?

MR. CASTLE: Oh, a picnic in the summer, or a potluck dinner.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: Those kind of--probably everybody on the SAC faculty had something for the faculty, so we did see each other socially.

MR. BROWN: But Franz was really the only one you would sit down with and have long talks with?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: What do you suppose there was about him that attracted you, you wanted to go talk with him?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I think the two of us probably saw each other as the artists in that group. Both of us tended to work more like artists and act more like it and be interested in art more than the other people. I mean, we were interested in painting and sculpture and those kind of fields far more than anybody else in that group. I mean, the rest of the group probably wouldn't bother to go to a painting show, but Franz and I would.

MR. BROWN: So that most of them then were just frequently interested only in their own field?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: Do you recall some of Franz's ideas, some of his attitudes, that stuck with you that are memorable?

MR. CASTLE: No, not really. I've always found him somewhat difficult to talk to about, oh, subjects of an artistic nature, to get into very deep to it. He'd get carried away real easy.

MR. BROWN: What do you mean?

MR. CASTLE: Well, kind of on a subject and kind of get away from it and go on and on and on, and then it would get to be--and it wasn't really quite what I was interested in. He's interesting, and certainly there was a lot of interesting conversations, but often it would get into a--you know, dominate too much of the conversation in an area that wasn't really what you were interested in. I can't put it, can't give a specific example.

MR. BROWN: But that was a fairly engaging quality, too, in him, was it?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: His energy, you know.

MR. CASTLE: Oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: And would he listen to you, when you were sort of--

MR. CASTLE: Well, I think Wharton Esherick was a mutual interest. He's very interested in Wharton Esherick, and I was very interested in Wharton Esherick, and he had Wharton Esherick furniture and enjoyed showing it to me, and other Wharton Esherick objects, and I was always very interested in that.

MR. BROWN: Did either of you go see--did you go see Esherick when he was still alive?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah. Not together. We both did.

MR. BROWN: What do you suppose there was in Esherick that appealed to both of you? I suppose, two different things. Wildenhain saw something different than you did.

MR. CASTLE: I imagine. What I saw was the first artist that I'd--well, the first person I'd seen who worked in wood who I'd think of as an artist who approached it like an art form and whose life style and work and everything were all tied up so closely together with the work. I mean, I found that very fascinating. It was the first personal experience I'd had with anybody who lived and worked that way. And I liked that aspect of it. Not so much that I was particularly fond of the work, but I found it fascinating and interesting because--well, I would have found any work that was unusual and imaginative fascinating. But he presented a fair body of it that, well, over a quite a few years, that met those criteria. So I was interested in his work and enjoyed seeing it. I didn't think it was great work or anything.

MR. BROWN: You thought it was rather limited and--

MR. CASTLE: Well, I was always bothered by the shoddiness of it. And as I have become more interested in the superfine craftsmanship, I think I've also become more tolerant of that shoddy craftsmanship, because it was appropriate in a way. Every level of work demands a certain type of craftsmanship to be acceptable, and it really is unnecessary to do better. But I think that's the level of craftsmanship I had in my work in the '60s, when I put a rocking chair and easy chair together. The level of craftsmanship in it was not this extraordinary craftsmanship I've spoken of, like 18th-century French craftsmanship, but it was absolutely adequate to the piece. And his work is at a lower level of craftsmanship, but I would say it's adequate for the piece and for the form. It bothered me some at the time, because I isolated it, and would look at things that were poorly crafted, and I don't think you should do it that way. I really feel in his work that that level of craftsmanship is appropriate to the form, and you have to look at it in a more of overall context, and it doesn't really bother me now, but it's still not--don't see his work as one of the highlights in the history of furniture. But in the American scene in the early part of making furniture, he certainly was the first and most important.

MR. BROWN: Back in the--would that be back in the '30s or '40s?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, nobody was doing that. So you've got to give him a lot of credit, and a lot of important point in history, I think, is partly because of the time and the way the pieces looked and all. I don't know--if you take them out and isolate them from the situation and stand them up next to the world's best pieces of furniture, they just aren't going to hold up too well. But you shouldn't look at them that way.

MR. BROWN: When you met with him, did you go see him several times, or did he talk to you quite a bit?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. I was there three times. And the first time unwelcome, because I showed up unannounced when I was a student before I'd even made any furniture. But I was impressed nonetheless, even though I didn't nearly get unjustly impressed with the location of the place and what I saw around, the way it looked and all. And it was quite a few years later--

[This interview was transcribed from duplicated tapes, which changed sides here. There is a break in the conversation here that may not have occurred in the original.]

MR. CASTLE: --earlier, because there was period when I tried to get him to come up to the School for American Craftsmen. Anyway, he didn't seem to be interested. I forget what the problem was.

MR. BROWN: You mean, to teach?

MR. CASTLE: No, just to talk. In the early '60s. And then I remember at one point I wrote him about coming down there and visiting, bringing some students, and he wrote back. He had large fee to let people visit him, and that really offended me. I can begin to understand that now, but I almost--I don't do it, but I've almost felt like it. And that bothered me, so we never went with the students. But I got there a few years later than that and he was very nice to me then.

MR. BROWN: What would he do or talk about when you visited him?

MR. CASTLE: Oh, we didn't have any deep conversations about the philosophy of furniture, but, you know, I was very interested in how he made things and seeing the things and answered any questions. But it was sort of conversational on the surface, nothing deep. And he wasn't really very interested in my work and didn't really want to know anything about it.

MR. BROWN: Then he was consumed by doing his own work.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: Was he a modest fellow, or arrogant, or how would you characterize him?

MR. CASTLE: Neither one. He was very sort of, the way you might expect. He wasn't overly modest or he wasn't overly arrogant. You know, I found him very pleasant. He was into his own work and really not in tune with what anybody else was doing, and he wasn't much concerned with anybody else was doing, although aware of it. He knew what I was doing. He knew what my work looked like. It wasn't that he was naive.

MR. BROWN: You said you admired--maybe the first furniture designer who you admired the lifestyle, the lack of separation.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. Well, I had had no experience with craftsmen at that point, and very little with artists, but I thought I knew how artists lived, and I sort of assumed that's how artists lived, and I guess I really didn't know that craftsmen did the same thing. There's really no difference, but in 1960, when I must have visited the first time, you know, the first time I'd ever visited any craftsman. In the same visit I was with a friend, Cooper Woodring. We had come east from Kansas--it was Easter vacation--and visited galleries in New York, and museums. He had relatives in Massachusetts, so we'd gone up, and we were driving through Roxbury, Connecticut, and I happened to remember that Calder lived there. And I think it was because Cooper had more guts in these matters than I, said "Let's stop and visit," and we did and Calder was very open really. Invited us in and showed us everything. And it was then later the same visit we stopped in to see Esherick, and he was, of course, not so open. Wouldn't let us in. But the lifestyle was pretty much the same for both of them. Calder hadn't built a house, but he had built an environment though that was very personal.

MR. BROWN: And you liked that, here in Rochester, you wanted to gradually develop that kind of like lifestyle yourself.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I really didn't, not visually. It never looked like that. But my life was that way. But working at the furniture was the most important thing.

MR. BROWN: You carried that home--

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: I mean that was never any separation.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: Did you have some family by then, in the '60s?

MR. CASTLE: Well, when I--

MR. BROWN: You had been married.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. When I left Kansas in '61, in spring of '61, got married in the spring of '61, to an opera singer that had a job with the City Center Opera Company in New York, so that made it easier to move to New York. Probably wouldn't have done it on my own. I lived in New York for nine months. Moved there in the summer and then the following summer left--well, actually almost a year. Almost a year. And let's see--we're still talking about the move to the new campus.

MR. BROWN: That's right.

MR. CASTLE: But I think that one of the things that bothered me the most about the move--because the facilities were actually improved. We had a great deal more, in spite of them not being laid out the way I thought they should have been laid out. The drafting room on the floor above and a very round-about way to get there, and I had been fighting for years to get the students to draw more, and I just knew that that battle which I was having trouble holding my own in now was going to be impossible, because you're not gonna chase them up a flight a stairs into the next room and you're not gonna be able to keep track of them anyway by teaching up there and teaching them down there at the same time. An impossible situation. It'd been the same way at the old campus again, but, you know, again, you accepted there. It was an old building. You didn't have any chance of any other way, and it was a much shorter distance upstairs. I mean, I was just bothered by a lot of things with the new campus. I didn't like it before I got there. And probably the worst aspect is not that we didn't have 12 or 15 students anymore. We had thirty.

MR. BROWN: What had happened? They decided they had to increase the enrollment?

MR. CASTLE: Well, they had to pay for a new campus. The expenses, of course, of running the programs were greatly increased now, and no faculty increase though. So teaching, you know, I was bothered by that. Not that it really did overwork me. I just didn't like the idea. I just really thought the other way was a much better way.

MR. BROWN: Did you find that you really couldn't spend much time, that you had to compress, oh, half of your time with each student?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I found it very awkward teaching there. The drafting room upstairs was--I just really fought a losing battle with getting anybody to draw at that point. Couldn't keep them upstairs. You couldn't get them upstairs. And then if they were up there, I couldn't meet with the ones downstairs. It was just--that was unworkable. And then working with so many more students. Then, let's see, the second semester of that one year that I was in the new campus, Keyser had a leave of absence that year, that semester. And I guess we knew about it quite a long time in advance, and I was really in the position to get to pick somebody to come, and Craig McArt, who had been a student a very good student several years before that and then had spent some time in Sweden, had met this Swedish craftsman that he thought was extraordinary and suggested, "Why don't you get him to come over?" And since I didn't really have anybody particularly in mind that I wanted, I said, "Well, sure, let's," you know, "I'll correspond with him." And the guy's name was Jim [James] Krenov, and I began to correspond with him, and we had wonderful correspondence. He writes letters that are incredible, page after page after page. [Laughs.] I'd never gotten letters like that. And agreed that he'd come teach for one semester. But the minute he got here, he hated it. He hated the school, he hated the building, he hated me, he hated the work. He hated everything. And it became a very awkward situation instantly. And he had, I guess, had very different ideas about what was going to be there from what was there. Didn't like the tools, didn't like the wood. And he, of course, didn't have the freedom to change any of that, and thought that I had polluted the minds of the students to a point that he had no chance of telling them anything because I'd brainwashed them all. I don't know, it was just an awful situation. And it finally came down to the point that I said to tell Brennan that either he's gonna go or I'm gonna go. And he did go; they fired him. But enough time went by that it was quite a bit of awkwardness. And then, as far as I'm concerned, it got more awkward because then they wouldn't let me hire anybody to replace him.

MR. BROWN: And you had a work overload as well.

MR. CASTLE: Well, they gave me the graduate assistant. They wouldn't let me bring in somebody else. I can't remember why. I don't even remember what Brennan said on this. But I suppose they'd spent money bringing the guy from Sweden and getting him back to Sweden and all, probably spent their budget, I guess. I don't know why. But I was pretty upset they wouldn't let me hire somebody else, and put the graduate assistant in there.

MR. BROWN: We he somebody that had been a former student?

MR. CASTLE: Well, he was a graduate assistant that was fine as far as I was concerned for the position he had, but he wasn't real good or real bright. I mean, he could sort of keep the blade on the bandsaw and do what his original job description was. But to expand it to teacher, I felt he was totally inadequate and couldn't do the job. So it wasn't so much that the workload was more than I could handle. It just wasn't--think nothing was going the way I thought it should be done. So a combination of that plus what we spoke about earlier, that made that quitting decision real easy at that point. And forget it! This place is not a place I want to work with.

MR. BROWN: So you went to Brennan and told him.

MR. CASTLE: And resigned.

MR. BROWN: What was his feeling? He was about to leave himself, wasn't he?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, he was leaving at the exact same time. It was his last semester. He and I had had a little friction over this because I presented him with a big problem his very last semester, and he didn't want any problems his last semester. So there was quite a bit of awkwardness over this, because he didn't want to have to fire somebody and deal with this guy who was pretty emotional either, and I forced him into having to do that. So that was some awkwardness there.

MR. BROWN: So you left; you never were under the new regime then, the new dean.

MR. CASTLE: No. I got offered the job back by the new dean.

MR. BROWN: What, for the coming year? For the next--

MR. CASTLE: Well, I think a year had gone by. What they did is they kept that graduate assistant on the next year even which I couldn't possibly--I can't imagine how they did that. But they didn't even hire anybody the next year. In fact, my position wasn't filled for about five years. So the next year the job was offered back to me, but I didn't want it. And then they filled it with temporary people for about five years.

MR. BROWN: And what effect did that have on it?

MR. CASTLE: Well, in the next few years they had a terrible time there. They had practically student riots, because the students didn't like this graduate assistant, either. And by the next year--I think they might have tolerated him for one semester, but the next year--it was really tough on Keyser. He had a couple of really bad years. Because he didn't really--I don't know why they didn't. Maybe he couldn't find anybody. But he had to work with some incompetent people. The students were really in a near-riot situation sometimes. I really left it a mess. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: The new dean couldn't do much about it either, huh? He was just getting his feet on the ground.

MR. CASTLE: I guess so.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I don't know whether I want to get into this, but it's so funny, because Keyser had not had any experience with this Krenov fellow. That all bypassed him, so they were in this temporary situation again. Keyser invited him back, as one of the teachers for the, probably a year later, and he--it happened all over again. They blame me, of course. After I left, all the problems with Krenov were blamed on me. And then they brought him back, and it happened all over again the exact same problems with Keyser, and it got down to the point that Keyser was either quitting or Krenov was being fired, so Krenov was fired again. [Laughs.] So there was just nothing but problems there. They had terrible problems for probably five years, and then they got a teacher, even though he was temporary, Doug Seigler, who was a student of mine in the early '60s, who'd been teaching in Buffalo. They hired him, and he was just going stay a few years, but he's still there. And he's not an extraordinary craftsman or designer or anything, but he does a real good job. The students like him and he spends time there, and things are on even keel now, and they don't have any problems. I think they've never solved the problem of what the program should be.

MR. BROWN: What do you mean?

MR. CASTLE: In terms of developing a craftsman, how a craftsman or how an artist is developed.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: But they at least have a very workable situation where nobody's upset about anything, and they have it working. But I still don't think they're teaching the way they should be teaching.

MR. BROWN: You think maybe there's not enough on the design side, the artist side?

MR. CASTLE: Well, there's not enough on either side. There's not enough of a supertechnical, and there's not enough of design. They're sort of in the middle there, you know, a little bit technical and a little bit design.

MR. BROWN: And weren't requirements aside from in the crafts building up over the years, too? They were requiring more?

MR. CASTLE: More general education courses. Yes, the time that the students spent.

MR. BROWN: That was happening even when you were there, wasn't it?

MR. CASTLE: It began to happen. It didn't really erode it to the point it has now. I mean, now a student really can spend, the maximum they can be in the shop is four days a week. When we had them--in fact, at the old campus, we had them five days a week, and they would leave a few hours each day for other things, but we saw them every day of the week.

MR. BROWN: You feel that's essential, do you, that--/p>

MR. CASTLE: Well, it was certainly--

MR. BROWN: --to be trained, they have to spend many hours.

MR. CASTLE: I don't know whether it's essential, but it's certainly a lot better. I mean, I don't think that having the university situation is unworkable. I'm not sure it's the best. Because it's certainly unnecessary to take history and English and a lot of other things that people take in order to get a baccalaureate degree to make you a craftsman. That has not much to do with it. You don't really need a degree for that kind of work. But you certainly need training. And I think some of the things that, I mean, I'm trying to correct now in the school here a lot of these deficiencies that I saw when I taught at RIT and I see--some of which are still there.

For example, a lack of any real understanding of the history of furniture, which seems to be pretty important. And an understanding not a scholarly approach to the history of furniture, where you can recognize styles and put dates on them and all that but just knowing what some of the styles are and what the development of how furniture got made is. How furniture became. The vocabulary for making furniture, how that progressed in the history of furniture. When they started using this kind of joint, when they developed a certain kind of drawer bottom and, you know, that relate to how furniture is made, and why it's made that way, and the social reasons for furniture. There are an awful lot of social things that went into the development of furniture: Where and how furniture was used. And that they may or may not be sensible today. And if you didn't understand that, you might accept things that--a certain kind of functions that furniture was made for that just don't exist today. And we have certain functions that furniture needs to do today that didn't exist then. And I have an understanding of this, and know why these things happen. You shouldn't go through four years of school and not have a clue about these things and then call yourself a furniture designer.

MR. BROWN: But on the other hand, back in the sixties you weren't teaching this sort of thing either, were you?

MR. CASTLE: No. I totally ignored it. I thought that this would be detrimental, and even impair your ability to be creative, because I really thought that furniture had to become sculpture.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, you said in these statements in the '60s, "I have no special interest in form following function."

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. [Telephone rings.] I'm not sure that I even do now, but I certainly have interest in function, form following function as the main idea behind a design, but if it's furniture it has to function and it should function reasonably well.

MR. BROWN: If you started out with that premise, what do you think would happen to your work? If you found out precisely what the function was and then you made that the dominant--

MR. CASTLE: Well, I think that it becomes an industrial design kind of problem. And I'm not really interested in working that way. You might produce reasonable furniture. But I'm more interested in art furniture. But right

now the vocabulary that I'm interested in pursuing is furniture that really appears like furniture, wouldn't try to masquerade as sculpture. And it would be interested in function, but not in any kind of excessive way. For example, a cabinet. You know, what do you put in it? I wouldn't get so carried away as to fit it all out with something maybe to try to design a function into it, rather than just it holds things.

MR. BROWN: You've never been interested in mass producible or industrially producible things?

MR. CASTLE: Oh, I've gotten interested in that now and then. In the early '70s, I had some fiberglass furniture that I designed that was in production, and I was interested in that. It never really went anywhere.

MR. BROWN: Were you pleased with what resulted? This was molded plastic?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. Oh, reasonably. I was very encouraged with that at the time.

MR. BROWN: You were interested in the problem of that particular material and how you could adapt your designs to it?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. The organic designs adapted fairly well to simplified forms. And had I had more time and more help working with it, I probably could have developed a lot more things. I worked pretty much alone developing those, and then they were picked up by a manufacturer after they were developed, not the other way around. But development costs were too high.

MR. BROWN: And you didn't have time enough to make, or create a large vocabulary in that medium?

MR. CASTLE: I had quite a few pieces. Maybe 15 pieces that were completed. And that's quite a few.

MR. BROWN: After you left SAC what was that, 1970 or so? did you sort of recede from teaching?

MR. CASTLE: No, I took another teaching job. But I taught sculpture. At State University of New York at Brockport. So I ended up with a better teaching situation than RIT. At RIT I had to teach three days a week with a fair amount of faculty meetings and outside stuff to do. And at Brockport I got a two day a week teaching job with virtually no outside things to do. So that that was a pretty good situation. Except that the problem at Brockport at that time was developing their art department, expanding it, and was really going out and trying to hire a good faculty. And they did a good job with that; they really hired a good faculty. But they never developed a program to go along with it. So they had a crummy program that never--the promise was that "Next year we'll have an MFA program," and all this and it's never happened.

MR. BROWN: You mean, the teachers couldn't themselves develop the program?

MR. CASTLE: Well, we would make our proposals and the administration somehow would just lay there and never--

MR. BROWN: So it resulted as sort of an amorphous series of courses?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, so it ended up being just a few series of courses that--and what the net result was that you really didn't attract serious students because you didn't have a real program. You couldn't get your BFA or MFA, which is essential if you're going to get into a fine arts program. You want to be in a BFA or MFA program.

MR. BROWN: You mean that's central as sort of a certificate for graduation?

MR. CASTLE: Where you get some--yeah, you really have a tough time getting into an MFA program if you don't have a BFA, and if you want to teach art you need an MFA.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm. And you realize that students have to, many of them have to aim towards teaching to make a living?

MR. CASTLE: Painting and sculpture. That's your--I've never heard of anybody who can graduate from college and immediately make a living as a painter or sculptor. Never heard of any of those yet. The better ones were able to get teaching jobs. But not having that option you really couldn't attract good students.

In the early '70s there were just enough students in school that sort of by default you got good ones, which wasn't bad in the beginning, but then as the declining enrollment began to hit the colleges better students were more careful about where they went, because they could get in, and so we didn't get the good students. It began to decline and became very frustrating. Just didn't have any good students. And the budgets got poorer so they couldn't even maintain the equipment. Got very frustrating there.

MR. BROWN: But you held on there for, what, eleven years, something like that? Till this year--

MR. CASTLE: Till two years ago. The faculty there is fabulous. It's just--I mean Albert Paley teaches there, and they have a real good printmaker, Bob Marx. And the other jeweler is good, Tom Markison. He gets outshined by Paley because Paley's so extraordinary. But it's just a good art department. They had good ceramics, Bill Stewart in the Ceramics Department. It's very good. But the art department is worth nothing--and it's beginning to fall apart now; everybody is leaving.

MR. BROWN: What did you--now you had never taught sculpture by itself, had you?

MR. CASTLE: Hm-hmm. No, I had never taught sculpture.

MR. BROWN: So did you have a fairly elaborate idea as to what you wanted to do? This was something you really wanted to do when you left School for American Craftsmen?

MR. CASTLE: Well--

MR. BROWN: Or you needed a job?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, I wasn't really prepared just to stop teaching, and that seemed the most logical thing to teach, since I more or less did it already, and I had a masters degree in sculpture. So teaching it wasn't really any big problem, particularly on the level that it ended up being; a fairly low level. It wasn't very demanding.

MR. BROWN: How did you begin with students? Drawing or modeling--

MR. CASTLE: Well, almost sort of basic three-dimensional design problems in the very beginning. Worked with cardboard and sticks and doing rather simple three-dimensional design things. So they weren't really capable of getting into sculpture. It was an impossible situation. So few students were able to actually make any sculpture. I had no idea how dumb people could be until I went out there to teach. For me academically RIT was a big step down from the University of Kansas, and the academic standards were so much lower.

MR. BROWN: You mean for the, not for the craftsmen.

MR. CASTLE: Just in general. No, the craftsman that's not any different there, just the academic standards. The quality of the library, the quality of the English, the literature courses, and the quality of the facilities, and everything that went with that. I mean, the libraries--I couldn't believe the RIT library.

MR. BROWN: It was mainly a technical school, so I suppose that's where its strength was.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. But then the academic standards at Brockport are even lower than RIT, because they had in the time I went there began to open it up to ghetto kids, you know, trying to get people in college that wouldn't normally get in college, and, boy, it just destroyed the school. You had practically illiterates in class.

MR. BROWN: You taught at least once at the North Carolina Penland. That was in the '70s, early '70s?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: What was that like? Was that just sort of like a holiday?

MR. CASTLE: A bit like a holiday. The--

MR. BROWN: You'd been invited down there?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. Philip Haines invited me down the first time to do some furniture for him, and he's on the board of directors of the--he was then, maybe he still is--and thought that I should meet Bill Brown, their director, and met Bill Brown, and Bill Brown of course invited down then to teach. But I enjoyed it. It's unworkable to do serious work in. A woodshop in a basement in North Carolina in the summer is so damp that all the machinery instantly rusts and the wood's all warped. So it's difficult, but I did enjoy it, just this nice environment, and the nice people around, and I had a good time. I went back the next summer and taught sculpture there, because I thought at least I didn't have the deal with the technical problems of wood. But, I don't know, that didn't work out all that well either.

MR. BROWN: Were the students very committed?

MR. CASTLE: No, no, no. The teaching wasn't really very rewarding enough, although I enjoyed being there.

MR. BROWN: But they weren't very demanding either, the students.

MR. CASTLE: No. I think I began by that point to get more selfish about sharing teaching. Didn't really want to

talk to somebody unless they were interested. And you know I continued to teach at Brockport for quite a few years beyond that, but it was the kind of situation that was so comfortable it was difficult to leave.

MR. BROWN: They left you alone sort of?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm, yeah. You really weren't bothered at all. It was probably the most comfortable teaching situation anyone could imagine, and in the early '70s it was absolutely ideal because the salaries were good and the raises. Didn't stay that way. It got very poor later on. Like there were no raises for years.

MR. BROWN: But by the early '70s were you beginning to think of setting up a workshop?

MR. CASTLE: Oh, I had a workshop.

MR. BROWN: Having assistants and that sort of thing?

MR. CASTLE: Oh, I had assistants.

MR. BROWN: That was already going?

MR. CASTLE: I already had that going, and I probably had at least two, maybe three, full time people, in 1970, I can't remember exactly. But I had it working very well that I could leave two days a week, and it didn't seem to interrupt things that much, and we got paid real well for that time. In fact, it's really--you know, I only quit two years now. It's still, you know--financially it's been more difficult, because that was a real big help. In working two more days a week in the shop, I don't by any means make up that much. I can't make up that much more income.

MR. BROWN: Now though, was it the last year, last fall, you began going back into teaching again on your own turf, on your own terms. You created a school here.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: What led you to do that? The old yearning for teaching came back again?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I'm not sure exactly why, but I sort of missed it, after dealing with Brockport and visiting--I would visit the furniture department, so that I was in tune with what was going on because I did a lot of lecturing, and really sort of began to miss it, working with people who were talented. I mean kids had built interesting pieces of furniture. I could see it did still exist. And I thought it'd be nice to be around that and be part of that, and I wasn't about to take a teaching job somewhere else at this point. So and seeing that, you know, a few other people had started schools and I had visited John Makepeace's school, I'd visited Little Ease Workshop, I'd visited Kirby's studio that there wasn't anything that they were doing that I wouldn't be capable of doing. It was nothing that extraordinary. So it seemed like a good thing to do. And the first year certainly worked out well. It is an awful lot of work and awful expensive. I don't know how I can make it pay, but I'm putting more into my program than the other people, so mine is more expensive to run.

MR. BROWN: What do you mean by that? In terms of your time? Equipment?

MR. CASTLE: No, I'm providing more equipment, more faculty, better facilities than any of these other places. So it's ended up costing me more.

MR. BROWN: Now the faculty is you and who else?

MR. CASTLE: Stephen Proctor, Don [Satill, Seh-till], and Hunter Kariher and Bruce Volts.

MR. BROWN: Who were all here anyway?

MR. CASTLE: No, Hunter Kariher's not. He comes in.

MR. BROWN: So they've got even a better student-faculty ratio than you had in those early days in the School for American Craftsmen.

MR. CASTLE: Well, actually, it's exactly the same. We didn't all come at once. It ended up that we had a teacher relationship ratio last year of one to twelve, which is just the same as the School for American Craftsmen. Except that you had access to many more points of view. None of these people were trained by me, so they all bring something to the program that couldn't be brought--I mean, I find it very difficult to imagine that you're really going to have a program that will expand and grow when you hire your own students to come right back and teach again. That just isn't going to be the way to do it, which is what RIT has done, and I feel that's pretty bad. They've really been hiring an awful lot of their own people back. I mean their wood department, for example, is a

hundred percent RIT graduates. So I made an effort to go exactly the opposite direction here and make sure I had nobody that I trained. So we have one RIT trained one was trained under Bill Keyser and actually during this awkward time and a whole bunch of other teachers.

MR. BROWN: But he's thoroughly trained in technique, isn't he?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, he's not--well, no. He's not a craftsman of this extraordinary nature like Stephen Proctor is capable of building these 17th-, 18th-century quality pieces, but he brings in other things to the teaching. He's very dynamic. He's been operating his own business for seven, eight years successfully, so he brings the entrepreneurship to it has a good understanding of wood, and understands how to use tools in efficient ways.

MR. BROWN: Who is this?

MR. CASTLE: Hunter Kariher.

MR. BROWN: What do you mean, the entrepreneurial?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I mean he's organized his own shop, he's gotten all his own tools, he's gone out and gotten business, he's hired employees--

MR. BROWN: But I mean with your students here then, he shows them how to be--

MR. CASTLE: Well, he's not directly responsible for that, but I'm just saying he can bring all this to the program.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. CASTLE: You know, he's somebody's who's experienced. He's done the craft fair thing selling multiples. He's done--he's just done a lot of kinds of work. And he's a real outgoing kind of guy that works well with students.

MR. BROWN: And some of that perhaps is going to rub off on them.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: Because you don't want them to be ivory tower artists hereafter.

MR. CASTLE: No, we have to be careful--

MR. BROWN: You need to show them.

MR. CASTLE: We have to real careful about that. That's one of the problems that I could see happening in a school like this. It could get such an elitist attitude that you end up just sort of putting yourself in the position where you're unemployable because you're too good to work on the stuff that's sort of practical and has to get made. You know, people do need certain kinds of things made, and they're not going to pay \$35,000 for their coffee table. You might get them up to \$3,000 maybe. You know, you have to consider that a big price. I mean, there's just so much work, so much material that you can put into a piece. So we're trying to train them to understand this, but we do feel on the other hand that if they don't have some understanding and some feeling of what this superb-quality work is they would never even know it exists. And so we figure that we're sort of shooting at that, saying "Here's what can happen," but on the other hand saying, "Well, this may be impractical for you though and you may have to work here. But you should know that this exists." And I think that's what you don't get in many other programs. You get a level somewhere in here that's pretty good, but you don't even realize there's another level up there.

MR. BROWN: So do they come in already with some training?

MR. CASTLE: Some do.

MR. BROWN: And do they work, what, is it with Steven Proctor that you mentioned--

MR. CASTLE: Well, if I'm going through the faculty, Steven Proctor's one of the teachers. He teaches one day a week. He has a sound basis in English traditional woodworking.

MR. BROWN: Which you said is a very high standard.

MR. CASTLE: Very high standard there. See, he has a good understanding of what a high standard means, and he has design background, too. He's a graduate of the Royal College of Art, which is--they're not really a technical school, they're a design school. So he has both. And Don Satill's a teacher, and he has an undergraduate art background and got into woodworking, learned it as an apprentice in another shop and

worked in a shop for ten years and became foreman of that shop, so he has a good understanding of production woodworking. Learned it in a shop and he keeps. .. he draws real well; he has a good drawing background.

Bruce Volts is not as qualified as the other teachers. He came from a Leeds program and other various woodworking jobs.

MR. BROWN: The Leeds program is one of these--

MR. CASTLE: One of these two year schools in woodworking, which when reading the catalogue sounds similar to ours, but the differences are immense. They don't appear to be, but they are. And then we have a drawing teacher that comes in one day a week and teaches drawing.

MR. BROWN: You mean the drawing of art and furniture forms, just freehand--

MR. CASTLE: Visualization drawing and drafting.

MR. BROWN: You feel so strongly about that that none of you do that--

MR. CASTLE: Oh, no, it's not that he can do it better. It's just that we're all busy with this other stuff. I mean, I feel capable of handling that myself, but it seems that I don't have to, so I'm hiring somebody.

MR. BROWN: And the virtue might be that he's yet another point of view to bring to the students.

MR. CASTLE: Well, that's what I'm thinking. I think that I'm not trying to have less faculty. I'm trying to have more. And I could--I'm teaching the history of furniture now. I mean, if I could find somebody to do that I certainly would. I'm not really that qualified, but I'm just having to do that one by default. I don't know who to--I really would like to get to the position where I teach less in my own school, but I'm here and involved and available, but not actually standing there all day long babysitting. Because some days teaching, you don't lecture all day long every day. So my hope is that actually in the future I'll probably teach a little less. I won't teach a full day. I'll be involved in other things with the school.

MR. BROWN: What would you like to be involved in more?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I always want to be involved in the critiques and the giving out of assignments and discussing how things are going to be made, and then at the end of a projector maybe in the middle come back with design critiques, involved in design philosophy, and to some extent in the history of furniture in recent times, but not so much on the older pieces. I'm not qualified enough. I wished I could divide the furniture history into two semesters and have it start about with the Art Nouveau and take that as 20th century furniture and have that for a semester, and then have the other earlier furniture for a semester. Probably do that once I can find somebody. And I think I can find somebody, I just haven't really looked.

MR. BROWN: Do you really feel that by looking at solutions of the past and understanding why they were arrived at, is very important for today's students?

MR. CASTLE: Well, not that you directly use that information, but you just need to understand it and be able to discuss that and know how it relates, so you don't do things naively. If you come up with a new design, and you've got a leg on it that's a Chinese leg, and you didn't even know it was a Chinese leg, and somebody says, "Oh, you've got a Chinese leg," you ought to know that and you ought to know what Chinese it came from and how the Chinese used it.

MR. BROWN: That may open up yet other ideas for you, right?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm--so you won't do things--you see that turning up in furniture all the time and so often naively. People would leaf through a book, and they've seen it and the image has remained in their mind, and it works, but it could work a little better if you had a good understanding.

MR. BROWN: So with your students in this history of furniture, you actually try to look at old pieces?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: Take them around and show them things.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, we do that.

MR. BROWN: If you can go see how they're put together.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: At the same time you have a visual library here, do you?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, we have a pretty good library. You could look up all these things. And we use a simple book as a text that doesn't get real carried away with any one thing, just kind of goes through a lot of stuff, but puts it in perspective how one relates to another and how, where the ideas came from earlier than that got into this one, because you can either, easily carry your idea back to here and then back to there and then back a little further and a little further, so maybe you can go way back to Egyptian furniture, and you see them popping up all through the history of furniture.

MR. BROWN: Sometimes deliberately, I guess, there's revivals and sometimes coincidental.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm, right.

MR. BROWN: Now on the technical side, I remember in your early years you were worried about too much technique would paralyze the artist's side.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: Now you have a fellow with the training in the high score in the English method. Does he spend a good deal of time with them? Or one day a week, you said?

MR. CASTLE: Well, in the beginning the program is almost a hundred percent technique or appears to be that way. They're actually doing some design, too, but the first semester of the first year they're really learning how to use their hand tools, how to cut joints. They're doing a little design work, too, but it's of a rather primitive nature. And they're drawing and all these other things, but the bulk of the time is spent on technical matters.

MR. BROWN: You've simply got to know what happens, right?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. And we spend a lot of time on hand tools, working with hand tools. Not that we have any real concern with things like--there's people who have an attitude that it's much better made with hand tools and that's the only proper way; it's not with that attitude in mind. It's with the attitude of increasing the kind of skills that you have at your disposal to later use, and that you should experience these kind of techniques and if you don't--they're difficult ones to manage, and frustrating, and you need to get it early on before you learn the shortcuts because you can learn so many shortcuts that make some of these appear to be unnecessary. But then if you're working with furniture that really has a very, very expanded vocabulary, there're going to constantly be certain forms that pop up that are impossible to do with machinery. And the way most craftsmen solve that is they don't do them then, or they do a modified version, because it's easy. This particular thing is too hard to do because they know no other way to do it but by hand, and you say, "Well, that's much too difficult," but if you feel real comfortable with a hand tool it probably isn't near as difficult as you think. It's as simple as cutting mortises by hand, chopping a mortise, and hand sawing a tenon. It is a fact that if you only--even though you're a very experienced craftsman, you have a completely equipped shop, if you're only cutting one of those it's quicker by hand than setting up the machine. If you're good at it and if you don't feel afraid of it and you feel confident, you can just cut this particularly in any odd angle, it's easier to do by hand. And you're never afraid of odd angles and you're never afraid of these kind of things if you have the ability to do it, because you just see the very limited vocabulary that craftsman who get on machines first have. Everything is rounded over with a router on the edge. That's the edge treatment. A certain kind of joinery's always used, certain kind of details because they're easy.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm. But if they were--they couldn't tackle what you called an "expanded vocabulary."

MR. CASTLE: No, they wouldn't be capable. They would frankly--

MR. BROWN: So that would be even more complicated.

MR. CASTLE: Not that they couldn't. Maybe they could. But they'd be real scared to try. They wouldn't feel confident about it. You have to have a lot of confidence to want to try those things.

MR. BROWN: By "expanded vocabulary," you mean one that tests the stability of the piece, the engineering of it?

MR. CASTLE: Well, not so much--it has to do with detailing and how things are cut and in many cases this may be rather subtle points, in some cases even buried later on and may have to do with construction and not even show later on. But the really proper way to do things as opposed to some shortcut methods that appear on the surface to say, "Oh, it's just as good," but really isn't as good, and it may take several seasons of expanding and contracting the wood to show up the differences.

MR. BROWN: The superior method's going to hold and do its job.

MR. CASTLE: The superior method will--

MR. BROWN: And the shortcut will result in weakness--

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. The shortcut method of--

MR. BROWN: --or deterioration.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah. And, you know, it's just rather little subtle things that we're trying up open their eyes up to.

MR. BROWN: And if they've got those under their belt early on, they've got that in their personal vocabulary.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: How long is the program?

MR. CASTLE: Two years.

MR. BROWN: Two-year program.

MR. CASTLE: With a possibility of coming back for a third for like postgraduate. We hold that open, and we'd sort of invite somebody that they could come back a third year.

MR. BROWN: The program at the school was four years, wasn't it?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: So are you giving them only half of what they would get in a, or would've gotten in those days?

MR. CASTLE: Well, actually--no, I think it's more. And if you look at it hour-wise it is more, because you don't go off to gym or English literature and these other things. You really have nothing but woodworking, so the hours in two years equal the hours in four years.

MR. BROWN: How do you discover these potential students? Do you send notices around to colleges or crafts societies?

MR. CASTLE: We just advertise in fine woodworking magazines, all we've done. We might try to do a little more in the future to reach some audience we may have missed. I'm not sure what we'd do, but--

MR. BROWN: So out of the fine woodworking's readership you've picked up those that are at least interested in the medium.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm, yeah.

MR. BROWN: What plans do you see ahead of you for this, for your teaching, for this school? Do you see it--

MR. CASTLE: Well, I'm looking to hire another teacher who'll be a fulltime teacher, teach more than one day a week. That's going to change. We're working on getting accredited and chartered by the state of New York. That won't have any real effect on the program. It's just going to have--the program has to appear on paper more nearly sort of--not more--oh, we have to write out everything and have curriculum, names for courses, and numbers for courses, and hours, and all these things we don't bother with right now, but it won't have any real change in the program.

MR. BROWN: You aren't going to have to include humanities programs and things like that.

MR. CASTLE: No.

MR. BROWN: You'd be accredited as what, a vocational school, something like that?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm, yeah. They don't call it that. It'll be called an Associate of Occupational Skills, is the degree it will give. So it's like a technical school. But it could be anything. It doesn't have to be technical. It could be the New York Culinary Institute, for example, is an Associate of Occupational Skills degree.

MR. BROWN: What do you see these students, their future? Are they preparing to teach, or are they going to go on and set up shops, or--

MR. CASTLE: Well, they won't be in a position to get a university teaching job because of the requirement of an advanced degree, which--

MR. BROWN: Do you think that's a bad thing?

MR. CASTLE: Well, if they wanted to go on and get that advanced degree, they could. This credit could be transferred to another school, and you could go on and get a masters. But in certain kinds of teaching situations for example, craft programs that are run like out of craft or art centers they won't have that requirement. So there's certain kinds of teaching jobs that they could get. I think they mostly are interested in making furniture, perhaps some of them permanently in somebody else's shop, most of them in somebody else's shop, at least on a short-term basis, would like to do that. A lot of them would like to start their own shop.

MR. BROWN: Do you see the future as pretty bright for more individually made pieces of furniture?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. On various levels, depending on--there's a level--there's certain levels that you could get into quickly and make money at. Depends on how your art philosophy holds you up or not holds you up. I mean, there's anything from architectural millwork kind of jobs, which would be a money maker. There's a need for that.

MR. BROWN: You mean fitting in the interior of a house, so to speak?

MR. CASTLE: Trim on houses and--well, houses don't very often get custom millwork, but, say, banks, churches, that kind of millwork, where it's custom millwork. Quite a need for people who can do that kind of work. They're not, we're not getting that kind of training here, but they could get into it real easy. Working in other shops that make what's usually considered office furniture, which is a lower level of activity. They aren't going to do handcut, dovetailed drawers all solid wood construction. It would be plywood, but they'd be qualified to get into that. They aren't really trained in that, but it'd be a pretty easy transition. Some of them are doing it this summer. It's like a lot of them have those kind of summer jobs. Working with architects and decorators for custom-made pieces, and you have to be fairly free to come up with what they want in the budget they want.

MR. BROWN: So you're not turning out a bunch of precious artisans.

MR. CASTLE: Well, no, we're trying to give them that kind of training, but we're telling them that that level of activity is very difficult to get into. We want them to be able to--hopefully, there'll be a few good ones that can get into that. Not only do you have to have the combination of having the skill, the drive, and some luck or some money--something, too, you know, there's a lot involved to get into that.

[Reel 3, side A. Side B is blank.]

MR. BROWN: Well, then, we've talked essentially about when you were at the School for American Craftsmen, and today we'll talk about your setting up a workshop which I understand you were still at the school when you began. Could you explain what you mean by your own workshop? I mean, that's dumb, but--

MR. CASTLE: The School for American Craftsmen made an effort to provide a private studio for faculty to encourage them to work there, and quite a few of them did and for a silversmith like Hans Christensen, his was quite adequate. Fred Meyer, at that time he had a studio in the School for American Craftsmen building and he did all his work there. A number of people did. Franz and Hobart [Toles] both had studios in the School for American Craftsmen, and it was Hobart's only studio. Franz had a second studio at home. It was my only studio when I came in '62. It was my only studio for about a year, and I was to share it with Bill Keyser, but he never used it, so I more or less got the whole thing, which made it pretty workable. It was a basement space, so not the most desirable as far as being attractive goes, but it was a dry basement with a reasonably decent ceiling and large enough. So it was as good as anything I had had previous to that time, and I had the availability of the machinery just a few steps away.

MR. BROWN: And the supplies and all the wood and everything yard was right near by, too, wasn't it?

MR. CASTLE: Right, everything was there that I needed, so it was a good setup. And I didn't really think about doing anything else other than staying there and working there, until I began to get some commissions and began to think about the possibility of employing somebody. And then of course--

MR. BROWN: This was when? In the late '60s, mid-'60s?

MR. CASTLE: No, this would have been about 1963. I do have some records. I could find out exactly when I got a studio. I'm trying to recall. I had a few small commissions and did employ a few students just to come in on evening or weekend a little bit in the studio there at the school. And that wasn't any problem. But if I were to employ someone who wasn't a student or wanted to employ someone during hours that I would normally be teaching, of course that wouldn't have been possible. And I did get a fairly large commission in '63 through the school. The school was helpful in this case. The Gleason Works, a large machinery manufacturer in Rochester,

and their--I don't know whether there were any of the Gleasons on the Board of Directors of RIT or not, but anyway they contributed money to RIT and were aware of RIT. So having had their new offices designed by interior decorators, the president really didn't like his office, and he thought that he'd get somebody from the School for American Craftsmen to do it. And I ended up with that job, and it was a pretty big job and would take a long time and require quite a bit of help, so I sort of instantly set up a studio.

MR. BROWN: At the school.

MR. CASTLE: No.

MR. BROWN: No.

MR. CASTLE: I found--I can't remember exactly how I found it or what I looked at around the neighborhood, but within a block--I lived a block from the School for American Craftsmen at the time, and within a block of the School for American Craftsmen in another direction I found a carriage house. A very marvelous twentieth-century carriage house onwell, behind a house on Troop Street that was a little bit in disrepair, but I was able to rent it cheaply. It did have heat in it, and did have electricity. And I partitioned off and put in a wooden floor and did a few things to it to make it usable, and used the down payment of this commission to buy equipment, and set up like an instant shop. It wasn't complete, but the things I was missing I could run a block away and use the tools that belonged to the school. So in spite of it not having everything it was pretty workable, and I was in that studio until 1969, and left it reluctantly.

It was very nice. It had very high ceilings. Two stories, with an elevator connecting the two floors. A hand-operated elevator, because it had been a carriage house that had--one of the reasons I had to cover up the floor--I mean, it had a turntable in the floor that bring the carriages in, then turned them in this turntable so they could go off in other direction, and then put them on this elevator and all the carriages were kept upstairs. So the floor was very uneven because of the turntable, so I had to put down a floor. But I used the elevator. I would store things upstairs. It was a very nice studio.

MR. BROWN: And you had to solicit commissions by then, didn't you, to be able to support all this?

MR. CASTLE: Well, that studio cost \$75 a month, which I could afford even if I didn't have any commissions. The heat in those days, in the winter, was running like another \$ dollars a month. Today that would be impossible to kept that kind of uninsulated building. So I think it was costing me in the neighborhood of \$150 to \$200 a month, which didn't require very much in the way of commissions to support, so it was sort of low pressure. But I began to hire students on a more regular basis, where they really--first hired people full time over a summer, over vacations, part time during school, weekends and evenings. And I'm trying to think when I hired the first full time person. It was a few years after that. I worked that way for a few years with part time people.

MR. BROWN: Now what--were you doing more things such as you did for Gleason? I mean these were--

MR. CASTLE: That was the only big commission I ever had.

MR. BROWN: That was not only office furniture, but the trim and--

MR. CASTLE: No, no trim. There were two offices, actually. The president and vice-president's office were similar.

MR. BROWN: Were you doing things with lamination by then?

MR. CASTLE: I was, but I didn't do it for this job, because there was a lot of furniture involved and to get it made and to use the help and everything with the deadlines and all, it was made more straightforward. It wasn't really all that far out.

MR. BROWN: How did you find the work in your, you know, being supervisor with a number of assistants?

MR. CASTLE: Well, it was easy because I was hiring my own students, so I was already sort of used to working with them.

MR. BROWN: And they were used to being with you.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, and I already knew what they could do and what they couldn't do.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: And so it was pretty easy to hire that kind of a person much easier than it is nowadays when I hire somebody in from some other training, which I've been doing now.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: It's a little more difficult.

MR. BROWN: And they were simply involved in some steps in the fabrication of the furniture? You didn't have this problem you spoke of last time when you were trying to teach them design as well, where--

MR. CASTLE: Oh, no, that wasn't--they were just helping out. They were doing sanding.

MR. BROWN: Why in '69 then did you leave this nice studio?

MR. CASTLE: Well, the neighborhood was undergoing urban renewal. Well, not really urban renewal, but when RIT moved from that neighborhood a road came through there and the house I lived in which was like a 150-year-old beautiful house, which was really a shame was going to be torn down. My studio wasn't. I could have kept the studio. But I had to find a place to move, and with RIT leaving the neighborhood, it was assumed the neighborhood would really go downhill, and that it wasn't a very desirable place to stay in. It was a fringe area anyway between what was a good neighborhood, and on the other side was really a bad neighborhood and RIT, the school being there, tended to moderate it, so that it made it reasonable. Without RIT it wouldn't have been reasonable there. That's turned around since, but it took 10 years. Now it's on its way back up again.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, that district's sort of southwest of the downtown.

MR. CASTLE: It's quite nice now, but it really took a turn for the worse when RIT left, and so I didn't really think I wanted to stay there. And there was a lot of urban renewal going on in Rochester all over the place at that time in the late sixties, so when I began to look for--it was my idea to try to find an industrial piece of property I might live in, so that the studio would take priority and I wouldn't try to get two places. I wouldn't try and find a studio and a house, and I would buy something. I rented both of these studios, the house and the studio, but because of all the urban renewal going on there was really not any cheap industrial property around. Everything had gotten very high priced because there was so little of it.

MR. BROWN: They'd knocked down so much.

MR. CASTLE: They'd knocked down all the sort of low-rent industrial properties.

MR. BROWN: And had driven up the rent on the remainder.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, so it was an impossible time. That's changed now, too. Now you can get them again. Even reconsidered going back into Rochester at this point, you know, buying old pieces of property available again. But anyway I started to look in the suburbs and came up with this place. Actually, I made a purchase offer on a place in Honeyoy Falls, before this one, and my purchase offer wasn't taken. It was a mill, too, but it was a historic mill, so it was sort of more attractive than this one, but not as easy to do things with. In the long run, this turned out to be a much better building because you could add on to it and things, where this old historic one made of stone would have been much more difficult to adapt, to change and add on to, so this was a better building from that standpoint.

MR. BROWN: It being entirely timber, too, sure. Well, by this time you had a regular group of assistants? They changed? Have you always had some?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I'm trying to think, that Richard Newman was the full time assistant I had, the last one I had in the carriage house in Rochester, and he moved here with me, too, and was here. I think he might be then the first full time one.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

MR. CASTLE: I can't think of any others who were full time before that.

MR. BROWN: But were you teaching? Attempting to teach some of this--

MR. CASTLE: No, I was hiring my own students, so they were more like already taught.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, they were already taught.

MR. CASTLE: So I wasn't doing any--

MR. BROWN: No apprenticeship, either. There wasn't, it wasn't a matter of apprenticeship.

MR. CASTLE: No. No, they were strictly, just came here and worked. It wasn't until I left RIT that I had the first

apprentice.

MR. BROWN: And that was about when?

MR. CASTLE: 1970.

MR. BROWN: Then you took on--

MR. CASTLE: I bought this place in '68, but it took a year of weekend work to get it to the point where we could move into it. We moved into it in '69. And then in 1970 I left RIT, and I think Richard Newman left about the same time and started his own shop and--Richard Newman then must have left earlier than that.

MR. BROWN: But you lived here as well as had your workshop?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: In the beginning?

MR. CASTLE: Lived on the second floor and had the workshop on the first floor. But I did take--I hired Hunter Kariher right after Richard, which would be about some time during '69. Richard left sometime during '69, but it might have been early '69 when Richard left. And Hunter Kariher had just graduated from RIT. And then I also hired about the same time another fellow full time, who was a graduate of Alfred [University] and a student of Tom [Lackaneena's, Lackaneenas] named Philip Tenant. Things really expanded about that time. And I also hired about a year later after--Hunter stayed two years I think, and I think that Tenant stayed about two years, and then about the second year of that time I hired Silas Kopf.

MR. BROWN: And these were all assistants, not apprentices.

MR. CASTLE: No, these are already been--

MR. BROWN: Yeah, trained.

MR. CASTLE: Silas was the first one that was like not very experienced.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

[Audio break.]

MR. CASTLE: I'm getting slight out of order. There's one other person that has to fit in before Silas.

MR. BROWN: And this was a time you were also doing some molded work, plastic things, '69, '70, something like that.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, I'm trying to get--I got some dates wrong here, because I've gotten up to 1970 too quick.

MR. BROWN: But you were gradually taking on more assistants.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Because commissions were expanding.

MR. CASTLE: Because there's a couple more people, I'm trying to figure out when they fit in there, that I had. John Scofield, who was the first apprentice I had that I actually called an apprentice. Silas wasn't called an apprentice.

MR. BROWN: And in calling him an apprentice, did he have different assumptions, different duties? Was he paid differently?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, Silas--I think John Scofield came before Silas. Now Hunter had already left. And Philip Tenant did stay on longer than Hunter. Well, Hunter came before Silas. He came before Philip Tenant, too. Maybe Philip Tenant stayed three years. I'd have some records from that could check this and John Scofield. Well, it'd be easy to look on my resume and get this one because I got a National Endowment Grant for an apprentice, for John Scofield, before they had an apprentice grant.

MR. BROWN: Oh, really.

MR. CASTLE: At that time when you wanted a grant you had to write out what you were going to do with it, and they'd like take various forms. Well, I wrote that I wanted an apprentice. Scofield was a student at RIT and when

he got this apprenticeship then he left RIT for that year. And they gave him some credit for it, too, so he didn't lose his year. But that was a National Endowment grant, and so he was officially an apprentice.

MR. BROWN: They were willing to give it to you even though this wasn't education related. Well, it is education, but you were an enterprise by then, weren't you? This was for private--

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: How did the role as the apprentice differ from that of the assistant?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I set aside a small space for him to do his own work. And he worked for me four days a week and did his own work one day a week. And the grant supplied the money to pay for that one extra day, so that he'd actually get paid for it, which I couldn't really afford to do otherwise. So Silas then obviously came after Scofield left. The people who are here at the same time--

MR. BROWN: Well, don't worry about an exact chronology; it doesn't matter. But the kind, did this give you greater flexibility to dream and design, and then because you had others who could help carry through in the making?

MR. CASTLE: No, I don't think it made any change. I just was able--it didn't give me any more flexibility. I was able to make more things. See we were trying to go in a lot of different directions at once in those times, trying to get some production things started, some smaller things, trying to make things for shows, and doing commission work. Trying to do all those things at once.

MR. BROWN: The shows--were shows becoming pretty important by then?

MR. CASTLE: Oh, yeah. There was a lot of shows that were asking for things, so there was always been chances to exhibit pieces.

MR. BROWN: Do you recall any exhibitions that were particularly memorable?

MR. CASTLE: Well, the first one that I suppose that was pretty important was the Fantasy Furniture. I think that was '67, '66?

MR. BROWN: And where was that?

MR. CASTLE: At the Museum of Contemporary Crafts in New York. That was the first sort of important showcase where I had several pieces where they'd only feature the work of five artists in a big show with a catalog. It got quite a lot of publicity. Then the Wooden Works show in I guess about 1969 or '70 at the Smithsonian, which was the opening show at the Renwick Gallery. That was the same kind of thing; that was five artists exhibiting.

MR. BROWN: Through those two shows, particularly through that Fantasy Furniture show, were you stamped in the public's mind as a sort of a sculptor as well as a furniture maker?

MR. CASTLE: That word wasn't used that much. "The sculpture role," something like that, rather than "sculptor," was more likely.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: I can't remember what the press called that kind of work. That was pretty interesting work in that show. That was a good show.

MR. BROWN: What kind of things were there?

MR. CASTLE: Well, there were two Italian people that made some pretty strange things.

MR. BROWN: But what were you making at that point?

MR. CASTLE: Well, not so different. Mine was probably the least fantasy of anybody in the show, but it was probably--it was further out than anybody else, with the exception of Tommy Simpson, was making in this country. His was fantasy furniture.

MR. BROWN: We just talked about a couple of exhibitions. Were dealers, have they been important occasionally to you, to have regular dealers in New York?

MR. CASTLE: [Inaudible] was certainly the first dealer, but I never really thought of him as a dealer. But I didn't really think of it as a dealer until I had an association with Lee Nordness. And again I've a problem; I couldn't tell

you what date it was, but in the '60s, late '60s. He moved into a new penthouse and wanted some furniture made. And that was my contact with him through going down and talking to him about that. But when I first met him I met him at his new penthouse that he had just, I guess, purchased it from a midtown co-op, and he was going to totally redecorate it, and one room he wanted my furniture in. So I got a commission to do the furniture, and at the same time I guess he got interested in handling me in his gallery. And his gallery had undergone a transition at this time. He'd just moved from Madison Avenue where he had run a traditional gallery, at least 10 years I would say, painting and sculpture. And I don't know why he had moved. I think I know why; he lost his lease, that's all. He couldn't stay there; I do remember now.

MR. BROWN: So were you about the first non-sculptor or painter that was shown by him?

MR. CASTLE: Right. He had lost his lease on this very desirable space, he couldn't stay there, and moved to a less desirable space. But he had a gallery, nonetheless, and offered me a one-man show, and I was the first craftsman he'd ever exhibited. He'd only exhibited painting and sculpture up until that point, and that show encouraged him then to become involved in the crafts, and he, as you know, became very involved when he did the Objects: USA show, which was sponsored by--

MR. BROWN: Johnson Wax.

MR. CASTLE: --Johnson, and he had a long association with Johnson Wax, because they'd also done Painting: USA some time in the '60s. I forget the dates on that, but he had curated the painting show for them. So he had gotten their okay to curate a craft show for them, Johnson Wax, and this was--this Sam Johnson had taken over the company between the two. Between the Objects: USA and the Painting: USA, the--I forget Sam's father's name, but he had retired as chairman, and Sam Johnson had taken over, continuing the tradition of having involvement with the arts, got involved in this show. And that put Lee Nordness in a position to be in contact with all the crafts all over the country. So I suppose he saw that as an opportunity to really get involved in crafts then, and moved his gallery again to a very large space. It's too bad he hadn't moved to SoHo and been one of the first down there, but he didn't. He moved to a gallery just off Third Avenue, I think around 75th and--really out of the way, very poor location, but a reasonable space. Very large gallery, remodeled it very nicely, and it was very attractive.

MR. BROWN: And he'd been doing quite well by you.

MR. CASTLE: Well, not that my show was a sellout or anything, but it got some good publicity and some sales, so he was very encouraged by that, and then of course having the connection with Johnson Wax, went into the crafts in a real big way. And I had a second one-man show in that other, that craft gallery. But at that point I had sort of left woodworking momentarily. I had been a little disillusioned with it in the late '60s. I don't know, maybe the work showing with plastic--at the time I had the show with him, the craft guy was working with plastic. And that show was not very well received.

MR. BROWN: No?

MR. CASTLE: When I look back on it, I had some pretty interesting things. I had a show of lamps. And they were pretty interesting, but they didn't really fit very well in that particular gallery. They weren't really craft. They weren't art in the traditional sense. But they weren't bad things, and I'm not embarrassed them. I kind of like them. I still have some of them. They never did sell. Nobody ever bought those things.

MR. BROWN: Do you think they seemed too artificial, maybe?

MR. CASTLE: No, they were like sculpture in the '60s. They had been up-layered for sculpture in the '60s, color and simple form and all, but they were never marketed in any kind of reasonable light. Just that one-man show; they were there in the gallery for 30 days and out again, and that was the end of that.

MR. BROWN: How was Nordness as a person to--

MR. CASTLE: Well, he was--

MR. BROWN: --promote things and get involved with his artists?

MR. CASTLE: Well, he was good that way initially. I thought he did a good job. But it began to deteriorate because his gallery really did not do well. I think a lot of it was maybe he got into it too big, too quick in a bad location. Because he was representing all the best craftsmen. He really did have everybody, because at that point no gallery in New York was handling any craftsmen. There wasn't anybody, except for a few artsy-craftsy places, that handled anything, and so he had first choice of everybody. And he shopped around carefully and got the best people. But I don't know why, it financially just didn't make it. There were some other ventures. Whether they contributed to the downfall or not--he also had a marketing venture selling crafts through a

catalogue, mail order catalogue, and Johnson Wax backed this one, and they put out a color catalogue and commissioned a lot of craftsmen to design things for them, and it really bombed.

MR. BROWN: Why do you suppose it did? These were fairly expensive items?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah. I don't think a craft catalogue would make it today either. I think the challenge for most people who sell pretty fancy things in catalogues offer just a few crafts, and that's probably good news. But an entire craft catalogue of high priced things, some of them pretty funky, I don't think you're going to buy that stuff mail order. So the gallery folded, and Lee Nordness still operates as a dealer but sort of an underground way out of his apartment.

MR. BROWN: Did you get to know him pretty well?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, because we'd gotten very friendly. And it was a very nice relationship, because when you'd go to go to New York he had a spare bedroom in his penthouse, and a very nice place. So Nancy and I would go stay there, and we stayed with him lots of times. And he would entertain us. It was a nice relationship.

MR. BROWN: In your opinion, he had a pretty good eye? He really knew his stuff, or he had definite tastes?

MR. CASTLE: Well, the Objects: USA show was almost like a--I mean, he handled virtually everybody--

MR. BROWN: That was an anthology practically of crafts, wasn't it?

MR. CASTLE: It was virtually everybody except for maybe a few old timers that are in there. He handled their work.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. So he did have very broad--

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. You know, he just, he was trying to handle too many people's work probably. And he never got around to giving everybody a one-man show, but he was giving two one-man shows at once even, trying to get through the people. He had a big enough space he could do that. But there weren't any--the buyers weren't there.

MR. BROWN: Then when he folded the craft gallery, did you then get on to another New York gallery?

MR. CASTLE: It was very shortly thereafter and I can't remember how much time went by that the Fairtree Gallery opened up in New York.

MR. BROWN: Who ran that?

MR. CASTLE: Stan Rifle was the first director, and it was Warner Brothers money. I can't think of the gal--[Betty Warner] Sheinbaum is the name, who started it. They had a Galleria Del Sol, I think in Santa Barbara, in California, and it was--Stan Rifle ran that one, and it was quite successful, I guess, and so they thought they would open up one in New York, and it was a not-for-profit situation.

MR. BROWN: And this was a craft gallery?

MR. CASTLE: Craft gallery, but from--they got a good address on Madison Avenue in the mid-'70s. So they had a decent small space, but good location, and Stan Rifle designed it and it was kind of nicely done. And then he came to New York to run it. But he was pretty good. He had a good feel for working with craftsmen and a good feel for starting the thing out. Because of its being a not-for-profit situation they were involved in--they were so-called involved in the educational crafts. They had an educational director and another relative on staff. Far too many. There wasn't any way that gallery could operate at even a break-even basis.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, but they had to have this to justify their nonprofit status also.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah. Hardly anybody else knew what they were doing, except for Stan Rifle. And he wasn't really wasn't really in tune with New York. He was a Californian, and really couldn't operate within that New York circle, even though he didn't--

MR. BROWN: Why? You mean he didn't have the contacts?

MR. CASTLE: He didn't have the contacts or the political clout.

[Audio break.]

MR. CASTLE: The gallery owners that I know since then, how the people who owned different galleries

acknowledge what they did for each other and, you know, all those sort of tradeoffs and things that go on in the gallery business. Of course there's none of that there, it was pretty isolated. But because of the decent address they got people stumbling in off the street. So it appeared like that gallery probably was making money, but of course they had so many people on the staff doing nothing. And Mrs. Sheinbaum had evidently given them five years to be able to operate on a break-even basis or the money was going to be cut off. Well, after about a year Stan didn't like it in New York he wanted to go back to California and they hired somebody else. And I had been scheduled to have a show there, and Albert Paley had been scheduled to have a show there, and the whole scheduling kind of got kind of mixed up and so we decided we'd have a show together, a two-man show.

MR. BROWN: There at Fairtree?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah. We did. We had a two-man show during their second year that they were in business. Stan Rifle had left already, but he had organized our show. And he'd organized it rather well. He had made it into a traveling show that would be there, and it would be at the [Herbert F.] Johnson Museum in Ithaca, and at the Tyler Museum, at Tyler School of Art. So it traveled a little, and it had a decent catalogue and he'd done a good job. So it was a pretty meaningful show as far as that goes. But when it comes to sales nothing was done except expecting somebody to wander in off the street. So the sales were terrible. I sold a piece or two and Albert sold a piece or two.

MR. BROWN: They apparently then didn't really work with other dealers ever very well.

MR. CASTLE: No, they weren't working with other dealers. They didn't know who the collectors were to go try and get them in there. There are craft collectors now. This was still a little bit early days. But they lasted five years and then they shut down.

MR. BROWN: That's the mid-'70s, right?

MR. CASTLE: Right, mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: Things have changed appreciably since then?

MR. CASTLE: Since then there's been--well, at that point there were a few other galleries that opened up to sell crafts, but they weren't anything I was interested in.

MR. BROWN: Why's that?

MR. CASTLE: Well, they were--I was really finding I was a bit too good for that sort of situation anyway. I really decided I'd never get into a Fairtree kind of situation again, at a craft gallery. I'd either get a legitimate real gallery, that operated like a real gallery. They operated like a craft shop. It was just a shop. It wasn't a real gallery.

MR. BROWN: You mean, the distinction being what?

MR. CASTLE: Well, the distinction--it's hard to make a distinction, because there aren't any rules--but in my own mind I never thought it was a real gallery compared to some of the well-known galleries where they really have a very reasonable exhibition space that's nicely done, museum style, and they'll give it over to an artist totally.

MR. BROWN: Whereas Fairtree was more still more like a shop--

MR. CASTLE: And it still had stuff like--

MR. BROWN: --to browse around and some view of so and so's work.

MR. CASTLE: Well, they still had in the back--when they give you a one-man show, they give you the bulk of the place, but not all of it. And it was so little you didn't get much anyway. So I didn't have anybody in New York for several years then, but I had continued to get a fair amount of commission work though, just kind of--people just called or wrote. So I still had a fair amount of business, but it began to drop off though, and in the late '60s Roy Cartwright had remarried a gal named Marguerite [Roter, Roder], who worked for a gallery from Cincinnati called Not in New York Gallery. And they made a big thing out of that by advertising nationally they were not in New York. And it was Carl Solway's gallery really.

MR. BROWN: I don't know him.

MR. CASTLE: Carl Solway operates a gallery in Cincinnati, too, but he doesn't deal with--or didn't until that point--young artists or unknown artists. He dealt in sort of buying and selling established things. He had [Isamu] Noguchis and [Alexander] Calder and [Jackson] Pollocks, that kind of thing. He'd buy them and sell them and that's what he still does. But then he decided to open a gallery in New York, and when he opened the gallery in

New York that were sort of looking for people, and because of contact with Marguerite I had an instant contact there. And then he opened up. I think he didn't last very long in New York, maybe two, three years.

MR. BROWN: This was when? In the '70s?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, late '70s. But they had a gallery at 139 Spring Street and shared a space very large space; it was a nice space with Braunstein Gallery, which is a San Francisco gallery, and the Phyllis Kind Gallery, which was a Chicago gallery. So they had a Cincinnati and a San Francisco and a Chicago gallery, which were trying to make it in New York. And I think the other two galleries tried harder, but Carl Solway just turned over to Marguerite Roter to run in New York, gave her the job. And I don't think ever did anything to sell.

MR. BROWN: Was she fairly effective?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, she was--well, she knew what she was doing, but she couldn't be as effective as, say, Phyllis Kind could be. She didn't have the stable, didn't have the artists really either, so I don't think the gallery ever did very well. In fact, in a few years they closed that one up. I did have a one-man show there, I think '60s.

MR. BROWN: Or '70.

MR. CASTLE: Was it 1970?

MR. BROWN: Seventy-eight.

MR. CASTLE: Oh, I mean, yeah, '78.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: About 1978.

MR. BROWN: So really galleries so far have not been all that important for you.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: Special exhibitions have--

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: But it's mainly been through commissions.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. If I would get enough exhibitions, just a piece here and a piece there, that I had something out all the time. Even though there was another period of several years where there was a lot of galleries. A year, year and a half ago, I decided to look for a gallery, and it's the first time I ever went looking.

MR. BROWN: You felt you needed to have an outlet, a steady outlet?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm, in New York. I had gotten--in the interim now I forget the exact date but in the mid-'70s come in contact with Barbara Fendrick [The Fendrick Gallery], in Washington, [DC], which is a good gallery, and got gallery representation there. And that was done New York style so it was a pretty legitimate setup, and she did fairly well. But when you have a show in Washington, you don't get reviewed in the New York magazines, and you don't get the kind of notice that you do from a New York show, so I felt I really wanted a New York situation which Barbara Sedrick wasn't very happy with that. She didn't want me to have a New York gallery.

But I had met--I can't think of the name. [Alexandra] Anderson's the last name. She's an associate editor of Portfolio magazine. In fact, I met her in Washington. And then talking to her I sort of told her that I was looking for a New York gallery and that I was open for suggestions, and she said, "Well, next time you come to New York," she says, "I'll sit down with you and go over some lists, and I'll make some phone calls for you. We can give you a hand." So next time I was in New York I called her, and she did that. She suggested a half a dozen different galleries and set me up some appointments. And that's how I ended up at the Milliken [Gallery], which is now representing me. That's been about a year and a half.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Does that seem to be working out pretty well?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, mm-hmm. It's better than any others I've ever had.

MR. BROWN: They're good at the way they show things and--

MR. CASTLE: Well, it's run--it's a SoHo Gallery. I wished I had a 57th Street gallery. But it's a nice space, on the ground floor on 5th Street. And it's run very professional. It's not like a--you know, certainly far from being any

craft-shop kind of situation. It's a legitimate art situation.

MR. BROWN: And you're in there with painters and sculptors?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm, yeah. So I'm in the kind of company I want categorically anyway. I might--I don't approve of some of the painters and sculptors, but--

MR. BROWN: You do like that though in your gallery? You like being with the finewhat used to be called the fine arts?

MR. CASTLE: Well, not--yes, I do.

MR. BROWN: Because I know in your work you're now, of course, looking deeply into craftsmanship.

MR. CASTLE: Right.

MR. BROWN: That aspect of your work.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I think I've started going in reverse on two situations where I really want to show in this fine art, but I don't consider it fine art, but I want it represented that way, treated that way, sold that way, priced that way. But I don't pretend it is.

MR. BROWN: And yet you feel it should have stature with the so-called fine arts?

MR. CASTLE: Well, it's equivalent stature. I don't really think it's painting, you know.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. CASTLE: Or it's not sculpture.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, but--

MR. CASTLE: It's decorative art.

MR. BROWN: But it should have an equivalence.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, it's equivalent in value.

MR. BROWN: Equal to.

MR. CASTLE: And for the first time recent work has done it by virtue of price if for no other reason. The price is equivalent.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

MR. CASTLE: And that's about as easy a way for me to equate it as any, or how do you know when you've made that grade?

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

MR. CASTLE: I mean, I thought I had made it a few other times before, but it was only because I was naive, and I thought I had sort of gotten to that plateau.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm. But then you were brought down to the depth of the lake?

MR. CASTLE: Well, because the first time--well, I don't know, this would have been in the middle '60s when I sold a coffee table for \$2,000 and I thought, "Wow, boy, now this is just the same as sculpture, \$2,000." But it was because I was really naive about what sculpture was going for. You really didn't get a decent piece of sculpture for \$2,000 from anybody with any kind of reputation. But it still wasn't, even though I sort of thought at the time I had made it, it really wasn't an equivalent piece. For the size of it, you would not get a piece of sculpture that sort of size for that kind of price by anybody with any reputation. But I didn't know that.

MR. BROWN: You feel then that your work should be considered equivalent? Now that you've been teaching, and you have your own school here, are you holding that out to the students or to your business--

MR. CASTLE: Most of them are realistic enough to know that that situation is a bit unusual.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: And that I did work at it 20 years.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: But I don't by any means have a sort of a comfortable setup even then.

MR. BROWN: You're realistic with them.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: So often in teaching the student doesn't quite know where the status of their production once they're out there is.

MR. CASTLE: Well, you know, we talk about that frequently, and I do try to make sure that they're aware that they're not going to make a piece of furniture, send it right out, and get \$10,000 to \$12,000 for it. You just don't do that. It doesn't work that way. There's so much more involved in it than just the actual piece. It's very difficult to sell those kind of things. And I still don't know whether what I'm currently involved in will actually work in the long run, whether people, whether there are enough people out there who will spend \$30,000 upwards for pieces of furniture, and that's kind of what I'm pricing things right now is \$30,000 up. And it's not a big piece of furniture.

MR. BROWN: When you talked a little bit about your current work, you said something about--seeing some here, this newly elegant, exotic, expensive materials? Furniture which is furniture, it's also very precious looking.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah. It is precious looking on purpose, which is a reversal. In fact it's almost the exact opposite of many, many things I did before. I was, at one point, bothered by people who treated material precious and actually still am, in the way that the people I'm thinking of would treat it precious. I mean, if you think of wood as an extremely precious thing, and then think wood should suggest a form, and that wood has certain things that you should do to it, and certain things you shouldn't do to it, in the way you treat it because of its preciousness. I still don't have any sympathy for that point of view, and I think I reacted against that point of view in the '60s. I really just sort of ignored the fact that things were even wood, and just made them, and wasn't concerned about the grain, about a piece of wood that's--certain pieces of wood are more precious than others because of their cost. I kind of, on purpose, chose the cheaper woods. But that's a position that you can't economically go with because you can't retrain the whole feeling that people have about the whole history of furniture and how certain materials are valuable and certain things are precious and certain woods are beautiful. I mean, you just can't deny that that exists. So just accept it, just accept the fact that the beauty of the wood is there, and the precious quality is there, and try to use it in a reasonable way. So I'm trying to use precious materials, the precious woods and other precious materials like silver, ivory, and the more precious woods, ebony and rosewood, other hard-to-get items, and present them in a precious way even now. Not try to use them in great excess.

MR. BROWN: As a sort of object?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, they're kind of small--kind of small and precious.

MR. BROWN: Cabinet.

MR. CASTLE: But sort of recreating what was happening in the 17th and 18th century when the highest form of furniture making was cabinet making, and the cabinets at that time took on an importance with the wealthy like big paintings do now. If you wanted to really have something that showed you had good taste, the best possible thing you could put in your interior in those days would have been a cabinet. That was the way you showed that you were rich and that your taste was good and everything else is you commissioned a cabinet from a famous cabinetmaker. That was the highest sort of art form you could do, something that's real big and splashy.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm. And rather that is something that showed wonderful working with the wood and use of precious material.

MR. CASTLE: Well, that cabinet work really didn't work with the wood at all. I'm just sort of beginning to try to understand how these things came about with those famous cabinets, and they happened differently in different countries and for different reasons. But mostly they weren't concerned with any honest use of wood. I don't think that ever concerned anybody. There was no terms of honesty, it was all what showed: the front of the piece, how it looked in the end. And defining the piece, see. So there's more detail and more fine workmanship would appear in parts of art scene. Even the work of lesser quality often will appear quite good on the outside, and the difference is do you get down to how well the chassis is made underneath all that veneer.

MR. BROWN: And you're equally concerned with both now?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. Yeah, we're sort of taking that thing even several steps further than they ever did, and that really, really concerned with that chassis and how it's made, and I don't think that was ever any cabinets, tables, or anything else ever made that were as well made from the backs and bottoms. As far as I know that we're the first to ever do that with this kind of work. And the bottom is just as elaborately done. There's just as much attention, the same quality material in the backs and bottoms. But all old furniture, particularly American furniture, I guess from what I see, was all frontal. It was like there was blind spots that all through the history that people have, and I guess it's just you just didn't look at the back on those bigger, 18th-century American secretaries. It was not done, because when you do look at it they're awful.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, a big slab of pine or--

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, I mean, there's no craftsmanship at all in the back, and that really bothered me.

MR. BROWN: You want both.

MR. CASTLE: And I can remember how disappointed I was, maybe I already told you this; I can't remember when Jonathan Fairbanks took me through a couple of years ago.

MR. BROWN: The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, and he also let me touch things and pull them out and let me do things he might not otherwise do. It was a terrible disappointment. I really wished I'd never pulled any drawers out and looked on the backs and bottoms. I mean they're just awful. And I thought--but it never bothered him any. I mean, he thought this was a marvelous piece, you know, we're looking at, and all I could see are all these things that were wrong with it. And I could not see that it was marvelous, and that that secretary--you know, he said, "There's only three of these ever made, and if it were on the market it'd bring a million dollars. To me it looked like a piece of junk.

MR. BROWN: After you'd seen its workmanship.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, I mean if you stand--in a photograph in a book it would look fabulous.

MR. BROWN: How'd it look from the front, when you saw it in the front?

MR. CASTLE: Pretty good from the front.

MR. BROWN: Pretty good.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah. But if you move around the side, the cornice work on the top, they didn't even finish it on the side. You could look right at it. You didn't even have to look at the back. You could peek around and see the back and it was terrible and pull a drawer out, knots in the wood and everything else.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm, and it wobbled probably?

MR. CASTLE: Well, no one was able to track drawers very well, even the French and English, which were in my mind better cabinetmakers. They didn't do too well with drawers either. But I do see that the French and English worked some improvement in the interior parts. But nobody really takes those real seriously. Probably the very best cabinetmaker of note, that ever took those things fairly seriously, was in the Art Deco period. Some people like [Emile] Ruhlmann did good jobs on the insides of cabinets. But again the back and bottom they paid no attention.

MR. BROWN: YThis stemmed, you told me last time, partly from a time when you went and saw John Makepeace's workshop in England and saw the careful attention to many, many details.

MR. CASTLE: Well, he was the first person that I saw that--John Makepeace was not very involved in cabinets. I can't even remember any cabinets. But whatever he did do--well, my furniture had always, right from the very beginning, always had finished backs and bottoms. But mainly because it didn't have any back or bottom, because it was so sculptural and organic in nature, that who knew where the bottom started.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. CASTLE: And so I'd already been dealing with this.

MR. BROWN: It was to be seen in the round, all around?

MR. CASTLE: That's right. I didn't make anything that was to go against the wall. Everything was to be seen in the round, and so it had been my way of thinking all along. But everybody else's furniture that I saw had backs and bottoms, and backs and bottoms were parts that were inferior. Well, John Makepeace's work, really, he

didn't deal with it as elaborately as we have. In fact, we've put decorations. I mean, we've gone so far as to have the same decoration on the back of the cabinet that's on the front. And I don't know that he'd ever--I can't think of any example that he went that far, but his backs and bottoms were nice.

MR. BROWN: You want to have, let's say, this decoration on the back because you feel the total object is worth savoring, or at least being aware that if you were to look at the back it would be just as finished, just as carefully designed as--

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, I haven't thought about this to any great extent, but I think it's probably the idea that it's still sculpture in a way, and there isn't, in spite of it being obviously meant to go against the wall, there isn't necessarily going to be a wall there. And it could be set three-dimensionally, and seen three-dimensionally it would stand on its own just fine. And I really wouldn't think of making a piece that couldn't do that.

MR. BROWN: It's true the piece you have in the current exhibition in Rochester done with the curator of the Metropolitan is an earlier one of yours. It's a flowing lines, lamination, but it's also about one of the very few in the show that has sort of a projecting platform, so that it can be easily seen all around. Why--

MR. CASTLE: I asked for that.

MR. BROWN: The others though, you have to admit, by and large are classic cases of not necessarily finished on the backs or underneath.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I actually asked for a change there, but everything was treated, whether really the backs in and not being seen. And where Mark had laid it out mine was the same way. And I said, "Well, on mine I actually sort of prefer the back to the front really." And I said, "You've got to handle it equally." So all they could do was cut the wall down in the back. So I said, "If you cut that wall down then mine could be seen from both sides," and so they did that.

MR. BROWN: Now while your current infatuation with the looks French, English, other pieces; American, a few that we saw in that exhibition, the 17th, 18th century, and art deco particularly, why do you think you have that? Is it this gift to the luxury materials?

MR. CASTLE: Well, there's so many reasons that I couldn't name one. I know that one of the reasons and one of the more obscure ones that right from the very beginning in all the furniture that I've ever been involved with I've been involved in a kind of a game. I think I've probably mentioned this, too, haven't I, that "Can you top this game?" is a game I've been playing all along and after--

MR. BROWN: After one plateau.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah. But the problem is there was nobody else in the game, so it began to get a little bit silly, and after a while--I didn't sort of consciously first do that, say, "Here, I'm going to play a game, you know, and I'm going to do some extraordinary things that nobody else had ever produced." It was pointed out to me by Don McKinley about 10 years ago that I was doing this, and he was, of course, absolutely right. That was exactly what I was doing. There really wasn't any need for me to do all those things that way, but I really wanted to try and do this "can you top this?" game.

MR. BROWN: How did McKinley happen to say that?

MR. CASTLE: I can't remember the circumstance, but it was his exact words, that "can you top this?" business and since then I've used it because I felt that was a correct. It was correctly stated that that's what I was doing. And that there really wasn't anybody else going to play the game with me. Not really. To anybody who--there were a lot of people joining in, but I think at a level that just didn't--I mean, I always sort of felt like maybe somebody'd come along and sort of challenge my position, and there never was anybody. I mean, there were certainly a lot of well-known craftsmen around, but they operate in a different kind of ballpark. I mean, such as Sam Maloof, say, a good example of somebody who operates and gets many more commissions than I ever get, but he's not trying to play that kind of a game. It's a different kind of a thing. I haven't met anybody else who sort of stepped in who could make furniture to try to make it art. I mean, operate with a form, trying to do things with a form.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: So it's like playing the same game but in a different way, because now I got some competition, but I got competition that happened two hundred years ago, and it was challenging to me because I know I haven't come close to these things in some respects. In some respects, we excel, and I did name one of them certainly in terms of treating details. The backs and bottoms, we're way better than anybody ever made furniture in the 18th century, 19th or 20th, or any other time. And in terms of the joinery aspects of it, I think we've certainly

equaled if not done better. But, you know, when you get into stuff, in the fancy stuff, like marquetry and inlays and ormolu work, of course we couldn't touch those things. No way to compete with those. So I have to sort of figure out a way around that one, but--

MR. BROWN: But of course a lot of those things you just mentioned were the product of specialized, separate, subtrades that supplied the masters.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. Absolutely. The cabinetmaker never did do ormolu work. But I'm wanting to play that kind of a game though, to get this deluxe--the deluxe things. And the people that are the easier comparisons are the art deco people, because they just didn't use much ormolu work and that was a vocabulary that was more modern.

MR. BROWN: Right. Yeah. And it could be dealt with in one shop, too, probably.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: They might use expensive material.

MR. CASTLE: So that kind of--but you know that turned out not to be--I thought that Emile Ruhlmann, supposedly the last of the great cabinetmakers, and that that sort of level would be difficult to achieve. Well, I don't think there was any problem getting to that point. It was not that big a deal.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

MR. CASTLE: So there's--I don't know what I'm trying to say now. But you really hit it right on the head, though, when you talked about the deluxe thing.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Why do you suppose you have to make this game of topping yourself, but now for topping those of the past? Is this what compels you, to a degree?

MR. CASTLE: I don't know why that is.

MR. BROWN: Curiosity? Partly?

MR. CASTLE: I mean, I sort of wished there was other people around that were doing stimulating things, and I would like that, but if you did feel like there was somebody doing things that were--you know, like if there--if it was a game. I mean, if it was like football or tennis or something and people did get ranked, and that there was somebody challenging you for your rank, it seems like it would sort of spur you on to try harder, which it obviously does in terms of tennis or something like that. If you want to get to be the best, you've got to work real hard. And if it were real easy to achieve, there wouldn't be anything much accomplished if you got there. And it's like this is too easy, and there isn't any competition.

But then that doesn't really equate on the marketplace, because the marketplace, the people who are buying, have no way to equate what's going at all anyway. So they don't even know which is the better piece or no one has any--there's no standards for what excellence is. There's certainly not any standards about what's good design. So it's just haphazard on the marketplace.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. There a dealer can hardly help them.

MR. CASTLE: But that's one thing I thought that maybe going in this new direction might, if you can just go that way so far, that it's so extraordinary, perhaps it will stand out as different.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

MR. CASTLE: Then I just saw it happening all the time. I really felt like I couldn't do lamination technically in a superior way, and that I had a sense of form that can accomplish some pretty reasonable things with. But on the marketplace or in shows I saw things being given spots of honor and articles and exhibitions that were just so awful, so poorly put together, and that couldn't last any time at all. So ill-conceived in terms of their design right. And I saw them getting places of honor all over the place, so I just figured it's just such a situation that no one knows good from bad.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: And that for me to continue to refine that form was a total waste of time. It was plenty good enough before I refined it. And it wasn't going to help any. Which is really what I've been doing, up until I started to make some changes in the--with the trompe l'oeil and those things. I had been refining--I hadn't really changed the vocabulary significantly since the 1970s, say, and for five, six years I'd just refined it. And I was

fairly happy with doing that, because I thought I was really kind of fine-uning something. But really when I'd look around, it was a total waste of time. It was totally unnecessary. The earlier cruder piece was plenty good enough, and no one was going to ever see that I had done anything differently. So I think maybe with this, with the work where the workmanship was more obvious, because the workmanship expresses the idea of the piece, where the workmanship in the organic work didn't have anything to do with expressing the idea of the piece. The workmanship was unappreciated really. It was on sort of an acceptable level, where it's not glues all over the place and gaping holes and--because I just saw this, the refinement that we've gone to not being appreciated. We worked the surfaces so carefully, when we turned the surface, it'd be a true curve you could feel with your hands. And your fingers can feel about a thousandth of an inch discrepancy when you've trained your hands. And to try to have a surface so true that it feels that nicely. A waste of time, because nobody else could feel, except a trained hand.

MR. BROWN: Perceiving the overall form.

MR. CASTLE: You can't possibly see it, those kind of things.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm, but in these works that you're doing now, these things are more obvious, huh?

MR. CASTLE: You can see--when you've gone for that kind of precision you can see it.

MR. BROWN: It's a more prominent part of this kind of form--

MR. CASTLE: Right.

MR. BROWN: --than it could have been of your more organics earlier.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, the craftsmanship never came to bear on it in the way that I kind of tried to make it bear on the issue, and it never did. It just didn't really matter. And in some respects it didn't matter if it was wood, even. It could have been made of some other material.

MR. BROWN: You recognized that in a sense, when you briefly went into plastic.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. But I did appreciate the quality of wood myself. And other people did, too, perhaps for the wrong reasons, but--for reasons like, "It's familiar." "It's comfortable to live with." So that even if the form of those pieces was not familiar, there were familiar aspects to them. They had a warm material, grain, and character, and all the things that furniture woods have. This furniture's supposed to be made out of wood even though the form's weird. But it's so difficult to have it appreciated on a level that made any sense.

MR. BROWN: Do you see now that it's beginning to happen with your new sort of elegance?

MR. CASTLE: Well, maybe. Well, now I have to fight the issue of the price, because the price has become so high that the market's limited. But I do see this appreciation.

MR. BROWN: You have mentioned a few collectors who are buying, almost as an investment.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm. Yeah, we made a few sales. I don't think much has happened since August that way.

MR. BROWN: But this is where you mean for the workshop to be now? Right where it essentially is?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah. I think that's good for the school, too. I thought the--the other aspect also had problems, and I think I've talked about that, too: The organic furniture having an influence that I wasn't happy with on the field.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: There's too much work that looked like mine. And that's another minus standpoint that helped me leave it.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: This work can be equally copied, certainly. In fact, perhaps even easier in one sense. The ideas can be copied easily, but the execution would be so difficult.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

MR. CASTLE: And that I'm perhaps the only in the country that has the sort of means to market it anyway, even if they--so I sort of feel like I've got a big jump on everybody again, even though I'm sort of starting, because I have a reputation that makes it possible to ask these high prices, and I, through my own twenty years of

working with wood, and having collected an excellent staff, are able to make these pieces. There's plenty of shops that could make them, and probably some designers who could design them, but I don't know whether they'd be able to market them. So, again, I sort of think I have a unique thing in a different kind of way.

MR. BROWN: And you have now the satisfaction of a benchmark. You can compare it against similar striving in the past.

MR. CASTLE: Well, surprisingly enough, art doesn't enter into this very much the way I wished. When I think of that little rosewood table we have downstairs as really beautiful, and it has a terrific presence. But the person who'll sell that in the gallery, that's not his selling point. He points at things --the top is made of six pieces of woodpie-shaped pieces and the six points come down to zero all at exactly the same point. So we could follow that line all the way around the table and come right back up around the other side, and the sixth line would line up again. He likes to point those kind of things out. Which to me aren't too important, as far as it--I wish somebody could just say "The piece is beautiful," and let it go there, but you can't just point that out to somebody that way. But you could point this other thing out and people are amazed. They can't believe it, that someone could do that. And they're amazed by the materials and various other things.

MR. BROWN: But you'll probably never find many people who will be able to say, "It's beautiful," and then begin to think why they think it's beautiful. But rather, people who perhaps will be amazed and admire virtuosity.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, mm-hmm. It's easier. So I'm not going to avoid it. I would prefer it just to be accepted as a beautiful thing. But I know I'm the same way. I looked at that Clement Rousseau table and I immediately recognized it as beautiful, but then I also can't help but be amazed at the beautiful way the sharkskins matched and they aligned them. And how the carving was done on the ivory to separate the sharkskin from the wood. And how precisely and perfectly it's done. You know, it's all important to carry the idea. I think that's what craftsmanship is sort of all about in every level. It has to be sufficient to carry the idea. And if you're dealing with ideas that require a great deal of precision, then that's what we do. Begin with rough work, carving a seat out of a log, pointless.

MR. BROWN: So you've got yourself a pretty rarefied level now.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: You like it, but it's a kind of a contention, too, isn't it?

MR. CASTLE: Well, it's not--yeah, it's difficult very difficult for me. Because the other organic work was easy, in a way, to do because it was like sculpture. And you just take your hammer and chisel and start whaling away, and then stop when you feel like it looks good. And you can't work that way this way. It's real precision work; it's like being a machinist. And you have to work it out paper more. Although I'm getting real happy with the results, but frustrated by the making. It's not as much fun in the making, because you can't have that sort of freedom of just waling away at the material.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

MR. CASTLE: So I don't know what the end result will be, but I'm certainly encouraged by it. I think if for no other reason, it's just good to have a change, do something a little different. I don't think I could have carved a waitress forever. I did like the trompe l'oeil carving, though. It's sort of in between the two.

MR. BROWN: That's right; it is very disciplined.

MR. CASTLE: It's disciplined, but not quite as precise.

MR. BROWN: But more so than the freer forms, of the past, which--

MR. CASTLE: Much more so. And that was an easier transition. But there really is no money in that. Again, for the same kind of reasons that bothered me about the organic work that I'd become so concerned about the quality of that, and the preciseness of the carving, that I'm putting into it so much work to get that preciseness, when in fact, in order to carry the message that, "Here, I'm a hat," or whatever, "A glove," you do not have to carve that well.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

MR. CASTLE: And a person with far inferior carving ability can probably carve a hat that will make the same statement. So it's pretty difficult to--

MR. BROWN: Whereas with the precious materials, and assembling various materials today, you have to proceed at extremely high level of skill or it shows, or it won't hold up.

MR. CASTLE: But you can also see it then and point it out. You cannot point that out on the, you know, if you carved a glove. It's really not, it's not on anything you can point at and say, "Wow! This shows that I really knew what I was doing because I got everything to come together here in the proper way." No one would understand that except me or a sculptor. But people don't see three-dimensional form very well. Particularly form that may be unique form, but certainly forms like familiar things that I've dealt with. They're familiar on purpose, too, because I wanted the trompe l'oeil, and [that] the very nature of trompe l'oeil work means that you probably looked at it quickly and perceived it as something that it isn't. Because if you'd looked real carefully it wouldn't have fooled you. And I think that's almost true with anything with the trompe l'oeil painting or whatever. It's not going to fool the real careful looker. It fools the sloppy looker. And most people are sloppy lookers, so it doesn't take too much to fool them. And that was very disappointing, to find that one out. I did all that work for nothing. So it was sort of sensible to turn it into--I think we might do some precise carving on some furniture. I haven't gotten anything out of that yet. But then I think it would be something you might be able to put your money back on.

The other thing I think that helps this is that the market is an antique market that you're sort of directing it at.

MR. BROWN: And it opens up a whole new public, doesn't it?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hmm, because they're used to that kind of money. And you don't buy a fine quality, say, art nouveau or art deco piece for \$10,000. That won't get you anything very good. Whereas people that collect it know that they're talking about \$100,000 if they want a significant piece. So if that's the kind of market you're looking at, then the people really are used to spending that kind of money, that you can convince them, which I'm hoping to do, that these pieces are of equal hopefully better quality, and that there's something about the design that may be recognized, as you get more and more of a name, as a significant development in the neo-classical thing that's happening.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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