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Oral history interview with Pietro Belluschi, 1983 August 22-September 4

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Pietro Belluschi on August 22 & 23 and September 4, 1983. The interview took place in Portland, Oregon, and was conducted by Meredith L. Clausen for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution as part of the Northwest Oral History Project.

Interview

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Mr. Belluschi, you were born in Ancona, Italy, 1899?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yes. 1899, last week [referring to his birthday--Ed.]. August 18, so that's [84 years old--Ed.].

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: What sort of town was it?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: An average size town on the Adriatic Sea. But the roots of my family are in Lombardy near the Lake of Como. Looking back in history, what we have of it, there are records of a lady by the name of Teresa Lucini born in 1750 who was the mother of my great-grandfather. From that point, every person has been identified including my great-grandfather, my grandfather, and of course my father. Before that there are records of the Belluschi family, and there is a Belluscho, a little town between Milan and Bergamo, where the family lived for many centuries. Also there was a Belluschi bishop in 9th century. There is a gap of about 150 years or so between records.

My father was employed by a private railroad company called the Adriatica. He was in charge of acquiring land to build the railroad. My great-grandfather happened to be the first man that got killed in a railroad accident, in the 1830s when the railroad was just being invented. Later my grandfather, my father, and my uncle were all employed by the same railroad company. The headquarters of the company at the end of the last century were in Ancona where I was born.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: About how large is it?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, it's about I'd say 100,000, maybe 120,000. Ten or twelve years ago I was asked to design a new university campus in Ancona, so I had a chance to visit. I went to see the apartment where I was born, the room where I was born. At that time, you didn't go to the hospital, you just had the babies at home.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And how long was it that you were there?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I was born there in 1899, and left in the fall of 1905. And from that year on I was in Rome with exception of three years, when I lived in Bologna, between 1911 and 1913.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And what took you to Bologna?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: My father had been transferred there by the railroad company when it was purchased by the state, so I lived in Bologna and went to school there before going back to Rome. Then there was the first World War, in which I was involved for three years.

So my having been born in Ancona is sort of a fluke, as my forefathers had all lived in Lombardy, which was the land conquered by the Longobard over a thousand years ago. I don't know exactly where they came from originally, perhaps from Germany. To this day Lombards are somewhat different from other Italians.

Milan is a very lively city, almost like an American city; there's a great deal of activity and people are very efficient and hard working-- quite different from the Florentines, or the Romans.

In Italy, they're very conscious of the province where you come from, because over the centuries each developed a unity of language and character and blood, which provided the characteristics of that particular region. In Milan, they were entrepreneurs, business people, and money lenders.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: When you think of your childhood experiences, do you remember most fondly those in Rome or Ancona?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I have some detached recollections of Ancona, and although I left when I was six, when I went back I knew exactly the map of the city. I knew where a certain church was and the main street, avenues, and plazas where I used to run and play.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: So it's the physical. ..

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: But Rome is really the place where I grew up, where my basic character was formed. [Earlier in Ancona, when my--Ed.] parents took me for a walk, I went to the opposite side of the street to show that I was independent. I was three or four years old! And I often disappeared so they couldn't find me; I wanted to be on my own.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Were you interested at that time in the physical aspect of the city?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. The physical world of course interested me. I didn't know much aesthetically as a child, but I had strong visual impressions, a memory of the church, a statue of the Pope when I was ____, and I remember colors and texture of buildings and things like that.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Were either of your parents artistic?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: My grandfathers on both sides were interested in drawing. Both were very good. My father was not inclined that way, nor was my mother.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Were you close to your grandparents?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, I was not close. My mother's father disliked children. He died when I was three or four years old, and he never wished to see me. My father's parents died before I was born, but my grandfather went to the Academy of Fine Arts at Milan. He was so gifted and made such beautiful drawings. One of his sons-- my father's brother, the youngest one -- also had a gift, but I wouldn't call it artistic. Some people are born with manual dexterity which is not the same thing as being imaginative or creative, but it helps.

As a young man I was fascinated in _____ Catholic Church.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Were you raised Catholic?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Oh very, yeah. My father and mother were very religious, but my grandmother was more so than anyone else. She used to give me copper coins to go to church, and I hated it. I hated the externals of the church, what in later years I regarded as being its strength: its appeal to all the senses, including incense for the smell and all the sculpture and paintings and the colors and the architecture and the music and so on. It really made a point to make religion interesting to all our senses. But that appeared to me to be a trick to get me to accept the catechism as it was taught by rather dull priests. That was at an early age when I was nine or ten. I suppose my grandmother's fanaticism made me react in a negative way; Santa Theresa of Avila, mysticism, miracles, and other irrational happenings did not convince my inquiring mind. Had I not been born in an environment where religion played such an important part, I probably wouldn't have been so skeptical.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Was there anything in the architecture at the time, or about church architecture, that particularly drew you or engaged your attention, or was that just a general kind of background?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Just the background, and I was not very conscious of it. I can still see the church of my youth in Bologna, as every church I've been to. Without knowing it, I had the sense of space as well as sense of smell and color. I remember the lighted candles, which look very beautiful as a decoration, but I didn't at that time realize it, and I was not able to analyze any of those feelings. Only later, in my teens, I became aware of beauty.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: What about the move to Rome? What were your impressions of Rome?

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PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, Rome was and still is a very beautiful city. I've been there almost every year since 1951, mostly to visit my mother who lived in Rome where she died at age 97. However, I must say that Rome now is not the same city I remember in my youth. It's smelly and dirty. People no longer walk; they drive at great speed. The ever-present automobile has raised havoc with the city-- pollution, congestion, added to social turmoil, Red Flags parades, the taking over of fancy hotels, and turning them into slums in no time, a rash of kidnapping and street crimes -- it is all sad to contemplate. Just last February, the young son of a very good friend of mine was kidnapped to be released more than six months later after paying $2million ransom. Perhaps all this is symptomatic of the unhappiness of a country that has no basic natural wealth and too many people who must work and eat.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, you as a child were happy to use. ..?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I was there until I was 24. At that time the lessons were spent there, earlier lessons in Bologna. It was in Rome that I made most of my good friends. So I like to go back to Rome where my best recollections are, but my desire is to visit the central part of Italy which is still beautiful and less spoiled. The small cities are unchanged. Each one was the capital of a Duchy or of a state which through the centuries prospered and produced really fine architecture as well as some of the greatest art the world has seen. But they

don't have any room, and all those cities, they were so beautiful, which the automobile has invaded. Those are the things that I remember with pleasure.

Unfortunately, my adolescence was cut short by the first World War. I was barely seventeen when I volunteered. I spent three and a half years in the army, and I participated in the heavy fighting. I don't know whether you read Farewell to Arms by Hemingway?

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I was exactly in the same situation he so vividly described in the book; we were the same age, and of course he was a correspondent on the Italian front. He was present at the retreat of Caporetto where I was almost taken prisoner. Those are the things that you look back with some mixed feelings-- about having participated in history and feeling disgusted with the human condition and all its stupidity, yet being part of living, I suppose. I suppose God made human beings aggressive so they would not deteriorate through an easy life.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: As you were talking I'm thinking of your mentioning at some point the rebels. Were these the Futurists, painters who were breaking away?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Oh yes. I was very conscious of their existence. I was spending the summers in Pistoia, near Florence, and there I did hear of the Futurists. Marinetti was the one that started all, followed by several painters.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And you were very much aware of this at the time?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I was young, but I was aware; Marinetti wanted to discard all tradition, start anew, completely new. Of course young people are very much taken with anything that's new. Only when you're old you become rational and question the new. But young people do not question it.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Was the forum there definitely Paris? Was all the activity in Paris at the time?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, it was in Italy, northern Italy, where Futurism began.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Sant'Elia, um hmm.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Artists made a big splash; it was of course fun to raise hell, but common people disliked them very much, because they were touching a sensitive subject: they were attacking the great Italian tradition and all the great architects and artists of the Renaissance.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Being of such an independent mind yourself, you must have felt a great affinity for what they were doing.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. I was fascinated and very excited about it.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: How did you feel about their attitudes toward tradition and the masterworks of the past?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, you know, when you are young, you don't think about that. You think that it is just a game; the past should be abolished because the future is so challenging. You're an interpreter of the future. And that has an appeal, and if you were not susceptive to this kind of attitude you are not alive or passionate. If you're young, the chance is that you'll like it.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: We all want a clean slate to begin anew, do we not? (chuckles)

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's right.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: What was it that led up to your decision to go to engineering school?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, let's see, my education was somewhat sketchy, mostly because I never liked school. I remember sitting in class always very quietly, but I wasn't listening to one word of the teacher; I was just sitting there dreaming. Then before finishing high school, I volunteered in the army, so I did not get the high school diploma until after I joined the army. I remember getting up at four o'clock in the morning, march all day and study at night-- I wanted to become an officer, but I could not go to officer school unless I had the high school diploma. So I studied at night, sleepy as I could be because I'd get up at four in the morning. Anyway, in spite of my lack of sleep, I made it. But barely. I suppose the examiners felt sorry for this boy-- for I was younger and looked younger than my age -- so they give me my diploma and then they sent me to officer's school in Turin for 45 days, two weeks of which were taken to quell a labor strike in Turin. So I didn't learn anything, but I became an officer and I was sent up to the front by the end of September 1917-- just in time to be caught in the

disastrous retreat of Caporetto when I was almost caught prisoner. But I went back and fought in many battles until the end of the war. I was released in 1920 to enroll in the University of Rome. I took engineering because I liked architecture, and there was no school of architecture in those days and one had to be a civil engineer to practice architecture.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: I see.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: 1922 was the year in which I graduated from the University of Rome. Again, the examiners were very lenient with the young officer as I had to be quizzed on difficult subjects (economics and physics) of which I knew little and for which I had no interest.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And this was from the school of applied engineering?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, that's what they called it. It's really part of the university.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And it was a doctorate?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, it's not the doctorate as understood in this country. They called it Dottore-Ingegnere, but it is not equivalent to the U.S. doctorate.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: What would it be the equivalent of?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Here it would be just civil engineer degree or C.E. [B.C.E.--Ed.]. That was in '22. In 1923 I spent a few months as inspector on a housing project in Rome. Then just by chance I met a lady looking for a person suitable to receive an exchange scholarship to go to America. I don't know why she picked me; maybe she was at end of the rope and she had to find someone in a hurry. Of course, I was excited at the prospect of going to America but was in misery because I didn't know the language and I had to attend classes where I couldn't understand a thing. Fortunately, I could take home the textbook and study it word for word at night. That was really the only time I worked hard in school.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Now, let me go back just a little bit. When you say this was an exchange scholarship, was it just one year?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Just one year.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: So you were expecting to go back at the end of the year?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's right. I was going back to Italy at the end of the year.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And this was a graduate fellowship?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: It was [an] exchange fellowship. I suppose they were trying to promote understanding between the two countries.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Were you able to study anything you wanted at Cornell?

BELLUSCHI
PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, I took civil engineering courses, and there was a course in architecture in which I was interested.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Did you receive a degree from Cornell?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, I got the C.E. degree after which I was supposed to go back to Italy, but I thought I should try to find a job first to learn a little bit more; I looked for a job but I couldn't get any.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, before we go on, what was the degree that you got from Cornell?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: C.E., civil engineering.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And that was in 1924?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's right.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And at Cornell you had at least one course in architecture, or were there other [architecture--MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN] courses?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yes, just one course in design.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And no other courses in architecture?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I have a rather hazy recollection, but I believe that architecture was under the school of engineering.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Do you have any memories of your impressions of the United States at the time?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Very confused. First impression was the sight of New York in the early morning and the Statue of Liberty. I was impressed by that. I clearly remember the Flatiron Building, its impressive height-- I'd never seen a building as tall as that. Nowadays there are all kinds of high rise buildings, but the Battery, the lower part of Manhattan as you arrive by ship, is an unforgettable sight. Now of course it's much larger, but to a young person at that time it was very impressive.

I was met by the lady and taken to a room which was on top of a speakeasy, but I didn't know about it. I knew there was liquor and stuff stored under my bed; policemen would come and they would be paid off in ten dollar bills. This was only a few days before I went from New York to Cornell.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: You mentioned the buildings-- what about the scale of the city?

[Tape 1; Side 2]

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: New York's traffic was not the same as it was later on. I remember that Fifth Avenue had traffic lights in the center of the avenue every few blocks; the lower part of New York was rather slummy; and in the
garment district, they pushed carts full of clothes down the sidewalks. I think they still do that now. I was in New York only a few days and not knowing the language I was quite lost. The first impression of New York from the sea was overwhelming, but after that the city itself did not impress me too much.

Soon I went to Cornell and I my recollection of Cornell was that it was a very hard place to like and just colder than I ever felt.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: (laughs)

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I tried to date some girls there and I wasn't used to that kind of cold. We went to Cayuga Lake, and the wind was blowing hard and it was ice cold. So that was my first impression.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Were you able to get out and explore New England during the year that you were there?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, I didn't have a car. I just walked. I remember when I arrived in Ithaca there was a football game, and I hadn't the slightest idea what a football game meant in a college town. What we called football in Italy is soccer in this country, but this was a great event, taking place in a big stadium. All seemed crazy. They were drinking and making much noise; it was all very strange.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Was there any aspect of American life that you didn't like, that struck you then as negative?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, no, I was observing and trying to learn, trying to understand, so that in itself was a task that took all my powers of observation and all my interest. I wasn't able to pass judgment on what I saw. I was asked to join a fraternity.

I also got a notice saying that they were going to give me an intelligence test. I don't know whether they still do that or not; they probably don't. But the intelligence test, the IQ, scared me to death because I really couldn't understand the language well enough to give any answer, let alone intelligent answers. I worried that they [might] find out I didn't know anything and kick me out. I don't [know--Ed.] what ever happened to that questionnaire.

I also remember having to study economics and I hated it, but that was something you had to have in order to graduate, in addition to thermodynamics and geology, etcetera. I still have bad dreams I have to pass-- it's hard to remember -- either geology or botany.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well this was all with the aim of getting a degree in civil engineering?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's right.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And then after graduating from Cornell in 1924, is that right, you then went to Idaho?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, I tried to find a job in New York but I wasn't successful. It's a very interesting story.

The Italian ambassador at that time was Prince Caetani. He belonged to one of the very, very old families in Rome. His ancestry went back to Scipio the African, way, way back to Roman times. He was an adventurer _____ aristocrat; at an early age he decided to go to America and study language and mining at Columbia University. He graduated from Columbia, then got a job in an Idaho mine where later he became superintendent of the mill where they grind rock excavated from the mine to extract lead, silver, and gold. He became an expert in drilling through mountains, through rocks. When the First World War came he went back to Italy as an officer and was given the task to drill a tunnel through the Adamello, a large mountain occupied by the enemy Austrian army. This tunnel was completed and filled with dynamite, and the enemy were blown up; it was a great victory. They didn't have many victories in Italy at that time, so that made Caetani quite famous, so much so that when the war was over he made a successful run for the chamber of deputies, and on a party closely related to Fascism. When Mussolini came to power in 1922, because Caetani knew the language and was a loyal deputy, he appointed him ambassador to Washington.

Well, anyway, I went to see him and he said, "Well, I can get you a job, a menial job, in Idaho, to work in the mine." I had only a few dollars left from the scholarship, but I had enough to purchase an upper berth on the train to Idaho. I arrived in the small town of Kellogg, Idaho, with the last two dollars in my pocket.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: What type of job was it?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Oh nothing. It was just helper electrician, just to help an electrician, standing around handing tools to an electrician. (chuckles) Little by little I made myself useful, but not very much.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: At that point had you already decided that you wanted to stay in the United States and not go back to Italy?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, I hadn't decided. I knew that I wanted to get into architecture. But I arrived there as I say with two dollars, so I couldn't do anything else but stay there and save money. I saved about $600 in nine months, and when I had that-- it was a fortune -- I asked my boss, whose name was Easton, whether he could help me. At the time he was building houses in the Coeur d' Alene district, and I asked him whether he could ask his architect to write letters of introduction to some architects on the West Coast.

The architect was very nice. He gave me two letters for Seattle, one for Portland, and three or four for San Francisco. But he said, "If you go to Portland, Mr. Doyle seems to be busy, and maybe you'll get a job." So without writing ahead-- I decided not to go to Seattle at all -- I took the train to Portland and arrived there either on a Saturday or Sunday; it was a beautiful April day. I was fascinated at first by the taste of the water, because in Kellogg it was contaminated, chlorinated, and tasted terrible. Here it was just unchlorinated, pure cold water from the mountains.

But anyway, I stayed at a hotel near the station and on Monday morning I went to see Mr. Doyle. He'd been in Italy and liked Italians, so he gave me a job even after I told him that I'd had no experience in architecture; I had only an interest in it. And he put me to work on tracing some drawings. At that time one did not make blueprints of full-size drawings, only hand tracings. I tried to make them look neat and nice and he was impressed, so I got a raise every month for several months. I had started at $20. I don't whether that was $20 a week or $20 a month-- yeah, very low.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Were you doing any drawing at that time?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Just tracing. I didn't even know what I was tracing. The construction in Italy is all in masonry with rocks and, oh, stucco, stone, etcetera, but here [it] was all wood, two by four sticks of wood put together.

In 1925 I was assigned to the design department.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: How did you happen to get put in the design department? Was that because you expressed the interest?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Because I was interested, yeah. I mean, I suppose I knew that I was drawing pretty well. The man in charge of the department had been raised from an office boy to head designer. His name was Charles Greene. He started as a poor boy with no education in architecture. He had some talent, but he was a homosexual, and a very obvious one. He was not a closet one. (chuckles) He was there trying to be a good designer and was much taken with Italian styles. The fact that I had been interested in architecture, had been raised in Rome, and was born with a natural sense of proportions, of materials, and a sense of how to go about designing, I soon acquired the needed skills by observing and learning as much as possible.

Then a piece of luck came my way. Luck has been a recurring thing in my life. Charlie Greene was always giving parties at his house and inviting young boys from the nearby high schools. (Of course he was very obviously a homosexual.) The schoolboard became aware of the problem of orgies, and they gave him 48hours to get the

hell out of town or he'd go to jail. So he had to leave very quickly, and I became the head of the design department. I was completely unprepared for it, but I took over. And that was in 1927, and I had to carry through all the designs which were in the office at the time.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: The Doyle firm was one of the most prestigious or largest in Portland, is that right?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Right.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: What kind of work were they engaged in? What kind of projects were they doing?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, for instance, I designed the library at Reed College, which was. ..

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: That was 1929, was that right?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: . ..in gothic style, so no originality there, but I wanted to preserve the integrity of the campus, which was all in gothic. I did not think even then that gothic buildings were suitable, but at that time, they made a nice academic background with all the buildings being in the same style. I think the University of Washington had buildings like that too; Gould's Library was gothic, although not quite as nice as Reed College gothic.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: So the choice of collegiate gothic was dictated by the context, by the campus context of the buildings and not so much the character of the library per se. If you were asked to design a collegiate library at the time, how else would you have done it?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, that's a good point. I haven't the slightest idea at the present moment. I know that Harry Weese came later in the fifties and added to it, with a modern wing but still brick, still in a modern style. Whether it's successful or not I don't know, but it's probably better than what others did later in the campus, which were very modern no-nonsense buildings for the sciences, which seem much out of place there.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, I think that sensitivity, your sensitivity to the existing environment-- not only the buildings, but also the physical environment -- is very characteristic of your work.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I suppose I always did see what is now becoming a very common idea, that architecture is not one building but the totality of the environment created by all buildings, both their form and the space between them. I always felt intuitively that that was very important without being too conscious of it.

You're too young to remember, but until about 50years ago, all you could hope for was to have a chance. You didn't have a choice. You had a quarter block, or half block, or one block, and you put a building on it. There was no opportunity for anyone to develop an integrated urban environment. There was no legal way of gathering large pieces of land and creating much more interesting cities, manipulating large pieces of land so that you had urban design as a result, recreating pieces of urban fabric much more challenging than just a building at a time, as in, for example, Seattle or Portland.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Before I move on, what other kind of buildings was the Doyle firm doing at the time? You mentioned the library, but as one of the major firms here in Portland. ..

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: This was late twenties and early thirties. Before the Depression, what kind of buildings were they doing? Commercial buildings?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: They were doing additions to Meier and Frank, the Bank of California, the United States National Bank, the First Equitable, and the Commonwealth Building -- all on Sixth Street.
MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And that was primarily the late twenties was it?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. The second portion of the U.S. National Bank, which is a very florid design, was under construction when I arrived in 1925. Meier and Frank was built in the first decade of this century. Mr. Doyle was working for the firm of Whidden and Lewis as a designer I think. Mr. Doyle was a very convincing person and he got the job on his own. He was lucky; he got that and then he got the American Bank Building and others. At that time, terra cotta was very popular, I still believe because ornament could be stamped on, repeated, without adding to the cost.

By the time I came to Portland, Mr. Doyle was sick. He went to Italy in 1927 with the whole family. He made a point to see my father and my mother and spoke to them through an interpreter. He soon came back, and died in January 1928. The office was left stranded.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: The kind of buildings, though, that the firm was concentrating on were primarily large

multistory downtown blocks, commercial buildings?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's right. The Pacific Building was done at that time-- I worked on it and the Public Service Building.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Was there any residential work being done?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Several large homes had been completed. I was put in charge of the Hamilton Corbett house. It was done in French Provincial. Nuns are living in it now. It cost $125,000 at that time. I shy from telling people that I designed it. It has an enormous roof with the wrong pitch. The walls were built with second-hand brick.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Now this raises one of the most interesting questions -- although everything we're talking about here is proving to be fascinating-- at what point was it that you embraced modernism?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, I didn't actually embrace it knowingly. I was doing houses and that house was almost the opposite of what the philosophy that I developed later on. The first [modernist, wood construction--Ed.] house was done for myself and were all very, very inexpensive houses. The Joss house, as well as mine, for instance, were built on about $4,000. They [had--Ed.] three bedrooms and basement. ..

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Was this still late twenties, or was this thirties already? Was this in the Depression?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Gosh, that was probably in early thirties.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: After the economy had begun to slip then?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. I think the museum [Portland Art Museum--Ed.] was finished in '32, but somebody had given the money and it was designed in '29, then the crash came, so everything stopped, and the only house I did was for the Corbetts, then the first wing of the art museum.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And the Corbett house was a traditional home?
PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, sort of French Provincial. Other than that there was no work at all. So I went back to Italy for almost a year. After they finished the museum in '32, I went back to Italy to stay with my family.

But before that I had a great tragedy. Somebody killed herself in my house and I went through a very serious crisis. The Depression was very bad in this country, but also bad in Italy; in fact it was bad all over the world. So the future looked very bleak and uncertain for me. I didn't know whether I'd come back or not. The office was just a skeleton office. They were making no money but somehow they were sitting there waiting. They couldn't go to their families as I was able to.

Things began moving again slightly, in 1934, so I came back. Then in '35 or '36 I began to design houses. One was for the newspaper man, Mr. Jenning Sutor, then Mr. Aubry Watzek came and asked me to design his house. I invited John Yeon to work in the office and John took over the design as well as all the credit. He is a good friend now, but it was not a happy experience for either one of us. I got the job. He [did the--Ed.] design but didn't want anybody to have any say, although all the work he was doing was done in my office, which was then called A.E. Doyle and Associates. That was the name of the firm until I got out.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, who was the principal designer of that house?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: John Yeon. [PIETRO BELLUSCHI added later: But all the drawings were done in the office of A. E. Doyle and Assoc., of which I was the designing partner -- we all know how sensitive is the question of credits in an office where much of it is teamwork.]

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Ah hah, he was then.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: [The bracketed material in the following passage was deleted in PIETRO BELLUSCHI's edited version--Ed.] [Yes. I think he claimed-- we never talked about it because it was a petty thing-- but he was under the impression that we wanted him to work on it. He was a very young man at the time. But once [Watzek--Ed.] came to me wanted me to sign and never mentioned Yeon. _____ (was, wasn't) my idea because John Yeon was a friend] [PIETRO BELLUSCHI added: although John was eleven years younger.]. We were [very] good friends and we saw things the same way. Although he was endowed with natural gifts, I already had designed two or three houses and was trying to give the office a good name.]

Anyway, at the end of the thirties, we began doing houses, maybe five or six, but I soon found out that you cannot make money in houses.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: The houses at this point were very different from the traditional houses of the twenties,

were they not? This was a decided break.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, perhaps they were, without knowing it, without making a special effort. We were sensitive to the environment, to the trees, the configuration of the soil, the beautiful scenery, the wind and the sun. These are the elements that we were exploring, exploiting to
make architecture. And of course there was the Japanese influence and inspiration where the gardens, building, and land merge.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Who introduced the Japanese influence? Who brought that in, or how was that brought in?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well I think Greene and Greene and some of the work in California had something to do with it. I'm a little bit vague on how it came about.

I did the house for Myers in Seattle up on Magnolia bluff. I went to visit them; the site was full of madrona trees. I hated to cut down madrona trees so I managed to preserve them by introducing many little courtyards without thinking much about Architecture with a capital "A", about the house itself. There must be about five or six courtyards. One would be for garbage cans, another would have a pool, another one would be for service, another one would be for the entrance, and so on. The house, the garden, the madrona trees would all be one. The final plans were completed and all ready to go, and [then I--Ed.] went to the city to get the permits, and found out it exceeded the number of square feet which one could put on that particular site. I was stunned. But I thought a moment and decided to eliminate part of the roof over the porch and show a trellis. The trick worked, but was a close call.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: (chuckles)

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: It is funny but Paul Thiry took the same thing and made a feature out of it in one of his houses. (chuckles) But I had to laugh because he even did the detail of that house for the _____. (I saw Paul Thiry about two weeks ago and shook his hand-- I used to know him before he was married; many, many years ago, he _____ -- and asked how old he was, and he said that he was 76.) I still remember very distinctly that the [detail--Ed.] that came out because of a special reason looked pretty well architecturally so it was copied many times over; that proved that he wasn't the first one to take _____. (laughter) But that just shows that some of the features are not designed; they're the outcome of having taken consideration of many things that _____ impinge upon the design. So I suppose that that attitude was the one that generated what was later known as the West Coast, or Northwest, kind of architecture.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: You've spoken of "we" in designing these houses, these newer houses, the simpler houses that now we call regional style. You've been speaking of "we," of "our" design. Was that a collaborative effort? Were there other people engaged in it and sharing your concerns? Or were you pretty much alone? John Yeon you mentioned.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, John Yeon started in the office. [PIETRO BELLUSCHI added:] I usually speak of "we" because buildings are always the result of complex teamwork.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Was it a parallel effort or was it really a collaboration? Were you discussing these issues together?

1BELLUSCHI
PIETRO BELLUSCHI: They were, yeah; it's funny, I think that the interesting part is that there was no conscious effort. Let's see now, Northwest magazine?-- It was a sort of a description he gave that he. ..

[Tape 2; Side 1]

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I think that the statement I made closer to what I really felt was that any design should not attempt to have a particular style. As a matter of fact, I would say that if there was any effort that I made it was not to follow a style. I have come to believe that everything is the result of having thought through a problem until the right solution emerges. I discussed this with John Yeon just a week ago. I was at his place on the Columbia River. His point was that you have to be aesthetically conscious, stylistically conscious of what you do. I rather felt that that was not my attitude. I still believe that style comes from understanding all the elements of a problem: space, access, view, sun, scale, intimacy, even love. And if you are a poet or an artist, then architecture will have real style in an authentic not artificial way. Not try to introduce a gable or other features because they are fashionable and have no bearing with the experience of living. To be an architect, you have to study, study, and live with a problem, suffer with it, and lay awake at night. If you're aesthetically oriented, aesthetics will come out, not by preconceived things or something you have seen or by copying some kind of feature which may have caught your eye.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: I sensed a strong affinity with Aalto in your work, and I am curious -- at what point did you become aware of his work, or enamored of his.. .?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Not until I went to MIT; he was there and I met him several times.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Ah hah. The whole question of regionalism, then, wasn't anything that you were particularly conscious of in the thirties?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, first of all he was an artist, using the same approach that I have attempted to describe: to consider all the elements, then see what you can do with them. But always in close relationship and with an open, creative mind.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: This period-- the late twenties, early mid-thirties-- was a pivotal moment, not only in your own career, but in architecture in general, particularly in this country. At what point were you first exposed to the work of the Modernists, Le Corbusier and Mies? Do you remember when this was and what the circumstances were?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I think that probably Mies had the greatest influence. I remember that in 1941 -- this was a story you may have read-- Howard Meyer was the editor of Architecture Forum. They couldn't get anything to publish because of the war at the time, and there had been the Depression. He put out a number which was May 1942 or '43. He called

it 194X. You remember that? Well there were several architects, including Mies, that were asked to design certain imaginary buildings. Mies was asked to do a museum and I was asked to do an office building. That's how that I got started thinking of the Equitable Building.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: That was 1943, I think.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: And I think, if I look back on that, that the purity of the idea came from him but I hadn't yet met Mies. I met him several times later, but I hadn't met him then. I knew of the fine house that he did in Brno.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And the Barcelona Pavilion?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: It made a great impression for its simplicity and directness of means. And I think this, as far as I can recollect with any degree of accuracy. ..

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: What about the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art? The Hitchcock and Johnson exhibition [of International Style architecture--MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN]?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That was later for me. I remember when Hitchcock took a trip to the West Coast and saw some of my houses and wrote about them.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well what about the International Style exhibition in...

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: '32, I think.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: In '32.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I think that it was '32. Well. All those, obviously, all those periodicals and _____ and what happened in Europe and Mies, that's all _____ not directly sort of a pervading kind of. ..

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MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Yes, go on. A pivotal moment. (chuckles)

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, you're not so conscious of those happenings at the time, perhaps not as much. For instance, what influence has the post-modern had on our cities already? The crenellated tower was a direct result of this kind of turmoil. And maybe it's all right.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: So the influence of the exhibition for you was essentially indirect, from periodicals? You didn't see the exhibition?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I don't think so, but there was a book published; I remember two small books.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: On the International Style?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I still have them, I think.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And did you know of Neutra's work in California, or Schindler, or any of the.. .

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: We knew, yes, I think so. And Neutra came here, did a house here in Portland. I wasn't too fond of the house, but it became well known, the one on the hill. But I was very much impressed with a house he did for Mr. Nesbit in L.A.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: So you knew.. .

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: But he already had been influenced by the West's materials. There was a redwood house, a beautiful, beautiful house he did in California, where he was already shedding most of the International Style and becoming more Californian. He did very nice work.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Harwell Hamilton Harris, too, was also in...?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, he was. That was a good period when Bill Wurster did many houses. He was even more in the direction of not searching for a style but having a gracious place where the living was at its best.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: So that was a general concern, then?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's right.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And was that thirties or more in the forties that it really blossomed?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: It grew like a grass in the field. It just sort of-- the climate and the hills and maybe just somebody providing the right inspiration.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: To what extent was that a reaction to the International Style?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: It could have well been part of it, but the International Style seemed to affect the other approach. It was looked upon as an exercise in aesthetics, which is worth applying when the situation demanded it. Like in an office building, you can do that with office buildings, unless it's two or three stories. But in a sense even here, philosophically and basically, one studies the problem until he knows all the possible answers that seem to satisfy. It is the same whether you do a house that satisfies the owner that has to live in it, or if you have an office building that satisfies the economics, the climate, the cost, the materials, etc. And also the discovery and the use of new materials such as double glass or aluminum. Double glass had just been invented when I designed this house over thirty years ago. And, the heat underneath the.. .

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Radiant heat?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Radiant heat, and the things that you incorporate in it.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, when you started working in what is now called modernism or the modernist style-- I'm sure you know a number of people have referred to your work as "orthodox modernism." At what point, or was there anybody else in Portland working in that style when you embraced it, when you started in this new direction?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, but there were some good architects such as [Robert W.--Ed.] Fritsch, Van Evera Bailey, who did some interesting houses. There was Brockman, who did the synagogue, but he was not modern; he was a very clever designer. He did the house for Lloyd Frank that later became Lewis and Clark College, which was a very sophisticated, very expensive sort of romantic neo-gothic. He would have had the ability but his taste wasn't for the modern approach. Maybe one of the reasons that I stood out was because there were few, if any -- with the exception of Van Evera Bailey-- that experimented with modern. It is so much easier to design white colonial houses, which everyone liked. I didn't really seek to do houses at all, but I did them.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, am I right in seeing the Portland Art Museum as the point of departure, or a turning point in your work, toward a more modernist approach in design? Up until the late twenties, with the Reed College Library, the firm was still working in a more or less traditional mode. And then the Portland Art Museum-- '31, '32 -- brought you to national attention and really marked a turning point. Is that right? Or were there others?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I'm not sure. I'm not able to be objective on that because I was doing houses first. Then the Equitable Building for the same client had three different versions over the years. As I look back, some of them were quite modern according to the definition of modern at that time. I did some banks down in Salem, many Willamette University buildings in Salem, the telephone company building also in Salem, and so on. The museum was finished during the Depression and started at the beginning of the Depression when money was there, given by Mr. Ayres. I started the design in '29-- that's the first wing -- then the second wing was completed in '42 and another (and last) wing about five or six years ago. That's the school wing. I don't know.

It's hard for me to deal with your question whether there was a turning point or not. It's just simply an evolution and the sort of process of exploration.

[Break in taping]

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: The question was about really the Portland Art Museum and how pivotal that was in your own work, in the evolution of your own work.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: There was another building about the same time which was a family mortuary, which is not very good, but there was, in a way, the same attitude or the same approach to it, which is simply to get away from the trite forms and find the ones that were appropriate for it without forcing anything. The art museum was really a question of finding a light that would be the best for paintings, a natural light, which then generated a sort of fenestration as well as clerestory lighting, which would solve the problem. Now they've been kind of fooling with it. That building cost $125,000 which is a very, very low sum, even at that time. I went to visit the Fogg Museum in Cambridge which probably is a direct ancestor of the Portland Museum. And I went to visit the Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design, where they had a special skylight, and I decided a skylight was not a good way of getting the light. It was expensive and you see yourself reflected in the glass of walls. So the design, and even the form of it, were very conservative for the times, particularly because of the people who donated the money; they didn't want anything very extraordinarily different from what they expected, which would be maybe a New England type of brick Georgian. But I studied the light and knew what the demands for exhibition were, so I developed what I thought was appropriate. So that's the result of really thoughtful consideration of the lighting problem, which was the main problem. And also, even at the time, I felt that the museum form should not be too self-conscious, express too much, either. [It] should really favor the art work to be exhibited rather than itself. That, to me, was very important.

If a museum is a grand, beautiful piece of architecture, like the Guggenheim Museum, it usually is at the expense of the art it contains. You can't really see things; they couldn't have a large painting there. When [they--Ed.] said, "This is too low, in the [ellipse there, upstairs]," [Wright--Ed.] said, "Well cut the painting." Frank Lloyd Wright could care less about the paintings, only about his own architecture.

But I feel that the museum should be one where the works of art show their very best. So the source of lighting, the direction and intensity of lighting, the material, the succession of visual experience as one moves from place to place, provisions for resting-- those are the things that a designer should strive for. After the museum in Seattle was done I went to visit it, and I didn't like the artificial light. I didn't like the sort of fancy grillwork and fancy superimposed ornament at the time. So this, as far as I recollect, [was] the thinking that went at that time. Whether it was a turning point I'm not sure. It was just simply there's a continuous orienting oneself to the problems inherent in each and every project.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, from what you said, this almost makes my question obsolete, but I will ask it anyway: That building has been described as "modern without being either Bauhausian or modernistic."

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yes, that's probably true.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: That's the way you would see it?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, I've been trying to do that for all my buildings and I think that one has to be true to oneself, and on the other hand one also has to be open to other people's ideas, which is sometimes difficult to do.

I made a mistake of objecting to the Michael Graves. I went to the city and said that this is interesting to have a experiment, but he should do it in Las Vegas and not in Portland. I was sorry I said that because it because in reality, some people in the street like it, and some architects liked the idea that you need some shock to wake up the profession to other possibilities. I still think that it's the wrong direction and I hope that.. . If you look through some of the recent photographs, the magazines in color, while some of them are mindless, others are really beginning to be quite interesting. And maybe that was good to kick architects in the pants. But I shouldn't have been involved in it. I regretted that I was more or less the spokesman for all these offended architects in Portland. I succumbed to that and I'll never do it again. (laughter)

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: This is very interesting about Graves and I hope we will pick that up a little bit later, perhaps tomorrow. But getting back to the Doyle firm and the Portland Art Museum, how did the Doyle firm get the commission?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well Mr. Doyle was already dead. The museum was in an old building on Fifth Avenue, full of plaster casts. You know the kind. The museums in the west didn't have money to buy any first-rate, first-hand, art. They could only buy casts. As I remember, there was one big room, maybe a little larger than this, all full of casts two feet apart, so that you couldn't find your way. (chuckles) But there was a very wonderful person as

curator, a woman by the name of Miss [Anna B.--Ed.] Crocker, who had been the secretary to a banker. The banker was among those who gave the original money to the museum. It was established in 1892, and she was made the director, actually called at the time the curator. She had an instinctive sense of what was good. She was intuitive and with an unusual artistic sense. She began to make purchases which showed her great gifts. At the time I became friends with a man who was teaching there, Mr. Harry Wentz. Mr. Wentz and I really loved painting and did some painting in there. And so Miss Crocker took a liking to me. She knew I was a struggling young architect and she took a chance. So surely, that was another piece of luck on my part.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: So that was your commission and you were the principal designer on that?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's right. I got the commission and went through with it, but at one time I was very discouraged and I wrote to Frank Lloyd Wright and said, "How do you go about trying to sell something that is not the old thing?" He was very encouraging; I have some letters from him, very nice. So I stood firm, and this is the best I could do within the limits of my abilities, within the ideas that we just discussed. That was the first large job, and I couldn't stay for the opening because there was no more money coming and I had just enough money to go to Italy so I left. It was opened in October '32; I left I think in September or something, and I came back here in 1933.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: You mentioned Harry Wentz.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: He was apparently influential in your development.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, very much. He was good with artists, and he had the gift of teaching, although he wasn't very vocal, but he made us aware-- that was John Yeon, myself, and others -- what were the basic rules of composition, and the relationship of forms, rules that can be applied to architecture as well to art. He was very sensitive and very nice and we loved him. As a matter of fact, when I came back, I didn't have a place to stay and didn't have any money, so I went to stay in his house, for almost a year I guess.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: So his influence was primarily an artistic one?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Was he a native of the Pacific Northwest?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, he was born here in Oregon. He was sick when he was young, in his twenties. He was told he had about a couple years to live, so he took all the money he had and took a trip to Paris, I think, thinking he would die. Well he died at age 87.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Did he contribute to opening your eyes to the natural environment here?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, he did. With Mr. Doyle, he designed a beautiful little cottage down at the coast. That's where we were last week-- not at that cottage but close by. His cottage was a little masterpiece; it had in itself the seed of everything we talked about, his being an artist. Mr. Doyle took some of the credit but Wentz said, "I told Doyle what to do." So he had the windows at the ocean, he had the porch looking north, he had a fireplace and everything compact, very simple, and no pretense but just right and so on. We used to stay there, go there and visit him in the summertime, and that was really an inspiration. You probably saw that photograph.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, he was quite a man. As far as I'm concerned he gave an understanding of the arts and above all an appreciation of the rules of composition -- what makes a work of art integral, and what color in relationship to form so as to be satisfying to the eye. And that's terribly important because you have to see the problem whole, understand the relationship of all materials to form, of what is man-built versus nature, landscaping and so on. It all comes back to the composition, which he succeeded in making me aware of.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Was he influenced by the Japanese or the Oriental influence?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I suppose, yeah. [PIETRO BELLUSCHI later added: I doubt it.]

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: But that wasn't particularly where you got it. Where.. .?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, no. I loved the Japanese because of their gardens, mostly, and also the simplicity and the feeling they had for wood. The people that had forests, lived in the forest environment, like in Norway that has churches, you know those beautiful old churches. And the Finns and the Japanese and some of the Northwest Indians, not all of them.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: They were, yeah; it's funny, I think that the interesting part is that there was no conscious effort. Let's see now, Northwest magazine?-- It was a sort of a description he gave that he. ..

I think that the statement I made closer to what I really felt was that any design should not attempt to have a particular style. As a matter of fact, I would say that if there was any effort that I made it was not to follow a style. I have come to believe that everything is the result of having thought through a problem until the right solution emerges. I discussed this with John Yeon just a week ago. I was at his place on the Columbia River. His point was that you have to be aesthetically conscious, stylistically conscious of what you do. I rather felt that that was not my attitude. I still believe that style comes from understanding all the elements of a problem: space, access, view, sun, scale, intimacy, even love. And if you are a poet or an artist, then architecture will have real style in an authentic not artificial way. Not try to introduce a gable or other features because they are fashionable and have no bearing with the experience of living. To be an architect, you have to study, study, and live with a problem, suffer with it, and lay awake at night. If you're aesthetically oriented, aesthetics will come out, not by preconceived things or something you have seen or by copying some kind of feature which may have caught your eye.

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MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Ah hah. The whole question of regionalism, then, wasn't anything that you were particularly conscious of in the thirties?

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MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: This period -- the late twenties, early mid-thirties-- was a pivotal moment, not only in your own career, but in architecture in general, particularly in this country. At what point were you first exposed to the work of the Modernists, Le Corbusier and Mies? Do you remember when this was and what the circumstances were?

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MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And the Barcelona Pavilion?

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MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: What about the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art? The Hitchcock and Johnson exhibition [of International Style architecture--MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN]?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That was later for me. I remember when Hitchcock took a trip to the West Coast and saw some of my houses and wrote about them.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well what about the International Style exhibition in.. .

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MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Yes, go on. A pivotal moment. (chuckles)

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, you're not so conscious of those happenings at the time, perhaps not as much. For instance, what influence has the post-modern had on our cities already? The crenellated tower was a direct result of this kind of turmoil. And maybe it's all right.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: So the influence of the exhibition for you was essentially indirect, from periodicals? You didn't see the exhibition?

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MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: On the International Style?

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MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And did you know of Neutra's work in California, or Schindler, or any of the.. .

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MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Harwell Hamilton Harris, too, was also in...?

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MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: So that was a general concern, then?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's right.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And was that thirties or more in the forties that it really blossomed?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: It grew like a grass in the field. It just sort of-- the climate and the hills and maybe just somebody providing the right inspiration.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: To what extent was that a reaction to the International Style?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: It could have well been part of it, but the International Style seemed to affect the other approach. It was looked upon as an exercise in aesthetics, which is worth applying when the situation demanded it. Like in an office building, you can do that with office buildings, unless it's two or three stories. But in a sense even here, philosophically and basically, one studies the problem until he knows all the possible answers that seem to satisfy. It is the same whether you do a house that satisfies the owner that has to live in it, or if you have an office building that satisfies the economics, the climate, the cost, the materials, etc. And also the discovery and the use of new materials such as double glass or aluminum. Double glass had just been invented when I designed this house over thirty years ago. And, the heat underneath the. ..

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Radiant heat?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Radiant heat, and the things that you incorporate in it.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, when you started working in what is now called modernism or the modernist style -- I'm sure you know a number of people have referred to your work as "orthodox modernism." At what point, or was there anybody else in Portland working in that style when you embraced it, when you started in in this new direction?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, but there were some good architects such as [Robert W.--Ed.] Fritsch, Van Evera Bailey, who did some interesting houses. There was Brockman, who did the synagogue, but he was not modern; he was a very clever designer. He did the house for Lloyd Frank that later became Lewis and Clark College, which was a very sophisticated, very expensive sort of romantic neo-gothic. He would have had the ability but his taste wasn't for the modern approach. Maybe one of the reasons that I stood out was because there were few, if any-- with the exception of Van Evera Bailey -- that experimented with modern. It is so much easier to design white

colonial houses, which everyone liked. I didn't really seek to do houses at all, but I did them.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, am I right in seeing the Portland Art Museum as the point of departure, or a turning point in your work, toward a more modernist approach in design? Up until the late twenties, with the Reed College Library, the firm was still working in a more or less traditional mode. And then the Portland Art Museum-- '31, '32 -- brought you to national attention and really marked a turning point. Is that right? Or were there others?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I'm not sure. I'm not able to be objective on that because I was doing houses first. Then the Equitable Building for the same client had three different versions over the years. As I look back, some of them were quite modern according to the definition of modern at that time. I did some banks down in Salem, many Willamette University buildings in Salem, the telephone company building also in Salem, and so on. The museum was finished during the Depression and started at the beginning of the Depression when money was there, given by Mr. Ayres. I started the design in '29-- that's the first wing -- then the second wing was completed in '42 and another (and last) wing about five or six years ago. That's the school wing. I don't know. It's hard for me to deal with your question whether there was a turning point or not. It's just simply an evolution and the sort of process of exploration.

[Break in taping]

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: The question was about really the Portland Art Museum and how pivotal that was in your own work, in the evolution of your own work.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: There was another building about the same time which was a family mortuary, which is not very good, but there was, in a way, the same attitude or the same approach to it, which is simply to get away from the trite forms and find the ones that were appropriate for it without forcing anything. The art museum was really a question of finding a light that would be the best for paintings, a natural light, which then generated a sort of fenestration as well as clerestory lighting, which would solve the problem. Now they've been kind of fooling with it. That building cost $125,000 which is a very, very low sum, even at that time. I went to visit the Fogg Museum in Cambridge which probably is a direct ancestor of the Portland Museum. And I went to visit the Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design, where they had a special skylight, and I decided a skylight was not a good way of getting the light. It was expensive and you see yourself reflected in the glass of walls. So the design, and even the form of it, were very conservative for the times, particularly because of the people who donated the money; they didn't want anything very extraordinarily different from what they expected, which would be maybe a New England type of brick Georgian. But I studied the light and knew what the demands for exhibition were, so I developed what I thought was appropriate. So that's the result of really thoughtful consideration of the lighting problem, which was the main problem. And also, even at the time, I felt that the museum form should not be too self-conscious, express too much, either. [It] should really favor the art work to be exhibited rather than itself. That, to me, was very important.

If a museum is a grand, beautiful piece of architecture, like the Guggenheim Museum, it usually is at the expense of the art it contains. You can't really see things; they couldn't have a large painting there. When [they--Ed.] said, "This is too low, in the [ellipse there, upstairs]," [Wright--Ed.] said, "Well cut the painting." Frank Lloyd Wright could care less about the paintings, only about his own architecture.

But I feel that the museum should be one where the works of art show their very best. So the source of lighting, the direction and intensity of lighting, the material, the succession of visual experience as one moves from place to place, provisions for resting-- those are the things that a designer should strive for. After the museum in Seattle was done I went to visit it, and I didn't like the artificial light. I didn't like the sort of fancy grillwork and fancy superimposed ornament at the time. So this, as far as I recollect, [was] the thinking that went at that time. Whether it was a turning point I'm not sure. It was just simply there's a continuous orienting oneself to the problems inherent in each and every project.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, from what you said, this almost makes my question obsolete, but I will ask it anyway: That building has been described as "modern without being either Bauhausian or modernistic."

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yes, that's probably true.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: That's the way you would see it?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, I've been trying to do that for all my buildings and I think that one has to be true to oneself, and on the other hand one also has to be open to other people's ideas, which is sometimes difficult to do.

I made a mistake of objecting to the Michael Graves. I went to the city and said that this is interesting to have an experiment, but he should do it in Las Vegas and not in Portland. I was sorry I said that because it because in

reality, some people in the street like it, and some architects liked the idea that you need some shock to wake up the profession to other possibilities. I still think that it's the wrong direction and I hope that. .. If you look through some of the recent photographs, the magazines in color, while some of them are mindless, others are really beginning to be quite interesting. And maybe that was good to kick architects in the pants. But I shouldn't have been involved in it. I regretted that I was more or less the spokesman for all these offended architects in Portland. I succumbed to that and I'll never do it again. (laughter)

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: This is very interesting about Graves and I hope we will pick that up a little bit later, perhaps tomorrow. But getting back to the Doyle firm and the Portland Art Museum, how did the Doyle firm get the commission?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well Mr. Doyle was already dead. The museum was in an old building on Fifth Avenue, full of plaster casts. You know the kind. The museums in the west didn't have money to buy any first-rate, first-hand, art. They could only buy casts. As I remember, there was one big room, maybe a little larger than this, all full of casts two feet apart, so that you couldn't find your way. (chuckles) But there was a very wonderful person as curator, a woman by the name of Miss [Anna B.--Ed.] Crocker, who had been the secretary to a banker. The banker was among those who gave the original money to the museum. It was established in 1892, and she was made the director, actually called at the time the curator. She had an instinctive sense of what was good. She was intuitive and with an unusual artistic sense. She began to make purchases which showed her great gifts. At the time I became friends with a man who was teaching there, Mr. Harry Wentz. Mr. Wentz and I really loved painting and did some painting in there. And so Miss Crocker took a liking to me. She knew I was a struggling young architect and she took a chance. So surely, that was another piece of luck on my part.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: So that was your commission and you were the principal designer on that?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's right. I got the commission and went through with it, but at one time I was very discouraged and I wrote to Frank Lloyd Wright and said, "How do you go about trying to sell something that is not the old thing?" He was very encouraging; I have some letters from him, very nice. So I stood firm, and this is the best I could do within the limits of my abilities, within the ideas that we just discussed. That was the first large job, and I couldn't stay for the opening because there was no more money coming and I had just enough money to go to Italy so I left. It was opened in October '32; I left I think in September or something, and I came back here in 1933.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: You mentioned Harry Wentz.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: He was apparently influential in your development.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, very much. He was good with artists, and he had the gift of teaching, although he wasn't very vocal, but he made us aware-- that was John Yeon, myself, and others -- what were the basic rules of composition, and the relationship of forms, rules that can be applied to architecture as well to art. He was very sensitive and very nice and we loved him. As a matter of fact, when I came back, I didn't have a place to stay and didn't have any money, so I went to stay in his house, for almost a year I guess.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: So his influence was primarily an artistic one?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Was he a native of the Pacific Northwest?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, he was born here in Oregon. He was sick when he was young, in his twenties. He was told he had about a couple years to live, so he took all the money he had and took a trip to Paris, I think, thinking he would die. Well he died at age 87.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Did he contribute to opening your eyes to the natural environment here?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, he did. With Mr. Doyle, he designed a beautiful little cottage down at the coast. That's where we were last week-- not at that cottage but close by. His cottage was a little masterpiece; it had in itself the seed of everything we talked about, his being an artist. Mr. Doyle took some of the credit but Wentz said, "I told Doyle what to do." So he had the windows at the ocean, he had the porch looking north, he had a fireplace and everything compact, very simple, and no pretense but just right and so on. We used to stay there, go there and visit him in the summertime, and that was really an inspiration. You probably saw that photograph.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, he was quite a man. As far as I'm concerned he gave an understanding of the arts and

above all an appreciation of the rules of composition-- what makes a work of art integral, and what color in relationship to form so as to be satisfying to the eye. And that's terribly important because you have to see the problem whole, understand the relationship of all materials to form, of what is man-built versus nature, landscaping and so on. It all comes back to the composition, which he succeeded in making me aware of.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Was he influenced by the Japanese or the Oriental influence?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I suppose, yeah. [PIETRO BELLUSCHI later added: I doubt it.]

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: But that wasn't particularly where you got it. Where...?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, no. I loved the Japanese because of their gardens, mostly, and also the simplicity and the feeling they had for wood. The people that had forests, lived in the forest environment, like in Norway that has churches, you know those beautiful old churches. And the Finns and the Japanese and some of the Northwest Indians, not all of them.

They learned, through the years and through generations, to manipulate wood -- not wood made into something else, but wood expressed as wood, a wonderful feeling of convincingly creative use to it, just like the handle of the hammer or _____ of the saw.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: I was just admiring the patina on the timbers outside. They've weathered so beautifully out there. _____ comes back to exactly what you are saying. Well now, we talked about regionalism, we've talked about the natural materials and of course the native environment here, but we haven't mentioned barns and the influence of _____.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Hah. Right.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Which is, of course often talked about, but how.. .?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, well I felt that the-- In Time magazine, 1930 or something, they said the man designed beautiful barns. I felt that, with all the partiality [?] of things, that the barns, mostly because of their simple forms, good proportions, gentle slope of roof, have grace -- and beautiful natural lesson, as they fit the landscape so beautifully, and so I felt that if we could only do houses that would have the same general character.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: ...relatively convincing. I think architects have to be convincing.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Was your love of landscaping and of the native natural environment awakened or aroused when you first came to the Pacific Northwest?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Portland then?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, when I came over, at first I was very excited about the Oregon woods. In Italy I used to walk across the country with knapsack on my back. I must have walked thousands of miles, but I was always within a short distance of some village. You could take your lunch with you, and could always find a place to stay overnight, buy some cheese and bread, and be on your way. But here in Oregon, you could not do this because of enormous distances, so I bought my first car, and I went first to the seacoast. There were no bridges across the rivers at that time so one had to be ferried across. The land here was all rugged and wild and I didn't appreciate it when I first came. When I slept out at night, when I went camping on the shores of many lakes up in the Cascades-- I climbed Mount Hood with shoes like this -- I found it exciting to be outdoors all the time. But that took me a little time. I ended up, of course, by understanding the real nature of the landscape, and of course as a beautiful background for buildings and houses.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And so you were conscious of barns and farmhouses as you were designing? This wasn't something that was...?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: [No, now] of course you don't...

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: This wasn't in the _____?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: It doesn't matter. Knowledge and ideas that come in your head-- what you see and experience -- conditions your thinking, without being very conscious about it. How to shape, design the form of the roofs, how to adjust the roof to the right pitch-- not too steep -- how to compose with the shape of the land-- those are means which help give an aesthetic, convincing quality to a house.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, this fits in very well with your referring to this Pacific Northwest style as regional, or rather, organic. Is that right? Is that a term you've used?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, I suppose that... You know, Frank Lloyd Wright used that word. Organic is when every part contributes to the whole, it acquires integrity, and produces a feeling of intimacy.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Was Wright a very strong influence in your....?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yes.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: At what point do you remember encountering his work or being.. .?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: From the beginning. When his work was published. Now looking back, I really do think that what we did in the first years came from Frank Lloyd Wright influence, without really trying to copy him. In my case I was trying to simplify.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: You mean that that regional style was in your domestic work?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I feel Frank Lloyd Wright did his best houses in the middle years of his age-- his early ones were much better than his later ones. I don't like his late Marin County building.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Oh, the Marin County Civic Center.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Nor his Greek church in Wisconsin, or for that matter the Guggenheim Museum and others. They were overly, over self-conscious, and he was trying too hard to be dramatic. And I think already the people who worked with him in his office were having an influence on his work.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: He was already a very old man at that time, too.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yes, he was old.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: But, you know, I'm curious. You raised an interesting question. Wright's work that you're referring to here is mostly his prairie houses, isn't it? Aren't you thinking of those?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yes.
MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: What about his more decorative work that he was doing in the twenties, for example the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo? Did you know of that at the time?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, that was the striving for form thing. I would say that it is the reason his Taliesin East in Wisconsin was such a great influence. It had low eaves and there was a great composition of forms, beautiful roofs, lovely gardens and porches, and natural materials, actually simple _____ space and form. I think that house influenced us more than the others. We admired [him--Ed.] for his inventiveness and sure touch. Wood was not to be painted, but left natural. Recently I visited his place and saw a church under construction originally designed by him but executed by his wife. The roof was being painted a hideous green, which I am sure he would not have approved of.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: What about his decorative houses or houses that had decoration on them in the mid twenties? What did you think of them?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, he tried; he was inventive but I never cared too much about it. Of course I admired it, but didn't respond to it like I did the other work. I felt he was already a little bit self-conscious, and I was trying to get to my own thing; [it--Ed.] didn't quite fit my thinking.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: So it was as much that exoticism and the self-consciousness, as you say, not so much the decor?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: [Probably nods in the affirmative--Ed.] In fact some of the houses _____ in Chicago and _____ were real _____.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Robie House.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, you've mentioned Wright. You've also mentioned Aalto. Who else was influential? Or who else's work were you...?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: At that time I didn't know Aalto too much. I met him, I think it was around 1951, but I think

that probably Mies in one way, and Corbusier in another way had an influence on my work.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: How so, Corbusier?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, Corbusier was a genius. I have all his books. He was a very egotistical man, and impossible to work with. I know how he fought with Wally Harrison when the United Nations building was being designed in New York. But he was really an artist. I still remember that day I opened Architectural Forum and saw the Ronchamp Chapel. In the same number there was a building by SOM [Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill--MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN], very stilted and dignified. All of a sudden, Ronchamp was like a discovery; someone had broken all the rules and finally come out _____ something very, very new, very interesting, and also completely unexpected and personal _____. Later he did other equally startling buildings. He was really a remarkable person. But he prided himself as being an equally great painter. And in fact he did some interesting work which was much influenced by Picasso. There's an interesting story that the Museum of Modern Art wanted to have an exhibit of his work and he said they'd have to pay him, something like $10,000. Then he reneged and said, "No, I want the $10,000, but also I want to have my paintings exhibited." But the Museum of Modern didn't think his paintings should be shown. They wanted his architecture. (laughter) So they had a terrible time for months and months. He was impossible to deal with. He was stubborn. But he was all of a piece.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: The thirties have received so much attention, particularly recently in the press; it's interesting because the forties, it seems to me, have yet to be explored. They're wholly untouched, and yet the forties represent a very fertile period in American architecture. I'm thinking particularly in your own work. That was the time of opening up, was it not? What sort of work were you engaged in during the war?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Oh, I was terribly busy. That's what really got [me--Ed.] out from a penurious kind of profession into a more prosperous one. I did the first shopping center and a large housing project-- 8,000 units --up in Vancouver, Washington, right across the river from here. It was the first shopping center in 1941. I also did an enormous number of barracks in Alaska for the army. All the work at that time was for the war effort. I had five lady architects working for me.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: So it was all.. .

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, the Kaiser Shipyards were across the Columbia River, and the people working in the yard came from all over the nation. They were of all types, from beggars to young people with a fairly high level of education. It was a tremendous range of social levels. To accomodate this we were told to design very inexpensive units, houses. The walls were made out of two by sixes nailed to floor and ceiling. We tried to make them very, very simple. When the people moved in, some of them planted flowers in boxes and put up nice fences and painted and kept their place neat, cottage-like and liveable; and then others, in the same exact unit, would throw the garbage out the window; there would be no attempt to beautify it or to make it attractive. It was a very good schooling as to the psychology of people in houses.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: How did you accommodate the different economic backgrounds of people with this.. .?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's right. They're all different, so that some of them would feel the need for a civilized environment, and others didn't care at all.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: So you provided basically the same house, same unit....?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: The same house, basically the same house. Later we found we had to satisfy social needs. We provided a recreation hall, movies, places where they could dance, a recreation center, a shopping center, schools, and everything else. So really we created a city from a barren field. It was a marvelous experience, particularly in understanding people.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And in enlarging your field of design, too, I would think. Was it at this time that your attention was first drawn to the problem of shopping center design.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's right. I wrote a chapter in Forms and Function of Twentieth Century Architecture, that was done by Professor Talbot Hamlin of Columbia University. My article was on shopping centers, before they started taking over, before they were built all over the country. I learned quite a bit about shopping centers.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Did shopping center design become a major concern of yours in the forties?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Not a major concern. I designed two or three of them, but I was-- and still am -- interested in the social impact that the "shopping center" had in an automobile society to create places which could become social centers. As it turns out, there's no end of what can be done to make it efficient and beautiful. One in Boston is a two-story building, and it has plantings, fountains, and sculptures, and the shops can show their merchandize in a most attractive way. It becomes very interesting, to me fascinating, because it is the

equivalent of all the market places throughout recorded history in all parts of the world. The Arab shopping places what do you call? There's a name for it.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: A bazaar, you mean?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, bazaar. And you had people -- no matter where you go, in Africa, Asia, Europe, and so on, they have maybe one day a week where they all gather to exchange not only goods, but also services, amenities, and maybe even clowns and circus and so on. It's really the essence of social intercourse, which is also the the basis of the kind of city shopping centers that Jim Rouse is doing in Boston, Baltimore, New York, and soon in Seattle and Portland, where there's a mixture of big department stores and little shops. Everything is mixed up. It has proved very successful in Baltimore, as well as in Boston. So I'm looking at that with a great deal of interest, because it's a wonderful sort of progression into an environment where autos are excluded and pedestrians may again meet and relax.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, am I right then in thinking that your interest in and your approach to shopping center design has been more in terms of community planning rather than in commercial development?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's right, yeah, that's true.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, were you aware of what was going on in Seattle with the Northgate Shopping Center-- one of the first big regional shopping centers -- in the late forties?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: You were not aware of that. That's very interesting. But you knew of the Northshore one back east? Or was that only later when you were writing the chapter? Let's see, that was a postwar development; 1947 is when the plans were getting going on that. And these were far larger than pre-war centers.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Which one? Seattle's?

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Both of them-- the one in Seattle and the one back east.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, I don't know. I was not aware of. .. I know the Westlake [a proposed mall in downtown Seattle--Ed.] now, the one that's going to go ahead, I think. I don't know too much about Seattle's.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: So the concept of the regional shopping center was not something that was being talked about in the late forties. Is that right?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: It became at the time the regional shopping center -- serving a region not a city. I think now there's a return to the city. But the regional shopping center was also a social problem: to find fairly inexpensive land with large parking space that would gather many people from as many communities as possible and provide all the facilities of a city. The sellers of goods were drained from the city and this left the city stranded in a way, and in bad shape. They found that out later, and now the situation is changing. I was involved in Baltimore over the last 20years. Three department stores in the city had gone bankrupt because the streets were too narrow and there was no parking. They could not compete with these big regional shopping centers, but people had to drive a long way to get there [to the shopping center--Ed.]. [It is--Ed.] Difficult to make it viable; you have [to have--Ed.] acres and acres of parking for it. So the problem isn't resolved yet, because parking is still a problem in the city.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: What about the Lloyd Center here in Portland. What did you think of it when it went up, and what do you think of it now?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, we. .. I was living there; Mr. Wentz was living there. It was nothing but empty lots there, and a very strong need for people to have a place to shop and park was becoming obvious.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Was that considered downtown Portland at the time?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: But it wasn't necessarily a suburb either; it was really adjacent to the downtown.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, now it's considered adjacent, but at that time, it was not accessible. It was terrible going out there, and people didn't walk because it was.. .

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: It was on the other side of the river.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's right. And now it's coming back. Downtown Portland is beginning to come back as a place to shop. We have a new Nordstrom's store and the new Rouse project on Sixth and Morrison Street, similar to Westlake in Seattle. It's a really interesting study of urban sociological phenomenona.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: You spoke at the AIA in 1949-- is that right? -- on shopping centers. Did you have any premonition at the time of how large a part they were going to play in American life in the sixties and seventies and indeed today?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: [PIETRO BELLUSCHI changed his previous response from "yes" to--Ed.]: No, but I soon did. I became involved in the one in Baltimore earlier, a shopping center for Rouse. I knew what it meant. It was not a regional one, but was outside of Baltimore. Then the regional projects got bigger and bigger and more important and more influential as they happened all over the east coast. I was involved in the designing of some. I knew they were an answer to a demand, but I also knew that there would be problems eventually.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And did you yourself learn from shopping center design?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Oh yes. I learn all the time.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: I mean, it seemed to me that you were working on an entirely different scale now, not with just one building, but rather a complex of buildings; and not just a large complex, but there were also parking problems. In a sense it was comparable to the planning of a college campus.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Obviously there is a lot to know on this. Every time you do a large-scale project, you need to have people who specialize in certain facts-- for instance, the proper mixture of food and merchandize, dry goods, and so on. You have to have just the right people, the right kind of people in order to make it successful. You have to have a parking consultant because he knows just how far people are willing to walk. You need to have a traffic consultant to avoid congestion. And then you must have a lighting consultant, a retail consultant, a landscaping consultant, etcetera. It becomes very difficult for an architect. It would be foolish for him to try to solve all the problems. There's too much to know, too much information to collect. I'm now involved in that convention center in Seattle. We need a consultant on convention centers: how many people will come and what brings the most money, how much people walk, and how many facilities you have to provide for.. .

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, the shopping center in the forties then in a sense introduced a new kind of complexity in design, and certainly the need for specialty.. .

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Very, very complex and you have to keep your eye on, your ears to the ground, and never be satisfied that you know enough. For instance, you have to know how many parking berths for trucks are needed and how long they would be, and if you have to have a turntable for the trucks, how big it should be. Just an infinity of things that you do not, cannot by a stretch of imagination rely on your own knowledge, so that you just have to rely on people that seem to spend their lives gathering knowledge in a very narrow field.
MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Victor Gruen, I think it was, in the early fifties wrote about how much he had learned in shopping center design, and how much of a transference there was from that to urban design-- that shopping center design was comparable to a project in urban design.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Right.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Did you find this too? That there is a carryover?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. Very much so. And we're learning more about how you can go wrong. For instance, I'm reading a book someday you'll want to read if you have a month to spend reading: The Powerbroker, which is the story of Robert Moses of New York fame. I have read a thousand pages, still 200 to go. Moses was a man that got things done, like expressways, bridges, and so on. But even with his power to do things, the good press that he received, and the help that he received, he missed the boat by having too many freeways so that everybody would come by car, creating massive congestion and preventing the development of mass transit.

About 30 or 40 years ago, I was asked to guess what the future of Portland would be. I wrote an article-- I still have it -- published in the Oregonian newspaper where I had predicted that there would be subways in Portland. Well, subways are very expensive and getting more expensive, so there are none. I don't know whether Seattle will have them. But instead of subways, they've mass transit and a mall that interferes with other surface traffic. I don't like it, frankly, because it's a compromise, and I would have much preferred to have the city not call it a pedestrian mall since pedestrians are in danger of being run over by buses speeding by every two seconds. But I'm the only dissenting voice. I would have preferred large parking garages at the edge of downtown and let them walk two or three blocks, thus encouraging shopping with sidewalks covered by porches or awnings for our rainy climate. Mass transportation should have been underground to start with. And now they just interfere with the other traffic, _____ cross open streets. It's very poor.. . They've spent quite a bit of money, and mass transit hasn't been resolved yet and is still a problem because it costs _____, so much more than can be justified.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Last time we stopped with church design. No! Actually, we didn't; it was shopping centers, before we got into church design.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Um hmm.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And I asked you about the different scale of shopping centers, that you were working on a different scale when you started working in shopping center design. And I think I asked you what did you find were the greatest challenges in taking on shopping center design?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No. I saw a potential for reproducing the situation that has existed through civilization as far back as the time when caravans traveled from India to the Near East. There were places where they stopped for rest and barter-- the bazaar -- where selling took place, and the coming together of people with an opportunity to satisfy some of the community social needs of talking and gossiping and things. I thought that here [with the shopping centers--Ed.] was again a healthy direction because you could provide it with as much money and effort as needed [for--Ed.] an aesthetic experience in a close environment. One of the first such centers-- perhaps not quite the first -- was in Framingham, Massachussetts. It consisted of a group of buildings and stores facing a mall. The mall was open and it got pretty cold in winter, so the next ones were enclosed and after that, all of these shopping centers were enclosed, heated, and air conditioned. Then they became much more attractive. They put fountains, lights, colors, and.. . I did one in Springfield, Massachussetts, and then did one in Chestnut Hill, Boston, both very colorful and successful because it is a controlled and pleasant environment for people.

It is somewhat like in a church; it's a different kind of an emotion, but they're similar in that you have people together. And people together act quite differently. The reactions of the masses are always a mystery. They may become violent, or they may become very emotional. Those are the things that are part of mystery of the human experience-- when people don't act quite the same way in a group that they act in solitude or with some intimate friends.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, you're talking of the shopping center almost in terms of a community social center rather than a commercial enterprise.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Oh yes, oh yes. Very much so. And how to induce -- seduce is a better word-- people to go there, that's what interested me. The questions of being pure architecture, whether it's Miesian or Corbusier, they're really minor. It is related to the importance of community interaction, people interaction. And that's also basic--

I don't want to jump from, but since it has relation to the church, and we probably talked about the church -- I remember it occurred to me a moment ago, when you mentioned the speech I made on church design, titled, "Simplicity in Church Design." I gave it in Seattle about 20, 25 years ago-- [it] was published very extensively -- where I extolled the great theme of holy emptiness. Where simplicity is the simplicity that comes from having thought and eliminated conflict, which is different from the simplicity of the idiot whose nature is just very simple and very boring. So simplicity has to be a reduction to essentials, which is then the essentials of space, of proportion, of height, and light-- the work of art which is a stimulus to the emotions to come forth. And the church in itself. .. I brought out the fact that Paul Tillich, who was a friend of mine, told us that probably the most emotional place for religious meetings after the war was in bombed-out tenements in Berlin. What was important was this strong feeling of being together. So the church is not the building; it's the coming together of people -- how they face each other, how they feel each other.

And it has an interesting variation. When we were designing Lincoln Center, and the drama theater, Mizner was consultant to Saarinen, [supposed to be an expert on, although the thing failed later]. But he wanted to be sure that the seats would not be too wide, because there was the very important element of contact, people [being; coming close in their reaction to the dramatic impact of the play. And that's true of the church. The church is people coming together. So you can see that the building itself, it just helps to get together, but it isn't the only thing that's important.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Did you arrive at your philosophy of eloquent simplicity primarily through church design?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, that came mostly through my concern for the quality of space. The quality of space is not only the proportion-- length, width, and height -- but it's also what you do with the material. And most important of all, it's the quality of light. Think of the great cathedrals: when you see those lights up there they just take your breath away, so to speak. So I tried to translate that in our times when we cannot build that kind of cathedral. We just simply find out what the basic elements are, and find that it is still light and the use of wood, of indigenous simple materials in a proper way, and the help of an artist doing stained glass and sculptures and art in general, which is very important. Because the moment you suggest that there is a spirit to help sustain the emotional quality so important in a church, the whole thing is transformed. There isn't anything like a good work of art to inspire. And it isn't easy because when you have artists that have trained in abstract

thing, but abstract which... Obviously, there's no definition of good art other than knowing what's right, and when it moves you, and you know when you just simply _____ a piece of things that's been _____ contrived, that's like everything else of a.. .

Well, that speech-- probably you must have seen it somewhere, but it was given in Seattle and it just came to mind now.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Um hmm. I believe that was "Eloquent Simplicity on Church Design," right?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, you've anticipated my next questions. It's interesting that you were designing shopping centers and churches at about the same time. The French 19th-century novelist, Emile Zola, once likened the department store to the cathedral; he called it "a cathe 'drale du commerce moderne."

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Hmm?

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: A "cathedral of modern commerce." Does that analogy have any significance for you?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yes, yes, very much. Very much so. Paris really was where it started with the Galleries LaFayette; you probably remember seeing it. They already had a kind of suggestion of this great palace, almost like the Crystal Palace, where the people would move around and buy and [do] things, but particularly-- and that's what people don't quite realize -- come together. The designer has to facilitate that coming together. You don't want to arrange space in such a way that you lose that. So you have spots where people can sit down, congregate, relax, and have a talk. Gathering places suggest to me, at least, the complication of the human mind, the individual, and how much we architects should be concerned with him. And maybe the post-modern have also been concerned. Thirty-two years ago, when they gave me an honorary degree at Reed College, I gave a talk at the time, suggesting that we'd lost all concern for human beings, taken away from them all those human little details, like green shutters, cartuches, and other ornaments, which in small ways satisfied their sense[s]. We have eliminated that and become very sterile and we needed something more. It was my feeling at that time-- and that's 33 years ago now -- that it was a mistake not to be concerned with that side because these things are much more important symbols than we realize. People need symbols and things that are not strictly utilitarian. But this has to be done with a great deal of taste and care, and not to start doing things just to shock. Perhaps little by little we will find new convincing ways to design things. There's already a sign of that happening. I see in photographs, in recent magazines, where they're obviously post-modern, but very creative and very good and very free and quite interesting.

I got a letter last week from a student of mine of about 30 years ago; his name is Jim Morgan. He had read my article about post-modern and the German that I wrote. You remember? Have you seen that? I thought you had. He praised it, but then he said, "I know Phil Johnson and I like him, and he's teaching at Pratt"-- I think -- "I can see what all this colors and new ideas are doing to the student; they're much more lively, much better." So that's another lesson that comes for me. I haven't answered the letter; probably I am not going to answer, but.. .

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, you raised, it seems to me, one of the critical problems in designing churches today, and that is of reconciling traditional symbols [of] the past with the modern techniques and materials of today. Is this how you would perceive the main challenge in church design today?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No. You don't perceive it in a conscious way. Once you have established within yourself a certain philosophy, if there is progress over 60 years of practice, you simply study the problem, find out possible solutions, alternative solutions, knowing by experience what the limitations and the cost of materials are. And knowing enough about some of the technical details like lighting, I mean natural light, what it does, the amount of it, and the direction it comes from, and so on, then of course you think, "I'm doing the best that can be done." _____ and that's going out for bids now, and the one which is in Milwaukee, and I'm doing a chapel for the University of Portland. That is [what] worries one and keeps him awake at night; you worry about it, what kind of form, _____. And I know that some clients, some of the laymen, people _____ in particular to the University of Portland, are very conservative, and they see a conventional church with a steeple, the kind they have in New England, white churches, which I admire very much. They are very nice, but not for Oregon. In addition the interior would not take the form that you would like.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, you have almost.. .

[Break in taping]

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I think it very important to think of a place where people meet as an experience in communal participation, whether it is [a] shopping center or a church-- I mentioned the bombed-out tenements in Berliln. Also the underground catacombs where the early Christians congregated. My father built a house in

Rome, which was over catacombs. [We found all these things with the old early Roman.. .] The new Christianity was eliciting from people great emotional enthusiasm. They used to meet in secret, since they were persecuted. They used to meet in the underground cellars. They had to be together and worship together. So that one musn't forget that this is fundamentally the most important thing. And so while you cannot duplicate the catacombs or the bombed-out tenement, there has to be some other symbol, and some other means by which this community of faithful get together and worship together, to satisfy their spirit.

So you think in terms of lasting symbols, and symbols developed over thousands [of] years-- not improvised symbols, but symbols which have become tradition, and that's very important. The cross is a symbol, and it took a long time to get away from the symbolic form of the cruciform of cathedrals and of the churches, where the _____ relationship to the priest. The priest was in the the very end of the nave, back of a chancel. A chancel is the same as cancello in Italian, a means of separating people from the altar, similar to what the Indian priest in a Mayan temple was doing in human sacrifices, being very secretive about it, so as to make a mystery of it. [They preserved the mystery instead of. ..] And that simply meant that in these long cathedrals, your communication with the priest was very slight. They were too far away, but the mystery was preserved, and all they got together was in the singing, the music, and the fact that people would see each other, and so on.

That there is a recent evolution in the design of the church is due to the last Vatican council when they decided about certain liturgical changes. One of them is that church is people, that the church means people, and they should be participants in the symbolic saying of the mass, rather than being spectators. So I take that into consideration in my designs. (Maybe I show you some slides, some photographs.)

And I've done several, many churches. Also, I've been involved in about ten or twelve symphonic halls, music, where they play music or they play drama and so on, at Juilliard, Baltimore, San Francisco, Sacramento, etcetera. The problems are very similar. That is, the principal problem is to have everybody see well and hear well. [And to eliminate echos. When you experience Avery Fisher Hall, symphony hall in New York, [they] had a lot of trouble.]

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: But your primary problem in church design is somewhat different on the interior, is it not? There you want.. .

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: [It's hard to explain without using funny words, like a spiritual thing.] The problem is similar, but in a church you try to introduce a spiritual feeling. You have images to lift the spirit, and that's why I go back to light as a creator of shadows and mystery. In Milwaukee, Oregon, they complained the sanctuary was too dark. I wanted to come from the strong light outside into a place that all of a sudden is different, a new mysterious kind of environment, with a shaft that would produce a dramatic impact, a dramatic emphasis on various parts of the enclosure. Unfortunately, you have to listen to everyone, particularly the Lutherans, who are much more democratic than Catholics in the sense that you have committees who decide; they have the choir committee and the music committee and the worship committee and many others. So they fight and they compromise, in the end, to satisfy all the various demands. In the Catholic church, there is a priest [who] makes all the decisions. If he's a good man, he asks some advice and then ignores it and goes ahead with it more efficiently. That's why I find church design interesting, because you test yourself all the time about your theories about people, what their reactions are and how you deal with them. You're never terribly sure that you're successful; you take chances.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, then how would you characterize or summarize the major challenge in church design? If it's not so much the traditional symbols, what would you say it is?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Find the key to release the pent-up emotions which are in everybody, whether he's religious or not religious.
MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And then, getting back to the question that you and I were talking about just briefly before, how do you reconcile-- since that involves interior space and light -- how do you reconcile that with exterior form, where you need those traditional symbols?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, now that is part of the same creative experience. Let me give you a recent example. When I was designing a Lutheran church in Beaverton, Oregon, I wanted to improve on what I had done in Milwaukee, where the light coming down from a ceiling opening did not quite work. I found I wasn't able to control its intensity and direction.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Can you describe the vaults there?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, that's where, _____.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Oh, okay.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: In Beaverton, I wanted a vertical window so that there'd be light coming from the sun at a

certain angle. Having a vertical window in a sloping roof created a special form, and that special form was a clear statement of the exterior form.

[Break in taping]

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Okay, let me ask you this. We were talking about contemporary design of churches. What do you think of Mies's solution to church design with the chapel at IIT [Illinois Institute of Technology--Ed.]?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, as I told you, I'm a great admirer of Mies's because he's the only one who tried to interpret our industrialized society, and therefore was devoted to simple forms. [What he was doing was a reflection of that], and he didn't believe in changing style every Monday morning. The shortcomings of Mies became very obvious when he tried to do the chapel. He believed a little stronger than other people that the exterior should not try to remind [us of--Ed.] the older traditions of the church. He felt that if you did the interior very well, that would satisfy. He had a very fixed philosophy of discipline, that the structure should dominate rather than be compromised. I went to his house many times. He was very much of an artist, much more than people realized. He also was taking great pleasure in collecting paintings, by Paul Klee for instance, though Paul Klee was on the opposite range of interests. Klee was very imaginative and full of a sense of color and full of abstract forms.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Humor, too.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: .. .of _____, humor and imagination. But Mies wanted to go very deep into the structure and give it an expression, and was interested in experimentation, of being clear-minded. But he had a slow German mind that would probe to the very last detail and aspect of an idea or philosophy. So you have to respect him. He was just almost the opposite of Philip Johnson. How they got together I don't know. Philip would try anything once-- right or wrong, just try it. Very interesting article about a lady who had him design a small building, not a chapel, but outdoors. The building fell apart structurally. She sued him and she won. He is a hedonist and a dilettante. He's just the opposite of Mies. When he worked with him he was kind of chomping at the bit.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: I bet. (chuckles)

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: And he was bored, _____ was bored.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, the Skidmore, Owings & Merrill Air Force Academy Chapel, in Colorado Springs, or just outside of Colorado Springs?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, I was consultant for that project.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Oh. What about that as an example of a church design, contemporary church design that adheres at least somewhat more to traditional symbols? Is that more successful, do you think?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Walter Netsch was the designer. I was a little bit disturbed about the rigidity of the academy master plan, and I thought that the chapel should free itself and become more of a symbol. So he devised this strange form that unfortunately in the climate of Colorado, up in the mountains with the great variation in temperature, kept moving and leaking. They've never been able to stop the leaking, but finally they decided to have inside gutters. So that would allow water to be collected before it fell over the worshiper's heads. And I think that in retrospect-- you know, at the time I wasn't 100 percent enthusiastic, [but I] supported it, and I said, "You should go ahead with it." In retrospect my feeling is that it's too, it's a little too obvious and too self-conscious and too much of an attempt to do something with all those 15 spires, which wags called the Twelve Apostles and the three Chiefs of Staff.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: (laughs)

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: So there was some reason to make a little fun of it. It stands there as an exercise in one man's interpretation of what a chapel should be. But it needed to be a visible symbol; it needed to be something that would impress, something strong, but it turned out a little too self-conscious.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: But do you think the attempt to accomodate traditional symbolism or to look like a church in a traditional sense was successful?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. It had.. . The first floor, the main floor was for Protestant worship, the basement for Catholics and Jews.

1BELLUSCHI

[Tape 3; Side 2]

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: The main nave looks very much like a Gothic cathedral, with very high ceilings.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Now that's the Protestant, isn't it, and the Catholic was.. .?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's the Protestant. Then they served the Catholics and the Jew down in basement.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Catacombs, yeah. (chuckles)

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: So there was quite an outcry, particularly by Catholics, because they were fairly numerous. Not the Jewish. But it couldn't be helped. But Walter Nash is a good designer. He was an MIT student, and did quite a few buildings for us at MIT. He's no longer at SOM [Skidmore, Owings and Merrill--Ed.], but he was in charge of the chapel; he's the one who made the design for it, while we consultants were hovering over him.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And what was your role in that?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Eero Saarinen, Roi Larson from Philadelphia, and I were the-- what do you call? -- consultants on design. And the architects had no time at all; it had to be done quickly.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Can you describe that position? That's one of the things that you are doing quite a bit now, is it not, design consultant? What exactly does that mean?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: It means that all of the variations from doing the complete design, [like I'm doing for Louisville, the design handed over I do the work _____].

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: In other words they give you the program and say.. .

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's right. Where you just simply stand over their shoulder and say, "Look, this doesn't look so good; why don't you try that?" and so on. So it's a sort of creative consultantship of all degrees. And I've had-- I counted about 150 firms all over the country. But in most cases, I did the design particularly of churches and _____. In others I just simply told them the best way I could. In a way [as I'm doing in Seattle] [at the Convention Center--Ed.], to stand back and look, see what they're doing, is in many ways a difficult task.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Is this true of the convention center?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's the convention center.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: I see. Uh huh. But now this is very interesting. When I've asked you this and you talked about it in terms of how it looks, does that mean that when you were brought in as a design consultant, you were
mostly consulted on how that form is going to look, the visual or aesthetic, if I can broaden that?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, I think that I would never let the function of the program take a subordinate role. The program has to be there and has to be good. I did, for instance, the agronomy building in the university, Ohio State. It come out pretty well. But I wanted to be sure that it filled the program and the demands of the people that will utilize and use that. In Cleveland -- the Hall of Justice-- they had a terrible scheme. The Fine Art Commission there turned it down, and I was called in and had to start all over. But keeping the program, which was a combination of courtrooms and jail. .. The circulation was very elaborate because prisoners and bystanders and judges and lawyers all had their own circulation pattern. So it's not just aesthetic or the form of the thing; it's a totality of the concept. In Sacramento, I developed the concept for the civic center after worrying at night about finding the right solution.

I never look with disdain at what the other fellow is doing; you work together and create a team. And all I can do most of the time is just stimulate the team and see whether the problem could be solved differently. So that role I found suited me much better. I used to have a big office in Portland, got ulcers and then that's why I went to MIT. I couldn't take it any more. You probably read that.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Yes. Well, let us finish up on church design and then we can move on to the MIT experience. One last question on church design: the question of monumentality. You've spoken about this in your writings before, but the Air Force Academy chapel is a good example. It's not exactly a building that most people would call monumental. But should the church in today's society be monumental? And if so, how can monumentality be achieved in terms other than scale?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's a good question. I really don't know the answers other than you have to have a definition of what is monumental. But I would say tentatively that monumentality is something that has a long-range quality that you are satisfied will endure. So while it is a question of scale-- sure, partly scale -- this small piece of sculpture can be monumental simply because it appeals to your sense, your perception of what is lasting, what has a lasting value for us. That's the best I can do on that. I can't think of monumentality without,

for instance, a pastiche of the Vittorio Emanuele Monument.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Milan?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: In Rome. You know, they tried very hard. The man who designed it went insane after a while. But it's been criticized from the time it was built in 1911. I was there when it was just opened. That remained unfinished for quite a while. I wouldn't be surprised if the post-modern people ended up by thinking it's a very good monument.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: (giggles)

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: You know which one I'm talking about?

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Sure.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: So that's monumental but only monumental in physical terms. That is not-- and it'll probably be there forever, because it's all Carrara marble -- it's a wonderful _____. I feel that the real test of it is something that deep in your heart you feel it has a lasting life, some value that you can respect.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: What about the Graves building in Portland? Would you say that's monumental? Does that fall into the class of a monumental building?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, I can't think [of] that as being monumental. I think he's a turning point, sort of a symbol of our discontent or of our superficiality. You see, he has to think in terms of our society nowadays, conditioned, much more than we realize, by the television, by the communication media, and by all the advertising and all the fluffy, the fashionable forms which are here today and they disappear tomorrow. It's part of our culture to have nothing lasting, nothing serious, nothing-- because that would be boring. It [is a, isn't] part of our nature, and so on. So that's caught -- in fact even our thinking in regard to buildings that are going to be there for a long time. So you'll raise a building in Seattle-- I don't know which is: the post modern with the ugly thing on the side -- it's terrible; I think it's awful.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: A new one? The Watermark Tower?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yes. They had sort of.. . Something happened to the corners on top.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, the moment you're beginning to translate it, translate the superficial, fashionable attitude, which is our society today, into forms that will be there for long time, then I get a little worried about how do you suppose we can change it. But I don't think they are monuments. I don't think that they are going to be remembered and I don't think that they're appreciated. But you can look back and say, "Well, that's the beginning of.. .whatever, post modern," and then something good can come out of it.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: I think it was Marion Dean Ross who mentioned or noted that some of your earlier churches tend to be longitudinal in plan, and your more recent ones tend to be centralized. Now does this reflect a change in liturgy or in your own thinking?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, not in liturgy. Hm umm.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Not a change in liturgy?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yes, after the last Vatican council, but also because if you have a lot of people, say nine hundred or a thousand people, if you put them all around the altar, you achieve a more efficient seating and have no more than 17 rows, so no one would be very far from the altar. But if you have a narrow nave, since you cannot have more than so many seats by regulation of the fire marshal, you'll have a long, long nave, and the people at the end would not be able either to hear, to see, or to participate. Also a round or hexagonal plan is better acoustically and visually, and it indeed is the result of liturgical changes.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: A change in _____?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: .. .and a new interpretation that people together form a church.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Was there anything lost in the transformation, in that the longitudinal space was so awesome, when you walk into the church in the west end.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Lost in the sense that we have turned our back to a long tradition that went from 12th century. The Gothic, first Gothic, Romanesque and Gothic used the arch, within which you were able span just so

much, and in order to make it large, you had to make it long. At that time, the cathedrals did not have fixed seats; even when I used to live there, you rented a chair, took it anywhere and sit. But the naves were empty-- no pews. And therefore you could sit anywhere you wanted. [_____ very many people there, then the fact that they were together, standing up -- men always stood up, but women probably sit down.] But they were together. In Gothic churches there was much more mystery, much less participation, and the priests were [on their own back there], performing rituals in Latin that nobody understood, way out in the sanctuary. Now all that is changed. I think in a way it's a mistake, too bad, if you think in terms what has been lost in mystery, which echoes the mystery of our existence. Now we try to explain what cannot be explained. In the end, it's a question of-- one's choice or philosophy -- of which is the best. When you say, "Lost," sure. If you think of a gothic cathedral and all that took place there and the Latin and incense that was burning, which they don't do that quite as much, it's a loss. But then you gain something else, I suppose, a modern interpretation of God.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Have you ever sensed or run into a conflict between church design and and the demands of the liturgy? For example, the church we were just looking at with the central light at the apex of the dome and your altar in the east end, doesn't that create a conflict in the main focus of the church?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, in that church, _____ was careful that there be one main source of light, one usually directed towards the altar, towards the sanctuary. And the others should be very subdued, so that you have a glimmer of light where it belongs. There might be some conflict, but if you keep it under control shouldn't worry too much. That church that you saw, Christ the King, they complained there was not enough light to read, and I told the priest, "I didn't think the people read book _____, and if they did, they should know it by heart."

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: (giggles)

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: But all we did, we put some artificial light on the back, so if they want to read at a certain time, they just.. . In the sermon, though, the acoustics is important, not as important, because you have a way of transmitting sound, which is not as demanding as in a symphony hall.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: The spaces tend to be smaller, too, do they not, in a modern church?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yes. That's right.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Now, it's interesting. Church design has played a major part in your career. How did you become involved in church design in the first place?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Oh, I did one, 40, 45 years ago, the first one I did, St. Thomas More. It was a very, very simple church. They ruined it when they added to it years later. Oh, it's awful what they did to it. But at that time it was just simply a very straightforward, using, exposing the trusses, and then I designed the pews and it was a very, very simple.. .

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: It was not unlike some of your domestic work at the time, is it?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's right, very much. And it was small. It cost $11,000, or something like that, to build. And had a fine priest who's still alive. They gave me a kind of a party at the museum about two weeks ago, and he was there. And all my clients, the priests and Presbyterian ministers, Lutheran ministers, they were all there. There were about 150 people. But that's how it got started. But I never sought church work. I never solicited any because they take much time and effort and you lose money. But there's so much pleasure to do it so that.. .

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: So that was the point of departure for a succession of churches?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yes. _____ _____.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And did you find.. . I was going to ask about the different denominations. You've worked in a number of different denominations, Lutheran you say.. .

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I had a lot of Jewish.. .

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Catholic, Jewish synagogues.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Jewish synagogues.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Did you find that you were changing fundamental goals in church design, working with these different denominations?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I did several Unitarians, and you know they don't even have a crucifix, so I had to take that into account. Catholics are much more oriented towards the liturgical rules. And the synagogues are mostly meeting places. The problem they have-- I've done four of them -- is that they are all fundamentally very loyal to

their faith, but they don't go to temple other than high holy days. But at the great holiday in October, there will be all the congregation members come.
So you have to have something that is good for the few and also for the many. That always presented a real problem.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: We've talked about church design in the past, but we haven't talked about the Ronchamp chapel. What about Corbusier's solution to that problem of the pilgrimage chapel?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Oh, yeah. That says it: the beauty of being very intimate and very much like a country church. It had those little windows which are-- you could see the prototype in Tunisia or up in French Africa -- where the light comes in in small shafts. He took advantage and made a very beautiful kind of source of light for the interior.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: He has that beautiful clerestory around.. .

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: The clerestory around, and it's just very, sort of unique statement that he makes, so very unlike any other piece of building that [he] has ever done, and that's typical of him, to be always searching. You see, after all the theories about art, you can talk forever and not come to any conclusion, but when you conceive a piece like that, the real artist-- the painter, the sculptor, the composer -- show how art is made. It is their task and their duty to forever search for it; it's art only when it comes from a unique point of view, a unique experience.

Some architects utilize that philosophy for their own: Phil Johnson, all the people [like] that, and Corbusier above all. But I've a feeling that architecture in general, being a social art, needs to be quite a bit more than a search for visual satisfaction. And that's why I think Aalto is the prototype of a good architect, much more than Corbusier, who is really an artist, or even Mies or Frank Lloyd Wright. Because Aalto studies a problem until he understands all its implications, and from [these facts] he extracts the forms and the aesthetic of its architecture. And it takes a great deal of ability and gift to do that. But pure artists, such as sculptors, painters, composers, and so on, it's their duty to keep on searching for unique visions even if they're wrong. Because their work doesn't have to be seen, doesn't have to be shown.

However, the other feeling that I have about artists, that the moment they get completely away from the human condition, they are bound to become shallow: The abstraction pleases the eyes, but it doesn't go beyond, does not get to your mind or your heart. When you see the Crucifixion and the Resurrection by Cimabue in Assisi-- their composition, the color, how they're put together, and what they convey -- all of sudden you realize it's also the human, very deeply human experience-- symbolically, visually, emotionally, everything else. Even Picasso, with all the experimentation, as you noticed, he never got away from relating somehow to the human condition, whether it's a face or a body distorted, or whether. .. So I have a feeling that the moment you begin to satisfy just the eye, you give up something elemental, which is the substance of the human condition, and the deep experience of living. This is just my simplified feeling and that's why I feel hesitant when you got post-modern: That all of
a sudden they've been oriented towards the superficial thing, the thing that it satisfies your eyes but it doesn't go beyond. They're not, they don't care what happens to people who live, work, or worship.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, you and I talked about this briefly before, and we both agreed that there is a difference between building and architecture.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Exactly.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: How would you characterize that difference?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, I think I'm going to repeat, but building is structure and material, but architecture is the totality of the experience -- where you take a person, take an individual or group of individuals, and you are concerned exactly what happens to them as they enter the building. You follow them in their in visual experience, in their becoming aware of a sense of intimacy, a sense of well-being, a sense of pleasure of being well-housed and.. .

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: This is an ordinary building, hmm?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's what _____ _____. [Probably responded in the negative--Ed.]

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: MEREDITH L. CLAUSENDonald's hamburger.. .?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: The exterior is conceived in the same manner; it is part of the same experience. It has to be a totality of experience.

The one you mentioned now, what was the.. .?

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: MEREDITH L. CLAUSENDonald's.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: MEREDITH L. CLAUSENDonald's. They needed a symbol, so it'd look nice so they'd sell more hamburgers, and therefore they have those ugly things. But they had a purpose for it.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, would that be architecture, or would that be building?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That would be simply bad architecture. Architecture can be good and bad. Quality comes to the fore in all degrees. Obviously there are no rules for that and would depend on who's doing it and what and how appropriate it is. But it is architecture when there is a conscious effort towards formal order. And there's also the theory that no matter what style, no matter what period, there are just as many good architects as there are bad architects-- or at least there are many more bad architects than are good architects. You can have a post-modern which is very good, or a modern which is very bad. So there's always. ..

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: A thin line.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: . ..evening up. You can't set any rules, any regulations. Certain buildings are successful sometimes because good men knew what they
were doing; sometimes it was he just has good luck. I think of that building in Seattle, the building that TRA did on Union and. ..?

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: People's Bank? Oh. One Union Square.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. I like it very much. It's so pristine and so clear, so sparkling. I like it.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, from what you're saying, it sounds as if the difference you would draw between building and architecture is that one is good and one is not so good.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, that's a little bit too simplistic, and not really true. But all architecture should be building, and in a speech I gave, I mentioned that an architect should be more concerned with the fact that his project should be considered a building, rather than an exercise in fashion -- better if he thinks it's a building than if he thinks it's a piece of fashion.

But in reality, architecture reemerges as the art of building, if you [don't--Ed.] allow words to obscure the issue. In other words, the more you overdo the artificiality of a design, the more you're apt to have a bad building. If you make a building structurally sound and fitting all given practical conditions, you have no architecture, but at least you have a building that functions well. When you begin to worry about how a building is used and about its proportion and elegance, and all the grammar that is part of architectural tradition, then it becomes architecture, but it has to be a building first.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: I see.

Let's move on to MIT, shall we? We can come back to this issue. But we've been talking about some of your work in the forties. You received the MIT position in the late forties, right? 1949 to 1950. You were at that point a noted authority on shopping centers. You were well known for your regionalism, your work particularly in domestic work, your church design, and then with the Equitable Building, 1948, the spanking new technologically advanced skyscraper. You were at the forefront of a lot of these architectural currents of the time. And then in 1948, you won a P.A. [Progressive Architecture--Ed.] award for both the Equitable Building and for the Yamhill, Oregon, house. Is that right?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Um hmm.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: At the same time you were trained as an engineer, but now you were deeply involved in architecture, and in planning, with the shopping center. You embraced an orthodox modernism yet at the same time you worked in a regional style. Still, at this point, you hadn't had much experience, am I right, in architectural education per se. Why, in your eyes, at this point, were you selected to be dean of MIT, one of the country's leading architectural schools?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I haven't the slightest idea. (laughter)

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I think that they were trying to look for someone that was somewhat known and that would be willing to forfeit his work as an architect and not.. . At that time, there were only two things. I had been appointed by Truman as a member of the Fine Arts Commission in Washington. So the president of MIT knew about that, and that made an impression on him. I'm guessing, because I'm not terribly sure that that's true. And then I had a stint-- in 1948 I taught at Yale for a while. I had a class there, and I had a terrible cold. All I

remember was that I was miserable, but they gave me beautiful house with a lot of books and I was just treated very nicely. And that time it was -- Ed Stone was part of the faculty, and George Howe, I think, was chairman of the department. So those two, and then Bill Wurster, was my friend, and Bill Wurster was the dean at MIT. I think he submitted my name and some recommendation, so President Killian sent the dean of engineering to look me over without saying what they were doing. I suspected their purpose, [looking me over]. I told them I didn't know whether to accept it; I'd have to think it over.

I was then at the height of a successful career, from the point of view of my office, a very successful practice. But I was working too hard. I had no partners. I used to get up at 3:30 in the morning, 4o'clock, and do design work until 10:00 a.m., and then deal with all the administrative duties and so on. I developed ulcers, which is a genetic curse. My sons and my father had them. So I thought that really the old-fashioned practice of architecture was more than I could take, as a physical person. So that was an opportunity. But I think -- I have a suspicion-- it was more than that. It was the same sense of adventure that made me come and work in a mine in Idaho. That this was a new experience and they probably would never offer it again. And I have some friends that said, "Well, MIT's a special place. It's the oldest school of architecture in America." And so after months. ..

[Tape 4; Side 1]

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: After months of agonizing, I decided to accept, and so at the end of 1950 I left Portland.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And did you pick up roots entirely?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I was trying to get some of my associates, some of my employees to take over, but it didn't work out, so I thought of Skidmore Owings and Merrill and went and asked them whether they would take over. So we were associated in partnership for five years, sharing the profits, so the firm was known as Belluschi and Skidmore Owings and Merrill associated for the last five years. It took some time to get going but then SOM became very successful. They have done a lot of buildings.

And so that's how I went to MIT. The reason why they picked me, I think they had my name on the list and probably they couldn't get anyone else.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: (chuckles) Your usual modesty. Well, as dean of MIT-- that was a role that you assumed in January 1951, is that correct? -- what did you see as your primary purpose, or what did you see as the primary purpose of architectural education? Did you look at it in technical terms, as a means of gaining technical skills?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, first of all, I wasn't ready at all to take that role. And I looked into and I found out it was a very small school, just 200 people or so, all five years. And they had a wonderful head of the department, Lawrence Anderson, and he did all the educational work and all the educational philosophy. We're very, very good friends and I respect him and like him very much. He's one that doesn't speak too much, but when he talks [with--Ed.] you, he has credibility and great wisdom, a flame under the bushel. So he really did manage the administrative part and the educational part, and I was simply joining with the other deans at budget committee time and so on.

But, all of a sudden, I found that I could utilize my time. I was on the thesis committee for the graduate students, as far as the student was concerned. But I was asked to give talks all over the country, which I did. I thought [it] was my duty. So that was an educational part, in preparing myself to talk about architecture.

And then soon after, I was asked to participate, to be a consultant in many things, both on committees on urban problems and sort of [a] mixture of problems. So I was busy traveling to many places, including Korea, China, Australia, New Zealand, Italy, and France. And at that time, I was also on the state department committee on foreign buildings when [it was] first established, and I wrote its guidelines [for foreign building operations and all their things]. So I was busy but I was not really directly involved with the teaching to the student. I had no class work. So, in a sense there was more education for me than there was for the students.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Were there any major changes made in the curriculum while you were there?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, because Andy Anderson was there for a long time, and I think that Bill Wurster had the same role; he let Anderson do it because he was so good at it.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: In the course of our conversation, you've mentioned many times the emotional quality of architecture, and the spiritual aspect, if you will, or the emotional quality. If we look at that as constituting at least part of the art of architecture, is that something that can be taught, do you think?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, I think, because potentially every person, and no matter how he looks or how he acts, he has this kind of inherited gift which is born of the human nature, of being lifted by some kind of [interest, emphasis] beyond avarice and all the sins. So it's a question of stimulating and giving importance to ideas and

asking artists of various kinds to come in [with] their thinking and talk about it. It's an atmosphere that you create where those things are possible. They made students aware of their existence and I think that it works. Now some people are born more of a gift of expression, others less so, but that's part of education.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: So it's well beyond just preparing the young architect for a professional life; it's.. .

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's right.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Getting back to the question of regionalism, which we've talked about before, what role did regionalism play in the curriculum at MIT? Or did it?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Not very much, as I remember. Regionalism takes many forms. I don't know whether you read the long article I wrote on the subject many years ago? You read that. It was one of the topics that I was interested [in] at that the time. My friend Professor Horacio Caminos has dedicated his life to it, the problem of providing shelter for the masses of people all over the world who could not afford it, to provide a minimum shelter still acceptable as a way of living, in places like Columbia, with all their slums. Those are the problems still unresolved, but they must be. You probably have read about that architect in Egypt who uses local technique and materials. The important [thing] was for the students to understand, to go through the process of understanding this problem and to have the discipline to relate to it and be able to use his analytical mind to dissect the problem and more importantly in the end to have the ability to synthesize that into what then becomes architecture. So that's a process you can insist through the years of a student in school. I never thought it was right to teach a certain style, to do it a certain way, and so on. But well thought out results are always regional in character. You go to China and there's a regional aspect. You go to India, there's a regional thing. But those are simply the result of the same process: of understanding the limitations and the potentials. So that to me was education.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Wasn't that a goal that was essentially at odds with the current Miesian approach to universal architecture and an international language of form?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, I don't.. . Well, maybe he went further, but he still analyzed a problem, and when he did apartments or he did some of the other work, he was very much interested in spatial relationships. He was also interested in the aspect of structure. And those are very important elements. He was trying to establish a regional attitude based on the concept of the discipline of structure as shown in the campus of Armor Institute, which became IIT, Illinois Institute of Technology. It creates a regional form, if you can call it that, but not like we did in the old times in the past traditional architecture. He took what was most readily available, which was steel and brick, and expressed it in very strong ways, yet obeying the rules set by the fire codes. So that it's the same process again, using modern technique and modern material, [but the processes are very different]. In Italy, some of the Italian house.. . Incidentally, you know Astra Zarina [Professor of Architecture, University of Washington, and head of Rome Abroad program in Italy--Ed.]?
MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I like to have her here. She was a student at MIT.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Uh huh. Well, so you sense no conflict then, between internationalism and the.. .?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, I don't. I don't see conflict; it's just the human mind at work. It has to receive nourishment from the world around, recognize that the world is changing, and that he's serious about. Like the old Italian hill towns. That's why I was thinking of Zarina, who bought a house in one of those towns. Those villagers had stone right there, and what is more natural than [to] put them together to make an edifice? Of course they fit beautifully with the landscape because it's the same material. Or you go down into the Puglie region, down in southern Italy: there's a sedimentary rock there; you just put the crowbar and it comes up in thin sheets which you can use like shingles in layers. You build a conical form for the roof, and that becomes the style because that was the easiest way to do it. Then they had a finial at the top which they painted white, and that becomes a human contribution to beauty, which then becomes architecture, regional in character.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, when we were talking about conveying whatever it is that constitutes the art of architecture, you mentioned the importance of bringing in artists to inspire students and give them some idea of what the possibilities are of architectural form. Now what about the art of the past? We haven't talked about architectural history and your views on that. Would or did architectural history play an important part in your curriculum?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Oh! Absolutely. Because whether we know it or not, all our mind and all our creative powers are conditioned by what we have been brought up to see and to admire and so on. Only you become very suspicious that if there is a certain ornament that no one can execute, or is secondhand stuff or an imitation, put through the press, you avoid it, simply because it's not an expression of your time. And that's the thing that one [must be--Ed.] most aware of in imitating the past. You just see the essence of it; you see the space and you see

the succession of visual experiences. And now, the [colonnade], the Egyptian.. . You know, for a while we were imitating Egyptian, imitating the arches and so on, or the art. Even got to the point-- I was involved with the supervision of the University of Colorado, and the students were designing [a] building that was built there in stone with an arch. And the students, instead of letting the arch be self-supporting, they put shelves to support the arches. You know, that's just ridiculous, but [is] the result of not understanding history.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: (laughs)

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: So those are the things that you admire: honesty of purpose and essence of what was done and what is essential, what is fundamental. All the things that were added, which was possible because they were artists and craftsmen and so on, and you cannot do it well, then you
don't do it. You find some substitute, something that is as -- not as good, because certainly the buildings in Florence, for instance, how can you duplicate some of those? They're so beautifully done. But Florence was full of craftsmen that would delight in carving furniture, carving doorways and adding ornament and so on. Try to find them now here.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: We've been talking about traditional symbols. We talked about the traditional symbols of the church, which to some extent we've tried to perpetuate in modern design with a steeple or an awesome, aspiring interior space. What about something like the gothic cathedral, or the collegiate gothic in the design of collegiate buildings in the twenties?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Because we couldn't find a substitute for the monumentality, for the-- I'm trying to think of the word, the emphasis or the. ..

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, we were still drawing on traditional symbols at that point. ..

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, so that it's so much easier to imitate or to copy than to start examining the elaborate philosophy of what is appropriate for now, you see; just simply grab it and use it. At Reed College, Mr. Doyle went to England and made some light, lovely sketches of that particular Tudor gothic, and [he] came back [and] gave it to a draftsman and that's how they were built. Fortunately the draftsman was good, Macomber, and had to pick the right brick, the right mortar, the right stone, and put the detail they know how to do it, and so on. So that transition at the time you people, they are not. But when the thing began shedding all these traditional forms [it--Ed.] was a time of great excitement, because you were relinquishing those and you were starting in a sense a new something, knowing well -- at least I knew at the time-- that [it was--Ed.] an uncharted course and you really didn't have the ability to do anywhere [near--Ed.] as well. But the other one had several centuries to perfect it and to arrive at that point. Somehow at that time, all these dogma, dogmatic approach, like Greek temples for the bank and so on, they were eliminated. They had to find something for the time being. So that's interesting to see the evolution, but [I] also don't want to diminish the excitement of the young designers to be able to start anew, even if they knew that they couldn't be as good.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, in a sense you were very fortunate then in being given the commission for the Portland Art Museum because you could start with a fresh slate. There weren't any traditional symbols-- am I right? -- that you had to accomodate.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's right. And I took the problem of lighting as being the fundamental theme on which, around which I built the building.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Now, isn't that interesting the way that later related to your church design?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Right. But there was still ambivalence somewhat, because the Portland Art Museum antecedent is the Fogg Museum in Cambridge, Massachussetts, and that is kind of New England. It wasn't really New England; it's a British, 19th-century design with the well proportioned windows and so on, but this is a sort of a hybrid of the times, an experiment in trying to make the thing work as a museum, with the least amount of money but with good material-- the brick is good. And then I used travertine, which I've been using extensively for the past 60 years, which has a sort of natural rich, permanent qualilty which I like.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, before we leave the issue of architectural history and the teaching of that, do you see or did you see any advantages at all, any benefits of the old Beaux Arts method of architectural design or approach to architectural theory?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, I think it would be a mistake to dismiss it entirely. It was still a discipline, still a system of educating your mind to see, and that's the most important. I know when I went to Cornell and I was taking that course in architecture, I was given a museum to design, and I remember still placing three arches, very much like in the public library in New York. And then [there] was ornament, or something that looked like ornament, but somehow it left me dissatisfied that I had to dip into a traditional point of view without being able to examine and probe your problem in depth. The problem became more and more difficult and more

complicated. If you build a library or a theater or almost anything, it's no longer just empty space to keep out the rain; it has also to establish relationships according to the demands of the program, which can be met only if you follow a mental process by which you're putting the sequence and relationships in the right order. [So that that stimulates it and also, very directly, inferences the design solution so that there's a concomitant there.] The Bauhaus, which is now so criticized, actually was trying to do that, to meet the problem a little bit more honestly than trying to fit the use to the form. I know Phillip Johnson well. I mention him because he's just the opposite. He says, "Well, you build the building and stuff the thing in. Pretty soon it'll be all right. It won't make any difference." So his firm idea is to have form and never worry why and how it was built and what kind of program had to [be] fulfilled. That I couldn't do. I just, beyond my ability.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: You've mentioned the Bauhaus. Do you see any limitations to the Bauhaus method?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, as a matter of fact, you know, the Bauhaus.. . The media-- the print and books -- have been somewhat exaggerating certain of its aspects. But there's no end with the process of thinking that the Bauhaus began, no end of the possibilities that they open up. And you can see what Kevin Roche-- and Ed Barnes, Bunshaft and others -- has been doing; they're all wonderful. Really the origin of what they did is from that process of thinking through and shaping the forms that seem most suitable and something very exciting, some of them very new, and I think that that's still a process that you cannot fault, in my opinion.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: But of course the Bauhaus turned their back on architectural history, on a sense of the past and tradition, did they not?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, that's what they say, the critics say. And actually, Gropius was not-- not that I defend; I have several opinions about Gropius -- but he didn't deny history; he denied the influence of the superficial aspects of history on the architect[ure] of our time, which demanded much more close attention to the solutions of.. .

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Do you see any analogy or similarities between postmodernism now and the old Beaux Arts approach to understanding or using the past?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. Postmodernism, although the expressions irritate me because they're so unconvincing, I see the cycle, the excitement of my young age, when I began to be involved in architecture, of breaking the rules and the excitement of the postmodern in the young college students. I see them as being very similar. And seeing again the disadavantage of being old when you don't take change quite so easily. (chuckles) You examine too much, you try to explain too much, you try to defend. That's it.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, let's see. You were dean at MIT from 1951 to '65. Is that right?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yes.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And this was of course a period when architectural education was undergoing some tremendous changes, was it not? I asked you this before. Were there any major changes in the curriculum at MIT, and you say there were none. Is that right?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, I don't. Yeah.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Major changes, I mean.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I wasn't aware that there were major changes. Somehow the important thing was to take the work seriously, and there were many courses to choose from. But the courses in design were all based on examination of the problem, so far as I was concerned, and to the defense that they could make of their thinking, if their thinking was based on sound process instead of just fancy. Of course, that depended on the students themselves. Some of them were really quite gifted and have since been very successful. Others were not.

But a funny part is that you can never tell. For instance, Ezra Erenkranz was a student of mine. I supervised his thesis, and he wasn't doing very well. But in the end, he came in with a little painting which I thought had a lot of quality. So I supported him and defended it at graduation. All of sudden, he became great authority on the fabrication and thorough analysis of structures-- he became very successful. That surprised me because I didn't think it was in him. So you're always surprised by students. The latent talent in some of them never flourishes, in some [it does].

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: On the whole, did you find those years at MIT rewarding, those 15years?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: If I'd known exactly what I was getting into in a field that was not within my experience, I probably wouldn't have accepted. But I never was sorry that I did it, because it opened up so many more

opportunities and opened up windows into a world that probably wouldn't have been open to me if I'd stayed in Portland. So it gave me opportunity to learn, to grow, and to become whatever was potential in me. So I think it was a good decision. But the actual specific experience of being a dean there wouldn't have attracted me.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Did it change in any fundamental way your approach to architectural design?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, because every time you enlarge the sphere of your experience, you are bound to test your ability against it, and either acquire insecurity or security or at least awareness of what you can do and what you cannot do. There are certain things I cannot and there are things that I can. .. But you have to know at all times just how you stand and whether you are able to do it; this was terribly important. I doubt whether I would have had the same kind of growth if I'd stayed in a small town like Portland. Now I can look with some unpredjudiced eyes on what is happening. They don't ask me any more here in Portland. They ask me from outside where they don't know I have been around so long.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: (chuckles)

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I told this guy, "You know, I'm an old man." And they said they had heard from Mr. Jim Ellis [Seattle attorney, representing the convention center--Ed.] that I was good diplomat. But that is experience that comes to count. The opportunity to grow is still there. It may be in your own genes you are programmed to grow to a certain awareness, whether you want it or not.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, you were, after the MIT experience, no longer considered a local architect. Why was it you decided to come back to Portland?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, that's a funny thing, because I designed this house in 1946. And I knew what it cost. It was designed for a lady and her husband who was a doctor, what do you call them?

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: A psychiatrist?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Right, a psychiatrist. And he had died of cancer and the daughter-- they'd had one daughter that died from the same type of cancer several years ago. She was left alone here. I was for many years consultant for the Portland Urban Redevelopment. So I used to come here quite often. In one of my visits I heard it was for sale. When I came up to the house, it was a beautiful day in May, with all the rhododendrons and wonderful sunshine, all very beautiful. I had no intention of moving from Boston because I had a nice townhouse down in the Back Bay. But I was seduced and there and then I bought the house. And then I had to move, which was quite a chore.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: (chuckles)

BELLUSCHI
PIETRO BELLUSCHI: But I thought I still had a lot of friends in Portland. They're all dying out of old age now, but I still had a lot of friends. Then, I thought I would retire gently and not get involved too much in architecture. Didn't turn out that way, but that was the intention anyway.

[Break in taping]

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: We were talking about your decision to come back to Portland after leaving MIT. What was it that made you decide to become a consulting architect rather than starting up again your own firm?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, I didn't get here until 1973. I was 74 years old. You don't start an office at that age. So I had so many demands to be consultant and. ..

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Now, excuse me, you left MIT in '65. Is that right?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. But from '65 to '73 I was still in Boston. So I didn't come directly back here. And in retrospect I could have kept my office going, like Bill Wurster did for 15 years, but I wasn't going to burden myself with a large practice. I didn't want to have another office -- ever! There's too much business, too much administration. The fact that when I had 30 employees and I could see.. .

[Tape 4; Side 2]

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I could see not only my employees, but all their family and their children, and I felt they were all my responsibility and I had to meet the payroll, usually borrow the money to meet the payroll, and I'm very conscientious about paying. I never fired anybody and I couldn't. So, I decided never to have an office again, but to be a consultant.

I did a lot of things for clients without charging anything. I designed churches, and donated more than I got, and

that's the kind of work that I like-- scooping the cream off the bottle. You just get the best, the part that you like to do best, and you leave all the rest for someone else without worrying about money.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, what are the problems of this collaborative approach?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, there are problems, obviously. First of all, sometimes I get more credit than I deserve; other times I don't get what I deserve. And one thing as part of the training -- and it comes only with old age-- is that you have to suppress your ego to the maximum extent. In other words, always make an effort to get your ego under a bushel. Maybe it's still there: it is never dead, it isn't spent, it isn't eliminated, but you learn not to show it. So that if I don't get the credit for something I've done, just don't complain. And sometimes the execution is faulty and you wish it could have been done differently and you don't say anything. Sometimes they take away, they steal your ideas and you don't say anything. It's really a process, because obviously nobody has ever done anything, no matter what kind of endeavor, without some ego, some feeling that you had to be appreciated and you had to be recognized. And I felt that that had been in the way of my wanting to be a consultant, because the pleasure of creating is overwhelming. It's one that is the most satisfying. And whether it's recognized or not, it's part of the ego and that should take second place. For instance, I have a client in Florida who thinks I'm a good architect. But he owes me about $200,000 or $300,000. I actually don't know how much. But I told him I will not sue him. He is one of those people that uses money as leverage to get things done. I suppose some day he will pay. But I don't worry. Because it is only my time and I don't have an overhead. If I had a big office and had to meet the payroll, I couldn't afford it.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Um hmm. You've talked in terms of the problem of credit, and giving credit where credit is due, as one of the major problems of collaboration, but what about compromising design? You as an architect have run into enough problems.. .

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, that's part of it. For instance, if you fight for an idea that you think is better than theirs, and you do it in a manner that doesn't demean the other fellow's ideas, which may be good ideas or have some good points. So you examine it objectively and you say, "This is better than that." Some people accept that and others don't. I worked with the very talented Chuck Bassett, you probably know him.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: We were working on the San Francisco Symphony Hall. I picked him up to be my collaborator. I was asked originally to design the Symphony Hall. I tried to get somebody else. Vernon DeMars was asked but the client thought he was too small a firm, so they got SOM because they could afford to do it and lose money, which they probably did.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Was working with DeMars your idea initially?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, DeMars was asked at first because he had done the theater at Berkeley, I think. And he had been asked to make some studies for the symphony when the site was under the freeway-- I forget now which, east, west. And so the client was the man for whom I worked, on the Bank of America project. He asked me to come and work with Vernon. I made many sketches.

Then they changed sites -- first near the public library, on the empty lot on this side of the library. Finally they got the lot on which it's now built, when it became available. And at that time, the client and I went around trying to select an architect, and SOM being, as I say, one of the larger firms, one that could afford to lose money, they got the job.

But at SOM they're not easy to work with-- [kind of arrogant]. I thought I had a much better idea for the interior. They designed an exterior which affected adversely my concept of the interior. I'd had experience and knew what I was doing because I'd done five or six other halls, including Juilliard, four theaters, and they had no experience on that field. I wanted to have a big dramatic entry hall, where everybody could look down into it from the various levels. It would have been much better than having all those lobbies at each level all connected by stairs to a very small entrance. That just irritated me because they were only interested in designing an exterior which would harmonize with the city hall across the street, rather than with the nature of its function. They had already spent $600,000 in architectural fees just to get to this phase. I told the client that my solution, which I had drafted myself over Christmas 1976 -- I forget now the exact date-- would have saved three or four million dollars. [But I lost out, because I couldn't prove it.]

It would have been much more effective-- [the big hall taking the whole thing, with the stairs and the entry and the exit; it would have been in this beautiful big hall, facing the Pacific Center.] But SOM had put such an effort [into it--Ed.] and spent so much money, that they finally prevailed with the client. So I lost, and I wrote a letter saying, "There cannot be two designers on this." So I gave up, but it hurt me very much because I knew my idea would have been much, much better. [It] would have given drama to the interior. Much of the hall itself is still my design, but the entrance to the core is lost in a series of boring lobbies.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: So SOM was responsible for the exterior form of it?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's right, that's right. So those things happen, and again you have to supress your ego. In this case, it hurts because I knew I was right, I knew I had the better idea. But Bassett was a great admirer of Mr. Brown, the fellow who designed the city hall.. .

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Bakewell and Brown?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. Brown.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Arthur Brown?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Arthur Brown. As a matter of fact I knew Brown very well. When I went to MIT he gave me a nice lunch during my first visit to San Francisco about 30years ago. Chuck [Bassett--Ed.] wanted a building that [recalled], echoed the appearance and aesthetics of the city hall, so he came up with that. And perhaps he had a point of contextuality, but I thought my idea was more important. I have a letter from him saying that he wouldn't change my design of the interior hall because it was right, but on the exterior he got his way. [The flowing of the people down into the center hall, the floor with the big windows, that got lost.]

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Um hmm. Well, you've mentioned the. ..

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: But I respect him; he's a very good designer.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: You've mentioned the Bank of America Building, the B of A building, and you were a design consultant on that as well.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Did you run into the same problems of multiple personalities?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, because the owner at that time, the client -- I had the design, which I had given to Wurster, pretty well set before the major architect for the working drawings was picked. The client gave him the design, telling him, "You cannot change it because it is already settled." So they went ahead, and they did the development of the working drawings in SOM's office.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, what was wanted there in the B of A building? Did the client want a visually compelling building?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. Very much so.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Or did they want a building that was integrated essentially into the urban fabric, a part of the fabric of the city?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No. The urban fabric was of great variety at the time. Now [it] is different because there are so many more large buildings. But at the time, being the biggest bank in the world, they wanted something that represented just that; that is, a very large, sculptural-looking building. And I also wanted a sculpture in the skyline. I took the inspiration from the great basaltic formations seen in the Cascade Mountains. Also, I didn't want the windows to stand out like dark holes, and therefore it has a dark material on it walls with tinted glass so that the reflection of the light on glass would be somewhat similar to that on masonry.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Whose idea was it.. . Who was it who held up the stack of pencils and said that the B of A building ought to look like this?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, I had a young sculptor, a very good sculptor, Japanese, in Boston, by the name of Michio Hihara, who made a model which had sliding wood sticks to try to find out where they should be stopped. Have you seen the model of that, photograph of the model?

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: No, I haven't seen the model.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I'll show it to you.

[Break in taping]

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: And these.. . The Japanese sculptor just made the model, and we were moving this to develop the idea of a natural erosion as it happens in nature. And I'll show you, because this is important. When [Richard L.--Ed.] Emmons tried to get some of the credit for this design-- he had nothing to do with it -- he made the point that that was not true

at all. He did not know I'd seen a poster by the Sierra Club showing this formation, which gave me the idea. And I have a photograph of that.

[Break in taping]

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: This photograph, then, is the genesis of it?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: This is the genesis. This is a poster in color, put out by the Sierra Club.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Interesting.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: And I must say.. . I have a slide somewhere, but this is a.. .

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: .. .a photocopy of it? Uh huh.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: .. .from it.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Oh, that's interesting. And Emmons didn't know about this? Is that right?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, he didn't know it.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, am I right in thinking that one of the major challenges in the design of the skyscraper or the big office building like this is integrating or relating its form to the urban fabric, to the city?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I don't [think] it's correct to say to the urban fabric. It's more to the somewhat vague tradition of San Francisco, where, as you notice, there are a lot of bay windows, so that there's a sort of another affinity to the city. As a matter of fact, what reinforced my idea was Tim Pfleuger's beautiful dental building on Sutter Street.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: That is a beauty.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: It's a little flatter. I am doing a 62-story building in Miami that has the same system, but the top is quite different.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, but this raises an interesting issue, because the way you're talking about it here it sounds more like regionalism, that you were wanting to relate the form of the building to the traditions of the.. .

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: There is a certain character in San Francisco. As you notice, even some of the black building-- I don't know who did it, but maybe Allen. ..

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Anshen and Allen?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Anshen and Allen. But I'm not sure whether [in] theirs the bay windows stick straight out. In San Francisco there's a tradition of projecting windows.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Part of the character.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: . ..it rings a bell, and it seems to be part of San Francisco. It's unique. So that there's a combination of feelings hard to define. I don't think the fabric is easy to describe. I feel strongly that repairing the torn fabric of a city is desirable. In Seattle the freeway really tore the city fabric very badly. And this [the convention center--Ed.] brings the landscaping into focus. The new convention hall over the freeway will be mostly a landscaping solution. But in San Francisco we had to tear down some buildings. We wanted the whole block but we could not get it. We then created a plaza, but California Street, to the west, is very steep, and so the plaza has a lot of steps coming down, which is architecturally all right. Then we had fun picking the Nagare sculpture for the plaza, which is that black sculpture that was criticized as symbolizing the black heart of the banker.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, the design of this building, again, was a group effort, was it not? It was Wurster, Bernardi and Emmons, you, and Mark Goldstein of SOM, is that right?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. Mark carried through the detailing and did a superb job. The concept-- really I don't want to sound egotistical -- the concept is really [entirely] mine, and I have a whole lot of sketches to prove it, [coming out and little by little resulting in this] before even SOM were involved at all. And.. .

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, were you brought in at the initial stages?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I brought it to Bill Wurster.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Uh huh, I see. Now, John Pastier, of the AIA journal?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yes.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: At one point [he--Ed.] said in his article on the building that the building was flawed from the point of view of urban design. Now what do you think?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, I think it was too big. I felt that it was overpowering at the time. But, as I remember, the main criticism was that it was dark and didn't really fit the light tone of the city, but that was before all the other buildings were built around it. Now it still dominates but is a part of the composition. And at that time, frankly, we [didn't think of].. . We wanted to have the biggest building and the most sculptural, and one that would have that many square feet-- I don't know, eight to nine hundred thousand. It was terribly important to have the right number of square feet per floor so that it would be an efficient floor in relation to the many elevators and the size of the core, and all the things that go with desiging a big building.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Is that, you would say, the primary difficulty with the B of A building at this point?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, I forget just what he [Pastier--Ed.] said, how he mentioned it, but. ..

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: I don't think he was specific. That's on the urban. ..

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, I can see that. First of all it was criticized for being dark. Second, because it was too big.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And the plaza was on the north side, too.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: And the plaza on the north side.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Doesn't get the sun.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: And instead of being this way, he felt it would be the other way.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Ah, turned the other.. .

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's a question of judgment. I don't think I would agree with him.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, before we turn to a discussion of some your other individual works, I want to discuss, briefly anyway, your design philosophy. Now you began, in an essay that you wrote in 1963, by speaking of the complexities of the architecture of our time, and then of your own preference for-- and I'm quoting you here -- "those simple qualities that are the basis or at the basis of all enduring architecture." This is an architecture that you said "imparts a serene quality, a simplicity that avoids dullness, and an architecture that requires humility on the part of the architect." Now, given that tastes today have changed, and that people now are seeking greater visual richness and variety and decoration, visually complicated forms, do you still adhere to those old formulations?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, I would stick to it, frankly. I'm reminded of-- golly, I wish I could quote it -- a comment made by Alfred North Whitehead (who is my favorite philosopher) in judging music, where modern music gets by with making a tremendous amount of noise because it has nothing to say compared with, say, the music of Bach, where the essential quality of good music resides. So I consider this phase where this so-called richness satisfies and meets the demands of the man in the street only a passing phase because I'm not convinced that you can improvise such forms on a high level of quality. And I don't believe that the advertising lights of Las Vegas, all those things, will in the long run satisfy our desire for richness. But in the meantime it will do; it's a transitional period where we realized that richness is good, but what kind of richness? And to make a big noise is not always music. And somebody mentioned John Cage's music. We can admire the fact that it's unusual, but we just are not happy with it, simply because he tries to say more than he's able to do well. I don't know how to put it.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: (chuckles) So in answer to the question about how to satisfy the current demand for visual richness.. .

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. That you can accept that in principle, but that's how it stands. It's a key.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: You would say still remains a challenge?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: It still remains that quality you recognize almost immediately by instinct. I am reminded [of] when you walk in the streets, say in a place where there are a lot of pedestrians, like Fifth Avenue in New York. If you are observant you see people going by, and you don't have to know them. Some you like, and some look

simpatico, some antipatico, some ugly, some are fat, so that.. . But you see someone beautiful, immediately you recognize it. Or you look through the pages of a magazine some building that is building, immediately you know, without analyzing, it hits you as being satisfying, convincing and beautiful. The work, for instance, of Kevin Roche appeals to me very much, and Pei-- some of his work is very good. And Ed Barnes, and so on. There is an immediate reaction to quality which hits you before you analyze it, and that will always be that way. And so anyone who tries very hard to be rich by spurious means, and so on, or he does it badly, you conclude that you cannot make quality out of tinsel. You just have to struggle for it and have the good luck to come out.

So I still think that you start with the building, you start with quality, you start with simplicity, you start with manipulation of the materials and elements that make good architecture; then you can add to its form, and then trust to luck.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, when was it that you came up with this, or first formulated this design philosophy of elegant simplicity?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, simply because I traveled a lot. I have seen a lot of people, particularly when I was consultant to the Foreign Buildings Operation. I went to all parts of the world to find out what was appropriate for each region; what kind of guidance should we give to the architects in designing a building for, say, Taiwan, or a building in Jeddah or a building in Baghdad. And all of a sudden you go to Baghdad, which has the fame of being the thousand and one nights, but it's terrible, all cheap modern made out of stucco, which is cracked and falling apart, and it's of all the bad quality of the Modern design, with a capitalM. It's there for you to decry and to be sorry and to be sad about it. And then you compare with what was there originally. And some of the buildings in Jeddah, for instance, [are] really very simple with windows with elaborate screens, some beautiful relationship of the ornament versus the plainness. You go down even in south Arabia and you see these beautiful cities, which are primitive in a way, but. .. Then you go to Africa, where they have simple huts with painted decoration on them, or you go to Italian hill towns, or you go to China, some of the sunken cities. They all had a quality which was native and authentic and sprang from the awareness of the people of their environment. And I saw their cities. I think of my friend Bernard Rudofsky who wrote two books about indigenous architecture, Architecture without Architects and The Prodigious Builders, and you will understand the real meaning of richness.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Rudofsky?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. And you can see these, how wonderful they are. So that when I wrote the article, "Regionalism," what regionalism means, I also spoke of that simplicity of approach. It's not being too much concerned about having some[thing] different and rich for the sake of richness that leads you anywhere but to perdition. That's my feeling. I mean, that's how I developed and I'll have to stick to it.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: That was a philosophy that you developed, though, fairly early on in your career, did you not?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yes.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: I would have said sometime around in the thirties, with the Portland Art Museum, or did it actually come a little bit later?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, I think aesthetically I made my decision instinctively by.. . One thing that-- repeating it -- is that when I came here and I was learning to be an architect-- which I wasn't as I never really studied in school to be an architect -- I went to Portland. I could admire the back sides of the buildings where they didn't try to do architecture. They were simple and honest and the materials were local. The brick was from local clay and of the right color, and so on, rather than the front where they try very hard to be fancy. That's an exaggeration, but it was true.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Um hmm. No, that's one thing I picked up very quickly in your work: You don't like pretentious architecture.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's right.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And [pretentious--Ed.] art, I would say. We've talked a fair amount about regionalism and contextualism. We haven't mentioned it, but the two relate to each other.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. But you know, you can stretch those words to mean anything. When Phillip Johnson-- to bring him up again (chuckles) -- gave a talk in receiving the gold medal, [he] said, "Now we learn contextualism," meaning we don't build a building in Chicago without knowing that Mies had been there-- or a building in Charlottesville without knowing that Jefferson did the University of Virginia campus. Then he called the Portland Building [a] contextual building. You really have to stretch it to make it a contextual building. It isn't. It's just a shocking kind of exercise in exhibitionism.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: You mean the Portland Building [Michael Graves, architect--Ed.] here?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yes, Portland Building.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, that's exactly the building I was going to ask you about. You don't see that as contextual?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I don't see any contextuality in that at all.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well now, that's the question I was going to ask. You do see a difference then between regionalism and contextualism, even though there is sort of an overlap. Both of them, do they not ascribe to relating the building to its context?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. Regionalism has a relationship to the potential of the natural elements-- that is, climate, local materials, habits, traditions, and so on. The other one is related to the manmade environment, [which might have been going up straight]. For instance, when Portland started as a city on the river -- where there was commerce-- the wealthy citizens began importing cast-iron facades. They had been invented in New York, so that all important buildings on First Avenue or Front Avenue were in cast iron. That is something that came from New York, usually through Cape Horn. They were installed on Main Street, and all of sudden they created a special environment. But there was a hearking back to -- Only New York had the ability to cast iron. And the forms they cast went back to the Renaissance, because they were all colonnade and arches copied from the past. One may even call them phoney.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: That's an imported architecture.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: But they created contextuality. I did a building some time ago in Salem, as an addition to an old cast-iron bank. My design was a modern interpretation of the old. I can show you in a moment. Later on they got hold of some more of these old cast-iron facades, so they demolished the one I did and put more cast iron-- which is all right, you know. I would not call it a regionalism kind of approach; it's a contextual exercise. So they're different.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, I think perhaps the Michael Graves building was trying to be contextual in relating to. ..

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: To the City Hall?

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: To the City Hall.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, as I say, you have to stretch your belief to believe it.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, the Graves building brings up another interesting issue, and that is the relationship between painting and sculpture to architecture. Now one point in I think it was your essay on the spirit of new architecture of 1953, you mentioned that modern artists, such as Matisse and Cezanne, Leger, Moore, have deeply affected our architecture. Could you elaborate?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. I think it has to do with images. You know, one has to admit that drawing and painting by Michael Graves is really superb. They were published. They show wonderful colors, wonderful composition. So he's an artist in that sense. Where he went wrong is to transfer that gift to architecture and make architecture a kind of a collage of artistic images, which architecture should not be.

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MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, he was thinking two dimensionally in a three dimensional form, wasn't he?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Perhaps, but in a very superficial way. [He's just put those things; they don't even match.] The forms do not derive from any reasoning that you can think of; they are there just as a painting for the sake of visual titillation. So that's where the controversy arises, by having architecture treated as a form of superficial art. It's much more than that. And where it falls down is when you go inside. It's not a pleasant place for people to work. The porch leads nowhere, it is dark and uninviting.. .

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: The porticos, you mean, on the periphery of the building?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. They really don't perform very well.

[Tape 5; Side 1]

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I lived in Bologna, where the porticos really do work, where the people in a sense love shopping. Bologna has a lot of snow, and also a lot of rainy weather. So they really perform, and they are

humanized to the extent that you are at ease walking under them. [And this is just up at a different level and nobody walks through there, because of the _____.]

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Uh huh, people avoid it.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: So that I find his dead-end portico at a high level such a superficial solution. But I admire Graves for his drawings, their composition and color; they are good.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: How was it that these artists, the great artists of the early 20th century, Matisse and Cezanne. How was it that they affected our architecture?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, well, I suppose that basically they taught us to see things, and forms, relationships. Maybe a hundred years ago, we used to think [of] art as being representative, representing or illustrating something or someone faithfully, [because we didn't have good photography. Now you go to a photographer if you want to get resembled]. Since then, we have gotten away from representation and become more interested in composition, what happens to the forms in space, and to see them, learn to see it. And that was a good discipline for the architect, to learn how to compose buildings, how to interpret spaces and proportions and color. So I think Mondrian or Matisse, but particularly Matisse, [with some of his wonderful things of color, taught us the importance of color to form. And Picasso, of course, was continually experimenting and gave us ability to see and to appreciate our great potential to create.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: What about artists today? Are there any artists today who you find exciting and opening our eyes in much the same way?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, actually, the percentage of artists who are really trying to give you a unique expression, [a unique version] of the visual world-- is very small. Many of them are derivative. Some of them experiment within certain confines established by other artists so that it's not quite unique. The great artist is the one who discovers a unique vision, and he is able to express it -- Van Gogh, for instance, or Picasso.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Right.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I don't take Oldenburg seriously. I can't really see it. But I see and like the other Dutchman, Willem deKooning -- always experimenting-- and Pollock _____.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Not Rauschenberg?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: [Yeah, no]. Well, those are also experimenting with the world as they see it and so on. So that it's hard; I don't think you can compare and say this is an artist, this isn't. You judge them by the uniqueness and by the strength of their vision. Sculptor [Gaston--Ed.] Lachaise, for instance, I find is a great. I like his drawings rather more than his sculptures. Fat women become transcendent visions. We used Henry Moore at Juilliard and at Seattle First [National Bank--Ed.]-- one of his best; I visited his place in England and used [his] 15-foot sculpture, The Spindle, in Miami. And I met -- a good friend of Henry Moore.. .

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Louise Nevelson?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: PIETRO BELLUSCHI added: We used a 30-foot sculpture by Nevelson at Juilliard.

That name, it's [Jacques--Ed.] Lipchitz. He did a sculpture for the Ministry of Education in Rio de Janeiro. I met Lipchitz. [I know him very well because] we used to meet and talk at Academy of Arts and Letters in New York.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, we can pick that up at some other point if you remember. There's one issue that I'd like very much to return to. We've touched on it several times, but we haven't really zeroed in. It's an interesting question, I think, and one that's going to come up more and more as we become more and more familiar with your work. You've been described on the one hand as a proponent of orthodox modernism, which is basically the International Style, yet at the same time your writings and certainly your domestic work-- and to some extent, I would say your churches as well -- suggest you are a regionalist. Now which do you think of yourself as?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, I don't think there's any contradiction there. When I had to face the problem of doing office buildings, the attitude and the program and the demands and the goals imposed by the client are so different; the process of thinking a solution and the examination and analysis of the analytical work that goes into finding out what satisfies the program of the client is very similar. You don't design

a big office building by the same mental process you design a church, because the goal is different. One has to make it economical, accessible, the view, the windows that work and so on. And with economy of means. In the other one you're concerned about the spirituality of it and creating atmosphere where the people who go to church or whatever, feel elevated and spiritual. In an office, for that to work, it has to be comfortable and

efficient. So that is the same process, if you're not held down by dogmas or think an office building has to be like what Frank Lloyd Wright would do. [He'd do it as simply as possible.] But there's the same concern about materials, details, money, etcetera. Why the first thing that came on the Equitable Building with all that glass, new use of glass, all of the same size in double thickness for climate control. Then we found how the sky was reflecting. The clouds moving through the sky-- you could see it, and the building looked like it was moving, because the clouds were moving. So the same is happening with the new U.S. National Bank Building; it's also the color, which changes continually from pink to rose. It's very exciting.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Uh huh. Well, you mention now the Equitable Building, a twelve-story building, aluminum clad, done in 1948. It's often heralded or spoke of as the first of the thin-skinned skyscrapers. ..

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Right.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: . ..that were going to dominate the cities in the fifties and sixties. How did the design concept of that come about?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: (chuckles) Well, that's very interesting, because during the war, the director of the Bonneville Power [Administration--Ed.]. .. At that time, it was selling electricity to make aluminum. Production of aluminum requires an enormous amount of electricity, and they were producing an enormous amount of aluminum to be used for aeroplane production. He came to see me -- we were good friends-- and said, "Whatever in the world are we going to do with all this aluminum after the war, after the demand is no longer here?" And I began thinking, and said, "Well, if the cost comes down you can use it for structures, you can use it for windows, you can use it for -- You can even use it for a building face instead of stone _____." And let it go at that. Then Howard Meyers, the editor of Architecture, [as] I said yesterday, asked me to design an office building, so I thought, "Let's pick up the idea." Actually, I'd done Northwest Airlines' office downtown, where I had used these sheets of aluminum with the rivets, just like a plane wing, so I thought that looked pretty good. I didn't know how it would last; we didn't have anodized aluminum then, just plain aluminum. So there are screws and rivets showing in it. When the time came the client said, "You have this building idea. Let's do it and use it." It was fun to work with him because anything new appealed to him. And I said, "Let's use aluminum." And then we had Mr. Davis, who was the founder of the aluminum company, Alcoa. He came to Portland and [I?--Ed.] asked, "What's going to happen to the aluminum surface after many years of use with our air pollution?" and he said, "Oh, young man, eighty years from now, it'll still be good." So we used it and I consulted with a sheet metal man, who was not an
architect, but a very good sheet metal man, to assure that the thing would work and not leak and so on. They've never had a leak in there.

It was the first building where you couldn't open the windows. People don't realize that. And so we had to have a special air conditioner, and also special details. Plus there were no lighting fixtures, just cold cathode tubes and reverse cycle heating and cooling, and all the new things we could think of. It was the very first building built after the war.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: My client was a Republican, a great power within his party. It was the first building permit issued after the war.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: It was begun in 1945 then, immediately after the war?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yes. It was the first building after the war. So that's how it started with idea of utilizing the great resources which no one knew what to do with, there was no tradition.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Was the problem of glare anticipated? The reflective surface, that highly.. .?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, that we didn't think about because there is a light green color, which reduces glare, and the glare is minimized to a great extent.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: I was thinking of the reflective surface on the exterior, the glare of the sun.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, that is something recent. People at the time didn't complain about it. There was no hint of that. I don't think there's anybody.. . There's a low bank in front of it, and no large building from which people could accuse of being disturbed by the glare. One thing was interesting: I got more calls from architects about how in the world you wash the windows. Now it seems a very simple task, but I got a bunch of calls. That was done before the.. .

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Lever House?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: .. .Lever House. They wanted to know how to wash the windows. Architect Pflueger called me, when he was designing the Magnin Building in San Francisco, and he asked, "How do you wash the windows?" So I told him that was just like a painter's scaffolding going up and down. At about the same time, I was traveling by train, and I had seen a rig in at Pocatello, Idaho, washing the train windows. After going through the prairies, they were very dirty, so they had a machine that was going very fast cleaning the glass, so we applied a similar system. But strangely, that was the thing that interested people most.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And how do you feel now about the hermetically sealed building, given that power is no longer so cheap?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, it's been a problem because, I tell you, they've been trying to be very sophisticated in the recycling of the heat, so it's more efficient from the point of view of utilizing power and economizing power than about giving the right quality of air. And also there've been fires and maybe some danger. My feelings are it makes it much more difficult to be able to get direct outside air and be able to control the internal climate. And of course now the amount of glass can be minimized. A building we just completed in Miami has very small but wide windows, so they get a full view with a minimum area of glass. [They don't have it all the way up, because they don't need it.]

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And again was that because of energy conservation?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Energy conservation, hurricanes-- but mostly conservation of energy.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: So it didn't have anything to do with the look on the exterior of building and the. ..?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No. No, you try to make it as attractive as possible, and in proportion to the window. [It could be continual like in the city bank, or you can make it _____; the choice is the designer's.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: In your opinion, what was the most, or what is the most significant aspect of the Equitable Building now? What was its most important contribution to the history of modern architecture?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, all the things I've been mentioning, that there was the first attempt to utilize a material that used to be very expensive, very difficult to get. They had found a system by which you can have great quantities at a comparatively low price, so as to be competitive. Until a short time ago, it was indeed competitive with any other material, because you could fabricate it and put it there with very little loss of time. Now energy's more expensive, so aluminum is more expensive, and no longer competes with granite or precast concrete.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: You've touched on church design already several times, but we haven't discussed St. Mary's specifically, and I do want to spend a little bit of time on that. Now, in 1962 the old red brick Gothic church of St. Mary's in San Francisco was destroyed by fire. Is that right?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: [nods in the affirmative--Ed.]

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And you were one of those, you were among those who were asked to design a new one. Can you tell us a little bit about this?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, I wasn't. I was in Boston and I had no intention or idea of submitting my name as a designer. There was quite an article in the Architectural Record, explicitly saying that the archbishop had selected three separate Catholic architects, and asked them to join together in the design of the new cathedral. The San Francisco community, particularly the architects, when they found out who the architects were and what their philosophy of architecture was, there was an uproar. They crticized the selection and said that there should have been a public competition because the building was too important and so on.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Was this the local firm of MEREDITH L. CLAUSENSweeney and Ryan and Lee?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yes.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Two of them have died already and the other one is still alive, [but was drinking all the time]. But anyway, they produced a very conventional, lifeless kind of design for the churches they had designed.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: A Gothic or traditional design, was it?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: It was traditional; it was not quite Gothic. [I think it had a dome, looked like _____ Sofia in Istanbul.] But somewhat in that direction. And since their name, their reputation among the architects was not of the best, there was such an uproar in the papers that the archbishop decided to get some outside consultant to help them. My name was suggested, so the architects came to Boston, to Cambridge rather. I looked at their

proposed design and I told them that it was not very exciting. I did give some suggestions. They went back to their motel and came back with a worse one the following day. And I told the archbishop, "I am sorry. I just cannot work that way. I think that you'll have to start just completely anew with some concept that would be a little bit more contemporary and take advantage of more up-to-date systems of construction, which are much better than they used to be."

So the archbishop gave me the power and the money to start completely anew. At that time I thought that the technique of placing precast sections together, on which Nervi had had so much experience, would be a good way to procede. So I asked that he be our structural consultant.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Excuse me, was Nervi brought in fairly early on then in the design process?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. Very early. But I already had developed a hyperbolic paraboloid form in a model which I brought with me when I went to Rome. Nervi saw it and never having had any experience with a hyperbolic paraboloid, he really didn't know how to arrive at any formula that would be mathematically, [structurally] defensible. It was to come out later, so he decided then the thing to do would be to make a model, pretty large model, and test it at the Bergamo Testing Laboratory, which are in the business of testing concrete, including the large concrete dams up in Italy where there are lots of different hydroelectric energy dams across the rivers. So the model was tested until destroyed, to find out its strength, and it proved to be very strong indeed. But they did not find the formula. [Even there we didn't know it.] Later, an engineer in San Francisco, by the name of Robinson, developed the formula for that.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: First name you don't know?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, I don't remember. But anyway, after several attempts, that became the solution. Then, of course, there are four legs that support the dome; they're tied with cables down way, way below ground. And there's a lot of space below the church itself, where the archdiocese has meetings and so on. But Nervi was very useful in giving advice how to erect and join these diamond-shaped forms into a dome.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: The concrete pillars at the base?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: And the concrete pillar. That's his design. We worked very well together, but it was a new experience for him because it was not his way of construction. As a matter of fact, he had done a cathedral design in Australia, I think, and he had three arches, three or four arches, filled with large windows. And you know, I told him, "We don't want anything like that because of the enormous amount of light and glare coming from such large windows, which would also destroy the sense of enclosure and intimacy. I wanted to have stained-glass windows, with the light coming from above as well as from the sides in limited amounts.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well you worked very closely with Nervi then, on the design of this?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Oh yes. Um hmm.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Was he in San Francisco or did he come.. .?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, we met-- he came a couple, three times in San Francisco and we went to Rome two or three times.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: It was a good working relationship, though?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Very, because I knew him well. He was a very good friend of mine.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Uh huh. How would you describe the architect-engineer relationship? It's one of the critical issues.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: It's just like a usual very good engineer. We suggest solutions, but we abided by the structural demands which he developed for us and was very important. [PIETRO BELLUSCHI apprears to have understood the question as specifically regarding Nervi--Ed.]

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Um hmm. Well, can you describe that a little bit more?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, the structure was a very unique one. At that time no formula could be determined, and the city engineers were not able to tell whether it would work-- stand up -- or not. Because they were not given the formulation, they didn't see the computations.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Uh huh, but did you have the form in mind?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, oh yes. In fact, I had it little taller than that. I could show you a lot of sketches which

are quite a bit taller than that. But there was a regulation in San Francisco that you cannot have concrete above certain height, so it had to be steel.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Earthquakes, um hmm.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: So we got permission, but with the provision of having structural steel imbedded in the vertical members at the four sides. It was not needed. [It was completely useless. It doesn't perform a damn thing there.] But the city engineers insisted. Nobody had the computations, until Robinson came out with them. As I say, the tests in Bergano were very hopeful, because it showed to be very strong. [You couldn't destroy it; it was very strong.] But that evidently wouldn't satisfy the city, and they wanted to protect themselves should anything happen. And they gave the permission to go above the 140 to about 160 feet.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: To what extent did the design have to be modified because of structural considerations?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Not really, because we felt that it was sound. We proceeded step by step. The main problem was to install the diamond-shaped forms which were the structure itself, but had to be self-supporting, and self-keyed. Then you had to cover them with a waterproofing membrane, then you had to have a outer skin in marble with about four inches in between, [very heavy].

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: So that's weight then? Hmm?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. Should there be any leak, water would have to come through this without penetrating the waterproof [skin--Ed.] [and then come out somewhere else.] The outside shape is a hyperbolic paraboloid, a warped surface which had to be covered with flat pieces of travertine. [So that that was a problem.] These pieces had to be no more than nine inches to fit the warped surface. Even then, there was a little bit of slip, say an eighth of an inch, which really doesn't show. So those were the problems of really technical and structural nature.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Wasn't your original idea, or didn't you at some point envision having a fully glazed base?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. [That's one of the things, if I had to design.. .] That was the least successful part. That is a sort of intellectual thing-- I wanted those beautiful four legs to show, to be expressed on the outside. So I glass at the four corners so that they would be visible. But then I found they were very distubing visually, so I retreated and used the dark glass so that the legs became less visible. [Instead of having glass, it's the travertine, which I like.]

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: So that was change for aesthetic reasons, not for structural reasons, is that right?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Aesthetic reasons. I would have preferred to have it all open, like there's a church in Philippines that has no outside walls, and you can see through it. It had been wonderful to see just the structure expressed, but it didn't work.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: How would that have affected the interior? After all, the site is. ..

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No, keep the interior. .. I think the interior, with the four legs rising up, it's very good; it's the best part of the cathedral. But the exterior -- you see, bear in mind that when I started thinking about the cathedral I went to San Francisco several times. I wanted it to be part of the fabric of the city. I was very aware that it could be overpowering. But you have to seat 2,500 people; that's a heck of a lot of people, [and all sitting down]. So I went around the city, pacing and measuring the gas tanks to see how big they were and how they looked at a distance. I felt that the building shouldn't be too large, and its proportion should not be overpowering. I felt it should be part of the cityscape texture. So given these limitations, yet having the problem of seating 2,500, that gave me a big square, 200feet in dimensions. But 200 feet, when you get it built, appears enormous. So I made the base of the dome smaller. So that was the problem, a visual problem, the technical problem of providing that many seats which were part of the program, without having an enormous superstructure which would also be enormously expensive. But on the exterior, the transition from the low portion to the upper one has never satisfied me. But if they asked me what you would do if you were to start all over, my answer would be that I wouldn't know. I haven't given that much thought, but I wouldn't do it any more that way. The first model I brought to Rome, now published in the Catholic Historical Review, volume 70, was much more satisfactory.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: It's interesting. The site is an intensely urban one, surrounded on all four sides by heavily trafficked streets.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That's right.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Was that a problem to you?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yes, from a minor street downhill to the south, you can penetrate into a parking space there, so you don't drive from the main avenue or from-- God, I forget the name -- the west street. You come from the minor street, so that access is resolved pretty well.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Um hmm. Was there any question about.. . Well, the glass now is fully transparent, is it not, at the base?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Not fully. It's very dark. You don't see the columns, but when there there was no dark glass, they were very disturbing.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: From the exterior. I was thinking from the interior looking out.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Oh.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Was there any question about blocking out that urban view, the parking and the traffic and.. .?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No. I really wanted the people sitting in the nave to be able to see the city, and the dark glass allows that.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Ah hah!

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: [So they still see it], but with the dark glass they don't see the inside from the outside. But they see from the outside from the inside. In fact, you have a beautiful view.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, so there was no question or problem raised in the minds of some about the need to block out the city, in this urban site? And to create a private space, a private sanctuary?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, it's a beautiful site, and I'm sorry that the tower of the apartment houses are there, because they destroy the [uniqueness] the monumentality of the dome.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: I see, so you were trying to incorporate the larger view.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Right. There is a high school down below, the Catholic High School; it's part of the whole complex. And it builds up pretty well, but as I say the apartment houses were there and I could not do very much about it.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: It's a very residential area now.

Let me move on, very quickly. I wish we had time to spend on some of your other individual works: the Pan Am building, the Juilliard School of Music, and Lincoln Center, and certainly the convention center in Seattle. But I think it might be of value to discuss some of your attitudes on current issues today, because a lot of these have not been touched in the literature. To start out, for example, were there any conceptual breakthroughs or failures in the course of your career that marked a turning point in the way you thought about architecture?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Not, I'm not aware of it, because it's a continuum. You just don't all of sudden, you know, say "This is a turning point." Maybe the biggest turning point is when I started and there was a rebellion against all the dogma of the past, and now it is repeated again-- coming around in circles -- with the postmodern, which has us shocked. That had an effect on us old people, [if they are thoughtful], but I'm not as negative as I was at the beginning; I'm still.. . You got a copy. Did she make a copy of that? [PIETRO BELLUSCHI is speaking about his article on postmodernism--Ed.]

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: That more or less sums up what I talked about in Kansas City. It sums up my attitude toward post modern. Then the other article of the.. .

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Post modernism?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: "Post Modernism," in the journal [________--Ed.].

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Um hmm. Okay. What about contextualism? We've talked a little bit about that.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: This has been called by some "the new dogma," or the dogma of contemporary architects. Now how do you feel about this? Do you see any conflict here between contextualism and the architect's traditional desire to make a statement, to do something big, to conceive something fresh, or to make a monument, to do something distinctive?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, I don't see any real conflict. I remember when I first came to Portland, almost 60years ago, that on the walls of the city hall there were a series of beautiful renderings by Guerin -- he was a renderer, a very gifted one-- of the "City Beautiful" -- capitol-C, capital-B-- where the buildings were all the same, all the same height, the squares were just prim and beautiful. And so that he had a concept of a City Beautiful drawn with very great consistency, which would provide a strong context; every building would be in same, in the context of a City Beautiful. Well, that would have been a deadly monotonous thing to contemplate. But in fact, the city is all these periods and these attitudes and these imaginative solutions. Even if they are at odds with the context, they are part of life and part of the excitement of living. So while there can be exaggeration on both sides, while you can overdo it one way-- and certainly have been done -- the problem as I see it is that it's only recently that we've been able to manipulate the city in any way, where you can speak of contextualism, where you are aware of it.

But for a great many years, during the first part of this century and maybe half of the past century, all we were interested in in a city was simply to build where we could. No one could judge the texture of a city. They were like a mouth with missing teeth: There would be an empty lot here, there would be a low building there, there'd be an ugly little cottage here, then a three-story or two-story, and so on. So that they never had the concept of the fabric, of a unified fabric of the city, that was worth worrying about.

We're much more conscious now. We're conscious in Seattle-- they have Pioneer Square. We have a Pioneer Square here in Portland, and so on. Where there was beauty, some of it we're lucky has been preserved. San Francisco gives us the best examples, downtown where the old wood and brick buildings have been recycled. So little by little, the city assumes, comes to have a form. But it would be, first of all, impossible to have a contextual attitude taken too seriously, so that everything has to be related to everything else, because it isn't possible. Michael Graves calls his building contextual. It isn't. It has no relation to the adjoining structures. But the fact that they are different may not be the problem. But we should not forget that the city has now a fabric that
should be respected. I think we are, in a way, probably making less mistakes than we used to.

[Break in taping]

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: It might be simplification, but if you assume -- and it is a rather hard assumption-- that there is some kind of continuity or some kind of integrity in the thinking process, and you apply that to buildings that are built in the city, and you allow certain things such as heat, energy conservation, height of building, width of streets, and shadows cast, and so on, you end up by having a variety of solutions which are not at odds with each other because each one had its own reason. And if one is a church, you'll find that a church with a high steeple, even in the old town, that's quite different, yet very complementary to it. And if you say you have a certain height-- Paris has the advantage of not having tall buildings, at least inside of the city. But you allow certain spires to come up and be visible. You have variety. Even the fact that any building responds to a different demand or a special program, if it is done with integrity of purpose, then you create variety without creating monotony, and the city acquires the vitality that it should have. London is a very good example of that. And Rome too. They have a variety, many different kinds of expression, different kinds of things that go well together. It's when you become overly conscious of contextuality and you make a buzzword out of it, it seems to me it's just the surface of a concept and not its essence. The essence is to be very honest about the purpose of a building, and think of a building as a building and not as a piece of fashion to put the tag on as being the latest in a series of new things.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, you think of your two buildings in San Francisco: the B ofA building -- Bank of America Building-- and St. Mary's. Do you see those as monuments, or as parts of the city, or. ..?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, I think that they were the result of a similar process of mine, different purposes, and there's no reason why they shouldn't live together pretty well. But as I probably don't need to tell you -- you're a historian-- we live somewhat by artificial formulas, and we cannot escape the fashionable aspect of things. It's part of our nature, and they creep in. And what is good today -- for instance, the Chrysler Building in New York for a long time was considered a monstrosity. All of a sudden it became a piece of "art moderne"-- no, art moderne [French pronunciation--Ed.].

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: The Moderne style or the Art Deco? Moderne, I guess.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: So that those you cannot ignore. They're part of the human experience and you feel a certain way today and you feel different tomorrow. Like people get married, they love very much, and then all of

sudden they hate and get divorced. And you know, you change your mind, you change your attitudes, and that's part of life, I guess, you can't avoid it.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, at least at one point in your career, you were involved in museum design, in the Portland Art Museum in the thirties. Now what do you think, 50years later, of the I. M. Pei east wing of the National Gallery as a museum?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, you know, I was advisor to that building there, and I was responsible for getting Pei. Actually, I had suggested both Pei and Kevin Roche to Mr. Paul Mellon, and I told him to visit some of the things they had done. I had myself explored about 30 or so versions of what to do for an east wing, which was on a very difficult site because it's not a true rectangle or a square; it's cut in one corner. Paul Mellon, at my suggestion, went to Oakland to visit the beautiful museum that Kevin Roche had designed there.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Roche and Dinkleloo?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Mr. Mellon didn't like the concrete walls. He's a very sophisticated, rich man. So he picked Pei, and Pei came out with in an idea which was absolutely brilliant. He met the site problem head on by dividing it into two triangles, and making the two parts join in a large hall. See, a great part of the museum is not really a museum; it's a national center for visual education. Henry Mellon is the director -- rather, he is the dean. He is a very good friend of mine as he was on the MIT faculty. So I admire very much the solution and I think it's an extraordinary, exciting building to be in. The only criticism which I think has some validity is that he created a monument and it's Pei's own monument, and in reality it isn't. Some works of art look well in it; some don't. I think that that's partly true, but on the other hand the role that that building must play on the mall and along Constitution Avenue is a very important one. One of my schemes was an extremely simple box, with just a few windows. It would have been a sort of minimal solution. His is much more dynamic and much more interesting, and so on. So I admire it very much because I know how difficult a problem it was.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: The need was there for a monument.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Hmm?

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: The need was there for a monument. How do you feel about the Centre Pompidou, another museum done at the same time?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Oh yeah. Well, I was fascinated. I must say that I was very excited. The details are absolutely marvelous. And the fact that it was almost the last word in rationality with a sparkle of creative detailing, I think it is a very successful building. One can criticize certain aspects. As you may know, I have had some experience in museums. I was president of the board here-- was on the board for 30 years -- and I was on the board of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, so I know museums-- and I was involved in others. The Pompidou can be criticized for the lack of sympathy for the works of art show there, as they're exhibited in an enormous, formless place. They have to go to a heck of lot of trouble to provide the right background for the works of art to show at their best. You cannot just throw works of art together; they have to be pampered, so to speak. They have to be respected to look their best, so they can show their creative qualities. But it has become a popular place. It's become a place where things happen, very exciting and lively. I understand they play music down in the square, in that open space, and I felt [much more] at ease to see such a direction being taken for public buildings, and I am excited about it. That is intrinsically an architect's serious effort.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: You mean [as compared to--Ed.] the Graves Building here at that time?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. The Portland Service Building is intrinsically a sort of idiosyncratic kind of exercise in cleverness. The other one is also that, but it's architecture because it's serious in its intent.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: People use it. They love it, the Centre Pompidou.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: People.. . That's it, that's right. Their escalators, they made a feature of it. They have a glass skin and they made a feature of it. The details are wonderful. And you enter there; it's an exciting place for things to happen. So I like it very much. As a matter of fact, I recommended [Renzo--Ed.] Piano, the young Italian architect, he and [Richard--Ed.] Rogers, for an honorary membership in our institute. I think [they--Ed.] finally got it. So that's Pompidou and got it on the map.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Which of the major 20th-century architects would you say have had the greatest impact on your own work, you personally?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I think that Frank Lloyd Wright, of course. Johnson thinks he was the best 19th-century architect. But yeah, I think all in all, if we look back, Frank Lloyd Wright in the mid-age work, not in the later work, gave us the best work. Aalto, of course, had a great impact on me.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: What about Mies?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Mies, indirectly. You never can get quite excited with his work. You feel great respect for him, but not love, and that's really what you can say about Mies. And I respected him as a man, his integrity. When he gave a speech when he got the gold medal, [he--Ed.] was a master; his prose was almost as good as some of his buildings. But somehow, your full respect, full of seriousness for the art of architecture, but somehow you don't get transported and so loving and say, "Oh, I wish." But I do that with Frank Lloyd Wright at his best period, and I feel that way about Aalto. And I feel strongly about some contemporary architects like Kevin Roche and Ed Barnes and a few others.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And Corbusier? Again, less important in your own work?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: And Corbusier, I've read too much about him. It strikes me as being such an egotistical person, hard for me to digest his attitude. I consider him quite an artist, a sculptor and painter even more than an architect. What he did was very, very exciting and very new and experimental. [You were a lucky fellow that make it three triple
somersault and be picked up by them.] You can admire him, but I don't want to be him. It seems to me that he's too much of a performer.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And you felt a much closer affinity to Wright? Is that right?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. When I was developing, that was one I felt inspired by [the most].

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: It's interesting [that--Ed.] we haven't mentioned Louis Kahn.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, he was a very close friend of mine. When I was at Yale, we used to be together a lot. It was 45 years ago, and [we] spent evenings talking. I remember a very hot evening in Philadelphia. He was a music composer. I believe he was a true, a real artist. He did some early-- not the later drawings -- he did beautiful drawings. He's an artist-- a creative artist. I cannot accept or digest or love his guru attitude. He was always talking in poetic terms and he knew what poetry was because one couldn't really understand him, make sense of it, and that's what the clue to poetry is, that you let the reader interpret his own way and to extract beauty which is not made evident: It's the suggestion. He was an artist again, like the other, but not really an architect.

I tell you that because I worked with him in Baltimore on a large project, a rather difficult project with many apartments, garage, office building, hotel, all in one big project -- very interesting. He was younger then, but he had already developed the authority and the reputation, and the client wanted to get the best architect available. He had already received a gold medal. He kept coming with schemes showing the windows six inches higher or lower with subtle relationships between them, but he never resolved, or tried to resolve, the problem [of-Ed.] how to serve the dining room from the kitchen, where to put the kitchen, where to put the entrance, what kind of circulation was best, how to get the garage to function, how to be practical. He hadn't the slightest idea. So he was an artist, but not really concerned with the mechanics of making the building work.

And so when he went reading his speech, [he--Ed.] makes a great impact and young people just worship him. But I know him very well from way back. When he gives his speech, he starts in very strange ways: He's saying, "I'll talk about the room," and he started from the room. I don't know whether you read it. It is all very poetic-- We need poets surely, but they cannot replace architects.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: It's worth reading. I liked him as a person, and he was very serious, but he was also the designer of the capital in Bangladesh which is a sort of an exercise in romanticism, and he did the library at Andover, which I -- not Andover, but the sister.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Oh, Exeter?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Exeter, which also was an effort to be different, and then when he said, "What the brick, that all the brick, and the brick asked me what he want to do, I want to be an arch." All those things are hard for me to digest. But that doesn't take away from me the respect that he deserves. He was a real artist, a sensitive artist. And he has always been very nice to me. When I did the Federal Reserve Bank in Philadelphia, he was on the city advisory committee, and he was very nice. But I have to be sincere in what I feel about it. It's in some cases-- a fellow who came and gave a lecture about him at the museum, about two or three months ago, and he took one building which is a square and with limited interest a little bit set aside, and he talked for an hour-and-a-half -- and I couldn't take it; I had to leave-- about the great genius of putting this and that at an angle, and so on. All such a fabrication of a cult, that I -- but that's my fault, my shortcoming.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: You don't like contrived architecture.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: I don't like.. . Yeah. I guess I don't like trying too hard.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Was there any architect in the past-- pre-20th century -- that you've been particularly drawn to or inspired by? Any particular architect or monument? Any building?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, of course all the Romanesque, the early Romanesque in Ravenna and Lombardy. I like particularly the murals on the walls; they appeal to me because they have great simplicity. The structure is almost evident in it, and the space comes alive. I admire those buildings very much. And some of them, instead of glass, they have transparent stone, which lets in the light, like the Rare Books Library at Yale. I forget the name of the stone. Not agate, but.. . But anyway, those are the buildings that I remember with great pleasure, a style before turning into Gothic. And of course the Gothic cathedrals, the Italian versions of the Gothic cathedrals, are very impressive. And probably the greatest building that was ever designed and built is the Doge Palace in Venice and of course the St. Mark Cathedral. And that's a pleasure. The planning is quite simple. And you have this square, which is so clear in intent and open, not like here in Portland, with the new Pioneer Square. They put everything in it they could think of, including an entrance to a garage and then silly little columns sticking out. But, and those belong to the same.. . The Doge Palace has a great simplicity, yet richness and has a counterpoint at it.. . Well, we could probably mention many others. I never thought much of.. .

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: While you're mentioning history, I understand the Paramount Theater, here in Portland.. .

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: The great masterpiece.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: It's a masterpiece, a classic Art Deco building of the twenties. Early twenties maybe?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, I was here when it was built.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Oh my. And it's being converted [into a different use--MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN]. It's from the latter part of the twenties then?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah, I think it was '27, '28.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Okay. And I understand that's being converted into a performing arts.. .?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Is going to be.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Did you have a hand in the.. .?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: No.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: What are your views on historic preservation? What sort of criteria do you think are important for determining which of these older buildings should be saved?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: This is something that bothers me quite a bit. I'm for preservation when there's a quality, intrinsic quality or expression, but not to preserve it just for the sake of preserving, which seems to be the thing now. And there are a lot of them that should be preserved. But if you overdo that, you prevent growth. There's a fellow that wrote at the turn of the century, and said, "There's nothing more beautiful than a city that is under construction, when everything is alive and ready to go, rather than try to preserve and build, not destroy anything. You know, you use common sense if some of them are worth preserving, but if you are prevented from the new to sprout, then you do them all damage in the long run _____ good." [PIETRO BELLUSCHI inserted the exact quote--Ed.] "Cities whose health is robust are never content to live as it were on their funded capital of achievement in buildings or anything else-- They push, they think more of building well now than of not pulling down, and no cities are so excitingly beautiful as those in which archictecture is still alive and at work."

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, here in Portland you've got both of them going on now. You have an upsurge, do you not, of new building, but at the same time a very strong preservation. ..?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Yeah. There's, along the Front Street, First and Second Street, a rather few buildings that are worth preserving, I guess. [PIETRO BELLUSCHI added:--Ed.] And I am all for it, but it can be overdone.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And you've mentioned quality, saving buildings of quality.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Sure.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: And I would agree with you exactly. The problem is how do you determine quality in a

building. ..?

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, it should be, you cannot let the standard of the man in the street say, "Oh that building; Washington slept here." Or, "This building has been there for a hundred years; why tear it down?" You have to have a panel of people with some background of judgment that you can trust, and then they might make mistakes but at least you have selected someone that can use their judgment properly. But if you have no standards at all, why you don't know whether to preserve it or not, and they don't know what quality is, and that's not too good.

MEREDITH L. CLAUSEN: Well, what about buildings like the Fox Theater or the Paramount which-- for somebody of your generation and to some extent mine as well -- are decorative buildings, or decorated buildings, and somewhat out of favor. What do you do in a case like that? It's not a building that would have been saved in the long term.

PIETRO BELLUSCHI: Well, you see, that was built by a firm of architects who did maybe 50 or 60, all exactly the same. They got them out of the drawer and its ornament is the corniest, the worst that can be. The old decor was uninspired to say the least, [makes you throw up]. I still remember going there as a young man. There was a Wurlitzer coming up by elevator, with a man dressed in white playing the most awful loud organ music, and we all made fun of that. You know, this was the most vulgar kind of expression of our society, and we felt ashamed. All of a sudden then, it was closed and went out of business, and now it becomes a beautiful treasure from the past or something to worship. You know, that gets really depressing. But it satisfies most [some] of the people and also it preserves the past and it's cheaper. I don't know what you think. You tell me. I just can't digest that. I prefer to have something that works well and is of our time. But we wouldn't be able to convince anyone.

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