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Oral history interview and slide presentation
with Hans Christensen, 1981 December 11-
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Hans Christensen on May 5 and December 3, 1982. The interview took place in Rochester, New York, and was conducted by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The Archives of American Art has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Most people, they think coffee pot as a body of silver, and—this coffee pot here is a body of silver, and a handle out to the right. But what you can see is that just the opposite angle as the hand picking up, so you can't hold it that way. In spite of this, all coffee pot is made that way. I did—I turned the handle around, and now it's held at right angle, comparing to the hand picking up. But you have an ugly duckling [ph]. So I threw the whole thing away, and put the handle on top, so the hands are sitting on top of the coffee pot. The top of the handle is the signal of movement, and you just tip a little backwards, and out comes the coffee.

ROBERT BROWN: It's to the side, is it?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. You see this?

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Of course, I drink stronger coffee than that. [They laugh.]

ROBERT BROWN: I see. So it's to the back, but slightly to the side.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This here is cream and sugar. No sugar cup is always made without handles. So that means they get all the fingerprints. But not that one. The upper edge is extended by one-sixteenth of an inch, the whole way around. So the hand grab on that edge, and no fingerprint on it.

ROBERT BROWN: You pick it up under that little edge?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, crossways, like that way. Here, you have the whole set.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, these were things you did when? Fairly early?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is very early, but however, the first ones were made for the World Fair in Brussels.

ROBERT BROWN: In '58 or ['5]9, yes.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. Since then, I've made nine of them, nine sets.

ROBERT BROWN: So you're thinking of many, many practical things?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: In the beginning. This is part of the whole thing. You will change as the world change. [00:02:02] In the beginning, they were very conservative things. They were useful things. Today, people are more gone into the more free-form or structure of the thing, not so much the use for it. But there's still this technique. Here, we have a little flip-out [ph]. Have you ever been to a dinner, a party? The host is saying to pour whiskey direct from the bottle, and you say [inaudible] with a smile. And you exact one ounce of whiskey in each glass. Then you come back an hour later. He can't see out of his eye. He had been drinking, too. So all over the whole floor. That little silver jigger [ph]. He can fill that, and if he spills, run down in the glass. So all what he has to do, flip it around, and one ounce of whiskey.

ROBERT BROWN: He doesn't have to steady it?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. [They laugh.]

ROBERT BROWN: The jigger with—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No. You go and you have to design—how will you design a punchbowl? Well, punch and milk is not far away. So you go out in the field, and then you see a cow. You understand?

ROBERT BROWN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. The other—the cow? Yes. Yes.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: There are only three [inaudible]. They all like this punch.

ROBERT BROWN: So this form is based on that?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And how about the dripping and the pouring?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They don't come out there. [They laugh.]

ROBERT BROWN: Those are maybe the legs of the punch bowl. [Laughs.]

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Small baptismal set. Candelabra. A teapot. You can see how the handle is coming out, and swinging out to let—for make the secure. It is not the technical thing. This is just for piece dye [ph]. The lid is sitting there. People always think the lid is always falling out. So to give it even more strength.

ROBERT BROWN: You bring the handle in front of the lid?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: In front of the lid.

ROBERT BROWN: Between it and the spout?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Why don't you have, say, that same arrangement you had in the coffee pot, with that vertical handle? [00:04:02]

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Because I don't need it there, because there, you are often on top of, can easy pour forward. That one there is an ice water pitcher. Now, what come out—now, you serve ice water in the summertime. The ice. Why? Because the ice is lighter than water. So I sit down and figure it out. Everything is one—the ice water bottle. That one have a straight front, and a nice little fanny. I pour forward. The water will go forward, but because the fanny is the highest point, the ice goes in the fanny, and the water go out of the spout, so all you get, you get water in your glass, and a cold fanny. You see this? This is a bowl that I made for the 25th anniversary down in New York art museum.

ROBERT BROWN: The Crafts Museum. As a commemoration, or for its exhibition?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Well, there were first purchase of the Johnson's wax many years ago, and then later, they were donated to the museum. This is a Chinese fortune cookie. There's a wonderful story about that. A woman called up one morning, said, "Is this Mr. Hans Christensen?" "Yes, this is Hans Christensen speaking." "Could you make a Chinese fortune cookie for me?" Now, I think they were one of my students that make jokes for me, because they do this sometimes. So I say, very nicely to the lady, "No, ma'am. The bakery is not open yet," and hung up. A little after, a secretary from RIT called me and said, "Do you know who you hung up on?" I said, "No idea. What in the world are you talking about?" "I'm talking about a Chinese fortune cookie." [00:06:03] It showed out that there was some big donator to RIT. So I said [laughs], "I better do something good." "Yes, you better." So what I did, I asked for the note, but then I called up. "Madam, the bakery is open." [They laugh.] And she laughed. She understood.

ROBERT BROWN: Why did she want a silver Chinese fortune cookie?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Because she was going to lay it down on the buffet in the living room. Each morning, her husband pick a note up. There is a note in every morning that she write, remind him about. So she wanted a place to put that note in every morning.

ROBERT BROWN: What consists of the cookie? What are these two smaller things?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is a cufflinks [ph] the cookie—

ROBERT BROWN: In the same shape?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: The same shape. This is a scroll I made.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, that work, you had to follow traditional?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: The corners of this frame.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: To hold the glass in place. This is a bowl I made for most of the movie stars in Hollywood, and glorious ones [ph], and [inaudible], and several other people that have them. You can see, there on the base, the camera with the light beam. You can see the two handles, where the eyes reflecting as the seeing eye. This is a mace.

ROBERT BROWN: Is that used in an academic procession?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, that's right.

ROBERT BROWN: What was that for? What school, do you know?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is from RIT. This is another bowl, and you can see that I made it in such a way that it's a little more humoristic [ph]. I do a lot of research on each person that's going to help these things.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You say this person—what—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: He was humorous. Very—loved jokes, cracked everything, and always. So I think he has to have a bowl that looks like that. [00:08:00]

ROBERT BROWN: It's almost like a pig.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. Oh, he looks like it. I'm telling you.

ROBERT BROWN: I see. [Laughs.] And what's this?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, a jewelry box. You cannot open it if you don't know how. If you try, you put your fingerprint down. But of course, you can steal the whole thing.

ROBERT BROWN: Certainly.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Here, you can see how it opened and it has [ph] two different points, and up come the lid.

ROBERT BROWN: But until you do that, it won't open? [Laughs.]

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No. This is a bowl for the food industry. You can see the wheat grain going up as a base, and into the bowl.

ROBERT BROWN: That's open work, the base?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That's right. This is for another. Most of these bowls are made for corporation, and given away every year.

ROBERT BROWN: What is this, so they—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is for Rain soap. They make, you know, for soap powder.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, yes, and that's the rising sun or something.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, that's right. A candelabra [inaudible] and silver. This is for the banking industry, banking [inaudible]. So I made this in form of a tree. It's a bowl that looks like a tree.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm. The bottom is like the bark of a tree trunk, is it?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. This is the Gowdia bowl. Gowdia were very famous designer of letters. The only American person that made 100 different alphabets. Every year, that bowl is given away to a well-known person in the independent industry from the whole world. Switzerland, England, Germany, and Italy have won it the last five years.

ROBERT BROWN: What is this greenish cast on it?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: It's just the light. The inscription is telling type, speaks. This is a big silver bowl, about two feet long. [00:10:00]

ROBERT BROWN: Very long, almost like a platter. What is this, a variation on your pitcher, your ice pitcher?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Another ice pitcher, and they were made to the man that invented the Soap Box Derby.

They are sponsor for the motors, you know. This is just a sailboat.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you enjoy doing these commemorative things?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, yeah, they're nice.

ROBERT BROWN: Because there, you're allowed a lot of freedom, and you want to express something?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, and I like the amount of research that goes into them. This is most fantastic—

ROBERT BROWN: You mean, what is the essence of a given industry, let's say? What do they want to—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: There, I shake out of them what they want to do, what they want to achieve, and all of these things going into it. This is a chocolate pot for left and right-handed people. There are two spouts on it.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, you can change the spout?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, the spout goes either way. Two, one on each side. That one, for instance, I made for Ms. Vanderbilt. You can see the lettering on the base: AW. There, I had to visit her house for see my bowl for fitting in. I mean, I couldn't make a bowl that was just modern, if she didn't have a living room that was modern. So I had to come inside the house without her knowing, and then—

ROBERT BROWN: She had older things? It was an older home?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: This is somewhat like an 18th-century bowl.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That's right. Because I couldn't go my way. I had to fit it into her place. It was not me that's going to have them.

ROBERT BROWN: What is that? Above the inscription, is that gadrooning, or what's the ornamental treatment in the band, just below the bowl?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is the AW for—

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, I see. It's running in frieze. It's your ornament as well.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: The whole way out, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Aileen Webb.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. This is a candelabra with a balance of light, silver, and it doesn't matter what side you're sitting on. [00:12:07] It looks beautiful. Most candlesticks have the trouble, they only look good from the side, not from the ends. They're all on one line or whatever. Here, you can walk around, and still very nice.

ROBERT BROWN: What's the stem on this? Are we looking up? What is the bottom like?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Just a point, like fingers. A small [inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: And again—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is [inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: —the pouring.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Salad server. Another bowl for the industry.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you make many sketches?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Many. Oh, yeah. That one is the bowl, called the Witmeyer Cup. Witmeyer is a winery here in New York state, and they sponsor the basketball tournament for the Eastern shore, and every year they give that away to the best. Flatware.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, these forms, are these fairly early pieces, or you do this flatware very often?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No. You cannot—there is not time enough to make, so I only make one, and then sell it to the industry, and then they make it.

ROBERT BROWN: And you've found that they'll adapt them without much change?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: American silversmith companies?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. And that one there, this is the most fantastic thing. This is a medallion. A person, from me, I know, ordered a candelabra. He got the candelabra. About a half year later, I got a call. He said, "Can you get three weeks off?" [00:14:00] "Yeah, I can get three weeks off. Why do you want to?" "Well, we would like you to join us on our schooner, and we are going on Saint Lawrence River." [Laughs.] So I spent vacation on that schooner there with five men, cool one, and we sailed up and down the whole way out to the Atlantic Ocean, back again. He was so pleased with his candelabra. He had paid for it, so he invited me on that. Now, what are you going to give a man that has four or five million in the first place? So I made that medallion. On one side is showing the picture of the schooner, and then the other side shows the hospitality. The anchor. There were small glasses of wine, and the American fork. So he was very pleased to get that one.

ROBERT BROWN: Wonderful.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: But that one is not cast. All my medallions, not cast. They're made soldered, layered on.

ROBERT BROWN: They're soldered?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. This is another form for the water pitcher, but a little more round, in silver [inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: When did you do these, in the '50s or '60s?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That one I just did last year.

ROBERT BROWN: But you developed the form—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. They were early '50s. This is the bowl I made for many of the people in the athletic field that get gold in the Olympics. That particular one was given to Janet Lynn.

ROBERT BROWN: And it's the Olympic circles?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No. There's not—this is what is left on the ice after she finished with the competition. The lines in the ice.

ROBERT BROWN: These are the figures she does?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. This is the Kodak bowl. Again, you see the seeing eye, because Kodak made film. [00:16:02] This is a candelabra

ROBERT BROWN: Was this probably a one-time commission?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Is this gold or is this silver?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, this is brass.

ROBERT BROWN: Forged brass.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. This is the bowl that is given away every year to the best written book that particular year.

ROBERT BROWN: This is the one given by the Rochester Public Library?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. Right. It's a teapot, but the whole thing is built on cattails that are growing up. Because, see, each one of them is a cattail. They're all like that.

ROBERT BROWN: This is one you were doing in the '40s in Denmark?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: We saw it in 1944.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is a jewelry box, called a guardsman, and he loses his head if you take the diamond. Here, he lost his head, and he took the diamond. This is the bowl that expressed the thank you for a very fantastic donation a family gave here to the school. This is all small student that are working the pottery, or woodworking. You see this the whole way around there. So it is, in a sense, a very expensive bowl. A little more than a half a million dollars. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: It costs that much? [Laughs.]

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I just feel to somebody to say thank you, so I made—

ROBERT BROWN: This was your idea?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, it was my idea.

ROBERT BROWN: Ah. Is the base separate from the bowl—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No.

ROBERT BROWN: —or it's just embedded there?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is, again, another medallion given away every year.

ROBERT BROWN: And it's in its little stand?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, little stand. Here we have another one, a tiny [ph] pitcher. [00:18:01] There, we have the Massachusetts spike, as I told you about the

ROBERT BROWN: The newspaper?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: —newspaper. Here, you can really see the half tone.

ROBERT BROWN: How did you do that, get that—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is a process with a molding wheel. Very difficult process. [Inaudible.] There are two half parts. A small candlestick. And this is a bowl I made for the hotel and restaurant business management. Then he gave me the thing. I was sitting down, playing, making one hand. Because every time I go into a hotel, there was always one hand that comes out, but I didn't dare. So I put two hands together, because two hands together is meaning serving. So they were pleased with that.

ROBERT BROWN: One hand would be out for a tip. [They laugh.] So this was given as an award?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. Here you see a bowl, where two hands claps together.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And the base is tilted, so it's reaching forward.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Forward. A big candlestick. Here's another bowl. You have to remember, all these things are things that I made every year.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean you would keep repeating?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, because almost every year, there is somebody that won within the same organization. Now we go into ecclesiastic silver. It is a very, very difficult thing to do, because many times, there's the wrong part that is placed in the church, because it's a person that buys a chalice, and they like it. That doesn't mean it can fit into the church. [00:20:00] But I do—I don't make any ecclesiastic silver without being in the church, look at the building, and most important, look how the people worship, because all of this is different. Here, you see a [inaudible]. I make so many chalices that it's almost fantastic. [Cat in the background.] Now the stupid cat is coming. They are all different, each fitting into a different group of people. Here's one, the cross enclosed by two hands. A more open, where the cross is flat down. A much more modern one. The line is straight. A tilted one.

ROBERT BROWN: Why is that tilted? Why was that tilted slightly?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: For give more life, a little more life. Let me change this here. See, I could make them straight, but then it looks much more informal. Because, see, that will tilt. What it do, it gives them more life.

ROBERT BROWN: And you consult closely with the clergy, I suppose, to know what—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Not in that way. I ask them questions. But they don't know the answer, or they don't know

the question either.

ROBERT BROWN: But you figure out by listening to them?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: By listening to them.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, that is a cross?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: A cross that lay down.

ROBERT BROWN: Recumbent cross.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is more old-fashioned chalice, this one here. Taller. Then the taller—the newer chalice is much lower. Candlestick for the altar. [00:22:00] Very tall, about two feet. You see, comparing to the chalice. A nissl stain [ph] of the two fish in water. And that is a processional cross, and made in such a way you can see the shadow on the wall. Now, they are set at a rail in front of the altar. The sun, on a Sunday morning, will come in. And now the service is over, the sermon is over, the sun has changed, and that shadow has walked out of the picture, because the wall is going to cool. They were all figured out in such a way.

ROBERT BROWN: And you figured that out?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I figured that. They didn't know it.

ROBERT BROWN: Is this pierced, the middle part—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They're pierced, so the light can go through. I was down—there's a church down in Greenwich, Connecticut and I go down and I saw the building, and I figured out the rail is there, and the sun is coming in here, and the sun is going that direction. So I made this so they were pierced. The body of Christ is negative, so the shadow is going on the wall, and—

ROBERT BROWN: So it becomes positive—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: It becomes positive.

ROBERT BROWN: —on the wall.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: On the wall. A wafer box, two fish, and the five loaves of bread. A chalice. And the [inaudible]. You will see, they're much stronger, these here. Completely different design.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, these are for more contemporary-minded congregations, probably.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. Let's see what's going on down here. This is for a church down in Washington, D.C. I have church silver all over. It's a good thing to see the country that way, because I don't make anything without being there. [00:24:04] Not the churches, anything else.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you do that in Denmark before you came here, or is it mainly since you've been here?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Mainly I got interested here.

ROBERT BROWN: There's the fish.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, this is—

ROBERT BROWN: The cross.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: —and this is them again.

ROBERT BROWN: Another one.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And what is that on the bottom?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is the Twelve Apostles. Christ, and you can see the Twelve Apostles sitting—

ROBERT BROWN: Nice. Yeah. That's etched, isn't that, around it?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. A baptismal water pitcher.

ROBERT BROWN: I hate to say it, but it looked a bit like one of the martini—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: It looked pretty close, yeah. A little strong for the job. [They laugh.]

ROBERT BROWN: I noticed the other one was a little christening.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: A cross. [Inaudible.] Bishop's cross.

ROBERT BROWN: Is that yellowed?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, it's the light. Yeah A memorial plate for a person that was involved in the cell system. You can see the cells in mass many times.

ROBERT BROWN: Dividing—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: That's enamel, isn't it, in the middle, or stained glass?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That's stained glass.

ROBERT BROWN: You did the stained glass?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: That would have been something you would have learned years ago, or just you taught yourself?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, part of—we had this in the school. That one there is used—this is a spice box that are used in the Jewish religion. Before I could make this, I had to study, or almost convert it. Most spice boxes are made like a little tower in a castle. You play chess?

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is wrong. But in old times, spices were always kept in the tower in the castle, because spices were very valuable, but not today. [00:26:00] So here, you can see I have two forms. The left one, representing the working week, the working hand. The right one, the holy tulip that was sent to holy Sabbath. I joined these two together.

ROBERT BROWN: And the spice is kept in there during the service?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Just down in the bottom. A little spice down there. There's a little box in the bottom.

ROBERT BROWN: What is the spice a symbol of, do you know?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: It's symbolizing the—as a divider between the working week and the holy Sabbath. It is like we are using the wine and getting Communion. They are using the spice. So in ritual.

ROBERT BROWN: And those are joined at the bottom?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Just joined at the bottom. There are only one seaman [ph]. He raised up. He's raising one flat sheet. This is another little chalice.

ROBERT BROWN: One flat place?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Piece. This is a chalice?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Is this for a Jewish congregation?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. You can see this is where he starts, and then the hoses [ph] could down.

ROBERT BROWN: Then it's going around?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Candelabra for the altar. That one was made for the pope, and you can see I have—now, you get a commission like this. He never got—he died before almost. Well, I wouldn't say it

that way. There are competitions at that time. But I still designed it for—do my outmost. So you can see your eyes are always going for the base, and into the cup, because the cup is the most important part of a chalice. So you can see the line is sweeping up, coming to the cup. [00:28:01] They're never going the other way around. You never go from the top and down. You always go from the bottom. Because see, the eye catches it each time.

ROBERT BROWN: The eye generally does that, or in that form?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: In that form there. This is the candelabra, the candlestick that goes with it. That one, that set there is now in the museum of the Vatican.

ROBERT BROWN: We saw a similar one much earlier, a similar candlestick.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Candlestick, a smaller one. They were a preparation for that one there. I was checking it out.

ROBERT BROWN: The candlesticks, too, your eye rises out.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: To the socket.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Right. More modern church. That one was a very, very strong personality of the priest. He was really dynamic. So I made the chalice in the form of a tree trunk. Do you see this? And the cross very strong. You can almost see the bombastic—

ROBERT BROWN: Is it fairly heavy?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, not—just for the eye. That one there, I can show you that. That person is coming today to get that one here. Then it's going to Germany.

ROBERT BROWN: To a church?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. This is Christ on a cross. You don't know that. But you can see the two arms going out on each side of the cup. See his head? The head doesn't exist. This is a shadow of the base. So it doesn't matter where you look. The head—

ROBERT BROWN: The shadow?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: The shadow will always be there. Figured it out ahead of time. I can show it.

ROBERT BROWN: How did you figure it out? Have you done many—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, yeah, I did by experience. Can you see how clearly—you see it now, it's changed.

ROBERT BROWN: It's still there, though.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: It's still there. You see this?

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [00:30:00]

HANS CHRISTENSEN: A hand holding the cup. A bishop's cross. Now we come in to make some jewelry. There's very little jewelry I make. Most jewelry is completely off. Jewelry is supposed to add to a girl's appearance. Most jewelry is all-powering. It takes away from the girl.

ROBERT BROWN: Because it's too lustrous?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: It's too lustrous. Another thing, most jewelry has long sticks on. So either you have sticks on to say, "Go away," or you have hooks on to say, "Come close, and then I have you." Either way, it is wrong. So I make all of my jewelry very simple, very refined. They are just wire and a pendant. Neck ring. Wire pendant.

ROBERT BROWN: It's almost classical, isn't it? I suppose when you were first training, the design you might have studied in part would have been Greek and Roman and Viking?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Like that, yeah. They were coming up. That one there, this is for NASA. This is the—NASA was—before they were on the moon.

[END OF TRACK AAA_christ81_3098_r.]

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This here is what we call the stretched dollar. For years, about—I think it was 20 years—I made a bowl for a banking industry, a banking corporation, and I was sick and tired of making that bowl, so I asked to make something new, and they didn't want it. Then I said, "Okay, I'll make something anyway and send it with me." Then I made what I call a stretched dollar. It is mobile that can turn around with just a little movement. I sent them down together, and three days later, I got a call back again, and said there were 18 people that were still living that had the bowl of mine, and they all liked the stretched dollar so much, so could I please make 18 more? So now I'm just in the same boat again.

ROBERT BROWN: And you did make them?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: As that moves around, the dollar actually seems to be stretching.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Stretching more and more.

ROBERT BROWN: And you've used that format, something moving on a pin, an upright post? You've used that several times?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Several times, because this thing, I figured out on the paper first, where the balance points are, and then hang in the right direction. Because, else, if I just made it, how do I know what it looks like, a stretched dollar, nothing coming out?

ROBERT BROWN: In school, in Denmark, you'd had thorough training, thorough drafting training?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: We had what we call—

ROBERT BROWN: —mechanical drawing?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Very, very—first, mechanical drawing, and then we had to figure things out in our own mind, and explain the work, which sometimes is more difficult than just make the—this here, for instance, this is the trophy for the world leader of the Boy Scouts. You can see he was a member of the Buffalo group. [00:02:00] So each horn here from the buffalo has to hang exactly there. If he adjust a little more, then there's an accuracy [ph] buffalo, then there's more down than this other one. So you have to have it just plain right.

ROBERT BROWN: That's an Asiatic type buffalo, isn't it? A water buffalo?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, this is the—

ROBERT BROWN: —African buffalo?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. Now, that one was made for Lady Bird Johnson. A group of people want—to have something in memory of her husband. It was up to me to figure out what good President Johnson had done, and I found that he signed the bill that enabled the deaf people to get the same education as the hearing. I made it in the form of the inner ear, which I couldn't have, and you can see that form is dancing around, and showing, emphasizing, sound.

ROBERT BROWN: I guess it's quite closed down and out, and toward you.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: These should be set in motion, then, when you're looking at them closely?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. Always in motion. If they're sitting on the floor, a wooden floor, just the vibration on the floor, it will move them. That one was made for the empress of Iran, in her better days, of course. You can see this is a very—this is what you call diademe [ph]. They go on the hip. That one, I made into a sculpture. Again, this contains one. Most of my structures are always made to be moving.

ROBERT BROWN: And when did you begin doing moving, kinetic—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh, I would say they would be in the early '60s. [00:04:00] This is, again, another thing, the Parkers. The thing is—be able to know what people want. First, about the teapot, the coffee pot. People were serving, but then the help died out. It was very expensive to have help. So you can't expect the housewives to serve the coffee in the silver pot. It has to be cleaned and things like that. They liked the convenience of a [inaudible] one. So I had to change the thing. People still want silver. You can just as well make something to please their eye without too much form and function into it.

ROBERT BROWN: Hence the market for ornamental silver? Just look at it.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. That one I made for Alistair Cooke, because he took the television serial *America*. He was flying from city to city, and supervising his television code they were taking up, all these shows. So the main speed, and almost—

ROBERT BROWN: And a fuselage of a plane, or of an engine.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And then, later here, the Swedish king was married. He got this as a wedding gift, because he's a jet pilot. Again, another form, the dancing around.

ROBERT BROWN: What is that? It looks almost like a horn.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, that one is the chicken that lost the head.

ROBERT BROWN: How did that come about?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They were coming out because we were talking about the chicken come first or the egg. So uh, we had a great discussion or something, then it so happened that the person had a birthday later here, so the wife ordered, gave him that. No, we have been out now [ph]. [00:06:00]

ROBERT BROWN: Good [inaudible]. Great to see.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: We have one more here. That one is a tennis trophy. This is not meant as a person, but the serve.

ROBERT BROWN: The act of serving? Generally, the posture.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. You can see how the silver is formed in such a way, get the strength out of it.

ROBERT BROWN: The power. It's right at the point where the serve is coming down.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I made that, because I was sick and tired of all of these big trophies they have that are gold. It looks awful. You can just as well make something that's nice. This is, again, another thing that can go back and forth, and roll halfway that way, halfway back again.

ROBERT BROWN: They were rolling—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Motion.

ROBERT BROWN: —ring?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. That one was a very difficult thing. I was asked to make something that was very powerful, almost like explosion. It's going to be given away every year to a big donor for RIT. Here, you see two forms, dynamic forms, together, and you see from the side, and then you walk around, and they're almost like an explosion. RIT, and then the name of the person. Can you see this powerful lines that are ending up in the letters? People don't think they end up in letters. They're so surprised to see the letters there, too.

ROBERT BROWN: That's very effective.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is a small bowl that is designed like a water lily.

ROBERT BROWN: And that's lined up and down?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: You see this?

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [00:08:00] This is a lovely one.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is for a group of people that were running from the East Coast—no, from the West Coast to the East Coast. So I made this in memory of them. This is a big mobile that is hanging from the ceiling.

ROBERT BROWN: Very different from the effect of painted, say Calder's, mobiles. Do you do many mobiles?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, yeah. That one is a big structure that is just coming around, but continues moving. Can you see the line? If you follow the line, it comes around and comes back again.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That's very large. What was that for?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: It was a private person that wanted to buy. That's another hanging mobile.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that large one silver, that very large one?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, this is brass. It is almost three feet high, so it would be almost impossible to pay for it. This is a number of bowls, structures, I made for [a] sales corporation.

ROBERT BROWN: And what does that—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: —mean?

ROBERT BROWN: It's a spiral—well, not a spiral. It's a circle.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, well Omega. Omega. See, they are given away to the last link from [inaudible] design the computer, or to another company. So it's the last link. Omega is the last letter in the Greek alphabet, and this is the last link with the arts before the computer is giving more. Except something is wrong, which we don't know. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: But this is given to people?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, it is given to the salesperson that has made most. As a matter of fact, most offices all over the whole world. If you can see, I make many of them.

ROBERT BROWN: So you spend a good deal of your year doing these commemorative things?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, yeah. This were made for a person within the management—Concorde. You know, the jet plane that go—

ROBERT BROWN: The jet from French—English. Yes. That's the general shape, plus expressing the speed.
[00:10:02]

HANS CHRISTENSEN: The speed.

ROBERT BROWN: And that is—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Big, almost two feet. It's a big one, that one. It is brass again. Can you see how powerful the lines are coming out? Sweeping down. That, again, can dance around.

ROBERT BROWN: It's also on a pin?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: A post.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is, again, another tennis trophy.

ROBERT BROWN: This shows their competition, the two racquets coming.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That's right, yeah. That one is made for science, and they are given to the person—Dr. Salk developed the polio vaccine. Now, science means breakthrough. You can see the shield, and you can see how it's been turned around, or going through.

ROBERT BROWN: Comes up, and then through a hole into itself.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Two hand claps together. That one, "Speak softly, but carry a big stick."

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.] Very whimsy. It's like speaking to him, and a great stick coming out the other end.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: You see the little hand holding the stick? That one is for an electric company. They mean mega inter-power. You can see all whatever the matter is, turning around, going through the turbine, and made into electricity.

ROBERT BROWN: Does that turbine turn?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No. It's stationary. As one of them said, "We wish they worked." [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: What? "We wished they worked?"

HANS CHRISTENSEN: "We wished they worked." [00:12:00] That's a big bird.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you work often in brass?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Lately, yeah, if the price of silver was sky-high. Twist. This, again, you can lay down, and then come up by itself.

ROBERT BROWN: So even for this sort of thing, there's many drawings and preliminary calculations?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: There are many, many things that go in. First of all, we have to figure out the balance point. We have to figure out how the metal is cut out before you start, because it is not like clay, where you can add a little. Because there are very few soldering on mine. Many times, none. I erased them direct up and I don't add more. So I have to be sure to know exactly the metal. By the way, if you make them in silver, or dealing with silver, you cannot afford to cut it off. There's a loss. So you have to have the correct amount. This is, again, another one here. This is the rosary award.

ROBERT BROWN: The rosary?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. Then it's in the form of [inaudible] untying the knot, in my opinion. They are trying to improve everything, straighten things out. So this is why I call it untying the knot. They're made in the form of a knot that is open halfway.

ROBERT BROWN: It's very expressive. Well, that's the aim in these, to express the essence of a group's purpose. [00:14:00]

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yes. That one, this is—

ROBERT BROWN: —a seeing eye again.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Seeing eye, forward and backward. Always observe.

ROBERT BROWN: Is this for some—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: It's an award. This is an award, too. This is the ach.

ROBERT BROWN: And this is just an ornamental piece?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, yeah. You have to remember one thing. Today's structure is, in a sense, made completely wrong. Because, according to the stylistic, every family move every fifth year. So if they have big casting structure, what are they going to do? They can't take them with them. My structure is made of sheet metal. Don't weigh more than, at the highest, two pounds. And even if you have the size, they're easy to put down in a suitcase and just transport. But if the same size were cast, they would be several thousand pounds, and they couldn't move them. So this is the difference. And at the same time, I am preserving the technique that all silversmiths were using. Raising, cremation[ph] and bringing it into what we need today. Today, we don't need coffee pots. Today, we need something that please the eye. This is Omega again, in another form. That one is a sweeping structure that's coming around, sitting on a very narrow—what do you call it?—point, and then cannot go around, and then will vibrate. This is a big one.

ROBERT BROWN: Goes to a point, and then—[00:16:00]

HANS CHRISTENSEN: —come out again. This is coming, then ride in the bottom coming into a very, very narrow point, and then sweep out again. Well, there are a lot of calculations, that one there. That one was made before the shuttle was shot up to the moon. I didn't even know they were going to look like that. There's a man within the NASA that helped order that one. He didn't know either.

ROBERT BROWN: So this is uh—it at least shows tremendous speed. It's a lovely form.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Then the coal [ph] flight. Very strong form. You see this? Fish power. Very powerful fish.

ROBERT BROWN: That's for what?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This was for a family that was very interested in fishing. So he wanted it for the living room. And that structure is called *The Difficult Role of Education*. You can see the ups and downs. You can see all the small students running the whole way up, and fall down again.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, they're little forms? Chased in?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They're chased in, yeah. Anniversary.

ROBERT BROWN: And that symbolized what?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Wedding. The wedding. Two rings put together. That one, the inch worm.

ROBERT BROWN: What is that for?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: [inaudible] they were just things.

ROBERT BROWN: Whimsy.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. They were just things. That one was for a company that drilled in the ocean, and you can almost see. [00:18:03] It is called *Drill in Ocean*. You can see the waves, and the drill going down.

ROBERT BROWN: The drill is the pin?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: The pin.

ROBERT BROWN: That's like a previous form, sort of split in two, with this round piece weighted at the bottom.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And that one, *Stop, Look, and Listen*.

ROBERT BROWN: It's like a bird.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: As a wading bird would be. A heron.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: It was made for a person who took four or five minutes each time he stepped out on the street. He always looked four or five times, and the family made jokes of him. So that one—he's so careful. He never does a single thing without shaking out four or five times, and you can almost say, "Stop, look, and listen." They didn't tell me that. They just wanted to give him a gift. But I figured that one out after I listened to their conversation. [Inaudible.] This is a big one, too, about three feet. That's another tennis trophy.

ROBERT BROWN: Candleholder tennis trophy.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: At the same time. That one is a whale. A person called me up and asked I will make anniversary gift, a silver bowl. I told the person, "No, you already have a bowl. Couldn't I make something else?" [00:20:00] He said, "What would you like to make?" He said, "I don't know." I said to him, "What do you and your wife enjoy most?" He said, "Well, we have a summer house on Nantucket Island." Then I said, "I know what you're going to have." Because talk about old whaling town. So here, I gave him a whale, and he was thrilled.

ROBERT BROWN: That whale is really nestling in.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: You see the powerful form?

ROBERT BROWN: This is from another view, the same one?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: It's the same one.

ROBERT BROWN: Tremendous tail.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Same one. And at the same time, you can always say, "I have a whale of a time." [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: And yet it's not literally copied after any particular whale?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No. It's just—

ROBERT BROWN: A sense of motion and weight and gracefulness.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Well, this is the end of it. This is what I call—

ROBERT BROWN: That's very useful. I'm really glad.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is a part of—why I put this together yesterday, so you get a little feeling of what I am doing, of why I am trying to preserve this old message of being a silversmith, because you have to remember,

they're one of the oldest crafts. Pottery was before, but pottery has always been kept as a craft form. But silversmithing, this is the beginning to the industry. The industry would not have been there if the silversmith had not existed, because he was the one that paved the road the whole way up.

ROBERT BROWN: And you worked with commissions traditionally? [00:22:02]

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, only commissions. Only commissions. I'm about two years behind. Let me explain this a little more. You have to remember, many of my things repeat. This is why it's difficult to add anything new, because my time is always plucked up.

ROBERT BROWN: Of course.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: [They laugh.] You understand this?

ROBERT BROWN: Seems rather clear to me.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: There is not much time left.

ROBERT BROWN: This was very useful. If I listen to that, and what I want to do, then, is think out some of the parts of the things you emphasized, and then when we get an interview, maybe have, oh, 30 slides, and at the appropriate point, put it on. And then I could throw out my possibly leading, dumb questions—several questions.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: You already have some—

ROBERT BROWN: That's right. I will ask a question, and you'll say something. I'll say, "What do you mean by that?" I want to go into more detail. I wasn't asking much right now.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, no, I understand.

ROBERT BROWN: Okay?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. That way—

ROBERT BROWN: This is excellent. You're exceptional.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Very good. So we will—

[END OF TRACK AAA_christ81_3099_r.]

ROBERT BROWN: Beginning an interview in Rochester, New York, with Hans Christensen. Bob Brown interviewing. This is May 5, 1982. Perhaps we could begin here talking a bit about your growing up in Denmark, where you were born in 1924. What about your family? What was their background and interests, and what kind of a family was it to grow up in?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Well, see, I have a very [inaudible] one way. My father, he was accountant, and many of his clients were involved in art, or in things that were very interesting. People that were adventurous. For instance, many people that were exploring the Polar [inaudible] in Greenland. For instance, Peter Freuchen, that wrote *Seven Seas*, he lived down here in Connecticut. He was a client. Knud Rasmussen, one of the famous explorers of Greenland, he come there. It is one of the reasons for why we still maintain a summer house close to Knud Rasmussen's house in Denmark. He died, of course, many years ago in [inaudible], up in Greenland. The house is now a museum, and we lived close by there.

ROBERT BROWN: And these were men you got to know quite well as a young boy?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I knew these people as a boy, and admired them for what they did. And we still have gifts and things like this that he gave us. Another famous person I knew, his name—Borge Rosenbaum. He is now well-known here in United States as Victor Borge the funny man on piano. So I knew him from the time he was a movie star in Denmark.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.] Was he a very amusing fellow, do you recall?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, he always made fun.

ROBERT BROWN: A very likable person?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: He was a fantastic person. As a boy, I looked up to him very much as the super-duper star. They were very entertaining. Another thing, I think around when my father, he was 50 years old, he asked me what kind of life I want to getting into, and I said, "I want to be a sculptor." And I can remember this early, clearly

today. He said, "Not over my dead body." So I had to change my mind.

ROBERT BROWN: How old were you then?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Sixteen.

ROBERT BROWN: So what did he want you to do?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: He wanted us to be accountants, but I didn't think they were good for me. So I said to him, "I'm going to be a silversmith," and he accepted this, because there's a compromise. The silversmith is a kind—it's not free-form art. It is more controlled, and there is more substantial, what we say, employment. I can make a living on it. Sculpture part, they were more insecure, and he didn't feel I could make any form for living on that.

ROBERT BROWN: So he was a pretty matter-of-fact man?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: He was a matter-of-fact man. Had always been.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you and he get along pretty well together?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, yeah. Of course, at that time, you have to remember, we are talking about the early '30s. You have to remember this, the relationship between parents was very different from what we have today. [00:04:06] I mean, he gave both the question and answer, [laughs] and you had to accept everything that would go with it. Today, I think there's a little more divided between both parties, a bit more understanding. But there were—

ROBERT BROWN: How about your mother?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: She was, as a matter of fact—again, she has always been involved in art.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, had she? In what ways?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Well, she admired—she didn't do anything herself, but she was always taking part in exhibitions or things like this with my father. They didn't do—he was more involved in purely the numbers game. My mother was very—taking part in all art, theater or things like this. So I grew up very happily. Got into the—and then I must say one thing. In high school, I was very fortunate. First, getting in the school where—oh, what would you call him? A dean for the high school—we use another name. But anyway, he was very amusing person. He was married to an opera star, a singer. He himself, an actor, too, and had gone, for some reason, into the school system. But he liked teaching. So besides taking care of them and [inaudible] two parts, he held classes. [00:06:00] One of the classes he was giving was language, and he was a specialist in dialect, old Danish dialect. Now that man, he had tremendous input on the student in form of language, and how people behave, or—his son, as a matter of fact, is now [inaudible] Copenhagen school's entertainer. He performs at the Royal Theatre in Denmark. All of these things, they have, of course, influence on you.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think, as you look back, was his interest in dialect and in—was he also interested in folk traditions and things?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yes. At that time, there was a big movie taking up in Denmark that were called [inaudible]. It is—like, you will have here, called giving the slaves free. We had the same thing there. Not for the black people, but this here were a movie something out in the 1700s, I believe, where there were no more—I think you called it tentative farmer?

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, or serfs, even?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Serf. Not serf, but people that live in a house, the owner, a bigger farm. The pay will be allowed to live there. They were not—they were given free at that time. Each, after, were given a piece of land. Now, a movie of that—they were, of course, with a lot of dialect. So he was advisor for that movie. We come in, and there were—all these things, I think, have influence.

ROBERT BROWN: I know, in Scandinavia, generally, at that time, there was a great deal of interest in dialect and in folk culture. [00:08:00]

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That's right, yes. Yes, there were a lot of things.

ROBERT BROWN: It certainly is seen in much of the art of that time.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, yeah. They were a part of the—see, number one is that you should realize, craft, or

art, have always been out between the people in Scandinavia.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you mean out between the people?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Let me put it that way. You can have a few artists in each country, and these may be stars, and then the rest of the people, they didn't do anything. But the average person has always been involved in art. This is where the word—the folk art is coming in. We have the opposite here. We can talk about sport here in United States. All right? We have extremely good stars, but the rest of the nation is a sitting nation. Do you watch? It will be better if everybody were [laughs] a performer of sports, and they were only the start of watching.

ROBERT BROWN: Whereas in Denmark, for example—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Everybody doing something with their hands.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, they were?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Everybody.

ROBERT BROWN: They always had, or was this—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They always—

ROBERT BROWN: Or was this a revival?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, they have always been that way. They have been—each person created thing for the home. And then there were, of course, the really artist that did the—but every home always been decorated—a good carving, or special [inaudible] or things like this. This is where the folk art is coming in, down on that level.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, in school, in high school and earlier, did you have much art training, crafts training?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: We didn't have it in form as you are thinking about it, but I can give you example of how we had our—for instance, we have a class—you have to remember, this is in the '30s. [00:10:14] I would call it the environment or something like this. We didn't have books about it. We were out in the gravel pits. We analyzed all the layer in the pit, dated them. Made our own books, made our own drawings. Because, at that time, nobody had a camera. All this, what we were asked to do. We were well-known in all travel agencies. As a matter of fact, many times, if they could, they would have closed the door, because we were going to pester them, because we didn't learn geography in the way you will do it with a book. We would be assigned a country. Three people would be assigned a country, and you'd go out and take all the information, either in library or in travel agencies. So we were well-known. Then we made our own books. Now, you do this, you are starting to make creative art minds. This, of course have started me. I think what I am thinking now about the sign, about art. So they go way back.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure, you had to be able to get your idea across? You had—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: You had to perform.

ROBERT BROWN: And a bit better than someone else.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. So we did this.

ROBERT BROWN: You learned design, layout.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Everything.

ROBERT BROWN: Rendering.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. Everything.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you discover you were fairly gifted with your hands pretty early?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, really not, because by having this, the whole class has to perform. [00:12:00] So you try to—what can we say? Compare yourself to the whole class. All of us were pretty good, because we were forced to it. And then, later, we compared ourselves to other classes that they didn't have that kind of training, because it was only our class that had that kind of training. Then we knew we were ahead of the other one. However, there was a drawback with that kind of schooling. Later in life, they were canceled. They were not allowed to go further.

ROBERT BROWN: What were the main drawbacks?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: The main drawback, that you didn't get the full education in, for instance, foreign language, because your time was spent in doing things. So all the regular classes give a minor value in that particular schooling. I mean, so as I say before, I didn't regret it—I was a part of them. They were against this person there.

ROBERT BROWN: They were what?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They were against this person I was talking about, the head of the school.

ROBERT BROWN: What was his name?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: His name Detlev Bolsen [ph].

ROBERT BROWN: Bolsen?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Bolsen, yeah. He did many, many extraordinary things.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this a special high school?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, the school was normal, but the class, that particular class—we spent two years as, I would say, a kind of test tube babies. We also succeeded—we all got involved in some kind of artwork, as a matter of fact. [00:14:00] Almost all of us. I think it is a kind of schooling that could be done on a limited basis. It cannot be done as a total. You will miss too many of the regular people. As a matter of fact, it can't help you to make all crazy people. You have to have some normal, too. [They laugh.]

ROBERT BROWN: They felt that you, for example, you people, that lost out on language training—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, they feel it, definite. Definite. Now, it didn't matter so much for our generation, anyway, because—see, we grew up during the war, but you are not allowed any English. We were only allowed to speak Danish, and we didn't want to speak German. So that came in. We were supposed to learn German, but nobody wanted to participate in it.

ROBERT BROWN: This was in Copenhagen?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: It was in Copenhagen, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: That's where you grew up?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I grew up there, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: As a boy, do you remember it as a fairly cosmopolitan city?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, absolutely. Copenhagen had probably been one of the finest cities. Well, still, they are very, very great in many, many ways. Number one is it is a friendly city. People are very outgoing. People want to express themselves in many ways, either in the form of music or theater [ph] or [inaudible]. In other words, just take a place like Tivoli. Tivoli is a great, fun place, where, at the same time, five orchestras are playing different tunes, with I think 22 or 24 restaurants. You grow up in an atmosphere like that. [00:16:00] There have always been a great number of theaters. So that way—and art was very much a part of life. The Danes, they always have to have art in their home. People frequently go to museums. There are so many museums in—and they go far back, again. You have to remember that you grow up in a country where great castles, where all art were in these castles, and they were built that Columbus would go and land here. At that time, we had—I think there were three universities at that time. This is all things that go back to the education, art. All kinds of art were part of this everyday life.

ROBERT BROWN: Was life fairly serious?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, I wouldn't call it serious.

ROBERT BROWN: Your father was an accountant. Did he tend to be a rather dry person?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: He was, of course, very conservative, but I have never seen a Dane that has been conservative without, at the same time, be smiling or happy-go-lucky. This is a very funny thing, because each of the Scandinavian countries have their own trademark put on them. A Swede is more conservative. A Norwegian can be a little melancholic. But the Dane, they are always arms and legs, jumping around. So I grew up in a very good atmosphere. [00:18:00] And then, besides this, we were only living, at that time—even today

where my mother still do something. But as a boy, we were only living in Copenhagen during the wintertime, and up at the seashore, about two hour's drive from Copenhagen, during the summertime. All of these things, they have an influence.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure they do. Do you remember the political atmosphere? You weren't very aware of that as a young—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: As I young—I cannot remember, but they were tough times at that time. They were in the '30s. There was Depression, as you have here. I think, at that time, there were a lot tilting over to the democratic way. It would be to the more left, it can be called, than we have here.

ROBERT BROWN: Was your family sort of in the middle, or was your father more conservative?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: He was very conservative, and I think our whole family were very conservative, because, number one, the working class would go over to the left. I mean, there are Communists at that time. I can remember that, but there were not a great amount.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you aware of class divisions as a boy?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Absolutely, yeah. But it disappeared. Yeah, absolutely, it disappeared. It disappeared for many reasons. It disappeared, first of all, that there were—what can I say?—the taxation. They were getting greater, greater, as the welfare state progressed. So economic—there were not much difference to be a president for a company or be the working person in some company. He will have, maybe, a much higher salary, but he pays so much more in taxes. [00:20:08] He wouldn't be able to get an apartment, or get a government grant for each child he have. Whereas the working class, for his child, he will have the government pay so much percent of the same apartment as the president maybe has.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, this had already happened by the '30s?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They happened, I would say—

ROBERT BROWN: Or afterwards?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I would say after—I can't remember. I can remember—I think it was '36—I was just a kid at that time. I think it was '36. My father took me to Berlin, in Germany, for summer Olympics there, and I saw Jesse Owens win. He was the first black athlete from here. I think it was '36. Then I came back. I was more aware of politics, because I have seen Germany, and it's scary to see it, how they handled the whole thing down there, because there was all propaganda, even through the Olympics at that time. I had not been very old.

ROBERT BROWN: It was very different from—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: —from Denmark.

ROBERT BROWN: —the way things were in Denmark.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you aware—when you went to Germany, were the Germans trying to reach out to Danes? When you came, were they very—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This, I can't remember.

ROBERT BROWN: You can't remember?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I can only remember all the flags and the cone—putting mast up, in big groups, and things like this. I can't remember any special about it. But I can remember that I came back, I was getting interested in politics, and I can remember there were the conservative party, and I can remember the more liberal parties. [00:22:01] I think, at that time, there were about, oh, 12 to 15 different parties. Then, of course, the war started, and I got in as apprentice in '39.

ROBERT BROWN: You went to a school, too, that year, right? The School for Arts and Crafts?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, this is at the same time. You are apprenticed in the daytime, and you go to the school in the evening. You spend five years there. You take double load, because our school there were based on—the school were giving to sign paperwork, we put it that way, and the shop was supposed to give us the training in working.

ROBERT BROWN: One was more theoretical—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: —and the other was practical training. Now, your father, then, had decided that you could be a silversmith by then?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Normally, your family—you would have gone to university, wouldn't you?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yes. They were aware, but the school split. Either you choose that line—but as you'll see later, I'm going back again. I go to the university.

ROBERT BROWN: You had a brother, right?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he go on to university?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: He went on to university.

ROBERT BROWN: More conventional?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: Expected. Was it a matter of pride on your father's part when you decided—did it hurt his pride?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, no.

ROBERT BROWN: No?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, no. He was just thinking purely economic. He knew I could make the money as a silversmith, but he knew I couldn't make this as a sculptor, because they were so unsure. I can remember he said at that time, "There may be one in a million to make it. [00:24:00] The rest of them, they don't make it."

ROBERT BROWN: But your father's position was fairly substantial in the country, wasn't it?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, yeah, he was.

ROBERT BROWN: He didn't mind you going to craft school?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, no.

ROBERT BROWN: In this country at that time, I believe most sons of such families would be expected to go to university, and go out into a profession such as banking or law.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, no. No. As a matter of fact, he was proud of what I did. No, no.

ROBERT BROWN: This indicates, again, another way of indicating the importance of crafts.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: You have to remember one thing. At that time, Georg Jensen was getting into—were probably the world's finest silversmith, with stores in almost every major city, the whole world over, with a fantastic reputation, and a substantial amount of the hard currency flowing back to Denmark through what they were selling. It was a prosperous business at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: So to your father, this made sense, then?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Did make sense.

ROBERT BROWN: You would be getting into something that was very substantial?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: So they were right. He accepted it with whole heart at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: You entered into the school in 1939.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: That was right at the time war broke out.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That's right. As a matter of fact, there were about—the ninth of April, it broke out. It would be 1940. There were—oh, I can remember that.

ROBERT BROWN: There had already been the invasion of Poland in '39.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That's right. We were a little later. Then, after that, then I—[00:26:01]

ROBERT BROWN: You mean, the invasion of Denmark came in '40?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I think it was '40. The ninth of April, 1940. I'm sure it was '40.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you in school that very day?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, I was riding on my bicycle to Georg Jensen, and they come right smack on, in big planes. I can remember all these flying machines, sitting on top of Copenhagen. One bunch flew down to refuel. A new one will come up. I can't remember, but we had very few hours to surrender, and [inaudible] dropped bombs over Copenhagen. So there was no other choice. There was a little fighting, but not much. Not much. But then, of course, there was, for four years, fighting after, after they established them.

ROBERT BROWN: But you were already—you had had about six or eight months at Georg Jensen by then?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: By that point, right.

ROBERT BROWN: How did that begin? Maybe we can describe that.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Well, this start, again there [inaudible]. It start with that you work, go between the design department and the silversmiths that make it.

ROBERT BROWN: As a go-between? You mean just doing errands?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, something like that. Even my luck—normally men wouldn't do this. Normally you would only be in the shop, and don't go out there. But with be the go-between, I learned both sides of the thing going on.

ROBERT BROWN: Would you have time to look at both, watch both?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Both of those, yeah. You have to remember that the apprentices at that time were only paid seven dollars a week. If not this, if we were forced to work—be productive, could we put it that way—we were getting an education. [00:28:08] There were silversmiths that were assigned to us, and they were responsible for have you learn something. They were, of course, in their own self-interest, of course, because the better we learned, we could help them. All silversmiths were making 12 coffee pots. He would show the apprentice how to make spouts. Then he's got seven—he gets 12 spouts for free, if we were smart. So they were going backward. Then, later, in your upper years, after you've been there four years, you make your own thing, and you were assigned one whole thing to make. There were a lot of interesting—then, as I say, sometime, every evening, you were going to the school. After I had been there for five years, this education, then I have to make a journeyman's piece, and I was lucky enough, again, there, to be allowed to do what I want to. So I designed a teapot. That teapot won both silver medallion for execution, and for design, which is very, very seldom. I think you have to go back to about 18-something-hundred. There are many that get a silver medallion, but only one. I got two. They were put in my hand of the king of Denmark. Because, again, silversmith's guild were very high-ranking. The royal family were involved in that, and they were an honorary member of the whole guild or something like this. [00:30:07] I can remember this. I still have the medallions.

ROBERT BROWN: Maybe we can talk a bit about the training and design that you received at the School for Arts and Crafts. How would that begin?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: It would begin that we have a number of artists involved in—trained us. That will, again, be supervised by a high-ranking member of Georg Jensen. Again, there was self-interest. Their interest, they will see how are education was going, because—they were not interested about educated people. They were interested to get good workers out of them. So some of the best artists in Denmark, they were a teacher, at some time, at the school, and we received, first of all, skill in drawing, skill in observing, and skill in art history.

ROBERT BROWN: Observing, you mean drawing from—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: We would be locked in a museum, given a pair of white gloves, and we would be assigned to a special silver piece that was from either 1600 or whenever they were from, and we would be asked to make

a complete drawing, in all angles, for the use for the museums. Of course, in the beginning, they just taught the drawing after we left, but little by little, we got better and better. That way, you learn to see. You learn to observe. You learn to see if the thing is just a little lopsided. If they were lopsided we [inaudible] have better make the drawing just exactly as lopsided. [00:32:02]

ROBERT BROWN: Because the master knew? He could tell if you were not drawing it accurately.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, yeah. This exactly.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you enjoy doing that kind of training?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: In the beginning, no. Nobody enjoyed it. Think it was—

ROBERT BROWN: —very tedious?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Very tedious. But we opened our eyes. We learned to see. I will give you another example. One of the teachers there, he was very close to the royal family. He bought one of the king's summer castles. We were sent up there to measure the whole summer castle, inside, and there were white boys that were standing in front of the castle, but the minute we opened the door, we took our shoes off. We had never been so peaceful or settled in. We were amazed to see where they were in [ph] in that castle. We stayed there for several days, and we tried to make the whole drawing.

ROBERT BROWN: This was an architectural drawing you had to make?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Thereby, you got training in perspective?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, there were perspect—everything was made up in such a way. Then we had faculty that were teaching us in design, in functional design.

ROBERT BROWN: What did that consist of?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They would consist of everything, to design of screwdriver, to design of car, or design silver. Anything that could just be—we would get assignment that were given out, for instance, say, okay, we have to have a water pitcher. How to make a water pitcher. Then it was up to us to make the water pitcher, in three-view drawing, not just in sketches and things like that.

ROBERT BROWN: Then would you have to give a little talk? Present it and give an explanation?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No. We didn't do this. They're one thing that come much, much later, especially something that come up here, that everybody has to talk. [00:34:05] We were doing the opposite. Our teacher would tell us, "Your drawing is supposed to say the whole thing, because you are not always there to explain." They settled that whole thing. So we were very much to rely on the drawing. We could make as many drawings as we wanted to.

ROBERT BROWN: And if you couldn't understand the problem, your drawing would reflect that, but you wouldn't show everything?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. They go, again, together. You have to remember, many times, because Denmark was so far ahead in craft, we had competition, and competition means you send drawing in. You were not there on [ph] the look of the drawing. So we had to make everything down on the paper. It can't help you to write long letters. You are judged in a competition. You don't sit down and write letter. You take a look. Either you're in or out. It was very valuable what we did. Now, after I had done this, then I took two years more, as extra. They were for what we call the [inaudible] how do I translate this? It would be the school from—it's not more of the School for Arts and Crafts, but this was a branch of the academy, and they were two years. For that, I had to have worked as a journeyman. I had completed my training completely. [00:36:02] There, we only have design. We have a little work, but it was mostly based on design, very fine, fine design.

ROBERT BROWN: You were in the school, as I understand, from 1939 to '44?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: So that would have been from, what, '44 to '46 you did this advanced—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, it was later. I think they were '52, '53.

ROBERT BROWN: So it was a little later that you—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, because you cannot go—you have to be out working as a professional before you're selected to that. This is a very great honor, coming to that school. The reason for it is that there were—there's a great competition. For instance, 53 students applied to get in, but only 12 got in. You cannot pay for it yourself. It is all grant. Some of the finest teachers that were teaching that particular school.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that by any chance the technical college?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No.

ROBERT BROWN: 1951 to ['5]3, you said?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Let me see.

[Audio Break.]

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I was starting to say the College of Technical Society is a college for very, very advanced silversmiths. They are people that have been out and worked as a professional for several years. It is [inaudible] it's the time between I graduated as a journeyman and up to there, '51. Then you get in there, and you apply for get in. As I say, we were 53 that were trying to get in, and only 12 come in, and all of it is grant. [00:38:00] They are, again, for train people to higher-ranking employer within the industry. So they knew not only about management of people, but design, execution of all the pieces, and all this goes together. So the industry can draw, for that pool of people, the educators, that one, very, very high training. This is a two-year course, and there is—as I say, very, very extensive, and there's some of the best teachers that teach there.

ROBERT BROWN: So whereas earlier, you'd simply studied as an apprentice and as a journeyman, and then gone to work at Georg Jensen's, now you were pulled out of that briefly, or at least part-time, in this College of Technical Society. And you went to school again, but with the most experienced, the top designers and the top silversmiths?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Not so much the top silversmiths.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, because it was design?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: It was design they were excess [ph] because you're supposed to already now know how to handle—

ROBERT BROWN: Know the craft?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Know the craft.

ROBERT BROWN: What could this more sophisticated level of design consist of? What could it have—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: It will give you the opportunity—for instance, in my case, where I was employed in a model department, and almost immediately advanced to the head of the model department for the world's biggest silversmith. And another one of my good friends, Bent Peterson, he got to another company, in Kolding, Hans Hansen silversmith, and he was employed right there as a designer right away. So all of these—as a matter of fact, these 12 people that were involved in this class were immediately sucked up in the industry. [00:40:08] There were—

ROBERT BROWN: What was it that they may have taught you in those two years that suddenly made you so much more qualified?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Well, number one is that you could design things that could be sold. One thing is to design thing for your own fantasy, but you apply this in such a way that you know there is a market. You know how to handle the people you are dealing with. This is a very important part of it, because they can either be the employer of a big company, or if you open your own store, they will be the customer.

ROBERT BROWN: So did they give you some practical experience in that while you were still in the college?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Very, very much. We were involved in so many things. We were not involved in everyday life. In other words, there was schooling all after, but—for instance, we were sent to Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, to make complete drawings, describe the Mexican exhibition. Was, at that time, traveling the whole world over. It was not because the people wanted to give us education in Mexican design or anything. They wanted to see how good we could describe all this thing for somebody else. We did this very well. [00:42:00] So it was a very good thing to do.

ROBERT BROWN: Your own designs that you were learning at Georg Jensen since 1939 were—it was very advanced.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, no. Thirty-nine, you are designing things to improve your skill to understand design. But you are not designing anything—

ROBERT BROWN: —on your own, no.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: You're not designing anything, because you are making, but there already have been design of other people.

ROBERT BROWN: Were those designs, as you look back on them, were they pretty advanced or conservative? Jensen was—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They were very mixed, because you have to remember, Georg Jensen was very advanced in many ways. He started around in 1900, and he cut a lot of the trimming off of old silver. But on the other hand, these designs he made, around 1905, that I come there to Georg Jensen, they were still using his design. So by that time, they were all designed. There were a few—I mean, I knew all the designers at the time, because my job was make the first piece of everything that were made between, shall we say, '51 or around there, and up to '54. So I knew all the designers there, and learned by that way how design was executed. I had a very difficult time, because many times, these designs were sketches, because all the designers of Georg Jensen, none of them were silversmiths. They were sculptors or painters. [00:44:00] People that would just have a name. For instance, I worked very close together with Prince Sigvard Bernadotte from Sweden. He was silver designer, but he couldn't make them. But he could design them, and I made his pieces.

ROBERT BROWN: You're talking about in the '50s?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: In the '50s, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: The older Jensen designs, though, were designed by silversmiths, for the most part?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They were designed by Georg Jensen.

ROBERT BROWN: As a silversmith?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: So there was some difficulty when you were taking the designs of someone who, himself, could not make silver? You sometimes had to make adaptations?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: The difficulty with this, that he took the design to me, and asked me to make the—because sometimes, you couldn't make it. So I had to translate that design into—then could be produced, without hurt their feelings.

ROBERT BROWN: But that was some of the things you were learning at the time?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: There was something. There was something.

ROBERT BROWN: How to adapt, compromise well.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Do all these things.

ROBERT BROWN: Be diplomatic.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: So I cannot complain about my whole adventure. Then there were, of course—then, in '52, I had—not me, but Georg Jensen had a very, very big silver show in Museum of Modern Art. I had almost made—I think 80 percent of this show, I made.

ROBERT BROWN: Really? You were perhaps the top—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: See, because I made all the first pieces, and they were in the show.

ROBERT BROWN: The first pieces of this new wave of design?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That's right. I made the first pieces of Henning Koppel. Henning Koppel. I made the first piece of [inaudible] Peterson. And what's—I forgot his name now, but he was an architect that had been in the [inaudible] and built a lot of things over there, and came back, and was very well-known. [00:46:11] What is his name? I can't remember, but anyway, all these people were part of my life.

ROBERT BROWN: I gotcha.

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ROBERT BROWN: Perhaps you can describe some of those people that you got to know a bit.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Many of these people that I was working for were well-known people within art, but none of them were silversmiths. One person I admire very much, a person named Harald Nielsen. Harald Nielsen, he was, at that time, the head designer for Georg Jensen, and a very fine person. Most of his designs were around in '35 or ['3]6, I think, like this. So he was very well-established when I came. He had many nice, nice things. Even during the war, when we couldn't get silver, he designed in stainless steel—coffee pots, things like that. I got to like his style, which was, shall we say, completely opposite Georg Jensen. Georg Jensen, he was a rich person, full of grapes, or full of life. Harald's were more, can be called, straight up and down, but still very beautiful design. I remember him very well. Then there were—

ROBERT BROWN: Would you discuss things with him quite a lot?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, because, see, at that time, he had been established for many years. My discussions coming into something were, for instance, Jorgen Jensen, which was a son of Georg Jensen. He was designer out there. His pieces—he would come, and we would sit down and discuss. [00:02:02] Something like Sigvard Bernadotte. This was a prince from Sweden. I had done most of all the things he had designed—I made at least the first piece. But since he was not a silversmith, he has to be guided in such a way that the pieces could be made. Not only could technically they could be made, but he has to look at cost, too. He can't help you make a piece that so many men are making out there unbelievably [ph]. So even if you work in silver, you have to be careful at the time. Don't run up.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he amenable to your suggestions?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: As a matter of fact, I once made a water pitcher for him. That one, with a sign, like an iron, when you iron clothing. I made the first one, and then he was angry, and he said, "Turn it upside down." So what I did, I took the word out of it and just left and I made an upside down. Doing this, we got a very beautiful pitcher out of. That one, I can remember very, very well, that we made that. He was, by the way, a very friendly person. I come to like him very much.

ROBERT BROWN: He was very approachable, even though a prince?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Then there was another person that was called Arno Malinowski. He was quite a fantastic fellow. He will come, on his riding horse, in every morning, with black riding trousers on, and boots. [00:04:02] He would dress so you couldn't find a piece of dust on his clothing. But no matter [inaudible] what he stood for. All his design, again, is very, very particular. I worked together with him for quite a long time. He made—

ROBERT BROWN: Those are much more complex forms.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: They seem to have some folk elements in them—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: He designed both jewelry and a few pieces of hollowware. So I had that. But the person I worked—can we say, helped most in breaking through, was Henning Koppel.

ROBERT BROWN: Henning Koppel.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. Henning Koppel, he made a completely new style in Georg Jensen. It was more sweeping forms. There was much more life in his silver, without it be decorated. He was sculptural, 100 percent sculptural. He couldn't even make a drawing. He would make a drawing with a piece of charcoal, and then it was up to you to either take the inner line, the middle line, or the outside line. If it were wrong, then couldn't you see it with another side, and if they were right, of course they were his lines that were right. All his pieces, I made them.

ROBERT BROWN: Was it difficult working with him?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Sometimes. I can tell you this. They were quite an experience. They were not easy, let me put it that way.

ROBERT BROWN: Were these men—were they on the payroll, or how were they paid?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, they were paid good. [00:06:00] They were kings. They were kings.

ROBERT BROWN: Because it was from that source that Jensen had traditionally gotten its new designs?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They were more than that. All of these people were well-known people in their own field before they came to Georg Jensen. They were the top-notch. Another one, for instance, was Magnus Stephensen. This was our architect that had been many years in Japan, and designed schools, homes, and buildings there. He made buildings that could withstand earthquake to so many degrees, all these things. He was very well-known over the whole world. His influence was Japanese. All his designs were in such a way that got that one could see he had been there. But he, of course, he couldn't make the—so I made all his pieces, too.

ROBERT BROWN: This represented a new departure for Jensen.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This, right.

ROBERT BROWN: You said when you came there—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They were mostly Georg Jensen, with grapes, leaves, and things like this.

ROBERT BROWN: Forty-year-old designs by the time you came.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That's right. But you can still say one thing. It is this. It is still the old Georg Jensen silver that sells today. The new one, I don't think they make money on it.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean this?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This kind of thing.

ROBERT BROWN: Those things that you developed in the early '50s with these designers are the standard things that sell?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: These days—

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you suppose they sell?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, they don't sell.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, they don't sell?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, no. Let me put it this way. These sell, but it is still George Jensen's old design that—

ROBERT BROWN: —is the standard?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Are the standard. [00:08:00]

ROBERT BROWN: That sell.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: From 1900.

ROBERT BROWN: A bit of decoration. More decorated than most of these.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Right.

ROBERT BROWN: So that, in fact, this period of these designers didn't bear a lot of fruit, is that correct?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They did.

ROBERT BROWN: It did? There were breakthroughs, but—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: There were breakthroughs. They made the advertisement, did all the shows, and make the whole company the leader of the world within silver. So you can't say they lost money, but they didn't catch on as the same magnitude that Georg Jensen, he was doing. Even this, his number two set, his coffee set with lion legs you can still go down and find in New York today. It is still there for sale.

ROBERT BROWN: That sounds like a fairly conservative piece.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, I wouldn't say they're conservative. They're very warm, very—can be called—it is a piece of silver that you will always admire. It can go in all kinds of surrounding.

ROBERT BROWN: This sounds—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is number two, that one there.

ROBERT BROWN: That looks to be an adaptation, almost, of an 18th-century design.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That one was designed in 1904.

ROBERT BROWN: So really, the situation at Jensen is not that unlike the situation in the silver company in the United States?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, no.

ROBERT BROWN: Where, when they brought in designers, they brought prestige and exhibitions, but what they're still relying on are the designs of 1895.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That's right. Yeah, this is right. So whole that area there were very interesting for me. [00:10:01] Then, of course—

ROBERT BROWN: You were a bit younger than most of these designers?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Absolutely, yeah. Oh, yeah. Some of them were even my students. They tried to learn, and then had to sit down and—you know. They didn't understand it. Then, of course, in 1954, I come here, to the craft school, in Rochester.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you glad to leave?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: In the beginning, I didn't want to leave, for many reasons. First of all, I didn't know a word in English. Second, I had a pretty good job. But they kept writing letters, coming and coming, so finally, I said, yes, I can always go, and I can go back again.

ROBERT BROWN: Who was this who was—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: There were many people. I got letters from Harold Brennan, of course.

ROBERT BROWN: Head of the—director of the school.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I got letters from—what was the name? Keating. You know? Senator Keating.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, really?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. And I got letters from Mrs. Vanderbilt.

ROBERT BROWN: Mrs. Webb?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Mrs. Webb, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: The patron of the school.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Then, finally, I think, it was Jack Prip's father that came and saw me in my apartment. I remember he came one Sunday morning. I couldn't understand who was calling that early, and it was Jack Prip's father that came.

ROBERT BROWN: He was now an established—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: He had his own company in Copenhagen. But he had been here, worked for many years in the United States, and he came and looked me up. Then, finally, I said, "Yes, I'm coming."

ROBERT BROWN: What argument did he use for you to come here?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Number one, he put up—he was getting old, and he wanted Jack Prip to come home. [00:12:01]

ROBERT BROWN: And he thought if you came here—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, then—

ROBERT BROWN: —his son would go back home?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. There was a lot of fun during this. So then—

ROBERT BROWN: So you left an established, comfortable position?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, yeah. I kept my—as a matter of fact, I had a beautiful apartment in Copenhagen, which was very difficult to get, because it was just after the war, and everybody would sign up and all this here. I kept it for five years. Then, finally, by court action, was thrown out, because you are not allowed to have an apartment, even if you pay for it every month.

ROBERT BROWN: If you don't live there?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: If you don't live there.

ROBERT BROWN: Before you left, were you already married or anything like that?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: So you already had—but you decided, finally, you would do it?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: At Georg Jensen, how far could you have gone? You were head of the—if you had stayed there.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: You can't say how much, what you will end up. I doubt I would have been there for much longer anyway, because at that time, I was already starting to make freelance design. However, I could not design in silver. They would be in French on my job. So I chose to design other things. I have a very—starting to get a great number of people I was designing for. They would be for lamps, to paper baskets, or things like this. Here, you would call it industrial design. This is, again, for one of the teacher's I had in the two-year school, as I mentioned before. His name was Erik Herlow. [00:14:01]

[Audio Break.]

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Erik is spelled E-R-I-K, and Herlow, H-E-R-L, and O with a line on it, and then W. This man, he was an architect. And he was involved in many fine design projects. Most of the time, he would take a redesigned thing, that already was designed, simplify it, and make it more beautiful. He was a great person in many ways, because he would tackle things that were far beyond what a designer was more country like Denmark like that [ph]. For instance, I think, at one of the World's Fair, he designed, and he designed several big exhibitions in England.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean the World's Fair in New York?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Not in New York. I think they were, at that time, some other place. I can't remember. I know he made several big exhibitions in England. After he came back from these fantastic things, then he started to teach at the school. Unfortunately, he didn't live for many years. But he wrote a book. They were the book I was looking for. I couldn't find. They were called *Good Forms*, and what he explained, what goes into or makes a good form, both functional and aesthetic. I liked him very much. He had great influence on me.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he? In what way? As a teacher?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Both as a teacher and as, shall we say, ideal person, because he was involved in so many things. [00:16:05] I think it is, but I—okay, I design silver, but I design silver in a way that I look into all possibility. I just don't sit down and design lines. I ask the question, what is the piece supposed to do? Who is it going to be given to? What is the occasion? What is the function of the piece? Is it a thing for use, this form for display? And all these things. He taught me all of these things. It was fun at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: At that advanced level, was your teaching fairly formal, or would this be in close conversation?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: We were only 12 students.

ROBERT BROWN: So it wasn't a formal lecture, then?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: We had, I think we had [inaudible]. We had Herlow. We had—what was his name? Bert Rasmussen. There were two or three that were floating for these 12 students. We had our own setup and everything. They couldn't be better. We were taken good care of. Best of the whole thing, you must remember that there were—the school provided all the funds from the industry. We couldn't pay so much as a single cent. Everything that we asked for, we'll get. They were wonderful.

ROBERT BROWN: Those last two years you were in Denmark, 1952 to ['5]4, teaching at your old school, right? [00:18:01] The School for Arts and Crafts.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I was teaching there, because there had always been customers that—the head man of Georg Jensen silversmith was teaching at that school. Since I moved into the model department, then it was my job to go to the school and supervise that.

ROBERT BROWN: And you taught design?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I taught design there.

ROBERT BROWN: At the same time, you were taking designs in your own work from these non-silversmiths?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: How did you teach—did that affect the way you taught back at your school?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yes. I tried to teach them in such a way that there were—I gave all—let me put it that way. I gave all the things that these people, non-silversmiths, were thinking in a way that they should have been given. Because, see, teachers were artists, but couldn't produce. One thing, there is this—make thing that looks good, but is very difficult to produce.

ROBERT BROWN: So you would translate this to students who were trying to learn how to produce?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: In the craft school.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Because they are supposed to go out and make the piece.

ROBERT BROWN: In general, did that mean making them simpler? Taking the design, say, of Renadato or—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, it doesn't mean always simpler, but it means that there were—there can be a certain line that's very difficult to make in silver. Either you cannot get the iron inside, or there are too many soldering on or something like this, then would try to eliminate many of these processes.

ROBERT BROWN: To conform to what the tools could do? To conform—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: To make a stronger piece?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Not a stronger piece. [00:20:00] Most of the time, could in [ph] time.

ROBERT BROWN: Time?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Time. Hours. Because it is the important part of it, because they can't help you sit down and make a piece, and then you are spending maybe 50 hours. Somebody has to pay for it in the end. Especially when you work in a company, where it is not the person, the self, that eats the money up, but because, on top of his salary, there has to be many other salaries. That makes it difficult.

ROBERT BROWN: Tell me, when you came here, then, in '54, did you find that some of the assumptions were fairly impractical? Because weren't there a lot of students coming in the craft school here who simply thought of being on their own, independent artists, who wouldn't have to take into account how long it would take to make something?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, no. It was just the opposite. No. I came in a time where there were many people in the craft school that were considerably older than students are today. They all had families. They were, most of them, GI, at least on GI Bills.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, yes. Okay. So they were interested, then—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They were only interested in learning how to make money. That was the main aim. They were maybe not that artist-oriented, but at least they knew how to make it, and they were very concerned about making a thing that could sell. So at that time there, there was great understanding from learning to be a professional. Later, here, the whole shift that was in the '60s, when everything has to be art. [00:22:05] Let me put it that way. There was a trend to everything should have a feeling, or a person should express themselves 100 percent. If they were not completely new, or his idea, he wouldn't even accept it. By doing this, get the thing

out of hand. They were more and more crazy, because they were very difficult, and live on an assumption that you have to create everything. The world had been art for a long time, and God heaven's sakes, what could the man in [inaudible] that make the design wheels? What should he do if he wants to create a new wheel each time? We can all add a little to it, but believe me, the most have been made before. Now, I'm not saying this man cannot be creative, but I'm saying, if men are creative, be sure you are not just plain doing things that are crazy because you want to say, "I made this, and nobody has made it. Everybody has to like it. This is what I want." Instead of going the other way, and designing things that other people like because they are going to buy them. They are not you that are going to buy them. So on that assumption, that man can exist. Why is the artist always be hungry? Most people grow up with that crazy thing in their mind, the artist, the craftsman, is one that should suffer all his life, instead of just he sits down and design things for other people. He doesn't need to prostitute himself. He can go very far, but he has to know where to stop, so he doesn't lose the customer. [00:24:04] He makes a product, and that product is unique, because the person doesn't want to buy a mass product, as he were going to a store, as he weren't going to a craftsman.

ROBERT BROWN: Uniqueness is not necessarily the same as craziness?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, no. You know what I'm talking about. I'm talking about this Pop art. You put it down on the floor, step on it four times, kick it up in the ceiling, and a little of the shoe color is fading off, and you call it art. We have seen example after how people, they put paint down on the road, and take a motorbike and drive over it four times, and then they cut it up in small paintings, and then they think they're artists.

ROBERT BROWN: And there were tendencies to do something analogous to that in silver?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

ROBERT BROWN: On the other hand, these first students you had here, they were a little too cautious, right?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They were very cautious.

ROBERT BROWN: Trying to save time and make them money.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: And they would sell.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. I would say one has to have a mixture of these two things.

ROBERT BROWN: So part of your task, when you first came here, was to lead them away from—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They were leading away from—then, of course, they get beyond. Now we are trying to lead them back again.

ROBERT BROWN: But those first years, the students weren't too interested in listening about design?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They were interested to the extent that they could understand. In other words, they would make nice things, down to earth, but they wouldn't go beyond that.

ROBERT BROWN: So they were even more conservative than, say, a Danish student who'd come through the apprenticeship?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Absolutely. Absolutely. Absolutely.

ROBERT BROWN: They were more comparable to the—well, some of them, like the old workmen, say, at Jensen, who had been doing similar things for years?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. They were all the people, and they wanted—and they made this—they were at the time where America House was selling blossom up to a fantastic—they have this great store in New York. [00:26:12] Every three weeks, we would take the station wagon and drive down, and they were full to the—they couldn't be stuffed one more thing in. They were all made of the students here.

ROBERT BROWN: Did the reputation spread pretty quickly, then?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Very quickly. Very quickly. It was amazing to see how it caught on.

ROBERT BROWN: You came in, and Jack Prip had been here?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: He had been, in the meantime, going all through Hitchcock, the manufacturer of belts. So

he was going over there.

ROBERT BROWN: So you were the sole teacher?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, there was another person, called Larry Copeland. He was teaching jewelry. But he left and came down to Oneida.

ROBERT BROWN: For another manufacturer?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. At that time, there were many of the faculty that walked into the industry, because the industry needed new blood, one can say. At that time, there were very few that knew anything about design in the industry. They knew how to make a machine, but they didn't know how to make things that were nice-looking or things like that.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you rather struck by the state of design in American industry? Was it pretty low, in your opinion?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: In my opinion, they were very low. Of course, there were good things. I'm not saying that there was not good design, but I'm saying, they were a terrible experience, go to stores, like Sears, Woolworths, where everything were—there were kitchenware, you know [inaudible] without any form sense, either functional or aesthetic. [00:28:08] They were just put together. Rivets that were coming out of the side. Performance, for instance, strainers were—the holes were just put down in such a way that there was no pattern or anything. Lines were just plain [inaudible] in their coffee pots. They were just—you could use a tomato can and put a spout on it, something like this. They were fantastic, during—in the '50s, '54. Then, later, it got completely crazy with the design. They were—you saw radio design as they were flying machines. The radio, of course, is a stationary thing, and doesn't need to fly. Then you have cars, with the fins—they were in the '50s. God heaven's sakes, there were fins that were bigger than the car, and they couldn't really not fly away fast anyway, and they could sit two and a half person in them. They were a fantastic thing, to see all this.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you discouraged in some ways?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: In a sense, because we had designed cars during the war, where we were placing the minimum of engine in a car for the sale of gasoline. There were some that were made only with one drawer. For instance, I designed a car that was two doors in, but the front wheel was wider apart than the back wheel, so they could turn easier on a narrow road. [00:30:02] And I made a fantastic discovery, that American cars all have a different distance between the light in the front, the front light, instead there could be a standard distance between the light. Someone could judge the car from far away. But if it have many different distance, you can't judge the car, because you will, for instance, have a Jeep coming out, which has a very headlight—very narrow, and you will think that it's much further away, because you'll judge them with an able [ph] car, where the car is farther between them. Now, all of these things, the American designer, he didn't care about. For instance, signal light, they were another thing I discovered, and I analyzed this. Signal light, of course, should sit on the side of the car, and not close to the license plate, because the closer it is to the middle, the less a person can read the signal light when they stand on a corner. But they were all placed around the license plate. All these fantastic stupidities that were made at this time. Speaking about license plate, the gas tank's opening, by many case, is over the license plate. But the reason [ph] [inaudible] the car speeded up from the gas station, then half of the gasoline will run out, because there are spring [inaudible] and it's so soft, and the rare end [ph] would sink down, and it would spill the gasoline out. Instead, if I have a gas vent that was higher up, for instance, close to the window, whatever—you know, three to four feet from the car. But they were all things we learned to analyze. [00:32:01] So you understand? We get our information not only for silver, and for many other aspects of life. They were a lot of fun, these days. They were. They were exciting.

ROBERT BROWN: The very stupidity of much American design taught you a great deal, did it?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I would say this. I can remember this. Take a listen to this. This is a very good thing. In the '50s, there was developed a door handle that was completely round. They were made of aluminum. Sitting one over there. There's sitting one in each bathroom, the whole United States. There are many factories make billions of these door handles. They're all round. If you're in the bathroom and you close the door, and you have cream on your hand, you can't open the door. The telephone can call outside. You have to grab a towel for it to open. Instead of, if the manufacturer analyzed what a door handle is supposed to do, open a door. He maybe liked the round shape, but he could have made an oval. That way, he would have kept the roundness, but he would be able to open the door. Still, today, there is nobody that objected to it, and this is unbelievable. We have seen some things coming through now, but there are many other things. For instance, we're all aware of telephones. For some reason or another, they have a cord that coiled up like this, coil it the whole way, for people can stretch this damn, stupid telephone as they walk around. [00:34:01] It is unbelievable somebody not have figured out it will be easier to have the coil running around on a wheel, so that you just draw it out. You get the same length, but now you have—you're not using the telephone. The cord is coiled around on this wheel that

is sitting on the bottom of the telephone. They will probably more work better on a wall telephone, on a wall. But you still have this lousy cord hanging around for every telephone, and they are usually full of grease and everything. I'm mostly talking about the kitchen telephone, because nobody there even cleaned them, because the telephone will get involved in all this, because the cord is not straight. This is another thing. There are many things that are still going that way. I think there may be a change now. Some order will be given to it.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you find that this perhaps had dulled—the students you met here in America, that their perceptions of improving design were dulled as a result?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, I don't think—no, I don't think—

ROBERT BROWN: Being surrounded by all these poor designs?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I do not think this. I think that you can find excellent designs, too.

ROBERT BROWN: But it was possible—let's say, given the average student—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is something else. Maybe they didn't have the right upbringing, or the right environment to grow up in.

ROBERT BROWN: It was possible, when you got them as students, to concentrate them on—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: We did.

ROBERT BROWN: —how to do it better?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. The whole craft school was standing for that. We were given a lecture about furniture that was supposed to work as furniture, sit in.

ROBERT BROWN: You were given lectures? You mean faculty would lecture?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Every faculty member would lecture about managing of design, because they were very valuable, give this thing out for to the student. [00:36:05] This, I can remember. Again, you know, I think where I was most shocked is with the number of items a man could buy. In other words, you will be better off to have half of the item, but then make this half good. Especially Woolworths. I could go for hours in there, just in my head, redesign all these things that were laying on the counter. People will buy these fantastic ugly [ph] things, instead of—and then they will use them for a short time, and throw them away, instead of buying one good thing, and then keep it for the rest of their life, appreciate. It will be cheaper, and more value to the person. But I think the goal in people now, they want better quality, they want things—function. They don't want anything that can go wrong. So the customer, today, is better-educated, has better eyes for it, and he is very much aware of if there is too high a profit on the item. So all of these things, they work to the better.

ROBERT BROWN: In your earlier years of teaching here, did you concentrate on function, would you say, in designing for use? [00:38:02]

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I can't say that, because I was designing in silver, and you have more freedom there. In other words, it is not always a silver object. Has to be 100 percent function. Because it has a mission to be very beautiful, and display some kind of standard or attitude or something like this.

ROBERT BROWN: It's a luxury?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: It is a luxury item. So you can't—you have a little more freedom there. But it doesn't mean, at that time, shied away for talk about other things that have to have function. I think it is sometimes easier to teach design that way, 100 function, because that way, it clarifies for other people—take, for instance—you can go another way around. I designed ice water pitcher. Now, all ice water pitchers that are made up to now, the ice comes out first when you pour. There's a big company that makes paper towels, and even advertise how fast it can mop it up. Instead of going the other way around—don't support the paper towel company. Support the designer that wants to design a new ice water pitcher. What I did, I made a pitcher that was almost straight in front, with a small fanny in the back. What I do now, there's this—I rely on—ice is lighter than water. So I pour. [00:40:00] The water will come out of the spout. Now the fanny is the highest point, so the ice *whoosh* from the opening, and into the bottom of the pitcher, or go up there. This is why the ice is on the ocean, lake, in the wintertime. They float up there. This, because people sit down and analyze—I did, at least. But all the other pitchers, does everybody think about it? How many handles on pots and pans is completely wrong? You can't even hang onto them. You see, even today, flatware be made of gold metal and plastic handle. I never heard such a thing. Today, when we use dishwasher, you know very well the dishwasher detergent, they go in between the plastic and the middle. It looks maybe good the two first days you have it. But after 10 washings, the plastic starts—it shrinks a little. The opening gets full of dark things sitting in, in the crevices, and they don't work.

Instead of think of them—they worked all right in old days. You had a maid that was then put down the soap water, take them up, rinse them, and take an apron or a cloth and dry them right away. A dishwasher, the temperature is so high, you can't help it. This is, again, one must sit down and think about.

ROBERT BROWN: In silver, a precious thing and luxury object, you would have the freedom, because of the client, or the potential—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: You can be more free there.

ROBERT BROWN: They would take something that was different?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They would take something that gave them prestige. I would put it like this, because many times, the customer, they like conservative silver piece, because they have the money, they are thinking conservative, and they don't want to go too far ahead of the whole game. [00:42:10]

ROBERT BROWN: And yet they were willing to accept some innovations—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, we can do this, but it is not done at their—what shall we say?—like abstract painting. They want control.

ROBERT BROWN: But they would, in silver—that person would buy that water pitcher with what you've called the fanny?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. I still say, there's still control, and it is not—

ROBERT BROWN: But you would hope, or you hoped when you first came to America, that such design would eventually influence the plastic design?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They have. As a matter of fact, they have influenced—you can see. That is important in everything. Even today, you can even buy plastic flatware that looks nice today. You couldn't do this 10 years ago. They were just plain—I don't know [inaudible]. You can buy very, very nice things. I think they're coming—they will come.

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ROBERT BROWN: This is the second interview with Hans Christensen, December 3, 1982.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: I wanted to ask you for a moment—you've been in exhibitions from the very—in Denmark, and then from almost the very day you got here. You've been exhibiting very steadily. For you, what has been the—have the exhibitions been a fairly important part of your career?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I wouldn't call it important part. I think it's nice to show things, and then see what other people are showing. But looking at a more economic part of it, I don't think I get a return value to the struggles it takes to show things. In other words, very few things I have sold through an exhibition. There's a certain value in showing things. I, for instance, over the last, I would say, 35 years, have shown in the neighborhood between five to eight shows a year, but I do this because I am into education. During this, then I expose myself to maybe students that will come up here under my guidance. But personally, I don't think I'm getting much for shows. It's the wrong people that go to the shows. It is people that already are associated with a craft or art. [00:02:00] It is not the buying people. It is the making people.

ROBERT BROWN: Do they already know about your work?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Either they know about it, or they are at least not the buyer.

ROBERT BROWN: They're not the buyers?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They're not the buyers.

ROBERT BROWN: But do you learn much from your fellow craftsmen when you go—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: There will always be an inter-dialogue between other people, either by talking to them direct, or seeing other people's work. This is why I go in museums and try to see other things. That way, exhibitions be very good. But doing—I will say this—exhibitions are, many times, understood, because museums, galleries, they think they do the craftsman a favor. I looked at it another way around. I think it is the craftsman that does the museum a favor of showing the piece, because it is, by no means, inexpensive, a

show in these fairs. I'm not talking about the small fee that is asked, usually \$10 or \$15, or \$25, for enter. That is what I'm not talking about. You have to make a piece that is suitable for that exhibition. It is not just a piece you take out of your own collection. It is made because of that particular show.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean, knowing what people will see it, or the kind of—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No. You are—

ROBERT BROWN: —building?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: You're dealing—no. You're dealing with three judges, and you are trying to, if you want to win a prize, work up against these judges, so you have yourself a chance. This you cannot do if you just take a piece there [ph]. [00:04:00] So there is a completely—so not only are you making a special piece for that show, but you are taking time that could have been used to make another thing that was for sale. This, of course, is not so important for people that have no sale, but for me, that always work on commission, about 18 months behind schedule—not behind schedule, because I always deliver on time, but at least people ask me more than a year ago what to make—then they're difficult for me, and very expensive for me, to take the time to make a piece for the show, but I do. But as I say, I do it because I'm into education, and because of this, I have to expose my work to students, and that way, make a contribution for the school.

ROBERT BROWN: I see. Is there even, sometimes, suggestions from the school that you exhibit?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Let me put it that way.

ROBERT BROWN: Do they feel it's a good thing for you—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They feel it is a good thing, and I have to report back every year what show I'm in.

ROBERT BROWN: In a sense, it not only shows potential students what is being done here, but it's also some advertising for the school?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Absolutely. Absolutely.

ROBERT BROWN: Why have you worked on commissions, I guess practically since you've come to this country, as opposed to making many things and then putting them into a place to be sold?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: First of all, I'm working with hollowware. Hollowware is very time-consuming, and it is bigger pieces of work. So I limit myself to, at the highest, 20 pieces a year. It means that you have to make time for these 20 pieces. [00:06:06] It is almost two every month, where you strain yourself to the outer limit. Because of that, it can't help I am starting selling to galleries or things like this, and I will get too many customers, and I can't fulfill my obligation to them. So I don't advertise. I try almost to hide as much as possible. People that come to me they say, "Can you make this or this?" and I say yes, it is very easy for me to say yes, because I know I am not going to deliver this year. When the time comes—

ROBERT BROWN: —it will be ready?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: It has to be ready. Then I'm [inaudible] for trying.

ROBERT BROWN: But for you to show in a shop, you might not sell everything either? There would be—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: These shops might do something then that is just purely speculation, and that is another thing, realizing this, because I work as a craftsman, and I make a piece that is suitable for a particular place. Now, if I just make a piece that I like, and hope other people will like, it is not a suitable place they're going into. I deal with building, I deal with personality, I deal with if there is a certain occasion, and all of these things go into me, and I design around these things.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this true in Denmark, too, before you came here?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Not so much after, because in Denmark, I was usually with Georg Jensen.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure. But did some things, in addition—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. They will do the two, and then they will not meet every part of—they will have their designer get involved in certain things. But I did make a few pieces before, because it was a part of my schooling. [00:08:04] We had to do these things for it be used to a work, scrap the idea, work into what people want. Because I feel that it is very, very important that a craftsman fulfill the mission he has to do in today's world. We are living in a mass society that, in a sense, is extremely hard on the personal life, because we can't

end up with all be gray numbers. Having the same thing, don't have any form of identity. It is why the craftsman can come in and can make something special for that family. We cannot all build the house we want. We buy a shelf, and we fill it with things we like. It doesn't mean we don't buy mass product, but you have to have a mixture of it, because it is the neighbor's house is just identical to yours.

ROBERT BROWN: So your kind of work is able—you're able to enhance, give them something that's tailored to their particular personality and—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I shoot to, because that way—why do you think people are spending tremendous—just for a shirt. You can buy a shirt if there are many factories of a thousand resources putting out. You can buy them for \$12, \$15. People spend three times this amount to have a special shirt made for them, so they know they're the only one to have it. Okay, good for them. There are people that have big hair. There are people that have long hair. There are people that have eye patch for an eye. There is nothing wrong with the eye. It's just for identity.

ROBERT BROWN: For personal—self—sense of one's—[00:10:02]

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Some of them, of course, idiotic, but this—

ROBERT BROWN: You find this work is much more rewarding, not only economically, but—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I feel they are—

ROBERT BROWN: I noticed, in '55, you had an exhibition at Shop One, the well-known cooperative gallery at that time in Rochester. Did you continue to have exhibitions there, or were you a partner with them at any time?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I'm a partner of them. So that one there, advertisement company, I never put a single thing after that in Shop One, but they will get the commission for me.

ROBERT BROWN: Through Shop One?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Through Shop One.

ROBERT BROWN: But the same thing applied to Shop One as applied to other exhibitions, or selling on speculation?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: We wanted to talk a bit, I think, with regard to some of your drawings for silver. Maybe in looking at those, you can discuss a little bit what your intention was, and for what occasions they might have been. I think some of the—the first ones go back to when you were—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Forties.

ROBERT BROWN: —still a student in Denmark. This first one we're looking at.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Forty-three.

ROBERT BROWN: Can you describe that? 1943.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: In '43.

ROBERT BROWN: You were in the School for Arts and Crafts, still, at that time?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: In Copenhagen.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: It is funny enough, I still have this drawing. It is a small beer bottle opener and cigar clipper, all in one. You have to realize, in '43, that idea was maybe not that spread out as it is today. This is made in the more functional way, and it is a decorative way. It was part of, at that time, men always were wearing a vest, and could slide in—this very thin, slender can opener, or beer opener, could fit in the vest pocket, without displaying a big bulk—buckle. [00:12:10] I did this design in '43. Then the—

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have a regard for style in this? It's a very simple, rectangular, functional form.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: It was purely functional. Purely functional. The same thing goes here for salt and pepper. They were made in such a way that they were one unit, but press a certain button—

ROBERT BROWN: Press a button, and it would open one or the other?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: One or the other, or both at the same time.

ROBERT BROWN: They're in one case?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: In one case.

ROBERT BROWN: They're, again, extremely functional. Just a cubical form, with milled edges for taking the top off the salt or the pepper. Was this kind of pure functionalism stressed in your schooling, or was this exceptional?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Absolutely. No, no. See, what happened is this. You have to realize, you have to first learn to think. Thinking is much better related when you can talk about. We're always forced to never think about the function, 100 percent function. You're talking about abstract. The faculty will not know, and the student is playing, because we can discuss abstract for 24 hours and don't even get closer. But function, you are nailed down to either they work or not. It doesn't mean a thing cannot be beautiful manufactured, because we all know the old phrase, form follows function. They can certainly be just as beautiful during this, but it was purely made out for learners to think, to analyze things, to realize that you must accept a certain project, and then write this letter down to yourself, what that particular thing is going to do. [00:14:26]

ROBERT BROWN: You had to write out—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Write out. For instance, okay, let's take a single thing. We can take a coffee cup. Now, a coffee cup has a long list of things that particular coffee cup must do. They start, okay, you must be able to hold it in one hand, graceful. It has to have an opening that is not too big, so the heat loss—

ROBERT BROWN: —is kept to a minimum.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Kept to a minimum. You have to have a lip that allows you to drink without dripping on both sides of your mouth. It cannot be bigger—it has to be big enough so you can drink graceful. If it's a very, very small opening, you have to tilt your neck completely back, and you cannot do this very graceful. All of these things, I think, have to be analyzed before you even go into the material you're going to make them. So you can see, if there is all of these things for a coffee pot, what is there for another object that may be much more complicated? That way, you learn to think. Then you go to the aesthetic part of it. It has to look beautiful, too. Now you must sit with this knowledge point, and make a drawing that is most beautiful. So this is—

ROBERT BROWN: What lay behind this—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This will lay behind it, these drawings here. [00:16:01]

ROBERT BROWN: Was the mechanism for the button—did you know how to do that, or did you learn that as you did that?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is part of your job of doing this. This is how it is done. Let me see. Let me go to '44.

ROBERT BROWN: That's the year you finished your apprenticeship and you were finished at the school.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Here, we see a coffee pot.

ROBERT BROWN: Is this done in school, or done for Jensen?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, this done in school. This done in school.

ROBERT BROWN: These forms are fairly traditional.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They're very traditional, because this is—now we are talking about '44. This is a year where there were very, very traditional things going on. People were living in—what can we say?—almost in—I hate to call it the past, but another way. There were certain style, and the people were dressed very straight up and down. Men will always have a hat on, and he would take the hat off if he were going in an elevator. Things like this were—

ROBERT BROWN: Society—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: —were very conservative.

ROBERT BROWN: This was at the end of the wartime?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That's right, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: So people tended to be conservative right then?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They did it for many reasons. They did it because they had so little to hang onto. They played it up to the extreme extent. People were, for instance—the women would wear the white gloves in the hand.

ROBERT BROWN: Anything to have something to hold onto.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: To hang onto.

ROBERT BROWN: It wasn't the time to plunge ahead into new things.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, no. They were very, very strict. I can remember this very, very—I can remember, for instance, the shirts getting shorter and shorter, because you couldn't, at that time, buy a shirt, so people ended up, they take the bottom part of the shirt and make new— [00:18:11]

ROBERT BROWN: A new collar?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Collar. For, you know, the way they say it. So they got shorter, shorter.

ROBERT BROWN: This is reflected in the form here, which is a pear shape. Eighteenth-century teapot shape. The materials—were you able, in Denmark, during the war, to get materials?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: You could do it, because they were not new material. In other words, people will sell their old silver—

ROBERT BROWN: To be made into—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: To making it into new. Because at that time, the silver business was booming. Most fantastic thing during the war, because they were the only thing you can buy. If you give a wedding gift, you couldn't buy anything, but you can say, "Okay, I have 24 pieces of flatware; make me a coffee service." Then we will do this, and then we will give it away.

ROBERT BROWN: Your drawings here, they're very detailed, very careful working drawings. This was your schooling?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is part of the schooling that was going on. Now, you see, we go into the '50s. The '50s, they were most revolving part of Danish design. It was a time that was exploding, because now the war was over. Everything was kind of new ways of look of life. The lines were loosening up. We could see, for instance, at that time, in the '50s, not only silver furniture and fabric were kind of explosion to the outer world, Danish design were well-known in this year, and had probably never been higher. They were the top years, and most of—if you go back in books, realize the top name in the design were all placed in Scandinavia at that time. [00:20:11]

ROBERT BROWN: In the early '50s?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Early '50s. Now you can see here, here is an ice water bucket, water pitcher. They are much more modern. The numbers, they are down on the right corner. These numbers on the drawing are part of identification of the particular drawing that entered a certain show.

ROBERT BROWN: You were entering exhibitions then?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. We were entering [inaudible]—I can't remember what they call them this here. They don't need to be exhibitions. It can be that they have been manufacturer that asked for design, and you send in your design, so you will not reveal your name in writing this particular thing.

ROBERT BROWN: They didn't even want your name, even if somebody were thinking of—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No. Because what happened is this. Many of these manufacturers within craft, whether they were in silver or in stainless steel or something like that, they will make a competition, print it in the newspaper, and then everybody could apply. Therefore, there is this number.

ROBERT BROWN: Because they might know you by name, and that would give you an unfair advantage?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: Wasn't it in their interest to be able just to contact you?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Well, then they can't have the competition.

ROBERT BROWN: No, they couldn't.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: So you have to take either—they can come to me as a private person, but if you print it in a newspaper, then you have to make it open for everybody.

ROBERT BROWN: That was the law, or that was the custom?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I think it was the custom, and I think this is something now you have what are called equal opportunity. [00:22:03] If you want to give a job opening, you have to put your advertisement in 20 newspapers for a certain—it's the same thing there.

ROBERT BROWN: Similar.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Similar there, with the drawings. So you can see—

ROBERT BROWN: The form here, from what do you think you derived that form? Tapers downward. It has this very powerful form of a handle, which is—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: By having this, you have to have a thing, now you enter this thing. There's a certain kind of—get people to stop, look at the drawing. So you have to use strong lines, and at the same time, it has to be useful. You can see here how the top part is placed in such a way to catch the eyes, so only the water comes out. At the same time, this very strong forward-moving line, that kind of cradled the pouring part of the vessel. This is—

ROBERT BROWN: You can't think of any particular influence on you, when you designed that?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No. I know they were far advanced, because you can see, within the two years, the previous drawing, it's completely changed.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, moving from that derivative form to this.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Here, we have a tea strainer, and again, there's a small line for our competitions. There must have been, because I can see I have been—

ROBERT BROWN: You have a description of—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Description of what they're supposed to do, and—yeah. So that one here is certainly a competition.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, the tea strainer—these lips that rise up, are these for holding it?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is for holding. If you want to move the whole cup, you are able to grab—only take the strainer out. So therefore, you don't have dripping all over, because that contains the tea. [00:24:01]

ROBERT BROWN: This is another exhibition drawing?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: You were at Jensen all those years?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I was at Jensen all these years. At that time—

ROBERT BROWN: But you could occasionally—you would enter competitions as well?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, yeah. I would do this, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: That was allowed?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: An employee there.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, sure. There are two drawings of this tea strainer. One I kept for myself, and another one that was entered in the competition, so I know what I was doing. You can see they write our name on one of

them, and another one is only marked by—

ROBERT BROWN: With a number.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: By the number. Then we just added the name on there. The same thing, we go into a beauty set here, which contains a mirror that can be held in the hand, standing by itself, or laying down on the table. You can still, as the matter were, free your hands if you are doing any kind for beautification for your hair or face or whatever it is. Here, it can stand up, and you can still look in. Here, it can lay down, and you can look down on the table. At the same time, then the nice holding in the hand. Again, very, very modern, and this—

ROBERT BROWN: Very streamlined. Very graceful, isn't it?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Here, it goes together with the brush that goes with it. There might be the powder.

ROBERT BROWN: The powder, or the compact.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Compact. You can see a very unusual hinge, because they're very difficult to put the hinges around without—

ROBERT BROWN: —without violating the roundness. The hinge is inside.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: The hinge is inside, that's right.

ROBERT BROWN: These forms are very crisp, but they're also curvilinear, aren't they? They're soft, and they're also very rather hard, could you say? [00:26:02]

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I would say that I wouldn't make them so hard today. I would be more on the softer side.

ROBERT BROWN: But here, you have a combination? The angularity, at least in profile, but in section, they are generally curvilinear.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They were very, very dynamic pieces. Here, we have a small casserole from '53. I think this—let's see.

ROBERT BROWN: This has a pouring spout, hasn't it?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They were made in such a way that the handles were put up in a certain angle.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, why is that? Handle coming up off at an angle, going up.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: The reason for it, for counterbalance, the weight. You're holding it in your hand. So they have no influence going downward. In other words, you hold this like in old day, when you were drinking with a well. You have a spoon that was coming down, and the handle was almost coming into the center.

ROBERT BROWN: A ladle?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: A ladle.

ROBERT BROWN: This is sort of like a ladle?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: Would this be easier? You'd have to grip it?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: You have to grip it and balance. You hold it like this here, and then pour.

ROBERT BROWN: The usual position.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. You can see the side handle is on. So in other words, you are not pouring forward, you are pouring sideways, that way here.

ROBERT BROWN: The spout is on the side, and the handle—the piece is down below the handle?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. Here, we have a whole coffee set. Again, very strong. They would make—I can remember this—they would make a stainless steel competition. I can remember this very closely.

ROBERT BROWN: Was the intention that they'd be manufactured later?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That's right, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Is that why the handles are simply collared and not soldered, because it was to be done in steel?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They were supposed to be done in steel. [00:28:01]

ROBERT BROWN: And pinned to riveting?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, that's right.

ROBERT BROWN: What is the material of the handle? A hardwood?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I think they were laminated wood at that time. Plastic were not out.

ROBERT BROWN: Again, we see the same combination of curving forms with angular ones. This is on the eve of your coming to the United States.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Just before. Yeah, just before. Here, we have an old piece. So far I can recall, that one here was a customer that wanted a piece that could fit into a collection they already had, because so far I can remember—I'm sure I'm right—I made that one for somebody that had a collection of old silver.

ROBERT BROWN: So even though it's 1953, it has that—it's a creamer, or a pitcher, with a helmet shape of the Neoclassical style.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh huh [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: But that was an exception then?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: It was an exception, that one, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: At that time.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Now we come in, here, to the—again, this is a very small, very functional thing. They are one of these small silver box that contains saccharin. They were made in such a way that you can just push them, and they allow one of them to drop out.

ROBERT BROWN: At one time?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: At one time.

ROBERT BROWN: Pills, little sweetener pills, saccharin?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. They were '53. Then we go—

ROBERT BROWN: These pieces that are sort of cases, very often the top slopes at one direction or another. [00:30:01]

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. You see, this is again—you can see that form there. These two lines that go through at the same time, so you can take two fingers and press there, and then flip open. Now, if I do there, then it stays closed. This is wider and bigger here. They're right—that slope is on certain [inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: So this slope here, to close the whole case—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, and if you want to open, you push there.

ROBERT BROWN: Okay. So it's very functional, and yet it is in line with the shape—the sloping top that we've seen on the pots and the pitchers a moment ago. So it's part of your aesthetic, but it's also thought-out in purely functional terms. They're one in the same at this point.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is how I was thinking in '53. Now we go to '56. That means I have arrived in the United States. My first big commission was making two very, very big silver bowls for North American champion, skating trophy. I made that for Ritter Shumway.

ROBERT BROWN: Ritter Shumway?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: Who is what, a sponsor of the—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: He was a sponsor of the—

ROBERT BROWN: —figure skating competition?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Not only competition. He was sponsor of all the in-line [ph] skating, and have done it even up until today. You can see here the pattern on the bottom of the ball is the American wall's dance on ice.

ROBERT BROWN: The American wall—a certain figure they cut on the ice, you show in this band around the stem. The form of the bowl itself is somewhat traditional.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They're very traditional.

ROBERT BROWN: It recalls a cauldron or something of that sort.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah, very, very traditional.

ROBERT BROWN: This mode here, with the motif in the base, is something that you've done repeatedly in various ways for various commissions in the last 20 years, haven't you? [00:32:05]

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: This was a very important thing. Did you get a good deal of publicity from this?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I think so, because I think it was one of the first times where television—I don't know. I shouldn't say, because I don't know, but for me, at least, it was first time I appeared on television.

ROBERT BROWN: To explain what you had done?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: What I had done with the silver bowl. That was in '56.

ROBERT BROWN: And you offered them three options?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, I made two options. One was that one. Another one was that one here.

ROBERT BROWN: Which one? The figure skating—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: The figure—that one there. That one was on a small one, that little one there. So there were really three. That one there was later made—oh, I can't remember how many. But every year after that, the little one was made. I can't remember how many that were made. You can see, there was a time when silver was very inexpensive, because you couldn't afford to make one like this today. To make this amount. Let me go into some flatware. Now, the flatware, of course, were not meant as flatware for each individual. They were prototypes that were made for the industry, then could make them by machine and stamp them out.

ROBERT BROWN: Did it bother you that they would be converted to machine-made?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: No, no. They were planned that way.

ROBERT BROWN: Did some of the larger silver companies pick these up?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Not exactly this pattern, but there are one that were called—the most fantastic story. [00:34:08] They were called—I think they were aristocrat. I made them very nice, let me put it that way. I made a very nice pattern. They were something like this here. Very nice. Then the company saw it, and they liked it. Then they say, "Well, we have to do something, because we have to sell it." So they put small rosebud all over.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, rosebuds?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. Then they called it aristocrat.

ROBERT BROWN: What did they call it?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Aristocrat.

ROBERT BROWN: Ice-to-car?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: What is it called in American? You know, when they're very rich. A person that is very affluent.

ROBERT BROWN: Wealthy?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah. You have a—what do you call it?

ROBERT BROWN: Tycoon?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: You know, you have— isn't there an English word, aristocrat?

ROBERT BROWN: Aristocrat?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Aristocrat?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Sure. The upper level of the—

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, yes. Socially, at least.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: What do you call them?

ROBERT BROWN: Aristocrat. The shape was—the handles and the working surface are in two different planes, aren't they? Right angles to each other.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: That was unusual.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That's the whole set, that one here. Then we go into ecclesiastic silver. Now, we see here, a wafer box, what are used—there should be five loaves of bread. There are only three on this drawing. I don't know why.

ROBERT BROWN: You said classic silver. What did you mean?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Ecclesiastic.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, ecclesiastic?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Ecclesiastic silver. They ended up with two fish and five loaves of bread. I don't know. This is just a sketch, this here.

ROBERT BROWN: It was done for the minister or for the church to look at?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you find—are there special problems when you're working with ecclesiastical commissions? [00:36:04]

HANS CHRISTENSEN: There are, because now you are not dealing only with buildings. You're dealing with human beings, the way they believe, the way they act, and how their feelings are during the whole service. All of these things are going into it. It is almost impossible to design silver for the church if you have not been there and taken part in—

ROBERT BROWN: —in the service?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Not merely looked at the building. Whereas, with the secular clients, you can look at their home, and you can—you have to talk with them, though, too, don't you?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Oh, yeah, yeah. But here, it's more—

ROBERT BROWN: It's more prescribed, isn't it?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Because you're dealing with many people, not one.

ROBERT BROWN: So you have to find a common denominator?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Common denominator for all of them.

ROBERT BROWN: And this is a processional cross, also for a church?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: These are from the '60s, aren't they?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This was '60s. That particular cross was made so that is a negative space in the middle of the cross, symbolizing the body of Christ. That is walked up through the rail—up to the rail, placed at the rail. Then the sun is shining on the cross, and a shadow will be cast on the cold wall behind the altar. So the shadow will then travel as the sun is moving. The priest is finished. The shadow has gone across the whole cold side where the altar is standing. There was a lot of thinking involved in. Here, there's another drawing. This is for a small chapel down in Georgetown, and you can see here there's a small chalice, together with a candlestick. [00:38:09]

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. And the motif in this—they're very simple forms, but you have a wave motif.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: The wave motif, because water is very often described to the religion as the holy water, all this. So the wave symbolizes this here. There are two parts. You can see both in the chalice—

ROBERT BROWN: —and in the candlestick.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That is made of two things that go together. This is unity, togetherness.

ROBERT BROWN: And this very graphically gives that feeling.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: The feeling. You can see, put two hands together. You have almost the same—the same form.

ROBERT BROWN: That's the symbolic level, and the practical level, for the candlestick, it provides a drip pan.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Not so much this, because they're up here.

ROBERT BROWN: This is one there.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: But for the chalice, where the priest can hold it.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: The priest can hold on.

ROBERT BROWN: Get his hand around that ridge, the wavy ridge.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: That one here, I think this is someplace out in California.

ROBERT BROWN: Combination chalice and paten to hold the wafers, Communion wafers.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And these holes, they're raised out, symbolize the cross.

ROBERT BROWN: These knobs. Again, to hold as well. Functional and symbolic.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: This is about what we have—

ROBERT BROWN: You have maintained, then, this very precise, very detailed working drawing from the time you were a student. You always—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Well, let me put it that way. We are just plain lucky, because I make the drawing, but I don't always save them.

ROBERT BROWN: No, no, but you do make the drawing is my point here. Very detailed, precise drawing—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I cannot work if I don't have a drawing. [00:40:01] The reason for it, since I work on commission, people commission me to do certain things.

ROBERT BROWN: You have to try to show them very precisely—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I have to show them, very precisely, exactly what it is. I have to tell them exactly the cost. I cannot estimate the cost if I don't know the size of the piece. I cannot give them a fair price in hours, how many hours it takes, if I don't know how the thing looks. I cannot live on accident.

ROBERT BROWN: What about, though, the comment that was made at the recent metal-smithing conference in Washington by some of the silversmiths who said that a drawing is one thing, but then when you go to work in the metal, it's something else, and therefore there's not a clear progression from one to the other? What do you think of that?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: I can tell you, it is because they cannot make—

ROBERT BROWN: —the drawing?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: They cannot make the thing look like the drawing.

ROBERT BROWN: But if you can, and you say you can—

HANS CHRISTENSEN: You have to.

ROBERT BROWN: —for the reasons you just gave, you must make the drawing?

HANS CHRISTENSEN: You have to make it. But they're even more complicated than that. You have to realize this. There are friends that say that I don't make it, and I don't like the drawing. Then I'm not going to say to myself that it has to look the drawing. Then I can change it, if I can. But you have to gear yourself up to always make the piece so close to the drawing as possible. That way, you don't make mistakes. In other words, there is a close relationship between my work and the drawing, and there's somebody that always, in the back of their mind, say, "I can always change." [00:42:04] He is going far away.

ROBERT BROWN: Right, whereas you are held, as you feel you should be. You've made a commitment.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: The worst part of this, if you make an agreement with somebody, and that somebody sees that drawing, he expects it to look like that drawing. It cannot help you come later to say, you know, this so happened. He can refuse to accept it if he wants to.

ROBERT BROWN: This is right.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: But this, again, I work, because I have the customer that already has agreed with me. Another one that don't work so close to the drawing, he don't have the customer.

ROBERT BROWN: He works speculatively.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: He works speculative. So he doesn't need to agree with anybody. But I will still maintain that you're better off having a good working drawing.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, they're lovely drawings.

HANS CHRISTENSEN: Yeah.

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