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Oral history interview with David Holzapfel, 2008 January 26-March 2

Funding for this interview was provided by the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America. Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with David Holzapfel on January 26 and March 2, 2008. The interview took place in Marlboro, Vermont, and was conducted by Josephine Shea for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

David Holzapfel has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JOSEPHINE SHEA: This is Josephine Shea interviewing David Holzapfel at the artist's home and studio in Marlboro, Vermont on January 26 [, 2008] for the Archives of American Art. This is disc number one.

We begin these things quite traditionally with when and where were you born?

DAVID HOLZAPFEL: I was born on March 10 in 1950 and in a hospital in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

MS. SHEA: Ah, New Jersey. And oldest?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: I'm the middle.

MS. SHEA: Michelle mentioned both of you are middle children.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: We're middle children. I have an older brother and a younger sister.

MS. SHEA: And did your parents stay in New Jersey? And what brought them to Elizabethtown, New Jersey?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Well, my dad worked for — at the time Esso. And he was I guess stationed there. I mean, we didn't live in Elizabeth for very long. Then we moved to Florham Park, which is all I really remember. I don't remember Elizabeth at all. And in Florham Park, he at that point was commuting into Manhattan to the Esso office buildings there so that we lived in what really was the country. It was wooded and, now, I think it's pretty much all built up. But at the time it was woods and so he would commute into the city.

And we stayed in Florham Park until I was about 12. Then we moved to Massachusetts. He got transferred to Gilbarco. They made gasoline pumps and they had a plant outside of Brimfield, Massachusetts. So we lived in Longmeadow, Massachusetts.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: I lived them for four years — three years. We moved then to Greensboro, North Carolina.

MS. SHEA: That must have been a big change.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, that was a big change. That was a big change. The northeast — I mean, the mid-Atlantic to the northeast was easy but the North Carolina was — that was a different world, especially then, it was the middle '60s and Greensboro was an interesting place at that time. It probably still is but we lived there for over a year. It was my junior year of high school and then my father was offered a job in sales in Italy. And so, at the end of my junior year of high school, we moved to Rome.

MS. SHEA: Not a bad place to move —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: It was a great place —

MS. SHEA: — Rome.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes and Greensboro was good place to move from. [Laughs.]

MS. SHEA: I'm assuming — I mean, traditionally did your mother work at all and what was her kind of educational background?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: She graduated from high school. She was a homemaker. I mean, it was very traditional 1950s family of the dad went off to work in the morning and the mom took care of the house and the kids.

MS. SHEA: Was he an engineer or in sales or —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Well, he was an interesting guy. I mean, he started off, at the time that we lived in Elizabeth, I think he — I don't — no, I think by that point he had moved into sales. He started off working as a garage mechanic with Esso. And over the course of his life, he was a smart guy, but again, I mean, he had a high school education. He did take some college courses later. I guess we were maybe in Long Meadow when he did that, maybe earlier. Anyway, and he worked his way up to being head of sales in Italy for several years. So he was a hardworking guy but he started on the bottom rung and worked his way to an executive position.

MS. SHEA: And were either of your parents interested in the arts at all? Did you go to the museums in Manhattan as a child at all or —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: No, we went to baseball games. [They laugh.]

MS. SHEA: You worshipped in a different cathedral. [They laugh.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Well, I mean, my grandmother lived in — my mother's mother lived in Cleveland. And when she came we would often go into the city but we'd go to Rockefeller Center. Oh, we went up the Empire State building. We did a lot of tourist things when she would come into town. But museums were not really part of my parents' culture.

MS. SHEA: Any other kind of arts? Were they interested in music or theater at all or —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Well, yes, my mother was particularly interested in jazz. She, and I think my father, would sometimes go down to 52nd Street in Manhattan and, you know, see whoever was — I think she told me she did once see Dizzy Gillespie. So they were interested in that but it wasn't a habit. It wasn't a passion that they had. And my father, he certainly liked music and listened to music, but he wasn't musical.

MS. SHEA: Then it must — any particular interesting experience in art, like art teachers in your elementary or high school before you went to Italy or —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Well, when I was in fifth grade, my fifth grade shop teacher was a guy named Hank Patterson. And during that year, I received the most improved award in woodshop. I'm not exactly sure what that — [laughs] — in retrospect, what does that mean? Was I so bad that I got somewhat better or I wasn't — I never did quite get it. But I, you know, was — it's amusing at this point to think about that. You know, I didn't really — my childhood was really, you know, again middle-class, white, suburban kid's upbringing. It involved playing sports and riding my bicycle all over the place and all the sort of, I don't know, are typical Ozzie and Harriet kind of experiences.

When we were in North Carolina — and I don't remember any specific thing happening, but at that point I began writing. I began writing poetry and began to think of in that way. I would say that that was the first art form that I felt drawn toward and pursued quite seriously for a good number of years. When we moved to Italy, my English professor was an Irish man, poet, by the name of Desmond O'Grady. Moving from Greensboro to North Carolina was just — I mean, from North Carolina to Rome was just a mind-blowing experience in every way.

And too, at that point, suddenly to be involved with someone like Desmond, a brilliant man but quite wild as well, was an eye opener. It was interesting that on any given week and I was in the honors English class and our first class of the day was at 8:00 in the morning or 8:30 or something. Anyway, so if Desmond showed up three out of those five days for that early morning class, that was a good week for him. If he could teach for two of those, that was terrific.

MS. SHEA: [Laughs.] Outstanding week?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: It was an outstanding week. But when he did teach, it was inspirational. I mean, he would stand up and recite entire poems of Shelley and just had a tremendous knowledge of not only western literature, but also Middle Eastern was another of his. But he spent a bunch of time in Egypt and in Iraq. So that catapulted me into a completely different way of seeing the world and enabled me to see a bigger world than North Carolina. I mean, I had a lot of fun in North Carolina but it wasn't stimulating in that way.

When we would have class, for example, let's say he's there for two days a week. Well, that could be Friday because usually by Friday he would probably show up on Friday morning. And then at the end of the day, we would all meet at the bar. You know, it was a very European educational system, where whatever happened at school happened in school. But as 17- and 18-year-olds, class would continue in the bar. But also in the bar would be all of Desmond's cohorts. And the other poets from other parts of the world that were passing through Rome would be at Desmond's and so my experience of the world of literature were opened up by him.

MS. SHEA: It sounds like an amazing —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, it was truly, truly.

MS. SHEA: And when you were in Rome did you or your family or at school go around and look at museums and monuments and —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, we did that a lot. Not only would school do that, you know, and it might be that we would go up to Vienna over the holiday break and go the museums in Vienna. And that would be a school trip or we would go down to Sorrento or Pompeii. So all those were happening and those would be special school trips, which Desmond was often a chaperone because it was a way for him to have free passage to go and do stuff that he wanted to do anyway. But we would also meet and go on walks. And Desmond had lived in Rome, by the time I had — he'd been there easily 10 years and Desmond had been Ezra Pound's personal secretary for a number of years.

So we would go on these walks and he would know about a particular church or a particular ruin or this or that and we'd, you know, we'd drink along the way. It was kind of a bar hop. But then he would hold forth on what we were looking at and it was a real education.

MS. SHEA: And then did your whole family move back when it was time for you to go to college or how did that fall within your dad's career?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Well, yes, they stayed at — well, let's see, in 1968, I graduated from the overseas school of Rome and at that point — and so I came back to the United States to go to college and my dad was then transferred to London. So they moved to London and they were in London for until the mid-'70s. And then he was given the golden parachute — not the golden parachute, the lead parachute. You know, he at that point would have been in his middle-'50s and, you know, at that point, having a high school education and being a, I don't know, not a — toward the end of his career with Esso, he was I guess you'd say fired. And then at that point, '74, maybe, they moved back to this country.

MS. SHEA: And how did you choose Marlboro College [Marlboro, VT]?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Well, the first college I went to was Marietta College in Marietta, Ohio. And that choice was very scientifically based. I'm being facetious. Living in Rome, it really wasn't possible to —

MS. SHEA: Go and visit schools or — [laughs].

MR. HOLZAPFEL: — go and visit schools. I mean, so you tended — and there was no guidance counselor. So you just sort of — so I ended up going to Marietta College because my girlfriend's older sister went there and she liked it.

MS. SHEA: And did your girlfriend go there or —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: No she didn't.

MS. SHEA: [Laughs] She went somewhere else.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, living in Rome at that time, so 1968. I guess I'm thinking now of 19 — either '69 or '70. Probably '69. I never reclassified myself. You know, maybe I'm getting ahead. We can go back to Marietta College. So at Marietta College — Marietta College was rough on me. It's in the sort of southeastern part of Ohio and it was a rather tumultuous time. And at that point, I had sort of — I had long hair and in Marietta, Ohio, there were maybe 20 hippies and 2000 jocks. And so we would often be threatened or whistled at and so it was not a great period of time.

But it was a very busy time and I ended up getting involved politically with the SDS [Students for a Democratic Society]. And I'm thinking actually of my girlfriend's sister because at one point in one of our protest against the Vietnam War, we decided we were going to shut the school down. So we barred entrances to the classroom for a day or a morning or something like that. And while I was keeping one of the doors closed, my sister's — I mean, my girlfriend's sister came up and she knew who I was, so that was the last time I saw my girlfriend's sister — [laughs] — or my girlfriend for that matter.

So I stayed at Marietta for a year and a half but I never reclassified myself. So I was 1A the entire time and that was intentional. I felt prepared to resist the war. But the beauty part was living in Europe. That's why I was home and it was just somewhere. I think it was 1969. I was in England where my parents were then and I got a letter from my draft board. And anyone who registers for the draft in a foreign country, at least at that time, I don't know what it's like now or I guess there is no draft. You have draft board 100, which was draft board in [Washington,] D.C. So I got a letter from General Whomever, saying that my number had come up and it was time for me to report for my pre-induction physical. What it means, too, if you're overseas is that you have to

pay to get there.

So I wrote the guy back and said, well, I can't really afford to do that now but I'm going to be back in the states in September and I'll get in touch with you then and then we can work something out. I'm thinking, pfttt. But I got a letter back saying, okay, fine. Get in touch with us when you get in the United States. Needless to say, I never contacted them and he never contacted me. So then the lottery came up and I had a high enough number that it wasn't an issue any longer.

Leaving Ohio in mid — let's say, I guess it was December, with another friend who is a potter and he had heard of the Bennington Pottery. And so we thought — I mean, my parents lived in Europe. His parents lived in Pittsburgh and so we thought, well, let's go move to Vermont. So we did and we moved into a cooperative housing — a dwelling — over in Bennington and both of us — he never got a job at the Bennington Pottery but we both got jobs in a furniture factory there making pine furniture. So that was my first experience of making furniture outside of my fifth grade shop class. And it was, you know, it was production pine. We had finished making this table then we had to like beat it with chains and distress it.

MS. SHEA: You gave it a distressed — [they laugh.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: It was distressing that's for sure. [They laugh.] But interestingly, the foreman there — this was the Valentine Mill in Bennington. The foreman had a shop in Arlington, Vermont, and it was a small custom shop. He and I became friendly and he had an arrangement worked out with Valentine Mills that he work during the winter there but then in the summertime, he would move to Arlington and be in his shop. And it was on Route 7 in Arlington so he had some tourist trade coming through and he worked in his own shop during the summer.

So in the early spring, I left the Valentine Mills just as he left to begin — he was going to get his stock ready for the summer so it was kind of probably April. And I went to work for him in his shop and I don't know what he thought I knew but he gave me some plans and he showed me a stack of lumber and he showed me where the machines were and he said I want you to make four rocking chairs, which I did. But I was sort of — [laughs] — figuring it out as I went, which actually seems to be the way I've learned what I know about woodworking is on the job training, which is kind of nice in that you get paid to learn. [Laughs.]

So that's what got me to Vermont and then I remained out of school for a half year. And while I was in Bennington, I had heard about Marlboro College from someone. I think my English professor — one of my English professors at Marietta, his nephew, he told me, went to a school in Marlboro, Vermont. And his loved the place especially because in the springtime, the students had gotten tired of living in the dorms and so they built tree houses and moved into the tree houses. [Laughs.] That sounded just right.

So while I was in Bennington, I came over to the college and had an interview and sent them my transcripts and talked with the admissions people and was accepted. I would have started in the fall of 1970. Yes, 1970.

MS. SHEA: Now, did you determine right away to study Italian and was that based on the fact that you knew Italian — [laughs] — or how did you choose that?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Well, it certainly — well, I mean, that there was even Italian offered was amazing. And a lot of the writing that I was doing — again, through my own interest and Desmond's encouragement — Desmond O'Grady's encouragement and this sort of the circle of friends that I came into contact with and writers and poets, because I knew Italian, I was also starting to do translation. And that seemed also to be — well, I was just interested in translation. And once I saw that Marlboro College offered Italian, then it was clear that that's what I was going to do.

MS. SHEA: And you studied since that you got a B.A. in Italian Poetry in translation.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, that's right. I studied with Edmond Brelsford, a true polyglot. I studied with him at Marlboro College. And it was interesting coming into the college as an older student.

MS. SHEA: You were a little older but not a lot older, right?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Well, I was able to come in as a junior.

MS. SHEA: Okay. Okay, so yes, okay.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: So you're right. It's funny how —

MS. SHEA: It seemed a lot older, I guess. [Laughs.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: I seemed so mature to myself. [They laugh.] But coming into the college — and in part, this was from my experience with Desmond. It's difficult to say this in a way that you could never really count on

Desmond to be where he said he was going to be when he said he was going to be there, which isn't to say he ever chose not to be where he said he was going to be. But, you know, he was, among other things, he was an alcoholic. And I lived with him and his family for a number of months and so he and I knew each other very well. Although, Edmond was certainly not an alcoholic and a very different temperament, Edmond had many, many interests.

And coming into Marlboro College and really coming in looking at the course offerings and taking a liberal arts curriculum, one of the great things about Marlboro is there were some students who wanted to study neurobiology but you had to have at least, I don't know, three or four, maybe five other students who wanted to study that in order to then approach a faculty member, who if he or she agreed, you had a class. You pulled together a tutorial. And so, I ended up taking this class in neurobiology, which was wonderful and I'm not exactly sure where I was headed with this right now. So taking liberal arts classes but studying with them and watching Edmond's plan students. Now, the plan at Marlboro College is a thesis. At the time that I was there, it was a one-year independent study that a student needed to complete in order to graduate. Now, it's a two-year process.

So I was able to, while being with Edmond and studying with him, see his plan students, who were vying for his attention. They needed help with their plan and feeling really frustrated because he's an accomplished musician and a linguist and a singer. So he was very — and a large family, a very busy man. And it occurred to me that in that aspect, and that aspect only, I needed to make sure that whatever I was going to do for my plan I didn't really need Edmond to do anything but sign off on what I was doing and help in ways that he certainly could. So that when it came time for my plan, he was very helpful in helping me get the sort of the paperwork and the verbiage right to submit to the plan acceptance board. I guess the faculty. And then I was able to pretty much work on my own, which included Michelle and me living in Rome for almost a year.

MS. SHEA: And what were you focused on when you were in Rome? Were you focused on literature and poetry?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes. The plan, as it was conceived, was that I was going to do a survey of 20th century Italian literature with a focus on Italian poetry. And in addition, there was going to be a translation component and as part of that translation component was going to be a performance component. So when I —

MS. SHEA: And would that include — I assume it would include the futurists?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: It did include — well, the way it turned out — I mean, they were part of my survey but it turned out that — so the survey was just that. It was a survey of Italian literature but then when I got to translation, it just happened that I decided that I wanted to pick poets from different eras. So one of the poets that I particularly liked was one of the Clarpluscloatti [ph], a poet by the name of Libero de Libero. And so he was working during the war and the post war. Before the war and the post war, he was — well, and so then I wanted sort of a contemporary of Desmond, someone who had sort of come into his own in the mid-century. And then a younger, who would have been my age or slightly older.

So in the course of my going to libraries and reading books at bookstores, I located these three poets. So Libero de Libero was the eldest of them and at the time, he would have been probably in his early middle '70s. And then Alfredo Giuliani, who was probably in his middle to late 30s, maybe in his 40s. And then [Igino] Balducci was his last name. I don't remember his first name and he was probably 28 or so. It just so happened that all three of them lived in Rome. I didn't know that beforehand.

MS. SHEA: When you were —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, when I was selected by them but they all happened to live in Rome. And Desmond knew de Libero and he knew Giuliani. He didn't know Balducci but it was possible to find him easily. And so I was able to go — you know, and so I had — what I had done was I started off with a hundred or so poems that I worked up into rough translations, then narrowed that down to a second draft, and then narrowed that down to 10 poems from each of those poets. Once I got them to a fairly, not a complete, but a coherent and English translation, then through Desmond, made contact with each of them and met them, talk with them, and showed them what I was doing.

De Libero didn't really speak any English and so in a way I had to translate back from English back into Italian or sort of explaining what the English meant so that he could then give me an idea of, yes, that's the direction that I was working. Giuliani and Balducci both spoke — Balducci's not right. That wasn't the guy's name. It doesn't matter. They had both spoke English so they could look at what I had written and say, well, yes or yes, this is right but, you know, it's a little — they didn't have the English vocabulary to work on the sort of the nuance of the translation but they knew enough to be able to have a clearer sense of what I was trying to do.

Coming back then — well, while Michelle and I were in Europe that summer — that's another facet of the story, which I'm happy to talk about. At any rate, I came back and finished my plan and graduated in June and then in July, our first child was born. So it was a few months but it was —

MS. SHEA: A very fruitful and productive — [they laugh.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: And I think our older son Simon was conceived in Siena. [They laugh.] It was such a great time and it was such a la bohème. We had a little apartment. A third floor walkup in Trastevere and the woman above us in the penthouse was a prostitute.

MS. SHEA: Michelle didn't mention that. [They laugh.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes. One night — you know, we didn't have a kitchen that was, you know, as wide as this table, no refrigerator. So everyday Michelle would go out to the market and I would be working at what I was doing. But one night, she, this woman Paula was calling for help in Italian. "Aiuto. Aiuto." And so I jumped up out of bed and opened the door and she was wrestling with some guy who's holding a pistol. And so, I was half asleep but I came up behind that guy and got him a bear hug from behind. And in English-English, he looked over his shoulder and he said to me, why are you grabbing me? I'm trying to get away from her, which so startled me that I let him go and he just ran on down the stairs. And Paula, you know, yelled something at him as he went and I'm just standing there. She looked at me and goes, "bah," you know, which is an Italian shrug and went back up to her apartment and that was —

MS. SHEA: Whatever that was. [Laughs.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: She also was — one of her visitors was J. Paul Getty's son when he was in his —

MS. SHEA: So a brush with the art world in a strange way. [Laughs.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: He was in his methamphetamines phase. It was when he cut some of his ear off and mailed it to his grandfather, J. Paul. We knew him right around that —

MS. SHEA: Oh, my gosh.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: — or no, we didn't know him. We were subjected to him right around that time. [Laughs.] But it was very — you know, we hardly had any money buy at that time in Rome, you didn't really need a lot of money. You could have a full meal for — you know, spaghetti and bread and wine for, I don't know, two to three dollars. And pizza was cheap and so it was really —

MS. SHEA: And coffee was good. [They laugh.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: And coffee was excellent. So it was really a very romantic time.

MS. SHEA: So you came back to Vermont and finished school and then did you think you were going to go on the kind of academic teacher route?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes. I mean, it seemed as though that — you know, having had kids right away, it meant that I needed to get a job and so that was the first priority. And Michelle and I talked about let's start a used bookstore in town because I'm not sure that there was one at that point. There may have been but it turned out that I got a job at a bookstore, The Bookseller. And I worked there for a while but it was actually a good experience because I realize that as much as I loved books, if you're working at a bookstore, you're dealing with items. You don't really have time to enjoy the books.

MS. SHEA: To read. [They laugh.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: You're just there moving product and so I sort of became a little disillusioned with that. Moreover, it was a fulltime job in the beginning and I was writing and needing to have time to write. And in addition to having children, having a fulltime job didn't work too well for me. We had a teepee that we — I'm sure Michelle described it.

MS. SHEA: No, she did not mention the teepee.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Oh, really? [Laughs.] Oh, my gracious. Well, when we graduated from — well, when I graduated from Marlboro a friend of ours, the woman who is the weaver, Anne Brooke [ph], she and a bunch of other friends had gotten together some money and bought us an 18-foot diameter teepee. And we put that teepee up on some land Edmond and Veronica Brelsford owned over in Newfane, pretty out there. Easily eight or so miles to the nearest paved road. And so that's where we lived when I finished in June at Marlboro. We moved into the teepee and Simon, our older son, was born in the teepee. Michelle didn't mention that?

MS. SHEA: I think there were several things. I'll let David fill that in. [They laugh.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: We knew we didn't want to go the hospital route, in part because it just seemed antithetical to

our feelings about what having a baby meant and it wasn't an operation. Michelle wasn't sick. We were young and very healthy. And somehow we got it into our heads that we could do this on our own in this teepee, which ultimately we did. So one morning about four o'clock. It was July 11, 1972, Michelle went into labor. And I went up to the house where Edmond and Veronica were and said, you know, we're going to be here. It's happening. And they said this what you want? I said yes and so we started.

And then about 12 hours later, Simon came out but we weren't quite ready. You know, in terms of literature and in terms of how to do any of that sort of thing, at that time, there was precious little. Well, we had an obstetrics textbook, which we discarded because it had 10 pages of a normal birth and 398 pages of all the things that could go wrong. But again, in the arrogance and folly in knowledge of youth — [laughs] — we ignored that. But we had a pretty good police manual, emergency police manual about what happens. And of course, this was giving birth in the back of a cruiser but it still had the essential information. And maybe, I don't know, maybe three weeks before Simon was born, we came across a book by Sheila Kitzinger, a British woman, a midwife, called the *Experience of Childbirth* [New York: Taplinger, 1972], I think.

And Michelle had read that and I was reading it. And I remember saying, you know, I think I'm starting to get an idea of what is going to happen here and the next morning it was happening. But we didn't really have the stuff we needed. So I boiled — I took the laces out of my sneakers and boiled them for — built a fire in the teepee and boiled my shoelaces for a couple of hours. Veronica brought a serrated bread knife down and I boiled that for a while. Then when Simon came out, you know, I did all the things I had to do and but then tied off his umbilicus with my sneaker shoelaces and then used the bread knife to cut through the umbilicus. And everything was fine. Michelle was feeling good. I mean, obviously, none of us were doctors and Veronica was crucial in that she had given birth at least three kids at home. So was as close to a real midwife as we got. And again, at that time, there really wasn't anything available.

And so the day went and it got to be night time and we could really keep a fire going. It would have gotten cool at night so we went up to the house and spent the night in the house. The placenta hadn't delivered and, you know, we knew enough not to just yank on the umbilicus so we were very careful. By the next morning, the umbilicus still hadn't been delivered so we thought, okay, we're going to have to go to the hospital. So we went down to the hospital and as soon as we walked in — maybe we called. Veronica or Edmond called before we left to say here we come and news had spread through the hospital like fire. Probably faster than fire. And people, nurses, and doctors came from different parts of the hospital to see this hippie couple who had given birth to a baby in a teepee. [Laughs.]

One of the — I guess he was a pediatrician had just come back from working with the Navajo, above Nassau, and he came in took me and Simon and he offered to check Simon out. And at the same time, Michelle went in with the obstetrician who lectured about how wrong what she had done was. But, you know, again, he's a doctor. He's experienced. He felt around and he just yanked on the end of the umbilicus and it had been delivered; it just hadn't come out. And Simon was fine and Michelle was fine and so that was a happy ending. Forrest was born in the farmhouse and things were somewhat different then. We had a doctor, who although wasn't allowed to be present at the birth, did all the prenatal and asked that we call him as soon as Forrest was out, which we did. He came and checked that out.

I mean, in a sense, having kids at such a young age meant that sort of our contemporaries, while they were building their careers, we were having kids and trying to figure out how to make money to survive. I mean, not survive, but to sustain ourselves. So I worked in Mount Snow as a lift attendant. I mean, and we were incredibly fortunate all the time. In the summer times, we lived for free at the Brelsfords' in our teepee and helped on the farm some. And then in the winter time, especially those first couple of years, we were the caretakers of the Green Mountain Zen in Woodsborrow, where we were, as caretakers, we lived there for free. So all that part was great.

And then I would just take whatever jobs were available. Initially it was working at Mount Snow and then that ended. And then one year, it must have been '74 or '5 — I think it was '74. It had to have been. After I had started working with Roy Sheldon but had gotten laid off because they left every winter. And the woman who ran the Green Mountain Zen Center decided to come back from San Francisco two months earlier so we had to leave. Michelle was pregnant with Forrest so it was — well, it was probably March and we packed all of our stuff and just paid our bills. You know, the gas bill and all the stuff from the Zen center place.

Packed all of our stuff into a Volkswagen bus, filled up the gas tank, and we had a $1.25. [Laughs.] That was the bottom.

MS. SHEA: Lean times.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: At that point, we thought, you know —

MS. SHEA: This with a family. [Laughs.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: — this is not going to work. [They laugh.] And then we went down to — a friend had a big enough apartment in Williamsville, Massachussetts, in the North Hampton area. And I worked as a garage mechanic and as a dish washer. And moved back up here in '74 or '5 or so and had a job for a whole summer as a carpenter. The exact years are a little muddy because I know that I started working for Roy [Sheldon] in 1973.

MS. SHEA: And did that connection come from the furniture person?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: No.

MS. SHEA: How did that come about?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: That came about because I needed work.

MS. SHEA: You just happen to hear — and his name was Roy?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Roy Sheldon.

MS. SHEA: Sheldon, because I think the name of his firm is rather interesting.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Fabulous Tables.

MS. SHEA: Fabulous Tables. To refer to it as a firm, he would be amused by it.

MS. SHEA: Okay, company. [They laugh.] Shop.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Shop, yes. This is a picture of Roy in about 1960 in front of — so this is a picture of Roy in 1960 and that's the kind of furniture he made. And that —

MS. SHEA: Oh, we're looking at a wonderful kind of barn roof line with green and there's a huge sign that says woodcraft. And that must be Roy standing beside a — would we call it a plank of wood that's twice as tall as he is.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes.

MS. SHEA: And surrounded by these — what I kind of think of as [George] Nakashima-eque —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, indeed

MS. SHEA: — tables. Although, he's taking a slice of the wood so it's very freeform and natural.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes.

MS. SHEA: And I can't quite see the table legs. They look a little more eaves — [laughs] — or something.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, the table legs were all mass produced, spindle turned.

MS. SHEA: Okay, spindles. Turned on a lath?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes.

MS. SHEA: And I wonder how he came up with the title of Fabulous Tables.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Well, his — I'll try to make his story brief. He graduated from Amherst College in 1919 with a degree in economics. He then decided he was going to go and live in Paris and he was going to be a writer. He lived in Paris and the writing wasn't working out. I don't exactly know why but it wasn't working out. So he switched to sculpture and there was a picture. And this barn, actually, was the cow barn for this house. Yes. For this house site. And so Roy — there's a great picture in the barn before it burned down in '72, I think, of Roy at a café in Paris.

He's got a cape and a big beret. And at the table, among others, are Brancusi and some other folks. So that's the circle he was running in. He began to specialize in caste bronze. He came back to this country in 1929, as the story goes, $100,000 worth of orders for work. Then with the stock market crash, all those orders got cancelled. So he decided to use his economics degree and he worked for a Madison Ave ad firm during the depression years. Then when the U.S. entered World War II, he signed with the U.S. government as the economics advisor to North Africa. So he spent the war years with Haile Selassie and the other North African tribal chieftains. At the end of the war, he moved back up here and he was done with the world. He'd seen it. He'd done it. He was ready to retreat.

So he came up here and moved into this barn. He taught sculpture at Marlboro College, which started, you know, right at the end of the war. And Roy taught sculpture there for a couple of years and then began his woodworking business. I don't actually know what caused him to start to do this. It would certainly seem as though he'd seen Nakashima's work because you're right, it is very Nakashima-ish and one small aspect of Nakashima's work. And I went to work for him in '73 when he was — let's see, he was 78 so when he died, so he would have been 72 or 3, chain smoker. He never worn any dust masks or had any kind of ventilation and he died of emphysema. He died in '75. So I really only worked while he was alive for two years. But it was another sort of on the job training situation in that he rarely came out to the shop. He was already quite frail and ill. But he'd come out and we got to know each other and he was — because he had a ready supply of workers from the college, my first five days with him I worked for 75 cents an hour and began in 1973.

And the way the pay scale worked was if you made it through the first week and into the second week then you got bumped up to a dollar and a quarter. And most workers there didn't get much beyond that. I got up to, in the last year that he was alive, I got up to $2.25 because I said to him and his wife, Roz Sheldon, that either they were going to have to pay me $2.25 or I was going to go over and work at Mount Snow because that's what Mount Snow would pay me. And so they agreed to that and so I worked throughout the winter there. And this original barn had burned down in, as I said, in '72.

And that winter of — it must have been '75, early winter of '75, I was just leaving the shop, in which is now this log building that's across the street, and just out of the corner of my eyes — Roy had been in the shop during the day but had gone back to the house, which would be just over here. Just out of the corner of my eyes saw some movement and looked and went over to investigate and I saw a cigarette and a trail like a fuse running through the sawdust. The sawdust on Roy's floors was quite deep because he had like a gravel floor so you couldn't really clean it up very well. And so there was an accumulation of sawdust and here was this little trail like a fuse running through this. And it occurred to me that that certainly how this building burned down as he was lax about putting out his cigarette. It just caught the building up. He had some phenomenal wood in there: walnut boards, three and half feet wide.

MS. SHEA: So that blast is a real tragedy —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes.

MS. SHEA: — of the wood.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: So, again, he was ill. He died in 1975 and his widow and I ran the business must be for the rest of that year. And then in 1976, she said look, my interest in this was only through him and so Michelle and I bought what was left of the wood. And he had accumulated some more but he didn't really know anything about woodworking or he knew very little. But what he did have was a really good eye and he had a way with customers that I don't emulate. But he was definitely a local legend. He was a crusty guy. [Laughs.] And if his customers could withstand the abuse — [they laugh] —

MS. SHEA: Then they could buy the table.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: — then they could buy a table from him.

MS. SHEA: Then they could have a fabulous table. [They laugh.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes.

MS. SHEA: That's interesting, especially with an economics background. You'd think he'd be a little more interested in the sale —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Well, you know, I think that was — but that was the point where he was done with that.

MS. SHEA: He was done with it all.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: He was done with being polite. [Laughs.] He was not interested in being polite any more. [Laughs.]

MS. SHEA: So as you're teaching yourself, did you then learn quite a bit about wood? It sounds like during this time frame.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, you know, in a way it was similar to making those rocking chairs. I didn't have any choice. My job was to make furniture and, you know, it was all Roy's — Roy was — he would tell me which one he wanted me to make. So he would pick out the top because Roy was really only interested in the tops. I at one point said to him, gee, you know, these tops are really beautiful but the legs are kind of — because he put those legs in everything.

MS. SHEA: It looks — even from here you can tell it looks quite uniform.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes and his point was — in a polite way, his point was that he just wasn't interested in the legs. He was interested in the tops. He loved the wood. He had a — that's where his interest lay. So it was clear that we were not going to talk about that again. But what it meant was, again, that I had to learn the tools — I mean, one of the aspects of using this kind of wood is conventional woodworking tools are used some but certainly not a table saw. We used a band saw regularly. But in terms of conventional cabinetmaking equipment, we didn't have any of that. I mean, Roy didn't have any of that and we had precious little of it here because it's just no what's called for.

So I never learned, really, how to make jigs and how to use a table saw. I mean, I've used a table saw plenty but because I was never making straight things, I didn't need that kind of equipment. I didn't need a jointer or any of that sort of thing. I wasn't joining boards together. And so I learned how to use an auto body grinder. I learned how to use a plane and now we have an electric that I use. So it was on the job training but it was quite — I mean, in a way, Roy's approach was a sculpture's approach as oppose to a cabinetmaker's approach. And I guess I feel as though that has also been my sense around it, is that I'm certainly not a cabinetmaker.

MS. SHEA: And would Michelle stop by and see what you were up to up into the point when you bought the place?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, because we lived in town. We lived, actually, right across the street from the Whetstone Inn where you're staying. If you just go right around that corner there's a red house on the corner and that's the house we were living in. The Brelsfords own that house, except they weren't living there at the time. Their kids were all onto school in Putney and so they were living there and we lived in the red house. So I would walk to work and toward the end, at the end of the day, often times Michelle and the kids would come down. You know, she'd be dragging them along in a wagon or something like that. And so, yes, they'd come by to see what we were doing.

And then one year, it seemed in conversation with Roy and Roz, it didn't make sense to try to keep this building heated and so I used the basement of the red house and worked down there. So that was not optimal but it was okay.

MS. SHEA: Then once you bought the place, then what happened?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Initially we tried to buy this property. You know, across the street. I mean, we had no money. We literally had no money and so we had no equity. We had junky cars. We had no capital. All we had was our willingness to work hard and good will. We paid all our bills so we weren't in debt but we didn't have any capital. And so it really became difficult for Roz to sell us the property knowing that, you know, maybe we'd be able to pay her; maybe we wouldn't. She couldn't afford to be in that situation. Moreover, her son — her daughter, rather, and her son-in-law were, at that point, were sort of — they were in charge of the estate.

And it was painful for Roz but the fact is she couldn't afford to take the risk. And it just so happened, right around that same time that this house became available. The guy who owned it prior to our living here, Parks Holcomb, was a nurseryman. And those birch trees in the back were part of his nursery. Michelle explained that part to you?

MS. SHEA: No.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Well, so he had — he was wholesale nurseryman.

MS. SHEA: I just knew that this — she did say that this property was basically a nursery and that was like a three —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Right. That's right.

MS. SHEA: — door —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: That our shop was a three bay garage where he parked his tractors and stuff like that. But the birch grove out back there was — he had planted all those white birch trees as whippets, you know, and with the intent of selling them. There were a couple of really wet springs and he couldn't get his equipment out there to harvest any of them and then he became ill. And he was ill for a couple of years before he died so he never got to them. And so they've been able to grow and be what they are today. We have thinned a little bit but they are mostly self-thinning.

This place became available and we were able to write to a man in town, Will Davison and his wife Air [ph], who, at that time, owned a fair amount of property in town. And owned the restaurant that was next door, which is

now — it was called the Four in Hand. It's now Marlboro College dorms but at the time it was a restaurant. He owned that property. So we approached him about buying this property with the idea that for five years we would pay rent and then after five years we would buy him out and to which he agreed. And we got down payment money. We borrowed from other friends and other friends so we were able to put together, again, through the good graces of friends and people that, I don't know, believed in us. That's maybe too strong a word but that was the fact.

So he bought the property. We moved in and, I mean, it was ludicrous. All the wood was across the street. We opened up the three doors of the three-bay garage and just moved all the wood in and started making furniture or starting making stuff right away. I mean, at that point, our kids were really little still so Michelle was really not much a part of the business, I mean, in terms of making things. And that went on — and then just slowly over the many years — so that was 1976 and here we are 30 years or so later. And about two years ago, my side of the shop got insulated and sheetrocked. So — [Laughs.]

MS. SHEA: It's been a long — [Laughs.]

[END MD 01 TR 01.]

DAVID HOLZAPFEL: So what is that? That brings us up to getting in here and starting.

MS. SHEA: Right.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Initially, in terms of the business, we were — well, in a way we didn't need much. Our rent was $200 a month and that $200 was for the house and the shop. So that was a bargain. And we would get some off the road traffic. Enough to sneak by. It was often tense and I would make picnic tables. I would make whatever was needed. And I think around 1978, maybe, I got a bus driver's license and began driving the school bus for the elementary school. So I had a part-time doing that and then worked in the shop the other part of the time.

By, I think, right around that same time, it just became clear that we were not going to be able to depend on road traffic.

MS. SHEA: Walk-in.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Moreover, that was kind of a difficult time there. I mean, at the end of the [President Jimmy] Carter administration and the energy crisis and suddenly there weren't people up here anymore the way they had been when I worked for Roy's. You know, it was pretty busy. I mean, he would — it seems to me that he — again, this would have been 1975 in the six or eight months that he was open, they made $16,000, which for us making $4 [thousand] or $5000 seemed great.

So we realized we weren't going to be able to make it just off the road. So then we started doing craft shows. And at that point, Michelle had then begun working in the shop and initially I got her to turn these kinds of legs, these spindle-turned legs. But that was really boring and I'm pretty sure she made four but — [laughs] — but not many.

MS. SHEA: Enough for one table.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Not many more. Enough for one table but not many more than that. And then she began turning small weed pots and as the kids got older and more independent and more involved in school activities, she upped her involvement. And that meant, too, that when we went to craft shows, you would have a variety of work to show. So I would have maybe some tables. There would be, particularly for the craft shows in the early days, I would make clocks and I would make mirrors and sort of smaller pieces like that and we would have her small turned pieces.

And we got that five-year time period. We realized — now, we went down to see the bank and the bank — the first time we went they literally laughed, you know, because we still didn't have any money but we had a track record. You know, we, again, our credit was always great but we didn't have any money. We didn't have money for a down payment or anything like that and so they wouldn't give us anything. Will Davison then agreed to accept the mortgage but he sort of arranged it so that it would be a balloon. And I think it was maybe a 10-year balloon mortgage and he gave us the best interest rate that he could at that time, which was 9 percent.

MS. SHEA: I was going to say that was a high —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: It was high interest period. I mean, interest rates were probably 12 to 15 percent but for tax reasons, the best he could do without it becoming a gift, which would be punitive to him. He gave us a 9 percent. And so for 10 years we paid our mortgage payments to him and with this balloon coming in 10 years. So that would have gotten us up to the early '90s when, by that point, I had a teaching job and then the banks

were amendable to giving — then they would give us a loan.

MS. SHEA: Then they would sit down and discuss this project. [Laughs.] So did you kind of stay with tables or it seems to me that would be hard to take to craft fairs. So you'd make smaller things or —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: I would make smaller things but the — certainly by the early '80s, it has been probably — yes, you know, by '83 or '4, I couldn't do those any more. You know, especially —

MS. SHEA: You were tabled out.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: — especially the clocks. I mean, the clocks — no, the smaller things.

MS. SHEA: Okay.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: The clocks were just — they were just mass production. And I didn't like it. Plus the clock manufacturers kept changing their — you know, they were all electronic battery operated mechanisms and they kept changing their models and it just got to be too much of a pain in the ass. And so I stopped making them then. And mirrors, I also stopped making as well but continued with making furniture. However, I mean, even before I left working at Fabulous Tables, I had already started to change the bases. I still had these spindle-turned legs for the first couple of years that we were here. It's because that's what I knew but I began changing how I was thinking about the furniture and what the design possibilities were.

I mean, Roy just wasn't interested in thinking about what else he could do. You know, maybe when I'm 74 or five [75] I'm not going to want to think about that either. He definitely was not interested in thinking about it. [Laughs.]

MS. SHEA: That's not where he was going.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: But, you know, as a 24-year-old, I was interested. And so that's how I began to develop ideas about what else could be done to hold up the table. In some respects, the tabletop takes care of itself but it's the base and the integration and proportional integration of the base and the top that makes the difference.

MS. SHEA: And another thing she mentioned was a benefit of working for Roy Sheldon's Fabulous Tables was I guess he had connection with the lumber people who would bring these fabulous burls and —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: That's right, with loggers mostly.

MS. SHEA: Oh, loggers.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, because the stuff that we used never makes it to the mill. The saw mills don't want to hear about burls and stuff like that or any of the big kind of stuff that we use. So they would never even get to the mill. The loggers — there were maybe Ovitt Dupuis [ph] or Richard Boisvert [ph] were two loggers in particular, from the area that brought Roy stuff and they were logging a lot at that time in the Green Mountain National Forest.

And so, once Roy was done and we moved over here, they continued to supply us with wood. And there's sort of a second generation now. Richard's Boisvert's daughter married a logger and Kim Thayer. Kim Thayer has brought us tons and tons of wood over the years. And it's really, in many respects, it was — it's funny how things, at the time, it was cheap. You know, the wood was cheap because it was junk. The loggers couldn't sell it anywhere else. You can't split it so it wasn't even good for firewood. So we were another source of income for them and continue to be.

But that was — the initial reasons were, first of all, that it's the material that Roy used. It's what I learned on and it was inexpensive. And, you know, I think it would be disingenuous to say it was anything grander than that. However, again in retrospect, these were all sustainable. I mean, these were little used species and that's sort of, in the world of cabinetmaking, using underused species. And reclaimed wood is now, you know, not in vogue but there's a sensibility around it that didn't exist when we were doing this. And yet, it was clear and we understood that the materials that we were using were local. We knew where the trees had been harvested. We knew a lot about the woods that we were using, again, say as oppose to going to a sawmill and buying some padauk from somewhere and some other rainforest part of the world.

In addition to all that, the woods that we were using, and this too we understood and recognized right from the start, were as exotic in terms of their grain and in terms of the inherent beauty of the wood were as gorgeous as anything from anywhere in the world. So there was that recognition.

MS. SHEA: And what woods are you using?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Well, primarily yellow birch, maple, beech, oak, all wood from around here. But they're, you know, they're trees that are twisted or they're trees that are too big for sawmills around here. Around here a sawmill can cut any, you know, most of them about up to 20 to 24 inches but, you know, we'll have a single board that will be 35 to — I can cut anything up to 52 inches wide. So we use old sugar maple trees, trees that are — it's sort of a growth of a tree that's called or referred to as a dog leg, where the tree will be growing up as a sapling, something happens, another tree or branch falls on it and it causes it to bend over, but then it wants to go back vertical again toward the sunlight.

So you have this sort of — what's referred to as a dog leg and the grain in that dog leg, the compression wood in that dog leg is just spectacular. Likewise, we use a lot of burls and hardwood burls. We use hardwood. We don't use softwoods. And they're all local. Spalted woods and the spalted woods —

MS. SHEA: What does that mean?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Well —

MS. SHEA: It's a term I've heard but I don't know — [laughs] — what it means.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Spalt is a condition of wood. Around here, there are certain trees that will spalt more than others. The trees around here that spalt are sugar maple or maple, both red and sugar maple and yellow birch, sometimes beech, sometimes oak, sometimes cherry. Cherry is another wood we use a lot around here, particularly cherry burl. And my understanding of what's spalt is is that it's — and it's typically wood that you see that has black lines running through it. That's one of the characteristics of spalted wood.

It's a tree or a board or whatever that's undergoing two processes at the same time, both of which stop as soon as the wood is dry. And they are decomposition because very often when you're looking at spalted wood and a maple log that has spalted from the outside is going to have fungus growing out of it. It's going to look like junk, spoiled, spalted. I think there's some relationship there. So it's undergoing the initial stages in decomposition. Bacteria have entered the tree either absorbing it from the ground if the tree is on the ground or if there's a fork in the tree further up and that's allowed moisture down into the tree. And you see variation in colors, different densities of wood within the same tree in a spalted tree.

So there's that aspect, the decomposition, then there's also another process, which is petrification because the black lines are actually mineral deposits. And those mineral deposits are indeed the beginning stages of petrification. The cell walls are being replaced by — or the cells, rather, are being replaced by mineral. Now, having said that, petrification takes 200,000 years and a dry climate. So that around here, if we were to go out in the woods and cut down a maple tree, we could go back to it in five years and it might be really nicely spalted. If we went back to it in 10 years, it would be rotten. Yellow birch is faster than that. So in a sense, you can't get any more exotic than that in my view. [Laughs.]

MS. SHEA: So, to get back to our questions, what are your thoughts about university trained artists and one I think we can safely say like you, who learned your craft outside of that academic world?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Someone referred to Michelle once as an autodidact. [Laughs.] You know, sometimes I think it would have been nice to have learned all those — I think mostly the learning curve would be faster in academia. You know, as a student, you would have the opportunity and the leisure and the instruction to learn how to do things. I think it's — in a glib sort of way, I've sort of jokingly said, well, I learned how to do things by doing it wrong so many times that I figured out how to do it right. And so I think that the skill development would take longer, particularly with the pressure of having to make stuff in order to survive, which would not have been the case had I had an opportunity to be in school to learn this.

Having said that, I think that for some people the academic training can teach high technique but it can't teach you sensitivity to the material. It can't teach you sensitivity to design. It can't teach you how to be an artist. It can teach you how to use the machinery. I mean, I have many friends who — furniture makers who've gone through that training and many of them are brilliant furniture makers. Some are very skilled but, you know, their work doesn't necessarily sing.

I don't really have any feelings one way or the other in part because I'm not sure that whether or not — well, I mean, in a way, I can't have any opinion on — having never seen the other side.

MS. SHEA: Right. Right.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: One aspect, I think — I mean, aside from the technical or the woodworking aspect, sort of the intellectual discipline of the history of the field and that aspect of it would have been interesting. I know I know more about art than I do about the history of furniture. Art interests me more than the history of furniture. I'll find, for example, I'll see a piece of furniture in a museum somewhere and I'll become really interested in it and

then I'll find out about that period. But I don't feel as though my grasp of the history of furniture is as complete as my pathetic — [laughs] — knowledge of the history of art. I know more about art. I've spent more time — when I go to New York, for example, I don't go to look at furniture. I go to art museums and I got to see, you know, what's on in the art world not so much in what's going on at the American Craft Museum or something like that.

MS. SHEA: Have you been involved at all on the other side? Have you taught like at Haystack [Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, ME] or —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: I never taught at Haystack. I taught — well, I can't remember what the name of the school was. It was for teens and was in western — I mean, it's outside of Williamsville, Massachusetts. And for a couple of summers I taught workshop. I think it was called maybe the New England Craft maybe Horizon but I think the name changed at some point. Maybe it was sold and they renamed it. It still exists and it's outside of Williamsville, Massachusetts, and I taught down there some. And the only class that I took, the only workshop that I took was with Michael Coffee, who is a furniture maker at Peter's Valley in New Jersey. And I went and studied with him for probably a long weekend or a week. I don't remember.

MS. SHEA: So the next question is I think quite broad. Where do you get ideas for your work? You know, Michelle says often when she talks to people that is the question that they have.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Well, I would say probably the one reliable source of inspiration or form are trees. The way they grow. The forms that the take. The manifestations that they exhibit in the natural world. That's something I always go back to. One of the things about the way trees grow is trees grow to the strength, which means that the direction of the grain — it's why shipbuilders, the Vikings, say for example. Shipbuilders when they would construct ships would go out and they'd look for the tree that grew in the form, once they shaped it, but that the grain direction would be such that they could use that for the structure of the hull of the ship. So they weren't taking lots of boards and laminating them. They were looking for a tree trunk or a tree section and they knew that the strength of that tree was along those grain lines and so they would purposefully look for those things.

Farm implements, early farm implements, the same thing. They would look for the strength of the tree and use that strength to make whatever implement that they needed to make. So in a like way, I always feel as though my most reliable source is that, the strength of the growth of trees. So if I'm out in the woods and I see a tree that's fallen down, you know, I'll study it and go back to it a bunch of times and then I'll cut some portions off it and bring it back to the shop and I'll use that as elements in a piece that I'm going to make at some point because I've got to let it dry. So I will drag stuff out of the woods whenever I see things that I think are useful.

In addition to that and sort of outside of the natural forms, I would say sculptors that I like are [Alexander] Calder and [Constantin] Brancusi, yes, Martin Puryear, David Nash, [Alberto] Giacometti. Not so much Henry Moore. Aspects of it. I mean, certainly don't dislike his work. [Laughs.] And I would say that that's probably the other source —

MS. SHEA: Checking on our time there. So we're good.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: That would be another important source of — and, I mean, one for a good many years — well, I guess I'm thinking to talk about hollows and my use of hollow logs. In the early '80s, a friend told me that he had a big cherry tree that he thought I would like because he was going to be cutting it down and he was going to build a building and I had to come down. So I went and looked at it and it was — and for around here, it was a monster. It was 17-feet in circumference. And so, I of course said yes, I love this tree but it was much too big for me to cut down. I've never cut anything down as big as that. So I got in touch with a tree surgeon friend and asked him to come take a look at it and cut it down.

Now, I was having visions of, you know, four foot wide by eight foot long, single board dining tables. I want to just also go back to George Nakashima, I hope, because he's certainly an important source of inspiration. At any rate, so this tree surgeon friend looked at this tree and went back to his truck and got a chainsaw with about an 18-inch bar on it for a tree that was close to five feet in diameter at the base. And he jammed his saw blade in and walked around the bottom of the tree like it had a zipper on it and down the tree came. He had known from the outside that the tree was hollow. I hadn't known that.

And so my dreams of these gigantic dining tables was over. And I was devastated and just left the tree there for probably whole another year. The guy needed to get it out of there so I hired a log truck to go down and pull it out and they brought it over here. But during that time, I began to think about what a hollow log was, which is essentially a cylinder and then began playing around with toilet paper rolls and experimenting with different ways to cut up cylinders to see what forms I could come up with in that. And so that by the time this cherry log came back or got up here, I was already starting to think about hollow logs as an opportunity for bases of infinite variety.

Now, hollow logs are referred to as center rot and it's something that happens to trees with some regularity, particularly around here. Yellow birch, beech, and maple — not so much maple but those other two, yellow birch, you know — it used to be that these hollow logs — well, so something had happened to the tree and the center of the tree had rotted out. But, of course, the life of the tree is on outside so that the tree was still standing. It was green and living and healthy except that the center was rotted out. And sometimes the rim of the cylinder would be 10-inches and there would only be a little bit of a center rotted out. Sometimes the rim of the tree would be three inches and a lot of the inside was rotted out. That varies. But the integrity of the tree is compromised. The strength of the tree is compromised. Moreover, to cut down a tree like that, you have no idea what the tree is going to do when you cut into it. You know, that is to say —

MS. SHEA: When you were talking about him cutting around like a zipper, I'm thinking, okay, where's the tree going to fall? [Laughs.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Well, you know, he's a very skilled — what was his name? He's a very skilled tree surgeon and he certainly would have looked at the tree to see where it was loaded. That is to say, where the majority of the branches were so which way it was going to fall. Moreover, it was on a slight hill so he went downhill with it. But having said that, you're absolutely right, cutting down a hollow tree is risky. But once I began to think about them and then talk to Kim Thayer, the logger we've dealt with these many years. He said, oh yes, I've got a bunch of those.

And so he brought them over and then I began making tables. The first ones were cylinder tables that I cut. You know, imagine a cylinder and then cutting out a form. I think one of the first ones was based on a multi-spur bit and the way the spurs have a mulit-spur bit go down and carve this table base. And they were sort of drum tables. That is to say, fitting inside the circumference of the circle was a piece of glass and the first couple were of that sort. But hollow logs used to be, back in the olden days before plastic pipe, loggers used those hollow logs as culverts for their logging operations. So they'd dig out — if they had to go by a stream or a wet spot, they'd dig it out. They put that hollow log in and then cover it over and they'd use that a culvert for their logging roads so that their use is known in that regard.

So after working with these — that must have been, I don't know, around '81 — two maybe. Then in '84 at MoMA [Museum of Modern Art] in Manhattan, was a show called something like Primitivism in Modern Art. Something like that. And the show was essentially showing how modern art influenced or modern art forms surrealism and maybe some dada really was influenced by the oceanic and African sculptures that were beginning to come into Europe in the late 1800s. And of course then [Henrí] Matisse and Picasso and [Georges] Braque and those guys were seeing that work and it was changing their view of — or it was contributing change to their view of art. And Matisse talked about how one of the things that he appreciated about African sculptures was that it was about the material but the material was representing the essence or the psychology of humans, say, as opposed to Sergeant or someone like that. He's certainly showing the psychology but in a different way. [Laughs.]

MS. SHEA: In a different way, right. [Laughs.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: You want some light?

MS. SHEA: I think it might be time to change discs, maybe. Why don't we do that.

[END MD 01 TR 02.]

MS. SHEA: Okay, once again, this is Josephine Shea at the home of David Holzapfel in Marlboro, Vermont, on January 26, 2008, for the Archives of American Art Smithsonian Institution. And this is disc number two.

We were talking about changes in inspiration and one aspect you were talking about was how, after initial negative reaction, the more you thought about the possibilities of hollow logs.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: So I had begun using hollows as table bases and as well, also, I was carving them for tractor seats in some stools that I had made. So I was taking a section, of like a three-quarter section of a hollow and then carving. They were thick enough that I could carve then a seat and carve a back. So I was using these hollows and then in '84, I saw this show in New York and in that show were examples of hollow logs used as furniture in Cameroon and that just blew my mind.

And so then I began studying African furniture and sculpture and I guess I feel as though I don't make African-like stuff work but the sensibility with regard to the material and the approach to the material, I found were very — I felt a kinship with work of African furniture makers. So that was delightful. And African and oceanic sculpture and material goods continue to be something of interest and inspiration.

MS. SHEA: Michelle talked a little about your travels. Obviously you spent quite a bit of time in Italy, twice, both when you were younger and then later when you went back for college. She also mentioned you going to Ireland.

Have any of those travels do you think impacted your work?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: I think so, yes. You know, when I think about influences and how they might manifest. So with regard to the African influence, if that's the right word. I'm not sure it is. But the African — there was a piece I made probably in the middle '80s that was called middle management and one motif, one season, African stools is of a figure holding up the stool and feet form a part of the base. In middle management, guys in business suits, three of them around this cylinder and except that they're upside down. So that was a sort of direct influence of that particular piece from African.

In a like manner, travel — I think of the influence in terms of did it manifest in a particular piece of furniture? So — that is to say, I was in Samoa visiting a friend a number of years ago and was just taken with the verdant or, you know, just the luxuriousness of the foliage and in particular of the — what's the taragutsit [ph] — what's it called? I can't remember. A particular leaf form and then came back and carved a table, again, using a hollow but it's sort of interwoven or lying on top of each other, these leaf motif around the — forming the — but very quite abstracted, not a replica of it.

Likewise, coming back from traveling with Michelle in Germany and spending time looking at arcs in the various cathedrals and things and coming back, again, with a hollow. Carving a table that is arcs, five arcs around the cylinder and it was called Arch Table or something like that, Art Table. So in that regard, yes, I mean, travel has certainly been an important influence. But also in terms of — one of the wonderful things about traveling is you're leaving the familiar. You're trusting that everything will be all right and there's a certain abandonment to travel that one can often feel whenever making something.

It seems as though there's always a place in making something where you're not quite sure what you're doing. You're not quite sure how it's going to manifest and that's a both a great part of making things but it's also that part where you don't have a map. I think that's, for me, it's also that can be a particularly intense experience, especially if I'm making something. Because of the nature of the material that I use, if I blow it at some point along the process, I can't go down to the store and get another one. I can't get another whatever it is, root system or that particular board because I don't have any more of those.

And so, what it does mean when I'm making things, especially on the larger pieces and especially if they're a commission piece, I have to be very careful and mindful as I go through the process of making it. I have to really think it out. One of the great things that would have been nice to have done would have been to learn to draw well.

MS. SHEA: I was going to ask if you sketch or if you work — I saw in your shop a little maquette and I wondered if you tended to work more on a —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, I either make maquettes or — I mean, I think what I do most is visualize and when I can see it well, then I know I'm ready for whatever the next step may be or if it's in terms of designing the whole piece. I do draw. I do sketch but my sketching is very flat, very two-dimensional, and I don't really think of it as drawing so much as I think of it as notes to myself.

So typically, if I make a sketch of something I'll have sketched it out but there will also be sort of a text explaining what it is that this drawing is meant to show. I know what it means but I'm not sure that someone else looking at it would — I mean, especially when I look at how facile Michelle is with drawing. She can sit down and draw anything. Her sketchbook is a piece of art in itself. It's fantastic. I don't have those skills.

MS. SHEA: Well, of course, she started — it sounds like she started a little — [inaudible] — [laughs] — than you did.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Well, she did and she practiced.

MS. SHEA: While you were studying Italian. [They laugh.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: So I tend to visualize. And when I'm — there's a piece I made not too long ago, it was called *A Hundred Camels in a Courtyard* [date?], which was for a woman who had just been diagnosed with a brain tumor. She was in her probably late 70s, early 80s. And the commission was from her son but was meant to be a gift to her. I can't remember a piece, although, I may be in one right now, where I've had to spend so much time trying to figure out how I'm going to do this. When it is furniture of sort of the kind that I'm familiar with making, I know what I'm doing. But when it moves outside of that, it's both more exciting and more tense, especially when you get to that place where you're not quite sure. That's one of the great things about traveling, is a lot of times when you're traveling you're thinking, now what?

MS. SHEA: And then some wonderful adventure can unfold or a terrible disaster. [They laugh.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: So travel has been important in that respect as well.

MS. SHEA: Does religion or a sense of spirituality play a role in your art?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, I think it does. I've been a student of Buddhism since college, anyway, and more recently — or not more recently but also and studying Taoism well. And I guess I feel as though the sort of sensibilities, particularly say in Japanese and Chinese Buddhism, and the sense of what it is one is doing with the material that that's been important to me. I think it's on our website, a quote from Alexander David Neal that there is no real production, only interdependence. And in many respects, that's how I see my approach to making things and here's where Nakashima fits in because in his writings he's very much aware of the material that he's using and of the nature of trees.

So when in a like manner, I too have that feel that I'm not producing something independently. I'm not in a sort of a rationalist way — in a way just set up a contrast that might — I'm not a cabinetmaker. Cabinetmakers — now this is a gross generalization so I'm going to back off that, but because of the relationship that I need to have with the materials that I use, the interdependence, I think, is more important in my sense of the material. I'm getting myself into a place where I'm not sure where I'm going. I'll just say there is no real production, only interdependence.

MS. SHEA: Well, it sounds to me like you're saying you don't necessarily see yourself as the great artist standing alone. You feel like it's all — is that a fair —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, that's good. I like that. I mean, it really is a question of working with the material, not working on the material and that the material has a great deal to say about what it's going to become. I may have an idea of something that I want to make but then I have to — well, another way that I sometimes have thought about it is that my work methods are a little bit like playing Scrabble. That is to say, there's the board and the board represents — let's say if I'm making a piece of furniture, the board represents function. So this is a piece of furniture that I'm going to make and it has to function. That's a given. That's its job.

But having said that, then what? And it's the then what that are the letters. So the board is its function and that's a given. The Scrabble board is right there. Then you've got your tray of letters and you can use those letters in various combinations and you can have the greatest word in your tray but if it doesn't fit the board, you've got nothing. And so in a way, that's sort of what I feel like I do, is I'm trying to arrange my letters such that they'll fit on the board and do what I want them to do, which is to make a functional piece of furniture.

And a lot of times — so I may think of something but if it doesn't fit, if it's not going to work, and there's not only the functional aspect of it, if it doesn't work structurally, if doesn't work visually, then it's not going to work. And so, there is where there's a difference, say, between what I do and what a cabinetmaker does. A cabinetmaker — and this is obviously and clearly an oversimplification, but a cabinetmaker will get bored, think up something, get the boards, glue them together to make the form.

Whereas I tend more toward starting with a mass and getting rid of everything that isn't the form that I want. So it's really a sculptor's approach to the material as oppose to a cabinetmaker's — a subtractive sculptor's approach to the materials as oppose to a cabinet maker's. Now, I do combine elements and do join things but it's not about the joint. It's about the form and it's about the integration of the elements as a whole.

MS. SHEA: Have you — it seems like a good time to talk about words. Have you found any particular writers or periodicals of interest to you?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Of interest to me in terms of woodworking?

MS. SHEA: In terms of your development as an artist is their question.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Well, in terms of woodworking, again, Nakashima's writings but there's an awful lot. I mean, I think probably the most recent — well, there Furniture Society publishes — John Kelsey's the editor of, it's called *Studio Furniture*, I think, and they've had five publications and those have been really excellent. Some of the articles are written by makers, some are written by academics, but they're all very to the point and speak to what's happening in the field now in addition to historical perspectives. But those have been of interest more recently during different times, different kinds of work. I mean, for a while fine woodworking was really important, reading about woodworking was really important, particularly the market and that sort of thing.

Art has always been an interest once I woke up to it. So I've always been — I couldn't get down to see Martin Puryear's show in Manhattan but it was cheaper to buy the catalogue, which is no substitute. So I've just finished reading that and then I have another of his books from a show out in Chicago and so I'm very broad in my — as I said, I really like what Calder has to say about the way he works. *American Craft* magazine for a while was important but I think, at least for me, there comes a point where I'm not that interested in sort of — because

those kinds of magazines are very much of a survey. You know, this is — and after a while, to put it crassly, I'm more interested in what I'm doing than what is in *American Craft* magazine.

MS. SHEA: Oh, so it sounds like then you're also more interested in something in depth, like whole exhibition catalogue on a single artist — versus a three-page — this is what Martin Puryear's doing.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Right, yes. Right, that's right. I think the only woodworking — well, we get *Turning Points*, which comes from the Woodturning Center. Albert Lockoffs' publication and we get *Woodwork* magazine out of John Lavine's publication out of L.A., I think it is and we still get those. I mean, both Albert and John are friends of ours so we keep up with the scene in that way.

MS. SHEA: I think I'll — how would you — you talked for a while about beginning and going to different craft fairs, craft markets, then did you get more involved with the gallery world and what was your take on that?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: During the '80s in particular, we were — well, the '80s was an interesting decade. Mostly, when we would go to craft shows, we would be showing Michelle's work in part because it's just easier to move. Moving furniture — I don't know, I probably have done maybe five craft shows and, you know, some of them were paid for my being there. But it's really hard to move furniture around and it always gets dinged and you end up having to come back and repair it. But Michelle's work was more transportable and, you know, quite honestly, more desirable in that market.

That is to say people would — let's say in the mid-'80s, people would walk into our booth at — well, to her booth at Baltimore and would spend $3000 or so. Whereas people didn't generally walk into a booth — a furniture maker's booth and — well, I'm probably not fair or I can't really speak to that because I just did so few of them. So during the '80s, we went to craft shows and we were mostly showing Michelle's work and it was, you know, a week and Baltimore was a week-long party. It was exhausting. It was a lot of fun. We met great people and had a real good time.

But it got to be, particularly toward the — oh, my gosh, I think it was probably around '88 or '89, when it Michelle just wasn't selling anything at craft shows and we — well, there were a couple of different milestones and I'm not going to be able to remember the years. So we're going along at one point and we realize that Michelle's market was — there was no middle market. And everything we had ever done has always been serendipitous with few exceptions. This was a time when we actually discussed what market we were going to target for her work.

And at that time, too, I was — this is all before I started teaching in '89 and that caused a whole different kind of shift in everything. But in the early part of the '80s, I did all the gallery contacts and publicity stuff and Michelle kept the books and that sort of thing. But we decided that it was just not working at craft shows and that we were going to connect with galleries and ramp it up try to get to a different market. A more moneyed- market and that the middle was over. And we did. Michelle started showing with — well, she showed with Snyderman [-Works Galleries] in Philadelphia.

MS. SHEA: She mentioned I think Perimeter [Gallery, Chicago, IL]?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Pritam & Eames [East Hampton, NY].

MS. SHEA: Oh, okay.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Pritam & Eames was a big, was an important gallery for her in particular because of what it then led to, which was the Peter Joseph Gallery [New York, NY]. At any rate and I just kept making furniture and I had, I don't know, I probably showed in galleries about as many times as I went to craft shows. I would find that I would send a half dozen pieces to a gallery and I'd get five of them back. And what I would —

MS.SHEA: Some of them that needed to be — [Laughs.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Some of them that needed to be repaired but what I would hear -- well, so and so really liked this one but it wasn't the right size. Can you make another one? Well, part of the problem with my material is no, I can't make another one. You know, I've got this one. I can make something. Maybe I can make something similar but I can't make this same thing but eight inches bigger. And there's where a cabinetmaker could. You know, they — so I can't really do that and it just got to be difficult.

So, you know, the invitations weren't coming either. In other words, if I'm bringing back five pieces, the galleries not happy because they haven't sold my work. And I'm not happy because they haven't sold my work. And so it just became clear that I was going to work out of here. Toward the end of the '80s, I had begun to have problems in my hands and wrists and forearms. You know, waking up at night in pain. And at first I thought, well, must be carpal tunnel and so went around to various doctors and then was seeing an acupuncturist and also

went to see an osteopath. And the two of them, independently of one another basically said you're at a place now — so I was 39 — that you're in a place now where you're going to need to make a decision. You can continue working in the shop as you have been, 12 hours a day, seven days a week, and by your early 50s, you're not going to have the use of your hands anymore in terms of being able to work. Or you can remove your economic dependence upon work in the shop and prolong your life in the shop by however much longer, you know. You'll be able to continue working.

So after digesting that, I decided that I would get certified to be a teacher. In the early '80s, I had been on the Vermont Council on the Arts as an artist in residence and so had done a fair amount of teaching in southern Vermont here in schools teaching woodworking. You know, I'd go in and we'd make masks or we'd make stilts or, you know, whatever the kids wanted to make. And they would be maybe any where from a two week to a six week residency. Down at the Marlboro School, we carved a totem pole that's actually still standing there.

So I knew that I liked teaching and I knew that I liked it and I seemed well suited to it. So that it wasn't such a huge jump for me to move from being in the studio all the time to walking into a classroom. And then through a series of very fortunate events, I ended up getting a job at the elementary school, 300-yards down the street. So that the only problem was that my commute, moving from the house into the shop, which is about 10-feet — then I had to walk all the way from the house 300-yards down to the elementary school so my commute increased quite a bit.

MS. SHEA: Dramatically. [They laugh.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: And in many respects that was — although it wasn't planned, it was a good thing that that happened because right around that time Michelle quit. She stopped working because she just wasn't making enough money to continue and she went to work in an optic's plant in Brattleboro and I was teaching at the elementary school. And then one of her collectors found out that she had quit and became irate — Nathan Ancell — and he got her back to work. And shortly after that the Peter Joseph Gallery opened. So then once she was at the Joseph Gallery, then there was a revival of her work and a quantum leap into the kind of work that she was making.

MS. SHEA: It also sounds to me like a kind of reaction, I don't know, to both your experiences at the craft in the craft market fair arena and the gallery world — it sounds like commissions would be the most important part of your work.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, I mean, would say easily 80 percent of my output is commission work. And one of the — I mean, I think one of the big differences that I found from moving, working in the studio fulltime to being a fulltime teacher and in some respects, a part-time furniture maker was I really can't work on more than one piece at a time. Whereas I used to be able to work on two or three even at the same time because I was on them all the time and I'd work on this piece for a while and then I'd get to a place where either I couldn't see what I was going to do next or I just needed to do something else and I go and work on this piece and work on that for a while and then go work on this piece over, say, the course of a week.

That became too difficult because I couldn't keep track of where I left off when I had a break of five days when I was teaching down at the elementary school. So now I really only work on one piece at a time and they're commission pieces. And in a given year, like right now, I have work that'll easily take me through the summer and this has been a particularly good year. But in an average year, I'll probably make five or six pieces of furniture in a year and that's between teaching and that's about as much as I have time for. And we're open — I mean, most of our business, most of our drive by business is happening in the late spring, summer, and fall anyway. And those are times that given the academic year, I'm more available.

MS. SHEA: How would you say most of your commissions come about? I know you mentioned sometimes people will stop into the shop, look at the work, and I guess kind of think about it for a year or so. But now there's also the Internet. How —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Well, last year, I guess, we got a website up. [Laughs.] It is a nice one. Meg McCarthy did a nice job on that. So we have a website but — I mean, we are still, in some respects, dependent upon drive by traffic. Our location is pretty good for that. The years that Michelle was in galleries and — I mean, for people who are interested, our name is known. There have been people who would drive by and they say, oh, I saw Holzapfel and, you know, probably they're thinking Michelle since she's certainly more well-known but that brings them in. [Laughs.]

One aspect that has been amusing over the years of having a showroom is sometimes people will come in and all they see is Michelle's work. All they see are the turned pieces and the carving and all that and my work might as well not be there. At the same time, there will be other people who will come in and all they see is the furniture and Michelle's work is over there. You know, I'm not looking at that. I don't even see that. All they see is the furniture. And, you know, I don't know why that is but we see it over and over again. And there will even

be times when like a couple of weekends ago, I some people were in and we were talking about a piece of furniture I'm going to make for them. And I was trying to get them interested in looking at what Michelle was doing and I showed them that linen fold piece, that walnut linen fold piece that you had looked at out there. And she said oh, yes, that's nice and then — neat.

MS. SHEA: [Laughs.] Zoom back.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, back to the furniture. So, you know, I don't know, but it's a good thing, you know. So commissions have been — and we find that we have repeat — a fair number of repeat clients, clients who when they're ordering something they'll order more than one piece, and as I mentioned earlier, this is the first year that I'm aware of where we really got — there are three different furniture pieces that I've either sold all ready or that are commissions that are from the younger generation of client. So the kids of people that we'd already sold work to. It's humbling. [Laughs.]

[END MD 02.]

MS. SHEA: And this is Josephine Shea speaking again with David Holzapfel in Marlboro, Vermont, the home and studio in Vermont, on the second of March — it's a Sunday after a leap year — for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. And this is disc number three.

You were going to tell me a little bit more about both your materials and the way that you work.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: The materials that we use, you know, there are no straight lines. And so over the course of my working time, career, I've thought — my thinking about that has changed. My thinking about the materials has changed and evolved and changed back to where I started from and diverged off that as well.

But I've — currently, my thinking is that the materials have an influence over what I do and how I do it in a way that I'm not sure is necessarily the same for all woodworkers, so that because very often I have only one of something — let's say, for example, a commissioned piece — I have only one of whatever it is that the individual has expressed an interest in making for him or her, which means that I have to be very careful about what I'm doing and how I'm doing it.

The design process is much more materials based than, say, a cabinet-maker. I mean, a cabinet-maker can always go and get another board. I appreciate that, you know, I'm oversimplifying that. It's not in any way a simple process for anyone who's making anything. But in other words, I guess what I'm saying is because I have only one of something, I can only — I can't afford to make a mistake, which means that my design and my work process has got to be materials-based in a way that, again, a cabinet-maker might not have to be quite so careful about that.

And so when I — like this dining table that I'm making now, this past week, I've been sort of in the crisis mode, that on any big commission, there's always — I always find that there's a crisis period where I'm not sure that what I'm doing is going to work. And I'll find myself dreaming about it and working out what I'm doing as I'm going. In other words, it's really hard to figure out in advance everything that's going to happen along the road of making something because there's — I have to make the references as I go, the indices as I go. But the overriding recognition was that I always build from the bottom up.

This dining table is a complex one in that it's got to expand from a five-foot top, it's going to have two wings on either side, two two-foot wings on either side so that it will become a nine-foot. Because I didn't want to cut the table in half and make it be a traditional leaf table, plus that would mean having to pull apart the base pieces which — they're burled yellow birch, it just wouldn't be easily done. It has to have wings, which will attach to either end. The process of figuring out how to do that when everything is curved and irregular led me to the various crises along the way because all of that has to be regular. So I always — I'll often find myself imposing a geometry, a rational geometry on an irrational and irregular natural form.

That process — I mean, very often times, also, I think a key aspect of what I do is knowing when to stop, knowing when the proportions are right, knowing when my imposing my desire on a given form needs to end and the form needs to take over the responsibility of the ultimate piece, the ultimate finished piece.

So what that has meant is that in a way, you know, my work is very vernacular. And it has also meant that — it's really hard to — well, duplication is not even —

MS. SHEA: [Laughs] — an option. It doesn't sound like.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: There have been times over the years where we've been involved with organizations that — not galleries, that's a whole separate thing, but like catalogue people, where they've had images of our work in catalogues, mostly online catalogues, and it just hasn't worked because we can't duplicate something. Michelle,

as well, she can't do the same thing twice.

So that the design is material-based and so is the building. And the building is in that I can't know — I can't plan out too many steps ahead what I'm going to need to do next because the material is what will determine that to a great deal. So in terms of building from the bottom up, I first have to establish the relationship between the floor and the bottom of the piece. And then from there, I can establish the form and establish the design structure, the — you know, what's going to keep it from falling over. But it definitely starts from the bottom up. And part of what happened in this sort of — this past week and my crisis is that I got too involved in thinking about the top and lost sight of building from strength, which is from the bottom.

MS. SHEA: And it's interesting to me because it's so opposite how you're kind of starting out working with — is it Bryce [?] fabulous tables —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yeah.

MS. SHEA: — and the things that held up the wood were basically kind of almost mass-produced.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yeah.

MS. SHEA: So in a way, that was kind of maybe top down. [Laughs.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Absolutely, it definitely was. It definitely was.

MS. SHEA: And even what was underneath was not so important as opposed to what you're saying right now that you're starting at the ground level and working your way up to what it's going to eventually be.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: And it's — over the years, I've done, you know I've sort of played with that regular geometry and the irregular quality of the materials that we use very much in the way Nakashima did where he would have a very geometric base with an irregular, natural-edged board on top. And I always thought with his work that that was similar to Japanese tea house architecture where there'd be, you know, straight lines, except they'll always be a wiggly post or a wiggly element within that regular geometry. So there have been times when I've been sort of playing with that more where I'll have a regular — all the elements will be regular except for some — like a stretcher that would be multiple wiggly branches.

[Inaudible] — there's — [inaudible] — I've thought in terms of it, you know, the natural world as being the world of chaos and the human-made geometry as being the ordered and sort of juxtaposing and playing with that sense of order and chaos, rational and irrational.

But the material, I think, has a great deal to say in what I do. Again, in a way, I'm not entirely sure it does with cabinet-makers in the same way. Well, I've had a number of cabinet-maker friends who have been over and, you know, see the way I have to work and they just can't believe it. They think I'm nuts for using wacky stuff.

MS. SHEA: Right, the wood that no one is even interested in — [laughs] — that's considered so flawed, it's — [laughs] —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: It's junk. [They laugh.] I have here in front of me a — the art historian, Martin Kemp, was — he was actually writing about Leonardo Da Vinci, but he says that the great topic is the underlying order and structure of nature. And in some ways, I feel as though that's a lot of what I'm trying to display and make manifest in something that's functional.

In a way, it's — you know, another way that I sometimes have thought about it is that it's — that I'm using found objects to assemble or sometimes carve, but that they're found objects and the difficulty is to take this assemblage of found objects and within the parameters of something that has to function — a table's got to stand up, it's got to support the magazines or the table, or the plates, or whatever, so it's got to function — and within that that — within those givens, to take this assemblage of materials and try to make it serve its purpose and its purpose is not simply the functional aspect, but it's also this sense of — some of its purpose is to — again, and this is sort of where I feel as though I was — you know, I have a shared sensibility with Nakashima is to show, as he said, the soul of the tree. So I use whole boards, whole 40-inch wide boards and not glued up things. I think that's what I needed to say. [Laughs.]

MS. SHEA: Well, that's great. I'm glad we could add that. [They laugh.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]