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Oral history interview with Mira Nakashima,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Mira Nakashima on March 11, 2010. The interview took place in New Hope, Pennsylvania, and was conducted by James McElhinney 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.

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

Interview

JAMES McELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney speaking with Mira Nakashima at the Nakashima Studios on Aquetong Road in New Hope, Pennsylvania, on the eleventh of March, Thursday, 2010. Good morning.

MIRA NAKASHIMA: Good morning to you.

MR. McELHINNEY: Thank you for agreeing to this conversation. Let me ask you when was the first time you became aware of art? I realize that you were raised in an artistic environment. But when did you realize it was special?

MS. NAKASHIMA: That's a tough question.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, we'll ask it later then. [They laugh.]

MS. NAKASHIMA: I don't know. It's always been there, so it's hard to pinpoint when it became special. I took, of course, art classes in high school. And I'd always painted and drawn and made stuff. But my parents made a judgment that my high school art teacher was no good.

MR. McELHINNEY: And where did you study in high school?

MS. NAKASHIMA: I went to Solebury School [New Hope, PA].

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, you went to the Solebury School.

MS. NAKASHIMA: For high school.

MR. McELHINNEY: For high school. When did you move here to New Hope?

MS. NAKASHIMA: In 1943.

MR. McELHINNEY: In 1943.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Take us back a little bit. May we speak a little about your father?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Of course.

MR. McELHINNEY: I believe when we met before, you told me that he was from Spokane, Washington.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Right.

MR. McELHINNEY: And he was the child of immigrants?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: And what can you tell us about his early life?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, my grandmother on my father's side was one of the—I always thought it was kind of amazing—she was a picture bride. She had been working in the court of the Emperor Meiji and really didn't want to leave the court. But her parents decided it was time for her to get married. And they were trying to arrange different marriages for her. And then she didn't like any of the guys. So she went to a fortune teller, and the fortune teller told her to marry a poor man at a distance. My grandfather in the meantime had—he'd been

sort of an explorer of different things. At one point my dad said that he took blankets to China and sold them to both sides in the war there. [Laughs.] And he came to the U.S. somewhere around the turn of the century. And he worked with a trading company and was looking for a wife. So he sent to Japan. He had a picture of her apparently; that's the way it worked. But she didn't have a picture of him. So when she came in on the boat, she was looking at this row of young men on the dock and hoping that the little man that looked like a monkey at the end of the line wasn't her husband, and it was. [Laughs.]

But they took no chances. The men came on board, and they performed marriage ceremonies before the women could change their minds. And my grandmother lived with him all her life, never complained. Had four children; my dad was the first of those children. She went to elementary school and sat in the little baby chairs in the first grade or whatever, kindergarten, whatever, wherever the smallest chairs were, to learn English. And she never really mastered the language. Towards the end of her life she came to visit us, and she would always speak the wrong language with the wrong people. If we had a group of Americans visiting, she would speak Japanese to them, and of course they didn't understand what she was saying. If we had a group of Japanese visitors, she would invariably speak English to them so that they didn't understand her either. It was funny. But anyway, that was my grandparents.

And then Dad was born in 1905, and that was the year when the Japanese had won a war with Russia. And so he was named Katsutoshi, which means "the year of victory." That was his middle name. The second son was named Victor, and then Theodore was the third one. And my Aunt Mary was the fourth child in their family. And they all grew up in Seattle, Washington. My dad went to the University of Washington in forestry because he'd been a Boy Scout, and was very fond of trees and did a lot of hiking in the Olympic Peninsula. So he started off in forestry, and I don't know if he realized that it was like limited job possibilities or what. I think he must have had a lot of talent in drawing because I don't have access—I think they all disappeared—his drawings from his earlier days. But in college he was a very developed — not draftsman, but he probably was good in drafting. We have some of his projects from MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA], where he went for graduate school. But, you know, he drew very well. And he got a scholarship to Fontainebleau [Ecole Américaine des Beaux-Arts, Fontainebleau, France] in 1929 and then a scholarship to Harvard Graduate School of Design [Cambridge, MA], which he didn't like, and transferred to MIT. He got his master's in 1930. Shall I go on with the George Nakashima story? [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Sure, sure.

MS. NAKASHIMA: It was the Depression, and he got a job with the New York State Park Commission for several years. And in 1934 or thereabouts, he decided it was cheaper to sell his car and buy a steamship ticket around the world than to try to earn a living in the U.S. So he went back to Paris by way of London. Got some dental work done in London because he said it was cheaper there, and bummed around Paris for a couple of years. And then he decided it was beginning to be the end of the Western world in Paris in the '30s, and got back on a boat and went to Japan. And he stayed in his ancestral home, which was in Kamata outside of Tokyo. And got a job with Antonin Raymond in Tokyo through an introduction of his father. Raymond had been trained in Czechoslovakia, and then he worked with Wright [Frank Lloyd Wright] in 1916 in Taliesin, and went to Japan in 1921 to work on the Imperial Hotel. And then, after he was finished with that project, he stayed on in Japan and had an office that was called "something about the American architects" [American Architectural and Engineering Company]. So he had a lot of Americans, he had a lot of Europeans who'd been trained abroad with the new technology of steel and concrete.

So Dad was part of that group, a very radical group transforming the face of Japanese architecture in the 1930s. And he needed some projects in Japan. One of them was the church in Karuizawa. It was supposedly masterminded by Raymond. But Dad had a good part in it. And it was built with what they would call sustainable architecture now—"green architecture." They used the wood from the property and the stone from the property to build the church. And the story is in the Raymond book, I believe, even, and there's an article in German that I researched before when I wrote my book, that they didn't have final dimensions on the church until they had finished building it. They relied completely on the skill of the Japanese master craftsman.

MR. McELHINNEY: Hmm.

MS. NAKASHIMA: And that method kind of stayed with Dad for his entire life except when he got to India. He was sent to India by Raymond to work on the first reinforced concrete building in India called Golconde. And they did do drawings there. They still keep them almost sacred [laughs] in files at the Ashram [Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, India]. And then I was luckily able to access them. But the engineers—John Minami was one of his best friends—was an engineer at Waseda University [Tokyo], and he did the engineering for Golconde in Japan, and they would send drawings back and forth. But Dad did all of the drawings on site, including the drawings for the framework for building that building. And they had to import all the materials from abroad

because they didn't have them, because it was the first reinforced concrete building in India. They started in 1936; and it wasn't finished 'til about 1939 or '40. But Dad was the architect on site. Although, you know, I guess it was basically Raymond's idea, Dad developed it and changed it a lot. It's a beautiful building to this day. It's incredible. It's got sort of a natural ventilation, natural insulation system, which is radical even these days.

MR. McELHINNEY: So but what we would call today green architecture.

MS. NAKASHIMA: The building in Golconde was not exactly green.

MR. McELHINNEY: No, no, but the one in Japan.

MS. NAKASHIMA: The one in Japan was. The one in India, they had to import all the cement. They had to import sand for a while because the sand in India wasn't good enough to make good cement or concrete. And then Dad developed—he kept a little notebook, which I was able to look at in the cold storage at the Ashram. They let me look at it. It's filled with all these little drawings of how he figured out how to do that building. And he had run every detail by the Mother of the Ashram. And he developed all these ideas from this little notebook with little tiny sketches. And one of the things he built was a sand-washing machine [laughs] so they could use native sand for the concrete, because they couldn't do it unless they washed it first.

So then in 1939 the war started to break out. In 1938 he became a disciple of Sri Aurobindo. In 1939 the war started to break out, and he left India very reluctantly. I think he wanted to be in that Ashram for the rest of his life. But his family was all back in the States.

So he came back by way of Tokyo, and just kind of by chance met my mother there. My mother had also been born and brought up in Seattle. Their brothers knew each other apparently. But Mother and Dad hadn't met until they were in Tokyo. And Mother's older sister was in Tokyo. She had been visiting her other sister in Australia and was on her way back to the States, and they bumped into each other. And fell in love and got engaged. And were married in 1941 in Los Angeles. Then they moved to Seattle. And while Dad was in the Los Angeles area, he saw a Frank Lloyd Wright building under construction. He decided that if that's the way they're doing architecture in the U.S., he wasn't going to be an architect anymore. That's Dad's favorite story, architecture story. I was at Taliesin a couple of weeks ago. I wasn't actually in Taliesin, but I was in Scottsdale [AZ]. And there were a number of people from Taliesin who came to my lecture. I told them that story, and they practically fell off their chairs. [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, that's sort of the Temple of Wright out there.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes, yes. Oh, definitely. Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: So I guess the State of Wisconsin and Arizona are both sort of shrines of Wrightdom. So what about the Wright building so offended him?

MS. NAKASHIMA: I think it was — it manifested the whole system of architecture in the U.S. and the system of construction. The system of architecture was that the architect did all these nice pencil drawings and gave them to the engineers to figure out. And then the contractors wrestled with them and changed things. And in the meantime you're fussing all the time with the client. And then you send it out to the contractors, and they cut all the corners they can, and bang everything together with two-by-fours and nails. And having been in Japan and India, where craftsmanship is one of the most important things in their lives, he just thought it was wrong. And so he turned to furniture in Seattle.

MR. McELHINNEY: So he moved to Seattle from Los Angeles with his wife.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. McELHINNEY: And what did he do there?

MS. NAKASHIMA: He worked part-time as an architect to pay the bills.

MR. McELHINNEY: As an architect.

MS. NAKASHIMA: But he also started a furniture operation. And interestingly enough, as we speak, we are developing a whole new line of furniture which was—we found drawings for it that Dad had done before. Some of them I think had been produced while he was in Seattle. And I don't know if some of them were produced at all, ever. But they were all from that early '40s period of time. And it was just in that transition between being an architect and a furniture maker. Very, very different from what everybody else was doing, and is known as Nakashima. They're all dimensioned lumber, very thin lumber. Dad always had—didn't always— but in the beginning had very thin lumber. Now we go to thicker lumber. One client who insists he has to have a three-inch-thick table. We usually don't cut wood that thick. [Laughs.] But it was very thin, about an inch thick, in the

beginning. And there's a whole series of drawings that he did that may or may not have been produced, but we're reproducing them now.

MR. McELHINNEY: But the objects have never come to light. The objects that may have been—

MS. NAKASHIMA: That we have drawings for? No. There are some from the Andre Ligné Collection, which have surfaced on the secondary market, and I forget where they are now. But they went through the 1950s gallery here.

MR. McELHINNEY: What were the first objects he designed? Were they tables or chairs or—

MS. NAKASHIMA: Tables, chairs, desks, dressing tables. There were some chairs that were a little bit like the cushion chair of André Ligné. They had, you know, wood frame. And the first version had rope on the bottom and cushions. Desks and tables. From that very early period, you know, there's not a whole lot he did. Some work for the [inaudible]. And Bob [Robert] Aibel had a show in October through December in Philadelphia of these pieces that we recently discovered, and a lot of other early pieces. And he was—bless his heart—he borrowed from somewhere two pieces that were made for the Ligné family in 1941. He found them, tracked them down, and borrowed them from the owners for that show. And he also had some furniture that Dad had designed for the ashram in India. They weren't the originals, but he had them produced and sent for this show.

MR. McELHINNEY: So what are the forms like? I think when people think of his work that, you know, canonical Nakashima, they imagine some kind of irregularity of the form of the tree or, you know, the surface of the tree being allowed to exist in the finished object.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: But what kind of forms were they at that point in time?

MS. NAKASHIMA: They were very rectilinear. I should bring you some drawings.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, after—

MS. NAKASHIMA: Actually we have them sitting down in the studio.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, when we resume the conversation after the break, I'll have a look at them.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. I had thought you were taking images as well. But if you need images, I can find you some.

MR. McELHINNEY: Anything is welcome. Any kind of information is welcome. Well, I'm just trying to understand the segue from sort of architecture to furniture, you know. How he's positioning himself, reinventing himself as an artist.

MS. NAKASHIMA: He didn't have to totally reinvent himself.

MR. McELHINNEY: No.

MS. NAKASHIMA: When he was working with the Raymond office, the Raymond office was a full-service office the way [Le] Courbusier's was. They did all the furniture, fitted the furnishings. They did weaving, and they did some chairs with grass seats, and I think some lounge chairs. They were all very rectilinear kind of like and/or tubular.

MR. McELHINNEY: International Style.

MS. NAKASHIMA: I guess you'd call them that. So the Raymond office, they made that furniture to go with their buildings when they did them, including the one in India, which Dad worked on. So it wasn't that big of a transition to go into furniture from where he'd been working in architecture. But the early days were very much, as you say, an International style. There as none of that free-form stuff until after the war.

In 1942 I was born, and we were put in the camps. I was six weeks old when we were put in the camps in the desert.

MR. McELHINNEY: Which camp was it?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Idaho, the Minidoka Camp.

MR. McELHINNEY: I just saw this.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Which is the—

MS. NAKASHIMA: I'm involved in that, and I'm giving a lecture there on—

MR. McELHINNEY: SAAM. I just, you know, to read it into the conversation: The Smithsonian American Art Museum [Washington, DC].

MS. NAKASHIMA: Right.

MR. McELHINNEY: "The Art of Gaman."

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: "The arts and crafts from—"

MS. NAKASHIMA: I have the catalog from that. They sent me one because I'm supposed to do a workshop there for two days in April. With Wendy Maruyama, who's also Japanese-American.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes, it's here in the book.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I haven't gotten ready for that one yet. I've got to talk with—

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, well, you have a little time.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, not really. I've got a whole lot of stuff in between I've got to take care of first. I've got to—

MR. McELHINNEY: Here's the Renwick. It's the Renwick Gallery [Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC]?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. Yes, yes. Right.

MR. McELHINNEY: You were how old at that time?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Six weeks.

MR. McELHINNEY: Six weeks. So it was—that environment would have been sort of the first environment that you were really sort of rationally cognizant of.

MS. NAKASHIMA: I guess so, yes. Mom and Dad lived in a little apartment in Seattle, but I wasn't there very long. And Mom had a tough time. And my aunt went. This is the aunt that had been in Tokyo came back to Los Angeles. I guess she had been there for the wedding or something. And her father lived in Los Angeles. Anyway, since we were put in the camps, the Nakashima [inaudible] family, decided if they had to be uprooted from where they were and what they were doing, the best thing they could do was to be together. So we were all together in that one camp, the Okajimas and the Nakashimas, as much as possible. So my grandparents were there and aunts and uncles. Oh, actually most of my uncles were in the service; so they weren't there.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes, you spoke about that before. They were in the Four Four Two [442]? [442nd Regimental Combat Team. Ed.]

MS. NAKASHIMA: Oh, yes, that's my Aunt Mary's husband. He just passed away.

MR. McELHINNEY: I'm sorry.

MS. NAKASHIMA: But he was a good old soldier. He was the epitome of the art of *gaman*. You know the term *gaman*. I don't know what the best translation is. But it's basically a tough upper lip.

MR. McELHINNEY: Holding up under hardship.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes, yes. Straight—what is it? Stiff upper lip. [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Stiff upper lip, yes, the British stiff upper lip. Well, that unit was the most decorated and took the highest casualties in the war of any American infantry.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Right. Well, they basically sent them out as disposable troops.

MR. McELHINNEY: Cannon fodder.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. Well, they certainly did leave a distinguished record.

MS. NAKASHIMA: They did, those that survived.

MR. McELHINNEY: Were you a part of the genesis of this exhibition at all?

MS. NAKASHIMA: No. No, I was not. This was based on collections of artifacts that people had remaining after the camp era. And they said there was probably still stuff in people's attics and basements that hasn't been uncovered. But there was enough uncovered. Probably it must have been connected with the Japanese-American National Museum. I haven't read that part of it yet. I don't know. But the Japanese-American National Museum in Los Angeles was one of the first museums and probably the best museum to bring that whole situation to the light and to memorialize it and commemorate it and collect things from that.

MR. McELHINNEY: It's an interesting image because it's Heart Mountain, Wyoming, right outside of Cody. And I was there a couple of years ago, and actually there's a lot of effort underway to interpret the camps and to create a memorial. Or they have established it.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Most of the campsites have been declared National Monuments. And they're trying to figure out what to do there. There's one in Bainbridge Island where most of the Japanese-Americans in Washington were shipped out from first. And that's pretty well built. They've designed and built quite a memorial there. They were talking about doing one at Minidoka, and I don't think they've gotten really far. You know when they first—when was it, 1990—right after my dad died, they gave us reparations money finally. So Dad never saw it, but they gave it to Mother. But that was the result of a long period of negotiations, you know, trying to make the government recognize the fact that all these American citizens had been incarcerated wrongly.

MR. McELHINNEY: Half a century.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Waiting.

MS. NAKASHIMA: But, I mean, that's part of *gaman*, too. In the Japanese culture, you respect authority. You respect the government. You put up with whatever. You respect your husband even though he comes out and leaves you. [Laughs.] And you put up with it. And that was so deeply ingrained in the Japanese society that it wasn't until 50 years later when my generation decided it was time to speak up and do something.

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

MS. NAKASHIMA: Actually it was, there were people in the Nisei generation who were brave enough to start the movement going [inaudible].

MR. McELHINNEY: What did your father do in the camps?

MS. NAKASHIMA: He and this fellow named Gentaro Hikogawa, who was a Japanese carpenter trained in Japan, worked together to try to make the barracks livable. And they—it was again one of those green projects—they used sustainable materials from whatever you could scrounge. They used packing boxes and little bits of bitter brush that they found on the desert, which doesn't grow there anymore [laughs]. But in, I think, rushes—I found when I was in, I gave a talk in Sun Valley [ID] in 2004, when our show the "Nature Form and Spirit" show was there. And I asked if I could have a day or two down to go down and visit Minidoka because I had never been back. And there was a professor from, I think, the University of Boise or Idaho or somewhere who had photocopied records, just little sketches. They weren't detailed sketches.

But there was a sketch that my father had done as a way of making those barracks livable. It was convertible furniture. With a frame—you'd take two cot beds, two metal cots that you were given, put them together as a double bed and make a frame around them. And you'd use them as a table that folded up into the wall because there wasn't any room. And there was a bench where you could store coal underneath, and the top flipped up, and you could sit on it when you weren't taking coal out. And a whole series of things like that. And there were rushes were used somehow or other in decorative ways. They were taking some from the riverbanks and [inaudible]. So he was busy just making stuff, I guess. Designing and making stuff. And there's pictures of him which the WRA [War Relocation Authority] took in front of a little shop in the camp. And he actually had some tools.

MR. McELHINNEY: As you stated earlier, he had been involved as an architect with the design of furniture

and as other architects at that period were. I mean, Royer, [Le] Courbusier, many, many architects designed it. And even Wright, of course, designed, you know, the furnishings for buildings.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: So he decides, your dad decides to focus more on furniture building—or entirely, although he has to earn a living as an architect before his interment. I'm just curious. Before he got into the camps, was he actually doing the work by hand himself, or was he working with other people who were craftsmen?

MS. NAKASHIMA: I believe he was doing most of it, if not all of the work himself. He didn't have a shop of his own. They just lived in this little apartment. And he worked out a deal with the Maryknoll priest, Father Tibesar, in Seattle to teach shop, woodworking, to the boys in the Maryknoll boys' club in exchange for using the machinery that they had.

MR. McELHINNEY: I see.

MS. NAKASHIMA: So he used the Maryknoll boys' club as his shop when the boys weren't working there. I guess. It might be that the boys pitched in and helped him sometimes. I don't know.

MR. McELHINNEY: What kind of tools did he have available to him in the camp?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Not a whole lot. I think it was mostly hand tools. In the beginning they weren't allowed, I think, to have anything sharp. [Laughs.] But as time went on, they—Oh, there was a funny story that I heard when I was in Minidoka. They said that they were in such a rush to get the internees out of the halfway place into the permanent—semi-permanent—camps, that they weren't finished by the time they got there. You know, the backs of the barracks were half done. And they didn't have time to put up all the barbed wire around the barracks. So they were still working on it when the internees were there. So the Americans would go out and put up barbed wire fences during the day, and the Japanese would come out at night and take them all down. This went on for like several weeks. And they finally decided there was nowhere to go anyway. So [laughs] they gave up with the barbed wire. I think there were armed guards, and you weren't allowed to go out of certain areas. But Dad and this carpenter were allowed out to go and forage for materials. But as time went on, I think they gradually accumulated more tools. But I don't remember that there were any power tools. Maybe there were.

MR. McELHINNEY: How did he accumulate them? Were they obtained from the government?

MS. NAKASHIMA: I should do some more study. I don't know.

MR. McELHINNEY: It's just an interesting question.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. I don't know. I think maybe the government supplied some of them eventually when they realized they weren't going to do anything [inaudible] with the sharp tools. But I think some of the visitors used to bring things as gifts. And I guess they were—

MR. McELHINNEY: Baking cakes, like a wood chisel baked in the cake.

MS. NAKASHIMA: I don't know. I have no idea. Maybe. I don't know. [They laugh.]

MR. McELHINNEY: But, no, I'm just trying to understand the way that he transitioned from being an architect and being a very hands-on designer who was involved with every aspect of a project and curious and engaged with every aspect of the project. And objected to the Wrightian idea of sort of the all-powerful architect reigning over subordinates who handled all of the details.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, it was partly that. And I think it was partly the elitist mentality, too. And the arrogance. I think that's what really got him. Because Dad was—well, he'd been in the Ashram and was a disciple of Sri Aurobindo, and that was a classless idea of society. It was a monastic kind of ideal in which there were—there was no hierarchy, in which everybody was equal. I mean, the Mother herself was very much hands-on and involved in every aspect of what went on in the Ashram. And he thought that's the way things should be. It was very egalitarian. And when he was building that building, the Ashram, the Mother was not concerned so much—well, maybe it was probably bad training for being an architect in the U.S. [laughs]—but to her, building that building was more of a spiritual exercise. Raymond was concerned with trying to get the building done on time and within budget.

MR. McELHINNEY: Of course.

MS. NAKASHIMA: And it didn't matter to her. She just wanted the disciples who were building it to learn something and increase their spiritual awareness by doing the work.

MR. McELHINNEY: So it was another opportunity for them to refine their training.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Oh, yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: So that would be completely at odds with—

MS. NAKASHIMA: That's called Karma Yoga. It's the yoga of doing the work.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, it would be kind of odds with, you know, capitalist—

MS. NAKASHIMA: Oh, yes, very much so.

MR. McELHINNEY: —deadline oriented, bottom-line-oriented approach to things.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Right.

MR. McELHINNEY: So when he was in the camps, did he also start to build things for himself?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Oh, yes. No, our apartment was—compartment—was completely furnished by Dad.

MR. McELHINNEY: What kind of building were you in?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Barracks.

MR. McELHINNEY: Barracks. Just regular—

MS. NAKASHIMA: They looked kind of like that.

MR. McELHINNEY: Army barracks.

MS. NAKASHIMA: I mean, I can show you my book later that shows more of—I mean, I have lots of books down in the studio.

MR. McELHINNEY: So each of the family groups would have x amount of square feet?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. It was about 100 square feet or something. They were very small. And I don't remember some of the bigger— There were three of us, so we got a little bit bigger than people where there were two of them. But sometimes whole families were squashed in there. The trouble is that I don't think the walls were all the way to the ceiling. They had the lights on all the time. So there was no privacy at all. And there wasn't even—there was no insulation. The dust storms came in through all the cracks in the walls. We had little pot-bellied stoves. It's a wonder they didn't all burn down, actually. But we did the best we could. And apparently Dad used old blueprints to paper the walls to keep the wind out.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, good.

MS. NAKASHIMA: So we don't have any of those drawings left. [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Are any of the pieces that he built in those years in existence now?

MS. NAKASHIMA: I believe so. I still have a toy box that he made from that time.

MR. McELHINNEY: And what was your memory of the whole experience? You're six weeks old at interment. And this is sort of your first experience as a conscious human being, you know, in this environment.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes, I think I left when I was like a year and a half old.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, you were a year and a half old.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Thanks to Mr. Raymond. Mr. Raymond had left Tokyo I think around '39 and came to the U.S. He bought a farm down the hill here in Pennsylvania. And moved his office. He actually had some of his men come from the Tokyo office to work with him here in Pennsylvania. And one of Dad's professors at MIT said to Raymond, "Can you please sponsor the Nakashimas so they don't have to stay in the camps forever?" And so he sponsored us, and we came out in 1943. So we weren't there that long.

MR. McELHINNEY: A year and a half roughly.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. I don't remember it as being particularly awful. I'm sure my mother did. But I have very few memories of that period of time.

MR. McELHINNEY: So basically this is where you grew up.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, yes, I have memories of being at Raymonds' farm, because I was there until I was three. Yes. And then we lived in a little house down the road on Aquetong for a while. Mom said it was a—it had been abandoned for a number of years, and there wasn't any heat, and there was no running water. There was a hand pump in the kitchen. So it was pretty primitive. But we had a pot-bellied stove and one of those big old cast-iron stoves for the kitchen. That was our heat.

MR. McELHINNEY: So at that point I'm assuming that your dad returns to architecture. He's working in a practice now?

MS. NAKASHIMA: No, no. He never returned to architecture. He was still in furniture. Well, when he went to Raymond's, he was not allowed to work as an architect.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, really.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Because they were working on government projects.

MR. McELHINNEY: I see.

MS. NAKASHIMA: And so he wasn't allowed to work as an architect. But he was working as a farmhand. He was working as a chicken farmer, because that's what they were raising.

MR. McELHINNEY: At the Raymonds'?

MS. NAKASHIMA: At the Raymonds'. So after a year and a half or so, Dad said— But Mr. Raymond allowed him to work in the milk house down there. We didn't go to the Raymonds' farm, did we? It's still down there.

MR. McELHINNEY: No, we didn't.

MS. NAKASHIMA: The old milk house is still there, and that was Dad's first shop in New Hope.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, really!

MS. NAKASHIMA: And again, he just worked from whatever he could scrounge, which was like barn doors and bits of this and that.

MR. McELHINNEY: So what was, you know, the genesis of all of what we now see here?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Oh, the free-edge thing that most people associate with Nakashima? When Dad moved out— I think when he was on the farm, he was still just using whatever he could scrounge around the farm and he didn't have to pay for. When he went to—but during that period of time, I think Mr. Raymond introduced him to Hans Knoll. And he designed a series of designs for Knoll Productions.

MR. McELHINNEY: Knoll Productions.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Later. It wasn't 'til the late '40s. But he had, I think he—there's a picture of me and Hans Knoll and Dad and Jens Risom's daughter at the Raymond Farm. So we must have met originally at the Raymond farm. But when Dad moved to this little cottage in New Hope, he worked out of the garage. He said it only had three sides, but he worked, you know, all year long in that little garage. And he was able to get castoffs from the lumber industry that nobody else wanted; it had cracks and holes and waney edges and things. So that's how the waney-edge thing got started. [Laughs.] And he said in the beginning people didn't understand what he was doing, because nobody did that back then. But he said after a while people paid extra for the cracks and holes and butterflies.

MR. McELHINNEY: [Laughs.] So just to sort of establish the chronology: He gets out of the camps. He works at the Raymond Farm. You're living on Aquetong Road in the small house with a hand pump in the garage, as a shop. He eventually organizes one at the milk house at the Raymond Farm.

MS. NAKASHIMA: No, no, no. He did—the Raymond Farm milk house project was before we moved to—

MR. McELHINNEY: Was first, was first.

MS. NAKASHIMA: When we were staying at the Raymond Farm for about a year and a half. That was Dad's shop. When we moved to the little place on Aquetong, he worked out of the garage there.

MR. McELHINNEY: Still on Aquetong Road, right.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. Further away.

MR. McELHINNEY: Further away. And how was he getting his work shown, sold? Who was buying it? Who were his clients?

MS. NAKASHIMA: We don't know for sure. My mother kept books very carefully, and that's the only records we have from the early days. There were a lot of things that were sold to Knoll. And I don't know if they were made for Knoll and marketed by Knoll. Probably. There was also a place in New York called Rabun Studios that had a lot of orders. So he must have sold through Rabun Studios in New York. And then, as I say, Knoll eventually did the manufacturing line in the late '40s. But it must have been tough to get started. [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes. Because even at that time, New Hope was, and the Delaware Valley, was a pretty intensely artistic area with the New Hope School of painters and [Edward] Redfield, [Daniel] Garber, et cetera. And some writers and theater people out of New York.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. McELHINNEY: And close enough to Princeton and close enough to Philadelphia to have some interaction with those areas. We have to assume there would have been some access to people who were looking for fine handmade furniture.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. McELHINNEY: But I'm just curious how he actually managed to go from being the chicken man to being an independent artist.

MS. NAKASHIMA: I don't think it was easy. [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: No, I'm sure.

MS. NAKASHIMA: There is a series of articles—not articles, letters that were written between Dad and Rene d'Harnoncourt in the early '40s when he was developing the grass-seated chair. And they have those at MoMA [Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY]. And when the Michener Museum [Doylestown, PA] did a show on the "Modernist Moment," Mathilda McQuaid wrote the — I forget whether it was the preface or whatever it was for the catalog. And she accessed boxes of correspondence between Dad and d'Harnoncourt, and she let me look at them.

MR. McELHINNEY: Who put them in contact with each other?

MS. NAKASHIMA: I don't know that.

MR. McELHINNEY: Because Rene d'Harnoncourt was the director of the Philadelphia Art Museum, I believe, at that time.

MS. NAKASHIMA: No, he was the director of MoMA.

MR. McELHINNEY: MoMA, okay. But he had something to do, I think earlier, at one point. At some point in time, I seem to recall—I could be wrong—he had something to do with Philadelphia.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Of course, his daughter was director for years.

MR. McELHINNEY: Of course, Anne, yes.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. I don't know.

MR. McELHINNEY: But anyway, somebody put him in touch with Rene d'Harnoncourt. They established a corresponding relationship.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Did he come to the studio to see the work?

MS. NAKASHIMA: I forget. There was—he must have. I don't know. But most of the letters that I remember were Dad's: I haven't quite figured out how to do the back on this yet. You know, I don't have the right material to do this yet. [Laughs.] It went on for, I don't know, a year or so before he finally got the chair.

MR. McELHINNEY: Where are those letters?

MS. NAKASHIMA: They're at MoMA in their archives.

MR. McELHINNEY: At MoMA now, okay.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. Mm-hmm.

MR. McELHINNEY: What year would that have been? You said it was in the early '40s. That must have been just after he—

MS. NAKASHIMA: I think it was '45 to '47, somewhere in there.

MR. McELHINNEY: So immediately after the war.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. And when they were still in the little cottage on Aquetong—because there's a picture of the prototype chair with my grandfather. My grandfather and my Aunt Thelma, who was with us in the camps, left the camps. And they went to Chicago as part of the intelligence arm of the army for a while. And then they came back to New Hope to live with us. And my grandfather taught Japanese at the University of Pennsylvania. He used to commute in, and then he'd stay with us. And there's a picture of my grandfather sitting on that chair down at the old house. So that must have been '44, '45 or so.

MR. McELHINNEY: Were they also released at the behest of—

MS. NAKASHIMA: No, they left because they were part of the army intelligence. They were allowed out.

MR. McELHINNEY: So they were in a whole other line of work.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. [They laugh.] For a while.

MR. McELHINNEY: So at what point did you leave the cottage on Aquetong, or did he and the family leave the cottage and move here?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. Oh, I was about five years old. So it would have been about '47. I think he found this property somewhere around '46, and he liked it because it was a south-facing slope. And the farmer who owned it was an MIT grad. And so they kind of trusted each other or something, being fellow alums. And Dad convinced him somehow or other to let him have three acres of property here in exchange for labor on his farm. And so that's how—And we moved here. And Dad started building the shop, and then he started building the house where my brother lives. And we lived in a tent, an old army tent, where the pole barn is now, while Dad was finishing the house. And when winter came, my mother's father had moved back to Los Angeles and was very ill. And it was his eightieth birthday. And so Mom and I took a transcontinental train ride when I was five, I think, and went to visit Granddaddy and spent a little time in Los Angeles. Because Mom grew up in Los Angeles. Oh, I said she grew up in Seattle, didn't I? I think she spent her early childhood in Seattle, and then in Los Angeles she went to school for quite a few years. So anyway, we stayed in Los Angeles for a while. And by the time we came back, Dad had enclosed the living room of the house. So we were able to survive in that instead of the tent for the winter.

MR. McELHINNEY: Which of the buildings was the original house?

MS. NAKASHIMA: The one right next door, where my brother lives.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, okay. So it's quite a lot of work and also working for the farmer at the same time.

MS. NAKASHIMA: He was supposed to, and eventually he didn't have enough time to work on the farm. So he paid it off in money from the furniture he made. They scrimped and saved a lot. My mother was very strict with the books. And some of the entries in her books are so funny. I mean, I guess they shouldn't be funny. But they're amusing because it said: "Well, we sold one piece of furniture. It was twelve fifty. So we went out and bought, you know, three planks of wood and a box of nails or a box of screws or something." And that was her bookkeeping. [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: It's an amazing story because a lot of artists have this image of being completely irresponsible and sort of inspired creatures who are living on the bohemian edge of truth and inspiration. And here you have someone who's got this incredible education, this sort of very unusual life path, and who is sort of doggedly building this world in a body of work in a very methodical way.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes, he did that. It wasn't particularly methodical. Dad was the artistic part of the partnership. My mother was the bookkeeper. And he realized that he needed Mom when they got engaged in Tokyo. He said, "I need a business manager." And he knew he was no good at it. So, I mean, she was a very good business partner. And she kept him in line. When Dad wrote his book in 1981, was it? *The Soul of a Tree*

[Kodansha USA, 1981] first came out, Dad was so proud of this book, you know. It had taken him years to get together because he didn't write very well. And Mother was the English major: "George, this isn't a sentence. You can't write this." And so she'd rewrite it for him, and this went on for [inaudible]. We had a secretary at the time; he did everything on a manual typewriter with no eraser, and carbon paper. So when he finally got his book written, he was so proud when it came out. You know, he had some copies down in the studio, and he'd give them to his friends as they came in. Mother got so mad at him she wouldn't let him have a book. She just gave him the cover so he could show them, but then they had to pay for it.

MR. McELHINNEY: [Laughs] They could have a discount, I assume, right?

MS. NAKASHIMA: [They laugh.] I don't know. Maybe not.

MR. McELHINNEY: If you want a discount, the bookstore's down the road.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. This was before Amazon.

MR. McELHINNEY: So the shop was built before the house.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: That's very telling.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes, yes. No, that was essential. He had to be able to work.

MR. McELHINNEY: And by this time—

MS. NAKASHIMA: And he was living in a tent. I mean, Dad liked camping. He was a Boy Scout. So, you know, it wasn't a big deal for him. It was a little hard on Mom.

MR. McELHINNEY: It's one of these huge green hospital tents rather than these big, big army tents.

MS. NAKASHIMA: I forget how big it was. No, it wasn't a green hospital tent. It was kind of like olive drab canvas, as I remember.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. Yes.

MS. NAKASHIMA: And there were flaps on it so you could open it for ventilation. And there was a vent at the top. And we had piles of packing boxes in the middle, so that my sleeping area was separate from theirs, but not by much. [Laughs.] It did have a floor. I think it had a wood floor. I don't think we were on the ground.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes, that would be standard government issue, a wood floor.

MS. NAKASHIMA: It wasn't very big. You know maybe 10, 15—

MR. McELHINNEY: And how long were you in this tent? Did you spend a winter in the tent?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, Dad did. [They laugh.] Mom and I escaped to Los Angeles that winter.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, I see.

MS. NAKASHIMA: We weren't there more than a—

MR. McELHINNEY: Clever ladies.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Got away. Yes, Los Angeles is a bit warmer than Bucks County in the winter. So he spent a winter in the tent. Or in the shop—you're not sure.

MS. NAKASHIMA: I am not sure. I remember one year when my cousin came to apprentice, my Aunt Dorothea's son, was in high school, I think. And he came to work with us one summer. And they put him up in the shop. So there must have been a bed in the shop. Maybe Dad did sleep in the shop. [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Unless he had guests. And then he had to sleep in the tent.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. Well, I'm sure he didn't have guests at that point.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, what kind of anecdotes could you share about him early in your life? What do you

remember? Some memorable event?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Memorable event.

MR. McELHINNEY: I mean, did he go—I know some people, and I know a few people, who are very, very crazy about wood and will go into the woods and only harvest deadfall. Or they have some—it's like a gambler. Everybody's got their own system, their own kind of logic of what they're going to use, what they're going to take. This sort of harvesting wood from, you know, the natural environment. And he did that, right? He did that.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Sort of. But Dad really didn't let me in on a whole lot of his creative process until he had a stroke, just before he died. He just kind of did stuff, and then he would tell me to do other stuff. But he didn't tell me why.

MR. McELHINNEY: But what did you think of him? You're a kid.

MS. NAKASHIMA: He was just Dad.

MR. McELHINNEY: He's just Dad. But other dads wore coats and ties and then went to offices or they were farmers. And your dad was—

MS. NAKASHIMA: In the shop.

MR. McELHINNEY: —making stuff.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Did that seem unusual to you at all?

MS. NAKASHIMA: No.

MR. McELHINNEY: Or your friends?

MS. NAKASHIMA: No, I didn't know he was different from other dads particularly. [Laughs.] Hey, I wasn't paying attention, I guess. I don't know. But as far as the wood goes, I remember when we lived at the little house down on Aquetong, he had a pile of wood outside, and he had one helper. He used to help him. And this—I just remember living in that little house. We had a little icebox, and the iceman would come every so often and put this big chunk of ice in the icebox so we could keep our food. And I remember some of the dolls that I had and the furniture that Dad made for me. I have pictures of a— He made me a bed that was almost identical to my doll bed, and I had the doll bed right next to mine. And I woke up—I had fallen out of bed one night. And I woke up in the doll bed one morning. I thought, what's wrong with my bed? [They laugh.] It shrank!

I remember when I was two years old I met a very important woman in my life whose name was Mildred Johnstone. She had been a Martha Graham dancer. Married the vice president of Bethlehem Steel and was studying art in New Hope. And it turns out—I thought she was studying with Maxo Vanka, which I think she did—but I just found out she also studied with Charlie Ward, and they both lived in the Carversville area, and we had friends in the Carversville area. But I didn't meet her there. I met her in New Hope. I was at the bookstore in New Hope. I forget what—was it the Delaware Bookstore at that point? And it was run by a hunchbacked lady. And Millie Johnstone, I guess, in her magnanimous position in society decided to help her out. So I think she was part owner or owner of that little bookstore. And I was in the bookstore looking for a book. Or Dad and Mother were looking for a book or something. Anyway, I happened to be there, and she walked in, and she looked at me, and she said, "Oh, would you like a book?" And I said, "No, thank you. I have one." And then the next thing she said to me, "Would you like to come home with me?" And I'm thinking I would say yes, and I said, "Okay." So I went home with her. And she took me—she was my fairy godmother. She took me to this house in Bethlehem, and she gave me piano—I don't know if she gave me piano lessons. But she gave me tennis and swimming lessons. And she took me up to the Trapp Family Singers camp. She took me to the Bach Festivals. She took me to Japan the first time when I graduated from college. And she was a very important person in my life. I have more memories of her than I do of— I guess, you know, it was kind of funny. People nowadays would never allow their kids to go off with someone like that. But either my parents were glad to get rid of me, or they recognized that this was a special lady, and it was okay.

MR. McELHINNEY: Were they acquainted at all with her before?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Uh-uh. [Negative.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Very curious. How old were you?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Two.

MR. McELHINNEY: Two!

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Wow! Just like Auntie Mame or something like that.

MS. NAKASHIMA: I guess. I don't know. But she was— It turned out—and I didn't know it at the time—she had lost one of her own children at the age of two. And she kind of took me in to fill that empty spot. Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Of that child.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: So at that point then she's actually raising you, or are you here?

MS. NAKASHIMA: At least part-time. No, I'm here most of the time. I used to go and visit Aunt Millie every now and then. I don't remember how many times. But I'd stay for a week or so.

MR. McELHINNEY: And siblings. You had—

MS. NAKASHIMA: Oh, my brother was born in 1954 after, you know, Mother and Dad had gone through most of their struggle, and their business was much more even-keeled then. They had money in the bank. When I was growing up, we drove I forget what model Ford it was, but there was a big hole in the floor. And I remember losing my shoes through it once. And when Dad built that first house, he'd go around and pick up rocks along the side of the road that he thought would be nice for the wall. And they'd bring them home in that car and put them in the wall. [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, there's no lack of stone walls in this county.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, yes. That's true. Yes, and eventually he was able to buy stone. But I think the first house it was either picked up off the property or off the road somewhere. Well, when Kevin came along, the car, you know, he needed a new car—Dad needed a new car—and he took Kevin to the car dealership. And Kevin looked at the T-Bird, which was brand new at the time, and said, "I like this." So Dad bought him a T-Bird. You know, he lived a very different life than me.

MR. McELHINNEY: You never had a T-Bird.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, eventually it got to me when I went off on my own. So it was pretty old by then. It didn't last too long. [They laugh.]

MR. McELHINNEY: So returning to sort of the evolution of this studio here, this compound. I don't know how to describe it. People reading this interview have to imagine a bluff above, I guess, a flood plain.

MS. NAKASHIMA: No, it's not a flood plain. I guess down below there there are a few brooks running through the woods.

MR. McELHINNEY: There's a stream at the bottom. And it's a south—

MS. NAKASHIMA: It's a south-facing slope.

MR. McELHINNEY: The slope perhaps what? Eighty feet, 60 feet above the fields at the bottom. And wooded now. When you were a kid, were all these trees here?

MS. NAKASHIMA: They were a lot smaller. [They laugh.] Yes. And the whole area had been farmed once. That's why there are hedgerows. And there were fields down there. They're pretty wild fields now. We cut the grass so it's—there aren't any wild strawberries anymore. But when I was growing up, there were wild strawberries and blackberries. Mom used to pick blackberries and make jam and pie.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, before the Second World War, as I understand it, most of the East Coast had been cleared for agriculture. And now most of that has returned to woods. So just imaging how, you know, the appearance of the property has changed over the years. And how large is the property now?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, we started out with the three acres. And then as Dad was able to afford to buy more land, we now have almost nine acres.

MR. McELHINNEY: So it's really kind of a compound there.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes, we called it the compound because he kept building. You know, he left

architecture, but architecture never left him. So he kept building. And I think he kept running out of space. After he died, I had to build that pole barn with all the lumber in it. And as I was trying to decide whether to sell the lumber or to build a barn for it—I first tried to buy temporary storage, and I couldn't find anything that quite really worked—I thought, well, that's why Dad kept building buildings. He didn't have enough room to store his lumber.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, it's every artist's lament: It's like, where do you put all the work you don't sell or all of the stuff you need to do your work?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. Mm-hmm.

MR. McELHINNEY: And aren't using at that very moment. And you know for sure that you're always going to need all these things [inaudible] give them up. So what we see here, when did all of this sort of arrive at the point of completion?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, Mom always complained that Dad never really completed anything. The house was always a work in progress; it was never completely finished. It was started in—let's see, I was five—so 1947. And that first winter he enclosed the living and bath area. So we all lived in that what's now the living room. And then I guess he built on layers, so it would have been my bedroom and Mother's bedroom. And then when Kevin was born, he built on another bedroom off to the south, which became my bedroom. Kevin moved into what had been my bedroom. And in the '70s, the roof started leaking so badly because Dad had made the original roof out of poured concrete panels. And between every seam, every time it rained, it would leak. And he decided he had to do something about the roof. So they added the cedar shake roof, I think in the '70s. And then doing so, he decided to expand three feet to the south and did away with the porch that used to be there; there used to be a sun porch all the way down around the south side, which was kind of nice. He built the moon-viewing platform. It was fairly late that there was some kind of cabinet that he'd made for somebody else, and they didn't want it. So he moved it into the house. And Mother said, "How come everybody else gets cabinets that fit the space? I just get the rejects." The shoemaker's children without shoes, we were in that syndrome. But that happened in the '70s..

The first building after the house was sort of completed was the show-room, which was built in 1954 when my brother was born. And I guess that was the building at the [inaudible] when he also added my room on the back of the house. So that was '54. And in '56 he built what's now the finishing room. I think that was built originally as a lumber shed as well. And then in '56—didn't I say '56—'57 he built the chair department. In '58 he started the Conoid studio, and when he finished about 1960, he built the pool house and the pool. And in 1967 he built the museum, otherwise the arts building, which is the HP show for Ben Shahn. Then this building that we're in now was built in 1975. And there was another shed in between or right after this one; it was the lumber shed that he built.

MR. McELHINNEY: So the old shed was pulled down.

MS. NAKASHIMA: No, the old shed did not get pulled down. They're still there; they're still full of lumber.

MR. McELHINNEY: Full of lumber?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes, there are two the little HP shells and the flat roof are still out there.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, okay. Because I'm trying to remember when I was here a month and a half ago or so, you took us into the full barn, and then there was another structure. Is that the one which—

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes, that's the concrete block structure with the old one.

MR. McELHINNEY: Is that sort of awesome to walk into that building and see all that hardware? Where was it before he built the full barn?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Oh, we didn't have that much. What we had was down in a lumberyard in Philadelphia. And that lumberyard in Philadelphia was Thompson Mahogany. And, you know, it's thanks to the Thompson family, old Mr. Thompson and the younger Thompson, they sort of wanted us out after Dad passed away. But up until that point they had processed all out lumber and stored it for us and dried it for us.

MR. McELHINNEY: Wow! Where are they located?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Thompson Mahogany is 7400 Edmund Street, I believe.

MR. McELHINNEY: Speak a little about this region. It mean, it's not just a region. What other artists did your parents form relationships with, social friendships?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, I think Charlie Ward and his family were friends. Kristina [Ward Turechek?] and I are still friends. Bill Nye—his name is Lloyd Nye—and Dad were friends. They used to go visiting back and forth. And his daughter Gretchen is still my friend. I don't see her too often, but we were pretty good friends growing up. I think they knew the Follansbees and the Lathrops and the Vankas. And then in the '60s he developed a very strong relationship with Ben Shahn and also with Bill Smith, William A. Smith. There are probably more that I don't remember.

MR. McELHINNEY: When I was here before, we took a—

[END DISC 1, TRACK 1.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Let's resume. So you were saying that your dad had developed a close relationship with Ben Shahn and William Smith.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: We were starting to unfold that story.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Oh. Well, I think Dad met Ben in the '60s and had a show down at the Parry Mansion [Gallery] in New Hope. And Ben decided he liked that table. And he took the table home. Bernarda [Bryson Shahn] had such a good story about that. My cousin, who's been trying to do a documentary film on my dad, had Bernarda reading this scene over and over again. But she said that the show, or when they purchased the table—

[END DISC 1, TRACK 2.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Let's resume. You were speaking a moment ago about the friendship that had developed between your father, Ben Shahn, and William Smith. Can you expand on that a little bit? How did that come about?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Oh, well, Ben Shahn I remember pretty distinctly because we filmed Bernarda sort of reenacting the episode in which she bought a Nakashima table, which was their first piece of furniture, that had been in a show at the Parry Mansion down in New Hope. And it was in the middle of winter, and it was a table about this size. But it was round rather than free-form. And she wanted to take it home rather than wait for better weather. And they had a convertible. And so they put it in the back of the car. And Dad loaned Bernarda an old army hat that he had had in the camp—it was wool, and it had earflaps on it. And we gave them, both Ben and Bernarda, a shot of whisky. And they went on their way. [They laugh.] And Roosevelt [NJ], you know, even today takes over an hour to get to. So I don't know how long it took them to get home. But she said that table was cold for three weeks before it warmed up. [Laughs.] I guess they got home all right.

But they used to invite us for dinner, and we'd invite them for dinner. And they decided they wanted to expand. They didn't really— They were living in Roosevelt, which was a low-cost housing development by Louis Kahn, and they didn't have a whole lot of space. So Dad said, "Well, I think we can design a second story to go on top of your first story." And he waited and waited. And he called up one day apparently and said, "We can build now. I found a beam the right size that'll work." And so he built the addition to their house in Roosevelt and furnished it all. And it was a pretty nice addition. It expanded the living space at least double. And Johnny [Shahn] and his wife Jeb and their son live there still in one half of the house. Then Bernarda lived in the other half.

MR. McELHINNEY: I know Jonathan. He's a nice man. We worked on a book together last year.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Oh, yes!

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes. There's also a studio on the property here that has a large mural by Ben Shahn.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. Dad—

MR. McELHINNEY: What was the genesis of that strand here—

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, I think Dad just wanted to build another building. And he was fascinated—

MR. McELHINNEY: Why not! [They laugh.]

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, because he had the money in the bank, so, you know, why not?

MR. McELHINNEY: Why not? [They laugh.]

MS. NAKASHIMA: So he was interested in warped-shell constructions. The smaller concrete block wood storage buildings also had HP shells on them, but they were fairly small. And I think he wanted to make a bigger one. And so that was built. I think the smaller ones were built in '56. So I guess that idea just remained dormant for a little while. And then in 1965 or so, he decided to build a larger building down there. I was in graduate school at the time. I was over at Waseda University in Tokyo. And because of his friendship with this Maryknoll priest who had given him instruction and baptized him a Catholic when he was in Seattle and allowed him to make furniture in the Maryknoll boys' club, was sent back to Japan to minister to the Japanese people in the Kyoto area. And he said they needed a new church, and he wanted George to design it. And so Dad designed it with an HP shell roof in concrete. So that became my project when I was in my second year of graduate school with architecture in Japan.

So that was finished in 1965. And he built this one almost simultaneously. But this one has a plywood roof. And while it was under construction, Ben went by, and he said, "George, you know, you really should have a mosaic on that wall and its perfect angle." So he designed a mosaic for the wall, and they opened the building in 1967 and intended to have an ongoing exhibit of Ben Shahn prints or paintings or whatever. And then Ben passed away two years later in 1969. So Dad and Kevin took the cartoon for the wall over to Chartres, France, and had it made as a mosaic in eight parts and shipped over and installed it in 1972. So that was Dad's testimony to his friendship.

MR. McELHINNEY: That's a lovely tribute.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mmm. And at one point we used to sell the Ben Shahn prints, and Dad would make the frames for them. And interestingly enough, I always thought the Ben Shahns were beautiful. We lived with them and grew up with them. I thought they were quite wonderful. But for some reason they've never achieved very much value. I just had everything evaluated, and most of the time the frames are worth more than the prints, which is kind of sad, because the frames aren't anything—I mean, they're okay. But the prints are beautiful. [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Tell us about this piece of calligraphy here, this hanging scroll.

MS. NAKASHIMA: That was painted when Ben was studying Chinese calligraphy. I forget exactly when. Probably in the '60s. That was one of his better efforts, and he inscribed it to Mother and Dad. And it doesn't say when. [They laugh.] I think it was in the '60s, though. And Ben was—I guess you know—his first job was as a calligrapher, a Western calligrapher. That's why his artwork is always very caligraphic. His line is so strong, so beautiful.

MR. McELHINNEY: There's a close connection historically between drawing and writing, I think. And a lot of Western art has been lost; not so much or at all in East Asian art.

MS. NAKASHIMA: But Dad and Ben had a lot in common about their attitudes toward modern society and modern art.

MR. McELHINNEY: How would you characterize that?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, they were both— They also had in common their—well, we physically were put into the camps during the war, and Ben's ancestors were also. And so they had that common.

MR. McELHINNEY: Those relatives.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Relatives, yes. So they had that common gripe against government and so-called democracy and war, and so-called modern society and industrialization. Particularly modern art. They both had grinding axes against the whole egotism of modern art and expressionism of ego.

MR. McELHINNEY: The egotism but not the style? What was their—let's just explore the subject of Abstract Expressionism: Pollock, de Kooning, Kline, that whole School of New York phenom that sort of came erupting out of the postwar years and really ruled the roost for a decade. What was their feeling about that?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, this isn't exactly what you asked. But, for instance, Dad and probably Ben, too, decided that Picasso was just a dirty old man. They were just expressing—

MR. McELHINNEY: Tell it like it is, Mira. [They laugh.] Tell it like it is.

MS. NAKASHIMA: They were just expressing this garbage from their egos rather than—well, when Dad was in the Ashram, he learned that beauty and art is sort of man's transliteration of the divine. It's the divine spirit which is speaking through man's art. I mean, that's what it should be. And modern art, most modern art, was antithesis of that. It's the regurgitation of something often ugly that happens within human experience. And

Dad thought, and Ben too, thought that art should be enlightening. It should be an expression of something more godly than human angst or whatever it is that was going on.

MR. McELHINNEY: It's interesting because if you look at your father's work, the acceptance of natural irregularities, some people might superficially try to draw some kind of comparison between that sort of the spontaneity of, you know, the growth of a tree that creates a particular shape, and perhaps, you know, a brush stroke in an Abstract Expressionist painting that ends with a drip or a splatter.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. McELHINNEY: You can say that this is accepting a process, you know. And try to connect them in some way. But he would have objected to that, do you think?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, I guess—

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, I mean like Pollock, for instance.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes, Pollock was definitely along that line. It's kind of interesting. We've had calligraphy workshops with John Stevens here.

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

MS. NAKASHIMA: For a number of years now. And he's taken the whole calligraphy technique to a different level, I think. And it is almost—I guess calligraphy by nature has to be somewhat expressive of the moment, where you are at that particular moment, where your mind is at that particular moment. If you're drawing a line, and you think of something else besides drawing that line, the line isn't going to be good. And I think that the expressionism as you speak of the natural form of the tree is something which nature has expressed; it's not something that man has expressed. And nature, you know, is usually formed, you know, if you think about God and you think about, well, nature and God are almost working the same.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. NAKASHIMA: And it's not anything to do with man. And man has to adapt to what God and nature are giving him, rather than try to cram what they want to say or do into something that is given from nature.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, I could imagine, though, someone hearing you say that and becoming very excited, let's say, "But think about Pollock accepting the behavior of paint, you know. It's obeying gravity. It's happening in time. He's not putting a brush onto the canvas and moving it intentionally. That would be the ego. He's abandoning ego by accepting this sort of automatism of the drip." Just as an argument.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. McELHINNEY: But I could—I mean, I'm just trying to explore how—and I can understand it—how he and Ben Shahn would perhaps have objected to the hype and the way that a lot of this art was packaged; and really sort of created the model for art packaging that we're laboring under today.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Exactly. Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: And a lot of people, including a lot of dealers I've interviewed, object to and find that "gee, wasn't it nice when art was about art."

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes, packaging.

MR. McELHINNEY: Not just about money and social climbing and other things like that.

MS. NAKASHIMA: And publicity and all that stuff.

MR. McELHINNEY: But did either of them like any of that art?

MS. NAKASHIMA: I don't know. Ben Shahn was very objective about it. Maybe he liked some of it, maybe he didn't. He didn't think that the painter himself or the artists themselves were that important. He wouldn't buy something or like something just because it was painted by somebody famous. He would like it because he liked it. And when he went to Japan, he would buy prints and, you know, paintings by unknown artists just because he liked them. And he thought that's the way art should be. It should be much more objective than this personalization, "Well, this was done by Hiroshige; even if it's a terrible print; it's done by Hiroshige, so it's got to be, you know, wonderful and valuable."

MR. McELHINNEY: "It's important to have one."

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: But he had the courage of his own taste because he had the agency of his own—

MS. NAKASHIMA: Or his own vision.

MR. McELHINNEY: Vision and artistic skill and so forth. So he figured, well, who's going to tell me what's good. I know what's good. Every artist believes they're, you know, the greatest artist alive anyway.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, yes and no. And I think maybe that's why Ben Shahn's work, his work, does not command prices the way it should, because he didn't sell himself. He did not play that game. And Dad had to play the game to a certain degree. But I remember after Dad passed away, it was very difficult for me to continue with the business because everybody thought Dad was this great artist. He did everything in the shop all by himself! Nobody can do it except Nakashima! Now that he's gone, you know, they're just making reproductions. You know, we can't possibly go on. And, you know, the people I spoke to said, "Well, you've got to send out publicity. You've got to put ads out. You've got to do this and make people know that you're still here and that you're still doing good work, that you can do it." And my mother, who is still alive, and my brother, who was her little puppet, said, "You can't do that! It cheapens the product! George never did that!" But George was really good at getting publicity—free publicity—because he had a lot of people in the newspapers and in the art world who would do articles about him. And also just because of his work with—I guess maybe MoMA gave him a little impetus.

MR. McELHINNEY: That would certainly help.

MS. NAKASHIMA: [Laughs.] But he had a show in the '50s that traveled around Europe or somewhere. And there was—what was her name? There's somebody in *House Beautiful* who used to write. What was her name? [Elizabeth Gordon -MN]

MR. McELHINNEY: But in the '50s, too, MoMA, as I recall, had this traditionally constructed showings of Shofusō House that they built in the courtyard that later was moved to Fairmount Park in Philadelphia, where it now stands. And I was on the board of the Friends of the Japanese House back in the '80s. Wonderful place. But it was also at that time—there seemed to have been a kind of Japonisme moment.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes! Yes!

MR. McELHINNEY: With people like Mark Tobey and even people talking about Franz Kline within the context of ink calligraphy.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Well, Wright, with his collecting of Japanese prints, also publicized the Japanese society.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, please, when we were having our technical difficulties—

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes?

MR. McELHINNEY: —and I was trying to find the conversation again, I overheard this conversation that you were having about Wright with Ginny. Could you reenact that conversation?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Oh, the one about the Coffin House? Or the I.N. Hagan House?

GINNY [transcriber]: Yes.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Otherwise known as Kentuck Knob, outside of Pittsburgh. Well, the I.N. Hagan family had commissioned from Frank Lloyd Wright a house outside of Pittsburgh, not far from Fallingwater. And somehow their interior designer, Ira Kaufman—I don't know exactly what his relationship was with Wright—told the Hagans to come check out Nakashima. I think maybe it was because of that article in *House Beautiful* or something. So they came, and they pled with Dad to design their furniture for their Frank Lloyd Wright house. And having left architecture because of Frank Lloyd Wright, Dad said: "No way. I'm not going to design furniture for a Frank Lloyd Wright house." And so they pled with him and pled with him. And I don't know if they came back two or three times. And he finally said, "Okay. All right. I'll make furniture for you and your house just 'cause I like you."

And so he furnished the entire house in Nakashima. And Wright was furious. He came in with his plans, he came in with his lawyer, he came in with his wife, and he said, "This is illegal! You signed a contract with me to have me design the house, and you are obligated by law to have all the furniture designed by me."

[Interviewer laughs.] And in the meantime the Hagans offered Mrs. Wright a chair, and the chair was a Nakashima chair, and she said, "Well, how do you like it?" And Mrs. Wright said, "Oh, this is the most comfortable chair I've ever sat in." And with that Mr. Wright's face must have turned beet red. He turned on his heel, and stomped out the door with his lawyer and his wife and his sheaf of papers.

MR. McELHINNEY: How did the story end?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, they were very happy with their collection of furniture. I think Mrs. Hagan just passed away this year. She had moved into a nursing home several years ago. But she took all her furniture with her and gave it to her family. She didn't leave it in the house. They sold the house, but they didn't sell the furniture.

MR. McELHINNEY: Did your dad ever sell a chair to Mrs. Wright secretly?

MS. NAKASHIMA: I don't think so. I'm sure her husband would not have allowed it. [They laugh.] But we have quite a few clients—I don't remember, I haven't done an exact count—but we have several clients who live in Frank Lloyd Wright homes and have bought Nakashima furniture to live with, because it goes so well.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, the Wright chairs don't even look very comfortable.

MS. NAKASHIMA: They're not. And if I could remember that article, exactly what the wording was, this furniture designer said it's the most uncomfortable furniture ever designed by man for another human being.

MR. McELHINNEY: And you heard it first here. [They laugh.] But how many Nakashima pieces are there in Oak Park, Illinois, right now?

MS. NAKASHIMA: I have no idea.

MR. McELHINNEY: There must be some.

MS. NAKASHIMA: I don't know. [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: See, that would be really— Because in a funny way Wright's architecture, some of it, owes a great deal to a kind of Japanese aesthetic.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Oh, yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: East Asian aesthetic.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Sure, sure.

MR. McELHINNEY: And, I mean, it's hybridizing things like stained glass. But the sort of clean lines and, you know, the low-angled eaves and all of that evokes a kind of Japanese feeling.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. McELHINNEY: So it seems reasonable that these objects would work well in that environment.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, they do. [Laughs.] And they're much more comfortable.

MR. McELHINNEY: Contrary to what Mr. Wright—it's a tremendous story. So William Smith. You were talking about him as well.

MS. NAKASHIMA: William A. Smith, yes. He's an old China hand. He had spent a lot of time in the Far East. And he's done a whole series of drawings and paintings of when he was in the Far East. So he and Dad were really good friends, but they had some really good arguments, too.

MR. McELHINNEY: About what?

MS. NAKASHIMA: I don't know. I was a kid, and I wasn't paying much attention to what these parents were arguing about. So I don't really know. But it was some, you know, about art and aesthetics and the way it's marketed. I think Bill played the game a little better than Ben did. But of course Ben and Dad used to have some arguments, too. You know, they had some differences of opinion. But Dad was very fond of them. I think he was very fond of Bill, too. I mean he liked a good argument every now and then.

MR. McELHINNEY: But Shahn's work, what most of us know, are things that represent events in social history: like Sacco and Vanzetti.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes, social commentary.

MR. McELHINNEY: Social commentary. And I guess—

MS. NAKASHIMA: And the LUCKY DRAGON series.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. The LUCKY DRAGON series. And living in Roosevelt, New Jersey, which was sort of this leftist, artistic, utopian—I know a number of people who live there now, and it's an interesting community.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes, yes, sure it is.

MR. McELHINNEY: The uniformity out in the middle of Monmouth County, I think.

MS. NAKASHIMA: I can't remember what county it is.

MR. McELHINNEY: I think it's Monmouth anyway. But it's in the middle of the Jersey truck farms.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, it was designed as worker housing first.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. Mm-hmm. But then in the '30s, a lot of artists identified with workers.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. McELHINNEY: You know the Works Progress Administration sort of cast artists—it was the way they were able to give artists assistance was to regard them as workers.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: So writers. I knew Arthur Miller. As a writer, he was involved with that. That whole generation seems to, you know, have cut their teeth, as it were, on whatever it was they were doing in that kind of environment. Especially in the '30s. But your dad wasn't really part of that. He was an architect. He was working outside the United States a lot.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes, but I think they were both social activists in a way.

MR. McELHINNEY: Same generation.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. Sort of anti-establishment kind of people [laughs].

MR. McELHINNEY: Or were they for another kind of establishment?

MS. NAKASHIMA: I think they were both free spirits.

MR. McELHINNEY: I see.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: So what were your dad's politics?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Anti-politics? [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Anti-politics, apolitical.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Because Shahn, looking at Shahn's work, one would immediately assume him to be left.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Oh, yes. Well, Dad was pretty far left, too. But I don't think he was an activist particularly. I mean, the strongest political statement he made was when he established his Foundation for Peace [Nakashima Foundation for Peace] in 1984 to make peace altars for the world. You know, he was a peacenik, I guess.

MR. McELHINNEY: What inspired him to do that?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, I think there were maybe two routes to that.

[Side conversation.]

MR. McELHINNEY: We're resuming. What inspired your dad to undertake the peace altar project?

MS. NAKASHIMA: The Peace Altar project? Well, it was inspired by a number of things, mostly it was inspired by the tree. There was this huge walnut log that he was thinking of purchasing in the '80s. And it was bigger and better than any walnut tree he'd ever seen. And he thought he should do something really special with it. And of course the logger wanted big money for it, and he wanted to make sure that it was used to its best advantage. And in the meantime, I remember, he was sick for a couple of days. And he thought he just had a stomach bug or something. But he went to the hospital, and because he'd finally gone to see a doctor, Dr. Krosnik, who was his doctor at the time. And Krosnik recognized that he had a gallbladder that was in really bad shape. So he went into the hospital and had the gallbladder removed. Had his gallbladder removed. And when he was coming out of the anesthesia, he had this vision that he would make Peace Altars for each of the continents of the world from this tree.

And I think the vision may have been inspired. Because he also envisioned a dome or a half dome that would be housing this enormous peace altar. And I think that was inspired primarily by his experience at the Ashram, the vision of peace, the vision of a peaceful society, which was common to all the people of the Ashram. But I think it may have been influenced also by the camp experience during the war. That one camp in Bainbridge Island, their motto is: Never again. Or *nidoto nai yoni*. You know, we don't want this to happen again. And I think that was also a part of the motivation for that. And he also was maybe just inspired. This table that we're sitting at was probably—it's very much the same shape, only smaller, of the peace altar. And he made this in 1975. And when we were in Russia and trying to find a place for the peace altar, the Russians understood the concept of a *krugli stol*, which is a round table, not just the physically round table, but the fact that it brings people together in a different way than a rectangular table does.

And so that's how that idea hatched. And he made the first one in 1986. It's still at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine [New York City, NY]. I've seen it. Second one we made in '95 at the fiftieth anniversary of the UN and sent it finally to Russia, installed it at the Academy of Art in 2001. And then we made another one in '96 which went to India; it's now in the Unity Pavilion in Auroville, outside of the Ashram where Daddy was.

MR. McELHINNEY: So now so far there are three?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Three. We're hoping to send a fourth one to South Africa to the Desmond Tutu Peace Center next year.

MR. McELHINNEY: I coughed. I'm sorry. If you could say again. It's going to—

MS. NAKASHIMA: Oh, to the Desmond Tutu Peace Center in South Africa.

[END DISC 2.]

MR. McELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney speaking with Mira Nakashima on Thursday, the eleventh of March, 2010, and being assisted by Dr. Virginia Scorrey running the recording equipment—thank you. Interesting question came up during our break regarding the unusual height of the tables. That a lot of the tables are a little bit lower than standard height. And I guess it was observed that the lower tables are a little bit higher than, you know, the Japanese equivalents. Can you speak about, you know, how your dad arrived at these specific dimensions?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, as I said before, Dad never shared very much with me about what he was doing and why he was doing it, and so forth. But I do know just from observation. In the beginning, when Dad first started out in the '40s, the coffee tables were sometimes 11 and 12 inches from the floor, or maybe 13. And then as time went on and we were dealing more with, you know, people, American-style people, that are used to having them a little higher than that, we raised the standard coffee table height to 15 inches off the floor, which works with our lower kind of seating. He has some lounge chairs that are 13 inches off the floor. Although when we did the room at the MET [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, NY], we had that table surrounded by seven chairs, I think, or eight chairs, I forget how many there are. But they were the lounge chairs. And those lounge chairs were first made for a Japanese client 13 inches off the floor. And the curator of the museum at that time said, "Well, most Americans have much longer legs than that. Thirteen's a little hard to get up and down out of. Can we have them a little higher?" So at that point we raised the standard height of the conoid lounge chair to 14 inches off the floor. I believe the table height on that one is—is it about this height? It's about 20; it's low. I think it's 21 inches or so. It's 20-some inches. It's lower than normal. But that's so that you can use it with the lower chairs. And it wasn't intended for dining so much as lounging or reading or watching the video. Or just, you know, meditating. And the lower height was more conducive to that than the higher height.

The dining tables were made—I don't know how he came up with 28-1/2 inches that are standard height. But it's different from the European standard. And it may be because of the Japanese influence. He felt that—as you've noticed, it's a different experience; one that the tabletop is lower, and you see what's served on the table

better. You see each other, you know, the people who are sitting around the table, you see them in a different way than if the table is higher. And he was aware of that. And I guess he designed the different heights because of that. This particular table we're sitting at is 26 inches. I think it's 26. I don't have my measure with me. But it's even lower than our usual standard dining table height. But it's a very pleasant experience to sit around this table and eat because, I don't know, it, as I said, makes it a different experience. It's not just eating. It's dining. It's experiencing your dinner partners and the food that's served on it in a different way.

MR. McELHINNEY: So he had a very conscious sensitivity to, you know, the way that these objects would help create an environment in a room.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Exactly.

MR. McELHINNEY: And how it would allow people to interact with each other.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: You said earlier that people were calling his work ergonomic before *ergonomic* was a buzzword.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Who called his work ergonomic first, do you know?

MS. NAKASHIMA: I have no idea. But it was—when did *ergonomic* become a buzzword in this society?

MR. McELHINNEY: A good question.

MS. NAKASHIMA: I don't know.

MR. McELHINNEY: But anyway.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Maybe in the '90s? Maybe the '80s. I don't know. And incidentally, the table that we're sitting around, I think Dad realized the dynamics of having a free-form, roundish kind of table, like this one. It's not exactly symmetrical, as you can see, because it's a bookmatched pair of wood, and this one's actually a little bit wider than it is long. But it's basically [inaudible, in Japanese?], approximately, circular. And it has a very different feel than a rectangular, ordinary rectangular, dining table. And I think this may have been the inspiration for his peace altar that came along later. But it's basically the same shape and the same kind of relationship between people that would happen around the table, around the peace altar, peace table, as around this dining table.

MR. McELHINNEY: As you were speaking earlier about the idea of a round table being the spirit of egalitarianism and everybody sort of—there's no head to the table.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. That's true.

MR. McELHINNEY: How do you think your dad would feel about art today?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Oh—

MR. McELHINNEY: And especially how, you know, people who are working in wood or working in an artistic way with objects that are utilitarian, how do you think he would see the evolution of what some might want to deem his field or his genre?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, when I was writing my book, what really sort of triggered my creative imagination was reading Soetsu Yanagi's book, *The Unknown Craftsman* [Kodansha International, 1989], because Dad had spoken about it as being very much similar to his own philosophy. And the more I read of Yanagi, the more it seemed like it was similar to what my father was trying to do. And when I went to Japan to do interviews with my cousin John Terry, we were able to track down Sori Yanagi and ask him about the Mingei philosophy and how it related to design, and so forth and so on. The problem with the Mingei is that in the beginning it was developed by craftsmen. But they made objects for use that were affordable by the common people. And that was one of the requirements of the Mingei way of life, the Mingei style, so to speak.

And as time went on, and these handcrafts started competing with the manufactured items, they could no longer compete. And now anything made by hand is very, very expensive. And, you know, Dad started off hoping that his furniture would be as affordable as manufactured furniture. And it doesn't hold anymore. Then after he passed away—or just before he passed away, when he had his first one-man show at the American Craft Museum [New York City, NY]—his work was elevated from the status of just being furniture to being art. And that

helped him along. You know, we were able to charge bigger prices for art than we were for just furniture.

MR. McELHINNEY: Apart from the commercial impact of that kind of a distinction, what do you think the transformation from crafts to art really consists of? I mean, what do you think, you know, the distinction is? What do you think the distinction was before and after that transformation or that redefinition of his work as art? Was it merely the acclaim of the established art world? Or was there something else? Was there something in the way his work was being talked about, discussed? More people were involved in the conversation?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. I think it was primarily an external labeling sort of situation, rather than anything that happened internally. I've always—or not always—but ever since Dad's been gone, I've been wrestling with the distinction between art and craft and design, and where one draws the line. And there really isn't a clear line that I can find. Except that maybe design is more from the head, craftsmanship and craft is more from the hand, and art is from the heart. Now hopefully, when you do something good, it integrates all three of those.

MR. McELHINNEY: That's very well put. So do you think that this rebranding of him from being a craftsman, a woodworker, to an artist, did that have any impact on him, how he saw himself? Or did he always see himself as an artist?

MS. NAKASHIMA: He saw himself as a woodworker. He never saw him as an artist, that I know of. He saw himself as a woodworker. His first drawings were labeled "Designer Craftsman." Now that was unusual in its day, because most designers were not craftsmen. Most craftsmen were not designers. And he was able to be both. And then, I don't know exactly when, he transisted over to the label which he made up himself, and everybody sort of thought he was crazy and too humble; he changed his name to "woodworker." And it was not a prestigious label. Nobody, you know, prided themselves on being woodworkers when he decided to be called "woodworker." "Designer Craftsman" was probably more prestigious as a name. But he decided it was more appropriate, and that's what he wanted to be. As I say, it was kind of like the whole Mingei tradition is the unknown craftsman. He was not about—well, I don't know. I remember listening in on an interview by Derek Ostergard when he was writing the catalog for "Full Circle." And he asked him this question about ego. And Dad gave him his standard lecture anti-ego and the trouble with the Western world is the ego is promoted and educated and predominant in all forms of art, and that it was wrong. And Mr. Ostergard had said, "Oh, but, Mr. Nakashima, you've got the biggest ego of anybody I've ever known!" And that was the paradox. [They laugh.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, any artist, if they're going to be able to get up in the morning and walk into the studio, has to have a pretty high opinion of himself and their prospects.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, we went through that, I think, in India when I went with my cousin to India to interview. And they said, "Well, there are"— Oh, no, I guess it was in Japan, that same trip, we interviewed one of the Japanese architects that Dad had worked with. And he said, "There are two kinds of ego. One is that you're just really stuck on yourself, and you can't think—you know, everything else sort of gets in the way unless it's you. And the other kind of ego is the kind that gets you up in the morning and makes you create something. Because if you had no ego at all, you wouldn't do that." But I think—he said, in his opinion, Dad had the good kind of ego that makes you do things rather than— You know, he didn't want to promote himself, but he was good at it. [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: So safe to say that for him, you know, the work was about the work. It wasn't about him. It was about doing the work, honoring the materials, honoring the idea.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Right. And I believe he was firmly planted in the Ashram definition of art, as being just for a translation of something greater than you or your materials.

MR. McELHINNEY: I think it's hard to try to create a mental image of a person who isn't around and imagine their sort of movements or habitual like a tic of the head or the way they wink at you or smile at a comment, all of the dimensions and aspects of a personality. But from what you've shared with us today, it seems like your dad was a person who was a very hard worker and was very serious about what he did, and was trying to bring things together in his work; not to, sort of, go after a known niche and inhabit it. But he was sort of trained as an architect and worked as an architect who was sort of called to woodworking. And through it, found a way to get people to think about life and how they interact with other people and how the objects that they use in order to do that shape their lives. I guess it's sort of pop culture recent Feng shui kind of idea is more popularized, I guess, you know, Chinese-based idea about design and organization.

But, you know, I'm trying to get an image of him, too. And I can imagine somebody who is, you know, who could be charming or quarrelsome or opinionated or generous or sharp. The comment about—that you shared about him—telling all the woodworkers in the shop that one other individual was superior to them. The kind of—that had to have been a stunning, stinging experience for people who knew they were really good.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. Dad was always big on humility. I think for himself as well as others.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes.

MS. NAKASHIMA: But he had no patience for people who were stuck on themselves.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. NAKASHIMA: And he liked to bring them down. He was good at bringing down people who were stuck on themselves.

MR. McELHINNEY: So if somebody were to be across a table and make some kind of pronouncement that he would find irksome, he would take them to task and argue with them?

MS. NAKASHIMA: You know, I don't remember that so much.

MR. McELHINNEY: Or he'd ignore them?

MS. NAKASHIMA: As I say, when I was little, I didn't pay too much attention to what the adults were talking about. I usually, you know, spent time with the children rather than the adults that were talking. [Laughs.] So I don't know. I know later in his life, he would sit around the table and hardly say anything. He'd just sort of watch what was going on, listen to what was going on. And sometimes he'd make a comment or two. But he really didn't say a whole lot. There is—I think it's in Yanagi's book also that says artists don't talk. When they talk, they can't create.

MR. McELHINNEY: Henri Matisse said that artists should have their tongues cut out.

MS. NAKASHIMA: [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Or quotes to that effect.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: You're only going to get yourself into trouble if you start talking about your work.

MS. NAKASHIMA: But you have to do that. You have to sell yourself nowadays.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, that's the reality of the market today.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: And how did he exist in that environment? I'm sure that as his fame grew and as his audience grew, people would seek him out and want to query him about ideas and trends and his opinions, you know, on this and that, as anyone would—I mean, be interested in, you know, the views, the private views, of an increasingly public figure.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. McELHINNEY: So how did he respond to that?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, I remember him over and over again giving people his standard Aurobindo lecture. He developed his business as a manifestation of the Integral Yoga, the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. And it was the yoga of making things. But it's also, he wanted to have an integrated environment here where, you know, even in the '40s, people's lives and their work were separate. And he wanted to have his life and his work all in one place. And so he built his house and his shop together, and his commute was a few steps away. And his lumber pile is here, his shop is here. You know, his friends became—I mean, his clients would come in initially to buy furniture, his clients would become his friends. And vice versa, his friends would become clients. And his intent was to build an integrated environment here. And that'd be built along the lines of the Ashram in India. I mean, I don't think that ever, ever left him.

MR. McELHINNEY: So did he think about some of, you know, the precedents for that kind of approach to daily life were explored maybe by the previous generation people? People like Russell Wright and others who were trying to bring, you know, elevate everyday life by trying to bring design, intelligent, artistic design to sort of everyday life.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. McELHINNEY: I mean, was he—

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes, I think he was maybe part of that, if you can call it a movement, that, you know, he

was definitely aligned with that way of thinking. But it was more than that. It was a whole philosophy of life which, and as I say, so many times I heard him giving his anti-ego lecture to people in the studio. And they would think that was interesting and, you know, sort of end up wanting to be a part of that. And their way of being part of that was to buy a piece of furniture. And often as people would buy one piece of furniture, and they'd take it home, and think, "Well, now the rest of the house looks funny." And so they'd have to buy another piece of furniture. You know, every now and then these people would come in, and they'd say, "Well, I need a whole roomful of furniture or a whole house full of furniture," like the Rockefellers. But most of the time it was just one piece of furniture at a time. And some people just stopped with one, too, you know [laughs], as much as they could afford or as much as they wanted.

MR. McELHINNEY: But was he interested—did he see a connection, apart from the connection with the Ashram, apart from the connection perhaps with certain East Asian artistic traditions, did he see a connection between what he evolved into as a designer/craftsman/ woodworker and people who had come before like Arts and Crafts Movement in the 19th century.

MS. NAKASHIMA: I don't think that was a conscious connection. But there definitely was a philosophical connection.

MR. McELHINNEY: But he liked that stuff, or he was interested in it [inaudible].

MS. NAKASHIMA: I don't think he was particularly interested in it. Like Wharton Esherick, people ask me if he knew or admired Wharton Esherick. They met. I think they may have met once or maybe twice. But they were not interested in each other's work. And they just sort of worked. They were busy doing their own thing.

MR. McELHINNEY: They were occupied with their own work.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes, Esherick was not far away. And then you also have in the Philadelphia area the ironworkers, the Yellins and others. I think there's a strong artistic, artisanal heritage in this region. So he was acquainted with these people. I mean, he was not a—

MS. NAKASHIMA: He didn't collaborate with anybody that I know of.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes, he was a circle-the-wagons guy, like a lot of artists tend to sort of huddle in these little posses and have the same ideas.

MS. NAKASHIMA: [Laughs.] Not that I know of.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, that's good.

MS. NAKASHIMA: I mean, the closest friends he had were William A. Smith and Ben Shahn that I know of. And then in the beginning in the '40, he was friends with a lot of the artists in the community.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. NAKASHIMA: But they certainly didn't—you know they shared talk and they shared food and they shared wine. But I don't think they shared any collaborative processes that I know of.

MR. McELHINNEY: Other than camaraderie and conversation.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes, right. Mm-hmm.

MR. McELHINNEY: What did he collect that he didn't—

MS. NAKASHIMA: Wood!

MR. McELHINNEY: Wood. Well, we've seen that pole barn. It's amazing. How to paint an image of that, how to paint an image of that for a reader. What are the dimensions of that barn?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Oh, the dimensions are—I think they're 180 feet by 45. And it's about 15 feet tall.

MR. McELHINNEY: Fifteen-foot ceilings. Literally with about an eight- to ten-foot bowling alley straight up the middle of it. And on either side—I mean a bowling alley—type space—on either side stacks, floor to ceiling, of rare hardwoods. Big slabs of rare hardwoods. Some of them standing up on end, but most of them lying horizontally with spacers in between. That when I walked in there, I was just blown away.

MS. NAKASHIMA: It's a tremendous amount of wood.

MR. McELHINNEY: It is.

MS. NAKASHIMA: And I think that's— After Dad passed away, I wasn't sure whether we were going to keep it going or not. But I just didn't want to waste that woodpile. [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, how long do you think it would take your shop now, operating at its current volume of production, to consume all of that wood?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, when we first got the permit for that pole barn, I told them about twenty years. But our twenty years are up. And we had to build on to the pole barn because we hadn't used it all up yet. So I hope they forgive us for not using it up quite that quickly. I have no idea. We never have the right stuff at the right time. So we have to keep buying [laughs] here and there. You know, people will come in, and they'll say, "Well, I want this size table out of that kind of wood," and we don't have it. Or we end up having the tabletop, and we don't have material for the base. So, you know.

MR. McELHINNEY: You were—yes, you were explaining over lunch how some customers will not explore the realities of owning piece of work that the shop's going to create because either their house isn't large enough or the door is too small. [They laugh.] Or they didn't take the time to measure. And then you have to do change orders, and you have to—yes. So there's this whole other side to the operation here at the studio. Is it called a studio or just a workshop?

MS. NAKASHIMA: We have both a studio and a workshop—several workshops.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. NAKASHIMA: There's the main workshop, the finishing room, and the chair department, which are all part of the workshops. We have the lumber storage buildings, which I guess are not really workshops, but they're part of the compound.

MR. McELHINNEY: But the fabrication end of it is—

MS. NAKASHIMA: Is in the main workshop primarily.

MR. McELHINNEY: So you could receive an order with a payment upfront of half in advance?

MS. NAKASHIMA: We only ask for 10 percent in advance. When my father passed away— In the very beginning, when my mother was running the business, she would ask for a third deposit when somebody placed an order. And then we'd ask for another third when the order was in production. And the final third would be due when the piece was finished. [Now (2015) we ask for one third deposit upfront, one third before work, and one third before shipment — just like the old days! -MN]

MR. McELHINNEY: That's fairly normal for art commissions.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Then it got to the point where there were so many orders coming through, Mom didn't want to be bothered with that much bookkeeping. So she didn't take any deposits. So when Dad passed away in 1990, we had no deposits on most of the orders in-house. We were actually supposed to be booked out for three years. But we had no deposits. So at least half of those orders cancelled, and we had no recourse. We'd spent a lot of time developing designs, picking out wood, and so forth. And there was no money down, so people cancelled. They figured it was all made by this one artist, and he wasn't there anymore. And they didn't want it.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, this might be a good time to sort of shift the conversation a little bit away from your late father and ask a few questions about you. And you were trained as an urban planner? You went to school for urban planning?

MS. NAKASHIMA: No, I went to Harvard undergraduate.

MR. McELHINNEY: Undergraduate.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Which was mostly general studies, and I did linguistics and Russian and architecture, [laughs] architectural studies. And I was very interested in sociology and architectural history. It was basically a liberal arts education.

MR. McELHINNEY: Okay.

MS. NAKASHIMA: And then I was able to get into Waseda University in Tokyo after I graduated. In

between them I took a trip. My first trip, to Japan, was with my Aunt Millie that I told you about.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. NAKASHIMA: And Alan Watts was the tour leader.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh!

MS. NAKASHIMA: So I got a very interesting—

MR. McELHINNEY: That must have been fascinating.

MS. NAKASHIMA: [Laughs] —first trip of Japan thanks to Alan Watts.

MR. McELHINNEY: Alan Watts and Aunt Millie. On the road with Alan Watts and Aunt Millie.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Right.

MR. McELHINNEY: Wow!

MS. NAKASHIMA: [Laughs] And then she stayed on to study tea at Urasenke in Kyoto. And I stayed on in Tokyo with my aunt, who lived there. And I was frantically trying to learn Japanese. I'd taken two years in college, and couldn't speak a word. So I enrolled in Japanese school for, I guess it was six months, between October and when the term started—in March does it start in Japan? So I was trying to catch up and learn Japanese in that period of time. And I think I took tea ceremony. I took flower arrangement, too. But mostly—and I did a little bit of teaching, and I did some freelance translation as well. But mostly I was studying Japanese. Then I got into Waseda University because my father's friend John Minami was teaching there, and Minami had been with the Raymond office when Dad was building in India. And he also had—his best friend was Junzo Yoshimura, who was with Geidai the National University. And I could have gone as a special student there, but they wouldn't give me a degree because I wasn't fluent enough in Japanese and I would have had to write all my papers in Japanese, which would have been impossible. So they said I could enroll as a special student.

But Waseda said I could do my papers in English, and they would accept me, you know, give me a degree at the end of the studies. So I thought, okay, I'll get a degree. [Laughs] So I went to Waseda, and I studied Japanese all the time I was there. And luckily my classmates wanted to learn English, so they helped me through all the lectures, which sort of passed in one ear and out the other with nothing in between. And then I did get my degree. When did I—I went in '63. I got my degree in '66 in architectural design. I had also married one of my classmates, and my first son was born in Japan in 1965. I think he was born in '65, yes. [Laughs] And then I came—didn't come back directly to New Hope. Dad got my husband a job in Pittsburgh with Mario Celli, whose brother had been one of Dad's classmates in Fontainebleau in Paris. And they were friends. So he gave my husband a job, and we lived in Pittsburgh for three years. Like I was raising kids and did a little freelance, but nothing much. Then I came back here in 1970, and Dad had purchased some property across the road from the Nakashima compound. Wanted to build me a little house. And that was an offer too good to resist. [Laughs.] And I started working part-time in 1970. I was in the office, and luckily they let me have flexible hours. My time card drove my mother crazy. But I did have flexible hours.

MR. McELHINNEY: You punched a time card?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: You had a clock?

MS. NAKASHIMA: I had a clock. We still do—

MR. McELHINNEY: You punched a time card?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. I did that until—

MR. McELHINNEY: The boss's daughter had to do that?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Oh, yes. [They laugh.] Yes. And after we incorporated in 1978, I became—like I say, I was the secretary of the corporation. And our accountant, who was our advisor at the time, said, "Well, you shouldn't have to punch the clock anymore." So that let me off the hook.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, not if you're on salary.

MS. NAKASHIMA: I wasn't on salary.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, you weren't.

MS. NAKASHIMA: No, I was on hourly wage.

MR. McELHINNEY: And you were an officer of the corporation?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, after '78 I think—I don't remember how they paid me, but I didn't have to punch the clock anymore. They must have given me a salary; otherwise I wouldn't have gotten paid at all.

MR. McELHINNEY: Just what you can carry across the room.

MS. NAKASHIMA: [Laughs] Yes, right. So I got more and more involved in design as Dad progressed in years and was doing less and less of— Well, I wasn't really doing much. I was doing the office work with my mother. And then trying to do the design work with my dad and puttering around the shop as well. And so when Dad passed away in 1990, and mother was getting along in years and not really as good as she was at managing, you know, the day-to-day operations of the business, it was tough. Because I had to do not only Dad's job, which I thought I had been trained for. But I had to do my mother's job as well.

MR. McELHINNEY: Just a question or two. When you started working here more or less full time, I would expect, after the incorporation of the Nakashima Woodworking, what's the exact corporate title? Is it Nakashima—?

MS. NAKASHIMA: George Nakashima Woodworker, S.A.—S.A. meaning "Société Anonyme." And Dad was very embarrassed about being incorporated. His estate planning lawyer advised him to do that, just because it was easier to transist into the next generation if you were incorporated and had officers and shares and all that stuff. And he was very reluctant to give any shares away. But the lawyer convinced him he had to give a certain number of shares to the rest of us as long as he could. So by the time he died, my mother, brother, and I were all sort of equal shareholders with Dad. Dad's shares went to the estate. My brother, mother, and I were equal shareholders. And that was tough, because it was two against one all the time.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, I see. You also spoke about working with your father on design tasks. What did that entail?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mostly in the beginning he would give me shop drawings to develop. He would do the general design with the client, for which they paid him the money, and then we had to develop drawings that were more detailed before they would be put into the shop.

MR. McELHINNEY: So in other words, you would have to have to do some of the draftsman work of taking the sketch on a napkin and turning it into a drawing that fabrication could use in order to make the thing.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Exactly. Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: And did you participate at all in any of the choices of form or material? Or was that entirely your father?

MS. NAKASHIMA: That was mostly my father's. And towards the end of his life, he let me get into that a little bit. But most of the preliminary drawings were done by Dad. Preliminary wood selection was done by Dad. The transitional projects after my dad had a stroke in the fall of 1989 were the Krosnick's, the Krosnick job. They had lost all of their furniture in May of 1989 in a fire in Princeton. And they had collected that furniture for over 35 years. And they wanted to replace the entire collection. So we were in the middle of that process when Dad got his stroke and couldn't really draw very well. I think he participated in some of the wood selection, but I had to do all the drawing because he couldn't do that anymore.

And then from that time on, I had to do not only the preliminary drawings but the shop drawings as well. And I wasn't used to that because I figured I'd get some correction on the way. [Laughs.] And when he died, of course, the following year, I had no correction at all. And I was running across drawings, preliminary drawings, which I had developed as well as figuring out how to make them, which are the shop drawings. So that went on until two years ago, when I got a design assistant. Now she does the shop drawings. I usually do the preliminary drawings. But, no, she's a big help.

MR. McELHINNEY: So when your dad passed away, was it expected or was it sudden? I mean, he's had a stroke. Was there a hope at that point that he might recover? Or was he—

MS. NAKASHIMA: I don't know if any of us hoped—well, of course, you always hope somebody's going to get better. But I don't know how realistic that hope was. He wasn't bad. He could walk around, and he could talk. He had a little trouble eating. And he bumped into things a little bit. It was a left-handed stroke. It was interesting because he could—it depended on the day. Some days he would be able to draw, and it was almost

normal. He never got the numbers back again. He used to be really good at math and writing down numbers. He never got the numbers quite back so that they were recognizable or understandable. And sometimes his drawings would be okay. It was interesting because his right side was all right. But the drawings on the right side were good. But the left hand was like totally out of whack. It was like a different drawing on the left-hand side of the paper than it was on the right.

MR. McELHINNEY: Wow.

MS. NAKASHIMA: And then I remember once right after he came back from the hospital, he was going to the shop, checking things out like he used to do. And he couldn't quite figure out what had gone wrong, you know, what was different. And one of the workmen came to me. He had a perfectly round burl that was going to be made up as an end table. And he was working. He came running after me after Dad had gone through the shop, and he says, "George came, and marked all of these edges to be cut off. Do you really want me to do that?" And I said, "No, thank you for asking." [Laughs.] So he didn't realize that, you know, things were a little different after he had his stroke. And then he began to realize that, and then he was kind of sad. Because that's what he did best, and that's what he did all his life, and he couldn't do it anymore.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, it's a terrible shock and loss.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: To lose a parent especially.

MS. NAKASHIMA: But he was pretty good until the very end. In fact, we had one dinner here, the Friday before Father's Day, and we had Chinese dinner. One of our client friends had come in from San Francisco. And I think they had been to the Conference on Science and Religion that was in India that was several years before that. And they were talking about that, and Dad was talking about his peace altars. And talking about, you know, Aurobindo because they'd been to the ashram together and all this stuff. And he was very lucid and very happy to share his philosophy with this person. And then my brother went out, and I went home. And I said, "Are you sure it's okay for Mother and Dad to be here by themselves?" Because Mother was fairly crippled at the time, too. And he fixed them a Japanese bath, a nice hot bath in this bath here in this building. Mother took her bath and went home. And Dad took a while coming back. So she wondered what happened to him, and came back, and he was in the tub.

And my sons—And she called us 'cause we were home, and my sons were home. And two of my sons came back and tried to revive him. Both of them had been in the Scouts and knew CPR and all this stuff. And mouth-to-mouth resusc. So they worked on him until the rescue squad came. And he wasn't really pronounced dead until after he got to the hospital. But he was pretty good 'til the very end. And I felt bad about it. But one of our Aurobindo friends said, "No. He decided to leave. He decided it was time." And so he left.

MR. McELHINNEY: Thanks for sharing that.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: What do you think he would want his legacy to be? Do you think, he would, if he could walk in the door now, as a younger man, as a man perhaps in his prime and have a look around, that he'd just smile and say, "Yeah, this is good"?

MS. NAKASHIMA: I don't know. Somebody asked me once when the auction prices started going through the roof, especially with the Krosnick collection there. I think that was the record price for a Nakashima table. It was in the Full Circle collection, and one of the two pieces that did not get burned. It went for something like, it went for eight hundred something thousand dollars.

MR. McELHINNEY: Wow!

MS. NAKASHIMA: And somebody asked me, they said, "Well, what do you think your father would have thought about that?" And I said, "You know, either he would have laughed, or he would've cried. I don't know." [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Maybe he would have laughed on one day and cried on another.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Maybe. I don't know. [Laughs.] And as far as I hope we're doing what he would have approved of now, and I hope that we will continue to do that no matter what form it takes. We're trying to set up a foundation. Actually we have a foundation. We have the Nakashima Foundation for Peace, which Dad set up to make Peace Altars.

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

MS. NAKASHIMA: But we're changing the mission so that it can be the receptacle for the furniture collection, because my brother and I are doing estate planning. I don't exactly how much it's worth. But it's worth more than taxes will allow. And we would like it ideally to be preserved within the buildings as long as it can be.

MR. McELHINNEY: So the reader understands, at this moment you're continuing to produce.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: You're continuing to fabricate George Nakashima designs.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Using woods and the stains and finishes that would have been used in his lifetime. During lunch you made a comment regarding somebody asking you in the past how are these Nakashima pieces and not reproductions? And how do you—

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, that was the big dilemma that we faced right after Dad passed away. And luckily there were enough people who believed in us and knew about me, that they felt that it was still as good as it was, if not better, than when Dad was alive. And one of those supporters was Ted [William Theodore] de Bary from Columbia University [New York City, NY]. And he had ordered a lot of furniture for himself personally, also for Columbia University. And after Dad passed away, he wanted us to make an altar out of the same log as a Peace Altar for the chapel at Columbia. And, you know, there was no question that he thought it was the same as Dad would have made. But we do get that accusation, and we did get that accusation after Dad passed away, that we were just making reproductions. And the people who didn't cancel their orders—eventually they usually did—wanted like 60 percent discounts because, they said, "*The artist is not here to supervise or sign anything, and we're not paying the full price for something that's a reproduction; it's not the real thing.*"

MR. McELHINNEY: But it's interesting. Earlier in this conversation, you made it very clear that your dad was opposed to this prevailing cult of ego that afflicts the art world. So how do you think he would answer them if he could sort of step out of the ether and explain it to them. I mean, if he didn't believe in this cult of the ego, he thought it was really about the work. It's his spirit is in the design, the concept, the tradition of craftsmanship. And it's not really about him.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. McELHINNEY: The same way that dirty old man Picasso [Ms. Nakashima laughs] was so besotted with himself according to Ben Shahn and your dad. So that, you know, what you're saying seems like it would be perfectly in keeping with his philosophy. That it's about the work, it's not about him. He's a conduit for a divine inspiration to take trees and turn them into beautiful things.

[END DISC 3.]

MS. NAKASHIMA: But it is always a question whether— The artistic traditions are really difficult to pass on from one generation to the other. You probably know in Mashiko, [Shoji] Hamada had a beautiful thing going. And his son was also a potter. But his son is not carrying on his studio, or his work. And, you know, sometimes it — After Dad passed away, there was this same Japanese friend who was talking about good ego and bad ego, was saying that in Japan there are three different ways that tradition is passed on. One is that the tradition passes on exactly as it always was, like the *Urasenke* tea ceremonies; you're not allowed to change anything as far as I know within the *Urasenke* tradition. And then there is another one like the *Sogetsu* form of flower arrangement. They have traditions which have been passed on from generation to generation, but the new master is supposed to develop something of his own. And that is, you know, it's not a total distinctly different branch; it's still a branch of the same tree. But it is different. And then in the Kabuki tradition, you can pass on the name of an actor from one generation to the next. It's not necessarily a relative or a child even. But it's an actor who takes the same name, but has a completely different style. He just has the name.

And he says there's, you know, those three ways of passing on tradition are well known in Japan. And he thought we were more like the *Sogetsu* tradition that I should develop. In the States you have to establish your own legitimacy as a designer. You can't just do the same old thing, or you're considered doing reproductions. And there's a fellow named Bob Aibel who has the Moderne Gallery in Philadelphia, who is extremely—he sold Nakashimas before Dad passed away, from the mid-'80s. He used to sell the so-called secondhand Nakashimas before they were called "vintage." And he said at that point they were just secondhand furniture. Nobody paid anything special for them. And then after Dad passed away, his market started going up. But nobody was willing to accept the fact that I could do it also. So he was very kind and sponsored a show for me. I think he had Dad's work as well. But he sponsored a show of the new designs that I had developed after Dad passed away in '94. And I think that brought us back to life, as well as the Michener Memorial Room that I designed and built in '93.

It established me as a person, a designer, in my own right, as distinct from Dad but still carrying on the Nakashima tradition. And it's tough, because in the States and in the Western world, that's not a legitimate thing to do. In the Far East it's important and respected.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. NAKASHIMA: But not in the West.

MR. McELHINNEY: No, it's certainly a huge emphasis on individuality and novelty and a kind of—

MS. NAKASHIMA: Self-expression. [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Self-expression, self-validation. A kind of individuality that almost wants to stand apart from any kind of tradition, especially in the Modernist, Postmodernist, wherever we are now; it's impossible to categorize. There's no taxonomy; we've used them all up.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, we'll think of something.

MR. McELHINNEY: All the "ismatic" begats have sort of run their course. So it's interesting, though, you know, to contemplate, especially in a global world which we inhabit now—

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: —that someone could choose to follow the values of a different tradition other than the prevailing market, celebrity-driven, money-driven art world that may be at the moment in a state of change.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. McELHINNEY: So how are your designs doing?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, they're moving along. I mean, I was grateful to Bob for even asking me to do this. Because I've been developing new designs, you know, as the occasion required and just shipping them out the door. Sometimes I didn't even have drawings of them or photographs. They just were jobs that I did, and I shipped them out the door. So Bob told me and his PR person, Phoebe Resnick, said, "You've got to name this collection. What are you going to name it?" And I called my friend Yasuko who's Japanese; she was at the Japan Society for a number of years, and she's a calligrapher. And I said, "Yasko, what do you think I should call them?" And she said, "Well, what are you doing?" And I said, "Well, I'm continuing." She said, "Ah." She said, "There's a word called *keisho* which is a very nice word. It means 'continuation' in Japanese." And she said she would calligraphy it for me." So she did. And whatever I've been doing that's different from Dad's since 1990 is called the Keisho Collection. And we just unearthed a new collection which is called Shoki, which means "early years." And Bob Aibel featured that at his gallery also last year. And they're the early designs from the 1940s.

MR. McELHINNEY: You spoke about that earlier.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. McELHINNEY: His early designs.

MS. NAKASHIMA: But whether they'll take off or not, remains to be seen. They do have a different look, and they're not what people usually consider to be Nakashima. They're not what they're used to.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, but then again, you spoke earlier about how Ben Shahn would buy things because he liked them, not because—

MS. NAKASHIMA: Right.

MR. McELHINNEY: —that it was a well-known artist. He didn't really care. He had the confidence in his own taste. I don't know, how do you think—I mean, how do you think your dad felt about that? Was he also that way? I would expect he was: If he liked something, as a collector, he'd just buy it.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. No, he'd buy things just because he liked them. I think his taste was very much geared toward the Mingei and the [... -MN] *wabi* and the *sabi* in Japanese aesthetic. He liked natural materials, natural colors, natural dyes. Nothing artificial. And that was very much like the Shaker tradition as well.

MR. McELHINNEY: Good comparison, because I think when we imagine American furniture, you know, the Western tradition, the Shaker style stands out. Especially if you think about here you are in Bucks County, which was the home of Charles Sheeler, who made a name with these wonderful paintings of Shaker furniture and

Pennsylvania stone barns. It's a kind of interesting aesthetic overlap there, too.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. McELHINNEY: If your dad wanted to be remembered—this is one of the standard questions, but I'll try to phrase it in a useful way— If he wanted to be remembered, if he wanted, or if he consciously spoke about a legacy or if he—I'll just ask the question. If he were to—if someone were to—if he were to have left an epitaph, what might it have been?

MS. NAKASHIMA: [Laughs] Well, I spoke about this to one of my friends from long ago. She was one of my earliest friends when we first moved to this property. And I said, "Well, one of the first words of wisdom that I remember that my father told me was 'keep your nose clean, and create a little beauty around you.'" So I guess that would be his epitaph. I don't know. [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Words to live by—

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. McELHINNEY: —anyway. What are your plans for the workshop and the compound?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, we're still in process with that. And as I say, we're trying to change the Foundation for Peace over to one of the Nakashima Foundation for Peace and Preservation. So that it will contain the mission of keeping the furniture and the buildings on the property well and alive and used and protected as long as possible. We're also trying to keep the business going as a business. Similar to the way [Isamu] Noguchi, Sam Maloof, maybe even the Mercer Museum [Doylestown, PA] work. You create a body of work which generates a certain amount of income, alongside the nonprofit as a way of keeping the work alive and meaningful, and hopefully useful to society. And maybe in the future we'll have apprenticeship programs or, you know, some kind of teaching element.

MR. McELHINNEY: Some kind of instructional—

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. But right now we are too busy trying to keep the business going to branch off that way.

MR. McELHINNEY: It's probably a whole other conversation, but, you know, the difference, it seems to me, between a lot of people in the fine arts and a lot of people in what has historically been deemed as craft— We talked earlier about, you know, your dad's exhibition, which sort of redefined him as an artist from being a craftsman, which of course had an impact, I'm sure, on his market and the interest in his work, the prices.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Sure. Mm-hmm.

MR. McELHINNEY: You know, I'm just curious. It seems like a lot of people in the crafts are, a lot of artists, working craftsmen, however you want to refer to them, do for themselves what galleries do for painters and sculptors. I mean, I know a very few so-called fine artists who actually represent their own work, sell their own work, interact with their own clientele. And I guess—

MS. NAKASHIMA: Write their own PR's, set up their shows and all that stuff?

MR. McELHINNEY: Right, all that stuff. Which you essentially have—

MS. NAKASHIMA: It's a lot of work.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right, it's a lot of work. It's a lot easier to—

MS. NAKASHIMA: But on the other hand, if you're an artist, and you're one person creating one piece of art at a time, it's not as bad as trying to manage 18 people.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. NAKASHIMA: I've got to manage 18 people besides.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, people, I think, artists—

MS. NAKASHIMA: Or 17; we lost one.

MR. McELHINNEY: Artists, contemporary artists like Jeff Koons, and I think from time to time people like Frank Stella and others, you know, when they're working on big commissions and they have a lot of demand for

their work, they do hire people; they do organize sort of a Taliesin and run the production of the art through that kind of process. It's almost like a Renaissance atelier process. But I guess I'm curious how you think this sort of dual-purpose operation shapes the creative process, you know, and how the creative process occurring in the same environment shapes, you know, the commercial practice.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. I haven't figured that out yet. I'm working on it. [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: That's a very honest answer. I think it's intriguing, though, because with the Internet and with all sorts of ways to communicate with colleagues and clients, I'm beginning to sense that a lot of the visual artists in studio arts and, you know, the traditional fine arts, are making non-utilitarian objects, and arguing more and more for themselves.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. McELHINNEY: And I'm just curious. It sounds like from this conversation that there was a lot of attention paid to the bookkeeping, to thrift, to doing things in a strategic way, like living in a tent until the house is ready to move into, [laughs] things like this. I don't know. Do you have any advice for any enterprising artists who might be inclined to take off on their own and eschew the gallery path?

MS. NAKASHIMA: [Laughs] You mean the woodworking workshop? I mean, woodworking is very different from a gallery.

MR. McELHINNEY: Of course. But I'm saying that an artist, I mean, you basically sell from the studio.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes, we do.

MR. McELHINNEY: And I'm saying that I think that there are a number of artists who are trying to do this.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Ah, okay.

MR. McELHINNEY: And in fact I know a woman who just maybe joined a gallery, who last year had an article about her in *Art in America*.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm.

MR. McELHINNEY: Never had a gallery.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, if you can do it, that's the way to go. Of course it's much less expensive that way. And the trouble with us is—I don't know if it's a trouble or what—but Dad realized that if he was going to have as much individual input and emphasis on craftsmanship and design in making his furniture, that he could no way compete with commercial furniture unless he sold directly to the public.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. NAKASHIMA: And so that's why he's never—we've never been successful with galleries. There were a couple of galleries. One was in Arizona, and one was in Alexandria, that were savvy enough for their clientele to almost pre-order things before they ordered them. And then they would have a show. And most of the things would sell, and they were pretty savvy about that. But most of the time, by the time people pay—I think Dad discounted a little bit for those people, but normally he didn't discount at all for anybody, not even the Rockefellers.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, they don't need it. [They laugh.]

MS. NAKASHIMA: [Laughs] No. But, I mean, he didn't charge them what he could have charged them for, you know; he was just honored to do it, and he wanted to do the best job he could and use the best wood he could.

MR. McELHINNEY: Of course.

MS. NAKASHIMA: And he fussed with the designs back and forth somewhat, but not as much as I have to fuss with my designs now. The trouble is by the time you sell through a gallery, they have a middle-man markup. And people know that if they order directly from us, it's going to be cheaper, and especially if— I mean, we have one big order now that we're in the midst of producing for a gallery in Seoul, Korea. And she wants us to mark down, mark down, mark down to the bare bones. So we're not making any profit at all. I mean, we'll be lucky if we break even on it. But they want it to be able to market in Seoul for the same price we sell here. By the time you ship there and pay taxes and all this back and forth about wood selection and change in design and so forth, I don't know if it's worth it for any of us.

MR. McELHINNEY: It's probably cheaper for them to hop on a plane, come here, and then just stick it on a container.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, that's what they're doing. But a lot of it is speculative. And they think they're going to be selling stuff. And some of it's on commission, so we're making it for nothing for now and shipping it out. And we'll see what happens. But the problem is the middle-man markup. Because most galleries mark up at least 50 percent, sometimes 100. And in Korea I don't know. The economy doesn't seem to be hit quite as hard as it is hit here. But that's still going to be more expensive than if they come directly. I don't know how—we haven't solved that dilemma yet.

MR. McELHINNEY: Do you think that at some point in time you might organize a museum here or some kind of—

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: I mean, I can imagine something like the John Soane House in London, you know, where you've got sort of these examples of the work and sort of being able to walk into the creative mind of the designer/craftsman and draw from that some kind of inspiration.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. No, I think that's probably what a lot of these buildings will do in the future. But I would also like to be able to continue to produce some, you know, for the clients.

MR. McELHINNEY: While you do that.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Your husband works here.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Do any of your children work here?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Not right now. My daughter-in-law does. And my son is working alongside us now. He's actually helping with the *Architectural Digest* show. He's going to NeoCon with my manager in June. And he worked with us for a while, and we ran into difficulties because our thinking processes weren't anywhere near the same. He has an MBA. And he was considered—you know, he was coming from the corporate management bottom-line mentality. And we were coming from a different place. And we just couldn't see things the same way. So he's been on his own for a while, and hopefully will resolve that and get back.

MR. McELHINNEY: It's funny, isn't it, how incompatible that mentality can be with the arts. I teach at the Art Students League of New York.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes?

MR. McELHINNEY: I teach drawing there. And I'm always astonished by how the place, how some people could walk in the door and have a look at the place and say, "This is so inefficient. It's mysterious why it's still—the doors are open." [Ms. Nakashima laughs.] But there is something there that works. And it's partly because they've got a very skilled director. It's also partly that there's just—there's 140 years almost of doing things this way that just seems to keep trucking along. And the worst thing that could happen with an operation like that would be, you know, to come in and have it accredited, and have it step in line with all the other schools in America, all of your other art schools. And it's just a mysterious thing. I mean, you can't really analyze it or explain it. I guess that's what you're saying, too. That your son had this, you know, MBA mentality, that sort of corporate take-no-prisoners, bottom-line mentality. And there's something about that that's just toxic to a creative environment.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Exactly. Thank you. Yes. That's exactly what went wrong.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, maybe he'll have an epiphany.

MS. NAKASHIMA: [Laughs] Or we'll get more organized. I think we've gotten more organized. I mean, a lot of the things he told us we should do were legitimate. And we've accomplished them slowly, you know, since he's been gone.

MR. McELHINNEY: But things have to happen, I think, in their own time, you know. They have to happen in a sort organic way or they fall apart, you know.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: If you force certain things, then they have no durability.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. Well, also I wanted him to do—I mean, he was trying to teach me how to do things, and I was trying to teach him to do things. I thought that if he were taking over, he should learn every aspect of making the furniture from the beginning to the end. And he thought I was punishing him, you know.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, that should tell you something.

MS. NAKASHIMA: [Laughs] Hopefully he's learned a little since he's been away.

MR. McELHINNEY: And does your daughter-in-law—

MS. NAKASHIMA: She works in the office, and she's come a long way. She's Korean. And every now and then there are little stumbling blocks here and there with the language problem. But she's been bringing a lot of

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, we met her this morning.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. But she's wonderful. And my son and I parted ways on not very friendly terms. And he told me I wasn't allowed to see my grandchildren anymore. And so he wouldn't let me see the grandchild. But she used to sneak me the grandchild every now and then. [Laughs] So for a while she was my only link to the family. But she's come a long way. She came in with no background in this kind of business at all. No background in any of the programs that we use on the computer. No background of living in the country. She lived in Seoul all her life. She was used to the city. She's just come a really long way. [Laughs] She was in hospitality, and she always is so outgoing and welcoming to all the visitors that come in. She keeps the store neat and tidy. It was kind of a mess when nobody was in charge.

MR. McELHINNEY: I guess my question is, when you are no longer able to work, do you think you'll have someone to carry on.

MS. NAKASHIMA: I hope so. Yes, I do hope so. Not only one someone for the business, but a good board of directors for the foundation as well.

MR. McELHINNEY: Are there any of the craftsmen other than your husband who have kind of stepped up and really shown a lot of promise?

MS. NAKASHIMA: For what?

MR. McELHINNEY: For design, for—

MS. NAKASHIMA: No.

MR. McELHINNEY: For fabrication, yes?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Fabrication, yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: But not design.

MS. NAKASHIMA: But not design. My assistant designer's the best one for that, and she's not family. My daughter, I was hoping, might come back someday. But she's moved—she went to school in Montreal. She went to McGill [University, Montreal, Canada]. Then she went abroad; she was in India for a while. She was in India when Dad passed away. And then she was in England. Then she was in California, and then she was in Japan. Then she came back to Montreal, and now she's moved out to Winnipeg and she's buying a house. So that's the end of that idea. She's the only one who's an architect and has a degree in design. But she didn't want to come home, so—

MR. McELHINNEY: Yet. Maybe. Who knows?

MS. NAKASHIMA: I don't know. I think she's—she likes Canada. She even likes Winnipeg. So what can I say? [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Who's your assistant designer?

MS. NAKASHIMA: Miriam Carpenter. I don't know if you saw her today.

MR. McELHINNEY: Did we meet her when we were here before? When I was here with the [inaudible]?

MS. NAKASHIMA: She's six feet tall, and has long blond hair.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes, we did.

MS. NAKASHIMA: [Laughs] You haven't met her yet today.

MR. McELHINNEY: We did meet, yes.

I think we might be nearing the close to this conversation.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Oh! Okay.

MR. McELHINNEY: Unless you have something to add. I mean, we could continue talking forever. It's fascinating.

MS. NAKASHIMA: I think you've talked about almost everything that I'd want to talk about.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, it's just such a fabulous place. It's very seldom, I think, in my life that I've been in an environment like this, you know. A really working environment, working, living environment. Just as you were saying that, you know, your dad was seeking to integrate his art with his work. It was sort of about the good ego, the kind of ego that wakes you up in the morning and makes you go into the studio and work. Not the kind of ego that leads to hubris and vain self-importance.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. Thank you.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, I'm—

VIRGINIA: The peanut gallery would like to add.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

VIRGINIA: And this is something I've struggled with, with, you know, doing pottery for so long. And it's a 20th-century issue, I guess. I'm not sure. Functionality: art. We think of them, the West at least thinks of them, as two different sides of the ravine. And here they are the same thing. And that is what is so pleasant about this, is that there is no gap whatsoever. Function is the art, and the art is the function.

MR. McELHINNEY: That's well put, yes.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Wow! Thank you.

VIRGINIA: That's what I've thought about this.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. Well, that is the goal. There is the—there's sometimes a little tension between the function and the art. And there is sometimes tension between the design and the construction. And the clients don't realize that, you know, all we go through to make this not only beautiful but sturdy. And sometimes it's a battle between those elements. But thank you for thinking that. [Laughs] We hope it looks that way.

MR. McELHINNEY: Also a conflict between the integrity of the design, you know, the creative spirit of the work, and the realities of commerce. Sometimes people don't want to accept the fact that the piece is not going to go in their door.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, when you get down to the nitty-gritty of that, they will accept that more than: "What do you mean I can't have a table twice the size with a base like this?" You know, like this? [She smacks the table.]

MR. McELHINNEY: That's a design issue.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: So that's the downside of being your own rep.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. The designer always—I mean, it seems to me nowadays the designer here always had conflicts with, or most of the time, has conflicts with the client! And that never used to happen when Dad was alive. He'd tell them to go to Macy's if he didn't like what they were doing. [They laugh.] I guess I've just got to learn to say that more often.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, it's a good line. Go to Macy's. Or go to—

MS. NAKASHIMA: Well, the trouble is we don't have—

VIRGINIA: [Inaudible.]

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: IKEA or whatever.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes. The trouble is—I mean, some people I should have told to go to Macy's or IKEA. [Laughs] Most of the time I consider them challenges. You know, if I can deal with this challenge and resolve it, I will have learned something, they will have learned something, and I will have hopefully made something beautiful and different.

MR. McELHINNEY: And do you think your clients and your late father's clients, collectors, have learned something from his work?

MS. NAKASHIMA: I hope so. I don't know if they appreciate everything that went into it. But I think they appreciate what they have—I mean, I hope they appreciate what they have in their homes. And when we were in Arizona, one of our major—two of our major—clients, actually three of our major clients, are in the Scottsdale area now. One of these is David Hovey, and he's a developer and architect. He went to hear Dad's lecture at IIT [Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago] in 1977. And he's been buying furniture ever since. Now he's gotten quite big in Scottsdale. He builds these huge, industrial-scale glass and steel buildings. And he really likes Nakashima to go in it. Somehow it softens the glass and steel. It brings something of nature into this kind of almost sterile environment. And we would have the good fortune of staying at one of his homes when we were in Scottsdale. And it was just like fun seeing all my old friends in this house when we'd stay there.

And another of our clients, they are the Krosnicks, who sold two-thirds of their collection in Princeton that they replaced their first collection with. They moved to Scottsdale as well. And they showed us our house, which is the same designer that did the house we stayed in, designed the house they live in, the condo that they live in. And their furniture is, you know, it's repositioned from where it was originally. But it again softens and enlivens their environment. And then there's another set of clients who live in Goodyear [AZ]. I think they took a lot of their collection with them, but I think maybe they sold some of it and ordered new, because they could sell their old stuff for more than ours cost new. So I'm not sure how much of their house is old and how much is new. I didn't get to visit them. But it's kind of nice the way it brings the outdoors in. And it kind of humanizes the manmade environment that most of us live in. And that makes it worthwhile, I guess. Especially if somebody appreciates it. [Laughs] Some people don't get it, you know. Some people do.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, art is always a challenge.

MS. NAKASHIMA: And I guess Ben Franklin— isn't it Ben Franklin who said that imitation is the highest form of flattery? It gets a little annoying sometimes if you go to a furniture show and there's row after row of Nakashima look-alikes. But I guess that's flattery. They appreciate him. [Laughs] Or appreciate what he did.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, it's certainly an indication that the aesthetic has a lot of admirers.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Well done for that.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Thank you.

MS. NAKASHIMA: No, thank you. I hope we can keep going.

MR. McELHINNEY: Thank you for your warmth and generosity and honesty and company.

MS. NAKASHIMA: Hope it doesn't get me into trouble. [Laughs] Thank you for your questions.

[END DISC 4.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]