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Oral history interview with Dror Benshetrit,  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Dror Benshetrit on November 30 and December 3, 2012. The interview took place in the designer's studio in New York City, and was conducted by Mija Riedel 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.

Dror Benshetrit had the opportunity to review the transcript and made no corrections or emendations. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Dror Benshetrit in the designer's studio in New York on November 30, 2012, for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art. This is card number one.

I'm delighted we actually are able to meet, given that our last meeting was canceled by that Superstorm Sandy. [They laugh.] So here we are on Friday afternoon. Thank you for making time.

DROR BENSHETRIT: Thank you.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's take care of some early biographical material first and then we can move into the work. You were born in Tel Aviv —

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — in 1977?

MR. BENSHETRIT: '77.

MS. RIEDEL: What was the date?

MR. BENSHETRIT: March 13.

MS. RIEDEL: March 13. Okay. So you're what, 34?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Thirty-five.

MS. RIEDEL: Thirty-five.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Still the youngest?

MS. RIEDEL: Still the youngest, quite — by quite some number of years from anyone else I've interviewed. Let's — your parents, their names and their occupations.

MR. BENSHETRIT: My dad is Isaac. My mom is Colette. They were — they're both currently living in Israel. My dad works for the airline company in Israel all of his life, all of his career. Started as a mechanic and moved to computers in the '80s, started to program for the company, and he managed a division somewhere in the corporation. My mom started as a nurse. She's been a delivery nurse for many years, then moved into cosmetics, and now she runs a retail operation.

MS. RIEDEL: Retail operation?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Retail, yes, for —

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And do you have siblings?

MR. BENSHETRIT: One sister, six years younger than me, Shany. She also currently lives in Israel.

MS. RIEDEL: You mentioned — in reading some of the — what's been written about you and some of the brief interviews that I've seen, you talked about your childhood environment and your family's — your parents' influence in particular affecting a desire to understand and utilize the essential. Can you say a little bit more about that, what you mean?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, you know, it's kind of funny because you've mentioned other people you've interviewed

having a bad memory due to their age, so I — probably no difference there. I have — actually I kind of recently found the advantage of having a bad memory. I think that it keeps you fresh and you're keeping on inventing things and discovering over and over the same thing, sometimes, which is wonderful, but it kind of keeps knowledge away at the same time, which is great for innovation.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHETRIT: So talking about my childhood, my — both parents are extremely talented, as far as I can see it, but they've never, I think, would have considered themselves talented individuals —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHETRIT: — simply because they both don't really work or practice any creative — specific creative fields. But it's — for me, it's still overwhelming sometimes to visit my parents still today and realize how incredible sensibility my mom have for color combinations and patterns, and just the refined aesthetics. She would — you know, sometimes, I would be so impressed. She would unpack my suitcase for as fast as it takes to hang your coat, you know, and shirts in the closet. And days later, she would say, why don't you wear this thing with this thing with this thing you've got — brilliant combination I haven't thought about.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And so it always really impresses me and I always thought that I got a lot of this kind of very basic, intuitive sensibility to style through my mom.

Now, my dad, on the contrary, very interested in physics, very interested in structures and aerodynamics and economics and things like this, but just out of curiosity — just out of raw curiosity. He never took it further, even not as a hobby of any kind. But we were, you know, as kids always challenging things and questioning things. How does this thing work? And why don't we take it apart and see, you know, how does it look inside and many time left with a lot of gear wheels and springs and did not know what to do with it.

But, you know, those two kind of — then I went to art school, and then I started getting this education that my parents never had. And what basically happened was that they were so proud just as parents to have the opportunity to study culture and art through my education, which they never had. But you know, their critique of my work was not educated, and for me was always just like, okay, my parents just like what I do, but that doesn't necessarily means that — you know, it wasn't the kind of feedback that, let's say if my parents were artists that I would respect, would affect my opinion on what they think.

So for me was always a self — a self-critique.

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Constantly —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: — looking back and saying, you know, that doesn't matter that you told me that you like it because, you know, you don't base it on — and I think that was actually something very interesting for me as a child to already at a young age acknowledge the — you know, the need that an artist have on, at times, be dependent on your own value and critique, and not necessarily reflect to what your immediate environment does.

So I think — I don't know exactly how was phrased what I mentioned before, but I think that that's probably how I refer to it and say, you know, this is kind of like what I take from my parents and what I feel that was left for me to do on my own.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] Well, what — it's interesting because when I think about your father being a mechanic, did you watch him, or you say you watch things come together, take things apart, was that something you did as a child?

MR. BENSHETRIT: That's something I did as a child, yes. I mean, I love taking things apart.

MS. RIEDEL: So taking them down to their essence, taking down to their fundamental elements.

MR. BENSHETRIT: There's something that for me questioning everything has always been part of who I am. I never accepted just — you know — that's just how it is or just because or God commanded us, or you know, all those kind of things that you constantly hear both as a child and as an adult. But I always had to have my own conclusion, my own understanding. I had to, you know, feel it, take it apart, understand it. This device — it gives

me time and there's no battery inside. How does this device work? I wanted to know, you know, what makes those hands move so. And it was — I mean, I don't think that I ever tried to take the TV apart, but I did take the radio apart. I took a lot of things apart, because I was just fascinated, you know, how are those people walking inside of this machine.

MS. RIEDEL: And your parents were supportive of this interest.

MR. BENSHETRIT: My parents were very, very, very supportive in a very interesting way, you know. I think that they were supportive of my curiosity to a certain extent, until it starts to affect my appearance and things like that. But they were extremely supportive. They were always extremely supportive. Of course, there're always those incidents where I took the radio apart and I couldn't put it back together, so there's no more radio in the house. But you know — or incidents like when I was very young, I was selected for a group of sponsored kids from the city of Tel Aviv to study fine arts. And my parents were extremely supported until a point that they heard that we are drawing nude models. And I think I was probably eight. And my mom thought like, "Why does he need to sit in front of a nude model?" And my dad said, "No, but this is art, you know. They teach them. They know what they're doing. This is a fine arts school." And my mom was kind of a bit uncomfortable with that. But other than that, they were always extremely supportive.

MS. RIEDEL: So how old were you when you were selected for this program and what was it, where was it?

MR. BENSHETRIT: I think I was either seven or eight. And we grew up in the suburbs of Tel Aviv at that time, which was not a very — not a great town, but it was very, very close to Tel Aviv that people just showed up in our school one day and asked to look at kids' work and their art. And they selected me —

MS. RIEDEL: From your drawings —

MR. BENSHETRIT: From my drawings —

MS. RIEDEL: — paintings —

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, from my drawings and paintings. And they gave me a scholarship that lasts about six or seven years to study in Tel Aviv Museum of Art, which was probably one of the best things that happened to me at that point.

MS. RIEDEL: How extraordinary.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Which was — yes, I mean, it really, really I think probably affected my entire life. At some point, I think it was 11 or 12, one of my drawings was selected to be in the mayor — Tel Aviv mayor's office, which was kind of like rewards that we got that felt so incredible, you know. If the mayor hangs a painting of mine at that age, then I can do a lot with my — with creativity. And always — I think that that was always my approach. I think when I was 14 — this was another thing, actually. My parents always educated me to work for living. And as a little kid, there was always those home tasks that I would get paid for. So you know, I would earn a couple of shekels for ironing or cleaning or washing the car, or, you know, and that was my allowance. I wouldn't just get a weekly sum for nothing. I had to have some tasks to justify that.

And then at some point, friends of ours, kids of my age went and catered in some restaurants. And I've done that as well. It was a very interesting experience. At first, it was a great thing to get out of the house, and you know, now, it's not your parents paying, but it's a — you know — an employer at an event, in a production, kind of like a serious business. Until a very specific event happened that I remember so clearly, where it was — it was some sort of weddings and bar mitzvahs and things like that, type of events. And an older lady opened her change purse and basically poured her coins into my back pocket while I was cleaning dishes off the table. And I just felt so — I just felt horrible. I just — and this was — and this was it. And at that point, I remember very clearly, I said, from now on, I'm going to find creative ways of making money.

And from that point on, it was only creativity that made me, you know, save money. So the first thing I've done was created some jewelry and kind of beaded things and sold it to my teachers in school and to the friends of my mom — [laughs] — and things like that.

MS. RIEDEL: This was in high school or even before that?

MR. BENSHETRIT: This was before high school. This was — this was — let's see — so we moved at the age of 11 — I think it was 11-12.

MS. RIEDEL: And you moved into Tel Aviv at that age?

MR. BENSHETRIT: No, we — so since I started traveling to Tel Aviv for school, which was several days a week after school, I would, you know, get on the bus, go to Tel Aviv, and come back, which was —

MS. RIEDEL: This went on for years.

MR. BENSHETRIT: For years —

MS. RIEDEL: For two or three days a week, after school during the summer as well?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, throughout the whole year, and it was absolutely incredible. I mean, the most incredible thing about it was that I could, at that point, realize that people from the area that I grew up are very different than other kids that came from other parts of Tel Aviv. And it was kind of like, you know, I would just compare it to, you know, arriving in the Metropolitan Museum of Art with kids that comes from Queens, Brooklyn, New Jersey, Staten Island, and so forth.

And I would start to realize that they have different backgrounds and I started asking our parents that maybe we should move to a different place. And that influenced my parents and — I mean, I'm just — you know, for me, it's just — I'm so thankful for that because we moved to the opposite side of Tel Aviv, which was from the south to the north, into a town called Herzliya, which is a lot more — you know — upper class. And all of a sudden, kids are coming with money to school. And you know, you kind of like start to feel the differences that I was at first intimidated by, but very, very grateful for them because I could already feel that, you know, who you are is who you surround yourself with. And those people were — those kids were a lot more eager, were more ambitious, were more competitive. And they just cared more. They just — there was a bit more of a — yes, just — they were full of life, you know. And I felt that they are — so where were we?

MS. RIEDEL: We were talking about the school — the school of the museum. And were there — what did they teach? Did you go and look at work in the museum and then talk about it? Did you draw? Did you experiment with materials? How did that work?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, every year, we had a different type of kind of fine art discipline that we were focused on. So one year it was sculpting and another year it was printmaking and photography. So every year it was something else. I don't know if it was a program that evolved or it was just different classes that I could every year choose from. I believe it was something that I could choose from. And that's what I've done. Every year, I've done something else, which is actually really interesting. I haven't spoken about that in — I don't know in years. So one year, I was doing only sculpting and one year I was photographing, and one year I was oil painting, and one year I was printmaking.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And we had lectures and we had museum visits every time the museum had another show. And you're surrounded by amazing pieces all the time. And the teachers were — I mean, I just remember them — I just remember just being — I was full of admiration for them. I was absolutely feeling like, you know, I wanted to be them when I would grow older and like — just — if somebody can give you so much, you know. I think that in school, in primary school and high school — not high school — sorry, sorry — well, there was a — how do you call it in English — preschool —

MS. RIEDEL: Sure. Kindergarten.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Kindergarten — no, no — after kindergarten, we have two different —

MS. RIEDEL: Elementary school?

MR. BENSHETRIT: — elementary school and then one —

MS. RIEDEL: Junior high school —

MR. BENSHETRIT: Junior high, yes. I don't remember respecting my teachers back then. I don't remember that they were an influence of me. I felt that they were just kind of asking us to do things. We didn't want to do it. They'd made sure that we had to do it. Then it was it. You know, and it didn't really matter. You know. It was kind of — I mean, I was just looking forward to take the bus to Tel Aviv and there were kids that only cared about us, art. They spoke about art all the time. They each had their own unique desire and style. And we would look at one another and you would, you know, critique and voice opinion. It was just so wonderful. It was really — it was really amazing. It was kind of like playing adults or something — and we were tiny. We were — I mean —

MS. RIEDEL: Very small. Seven or eight to start that program is extraordinary.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, and you know, you'd be in Tel Aviv. I didn't live there. I once got lost on the bus and cried and called my parents, "I don't even know where I am. Come pick me up." It was really very, very, very unique time.

So yes, that — and then I remember actually I met a girl in that class that told me — because we were, you know, growing, we were there for several years — and she said, "I'm going to go to an art high school." And I said, "What's an art high school?" She said, "Yeah, a school where everybody just study arts." And I went home and I said, "Dad, I want to go to art high school," you know. And I didn't know that it existed. And fortunately, there was one very close to our town in a neighboring town, Ramat HaSharon, which took — so we went there and they had all of this application forms and portfolio. And you had to go and draw — you know — live model and be critiqued on that. And that — having accepted — but it was just unbelievable. I mean, it was like — I would compare it to today's standard — an *American Idol* type of audition. So it was like kids lining up with their portfolio bags of all sizes. Some of them had small sketches like this and notebooks. Some of them came with canvases. And it was just really, really unique. And that was —

MS. RIEDEL: What was the name of it?

MR. BENSHETRIT: The high school was Alon — Yigal Alon in Ramat HaSharon. And it was unbelievable. It was just unbelievable because until that point art was already part of my life for many years, but I realized that it's not just about fine art. Fine art was just a portion of the whole school. Some people played music. Some people danced. Some people played. And all of that was not yet for me part of the bigger picture of creativity because I thought that creativity that just go through my hands and my eyes. But I didn't think about voice, about face expressions, about all those kind of things that kids were extremely — so high school was probably the opposite experience of anybody else that I know. We just did not leave school. We were in school as long as our parents would allow us to stay in school. We were just there the whole day, the whole evening, until — you know — until our parents were worried. And —

MS. RIEDEL: And were there art history classes, studio classes, the whole —

MR. BENSHETRIT: I mean, the whole thing, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you study strictly visual arts or did you explore a variety of things?

MR. BENSHETRIT: I studied visual arts.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: I studied visual arts, but we had — I mean, the school was really built like a square, so the center of all the classrooms were this massive kind of like a theater, amphitheater, where the center itself was where the theater classes were and music performances from time to time. So after normal school hours, there's this folding wall that will open up and you can sit there and we would sit there and draw the dancers. And sometimes the music school would play there. So we had a lot of exchange. We had a lot of — we saw what others are doing and we heard and we, you know — not necessarily participated in their classes, but we observed a lot.

MS. RIEDEL: So you had an extraordinarily immersion and exposure it seems like from the very beginning and only building through your high school years.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Absolutely. I mean — and the most amazing thing is now you look at my classmates in high school, 90 percent of them are extremely successful artists.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. That's extraordinary.

MR. BENSHETRIT: They all continued. They almost all continued and studied art in their higher education and they're all — I mean, from animators to sculptors to painters and — yes — some of them are here in New York. Some of them are in Europe, in London, in really very, very interesting places.

MS. RIEDEL: Fascinating.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Totally fascinating.

MS. RIEDEL: Is the school still continuing —

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, yes. The school is still there. There was even a reunion recently for our time. [Laughs.] And I haven't visited it in a while. I haven't visited in a while. I should take my wife.

MS. RIEDEL: That was a very — that's an extraordinary story. That is different than just about anybody else's experience that I've heard of. That kind of engagement in an art high school, but even before that.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: I know the architecture in Tel Aviv, too, is quite extraordinary, quite interesting, a real range of things. Were you aware of that at the time as well?

MR. BENSHETRIT: I have to say not at all.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Or — I mean, I don't think so.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: It's kind of interesting because — well, there's a couple of things that happened during high school, which were remarkable, I think, influences on myself. Two of my best friends started a company when they were 15. And they started something that did not exist in Israel at that time. They started the rendering office to give services to architects and create visualization for their work. Now, you're talking — that must have been — I mean, if we were 15, that's 20 years ago, that's '82 — 1982. 1982 —

MS. RIEDEL: '82, '92? '92, right?

MR. BENSHETRIT: '92, sorry. '82, I was only five, yes. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Precocious. [They laugh.] Extraordinary.

MR. BENSHETRIT: '92. Oh, yes. Not that long ago. [They laugh.] They started a rendering company that provided service for architects and, you know, the kind of things that we're doing today. The type of cropping people in Photoshop, putting them on grass and changing the sky and changing the opacity of the glass, and providing them glossy prints for presentations. That did not exist back in the time, and they made a fortune. When they turned 16 — no, 17, they both like arrived at school with two brand new cars. Everybody — I mean, they were just — I mean — so —

MS. RIEDEL: And all digital. All kind of digital.

MR. BENSHETRIT: All digital.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, interesting. [Inaudible.]

MR. BENSHETRIT: At that time, computer was completely foreign to all of us, the rest.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: From time to time — now, both of their parents, both of their dads shared an office.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And one of their dads was an architect, so that justified that. And the other dad was a computer science. And those are two of my very best friends till — I mean, we're still best friends. And I would go and spend time and said, you know, "I believe in what you guys are doing," because I used oil and brushes, and that's what I did. And — and they started teaching me Photoshop. So I started playing with Photoshop. I didn't dare to touch anything related to architecture at this point. I was absolute — I just felt like that's not my thing.

So my Photoshop stuff would create actually something quite similar to what I would draw. It would be like a still life — [laughs] — I would take like vegetables and fruits and — [inaudible] — and do that in Photoshop, which was kind of funny. And then of course, I kind of started, you can do some greater things here. But they taught me computers.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And — and, and, and, and, and. But that was for me an introduction into the world of architecture, to the — you know — one of — it's funny because one of them today is an architect, of course, the son that became an architect and the other is a fine painter that didn't touch computer since they closed the company.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, it seems like it was a childhood [trauma ?]. I don't know exactly. It was — it was actually really interesting what happened there and I think that, you know, this is something — I'm so happy we're doing

this because I'm realizing a lot of things. It's like a best — better than a shrink.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BENSHETRIT: Something really interesting happened. They both were partners. They did everything together. And they were — they were very equal. It's just that one cared a lot about the architecture and about the money. And the other cared a lot about the aesthetic and the integrity of an artist. And at some point, they, you know, they did it. When they were 15 and 16, they did it. They made a lot of money. They realized that clients need them to bring in something new to the market.

Now what? So the artist guy was, you know, "I don't like it. I don't want to do things for others. I want to do things for myself. I don't want people to tell me that the sky is too blue or too — you know, there's not enough people in this image." And he decided to quit and altogether, and actually since then did not touch computers and never had a client after that, and became a fine painter. And the other, went to architecture school, kept doing this thing, kept working with clients, kept — you know — and I was from the outside absorbing all of this. And I was just kind of understanding, hmm. Because at that time, you know, I mean, what I've done for a living while they were doing that, I started doing window decorations.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And that made me, actually, also a good amount of money at that time. That started only as whole other interesting story. I actually have my house frame in my first business card design, which I don't remember what year it was, but I must have been — it was before high school, actually. It was before high school.

MS. RIEDEL: Before high school?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes. It was before high school because I remember that I did this in Herzliya, not in Ramat HaSharon. I had — yes, that's — I have a lot of funny stories from that time, too, actually. My uncle — one of my uncles used to do that professionally in Israel to big brands, window decoration. And one day, I just said, "Well, I can do that, too." And that was it. I took kind of like a briefcase. I put some fishing wire, pens, scissors, knives, and stuff. And I, you know, printed some business cards. And I went to stores and I offered my service.

MS. RIEDEL: How old were you?

MR. BENSHETRIT: I was very young.

MS. RIEDEL: Twelve, fifteen?

MR. BENSHETRIT: No, I must have been 14 probably. And so then I get there and, you know, they look at me and smile and kind of appreciate my entrepreneurial spirit. And I said, I will do my first window for free and if you like it, then you — this is my rate. [They laugh.] And I remember very, very, very well my first window design. I remember it so well. There was — I don't know if they installed — they did — around town, they did infrastructure work where they laid cables. I don't know it was phone cables or what it was, but they had those wooden circles like this with a —

MS. RIEDEL: With a center, like a spool, yes?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes. And they were in different sizes. And I said, I'm going to collect some of those and put them on the floor of the window as kind of like a raised platform. And I'm going to put some mannequins and I'm going to stretch some fabric behind it with pins and this — so I planned all of this and I sketched them by hand. And I arrive to the story. There's no mannequins. So I said, you know what, I think that I can take the clothing and stuff them with newspaper and create the shape of the body and hold it with — and I got and it didn't work. It just — I didn't know where to touch things and I sat there for hours. It's not working. I can't — it doesn't look like people. It looks messy. But I don't know. Something worked out.

And it got — you know — you're sitting there for hours from the morning till the evening, trying to fix this thing and the guy kind of like looks at you. He's like, you know, "I'm going to sit here and watch this kid struggle." And I guess he had fun because the window before was just nothing, was just some — but something — it worked. I don't know. Something was fun at the end and it was interesting. And he said, you know what, come next week and let's do another one, and I'll pay you what you asked for it. And he was my first client. And we did that for quite some time.

So after I got a hang of that, and kind of went home, created a new look, a new design, came back, set it up, I started to realize, you know, how to work with the fishing wires and stuff like that, and you know, created — all kinds of fun stuff. Then I went to a menswear shop and I offered my service there. And the guy said, "Do you



know how to tie a tie?" And I — [laughs] — I remember it so well. I was such an arrogant kid. I said, do you think I would come to offer my service to you and not know how to tie a tie? That's an insult. And I had no idea how to tie a tie. And I ran home — no, so he said — so he said, "Okay, come tomorrow and let's see what you can do." I ran home and I said, "Dad, teach me how to tie a tie." [They laugh.] And I remember my dad said, "You know what, I'm not very good at that either. I always have my tie fixed and I just keep it like this. So let's see how" — like so we were like seeing and he taught me how to tie a tie on my leg, which is still how I tie my ties, on the leg. And I tried — the guy was not satisfied. And then I learned how to lose a client.

But I think my next client was actually a lingerie store. And I was actually successful and I did well, until one day I was in the window, fixing bras, and some of my classmates stopped by — passed by this window. "Hey, you," and they start laughing at me. And it was okay because it was my job, you know. I'm not ashamed of that at all. You know, I'm doing something creative and I'm — and — I just remember it as a point of kind of building confidence. I'm proud of this and also I think it was a time where — kind of exploration with femininity, masculinity, which was — which I think is also a very kind of important part of how I think.

MS. RIEDEL: How so? Can you say a little bit more about that?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes. Creativity in general, and I'm generalizing, I feel comes from a feminine side. I think that it's something more natural, you know, like giving birth to something is something very feminine. I feel the same way when I create and I feel that a lot of time, I need to get it to a certain mood, to a certain type — and a lot of time it is not the, you know, masculine ground. It is something a bit more fragile. It's something a bit more soft and sensitive. And there were times where I would — you know, I don't — I dress more feminine to work on tasks that will you know, require more sensitivity.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And yes, so I mean, that was army time — army time was a whole other —

MS. RIEDEL: Right, we'll get there then.

MR. BENSHETRIT: But yes, I — during — yes, we'll get there. There's a lot of that there.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. I'll make a note to make sure we touch that then. But you mentioned that there were two really significant things in high school. Are these the ones of your two friends and then also having the experience designing windows?

MR. BENSHETRIT: A lot of things happened in the high school. High school was an incredible time for me. Yes, I mean, the experience of my friends and their company is definitely a big part of that.

MS. RIEDEL: And so from that you took away what, in particular? Because one stayed with it, one went on to something else.

MR. BENSHETRIT: I think for me is really understanding both sides. They — at that point, when they decided to break the company, they were not speaking for a couple of years. And I was a good friend of both of them. And I appreciated both of them and I could see each other's quality.

Now, if you look at what we all three of us did, I think that I'm the one that kind of took a little bit of both in a way. And I realize, you know, that one acknowledge the need that the clients give you to move forward in your career, in your creativity. The other realized what it takes and the integrity, which was so important for him. And I think that, you know, today, I practice a balance around exactly that, you know, around the integrity of an artist and the capability the clients allows you to create your creations. But I think that it's — both of them are extremely important to constantly remember.

There are days where you just say, you know, I just don't want to have any clients anymore. I just want to do my own art and I don't want to listen to — you know, but then you realize that you could have never get to anything without the clients that allows you to spend hours creating on your things that nobody asks for, that don't necessarily pay the bill, that don't necessarily — so it is — it is a very fine balance that you keep. And I think that today, our practice — we've built something that we are so fortunate to work with only clients that we absolutely love.

MS. RIEDEL: That's extraordinary.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And we don't have those kind of bread and butter or whatever people call it. We just do this on the side and we don't do any of that. We don't work on any project that we don't absolutely love and connect and feel directly fruitful, and synched with our integrity.

So I give a lot of credit to those good friends and their experience there. I mean, high school was my — I call it

my first academic experience. It was a really, really, really high level. We respected our teachers so much. We loved them. They would — they would cry if we — your teacher, I remember, would cry if you didn't care about something that they cared. And for us, it was like — there was — and again, I'm talking primarily about the art teachers, but even the — you know — history and English and literature, those teacher that rubbed with the art teachers had a lot of that too. They taught you from the heart and they cared. Then they leave the room and trusted nobody cheats — and even though we did at some — but it was very, very, very mature. It was very respectful environment, very, very, very respectful, I think. And I hear horrific stories from both my wife and other people that went to high schools that are just terrible, absolutely terrible.

And — yes, no, I mean, we loved our teachers. They cared so much about us. They still do. I mean, sometimes getting feedback emails from my teacher in high school, telling me, "I've seen this project of yours," like it's just — it's just amazing. You know. It's just absolutely incredible.

In general, now, you know, when I'm 35, I'm thinking, what does it mean to be a high school teacher, you know? It's just — I really respect them a lot. I think it's incredible the kind of service that they gave us and how they helped us shape our personalities.

A lot of incidents, one in particular that I remember. We were working on an exhibition in high school. And I did a drawing that I spent enormous amount of time on, hours and hours and hours and hours and hours after school for weeks. And I was so proud of that drawing.

MS. RIEDEL: What was it?

MR. BENSHETRIT: It was a Roman sculpture that I copied in monochromatic charcoal. It's called sanguine. I don't know if it's called the same in English. It's a type of brown charcoal.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And I spent so much time working on this drawing. The exhibition went up and I was so proud of it. I arrived the next morning and out of the entire exhibit, my print was missing.

MS. RIEDEL: Missing?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Missing. And it was crazy. Where is the painting? Where did it go? Who took it? It was somebody took it.

MS. RIEDEL: The wall was empty. It was gone.

MR. BENSHETRIT: The wall was empty. It was gone. And I was absolutely devastated. I was just, you know — it was just very unlikely to our school. I mean, we had all of our stuff always open. We left our pens and our pads. It was a very, very, very trusting place. And my art was missing.

So you know, notes all over the school and warning, whoever anonymously, return it, da-da-da. Nothing. The painting — who knows where it is. And my teacher — I mean, that was really like — besides the type of events that every kids have, I guess, and can call traumatic from different times. That was one of those kind of events and then a bit relates to my profession in a way. And my teacher said, "You know, you got to do it again." And I had the same reactions: "What are you talking about?" I spent like really weeks every day and different part of the drawing was more and more complete. And I've never done anything like this. I've never spent that much time perfecting one thing patiently every day a bit and a bit and a bit more. And now, you're telling me I have to do this again. It will never look the same. It will never be the same. And I — you know, and I cried. And I said, "There's no way."

And I went home. I said, "I'm going to do it again." And I did it again. I did the whole thing again. It took me a few weeks and I came back with — I was about to say the same, but it's not the same. I think. I've never seen them next to each other, but I think first one was better. [They laugh.] And I always —

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. BENSHETRIT: It's very good. It's very close. It still hangs on my parents' wall in their house, but —

MS. RIEDEL: And it's a representational, it's a figurative image?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, yes. I don't even think that I changed it. I think it was just that is what I wanted to do. I just wanted to reproduce that sculpture in that —

MS. RIEDEL: Who was it, which sculptor, do you remember it?

MR. BENSHETRIT: No. I could find out very easily, actually.

MS. RIEDEL: We can have that later.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes. But it was — I mean, you know, it's funny. I don't know — it's not like the other story with my friends that I can tell you this is what I took from here. I don't know exactly what — how that event influenced me. I just remember that when we moved to this new office, a month and a half ago, I found a box of colored pencils that I got from my teacher as a gift for kind of, you know, that he felt bad for this event, and I still have that.

MS. RIEDEL: That's extraordinary. You've moved around quite a bit. Twenty years later, you still have it.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, I still have that. It is somewhere here. But yes, that event was one that I remember very well.

MS. RIEDEL: When you think back on high school — and we'll get to college, too — and you look back on all of your educational experiences, is there one that really stands out as among the most rewarding?

MR. BENSHETRIT: You mean between high school and the other?

MS. RIEDEL: College or anything in particular in either one, a particular teacher?

MR. BENSHETRIT: I mean they're all extremely important. They were —

MS. RIEDEL: Sounds like it went on for years, just one extraordinary experience —

MR. BENSHETRIT: They were all unbelievably important and unbelievably eventful and — I mean, yes. I mean, from the age of seven on, pretty much nonstop since then I've been creative.

MS. RIEDEL: Was it all primarily 2D through high school, painting and drawing or had — any 3D work at all?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes. Not much. I mean, I had one year in Tel Aviv museum where I sculpted. And I don't have anything from that period, actually, nothing that I kept, and actually was also my probably least memorable year. I remember my drawings very well. I remember my print. I don't remember so much my sculpting time.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And in high school, it was painting, painting, painting, painting, painting, printmaking. Yes, no — not — you know, it's actually funny because one other thing that I was thinking about was the influence of my parents. I was ridiculously neat. I was very, very, very clean and proper and organized for a creative kid. I was not spilling paints or drawings on the walls or, you know. And my mom is extremely clean and she was a clean freak when we grew up. But she would even be like — she would laugh at me as a kid, like, this kid doesn't like to get dirty.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BENSHETRIT: This kid doesn't like to — you know — and I — I would get dirty and messy when I worked, but just in the — you know — in the organized way. No, but my entire education, formal education has been very significant to me.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. How did you decide to go to school, then to go to college in the Netherlands, is that correct?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Well —

MS. RIEDEL: Where did you graduate high school?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Well, high school was — so 17 is '94-'95 — '95. So for me, high school and college and four and a half years in between.

MS. RIEDEL: Between them, okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: I have army, a year in New York —

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: — and then college.

MS. RIEDEL: So finished college in — is it '97 — what, '94?

MR. BENSHETRIT: College?

MS. RIEDEL: Sorry, high school.

MR. BENSHETRIT: High school, I finish it either '94, '95.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Army started '95 to '98 —

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, so it's three years.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Three years, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And if I'm not mistaken, I think I've started July of '95 — what is the school year ends?

MS. RIEDEL: Normally June here, but I don't know there.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes. That's a little strange, because I had two months between — so no, so I must have graduated high school in '95 and a couple months later started the army.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So let's talk about that experience because I thought it was also extremely formative.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, oh. I haven't spoke about the army in years. Army. So as a kid growing up in Israel, it's — you know that after high school, you're going to the army. That's just a given. Unless you just really want to escape. And of course, you can find ways to escape. You can declare that you're gay or that you're religious or that you're afraid of weapon and that you'll kill yourself, something like that. Those were pretty much the three options that you had, I guess, back at the time. I think today is a little easier.

But I never had those thoughts. For me, the army was a time that I was looking forward to. It's something that I realized that — so I had kind of like a couple of plans. Since my dad was working for El Al, the Israeli airline, we were always fascinated with planes. And we always talked about planes and how magical the plane is. So for me, it was, let's be a pilot — I'm going to be a pilot. Now, realizing, at that point, that if you're going to be a pilot in the Israeli army, you're most likely going to be pilot for the rest of your life. Either you're going to be a pilot in the army or you're going to find a job at the airline company because it is, you know, one of the best air forces in the world.

So for me, I always knew that I'm either going to be an artist or I'm going to be a pilot. And those two things are just so different. And it was really — what other things happened in high school? I had the option of you can choose a certain major subject in high school. And I had my art and physics.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes. And at some point, I didn't enjoy physics anymore since we started learning about electricity and it was just — I just lost it there. I was just, "No, it doesn't interest me anymore." And I was so afraid to go and tell my dad, I think I'm going to drop physics. And I decided — should we stop?

MS. RIEDEL: No, no, we're fine, I was going to turn up the volume a little bit.

MR. BENSHETRIT: We — I went to my dad and said, I think I'm going to drop physics and continue with art. There was a bit of a silence there and he asked me one question, which was, "Do you think you can shop in the supermarket with art?" And I said, "Yes, dad." And he said okay. That was his way. I mean, I'm kind of translating it from Hebrew. But that was his way — do you think you can make a living?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Do you think you can support yourself with art? And I said, "Yes." And that was it.

MS. RIEDEL: And it was interesting that you'd had enough experiences as a young person already selling your beaded pieces, working and doing displays of windows, yes?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes. But you know, I'm so proud of him. I'm so, so proud of him for saying that. You know. And

for making it as simple, as linear as he chose to say it. That was it. And he never asked me again about physics. And he — I mean, they really believed in me. And that's all — they gave me unconditional support. I mean, not financially, but from the heart. And that was amazing. I mean, and that's — I think that's all I needed then.

And that's, I think, that all my kids needs and anybody else needs. It was — it was really amazing. Because I was terrified to go and tell him that. I was just — I thought that he would convince me and said absolutely not. Then we have to study physics and there's — you know — what are you going to do with art. Like — no. It was this long silence. He carefully thought about how to say it. He asked. I answered with one word and I was done with the conversation. And that was brilliant. And that does — I mean, it was really — I remember it so well.

MS. RIEDEL: It's quite remarkable.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And your mother was willing to go along with that as well?

MR. BENSHETRIT: I think that it's funny. I don't know. I don't know. I mean, it's kind of like seems like those things were my dad's responsibility and my mom had other responsibility.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Those are — you know, school and what you're learning and how you're doing was kind of like the dad things. And my mom made sure that we know about safe sex and stuff. [They laugh.] But then the army. So yes, I mean, air force.

So during high school in Israel, you are going to some interviews in the army. And the first thing they ask you, what you want to do and if you're willing to volunteer to, you know, ground forces and specialized unit and things like this. And you're doing some kind of IQ tests to put you in different potential units. And I had two options. I had the option to be in the air force, trying to be a pilot, which is a very, very difficult process and a very small percentage of the people that starts are actually graduating. And then I had the option to be in basically the most exclusive anti-terrorism ground forces unit of Israel. It's a kind of like a — the Mossad of the army.

And because I had the options of going to both, what they do is they — for people like myself, they give certain tests that usually comes later on in your — in your army career. They let you do that earlier on in order to map, and know, if you're not going to be a pilot, you're going straight — go to that unit straight.

So if the air force was option — the first option and the army was the second, and the army started — I mean, you can imagine a kid that came from art school with artistic kids that are very, very different than the — you know, soldiers, fighters, air force kids, sons of pilots. And, you know, I was creative, and I was, you know, a flower kid.

And I was — I mean, it was all foreign to me. It was all intimidating, challenging, tough, rough. I was also a very urban kid. I came from the big city. A lot of the kids came from kibbutzes, and farms. And they were stronger and built differently. And it was difficult. It was very, very difficult. I did well.

Hello.

MR. : [Inaudible] — office from the other side.

[Off mic.]

MR. BENSHETRIT: Where were we?

MS. RIEDEL: You joined the army and just were shocked — [inaudible].

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes. So — I mean, yes. It was — it was really tough. I mean, usually, I don't even know those terms of English. There is this three months — it's kind of like a — I guess an army internship that you do prior to getting into the army stuff. And everybody does that. It doesn't matter which force you're in. And — but I did not have to do that. So I didn't have that three months kind of acclimation period to go into the air force testing. And we were pretty — pretty much on week three or four already flying planes. And, in that section, we had five flights per week, a flight a day, where on Sunday, there's an announcement of who passed and who fails.

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And who — those who fail pack their stuff and go back to the mother station, whatever it's called — and they're being repositioned in other places. So I passed the first five flights; the second five flights;

and the last one I failed. And I know exactly why.

On my 13th flight, which was the only flight that you couldn't study for — it was kind of like an unknown flight. Your instructor tells you on the spot what to do. And there was this tiny little clock that readjusted itself every time you changed latitude that I did not know about. And he just says, you know, "A certain amount of feet, you will do this." And I'm going — [inaudible]. [They laugh.] I'm going. He's like, "Where are you going?" And I say, "I don't know." [They laugh.] So, yes. I failed. And that was it.

And I realized that, okay, from now on my army time is changing from being potentially a pilot to being an artist that is going to give Israel, as a country, three years of my time, and that's it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And then I'm going to be an artist. And, at that time, I was painting oil mainly and that's what I envisioned doing for the rest of my life.

MS. RIEDEL: Was it representational work? Was it abstract? What was it like?

MR. BENSHETRIT: It was a lot of abstract work.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes. A lot of abstract work. And then I moved to — then — I mean, then — then it was very tough. Then it was very, very, very, very tough. So from the army — from the air force, which was similar type of people but a lot more academic people, much more — you know brainers [ph] than just physically strong and physically capable. And some of them were athletes of all kinds.

And I was — I mean, I was tall and I looked big, but I was very weak, very, very, very weak compared to the rest of the — it was kind of like a Navy SEALs type of crowd. But also — I mean, carefully selected, smart, and — I mean, a lot of them continued to Mossad later on and those kind of units.

At that time, I — oh, it was tough. It was very, very, very hard for me. I just was constantly trying to adjust. I was constantly feeling as I'm chasing this thing, because the training were ridiculously tough. It was just in — I mean, you can just imagine, like two hours of sleep at night, and like — I mean, tough, tough, tough. I mean, hundreds of miles of walking and navigating, and navigating on your own in the forest, and in the desert, and — I mean, it was incredible. I mean, incredible how they taught us that — it's all in your brain. It's just — you can do anything. You can just do anything. I mean, there were — the type of training that we went through in this unit was just — I mean, you arrived on a site that you've never been before and you would see this cliff going down to the beach. And it was a 45 degrees cliff that is all sand. And you would be like, "Yes, you run all the way down and run the way back." Absolutely crazy. This is — this is — and you would do it 100 times.

And you would — you know, you would — the first time you've done it, you're like, "This is the most challenging thing I've ever done." "Now, do it again." I'm like, "No." And when you finished this, and again and again and again. And it was just — I mean, it was just — to the point where your muscles get to a point where they just — at one point, they just shut down and your legs are completely stiff. And somebody has got to carry you up.

No. It was — it was — it was tough, tough, tough training. And, at some point, they started dividing our team into different personal strength. And they designated me to be a sniper. And so they send me and a couple of other guys to a special place to be trained for that. We were there for a few days. It was — it was relaxing in comparison to what we had before. But we were — we were exhausted. We were just worn out.

At some point, we had to — I mean, the type of weapon we used took a lot of time to calibrate and set up and position. And it was — it was really like sniper work, so we wouldn't take it apart for lunch and in between breaks. So somebody always had to guard everybody's weapon. And it was me and another guy that stayed during one of those lunch breaks. And we fell asleep. And we just fell asleep guarding those weapons.

Everybody returned, found us asleep. [They laugh.] And the commander shot in the air, woke us up with a bullet. We jumped and we knew we were in trouble. We just knew that we were in trouble. I felt responsible, because I said to my friend — he asked me if I'm awake before we fell asleep and I said, "Yes." And then, we woke up.

So then a phone call to my unit, to my commander there, that sent us here, he arrived and he said, "You know you're representing us," because it was kind of like on a different — "and you'll have to resign from our" — you will — you know, it was kind of like a mature thing that I would have to go back, speak to my team — to my unit and say that I'm leaving. I've done — I fucked up. I — [inaudible].

So I've done that. And that was — that was hard. That was very, very hard. I mean, that was kind of like a

second failure after the air force. The air force was okay because I had a plan B.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And my plan B was — you know, I fell into this — and it was also related to my future because I didn't see myself being — you know — but that was a failure. That was a fuckup of mine.

But I got a phone call from the place that was — that I did my sniper course, and, they said, we would have you if you would like to join us as a unit. So the place that was training anti-terrorism skills hired me to be a commander — to study for being a commander to teach others to be commanders.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And that was probably the best thing that happened to me — [inaudible].

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Because that unit shaped my designer part.

MS. RIEDEL: Shaped your — sorry?

MR. BENSHETRIT: My designer part of my skill.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. The unit you went to?

MR. BENSHETRIT: And — yes. So, basically, at that point — I mean, it was hard. It was hard because I had to let go of this amazing place I was in. I mean, the other place was an amazing place too, but it's — you know, the type of privilege that — I mean, the other unit had to — like had no uniforms. It was really like a very, very unique place.

Now, I'm going to be a commander for an anti-terrorism school in a way. But the amazing thing about that place — so now, I am in the — now I move there, I accepted it, because I thought it was a great place, and I — and I — and I had a lot of respect for that place.

We had six months of the — if I thought the type of training I had before was crazy, that was 10 times harder. That was — I mean, because it was a lot of hand fighting. And it was a lot of — you know, just — and I was just not built for that. I never raised my hand on anybody, and I had to learn what is it like to survive a terror attack of some sort, you know, and all kinds of attacks. And there are millions more options of the type of events that you could — which, basically, what brought the type of intuition that I think is incredibly important in our field, because you had to constantly invent the scenario and find the solution, and invent the scenario and the find the solution. So 99 percent of the time is training. Ninety-nine percent of the time is events that you create and solve, create and solve.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And what happens if a bus is being hijacked, and a plane is being hijacked, and a school is being hijacked, and an apartment building, a private home. How do you — you know, what if there's multiple hijackers, and what if — you know, very fascinating. A lot of — it was — it was, first of all, studying a lot, a lot of books, a lot of archives of cases.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. BENSHETRIT: But extremely innovative, unbelievably innovative. So I started looking for solutions. I started inventing equipment. They started inventing outerwear. I started inventing camouflaging techniques. I started inventing jumping targets for my unit. I started inventing — you know, how to demonstrate how the weapon — how the different weapons work and how to choose which weapons to take with you on different occasions. Do you carry that kind of pistol? Do you carry an automatic machine gun, or, you know, a rifle or a — you know. I mean, I start inventing things. And —

MS. RIEDEL: How does the intuition come in?

MR. BENSHETRIT: I mean, it was really agreeable [ph]. That's — so first we've had the six months of training where we graduated commanders in anti-terrorism. And, from that point on, I was a commander for commander school — for teaching — for teaching then again basically what I've done.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And that, on its own, had — I mean, you are in charge of 20 kids that are now going through this hell that you went through, and you are their mother, their father, their mentor, their teacher. You're everything for them. You have to kind of know when to be soft, when to be hard, when to punish them, when to give them a hug, when to — and it's also — I mean, it's — I mean, the type of things we went through and took them through was extremely dangerous. I mean, it was fire, I mean, live fire training. It was — it was climbing up roofs of buildings and jumping from them, and being attached with a wire and breaking through glasses, and jumping off planes, and jumping off buses, and — and, yes, a lot of crazy stuff.

So, I mean, there's a few specific events that — I mean, again, that I can go on forever with those, but there's a few specific events that I remember that my heart was just — actually not for my own safety, mainly for the safety of my soldiers that were — at time were — we had to connect two ladders that had to go from the ground three-story up in a — in a high school where we were training.

And this ladder was — the gap between the ladders, one that attached and one that is from the ground was about a meter. So you had to climb up to the last step of that ladder and jump to reach the first step of the — of the other. And I was standing there as the commander of those kids, and realizing that, if they don't make that jump right — you know, I'm responsible.

But it was great because it taught me — it taught me everything I needed to do this, you know. It taught me — [laughs].

MS. RIEDEL: You have to be a little bit more specific, I think. [Laughs.] Help me with that connection.

MR. BENSHETRIT: No, I mean, it taught me to understand how to work with people, how to be their boss. Of course, it's very different, your employees from your army, but it's — but in so many ways, I mean, when somebody comes on Monday morning and something is wrong at home, it affects how they work, and my soldiers the same. You would send them home over the weekend, they'll come back, and they'll tell you — [inaudible] — their own stories from home. My parents are getting divorced and my sister is sick, you know, and you have to work with that. You have to understand that and know — you know, what does that mean? Can I make an exception here?

Can I — you know, now you're 20 years old, you know, and you're responsible for those kids. You're only a year or two years older than them. That's all. That's the difference. And now you're wearing this hat, and they're wearing a different hat, and that's the only difference.

So, yes. And it's — you know, you understand. I mean, of course, the army has a very different kind of vocabulary, but you know, punish, don't punish. You know, you — everything has a different — you can have a different perspective on every occasion.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MR. BENSHETRIT: So, I mean, I learned a lot from that time. I learned so much about responsibility, about integrity, about honesty, about — I mean, the type of friends that I made in the army, I've never known friendship like that before. We — and I remember that for years and years and years after my army service, when I was here in New York, away from this type of, you know, problems that our country has. And I know that if I need them or they need me, we would all be on a plane immediately for one another. They were like brothers.

They were just — I mean, you — during the army service, you know that you would sacrifice your life for those people. You don't use that kind of vocabulary in high school or in — or in any other type of friendship. You don't use that kind of — but you knew that your life and their lives are connected.

I mean, it's a crazy time. I mean, we've been to funerals. We've been to — you know, there were events where people died. There are those, you know, because we taught — we've taught — [inaudible] — went to the field and tried what we've taught them and something happened. Yes.

I mean — I mean — but to the positive side of the army, I realized that creativity has other ways than fine arts, that creativity can teach people, not just inspire, can physically help people, can physically — and that's what — that's what I understood design is because I never thought about design. My parents were not — you know, I didn't know who were the Eameses [Ray and Charles Eames] and who were. I knew Chagall, and Rothko, and, you know, fine painters, Cézanne. Those were my heroes. But now I realize that there's this thing called design.

So after the army, I thought, okay. I want to look into a degree in either fine art or design. So I went to see SVA and Parsons, the first schools.

MS. RIEDEL: You did?



MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And you decided that you wanted to leave Israel and study abroad?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Well, so a couple of things happened. Since my dad was working in the Israeli airline —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: We had stand-by tickets for free. So every summer, we would go somewhere, or I would go somewhere. And I had an aunt in the States so I spent my summers in the States —

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: — during high school time. And a bit before also, actually, from — since I was 13 I came every year to the States.

MS. RIEDEL: To New York?

MR. BENSHETRIT: No. At first, it was to Connecticut.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Then to Albany, then to Baltimore, then to Washington, D.C. So I spent summers here.

MS. RIEDEL: And saw a lot of the States.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And saw — yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And saw parts of the States. And —

MS. RIEDEL: But never to New York?

MR. BENSHETRIT: I mean, we were in New York, in and out, and — yes. In every trip, I think we would pass — come to New York. And then, when I graduated — I'm sorry — when I finished the army, we — no. I'm sorry.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you need to take a minute?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Before I finished the army. No. No. I'm fine. Before I finished the army, I got an award. I got commander of the year. And so I got the — the prize that I got for that was to come to the United States for three months and be a camp counselor in a Jewish camp. And so I was — '98, in the summer of '98, when kids go to camp, I went to Camp Ramah in Maine [in Palmer, Massachusetts].

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Where in Maine?

MR. BENSHETRIT: I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. I'll look it up.

MR. BENSHETRIT: I don't know. [Laughs.] Well, that was — that was a very interesting time too. I — yes. So I was here for three months. My English was so poor, I couldn't finish a sentence. And the campers taught me, my very first, you know, English vocabulary. And I would — [laughs] and I'd teach them stuff from the army. We would wear some black paint, camouflage, and crawl in the forest. [They laugh.] It was great. It was really great. I mean, it was — I've learned a lot from them.

And so I've done that for three months and then I came back to finish my service. And came back, straight back to New York. I had an uncle in New York so I stayed with him. And he is a fashion designer, very successful, back —

MS. RIEDEL: What's his name?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yigal Azrouel. In '98 — that was the end of '98. It must have been September — no. It was August of '98 when I moved to the States. And I lived here for a year and it as unbelievable. It was just an incredible thing to do after three years of army.

MS. RIEDEL: You were here in the city?

MR. BENSHETRIT: I was in the city. I lived with him for a year and I worked for him. He started his company back then so I've been the bookkeeper and receptionist, and everything he wanted me to do, I've been. And I hired people, I fired people. I had — it was great, because we — I don't know how we did that. We did not sleep. We would work from 7:00 in the morning until 7:00 in the evening, go out, come back at 2:00 a.m., be in the office again.

It was — it was really in the — I mean, I just — that time for me felt like a movie. I was just in a movie. I mean, in '98, New York had crazy nightlife scene and we would just party like crazy. And it was unbelievable — it was just really, really incredible. I mean, I just felt like you can do anything. You can be whoever you want, anything one night of the week.

And — oh, I've missed a couple of things. During the army, in the weekends, I would paint. And I had my first solo show in a museum, in a small town outside of Tel Aviv. It was a very, very, very incredible event. The mayor came. It was very, very interesting. I don't know how I pulled this together, but it was — it was really incredible. And I started getting articles in the press and — that was army time. And then, when I moved to New York —

MS. RIEDEL: These were abstract paintings.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you looking at any artist in particular? Were you looking at more minimal work? I mean, you mentioned your interest in Mondrian and —

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes. It was — it was a very abstract shapes and colors and a lot of influences from Rothko at that time. And — yes. That was my first solo show.

MS. RIEDEL: That would have been 1980 — '80s?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Those — '98 I think. Probably —

MS. RIEDEL: '98? Right.

MR. BENSHETRIT: — middle of — beginning of '98, something like that, the year before. So then I moved to New York. And I started looking for school during — I mean, during this whole — working like crazy, going out like crazy. I don't know how I found time, but I built my portfolio, my design portfolio, in between. And I —

MS. RIEDEL: It's all still two-dimensional work at this point?

MR. BENSHETRIT: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: So at this point, I'm starting to design. At his point, I'm starting to build my portfolio for design school. I was pretty much set to go to design school at this point. I decided to — that I'm — well, at this point, I still looked for school and was not satisfied with the schools that I found in the States. And I decided to take a trip in Europe and look for some schools there. I went to Paris and London and Holland.

And on my very last day, in Amsterdam, before returning to the States, somebody told me there's a school an hour and a half from here. "You should check if you have the time." And I said, "You know what, I think I can still make it. I'll go check it out." I arrived in Eindhoven, entered the school and realized on the spot, "I have to be here. I just have to learn here." And I had no other option. That's it. It was just — you know, there's no — I'm not going to take no for an answer. I'm going to study in this school.

MS. RIEDEL: What did you see that you convinced you?

MR. BENSHETRIT: It was just very similar to my high school. It was very, very, very similar to my high school. But it just — give me —

MS. RIEDEL: Sure. Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes. I mean, what I loved about Eindhoven was — it was free. There were no walls. It was kind of like this, but there was a —

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BENSHETRIT: There was a big floor with big columns in the center. And people did their things. People just created stuff, different things in different corners, and classmates were pretty much a group of people gathering

in a corner. Sometimes they would put some curtains up.

So I just fell in love with that place. Fell absolutely in love. It was — you know, it was — in other schools, people came with skateboards, and it was — that was a serious school. People looked like they're having fun. They're there because they want to be there. They don't seem like they're going to leave anytime soon, which was something that was very familiar for me from high school. And I just had to be, just had to — [inaudible] — there.

MS. RIEDEL: So it wasn't the work you saw. It was the — it was the people you talked to or was it the space itself?

MR. BENSHETRIT: It was a lot of the space and the people. And what I've seen of them on the walls, and — yes. It was the whole thing. It was just — it was just — it was just absolutely what I was looking for. It was very conceptual. It was very artistic.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And it was not industrial design or product design. It was designing arts. And some people made a chair, and some people wrote a poem, and for the same assignment. That's brilliant. I loved — it was a school with no boundaries, A to Z.

And that was also a time of Bloch [ph] design, which I was admiring and influenced by from my first days of knowing anything about design. I mean, when you're talking about the Yves [ph]. I don't know the Yves [ph] then. I — [inaudible] — design. I didn't know Dieter Rams. I knew Marcel Wanders.

And so I returned to New York. I worked like crazy on my portfolio. So I made my portfolio. I went back to the Netherlands for an interview, and they accepted me to the second year, which was something I did not expect. They said — well, they said — they said, "We have three things. First, we accept you. Second, we think that you are — you should start in the second year. And, third, you're going to have a problem moving to New York to Eindhoven." [They laugh.]

And — and I was just the happiest person. I was so happy to get accepted to that school. I mean, there was nothing else I wanted. It was — it was not an option. I had no — you know, several applications. It was just that. I didn't apply anywhere else. I didn't even consider the chances of not going to this school. It was not —

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BENSHETRIT: — an option.

MS. RIEDEL: So what year was this that you started there?

MR. BENSHETRIT: That was the year after, '99.

MS. RIEDEL: '99.

MR. BENSHETRIT: '99 I started. I arrived in the Netherlands. I bought a bicycle and cell phone. And I called my dad. Then, I said, "You wouldn't believe. I'm taking the shortcut through the fields with cows." [They laugh.] And it was wonderful. It was absolutely wonderful.

And actually, that's kind of funny, because I'm realizing then — you know, moving from New York to a place like Eindhoven, which was gorgeous nature, and really shortcuts through the fields to go to school, how much when I came back, I missed that nature. And now, kind of — you know, I bought a house in the mountains, in Connecticut, and realized that I've been missing that. But Eindhoven was an unbelievable, unbelievable school.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting, too, because you've mentioned nature as being a significant influence and source of inspiration over time.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So does it really date back, do you think, to that experience or earlier even?

MR. BENSHETRIT: You know what? I don't know — I don't know if I realized it back then as much as I — in the past couple of years. Probably not — not a lot. Now, I'm craving it more and more and more. And it's kind of — yes, it's unbelievable how much I crave that.

But Eindhoven, I mean, had it all for me. Great teachers, great projects. I've worked like crazy for school, nonstop, day and night, all the time. And it was wonderful.

MS. RIEDEL: You were there for two years?

MR. BENSHE TRIT: Three years.

MS. RIEDEL: Three years.

MR. BENSHE TRIT: I was there for three years. It was eventful. I mean, it was a lot of stuff that happened. I mean, I fell in love a lot. [They laugh.] Great projects, serious failures, serious rebelliousness, crazy experimentation with myself.

MS. RIEDEL: Was there a lot of CAD design, a lot of digital work happening at that point?

MR. BENSHE TRIT: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Not at all?

MR. BENSHE TRIT: Well, some. And, mostly, at that time, I was very attracted to videos, very attracted to video editing and presenting through video, which I still do. I mean, it's incredible how much this school influenced me today.

I mean, the one thing that I learned, and that I'm so thankful for, is that school taught me who I am. That school made me realize where is my integrity really lies, and that nothing else mattered, that there are no obstacles whatsoever beyond your own will. If there's something you don't know, you find somebody else who can help you. You can find the right engineer, or the right glass builder, or the right — the craftsmanship that I cared about the most was myself, was understanding my passion. It was understanding my thoughts. It was understanding why do my knees stop in front of this thing and don't let me move on. And that's an amazing thing to learn. That's — the fact that an academic place can do that for you is — it's remarkable. And —

MS. RIEDEL: Can you put that into words? Can you define what that was?

MR. BENSHE TRIT: Yes. I mean, it was freedom. It was absolutely freedom. If you did not want to do something, if you had an assignment that was specific, you could always go back and say, "My way to do it is like this" and it was accepted. I mean, it was — it was — it was — it's not that the school was kind of forgiving and easy. Not at all, actually. You would — if you were not — if you did not do well in a semester, you would fail. And 70 percent of the students in every semester would fail.

MS. RIEDEL: Seventy?

MR. BENSHE TRIT: People continued school for five, six, seven, eight years after they graduated, simply because if you failed a semester, you had to do it again, and do it again, and do it again. So, yes. On average, Dutch students, for the most part, take their time. And it would be — well, probably not 70, but — I mean, it's — some semesters, a lot would fail.

And — but there's always been a sense of self-interest, you know. It was — what is it that you want to do? What is it that starts you in this project, the definition between an idea and a concept, you know, something that you really, really, really shape from. Where is it coming from? How do you go to the roots and the essence of what you're really trying to do, to communicate?

I mean, that's why our teachers, each one of them was extremely successful in their own career. They were not like most art schools that have — you know, artists that did not make it on their own and went to the academic world. It was people that taught, and at the same time, they had an incredibly successful career. So you looked up to that, and you said — you know, "You just exhibited in this museum, and you just had this piece and you" — and they would critique you and teach you and — it was — it was great.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, you said that you walked away from that with a sense of what your vision and your identity was as well. Can you put that into words? You [didn't ?] walk away with a connection to a particular material or particular discipline. What was your vision?

MR. BENSHE TRIT: I think that, first of all, you can go to school very conservative so there was a major emphasis on the why, not what you've brought to the final presentation. And that was very interesting because I also worked very hard. It's not like I arrived and sang a song at the final presentation. I made physical models and stayed hours and hours and hours. But it wasn't important. It was not about the working hard. You will never be graded by how hard you work but how smart, and how insightful, and how connected you were to your project.

And that connection was not — could not be faked. It had to be real. You had to — you know, live it, and feel it, understand it. And first, you don't understand. What does that mean — [inaudible]? What does that mean to come up — you know — and what I did I learn about myself — I mean, I learned that we are all complex beings. I

learned that we are all — you know, I simply realized that after I've built a collection of projects in school, they all had something to do with transformation.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: They all had something to do with either physics or metaphorical change.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And that was it. I realized that — you know, that's how I define myself. None of my projects were aesthetically driven, but the aesthetic of them was ridiculously important for me. But that was not the motivation. That was always kind of the — you know, it's got to be attractive, but it needs to come from an intellectual place, from a place that — and it's got to be innovative. It's got to be something that is different, that was never done before like that. So that's what I got in school.

I think that I also added more and more to that from my professional experience, where — you know, one of the departments I studied in, called well-being. And, at first, I didn't know what well-being meant in English. You know, because people do things, and so why would you call this well-being? Why are you studying a department called well-being and that's a chair that you've done?

And I realized that I probably created a very different definition to well-being in my head, because design for me and a designer's responsibility have direct correlation to people's well-being, but is it only making a better knife to cut your tomatoes that improves your well-being, or, you know, going to the Metropolitan and seeing a chair there that inspires you, improves your well-being, and what's more important?

And in fact, both of them are important. They're important in different ways. Influenced me to work like I work today, and I practice cross-disciplinary, and really have no boundaries, and have — it's not important for me whether it's considered art or considered design or this is architecture and this is interior, and this is product, and this is — they're all interrelated.

And I feel that we can influence in many areas, and we could work with — [inaudible] — improvement, and you can design pieces for Cappellini or — you know, gallery pieces. And you can do it simultaneously. They're both important, equally important. And sometimes, something very small can be as important as something very big.

I mean, now, urban planning is kind of like another thing that interests me, and the world population, and, you know, this century that — you know, we are in this technological revolution today, but what's next? I think for me, I'm fascinated at the moment with the fact that we are 7 billion people, but we're going to be 16 billion in my lifetime. You know, it's — [inaudible]. It's fascinating for me.

And the type of problems that we have today in the world that we can't deal with the amount of population that we have right now, how we're going to do it when we're doubling that? It talks about urbanism. It talks about so many different things — transportation.

So I'm jumping, but this is kind of like what's next and things like that I'm busy with right now, and care about and are part of what's important for me. How did we get to that — [inaudible]?

MS. RIEDEL: That's great. Yes.

[End of disc.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Dror Benshetrit in the designer's studio in New York on November 30, 2012, for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art. This is card number two.

Let's — you graduated from Eindhoven in what year?

MR. BENSHETRIT: 2002.

MS. RIEDEL: 2002. And immediately you came to New York and started your studio?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: You didn't waste any time. [They laugh.] There was never any interest in working with anyone else? And it was always very clear to come to New York and start here?

MR. BENSHETRIT: It's a really interesting question. I think that I felt like a sponge in Eindhoven and I realized how much I learned. And I realized that if I'm going to go and work for somebody else, I'm going to be a sponge. And I'm going to be very influenced and maybe take things that are not necessarily my own. So I knew that I'm

choosing the harder path by going and trying things on my own and teaching myself and kind of taking more of a trial and error path, rather than studying — rather than working for somebody.

So it was a tough choice to make because, obviously, as soon as I made that choice, I was wondering if I did the right thing because I had to face a lot of things I've never done before and didn't know how to do certain things and how to find certain knowledge that I was lacking. And — but it felt right. It felt right. I wanted to do things my own way always.

I always believed in this kind of intuitive trial and error as a way to self-educating yourself. I mean, even the Eindhoven school was not academic in the academic sense that you're just downloading a lot of information. You were pretty much given tasks to explore on your own. And you'd be critiqued for it and guided by it, but it was your own path that you seek the guidance for, rather than somebody else choosing for you.

So yes, I felt like let's go and do it. Let's go and try. And it was tough and great. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Did you have clients through your contacts with your uncle or you just came to town and introduced yourself?

MR. BENSHETRIT: [Laughs.] I came to town and introduced myself. I knocked on a lot of doors. I'm extremely, extremely thankful for anybody that would speak with me. I was extremely — I was just eager to ask as many questions as they would allow me to ask. And overall, people were very, very, very kind to me. They believed in me. I don't know why and what did they see. But some gave me money and said give us something back. Some asked me to solve some challenges. I mean, I was very, very lucky to be given opportunities. I was extremely poor. [Laughs.] I wouldn't say that it was extremely successful financially right away, but it wasn't — it wasn't the case. I was here to do my things. I was here to experiment. And if a company allowed me to experiment with their budget, it was great. Otherwise, I would find ways to experiment on my own.

I had people contacting me because I put a website with my work and they wanted to intern with me. And I would be, wow, intern, you know, I just graduated like you. And one of those guys still works for me today. Not just one of those guys, but the first one that I was surprised by, really, you would come and work for me? [They laugh.] You'd come and intern with me? And yes, I had to play that role. And we still work together.

MS. RIEDEL: How big is the firm now?

MR. BENSHETRIT: We are 12 in-house —

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: — and — yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And you started up just by yourself in 2002?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Just by myself, in 2002. I've never been by myself. I've always called myself "we." It was us doing this thing, which basically meant myself and I. [They laugh.] But actually, you know, very quickly, I had a lot of interns. I had myself and interns.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: I mean, it was — and we created stuff together. We tried and pour resin and cut wood and did things, all kinds of things.

MS. RIEDEL: When you look at those early years, 2002, '03, '04, are there particular projects that stand out as —

MR. BENSHETRIT: Of course.

MS. RIEDEL: — successful or great disasters for one reason or another?

MR. BENSHETRIT: [Laughs.] Both. I mean, yes, it's pretty successful. I mean, my first product in the marketplace is the *Vase of Phases*. It's the vase for Rosenthal.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, that's the very first one. Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: It's my first project in production. I've done it as soon as I came to New York. I mean, the first months in New York were very challenging. I came with an amount of money that was not enough to cover the down payment on my studio apartment. But I just I was convinced that by the end of the month I'll find the money to pay for the next somehow. And I — and the following month, I did, too. And then it was okay if I had a pizza for lunch, a pizza for dinner. [Laughs.] And simultaneously, I would go to fancy events invited by others

and then take the bus home. And you know, and have pizza the next day. [They laugh.]

It was a lot of kind of like a bit of a double life at that time. It was a bit kind of like — my uncle helped me a lot and I tried to take very little, but — I mean, he provided shelter for me. And he gave me one of my first projects, which was designing his store in the Meatpacking District, which is my first interior project. That from there went to more interior projects due to, you know, client that saw it and liked it.

I mean, he was obviously a successful designer on his own. He did the same thing without, you know — him to me — 10 years prior to that. And it was inspirational for me. It was, you know, yes, you can do it. If you work hard and wake up in the morning and you believe in yourself and keep on trying, keep on trying, keep on trying, and not letting people tell you that it's not possible and you should go and work for somebody for a while and — I mean, he'd never worked for anybody else either. And he invented his way and came a very long way.

I met a lot of amazing people that I'm thankful for. Paola Antonelli, from the Museum of Modern Art, was somebody I met when I really just moved to New York. And she helped me a lot. She listened to my ideas and saw my portfolio, which was a school portfolio, and came to my opening. And she was extremely supportive and introduced me to people. And she was extremely supportive and I'm very, very grateful for that. Along with — I mean, the list is extremely long. I mean — I mean, New York is wonderful like that, and as somebody that now kind of meets designer that just graduated, knocks on your door and sending you seven emails until you spend 15 minutes with them.

I mean, I was lucky [ph]. I was there, too. So I know. I know what it's like. And we all did that. And I think that's what's great about New York is that anybody behind any fancy desks knows that most of us started like that. You know. And that we have to give chances to young people and that we have to be, you know, mentors at time, and how important that is.

Yes, those years are incredible. They're very, very, very important.

MS. RIEDEL: We should talk maybe about that vase, too, since it is — and we're looking at a shelf of them of them right here.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And I've seen it, in the Museum of Arts and Design, a few years ago, at a show that Marek Cecula curated I think, at Factory Object [Object Factory] — I think that was it.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: But how did that piece come about? Was that commissioned by someone or was that an —

MR. BENSHETRIT: No.

MS. RIEDEL: — experimentation — experiment on your own? I know I've seen things online about how it's actually formed, but how did the idea for that come to mind?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Well, there's — I — I was that broken vase. It's as simple as that. I came to New York, even though I've been in New York for a year before, that year in New York before was not my business, was not my — [phone rings] — we were talking about the vase.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, I mean, it was hard. It was very hard. It was hard financially. It was, you know, people sometimes try to take advantage of you and you know, ask you to do things for free. And it was hard. And they would be, hey — there were a few of those things. And part of me felt like my soft me is being roughened up and kind of thrown around and — yes, so the broken vase was my way of taking my — showing how I believed that taking myself through experiences can form a better me.

I was — I kind of like saw New York was rough. New York was a little rough. And I kind of felt like I have a choice. I'm either not going to deal with it and be here, or I see that it's going to take me to a better place and that I want to confront it and I want to experience that. And I chose to stay. I chose to deal with it. And the vase was my way of showing I went through experiences and those experiences are maybe way up and — and it's kind of funny because before we had this vase in production with Rosenthal, we produced it ourselves. And we've created a mold and we fired it. And you know, had a series, numbered edition, and we created packaging, and we wrote the text. And the store in Brooklyn carried the vase, *Future Perfect*.

And they called me one day and said that a lady came and was very, very, very upset they were carrying this vase. And I said, "Why?" Because she read the text on the box and she was extremely offended. I said, "Why is

she offended?" So I read the text and I could see why she would think that it was about feminine beauty that was broken, but can still be used again and flowers in the water can still be — [laughs] — and for her, it was just completely — but for me, that was a great experience because, I mean, that project was so meaningful for me. It was so representative of who I am and what I'm going through, and not at all any of what she interpreted that.

But that was for me the first experience of how powerful your words can be, you know, and how people could misinterpreted your ideas and your concept and your thoughts. And how important it is to be eclectic and specific. And then something I'm still fighting with for multiple reason — I'm dyslexic, I — English is not my first language. I, by nature, don't express myself best in words. I express myself best in forms and in design. So it's been a struggle, that part of the needs to write and to express things verbally because I find that extremely important.

So that was the story of the vase. So after that — I mean, the intention was always to put it in production with potentially a good porcelain manufacturer. We start from the top, share it to Rosenthal, and Rosenthal, said, we've been trying to perfect porcelain for 125 years and here you come and you break it and you show the beauty of imperfection.

It's been a ridiculously successful product for them and still it's one of their best selling products in their gift category for the last nine years or eight years that it's in production. It's been on covers of many magazines. It's been in permanent collections in museums and exhibits all throughout, all over the world. And then that piece pretty much opened my career.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting, too, because it's a piece that — what strikes me — is so embodying two words that you've used specifically in relation to your work about movement and transformation.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: It just so perfectly captures the moment of transformation.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: It's so between stages.

MR. BENSHETRIT: It's — yes, absolutely, I mean, it's so much for me. It's breaking boundaries. It's going to the extremes, going to the worst experience porcelain can have and yet be — what I love is just really in the press how different interpretation people have on this piece. You know, going to high schools and talking about it, and kids pointing out, it's broken, you know, to academic level or to, you know, excuses that marketing people give it, like best gift for your mother since all the porcelain you broke in your childhood. [They laugh.] Like all those kind of excellent — but then something really interesting happened. Then companies start asking me to break things. Will you break this? Will you break that? And I said no to all of them. I said absolutely not. That was a vase representing something very specific for a very specific story and I won't crash a car and this, and I don't want to be the guy who breaks things.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BENSHETRIT: And everybody said you're doing a mistake. You're making a huge mistake. You're on a great wave. You got it right and you've got to continue. That's what every artist does. They have a language and that language continues. And I said, no, but that's — that's not the language that relates to me in all of those things. Because it relates to me here, with this product. That was this story and I have other stories to tell. Which was an interesting choice and I'm not regretting it at all. The opposite, I know — [inaudible] — that I would have kept on — that this is what I would have done, breaking things.

But instead, I moved on to tell other stories and I always looked at it as kind of mapping a master plan. It's not about building this tower of more and more and more of the same, but it's about a variety of things that — [inaudible] — and it's a longer process and it takes more time to people to thread old project and see what's the relationship with this and this and this and that. But it's okay. You know. It's okay. You know, and people tell me, oh, you've accomplished so much. And I'm still a kid, you know, I've been doing what I'm doing for just barely 10 years now, and hopefully, I — masterpieces don't come in those — they shouldn't come in those years. They shouldn't be, you know — so I have, hopefully, hopefully many more years to come and to do great things.

But yes, so you know, I'm not — in one way, I'm not in a hurry to draw conclusion, to jump into one thing. For instance, I mean, the QuaDror geometry that I'm working with, that's something that keeps on fascinating me.



Every single day, I find more and more application and more and more things that I use in this geometry. So that's very different than just keep on breaking things just because that's what the industry wants to see you do.

MS. RIEDEL: How — I'd like to talk about the evolution of that because I know it was years and years in the making. I know it was at University in Minnesota or something, you did an entire term on that —

MR. BENSHEITRIT: Yes —

MS. RIEDEL: — structure. It was a collaborative venture, right? And that's — that has such extraordinary possibilities for implementation, going from such a small fundamental element to such huge architectural use.

MR. BENSHEITRIT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: If you talk about that — how that evolved, that would, I think, be very helpful to have that documented.

MR. BENSHEITRIT: Well —

MS. RIEDEL: I know we don't have —

MR. BENSHEITRIT: — the piece that you see over there —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, all right.

MR. BENSHEITRIT: — is the very first piece using that geometry.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. It's a light, yes.

MR. BENSHEITRIT: Light. You know, that project, if I can call it a project, endeavor, started accidentally in the workshop.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BENSHEITRIT: I didn't have any intention to create a structural support. I had an intention to create a geometry that would result in a very particular detail at the edge. I wanted to have two frames intersect in such a way that they are reaching a point. So how do you do that? You start cutting some material from here and some material from here, and putting them together, and all of a sudden, you can articulate it and all of a sudden you can move and you can go from flat to three-dimension. And you start doing it over and over again. Hmm, it's interesting. Why am I so attracted to this thing? Why am I so attracted to this geometry?

And then you start looking, is there something else out there that does that, functions like that, changing the scale, changing the thicknesses, changing the material, aggregating it, stacking it? And I developed an obsession. I just stayed in the workshop and cut more and more pieces of wood and put them together. Five years later, I'm still the same. I still find more and more — more and more applications and things.

And you know, that process made me realize quite a lot of different things because we've built a portfolio — now, when you start your career, you build your initial portfolio so the industry will give you a chance, will believe that you could give them what they're looking for. And slowly, slowly, those — this portfolio starts to disappear and your work portfolio starts to take place. And then, from that point on, your work portfolio grows, and from time to time, you say, you know, this is not an important project anymore. I take it out of the portfolio. I've grown out of this. I don't want to see this anymore, and that's it.

This project was pretty much — five years after I started it, was reintroducing ideas that nobody asked us to design. Now, it wasn't like — because, you know, chair for Cappellini, they didn't ask us to design. We presented it to them. And in general, there's always — I always keep like a portion of my brain open to ideas that are not coming from the brief, but are my own creation, my own desire to experiment with something, but this was slightly different.

All of the possibilities and applications that we've chose to experiment with came from a very different sets of questions that normal projects are coming from. And those were, what if? If it's strong and stable, can it hold a table? Can it hold a house? Can it hold a roof? Can it hold a multistory house? Can it be a skyscraper? If those triangulations aggregate in the mix, is it acoustic? Yes. If it's acoustic, could it be a highway retaining wall? Can it be an office partition? Can it be — and — and that's it. It was asking a question and trying it out, asking a question and trying it out, and that's how we started building a portfolio.

Then we started inviting engineers and show it to them. And said, "Well, we had a thought. It looks acoustic. It can be a highway wall. This is a render of how it would look like." "Can you really build it?" And then we've

experimented. We've tried. We convinced people to, you know, open models [ph], pour concrete, bend steel, weld it. And slowly, slowly, we're starting to bring some of those ideas from concepts to the marketplace.

But yes, I mean, it's a very different way of working. It's a very kind of unorthodox way of developing design practice, where for the most part design practice are catered to clients and are working based on what the clients are challenging them. But I started from a chandelier for Swarovski and I ended up in the relief housing for slums and favelas. I don't think that if an organization of slums and favelas improvement would have come to me and said, would you design a shelter, I would have designed this. It would have never find its way then.

So this is what upsets me sometimes when people ask, "So are you more of an artist or are you more of a designer?" Because my eagerness to try and explore things for my inner urge — I call it artistic expression, rather than design — even though it's a design solution, and it's for infrastructure use or for, you know. But the motives have been, you know, not the same, not coming from the natural progression of here's a problem, solve it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Highway barrier walls, or sound barrier walls, or, you know, those are things that just kind of like unfolded rather than — they were discovered from discovery, not even a search in those particular places.

So yes, I mean, I think it's a really interesting way of working. And it's a really interesting way of mixing that with work that clients ask us to do.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm reminded immediately of something you mentioned at the beginning of the conversation, which is the story you told of your two friends, one went on to become the architect and then one went on to become the fine artist and how you find yourself right in between, straitening those two places back and forth, and it's as you've described exactly what you said up earlier.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And I think that it's those two friends, it's being Israeli, it's being a creator and a man. I think that I love duality of the contributions. I love — I mean, transformation for me is all about A and B, is all about the movement from one point to another. And I think that that's — that is my strength essentially. It is always looking at the same thing from two ends and kind of approaching the same problems from two sides. I think that it's — you can see it everywhere in what I do.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. And I'm just struck by how the form came together as a physical experiment you were working on, but it evolves completely as a digital experiment.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And then you could not have gone where it's gone without digital technology.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes. I mean, even — it's funny that you're mentioning that because there's a huge portion, digital component of that that we haven't even shared with the industry and that we're just kind of now trying to find what would be the best way of doing that. But we — I mean, we have built a parametric — digital parametric tools to analyze that geometry in an incredible way. I mean, it's just — yes — I mean, it started with a lot of physical experimentation. This type of idea would have never come from a computer, I believe.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHETRIT: It needed to come from a block of wood being cut by hand and tried by hand. But at the same time, for the perfection and the precision of the manufacturing, we could have never done it without the calculation that the computer actually does. It's a very simple form, but quite complex at the same time.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. BENSHETRIT: We're actually still learning a lot about it. It's still quite tricky to wrap your head around. I mean, it's — it's also actually something that I believe couldn't have come much earlier technologically because a lot of the solution were done due to 3D software.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And we couldn't have done it without 3D software.

MS. RIEDEL: I was thinking about it, yes. But it was fascinating, too, that you built it with these pieces of wood, but it could not have evolved further —

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — without that.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes. Yes, definitely. I mean — I mean, it could. You could have calculated it by hand and stuff, but we don't know how to do it that way.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And the potential for application, I don't think I've talked with anybody else who has come up with such a seemingly simple, small fundamental element that has potential for such wide range in use. And it makes me think of you mentioned Buckminster Fuller as one of the influences —

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes. Yes, definitely. I mean, Buckminster Fuller has a ridiculous influence on me and my work and I'm also very thankful to be close to the institution now and to his life partner that I met in Japan last year. Yes, I mean, he — he's been asking the same question. And he would have given you similar answers and I think we share a lot of obviously interests and — but yes, it's a fascinating thing that came to us.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that the impetus or was that your entrée into thinking more architecturally?

MR. BENSHETRIT: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: It happened — actually, well, it kind of happened simultaneously. My first architectural project is very, very important and interesting. It started — well — I was intimidated with architecture, as I told you, in high school for a very long time. And the reason why I was intimidated with architecture was the architects friends of mine and architects that I've interacted with always had to solve problems that some point I didn't care much about. Where the toilet is or where the — sink in relationship to it. Now, I appreciate that because I'm more educated about it. But at first, it just seems like you know, terrible things to be concerned about. [Laughs]

Every time you're checking, there is no —

MS. RIEDEL: Just to make sure the horns aren't completely overwhelming over us.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And yes, I mean, it just seemed such a complex things to resolve, the A to Z buildings and structures. So I was intimidated by that. But for many years, people said your work is very architectural. And I didn't understand what it means. I played with physics and my chairs move and do those things, but — until one day, I decided, let's think about a house. If I would design a house, what would it be? So I opened my sketchbook and I drew an A-frame house and I stared at it. And I thought every kid around the world draws an A-frame house like that. Why? What's the significant of that shape? And so I search and realized that triangle is very strong and it's very easy to create a pitched roof and it's fantastic for snow loads and for heavy rain. And I said, well, does the kid in Mexico draw an A-frame house too? Probably not.

And it made me think immediately about transformation, of seasons. You live in a place like New York, extremely hot in the summer, extremely cold in the winter. Does my pitched roof really necessary during the summer. Then I realized that this drawing that I've done was very symmetrical and that square and that square could be the same. And I said, well, let's put this pitched roof on two hydraulic pistons like a garbage truck and rotate that 45 down, and now I have an open terrace during the summer.

So I took two post-its and I positioned them 45 to one another and I start rotating and said, "Well, hey, guys, what do you think about the house with a roof like that?" And the roof folds down like garbage truck, like two pistons from a garbage truck. And friends, wow, that — sure, it's cool. So we just put it in 3D and I didn't — you know — we just designed the house. And I hired an architect, somebody who really graduated from architectural school and he had much more knowledge than I have. And he said, "Well, listen, I mean, it's really interesting because summer sun and winter sun are different. Summer sun is a lot higher. Winter sun is a lot lower. If we position the house in such a way that the sun can come in during the summer, and in the winter, we can collect the sun, it could be an ecological house." And I said, "Well, that's brilliant because my work is about transformation and I now created a house that can transform and can change like I change my wardrobe from winter to summer." So the whole house changes from winter to summer.

And we built this. And product designers would figure out the technical details of the mechanism and the graphic designer would create the animation. And the interior designer would — and I was, "Wow, now everybody's working on the same project." And we never worked all together in the same project. Of course, nobody asked us to design this house. It was a portfolio piece, but then, we just built it up — it does grow a portfolio and we did another idea. And we said, okay, that was a house about four seasons.

And back then, I traveled to Costa Rica a couple of times a year. And I thought, wow, that's another interesting

phenomenon, people building houses that needs to survive tropical storm that only happens a couple of days throughout the year. So you're designing a house to survive certain condition that happens once in a while, but other than that, you would live in an open space. You could — you know, the temperature is beautiful. You can cook outside and you can eat outside and you could sleep outside. So we designed the tropical house. We designed the house that can collapse — shutters can collapse and what collapse actually become outdoor terraces. And we realized, oh, my God, this transformation works great for architecture. We could totally keep on doing transformable things.

We didn't force it. It just happened. That was the things that interested me. Like, hey, I need to design a house for just those few days. And then we designed a library that can breathe with the roof that moves. And — and then we said, okay. Let's try to find a client. Let's try to work in this field.

So we met with a big marketer here in New York, Michael Shvo, and he was the first person that we showed an architectural portfolio to. I sweated in that meeting like I've never sweated before because I — I'm presenting architecture. I only started playing with buildings and architecture just a couple of months before, building what I'm showing you right now. And — and I wasn't lying. I was just saying, you know, I have interest in cross-disciplinary and I graduated product design and I want to get into architecture. And he — I finished my presentation. And he said, "I like it very much. Do you think you can handle five, six, seven-story building?" I said, "Sure." He said, "Okay. Give me three months and I'll find you a project." And he did.

Three months later, we signed a contract with a developer that he brought. It wasn't four or five or six or seven-story building. It was 25-story building. But it was okay.

MS. RIEDEL: Where is that located?

MR. BENSHEITRIT: Here in New York. Never happened, never been built, but we worked on that project. It was very successful throughout all of the conceptual stages, schematic. We demolished two town houses to build this tower of 25 stories. The day of demolition was, oh, my God, just seeing this ball knocking those brownstones in order to put foundation for your vision was insane, was just absolutely an amazing event. That was 2008. Recession hit, project canceled, never heard from the developer ever again. And that was our first experience in architecture.

But something else happened simultaneously. Michael Shvo, which was the marketer on that tower, was very happy with how we worked on this project, and during that project already introduced us to another client. This client was from a very different region, Abu Dhabi. And we presented our work to that client. And they said, "Yes, we like your work. We would like you to think about — we would like you to think about an island. It's 135,000 square meter of land. And we want it to be top luxury, highest end residential you could imagine, and a hotel that served those residents, small boutique hotel, just to have amenities on this, this, or that." Okay, interesting. Never thought about anything like that before. I mean, it was ridiculous. I mean, I just, you know, I just remembered going from that meeting to the gym and I start running like double my normal speed. I was just high completely, completely high.

And I started to imagine houses collapsing into the sand and crazy stuff and started sketching all night. From the gym, I went to the deli next to my house and I bought — [laughs] — a six-pack of Red Bull. [They laugh.] I never drink Red Bull, never ever drink Red Bull, except if I need to drive like long distance drives and I need to stay up and I'm super tired. It's the only occasion that I drink Red Bull. Six-pack of Red Bull because I said tonight I'm going to sketch. And I stayed up all night with Red Bull and the sketchbook. And my apartment was filled with sketches on the floor everywhere of just things and more — I was high. I was totally, totally high.

[Laughs.] And because they gave us three months, 12 weeks, come back and present to us the concept. They gave us a nice check and said, "Good luck." Never heard — I mean, it was very different from my first developer. The first developer was attached to his calculator, was, you know, building in New York. Need that. Can you meet this code? And here, you have sand in the middle of the ocean. You want it to be bigger, we will dredge more land. You want it to be smaller, complete carte blanche, do what you want.

So I sketched and I sketched and I sketched all night. And came back the next morning and started drawing thoughts and ideas. And the first thing that came to mind was who wants to live on an island and have neighbors? Because they wanted 35 villas on land and 35 villas on the water. And I thought, top luxury is not having neighbors. If I had that kind of money, I would want to live on island by myself.

So, yes, I mean, it's nice to have all of those amenities and if I feel like going to a cigar bar, the cigar bar would appear, but when I don't want it there, it would just disappear, because I want to be on a deserted island.

So I've never been in that region in my life still — [laughs] — for the obvious reasons. And I thought about the first thing that I know of that region was carpet, carpet making. And I thought we always say what we don't want see, you shove underneath the carpet. And conceptually, that was something that I thought, what if I built this

island with this carpet of meditation and all the villas are just, you know, tacked underneath. So when you are in the middle of this island, you don't see it. You see hills of green and you don't see the structure. And you don't see the architecture. And that thought, which bought the client and excited everybody when we presented and made this project move forward and made this project built, became my first architectural commission to be built and it's \$1.5 — \$1.2 billion construction budget.

More than that, it was the project that broke the record of the most expensive residential ever saw in the UAE per square foot. And it was because of this one word, carpet. So we presented, after 12 weeks, a video. The video was — I mean, the presentation was here in New York. I was being filmed giving the presentation that in Abu Dhabi, there were two screens presenting to the crown sheik, one of me presenting and the other one with the presentation.

We got a phone call back, a week later, and they said — that I remember this so clearly. I was on my way back from Art Basel, Miami, December of '07. And they said, "The crown sheik have seen your presentation and he wants to build it." Now, that was — you know, I mean, you look at this presentation. It's a nice presentation, but it's computer generated renderings. And I started to laugh hysterically. And I started — I just — I couldn't stop. I just — I said, "Guys, look. I don't know how to build this." And that time, they said the smartest thing I've heard a client say. And they said, "We know. We've done our homework on the size of your team. We know you've never done anything like this. We know that we need to pad you with the knowledge you lack."

A week later, we had 25 consultants in a room. I sweated like crazy again presenting them this concept. And I realized that the one word that they kept on using from there until construction started was "carpet, carpet, no we can't have mechanical and air conditioning outlet. It's got to be outside. It's got to be camouflaged." The whole idea is that I feel like I'm the only one in this island because I don't want to be number 17 on the row of those houses.

Sales office opened in May of '08, 72 hours later everything sold out.

MS. RIEDEL: Seventy-two hours.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Seventy-two hours later.

MS. RIEDEL: That's 35 villas on land and 35 on the water.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes. Now, that was — I mean, I have to give a ridiculous amount of credit to Michael Shvo, which did the sale, but more than that, we were working around the clock to deliver this material in time, and I could not understand. I said, "You know, you invented this deadline. Can't you extend it? I mean, I need one more month. I can give you a month." He said, "No, if we're not going to open the sales office in May, we might as well not do this project." I was like, "Why? You invented that thing. Why?" I guess he knew. He knew very well. A minute after the recession hits, stock went down, economy — I mean, and people that signed \$5 and \$6 and \$10 million checks to have 10 percent down payment disappeared, disappeared, pretty much did not come to ask for their house or, you know — but that money paid for that project to ignite, paid for that project to start. So they didn't end up building 35 villas on land and 35 on the water. They built a lot less, but the project continued and the project was — is being completed today, is being completed now.

But, I mean, what an experience, an experience that brings me back to my years in school that taught me the importance of your idea, the importance of your concept, the fact that it doesn't matter if you don't know how to execute it. You could find people that will help you to execute it. But what's important is the essence. And since then, for me, this is what I care about the most because what's there is the foundation. It's the foundation of the project. And — and —

MS. RIEDEL: Did the actual development and the construction proceed pretty much as you all had envisioned it?

MR. BENSHETRIT: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes — [laughs].

MR. BENSHETRIT: For a very simple reason. This is being recorded to an important occasion, so I will share with you a lot of things I've never shared before, not in interviews and not in my lectures, or — you know.

When we delivered what we needed to deliver for the sales office to open, the client disappeared. They could care less whether I'm going to be in the opening ceremony of this project because crown sheik is involved in a project and if you wanted the Israeli designer to arrive, he could make it happen, but he didn't or they didn't or, you know. My name was not mentioned in the material that was given to the buyers and I had to force hard my credit back into this project through our own effort.

And the funny thing is that they hired a very respectful PR agency in London that we knew very well in the designer world. And when I went to them and said, "I would like to show you what I've done for this project," they came back to their client and said we would not work with you unless Dror's name is on this material. And Camron and us have had many successful PR events since then. And we've commissioned them on several projects.

But you know, so our relationship with that developer, from that point on, went downhill. So they've hired other architectural firms to continue what we've started. We get pictures of construction here and there and we see things that are different than what we wish for. And we came to term that, yes, I mean, it's — this project has been extremely important for our studio. It's been important for my career. But a lot of lessons have learned in this project.

And yes, I mean, the way we stand today is that there is — we had to chase them for a long time for payments. We had to chase them for a long time for credit, which still is not really there. And we now just kind of following their progression remotely and not involved.

But yes, I mean, it was an experience that, I mean, I bless a lot because it — you know — I don't know anybody that gets \$1.2 billion of first commission in architecture.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And to see something that different, that innovative, constructive.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, yes. No, it's amazing. I mean, it's — I mean, basically, all of our architectural work since then has been after that project, so — and of course, I mean, it's not that many years ago. It's — you're talking about a project that is still being constructed. We're talking 2008. We are, you know, four years, five years later now, which in architectural time is very short.

So yes, but you know, I'm very — you know, a lot of really interesting things happened. A lot of very interesting things happened.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Have a good weekend.

We probably kind of — like few more minutes.

MS. RIEDEL: Wind up, sure.

MR. BENSHETRIT: I was very, very, very lucky with this project for a lot of reasons. The type of responsibility, ecological responsibility that projects of that scale have, especially when you're talking about a place like Abu Dhabi, where, you know, things are being built —

MS. RIEDEL: It made me think, too, of the project in Istanbul as well —

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — ecological implications. And that like — it'd be interesting to talk about —

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — but we may get to that on Monday.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, but this project, I mean, intuitively is extremely sustainable. And I can't say that it came from knowledge or, it was — the fact that those green roofs are good for those climates and that the grey water of those houses can be used to water those roofs and — I mean, none of that was really planned and thought of. But it really made me realize a lot of things that, you know, about knowledge and intuition. About, you know, how to create innovation, that a lot of time innovation needs — you need to turn knowledge off for a minute, think about something and then question it against knowledge again. But yes — no, a lot of things I learned from this project, a lot of great things I learned from this.

MS. RIEDEL: So it's again that duality you're talking about between intuition and the knowledge.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Many people talk about that.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Everybody in their own unique way, but it is interesting that it's —

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, very, very, very —

MS. RIEDEL: — a very generative process, it seems, that back and forth.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes. Obviously, with a project like that, which, if you're thinking in financial terms, it is probably the most important project we've ever done, but it's the only project — I mean, for somebody that doesn't have any experience in architecture, I was not designing — I don't even thought that this thing would be considered to be built. What I mean? It was just so far out there in my imagination that, you know, when they said the crown sheik wants to — I mean, I laughed. That was my reaction. That was the real — it was just, you know — if Walt Disney would have asked me — commissioned me to think about the same thing, I would have given them the same presentation. I mean, it's not — it's felt as it's an animated film. It's not document for construction.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Also probably because I wouldn't know how to advise you on how to construct it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHETRIT: So yes, but that's what's great about it. That's what's so interesting about it. I mean, then, I learned that Tadao Ando never went to architectural school, and I felt like —

MS. RIEDEL: Sorry, you learned that?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Tadao Ando never went to —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes, exactly.

MR. BENSHETRIT: So yes, no, I mean, it's — I mean, the Turkish project is a whole other amazing, incredible, incredible story. I mean, I'm comfortable saying, but I think that — I believe that the Turkish project is the most important concept I've ever done. It's hard to say and everybody around here and in the industry would disagree with me because they would call me a child. They would say you don't know what you're talking about. You're not educated enough to put something like that up there. But I believe it has brought me so much. And if you ask me today, being in the same exact point that I was when I presented the Abu Dhabi project, I can see this being built today, much more that I could have seen the Abu Dhabi project being built back then.

Now, that's not, you know, 65 private, rich individual. It is 300,000 residents and it's an urban plan. It's a city and it's — yes, that's — I mean, that's summarizing a lot for me. That's New York. That's experiencing Istanbul. That's experiencing a lot of cities I've visited.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you read at all Paolo Soleri?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Oh, yes, of course. But when you say "read" — I've read, you know, that's it. I haven't confronted it. I haven't — I've — you know, somebody referenced it when I showed them —

MS. RIEDEL: Have you gotten a chance to visit it, that Arcosanti, it is — that was partially constructed in Arizona?

MR. BENSHETRIT: No, I haven't. No, I mean, it was — you know, the whole process with this project has been thought and — like it was me showing something to a team member or to an engineer that we've collaborated. And then they said, well, you should do this. And then I looked at that and something else came from that. And then, I showed them how to do it. But that — that was the process. And that's also how we got in touch with the Buckminster Fuller. I mean, no, that was before, but how I got in touch with Shoji Sadao, the partner of Buckminster Fuller in Tokyo.

And, I mean, that process was also a little bit mystical for me, a little bit — you know — things had happened in a really weird way. Like I would sketch something and the next day, I would find that Buckminster Fuller sketched it, looked exactly the same. And I would hear that that's — that the proof that the person who owned that sketch is a gallerist in Chelsea that I found a month before a fake QuaDror piece in, like a lot of kind of weird coincidence that happened around this project and strange things, as if, the developer that commissioned me and I have the same birthday, all kinds of kind of — [laughs] — weird. Let's leave that for — [inaudible].

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. All right. Do you want to stop for now?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Sure.

[End of disc.]

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Dror Benshetrit in the designer's studio in New York, on December 3rd, 2012, for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art. This is disc — card number three.

I thought — you talked in passing, last week — you mentioned a few of your influences, but I'd like to go into that in a little bit further depth, of who you consider or what you consider to be the most powerful influences in your career. We've talked about certain things, of course, and you mentioned Buckminster Fuller for one, but who else during different parts of your career has been significant to you or what else, movements?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, you know, as my life kind of progressed from focusing on art to design, I had various influences at different time of my career. I think at early ages, people like Cézanne and Rodin were more influential on my work. I think that later on, it became more early 20 century artists like Rothko and more sculptors evolving into artists like Noguchi that also contributed a lot to design in his life.

And then, of course, important people in design that I draw a lot of influences from are Castiglioni, which I've mentioned very often, of course Buckminster Fuller for all of his work, ranging from invention and product invention and architecture invention in kind of larger thinking of urbanism. And — but Yes, it's kind of interesting how periodically those individual — those artists from the past would kind of raise back into the surface in regards to different things. And I think that probably Rothko is an artist that I've mentioned at least once a month, in the context of — to something.

I think that I always loved putting just raw colors next to each other and let them just create one very sharp emotion, very sharp feeling. And I still — I think kind of refer to that and like seeing that and work with that in my work.

Other examples, a lot of American influences from the, again, mid-century, Dan Flavin — what's his name? The *White on White* and black and some — [inaudible] — like that. But Yes, a lot of Bill Viola and people — that plays a lot with compositions of colors and light and volumes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: I have a lot of influences.

MS. RIEDEL: Have — have your travels had an effect on your work?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Definitely. I started traveling for business more and more in the past 10 years, of course. Prior to that, my travel were more limited to visits in the U.S. and a few visits in Europe. But I also living in Israel or growing up in Israel, I think you are very influenced by the multi-culture of that nation and the fact that everybody have heritage and their parents came from different countries. I'm sure also have a lot of influences from this very — this very melted — melting pot that New York is in many ways.

I think I find a lot of inspiration in Europe. I think in the early years of my career — I hope I'm still in my early years of my career —

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.] You are.

MR. BENSHETRIT: In the early, early years of my career — [laughs] — Europe has been a tremendous influence. Of course, I went to school in the Netherlands, but Italian design and Italy and France has been significant influences in my work.

When I started my practice, 10 years ago, Japan has been a tremendous source of inspiration for me. I just loved the precision. I loved the attention to fine detail that usually come from a lot of influences in the nature, come from a lot of influences in kind of raw, pure forms. And I think it's still there. I think now it's just kind of mixed with a lot of other places, a lot of other places that I discover along the way, such as Brazil and South America, India, which I recently been interacting more and more often, in Turkey, which is a part of the Middle East that I only also discovered in recent years and drew a lot of inspiration from.

Specifically, Turkey have something for me that is a very, very, very interesting kind of clashes of culture, Europe and Asia and Mediterranean kind of, all of those three that— in Israel, we use to kind of feel that, but I think in Israel we kind of felt it more in MTV rather than in — you know — we used to literally have the American MTV, the European MTV, and the Asian MTV, three channels one after the other simply because we are there.

But a place like Istanbul that literally plays where — you know — two continents — you actually drive back and forth from the European side to the Asian side. And you are in a Muslim country. It's so powerful. It's so interesting for me.

MS. RIEDEL: I'd like to talk about that in relation to your work because clearly Turkey has played a significant role in your work of late, with the — you've just revealed the design for — how do you pronounce it — HavvAda?



MR. BENSHETRIT: HavvAda, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And the — the island that will be off the coast of Turkey. This is a very clear example of how your travels have influenced your work or inspired your work. There're a few others that we talked about last week as well. Is that often the case that the travels will result in specific projects, or is that more the exception to the rule?

MR. BENSHETRIT: It's an interesting question. There's an English sentence that I always — that I adopted and I always use, which — looking forward to see what the future will unfold. I think we — in Hebrew, we probably don't have that same — and for me, when I kind of visualize, you know, being a dyslexic, every word for me have a very strong visual, I literally see kind of like an envelope that opens up.

And every time this folds, open up and see more and more of the picture. So I always feel like my travels are unfolding something. And I always kind of see a bigger picture and see more and understand more. And so — so yes, I mean, my travels, primarily are directed to commissions those days. So if I have a commission in Turkey, I will be there. And when I'm there, of course, I'm influenced. So it kind of goes both ways.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHETRIT: But yes, my interaction with the region in Turkey has definitely impacted my way of thinking in the past year or two and I'm very excited about that. I'm very, very excited about that.

MS. RIEDEL: How's that process working? You've designed this potential island. What is the next step? Is there a competition? Is it — at this point — more hypothetical?

MR. BENSHETRIT: This specific process has been extremely unique because it wasn't as if a client gave us a particular brief and said, this is what I need you to work on. It was more kind of a bit far into the future vision work. So it's probably more in line with go home and dream of the future, or go home and dream of what cities, utopic city would you like to see.

Of course, we have a particular site and we of course have a particular circumstances that are attached to this project, but, you know, the — probably the most important thing here is that I never ever thought about those problems before. So I, of course, had to not just think about that site and that developer that commissioned that work. I started thinking about all of the cities I visited, all of the places that I know and what I like about them and what I dislike about them. What would I change? How would I like to envision transporting from one place to another in my — in the cities I'm in.

And all those questions kind of went into this proposal, went into this thought. And yes, so the developer that commissioned us is definitely a visionary, is somebody that care a lot about the future and believes in the future of Turkey in that region.

He has a very particular vision that he believes the time right now is good to evolve into kind of a new era for Turkey. And I — I mean, I was just incredibly immersed in his way of thinking and I found him to be a fascinating man. So a big influence on the — on the what, on the set, the vision that this sets him was part of him kind of unfolding this major vision that he has for the whole region, not just for this particular site. I mean, he's the one. I mean, this project, this island came as a result of dredging land that will come from carving a canal from the Black Sea to the Marmora Sea.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And what's interesting here is that this was not his idea. This idea actually came 500 years ago, during the Ottoman Empire, that there is a lot of commerce from the Black Sea to the rest of the world. And they all have to pass through the Bosphorus. So back then, they already saw the need and potential to create basically an additional lane of transportation, of communication between those two seas. And today, 500 years ago — 500 years later, of course, we are transporting more. We're transporting more chemical and hazardous material. And the population have grown on the size of the Bosphorus to a crazy density. And those commerce are definitely hazardous to the environment there.

So now it's more relevant. Of course, the technology that we have today, the capability of doing a project of that scale are a lot easier. This proposal was approximately, you know, re-proposed in that region every 100 years — so — ever so often. And now, it seems like the prime minister of Turkey, looking to complete this excavation project in the next 10 years, ideally in celebration for 100 years to the independence of Turkey.

So that canal results directly in the billion cubic meter of land that is going to be dredged.

MS. RIEDEL: That's something — [inaudible].

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes. So that is one out of 21 proposals that Inanlar, the developer that we've been working with, is doing there.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm- hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. BENSHETRIT: And some of that are trains and fast trains, transportation in the region, and all kinds of projects that are basically for the future growth of that part of the world.

MS. RIEDEL: And this was the first project that you've done of this scale. I know this was going to be a city of 300,000, is that correct?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Correct, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, definitely. I mean, we never thought about anything of that scale before, which was fascinating, which was extremely interesting. And through this project, you know, I have to say — I mean, I don't know exactly what will be the influences of this project on the future of my career, but it puts things in a different perspective all of a sudden. I mean, we still appreciate and love doing small, unique, practical or conceptual projects. But the scales have stretched. And now, I have another responsibility to worry about. I think that understanding that we are 7 billion people today and we're going to be 16 billion people this century is a — is a major problem, is a major challenge on the way we live today, on the cities as we know them. And I think that our vocabulary, our urban vocabulary right now is extremely limited. We have one typology. That's called skyscrapers. That's the solution that we found to pack more people in one place. I find a lot of problems with that. I find that skyscrapers are an immediate — an immediate solution to a need. In the cities that we live today, it's an expected solution. But I believe that in the cities that we are going to construct in the future, we might want to look at some other typology, some other type of living conditions.

MS. RIEDEL: And are — what are you thinking of, in particular? I imagine it's a multi-use space, I imagine you're talking about environmental implications among others.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, this is my very kind of simplistic and short answer to that question. It's a bit childish, but in a way, it's the best way that I found today to answer this point. Buildings are selfish and we constructed them, so they're serving our needs, of course. So they're not selfish for the — they're not selfish for the users, but they're selfish to nature. They don't give back beyond their immediate shelters for the people that are using them. And there's absolutely no interaction. The buildings are there. They suck what they need out of the grid and they throw back at the grid their waste and what they don't need.

I see future where buildings have a lot more interaction with nature, where they have more harmonious way of giving and taking from the land.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right. Green roofs, gray water, that sort of thing?

MR. BENSHETRIT: It starts with that —

MS. RIEDEL: Cradle to Cradle kind of thinking?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, it starts with that, of course. There's a lot of work that is being done right now, where architecture and biomimicry are coming together. I definitely see — see some solutions there. But formally, I think that it's good to probably be a bit — certainly a bit more familiar from nature. Skyscrapers are not a very natural type of phenomenon. We don't have anything that kind of comes out of the ground vertically of this and that's it. It could be, yes, a trunk of a tree with no — you know, with no branches and leaves, but there are no trees that grows like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Trees are very recyclable.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Of course.

MS. RIEDEL: They generate. They give back. They —

MR. BENSHETRIT: Of course. And they change with the season and they adapt. So I see something a bit more — now, when I say "selfish," I refer to particular things that, you know, the first thing that comes to mind is somebody invented, a few years ago, a new type of parties in the forest, where people used to wear headphones that are wirelessly connected to a surround system, and you're seeing hundreds of people dancing in a site. They all have their own sound system in their headphones. And they dance. So you would say, hmm, that's kind of an interesting party. Seems kind of — you know — everybody's on his own. And you could even play different channels in different ears and everybody's listening to — and in a way, that's kind of similar to how our buildings

works today. They all tune to their own needs, to their own channel. And they don't hold hands. A different kind of party, maybe a little bit more old-fashioned type of party would be, you know, we're all holding hands, dancing in a circle, you know, supporting one another, holding one another, sharing and giving energy to one another. And — and I see urbanism a little bit more like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm- hm. [Affirmative.] Interesting. Do you think about your work in terms of social or political commentary?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes and no. [Laughs.] I think that we have, of course, social responsibilities. I think that the term "sustainability" is — should be obvious for us when it comes to design and less of an excusable type of vocabulary. Political, yes, of course. I mean, you — anything that is public that is there to serve — serve population is political. For me the word "political" associates directly with politics, which you will never find me speak about.

I have a very, you know, problem with — I think that as an artist it's very dangerous to be busy with information that takes a lot of effort to sort out. I think that it's — it's actually a big problem. I find myself sometimes going through long periods of time where I'm completely disconnected from the news purposely. I just — it just takes a lot of effort for me to sometimes realize that there's something that I'm very interested in or should be very interested in because it applies so much directly to my life, but yet, I'll be doing this tremendous effort to be selective of that information to trust some of it and some of it not, and — so yes, when you say, is your political, you know, it always scares me to be attached to politics in some way, to be attached with — but it is, in a sense, work that relates to time and to people.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Does it feel more environmental in any way?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Definitely —

MS. RIEDEL: More environmental than political, or more social than political?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Definitely. Definitely. Definitely. But again, in kind of in my own way.

MS. RIEDEL: Indirectly.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: When we started working with a lot of NGOs, we very often heard, "but you also create luxury." [Laughs.] And it was as if I should not. I — you know, you think there's a lot of kind of varying school of thoughts that put boundaries very often in the wrong places. When you say "luxury," I think about a lot of different things. I think about some old craftsmanship that is dying in our world and some very few companies that are somewhat luxurious today are fighting to maintain this craft. So some see it as luxury and some see it as a form of art that needs to be communicated that have important contribution to our society.

Now, improvements of well-being for us have very often come from luxurious type of clients that allows us to spend time to reinvent, spend time to have an R&D type of work that results in all kinds of improvements, direct or indirect to the specific brief that we have. So we really, really, really want to make sure that in our work we see a bigger picture where there are no sharp boundaries and there are no sharp kind of defined rules and unacceptance to certain things, because we very often are surprised by the preconceived knowledge that we have about something, and all of a sudden, the picture is 180 degrees shifted to the other side. And a very good example to that, I think you're talking about sustainability. It's a major point.

I remember watching the movie *The Corporation*, some years ago. I left that movie quite overwhelmed. And my first reaction was, I have no interest in working with some of those large corporation that are doing terrible damage to our planet. That was my first reaction. I went home and it really kind of bothered me what I've seen and what I've learned and what I realized, and I woke up in the morning with the opposite approach. I have to work with those companies. I have to make sure that those companies are actually doing better. And I would like to try to influence them in doing better.

It's a really, really, really — I mean, all of those questions are so complex and they're always two-sided. We are very often asked to do projects in beautiful parts of the world, beautiful nature that is about to be converted into resorts, you know, residential areas, and almost always your immediate reaction, well, I cannot make this place more beautiful than it is already. The best thing for you to do is don't do anything. But at the same time, you understand that it's a lot more complex than that. You understand that some of those projects have very, very, very important financial implication to that area. Some of those areas are extremely poor and they are in immediate need for this workload that this project can bring, the financial contribution of something like this.

So it's kind of funny that sometimes people critique large amount of infrastructure that is needed for a project, where we neglect sometimes that — what, this city has been growing naturally? I mean, this is all artificial, right? This is all — has just been taking years and years and years of adding and adding and adding, right? But if today, I'll take a deserted island like Manhattan was 500 years ago and I would propose this crazy city with skyscrapers, everybody said, "You're absolutely nuts." And look at the — you know.

So, it's a lot more complex than just, you know, taking a fact and scaling it out of proportion. I think that it's very, very, very important for us to be informed about a lot of things. And it's very important for us to listen and be open-minded to various school of thoughts. That's — and I think that sometimes, I summarize sustainability and — in a simple word of love. I think that you are the most responsible, you're the most sustainable when there is a lot of love, where — you know — and somebody says, let's make sure that this is a sustainable building. For some people, it means, let's be very smart about the heating system, the glass, the glazing, this and that. A building that everybody loves means that is going to be a landmark, means that this building was not going to be torn down in a few years because nobody care about it.

I think that the most sustainable thing we can do is long-lasting things, more so than improving a couple of percentages. I mean, if you could have a couch that you love so much that would stay in your house for so long, and even when you want to give it away, you're not just going to abandon it in the street, but you would call your best friend or best relative and say, I think it's time for me to have something else. Would you like my beautiful couch that I owned for so long.

So it's — rather than having this disposal culture that — at the same time, there's also ways of looking at the things that needs to have a disposal type of lifespan and their contribution and their way of maybe, you know, disintegrating quick or. I mean, so obviously — I mean — or structured and instead of being landmark, they have to stay there for 500 years, maybe they are built in such a way that they're actually very easy to deploy and be re-erected somewhere else, which is almost the opposite, but another way of looking at sustainability.

MS. RIEDEL: It makes me think of a word that you used when we were speaking on Friday, "movement," and the other word, "transformation," but it also brings to mind the word "versatility."

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Because I think, when I think about your work as a body of work, I think of the Tumi bags that expand. I think of the QuaDror structures that are meant to be able to be assembled very quickly in areas of disaster relief. I'm just thinking the versatility — it seems inherent in both of those designs and in many of your designs.

MR. BENSHETRIT: The versatility is actually a very, very interesting word because I often speak about a sentence that I read in a great book about collapsible structures. And that sentence, if I quote it correctly, was "we are transformable beings, both physically and emotionally, and we desire transformable things."

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. Do you remember the book or the author?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, I should have it in the library here and find it —

MS. RIEDEL: Or we can add it when we see the transcript, but that would be nice to have.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And for me, it's a really brilliant sentence because, you know, first of all, emotionally, we constantly change. We can go from happy to sadness. We can go from happy to sadness. We can go from anger to love in seconds. And at different psychological states that we're in, you might crave something else. Two weeks ago, when my wife was laboring, I ran around the house thinking, no, brighter, no, no, no, no, more moody, darker, let's put some music. No, no, no music, no music. Let's turn some candles on. No, no, no, no, no candles. [Laughs.] It was a state of nothing is right and you're trying to find the right solution, but — you know — so it's really interesting. I mean, for me it always excites me when I think about different diversity.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: We live in a one-bedroom apartment. That basically means that my living room serves so many different functions.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Sometimes it's a party, so I want to move all my furniture and open up the floor. Sometimes I make a romantic dinner. Sometimes I invite friends to watch a football game. Sometimes I just want to have a beautiful Saturday morning listening to great music and send it to my bedroom. Sometimes I want to watch a movie and fell asleep in bed. Sometimes I don't want any technology in that bedroom and I want to enjoy

reading a book.

So yes, I mean, those are the kind of things that I'm always busy with, is this — is this un-static nature of our life and ourselves. Nothing — I think, at some point, I said, you know, static things freaks me out because there's nothing that is really static in our world. From our own body, which is just fascinating to think about, the organism that are constantly in movement, that are constantly in flux, to the cycle of seasons, to the cycle of nature, to the movement in rivers and so forth.

So there's really nothing static. There's nothing that really kind of stands still. I mean, even when you're thinking about objects that are — that are static, they're not really static because we move around them and we see them differently and they always have context and they always have — so — so that's kind of like where movement, where poetry and physics, or you know, metaphorical and physicals are how I relate to those two things.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And I think there — I mean, that sentence in that book, which we'll find in a second, is exactly that —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: — is exactly about those two things. And sometimes they are independent. Sometimes they are together, and sometimes —

MS. RIEDEL: Does any of your work have a spiritual component to it at all?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Absolutely. Absolutely. I mean, I think that spirituality is a growing theme. You know.

MS. RIEDEL: In your work in particular or in general?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, yes, in my work in general — in particular. I — it's kind of funny because I think that the word "spirituality" have had a very particular meaning for me for many years, until it starts adding other and additional meanings. So I grew up in a quite conservative family of religious heritage in my grandparents. And I think a huge contribution to the fact that I question everything, or at least I like to think about myself as somebody that questions everything, is that when I approach belief in my immediate family, I was never satisfied with the answers that I got.

It was very often — it's just because it's just like that. God has told us so, things like this. And I could never accept that. I felt that there is definitely somebody else out there that can give me a better answer or — and — and then I realize that spirituality have a lot more than that and that faith is something that, whether we chose to put tags on, is something that all of us have. I think that there is an inherent need for life that directly relates to optimism and hope. Of course, it means different things to different people.

One of the things — and maybe I'm jumping, but one of the things that strike me a couple of years ago and influenced me greatly was a video that I saw from Sierra Leone, where a woman was using a very small container, slightly larger than an American size coffee mug, to pour water from underneath her feet, from basically this body of water that she was standing in, in her own slum like home, and pour it just, you know, three feet in front of her into the same body of water. And the video focused on this lady for quite some time and you're basically seeing her repetitively taking water from here, dropping it there, and taking it from here as in the hope that she will eventually succeed to relieve her house from this flood.

But you, watching this video, and you're realizing that she's in a way wasting her time. But instead of feeling an ordinary, you know, pity, I felt the need to find ways to help that state of mind. And at that point, I was completely hopeless, because I had no idea, as a designer, how can I — how can I help this lady? What kind of tools or what kind of help can I think to design to provide her? And I realized that there's a huge problem because what I mean when I say "hope" and what she means when she says "hope" is fundamentally different. So for me to assume that I can come up with something right now in my fancy desk, in my fancy office, and reflect her type of problems and concern is pretentious.

So — that doesn't mean I need to leave it alone and not to react to my emotion, but there's a different way of thinking about that, there's a different way of — so you know, spirituality for me directly relates to optimism, directly relates to a sense of ambitious that we have for ourselves, for our society, for our family, for our friends. And I think that — this is how I like to view it. We are — we are universe on our own within a universe that we know, within a universe that we know a little less, a universe that we know a little less. And at the end of the day, we choose to apply — yes, I guess our sets of belief into the circumstances.

I don't know if I answered your question. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Well, let me ask another question that might shed a little more light on that. When you think about yourself and your work, do you think of yourself and the work as being part of a particular tradition, either an international tradition, a design tradition, art tradition, American tradition, Israeli tradition? And do you think about it — frame it in any way?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Well, I've never liked to kind of put boundaries —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHETRIT: — or putting like a specific —

MS. RIEDEL: Right. That would clear off. [They laugh.]

MR. BENSHETRIT: I remember, walking with my wife today, girlfriend at that time, and we randomly in the street ran into an old friend of her that says, ah, finally you're dating a normal guy. And I thought that was like the biggest insult I've ever got in my entire life because I — [they laugh] — I never like to consider myself normal or to be like, belongs to a very kind of — [inaudible] — as such.

MS. RIEDEL: What about an interdisciplinary tradition?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Multidisciplinary tradition, you know, or — I mean, do you think about it at all in that way or not?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Well, you know, of course I think about it, but I think I'm no different than anybody else when it comes to picking and choosing what I like and what I don't like and making my way in my own tradition. There's a lot of things that I take out of different cultures and adopt as my own, a lot of beautiful things that I discover as a child or discover recently in my travel or that I adopt and make something new out of that.

I think that — I'm sure I'm going to keep on doing that. So it's hard for me to really say like, yes, I mean, I am at the end of the day so appreciative of so many different things that I find my way of kind of putting them all in a blender and making —

MS. RIEDEL: Conceptual art perhaps? None of these?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, it's hard for me to kind of like use specific words to describe that. You know, it's —

MS. RIEDEL: But even when I was looking at the way you broke down your different projects on the website, there's product design, interior design, architecture, art and installation, and then creative direction, so I felt, well — [laughs] — maybe that's the best — the closest we can get to framework or tradition.

MR. BENSHETRIT: It's funny that you're mentioning that because we've been fighting for so long how to divide up projects.

MS. RIEDEL: I can imagine.

MR. BENSHETRIT: So you know, this is how the industry — this is the easiest way for the industry to view our work. And at some point, we thought to just divide it by small, medium, large, but then would that imply that, you know, large work is important, small work is less? No. [Laughs.] Yes, it's very, very hard for me to draw boundaries. I'm actually — I've never been interested in drawing boundaries, the opposite. I'm interested in breaking them. That's — for me it's more important to question them. I think that our societies are built out of a lot of boundaries, a lot more boundaries than questions of boundaries. And I think that our society doesn't need me to draw more boundaries. They need me to highlight and break them.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHETRIT: So yes, I think that — I think that it pretty much directly reflect my own — my own life directly reflects the fact that if there's something that moves you as an individual and have a great impact, you should do something about it. You should not just leave it there. You should take it and adapt it.

I think that's the beauty, you know, that's the beauty of how we live today. I mean, we're a little bit nomads and I love that. I absolutely love that. I feel so fortunate to travel to different places and discover things that I wouldn't otherwise.

MS. RIEDEL: What do you see as the similarities and the differences between your earlier work and what you're

working on now?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Ah, that's an interesting question. I have a feeling that there's things that I have no way to control, like aging, for instance, right? We have no way to control. But we can control our spirit. So in so many ways, if I look at my work, I think I would love for my future work to always have the same spirit as my early work. And —

MS. RIEDEL: What is that spirit?

MR. BENSHETRIT: — the other part —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: — would take care of itself. You know what I mean? I'm going to be more mature and more educated and more, you know, but — for me, I look at children and their imagination, which I value imagination at the top of the list of creativity because it all starts with the spark of an idea and the spark of idea, you know, is more childish it is, the better. [They laugh.] But it's true, I mean, I think my strongest work is the most — the one that can describe by a little child. We spoke on Friday about the project in Abu Dhabi and the carpet, you know, the fact that, you know, you do it as a kid. You want to hide something, so you lift the carpet and you put it underneath. When was the last time you've done that?

MS. RIEDEL: A long time?

MR. BENSHETRIT: I haven't done that either. If I want to hide something, I'm going to lift the carpet and put it there. You know, we — kids do that and it's brilliant.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: So yes, I mean, I just — I think that maybe that's at some point the reason why you're having kids, is so they can keep you young.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BENSHETRIT: And also you can be inspired by their spirit and kind of think a little bit like them, mimic them a little bit and kind of be foolish with them. I mean, that's really for me — it's more and more and more reassuring that it's more exciting for me. I think that when you're young, maybe you are trying to be more adult. You're trying to be, you know — and even in business, you know, you have that kind of a feeling when you start your career, it was like, yes, when I'm going to have a little bit more grey hair people will take me more seriously. You know, and I'm going to charge — be able to charge more. [Laughs.] But at the same time, you know, you — yes, I mean, there is this — there is this young spirit that I hope to never lose, you know, and then give it my — [inaudible] — again and again.

MS. RIEDEL: It's probably helpful for people who will read this or hear this to know that you just had your first child —

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — two weeks ago.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, yes, yes. To be exact, three weeks ago.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: She's 23 days today. It's unbelievable.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: It's just unbelievable. It's — I mean, I know I heard that from friends and other people about that. It's just the kind of feeling that is impossible to describe.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: It's just such a joy.

MS. RIEDEL: It will be interesting to see what and how that might influence your own work.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Definitely. I'm curious, too. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Have your sources of inspiration changed over the years or you think they stayed fairly constant? Or both?

MR. BENSHETRIT: That question for me directly relates to the one before. I think that I don't want it to change so much because I think that in an earlier time most of my inspiration came from within or more from within. And then as you grow older, you start looking outside and searching for more inspiration outside.

Today, I feel that nature plays a major role in inspiration for me.

MS. RIEDEL: What in particular about nature? As a system, as —

MR. BENSHETRIT: As a system and a cycle.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. BENSHETRIT: I think that what inspires me in nature is different natural phenomena that are there for a reason. And that's just fascinating for me more and more those days. But toys has been major influence on my work. I always find very clever toys that have evolved into more sophisticated creation for me.

MS. RIEDEL: Can you give an example?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Oh, yes, maybe. So a lot of kinetic type of toys, you know, folding snake and toys that plays with geometry and —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHETRIT: — object that move and convert, things that plays with pressure of liquid going up and down. I mean, a lot of movement, a lot of movement that exists in toys. And I must say, like, even cartoons, you know cartoons that never needed to come out of the 2D world and have been very easy to kind of inspire about some sort of adaptation and transformation. I found inspiration for three-dimensional work that I've done.

Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Is there a sense of play in either your working process or in a finished work?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Oh, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: I mean, certainly I look at certain pieces and it seems that way. Does it feel like that for you too?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Oh, for sure. [Laughs.] I mean, I feel so fortunate that, you know, a client pays us to play.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MR. BENSHETRIT: It's — if it's not playful, it's not — it's not right. You know.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BENSHETRIT: It's got to be extremely playful. I mean, think about any creation, starting from the most basic one, cooking. It's got to be playful. It's got to be fun. I mean, if you're not playful in your cooking, I'm having a hard time believing that it's going to taste good, or at least not as good as if it was playful.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BENSHETRIT: It's just life for me is about putting a positive spirit on everything, you know. It's about turning — I mean, what's [a] better example than the movie — the *Life is Beautiful* movie. It's just — it is about making a beautiful spin out of everything in life, whether it's something traumatic and bad —

[End of disc.]

MR. BENSHETRIT: So yes, I mean, I — for me, the number one criteria to hire somebody to work with me is that if I can envision having fun, being playful, and playing with that. [Phone rings.]

MS. RIEDEL: I should close that?

I look at certain pieces and they look especially playful. I think about the Peacock Chair. I think about the Tron Chair. Do you need to —

MR. BENSHETRIT: No, I'm just going to disconnect this phone so nobody will bother us.



MS. RIEDEL: I mean, the *Vase of Phases*, all of them feel very — all — I think of the lights, many of the lights, all of them have a real playful feel to them.

MR. BENSHETRIT: I hope so.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, and even the architecture, in some ways, has — I mean, hiding villas under apartments, it's kind of funny.

MR. BENSHETRIT: I hope so. I mean — I mean the people that I appreciate the most have very playful work and I think that Castiglioni is a great example of a designer that brought playful and fun into objects that are very ordinary and stiff, in a way. Yes, I think it's — it's very important. And I think it's — I don't see a reason to take anything without a smile. It's just — it's just — you know, you can make rocket science playful. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: What are the — how would you describe the qualities of the working environment here and over time? And it would be really interesting to talk about this space because it's new — for — in past few months, yes?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Playful. [Laughs.] Yes —

MS. RIEDEL: Collaborative.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Collaborative. I think that — I mean, open to different unexpected things to happen. I think that an environment that is extremely rigid, that is extremely compartmentalized don't provoke creativity in essence for me. So what we tried to do here is to have a space that flows, a space that lets a lot of light when you want it in, is very open, is very transparent. I mean, as you can see there is very little visual boundaries. And I like it like that. And I really like it.

The only thing that we're currently missing on the floor, which we're going to have in the basement — it does bother me a little bit that it's not directly attached to our space here — but it's just the circumstances of this building is that we're going to have a workshop, our physical workshop in the basement, which is an important component in my work. I spend a lot of time in a physical shop.

MS. RIEDEL: And what does that physical shop contain? What are the primary needs for that?

MR. BENSHETRIT: So I mean, it's primarily the more messy work, where you can build things out of wood, cardboard, whatever, whatever it is. Of course, we are limited with some materials, of course, but for me it's very important when I have an idea sometimes to go directly and make it and see it and feel it in my hands.

The computer has been a remarkable tool for us. I mean, a toolbox for us. I mean, of course it has many tools in it, but the computer is also limited to a certain extent. And there are ideas that have to come from a basic and more kind of old-fashioned saw and hammer that — that goes directly into a long theory.

MS. RIEDEL: You often start there?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, I mean, I would now most of the time start by hand, meaning sketch and sketch for me is always by hand. It's interesting because after school, of course computer was my best friend and I've done everything on the computer, but that slowly, slowly, when I started hiring people to my team, I realized that I'm getting slower and slower and slower and younger and younger members of our team have done things faster and faster.

And I deliberately decided I'm going to continue myself without the computer. Of course, I make sure that I know the capabilities and I spend a lot of time behind a computer with somebody else, and so I know how to utilize those tools, but for the most part not through the direct contact of my hands.

But the workshop is a space I spend a lot of time in and actually build a lot of things myself because it's also — I use it more of a thinking tool. And of course, the computer is a thinking tool as well. It's just that I — you know, it's the kind of tool that today progresses so fast and if you're not daily, daily on top of some of those software is — you just feel like you're chasing them constantly. And I — it started being unhealthy for me, so I realized that that part I rather have my team work with.

MS. RIEDEL: So thinking — are there specific pieces or projects that we can look that might have very clear roots in experimenting in a workshop — for example, the Peacock Chair and the Tron Chair —

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — some of the lamps.

MR. BENSHETRIT: The *Vase of Phases*.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, there's a — I mean, the whole Quadror geometry started in the workshop.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, right.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Started in discovery of proportion physically.

MS. RIEDEL: And just experimenting with small pieces of wood or small pieces of cardboard, yes?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, yes, absolutely. I mean, actually, at some point, when we realized that there — we can clearly define work that we've done and started by hand and work that we've done and started by computer, this is where we started working on the Tron Chair, which has been the first piece out of our studio that clearly, clearly clashes the digital and the physical.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And that was the purpose of that piece is to highlight, you know, digital collision versus physical collision. And —

MS. RIEDEL: And was that a real shift in your process to specifically do that or was it just taking it to a new extreme, a new balance?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, exactly. Yes, but it's just about kind of highlighting a point, highlighting a specific type of interaction. I think that for me the strongest work is a work that highlights the process.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BENSHETRIT: So for me, you know, if the Tron Chair highlights this collision, that's part of the beauty of the final work, you know. If — you know — everybody that looks at the Peacock Chair cannot avoid how it is being assembled, you know, how — like somebody sit there and folds those one by one. And the vase — the *Vase of Phases* is clearly has been physically broken at some point. So it's — it's evident in the final results. And I think that — yes, I mean, that's — now, I'm inspired to even take that a step further and work on more of an architectural scale —

MS. RIEDEL: I was going to ask —

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Because I'm trying to think about that vocabulary. Yes, I mean, it is there with some projects, like the Eco House for me is doing that.

MS. RIEDEL: I also think of the interior of the Soho Synagogue, almost just having the process and the materials very much a part of what you take in as the final product.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes. Yes. It's also — maybe it is also something a bit that I'm bringing from home, that kind of working with what you have. And I mean, this is what we have and we'll make something out of that. It was always — yes, something that I could see.

MS. RIEDEL: So almost a limit that's a helpful limitation.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, it grounds you in a certain way. It gives you a framework sometimes.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Have you done much teaching? Have you done any teaching?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, I have. And I've started and stopped and started and stopped. I lecture often, but teaching — teaching, I have a bit of a problem with today because there's such tremendous responsibility in teaching. I feel that I'm probably not a very good teacher at the moment because I can't allow for what teaching really needs out of me at the moment. I also, I get very attached to what I do and I think that going in for a semester and out is challenging.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm- hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. BENSHETRIT: I mean, the next time that I would like to teach — I mean, I recently taught a class in the UMN University —

MS. RIEDEL: Which one?

MR. BENSHETRIT: UMN is the University of Minnesota —

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHETRIT: — and —

MS. RIEDEL: That was a term-long course, right?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes. It was great, but it was like a teaser. I was like three months of that, okay, done. And —

MS. RIEDEL: That was 2000 —

MR. BENSHETRIT: That was last year.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: And the next time, I would like to have a bigger engagement with the academy. I would love to, you know. But I also think that my practice at this point needs 120 percent of me and I have a difficulty — you know, I mean, teaching is just extremely consuming.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: It's — it should be consuming. It should not be taken lightly or think that you are influencing so much, or you should be or you could influence so much, so you shouldn't take it too lightly, you know. It's an important task. It's very, very, very influential on students, on yourself, of course, but I think there's nothing more rewarding than that. So I'm not — I'm just kind of putting it on the hold for a moment. I would like to revisit teaching on a later date.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you see any difference between a designer or an artist who's trained in a university and one who's trained in either a specific design academy or self-taught?

MR. BENSHETRIT: That's a very good question. Hmm. That's a — really a fantastic question because I — I have a big problem with some institutions, related or non-related to art and design. You know, schools are problematic places.

MS. RIEDEL: Sorry?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Schools are problematic places. I think that a lot of schools are giving — I don't even know how to say it appropriately because it's — you know, I would probably relate more with those who did not go to school than those who have. I think that schools are incredible places. I mean, I'm so grateful for the school experiences that I had, but I'm so grateful that they allow me to take what I personally needed and not necessarily what the school needed to give. And I think that a lot of schools have an agenda of what they need to give, rather than what the student needs to take. And what the student needs to take is something more individual listing [ph] than an equal amount for every students.

It's a — it's very problematic. We spoke on Friday about high school. When I went to this high school, in my years, the selection of students were extremely high. Hundreds of kids have been — applied and only few have been selected very carefully for their individual or what the teacher have seen as potential. Later on, the school have shifted slightly into larger groups of kids and the selection, of course, went slightly down.

So one would say, yes, it's a bit more democratic. There's, you know, capability of having more people to be exposed to that unique environment, is that good or bad. And it's a very tough question to answer because in one way, of course, it's good. You are giving more of this unique to more. But do they really get the same amount or is it better to focus on affecting fewer?

It's funny because I doubt it. I'm not saying it as an educated answer, but I doubt it that the amount of students that went to my high school during my time that have — that are today — are influential artists in their area of expertise, if in percentage there are that many individuals graduating from the larger classes that came after me, I strongly doubt.

I have a feeling that there are far few of them. So yes, that is again, a bit of a problem.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that a problem that you noticed when you went looking for a school you wanted to attend, and one reason why you chose Eindhoven is because it felt —

MR. BENSHE TRIT: Oh, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: — so different —

MR. BENSHE TRIT: Definitely.

MS. RIEDEL: — in that sense? Yes.

MR. BENSHE TRIT: I'm probably more aware of it now than before, of course, but I mean one of the things that drives me absolutely crazy is that when I go to school and I ask students a question, I get 35 identical answers.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. BENSHE TRIT: And I think that's terrible. And schools I went to, you ask the same question 35 times, you will get 35 different answers. And yes, I mean, we're producing — production line, you know. It's —

MS. RIEDEL: Narrower focus, narrow — fewer possibilities.

MR. BENSHE TRIT: Yes, I think there's a major, major problem with education in the 20th century as a whole. I think we needed to compartmentalize so much. We have compartmentalized subject. We have compartmentalized areas of expertise. You know. But when we're talking about nature, nothing is really compartmentalized. And we're starting to see that problem. You're going to a specialized doctor and he can't figure out your problem. Why? Because he only deals with those things, but within this problem that you allocated as an eye problem, it could relate to other systems in your body. So — I mean, this is again where designers like myself are talking about cross-disciplinary or talking about, you know — we did not invent that, of course, you know, existed all along, but now we have a term for it. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Do you see any place for universities in terms of designers? Do you see any benefits to the university education?

MR. BENSHE TRIT: In terms of the benefit of university? Oh, of course. I mean, of course. I mean — yes, I mean — formal education can be unbelievable, absolutely unbelievable. I mean, I encourage interns of ours and people constantly to find the right schools that fit for them. But I also ask them to take what they feel is right out of it, out of the whole thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHE TRIT: Yes, I mean, you — I mean, there's so much that you can take that it will be extremely challenging to reach on your own, and there's a lot of people who need it. And I actually think if you feel that you don't want it, then of course, it's not for you. School is not for everybody. It's the same as you asked me on Friday why I didn't go to work for anybody else. You know, I felt that that type of experience is maybe not good for me. I would not like to take it. I also never went to architectural school and I today practice design of architecture. It's a choice.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm struck by one of these questions. Is there a community that's been important to your development as a designer? It seems like community in general has been a huge part of your development as a designer and continues to be. Does that seem accurate to you?

MR. BENSHE TRIT: Ha, that's a very good question. Oh, can we pause?

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

[End of disc.]

MR. BENSHE TRIT: Yes. So community is an interesting question because I find myself belong to several different communities and I'm probably the only one that I know that belongs to all of those different communities at the same time. But I guess that's, again, something that's actually very normal for me.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHE TRIT: That, you know, I somewhat belong and not belong at the same time. I think it's also — you know — it's had an interesting contribution as I see it to the way that I grew up. My both parents are one out of

eight sisters and brothers. And in my childhood, we were very, very close in particular to my mom's side, where her youngest brother is only four years older than me.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: So I've always been somewhat the ninth child. And throughout my childhood, it's always been up to me to choose am I the ninth or I'm the grandson.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Because I was the oldest grandchild and very close in age to the brothers and sisters. So I've always had the ability to kind of get in and out, which I think it's probably still — [laughs] — something that I do with relationship to communities.

MS. RIEDEL: Are there any particular writers or periodicals, books, magazines that have been especially influential to your career and your work? Design criticism, art criticism?

MR. BENSHETRIT: That's a good question. I — there are books that are — that has been influential for me and most of them are not design or art related actually, but more philosophical. I think there are a few things kind of representing different time in my life, but there's — in literature, I have to say that there is nothing that I can say, has been there all along, has always been influential on me.

MS. RIEDEL: But at different points, were there books that were significant or writers that were significant? I know you mentioned Rodin at a certain point, Cézanne at a different point.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Rothko more consistently. Anybody in terms of writing or critical thinking, philosophy?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Right. We should mention — I mean, I don't know — I don't necessarily see —

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. BENSHETRIT: — the direct links of writers —

MS. RIEDEL: That's fine.

MR. BENSHETRIT: I think that there are books with specific thoughts that made me realize different things at different time. There was a time that I was very fascinated to learn more about dyslexia. And — because when I grew up, it sounded like something terrible to have. And we always tried to kind of push it away, like it's not there. And then I found this book, I remember it was called *The Gift of Dyslexia*. And all of a sudden, that book kind of shined a beautiful light at the benefits of being dyslexic. So that's one thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHETRIT: There were books like *When Nietzsche Wept*, which was a fascinating book for me during high school. And other kind of more philosophy book at I read at that time that were interesting. I mean, then recently, in recent years, I started reading a lot of Buckminster Fuller work and found a lot of that quite interesting. Ayn Rand. [They laugh.] Of course, how can she not? It's funny because I love her writing. I think for me she is probably by far the most articulated in her words. I also find her books fascinating, but — and there's so much that I relate to, a lot, a lot, a lot that I relate to and believe in. But I think that I have kind of like a slightly different spin on the "I." For me the "I" and the "we" are interconnected in a different way.

MS. RIEDEL: How so?

MR. BENSHETRIT: I think that our coming decade, if not century is going to be a lot more about the "we" than the "I." I think that the type of design problems that we have that we will need solutions for are going to come from not a single individual that we can give credit for, but movements. And those movements are thanks to a large amount of people. So — but at the same time, we're always going to be heroes. We're going to praise an individual. But I think that there's this kind of like an interesting, you know — we spoke a lot about Steve Jobs. Now, we're talking a lot about Steve Jobs and Apple, you know Apple being a movement of "we" and Steve Jobs an individual.

So I think that when Ayn Rand is talking about the influence of a single man on society, I totally understand and I totally believe in the initial spark that needs to come from a single-minded or single mind. But then, that spark lights a forest and that forest together causes a significant reaction. And I think that's a big part of, you know, us moving into that space, is for the sake of sharing, for the sake of having collaborator that we do things with. I am

a strong believer in collaborationism. And I think that, again, because things are constantly connected to other and there are no boundaries, there's a needs to pass — pass things and receive and continue to pass it. There's something a bit Kabbalistic about it. There's something a bit spiritual about it, like we are actually vessels for something. We're just channeling things. We're just directing things from one point to another. So.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you see American design moving in any particular direction? Do you see it in relation to international design as playing any particular role, having particular strengths and weaknesses, or do you see it at all blurring more the other?

MR. BENSHEITRIT: I would like to see American design move in a lot of directions, actually. If you're thinking about American design globally today, you're thinking about technology and technology have major influences on our design life. But I would like to see us not just influencing technology. I would like to see — because I think that capabilities of influences that America has on the world are enormous.

I think that we are the only country that it's — that breaks — I mean, it's the easiest country to break boundaries. It's the easiest country to think different. So I would like to see a lot more innovation in infrastructure, a lot more innovation in architecture and construction. And this is where I see a next step. And — and I would like us as Americans to find more solutions to manufacturing in the near future. The fact that we are — we don't manufacture much anymore in this part of the world is a major problem, major problem that we don't really know how to address yet because we have to solve that problem in China first, and then address it here. But I think we — you know — hopefully creativity will find solutions for that, but there is —

MS. RIEDEL: Do you have any thoughts about how that would start or where that might start, where you see opportunity for that?

MR. BENSHEITRIT: I look at who we all have to — it's funny, we're talking about boundaries, and now I'm going to speak about the law. [Laughs.] When we — in our society today, we have the capability of addressing thing with laws. And I think that laws should help us as society to address some problems. We as designers, when you think about laws, the first thing that comes to mind is our patents.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHEITRIT: And for many years, the — you know, reaching out to a patent office was not even a question simply because it's a very expensive process. It's very expensive. It's extremely old-fashioned, the way that, you know, paperworks are being submitted and reviewed. But then, for many years, I kind of looked at it as an expense, rather than as an investment, where it really should be looked at as an investment, rather than expense. Today, I think I'm starting to see it more and more of an investment, but what kind of investment that is in a global world like today, where I cannot reinforce with that type of law the entire work?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. BENSHEITRIT: The fact that I can spend thousands and thousands of dollars here today and in China they can do whatever you want with that, it's a major problem. So I think that we should probably start there. We should start — probably start with some ways of reinforcing with laws and so forth those issues. I'm always trying to find the creative spin of sometimes some rebellious acts that could do that rather than the municipalities. I just watched a fantastic documentary that is called *How to Win a Pledge* or how to — is it *How to Succeed in a Pledge* [*How to Survive a Plague*], which was about the revolution in the '80s against, you know, research in HIV and the influences of independent organizations that have contributed and accelerated the cure for the disease. I mean, it's remarkable. So maybe we need to start something, you know, underground rebellious act in ourselves and deal with it. I don't know.

I mean, you kind of surprised me with this question. It could be an interesting project to start. [Laughs.] An interesting thing to address. But it's a — it's — yes, it's a problem.

It's about QuaDror —

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. BENSHEITRIT: — as a geometry. There's actually a lot to say about that and I'll try to be quite brief about it. When we started working with what we've discovered, we realized that there is infinite possibilities. There's on and on and on things for us to do. Now, as self — as a small independent business, this R&D has been coming directly out of our profit. And considering the size of our operation, considering the size of our studio, it's been a very challenging thing for us to do.

And we realized that we could apply for some grant. We could team up with some large corporations. We could find investors and so forth, but as designers, we don't know how to do those things very well. [Laughs.] We know

how to design. We know how to continue and search and find possibilities. We don't know how to — so when you have an interesting idea that you believe it and you hold in your private domain, the only way of introducing it to companies and other individuals is pretty much knock on doors and basically say, hey, I came up with something I would like to share with you. But then, how to prioritize which door to knock on first, when something that unfolds in front of you simply looks like hundreds and hundreds of interesting possibilities and interesting applications. And they could all be groundbreaking in different ways.

So we decided, instead of knocking on doors, is to actually use our network, our social network, use our media contacts, and actually share it with the world. And instead of knocking on doors, having companies knock on our door.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BENSHETRIT: But something really interesting happened here. We've done it unbelievably successfully. And it's kind of like I'm always thinking at this point when I'm saying that as kind of be careful what you wish for, because you wanted people to knock on your doors, now hundreds of companies are knocking on your doors and you're not equipped to serve hundreds of people knocking on your doors. Now, you don't even have the people to actually sort out of those hundreds of applications who's more important.

So actually, your problem that you had before is the exact same problem that you have now. You have the hundreds of ideas you wanted to share with hundreds of companies. You didn't know what — how to prioritize it. Now, hundreds of companies are reaching to you. Now, you don't know how to prioritize them. And that was really challenging. And I think that probably because we were — we are quite progressive with how we present things and how we render our visions, we have a little bit misled the industry and those companies, because we got a lot of phone calls asking, "How much does this cost?"

And we were, "Well, what do you mean, at what scale, out of what material." We don't really — you know — we're a design studio that highlights ideas and possibilities for you. Now, somebody else needs to come take those thoughts, take some of those conceptual direction, bring them to the next step and then the question of how much is relevant, but it's just not relevant yet.

It's like — it's as if — you know, you go to an architect and say, "I want 300,000" — sorry — "3,000 square foot home, how much would it cost?" So — so yes, we highlight homes. We highlight this. But they were — and —

MS. RIEDEL: You almost need a research university or graduate students or doctoral students to experiment with it, yes.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Exactly, or be part of a company that does have that kind of R&D. So we've been exhausting ourselves for another round of driving all over town and flying all over the world to present our concepts to companies that don't really understand the R&D nature of innovation.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BENSHETRIT: So it's not like I have a Bluetooth for you for sale and costs X amount of dollar. I know that Bluetooths have capability to be part of your technology. I need you to help me make that usable within your device by continuing that R&D for your particular needs.

MS. RIEDEL: Sounds like some of the collaborations that artists used to do with established factories, designed going to glass factories, or going to — and glass is the form that comes to mind, certainly ceramic as well, to try and use the infrastructure there to develop their ideas through that particular material.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes, I mean — yes, absolutely, I mean, there is — I mean, here the biggest problem was that infrastructure is a very slow industry to influence. And when you're thinking about early adopters of technological revolutions— there's only a few companies that would do that. I mean, you're looking at so many examples, like Dyson have tried to convince dozens of vacuum companies to adopt this technology, but nobody wanted to do that because why would you?

So you know, and you're reading about both Buckminster Fuller trying to push some of his ideas for all of his life and people like Einstein trying to convince people for years about something he discovered in his 20s. I think that we are now understanding that there is — you know, there's a third way — there's another way of doing it and that it's not knocking on hundreds of doors simultaneously or having hundred doors knocking on ours. We are starting to realize that maybe with some sort of more of an open source approach, we can teach others to do what we've — the knowledge we've accumulated and let them take it to the next level. I mean, it's a little complex. I mean, we now are trying to — to find the best ways to translate ideas into business. And that we're, I must say, a little struggling with that at the moment.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm going to change the card.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Yes.

[End of disc.]

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Dror Benshetrit in the designer's studio in New York on December 3, 2012, for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. Card number four.

Just a kind of summary questions and any final thoughts that you might have. When you look back on what's been accomplished so far, what do you — in your own work and also in the fields in general, what do you think of as the importance of design as a means of expression?

DROR BENSHETRIT: Well — [laughs] — I don't know if I can answer this question.

MS. RIEDEL: Just a small summary, of course.

MR. BENSHETRIT: I mean, about my own work and the design at the same time —

MS. RIEDEL: Right, strengths and limitations of the field.

MR. BENSHETRIT: It's — I'll start maybe with the fact that it saddened me sometimes to hear from people that just graduates or people that has been practicing for a long time, when they say, "Oh, everything was already discovered. Everything was already done. There is nothing new. You just need to recycle what's old." And I cannot disagree with that more.

I believe that there is so much more to do. There is so much more to discover. There is so much more to explore. And we are, in fact — this industry is so young. And we have — I mean, we have tremendous more to go and to discover.

So you know, that for me applies to probably, you know, both. I mean, we — it's incredible. I mean, we're looking out the window here and we're seeing what we've accomplished in terms of architecture. I mean, within the same view here, we have both the Woolworth, which is the tallest skyscraper that next year is going to be 100 years old, and the new Liberty Tower. So it's 100 years apart and so much in between.

And in terms of design and product and contemporary work, I mean, we've done amazing things and amazing technology, amazing capabilities. I think, yes, I mean, I'm really curious to see what's — how we're progressing. But there's a lot to do and there's a lot to discover. And that's how I would like to also obviously view my work. I practiced professionally design for only 10 years. So I think about lifetime career of people that I appreciate and I hope that I will be fortunate to have another — I don't know how many actually — maybe 100 — [they laugh].

Yes, so, you know, it's exciting.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. It does seem that you are very much still in your embarking phase, that a lot has been accomplished, but that a lot of what has been accomplished has only opened the door for future and more possibilities.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Absolutely.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you see your work — this goes back — it touches on a question we were talking about earlier about how to look at your work, how to break it up, if there's any point in breaking it up at all. But do you personally see it in terms and in kinds of groups that are distinct? Do you see it all as just a large body of work with a thread of continuity running through it? Have you thought about it? And what about the work in particular matters to you?

MR. BENSHETRIT: The easiest way for me to divide my work is commissions and work that we've done first for ourselves. That's the easiest way for me to kind of break those because some have come from, let's say if it's a play of the brain and the heart, so the difference between is that one started here and move here, and that island started — you know — it's who — you know, what foot touched the ground first. It's like the left or the right.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And are you associating the brain and heart, one being with a client and one being self-generated, or do they switch?

MR. BENSHETRIT: No — well it's interesting because if you look at relationships, if you had the desire prior to your partner or your partner had the desire prior to you, doesn't make really a difference in the long run of the relationship, sometimes not. Sometimes the person that is, you know, madly more in love — [laughs]. So I think



it's just a starting point. I think that I value and some clients' work of mine are more dear to my heart than things that started from my own intuition.

So I think that it's unbelievably important the work that we've done for hire and the work that we've done for clients or that has been requested first by clients.

MS. RIEDEL: Anything in particular that you would cite?

MR. BENSHETRIT: I — well, we've recently completed the Tumi collection. That project means a lot to me. I could not have ever imagined that it would be as influential on my work.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. BENSHETRIT: The first thing you think is bag and luggage, but after a very short time you realize that I'm attached, physically attached to this luggage and bags. It's the extension of me when I'm walking down the streets and on my trip — and every trip.

So it's that mixed with an incredible group of individuals that we've worked with in that corporation.

Again, things that we were invited to do, like the project in Turkey, who knows if I ever would have stretched my imagination to that kind of scale if nobody have asked me to do so. It's — and it's great.

So yes, I mean, this is how I would define it. It's kind of like a question of a starting point.

Other than that, I would really love to not need to get — compartmentalize my work.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.] What about — what about design in particular resonates with you especially now, after 10 years? What about it still holds your attention?

MR. BENSHETRIT: Everything, absolutely everything. I — when I went to school and somebody would ask me what you don't care about designing, I would probably give you a long list. I would have probably started with something like a remote control, a laundry machine, you know, kind of like what would probably be sound at first as a boring thing. But today, there's nothing that I would say I have no interest in. Of course, there is things that relates to ideological and things like this that are harmful, or things that I don't want to necessarily do, of course, but it's not like designing a pen no longer excites me when I design cities. I think that it's — I compare it to the power of importance of a mosquito bite. It's so insignificant, but it can bother you all night, disturb your sleep, and — and that's it.

So that little creature can cause you so much — so yes, I mean, the influence of my pen is tremendous on what I do with it. I think that the best thing I've heard is that you're stuck without an idea, switch your pens, brilliant thought, brilliant, brilliant thought. Every pen flows differently and the flow dictates what comes. [Laughs]. It's just like, you know, if I land from an overnight flight, I can barely speak. I just — if I schedule a speaking engagement right after I — it's a disaster. [Laughs.] It's just a disaster.

Yes, so it's the same thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, any final thoughts?

MR. BENSHETRIT: No, thank you very much for this. This was fun.

MS. RIEDEL: Thank you very much. Appreciate your time, very insightful.

MR. BENSHETRIT: Thank you.

[END]