THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **CESAR PELLI (CP)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SZ: I'll start the way I always do and ask you very simple questions: where and when were you born, and just a little bit about your background.

CP: I was born in Argentina in the city of Tucuman, which is a provincial city in the northwest of Argentina, in October 1926. Exactly fifty years ago--it could be to the day, but I don't remember--I started to study architecture....

SZ: At the age of...?

CP: Seventeen.

SZ: Was architecture something that you knew you always wanted to do? How did you come upon it?

CP: No. Actually, I'd never known of an architect as a young man. I think there was only one architect in Tucuman.

SZ: How big a town or city is Tucuman?

CP: Today it's about 600,000; when I grew up, it was 120,000.

SZ: So that's not small

CP: No, no. It was, as I said, a provincial city, more in the French sense--that these are subcenters of culture and government and administration, but they don't have the power or the strength of the capital; it is more like in France. In the United States, we don't have comparable situations.

SZ: It would be like Toulouse.

CP: It would be like Toulouse, Lyon, Nantes--exactly, like some of the secondary cities in France.

SZ: So you had not known an architect?

CP: No, never met an architect, but in Argentina as you finish high school, and I finished high school two years earlier than other people. My mother was an educator and she was full of progressive ideas of education, and following them she sent me two years earlier to school and I was always two years younger than my classmates, which was very good when I came through because I had a couple of years that I could waste and still not be out of the mainstream. It was terrible when I was kid because I was never as good as my classmates in any sport, so I never played sports, and it was very bad when I was a teenager because of course girls pay zero attention to a kid that is two years younger [laughter]. But in any case, when you finish high school in Argentina, you have to choose a career; there is no liberal arts education system that you can go through. So I reviewed all the careers that were offered in the university in Tucuman, and one of those was architecture; that was fairly new, about three or four years old. I read the prospectus, and everything in the career seemed very appealing. It sounded like something that I would enjoy doing. Although I did not know yet to what purpose; indeed, through much of my career, I kept wondering, "This is all terrific, I love it, but what do I do when I graduate?"

SZ: They never told you that.

CP: The truth is that if I had stayed in Tucuman, it would have been a disaster, because the nation went through many, many years of economic decline, and Tucuman was particularly affected. Other provinces may have been too, but Tucuman was very affected. It was very prosperous when I grew up and it suffered many plagues. There was a strong guerrilla movement for many years, which was one of the justifications for the military suppression and abuse, and that was centered around Tucuman. Tucuman was hit by many calamities. If I would have stayed there, I don't know if I would have been able to practice as much.

SZ: Did that become clear during the course of your education?

CP: No, not at all. No, at that time we all felt very good about our lot. I felt wonderful about Argentina, and after I graduated I got a good job as head of design of a government organization; we were designing subsidized housing--large neighborhoods of subsidized houses, single-family subsidized houses. I designed a neighborhood of subsidized housing for sugar-cane workers. It was a rather subversive design, but it was fine. Subsidized housing in these enterprises had been designed as little middle-class chalets; they were meant to be for the poorer workers, but ended up occupied by clerks with connections. I designed the kind of house that I thought the middle class would not be interested in, built as cheaply as possible, but with as much square footage as possible so they could finish it and use it with a lifestyle that would not be middle class and with zero image, purposefully, very straightforward construction. As it happened, it was only partially successful. Many people in the middle class went in and they started remodeling them [laughter], which is good and it's bad, actually. I was very disappointed in that. But I must recognize that what those neighborhoods do is that they very quickly become integrated in the city. They are good, because they are sold at very low interest and low cost. But people start fixing them up, adding rooms, transforming them, building small shops, and you don't have the problem or the stigma of public housing--this becomes a perfectly respectable neighborhood. They are usually called barrio jardin, which means garden neighborhood. So it's good and it's bad.

SZ: One other question: when you were young, did you have a visual sense of things? Was that an important part of your life?

CP: Yes. That's why architecture was appealing to me, because there were things I did well. I could draw well; I always had a very good eye--I knew that. There was as I saw it a strong component of history that I have always loved. There were three or four strands in the career that seemed to match some strong strands in my makeup, which eventually proved to be so.

SZ: How did you leave Argentina?

CP: I had graduated about a year earlier. I had just married, and somebody mentioned that there were these scholarships being offered to come to the United States. So I filled a form, presented it, got a couple of letters of recommendation, and as nothing happened, proceeded to forget about it. One day almost a year later an envelope came in with no letter, no nothing, only a ticket on Braniff to come to the United States [laughing]. The following day a letter arrived from the Institute of International Education that says, "You were supposed to be last week in the University of Illinois." This arrived in mid September and classes were starting the first week in September, and I'm supposed to be there to start classes. I thought, Where is Illinois? I had an idea of where Chicago was, and that's where Illinois is. So we scrambled for a while and at that time, because there was a great deal of political tension and anti-U.S. feelings.

SZ: It was about the early '50s as I remember.

CP: This was 1952. I was being advised not to come: "This is going to be terrible for your career." As I said, I had just married and I wanted to come with my wife, and it was inordinately expensive for us at that moment. Finally, I came, a couple of weeks later, and Diana followed me. We came for nine months, and then after the nine months

we were both asked to stay and teach at the University of Illinois. When that year was ending and I was getting ready to go back to Argentina, I got an offer to work for Eero Saarinen. So we kept on extending our visa because I was always involved in some nice project. We went to Mexico, changed our student visas for immigrant visas....

SZ: Which you could do from there.

CP: At that time, if you were a citizen of any of the American republics, there was no quota.

SZ: You just asked for the proper visa and you would get it.

CP: You had to have the proper credentials and you had to fulfill some economic requirements so that you would not become a burden to the state. As I had a job, I could prove we could support ourselves.

SZ: For an architect, not a bad job, right?

CP: As I remember, I was making $2.50 an hour [laughing], but it was enough not to have to depend on welfare. There wasn't much welfare at that time, anyway.

SZ: I would assume, also, having come from Argentina and moving into this world where a lot of building was going on, and you were working for an eminent architect....

CP: Of course. I was very excited--the whole experience. Just coming to America was very exciting. The American traits suit me extremely well. We both felt immediately very comfortable, not only [with] our work, but with our new friends and American attitudes. Also, we had children here. After a few years we realized we had more roots here than in Argentina. It took a while to decide that we were staying permanently, but it was not a difficult decision. It was something that you don't rush into, but it was a very natural, slow process.

SZ: For you, what was the first really important change in your career?

CP: The most important change was coming to the States--that was very critical. Second was to go to work for Eero Saarinen; that was also absolutely essential and very, very important to me. I spent a total of ten years in the firm--eight years until he died, and I stayed a couple more years finishing some projects. Then, of course, starting to work on my own in California. Then, it was very important to come east to become the dean of the School of Architecture at Yale, and a very, very critical event for me was to be selected to the renovation and expansion of The Museum of Modern Art, which I still don't know how....

SZ: You don't know how it came to you?

CP: I know how, but even today I wonder, How could they ever have selected me? You see, I had come from Los Angeles--I had been there a partner of Gruen Associates, a large Los Angeles firm--and when the possibility of becoming a dean at Yale came, it was a very appropriate moment in my life. I was interested in a number of issues that I could not pursue while in a firm like Gruen's. I thought, I love Yale, I had taught many times at Yale, I thought this would be a very appropriate place. The office of Eero Saarinen had moved to the New Haven area, to Hamden. Eero was going to move; actually, he died as the move was taking place. I had many friends in the area, old friends from the Saarinen days. So I thought this would be a very good moment in my life to do some thinking, writing, teaching.

SZ: Very contemplative.

CP: And I thought, besides running a school, perhaps I'll get to do some architecture, perhaps kitchen renovations, which is what many of my teaching friends like Michael Graves were doing at the same time. So that's what I was preparing myself for. But actually, before I came to New Haven but well after I had been appointed as dean of

the school, I had been asked to send material on my work to MoMA for consideration for the Museum expansion. But I never took it very seriously. By the time the process continued...you see, I didn't even have an office; I didn't even have a drafting table--I was just myself. I of course immediately formed an association with my old firm of Gruen, so that we presented ourselves together. But I was not in the firm itself; this was an association between me with a future firm of mine and Gruen, which had an office in New York.

SZ: Somebody must have seen and been impressed by some of your work.

CP: There were a couple of persons that I know helped. One was, of course, Philip Johnson. Philip, I think, had been very well impressed by some buildings I had done but primarily by the Pacific Design Center. Actually, twice he made public statements which--and it still surprises that he would say it--but he said, "That's the one building I wish I had designed," which is a very nice compliment. Also, Richard Weinstein was acting as advisor to The Museum of Modern Art, not only on the selection process, but actually Richard was a main player in inventing the law that allowed The Museum of Modern Art to receive the funds from the development of its air rights--payments in lieu of taxes--together with Don Elliott, a lawyer. I know that Richard had been impressed by the fact that I was able to combine very pragmatic aspects of architecture working with lean budgets for tough developers and still produce serious architecture. Philosophically, I think, believes that this is a skill, an attitude, that architects must have but don't. So he had been interested in my work; we didn't know each other, but we had corresponded a few times. Having become the dean of architecture at Yale also helped, because this created a kind of "Seal of Good Housekeeping" that helps in those decisions. It was the most thorough selection process I have ever been involved in. They started probably,...it must have been Arthur Drexler that started collecting folios of packages of the work of about sixty potential architects.

SZ: That was that first letter you got.

CP: No, this had happened before I got wind of it. I think it was just within the Museum, like a year earlier, Arthur, as soon as the expansion appeared possible, started probably assembling some sort of package on every interesting architect alive anywhere in the world. The list was reduced, I believe, to some ten or twelve architects. I do not know who they were. I was in California, so I was totally disconnected. This was for me like something happening on Mars.... If I had been in New York I may have been receiving all sorts of gossip and information, but in Los Angeles...and I tend by nature to disconnect myself from that kind of speculations, so that I'm never as up-to-date as my friends or colleagues. By the time I was first called for the first interview--that must have been about October or November of '76--the list had been reduced to three firms. It was myself, Mitchell/Giurgola and I. M. Pei's firm, and I believe the person being considered was specifically Harry Cobb [from I. M. Pei], and the same with Aldo Giurgola from Mitchell/Giurgola. We had three interviews, each one about a month apart.

SZ: I think there was Kevin Roche, too. I think Roche, Dinkeloo was in there.

CP: That may have been earlier in the process, but...by the time I was interviewed there were three firms. I'm sure that Roche must have been one that got very close to it. I may not have even been aware; they may have been interviewing other people. That's what I heard later from Richard Weinstein, but there may have been more persons interviewed. I had no way of knowing who else was being interviewed. There were interviews at MoMA in one of the large conference rooms in which there must have been at least twenty persons, the architects, Philip--[Edward Lar- rabee] Barnes became a member later--but at the time I was presenting I think it was Philip and Gordon Bunshaft and Wally Harrison and [Ivan] Chermayeff, and Arthur Drexler, of course, and there was a number of people who...actually, I would come into these very dark rooms and some names were just mentioned, I didn't know who these people were. Blan- chette [Rockefeller] was, of course, there. Blanchette was the hero of this whole process as far as I'm concerned; she was wonderful--not of the

selection process but getting the building built. There were Peter [G.] Peterson and I think Patty Peterson. Patty Peterson was a developer--there were several people who were in development. I would be asked every possible question. They had visited some of my projects, and then in between they kept visiting more of my projects. By the last interview, somebody on the committee had visited every one of my projects and talked to my clients. Actually, I remember we had this long discussion about a project that the Gruen office had done in Albany for which I had sent from Los Angeles a design, and there had been some water infiltration, and "Why did this happen, how...?" [laughing] And they checked back to find out who was the partner (at Gruen) that was involved. They kept on calling, the clients, [asking], "What's going on here, where is the leak?" "It's been taken care of." "Yes, but it shouldn't have happened" [laughing]. So they were very, very thorough, and I believe they did the same with Giurgola's and Harry Cobb's work. They talked, of course, with Irwin Miller. I had done a project for Irwin Miller, and I think a very large group from the committee went to Columbus, Indiana, to look at my project, and they were all snowed in in Columbus. I think it was on January 28th, 1977, that I received this letter from Blanchette telling me that I had been selected.

SZ: Were you surprised?

CP: Absolutely. Absolutely. I'm <u>still</u> surprised [laughing].

SZ: But this was done without any presentation of any initial design concept?

CP: No. Nothing.

SZ: It was just really....

CP: It was selection on the record. I am sure they saw hundreds of slides of my work, and as I said, they looked at all of my buildings. What I think helped me was that the Museum had an incredibly small budget that grew as the project was developed and

as more accurate estimates were made, but even as it was finished, I believe this was the cheapest of any major museum ever built. It was a moment when the Museum had very little money, and in between generations, a time when the key players who used to write the big checks, particularly, of course, Nelson Rockefeller, were not writing checks anymore for MoMA. There was a deep concern in many of the older trustees, the older families that had made MoMA, that their children were not so interested in the arts and were not going to keep on supporting the Museum as they had. So there were not only concerns about the monies but also the future monies--where would they be coming from? So the fact that I had done a number of fairly good projects with very tight budgets, with very tough schedules--you see, I not only had to design the new Museum with very little money but I had to work with Arlen Realty to design the tower and Arlen Realty was a very tough developer. So they needed somebody who could work with Arlen Realty without the whole project coming apart; someone who could work within the very tight parameters that Arlen Realty would set, which indeed they did. Also, incredibly tight financial parameters. Fortunately for the project and unfortunately for Arlen Realty--as you know, Arlen Realty started having real financial problems of their own and they couldn't fulfil their obligations, so the whole deal with Arlen Realty came apart and the Museum restructured a deal, re-advertised, and they finally selected Charles Shaw of Chicago, which built a tower of better quality than Arlen would have--still very tight, but of better quality. He did a couple of things that are not readily visible, but which made a difference in the quality of the tower he built. He built larger apartments than Arlen was planning. He made them not absolutely the most efficient possible, which means, for example, that he put the living rooms in the corner of the towers so you need more corridor space to reach the living rooms from the central core. If you put the bedrooms in the corner of the tower and the living room right by its entrance you have a more efficient apartment but one not nearly as gracious.... He gave the apartments a little higher ceiling. So he built better-quality apartments in many ways. The corner living rooms, for example, were very important to the exterior design, because the design is a subtle interpretation on the exterior of what happens inside,...and the glassier corners are more appropriate to the composition than it

would have been to have the larger panes of glass near the center of the facade.

SZ: I was going to ask you this later, but since we're here, didn't the change in developer impact the design of the tower, because originally my understanding was that Arlen was given complete right to hire whatever architect to do the design.

CP: No, not correct--not according to my mandate.

SZ: No, but I think that by the time you got there that had changed, I'm not sure. I have it here--this was from Dick [Oldenburg]--it said that Arlen [was engaged] "to design, finance, build and market such an apartment tower, that Arlen alone would be responsible for those aspects of the project."

CP: Yes, but what actually happened is, that...Arlen and with Shaw, Arlen engaged the firm of Llewylen Davis. Jacquelyn Robertson was then working for Llewylen Davis, and he worked with Arlen from the inside out. Jacque did the floorplans and the layouts. I had opinions on the floorplans, but Llewylen Davis and Arlen had the last word on the floorplans, [just as] he would have opinions on the exterior, but I had the last word on the exterior. By the time it became Charles Shaw's project, it became more clearly codified that I represented The Museum of Modern Art and actually I was established between the two parties as the final arbiter on all aesthetic matters. Charlie Shaw engaged the firm of Ed Stone, and the principal at that time was Peter Capone because Ed, of course, was dead, and they did the interiors. This was a simpler, very smooth relationship. They did the plans, I had opinions on the plans, but we did the exterior by ourselves; their opinions only had to do with how the exterior composition affected the planning. I would ask them if they could move the bathroom or the bedrooms to make the composition more agreeable. But I have always been...the correct description of my role is that I was the architect for the renovation and the expansion of the Museum, but I also had aesthetic control on the form and volume of the tower. My first piece of work...actually, as soon as I was selected, I immediately went to a meeting at the Museum and was told that, in a week or ten

days, I don't remember exactly, we had this major public presentation [laughing], because indeed, the work should have started months earlier, but the selection process had used up almost all the time. I was selected at the very last minute, and by the time of the presentation, indeed, I was able to show up and I had studies in modern form defining the position and volumetry of the tower and expansion. That was the first step of my work. I had established where the tower went and how big the footprint could be. Then Arlen and Charlie Shaw took that volumetry and put the apartments inside. I was the architect for the Museum and as representative of the Museum I had aesthetic control of the exterior and form of the tower. But the plans of the tower and its structure and the working drawings and all details were developed by another architect working for the developer. So I was not the architect for the tower, I was just in control of its aesthetic characteristics. For the base, for the Museum, I was associated with Gruen Associates, who was the architect of record, and they prepared the working drawings and construction documents for the Museum renovation and the expansion.

SZ: So you were selected and all of a sudden you had in ten days' time to prepare for a [public hearing], which you had a feeling was not going to be....

CP: Not Easy. I think I had over a hundred public presentations through the course of the project--not all major presentations. Some were to members of the board of the Museum, some to the public, some to interested groups, some to the community board. We had several presentations to the Municipal Art Society, to the American Institute of Architects, of New York, many, many to the community board, public hearings--many, many public hearings, and many private meetings.

SZ: You must have had a sense that this was going to be a somewhat controversial....

CP: Not before I was selected.

SZ: No? Did they give you a clue before you walked into that meeting ten days later?

CP: A little, yes. Richard was acting as my coach, preparing me, telling me all that was going on. His skills were very complementary to mine, because just as I tend not to follow those things, Richard was perfect, had seventeen antennae going in every direction, and he knew everything that was going on. He would tell me who each person was and what they represented and what their problems and hang-ups were [laughing]. He was very good at that, very, very good. I was so new at this and new to New York that I just followed their script at the public presentations. By their script I mean Richard's advice and the building committee, which was Blanchette. Blanchette was much savvier than she allowed.

SZ: That building committee was headed by Don Marron, right?

CP: No, Blanchette.... [Marron] may have been head of the building committee as such, but she, as the president, was always in those meetings, and Marron deferred to her.... There was the building committee, which Ed Saxe (or Blanchette) concluded was too large, so a much smaller group [the executive committee] was created, and that was composed of Blanchette, Donald, Richard Oldenburg, Ed Saxe, and myself. We would meet regularly, and often it was primarily to cope with some of the crises that happened all the time. This project was quite an education.

SZ: This was your first museum, right?

CP: This was my first museum, yes--my first museum, my first project in Manhattan. But it worked out well. From that point of view, in terms of temperament, I could do this well. These things don't get under my skin, so I could remain in control of myself and in control of the project. I'm a very good listener, and I'm not interested in having fights simply for a question of protocol or vanity. If our adversaries had good suggestions, I was ready to incorporate them.

SZ: Because you did run into that.

CP: There was a lot of that.

SZ: Tell me a little bit about the evolution of the design concept.

CP: We started work with a three-dimensional functional diagram that Weinstein had prepared. It was a very intelligent diagram. We revisited it, we re-studied the problem from the beginning, and we ended up with something rather similar to what Richard had prepared. The tower indeed ended up in very much the same place that he had placed it, because the truth is, there were very few other places where it would make sense. The one person that had a strong disagreement was Ed Barnes. He was upset with the diagonal relationship between the tower and the garden. He wanted it on top of the Whitney wing so that it would be a direct relationship between the tower and the garden, which makes, in plan, a much nicer composition.

SZ: In plan.

CP: In plan. It makes for a much more carefully composed form; even in a model it makes a very carefully composed form because you have a flat plane and a flat tower at its end, and they just relate very well. But for me, I knew that the diagonal relationship to the garden, with the trees in the garden was the position for the tower with the least impact on the garden. Although huge--and some people were horrified--the real impact was really going to be minor. If the tower had been on top of the Whitney, the real impact of the tower would have been enormous, and for me that relationship between the tower.... The garden, I must say, was one of the key elements and for me it was very important to preserve its vitality and its character as much as possible. The garden is one of the jewels of the Museum, as important in some ways as the Demoiselles d'Avignon, not in terms of art history but in terms of what it means to a visitor of the Museum. Therefore, putting the tower where it would impact the garden

the least was essential. I did not want to put it over the old building either, as some people were suggesting, because I thought that would be criminal, to build over the No. 11 building. That left very few....

SZ: That would have gone over for about a half a minute.

CP: It left very few choices. It would have been not only criminal, it would have been extremely expensive, because it would have been necessary to drive columns through all of the existing floors. Placing and shaping the tower was the main effort.... The other great effort was to reorganize the plan, and that, from an architectural point of view, particularly from a theoretical point of view, I think that was my main contribution, and I can describe it if you are interested.

SZ: Yes.

CP: The other important issue was the facades of the building and the tower, and that's a long story. About the organization of the building, it seemed to me that the original building had used the model of a grand house. You enter into a hallway, you have a stair that takes you up and on each floor you have a succession of rooms with paintings on their walls. Other people have taken my analogy and said it was more like a private club, but the idea is the same. You went from floor to floor, point to point. The stair and the elevators took you exactly to the same point. You moved from one hall to the same at a higher floor, and from that point you went into a maze of rooms and came back to where you started. This was very appropriate for what The Museum of Modern Art originally was, which was indeed this small club of people who were interested in modern art. By this I am not including just the people who ran the Museum but everybody who loved modern art. It was indeed a place, which I got to know in my early years in the United States. I would come to New York and I could not go to MoMA without running into a couple of friends, because it was a small

percentage of the population that tended to visit the Museum. As the Museum expanded, starting with the East Wing of Philip Johnson, and the popularity of modern art permeated through the culture, it is clear that the institution had to change. The number of people visiting, the type of people visiting and the number of groups visiting had changed the nature of the institution. It was necessary to deal with these large, massive groups in a different way, so that now, in the renovation, instead of moving from point to point, you have in each floor a horizontal concourse, formed by the Garden Hall and its extension. The galleries don't connect with each other directly but through the Garden Hall. So the movement in the Garden Hall is organized like in a more contemporary building type and in going from gallery to gallery you are in contact with the sky and the trees. The size of the Museum is now such that it is impossible to see it all in one nonstop visit. I need, and I believe that most people need, if I look at art for more than an hour nonstop I'm exhausted, as if I had been shoveling sand for a week, because I do it with such intensity. So at least five minutes of sitting and looking out to the trees--at the snow, at the sky--that recharges me, allows my whole nervous system to come back in balance and I can walk refreshed into another gallery. It allows me to mediate between drawings and photography, or drawings and architecture--whatever--and I notice that many other people do the same. There are some who still do the marathon viewing. There are people coming from Europe or Asia, Latin America, and this is their chance and they're going to spend a whole afternoon in the Museum and they are going to see it all. So one needs to help them psychologically to do so. I called it the Garden Hall because it brings the garden into the Museum, from the inside, and from the outside you see through the glass and it brings the Museum into the garden. It has become a mediating space. The Garden Hall is a halfway space between the galleries and the garden. With great misgivings on the part of Bill Rubin--he thought he would never hang up paintings or put a piece of art there, because there was too much light, it was too out of control, too much was going on, but fortunately, even Bill, as soon as it was built, started putting paintings there [laughing], which is wonderful. So that was, I think, from an architect's point of view, my most important contribution. You see, much was predetermined in this project, and as you probably know, the galleries

remained in the control of the directors of each department, with our help to the degree that they wanted to avail themselves of it, but it was in their control.

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BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1

SZ: That must have been an interesting experience, from department from department. I won't characterize it, I'll ask you. Painting and Sculpture had a very...

CP: Dominant [director] [laughing].

SZ: So therefore the exchange between you and that department was....

CP: Quite minimal. Actually, I wanted, for example, to put some windows, because they were possible, under the tower on the south wall, and Rubin was upset about that. So I finally ended up building the windows and we said we'd cover them with sheetrock; thinking that there may be somebody in the future who would want to open them. He was upset with that, but the building committee agreed with me and we built them. As you know, before the building was finished he opened one of those windows and put the Dancers by Matisse there. But Bill was always suspicious, I think, of my role, although we did everything he wanted--not completely everything, but almost everything he wanted.

SZ: Did you meet that resistance in other departments?

CP: No. He's a very powerful person and a great curator; I have nothing but admiration for Bill Rubin. But the process of the design of the expansion and renovation was not under his control. He was not a key player in the project. He had a strong voice that could be heard, but only to stop something that he did not like. Arthur Drexler,

actually, had a considerably greater role in the expansion, because he was a member of the committee.

SZ: How did your relationship with him work in that?

CP: Very well. Arthur was very bright, extremely astute, he understood the politics of the Museum better than anyone I dealt with. There may be others that I did not deal with who understood it better, but of those that I dealt with he was very, very astute, because he was also operating from a base of relatively little power, so I guess he depended more in his knowing how the currents were moving. He did one thing that was brilliant in my mind. We had, as you know,...expanded the Museum by extending the second- and the third-floor galleries under the tower, with basically the same type of spaces. A new space was created on the fourth floor, and the curators showed very little interest in it because they thought nobody was going to go to the fourth floor, ever. Arthur was the only one that saw that if you had escalators, the whole relationship, based on accessibility, changes. So he grabbed it, with no resistance from anybody else, and with this he obtained for his department a space that was almost twice as big as what he had been allocated. So he ended up with a fantastic space at the very end of the sequence, where he could hang his Bell helicopter and place his Cisitalia; before the plans were fully developed he knew that he was going to have the Cisitalia there [laughing]. Actually, that was his primary intervention; in the rest he acted more as a consultant or somebody who would give an opinion on matters of aesthetics. He did not have a dominant role in the planning of the building. But he was very good at protecting the Architecture and Design Department. As I said, he was the only one who understood the topological effect of escalators.

SZ: I think there was also, at least the lore of the place includes the fact that all of the department heads were really, it was kind of like, "Try to get what you can."

CP: Definitely, and Bill Rubin could get what he wanted. Bill Rubin, no question, because in a way the strength of the directors seemed to depend on the number and type of

board members supporting them, and Bill of course could count on almost unanimous support by the board, or at least by the very major, more powerful board members. Arthur didn't. You see, for Architecture and Design, the primary support was Philip, and Philip Johnson is very undependable support [laughing]. When Philip wants to help you, he is fantastic, but if he feels naughty that day, God help you.

SZ: Didn't you run into that problem a little bit, because, in fact, he was reputedly upset that it had not come to him?

CP: He was very vocal about it. He repeated it a hundred times. He thought that this business of the legislation was a ruse that had been invented specifically to keep him from designing this project [laughing], that he should have designed it and that if they had really wanted him, the legislation would have been no problem, anyway. He thought that this was...I have a vague memory, I think he was blaming Nelson for something, but I'm not sure of that now. Oh yes, he was very vocal about it; on the other hand, he was, by and large, very supportive. My blackest day there was...the project had been moving very well, and I presented to the board a resolution of the elevations, which was conceptually what we ended up with, and the board was, you could sense, moving toward an approval, when Gordon Bunshaft, who rarely spoke, this was the only time, I think, and in a very blunt way, as Gordon would be, he said, "You are approving a sham." He said, "I was a young man and I worked for Ed Stone in that building, and that facade of Ed Stone was a sham then and it continues being a sham. It has nothing to do with the functions inside. Besides, I think it is wrong to preserve it because it makes"--how did he go. This may have been recorded in the minutes of the board meeting--"because it breaks the sense of the institution, and this is one institution that should have a single, unified facade." So somebody asked Philip, "What do you think?," and Philip says, "I think Gordon is absolutely right." So I was sent back--and we knew already that this was going to be, that to take down the facade of the No. 11 building was going to be political disaster--but I was sent back to restudy a single, unified facade. What Philip didn't think--he was winking at Gordon; he loved these naughty twists, and he was going to enjoy seeing me raked over the

coals--what he didn't think is that a unified facade meant that I had to take down his East Wing facade, too. He just did not put two and two together [laughing]. So we spent a month designing unified facades, until I could convince Blanchette, primarily, that it was wrong; then she figured, okay, how do we get back to the board? And she arranged a private meeting, to which we went to CBS, presented to Bill Paley and convinced Bill. Then, we had a presentation to David Rockefeller, who understood the problem and liked my scheme. She said, "If you have Bill and David, the rest is easy." The next [board] meeting came up, and she presented my design. "We looked at several designs for unified facades," but Mrs. [Rockefeller said], "Cesar has convinced me of his design, and I must say that it has the full support of David Rockefeller and Bill Paley," and they both nodded, and she said, "How do you all feel?" [laughing] Nobody, not Gordon, not Philip, said a thing. But that was a hairy one, because we had been.... It would have been a political disaster. She realized it; she knew that this was going to send the project into a tailspin. Gordon did it out of conviction, and Philip did it just because he couldn't resist it. You could see his eyes suddenly perk up [laughing] He's such like a kid, he was just like a little kid [who wanted to] have some fun [laughing]. To me, the dealings with the community board were in a way much more straightforward. This was much more difficult, but Blanchette was superb. She handled it with consummate skill; she was superb, and she always did it in such a way that she appeared to be removed from it. But she wanted that museum expanded, she was going to get it expanded, she was going to keep it within the budget. She was very, very good--very sweet, but very determined.

SZ: As I recall, there were three main issues in the beginning that you struggled with. One was the facade...set back or not. I think that was one thing that was at the AIA, somebody was worried about....

CP: There were many issues. One of the issues was the preservation of the townhouse where the bookshop annex was, which had been designed by Joseph Hunt, a nephew, I believe, of William Morris Hunt. Many architects, particularly Bob Stern, felt that I should preserve the facade and set back the tower. Actually, we had a number

of drawings that showed that option, and it was a joke. That was one of the issues I presented to the AIA, showing that a building with a mansard--the townhouse had a huge, deep mansard--creates two impossible problems. First of all, a mansard has to be seen against the sky, not under a building. Second, it would force such a huge setback there would be no tower left. The tower, actually, was already on the smallish side to make economic sense, at least as Arlen and Charles Shaw explained [it] to me.... They would have preferred it a little larger. It would have made a more efficient floorplan; they could have built better apartments for proportionately less money. But keeping the townhouse just did not make any sense. This was, as you know, at the beginnings of preservationism, Postmodernism--those currents were running strong. It was not a fantastic building, but it was a very good townhouse, of which we have fewer and fewer in Manhattan. The whole street was made of those kinds of townhouses before, and that was one of the good examples of townhouses left, and clearly, the expansion of the Museum created serious conflicts, very valid conflicts, on either side, of the value of the institution versus the value of urban qualities that were lost.

SZ: For instance, the scale of the street.

CP: The scale of the street--that's correct. Midblock towers--that was the real issue.

SZ: Did this bother you?

CP: Yes. If a midblock tower would have been proposed just to build an apartment house, unconnected to the Museum, I would have been completely against it, but I felt that the harm that the midblock tower did to the street was of a lesser magnitude than the good that it did to an institution that I love and admire. Therefore, it was for me a reasonable and good trade-off. When one deals with urban issues, one never deals with clear black-and-white issues; they're all trade-offs. Important urban issues present conflicting values. They were both good things that I would support independently, but sometimes they are in conflict and you cannot do both, you have

to choose. That is the basis of politics. This is how you resolve the conflict in values, how you set various priorities; this is what the Clinton health plan is all about, that's why the arguments are so ferocious because you achieve something and you damage something, and how do you measure those things--you get two oranges but you have to get rid of an apple. But there were many conflicting issues. There were also sentimental issues. I had people come and tell me, "My God, I met my future wife there at that end of the Museum and now you are going to be building something there, how dare you?" [laughing]

SZ: Was that hard for you, to have all those pressures? You had all these architects giving you advice and groups pushing you in different directions.

CP: It was enormous pressure, but I don't mind that. It's part of architecture. Architecture is a very public art. Other artists seldom face it, unless they seek it like Christo. I think those kinds of conflicts or forces actually energize architecture. They are the substance of what makes good cities, the substance of what makes good architecture. Not good architecture as an individual work of art, not necessarily, although it could be that, too, but good architecture as the shaper of cities. I'm sure that what Baron Hausmann did in Paris would have been, if he did not have all the power he had, would have been subject to enormous conflicts and discussions, and we can still discuss it today, its good or bad aspects. Those are the kinds of things that make our cities. If they are done intelligently and with some real purpose, not phony purposes or [out of] pure greed--that I would oppose. For The Museum of Modern Art this was a very good cause. I felt very good about it; this was a very, very good cause. But the issue appeared clearer then than now, when there have been so many other museums claiming the need for expansion, so one wonders a little, at least about some of the new claims. How big is big enough in museums? The Whitney, the Guggenheim, practically every museum. I know that MoMA itself is considering further expansion, and the question of how big is big enough is a very important issue that does not get debated. Also, if there is a maximum size, what happens then with that institution? Anyway, those were not issues that I was dealing

with at that time. The facade was very difficult, because there was no money. We knew that on the tower the glass wall was a given, because of cost. That's a minimum-cost wall. It also interested me aesthetically, because I had been working in glass skins. But the colors hit a very raw nerve in the Museum. We started by proposing much brighter colors. I think I was right [about] the bright colors.

SZ: The same values, but brighter?

CP: No, much more intense.

SZ: Give me an example.

CP: Bright yellows. We had actually started with a number of yellows and oranges, because a bright color would have made 53rd Street a much livelier street. It would have been appropriate in The Museum of Modern Art in my mind. Less so on the tower, but primarily on the base. But it was seen with great horror by the board. There were strong feelings that I do nothing that could be seen as an artistic statement by MoMA.

SZ: That's a hard thing to ask an architect, isn't it?

CP: Ridiculous. I was asked to do a great building, but nothing that could be seen as representing Bill Rubin's position on art. The brighter colors were seen as running that danger. So we kept on preparing colors, which were considerably toned down, and we were asked to tone them down even further. Actually, for the colors as they are now, a mock-up was built in Long Island, with full-size pieces. I remember Donald Marron saying, "These are way too bright.... These are much too intense. We're going to be criticized." But fortunately Blanchette said, "No, Donald, I think they are fine" [laughing], or some such words. You can see now that they are very desaturated. For the tower, actually, I don't mind. The warm grays as I have them there--this is so subtle that you cannot tell, but the apartment tower has grays on a

brown range, that is, on a yellow range; in the base, those are grays on a red range, which, if you had a bit more color, more saturation, you'd see some pinkness to it. But they have been so desaturated that the sense of color is lost. In the tower, actually, I think that warm grayness is very New York, and it fits well, comfortably, in New York. I would have wanted it a little livelier. Actually, it is a very different building, but I think the colors of the Carnegie Hall tower are a lot more special. It's a more wonderful thing to see against the New York skyline. The Museum of Modern Art ended up being much more conservative than we had started with, but still very appropriate, and it's a perfectly handsome and nice tower. On the base, I still think we should have had more intensity of color. They are definitely a bit drab.

SZ: One presumes that you really argued that strongly.

CP: For months, months, and months. But that was one issue that the board felt very strongly about. They were very worried about criticism by their friends--you see, nothing had been built in the Museum for many years, or by this group....

SZ: I think one of the criticisms that appeared in the press was that there was a great deal of secrecy around the whole design process.

CP: But that was necessary, because there were so many people who were interested in the design process, not as design, but just as trying to find something to criticize. There were many people who were looking for anything they could find to derail the process. These were very agitated and charged meetings, the public hearings, that lasted sometimes past midnight, so that there were many, many persons who would have loved to find arguments that would derail the process. So the secrecy, I think, was justified. Also, as you know, The Museum of Modern Art is a democracy or a collegial aristocracy; I discovered that anybody of some importance in the Museum could veto anything. If somebody--a director, a senior curator, a member of the board--objected to something strongly enough, that would be enough to undo a previous decision. You needed consensus to approve, but one person could

disapprove.

SZ: Depending on who that one person was.

CP: Yes. A trustee, a senior director or senior curator, would have that authority. That voice would worry the rest, so that they would not go ahead. It would have been easy to stop the process if too much was known, because there would have been too many things to which someone could object.... It was almost...not a democracy, but it was collegial or very familylike, where all members are given a strong voice, so the secrecy was probably necessary. That's why the building committee was reduced to this executive committee--I can't remember the exact name--which was much smaller, because it was realized that in the whole building committee, there were too many persons. There were so many decisions to be made, the trade-offs were endless, primarily due to the lack of funds. Hundreds of things that were desired and discussed had to be abandoned because they couldn't be afforded. For me also the budget was very important. I get my projects built; I design them with whatever monies I have available. That they knew before they chose me. So that probably from that point of view they were correct. I would not stamp my feet and say, "It has to be this way, you find the money." I would never do that.

SZ: But that's one issue. Other issues, such as the aesthetic issues--the glass wall, the color of the glass wall....

CP: But those did not stop the project. Those just took endless discussions. There were others: if we don't reduce this by a couple of million dollars, we can't build it, so where do the two million dollars come from? And you never find one single thing that you can eliminate. You eliminate ten thousand dollars here, fifty over there, another twenty-five over here. One ends up eliminating fifty things that some people wanted, and which fifty do you take out?

SZ: Were any of those decisions that were made that you feel were really mistakes now,

in retrospect?

CP: Not any more. At the moment, of course, I felt very strongly about many things that were lost, but as I said, I was adjusting my design early enough so that it would be a design that could be built for a minimum budget. We did not explore ideas that would have been more appealing. One of the losses, perhaps, was.... I wanted to try to re-create the old facade, but to also allow light into the staircase, the inside staircase, the one now within Painting and Sculpture that connects the second to the third floor. The original glass wall, the one that [Philip] Goodwin and Stone had designed, was a newfangled product--two layers of glass with glass fiber in between that had a light straw color that soon started mildewing. That allowed light to come through and supposedly would protect the paintings from heat and sunlight, which it did not do, so that in the galleries that glass wall ended up being walled off. That was one of the things that bothered Bunshaft. One needed...a glass that could have allowed...that I could put in front of the sheetrock and in front of the staircase that would have let light into the staircase but look the same from the outside. We found some products that were untested and expensive, so we could not use them. So instead we had to use that much more ordinary ceramic glass that forced the blanking of the staircase. If we had put glass there, normal glass, you would have broken the composition of the exterior facade, another impossible conflict, which could only be resolved with some high-tech, expensive material, which we started investigating, but it was obvious the monies were not there. The people that kept on telling us what we could afford were Carl Morse of Morse Diesel, who was advising MoMA; Ed Saxe; David Marrus; people from Turner Construction. There were a number of people who rotated and changed and made different decisions, so that preferences varied, but the message was always the same. The other condition that created problems but was inevitable was that, when the date was set to open the Museum, in a way that gave the contractor carte blanche. We would find disastrous things. Walls of gypsum board were waving, things were built wrong, and the contractor would say, "You're

right, and we'll be happy to change it at our cost, but we need two more weeks." It became like a little refrain, because they knew the problem was not just the cost; the Museum could not postpone the opening, which had been announced to the public. So the contractor knew this, the workers knew this, and they knew that they could get away with anything. Most of the flawed work was changed after the opening, redone; some was not, so they remain thus, as unnecessarily poor workmanship because the contractor should have done it well. If the time pressures had not been there, after three or four times that they had to tear down a wall and rebuild it, they would have made sure to do it right from the beginning.

SZ: That's not an untypical thing, is it?

CP: Not untypical, but the pressures in this case were greater than usual.

SZ: Because of the money.

CP: Because of the money, but primarily because the time was tighter than normal. The opening date had been set under very optimistic considerations. You have to remember that this was a major remodeling and renovation, not just all new construction, in one of the tightest quarters in midtown Manhattan. There was not a square inch for a construction yard--it was all done from the sidewalk. What the contractor originally wanted was to cut down the trees and use the garden as the construction yard [laughing], which would have made, indeed, a much more efficient construction condition. It is amazing that they could build this complicated a building from the sidewalk, which happens a lot in New York. That alone probably adds twenty percent to the costs of construction in the city.

SZ: But it was clear that's how it had to be done.

CP: Yes. That's typical in Manhattan; not unusual.... Other projects are more straightforward, they are all new. The fact that this was half new, half old..., and also,

remember, there were two owners on top of each other, two different contractors on top of each other, two different architects on top of each other, two different sets of drawings.

SZ: In thinking about that now, does it seem amazing that it....

CP: It's amazing that it got built at all, it's extraordinary that it got built in time.

SZ: Then why did it?

CP: That was a lot the Museum. There were a number of people--Ed Saxe was very good....

SZ: How was Ed Saxe in this whole process?

CP: For the period he was there, he was very good at getting things done. That was his job and he was very good at it. That's what he understood. I really don't why he was let go. My impression is that he was not as sensitive to the nature of the Museum and its personalities, but I never have known this. He has never said anything and I did not ask him.

SZ: But he was an important aspect to that.

CP: for a period, he was very critical, very critical....

SZ: Because I think it was just around the same time that he was really brought in over the head of Dick Koch, who had had a lot to do with some of the initial concept.

CP: Actually, one funny thing is...these are all lovely people. Dick was a lovely person, and I still don't know why Dick did not remain. Dick had been very important also in structuring of the legislation. I guess it was felt that somebody with a stronger

executive ability accustomed to getting things done was necessary for the construction. To me, that would have been someone besides Dick Koch, but I really don't know. You probably have much better sources than I have on those changes. Then I still don't know why Ed Saxe was dismissed.

SZ: There was another person still at the Museum, James Snyder, who had a lot to do with watching the schedule.

CP: James came after that. He was very good and considerably savvier in the structure of the Museum than Ed was. As I said, they were all terrific, and I still remain friends of Dick Koch, Ed Saxe and James Snyder. They were all very, very good, very different, each one from the other.

SZ: I'm surprised...I'm just going to look at the date of this document, but there was an early document put out...it had the completion date of Spring 1984, and it seemed kind of risky.

CP: Well, they had to.... No matter what, [the date] had to be kept. At that point, if more people were necessary, if extra payments had to be made--I was not part of that--if bad work had to be accepted, the one dominant consideration was the date of the opening of the Museum. It became a bit like D-Day, where everything is marshalled toward that one objective, and it was accomplished, and when the Museum opened, it was a finished museum. There were many things that had to be corrected afterwards, but they were not critical things. The Museum was there, it was operating and built for an incredibly low budget. It was a full museum, and people could see it and discuss it and admire it or not as a first-class museum. That was the part that I felt I delivered: with half the budget that was necessary, it is a first-class museum.

SZ: Just going back a little bit, to this issue of sort of having to deal with so many personalities, having to hear what they feel they need and coming up with something that was agreeable to everyone, and then sort of seeing how it worked, how do you

feel now, and I'm really specifically thinking of the inside, the way the spaces are allocated, the public spaces.

CP: That I worked very hard on, and all of that has been solved well. More money would not have changed those relationships. Not at all. More money would have affected primarily qualities of spaces and details, but the relationships of spaces are as good as I could make them at the time and as it was possible within all of the constraints, because we were working with an inordinate number of constraints. We were not only building piecemeal...see, nothing was really a freestanding new museum; we had the old No. 11, the oldest wing, the Whitney wing, we were building over and within the structure of the d'Harnoncourt Galleries, which became the restaurants, and we were building under the new tower, so that all of the new spaces were preconditioned by other, greater forces, either preexisting or the tower that was new but the forces of all those columns and elevators coming through were given. Many of the original buildings...for example, the Whitney wing had been built as a totally independent building; the floors do not line up with those of the No. 11 building, so that's why we have all of those ramps and stairs and funny connections. Even between structures that touch each other, lots of things that should have lined up did not line up. There were thousands of misalignments that we had to resolve so that they didn't become jarring to the visitor. Different materials had been used, different considerations had been used in each one of the wings, different fenestrations. Much of that remained; some was new.

SZ: What about the decision to have the galleries that are now underneath--you take the escalator down, and that's where a lot of the temporary shows are housed....

CP: One of the things that everybody wanted to change was the floor-to-floor height of the galleries, because since the original galleries were built, the art of the '60s and '70s was of much larger scale and it is very difficult to accommodate within the ceiling

heights of the Museum. But the decision was made that the floors should extend horizontally without major steps or ramps, then those same ceiling heights had to be obtained in the new wing of the Museum. We have a little more room, although even that was very limited, in the floor below grade. All of that was limited by the structures of columns and elevators of the tower above, so that in a way one can say that all of the gallery spaces were found spaces. Some other results were also questions of money; for example, the ceilings are atrocious. That had to do with money and time, because we had the very cheapest of distribution systems and sheetrock ceilings, and every time you needed to have an access panel, a hole was cut into the ceiling. We had them all nicely organized in our drawings, but for reasons of expediency they just went in wherever anybody, an electrician, needed access, they just cut a new hole in the ceiling. With a little more money, a little more time, those conditions could have been much more nicely resolved. The light baffles, we had started with a very handsome custom design....

SZ: They're expensive, aren't they?

CP: That's right. We changed to a cheap metal baffle and then eventually it was changed to a cheaper painted particle board [laughing]....

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1

BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2

CP: That decision came directly from somebody who was watching pennies. There were dozens of those decisions. You can do something for little money and nicely but you can do it not so nice but cheaper. Often we were directed to do it cheaper. As I said, no visitor will really be aware of these things. I was very careful to do nothing terrible that would be clearly apparent to a non-architect. You can sacrifice many details that an architect will see, but somebody who goes there to look at art will not see.

Therefore, nothing important in the Museum was sacrificed. This is not a lesser museum; it is a first-class museum. One needs a very clear hierarchical system in one's head. This is difficult for architects, very difficult--I find it even in people who collaborate with me. Many architects have these relationships upside-down, and they will fight like hell to do a perfect handrail...and they will forget about a major spatial or functional relationship or how to make the visitors enjoy the things that they are supposed to enjoy there.

SZ: That's one of the things that is often said, that you don't really think about the people who are going to be in spaces.

CP: Of course. In this Museum people not only enjoy the things they're supposed to enjoy but they enjoy them in the way they're supposed to enjoy them, according to the Barr/Rubin prescriptions for exhibiting modern art [laughter]....

SZ: But the things that can't be changed, those were things that were given to you, and that's what we were talking about before.

CP: If you think about it, the spaces are primarily found spaces. The massing and core of the tower--once you accept the logic--was given. My contribution was to restructure the circulation diagram and to transform the vertical circulation space into truly a Garden Hall.... The galleries were in the hands of each curator, each one would design for his or her own gallery. The facade, clearly, that was also my design, but within very severe limits. I'm not saying this to complain; I'm not complaining. This was an extreme case of a project with very severe limits, which is in the nature of the place. For The Museum of Modern Art all of this was totally worthwhile. It was a wonderful project, and I loved it.

SZ: You do love it.

CP: I love it now. I loved doing it. I loved going through all of the nonsense. I think the

community-board system in Manhattan is fantastic. Every time I go through it, it irritates me to no end, but I think it is a great thing to have. I think they are a wonderful thing. Democracy should have more of it. So, even if they are irritating, that irritation is part of what worthwhile architecture is all about.

SZ: This is one of the projects that you feel best about? Or is that an impossible thing to ask?

CP: It's a very difficult thing to ask. It was perhaps the project that was most critical in my life, in changing my career, completely, and for about two years it occupied me fully. I was asked during the interview--it was not even a commitment--but I was asked, if selected to do this project, if we requested it, would you promise to do nothing but this project for one year? I said of course, I'd be happy to. Nobody asked me, but, indeed, I didn't even think of taking another commission until a year and a half, almost two years after I had started MoMA. It was crazy because I had also just started my deanship at Yale. I was working over forty hours at Yale and working over forty hours on MoMA. I had no time for anything. Fortunately, my wife was also working on the project, so we both together would go to Manhattan to these presentations, take the last train to New Haven, collapse in our seats, wake up when the train stopped--sometimes the guards would wake us up--go to bed, and be at Yale early in the morning. But it was very exciting. For me, architecture is a fantastic art, but very different from painting or sculpture. So many people tend to see them in the same way...but I love the differences, the nitty-gritty that's involved in architecture. I love it. I think architecture is healthier, stronger, more real by coming through these complicated processes. Less perfect, but perfection is secondary in architecture. If I was doing a great mausoleum for a George Washington or a Thomas Jefferson, then perhaps perfection would be an important thing, but if I'm not dealing in mausoleums, but in living institutions, then perfection is secondary. I love the nitty-gritty, and there was more nitty-gritty in this project than in most of my other projects put together!

SZ: I wonder if it was the same for the Guggenheim, for instance? I wonder how much of

that is inherent in the nature of an institution like a museum, the way it's run and who has an interest in it.

CP: Very different in the Guggenheim. Probably. The main problem there was Frank Lloyd Wright. Fortunately I did not have to deal with that. Also, a peculiar condition beyond Frank Lloyd Wright. The Guggenheim has become an artistic and cultural icon, and that goes beyond the value of the architecture. It's like the Mona Lisa. The value that society has placed on it is way beyond, for me, the value of the painting as a work of art. At MoMA, to me, Les Demoiselles, its value as a historical, artistic icon is much greater than the pure artistic value of the painting. The same is true for the Guggenheim building. Suppose there was a curator who said, "My God, I need to fill this wall with the Demoiselles, but the Demoiselles is too small. I need somebody to add two feet to it. Which painter would add two feet to the Demoiselles? You don't; you can't. To me, you can't add to the Guggenheim. Not because it's a museum, and not because it's Frank Lloyd Wright, but because it has become this great artistic icon. We all, collectively, have given a unique value to their specific work, a specific moment in history, in the life of a great architect, and once this happens, you can't add to it. I think it was crazy of Charles Gwathmey to consider it, to push for it. For me, Charley should not have taken the commission. I don't think anybody should have taken this commission. Even if somebody could have solved it perfectly. Even if there was a painter who could add two successful feet to the Demoiselles, nobody has any business adding to it.... In the past, painters had no problem correcting the work of previous painters; up until the nineteenth century, that was rather common. But some paintings reach this object, which is not given only by the artist, it has been given by society at large--a combination of history, appreciation--that transforms the painting into an almost sacred condition. And MoMA has quite a few of those icons, they're one of the things that make MoMA so special.

SZ: In fact, part of that is it was always said that modern art was meant to be seen in

intimate spaces and, therefore, while you may need height, the galleries should be intimate and small.

CP: Rubin was extremely clear about this. I respected it totally, and this is one of the nice things of working with MoMA, that everybody there loved art, cared a lot about it, and had very strong ideas about art, and they were very sophisticated ideas. This was just fantastic. One of the wonderful things about architecture is that when you start a project, you enter a world that occasionally, like at MoMA, is a fully developed world that you are admitted to that otherwise you would have remained outside, looking at it from the outside. One learns so much, it adds so much to what I am. And still, now, you know. I'll do a project in a foreign country that I've never worked in before and it's also a great amount of learning for different reasons, which just pours in, and it's fantastic. Painters don't have that, nor sculptors, but architects do, because you not only have to appreciate, you have to get into the culture to do your work well--into the museum culture, or now, working in Malaysia, I had to get into Malaysian culture; in Japan I had to get into the Japanese culture. Otherwise, I'm not doing my job as an architect. Then I need to transform all of that artistically, but it is a transformation of something that is already there. Now a painter may indeed.... When Cézanne did Mont St. Victoire, he was transforming it, and interpreting it, but he was interpreting something of his choice and that is never as complex and as rich as a whole other culture, which is fantastic. For an architect, it's extraordinary. So projects like MoMA have been, of course, unique, because it's an incredibly charged and sophisticated world, and the personalities were fantastic. One could write a novel--several novels [laughter].

SZ: Your next career [laughter].

CP: Not me. That's for you, not for me. You're collecting all of the...I don't have any of the juicy stuff for novels. I used to get them from Dick Koch...Monroe Wheeler was great.

Monroe had endless stories.

SZ: Monroe? That's right, I guess he was still....

CP: Very much so. He did not play an active role, but he was very important, just coaching and explaining. He was a charming person, with endless stories. Drexler, Koch, and Wheeler, the three of them could talk forever, and they had so many stories from so many different angles. Their personalities, of course, as they interpreted the stories, were so different, the three of them. Monroe was one of the most charming persons ever. He must have been fantastic when he was young and full of pep and wheeling and dealing. By my time, of course, it was mostly reminiscence, but very, very charming.

SZ: I have just one last question. The way the building is now, do you see any way in which the Museum can find more space?

CP: Expand? This was thoroughly discussed, and the obvious way, which I don't know if it is still possible, was west, and actually the Museum was designed to expand west. We have like the beginning of an expansion of a bay that we purposefully cut off without a termination, because it was meant to expand. [It is a] logical expansion, which would also allow for the galleries to expand in, "a natural way," just horizontally. Some of the other expansions I have heard of, like under the garden, make me cringe.

SZ: I think that one was done away with. I think the feasibility study showed it wasn't too feasible.

CP: Of course. It would have created something so detached from the normal function of the Museum. But extending it west would be very, very natural, and the advantage would be that one would get past the underside of the tower into spaces that would be considerably freer, where larger spaces or two-story spaces could be created that

MoMA needs. MoMA should have some large, two-story galleries...the under-the-garden [plan] was going to keep providing these restrictive, compressed spaces, but expanding west, with no tower on top.... But I don't know if that's possible anymore. I understand that some properties that were there were not obtained or options were allowed to expire. I heard bits and pieces but no full explanation.... But that would be the logical expansion--or, indeed, somewhere else. Even across the street, but, perhaps truly, somewhere else. Like the Soho example of the [Guggenheim], I don't know if that's a good example, and I don't know if The Museum of Modern Art needs to do that; it's such a different institution with such a clear purpose. In a way, what The Museum of Modern Art has always done that I think should keep on doing is that it keeps the best of the best, and more than in any other museum that you see, there are truly extraordinary examples of the artistic production of this last hundred years--according to Rubin, a hundred and ten [laughing]. I guess Barr was the one that gave the birth of the modern movement in '85. But he was looking at painting. If you had been looking at architecture, it would be 1851.

SZ: Because?

CP: The Crystal Palace--the first, for me, modern masterpiece, which happens to be thirty-four years before the first [modern] painting.... Architecture was never taken as its own art. Architecture, as The Museum of Modern Art has typically seen it, is a form of three-dimensional painting, or inhabitable sculpture, the way that Philip and [Henry-Russell] Hitchcock presented it, in that exhibition [Modern Architecture, 1932]. But the nature of architecture, the nature of the art of architecture, has never been fully explored and presented. The truth is, it creates an impossible problem, because in painting and in sculpture you exhibit the originals; in architecture, you cannot exhibit the originals, you cannot exhibit even full-size reproductions. Only before Philip Johnson's garden, when the Museum used to build occasionally houses in the garden, was architecture presented as a whole, but even that, that was not truly architecture, because...a Japanese house [Japanese Exhibition House, 1954]....

SZ: It's not on the site.

CP: Exactly. Architecture is only in one place. It belongs in its place. But, still, museums are important to architecture, and the presentation of architectural ideas and forms in museums is very important, but not in the Barr conception. For him, I think, it was just this desire to incorporate all of the arts--and this is extraordinary. I sound as if I am criticizing him, but my criticism is only of the mode he did it, which is minor. I'm extremely grateful to him and have great admiration for his having done it at all, because that was the great breakthrough, and to have brought architecture into the realm of the high arts...and design, which is even less clear. Design has become more complicated today, to be discussed as a high art, because design has such a strong commercial overtone.

SZ: Which the Museum is also responsible for.

CP: Of course, of course. But it's such an incredible institution. I often have memories of those two years I was immersed in this, and I look back with great love and knowing it was a very important moment in my life, very, very important.

SZ: Thank you.

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END INTERVIEW