

**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

**INTERVIEW WITH: DONALD B. MARRON (DM)**

**INTERVIEWER: SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

**LOCATION: NEW YORK CITY**

**DATE: 13 SEPTEMBER 1994**

**BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1**

SZ: I thought that I would start by asking you how in the course of your own career you became interested in art, what kind of art it was, and how that developed to get you to the Museum, though I did read somewhere that, as a child, you visited the Museum? Let's go back to that.

DM: My earliest specific recollections of art were going to The Museum of Modern Art when I was a teenager and winding up in what I always call the "1911" room, which is the room for Cubist pictures at the Modern, and being so excited by being in that room in particular. I couldn't stay very long. It just made me so excited to be there and to see those pictures. Of course there were lots of other pictures to see at the Modern as well, but those pictures at that time.... The gallery then was Cubist pictures from 1911, 1912, principally [Georges] Braque and [Pablo] Picasso.

SZ: This would have been in the '40s or the '30s?

DM: Late '40s, early '50s, that's right.

SZ: Had you been a particularly visual kid or had interest in that sort of...?

DM: I don't picture myself as having been particularly visual. People who see me now say I have an unusual visual memory for pictures [inaudible] now, being a collector—I think many collectors have this—they'll show me a picture and I'll say, "I know I've seen that somewhere before." And sure enough, I'll go back and

there it is. But I don't picture that.

SZ: They say you have a wonderful eye as well.

DM: Well, that's very nice. So that's my first recollection. To jump all the way ahead, the next time I remember being really exposed to the issue of art in a [inaudible] was when I got married and we had an apartment and we looked around at what to hang up on the walls. At that time, I discovered Hudson River School painting, which I liked and which also had the great attribute of being something that I could afford. There was very little known about it. There were only about four books. I remember one was by James Flexner at the time, and it was much prized because it was out-of-print and I had to run around New York to find it. In New York then there were a very small number of dealers; Kennedy, of course, was the best known, but there was a man named Bob Sloan who had a little gallery called Sloan, and then Sloan and Roman, and he dealt in nineteenth-century Hudson River School paintings, and I found that I could afford them. I was even more excited when I realized that some of those artists were also artists that I'd seen at the Metropolitan Museum. In fact, several of them were founders of the Metropolitan—Arnold Whitridge and John Kensett were both among the founders of the Met. So, in a very modest way, that was the first collection. We bought a marvelous little, teeny [Albert] Bierstadt of a boat on the water—a very small Bierstadt, maybe 6 x 9. Later, and I love to look at art books and get the whole sense of the work of the artist, I found later, learning about Bierstadt, that—of course, the big paintings that you saw were all done in the studio, whereas the little paintings were done out on horseback, with the canvas. I didn't know that before, but after I knew that, I knew why I was taken by this little picture, because it had this enormous freshness, and I prized it even more then, because it was more original, in my mind, than one of those gigantic works that you saw hanging up. I had a [inaudible], I had an Alexander Wyatt, I had a still-life artist, his name was Loge... It was a lot of fun. From there, I remember I was in Easthampton—I don't remember when, the year, but we can find it out

because this is all documented, and I went to a show at Guild Hall that turned out to be of American black-and-white prints. I remember that because I walked around, and I didn't know anything about prints, and found a number of these American artists, kind of an extension of the Hudson River School, that was the next real generation of American art: [Winslow] Homer, [Edward] Hopper, [George] Bellows, [Thomas Hart] Benton, [John] Sloan—the Ash Can School. The Group of Eight, I guess the Group of Ten, didn't really do very many prints. I just was overwhelmed to find these artists, whose paintings I could possibly afford, had done prints, all black-and-white. It was just so exciting. I remember looking at one print—Thomas Hart Benton—and looking at the credit on it. The credit said, "Associated American Artists." I went the next week to Associated American Artists—I don't remember where it was then—which published Benton's prints.

SZ: That was known as the AAA.

DM: Yes, the AAA—this was a long, long time ago—and I bought it. It was *Departure of the Dryads*. From that came this marvelous adventure in learning about [inaudible] American artists that did prints, and you learn about American artists who did prints who did good prints. And that got me to the interest in really collecting American prints, and I built a marvelous collection of American prints. We have a catalogue here, because it toured. I took the artists I loved the most and found the best prints. You can't do that collecting paintings, because obviously a number of them are taken, but with prints, theoretically, you can get anything you want if you're patient. So I had all the Hoppers I wanted, all the Homers I wanted, and the Bentions and the Bellows, and John Marin, and John Sloan, and [Charles] Sheeler, a number of John Taylor Arms, a less-known, great American engraver. It was just a marvelous time. Everywhere I went I looked. I remember I went to Philadelphia, and I went into a place—maybe you remember it—a marvelous old print dealer, very distinguished, I can't remember the name now. In those days they had prints on racks and you could go through

them. Homer had five or six great etchings, big, about 20 x 30 inches, of which Eight Bells is probably the best known. They were, even then, very rare and quite expensive. I went and I found one of them in the racks there. I remember it, and I think it was five hundred dollars, which was a lot of money for me. I was looking at it, and I kept looking at it and looking at it, and I thought, "There's something odd about this one." This is the one where there's a woman in a sling going from ship to shore...she's being saved in a storm. I kept looking at it, and I thought, "There's something strange about this." So I said to the people—they also sold books—"Do you have the Homer catalogue? They got a catalogue that the Whitney had done—by Lloyd Goodrich, is that his name?"

SZ: Yes.

DM: And I got to this etching and I looked at it, and sure enough, the etching that they had was the reverse image of the one in the book. So then I flipped through the book and I found that somebody at the time had made photos of these etchings, reversed them, and printed them. And that's what it was. I pointed it out to the owners, and they went over to the five hundred dollars and they erased the last zero. But it didn't fit me because it wasn't an original print. So that was a great collection. It toured all kinds of places, and it spawned other people to collect. Dave Williams has a big collection now. Of course, he was with our firm, and that's where he learned about black-and-white American prints. He saw me hanging them up. He hadn't heard of them at all until then. He wasn't interested in art at that point.

SZ: So it's really a combination of loving what you're looking at and also the chase.

DM: And the chase—it's that combination of the two. Print collecting is different from paintings, because there you have the whole [inaudible] is really there. You can go through catalogue raisonnés or go to a museum—you can see them all. I tell people that the marvelous thing about collecting prints originally is you can

theoretically get what you want. From there, I started to collect nineteenth-century French color lithographs. Color lithography was invented in the late eighteen-hundreds and really only thrived for five or six years, from 1894 to the end of the century. Of course, [Henri de Toulouse-] Lautrec's the best known person, but also [Pierre] Bonnard did a marvelous collection, [Edouard] Vuillard did, [Paul] Signac did a couple. And then there were color lithographs that were done by a man named [Auguste Clot] where the artist didn't do them all—the artist did part of them and Clot put in the colors. I still have some of the Lautrecs. So I had a collection of those. I did some research on how to do printmaking. I went from that to meeting June Wayne, who, you may remember, reinvented color lithography.

SZ: She's an old friend of our family's.

DM: Is she? She was then in California, in Los Angeles. She had been somewhere else, in the Southwest.... She had started Tamarind and then moved it from where it was—Santa Fe or somewhere—to L.A. So I went to see her so that I could learn more about printing.

SZ: That must have been the time that lithography was having a renaissance here.

DM: That's right. I spent a lot of time in Los Angeles on business. I eventually went on the board of the California Institute of the Arts. I went into—I don't know whether you want all this—Gemini [G.E.L.] because it was a printmaker, and I went in there the day they were making the first prints of Frank Stella's, called "River of Ponds." There were two that were square and there were two double squares, one was called Port aux Basques and the other was called Bonne Bay. And there they were, they were printing them—Ken Taylor and Stan Grinstein and Sid Felson. I looked at those things and I was just stunned. I knew nothing about contemporary art at that time, and I was just stunned at how great they were. It turned out that in retrospect they may have been the most dramatic prints that

Frank ever made. But there they were. I thought, "Wow, this is another element of printmaking that I've never seen before." In those days, the way you got the prints from Gemini is you took a subscription—you got one of everything—and I wanted those prints. They said, "You can't have those prints unless you take a subscription." So I went back and decided I would take the subscription. So I started collecting contemporary prints. From that, I got to know some of the artists, including Frank.

SZ: Did seeing the process make you appreciate the product in a different way?

DM: Yes, it did. I'd read about it, but it did. It's important, I think particularly in contemporary prints, because you had the feeling in contemporary prints that they were just commercially made, or at least that was the argument that some people were using at the time. But when you saw how they did them and what it took and the process, you realized what an art process it was. And of course Gemini then had Frank and it had Jasper Johns and Bob Rauschenberg. From Tamarind around that time, what Tamarind did was a marvelous set of early prints by Ed Ruscha, who I also got to know pretty well after that, and love his work. And then I got on a train one day, at her invitation, and went to West Islip to Tanya Grossman's.

SZ: Because she knew by this time that you had interest and were....

DM: I don't remember, but certainly when I saw her prints, they had a richness that I think could not be accomplished in the same way by anyone else.

SZ: Could you see the reason for that?

DM: You just look at the work and see the texture and the richness and know how great it was.

SZ: But having seen the different operations, could you see why that was?

DM: Talking to her, yes, absolutely. She did real lithography on the stones. Gemini did

lithography on zinc plates, a very different kind of thing, although later they did other things and Ken Tyler did his thing up in Westchester. She, for example, told me when I went out there, I asked her about the size of editions, and she said she did the printing all only in one day, because she didn't want atmospheric conditions and weather to alter things. I remember asking her how she got to West Islip, and she said that she came to this country as a refugee and she got on the train, got out at West Islip, walked around, found a house, that was it. She and her husband didn't know anybody.

SZ: And then discovered the stone in the yard.

DM: She discovered the stone in her yard or something like that. Whether it's true or not, we'll never know. So I got to know Tanya. There again, what you wanted, obviously, were the most marvelous things she was doing, and the most marvelous things, in many cases, were early Johnses. Tanya had a few dealers, but she would sell to some people directly, as she was willing to sell to me. The way it worked is, she would call me up and she'd say that she had a print. I was then downtown, and one day—I remember it vividly—she came down, came up to the office with a print. If you ever saw Tanya Grossman's prints when they were wrapped, it was a work of art, the way they were wrapped—enormous detail, as much detail as the pictures. The way Tanya worked was, she came in with this Johns—it was Decoy, a marvelous print; it was big—and she unwrapped it, which took about five minutes, to get it unwrapped and on my desk to look at. She looked at me and she said, "Well Donald, you have to decide if you like it or not, I'm double-parked" [laughter].

SZ: And did you?

DM: I did, and I did. That's the way it worked with Tanya in those days. That got me into, again, a kind of broader range of prints, but that [also] got me into the artists. From there I got into paintings and drawings, having seen the artists and

seen the work. And that got me excited about all the potentials. By that time, I was in a position where I could collect paintings and drawings, so I began to collect those artists that I knew through printmaking originally, and then a whole range of contemporary artists, and then I went beyond that to other contemporary artists. Then we wound up...I started to do it for PaineWebber, and when this book comes out, you'll see what's there. In the last seven or eight years I've gone backward and started collecting nineteenth-century European paintings.

SZ: Why is that?

DM: Back to my very biggest love, which is [Henri] Matisse.

SZ: Who you consider a nineteenth-century European?

DM: Well...I should say nineteenth, early twentieth century. For me, learning about art has been just a process of looking—and we can talk about the Museum's contribution to all that—but just looking and going to museums, going to galleries. When I got remarried, the apartment was all contemporary pictures, big ones, too—a Stella Protractor in one room, a Johns here, this, that, and everything else. When you get married and settle down and look around, you decide, and since the office was all contemporary, maybe it was time at home, with a different kind of life, to consider other works. Also, Katie felt it would be nice to have things that were a little...she loved contemporary art, but it was sort of unrelenting—it was on every wall and every place. I had always wanted to collect Matisse. So that's where it started. As a matter of fact, the day I became president of the Modern, that night—merely coincidence...one of the great Matisses was auctioned at Sotheby's, called the Backwin Matisse. It used to be owned by John Quinn. It was a Nice picture but actually a great one. I remember it because it was on the cover of the catalogue and I had never bid on—I rarely buy at auction—I'd never bid on a picture of that type at all. The thought was that this was all going to be an academic exercise, because it was on the cover of the catalogue, and then for some reason I was able to get it. So it was quite a day.



So we keep collecting for the firm, and now it's much more formal; we have...a curator. I collect at home, but now I have a little baby I have other things to do, too. That's the history—looking.

SZ: When you began collecting paintings, you developed a relationship with Leo [Castelli], is that correct?

DM: Yes. I feel a great debt to dealers. Going back to prints, there was a great...what they used to call in those days "fine" print dealers, a nineteenth- and twentieth-century dealer named Peter Deitsch—I don't know whether you knew him or not—who was the dean of those people, a very distinguished, quiet man. I used to go there every Saturday and spend a few hours with him. But those were in the days when a dealer had three or four hours. Five people came in during the course of the day and I'd go there and spend a lot of time. I learned a lot from a dealer named Barney Gordon, who publishes the Gordon-something now. When I was able to start collecting paintings, which obviously is a broader field,...Leo I used to go down to. He was at 4 East 77th Street then. I used to go to see Leo and spend a lot of time with Leo. Angela Westwater and, more laterally, I'd spend some time with Arne Glimcher, though not a lot. Nick Wilder I used to spend a lot of time with in Los Angeles...he was kind of the dealer in L.A. You could probably name another half-dozen. And of course Leo was the center of everything, because he had these marvelous artists. I'd go down and we'd walk and talk.

SZ: But it always ended up being what you saw, what you liked.

DM: Yes.

SZ: Because there are some collectors who have somebody else do the buying for them.

DM: No, it was always what I liked. And what I liked would evolve. That's the way it

would work. I was able to trade, sometimes, an older work for a younger work—I don't mean contemporary, but a group of prints for a work or one kind of work for another kind of work. So it was enormous fun.

SZ: Two things, just to sort of tie this up. Stella described you as a cautious collector, and Leo described you as omnivorous.

DM: Oh, really? [laughing]

SZ: Two very interesting adjectives.

DM: They are. I suppose my view of collecting, to take Frank's first, was, he meant cautious about the works or the process?

SZ: I think, as I remember the context, he was really talking about you...being really very discretionary in your choices.

DM: Was this written somewhere, or did he say this in one of your interviews?

SZ: I read it somewhere. I can get you the citation next time.

DM: Before I actually got a work of art, what I liked to know was where that work of art fit in the whole body of work of the artist, because I really wanted to feel that I was trying to get what, for me, was the thing that I felt was the best representation of the artist, which would make you more cautious in those terms. I would not go down and see a show and then five minutes later say, "I'll take that one," other than in those cases where in the later years that was your only choice, where you had to go down and make a decision overnight. So in that sense maybe I was cautious. In the Leo sense, omnivorous, what do you think he meant by that?

- SZ: I think he meant just sort of what you've described, that you really had a very broad....
- DM: I was open to anything. I'm open to any kind of art, at any time, unlimited by time and resources. So someone says we have a great young artist or we have an old established work, that was a marvelous combination.
- SZ: You've spent a lot of time downtown.
- DM: Did then. I haven't in the last few years, with everything else in my life. Frankly, once I became president of The Museum of Modern Art, it put a big dent in my collecting. Also, as long as this is a history, historians should realize that, when Soho first started and these things first happened, this was a marvelously casual, low-key, take-your-time-and-think-about-it process. It wasn't until the middle or late '80s that the hordes of people went down.
- SZ: When it was a frenzy.
- DM: It was a frenzy, you had to make a decision quickly, you had to be on the list. I remember Ivan Karp showing me a new realist painter, whose name I can't remember at the moment—not Robert Estes—and telling me he had a five-year waiting list for these pictures, and all I could think of was why? I remember giving a talk to the Young Presidents organizations, which I was once a member of, which had a number of these new, eager collectors, and the biggest question other than the one or two about art was, "How did you get to the head of the list for Ivan Karp's new realist painter?" So when I was doing this, for most of the earlier times you could go down, spend half an hour with somebody, have a cup of coffee, it was fun on both sides. You'd go away, think about it, call up next week and do it again, and that was fun. It was a lot less fun when it was a head-to-head, immediate, frantic competition.

- SZ: This is a nice background in terms of your interest and knowledge. How did you get to the Museum?
- DM: I got to the Museum because of Jeff Byers. Barbara Jakobson tells me I met Jeff Byers through her. I don't remember the details, but I've known Barbara forever. Jeff Byers, if you remember, was a marvelous collector, owned part of the Bikert Gallery, and for the record, was Bill Paley's son-in-law. We had lunch one day, and he said, "You should get involved with The Museum of Modern Art." It was the first time it had ever come up. I said, "That sounds like a nice idea." He said, "I want you to meet Walter Thayer." I said that I'd like that, and over the course of the next few months I had lunch with Walter Thayer...who was a trustee and Bill Paley's adviser and confidante. Walter Thayer said, "I want you to meet Bill Paley." I think in the end I went on the print committee at the Museum. Riva [Castleman] would know the dates, but I don't remember that. But whenever it was, then after that they asked me to become a trustee. I never told them this, but I can tell it for the record now: I wasn't even a member of the Museum. I used to just go and pay my money to go in [laughing]. That's how it happened. It was Jeff Byers and having lunch.
- SZ: And the idea appealed to you because?
- DM: There was that place that I'd gone to as a teenager, and the thought of being involved in that way was just thrilling, to be closer to all those pictures. Little did I know what I was going to get involved in [laughter].
- SZ: I think this probably is a good place to stop.

**END TAPE 1, SIDE 1**

**SIDE 2, BLANK**



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**INTERVIEW WITH:** DONALD BAIRD MARRON (DM)  
**INTERVIEWER:** SHARON ZANE (SZ)  
**LOCATION:** PAINWEBBER, 1285 AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS,  
NEW YORK, NEW YORK  
**DATE:** MAY 16, 1996

**TAPE 1, SIDE 1**

SZ: My intention today is to try to cover at least part of the expansion project. The last time we got you to the Museum, we got you on the Print Committee, and then you were elected Trustee. I think right around the same time the idea for this was cooking, so maybe you can give me the background of that.

DM: Well, as a matter of fact, I was on the Board only for a short period of time before Bill Paley and Blanchette Rockefeller raised with me the issue of a potential expansion of the Museum. And I remember a meeting that included that group plus one or two others, Bill Paley then being the Chairman of the Museum and Blanchette Rockefeller being the President, at which there was a discussion about how this might proceed, this important project, and then I realized there was a silence and everybody was looking at me [laughter], so, you know, you'd be certainly a logical person to take it on. So I did.

SZ: Had you never done anything quite like that.

DM: I had never been involved in anything like that. It seemed to me the key thing to do at the beginning was to make sure that we all understood what the issues were and what the vision was. And we divided the vision and the issues up into three categories. One was the obvious one, financial. The second one, in our case, was legal, because we were about to embark on a set of creative ideas

which culminated in the Trust for Cultural Resources. The third aspect of it, and I must say, the one that was the most fun, was the architectural and the museum aspect of it. So may we stop by each of those three?

SZ: Absolutely. You're terrific.

DM: Taking the third one first, the architectural and the museum aspects of the thing, the Museum at that point was able to show less than fifteen percent of its collection. Now that was always our selling point. I should say for the record, that when you look at the Museum's whole collection, it's unlikely that the Museum would ever want to show all of its collection. But nonetheless, the fact was, we were limited in what we could show. Secondly, this Museum, unlike almost any other museum, is divided into various curatorial disciplines: painting and sculpture, prints, drawings, film, video, architecture and design, and at that point, not each of those areas had their own space to exhibit. So not only was there a limitation on showing the collection, there was a great limitation on the ability of important parts of the Museum, such as Drawings, such as Prints, to have their own independent space. Plus our situation with the Film Department had just one theater, not that big, and again, that was very, very limiting. We further had the issue that in terms of doing big shows, the space from the point of view of Bill Rubin and others, wasn't perfect, given what had happened to modern art since the Museum had been built. The number of artists had expanded substantially, contemporary artists make works that are on the average much bigger than modern artists, so that put pressure on the space. And the interest in the Museum of doing comprehensive shows such as the one that we opened in the new space with the Picasso show, had grown dramatically. The second issue was obviously that the Museum's commitment to architecture meant that any expansion had to respect that commitment and elevate it as much as it could. There was a serious limitation in that, because the expansion as eventually conceived involved building an apartment house over part of the Museum. Therefore, any architectural decision had to incorporate an apartment house in the midst and some kind of design that was comprehensive. Now we come back

to go through each point separately. Secondly, the financial side was crucial in this case, because normally when you expand a museum, the thing that expands the most after the space is the cost, because a bigger museum costs more to run, whether it's guards or maintenance or other things, and not always do you wind up with enough additional attendance to [offset]; it's rarely that you do. So the expansion had to incorporate not only the cost of expanding, but how you were going to enhance the revenues of the Museum so that when you got all through you had a financially sound structure. That, of course, was the genesis of building an apartment house over the Museum, because the concept was that you would enhance the financial side two ways. First, you would sell the air rights — that is, the right to build over the Museum — to an as then yet unpicked developer, and that would be additional capital for the Museum, and secondly, as eventually developed, you would enter into an agreement with the City to create a special trust, The Trust for Cultural Resources, that would allow the real estate taxes that would be paid by the owner of the proposed condominium apartments, to go, instead of to the City, through the vehicle of a trust, to wind up benefiting the Museum. And again, if you want me to come back I will do that, because this is a very complicated set of issues. The third big issue involved in doing all of that as well, is how to do it in such a way that you minimize the closing of the Museum, because that had a big financial cost as well as obviously a human and a public cost. So that led us to the third aspect, which was the legal side, because in order to do the things that I've described, we had to break new ground in the law in New York, that is, stimulate legislation that would create the Trust for Cultural Resources. The argument was that many not-for-profit institutions in the state of New York were in low rise buildings right in the middle of their respective cities or towns. If you think about it it's true. The Museum of Natural History would be a very good example in our city. The argument that we made was, it would be logical to stimulate building there, but you'd have to do it through some kind of financial incentive. And so the legal aspect was how to create this trust first. Secondly, we had to have a creative way to finance the expansion through the issue of tax-exempt bonds and collateral funds, which now have generated almost a hundred million dollars for the Museum. The third



aspect was how to create this proposal of using the tax payments, which then became known as tax-equivalency payments, to benefit the Museum. We can come back to how all of those details work. So those were the three elements, and I presented those aspects first to the small Executive Committee of the Museum and then to the Board, saying these are the things we're going to have to go through if we want to commit ourselves to this project.

SZ: But nothing like that had ever been done before.

DM: It had never been done, and furthermore, it had to all be done simultaneously, because you had to persuade the city, the state, you had to raise the private money to handle our share of the financing, you had to work closely with the curators and the staff of the Museum to make sure that what you wanted to do was possible. And you had to do all of that with the serious limitation that you didn't have any more space; that you had to do this on the existing footprint of the Museum. And there was one absolute rule for us, which was, we could not touch the Garden. So therefore, we were limited to what's called the footprint of the Museum, plus whatever we could acquire that was right next door, and we had to combine this with the opportunities but big limitations of building an apartment house. Just to give you one anecdotal, simple one, I had never heard of a sun chart before, but we spent an awful lot of time on sun charts because building this huge apartment house was going to block out the sun. So there was the question of the neighbors of the Museum, the Garden of the Museum, what would happen if there was no sun to the trees in the Museum. So this was a very, very complicated project, which as you know, in the end took more than seven years. So that's the briefest possible description of the issues. Where would you like to go next?

SZ: It was so complicated, these different ideas and putting them all together. How did you pull everybody together to have that happen?

DM: Because obviously this was a new thing for the Museum and I was a relatively

new trustee. What made it all work so well in the beginning was the absolute support of Bill Paley and Blanchette Rockefeller in their direct roles, and of David Rockefeller in his slightly less direct role, only in the sense that at that point he was neither the Chairman nor the President of the Museum, and the big support of Walter Thayer, who was an important trustee of the Museum and was an advisor to Bill Paley. So you had the founders of the Museum, the leaders of the Museum, absolutely committed to this project in a courageous way. I remember at key times, Bill, and then in many ways as it went on even more, David Rockefeller, stepping in and saying, "Yes, we should do this," even though there were many different kinds of risks. So that was where it started. And then you had the great support of the staff of the Museum, because they wanted the expansion, and you had, as it was broadened, very good support from the trustees.

SZ: Which was all very important. So the way you envisioned it, with these three basic issues, did it seem always doable to you in those early days? Because I know there was community opposition.

DM: Community Planning Board Number Five. Well, maybe it's just because I'm a natural optimist, or maybe it's because I love the Museum, or maybe it's because I love art, but in my mind I never doubted that we would get the thing done. That we would do it, that it would just be a question of creativity, time and the kind of thinking about a complex project that in some ways is almost unique to New York City, because it's such a complicated town. My office was within downtown, so I must say I spent an awful lot of time going uptown and downtown working on this. But I had no doubt that it would be the best thing for the Museum, and that it could be done.

SZ: Let's start with the architecture. Let's talk about the choice of architect.

DM: Well obviously, trying to pick an architect in a museum with an architectural tradition and three architects on the Board was complicated. Further, the prior

expansion of the museum had been done by Edward Durrell Stone [and Philip Goodwin] and by Philip Johnson, and I was given guidance right from the beginning by Blanchette and Bill Paley that we should look for a new architect. We decided we would look outside the Board because we wanted a fresh approach. We then put together an architectural selection committee and we put together a committee of architects. The committee of architects included the three architects on the Board, Ed Barnes, Wally Harrison and Philip Johnson, as well as Arthur Drexler, who was the head of the Architecture and Design Committee, and I believe there was one other member, I can't remember who it was. Their role was essentially to provide a short list of architects from which the then trustee selection committee could choose, and then it could go to the Board. I learned very quickly that the definition "young" architect meant somebody under fifty, which sounds a lot younger to me now than it did then, and the original group that we approached was limited basically to senior architects. That was an interesting experience because in one case, one architect, Kevin Roche, decided not to be considered.

SZ: The reason being.

DM: That he was working on the Met and the Met plan, and there may have been other issues. The second architect, I. M. Pei, felt he couldn't do it himself, so he sent Harry Cobb, his partner, to be involved. And one that Bill Paley and I particularly liked, Rinaldo Giurgola, who we thought was very good and we all were very interested in, but he didn't communicate as much with the trustees as some of the other people did.

SZ: You mean as effectively?

DM: Yes, as effectively. And there must have been a fourth architect too. One of the architects, I guess it was Harry Cobb, or Pei, was having problems because their windows were falling out of the building that they built in Boston. So that was the first group. And then there was a big discussion about young architects. I

remember at that point going to Philip Johnson and saying, "You are a real architectural leader as well as being an architect. You must have certain people in your mind." Now Philip was reluctant to step out on that, or circumvent the process, but it was perfectly clear that he thought that Cesar Pelli, who we had not yet met, would be a very good candidate for this. One of the reasons that he would be a good candidate was that he was at that point working substantially in California with real-estate developers, and we had this very specific issue, which was that the real estate developer that would build the building, since that was a commercial enterprise, would not be willing to permit the external design of the building to be determined by the Museum, because he was concerned, obviously, of the impact on the economics, unless he could be persuaded that the architect was someone who would really understand the economics of building an apartment house and selling it for a profit. The second thing that we wanted was that the apartment house and the new expanded Museum had to be of a piece. We at one point even discussed, could you have two architects, one do the apartment house and one do the expansion or the external apartment, and decided, no, it all had to be of a piece. That influenced the committee significantly, because you wanted someone with enough experience in dealing with apartment houses. I can't remember the names of the other younger architects, but there was a group that was looked at and considered, and obviously, in the end, the decision was that Cesar Pelli would be the best choice. He has since then gone on to be much better now. At that point he was about to become head of the Yale Architecture School, so we knew he'd be in the east more, and that was the decision.

SZ: I presume there was some sort of a preliminary design presented by some of these front-runners.

DM: There was some discussion. We never had a contest or a set of models. There were designs, there were conversations. As I recall, the first model I ever saw was the one that was created by Cesar Pelli. I must admit, I don't remember all the details of that. But when we went from this idea of considering a major

architect, not that the others were less, but, a very established architect, and since we had made a trustee decision to not have in this selection thing architects on the Board, we very quickly went from that to these younger architects.

SZ: Since we've talked about selection of the architect, let's talk a little about the selection of the developer.

DM: That was a real problem. By the time I got involved in the process, the Museum had already made certain discussions and some progress, they thought, in this whole process. The Museum had had early discussions with Arlen Realty. What was the name of the man who ran it? Arthur Cohen. In a very early stage, there was a very preliminary set of sketches, I guess, or plans, made in some combination of Arlen Realty and some architect, I think maybe Jacques Robertson, I can't remember, for a kind of a building that would fit this concept, very very early on. What in fact happened was, the Museum never built that building. We never picked Arlen Realty as the developer. We eventually picked Charlie Shaw from Chicago.

SZ: And I guess simultaneously the trust legislation was being put together.

DM: On the second front, of the people who were involved, Richard Weinstein was the first person who I ever heard talk about this idea of building an apartment house over the Museum. And while in the later stage of the project he wasn't involved, I regard him as the person who had the most to do with the concept. The idea for the trusts and the structure, I don't know where the original idea came, but Don Elliott, the lawyer, was the first person that I got involved with in dealing with the legal means by which you would set up this trust and how you would get this all done. He was certainly involved right from day one in this very complex process. The idea was really, as I said earlier, to create a trust whose purpose would be to encourage low-rise, not-for-profit institutions in the state of New York, to more effectively use their space, and the means by which that

would occur was that the Trust would have the power to issue tax-exempt bonds. The value of tax-exempt bonds is that they can be sold at a much lower interest rate than taxable bonds, and the proceeds from those tax-exempt bonds could be used by a participating institution to build. In our case, we added to that several elements. The first was that the building that would be built with these proceeds and these bonds would eventually be paid off by tax-equivalency payments from the to-be owners of the condominium apartments, which would go into the Trust. The Trust would then use those proceeds to pay down these bonds. Furthermore, the way these bonds would get a very high credit rating, that is, a triple A credit rating, the bonds would be backed by a collateral fund, the collateral fund being U.S. Government bonds, which would be funded in part by the sale of the air rights and by other things, and that those bonds would guarantee. Now what happened was those bonds were bought at a time when interest rates were very high, so when interest rates went down, the value of those bonds went up dramatically, so that the collateral fund did not need all those bonds. We were able to refinance the bonds, take the difference out and give it to the Museum, and thereby have an even one more and greater source of revenues. And as I think I said, I think the net result of the whole project has probably created close to if not over a hundred million dollars for the Museum. It was a first of its kind as far as we know, and it was very, very successful. So Don Elliott was certainly the architect of these legal issues. There were then issues of having it passed by the state legislature. On the night it was to be voted on, it was first apparently voted down, and then through some lobbying efforts, voted up. I know that Bob Douglas, who was then with the Chase Bank was involved in helping to have that turnaround occur. I must say I don't remember all of the details of that.

SZ: However, that turnaround, and I guess some of the other aspects of creating the Trust, really met with significant criticism in the press. How did you deal with that?

DM: First you try to deal with it by explaining it. The best explanation for something

like that was that this was not a special purpose trust set up only for the Museum, which was probably the main criticism, and that secondly, it was true that there were, all over the state, low-rise institutions right in the middle of town where you could help to revitalize downtown areas, providing you could do it. Since then, the Trust has done financings for Carnegie Hall, Channel Thirteen, and a number of other institutions. So what we said at the time was, this is not only for the Museum, it will be used by others, in fact turned out to be the case. But let's face it, it was something that clearly benefited The Museum of Modern Art. On the other hand, my view is that New York City is heavily dependent, for its success and leadership, on tourism, and expanding a great museum is important. It's heavily dependent for success on the fact that it's considered not only the financial capital of the world, but one of the two or three arts capitals of the world, and therefore this enhanced that position. Finally, and I think something that was very persuasive to the city at that point, the economics in New York City were not good. There were big problems in jobs, and creating this then very big construction project added a number of jobs to the city, plus all of the purchasing power that goes with that kind of a project. Those were our arguments. Some people saw them rather clearly then and some didn't. I would hope everybody sees them now. Then we had to deal with the Community Planning Board, who had other issues. They had legitimate issues of what happens when you build a great big apartment house in the middle of a low-rise block, and they range from traffic to sun to other quality of life issues. In fact, as I recall, the zoning in New York City then was that you could build a high-rise building up to I think it was then 55th Street. So this was not something that the city fathers had ruled out. But it was clearly an issue, and we went through any number of hearings. I remember the sun charts the best — I was there showing my sun charts to all these people, and the architects were — but the issues ranged from very legitimate ones to ones that were, to say extreme would be kind.

SZ: Understanding how the Trust generated funds is one thing, but a big fundraising effort had to be undertaken as well.

DM: Yes. There was separately a fundraising effort because obviously the Museum had to raise the money to build the building, even though we used it for the collateral fund in part, and raise enough money to increase the endowment so we could handle the increased cost. That was led by Walter Thayer, who, from my view, did a great job, and I'm not sure has ever gotten as much credit for it as he should. That was also part of our charter in this whole Expansion Committee. That's where the leadership of Bill Paley and David Rockefeller really was crucial, because they, together with Blanchette Rockefeller, stood up and said, "This is important; this is a project that's crucial, and we are going to be the lead in supporting this and getting it done."

SZ: How do we ever really know how to estimate what is going to be needed, since it's kind of like the old joke about when you get a contractor who tells you what it's going to be, you just triple it.

DM: I've always had a motto in construction: twice as long and twice as much. First of all, you've got to look at it from several aspects, and since the Museum is about to go through another expansion, which they kindly asked me if I wanted to chair and I said no, I did it once. You had the physical construction of the building. That's the first part of it, the cost of that. The way that you try to do that is by getting from a contractor as close to a fixed price as you could. Now everybody who has ever been involved in construction knows there's really no such thing as a fixed price, because as you start to build you change things, and once you change things then all bets are off. But Turner Construction, I think, made the best effort that they could, with Al McNeil to provide the Museum with as close to a firm base as they could. So that was the first piece. The second piece was recognizing the expanded Museum had higher operating costs, to raise enough additional money for the endowment so that the interest or the return on that money would offset the increased operating costs. The third aspect of it, of course, was to hope you could raise more than that, so that you'd have additional money for what, let's face it, we all find the most fun, which are



acquisitions and exhibitions. In the end we were able to estimate those things reasonably well. The fundraising drive went well. It raised more than the amount that was planned, although I don't think I remember exactly what that amount was now. That was successful.

SZ: I don't know why I think \$36 million.

DM: Thirty-six million sounds about right. Plus, as we started to build the building, we did realize that the idea of the tax-equivalency payments was going to work. There was going to be even more income there, although not at the beginning. The law was an incentive to people to build, which was a further argument where this was a good idea for the city. The city was giving incentives for people to build exactly this kind of building, and the incentive was a tax abatement, so that over the first ten years you started paying almost no taxes in the beginning, and the full tax rate was not borne by the owners until the tenth year. So we knew the tax-equivalency payments would be important in future years, but they'd have very little impact in the early years. We worked all those numbers through and were able to estimate roughly what we would need, and then we went ahead and did it. A lot of it was fun and a lot of it was very hard work, but the end product was really worth it.

SZ: The construction took four years in various phases.

DM: We were concerned about how would this work in conjunction with the apartment house, since obviously the apartment people had a different point of view than we did. They wanted to get a commercial structure up. Charlie Shaw could not have been a better, more cooperative partner. There was a whole set of issues involving the acquisition and eventual demolition of some very old townhouses next door. Since some people were living in them, we were very sensitive to that. We did not want to be in the position of creating hardship for individuals. Of course, as these things work, in the end there are always some holdouts, where maybe the demands exceed the reality, and that took a certain amount of time

and sensitivity. And all of that got done, but not without a lot of work. We had the Community Planning Board to deal with all the way through. We had the fact that when you build a museum, a non-commercial enterprise, the museum staff and the curators had a number of issues that were important to them, crucial to them, going on, and they had to be dealt with in non-economic terms. We had to deal with them in terms of how would it work, what would be the best for the Museum, what would be best for showing the works of art. Modifications occurred as we went along, so that's one reason the project took longer than a normal project. But after all, the whole purpose of the thing was to build a museum.

SZ: That everybody could be happy with and use.

DM: Yes. So when people came to me and said, "Well this is commercial," I said, "No, this is not commercial. We have to use commercial techniques to make sure that we get it done appropriately, but in the end, what's inside the Museum and how it works must be determined by the curators." And that, in fact, is what happened.

SZ: How much did you get involved in squabbles over space and things like that?

DM: Well, that was something we tried to have all done by staff. Where you got involved was on large issues, such as, do we have one theater or two, a big issue. We wound up having two, which meant digging another great big hole to do it. We had very broad issues of: would the Print Department have its own gallery; would the Drawing Department have its own gallery; how would that work; where would it be, and all of those things. They eventually came to the Board. But The Museum of Modern Art is very fortunate to have a very strong staff with very strong views, and we've always had the policy that the staff's control over the artistic side is important, so that was done much more that way.

SZ: And you had pretty much unanimity among the trustees on this project from the start?

DM: I think we did. Again, I was a young trustee, so I don't know that I would have heard all the issues from the old guard, but I think that once David Rockefeller, Bill Paley and Blanchette Rockefeller said they wanted to do this. Dick Oldenburg of course was very involved, then the Director of the Museum, and he was highly regarded by the trustees. Bill Rubin was very strongly in favor of this project, and he has the greatest respect from the trustees. So I'd say that everyone — when you finally get down to having a new, young trustee involved and you're about to tear down your museum and build an apartment house and raise a lot of money, obviously people — but my policy was to keep the Museum trustees as closely involved as possible. I think, looking back, someone told me that I did not miss one trustee meeting in sixteen years, or something like that. I just made it my plan to be there so the trustees could ask any question they want. And the second thing I found in dealing with it, to give people more information than perhaps they want. I remember I made these huge charts that went all around the Trustees Room, a timeline showing where each of these aspects — architectural, legal and financial — were, so every trustee could know as much about this project as they wanted to know. I think what you can say about the trustees, is that different trustees had very different issues. Some trustees were the most interested in the artistic side, protecting the goals; some trustees were very financial oriented, and other trustees said, you know, I just want to know this thing is being done properly. It had a lot of trustee involvement.

SZ: Your feelings about it when it was completed, and now, which is twelve years later.

DM: Well, when it was completed it was just a great, marvelous accomplishment. I remember the dedication ceremony. I spoke, Paley spoke, David spoke and Blanchette spoke. To be standing there at the base of that great hall looking at something that was only a dream ten years earlier is a very extraordinary feeling. I'd been involved in other construction projects, but nothing like trying to build a new Museum of Modern Art. To see the look on people's faces when they went through there, to see what we'd done and to see how well received the first

shows were, and to see the enthusiasm of the curators, made the whole thing worth doing. It did take a lot of my time and energy, and there was a lot of emotion involved. I don't think anybody anticipated how quickly the space would be used. When that project was going on it was before the huge increase in interest, popular interest in art. It had always been a great interest, but the '80s were just about upon us, and all that is signified by that, good and bad, in some ways is reflected in the art world. So I don't think that anyone anticipated how quickly the space would be used, how fast what we then thought was available things would be taken. However, it became pretty apparent four or five years later that if you could do it again at some point, it would be a great thing to do one more time. And that's where we are now. I think what's been put in place, certainly the Trust, the process by which we did this, the record of having done it successfully, the fact that the city realizes the first time around having done it was good for the city, all of that is a tremendous platform for what's going to happen now. And my guess is this project will take ten years.

SZ: And you are not going to have anything to do with it?

DM: That's probably too strong. After that, I was still chairman of the Executive Committee and chairman of the Expansion Committee, and I asked to be relieved of both of those responsibilities. I am still a vice-chairman of the Museum and I meet now every month with Glenn Lowry who comes over here and we talk about the various aspects. I meet every month with Aggie Gund, and I meet more often than that with David Rockefeller to go over all these things, so I'm involved in that way. But I do believe one thing about this kind of a project is that it gets done the best if one or at most two people are in charge. So I said to everybody, I'm happy to be an advisor, but I don't think I should be directly involved because this is a new project, a new time. Somebody else ought to do it.

SZ: Let me just ask you, what was the biggest challenge about it for you and what was the most fun about it?

DM: Yes, that's a very good point. Well, I don't know what the most fun was. I used to go to The Museum of Modern Art when I was a kid, and I never would have believed I would have been involved in its future as I was. So the greatest fun was to work with the institution and the staff and the trustees, knowing what you were doing was contributing to building, something that just built on the long traditions of the Museum. I think the hardest part was, although I knew it as an abstraction, was to realize it wasn't a business project. It was a not-for-profit project, and there were therefore many more people and many more issues and many more compromises that you had to make. The frustration in that was you knew there was a way to do it but you couldn't go from A to B, the way you would in business. I learned that very quickly, but it's still something that gets reinforced as you go along. You knew you weren't dealing with nice linear, straightforward goals. We had a much larger goal here, which sometimes was a cross purposes with what you wanted to do. So that was the frustration. Of course, there were always people involved. The project had its heroes, the project had its people who were problems. A project like this is complicated, just like any other part of life. You have to rely in many cases on people's words. I go back to Charlie Shaw, because he stood by at a time when it would have been difficult. He could have made things difficult for the Museum. I think that the leaders of the Museum, in particular David Rockefeller and Bill Paley and Blanchette. There were moments when there were questions, and there were bridges that had to be crossed when there was no bridge. I'd go over and meet with them and say, "This is what I think has to happen and I can't tell you how its going to work exactly, but we've got to get support for this;" — in other words, financial, or just a kind of an emotional issue with architects — "we've got to get through this next point before anything more can happen." And they every time said, "Okay, we agree with you; we support you; hold a meeting." We went to the trustees meeting and they were all there. David, particularly, understanding this, and seeing how it worked over time, would always stand up and say, "This is the right thing to do." Now, he would say it because he knew about it, also. He was

thoroughly briefed and I spent an awful lot of time with him. But the great joy was seeing the thing happen, and it's there forever. It's right up there. I wish I'd been next door in my PaineWebber building then. That didn't happen until the end of the project.