

BGC CRAFT, ART & DESIGN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Malcolm Holzman

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Conducted by Berit Hoff on April 11, 2009 at the Landsman/Holzman Loft, New York, New York

Malcolm Holzman is a founding partner of Holzman Moss Bottino Architecture. He was born in 1940 in Newark, New Jersey, and received a B.Arch. from Pratt Institute in New York in 1963. In 1967, he and partners Hugh Hardy and Norman Pfeiffer established Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates in New York. In 2004, Holzman established Holzman Moss Architecture with partner Douglas Moss, subsequently joined by Nestor Bottino. He has held both the Saarinen and Davenport Visiting Professorships at Yale University, and endowed chairs at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, Ball State University, the University of Texas, Syracuse University, the City College of New York, and has taught at Lawrence Technological University and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Holzman has designed many civic and academic buildings in the United States, notably libraries, museums, and performing arts centers, and has received numerous awards for his work.

In this interview, Holzman speaks about his education, career, and recent projects, including the Lucille "Lupe" Murchinson Performing Arts Center at the University of North Texas; the Wylie, Texas Municipal Center; the Globe-News Center for the Performing Arts; the Alaska Center for the Performing Arts; the Cedar Hill Government Center; the Landsman/Holzman Loft; the Columbus [Indiana] Occupational Health Center; and the Texas Tech University Student Center. Holzman also discusses his interests in innovative building materials and historic structures, and writing his books *Stonework: Designing with Stone* (2006) and *A Material Life: Adventures and Discoveries in Materials Research* (2008).

This oral history transcript is the result of a digitally recorded interview. The interviewee has reviewed the transcript and made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

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Berit Hoff (BH): I'll start off with a broad question. How do you define architecture?

Malcolm Holzman (MH): Almost everything that's built.

BH: What interests you most about the history of architecture?

MH: Learning how to make buildings today. When I observe a building, it's as if I'm communicating with the architect who made it because of the shared understanding of how buildings are constructed. I gain knowledge from antique buildings. In fact, it doesn't matter how old they are. It's a lot of fun to look at historic structures, because there are stories they tell. These aren't necessarily the stories you read in books. They aren't the accomplishments academia teaches either. There are fascinating stories in every piece of architecture, if you can find them.

BH: How does your interest in historic buildings, or older buildings, relate to your interest in materials?

MH: All buildings are made of specific materials. To see how other architects used materials, how they made a style their own, and usually through manipulating materials in specific ways, is revealing. There are buildings by, say, Nicholas Hawksmoor, where he has taken a standard material of his time, stone, and done something out of the ordinary with it. Or look at the second-century Pompeian basilica, although it wasn't known by that name when it was built. The columns on this oldest known Roman basilica were made of pre-manufactured pieces; it was the first time I saw clay (bricks) fired in cylindrical and irregular pentagonal shapes, then combined to form the sub-structure for fluted columns. Although a lot is recorded about Pompeii, this is something little has been written about. I can learn from looking at older structures about an architect's intent, and how they were able to take a material and use it in a special way.

BH: What do you get out of historic buildings in relation to form?

MH: I gain an understanding of the forms that other architects liked to use and how they assembled them. Most archaic structures were singular shapes; few were combined forms. When I look at old structures, I am most fascinated by ones with collected forms. There are examples that have direct application to the buildings I design.

BH: How do you approach form?

MH: Oh, right from the start of a project. Architects make forms [laughs]. Architects make spaces.

BH: Right.

MH: They make forms that can be riveting to people. The materials that make the form are the elements that people relate to up close. It's the combination of three ingredients, form, space, and materials, which actually make buildings memorable.

BH: You write in *Stonework* [Images Publishing, 2001] about lending personality to a building through your use of materials. What sort of personalities do you think can be attained through materials?

MH: Stone can be an arresting material. Currently there's a preoccupation with making stone appear weightless. In architecture today, stone is often applied like metal or glass. I don't have that interest; it goes against the grain of what the material is about. Stone is a material that can represent permanence, that's how I normally think about applying the material. It can be weighty, it can give the sense of tradition; it can do a lot just by the very nature of the material. Until one hundred years ago, if an architect wanted to construct a building that was intended to last for generations, it was made from stone. Materials convey novel properties. The architect can capitalize on these characteristic attributes, can exploit them, or work against the grain, make them do something opposite, like defy gravity, if that's the intention.

BH: That's interesting, because I can understand wanting to approach stone with integrity to the material, but at the same time you do like to use materials out of context.

MH: Oh, absolutely.

BH: How would you say your approach to stone differs from your approach to other materials? Is it the history that makes you want to use it in a more traditional way?

MH: We work in an era of construction where there is little sense of skillfulness unless there is a large construction budget. Buildings need to be constructed in very basic ways. In using stone, that means piling the blocks up and putting mortar between them. Today, most masons make concrete block buildings and understand this method of construction. Many masons may never

have built a stone building, but if they can make a concrete block structure, with a little bit of training they can produce a stone one. It's much easier to construct buildings in a fashion understood by the builder, in very basic and rudimentary ways. An architect needs to either have a large budget, or a philosophical desire to put stone together so that it appears to fly through space or is held up on wires. I don't have projects with budgets big enough to actually allow for that. I sometimes employ materials counter to the way they are traditionally used, but I develop a method for contractors to install them in a simple and direct manner.

BH: In your writing, you rarely refer to the structure of the buildings you design; rather, you seem more material-oriented. What sorts of structures are you most interested in? Most drawn to?

MH: Structures play a very strong role in all the buildings I design. I wrote *Stonework* because there was a misconception about what stone could be today. There aren't many architects who enjoy using stone the way I do. I needed to set down examples of my built projects to allow other architects to understand stone could still be a special material. That's what prompted the next book about all the other materials I use, but I don't think I'm going to write a book about structure. I was trained in a period when rational thinking was at the forefront of architectural design; in part, that's what modernism was about. I haven't lost that kind of discipline. One of the design challenges at the University of North Texas, Murchison Performing Arts Center was to make an acoustically excellent concert hall with a very modest budget. The structure is exposed, something that is unusual in a concert hall design; normally they have finished surfaces and a concealed structure. In this project we couldn't afford to cover everything up with a second layer of finishes, so the structure becomes a visual part of the concert hall. In the lobby, the structure is visible as well; it's raw concrete, much different from the timber structure that's in the hall. There is regularity and a normalcy that structure can provide a building design. This is great, because once I have that regularity it can be taken advantage or traded on by opposing it.

We are currently designing the Wylie, Texas Municipal Center. In this civic building, we are designing a stone-bearing wall. This almost 800 foot-long serpentine wall rises from a one-story structure supporting a roof to a three-story structure supporting two floors and a roof. It employs everyday construction techniques but eliminates the steel or concrete structure associated with typical stone veneer walls. This endeavor uses stone as a structural element, something that has infrequently occurred during the last 100 years.

BH: How do you approach combining materials on different scales? Does it differ on a small versus a large scale?

MH: Combining materials is a joy, because putting building elements together provides the opportunity to make materials compatible or contrasting—two materials that look like they go together or two that don't. It depends upon what I'm trying to accomplish in an interior space. I may want to reduce the scale of a large interior space and will scale the materials to make it feel more intimate. In a concert hall, the audience comes together with a performer in one room. I frequently scale the materials to reduce the sense of how big the hall appears. Similar to the decoration of a fifteenth-century room, the materials and how they are assembled provides the scale of the room. On the other hand, when making a small space, the architect may wish to scale it up. How the materials go together in that case would be totally different. The materials, details, lighting, and the patterns, they give a sense of the scale and proportion to the room. Most people visually measure against things they know. A visitor entering a room that's constructed of wood knows how big a board is; it provides a sense of scale to the space. But if the designer enlarges the scale of the wood board, the eye of the observer is fooled, and it permits the space to take on another proportion.

BH: In your texts you often mention learning about production processes of materials you employ. What does that learning process involve?

MH: To understand how the material is taken from a raw state to a finished product provides a sense of the character, properties, and unique qualities that lead to a finished product; it allows the architect to understand how to use it economically and not torture it into being something that it doesn't want to be. A visit to a stone quarry provides an understanding of where the costs to make a building block occur; knowledge is gained about how to use the specific stone economically. Stone can be expensive due to costs of processing, but awareness of quarry and fabrication procedures provide clues about potential inexpensive applications of the material. Using material as it comes out of the quarry often proves to be least expensive. If it is possible to use discarded material already in the spoil pile, it can be provided at minimal cost. These are things that I learn by going to a quarry. To watch the processing of copper or aluminum provides an understanding of how the raw material becomes an ingot, coil, or sheet material. The question is, what can an architect do with a roll of material? Visiting a wood mill, I can see the process of turning raw lumber into finished boards, but it also provides an understanding of the residue, fragments, and chips that remain at the end of the sequence. Visits to fabricators encourage speculation about how all these potential products can be used. A means of application for a material can be gained from how it originates and subsequently how it is fabricated. The processing of a material provides clues about how to use it with minimal costs. It doesn't necessarily end with a finished product—but sometimes it conveys inspiration about making a

finished product.

BH: In your writing, it makes it seem as though your response to a material is almost instantaneous; you describe coming across material and just knowing you wanted to use it. Have you ever had that experience and then not been able to later integrate it for some reason?

MH: Yes, there are many materials on my 'waiting list'. I see many more things than I could ever use. I need to have the correct situation and the correct opportunity—the building where it would make sense to actually try it in a specific application.

BH: How do the manufacturers respond when you describe to them that you're going to be using their product in an unorthodox manner?

MH: They're surprised. They can't figure out why a non-standard application of their product is of interest. They can't imagine why an architect might want a discarded piece of material of little value, especially if it's coming out of their scrap pile. If I approach a product manufacturer and use their material for another purpose, it's an even bigger surprise.

BH: Right.

MH: A product not actually conceived for construction may be used as part of architecture, but it will be totally unexpected by the supplier. It leaves them wondering how this will be accomplished. Often, when we borrow materials from allied fields, they've been given as contributions to our projects. Nonetheless, to see their products presented differently is of interest to them.

BH: How do clients respond, especially when you use something so out of context?

MH: The product needs to have the right application. It's tough to drive down any Texas highway and not feel like you're going to be run off the road by a cattle truck. Seeing those metal panels on the trucks so many times made me think, why aren't they a building material? It is a metal panel with openings. The panels aren't particularly expensive, and we've had the chance to use them in a few applications. At the Globe-News Center for the Performing Arts in Amarillo, Texas, they are the ceiling surface of the lobby space. A lot of people enter the building, look at the ceiling, and don't recognize the cattle truck panels. But when they finally perceive them—the fact that they're in West Texas and see these trucks all the time—these people know that it is part of their world, something that's familiar, and therefore it helps root the building in their community.

Regional users of the hall are really taken with and quite proud of it. They're delighted that this is in fact the ceiling of their arts facility. Sometimes individuals immediately understand what they're looking at. When we used automobile fenders for the American Film Institute auditorium in Washington, some people didn't understand what they were because they weren't in their usual location; they were flat on the wall. Some people needed to be told what they were, others immediately saw and understood them.

BH: I thought the use of the cattle panels was very effective in *A Material Life* [Images Publishing, 2008]. You had a photo of them early in the book, and I remember looking at them and thinking, wow, those are really intriguing, and beautiful in that context, but I had no idea what they were until later in the book when you start discussing them. I don't know if that was on purpose or just the use of an image.

MH: I see things all the time, and when they're visually attractive I try to discover a means to use them; they go in a visual archive. For instance, with expanded metal, an inexpensive product, it was a matter of taking it from a building location that people didn't see and making it visible and usable for another purpose. It naturally provides an acoustically transparent surface but was not intended to be used in this manner. The public wouldn't know this material; it is usually hidden in a plaster wall. They wouldn't have seen it unless they've been on a job site where plaster was being installed. Although it's readily available, it presents the design question of, what can I do with it? It has managed to find its way into the proscenium arch at The Atwood Concert Hall in Anchorage, Alaska, and numerous hung ceilings across the country in our projects. We've recently installed the siding from railroad cars, the protective screening enclosing automobiles during shipping, because it's partially transparent and lightweight. We've used it as sunscreens. They're corrugated, rigid, and have perforations. On the Cedar Hill, Texas Municipal Complex, I'm not sure visitors to this public building initially recognize their railroad industry origin.

BH: How does your interest in materials affect the way you experience the world? Or does it?

MH: It makes me interested in everything. People have been making pots forever, vessels, in the art world. If you pick up a George Ohr pot, it is obvious that the vessel has thin walls, so you immediately know that he was a master at what he was doing. You reflect, how does he get the wall on a pot to be that thin? He did a lot of things with his vessels, so the material, the quality of the touch, the surface of it makes an impression. Not everyone recognizes what is in their field of vision. Observation is an important part of architecture; it makes a big difference.

BH: I'm changing the topic now, but what do you think about the use of computers in architectural production?

MH: I think it's the only way buildings are being made today.

BH: Right.

MH: In terms of getting construction completed, it plays a very important role and is going to become even more important. It's become the backbone of the building business, and it's going to allow the process to change as well. There are now programs that are more advanced than CAD [computer-aided drafting]. It isn't totally perfected, but nonetheless, it's starting. BIM [building information modeling] will be a great advantage to everyone; it's going to alter the process of making buildings because it gives the contractor a better three-dimensional picture of the building, and it is easier to build from this data. It will be a lot different from the current process, where drawings are made by the architect and engineers, the contractor sends back the drawings of what they will build, these drawings get approval, and then they are used to make the building. Construction is going to drastically change because of the improvements in computer technology and the economy that it brings to the process.

BH: What about computers in architectural education?

MH: It's also been adopted and adapted by the academic world. I have a concern due to my interest in the world that I go through every day, based upon observation. In academia, we're losing some skills that were taught about observation because of the computer. The computer can produce finished looking drawings even when they are incomplete. In academia, there has been a reduction in emphasis on drawing by hand. I'm not advocating being backwards and doing things in an archaic way. Computer drafting is essential to the architect. Hand drawing is equally important to me. In order to draw something by hand, it has to be observed or imagined first. If you went to art school thirty years ago, there were beginner's exercises: draw ten trees, ten cars, ten of this or that. To illustrate ten different trees, the student had to look at a tree in order to draw it and to know how to distinguish one tree from the next. Observation is not required when the computer is used. Drawing is about the end result, but it is also about observation. The computer has done away with the need for observation, the drawing process—to observe what you're illustrating—and to also imagine what the end product might be ahead of time. Today an architect can make computer drawings for a building and that architect may not know what materials are illustrated. When a building was drawn by hand, it had to be thought out beforehand, and the

process that allowed that to happen was based upon observation and acquired knowledge. The selection of materials and how they go together can actually happen much later in the computer design process. For a person who went to art school decades ago, that's a drastic change and concern.

BH: I studied architecture for one year, but drawing, just drawing, was part of it. First semester you spent a lot of time drawing.

MH: Architectural education goes through phases. When I was invited to teach at the University of Wisconsin thirty years ago, they had stopped teaching history. This sounds hard to believe. It was not a curriculum requirement. Things change, and I think that it's difficult to know what's being taught and how a curriculum is being shuffled around because of current influences.

BH: Where does drawing or sketching fit into your design process now? Or does it?

MH: It does. Drawing is a way of thinking. I draw to illustrate ideas. In my office, it's frequently difficult to describe ideas only in words; it's often easier to make a sketch and say, "this is something." Drawing has the ability to short circuit and compact thinking; being able to illustrate things to the people you work with is very helpful. Sketching is important. Sketching three dimensionally with models allows me to convey volumetric ideas much more quickly and to illustrate them by clearly fleshing out what the words are about.

BH: Beyond models and sketching, are there any other steps you take in designing that aren't apparent in your books?

MH: Yes. There's the desire, on our part, to have what I'll call a 'rich' building environment. There's a layering process, what forms and spaces are made of and how they go together, that is incredibly important. Materials can be standard, purchased at Home Depot or general suppliers. Then there are materials that need to be specially produced because of the place they are going in a project. In our office there is always a design discussion about how to bring richness to a project. What can a building afford, even if it's an economical project, even if there isn't a large budget? How can it still become a distinguished or memorable place? Frequently this has to do with varying materials or multiplicity of materials and how they are combined.

BH: How did the process of designing this apartment differ from designing for a client?

MH: I missed the beginning of that.

MH: Not much. How would the open space be organized? What would the place be made of? How would the place be shaped? How could it be comfortable to live in? How could it be economical? These are considerations in designing for any client; it was just that I was going to end up living here, with my family, which is different.

BH: Right.

MH: I'd have to live with my mistakes.

BH: [laughs] How involved is a client usually in your design process?

MH: Very involved. The clients who select us to make a building really don't want what a lot of other clients desire. Usually our clients want to know how their buildings are being designed and constructed, and why they're taking shape the way they are. If you design public structures, which are the basis of our practice—libraries, auditoriums, student centers, and projects of that nature—these are very public academic and civic structures. The people who are involved in making them want to understand the thinking that's gone into them. They want to understand the decisions that bring them to completion, and they want to participate in making them. While they have a lot of involvement, it varies from project to project; it can be about the conceptual beginning of a project, it can be about the colors and materials, because everyone wants to know how the project is going to be finished and what it will look like. Public clients have a lot of involvement at many different levels, everyone from citizens to administrators to actual users participate.

BH: Do you seek out any particular sort of commission?

MH: Generally public buildings. We enjoy designing them. We know how to design them. We've done them for a long time. We're more interested in them because they have an influence on the communities in which they are built. We don't usually undertake residential or commercial work. Every one of our projects is unique in some way, which therefore leads to uniqueness in the architecture.

BH: You discuss the Columbus Occupational Health Center, which you describe as the first Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates project to win a national American Institute of Architects award. I was curious about the process of designing in Columbus, Indiana, and whether its

program for having contemporary architecture affected the way you approached the project at the time?

MH: No. It was clear from the start the client wanted to have 'architecture'. Sometimes at the start of a project you're not sure if the client knows what a fantastic building they can have. They may have ambitions, but they're not sure how important, significant, and memorable their project can be. If you build in Columbus, Indiana, they've hired you because they want a memorable building.

BH: Right.

MH: I've recently been back to Columbus, and it's very unusual to visit a museum of architecture because you can see which buildings are being curated, conserved, and deaccessioned. I saw projects that made it into 'storage' and ones that haven't. Then there's also—because of Columbus—the diminutive nature of the buildings. What you see are tiny versions of architect's better known buildings. It's very nice. There's a current American painter who is quite popular, Richard Pettibone. He copies other artist's images at a very reduced scale. In a strange way Columbus is like that, because these are tiny versions of bigger buildings. There's a very modest I.M. Pei library. There are a few full-size buildings. The elder Saarinen's church is full size, but some of the other buildings look diminutive. I'd forgotten how small Robert Venturi's firehouse was. Academically you would think it's gigantic, but when you see it today, it appears barely bigger than a garage, which is exactly what it is.

BH: I don't think I've ever heard that perspective on Columbus.

MH: I find Columbus fascinating, because here was an individual [J. Irwin Miller] who wanted to improve the community through architecture, and did. There was a partial love-hate relationship between the benefactor [Cummins Foundation] and the community. There was the option for the community to hire an architect from the 'list of architects,' but it wasn't required. The community avoided the list for a while, and they realized these buildings weren't quite as good. They went back to selecting architects from the list. It's a fascinating story. A lot has been written about it, but it would be interesting to see how it all settles down years from now. Visiting just this year, it was a lot of fun. I took some friends, who are not Americans; they were not as impressed with it as I was.

BH: Your books make it seem as though your design process is very tactile, and involves playing

with materials and building models. Is there anything that's particularly crucial or effective about that process? About the tactile playing?

MH: Yes, of course. I happened to see a television program broadcast last night about Galileo's telescope and astronomy. There was a perception in Copernicus's time that all the objects floating above our heads in the atmosphere were smooth solids; they were perfect pieces of geometry. When Galileo first looked at the moon and discovered its pock-marked and irregular surface, it was a surprise. Today's architecture seems, to me, to be of the non pock-marked variety. This is particularly uninteresting to me. All of these smooth surfaces [stands up and walks across the room] made out of glass and sheet rock are perfectly beautiful if the architect wishes to be pristine or a reductionist [walks back]. But, if you happen to go to a stone quarry and see this in a trash pile [places stone on table], a person like me goes, what's that? Then, after the initial surprise, you find out that it's really a trace fossil from twenty-five million years ago. I think, why shouldn't this be a building material? It's a fine piece of stone. Normally the fabricator would cut the fossil off, throw it aside, and use this [pats smooth side of stone] uniform part as the building material.

BH: Yeah.

MH: I think people are attracted to materials like this—just as you were.

BH: Yeah.

MH: If I picked this uniform stone up and showed you this part, it's drab [drops stone on table]. I believe people, intuitively, look at materials. They may not understand what they're looking at, but it generates interest. This has to do with my notion that materials are a means to get people involved with architecture. Highly polished surfaces are going to be reflective, and can push the viewer away; in some instances, that is desirable. If I want to invite people in, get them engaged, materials can do that. If you practice architecture long enough, an understanding of how to make buildings inviting or forbidding is developed. Getting the public involved in architecture through materials is a much different approach than saying, well, they should appreciate this form, or they should be impressed with the height of this, or they should admire the expense of that. Materials get people involved with architecture more directly.

BH: At the time you were studying at Pratt, it was an art school, and New York had a vibrant and diverse contemporary art scene. How did the architecture program engage that?

MH: In those days, a student could take courses in any program given at Pratt. To take drawing with Philip Pearlstein or Gabriel Laderman instead of the architectural drawing instructor was possible. I remember taking Gabriel Laderman's painting class—actually I'm going to visit the National Academy this afternoon because there's a retrospective of his work that I want to see—I remember one assignment; look out the window and paint what you see. I did this. I was direct. The first thing Laderman did when he came over to see my work was to say, "Are you color blind?" [laughs] I looked out the window again; there was a row of brick structures and a couple of trees, so I painted the 'red' brick and the 'green' trees. I couldn't figure out what he was saying. During the course of the semester, I got what he was suggesting about the variation of color in every object. Being in an art school, I would be challenged by instructors that were not part of my academic program. This was great. The courses in philosophy were taught by instructors from the general programs, and some of the mathematics courses were taught in the engineering school instead of in the architecture school. I look back on that and find it to be a good education model. Today in many architecture schools everything is geared to architecture alone. Architects teach you how to draw. I'm not sure learning how to draw as an architect is what you should be doing when you start. Students should learn how to draw, period. Then they can figure out how to illustrate architecture. It was a rewarding experience, and that crossover allowed me to bump into other students, other instructors; it was exciting and made a difference.

BH: Did you approach your study of architecture already interested in materials? Or was that something that developed?

MH: No. I didn't; they didn't teach materials, and I didn't realize their importance. They had a course called 'strength of materials'; statics. They didn't really have a course about the nature of materials; I believe that's changing because in this era where sustainability has come to the fore, materials are incredibly important. There's a new emphasis on how to make buildings. I just read a curriculum statement for a change of direction at one American university teaching architecture. It begins to focus on how to build. This is exciting, because there are a lot of schools that are based on theory only. Some schools never adopted that model, but the models that they did adopt didn't necessarily have at the core the notion that buildings are constructed from materials. Students can never start to learn about materials too soon. It takes a long time to appreciate this knowledge; it's taken me a lifetime to accumulate what I know [laughs]. So I wish at school they'd told me that I needed to pay attention to this subject.

BH: In *A Material Life*, you discuss what you refer to as a "pilgrimage" to Texas for your new firm and that caught my attention. What do you think the firm as a whole got out of that?

MH: Earlier I said drawing is about observing. When we started our new practice about five years ago, we had a modicum of success; we had to hire new people to join us. The dozen of us that had been working together knew all the areas of interest in the practice, and one of them is materials. The new people didn't have a clue about materials. Many were young and just out of school. Because they'd been trained at school or another office, they were concerned more about the edge and the end of the piece of sheetrock, or how it met the next piece of sheetrock. What the material itself was and what it could do for a building was new territory for these folks. In our office environment, I can talk to staff, I can work with them, but materials need to be experienced to be understood. By taking everyone to Texas, closing the office and going to see half a dozen of our buildings and a dozen other pieces of architecture, we could stand in buildings, talk about what we had accomplished, and discuss the materials in addition to the spaces, forms, and other concerns. It allowed the new people to get a sense of what the office discussions were about, because we could actually be in a place and discuss the physical results. We also went to see other architects' work; in Lubbock, an architect [Robert Bruno] decided twenty-five years prior to our visit to make an entirely welded steel house, sort of a three-dimensional Richard Serra for living. For the longest time it had no windows, but by the time we got there it was enclosed and almost livable. We went to see people who had other notions about materials and how to use them. It was extraordinarily helpful, because architecture is really about examining the buildings you've made, or the structure somebody else has made, and gaining knowledge. It was a very, very good experience. Because it was a multi-day trip, there were formal gatherings that happened, but there were also a lot of informal discussions and conversations—getting between places and over meals—opportunities to discuss topics in an environment outside the office. It was very helpful.

BH: Do you still send employees out to look at things, out on trips?

MH: Oh, all the time. We recently had a little tour of three projects in the Hudson River Valley; we're planning one through Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware. We think it's very important to do this. We show pictures in the office all the time. Some of us more than others get to go to projects. We always want to tell everybody else what's going on. They can all see projects being drawn, and they sort of know what's going on, but these presentations aren't informative enough. Seeing the finished project is important.

BH: What prompted you to start writing? I think we touched on this a little bit earlier.

MH: I realized that my thinking about architecture wasn't exactly the same as everyone else's. At some point I got drained of the strength to repeat myself. There would be confusion about the stone buildings the office made. Someone might inquire, "Is this an old building that you're renovating?" and I'd say, "No, we just made that." "You made that? How did you get stones that big?" I was prompted to write about stone because it's a readily available material. There's a lot of it. It can be found in every part of the country and all around the world. At that time something totally bizarre was happening in the construction industry because of the global economy. It was less expensive to buy Brazilian stone, have it cut in Italy and installed in America than to move a block in your state onto the building site. To write that there was another way to use stone, and that it could be less expensive than the popular method, was important. At that time stone was being marketed by the people in the stone business as a very thin material. It was all that architects knew about. It was as if we had forgotten history in some way. I needed to do something about stone. Having written about stone, I said I'd never write anything about another material. And then I became 'Mr. Stone.' The stone industry adopted me. Would I do a lecture in every province in Canada? [laughs]. There were a lot of other materials I had an interest in using. I like metal, wood, all sorts of synthetic materials. That's what prompted the second book about the other materials. I think I'm done writing about materials. I just hope that there's a big enough audience that understands my presentation, because too much architecture is bland. Too much architecture is about beautiful forms and beautiful spaces, but when you get up close to them there's nothing appealing. In fact, some buildings repel you when approaching them.

BH: Who was the intended audience?

MH: My fellow professionals. I was expecting that my peers would get something from this effort. My intention is that architecture should be more engaging. As it gets more difficult to practice architecture, it doesn't mean that it should be any less engaging than it was three centuries ago. There's absolutely no reason the public can't be invited in unusual ways to participate in architecture.

BH: Do you see your books fitting into a particular genre of architectural writing?

MH: No. I wasn't an English major in college. I was an architectural major, so I have never thought writing was my forte. The writing that I've done has been anecdotal. Although I've written small pieces about other architects' works, and I've thought about writing longer ones, I understand the energy and research that it takes to prepare a book and that's a profession unto itself. So I'm not sure what I may write about next, although the publisher I have been working

with is happy to publish almost anything we produce. In fact, the next book is there. It's about theaters. It's a second volume of a book about theaters we did ten years ago. That's a very specific type of book, and it didn't require a lot of writing.

BH: Either as a student or now, have you been inspired by any particular architectural texts? Either when it comes to your designs or when it comes to your writing?

MH: Sure, I'm inspired by unusual writers, usually not architectural texts. I'm delighted that in the last two months there've been a lot of reviews of Flannery O'Connor's work. Flannery O'Connor is a special writer, and the fact that someone has written a biography about her again I find very intriguing. I haven't read the book yet, but I will. She is a writer who's a religious person at heart but writes about religion in ways that are totally unexpected, wildly outrageous and amusing. It was wonderful to have been interviewed for a project in her home town, Milledgeville, Georgia. I was probably the only architect who came to the interview and suggested that if I acted like Hazel Motes, I probably wouldn't be selected for the project. The president of the local university heard me say this [laughs] and she knew exactly who Hazel Motes was, but nobody else did. There are writers that I find very absorbing. Melville's stuff is great. The short stories are fantastic. I read different things with my kids, such as *Bartleby, the Scrivener*.

BH: Right.

MH: *Bartleby* suggested he would 'prefer' not to do something [laughs]; this remains with you because of how it's been written, and the writing is just so nice to read that it's a pleasure. The writing I find inspirational is not about architecture. Writing about architecture is too often uninformative and dull. Usually someone's proselytizing for something; in fact, my two books are. They're suggesting that people are overlooking something. An author is trying to give you a pitch, and usually it's the other things that are inspiring and cause you to think slightly differently. Not being a trained writer, I'm not clever enough to write a book that would inspire people to use materials, so I tell them anecdotal stories instead and why it might be good for them. I could never be as clever about architecture as Flannery O'Connor is about religion. I wish I were. But that's not my forte.

BH: Off the top of my head I can't think of anything I've read related to architecture that does do that. Maybe architecture doesn't even lend itself to that.

MH: No. It doesn't. But it should. I wonder why people can't do that. I find lots of architects who

aren't with us anymore inspiring. Hawksmoor is interesting to me. I haven't spent enough time looking at the buildings that are solely attributed to him—there are only six. They're just fantastic. They were built three hundred years ago, and there are aspects of them that are modern, it's startling. Von Klenze, the Munich architect, did the art gallery for the first Ludwig, and his art gallery is a very modern idea. It's three bars, smashed together to make a multi-level art gallery. Because it's in classical garb, nobody writes about this building today. Nobody writes about how it even relates to the obsession of making bar buildings for the last twenty years. He also did things that were opulent, which is why he did the last addition to the Hermitage. And because of style, people don't write about buildings in an involving way. Authors would need to get past the descriptions of what they're about and get to what's underneath them. That's the difficult part. I can see things, I can understand things, and I can benefit from looking at them, but I can't quite write about them [laughs]. One of my favorite Scottish architects combines forms in ways that are exceptional. He would ram, not necessarily ram—he would do it much more gently—three or four building elements together. A Greek temple, a campanili that was inspired by something from the Middle East, and a cyclopean base, and it would be a magical composition. How this individual was capable of doing this was startling.

BH: Who was that?

MH: Alexander Thomson. Although Sir John Summerson once declared, “there is something wildly American about Thomson,” it was Henry-Russell Hitchcock that indicated Thomson had made “three of the finest Romantic Classical churches in the world.” He did astonishing buildings. The three churches Thomson made have really not been written about fully. Writers provide a sense of his place in the history of architecture and style but not much more. Recently there was a book published about him, just like the one that appeared before that, maybe twenty or thirty years ago, that's just pretty dull [laughs]. It tells you what everyone generally knows, but it doesn't tell you what's really important about the architecture. Writing about the essence of architecture is very, very difficult.

BH: It is. Is there anything that you feel that you ought to add to?

MH: Tell me what your objective is in all this and then maybe I can assist in some way.

BH: I ended up skipping certain questions because your answers touched upon a lot of things I wanted to ask about. My questions did involve material, and craft, and tactility to some extent, how involved you are in the design process—you're very involved in what seems like every

aspect.

MH: Yes, that's the only way.

BH: We've discussed craft and design through the last sixty to seventy years in the United States. If I look at it from that point of view, is there anything about practicing in the United States that affects the way your practice?

MH: Oh, absolutely. Everything. Everything about the way I practice is American. America and what happens here is much different than what happens in Japan, Europe, or a lot of other places. If you practice in this era, the ability to have what used to be called craftsmanship is difficult to achieve. You need to look for it in new ways, and the more the practice of architecture becomes uniform and global through the uses of a device like this [indicates laptop] there seems to be less need, less concern, less knowledge about how to do something that still requires skill in execution. A well-designed building, when times are crude, is hard to achieve. We make buildings today to be built crudely, not with sophistication. Although the cost of construction keeps going up, though we're in a lull right now, people's expectations, because they're spending a lot of money for a building, do not necessarily coincide with the level of excellence they may receive. Fifty years ago I could get this and the craft would be that, but today you're lucky if a mason has ever handled a piece of stone. Does it look like stone when they're done with it, or does it look like concrete blocks? That is a concern. With new materials, there's the need to include those in special ways, so that they can be put together in new ways. It's a dilemma. But it's a dilemma that the profession faces, and there's the hope that it's being addressed.

BH: I think that's a good note to end on. Thank you.

[End of the interview]

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