

1. Modern Talk: NW Mid-century Architects (a project of Docomomo WEWA)
2. Interview with Wendell Lovett
3. Interviewer: Alan Michelson
4. 1.26.09

TRACK 1

5. Alan: OK Wendell, I'd like to first ask you about your early, early life. Your formative years. What buildings do you remember from your childhood growing up in Seattle?
6. Wendell: Buildings?
7. Alan: Buildings that may have been in the neighborhood? Things that you saw that were being built.
8. Wendell: Well, in my early childhood I, I wasn't really into buildings.
9. Alan: Yeah.
10. Wendell: I was more interested in things that moved. I loved airplanes, of course, autos, dirigibles, they came along a little later, ships. These were the things that I drew from at age two, or three or four. Somewhere in there. That impressed me I guess. It wasn't architecture.
11. Alan: You had experiences where your father took you to Boeing field.
12. Wendell: Oh yes.
13. Alan: Looked at airplanes.
14. Wendell: Yes, yes, I fell in love with airplanes and the whole atmosphere down there and so naturally I would draw those things and then strangely it was my mother who liked to visit along with me the ships in the harbor during Fleet Week which was, I don't know whether that was an annual thing or semi-annual or whatever, but we always visited two or three of the ships and I still have pretty vivid memories of the decks and the way the planking was joined and the black asphaltic material between these big teak planks. And, oh, just the feel of the whole thing with the round cornered doors and the step-over. And of course, that's been reinforced in my mind by trips as an adult to various exotic places where ships were involved.
15. Alan: It sounds like you noticed details, the details of architecture or of how things were put together early on.
16. Wendell: Details.

17. Alan: Yeah, you noticed a lot about the ship's construction, that kind of thing.
18. Wendell: I think maybe a bit of that love of detailing has come from some of those early experiences.
19. Alan: OK. They asked me to introduce myself and introduce you. So, this is an interview, my name's Alan Michelson. I'm the architecture librarian over at the University of Washington and today is the 26th of January 2009 and I'm interviewing the architect Wendell Lovett.
20. Alan: In high school, what classes did you like the best and the least?
21. Wendell: (laughter) Well, in school, my favorite classes had to do with art and science. Primarily art I think, but I also enjoyed the science classes where they reveal. Sometimes there would be a bird in a cage, of course, and I remember even one science teacher who allowed me and my mother to take a bird home during vacation and let it fly in the house and land on the finger and back in the cage and oh, I was probably eight to ten years old at that time. But the art classes that I had were always a joy to attend and be involved in and I would occasionally do things. I don't know how I started this, but doing cut-outs of figures or silhouettes, looking at this black on plain cloth reminds of some of that kind of work that I did. Apparently, the teachers were surprised by it, so much so, that they put a lot of it up in the classrooms and oh, I remember being interviewed about that once when I was probably seven or eight years old by the teacher.
22. Alan: Your father operated his father's roofing company. Your father operated his father's roofing company.
23. Wendell: Yes.
24. Alan: How did he ...
25. Wendell: He started that way and then he took it over. But it was, you know, a miserable line of work. He really got sort of trapped into it and his father was really more interested in the coatings and the formulation and the making of them which was much more sensible. But my dad was kind of the lackey they used to do the dirty work and I sort of fault my grandfather for doing this to him and sort of leaving him in this position. And that's what he pursued for a livelihood of sorts. Very, very hard work. I helped my dad quite a bit in the business, all the time shaking my head, there's no way I'm going to be doing this kind of thing. And my dad wasn't trying to encourage me to do it either. He knew there was something better on the horizon if possible.
26. Alan: That brings up the next question: how did he or your mother influence you to become an architect?

27. Wendell: Well, perhaps encouraging the drawing. I like doing [it] anyway from two years old on. And, we, when I was about five, we moved from a house in Ballard to a house, well it was kind of between the University District and Woodland Park and a much better place to live and I had a bicycle and a good friend or two to ride with and we explored the U campus pretty thoroughly as well as Woodland Park and even up in the area of the zoo and I'm not sure that had a lot to do with architecture, but it's sort of life in general, I suppose.
28. Alan: But the, your mother's influence, in terms of the drawing, the art, the interest in, fostering your interest in art probably.
29. Wendell: Yeah, I drew things that I was fascinated by and they were almost always ships, boats, cars, things that were mechanical in nature, airplanes of course. And my parents did, you know, I think I constantly bugged them about going to Boeing Field on a Saturday or Sunday or whenever and I was really fascinated by the airplanes. I loved to draw them and to see them and see how they work and I built little models, I built very small kinds that were sort of carved out of balsa and glued together and...
30. Alan: In eighth grade you, your class visited the University of Washington School of Architecture. Do you remember that at all?
31. Wendell: Yes, that was in junior, it was in junior high school, Alexander Hamilton and, just happened to have an instructor who had, I think he must have had attended or entered the architecture program at least briefly. I thought it was odd that he seemed to know so much about it and about the encouraging of freehand drawing and such and to not stick with it and have a degree, probably if he had though, he wouldn't have become a teacher in a junior high school and I was the beneficiary in a way of having someone who was almost out of place there. But it was ideal from my point of view and there were two or three others in the room. I remember Colin McClennan and oh, I can't remember the other names, but I remember Colin and I were both in the same classes at Washington when we finally got there. It was a reunion so to speak.
32. Alan: What, so this experience when you were in junior high probably influenced you to go to UW, were there other reasons that you went there?
33. Wendell: Yes, I'm not sure, I would have gone to, start that over, I would have gone to the UW probably regardless of what program I went in to, but influences that took me into architecture were this interest, general interest in art and enjoying drawing, painting, I took some additional art classes in high school as electives there also because I knew that I was headed that way and would be involved more and more in that sort of thing.

34. Alan: Who were some of your classmates? You mentioned one person from junior high that you went to UW, but who were some of your classmates and how would you characterize them?
35. Wendell: Those in the university...
36. Alan: In the department of architecture.
37. Wendell: Well, they were a pretty varied lot, but I think that we all had interest in drawing buildings, maybe in sculpture, things of that kind and maybe engineering in some cases. One of my best friends at the university happened to be a student by the name of Kolb. I sat next to Keith Kolb, oh for at least a year or more. Our, we were arranged alphabetically in the classroom and K and L were right together and Keith and I became good friends and we often walked together up to the upper classroom for lunch and we were in different fraternities, but they were quite close together so we got to know each other very, very well. Keith was from Bozeman, Montana originally and had some, I think it was after graduation that he had some contact there with Richard Neutra and got to know him quite well. Neutra taught for a while at Bozeman, too. But anyway Keith and I were off and on together and walked together almost daily up to upper campus discussing architecture.

TRACK 2

38. Wendell: Bob Price was in my design classes for a year or two at Washington and then he enrolled at MIT so we were in the same learning situation, there with Aalto for a while. But [Price] went back to Washington, the, very, very good architect in Spokane...
39. Alan: That's OK, we can move on, we'll come up with something else.
39. Wendell: Well, Bruce Walker was one, I'm trying to think.
40. Alan: Kenneth Brooks? Was that Kenneth Brooks?
41. Wendell: Do you know Bruce?
42. Alan: I'm sorry?
43. Wendell: Bruce Walker?
44. Alan: Bruce Walker, OK. I've heard of him.
45. Wendell: And the other one doesn't come to me.
46. Alan: OK.

47. Wendell: His father was an architect also.
48. Alan: Um-hmm. What role did your UW professor Lionel Pries have in your education?
49. Wendell: Well, Pries was certainly the dominant professor in the school I think in terms of design and also the ability to demonstrate the techniques in drawing, watercolor. Pries was certainly an artist, architect and very influential in the school. I almost thought he was such an overpowering personality it was hard to, I enjoyed working with him, but I felt often times that I was being led too much. In ways, I had the feeling I wanted to distance myself a little bit or take a quarter off and then come back or something because he was such an influence and he was the only person in the school who both taught classes and invited students into his home which was wonderful. And he lived just north of the campus about a block and so it was possible to walk up there. I'm sure he, well I'm not sure, I think some of the time he did that, made that walk himself down to school and home, but later when I was there he acquired a, one of the first, what was it called, US sports cars, anyway Pries had it and I particularly remember that it had a folding top and the passenger seat, there was a hand bar, very sculpted that came out and around. It was a Corvette, that was it. And Lionel Pries always took his umbrella to school, no matter what and in his car always stood the umbrella in his new car (laughter).
50. Alan: One thing I've read about Pries is that he encouraged students to look at a wide range of influences.
51. Wendell: Yes.
52. Alan: From, not just European, but around the world. Did he do that with you?
53. Wendell: Yes, I believe that's true. He was, in my case, he was a little, I think I told him once in my last year or so that I was thinking of applying to MIT for a Masters degree and I also mentioned Harvard and he seemed to be, I got a feeling of reluctance to encourage my going to MIT, but I believed he saw it as the nuts and bolts kind of materials and methods sort of a place. It was especially, with Alvar Aalto there, it was anything but that. And that's, he was the main reason I chose to go to MIT, rather than Harvard which for years had Gropius as the principal instructor for graduates. I was much more interested in. I was much more interested in, I would have been more interested in Harvard if Breuer, Marcel Breuer had continued to teach there, but his tenure was pretty brief and he was, I think, too busy with his practice to spend much time, so I occasionally went up to, it's about two miles, took the trolley from MIT up to Harvard Square and went to the architecture building to attend crits which was quite interesting and picked up the Gropius point of view.

54. Alan: In the 1940s when you were at UW, they still had a Beaux Arts system of education.
55. Wendell: Oh yes.
56. Alan: How did you find modernism in that type of environment?
57. Wendell: Library.
58. Alan: Library?
59. Wendell: Oh yes. I discovered Le Corbusier, his complete works, well they were in the first, second volume. I think UW library had the first two volumes and then others came after that and I began through Wittenborn in New York, I got their art and architecture booklist and I would order my own copies. I was really hooked on Corb. I called him Corbu at that time and there were a lot of others. Not too many I think at Washington, but there were a couple of others at MIT that tended that way.
60. Alan: Before I get into MIT, I just wanted to ask you one more question about your time after undergraduate school. Did your time in the army during WWII, affect you, change you at all?
61. Wendell: Did it influence me or change me?
62. Alan: Yeah.
63. Wendell: Oh not in any kind of sinister way. I think, it was definitely a long experience. I spent most of my times in the States, mostly in Texas. And I don't think I learned much about architecture in the camps down there, but it did introduce me to the big cities that were fairly near and I would head to Dallas just about every weekend if I could possibly get away and of course I was interested in young ladies at that time almost as much as architecture and I found a very nice lady to dance with I think about the first time I went to one of these, UFO comes to mind, but it was the USO get-together and her name was Fanny Snow and Fanny later moved to Denton to attend the Texas State Teachers College. So I made longer trips to Denton then for a while. This is getting way off the architecture thing, but, it did get me up into, we walked and we took trolleys and things around the hills around Dallas and the small town of Denton and there was still some architecture to be reckoned with there.

TRACK 3

64. Alan: We talked before once and you mentioned that you were stationed in southern California.

65. Wendell: Oh yes.

66. Alan: Did you explore Los Angeles?

67. Wendell: Yes.

68. Alan: And did you see any architecture that made any impression there?

69. Wendell: Oh yes, there were some things. I'm trying to get things straight in my mind now. I signed up when I entered the university, I signed up for an army specialized training program. And I was involved in that and that set me off to southern California and to Pasadena Junior College for really basically engineering classes, but the buildings on that campus were kind of Southern Cal, kind of a cross between things influenced strongly by Mexico, Mexican architecture and the southwest. But I enjoyed being stationed there and learning in those buildings. And just being in that milieu for a while.

70. Alan: When you were down there did you see any buildings by Richard Neutra or?

71. Wendell: At that time I didn't. I wasn't really that aware of Neutra. I did later on visit a couple of his houses there. How was that? I came back later, at a later time

TRACK 4

72. Alan: Let's move on to your time at MIT. You mentioned that you selected MIT because of Alvar Aalto.

73. Wendell: Oh yes.

74. Alan: Who were your main instructors there at MIT?

75. Wendell: Well, Ralph Rapson and Aalto and to some extent Lawrence.

76. Alan: Anderson? Lawrence Anderson?

77. Wendell: Yes. Aalto was not much inclined to give desk crits. He was best in, and I wouldn't say he was a lecturer. He was the kind of guy that opened up if we could have taken him into a bar or tavern and sat around a table, there, it would have been preferable to doing it in the classroom. Even in the classroom without anything to drink he was at his prime.

78. Alan: I've read that he did some critiques of your work that were pretty critical. Is that true?

79. Wendell: Well, there was one when we first arrived at MIT, Aalto wasn't there and the first two weeks we did some projects or a, I remember, there was a business superbloc project that was written by, not Anderson, but Beckwith I think, Anderson's partner and it was supposed to be in downtown, no, it could have been anywhere. I happened to choose, unfortunately for me, the heart of Boston, right next to the Commons, the big park which is sacrosanct in Boston. You don't want to do anything to that and I did, not much, but introduced a road in part of it and I was planning on this, I mean, you know, it was a big sketch problem, what the hell, a huge skyscraper right next to the...and of course, to a Bostonian, bhewwww, you can't do that. You crazy man?

80. Alan: So that didn't go over too well, doesn't sound like.

81. Wendell: No.

82. Alan: So you graduated from MIT in 1948 and you came back to Seattle. What was your role in the Seattle architecture firm of Bassetti and Morse?

TRACK 5

83. Wendell: Bassetti and Morse, Bassetti and Morse, yes I was a draftsman. But I also got into doing a bit of design work. Bassetti and Morse, they got a lot of work and they work pretty much independently. Jack had his own thing and did it and I wasn't very much enamored by what he did. I tried to do some working drawings for a very simple house that he had designed and I tried to improve the house, but mostly I worked for Bassetti and he gave me pretty much a free hand in design and a good deal of encouragement, but Fred never was a designer. He hired some of the best people around and I give Fred a lot of credit for finding these people and giving them a chance to do some good buildings.

84. Alan: What led you to teach at the University of Washington?

85. Wendell: What did I teach?

86. Alan: What led you to teach there? How did you become a professor at the University of Washington?

87. Wendell: Oh, well, when I came back from MIT I got a phone call from Arthur P. Hermann who was head of the school and he said, 'Will you have lunch with me downtown at a certain restaurant?' And I said, 'Sure. I'd be delighted,' and he proposed that I join the faculty as an assistant professor and gave me an idea of what the salary would be and I said I'd very much like to do that.

88. Alan: How did teaching architecture affect your architectural practice?

89. Wendell: Well, in a negative way it meant I would have less time to engage in practice, but I think the positive was that it would give me the chance to work with students and to philosophize and be more free to do what I wanted to do. Work with clients on some projects, to not take everything that came along and that was a big plus and I think mixing the two was very positive and I always, frankly, I enjoyed the instructors in the school who were also engaged in practice. I thought I got something more from them because of the real world experience than I would have or did get from instructors who had no such practice. In fact, I went so far as to convince myself that teaching without having practiced or being involved in practice or design should be a no-no. And one shouldn't do it and schools shouldn't hire people that didn't have experience in the profession.

TRACK 6

90. Alan: Did you feel, at this time, that you were part of a regional movement of architecture in the Pacific Northwest? Did you feel kinship with your colleagues in Seattle?

91. Wendell: Yes and no. I think I probably didn't think much of most of the work. At the time I was a student, there weren't many architects in the Northwest who impressed me. I think probably the only one that did occasionally was Paul Thiry, I said, occasionally.

92. Alan: In the 50s, what affinity did you feel with the Italian and Scandinavian designers?

93. Wendell: I became fascinated with the, I spent a lot of time in the library at UW, and I dug around and got into a set of volumes of Domus, published in Italy and also various Scandinavian architects. Somehow, I think I mentioned Wittenborn a few minutes ago, and I got a list of publications from them from New York. They didn't have at that time any representative in Seattle and I would pick and choose things and order. I got several volumes of, well a couple anyway, of Corbu's work and something on Breuer and Gropius and I can't remember whether BBPR or influences that hit me that early. I know there was another country. Brazil, the work being done by architects in and around Sao Paulo was pretty exceptional. And I got a book or two on work from those people. It was exceptionally influenced by Corbu also.

94. Alan: Oscar Niemeyer and Luis Costa.

95. Wendell: Yes, yes. Niemeyer, yeah.

96. Alan: So you would say then during the 50s your prime influences on your work would be Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, people like that?

97. Wendell: Marcel Breuer.

98. Alan: Breuer.
99. Wendell: Yeah, Mies to some extent though I didn't, Mies, except Mies's early houses I thought were great. I didn't like Illinois, IIT, too damned rigid. But early, early Mies where the roofs on like columns would cantilever, ever so much more exciting and interesting. Full of possibilities.
100. Alan: And in your early houses, the two houses, the house that you did for your family and the house that you did for your parents. They had influences of Mies?
101. Wendell: They were pretty boxy, yeah. Yeah, I suppose that was Mies in a way and the other thing was just building cheap houses and feeling that there must be a way to build with panels and frames and still get something that was visually interesting. And also inexpensive to build. I was struck with the need to do that. I couldn't do anything else really than build a cheap house and so I did a lot of the work myself and inhaled a lot of sawdust and I bought a Shopsmith and set it up in my basement at my parents' house on Queen Anne hill and I made all the kitchen cabinets for that first house, Eileen's and mine on Hilltop in that basement. Even the dados I made by making two saw cuts and using a chisel to, I didn't have a dado thing.
102. Alan: Did you know the house by Charles Eames? That he did for himself?
103. Wendell: Oh yes, yes, yes.
104. Wendell: Charles and Ray Eames' own house was a very strong influence. I was fascinated by Eames and Eames furniture. Had Eames dining chairs and a little table I designed. Sort of Eamesish design, but of course they were the first, I think they were far better designer than George Nelson ever tried to be. But Nelson seemed to get a lot of press along with Eames. But Charles and Ray Eames did great stuff. They didn't do enough of it, but whatever they did was always great.
105. Alan: An early sort of important building I think in your development was the Gervais Reed house?
106. Wendell: Yes.
107. Alan: How did that, I mean, it had demonstrated a different approach.
108. Wendell: How did I get that weird one out?
109. Alan: How did you get that weird one out? That's a good question.

110. Wendell: Well, I kind of have to think myself on how I got off on that one. I had seen some of the work of another hero architect of mine, Ralph Erskine and Erskine was an Englishman who became enamored of work being done in Sweden. Modern Swedish architects. And so he decided he'd go to Sweden and work there for a while and then he went off on his own and he was also very interested in sailing and ships and apparently had enough money to have a ship of his own that he could sail in times of good weather and his work impressed me I think because it had the feeling of working with the setting, with the weather. It had the nautical aura atmosphere about it, too in some cases. And I also liked very much work of the older any older Swedish architects.

111. Alan: Asplund?

112. Wendell: Gunnar Asplund certainly, yes. And oh my memory's giving out.

113. Alan: Sven Markelius?

114. Wendell: Markelius? Yes.

115. Alan: She asked us if we need any sort of break, do you need a break?

116. Wendell: Break?

117. Alan: Yeah, do you need one?

118. Wendell: Yeah, a little.

119. Alan: Take a few minutes I guess.

TRACK 7

120. Wendell: Meetings, I'd often be sitting near Vic Steinbrueck and Vic was so bored most of the time at the faculty meetings that he had to do something and he'd doodle constantly, make little doodle drawings. They were really pretty interesting.

121. Alan: Yeah, well his sketches are great. Really interesting to look at and they kind of have a doodlish quality to them.

122. Wendell: Yeah.

123. Alan: He looked at interesting things. He had a great eye. When I look at his slides, he had just an amazing eye.

124. Wendell: Yeah, he was ahead of his time here and he was a good teacher, too. Are we on?
125. Alan: I don't know, are we on? But that was being taped? OK, you're fine. You can keep talking about Victor Steinbrueck.
126. Wendell: Yeah, Vic had a very fascinating house. Very modern, simple box, boxes were sort of in at that time, but Vic did a story and a half box with an aluminum foil ceiling, crinkled foil that he fastened, tacked, glued, something. Somehow got it to stick to the surface above and good Vic was always kind of tugging at the edges and exploring and experimenting and that made him a good teacher although I didn't have him as a student. But I assume it did. I did have him as a lecturer though. And that was, they were informative and eye-opening and he introduced students and me to CIAM, Congres International d'Architecture Moderne. And it was later that I had the opportunity myself, in fact I was invited, believe it or not, to attend one of those things. And this was through the Gropius connection which was through Bassetti. Things that came to Gropius in the United States were sent to former Gropius students I think. They were spotted around in various larger cities and I saw this, I still remember, I think it was faxed, or I don't think we had fax machines at that time, but anyway, copied onto a blue paper and it mentioned...
127. Alan: It mentioned the upcoming conference that, it mentioned the upcoming CIAM conference?
128. Wendell: Yeah, yeah, yeah.
129. Alan: And then you kind of got interested in attending.
130. Wendell: That's right. And Fred sent the CIAM people the first communication that we had was from [Jacob B.] Bakema and Holland and at that time they were thinking of having team projects and was there any interest in Seattle. Bassetti organized a little team for this project and Fred asked several of us naturally, Jack Morse I think and me. And maybe a couple of others I don't know and that got me on a mailing list and I started getting things from Bakema. And I received finally this invitation, individual invitation to go to the CIAM Congress in Otterlo, Holland.
131. Alan: In what year, what year was that? What year was the CIAM conference?
132. Wendell: '59.
133. Alan: 1959. In 1959 and 1960 you were a Fulbright lecturer at the Technische Hochschule in Stuttgart.

134. Wendell: I went to the CIAM Congress first. It worked out, just gave us time to hop on a train in Rotterdam and zip down to Stuttgart and got me there about a day ahead of time in Stuttgart.

135. Alan: I'm curious, how was the German method of architectural education different from that in the United States?

136. Wendell: How does it differ?

137. Alan: Yes.

TRACK 8

138. Wendell: German education? Oh, well, number of ways. The professors of architecture in Germany, I think it's true in Stuttgart and other German cities that have, have or had schools of architecture, well in Stuttgart it was called a technical institute, Technische Hochschule. Hochschule meant university, not high school. And, well, all the professors were or had been active in the profession unlike in the United States where you could simply be a graduate of schools and practice. That was a must in the German system. And I think probably was a good way to do it.

139. Alan: Can I ask you about Rolf Gutbrod? He was at the Technische Hochschule at that time and you became friends with him.

140. Wendell: Yes.

141. Alan: How did he influence your work?

142. Wendell: Influence my work?

143. Alan: Yes, or did he? Gutbrod.

144. Wendell: I think he was, well, he made me think about what the Germans call "organic architecture." There was a professor...

145. Alan: Scharoun? Hans Scharoun? Hans Scharoun?

146. Wendell: Well, yes and no. Scharoun was certainly very, very well-known and did the symphony hall in Berlin among other things, but there was another name, I don't think anybody ever hardly heard of this guy, but he was sort of the big daddy of the organic school.

147. Alan: Was that Rudolph Steiner? Rudolph Steiner?

148. Wendell: No, well, Steiner to some extent before this guy even. What's that?
149. Alan: I'm not sure, construction outside maybe.
150. Wendell: Bass drum. This fella I'm trying to think of did some buildings in Stuttgart that were called the Sisters I think or the Three Ladies or something like that towers. Very, very interesting and playful. Wonderful balconies that were not just stacked up, but they did different things on different levels and had different shapes. And I did see in Gutbrod's work that kind of breaking out of the stereotypical rigidity involved with Mies for example or American modernism to have that strong influence of Mies and order, order, order, order. So this Stuttgart experience was just a total, not a trashing of that exactly, but just a breath of fresh air. I mean, Gutbrod did the concert hall, the lieder, the liederhalle in Stuttgart and in it were all kinds of concerts, symphony, voice, choral and it was anything but a box. It had some angled hard surfaces and some wavy surfaces and why? It mixes the sound, you don't want to get the same waves. You get too much in some places and not enough sound in others depending on the frequency.
151. Alan: So for Gutbrod, the square form or the rectilinear form wasn't as important as creating a building that responded to the function, the need, and regardless of what form that would take.
152. Wendell: Well, he would almost go out of his way to get away from the rectangle, the boxes and if he got anything close to that he'd bury it.
153. Alan: That seems like it was a pretty strong influence on the addition you made to your house in 1959.
154. Wendell: Yes, it had some influence there certainly.
155. Alan: It's a new direction for you.
156. Wendell: Yes, yes, yeah.
157. Alan: So that trip sounds like it was quite important then.
158. Wendell: Yeah. The house I'm in now is probably influenced by that, too. Loosening and experimenting with curved forms as well as rectangles or flat surfaces and just about anything you do that breaks up all the boxes is good in terms of sound and I think it can be also good visually.
159. Alan: You've said elsewhere that it was only at this time, after your time in Stuttgart that you really began to appreciate Aalto. You got a new appreciation for him at least. Is that true?

160. Wendell: To see Aalto's work, a lot of what I was enjoying in the Gutbrod and some of the other people in Stuttgart. But Aalto got there pretty early and he seemed to, I really don't know for sure for example in his main concert hall in...
161. Alan: Helsinki. Finlandia. Finlandia Hall.
162. Wendell: Finlandia Hall. Yes. I would suspect that Aalto may have seen some of the organic work, but I don't know. Aalto is sort of out there on his own and there was Asplund. He's a big hero of mine. Maybe you've mentioned this.
163. Alan: OK, I've got some general questions at the end here.

TRACK 9

164. Alan: How do a house's spaces and forms affect its occupants?
165. Wendell: How do they?
166. Alan: Affect its occupants?
167. Wendell: (Laughter)
168. Alan: Pretty general question I guess.
169. Wendell: I mean, I would say yes they do, but we'd have to get into the specifics of the forms themselves and the particular arrangement of them to maybe touch on how one is influenced.
170. Alan: It's probably more complex than we have time for.
171. Wendell: Yeah.
172. Alan: Did your approach to siting a house change over the years? Did your approach to siting a house...
173. Wendell: Deciding?
174. Alan: Siting. Putting it, how you placed the building in its natural context. Its environment, its site. Did it change over time? Did you have a different approach to how you...
175. Wendell: Oh, oh, I think in general I took into account much more readily or realized I had to consider context more as time went on and be influenced by it. That sometimes can cause you to emulate or design with forms that you see in a given context or it could lead you to maybe some of the opposite or maybe exactly the opposite. I don't know, but what you start with is always important,

however you choose to deal with it is, too, but I don't think it necessarily means you're going to go in this direction or that direction. At least I don't. I feel I can be loose enough to do what I want anyway. I suppose.

176. Alan: Your work is very interesting because you developed over time ideas about how, planning ideas about your "stop and go" spaces and you built up ideas about how that should happen. But each commission was very different and you derived a great deal of inspiration from the clients themselves.
177. Wendell: Yes, yes. Well, that's got to be there and some cases, some clients are explicit or tend that way in the program that they give you or just the feelings that you get from them as you go through the process. You just kind of have to be a judge yourself of how you're going to respond to their demands, if they're not demands, just suggestions, or you know...
178. Alan: It's a give and take process.
179. Wendell: Yeah, sure. You show them things and you wait for a reaction, you build models and you will see things a little better and usually by that time you've got them pretty well sold on what's going to happen and, but tweaks and changes are made and come about even as they do as the building is being built sometimes. And you say, oh, the building's going to be like that?!
180. Alan: You often showed clients previous houses of yours.
181. Wendell: Yeah.
182. Alan: Did you go out with them to sort of explain the buildings to them? So you didn't just give them an address and say...
183. Wendell: No.
184. Alan: You'd go and try to teach them the...
185. Wendell: Ninety percent of the time anyway I would, yeah. I'd want to be with them. I might, yeah.
186. Alan: You're sort of teaching them how you go about planning.
187. Wendell: Yeah.
188. Alan: Some architects simply give people addresses and say, see it yourself. But in your case you wanted to guide them it sounds like.
189. Wendell: I suppose it doesn't amount to kind of teaching, but that suggests maybe too much that you're, they have inferior intellect or ideas or something, so,

but certainly you want to expose them to things that you value or things you like to do or have done and get feedback from them regarding these things or places and most clients are more than happy to take little field trips and go see things that you've done. Most of them probably come to you because they have seen some things or perhaps sometimes just newspaper, Sunday supplements, real estate page or something.

190. Alan: One of the most interesting things about your work I think is how you derived inspiration from gesture and hand motions and things of that kind. How you felt that was important to creating a solution to a problem. Is that true?
191. Wendell: Well, somewhere along the line I realized that that's what buildings do. We respond or we don't respond, but we're influenced more or less by what the building tells us, how it gestures about itself and about the spaces that we're entering or going in to and I spent a lot of time with students and over the years teaching. I didn't always teach at the last levels of design, but a lot of times they wanted me to teach basic design and beginners and I started to think about, especially with beginners getting them to have an idea about what forms mean. They're opened or closed, they're inviting, they're stand-offish and you can, I used to have students, one project I gave them was to maximize spatial experience. Do something that maximizes this experience you're going to have between these things. I gave them, well usually, a toilet paper roll thing, that would be a cylinder, a tall, boxy shape or two, maybe a couple more freer form and say, OK, take these forms, two exercises: the first one you're going to try to maximize spatial experience. Just imagine you're going to walk in among these things and then the second time we're going to try to minimize spatial experience. Just do the dumbest most boring, ordinary, uninspired thing you can, you know, and they go, what?! But it was fun. And I think they, we all learned something from this.
192. Alan: One of the most interesting spaces that recur in your work is the cave.
193. Wendell: Oh yeah.
194. Alan: And it's often seen as a small, enclosed space often with a rounded wall.
195. Wendell: Yeah.
196. Alan: And it's seen in contrast to a living space where it is more open and transparent. Can you discuss a little about that contrast? I mean, that to me seems like a quintessential element of your work.
197. Wendell: I have to confess that one of the first times I started thinking about caves was way back when Charles and Ray Eames did their wonderful house in north...

198. Alan: Santa Monica. Santa Monica.
199. Wendell: Near the seacoast.
200. Alan: Pacific Palisades. That's right.
201. Wendell: They were kind of back behind the hill, they didn't look at the water. They probably picked a cheap site to build this sort of a factory inspired structure of theirs, this house, but in this I think it was the north end of the main space that they created, they had a cave-like space that had a lower ceiling, there was a bedroom on a balcony above it I believe, and but it had seating on probably two sides and I think they sort of angled towards each other in my mind. They created a dead end space and dead end spaces are caves by definition and they should, I mean it was soft seating and maybe books around. They're attractive, they draw you in and give you a nice place to rest and a sense of protection and your back side, nobody's looking at you, nobody's going to run into you, none of these things and the exact opposite of this is it's a curious one, but another kind of stop space is an island. I think about the San Juans, you can look out over there and you see an island and you go out there and you get on it and you'd be the only one there and it's, I thought well, it's kind of like putting a carpet on the floor. If you have a bare floor in whatever material and you put a circular carpet, will people tend to go there and stay for a while? Give them a couple of chairs or a lamp or a few pieces of furniture and they'll be drawn to that kind of a space. It won't be a cave at all, but that's another kind of a stop space.

DISC 2 TRACK 1

202. Alan: Now we were talking about stop spaces and you were talking about the metaphor of an island.
203. Wendell: Stop and go.
204. Alan: San Juan Island and that sort of thing.
205. Wendell: Yeah.
206. Alan: Can I, one thing as you were talking struck me as very interesting about, you saw the Eames house, that cave in the Eames house.
- 207.
208. Wendell: Yeah.
- 209.
210. Alan: Did you actually see it physically, were you down there or did you see it in magazines?

211. Wendell: I just saw it in photographs. I didn't visit it actually. You know I almost wonder if I did because I think through the photographs I know that space so well, it's almost like I really had been there when I see it.
- 212.
213. Alan: Very strong impact, strong influence.
214. Wendell: Yeah, yeah.
215. Alan: Amazing. As your career went on you got commissions for larger houses. Was the experience of planning a large house different in any measurable way to some of the smaller houses you did early in your career? Was it a different design experience for you?
216. Wendell: Well, I think that's a good question. I'm not, I'm going to ramble around on the answer for it I think. It was certainly a change. The first large house I did really started to be, for me a large house, but in terms of the final product, it was a small house. I'm speaking of Simonyi's first house. But the work was fun to do and Charles was a good client. He gave me several sheets of, you know programmatic stuff that he wanted to accomplish or signs of spaces he wanted and it was important to me to do a good a job as I could possibly do because I knew I had a sharp guy there and also the possibility of it leading to further work was real, but he was, he was at times quite difficult and at other times quite delightful. So it was kind of between the devil and the deep blue sea on that one, but...
217. Alan: Looking back at your career do you have any houses that hold special place for you in your development? Are there certain turning points that you see that certain houses were, you know as you can see your whole career now?
218. Wendell: Do I see a turning point?
219. Alan: Well, do you see any houses, I guess what I'm asking, are there certain houses that you have a special fondness for because they seem to be most fulfilling creatively?
220. Wendell: I suppose there have been some, it would be hard to think which ones. I don't know, I'm just very happy that I have had a pretty rich variety of experiences in terms of size, complexity, setting, cost, over the years, generally going from simple and cheap, to complex and expensive. But the last house, the Cutler and Girdler, prior to that it was Simonyi, those two stretched me out a bit I think and I feel pretty happy with those as kind of concluding works. I have done recently one more and this is a fairly modest sized house [Jack Johnson House] that I feel quite good about that's out near Seahurst for a bachelor engineer that designed the SST, the one they didn't build. And he was pretty open-minded, but had kind of a closed-minded budget. I had my fingers crossed, but he's kind of getting to realize now and the last time I was there, I was really impressed. I liked

my own work pretty well. And he had, he had pretty well stuck to the drawings and a few little changes, but not serious and so I'm pleased with that and I'd kind of written it off for a while because it took so long to get it done.

221. Alan: One question, I kind of may be wrapping up here, your career, you did mostly houses. Are there other building types that you wish you had been able to design or are there things that you, do you think the house holds a special place in the world of architecture?

222. Wendell: Well, doing, having a career built on doing houses certainly wasn't, wouldn't give one the income that you'd get doing just about any other building, if you did enough of them, but I just derived a great deal of satisfaction from doing good houses and occasionally the owners of them invite me to come back. And that's especially nice. You know, if they're going to talk about how nice the house has been for them, then I like to go. If they're going to tell me this is wearing out and you know, it's not quite as much fun, but.

223. Alan: Yeah. Well, but it must be satisfying to see how your work has helped people to lead better lives.

224. Wendell: Yeah, there is that.

225. Alan: So.

226. Wendell: Yeah.

227. Alan: So I think that's all the questions I have. This has been wonderful and I really appreciate you taking the time to answer them so fully.

228. Wendell: It's been kind of fun to stir up the cobwebs a little bit and see if I can remember anything.

229. Alan: Well, you did that very well. Some really interesting insights I think.

230. Wendell: Yeah. I hope it's something useful. Yeah, well I think it is.

231. Alan: Great, I thought you were great.