

1. Modern Talk: NW Mid-Century Modern Architects Oral History Project
2. Fred Bassetti interview

3. Track 1

4. Fred Bassetti
5. Eugenia Woo
6. Eugenia: Today is Wednesday, January 30th, 2008 and we're here with Mr. Fred Bassetti, architect. The interviewer is Eugenia Woo from Docomomo WEWA, and we're at Jack Straw Studios in Seattle. Mr. Bassetti, thank you so much for taking the time today to talk with us.
7. Fred: Not at all, glad to do so. (soft laughter)
8. Eugenia: I was wondering, can you tell me a bit about what led you to study architecture? Did you have family members or mentors that led you to that?
9. Fred: No, unlike so many things in life, it was an accident. I had enrolled at the University of Washington in engineering. This is way back in the 30s last year, right in the middle of the depression—1936. It had never occurred to me to do architecture; I had always thought I'd be an engineer. And so I enrolled in 1936, but the end of the first quarter, my grades were all at the bottom of the alphabet. There weren't any A, B, A's, B's, and C's. They were, all my grades were X's, Y's, and Z's. And after a quarter like that and I saw those terrible grades, I wondered "What on earth?! What am I doing in engineering? I'm not adapted to this." But I didn't know what else to do. And a friend of mine from high school had invited me over to the architecture building (he was a sophomore in architecture by then) but I'd never been over there before, and as I was waiting in the lobby to see him, I looked around and saw all these great, large watercolor drawings on the walls. Wow! They were drawings of either exotic buildings or interesting buildings, anyway, modern architecture, generally. I was quite taken with them. One was a lamazary, which means a building for lamas, in, not the animal. A lama in Tibet is a monk. (cough) Yeah. They were, this was on the side of a mountain in Tibet, in the Himalayan mountains, and another drawing I remember was a very nice restaurant up in the San Juan islands, it was on Orcas. There were very daring and exciting cantilevers out from the

rocky beach under these cantilever terraces, with people on top drinking champagne or martinis, or, they seemed very sophisticated anyway, to me. (laughter) And, I was quite taken with them. And I thought "Golly! Maybe architecture would be something to go into! Wow, I didn't know that buildings like this could be done." Had never occurred to me. So, next day, I went over to see the head of the architecture department, Arthur P. Herman, whom I spent five years under then, from then on. So I asked him if I might switch from engineering to architecture. So the first question he asked, "Well, have you done lots of free-hand drawing from nature?" "Well, no sir, I haven't." (laughter) I had never done a drawing from nature, never occurred to me to do it. He said, "Well, you wouldn't be very successful in architecture then. I wouldn't recommend it. Of course, if you want a second opinion, you could go to Professor Olshefsky." Which, so, I got an appointment with him the next day, and he said, asked me the very same question, of course, with the same answer. "Don't, don't even try." So I signed up. And that was the beginning of my architectural career. I wasn't very good, I was probably the least likely to succeed in my freshman class, and it took a long time to learn anything about architecture and I was totally unprepared, but I was fascinated and worked awful hard. So finally it came to me, what architecture was, how you could do buildings that were interesting, that were harmonious with the, I suppose you'd say, with the surroundings, with the climate, with the land if it's a steep hill or if it's a flat site. All these things have a bearing on how they're designed. And, so, gradually I began to learn, and finally I did get out, and went on to Harvard after the war, studied awfully hard there and came and set up my own practice with Jack Morse. That was about it. (laughter) That's how I started.

10. Eugenia: Oh that's great, to hear that; so, you were at the UW and Harvard during time when some of the most influential architects, such as Lionel Pries at UW, Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer were there. What was that like studying with them, and were you influenced by their work?
11. Fred: Well, at the UW, Spike Pries, Lionel Pries, was the most inspirational and capable teacher we had here. I had revered him for his knowledge, for his absolute commitment to architecture. To me, the architecture was the most important thing in the world. I knew, just at the end of the war, whole new world was dawning, the evils of fascism and Nazism had been,

crushed, largely because the Nazis went into, into Russia, and, and it practically killed them. They killed millions of Russians and visa versa, but finally the Nazis were crushed and those bad things disappeared on the, in the enormous scale that they were happening then. We knew that the, and this is the, the feeling of a young architect just graduated, well, we knew that the world was going to be a pure, wonderful place. The reason is going to, conquer (laughter), if I say, I thought we would be religion-free, that's a personal comment of the way we felt, others would feel completely different. But, at any rate, we thought it was a new, golden land coming. I find that that didn't happen but many good things happened, and you have to, they have to be looked at on a total spread of consideration. We have our own troubles; the Korean War came, the Vietnam War came, now, Iraq. There are all reasons for them, but at any rate, not on the giant scale of the Second World War as to the teachers themselves, I was very much influenced by Professor Pries. When I went to Harvard, I went there because Walter Gropius was the head of the architecture department, and he was one of the probably four most famous and important architects in the world. As it turned out, he was not as good a teacher as I expected. He had founded the Bauhaus, which is a remarkable achievement. Bauhaus was a whole new method of teaching architecture by teaching art and crafts all together, and a marvelous, marvelous successful thing. As it turned out, Walter Gropius was not a very good teacher in my estimation now. I thought at the time he was wonderful. Of course, now, looking back on it, Marcel Breuer, I feel was a much better teacher. And I, perhaps should even have gone, gone over to Pennsylvania—University of Pennsylvania instead. One of the professors at Harvard had been asked to go to Penn, University of Penn, and teach there and asked me to come along with him. Well I couldn't imagine going to any other university as long as Gropius was teaching at, at Harvard. Later on, of course, I realized that Perkins had gone to Penn because a young man named Louis Kahn was teaching there. Louis Kahn became the, the greatest architect of those years. Between, I'd say, 1946, '48, '50, on to about 1980 or '85 when he died. Remarkably capable architect, and probably the highest honored in the world, of those years. But, at any rate, I didn't go over, I met Kahn several times after that. Wonderful writer, wonderful teacher. I remember when we had invited him up here to speak at one of the regional conferences, and he was, speaking in front of a group of us, we were all lying on the, sitting on the floor looking up at him, and going "Ooh and ahh,

how wonderful those comments are." I remember one thing he said, he says "The walls parted [this is historical, and thousand years ago, maybe], the walls parted, and the column BECAME." Ohhh! We all almost fainted with the beauty of the, of the words and the significance of what they meant.

12. Eugenia: That must have been amazing, having met him, and, did you see the film—the documentary on him that his son made?
13. Fred: Yes, I did. I knew Kahn, Kahn reasonably, not intimately and I had no idea, of course, that he had, was living with three different women (laughter). It's pretty tough, having, eating three dinners, I guess. Anyway, he was a wonderful guy, very, very inspiring.
14. Eugenia: That's wonderful. Now, when you started to practice, and in those post-war years, was there a group of like-minded architects in Seattle in those years? Did you feel like you were part of an architectural movement or anything?
15. Fred: Yes, we certainly did. We didn't feel that the A.I.A., which is our national organization (American Institute of Architects), was that instrument of change. We were like most young people, enormously—what's the word—looking toward the future, dissatisfied with the past. None of us would consider doing a building that was based on, on any historical fashion or style. It meant nothing to us. We were throwing everything out. Of course we would also throw the baby out with the bath water. And we knew nothing about classical architecture. We took historical, history classes. A.P. Herman who was head of the school, as I mentioned, was, taught that. He did a very good class, too. But we wanted flat roofs, walls of glass, nothing to do with the past. Even in a, we were so, taken with the modern architecture around the world, which was mostly flat roofs at that time, that we'd, we would design flat roofs without realizing that they were almost all going to leak in the rain; we're in a rainy country here in Seattle and we ignored it. You can imagine an architect coming to a new area, Gropius did when he built a house in Lincoln, Massachusetts, which is essentially a box. It has a flat roof and, just straight, square box, sort of, and I never asked him, actually, where, how much it leaked. We lived in, my wife and I, at that time, lived in the house one summer for three months when he and his wife left after the war to go back to

Germany to see it. They had, they'd been gone since about 1936 and this must have been about 1946, ten years later. And the whole character of the world had changed. He built this house, a parallelepiped, not quite squared, was oblong, it'd, you might say, and it probably did leak, although it didn't. I never noticed any leaks inside it while we were there. Of course, that was summertime. But I did several flat-roof houses here in Seattle, including my own, and I spent, it must have been, 10 or 15 times, up on the roof when it was raining hard, with raincoat or my pajamas trying to find the leaks. Where were they? And after about 10 years of that, it was too much for me and I put a sloping roof on it, on over the flat roof, and finally the problem was solved and it never leaked since. All, it also looked a hell of a lot better with this pitched roof. Eh, if you look around you, as Gropius should have in, Boston, or rather, in Lincoln, Massachusetts, every house, every traditional house had a pitched roof. Wasn't there some reason for that? He could've looked and wondered about it and he would've found out that the pitched roofs don't leak. The real difference is that a pitched roof, a flat roof, when it leaks, it usually leaks a flood, because the whole flat roof just holds the water up there. Whereas a pitched roof, if you have a leak, it's only a few drops because the rain is directed outside the house. And, at any rate, there are lots of reasons and that's why all the other houses are pitched.

16. Eugenia: That's, that's great. This is a good lead into some of my questions about your residential work. You and John Morse were among the original founders of the Hilltop community.
17. Fred: Yes.
18. Eugenia: In Bellevue. How did, how did the ideas of developing this area come about and what was this unique collaborative experience like with, working with so many well-known architects at the time?
19. Fred: I can't remember and I'm not sure I knew exactly how it began and I know that quite a few people starting with (cough) Perry Johanson, one of the partners of the largest firm in town, N.B.B.J., and Jack Morse who knew each other through their church, a bunch of others from the University of Washington in particular, decided they'd like to try and find some land outside the city, so they could buy a large piece of

land and then divide it, and live in the same neighborhood. And when I was partnered with Jack Morse at that time, starting in about 1947, I was asked to join that group, my wife and I, which we were delighted to do. And they had already found a parcel of property over on the east side, in south Bellevue, about 60 acres, up, well, we called it Hilltop, it's just above the crisscross of I-90 and, I don't know which road that is, going north and south, just, it's directly south, more or less, of Bellevue Community College. It's the top of, we carved out of that big property, the top 63 acres, so, also having the top of the hill, which gives glorious views. We were able to plan the layout ourselves and not have to depend on some developer, which we did, and chose lots, starting with five people: Walter Isaacs, art professor at the university; Perry; Jack Morse; myself; let's see, who are the others? Well, it doesn't really matter now...

20. Eugenia: Steinbrueck?
21. Fred: No, Steinbrueck was not in it, um, Harry...gosh, I can't remember his name...I can't remember the rest of them, but any rate, having 63 acres for about only 50 houses gave a generous portion of land to us all. We had a space about, say it varied from a couple hundred feet to maybe 300 feet all the way around this property which was kind of a circle, which was a visual and a planting break, in which also we had a trail, a track all the way around, for jogging and so on, two miles about, which was a wonderful thing. It turned out, I think, that the land was, that we had too large lots. We weren't able to maintain them in a tidy way because they were so large. It became too much for any, all of us, except for those who were willing to spend full time gardening. But it was very successful from the standpoint of getting along well together. Almost everybody was accepted that was approached to join, and I think only of one, one couple that was not accepted. They're still going as a great group together, I think.
22. Eugenia: Yeah, I think it's definitely a communal feel, that's really continued and...
23. Fred: Yes.
24. Eugenia: I know at Docomomo WEWA we've toured
25. Fred: Uh huh

26. Eugenia: Many of the houses there and so
27. Fred: Um hm
28. Eugenia: they have to adjust the microphone (laughter), so we're going to take a break
29. Fred: Sure.
30. Eugenia: I know, I did notice it, did I do something? (more laughter, background talking) Oh, okay (mic adjustment noises). Okay (background: otherwise, sounds great.). Okay
31. Fred: Good.
32. Background, engineer?: Good sound quality, interesting
33. Eugenia: Good (door closing). You're doing great. Okay.
34. Track 2
35. Eugenia: So, of all the residences you've designed, on Hilltop or Bellingham or Seattle, which one stands out in your view, and why?
36. Fred: A few of them do stand out, I think. I think that if they stand out it's because they were designed from a very direct, humane standpoint. So many of those modern houses were designed to be seen. I've never liked the idea of that kind of thing, where you design a house and make it seem even better than it does or go over in some of these more recent areas where you find what's, what's often called a McMansion. They are designed more of them, rather than from the standpoint of the owner raising kids and having a comfortable, livable house, they're often designed with four or six columns on the outside, around the entrance with a quite often, with two doors, rather than a single door because it looks, it makes them look a little more impressive. There are some houses built on a tract, I remember this is in Sudbury, Massachusetts, and you walk by them, they are all enormous houses, they all have columns at the entrance, and double doors, and fancy bronze or brass hardware flashing around you, and it seems, who on earth can live in those? They must have seven, ten kids to occupy all

of that space. I've never understood it, as a matter of fact. And quite often they not only have three cars, but they have a garage big enough for four. Who can use all those cars? Maybe it's done so they'll sell at high prices. I've never really known, but the houses, any building that's the most, most successful is one which is designed to suit a family and its needs. If it's too jazzed up and too classy and big, it often seems insincere. That's a characteristic of a house that I like, to use, but, you might ask what is it that makes a sincere house? Well, it's the, exactly that: if it's too big for the family, even though they want something impressive to show their friends and cousins, it's like we're, we're not, the non-architect is usually not as keenly responsive to building. If you go to a dinner, you're invited to dinner and you meet some new people while you're having drinks before dinner, if you meet somebody that seems insincere to you, a person, we are so exquisitely attentive or aware of other people, if you meet them, you can tell, you know inside of five minutes if a person is sincere, insincere, or putting on the dog, or trying to impress you. You can tell partly the way they're dressed, very much the way they address you in talking, and it comes out immediately if somebody's insincere, trying to put on the dog. Well, the same thing goes with a house or any building. If it's calm, as Jean Godden, I remember she used to, used to be a columnist and now a city councilwoman, she says "I want a house, I want a house to, or any building to be friendly, to ask me to come in by the way it looks, by the doors it has," which reminds me of the new Seattle Public Library, the main one downtown. I don't mind all the angles it has on the outside, but I do wonder about the entrance. The main entrance is on 4th Avenue, which is where most people come from, in that direction, and it has a door about four or five feet wide for this great large building, cost 150 million or something like that. It's hard to find. You have to look around to find the entrance. The main entrance is about one door, about that wide. And makes you wonder. You go up to Vancouver and look at their library, which I think is a great design, by a man who was turned down as designer here, Moshe Safdie, its entrance is about 40 feet wide. It does invite you to come in. There's a little, little coffee shop right there in the entrance, a large, open area where you can sit and have coffee or a cookie or something like that, and then from there, into the big, economical, big library part. But at any rate, it does invite you to come in, it says "C'mon, I'm interesting. Come on in." The one in Seattle certainly doesn't do

that. So I think that's one of the character, characteristics about a house; is it kindly, does it invite you?

37. Eugenia: That's true, because really, I mean, these buildings are for people, so you want to have them feel comfortable in it. So, I know in the past we talked about, you mentioned particularly a house in Laurelhurst you designed that you liked. Can you tell me a little bit more about that home?

38. Fred: Yes, this is a small, a very small house which we designed about 40 years ago, 45 years ago. The owners had very little money, they could only afford about 900 square feet of a house, and they had no view. But the land they bought was very cheap. It's right at the top of a hill, up on Laurelhurst, but this was just outside the developed part. And so I suggested, why don't you put it up on stilts, on poles, on posts? Which, so, and we put up posts about 18 feet high there it's a, has a flat roof, I was still in my flat, flat roof period. I am ashamed of it now for having a flat roof. At any rate, it was really economical to build and by putting it up on posts and by putting the car and some storage underneath the lifted portion from the main part which was raised up, they could see in every direction, so they had great views. That house, there were little tiny trees around it, oh, maybe about 3 or 4 inches thick. As, as time went on, I had only seen it since it was built, just last year, and I was amazed, because it was now surrounded by these trees which hadn't been altered, but they kept growing, and now these trees are maybe sixty years old, if they'd, if they'd been ten or ten years old then, little tiny trees, now they surround it, and they're about 150 feet high, so they completely overwhelm the house. But in on the other hand, it gives a wonderful sense of opening around the giant firs and cedars into the house itself, and you're in a real forest there, to see it. I love the house. They, the owner has maintained it perfectly, care, really cared about it and the garden. So it's a lovely place, I think now. All of, all of glass up above, but they're, they're enclosed in all of these great trees, so nobody can see in. At any rate, I'm rather proud of it. It did win a national honor award at the time. There's another one we did about the same time, or maybe a year or so earlier, up at Bellingham for a lawyer and his wife up there. It's hard to explain without drawings. I can't show it, but turned out very well.

39. Eugenia: Great. Well, look forward to, and the one in Bellingham is still there?
40. Fred: Yes, it is.
41. Eugenia: Great.
42. Fred: Now I haven't been by it for several years, but I believe it still is.
43. Eugenia: Yeah. Well, we look forward to checking a couple of these out.
44. Track 3
45. Eugenia: We've talked about your residential work; let's switch to your non-residential work. You've kind of specialized in designing schools. Particularly of note, is the work you did at Central Washington University and Western Washington. Can you discuss, maybe one building on campus that you're particularly proud of, and why?
46. Fred: Okay. We've happened to do a lot of college and university buildings. We, particularly at U of Central Washington, oh, it's called Central Washington University and at Western Washington University, Bellingham. The, the largest amount of work we did at Central was dormitories, well at both universities. The u, just like these coll, you know, they used to be called colleges, now they call themselves universities; sounds a little fancier I guess. Before going into designing any buildings for the university we went to see what kind of buildings they already had. In both places there were kind of flat-roofed, kind of boxy buildings, which I didn't care for much. They seemed like motels along the highway; very unfriendly. So we spent a long time figuring out at both places how the kids would get from classroom to the, to the dormitories, and how these paths of movement would affect the students, both as to meeting other kids, as to their paths, and the buildings were laid out accordingly so as much as possible they'd get acquainted with each other. As a freshman, you go there and you're, you know practically nobody, but as time goes on, you see a kid going around a corner of a building and you almost bump into him sometimes. So that very shy freshman, after a year or two, gets to know practically, or gets to recognize half of the university

kids, and pretty soon, at first you're shy and trying to stay away, pretty soon you say hello, after a while you're chatting as you go along, maybe by senior year, you're inviting them out on a date. By golly, you actually do. That actually does affect them greatly. I remember at, particularly at Bellingham, it's on a steep hill. The, not only did the paths which lead back to the, from one building to another, if they're in separate buildings, we tried to keep the scale as small as we could so you didn't feel you were in a great big building where you shouldn't interrupt somebody on another floor or seniors from sophomores. And I remember we jugged the building and plan, shifted it sideways, to break up the scale into smaller groups. The whole building, one of those buildings, held about a hundred kids, and we would shift it, and then since it, the building, was dropping down the hill there'd be a few steps in between the shifted areas so a little block of the building would be maybe 35 kids, and another area might be only 20 and each room would be a double room, so you'd get to know most intimately the ones in your own room, then you'd get to acquainted with the kids in your little shifted group and maybe 20 or 30 and then maybe you get to know people on other floors. Then there's the lounge, you'd get to know each other there, and they really became groups that are socially adapted to friendliness as well as for the building as a whole, you'd meet them in the lounge of course. Well, that's a quick explanation of the way they worked.

47. Eugenia: Some of your projects
48. Track 4
49. Eugenia (cont'd): included artwork. Did you design some of the buildings with the art in mind? Can you discuss how art enhances a project?
50. Fred: Yes, well having been a long-time student of art while knowing nothing about it to start, I felt having an artist there would give some character to the building as a whole, both outside art and inside. At Bellingham, I, that was done after I got acquainted with art, more artists and one time at Ellensburg, I asked a committee, the building committee, of the professors and administrators if we couldn't have a budget for art there and I talked them into \$10,000 to hire artists to work on those dormitories. Well, halfway through the job, the committee told me, "Well, we needed \$10,000 more for stainless steel

equipment in the, in the kitchen in the dorm, for the dining hall, so I'm sorry, we have taken away your \$10,000 for art." And I was very unhappy about it. I didn't think of any quick way to solve that, but, got an idea one day when the representative of the brick company came in the office to show us his company's wares, and this just popped into my mind, it says, Jane Yolen, a great writer, said, she called reason the slow poke of the mind. She was talking about intuition being the speedy one. And it's true, I didn't think about this, it just popped into my mind when this guy came into the office to show us Mutual Materials bricks. I said to, I can't remember his name right now, "Hey, Joe, why don't you bring us in some, some soft brick before they've been fired, someday. I've got an idea." And I, a couple of weeks later he came in with maybe 20 or 30 bricks, green bricks. They're called "green" before they've been fired. Now they aren't, that's not really very soft. It might be like cedar, as hard as cedar, which is a soft wood. I said, "Bring it, bring that tray of bricks back here in the office. Bring it and put it on the desk here in the back room, the back room being where the, where a lot of the down to earth workers...be...carried on, like drafting, compared to designing, I used to, most of these designs myself, or at least most of it, whereas a lot of the younger architects were doing the drafting. Well, I would do some of that too. But the drafting tables that we could use back there. So he put the green bricks on this table and I called everybody together; my partner and three or four of the draftsmen, I probably only had six or eight draftsmen in the whole office at that time. I told the worker to experiment with some, with some green bricks. Let's see if we can, we've had the art budget taken away from us. Let's do it ourselves. I want to, I want you all to drop your drafting work for the moment, grab any tool that you can, a knife or a stick. One guy picked up I remember, my partner Skip Norton, picked up a beer can opener and we all used what, whatever we could find to decorate these bricks. So we turned them with the side that was going to be faced to the weather, faced to the outside where they could be seen and carved them ourselves. One guy did a little saying. This was just after Kennedy's assassination in 1963 and he did something about, "As it was then, you will find, it happens today," and he was referring to Kennedy and other presidents and prime ministers have been killed. So this thing is, was, when they were fired, we saw them. Some turned out very well. We probably threw away about half of them. Then I got maybe a few hundred bricks, and I hired some artists to go down to the brick company, in their yard, and carve these bricks

before they were fired. These were, of course, were professional artists. We didn't have much money. I remember giving one of them \$15 out of my own pocket to do some carving. Of course, when they got there, these artists loved it, doing it this way. It was very direct, straight from the heart work; small amounts of money, small areas of the wall. At any rate, these were finally put into the walls by the brick masons. They were all numbered so that they could be put back together the same way the artists did it and it was very successful. Some that they were published in some architectural magazines and now architects have done, and artists have done that all over the country. It's a very inexpensive, very successful way of doing it while getting up on your high horse and doing fancy art.

51. Eugenia: Well that was a very creative way of incorporating art in your project since they took away your budget on that, so...
52. Fred: Yeah.
53. Eugenia: I look forward to, when on my next trip to Ellensburg, I'll definitely look for it. So, I wanted to talk to you about maybe some of your more unique projects, like the East Pine sub station. Can you tell us more about that project? And, probably, it's very utilitarian building obviously.
54. Fred: Yeah, that's one of my favorite projects. I think there's no project that I've ever done that was as carefully studied by myself and with directions, the draftsman who worked on it. It, all it is a sub station where they bring in high powered, high voltage electricity from the generating plants directly to, it's under, it comes in underground because such high voltage probably comes in at 4,000, 400, whatever it is, 8,000 volts, and it comes up into various areas within this, and the, this is Seattle City Light project. I worked with one of their engineers all the way through it, and it's very dangerous, high power you get within it, you touch it, of course, you're killed immediately with high power like that. So it's kept away from anybody and they wanted a 10 foot high wall that could not be gotten over easily. So I was, I designed several plans of it, several different ways to do that. And I finally, I wanted this 10 foot high wall, if it was one brick thick, it would be easily broken if a car happened to, it's on 23, 23rd street, an arterial in Seattle. Cars are generally going 35 or 40. So if one of them got off the

track a little bit and even bumped it with its bumper with a one brick thick, called one wythe, w-y-t-h-e, is what we call it when it's thick. They, you could put up two bricks thick, of course, that would cost twice as much off a, more or less. Anyways, so I designed a curved brick, and actually, it's an L-shaped brick. One end turns rather sharply, compared to the other. And if you, so it was built this way. If you turn over one brick on the other, it makes a deep corrugation all the way along. That's all I can think of to call it, a corrugated wall. Because it's corrugated, it's, it's very strong. If, if you push against it, it takes quite a bit of effort and it, the whole wall, wouldn't come tumbling down. Excuse me. But in doing this, I hadn't realized, of course, when we first started, that's going to give it a very interesting, very strong shadow pattern, almost any way the s, any position of the sun. Then we, we tapered the, a special block on top of it. It seems like it would be very expensive to do that, and normally it would, but I developed a, a special base for it. These were cast in concrete with a ridge coming up from the flat concrete on the bottom and sloping slightly up, and the, and this ridge was corrugated in, in the, in a form before being used. Just say they're about six feet long, six or eight feet, I can't remember, and they are laid down as a foundation. Then they, the block slopes slightly so the top of this raised portion sets down as the wall comes down eight inches or so, every ten feet to accommodate the slope and then this meant that the, the brick layers wouldn't have to figure out exactly where these bricks come, they just lay them on top of this raised portion on the foundation. It's easy to make that curve in a, in a form. And it didn't take too many forms. Maybe it took a hundred of these six foot long forms all the way around the whole project. It would've, whereas there were probably 600 bricks in that distance. At any rate, it made it very easy for the masons to raise this and it looks very complicated and expensive, so in actuality it isn't. That, another thing we did there that I was proud of, the high tension is high up where these wires come, and they come up from below with special protection so if somebody throws a rock in there even if they hit it square on, it won't get knocked over, so where the, where the wires are with this high tension separated from the ground, there's a tower of concrete in between. The copper above is a high, high efficiency conductor of electricity whereas the concrete is neutral. It actually conducts a little bit but, but very little. So the, the wires above the concrete in between, and all that shows the actual

character of the, of the electricity as it's used. Yeah, it's a long discussion, hard to explain.

55. Eugenia: Well, no, it's fascinating because I think, I mean most people, well they probably don't think of substations, or they do, I mean just because it's so functional. I mean, obviously it takes a lot of engineering and,

56. Fred: Right.

57. Eugenia: and the way you designed it, it was also very artistic too and

58. Fred: Well!

59. Eugenia: so, (laugh)

60. Fred: We're very proud of that project.

61. Eugenia: Great. Well we're, I think we're definitely going to have John Stamets probably photograph that building so that'd

62. Fred: Yeah there's

63. Eugenia: be great

64. Fred: are things that are especially interesting.

65. Track 6

66. Eugenia: And another project that's completely different, but up at Neah Bay, the Makah cultural center, was a very important building for the Makah tribe.

67. Fred: Yes.

68. Eugenia: What was it like working on a project with so much cultural meaning?

69. Fred: It's difficult, in a way, because you want to show, give as much meaning to the building in two different ways. One is to the tribe; they're proud of their artifacts. They've found

wonderful artifacts there, and we want the Indians to be proud of them, which they are very proud of it. And we're proud of the building. It's not an ordinary museum as they used to build, nor is it, is it a building standing on its head like these build...museums that are being built today all over the world. Museum buildings seem to get these so-called prize architects, well I would see we were prize architects for this one. But we were well known but not known, not a name that's on everybody's tongue. But it's, it's interesting in another way still. You always wonder, where does an architect get his commissions? And among architects, it's like land or a location, location, location for real estate. Well, among architects, it's how do you get the client, how do you get the client? It's very difficult for a young man just starting out to get a client. Well, this, we weren't just starting out by the time this one came along, but it's rather interesting how it came to us. There was a, a man who parked cars in the lot next door to our office on 4th Avenue. We got, he got, very friendly with him since he parked our car every day. That's before there were just lots there unattended. And he was a very nice guy. I actually thought he was Japanese at the time. I didn't realize he was a Native American. But at any rate, we were very friendly with him and one day he disappeared. He, we didn't know at the time what had happened. Then I got a call another day, I'm trying to remember his name. It's been so long now since we built, designed, built that building. But it's like, the telephone rings and my secretary calls me in or gives me an intercom call. It's, it's Bill on the telephone. Really? Bill who? At any rate, I got this call, I didn't know who it was. And he says "Oh, I'm the guy who used to park your car. I'm back on the rez out at Neah Bay." We had never realized he was there. At any rate, he, in the, he was an elder of the tribe and one of the highly regarded members of the tribe and he had apparently, when they got the allowance or the money appropriation from Congress through Senator Jackson, he said "Now we need an architect." And the committee, the governing council, asked "Where, anybody you know an architect?" "Well, I know one. I used to park cars next to their office." And he called us, this, this, this telephone call. I

went out there to talk to them, and just wonderful people, delighted to do it and, and we built it from the standpoint of the, of the exhibit, all the wonderful artifacts they found there. Neah Bay, the Makah tribe, was particularly important because 700 years ago or so, there was a big slide on the cliff, facing on the beach and the slide was so extensive and so muddy that this, actually this little village was completely destroyed; the people and the artifacts at the same time. And the mud that came down with all the artifacts was essentially without air in it. I've forgotten the word now for, anaerobic I guess. So the, that the, all the artifacts that came down were preserved for 700 years until they were found probably within the last century or two. So they have a remarkably extensive collection there which is absolutely beyond price it's so special. It's a long way out, but I recommend you take a run out there. The concrete is, the, the building is concrete and made especially fireproof because the, the collection is so rare and priceless.

70. Eugenia: Wow. I'll have to go back. I was there maybe about 10 years ago but now knowing sort of the history, especially how you got the commission that was, pretty exciting (laughter).

71. Track 7

72. Eugenia: This has, this has been great. I was just, wanted to end it with asking a very kind of, it's kind of a big question. Which are some of your favorite buildings today by other architects?

73. Fred: Well there are a lot of them. They're, favorite buildings, are extremely rare. They're as rare as those Indian artifacts. But for many years I've owned a convertible so that wherever I go, if it's decent weather, and sometimes if it isn't, I can pull down the top and look up at buildings and study them. There are a lot of buildings in Seattle that have all, been my favorites, like the Northern Life tower at 3rd and University, the southeast corner of 3rd and University, which is the first, no, it's

the second tallest building in Seattle. Smith Tower, of course, was the first, built about 1914. The Northern Life Tower, and I think it's a little diff, I think it's called the Northern Tower or something now, I can't quite remember. But it's a wonderful building of graduated color brick; darker at the bottom and lighter at the top. It was designed by a guy named Joe Wilson of the firm Albertson, Wilson and Richardson. Joe Wilson happened to be my first father-in-law, Mary Wilson Bassetti, a very fine designer herself, perhaps because her father was an architect, at any rate, he was a very good designer and did quite a few buildings around here. Churches; he did the second YMCA on, let's see, what's that saying, "Seattle was built under protest..."

74. Eugenia: Oh, right. (Laughter)

75. Fred: I've forgotten how that goes. (laughter) At any rate, it's on the street just next street south of University. It must be Seneca. But he did a lot of good buildings in Seattle. Of course my favorite building in Seattle of all is, is the St. Ignatius Chapel up at Seattle University, just a half-block off Madison, about, about 11th, between 10th and 11th on the right hand side going out east on Madison. Wonderful building done by Steve

76. Eugenia: Holl

77. Fred: Holl. H-O-L-L. (laughter) Who practiced in New York. He's actually a Seattle student; went to the UW here, but practices in New York now. The interior of that building, I'm not a religious man myself, but I go into that, walk into that building, and that interior has the most reverent feeling of any building I've ever been in, and I've been in Chartres and a lot of the others, St. Peters, but this, which is totally different from any other, has that sense of, of reverence. Just, you've got to feel almost religious when you get in there. Just a remarkable building. You take a look at the walls, the way the plaster was put on with a scratched tool, everything about it, all the details are superbly done. At any rate, that's my favorite in the city of Seattle, over any building I've designed. Let's see, what other

buildings? Gene Zema, who's a very fine architect who's designed a lot of houses around that I feel are very fine. Wendell Lovett has designed houses here and there, one of the world, most world, best world class buildings I know of, are his little country retreat up on Crane Island, just off Orcas. It's, you can see it from the ferry, going from Anacortes to the islands, northwest of there. Wonderful little white triangle summer house. You can't call it a house almost, but it is a house, and just a delightful design in every way. Going to New York, I remember the Harriman and Brown, Harriman Brown, Brown Brothers, Harriman office building, wonderful thing. I've sought out the best buildings all over the world. Best in my opinion, at any rate. If I go to Venice, I always want to take a little detour to a cemetery near, between Venice and, and, what's the next one, Padova, or Vicenza. It's the tomb of a guy named Brion, B-R-I-O-N, designed by Carlos Scarpa. It's very hard to find but it's worth going there; it's one of the great designs of the world. Other great designs, houses, the Villa Savoie by Le Corbusier of France. It's, it can be reached by the subway actually, outside Paris. You know you have just about five blocks to walk, and there it is; one of the great houses of the world, done about 1928. Or the house in the town of Brion, excuse me, or the town of Brno, in the Czech Republic. We were in Vienna a couple of years ago, and I realized suddenly that the town of Brno was only about 80 miles away, so I suggested to my wife that we take a little side trip up there. And there it was, the little Tugendhat House by Mies van der Rohe, the famous German architect. Just a marvelous house. Or you go the other direction in the United States. Go to, is it, I guess it's Chicago, by Frank Lloyd Wright, the Robie house, R-O-B-I-E, or some other houses by Frank Lloyd Wright, particularly his own in Spring Green, Wisconsin, which I visited a couple of times. I met Wright there, actually. He asked what we were doing and I said I was going back east to study under his competitors, Gropius and Breuer. He said "There's, they're not competitors of mine! They're also-rans!" He tried to get me to stay there to study under him. By then I wasn't that, I still thought, and to think today that Wright is one of the great geniuses of architecture, great geniuses of all

time. But as he got older, I think the quality of his work went down a little, actually quite a bit (laughter), in my opinion. Then there's Taliesin West in Scottsdale, Arizona. See, there's so many buildings I've been thrilled about over the years. The treasury, the Museum of the Treasury of St. Lawrence in Geneva, under the St. Lawrence, the Cathedral of St. Lawrence, is this Treasure, Treasury of the, it's a little museum of the treasures of the church there, beautifully designed by an architect, what was it, Figini or something like that, from Milan. Well worth going to. I think it's open only on Thursday, at least used to be, have to make an appointment to get there, practically. But there are examples in most of the great cities, there's a house by Wright, the Millard House in Los Angeles. I think Frank Gehry's, the, not that we can say cathedral, the concert hall that he did in Los Angeles is a great design, I feel. It goes on and on.

78. Eugenia: It does. (laughter)

79. Fred: But they're so rare. You know, if you go around great works of architecture, if you want to take the, how many are there in the United States, ten, in the whole country, really great works of architecture?

80. Eugenia: So it sounds like

81. Track 8

82. Eugenia: I mean, you've traveled quite a bit. Do you try to make a point to visit some of these places and go out of your way just to see?

83. Fred: Oh right, I'd go 1,000 miles out of my way (laughter)

84. Eugenia: I agree.

85. Fred: To see some of these that I haven't seen before. Well I've traveled for, since 1932, when I took a freighter to go to Torino to meet, to stay with my grandmother one year. My father decided I'd better get some culture, and that's where I went. He was an immigrant from Italy while my mother came from Norway. So he sent me there to get a little culture. So we would traveled all, I, I've always traveled everywhere I could to see the buildings. And but now, on the spur of the moment, I can't think of the ones but Corbu and Wright and Mies van der Rohe. I did go to the, there was a great project in Stuttgart that the Germans did. The Siedons, I can't quite remember now. In 1928 they put on a special exhibit there where they got Corbusier, Gropius, J.J.P. Oud from, from Holland. I'd like to go to Utrecht in Holland to see a great house that, who did? It's the most famous house in Utrecht. None of these houses fit in the neighborhoods of course. They were so early and so extreme that they made the neighbors unhappy. But you got to kind of overlook it because from the standpoint of architecture in the, in the long stretch of time, they do count and they are very important. But architecture itself, you know it, it's exceedingly, it's the, one of the most important things in the world because all our cities are designed by architects and yet there're so few great ones that architecture has a, an almost totally insignificant part in the whole world. You look at every building, it's only one in 5,000 that is, is a great building, maybe, 100,000. So rare. I wish I could say, give the key to making them better. Well, I'd start with improving the schools, but, how do you teach? That's another difficult thing. You have to sit and talk with your colleagues and friends and with, with people that are genuine philosophers of their own, you know, not something, well, some of them develop themselves. But it's a philosophy of a life. What is that? There's endless discussions among architects as to what makes sense and what doesn't. Louis Sullivan wrote about it which is, was very well done "Kindergarten Chats." He was the guy who was the successor to Frank Lloyd Wright in a way. Here we had Lionel Pries at the UW, and some really fine teacher, teachers followed him; Alec McLaren and Bissell Alderman, who have not been widely publicized, but each one was a fine

- teacher, but they only were here for two or three years as I remember.
86. Eugenia: Have you seen the new book Jeffrey Ochsner has written on Lionel Pries?
87. Fred: Yes, I have it.
88. Eugenia: Oh, excellent.
89. Fred: It's a very good book. It has a lot of pictures of his watercolors and his buildings. He was a very fine man. His heart was with architecture as much as mine or other students' were at that time, and you know, he died a long time ago, but, he cared about it. I, I think myself that I was rather naïve in caring that much. But, how can you do good work unless you really care from heart?
90. Eugenia: Well. Yeah. Well I think I know from our standpoint, we were so fortunate to, that you've agreed to participate in this project and you've interviewed with us and I'm really glad that you care so much because you've left us with a wonderful legacy...
91. Fred: Well, good. I hope so.
92. Eugenia: of work, so
93. Fred: I'd like to see what my colleagues say (laughter)
94. Eugenia: Yeah.
95. Fred: Maybe you could send me a transcript of the whole works, just a copy.
96. Eugenia: Well, yeah, we're hoping at the end of the project we could all get together,

97. Fred: Oh, of course
98. Eugenia: and have a party.
99. Fred: be delighted to
100. Eugenia: That'd be great. Okay, well, thank you. I think that'll be the end of the interview.
101. Fred: Well, that's terrific. I wish I could have thought of more great buildings (laughter) to have mentioned, but anyway
102. Eugenia: No, this is great.
103. Fred: that'll do.
104. Eugenia: Okay, thanks.
105. Fred: I guess. How we doing on time?
106. Eugenia: We're great, perfect.
107. Fred: Oh, we got plenty of time.
108. Eugenia: Yeah. Thanks.
109. Fred: Okay, thank you for
110. Eugenia: This is great.
111. Track 9
112. Fred: inviting me

NOTE: Line 112 is the end of the interview. Fred and Eugenia's conversation after the interview was over was recorded. Below is the transcript of the discussion.

113. Eugenia: You know I, I love St. Ignatius as well, and the funny, I'm not a religious person, but when I walked in there, it was the, sort of that same,
114. Fred: Isn't it amazing?
115. Eugenia: Yeah, it is, I
116. Fred: the sound quality, and the light.
117. Eugenia: Everything. You just want to sit there, or, you know, walk around and
118. Fred: Right.
119. Eugenia: just look at the spaces.
120. Fred: My wife, when she came in, she let go, she's a singer and let go of a few notes.
121. Eugenia: Wow. Oh.
122. Fred: It has wonderful acoustics.
123. Eugenia: Oh my God, wow.
124. Fred: As you can imagine with all those different sizes and shapes, heights of ceiling.
125. Eugenia: I mean, everything from the moment, I mean, from before you enter the building and how
126. Fred: Right.
127. Eugenia: the doors and

128. Fred: And the handles and the windows and the, what do they call all those sacred shapes of things for the oh I del and all the rest that stuff
129. Eugenia: yeah. (Laughter)
130. Fred: Now, did you go in right after it was built or a long time after.
131. Eugenia: No, pretty much, probably about within a year after, after it was built.
132. Fred: Did the special chapel back there have its odor still, 'cause all, those walls were covered with wax that had its own aroma.
133. Eugenia: Oh, no, that hadn't been (laughter).
134. Fred: It's probably gone by now
135. Eugenia: Oh, okay.
136. Fred: but there very. I got in very, at the very beginning. I watched it during construction.
137. Eugenia: Oh, wow.
138. Fred: And that odor in that room made it so unusual and so special. St. Catherine (laughter).
139. Eugenia: Yeah.
140. Fred: And it's funny. Steve Holl was recommended for the art museum in Bellevue
141. Eugenia: Oh, right.

142. Fred: on the, on the strength of the chapel. Ed what's his name, it's a Jewish name I can't quite remember, he's practicing architect, has his own office, he and I were both on the jury and we both recommended Steve Holl on the basis of his chapel and he did a lousy job on
143. Eugenia: Yeah. (laughter)
144. Fred: the Bellevue art museum. (laughter) So much so that it
145. Eugenia: How does that happen? I don't understand.
146. Fred: went out of business, practically. Well it did go out of business for two or three, four years.
147. Eugenia: Yeah, well it, their, CFO was (cough) (not understandable word...) in all those things and. (laughter)
148. Fred: Have you been in it now, the, now that they fixed it up?
149. Eugenia: I
150. Fred: Haven't they revised it a lot?
151. Eugenia: Yeah, yeah, I've been, they had a Russel Wright exhibit recently,
152. Fred: I haven't