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Oral history interview with David and Michelle Holzapfel, 2008 January 6 and March 2

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with David and Michelle Holzapfel on January 26 and March 2, 2008. The interview took place in Marlboro, Vermont, and was conducted by Josephine Shea for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

David and Michelle Holzapfel have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JOSEPHINE SHEA: Once again, this is Josephine Shea interviewing now David and Michelle Holzapfel in the artists' home and studio in Brattleboro, Vermont.

DAVID HOLZAPFEL: Marlboro.

MS. SHEA: Sorry. [Laughs.] I just changed towns.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: We'll be in Brattleboro for dinner.

[They laugh.]

MS. SHEA: For the Archives of American Art, the Smithsonian Institution and this is the first disc with both of them.

I thought it might be good to talk about, since you share workspace — one of the questions is what are the qualities of your working environment?

MICHELLE HOLZAPFEL: Qualities? Dusty.

[They laugh.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Too small.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, it's like you can never have enough room, but over the years — well, it's evolved a lot over the years.

MS. SHEA: I've heard really over a 30-year time span.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, yes, and we used to have a wood stove in there. Every night, it would be like rolling the dice. We had fire insurance, but you'd stoke that that stove up and just hope nothing bad happened.

MS. SHEA: No stray spark went awry.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: And so, again, over the years, as we've amassed bits of capital here and there, we've made improvements, cosmetic improvements, but also improvements in terms of making it easier to heat. Here, nine months of the year, you need to be able to tick that heater on and you don't want it all going through the walls. So we've insulated and made that separate space for me, so we're not trying to heat the whole building when I'm just sitting in a space this big. But you need a lot more space than I do.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: It is true that we — when we had a fairly major renovation in the early '90s and — well, just to jump back quickly in the '80s, the middle '80s, we first got air tools. That made a huge difference, and I think that our working life has been extended because of that. And then in the early '90s, we made the showroom. We sort of divided up the space in the showroom, and Michelle's working space — her sort of carving area, not where the lathe is — and again, because she was in there all the time, and when she's carving, when she's working on a piece, she's quite stationary, whereas, when I'm working, I'm moving around. And so it's more active and hers is more contained. And so we got that space insulated and heated, and it's facing south, so she gets great sunlight in through there.

MS. SHEA: I noticed the light was very nice.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: It's very nice, yes.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes. And then it wasn't until —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Maybe five years ago?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, maybe five years or so ago that my side of the shop got insulated and a heater put in.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Those had been overhead rafters. There wasn't even a solid ceiling there.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Right.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: So all the heat would go into the upstairs, which is just storage space, so ceiling, sheetrock, more insulation and then another heater on David's side. That made a huge difference as well.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: We also — in order to be able to maintain a degree of civility, we clearly separated our work spaces, and I'm going to say this in maybe a genteel way. My working environment tends to be more sprawling than Michelle's, but it is also true that the materials that I'm working with are bigger and take up more space. But having said that, I also tend to sprawl, but I know where stuff is, but it's not neat, whereas Michelle is much more organized and neat. And it was certainly frustrating for her when my sprawl would encroach into her space, which it still does, but not to the degree that it used to.

[They laugh.]

MS. HOLZAPFEL: It still does, yes, right. And there are certain tools that we use in common, something like the band saw we both use.

MS. SHEA: The band saw?

MS. HOLZAPFEL: The band saw and like any common space, there's a — I wouldn't say it's unspoken. I'd say it's spoken over and over again, understanding that something used in common has to be kept fit.

MS. SHEA: Left ready for the next person to use it. [Laughs.]

MS. HOLZAPFEL: For the next person, yes.

MS. SHEA: The bathroom principle or the Xerox principle or whatever. [Laughs.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, we can — [inaudible.]

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Exactly, exactly, whatever it is. And I'd say over the years too we've tended to get double sets of tools, just because I don't want to be running in there because that's where the screwdrivers live or vice versa. So I'd say we have much fewer fights than we used to have about that, much fewer. Instead of once a week, it's more like once a year, which is pretty good. [They laugh.] So I'd say we've worked that out well. The showroom space where we still have future plans to make that a little nicer with — because that's an important space. That's the first thing people see when they come in, and it's like that's the chance to make a first impression.

So we would — we've always got the five-year plan of what needs doing next. But the storage space, the wood storage space, again, is a factor of the scale of David's work and my work. It's much more full of big boards, but I've still got plenty of wood, so that's never — it's not really an issue. And I would say too that it's rare that we both slaver over the same piece of wood, because, again, I'm looking for, say, a burl, and he is — if we get a big, big burl, a lot of times, what we'll do is I'll take the two end pieces, kind of like the heel of the bread because those are nice for turning for vessel forms, and then he'll take the slabs in the middle.

MS. SHEA: So you don't have to do scissor, paper, rock for it?

[They laugh.]

MS. HOLZAPFEL: No, it's funny. We've just got enough that that's not — fortunately, that's not an issue and we try and like not use up all the finish, and then not get a new can, so that when the other person goes to use it, there's isn't any. I would say that's worked out.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Moreover, there are — I think we've always sort of been sensitive to each other's trajectory in a given project, so that is to say, if Michelle was getting ready for a show, she would — her needs for anything out in the shop was priority, and whatever I was working on would be secondary, and vice versa. If I was getting to the end of a project and had a deadline to have a piece completed, she would defer to my need to get that done.

That's really been sort of unspoken, but —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, right. We've helped each other in a clinch with the —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Finishing and —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Whatever, yes.

MS. SHEA: Do you ever physically help each other or is —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Well, sometimes holding something up or looking at each other's work. That happens a lot, but it's very — I think we each tend to wait for the — like, David will wait for me to ask him, to solicit his opinion, and vice versa.

MS. SHEA: You just don't wander by and say, uh-oh. [Laughs.]

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Although it has happened.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: If it's an uh-oh situation, I might or she might.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, or that I might just look at him and think — because a lot of times I'm in there all day, and David's at school. And so generally, he comes home at the end of the day and often will check in, and I might say, you know, I was looking at that and I'm just wondering, are you planning to kind of cut that back? And a lot of times he'll say, oh, yes, I just haven't gotten to that yet. It's really nice to have another pair of eyes, and I don't think we've ever — I don't think there have ever been any tears over anything we've said to each other in that respect.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: No, we might not agree.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: In other words, if I make a suggestion to Michelle, or she to me, and I or she don't agree about it, we may not do it, but that's — even that's pretty rare.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Right.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: I think usually, our mutual critiques are pretty good.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: And we haven't really — we haven't collaborated a lot. There are some couples, or even partners, maybe not married, but people who collaborate a lot, and I would say that all our collaborative energy just tends to go into the household and the business. And when it comes to actually making things, we've got pretty different ideas of what we want to make and how we want to make things. So it's interesting that of all the spheres we could overlap, I'd say that's the one we overlap the least.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: And even — there was — early on, I would say probably in the early '80s, we did have some collaborative pieces, where Michelle would make a part of it and I would make a part of it, but even that — Michelle's left-handed and I'm right-handed. And so sometimes — it's funny what happened is when we felt like we were going to collaborate — and I'm not even sure why we felt like we needed to but we did — and the way we finally worked it out best was either I would start the piece and stop, and give it to her and I would have no more say in it, or she would start the piece and then give it to me, and she could have no more say in it. And that worked out pretty well.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: You would subcontract to me. If you wanted to have a turned base, you'd say, it wants to start here and here make a curve, you'd come back, now, I want that curve tighter or whatever.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: I was outsourcing.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: It would just be like subcontract — [they laugh].

MS. SHEA: Across the shop.

[They laugh.]

MS. HOLZAPFEL: But really, I think we've had some of our worst misunderstandings — we've got a board this big. David will ask me, can you help me pick this up? And I go like this and he goes like this —

MS. SHEA: You grab it a certain way?

MS. HOLZAPFEL: — and we start to twist. I mean, he's —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: That's the left hand/right hand problem.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: That's the left hand/right hand thing and sometimes, I'll drop it on my foot and then I'll have to get really worked up about that, but it's that simple a thing that — [laughs].

MR. HOLZAPFEL: When we're sort of mindful of it, what we'll do and say, okay, you're in charge, tell me —

MS. SHEA: Of the move. [Laughs.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes. You're in charge of this move, tell me what you want me to do, and then that works — that always works out best.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: And we have to choreograph it, we have to choreograph it. I'm going to put my hand here and then I'm going to lift like this and turn like this; you're going to swing around that way and we have to choreograph the entire thing because we otherwise would get really fouled up. It's unbelievable. It's like we're like a circus act or something. [They laugh.] Yes.

MS. SHEA: And that is how they move art in museums. You have to plan the move, some person is always the leader of the move, and, yes, you talk about every moment, so you are actually — [inaudible] — art handlers.

[They laugh.]

MS. HOLZAPFEL: By default. And in terms of the business as well — not so much the making things part of it — but it's always been the case that when the gruff logger comes with his truck full of logs, that's a conversation that David's going to have with him, and I'm going to stand back. When it's time to do the bookkeeping, the taxes, that's my department. We've had this sort of division of labor as well that's really worked out. And over the years, with customers also, there have been times when we've really been an effective sort of double team. [Laughs.] I shouldn't even say this, but he will speak to them and then sometimes, I will speak to them and then sometimes, he'll come back. It can be really helpful to have that second person there to — oh, God. Every word that sprang to mind sounds like we're —

MS. SHEA: Maybe reassured?

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, but —

MS. SHEA: Or communicate or —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Sort of like refresh the situation somehow, because you never know. Sometimes the person — this is sort of retail sale, retail stories. It's interesting how some people really like to be — it's almost like they desire to be overpowered by you, they want you to —

MS. SHEA: They want you to tell you that you must have this or something?

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, they want that.

MS. SHEA: Okay.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: You look beautiful in this, or whatever. They want that, and I tend to not be very good at that, but I'll do it if it means making a sale. Other people want you to just — it's like if you even step toward them, they'll run away and you kind of have to suss out every person and —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: I always think of the double teaming, though, when people — they want to bargain.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Oh, yes.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: And one of the more famous examples was we were at a craft show in Morristown, New Jersey, showing Michelle's work. And she was either busy talking to somebody else, or was out of the booth. And so I'm talking to this guy and this guy wants to bargain. He doesn't see any reason why he should pay what the price is. And he and I are going back and forth, and I'm not giving into him, but this guy's wearing me down. And so finally, he'd been chewing on me for easily 15 minutes and finally, I needed to be refreshed. And so I took him over to meet the artist and he started in with her, but she was coming at it clean. And although he was really worked up, she was coming into it clean, and the first thing she said to him was, I'm offended that you are asking me to do this. And that immediately shut him down. He didn't mean to — he didn't want to offend. For him, this was like a game that he was playing, but for us, it wasn't a game. It's tedious. That's just tedious. But anyway, that's a good example in the retail realm of where — because each of us can speak about the other's work

equally well.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: It's almost more easy to speak about the other person's work.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, it certainly is possible — there have been many times — again, because we've shown mostly Michelle's work at — well, mostly at craft shows. When galleries were involved, they were doing all that stuff, but —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Hopefully.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: So at craft shows, often times, Michelle would go away for an hour or so, and I would be in the booth and interacting with new clients. A craft show, at least then — I don't really know what they're like now — but it was — they were real. It was the marketplace. It was the hurly-burly and a real medieval fair. [Laughs.] People come up to you and they say the most — either the most wonderful things or the most idiotic things and —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: People — we swore we were going to write a book of some of the comments that we've collected over the years. A person is in their booth and two people of undisclosed gender are standing there, and one bystander says to the other, how did these people find the time to make this stuff? [Laughs.] And the companion says, well, they don't work.

[They laugh.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Or one time, we were in — I think it was Baltimore — showing Michelle's work and these two people come into the booth and they were really liking it, and they saw Michelle Holzapfel. So they knew it was — the maker was a woman, and they clearly knew it wasn't me. So I said who I was and they were expressing their delight with the work and they said, where did she study? And I said, well, she studied at the University of Hard Knocks. And one of them said to the other one, I think that's in Wisconsin. And I said, yes, there is a campus in Wisconsin.

[They laugh.]

MS. SHEA: I think there's a campus at Berkeley [University of California, Berkeley] —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: But I think, for me, one of the best interactions we had, and this happened on two ends of a day at the Morristown Craft Show. It seemed to me it was on like the same day. In my mind, I've conflated these as being almost back-to-back conversations where we're standing there, the two of us, with probably both of our work, and a couple comes in, clearly, upper management. And we're chatting and the guy, the mister says — definitely a manager kind of guy — he says, oh, so I get it. After we talked, he said, oh, I get it. So he's pointing — like he does the designing and the hard part, and you just do the sanding or something like that. And we were — had to enlighten him that that wasn't how it was, but it was sort of more revealing of this person than —

MS. SHEA: Right, their outlook on —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: But before the day was out, another couple came in, very clearly more like maybe they own a body shop or something. And again, we're giving them the spiel, both of us, having a four-way conversation. And again, the guy says, oh, so I get it. You — he points to me — you do some drawings and then he does all the hard work. [They laugh.] Again, I was saying to you earlier like, you just can't win. [They laugh.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: And those years were both fun and exhausting, but it was a real education in retail.

MS. SHEA: It was graduate school.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: It was graduate school, yes.

[They laugh.]

MS. HOLZAPFEL: And I must give David credit. If it had been up to me, I don't know that I would have done those. It was a tremendous amount of driving and our van always seemed to break down and set up. The WBAI show, you'd be parking down on the street there, down there at Columbia University, and have to lock your car every time. People always had their cars get broken into. And you had to schlep — it would be the equivalent of — it felt like it was a quarter of a mile schlep with your booth, all the parts of your booth, all your display stuff, all your work, all your —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Up several flights of stairs.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Flights of steps up, down. It was grueling and —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Craft shows are grueling.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: I just always was amazed. It was like being a single parent, people who did those by themselves. And everyone hated the jewelry people because they would come with an attaché case —

MS. SHEA: This light, little — [laughs.]

MS. HOLZAPFEL: — and open it and take out their five gold necklaces and sell each one for $36,000 and pack up and go home. We just don't like her. [Laughs.] But that was hard work. But I don't see that there was any other way.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: The other side of it is that it was incredibly fortunate to have a venue that so many people were interested in going to attend and spending serious amounts of money. They were coming to you, in essence. And for that, it was great, because they certainly weren't driving by here.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes.

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MS. SHEA: Would you say that there is a particular community that's been important to you?

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, definitely. Oh, besides the local community, during those years, we made some very close friends, some of whom we still stay in touch with. And I would say, for myself, through the Wood Turning Center [Philadelphia, PA] especially, I've made some good friends and some really important colleagues, some — a very important community. And whether — it's almost — it's not really even a question of how I might feel about their work. It's more we're all in this together and there's a lot of good shared information. And I was going to say misery loves company. That's not really putting it well — [laughs] — but it is comforting to know that you can talk to these other people, and you're all in same boat. And you have similar issues that you're trying to work out.

And I would say 99 times out of 100, people are unfailingly generous with their knowledge. They're remembering you, you're remembering them, you're giving their name to a gallery that you think might like their work, just that kind of networking that was done and it still is done. It's extremely important, it's extremely collegial, and I think unlike maybe some other realms, although it's competitive, I would say the personality of most people who are crafts people tends to be collegial and not — it's not a really cut-throat, hard-driven person who's going to be a potter. I haven't met any.

[They laugh.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Likewise, we've only gone once, but there's a — Michael Hosaluk and Mark Sfirri began this — Michel is Canadian, and they began a — well, in Europe, they call them — they refer to them as artist colonies. It turned into a — it was a fundraising event for the Canadian Crafts Council. And what they would do is invite — they had a place at Emma Lake, which is North of Saskatoon, about two hours north of Saskatoon, out there.

MS. SHEA: I assume this is in the summer?

[They laugh.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: In the summer, yes.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: When the mosquitoes are really very hungry.

MS. SHEA: Okay.

[They laugh.]

MS. HOLZAPFEL: But beautiful; it was really beautiful.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, a beautiful place and —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: It's a camp.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: It's a camp, but they would bring in all this woodworking equipment and then they would invite 50 —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, and other media as well, materials —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: — 50 artists to come in and make stuff.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Just camp out and —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: And a lot of the work would be collaborative work, so that the year that we were there, we worked with Craig Nutt in building a ladder, like an orchard ladder.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: I never laughed so much in my life. Yes, and we'd have our meals together — [inaudible].

MR. HOLZAPFEL: We'd have our meals together, we'd drink beer together and —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: And swim in the lake.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: That was —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: And what was interesting about it is the amount of energy was intense. The shop was being used 20 hours a day, because there were some people who tended to be more night owls, and they would start working about 7:00 p.m. at night and work until 4:00 a.m. in the morning and then go to sleep and —

MS. SHEA: The early birds? [Laughs.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: The early birds, yes.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: The morning shift.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: And what's so cool about this — well, there are many things that are cool — but one aspect of it is the fact that everything you make gets auctioned off, so you're not there making something that you're going to sell. You're building something with other people and some of the work is unbelievable. These are skilled people in their field, whether it's paper making or pottery or metal work, a lot of woodworkers because both Mark and —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Michael.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: — and Michael are woodworkers, so a lot of woodworkers, but other disciplines as well. And so I don't know, maybe there would be two dozen pieces made in that week-long period by these bunch of people working, some very funky stuff, some really gorgeous stuff. Then at the very end, the Canadian Crafts Council holds an auction and they auction off — they fly in collectors, whoever expresses interest.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Gallery owners.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Gallery owners and collectors from the U.S. and Canada and elsewhere I imagine, and they auction off all the work, and then the proceeds go to the Canadian Crafts Council. And so one of the wonderful things about that is it just short-circuits the, I'm working on my thing, because you're not. [Laughs.] That's not even an option.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: It makes me think of a great thing that I haven't participated personally, but one of the really important aspects of what the woodturning center does, they have a ITE, International Turning Exchange, every year in the summer and it's for six or eight weeks. They used to have it at the George School in New Jersey, but at any rate, you have to apply to that and they get people from all over the world, from Australia and New Zealand, from Europe —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: France.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: — from France, from Canada, from everywhere, and they'll select a very mixed group and —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: But only about 10 or so.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, or even eight, and they also have a resident scholar and —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Usually, a documentarian.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, someone to document. And those have been extremely interesting. Those are always very well documented, and that's been a wonderful thing as well for cross-fertilization in the field, because those people end up — because they're sharing a shop and they're living together — and they end up often doing really interesting collaborative work as well. And I think that's part of the deal is you do some of your own work, but you really are — part of the reason for it is to foster collaboration.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: And to learn from each other.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, yes. So that's been a very vital thing, a good thing in the field as well. Did you talk about Croatia? I realized earlier —

MS. SHEA: No, I didn't hear about it.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: It almost came up.

MS. SHEA: That's just when you were asking earlier. In 19 — I think it was '96 or '97.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Whenever the Serbian-Croatian war was happening.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, it was still happening. It was toward the tail end, but I got a call — I know. I came home and Forrest [ph] had answered the phone and he said, some person's calling you from Croatia. I'm thinking, right — [laughs] — but it was true. And this woman called me back and — I don't know if you listen to National Public Radio. She had a voice just like Sylvia Poggioli, that kind of sounds like kind of a pack-a-day voice. And she said, we're having — I'm just backing up a little bit. Martha Cannel [ph] had curated a show with the USIS, the U.S. Information Service, that was kind of an ambassadorial tour of woodturning that was going to tour in Eastern Europe, as well as in Europe. And so I think it opened in Tirana and it traveled all around Europe and into Eastern Europe. And I guess I knew about the show, but I was happy that it was happening, but maybe midway into the show, I get this call from the Canadian — I mean, the Croatian —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Minister of — yes.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: — cultural minister — whatever she was — inviting me, because I had a piece of work in the show inviting me to go to Croatia when the show was in their venue in the town of Varaždin, which was not in Zagreb. It wasn't near the capital. It was way up near the Austrian border because they were thinking this is a good way to get out if we can get these Americans out of here fast. And at first I thought — and then I thought, well, this is an amazing experience. It turned out that the American ambassador to Croatia at that time was Peter Galbraith.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Who lives in Newfane, a couple of towns away.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: He's the son of John Kenneth Galbraith.

MS. SHEA: Okay.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes. But they were from Vermont. They lived in Boston, but they also had a house in Vermont. And he's back in America now; he lives in Newfane. Anyway, he had looked at the list and said, are any of these people from Vermont? And there was my name and I think Al Stirt, who's also from Vermont was on there but his name starts with an S. I don't know if he even —

MS. SHEA: The alphabet triumphs, yay!

[They laugh.]

MS. HOLZAPFEL: At any rate, so they invited me and I sort of let them know that David is also a woodworker and they could sort of get two-for-one if they wanted to. And they were very amenable to that, so we worked out the details and off we went, and actually flew in and out of Vienna, took a train to Zagreb, were debriefed by that State Department there. They told us what to say and what not to say, don't say Serbo-Croatians, and sort of filled us in on all the sensitive cultural details, like how to make sure to not offend anyone.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: They told us what the escape plan was if needed to be.

[They laugh.]

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes.

MS. SHEA: Wow.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: They said, we're going to know where you are and if anything happens, we'll get you out.

[They laugh.]

MS. HOLZAPFEL: But nothing — well, things happened, but they were only wonderful things. And the town of Varaždin was maybe the size of — I don't know, Hartford maybe, Hartford, Connecticut.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Not a tiny town, and this was around the time that Newt Gingrich was lambasting the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] for —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Showing breasts.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: — for things with nude people or something, and this was a dark time for the arts in America. It was so amazing to be so feted there. Oh, God, our itinerary was just — it was one party after another and —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Two parties a day.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Oh, incredible.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: We would be picked up in the morning by one group, who would take us to a furniture factory. When we arrived at the furniture factory, the first thing we would do — so this is at 9:30 a.m. in the morning.

MS. SHEA: Nine or 10:00 a.m.?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: The first thing we would is sit down and have brandy.

MS. SHEA: Slivovitz?

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Slivovitz.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, Slivovitz, exactly right.

[They laugh.]

MS. SHEA: For breakfast, essentially. [Laughs.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: That's right. While the director of the factory gave us a brief 40-minute history of the factory — [laughs] — but they were very understanding. And just before that portion of the interview was over, they'd bring in coffee. So you'd first have a couple of Slivovitz, then you'd have a couple Café Turc and then you'd go off to visit the plant. The people who picked us up in the morning, and with whom we toured the plant, we would then go to lunch with. Lunch would begin around 1:00 p.m. and end at around 4:00 p.m.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: With more of everything.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: With great food and great wine, just for hours and hours and hours, and great conversation.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Because these would be artists or painters or —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Sculptors.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: And we'd got visit their studios, they'd take us to their gallery, we'd meet the — it was incredible. It was an incredible experience. And then —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: And we'd go home, we'd go home for a —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Oh, yes, to put our feet up for 10 minutes.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: — we'd go back to our hotel for an hour, and then we'd get picked up at 6:00 p.m. for the night activities, which would be —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: A play —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Concerts —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: — or a concert.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: They had an — we were mostly — our host was the local culture minister and he said this town spent —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: A quarter.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: A quarter of its municipal budget on arts and culture. [Laughs.] They had this incredible baroque music festival every summer. It was just amazing. So we had a great, great time. And then there was

the opening of the show where the ambassador came, and other — so it's time for the big, big banquet with the ambassador at the opening, and the hosts are tripping over themselves. They're so embarrassed because it's Friday and it's the beginning of Lent, and so there can be no meat. So instead, there's lobster and caviar, a bucket of caviar.

[They laugh.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Flounder, and it's just unbelievable.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: It was ridiculous. It was great, and all kinds of local cheeses and so that was — and it was a very beautiful old, baroque city, just beautiful to walk around in, and obviously, we were being shown sort of the best of everything.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, we had a translator the entire time —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: The whole time.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: — a young woman for most of the time, but for a press conference, we had [Franjo] Tudjman —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: The president.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: — the president, President Tudjam's interpreter —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: It was unbelievable.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: — who was doing simultaneous translation. It was extraordinary. Somebody would be asking a question in Croatian. While that person is speaking, she's translating it in English to Michelle or me or to whomever it was directed. Then, when we would begin to respond, we'd get maybe a sentence in and then she would be speaking Croatian back to the questioner, while we were speaking to her of the answer.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: It was amazing.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: She was amazing. She was good.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: She was a pro. That was a wonderful experience. And then at the very end, when we were heading back to Zagreb to take the train back, we visited — and this was interesting too. And we visited that school, because their art academy and their training schools were very formal, and we gave a slide lecture and talked to them. It was like stepping back in time. It's what I imagine like Bauhaus art training was in the '30s, very, very formal. So they were — I got the feeling that they were really intrigued by just the craziness and the looseness of sort of the American way, and the fact that we didn't have like heavy duty credentials. We weren't professors; we were just self-taught. That was very unusual to them, where it was a much more kind of hierarchical — [inaudible].

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Well, or lineage.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, a lineage. Yes, that's right.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: A lineage more than hierarchical because the first thing they would do is tell you who they studied with, which —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: So that was — it was extremely educational for us. I hope it was educational for them.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: And whenever we would go and visit artists' studios and sit around and drink and talk, it was really — mostly what they wanted to know about was the art market, which —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Well, it's that old saying.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: That Oscar Wilde —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Oscar Wilde?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Oscar Wilde, that artists sit around and talk about money and bankers sit around and talk about art. [They laugh.] That's a loose paraphrase but —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes.

MS. SHEA: One of the general questions, and sometimes these are a little broad: do you see the field moving in a particular direction? We talked about more about how you saw the gallery economics going, but do you have

—

MS. HOLZAPFEL: I don't feel like I'm sort of in the middle of things that much. I imagine that there are — I hope that there are some younger practitioners coming along, keeping the field vital.

MS. SHEA: Do you think —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: I don't see — and I think maybe some people are using computers and stuff, but in terms of formal development, I think if anything, maybe it's been that era when people really did begin doing collaborative work, or stretching into furniture design, kind of moving more laterally than necessarily a big evolution in their forms.

MS. SHEA: You talked about how a lot of — I guess you would call them the hobbyists — are — tend to be men and tend to be older. Do you think — are there people coming up within?

MS. HOLZAPFEL: I don't know. I really — I don't know.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: I would say based on one of the —

MS. SHEA: Younger people, like we were talking about the younger client.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: I think one of the — it can be looked at in many ways, but not to necessarily make it polarized, but one of the aspects of our working life is that we're really isolated here. We're not in the metropolitan areas where everybody — where you can just walk down the street and see the new show or whatever. So that in many respects, we don't really know because we're not in that, so we're reliant upon whatever gets into the publications, the few publications that we get. But it certainly does — but the other side of that is, that's not a distraction for us. So that might be regarded as the good side of that, but it does seem as though, in looking at the magazines, that there's new work coming along, names that we don't know and that's a good thing.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: The student, the CCAC, the California College of [Arts and Crafts, now California College of the Arts, San Francisco, CA] — I think they've changed their name. It's not even arts and crafts —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Art design. [Laughs.]

MS. HOLZAPFEL: But in, say, *Woodwork* magazine, which is — we have a subscription to — which tries to show current work. They have a gallery section and you'll see the CCAC Show or the various institutions that have woodworking programs, and they'll have a student show and there will be a little spread there of student work. So, yes, there's stuff being done. It always seems like it's more furniture, which is understandable because there's that functional component.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: And there's the academia. There are programs in woodworking, furniture making and design.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes. And I don't — the Wood Turning Center has a quarterly newsletter that's now online, and then the AAW [American Association of Woodworkers], they have some kind of journal which I don't subscribe to. But to me, that field tends to be — I guess my sense is that it tends to be more like recycling its own, in a sense. That's the sense that I get.

MS. SHEA: Because that is — it kind of segues into this next question: what do you see as the place of universities in the American craft movement?

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Very important, really.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Although we haven't partaken in that, I still — it goes back to what we were talking about earlier about a body of criticism. I feel as though perhaps woodturning has suffered from this definitely more than furniture, sort of a dearth of rigorous criticism, whereas the Furniture Society, as I mentioned, their publications have been extremely good and insightful and thought provoking and scholarly in the best way. And I think it's because they have those programs that are generating that level of discourse.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, and that are examining both the historical and the sort of the history of furniture and the history of design as well, and it's in those disciplines that a conversation can then — about work can then — it's only when you've got that vocabulary that you can begin to have that conversation. And in publications or in the universities, that's where that can happen and it spreads out, as Michelle is saying, in some select publications. That's definitely a good thing.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Although I've certainly talked to people who have had — have gone to art school and who have

said, I wish I had never gone. It tightened me up, it took away my sense that I could do anything because it was sort of — it was proscriptive, if that's the right word. But to me, that's no indictment of academia. It's just it's not for everyone.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: That's sort of what I was saying also about how we know some people who went through the academic training, and they learned technique, but they didn't necessarily learn what it is to be an artist, whatever that is. But at the same time, that aspect of the process, in the context of its history, is something that often — and unfortunately, in woodturning, is often the case where that kind of understanding of the traditions and history of woodturning is not really known or appreciated. And yet it's crucial to really understanding — there's always a tendency — or not always. Sometimes there's a tendency for artists to think, oh, I don't want to be influenced by anything because I want to just make this up on my own. That is so tedious.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: And unfortunately, in woodturning more than in furniture making that can sometimes be the case.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: But having said that, there are some very insightful people.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, absolutely.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: And I think what's unfortunate is that there's some really good work that, to me, hasn't gotten the credit that it deserves because it's almost too insightful. [Laughs.] I think of someone like David Sengel. I think his work's incredible. I could never figure out why he wasn't getting more coverage.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, it's the vagaries of time and place.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes. And I can think of a lot of great work, because especially in those years that I was really more active, and when I was curating that show, I saw a lot of work. Some of these people I had never heard of and some of the stuff was fantastic, but it goes back to what I was saying before, about if you can manage to have some talent and some luck, you've got it made, but if, for some reason, you don't, you're missing some piece, your work could be fabulous and you will just flounder in obscurity. And that's a harsh thing, but it seems to be true.

MS. SHEA: Would you say that you've been involved with national organizations?

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, I have.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, I have, with the Furniture Society although really, fairly marginally. The Furniture Society is — I don't know — it's maybe a six, eight, 10-year-old, 10, 12-year-old —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, yes.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: — institution, or whatever, organization. And they always have their conference, their annual conference. I'm sure that it's — they choose the date based on the university academic year. And so it's always early in June, like the 5th or 6th or 7th, or 8th of June. I'm still in school, so I'm not — I can't — except in 1999, I gave a talk when it was in Tennessee. Craig Nutt was one of the organizers and so I went down and gave a talk to the — I was at one of the workshops and one of the lectures that was given, but that's really the only one that I've ever been to, but in this year, it's going to be in Purchase, New York.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: New York, yes.

MS. SHEA: New York.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: And it's going to be like the 20th or so, or 19th of June. So I'll be able to go to that one. [Laughs.] And that actually is sort of — in 1979 was the first woodworking —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, conference.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: — woodworking conference and it was at — held at Purchase [NY], the campus of NYU [New York University] at Purchase.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: And they have a woodworking program. Denis Fitzgerald runs that.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, they have a woodworking — yes. And that was an interesting — that was the first one, so —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: And David — I would say we're not huge shakers and movers in these organizations, but we've certainly partaken and benefited from them too, and they've been important.

MS. SHEA: I thought this might be a good joint question: what impact has technology had on your work? You did mention moving from electric tools to air was a big step for both of you.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, the Kubota is great for moving heavy pieces of wood. That's a nice piece. [They laugh.] Well, digital technology has been really important. We were talking this morning about doing commissions by email, with digital photographs. That's been a great thing. We've just, in the last year, got a website and have gotten links that are on the Vermont Crafts Council website and a couple of others, that kind of —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: We're also part of an online gallery, Vermont Woods, which is a local-sited and it's a couple of towns over, but it's certainly got international reach and that's all online.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: And even for writing. I've done a lot of writing over the years and the word processor is — it's so fabulous.

MS. SHEA: We don't even think about it, typing and we used to have to correct.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: You wouldn't have had nearly so much to say if —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: No, I wouldn't have.

[They laugh.]

MS. SHEA: You had to take it all out.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: I'm a pretty good typer, but that's been wonderful. And even in putting this little book together and using — having my little thumbnails and organizing it, the computer has been just a fabulous way to organize information, things like bookkeeping, things like email, keeping in touch. When I was first at the Peter Joseph Gallery that first year, and Lorry bought each of the artisan stable a fax machine and at the time, it was just like, wow, unbelievable, a fax machine. But all those things made for a lot of instantaneous good — sometimes too instant communication. [Laughs.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: And for example, one way in which, just to sort of — although I haven't made it yet. I took a commission recently for a dining table. The person had seen work on our website, and then we met at his parents' apartment in Boston. And he told me about which pieces on our website he really liked, and indicated that he was interested in a dining table. So I said, great, and we talked a little bit about some of the parameters of what he was interested in. I came back here, looked at some boards that would be appropriate to the size and whatnot, and marked them with chalk, and then took digital images of them, sent them to him.

He looked at it and said, well, you know; we went back and forth. I showed him several different possibilities for what he had indicated was of interest to him. We settled on one, then we — then I took images of what the base pieces might look like, sent him those images. And so thus far, he hasn't seen anything here. All he's seen are the digital images of them. At the same time, he knows my work because his parents have work by us, but he hasn't seen anything yet. He's never been to the shop.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: That technology has been great. I can't think of any like out there technology other than air tools. There are always little things that are like, oh, the newest carbide burrs really cuts great, but there's a lot of slogging as well. I can't say that there's any major innovation — [unintelligible].

MR. HOLZAPFEL: A chain hoist.

[They laugh.]

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes. But other than that, it's pretty — it's almost pre-industrial, some of the — I still do a lot of hand-carving as well, just hammer and chisel, just the way somebody would do it 100, 200, 300 years ago.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: We try as much as possible to use power equipment for what we need to do, but there always comes a point at which it's hand-work. It's our — it's chisel work, it's riffler work, it's not mechanized in any way and that's true with really every piece we make.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: And sometimes, that's the fastest way, actually.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Sometimes it's the fastest way, because one of the things about a power tool is it can remove

material, but it can remove it sometimes faster than you want it to. And one of the aspects of the work that both of us do is the fact that once you remove something, it's really hard to put it back, especially when it's sawdust.

[They laugh.]

MS. HOLZAPFEL: I have super-glued a chip back on — I'll fully admit that.

[They laugh.]

MS. SHEA: Well, I think you've — is there anything else that either of you would like —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: There's something I was thinking about when I was out working and now it's not coming to me that I had wanted to circle around.

MS. SHEA: Did you want to look through your notes and see if you feel like you've covered things?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: "Nature abhors a straight line." [Laughs.] That was from William Kemp in 1502.

MS. SHEA: Oh, really?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes. One of the questions had to do with the element of play.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: What are your thoughts on that one, Michelle?

MS. HOLZAPFEL: I guess I was thinking about that when I talking with you earlier about science or about experimenting. I think, for me, it's a little more like experimenting. Play — I like to play with my grandchildren.

MS. SHEA: It's a little too light.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: It's a little too light for me, yes.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Likewise, when I was thinking about that, I was thinking, what I have written here is play as openness to what emerges, or fluidity, not being play in terms of being —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: A kind of reciprocity with —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, accessible or available to what emerges, play in that sense.

MS. SHEA: Being open to the possibilities?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, because again, because of the nature of what we do, the material has a lot to say about it. And if you're not sensitive to that, if you're not open to that, if you're not available to that, it just — it doesn't work.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: I had the experience many times because I like to draw. A lot of times I'll draw a lot when I'm working. And at first, I would make these very elaborate drawings, because I liked drawing, and then I'd try and make that drawing be the basis for a piece. And I often found that the piece ended up feeling a little static and I would find that if I just responded more to say, voids or grain lines or whatever, that the piece would be more successful. So I would — it's more like the analogy of a pilot starting with a flight plan. They know they're going from A to B and they're heading west-northwest, but if something comes up, they're going to go with that.

So I found my drawings getting sketchier and sketchier. If I really felt like drawing, I'd draw for the joy of drawing, but not have that be so much the basis of the piece that I was going to make. And so now, sometimes I hardly sketch at all. I'll write three words. I'll write inverted ring because I have this idea in my mind and then I'll remember what it means when I look at it, and not even necessarily make a drawing, although there are times when I'm trying to make something that's actually quite engineered, where I really do need to make a drawing to figure out how a piece is going to be cut and moved. Then that's something that needs — more like a measured drawing.

But I really found that a lot of times, the idea that I had discarded ended up being, in a way, a much weaker idea or the piece that I ended up with ended up being a stronger piece than my initial thought, because I took a cue somehow, a formal cue from some gap or something that was happening in the wood. And that led me into a new direction, the way you would be led in a new direction by collaborating with a person, when they say, hey, what about this? That's what the wood is saying. It's saying, hey, look at this big crack.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: What are you going to do about that?

MS. HOLZAPFEL: What are you going to do about that?

[They laugh.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: In some ways, this relates too to what I was talking about before about the strength of the tree, and going with the tree strength, as opposed to some imposed notion of what this material's supposed to do for me. It's much more — well, I'll go back to no real production, only interdependence.

MS. SHEA: I often ask, if you were approached by someone who is kind of starting out and was very interested in this field, what kinds of advice would you offer them?

MS. HOLZAPFEL: It's a really tough question. I went and spoke one day — yes.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Go ahead.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Denis Fitzgerald over at SUNY [State University of New York] invited me to just go for the day and talk to his students, and they asked me that question. And it wasn't as though I was saying, don't do it, but I felt very — it was sort of a very sober message that I was trying to give them about just the difficulty of getting started because, yes, it's partly about just having a lot of energy, a lot of good ideas about having skills. But there's that element of luck and there's that need for self-promotion or to be able to just hire an agent.

You could have a shop full of fabulous stuff and if you can't sell it, you're not going to be in business for very long, unless you have an independent income. And I think — I haven't gone through the academic process, so I don't know how much they're teaching marketing and teaching that — just teaching business sense, but to me, that's what runs people into the ground, is the marketing aspect of it. And so I guess my message was, if you're not ready to buckle up to — [inaudible] — you might want to just find a good employer and do the work that you like doing, but you can work for someone else, because to start out on your own —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: In terms of furniture making, there aren't many who don't have some other job, who either work in academia or have some other income stream, either a spouse or some other revenue. It's tough, and increasingly, the market is thinning, I think.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: If you want to go to a craft show and rent a booth, it can cost $1,000. Even for something as simple as a craft show, the overhead can be significant: five days of staying in a hotel, meals, the cost of your booth, the rental fees. It's really intense. If you're just out of school and you've got student loans, wow, I don't know. And I think people do tend to do internships or do basically the equivalent of an — not an internship, but like the guild system.

MS. SHEA: Apprenticeship.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, apprenticeship —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Apprenticeship, yes.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: — and work for someone who's established, because those people are — John Dunnigan and Wendell and Hozan [ph], a lot of the people who are furniture makers and designers in academia hire people to fulfill certain aspects of their work. And that's — so then it's from the studio of, and that studio system again, goes way back to masters. The European masters —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Pre-Renaissance.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: — had their workshop and —

MS. SHEA: Have you ever taken on —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Not really, no. We have a high school student, who's just fabulous who's helped us do milling, milling boards, and he's done a bit here and there, but basically, no. We're just done stuff ourselves. It's not steady enough.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: In part, the shop's too small, it's —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Space.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Our methods are so — I don't know. Maybe they're not — they just seem quirky to me, but maybe they're not as quirky as I think they are, and that it is possible to teach someone to do what we want

them to do. But my sense has always been that by the time you finish teaching them how to do it, they'll think, I can do this, I don't need this person and I'm off to — and our volume is just not — our volume is — in a big cabinet shop, where they've got a lot of volume, there's where they can take on apprentices and retain them if they're paid well.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: I could never figure — I like every aspect of the process of what I do and somehow, the idea of paying someone to have my fun for me, it just seems crazy. [Laughs.] It's like making a great meal and paying someone to eat it for me. It's like why would I want to do that? That's the fun part, so I —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: It's also — and this goes back to again, the material, and maybe it is quirky, because you can teach somebody the technique, but I don't know that you can teach somebody to be receptive to the material. You can't teach someone that. There certainly are people who are, or who could get it, could see it, and be able to do that, but there are too many sort of crucial — there's no phase of it that isn't important.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: And something like sanding, which can be very repetitive, but I like that time because when I'm sanding, it's not taking 100 percent of my concentration, but that can be a time when I'm thinking about other pieces that I want to make. I'm actually doing two kinds of work when I'm doing — just the way you can be doing the dishes and suddenly get this great idea —

MS. SHEA: Idea.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: — for something else or a phrase will come to you or whatever. So I like that time, even of the more repetitive or simple tasks.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: My hands don't necessarily like it, but —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: No. [Laughs.] The one thing I've always been willing to pay half of the price of a piece for is to have somebody else sell it for me. And mostly, although I've had my ups and downs with the galleries, I never begrudged them their 50 percent because I know what hard work that is, and I know they've got rent to pay and staff to pay, and they pretty much earn that the hard way. But I did find, when I was then suddenly dealing with galleries a lot, that I kind of missed the interaction with the clients.

Sometimes, the clients, people would buy work and then come up and visit me and we'd get to chat and I'd get to meet them, but a lot of times, these are just names or I don't even know their names. A lot of galleries are very, very jealous of sharing the names of their clients even with — I have — if we ever get this retrospective together, and they ask me where's this piece and that piece, I'm going to have to send them to these gallery owners to get the names of who owns these pieces and the addresses because a lot of times, I never know.

MS. SHEA: Whereas that wouldn't be quite so much your situation because you've been working more in the commission arena.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, right. There are some pieces that I wish I knew where they were, but I may also have that information somewhere.

[They laugh.]

MS. HOLZAPFEL: The archives.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Which is why I say it would be nice to know where it was, but — [they laugh] — in the archives, yes.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: I know now what I was thinking about when you were asking me about various motifs. One whole area of motifs that I've used a lot that I didn't mention was textile motifs: woven, upholstered-looking pieces, draped pieces, where the pieces are actually look clothed and linen fold, the linen-fold motif. That's something that I've incorporated into my work a lot and for some reason, I didn't mention it, but that really does harken back also to my background, and my family background, and that kind of an homage to all the textile workers in my family. There was something that always felt very right to me about combining — and in a way, wood and textiles are both sort of cellulosic. They're both fiber, in a way, fiber media and vegetable, except for wool, I guess, but still, there's some kindredness, I think, between —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: The plant kingdom.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, between fabric and trees. And textiles look good rendered in wood. Some things it's really hard to render flesh in wood. It always has that kind of harsh look, but fabric in wood is just — they just melt into each other really nicely.

MS. SHEA: And that's interesting because there's such a history of that.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, and it just goes back to that bespoke notion of tailoring wood or tailoring the form of the wood to be clothed, to be embodied. And a lot of my work is — the titles are — they're like characters, titles of sort of mythological characters or —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Jackie O [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis].

MS. HOLZAPFEL: — family characters, yes, or the first lady, and a lot of the vocabulary of the vessel form, the neck, the foot. It's an anthropomorphic form, so it never took much brain power on my part to come to the conclusion that these were like little figures and I was going to sort of dress them in different ways.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: One of the questions you have here has to do with political and social commentary. I think, in some respects, our choice of material is — I don't know that it's a social commentary, but as I had mentioned to your earlier, and when we first started using these materials because it was what was available to us, but then as the environmental implications of imported woods became more significant and more to the forefront of people's consciousness, suddenly, using woods from our backyard begins to make a very direct social comment. Again, I wouldn't want to say that that's — it wasn't intentional, but the fact of it is true.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: In a lot of ways, we had to be very conservative because we didn't have tons of capital, so we had to be kind of small C, conservative in what we did and how we did it, and it ends up being politically correct probably. [Laughs.]

MS. SHEA: It's all worked out very well.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: And I guess too, some people can sort of afford to patronize local people. We sort of pay ourselves the kind of wage that plumbers and car mechanics get paid. which seems pretty fair but in the — I go into stores now and see imported stuff, baskets and sewing things, stuff that I want, stuff that's beautiful, that's really great looking, and I look at the prices and they're just incredibly — I can afford them, and I think, boy, why would anyone buy a bowl that I made and spend $5,000, when they can come down here and here's a perfectly nice salad bowl with a bit of carving, or a beautiful quilted pillow from India that's all pieced silk and it's $40. How can I compete with that? And in a way, more power to them, although I don't know that it's the maker who's really getting paid —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, you do. You know the makers are not getting paid.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Well, I know that, but the quandary there is if they weren't doing that, what would they be doing? It's — that's a big, big question. But for someone who can afford to pay sort of the premium of buying work from an American, and pay us sort of that fair wage, for some people, that means a lot too. That sort of has political indications as well.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: And I guess I feel as though, at least — people who buy my furniture, if they need a table, they're not buying my furniture because they need a table. They can go to Wal-Mart and buy a table, but they want something more than that, and so it's —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: But I understand. We do go to Wal-Mart too.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yes.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: It's sort of amazing after all these years. I still am amazed. We're friends with Michael Tree who plays viola for the Guameri Quartet, and I heard him say this once and I thought that was so funny and it's true. He said, I can't believe I got to spend my whole life doing what I really love to do and get paid, like, go figure. And even though we've had some very tough years, I still feel like it's an amazing thing that anyone out there will spend a big chunk of cash to have something that's basically — that's beautiful and meaningful to them, but I'm still quite amazed that I've been able to make any kind of living doing this work.

MS. SHEA: That seems like it might be a good place to end. Thank you, both of you, for sharing that amazing journey.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Thank you. You're a good listener.

[They laugh.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: It's not over, I hope.

[They laugh.]

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes, I hope not.

MS. SHEA: Thank you both very much.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Thank you.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Thank you.

[END MD 01 TR 02.]

MS. SHEA: And once again, this is Josephine Shea and I am with both David and Michelle Holzapfel in Marlboro, Vermont, in their home for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. And this is disc number two of the discs with both of our artists.

We were talking about, Michelle, how you didn't feel that you really apprenticed under any one in particular, but there was kind of a relationship, a mentorship that you thought was very important.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yeah. In I believe it was '84, I was invited by Albert LeCoff by the Woodturning Center to take part in a weekend symposium, I guess you would call it. At that time, the Woodturning Center had a relationship with the Craft Alliance in St. Louis, Missouri. And I know that went on for several years that there would be a woodturning event of some sort at Craft Alliance, an exhibit.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: It was a gallery.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yeah, it was a gallery called Craft Alliance, right. And so that particular year, which I believe was '83, I was invited to be on a panel and speak and I don't even know if I knew ahead of time that it would be James Prestini and I. And there may have been a third person. Bruce Mitchell. Bruce Mitchell?

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Or Steve Laurer [ph]?

MS. HOLZAPFEL: No, I think it was Bruce. At any rate, we each had remarks prepared which we gave. And then afterwards, I had never met Prestini before, but he was very well known in the field because he was at that point in his 80s even and he had done woodturning back in the '40s, I guess, the '40s and '50s, as part of — you know, he was a modernist. He had studied with [László] Moholy-Nagy and he had taught at — was it the [School of the] Art Institute of Chicago, perhaps. At this time in '83, he was a professor at Berkeley.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: He was sort of coming out of a Bauhaus. He was working with the Bauhaus artists and architects who left Europe in the late '30s and early '40s. And he became associated with them and his woodturning was reflective of that in that the forms were very clean, very unadorned.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Unadorned. It was about letting the wood sort of be itself. I mean, all the grain and color of the wood. There were no staining.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: It was about the form, the simplicity and directness of form.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Very smooth forms and very exact as well. And what was interesting was somehow — and this often happens when you meet people, you're sort of either not hitting it off or kind of hitting it off and sometimes you really are just instantly hitting it off. We got to talking afterwards about jazz, as I remember. And —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Big Spider Beck [ph]?

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yeah, and Jack Tea Garden. And we got into this — [they laugh] — this discussion about jazz and the next thing you know, we were just — we spent the whole rest of that day together and had dinner. And I guess we were there for a second day in which we walked around St. Louis. We went to the [Gateway] Arch. We went to the St. Louis Art Museum, just the three of us, and had the best time. And I remember him saying that he had grown up in Rhode Island as well.

MS. SHEA: Oh, an interesting connection.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yes. And, you know, an immigrant family, Italian family. He said, you know, when they needed some front steps, they went out and nixed some concrete and poured their own steps, which is just what we had done. I used to help my father mix concrete and do projects like that all the time. So — and it's almost like small phrases that are code for much wider experiences or commonalities. So we just had a great time and it — so in a way, our relationship really was not that much about the specifics of our styles of work. I have no idea what he really thought about my work, whether he liked it or not. We didn't talk that much. Well, you had a different experience.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Well, yes, but I guess the only thing I wanted to say was that by the '50s, by the mid-50s, he had stopped turning completely. So he had maybe a 10-year period where he was exploring woodturning. And

then he continued with his architecture and sculptural interests and that's where he was at the U [University of] Chicago. So he was — in the woodturning field, he's regarded as one of the founders of the studio woodturner.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Maybe the John Adams of woodturning. [They laugh.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: At the — just to, before Michelle goes away from our time in St. Louis, we spent one afternoon at the St. Louis Art Museum just wandering around looking at various paintings and sculptures and talking about them —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Well, and looking at the building, talking about the building.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: — talking about the building. And there was also in conjunction with this conference was this exhibition of woodturning which, of course, had a reception afterwards. And Prestini and I spent almost the entire evening playing this little game where would go and — we'd each get a glass of wine and we'd go and stand around and just talk about whatever and drink this glass of wine.

Then we'd take turns to one or another piece, either a piece we liked or a piece we didn't like, and we would talk to each other about what we liked about it, what we felt worked, what we didn't get, or — so it was an art history class that actually was sort of reminiscent of the poetry classes I used to have with Desmond O'Grady in that — I don't even know how much wine we drank, but the conversation got more and more lively and the interesting as the evening went on. [They laugh.]

We also figured out — there was at one point, we had a problem in that there was no more wine on the table. And we couldn't find anyone to ask about getting more bottles of wine, so I said, James, let's try this, and I took one of the empty bottles and lay it on its side, which, you know, the people who were attending to the refreshment table saw that and immediately came over and —

MS. SHEA: The signal. [Laughs.]

MR. HOLZAPFEL: — remedied — it was a signal — [they laugh] — they remedied the situation and our history seminar was able to continue. [They laugh.]

MS. SHEA: And was Michelle following along in this?

MS. HOLZAPFEL: I was there. I was not drinking as much wine as — [they laugh] —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: But you were also — I think you were also being —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: I was more — yeah, on —

MS. SHEA: Part of the mix of the —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yeah.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yeah, whereas Prestini didn't seem to — you know, he was, as the elder statesman, he didn't need to — he could do whatever he wanted and he and I were having a great time. [They laugh.]

MS. HOLZAPFEL: I just didn't know at that point that I could do whatever I wanted. [They laugh.] That's the difference between being 35 and 85. So that was a delightful weekend. And after that — I mean, we might have just parted ways and that would have been fine. But I think he probably initiated this correspondence. And probably once a month or every six weeks or so, in the mail, we would get this legal sized envelope just stuffed. It was always about, you know, half an inch thick and inside would be two or five or six sheets of typing paper. And usually on each sheet there might be a little — one little epigram of his. Sometimes maybe a little political cartoon. It would just be a little package of thoughts that he would put together.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Typed. This is pre-computer.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Typed on a typewriter, yeah. And then sometimes something in writing, too. But what this dialogue was about — and we would write back. We would write.

MS. SHEA: A little longer or —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yeah, a little longer.

MS. SHEA: It seemed kind of — [laughs].

MS. HOLZAPFEL: And sometimes — and what was nice about it is it would be to you or it would be to me, he

distinguished between the two of us, which I always felt was very nice. And I would say what I remember as being the meat of the discussion between the two of us was what is art for, what is this stuff that you're making for, what are the markets, what is the understanding of the markets, the audience. Because I was at that time in the late '80s selling some work, but it was really a struggle for me.

And I kept vacillating between whether — especially as our kids got — you know, they were getting to high school age and then even after high school, you know, sort of approaching college. And I was just thinking why am I doing this? You know, this is such a financial struggle. You know, does America want this? Does anybody really want this? Is this really worth doing? And —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Prestini's comments would often — even though that might not have been communicated to him, many of his epigrams dealt with that sort of thing, dealt with sort of the role of the artist in society, dealt with the artist's self understanding as well. I think of that one — one of them was something along the line of, if you want to be different, be good.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yeah, and you will be good.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: As an artist. You know, if you want to be a good artist — or if you want to be different, if you want to sort of distinguish yourself, be good. You know, do good work. And that —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Or do good work and you won't have to wear jewelry. [They laugh.] He was very aware of the hype, not just of artists, performers, whatever, but that that kind of glamorization and cultive personality that seems to be — branding, I guess we would call it now, that drives a great deal of what is considered success. And he was just sort of cautioning, you know, don't forget who you are, don't forget what you're trying to say. And what was interesting was it was often a very kind of discouraging edge to his messages, or very realistic, very —

MS. SHEA: I was going to say, so there's a real reality based on his years of —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Definitely. No, it was not hearts and flowers. It was not —

MS. HOLZAPFEL: No, no. And it was very much based on his experience, you know.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yeah.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: So somehow coming from him, in some way, I found it vaguely encouraging just because we kept talking about it. And although at the end of the '80s, I did take a year off and get a job in Brattleboro just because it was, you know, it was ridiculous. I couldn't not — I couldn't continue with the extremely pathetic level of income that I was getting at that point. And I'm trying to remember when he died. It was the early to mid-90s maybe. Because at some point, the correspondence began to taper off and one day I got a letter from probably a graduate student or someone —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Assistant.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: — who was helping him, assisting him, getting his papers together, just saying that, you know, he hadn't been well. I guess he had had some heart problems. And then, you know, and then it really tapered off and then we heard that he had —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: [Inaudible.]

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Sorry. Then we heard that he had died.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: One of the things that I remember him talking about and just every — and he mentioned this more than once, but he got such a kick out of it, is he talked about wearing a tie. [Laughs.] And he said this tie was his disguise. [They laugh.] It made him seem respectable.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: In the manuscript — I think I sent you one, the manuscript that I'm putting together — one of the things that I included in there was an essay that I wrote when he died for *American Craft*. Just a very short, you know, a few hundred words. But I often think of that as being like one of the better pieces of writing that I'd done. It wasn't about me so much. And it was sort of a homage to him.

And he just — I don't know, he was so realistic. He was quite grumpy in a way, but kind of good grumpy, you know, bracingly grumpy. But the fact that he was a good teacher — I don't know, he had that kind of teacher gene of just being a good example of how to maneuver through the world. You know, he had — he was a golf pro as well. He had taught math or something. I mean, he did — he was a poly-math — he was really —

MR. HOLZAPFEL: And I think at the time he was working in stainless steel.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Yeah.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: In terms of his sculptural work, he was working in stainless steel. I remember, just when you were talking about his being a good teacher, one of his phrases, too, was that good students make the teacher look good. [They laugh.]

MS. HOLZAPFEL: He had all these — and also, actually, I would say sort of his central tenet about craft had to do with, you know, good art is craft and craft is — good craft is art. And you know, he — and again, maybe it's his background. He sent another one of his lines was I learned more from being poor than I ever learned at Yale. [They laugh.] I think he always wanted to make sure that it was clear that even the most sublime piece of art is grounded in skill, you know, in craft, in skill, and that good art never ceases being good craft. It just, you know, there's an accretion perhaps of more and more levels of meaning. But that, you know, that craft is an unbreakable brute.

And I still — that was something that I think we firmly agreed on and understood. But he — I think he helped me to focus on that somehow. That's such an ongoing and sort of annoying debate that just doesn't go away. Not a debate, but a — it's a misunderstanding somehow or it's a vexed issue somehow. And it'll be interesting, you know — I'd like to live a long time just so that I can look back in 30 years when maybe there's a little bit more distance and look at the craft movement of the late 20th and early 21st century and what it all came down to.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: I mean, thinking of Prestini, it makes me wonder maybe, here's a man who had in the '40s done a lot of woodturning and then stopped and wasn't even thinking about it at all and then suddenly 30 years later, everyone wants to ask him about his woodturning. He didn't really have that much to say about it. [Laughs.] He was like, at the time it was interesting and he was exploring and experimenting. But I mean, his forms were kind of salad bowls.

MS. HOLZAPFEL (?): Because they were meant to be functional.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Because they were — yeah, they were meant to be functional, yeah. Plates and salad bowls and that sort of thing. But clean, you know, Bauhaus clean.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Right, that's right, Danish modern — [inaudible].

MR. HOLZAPFEL: Yeah, yeah.

MS. SHEA: Well, hopefully, we will be able to look back — [they laugh] — on this.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: I hope if I live to be his age, I won't necessarily still be hacking away at wood, though.

MR. HOLZAPFEL: You're going to go to stainless? [They laugh.]

MS. HOLZAPFEL: [Inaudible] — something that's a little easier on the joints.

MS. SHEA: Well, we'll see what the future holds. And in the meantime, thank you both very much for sharing.
MR. HOLZAPFEL: Thank you, Josephine.

MS. HOLZAPFEL: Thank you, Josephine. That's great. Glad to be able to add that part.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]