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Oral history interview with Wendell Castle,
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Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Wendell Castle on February 22 and 24, 2012. The interview took place in Scottsville, New York, and was conducted by Jeannine Falino 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.

OLD TRANSCRIPTS-NO INITIALS IN BRACKETS: {WHO} has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JEANNINE FALINO: All right, this is Jeannine Falino speaking for the Archives of American Art. And I am meeting here in an oral interview with Wendell Castle at his workshop in Scottsville, New York. It is February 22, 2012.

Now, Wendell, what I probably should have said when I started, or before I turned down the microphone, is that what I'd like to do in this first session is to review your early career.

WENDELL CASTLE: Okay.

MS. FALINO: And then we're going to have a second session, and in that one I'd like to talk about more of your later work, and I want to explore more of your philosophies more in an expanded version. So obviously you're going to be talking about your approaches all the way through, but hopefully we can expand upon them in the second session.

MR. CASTLE: Okay.

MS. FALINO: So this will be ground that's been covered to some degree before, but we wanted to get your perspective of time since the last time you were interviewed by the archives. So, we're going to start at the beginning.

MR. CASTLE: Way back.

MS. FALINO: Way back when.

MR. CASTLE: Back in Kansas?

MS. FALINO: Back in Kansas.

MR. CASTLE: That far back?

MS. FALINO: Yes, all that way back. And if you would just start by telling us about your birthplace and your parents.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I was born in Emporia, Kansas but really never lived there. My parents lived in a very small town near Emporia where my father was a vocational agriculture teacher. And the little town was called Staffordville —

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: — which I think maybe doesn't even exist anymore. It was just a kind of a wide spot in the road, but it had a school.

MS. FALINO: [Laughs.]

MR. CASTLE: But then we moved to Blue Rapids when I was three or four. And then by the time I was, like, 5 years old, we moved to Holten, Kansas —

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: — where I went through — there was no kindergarten in those days. So, anyway, 1st through, I think, 6th grade. Then my father took a job teaching — still teaching vocational agriculture in Coffeerville, Kansas. Coffeerville had a fabulous school system. I wish we'd have stayed there.

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: But that's where I had my one and only shop class in the 8th grade. Eight-grade boys in that school had to take three shop classes. One was electricity, where you kind of learned about how electricity works and learned how to splice wire and wind an armature and a few things like that. And then we had metal shop, which was really you bent some iron and did kind of wrought iron —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — sort of work. And the other was wood shop.

MS. FALINO: And that's where you made a birdhouse?

MR. CASTLE: No, I didn't make any birdhouse.

MS. FALINO: [Laughs.]

MR. CASTLE: It was amazingly advanced, if you were up for it. And I built two pieces of furniture, which still exist.

MS. FALINO: And where are they?

MR. CASTLE: Well, my brother has one, and I don't know where the other is but somebody sent a picture of it recently.

MS. FALINO: Oh, that's great.

MR. CASTLE: I mean, what the teacher told you to do was go to a Sears catalogue and cut out a picture of something you wanted to make, and he would help you make it.

MS. FALINO: Wow.

MR. CASTLE: And I cut out a picture of a — it was kind of a — kind of a Duncan Phyfe sort of coffee table. And I don't think Duncan Phyfe every made any coffee tables, but —

MS. FALINO: Certainly not for Sears.

MR. CASTLE: No. So it wasn't really. And the other was a — the design I think came through a hobby magazine or something — was a telephone stand. My brother has that in Kansas City.

MS. FALINO: Still very useful?

MR. CASTLE: Well, he doesn't use it, but you could.

MS. FALINO: [Laughs.]

MR. CASTLE: I mean, it's in fine condition.

MS. FALINO: And you had a good teacher?

MR. CASTLE: And I had a terrific teacher, Mr. Lake — I think his name was Donald Lake — who was really good. I mean, he — if he saw somebody had some talent, he really helped them, and so I got a lot out of it.

MS. FALINO: Excellent.

MR. CASTLE: That's it.

Then the other — when my father then took another kind of job — he worked for a bank, actually and then moved back to Holten, Kansas. My uncle owned a bank and wanted my father to handle the farm loans, which he never liked that job very well, but — so we moved backed to Holten.

And they had a shop class, so I thought I was going to take it. But I went in, and the first day in there I decided it was not anything I wanted to have anything to do with. It was a terrible shop compared to the one — the 8th grade shop. And the teacher — I could see, you know, just all the dumb kids were in there.

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: In the 8th grade, everybody had to take that shop class. It was not an option. You had to take it. But then the shop after that, it was optional and only stupid kids were in there —

MS. FALINO: And the quality —

MR. CASTLE: — so I immediately dropped out.

MS. FALINO: And the quality wasn't anywhere near where you were?

MR. CASTLE: No, they didn't have a good shop, and I didn't think the teacher knew what he was doing. So, that was my one and only shop class.

MS. FALINO: Now, your dad had — you moved, like, one, two, three, four, five times almost until you were in 8th grade. That's quite a lot. And your dad was teaching most of the time and then he got into the banking business.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm [affirmation] — but I only went to two different schools, though —

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: — because the early moves were when I was too young.

MS. FALINO: When you were so young.

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: Right. That seems unusual for a teacher to move around so much. Why do you think that was?

MR. CASTLE: I don't know. I mean, he got better jobs each time, so he moved up.

MS. FALINO: So he was moving up maybe into administration?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.]

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: In Coffeerville he had the best job in the state —

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: — clearly.

MS. FALINO: Oh, okay.

MR. CASTLE: Which he knew and I know he never should have left.

MS. FALINO: And your mom, she was also college educated.

MR. CASTLE: Yes. They both graduated from Manhattan —

MS. FALINO: Kansas State.

MR. CASTLE: — Kansas State.

MS. FALINO: Great.

MR. CASTLE: And she didn't work when I was little, but then later she began to teach grade school.

MS. FALINO: And as I recall, they were not all that interested, your parents, in what you had to do in any kind of artistic way.

MR. CASTLE: Not at all, no.

MS. FALINO: They had different expectations for you.

MR. CASTLE: Yes. And I actually drew a lot as a child, but nobody ever suggested that they were any good or I should save them. So I have no childhood drawings.

MS. FALINO: No records.

MR. CASTLE: And in high school I did — my high school had not art program, so you couldn't take any art. But I did do some illustrations for the high school newspaper, so I did still draw some. So, I guess I could draw better than other people.

MS. FALINO: Yes. And it seems like, from what I've read, that you had — while you didn't — you weren't particularly athletic, at least by what was being offered in the Kansas school system, like football or basketball or baseball, it didn't particularly bother you, or you somehow made yourself immune to those things and didn't let it —

MR. CASTLE: Well, yes, it didn't bother me very much. I mean, I kind of wished I had some skills, or had been bigger for football but, you know, I never thought much about it.

MS. FALINO: But your dad was handy around the house and you observed him.

MR. CASTLE: Yes. I mean, we had a small kind of handyman workshop at home, so you could make things. And I did, when I was young — I don't know, even — in fact, there's a picture downstairs on that little bulletin board in the office, and it shows me and my brother and a neighborhood kid making kind of like a clubhouse.

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: And I'm sawing. And I was always in charge of those projects.

MS. FALINO: So you were thinking conceptually.

MR. CASTLE: So, if it was a tree house, you know, I was the one that figured out how to do it.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And the other kids would then help me.

MS. FALINO: Well, then this is not much different. [They laugh.]

MR. CASTLE: Just the same — no. You know?

MS. FALINO: Now, you mentioned you have a younger brother.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.]

MS. FALINO: And he's now in Kansas City.

MR. CASTLE: He is.

MS. FALINO: And what was he like growing up?

MR. CASTLE: Well, we played together and did things together and built things together.

MS. FALINO: Like the tree house.

MR. CASTLE: Like a tree house or a boat or — you know, we built some things. And he's very handy too, you know, making things. He's a Methodist minister, but he's very handy and has good carpenter skills and mechanical skills, and better at working on cars than I am.

MS. FALINO: Do you think that that was true for a lot of kids growing up in Kansas, just being out, you know, in the heartland, so to speak? Or is that more particular to your family? I'm just curious in terms of comparison.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I think we were kind of unusual, that the —

MS. FALINO: In what way?

MR. CASTLE: Well, that I liked to make things. And a neighbor kid, who was a couple of years younger, but his father was a doctor, Doc Kendell, and he had a workshop, a good one, much better than my father's. And he would encourage us kids that we could use his workshop. I mean, he was very helpful. In fact, when we made a boat once, he bought all the materials, so —

MS. FALINO: Oh, nice.

MR. CASTLE: So I had — my father was handy with stuff and then this Doc Kendell, which was like two houses away —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — had a shop in his basement and let us kids use it.

MS. FALINO: Oh, so that's very encouraging.

MR. CASTLE: So I think that's unusual.

MS. FALINO: Yes. Well, I know, just for comparison's sake, Mary [Lee] Hu, the jeweler, has very fond memories of working with her dad in his workshop. And I think, you know, sometimes those things do translate into lifelong pleasures —

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: — you know, that you derive that kind of pleasure from that kind of creative activity.

MR. CASTLE: You know, I don't think I ever built things with my father, but, you know, he would tell us the correct way to use a tool —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — kind of thing.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: Because in vocational agriculture, the teaching part of it was sort of dealing with farm equipment.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: And you had — you know, back in those days a lot of things still used wood, like wagons were made of wood.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: And so that was sort of part of what he taught.

MS. FALINO: Now, what about your wider family? I mean, where — actually, let's go back a little further. Where does the Castle family come from? Do you know what their family origins are?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I had an aunt that traced it way back because she wanted to belong to the Daughters of the American Revolution or something, and traced it back. They had been in this country quite a number of generations. I don't really — I don't know exactly, really.

MS. FALINO: But do you think your family was living out in Kansas for a very long time?

MR. CASTLE: No. No, they weren't. No. My grandfather — my father was born in Iowa — and he farmed in Iowa, my grandfather, and came to Kansas. I'm not sure exactly why, but I think it was somewhat for health reasons. I don't know why they would be better in Kansas, but they had a farm there. So they would have only been in Kansas — my grandfather came when my father was grade-school age.

MS. FALINO: Yeah, so one generation. So the previous generations were farmers.

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: And before that it was Iowa.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.]

MS. FALINO: And what about your mother's side?

MR. CASTLE: Well, they, the Deckers, they came from Kentucky to Kansas, but that was my grandfather came when he was young to Kansas — I think he wasn't even married — back when they were giving land away.

MS. FALINO: Right. That's what I was wondering, if that was the reason people were going there.

MR. CASTLE: Yes. Then he married a Longnecker. That's what — [laughs]. And my mother was one of nine kids.

MS. FALINO: Wow.

MR. CASTLE: Two are still alive.

MS. FALINO: Really? God bless them. How old are they?

MR. CASTLE: One is a hundred —

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: — and still driving a car. And the other is 96 but she's not in such good shape.

MS. FALINO: And were they housewives? These were women or me?

MR. CASTLE: Women. They're both women.

MS. FALINO: Somewhere along the way I read that you mentioned you had dyslexia.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, I do. I still do.

MS. FALINO: Still do. A lot of artists have dyslexia. Brent Kington does and I think Robert Ebendorf does, just to mention two other cases. And it happened to come up in conversations that we had.

And they both claimed that the dyslexia was one of the reasons why they went into the arts, that they didn't find academics interesting and it was in working with their hands and their minds that they really had felt the greatest happiness and expression.

MR. CASTLE: Right. Yes. I mean, things like numbers were very difficult because I would reverse things all the time. And reading was difficult, although I don't have much trouble anymore, but I've learned how to do it.

MS. FALINO: You've learned to compensate, I'm sure.

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: Yes. And of course in those days they didn't maybe recognize dyslexia.

MR. CASTLE: No.

MS. FALINO: Were you diagnosed?

MR. CASTLE: No, and so I did poorly in school. There were a few things I could do, but —

MS. FALINO: But, now, your parents were college educated. They were sort of one generation up from the farm —

MR. CASTLE: Right.

MS. FALINO: — and were upwardly mobile, in an intellectual sense, at the very least.

MR. CASTLE: Right.

MS. FALINO: So —

MR. CASTLE: My mother's family was really unusual. Three of her brothers had Ph.D.s —

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: — which is really amazing.

MS. FALINO: Really amazing. And did they get them back East or in the Midwest?

MR. CASTLE: Let's see; I know that one of them got it from Kansas State, but I don't know where John got his. Maybe it's Uncle Sam. And he taught at Kansas State for a while.

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: Then I had another Uncle, Ferris, and he taught at Florida State, but I'm not sure where he got his doctor's. I know they all went undergraduate to Manhattan —

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: — but doctors' degrees, I'm not sure about where they came from.

MS. FALINO: Oh, they were medical doctors too?

MR. CASTLE: No, just Ph.D.s.

MS. FALINO: No, Ph.D.s.

MR. CASTLE: All Ph.D.s.

MS. FALINO: That's really quite an accomplishment. But it doesn't seem to have affected you in a long-term fashion. You just sort of — you know, it seems like you held out, in a way, until you could find your own place.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I could get mostly C's, so I could pass. [They laugh.] And I didn't — you know, it was obvious that I was supposed to go to college, but I didn't have any idea what I wanted to study.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And I didn't even know where I wanted to go to school, so my parents sent me to Baker University because it's a religious school. They thought it would be safe — a Methodist school, which I didn't really like very well at all. And so I was there a year-and-a-half. And the first semester of my second year I had an opportunity to take an elective, and —

MS. FALINO: And what did you take?

MR. CASTLE: Art. It was the first time they had an art course.

MS. FALINO: And it resonated with you?

MR. CASTLE: Yep.

MS. FALINO: What kind of an art class was it?

MR. CASTLE: Well, it was just general, because they really didn't have an art major in school.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: They just had a few art — maybe they — I don't even — maybe it was the only art course, I don't even know, because it was watercolor and drawing and just very general stuff, no figurative — there wasn't any figure drawing. It was some still-life drawing, landscape drawing, landscape watercolor, stuff like that.

MS. FALINO: And you found that you were enjoying yourself.

MR. CASTLE: I was the best one.

MS. FALINO: [Laughs.] But you had started out as a business major.

MR. CASTLE: Well, you don't really have a major. People like to say that, but — my wife —

MS. FALINO: Well, that's what your parents wanted for you?

MR. CASTLE: Kind of. They would have liked that.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: But, you know, your first year you don't really have a major anyway. It's all liberal arts stuff.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: So, I didn't really have a true major.

MS. FALINO: Now, do you —

MR. CASTLE: But the art teacher encouraged me to leave that school.

MS. FALINO: Do you know what his name was?

MR. CASTLE: Simone — Dr. Simone. I don't know his first name. I should look that up — find an old catalogue from the school.

MS. FALINO: Those were the little spurs that move you on to the next level, huh?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, because he was good. He was a good teacher.

MS. FALINO: So you took a couple of art classes and then you moved on to KU.

MR. CASTLE: Well, just one.

MS. FALINO: Just one.

MR. CASTLE: Just one.

MS. FALINO: It must have been a pretty small school. Was it, like, 500 students or —

MR. CASTLE: Well, maybe more than that, but, you know, probably under a thousand.

MS. FALINO: Yeah. And you lived away from home for that? That was the first time you lived away from home.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.]

MS. FALINO: And how was that experience just as —

MR. CASTLE: Well, I didn't like it in the beginning, but then I really didn't mind being away from home. The school just seemed boring to me. I wasn't taking anything, except for the art course, that I liked. I did join the fraternity and that was — you know, so I had some friends. So that part of it was good. So I had some social life.

MS. FALINO: Socializing, yeah. So, getting to Lawrence, that was a much bigger town.

MR. CASTLE: Well, much bigger town and a whole lot bigger school. I mean, it was probably 15,000 students when I was there.

MS. FALINO: Ah. Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: It's probably twice that now. So I loved the art part but I still had some — well, I had an awful lot of my liberal arts out of the way, having a year-and-a-half of them —

MS. FALINO: Oh, right.

MR. CASTLE: — but I still had some things I had to take. But the art courses I loved, and they were good. I thought I had good teachers, and I did well in those.

MS. FALINO: Yeah, the school actually was, I think, quite important in the Midwest as an important pioneer actually in establishing a design program, and that was — you knew Marjorie Whitney?

MR. CASTLE: I sure do.

MS. FALINO: Can you recollect anything —

MR. CASTLE: A lot about her — yeah, I can tell you a lot about her.

MS. FALINO: Oh, I would love to hear that.

MR. CASTLE: You know, the — you know, I probably didn't know — when I first went there I probably had no contact with her, really, although she was the — well, now, what was her official title, dean? I don't know. Or just director of the art school — I forget.

MS. FALINO: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: She was in charge of the design part of the art school.

MS. FALINO: I think that's what it was.

MR. CASTLE: The design part and the fine arts part had two different directors. They were next to each other.

MS. FALINO: Yeah, and industrial design was part of the design side.

MR. CASTLE: And, strangely enough, sculpture was part of the design side.

MS. FALINO: Design. That is strange.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, so that didn't make sense but that's the way it was.

MS. FALINO: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: And, well, back in those days — that was the days of the Korean War and the draft was in effect then. So, what happened every year in the spring when you left school, you would get drafted. And then you could get a letter from the school that said you're enrolled the following fall and then you would — they'd exempt you.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: But I went to the draft board because I needed five years, because now I wasn't going to be able to graduate in four years. It was going to take me five years. The draft board wouldn't give me five years. They said, "You're only going to get four."

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: So I let them draft me after that first semester. So I only had one semester of art. And when it came time for — the draft notice came in the spring — I did not re-enroll —

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: — because then I could get the GI Bill.

MS. FALINO: So you could get your education paid for when you come back.

MR. CASTLE: And I thought it would be a lot better to have an interruption early than an interruption between your junior and senior year. That seemed to me that would be terrible to have a two-year interruption.

MS. FALINO: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: So I got drafted then, in the Army.

MS. FALINO: That must have been tough to do in the sense that you had just found what you enjoyed doing and then you took this break to go off to — did you go to Korea or —

MR. CASTLE: No, I did not, luckily.

MS. FALINO: You were in El Paso, right?

MR. CASTLE: I was in El Paso first, yes.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And, you know, I didn't like the Army at all, but I did have some friends that — I had longtime friends, particularly one, Arthur Harkens.

Anyway, I ended up in Germany as part of the occupation force there. And I hadn't been in Germany — and I was in the Signal Corps, and all — you know, there was nothing you did; you just trained. You had nothing to do, really. You just — I don't know what you did.

But, anyway, I hadn't been there more than a month, maybe two months — I can't remember — and I met the guy who was battalion artist. And I didn't even know they had a battalion artist, but somehow I met this guy. And his time was almost up. He was leaving in another month or two, something like that. So I applied for his job and I got it.

So I was battalion artist for most of the time in Germany. And if you have an actual job in the Army, you don't have to do guard duty or KP. You just had a 9-to-5 thing.

MS. FALINO: Very nice.

MR. CASTLE: And so, I had a cushy deal — [they laugh] — and a little office. I've got some pictures of me in my office.

MS. FALINO: Oh, really?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.] And there wasn't really very much to do, so you could more or less — I would sit around and draw all day. I mean, I would make some illustrations for the battalion newspaper. I'd make some signs. I'd draw some maps. I mean, there wasn't really very much to do.

MS. FALINO: So what did you do with your time?

MR. CASTLE: So I drew.

MS. FALINO: And when you had time off?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I'd travel all over Europe everywhere — I mean, France, Germany, Italy, Holland, Belgium, England, France.

MS. FALINO: Now, this is what year? We're talking about '57?

MR. CASTLE: No, earlier.

MS. FALINO: Fifty —

MR. CASTLE: Fifty-three and '4.

MS. FALINO: Oh, my gosh.

MS. FALINO: It was really a wide-open time in Europe, wasn't it?

MR. CASTLE: It was great. It was a very unusual — I mean, places like the Maginot Line were open. You could just find where the entrances were —

MS. FALINO: Oh, my gosh.

MR. CASTLE: — and you could go in there and walk for miles — you'd need a flashlight —

MS. FALINO: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: — underground. And there would still be, you know, beds laying around and pots and pans.

MS. FALINO: Wow.

MR. CASTLE: You could just walk through — it was just wide open, not closed off a bit. And, like, castles that were in ruins, you could just go right in and climb right up to the top. And, you know, there was nobody — nothing was — everything was just open. Nobody had any sort of, you know — [inaudible] — and things, they were — you could climb on them, do anything.

MS. FALINO: Did you travel around mostly by yourself?

MR. CASTLE: No, sometimes I would — no, usually I would go with someone.

MS. FALINO: Somebody from the Army?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah.

MS. FALINO: And you also went to museums.

MR. CASTLE: Oh, yeah, everywhere I went to museums, all over Germany and in Paris and Holland and England. I went to all the museums all over.

MS. FALINO: At that time did you hear much about the Monument Men? Was there any talk about them?

MR. CASTLE: No, I didn't know about the Monument Men until a few years ago —

MS. FALINO: Yeah, they've become better known.

MR. CASTLE: — when I read *The Rape of Europa*, but I'd like to know more and I think I'd like to research that subject.

MS. FALINO: Well, we can talk about that.

MR. CASTLE: Do you know about the Monument Men?

MS. FALINO: A little bit. A little bit.

MR. CASTLE: More than there would be in that book?

MS. FALINO: There is another book as well.

MR. CASTLE: Really?

MS. FALINO: Yeah, and there's — I think a film has been made.

MR. CASTLE: Well, *The Rape of Europa* is a film.

MS. FALINO: Is it a film? Okay.

MR. CASTLE: Oh, yeah. And there is a fair amount in there about Monument Men, particularly Keller. That subject really interests me. That's amazing.

MS. FALINO: Yeah, and the story continues to this very day. It's astonishing.

MR. CASTLE: I mean, if I had known about the — they still would have been working when I was there.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: But I didn't know about it.

MS. FALINO: You were probably passing right by them and didn't realize it.

MR. CASTLE: I probably was, yeah.

MS. FALINO: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: They were probably there.

MS. FALINO: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: Certainly they were there.

MS. FALINO: Yeah, fascinating, really.

So, were there any particular things — I mean, you talk about seeing castles and going to museums, but were there any particular things that really stick in your memory as, you know, saying, "I love that," or "I've got to make one of those," or "I wish I could do something like that"?

MR. CASTLE: I wasn't thinking about furniture in those days at all.

MS. FALINO: I mean, I'm not talking about furniture in particular.

MR. CASTLE: So I wasn't looking at any design or — I was only looking at fine art.

MS. FALINO: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: You know, I don't know whether there would be — I mean, the obvious thing is going to see the *Mona Lisa*, but, you know — I can't remember anything that stuck out, but I had a great experience.

MS. FALINO: And it was, really, a visual experience. You were just taking — you were sort of — you were taking it all in and, you know, storing up your visual memories with all these things.

MR. CASTLE: Right. I mean, the countryside in Germany — this is Southern Germany where I was, near the French border. It was beautiful countryside, very beautiful out there, and you could just go driving down a road and see a castle sitting up there, and you could just go up there and go in.

MS. FALINO: Amazing.

All right, so you were — when you were a battalion artist, I wanted to ask, did you — I don't know whether this was part of your job or not, but I wanted to ask, did you have anything to do with stage sets?

MR. CASTLE: No.

MS. FALINO: No? And have you ever had any involvement with that?

MR. CASTLE: I never had any, no. No, nobody was putting — no, nobody put on any plays —

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: — at this battalion.

MS. FALINO: Okay. I must be thinking of *South Pacific*. [They laugh.]

MR. CASTLE: No, I don't think — no sets. No, never done it.

MS. FALINO: Okay, so you made — you made this really amazing trip courtesy of the Army, to Europe. You saw a great deal of the world in Western Europe. And then you returned to Kansas.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.]

MS. FALINO: And how did that feel?

MR. CASTLE: Well, good. I mean, my parents weren't really going to support the art thing, so that wasn't going to work out very well either. But now with the GI Bill, I didn't need any support there. The GI Bill was — really, I lived comfortably. You know, I had a car and — you could live on it.

MS. FALINO: They paid you to go to school and they gave you a stipend.

MR. CASTLE: You got a certain amount. They would cover tuition and they'd give you a certain amount each month for living expenses.

MS. FALINO: Yeah. It was a great engine for so many careers.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, I mean, it was fabulous, and I lived very comfortably. I drove a sports car and — [laughs].

MS. FALINO: Oh, even back then?

MR. CASTLE: Even back then I had a sports car.

MS. FALINO: So, if you would, I would love to have you tell about the various teachers and personages at the school, because a lot of those individuals are not well known or recorded.

MR. CASTLE: No. I mean, Donner Dykes — which is a pretty weird name — was the industrial design teacher I had most of the time. When I first was there — the first semester when I went there — well, let me back up — I actually ended up in industrial design by default, because when I left Baker University to go to KU, I kind of convinced my parents that industrial design — the key word was "industrial" and that it wasn't really an art thing.

MS. FALINO: Yes, sort of serious.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah. And that sort of made it tolerable with my parents. But then really what ended up happening because of being in school five years to get my undergraduate degree, and having quite a few of the liberal arts things out of the way, I got to take way more electives than other people did. And I took them all in the fine arts, you know, drawing and painting. So I took all my electives.

MS. FALINO: So you were able to really balance the industrial design with a lot of other fine arts skills.

MR. CASTLE: Yeah, so I had a lot more drawing courses than an industrial designer would normally have, and watercolor classes and painting classes. And there were some good teachers. There was a guy named [Rayond] Eastwood taught there, who painted, kind of, landscapes that I thought were pretty boring.

But he was amazing. You would have a still-life drawing class and they would set up — he would set up a still life and the students would all go around in a circle around it. And if you'd have something — let's say a bicycle — if the wheel is straight on you, it's a circle, and if it's crooked, it's an ellipse.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: If it happens to be almost a circle, that's the hardest one to draw. A true ellipse is easy.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: A true circle is easy. That one — and if you kind of, like, cheated, he would catch you every time.

MS. FALINO: [Laughs.]

MR. CASTLE: He would know — somehow when he graded the drawings he knew where you sat, and if you didn't draw it from where you sat —

MS. FALINO: He'd call you on it.

MR. CASTLE: He would catch you on it. And I still have a lot of those drawings up in the attic here. And he would grade 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. You know, the best one is number 1.

MS. FALINO: Oh. And how did you do?

MR. CASTLE: I would usually get number 1.

MS. FALINO: Pretty good.

Now, as I recall, you did teach — well, you taught perspective a little bit later.

MR. CASTLE: I did. One of the courses, which was part of the industrial design program, was a course in — a full semester course is perspective drawing, which covered huge aspects of it from a mechanical perspective — you know, 1, 2 and 3-point mechanical — free-hand perspective. And then when I was a graduate — I'm jumping ahead, but then I taught that course.

MS. FALINO: And you taught. So, did — so Mr. Eastwood —

MR. CASTLE: Well, no, he —

MS. FALINO: — do you think he helped you with some of that?

MR. CASTLE: No, he didn't teach — he didn't teach the perspective drawing class. Well, of course he —

MS. FALINO: But that was —

MR. CASTLE: You know, I don't even remember who taught the perspective drawing class for me, because I had that fairly early on in school. But I remember Eastwood and his drawing classes, but he was a painting teacher primarily.

MS. FALINO: Primarily.

MR. CASTLE: And then there's a guy named Bob Sudlow. And Bob Sudlow was a pretty well-known Kansas artist. And he — I had some classes from him. They used to have one called antique drawing, where you have plaster casts —

MS. FALINO: Oh, yeah.

MR. CASTLE: — of famous things.

MS. FALINO: Sure.

MR. CASTLE: And you would draw. And plaster casts are really cool to draw from because you get such nice, clean shadows on them —

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: — because you can light them. And because they're white, they really are much easier to draw than, say, to draw a person.

MS. FALINO: So where were the plaster casts?

MR. CASTLE: They had a whole roomful.

MS. FALINO: At the museum or in the school?

MR. CASTLE: No, they had a roomful of these in the art school —

MS. FALINO: Yeah.

MR. CASTLE: — which, they've probably all thrown them away, I bet. But that was great to draw those.

And then Bob Sudlow taught watercolor, so I had that from him. I never took any printmaking, but they had a well-known printmaker there then. Oh, what was his name? He was kind of well known.

MS. FALINO: There were a lot of them. That's all right.

MR. CASTLE: But I never took printmaking. And in the industrial design curriculum, you had to take one craft

class, and you got to choose from ceramics, weaving and metal jewelry, and I took jewelry. And Carlyle Smith was the teacher, and I loved it. And I took another — when I had another elective, I took a second jewelry class. And he tried to talk me into changing my major to jewelry.

MS. FALINO: He was a great proselytizer for metal.

So, tell us a little bit about your observations of him. What was he like as a teacher?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I thought he was a good teacher. You know, it was mostly technical stuff. I don't think he was too big on aesthetics, you know.

MS. FALINO: No, I don't think he was either.

MR. CASTLE: No, I don't think that. It was really teaching you how to raise and how to solder and set a stone, and all that kind of stuff. But I thought he was a good teacher. I liked him.

MS. FALINO: One of his great — I think, anyway — one of his great features was that he didn't want anybody to be like him. He wasn't trying to force them into a particular style, which is why his students, like Brent Kington and Bob Ebendorf are such very different artists and, you know, very talented in their own way, but didn't necessarily take after, you know, their teacher.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.] Well, there was another teacher who was very influential to me, although I never took a class from him, but he took an interest in me and always would like to talk to me about my sketchbook and wanted to see it. And his name was George Montgomery.

MS. FALINO: This was Monty?

MR. CASTLE: Monty. He was fabulous. So you know that name?

MS. FALINO: I know about him, yes.

MR. CASTLE: He was great.

MS. FALINO: Now, he was in the war.

MR. CASTLE: I know. He was badly wounded in the war.

MS. FALINO: World War II.

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: So he was disfigured — not horribly, but, you know, somewhat.

MS. FALINO: So, you found him to be a very — kind of a sensitive artist?

MR. CASTLE: Yeah.

MS. FALINO: And he was a metalsmith, but did he do other things?

MR. CASTLE: I don't think he did much, really. I can't remember his work at all.

MS. FALINO: But he encouraged you.

MR. CASTLE: He did.

MS. FALINO: And that means a great deal, I think, when you're finding your way, to have somebody really say — latch on to you and say, you know, you've got something more than the average guy.

MR. CASTLE: Another person who was never my teacher but really was very helpful was "Poco" Frazier.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: Do you know that name?

MS. FALINO: Yes, I do.

MR. CASTLE: He was great. And he would — in those days they had — the sculpture department was in the

design department, but the architecture department had their own sculpture department.

MS. FALINO: So there were two sculpture departments at KU?

MR. CASTLE: There were two sculpture departments, and [Bernard] Poco Frazier taught the architecture part of it.

MS. FALINO: Okay. And you found him — you didn't take a class with him did you say?

MR. CASTLE: No. No, I couldn't take that. You didn't —

MS. FALINO: You weren't allowed.

MR. CASTLE: You weren't allowed to do that.

MS. FALINO: But you found him nonetheless.

MR. CASTLE: Well, he probably found me, because he would come around.

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: And he took an interest and really was helpful to me. And he was the first one that sort of talked to me about bent lamination and talking to me about lamination. And I don't think he did either of those but he sort of knew about them and thought I should know about them.

MS. FALINO: He did plaster or he did —

MR. CASTLE: Well, he did —

MS. FALINO: — bronze castings and stone?

MR. CASTLE: He did bronze casting, stone carving —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — giant stone carving —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — on the side of a building.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: Monumental stuff. And he had such a small studio, and he would be doing this really big piece, and he had a reducing glass that he could look through that made everything look smaller. [They laugh.] So he couldn't stand back very far.

MS. FALINO: Oh, my gosh.

MR. CASTLE: It was so weird. I don't know why he had such a small studio. But he was a really nice guy.

MS. FALINO: Was he working on commissions?

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: Do you know who — do you know of any particular —

MR. CASTLE: Well, one of them that he did during the time I know — in Topeka on some state building he carved on the side of a building. It was, like, a covered wagon and horses pulling it or something, or maybe oxen. I don't know.

I mean, he did awfully academic stuff. Well, Elden Tefft did too. Elden Tefft, he was like a WPA sculptor, although he was maybe a little young for that, but I always thought his work looked like WPA work.

MS. FALINO: Yes, these sort of thick figures, sort of semi-archaic, or sort of, you know, in action doing different kinds of tasks.

MR. CASTLE: Yes. Yes, he did that. But he never did an awful lot of his own work.

MS. FALINO: Now —

MR. CASTLE: The big thing he did while I was in school was make a bronze Jayhawk. [They laugh.] A big one.

MS. FALINO: Now, that's the KU mascot, right?

MR. CASTLE: Right.

MS. FALINO: I learned that from Carlyle.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, but — you know, and Elden was — he was a strange kind of teacher. I mean, I think I learned a lot from him, particularly learned a lot about bronze casting and mold-making, you know, which he was very good at. He knew a lot about that. He was very good. But he wasn't very helpful in sort of idea stuff.

MS. FALINO: Now, it's Elden Tefft, not Taft — no relation to Lorado Taft?

MR. CASTLE: I think it's spelled the same.

MS. FALINO: Is it? Was he related, do you think?

MR. CASTLE: I don't know.

MS. FALINO: Or the not-so-smart relative?

MR. CASTLE: I have wondered about that myself. He certainly never mentioned it.

MS. FALINO: But I think Poco worked with Tefft, didn't he?

MR. CASTLE: Well, he worked — he was a true WPA sculptor.

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: He actually was truly one. And I don't know exactly who he worked with, but he was older and he had that job during the Depression.

MS. FALINO: Okay.

All right, did you do other things, or did you see other kinds of work being done like — I know there was a class in bookbinding, for instance. Did you ever check those things out, or did you check out the weaving classes?

MR. CASTLE: I had checked out the weaving class and actually wove a little something.

MS. FALINO: Oh, you did?

MR. CASTLE: But I didn't have much interest in that, but —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And I didn't even remember bookbinding. I don't remember that.

MS. FALINO: It may have — they may have stopped it by the time you came.

MR. CASTLE: I remember Sheldon Carey's upside-down wheel.

MS. FALINO: The upside-down pots.

MR. CASTLE: Sure do. [They laugh.] Yes.

MS. FALINO: Did that appeal to you?

MR. CASTLE: No. No, I wasn't — no, clearly jewelry —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — attracted me more than those other options.

MS. FALINO: In terms of clay, was it — you know, was it too malleable? You know, metal is a little bit more like wood in that respect.

MR. CASTLE: No, I think that if I'd know what I know about what you can do with clay now, it probably would have interested me, but it seemed like in those it was only pots.

MS. FALINO: Yes, in those days that's what it was.

MR. CASTLE: You were going to make pots, and I don't think I had any interest in making pots.

MS. FALINO: Yes, that was all pre-Voukos.

MR. CASTLE: Yes. Yes. I mean, nobody that I knew of was doing anything, like, adventuresome.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: It was all very traditional.

MS. FALINO: Oh.

So then — all right, so Marjorie Whitney. Did you take the weaving class with her?

MR. CASTLE: No. McGraw —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — what's her first name — taught weaving.

MS. FALINO: I have it somewhere.

MR. CASTLE: And — what's her first name, Marjorie? No, that's Marjorie Whitney. I can't remember McGraw's first name.

MS. FALINO: I have the name somewhere.

MR. CASTLE: But she and Marjorie Whitney lived together, and they had built quite a nice modern house. In fact, it was a very nice modern house.

But, you know, first Marjorie Whitney seemed to be sort of on my case and I didn't like her at all. But, you know, as things went along she became more and more of a supporter, and by the time I left she was a great supporter.

MS. FALINO: That's great. Now, she traveled quite a bit. She went to Europe on a number of occasions.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I don't think I knew about that. But, you know, she kept — well, when I left — I mean, I — well, I should back up a bit maybe if I want to get this story right. I mean, after my undergraduate degree in industrial design, my friend, Art Harkens, the friend from the Army, who had —

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: — we'd still spent some time together and even were roommates occasionally. Anyway, we graduated the same year, '58, and he was interested in the space program, and he — I don't know how he did it, but he found a job with a company called Radiation, Incorporated in Orlando, Florida, which had government contracts for research about space travel. And this is 1958.

MS. FALINO: So this is the height of Sputnik.

MR. CASTLE: I guess so. I don't know the exact dates. But, anyway, he talked the company into hiring me then because they needed somebody — some designer. But then when I got there, they didn't know what to do with me. They didn't know what to have me design or anything, so I ended up just doing illustration for some of their brochures and things.

And so I didn't stay very long. I hadn't been in Orlando probably half the — I went there in June and knew I didn't want to stay with that, so then I called Marjorie Whitney about getting into the sculpture program.

MS. FALINO: I'll bet she was delighted.

MR. CASTLE: [Laughs.] Yes.

MS. FALINO: That's nice.

MR. CASTLE: And giving me a graduate assistantship. So, essentially it was free to go to school then. I had to teach.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: So then my GI Bill really — I lived in luxury.

MS. FALINO: Oh, you were a king.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, because I didn't have to pay anything. And I taught a basic course in design, two-dimensional design, and Marjorie Whitney wrote the textbook —

MS. FALINO: Really?

MR. CASTLE: — mm-hm — [affirmation] — for that class.

MS. FALINO: You mean a published textbook?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.] Well, you know, it was a pretty thin book, but it was — she wrote it.

MS. FALINO: But it was published?

MR. CASTLE: Oh, yes. Well, at least you could buy it in the bookstore.

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: The students all had to buy it.

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: And it had to do with color and, you know, very basic design stuff. And I taught the perspective drawing class.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: And I really enjoyed the teaching.

MS. FALINO: So that's when you began to — well, were you thinking of that as sort of an academic path?

MR. CASTLE: No.

MS. FALINO: No.

MR. CASTLE: I was not thinking about an academic path. I did enjoy it, as I said, but I had not thought about trying to find a permanent teaching job at all.

MS. FALINO: Now, when you — by the time you were teaching, let's see, where — there's another name that comes up here, and that's Cooper Woodring.

MR. CASTLE: Oh, yes, Cooper Woodring, very important guy. Do you know who he is? I mean, he is — well, he and a lot of different — he went for his master's at Cranbrook, but we were in the same class graduating industrial design. And we spent time together. In fact, we were roommates for one year — I think just one. His father had been governor of Kansas.

MS. FALINO: Oh, my.

MR. CASTLE: And his name is Cooper Coolidge Woodring. His mother is a Coolidge, and she's — what would it be — Calvin Coolidge's granddaughter or something like that. There's a direct —

MS. FALINO: Direct relationship.

MR. CASTLE: He's directly related to Calvin Coolidge.

MS. FALINO: So a political family.

MR. CASTLE: And her family — I don't know what her maiden name was — were extremely wealthy, and they were from back East, his mother.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: Anyway, and his father, Harry Woodring, was governor of Kansas. But that was even before he was born. It was back in the '30s. Well, he might have been born but he would have been a baby. He didn't remember his father as governor.

MS. FALINO: So, was Cooper kind of a kindred spirit, then, as an undergraduate?

MR. CASTLE: Yes, he was a bright guy and he had — you know, we had similar interests. He loved cars and stuff like that, that we both liked. And he went onto a really successful career. I can't remember some of his early jobs, but one of them was, in the '70s, J.C. Penney's decided they would have their own interior — their own inside design company, and they hired him to direct it.

MS. FALINO: To lead that. Very good.

MR. CASTLE: And he's been — he was president of the Industrial Design Society of America, and is still involved. And then when he kind of retired from that, he became an expert witness in design infringements.

MS. FALINO: [Laughs.]

MR. CASTLE: But he's a very cool guy.

MS. FALINO: And, as I recall, he lives in New York?

MR. CASTLE: No. Right now he's — I thought it was Maryland or something. I have an address for him. I haven't seen him in, like, five years. When he was in Kansas for a while I saw him regularly, and when he was in New York I used to see him. His early jobs were in New York and I used to see him then. But we were roommates, and we made furniture together.

MS. FALINO: Oh, you did?

MR. CASTLE: We did. And this is something most people don't know, that — you know, the industrial design department had a shop with some basic woodworking tools in it — a band saw and a lathe and, you know, some of the basic stuff.

And we both decided we were going to make coffee tables. And we went to Kansas City and bought some fancy wood. There was a, you know, lumber yard that had fancy wood there. And came back and we both worked together in the shop making a coffee table. And he made a very cool one too. I don't know whatever happened to his, but mine is in the collection of the Smithsonian now.

MS. FALINO: Really?

MR. CASTLE: That coffee table. But Cooper made one at the same time and his was very good. I don't think I can describe it but I remember that I thought he had a very good design too. And that was one of — about the earliest pieces — I mean, I usually talk about my high chair as being my earliest piece —

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: — but this actually predates it, even though I seldom talk about this one.

MS. FALINO: And yet — so they had a wood shop but nobody was teaching furniture.

MR. CASTLE: No. Well, no. No, the wood shop was really meant for the industrial design students only to go in and make models.

MS. FALINO: Model-making. Okay.

MR. CASTLE: That's what it was really for.

MS. FALINO: All right. All right.

MR. CASTLE: But, you know, by the time we were seniors you kind of had the run of the place.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: You could get in anytime of the day, and we would work late at night when there was no classes, because there would be classes in there during the day, but at night we'd go in and have the shop to ourselves.

MS. FALINO: You had it to yourself. And, as I recall, you've said that the facilities at KU were really pretty great.

MR. CASTLE: Well, by my standards right now that shop was not so great —

MS. FALINO: [Laughs.]

MR. CASTLE: — but my standards then I thought it was pretty good.

MS. FALINO: Yes. But in general, I mean, beyond the shop itself — I mean, all the studios and the materials you had —

MR. CASTLE: Oh, yeah. Yes, they were good. And, you know, the sculpture department was probably, I think — I'm pretty sure the first college in the country to have a foundry. It had a big one — I mean, a good foundry.

MS. FALINO: It had a working foundry onsite?

MR. CASTLE: Yes, in the sculpture — a bronze-casting foundry, and a good one.

MS. FALINO: Oh, and that's what Elden Tefft was doing.

MR. CASTLE: Elden Tefft. And that's what prompted him to start — what was first a bronze-casting society became the furniture — I mean, I'm sorry, the sculpture — he started that, Elden Tefft.

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: What did they call it? The —

MS. FALINO: National Sculpture Society?

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: No, that can't be right.

MR. CASTLE: Well, something like that. Anyway, he started that. But we had a good foundry.

MS. FALINO: That's great.

MR. CASTLE: And I used to do a lot of casting.

MS. FALINO: What did you cast there?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I made some pieces you might call art, but I did it — I met a guy in Kansas City whose name — an artist whose name was Arthur Kraft. And he was older, quite a bit older than me. And I can't remember how I met him, but he was, like — at that point in time was, like, "the" Kansas City artist. If you look at it now it looks awful, the work, but, you know, he's more of an illustrator. But he was highly respected in Kansas City and knew all the wealthy people.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And he saw my work, and I had a figure thing that he saw. And he said, "Well, I can get you some commissions doing portraits of people." And he did. He introduced me to people, and I would do a portrait in bronze, a life-size head.

MS. FALINO: Portrait heads.

MR. CASTLE: Portrait heads in bronze. And I'd cast them myself. You know, I'd go model it in Plasticine and make molds and cast heads, and made a little extra money.

MS. FALINO: Wow. And yet you weren't in the — you weren't studying under Poco. You did study with — you did study with Elden, so you —

MR. CASTLE: Elden was my official teacher.

MS. FALINO: So, you were doing — were you doing portraits with him?

MR. CASTLE: Well, these were kind of unofficial.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: They were not part of the class. But I was — I was a graduate student at that point. He pretty much

left the graduate students alone to do whatever they wanted.

MS. FALINO: Yes. And how did you find portraiture? Was it easy for you?

MR. CASTLE: Yes. I mean, I think that all these things are the same, drawing and — if you can draw a portrait, I think you can model one.

MS. FALINO: Model it.

MR. CASTLE: And if you can model one, you can carve one. They're all the same, all these kind of — thinking three-dimensionally and understanding, you know, it's just as simple as, you know, if you're drawing a cup. Does it look like the cup? And you come over here to your drawing and then you look at the cup and you make them the same. And it's the same with a head or anything. They're all the same.

MS. FALINO: For some.

MR. CASTLE: If you can do one, you can do the other.

MS. FALINO: [Laughs.] I'm glad you can do it.

Now, let's see, let's just — in finishing up, you returned from graduate school, and is there anything else we're missing in terms of who you encountered or what your —

MR. CASTLE: Tal Streeter. Do you know that name?

MS. FALINO: No, I don't.

MR. CASTLE: Well, he was one year ahead of me, so he graduated with his master's a year before I. But he was very good. And he then got a job at Purchase teaching sculpture and was there for his whole career, I think. And he did some good work.

MS. FALINO: And what did he do — what was he teaching at Purchase?

MR. CASTLE: Sculpture.

MS. FALINO: Sculpture.

MR. CASTLE: He was head of the sculpture department at Purchase for years. And I've kept in contact with him. I don't see him very often, but —

MS. FALINO: And what kind of work does he do?

MR. CASTLE: Well, right —

MS. FALINO: Is it figurative?

MR. CASTLE: No. No, abstract.

MS. FALINO: Abstract.

MR. CASTLE: Yes. And he has become well known as a designer and an expert on Japanese kites. He's written a book — a couple of books on that subject. So there's another Kansas artist.

MS. FALINO: Another Kansas artist. Good. We'll add him to the list.

MR. CASTLE: A good one too.

MS. FALINO: That's excellent.

So, you had — so your major colleague was Cooper as an undergraduate, and Tal became one of the key people —

MR. CASTLE: Well, no, we weren't really close. I didn't hang around with him or anything.

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: But, you know, we were in the same studio.

MS. FALINO: Right, so you were classmates.

MR. CASTLE: So I knew him, but we weren't roommates or close friends.

MS. FALINO: And then — oh, I know what it was. In graduate school is when you wrote your thesis on lamination. So you were — Poco had introduced you to the concept of laminating.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, although it isn't really the kind of lamination I do now. It's different.

MS. FALINO: In what way?

MR. CASTLE: Well, really, I was just calling piecing wood together lamination.

MS. FALINO: Yes. He was keying them together?

MR. CASTLE: And, really, I understood what — I understood what could be accomplished in lamination, but I didn't have the — I had no way to do it. I didn't have any way to surface wood. The sculpture department probably had three clamps. You know, you need a hundred.

MS. FALINO: [Laughs.]

MR. CASTLE: You need an enormous amount of clamps to do what I do, so I couldn't do it, even though I sort of wanted to. And I remember another thing that — I've told this story before about the duck decoy carving —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — and Leonard Baskin.

MS. FALINO: Yes. Now, where did you come upon this decoy? Was it as a younger — as a young boy?

MR. CASTLE: As a young boy. In fact, I have the magazine with the duck decoy in it, in there —

MS. FALINO: Oh, that's great.

MR. CASTLE: — if you want to see it.

MS. FALINO: I would love to.

MR. CASTLE: And I think it would be, like, around 1946 or '7, around in those days. It was a magazine that Delta Tools put out, a little how-to-do-it magazine, and the duck thing was in there. And I thought that was — when I was a kid I thought that was kind of cool.

MS. FALINO: Yes, so you were, like, 12, 13.

MR. CASTLE: But I never did — you know, I had no reason to have a duck decoy, so I never did a duck decoy.

And it wasn't until — I saw this article in some art magazine that showed Leonard Baskin step-by-step doing this sculpture. And the first step was he had ordered from a millwork house, I suppose, to glue him up this giant block of wood, this rectangle, which was big. It's probably 3-foot square and, you know, 7-foot tall.

MS. FALINO: Like a big butcher block.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, they glued him up this giant block and then he goes and carves a figure in it. And I thought, boy, if he had just known about the duck, he could have saved weeks and weeks of work and it would have been closer to the original form — the form that he wants.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: But sculptors don't generally do that. You know, traditionally he's doing what sculptors have always done — a block of marble and — it's the way that sculptors do it.

MS. FALINO: Yes, the reductive method.

MR. CASTLE: And I saw that you have further opportunities because you can design the block, essentially, and the block doesn't have to be rectangular; it could be all kind of any old weird shape.

MS. FALINO: Right, because you have —

MR. CASTLE: And so, there were more opportunities — the figures that you carve out of wood cannot have their arms out like this. They always have their arms in. And of course his would — he would do this —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — with his figures. But you've got to keep the arms in because you can't have them out. They'll break off.

MS. FALINO: The structure — yes.

MR. CASTLE: Yes. But if you do a lamination they won't. You can do that. You can have the arms anywhere you want them. So I just, you know, began to figure out that you can build — in this case, the summer I had gotten — well, I really hadn't done hardly any lamination until I came to Rochester, even though I'd sort of tried. And I had done some, because you could buy pine — it was the only wood you could buy that was already smooth.

MS. FALINO: On both sides.

MR. CASTLE: And I did some — I did some lamination and carved some figures. I'm not sure they were very successful. It wasn't until I got to Rochester that I could use hardwood, because I could mill it myself and it would be smooth, and had plenty of clamps, so you could glue it. So I was able to — I really didn't do any major things until coming here.

MS. FALINO: Going back to Poco, did he — he just discussed it with you, or did you see him doing it?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I remember one incident, and I can't remember whether he brought it to me or I went to see it, but he had thin pieces of wood — and I'm not sure where he'd gotten the thin pieces of wood; maybe he had somebody saw it up for him — and he soaked them in water. And they were maybe a quarter-inch thick. And then he showed me — when they got soaked in water they got soft.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And you could — then he would clamp it to a form —

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: — and leave it there until it dried out, and then it would kind of stay. And then he'd put glue on it when it got dry and he'd glue it together and he could have this curved piece of wood —

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: — which was pretty cool, although I didn't use that technique until I came to Rochester. I didn't do anything with it, but I had it in my mind that that was a good thing —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — and that that was pretty neat, what you can do.

MS. FALINO: So he was just — he wasn't, like, trying to make a head with it. He was making, like, a piece of drapery or —

MR. CASTLE: Yes, I don't even know what he was making, what it was for. I don't even remember what part it was, but I clearly remember him showing me this.

MS. FALINO: So he was experimenting with it for some reason.

MR. CASTLE: For some reason, and thought I should know about it and told me. He was very — he was great.

MS. FALINO: So, let's see, that's — and with the lamination, the thesis — I don't mean to dig into ancient history with your thesis, but you basically conducted a survey of the literature or — how did you —

MR. CASTLE: Well, I have it.

MS. FALINO: You do?

MR. CASTLE: Yes, if I can — I think it's in my office. We can take a break and I can go find the duck and the thesis, because you might be interested. The thesis was — you know, my master's degree actually didn't — I wasn't thinking about it having any meaning. I just wanted to stay in school, essentially. [They laugh.]

And I was interested in sculpture, because I knew at that point I didn't want to be an industrial designer and sculpture interested me. But I had no thoughts about teaching. I needed a credential. And I actually didn't even seem to care about — I didn't care about the degree. I just liked — I liked being in school and I liked doing

sculpture.

So when the time came that I finished all my class work, I really hadn't done a thesis, and I really wasn't going to do one. It just didn't seem to matter to me. But then, out of the blue, when I was living in New York City — actually Brooklyn at the time — a job offer came from RIT to teach, and I was going to need a master's degree. [They laugh.]

MS. FALINO: So you had to finish your thesis.

MR. CASTLE: But I also remember, about the same time — and I think it was actually before — that Marjorie Whitney wrote me that, "You need to finish your thesis." And even though she had given me — had given me a deadline, I didn't pay much attention until the job. And then I figured, well, I better do it.

MS. FALINO: Time to just get that sheepskin.

MR. CASTLE: But she was really good and, you know, kind of kept the door open for me to do it.

MS. FALINO: Okay. That's one way to get it done. So you just — basically you took the topic that was closest at hand and you just finished it up.

MR. CASTLE: Yes. So there wasn't any real research.

MS. FALINO: But it was something that had been germinating in your mind, nonetheless.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.]

MS. FALINO: All right, now, let's see, you got married in Kansas before you came out to New York?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.]

MS. FALINO: And your first wife, her name is Joyce but I don't have her last name.

MR. CASTLE: Well, her maiden name was Malicky.

MS. FALINO: Can you spell that?

MR. CASTLE: M-A-L-K-E-Y [sic], I believe. Boy, I haven't spelled that in forever.

MS. FALINO: [Laughs.] We'll check that. We'll check that later anyway. But she was — she was in music.

MR. CASTLE: Opera singer.

MS. FALINO: And you met her at KU?

MR. CASTLE: That's right.

MS. FALINO: And she got a job in New York and that's what brought you here?

MR. CASTLE: She got a job with the City Center Opera Company, so she had work in New York, or I'd have probably just stayed in Kansas and tried to make the master's degree stretch out a few more years.

MS. FALINO: A few more years. [They laugh.]

And so, then, when you were living in Brooklyn you had the basics for working in wood but not a lot else.

MR. CASTLE: No, I had a studio but it was — I didn't have much equipment at all. I couldn't do lamination.

MS. FALINO: So what were you making?

MR. CASTLE: I was welding mostly.

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: And, you know, I did a little bit of wood.

MS. FALINO: And what were you welding?

MR. CASTLE: Sculptures.

MS. FALINO: You were making welded sculptures?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.]

MS. FALINO: Are any of those around?

MR. CASTLE: Well, what I was doing was I was welding up armatures and then filling them with plaster, but the armatures would still show on the outside, so the skeleton was kind of on the outside but I'd fill them with plaster. But I don't have any of them. They ended up — when I came to Rochester I ended up putting them outside and then they didn't last long.

MS. FALINO: Oh, but you did start making furniture.

MR. CASTLE: I had made at least one piece in New York, in Brooklyn.

MS. FALINO: In Brooklyn. And what was that?

MR. CASTLE: A chair.

MS. FALINO: That's not the scribe piece.

MR. CASTLE: No, it's not. Most of the — the scribe piece was actually — the photography and the building of that was all done in Kansas —

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: — but I had not ever done the writing part. I had done — I had the pictures of the step-by-step but I had never done the text.

MS. FALINO: Now, you're talking about the thesis.

MR. CASTLE: The thesis.

MS. FALINO: Right. But the scribe chair —

MR. CASTLE: That was made in Kansas.

MS. FALINO: That was made in Kansas. That was, like, '58.

MR. CASTLE: There are two *Scribes Chairs*.

MS. FALINO: Right. One is at the Museum of Arts and Design, isn't it?

MR. CASTLE: No. One of them is at Arts Decoratifs.

MS. FALINO: In Paris?

MR. CASTLE: In Montreal.

MS. FALINO: Oh, maybe that's what I was thinking of.

MR. CASTLE: In Montreal. And the other is in a private collection —

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: — which, that's a story in itself. I shouldn't have sold it. But we're jumping — that would be way ahead of this story.

MS. FALINO: Okay. And maybe my chronology is wrong too. I know that you were selling at America House.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.]

MS. FALINO: What was that — that was after you moved up to Rochester?

MR. CASTLE: Yes. Yes. I didn't really have, really, anything really for sale of any interest to anybody when I was in Brooklyn.

MS. FALINO: But you were — you made — after — you made the scribe stool in Kansas and you showed it at the Young Americans exhibition.

MR. CASTLE: That's right. That's —

MS. FALINO: So even though — you hadn't done anything in New York but your reputation preceded you.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I hadn't brought that piece. In fact, there were two of them. So I had both of them. And, actually, the one that was — I think — now I clearly think one is better than the other. The first one I really think is better than the second one, but the second one was what was in the show.

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: And what happened, really, to get me this job in Rochester was that the dean here in Rochester, Harold Brennan —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — saw that show and thought that piece — that piece interested him. And he thought that bringing a sculptor into the furniture design program would be just the thing.

MS. FALINO: So that's how —

MR. CASTLE: And I guess I was probably the only one he knew — [they laugh] — that was a sculptor who did some furniture.

MS. FALINO: Well, you were kind of in a class by yourself, too.

MR. CASTLE: So I kind of got the job by default, I guess.

MS. FALINO: So, then, how long were you actually in New York per se?

MR. CASTLE: About a year-and-a-half.

MS. FALINO: Oh, very brief.

MR. CASTLE: Yes. And what happened then, when I got the job offer, then Joyce thought, well, going to Rochester wouldn't be a bad thing; I bet I could get a teaching assistantship at Eastman School of Music.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: Which she did get. So she got a scholarship and got a free master's degree. So it kind of made sense to her to come here, but only briefly.

MS. FALINO: Right. Right.

MR. CASTLE: A couple of years would be great. And that was the plan. When it came — I didn't really want to go to Rochester either. I wanted to stay in New York. And I think the first year I really didn't like Rochester at all and was ready to go back to New York City. But then, you know, by the second year or thereabouts, you know, I began to like it here.

MS. FALINO: And what was it about Rochester that you came to like?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I got a very good kind of work thing going and had developed some good friendships. You know, at first, I mean, I thought RIT was, like, the worst school I'd ever seen. I mean, coming from Kansas, which is a beautiful, beautiful campus and come to RIT downtown — it was downtown then in a bunch of old buildings and didn't seem like a college at all. And the library was in an old garage and, you know — but then, you know, I began to change and began to be very comfortable there.

MS. FALINO: And you had a lot of range yourself. I mean, you were brought in — the equipment was — the studio itself was pretty good.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, they furnished me a studio. And of course in those days they didn't let the students come back at night, so every night I had the whole place to myself.

MS. FALINO: So it was your studio.

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: So I had a fabulous — that worked for about the first two years. Then by the third year I got my own studio because I wanted to have help. I couldn't have any help.

MS. FALINO: Right. Okay. And of course the economics of living up here must have been very appealing.

MR. CASTLE: Well, it was. We certainly had more money, by far.

MS. FALINO: Yes, I mean, in terms of space, you know, the kind of space you could rent — could afford to rent must have been —

MR. CASTLE: I don't remember what it was, but we had a wonderful apartment. I remember that my first salary was \$6,600 a year, and you could live very comfortably on that —

MS. FALINO: Very nice.

MR. CASTLE: — and drive a new car. I remember I bought a new Volvo. [They laugh.] Got rid of the sports car for a while, then I soon had another sports car, though.

MS. FALINO: Those were the great years, I think, for the whole American academic system. It was just bursting. And of course Mrs. Webb was behind the school.

MR. CASTLE: Oh, it was crazy, that school. Mrs. Webb — well, when I came there — and it stayed that way almost the whole time I was there; it began to go away — she furnished free materials for the students. That included gold and silver —

MS. FALINO: That's phenomenal.

MR. CASTLE: — for jewelers. So the wood — and it didn't matter; the students could build out of rosewood, expensive woods, for free, but if they wanted to take it home they had to pay for the materials. But of course the materials were not kept track of very accurately — [they laugh] — so everybody would kind of underestimate what the materials were.

MS. FALINO: Nice.

MR. CASTLE: And if you really had a total reject, you of course left it for the school. You didn't have to take it. And at the end of the year she would pony up the money for whatever the students didn't buy, and of course they never bought everything, so there was always something that she had to kick in. I have no idea what those figures were.

MS. FALINO: She was a great lady.

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: Did you see much of her?

MR. CASTLE: A lot, yes.

MS. FALINO: She came up to visit quite often?

MR. CASTLE: She would come up a couple of times a year, you know, and be very social. Like, I'd stay in her apartment in New York City.

MS. FALINO: She put you up in New York?

MR. CASTLE: She put me up in her penthouse, which is a very strange penthouse.

MS. FALINO: How so?

MR. CASTLE: Well, it was dark. I mean, but she had paintings on the wall, like Monet kind of things. But I remember it was, like — I don't know whether it was — kept the curtains down or something, but it was such a dark apartment. But it was a penthouse.

MS. FALINO: Yes, I'd heard that she had let artists stay in her apartment as needed. She was a very generous, civic-minded lady.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, I think it had to be an event that — now, I couldn't just go there for any old reason, but if there was an event, like something —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — you know, opening at the museum, I could stay at her place.

MS. FALINO: Right.

So I know you followed Tage Frid. He had moved down to RISD — not before you arrived. Was he still there?

MR. CASTLE: Well, he got — well, they didn't have tenure.

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: He didn't have tenure. And he was let go, but he immediately found a job. And at the time they had two teachers here, and the other one — oh, what was his name? He was an English guy. Oh, man, I'm drawing a blank. I'll think of it. But anyway —

MS. FALINO: [Michael] Harms?

MR. CASTLE: Yes, Harms. That's his name.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: Harms was here, and I was supposed to — he was supposed to be the technical part and I would be the design part. But then he ended up leaving too, and he went to Canada to teach, and they hired Bill Keyser to replace him.

So there was supposed to be a division in the department that I would teach the design part and Bill Keyser would teach the technical part. But the way the schedule was, it didn't really work very well because he would teach three days a week and I would teach three days a week. We would overlap once. So, if something technical came up when I was the only one there, of course I had to deal with it. And if something design came up when I wasn't there —

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: So, it ended up being kind of a mix, really, even though I knew nothing about woodworking when I came.

MS. FALINO: Right, the technical — the construction aspects were — still felt relatively new to you.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I'd never cut a dovetail or a mortise and tenon. I didn't have a clue how you did veneer. I didn't know any of this stuff. But, kind of unfortunately, I'm facile.

MS. FALINO: You're a quick study.

MR. CASTLE: If I see somebody do it, I can do it.

MS. FALINO: And that relationship in terms of him being the technical side and you being the design side, how did that — how was that relationship —

MR. CASTLE: Well, that broke down fairly quickly, so that was not — after a year that wasn't clear anymore to anybody, I don't think, and we didn't pay much attention to that.

MS. FALINO: Now, and one of the reasons that you were hired was because Harold Brennan wanted to change things up a bit? He was looking —

MR. CASTLE: He wanted the Danish modern out. He thought the Danish modern period was over.

MS. FALINO: Now, that actually — see, the school was founded in the mid-'40s but it really didn't get going until the early '50s. So, when you arrived, it was '62, thereabouts, so they'd had about maybe a dozen years of Scandinavian influence. They had Jack Prip and they had Hans Christensen and Tage Frid.

And I think they — at the time they didn't have that many people they could look to in the U.S. — or so they thought, anyway, which is how they all ended up coming in and —

MR. CASTLE: That's right.

MS. FALINO: Frid was really a journeyman. He was a furniture-maker —

MR. CASTLE: Right.

MS. FALINO: — in the trade.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, he wasn't a designer, really.

MS. FALINO: So, do you — did you find that that was — you were really brought in as a change agent.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, and when I came here I had actually no intention of really doing furniture.

MS. FALINO: What were you expecting to do?

MR. CASTLE: The first year I did nothing but sculpture.

MS. FALINO: Working with armatures or —

MR. CASTLE: No, I used lamination.

MS. FALINO: Okay, so you were doing that.

MR. CASTLE: I began to laminate and carve. And I combined those two things — the bent laminations and the stacked lamination was what I did the first year — into sculptures. Those two things that I brought from Kansas that I couldn't do in Kansas —

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: — I could do them here. But then I had been there about a year and I could see kind of what was going on in the field, which I hadn't known about the field before. I didn't know who anybody was. I didn't know anybody made furniture except for Esherick. He was the only one I had ever heard of. And I didn't tell my Esherick story.

MS. FALINO: We'll go back to that. Don't worry.

MR. CASTLE: Cooper and I went to see him. But I should tell you that, but to finish this, I mean, I began to see who was making what, you know, and I discovered Sam Maloof and Walker Reed [sic] and, I don't know — Weed. Who else? I forget.

MS. FALINO: Nakashima.

MR. CASTLE: Nakashima. And, you know, I thought, this field doesn't have anything interesting going on, so I can jump right in and be at the top of the heap, where in sculpture, that's not going to be so easy.

I could see — I'd spent a year in New York talking to galleries and stuff, and I could see I had a long road to hoe there, and that would not be easy. Well, I thought, this is a piece of cake. And it was. I mean, I started making furniture and within a year Jack Larsen had me in the Triennale in Italy —

MS. FALINO: In Italy.

MR. CASTLE: — and I had a piece in *Time* magazine.

MS. FALINO: And you were a — you were really a celebrity.

MR. CASTLE: Within one year of starting.

MS. FALINO: Yes, quite remarkable.

MR. CASTLE: But I worked really hard.

MS. FALINO: Oh, there's no doubt.

One of the reasons I guess I was asking earlier about Brooklyn was I wondered if you knew at the time, or knew of Richard Artschwager.

MR. CASTLE: No, I did not know about him then.

MS. FALINO: Okay. In those days he was just making contract furniture. You know, he was trying to make a living as a real woodworker.

MR. CASTLE: Right.

MS. FALINO: And it wasn't until the '60s that he began turning his attention to conceptual. I was trying to think of who else you might have — you know, you might have crossed paths with in that early time.

MR. CASTLE: I didn't — I don't think I knew any artist at the time.

MS. FALINO: That's interesting. So, why don't you tell your Cooper story with Wharton Esherick?

MR. CASTLE: Well, he and I — I mean, he had a cousin who was living in New York who had a loft, so we were going to — we took a trip spring vacation —

MS. FALINO: This was from Lawrence, Kansas.

MR. CASTLE: — from Lawrence — I believe this was '59, I believe — and drove to New York City in his car, a big Oldsmobile. And we had a third person that rode as far as Syracuse, who was going home. The person was not a friend. Somehow we hooked up with a third person.

And then we went on to New York and stayed with his cousin in a loft for three or four days and went to museums and galleries and looked all around. But he had a lot of relatives in the East and he wanted to visit some of his aunts and uncles. And one was in Connecticut in the town where Calder lived.

MS. FALINO: Oh, so this is Roxbury.

MR. CASTLE: Roxbury. And he had an aunt and uncle that lived there. And so we went there and thought — I knew that Calder lived there. I'm pretty sure it was me that thought of it. And we said, "We ought to go visit him." And we had no idea of proper etiquette —

MS. FALINO: [Laughs.]

MR. CASTLE: — and just showed up at his door. And he was wonderful. I mean, he took us into his studio, showed us all around in the house, met his wife, had a cup of tea. And he was just as kind and generous as can be. And so we thought, boy, this is an artist; this is something else.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: We loved it. And then it turns out he had another aunt and uncle he wanted to visit down near Philadelphia, so we drove down there and stayed with his aunt and uncle for a day or two. And I knew that — I had read in a book called *Shaping America's Products* about Wharton Esherick. I think Sam Maloof might have been in that book too, but that didn't track my attention, but Esherick did.

And so, that's all I knew about him is whatever is in that book. But I knew he lived in Paoli, which wasn't very far from where we were. And we just asked — drove in that area and asked somebody at a gas station or something. I can't remember. You know —

MS. FALINO: He was so famous anybody could find you.

MR. CASTLE: We got directions to his house, showed up at his door and knocked, and he said, "Get out of here. I'm busy." So we didn't see him. But it was worth the visit anyway because you saw — the house was pretty damn interesting from the outside.

MS. FALINO: Yes. Now, by that time he was — he must have been a pretty old fellow.

MR. CASTLE: Well, he was. And then it was only a few years later when I came to Rochester that I wanted to organize a field trip. And I thought we could go down and visit him, so I wrote him a letter and then he wrote back and he wanted to charge, like, per head —

MS. FALINO: No.

MR. CASTLE: — to bring the students in. And I thought, that's silly, so we never went. But then a few years go by, and maybe it's late '60s by now, and a good friend of mine, Don McKinley, another Kansas artist —

MS. FALINO: I didn't realize he was from Kansas.

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: Did he end up in Canada?

MR. CASTLE: Yes, at Sheridan College. He was a good friend. And at that point he worked — he worked for Gunlock, a furniture company, as their designer at this time, and lived in a little town, you know, a half-hour from here.

And he wanted to write a book on Esherick, and he got a contract I think from Van Nostrand Reinhold, I believe.

MS. FALINO: Don did?

MR. CASTLE: Don did —

MS. FALINO: Really?

MR. CASTLE: — to write a book on Esherick. So he had corresponded with Esherick, and Esherick was agreeable. And he was going to go down and visit Esherick and wanted to know if I wanted to come along. And I did.

MS. FALINO: Here's your big chance. [They laugh.]

MR. CASTLE: Yes. And then he was as nice as could be. You know, he was very nice, and we stayed for lunch, had lunch there, and showed us — we talked and Don took hundreds of pictures.

MS. FALINO: Did he publish it?

MR. CASTLE: No. Don was a — he could have done a good job, but he was this kind of guy that really procrastinates —

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: — and just never — I wonder — he died, unfortunately. He had a heart attack.

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: I just wonder if there's any manuscript.

MS. FALINO: Me too.

MR. CASTLE: There's a lot of pictures. Some of the pictures I have from that trip — in fact, a lot, probably 50 —

MS. FALINO: That would be very interesting.

MR. CASTLE: — 50 slides at least, that trip there with Don.

MS. FALINO: So, during your visit, you saw the interior. I'm actually going there for the first time soon, but I've seen a lot of photographs. Did you talk to him about his process at all?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.] We talked probably about everything.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: You know, we spent, you know, most of a day there. We went down the night before and stayed somewhere, and so we went in there probably the middle of the morning and stayed all afternoon. We were there for five or six hours.

MS. FALINO: Yes. I know in the *Crafting Modernism* exhibition we had the Esherick chest of drawers next to your music stand, and I enjoyed telling people about your admiration for him and the fact that you both are so sculpturally — your approach to furniture is so sculptural. So, you must have felt a great kinship with the things you saw there.

MR. CASTLE: Well, yeah, he really is — you know, the woodblocks I think are spectacular. And he really could draw beautifully, and the woodblocks are amazing. I have some.

MS. FALINO: Yes, he really — like you, I mean, he's multitalented in many media.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, his early paintings — you know, he could paint.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: I mean, it was pretty academic but he could paint.

MS. FALINO: Yes, and his wood blocks are great.

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: Let's see, what was a question I had about him? Oh, yes, I recall that Esherick had a shop, that he had people working for him.

MR. CASTLE: He did.

MS. FALINO: Did you talk to him about that at all?

MR. CASTLE: Yes, I believe he had two people at that point. Actually, they tried to keep them on after he died, keep making things.

MS. FALINO: Oh, really?

MR. CASTLE: But they really couldn't sort of do it. I mean, they — without him they were kind of lost.

MS. FALINO: Well, I think unless you have somebody at the helm, you know, like Nakashima had Mira —

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: — to continue things, but he was really — he was really the man.

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: So it must have been very difficult to continue. But he did — you know, he achieved a certain economy of production that way, which at that point in your life, had you hired anybody? You had already started here.

MR. CASTLE: I started hiring in — by '64 I had full-time people.

MS. FALINO: So, he proved to be kind of a model for you.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I wouldn't have ever thought that furniture might be interesting. It wouldn't — my mind would have never sort of gone —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — to the point — now, I never knew that anybody actually — I assumed from that article that he made a living but I had never heard of anybody who made strange-looking furniture who actually made a living at it. I didn't know anybody ever did that.

MS. FALINO: Yes. I always loved that he made a table and chairs for the 1939 World's Fair, and it's some kind of a — [inaudible] — or —

MR. CASTLE: I know which one it is.

MS. FALINO: So dynamic and —

MR. CASTLE: It's a great piece.

MS. FALINO: — and, you know, funky.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, with stretchers on the floor.

MS. FALINO: Really thinking — you know, at that time, that was — imagine 1939 he was so far ahead of everyone.

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: Still is, I think, the dean of the studio craft movement. In that respect he sort of led the way for so many.

So, now we're looking at — we've been, actually, talking for an hour-and-a-half.

MR. CASTLE: What time is it?

MS. FALINO: It is 20 of 6:00.

MR. CASTLE: You know, we might want to head home soon.

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: We can keep talking, but we can —

MS. FALINO: I'm going to stop this here.

MR. CASTLE: — build a fire in the fireplace.

[END OF DISC]

MS. FALINO: And this is Jeannine Falino speaking for the Archives of American Art. I am meeting today with Wendell Castle for the second of our discussions at his workshop in Scottsville, New York. Today is Friday, February 24, 2012.

All right, well, we had a great discussion a couple of days ago about your early career, your early education, and your arrival at the School for American Craftsmen, where you got to begin your teaching career in earnest. And could you talk a little bit about some of your colleagues at the school, like Frans Wildenhain?

MR. CASTLE: Well, Frans Wildenhain was the star, clearly, when I came. And he was, like — I guess Rochester really appreciated him. And I remember that my first meeting him, that, you know, I had — well, the teachers at the University of Kansas for the most part would teach in a coat and tie, except for, you know, some shop things. And so I kind of was used to everybody — the teachers wearing a coat and tie.

I remember I came in and Harold Brennan introduced me to Frans Wildenhain without telling me who he was or what he was doing there.

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: I assumed him to be a student because he was dressed casually, with clay all over him, so I figured he was a student. And he looked fairly young, although at the time he probably would have been upper 40s maybe. I'm not sure of his age.

Anyway, he was the one that — you know, Harold Brennan was very proud of his work and he would get more press than other artists in Rochester. And his colleague that worked with him, Hobart Cowles, who was more the technical and glaze guy — Franz was supposed to be the creative part, and he was — was a very strange guy.

I remember the first faculty meeting that I ever attended at the School for American Craftsmen, Harold Brennan asked a question of Hobart — and I have no idea what the question was, but it seemed to me it would have a simple, like, yes or no answer.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And Hobart said nothing for the longest time. And I kept wondering, well, he didn't hear the question. Why doesn't the dean repeat the question? And forever went by and then finally he answered the question. Well, that's the way he was.

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: And of course everybody knew that but me. I didn't know. He was a very quiet guy and took forever to answer a question. But he was —

MS. FALINO: And technically how was he?

MR. CASTLE: Technically he was a glaze expert was really his — and, you know, he did work. He was very traditional but competent. And Frans did more adventuresome things.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: We had one of the best pots Frans had ever made. Nancy and I got it from him.

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: Big, big thing. And then there was an exhibit at the Morton Art Gallery at some point. This was 20 years ago. And they — I forget what the exhibit was but they had a piece of Frans's out there. And I don't remember who the director — what his name was, but we said, "Well, we've got a whole lot better one than that." And we were talking about it. So we gave it to them.

MS. FALINO: Oh, that's nice.

MR. CASTLE: So they have a super piece of Frans's that we gave them. We still have a few of Frans's things in our house, but not many of his best things.

MS. FALINO: Yes. Yes. And, I mean, how did you consider him in terms of his adventures and also his star power? What was it that you saw in him?

MR. CASTLE: We weren't really very friendly in the beginning. I think that after I got into the Triennale in Italy and got in *Time* magazine, he felt that I was kind of like competition for his position.

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: But that went away in a couple of years and we did become good friends.

MS. FALINO: And so, what was it about his work that you thought made him a cut above?

MR. CASTLE: Well, he made some very energetic works that really — you know, they weren't Peter Voulkos wild, but pretty wild. And he really attracted some very good students, particularly one that I became very friendly with. Roy Cartwright came to work with Frans in California, and he's the one that made our fireplace out here —

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: — Roy Cartwright.

MS. FALINO: Nice.

MR. CASTLE: And so, you know, Roy and I became good friends, and a few other — he attracted some very good graduate students.

MS. FALINO: And then, you also were friendly with some folks on the fine arts side, Bill Sellers?

MR. CASTLE: Bill Sellers was the sculpture teacher, and we became — we entered RIT at the exact same time and we were both hired. And we met each other at the new faculty party and have been close friends ever since.

MS. FALINO: Nice.

MR. CASTLE: And then one year later, Judd Williams came to teach painting and printmaking, and we became very good friends and still are. And then that same year, Stuart Ross came, who was a really good painter, to teach. And he's the one that had the painting in the living room that I traded for a chair.

MS. FALINO: Ah, right.

MR. CASTLE: And, you know, he left Rochester but we've still kept in touch and get together once in a while.

MS. FALINO: Okay. And Hans Christensen was there.

MR. CASTLE: And Hans Christensen was in the silver department, although socially we never really did get together much with him.

MS. FALINO: He was very involved in his work. Didn't he spend a lot of time in his studio?

MR. CASTLE: Yes, he did. Yes, he was a hard worker. And, you know, technically that department was cutting-edge, technically. I'm not sure that they were cutting-edge when it comes to design. It was pretty Danish kind of oriented.

MS. FALINO: Yes, he was still carrying that —

MR. CASTLE: But he was — you know, as a silversmith could raise — you know, tremendous ability.

MS. FALINO: He also got into sculpture — sculptural shapes and metal, not too large but table-sized.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, he did. And then Don Bujnowski, in '62, was the weaving teacher. And he was kind of a strange guy, but he was very social and he would have parties at his house — you know, invite the faculty.

MS. FALINO: And what was your sense of the school as a whole, I mean, that the school was very prominent nationally? Do you feel you were attracting good students in those days?

MR. CASTLE: You know, I don't know that I was so aware of how — that it was a nationally recognized thing or not. I mean, I'd never even heard of it until I got invited to come there and teach.

MS. FALINO: Okay. All right.

MR. CASTLE: I never heard of it. So I don't know — and it seemed to have an odd relationship, sort of, with New York, although Mrs. Webb of course was super supportive.

But Harold Brennan, who was such a dynamic guy and really never did any real promotion — like I always felt he should have been getting us shows down there because he had these contacts and they never seemed to — like, during the time I was there he never — never a faculty show at the America House or the Museum or a student faculty, nothing like that. And I always thought that certainly Harold Brennan could have organized that.

And I also thought he should have been writing — he was a smart guy — and writing articles about the school and the faculty. He never did that. I mean, I liked him and he was a really nice fellow. In fact, he was very social and he had parties for the faculty fairly often.

And at the same time that I came, Bill Keyser came.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: And, you know, and we saw each other socially. We were never close friends. I think I very shortly put him in an awkward position.

MS. FALINO: Because he was more the technical —

MR. CASTLE: Well, no, he — that began to sort of break down and there was — it was not a clear definition anymore. And I had begun to get international attention —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — and have an awful lot more going than he did. And, you know, I started to have — I hadn't been there two years and I had a staff of my own.

MS. FALINO: Now, in terms of your students over the years at the school, do any particular ones stand out for you?

MR. CASTLE: I think I mentioned this yesterday, that in the early days of the school, Craig McArt, who I mentioned this morning, came as a graduate student, and his work was fairly straightforward but he was very good.

Another graduate student in the early times was Doug Sigler, who ended up teaching there after I left.

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: But the students that I — I think I already mentioned three of the students that I had, which were, I thought, the best ones, was Dan Jackson and Joe Distefano and Tom Lacagnina. Those were the best students from the early days.

MS. FALINO: Now, in terms of your own exhibitions, you certainly got one of your early shows here with Shop One.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.] That was very early.

MS. FALINO: And what's your recollection about Shop One and its position in the gallery world? I know it as one of the very first galleries, following America House.

MR. CASTLE: I mean, I think its reputation was mostly local, but it had a big reputation. Like, everybody knew about Shop One. It was very, very close to RIT —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — in proximity. It was only, like, two blocks —

MS. FALINO: I see.

MR. CASTLE: — away in a carriage house of what was a mansion but it had been turned into apartments — a very attractive carriage house. And they had the second floor. You had to walk up a set of stairs. It wasn't easy

to get big things in there.

MS. FALINO: [Laughs.] So furniture was a bit of a challenge to get up there?

MR. CASTLE: Yes. Yes. And it was not that big. But they handled Wharton Esherick pieces of furniture.

MS. FALINO: I did not know that.

MR. CASTLE: You know, his smaller things. I remember a music rack; I remember stools, smaller pieces. Frans and Wharton Esherick became very close friends, but that was the early days before — I didn't even find out about this until later because Frans — even though Esherick had come up, Frans had never told me about it —

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: — until sometime later, you know, until — as I say, this was happening in the early '60s and I didn't even know about it until the late '60s.

MS. FALINO: Gosh. So they were selling the works of other craftsmen. They were reaching out.

MR. CASTLE: Yes. I mean, Frans certainly had his work there. And Tage Frid's work stayed there for a little while after he left, but not for very long. And whether he sold his shares or — I don't know why.

MS. FALINO: But you never became a member of the ownership.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I was involved much later, not then.

MS. FALINO: Oh, later you were?

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: As, like a — not a shareholder or a part-owner?

MR. CASTLE: Yes, not a shareholder. But that was sort of when it was kind of on a decline at that point.

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: It really — once RIT moved, that neighborhood really — well, the urban development, they were building a road through there. The neighborhood was a mess.

MS. FALINO: I see.

MR. CASTLE: So nobody would go to Shop One anymore because it was very hard to get to.

MS. FALINO: Got it.

MR. CASTLE: It was in the middle of a mess and the neighborhood was very questionable at that point. And so, that was really a decline, but then they moved to what looked like going to be a renaissance.

At that time Ronnie Pearson pretty much was doing everything because Frans was getting a little older, and he was still involved but he didn't really participate too much.

MS. FALINO: Yes, and Ron was really the manager.

MR. CASTLE: And Ron was — he took, kind of, charge of everything.

MS. FALINO: And I guess the — it was a unique place because it was really run by the craftsmen themselves, so it's quite a unique concept in that respect.

MR. CASTLE: Well, when it was in the location of the carriage house in the close proximity to RIT, everything sort of worked.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: When RIT moved out to Henrietta and Shop One was sort of forced to move, they moved into what they thought was going to be a kind of an up-and-coming place —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — which didn't turn out to be that. So their location at that point turned out to be — even though

Ron Pearson made those decisions about that, it didn't turn out to be a very great — even though they had a better space, much nicer exhibition space, it just wasn't the same anymore.

MS. FALINO: Well, sometimes those things are, you know, based on chemistry, synergy and —

MR. CASTLE: Yes. So that was kind of gone and it began to dwindle away.

MS. FALINO: So you were — you had a one-man show there, at least one. And then you were also selling your work in America House at about the same time.

MR. CASTLE: Well, the most significant thing that happened sort of here in Rochester was — I believe it was 1964 that — there's an exhibition that the Memorial Art Gallery would have every year called the Finger Lakes Exhibition.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And in those days it was, you know, open to all media. So it was painting and it was, you know, crafts, everything. And the top prize in those days was that they would buy a piece of yours and give you a one-man show.

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: And I won the top award in '64 and had a one-man exhibition there in 1965. And they did my — kind of a peanut-shaped thing I call *The Blanket Chest*. And that's a purchase award.

MS. FALINO: Oh, that's *The Blanket Chest*, you mean. Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And, you know, Michael Watson was very supportive of the gallery. There's the Watson name. Do you know about the Watson family?

MS. FALINO: Of IBM?

MR. CASTLE: No. Let's see, it was Hildegarde Watson and James Sibley Watson in the early '60s were — well, in fact, they had actually started the Memorial Art Gallery. They were good friends of — they ran a magazine in New York called *Dial* magazine.

MS. FALINO: Oh, really?

MR. CASTLE: Yes, that was theirs. And he had invented a motion picture x-ray, but the family had money I think from — what's the telegraph company?

MS. FALINO: AT&T?

MR. CASTLE: No. Well, some family member — they had a lot of money.

MS. FALINO: Okay, and they were —

MR. CASTLE: They —

MS. FALINO: They were supportive of the Finger Lakes Exhibition?

MR. CASTLE: Well, yes, I think they made the purchase award on my piece.

MS. FALINO: Oh, Okay. Yes, I mean, '64 was a great year for you in many ways.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, so '64 a lot was happening, and I had a very good exhibition here and I really knocked myself out. I had that — the library sculpture was in there, which the gallery now owns.

MS. FALINO: Yep.

MR. CASTLE: And it was the most expensive piece in that exhibition at \$4,000.

MS. FALINO: Probably by a long shot, compared to anybody else, yeah? What a deal it is.

MR. CASTLE: [Laughs.] And I sold it instantly. I thought it would be totally unsaleable because you had to bolt it to the floor.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And the guy that bought it put it in a fairly traditional house with a big — he put it in a library, and that became called *The Library Sculpture*. He had a big oriental rug and he let me punch a hole right through the oriental rug and drill through the floor. And they ended up giving it to the art gallery —

MS. FALINO: Great.

MR. CASTLE: — that family. But I was going to say something else and I got lost in — that was reminding me — oh, still about the Michael Watson, Wharton Esherick, Frans Wildenhain connection.

MS. FALINO: And what is that?

MR. CASTLE: Have you seen the Wharton Esherick book, fairly new one?

MS. FALINO: No, I have not.

MR. CASTLE: Well, there's a little-known house in there that — Wharton Esherick designed a house here in Rochester. Frans Wildenhain was good friends with Michael Watson. And he was James Sibley Watson's son, so he was very wealthy. And he was an M.D. but he — after he got hanging around with Frans he gave it up and started making furniture.

MS. FALINO: [Laughs.]

MR. CASTLE: But, anyway, he had a lot of money and, you know, Frans had owned quite a bit of Wharton Esherick furniture — a lot.

MS. FALINO: Oh, I didn't know that.

MR. CASTLE: A dining room table and chairs plus some other — a stool and, I don't know, a bunch of stuff. And so, Michael Watson liked the Wharton Esherick furniture, and then had visited Wharton Esherick and seen his house, so he commissioned Wharton Esherick to design him a house here in Rochester —

MS. FALINO: My.

MR. CASTLE: — very close to Frans, right?

MS. FALINO: How fabulous.

MR. CASTLE: You know, a stone's throw away from Frans's house. And the original intention was that the house would be furnished with Wharton Esherick furniture, which at that point Michael hadn't gotten very much furniture. Well, the house has a replica — or had — of the staircase from Paoli.

MS. FALINO: Really?

MR. CASTLE: Yes. It is — anyway, it was in the living room, this staircase, very close to being the same as the one in Paoli.

But Wharton Esherick had gotten his measurements wrong and it came in to install —which he didn't install it; he wasn't even here — and it was one step short. Well, Michael Watson, being a woodworker, said, "You know, I won't bother him; I can just fix this," which he did. And when Wharton Esherick came later, he was furious. He hated it. And they never spoke again. [They laugh.]

MS. FALINO: So no furniture went into the house.

MR. CASTLE: No furniture went into the house.

MS. FALINO: Oh, that's very funny.

MR. CASTLE: And the house went on the market. It had been owned by the family even though Michael Watson moved to Florida 20 years ago. They kept the house, kept it heated, all painted, empty for, like, 20-some years.

MS. FALINO: Oh, lord.

MR. CASTLE: But Michael Watson is still alive but he's in an old — he's got Alzheimer's. He's in an old-folks home. So his daughter actually sold it recently. And they had it, like, a million-one [dollars] — it's a fabulous house — but they weren't getting any takers.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And we went to see it. In fact, I hadn't been there since the party when they moved in. They had a big opening party. So I hadn't been there since then — which Wharton Esherick of course did not attend.

But it ended up that, really, they just weren't getting the money that they wanted and figured that nobody up here really knew anything about Esherick and didn't appreciate the staircase. And Nancy and I told Evan Snyderman about the situation.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: So he talked the Watson daughter into letting him take it on consignment.

MS. FALINO: The staircase?

MR. CASTLE: The staircase. So it's in New York now.

MS. FALINO: Wow.

MR. CASTLE: And that house doesn't have a staircase anymore.

MS. FALINO: My goodness.

MR. CASTLE: But it did sell. They lowered the price to about 300,000 [dollars], which they think they're going to get for the staircase.

MS. FALINO: Yes. Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And then the house just sold.

MS. FALINO: Wow. That's a fascinating story. I had no idea that Esherick had a story up here.

MR. CASTLE: We got off-track there. We shouldn't have been talking about that, but —

MS. FALINO: No, that's a fascinating story.

MR. CASTLE: That's a little-known story, but in the Wharton Esherick book there is a — in the back of the book —

MS. FALINO: There's a picture of it.

MR. CASTLE: — a picture of that house. [Phone rings.] Tricia is off today, so that phone is going to be a problem.

MS. FALINO: If we unplug the phone here, would that cause a problem?

MR. CASTLE: No, because I'm really not going to answer it. It keeps — somebody just keeps calling back and back and back.

MS. FALINO: Okay.

But I don't think we talked on the record about America House. We talked a bit about America House at your home.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, we did. We talked about Florence Eastmead —

MS. FALINO: And you were going to tell us about Florence Eastmead. Could you —

MR. CASTLE: — and the jewelry cabinets I designed.

MS. FALINO: And the cabinets that you made. Exactly.

MR. CASTLE: Right.

Well, Mrs. Eastmead was the person you dealt with. Mrs. Webb had an office somewhere in there, but, you know, if you were just dealing with, you know, giving them stuff on consignment —

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: — you didn't deal with Mrs. Webb.

MS. FALINO: So tell us a bit about her, about Mrs. Eastmead.

MR. CASTLE: Well, she was — I remember I liked her. She was very nice.

MS. FALINO: Was she very knowledgeable about craft?

MR. CASTLE: Fairly, I would say, yes — probably not of avant-garde stuff.

MS. FALINO: Well, that was not the time for it maybe.

MR. CASTLE: But, you know, the California things didn't really end up there too much, I guess probably because the shipping was probably a big problem. And I'm not sure that maybe those early days that the California people were so close to America House to be promoting themselves there. So I don't remember any of the funk sort of California things being there.

MS. FALINO: Right. What do you remember being sold there?

MR. CASTLE: Well, it was fairly traditional things for the most part. Yes, I like to think that mine weren't so traditional, but I might have been one of the more adventuresome people they sold. I think ceramics and jewelry were probably the bigger sellers.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: It was too early for glass —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — so very little glass.

MS. FALINO: Yes, and more affordable, too.

MR. CASTLE: Yes. And I think jewelry was one of their good things. That's why they, I thought, probably felt that they could spend money on jewelry cases and that would be the first thing you see when you walk in the door.

MS. FALINO: Yes, so describe those cases, would you?

MR. CASTLE: Yes, they commissioned me, and I had a fairly open brief to do pretty much what I wanted. So I designed kind of an L shape that came out from the wall and then went down. This side is open so you could walk in. And they were probably about counter height, 36 inches, with glass tops. But they were fairly narrow. And then they had a very sculptured leg —

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: — which is sort of typical of what I was doing, kind of tree-trunk kind of leg, and maybe three legs. One end fastened on the wall, so you didn't need a leg there. A leg at the corner and maybe two more. I can't remember. And the cases would open on the back side and you could pull out a tray of jewelry.

MS. FALINO: And what was the wood made of?

MR. CASTLE: Teak.

MS. FALINO: Teak. Nice.

MR. CASTLE: In those days, the fancy woods were very inexpensive.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: You could get teak and rosewood in those days frequently. And then there was also a cabinet on the wall behind with a glass front.

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: And they had a very good window display, a big window. So they would — you know, putting things in the window got a lot of attention.

MS. FALINO: Yes, except was furniture something they were able to put there?

MR. CASTLE: Yes, it was a pretty big —

MS. FALINO: It was a good feature place?

MR. CASTLE: Yes, I had furniture in the window more than once.

MS. FALINO: Now, I know in the late '50s they had a show of Paul Evans and Phillip Lloyd Powell, but I think — they didn't have a lot of other furniture makers. They had — they might have had one other furniture show.

MR. CASTLE: I mean, David — I mean, Coffey — what's his — Michael Coffey came along later.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: He wasn't — he might have shown in America House much later maybe. I'm not sure. But he's the only one I can think of that might have been.

MS. FALINO: Okay, now let's return back to Rochester and talk a bit about your departure from RIT to go to Rockport. That's what happened next, correct?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.]

MS. FALINO: Could you tell us a bit about that?

MR. CASTLE: Well — [laughs] — this is an awful long story —

MS. FALINO: Oh, dear.

MR. CASTLE: — but in 1969, which is the first year that they were on the new campus — and I didn't care much for the new campus. There were a lot of — you know, after the intimacy of the downtown and the School for American Craftsmen having their own building and their own gallery space, well, we didn't have that anymore. It was just sort of part of a big thing.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: So I didn't like the campus very much, but then what actually caused the big problem was that at that point Bill Keyser had a sabbatical, so I could hire someone for the year. And at that point Craig McArt and I — which name I mentioned —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — we're friends and we saw each other a lot, and he had spent some time in — is it Denmark or Sweden? But, anyway, he had met James Krenov.

MS. FALINO: Oh, yes, this is the Krenov chapter. [They laugh.]

MR. CASTLE: And I had never heard of James Krenov, but he came back and really — and, really, the timing was something — he just had come back and I had a chance to hire somebody. And before I'd really got to look around much, he brought me some Krenov material and thought I should hire him for the year.

And so I wrote Jim Krenov and sort of talked to about, you know, his — what his philosophy of teaching would be and, you know, what his philosophy about his work. And I remember, I got back multipage letters that were beautifully written, you know, like four- or five-page letter. I'd never gotten a letter so long. And he was very articulate.

And so I never really shopped around for anybody, and I hired him. And I remember that I was talking to Harold Brennan about his coming and asking Harold Brennan if the school could, you know — you know, I wanted to find him a place to live, and could the school then, you know, put the money up front to do this? And he said, "No, no, no, you know, let him find his own place."

And so, when I was supposed to pick him up at the airport, the time he had written, I go to the airport and his plane comes in and he's not there. And, you know, the airline said, "Well, he wasn't on the flight," and they didn't seem to know anything. So I went back home, and maybe 12 hours, 24 hours later, I don't know what, he's calling from the airport, furious at me for not being there to pick him up.

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: And of course I didn't know when he was coming in. And then he also said, "You should have gotten me a place to live." And so, he was kind of — we were off on a bad foot.

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: And then, as soon as he got to the school, he thought it was the worst place he had ever seen. The

wood was terrible, the equipment was terrible, and just everything was wrong.

MS. FALINO: He had been a teacher?

MR. CASTLE: No.

MS. FALINO: No, so he was coming in in a very junior capacity.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, he was just hired for, you know, one year.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: It wasn't a permanent position.

But then, you know, things — you know, I got him some of the wood that he wanted and some of the equipment he needed, or wanted anyway. I don't know whether he needed it, but, you know, I tried to make him happy.

But then as the teaching went along, he had really quite a different idea about things than I did. And I had been there at that point like eight years. So he thought that I had brainwashed all the students against him so that whatever he taught he didn't stand a chance of getting through. I had them brainwashed.

So things weren't going very smoothly. And one day he called up Nancy and just lambasted her about what a terrible person I was, and he was going to get a gun and kill me.

MS. FALINO: Oh, lord.

MR. CASTLE: So I went in to Harold Brennan and said, "I'm leaving."

MS. FALINO: I'm out of here. [They laugh.]

MR. CASTLE: I said, "When he's gone, I'll come back." Well, he was gone the next day. They put him on an airplane and sent him home. And I got a temporary person in and things were Okay.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: But, really, you know, I just kind of — that kind of ruined it for me, so I didn't want to stay there anymore. And there were two jobs open at the time in Rochester for sculpture, one at the University of Rochester, which in hindsight was the one I should have taken, and Rockport.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: Rockport had — in 1970 there was a huge amount of money available for anything I wanted.

MS. FALINO: Those were great years for the SUNY system.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, so the SUNY system had tons of money. I could buy any equipment I wanted, so I went to Rockport.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And I had a good — you know, I went from a three-day teaching schedule at RIT to a two-day teaching schedule.

MS. FALINO: Very nice.

MR. CASTLE: I had this huge equipment budget and bought some stuff that I thought would be nice to have. And, you know, in the beginning they also had promised that they would have a master's degree program within a year or two.

Well, they never got the program. And in the early years there really were a lot of good students there. Several of them I've actually kept up with. But then it gradually — some of the students seemed to be not so good and pretty soon that job became boring, and it really wasn't getting any good students.

MS. FALINO: Yes, that was fairly brief for you.

MR. CASTLE: Well, it was, like, nine years, I think.

MS. FALINO: Well, I guess — yeah, so it's a significant amount of time.

MR. CASTLE: So I quit teaching, but then at that point I had also met John Makepeace. And at that point he had moved from Oxfordshire to Parnham House and started this school. And I was pretty impressed with what he was doing at the school and thought, well, I could do that.

And there seemed to be an opportunity here, because I didn't feel like — my feeling was that, you know, spending four years for something that's craft-oriented and maybe not going to get you a huge amount of money salary wise for whatever you do, but why couldn't you do that schooling in two years? I thought you could.

And so I started a two-year school, and actually it worked. We really did get as good of results, because it was — well, I actually became the president of the smallest accredited school in New York State. We were accredited —

MS. FALINO: That's pretty good.

MR. CASTLE: — to give an associate's degree.

MS. FALINO: Very good.

MR. CASTLE: Now, I was lucky because I was friendly with the high school superintendent who had just retired at that point. And of course he knew a lot of the Albany people —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — and knew how to do the paperwork. So I hired him to do the paperwork —

MS. FALINO: Smart.

MR. CASTLE: — which, you know, I probably couldn't have done it, but he knew who to talk to and all that stuff. And I remember that after you go through all the stuff you needed to do, the kind of final thing that they do in New York State is that when you're introducing a new program, they don't want to duplicate programs that are in the area.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: And they have college meetings, I don't know, once a year or two times a year — I don't know what — and they send a representative from the University of Rochester, from Rockport, from Geneseo, from Nazareth, St. John Fisher, all the colleges that are within a certain amount of area, and they get to vote on — and I remember going there and presenting my case. And RIT had sent somebody who was just trying to shoot me down.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And they really — in fact, it was the dean that later hired me. [They laugh.] Dean Johnson was just saying everything he could against the program. But the rest of the people then, I think he kind of overdid it and couldn't understand why he was attacking me, because I was suggesting a two-year program.

Well, they didn't have a two-year program, so it wasn't the same. I mean, they had a furniture design program but it was four years. I was proposing a furniture design program that was two years, and it was an AOS degree, so it was different. I found out later why he was so upset about it. They had planned to do the same thing.

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: And of course if I got it, they couldn't have it.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: So it turned out to be my sort of ace card to play later.

But, anyway, the school went really well in the beginning, and we really could really pick the cream of the crop. And we would get —

MS. FALINO: Was it held here in this building —

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: — in your workshop?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.] It was a little crowded. But we really had a lot of applicants so we could

really pick who we wanted. And it ran very well, but of course, like all schools, the tuition we charged really wasn't enough to pay for the program. But we were a 501(c)(3), and in the beginning, I found it very easy to raise that money because I knew enough people around here to hit up.

MS. FALINO: To help support it.

MR. CASTLE: And it wasn't a lot of money we were needing each year. So it turned out to be pretty easy for the first couple of years, but then I realized that I couldn't go back to the same people all the time, and that list was getting short.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: So I realized that I couldn't keep this going. So we kept it going, like, for four years, but then RIT was always pretty upset about it, and we really — we got the spotlights around here. I was able to organize, you know, exhibits for the students in good places, even in New York City.

MS. FALINO: Unlike Harold Brennan was able to do.

MR. CASTLE: Well, Harold Brennan should have done it —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — but he never did.

MS. FALINO: So you understood that aspect.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, and so I got my students a one-man show at the Milliken Gallery in New York —

MS. FALINO: Nice.

MR. CASTLE: — which was a very good show.

So we did things that were good. So then RIT really started approaching me that they would take the school and they would give me a tenured faculty position. I turned it down. This was a full-time teaching position.

So I turned that down, but then they came back with a better offer that they would, you know, pay off the debts of the school. There were some, not — they weren't huge — and they would offer me the artist in residence position. Well, that was a lot more attractive.

MS. FALINO: Yes, I'll bet.

MR. CASTLE: And so, that one happened. So the AOS program went over there, but it was really very awkward because Bill Keyser was there then —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — and this was all done without him having any knowledge of it.

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: So, all of a sudden he had an AOS program, and of course he wasn't very happy about that, which is kind of understandable.

MS. FALINO: Sure.

MR. CASTLE: They put him in an awkward position. Well, when the dean realized that, he actually gave Bill Keyser a grant to have a film made about his work to try to sort of cheer him up. But then of course it never did much once it got there because Bill Keyser really wasn't going to promote it. It's still there and it's used occasionally, but not much.

MS. FALINO: So it is an option for students to exercise if they enroll in it.

MR. CASTLE: So, the plan was from Dean Johnson, Bob Johnson, who was the one that hired me for that position, that they would start offering an AOS in all of the craft school areas, but then when he went to the faculty council, or however they have to bring these things up, the liberal arts people were very upset about this. There's no liberal arts component —

MS. FALINO: True.

MR. CASTLE: — in an AOS. And they voted it down. So they never let him go ahead with that idea.

MS. FALINO: But they had already negotiated the —

MR. CASTLE: Well, they already had mine, so they had the AOS degree.

MS. FALINO: So they had that.

MR. CASTLE: But then they never — they never used it. Well, I mean, only in woodworking.

MS. FALINO: Yes. Okay.

MR. CASTLE: And they don't promote it. And so, they don't get very many students doing it.

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: But it really accomplished what I needed to accomplish because the other problem was going to be that I would have to keep these records for the students.

MS. FALINO: Right. It's a big administrative thing to run a school.

MR. CASTLE: And now they have the records.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: So the students have — their records are permanent —

MS. FALINO: Over there.

MR. CASTLE: — and they have access to them.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: So that worked out really well.

MS. FALINO: So when you became artist in residence back there, what kind of schedule did you keep?

MR. CASTLE: I didn't have one.

MS. FALINO: It was as you wanted. You came and went.

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: Did you do mostly crits, or you —

MR. CASTLE: Crits, committees, thesis committees.

MS. FALINO: So you were brought in in sort of a consulting capacity.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.] And then, just the last few years, I've started to — on my own, because the industrial design wanted me — I'm teaching one class a year.

MS. FALINO: Oh, you are? What are you teaching now?

MR. CASTLE: Design as art.

MS. FALINO: I love it. Very nice.

All right, let's turn for a moment, then, to the galleries that you've worked with. Lee Nordness we'll come to in a minute, but I wanted you to say a bit about Jackie Schuman.

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: She was a gallerist here in Rochester.

MR. CASTLE: That's right.

MS. FALINO: Did she show fine art primarily?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.] She had a gallery. Her husband, Dan Schuman, was president of Bausch and Lomb, so she was very well connected locally, so she knew everybody who had money.

And she was really the person in that town if you wanted some advice about art, New York art, because that's what she handled — a few local artists, but she had prints from all the major people, so you could get a Warhol print or a Rauschenberg print from her.

MS. FALINO: Pretty good.

MR. CASTLE: She would have that kind of thing.

MS. FALINO: Yes, so very progressive.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.] And being very well socially connected, she sold this stuff.

And I remember I went to her right off, the first year I was here, when I was doing only sculpture, and she agreed to show it. I never had a one-man show there with the sculpture, but I had pieces in her gallery. In fact, *Icarus* —

MS. FALINO: *Icarus* was there.

MR. CASTLE: — was sold there.

MS. FALINO: Oh, great.

MR. CASTLE: She's the one that sold *Icarus* and a few other things.

But I remember that the time came when I decided I wasn't going to do any more sculpture, and I went in and told her that, that I was going to just now make furniture. And I assumed she would say that she wouldn't show me anymore, is what I assumed, but it wasn't the case. She was going to be happy to show the furniture. And I did —

MS. FALINO: And she was able to place it?

MR. CASTLE: And I did sell — I mean, I did have a one-man show with her later, at that point, and it was — and, yes, she sold — I don't think a lot but, you know, some. That was sort of the — she, probably by — I can't think of the date exactly, by 1970 I think she had closed her gallery. Her husband retired from Bausch and Lomb and they moved to Florida.

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: Or early '70s maybe. I don't know the exact date.

MS. FALINO: Yes, and in the meantime you were getting more of a reputation in New York City and the Nordness had taken you on by the time of *Objects: USA*?

MR. CASTLE: The late '60s, before *Objects: USA* several years —

MS. FALINO: Was it?

MR. CASTLE: — when he had a gallery on Madison Avenue, a small gallery, and handled painting. I mean, the only person that I actually can remember that he handled was Fritz Scholder.

MS. FALINO: Oh, Native American.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, who I later had quite a bit of contact with. But I remember meeting him at some point in the late '60s but, you know, I never had contact with him again until the '80s, when I was given an award and he was at the — he had been given the same award I think the year before, or something. It was at the event.

MS. FALINO: I see. So, what — Lee was a very pivotal person for representing studio craft. He was the first, and he was important because he sold fine art. He was a — I know he wasn't enormously — he wasn't a huge gallery.

MR. CASTLE: No, it was a small gallery.

MS. FALINO: Yes, but —

MR. CASTLE: Kind of narrow. You know, probably as narrow as this but twice as long.

MS. FALINO: So —

MR. CASTLE: Kind of a weird space.

MS. FALINO: So, like, what, 30 feet, 40 feet long and —

MR. CASTLE: Forty feet long —

MS. FALINO: — by 20?

MR. CASTLE: — by 20-something. Yes, a narrow space.

MS. FALINO: Okay. I mean, Jackie was similar. Jackie sold fine art and she sold your sculpture and then your furniture. So she was similar to Nordness except he was in Manhattan —

MR. CASTLE: Right.

MS. FALINO: — and he had achieved visibility with the Johnsons, having done the *Painting: USA* show.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I think more or less what happened is that, you know, he was encouraged by what he did for me and started paying more attention to what was going on in the craft field.

MS. FALINO: Ah, so you think — you think it was his initial contact with you that turned his mind —

MR. CASTLE: Well, I was the first — I was the first person he ever showed that had function in their work, but then I think he saw an opportunity when he looked at the field —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — of who he could represent. I mean, people like Arneson.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: He represented Arneson. When he moved his gallery — it was kind of on a side street. I can't remember. It wasn't on Madison Avenue anymore. It was off Madison Avenue, but he had a much bigger space and began to handle people like Voulkos and artists — he knew a lot of people.

And, you know, then at the same time as *Objects: USA*, because I figured he probably could capitalize on —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: But, you know, that gallery didn't last very long, and I don't really know why.

MS. FALINO: Did you ever show at Bonnier's? No — because they showed Voulkos.

MR. CASTLE: Did they?

MS. FALINO: And a few other contemporary Americans, you know, because they were primarily more Scandinavian in focus.

MR. CASTLE: He organized — Lee organized for me a show at Gimbels.

MS. FALINO: Really?

MR. CASTLE: Gimbels opened a new store on the Upper East Side, and they had a gallery space in that new store. It was new — this would have been — well, again, roughly about the time of the *Objects: USA*. And he organized a show for me there. That store didn't last long. I don't think it was there more than four or five years and it was gone.

MS. FALINO: But he really had quite a showman style, it must have been, because he understood the virtues of mounting these big shows and getting publicity. And Gimbels is a good example of that as well as the *Painting: USA* show that he did at the Coliseum.

MR. CASTLE: And he must have been really good with people. I mean, he was a handsome guy and very articulate. He was probably very effective in negotiating all these things.

MS. FALINO: And so, the latter part of his career, say after the late '60s, was his gallery primarily focused on studio craft or did he continue —

MR. CASTLE: No, it was primarily focused.

MS. FALINO: I see. Okay. That's great.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, he really changed his focus. I had a show in his new space, a one-man show, in 1969. That was the last show I had with him, which was these plastic floor lamps.

MS. FALINO: Oh, yes.

MR. CASTLE: And which, you know, he was — he let me do whatever I wanted. I'm sure he would have much rather had the wooden furniture, because he could have sold it. But he never made any — you know, when I suggested — whatever I suggested was going to be fine.

So he let me mount this show — which he did a good job of. It looked great, because the gallery made it kind of dark so that the lights could function better. And he gave me a really nice show of these lamps, and never sold a one. But, you know, he was supportive that way.

MS. FALINO: That's great.

MR. CASTLE: It didn't matter that it didn't have to sell.

MS. FALINO: It's nice to have that kind of a gallery director that's willing to take those kind of risks — not easy to do.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I have one now that will do the same thing.

MS. FALINO: That's great. So then your next dealer was Milliken?

MR. CASTLE: Well, the next important one. No, there were some —

MS. FALINO: Others in between?

MR. CASTLE: You know, not really that you would really say were "your" gallery —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — but places where I showed things. What are some of the names? They were more craft-oriented. Boy, Nancy might remember, because at this point Nancy would have been around. What were they — boy, I'm kind of drawing a blank on — you know, some of them had good locations in Manhattan. They were —

MS. FALINO: Fairtree?

MR. CASTLE: Fairtree, that's one of them, yes. Fairtree. Yes, I showed there.

MS. FALINO: That was more of a '70s gallery, I think.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, but they didn't act like a true dealer like Nordness did, which arranged shows for you and stuff.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: So they weren't — they just would take a piece on consignment and try to sell it.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: That happened for a few years. And then I remember I met a lady at something, at a party or something in New York, who said, "Oh, you ought to have a real gallery." And she said, "I know some people you ought to meet." One of them was Milliken.

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: So she introduced me to Milliken. Boy, I wish I could remember her name. She was very nice.

MS. FALINO: But that was in the early '80s.

MR. CASTLE: Late '70s —

MS. FALINO: Late '70s.

MR. CASTLE: — like '79. And she — anyway, she introduced me to Sandy Milliken and we hit it off, and he was

interested. So I began to show there.

MS. FALINO: And how was that arrangement?

MR. CASTLE: Well, he was great. He was really very supportive and functioned like a true gallery.

MS. FALINO: Great. And then you said he also showed work by your students?

MR. CASTLE: For just one time.

MS. FALINO: But that's marvelous.

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: Yes. And those were great years for you too. You had really — your reputation had gotten much broader and —

MR. CASTLE: Well, really what — what had happened just before that was in the late '70s I was, well, feeling that my idea about the organic stack-laminated pieces being accepted as art just wasn't happening, even though that's when I thought from the beginning that, you know, if you make this very sculptural furniture, hopefully it will be appreciated as sculpture.

Well, you know, I'd had some success but it wasn't happening the way I really wanted it to. So I wondered about the idea that, what would be the opposite of doing that? And somehow — and I was teaching drawing at the time. At Rockport it was one of the classes I taught.

And at one point I had, I guess, not thought about what the still life would be that you would draw that day and just put a chair in the middle of the room and hung my sport coat over the back of the chair, and the students were drawing that. And it was, I guess, a slow day and so I drew it too.

And then I got to thinking about that: That would be the opposite of what carving the organic things would be, is that this is a chair that I did not design — what I designed was putting the coat on the back — and carving the whole thing, the coat and the chair, out of wood. I thought, that's the opposite.

Well, in the beginning I thought this would be the great challenge again —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — but it turned out to be very easy to fool people. It's easy because it's a very normal and everyday thing. You don't have to think too much about — if you see it, you know what it is.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: You don't have to sort of scratch your head and think about it. And I think that's what makes *trompe l'oeil* work —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — is that there are always things that look right.

MS. FALINO: That fit in.

MR. CASTLE: That fit, that would be there.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: You know, sports coat, you know, on the back of a chair; that's not unusual. And so, your mind makes that decision without you really thinking.

So, fooling people, I'd figured out almost from the beginning sort of what the formula would be. And then it was sort of hats and umbrellas and coats and keys and gloves and things.

MS. FALINO: And did Milliken like that change?

MR. CASTLE: Well, no, this was happening — this happened just before Milliken.

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: There was a gallery in New York called Carl Solway Gallery. Do you know Carl Solway, that name?

MS. FALINO: No.

MR. CASTLE: Well, he's actually a big dealer, and still is. And he's in Cincinnati. But what he does is he's a second-market dealer.

MS. FALINO: Yes?

MR. CASTLE: He owns top stuff, and it's for sale.

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: But briefly he opened a gallery in New York to expand. He's kept his gallery in Cincinnati. So, briefly — and I had a one-man show of the *trompe l'oeil* pieces there.

MS. FALINO: Oh, Okay.

MR. CASTLE: So this was in SoHo, in a good location and good space. And SoHo, in those days, was the place to have a gallery.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: Well, he didn't sell a one of them. But it was very shortly after that I met Milliken, so the first thing I had to show Milliken were the *trompe l'oeil* pieces.

And he mounted a show — almost the same show; I may have added a piece or two — and he sold them all. But at that point I decided I didn't want to do that anymore because, you know, you'd figured out how to do it, and the part that's most exciting to me is that drawing and discovering new shapes and new ideas and new things.

Well, there wasn't any room for that. That was just going to be doing the same thing over again. And at that point I also had gotten interested in the clock series —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — about that same time, because I had an employee, Greg Bloomfield, who was this kind of like a mechanical guy. He knew how to make things that worked, like clocks. But then also at the same time I decided that I would do one last *trompe l'oeil* piece, and that would be the end of it, and that was the grandfather clock called the *Ghost Clock*.

MS. FALINO: The *Ghost Clock*, yes.

MR. CASTLE: Which, it became part of the clock series because this all happened kind of at the same time as building the other clocks.

So, Milliken really got behind the clock idea and thought that was great. He even advanced money to do it because it got pretty expensive, and mounted a show of clocks and also organized — part of the clocks went to Cincinnati and part of them went to the Renwick, so it was showing —

MS. FALINO: Yes, so it got around the country.

MR. CASTLE: — in a couple of places, and got around. The show was very successful. It sold well —

MS. FALINO: Good.

MR. CASTLE: — eventually every single one of them.

MS. FALINO: So that's a good case of a dealer who is accepting your changes and really rolling with it and, in fact, supporting it — financially supporting it.

MR. CASTLE: But then at the same time — and I kind of wanted the clocks — well, how should I put this — to be kind of a wide range of things. So, some of them were a little more traditional, and at the same time it was that Penelope Hunter-Stiebol thing had happened with me discovering Ruhlmann —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — at the same time as the clocks. So they're actually is a little Ruhlmann influence into the clocks.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: Hopefully not so noticeable, but it's there. And then, you know, talking to Sandy Milliken, and he seemed to really get behind the idea that extraordinarily well-made pieces out of, you know, expensive and valuable materials would be the way to go. And so he really got behind that.

And then I did mount another show there that had the kind of Roman-influenced pieces.

MS. FALINO: And how well was that received?

MR. CASTLE: That sold well.

MS. FALINO: Very well. Good.

MR. CASTLE: But then I decided that wasn't any fun either, that really — so I began to try to — I didn't just jump away from it instantly but sort of began to try to put a funky spin on it to make it more interesting because I became bored with that. And, again, that was — you know, I thought it would be difficult to do, and in the end — you know, once you can do it, you don't want to do it anymore.

So I didn't want to do that anymore, but I still had — at that point had sort of gotten this shop with some really superb, more traditional — kind of craftsman — starting with the clocks —

MS. FALINO: Yes, and —

MR. CASTLE: — and then the fancy furniture. The guys who were really good at — you know, will do that, were here.

MS. FALINO: Yes, you had people with good metalworking skills, right?

MR. CASTLE: Greg Bloomfield did the metalworking.

MS. FALINO: Oh, he was the metal person.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.]

MS. FALINO: And he did the clocks as well.

MR. CASTLE: Well, he made the clock movements.

MS. FALINO: He made the — he actually was a clockmaker?

MR. CASTLE: Well, what we mostly did was alter the clock movements, rebuild them to do — to be different.

MS. FALINO: Time-wise? I mean, you were changing the —

MR. CASTLE: No, they still functioned as clocks but they would do something different.

MS. FALINO: Such as?

MR. CASTLE: Well, instead of, you know — instead of having hands on the front, lay the clock down and the whole top of the clock would turn.

MS. FALINO: Oh, I see, in terms of orientation.

MR. CASTLE: Yes. And then some we built from electric clocks. It would just move things around. So they weren't like traditional clocks at all, but they used a clock motor —

MS. FALINO: Right. Oh, I know what you're saying.

MR. CASTLE: — to run them.

MS. FALINO: Like, there's one you have which is like a pole, and then the hands are on the outside of it, but they still functioned as — they still had the clock motor intact and functioning correctly.

So, after Milliken —

MR. CASTLE: Well then Peter Joseph came along.

MS. FALINO: Oh, yeah.

MR. CASTLE: And Peter Joseph discovered my work at Pritam & Eames actually, because he would spend summers in Long Island once he became wealthy. And he became sort of instantly wealthy. He was the person that sold the Plaza Hotel to Donald Trump.

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: Donald Trump had been trying to buy the Plaza Hotel, but it was part of a chain, and so they wouldn't sell of the Plaza Hotel. So Peter Joseph got this idea, well, we'll buy the chain and then we can sell it off. So he organized the money, which mostly came from [Richard] Bass money.

But he organized this whole thing to buy the whole chain, and then had found a buyer for the whole chain before this was over and sold off the Plaza Hotel. And apparently the people who were buying it didn't realize that they weren't getting the Plaza Hotel. [They laugh.] They had not read the thing. So they were not happy when they found out.

And he got a very high price from Trump. And his piece of the action sort of made him instantly wealthy.

MS. FALINO: Aha. So then he had the time to devote to other things?

MR. CASTLE: So then he found — at that point he had discovered Milliken and my work, because he had seen work at Pritam & Eames and became interested in furniture. And then he found my work. And as soon as he had made this money, he bought quite a nice apartment and commissioned me to do a room.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And that's the first *Caligari* room. But that was also through Milliken. The commission went through Milliken.

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: But then it got kind of — Peter Joseph got really upset that Milliken was getting this big piece of this action —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — and began to have, you know, fights with Milliken. And I was sort of caught in the middle —

MS. FALINO: Oh, dear.

MR. CASTLE: — of these fights that he thought he was being over-charged by Milliken. And then at the same time he got this idea before the gallery of representing me. So he approached me that he would form a company and the name of the company was Caligari.

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: You might be interested in this. I mean, here's one of the Caligari note pads. And he designed all this — had all this stationary designed —

MS. FALINO: Wow.

MR. CASTLE: — and brochures designed.

MS. FALINO: Nice.

MR. CASTLE: The Caligari Corporation.

MS. FALINO: And what was the purpose of the firm, to promote your work?

MR. CASTLE: To promote my work. So he wanted to buy tons of my stuff. And, partly, he needed stuff too because he was even getting richer and he was going to move to an even bigger apartment. So he needed lots of things for his apartment.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: So he really was then — I think by offering me this, that he would buy everything I make. A lot of it he was going to use, so he would get it, like, without Milliken.

MS. FALINO: Without the middleman, yes.

MR. CASTLE: Of course, then Milliken was really pissed, but —

MS. FALINO: Well, you were probably one of his prize people.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I was being offered a lot of money, way more than Milliken had ever made me —

MS. FALINO: Sure.

MR. CASTLE: — to do this. I mean, in hindsight, it was a bad deal. But then he needed somebody to manage this, and at that time Lorry Dudley worked for me here, was sort of at my shop doing what Marvin is kind of doing now, only more —

MS. FALINO: And would you explain —

MR. CASTLE: — in terms of sales —

MS. FALINO: Okay, sales.

MR. CASTLE: — because she was involved in promoting some things, mostly working with Peter, though. And then Peter got — later got the idea of having a gallery and hiring Lorry away from me —

MS. FALINO: Aha.

MR. CASTLE: — to run the gallery. But he was buying everything of mine, like, two years before the gallery even started.

MS. FALINO: So he was really stockpiling —

MR. CASTLE: He was stockpiling.

MS. FALINO: — building inventory.

MR. CASTLE: Well, he was using quite a bit of it —

MS. FALINO: Yes?

MR. CASTLE: — because he was furnishing this 10,000-square-foot apartment, so he needed a lot of things.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: But he was also stockpiling — both.

MS. FALINO: So he was looking ahead to this, building this —

MR. CASTLE: So I'm not sure. He may have had the gallery in mind from the beginning. I don't know. He never mentioned it, because it — I guess I didn't worry too much about what he was going to do with it. It was good money at the time.

MS. FALINO: So then, do you feel that the gallery was really established because of his connection with you? Was he forming relationships at the same time with other furniture makers that you knew?

MR. CASTLE: Not for Caligari. I was the only one involved with Caligari.

MS. FALINO: And then once he established the Peter Joseph Gallery, by that time he had —

MR. CASTLE: Then he had picked up a bunch of people.

MS. FALINO: The network fanned out.

MR. CASTLE: Yes. Right.

MS. FALINO: Okay. That's interesting.

MR. CASTLE: But Lorry would have been responsible for helping with that.

MS. FALINO: Yes. And so she stayed with him.

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: And that went on for — that was — this was, like, the mid-'80s?

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: Then he died very suddenly.

MR. CASTLE: Well, then — you know, the gallery — he got a nice space on 5th Avenue and hired a good architect who was from Texas, a friend of Lorry's who did a good job. I mean, the gallery was very beautiful and quite large. And so it was an attractive place to show. But I think that right from the beginning — and I don't think it ever got what Peter wanted out of it.

MS. FALINO: Financially, you mean?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I don't think he knew all — I don't think he had to have money out of it. I mean, I'm sure he wished it made more money than it did, but he didn't need the money.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: But I think what he wanted out of it more than money was prestige.

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: And he wanted to become part of the art community. Well, that never happened.

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: I mean, the art community did not pay any attention to that gallery.

MS. FALINO: You're talking about the fine art community.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, the fine art community.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And, you know, that — later on he — at the end of the gallery he actually became involved with ballet and kind of got the acceptance in that community —

MS. FALINO: I see.

MR. CASTLE: — that he had wanted from the art community, which never accepted him. But the ballet community did, and he started giving money to the American Ballet —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — and was on their board. But I don't feel — right from the beginning I didn't feel the gallery was being run right at all, and it was run in a very weird way.

MS. FALINO: He had a lot of exclusive agreements with people, as I recall.

MR. CASTLE: He had exclusive agreements, and he had quite a few of those. And, you know, with mine there was — the situation was very generous in the beginning, but then each time the contract came up it got a little less generous. [They laugh.] And he was such a negotiator. Of course, he was —

MS. FALINO: That's his world.

MR. CASTLE: — good at that. And, you know, you would have this meeting with him and talk about what you're going to do and here's what's going to be in the contract. The contract would come and it would be very different. It would have a whole lot of things in there that — I don't want that, I don't want this, I don't want that.

And I know now why he did that is that you then look for the one that offends you most and fight for that one. You're kind of not so likely to fight for every single one of them. You take the one that you think is the most important and got to — and you'll give in.

MS. FALINO: Yes, so he'll get part of what he wants.

MR. CASTLE: So he'd get part of it each time.

MS. FALINO: Yes. Well, that's negotiation.

MR. CASTLE: I know. It's smart.

MS. FALINO: That's the art.

MR. CASTLE: Very smart. Very smart. So, you know, as the years went by it became less lucrative, but in the beginning it was very lucrative.

MS. FALINO: Yes, and he — I mean, it seems that — my recollection is that the gallery made quite a big splash in the craft world, and it really made the reputations of a lot of — the generation of sort of the so-called, you know, second generation of art furniture makers.

MR. CASTLE: But I think it was a false thing.

MS. FALINO: A bubble?

MR. CASTLE: It was a bubble. I mean that — for example, I think some of the people he chose were really not potentially able to really fill the bill. I mean, he appreciated great workmanship and that sometimes overshadowed design in his mind.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: But then the kind of promotion he did was false.

MS. FALINO: How so?

MR. CASTLE: I mean, whenever he would mount a show, he would almost have always pre-bought the most expensive things for himself.

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: And you would go into the show and you'd look at the price sheet, and something from a person who has no business getting that kind of price would be published, the price but a red sticker. Well, Peter bought it.

MS. FALINO: Ah. So he was only denying the clients the best purchases.

MR. CASTLE: Well, he had not, of course, paid anywhere near that for it —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — but would try to give the impression that this artist had gotten \$100,000 for a piece —

MS. FALINO: Oh, I see. So it's the —

MR. CASTLE: — that had never gotten even half that for a piece ever.

MS. FALINO: Do you think he was doing that as a psychological tool?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I think he was, like, priming the pump.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: I mean, I think that that's not unheard of to do that, but he overdid it. He would make — I mean, I'm sure that some sales happen in galleries the same way, but they really shouldn't.

And any galleries that do would have to do that just a tiny bit. They can't do that very often. He did it all the time. Every show was that way. Every show would, before opening, the most expensive piece would already be gone. And they would probably say they've sold it.

But, so, in the end you can't substantiate that. And when the gallery closed, I mean, I think maybe I'm the only one would could move along to another gallery, because it couldn't — there was no way those prices were going to work —

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: — for anyone else. And people like Roseanne [Somerson] and Alphonse [Mattia] and Richard Newman have had no market since then, it's just zero, because they don't want to make — you know, they're not going to get those prices ever again.

MS. FALINO: Right.

Now, where did you go after Peter Joseph?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I went with Leo Kaplan Modern —

MS. FALINO: Oh, right. Okay.

MR. CASTLE: — who made great promises and never came up with them. But they were just, at that point, getting their new space in the Fuller Building, so it looked pretty attractive. And they had a very — a brand-new, really nice space, but they never had the clientele to sell that much.

MS. FALINO: Right. I think we should stop here. Wait a minute. Oh, no, it's — we have a few more minutes. We have 15 more minutes. Okay.

MR. CASTLE: Okay.

MS. FALINO: So let's continue.

So, Leo Kaplan didn't promote it very well either, do you think?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I mean, he gave me exhibitions and, you know, he did sell some things, but it wasn't enough.

MS. FALINO: The location was great. That's a great building.

MR. CASTLE: Good location, yeah, although the Fuller Building was beginning to empty out, which it did eventually.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And he gave up his space. He's no longer got a space.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: But at that point in time when he moved in, it was a very active building, and that was considered to be a good location and, you know, it was a good space.

MS. FALINO: And that was in the '90s?

MR. CASTLE: Because at the same time I could have gone with Barry [Friedman].

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And I made, of course, a wrong decision. Barry's space was just off Madison Avenue, that upstairs. I thought it was a horrible space. I hated it. I made a decision on the basis of space —

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: — which was a bad decision, because Barry is true dealer. And Scott Jacobson did pretty well with glass, but that's really the only place he really sold.

MS. FALINO: So, does that take us then to Friedman?

MR. CASTLE: Well, there was a period in between of several years when Leo Kaplan was sort of not doing anywhere near as much as they should.

And then another thing that happened that really made things difficult was when Peter [Joseph] died Wendy [Evans] didn't care for the furniture and began to — also, the fancy space where it was stored was no longer paid for. It was stored in a different place where they did not take care of it.

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: And damage was happening to pieces like crazy. And she didn't want the furniture and just dumped it on the market. Well, when you want to sell, like, 15 pieces of mine, Sotheby's won't take 15 pieces.

MS. FALINO: No, and the market won't hold it.

MR. CASTLE: They might have taken one.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: So she went to what was Sollo Rago then, because they will take 15 pieces. And of course when you dump things on the market, the prices don't do that well —

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: And at the same time, she was also giving Donna Schneier pieces. And Donna Schneier seemed to know all the same collectors that I knew. And things would happen like, you know, some collector would be talking to me about they want to get this or that, and the first thing I would find out, oh, Donna Schneier sold them something for half the price that I was asking.

So, it was really a difficult time because with the pieces being dumped on the market and sold at prices less than what I would have to ask —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — it really made things very difficult. But, fortunately, that's all gone now.

MS. FALINO: It's all past.

MR. CASTLE: So that's not a problem anymore.

MS. FALINO: But you won't do that arrangement again.

MR. CASTLE: So, in hindsight, it was really a bad thing to do. I don't think the gallery raised my reputation. They introduced me to a few good collectors, who I still know, but they didn't really raise my reputation. And what happened, really, that was the real problem was that Peter encouraged me to make more and more. He wanted to create this inventory.

And then he got a house in Long Island and I was doing work for two houses, plus this inventory, so he encouraged me to hire more people, make more work. Well, as soon as you start doing that and you've got to pay for it, that sounded good, but this editing process really diminishes when you have to produce more things.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And more things slip through that just shouldn't have. And also, then you begin to really want to make more, so you think about efficiencies, about using your help.

MS. FALINO: Sure.

MR. CASTLE: And those are all bad things. You don't want to make more. You want to make less.

MS. FALINO: And make them right.

MR. CASTLE: And you don't want the employees to, you know, think about what their skills are and design for their skills. You don't want — that's a bad thing. And what brought me to where I am now is that sometime in there I really thought to myself, what would my work look like if I had to make it, all of it?

MS. FALINO: And what do you think it would be like?

MR. CASTLE: Like the early work.

MS. FALINO: Really?

MR. CASTLE: That's when I made it all.

MS. FALINO: Was that where you had the most control and the most pleasure?

MR. CASTLE: Yes. It was all things that I could do, even though I didn't have to do it, but that was the guiding light.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And that original vocabulary was closer to being right. You know, I didn't make things that looked the same. They looked different, but —

MS. FALINO: But they were totally under your control.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, they were — and stack laminating offered what I believed to be the right way for me to go.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And, surprisingly, there is really nobody else doing this.

MS. FALINO: Well, I was thinking — and this is a subject I wanted to bring up — well, we could at least start it now — and that was when you have a shop, when you start to hire employees, it does — it changes — it has an effect on how you design, as you just described it.

You know, you think about who your people are and what their strengths are, and maybe you find yourself making things or designing things that they are better able to execute rather than something you would strictly want for your own.

MR. CASTLE: Right.

MS. FALINO: And then there's also the issue of meeting payroll.

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: And that, I think, is a great motivator. Sometimes, though — you know, for good, but sometimes not for good.

And I remember years ago speaking with someone about Dale Chihuly, who has a big operation, and how it was — and I don't wish to ascribe this to him particularly; this is just sort of a topic of discussion — that he must have to think hard about how he's going to do projects so that he can also keep everybody going — you know, dream up projects that are going to be exciting for him but also will help keep everybody going who's getting a paycheck from him.

And how does that affect the results, especially when there are lean times? You know, you may have to let people go, or you just — you try other things that may bring you a claim, at least from a financial standpoint.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, that's true.

MS. FALINO: So —

MR. CASTLE: You know, you can — I mean, I kind of know — I've been in his studio enough times to sort of know how it works. I mean, he does new things, of course.

MS. FALINO: Of course.

MR. CASTLE: But they're also doing an awful lot of one thing, like the chandeliers, for example.

MS. FALINO: Exactly.

MR. CASTLE: They can do those with their eyes closed, probably. You know, so there's a certain amount of things that happen that are pretty similar to things before. And they do take a team because they require fairly complex installation. And so, he has an architect on staff who will understand the structures and things, and then of course people who physically do that. So you need quite a group of people.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: But the people working with the hot glass, I mean, they're really dealing with different colors, and there's a vocabulary of things that they can put together and use this vocabulary or this vocabulary or this color range.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: So there's enough things that keep people busy that you don't have to have a new thing every day.

MS. FALINO: Yes. And so, even in down times you can still put people to work —

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: — making some of those things.

MR. CASTLE: And then he has a little thing going that is — maybe it's a big moneymaker; I have no idea — where he makes these smaller things that museum shops sell.

MS. FALINO: Yes, I've seen those now.

MR. CASTLE: So, I suppose that on a slow day he could say, well, make some of these.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: I mean, and you're talking about a lot. I mean, he might make a hundred, you know.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: And he's got a nice thing going that museum shops like these. They even have them here, I think.

MS. FALINO: Yes, and they're priced so that they're a reach for the average visitor, but for someone who's well-heeled but not maybe a serious collector or a high-level collector they can actually acquire them. So they're attractively priced.

MR. CASTLE: And if you're a collector who really understands the market, you would buy Chihuly's at auction, because you're going to get them much cheaper than you're going to get it if you walk in the Marlborough or walk into his studio. They're always cheaper at a Sotheby's auction, and they come up fairly regularly.

MS. FALINO: Yes. How has the secondary market been for your work?

MR. CASTLE: For the work from the '60s and the '70s, amazing, fabulous. I mean, I had a piece go at right — a month ago —

MS. FALINO: In Chicago?

MR. CASTLE: Yes — 150,000 [dollars] for a '60s settee.

MS. FALINO: Nice. So, a stack laminated settee.

MR. CASTLE: Stack laminated.

MS. FALINO: Very good.

MR. CASTLE: And what's his name from the Sotheby's, Jim Zemaitis —

MS. FALINO: Zemaitis, yes.

MR. CASTLE: — Zemaitis. And he keeps bugging me all the time to get something —

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: — for him to sell. So they want those '60s, '70s pieces.

MS. FALINO: That's great.

MR. CASTLE: And *trompe l'oeil* has done well at auction. And they don't — they're not really interested in the '80s pieces.

MS. FALINO: The historical ones?

MR. CASTLE: No. Well, I don't think any of those have come up anyway, but the things from the Peter Joseph period, Sotheby's is not really, with the exception of *Angel Chairs*, interested in those. So those will go to Rago. But, like I said, not too much of it anymore.

And Evan Snyderman is very active in searching for my old work.

MS. FALINO: Is that right?

MR. CASTLE: And he is finding stuff. So he's bought out a lot.

MS. FALINO: Yes. Let's talk a minute about Snyderman because they have been issuing — they've done a reissue of some of your early work.

MR. CASTLE: Right.

MS. FALINO: And I think — you know, it coincides with a rejuvenated interest in the period, like the *Crafting Modernism* show. I thought it was a great idea.

MR. CASTLE: Well, first, yes, it's been really good. The first one was *The Black Edition*, which, in the — I don't think we've talked too much about Stendig and Beylerian, but —

MS. FALINO: We'll do that in the next — this afternoon.

MR. CASTLE: We'll come back and get that later. But, anyway, Beylerian sold the *Molar Group*. And the *Molar Group* is much better known than what Stendig had. But he approached me about re-issuing some of those pieces. And one of them that was not well-known was a conference table from 1970. Have you seen the little brochure for this?

MS. FALINO: I don't think so.

MR. CASTLE: I'll get you one. Maybe I'll get one right now while we're talking about it.

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: I know right where they are.

[Pause.]

MS. FALINO: He's coming back.

MR. CASTLE: This is the —

MS. FALINO: Thank you.

MR. CASTLE: — oh, this is dirty —

MS. FALINO: That's all right. Not to worry.

MR. CASTLE: — *The Black Edition*. And it was kind of his selection about what he thought would be the ones to re-edition —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — although he wants to re-edition more but I'm a little reluctant. But, anyway, the conference table, only one was ever made and I still had the molds. And, you know, it's huge, but it's been super-successful.

MS. FALINO: Great.

MR. CASTLE: And it is very expensive. I mean, it started — the price goes up every one.

MS. FALINO: Every time you make a new one.

MR. CASTLE: I think there's only one left to sell, and it will have a high price.

MS. FALINO: So that's proved to be very — a very good arrangement. He understands the marketplace and the sensibility for —

MR. CASTLE: Yes. Well, it's been very interesting that the biggest and most expensive one, in a sense, has sold the best. I think that the edition numbers on some of them were higher than they should have been. I think 25 is fine, and we've probably sold half of that or better.

MS. FALINO: You're talking about the — what's the name of that one you just mentioned, this one?

MR. CASTLE: The *Molar Coffee Table*.

MS. FALINO: The *Molar Coffee Table*. Okay.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, I bet we've sold at least half of that edition, or more.

MS. FALINO: At 25,000 [dollars]?

MR. CASTLE: Yes, and this one's 12 [thousand dollars], and we've probably sold about half of that. But this one, which is an edition, I think, of — well, that's 50 [thousand dollars].

MS. FALINO: That's the *Cloud*.

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: But the conference table?

MR. CASTLE: What is it? An edition of eight.

MS. FALINO: And you sold seven?

MR. CASTLE: But then what he did shortly after this started, he also decided, well, we'll have an edition of white. Well, the white have sold just as well. I think there's only one white one left —

MS. FALINO: Really?

MR. CASTLE: — and one black one left. And maybe the black one is even gone. I'm not sure.

MS. FALINO: And are the conference tables —

MR. CASTLE: And they're, like, you know, a couple hundred thousand dollars. That's —

MS. FALINO: Are they going to private homes or are they going to corporations?

MR. CASTLE: Both.

MS. FALINO: Aha.

MR. CASTLE: The new museum has one as their conference table.

MS. FALINO: Very nice.

MR. CASTLE: What was I going to say? It turned out almost easier to sell something big and expensive than it is something that was not very expensive.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And this edition number was really too high.

MS. FALINO: The *Cloud*?

MR. CASTLE: Yes. I don't think we sold more than 20 of those.

MS. FALINO: And how many did you make?

MR. CASTLE: Well, there's supposed to be 50.

MS. FALINO: Oh, that's quite a lot.

MR. CASTLE: But we only make them as they sell.

MS. FALINO: So —

MR. CASTLE: So there's no inventory.

MS. FALINO: Okay.

All right, we're going to stop here, and when we come back we'll finish discussing the dealers.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, because there's another edition too, the lamps.

MS. FALINO: Well, we'll talk about that in the afternoon, and then we'll — then we'll address your style topics, and then a few other things before we conclude.

MR. CASTLE: Okay.

[END OF DISC]

MS. FALINO: All right, this is Jeannine Falino. This is the third portion of my interview with Wendell Castle at his workshop in Scottsville, New York. This is February 24, 2012.

And we were — when we left off before lunch we were talking about the various galleries that you had been associated with and the kind of relationships that you were looking for and sought, or in some cases did not find, the learning curve of working with dealers and finding out whether or not they were able to represent you

properly or to bring you the kind of greater visibility that you sought.

And we ended with Leo Kaplan Modern. And after Leo Kaplan you said you didn't have much representation for bit.

MR. CASTLE: For a couple of years.

MS. FALINO: And then who did you begin with?

MR. CASTLE: Then I went to Barry Friedman. And that was just the point — it was exactly the right time. They were just moving from the space I thought was awful off Madison Avenue to a new very large space in Chelsea on a good street with good galleries, fabulous space. And they were opening up two galleries.

Barry had taken on a partner, Marc Benda, so they were opening up a space called Friedman Benda. And then Barry has his gallery there too. And they have a big storage area in the basement and then they have Friedman Benda on the first floor and Barry on the second floor. Then they had the third floor where they just sort of keep some things out from the artists that they represent so they can show someone who asks.

MS. FALINO: So, about what year did this association begin?

MR. CASTLE: About four years — four years ago?

MS. FALINO: Okay, so 2008.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, maybe five — five years ago. Five years ago.

MS. FALINO: All right.

MR. CASTLE: It's got to be five years ago.

MS. FALINO: All right.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, five. But I've ended up working primarily with Marc Benda, and I don't know why. It just seemed to go that direction. And I speak with him on a very regular basis about everything that's going on. And through their relationship they've hooked me up with some other good relationships in Europe.

MS. FALINO: With other galleries.

MR. CASTLE: With other galleries, principally Carpenters Workshop Gallery, which has a space on Albemarle Street, which is "the" street to be on in London, right sort of halfway between Sotheby's and Christie's. And then they've opened up a new space, opened last fall in Paris, a pretty large space. I haven't actually been in it yet, but I'll be in it — well, I was in their opening show and I'll be in a one-man show there coming up.

And then I've also got a — they again, through Marc, a relationship with a gallery in Zurich. I can't expect as much to happen in Zurich as Paris or London.

MS. FALINO: And why do you say that?

MR. CASTLE: Well, it's just a bigger art market in Paris. You stand a much better chance of selling things, because it's very international. I mean, I really get people from New York buying something in London —

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: — and you get somebody from London buying in New York.

MS. FALINO: Do you have any sense at this point of how much of your work is actually abroad?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I have quite a bit in Korea. You know, I couldn't put a number on it, but starting with my — I've only had two shows in London, and I don't know what they would have sold from that first show. I think it was seven or eight things.

MS. FALINO: Not bad.

MR. CASTLE: And then I had another show there in London and they sold — it was odd. I had four big pieces and two little pieces. The big pieces were the ones — they all sold. People wanted to spend more money, I think. They don't want a little one.

And then I've sold actually quite a bit in Switzerland, because Marc is Swiss, and his family is in the art business

so he's very well connected in Switzerland. So I've sold quite a lot in Switzerland.

MS. FALINO: And this is the Kessler Gallery, you said.

MR. CASTLE: Well, not necessarily through the Kessler Gallery. Some of it Marc just —

MS. FALINO: Directly.

MR. CASTLE: — sold —

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: — from Friedman Benda to Swiss clients. And the Swiss clients come into New York and buy. So there's quite a bit in Switzerland, only a little bit in France, a few pieces, but I expect that to change, I hope.

MS. FALINO: And so, when Barry and Marc are reaching out to these other galleries, they're forming a partnership that —

MR. CASTLE: They get a piece of the action.

MS. FALINO: But it certainly extends your range considerably.

MR. CASTLE: Right. Yes.

MS. FALINO: And that's very, very smart.

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: And then, what about Evan Snyderman?

MR. CASTLE: Well, you know, Evan really primarily has sold work that I never owned and he found.

MS. FALINO: Yes, so the secondary market.

MR. CASTLE: So I don't get anything from that. I have had a few pieces in my inventory that I let go that he sold, but not very many. I don't have very many I want to sell. But he has also taken my second market work to the important fairs, which gives me nice exposure and press, even though I don't get any money from the sale.

MS. FALINO: Right, but that —

MR. CASTLE: It's been a great exposure that he's done for me.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: He goes to the Art Basel. During Art Basel they also have the Design Miami Fair both in Basel and in Miami, and he pretty much goes every year to those things.

MS. FALINO: Now, supposing somebody approaches you with a piece that, you know, a former client has, and they want to move it. Would you suggest that they go to Evan?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.]

MS. FALINO: So —

MR. CASTLE: Well, I usually suggest Barry too. Evan is probably a more likely person to take it.

MS. FALINO: Because he tends to deal more with secondary market at this time.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.] But Marc and Barry are interested in old pieces too, but they're not as aggressively seeking them the way Evan is.

MS. FALINO: And what Evan also has done is he's begun to help to reissue some of your earlier works.

MR. CASTLE: Right.

MS. FALINO: And so, why don't you tell me a bit about that relationship?

MR. CASTLE: Well, the first was the *Black Edition*. We didn't record that this morning?

MS. FALINO: Oh, yes, maybe we did talk a bit about that.

MR. CASTLE: And the second — I think we talked about the *Black Edition*.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And then the second one was that really they — oh, about six, seven years ago they had been searching for the lamps from the Nordness show and had found some of them. And I still had *Benny* —

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: — and one other one. I have one upstairs in the attic —

MS. FALINO: Aha.

MR. CASTLE: — from that time. And they borrowed that one from me and they had found some of the others that they wanted to show —

MS. FALINO: Great.

MR. CASTLE: — six, seven years ago. And they sold everything they had at that point.

So then they came back with the idea, after this was kind of underway with the *Black Edition* and was working very well, that we would re-edition some of the lamps, not all of them. And they did that, and it hasn't moved as fast. Surprising. I thought it would be — I mean, they've sold some.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: There was going to be eight of each, so it's a smaller number. But eight actually means 12.

MS. FALINO: Why?

MR. CASTLE: Because there will be two artist's proofs and two prototypes.

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: It's what everybody in Europe does, and so Marc picked up on that and we do it the same way as Ron Arad. All of his are that way. So there will actually be 12 of each lamp.

MS. FALINO: Very nice.

MR. CASTLE: They've sold — and they've sold them oddly. They've sold them by somebody buying the whole thing, all of them.

MS. FALINO: The set.

MR. CASTLE: The set.

MS. FALINO: Love that.

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: Wish there were more of them.

MR. CASTLE: Yes. So it's only — I think they've only sold three or four sets, so there's quite a few for sale. So that one hasn't been as successful, although they're still — you know, it very likely might pick up in the fall.

MS. FALINO: Yes, and I think it just redirects attention to that earlier part of your career.

MR. CASTLE: Because there will be a few of those in that exhibit at the Aldridge.

MS. FALINO: Yes. Oh, yes, you have this upcoming show.

MR. CASTLE: At least one of those lamps. And they'll be in the book so they're going to get some exposure, so that might prompt some sales. We'll see.

MS. FALINO: Good. Good.

MR. CASTLE: But I'm not inclined to want to do anymore.

MS. FALINO: So, I mean —

MR. CASTLE: I mean, I keep — people keep wanting me to do the *Molar* chair —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — which would probably be the most saleable of all of them, but I've been reluctant to do it.

MS. FALINO: And for what reason?

MR. CASTLE: Well, I'm just so much more interested in the brand-new work.

MS. FALINO: Yes, so doing a few of these —

MR. CASTLE: So I kind of don't want anything competing with it.

MS. FALINO: Yes. A few of these re-issues is fine, but you don't want to overdo it.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, I don't want to get too many of those. I mean, the *Castle* chair would be a good one too. I probably made the first chair ever with a drink holder.

MS. FALINO: [Laughs.]

So, if you had to sort of summarize all of these experiences with these dealers and how they've sort of helped or hindered your ability to reach a wider audience and find the clientele for your work, how would you summarize that?

MR. CASTLE: Well, there are two other dealers that were early on that we didn't talk about —

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: — which are truly dealers is Stendig and Beylerian, which handled the plastic pieces, the original ones, which was handled like a production thing at the time, although there weren't huge numbers of them made.

MS. FALINO: But they were dealers who —

MR. CASTLE: Well, they had — they really were furniture dealers, not galleries. I mean, Stendig was — do you know Charlie Stendig?

MS. FALINO: No.

MR. CASTLE: Oh, he's a neat person, and he's very elderly now but he's still around. I get notes from him all the time, whenever he sees something in the press. And he had really avant-garde Italian stuff, Archizoom and — what are some of those other early Italian stuff? He had really avant-garde stuff. And Beylerian had — when I worked with him was mostly Italian stuff, but he was the cartel dealer then.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And that was his big thing. And it ended up that after I only worked with Beylerian for a couple of years, he was bought out by Steelcase, and they made him director of design. But Steelcase wasn't interested in my plastic furniture, which was not selling in the volumes they wanted to sell in.

And then, shortly thereafter, Stendig was bought out by Burlington, and what they ever did with Stendig I have no idea, but anyway that all went away too. And I tried briefly to market some of the *Molar* chair myself, but gave up after a very short time.

MS. FALINO: So these were people who were dealers in Italian — primarily Italian design.

MR. CASTLE: Primarily Italian, not exclusively, but that was their primary product. I was the only American, I think, that they had work.

MS. FALINO: So, of all of these sort of — you know, what do you think has maybe worked — what's the formula that's worked best for you?

MR. CASTLE: One-off pieces —

MS. FALINO: One-off.

MR. CASTLE: — or very limited.

MS. FALINO: So the rarity.

MR. CASTLE: Yes. And organic pieces and, you know, basically impractical pieces —

MS. FALINO: [Laughs.] The sculptural.

MR. CASTLE: — have been the best, short term and long term.

MS. FALINO: But in terms of the dealers, who have worked the best for you —

MR. CASTLE: Well, those have been —

MS. FALINO: — the relationships.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I've got the best relationship now that I've ever had.

MS. FALINO: With Marc Benda.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.] I mean, it's being handled in a much more sort of honest and straightforward way than, say, Peter Joseph, even though Peter Joseph financially was the best relationship.

MS. FALINO: Right, that seemed at the time like it was going to be the best.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, but, you know, money isn't really everything. There's a lot more to it than that. And, you know, for example, there's not a huge inventory being built up or anything like that. So if something should happen, there wouldn't be a glut on the market.

MS. FALINO: Right. And in terms of placement, he's really reaching out to far-flung areas like Korea and —

MR. CASTLE: I never had an international market until Marc Benda.

MS. FALINO: Great. Okay.

MR. CASTLE: I mean, I would sell a piece in Europe once in a while. It would be a happenstance.

MS. FALINO: Okay. All right, so let's turn to all of these — this evolution of style in your career. We've touched upon bits of it all through this interview, but it would be nice to sort of deal with it as a progression. So, during the break you showed me that wonderful example of the delta — what was it?

MR. CASTLE: *Deltagram*.

MS. FALINO: *The Deltagram*, that we will try to provide an image to the Archives of — the *Deltagram* brochures that were published by Delta Power Tools, that Wendell saw as a young boy at home with his parents.

MR. CASTLE: In the 1940s.

MS. FALINO: In the '40s. And this particular image, or this story, was of the work on a decoy made with lamination techniques, and is beautifully laid out and very clearly encapsulates your early working style in sculpture.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.]

MS. FALINO: So you saw that as a — probably as a young boy, or a teenager maybe?

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: In '44? You were 11, 12?

MR. CASTLE: Yes, I —

MS. FALINO: That's great. And you kind of filed that away.

MR. CASTLE: I did. I filed that away and never forgot about that. And it was only recently — I think 10 years ago — that I actually found the article again. But it really was what made me know that lamination would offer these kind of sculptural possibilities.

MS. FALINO: And then, was that kind of triggered by your interactions with Poco Frazier?

MR. CASTLE: Well, he encouraged that kind of thinking, and I sort of tried to do it in college, where I did try to pile up some lumber, but without really good surfacing equipment to prepare the lumber and without adequate number of clamps, you really could do it only rather primitively. And so, you know, it was frustrating so I didn't really do too much with that — I couldn't do what I wanted to do — and kind of filed that away until later.

MS. FALINO: And then there was that wonderful film in '64 of you making the music stand, which is a beautiful, very clear explanation of how you laid out the pieces and glued them and clamped them.

MR. CASTLE: Well, it was Poco Frazier who not only actually sort of demonstrated me how you could bend thin pieces of wood —

MS. FALINO: Oh, right.

MR. CASTLE: — and glue them together, even though I don't think he was using that in his work, that I remember anyway, but he thought that was something I ought to know about and demonstrated that to me. And I liked that idea.

And, again, I really — didn't really pick up on it very much until a few years later when I was put in a situation where I could prepare the lumber properly and had plenty of clamps to do it with. And so, some of the early work in Rochester was sculpture using bent lamination and stack lamination together. I think we talked about that.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: I forgot where we were going with this.

MS. FALINO: Well, so, sculpturally it was figures like *Icarus*.

MR. CASTLE: Well, *Icarus* was a laminated piece —

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: — but laminated in a slightly haphazard way, even though it didn't need to be. I could have done it in the way I do it now. I had that capability, but I thought that lended something, a crudeness I felt should be part of it.

MS. FALINO: Part of the aesthetic.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, so it was laminated in a haphazard way.

MS. FALINO: One thing I recall reading — and maybe — I think it has to do with this period, is when you got to New York and you were looking around and realized that you sort of had a — you had a — you'd latched onto something that was unique, really, that you could make a unique application to sculpture or to furniture making that hadn't been — wasn't being used, at least presently.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I probably thought about that in New York City, but I don't think that I made that final decision until I was in Rochester, where that's what I would actually do.

MS. FALINO: But you said something to the effect of, you know, you looked around and you realized that you sort of had — you had this field to yourself, in a sense. You could really do something —

MR. CASTLE: I did.

MS. FALINO: — that nobody else could do.

MR. CASTLE: Right. I thought it was exactly the same as my grandfather, when he could go put a fence around — you know, I think in one day, if you could fence it in, you owned it.

MS. FALINO: Right. And you could do that with lamination.

MR. CASTLE: I could do that. I could put a fence around it and I owned it.

MS. FALINO: Yes. Now, that's a great feeling to realize that you can sort of make your mark in that way.

MR. CASTLE: And I felt I had to do that quickly because I figured it would be somebody else trying to do the same thing, although there wasn't very much of it. [They laugh.]

MS. FALINO: Well, it continues because I was at the school yesterday and I saw a young student making a stack laminated coffee table. And so, I —

MR. CASTLE: I'll be over there Monday for the critique —

MS. FALINO: [Laughs.]

MR. CASTLE: — so I can see how he did.

But the vocabulary was really — you know, I think the only reason that I could give up sculpture and make furniture is because I thought the vocabulary was the same —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — at least it would be for me anyway — not that it was the same, but it would be the same for me, and that I wouldn't be throwing away an activity of a higher level to pursue one at some lower level that they were the same. And it was that understanding with myself that made that decision possible.

MS. FALINO: Yes. Yes, it was really, I think, an epiphany and, you know, a clear-headed view of the marketplace and your competition, so to speak, to say, well, this is something I can call my own and make it my kind of — give it my own personal stamp.

MR. CASTLE: I mean, you could have pursued it with the sculpture and the techniques would be a little outside of what was going on, but in sculpture it didn't matter what the technique was. Casting let you make any shape you want, but in wood you — traditionally, furniture you couldn't make any shape you want.

MS. FALINO: And then you wrote a book on lamination.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.]

MS. FALINO: And that also sort of helped to cement the reputation that you were seeking, I think.

MR. CASTLE: Well, maybe. I don't know about that. I think at the point — at the point when I wrote the book was about the point when I decided that that maybe wasn't the way to go and started on the *trompe l'oeil* pieces.

MS. FALINO: Well, that's kind of typical of your behavior, though. You sort of master it, you take it as far as you think it can go, so well that you could write the book; time to move on.

MR. CASTLE: I don't know. So that was — I think that kind of ruined it for me, in a sense, writing the book. It wasn't until I decided I could reinvent it in the last 10 years that that changed.

MS. FALINO: So then came the work with fiberglass. And there were other people working in plastic. We talked about the Eames, for instance, and there was Joe Colombo and [Dimitrios] Tsatsas.

MR. CASTLE: I was aware of the Italian work that was going on.

MS. FALINO: Yes, and the malleability of the medium. But in terms of art furniture, I mean, the Eames were doing, you know, real easily reproducible, functional furniture, and you were really aiming for a different — a different kind of interpretation.

MR. CASTLE: Right.

MS. FALINO: We talked about the *Molar* chairs and your Stendig relationship. And after that, what was it — when you got to the end of the *trompe l'oeil* story, the exploration of that and the facility with which you could produce these, you know, gloves on tables or umbrellas in umbrella stands. What do you think drove you toward historicism?

I know at one point you discussed the fact that you really weren't that interested in history, and then you — obviously you had been to Europe, you'd seen quite a bit, but you became more interested in historical styles. Was that when you got to Makepeace?

MR. CASTLE: No, discovering Ruhlmann through Penelope.

MS. FALINO: Through Penelope; that's right.

MR. CASTLE: That was the first time I'd sort of paid attention to it, then the art deco pieces attracted me, although art nouveau had interested me to some extent, too.

MS. FALINO: Yes. I notice you have a lot of art nouveau books on your shelves.

MR. CASTLE: There are — yeah, there are some.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: I'm not sure where they are.

MS. FALINO: And I think I saw a couple of prints by Alfons Mucha, I think in the room that I'm staying in.

MR. CASTLE: And there's one in the dining room too.

MS. FALINO: So those are — those are visual influences that you've had around here for some time.

MR. CASTLE: A long time.

MS. FALINO: And you'd seen a lot of art nouveau furniture.

MR. CASTLE: Well, actually the Mucha, the two that are in the bedroom —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — I bought from the Nelson Art Gallery, like store, when I was still in college.

MS. FALINO: Oh, gosh, in Kansas City.

MR. CASTLE: And I had never even heard of Mucha before. And they were, like, 50 bucks apiece. And I bought two of them when I was in college.

MS. FALINO: So you and Albert Paley share a similar thread of interest in that respect.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, I'm really not looking to buy anymore, but —

MS. FALINO: [Laughs.] Certainly art nouveau furniture is extremely sculptural.

MR. CASTLE: It was, and I did — I had paid some attention to that before the art deco, but only one piece I think is influenced by.

MS. FALINO: And which — oh, it's the secretary —

MR. CASTLE: The desk. Yes.

MS. FALINO: — with the hinged sides?

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: Yes, rather Rentke-like [ph]. Yes.

MR. CASTLE: So that influenced — didn't make — you know, I tried to sort of do some of that, but that didn't seem to really fit that well. So that was abandoned after one piece.

MS. FALINO: Yes, you had those beautiful cabriole-style legs almost, sort of attenuated legs, very elegant line.

MR. CASTLE: You know, the piece is in Rochester.

MS. FALINO: Oh, is that in a private collection?

MR. CASTLE: Private collection. And the Leveys bought that from that show in 1965 at the Memorial Art Gallery.

MS. FALINO: That was a good time to buy it, I'll bet. [They laugh.]

MR. CASTLE: I think they paid, like, \$2,000 or 1,900 [dollars] for it.

MS. FALINO: Gosh.

MR. CASTLE: And he just died recently, so I'm not sure whether they might be willing to sell it or something. I don't know —

MS. FALINO: Wow.

MR. CASTLE: — what's going to happen.

MS. FALINO: But that was a very beautiful, sensuous exploration of that style.

MR. CASTLE: And it was kind of fun to do. It's essentially stack laminated, except for the legs.

MS. FALINO: So you applied the same principles to a different aesthetic end.

MR. CASTLE: But they never pursued that line of thinking.

MS. FALINO: And then, with Penelope you got to looking at the Ruhlmann furniture at the Met.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.] But then it was also at the same time that sort of the clocks were going on and the same time I was involved with Milliken, and Milliken really encouraged that direction. I might not have gone there but he really felt that that was very saleable, and it was.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: It was very saleable.

MS. FALINO: And you began to use more veneers.

MR. CASTLE: And higher — and high prices. Yes, veneers were used more then.

MS. FALINO: Yes. There's one element — I mean, you explored a lot of different styles in addition to the Ruhlmann or the deco style, a sort of block style. But others — others are more divergent, like you have some Egyptian — sort of Egyptian deco, I guess, pieces.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, that's right.

MS. FALINO: And some classically influenced ones. I think the ones that you did for — was it Gunlock?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.]

MS. FALINO: Those commissions were —

MR. CASTLE: This was done for Gunlock.

MS. FALINO: Oh, really? Yes, and this table that we're sitting at, which is in Wendell's conference room, has these great plinths with conical supports under a very large tabletop. And those cones, those are maybe sort of Egyptian, but in a sense they seem to be your own kind of decorative contribution.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I used the cones quite a bit —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — in not just the kind of classical ones, but sometimes later.

MS. FALINO: Yes, cones and rings.

MR. CASTLE: Rings I particularly like —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — and have used them recently. I mean, that clock out there is a big donut —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — holding the clock up. I mean, that shape appeals to me.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: I haven't figured out how to use it in things I'm currently doing, but if you notice, down in my room I brought in from outdoors the piece that was made for that clock originally, the donut part. And it's laying on the floor because I'm trying to think of ways to use it in another way in the vocabulary I'm trying to work with now.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: I can combine that. I haven't figured out how to do that, but that's why it's laying on the floor to make me think about it.

MS. FALINO: Well, that's part of the creative process.

MR. CASTLE: So there have been lots of rings, conical shape, donuts, whatever you want to call them.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: I mean, if you want to make a metaphor out of that, that's easy to do, although I've never thought that was very important, what the metaphors were.

MS. FALINO: I don't know; what do you — what would you think it is, a metaphor for what?

MR. CASTLE: Well, a ring is a continuous thing with no beginning and no end.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: Which is a good thought.

MS. FALINO: Yes, and a conical piece is like a projectile.

MR. CASTLE: Yes. Yes.

MS. FALINO: Well, they do make a very dynamic combination.

MR. CASTLE: So those have — you know, there's — I mean, you can always sort of find those metaphors, and sometimes they're so obvious you can't ignore them, but I don't really think much about that.

MS. FALINO: But they make a very nice, regal kind of a statement — the dining table you have in your home with. The text that is adorning the tabletop has a wonderful series of conical forms. And those are wrapped in leather?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.]

MS. FALINO: And then you have rings on the end and elsewhere.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, I've got both those in that piece.

MS. FALINO: Yes, and they make a very strong statement.

Now, there's another piece here in this room, the conference room, that to me — I don't know if this is — is this sort of from — I don't know if this after the historical period —

MR. CASTLE: Right.

MS. FALINO: — but it represents a kind of a hybrid.

MR. CASTLE: Well, yeah, because the cabinet part still maintains some of the kind of veneering and, you know, sort of the classical aspect but it's got real funky legs.

MS. FALINO: Yes, it has — it's like a truncated cone for a cabinet rendered in flat planes squared up. And the base is rounded and sort of muscular kind of like — they kind of remind me of Adrian Saxe's work in ceramics where there are two very disconnected pieces that are brought together. And that's kind of also the surrealist aspect of your work sometimes where —

MR. CASTLE: Well, I always liked disconnected —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — bringing together.

MS. FALINO: Yes, and they're — I think that they end up being very well-balanced. They balance each other while there's a tension, which I think you're also aiming for.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.]

MS. FALINO: And the clocks, the early clock series, those also are sort of — well, they're a disparate group. There are some that have a deco quality and others that are just their very own unique kind of aesthetic.

MR. CASTLE: That's right.

MS. FALINO: A lot of small surface decoration.

MR. CASTLE: They all sort of come at that time, though, when the thought was to try to put obvious sort of leading-edge craftwork and, you know, exotic materials together.

MS. FALINO: Yes. Yes, that period was characterized by a lot of exotic veneers and gilded or metal surfaces.

And then toward the '80s is when you moved into a kind of a cubist phase that I think we've alluded to, this Dr. Caligari —

MR. CASTLE: Right.

MS. FALINO: — series, which I find very attractive and kind of interesting.

MR. CASTLE: Well, that was a good series, but it's one of those series that has to be brief. I mean, I had seen the movie, *The Doctor of Caligari* [sic] —

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: — when I was in college. I guess it takes me a long time for it to sit in my brain before I can do something with it. But I had not seen the movie — you know, I'd seen the movie back in the late '50s, but I — and I, of course, couldn't remember — I had no idea what the story was, but I had such clear visual images of things in the movie, the sets, and there was some furniture —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — that was very abstract. And the sets seemed to be painted in a Franz Kline kind of brush stroke way.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And of course it's a black-and-white movie so everything is black and white.

MS. FALINO: Yes, and of course it was a very ambiguous space —

MR. CASTLE: Right.

MS. FALINO: — depicted because of that.

MR. CASTLE: And I'm not sure what prompted me to want to do it in the first place, but I thought, wouldn't it be cool if I could furnish Dr. Caligari's home?

MS. FALINO: [Laughs.]

MR. CASTLE: And this was during the Peter Joseph days.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And he thought that was a pretty good idea. So most of these pieces went through him. So I made a bunch of furniture that I thought had something of the movie in them.

But then, again, it's not the kind of thing that can sustain itself because it's missing some of the most important ingredients for me, is that discovery of, sort of, new things. I mean, you've got this vocabulary and that's kind of what you've got to use. If you don't use the Dr. Caligari vocabulary, it won't be Dr. Caligari furniture.

MS. FALINO: Yes, and of course if you continue it, then you just get to be known as perhaps not Wendell Castle but "the Caligari guy" and —

MR. CASTLE: I mean, it was probably good enough —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — that you could have done hundreds. I mean, there was even a grand piano, a Steinway piano —

MS. FALINO: Really?

MR. CASTLE: — which I wished I owned that. That one I really liked.

MS. FALINO: So you've done at least two pianos, then, I know one with —

MR. CASTLE: I've done five pianos.

MS. FALINO: Oh, heavens. Okay. I know there's one with all the names of the composers on them.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, Steinway's 500,000th piano.

MS. FALINO: Wow. And what were the other styles like?

MR. CASTLE: Well, there were two Ds. Ds are the concert grands. They — one for Steinway. And then I did one for — Davira was at Toledo —

MS. FALINO: Yes, Davira Taragin, the curator.

MR. CASTLE: Yes. And she got me a commission from the symphony there to commission one for the orchestra.

MS. FALINO: Fantastic.

MR. CASTLE: And that's a D.

MS. FALINO: And what did that look like?

MR. CASTLE: It was simpler. The one I did for Steinway is way too elaborate. I mean, I don't really care for it myself anymore. But that was a cleaner, simpler one. It's hard to describe it. It didn't have legs in the traditional sense. It had a different — it had a curved piece that went around under the piano in the front where the pedals are, which hid the pedals from one view. And what was the other leg? It had another leg too. I can't remember.

MS. FALINO: That's all right.

MR. CASTLE: And then I did the three which Peter sold. One he kept, actually. It was in his apartment. It's maybe gone now. I don't know where it went to. It was an upright and blonde wood, and I thought maybe it was the most beautiful, although I liked the *Caligari* best. It wasn't beautiful but I liked it.

And then another one that had cones —

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: — for the base, and it belongs to — Peter sold it to somebody he'd worked with in the investment business who I became friendly with who lives in California. And they have it in their home in Pacific Palisades.

MS. FALINO: So you applied a number of styles to the piano.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, and they were all pretty different. And Steinway keeps suggesting that I should do another one, and I keep thinking about it but it seems like always something else takes priority. And there's no real money in those things for Steinway.

MS. FALINO: Now, there were some other pieces — let's see, there's a piece that's at the Rochester Art Museum that has the chair that's standing on its head. Does that represent, like, a one-off kind of experiment, or did you do other —

MR. CASTLE: No, there are some others. It was —

MS. FALINO: So this was sort of a —

MR. CASTLE: Well, I mean, I think Nancy, for one, always thought I should do some more *trompe l'oeil*. And of course I wasn't going to go do what I did before, and so I got this idea that how pillows, when they're mused, they make a lot of interesting wrinkles. And so I did some things where I thought I would still tie it to furniture in some way —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — by making a stick chair, which this chair would represent a human, and that it might do things with the pillow that a human might do. It might lay on it, it might kneel on it, it might stand on its head on it, things like that.

And I made about perhaps eight of them, something like that, and sold maybe half of them. But, you know, I don't think it was a very successful series. And of course, again, I didn't want to do pillows anymore.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: There's a half-finished one in the attic.

MS. FALINO: [Laughs.]

MR. CASTLE: Plus, that idea I think was a little corny.

MS. FALINO: Now, let's see, some of your recent work has to do with this concept of racing this chair that you're currently producing. It's been around for several years now.

MR. CASTLE: Well, we're actually not making any anymore. I'm finished.

MS. FALINO: Oh, you're finished with that series.

MR. CASTLE: Finished, but there was an exhibition a year ago —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — or a year-and-a-half ago called rocking — Rockin'.

MS. FALINO: Rockin'.

MR. CASTLE: Rockin', which the show was primarily rocking chairs, not exclusively. And they were based upon themes from an automobile. And one of them was that — there's a famous photograph — well, there's more than one — of back in the early — in the days of, say, the teens, there were — in car races, if you photographed them, they didn't have high enough speed film and the wheels would look elliptical —

MS. FALINO: Yes, that's right.

MR. CASTLE: — in photographs of racing cars in the teens. So I thought, that's kind of neat. I've always loved ellipses, and they lean forward, which seems right.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And when a cartoonist ever draws a car — well, not always but I mean a lot of times they'll be speeding towards you —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — and the front is, of course, much bigger than the back. They exaggerate the perspective.

MS. FALINO: Right. Right.

MR. CASTLE: So it seems to get larger in the front.

And then another metaphor was that racecars in the '20s and '30s — and cars still have this but it's not noticeable — have what's called camber on the front wheels.

MS. FALINO: What's that?

MR. CASTLE: Camber is that the front wheels in a car are not straight like this. And in racing cars, when the tires were thin, this was exaggerated. The wheels sat like this.

MS. FALINO: So, out — they're canted out?

MR. CASTLE: Yes. That made your corner better. Now, with fat tires, that doesn't matter very much anymore.

MS. FALINO: I see.

MR. CASTLE: But in the old days, all the tires were very thin and camber really helped in cornering.

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: So, if you looked at a racecar from the front — I've got a picture open in a magazine I was looking at the other day — in there, the front of the car, they looked like this.

MS. FALINO: So, those rocking chairs do have that profile.

MR. CASTLE: So the rocking chairs all do this, and they're really much bigger in the front —

MS. FALINO: In the front, yeah.

MR. CASTLE: — because they narrow. The back is narrow, the front is fat, so that is that exaggerated perspective. And then the ellipticals, they always kind of lean —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — all lean forward —

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: — which gives you that feeling of speed.

MS. FALINO: I love that. And the fact that — are they all black?

MR. CASTLE: No.

MS. FALINO: No. But the black ones kind of give it that —

MR. CASTLE: Mostly black.

MS. FALINO: It kinds of gives that old style feel to it as well. But they're very, very contemporary. They have a wonderful feeling of motion. And they do have that speed-related quality that I think you — as you describe you've been striving for.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, so that kind of thought process actually goes into lots of things, when you think about them, sometimes in silly ways.

MS. FALINO: You've also got a wonderful series of recent fiberglass designs. I think they're fiberglass —

MR. CASTLE: Yes, like —

MS. FALINO: — this silver one we've been looking at.

MR. CASTLE: We did a bunch of them like four years ago.

MS. FALINO: And you have that wonderful purple chair. I don't know the names of them, but maybe you do.

MR. CASTLE: The purple chair is *Nirvana*.

MS. FALINO: *Nirvana*. And they also have a sense of speed, or almost science fiction quality to them, certainly the silver one with the automated cabinet door is very pod-like, has a wonderful pod shape, but it has that sort of auto paint sparkling silver quality that gives it an other-worldly or futuristic kind of appeal.

MR. CASTLE: Those are hot rod paints called Hot Colors.

MS. FALINO: Hot Colors.

MR. CASTLE: Well, that's one of the names, but —

MS. FALINO: So you could apply that to a fiberglass body.

MR. CASTLE: Yes. Well, you could apply it to a metal body.

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: You wouldn't apply it to wood.

MS. FALINO: And the *Nirvana* one is translucent, so the fiberglass is embedded with color.

MR. CASTLE: No.

MS. FALINO: Isn't it?

MR. CASTLE: It's all in the paint.

MS. FALINO: It's in the paint, really?

MR. CASTLE: But there are crazy paints today that change colors, depending on the light.

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: And some dramatically change colors, but that one just changes from blue to purple.

MS. FALINO: It has a really luminous quality.

MR. CASTLE: So, depending on how you shine the light on it, it's either blue or purple —

MS. FALINO: Yes, I'm taking that one home, by the way. [Laughs.]

MR. CASTLE: — or somewhere in between. And there's another chair out here that uses a paint that has red under the black and in poor light looks entirely black, but if you get a little direct light on it, it comes up red. So it's red and black, depending on the light.

MS. FALINO: Now, this pod form that I just mentioned, which is part of this table, this silver table I just mentioned, the pod has been a sort of recurring element in your work. And it certainly appeared in some of your more organic designs, maybe in a more softer sense, but it crops up quite a bit, and —

MR. CASTLE: There has been a lot of pods, different types. I mean, at first I thought of them more as seeds, which is, again, a good metaphor.

MS. FALINO: Yep.

MR. CASTLE: And now they're still pods but they're softer, and so they've become a little bit more like ellipsoids, even though they're still pods, I think. And pod vocabulary has been important on and off for a long time.

MS. FALINO: Yes, it's —

MR. CASTLE: It's been handled in different ways. Now I'm doing the merging pods, which was — I was — it's very difficult to do. Using a traditional ways of thinking about these things, is the drawings can look good but they don't give you much information, and you need to have, really, a lot of information to make the piece because what you see in the front view and what you might see in the back view could be so different —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — that you don't really understand it from any one view, which is an appealing idea.

MS. FALINO: Yes, so that's also going back to Esherick, where the piece is never the same from — from every angle it's completely different.

MS. FALINO: That's right, exactly. But that vocabulary is complex, and so if you just do the design totally drawing, you really don't have an awful lot of information when it comes to making the full three-dimensional piece because you can draw a front view and say, this is what it looks like from the front. You can draw a back view and say, this is what it looks like from the back, but do they really fit?

MS. FALINO: [Laughs.]

MR. CASTLE: You know, you can also draw the top view and you can draw the side view, but do they all fit?

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: There is no way to know for sure unless you make a model, and the model will give you — because you can have all that information. And so, now in the digital age, you can make — I can make a much more complex form, even though I still like to think that they're simple. They don't look complex, but they are. And if you make it in model, you can understand it and make sure that what you see in the front actually works from the back, et cetera.

And then, if you want to make it, you can just digitize that and print you up some patterns, like the duck, and you can make it with a great deal of efficiency.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: Now, you could make it by just laminating up a great big, pretty rough block and somehow it's in there, but that would take a great deal more time, and also they would really — you might not necessarily get what you want. And this way — you know, so, if I have to make four or five models before I get it right, I haven't spent anywhere near the amount of time if I had to make four or five originals to get it right.

MS. FALINO: That's right, full size.

Well, you've made great use of technology throughout your career, taking advantage of thermoplastics, whatever you want to call fiberglass.

MR. CASTLE: Right. You know, I mean, that was — when I first used it, it was a pretty new material. And vacuum forming, we've done vacuum forming pieces, which, again, isn't a very new technology anymore. But I think the carving by robotics is pretty new.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: Nobody has been doing that for very long.

MS. FALINO: Now, yesterday, or two days ago, you showed me a little video of a robotic arm that was carving a piece of yours. Could you describe that a bit?

MR. CASTLE: I mean, it's exactly the kind that they use on the assembly lines in Detroit for doing welding and spraying and all kinds of tasks on the assembly line that they can be programmed to put that arm in a very precise place. And they have — there are six axes, so they have total movement, as much as your arm. Anything your arm can do, it can do. It can get on top, it can reach over —

MS. FALINO: So above, below, around.

MR. CASTLE: — it can go underneath. It can do anywhere. And it's a big arm and very strong. And those are pretty readily available on the used market because Detroit is always downsizing or, if they're on an assembly line going 24 hours a day, they lose some tolerance in a couple of years and they retire them. They need a lot more tolerance than I need. I mean, you don't work wood to a thousandth of an inch like you do on a car. But they are not something that you can just instantly use, because programming of it is extraordinarily difficult.

MS. FALINO: And costly.

MR. CASTLE: Yes. The program even to run the computer or just to buy the — you can buy the — you can buy the robot cheaper than you can buy the program.

MS. FALINO: Right. The figures you were using the other day, was it the robot — are used?

MR. CASTLE: You can buy a used robot, reconditioned in the 20s.

MS. FALINO: Twenty-thousand.

MR. CASTLE: Twenty [thousand dollars], \$25,000.

MS. FALINO: And the program would cost more than that?

MR. CASTLE: And the computer comes with it —

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: — but no programs.

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: So it won't do anything. And to write programs, specific programs — actually, what comes with it, you can move it but you can't really —

MS. FALINO: Direct it.

MR. CASTLE: You know, you can make it move up and down or do this, but it doesn't really have a path that it's following, a tool path.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: You have to program tool paths. And programming six axes is pretty difficult.

MS. FALINO: No question. And —

MR. CASTLE: But you can do it.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And it's done all the time. It's just not easy.

MS. FALINO: So, then, a program for a single piece of furniture could cost more than the machine itself?

MR. CASTLE: No, not to have it programmed but to buy the software.

MS. FALINO: Oh, the software would cost that much.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, the software would cost more than the robot.

MS. FALINO: Okay. And then you would have to hire somebody to actually —

MR. CASTLE: Then you need somebody to know how to do it.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And, luckily, we have made a contact with a person who knows how to program, although there's quite a learning curve even for him.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: But we're there. We're carving things.

MS. FALINO: But it's really remarkable, you know. I think back to when you learned lamination but you didn't really have all the furniture-making skills in your arsenal at that time, but that didn't deter you. You found a way to do things, and then you learned as you needed and you were a quick study.

And along the way you've continued, whether it's people that you have in your shop who have certain specialties or, you know, finding other tools there. You've been really an adopter, I would say, someone who has taken advantage of them and used them for your own creative ends.

MR. CASTLE: Well, this is really working out really well because it also — nowadays in the market there's — it's nice to have some edition things to sell.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And those are not — you know, I don't want to make 12 of the same thing. That would be boring.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And so, really, I can make one and digitize it, and then the robot could carve it, so we could have an edition of 12 and it wouldn't really be — I'd only have to make one.

MS. FALINO: Yes. And could you — could the same kind of machine be adapted for use with stone, for instance —

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: — if you wanted to make outdoor —

MR. CASTLE: It's a little bit different but, yes, it can.

MS. FALINO: It's the same principle.

MR. CASTLE: Yes.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: There's robotic carving of stone. Sometimes that's done with water jet, but there are robotic ways to do that too.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: I'm not too familiar with that.

MS. FALINO: Yes, I know in some cases some furniture people — Judy McKie comes to mind. She's had some stone pieces made, but she had the work done, I think, in China. Is that your recollection?

MR. CASTLE: There's a lot of that being done in China, and I had a conversation with Marc about this not too long ago, suggesting that, and he said, "No, we're not going to do anything in China." He said that if it's a successful

piece, they're going to rip it off.

MS. FALINO: [Laughs.] Very interesting.

MR. CASTLE: Because once a program goes there, they could make a copy.

MS. FALINO: It's true. It's true.

Let's see, maybe now is a good time to — if you would just give some thought to the issue of artists like yourself who have been able to really successfully combine creative impetus, you know, with good business acumen vis-à-vis a lot of artists — well, let's just stick with the studio craft world, you know, who may not be as — you needn't address individuals particularly, but just how you feel your own approach to your work as not only an art but a business has been part of your own key to your success.

MR. CASTLE: Well, the early production pieces like the *Molar Group*, I didn't make those. They were made in a factory in Syracuse. And they took my original and made a mold and worked from there. And that, you know, almost worked. Well, it never made much money, but almost sort of did.

And then there was nothing that I did for quite a few years until — I guess in this slow period sort of after the Leo Kaplan Modern and before coming — I knew things were a little slower, and I thought about this idea again of production, but I thought about doing it in wood and creating a small company that would produce these things and market them. But I didn't really want to have it work here.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: I wanted it to be its own stand-alone thing. And so, this idea of forming a company came up, and selling shares in it so I'd have the money, and that worked. I mean, I was able to do that, and start a company that did this. But it's never really worked that well —

MS. FALINO: What was the company?

MR. CASTLE: — and it seems like we just got it going rather well and become profitable, hit 9/11 —

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: — and then things all kind of went to hell. And then it kind of got going almost to the point it was making some money again, and then the recession came.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And really what's happened is that — I mean, it's still going.

MS. FALINO: And what is the name of it?

MR. CASTLE: Icon Design.

MS. FALINO: Okay, so this is a firm you established.

MR. CASTLE: I started it but sold shares, and as time has gone along, as money needed to be put in the corporation — and that was Richard Sands.

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: He really is the primary owner. I mean, it switched from needing money to keep it going, and he wanted to keep it going. So he owns about 80 percent of it. And then there are a few other people that own a piece of it too, and I own a small piece too.

MS. FALINO: And it just produces you own work, your own design?

MR. CASTLE: Well, at points — an opportunity came along early on, actually, that — a company named Holly Hunt —

MS. FALINO: Oh, yeah, I've heard of Holly Hunt.

MR. CASTLE: — in Chicago approached us to make the Christian Liaigre line for her, which is a French designer that she had a successful — very successful line of furniture for her. We didn't make it all, but part of it. And that seemed like a good thing. And it was a pretty good thing, but she was hard to deal with, and really we ended up kind of not making really any money on it because she was difficult and never paid on time and all kinds of

problems.

And then we made a little bit of furniture — Donghia came to us at one point —

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: — and we made a few pieces for Donghia, which wasn't bad but it was just — you know, it was not a big business but a small. So we've done a few things for other companies.

MS. FALINO: And the fabrication is done here at the studio?

MR. CASTLE: No, none of it here.

MS. FALINO: None of it here.

MR. CASTLE: No, there's another factory.

MS. FALINO: Oh.

MR. CASTLE: It's in Le Roy.

MS. FALINO: Oh, gosh.

MR. CASTLE: No, it's not here.

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: And, you know, after the recession it was dramatically reduced in size, but a lot of efficiencies have been brought in since then, and they are operating at a small profit.

MS. FALINO: That's wonderful.

MR. CASTLE: But, you know, it's small and I don't think it's really ever going to — it's growing. Sales have been — what did they say — they tell me 20 percent better than last year this year.

MS. FALINO: That's great news.

MR. CASTLE: But, you know, for me I'm so into these other things right now that I almost don't want to even think about that. I just gave them a couple new designs, and I have to go to an opening in California in a few weeks where they're going to introduce these new pieces. You know, so I have to do a few things, but I'm really trying to keep that to a real minimum —

MS. FALINO: Keep it to a minimum.

MR. CASTLE: — because I have these other things — I've got so much to do, and they seem more important.

MS. FALINO: But you really have continually striven to think about new ways to produce your work and to get it out at different price points I guess in that respect of — the furniture you're designing for Icon is not —

MR. CASTLE: Oh, yeah, you know, it's very nicely made.

MS. FALINO: I'm sure.

MR. CASTLE: It's just as nicely made as things here, but they're simpler.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: And they're a great deal less expensive. I mean, you can get a major piece there — probably the most — you know, a desk like \$8,000, you know, which is kind of expensive for production but compared to —

MS. FALINO: Yes, compared to these —

MR. CASTLE: — what I would make a desk for here, it's a very small figure.

MS. FALINO: Yes. And I know I've seen — I've seen Icon installations at ICFF, if I'm not mistaken.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, they have shown there occasionally. I think the decision is pretty much made that they probably won't do it anymore. I don't think it's really every paid off very much, but they try it now and then.

MS. FALINO: Now, was there another company, arch?

MR. CASTLE: Oh, Arc International. Yes, that was back in the '80s. Arc International, a guy named Joe Duke, who married Jennifer Johnson of Johnson & Johnson —

MS. FALINO: Ah.

MR. CASTLE: — and they lived in New York at that point. And he was, I guess, a bit of a furniture maker, but he had this idea of getting people involved to furnish designs. And he had a showroom on 57th street in New York — 24 West 57th Street, a beautiful, beautiful showroom. And he had some designs of his. That's one of Joe Duke's.

MS. FALINO: And what is that one called, just for the record? "A Tuscan table desk" —

MR. CASTLE: Desk.

MS. FALINO: — "by Joe Duke." Okay.

MR. CASTLE: And, let's see who else is in here. They're all Joe Duke in the beginning. I don't know who that is. He didn't design everything. He had Robert Graham, the sculptor, did this table.

MS. FALINO: Oh, nice. Very nice.

MR. CASTLE: And that's a nice table. He had Robert Mapplethorpe —

MS. FALINO: Mapplethorpe?

MR. CASTLE: Yes, had him design this for him.

MS. FALINO: Quite nice.

MR. CASTLE: And they produced it. They just farmed it out to various shops. So they made these things. Pat Naggar, he's a well-known interior designer, designed that one.

MS. FALINO: So, were they, like, in the D&D Building in New York?

MR. CASTLE: No, no, they were on 57th Street in the gallery district.

MS. FALINO: Oh, in the — Okay.

MR. CASTLE: Bob Trotman. Kevin Walsh, he's still around working.

MS. FALINO: So, quite a lot of designers were brought in.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.] That's Pat Naggar. Richard — no, I don't know who he is. Arron Fisher, a sculptor —

MS. FALINO: Nice.

MR. CASTLE: — did that. And Robert Graham and somebody else designed this chair. And I had some things but I think I took my pages out. They're not in here. But I had some things too.

MS. FALINO: Okay. So that was in relationship to — for them to produce what — could you call it contract furniture?

MR. CASTLE: I guess you could call it that.

MS. FALINO: And that was in the '80s?

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.]

MS. FALINO: So how did that work for you?

MR. CASTLE: They never sold very much.

Yes, here's a couple of my things right there. And they had another — they had a dining table and chairs.

MS. FALINO: Well, it's interesting because you talked about all of these different enterprises and none of them seemed to have been enormously successful —

MR. CASTLE: No.

MS. FALINO: — but that hasn't stopped you from doing others and starting other ventures.

MR. CASTLE: No. [Laughs.]

MS. FALINO: That's the optimistic part of your personality?

MR. CASTLE: Maybe. I mean, they had — they had quite a beautiful showroom, but it never really — I think it sort of fell somewhere in between being contract furniture and available retail, because it was kind of both.

MS. FALINO: With an artistic —

MR. CASTLE: Now, you know, in those days —

MS. FALINO: — bent.

MR. CASTLE: Nowadays that's kind of become more common. It wasn't so common then. So they kind of fell in kind of an awkward place. And they tried to do it as a gallery.

MS. FALINO: Now, I also read about — this probably goes back a little further in time — I read about Wendell Castle Associates. And that was formed for your plastics —

MR. CASTLE: No, that really never —

MS. FALINO: — the *Molars*?

MR. CASTLE: No, that one never really did much.

MS. FALINO: Okay.

MR. CASTLE: It was sort of the idea that we would do things.

MS. FALINO: [Laughs.] And then you did produce editions of furniture like the *Zephyr* and the *Alpha* chairs. Those you produced in greater numbers.

MR. CASTLE: Mm-hm. [Affirmation.]

MS. FALINO: So those were — those were obviously art furniture pieces, but you felt maybe they had greater appeal in larger numbers?

MR. CASTLE: Yes. Well, they got made kind of on and off. The only one that I kind of thought ought to be a production piece and tried to make it happen was the *Crescent* rocker, where I kind of thought that would have potential to make a lot of them.

And I remember somebody suggested, "Oh, you should run an ad in the *New York Times* on a Sunday," and I did — you know, it wasn't a very big ad, a little one — and got hundreds of inquiries, but they would all say, "Where can we go sit in one?" And as soon as I said "Rochester," nobody same. [They laugh.] So, obviously you needed one in New York.

MS. FALINO: But behind all these multiples, whether they're fiberglass or they're wood or whatever, the theory is that maybe it would help to support the more unique pieces, the more — the riskier pieces.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, they would have. I mean, the *Crescent* rocker, for example, after making a few, the assistants around here knew how to make them.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: So we could have made them and I didn't have to do it.

MS. FALINO: Right.

MR. CASTLE: And we'd send them out from Maple Street to somebody else. And so it seemed pretty simple to do more.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: But we never really had the right way to market them.

MS. FALINO: Yes. But that didn't prevent you from seeking other opportunities to try. That's admirable in itself.

All right, we're reaching the end of our time, and I think now would be a good time to really sort of — I'd like to sort of ask you to reflect a little bit in a much larger way about your approach to your work.

Really, for me, I think a big part of what you do is a lot of risk. And we've talked about this a few times during my visit here. I think it was about — you know, if somebody likes your work, well, that's a problem, and if they don't like it, that's a sign that it's time to continue doing more of that.

But I think, you know, from your youth you were accustomed to maybe not always being appreciated for your natural talents, or your natural talents weren't necessarily found until a little bit later. And I think it created a kind of resiliency in you —

MR. CASTLE: Maybe.

MS. FALINO: — that allowed you to take risks and not — I'm sure you weren't immune to criticism.

MR. CASTLE: No, but it never — you know, I never really minded. It didn't really — I think I learned in college once that — I remember in a critique in industrial design, once they brought in some outside guy.

And I remember he was very hard on whatever I had. I can't remember what it was. And I remember trying to defend it, which made it worse, of course. And I've known ever since then I won't — I won't defend anything, verbally.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: I'm just not going to let it bother me.

MS. FALINO: Very wise.

So, where do you see things taking you in the future? Have you got some other plans under wraps, or different pods that you're going to be creating? This last series that you've been referring to, that you've been working out, they're kind of like — they're truncated in a way. The pods are sort of cut off at the top to allow for seeding, and that makes for a really, I think, wonderful clustered kind of pod design.

MR. CASTLE: Yes, clustering is what I've been trying to do with them, which is that complex thing of how they intersect. What that intersection looks like can become complex.

MS. FALINO: And then I know you have a series of sort of a seating arrangement that you're now designing that are going to have bronze footings if it all works out. But they have little pods under the seats, sort of — almost like little sprouting leaves.

MR. CASTLE: Right. That's a good way to describe it. Yes, they do. And that's something I'd actually thought about since the 60s, is creating more of an environment situation, which is hard to do.

MS. FALINO: It's kind of a reverse of an Alexander Girard pit.

MR. CASTLE: Right.

MS. FALINO: Instead of going down, you're sort of growing it up.

MR. CASTLE: Well, I think I might go down if I could, but that maybe might be more difficult.

You know, I also think — and I learned this too, which I think is important — that some specific things are problematic. You probably don't want to do those, because they're not going to necessarily stay where you put them.

And I remember I did this commission in New York City in a wonderful modern apartment. It was their *pied-à-terre*. They lived somewhere else. So it was smallish, but they had a lot of money so they could — and they commissioned me and they wanted to make a dining room table but they also needed to have some storage and they also needed to kind of use it as a desk.

And so I designed this thing that hung off the wall, and it kind of folded out. And you could just fold it out a little bit if you want the desk, or you could fold it out all the way and you get the dining table. And it has some drawers and storage in it too.

And I remember that at one point they gave up — I think the husband died, I think, and they gave up that

apartment and the wife moved to another apartment that didn't have — it also needed — had a corner, needed a corner. They didn't have a corner. So she put it in this other apartment and it looked awful, just awful. It didn't make any sense.

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: Like, how would you be so dumb as to do this thing this way? [They laugh.]

MS. FALINO: Well, that's the problem with a lot of Esherick pieces. A lot of those are —

MR. CASTLE: Yes, so it's just not right. And I know that even the same thing happens with sculptures that corporations commission sometimes —

MS. FALINO: Very true.

MR. CASTLE: — and then they're bought out by some other bank, and that thing never made sense anymore because it fit — it was nice in that location but it was specific to that location —

MS. FALINO: Yes.

MR. CASTLE: — and it's not there anymore. And so, I try to think of things that way, that I know they're not going to stay, and what would it look like if you took it somewhere else?

MS. FALINO: Yes, they have a life far beyond that of the initial owner.

MR. CASTLE: That's important. So that's why — that limits to some extent, but I think it's a good limitation, like this piece with this floor. You could install it, but then you could also take it out and it would — just set it on the loft floor and it would be fine too. It doesn't have to be installed.

MS. FALINO: Yes, so that gives it flexibility.

MR. CASTLE: It is its own thing and can fit in any environment that's large enough. It does require some space, but that's it. And I think that's the best way to think about things, where they might end up at some point in time.

MS. FALINO: Do you feel we've covered the gamut —

MR. CASTLE: Maybe.

MS. FALINO: — or have we missed any important —

MR. CASTLE: I don't know.

MS. FALINO: You've had such a long and varied career. If there is something, this is a good time to share.

MR. CASTLE: I don't know what we haven't covered. There's been a lot of ground covered.

MS. FALINO: Well, if you feel that's good enough for now — there's always a future opportunity. I want to tell you it's been an honor and a privilege to interview you, a real pleasure to see your home and your shop and your many works.

MR. CASTLE: Well, it's been nice having you.

MS. FALINO: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]