INTERVIEW I

DATE: June 25, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: GORDON BUNSHAFT

INTERVIEWER: PAIGE E. MULHOLLAN

PLACE: Mr. Bunshaft's office, 400 Park Avenue, New York

Tape 1 of 1

B: This started the whole thing. You lose track of years. Here's a telegram from Mr. Heath, who was then the chairman of the Board of [Regents of] the University of Texas, saying he looked forward to meeting me when I came down there next Wednesday, which was November 27, 1965. [December 1, 1965].

M: I didn't know it went back that far.

B: I wouldn't have guessed it either. That's why I looked it up.

M: The time's gone pretty fast, sometimes, they said.

Let's begin by identifying you, sir. You're Gordon Bunshaft, and you're an associate with an architectural firm in New York City.

B: I'm a partner.

M: Partner, yes.

B: Partner of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill.

M: Did you know Mr. Johnson at all prior to the time you undertook this work for him?

B: No.

M: No contact whatsoever?

B: No.

M: You were appointed to the Commission on Fine Arts in 1963. Was that by President Kennedy?

B: Yes.

M: Focusing on that work for a few moments: Was there a difference in the way the Kennedy Administration operated as compared to the way the Johnson Administration operated?

B: In regards to the Fine Arts?

M: In regard to that commission's work and emphasis.

B: No, I think both presidents were interested in encouraging the [Commission on] Fine Arts to do a good job and to be selective in the things they approved. I think that President Kennedy when he came into office had a commission that had been there a long time, because each member of the Fine Arts is appointed for a period of four years and they can't leave until a new man is appointed.

M: You say "can't leave" as if it were some kind of punishment!

B: This goes back to Truman. Truman was mad at the Fine Arts Commission. At that time, these candidate members, their periods overlapped, if they left, each at [the end of] four years, there was always two or three coming in, not seven. Truman was so mad at them, he wouldn't reappoint anybody, so that time ran out. So when Eisenhower came in, he appointed a whole new group of seven [members]. That kept on going. When Kennedy came in, the whole seven were coming in 1963 for reappointment at that time. One of Kennedy's close friends was a man named Bill Walton.

M: Yes, he was chairman of that commission.

B: Walton was trying to get the President to sort of put out directives, not just for the Fine Arts, but the GSA general construction, to pick better architects and set a high standard for federal projects. And Walton succeeded in getting President Kennedy interested in that. Of course, the first thing to do is get a good commission. So Walton really picked us. I had met Walton earlier at some other thing, and he picked a group that I personally, besides myself, think was a pretty good one. We were all probably the most modern group they ever had there.

The amusing thing is that Kennedy was, of course, interested in the arts, but had never had time to meet the Fine Arts Commission. President Johnson, when he came into office, one month after he'd been in office, he invited the whole commission to come and meet him.

M: That soon?

B: That was quite surprising, because he didn't look like the kind of man at that time who would be interested in architecture or the arts. We went to see him, spent a half-hour. So I was wrong [about not meeting him earlier]. I did meet him then, but as a group. He was very pleasant and sat in that Oval Room. He has backed the Fine Arts on any problems, and of course, Walton has been advisor to the White House, not as much of course, as he was when Kennedy was there.

M: The commission has stayed the same since Mr. Johnson took office?

B: No. During Mr. Johnson's time, six of us came up for termination. [Hideo] Sasaki had been appointed earlier in the year and been reappointed during Johnson's time. Six of us came up, and Johnson reappointed Walton for four years and appointed a new member to replace one of the planners, a woman named Cloethiel Smith, who was an architect--she was local--and appointed Mr. Walker of the National Gallery. Aline B. Saarinen and I, they didn't replace or reappoint. We just stayed on a year. That was in an effort to get rotation, I guess. In this past year, just before the President left, he reappointed Aline and myself. So we will have served nine years when we get through, and Walton will have served eight.

M: What you are saying, I take it, is that there is certainly no diminution in the quality of people during Mr. Johnson's time.

B: No, no, on the contrary. I think that Mrs. Johnson's interest in beautification, which is not exactly a marvelous word for what she did, sounds sort of superficial, but she was really interested. I think she is a fantastic person with dedication to doing something.

M: How much contact did she have with the commission in that project?

B: None directly, although Walton was on this beautification committee. I think that she helped the President in selecting new members. I would just say that's an impression I have. I'm including a woman being appointed, another woman.

The President was really interested, when he had time I would guess in good architecture. He was instrumental in getting this

Hirshhorn Museum, this great collection, to Washington.

M: That has been in the news as late as this morning, I think.

B: Yes, well, problems of money. But I might say that's quite a thing. You wouldn't suspect a president of the political figure like he is to take the time to [do this]. I don't think you would expect that of Nixon, and I don't think he would. Johnson felt it was a good thing, and the reason the Hirshhorn is around is, I think, through the efforts of President [Johnson].

M: What were the circumstances under which you were selected to do the Johnson Library? I think this is the closest contact you've had.

B: Well, I think I'll bore you with it.

M: By all means, it won't bore me at all.

B: I'll give you my impression of the whole history of it.

M: That's fine.

B: I first heard about it through one of my partners here, Cutler, who said Max Brooks who was a friend of his, an architect in Texas--

M: This was an Austin architect?

B: Yes.

M: I went to school in Austin. I remember the name.

B: Max Brooks of Brooks, Barr, Graeber, and White had called him and said that they were thinking of considering myself and our firm as one of the possible architects for the Johnson Library. It was kind of hush-hush. That was a lot of nonsense, because I went to school with Max Brooks. Max Brooks took a Master's at M.I.T.

when I was taking a Master's. I went there as an undergraduate, and he came and took a Master's. So I knew him. Anyhow, eventually he called me and said that they were considering me and some others, and that he was for me and some other people there were interested in some other architects. Anyhow, to cut it all short, he said he'd like to arrange for me to come out and meet the chairman of the Board of the University, Mr. Heath. I said, "Fine." That's that telegram.

M: Right.

B: Heath's wire.

M: This was in the fall of 1965.

B: Fall of 1965, yes. Heath was confirming that I was coming out. And I went out there. I got there in the morning or the night before. Anyhow, I talked with Max and then I met Heath, who's a lawyer, you know. Do you know who he is?

M: I know who he is. I never met him. No, sir.

B: He's a lawyer and a real Texas old fellow, quite stubborn and quite a nice man, a real person. They said that we were invited to the Johnson's place for lunch.

M: Out to the Ranch.

B: Yes, out to the Ranch for lunch. This was about eleven o'clock, and they tried to tell me that we would probably go out there for lunch and after lunch come back. We went out there; we drove out there. We got there about twelve-thirty. Well, to cut it short, I was there from twelve-thirty to ten o'clock at night.

M: At the Ranch? All that time?

B: I was interviewed, my friend!

M: (Laughter)

B: We met and had lunch. They have a big dining table and everybody on the staff has lunch there, the secretaries and staff. Johnson ate at one end and I was next to Mrs. Johnson. I don't remember whether I had met Mrs. Johnson before or not. Anyhow, she was very cordial.

After lunch we got into this Lincoln Continental with the President driving, Mrs. Johnson in the middle, and me in the front, the three of us, and Heath and Brooks in the back. And we started riding around the Ranch and looking at steers and whatnot with a Secret Service car in the back. We stopped at some pre-fab he was building there, and there was some debate about putting a new window in some wall. I told them it was a mistake; there was no room for any beds after they got all these windows, and he said, "Naw" he was going to do it. (Laughter) First disagreement. Then we rode into town and we went over to see a bank building, they're all green with apartments above. Then we went to where he was really raised, this house that's now sort of a museum. We sat in the living room. It was getting to be about five o'clock.

Up till then he hadn't said a word to me. Mrs. Johnson chatted and he would kind of listen. I have a feeling he was trying to figure out whether I was some goddamned decorator or a man. (Laughter) He listened, but he didn't say anything.

And he did all the things such as stopping and talking about cattle and whatnot.

Then we got to the house. And that house and the interior and the Victrola and stuff! He's about my age, see, and it was just like the house I was raised in, except a little different, in Buffalo. That Victrola, really. Then they had some drinks, and he started talking about what he wanted to accomplish in this building and all that. He really talked. He was very interesting, very intense, and he was talking to me, not really directly. We listened for a couple of hours. Then we went over and looked for a new post office site, or something.

M: By this time it must have been almost dark?

B: Eight o'clock.

M: That's right.

B: And Mrs. Johnson said, "Well, there's no use going back sixty miles. Why don't you take potluck with us?" So we went back to the Ranch and had dinner, and we sat in the living room there. Have you been there?

M: Yes.

B: This was really interesting. He got out an issue of Life which had just come out with a big story on the front about him by a man--I've forgotten who. The story was saying he was two kinds of men: one who played the tough, rough, crude rancher, and the other, the very bright, brilliant, political, educated man. This was a pretty good article. He read the whole damned thing out

loud, including all the sort of kidding about this hillbilly stuff, all that. Some of it, I wouldn't have said. It was sort of embarrassing. But his friends--Max Brooks is really a very close friend of theirs.

M: Yes.

B: When he got through he said, "Well, on the whole it's pretty good."

It was then about nine-thirty or so, and we all thought, "Well, we'd better leave." And he went out [where] he has an office there, which is an adjoining room where he sits and two secretaries and his assistant. As we started to leave, he called me in there and he handed me two or three books about his life, small books that are written about Texas.

M: Yes.

B: And he had signed them, "With Appreciation," or some darn thing, I've forgotten what. He had my name misspelled.

And we left. It was a Friday, I think, although it says here Wednesday, maybe Wednesday, I don't know. [Wednesday, December 1, 1965]

M: No mention as to whether you had been selected?

B: No, no.

M: Nothing.

B: We drove back. Both Brooks and Heath were quite flabbergasted with this big day.

Heath and Max wanted us as the architects. That's why they took us out there. There was some other buddy that wanted another

architect, who they disliked immensely because he was sort of decoratorish. So they were really pushing me, even though Heath had never met me. And on the way back, Heath said that the President, in his funny way, had given me a history of his life, showing me all the phases of his interest in the Ranch and all that. And he was quite cordial when I left.

The Johnsons, at least the gossip is that they check with a lot of people until they make a decision and make sure they get the best advice. I assumed it would be several weeks. So did Heath. I believe the following Monday they asked the President what he was sort of thinking and he said, "Go ahead and hire Bunshaft." They called me and that's how we started.

Then we went to work and we got up a presentation to show the basic ideas that we had developed. We had a presentation in sort of a temporary TV room in the White House, I don't say temporary, that's where he--

M: Where his big recliner is?

B: Oh, yes, and all the lights are set up exactly, and we insisted on moving them to light the model, and TV guys were going through the roof. (Laughter) We made quite a presentation down there. Mrs. Johnson came in and all the people from Texas: Heath and [Frank] Erwin who is now the chairman [of the Board].

M: Yes.

B: He was vice-chairman then. A few others [came in]. We talked for several hours. We had a good idea.

M: Had Mr. Johnson, in this first meeting that you described, given you some kind of specific idea?

B: No, not as far as physical building. He was talking about what he wanted to tell the public about his life, what he had done, and what programs he had done on welfare and education, and his parts in all these things. He felt that the exhibits in the building should somehow tell this story. He wasn't talking about building.

M: He wasn't trying to tell you the architect's business in this conversation at all.

B: No, no. He showed me a building he had been involved in. I think it was the headquarters for rural electrification.

M: Right.

B: All the discussion, with anybody you talk to, is always, "What's it going to be built out of? What kind of stone?" He took me to show me a stone.

You know, we kind of developed a program with the U.S. Archives. I went on a trip to see Truman's Library with--I can't remember his name, a very good guy. That was awful, the Truman thing. In the course of flying around then, he wrote a program, this man I was with. They had established that it would be about 150,000 square feet, 50,000 square feet to be used by the University. So we filled in areas for exhibits, areas for auditoriums, offices, et cetera. It involved a preliminary program. From that, we got an idea and developed a solution

and presented it to Mrs. Johnson. It went on two or three hours. There was some talk that the President might come in. We had a model at one end and these drawings at the other; it was perfect for people sitting down who had a couple of hours. Mrs. Johnson was concerned about the size and the magnitude. We had a great room, and she was frightened at that.

The President walked in and he said, "Mr. Bunshaft, I only have five minutes." God, I ran him back and forth between these two things, and he stayed about fifteen minutes. I didn't ever figure out how he could understand what I was talking about. This is a complex building, if you see it, especially on drawings. I ran him back and forth. That was a Friday. He didn't say a word [about] whether he liked it or not. He left and Mrs. Johnson said, "Well, we'll have to do a lot of thinking and talking about this." Then that was the end of it.

Monday the President called up Heath in Texas and said, "I approve the design."

M: From a lengthy fifteen minute briefing.

B: Yes. That floored everybody, because we assumed it would take at least a month. By coincidence, a friend of mine is Frank Stanton.

M: Head of CBS?

B: Yes. And I assumed he would be asked by the Johnsons what he thought about our design, because he has wonderful aesthetics and judgment, and I think they like him and respect him. So I had showed him the design before I took it to Washington. He, by

coincidence, was invited to dinner Tuesday with his wife--they're good friends of the Johnsons--the next day after the President approved it. So he had no influence on it. The reason I'm telling you this is an interesting thing. Frank had thought that the President might talk of this. He didn't know about the approval. In fact, I didn't either Tuesday. And he described the building to his wife. After dinner, President Johnson described every damned detail of this building to Mrs. Stanton.

M: And got it right.

B: Got the whole damned thing. Now, how the hell he could have understood it and remembered it from fifteen minutes is beyond me. In fact, the next meeting I had, I talked to one of the secretaries, Juanita Roberts, and I said, "Look, he must have come back and studied that model." The model was taken away the next morning, but he could have come back that evening. She's very close, not his secretary, she's an assistant; she's not out there, but she's in Washington--anyhow, swore up and down that the President never went back.

I tell this story. It's really remarkable.

M: Yes, it is.

B: I mean, a layman understanding a complex--you can understand a house maybe, but a complex [building].

He [Johnson] was kidding Frank [Stanton] and said, "I understand Bunshaft's expensive. You've got to help me keep him in line." He was very pleased with the design. That's what Stanton told me afterwards.

M: What did he ever say? Did he ever mention money in the discussions?

B: Oh, well, we had a budget.

M: You did have a very strict budget.

B: Oh, The University of Texas, that's all Heath talked to me about. Their whole attitude was: "You eastern fancy architects, you've got to keep this in this budget." The budget for the original project was 6 1/2 million [dollars]. And then, of course, like that first meeting the first time we went there, they decided to add a university building on the campus. They had the land, but it was separated originally with the deal, and they raised the budget for the two projects to 12 1/2 million dollars. Then taking off fees and stuff, our budget for the total two buildings was $11,750,000.

M: Hardly a blank check, then?

B: That was the budget and the thing that Heath always talked to me about was, "You've got to keep it in that, now. Don't start getting fancy." And, "You sure this thing is--?" And, "We have no more money, and we're not going to give you a nickel more." And, "If you go over, you'll redraw at your own expense." Well, I tell you this story because when the bids were opened, Erwin was then chairman of the Board [of Regents].

M: Yes.

B: The low bid was $11,800,000, fifty thousand over. And we had alternates that you could have taken out a couple hundred thousand. Erwin, I found out later, had expected he might have to spend a million more. He couldn't get over the fact we came in [so close];

that's practically coming right in on the button.

M: Yes, yes.

B: And I rubbed it in about these Texans thinking easterners are a bunch of decorators.

M: You didn't have anything to do about the site selection?

B: No, that was all done. We heard Mrs. Johnson wanted it on the hill; everybody including Heath wanted it on the hill where some house was--where it isn't now, at the other end, the end where there's a printing plant. There was a house up on the hill there, and that was the wrong place. That was the main discussion at the first meetings. We had it far away from where the client thought it should be.

Anyhow, the President was very nice to me; he's always been very nice. We saw him again, and he came in and said he only had a minute, and then he stayed quite awhile. He's always approved everything we've done.

M: You mentioned one time earlier something about first disagreement. Were there disagreements as the [work progressed]?

B: No. Mrs. Johnson used to be concerned. She was concerned, but I think she's very happy about it now.

M: Oh, I'm sure she is.

B: She's accustomed to stewing over things for a long time, and unfortunately you have to get along. And it's turning out . . . I understand they've both seen it several times and they're very happy. That's the main thing, because what you see in a model

has nothing to do with what you really see. And we as architects are surprised when the thing's built; so a layman must be surprised plenty. (Laughter) It's going to be a wonderful building.

M: I saw it as late as March. That's the last time I've been down there.

B: It's going to be quite a building.

He invited us, my wife and myself, shortly after that first meeting, to one of the dinners at the White House for Erhard, the chancellor of Germany. You go through a line, and he introduced me as his architect. He was very charming. He has a marvelous memory.

He broke ground for the Hirshhorn. One of the last things the President did in the White House I think the two days before he left was to break ground for the Hirshhorn Museum.

M: Had he anything to do directly with your commission for that job?

B: He was surprised to find out that I was the architect for it.

You know, this is a good story. The building is being built and this groundbreaking was done essentially for him. You know, Mr. Hirshhorn, [S. Dillon] Ripley, and everybody were so appreciative that he was so interested. And he was leaving. The building wasn't under construction or anything, but you could have a groundbreaking. So, they arranged this I think about two days before he left. Naturally we as the architects were there, and he said hello to me and my wife, was very nice, had some pictures taken. He likes Mr. Hirshhorn. Hirshhorn's quite a character. And then by coincidence,

the next night, a group of very wealthy friends, like Laurance Rockefeller and seven others, gave a dinner up here at the Plaza Hotel for him, without any motive, without anything. And I don't know how, but we were invited, my wife and I. There were about four hundred people, and it was really a fancy party, no politics, no nothing, just a party.

M: I read about that in the paper, I guess.

B: Four hundred guests and four hundred Secret Service men. (Laughter) [It was] the first time I've ever seen four Rockefeller brothers in one place. They never go to the same party. There are four of them; Winthrop wasn't there. Anyway, going through the receiving line, the President said, "I didn't know you were building everything in the United States." That revealed that he didn't even know that we were the architects for the Hirshhorn.

Shortly after that I heard a story. I tell this because it's interesting. They were considering architects for the extension of the National Gallery in Washington, the Mellon. An architect named Ieoh Pei, a very good architect, got the job. We were one of the four being considered. Dillon Ripley is on the board and he told me the story. One of the board members who is a lawyer, after the meeting where they're discussing architects, was whispering to another board member and Dillon overhead him saying, "Well, we don't want Bunshaft. Johnson got him. Probably went ahead with this Hirshhorn to get him this job. He's Johnson's architect." Now, that implied that Johnson had a hand in my

being selected for the Hirshhorn. Johnson didn't even know it. The truth of the matter isn't what people build up.

M: So you get some good and some bad out of being thought to be the President's architect.

B: He didn't know anything about it.

M: There are some wrinkles in that Johnson Library building that are interesting, things like the replica of the Oval Office. Whose idea was that?

B: That was not ours. Presidential Libraries seem to have reproductions of the Oval Room. Truman has a complete reproduction.

M: I didn't know that.

B: Complete, exact, paint and all. It cost a quarter of a million dollars. But it's an exhibit; it isn't an office. It's in the exhibit area. And during the course of this job, always Mrs. Johnson kept saying . . . You know, that came up immediately, and we all discouraged her, everybody involved. We had no room for it. It's a high room, you know. I'm glad you brought this up. This is a cute story.

Then we got an exhibit designer, Arthur Drexler; he's doing the exhibits under our control, but you wouldn't believe it to read the papers. But anyway, Mrs. Johnson said she'd like a corner of one of the rooms and he [Drexler] came up with the idea of large photomurals and colored transparencies, and [Ezra] Stoller photographed it. We thought it was all buried.

One night, I was at home and about seven-thirty, I got a call

from some secretary at the White House saying, "The President wants to talk to you, and he will call back in a few minutes. We're just alerting you." I said, "Fine. I'm here." I couldn't think of what he could be calling about. Then in about fifteen minutes, as usual bungling, he came on and lifted the receiver and said to somebody, "Who am I talking to?" I guess he put in a line on me and hung up, and eventually he got on. He started off, "Gordon." I knew something was coming. (Laughter) "You know, I'm very happy with the building and I think it's going to be wonderful. But I'm not going to be happy unless I have a reproduction of my office here in that building. I understand--Mrs. Johnson tells me--that there isn't room enough because of the height. I'm willing to take it three-quarters full size. I just want to have it in that building." You know, he was saying, "Mrs. Johnson told me that you thought it would be impossible." He was very friendly.

I said, "Mr. President, if you really want it, nothing is impossible. I guess we'll have it." What am I going to do? Argue with him? I assumed he wanted it down in the exhibit area as an exhibit.

M: Like the Truman one?

B: Truman. I don't know if the others [have them].

Then he went on, "How are costs? How is scheduling?" All small talk, but he got his point. I guess she had told him she couldn't get anything out of me, and he was going to make sure he got it. (Laughter) What the hell? Are you going to argue?

M: Of course not.

B: After he hung up, I called Max Brooks, who really deals with the President quite a bit, and I told him about this. He said, "God, I'm sorry I didn't call you, but I've been hearing rumors about this for three days." I understand he wants to use this office." Gee, it never entered my head to think that he might want to put it up in lieu of his office on the top. I just assumed he meant an exhibit. If it's an exhibit, it's really going to be murder. Up on the top, where it's a roof, we can perhaps stuff it in somehow. So it was left that Max would call the President and find out where the hell he had it, whether he wanted it as an exhibit or a using thing. He finally got the President in a couple of days, and the President really hadn't thought about it. He just wanted to be sure it was going in somewhere. In talking, they finally came around to putting it up as an office which he would use. It relieved us of the problem of wrecking the whole damned exhibit area. This big space, we would have had to mutilate the building inside to do it.

But, my opinion, I thought it was a terrible thing with visitors coming to see the President now that he's retired to come into a contemporary building, see contemporary exhibits, and then take an elevator up and suddenly walk in and be sitting with the President in the White House.

M: Which is hardly contemporary.

B: Well, whatever it is, it's somehow like some man who won't leave,

you know, who's carrying on. To me, it seemed to be. I visualized when this thing was finished and he was in there that the press would crucify him for sort of hanging on to something that wasn't his.

M: Yes, I can see that.

B: In fact, I talked to a couple of people about it, and they agreed with me. But you can't raise that point with the President. But I'm a stubborn guy, and I raised it in a meeting. We used to have a lot of meetings with Mrs. Johnson in the Treaty Room at the White House [about] all the exhibits--discussions, and all that. And it somehow led to that, and I gave my opinion. Frank Stanton was there. And there were a couple of his [Johnson's] public relations [people]--USIA, this fellow, Marks.

M: Leonard Marks, yes.

B: And this secretary, Juanita Roberts. Juanita was the one that I talked to [earlier on this subject]. Also, she was crazy about design. When I presented it to Johnson the first time, Juanita was running back and forth with a little telescope we had for getting the view. She said, "Show this to him." She had him bending down and shoving his head into it. It was a riot.

Anyhow, I raised this point. It just bothered me so, I thought it was a mistake. And Juanita was pretty bright; she had an answer, she said, "I thought of it, too. We'll announce before the building is done that it is an exhibit and while he's alive he's going to use it and when he is dead it will be an exhibit."

Which I think relieves it, except it isn't accessible to the public, and it's on the top. Anyhow, that's the story of the [Oval Office].

M: Were there other rooms or exhibits or things that the family insisted on that you [weren't in favor of]?

B: No, no.

M: That was the only instance.

B: That was the only thing. In the meantime, I checked with Pei, who's a good friend of mine who's doing the Kennedy Library, and it turns out they have one, too! (Laughter) He doesn't want it, but they all want it. So we're not alone in this. It's really kind of nutty, when you think about it, that all over the country: Oval Rooms! (Laughter) Truman's was awful. It was painted kind of a dirty gray, and the furniture in it was awful. Johnson's is seven-eighths full-size. We couldn't make it full-size.

M: Not quite a replica.

B: The reason we got away with that [is that] Kennedy's is seven-eights, too.

M: Did that come up? The fact that Kennedy's was seven-eighths?

B: No, we just couldn't stick it up there.

It ought to be interesting.

M: Oh, I'm sure it will. What about Mr. Johnson's staff? Did they get in your way a lot, with requirements and things?

B: No. I think Juanita reviewed the plans. The only thing the staff

of the President has been concerned with was his office and the facilities around it on the eighth floor of the building. And that's changing. You know, we never did do a final plan for that area, because we've kept it fluid. You know, the details of little partitions aren't important and what was originally dreamt of was changing radically. Juanita had all sorts of waiting rooms, as if there would be five thousand people there. It's all changed. Now we're seriously working on it with Mrs. Johnson. It's going to be quite nice and simplified, because there's a difference when a man is in office and when a man's not in office.

M: Sure. He had time to find out some of the differences.

B: Well, I mean, they had all sorts of waiting rooms, you know, so one guy wouldn't see who the other one was, and security and all that.

M: What about the interior design? You mentioned Mr. Drexler was doing that through--

B: Well, the interiors are done by us. The interior of this building is the same as the outside. It's all stone.

M: I see.

B: There's nothing left for anybody to putter around with. We want to make sure that the bad taste of various people won't affect the building. Arthur Drexler was appointed after much grueling discussion--and he's very good--at our suggestion, and he's done a beautiful job of designing exhibits. That, of course, has been tons of meetings; I've been to some, of what these exhibits should tell, what should be in film, what should be in stills,

you know, all that. It's a very complicated thing. And there Arthur's had the patience of a saint, because everybody has opinions. In fact, I think Stanton and Marks and a few others are advisers to Mrs. Johnson on this. That's what most of the meetings at the Treaty Room were on: what should these exhibits tell and what's the purpose of having people come there and see them. That's been a complex thing, and that's still changing. What we've got now is the chassis for the film and things, but what the film is, that's still to be written and all that. Quite a job.

M: But Mrs. Johnson has taken a specific interest in this?

B: Oh, she's been involved. She's been really the daily guide on the whole building, especially on the exhibits.

M: You've been very detailed and kind to go through it like this. Are there some other contracts you had or anecdotes that occur to you that I don't know enough to ask you about? I hate to cut you off.

B: No, no. As I said, I've seen the President two or three times for a short time. That's about all I've seen him.

M: You've seen a side of him, though, that a lot of people, even his closest business associates, [have not seen].

B: Well, he's been extremely kind to me.

This was rather nice: One of the meetings we had at the Oval Room, he dropped in and sat a while. Oh, this I can tell to company. He sort of whispered to somebody, and they came back with something. He was sitting there, and I guess I was having trouble

with my lighter, and he handed me one of these little lighters with a seal on it. That was the second time. The first time, one time he came in and he left, and then he had a secretary come in with six different books on him, each one "To Gordon Bunshaft," spelled all of them correctly that time. Each one had a different thing, one was "Best Regards," or "With much hope," all six different.

M: Different inscriptions.

B: Yes. I had the whole eight or nine books. It was very nice.

One time we had a discussion on materials, you know, what kind of stone. I think he asked us to come for breakfast the next day, and we came. Of course, everybody had had breakfast. And we sat and talked around breakfast. Oh, I think we were having breakfast, and he had had breakfast. He came in and was chatting, and I was telling him about this beautiful granite, which was too expensive, but I thought it was a beautiful granite, tan color of the Freer Museum in Washington. He said, "Let's go over and look at it." So we got a car, and we drove over there, Mrs. Johnson, the President, Max Brooks, and a couple of others. And we got over there and we got out and looked, and he thought it was nice, and we all got back in, except the President. I sort of got in.

This is a pretty nice story. I turned around and there he was way over in the corner talking to two elderly people. And he came back, and they looked really touched.

M: They were just people on the street.

B: Just happened to be there. He came back and he had shaken hands with them and chatted. They were a Polish couple who were making a visit to Washington, and they were really flabbergasted to shake the President's hand at nine-thirty or ten o'clock in the morning.

M: I can imagine.

B: But it was very thoughtful of him to do it. You know, all of us got out and looked and got in. And here's this man, I didn't notice these people; he did, and he went over and said hello to them. It was very touching to me at the time.

M: Yes.

B: Very thoughtful. You know, there were no cameras, there was no nothing, just a man being very friendly and thoughtful.

M: Well, you've been very friendly and thoughtful to us this afternoon in giving us so much time. That's mighty nice of you.

B: As you get older, you love to chat.

M: Well, I love to hear you.

B: I've heard stories, you know, about how tough the President is and all that. He's been, as far as I'm concerned, very kind and very thoughtful.

The main thing is we're building a good building. As an architect, I've done the best work for people who don't try to completely understand, but have faith in what I'm doing rather than having complete understanding, then make their own judgments, right or wrong. Like a doctor explaining to you all the various

alternates and then letting you decide which one you should take. The good doctor will tell you, "This is what you have to do," and you do it. If you make the decisions, you're an amateur doctor.

M: Right.

B: Johnson, in a sense, I think must have made his decisions on this building on the general impression and on the feeling--well, I hope he did--"Now this guy knows what he's doing."

M: And this way, he's let you do what you think is your kind of best work.

B: Best work for him. Somebody asked me why we did the building we did. And I said I thought the President was really a virile man, a strong man with nothing sweet or sentimental or small about him, and he ought to have a vigorous, male building. And we've got a vigorous, male building. I don't know if you'd do a building like that for President Roosevelt, for example. I think this building is kind of powerful, and he's kind of a powerful guy. There's nothing delicate about him.

M: Right. Thank you very much. You've been very helpful to us.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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