

Interviewee: Michael Kinerk

Interviewer: Kathy Hersh

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Q: Tell us about your involvement with the Miami Design Preservation League, the beginning of it?

A: There's a reason it's called Miami Design Preservation League and not Miami Beach Preservation League. Barbara started her career working with designers and to her, design was one of the most important components of life. Her first constituency was designers. She was a strong member of the ASID, American Society of Interior Designers, kind of honorary as she was really a journalist and publicist. And because she started the movement as a project for the United States Bicentennial in 1976, she had to recruit an organization -- she had to create one out of whole cloth. She chose designers, and she called it the Miami Design Preservation League because it was formed in the Miami Design District, which then faded and then came back and is a very strong, vibrant area today. But nothing happened in Miami Beach in the 1970s and she would've not been wise to call it the Miami Beach anything. It would have been a turn-off. But calling it Miami Design Preservation League was her choice. Most people assume that it's M.B. -- Miami Beach something -- because its sole focus is on the historic districts of the city of Miami Beach. So that's why it's Miami Design Preservation League.

Your question was how I got started?

Q: Yes, you told an interesting anecdote about getting a letter. Would you like to reiterate that story?

A: That's not the beginning, that's the end of Barbara's involvement. I had just no decision in the beginning that the end of Barbara's involvement. It was kind of obvious to some of us, but she named me her successor to run the movement. She knew she was very ill. She had suffered from congestive heart failure for several years and had other problems like diabetes, high blood pressure. She passed away in March, 1990 some time

in 1989 she wrote a letter to one of her best friends whose name is Evelyn Perlman and Evelyn was a very fashionable, good-looking woman who had worked for cosmetics companies in New York. Barbara liked that. Anything stylish and involved with design and fashion, Barbara liked. So Barbara wrote Evelyn the letter and said Michael Kinerk will be my successor. She didn't send me the letter and she never told me that, but I had been keeping the League together for years as... behind the scenes; as the treasurer, as the secretary of the board, writing the minutes, paying all the bills. That had been my role since the earliest days when Andrew Capitman was the Chairman and he brought the Art Deco Weekend from an antique display in the Cardozo Hotel, entirely within the hotel, he brought it out onto the street, added music and entertainment -- magicians, jugglers. Eventually the Art Deco Weekend grew. After he left, I eventually I became Chairman. Matti Bower was Chairman. Betty Gutierrez was Chairman. There have been quite a few chairs, maybe 10, but my main interest in the festival was music. So I made sure that we had the legends of the Art Deco era on the musical stages. But there never would have been musical stages without Andrew. He saw that entertainment was a component of the festival. Back in the early days -- I'm talking about '79, '80, '81. Andrew would spend the money and I had to pay the bills. It was the same with Barbara, she had no concept of our budget nor any concern about it and people respected and admired Barbara, often, and they would withhold suing us to get payment for money. And I would call them and say, "we will pay you. I promise." And somehow they believed me, maybe because I worked for *The Miami Herald*, which had nothing to do with this, although the *Herald's* editorials supported Barbara and her quest.

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I was the treasurer for about four years. I was secretary-treasurer. I served in every job. I've been on the board continuously since 1977, when she just told me I was on the board.

Barbara was famous for pulling proclamations and awards of her giant bag. People always speak about Barbara Capitman as a little old bag lady in tennis shoes. She actually was. She had a big bag, about half the size of a person, and she would pull things out of it. And she would also anoint people to the board -- especially journalists. There is a long line of distinguished journalists -- Ed Bell was on the board of MDPL - a WLRN announcer.

Well, so how did I get involved? When Barbour wrote that letter it was at the end of her tenure and I had already been on the board then for 13 years.

Q: What attracted you to getting involved in the work -- from your background?

A: I was trying to avoid Barbara. I'd read about her in the newspaper, in *The Miami Herald*. I knew that she was on a crusade. It seemed hopeless to me. I didn't have the vision that she and her sons had. I was much more pragmatic and cynical, as many journalists are. I knew she was using me just to get access to *The Miami Herald* building so she could pester the columnists. She would come in ostensibly to see me and then go and visit George Sherman or Beth Dunlop or Jack Kofoed -- old-time *Herald* columnists who were very important in Barbara's mission to get the Art Deco District mentioned in a positive way. Barbara also had her uses for me.

She started this Art Deco Week festival in the Cardozo Hotel in 1978. That's why it's now 35 years we're celebrating. The 35 years up to this year. The theme is not the tenure of the League, which was founded in 1976. There was an organizing meeting in the summer of 76 and then there was a big conclave-like meeting at the Cinema Theater at 1235 Washington Avenue. That attracted hundreds of people, mostly designers and the people interested in the style of this area and that's kind of when she knew that the League had been founded. Then there was another meeting on the porch of what is now called Casa Casuarina, the "Gianni Versace Mansion" as it's most popularly known, because that's where he was murdered. But a long time before that happened it was called the Amsterdam Palace and that was where the small group first met on the porch to survey the buildings in the neighborhood and decide if they were a worthy project for this fledgling design group. And they decided it was, and it was Carl Weinhardt, director of Vizcaya, who told Barbara, "yes you could call these buildings Art Deco," because many other artist historians said, "no you cannot call them Art Deco, Art Deco is something else."

So that was a sub theme that Barbara had to deal with in the early years. Still, I wasn't having anything to do with it. I was staying at arms length. My partner Dennis Wilhelm became an early advocate and admirer of Barbara

and he was going to her meetings and he was encouraging me to go and I was refusing.

What happened that got me involved was finally in November of '77, it was announced that the Cinema Theater, which had been operating as a movie theater would close and would be demolished. All my life I have been interested in movies, Hollywood and movie theaters and theater architecture. As a boy in elementary school I had drawn blueprints -- designs for movie theaters. I'm quite a student of movie theaters and theater architecture -- theaters of all kinds and music were my first loves. So that actually galvanized me -- the Cinema Theater threat -- and I told Barbara I would help make phone calls and work with her to stop the demolition of the Cinema Theater. We did actually stop the demolition, but the theater was severely damaged. It was owned by a very large New York group called the Brandt family, which was brothers -- the Brandt brothers. I personally called the Brandt office and spoke to some of the brothers and told them how important the theater was. And they decided not to tear it down but they wanted some financial return out of the building.

10:00

It was a very large movie theater designed by the dean of American theater architects Thomas Lamb. It was a twin to the one in New York where Billy Rose had his Aquacades. It was a magnificent Art Deco interior, still is. Fortunately it's been preserved. The Brandt Brothers tore out the lobby. Tore out the marble staircase. Tore out the chandeliers and the Art Deco dome, which were all magnificent because Thomas Lamb was the master. And they put in a shoe store, or a store. They put in a rental store. They wanted a shoe store. I think that it was never rented. They made a nice empty storefront out of the lobby and it came to naught. It was a bust. About 10 years later they, actually at their own expense, I think, restored the lobby, rebuilt the staircase, redid the dome, removed all the false ceilings and the Cinema Theater was again restored. Then it reopened as a nightclub at just about the time when South Beach was starting to click in about 1980-81. It was only this vacant storefront for about a year and a half or two years.

Well that's how I got involved. Only my interest in saving a movie theater allowed me to work with Barbara who I already perceived was a mad, driven woman, eccentric and crazy -- slightly crazy or fully crazy -- and

once she had her hooks in me I, like legions of others, was in her service. And she just told me, “you’re on the board, now.” I met a lot of very important people because I was the least of the significant, important people that Barbara attracted.

On that board I got to meet Carl Weinhardt, Director of Vizcaya, Andres Fabregas, a prominent architect who designed much of the 1970s Miami International Airport and the architect of Miami Beach’s present City Hall, and perhaps most significantly Mickey Wolfson, who was a young collector of not only Deco, but interesting things from a certain very strictly defined period, which I can’t quote from memory but it’s something like 1880 to 1945, which certainly covered Art Deco. At that time our collection was bigger than Mickey’s so he was slightly jealous and came over to our house quite often. We socialized then with Mickey, Carl Weinhardt, Andres and a lot of others that were in the orbit of Barbara Capitman. Many of us had our reservations about helping her, for example Mickey’s father, who was chairman of the Wometco Corporation, was a very important person in the community and, in fact, the Miami-Dade College downtown campus is named for him and he was the founder of it. So his father was telling Mickey, “don’t have anything to do with that woman, she’s on a hopeless quest.”

Of course, as we know, she was opposed by all the power structure. They had in mind that the salvation of Miami Beach would be the total demolition of everything south of 23rd Street and the building of a giant resort complex with canals and lagoons. It was to be the Venice of Florida. Who knows if that would’ve succeeded? It would’ve been like one of the complexes in Las Vegas -- like the Bellagio, perhaps, or maybe it would not have been as well-done as that. Steven Wynn would not have been involved.

Q: Were plans drawn up?

A: Yes. The whole area was under the control of a redevelopment authority, which is headed by Stephen Moss, who was then the owner of the Fontainebleau hotel and had made many millions of dollars by building apartment buildings up and down Collins Avenue. He was opposed to her plans. In fact, it was when she finally got a national register district created and on the books in the Department of the Interior. It was a giant compromise because she wanted the district to go further north than 23rd Street and all the way to the Southpoint. Instead, the district stopped at 6th

Street as a slight concession to Mr. Moss and the South Beach redevelopment authority because then they rescaled their plan and decided they would perhaps do everything south of Fifth Street. Everything south of Fifth Street was just as Art Deco as anything north of Fifth Street but Barbara gave -- made a compromise, which is very rare for Barbara. She was known, basically, for never compromising and never giving up. That's the main lesson I drew from Barbara in my lifetime experience with her -- never give up and pursue your dream.

15:00

She really did it and I was not one of those who saw the clarity of her vision, at first. I just hoped she would succeed but I was sure she wouldn't and I didn't really want to be enmeshed in this futile imbroglio. So she lured me in like she lured so many others, by appealing to whatever appealed to us.

It was a her genius in marketing that she could package something that was imaginary and put it in front of your eyes and make you buy it. So I came in to help her and never got loose, never escaped.

Q: What keeps you?

A: Well, now the Art Deco District and the Miami Design Preservation League are my child. My willful, wily, troublesome, teenage child -- although it's 35 years old. But it's in regression. The struggle is continuous. The Art Deco District of Miami Beach will never be safe from encroachment by inappropriate development, destruction of historic elements. Every time a hotel is rehabbed most of the community celebrates it and I cringe at all the original elements that are destroyed in the rehab -- lost forever. At some point there will hardly be anything original left and it will all be a fictitious fabric, like Disney World.

Q: What features are you talking about, specifically: interior?

A: Yes, interiors or eyebrows. For example the Cardozo Hotel which is a fine restoration had originally copper disks in patterns of three up on the top of the façade and flagpoles, duel flagpoles, with three copper round bases that looked something like appliances from a death ray gun from Buck Rogers or Flash Gordon. All of that's removed, mainly because it was

falling off the building. It's just like the problem in New York where the historic preservation commission had to approve removing the cornices on the top of the 1800s buildings because they might fall down and kill someone. You do have to make concessions in modern-day adaptive re-use. You have to make many concessions to keep something alive and vibrant and not a museum piece that's been restored and cannot be touched except with white gloves. But more of concern to me is the interiors, which are not protected under the law, unless you've specifically catalogued. I don't think there's very many interiors protected under Miami Beach law, if any. In the interiors, the items of concern are the plasterwork, murals, the light fixtures -- which are the first thing to go -- and the original hardware: door handles, doorframes, windows, casement windows. It's very difficult to find any original hardware in most historic districts because they wear out or people foolishly remove them thinking something new would be better. So I am kind of a strict preservationist and I'd probably be happier if the entire Art Deco district were a museum and couldn't be touched, nevertheless it has some of the strictest preservation laws in the United States in force here which is only due to the efforts of the Miami Design Preservation League and its ability, politically, to win a majority of city commissioners and keep them there for the past twenty-five years.

In fact, some Miami Design Preservation League board members have risen through the political ranks, many to become city commissioners -- well, three or four -- and two to become mayor. I don't know how long the League can sustain that because a new generation of commissioners will have no knowledge of what came before unless perhaps they view this work, now.

Q: That's part of the reason the archive is being established is to give that continuity.

A: One of our most important board members and Mayor is Matti Bower who was also my co-chairman of Art Deco weekend for about 10 years. This project of archiving the history was very important to her and she's spearheading the city support of it. In my view she's the best mayor Miami Beach has ever had in its history and I have studied the history of Miami Beach, in depth. And I know several of the former mayors, at least eight of them.

Q: Because she has a community base, perhaps?

20:00

A: Yes. She's the first woman mayor. She's the first mother who's been a mayor. Before she came into the preservation movement her efforts were in the schools. She rose up through the ranks and learned political operations in the PTA. She came into the League because she admired Barbara's work as a woman and as a crusader and as someone who wanted to better the community and create something unique. That's still the important thing here; the Art Deco district is unique in the entire world. There is a lot of other Deco. There's a lot more Deco in Chicago, New York and Los Angeles. We certainly know that from our book. We've written several books but one of them where Barbara was the co-author and she recruited me to be her co-author -- there were then two of us -- and she passed away before the book was even nearly finished and Denis Wilhelm helped me complete it which took us six more years, really, or five years.

That book was... One of Barbara's dreams was to document how important early 20th century architecture was in the fabric of American society and how important it was in the history of design and architecture. And she went around the country with League co-founder Leonard Horowitz's who was kind of her sidekick and her best friend and confidante. And they started Art Deco societies in every city they could, including Washington, DC, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago.

Q: You mean Art Deco societies didn't exist there before Barbara and Leonard Horowitz went about doing it?

A: That's exactly correct. And the Miami Design Preservation League proudly advertises itself as the world's first Art Deco Society, which it is. Most people around the world credit Barbara with starting the worldwide movement to protect and sustain Art Deco design and architecture. She also - among her many, many accomplishments - she started an event called the World Congress on Art Deco. She organized it and established it and then died in 1990, and the world the first world Congress was here in Miami Beach in 1991. Matti Bower was a co-chair of that event and it is still thriving today and it attracts hundreds of delegates every two years to a different city around the world and Barbara is credited with being its founder and the creator of movement to preserve Art Deco.

The World Congress is a lot of fun because you go to these foreign cities or cities in the United States and you, basically, take tours over a five-day period to see all the most important Art Deco buildings. And so the world Congress has been all around the world -- it's been in Australia three times (sorry, twice) and New Zealand, once. It's been in the United States in New York, Tulsa, Oklahoma, Los Angeles and of course Miami Beach.

Q: It's only been here once, right?

A: It's never been any place more than once, so far. And it's been in Johannesburg, South Africa and Brighton, England and London and Montréal, Canada and the last, recent, one in 2011 was in Rio de Janeiro. That was the first Latin American, South American visit. It's our hope to have the 2025 world Congress in Paris, France -- which is generally considered to be the birthplace of Art Deco and gave the name Art Deco to the movement. And the name came from a legendary exhibition of style and design and products from 1925, and is often called in "1925 Exhibition." And so, we think having it 100 years later in 2025 will be a brilliant move, so all we have to do is get an organization there to form and sustain the operation, because it has to be run by a local group. Traditionally its run by one of these societies, many of which Barbara established.

She even tried to get Canada into our book -- our books title is "Rediscovering Art Deco. USA." And the first thing Barbara told me was she wanted 40 cities in it and two of them had to be Vancouver and Toronto and I said, "Barbara, I don't think Vancouver and Toronto are in the USA." But she didn't care. She wasn't governed by rules or strict constructional concepts; she was the classic outside the box thinker, while I was the opposite.

25:00

Q: You were a good team, then?

A: I guess so.

Q: You said they're every two years. Where will the next one be? Do you know, yet?

A: Yes, it's been a contentious issue. It will be in Havana, Cuba and the Miami Design Preservation League actually controls the World Congress but we delegated to voting for sites to the international group that Denis Wilhelm and others formed which was first called the National President's Counsel -- referring to presidents of Art Deco societies -- and then it became the National Coalition for Art Deco Societies which is binding up these groups that Barbara had started -- and many she did not start, because they came later. She only did her tour around the country one time and that was her shot to get certain of the groups established.

After the National Coalition was formed, about 18 months later, we had a meeting in San Francisco and the second World Congress was slated for Perth, Australia and there were several Australians there and they were complaining why was this a national movement when it was truly -- Art Deco is an international movement, always has been -- and so the name was changed to the International Coalition of Art Deco Societies. Well several of their members, especially Canadians and Australians, and some New Yorkers, wanted very strongly to go to Havana, Cuba. The Preservation League here, the MDPL, Miami Design Preservation League could not support any move to deal with the government of Cuba under state and local law. We would have had all our funding and support politically canceled if we had endorsed this. So the League posted and several other people -- like the did the Dallas organization is run by a Cuban expatriate, a Cuban refugee, and there were several in the majority of the American groups opposed going to Cuba but eventually, after stalling it for almost 10 years, that's when it was first proposed. It was voted on in Montréal to go there by the slimmest majority like 5 to 6, or 6 to 5. So, the League has delegated the administration of that World Congress to the Montréal organization in Canada, which can freely deal with the government of Cuba.

So, we'll be in a Havana, Cuba in 2013, we think, unless the organization there falls apart. It's something to do with the Museum of Bellas Artes and the Ministry of Culture -- because everything in Cuba has to be a government operation. There are no grassroots civic organizations, by law. We have the same problem in China. The next World Congress after Havana will be 2015 in a Shanghai, China. And Denis and I have been working very hard to help that group build up to the point where they can operate a world congress. Shanghai has hundreds and hundreds, if not thousands, of Art Deco buildings.

Q: Is it fair to say that even though the acknowledgment of Art Deco as an art form may have originated in Paris it was legitimized here in Miami Beach?

A: Well, the appreciation of it was grounded -- headquartered -- here. The appreciation of Art Deco is truly worldwide and we didn't appreciate it first, we just made it a movement -- a political cause -- and gave it credibility and started organizing groups. Before that time, the appreciation of Art Deco, I think, was individualistic. There were many books by the time Barbara started her movement in 1976, I think there were perhaps 10 or 12 important books on the subject.

Bevis Hillier wrote the first book on Art Deco and is credited with putting the name Art Deco into use. He wrote that book in 1968. Through the years Art Deco had been called many things -- many, many things -- mostly Modern or Streamline Modern, Depression Modern, Skyscraper Style, Jazz Style. There were perhaps 100 names for it. Barbara, probably, is the reason why it's called Art Deco universally today. And she had many debates about what to call it. She told me once she wanted to call it Art Deco because it had the word art in, which would be popular with the public.

30:00

We know that Art Deco was popularized worldwide before it got its name because of worlds fairs and motion pictures. They spread the style all around the globe. Even, in the '30s, motion picture theaters became Art Deco to echo the style that was so popular in movies -- particularly movies like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Also the cartoons, I mentioned, the Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon. They were cartoons that were serial motion pictures. So it's been a popular style since the day it was invented. It was used in the '30s and '40s to make a corporation seem up to date and not stodgy and old-fashioned. Buildings that were made out of old brick-and-mortar were clad in slick, Vitrolite panels -- usually black, on the exterior -- which made them look ultra moderne -- "moderne" being another word for Art Deco.

Well, Barbara wanted to call it Art Deco and she called it Art Deco -- and everyone else eventually followed along.

Q: There's a bit of whimsy to some of the design here in Miami Beach -- nautical themes, for example?

A: If you study the architectural history, the idea of responding to the natural location is often credited with Louis Sullivan, the great Chicago architect. Barbara was from Chicago and in our book we called Chicago the cradle of Art Deco. The first skyscraper also went up in Chicago -- if you think of Art Deco is the "skyscraper style" -- that's another natural fit. Well, Louis Sullivan said that a building should respond to the natural environment in its site. And his number one student was Frank Lloyd Wright. And Barbara was the first person really who publicly said Frank Lloyd Wright was one of the inventors of the Art Deco style.

In a lecture in Chicago in 1979 she was introduced by the prominent Stanley Tigerman at a meeting of architects and Barbara gave an explanation of her movement to preserve Art Deco. And she's announced that Frank Lloyd Wright was the first or the most important Art Deco architect. The audience, which had been trained in school to dislike Art Deco as embarrassing afterthought of modernism, booed her. They booed the great Barbara Capitman. Of course, she was right and they were wrong but Frank Lloyd Wright is one of the reasons why this style developed, because of his geometric planes and his response to the environment. Well, all Art Deco buildings do respond to the environment, that is why you have all these different genres of Art Deco like Pueblo Deco, which is in the American southwest, and there's Viking Deco in Minneapolis and what we have in Miami Beach is often called "Tropical Deco" or "Nautical Deco."

You have a lot of the same thing in Los Angeles. It's because these are cities that were position on the sea and the architecture needed to reflect that oceanography, that oceangoing flavor of the region. Here in Miami Beach we have seahorses, we have underwater plants, we have fish, we have seashells embedded in the Art Deco architecture. One reason Art Deco was considered an embarrassment to the 1950s and 1960s modernists was it had this gratuitous decoration and the theory of modernism, almost like a religion, was it had to be pure and clean lines. So the buildings here are pure and have clean line, but then they have slapped on them a panel that has a seahorse in it, or a seashell. While this was anathema, these architects were apostate to the modernist movement, so Art Deco was really reviled and despised in the '50s and '60s. If you study

architectural textbooks, Art Deco was expunged from the lexicon in the '50s and '60s and a whole generation of architects were taught to pretend like it was the funny relative up in the attic and we don't talk about it. And this is the environment into which Barbara had to introduce an appreciation of Art Deco in the '70s. It was very difficult because architecturally in upper echelon circles, Art Deco was an embarrassment.

Q: Of course, one of the reasons people came down here was to escape and have their vacation and be reminded they were by the ocean and to see fish and fins...

A: The people always loved Art Deco; it's the architects and academics who didn't like it.

35:00

It was never really unpopular with ordinary people because it's so attractive and ordinary people are not concerned about stylistic rules and regulations or the tenets of modernism. It's of no concern to Joe six-pack. But they liked Art Deco because of the movies. It was sleek, it was good-looking, was well proportioned.

So, Barbara kept chipping away to call it Art Deco. She fought movements to call at "modernism" or "moderne" or Bauhaus and she just focused on "it's Art Deco."

Art Deco is a giant umbrella term that encompasses three rather different periods of architecture. The first one of those is certainly European-based and French in origin, but the real origins of Art Deco go all the way back to the 1850s when the first time buildings were built with steel and glass, such as the Crystal Pavilion in the great exhibition in London. We know those were the first true Art Deco progenitors. It's just that by the 1930s almost every building was Art Deco -- every public building, every post office, every school, every bridge. The cover of our book is the Golden Gate Bridge. It's Art Deco. The Hoover Dam is Art Deco. Of course it was the Boulder Dam when it was built. Barbara knew all these things. She was a very smart woman.

Q: I think we need to talk about, at least mention, the hurricane. That is why so much of the South Beach Area -- the Reason that the district is so big is because of that act of nature.

A: We all take that as fact. It happened... Similar things happened elsewhere in the world. A competing Art Deco district is where one world Congress took place is Napier, New Zealand. Similarly, the entire city of Napier was destroyed by an earthquake, which by gift of timing caused everything that was built to replace it to be in the popular style of era, which was Art Deco, and that's what happened here. The hurricane wiped out the City of Miami Beach in 1926, and so everything that was built between '27 and World War II tended to be Art Deco. Also, there was a unique situation that only six or eight architects built 90 percent of the buildings -- designed 90 percent of the buildings. Henry Hohausen chief among them. Almost everything he touched was a masterpiece of design: the New Yorker Hotel was a Henry Hohausen design.

Q: And that got destroyed?

A: Yes, it's gone. It lives on as the logotype, the emblem of the League. Logotypes, marketing and symbols were one of Barbara's most brilliant concepts. You'll hear me talking more later about how Barbara packaged the Art Deco district and made it a product.

Q: Can we talk about the demolition of the New Yorker and The Senator as part of the struggle? Those were crucial moments, would you say?

A: Yes. Those were the two most pivotal moments. The third most pivotal moment was in March of 1979 when the National Register of Historic Places inducted the Miami Beach architectural historic district into the roles of national historic places. I think that was Barbara's singular, signature great achievement. And the demolition of the New Yorker and the Senator were her two great low points. Her greatest failure -- not only hers, of course, the entire preservation movement here in South Florida.

Q: That must've been a blow to morale?

A: I was there for all of them. The joy of the listing -- we said through the years that we had the first 20th century historic district and many have said it was the largest historic district. Maybe none of that is exactly true. There

are technicalities in other districts. For example, there is a much larger Art Deco district in Eritrea, Africa, and I mentioned the one in Napier, New Zealand. There is competing Art Deco Districts, which only goes to show, once again, that it was the first truly worldwide design movement in history of the world. There's Art Deco in every continent of the globe except Antarctica.

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That's one of the reasons we started the World Congress, because we knew there was Art Deco everywhere and that it all was worthy of preservation because once it's gone, it's gone.

To focus a bit on the Senator and the New Yorker demolition. Well the New Yorker came first, early on. I don't remember the year that the New Yorker was demolished but Barbara was still young. We protested. There were proposals to save the hotel. There were adaptive re-use proposals put forth by the firm of Bouterse, Perez and Fabregas, of which the principle architect was Andy Fabregas who was chairman of the League, early on, and one of Barbara's great allies and they gave free architectural planning services to the owners of the New Yorker, the two principals who had no vision and no understanding and were, in fact, almost vindictive to Barbara were Abe Resnick, who later became a city commissioner and is revered here for spearheading the Holocaust Memorial, here. I respect that, but I certainly don't revere him because he stabbed Barbara in the back and lied to her and he tore down the New Yorker. And his partner Dave Donielski whose motto was "if I own the Mona Lisa, it is my right to destroy it." You could argue that property rights question forever. We're certainly glad the Mona Lisa wasn't destroyed and the New Yorker was and we're not glad about that.

So, Barbara made it into the emblem of the league, which is a very attractive... Well, Andy Fabregas drew it. It came out of his office. It's the New Yorker and a palm frond and the moon peeking out from behind it which clearly says, "*Moon over Miami*," the great song, the great movie, and it evoked a feeling and romantic feeling that would lure people here. Everything Barbara did was about bringing people here to appreciate what we have and that's why she had a positive mission and a positive vision, which are so important in leading worldwide movements.

The New Yorker was torn down, eventually, after almost a year of protracted negotiations. We had pickets during the demolition. There was even danger that falling concrete slabs would kill someone. Mr. Resnick and Donielski were slightly embarrassed by the ongoing protests so they sent their employees over to counter protest. There is very notable pictures in our archives of the counter protesters carrying signs "Deco is Ugly", "Deco Smecklo." It was hilarious if you look back on it now. How blind they were to the obvious.

So that was our first great loss and it really galvanized Barbara's supporters into understanding that this was a little more serious than the they might have imagined, and that the buildings actually were under threat, especially because of the South Beach redevelopment project which wanted to level all of them. We gradually gained preservation protection only through the wise visionary leadership at the Dade County level, the county level. The city continued to oppose it and refused to work with Barbara literally until she died.

Since that time the city is completely different and it gradually as we got a majority on the city commission we brought in staff and leadership into the city that understood the importance of historic preservation in a balance with economic development. And the city today is very good about protecting the Art Deco District and serving the needs of businessmen. They found a very good balance and they're walking a fine, high wire to do it.

But in the '80s -- Barbara died in 1990 -- and her last great battle, her last publicity campaign, was saving the Senator, which also she failed to do and the League failed to save it. That was the more important loss because it resulted in... Barbara had been working now for bringing public awareness -- international awareness -- to this district for well over 10 years and when the Senator was torn down and then Barbara passed away shortly thereafter, people realized that something was going on here that shouldn't be destroyed and the city then passed, the city commission, passed the strongest preservation measures ever seen in Florida.

45:00

They finally prohibited demolition -- flat out, it's prohibited. It had just been, before that, you shouldn't tear it down, we will delay your permit to tear it down by six months. There was no prohibition. It was only persuasion. Well, now when the Senator was lost, the city commission was galvanized by public opinion, really, and, I think, by a large majority -- I don't think it was unanimous, I'm sure Abe Resnick voted against it. But maybe by 6 to 1 or 5 to 2, the laws were changed and demolition of historic buildings was prohibited.

I think in the history of the district that might be Barbara's greatest success -- making the public aware that these were treasures that had to be protected.

Q: Still threats, though.

A: Yes, the threats now are chipping away like the water dripping, forming the Grand Canyon. Every renovation project presents new threats and challenges. All developers want more rent from their properties and they think one way to do that is built more stories on top. Ultimately, you destroy the historic district and people will not come here to see it. And then you have wide a variety of choices of other resorts they could go to. There are thousands of beach cities in the world. We're the only one that has an Art Deco District and many people come here solely for that reason. The Art Deco District of Miami Beach is the second-largest tourist destination in Florida, studies have shown.

Q: After Disney World?

A: Yes, Disney World is a much larger destination but the Art Deco District is second. It's not even really called the Art Deco district around the world. It is more known as South Beach. Just a name I don't like to use, but I will use it because everybody, like Art Deco, it's what everybody calls it, so you have to go along with it.

So you call the style Art Deco and you call the area South Beach -- those are the facts of life. And South Beach embodies much more than an architectural/vacation resort: ocean, sun, surf, nightclubs, drinking, hedonism, barely clad bodies. Things you can really make money with.

Q: Mayor Matti Bower made clear she was concerned about the chipping away by the City Commissioners if any changes are allowed that are out of character.

A: That's another reason why Matti is the greatest mayor in Miami Beach history.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Michael, is there anything else you would like to add?

A: Beware of people who think that the preservation movement started when they got here. Hundreds of people think everything started with them. Let me be very clear. It started with Barbara Capitman. She never gave up, she never quit and everything that we have today in the city's burgeoning economic vitality, nightclub scene, historic properties, hotels, we owe it to Barbara Capitman. I think she had as much importance to this city as Carl Fisher, as Julia Tuttle did to the city of Miami, or as Henry Flagler. Barbara is in that constellation of the greats of Florida history. So whatever you have in your interviews with others that contradicts that, you should sniff that out.

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