



Interview with Architect Robert Swedroe

Kathy Hersh: My name is Kathy Hersh and I'm interviewing Robert Swedroe for the Miami Beach Visual Memoirs Project. The date of the recording is May 12th, 2015.

Okay I want to start with, since these are memories and it's good to start early and move forward usually, let's see what comes up when we talk about, you first came here in 1960? What brought you here?

Robert Swedroe: My wife.

Kathy Hersh: How did she happen to do that?

Robert Swedroe: I met her in college and I was one year ahead of her. I was on a five year architects program, she was in a four year program.

Kathy Hersh: And where was that?

Robert Swedroe: At Carnegie Institute of Technology, now known as Carnegie Mellon where my son graduated. One of my sons graduated there.

Kathy Hersh: So not knowing Rita's background, was she from here, or?

Robert Swedroe: For all intents and purposes, her family moved here in 1944? Right. '44.

Kathy Hersh: So she said if you marry me you have to live in Miami?

Robert Swedroe: Not exactly. But I had - I don't know if I've ever been here before I met you. I don't think so. But when we got engaged I came and worked here for the summers for Don Reiff, a well-known architect and Wiener Dutkin was another firm I had worked for.

And then we - we graduated together and I went to Yale for my masters degree and Rita went to New Haven State Teacher's College for her teaching degree and she taught and I worked while I was at school in Yale.

And then when I graduated I came down here to work for one of the architects that I had worked for during the summer, Don Reiff. And he was a beach person, a beach architect and it

wasn't really challenging enough and I was looking for a firm that could use my abilities.

Someone told me Morris Lapidus' firm has got a lot of work and is looking for designers. Something like that. And I went there on Lincoln Road and I said my name, here's my portfolio, I'm here for an interview. No I didn't say that. I just gave him my name and they said, we're not interviewing now. I said could you give this portfolio to someone in charge. She went away and Lapidus' partner, Abbott Hall came out. And if you heard that name, Abbott Hall, [inaudible][03:39] he was a partner. All he did was open the door and wave me in and the interview was very short, I was hired and the first project I worked on was the Hebrew Academy. Rabbi Gross, right? I worked with Rabbi Gross and that was my first project with Morris Lapidus.

Kathy Hersh: What year are we talking about? Is this -

Robert Swedroe: About 1962.

Kathy Hersh: Okay. And what year was the Fontainebleau built and the Eden Roc?

Robert Swedroe: Probably built in - what year were we married, in '58?

Rita Swedroe : Fifty-six.

Robert Swedroe: We were married in '56 so the Fontainebleau was built two years before we were - right?

Rita Swedroe : One year.

Robert Swedroe: Okay so the Fontainebleau was about 1955, '54. Fifty-four sounds familiar but you can check that out. And we were married there.

Kathy Hersh: So he had - in the Fontainebleau?

Robert Swedroe: Yes.

Kathy Hersh: It was very controversial at the time, the Fontainebleau.

Robert Swedroe: Oh, yeah.

Kathy Hersh: And so working for Morris Lapidus was undertaking to work for someone who was controversial.

Robert Swedroe: Oh, very. He was very controversial. And the adage was, it's a chance to grow, he'll be as good as his designers are, he's a showman, he can put things together, he's a people person and he was. He came out of a background in New York from store designs, which he was very good at and he had a very - he was here at the right time, okay?

When the beach was booming and the only - I mean there was competition. It was Melvin Grossman, was another big firm.

Kathy Hersh: So you say he was a people person. Was that you feel was part of his success?

Robert Swedroe: Well, yeah, he was very articulate and he was connected. He knew the right buttons to push and politicians and so on and he was adventurous which was good. He always challenged us. I worked my way up to be senior designer. I had my own space with my own people that worked for me. And the discussion came up at the Lapidus event of Lincoln Road and I mentioned it and Laurinda Spear picked it up and she tactfully spoke about it like an attaché.

One man in a big office does not design all his buildings. It's done - he could be the leader, director, he can critique it, but he doesn't sit down and design everything. It's the workers like I was that physically did the work. And she was very articulate about that. And Joe Farcus was another one. He chimed right in and said the same thing.

You got two offices, one in New York, one in here, you got 20 people and 20 people - you think he's sitting in his office designing buildings? Doesn't work. No, no. He was a good business man, I learned a lot from him. How to run an office. He would always say, "In order to be an architect you want to practice - see your buildings built, you got to learn how to run a business first. First it's a business. If you can't run a business you can't see your buildings built."

So I learned the means and methods of accounting and bookkeeping and job reports from him.

Kathy Hersh: Was he, aside from Frank Lloyd Wright, one of the first architects to design the furniture and the carpeting and the things that went with the building?

Robert Swedroe: No. He had an interior design firm which was a carryover from the store design work that he had done in New York so even when I joined the firm, they had an interior design firm segment to the office. So he got into all aspects, both exterior and interior and I think he really enjoyed the interiors more than the buildings. The buildings were an envelope to express what he wanted to do with furniture and color and things inside the building.

Kathy Hersh: And what was his sort of key philosophy? What was he trying to do? What kind of a statement was he trying to make?

Robert Swedroe: I don't know that he really thought about making a statement. I think people today try to think that there was some mystical

goal he was trying to achieve. He was trying to be creative like all architects are in each and every endeavor and he wasn't really practicing any one particular style. They tag him for MiMo architecture or whatever.

He did all styles of buildings by just looking at the repertoire from very stark massive looking office building, like in Washington the G Street office building. We did Fancival Hotel in Washington with a dome. That was innovative. The Circle Hotel, it may still be there. It had a retractable domed roof over a swimming pool. Who'd have think it?

He tried to be creative and a number of examples to be unique. He really wasn't looking at the past as to what came before.

When we were doing apartment work the client dictated what he wanted, how many units, how big and so on. You got a piece of land - he bought it for so much money your job is to design a building with so many units, fill in the program, make it work. And that kind of stuff was handed off to me.

He wasn't, I don't think, that interested in that work as much as he was in the more flamboyant or colorful hotel work. So I got most of the apartments - and they were rental buildings. There were no condos at the time, they were mostly rental buildings.

- Kathy Hersh:** So he went from designing the Fontainebleau to the Eden Roc next door and those are two - were two vastly different -
- Robert Swedroe:** Right, right, right. He wasn't going to do two buildings that look alike, especially with two clients that hated each other, so.
- Kathy Hersh:** He was part of the cause of that feud was he not?
- Robert Swedroe:** He what?
- Kathy Hersh:** Wasn't it the owner of the Fontainebleau angry that Morris Lapidus, his architect, then did the Eden Roc?
- Robert Swedroe:** Yeah. Happens all the time. Yes.
- Kathy Hersh:** You were assigned to do a firehouse by Morris Lapidus.
- Robert Swedroe:** Yeah, one of many jobs. It's a 9-to-5 job working for Lapidus and so on. He got the commission to do a fire station, signed the contract, and knew nothing about the contract, it was not given to me and I wanted to learn about designing fire stations by going to a book so I went to the - either somebody knew somebody or I did it on my own, but I contacted the head of the Coral Gables Fire Department and told him we're planning to do a fire station in Miami Beach, the location, what the program was, size and so on and I went down there and he

toured me around and I took a lot of notes and I got educated enough to come and do the building.

Kathy Hersh: Why did you have to go to Coral Gables?

Robert Swedroe: Bob - Robert Able [phonetic], Bob Able there's a name I didn't remember. You remember him? Was in a wheelchair even then. Remember? Or he was on crutches then. He was the contractor who built that fire station. Bob Able. He was a beach contractor.

Kathy Hersh: Why did you have to go to Coral Gables to find out how to build a fire station?

Robert Swedroe: Because there was nobody really in Miami Beach that I could turn to that knew anything. I don't recall exactly the details but I wasn't getting any information from the fire chief, from the city of Miami Beach.

Kathy Hersh: Okay. And so Morris Lapidus gave you a lot of latitude it sounds like.

Robert Swedroe: Well he gave - yes, he would give me a lot - that was one good thing about him. He gave you a lot of latitude and, of course, he would review - approve or disapprove what you were doing. And that was true.

I mean I worked on many projects. I went to Baltimore. We did Beth Tfiloh, a major, major project that I worked on for a long time. That's Beth Tfiloh Temple. A huge project and I remember distinctly - I'd done all the drawings and I think I still have a lot of those drawings and you remember silly things like when he was presenting he was leaning over, pointing and his pants split. It's funny. Silly things like that I remember.

But I remember going to Baltimore with him. I think by plane or train. I knew we were in a train - it's kind of vague in my mind - and we had a lot of varied projects. Airport - Dulles Airport Hotel I worked on with him. Right here the temple, what's the temple here?

Rita Swedroe : Judea.

Robert Swedroe: Temple Judea. I have big pictures in my box because I designed it. It was the Lapidus job. But I designed it so I felt it was my job. It was a renovation. It was a remodeling job but I drive it every day so I see it every day.

But it's his job. He was the architect that got the contract, they got paid and his name's on the plate. And the same thing with my office now. I'm not designing. I still get involved in design but not at the extent like I used to. There's other people who are more capable and have people that work for me.

They call it something. I think its an Italie [phonetic] where it's a team effort, put it that way.

Technician: I'm going to change this 'cause it's rubbing just slightly and I'd rather make you a little bit clearer. There we go. Thank you.

Kathy Hersh: So after Morris Lapidus, working for him, what did you do after that? Did you go out on your own then, or?

Robert Swedroe: Well the separation wasn't just - an interesting story in itself. There was a building on Collins Avenue, 5701 Collins now, and it was a client that came from Washington, he was a plumbing contractor that made a lot of money during the war and he wanted us to design a building strictly for widows. That was his program. He wanted all one bedrooms for widows and we did that. We designed a building and the building went up and the famous lobby Lapidus stair was built and it went as far as the mezzanine and then he lost his financing and the building sat there and nobody would touch it because Steve Muss looked at it or Alex Muss, I don't know what was it at the time. I don't know the year but I could probably guess it. And it was there for several years and then Arlen, a major developer in New York came down and looked at it and wanted to buy it and convert it into an apartment building with apartments that fit the program of the day.

And I was in the meetings with Lapidus and - trying to think of the contractor who's name comes in and out of my mind sometimes. And I had a plan for the building that was different than what I think Lapidus wanted and I would argue with the client about what I think should be done. And Lapidus called me into his office one day and I remember this clear as a bell. He said, "If you don't stop arguing with the client, I'm going to take you off this job."

The story is, I won the client over, I designed the building that I wanted to have designed, it sits there today and when Lapidus said - oh, that was Arlen. That was the Arlen Company, Arthur Levine, Arthur Cohen. Arthur Cohen was the president. He just died awhile ago. Arthur Levine died about ten years ago. And they were buying into a new project what is now Aventura. It was called Biscayne Village; that was the name of it - 856 acres.

And they were collaborating with Harry Soffer, that's Don Soffer's father. Don Soffer's the developer of Aventura. So we got to work on that project. That was the largest - one of the largest residential projects in Dade County, 856 acres, if memory serves me right and Hall and Goodhew were the master planners for the project and Lapidus' firm was the designer which meant me because it was residential. And I was designing buildings in Aventura. The first mid-rise building is Bonavita and the next one was Bonavista.

What happened was at the time Lapidus was tapering down and called a meeting with Arlen and said to Arlen that he's going from a five day workweek to a four day workweek and they said that's fine but we want Swedroe five days a week. Furthermore, we want him on the site. So they built a trailer office and I had my own secretary and my own staff at Aventura and at first it was Biscayne Village and then it was Zanadoo and then it was Aventura.

Kathy Hersh: That was the 856 acres?

Robert Swedroe: Dade County - yes. City of Aventura.

Kathy Hersh: The City of Aventura?

Robert Swedroe: And when I was there that's when Chad Oppenheim and Laurinda Spear and these other people who were on a dais a couple of weeks ago were in the Lapidus office, which was on Purdy Avenue. They moved from - first they were on Lincoln Road, I was there, then they were at 1881, right? 1881, right? Across from Burdines. Meridian - 1881 Meridian.

Rita Swedroe : No, 1680.

Robert Swedroe: 1680 Meridian Avenue. And we designed that building and that's where the main office was. So I worked for him on Lincoln Road, worked from an 1880 [sic]. I was there from 1962 to 1974. And then in 1962 I became a registered architect and 1963 I got my national registration, so I had a national license to practice, anyways, while I was with Lapidus.

Anyway, I'm now up there at Aventura in a trailer with a staff designing buildings for Soffer-Arlen Group.

Lapidus decides he's cashing it in and he's going to close his office and I'm still an employee, so I was sought after by some other firms, wanted me to come work for them. I was 40-years-old, right? Forty or 41 when I decided to bite the bullet and open my own office.

See, I was going to work for Lapidus forever. I opened my own office at age 41 and I inherited the work at Aventura and a lot of other work. Now some of the work up there was the Hamptons and next door was the Terraces. Two competing entities just like the problem that Lapidus had at the Fontainebleau and Eden Roc. Two competing entities. One was a client that I had still have and I'm still doing work for - it's true. Elliot Monter, Gerald Monter was his father, now working for his son.

Next to him was the Terraces of Turnberry, Larry Silverstein who built the World Trade Center, okay and he was one of

three people that built the Terraces. Both buildings, same program, same size building, same competition, competing for the same client, same architect. Each one telling the architect you can't do this job because you're doing my job. And I got to do both of them and they were both successful.

I've since done 120 buildings in the city of Aventura. Probably 40 percent of the hi-rise, 40, 50 percent of the hi-rises, but 120 buildings that I've documented in the city of Aventura.

Kathy Hersh: So how does it feel like when you drive up there?

Robert Swedroe: Very good. Very good. And Aventura is the point, The Point At The Waterways where we have five hi-rises, I have 66 townhouses, several club facilities, gatehouses and so on. Fifteen years of one project because it was - that one project alone went through presidents and I could probably name them all. Oh I have them all documented.

Every time a president - it was Costain of London, then it was Coscan of Toronto, then Coscan of Florida. There was an upheaval over so many years each time and what do you do when a new person comes in? They clean house, right? Five times that happened, five times I was the first one brought back. So I was there from the beginning, I was there for the end. So I did every building at The Point At The Waterways. Fifteen years. That's my biggest project in the City of Aventura.

Kathy Hersh: What's the project that you feel most pride about in terms of originality or - do you have a favorite?

Robert Swedroe: The next one. Now The Point At The Waterways and the buildings I did around Aventura that was many stories there. The other great stories of Williams Island where I did all the buildings at Williams Island. There are ten hi-rises, I did nine of the ten. I didn't do the last one because it wasn't even supposed to be there, the Bellini, and that was just finished. But my daughter's doing work in that building now. She has a contract to do offices in that building.

But I did all the hi-rises, designed all the hi-rises on that building for Jules Trump. Jule Trump bought the island called Williams Island because his father's name was William, that's why he bought it, because it was called Williams Island. True story. Ask him.

And he lived at Turnberry in Aventura and I was the architect for Turnberry and he learned everything about the success of the buildings at Turnberry and he hired the same architect, me, same landscape architect, Taft Bradshaw and the same team. And we had to do a better mousetrap because they're closer to the ocean, they have golf course, and we did. We did different

things, different designs that made Williams Island successful. So one success begets another.

So from the first building 3000 Island Boulevard, they got 2800 Island Boulevard, then 2600 Island Boulevard. I did all the buildings. If I wasn't the architect of record I was designer architect.

The last site he couldn't figure out what to do. We gave him all kinds of options and it was too complicated for him. He sold it to WCI who was my client. I did 40 hi-rises for them on the West Coast of Florida. All up and down the West Coast of Florida. So WCI bought that site and then at last the biggest and best building of Williams Island called Bella Mare and I'm the architect for that building, 216 units all with direct entry private elevators.

Getting to the best building or claim to fame, there are several. Bal Harbour Tower in Bal Harbour was the revolutionary breakthrough in hi-rise design.

Kathy Hersh: What was different about it? What was the breakthrough?

Robert Swedroe: The breakthrough was the developer, Cal Covens, friend of Jimmy Hoffa, really tough guy, builder, down here built a lot of buildings, he built Bal Harbour one-on-one. He built several buildings but Bal Harbour - he just finished Bal Harbour one-in-one. Huge monstrous building in Bal Harbour.

Kathy Hersh: Okay, let's pick up on the Bal Harbour Tower. **[27:57]**

Robert Swedroe: Bal Harbour Tower, Cal Covens just finished a building, a huge building, big apartments because the apartments were getting bigger and bigger and I pointed out to him that the elevators were in the middle and when you get off the elevators the best apartments were either end of the building so you had to walk the furthest to get to the best apartments. That didn't make any sense to me. That was conventional design.

You had to walk down hallways and meet - maybe see people you didn't want to see, you had to build a hallway and you had to decorate it, you had air conditioning, you had to light it, you have to clean it and there's no income from it. And all the apartments faced one way or they face another way. I got a better idea. Let's eliminate the hallways altogether and let's do everything with private elevators.

I was able to convince him and he was the first client - a big building, Bal Harbour Tower to go with that concept direct entry elevators where we have no hallways, you access your apartment vertically by an elevator. You eliminate halls, you pick up ten to 15 percent of additional area within the same envelope, you now have more area to put into apartments that

you can sell. Plus your apartments now are not one directional they are through view. And we invented the term "sunrise to sunset."

If you think of Bal Harbour Tower or any of these buildings, sunrise is on one - you can stand in one location and look at the ocean and the bay, you can see the sunrise and you can see the sunset.

You bring your elevator up to the middle of the unit so it's better than a house. In a house you enter the house - the front door from the street and you have to traverse the house to get to the view side of the house. With a private elevator concept, you bring the elevator up in the middle where you have one side for your primary spaces, living room, kitchen, dining, master bedroom and on the back side you have your secondary spaces, your laundry and your second, third and fourth bedrooms. And we did that and Bal Harbour Tower became a huge success.

Nobody knew what we were doing with private elevators. We did two more buildings at Aventura called - what are the two buildings Rita?

Rita Swedroe: [inaudible][30:33].

Robert Swedroe: The two buildings at the Waterways, I and II. Two identical hi-rises in the Waterways. One private. We had three buildings built before anybody knew what we were doing. Then the whole world - all the architects and they came and screwed things up because they bastardized the concept, laws, the Elevator Commission went nuts, they started to write laws. We were doing a job up in the Panhandle with private elevators and the building officials said he never heard of that. He wasn't going to allow it. He never heard of such a thing.

So we had to go there with a lawyer and convince him of the concept and the safety and so, anyway.

So every building we do now we start out with direct entry. 1 Island Place, the second and third hi-rise with private elevators was 1 Island Place I and II.

At the Waterways I did ten hi-rises and three of them were at this transition point. As soon as we learned about private elevators - sorry, four of them. Four of the ten have designed with private elevators. The private elevated buildings have the highest resale value, they're the most in demand, they don't cost any more than a conventional building and this was a revolutionary concept.

Kathy Hersh: It doesn't cost any more to put in all those elevators?

Robert Swedroe: No, it doesn't. The reason it doesn't cost any more because within the same given buildable envelope you're having a lot more elevators and that expense goes up which you're picking up ten to 15 percent of the area that would - you'd have to build light, air condition, clean, that you had nothing for. It's just becomes an expense. With the private elevator concept that area now becomes saleable. It also decreases your monthly maintenance. You don't have calls. You don't have hallways where light bulbs go out, carpets to be changed, cleaned, so on. It doesn't exist.

You have privacy. You don't have cards to go down. It was truly a revolutionary concept, documented in the video "Edge of Entry."

There was a major lawsuit - it's still going on - where one architect in Washington - from Houston was suing an architect in Washington because he infringed on his building with private elevators.

I got a call from California, they heard about me, I became an expert witness and as it turned out, the architect from Texas who was suing the architect in Washington copied one of my buildings, exact, exact and they proved it because I spoke at the LIU - what is it, Land Use Committee Seminar, their major seminar and I spoke about direct entry elevators to a group of builders and architects to a standing ovation. And I don't speak publicly. I hate speaking publicly. And that guy, that architect, was on the panel with me, on the dais with me and the intellectual property lawyers that represented the architect in Washington, that hired me, bought the rights to that building and paid me for the rights so he can use it in his argument.

So the lawsuit is several hundred million dollars. And, in fact, I think a final ruling is coming down this week. This has been going on now for over a year. So that was very interesting scenario.

Kathy Hersh: So you may be in for a windfall.

Robert Swedroe: Well not me. They paid me very handsomely for me to give them the right to that building that that architect said was copied, but he copied me. And never knew anybody would find out. Anyway, that's Foley, Jim Foley, got friendly with the attorney, he's an intellectual property attorney. We hired him for my granddaughter's business, which is another whole story.

Kathy Hersh: Let's talk about the art. You mentioned that you have - was doing art before you went into architecture and then you went -

Robert Swedroe: I was doing art when I was working for Lapidus. I would come home, work on weekends and I had shows. Like I said, the

frustration of having to deal with - I was going to say Mr. and Mrs. Lapidus. She was never involved in it.

But clients and budgets and so on and had the freedom to do what I want and I would do - first I learned how to do them in school and I would do them and give them away as gifts, as Christmas. Right - remember when we lived in Bay Harbour?

Kathy Hersh: You're talking about collages specifically?

Robert Swedroe: Yeah, little collages and then somebody said it was good enough go into a gallery and I submitted to - what was it? Grove House. Grove House Gallery, which looked at your work based on artistic content, salability and I guess price. And they took me on and they were selling my work.

And then a gallerist from the Fontainebleau Hotel had a big gallery in the lobby, Wencost [phonetic], Carol Wencost. Right? Today my memory is clicking. And it was the Fontainebleau Gallery and they had my name - remember? Big brass letters, Swedroe?

Rita Swedroe Yeah, but you forgot one important thing.

Robert Swedroe: What, what?

Rita Swedroe : George Berlin. If it wasn't for George Berlin.

Robert Swedroe: Well that was - that goes back to the Aventura story. Wouldn't be in Aventura if it wasn't for George Berlin. But I mean if you want to continue with the art, okay, just -

Kathy Hersh: We can go back to -

Robert Swedroe: Okay. She would be selling my art. We lived on Prairie Avenue which was close to the Fontainebleau Hotel. I get calls from her constantly. Oh these people they love your work, they're on the way to the airport. Can you reduce the price and so on. So I had a lot of that. And that was fine and I was happy to be there, make work, so we made a few dollars. Pieces were selling for like, what, \$100, couple, \$200, \$300. At the time I guess maybe that was good money.

And then I went into - well I think it's from there, Judy Drucker. You know Judy?

Kathy Hersh: Uh-huh.

Robert Swedroe: You must have interviewed -

Kathy Hersh: We've interviewed her.

Robert Swedroe: Okay. If you asked her about me and how she - she gave me my first show at Beth Sholom. She gave me my first show and as luck would have it, we got a write up - the show opened in Beth Sholom on a Sunday, right? And we got a write up in the Miami Herald and the Miami News front page, in color, both papers. The show sold out in a week to about 35 pieces. It was fantastic.

And I have pictures of my kid, my kids which will - grow and they have their own kids and grandkids. And this one said don't do it again. You made it to the top. Don't try to repeat it. I remember you told me that. You don't remember that. But I had the taste and I did it again next year with Judy Drucker giving me a second show.

I had the same write-ups from the same critics in color. I have copies in color, full page in color Miami News, which was the paper then and the Miami Herald. Three years we did it, three years in a row sold out shows at - what was the name of the gallery? Was it - it wasn't called the Beth Shalom Galleries.

Rita Swedroe : Lowe Levinson.

Robert Swedroe: Yeah. And from there I got picked up by another gallery in Bay Harbor. I had - and then - oh, and one of the shows, the third show at Beth Sholom some gallery from New York came and they said we like your work. We'd like to give you a show in New York. I said I don't have any work, I sold out. You'll make more work. What was the name of -

Rita Swedroe : The Weiner Gallery.

Robert Swedroe: The Weiner Gallery. And I said, okay, on one condition. That whatever I do I want to be able to show - that was the second year that it happened - I said I want to be able to show in my temple next year, Beth Sholom.

So I had two shows that year, I had eight sell out shows in seven years. That's my claim to fame. Eight sell out shows in - that number's gotten expanded by Bobbi and some of the things she writes up, but -

Kathy Hersh: But then you stopped.

Robert Swedroe: I stopped for 33 years to open up my own office, right? Right. Right.

Kathy Hersh: There was no time to do the art?

Robert Swedroe: No, no time to do the art.

I did get talked into going to Pittsburgh and giving a course in collage, right? You were there. We went to Pittsburgh as an

from the university and I don't know how I did it but I got people prepared with information and things to do and they actually all did collages.

We were there for another reason though, weren't we?

Woman: Just probably a reunion.

Robert Swedroe: Maybe. So I didn't start up again until the story I told you about the Big House Gallery in 2006. And from 2006 until now - I was producing about 100 pieces a year while running a full-time office and I still go to work ten to five every day and come home and I worked last night. I really felt it last night and I shouldn't be doing this. I was dragging my ass really tired.

I'm best working Saturday's. I can work all day without eating, just quick snack and some drinks but I can just put in the time and generate the work. And when we go in the studio I'll show you.

I have a show coming up. I won a competition in the city of Hollywood. I had a month long show in Hollywood, a solo show for a month. But that was last show, wasn't it? That was in March - when was it? March?

Rita Swedroe : Yeah just [inaudible][42:08] he was -

Robert Swedroe: Yeah, March, March 2nd. The whole month of March. I was in three shows in Hollywood within a couple of miles of each other. I'm in a show now in Hollywood, I'm going to be in a show on Brickell, I'm in the Four Seasons. You haven't been there. You have to go there, see it.

Rita Swedroe : And then St. Thomas.

Robert Swedroe: Hmm?

Rita Swedroe : St. Thomas.

Robert Swedroe: I had a solo show at St. Thomas University. They give two shows a year. The best show is the winter show. They gave me the winter show. That was terrific. Joy was there, right? Yeah, we had a lot of people there.

Kathy Hersh: What do you think about Art Basel? Have you had any representation there?

Robert Swedroe: In it. I was in Spectra and I was in Red Dot this year. I'm not going to do it again because I like to go to Art Basel and go - there are 20 venues on the beach, 20 in Miami. You can't get to see them all in a limited time and when you're in a gallery and you're in a show and you got to be there, you can't - with one

ass you can't be on two toilets, right? One of her favorite expressions.

Anyway, it wasn't worth it to me. I now have a gallery that represents me in Cleveland and I just contracted with a rep and I just like doing the work. I hate selling, I really hate selling. I just like to produce the work. I'm looking for a representative to, which I found, which is a dealer that take 50 percent, which is fine.

And the show on Brickell is interesting, Bank of Brazil they don't take a commission. They're promoting art, local Miami artists. Three artists, two artists, one from Brazil, me and a sculptor. That's three artists. That's on June 14th. And the work is just laid out there.

Kathy Hersh:

What we hear in all of the people that we've talked to and all the history that we've heard covered from people's memories is Miami Beach keeps reinventing itself. It has a knack for having slump periods and then coming up again.

Being here since 1960 you've probably seen a lot of this ebb and flow and transitions. Would you care to comment on that?

Robert Swedroe:

Well it's a vacation mecca and it is fortunate in it has assets people are looking for. Beautiful beaches, you have great weather, you have the newest most spectacular hotels, the best shopping, you're in close proximity to airports. I mean it just naturally has a lot of things going for it.

Lincoln Road we remember the down time when... [telephone rings] - I hope they're not calling for me.

[off topic talking]

Kathy Hersh:

Lincoln Road you started to talk about.

Robert Swedroe:

Well, remember Lincoln Road and that was the folks the topic of discussion that FIU promoted. It was a beautiful event at the W Hotel, but we thought it was very restrictive. Just limiting it Lincoln Road.

But if you're going to break it down and I asked and challenged them: why don't you find out what kind of a fee he got to do Lincoln Road. It was probably next to nothing. I mean those kind of commissions wouldn't support the two offices, offices in Miami and office in New York and it was a lark. I mean it was a jumble of opportunities to do fanciful stuff. It's just like Joe Farcus was a lot more articulate about it than I was and it's now become like the Taj Mahal.

Well Miami is fortunate to have it, whatever it is, people love it, they come here, they enjoy it. What's happening is the big

companies are coming in driving up the prices, changing its character. The art studios that used to be here and all the nice restaurants they're getting kicked out because the rents are going up and the greed, the money and accruals and so the character there is changing and the city really - I don't know - should find a way to preserve it.

I didn't really know what I was getting into. I should have known that it was all about Lincoln Road because my work with Lapidus didn't involve Lincoln Road at all because I was involved with the money making projects not Lincoln Road which I'm sure was not a profitable venture for him. It was a lark.

But anyway Miami Beach fortunate that it's had all this great weather. We haven't had any big storms lately, new hotels and now we're finding that Miami in itself is the capital of South America and you have all this Latin money coming in and Latin developers. As countries go south the problems they have in all these countries, the money comes out, it comes here, they invest and they build and they take chances. They overpay for things but they're just driving up the value of everything and that I guess is a good thing.

When Miami Vice came here it was an outgrowth of the cocaine cowboy era and it was such a black eye to the city of Miami Beach, city of Miami and it has all this negative publicity, but if you saw the documentary it really made the city. All that money that came in bought a lot of stuff, built a lot of buildings, created a lot of movement in the city. Miami Vice followed, further extolling the good and the bad of Miami. And now you've got people from not only all over the world, but all over the country coming here, driving up prices.

We met today, talked about the prices from \$1,000 to \$3,000 a foot. We're almost on the par with New York for selling price per square foot so when you say Miami reinvents itself, I don't think you can attribute that to any one individual. I think it's a combination of economic happenings, political happenings.

Kathy Hersh: Carl ,you're going to have any more questions?

Carl Hersh: No, I'm fine.

Kathy Hersh: Anything you want to project ahead for future scholars who may be perusing this archive and click on your name or maybe by then who knows whether you click on it or you just think you want to see it and it comes popping up.

Robert Swedroe: Well I'm really not - I'm not sure. I mean ask me a question and I'll answer you as best I can, but I'm not -

Kathy Hersh: Is there a future for Miami Beach?

Robert Swedroe: I think the future is now. It's only getting - the island's only seven miles long and one mile wide and we had the mayor a few years ago, Mayor Gelber to our house for dinner. We have a home on the ocean. In fact we have the only ocean from home in a historical district which we developed, which I'll tell you about. Another story I didn't tell you about.

And I said to the mayor - he got very upset - I said you got to do something to curtail the development to keep the quality of life that we have now because as the city there's only so much land and the intensity of the population I think has to reach a max of 98 to 100,000. After that the quality of life is going to deteriorate. And I was right. It is deteriorating. The traffic is terrible. I mean they're beside themselves with how they're going to - now they're talking about mass transit system.

So the city wants to grow but really should it grow? And how can you stop it from growing if you wanted to?

I mean at the time we talked about it there was still time to implement zoning laws and restrictions and densities. They got FAR Florida ratios here now. You can build as high as you want. They make it very difficult but still there's nothing to curtail the growth and density because as you get denser the quality of life dissipates.

And what has happened over the years and we know a lot of the original families can't take it. They just pack up and they move. They move to Boca, Palm Beach, they're out of here. So it's now becoming I think, what do they say, like 60 percent of the people that live here weren't born here, okay? So you're getting - it's a Casablanca. The capital of South America and the Casablanca of the United States.

Kathy Hersh: Oh I know what I want to ask. Sea level rise. The predictions sound ominous. As an architect what can be done except --

Robert Swedroe: Oh you can design foundations that could support - sea level rises isn't that dramatic that you can't overcome it. Cities addressing it with what they're doing, it's a drop in the bucket. They predict that parts of South Beach are going to be under water in 20 years. I don't know. I find it hard to believe.

I got bigger things to worry about. I don't see it here. I mean I see the water rising when we have a full moon and a high tide it goes a little bit over our dock. Some of our streets get flooded. We've been here for 12 years, we haven't noticed much of a difference, have we? I don't think so.

I did want to talk to you about the Historic District and all the good that Barbara Capitman did which you know. You have that all recorded. But what you don't have recorded, there's a

second Historic District in the city of Miami Beach called Altos del Mar.

Kathy Hersh: Tell us about it.

Robert Swedroe: Altos Del Mar was an area by who is the developer? His wife lived next door, so Prairie Avenue? Oh, it's your memory. Carl Fisher. Jane Fisher was our neighbor. That should tell you how old we are. Carl Fisher's wife - am I right? Jane Fisher was our neighbor when we lived on Prairie Avenue

Kathy Hersh: You knew her?

Robert Swedroe: Well we met her. I mean she lived there. The building on Lincoln Road it's a ten stories and what's it called?

Rita Swedroe : Van Dyke.

Robert Swedroe: The Van Dyke building, as we know it, he would bring people to the top of that building and with a telescope look at the property in North Beach and would sell that land, which was undeveloped. That was what, in the 20's I guess. And that was Altos del Mar, which Highlands something - forgot the interpretation.

When my - my three children are architects. My daughter was an architect at Tulane and came for her to do her thesis, she didn't have a subject and I suggested to her that she do the area where we live. We lived there. And it was the basis of making a historic district. And when she graduated she got the backing of the city planning department and it eventually became Altos del Mar is the second designated Historic district in the city of Miami Beach.

Kathy Hersh: And what's your daughter's name?

Robert Swedroe: Lorrie. She should have been here. She could tell you about it. She'd be home by now.

Kathy Hersh: How about last name does she use?

Robert Swedroe: Swedroe.

Kathy Hersh: I've learned not to make assumptions, gets me in trouble sometimes.

Robert Swedroe: And that area now and we fought to keep that area free of hi-rises. I fought the city, I fought the state while I was doing hi-rises but I didn't want - didn't want them in my neighborhood and we were very successful to keep its - there's North Shore Park and then from the south end of North Shore Park all the way to Ocean Terrace new hi-rises.

The Burleigh House where her mother lived was the last hi-rise and then the St. Tropez got approved in 1999 and that's the northern most hi-rise in Miami Beach until this happening here at 8701 Collins the Lapidus Hotel that was torn down last month. Go there now you'll see they're still cleaning up the site.

Kathy Hersh: A Lapidus Hotel was torn down?

Robert Swedroe: Yes, yes. What was the name of the hotel?

Rita Swedroe : Well that was a Howard Johnsons.

Robert Swedroe: It was but before that it was a Lapidus hotel. What was it?

Rita Swedroe : I don't remember.

Robert Swedroe: Joy knows, Joy knows.

Kathy Hersh: Okay.

Robert Swedroe: She'll tell you. And the historic preservation board is livid that it was torn down.

Kathy Hersh: And that was what address again?

Robert Swedroe: 8701 Collins.

Rita Swedroe : It was an ugly building.

Robert Swedroe: It was a Lapidus hotel. Now there'll be a hi-rise there. But it's at the very north end of North Shore Park. There's one piece of property just north of the park that belongs to the city of Miami Beach and that's that piece. And after that it's Surfside where we are. That's Miami Beach over there. This is the first block in Surfside.

Carl Swedroe: Not to get too far off the story, when we talked on the phone you mentioned an incident with Meyer Lansky.

Robert Swedroe: Yeah, that's another whole... I've got millions of stories. Millions of stories.

Carl Swedroe: He is one of our most illustrious antecedents.

Robert Swedroe: Well, when you interview Rita she can tell you. I would go to play tennis religiously every weekend behind a walled-in, gated community. It was by invitation only. There was always a helicopter flying overhead. All the phones were tapped. I told you, Jack Cooper—you should find out who he was and his contribution to the city—Jack Cooper.

Kathy Hersh: So were you playing tennis with Meyer Lansky?

Robert Swedroe: No. No. He was too old to play tennis. But he was a good friend of Jack Cooper. And several other people would come there.

There was a preacher who didn't like him or didn't like the sound of the tennis and he complained to the city and looked up and found you can't have an accessory use on a piece of property without a principle use. That's the law today. So Jack Cooper didn't have a principle, so he built a gorgeous home. Nobody lived there, but he build it just so he could satisfy that part of the law. And that's where the black limos would pull up. That's where Meyer Lansky would come and go in and they would meet there when I would play on the weekends. I'm sure it was in use all the time but I was working for Lapidus at the time. I did a few jobs for Jack Cooper. I'll tell you a quick Jack Cooper story.

Kathy Hersh: Is he still alive?

Robert Swedroe: No. Jack Cooper died. Brilliant, brilliant man. The Indian Reservation. You know the Indians? They don't have to conform to any zoning laws or taxes or anything. Seminole Indians. Well, I designed to first building for Jack Cooper which, was a cigarette building. It's out there in Pembroke Pines, where I just came from. It's probably still there.

Kathy Hersh: What do you mean by a cigarette building?

Robert Swedroe: You could go buy and not have to pay taxes because it was a Seminole Indian building. He built it for them and he was able—he was always figuring ways to get around the law and he was kind of a shady character but very well liked and admired. Very articulate. And we did the cigarette building. I wish I could think of it. It was called something else. But you could go there and buy cartons of cigarettes and not have to pay that heavy tax on it. Windfall. And then the big Seminole Indian... What? It was a building we did for him. What was it called? Now my memory's really going.

Kathy Hersh: Not the Hard Rock Café?

Robert Swedroe: No, no it was way before that. He had some great ideas. But this other one was built... It was the second building we did. It was much bigger. Which also circumvented taxes. He had all kinds of great ideas and plans incorporating this... and this was the beginning. That's when all the tribes all around the country got wind of the things he was doing and they began to do the same thing.

Kathy Hersh: How much are handouts part of doing business?

Robert Swedroe: It was rampant. It was... it was bag men in the open. Name some of the wonderful politicians. Joe Malek, right.

Rita Swedroe: There's a book that names them all.

Robert Swedroe: Alex Daoud wrote a book. He was another one.

Kathy Hersh: We haven't interviewed him but I have his phone number. I'm going to give him a call.

Robert Swedroe: Alex Daoud? Good luck.

Kathy Hersh: Somebody told me that he put his phone number in his book. That he is obviously not shy about talking to people.

Robert Swedroe: There was a big story about him and his daughter. She was suing him. She was throwing him out of his house. She owned the house.

Kathy Hersh: Could be very interesting.

Robert Swedroe: A lot of crazies. Bob Turchin was a commissioner. A great guy. I don't think he was – maybe one of the few – that was straight. And his son, John. John Turchin, do you know him? He'd be a good one for you to interview because he did some of the nightclubs here in Miami Beach when he was younger. John Turchin.

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