

## Jack Finglass Interview

Kathy Hersh 0:00

My name is Kathy Hirsh. I'm interviewing Jack Finglass in a 1951. Norman Geller, historic home for the Miami Beach visual memoirs project and the date is April 20 2022. Jack, how would you describe the current state of historic preservation on Miami Beach?

Jack Finglass 0:22

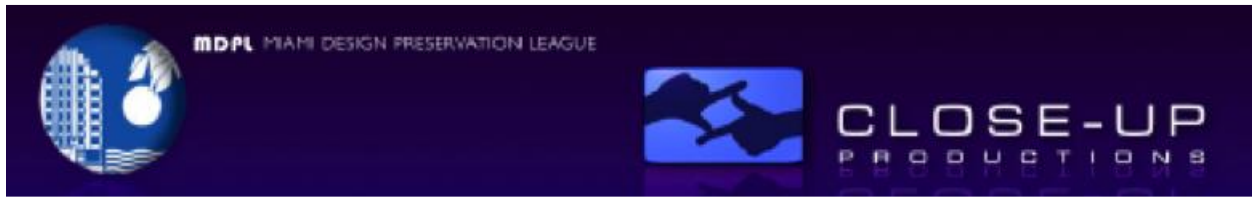
Very good question very, very general. And I'll try to hone it down a bit. There are many problems today that didn't exist when Barbara Capitman started her work in the 50s. The main one being the attitudes, and also climate change. When we use those two as the basis of the conversation, the attitudes vary tremendously depending on where you are in the city, and what you do for a living. And, and where you think the city should go. politically and architecturally, and development wise, we have a city which is on a barrier island, and the water in the ocean is rising, as most people realize. And also, it's rising under us as well through the coral stone. And so we have flooding, in some cases, it's rather severe and other cases, it's relatively minor. But in all cases, it's going to get worse. And it probably will not get any better because there's really no way known to stop it at this point. By 2100, it should be considerably worse. But who knows between 2025 and 2100, there may be new sources or technology, which will certainly help us. One thing is for certain to build a wall around the island is not practical, because the water also comes from underneath. The attitudes vary. And there are some people who are specifically in the preservation camp, who believe that on the extreme that most everything should be preserved and can be preserved because that's the very soul of Miami Beach. We don't want to look like Aventura or Sunny Isles. Although I'm sure there are some developers I know who work here who would love Miami Beach to become Aventura or Sunny Isles, but most of us preservationist will, I'm sure will not allow that to happen. We have a small scale city, they're only 90,000 people. There are a few big towers that punctuate the skyline on the ocean. But thank God at this point, they're very few. And the historic preservation board for the most part, wants to make sure that the scale of what we have is remains. There are many property owners on the beach, in particular on the ocean, who have maybe



10 storey buildings now, who would love to build towers that are unfortunately 30, 40, 50 storeys high on their property on the vacant part of the properties or tear historic buildings down and reinvent the beach. I don't think that's going to happen. I think our historic preservation board is very active, very strong. And there have been very few challenges to its authority. The main challenge that I see now is it's a group of developers who just basically flunked the laws. There are very strict laws that the city has, thank God and the historic preservation board, the authority that they have, up to now has never been challenged. But the recent case of the Deauville is a good example of a case where this has been challenged. There is something called demolition by neglect. And that's a very powerful tool that developers have used in the past on single family houses, commercial buildings and hotels. By not maintaining them, they reach a point where they come back to a board or the city and say we can no longer maintain the building. It needs to come down. And we have this beautiful new development plan for the property. This unfortunately is becoming more common than not. But I think the historic preservation board and the citizenry in general are very much behind historic preservation and will not allow this to take place.

Jack Finglass 4:25

For the foreseeable future. We do have significant losses. There significant fights that are still going on the Al Capone house is a very good example. So its significance is it is certified and significant. It's not one of the best houses in the city. But historically it's very important. I still have the bullet holes in the wall where the gangsters are fired audit. Everyone who wants to comes to Miami Beach, almost everyone takes a tour asked to see it. And if that isn't enough to keep it I don't What is because it's like George Washington or Miami Beach, everybody wants to go, because everybody's heard of it. The same up to this point, the Deauville was the same. Everybody knew what the Deauville was, or the Fontanebleau, or the Eden Roc. These are things that have to stay because they're a genuine part of the fabric of American history and Culture. And they need to stay because they are unique. I don't know of a single other city in the United States that has the architecture, the climate, the scale, and the culture that we have had for the past. No, since 1915, when the city was was founded. This this is these are probably the most important things that the five preservation today I think,



Interviewer 5:45

I want to ask about the Champlain tower catastrophe, and how that what impact that had on both sort of the common attitudes here and also on developers?

Jack Finglass 5:59

Oh, that's a that's a great question, because that's the core of the issue today. Many people feel that a building that gets old, 40 years or older, needs to be either dramatically repaired or removed. Because of the damage that salt in the air and the ocean have caused especially on the sand on the beach. The Champlain tower is is a is unfortunately a good example for for that train of thought, because it collapsed, unfortunately killed so many people. It's an absolute tragedy. But from what I understand, there was a division in the property ownership. Some people wanted to spend a lot of money on assessments to repair it. Some people didn't, they apparently could not come to an agreement and the tragedy happened. That's the definition of a condominium board. I've been on several boards. And I know that that's what happens and it can lead to problems. But a normal building that's maintained well, should last indefinitely.

Interviewer 7:08

Even an eighty story building?

Jack Finglass 7:10

Well, in, in sunny out today, you have 80 storey buildings that are built that I certainly wouldn't want to live in because I don't like to be above the third or fourth floor personally, and to be up that high on the water with sand underneath you. And a stone that is permeable is not my idea of safety but you know greater minds than I with great much greater pocketbooks believe that it's that's fine. And for those people may they may they enjoy their lifetimes there. I wouldn't do it because I just I just don't get that I just don't get it. There's a limit to the density and to God knows there must be a limit to the weight at some point. And with water rising from the ocean there. What what do they expect they'll be surrounding they'll be sailing around the building and gondolas, you know, that's one of the original



designs for Miami Beach was to have a canals with gond olas in them that was that was the first idea.

Kathy Hersh 8:41

I'm wondering if people even want if that affected the market for tall buildings after that disaster. It was so covered nationally every night national news.

Jack Finglass 9:00

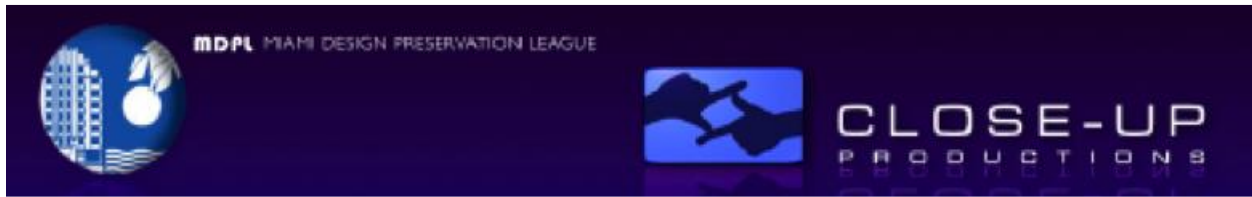
The market seems to still be very strong. There are plans for the last remaining routes and lots in Aventura and Sunny Isles to be built on. I know three. One is the Sahara that has the famous statues of the the Arab people with the camels in front, from the 19, early 50s. That's the latest one that's slated to come down there are only two left. So they're building another huge tower there. There seems to be no end to it. And of course, where does all this money come from? It's truly, truly amazing that people are willing, even though the climate issues to build to invest in property, which in 50 years may not be manageable. That's always astounded me. I certainly wouldn't want to be in a building like that, or have the responsibility of that for my children or grandchildren.

Kathy Hersh 9:53

Speaking of responsibility, what efforts are thinking long range plan Trying to save the historic buildings from sea level rise?

Jack Finglass 10:06

Well, that's that's a good question as well. There was just a, a conference last week that the city of Miami Beach sponsored about sustainability, and resilience. And those are the two key buzzwords today. And those two things are extremely important. You've got to have resiliency or else with the rising water, there will be many, many buildings that will have to come down because they cannot be saved. People talk about raising buildings. The city of Galveston was raised early in the 20th century, because of the hurricane issue and the constant constant flooding. They raised the whole city there, at that time was much smaller than it is now. But they raised the entire city. And today, of course, it's the expense to raise a building a normal house. At this conference last week, I think the figure of two or \$400,000 was mentioned. And a lot of people don't have two or \$400,000



Extra to raise their house. And when it's raised, what is that due to the historicity of the property? Now the question people don't really have a firm grasp on if I raised this house 10 feet, it wouldn't have any of the qualities or architectural details probably that it has now, I think would look rather bizarre. Frankly. That's that's a problem that has to be worked out. Obviously, we're not going to be able to die crowded. And they are raising the roads to keep them above water. But what happens then is as follows I, I consider myself somewhat of an expert on that. If you raise the road to get it above the peak flood level. Then you have a swale in Miami Beach, you have a row which is owned by the either the city or the county. And then you have a green area called a swale, which is now flat. And if they raise the roads, it becomes literally a swale. And then you have the property which is here. Well, logically, physics always says water will reach the lowest point. Well, if you raise the road and the water runs off, where do you think it's going to go? It's going to go on people's property, which is down here. They say they will build the proper drains to drain into the bay. But unfortunately, even now, there's most of the water that's runoff into the bay is not even treated. We don't have a mechanism to do that. And it's it's polluting the bay. So what do you think is going to happen when they raise the roads and even more, tremendously more water is going to go, this has to be handled by means much greater than my own. I'm not an engineer. But what they've shown us to date is not a solution. And and frankly, in places like Sunset Harbor in Miami Beach, where they did raise the roads at first, they've had many instances of the water running down into the restaurants and commercial spaces, and flooding them out. Again. Excuse me. So I don't think that's a viable a viable solution either. But there hasn't been one brought to us that is a solves the problem that any of us can see as of yet, but who knows what the future might bring?

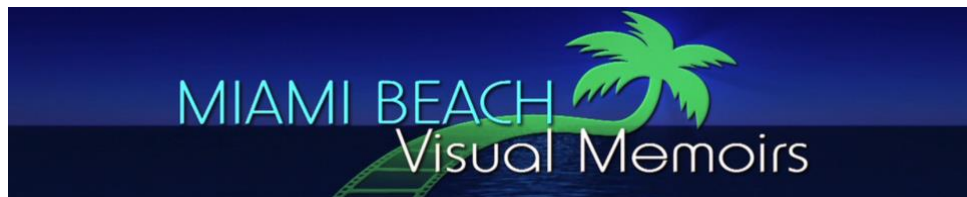
Interviewer 13:17

Yes, they install these pumps are and they were run by electricity. So...

Jack Finglass 13:29

that's another pro there's a pump block from here. It's a big, great big orange box. I don't it doesn't bother me and it does. They do work that they do take the water from the street or from the swales and pump them out. The water goes into the bay untreated and it's it's it's making the bay





problem greater. It seems like there's no even balance, you may solve a problem one point and be creates another problem somewhere else. And that's that's a tremendous issue.

Interviewer 14:02

But the situation unless they have their own generators, do they now have their own generators?

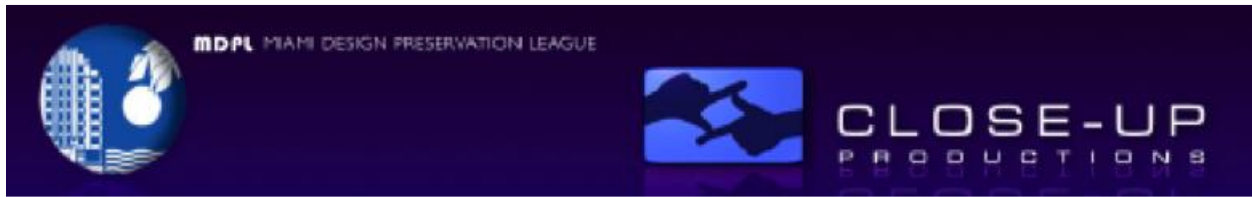
Jack Finglass 14:08

They do in Sunset, sunset harbor. They have this huge machine in the middle of one of the streets. It's like a story and half high and about 50 feet long that supposedly does that. But you look at that solution for power and for the resiliency in the neutral houses like this one. I checked into getting a generator and it can cost anywhere from 50 to almost \$100,000 to get one that works. Everything in the house. They have smaller ones that will keep refrigeration odd things like that. But most people can't afford that. And especially in the North Beach area where there's small condominiums again, you have a price Who's gonna pay for it? Some people want it some people won't. It's, it's, it's a democracy. And that's part of the problem. Because you have 50/50 vote what what do you do, you can't force people to to pay. And that's a constant constant problem here. And it single family houses are one thing. A little apartments are bigger buildings are another. And there are many buildings on the beach that have their own generators. I know, during Irma, when the power was out here, when we return, we fled to Orlando, and came back and still all the power was off. So we moved to the Fontanebleau, and they let the dogs in. They let anybody, anybody in who had who had the money. And we say there were four or five extra days until they clean up everything and the power was restored. But that is a huge, a huge problem. Again, no solution.

Kathy Hersh 15:54

One of the things that I would like for us to touch on is the destruction of private residences, some of which are extremely valuable models of architecture and, and probably ought to have been preserved. While you can tell which camp I'm in, but there seems to be an effort to try to raise consciousness about that. Is that making any headway at all?

Jack Finglass 16:23



It is. Our commission is made up of seven members, the mayor, and six elected commissioners. The city is unusual in that it's the commissioners represent the city at large, they don't represent an individual area. Like ideally, there's South Beach, mid beach and North Beach. From my point of view, each one should get to county commissioners. That's not the way it works. Here. They everyone is what's the word. They represent everyone. We have some commissioners, the majority now I think is on the side of reservation. But three or four years ago, that was not the case. And I think it will continue for a while to be heavily pro pro preservation. But they can only do so much. The laws in Florida are very, very pro development. Probably the most pro development of any state. And that's very hard. We can override state law. And the state laws are in many cases, the main problems here, because we're capped, we can only do what we can do and how we can do it.

Kathy Hersh 17:39

What is the name of that law that allows a property owner to maximize their profit on the...

Jack Finglass 17:48

I don't think that there's a law but the way the whole system is set up.

Interviewer 17:52

There's one specifically that they can sue if they're denied..

Jack Finglass 17:57

Oh, that's true. I don't know. I don't know the name of it.

Kathy Hersh 18:02

That's very much the case in Central Florida where we are living now.

Jack Finglass 18:07

They can sue. It's a property rights state so they can sue if they feel their rights are being abridged. There are people here who have sued. Well, the Deauville is is a good example. They they feel their rights are being infringed upon because the city and I think the state are trying to tell them what to do with their property. And that's in court now. So I can't say



anything about it. That's all I know about it. But I hope it has a good outcome. But the laws are heavily on the side of the developer. As far as FAR and heights of buildings and what you can add onto a building. It's all pretty much pro pro development. The historic preservation board does restrict it in historic districts and for certified historic buildings. But it's the law basically is not on our side for the most part. When I say our I mean historic preservation.

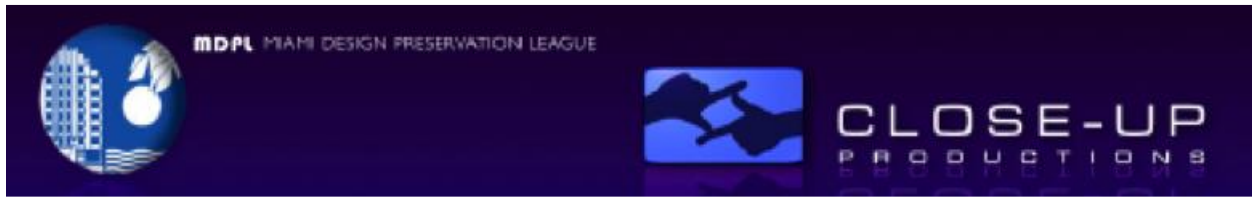
Kathy Hersh 19:09

What made you get involved in historic precedent.

Jack Finglass 19:13

That's a very easy question. Since the age of three or four. I used to live in Washington DC in mid-Atlantic area and my parents took me all the historic sites; Historic Williamsburg, to Kenmore to... you name it; Virginia, Maryland, Annapolis, Baltimore when it was a much bigger city in a historic preservation sense. And I fell in love with it in early age and I focused my education toward architecture and historic preservation I might have when I went to architecture school at Carnegie Mellon. I was definitely an odd man out because they were very Bauhausian and they thought I was you know from a different planet. Because no one wanted to keep anything that was historic or knew anything about it. In six years, we had I think one course every two years on historic architecture. Nothing was... they didn't know what Historic Preservation was in 1966 to 71. And when I went to Columbia for historic preservation, I felt like Christopher Columbus discovering America because they were well, in tune. They had a whole program just before that, they were that one of the first schools to offer that. And I'm firmly in that camp, everything I've done my entire life since has been focused on that. I'm the anti development pill, I guess you might call me the, the poison pill for developers. They have their place. And a good addition to an historic building is a fabulous thing. The problem is getting that addition to be good. That is tremendously important. There are architects in this town, who in my opinion, should not be allowed to practice the what they do, to beautiful sites, and to sites where there were gorgeous historic buildings. And now they're putting up concrete and glass Lego boxes, like next door to me. They should be number one a shame since they do live here. They should be ashamed. It's in Jewish it's called a Shonda that they they're putting they're putting a curse on themselves,





because they're so out of sync with what most people want, and desire. And it's really, it's tragic. They're making lots of money. And they're raising the values of all the properties to the point that normal people can't afford to buy anything. And that's happening around the country. But here, it's absolutely astounding, what's happening?

Interviewer 21:45

Well, it's from a historic preservation point of view downright painful to see beautiful residences. Done by Star architects...

Jack Finglass 21:57

"Starchitects."

Interviewer 21:58

"Starchitects." Can you give us an example of one that that brought everybody's hanky out?

Jack Finglass 22:06

Oh, there's so many I could keep you all day. I mean, that the let me bring up the Design Review Board, which is the crux here of this matter. The Design Review Board, I was on the historic preservation board design review board, its function is to in theory, review designs for historic properties, or new buildings, in either can be in historic districts or individual houses or outside of historic districts. And but the law is so pro pres pro development, that they cannot legally stop an owner who comes to them with a outstanding historic property, they cannot stop them from tearing it down. It's like a rubber stamp. And it's been that way forever. A small group of us are trying to change that and have harmonization between the Design Review Board and the historic preservation board. So the historic preservation board can at least have some purview oversight over all properties brought to them and the DRB to make sure that something that's vitally important, can be saved. The problem, again, is property rights. No one can force someone, if they buy a property to preserve it. It's not even in the ether. If someone is determined to tear down a non designated or certified property, they can do it. And there's no restriction on that. I had a campaign for 5800 North Bay Road, which was a house of Jennifer Lopez and Phil Phil Collins. Fabulous. I think there was Pancoast if I'm not



mistaken, gorgeous mansion with the most beautiful standard of 50 to 100 year old palm trees, just gorgeous property. And what's the DRB? Sorry, gone. I went with my signs. And I went and I sat through meetings. And I knew that it was not going to nothing was going to come of it. But that's what the law says. And the developers brought six of the biggest attorneys in town to sit behind me when I spoke, I turned to them and I said, Boy, you really brought out the big guns for this and you really didn't have to because you've won before you start before we start, that has to change. And that's what we're working toward now. Because every month 10 or 15, very interesting properties come up to the DRB and they go to the trash dump. And there's no effort. There's no effort to save even any of the architectural details. The Deauville is a good example. The very first day that that after the judge ruled the historic Deauville sign was taken down and disappeared and they wrecked the famous arch in front. It's gone. People have developers have no respect for the laws that exist and they do everything they can to worm their way around them. If they don't think they're going to be able to do what they want.

Kathy Hersh 25:13

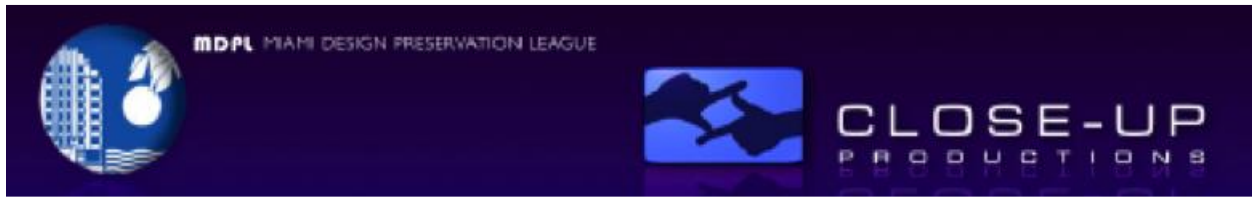
So the demolition of the Deauville has stopped.

Jack Finglass 25:16

It stopped until at least tomorrow, tomorrow is, is the deadline, they've already destroyed the portcochere, and the doorway entrance. But the rest of the building, as far as we know, is intact. There was a Cat machine a Caterpillar inside the lobby, they The owner said they were doing asbestos removal. I don't know what that means with a caterpillar. Usually, asbestos is touched by people in hazmat suits, and they take it out now with Caterpillar machines. But we're not allowed in we're not allowed to see it. Thank goodness, the city hired someone to do a - I don't know what the technical term is - it's when they use lasers to laser guided drawing system, where they have now a full set of drawings of the building down to a quarter of an inch in accuracy that they did without ever having to enter the property because the owners would not allow anybody in the property. They're so hell bent determined to get what they want.

Kathy Hersh 26:21

Is there not a market for beautiful historic houses?



Jack Finglass 26:27

That's that's an interesting point. I would like to think there is there are two examples like nicop, on the street, North Bay Road where a local architect was hired and he had to save the shell of the house. But that may be as one of 10 the people, well, let me back up and just say that ...

there's always been a gangster mentality in Miami Beach since 1915, Al Capone, all the big gangsters lived here. They came here to party, it's always been a town considered temporary. And at the height of fashion, that's the key, it's always been at the height of architectural design and fashion. And that means that something has to go, you can't keep everything and have a new generation come in with their ideas. And that's what's happening here. The glass and concrete Lego boxes are apparently the new idea that architects think is the way to go. So there's no impetus, there's no encouragement, there's no incentive for anybody to go reproduce, Spanish style, Mediterranean style, Mimo, any historic architectural style, Venetian Phoenician style, there are many beautiful Venetian style houses here on Indian Creek, there's no incentive or that's not even, that's not even an idea for most people. Because number one, to do fabulous details and a good style costs a lot more money than a concrete and glass box with no details. That's what's driven because they can get hundreds of percent profit on a building just plain concrete and glass, why should they go to the extra effort of building a building a building car cartouches and beautiful details that cost a lot of money in which the, the craftsmen are hard to find, etc. I mean, you know, it's a practical thing to for these developers, they're minimizing their input and maximizing their output, the game. You know, they're here to make as much money as humanly possible, and move on. And we have no control over that. That's that's, that's what I call the the criminality of it all, is that the people appreciate Fine Art architecture. It's not like Palm Beach, that's a nother thing I like to probably Beach has an exceedingly effective Historic Preservation Program, you dare not even think about knocking anything down there, or planning something that doesn't blend in with what they already have. It's just not done. Because there are people there are very wealthy, they want to control their environment. And they have the means and the laws behind them to protect what they have here. We've never had



that because we were the wild. They used to call us the Wild West, as far east as you could go. Because it's always been open to the newest technology, the newest trends, the newest of everything, which there's nothing wrong with that. But in proportion, you know, every 20 years, we don't need to tear everything down here and rebuild in a new city, which functionally and economically is less than less than less viable. Something that's lasted here 50 - 60 years. Some of the things they're building here today won't last 20 - 30 years. They can't the sand is bad with the concrete. Their construction practices are minimally correct. No they're not built for the ages. They're built to maximize their profit, now. And people don't seem to get that. I don't, the vast majority of people don't care. And that encourages, of course, as things become more rundown, there's another cycle of whatever the new thing will be. I'm not against new, new, creative, inventive architecture, but for God's sake, have it be related to human scale, and beauty and functionality as well. Not just a box with holes punched in it. That's the key. And I think most people in Miami Beach would stand out and shout agreement with that. But again, you have to get them motivated. And geared up.

Kathy Hersh 30:40

Maybe they feel powerless against...

Jack Finglass 30:42

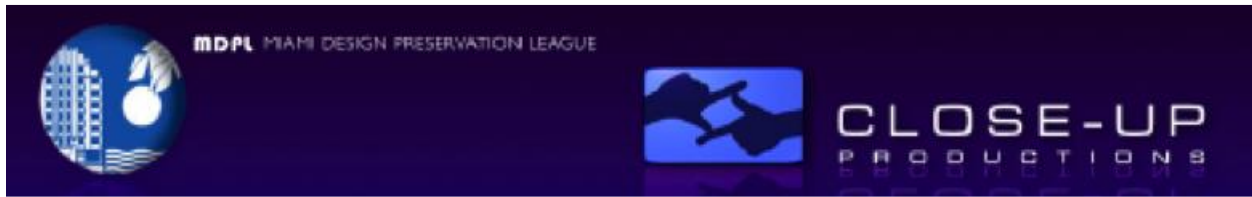
We need another Barbara Capitman. You know she chained herself to a building in South Beach. And it was in headlines all over the world. I was thinking a few days ago of doing that to the Deauville. But then I'm sure they would put me in jail and throw the key away. And I'd never get out. But, you know, it's all relative.

Kathy Hersh 31:04

Were you around during her time?

Jack Finglass 31:07

Well, I shouldn't say that. I was not knowledgeable. I was only 10, eight to eight years old. So now let's get an eight year old do or know about these things. Now my grandparents lived here and I came from 1950 on to visit them they were 301 Ocean Drive in a building, which by the way, which today is the HPB because it's falling apart. It was a brand new the current



most avant garde building of its day. And because again, lack of maintenance, and this it's right on the water, and the salt in the air. It's in dire need of some restoration on the balconies, etc. Because it's in bad shape. You must maintain, whatever you build, you are or whatever you own, you must maintain it or else you'll be in the Champlain tower position that unfortunately, God forbid, is going to happen again. Because there are boards of condos who don't follow logic. And you either do it or you have a problem. You either do it right or you have a problem. There's very little in between because time is on your side, especially on the ocean. The ocean is not our friend.

Kathy Hersh 32:26  
In terms of architecture.

Jack Finglass 32:29  
For sunbathing, it's great, but as far as your building is concerned, it's not your friend.

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