

**Steven Haas Interview**

**Kathy Hersh:** This is for the Miami Beach Visual Memoirs Project. Today is the 10<sup>th</sup> of March, 2017. My name is Kathy Hersh. We're interviewing Steven, middle initial please?

**Steven Hass:** H.

**Kathy Hersh:** H. Hass [laughter] and we are at Jack's Home Cooking. So you weren't born in Miami Beach were you?

**Steven Hass:** No actually I was not. I was born in New York in Jackson Heights, Queens, and I lived there for the first 14 years of my life. In 1972, so I'm now revealing my age, my family moved down to Miami Beach where I started high school.

**Kathy Hersh:** What brought them down?

**Steven Hass:** In the early '70s New York was a very rough place. It was a pretty scary place, and my family decided it was time to leave. The funniest thing is I had six friends I've known since birth. Our parents were friends together, and they all made the decision at the same time, so all my six friends moved the same month around the country.

**Kathy Hersh:** Boy, you were lucky because you brought your friends with you at that critical age.

**Steven Hass:** One came to Palm Beach exactly, and we're still friends. So I am turning 60 on my next birthday and we're celebrating our sixtieth birthday together.

**Kathy Hersh:** Fantastic. So...

**Steven Hass:** I'm very excited about that.

**Kathy Hersh:** ...it was part of that urban exodus, then in the '70s

**Steven Hass:** It was, exactly.

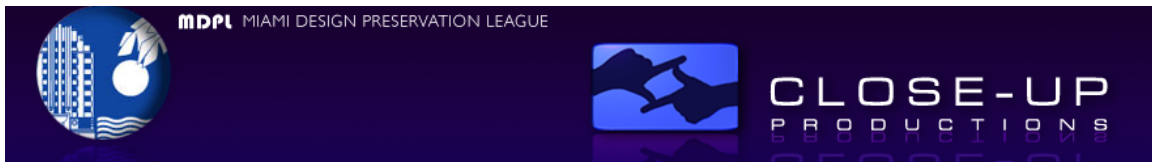
**Kathy Hersh:** ...war on crime and all that [crosstalk] kind of stuff.

**Steven Hass:** It was. New York had a huge exodus. Actually I think it was about four million people who left New York in that five year period in the early '70s.

**Kathy Hersh:** Why Miami Beach? Did you have relatives here or...?

**Steven Hass:** No, no reason. My grandfather was the engineer for the Silver Streak or the Silver Star that took everybody to Miami Beach. So my grandmother spent all her winters in Miami Beach. So my parents knew Miami Beach very well.

**Kathy Hersh:** Did you ever come down on the train as a child?



**Steven Hass:** Never. My grandmother every summer – I keep saying summer; winter, she never missed a winter from the 1940s until she moved down in 1978.

**Kathy Hersh:** You went to Miami Beach High.

**Steven Hass:** I certainly did.

**Kathy Hersh:** We've heard a lot of things about that being a very special place. Did you find it too?

**Steven Hass:** Honestly, the day we graduated was an incredibly sad day for me. It was a very special high school. We loved high school. It was number one in the state; it was number one scholastically. It was the number one football team. I've never been to a school with so much spirit. The pep rallies were deafening. The drama department was amazing. It was just an incredible high school. Everybody loved high school, and it's amazing how many successful came out of my class. I'm the class of '75, and I'm amazed. I've very close to actually everybody from high school. We just had our 40<sup>th</sup> class reunion. There wasn't anybody I haven't seen through the years. Being in the restaurant business I get to see them all. Most have stayed on Miami Beach or in Dade County, and most are incredibly successful.

**Kathy Hersh:** What do you attribute that to?

**Steven Hass:** Many of them came from prominent Miami Beach families, the forefathers of Miami Beach, the Malniks, Wayne Chaplin. His family owns Southern Wine and Spirits, Michael Milberg, who is the President of the Founders of Mount Sinai. It's all the main departments of Miami Beach. The people who are running them today are actually from my class.

**Kathy Hersh:** Wow. That must be very handy.

**Steven Hass:** It is. It's good to have friends. [Laughter]

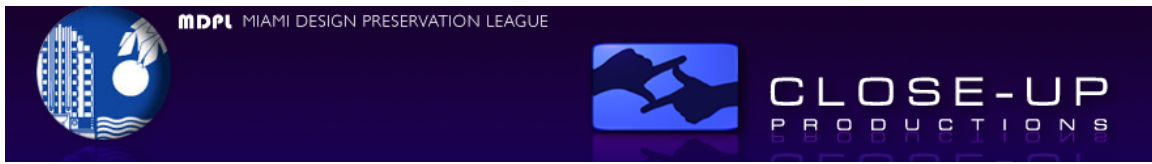
**Kathy Hersh:** Especially in your business.

**Steven Hass:** Exactly. We help each other out, and we're actually in contact with each other.

**Kathy Hersh:** So what made you decide to go in the direction you've gone in?

**Steven Hass:** Well, I've been in the restaurant business my whole life. My parents owned restaurants. My dad owned the oldest deli in Dade County. It was in North Miami Beach. It was called Sam's Deli in which Meyer Lansky had breakfast every single morning, and I was fifteen years old working after school. My father used to always tell me, that's Meyer Lansky, and I would like, and what does that mean? I just saw a little old man. [Laughter] [Crosstalk] I didn't realize who...

**Kathy Hersh:** Did you ever go talk to him?



**Steven Hass:** Absolutely especially when I ran The Forge. I ran The Forge from 1979 to 1990, and the Lansky's were a prominent family in the restaurant.

**Kathy Hersh:** That's a long period of time.

**Steven Hass:** Yes, 11 years.

**Kathy Hersh:** You must have seen a lot of things and people there.

**Steven Hass:** I can't think of anybody who wasn't there. I mean I held hands with Elizabeth Taylor, Paul Newman. I did Richard Burton's 65<sup>th</sup> birthday party. Robert Redford, Madonna, Prince, everybody came in, everybody because at that time all the hotels actually had big entertainment every night, and The Forge was the only restaurant serving after the shows. So we used to seat until 2:30 in the morning.

**Kathy Hersh:** Wow.

**Steven Hass:** So everybody from Joan Rivers, every famous comedian you can think of at that time. If it was Don Rickles who used to come in once a month because his mother lived on Miami Beach so he was always at The Forge. He was actually one of the gentlemen that always impressed me because he knew every employee's name.

**Kathy Hersh:** Wow.

**Steven Hass:** If you ever waited on him, if you every said hello to him, he never forgot your name. He was very impressive.

**Kathy Hersh:** So you have a real it seems hospitality ethic. That's something you're very proud about.

**Steven Hass:** I'm very proud of it. My parents taught me that. Customers come first, and it's how you take care of your customer. How do you make them feel; how do you make everybody feel like this is your home.

**Kathy Hersh:** So did you actually work in restaurants as a child then, in your father's [crosstalk] place?

**Steven Hass:** My dad's deli and my dad's coffee shop on Miami Beach after school.

**Kathy Hersh:** Where was that?

**Steven Hass:** That was on 71<sup>st</sup> street. It was a tiny little coffee shop. It was called The Normandy Coffee Shop. Today it's still a very small coffee shop called Mi Columbia. [Laughter]

**Kathy Hersh:** That says a lot about the demographics, doesn't it?

**Steven Hass:** It certainly does. [Laughter]

**Kathy Hersh:** Speaking of demographics, what would you say are the biggest changes that you've seen since 1972.

**Steven Hass:** Wow. Miami has changed dramatically. First of all I lived in Miami when it was a small town. Population of Dade County in 1972 was under 500 thousand. We have broken the three million mark, and we're heading to the four million mark very fast. Brickell Avenue had I think three office buildings when my restaurant which was City Hall which was on 20<sup>th</sup> and Biscayne Boulevard people would tell me, you know this area has come back. I said, no this area just started. It never was a neighborhood before. When I moved to Miami, Kendall didn't exist, and Kendall has a population today of 500 thousand people. It's changed. Aventura did not exist.

**Kathy Hersh:** Because of all the changes going on, restaurants are risky businesses, are they not? I mean, how...

**Steven Hass:** Are they risky businesses? The answer is absolutely.

**Kathy Hersh:** How do... [Crosstalk]

**Steven Hass:** It's one of the most risky.

**Kathy Hersh:** So your dad's restaurant was around for quite a time, then.

**Steven Hass:** My dad's two restaurants were around for a very long time, but they were more neighborhood casual places. Fine dining is probably the most risky.

**Kathy Hersh:** Why is that?

**Steven Hass:** First it's the costs and in Miami we're a very trendy city. So many times you're just hot until the next one opens. Unless you do it all right and if you're giving exceptional service, exceptional food and a value, the chances are you will remain for a while.

**Kathy Hersh:** I remember reading in Mama Leone's cookbook that to give them plenty of food and make it cheap enough and they will come.

**Steven Hass:** That's an old expression. I don't even know if we can hold that true today because a lot of people today are offended when they see a lot of food.

**Kathy Hersh:** Really?

**Steven Hass:** Yes. They don't want to see a lot of food because they're going to eat and they don't want to see it.

**Kathy Hersh:** That's amazing.

**Steven Hass:** I know.

**Kathy Hersh:** I remember the stories of all the delicatessens and the cafeterias [crosstalk] on Miami Beach where you got loaded up for the whole day



practically.

**Steven Hass:** Absolutely. If you went to Pumpnick's or Wolfie's or The Rascal House, which was actually all under the same umbrella, they ruled Miami Beach as far as the delis were concerned but these were huge delis. These delis sat 3 to 5 hundred people, and they would do something in the vicinity of 3 to 5 thousand people a day. Actually all the restaurants in Miami in the '60s and '70s were huge restaurants and incredibly successful because there weren't that many restaurants. Today we are overloaded with restaurants, and there're probably too many for the population that we have at this moment. We're saturated.

**Kathy Hersh:** So that adds to the risk factor obviously.

**Steven Hass:** Absolutely.

**Kathy Hersh:** Could you just reiterate again why you think the restaurants that are successful, the ones in the past compared to now. When does it - then it was - what were the criteria that...

**Steven Hass:** The criteria was large portions, reasonable prices, fast and friendly service and being very efficient. Everybody was going to a show. Everybody was going somewhere. Today it's smaller portions, much higher prices. Our rents unfortunately especially on Miami Beach are extremely high to the point it's insane. I would compare especially Ocean Drive and Lincoln Road, I would compare with Fifth Avenue in New York in prices, and that is just too high. That's why if you see [background traffic sounds] especially on Lincoln Road, the scary part is there's an evolution now going on where the mom and pops are now leaving and high end stores and the big chain stores that you in malls are all coming in because they're probably the only ones that can afford to pay the rents today.

**Kathy Hersh:** What about the restaurants? It's going to affect the restaurant business too, huh?

**Steven Hass:** It is affecting the restaurant business. Everyone's looking for new locations, and the new hot spot, the new neighborhood. The interesting thing about the restaurant business today is it was always about Miami Beach at one time or Coral Gables and Coconut Grove. Those were our night spots. Now we have such a diversity. We have Wynwood. We have the Design District. We have Edgewater. We have Brickell Avenue. We even have the Doral today. [Crosstalk]

**Kathy Hersh:** Doral?

**Steven Hass:** Doral is on fire today. Twenty restaurants have just recently opened in Doral.

**Kathy Hersh:** What's special about Doral? Tell me. [Laughter]

**Steven Hass:** It's a nice place to live. So the problem is if you're going to live in Doral,

we have such a huge traffic problem in Miami. Everybody wants to live, work and play in their neighborhoods now. So by the time you get home and go through the traffic, you certainly don't want to leave Doral. So you want to stay in Doral. So Doral is now understanding that it has to grow and become its own city.

**Kathy Hersh:** That's very interesting. My question was going to be next. How does Miami Beach drive South Florida's overall tourism? It sounds like it's spreading.

**Steven Hass:** It is spreading. We have in the last two years such incredible new hotels on Miami Beach, The Faena, the 1, the addition, the renovations of the Fountain Blue, the SLS, and all the smaller hotels like the Gale, and so many, the Red Berry. There're such great new hotels on Miami Beach and great new restaurants, but the problem is for the very first time in Miami Beach's history, it's competing against Miami. Miami has great, new hotels. The East Hotel, the SLS downtown, the J.W. Marriott, the Marriott Marquis, the Epic, the renovations of the Intercontinental which I find amazing. I think they did an exceptional job, and it goes on and on. Hotels are opening everywhere, everywhere. So Miami Beach is competing for the very first time against its own city.

**Kathy Hersh:** So is there now an overall brand that's just sort of Miami or has that always been the case or has it been Miami Beach [crosstalk] being the brand?

**Steven Hass:** I just stepped down as the chairman of the Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau. The brand of Miami has always been Miami and the beaches, and today it's still Miami and the beaches. See what Miami Beach still has is the beach, but Miami is really competing. It's going after the conventions. It's going after a lot of things that has always been strictly on Miami Beach. So now there's a healthy competition between both sides, and they are literally fighting for each other which is the benefits to the person booking the convention. [Background traffic sounds]

**Kathy Hersh:** How does it benefit tourism and general tourists?

**Steven Hass:** The same thing, it's keeping prices down because if it was exclusive to Miami Beach I'd believe our hotels would be even higher than they are today. So branding Miami as a city on its own and with things like Uber and it's so easy to get to Miami Beach, do you necessarily have to say in Miami Beach. If you're not looking for that ocean view, you could easily stay in Miami.

**Kathy Hersh:** Speaking of Uber and ride sharing, what about home sharing and AirBnB. How's do [crosstalk] you see that?

**Steven Hass:** That is seriously affecting Dade County. We have 15 thousand rooms under the AirBnB umbrella, and getting that under control, making sure that the tax revenue is going to the city, it is also affecting the hotel themselves. Fifteen thousand rooms is a lot of rooms. I understand the



price point is lower, but you're not getting the services of a hotel. You're going to be cooking in your own kitchen. You're going to be doing things like you're staying at your house, which can be fun, but I think most people who go on vacation want a vacation. That's why I personally do not stay in AirBnBs because I'm on vacation. The last thing I want to do is clean my room and cook. I want to be taken care of, and I want a first class hotel.

**Kathy Hersh:** It seems like in this business you really have to have your finger to the wheel a lot.

**Steven Hass:** Constantly and there's a constant change and you have to be on point because you don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. Tomorrow it's going to change again. The internet is changing everything; marketing is very creative today. We can reach the entire world with the press of a button. So you really have to be on top of things to stay on top.

**Kathy Hersh:** So can you give me some examples recently of adjustments that you're making. Can you even make a long range plan if it's that [crosstalk] sort of changeable? [Background traffic sounds]

**Steven Hass:** I think it's very difficult. I think you need to make it year to year by now because there's so many changes taking place and you need to be aware of your surroundings, and you need to be aware of the world's surroundings. What is happening in Russia and what is happening in Japan? What is happening in India? What is happening in Asia? What's happening in South America, and you have to be able to touch all of those elements because the change is changing fast. Culinary world is changing fast. We're getting food from all over the world. I could order today on the internet anywhere in the world and have it in 24 hours. So there's a lot of changes really taking place, and you want to be the hot, new trendy place. As I always say, I'm the trend setter. I'm the person who's creating. I'm the marketing person. I'm the person that I rather see people follow where I won't follow. I'm not a follower. I'm the person that's trying to create it.

**Kathy Hersh:** So what are you creating? What are you working on now? Can you...

**Steven Hass:** Unfortunately I closed my restaurant, City Hall, recently, and I am working on many things. I'm not at liberty to talk about them just yet, but actually I wrote it down today. There are 17 different things I am working on at the same time, which is actually exhausting. I'm trying to get focused, but probably the most creative thing I've done for the city, and I've done quite a few different programs, is that I created Miami Spice. Miami Spice on the last year was 15 years, and we're always every year looking at it. What can we do to make it bigger and better and to really impress everybody each year, and it's hard. Fifteen years is very hard to maintain a program. So we're hoping that the next year we're going to add another element to it. The greatest thing about the bureau understanding Miami Spice because of its success, we have now created the Temptations Program which every month we do something for the city. Miami Spice is August and September, and what follows that in

success right now is Miami Spa Month. Miami Spa Month has taken off. [Background traffic sounds] It took a few years, but it's incredible. If you haven't been to a Miami Spa Month spa, it is so worth your while. It is incredible. I have been to every spa in Miami. Every single hotel has a first class spa, and they are really outdoing each other. They're in competition big time.

**Kathy Hersh:** So that's one of the things that tourists to this area now have to come to expect.

**Steven Hass:** Tourists expect and it's a local satisfier as well. Both those programs are local satisfiers. Other programs that really focuses more on tourism is... [Background traffic sounds] I'm going to wait until our...

**Male Speaker 1:** I'll let you know if we...

**Steven Hass:** You could hear me?

**Male Speaker 1:** Yeah. [Inaudible] [19:07]

**Steven Hass:** ...is museum month, attractions month, romance month. We're attracting [background vehicle honking sounds] weddings to come to Miami which is a big thing. Everybody wants to get married on the beach. What better beach in the United States than Miami Beach and having a phenomenal hotel in the background. Destination weddings are becoming a very big deal.

**Kathy Hersh:** Is there anything unexpected that you see emerging like, I don't know, something that you hadn't expected to see as a market.

**Steven Hass:** I probably would say the only thing that's been very unexpected is the growth of Miami, the population growth first of all, the boom of South America to Miami such as Venezuela. Venezuela's economy and their democracy is unfortunately falling apart and I never would have expected the population of Venezuela to move to Miami. We also have that with Argentina and also Brazil, and right now with our dollar growing it's a good thing and unfortunately it's also a bad thing. The dollar growing does not attract the outside of the [background vehicle honking sounds] United States tourists. We have dropped in European tourism, and we've dropped in South American tourism because the dollar value has increased so much that it's no longer that incredible value that it was.

**Kathy Hersh:** So you really have to pay attention to global issues, to economies, to [crosstalk] changing taste.

**Steven Hass:** One hundred percent. You must. If you're in business of any kind of business you must pay attention to the trends that are happening around the world because all of them affect Dade County.

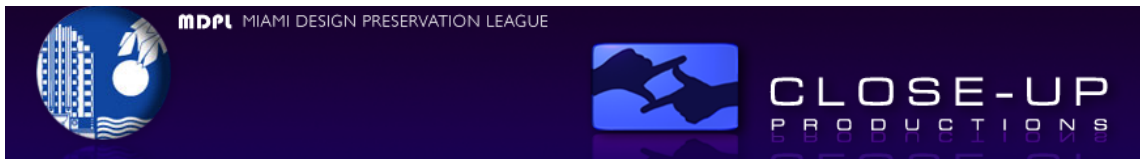
**Kathy Hersh:** What about Cuba opening up? How's that going to affect Miami? How's it affected Miami?





- Steven Hass:** Yes. I'm laughing because I'm probably the spokesperson for this subject. I have been fighting with every mayor in Dade County for the last 20 years preparing Miami and Miami Beach for the opening of Cuba. I have said from I can't think of how many mayors have gone back in Miami Beach saying, in our lifetime those doors are going to open, and we have to be ready. We can't forget that Havana was South Beach of the '50s, and it will be again. They offer one thing better than we have. They have pristine beaches. They have Caribbean beaches, absolutely beautiful water and beautiful sand, and it's very hard to compete against that. Our prices are much higher. So we have to give a perception of value even though Miami and Miami Beach is a fairly expensive city to travel to, but Cuba can seriously affect us. I think in the long run it will affect more of the Caribbean islands like the Bahamas, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Haiti, all the islands that are closer to us. I have a couple of surprises for the future that I think are going to work for us and Cuba together. I'm working on it right now.
- Kathy Hersh:** That's good to hear. Can't wait. [Laughter]
- Steven Hass:** It's actually a really good one, and I can't wait to announce it. [Laughter]
- Kathy Hersh:** Let me see if I got through everything that I wanted to talk about. Let's talk about segments of the population. For example your friend, Steve Atkins, we talked with about how the GLBT population has helped create a welcoming, very open environment here. Is that a growing segment of...
- Steven Hass:** It's definitely a growing segment. It was a very large part of our population. In the '70s and in the '80s actually the gay and lesbian population actually moved out of Dade County. There were a lot of negativity especially during the Anita Bryant period. It was a very interesting period. It was the first time anywhere in the United States where gay rights was on the table, and she won the right to make sure that gays were not equal. So it became a place where well do I really want to live here or not. Actually the population didn't move far. It went to Key West and to Fort Lauderdale, and now I see that there's a huge trend coming back to Miami. I don't know if it's a stereotype or not but gay people are not afraid to create a neighborhood. They're not afraid to be the pioneers, to come in early, to resurrect the neighborhood, to change a neighborhood like Winward for instance, and the Design District and Edgewater and everything that's happening in Miami right now.
- Kathy Hersh:** The Art Deco District.
- Steven Hass:** Definitely the Art Deco District.
- Kathy Hersh:** So you must have seen that change happen on [crosstalk] South Beach.
- Steven Hass:** I've seen a huge change.
- Steven Hass:** Were you involved at all in the Art Deco movement during...?

- Steven Hass:** No. I was not. I'm happy... [Crosstalk]
- Kathy Hersh:** What did you think about when you saw it?
- Steven Hass:** I was at the opening night of the very first restaurant on Ocean Drive and I was so... [Crosstalk]
- Kathy Hersh:** Was that for Café Cardozo or...
- Steven Hass:** You know there's a war going on saying which one was the first. [Laughter] I'm saying it's the Carlisle but I keep hearing the Cardozo. I specifically remember the Carlisle, and it's not that long ago. They were I believed owned by the same people at the same time, and they were next door. So maybe it was pretty close at the same time, but it was such an eye opening experience to see a retirement district. This was what we used to call God's waiting room. There was no reason to go to what is today called South Beach. We didn't even have the name South Beach. It was just south Miami Beach, and to see the evolution and the change of where it is today is actually wonderful to see the preservation of these hotels and to see the growth and the continuing growth. There's still probably the best real estate value on Miami Beach or the most expensive I should say is still South Beach and it's continuing. Those condos are extremely expensive, [background traffic sounds] and that's what's going to always maintain that area now. So that area should never decrease any further; it will only move forward now. It's wonderful to see the changes. They've gone a little too far maybe, and it's time to curtail what they have done. [Crosstalk]
- Kathy Hersh:** Why - what's... [Crosstalk]
- Steven Hass:** I was just involved in that program.
- Kathy Hersh:** What is that, you're talking about the sidewalk restaurant problem.
- Steven Hass:** Yes. I'm talking about Ocean Drive. Ocean Drive is going through a big change at this moment. It's in time to improve service. It's in time to enhance customer service. It's time to make it a much friendlier area. It's had its downfall for a little while, and it's time to bring it back.
- Kathy Hersh:** Another thing that we've noticed and I'd like to get your opinion on this is where it used to be just a winter spot, there seems to be tourism year round now.
- Steven Hass:** That's probably the biggest change in Dade County. When I was a kid it was a tourist destination, and it was a resort town. Half the hotels closed for the summer. There was nothing going on during the summer, and today we have almost a four million person population today. Most people live here 365 days a year. So we have gone from a resort town to a full-fledged city. As a matter of fact we're the fifth most populated city now in the United States.
- Kathy Hersh:** Well I believe that just trying to drive.



**Steven Hass:** It's continuing. Yes. Traffic is an issue and it's a very big issue but you know, as I talked about the country, it's a big issue in every major city. It's probably the number one issue everywhere now, and we're facing it. [Background traffic sounds] We're at least facing it, dealing with it, looking at it and trying to project how to create the new traffic flows.

**Kathy Hersh:** One of the things that I've noticed that you're doing lately is the More to Explore and exploiting South Dade, which really has been, I don't know, kind of lesser explored by tourists.

**Steven Hass:** South Dade has been and it's definitely on the horizon as changing. As I sit on the Transportation Committee, we're looking at all different areas and one of the areas that's probably has one of the loudest voices is Homestead which surprised me. Then when I realized it, it made sense to me. Doral and Homestead, it takes almost an hour and 45 minutes to get home. So we have to change the traffic patterns. They must be able to get home in less than an hour. That should never happen in any city. So as transportation changes you're going to see growth coming down to those areas, not just in population but in business. People are looking into go further away than being in the center of a city especially if you need land for any kind of building space. The land is going south and west. It's certainly not in the center of our city.

**Kathy Hersh:** Even though there are boundaries on the west.

**Steven Hass:** There are boundaries but they're pretty far west. You can go pretty far west today. There are a lot of boundaries. We stop at the Everglades, but you can definitely go pretty far and there's still land available. We actually still have a lot of land available, but definitely more to the south.

**Kathy Hersh:** Cool. Do you have any questions?

**Male Speaker 1:** I'd like to explore a little more of that trajectory of how tourism has changed. We got into some of that with Steve Atkins, but I'm sort of curious if you could give us sort of that overview of how strategies and how people coming to Miami how that changed over the years. You certainly have 40 of trajectory [crosstalk] or 45 years in it...

**Steven Hass:** Absolutely. [Laughter]

**Male Speaker 1:** ...maybe not complete but...

**Steven Hass:** Good question.

**Kathy Hersh:** Also you can tie in social media [Crosstalk] into that answer very easily.

**Steven Hass:** Right. There's a lot of reasons. Do you want to ask the question or something [crosstalk] or do you want me to just talk.

**Kathy Hersh:** What he said. [Laughter]

**Steven Hass:** What he said. [Laughter] You know it's funny how Miami has changed and the markets have changed dramatically. Miami Beach's history for the first 50, 60 years we focused mostly on New Yorkers and Canadians. That was our market and that's who came to Miami. We had little groups around the United States, but today we are focused around the world. Our newest focus is actually Asia. Asia is huge for us. Now that the 787 is on board, we can now have direct flights to Korea, to China and to all these cities, and we're looking to have them come directly to Miami. We've always had a very small Asian demographic coming to Miami, and now it's slowly changing. It's a great market to work with. They are phenomenal tourists. They love to experience; they love to spend money. They love to eat; they love to shop. For us they're the perfect tourist. We are also focused on Russia. We're focused now on India. India is now becoming the new horizon. So the tourist destination today is limitless. It's any place we want to think about we're getting those people. We've always gotten a little bit of European. Europe has definitely grown a lot more. It's really the jet age that's changed travel, and people are not afraid to go from anywhere. We're now going to Australia like it's around the corner, and it's still a 24 hour flight. So we're really reaching out around the world, and I can't think of a place that we're not touching at this moment.

**Kathy Hersh:** What kind of social media outreach do you have and how important is that to you?

**Steven Hass:** I think it's incredibly important. The very first time I really realized the importance of social media was about 20 years ago when I got a phone call from a family who was traveling from Japan to Miami Beach, and they called me when I was the Regional Manager for China Grow Management. I was running one of my restaurants under my umbrella was Tuscan Steak. They called me because they were looking at my menu online, and he didn't understand what gnocchi was. He's trying to explain to his children when we come to Miami Beach what we're going to experiment and what we're going to try, and what we're going to experience because it's totally different food than what they're used to. I got off that phone and I was like, oh my god. I'm talking to somebody from Japan who's coming to my restaurant next week. So I realized the unbelievable importance of the internet and today it's all about social media. Everybody's on Facebook and Twitter and Pinterest and Instagram and on and on and on. Even the President of the United States lives and breathes on Twitter. He's able to reach the population with the press of a button. That's incredible to me. There's never been a President even though Obama did a little bit; just go back three, four Presidents ago, television was your only outlet. That might have been once a week or once a month. Today every minute of every day whenever he feels like it, he writes whatever he wants, presses a button and he can reach the entire world by pressing a button. It's amazing.

**Kathy Hersh:** Is there anything that we didn't cover that you think we should have?

**Steven Hass:** Well, there's a million things we didn't cover. I'm just trying to think of what I would want to talk about. Probably the fun part of the '80s in



Miami; I don't really want to talk about it. [Laughter] Running The Forge when The Forge was the cocaine of Miami, and you name it. It came in there, and it all happened there. There's nothing I didn't see, nothing, including Meyer Lansky's son being murdered there. There was nothing...

**Kathy Hersh:** Being murdered there?

**Steven Hass:** Yeah. Nothing didn't happen there; everything happened [crosstalk] - 1977.

**Kathy Hersh:** Can you talk about that?

**Steven Hass:** I really wasn't involved so I'd rather not.

**Kathy Hersh:** Okay.

**Steven Hass:** There's a few things - I'm in five books because of The Forge, just talking about what took place from the coke dealers to well what happened tonight. It's like finding a million dollars in cash under a table or a transaction or it... [Crosstalk]

**Kathy Hersh:** So it was the place.

**Steven Hass:** The only place.

**Kathy Hersh:** The only place.

**Steven Hass:** The Forge was the restaurant of Miami in the '70s and '80s. It really didn't have competition at all. We never marketed; we never did anything. We used to do six, seven, eight hundred covers a night. We didn't have to do anything because you really didn't have competition. If you wanted to go to the best place, you went to The Forge period. Where else should we go? Today you have a hundred restaurants to talk about. At that time it was The Forge. There was no such thing as South Beach. It didn't exist.

**Kathy Hersh:** They had extensive wine cellar I understand.

**Steven Hass:** In competition for the largest in the United States for the last 30 years. It's either in first place or in second place between Burn's Steakhouse in Tampa, the two largest wine cellars in the United States.

**Kathy Hersh:** So that has a certain cache even [crosstalk] if you're not a big wine drinker.

**Steven Hass:** It certainly does. The Forge probably the greatest thing that happened for the wine cellar itself was the Rothschild Family came to The Forge in I think it was in '86 to re-cork bottles in this country. Corks will not last forever, wine will. So they came - that's a good story we could talk about. Should we start from the beginning?

**Kathy Hersh:** Yeah.

**Steven Hass:** One of my favorite stories of The Forge was pertaining to the wine cellar itself. The Rothschild family chose The Forge as their destination to come to the United States to re-cork bottles in the United States, and they flew in all the top restaurants from around the country from New York like the 21, The Four Seasons, Maxwell Plums. They all came down with their collections to have their bottles re-corked. See cork will slowly literally crumble. It will just disintegrate. The wine itself if it's kept in a controlled environment it will maintain. Well, they chose The Forge because The Forge had the largest wine cellar in the United States, but also because The Forge had a wine that was extremely rare. There was only two bottles in the world, one at The Forge and one at the Rothschild family's own collection. It's an 1822 Chateau Laffite. So it's always been part of the collection, and today it's actually on the list for 150 thousand dollars. When you re-cork a bottle of wine, they came with suitcases filled with corks and labels. They will re-label the bottle and re-cork the bottle with a nitrogen machine, but they had one policy. If the wine was not good, they will not re-cork it. So all these restaurants come down to Miami for the week, and we were on the news every single day. The very last bottle of the week was the 1822, and they asked Alvin Malnik do we or do we not open this bottle. He said let's go for it. So they opened it. They took out one shot glass, and we passed it around. We all got to taste a bottle that's worth 150 thousand dollars, and it was good.

**Kathy Hersh:** It was good.

**Steven Hass:** It was to our amazement because everything when you looked at the bottle indicated it wasn't. It was good, and we replaced it with the best year of the last century which was 1961. So the bottle is about 95 percent 1822 and 5 percent 1961, and yes it's still worth 150 thousand dollars.

**Kathy Hersh:** Wow and nobody has bought it yet.

**Steven Hass:** I don't believe they particularly want to sell it.

**Kathy Hersh:** Okay.

**Steven Hass:** It's really more of the owner's collection, and he has a pretty extensive collection. Their inventory at The Forge is three million dollars. It's impressive. It's worth going to; it's worth seeing. They have a dining room at The Forge that is exceptional in the wine cellar itself. It's really an incredible experience if you can experience it.

**Kathy Hersh:** You managed there for how long?

**Steven Hass:** Eleven years of my life. Actually I loved every minute of it. I had a great, great time. It was just time to go after eleven years. I really ready to go in nine years and I kept saying I was very young. I started at 25 years old running the most award winning restaurant in the United States. Where do you go from there?

**Kathy Hersh:** Where do you go?

**Steven Hass:** Where do you go from there? It was very hard to leave. It was very hard to give that up, but it was time. I didn't want dedicate my entire life to the restaurant and what's amazing to me, they still have employees there since 1977. They're still there. It's now 2017, wow.

**Kathy Hersh:** Well, look at Joe's Stone Crab.

**Steven Hass:** Joe's is almost the same way, and I actually worked at Joe's. I've worked at Joe's for two years, and to me it's still family when I go there. I'm very close to everybody there, and I worked there 35 years ago. [Laughter]

**Kathy Hersh:** It's an institution.

**Steven Hass:** Absolutely. The Forge and Joe's are still my favorite restaurants.

**Kathy Hersh:** We did an interview with Jo Ann Bass. She told...

**Male Speaker 1:** I'd like to follow up on the restaurants...

**Steven Hass:** Okay.

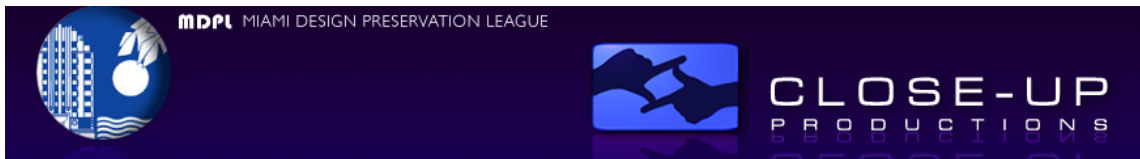
**Male Speaker 1:** ...because I think one of things that we've seen in our trajectory, which is only since 1981 that we've been here, but since then Miami certainly was not known as a restaurant town.

**Steven Hass:** Absolutely not.

**Male Speaker 1:** What happened and how did it happen? [Laughter]

**Steven Hass:** Probably in the '90s as Miami's growth really took place [background conversation noises] everybody really wanted to open the hottest, newest, and what they thought was it was time to bring celebrity chefs to Miami. The famous chefs of New York, the famous chefs of Chicago, the famous chefs of Europe all came and opened restaurants in Miami, and everybody really was focused on the hot, new celebrity chefs, which is still part of the game today. Celebrity chefs are a very big part of the culinary world, but they really started the trend for Miami in bringing top restaurants to Miami.

I ran a restaurant called China Grill [background traffic sounds] which was definitely in the top three restaurants of Dade County besides The Forge and Joe's. I always call the landmark restaurants. They're the godmothers of our city. They're still around, but places like China Grill the concierges would say if you're only here for one night, that's the restaurant to go to because you want to experience what South Beach is all about. They started a huge trend in the culinary world which was turning a restaurant into a party. It wasn't just about dining. It was about having a great time. It was about raising the volume of music; it was about allowing people to dance. It was literally turning a restaurant into a club without being a club, and that really set the trend of the culinary



world in the '90s. The '90s was a big change.

**Kathy Hersh:** That was Oprah's place, wasn't it?

**Steven Hass:** Oprah, no.

**Kathy Hersh:** One of her favorite spots to eat?

**Kathy Hersh:** She came in. I actually did Oprah's Christmas party, and I've got to tell you. I went to her home and sat with her for four different occasions. I truly understand her popularity. She is one hell of a person to work with. I love her. I love her. She's really, really, really great, but she lived on Fisher Island. So it was very close.

**Kathy Hersh:** Well... [Crosstalk]

**Steven Hass:** It was everybody's favorite place. Everybody loved China Grill. It's very unfortunate that China Grill closed. It had a 15 year run which is a long time for the restaurant industry, but they opened a sister concept. It's called Komodo. It's a very popular restaurant right now on Brickell Avenue.

**Kathy Hersh:** Oprah would create best sellers just by holding a book up by her face. If it were just in her lap, it would maybe make the best seller list...

**Steven Hass:** Right.

**Kathy Hersh:** If she raised it up and went like this...

**Steven Hass:** It was amazing. [Crosstalk]

**Kathy Hersh:** So maybe she had an impact. [Crosstalk]

**Steven Hass:** To this day, she...

**Kathy Hersh:** She influenced a lot of people.

**Steven Hass:** All of a sudden they're talking about she's going to run for President.

**Kathy Hersh:** No kidding.

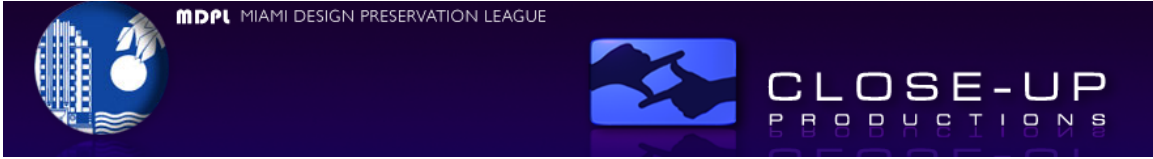
**Steven Hass:** They actually just talked to her on the news a couple of days ago. She never said she would be strong enough or powerful enough or knew enough because she's not an attorney, but she's learned [laughter] you don't need to be.

**Kathy Hersh:** You don't need to know a lot.

**Steven Hass:** She knows that she could do - we're not filming are we?

**Male Speaker 1:** Still rolling. [Laughter]





**Steven Hass:** We'll leave it alone. [Laughter] I have nothing else to say. [Laughter]

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