

Kobi Karp Interview

Kathy Hersh: Today is October 2, 2017. My name is Kathy Hersh and I'm interviewing Kobi Karp for the Miami Beach Visual Memoirs Project. Could you give us a little bit of background about yourself?

Kobi Karp: Sure.

Interviewer: Where you born. When you came here.

Kobi Karp: I was born in 1962, November 1st in Israel and when I was 11 years old, my family migrated to Minneapolis, Minnesota and Minneapolis was a nice place for me to grow. I went from the Middle East to Midwest and it was a very nice place. I went to 6th grade and Junior High, High School, University. My first degree was in environmental design in the University of Minnesota Institute of Technology. My second degree was in architecture from the school of architecture at the Institute of Technology and I graduated when I was 24.

I worked during college to help pay for college and that gave me the hours that I needed to sit down for the registration exam at the age of 25. I took the exam at the age of 25 and I passed it all the first time. At that time, it was 1988, business was a bit slow in the Midwest. So, I joined a British firm that was on 925 Lincoln Road in the Sterling Building and there was our office. We designed hotels and resorts in the Caribbean, in the British West Indies, in Sambisa [phonetic] [01:54], Granada, Turks and Caicos, the Bahamas.

Interviewer: What was the name of the firm?

Kobi Karp: Originally, it was called Lane Pettigrew Jones, LPJ and they became LPWUK, Lane Pettigrew Woodincarp [phonetic] [02:10]. Jones was one of the partners. He was from England and Cardiff... actually, Newport in Wales, which is close to Cardiff and that's where we basically, designed quite a bit of the hotels and resorts in the Caribbean from the late 80s to the early 90s.

Interviewer: So then, you decided to stay here in Miami and do your own thing?

Kobi Karp: So what happened was is just as time would have it, I was the American registered architect and my partners wished to continue to work in the Caribbean and we started to pick up projects here in



Miami. It was the mid-90s and so, some of the projects that we received were like the Astor Hotel, to renovate and build up the Astor Hotel for a very nice gentleman named Karmin Masri. We did that at the same time other hotels were going on such as the Delano Hotel and so forth. It was a time of renaissance in Miami Beach.

Interviewer: There was a boom going on then?

Kobi Karp: Huh?

Interviewer: That was good timing?

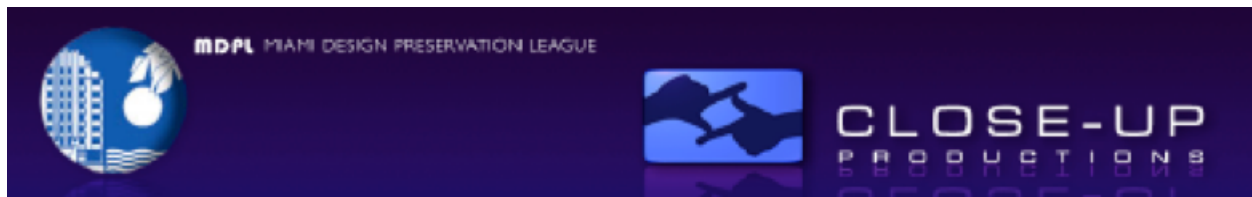
Kobi Karp: It was good timing. It really started to come together were people were... Barbara Captman got a start a few years before, but at this point, people were ready, willing and able to put their money into renovating existing structures and bringing them back to operational purposes. That allowed for hotels such as Sea Coast Towers... I mean, for hotels such as the Astro Hotel or for renovation of apartment buildings like Sea Coast Towers to become residential condominiums. We restored those and then as time would have it, I would find out that Morris Lapidus is the architect and this is going back to 1993.

Out of respect, I called Morris and I said, "Morris, you did the Sea Coast Towers." He goes, "How did you get my number?" I said, "Well, it's listed here in the yellow pages." He goes, "That's very smart of you." So, you know, I called him up and he was living on the Venetian on Bell Isle. He said, "Let me see what you're doing."

One of the things that he wanted us to do was paint the outside vertical staircase in royal blue as the ocean and the sandy color of the beach and get rid of what he called the French Rococo on the inside. It was made by a decorator he did not appreciate. I said I would do that and then, he said, "Show me what you're proposing to do," which was a modern building on the back.

Interviewer: On the back of the existing...?

Kobi Karp: Yes, of 5151 Collins Avenue. Sea Coast Towers, it's called. It's the X-shaped building and he liked it. So, he said, "You know what? I'll support you and I'll come to the hearing and you know, we'll see if you can get some support," and he did. He did come. He's a feisty person and he spoke for quite a bit. This is going back in 1994 and



we received the approval and we renovated the buildings. That was one of the reasons why we also were able to bring Morris back into the fold, into the American Institute of Architects. Randall Robinson and so forth wanted me to bring him so that he can talk and that's we did. It was an honor and a pleasure to bring somebody like that who for a period of time was not respected or liked or he did not respect or like the American Institute of Architects. It was an honor to bring him back into the arena where people...

Interviewer: So, there was a kind of reconciliation?

Kobi Karp: I think so. I think it was a substantial reconciliation where people came and saw and appreciated and he spoke at the NDPL building on Ocean Drive, on 10th and Ocean, across from the Breakwater and Edison. He was a very talented individual. Some people hated his designs and some people loved his designs, but for me, he was an inspiration.

Interviewer: Would you say that his design had an influence on you?

Kobi Karp: Oh, certainly. I think his design definitely had an influence on me. I think that as you grow as an architect, the people that you meet who you like or spend time with... I spent time in Europe when I was in the School of Architects. So, we studied monasteries and cloisters around the Alps, whether it's Northern Italian or it's Southern French or Southern German, but then, you get exposed to Bowhouse movement. You get to the Locobustiere [phonetic] [07:30] Movement and you [inaudible] [07:33] or how it is on an ongoing seasonal basis and you spend time. You have an ability, I think then to value the designs and appreciate them in a different light, in a more personal level and Morris Lapidus was one of the individuals that I've had the pleasure and honor and luck to meet and spend time with. Certainly, it made on me a deep movement.

Interviewer: You think that in certain parts of the world are known for certain icons in architecture. Do you think that Miami Beach or let's say Miami in general has such an icon or is it varied or how do you see the architecture?

Kobi Karp: I think Miami Beach has such icons as a vignette. For example, as the vignette, let's say of Ocean Drive. Does the vignette... let's go back to Morris Lapidus and the Fontainebleau. There are the multiple vignettes that were done by Roy France of the Vertical Towers, right? We did the Cadillac Hotel. The Cadillac Hotel was

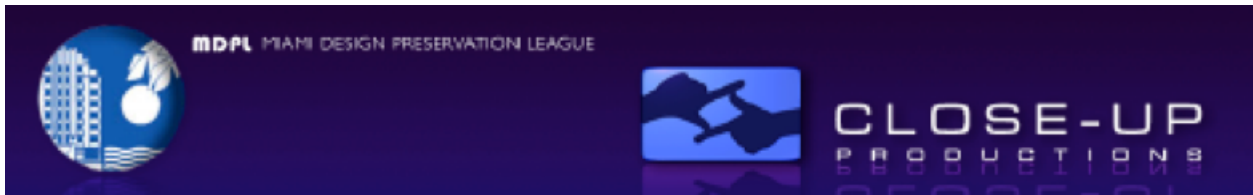


done by Gus Bullison [phonetic] [08:54] back in 1999 and they bought it. It was on Collins Avenue on 38th Street and nobody wanted to go there, specifically not a brand hotel such as Marriot. They came in and they flagged that as a Marriot, 250 plus keys and they allowed us to renovate the Roy France building with the Grossman addition.

It also gave us the money and the ability to separate the two to show... because Grossman, when he built his addition, basically hid the lobby and the entrance threw a breeze-block system that Tom Mooney and Randall Robinson and other people in the [inaudible] [09:40] would asked us to remove and the staff and bring back Roy France's original, vertical tower, which is on the Cadillac, which is on the Versace. It's that kind of a symmetrical tall, elegant towerette and we made that the main entry to the Marriot Courtyard and it still is to the Cadillac Hotel brought back the stainless steel Cadillac canopies and so forth.

The Roy France addition became the food and beverage area and that's how... and we also made an addition later on on the back. That kind of development of architecture, whether it's Roy France, whether it's a Pancoast, whether it is done by Morris Lapidus, that language of architecture is unique tropical, unique however you want to label it, right? I mean, Terry and Randall have different names for it and so does everybody else, but I think that there's a language, a lexicon of architecture that is uniquely Florida, that is uniquely Miami that people pick on and they say, "This is Miami is about."

In the 50s and 60s, it's the Fontainebleau. In the 30s and 40s, it might have been France and Company and then, it could have been somebody else in another period of time, but that language carries through from the eye brows [phonetic] [11:08] to the cheese holes [phonetic] [11:10] to the traditional vertical deco buildings, which are beautiful and yet, very simple and simple sometimes, most times to me means very elegant. You can see beautiful deco examples from France to New York City, right and very complex and very detailed and very sophisticated and very ornate. Then, you come here to Florida and you have them so available, so public. You can drive by. You see such a great variety in such a short space that it really makes Florida, Wow, very photogenic and I think that's what makes Florida and Miami, specifically very unique.



Interviewer: You came at just the right time it sounds like when the sort of renaissance started happening with Tony Goldman and Craig Robins and some of those people where... and on the commercial strip too, Songross [phonetic] [12:11] and Washington Avenue where...

Kobi Karp: Mel Schleicher...

Interviewer: Mel Schleicher where there was a... we've heard it described as kind of a club...

Kobi Karp: Yes.

Interviewer: ... of people coming together and discussing their projects and sharing. Did you get in on that aspect?

Kobi Karp: I did to a certain extent, to a limited extent. I'm an architect and most of the work that we involved in... for example, one of my first projects was from Nancy Liebman. She was on the Historical Preservation Board, but it wasn't on the board itself. You would go downstairs and it was like a little conference room and our offices were in the Sterling Building. So, she says to me, "Kobi, I know you're presenting this strip mall to us on 9th and Alton. Nobody..." you know Alton Road was off the beaten path. It was for Nelson Fox and Company and she says, "This facade looks very unique," and I said, "Well, it's the Sterling Building facade with a glass block and the stucco waves, with the neon lights behind, but we flipped it upside down [laughs] [13:21] and we made it a little bit more, if you will, modern rather than..." She goes, "My God! Yes, it is with the scoring and the stucco and [inaudible] [13:31]."

I would have thought that that building would have been demolished by now, but it's on 9th and Alton. It's where there was a sushi place there for a long time. It was built in 1994 and there is the Cuban restaurant there now and a famous one that's... you have to help me with that, Kathy.

Interviewer: Versace?

Kobi Karp: No, not Versace. The one that was on Collins Avenue and moved, on Collins and 9th.

Interviewer: Cuban restaurant? Well, there's... the only Cuban restaurant I know of and I know of two and one is Puerto Sagua. That's on 7th and...



Kobi Karp: Washington.

Interviewer: ... Washington and then, there's the one that's on Espanola Way on the corner. There was another Cuban restaurant?

Kobi Karp: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Kobi Karp: That's all right. I'll remember it. They're there now on the 9th and Alton Shopping Center and doing very, very well. It's David's Cafe.

Interviewer: Okay.

Kobi Karp: They've been also behind Lincoln Road and very successful. My boys grew up on their steaks.

Interviewer: [laughs] [14:45] David's Cafe?

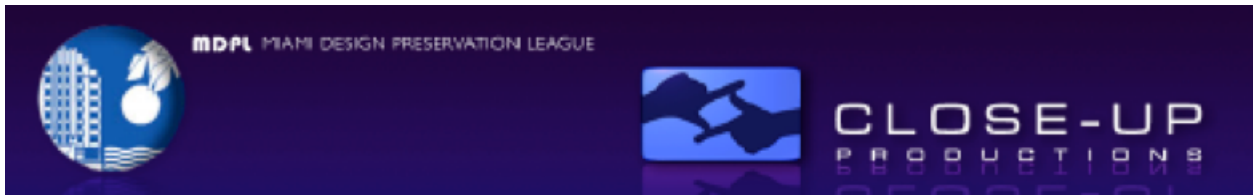
Kobi Karp: David's Cafe.

Interviewer: Yeah, I know where that is.

Kobi Karp: Yes, of course and so, the language of architecture here, really for us, it was very nice. It was very unique and it afforded us a lot of experimental opportunities. You know, buildings that we have built and are still building today that incorporate the Historic Reservation, whether it's the Cadillac... we took the crown that you're familiar, the crown of parmits [phonetic] [15:15] that belonged to the Cohen family for decades and they sold it to Pritzgers [phonetic] [15:20] who made it into confidant, a high confidant and brought it back to become a hotel again next to the Cadillac on the 38th and Collins.

Those are the kind of things that for us they make you stop and think about life. How we're able to circle back and recycle the structure and the recycle the buildings. Sometimes, they were original [inaudible] [15:47] and sometimes, to their original glory. We just finished a project on Collins Avenue and Surf Side, which was a club that nobody could go to. Let me rephrase, that certain people could not go to.

Interviewer: It was restricted.



Kobi Karp: It was a restricted club, yeah. We did it on Collins Avenue. We did it on one hotel as well and we also did the Surf Club and the Surf Club, we converted into a hotel. We presented it the Historic Preservation Board in front of Mitch Novac and Company, with Kathleen Kauffmann as the staff and back in 2012 and we received a unanimous approval, because we are really restoring the club to the way it was originally built by Russell Pankos. We're restoring the interiors and the exteriors. We're restoring the finishes and the materials, the floors, the fireplace, the murals that were hidden behind the walls.

Interviewer: Oh my!

Kobi Karp: We're removing all the clichés and all the layers that were added on from the 60s and 50s and 70s and 80s and 90s, the dropped ceiling to save the air conditioning, exposed back the painted wooden beams and joists and the original keystone and that was used as a platform to recycle it to what it originally was intended, as a party event space, but this time open to the public by using it as a hotel. In this case, we brought in the Four Seasons Hotel as the brand, but that is the intent and open it up, removed a wall. Remember, there was a wall along Collins Avenue. We removed the wall so you can see the club and you can enter it and you can feel it more welcoming.

Interviewer: At what point does the hotel chain come into the process? Do they decide they want a space and you work out what happens there or do you reveal a first... well, of course, you'd have to have the funding to do that?

Kobi Karp: That's a very good question, Kathy. What it usually does, a hotel would like to dictate to you with the back up house and the food and beverage and operation spaces are that they need, but you don't always get them. For example, we have an expertise in that since the 90s doing the Cadillac and being able to mold the Marriot program, if you will into rooms which would be a bit too small for their program or corridors that might be too wide or public spaces might be too grand in some locations and we're able to make it work as a Marriot hotel in Miami Beach.

That's what we did with the Four Seasons. We showed them how to put their program and their demands can work within the space and how it can be accommodated in some places better and in some places not so good but, our ability to compromise, to design and



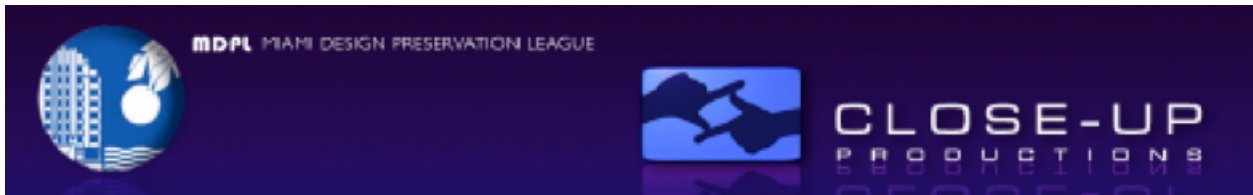
compromise, to design and simplify things to the essence of what makes the deal and that transaction happen is what allows us as architects here in the community since the 80s to create spaces that unique and actually can work on a long-term basis.

The Astor Hotel is still operational. The Astor Hotel built in or designed or redesigned in 1993 and 1994, that hotel we were able to open up the lobby, remove a wall to the basement that was there, which was a United States Army mess hall and opened it up to the outside garden where we put the baby grand glass piano shape to it and that let the light in, because it faces south. That made the basement feel like a "Wow" space and the Historic Preservation Board allowed us to remove some of the guest rooms on the second floor. You know, you walk up the [inaudible] [19:46] steps and you have guest rooms. We were able to remove those guest rooms and create a "Wow" three-dimensional space from the lobby to look into the main event, if you will of the Astor Hotel.

Interviewer: How did the interior space then.... are you saying it had been altered by the Army when the soldiers were stationed there as a barracks?

Kobi Karp: The United States Army used the basement as a mess hall, which gave us the opportunity to say that we want to have a restaurant and a food and beverage in the basement. Where before, such a use may not have existed. Now, that we have that opportunity, we're able to expand that and create a food and beverage venue in a historical hotel on a corner, which really had no beach and this is 1993, 1994. People were looking for a beach experience and what we promoting is an urban experience. No beach front, a little [inaudible] [20:45], a great museum across the street that will [inaudible] [20:50], a pedestrian access to Ocean Drive on Collins Avenue to enjoy the rich texture and architecture of South Beach. This is the beginning essence of seeing things like that come about.

Years later, when we do the Marriotts and we do the Fiana's [phonetic] [21:14] and we do the one hotels and the Ws, those are already hotels that know that there is a strong demand again. So, I think with the Four Seasons.... the Four Seasons looked at the surf life and said, "My goodness, this is Surf Side. This is honky-tonk. You're not Bell Harbor and you're certainly even close to being in South Beach. Are you Mr. Karp?" So, there's a certain element of creating value and place and space, by... I would say by preservation and restoration of structures.



Interviewer: Have you encountered... it sounds kind of like a pretty picture, but have you encountered any resistance from... I remember an argument about The Gap on Lincoln Mall wanting to brand the building with their look and how some people were incensed at their coming in and being so demanding and there was a kind of standoff, I think for a while. Have you encountered any resistance?

Kobi Karp: Look, I was lucky enough a few years ago to do the Lincoln Theatre conversion to an H&M store with Allan Schulman, who I like very much and a very talented architect. We were able to use the existing box and [inaudible] [22:49] and embellish them, especially towards the real, where Lincoln Lane is, towards the garage where the Frank Gary Performing Center is. We created a glass wall that wraps around that really made it, if you will a "Wow" location. So as you descend from the garage, you go, "Wow, look. What is this?"

There, there was again a story to tell. We were able to take the theatre that was inside the stage and the stage apparatus around it and preserve it and restore within the H&M venue so that you have a screen, two-story screen that you walk on the outside and you go, "Wow, somebody has really peeled back the wall and opened up the stage. You see the stage and it's functioning within the retail space.

I would like to say that I like those kind of steps and actions and thought processes more so than recreating a new venue. I like to work off of the DNA of what is existing. We all come from someplace and we all have a father or a mother who created us and they may not have raised us, but our DNA goes back. I have two children. I have two boys and I can tell you, they're substantially different from each other. They're from the same father, from the same mother. Well, I'll have to wait for the DNA results to come back, but no, seriously. They are two boys and they are substantially different and the same thing with buildings. The buildings come from different DNA and you have an opportunity to capture a story and to recreate it and tell it in hopefully an eloquent fashion and you prove it. You take it to the next generation as the generations improve.

There's a very well-known architect called Carlos Scarpa. He does it in Italy where he takes old castles and museums and converts them into semi-public and public spaces with very light elegant touch. I like those sort of steps. I respect them very much and if



they're done in a sensitive way and I think that we have been lucky, I have been lucky to have a board such as the Historic Preservation Board in Miami Beach where the Nancy days or the Randall Robinson days or Mitch Novac days and it continues on. There is a check and balance system, which I find to be very enlightening, very community-orientated and at the end of the day, produces an element, which I am very, very proud of and very proud to partake in.

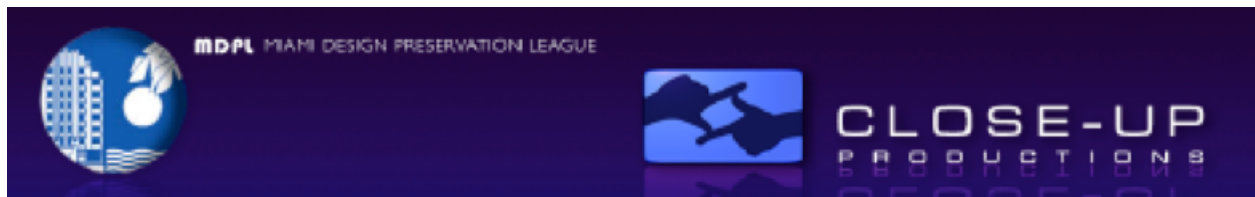
Because, most important what it does is it creates a stepping stone for the community to continue its DNA and its sensibility of what its history was and we become so much stronger, so much better if we build on that. That is sort of what I was raised on. That's what I was educated on. That's where I came from and yes, I'm a modernist, but ultimately, that's what I like to follow, those stepping stones.

Interviewer: That's very interesting. I hadn't really thought of... but, it strikes me that it's a very win-win situation for you and for Miami Beach that you were here at the right time and continue that... I can see now where this could go on forever and evolution, still staying with the original DNA, but updating, modernizing as needs continue, as trends change. Like even, you were mentioning the width of the hallways. It didn't occur to me that that would be effected by...

Kobi Karp: Yes.

Interviewer: ... you know, or that that would change actually. Was it with the width of hallways?

Kobi Karp: It's with everything. The staircases, the width of the stair cases, stair case rails in the historic buildings do not meet the code. Sometimes, they rise and run on a stair case, meaning the vertical and the horizontal do not meet the code. Usually, it does. Most of the buildings do have two mean of egress and we have had the good opportunity to work with the fire department of Miami Beach, which is extremely sophisticated and extremely cultured not only what the code, but what the code can be for historic preservation of buildings. They have been perfect to work with, in a sense that, it allows you to preserve the building from the outside, yet from the inside we can really do... we add to the structure, which was built in the 20s or 30s or 40s with sand and salt from the beach, sometimes which just corrodes away the steel and the reinforcement bars that are holding up that structure. That we need to go back in and really redo the work.



Interviewer: Like they did at the Royal Palm, for example?

Kobi Karp: A very good example and those are the kind of directions that we need to go and across from the Royal Palm. It was on the corner of 16th and Collins. It was a derelict apartment building, two story, with a garden courtyard. We were able to come back to it and add to it, because it had eye brows that bulge out with windows and it had certain fluting on the trim. We were able to take it into a contemporary glass box and pick up the DNA of the fluting, of the bulging windows and create a terminology that sits on the corner. It's currently the Hyatt Hotel, built by the Thinbarb [phonetic] [28:57] family, reviewed by the city of Miami Beach [inaudible] [29:02] Historic Preservation Board, approved unanimously the first time coming through, always with comments, always with suggestions, always with ideas, but you know what? Those comments are so good, they're so right out, they're so thoughtful, they're so experienced and that's why I like to come back to Miami Beach and the city of Miami Preservation Board and Historic Board and really have this kind of presentation. I enjoy it thoroughly.

Interviewer: You feel like it's a partnership then?

Kobi Karp: I feel it's a partnership and I think more than anything else, it's an education. I educate them about the project and they educate me about things that I might have not thought about or seen and if I'm able to be creative and accommodate their wishes and desires and usually I am and I have been happy to do so, then yes.

Interviewer: What about the green aspects, the commitment to green building practices?

Kobi Karp: That's a given. My first degree before architecture is in environmental design. Buildings were originally designed to be cross-ventilated. They were designed for eye brows to create shade and shadows on the facade to protect the glass. It is our duty as people to design buildings green. Today, we're designing homes for the average family where by we have efficient solar panels. When I grew up, solar panels meant that it's a brass or copper pipe running through a glass box and heats up the water. No more. Today, the solar panel is a photo-technologically advanced element that can collect the sun more so than ever before and we actually have something to store the energy, which is this beautiful battery that some people use for cars, like Tesla batteries.



Interviewer: What do you think about the Tesla roofs?

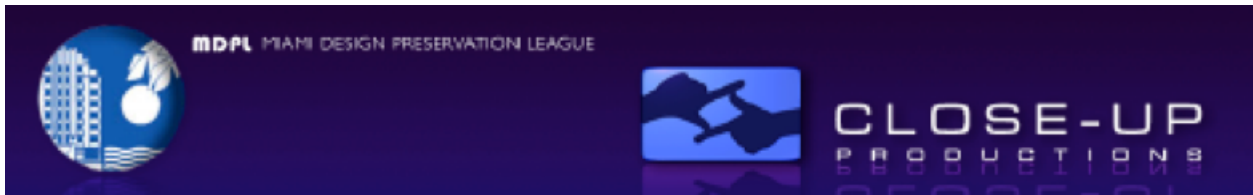
Kobi Karp: I think it's a great idea. I think the roofs is only one step. Today, we have a solar panel connected to the battery, but then, it's connected to the generator that is nothing more than a car engine and they can run your whole house. For all intent and purposes, I can take you, Kathy, off the grid completely and the for the investment into your mortgage of \$60,000 or \$70,000, you can have the solar panel, the battery and the motor running your house, specifically for what you care about the most, which is air conditioning. As lighting gets more and more efficient, even this flood light that you have in my eyes right now, it's a special LED low-voltage light. It's not the heated cells that we used to burn out like the flash bulbs from the 30s, right? We used to take pictures of Frank Sinatra and Marilyn Monroe. Those days are over.

We have the technology. We use less energy to get more bang for the buck. We can finance into your mortgage, basically a solar panel that gives you the power and the energy for the consumption not only the lights and the refrigerators, but mostly important, also for the cooling and mechanical systems of your house. This is where we're going in the next five to ten years. Green is a must. Scandinavia is all about zero-carbon foot print. We have offices in Abu Dhabi since 2005. Mazdar, pushing forward environmental concerns.

My first degree from Minnesota was in environmental design, which had very little to do with what it is that we're doing today, because a quarter of a century later, the technology's so advanced, but green, zero-carbon foot print is a must. It's a, I feel extremely privileged to be in this point and time in my life where we can actually implement it more so than ever before and I'm hoping that with time, we've had 100 years on fossil fuels, if we're in 2010 or 2020 now, we've had a solid 100 years on fossil fuels. Hopefully, the next 100 hundred, we'll get off the fossil fuels and hopefully, we will then be able to restore some of the things that we've done to our mother.

Interviewer: Do you think there may be an impetuous after the Irma and Maria experience we've just had?

Kobi Karp: I think these are just more lessons that nature and it could be... listen, it could be nothing to do with Earth warming or sea levels rising. I believe that there was an ice age before and there could be



an ice age in the future. We don't really understand why the ice receded and that took a lot of warm energy to make it happen. I can not yet qualify 100% how much we have not as a human race have effected Mother Earth. I know we have a lot. I don't know exactly. I can not quantify to you from a mathematician background. The facts and the science is there. We don't need to argue that, but really the most important thing is not that. Really the most important thing is how can we restore and bring back the damage.

We used to have cities everywhere that you drive to. I believe the use of cars has gone substantially down. I believe that the demand and the desire for the human race throughout, from China to Germany to Israel to Africa to populate with single-family residential throughout where land is so low in value and infrastructure is so expensive in value and the maintenance and operation of infrastructure will recede. People will come back and live more and more in an urban setting, more so than ever before. It'll be more intense urban setting, but they will come back and live and such.

You can see it throughout the world. You can see it from Hong Kong in the Far East. You can see it in China. You can see it Cambodia, Vietnam. You can see it in Africa, everywhere. You can see it.

Interviewer: Miami Beach?

Kobi Karp: You can see it in Miami Beach and you can see it in the city of Miami, absolutely.

Interviewer: Okay, Carl can you think of anything that we didn't cover?

Carl: I would think that just take that one step... when I'm fascinated by the use of light. Obviously, prior to...

Kobi Karp: Yes.

Carl: ... what I did and I'm interested in how that integrates with what you do. How do you think about light? How do you think about natural light? How do you think about use of artificial within your structures?

Kobi Karp: Light is everything.

Carl: And talk to Kathy about it.



Kobi Karp:

Talk to Kathy. I'll talk to Kathy. I'll talk to the camera if you want me to. I'll talk to whoever you want. No, but seriously. There is light at night. When the sun sets, we light up our buildings and now, most efficiently than ever before, but here in the tropical weather, where the sun... we have the luxury of having the sun straight up in the air, the light is so dramatic. I grew up in the Midwest in Minneapolis, Minnesota. When I came here as a teenager or during college and see the light, you feel the light all around, whether how it lights up the tress, the palm leaves and the buildings, the shade and shadow. How strong it is here in the tropics is so critical.

You can go to the desert. We work in the deserts in Israel. We work in Abu Dhabi. It's different. We work in Las Vegas. We work in Phoenix, Arizona. You can go to California. The light is beautiful, but it's not as unique as it is in the tropics and we here in Florida are very lucky. We're the only state in the lower 48 with subtropical weather and that is very unique of Florida. That's why I love Florida. I love Florida East. I love Florida West. I like Orlando. I love the whole area. Most important what I like is the way the light effects. We just discussed the Astor Hotel. The whole basement lights up through a glass atrium that sits on the side and that glass box, let's the light indirectly into the basement. By letting it into the basement, it makes it a place where people come and have breakfast, lunch, dinner.

One of the most popular venues there is to have the Sunday brunch and with a jazz soul singer and the light is the most important thing that we have. That is really the essence of what we can sell in design and it makes it so three-dimensional here and that's important.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]