AUSTIN HISTORY CENTER

Oral History Transcript

**Interviewee:** David Hoffman

**Interviewer:** Toni Thomasson

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TONI THOMASSON: This is Toni Thomasson. Today is Thursday, July 27th, 2017. And today I’m interviewing, for the first time, architect David Hoffman. This interview is taking place at the Austin History Center, at 810 Guadalupe Street, in Austin, Texas. This interview is being done for the Austin History Center Architectural Archives and is one of a series of interviews with and about Austin/Travis County architects. Good morning, David.

DAVID HOFFMAN: Good morning!

TT: Why don’t we begin by having you tell me your full name and when and where you were born?

DH: David Hirsch Hoffman, H‑I‑R‑S‑C‑H, born in Dallas, in 1949.

TT: And did you grow up in Dallas?

DH: For the first seven years. In 1956, our family [01:00] moved to Houston. And they built a house in the Memorial area, which is west of Houston. And it was on the fringe of the Memorial area, in 1959, when they moved out there and built the house. And that’s where I would say I grew up. That house that I grew up in --

TT: Yeah, tell me about your house.

DH: -- was an ultramodern house --

TT: Wow! Look at that.

DH: -- designed by an Austin archi‑- I mean, a Houston architect named Arthur Steinberg. And he designed it in 1958. And they completed the house in 1959. And it was the only house in the Memorial area that was designed contemporary like that. And when I settled into the neighborhood and had buddies in nearby [02:00] houses, they said, when it was being built, they thought a spaceship had landed --

TT: (laughs)

DH: -- in the Memorial area. But in 1959, I‑10, which is now 16 lanes wide or something --

TT: Right.

DH: -- was one lane going in and one lane coming out. And it was called Katy Road. But it was a...

TT: Is that house still there?

DH: No.

TT: No?

DH: Arthur knew how to design contemporary architecture but he didn’t know how to design wood structures for termites.

TT: Uh-oh.

DH: And the people that bought the house eventually had termites and they tore the house down and built a --

TT: Built something else.

DH: -- yeah -- something more traditional --

TT: That’s too bad.

DH: -- on the property. Yeah. We walked the site, after they had torn it down, and found little pieces of the house. There was a terrazzo floor [03:00] in all the living area. And we found pieces of terrazzo and a little bit of this and that, that we recognized. And we took them home as --

TT: Souvenirs?

DH: -- mm-hmm -- mementos.

TT: Well, do you think living in that house influenced your decision to become an architect?

DH: Well, I don’t think I ever really had a de‑- a definitive moment when I decided to be an architect. I think it was just sort of an intuitively acquired path, that seemed to follow me from one endeavor to the next. And this photograph is from --

TT: Oh, my gosh!

DH: -- Dallas in 1952. And if it doesn’t look like I was preordained to be an architect -- or on a construction site -- nothing would.

TT: That’s great. Is that under construction --

DH: That’s the house --

TT: -- what you’re standing in?

DH: -- that my parents built, in 1952, in Dallas. [04:00] And that’s just... I appear to be the clerk of the works.

TT: Standing there in the framing.

DH: Yeah, with my overalls on and looking like I own the place. But, yeah, no matter how... I seemed to do well in art classes. In sixth grade, I was the chief muralist for our Christmas mural and won a blue ribbon in arts division, in junior high. And we had three years of drafting offered in our high school --

TT: Wow!

DH: -- mechanical -- well, basic drawing, mechanical drawing the second year, and architectural drawing the third year. And I got the highest score, for those three years, and got the Industrial Arts Award. And then, when it was time to go to college, my parents had gone to UT, so I figured why not me? And it was that basic a decision. And what school? [05:00] Well, why not architecture school? And that’s how it all began.

TT: You make it sound so easy, that decision.

DH: Well, it was. Because, like I say, it just sort of followed me. And I was just casually going down the path. And several times during my school career, I could have easily upset the whole thing and cut off the career track, just due to my lack of attention.

TT: Oh.

DH: And I’ll speak to that, as we -- as we go on.

TT: So your family must have been encouraging for you to be in architecture?

DH: Well, my mother was real pleased about it, because she always thought she should have been an interior designer. And that’s why they kept building houses. Because...

TT: That was her interest.

DH: [06:00] Yeah, that was her interest. And my dad was in wholesale electrical supply. So it was a related industry. And when we built the house in ’52, because they were in the industry, mother got to go to a market in Dallas and select all Herman Miller, Knoll furniture for the house.

TT: Wow!

DH: And -- yeah -- and that collection of stuff served them until they were in a nursing home. And it was just well built and, you know, very well styled.

TT: Right.

DH: And they never replaced any of it. They just kept using it for 25, 30 years.

TT: That’s amazing. So you went to UT School of Architecture. Were there any instructors or professors that were particularly important to you?

DH: Alan Taniguchi was probably [07:00] the most important person in my career. He was dean of the architecture school at the time. And my first couple of years, I didn’t really worry about grades or care about grades. And I was in a rock ’n’ roll band, playing around the city.

TT: Was this about 1968?

DH: Sixty-seven, ’68, and ’69. And I had two semesters on scholastic probation. And in the architecture school rules, that wasn’t allowed. If you had two consecutive semesters, you were out. And I went to see Alan. And he said, “Well, I’ll give you one more shot at it. But you better do right.” And I did right --

TT: (laughs)

DH: -- and made dean’s list that next semester. So went back to see him and he said, [08:00] “You’re the only student I know of that’s done two semesters of scholastic probation followed by a dean’s list.”

TT: Dean’s list. It’s pretty amazing.

DH: So I think I hold the record at the architecture school.

TT: Well, that’s a good one to have, I guess.

DH: Yeah.

TT: Anyone else there that you...?

DH: Blake Alexander was influential, because he imbued me with the spirit of architectural history. James Coote -- or Jim Coote was, I think, influential in my thinking career, not so much my architectural career. But he made you think. And I enjoyed being in his class, because it was challenging. Oh, and Luis Divino --

TT: Oh, yes.

DH: -- was sort of a basic drawing, basic design teacher, early on. And I just liked him as a person and thought he taught some interesting things. Owen Cappleman did some [09:00] interesting things, also. Remember trompe l’oeil and several other sort of exercises that were good for skills.

TT: Yeah. What are the aspects from your background and your upbringing that you think might have shaped your design principals and philosophies?

DH: Well, I think, if I had to label it, it would be respect for the past. In the Jewish tradition, as expressed by Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*, it’s tradition. And we had a lot of tradition in our family and in our faith‑- And I think that segued over to [10:00] the architecture, ultimately.

TT: Mm-hmm. So were you interested in restoration/preservation in school?

DH: Well, actually not. I fell into it. It was the end of my fourth year in architecture school. It was a five-year school. And I was very disgruntled with what I’d been offered so far in school and wasn’t inspired at all and was seriously considering switching majors, deciding, well, I just wasn’t getting anything here and it wasn’t of interest and no one was stimulating and‑- And so I was ready to switch. And Blake Alexa‑- and Blake Alexander’s history course, he announced in May, before we‑- I think it was the last session of class -- that [11:00] the San Antonio Conservation Society was offering what they called the first Texas Historic Resources Fellowship, where a student out of one of the five architecture schools in Texas was being offered a $1,500 grant, if you will, for a project in historic preservation. And Blake announced that in the class. And I thought, “Hm. That might be a way to do independent study for my fifth year and ‑‑”

TT: Ah!

DH: “-- get out of here with a degree, rather than have wasted the last four years.” And so I went to Blake and I went to Roy Graham and several other professors, and saying, “Tell me something I can do. And I’ll submit a proposal. Because I don’t know...” They didn’t have a preservation curriculum in the school, at the time. They had architectural history but it really wasn’t preservation/restoration-related. And [12:00] again, no inspiration, no ideas. And so I thought, “Well, that’s going to come and go. And that’s not the opportunity, I guess, that I was supposed to take.” And I had a two-year-old daughter. And she was supposed to go the doctor one afternoon, the pediatrician, for a checkup. And my wife was supposed to take her. And she got busy at school. She was in graduate school, at the time. And I took our daughter to the doctor. And I was in the waiting room, reading magazines off the table, while she crawled around the floor. And I was reading a *Texas Parade* magazine, that was current. And it had an article about a city down on the border with historic buildings and a lot of history. And I thought, [13:00] “Hm.” And when we left, I purloined the magazine and took it home --

TT: (laughs)

DH: -- and wrote a two-page proposal and submitted it to the architecture office, on the last day that these things were to be submitted. And about two weeks later, Alan’s secretary hollered at me as I was walking by in the foyer. And I went in. She said, “Congratulations. You won the fellowship.” And I said, “Oh, great. Does anybody know where Roma, Texas, is?”

TT: (laughs)

DH: Because I had -- I had...

TT: Hadn’t been.

DH: No, I hadn’t. And...

TT: Was it for the fort that’s down there or jus‑‑? Was your proposal related to the fort or...?

DH: No. It related to documenting the historic buildings on the plaza in Roma --

TT: Oh! Okay. Okay.

DH: -- and doing history of the buildings and doing architectural drawings and 4‑by‑5 photography. So I really put a lot into the proposal.

TT: Yeah!

DH: [14:00] So once... I quickly scrambled and went back to those same professors and said, “If I call the course Architectural Photography 101, can I get three hours credit?” And Roy Graham would sign off on that one. And Blake would sign off on another one. And I built enough hours to where I could...

TT: Get a semester?

DH: R‑­-

TT: Wow!

DH: Two semesters, actually.

TT: Oh!

DH: And so I was now in preservation studies but more or less guiding myself through it. And...

TT: So you were a pioneer for the school, I guess, huh?

DH: Mm-hmm. And while I was... It was the fall semester of my fifth year. In, I think, November, there was a notice posted on the bulletin board out in the foyer, that Texas Parks and Wildlife needed a draftsman for [15:00] their newly formed Historic Sites and Restoration Branch. And I remember it was $650 a month. In 1971, that was a lot of money.

TT: It was.

DH: Yeah. And so I took whatever work I’d done that summer to the interview and showed the architect that was doing the interviewing my preservation work, quote, unquote. And he hired me. And since I was doing independent study, I could -- I could work full-time at Parks and Wildlife and do my work on the weekends and at nights --

TT: Yeah!

DH: -- so my schoolwork. And so, all of a sudden, I was employed in restoration/preservation. So it was on the basis of that magazine article that I just sort of fell into preservation --

TT: Sort of.

DH: -- again, wasn’t a conscious choice, like being an architect. [16:00] It wasn’t a conscious choice. It was just -- no epiphany, just...

TT: Opportunity.

DH: Yeah, yeah, that I happened to step into. And wh‑- This isn’t really too relevant but it’s an interesting part of the story. About 30 -- about 30 years later, I was down in Goliad, with a restoration contractor and the Heritage Director of Victoria County. And we were doing some consultation on a building in downtown Goliad. And it was time to go to lunch. And the contractor said, “Do you mind if I go pick up a friend of mine who I’d like you to meet and he’d go to lunch with us?” And said, “That’s great.” We got in the car. He got in the car. And we were driving over there. And he and I were in the backseat. And we started talking -- just mutual interest. And he was a photographer and a writer. And we got to the table and, [17:00] again, we were engaged in cross-conversation. And he said... I was talking about our preservation work. And he said, “A long time ago, I wrote an article about a little town down on the border.” And I said, “*Texas Parade* magazine, 1971.” And he said... He just had the most bewildered look on his face. And he said, “How did you know that?” And I explained to him how. And I could have kissed him. (laughs)

TT: Yeah!

DH: And he was thrilled, to know that my career had followed his...

TT: Right from the start --

DH: Yeah, from his article.

TT: -- that one little thing. That’s a great story. So you never looked back, after that, it was preservation from then on?

DH: Yes. To pick up on the story, when I went to Parks and Wildlife, [18:00] for a year we toured Texas, evaluating historic sites for state acquisition. So we got access to private lands and public lands, in order to evaluate these sites and rank them in priority. And I was there for about a year. There was a branch head, who -- the position had not been filled, and a branch architect and a draftsman, historian, and an archeologist --

TT: What a great team!

DH: -- in the team. And everybody was in place except the branch head. And after about a year, the architect, who was hoping to be promoted to branch head, was not. And Wayne Bell was hired, from the Historical Commission --

TT: Oh.

DH: -- to be branch head. And the architect got his feelings hurt and he quit Parks and Wildlife. And [19:00] I’ll never forget the day Wayne came in an‑‑ Again, I was just a draftsman, still in school. I hadn’t gotten my degree quite yet. And Wayne came in and took the desk and called me in and said, “You’re the draftsman?” I said, “Yes.” And -- “You’ve been here for a year?” “Yes.” And he said, “Well, you’re the most experienced person here. I’m promoting you to architect. And go hire a draftsman.” And I said, “Okay.”

TT: (laughs)

DH: And so I took my promotion and came back to my office and interviewed and hired John Klein.

TT: Oh!

DH: And that’s how the three of us got together.

TT: That’s how your firm was formed.

DH: Mm-hmm. And Wayne, at the time, was getting requests for consultations and to be architect for this and that. And he didn’t have the time to do it. So he asked John and I if we would like to moonlight these projects. And we said, [20:00] “Sure, we’ll do that.” And the moonlight just kept coming and coming and coming. And we were getting kind of exhausted. And it was hard to keep track off too, because we had day jobs and these projects were starting to be ongoing. And the three of us decided that we’d start a firm and John would be the first partner to man the firm. So John left Parks and Wildlife, at that point. Because we... Well, he left Parks -- Wildlife. And we opened an office, on Congress Avenue. And eventually, there was enough work... We had one employee, first. Still too much work. We needed another partner down there. So I left Parks and Wildlife and went down. And then we just grew as a firm. And so, once I picked up, again, that magazine, it was restoration/preservation, always.

TT: Yeah. So what year did you leave Parks and Wildlife and go join this...?

DH: I’ll never forget. It was [21:00] August 1974. I’d been there three and a half years and I thought I was going to be, you know, riding out with confetti and balloons. And it was the day that Nixon left the White House. And everybody was focused on the TV.

TT: (laughs) Nobody cared!

DH: And Dick Nixon stole my moment of glory at Parks and Wildlife. And I just left kind of sadly. But it wa‑- it was a good thing. But I never forgave him for it.

TT: I’m sure, over the years, you must have continued to work with Parks and Wildlife.

DH: We did some of their work, yes. We did the Sam Bell Maxey House in Paris, for them, Sam Bell Maxey State Historic Site, and Landmark Inn, in Castroville.

TT: Sure.

DH: That’s the only two I can remember.

TT: This is just an odd [22:00] question but it’s one I find interesting, the answers I get -- is, when you were working in the firm, did you ever talk about your work, outside of the office, with anyone?

DH: In the general populations?

TT: Mm-hmm. Friend or...

DH: Yeah. Not so much friends. When we would talk with people that identified the work that we did, people always wanted to know something about... They always thought it was intriguing, the restoration and preservation aspect of the work. And they would ask a lot of questions about the history and/or the people involved in the past --

TT: Sure.

DH: -- the history of the building and stories, you know, about it. So [23:00] I wouldn’t call it a habit of talking with people, in general. But we would always respond to people’s interest. Because there was a lot of interest in it.

TT: Mm-hmm. Sure. So tell me about some of your Austin/Travis County projects.

DH: Well, I meant to bring a project list but I didn’t. And what I thought -- the best way to describe is, if you start at what I call the epicenter, of downtown Austin, Sixth and Congress, and go north -- I’m going to have to visualize now -- again, the major restoration projects were the Paramount Theatre, the old Millet Opera House, the Lundberg Bakery, the Walter Tips Building. Going south from the epicenter, you’ve got the McKean-Eilers [24:00] building, the Day Building, the Swift Building, and the six-story -- I think it’s six-story -- building on the corner. All those four were done for Trammell Crow Company, and before they built the high-rise. Hannig Row on Sixth Street. There are four buildings in what’s known as Hannig Row, on Sixth Street. Other projects around town, the Bremond Block. We did houses on the Bremond Block, just a block away from here. The Austin History Center was one of our projects, the Ney Museum. And probably the one that stayed with me the longest is the Moonlight Towers. And those are the major projects I can think of. There were a multitude of more minor projects -- or less major. I wouldn’t want to call a former client minor.

TT: [25:00] So what time period does that work span, just generally‑‑?

DH: Probably 1970 to 2005.

TT: Wow. So here’s a question I thought of last night, thinking about this interview. I’m wondering what buildings have disappeared, that you really feel pain (laughs) for the fact that we lost?

DH: We were talking about this morning, as we were driving to the History Center. We were driving by the former site of the Honeycutt House. And as we were driving by, I just pointed up to the lot and said, “Honeycutt” -- and we [26:00] turned the corner and went, “Houghton,” which is now a parking garage. We got to the next block. I went, “Butler.” And it’s just an empty parking lot. And those were three great Austin homes, that were torn down within a year of each other, I think. And that was -- that was crushing for the in‑- the infancy of the preservation movement, in one way, but, in another way, it rallied the Austin preservation movement and woke a lot of people up to the fact that it’s not just a society in name only, a heritage society, it needs to be a preservation activist. And it got a lot of people involved and stimulated, in that regard. The [27:00] one building that preceded the destruction of those three was the Shot Tower, on 9th Street. And it wasn’t a significantly detailed building. It was a very plain building. But it was -- it was historic, nevertheless. And it was torn down in the middle of the night. And those four destructions hurt. Beyond that, I can’t think of any major losses that come to mind. We were pretty successful after that, in --

TT: Saving...

DH: -- spreading the word.

TT: Tell me about one of your favorite projects.

DH: [28:00] That question is almost like “Who’s your favorite child?”

(laughter)

TT: Okay.

DH: But if I were to answer it, I would have to say it’s the Moonlight Tower project --

TT: Yeah.

DH: -- because it followed me for the next 20 years after we completed the project. Because we had started doing the historical research during the 1993 to 1995 restoration. But we did enough r‑- We didn’t have time to do comprehensive research. We did some basic historical research. But it was enough to identify for us that the information that was available about the towers was incorrect. And so, for the next 15 years, I became obsessed and on a personal mission to straighten that out and [29:00] tell the true story of the history of the Austin Moonlight Towers. And I traveled to New York and Michigan and Indiana and Illinois, going to the source of the towers, and ended up writing a book about not just the Austin towers but the origination of electric light towers in the United States and how the Moonlight Towers were a part of that story. But there was a big story of almost 15 years prior to Austin’s Moonlight Towers, where the tale of the towers begins. And I was able to put that in the book and then printed the book in 2013, I think. And then, within this last year... I thought I was through with the towers.

TT: (laughs)

DH: [30:00] And then, within this last year, two filmmakers were going to do a documentary movie on the Moonlight Towers, as icons. And I was pretty heavily involved in providing them information and appearing in the movie, giving interviews. And so it still...

TT: Carries on.

DH: Yes, it does.

TT: So where were out towers manufactured?

DH: Fort Wayne, Indiana.

TT: And did they install them all at one time? Or were they kind of added on, over...?

DH: The initial installation was for 31 towers. And they put the first one up in Hyde Park. And I can’t remember the timeframe but, within five to six months, I [31:00] think all the rest of them were in place. And then they needed to complete the powerhouse which provided the electricity to light the towers. And I think it was in 1895. Can’t remember the month. They let the contract in 1893 and they were completed by 1895 and lit. And in 1900, the river washed the dam out and the powerhouse. And so they went dark for a number of years, after that. And then there’s a long history of towers that have fallen and some that have been knocked down purposefully and just a long story of attrition, from 31 to 17 towers.

TT: So your book covers the history of [32:00] each location and each tower?

DH: Everything that we could find out about them. And I did the research before you could access online like you can. And so occa‑- Like the filmmakers came up with a tower incident that I’d never heard of. And it was documented in the Austin *Statesman*. You can search the Austin *Statesman* now, for “Moonlight Towers,” on the website for the History Center. And you couldn’t, back then. Back then it was like one microfilm sheet at a time. And you’d have to scan the whole thing, to see if there was a Moonlight Tower reference. And I missed one. Because I couldn’t sit in front of the microfilm for --

TT: No. (laughs)

DH: -- 100 years’ worth of Austin *American-Statesman* and scan it. My brain [33:00] just wouldn’t do that. So there’s still information out there that will come up, every now and then. But I guarantee you the major information was covered in the book.

TT: What was the biggest misconception that...? Because you mentioned misinformation that existed prior to your research and book. What’s the biggest...?

DH: The biggest discrepancy was the tower inventor. And it’s easy to understand why. But it was always credited to this particular person. And there were two tower inventors, in the 1880s. And they were both from Elgin, Illinois. And one was Edward O’Beirne and one was John Adams. And they each had an electric light tower design. [34:00] But O’Beirne’s was pyramidal, in that it had a wide base and came to a point at the top. And the other was the design of the tower that we have. But the original design from John Adams used hollow pipe. And O’Beirne’s pyramidal tower used what they called star iron, which in cross-section just looks like a plus sign. And the advantage of the star iron was that there was no condensation on the interior of the pipe, that you couldn’t maintain and therefore would rust. And the Fort Wayne Electric Company ended up owning the patents from John Adams and Edward O’Beirne. And they recognized the weakness in the hollow pipe but also knew that the -- that [35:00] the tower, standing on one base, with guy wires, was easier to place in a developing urban setting than a pyramidal tower, with a big, spread base. Because you need a lot of area to do that.

TT: Sure, a lot of real estate.

DH: Mm-hmm. And so they combined the patents and produced a tower of John Adams’s design but with O’Beirne’s star iron pattern. And Austin was one o‑- This was late in the career of electric light towers. And Austin just happened to get a set of those towers which have en‑- have endured, for that reason, of the combined patents. But most of the other cities either grew up too fast and the towers were not of any use anymore, because of the taller buildings, or they just deteriorated, because they were hollow pipe.

TT: I see. [36:00] Interesting. So it sounds like this part of your career was probably the most influential on Austin and its development, of all the things you’ve worked on?

DH: I think so. And I’d like to credit the firm, John and Wayne, as... I think -- I think our contribution was not just individual building restorations but it was setting a standard for restoration, that I think other architects and clients recognized and many aspired to -- as well as people that were hired by our office, trained in our office, practiced in our office, and then went on to [37:00] do --

TT: Their ow‑­-

DH: -- their own good work.

TT: Who were some of those people? Do you...?

DH: John Volz was one of them. Kim Williams was another. Laurie Limbacher, Al Godfrey.

TT: Yeah. Definitely. Let’s see.

DH: Jay Farrell. I’m just remembering names now.

TT: Can you describe an evolution in your work or your thinking about architecture, from when you first started to even today?

DH: Well, originally, when we were young bucks (laughter) and had dark hair, we were very purist. And we sort of [38:00] mocked, in a gentle way, older architects, like Raiford Stripling, in East Texas, and O’Neil Ford, in San Antonio, who had been doing restoration work but were doing it in a less purist way -- I’ll put it that way -- some things at their own discretion, as opposed to following the rigidity of the history and the research. And over the years, I got sort of better understanding of where they were coming from and had a more relaxed attitude, not capricious or reckless but...

TT: You could understand where they --

DH: Yeah.

TT: -- had been coming from.

DH: Things aren’t quite so serious as you think they are, you know. And maybe a little flourish here or a little change in the design [39:00] would be for the betterment, you know, of the project or a better design aspect of the project, nothing major but just a minor change, and don’t sweat the details. John and I were both at Parks and Wildlife when... Do you know Raiford Stripling?

TT: I do not, no.

DH: Well, he was probably one of the first restoration architects in the state of Texas. And he lived over in San Augustine. And he was... We were still at Parks and Wildlife. And he was hired for the restoration of General Zaragoza’s birthplace, which is outside of Presidio La Bahia. And years ago, he had started [40:00] drawing on the project, before we were at Parks and Wildlife, but it got suspended somehow. And we were asked to pick the project back up, by the state representative. So we hired Raiford to pick the project back up. And we unrolled the plans. And he... This was a very simple, humble adobe house, that General Zaragoza lived in. And Raiford had designed it like the Governor’s Palace in San Antonio, and all kinds of wrought iron and tile floors and... It was very elaborate. And we had to... Here it was, the dean of restoration. And we were just children, basically, on site, telling the dean of restoration that, “You have to take this off and this off and simplify this.” And...

TT: To bring it down to the basics.

DH: Yeah. Yeah. I’ll never forget‑- He did, [41:00] grudgingly. But he did. That’s beyond what I ultimately ended up doing myself. But it w‑­- it was really to the extreme. But I understood, because of that experience, better about where I was getting less and less concerned about the exacting detail, you know, as far as what was a priority in our work.

TT: Is there a part of the whole architecture process that you like the best, like any phase of it?

DH: I think the most challenging part in restoration is bringing forward from the past what’s important and integrating it with [42:00] what has to be updated and sort of being the judge of what takes priority and how they’re integrated. That’s the intellectual challenge in restoration. The rest is a technical challenge. But it’s the...

TT: You like thinking through that process.

DH: Right.

TT: Yeah. Are you a sketcher?

DH: I am now. I didn’t sketch in the practice. Some people were great at butter paper sketching. When I saw that question, I thought of Tom Shefelman. He used to do a lot of butter paper sketching. I never could roll it out and sketch it, tear it off and sketch again. But I do a lot of travel sketching [43:00] now, and pencil sk‑-

(cell phone rings)

TT: That’s okay.

DH: It’s my phone.

TT: It’s all right.

DH: I do pencil sketches, when we travel, and scan them and then colorize them on the computer, with software. But I didn’t sketch -- or...

TT: When you working.

DH: No.

TT: Do you think sketching and model building are still as important as they once were considered in architectural practice?

DH: I don’t know if they’re still as important. But they’ve always been a big part of me. When I wa‑- I started building model cars and planes and ships, when I was a little tyke, and did up into my teenage years. And then, when we started the firm, [44:00] every opportunity I got, I would build the model rather than let a staff-person do it. And I’m still building models today, in retirement, of what my friends have called whimsies, things that are indescribable until you see them.

TT: So they’re abstract things that you’re building or...?

DH: Mostly things from found objects on the ranch --

TT: Oh. Uh-huh.

DH: -- or something... Like I say, it’s sort of hard to describe but putting together things and lighting them. You’ll have to come out the ranch and see.

TT: Yeah! Okay.

DH: I, fortunately, have been developing a large studio, out on the ranch, [45:00] and have a room where I can do painting and a room where I can write and a room where I can record music. And we’ve got a theater out there --

TT: Wow!

DH: -- theater room in the studio -- and it’s -- and an archive. I’m the family archivist, and got a pretty large archives of family documents, in the studio.

TT: Nice.

DH: And my wife indulges me.

(laughter)

TT: Sounds perfect! At what point in your career did you...? Was there a single project where you thought, “Oh, I’ve really made the right decision”? Maybe it was a job, rather than a single project, but where you knew, “Architecture’s what I should be doing. Restoration’s what I should be doing.” I mean, you said before you didn’t really have an epiphany but...

DH: No. [46:00] In terms of the firm’s career... Because once we started the firm, we weren’t really thinking as individuals. We were really thinking as a firm. And so, for many years, it was the firm that was -- the reputation of the firm. And the glory went to the firm, not to the individual.

TT: An individual?

DH: Yeah. So I can’t think of anything personally. I do know that, as the firm grew, I became more detached from architecture and more into management of the firm.

TT: I see.

DH: So I was coveting what my employees were doing. Because they got to actually work on the projects. And [47:00] I was managing the project, from an administrative standpoint. And it wasn’t until we started... People come and go, in firms. And at the time, we made a decision, when they went, we wouldn’t rehire, we’d just stay with -- we wouldn’t let anybody go but we would wait until somebody left and we’d just get smaller and smaller. And the smaller we got, the more I could start getting back into the work again.

TT: Yeah.

DH: And eventually it got down to Binnie and myself, my wife and I. She was an architectural historian and was with the firm for many years. And we got down to she and I, two employees. And we decided to move the firm from downtown to our home, and take over the bedroom area [48:00] where our daughters had lived but had all gone to college. And so it got down to just the two of us. And I could finally get back into a project, which, I hadn’t been for years.

TT: Yeah.

DH: And that would be the closest thing to what you’re saying, where I had sort of a new-found enthusiasm and direction for what I was doing.

TT: Enjoyment --

DH: Yes, that too.

TT: -- of all that. Yeah. Well, it sounds like your days, these days, are very creative. Is there a ritual in the morning, to prepare yourself? Do you go into each day knowing...?

DH: I wake up with the creative process (laughs) in my... Sometimes I wake up with the idea in m‑- It’s already there. It was planted overnight, somehow. And I wake up and I’ll go do [49:00] whatever it is.

TT: Straight to your studio?

DH: Yeah. So waking up is the ritual.

TT: (laughs) No stop for coffee, even.

DH: No. Never did coffee, not even in architecture school.

TT: Tell me about places you’ve traveled. And have any of those influenced your work?

DH: We’ve traveled the North American continent and we’ve done some European travel. We’ve done some Middle East travel. Probably the most influential place that we’ve ever been... Well, there are two places. One was, on our honeymoon, we went to Cairo and out to Giza, where the pyramids are. And we wanted to go to the top of the pyramid. And there are all sorts of guides around the bottom of the pyramid, that will take your $10 [50:00] and take -- le‑- The only way you can get up is with a guide. And I offered the guide $20, if he would stay down on the ground and watch us go up. And he thought that’s not a bad deal. And so he stayed down and we climbed up to the top. And I had a tripod for my camera. We were the only ones at the top. And I had a tripod for my camera, which I set up on a rock, and, with the setting sun behind us and with minarets -- call for prayer going on, took a picture, on our honeymoon, of my wife and I on top of the pyramids. And that’ll be always the most special place I’ve ever visited. Because it was a magical moment. But after that, we went to Jerusalem and toured Israel. And Jerusalem is the most fascinating city, I think, in the -- in the world. Because it’s just [51:00] got layers and layers of civilization. And if you don’t feel the history and the march of time in Jerusalem, you’re dead, you know --

TT: (laughs)

DH: -- if you don’t experience it. It was very moving, and inspiring --

TT: Nice.

DH: -- and made a connection for me -- which I thought I had. But it really reinforced my connection with history and with the past.

TT: Is there a development in architecture, during your career, that you consider the most interesting development?

DH: I thought about that. And from a vocational standpoint, [52:00] I think computer-aided drafting was the biggest change in architecture, in my lifetime. I never got into it. Because I didn’t want to have to teach myself how to do it. And by the time it came to the forefront, we were down to just my wife and I. And I’m not sure whether... I’m sure, from a production standpoint, that’s been a plus. I’m not sure, in the long run, it’s going to be a plus for the profession, in terms of people not developing a hand-drawing technique or... Because I think a lot of creativity comes from the mind through the hand, and not necessarily a hand on the keyboard.

TT: I agree. Yeah. Outside of architecture, what are you most fascinated by?

DH: [53:00] That changes from day to day, week to week.

TT: (laughs)

DH: But I did bring you... For the last two years, I’ve been fascinated by all the wildflowers and sunrises and sunsets, all from within our front and back yard. And it’s been a bountiful year for wildflowers, because of all the rain we had --

TT: Rain.

DH: -- over the winter and the spring. Let me see if I can... I brought these as an example, to show you what our backyard...

TT: What a vista!

DH: This is from the backyard. That was from the front yard. Front yard. [54:00] And I’ve just been just fascinated by the complexity and the order of these wildflowers and other things.

TT: Are you planting wildflowers or --

DH: No --

TT: -- just let them evolve on their own?

DH: -- just let them grow naturally.

TT: That’s interesting.

DH: Devil’s claw. That’s a weed. But it’s beautiful.

TT: It’s beautiful, looks like an orchid.

DH: Yeah. This is a wild garlic.

TT: Wow! That’s beautiful.

DH: So that’s my current fascination.

TT: Okay. That’s a good one. I know you don’t live in Austin anymore. Not sure how often you come in to visit. But I was going to ask you what excites you about Austin, these days, and what concerns you, if...

DH: Well, because we’re relatively isolated, out on the ranch, [55:00] what excites us about coming to Austin is the restaurants. (laughter) What’s disturbing about Austin is I get so disoriented driving in town now. Because the old visual landmarks --

TT: Landmarks.

DH: -- either obliterated or obscured. And I’ll be at an intersection and have this panic that I’m not at Sixth and Lamar, you know. Where am I? And so that’s... So we try and stay pretty much our doctors’. We come maybe once a week, once every two weeks back to Austin, for a doctor’s appointment or health food or something like that but it’s usually only penetrating Austin as far as we need to go and then back --

TT: Back out --

DH: -- out again.

TT: -- back home.

DH: Because the kinetic energy [56:00] here is just so different than being on the ranch.

TT: Sure. I’m curious. Did you ever go back and teach at UT, in the School of Architecture?

DH: Yes, I did. For three or four years, I had... While I was still with the firm, we still had employees... I don’t remember exactly what the years were. But Wayne wanted me to teach a Preservation Technology course. He was in charge of Preservation Studies at the time, at UT. And he asked me to teach Preservation Technology for three or four years, I think it was. And every Tuesday, I had to spend developing a curriculum for that afternoon. And it was like four‑ or six-hour session, in the master’s program. And I really enjoyed it. It [57:00] was sort of re‑stimulating.

TT: What advice would you have for students or young architects, these days?

DH: I don’t know so much as... If it were advice, it would probably be follow your heart and your instincts. If it were a wish, I wish them the kind of luck that I had in finding my career.

TT: Yeah. What’s your favorite building in the world?

DH: This may sound corny but it’s the 1872 restored home that we live in.

TT: Oh! Sure. What about in Austin?

DH: It’s the little stone carriage house at the base of the Austin Women’s Club building, [58:00] down 10th Street --

TT: Yes.

DH: -- I think, the bottom of 10th and... I don’t remember what the cross-street is. But it’s at the base of the Austin Women’s Club building. And it was the first drafting job that I had, with a designer named Dan Powell. And it was the beginning of my professional career, you know, drafting.

TT: Mm-hmm. Is that the one that’s a photographer’s studio now?

DH: I don’t know what it is now. I haven’t been down there in a long time. But every time... I mean, I can visualize that building. And it always takes me back to my roots, whenever I go by it. It’ll always have an indelible sort of memory experience, for me.

TT: Well, that’s [59:00] all of my questions. Is there anything that we didn’t talk about, that you’d like to talk about?

DH: I can’t -- I can’t think of anything. I would like to add that this is an excellent set of questions and inquiries, for an architect. I think this is a really worthwhile thing that you’re doing --

TT: Well, thank you.

DH: -- commend you for it.

TT: Thanks. And thank you for coming in and doing the interview with us. It was appreciated.

DH: My pleasure. Thank you for asking.

END OF AUDIO FILE