

ORAL HISTORY OF

Suzanne Binswanger

Interviewed by Hyman Myers and Bruce Lavery

February 24, 2012

Recorded under the auspices of The Athenaeum of Philadelphia

Keystones Oral History Collection

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PREFACE & SUMMARY

On February 24, 2012 Hyman Myers and Bruce Lavery interviewed Suzanne Binswanger at her house. Myers was a preservation architect at VITETTA. Lavery was the Gladys Brooks Curator of Architecture at The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

Lynn Mandarano transcribed this interview in 2025. The transcription process was funded by a Historical and Archival Records Care (HARC) Grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC). Eve Wildrick, Binswanger's daughter and partner, reviewed the transcript for accuracy in 2025.

The following is an AI-generated summary. A member of the project team or a research intern at The Athenaeum will review the summary and expand upon it for accuracy prior to online publication.

Suzanne Binswanger, a prominent interior designer in Philadelphia, discusses her career and design philosophy. She started her firm, Executive Interiors, in 1961, initially focusing on corporate offices and later expanding into residential design. Binswanger describes her approach to working with clients, her appreciation for both traditional and contemporary styles, and her collaborations with architects. She highlights some of her notable projects, including the Lou Kahn-designed Korman residence and her work for Walter Annenberg and the University of Pennsylvania. Binswanger also reflects on the evolution of interior design, noting the changing trends and the influence of designers like Martha Stewart in bringing design to the forefront of public consciousness.

The transcription discusses the challenges of interior design work, particularly in the healthcare and education sectors. The speaker mentions working on projects for organizations like Price Waterhouse and Fox Chase Cancer Center, and how the designed spaces would sometimes be rearranged or not maintained as intended. The speaker also notes the importance of the healthcare and education industries in Philadelphia's economy, and the work of individuals like Judith Rodin in revitalizing certain areas of the city. Overall, the transcription highlights the complexities and realities of interior design work, especially when dealing with clients who may not fully appreciate or maintain the designed spaces.

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE

Suzanne Hirsch Binswanger (1930-2025) was the founder of Executive Interiors, an interior design firm that specialized in corporate offices, including the offices of the legal firm Wolf Block Schorr & Solis-Cohen, Price Waterhouse, Rohm & House, Triangle Publications (Walter Annenberg's media group), and the executive offices for The Philadelphia Inquirer and Daily News companies. Binswanger also did the interior design for the Korman House, Louis Kahn's last residential project.

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ORAL HISTORY OF SUZANNE BINSWANGER

- Myers
[00:01:50] And you'll begin by just saying, "I'm Suzanne Binswanger" and give a little background on yourself, when you were born, where you were born, and your family interests. Was there an interest in designing in your family?
- Binswanger
[00:02:06] My mother had very good taste. I think I was used to that.
- Myers
[00:02:09] Well, that's a good thing to say. But no professional background in design, so that would be good.
- Suzanne, as a major designer in Philadelphia for interiors, tell us about your beginnings. When you grew up, were there other professional designers that you knew or were inspired by?
- Binswanger
[00:03:08] No, never by designers because I really didn't have occasion to know them. And I actually got into it because I was very interested in art at college. And when actually when our son was four, our youngest, I went into business. And another girl and I were selling paintings to offices. Because at that time in 1961-2, men didn't have art on their walls. They had, the attorneys, had those terrible English men in the wigs, the Tories. And people didn't have lithographs or even posters in their general office areas. And people would say as we were taking these, dragging paintings around from different galleries that we thought were suitable, and people, [and we'd] say... "Tsk, look at those draperies, they looked so horrible or my chair is all worn. It was because the chair was so high and rubbing underneath the desk. Can you do anything about it?" So we realized that there was A. Pomerantz & Co. at the time. I don't think I knew of any other office furniture people. We got to know some. But I didn't know of any of their designers. And actually my mother-in-law had had a designer that did our first house, you know, when I think about it. I mean that was a wedding present. It was like a fait accompli.
- Laverty
[00:04:38] Were you born in Philadelphia?
- Binswanger [00:04:41] Yeah, I'm a Philadelphian.
- Laverty
[00:04:42] And where did you go to school?
- Binswanger [00:04:44] Abington High School and then I went to Sarah Lawrence College.
- Myers
[00:04:48] And it was at Sarah Lawrence that the art became interesting to you?

Binswanger
[00:04:52]

Yeah, I took painting, and then I took sculpture. And of course, I missed out. I took the sculpture after I left school. I was painting with a terrible professor because he wouldn't tell you anything. He felt you had to learn everything for yourself. And if he told you something, it would be like he was doing the painting. It was ridiculous. And next door was David Smith, a fabulous welder. And I longed for the time that I... had I been aware and even interested in sculpture, which I ended up taking later with Leon Sitarchuk, because I didn't have time to clean up the paints, which if I did, well I had three children. So I took up sculpture. But anyhow, had I had the experience with David Smith. I think it would have served me very well.

Myers
[00:05:52]

Did your family collect art? Did that influence you?

Binswanger
[00:05:56]

Well, actually my mother...She had very good taste, and she's a painter. If you walk around, I can show you some of the things she'd done. And so I think it started there. So we realized, Joan [Rich, Binswanger's partner] and I realized that they were, you know, a need probably for some independent designers to go around because we thought corporate offices, which is why our firm is called Executive Interiors, should be reflective of what men might have in their own studies at home. And so that's how we started.

Myers
[00:06:42]

So you started in 1961, is that right? And you still are active?

Binswanger
[00:06:48]

Yeah, I'd like to even be more active.

Myers
[00:06:52]

But you said you're [with your] daughter now?

Binswanger
[00:06:53]

My daughter, Eve Wildrick, has taken over. I mean, I definitely go to the office, but she has taken over, and she is more in the corporate world. And when I say that because I have become more of a residential designer.

And we did things like the Fox Chase Cancer Center and all of their lobbies over the years. But she's done things like Chestnut Hill College and Germantown Friends, Lawrenceville School every year she goes back, and the University of Pennsylvania. We did some of those together.

Myers
[00:07:31]

So 38 years is a long time.

Binswanger
[00:07:34]

This is some of the work that she did [referring to a portfolio].

- Myers
[00:07:37] And so the firm was called Executive Interiors from the beginning. That's a long time, you've done a lot of projects.
- Binswanger
[00:07:49] Yeah, well, I find it very rewarding. I really do.
- Myers
[00:07:53] So you did executive interiors for offices, corporate headquarters, but you also did a lot of residential work.
- Binswanger
[00:08:01] Yeah, and the residential we've done over the years. So we've done both.
- Myers
[00:08:07] What would be your favorite corporate project that you can think of?
- Binswanger
[00:08:11] Let's see that list. You're putting me on the spot. Well, I guess Price Waterhouse because I was young and I did the managing partner and twelve partners' offices there when they were over here at the Rohm & Haas building. And then when Shaun O'Malley became president and went to New York, I did his office in New York and his apartment.
- Myers
[00:08:52] What was the concept of doing these executive interiors? Was there a philosophy involved?
- Binswanger
[00:09:00] For each office, as you can see if you're looking through the pictures, [it] is very, very different. And some people definitely wanted contemporary and some wanted traditional. When we did Walter Annenberg's office, he wanted his same--the living room rug out there I bought in Schrodinger for him, but he wanted the same Edward Fields rug that he had in his former office. So we had to replicate that. He was a delight to work for. Lee [Annenberg] was the one who was really running the job though, I think. And so that was really very interesting.
- Myers
[00:09:42] So when you went into an Annenberg office and he hired you to do the work, what would be your beginning thoughts about how it might look? Because this is an individual project with a specialty. Like keep this, or use this again, or I like red or green?
- Binswanger
[00:10:00] Yeah, I usually let the clients lead, you know, what color palette if they know, or start taking things and then can sort of eliminate things as we go along....So anyhow, different people have different tastes and I was brought up in the world of antiques and I think that's my most favorite thing to do.
- Myers
[00:10:58] But that certainly didn't stop you from doing modern as well. So there's a love for both clearly.

- Binswanger
[00:11:00] Well I think I like good design and I can appreciate it even if things are reproductions. I have [this] disdain because I hate to have people throw money away because the things are used furniture the next day. But if the lines are good, it's still acceptable. So I just feel it's a much better investment if you can afford them. A good buy.
- Laverty
[00:11:28] The office that you did for Walter Annenberg, was that his home office? Was it at the Inquirer or Red...
- Binswanger
[00:11:34] It was at the Corporate Center. I did a few offices, I forgot to put them [in]. I did Sam McHale's office, I forgot to put that down, at the Inquirer. And Ralph Neal at the Daily News. I forgot even to put those down.
- Myers
[00:11:47] Yeah. An interior I saw and I didn't know that you had done was this Lou Kahn design, residential design interior, which is beautiful. Do you want to talk about that? That was back when?
- Binswanger
[00:12:02] 1974.
- Myers
[00:12:04] 1974. And it made the cover of Interior Design magazine.
- Laverty
[00:12:09] And who is the client?
- Binswanger [00:12:11] Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Korman, and it was out in Fort Washington, and there were three houses built on this property. One was Hugh Jacobsen and one was Lou Kahn, and I don't know who did the third, do you remember? I can't remember. But it was pretty exciting.
- Myer
[00:12:31] And it was Korman who chose you, right?
- Binswanger
[00:12:35] Yes
- Myers
[00:12:36] And insisted.
- Binswanger
[00:12:37] Yeah, much to Lou Kahn's disappointment because he had hoped to do the whole thing. So our first meeting with him, and actually it was probably the only meeting I had with him in his office. I think I mentioned to you before he was sitting there with a plain table and just some beautiful stones all in natural colors and leaves and he gave me the idea that he liked those colors so I chose those colors and the Kormans didn't want any color in the house. They wanted his architecture to be the pre-eminent thing, so I was very respectful of it. There

was a huge cavernous... fireplace. Is it shown in that picture on the cover? And he was always going to design a chair for it. So I never did the living room until the last because I was waiting for this chair, [but] it never came. But anyhow, I think it all worked out well. Because six weeks before he died, we had dinner. We were invited to the Korman's for dinner. It was just the Kormans, ourselves, Lou Kahn, and his wife. And Elaine Kurtz, the artist whose paintings were all over the house, and her husband, who I think was then Secretary, not Secretary of the Treasury, something to do with taxes in Washington. Had quite a fine job. Anyhow, people were going around making toasts, and much to my surprise, because I'd never seen him during the whole job after that first meeting. Lou Kahn made a toast to me and thanked me for being so sympathetic or empathetic with his architecture. So to me, that was the height of compliments.

Myers
[00:14:41]

That certainly was because. We had a tour sponsored by The Athenaeum to that house and when we went there, everybody, including myself, thought all the interiors were by Lou Kahn because they fit it so well with the architecture of the building. Well, I'm delighted to know that you were the designer.

Binswanger
[00:15:04]

But Stephen and Toby Korman were still there then because I know the house now belongs [to] the son.

Myers
[00:15:09]

I think only the son.

Binswanger
[00:15:11]

I don't know whether that furniture is the same furniture.

Myers
[00:15:14]

It's very much similar to this magazine, yes.

Binswanger
[00:15:17]

I'm very flattered.

Myers
[00:15:19]

And all the partitions are there and the wood quality. Yeah, lovely.

Laverty
[00:15:25]

It did not look like the 35-year-old building when we visited. I mean, there was a freshness about it.

Myers
[00:15:35]

Well, that's quite the compliment.

Binswanger
[00:15:37]

So you took a tour from The Athenaeum?

- Laverty
[00:15:38] Well, it was a group of curators from around the country. It was the International Confederation of Architectural Museums, which is a fairly small group. But we meet biannually in a North American chapter. And so Philadelphia hosted that.
- Myers
[00:15:57] And the Architectural Archives.
- Laverty
[00:15:59] The Architectural Archives at the University of Pennsylvania. We worked with them in co-hosting this tour, so we took care of the 19th century on one day and then Bill Whitaker took care of the 20th century.
- Myers
[00:16:16] I was a tourist. I wasn't a guide. I went along for...
The other magazine here is By the Sea.
- Binswanger [00:16:46] Oh, that's our house on the shore. It was first done, and that was about 35 years ago.
- Myers
[00:16:51] And where is that located?
- Binswanger [00:16:53] In Margate, in [New] Jersey. And then a storm went through about eight or ten years ago and that's when we changed and got into the fully African mode and the furniture is not dissimilar but we still have those reclining chairs that people love.
- Laverty
[00:17:14] Did you build the house yourself?
- Binswanger
[00:17:15] No, it hadn't been [our] house. That was two brothers had built it, and it was like a square box actually. And they thought they were really fooling everybody because they had two houses inside. There were two laundries. There were two stairways upstairs all the way to the third floor. There were two stairways. So I did have an architect at first and he didn't quite see that I wanted these big glass panes overlooking...I don't like anything that obstructs glass like this. Well, it's serene, I won't bother to tackle any of that. And I wanted all panes of glass. And I wanted it, as you came in, I wanted them angled so you could look at the ocean. And he had his drawings, so they were going the other way. There were angles, so then they looked at the street. So then I changed and had someone else finish it with me. But we had to take out stairways and laundries and simplify it to make it a one-family house.
- Laverty
[00:18:21] Do you spend a lot of time there now?

Binswanger
[00:18:22] We actually spend more time than we had because we've made a group of younger friends from there that are really very, very nice and include us in a lot of things. And so we find it quite nice and a nice change from Philadelphia. And it's an hour and ten minutes away.

Myers
[00:18:48] Also, I like the look of this private residence in Rittenhouse Square

Binswanger
[00:18:53] That was a 12-year project.

Myers
[00:18:55] 12 years!

Binswanger
[00:18:56] 12 years from the start when I was hired.

Myers
[00:18:58] Oh my goodness.

Binswanger
[00:18:59] And we're just about finished now. When I say just about, they have some new chairs they want me to get traveling for, but I haven't gotten a quote. They travel a tremendous amount. And so I'm waiting because I really like them. So over 12 years, they did all the purchasing of the antiques.

Myers
[00:19:20] Themselves?

Binswanger
[00:19:21] They did.

Laverty
[00:19:22] Was that a challenge for you as a designer?

Binswanger
[00:19:25] It was because it was a period that I had never worked in before and it was really very... They looked to me for all the fabrics and things that would be compatible with the furniture and we selected the rugs together at least the rugs in that main what they called the reception room downstairs, which they [use] to entertain business people, as well as guests... But they had a lot of things of their own and from their parents, so we incorporated them.

Voith & MacTavish did the architecture.

Myers
[00:20:13] This was done through the firm Executive Interiors?

Binswanger
[00:20:20] No, I was hired independently.

Myers
[00:20:22] Independently? Ah. Well, these people must have had a lot of confidence because they must have seen what you did before.

Binswanger
[00:20:29] They saw a few things.

Myers
[00:20:32] Is that how you mostly got your business? By word of mouth?

Binswanger
[00:20:41] We never had a brochure. Yes, by word of mouth and people knowing of some of the things we've done. I guess one of my favorite jobs too, I forgot to mention, was Judith Rodin when she was President of Penn. We were privileged to do her house and she was marvelous.

Myers
[00:21:02] Now is this the President's house?

Binswanger
[00:21:04] The President's House, Eisenlohr. Yes And then I did a beach house for her in --- Maryland

Myers
[00:21:14] Of course, that's the greatest compliment when you do one and then you do another because they really loved it.

Binswanger
[00:21:20] Thank you, we enjoyed working together.

Myers
[00:21:23] And do you find that you've done most of your work with architects or you were hired independently?

Binswanger
[00:21:30] Mostly, I'm hired independently. I'd love Hy Myers to take me on.

Myers
[00:21:37] I am now retired.

Binswanger
[00:21:40] You see, I haven't said that. I'm not. I don't think of myself.

Myers
[00:21:43] I'm pretty busy, but I'm still retired.

Binswanger
[00:21:46] You know I'm finishing up a lot but I'm always receptive and I get so turned on working that I just don't want to stop if I can. I love the project I did for The Athenaeum as a photographer.

Laverty
[00:22:01] Binswanger photographed countless of our museum objects. She and Mary Ellen Weber went through our cases and cabinets and photographed things, many for the first time. [Unclear].

Binswanger
[00:22:16] But I hear the archives are used a lot by students now.

Laverty
[00:22:20] Oh yeah, absolutely. It's terrific. And all sorts of surprises.

Binswanger
[00:22:24] It's very exciting working there and seeing all those beautiful things.

Myers
[00:22:28] Now, when you do this work, you did it from your home originally?

Binswanger
[00:22:32] Originally I had my office in the basement, which was above ground in Baederwood [near Jenkintown]. And we've been at four different locations now in town.

Myers
[00:22:42] And where's your latest location?

Binswanger
[00:22:43] Two Logan Square. We rent space with the Binswanger's.

Laverty
[00:22:51] On good terms, I would hope! [Suzanne was married to Frank Binswanger of the Binswanger, a commercial real estate and brokerage company.]

Binswanger
[00:22:53] After doing 30,000 square feet of designing for them.

Myers
[00:22:58] So, about how many projects have you done over the years? I mean, I see a whole stack.

Binswanger
[00:23:01] I obviously have forgotten, yeah. And there are others. Too many. I don't know.

Myers
[00:23:07] About half houses and have offices?

Binswanger
[00:23:09] I'd say more corporate.

Myers
[00:23:11] More corporate?

Binswanger
More corporate.

[00:23:12]

Myers And that was your beginning, actually.

[00:23:13]

Binswanger Yeah.

[00:23:15]

Myers Have you done any other interiors? For example, any hospitals or schools or?

[00:23:16]

Binswanger Right, well we have done, I personally have done a lot of work at Fox Chase Cancer Center. Now Eve has been doing work at a lot of schools. She's doing Lawrenceville School, Millbrook School. Now she's working on, she's doing all the interiors for the new University of Pennsylvania Law School...So she has really done the majority of things in the last few years. She worked with me on Walter Annenberg's. Hampshire College and we did the Division of Plastic Surgery at the University of Pennsylvania.

Myers Oh, I can see where she got her influence, obviously. Must have been all those fabrics around the house, and paint colors, and what have you.

[00:24:16]

Binswanger She used to be in the plant business, which she got out of college, plant landscaping. And I don't know how she came. I sort of drew her over to the business. And still to this day, as busy as she is, she says, that's really not a business for me. She's so well respected. It's so funny that she gets all these things on her own. Mostly with Voith & MacTavish [Architects].

[00:24:25]

Laverty When you started the business in 1961, I assume your children were small.

[00:24:53]

Binswanger Yeah, Jeff was the youngest when he was four.

[00:24:58]

Laverty Do you want to talk at all about the challenges of motherhood and starting a business in a man's world, particularly in the legal and the business world?

[00:25:00]

Binswanger Well, I really, from the very get-go, I just, I have a wonderful husband and the children, they were always first. They came first. And I've never let it change. So I waited until Jeff was four. Now most women start in business early, get married later. But I had all the children by the time I was 25. And so it was a little different then. And I had the kind of job, being your own boss, you could arrange to be home by four o'clock. And they never came home to an empty house, always had someone there, and so I hope they never felt neglected. Jeff keeps talking about how we missed two of his birthdays, but he's now 55.

[00:25:11]

Laverty Well, he'll want to take those off pretty soon anyway.

[00:25:57]

Binswanger
[00:26:02]

Because we were away at conventions.

Myers
[00:26:08]

And did you ever get any formal education in design?

Binswanger
[00:26:13]

Actually, we were taught by business furniture people, the corporate design. Having had the art background and a sense of color, that's the thing that I think I specialize in. At least, I love color. And even though things were traditional, I always did them with a more contemporary feel for color. I used navy blue walls, a lot of dark walls, as you can see. I used a lot of colors. And I was restricted in some of these places because they didn't want it. And in the case of Michael Cone and Connie, [she] was an artist herself, so I had to be respectful. I was their hire or whatever and so I went along.

Myers
[00:27:06]

Were there any projects which you started and said, "Look, I can't work with this client. It's just too difficult."

Binswanger
[00:27:15]

Some people highlight less than others, certainly. But I don't think I ever left, or I don't think I was ever discharged. I definitely wasn't discharged. And I don't think I've ever left.

Myers
[00:27:30]

So you were able to work with all kinds of people. I know some people can be very difficult. Very.

Binswanger
[00:27:36]

Afterwards I'll tell you which ones were more difficult! [Laughter] There were a few people.

Myers
[00:27:47]

That's nice to hear.

Binswanger
[00:27:48]

Oh, I guess. Very nice. We'll have to see if Shaun O'Malley remembers anything.

Myers
[00:27:54]

I'm sure he will. How long ago was that job?

Binswanger
[00:27:59]

You know, I have to have him tell. I have no idea. I didn't even live downtown, I don't think, when they were at the Rohm and Haas building. So it must have been 40 years. I remember it was my first big job and there were all these partners sitting around the table. It was really quite awesome and I don't know how I was hired because I just don't do this, you know, very well. I'm not a big salesperson, but somehow I got it and I did twelve partners' offices there.

Myers

And you have associates working with you in your office, beside your daughter?

[00:28:44]

Binswanger
[00:28:49]

This is amazing. We do not. We hire drafting people, if it's needed, and hire people, you know, architecture, and are usually called into architectural firms and co-venture with them, often with the principles, selection, and... But we have, it's just them, the two of us, and we have a woman who comes in twice a week and she does all our bookkeeping and that's about it. Isn't that strange?

Myers
[00:29:25]

It's wonderful.

When you started, there must not have been very many designers in the field who could do what you were thinking of doing.

Binswanger
[00:29:38]

There weren't a lot of big people, I'm sure. Vincent Kling, I am sure.

Myers
[00:29:41]

He did have an interior design firm, Portia.

Binswanger
[00:29:45]

And there were some, definitely some residential designers. I never did it as a social thing, so I never became friendly with a lot of designers. But there were definitely residential designers

Myers
[00:30:01]

And did you attend conventions and things in which the designers would get together?

Binswanger
[00:30:06]

Went to Milan twice, and that was great. I mean, there's massive shows. That was fun. You probably have done that too.

Myers
[00:30:16]

You can take forever at those shows, I mean, there's so much to see and nobody can see it all, nobody. It's just too much.

Binswanger
[00:30:24]

We'd spend two or three days and that was more than enough.

Myers
[00:30:30]

Were you members of groups in Philadelphia that were interior design related, like ASID?

Binswanger
[00:30:35]

No, I never joined that. I've never joined any groups. I don't belong to any clubs.

Laverty
[00:30:42]

Except for The Athenaeum.

Binswanger
[00:30:44]

I don't think about it. It's not a club. It's my museum.

Myers
[00:30:50] Have you ever done a museum? Have you worked on a museum?

Binswanger
[00:30:54] No.

Myers
[00:30:55] That would be interesting.

Binswanger
[00:30:56] That would be. That would be.

Myers
[00:30:59] Although many of your houses have, or your own houses, have museum artifacts. And so that could be a very good thing for you.

Binswanger
[00:31:08] It would be great. Have you seen the new Barnes [Foundation]?

Myers
[00:31:14] I haven't seen it inside yet. Have we been inside?

Binswanger
[00:31:17] Yeah, that's not finished. They had a group come and that Billie Tsien and her husband and they've done, they've recreated the Barnes inside with those burlap walls and even the size of the rooms. In other words, they designed a museum within a museum. And it just is striking. I think Dr. Barnes would have been very pleased after he got over the initial shock.

Myers
[00:31:50] I see a lot of your corporate interiors here, conference rooms and what have you. Had the digital age made a big difference in the design of conference rooms?

Binswanger
[00:32:01] Yeah, when we first started out, I remember IBM was in different offices, but it was on raised platforms. And the rooms had to be refrigerated to a certain degree. Do you remember that? No. You're younger than I am. With the IBM machines.

Laverty
[00:32:19] You mean for the computers, because they had to be refrigerated?

Binswanger
[00:32:25] It was very different. But now, of course, you have to have raceways. And I need a raceway in my home desk over here because there's so much equipment.

Myers
[00:32:41] Are you contemporary in doing all those things now for these conference rooms and meeting rooms?

- Binswanger
[00:32:48] It depends what the tenor of it is. Of [what] the office is, in and out. I love doing traditional ones, and this is our old house.
- Myers
[00:32:57] I still saw that when I came in.
- Binswanger
[00:33:01] I.M. Pei house.
- Myers
[00:33:01] Oh, you were in one of the Pei townhouses?
- Binswanger
[00:33:03] Yeah, two blocks away. This is, I don't know if you're interested in this, but this is our old house.
- Laverty
[00:33:09] In the tower?
- Binswanger
[00:33:10] Yeah. So I had this huge picture because I couldn't stand the marble fireplace. I had to buy something. So, I went to Wannamaker's antique place and Frank used to tell people it was my mother. [Laughter] He still does.
- Myers
[00:33:30] It would be wonderful to have these ceilings everywhere. You don't get chances...
- Binswanger
[00:33:38] And this was all done. It was just a shell. But we didn't get a chance.
- Myers
[00:33:43] But even in offices, you never get this quality of space.
- Binswanger
[00:33:48] More space upstairs.
- Myers
[00:33:53] Was there a furniture designer that you liked and that you used a lot of their furnishings?
- Binswanger
[00:33:59] Well, the more contemporary, but what we try to buy [is] as many antiques for people, or find antique reproductions. I guess Baker's Milling Road who had the patinas on their furniture that was what I was interested in [Baker is a furniture company; Milling Road is a division within the company]. I hated most reproductions because they didn't have open-pore finishes and they had a highly lacquered finish that looks so new. So, I remember this was Cumberland Furniture, still exists.
- Myers
[00:34:39] Well, I can see that interiors also had a lot of greenery and plants.

Binswanger
[00:34:44] Yeah, I think that's fabulous. In fact, some of the restaurants in Philadelphia that I don't think are doing that well, I think would be so much more enhanced with good lighting and plants. I guess there's no good advice that's free advice, but I told the guy over here we need plants in the place to make it look alive.

Laverty
[00:35:09] Over where?

Binswanger
[00:35:11] I don't want to say.

Laverty
[00:35:14] At a nearby establishment.

Binswanger
[00:35:16] The one that's like the bomb.

Laverty
[00:35:17] Okay.

Myers
[00:35:19] It certainly makes a difference, because you do get color in the plants, and if they're in flower, they can be absolutely beautiful if they are well lit. And you have a lighting designer on staff, you still do that yourself?

Binswanger
Consistently used Ray Grenald.

Laverty
[00:35:36] He's one of our interviewees as well.

Binswanger
[00:35:38] Oh really? And Lee Waldron. They've done all of our houses and they've done all of our work. Now, not for the Cone [house], not for their recent job because they had their own lighting people and there's no recessed lighting. They didn't believe in it. [Unclear.] And I couldn't live in that kind of darkness anymore. But again, that's what they like and that's why they have.

Myers
[00:36:06] Do you see design of interiors going in a certain direction? I know you say each design is different, but I'm wondering if you see any trends.

Binswanger
[00:36:19] I think young people are going to work contemporary. I don't think young people are taking, starting out and having traditional furniture. I think it's a shame. I think so much of it looks the same. I don't think it has a lot of individuality.

Myers
[00:36:33] There's less interest in antiques these days.

Binswanger
[00:36:35] Oh, definitely less antiques, less interest. And yet the big shows are still commanding great prices.

- Myers
[00:36:43] That's true, that's true.
- Binswanger
[00:36:45] I guess because I always lived with the antiques growing up. Both my mother and mother in-law had that appreciation.
- Myers
[00:36:51] But your children have lived with antiques too, and their children have some antiques in their life.
- Binswanger
[00:36:58] They all have old things in their apartments.
- Myers
[00:37:00] But new people seem to be uninterested.
- Binswanger
[00:37:06] It's less expensive, it's easy to do, but there's a sameness, don't you think? When you see these pictures of interiors?
- Myers
[00:37:16] One of the problems of any restoration, when we work on restorations, is the newness of it. And I've heard people say to me, "Well, this is going to be beautiful in a year when you get a little dust and a little downgrading of the new quality." And that's true. It fits much better within a year.
- Binswanger
[00:37:39] Beautiful job at the Academy of Music.
- Myers
[00:37:41] Thank you. Do you see a new trend besides being modern? Is there any other trend that you see? Is there a fabric trend, a color trend? Is that always changing?
- Binswanger
[00:37:59] I think that's changed, don't you think? I think it's always changing. There are new things that sort of come out. It's like fashion. You know, that color of the season. And I think we'll always change. But I like color, so I'm always tempted to incorporate color. Except for the one house that I did all variations with one cup and one accent color.
- Myers
[00:38:26] A lot of houses are only white. Everything is white. A little boring.
- Binswanger
[00:38:37] I did that with the shore house I had, mostly white at first. And then soon to buy white dining room chairs with skirts, very simple. And I realized soon that that was not practical with teenagers and guests. So that was just a fad. So, Bruce, you must have some other questions. I'm sure there are things I haven't touched on that you might.
- Laverty
[00:39:07] I usually defer to Hy here.

- Myers
[00:39:10] Are there any designers that you have seen in magazines, books, television, which have affected you and say, "Oh boy, that person has a good design sense, I like their designs." Somebody who has impressed you?
- Binswanger
[00:39:26] Oh, I think there have been over the years. I'm sure there are a number of them.
- Myers
[00:39:30] Can you think of anybody, specifically, perhaps, in Philadelphia?
- Binswanger
[00:39:39] I mean, I'm sure there are. I kind of had to think about that question. Well, I mean, architects, I'm more impressed with them. Like Kahn. Yeah, and you. No, seriously, there's been some very good architecture. And there are some very fine designers. Don't misunderstand me. As I say, I never did it as a social thing, so I would not have seen it.
- Myers
[00:40:12] Be a major influence.
- Binswanger
[00:40:14] Dennis Weinstock is probably the only person in traditional things that I really admire.
- Myers
[00:40:23] There have been a lot of design shows now on television.
- Binswanger
[00:40:30] I watch very little television. I probably, other than the *Antique Road Show*. I don't really watch a lot of the other ones, so usually during the day when I'm not home.
- Myers
[00:40:42] Martha Stewart was a big innovator.
- Binswanger
[00:40:45] Yeah, she was.
- Myers
[00:40:45] In getting design up front on TV.
- Binswanger
[00:40:50] And people's consciousness.
- Myers
[00:40:51] Yes, and it really did make America conscious of design, and I thought that that was an interesting thing. I didn't think that would ever make it popular, but it did. It became very popular.
- Binswanger
[00:41:08] It's a shame about Martha Stewart. I guess she's come back on her own.

Laverty
[00:41:09]

Yes. Very much so, very much.

Binswanger
[00:41:14]

The design is really something that people think about now.

Myers
[00:41:18]

Yes, and I know. When I was practicing for 45 years, not many people thought about design. The professionals thought about it and you hired a professional to think about it. But that was all

Binswanger
[00:41:32]

And a lot of the showrooms now, you know, the rest of retail, have designers who offer their services and help people coordinate things for young couples.

Myers
[00:41:46]

As you mentioned, only [A.] Pomerantz in the '60s would assist you in that way.

Binswanger
[00:41:53]

Another firm on Broad Street, [Unclear], and another firm actually, they taught us a lot. There was a guy there who gave me a lot of information, on an ongoing basis we bought things there. I can't think of it. That's what happens when you get a little older.

Okay. Yeah. I hope I've been able to be of help.

Laverty
[00:42:25]

It's wonderful. Absolutely wonderful.

RECORDING BREAK

RECORDING RESUMES

Myers
[00:00:18]

Did you ever go back and look at what you've done?

Binswanger
[00:00:23]

I think people should have their designers come back and look at them.

Myers
[00:00:27]

To see how successful...

Binswanger
[00:00:28]

And, well, things may tweak. I remember the Fox Chase Cancer Center. I had all the chairs, I had groups of chairs, color-coordinated them, three colors in each grouping. I came back, the chairs would be askew and... And you know, that wasn't their interest. And sometimes they would have moved chairs around. It really disturbed me but there is nothing you can do about that.

Myers
[00:00:54]

Well, sometimes you can make those tweaks and tell them, "Look, you should really regroup these chairs."

Binswanger
[00:00:59]

And I remember going back to the Division of Plastic Surgery and they said, "We love your interiors," but they said, "the furniture gets so many crumbs in it." I said, "That has nothing to do with the interior design." I said, "Do you let people eat here in the waiting room?" "Oh yes, I guess that's it." I mean, come on, wake up. I thought that was the funniest comment I've heard.

Myers
[00:01:25]

That's true. Do you expect, when you go back to your interiors, that they would have remained the same? Or do you think they would've been updated?

Binswanger
[00:01:38]

Uh, yeah, some of them have changed completely.

Myers
[00:01:43]

Completely?

Binswanger
[00:01:44]

Yeah, Price Waterhouse. I don't even know where they are. Are they here in Philadelphia, now?

Myers
[00:01:47]

I don't think so. And they're gone.

Binswanger
[00:01:52]

Such a preeminent firm there...

Myers
[00:01:54] Yes, that's what I have found. Names that were absolutely commonplace have now disappeared completely.

Binswanger
[00:02:03] But I think there's a great future in hospital and education, and I think that's right now, with the economy as it is now, seems to be the two areas where people are continually improving and re-looking at ...

Laverty
[00:02:20] They say that Philadelphia's future is in "Eds and Meds."

Binswanger
[00:02:24] Eds and Meds?

Laverty
[00:02:24] Eds and Meds. That's it.

Binswanger
[00:02:25] Oh, that's cute.

Laverty
[00:02:28] Well, the largest single employer in the city is the University of Pennsylvania. Used to be the Navy Yard, but...

Myers
[00:02:38] And before that it used to be the Pennsylvania Railroad, but all of those are gone.

Binswanger
[00:02:43] Judith Rodin, I really admire her. She did so much to bring the faculty and people into the West Philadelphia area, gentrified that whole area, and it really made it work, because otherwise it wasn't that appealing.

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