



















SUBSTANCE AND FUNCTION IN ARCHITECTURE

Raphael Soriano

Interviewed by Marlene L. Laskey

Completed under the auspices  
of the  
Oral History Program  
University of California  
Los Angeles

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## CONTENTS

Biographical Summary.....	vii
Interview History.....	ix
TAPE NUMBER: I, Side One (July 19, 1985).....	1
Family background--Persecution and expulsion of Spanish Jews--The island of Rhodes--Father's method of punishing him--Takes care of parents as they grow older--Exposure and feelings toward music--Early education--Leaving for America--Arriving at Ellis Island.	
TAPE NUMBER: I, Side Two (July 19, 1985).....	35
Eating in America--Learns English at the Los Angeles Coaching School--Studies at the University of Southern California--Choosing architecture over music composition--Romain Rolland--Questions teachers at the USC School of Architecture--The acceptance of new ideas among students and colleagues.	
TAPE NUMBER: II, Side One (July 19, 1985).....	66
Lecture to the American Institute of Architects--The Second Generation and imitations of Richard J. Neutra--Rudolph M. Schindler--Designing his first house--The John Reed Club--David Siqueiros--Falling in love with Ruth Orkin--Frank Lloyd Wright and Richard J. Neutra speak at the Los Angeles Philharmonic Auditorium--Working for the County of Los Angeles--Learning architecture through observation--Building the Lipetz House--Recovering from the 1932 accident.	
TAPE NUMBER: II, Side Two (July 19, 1985).....	103
The use of steel--Influence of Neutra--The lost projects in Tiburon--The advantages of using aluminum over wood--The work of Joseph Eichler, Theodore C. Bernardi, Frederick Emmons, and A. Quincy Jones--"Nostalgic" housing styles and standards--The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and its requirement of conforming to the	



neighborhood quality and housing--Rebelling  
against nostalgia and tradition.

TAPE NUMBER: III, Side One (July 20, 1985).....133

Working with Fritz Ruppell--Milton Katz and the  
Gato House--The Polito House--The [Glen] Lukens  
House--Soriano's landscaping work--The advantages  
of building with steel--Using aluminum--The  
Strauss House--Using prefabricated materials to  
construct the Hallawell Nursery--Acquiring  
rationed materials during World War II--Vies with  
Frank Lloyd Wright to do the V.C. Morris Company.

TAPE NUMBER: III, Side Two (July 20, 1985).....162

Gives V.C. Morris contract to Wright--Soriano's  
"stolen" drawings for the IBM building in San  
Francisco--The Julius Shulman House and the use  
of epoxy resin for welding--The Curtis House:  
Soriano's first prefabricated house--  
Experimenting with insulating cork--More on the  
use of steel in housing--Philip C. Johnson--  
Soriano's influence on Craig Ellwood--Attitude  
towards the work and writings of Cesar Pelli--  
Joseph Y. Fujikawa--Gets turned down to do  
Station KQED in San Francisco.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side One (July 20, 1985).....197

Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors rejects  
his model for the Barnsdall Art Center--The Case  
Study Program and California Arts and  
Architecture--Feelings toward John Entenza and  
his promotion of modern architecture--Charles  
Eames and the Eames House--The Case Study Houses  
1945-1960--Relationship with Julius Shulman--The  
1950 Alcoa Aluminum Conference--Moves to the San  
Francisco area--Organizes Project Architects--  
Ciro's stores in San Francisco and Beverly  
Hills--The Colby Apartment.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side Two (July 20, 1985).....231

More on the Colby Apartment and its cabinetry--  
The lack of craftsmanship in architecture--"The  
New House in 194X"--Introduces the use of  
eight-foot doors--Plywood walls and ribbon  
windows--Corrugating with Plexiglas--Creating  
light.



TAPE NUMBER: V, Side One (July 20, 1985).....262

Questions the existence of a Bay Area style of architecture--Soriano's influence on London architecture--Designing housing with climate in mind--Being a part of the architectural scene in Los Angeles during the thirties and forties--Richard J. Neutra's contributions to housing--William W. Wurster--Soriano's present living conditions.

TAPE NUMBER: V, Side Two (July 21, 1985).....296

First wife--Moving to Tiburon--The Alcoa project--The proposal for Alcatraz--Builds prefabricated aluminum houses in Hawaii--Building for Frank McCauley--The extent of Soriano's influence--Builders' and architects' reluctance to adopt Soriano's ideas.

TAPE NUMBER: VI, Side One (July 21, 1985).....323

Style and classification in art and architecture--The imposition of artificiality on architect and the arts--Questions of aesthetics and function--Architectural style during the Renaissance--Seeing religious murals as propaganda posters.

TAPE NUMBER: VI, Side Two (July 21, 1985).....357

The need for progress in architecture--The importance of critical thinking in the teaching of architecture--Defining art and artisans--Building with durability and other considerations in mind--Concern for public housing among architects--Feelings toward the state's attitude toward architecture--Serving on the California State Board of Architectural Examiners--The significance of architectural history in an architectural curriculum--Questions the notion of human equality.

Index.....386





## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

### PERSONAL HISTORY:

Born: August 1, 1904, Rhodes, Greece.

Education: Saint Jean Baptiste French School, Rhodes;  
Los Angeles Coaching School; B.A., University of  
Southern California, Los Angeles.

### MAJOR PROJECTS:

- 1936      Lipetz House, 1834 North Dillon Street, Los Angeles.
- 1937      Driver House, 1830 North Dillon Street, Los Angeles.
- 1938      Austrian House, Landa Street, Echo Park, Los Angeles.
- Polito House, 1650 Queens Road, Los Angeles.
- Ross House, 2123 Valentine Avenue, Los Angeles.
- Lee and Cady Warehouse, Ferndale, Michigan.
- 1939      George and Ida Latz Memorial Jewish Community Center, 2317 Michigan Avenue, Los Angeles.
- Gogol House, 2190 Talmadge Street, Los Angeles.
- 1940      Lukens House, 3425 West 27th Street, Los Angeles.
- 1941      Strauss House, 3131 Queensbury Drive, Los Angeles.
- 1942      Hallawell Nursery and Garden Center, San Francisco.
- 1947      Katz House, North Hollywood.
- 1948      Ciro of London, branch jewelry shop, San Francisco.
- Ciro of London, jewelry shop, Beverly Hills.



- 1950      Curtis House, 111 Stone Canyon Road, Bel Air,  
            Los Angeles.
- Arts and Architecture Case Study House, 1080**  
            **Ravoli Drive, Pacific Palisades.**
- Shulman House, 7875 Woodrow Wilson Drive, Los  
            Angeles.
- 1952      Colby Apartments, 1312 Beverly Green Drive, Los  
            Angeles.
- 1955      Eichler Builders House (Saunders House), Palo  
            Alto.
- 1958      Adolph's Office Building and Laboratory, 1800  
            Magnolia, Burbank.
- 1959      McCauley Builders Houses, 20 and 24 Longfellow  
            Road, Mill Valley.
- 1961      San Pedro Community Hospital, 1300 West 7th  
            Street, San Pedro.
- 1965      Eleven All-Aluminium Houses, Hawaii.
- 1966      Alcoa Aluminum Office Tower (planned project).



## INTERVIEW HISTORY

### INTERVIEWER:

Marlene L. Laskey, interviewer, Oral History Program, UCLA. B.A., Political Science, UCLA; has researched, organized, and conducted architecture tours of Los Angeles.

### TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

**Place:** Soriano's office in Tiburon, California.

**Dates:** July 19, 20, 21, 1985.

**Time of day, length of sessions, and total number of hours recorded:** Sessions lasted an hour and a half to four hours. A total of nine hours of conversation was recorded.

**Persons present during interview:** Soriano and Laskey.

### CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

The interview was conducted during an emotionally-charged period. Overriding all else was the fact that Soriano was being evicted from his office/residence of thirty-three years. How and why he would be able to relocate was uppermost in his mind. Secondly, there were instances in which the taped discussion alluded to dialogue that occurred when the tape recorder was not engaged. Moreover, a succession of telephone and visitors' calls caused repeated interruptions. Amongst such pressing events and continuing interruptions it is understandable that Soriano was very tired near the end of the interview. Still, the end result justified the timing of the interview; Soriano passed away in 1988, several months before the completion of this transcript.

In general the interview follows a chronological format, beginning with Soriano's childhood on the island of Rhodes, Greece (from 1912 to 1947 ruled by Italy), and subsequent migration to America, and continuing on to his education and early influences in the field of architecture. The bulk of the interview focuses on Soriano's major projects and the various architectural innovations he made involving the use of steel, aluminum, and prefabricated materials.



## EDITING:

Carey Southall, editorial assistant, edited the interview. He checked the verbatim transcript of the interview against the original tape recordings, edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling, and verified proper names. Words and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed. The final manuscript remains in the same order as the taped material.

In February 1987 the edited transcript was sent to Soriano, who reviewed and approved it. He made some corrections and returned the manuscript in February 1988.

Chana Lee, editorial assistant, prepared the table of contents, biographical summary, and interview history. Bryce Little, editor, prepared the index.

## SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

The original tape recordings of the interview are in the university archives and are available under the regulations governing the use of permanent noncurrent records of the university. Records relating to the interview are located in the office of the UCLA Oral History Program.





TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

JULY 19, 1985

LASKEY: Okay, Mr. Soriano, we'll begin our interview at the very beginning with some background on your family.

SORIANO: Okay. Well, my family was really a very-- Oh, what will I say? My mother was--didn't know how to write or read, number one. And in those days, you know, she came from a [family of] eleven children. Eight survived, something like that. There were seven daughters and one son.

LASKEY: Where was your mother born?

SORIANO: Was in Rhodes. It was part of Turkey then.

LASKEY: She was born in Rhodes?

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: What was her name?

SORIANO: Was Rebecca, or we used to call her Bohora. In the Hebraic language, Bohora means the first born female, the oldest born woman. Bohor is for men. Any first born is called Bohor, and Bohora--also because of Spanish Jews, you see, she was a Spanish Jew--and therefore, Bohora, for the feminine. Mean[ing] first--the oldest daughter.

LASKEY: Well, did she get to Rhodes, then, because of the--

SORIANO: From the Inquisition.

LASKEY: --expulsion of the Jews--

SORIANO: Yes, that's right.



LASKEY: --from Spain.

SORIANO: , That's right. Her grandparents came to Rhodes.

LASKEY: I see.

SORIANO: The way all the parents came, they were all in the Mediterranean basin. So it happened that I was born because of that. In there.

LASKEY: In Rhodes.

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: Your father [Simon Soriano] was at--?

SORIANO: My father was also there. His grandfather came from Bayonne, the southern part of France, you see, Basque country. Also expelled from Spain. My father was quite a scholar. [noise outside] I better close this door because it's a mess with those tourists going to Angel Island.

LASKEY: Okay.

SORIANO: Okay, we continue. We were talking about my mother, wasn't it?

LASKEY: Yes, we were.

SORIANO And then my father, I told you that he was--his grandfather came from Bayonne, southern part of France.

And this is the tragedy of these damn persecutions, as you know what happened to all the Jews in Germany and the same thing [in] Spain. This is [the] tragedy of these uncivilized human beings who think they have to have scapegoats to do their dirty activities instead of loving



humanity and loving people. And as you were observing my photograph there, of that little girl I told you, that she came to the door and she wanted to have a photograph with my beret. She's adorable. Already a woman at the age of nine.

LASKEY: With a beautiful smile.

SORIANO: Absolutely superb. And intelligent, sensitive. She plays the piano and cello. I mean, piano and violin. And, just recently I met another girl by the name of Hillary. She lives in Pomona with her mother, and father's a pilot, I told you. And I went-- I saw her. I said, "Most marvelous face." I get fascinated with faces, as I am fascinated with blossoms or with excellent music or the ballet for that reason, you see. But not with stories.

I love life in complete lucidity, as life is. And to me that represents something that I relate to. Anything else, fairy tales, stories, don't appeal to me because they don't mean anything to me. That's somebody else's concoction, and why should I worry about that, you see.

Now, this little Hillary was so sweet, and I went to her and I said, "What a beautiful child! Who are you?" And she gave me her name. Her mother told me she's in one of the schools for talented children, for gifted kids.

LASKEY: Oh, really?

SORIANO: Yes. And we became very good friends. And then





they came over here, she wanted me to go to have dinner with them at night. But I said, "No thank you, dear. I can't." But they were so sweet. And they came over here and sat down and I said, "Oh, so beautiful." I say, "I wish I could keep you here." And the mother said, "It won't take one second; she'll stay." [laughter] And she came and hugged me. I mean, imagine that lovely child, and is just the opposite of what we're trying to make nowadays because of all these horrible things that happen. We tell the kids, "Now, don't go near somebody. Don't talk to anybody," you know.

LASKEY: Well, that's-- Of course, that's a double-edged danger--

SORIANO: It is.

LASKEY: --because you lose-- The children must be protected. On the other hand, they are losing that very thing that you're talking about which is of a spontaneous contact with life.

SORIANO: Exactly. And she sent me, just about two or three weeks ago, she sent me two little snapshots of her. She's nine years old, Hillary.

LASKEY: And she lives in Pomona?

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: You met her in Pomona?

SORIANO: They live over there. I met her here. On the



dock.

LASKEY: I might just mention that we're at your office which is on the wharf at Tiburon--

SORIANO: Yes, in Tiburon.

LASKEY: --looking out across the bay to a beautiful view of San Francisco and Angel Island.

SORIANO: But as I told you, I may move from here because my landlord is kicking me out because he wants to remodel this and make--raise four, five, six times as much rent. It's all money, money, money; nothing else. There's nothing-- Even though I've been here thirty-three years, you see. But anyway, that's not the story which I'll resolve. But it's painful still. It's traumatic due to the fact that after all these years-- Thirty-three years I've been here paying him rent, with this great discourtesy. However--

Anyway, let's go back to the serious business which is more important. You were asking me-- I told you that my mother didn't know how to write or read. My father was very well educated in many--knew several languages. And he taught my mother how to write and read. And my mother knew French, Italian and Spanish--and English when I brought them to the U.S.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: --fluently. And then during the war,



fortunately, they escaped from Rhodes.

LASKEY: Now, which war?

SORIANO: Second war.

LASKEY: Oh, the Second World War.

SORIANO: The Second World War--

LASKEY: They were still in Rhodes?

SORIANO: They were still in Rhodes. Yes, I came from Rhodes.

LASKEY: I know you did, but I didn't know that--

SORIANO: Well, they were there. They remained there. And then when Germany and Italy were allies, you see, then Hitler and the Italians at the time, they were becoming very anti-Semitic. And then when Italy made peace with the Allies and broke with Germany, then the Germans occupied the islands and they had submarine and air bases. And they took all the Italian citizens, all the Greek citizens, all the Jewish population that was there--Spanish Jews--which were nothing but Spanish Jews. They all took them to the camps, and I lost several aunts and so on. Fortunately, my mother and father and a young brother I have--I have two other brothers [Vittorio and Alfredo]--two brothers, you know. One was already in Israel. Then they migrated to the Belgian Congo. It's the only place they could go.

LASKEY: The Belgian Congo?

SORIANO: Yes. Because we had a relative in the Belgian



Congo, that was the easiest way of going, instead of coming to America and the required quotas and-- You know.

LASKEY: What would they do in the Belgian Congo once they got there?

SORIANO: Well, they went there just to work. What else could they do?

LASKEY: Was there work, I guess, is my question.

SORIANO: Well, yes. The Belgian-- Africa was always-- They needed all the people, so-called whites. Yeah, when they have stores and offices and professions, naturally. Yeah, they used to, you know-- All the people have-- Africa was run by the--among the Europeans.

LASKEY: Well, that's true. The bureaucracy.

SORIANO: The bureaucracy, exactly. They wanted to exploit all the people there, naturally. Well, business is business.

LASKEY: [laughter] Even during the war it's business.

SORIANO: Yeah, business even before, you see.

LASKEY: Do you still have relatives in the Congo? or whatever it's called now? I must say, my current geography is bad.

SORIANO: I don't know if I have-- I don't think I have anybody in the Congo.

LASKEY: Well, do you consider your citizenship, your original citizenship, as Greek, Italian?





SORIANO: Italian.

LASKEY: Italian?

SORIANO: Italian, because, you know, the islands were Italian to begin with. And after the war, they [the Allies] gave them back to Greece.

LASKEY: No, I didn't know that.

SORIANO: Yes. That's exactly what happened. As a matter of fact, I have passports-- In my travels, you know, I filled up so many passports. And originally I was an Italian citizen from Italy, originally. Now I'm an American citizen of course; I've been since 1930. And then recently it's been Greek. [laughter]

LASKEY: I think of Rhodes as being Greek. That's why I asked this.

SORIANO: Now. Now, yes. But Greek-- Don't forget, Rhodes was being stolen constantly by the Venetians, the Greeks, the Turks, the Romans. Everybody wanted to have Rhodes because it was the crossroads of the world and the islands are superb. You've never been there?

LASKEY: I've never, unfortunately, been there.

SORIANO: If you ever go to Greece, go to Rhodes. Because Rhodes is the jewel of the whole Aegean Mediterranean, as an island, climatically as well.

LASKEY: Well, I've seen many, many pictures of it, of course. It is stunning.



SORIANO: But it's beautiful. Really, you cannot imagine how beautiful it is. Climatically and so on. And the fruits-- Everything tastes so good because of the soil apparently-- No doubt, it is volcanic soil which gives certain flavor. But anyway--

LASKEY: What was it like to grow up there?

SORIANO: Well, it was a small-- Islands are islands. You know, it's very constrictive. You couldn't go to college unless you were very rich, you couldn't have an education. It's very difficult.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Well, nothing-- My father was my first tutor. He taught me Greek, my first language. I used to write it fluently and speak it. And then my other languages, which we spoke at home-- Spanish, naturally. And I still, when I lectured in Spain or in the Americas from Argentina down-- all the Americas I've lectured in--in my Spanish all the time of Cervantes, which we still speak. I have a book given to me by Felix Candela, you know, the famous Spanish--

LASKEY: The architect, yes.

SORIANO: Architect-engineer. And with a lovely inscription after he heard me lecture. He brought me the book--and I'll show it to you--and he said-- Here, I think we'll find it. Let's see, Candela. You see the Candela there? You record this? I'll show you. This is very



interesting, what he wrote. See? This lovely inscription he made.

LASKEY: Well, you'll have to read it to me. [laughter]

SORIANO: Yeah, I'll read it to you. I'll explain it to you.

LASKEY: [laughter] That's wonderful.

SORIANO: This was at the university in Mexico City I gave this. And that was in '64, July 1964, the Pan-American Congress.

LASKEY: Twenty-one years ago.

SORIANO: Yes. I've been lecturing there many, many times. That was at the opening of the [National Autonomous] University of Mexico. I was a speaker there, you know.

LASKEY: He did some of the buildings for the University of Mexico?

SORIANO: Yes, he did. He did the scientific building which is like a little wagon [hyperbolic paraboloid]. He did a lot of restaurants and so on. And he brought me this in the morning to the hotel, and I present this-- [translates inscription] "This is for my good friend Raphael"--now, I never met him before, but I knew of his work, of course--"with an affection and admiration more sincere and a souvenir of a stupendous conference--or lecture--that you gave us in a language delicious that had



the flavor of the romance of the old days"--

LASKEY: Oh, that's wonderful. That's delightful.

SORIANO: Yeah. --"and of a discussion full of passion, but very cordial and friendly. México, July 1964, Felix Candela." You see.

LASKEY: That's very impressive.

SORIANO: Yeah, it was very charming, you see. I have things like that that have happened in my life, but more appreciated there than I am in my own country here, really. Even though I know many of my colleagues know me, but-- Actually, to tell you the truth, I'm wasted. My talents are wasted. I've contributed [things] in housing that nobody knows what I have done. We need thousands and thousands of housing units. And I have a system that I made: I can put four houses in one day made of aluminum structures. They talk about ecology of using trees. I haven't used a piece of wood since the year 1936.

LASKEY: That's amazing.

SORIANO: All my structures have been made of metal now. If I hadn't done these efforts, nobody would have done-- We wouldn't have had the steel houses today. When you find all the assistants of mine, former assistants that have done like-- Pierre Koenig, Craig Ellwood, Joe [Joseph Y.] Fujikuawa, and a few of the others who are doing steel houses now would have never been. Because I made the





effort and nobody wanted to give a bid even then. And I used to do them myself. I used to undertake-- I used to tell the clients, "I'll build them for you. It'll be cheaper anyway." And it was.

LASKEY: Well, I don't want to talk too much about that now because we want to get into this in greater detail later on.

SORIANO: Okay.

LASKEY: But I think it's interesting that Esther McCoy and Reyner Banham saw you as a very important link between the European architects and the modern American architects that were to follow people like [Charles] Eames and Koenig and Ellwood. And I think that that's something that we're going to want to talk about a lot.

SORIANO: Okay, sure.

LASKEY: We still have you on Rhodes, however.

SORIANO: Okay. Well, in Rhodes, you know, as I told you, it was very, very--a sort of a small little island. You know, islands are very constricted. And if you don't have any money, you do what you can. Either you can go to school--the high school type of thing or college type of-- Which is nothing, really, no-- And I wanted to really do something and I wanted to have a profession. And then I wanted to get away from Rhodes because my father was a very interesting man and yet he was very cruel to me.



LASKEY: He was cruel?

SORIANO: Yes. He used to beat the hell out of me.

LASKEY: You're kidding.

SORIANO: No, I'm not kidding. I mean, they talk about here: "Well, that's the home life, you know; therefore, he was a criminal." [laughter] Well, that's not the whole truth in life, depending on your chromosomes how your behavior is. It isn't all just because you were abused. Yeah, my father used to tie my two feet. He meant well, because he thought gold that isn't pounded never shines. He used to tell me. I used to tell him-- I said, "I'm not gold." [laughter]

LASKEY: I'm a person! Was this considered an ordinary pun-- I mean, was this punishment at the time?

SORIANO: The European way.

LASKEY: It was.

SORIANO: The European way, but he was way in exaggeration. I mean, to tie a child, the feet, and give it a nice bastonada, the cane stroke [on] the bottom of the feet. And if I disobeyed him, he used to instruct my mother not to let me go out and play with anybody.

LASKEY: How did your mother feel about that?

SORIANO: She hated it. She hated him for that. My mother was a very beautiful, very intelligent, sensitive human being even though she never went to school. But she would



have an innate intelligence and sensitivity. Whatever she did was done exquisitely. Whether she did dentelle, cooking, or pastry. In fact, she was so talented in doing this-- Nobody taught her. But she had this finesse within herself. In fact, when they had weddings they used to ask my mother to please help them, what to do and how to do it. And my mother said, "Yes, you can crush the almonds, but I'll do the rest." Yeah.

LASKEY: She sounds wonderful.

SORIANO: She was a beautiful human being, really. And my father too was an exciting man, very interesting.

LASKEY: What was his name?

SORIANO: Simon. Simon Soriano.

LASKEY: How did he get to Rhodes from--

SORIANO: Well, from the same. They [his grandparents] migrated there, I suppose, from the time of the [Spanish] Inquisition. They went all over the areas.

LASKEY: Or went to France and then--

SORIANO: And then his father, and then they went to Turkey, from there to Rhodes. Yeah. And this is the interesting area there.

And of course I hated my father because of his spanking, you know. My mother used to tell me, she said, "Your father used to kiss you when you were asleep." Well, imagine a child. I wanted-- That's his whole idea.



LASKEY: It did you no good when you were asleep.

SORIANO: The result is that I hated him. But then I have compassion. I brought them here to America. I took care of all their needs. Both my mother and father are buried in Los Angeles.

LASKEY: Are they really?

SORIANO: I brought them there and I took care of their needs since the age of fourteen. My father worked very erratically or neurotically. He hated business.

LASKEY: [laughter] He was in business though?

SORIANO: No.

LASKEY: Oh, he wasn't. What did he do?

SORIANO: He was a very educated man, but he didn't have any profession. And his father was quite wealthy at one time. And when he got married to my mother, I understand he [Simon Soriano's father] opened for them a--some kind of dry goods store or something. And then he [Simon Soriano] sold it because he felt it was--business is dishonest. That was his thinking. Oh, he was a very interesting man. He had a very--

LASKEY: I should say!

SORIANO: --very advanced ideas indeed, but very impractical. But yet he would work for somebody doing the same thing for wages instead of his own. Well, maybe he was absolved by not participating in the rules.





LASKEY: [laughter] He wasn't making the rules.

SORIANO: Yes. So this was the character of the man. And so, he was so-- He was an extremely honest person. Really.

LASKEY: Obviously a trait that he's passed on to you, too.

SORIANO: Possibly.

LASKEY: In the sense of rightness and--

SORIANO: I'm sure I have some of that--both of them--from both parents. And I'm very proud of it, frankly, in spite of all of that. And yet, afterwards when I grew up, I understood the whole thing and I had compassion for him. And, in fact, I took care of all his needs. When it was time to go to an old-age home in Los Angeles, he was already almost ninety-something. And I used to fly there every week to take care of him and to see how he was. And I used to sweep his floor and all that because I said, "I can't afford to have somebody--" In those days, you know, no Medicare or anything like that yet. And at the time, I was married and I had responsibilities here. So it was a difficult life, darling, but nevertheless I used to do that.

LASKEY: Well, you must take a certain amount of pride from that.

SORIANO: I do. I don't degrade it because I spent every cent to-- My mother had cancer and she had two operations. And I spent every little saving I have to--for



her in Los Angeles because I love her. I love both of them. And so, the result is that I'm in a condition I'm in now. I never thought of myself, so-- Because I have nothing, really.

LASKEY: Well, you have your work and you have a very good mind. Well, didn't your father-- I think I read that your father taught you about music or taught you--

SORIANO: Yes, he bought a small violin for me because he used to play the violin, the mandolin, the eukarina. He was a very good musician, a very good-- But he never did anything as a profession. He was very talented and he wanted me to learn the violin, but his method, again, was very brutal. If I made a mistake--we used to practice together--if I made a mistake on one of the notes, with his bow, bang on my little fingers. But, I mean, I adore music. Music--my whole life revolves around music and yet, I hated the violin.

LASKEY: Well, I think it's interesting that you love music, having been introduced to it in that way. It's interesting that you didn't run away from it.

SORIANO: No. But it was inside of my chromosomes-- My mother too loved music, and my brothers-- I have a brother here, a younger brother Alfredo, he also-- He just cries when he listens to Beethoven and stuff.

LASKEY: Did you have access to music on Rhodes?



SORIANO: No. Nothing of the sort, nothing. There was nothing--well, except the bands, military bands. They used to play every Thursday, the Italian band. They used to play all the operas, you know. But I hated them. I didn't like the operas.

LASKEY: You didn't like opera? Do you like opera now?

SORIANO: No.

LASKEY: Or do you still think of it as a fairy tale? a part of the--?

SORIANO: It is. They are fairy taleish, most of them, except some operas that take an exception: the operas of [Giovanni] Paisiello.

LASKEY: I don't know those.

SORIANO: Well, I'll have to let you hear Paisiello. You'll see how beautiful that is. In fact, I use that in my lectures a great deal, Paisiello. He was, oh well, seventeenth century. The time of Bach and that era. He produced one, "The Barbieri of Siviglia," "The Barber of Seville."

LASKEY: That early?

SORIANO: Before Rossini.

LASKEY: [laughter] Before Mozart.

SORIANO: Yeah. And then it was one of the most magnificent operas in the world. But, you see, the opera then was different. The music was first, the dominant



factor. The story was secondary. Yeah. And what I detest of most of these so-called soap opera is that--

LASKEY: Soap operas. [laughter]

SORIANO: Well, this is exactly [what] I'm telling you: soap operas--is because the story's first, music becomes sort of a--like a fumigator. Yeah.

LASKEY: Oh, dear.

SORIANO: Yeah. And this is why I detest most of the so-called pop-rock junk that's with the kids today, and even jazz. I think it's a lot of nonsense, in my humble opinion. However, I think I'm right. Because it's nothing but an artificial, contrived nonsense that has become a cult instead of culture. And they try to make it into a culture, but it isn't really. Because if you find anybody doing their own thing [sings] tra-re-la-ra-la-voom-a-bum-a-an-a-woo-woo-woo-woo following a rhythm; all right, big deal, so what. [laughter]

LASKEY: Is that most jazz or all jazz that--

SORIANO: All jazz. All jazz.

LASKEY: All jazz you would include.

SORIANO: There's nothing, really. Jazz is-- I've seen-- I've made these studies of that and I have tremendous numbers of records that I have. And I've had a lot of thought about this. I really did. And I'm pretty accurate. And I spoke with many composers that I know,





friends of mine. In fact, I'll be interviewed for a [radio station] KPFA, I believe, in Berkeley on a musical thing. Somebody wrote to me and, "We are going to do some program on music, discussing music."

LASKEY: What's your favorite music? I mean, favorite area--

SORIANO: Well, Bach--

LASKEY: --I guess, would be fair.

SORIANO: Bach comes-- Well, I have some of the ones that I think they were serious people. There's Bach; there's [Dietrich] Buxtehude before Bach. And then you find even the eleventh-century English composers, the folklorists. I think they're excellent. And folklores of all the different peoples, folklores. They are mostly in dance form. I say you never sing a song; you always dance it. That's my theory. That's my own statement. You dance your songs, you never sing them. And you find the best folklores are always that. They can tell all the stories of the world, but they're always danced; never sung.

When you start singing something, it becomes exactly all these platitudes of the kids today: [sings] "Oh, I love you, I love you, I loooove yoooooooouuuuuu. You come into meeee. I looooove yooouuuu, come into meeeeeeee." And that's all there is to it. That's all you're hearing, the same old--same words repeated over, because they never



understood what it is, really, because music is something else. Music transcends this so-called trivial nonsense that you "want expressed." You don't have to express any more than two lovers expressing-- Worth anything. It's just the one look has more already there. One warmth of a bosom of a woman against your chest tells you lots of things rather than the words of explaining it. In fact, in Spanish, my mother used to say something very beautiful. You see, we kept a lot of the Spanish tradition which is so beautiful. And in fact, the cousin of my mother wrote several books--used to be quite a scholar--wrote the sayings of the Spanish Jews all over the Mediterranean, and particularly of Rhodes. He has a book of sayings, the most marvelous, all in Spanish. [tape recorder turned off]

LASKEY: Okay.

SORIANO: Let it be. It'll serve because it's mine; it makes it more interesting, more humane.

We have a saying which is applicable to what I will say, that "Ni escrito ni estampado se puede describir." "Not in wri--even in writing or in painting or in printing can you describe anything." Now, look at the depth of that saying. Just reflect on that. Not even in writing or in painting can you describe anything. Yeah.

But look at the vastness of the universe. Suppose I wanted to-- I've seen many painters try to do that, which



is a lot of nonsense. They can't-- What can they do? Put a couple of splashes of painting? Nonsense. Or like the writers, too, with words and words and words-- So what? What do they say? Nothing, really. Just a little tiny, tiny speck of nothing. So the wisdom of that is so profound, so exquisite. Then if you really understand the meaning of that, then you become silent. Unless you have something to say. [Then] you say something. The only ones who really can say about the universe are the people doing research, investigation. They give their life's work investigating, don't they? Yeah.

LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: Okay. They validate, they find, and then they state. Yeah. Now, before that the people who spoke about things, they were mythologists. You know, they thought. You know, they used to conjure and conjecture. And this goes in the category of the medicine man. To me this medicine man postulated all kinds of things without validation. And they're clever, many of them. They used to-- For example, some of the people used to make rain, you know, like the shamasses, shamans. And they used to know by observing-- They were clever. They used to observe when the cloud formations. And then most of the tribe didn't think much; they didn't observe much. They [the shamans] said, "Now, let's make a dance. I want to make rain." And



sure enough, rain will occur because he knew already these clouds will make rain. You see, this is how they become the chiefs, you see. [phone rings] Excuse me, darling. You're right, Diane, but not in our style manual. [tape recorder turned off]

Go ahead.

LASKEY: Let's see. We-- I think maybe--

SORIANO: Go ahead.

LASKEY: What we haven't talked about or gotten into or go back to your education, how you-- How did you get educated besides your father?

SORIANO: My educator [education] was very, very limited. My father was the one who was my tutor till I was twelve or something like that. Then I spent two years, three years with the Christian brothers, [Collège] Saint-Jean-Baptiste. They were the brothers, Catholic brothers. Excellent schools. My father had an excellent education. In other words, he wanted me to be educated, but he wanted me to be the best. He was my first tutor because he didn't want me to be contaminated with bad words with children. He didn't want me to play. That's the reason he kept shielding me. But, you know, I used to know every other bad word.

LASKEY: [laughs] Of course.

SORIANO: Kids always do that. And my mother would not--





Even though he used to instruct my mother not to let me out of her sight, not to let me out of their house. And of course she wouldn't do that. She would let me play and I used to learn every other bad word. And of course my father hated that. And so then he sent me to the Saint-Jean-Baptiste French school, the Christian brothers.

LASKEY: Now, was that in Rhodes?

SORIANO: In Rhodes, yes. They had wonderful schools. They were excellent teachers, really. Excuse me, I have to-- [tape recorder turned off]

LASKEY: We're talking about your school, about--

SORIANO: Yeah. Well, the school was the French brothers that were very excellent teachers, really. It was nice to go there. I was not en pension, as they say. In other words, I wasn't living in this school. They have also people who live there; Catholic students, particularly, who had kids used to go there. But, no. I used to go there during the day at school. And so that was it.

LASKEY: Was it a regular classical education, that is, what we would now call a liberal arts education?

SORIANO: Yes. Liberal arts, yes. They used to teach everything: mathematics, geography, and all that. And so then I wanted to migrate and secretly, without telling my father, I asked-- I had two--three aunts in Los Angeles, actually, at the time.



LASKEY: How did they happen to be in Los Angeles?

SORIANO: They went to America. They came over here-- They were sent, you know, they were my mother's sisters. They used to try to send the daughters wherever there was somebody to be married, especially from Rhodes and so on. And that's what happened. They used to send them here, to Africa, to Los Angeles. And that's because to have a daughter was a complete liability. They have to have a trousseau, they have to have dowry. Are you kidding? They used to prepare the-- The minute the girl was born, they used to freeze. My grandmother, I understand, after having daughters after daughters after daughters, you know, she was-- When she had the one, the last one, who's here--my Aunt Matilda in Los Angeles. She's past ninety--so many years old--and she said her mother sort of se hieló, [which] in Spanish means, "she froze," [laughter] to have another daughter. Then after her a boy came. That was the only boy they had.

LASKEY: Of eleven children? One boy?

SORIANO: Yes. And seven daughters lived, that's all.

LASKEY: Well, then they had seven daughters that had to be "disposed of."

SORIANO: They had to be-- Absolutely.

Let me remove that. Is that yours or mine? Oh, that's okay. Do you have enough room?



LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: Put it on top of any place. Let me remove this away. Then you can have that.

LASKEY: Oh, no. This is-- Actually, this is just--

SORIANO: Here, darling. Let me remove this. This is no problem. [microphone adjusted] Okay. All right. Okay.

Anyway, so that's the way I have enough-- That is how it happened for them to come to America. And I-- My father went to look for work in Egypt because he had a sister there, married at the time. And so I took the occasion to run away. And--

LASKEY: How old were you?

SORIANO: I must have been seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, something like that. And my father was so mad that I disobeyed him after all this severity, all this training that I will be an obedient [son] and so on. And he would absolutely not speak to me, wouldn't write to me, for almost three years.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Four years. I don't know.

LASKEY: But you did write to your mother.

SORIANO: Yes, of course. And I used to cry. I wanted for my father to write and not to have that rancor. But then he wrote to me. It was an interesting one. After three years, "I forgive you, my son. Will you send me four



hundred dollars because I have to go to Africa to look for a job." Yeah. And then I start crying that my father finally wrote to me. Instead of saying, you know, "You--!"

LASKEY: How dare you!

SORIANO: Yeah. But no, I didn't. I had this tenderness in my heart somehow. Really.

LASKEY: Did you send him the four hundred dollars?

SORIANO: Yes. And I went to my boss-- I was working [at] a fruit stand at the time, and I went to my boss, I said, "Can you, perhaps, send my father four hundred--"

"Well, I can't give it to you, but I'll take you to the Morris Plan Company."

In other words, the Morris Plan Company [loaned me the money]. And I remember I thought I will never finish paying. I was paying and paying interest. You know how this thing--

LASKEY: Oh, yes. Four hundred dollars-- This would be--

SORIANO: In those days.

LASKEY: --in about the 1920s, wouldn't it?

SORIANO: Nineteen twenties, yes. In '26, '27, something like that.

LASKEY: Now, you were born August 1, 1904, is that right?

SORIANO: And so that really was something.

LASKEY: Well, I think I read that your trip over here was pretty horrendous, too, getting from Rhodes to the United





States.

SORIANO: It was very traumatic because I had the visa-- I mean, I had the permit to come, I have the affidavits, and I have all the examination, doctor certificates; I was in excellent health. And here I come to Naples embarkation point, we go to the American consul to get the visa, and, "No." It was just the time, in 1924, when they were eliminating the Orientals from the quotas.

LASKEY: Of course. Of course. They were instituting a quota system, period. The 1924 immigration law.

SORIANO: That's correct.

LASKEY: Right. Of course.

SORIANO: And then here I had the brunt of it. All of a sudden, here I thought I will have free passage right away within the week, and, "No, because we'll have to wait till the [United States] Senate gives us the quotas for Italy and everybody else." And I waited, I think, four months, six months, something. I don't--forget now. I'll have to look it up in my records. And it was horrible because here I didn't dare spend anything. I had just enough money for the trip--to pay for the boat, passage--which I borrowed from my grandfather and an uncle.

And it was very, very traumatic. And then I used to wash dishes and do a little interpreting sometimes for foreigners, who used to come and they didn't know how to



speak Italian or French or Spanish, and-- Nothing, just--  
And wash dishes so I can get a plate of beans once in a  
while. And I used to eat cheese and bread, chocolate and  
bread the next day so I [don't] get tired of one. That's  
what I did. And it was really-- I lived in one little  
room, and I used to take a bath once every two weeks in a  
public bathhouse. And I used to take all my laundry with  
me in a newspaper, and then while I was taking a bath I  
used to wash it so nobody will know, you know. Wash my  
laundry there and then bring it and hang it in my room  
because I couldn't afford anything else. Who could afford  
laundry or anything like [that]? It was one of those rooms  
in Naples in the slum-- [phone rings] Excuse me. [tape  
recorder turned off]

  Okay.

LASKEY: All set.

SORIANO: Now, what were we saying? We should have another  
came to-- That is, I was in Naples and trying to get to  
America. Well, finally, after several months, the Senate  
already had the quotas for every country minus the  
Orientals. You see, the Turks and all that, and they were  
not allowed to come. But then I was-- We used to check the  
list. The American consul used to paste [up] the list of  
the visas that are given. And I saw the first ship leave,  
second ship leave, third ship leave, fourth ship leave,



fifth ship leave. I think I was in the sixth and the last ship, which was the Giulio Cesare. Julius Caesar was the fastest ship of the Italian merchant marine. They used to brag, "This is the fastest ship built--" Stabilizers, and four propellers they had. As a matter of fact, during the war the British sunk it in the Mediterranean during the World War II.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Yeah, because it was a troop carrier for the Italians. But anyway, so just this last boat-- I looked at the list. There was a fear in my heart I won't be in the quota. Then two or three from the last--because my [name is] Soriano, you know, S--then I saw my name three from the last. And I was so happy. Finally. And I remember tasting on the ship-- It took about five, six days to traverse the trans-Atlantic. And I remember eating the first Jonathan apple on the ship.

LASKEY: Really? [laughter]

SORIANO: Yeah. It was delicious. Yeah. And then after that, when I came to America, I used to sell tons of that in the fruit stand. [laughter] Anyway, so--

LASKEY: You came through Ellis Island?

SORIANO: Through Ellis Island, yes. And an interesting thing that happened there. Then we were examined, you know; stripped waist up. And all of a sudden-- Apparently,



I must have-- My ribs were showing from not eating too much. And all of a sudden they gave me a little green piece of paper, I remember, with the words "send to hospital." "Hospital" I could decipher.

LASKEY: That's right, you didn't speak English.

SORIANO: "Send to"--I don't know what it was. But I saw most of them going in this line; they directed me to this other line. And I went there. Immediately we were thrown in a room. And some orderly came in and took me somewhere, and all of a sudden he gave me new clothing, hospital clothing. And I just about died. I thought they would send me back for-- I didn't understand the reason. And I remember the tenderness of that orderly. A man puts his hand on my arm and he started to reassure me with a nice smile. And so all of a sudden here I was in a huge room with Chinese, Italians, all kinds of people; a huge dormitory with beds, hospital beds. And so they took my clothes, they gave me hospital type of thing. Then-- I was scared they will send me back. I didn't even know why.

LASKEY: And nobody there spoke--could tell you what was happening?

SORIANO: No. Not yet, until finally a lovely nurse came in and spoke French. And she was very sweet. Immediately, she took a liking to me. She brought me glasses of milk, a box of chocolates. She was so sweet, really.





LASKEY: Is that why they kept you, though, was--?

SORIANO: They kept me to observe me, whether I have TB, because I was undernourished. My ribs were sticking [out]. They would not admit anybody with tuberculosis.

LASKEY: Oh, of course.

SORIANO: If you have any kind of disease, eye disease or tuberculosis, you're not admitted.

LASKEY: So it wasn't just out of the goodness of their heart to fatten you up a little bit. They wanted to make you--

SORIANO: No, no, no, no. They wanted-- They want to be sure. And then I was examined the next day, right away, with I don't know how many doctors. They were checking me all over. And I said to myself, "My god, what's--" I didn't even know. I was-- I knew I was always healthy. My genes were okay, but--

LASKEY: That must have been-- Must have been--

SORIANO: Most traumatic.

LASKEY: --worried, scary.

SORIANO: And I was so scared. I thought if they send me back I will throw myself in the water, really, because I had these debts incurred. And I didn't want to go back to my father. He would have killed me to begin with. Now, this was what happened. But then, [among] some of the inmates that I talked to, there was one Italian fellow. So



I started talking with him. And he explained to me, "Ah, this is for observation and, you know, if that chart on your bed"--we had a little chart, everybody--he said, "when that is removed, that means you're admitted."

And one Sunday morning, sure enough, that wasn't there. I was admitted. But they used to serve me-- For the first time I saw the most magnificent breakfast. At home we used to have nothing but [a] piece of bread: toast, bread, and tea. That's all at breakfast. That's all we ate. French bread and tea. Nothing else. And over here they had scrambled eggs, jam, cereal, milk, cream. [laughter] Oh god!

LASKEY: The promised land.

SORIANO: This-- I didn't have-- I couldn't eat anything. I was so scared and so frightened.

LASKEY: Really? Of course. I mean, not knowing the language and not knowing what was going to happen to you.

SORIANO: It was absolutely traumatic; but I mean traumatic.

LASKEY: Of course.

SORIANO: And it really sort of was a very shocking thing to me. However, the nurses were so superbly beautiful; so charming, so gracious, really. Everybody was nice. The impression I have of the Americans is really lovely, kind people. And then when they removed that, all of a sudden



they asked me to dress, and that's it. They gave me two lunch boxes and they put me on a train that took six days and five nights or five nights and six days, I don't remember. Went through Chicago and all that. Well, my destination was California where my aunts were, you see?

LASKEY: How did you travel across the country not knowing the language?

SORIANO: Well, you don't. It's very difficult. I sat in a seat, naturally-- There was an English boy sitting next to me. And he was so selfish. He used to be close to the window. I wanted to see what's going on and he didn't want to; he wanted to get the shade--the sun out. He used to close it. And I used to say-- I had to do this.

[pantomiming] And he used to take, like that. And so finally one day I just got-- I said-- I used to signal to him. And he said, "Me, English!" like that. And I said, "Me, Italian!" [laughter] I said it like that. And then he let me open that.

LASKEY: That's wonderful.

SORIANO: He really got scared and let me open it so I can look at the--what's outside.

LASKEY: Well, of course. If he didn't want to look out the window, he could have at least just changed places with you.

SORIANO: Well, he was absolutely, I suppose, a very difficult young man, I suppose, I don't know--



TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO

JULY 19, 1985

SORIANO: So, as I said, the train stopped in Chino and a lady got on the train. She came in then; I told her what happened. She introduced me to another Italian. So she starts talking to me in Italian. And she knew a little Italian. Not very much, but still-- I said, "You have a very impolite nephew." I said, "I wanted to look at the view and he won't let me. He wanted-- Whenever he wanted he would close this, and this would be ingracious." And she says, "Oh, he shouldn't have done that. Shouldn't have." She gave me the address, I should come back and visit them and so on. I didn't bother. But anyway, what else do we have? So then that was it.

Then my poor aunts were out of their minds because here they know I left Naples, and here I come to Ellis Island and should be coming directly, and here I was a whole week detained. They didn't know whatever happened to me. Then they were trying to look, and they got through some political people, the-- Somebody, I don't know, who knew somebody--they tried. Finally, they checked, and Ellis Island said, "Yes, Raphael's been admitted. He's on the train." And so that's what happened. And then I took a taxi, with the last five dollars I had, to Santa Barbara Avenue [now Martin Luther King, Jr., Boulevard] where my





aunt was and surprised them. So that's the way it was.

And then in the meantime when I was traveling, you know, I didn't know a word of English. I didn't know how much things cost. I had just a limited amount; five or six or seven dollars, ten dollars, whatever I had. I finished the lunch boxes; most of it I hated. I ate the sardines, I ate the apples and the crackers-- They had biscuits [which] were just like salt crackers. I hated those damn things. [laughter] And then the other thing was salami, which I never eat; I hate it. And then the cheese--

LASKEY: An Italian who hates salami?

SORIANO: Well, yes.

LASKEY: Isn't that a contradiction in--

SORIANO: We never ate this kind of a things, no. And, as I told you, my mother was a superb cook. We ate some really good, sensible things. And cheese-- The cheese looked like soap to me, the American cheese. I'm used to Parmesan and all these nice tasty cheeses.

LASKEY: Gorgonzola.

SORIANO: So-- Not so much the Gorgonzola. We used to eat those harder cheeses, yeah. And this is what happened here. And so here I was.

And I tried to get, with change-- The coffee man came in-- I used to get a cup of coffee. Or if they have something sweet, you know, [that they're] selling, I used



to get that. That's all I could know. But go to the restaurant, where they had a restaurant in with the train, I wouldn't dare because I didn't know the costs or anything. We used to stop in Chicago and I used to go to the little coffee shop. I used to point to pies. That's all I know: apple pie. I ate so many apple--so many pies, [laughter] I detest it. I didn't want to eat any more, of any sweet, ever.

LASKEY: Ever.

SORIANO: That's all I did, survive for a whole week: coffee and sweets. And that was it. Then I was in California, where California was a little village then. Especially Los Angeles.

LASKEY: Well, Los Angeles must not have been that much different from Rhodes climate-wise, was it?

SORIANO: Climate-wise was very close, but not quite.

Rhodes was-- Yes, it's very similar. It's benign climate; very clement. And we have orange blossoms, it was nice. Flowers and all that, which was lovely. But Rhodes is full of flowers; beautiful things really. And Los Angeles was very close [to Rhodes' climate]: oranges and the orange blossoms I love. My mother used to make the most beautiful pastry with them, with the blossoms of the oranges. With almonds.

LASKEY: In the pastry?



SORIANO: She used to make beautiful confiturerie (preserves), you know, pastries, with orange blossoms, the petals of the orange blossoms in almonds. You don't really know how delicious that is.

LASKEY: Oh, it sounds wonderful.

SORIANO: My mother was a superb woman, really. Yeah. She was really a girl. She could do things with such a finesse. Ooof.

LASKEY: Did she teach you how to cook? Did you learn any of those?

SORIANO: No, but it came in through osmosis. I cook beautifully.

LASKEY: That's what you'd said.

SORIANO: I'm sorry I didn't cook for you, but maybe we'll see towards the end of it; maybe [with] my friend, love of mine-- We'll see what happens; maybe when we can have the time.

LASKEY: Well, you came to Los Angeles in 1924.

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: It must have been very different from the Los Angeles you see now.

SORIANO: Oohfff, yes, yes, yes, yes. Los Angeles was very clement, very lovely, very few cars actually. And as far as you can-- Santa Barbara Avenue and Western [Avenue] was about as developed--the only thing. The rest of it was



just small town. And from then on to the beach were just bean fields cultivated by Japanese. The Red streetcar line used to go from downtown, Hill Street, to all the beaches. Yeah. Red streetcar lines only. And there were hardly-- There were no buses. There were streetcars all over. Used to take a bus from Fifth [Street] and Hill or Third [Street] and Hill Street where I worked in a fruit stand to Santa Barbara Avenue and Western. Used to take about half an hour with a streetcar. Used to cost a nickel. I didn't even know how to say [take it]. I said, "Take-it," you know. "Take-eet." [laughs]

LASKEY: "Take-eet." [laughter]

SORIANO: I used to say that. You know, you eventually learn the language. [tape recorder turned off] Okay.

LASKEY: There we go.

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: So you were in Los Angeles in 1924 and you're living with your aunts.

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: Had you thought about being an architect at that point?

SORIANO: No. I wanted to go to the university though; that was the first thing. But I wanted to be a composer.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: That was my greatest joy in the world. Or





architecture was close, but composition--music--was my greatest joy.

LASKEY: Had you done any composing?

SORIANO: No. I bought a violin immediately. First money I could make I bought a violin right from Hill Street--Hill and Third. There was an old violin maker and so on. I bought an old copy of a French Maggini [violin]. I still have it. And I remember the first monies that I could save, and I put it to a violin. And I was taking lessons from a certain Mr. Hunter. Mr. Hunter-- Hunter, I think it was. His son-in-law or his son, I believe, was a violinist in the Philharmonic in Los Angeles. But he was a teacher. Was quite an old gentleman. He used to write his notes on the little envelope instead of-- You throw away all the paper, old envelopes, he used to keep all the back side of envelopes to write little notes and little assignments. In other words, nothing was wasted, even then.

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: Today, you know-- I remember I have assistants, you get a roll, a ream. If they write three lines like that they [throw it away]. I said, "Look, I'm paying for that." I say, "You don't have to waste a whole page for one line." And, you know, that's how spoiled we are, really. Well, maybe that's part of our society. I don't



know. But, so this [is] what I wanted to do; I wanted music. And then I entered the university, of course, and the first time-- Then I was taking English in the Los Angeles Coaching School.

LASKEY: Where was the Los Angeles Coaching School?

SORIANO: It was right on, I believe, on Fifth and Hill streets--

LASKEY: Fifth and Hill.

SORIANO: --on top of one of the buildings there. Near the Philharmonic Auditorium, right near there.

LASKEY: And it was just to teach--

SORIANO: They used to teach--

LASKEY: --to teach English--

SORIANO: They used to teach English, and they had also students there that--they couldn't pass their exams. They used to coach some rich people to prepare for their exams also. And so the teachers took a great liking to me somehow. I don't know why. But anyway, they, the director of the school liked [me], and then I told him that I wanted to go to the university to study.

LASKEY: Now, this is the University of Southern California?

SORIANO: Southern California, yes.

LASKEY: Why--

SORIANO: Well, I didn't know--



LASKEY: Oh, oh, oh.

SORIANO: --which one, but I wanted to study. I wanted to go to the university and I said composition, and maybe [in] architecture, I had possibility. Then I was still sending money home to my parents. Right from the first moment I came to America. Because I start working at the age of fourteen. I used to give my mother the whole--everything I earned. And then I used to ask her, "Can I have a soloo [Italian penny]--like one cent to buy chocolate?"

Remember, I made the money for the whole family and I had to ask my mother. I mean, this is the way we were brought up. But that's where my nature, see? I gave it to my mother and I asked my mother to give me--

LASKEY: To give it to you.

SORIANO: Yeah. And this is the whole thing. And then I-- didn't know. I wanted to learn something and I knew Rhodes was awful. I came to America and this [is] what I wanted to do. So, and all the credentials I have is some certificates from the Collège Saint-Jean-Baptiste, the Christian brothers. And that wasn't recognized by the college.

LASKEY: By 'SC [University of Southern California]?

SORIANO: Yeah. They didn't recognize it. The director of this coaching school, and there was a professor of chemistry [Mr. Driscoll], just took such a liking to me.



They used to invite me, all the holidays, to their house, and they really were very gracious, really. And then he took me to USC, [to] the dean of the school, the coaching school. Mr. Driscoll, I believe was his name. I forgot his name. I'm not so sure yet. [Arthur Weatherhead]

LASKEY: Okay.

SORIANO: And then he took me there and he told them I was conversant in languages and also how well I was conversant in arithmetic also. And they said then--I forgot who it was, the admissions then--he said, "Well, can you pass an exam on this two things?" He said, "Well, sure." I took the exams. They gave me junior mathematics and I passed it [snaps fingers] like this. And then they gave me languages also.

LASKEY: No problem with languages.

SORIANO: So I was admitted, provided I stay in school with a B average, which I did. And that's how I was admitted.

LASKEY: Were you there on a scholarship since 'SC was very expensive, or is very expensive?

SORIANO: No, no, no. I was paying my way.

LASKEY: How did you do that?

SORIANO: It was difficult. At the end of the month I couldn't hardly save and I met, in the fruit stand on Fifth and Hill, a Dr. [René] Bellé. I think Esther [McCoy] mentions that, but she doesn't--I don't think she





understood. She's confused a little bit of the statements I made. Professor Bellé was the dean of the school of French--Department of French at USC. He came in from a concert from the Philharmonic Auditorium, around the corner from the fruit stand where I was working, you know.

LASKEY: It's not there anymore.

SORIANO: I don't know where it is. It was right there. It was the only concert auditorium. And in fact, that's where I saw [Richard J.] Neutra and Frank Lloyd Wright. I met them there, both of them, giving lectures one after the other, yeah, in that little auditorium--Philharmonic Auditorium. And so he came to buy some fruits from me and we both had accents. And we started talking; exchanging some thoughts. And he said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "I'm a student at USC." "Oh, I'm a French professor." And so immediately we were exchanging courtesies and he asked me to come and visit him and I did. And he had a charming wife, Gertrude. We became very good friends, all of us. We discussed music and all that for the first time. I said, "Oh my god, I had finally a friend." Because at school, I brought in my Victrola when I went to USC. I was playing Bach [on] one of those crank cases.

LASKEY: You took it with you onto the campus?

SORIANO: Yes. I took it then to listen to Bach while I



would draw and all that. And the students used to say--the boys particularly--"Oh, cut that stuff, Soriano!"

[laughter]

LASKEY: Did they really?

SORIANO: Yes. And then when we used to take life drawing. I had that playing while the model was being drawn, you know. They usually were European models that were either French or German or Italian girls. And they were very, sort of, sophisticated. They loved the beautiful music.

LASKEY: Of course.

SORIANO: And of course they loved that. And the American girls, the coeds were wonderful. They were sensitive. They loved this good music. The boys hated it: "Oh, Soriano! Cut that music!" And the girls used to say, "Oh, no! We like that." And the model said, "I'm not going to pose unless Mr. Soriano plays his music."

SORIANO: And that's the way--

LASKEY: That's great.

SORIANO: Yeah. This is the way-- This is true. And this was in Paul Semple's office. Paul Semple was the professor of painting which we all had to take courses in: life drawing and painting.

LASKEY: When you were taking-- As part of the architecture curriculum?



SORIANO: At USC, yes, yes, yes. It was in the old little building which was the music building afterwards.

LASKEY: Well, why--just to backtrack just a second--how did you happen to settle upon architecture rather than composing?

SORIANO: I'll tell you why. I had to send home money every month. I was reflecting: composition is hardly any-- You don't make money. I discussed this with-- I forgot now. Oh, yes. I met a violinist at the fruit stand, curiously enough; a friend of [Arturo] Toscanini. He was a violinist from [the] Chicago Symphony Orchestra. And he used to tell me "Se vuol trovare Parini, cercate Toscanini." "If you like to find Parini, look for Toscanini." Now, this just came into my mind; I remember distinctly. We became very good friends. I still have some of his letters he used to write to me from Chicago. And was a violinist. Charming person. I made so many, many friends over there.

LASKEY: Now, you were working? That's how you earned your money? Working in the fruit stand--

SORIANO: Yes. Working in the fruit stand. Absolutely.

LASKEY: --on Fifth and Hill?

SORIANO: Yeah. And also, I worked in Grand Central Market. And then I graduated to Fifth and Hill. And so then discussing that, and he said, "Ah, compositioning--" I



remember him telling me, he says, "You can't. Even violinist is kind of hard." So then I decided something more practical.

LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: And so I was then illustrating also, part-time with the zoology department, some foraminifera, which were the sediment from the Galapagos Islands where the [John Allan] Hancock expedition in Los Angeles-- You remember Hancock--

LASKEY: Oh, yes, yes. The Hancock Hall.

SORIANO: --where they used to bring all the sediment from the Galapagos Islands from his--with his boat--to USC, to the zoology department for analysis. And I made all these drawings which are in this Smithsonian Institution.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: I may have several thousand drawings there, or hundreds, I don't know, which they-- Dr. [Irene] McCulloch, I believe. She was a very lovely, tall, zoologist. She took a liking to me so I used to do all the drawings for her through the microscope, from a little sand pinpoint.

LASKEY: Oh my goodness.

SORIANO: And I still draw the ventral and dorsal in pencil. Yeah. I still have some drawings so they are-- they'll come in my book. And so then I used to earn some money doing that. And I told her what I wanted to do and I





was already admitted at USC. Then she took me to the dean of the school of architecture herself. And so I remember it was Dean Weatherhead, a very strange man. And he said, "Oh, you have a nice name," and this and that. [laughter] "But you don't make money in architecture. You have to have a rich man, or inherit money, to make money."

That's the first thing he told me. Anyway, finally, I settled down. I wanted to study architecture; I did.

And of course, having met my friend Bellé, Dr. Bellé, he used to co-sign for me for every semester to--

LASKEY: For the fees?

SORIANO: For the fees. It was expensive. And I was always behind the eight ball, always in debt.

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: And I remember when I graduated my diploma was folded in two, three inches--fold that still shows [on] my diploma--and that's where at the end behind those things you won't even see--where they kept it in the vault until I paid. And I paid it after I had an accident, years ago, in 1937. Imagine that. I graduated in '34. And they were trying to fail me because I wasn't talented. The first year I got--

LASKEY: Because you weren't talented?

SORIANO: Yeah, that's what the dean told me.

LASKEY: Why-- How did he come to that?



SORIANO: Well, here, let me tell you. The first year I did very well. I had first mention, first place, first. In other words, I had first mentions, the best that they can give you because we used to make the [architectural] orders. In other words, we used to draw Corinthian, the Ionic columns, and all the orders. And anybody with a little dedication and a little dexterity could do them, and I did them very well. But the second year we started getting problems. They gave us the design of a little bank or a little, whatever, a little small building. And I used to try to design them in my own concept of what architecture should be rather than copy. They used to tell us to design it in English or in French [style], and I refused to do it. I used to say, "What is a style? That doesn't mean anything."

LASKEY: You started talking a little earlier and I interrupted you on the curriculum, and as I gather, it was strictly a Beaux Arts--

SORIANO: Oh, yes.

LASKEY: --curriculum, very classical.

SORIANO: They used to give you the thing and a sheet of paper, eight [inches] by ten, Beaux Arts style, and they used to prescribe the style: do it in English or do it in Spanish. Do it in whatever. They thought-- And I used to question that. And I refused to do it. Then, who am I? A



punk student. Now, I used to read a lot of French books also. And talking with Bellé, René Bellé, he used to clarify and give me more courage of my beliefs. And he used to give me some very interesting things of Alain, the French professor at the Sorbonne who was a very, very great thinker. And then, besides that, I, reading the French books that I had, I used to correspond with Romain Rolland. You know who Romain Rolland was?

LASKEY: No, I don't.

SORIANO: You know Thomas Mann?

LASKEY: Yes.

SORIANO: Well, you should know Romain Rolland. You see, you Americans don't know.

LASKEY: Don't know.

SORIANO: Romain Rolland, the stature of that man is one hundred stories or more higher than Thomas Mann in stature and depth of thinking. He wrote so many, many books. And I corresponded with him and he answered me. He sent me two photographs and also some letters that I have which will be in my book. Now, he wrote the Life of Beethoven, Beethoven and Goethe, Beethoven the Creator. He wrote three lives on Beethoven. He wrote the Life of Gandhi, one of the most beautiful life you could imagine. He wrote the Life of Michelangelo.

LASKEY: Really?



SORIANO: He wrote many, many lives-- That's how-- This is the tragedy of our school. Unless it is Germanic or English, you have no idea what are the literary geniuses that occurred in our society. And Romain Rolland's one of the greatest things that ever happened in our century. He's known all over the world. He's been translated in all the languages in the world. But our schools--they're all ignorant. You know, an interesting thing happened. I was in London. I spoke to the Royal Institute of British Architects and I gave another lecture to the architecture consultants or some such thing. And then I talk of the music of [Edgard] Varèse because I always, in my lecture, I use music and I use other things. And there was--I mentioned Varèse--immediately there was one man in the audience, one architect, he said, "Oh, Mr. Soriano, that's wonderful! I'm glad you mentioned Varèse." "Well, I'm delighted for you. For the first time I heard somebody that knows Varèse." Most people, they don't know. They know the pop records, they know junky, but they don't know Varèse, the great master. Really. That's that man over there. Yeah. That photograph you see next--

LASKEY: Oh, really?

SORIANO: The one above. See?

LASKEY: Yes.

SORIANO: That black and white.





LASKEY: Varèse?

SORIANO: That's Edgard Varèse. He was the modern composer of our century. Yep. Yep. Now, he used to live in that same row of houses I told you, on that street where Tom-- Man Ray, you know, the photographer?

LASKEY: Man Ray, yes.

SORIANO: Varèse, Knud Merrild, [Agnes] Varda, and Charlie Chaplin; all these were in the same, in the one whole long street around that area in Hollywood. Yeah. And I was there, you see, right in there. And I was very good friends with Man Ray. In fact, Man Ray did two portraits of me.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Yes. This will be in my book.

LASKEY: That's very impressive.

SORIANO: Yeah. And we had marvelous evenings, marvelous discussions with these people.

LASKEY: I imagine that the conversation must have been on a rather high plane.

SORIANO: It was. It was more international, more exciting. And instead of all this boorish junk of these people-- When I look at, really, the convention we had in 1958 in June in San Francisco--in 1985, I mean, instead of '58--for the American Institute of Architects, I tell you, it's enough to absolutely disturb anybody who has any



sensitivities. The low quality, the debasing type of nonsense--professional people, architects, to resort to these banalities! God! Awful! No wonder nobody respects the profession. Really we bring it upon ourselves, that.

LASKEY: Oh, absolutely.

SORIANO: But anyway-- What was I telling you? I don't know, I forgot.

LASKEY: We were talking about 'SC, the Beaux Arts school and the--

SORIANO: Oh yeah, the Beaux Arts. And then I--I just finally, I used to question my teachers. "Oh, Soriano, you make me sick." Because I used to ask, "But why this? Why that?" "What's the style?" I said, "I don't understand what an English style is or Spanish style. Is it the tile roofs or what? What is this? This is purely a mannerism which I don't think this is architecture--" I used to question that and earn enmity. "Well, you're a student; you have to learn." I said, "Well, I can think, too." I used to question them. And, of course, I was in complete isolation. I used to get nothing but D's, failing.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Yes. They wanted for me to quit. The dean said, "We won't let you graduate. You're not talented. Maybe you'll be better off if you open up a fruit stand." That's what the dean--the same dean who told me I had a beautiful



name and this and that, and that I was getting beautiful awards in the first year, you see: first mention, place first. But the second year they made my life miserable.

LASKEY: And that was because of your ideas?

SORIANO: That's right. Because I questioned them. Then, Paul Semple, the painter whose--where we used to take life drawing, he sort of began to realize the music-- All he knew is this fellow Tchaikovsky. [laughter] Beyond that, he didn't know any music. And I used to try to tell him that there were more. There were some others, Scarlatti, there were other-- There were all the Couperins, Rameau, the French wonderful composers, and a few others of the past centuries, and some lovely folklores. And he wanted-- he was very eager to learn more. He said, "Will you-- You come over here and just bring your table here. You do the work in here, in my office, and you can play the music. It's all right." So I did. And I wasn't taking a single course from any of the professors from sophomore on.

LASKEY: From--

SORIANO: The sophomore year on.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: How did--

SORIANO: Nothing.

LASKEY: How did you do that?



SORIANO: Well, I graduated, I said, in French literature-- in architecture and French literature, I tell that. I graduated in architecture and French literature because I was taking-- I used to tell Bellé, my friend, I say what they were doing to me. He says, "Don't worry." He says, "You need to take electives. Come and take some French classes. You don't even have to attend class. You know already French. You'll get straight A's. You got so many grade points to compensate your main subject." The other subjects I could get C's average at least. But in architecture they were purposely failing me, giving me D's so I won't graduate. And so I, from year to year, I fooled them. [laughter] And the dean used to say, "Are you still here?" [laughter] Like that's what happened. So help me. That's what happened.

LASKEY: Did they really?

SORIANO: This is the true story I'm telling you; not a word romanticized or lied or fantasized.

LASKEY: Well, how did you feel about that? I mean, wasn't it very difficult to continue to go on?

SORIANO: It was difficult, it was difficult. But somehow I have a tenacity and stubbornness in my knowledge, somehow, even though I'm ignorant. Or maybe stubbornness in my ignorance, I don't know. But somehow I know what I know and what I feel, and what I know, it was right. And





to this day I can tell you I'm right, by golly, and that's true. I have this kind of assurance when I see something, and I know when it's not right. I can tell it to you, too. And if I make an error, I will tell you. I will be the first one to admit it. I have this kind of assurance. People who know me know that, so people who do not know me misunderstand me. They think, "Oh, well, opinionated this and that." That's okay, I don't care.  
[tape recorder off]

LASKEY: But eventually, then, they did graduate you?

SORIANO: Well, I graduated in spite of themselves and contrary to what they thought I would do. They didn't know that I was getting these extra grade points. They couldn't say no because I did make--I took electives. I was within the law. And even though I got a D in my major subject, but I--in the final analysis I got C average so I could graduate; and I did. That was in 1934.

Now, I'll tell you an interesting story pertaining to that. A few years ago I was teaching at Pomona State University [California State Polytechnic University, Pomona]. There was there a Professor Chilynski, Richard Chilynski. When I lectured, he asked me to come in, the president of the university--wanted to see me, in Pomona. And I went, and then he [Chilynsky] told him. He said, "Well now, Mr. Soriano doesn't know this," he said to him



[the president]. He said, "I want to tell you something very interesting now. I went to USC to enroll to the College of Architecture and then I talked to the dean." It was the same dean, Dean Weatherhead, and he, after interviewing with him [Chilynsky], he told him that he was not talented; he would not make a good architect. He had this kind of attitude. This man, he will tell you yes or no. He's on judgment without understanding what-- He said, "No, we discouraged him." So he came out of the door of the dean's room very distraught. And then in the patio was a professor; his name was [Clayton M.] Baldwin.

LASKEY: Baldwin?

SORIANO: Baldwin. We used to call him Baldy. Now, Baldwin was the only professor that was very charming, very lovely; more humane than the others. Baldwin would never tell me not--all that. He would never cut me. He was a very gracious person, really. And he saw this Chilynski at the door with a face dejected. He said, "What's the matter?" Well, he told him the story that he wanted to study architecture; the dean said no. He said, "Come to my office. I'll tell you a story." So he told him. He said, "There was a young man by the name of Raphael Soriano few years before you, and he told him the same thing. Look at him now. He's this very famous architect." And he told that to the president of Pomona State University. Yeah,



and that was maybe four, five years ago, something like that. I didn't even know that this thing happened to him, too.

LASKEY: That's very interesting.

SORIANO: Yeah. And he's an architect. He's one of the best teachers we have in Pomona there; excellent man. Perfect. You see? How they can destroy you with some of these complete arbitrary decisions by one man.

LASKEY: Oh, absolutely.

SORIANO: Yeah. Well, this is what happens in our universities today with all these teachers who are destroying these lovely mentalities of the kids. Again, in Pomona, last year I think it was, I gave a criticism to one of the classes. There was a black girl over there, and I was criticizing her problem, or somebody else's problem, and I mentioned why [I said] these things. And I said, "Well, I won't let the professors-- They shouldn't have let the kids go that far without guiding them properly in this." She jumped up, "Why doesn't anybody-- Why don't we have teachers like that to tell us these things? I'm so glad you did this!" She started shouting and telling me-- [laughter] I don't know if the faculty liked it, not when-- I'm sure the reverberations went through.

LASKEY: I'm sure.

SORIANO: And then when I used to go into the class



criticizing, everybody used to come there. They used to fill the room. They wanted to hear me talk and blast. And yet there were other students who were static--doing all this postmodern garbage. They thought they really were doing great. And in fact, they used to be very insolent. And I said, "Well, I don't think this is the direction of architecture." "Well, that's your opinion!"

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Yeah. One girl, second-year girl, told me that last year. And I said, "Yes, it's a fifty-year-old opinion versus two years of yours, yes?" And I said, "You're a bit insolent, aren't you?" I just tell her that. And of course she was a little red in the face. She tried to talk and all the professors stopped her. And then she tried to bring me a little cup of juice or something afterwards to make up so that-- Well, that's nothing. Even three, four years before that there was a student--I think it was either a senior or a graduate student--we were discussing that. Then some of the professors were taking his side. They were arguing contrary to what I said, which is all right.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: This was in the class--

SORIANO: In the class.





LASKEY: --on criticism?

SORIANO: Yeah, on criticism. We were criticizing the project of someone-- I was philosophically telling him why I thought this is not. And we were talking about the arts, you know, and why all this artiness, all this personal expression is disastrous. And, of course, the teacher's offended. That was his own teaching, you see, that I hit.

LASKEY: Well, if it was dealing with postmodernism, if he's a postmodernist, of course it would be--

SORIANO: It would be--

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: Of course, he would be gored with that and will have to fight. And said, "Well, Mr. Soriano," this and that and the other. And of course that student was probably aware I was giving some comments. Again, he said, "Well, it's your opinion." I said, "Well, yes, that's my opinion. Then why did you come here for? What do you come to school for? Since you have an opinion, I have an opinion, there's no point of discussing anything, is there?" Like that. Of course, he could not answer that one. And this is the tragedy. You see, we spoil them by just making it, "Well, do whatever you want." I played a tape in some of my lectures when they--public lectures that I give--of Casals, Pablo Casals, recorded, which I did, when he was giving master classes.



LASKEY: You attended them?

SORIANO: At USC. And he said--he was telling the students, "No, it's not--it's not allegretto, no. It's not playful. It's a big thing about Bach," he said. "Big thing." And then he lowers his voice and he says, "No, you don't do what you want. No, no, no. You do what's there. You don't do what I want. No. You don't do what you want, no. Everything must have order, must have logic." That's in his own words. And I played this many times in universities when I lectured. I said, "Look, listen to what other people have to say." Then I have Ravi Shankar, a friend of mine, too. See the picture there? The corner.

LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: Yep. I have some tapes of his where he says almost the same thing. He says, we, the American public must not think of Indian music as akin to jazz or romantic or this or all these adjectives. No, it's nothing but descending and ascending scales, with tensions and whatever, which are microtones, you see. Those are beautiful things. This [is] why I used to criticize [Arnold] Schoenberg for. He made a cult of the twelve-tone scale which is nonsense. Yeah.

I had discussions with his star student, Adolph Weiss, in Los Angeles where I had a big polemic with him. And I



said, "This is nonsense, twelve-tone. My god, the Italians in the early centuries, they used to play with twenty-five tones. Yeah. Sixteen tones, all these tones; they never made a cult out of this. This is microtone. That's what they are; they're microtones. They're vibrations--da-da-da-da. That's their tones, big tones." I said, "The Indians do that. These microtones that they use, not twelve tones. It's just vibrations--dee-dee-dee-dee. And according to whether you tune or no," I said, "to make a big to-do about this is silly. The important thing is what are you structuring, isn't it?" That's the thing; yeah. And most people don't understand that. And so that's why I bring music, I bring ballet, I bring all those things for them to understand; and it does work. They understand it!

I'll tell you an interesting experience that happened to me. I was lecturing at Technion in Haifa in Israel about three years ago, four years ago, and they promised they were going to bring me a video player. And somehow they couldn't get it. Over there is strange place, you know, where they have to hide and something. Apparently, the technicians were not paid; therefore, they promised to bring it--they wanted to get paid until they brought the things. So finally, they didn't bring this and therefore, I didn't play. This Natalia Makarova, I had a pas de deux



I was going to show which I take her all over the world; it's an eight-minute ditty, this very beautiful thing to show. Yes. I've shown her all over the world. And so the students were so astute. I said, "Well, unless we find some place where I can show you this, because it's too bad you don't get the experience to see what I'm trying to show you in here that will clarify this more." So finally the American consulate in Tel Aviv had about twenty of those video players with televisions. This is how we are, you know. We are marvelous. The USA's a glorious country, really. We have everything.

LASKEY: Twenty-five.

SORIANO: Yes. And here, so finally, we arranged the--that the consulate will see that, and I gave them this part of the lecture in the United States consulate in Tel Aviv.

LASKEY: That's great.

SORIANO: And the lady, the librarian, even brought me another tape of ballet which helped also to show what not to do. Yeah. And the students came to me afterwards and said, "Now we got it; we got it--seeing that." You see? Because it's kind of hard to talk about architecture in the realms that I talk because I gore most of the people's so-called pseudo-beliefs, sort of the, you know, nostalgic beliefs that they have. They don't like to hear that. They get hurt. They think they were-- Like religion, you





know. They just are stuck in an area of their thought and beyond, and if you attack that, you know, you're attacking something very serious. And instead of being objective, I was talking about something else and the idea of thought which transcends all kinds of personal things. And so for that reason I show all these different devices for them-- for the students to understand and my colleagues to understand. Yeah.

LASKEY: Do you feel that you're successful in convincing your students--?

SORIANO: Yes, very.

LASKEY: --in your--

SORIANO: Very, very, very. Not all of them, certainly. The ones I convince, I convinced them very, very beautifully. And there are many of them who will never be convinced.

I had one, another experience, one of the universities-- I was talking about the Beatles, how the Beatles were not producing anything. "They're just lulling all you kids into all this fake sex acts. Could you escape [from] that to experience?" I said, "You get it through this jumping around and, you know, things just like that instead of going to it. Go to the girl; love her, kiss her, hug her." And then I said, "The Beatles are not because they have been plagiarizing Bach and a lot of other



composers." I said, "These are not original composers, contrary to what you people think." And I showed them how where they take a piece of Bach, a piece of that, a piece of the other. I have tapes of that.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Yeah. Now, maybe the history should invite me to lecture; they'll hear something--



TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE

JULY 19, 1985

SORIANO: You asked me whether I convince some of the students. Well, I certainly do. I'll share an interesting story. The reason I brought this thing here-- You don't know what that is.

LASKEY: No, I don't know what it is. It's a large--

SORIANO: It's a valve. It's a piston valve of an airplane.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: This is the thing that, with those propeller airplanes, that lifts you up. This is a piston.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Look how beautiful and precise that is.

LASKEY: It is indeed--

SORIANO: And this, from here to there--

LASKEY: Like a sculpture.

SORIANO: Forget it. Don't call it that because I get offended about that. I'm just joking now but it's true. Many people say a sculpture. I think it's silly; it's not [a sculpture]. It's a working element of a motor to take you up with a plane. It's nothing to do with sculpturing. This is inside--it is hollow. It has sodium in it to keep it cool. So when this thing goes up and down to lift you up when you go up in the plane, those piston, the



propellers--

LASKEY: Yes.

SORIANO: This is the thing that works. [makes sound of engine] And actually, this gets hot, but the sodium inside-- But you see the precision to make this? Look how beautifully done.

LASKEY: Absolutely.

SORIANO: Yeah. Now, I'll show you why I show you that. I gave a lecture to the American Institute of Architects, to the practicing architects. These were all practicing architects, not students. There were one or two sprinklings, young students yet. But most of us-- This lecture I gave in Los Angeles to the practicing architects. After the lecture, it was-- No, first, during the lecture, there was this Garret Eckbo, you know, the landscape man.

LASKEY: What's the name?

SORIANO: Garret Eckbo. Doesn't mean anything. Anyway, he calls me, "You're a philistine!" and he walks away.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: During the--yeah--during the lecture. Stupid. Yeah. I mean, he has an idea-- I'll tell you, I have other reasons for that. But anyway-- So after I lectured, there was very polite applause, that's about all. "Are there any questions?" None. I said to myself, "God!" I stopped at





the Knickerbocker Hotel, Hollywood Knickerbocker-- Is it still there? I don't know.

LASKEY: I don't think so. I'm not sure.

SORIANO: That used to be the hotel of all the movie crowd.

LASKEY: The Roosevelt is being remodeled, but I'm not sure-- I think the Knickerbocker is--

SORIANO: Yeah, but the Hollywood Knickerbocker used to be the hotel.

LASKEY: Yeah, I think it's--

SORIANO: Used to be all electric, heaters for the guest rooms.

LASKEY: --apartments or something now.

SORIANO: Yes. Used to be very first-- Beautiful hotel.

And I loved to stop there because they had electric heaters. No gas or anything like the old furnaces, and it was centrally located. And I was sort of distraught after that evening, you know. I came to the hotel and I said, "What did I do? Did I make a mess of my lecture? Didn't I say something--" In my heart, I knew I did--speak beautifully and I gave a beautiful lecture.

In the morning, around nine o'clock, the telephone rings; a young architect who was in my lecture. He said, "Mr. Soriano, I was at your lecture last night. May I come to talk to you, please?" I said, "Well, of course." And so he brings me this valve.



LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: And he says, "This is designed by a friend of mine who works for the aircraft industry, designed these things." And he gave it to me. "But I want to give it to you in token of my esteem and appreciation. I've heard you almost nine times and you are more right every time."

Now, that's it. That's why I show you this valve. See? Now, this is a true story. And at least it encouraged me. I told him what this guy says. "Oh, well, you-- Don't you know they are old fossils." He said that. [laughter] And at least he gave me a little courage, you know, to see, well, at least maybe I wasn't all bad.

LASKEY: Yeah. Some of your message got through.

SORIANO: Yes. At least I had one. [laughs]

LASKEY: But I would think that you would get a lot of out-and-out battles--

SORIANO: Oh, yes.

LASKEY: --when you talk about, you know, take out the sculptural aspect or the artistic aspect--

SORIANO: Ooooooh, yes.

LASKEY: --of when you dismiss painting and sculpture--

SORIANO: Absolutely.

LASKEY: --that you touch a lot of--

SORIANO: Guts--



LASKEY: --nerves. [laughter]

SORIANO: I destroy a lot of guts, yes. As a matter of fact, I'll give you two instances: One is, I remember distinctly, one girl asking me, "Mr. Soriano, don't you like **anything**?" [laughter] And I said, "On the contrary, I like lots of things." And then a student-- Very recently, a couple of years ago in one of the colleges, I was talking about the Beatles. I said, "You shouldn't listen to that because it doesn't mean anything; I'll show you of all the things, where things were taken out." And "Why don't you listen to the real thing instead of all this rehash, junk? Because all you are enamored with all these words which mean nothing, you think you are part of that culture? Forget that! Be yourselves. You're part of the universe; it's a greater culture than the cults of your own peers." I tell them that.

And one boy, "No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. No, Mr. Soriano," like that and started jumping-- "No, I wanted-- No, no, no. I want an answer right now!" and he started telling me-- And I said, "Will you please listen to the end of this--beginning of that musical thing what I will do? And then you'll see what I'm trying to develop; therefore, you to understand. Then we can talk, yes? There will be a question period, too." He sat down. Again, he couldn't stand five more minutes. Again, he was sort of--so gored,



he said, "No, I want an answer right now! Right now! Right now!" Just like that.

LASKEY: So upset?

SORIANO: Yeah, he was so upset. I said, "Well," I tried to explain to him. Finally, he kept challenging me. "No, this is a different thing. You don't understand it." I said, "Oh, shut up and sit down and learn something!" And then the president of the university was in the audience and shook my hand and said, "I'm so glad you told him that because none of the professors tell them anything. They'll let them do what they want."

LASKEY: Yes.

SORIANO: This is the tragedy. Anyway, so this is the way it was. I mean, I have many, many incidents like that. Many of them call me pristine; they call me communist; they call me-- You name it, I have been called.

LASKEY: Well, that's-- It's touching on something very vital with the art. How did you come to that conclusion? I mean, I think that's rather a unique perspective.

SORIANO: Yes. It is. That's why I'm different than most of my colleagues. That's why I didn't like for Esther [McCoy] to write a book with the three others which are totally the opposite of my thinking. I once was going to be with Konrad Wachsmann and myself, and all of a sudden she changed it to this, without telling me.





LASKEY: I'm going to just mention the book we're talking about.

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: The Second Generation.

SORIANO: The Second Generation.

LASKEY: And it's interesting because it deals with [J. R.] Davidson, [Gregory] Ain, [Harwell Hamilton] Harris, and yourself, and Wachsmann isn't even in it--

SORIANO: No, because she was going--

LASKEY: --which is sort of interesting.

SORIANO: Yes. She was going to have me and Wachsmann only; two of us. And that's why I said, "At least tell me," because I didn't want to be with the other four, the other three, because I don't think they come up to my thinking, or at least they don't represent what I think my generation, I mean, they really should be.

LASKEY: But you were all--

SORIANO: Contemporaries.

LASKEY: --colleagues, weren't you?

SORIANO: I know. But that still doesn't mean anything. I have a lot of students were my colleagues from USC [University of Southern California], too. Many of them have done Spanish haciendas. And what is Harris doing? I don't understand that what Harris has done. Nothing but imitation of Frank Lloyd Wright. And if you hear him talk



you will see-- I don't think he says much of anything of, in my estimation. And Gregory Ain, what--? They talk about nothing, really. What is Gregory Ain? What has he contributed? Nothing, really, except imitation of [Rudolph M.] Schindler and [Richard J.] Neutra, badly, badly. He didn't have the comprehension of any of those. And Davidson, even I call Davidson a sort of-- He lost his virility. In other words, he wasn't fertile.

LASKEY: Oh.

SORIANO: When you look at his architecture, it's very flat, very meaningless. To me it doesn't represent anything. It looks, so-called, the type of the language [it] was in the thirties, but in reality [it] isn't. It's sort of half-baked or somebody timid. In other words, that was the statement by a timid man. I call him that--it would be excellent. A timid statement; perfect. Here, I'll show you. I'll show you why. Because Davidson begins [the book], doesn't it?

LASKEY: Yes.

SORIANO: Yeah, so-- [turns pages] Yeah. When you look at all of this-- You see, that's Davidson, isn't it? Yeah.

LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: So what is this? What has it done here that Neutra hasn't done better ten times, hundred times? Imitations of Neutra, badly. See? This kind of a



things. And complicated even in plan. I wouldn't do things like that--all of these angles and all. That's not architecture. That's another interesting lecture from me.

LASKEY: Oh, really? On planning? Laying plans?

SORIANO: Yes. I said that they're all--

LASKEY: Well, your plans were always models of simplicity.

SORIANO: They-- I'll show you more you'll see. Like this. So what? All of these things are nothing, really. They're not real things. They are-- They look like-- It's just like somebody imitating Bach, without being Bach. You know what I mean?

LASKEY: I know what you mean.

SORIANO: Uh-huh. [turns page] And--

LASKEY: But it was very--

SORIANO: Well, it's simple--

LASKEY: --the International, in what they--very much the International Style--

SORIANO: Yeah, which I hate: I hate that name. Yeah.

LASKEY: The quintessential-- The white, flat surfaces.

SORIANO: Yeah, but to me that's not architecture. It is more than just surfaces, more [than] the styles. It represents a different type of thing. It's the thinking; it's the structuring of all the totality of the elements in the unified concept which is not-- And here you find little bits of this, little bits of that, which, here-- Maybe on



this. You know, they-- Really, look at the plans. This, to me, is not architecture, you see.

Casals said, "I do anything I like, no." [laughter] See? "I do this, no?" So what? I can do that work and do that way--so what? But to conceive the thinking-- Proper structure is difficult, and beautiful. This--anybody could do that. You could do it. Sure!

LASKEY: Not me.

SORIANO: Sure you could. [turns page] This is what happens. You see, we can do these things, look. I don't know how much of that goes on.

LASKEY: That's Harris.

SORIANO: That's Harwell Harris, yeah.

LASKEY: Well, now, his style--

SORIANO: Is very, very much--

LASKEY: Harris's style was quite different from yours--

SORIANO: Frank Lloyd Wright.

LASKEY: --in that it was much wood--

SORIANO: Frank Lloyd Wright.

LASKEY: --wood surfaces. That's the [John] Entenza House, isn't it?

SORIANO: Now, look, all these-- Yeah. So are the worst house.

LASKEY: But that's unusual for-- That's an unusual house for Harris, too.





SORIANO: Yeah, because he wanted to be modern, yeah.

LASKEY: Yeah, I think he--

SORIANO: But I think Harris is very Frank Lloyd Wrightish, and I heard him lecture a couple of times. He was pointing all these abstract things--pointing that way, the roof, because you can "see the sky" and all this--all these exaggerated.

LASKEY: Well, I see more-- He seems to be somewhat more influenced by the Japanese, too--

SORIANO: Yeah--

LASKEY: --use a lot of wood and--

SORIANO: Darling, I was in Japan and Tokyo many times. I lectured to them. Not all Japanese is good. And some of the things they do are lovely, yes. But I don't think Harris is as Japanesey at all. It's more or less bad Frank Lloyd Wright. Yeah. Trying to be Frank Lloyd Wright.

[turns page] All this sculptural attitude, you see?

LASKEY: That's very Wrightian, yeah.

SORIANO: Yeah. All these things. You see, that, to me-- I don't know.

LASKEY: Well, of course, that is the-- That's the Louis Sullivan Building.

SORIANO: And then Gregory Ain. He goes with this, so, all right. Okay. All right. So? [turns pages] So? He worked for-- This [Rudolph] Schindleresque, you see? He



worked for-- See all of that? Cut out into this little--

LASKEY: Schindler did that?

SORIANO: Yes. You see, this is, again, imitations of that. I imitated Neutra in the beginning, certainly. And then immediately I realized no, that's not it. And I went beyond that. And Neutra's youngest son, Raymond, told me something very interesting. He came to see me after I gave that lecture at USC, I believe it was, with his wife. He came, "Raphael, you did what my father wanted to do and never did it."

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: Well, that must have been quite a compliment for you to get.

SORIANO: That's right. And I was terribly touched by this statement. And it's true. I really went beyond. In fact, I used to criticize Neutra. I admired Neutra very much because Neutra was really great.

LASKEY: When did you know Neutra or work with him?

SORIANO: When I was a student.

LASKEY: It's while you were still a student?

SORIANO: Maybe '28--something; '28, '29, '30. Yeah.

LASKEY: And you worked on the Rush City project?

SORIANO: Yes. That's all. For a few months I was there, just-- And then Schindler called me, as I told you. And



then I went to Schindler. Then I couldn't stand Schindler.

LASKEY: You couldn't stand Schindler [his work]?

SORIANO: Because--

LASKEY: The way he worked, or his--

SORIANO: It was charming the way he worked, yes. No, personally I liked him. He was charming; very nice, gracious man. Always a smile. Yes. But he had something very strange. He used to leave me with a little-- [sketches] Little sketches like that.

LASKEY: What is that?

SORIANO: I don't know. [laughter] Now, for me to develop-- And then he used to go to his jobs and never come back. And I used to try to solve the problem in my own way. "Ah, too functional, too functional," he used to tell me.

LASKEY: He thought it was too functional?

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: I'm surprised.

SORIANO: What I did. Because, you see, his was very personal, very sculptural.

LASKEY: Well, that's true.

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: That's true.

SORIANO: And I was just the opposite. I wanted to structure the thing objectively, not sculptural. I was one



to see the logic of the thing, how the thing goes together, even though I was ignorant; I didn't know much of anything. So finally, I told him, I said, "Look, I don't think I will serve you, not that I could be of use to you, not that I learned anything from your way." I said, "I don't think it's best," so I quit. That way we part. I did.

LASKEY: So you developed your theories then, really, very early.

SORIANO: That's correct. I did my first house in 1934. That was the--my love's [Helen Lipetz] house. Yeah. A pianist.

LASKEY: The [Manny] Lipetz House?

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: That's an interesting story.

SORIANO: Very few know that.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Yeah. She used to play Bach, Scarlatti, Rameau, Couperin. She was a fantastic pianist. Yeah. She had a Bechstein piano there.

LASKEY: What kind?

SORIANO: Bechstein, a German piano; beautiful one.

Yeah. Yeah. That was it. And I did that house; I built it myself. We had no contract.

LASKEY: How did you come on-- The house was very





interesting looking in, again, in pictures.

SORIANO: Yeah, but inside it was--I don't know--the one who owns it after, I don't know what they did with it. They changed-- They put their own improvisations, which is sad. But anyway, I have some beautiful shots; I'll show you. What happened was really this. This is an interesting story how I happened to know--

What do you have there? Is that--?

LASKEY: Just a floor plan of the house.

SORIANO: Yeah. That was my original, the floor plan. Yes, I know. It's interesting. But I wanted to do this one a complete round.

LASKEY: The entire house?

SORIANO: The entire house in a round or a square; a perfect square or round in one block, in one unity. Her husband, Manny, he was very--used to love [George] Gershwin and was still contaminated with this so-called pseudo New York culture. And he wanted little round corners here, round corners there, and all that. And the lot we bought was very, very difficult; was a hillside.

LASKEY: This was in West Hollywood, was it?

SORIANO: No, no. It was in the Silver Lake [district] on top of the--overlooking Neutra's house on the hill, all along the street.

LASKEY: Oh, really? It was at Silver Lake?



SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: Okay. I've got wrong information here.

SORIANO: Yeah. And so I finally compromised by doing that round living room for Helen, the pianist. Yeah. And now, how I get this commission, I'll show you. It's very interesting in my life. I was just barely nothing. I wasn't even known, or anything. I was hungry for a European film; I hated the Hollywood films. And I saw in one of these journals--newspapers, it said in one place in either Beverly Hills or Hollywood, in one of the stores, the John Reed Club-- You know who John Reed Club was--

LASKEY: Yes, pretty much. Political--

SORIANO: That's right. It was John Reed--

LASKEY: --remembrance of John Reed, who--

SORIANO: He was the--

LASKEY: --the journalist.

SORIANO: --newspaperman, journalist who died in the USSR. Buried in the Kremlin.

LASKEY: Ten Days That Shook the World.

SORIANO: That's right. And he was-- They were intellectuals, artists who organized, all over the United States, John Reed Clubs to have friendship with Russia and the United States and other countries. And this was the way that I met [David] Siqueiros, you know, the Mexican painter.



LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: That would be impressive.

SORIANO: Siqueiros was a member there and his wife Blanca Luz. Yeah. You don't know that. It's history. Blanca Luz was a poetess. She used to write the most fantastic, beautiful, tender letters to Siqueiros because he was always in jail as a commie.

LASKEY: Yes. [laughter]

SORIANO: Okay.

LASKEY: You know, there's a Siqueiros mural downtown.

SORIANO: I know that. I know that very well; as a matter of fact, when he did that. And so I met Siqueiros. I used to know them. In fact, I met afterwards in Mexico City at the--in Mario Pani's [Pan-American Congress] buildings he had those murals with the hands like that. Yeah. In the administration building. Yeah. He did that. And I have tapes on that collaboration of the artists with architecture, which I blasted them. I have tapes and tapes of those things which I engaged the people who did that collaboration. You don't know what I have, really. I have treasures here. That's why I want to get somewhere I can sit down and really write all these things properly.

LASKEY: And catalog and find, you know, make sure that--

SORIANO: It requires finances and I don't have anything.



And so this is the story. So what happens is this. I wanted to see a European film. I read in the newspaper that *Le Miracle de Saint-George* in French was showing in the John Reed Club. The Miracle of Saint George. It was a satire on how the church and the big business[es] get together and make all these deals, yeah.

LASKEY: Ah, I've never heard of that.

SORIANO: But done, oh, this was a film, a satire such as you never--is hilarious and magnificent. Only the French could do a thing like that, you see.

LASKEY: Who did it? Do you know--remember who the filmmaker was?

SORIANO: Oh my goodness, it's years ago. I don't even remember. Do you know how many years ago this is?

LASKEY: Mm, about fifty?

SORIANO: Fifty years. Yeah, fifty, fifty-three year--more than that; fifty-three years. Yeah. And so I said, "I want to go." I was hungry to see a European film. I hated the American films from Hollywood. So I decided to see that film and I went there. And all titles in French. There was nothing in-- All spoken in French but no titles.

LASKEY: No subtitles?

SORIANO: No, because most of the people attended were already international audience from Europe who know, apparently, French. And behind me sat a Mrs. Orkin. Her





husband was an inventor of all kinds of little gadgets. And her daughter, Ruth Orkin, bicycled from Los Angeles to New York and wrote a book. I'm talking about this in the early years of the thirties. She became a very good photographer of people. And the poor baby. She came to visit me about three years ago; she's suffering from cancer.

LASKEY: I know the name. I think I've seen her photographs.

SORIANO: Yeah, Ruth Orkin, yes. She does beautiful photography. Well, to make the story short, she kept poking me. She sat behind me in a nearby row in the auditorium there, and she said, "What did he say? What did he say?" [laughter] And I said, "Well, we disturb people. I'll tell you after the film, okay?" And she took me up on it. She said, "You're an interesting man. What are you doing?" I said, "Well, I'm a student," and this and that. And she drove me home in her car to Santa Barbara Avenue with her little daughter. They were in here and I explained the stuff. She said, "Oh . . . " We talk about music, and so, "Oh my god, my cousin is a concert pianist. She's going to be here in six months. I'll invite you. Will you come?" And she did invite me; and I came. And this was the beginning.

LASKEY: Oh, that's a nice story.



SORIANO: And we fell madly in love the first second our eyes hit, you know.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: What happened to the relationship?

SORIANO: Well, this is something-- Sometime I'll tell you; not now. But anyway, so I built this house. Yeah.

LASKEY: That must have been a very interesting experience--

SORIANO: It was.

LASKEY: --building a house under--your first house--

SORIANO: My first beautiful love.

LASKEY: --your first beautiful love--

SORIANO: And music in there.

LASKEY: --the main thing being a music room which is something that had to mean as much to you as it did to them.

SORIANO: It was, absolutely. And then I know I had many musicians from the [Los Angeles] Philharmonic [Orchestra], who have retired already. They've seen my sign outside and they say, "My god, you don't remember? We were at that house you built--you remember?--with the round--with the piano. We used to give concerts there, chamber music." And I said, "Yes."

LASKEY: Of course you remember it.

SORIANO: How can I not remember it?







building.

LASKEY: The house?

SORIANO: Yes. I knew them from that, when I was going to school. That's how I knew them. Then we became very friendly and I liked them.

And as I told you before that there was a lecture at the [Los Angeles] Philharmonic Auditorium and through my--I don't know how I keep meeting people, from the skies--and there was a lovely lady--her husband--and she was a writer for the movies. Her husband was also a bookkeeper or something in the movie industry. Somehow I don't know where did I meet them. I forget now. She was a lovely meticulous woman. She used to always invite me to her house. And she was a superb cook; fine, clean, meticulous. I remember that when she used to wash her beans, every bean has to be studied and cleaned. Really. And meticulous. The spinach, the same way. And she, in fact, threw me to Frank Lloyd Wright and Neutra. At the time I didn't even know who they were. Yeah. I was a student then working in a fruit stand. And then she said, "There'll be two architects [speaking]." And then I heard them. I heard Frank Lloyd Wright first. It was filled with people, the auditorium.

LASKEY: Well, if Frank Lloyd Wright was talking, then--

SORIANO: Yeah. And then Neutra was about half-filled or





something like that. And so Frank Lloyd Wright was a--had a flair, drama in his speech. Mr. Neutra was really interesting but a little more difficult to understand him with his direction. Frank Lloyd Wright [had] more of metaphors and all this flair which will charm many people with saying nothing even though saying words. But then afterwards I met both of them because of that meeting with that lady brought me there to that Philharmonic Auditorium to tell you. And then when I did my Hallawell Seed Company, that blue glass nursery, everybody compared it to the [Ludwig] Mies van der Rohe. I didn't even know who Mies van der Rohe was when I did that.

LASKEY: So you actually came to architecture from a philosophical point of view, and not from an actual having studied--studied architecture--

SORIANO: That's correct.

LASKEY: --and wanted to--

SORIANO: That's correct.

LASKEY: --wanted to do that.

SORIANO: That's correct.

LASKEY: That's very interesting.

SORIANO: I didn't even know what I was doing when I designed that house.

LASKEY: The Lipetz House?

SORIANO: Yes.



LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: I met architecture at the time just when I graduated, you see. Then there was WPA [Works Progress Administration], you know, with the Depression.

LASKEY: Oh, sure.

SORIANO: And I remember I met Cassatt Griffin which is a very lovely person. Was an architect, conservative, but very nice, charming person, really.

I worked for the County of Los Angeles in some special projects for indigent housing which I did-- Really, I have these plans, very simple ones.

LASKEY: Now, that was right when you got out of school, right?

SORIANO: Yes, yes.

LASKEY: And you went to work for the county.

SORIANO: Yeah. And we used to-- Out of school there was nothing, you know, with the Depression.

LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: And we used to measure manholes for the City of Los Angeles. They put sewer systems-- They put manholes, but they didn't know where they were. Yeah. Can't catch, catch-can in case anything goes wrong. And so we had to mark them. All the engineers and architects were put to work to mark the manholes in the City of Los Angeles. That's my first job. And then I graduated to the County of



Los Angeles to do special projects for the indigent housing and all that which I did very interesting things. I still have the drawings nicely, which will be in my book.

LASKEY: So these were at the time, of course, the Depression was on--

SORIANO: That's correct.

LASKEY: --and this was the idea for the housing, was to--

SORIANO: For the indigent.

LASKEY: --help take care of this surplus--

SORIANO: Indigents which were coming here, yes.

LASKEY: They were coming in. That was--would be part of the Dust Bowl migration--

SORIANO: That's exactly, exactly.

LASKEY: --were starting to come in, too, weren't they?

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: It's interesting that at that time that the city was considering--city or county--

SORIANO: It's the county, yes.

LASKEY: Okay, the county was considering something that massive because certainly there wasn't much money around--

SORIANO: I have dormitories and everything else that I designed. Even schools, yeah.

LASKEY: But they never got built?

SORIANO: No. And because-- Modifications, politics, and, you know, those things. At the time I never comprehended



anything like that. But I used to ask Cassatt Griffin, "How do you do that?" I wanted him to-- The first time, [I wanted] to take something underground with wood. Are you kidding? I didn't know a damn thing about architecture, but I knew my senses were correct. My senses were beautiful, but the knowledge [of] how to construct that thing--

LASKEY: Oh, and that's what--that's what--

SORIANO: --was lacking.

LASKEY: He was an engineer or--?

SORIANO: He was an architect actually--

LASKEY: He was an architect--

SORIANO: --but he was the architect of the County of Los Angeles. Yeah. And I used to ask him, I said, "How do you indicate that?" Because I used to go and it was curiosity to see in the building when they used to build foundations. And all of a sudden I saw a lump of concrete. And yet, [in school] we make our foundations [look] like [a] precise T. I said, "How could that be?" I said, "Why?" I asked him. I said, "You know--" Nobody could explain.

At school nobody even could-- We did working drawings. But the working and drawings were copies of a building of a big office, one sheet of drawing. We had to trace that. How can you learn on that? That's why I used





to rebel. I said, "I don't understand. What does that mean?"

LASKEY: You didn't actually have to go out to a site or-- Did you do models or--?

SORIANO: No, no, no. Models we could do. I think we did-- Maybe or maybe not; I don't even remember, really. But anyway, so their teaching was superficial. Just copy, copy, copy. That's all it was. And I didn't want to copy; I wanted to hear, to understand, to, "What is it--what?" And so Cassatt used to give me some clues then-- [I] said, "Oh . . . " And I said, "Well, why is this a lump and then why have indicated steel?" "Well, if you find enough of that cross section of that stuff, that is all right. It'll pass." And I said, "Oh, so that's what it--" [laughter] Then with a little engineering that I had and calculating, then I began to feel my oats. Then when I built this, I learned a hell of a lot. I took it for me to build it. Imagine the daringness of this?

LASKEY: Well, it's a daring design.

SORIANO: And I questioned and I investigated and be sure that this thing will do this, will work that way. And then I did it. So I went in that direction: learning, observing, questioning, and then digesting in my brain what it is. "Ah-hah. You can do that. You take these liberties," or "It means that," you see. You know. This



is interesting.

LASKEY: That's very interesting.

SORIANO: Yeah. So I didn't learn anything in school except maybe how to work at nights, hours, or work all night, which I still do sometimes if I have to do a drawing. Yeah. Yeah.

LASKEY: Were you pleased with the house when it was done?

SORIANO: Yes, I was very pleased with it; however, there are other things I wouldn't have done today what I did had I known.

LASKEY: Well, this is your first house.

SORIANO: Naturally, sure. Still, I was pleased at the fact what I did-- I did even innovations there which before even they had those lumin-line troughs in the trains-- You remember, indirect lighting?

LASKEY: Yes.

SORIANO: I installed them-- The first thing the lumin-lines came in I installed them in the house in the round. Going to have to show you that. This is really very interesting for you to see. That's why they didn't copy the right pictures.

LASKEY: Well, the room with that light at night looks so beautiful. It illuminated--

SORIANO: It is. Exquisite, yeah.

LASKEY: How did it work?



SORIANO: It worked beautifully.

LASKEY: Acoustically.

SORIANO: It was perfect.

LASKEY: Did it sound as good as it looked?

SORIANO: It was excellent acoustics because that trough already took this thing [sound] instead of reverberating back. It absorbed it. I didn't even know it. This was just a happenstance, a mystery. Yeah.

LASKEY: Great. So you did the Lipetz House in 1936.

SORIANO: Yes. 'Thirty-four, actually.

LASKEY: 'Thirty-four. Really?

SORIANO: Yeah. Before even that. Just barely graduated.

LASKEY: That's amazing. And by 1938--

SORIANO: 'Thirty-seven, I didn't go, because that's when I was injured. Nineteen thirty-seven I was injured when I built the [George and Ida Latz Memorial] Jewish Community Center.

LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: Yeah. And I'll show you the Jewish Community Center.

LASKEY: Now, this is in East Los Angeles?

SORIANO: Well, I don't know.

LASKEY: We're at the [George and Ida] Latz Memorial [Jewish Community Center].

SORIANO: I don't know where that is. Yeah, Latz



Memorial. I don't know what happened to it.

LASKEY: There's not much left of it right now.

SORIANO: Yeah, this is it.

LASKEY: Hidden by shrubberies and things.

SORIANO: See. This is what it looked like. See. And this.

LASKEY: It's--

SORIANO: I was injured right in there. I was telling--

LASKEY: How did the injury happen?

SORIANO: Well, I was telling the welder to please weld the rivet properly plumbed because I was going to hang a gate in it, to "please make it plumb." And a car came down the hill; somebody steered it-- And a girl was in the car. She got scared. She steered it, came right across the street, on the sidewalk, hit me in the back. And it broke my femur, my knee.

LASKEY: Oh.

SORIANO: Ai-yi-yi-yi-yi-- You don't know what they did. Yeah.

LASKEY: For how long were you--

SORIANO: I was six months in the hospital with my leg like that, with weights, with osteomyelitis of the nose, I lost a piece of jawbone with my lower front teeth, and this was-- My lip was cut like that, and my clavicle was broken. My head was broken like that--see those two fingers. And I'll





tell you, to this day I suffer fantastic pains.

LASKEY: Oh, of course.

SORIANO: My legs and all that. I have to take a pill every now and then to, to--

LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: And this is the whole beautiful tragedy of our pathos of life. Yeah.

LASKEY: Well, that's when-- That was the year, too, when a whole--when you were doing a whole number of things.

SORIANO: Oh, yes. I was really-- And I designed-- Look at the tenacity of me. Excuse me if I take a half pill because I've been a little bit under--

LASKEY: Would you like to take a--

SORIANO: No, that's okay. You like any coffee?

LASKEY: Oh, yes. I'd love some.

SORIANO: Good. I put some water. [tape recorder off]

SORIANO: Now, the accident, which in '37 just about killed me-- Well, to show you my tenacity, I designed two houses there.

LASKEY: In the hospital?

SORIANO: Yes. Here I was six months in traction--six or four, I've forgotten now where it was. I have my records here somewhere. [microphone adjusted] See, we forgot to put this-- But anyway-- Could it be that those two are close together?



LASKEY: No, I don't think so. I think it's in the tape.

SORIANO: Let me see.

LASKEY: We can move it and see.

SORIANO: Now, in the hospital, as I told you, they took me there, practically, with shovels. It was so hideous [an] accident. I've never seen anything like it. And I had six clients, I believe. They all run to be relinquished from their contract. They thought I was going to die. And one, Nixon-- the Dixon House, they said, "No. We believe in you. You'll survive. We'll wait for you." I was deeply touched. And we did. And I had the house designed almost, but I finished it there. Then I did a house for a doctor, Dr. Gogol.

LASKEY: Oh, yes, yes.

SORIANO: Yeah. And his wife was sort of a Trotskyite. They were the real Trotskyites, but particularly Mrs. Gogol. Oh, how daring she was. Oh, she detested Stalin-- [laughter] There was interesting characters always.

LASKEY: Great period for radical women in the United States.

SORIANO: Yeah, yeah. And--

Forgive me for pulling this up because I have to--

LASKEY: Oh, no. Please, just be comfortable.

SORIANO: And so I designed that house, and look at the tenacity of me. Now, after I got out of the hospital, I



was with a body cast; full body cast: this leg completely, this up to here. The only thing free was this, except to go to the bathroom. But I was solid. With crutches and a cane, for nine months I had that. Then when I-- We started building the Dixon House in Long Beach, of all the places. Long Beach!

LASKEY: Long Beach.

SORIANO: Oh, god. I forgot to-- [laughter] I forgot-- And the Red streetcar line used to go to Long Beach from Hill Street. And I was in a hotel then, the Huntley Apartments which is near-- My god, it was the hotel of the movie crowd.

LASKEY: The Huntley Apartments?

SORIANO: Yes. That was, at the time, way, way, way, way back. And they had the rooms where [they] had rosewood, little so-called tables for writing with envelopes. They had silverware in there. And they had [a] billiard room, a huge ballroom [with] billiard room below. Yeah.

LASKEY: Where was this? Where was it?

SORIANO: In Temple Avenue, near Temple and somewhere around that. I have the whole story.

LASKEY: Sounds wonderful.

SORIANO: Yeah. That was the hotel, the hotel I was in, the Huntley. Because through a friend of mine that I met in the fruit stand, his girl friend became the manager of



that hotel; therefore, I got a room there. And that's when I got injured. Naturally, after I finished treatment, they [my friends] all wanted to close my studio in the Huntley, which I had there, because they thought I would die anyway. I said, "No, I want you to bring my Bach records and my Victrola and then my drafting table like the little one like that." And I said, "I want that." And they would argue with me. I said, "No!" I said, "I want that." And I did.

The first nurse I had--she came through the emergency--said, "I'm your special nurse." And I look at her. She had the most beautiful brown eyes. I said, "You have exquisite eyes." She said to me afterwards, a week later when I was a little more coherent, she said, "You know, when you told me that I knew you would live, because they told me I had a curtain case." And I kept her for all the six to eight months. And even later on she used to come to see how I was and take care of me. She's so sweet, that Virginia. Just tender!

I couldn't wait in the morning until she came because I was a mess. My jaws were wired and my back-- Puss oozing from my nose. And I'll tell you, it was the devil, really. If I think of it now, I'll go crazy. Felt awful; full of aches and pains and sores--bed sores. In those days they had calamine lotion which did nothing, you





know. That's the only thing they had.

LASKEY: And then they didn't even have a lot of the pain killers that they might--

SORIANO: Nothing.

LASKEY: --have given you now--

SORIANO: That's right.

LASKEY: --and the techniques--

SORIANO: That's right.

LASKEY: --that would have made it at least less painful.

SORIANO: They didn't even have penicillin. That would have cured the osteomyelitis, would have been cured like that. But they didn't. The doctor said either you'll kill it or they'll kill you.

LASKEY: You must have really wanted to live.

SORIANO: Of course I did. And then-- So I designed these two houses in the hospital. And I built-- When I came back to my room, I used to drag myself to go to the bathroom on my hands because I couldn't walk at all. And it was not a pleasant one. And then I had a little electric burner this big so I could make myself some lima beans, soup, and this and that. And so I managed it.

LASKEY: I know how--

SORIANO: But you see, life is not so bad in spite of the inconveniences. Because I was brought up in my mother's home-- We never had water, running water. We never had



electricity, heating. We have to bring charcoal, wood charcoal. We used to buy big sacks of it, store it in a box outside and bring it in. Make the charcoal burn as-- In the tandours metal box with flaps, you know, these type of things. We used to make hot coals and bring it in when red hot. Then cook on top of them, and this used to serve in the winter to warm our hands, and that's all. We used to sit around in the living room, cook there and warm-- This is the thing. And the john was an outhouse type of a thing. This is where I used to fetch the water from the outside, whatever. We never had such things so I was used to those things, so it didn't matter to me. I wasn't so spoiled. In America, everything is utensils, utensils.

This friend of mine I have, a charming girl, she has everything-- She has a utensil for everything, even for to make little chopped parsley and all this. She had a table for this and that and the other thing. And I'd take them stuff, I'd clean it thoroughly, and then I'd take with a knife, clip, clip, clip, clip, clip, [laughter] without anything.

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: Without any mess or anything-- She gets astonished.

LASKEY: How do you do that?

SORIANO: And garlic, I take and I just dut, dut, dut, dut



with my hand, and I chopped it instead of squashing it with all the--with jillions of utensils. So this is what happened. And it was a beautiful thing, the fact that I was brought up with this kind of a thing: simplicity. Simplicity of life. And we get used to this, you know. But now I can use the most exquisite utensils. Why not? It's lovely to have all--



TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE TWO

JULY 19, 1985

SORIANO: Okay. Now, where were we?

LASKEY: We were talking about simplicity and the recovering-- How did you get, because at this point then you-- I think the Latz Memorial, the framing was in steel.

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: How had you gotten into steel at such an early time?

SORIANO: Well, I was always thinking of new thought-- I was never happy with the wood. I used to-- The wood is all right, but not flexible. It's static. So big deal, you copy it. Two-by-four, sixteen inches on center. Everybody does that, so who cares? So why not? We have industry. I used to read and find out what there is and I used to say, "Well, why not use that? We have metallurgy today and our scientific thinking and our industry. We have new materials. Why not use them properly?" Since I didn't believe in style-- I wasn't interested in copying style. It was nothing but ornamentation anyway. When they talk about style, they were talking about ornament. That's what they were talking about. It had nothing to do with architecture.

LASKEY: It's interesting when in the background that you were just talking about-- That's what made me think to ask





you the question about steel, that you come from a very traditional kind of a background and a very functional background, to have made this leap into something nontraditional and, in fact, being interested in eliminating traditions and dealing only with function, I think, is very interesting.

SORIANO: Yeah, but my tradition-- I am a universal person. My tradition is the universe, you see. I'm not a traditional person--sectarian tradition, let's say.

LASKEY: Well, I was just thinking of the society in Rhodes in a small island in the middle of the Aegean.

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: You must have been pretty much steeped in the tradition.

SORIANO: Well, they do. But still, I'm a clear thinker. I'm a questioner.

LASKEY: Well, that's what is so interesting.

SORIANO: Yeah. I'm like the little fermentation, like little yeast that ferments a great deal and questions a great deal because-- Just because they did build it, why not? But I look broadly. I always think new ways. Things stimulate me. If I see something, a gadget, it always gives me an idea. "Gosh, that could work for something; I can do this." And I'm always eager to learn, to advance, rather than to remain, to ruminate. It's more exciting to



do that because that doesn't satisfy me at all, as a human being, to keep ruminating. No, no, no, no, no. So I've kept questioning, kept wondering. Especially with our industry, all kinds of materials came in. I used to look at catalogs with new things and I used to say, "Why not do that?"

And so since I already got this daringness between my friends, this Cassatt Griffin particularly, would used to tell me, "Well, you can do this and that." So immediately, I realized this, "Who the hell is to tell me anything?" This is all arbitrary things anyway. I can make my own arbitrations, as long as they're working, as long as they will be tenable from the standpoint of engineering, the stresses and all this analysis which will work well.

So I went to steel right away. And I built the steel floor. As a matter of fact, in the Lipetz House, you don't even know-- You know, the floor I used the junior--what they call junior I-beams of steel. The whole floor's made of steel, I-beams.

LASKEY: No, I didn't know that.

SORIANO: No, nobody knows that. They forget because they didn't ask me and I didn't say, maybe. Now it just occurred to me. Actually, I had the I-beams of steel.

LASKEY: So you were working with steel--

SORIANO: Then.



LASKEY: --in 1934.

SORIANO: Yes, I did. Except the frame was wood. Then I graduated afterwards. I began to think, "Okay, the floor is beautiful the way it was." It was made with junior I-beams, the little, small I-beams; they called them junior I-beams. I used enough for the first time they came. I used the first time these incandescent lights that were used in the round [room]. Nobody had used them. They just came in as a novelty. And immediately I said, "Can I get so many of these? Can I use it?" "Oh, sure." And I have a sheet metal man make me the trough of my own design. Then the trains begin to use these. Even the train--the old streamline trains, you remember?--

LASKEY: Oh, yes.

SORIANO: All right. If you look at-- The interiors used to have troughs like that afterwards, not before I did. No.

LASKEY: Well, I know you've been asked before and I wanted to ask you for the sake [of] the interview about the influence of Neutra on your use of steel.

SORIANO: Neutra's steel was not an influence to me or any other material. The influence of Neutra was the assurance that Neutra gave me from a standpoint of planning logically. Yeah. Up to a certain point.

LASKEY: Oh, really?



SORIANO: Yeah. He was, at the time, I thought it was superb, completely. But then after I began to get on my own and start thinking more on myself, there were a lot of things that Neutra did which I will never do, you see. But yet Neutra was a great master and he had an excellent sensitivity in materials and taste. And the steel that he used was a different type of steel. What I use in steel in my housing is different than what Neutra did, you see.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: In what way?

SORIANO: Well, I used an industrially produced steel in modularly planned housing. Neutra didn't do that.

LASKEY: Oh, he didn't? I thought of his houses as being modular. I haven't looked at them that carefully.

SORIANO: No, no. I don't think they are completely modular. They can be called-- He has an order; they're orderly, yes.

LASKEY: But they're not modules.

SORIANO: Not the way I considered the modules, you see. Because I plan a precise strict module like a fugue of Bach. I will compare it to that, you see. But if you look at the plans of Neutra, I can get any plan for you and I'll show you why. They are totally different than mine. In that respect, I said I did my own innovations in there, you





see. The influences of Neutra, yes, with the orderly, the planning, was a great inspiration for me and I admire them very much, in fact. And he has tremendous sensitivity in colors, textures. And the quality-- When he used to do something, he used to do it beautifully, on grand scale. And that, yes. That was the influence. But I don't think I copied steel from Neutra or anything like that. No. And it's an order that I had from Neutra.

I think we'll stop one minute and then I'll see if I can find the-- Okay. [tape recorder off]

LASKEY: So we were talking about your--

SORIANO: The module.

LASKEY: The module and also about your relationship to Neutra or what, you know, what you had learned from him and also, mainly, I think, it was discussing steel, how you came to steel and your use of it as opposed to Neutra's or Mies van der Rohe.

SORIANO: Well, the steel, you see, as I told you before, I think, I was always interested in advancement. I was interested in utilization of materials that belonged into our age because I thought this age we were doing tremendous strides, particularly metallurgy which, to me, sort of almost gave me a clue to the direction of richness of materials we can have with the metallurgy. Can you imagine-- We have today metals that can take five thousand



degrees of heat and it won't buckle or melt? Well, imagine that, what implications it will have with our skyscrapers--

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: --with our building industry. Instead of building with steel and then you have to put cement to fireproof them, all these complications, all these expensive things. And before you know it you have nothing but a monster: neither a fish nor a fowl. It's a high breed of junk. Yeah.

Make yourself at home, please. You want a pillow? You can have it.

LASKEY: No, I've got it off the edge here. It's just my knee was--

SORIANO: But please, make yourself more comfortable.

And the result is that I kept asking, "Why? Why go back to chopping trees?" And then all of a sudden you find people who, supposedly, for ecology using--chopping trees. [laughs] There are the ones-- I have an interesting experience here I must tell you. This is very funny. I had two projects here in Tiburon: one, seven units; another, twenty-five units. It's here around the corner. About four, five, six, seven years ago. One of the architects was sitting on the board of Tiburon City, big, big deal. And this architect, stupid young punk I would call him, and he was for, you know, riding the



bandwagon of the ecology without understanding what ecology is. And I submitted for this project what I had: the landscaping plan, what trees-- There were a lot of trees in there which were rooted, bad roots, many of them were toppled. And then I had the landscape plan that I made and I had also a consultation of a Japanese tree surgeon or tree expert to examine all the things and gave me a letter to that effect. He said that the plan I have is even more conservative. If he were here he would remove many of the other trees because eventually they would be bad, the others--the young ones won't grow as well. I said they should remove these. But this architect sitting on the planning board said, "I don't want a single tree removed." Just like that, arbitrarily.

LASKEY: A single--

SORIANO: And he kept-- Yeah. In other words, he kept making it-- And then we've been delaying three months like that back and forth. I marked all the trees to be removed so the board could go over--the planning commission would go and see. He went through all these delaying tactics. And my client told me, he said, "Raphael, I know you're very strong and don't-- Just let them talk. Maybe this way they might be able to give us the permit." He was scared that I would antagonize them. I said, "Don't worry about it." And so finally he realized the delaying tactics and



the stupidity of them. This poor guy was having loans from Switzerland, from a friend, and they were hounding him:

"When are you going to start building?" So finally--this is an interesting story-- Then he realized that the thing was a no return. So he says to me, "Go ahead, do whatever you want. I'm fed up with them." So I went and I faced him. I went right to this architect. His name is [Charles] Bassett.

LASKEY: Bassett.

SORIANO: Bassett like a wurst. The dogs I won't even insult them. I said, "Look, you, how many houses have you built?" He said, "Well, not as many as you, Mr. Soriano, of course." And I said, "All right. What materials did you use?" He said, "What [does] this have to do with it?" And I said, "Plenty. You use nothing but wood, isn't it? And here you sit there pompously, you don't want to cut trees because you're concerned with the ecology, with nature, isn't it? I haven't used a stitch of wood since the year 1936." [laughter] I said, "And you sit pompously doing that to me, delaying this job and my clients, too."

And then I had another twenty-five units around the corner, too, the same way, he was delaying it. And then finally the president of the board realized, you know, he said, "Well, we have another architect." And then he became the mayor, this other architect. It was Mr. [Bruce]





Ross from here [Tiburon]. He was a charming man. So he got up and bow[ed] at me. He says, "Far be for me to criticize Mr. Soriano's work." And this punk Bassett had given a memo, interoffice memo, saying, "Well, I don't see that the plan that Soriano gave us is any kind of conventional type of planning." Imagine the jackass? "It isn't any conventional type of a plan that he gave us." He was giving that-- [It was] confidential, but it was given to me as confidential and I have it. And that really made me furious. I said, "This punk sitting there--" So immediately they gave me the permit that night. But the next morning there was the water moratorium.

LASKEY: Oh, no.

SORIANO: You couldn't build this. Now, we lost-- Two projects I lost, and [they] could have been sitting beautifully today. Yes. This is the tragedy of life. By a colleague who is insipid, stupid, mean--jealous, no doubt--a little punk sitting there in a planning commission, "Ah-ha. I want to fix that Soriano," you know. "Big Soriano." And I'm sure there are many people like that. They are pompous peanut-brains. Instead of being gracious and nice and understanding and learn something that he didn't have in his brains. So that's it, and I lost several jobs like that. And that's why--

LASKEY: That's very sad.



SORIANO: --you see my innovations. Again, you see, I use aluminum instead of using sticks of wood. [laughs]  
Conserving trees and forest. We have-- We can do today not only that, but you see, I can span-- Imagine, I can span thirty-six feet in this low-cost housing, the smallest ones-- I can span thirty-six feet without any supports in between. Can you imagine? You know what thirty-six feet is? This is twelve feet, I mean, sixteen-- Let's see, six-- Yeah, this is twelve feet, those two tables.

LASKEY: So it's three times--

SORIANO: Three times that. I can span with two columns, one on each end. And this column's this big.

LASKEY: Well, the flexibility and low cost and--

SORIANO: And also the durability, too. When an earthquake, they will do this, but they won't fall. The airplane wing does this, it doesn't fall, does it? Now, this is the way I plan. So, in this case, I said, "Well, why not use this beautiful material." And they're not expensive at all; they're cheaper. I can build four houses. We get into it, I'll show you. In one day I could put the frame of four houses: the columns, the beams, the finish, ceiling, and the roof including all the connectors to receive vertical walls. All this installed in one day, four houses, with six unskilled men.

Now, do you mind, do you realize the implications that



is that in housing? I send the brochures to the president of the United States, to [James E.] Carter at that time, and to Rosalynn [Carter], to both I addressed it. I get very nice letters, from [Gary] Hart, too: "When you have some projects we will be able to help give you--" When I have-- But nobody wants this. You go to the jackass builders, to the bankers, to the developers; they don't want. They want this junk that you see here in Tiburon. This.

LASKEY: Why?

SORIANO: Because they're ignorant; they don't know anything. They're so ignorant they think this sells-- This has been sold, has been selling because of the way they have made the economy. They think that's going to make money. The other, they think, "Oh, well, this is an untried thing." They don't know-- But it is not untried. Already it's been-- It's history already. Yeah. That's what I have to put up with.

And many people ask me, "Soriano, with all your name, all your fame, why, why?" Even my love over here, she asked me that same question. Yes. And the reason is because of the ignorance of other people and because they don't want to relinquish their nostalgia. They go by nostalgia rather by reason.

LASKEY: And they're afraid of something new.



SORIANO: That's exactly.

LASKEY: Well, now you built the Eichler House. That was an aluminum house. That was aluminum, wasn't it?

SORIANO: Steel. Steel.

LASKEY: That was-- Oh, that was steel. So the only aluminum houses you've done are the ones in Hawaii.

SORIANO: In Hawaii. And I did one in Los Angeles which I don't even want to mention because of-- I'll tell you; it's a long story.

LASKEY: But even the steel house that you did for Eichler, which, at least in the photographs, looks--

SORIANO: It's a beautiful thing.

LASKEY: --wonderful.

SORIANO: It is. They're lovely houses.

LASKEY: And he built it. Why didn't he pursue it?

SORIANO: I'll tell you why. [Joseph] Eichler was a big funny guy as much as the rest of them. He used to-- You know what, you know, Eichler, Eichler had all these big publicity names. If you know the real truth you will shiver, as I know some of the truth that I have been in contact with them, including John Entenza, and the Case Study houses. Yeah. Many people don't know some of the things that I might tell you in the proceeds of this conversations. Coming to Eichler--

Eichler didn't have any taste to come to me, but he





went to--he made a deal with [A.] Quincy Jones and [Frederick] Emmons, you see. Quincy Jones used to imitate my houses. Yeah. Yeah. This is history. As a matter of fact, Bernardi, you know, with Bernardi--[William W.] Wurster, [Theodore C.] Bernardi and [Donn] Emmons, you know. Bernardi, one day, at one of the lectures, somebody asked him, "What do you think of Quincy Jones?" "What the hell Quincy Jones has done that Soriano hasn't done thousand times better?" He said that to him, you know. It's true. Quincy Jones was trying to imitate me because he never did this type of thing before.

LASKEY: But he did a lot of large-scale housing, didn't he? Jones?

SORIANO: Well, yes.

LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: Naturally, because they used to-- He used to work for Eichler, used to give him fifty dollars a house, in repetitions. Yeah. And he will do anything Eichler wanted. And he used to get the wood houses, the wood type of systems.

LASKEY: Yeah. And so he did more wood. He did--

SORIANO: The wood type of the--

LASKEY: He worked in more traditional materials, at least, if not in design.

SORIANO: That's right. Well, they didn't even in the



design, you see. The wood houses that even Neutra and I did, they were capitalized afterwards by putting instead of a flat roof, they used to put little things like that. The rest were our imitation of Neutra and mine, even in the wood. They were not as original as you think. I mean, most people they don't know immediately they take this [as original] because he has done so many, you know.

Immediately the publicity brings them up as--

LASKEY: Oh, right.

SORIANO: --they are the ones. But in reality, they're not. They were just the imitations of what Neutra did and what I did. Yeah. And what even Harris did. And they used to capitalize and make this into a big thing. He used to get along with Eichler giving them fifty dollars a house, every two-- I have a contract here that I even have that Eichler gave me.

LASKEY: Well, who was Eichler?

SORIANO: He was a butter-and-egg man. [laughter] A shrewd butter-and-egg man that he saw the potential. Being a clever little Jew, he realized that-- Don't forget, I'm a Jewish man, too--

LASKEY: I know, I know.

SORIANO: --so I can say that. [laughter]

LASKEY: How did they get into building? Is that--

SORIANO: Well, because--



LASKEY: --just that really was what happened?

SORIANO: --he was a butter-and-egg man, he saw the potential of that. And with little money saved-- They're pretty clever. The Jews are very enterprising, you know. They're really wonderfully alert to anything that is to get money. Why do you suppose all these beatnik and all these million of records are sold? You investigate that you'll see whose there behind all of that. They're money-makers; that's all. That's the reason they are capitalizing and publicizing. This way-- Publicity you can sell anything.

LASKEY: Whatever makes money.

SORIANO: Exactly, darling. That's the whole tragedy. I always say that if there is some sensitive man that will see what we have with concocted publicity, we can make millions. And this can grow like wildfire. I've been still fighting on that, and I'm going to do it, by golly. I'm not finished yet.

LASKEY: [laughter] I can tell that.

SORIANO: I'm not finished yet. I send hundreds of brochures all over from Australia to Japan to Iran to Saudi Arabia. Yes.

LASKEY: It just fascinates me because it is so sensible. It's inexpensive and, heaven knows, we need inexpensive housing at this time.

SORIANO: And beautiful and logical.



LASKEY: It's logical. It's simple. It's simple to put together. It's inexpensive. In a world that's crying out for housing like that, why isn't it picked up--why don't governments pick up on it?

SORIANO: Well, the governments, of course, are a bunch of people, again, the nostalgias. Most of them are extremely conservative. And the very few of them who are of the intelligence, sensitive enough, to really come out and understand with logic and reality, says, "Yes, that has merit." I had a project almost in the, with the model cities. I show you letters. Next time I'll see it.

Tomorrow. I'll show you those, the model cities. They said, "They are the best prefabricated houses they've ever seen by their research engineers." That was for Richmond [California]. Yes. They wanted to have funds and all that. There were very few that will buy. They said, "Houses like that? Flat roofs?" They always go-- They think unless you have this, it's not a house. I said, "What is the meretricious about a flat roof?" I said, "Do you-- Your car has a jagged roof?" [laughter]

LASKEY: Pointed roof?

SORIANO: And yet they don't question that. I said, "A train has that? Your plane have that?" But, you see, when it comes to house-- Years ago, as a member for Consolidated Voltee Aircraft [Company]-- You know who they were? That





was during the war. They were making very fancy planes for the army.

LASKEY: Consolidated Aircraft?

SORIANO: Voltee. Consolidated Voltee. Voltee.

LASKEY: Voltee? No.

SORIANO: Yeah. They were very, very big manufacturers of planes. They were involved with the war effort. At the time I had a-- The vice president of the corporation was George Tidmarsh, was a friend of mine. I met him. And we were discussing-- I said, "Look, you know, there will be a need immediately after the war." That was in '39 already, you see. "If there's a war, or even now, and after the war, there will be a need of housing." And I said, "How about really stimulating your industry, the aircraft industry to fabricate these houses of mine since they are made of metal?" And I designed a beautiful house of metal, like an airplane. Yeah. I'll show you the drawings.

We had a meeting and the chairman of the board--who do you suppose it was?--was a certain, a scientist from Caltech [California Institute of Technology], Los Angeles, Pasadena. I forgot his name. And he said-- He was the chairman of the board, and the first criticism I got was from him, a scientist from Caltech, telling-- He said, "Mr. Soriano, can we put some colonial type of an entrance, porches?" I said, "Why do you want to do that? Do you do



that to your planes?" I said to him. He said, "No, but houses, you know, we have to have sales. We have to have appeal of the public."

I said, "Don't you set the appeal yourself? All the planes set the appeal. People have nothing to do with it. The cars set the appeal by the fabricators. The people never put an input in this. Then it becomes familiar." I said, "You have to dare. You have to really do it." And this is the question I'm telling you. It has to do with this incompetent, nostalgic brains who think this should look like that otherwise it won't sell, instead of being daring enough and say, "Let's try. Let's put a few--" I always tell, "Put a half a dozen of them and see what the public says."

LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: Yeah. Well, no-- Some of them said, "Well, how about putting one example." I said, "No. One won't show. Few, yes, because I gave a varieties. Then we'll suit different people, then you'll see that you don't scare the public in this case. Then you give them differences: different textures, different colors, even different planning. And I can show you the different varieties they could be instead of saying, "Well, won't they be all monotonous?" And yet they don't talk about that being monotonous, this thing on Tiburon, you know. They're all



the same--exactly the same.

LASKEY: Exactly.

SORIANO: They don't say this is monotonous. And yet they will tell monotonous at mine because they sit simple, you see. They don't see the nuances within that I can make, millions of them. That's why I want to show with different plans, different samples together. Plan and relationship, one to the other, then they can see what they can do. But no; there's nobody. You talk to them and you might as well talk to the moon. I think I can get better response from the moon, I can assure you. It's a sick thing, really, to me to think that there is this magnificent potential of making money at the same time of serving the public and giving some beautiful housing, beautiful planned housing, instead of all these sickening things.

Or either they talk about how our standards have to change, FHA [Federal Housing Administration] have to change their requirements. They make an arbitrary statement that a room has to be this, so many square feet. And the average person cannot afford that. They don't have to be rooms-- They don't have to put so many square feet, especially bedrooms that you sleep at night only. They can be smaller room and very cozy, but yet FHA requires that. To give you a loan they have to be that. I used to fight with the FHA, you don't know how many times.



LASKEY: Well, didn't banks used to have--or some banks at least--have a requirement that it have a hipped roof--?

SORIANO: Oh, yes.

LASKEY: --that you couldn't build a house or you couldn't get it past the planning commission or planning, the board, if it had a--house had a flat roof?

SORIANO: This is exactly-- Set by this nostalgic, ignorant people, whether they're bankers, real estate men, professors of universities, or whatever, or movie stars. They have misconceptions of what a house will be. They go by their own comfortable impression of what a house was with their grandfathers, maybe. Therefore, they want everything to be like that instead of seeing something as an advancement, like we do on our cars and every gadget. We want the latest thing. We don't want the antiquated things. Yet when it comes to a house, nope. I give articles that I wrote on that.

LASKEY: Well, it's a very interesting point that we do modernize in our clothes--

SORIANO: Everything.

LASKEY: --in our hair.

SORIANO: Everything.

LASKEY: Except houses.

SORIANO: Yeah. Look at these little instruments. Look at this new cooking--what do you call it?--the--





LASKEY: Microwave?

SORIANO: Microwaves, yes. In three minutes, brip, you can cook, you can heat, yet that's the latest thing. Everyone says, "Oh, you don't have a microwave? Oh, la, la. Why not?" Well-- But, you see, they are propagated by these ignorant people who have the power of the money. And the developers, they are the biggest retarders of progress, are these scavengers which I call them: the bankers, the real estate people, the lenders who make the standards-- They set the tone. When they write it, subdivide, subdevelopment, they're the ones who write that with the attorneys: "You should conform to the neighborhood quality of housing." I'll tell you what happened to me once and to Neutra. The same thing happened with FHA. I'm going back in the early thirties: '34, '36. They used to reject our plans, Neutra's and mine, too. And finally we wrote to Washington [D.C], and then they asked us to resubmit. And we did. And just in spite they will approve one and reject one just so they can save their face. That's the way they used to play that game. Or they will give you \$500 less. In those days, you know, \$500-- If you build a \$5,000 house, if FHA gave you \$500 less, that's quite a lot of money. I used to end up usually giving half--

LASKEY: That's 10 percent.

SORIANO: --of that. Half of that to-- Five hundred. I



said, "I'll give you a part of my fee as a gift. So help me; I did that many times. And I said, "Could you find the other \$250 so you can make it possible?" And this is what I did, several of them. One time-- Let me tell you what happened. I'll give you two interesting examples that's really part of history. I did submit a plan, rejected by these fossils, the real estate fossils who set the FHA appraisal: "He doesn't conform to the neighborhood." And so finally I just got incensed. So two, three times, "Well, it doesn't conform to the neighborhood." I said okay. So I went and took photographs of all the houses in the neighborhood. They were five, six different type of so-called styles. So I took the photographs and said, "All right, here, sir." Ten photographs. "Which one of these you want me to conform to?" [laughter] He said, "Well, you're the architect." [laughter] I said, "I know, but you're the one that's telling me it doesn't conform to the neighborhood, so you tell me. What's the neighborhood to conform to?" And of course I got them there, you see. And I argued with the point. And finally, after going back to another person who's above him, "Well, I've nothing to do with it," blah, blah. They save face. And I say, "This is shameful." I said, "You have a much more beautifully designed house, more livable," and I get their approval. But it used to take pains and aggravations. I have another



one: The house I designed for Dr. Gogol. We got the loan already--this is interesting--

LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: --and all of a sudden, after it was under construction, I got a petition from the neighborhood to stop construction and the lending agency sent us a notice: "We're going to withdraw the loan because the people in the neighborhood--they're complaining it doesn't conform to the neighborhood." After already we had their approval of the FHA and the lending agency.

LASKEY: Oh, my.

SORIANO: And here we are under construction, payroll. I'll tell you, I went from door to door to door to door pleading with everyone. "Well, Mr. Soriano, you know, we have a good neighborhood here, we have to keep it--" And I said, "I'm not violating anything, am I?" I said, "I'm giving you very beautiful--" "Well, there is not a flat roof house here." I said, "Is that all the problem?" He said, "Well, you know, it has to conform to this neighborhood." I said, "Well, let me tell you something." I said, "I have decks, they're all decks from the living areas, from different areas to go. Don't you think it's good, because a hillside like that and I converted those beautiful areas of deck so the people could enjoy the outdoors. Is that a--anything wrong? I think



it's the best thing. You should thank me for it." "No, well, you know, flat roof. Well, they all look flat, they don't--"

So finally, at the very top I had a studio for the doctor, for Dr. Gogol, an office, a small one, ten by twelve. And it was flat, also. It was finished already. And I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do." I said, "You want me to put a hip roof like that on top? Would that help?" "Now you're talking."

I said, "Fine. All right." So immediately I sent a carpenter and I said, "The roof is finished anyway. Instead of two-by-threes or two-by-fours," I said, "put two-by-twos and tack the shingles-- It'll just be one tack. Let the wind blow the damn things up off after we finish and get the loan." And they moved in and we did that. That's exactly what happened. Yeah. [laughter]

Well, what else can I do with those jokers? You tell me. They just about blew my top. I mean, really, if I were not strong, I would have collapsed underneath of all this and said, "Well, what the hell is the use of all this trouble." Really. You have no idea what--how they make you miserable. It's not only the clients you fight with. Them, at least you can reason with them. They invariably come to-- Sometime they have come with nostalgic ideas, too. But that doesn't matter. This is for their own





good. I say, "Look, you let me do that and if you don't like it, I'll change it for you free of charge, okay? Then at least you'll see it." And then they realize that I was right.

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: In fact, I had a client who said once-- I received an award and then I invited him to the dining--to the table to Los Angeles; they flew in. And they were talking among themselves, and one of them said I was-- The Hallawell Seed Company, Mr. McNabb, the president, he said, "Every time we lost an argument with Soriano, we won." Was a nice statement, isn't it?

LASKEY: Right. It really is.

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: Well, it's difficult enough to deal with a client, but when you have a whole--an entire neighborhood--

SORIANO: You have the neighborhood, then you have the building department. You know, when I built the Jewish Community Center in Boyle Heights, did you know what I had to do with it, too?

LASKEY: No.

SORIANO: I had the three-and-a-half-inch, extrastrong pipes occuring every twelve feet. The ordinance in those days in the county was all Lally columns had to be six inches thick in diameter. And so I went there, the



engineers said, "Look, these are not Lally columns."

"Besides," I said, "they have enough [strength]."

And he said, "Well, you know, the ordinance says Lally columns have to be--"

I said, "These are not Lally columns, sir." [laughter]

LASKEY: They're not even pretending to be Lally columns.

[laughter]

SORIANO: No. They are steel columns and they are three and a half inches in diameter and they are sufficient for three stories. The building [has] only two. And I said, "Here are the calculations. Here are my stresses, my engineering data here. Just see for yourself."

"Well, I'm sorry, but the ordinance says--"

I said, "Well, let me speak to your chief engineer, please."

"Well, let me see if he's in." Well, he looks in and he was in. He comes out.

"What's the matter?"

I said-- Again, same repetition. Then he opens the book again.

"Well, I'm sorry, but the ordinance says they have to be six-inch [pipes]."

And I said, "But sir, you're an engineer. Look at the calculations I have here. Will you please look at the stresses? They're more than even the requirement with the



six-inch columns I have in my three-and-a-half-inch extra-strong columns of steel."

"Sorry, but the ordinance says--"

I said, "Anybody above you I can appeal to?"

"Yeah. Appeal to the board. It meets every other Thursday." I did.

LASKEY: Good.

SORIANO: I said, "All right." I did. And I went there and I appealed my case. I said, "Really, I don't understand why should this ordinance be like that to begin with. Why shouldn't they be flexible?" And I said, "Here are the calculations." There was an engineer; he looked at it and so on. They-- Finally, they gave me--said, "Well, this time I think we'll let you go with it." They talked among themselves; they realized how wrong they were. "This time we'll let you-- We'll give you the permit." And I got the permit. So we were the outspoken ones. The next year they changed the ordinance. There was not such a clause in there, you see.

LASKEY: Well, there are battles that get won.

SORIANO: Well, yes, but how many of them do? How many of my colleagues do that? They take the line of least resistance and therefore, I cannot relate to them. They don't help me! They don't help themselves either and they don't help the public. The public loses out. Yeah. This



is where it bothers me, really. And then our education of the students is even pathetic due to the fact that we're wasting all this youth with all this misconceptions. And then the result is they come out completely ignorant, and the result is we have our cities being contaminated with this mess. And this is pathetic and tragic and insulting to our society, truly. And yet nobody opens their mouth; they don't say a word. "Don't rock the boat," like Dean Wurster at University of California, Berkeley, used to say; therefore, I don't--I'm not invited to lecture at Cal. But [at] Los Angeles Cal [University of California, Los Angeles] I did lecture.

LASKEY: Good.

SORIANO: But because my client paid for it, see.

Interesting--

LASKEY: There's a way around these things.

SORIANO: I know. It has to be men of goodwill, you must have. Yeah, isn't it? Yeah, it must be men of goodwill to--

Look how beautiful these little things [microphones] are. Aren't they superb? It took several brains to devise this instead of the old big microphones.

LASKEY: They're fantastic.

SORIANO: They are exquisite.

LASKEY: They really are.





SORIANO: This size, already, instead of that size. They used to be heavy. Look at that crate over here. That weighs seventy-five pounds. That was one of the Webster tape recorders, the first one that came out. Look how beautifully designed it was. It has one speed only; seven-and-a-half. But the speaker, the tone is lousy because in those days, you know, went back [with little experimentation].

LASKEY: But that was state-of-the-art.

SORIANO: That was the one. And then it was beautiful the way it turns out. But look at it now; they're even smaller ones than that.

LASKEY: Much smaller. This is a big one.

SORIANO: Of course. And I'll tell you, it makes me think. It makes me think a lot. And this requires men of goodwill, people who dare. They dare in this area, but we don't dare in housing, in architecture. Very most antiquated mess! Yes.



TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE

JULY 20, 1985

LASKEY: According to Esther McCoy's bibliography of your work, in 1938 you did the Austrian House, the Polito House, the Ross House, and the Lee and Cady Warehouse. Now, those are all important house--projects.

SORIANO: The Lee and Cady was before '37. That was a wrong date.

LASKEY: Okay.

SORIANO: Yeah. That was way, way in '36, I believe.

LASKEY: Really? Okay.

SORIANO: Lee and Cady was a steel building which I did with Ruppell, the name she mentions there that Fritz Ruppell was my mentor, which was not right. He was a friend of mine. I mean, she romanticized all kinds of things which I never said.

LASKEY: What about Fritz Ruppell?

SORIANO: Fritz Ruppell was the president of the Lattice Steel Corporation of California. He used to make prefabricated light steel construction near the prefabricating plant in Pasadena. And I, in fact, would work with him. We advised him to make prefabricated lift slabs using lattice steel, with one-inch plumber's tape. And I was responsible to work with him. And I said, "Why don't you do that and that way. And then to lift already



precast cement walls on the floor with this lattice steel of his, putting cement, and then with two hooks lift them up after they were cured." Yeah, they were the first prefabricated cement walls, sections of walls.

LASKEY: And you worked with him--

SORIANO: Yes, on that.

LASKEY: --to develop those?

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: How did you meet him?

SORIANO: I met him through, I believe, if my memory doesn't fail me, through an engineer friend of mine in the county. I think it was a friend of Cassatt Griffin which I mentioned before. And I can't recollect his name, but I'll have it. I have it in my records. And he was a lovely person. They were a friend of his because being an engineer in Pasadena they knew each other. So he [Griffin's friend] introduced him to me, and then from there on our friendship flourished. And then immediately I was consultant for the Lee and Cady, and then I immediately went and we started doing work in the steel, you see. And I did the [George and Ida Latz Memorial] Jewish Community Center, was a steel building; Lattice Steel Corporation of California built it, you see. And then the house, too, was done at the same time, my first steel house with this type of system, light steel.



LASKEY: Now, I call that, your first steel house, the Katz House, but you prefer to call it the Gato House.

SORIANO: I call it Gato for this reason: He [Milton Katz] was a dishonest man, he chiseled my fees by pretending that he didn't have any money, that he spent all the money in the house which was-- I helped him even, built it so it wouldn't cost him too much, because Lattice Steel did it and I asked him not to charge him too much. And then he said, "My wife's pregnant--we're going to have a baby. Do you mind waiting for your fee?" I said, "That's all right." At the time I was busy and it didn't even matter to me. I waited a couple of years or so. Then all of a sudden I got very busy and I needed the payroll and I called him. I said--I forgot--Milton, yes--"Milton, will you please--" "Oh, gee, I haven't got it." And then I learned afterwards that he was the owner of several theaters, movie houses in Hollywood. He had the Newsreel Theater and several other theater houses. And yeah, they used to make money in those days. Everybody used to go to the movies. And he didn't have it. And then I said, "Well, can you pay me \$100 a month?" It's \$500 he owed me. And, "Oh, I haven't got it." "How about \$50?" "No, no, no." I said, "Twenty-five?" "Well, I'll see. Twenty-five--" I said, "Well, let's do that and I want to get through because I need this money." I said, "Milton, I





didn't charge you interest or anything." Then he said, "Okay." He agreed. And then he took two months and he sends me \$15. Then my secretary and I used to call and call and call. And then he used to delay weeks and he used to send me \$5. I mean, this kind of thing-- Finally, my secretary said, "I'm sick and tired. I don't want to do it. I get so wrapped up with this." And I said, "Well, forget it. We'll drop it." And so, therefore, this is what happened. I published the house and I called it the Gato House; Katz--

LASKEY: Spanish.

SORIANO: --in Spanish, Gato. [laughter] I called it that. So I wouldn't give him the credit to put his name there and I don't see why-- Because he didn't contribute anything. I did it.

LASKEY: Well, I was going to ask you about that because [Paul] Heyer in his book *Architects on Architecture* refers to it as the Gato House.

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: Esther McCoy refers to it as the Katz House--

SORIANO: Well, she made a--

LASKEY: --and I was interested--

SORIANO: Esther doesn't check with me all these things. She should have because I-- This is exactly why I did it. Now you know the true story. And that will be in my book



that way, too.

LASKEY: Well, now, the Katz House, or the Gato House--

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: --actually was a little bit later, right? That was in the early forties and after the houses--

SORIANO: After I built the--

LASKEY: --like the Polito House.

SORIANO: --after I built the Jewish Community Center in '38.

LASKEY: After the--

SORIANO: Yeah, about that, about '37, '38. Yeah.

LASKEY: But I think in particular there--the Polito House has always looked like an extremely interesting structure built on the three levels.

SORIANO: Well, yes. It was in a very steep hillside in Hollywood and I built it that way because that was the most logical thing. And I put a beautiful little three-story cube and then I have a lovely bridge across to go to the grounds which is very elegant.

LASKEY: Now, most-- Now, on the street side is mostly a blank facade, right?

SORIANO: That's right. On the street is a blank facade. The garage is down below the first floor and then we go up the lovely stairs and there are rooms with few lights on the-- But everything's facing towards the gardens and park



which was the [garden aviers] in there. Yeah. So, in other words, why put on the street things that you don't want on the street. Big glasses, I put small glasses [windows].

LASKEY: Well, and I also read, in one of the magazines it was published in, that under the stairways, I believe, had a sandblasted--

SORIANO: Glass.

LASKEY: --glass window to let light--

SORIANO: It's huge.

LASKEY: --to light up the stairway.

SORIANO: That's right.

LASKEY: Must have--get beautiful light.

SORIANO: It's lovely; it's beautiful. The whole thing is a lovely house. One of my wood houses? [laughs]

LASKEY: But all of these houses would have been wood houses--

SORIANO: They were all--

LASKEY: --until--

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: --until you got into steel which came--

SORIANO: With the Gato House.

LASKEY: --later. It came with the Gato House. But there was the, as I say and according to these records, you did four or five houses in one year, and that must have been



also at the time when you had your accident.

SORIANO: No.

LASKEY: But you-- No? Was this after?

SORIANO: No. Before the accident I had several houses, and after the accident I did also a few. I have to check in my records exactly what the dates [are]. Unfortunately, I don't have them in my brains at this point.

LASKEY: Another house that was published a lot and that was fascinating and that, unfortunately, seems to have been really destroyed in the process was the Lukens House.

SORIANO: Oh, yes. The Lukens was a lovely house. It was a beautiful house I did. That was before my accident. Sure.

SORIANO: I have it as 1940. Is that wrong?

SORIANO: I believe so. This was done before, I believe, at the time it was taken.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Yes, because he [Glen Lukens] bought himself the old garden from an old estate, wherever it was. I forgot even the address. Do you have it there?

LASKEY: Yes, 3425 West Twenty-seventh Street--

SORIANO: West Twenty-seventh Street.

LASKEY: Which is just off Adams [Boulevard].

SORIANO: Yes. That's right. And he had-- It was an old, old house--estate, big garden. He bought that garden and I





built for him-- I think it was before my accident. Yeah, because I was going to USC [University of Southern California] then and I knew Glen Lukens was a ceramicist; was a professor of ceramics there. Yeah. And the dates are wrong because I will look into that when it-- You see, sometimes when they are published, they might be published later than they appear as if they are like that, you see.

LASKEY: Okay.

SORIANO: I have to really check my dates myself because the drawings will tell exactly when.

LASKEY: Yeah. Most of the information I have shows it as 1940.

SORIANO: Well--

LASKEY: But that's--

SORIANO: It could have been before my--

LASKEY: But as you say, that's just when it was published.

SORIANO: Sure, sure.

LASKEY: And it was a combination of a studio--

SORIANO: It was a studio in one side and I put this beautiful frosted glass, sandblasted glass to get all the light in there. And then [there] was a beautiful balcony with veranda to go to the living areas on one side and the studio on the other side, yeah, with a garage, which was very beautiful, really. It was an exciting house. And I did everything. I designed all the interiors; I always do.



LASKEY: Oh, you do? I was going to ask you because--

SORIANO: Always. I always--

LASKEY: --you had done the interior in this one, specifically because there are pictures of it.

SORIANO: I did the interiors of every one of my wood houses. Yeah. Every one. The Austrian, the Driver, the Gogol House, the Lipetz House, everything else. I did all the interiors as well. I always do that, including the landscaping.

LASKEY: Oh, you did the landscaping?

SORIANO: I always did all the landscaping in all my buildings. Yes, ma'am. Yeah, because I know-- I'm a good gardener and I love, I love blossoms, I love trees. I used to go and select the most beautiful plants.

LASKEY: Did you ever get a lot of static from your clients about, in conflict, with what they wanted and with what you wanted?

SORIANO: No. No, because I discuss that with them. I'm very open. I discuss before even-- Because they have to pay for it. And I said, "Look--" And they used to give me discounts-- Evans and Reeves, I remember in Los Angeles, used to be the big nursery gardens. And they used to give me discounts on all the plants and I used to turn them [the discounts] over to the client. I did. I always did that. To me, I wanted to do the thing beautifully and I



didn't care. You know, my fee in architecture was enough. I didn't even charge them for the interiors, extras, or anything like that, except the house on 111 Stone Canyon, but that's another story. But otherwise, I used to do the interiors with the same cost, you know, with ten percent. Everything as the cost, yeah. Which was not enough, but then I wanted this to be well and I want the clients to--to really be--to afford it. And for that reason I used to be gracious enough, I think, to really be cooperative so that at least to make it possible, and it helped me and it helped them.

LASKEY: Now, with the Lukens House you already had a garden. So what did you--

SORIANO: It was a big estate, actually, big, big--a lot of grounds. And we planted a few little trees here and there and some flowers around the house. But the rest of it was old, old trees and all that.

LASKEY: That's what I wondered, if you sited the house to--in the garden to take advantage of it.

SORIANO: You brought up a very good point. I did. We studied the grounds and then there were a lot of big trees and I put the house within this complex of trees. Yeah. Yeah. It was oriented so to take advantage of the trees and the beautiful old oak trees. And the photographs that were published, as you can see, have that lovely quality.



Yeah. So I remember one tree which was a beautiful old one. New, you know, a new lot, usually you plant a tree by the time they grow-- It does not have this lovely quality of nature.

My god, I'm supposed to give you coffee. Remember? I've been boiling the water.

LASKEY: Actually, I turned the water-- It-- When I went to the--

SORIANO: You did? [tape recorder off]

LASKEY: Go back to the Lee and Cady Warehouse for a minute because that was-- Would that be considered your first steel building? Do you consider that--

SORIANO: It was considered not my own entire creation, no. It was-- I was sort of a consultant for [Fritz] Ruppell. And he had another architect that he--friend of his that used to work, but he was not very creative according to Ruppell. And so I was there trying to make it [a] little more creative. And still-- And he had already some plans done which I kept fixing it, cleaning them up with more order, you see.

LASKEY: [laughter] Right.

SORIANO: Yeah. This is the Lee and Cady.

LASKEY: But how-- Lee and Cady was in Michigan and it just seems like--

SORIANO: Ferndale, Michigan. It was a Quaker products--





Quaker Oats. Yeah, because of Fritz Ruppell. Um-hm. And I had, a house that I did years later, my forty-foot spans in Youngstown, Ohio.

LASKEY: Oh.

SORIANO: Yeah. Very few people know that.

LASKEY: Well, did this spark a greater interest in steel or--

SORIANO: No, I went-- You see, I right away went into steel because I saw the potential of metallurgy, the potential of steel. Because with wood, you know, what do you do? It's just simply try to-- Well, the same old stuff, and all you do is just put those little sticks all over the place. And I said this is not the way to build. This is uneconomical, clumsy, costly, the labor, and then the result is wrong. You have four walls to hold a little room with these two-by-fours. In mine, I don't need that. I liberated right away. I went into complete freedom having just no obstacles. I said why not? Why not have the structure to be self-tenable than anything else inside to be flexible. A bomb could go off and yet the structure will still stand, you see. You still have the shelter. And this is the fact I did the office building of Adolph's in Burbank that same way. All this stuff came from different parts of the United States. All prefabricated to be assembled in Burbank. Yeah.



There's no bearing wall there. When you go inside, you'll see there's no bearing wall in this whole area. There're only those columns that I showed you yesterday. There are three columns eight inches in--eight-by-eight I-beams of steel, spanning forty-foot modules in one direction and twenty in the other. That's the whole module. And then two cantilevers like that; one twenty feet and one ten feet to take care of the whole lot. That's all.

LASKEY: Leaving the interior free--

SORIANO: Completely free.

LASKEY: --to do anything you want to--

SORIANO: And I remember many times when I built houses like that, afterwards people used to say, "What is that? Is that a house?" And I said, "Yes." "Well, where are the rooms?" I said, "You wait. They'll be there." We used to finish the whole thing: finish the ceiling, the roof, and all the floors were finished, and then we used to install the walls, the outside enclosure. And then the inside still was a huge cube, empty. And then the cabinets used to make the rooms, prefabricated cabinets. That's what I did. I have some details of that. This is the method that I used and I've been using it ever since. Yeah.

LASKEY: Were those cabinets, once they got in, they were movable, right?



SORIANO: Yes. You can move them.

LASKEY: So that if you wanted to rearrange the size--

SORIANO: Yeah, but it would be kind of hard for anybody-- one person to do it.

LASKEY: But it could be done.

SORIANO: Oh, of course. We did-- As a matter of fact, I'll give you an interesting example that when we built the Adolph's Building their laboratory was inside of that--the whole lot. Then finally they extended very big and [so] they were in need of office rooms, so we put the laboratory in another building someplace else. And then we remodeled, we readjust[ed] the area of the laboratories for some living areas. Yeah, for offices. And it was done very simply. And exactly to--with the same details of the rest of the building, [by] removing the laboratory and putting some offices without destroying anything. Yeah.

LASKEY: Well, was that idea ever explored with the idea of single-family dwellings?

SORIANO: I did. This what I told you already, that I'd sent in Hawaii. Eleven housing units of that and now I'm proposing to the governments, to all kinds of people, [that] in four days I can build-- In one day I can build four houses with six unskilled persons.

LASKEY: But once the house is built with the module, with the module idea, it sounds like it would be easy to add on



or to add on rooms.

SORIANO: You could.

LASKEY: I'm thinking in terms of a young family that might grow in number, that the house could expand or contract.

SORIANO: Yes. You could do that, but let me tell you something. There's a danger there. You see, most people think they can do it themselves. That's no good. In my system, I give them open patios, pergolas, or-- Yeah, but the open patios with two columns the size of a big room already, with the roof, partially enclosed [so] that if they want to add this as another room, it'll be part of the same structure rather than leaving it to the public to call the carpenter or somebody else, and this is what they will do. They will put something which is totally different and will make a mess of the original concept, you see.

This type of thing has happened in Israel, for example, not of mine. An engineer took me once to show me a project that they were building with blocks, cement blocks. You know, over there that's all they did, mostly. And then they said, "Well, we have a place here for the clients to add their own room, another room if they want to." And he showed me what the clients did. Everybody's misconception, all the junk, all the nonsense, and the whole thing was ruined. In my case, no. In my case I really pre-establish areas like patios, pergolas,





and if they want to enclose that room, make another room or two rooms, they have it-- They have already established-- the roof is there, the columns are there. All they put is the vertical walls to enclose it. I'll show you. I have some plans of that.

LASKEY: If you were building-- When you plan today, would you stick with aluminum or would you move on because you've always been interested in, you know, exploring. Are there new metals that you would build with?

SORIANO: I would move on indeed, but the trouble is the cost. So far, the aluminum is still cheaper. It's a little more expensive than steel; it always has been. But in the total workings of it, it's cheaper than anything because it can have the whole thing anodized and easy to fabricate, easy to ship because it's lighter than steel, and it doesn't require upkeep. With steel you have to paint it. Look at our Golden Gate Bridge. By the time you finish one end of painting, you start the other one, and it never ends. But with aluminum, you don't have to do that. You anodize, you're there; already prefinished colors. You remember the days I showed you how beautiful they were, those greens and blues and yellows, blacks.

LASKEY: And they stay that way.

SORIANO: Sure.

LASKEY: Well, going back again to the thirties, you did do



a couple of houses that were sheathed in wood, that looked very different: your Strauss House--

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: --and the Ebert House.

SORIANO: The Strauss House was a whole wood house; completely wood. They are in a cluster. Yeah. That was the, one of the complete wood houses I tried. And I used the wood very elegantly, very good. Was a beautiful house, I thought.

LASKEY: It is a beautiful house--

SORIANO: It is. Yeah.

LASKEY: --looking at the pictures.

SORIANO: But that's a lousy picture. Esther [McCoy], really, she just doesn't realize, doesn't have any sensitivity to at least ask me-- They went with [Julius] Shulman-- She [McCoy] got whatever photographs maybe Shulman gave her. And this is the worst picture to show what it is. I could show you-- I don't know if I have the Strauss House here in one of the magazines. Gosh, I have all the publications here, in here. Aah, la, la, la.

[looks through papers]

LASKEY: I did see other pictures of it. This was just the one that was convenient for--

SORIANO: Yeah, but it is--

LASKEY: --reproducing. But I saw it in the research--



SORIANO: Yeah, but she didn't have it; she didn't have the right pictures. I have some beautiful pictures of that.

LASKEY: Well, it was a beautiful house.

SORIANO: It is an exquisite one. That was in Cheviot Hills. Did you see it? Actually?

LASKEY: Only in the--

SORIANO: --photographs.

LASKEY: Again, only so many-- I tried to see some of the houses and they're very hard to see.

SORIANO: I don't know in what condition it is now. I don't know. Maybe some day I should make a [unintelligible] trip there to go and see my old, to visit every one of them. It's interesting what state they are-- It would be interesting.

LASKEY: Well, if you ever want to do that, let me know--

SORIANO: Thank you.

LASKEY: --when you're down there and I would be happy to escort-- [tape recorder off] Then came the Hallawell Nursery [and Garden Center].

SORIANO: The Hallawell Nursery was before that. It was actually in '39 when we start doing the drawings, when we did the drawings.

LASKEY: Now, was that your first--

SORIANO: It was my first prefabricated--

LASKEY: --prefabricated--



SORIANO: --that I [dash] from one area to another area, one city to another city. It was-- You know, I'm pretty daring, I think, in many ways.

LASKEY: Well, you--

SORIANO: Maybe I'm ornery [unintelligible].

LASKEY: [laughter] Well, how did you accomplish it? How did you-- What is prefabricated where, and sent where?

SORIANO: Okay. I-- What I did was this: I made complete drawings, made of steel. Then we got some contractors in San Francisco to give some bids. And I told my client [Hallawell Seed Company] that that was going to cost about \$19.000 for the whole thing, the way I estimated it myself. Then we gave it to the contractors who all of a sudden-- The contractors, you know, they are very peculiar people. Unless they're familiar with the old stuff that they did, anything that's different, they immediately raise the price two, three times, without even studying carefully. And, as a matter of fact, they came in with a big price, so my client called me [and] says, "Raphael, you know, we won't be able to afford this price they've been quoting us. I'm sorry." And I said, "Well, let me see what it is." So I flew down--those DC-3s at the time, I remember. And-- Or took the train; I don't even remember what I did now. That was something. It was the--

LASKEY: Probably the train. The Lark?





SORIANO: --train. Yeah. I used to change even to go to Berkeley with the Santa Fe, it was. Yes, with the Trailways system to somewheres near San Luis Obispo, then change to the train to land in Berkeley, then take the ferry across.

LASKEY: Well, what was the original commission? What was it that you were going to do for Hallawell?

SORIANO: Well, Hallawell, they wanted this nursery, a nursery building. They showed me the plot of land and they were operating there. And it was all made of wood, stud junk. And I said, "I'll do something very lovely for you." Then I used also some of the lath houses that they had, some of the wood lath. You see, the one on top--they stay on top of the new steel. I used the old wood lath that they had already in order to save money. Because they just--it acts like this, like a shape for the plants. I used that. The main structure's made of steel, very light, on a module again.

And so I came down and I asked the steel contractors-- or the contractor gave me--

"Well, whoever heard of a nursery of steel? Why not wood?"

And I said, "Well, why do you say that?" I said, "Why not give an actual bid? You have all the drawings."

"Well, we don't know what contingencies."



"Now, what contingencies?" I said, "Look, I have the drawings here. They have complete details. Bid according to that, okay?"

"Well, whoever heard--"

Again, they started this. I said, "Will you please-- Is that what you do with the skyscrapers?" I said to them, "When you do a multiple building, a high-rise building, do you do this?" And so finally he said, "Well, I don't know. We'll refigure." The figure still was expensive. They still may want to-- So that to protect themselves, thinking that it will be contingencies because they have never seen anything like that before. So finally I got so mad. And my clients, they said, "Raphael, we only have a certain budget as you told us. Beyond that, we cannot." So I said, "Okay."

You know what I did? I talked to Fritz. "Fritz, this is what I have and they're being-- Can we fabricate it and we go there with two of your welders and fly over the weekend and erect that damn thing?" "Oh, sure. Hell." [laughter] And that's what I did. You see, I always have-- He gave me a quotation, then I flew in and I got the plasterers, the electrical men, the plumbers to give us a bid for that separately. Then I added the whole thing; it was just as cheap what I told them. In fact, it was even less, few hundred dollars less, from the \$19,000 they



want. Then we went and built it. And as a matter of fact, I got a \$500 bonus later on because they did so much business from that. And I did those-- On account of that, I did their new Market Street store. Yes. Which was a beautiful store with the most innovative things of selling packets of seeds. I have marvelous color pictures of that. Yeah.

LASKEY: Well, what part of the nursery was fabricated down here and how did you get it--?

SORIANO: Nothing was fabricated down here. Everything was fabricated in Pasadena and shipped here. The whole--

LASKEY: I'm sorry, I'm sorry. That's what I meant. What part was done in Pasadena?

SORIANO: The whole building was done in Pasadena. All the frame, all this that you see in the nursery, except the plasterwork, was done by the plasterers in San Francisco. The electricians came in and did that. The rest, the walls, the framing, everything was done in Pasadena.

LASKEY: And you just loaded it on the truck?

SORIANO: Yeah. First time. And then I came in with them, with the welders on the same truck. And we ran the job and helped them build this and that. Then we have--we got up there, we made a whole frame ready to be plastered and all that. We called the plasterers, the electricians, the plumber to do their work. And I did very interesting



innovations. Even some new lath houses of wood we have, that a cabinet man do that. And everything was done--  
[tape recorder off]

LASKEY: Well, you also were involved in the design of the interior of the nursery itself, weren't you?

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: That is the--

SORIANO: All the cabinets--

LASKEY: --all the cabinets--

SORIANO: --all the storage facilities, display cases. Even the lighting fixtures I did. Yes. I designed even the lighting fixtures with the--which I used even in houses later on. I had one hundred, two hundred, three hundred, four hundred, five hundred, six hundred watts by doing this [demonstrates shape], with a switch, by hand. In those days, you know, they were primitive things. But I had those fixtures done with sheet metal housing, my own reflector--indirect lighting--throughout the store. I mean, these are all things that I always used to do. Very-- With peace and beautiful quality of the display merchandise instead of glare. They were in all indirect lighting as the sun would do, you see. Okay. Now, let's see if that's-- [tape recorder off] What were you saying about the--?

LASKEY: Well, in steel at this point, you did--the





Hallawell was just prewar, just prior to the war--

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: --and the involvement. What would the effect of the war have on your steel construction?

SORIANO: The war was very difficult, no matter steel or any other material. In fact, the OPA [Office of Price Administration] at the time--if you remember or may not remember that OPA--

LASKEY: I do.

SORIANO: They used to specify and direct how much material. If you had to do a little remodeling, even then, to fix a little showcase, you had to have permission what materials you will get and this and that. And therefore, I did several stores, you know, little clothing stores, jewelry shops type of thing. In fact, I did a restaurant on Hollywood Boulevard, the Pep's Restaurant, which they got a permission to do that with the understanding that it was one to serve to the GIs steaks and, you know, everything was rationed. And so I devised a very beautiful restaurant right on Hollywood Boulevard with the chefs cooking steaks right in front. I put the grid right there with the chefs. And, you know, every--all the GIs, everybody passing by, their mouths-- And then inside I had a long--it was a long store; we converted it into a restaurant--some beautiful blue and black booths, blue



seats of--vinyl seats, and black painted stuff. It was a very exciting type of a--very beautiful restaurant. I have some Kodachromes of these. And it was published. I published some of these things in some of the magazines. And we had [a] permit to build that with the understanding that they were going to charge very low prices for the GIs. And everything was prescribed: a slice of bread will cost that much, butter was rationed, even a piece of--square of butter, and then the steaks will cost that much. And [for] that reason we got the permit to build that restaurant.

LASKEY: You had to specify that before you could even get the permit to build?

SORIANO: You didn't get that-- Yes, you have to apply, and then suggest and tell that this is what we're going to do. Yeah. And for-- With that understanding, then you get the permit to get all the materials; otherwise, you couldn't do it.

And I don't know if I did--when I did the Ciro's Bond Street--the jewelry shops or whatever it is-- No, I did that afterwards, I believe. But even then, there was a rationed type of material. I couldn't even get materials. But I did the Bond's--Ciro's, Bond Street, from England. I did a Beverly Hills shop which is still standing there on Wilshire Boulevard. The one here,



unfortunately, that was the most beautiful gem, it's nonexistent now. The lease expired and they didn't [renew] it.

So, I could get materials because of my friendship with some of these contractors, and I used the National Cornice Works which was a sheet metal maker. Mr. Ness was the--that doesn't matter; it's just a name of the president of the company--was the president of the National Cornice Works. And he was--used to take his integrity to do the right work. He used to come to the job to supervise how the craftsmen were doing. That's for roofers, you know. You put sheet metal all around [in] those days for the wood houses. And that's for the wood houses we're talking about, and I used to do-- And I met this man. He was so nice that he used to carry the job with integrity. And I got very friendly with him. Every time I used to get a sheet metal work, I used to call the National Cornice['s] Mr. Ness and he used to give me a price. I wouldn't even get another bid because I know it will be fair, but I know the work will be superb. And I know it won't be, sort of, be out of line.

So I told him, I said, "I have these shops and I need some brass. Is there any bronze or brass? They want some--that high-class, to look like gold." "Well, for you, Raphael, I will do it." They were doing submarine work for



the navy, they rationed, put a requisition of all this fancy materials. He said, "We have enough of this to give you these details for the showcases." And I designed the most elegant shop. I designed all their showcases, their chairs, their storage facilities with the drawers with brass pulls. Everything was done-- It was one of the most elegant stores. I have some beautiful Kodachrome slides which I'll show you. And, really, it was one of the most elegant buildings. And because of that friendship, again, with the president of a corp--sheet metal works, I could get these materials which is impossible to get. Everybody used to say, "How did you get that?" Of course, I won't tell them where. [laughter] Then, because of that lovely, elegant store--You know the V. C. Morris Company that Frank Lloyd Wright did on Maiden Lane [San Francisco]?

LASKEY: Oh, yes. Off Maiden--on Maiden Lane.

SORIANO: That was my store, originally. I had a contract to do that.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Yes. I had a contract to do the V. C. Morris because of that. They saw this lovely gem right on Union Square that was next to Macy's, 257 Geary [Street]. That's where it was. And then he, the Morrises called me and said, "Look, Mr. Soriano, we love that store you did. We'd like [you] to do our store." All right; I did that. And I





had a contract. Now, all of a sudden one day I came in with drawings to have a conference with them, and who was on the door? Mr. Wright. And Mr. Morris and Mrs. Morris. Mr. Wright was a friend of Mrs. Morris and he designed a house for them to be built right beyond the bridge overlooking a cliff on the water, but they never built it.

LASKEY: I was going to say, was it ever built? Because it doesn't sound familiar.

SORIANO: No, it was never built, but the drawings were published, you see. Then, all of a sudden when I was at--I met him right at the door, as they were coming out to go to lunch-- I just came in from the airport with drawings. And immediately Frank Lloyd Wright said, "What is Soriano doing for you?" Because he saw that I had drawings. And he [Mr. Morris] says, "Well, he's doing our shop." "Oh. Why didn't you call me?" And then he said, "Well, we didn't know that you would be interested in such a small job." "Oh, sure. I can do the job and Soriano could supervise it." And I said, "Mr. Wright, you know, our ideas are entirely in opposite camps. And besides, I don't supervise anybody else's work except mine." And then they said, "Well, come and have lunch." I said, "No, no. Go ahead since you were going out to lunch. I'll see you. I have another client to see anyway."



So I saw them afterwards. They were mortified, the Morrisises, because Mr. Wright insisted that he wants to do the job. And then Mr. Morris said, "Well, maybe he'll forget." But he didn't. He kept sending them sketches after sketches. So he was terribly upset and he said to me, "I know I'll go broke if he does the job, but my wife is insisting because they're friends." And I said, [knocking on door] "Look, if you want to find out about this, forget it." I said, "Look, you can give it to him if he's that hungry for a job," I said, "but I'm not going to be part of this nonsense."



TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE TWO

JULY 20, 1985

SORIANO: I said, "If he [Wright] needs the job so badly--" I said, "This is unethical, to begin with. Once we have a contract with another architect, you don't go and take it away. I wouldn't do that to-- Even when I have sometimes plans from other architects, I usually call the architects and I ask the client to give me a written letter that he is not engaged by this other architect." I say those things, you see. And this is only the ethics. And so finally I said, "Give it to him." And then I got paid for what I did. And so that's why in the end he went broke, sure enough.

LASKEY: Morris did?

SORIANO: Sure. Because he [Wright] made a big tour de force, you know, like he got a-- They couldn't display all these gifts that he [Morris] had. They were glassware and gifts, very fancy gifts that they used to sell. It was a real elegant store. And of course from then it [made] it impossible to exhibit anything and it costs so much, naturally, to do all these big round circles.

LASKEY: The ramp.

SORIANO: So anyway, so, this was it. Then I told his son in Beverly Hills, Lloyd Wright, I said, "Lloyd, do you know what your father did?" And I explained [it to] him. He



said, "Oh, god, Raphael. If that will console you, he stole three or four churches from me." From his son. Yeah. That's what Lloyd Wright told me. This is the type of ethics that Frank Lloyd Wright had and most people don't know that. He was--no scruples at all, as a human being.

LASKEY: Did he need the work that badly?

SORIANO: I don't know if he needed it or not. No matter what, even if you were starving, if I were starving, I would not take anybody's work. This is not ethical. It's impossible. I mean, where is the human ethics in life? Above a profession a human being should be ethical, should have integrity. This is [the] first thing, you're a human being. And that implies everything with it. Without that, if you don't have that-- Who was it-- Beethoven said that, said something very beautiful. He said, "There is one great mark of a human being: the kindness of the heart." He said, "When that is lacking, there is no human being, there's no great artist." Beethoven said that. Isn't that interesting?

LASKEY: It is.

SORIANO: And just to show you that in-- After all, life is that. God, if you don't have enough integrity among us, especially professional people, then what is there? Then we are bandits; just robbers, scavengers, aren't we? And all this publicity-- You can be the greatest man in the





world and you can be a scavenger like that. It's silly. And I was really shocked. Yeah. Most people don't know those things, you see, of him. But I happen to have a nice little archives of experiences that most people don't know. Yeah. This will be all in my book; I will put all of that. Sure.

LASKEY: Well, how did Mr. Morris justify--or I guess he really couldn't justify--

SORIANO: He couldn't justify anything except that his wife really wanted to give it because naturally Frank Lloyd Wright is a bigger name, she-- And then he was friend of the family, you see. They were very good friends with Frank Lloyd Wright and apparently she wanted that. And he designed that house which they never built. And thinking that, one and the two, even though they appreciated my lovely store I did which they both admired very much. And still Frank Lloyd Wright insisted on doing it. Yeah.

LASKEY: That's amazing. Really is amazing.

SORIANO: Yeah, that's the way life is. I can tell you stories about all the projects that architects stole from me. It's shameful. Yeah. Anyway, I had the IBM Building to do right here in the San Francisco area and what's-his-name stole it. John Bowles did it. My drawings, the drawings that I did-- I have drawings, this is one of them. And I had several of those. Maybe twenty or



something--that I gave for decision after I had a contract already. And I gave it to-- I sent the drawings to Mr. [Thomas J.] Watson [Jr.] at the time who became the chairman of the board. He was the president of the area here in Palo Alto. And they said, "We'll have to send the drawings to New York for that final approval." They wanted me; it's already set. I had a contract with them. And I didn't have any response for a couple weeks or so.

And then before that, I had an assistant--I used to have all kinds of assistants come to me looking for [a] job and one was a fellow by the name of Cruzen, I believe, from New York. His father was an architect--don't worry; don't mark that one--and he said, "I want you--my son to have a little influence [from] you. Can you give him some time?" I said, "Well, I have no space; however, he can be here for a week." And he came over here and worked a little bit. And then I said, "Now, you look for another job because I need the space."

And he went to find a job in John Bowles's office in San Francisco. And he called me and said, "Mr. Soriano, you know, they have the drawings for IBM in Mr. Bowles office."

I said, "What?"

[He] said, "Yes."

I said, "Will you please go inside and see again. Be



sure they are the drawings."

"Yes, yes. They are your drawings for IBM."

And then I called Watson and I asked-- I said, "Mr. Watson," I said, "what's happening to the drawings that you were supposed to tell me [about] from New York?"

"Well, you know, it takes time."

I said, "Well, tell me one thing. I understand they are in one architect's office in San Francisco, John Bowles's specifically, John Bowles's office."

"Who told you that?"

I said, "Well, an assistant of mine told me that."

"What's his name?"

I said, "I'm not going to tell you his name, but is it or is it not?" And he sent me-- Mr. Crooks was his--the engineer-- Charming, even though his name sounds funny.

LASKEY: [laughter] It sounds appropriate.

SORIANO: Yeah, but it was-- No.

LASKEY: No?

SORIANO: This was a marvelous engineer. He liked my drawings. They were elated, really. At the time I was even-- I was married and we went to Lietz Company for materials, to buy some materials. They said, "Congratulations, Mr. Soriano."

I said, "On what?"

"You're doing the IBM job, aren't you?"



I said, "Yes. How did you know?"

"Well, the engineers came in. They were happy that you're going to do their job and they are thrilled with it."

And we were so happy, you know. We had a marvelous dinner to celebrate that we know we had the job definitely. And then he came to tell me--he was crying, that engineer. Now, this is a true story. He says the John Bowles's father-in-law apparently was a fabricator or manufacturer of company planes, small planes, and he was playing golf with the chairman of the board of IBM. They concocted between the two of them that his son-in-law over here should do the job. Therefore, I got paid and all that, but I didn't-- I could have sued both of them; I didn't. In those days, I just dropped it. [I was] never so disgusted. Yeah. I lost [a] beautiful job there, too.

LASKEY: When was this?

SORIANO: Gosh, I don't even remember. I was-- Maybe it must have been twenty years ago, easily. Yeah. I did the most beautiful plan, most exquisite concepts, really. I designed all the cabinets for the scientist to study properly. As you can see, this drawing over there, that's all--

LASKEY: It's beautiful.

SORIANO: --for the--





LASKEY: In color.

SORIANO: The concept is so lovely. Now, these are little cells for the creative scientists--IBM--the thinkers, you know. And then there is several of them in here. And this is a hallway going to their big building to do their research, to experiment in what they thought [of] in these cubicles.

LASKEY: Now, these are glass walls--

SORIANO: These are all glass walls in a beautiful ambience of parks because there were acres of land all around there.

LASKEY: What is the ceiling?

SORIANO: It's all aluminum: this [indicates rhythm] snap, crackle, pop.

LASKEY: That's just--it's the corrugated aluminum.

SORIANO: This type of thing. Acoustically beautiful, you see, and insulated. Well, anyway, so that's one of those things. So, what can you do? It's the tragedy of our civilization and the lack of ethics of humanity. Really.

Yeah. And people keep asking, "Well, why don't you have--? Why is it that you're not so active? You don't know business." I say, "I've been very busy. I did my best. But we're dealing with gangsters. And so I don't have to be equally as gangstery and be careless and not give a damn, really."

LASKEY: Really?



SORIANO: Or keep your integrity and then take your chances, as they say. But I'd rather be the way I am. So what; one job less. But I would've loved to have done that. Certainly. It would have been a beautiful job. They were marvelous concepts, what I had, really.

LASKEY: Did you ever get a chance to apply them in another building?

SORIANO: No, it's kind of hard. No. And even IBM, you know, they could have called me again after all this. I mean, they['re] shameless. And then the same Watson became the chairman of the board afterwards. Well, I didn't care to deal with those people, you see. Their regular engineers, their creative people liked my ideas. They were absolutely enthralled with what I did. They loved them. Yeah. Yeah. Such is life.

LASKEY: Very sad. We were talking about the difficulty of getting material--

SORIANO: Oh, yes, and during the war.

LASKEY: --in the Second World War.

SORIANO: I told you already the problem. There was nothing unless you apply for specific reasons and so on. And then they'll give you all this, give you so much or such and such of materials, no more, and also limited in scope. Beyond that, they won't. But now, the tragedy is, darling, that, you see, in those days in the war, you still



could do [a] few little things. But there wasn't much you can do creatively, really, because you were restricted completely; war effort and all the materials. And I wrote articles, even. Designed some housing and so on. Really.

LASKEY: Well, even later when you were doing the Shulman House and the Curtis House when we were--gotten involved in Korea, you-- Wasn't that one of the reasons that the Shulman House particularly wasn't all steel, because there was a shortage of steel?

SORIANO: No, that wasn't the reason at all. No. The Shulman House was already a prototype type of thing. I was using steel and then they wanted finished ceilings of plaster, you see. They were leery about corrugated ceilings like that photograph there in color, you see. Yeah.

LASKEY: I think we might just mention here that the Shulman House was done for Julius Shulman--

SORIANO: That's correct.

LASKEY: --the architectural photographer.

SORIANO: That's correct. And, you see, in those days there were people who were leery about corrugation, corrugated ceilings. Therefore, to use plaster and to use wood, whatever, then we have to use planks. They were the simplest things. So I used steel, the whole frame, and then wood in between so you can either cement with



adhesives, with epoxy resins [from] which I did welded wood. That's-- Yes, in those days I never use nails anymore.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: I used welded-- Yes. You see, I was one of the first who used this technology in the factories when they used to use planes with wood. They used to have this plywood, making planes, and they used to weld them with epoxies. Yes, I did. I never did nails anymore because years and years ago, when I did the first plaster houses and wood houses in my period and we used to have little nails, little tiny finish nails to install the plywood panels of the wood. And then sometimes we have to even feel those little holes, set them in. That's silly. I said, "What is all of this nonsense!" Then when I saw this welding, I said, "Well, now we are in line."

And so we have a plywood panel like that, [demonstrates] you put a few little brush strokes of epoxy like that, and then you put it against the wall which has a preliminary rough plywood base underneath the frame. You put it in there already from floor to ceiling, four-by-eight panels, and all you do--like that, just as much as I'm telling you now. You press the button with the hand like that; pssssssss, it's sealed already. It's there. You can't remove it. Pssss, pssss, psssss, psssss.





Already done. And so this is the way it was built. I did ceilings with that, with wood ceilings. I have several houses I did wood and the walls of the same and I never used anymore nails or anything like that. Now, you see, I was constantly tapping new things.

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: Constantly. Yeah. So the Shulman House--coming back to the question--was done because in those days, you see, I was still--they wanted to, the clients wanted that kind of a thing. They wanted flat roofs with plaster and wood and whatever. And so that was the most economical, the best way. And then even after that I realized the whole thing is nonsense to do even that. Then I went--I did my Curtis House and which is the first actually prefabricated house.

LASKEY: Oh, really?

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: Want to describe that in some detail?

SORIANO: Yeah. The first--the Curtis House was the one because then I did, [for] the first time, brought in the cabinets when all the frame was there. That's when everybody used to ask--say, "What is that? A house?"  
(That was in Bel Air, you know.)

LASKEY: Yes.

SORIANO: And I said, "Yes." There are five bathrooms that



were completely finished, enclosed, and the walls we put in--no cabinets in there. Then we brought in the cabinets.

LASKEY: Now, were the walls prefabricated at another site, too?

SORIANO: Yes, yes, yes. They were prefabricated and-- Except we applied, at the finish, cork, insulating cork, on the outside. That was also a first. Yeah. And I did the same thing in Youngstown, Ohio, for one of the houses I built there. Cork, even in the snow. And my client was terribly leery at the time. "Cork? My god," you know, "whoever heard of that?" And then I called the Armstrong Cork Company at the time [which said], "No, we don't recommend it." They-- That's the cork I'm talking about, the insulating cork they used to use in the refrigerators. You know that rough--with holey--cork? Which is dark?

LASKEY: Oh, yeah. Right. Right.

SORIANO: That's the one I use outside.

LASKEY: On the exterior?

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: In Ohio?

SORIANO: In Ohio as well as in Bel Air, the Stone Canyon House. Now, the owner-- That's 1950 already. This is thirty-five years ago. And the owner said, "My god. This is awful!"



I said, "No."

"Well, god--" And he calls up.

The cork company says, "We don't recommend it."

"Why?"

"Because we don't use it for that."

I asked him the same thing. I said, "Well, just because you don't use it is not a reason why you don't recommend it." They don't know, you see. They learn to do something, that's all they think it's done for.

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: Beyond that, they have no other imagination.

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: And I said, "I want to use it." Not only that, but this came in one inch, to save money, I have it cut in half an inch because we already had complete insulation of panel, three-quarters-of-an-inch panel anyway of plywood. And I put this on the plywood; cement it in, which was--

LASKEY: So it was the cork on the plywood?

SORIANO: On the plywood, yes, which makes a perfect wall and perfect insulation. Yeah.

LASKEY: And this is the exterior wall?

SORIANO: The exterior wall, yeah.

LASKEY: And that's filled in between the metal--

SORIANO: The metal was--

LASKEY: --metal columns.



SORIANO: --in ten foot-- Ten-foot column modules, yes.

And then all this was anchored completely, top and bottom.

LASKEY: I've been curious. You used a lot of steel decking for your roofs and ceilings. With a flat roof, how did you prevent it from being very hot in the summer?

SORIANO: We have insulation on top. We use fiberglass insulation, an inch and a half, two inches sometimes, depending on the climate, and that's all. And then you put roofing on top of that.

LASKEY: Roofing on the top of that.

SORIANO: Oh, sure.

LASKEY: Okay.

SORIANO: In the Adolph's Building, you will see, we have a six-inch cell of metal, perforated metal--not corrugated, but perforated steel mesh--with cells like that with fiberglass insulation and then the roofing on top with insulation, too. Yeah. These are all new elements, new technologies which were used for buildings. They used some of this stuff--things in big buildings, high rise. And I use some of these things from the industry, from housing. Yeah. And--

LASKEY: Well, just getting back to the Curtis House that we were talking about.

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: How do you convince the client to do something





that was really very experimental?

SORIANO: Well, the fact is I, myself, am a very convinced person many times. Sometimes I may err a little bit, but my errors are not so big, really. And the fact is, I'm assured, first, when I do something and I use something, I investigate it a great deal and I check, question, research, and I take tremendous amount of effort to find out the pros and cons and the possibilities. And then if I'm convinced that it works, that there are more positive things than negatives, then I use it. And especially if it serves well, why not? Like the cork is an example. And my client was leery. He called the cork company again and he says, "No, we don't recommend it." Then somebody told him, says, "Oh, god," you know, "cork? With the rain? What are you going to do?" And I said to my client [about] all these things that he's gathering from all the people and I said, "Look, do you know why cork floats?" He didn't know. And I said, "It floats because it has no capillary action." That means it doesn't absorb water. Otherwise it will sink. I said, "That's why it floats." I said, "Now, will that convince you that it's a wonderful material for insulation and the water will not penetrate?" Still he wasn't convinced. Somebody told him to get a waterproofer to give a--put a waterproofing stuff. I said, "You don't need to." And I said, "Well, I'll tell you what. Let's



get your waterproofer. Let's have examples of it. We'll give him one sheet of that," and then I had one sheet naturally, the way it came, and another one, I said, "we can use, if you really worry, use carnauba wax," which is palm tree wax "over it," which doesn't affect anything. It keeps it nicely. I use carnauba wax even with plywood panels. It's the only one that doesn't change the color.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Yes. And it protects it, seals it. So here we are, three panels. One, the waterproofer expert, which the client got. And I had two panels; one with carnauba wax, one without anything. Okay, the waterproofer came in--that's a true story, now--and I put them right on the floor. He came in all happy that he did something, and it looked like the dickens, too, like varnished, gaudy, you know. And I didn't like the stuff but I didn't say anything. I said, "All right," and I put the other two there and I took the hose; put the hose over the whole three panels. The panel [that's] supposed to be waterproof absorbed the water like that because he destroyed the capillary action of the material and the resins that they were impregnated with. He just made it spongy rather than to preventing--

LASKEY: That's interesting.

SORIANO: And then mine were just beautifully like the



ducks, the goose's back; the water will fall off. And I said, "All right?" And then the man who's supposedly the expert waterproofer, his eyes were-- "I'll be darned," he said. And I said, "Well, will that satisfy you?" I said to my client. I said, "There you are." And finally I did it, see? That was it.

LASKEY: You did the whole exterior in cork?

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: And did it hold up?

SORIANO: Sure. It held up. And I don't know what state it is in now, but he needs really to take off the thing. And I think it was okay. I saw it about--when was it?--seven, eight years ago. It was all right still. Yeah. And he changed hands, you know. President [John F.] Kennedy lived in there with Marilyn Monroe.

LASKEY: In the Youngstown house?

SORIANO: In the Bel Air--the Bel Air house.

LASKEY: Oh, the Bel Air house.

SORIANO: That was their little retreat. And they had a--security things, and they had a tremendous amount of electrical things in there. Yeah. And the whole thing was electrified--that house, anyway, because I used radiant heating with nickel and chrome, nick-chrome wires for electricity so you can tune your house, the temperature, like a musical instrument, with different elements, with



switches.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Not in-- Yes. That was done because with electricity you can do that, but [with] hot water you cannot because the hot water runs through the pipes. And that was just with the elements like that. Wires are not bigger than that. Nickel and chrome, made of nickel and chrome wire, insulated with glass. Yeah.

LASKEY: And you used that through the whole flooring system?

SORIANO: And he gave-- Yeah, it became this thick. Yeah. And then it was all over fiberglass mats and I put a sandwich of concrete, three inches, [then] fiberglass with this, plus another three inches. Very resilient floor. Yeah.

LASKEY: You used radiant heating in many of your houses.

SORIANO: Most of my houses were done that way. In the later houses, yeah. Yeah, because I didn't think, first, there was any healthful thing; just awful. Complicated: sheet metal, ducts and grills all over the place. Radiant heating is just like you warm as toast. Yeah, because it's a clean sort of a field of heat rather than circulating hot air. That's what radiant heating is.

LASKEY: It also keeps your spaces clear on the interior.

SORIANO: It is beautiful, it's clean, it's lovely.





There's nothing--the grills don't get dark, dirty, and there's no circulation of that dirty air with registers. Have you ever seen the registers [unintelligible]? They're always black. And then it's the worst thing that we found out today even, that air-conditioning in hospitals is the most--where the bacteria really loves to settle and they circulate the bacteria all over the hospital, diseases. Yeah. Contrary to all these so-called things that we claim that they are beautiful. Yeah. Yes, ma'am.

LASKEY: But with the Curtis House, too, which as you said was your first house in which you--

SORIANO: The first real prefabricated house, where the cabinets were brought in made, all beautifully made with walnut woods and so on. I designed all the furniture--and everything in there.

LASKEY: Did you have a hard time convincing the Curtises that they should buy a house that didn't have--

SORIANO: No.

LASKEY: --study rooms, you know, pre-built room rooms? It must have been a--

SORIANO: No, I didn't--

LASKEY: --strange concept.

SORIANO: No, this was-- The Curtises were not the original owners.

LASKEY: Oh, they weren't?



SORIANO: No. I have reasons for it which, I won't say it now, but this will come in my book. And the Curtises were the ones who bought it afterwards, which were absolutely beautiful. Madame, Mrs. Curtis, from New York, she wrote the most beautiful letter. She loved me. The original owners were, I would say, semi-gangsters.

LASKEY: Oh, really?

SORIANO: They were in Drew Pearson's column. They were-- called them "Truman's five-percenters." It was one of the Truman five-percenter. You know what that was? Five percent was under the table. Yeah. He mentioned several of them, and he was one of them. Yep. It's a long story which I don't care to go over.

LASKEY: Right. Okay.

SORIANO: All right? Then the Case Study house came in at that same time, you see.

LASKEY: The guest house was built--

SORIANO: The Case Study house--

LASKEY: Oh, yes. I'm sorry, because I know that the Curtis House has the little guest house--

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: --attached to it.

SORIANO: Which is the same thing as-- For guests as-- completely as a lovely unit. It has bathroom, kitchenette, Pullman kitchenette, and everything. Just a complete



little unit that a mother-in-law or anybody could live there beautifully. Yeah.

LASKEY: But, to go back-- I'm jumping back a little bit--

SORIANO: Okay.

LASKEY: --before we get into the Case Study house because they do go together. When you built the Gato House which was your first steel-structure house, how had you made the decision to move into housing? Now, you've done buildings in steel but you hadn't done houses.

SORIANO: Well, I-- Housing, I did a lot of houses indeed. And I realized why not in houses? Houses, it will be very easy to industrialize housing. I said, "This is our era." We make cars with steel, metals. And then I thought the real advancements had been made in metallurgy. No other material has made as many advancements we have as in metallurgy. Yeah. And yet we don't tap that one. And therefore, I said, "Well, I'm going to go into this," you see. I've been doing-- I was the first one [who] did with the steel houses, really, in this area. And then also the first one [who] did aluminum houses, the way they should be, intelligently done, modularly planned, industrially produced; assembled, rather than all these piddlings with welds and all that. No. No, no, no, no, no. My system is really [a] beautiful system.

LASKEY: It's so simple.



SORIANO: It is. Simple and elegant at the same time. And simplicity doesn't bring monotony. As some people always, without thinking, they say, "Well, won't they be all monotonous, the same thing?" And I said, "Look at all the junk you people produce which are all the same thing except they are [with] a little different shutters. Mine are different, even though using the same elements. I can do somersaults with my houses and make every house different, but using the same elements. But you have to dedicate and apply yourself with intelligence and sensitivity. And I have it, damn it." [laughs]

LASKEY: Well, in the Gato House, you used the lattice steel.

SORIANO: Yes. That was the steel with-- Lattice steel at the time was, Fritz Ruppell had developed, you see. And I said, "We'll use that," which was okay. It was fine. It worked very beautifully. It was a nice house.

LASKEY: Isn't-- Aren't steel houses more difficult to-- what's the word I want--the tolerances, that they have to be more exact--the building has to be more exact than a wood-frame house?

SORIANO: Oh, certainly. With wood frame, if you make a mistake or if you--you can always chop one inch off, cut it, take the saw-- If it is cut too much, you put a molding on it. Yeah. You can do that with wood, but with steel,





metals, once you order these from the factory precisely done, they have to be exact and your details have to be absolutely exact. And that's all right. There's nothing wrong with that.

We can make them. And it's a question for you to apply yourself again and check in the shop drawings before the fabricator makes them, to see to it that he tells you-- gives you back the shop drawings--if he understands correctly what your intent is. Then you send them back with corrections and instructions again until they are absolutely right, they understand right, then you say, "Okay; proceed." It requires dedication, time and effort. Without that, nothing happens.

The tragedy of our profession and my colleagues, they don't give a damn. They make a little abstract drawing, they let the builder make his own details. You look at some drawings of many architects you will see how [much they] lack in details. You should see mine. I have tons of details. [tape recorder off]

LASKEY: Do you think that other architects didn't pursue the idea of building steel houses because of the detail demanded in the--

SORIANO: Will you ask that again, please? Ask that again. [tape recorder off]

LASKEY: Do you think that other architects didn't pursue



the idea of building steel houses because of the detail and the attention to detail and the work involved in steel construction?

SORIANO: Well, possibly. I don't know. Maybe that's it and maybe that their imagination was not, then, in the direction of that because the line of least resistance is to simply build over the same old conventional two-by-four. It's simple, no headaches. Possibly that's it, and then easy. And everybody knows the language. You give it to a builder who builds it for you, you make less details, you see. You let the builder improvise on the job. But naturally, I have precision, as I told you, with all the detailing. Maybe they weren't in-- However, some of my assistants after, when they worked with me, then they did that. Yeah. Those are the other ones who pursued that. But the tragedy is that most people are corrupted in their taste because of what they see. They see all this woodsy, shakey, shaky, tacky with spit and cardboard--the same old thing we've been doing now for centuries and centuries. And this is what people think houses should look like or should be. And consequently, we get the brunt of it. And now we have another mess, another disease in this post-modernism, all this garbage, all the beatniks, so to speak, like [Michael] Graves and Philip [C.] Johnson and the rest of them. And contaminating the brains of the people and



architecture at the same time.

LASKEY: Well, Philip Johnson has sort of run the gamut--

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: --from International Style to postmodernism.

SORIANO: Yeah, because he was not really-- You know, he was with [Ludwig] Mies van der Rohe--was an assistant to Mies van der Rohe. He was not even an architect. At one time, you know, he was a fascist. Did you know that? He wanted to be a Nazi? Did you know that?

LASKEY: Philip Johnson? No, I didn't know that.

SORIANO: My god, this is all written up in *Time* magazine.

LASKEY: No, I didn't know that.

SORIANO: I'll tell you what it was written up in *Time* magazine. Philip Johnson was an admirer of Hitler. He went to Germany before he was an architect and he wanted to--came to America, to New York to organize an SS fascist type of thing like in Germany. Yes. This was in *Time* magazine!

LASKEY: I didn't-- [laughter]

SORIANO: Yeah. You search, you'll see.

LASKEY: I'm just surprised.

SORIANO: Yeah, yeah. Well, everybody-- So was I. And then after that, he changed his mind. He realized it was a dangerous state of affairs--

LASKEY: Thank goodness.



SORIANO: --and he didn't succeed. And so then he met Mies van der Rohe through the daughter of--was a student. He was teaching at Yale [University] or whatever it-- When he started architecture then he was teaching-- You know, he speaks quite well, and being a rich boy--

LASKEY: Yes.

SORIANO: --you know, he got all these plums right away with the Seagram Building and so on. He knew the student, the daughter of one of the Seagram people; therefore, that's how he got it and then he got Mies van der Rohe to do the job. Therefore, he became his assistant. You see, that's the whole thing. And from there on, you know, the publicity and money, you can always do anything you want. And I remember Philip Johnson, he invited me to see his ["glass box"] house that he did in New Canaan [Connecticut].

LASKEY: Oh, the New Canaan house.

SORIANO: Yes. And I said, "It's beautiful, Philip." He says, "Hell, you do for five thousand dollars what I do for three hundred thousand." [laughter] Yeah. He admired me, actually, and we were very good friends in many ways. And I thought he was a very nice man. I didn't even know about all this nonsense and all his weaknesses. And I said, "Wonderful, Philip." And in fact when he went to have his gold medal, he called me and he said, "Are you coming to the convention?" I said, "Unfortunately, no, but





congratulations, Philip." He said, "We are two of us left, you know." He told me that. And then I wrote to him afterwards and I said, "Only one of us left--

LASKEY: Us is left.

SORIANO: --Philip," after he did cabinet pediment on top of a high rise.

LASKEY: The--

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: --American Telephone and Telegraph Building.

SORIANO: And this is the thing. And this is the big problem we have now, unfortunately.

LASKEY: Well, this is sort of an aside, but I'm curious: How does the New Canaan house work as a living space?

SORIANO: It was very lovely, I think. For him, it was beautiful; nothing wrong with that. Even anybody could adopt itself beautifully. So much acreage.

LASKEY: The house itself--

SORIANO: The house is very beautiful. It's lovely. It's nothing wrong with that.

LASKEY: It's livable?

SORIANO: Sure it is. Why shouldn't it be? To be among a lovely--beautifully done, among trees and all that? Why shouldn't it be livable?

LASKEY: Oh, the siting is beautiful and it looks beautiful. But I just wondered how it worked to be in it.



SORIANO: Well, why not? I mean, in other words, you're talking about nostalgia again.

LASKEY: I'm not-- [laughter] Well, it looks like living in a fishbowl. I mean, it looks like a little jewel box in this setting, but I wondered--

SORIANO: This is great.

LASKEY: --how it worked for human dimensions, to actually be there to live in it?

SORIANO: Well, for everybody, no, because not everybody has the wealth of Philip Johnson or the acreage. You don't put one house like that in so many acres surrounded with trees of your own and pieces of sculpture and all that.

LASKEY: Well--

SORIANO: It's just like a park. If you're talking about for individuals, you could do it beautifully with privacy. Certainly. Why not? I've done it. And with all the glass even in there, one small lot, depending how you orientate the whole thing. Sure. And it's all a matter of-- Oh, this [the tape] is already finished; do you want to continue?

LASKEY: Well, we don't want to get too sidetracked on Philip Johnson.

SORIANO: Well, no, okay. That's okay.

LASKEY: But, talking about your own assistants-- You were talking about Johnson being an assistant to Mies-- Your



assistants, Craig Ellwood and Pierre Koenig, in particular, would go on and do steel houses probably as a result of having been in your office.

SORIANO: That's right.

LASKEY: How did they come to be in your office?

SORIANO: Well, Pierre Koenig worked for me as an assistant like others--I had a whole flock of them--and Craig Ellwood was a very strange combination. He was a salesman of furniture. Most people don't know that.

LASKEY: I didn't know that.

SORIANO: Yeah. And he came to sell some furniture in the apartment house I did. See, before that he used to do wood houses like Frank Lloyd Wright type of things. Then he saw my apartment and then immediately his eyes opened and then of course-- Most of the things are not done by Craig Ellwood. He has the name. You see, most of the young people in his office who were influenced by my stuff were working there and then immediately saw the quality and all that. From there on it became-- And then he was married to an actress, which boost him up, too, you see? And that's how it is. But he, as himself-- He had good taste to have a good office and have good publicity, yes. But I'm sure as a man, as a creative person, I don't know.

LASKEY: They always, almost always, in the architecture books refer to him as having been influenced by Mies in



doing Miesian boxes.

SORIANO: Nonsense. Nonsense. That's, yeah, because he said that and didn't mean it. So? Big deal. Mies never did houses like that. I did--his houses that he was, houses that he was doing with I-beams.

LASKEY: Well, in the book *The Second Generation*, Cesar Pelli in the introduction talks about the difference between--what?--between your work or your kind of work and Mies. And he talks--he calls--he says that the steel work is more relaxed and slender than yours.

SORIANO: Whose?

LASKEY: He's talking about Southern California architecture in general. But as far as the steel is concerned--and I think he mentioned--he's talking about you and Ellwood and--

SORIANO: In other words--

LASKEY: --and the Case Study houses.

SORIANO: --which is more relaxed? What is--?

LASKEY: The Southern California, yours, that it's slender--

SORIANO: Much better than what Mies does.

LASKEY: --the steel work is slenderer and, whereas, he called the Miesian [style] heavy and-- I can't remember what the other word was, but--

SORIANO: Pelli's ignorant. He doesn't know what he's talking about. Pelli, again, is another one of those





parvenus, as far as I'm concerned. In fact, you should see the buildings he has done. I criticize them. He is full of theatrics, Hollywood. He's a Hollywood architect. I know Esther likes him because she had him do the preface on the book. And all the things he said were absolutely nonsense. I know some of the things that he has written. I believe Pelli is not, to me, a serious, serious thinker.

Now, of course he's in Yale, dean of Yale, of course. As a matter of fact, he did some buildings in San Bernardino; he did the City Hall there. And they asked me what I thought of it. I said it was a horrible piece of work. [laughter] Slanting all the things, arbitrarily chopping corners-- For what? This is not the way of architecture. This is the postmodernism, and Pelli is one of those, you see. And I know even Esther wrote a book--I saw it in England, but I didn't know he had a book--on Craig Ellwood. Did you know that?

LASKEY: No.

SORIANO: I saw it in-- One of my admirers, in England, he showed me the book. He says, "Can you imagine that?" He says, "They didn't write about you; they wrote about Craig Ellwood," and Esther did a book. I said, "Who wrote this?" Esther. Yeah. I didn't know that. I've never seen it, except there in London. Yeah. Now, that's news



you don't know.

LASKEY: That's interesting.

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: Yeah, that's very interesting.

SORIANO: This is history. You're getting it right precisely. I'm sorry, I don't mean to talk degenerately of my colleagues or my friends. I don't care who they are; to me it doesn't make any difference. But the truth is truth. And Pelli, to me, doesn't represent anything. He doesn't even understand what architecture is, as far as I'm concerned. He's playing with all kinds of fantasies, cubism and decorations. Even some of this so-called high-rise things they're doing now, all this à la mode like Johnson, they're playing with all this gimmickry, really. So--?

LASKEY: But would you agree with his assessment of the steel work that was done by you and your colleagues in Southern California?

SORIANO: No, no. Totally incorrect. I don't think he understood Mies van der Rohe to begin with. No. As a matter of fact, one of my assistants, Joe [Joseph Y.] Fujikawa, during the war-- You don't know him. That's a good name because he's a lovely person. Joe Fujikawa, yeah. He was the right hand of Mies van der Rohe.

LASKEY: Really?



SORIANO: Yes. And now he's getting the offices--he's now on his own--when Mies died. I sent him to Mies. He worked for me. Joe worked for me during the war. He was Japanese, you know; they had to go inland. And instead of that I said, "Go to Chicago to Mies."

LASKEY: You mean, that's when you sent him? After--

SORIANO: That's right.

LASKEY: When they were going--

SORIANO: During the war.

LASKEY: --to incarcerate--

SORIANO: Absolutely.

LASKEY: --all the Japanese?

SORIANO: Absolutely. That's when-- And then he worked for Mies. He became the right-hand man of Mies. He was a very lovely, talented, dedicated young man.

LASKEY: That's a great story.

SORIANO: And he called me--yes--he called me his mentor and he admired me. He sent me some letters. In fact, the Graham Foundation showed me a whole lot of jobs that Joe was doing.

LASKEY: Well, that's wonderful.

SORIANO: Yes. Yeah, that's another thing most people don't know. You see, even Esther doesn't know. Yep.

LASKEY: Did you ever meet Mies?

SORIANO: Oh sure. He sent me some beautiful letters about



me, too, when they were doing the station KQED [San Francisco] here. And he says, "Get Soriano. He's the best you can have there." And you know what happened? The engineers wanted me. Everybody was for me. Then all of a sudden there was Fleish--Fleishman or [Mortimer] Fleishhacker was giving \$90,000 subsidy, then, at the time, taxwise, you know, to the station. And he kept saying, "Well, I want to use my architect." And that was-- He had his own architects. Yeah.

And so at the time James Day was the director of the station, the KQED station, television, educational station. And then they had a big, big fight with the-- Yeah. They had a big fight with the membership there, with the engineers which wanted me. And I already-- Just like the IBM [Building]. They were so pleased that I was going to do the jobs. La tragédie humaine [the human tragedy]. So then James Day wrote an article and said, "Well, between Soriano and \$90,000, I have to get the \$90,000." So that's how they ended up. And then they got this architect, supposedly, by Fleishhacker, who comes right on the button with cost, supposedly. And this architect got some Johansson from the East to collaborate with him, and the prices were three or four times of what they thought they would cost, and then they didn't build the building, you





see, and they lost Soriano. That's not a nice story, isn't it? Nobody knows that.



TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE ONE

JULY 20, 1985

SORIANO: Well, I'll tell you another thing about the museum. You know the Barnsdall House [Hollyhock House]?

LASKEY: Oh, the Frank Lloyd Wright--

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: The Hollyhock House?

SORIANO: Which is already an art center, isn't it? Something there?

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: All right. They wanted me, they wanted Mr. Rigler--[to whom] you spoke on the phone?

LASKEY: From the Adolph's Building?

SORIANO: Yes. To give the money to put in a, some kind of a sign in Hollywood so to identify that there is the art center there. But nobody knows. They have a little stupid kiosk made of wood--you know?--in there, but nobody knows. And there is a car wash with a big sign next door.

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: And so my friend and client, Mr. [Leo G.] Rigler called me, and I went to see the premises and so on, and I made a very interesting model that I was going to put--entirely on metal. [It] was going to be a beautiful thing, almost like Frank Lloyd Wright. Let's see what I have-- Here, this one.



LASKEY: Oh.

SORIANO: And I made a lovely little sketch. I made the mistake of doing that: Barnsdall Art Center, you see? Was--

LASKEY: That's charming.

SORIANO: --going to be like that. Very beautiful. Was going to be about sixty or eighty feet high right on the premises there where the grounds are.

LASKEY: At the bottom of the hill?

SORIANO: Yes. And possibly I was going to have a ramp to go from here to the premises nicely for the people to go. And so I met with the [Los Angeles County] Board of Supervisors with Mr. Rigler, the county board of supervisors, with two ladies, and [a] Japanese, and [a] Mexican; you know, this democracy of ours. And an architect was there. And so I did this myself, without a contractor, because Mr. Rigler was going to donate the money and I thought there would be a job. So they insulted both of us with silly remarks. Mr. Rigler was insulted and so was I. So one of the ladies there, the supervisor, says, "Mr. Soriano, could you lower this six inches down?" That triangle, do you see there: B-A-C.

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: And I said, "Why do you ask me that? Why will I lower that? What is the purpose?" "Well I think it'd look



better." Now, can you imagine that? A supervisor, a person like that not to have sensitivity to her concept is so-- To ask me to do this kind of thing. And then another supervisor, [a] woman, said, "It looks like the Corniforium"--or something that is right--

LASKEY: The Triforium.

SORIANO: "--the Triforium there." I said, "What is that?" I never seen-- Through the window where we were meeting you could see the thing down below. I said, "Well, how can you compare that mess of concrete with this?" I said, "This is--" And then I went and saw the thing and said, "How ridiculous, this is what I'm--" And then the young man who was the head of the supervisors said, "Well, we have to sort of have a meeting and then we'll let you know." Mr. Rigler was absolutely mad and wouldn't give them the money. Still he didn't. Yeah.

And now they're coming back to him for money, but they don't want me, they want to have their architects. [But Rigler said] "No, if you want my money, you have to have Soriano." And then they told Mr. Rigler, he says, "Well, Soriano's not a sculptor." Well, who the hell said I was a sculptor. Is that what they wanted? A piece of sculpture.

LASKEY: They want a sign.

SORIANO: Can you imagine the stupidity of those people? I mean, this is what I am dealing with. This is what we are





dealing with: these politicians who know nothing, ignorants. Miserable heads of individuals to dictate terms. What is, what shouldn't be. Yeah. This is what we are working with. That's why people will ask [and] say, "Why aren't you so busy? Why don't you do this?" This is why. Yeah. I could have easily played with them so-- "Oh sure," you know. "Oh sure, you want six inches, I'll lower it six inches down." But what does that prove? Nothing. Really. Anyway, so that's that.

Now what other question [do] you have?

LASKEY: Well, we'll go back to 1950, which--

SORIANO: The Case Study house.

LASKEY: The Case Study. The whole Case Study program.

SORIANO: Well, the Case Study house, as far as I'm concerned, was-- It's all right. It did some good to advertise possibilities. Everybody else does Case Study houses.

LASKEY: Well, you might just want to begin and say even what the Case Study program was.

SORIANO: The Case Study program was-- I don't know actually the real scope of it, but the way I understood it, was just to make money for [California] Arts and Architecture.

LASKEY: Which was a magazine.

SORIANO: Yeah, a magazine, and also to publicize the



magazine by using names who could do this so-called modern things, were à la mode.

LASKEY: You don't think it was to promote modern architecture?

SORIANO: [laughing] I'm not so convinced that John Entenza was so intelligent about that. [laughter] I don't think he knew as much as you think. And he was an opportunist. You know, his father was publisher or whatever, I forgot. He had money, bought that Arts and Architecture. It was a very conservative type of magazine. Have you known that? Used to be an old magazine publishing Spanish houses and all that.

LASKEY: Yeah. I think it was called California Arts and Architecture.

SORIANO: Yeah, whatever it was. Yeah, yeah.

LASKEY: It was a regional--

SORIANO: This is all right.

LASKEY: --magazine of architecture.

SORIANO: Then he became à la mode now. Having with all this-- What do you call that? Illuminaries that were already so many in California, Los Angeles. Was a nice occasion. In that respect, I give credit to John to top this. That was good. But you know what happened with it, you know? With it, we have to specify, I have to sell my signature with everything that's been used in the house:



That Soriano specifies cups for the Case Study House No. 2 or whatever; Soriano specifies this john, this bidet, these light fixtures; signed. And they charged the company who was selling this, giving them free.

LASKEY: I was going to ask you about that--

SORIANO: Yeah. This is what they did.

LASKEY: --as we discussed it. Because when I was looking at your-- As it was actually published in California Arts and Architecture, which I think was December of 1950, it specified, or it gives always a list of who did the doors--

SORIANO: Always. "Soriano specifies that."

LASKEY: --who did everything. I was going to ask you how the program actually worked. Were these things then contributed to build the house on the stipulation that when it was published they--

Soriano: They would have credit.

LASKEY: --would get credit.

SORIANO: And they give it for nothing. And that means then they sold [the] house and they had a promoter who had a piece of property which made money. You see, they all made money except me. I got the fee. Regular fee. But then I [was] used. With my signature, they sell, they sold all these trades: "Soriano specifies that, Soriano specifies that, Soriano specifies that." At least they could have given me part of that, no? Oh, no. I forgot



the name who was at the head of that promotion department. I forgot his name. Oh, yes, they wanted [a] lot of things and I refused. Lot of things they wanted to--for me to specify because anybody who had a piece of junk they want to put it there. Used to bring it-- I said, "No, Soriano doesn't specify this, I'm sorry." Yeah, I was [a] very difficult man because I refused to-- I said, "I'm not gonna put my name to something I don't believe. I'm sorry." Yeah. They wanted me to just-- Because they get money and free stuff. And they get advertising and charge five hundred dollars or whatever for the advertising in their magazine of their product.

LASKEY: Well, John Entenza, who owned the magazine, did this as a--supposedly--to promote modern architecture--

SORIANO: Nonsense; it was for John Entenza.

LASKEY: --in Southern California. Now, did Arts and Architecture buy the land?

SORIANO: No.

LASKEY: Who-- How were the houses built? That's what I'm curious about.

SORIANO: This is what they-- They found a client who had a lawn, a piece of lot [1080 Ravoli Drive]. They went around searching and, like in my case, was Olds, Mr. [Alan] Olds [who] owned that piece of property. In the [Pacific] Palisades. Alan Olds, I believe it was. He [was] a very





charming man. And then he gave the land so I can build the Case Study house. When they sold the house, they divide the profits, whatever they did, I don't know. Yeah. They found a client with land and then they had people with the material company donate all that free, you see, then they made a deal out of that and make [it a] money-making proposition. That's all it was.

LASKEY: So the only fee they actually had then, would be the architect's fee?

SORIANO: That's it. Yes. Yes. You know, most people don't know-- They think [it] is altruism, all these beautiful big things. As I told you, even John Entenza-- how sensitive he was--when he became the [president of the] Graham Foundation-- Because of that, already--naturally, money and all this publicity--became the chief of Graham Foundation. When I apply for, to get a grant to write books, he says, "Oh, Soriano's too old." And yet in the same year, he gave to Philip [C.] Johnson and, I think, Peter Blake or something, to do a grant to study the theater in Germany. If you please, which had nothing to do with it. This is true. This is facts I'm telling you. And this is how much he was promoting architecture. It was a big farce, I'll tell you.

Sorry, but these are the realities, darling. You know, I don't spare words and I know, because I'm right.



When I tell you something, I know, I can stand--be right. You go through history you'll find that I'm right, what I tell you. Yeah. Most people don't know those things. You see, they all take it blindly or "John Enten--" Because a group like that was retained and all that, they play all this "John Entenza did this, John Entenza did that, Esther McCoy did that," and so on. Well, this is fine. They have their own contributions, yes, for doing it. But, there are all the other things behind the stuff which was not exactly that altruism or knowledge. It was business! Money. Money-maker.

As I told you, I refused to specify things they used to bring me. They want me to do it. I said, "No. I don't believe in such a utensils. I don't believe in such fixtures." "Well, we have to--" I said, "No, you have to, but I don't." Not nothing goes in my name that I--with this. And they took it that way. Yeah, I used to have real interesting battles with them.

LASKEY: Well, how were the architects selected? How were you selected to do what you did?

SORIANO: Well, I had a name already, they could not ignore me.

LASKEY: Well, they ignored Harwell Hamilton Harris.

SORIANO: Well, because Hamilton Harris, apparently, he maybe didn't qualify because he was doing à la Frank Lloyd



Wright, you see, that wasn't supposedly the real industrially [inspired] houses of the days. Yeah. And they used many others which I don't think they were doing-- I mean, they were all right, but nothing so startling. [Richard J.] Neutra was the only one that I thought-- And the other assistant--

LASKEY: There was the Eames House that--

SORIANO: And the other.

LASKEY: You don't like that?

SORIANO: Well, the Eames-- I knew Charlie [Charles Eames] very well as a matter of fact. Charlie was doing regular house[s] just like Craig Ellwood did at one time. Yeah. And so all of a sudden he did that. I remember we used to, I used to go with a girl--the daughter of-- God! An actress, a very beautiful actress, I adore her. Frances was a sculptress, the daughter of this actress. It [her name] will come to me. And Charlie was going with her, too. And he designed a house for her entirely of redwood; you should have seen the plans. She showed it to me. It was awful. Yeah, the time when [at] the beginning he was learning, I suppose.

LASKEY: Of course.

SORIANO: It's okay. But then he did his house, which to me-- It's all right, but it's not what I call the real prefabricated thing, you know. It's full of all decorated



Mondrianish things, you know. To me that's not the direction because not everybody will have Mondrian houses and all these fancy things. And the thing is, Charlie was associated with his wife [Ray Eames] who loved all these little trinkets, little dolls, and little playthings. You know, they were that kind of a playful individuals you see, which is to me not what architecture is.

LASKEY: Well, I don't think Eames really-- I don't think of him as being an architect first and foremost.

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: First and foremost he was an industrial designer, and I think in terms of his furniture and his--

SORIANO: Was associated with [Eero] Saarinen, certainly.

Yeah. And-- But then they made a big to-do. As a matter of fact, I'll tell you another thing since we're talking about Entenza, at the time they were absolutely chummy.

Entenza and Charlie were just like that: friends. And there was not a word that came from Entenza's mouth that wasn't uttered by Charlie. Everything was Charlie's decision and sayings. I know that. Then after, when they got a big fight, when they did that house for Entenza, you remember?

LASKEY: Well, I was going to ask you, I've never seen-- Saarinen and Eames did the house for Entenza.

SORIANO: Which was the worst house on earth.





LASKEY: Which apparently is next to or right by the Eames House, but I've never seen it and I don't know that I've ever seen a picture of it other than--

SORIANO: It's a friend of mine, a friend of mine owns it.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: Really. How does it-- What's it like?

SORIANO: It's awful. It was the worst house I think I've seen.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Yeah, nothing really startling. It was in a lovely area, but the architecture to me was [a] big zero. Yeah.

LASKEY: Because the Eames House has so much publicity and it's considered one of the classics in Los Angeles, but you never hear about the Eames-Saarinen House. And considering it was Saarinen, and I'm, was, sort of surprised that it just fell away.

SORIANO: Because it's not a good house really.

LASKEY: That's interesting.

SORIANO: And then don't forget he [Entenza] had a fight with Saarinen, with Eam--Charlie--when they just fall apart completely. They were enemies afterwards. I don't know--

LASKEY: Permanently?

SORIANO: Yes. I don't know whatever happened to them.



Yeah. Unless they made it up afterwards and I didn't know. I don't know that. But I knew after they were chummy-chummy. Everything else that Eames said, Entenza used to ruminate. Really. This is what I'm telling you that this fact. And then after that, I don't know what happened. They fall apart and--

LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: Those things happen. However, still, Charlie's house is not bad, but the direction is not that way. You see, because it's full of gimmickry and decorations and-- Yeah, publicity sometimes can make or break, and depending who makes the publicity, who writes.

LASKEY: Well, were you given any stipulations when--?

SORIANO: The house?

LASKEY: When you were assigned a Case Study house, or when you accepted the commission to do it, I mean, did they say it had to be--? Were you given the size, or it had to be three bedrooms, or it had to do anything?

SORIANO: I believe it was a three-bedroom house type of a thing, yeah. Then, from then on, I was free. But they knew I wouldn't submit to any dictation of the styles or anything like that, which I don't believe anyway. But I worked and I helped them really do it beautifully. It was one of the nicest houses I did. It was beautifully printed. But then I think somebody bought it now and



changed a little bit. They did some changes. They always do, unfortunately.

LASKEY: How do you feel about that?

SORIANO: Well, it breaks my heart when they do that.

Instead of calling me, you know? But then-- I don't know. It's just-- Instead of having the finesse to tell me-- I don't even know this book.

LASKEY: You don't know this book?

SORIANO: No.

LASKEY: It's The Case Study Houses 1945-1962.

SORIANO: May I see that?

LASKEY: Yeah, I was just looking for your house here. Let me find it for you.

SORIANO: Who wrote the preface? [Cesar] Pelli again?

LASKEY: No, Esther.

SORIANO: She published that? Esther published the--

LASKEY: Yeah, it was originally published in 1962. And then it was just republished again in 1970.

SORIANO: I don't know, I really don't know.

LASKEY: Really? You should. You should have this.

SORIANO: Well, there are a lot of books that came out with my work; I don't even know anymore. You don't know how many books I have and magazines I have. But I kept, fortunately, most of the magazines that I know. Yeah, I thought so. Yeah, that's a lovely house you see,



beautiful.

LASKEY: Oh, it is.

SORIANO: Yeah, I have some marvelous elevations of this which I don't think they published. This is wrong, you see. I have a better elevation; this was done without even finishing it. Silly. This is a photo that [Julius] Shulman did. But this photograph was published by another. [James H.] Reed, I believe, photographed a great deal of this which had a beautiful, beautiful details and-- Yeah, yeah, all of this. Yeah; not this. No, I had a beautiful elevation of that. This is silly. Really, I'm sad. This is what hurts me. They don't have enough sensitivity. This is just simply without building it. And I have marvelous construction details of this rather than just this elevation.

LASKEY: Well, I think she was just trying to show the pavilion.

SORIANO: I know, but she-- These were done by Reed, most of these photographs. This one wasn't by Shulman. And he did beautiful photography. Yep. Sorry. Well, anyway, so it doesn't make any difference, really.

LASKEY: How long were you associated with Shulman?

SORIANO: Well, Shulman-- He did many-- You know, Shulman started out photography when I started my first house. He came in with a Brownie one day, said, "Oh Soriano, look!





I'm Julius Shulman, a photographer, and I'm just starting out, too; can I photograph your house?" I said, "Sure." He had a Brownie.

LASKEY: That's incredible.

SORIANO: Yes. That's exactly it.

LASKEY: [laughter] That's really amazing.

SORIANO: Yeah. And then we became friends and not one time he wanted me to have the--to build his house. He said, "Well, I know, most of the architects do houses, and I like to invite every architect to do one room." I said, "Julius, that will never be, because nobody will do that. That's not going to work any more than to have ten chefs do one meal."

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: And [he] said, "Well, I think I'll--" I said, "Well, try it," I said, "but I doubt it very much." And do you know? He came to me and says, "Soriano, I think I'll select you to do the--" And I said, "Fine, thank you." And I did.

LASKEY: And he was obviously very satisfied since--

SORIANO: He was!

LASKEY: --he's still living in the house and hasn't changed it.

SORIANO: He called me last week to tell me that, "Raphael, why don't I see you? Why don't I hear from you?" And I



said, "Well, I've been pretty busy." And his new wife, you know--not Emma, but his wife he married very recently, when his wife died.

LASKEY: No, I didn't know.

SORIANO: Olga--is suffering from leukemia. He told me that.

LASKEY: Shulman is?

SORIANO: Not Shulman; his wife.

LASKEY: His wife.

SORIANO: Yeah, don't say anything because it's not-- Maybe he wants to repeat himself, but that's what he told me.

And he was very dejected, and of course she was, too. And I felt sad and sorry. And he says, "Well, we're not going to go anywheres and I've been telling her, where else would you go with this beautiful house?" And then Mrs. Jones, [A.] Quincy Jones's wife went there and says, "Look at the beautiful house that Soriano did. Look at the atmosphere that Soriano did." And so he was telling me that, Julius [was].

LASKEY: Well, Mrs. Jones used to live in one of your apartments at one time, didn't she?

SORIANO: I know, I know. Yeah. Yep. That's life. Things change. Things occur.

LASKEY: Well, did any--

SORIANO: Sometimes we know the truth, sometimes we don't.



LASKEY: Did your--? Did the publication of the Case Study house help you any? Did you directly--?

SORIANO: Possibly. I think--

LASKEY: --get a benefit from it?

SORIANO: I really don't know. Because I've been published in so many magazines and books so I don't think the-- Just because Arts and Architecture published it, because at the time I published time in the Architectural Forum, the [Architectural] Record, House and Garden, the German magazines, the Italian magazines. In fact, the Italian magazines did a beautiful-- Let me see if I can find really an interesting-- I believe I have a nice little color photo [from] the Italian magazine the way they published it. Yeah, years ago before the Case Study house. Yeah, I will stop this. [tape recorder off]

Well, as I showed you already, I've been published in so many magazines I don't know. I'm sure every little publicity helps, yes. Doesn't hurt. But then people forget. You know, I've had, you see, magazines here like that-- All my work has been published in these. I have tons of these: every one of the magazines. I kept them fortunately. And many universities, you know, the people steal the magazines. [Then] they don't have it, they come to me [and ask], "Do you have this?" And I have them, you see. And, poor [Richard J.] Neutra, when he had his fire,



you know, he lost a lot of his stuff. Most of the books and magazines he had.

LASKEY: Oh, really? I never thought about that, but of course.

SORIANO: Oh, yes. Yeah. So what is another question you may have? Forgive me if I put my leg up, because I have to relax it a little bit because of my condition. It's too bad I cannot show you that Italian magazine. It was really beautifully published: the Case Study house in color.

LASKEY: Well, I'm noticing that 1950, which seems to have been quite a year for you--

SORIANO: It was a very nice year, yes.

LASKEY: --was also the year that you attended the Alcoa Aluminum Conference.

SORIANO: Yes, yes.

LASKEY: Which was to send you off in another direction.

SORIANO: Yes, to promote-- Well, that didn't actually convince me into [using] aluminum because I already was thinking of aluminum even then before that.

LASKEY: Oh, you were?

SORIANO: I'm sure that's why Alcoa invited me, because I was talking to Fritz Close, I believe, which was the chairman of the board of Alcoa. As a matter of fact, when he was retired, they invited [a] few of his friends to make a little film, a little audio-visual statement. I was the





only architect invited to say something. Yeah, with all the big moguls, supposedly. I have a little [unintelligible], yeah. And I had a very interesting aluminum dish they presented for the conference. That was in Boca Raton, Florida. Alcoa created [the] conference and they had a certain man there by the name of Rowse--Roos, Rowse--who is quite in the government, you know, is a big builder business. I told him at the time, I said, "Why don't you promote something." Some of the things that I did of course-- Now, he has his own concept of ideas which is really conservative, but then that's what happens, you see. People are scared to death of something really starkly light and frank. They don't like that. They like sugar-coated little statements of architecture. Yeah.

LASKEY: I think they like it-- I guess you're right. I think they're afraid of something that isn't solid.

SORIANO: Well, mine is very solid actually, as-- Can be made more solid than wood.

LASKEY: [laughter] Well, but, you know.

SORIANO: Sure. Couldn't be more solid than wood. I mean, than steel, than aluminum. We fly airplanes with aluminum, imagine we don't fly them with wood. They won't last three minutes in all this fantastic stresses that will take the plane going at such a speed and such altitudes. All the stuff we're doing for space, [of] what are they made?



Aluminum and other alloyed sophisticated aluminum. Now they have a new material which is an alloy of graphite and aluminum which is stronger and lighter. Graphite, the regular lead pencil that you write on. Isn't it marvelous? But all this come from a scientific thinking, never from the architects. [laughter] Yeah.

LASKEY: And then they don't want to use it.

SORIANO: Of course not. Most architects don't even know that thing exists. Yeah.

LASKEY: But then you, after-- Before you got into aluminum, you still did the Colby Apartments which-- And the, your--

SORIANO: That was the same year, same year.

LASKEY: Probably your shining example of steel, which would be the Adolph's Building which came later.

SORIANO: Well, then the Adolph's was already aluminum and steel; I used same principles of prefabrication: assembly method, no bearing walls--which I developed with the Curtis House. I used it in the Adolph's Building. Yeah. In '54, just four year later, I got the commission to do the Adolph's Building, and then it was built later. Yeah, I moved here [Northern California], barely I moved here, and then I got this commission. Everybody says, "Oh, Soriano, you just-- Why move from Los Angeles? All your clientele--" I said, "Well, if they want me, they can reach me."



LASKEY: Why did you move from Los Angeles?

SORIANO: Well, it was an interesting story. I got married--foolishly--to a girl with three children, and she was having problems with her husband and so on. Then I said, "My god, why did I have to marry this?" To get into this mess when I used to have all these baby starlets, stars from Hollywood. And to get to this position--and stresses and anxiety. Why? Well, I did.

So, but anyway, so I said to my ex-wife, I said, "I was planning to move to San Francisco area, particularly in the-- Marin County's very beautiful." Because I already was familiar doing work in San Francisco area. And I said, "Come and let's see if you like it." [She] said, "Oh, yes," and immediately I bought a house in Tiburon. It wasn't even developed yet. That was not even a town.

LASKEY: This was in 1953.

SORIANO: Nineteen fifty-three. And I was in Mill Valley for about a year there. We had a house until-- Then I found this, was not even developed. In fact, the whole area there was completely-- Black Angus cows were grazing all over those hills. That's all there were. It was nothing. None of these buildings, these restaurants-- All these three restaurants were not here. Nothing. And so then that's how I moved here. And then I bought some property that I was going to develop and do some beautiful



things. I had a lovely parcel for multiple units overlooking this bay right below the acres of land I have, which my ex-wife took. Yeah, it was a disaster. Really. Well--

LASKEY: But you opted to stay up here.

SORIANO: It was lovely and I was-- And I moved to the studio. This was used-- This [was] my drafting room. I had eight boys working over here; I have another room there, full of documents.

LASKEY: Even in 1953 when you moved up here from Los Angeles your studio was still going then at full blast.

SORIANO: I had, I still had another--

LASKEY: You still had--

SORIANO: Yeah, on Leeden Way, I think it was, yeah.

LASKEY: You had a staff of eight?

SORIANO: Over here. Not over there. Over there I had a secretary I kept--

LASKEY: But I mean just-- You had an office that had-- You had eight people, at least eight people--

SORIANO: Eight people, yes.

LASKEY: --working for you.

SORIANO: Maximum was eight people. Six to eight people used to work. Because I didn't want to handle any more than that. It becomes a mess.

LASKEY: And you were doing mostly small--or individual





houses--

SORIANO: Well, yes.

LASKEY: --or were you moving into other--

SORIANO: Individual houses, I was doing a lot of things and I-- And also I organized Project Architects. You know, you may have heard that: Project Architects? I was the one who organized that. Yeah, with Maynard Lyndon. I told Maynard Lyndon at the time--we were very good friends--and Arthur [B.] Gallion, dean of USC [University of Southern California], and we were discussing one [partnership]. I said, "Well, let's get together since we are good friends. We relate in our thinking. And we can go for big jobs." In fact, we even made a bid for the airport, Los Angeles Airport.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: This was an amalgamation of individual--

SORIANO: Of individual.

LASKEY: --small, small--

SORIANO: Small, yes.

LASKEY: --office architects to--

SORIANO: Yes, it was Maynard Lyndon, Arthur Gallion, Soriano. And then all of a sudden Gallion and Maynard Lyndon said, "Well, let's get [Frederick] Emmons and [A. Quincy] Jones." Jones and Emmons, at the time. And



[Douglas] Honnold and [John] Rex, I believe, also. They wanted to incorporate it because they were-- They could have this more clout and all that. And then we had a big brochure we put out and we said-- The statement we made is that only the principals will participate; not the draftsman, no-- The principals would design this. For the first time we would give a service designed by top-notch principals of the firm rather than-- In reality, that [design by assistants] was the case, really.

LASKEY: [laughter] Fraud, fraud.

SORIANO: Then I dissolved it. I, personally. Then I said, "Forget it." Because I used to come prepared to discuss everything; I knew everything. The others used to come-- Jones used to come with his assistant; he knew nothing. And they were playing politics, this dirty little politics. Jones was a real clever, shrewdy one. Really. So this is the way it was, and at one time I just got so mad-- The whole thing's so silly. And he, the assistants were doing the work and he was supposed to really do-- The principals [were to] do the work. And Jones, you know, used to drink a lot. So it was dissolved. But we did a hospital together. You see, San Pedro Community Hospital [1961].

LASKEY: The San Pedro Community Hospital?

SORIANO: Yes. And all of this was my own doing. Most



people may not know that. And I designed the graphics, and I have the sheets, the pages I can show you, the letterheads and all that. I had the office here and the office in Wilshire Boulevard, Maynard Lyndon's place.

Yeah. You see, I was trying to see whether we can expand to greater things. Then when I designed the hundred-story office I did it myself. No more associations. Yeah.

LASKEY: Was it too many individual personalities?

SORIANO: It is that way, and it never works. Like too many cooks doing one--

LASKEY: Right, right.

SORIANO: How can that work? They're all prima donnas.

Yeah. Especially Jones used to bug me. He used to come-- Whatever I said [Jones would reply] "No." And then he used to ruminate what I said as his own. Really. And I said to myself, What is this? Yeah. And I used to come with a prepared beautiful drawings and then I had them beautifully done, as I do.

LASKEY: Yes, yes.

SORIANO: Documented like that.

LASKEY: Beautiful.

SORIANO: And then also after we had a meeting then he used to come later on and say, "Ha! Now this is what we have to do." Exactly what I did. And I used to say to myself, "Am I really seeing things?" That's the true story. And it



wasn't his, you see. And his assistants used to work on this. And he didn't know what was going on and I knew. And so did Maynard Lyndon. And Gallion. The others didn't. Yeah. I started with those three, those two, others but not with the rest of them. But, just after-- We did one job; that was it.

LASKEY: Well, you did do the Ciro's jobs with--

SORIANO: Ciro's, Bond Street, we did. This was, again, was brought to me by [Serge] Chermayeff.

LASKEY: Yes. And you did collaborate with him on that, didn't you?

SORIANO: No!

LASKEY: No?

SORIANO: I did it all myself.

LASKEY: Oh, really.

SORIANO: Oh yeah, because he sent me the most stupid drawing and the clients were also very unhappy about it. Yeah, he used to send me all kinds of sort of art deco type of things, so finally I said, "No, no, no, no, this cannot be." And he was, you know, Serge was a prima donna. Used to [put on] big hot airs. You know, he was a tall fellow and used to look upon-- Well, you know, this kind of thing. Because he was associated with [Eric] Mendelssohn at one time. Apparently he got pompous.

LASKEY: Oh, really?





SORIANO: Yeah. Got big. I think it was [Mendelssohn], I'm not so sure now. I believe it was so. But, then, the clients themselves sort of didn't like what Serge was doing so then I remained in the project. And I did a most beautiful job for them. I designed everything. I was happy because I didn't-- I couldn't stand all this art deco type of things he was making-- Which he still does, the same thing I guess; his son does the same thing.

LASKEY: Well, art deco is back in.

SORIANO: Yeah, of course. Well, even then they used to have all this painting type of things and gimmickry, you know. I did something extremely logical, simple, beautiful. It was a gem of a store, really.

LASKEY: You did two stores?

SORIANO: I did two. The one in Beverly Hills--still there. But you know, [an] interesting thing happened at the one in Beverly Hills made me mad again. Ai-yi-yi-yi-yi. It's really-- It's so, so--what's that?--mind boggling?

LASKEY: Mind boggling.

SORIANO: Yeah. For example, I had those beautiful leather walls. You see. Look at this, how leather-- Those walls, they're like blocks.

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: They're leather stuffed with cotton in it. It



gives softness to it and then is beautiful. Of course, again, the marvelous-- That's real leather, genuine leather.

LASKEY: Oh.

SORIANO: Look how beautiful they were. Now, I did the same thing in Beverly Hills. The same thing. You'll find out. All of a sudden, just when the art deco began, just a few years ago, apparently the company changed hands already--they sold the whole operations--and all of a sudden they had some decorator come in and, if you please, they made one [leather block] black, one white: checkerboard.

LASKEY: Oh, no.

SORIANO: Yeah. You will see the walls--

LASKEY: Did they remove the leather? Or they painted them?

SORIANO: No, they painted them I think.

LASKEY: Oh.

SORIANO: That's what they did. And I said to myself-- And then the rest of it--

LASKEY: Oh, that's too bad.

SORIANO: --remained beautifully. The rest-- You will see the fixtures where the windows are. They were all done brass, I told you. They were done for both stores.

Yeah. I'll show you in color-- They're really beautiful.



Here. [searches through photographs] I'm talking about--  
See, this is the [San Pedro] hospital--

LASKEY: Great use of color.

SORIANO: --we did together. See that? These are all my  
own Kodachrome. Look how lovely they are.

LASKEY: They really are.

SORIANO: And I want to publish them in color, damn it!

LASKEY: Well--

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: They stand a much better chance-- They're doing a  
lot more color--

SORIANO: Today, yeah.

LASKEY: --color publishing.

SORIANO: Look, look how beautiful these are. Now look,  
that's the beautiful colors-- Look. This is the San  
Francisco [Ciro's store].

LASKEY: Oh, that's San Francisco.

SORIANO: And this is the one from the back entrance, if  
you please, of the Beverly Hills [store]. You enter there  
like that, see? Look at the walls, and look at this  
beautiful-- These are all brass.

LASKEY: It's so elegant.

SORIANO: And there's the back entrance, yeah. That's the  
entrance to San Francisco. But look how lovely this is.

LASKEY: Now this is--



SORIANO: These are all the tables and showcases I designed.

LASKEY: But is this in San Francisco or Beverly Hills?

SORIANO: It's San Francisco.

LASKEY: That's San Francisco. And this one is--

SORIANO: And the same thing like this is in Beverly Hills, also.

LASKEY: Yeah, I thought so.

SORIANO: Except that the, these things were, one [section] black and white in Beverly Hills now.

LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: But the one in San Francisco doesn't exist because the lease expired and Macy's has, took it over. And then I don't know what the hell happened to it.

LASKEY: It's beautiful.

SORIANO: Isn't that lovely?

LASKEY: Yes.

SORIANO: Well, that's it.

LASKEY: Yeah, the colors are wonderful.

SORIANO: Yeah. It breaks my heart, but then what can I do? [looks through photographs] That's the one in Beverly Hills, you see? Round like that, with [the] same coloring. Ah, well--

LASKEY: The Colby Apartments--

SORIANO: Yeah. \* [Unfortunately, the owner, a woman from Taiwan, had it demolished in spite of hundreds of letters





and telegrams sent to the mayor. Ignorant politicians without culture! We missed it by one vote at the Los Angeles City Council. Two black council members, I understand, were bribed by this woman from Taiwan! This was in spite of the cultural heritage.]

LASKEY: Did they--? What kind of color did you use?

SORIANO: The Colby Apartments?

LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: Well, the outside was, we had black. The steel was all painted jet black and with some orange color in some--in between the members, identifying certain members which were less structural than the others. And then I used the fiberglass, corrugated fiberglass, for the balconies. I used yellow on the north side because it was very beautiful, and I used blue, a beautiful aquamarine blue on the southwest side. Because the glare of the sun with the yellow was a little too intense so the blue was better. So we study all these things, you see, in that area. A lot of them arbitrarily say, "Let's put the yellow here and blue here." This we studied. The same thing with the Hallawell Seed Company. I did-- People say, "What is that blue glass? How did you decide?" Well, we tried

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\* Mr. Soriano added the following bracketed material during his review of the transcript.



blue, we tried clear, we tried greenish, we tried grey, and we found the blue glass that I used was the only one that did not affect the color of the plants within the nursery.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Yeah. It's interesting.

LASKEY: That's very interesting, since it was outside.

SORIANO: Yeah, the other ones cast a hue and a shade over the plants and made the plants not real. And the blue sort of let the plants be exactly the way they were in color.

And I said, "We select the blue." And then the red protective painting of the nursery-- "Why red?" "Well," I said, "I paint it with red lead"--which is a lovely color, Chinese red--"the columns, steel, to protect them." And I remain that way. So one was logical; one also equally as logical. The two were lovely together. And then for the building itself I used sort of a light grey. Sort of light, just almost a neutral grey tone or white. Yeah, that's all: the three [colors]. And I remember Mrs. [Esther] McNabb, the owner's wife, she sat down-- She was very conservative-- You know, when I did this it was a very startling thing. People used to go and take photographs and movies and-- Every weekend that was used for that. And she used to say-- She wrote to me a letter which I still have. That's the one that they say to my other client-- [It] says, "When we lost an argument with Soriano, we'll



gain, we won." And she said, "Dear boy, don't you think it's a bit obvious: red, white, and blue?" I said, "Come on, Esther." I said, "This is not red, white, and blue; it's grey, [red] and blue." And I say, "Why don't you let us finish that and if you don't like any of the colors I'll change them for you, okay?" That's the way it was. And then when everybody used to talk about this, they used to come there on weekends to take movies. And from then on then business [went] way up and they would send me a letter: "At first we thought we will double our operation. It has far surpassed our expectations." That was when we got the \$500 bonus. You see, from then on they realize how right I was, yeah. Well, it takes tenacity and education.

LASKEY: Well, it also takes a certain amount of confidence in yourself.

SORIANO: Exactly. And that I have. [laughter]



TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE TWO

JULY 20, 1985

LASKEY: The interesting thing--another of the interesting things about the Colby Apartments besides the use of color--was their design: the whole matter of little gardens and balconies and patios. How did you design it?

SORIANO: I always loved gardens, loved patios. And since none have no bearing walls, this is the way it was designed, too, you see? From then on I have no bearing walls in any of my concepts. From 1950 on. Yeah. No bearing walls. So the structure, the structural elements, were self-tenable and the walls were just simply either cabinets or free. That's what I did. From then on I've been doing that. And so it works out beautifully for me, and this is what I designed even with my aluminum prefabricated houses. I can put in one day four houses with six unskilled men because they're all prefabricated, pre-studded, precisely done: all you do is bolt them. Any moron could find the holes; if he doesn't, he's worse than a moron than I thought.

LASKEY: [laughing] Were the Colby Apartments prefabricated then?

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: And assembled?

SORIANO: The same way, no bearing walls. Yeah. And





except that we did a lot of work on the cabinets. Most of it were not done in the factory; they were done locally. Because it was cheaper that way, at that time. I think it was [the] Korean War then? Was something we didn't have-- Nineteen fifty-two.

LASKEY: Nineteen fifty-two. Could be the Korean War.

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: Or the aftermath.

SORIANO: Yeah, whatever. Anyway, so, whatever. So we had, I had a marvelous connection with the U.S. Plywood [Company]. And I knew the president and he used to let us go to the warehouse all the time to select the panels as to grain and color. We were receiving lots of plywood ash from Japan. And I remember I went with my assistant Dan Dworsky, you know, in Los Angeles?

LASKEY: Oh, the architect?

SORIANO: He used to work for me. Yes. He was my assistant. In fact, he worked on my Colby Apartments. We installed all the Plexiglas. He worked locally there.

LASKEY: Daniel Dworsky?

SORIANO: Yes. I used to make-- That's right, you didn't know that, did you?

LASKEY: No, I didn't know that. [laughter]

SORIANO: I gave you so many names. Oh, I can give you so many, many names. Yeah. Dan Dworsky. I gave you Joe



[Joseph Y.] Fujikawa. Dan Dworsky worked in the apartment-- In fact, I put him to work [on] the divisions of the patios, the balconies: all this Plexiglas--corrugated? We used to install it-- I devised a way with a little wire, with a little piece of plywood hanging down. We'd improvise those things on the job. And Dan worked on them. Dan is a lovely boy, I liked him. Is a good friend of mine, and his lovely wife, too--charming. And so this is what we did. And I-- In fact, we went to U.S. Plywood with a couple of assistants and selected--I don't know how many--hundreds of panels from several boxes. Hundreds of boxes they had there of U.S. Plywood that came from Japan, this thick, with maybe twenty or forty panels in it. And I used to pick them up. They were four [feet] by eights. Yeah. And I used to go and pick them up and put them on the wall and select them per color, for grain, to match them. And so I used to do that. And I matched them as top one, top two, top three, top four, east wall, living room. Things like that. I matched every room different woods, and I used to mark them precisely because I want the cabinetmakers to install them exactly as I put them up as per grain, as per color. And so as not to make mistake to leave it to them to do that, I used to do that.

LASKEY: To mark them.

SORIANO: Yes. And I'll give you an interesting story in a



minute. And this wood also-- This wood was welded wood with infrared light. No nails again, you see; I used that completely. Yeah.

And so [an] interesting thing happened there. I asked the union there to send me some real cabinetmakers. And at the time, you know, they were working time and material. It was a difficulty to get labor. They were very rambunctious, the laborers, the unions. And they have to take it on time and material. And I asked the union [for] the cabinetmakers I want. "Yeah, sure we have the best." Okay. They came in and I said, "Look, I took the trouble to mark them. Top one, top two, top three, top four, from east to west on such and such a wall. It's all marked on the wall, too. All you have to do is just put them together properly and be sure that they're exactly done. All I want you to-- Installation, you know, with the plane. Just make that lovely one-eighth-of-an-inch V, you put them together, they are beautiful, and then put the epoxy resin and then bang! Done." And that's the way it was done, it's very simple. But I said, "I want you to be careful. Please." And they said, "Oh, sure, sure, I understand it very good." You know, right. What happened was this, a very interesting thing. I come-- I used to go every day or sometimes twice a day to supervise, to see how it's going on. And so I looked at the installation of one



wall-- I said, "There's a mistake there." I have very sharp eyes; I may not appear so, but I can sense-- "Oh, I did exactly what you said." I said, "Well, it looks like there's a mistake there, I'm sorry. Do you mind removing it?" He said, "Oh, come on." I said, "Yes, what's the difference? You're getting paid by the hour." They were getting paid like that. And I said, "I'll see to it that the material-- I'll pay or the owner will pay for it, okay? You have nothing to lose." The contractor loses nothing since he is on time and material. You pay him by the hour, that's all. And he said, "No! That's the [most] foolish thing I've ever heard." I said, "Never mind with that; I think there's a mistake there, sir." Reluctantly he removed [it], and sure enough, he had made a mistake. Instead of one-two, he had one-four. Yeah. And I said, "You see? After I ask you like a gentleman, like a friend, I explain to you and I really ask you with great kindness to please be careful in installation, didn't I?" And he takes the hammer and threw it on the floor. We had already carpets on the floor already. Said, "I quit this goddamn job." I said, "Okay, fine. Excellent," I say, "because I don't want a person like that here working anyway." And so I wrote a letter immediately to the contractor: noncompliance with the performance of the job, and I have the attorney write him a letter to follow it up--





termination of contract with this union builder. And he came begging and pleading, and the union official came in. And I said, "Nope. I asked for cabinetmakers; I don't want butchers." I said, "I explained, I took the time. Look what I have on the panels, they're all marked precisely. And look what he did." "Well, maybe we can send others." I said, "No, forget it. The owners are very, very pissed off with this," I said to them [laughing] like that, which is true.

LASKEY: Of course.

SORIANO: And I said, "They don't want to lose time and all that with this kind of incompetency." And I said, "We're not-- They said they don't want to finish, they want to move in right now." But all of a sudden I remember I used to have Italian cabinetmakers that did work for me in shop stores that I did. Johnny Basso was his name. And I said, "Johnny, do you have any Italian cabinetmakers, Italian real cabinet--" "Oh, sure enough, but they no union though." And I said, "That's all right." Now we had-- The whole job was a union job, you see. And we had to have the plumbing-- Everything was done so we didn't care. And I said, "Fine." So we put some sheets on walls because of complete big glass walls and we worked at night. And I had those two Italian cabinetmakers from Italy-- They hardly spoke English. And they were the most beautiful people on



earth. They used to finish the cabinet--they did all the work--and they used to finish a cabinet and they used to call me, "Signore Soriano, guarda! Che bello!" Said, "Mr. Soriano, look how beautiful." Their own work! Putting their hands over it. Can you imagine that kind of craftsmanship?

LASKEY: No.

SORIANO: And I was touched. I loved these guys. I said to them, I said, Look at this, and look at the debasing things that have come with these so-called unions. These stupid jackasses. Just because they're union they think they-- Instead of really having the finesse, the pride of their work. And we finished the job that way. And they did the most marvelous work with his Italian nonunion guys.

LASKEY: Now, this is all the cabinetwork in the Colby Apartments?

SORIANO: All the cabinet and all the paneling in that Colby Apartments. Yes. This is what you do, you see. Pains, pains, struggles, fights, and then the union men came in there; they want to picket the job and this and that. I said, "Go right ahead." Said, "I'm sorry, the owner doesn't want to pay for it, so what are you going to do?" [laughs] "Go ahead." And so they couldn't do anything. You see.

And, you see, the cabinetry that we had in there. Let



me see if I have a picture here. Oh, yes. You see, this is the apartment. This is-- Now, let me see if I have a cabinet-- Unfortunately, I don't think I have it here. I had some beautiful pictures of the cabinetwork. Maybe-- Wait a minute, wait a minute, maybe I have it. No, that's the Adolph's Building; you should see the inside of it. Yeah, all this is the Adolph's Building. See, I did all the furniture and everything.

LASKEY: That's beautiful.

SORIANO: Every, everything. You should see how beautiful that is really.

LASKEY: You generally ended up doing your own subcontracting--

SORIANO: Every-- I did-- Most of them.

LASKEY: --didn't you, on your buildings?

SORIANO: If I hadn't done that, there wouldn't have been an office building. I mean, there wouldn't have been a single house of steel, ever. Because I took the trouble--

You see, this is the apartment house.

LASKEY: That is beautiful.

SORIANO: See?

LASKEY: Yes.

SORIANO: Now, let me see if I have these cabinets.

LASKEY: It's a shame they've let it go to waste.

SORIANO: Well, this is the tragedy--what happens you



know. People have no finesse.

Unfortunately, I have them [the cabinet photos] someplace else, but not here.

LASKEY: I'm sorry.

SORIANO: So do I.

LASKEY: I'd like to see that.

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: Because none of the pictures that I saw were of the interior.

SORIANO: No--

LASKEY: They were always of the courts and the exterior.

SORIANO: I know, I know, I know. I have some cabinetry I may show you after you finish this. Anyway. So this is what happened. I did the dressers and everything else. Hundreds of drawers beautifully done with [the] same beautiful ash by these cabinetmen. And I loved the story-- It's a true story. They used to rub their hands on their cabinet they'd finished and say, "Signore Soriano, guarda che bello!" Says, "Look, Mr. Soriano, how beautiful." They were proud of what they accomplished. Putting their hands over-- [There would] be such a finesse. As if they did something--which is true, they did a beautiful job. Yeah.

Because I had beautiful cabinets for in the dressing room, Mrs. Colby, for her purses and hundreds of shoes and





brassieres, you name it. All that separate, separate, separate drawers and drawers. Yeah.

LASKEY: Is craftsmanship just not important to American workmen? Or is it just not part of our tradition? Or--

SORIANO: I don't think it is.

LASKEY: Why is it difficult?

SORIANO: I don't think it-- Is nothing to do with our tradition. The contrary. I think America was built because if you make a better mousetrap you succeed, don't you? So that means that you have to really do some better work. The trouble is the forces--the unions and several individuals--not that I'm against unions, but on the contrary--the unions have been-- Originally, it was all right. But all of a sudden now they became the worst enemies of themselves. Because all they think is money, money, money rather than to educate the craftsmen properly.

The same thing with architecture. Why do you suppose we are producing a whole bunch of "unhatched eggs," I call them. And I will use that expression which I think fits to architects who know nothing. Not the A-B-C of architecture to do buildings, and that's why our cities are so horrible. They're playing with all these fantasies, gimmickry, painting, sculpture. They depend on these artificialities to make their architecture viable. That's



all you see. Just gimmickry. Nothing else. Nothing logical architecturally. No. Because architecture transcends that area of this gimmickry. Which is like Bach. His music is superb because these structures, these tonalities [are] so beautiful. The same thing, the Hindu music, is the same way. These beautiful structuring of tonalities. [imitates tones] It's like the atmosphere, like the air. Like the oceans. You don't find gimmickry in the ocean, you don't find gimmickry in the air. You don't find gimmickry in the flowers, the plants, do you? No. Never. This is a natural process and it's clear, orderly. That's the thing. Yeah. Yes, darling, that's the way it is. Unfortunately we are in a very, state of decadence which to me is very disastrous and it might be the ruin of America if we don't watch out, really. We find what's happening to the automobile industry. Yeah. And we're complaining that many cars are sold are the foreign cars rather than the American cars. Well, we made it. I read an article in 1940 about these gadgets they put on the automobile industry. All this chrome, facings, for nothing. And I said, "When are we going to learn that?" In 1940 I wrote this article. Yeah. It was published in the Philosophical Library of New York: **New Architecture and City Planning.**

Here, give me that book, will you please? The one,



you see that? The International--red--International--

LASKEY: Oh, the International Who's Who?

SORIANO: Yeah, on top of that there is a, this sort of tan reddish book. The New Architecture and City Planning.

LASKEY: Here you go.

SORIANO: Thank you. Yeah. This is the one I wrote.

[turns through pages] Yeah. It's really interesting, isn't it? Let's see what my book-- [Page] 290. Yeah.

[turns pages] Here it is: "Some Problems of the Low-Cost Home," 1940, by the Philosophical Library of New York, New Architecture and City Planning, by [Paul] Zucker. Let's

see if I have the place there. I said [in the book], "Unfortunately, it took a horrible carnage like war to bring to light the stupidity of making hundreds of variations of the same article simply by adding superfluous embellishments." Isn't that what we're doing today?

LASKEY: Yes.

SORIANO: Okay. [continues reading] "With one stroke, our publicity machinery and our manufacturers, forced by patriotic duty"--that was during the war, see?--"began advocating conservation of materials." Yeah. "In conserving, one must say the most with the least. Is not this one of the most important laws in any kind of creation?" That's what Bach does, isn't it? Yeah. "In the design of a chair, the building of a house, in planning



a city, in writing music"--you see?--"is not this what the client asks of the architect and what the architect must give to his client?" I asked these questions, yeah. "We still like to dress our inventions, if not with complicated dresses of the middle ages, still with simple streamlined dresses." Yeah. That's what we used to do with our cars, streamline [with] chrome lines. For what? [continuing] "Dresses which are nonetheless still dresses. Our inventive achievements can stand on their own merits. They do not need external embellishments to show their usefulness. I'm not speaking here of likes and dislikes of individuals. Everyone has the right to buy or make for himself anything he wishes, but certainly no one should assume the responsibility of making for people's consumption, designs that need psychoanalysis."

LASKEY: [laughs]

SORIANO: Yeah. That was in 1940. [laughs] Actually, to be truthful, it was 1939 when I wrote this; it was published in 1940. I said, "People have been loud for centuries with false notions," and this is what they're doing even more now. "They will need re-education to bring back the normal innate appreciation of intelligent forms. I blame more than anyone else the designers of this pathetic state." Yes. Yeah. "I blame more"--yeah--"the designers of this pathetic state. Their misdeeds have





contaminated everything inside and outside of the houses." True today? Yeah. Ay-yi-yi-yi-yi-ya. "I have seen too many serious efforts on the part of some of my colleagues and myself spoiled because of this general epidemic of confusion." True today?

LASKEY: Yes.

SORIANO: Well, anyway, I go on. And look what I proposed for prefabricated houses. In slices, and of wood. Look. I was designing already the two walls and the ceiling at the same time. Prefinished. And the floors prefinished. All you do [is] bolt it. And you can stack these things one on top of the other. See? Bam, bam, bam: like chairs.

LASKEY: It really is amazing, or interesting--

SORIANO: That's in 1939.

LASKEY: Oh. Before the war.

SORIANO: Yeah. These are lovely? And I have also the one I did for Consolidated Voltee Aircraft Company. Give me that thing on top there. I'll show you. Right down-- The very top. This magazine [Architectural] Forum.

LASKEY: This one right here?

SORIANO: Yeah. You already know that one. You've seen it.

LASKEY: Yes. I saw that.

SORIANO: Okay. Did you remember what I did right there?



LASKEY: Was that the umbrella--?

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: Yes.

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: Well, as I was starting to say, I think it's so interesting that Americans, who have this love affair with progress and new things, haven't adopted it for their houses.

SORIANO: No.

LASKEY: It just makes-- I mean, they like everything else to be modern, they like streamlining, they like new materials. They love portable things.

SORIANO: That's correct.

LASKEY: But they haven't accepted it in house design, which-- Especially in Los Angeles, well, I think any place--

SORIANO: All over.

LASKEY: --that housing has become so incredibly expensive that only the rich can have houses. I think they would be delighted.

SORIANO: This is exactly it. This is what has happened. This is what I've been talking for years and years and years until I am about-- I sound like a broken record, ruminat[ing] the same things. But even here, in 1939 I wrote this article--article was published in *Architectural Forum*--"The New House in 194X." Yeah. You remember that



idea that's like an airplane. I said, "Why not use that?" And you should read what I had in here. I had no wiring for the houses anymore--using completely activated lights with paints, you see? And instead of wiring which was-- I was anticipating things that will be scientifically done in a house which will eventually be.

LASKEY: I love the idea of wheeling the house to the lot.

SORIANO: Exactly.

LASKEY: Just have all the utilities put in in advance and then--

SORIANO: And, then, also look at the floor: telescope. Right there. Prefinished floor, once you prepare the grounds. And also, now look what I did here and look what other colleagues of mine [did] when they took the "new house 194x," like Douglas Meyer and Eric Nicholson. Look at this kind of a thing: plain, with-- You see little sketches. But they don't-- They didn't do anything.

[turns pages] Look. Look at this. What is that?

Nothing, really. And some designing little bathrooms and little-- This is the same old stuff. "Flexible space."

But then, I was thinking of structures, not just simply little cubicles. Look. This kind of thing-- Like one fellow from California, near Berkeley, Russian-born, said-- what his name is? Michael Goodman-- "Yeah, but using the same old wood, the same old stuff. Nothing really



innovative." But the idea you have to put all this because there are not many people, well, going ahead. [turns pages] Look at this, Durham White; I don't know who he was anyway. Look at this, is that anything new? Nah. No. Even some of the big names were doing the same old stuff. Yeah. [turns pages] These are all the real boys-- Yeah, at the time they-- There's Harwell Harris--betting lounge, he designed. But still he has the same old stuff that-- Yeah. Look at that. [turns pages] Gadgets, gadgets, the same old junk. Neutra. There's Neutra. At least--

LASKEY: Oh, Neutra?

SORIANO: Yes, here's Neutra. He was doing at least, look, modularly planned-- At least he had that system of precision.

LASKEY: Well, this is nineteen-- What, what--

SORIANO: This was the 1920-30, he designed this.

LASKEY: Oh.

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: But what issue of *Architectural Forum* is this?

SORIANO: This is September 1942.

LASKEY: 'Forty-two. So the war was already well on.

SORIANO: Yes, yes, yes. and this is what they thought the new houses will be in "194X."

LASKEY: At some point in--

SORIANO: Yeah, yeah. And so-- But, you know, I





anticipated these type of things, new things rather than the same old things like that. Yeah. Foundation savers, prefabricated parts, same old wood, so--

LASKEY: Well, they did a lot of prefabrication during the war, didn't they? Didn't the army and navy--?

SORIANO: Aaaaaah. Nah.

LASKEY: No?

SORIANO: That's all because you can take a machine that makes [one] hundred nails in one shot instead of by hammer and nail, so big deal. What is that? That doesn't mean anything. That's not prefabrication.

LASKEY: Oh.

SORIANO: That's using the same old stuff only [with a] little bit of makeup to make you look prettier quickly.

LASKEY: Oh.

SORIANO: In other words, when you come out from sleep [such] that you're tired or maybe your eyes don't feel so good, put a little makeup quickly. That'll hide a multitude of sins. This is what they're trying to do by having a machine that can do that. So what? Big deal.

LASKEY: But it wasn't really prefabricated parts--

SORIANO: No, no.

LASKEY: --where they would just truck them out and assemble camps.

SORIANO: Exactly. It still will be the same old junk.



They look the same way. (That's okay, don't worry.) Yeah, yeah.

LASKEY: Well, something that you said just a few minutes ago reminded me of something that I wanted to talk to you about, and that was the--that you tended to use--was it eight-foot ceilings? Wasn't that unusual? And doors.

SORIANO: Yes, my doors, I-- See, I-- That's true. I used to say, "My god! Look at--" Like this door here.

LASKEY: Yes.

SORIANO: This is seven-foot ceiling here-- This one is not even eight--which is not the standard housing authority standard--but seven. And some builder did it. The father of this jackass did it, you see. And you see, have an eight-inch piece of stuff in there, on top of the door. And most of the doors [are] six foot [by] eight [inches]. That is one-foot-four-inch space on top. And I said, "How ridiculous that is. Why?" And I used to watch the amount of time spent--

I measured the time of what the carpenter to make the blocking of the one-foot-four-inches space above the door. The amount of time it took to block it up. Then the plasterers have to come, then you put all the plaster moldings and everything else to hold the plaster around the door header and all that. And I said to myself, "How awful! How wasteful. The cost of that is so horrible."



And I ask how much a complete door, an eight-foot door? I have this written up in one of the articles. The average door used to cost about five dollars or six dollars. They will charge you almost twenty dollars for the door--for an eight-foot door.

LASKEY: For an eight-foot door.

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: So that's--

SORIANO: Three times, four times the amount.

LASKEY: About three times.

SORIANO: And sometimes not. Maybe ten dollars more. And so I used to figure, it's still cheaper than the labor that-- And we had to spend a hundred dollars to put that piece of stuff on top of the door! And then I said, "Nonsense. Eliminate that." I said, "Figure eight-foot doors and eliminate that cost on top." And I used to argue with the builders and the subcontractors. And they'd say, "Oh, no." I said, "Well, tell me, how much you spending is painting on top with that header?" "Well, now, I don't know; we take it all as one." "No," I said, "I want you to tell me that. Maybe I won't eliminate that." And we used to come-- They were more expensive, yes. They didn't know it themselves. But now they advertise, you know, you have big ads: "Use eight-foot doors because they are money savers, they're cheaper." Yeah. Now.



LASKEY: That's interesting.

SORIANO: After how many years? [laughing] Half-century afterwards. Yeah. Yes ma'am, that's Mr. Soriano for you. Yeah.

LASKEY: Well--

SORIANO: Not accepting. Questioning. Yeah. Observing, questioning, questioning, questioning. And that's the only way innovations come. But then they used to make my life miserable. They used to go to the owner and say, "Why the hell do you want to [have] eight-foot doors for?" Yeah, no kidding. And the clients would--

LASKEY: The contractors would go--

SORIANO: Yes! They would go to--

LASKEY: --to the clients?

SORIANO: --the clients, yes. They said, you know, "You want to save money?" You know, "These eight-foot doors you have--" They used to blame [it] on the eight-foot doors. And I said, "Don't listen to them. They are liars." And I used to finally challenge them. And I said, "How dare you tell me that costs more. How much do you spend on top there? What are you figuring?" "Well, we take the whole job." (As I mentioned before.) I said, "No, you don't take the whole-- You figure every inch of it, don't you?" I want to find out how much it costs you to block this and plaster that. I want a precise answer to that." And they





used to give it to me. And finally they began to see.

"Well now, of course, we take [it] as a whole thing--

Again, they used to bring that to-- I said, "No, no. I'll

tell you what. Don't put any of that on top. All right?

Eliminate that since it costs you that much; I'll buy the

eight-foot doors, okay?" With a geminold, which have

prefabricated doors, fine. And that's what I did. And

that's how I start these things, always.

And besides, when I did the prefabrication with the cabinets made in the factory, I brought them together with the cabinets and the jambs together so it was all assembly method; there was no problem--no plaster. I didn't use plaster anymore anyway. Yeah.

LASKEY: When you went from the wood frame or, you know, from wood to your steel houses, you also went from ribbon windows--the smaller windows--to the whole glass walls.

But the other walls, were they plywood? When you stopped using plaster, what did you use for the fill when you went to your modular housing?

SORIANO: Well, there are lots of walls. For example, we use inch-and-an-eighth plywood.

LASKEY: Plywood.

SORIANO: Which is very good sound. Is almost as good as plaster walling in insulation and all that. Inch and an eighth thick.



LASKEY: Would the plywood actually be what the surface was? The exterior surface was plywood?

SORIANO: The plywood then we used-- We used good plywoods on the inside, and on the outside I used to put other-- another layer of plywood. Or I used to put a marine grade plywood of a different material, or I used to put in cork. That's what I did.

LASKEY: I know, the cork we'd talked about.

SORIANO: That's exactly what it was.

LASKEY: But, would plywood--? Would you then just paint it? Or how would you--?

SORIANO: No.

LASKEY: Because I think of plywood as being perishable.

SORIANO: No.

LASKEY: Or would warp, or would stain.

SORIANO: Depending [on] what you use, you see. There are many grades of plywood. There are a hundred grades of plywood. You have to choose the proper properties of the plywood. The marine grades of plywood which will stand any kind of salt water and then moisture. Then you finish them properly. On the inside I used to use beautiful woods laminated to the plywood, if I ordered it properly from the factory. Or we used to apply another quarter of an inch on top welded, again, with infrared light and epoxies. And then the one-and-an-eighth-inch plywood used to be like a



core, which was an excellent insulation. And that's the way I used to do it. And then the outside I could face-- I can put anything. I could put-- Either leave it alone by ordering marine grade or redwood or whatever I wanted on the outside, or use any other material applied to it as I did-- And so become like a sandwich wall which used to be about two inches, two and a half inches thick. Yeah. And instead of the so-called six inches thick of the plaster and two-by-fours and all that, which is silly, you save inches on the inside. Yeah.

LASKEY: How did you deal with the problem of Southern California heat with the glass--with the sliding glass windows or the large glass walls?

SORIANO: I didn't think I had any problem there because I don't think it was-- They were all very well insulated. Most of the heat flies [out] from the top, you see? You know, the average house supposedly that they tell you, with a hip roof, they say that insulates. That's a lot of nonsense. That becomes the hot box, especially [when] they put the shingles that are like that. That space in there becomes so hot, it transmits the heat downward.

Now, I'll tell you, the girl you met, Maureen, she has a house she had done by one of the so-called conservative architects, John Lloyd King, in Tiburon at the time; he's dead now. And he did all this woodsy stuff. And he has



the bedroom upstairs. She has a ceiling which is more than eight feet high. It's almost like fourteen feet high with a slanting roof going up to the sky, and he has one of those round bulbs hanging from the top there. You can-- Suppose the bulb burns [out]. You have to have a ladder to go and change that bulb and remove the fixture. I mean this is done. And you should see how hot the room gets. Yeah. And you hear all the rain falling on top of that, the shingles and all that's on top. Now, this is how cheaply done, even though they used to permit this kind of construction. And they used to think this, this is what sells, yeah. Unfortunately, this is the-- Most people never pay attention to these little details. Yeah. They go into all these abstract ideas of making it this, this will be cooler, but it isn't. It's worse. Yeah. And the ribbon glasses, the reason of the ribbon glass-- Do you know why?

LASKEY: No.

SORIANO: You study any room when you have a window in a dark space, [then] another window-- Like in a conservative thing you have windows with a space-- You see in the restaurant there, see? Window and a space, window and a space-- You go inside, you find that window becomes very glarey in contrast to the dark space. You have not a series-- Bup, bup, bup, bup, glarey, glarey, shots of the





window. By making only one ribbon, then you have one unified concept of soft light all the way through. Yeah. This is why we did all these ribbon windows: continuity of glass. That was the reason. Most people think it's just the style. It's nothing--

LASKEY: "It looks good."

SORIANO: Nothing to do with it. It looks good all right because it was all unified concept. One reposed, lovely window, instead of just shots of annoying things. Just like noises: enh! enh! enh! enh! Like that, see? Yeah. Instead of talking: aaaaaah. Yeah?

LASKEY: Okay.

SORIANO: That will describe it I think.

LASKEY: So when you went-- When you were able to eliminate the bearing walls, then you could go fully to glass or--

SORIANO: You can do anything you want with it.

LASKEY: Anything you wanted to.

SORIANO: I can put glass, I can put panels, I could put glass and panels, I can do anything I want in there. Free, freedom. But if you have your walls to support your ceiling, you can't do that. Mine: just little columns hold the whole thing. They're so designed to resist seismic stresses in any direction. Yeah.

LASKEY: I can't remember which house it was--I'm sorry; I think it may have been the Cook House--that used the



decking as part of the ceiling. And [I was] reading that you actually went in where the decking was laying on the joint, that you filled in the spaces with--

SORIANO: Plexiglas.

LASKEY: Plexiglas.

SORIANO: Yeah. I do that. Because it gives you a lovely quality to it. You get extra light, and it has a marvelous feeling. Yeah.

LASKEY: Well, that's attention to detail you've been talking about.

SORIANO: Absolutely. And you should see, not only that, but I can tell you many other details related to that Plexiglas in relationship to the corrugation to the building. Yeah. You know, normally, you will see-- Like in the Adolph's [Building] I did these things very beautifully. We used a lot of Plexiglas, transoms above the areas of the cabinets to the ceiling. Now, the Plexiglas that I used was very interesting. I used a joint--which I'll show you, I have a very interesting detail, sample of it. And then you say, "Well, now, how we going to put the [Plexiglas] to the surface of the decking? The Plexiglas to adhere that." (I'm going to change that [microphone] in a minute.) And then you'll see what I did there. (Now, I'm going to turn this because those people will make lot of noise outside, yeah. Let's



turn this-- Very simple.) So I used a very interesting device. See, you assume the Plexiglas was like that, you see, this size assuming, and then the-- This will go to the surface like that, but, you know, a metallic surface or any other surface, when you put one next to the other it is always-- There is not an even nor-- Might be a little wave, you see? Now, immediately, they-- When we did these details under my supervision, my own details of Plexiglas, then the men said, "Well, we can always put a putty." I said, "No putties in my building. No sir." "Well, how are we going to have the seal completely sealed for sound?" I said, "Well, use your brains. Do you know how? See what you can do." I challenge them. But I knew already what we do, you see. Well, they couldn't think of it; putty was the only thing. I said, "Look, why do you suppose I ordered these to have a half-round [piece] here. Do I? Half-round? Didn't you do that? Do you have that in fabrication, that you made a half-round?" "Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I thought we were going to fill that with putty." I said, "No. You put in a tube, a round tube of Plexiglas or Lucite or whatever. A tube, like a pipe." And I said, "Set it in there; half in there, half against the ceiling. That makes a perfect adhesion and it takes in all the different defects of corrugation and makes a perfect fit. And that seals the noise. Better than



putty; then [it] always be there." That's what we did. Yeah. "Yes. Yes, yes, yes, yes!" And it was beautiful, and it's still there. When you go there I'll show you in the building, you'll see. (All right, I'm going to change this. I'm being--) [tape recorder off]

LASKEY: With the Adolph's Building and the Plexi[glas] that we've been talking about, you could easily have put panels, you could have put boards--surfaces that you couldn't see through. Obviously you did it because you wanted the light. And I wonder--this is a very romantic kind of a question--but does it have anything to do with your background on Rhodes? The idea of the importance of light?

SORIANO: Nah. Not at all.

LASKEY: No?

SORIANO: Nothing to do with it. I don't think I identify with any-- At least not that I'm aware of. Maybe subconsciously I may, but I don't think so. I don't identify myself with this type of things. I feel I just design things logically to solve a problem at the time with the principles I'm working with.

LASKEY: But you could have solved that problem in--by simply closing off the light, too, which is what-- Well, most architects would have had a wall there, a floor-to-ceiling wall. But the idea that you chose not to put a





floor-to-ceiling wall, in fact that you didn't have a wall at all-- But the space, when you closed the space off for sound, you didn't close it off for light. I think that's an interesting choice.

SORIANO: Yes. I did, in some areas where we needed no light. I have a room there-- When you'll see it, it was completely black. Dark. And I did it with devices completely black. Yeah. Now, the things that I did mostly-- Most of these offices were working spaces for secretaries, executives, and so on. And even the president, as you will see, they are between patios with beautiful gardens; lovely, exquisite areas where you live. They are the most beautiful spaces imaginable for offices. And the secretaries love them. They all have a private garden, each one. And not only that, but they also have the privilege of shutting the music that is taped from the central music system-- We used to play nothing but classical music there when Mr. Deutch used to be alive. He loved only the classical music. But now, unfortunately, the people there play all this rock junk, sort of pseudo-emasculated type of music. The Muzak.

LASKEY: Oh.

SORIANO: Which is sad, you know. And I know Mr. Deutch would have jumped from the grave if he heard that. Because I designed a beautiful music area with tape recorders and



whatnot, record players and all that. Yeah. And it really hurts me when I see that--when I go there and they play that awful junk. But anyway, that's the-- They keep telling me something: "Well, that's the music--" this and that. But if they wanted they could do it, you see. I think the people who are running the show now don't want it. I know that for a fact.

And the fact that I did all this openness and above the transoms with the lights-- I have indirect lighting all the way through in the whole building; you don't see a single light fixture in there. Not one. No register for air-conditioning either. They're all com[ing] from a trough on top of the cabinets, on top of the doors. And it continues all over the whole building. It's one city block. This is an innovation I did, you see? I can't-- It's hard to explain all of that. And then when you go there, you'll see how beautiful that is. And that gives to the offices for the secretaries some lovely lightness and openness instead of being constricted with darkness. Then this way, we have economy also of light. You see. Now.



TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE ONE

JULY 20, 1985

LASKEY: The Colby Apartments were your last major commission in Los Angeles before you moved up here to Tiburon.

SORIANO: No, the--

LASKEY: I mean, you--

SORIANO: The Adolph's.

LASKEY: From Tiburon--

SORIANO: Oh, I see. I see.

LASKEY: --you would do the Adolph's Building--

SORIANO: Yeah, yeah.

LASKEY: But you're in Los Angeles, and then you moved up here. And--

SORIANO: No, we did the [San Pedro Community] Hospital [1961].

LASKEY: Oh, the hospital was after that?

SORIANO: Yes. Because I was here already when we did the hospital. Yeah. Sure. Si, Madame, this is true. Because the Colby was in '50; the hospital was a little later.

LASKEY: But did you do it in Los Angeles? Or did you work on it--

SORIANO: We worked on the plans here and we had other people working in different area--Los Angeles, you see. The rest of the project architects were in Los Angeles.



Yeah.

LASKEY: But the Colby Apartments were--

SORIANO: Were in Los Angeles, exclusively.

LASKEY: Were in Los Angeles.

SORIANO: That's correct. Correct.

LASKEY: Then you, after they were completed you came up here.

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: And you did your other work from up here.

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: And of course, the Adolph's Building you did from up here.

SORIANO: I did it from up here. Exclusively.

LASKEY: And the hospital, which I hadn't realized. But then your other work mainly was in the [San Francisco] Bay Area?

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: Were there any major changes in what you did, because the climate and the terrain and the--

SORIANO: Not necessarily, not necessarily, really.

LASKEY: --attitudes toward architecture are different.

SORIANO: This is-- People romanticize the Bay Area region['s] architecture, the Bay Area--all that nonsense. That's coined by critics and writers who know nothing. Ignorant. They gave all this aura-- The Bay Area, Bay





region architecture, the Bay Area whatever--or the International Style. These are all nonsense words. To me these are gimmick words by critics of--writers who know nothing. It's nice to have adjectives, titles-- So what do they represent? What is the Bay Area architecture? Nothing. [Richard J.] Neutra has done houses here. They're not different from the ones he did in Los Angeles. And I've done in design things in Hawaii which are similar to the ones I designed in other places, so they have different climate, yes. I have designed things for Guam and even for Alaska. I have projects which I never built. But then, unfortunately, due to circumstances--war and all that stuff--prevented from these projects from being realized. However, the adjustment to climatic conditions has to do with what you do with the insulation, with the glare and so on, orientation. A lot of factors to consider. It's all a matter of consideration of factors for a performance. A process of architecture for a particular performance. This is very important. Yeah. This is the way I worked. I don't romanticize because it is this, it is that, and therefore I want it that way. And you find many people who even build in the East, they have houses that look very much like the ones in San Francisco or Los Angeles. All this colonial housing; they're not different. Yeah. They are all awful. They are unlivable



to begin with, whether here or there. Only with there they have severe climates, they have to depend on more heat kind of fixture.

Now, I was in London, as I told you, last November lecturing there. And the chairman of the Royal Institute of British Architects-- He came to see me twenty years ago. He was in my office here in Tiburon. Was here. And he told me that he came for look of work for me. And now, he says I was responsible for that direction in architecture. Yeah. And you should see the modern house they built. They built a lovely pavilion of aluminum and glass. Where? Between two renaissance buildings.

LASKEY: In London?

SORIANO: Yes! In London, London, London! if you please. And you should see what they did. They even put a glass roof so they can look at the trees. Because London is always raining and gloomy and it becomes very-- You should see how charming their house is, and my-- I'll tell you their names: Robin Spence is his name.

LASKEY: Robin Webb Spence?

SORIANO: No, Robin Spence.

LASKEY: Robin Spence.

SORIANO: And also, he built that in partnership with the-- Also Robin Webster, but Robin Spence [is] the one who did that pavilion. And his wife Delia Spence was absolutely



charming. They're both very dear friends of mine and charming. Really. Gracious people.

And so they have this pavilion of glass and aluminum. And you should see the fixtures, you should see the connections; they use all the industrially produced things that they use even in trucks to build that house. Now people will say, "My god! In London, this?" My god, they can tell you that. Maybe tomorrow we'll give them a ring. Then you talk to them and see. Really, because I haven't spoken to him-- What time is it now? It will be eight hours again. Six, eight hours. It's exactly midnight there. Yeah. I don't know if I should wake him up now. And they're absolutely beautiful people. They can tell you themselves how marvelous the houses are. How this architecture's beautiful-- And I saw also there are groups of architects. A husband and wife do, also, the same type of things that I do.

LASKEY: How do you insulate a glass house in a climate like London?

SORIANO: They can use two glasses, double glaze. Or triple sometimes.

LASKEY: Oh.

SORIANO: You can do anything you want. We have to use our brains and science, isn't it? We have it. Yeah. There are all kinds of glasses which are reflective. Yeah. And



you insulate the up. Even you can put two layers of glass. That will insulate. There's no problem at all. How do you suppose they insulate a little--the airplanes? Here you [have] again a skin of aluminum, isn't it?

LASKEY: Yes.

SORIANO: And yet you ride in comfort--you go forty thousand feet, which is below zero. Yeah. Have you flown to Hawaii?

LASKEY: No, I never have.

SORIANO: Well, you-- Hawaii is, you know, hot, humid, and lovely, balmy. And then all of a sudden you take the plane, in a few minutes you're about forty thousand feet up in the air which is minus forty degrees or something; cold! And yet you're very comfortable there. Sitting on the plane eating a marvelous dinner or lunch, whatever they serve you. Not marvelous so much in cuisine. [laughter] But anyway, you eat. So they give you all the food and then you have music. You can-- Even especially if you use the French airlines --UTA I think it is, yeah--they have a beautiful Bach or Scarlatti or Vivaldi. Yeah, they have these beautiful choices of music that you can listen on the earphone. They play it constantly. Beautiful thing. Absolutely enjoyable. Then you are comfortable even better than the slum I am in here. Yeah.

LASKEY: But that's essentially an artificially created





environment on an airplane. This is--

SORIANO: So what?

LASKEY: Well, I'm just thinking in terms of a house that--

SORIANO: We are creating it-- It's not an artificially created environment, too? A house? Because the environment is outside when there is nothing. When you enclose something, you build something that's-- You're doing it artificially, isn't it? Call it that if you want to.

LASKEY: I don't think I'm saying what I mean to say. I'll try again: that with a house, unless you want to constantly have an air-conditioning system or heating system, which is what I think you're--

SORIANO: Well, don't you? Don't you?

LASKEY: No, not in Southern California.

SORIANO: Well, I know; Southern California. But in the East? Ha, ha!

LASKEY: No, in the summer we never had an air con-- Where I grew up we never had an air conditioner.

SORIANO: Where? Where?

LASKEY: Grand Rapids, Michigan. It got pretty humid, but--

SORIANO: But humid-- What do you do with the humidity?

LASKEY: You sweat a lot.

SORIANO: You like to be comfortable. Sweat a lot, yeah. How about in the winter?



LASKEY: Heat.

SORIANO: What kind of heat?

LASKEY: Well, we had artificial--

SORIANO: Stuff is artificial, isn't it?

LASKEY: Yeah, right.

SORIANO: Yeah, it's not natural any more than will be in Southern California--

LASKEY: But that's what I'm saying, that, in particular, would you design houses differently? Would the climate dictate the design of the house?

SORIANO: It does.

LASKEY: Or could you take the same design and put it in any climate?

SORIANO: You could, as a matter of fact, by adjusting the elements, whatever you want. In other words, I said before, it's all a matter of adjusting it to a process of performance. You do something for a particular performance, meaning if you have to use a name, in a climate which is very severe, you have to use insulation, naturally. You find condensation of the atmosphere [on] the glasses. You see, there will be hot inside and cold outside; there [is] a lot of freezing and condensation will occur. So you make provisions for that. Scientifically you can do it. This is what I mentioned, that the satellites and planes we have. Because they have taken



care scientifically to regulate that, to be comfortable. You do the same thing with the houses, which is, again, artificial, isn't it? Yeah, it is artificially done.

LASKEY: But it's somewhat less artificial.

SORIANO: No, it's not--

LASKEY: I mean, unless, unless you want it to be-- Unless it's going to be horrendously expensive to run, I think that--

SORIANO: No, it--

LASKEY: --you have to have, you know, a--

SORIANO: Now, this is true, this is true. However, we are talking about now in sort of climates which are not too extreme. If you're talking about San Francisco and Los Angeles, naturally, you have to use not the expensive air-conditioning system that we use in the East--even the heating systems that we use in the East. You will require a tremendous amount [of] humidifier and heat, otherwise you'll suffocate with the heat in the winter. I've been-- I was in the East. I lived there. Even in Saint Louis, where it gets absolutely humid and cold-- Well, the climate is very severe in that area. And I lived in New Haven, Connecticut, when I was lecturing at Yale [University], and some of the places in New York, yes. To me that was very stifling. I couldn't bear even to be constantly there in this below zero outside. And inside, you know, has to be



hot and protective, but it gets very oppressive to the system. Well, you have to have very fine air-conditioning, or you have the regular hot systems, just furnaces that blow hot air.

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: Well, that means there [is] plenty of expense again. Money. Money dictates what kind of a system you want to have. But it's still-- It's all artificial, isn't it, still? Yeah, you heat it artificially.

LASKEY: Well, if you heat it or cool it it's already--

SORIANO: That's correct. It's all artificial made. It isn't natural. In other words, in Hawaii--I'll give you an example--when I designed my houses, they all--because of the tourists, because of all this--they all want to have air-conditioning systems. Which is horrible. I'll tell you why: there's the most mild climate in Hawaii with the winds, the trade winds, and it's balmy. Yeah. Now, the tragedy is, all of a sudden, you put an air-conditioning system; it's freezing, it's cold. It's cool all right, but you go outside [and] it's the biggest shock in the world--the difference in temperature, you see? Now, I told my clients-- They want to have air-conditioning. I said, "Why don't you wait? I'll make this so you'll have cross ventilation," because I had transoms with screen-- You know the transoms above?





LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: I had screens. So you can have cross ventilation from both areas, across. And it will remove the heat--the hot air--away, and then the breeze makes it very comfortable to be in without any air-conditioning. And I proved to my client that this was so, and he couldn't believe it. He was going to spend money air-conditioning. "You can always put units," I said. You can always do that. So he realized that you didn't need it really. Now, if you are spoiled, you think you have to have air-conditioning system. That's what all the hotels do, because the clients coming from the east or other places are used to air-conditioning. You go to any hotel nowadays-- Even in Los Angeles they have air-conditioning, isn't it?

LASKEY: Well, in the--

SORIANO: Sure they do.

LASKEY: In covered malls.

SORIANO: What's that?

LASKEY: Shopping malls.

SORIANO: Yeah. What's that?

LASKEY: Shopping centers--

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: --that are covered.

SORIANO: Oh, in covered malls.



LASKEY: In a place like Los Angeles.

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: Which is so silly.

SORIANO: Well, you know why: because they have the smog, and they have to make-- Well, to you it isn't, but most people, they think it's awful to look at the smog. It's hideous, really. And then they make it comfortable for you, for the clients to be there more comfortable and cool so they can shop. It's all money making. Yeah. Because, you see, Los Angeles-- Because I lived there since 1924, I know the climate of Los Angeles too well. Used to be marvelous before the war. With the advent of the war, it became smoggy as that. Otherwise it was blue sky, warm, very clement weather, beautiful. Orange blossoms, avocado trees. As I told you before, it is not anymore the same way. Well--

LASKEY: We talked, and I don't think we talked on the tape-- I think we were talking at lunch yesterday about what it was like to have been part of the architectural scene in Los Angeles in the thirties.

SORIANO: What it was like?

LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: In what respect?

LASKEY: For you. Because there was so much going on. The whole--



SORIANO: It was an exciting area because they used-- There was a group of human beings there that used to seek-- They wanted this so-called new type of architecture because they realized they were more livable, they were more gracious, more open. With patios they've the ability [of having] privacy--which, before, the houses were never given this consideration. They were given a sort of a style, a Spanish-- Mostly [they] were designed in Spanish style, with all this silly plaster, devised by a contractor to make it rough so as not to be careful. Yeah, that's the reason. All this "jazzed up" plaster they used to call it. Yeah. And the reason they did that [was] just so as not to be very precise, very methodically well-structured stuff. "Any old way, just knock it off." Like that, rough-- They call it "jazzed up." Yeah. It's a nice connotation for the jazz we were talking [about] before, isn't it?

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: "All this jazz"?

LASKEY: All that jazz.

SORIANO: That gives you a nice clue. Yeah. So-- I don't know, I don't know what to tell you. What were you, what did we discuss. I forgot, sort of.

LASKEY: We were talking, just talking about what being an architect in Los Angeles in--well, from the twenties to the



forties. You were there in the thirties and forties.

SORIANO: Yeah. It was very lovely because we have enough clients--used to come to a few of us who were really following this marvelous movement of architecture, which [was] started by Mr. Neutra, really. He should deserve the first credit.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: I think so.

LASKEY: What about [Frank Lloyd] Wright in that sense? It was Wright that Neutra and [Rudolph M.] Schindler came over to see to, you know. They took his ideas and then followed him out here.

SORIANO: Well, I don't think they took his ideas, but they thought--

LASKEY: Well, they liked his ideas, they were impressed with the--

SORIANO: At the time, yeah, at the time they were impressed. In fact, Neutra saw [Louis] Sullivan--

LASKEY: That's true.

SORIANO: --at the time when he was sick and poor. He was shocked to see him, the great Sullivan, to be absolutely destitute and ill at the same time. And I was laughing at that myself. [laughs] Yeah, that's really tragic, isn't it? Pathetic, when you think of it. But--

LASKEY: Well, Wright, too--





SORIANO: Well, yes--

LASKEY: --paid homage to Sullivan in his declining days.

SORIANO: Yes, sure. But this is the tragedy, you know, instead of-- At least I have a little comfort that, in their last years, you know, they're harassed with all these deprivations and struggle of bare necessities of life.

LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: Yeah. This is what I'm going through right now, huh? Same thing. But anyway, still I have the good health and good spirits.

LASKEY: Yeah. Sullivan had a lot [of] other problems.

SORIANO: Sure. Such as-- I don't even know.

LASKEY: He was an alcoholic.

SORIANO: Oh, he was? Well, I don't have that.

LASKEY: He was sick and he--

SORIANO: I'm fortunate; I don't have that. Only I've had this broken leg from the accident, which bothers me.

[laughs] This I can bear it. Anyway, I've been living with it for so many years now. Almost a half-century.

Yeah. But no, Neutra deserves the greatest credit, really, because he was an admirable man. He did the first-- He awakened the public, I think, to housing, to the attention, for the first time, to housing. Before that, you know, most of the architects were involved with big buildings, cathedrals, and all this stuff. And housing was



neglected. Look at the Acropolis. Look at Rome. The only thing that we talk about Rome or Acropolis is those big temples, the big cathedrals. The public? All the slums. That's what they were. They're all one on top of another. And they romanticize about how marvelous the roof tiles look, and that's what they tried to imitate here. Yeah. With all this roofing, roofing-- You know, you go to the airport, you'll see those roofs looking you in the face. Thousands of these--thousands--done by a builder. Roofs, roofs, roofs, that's all they show you, the roofs. And, well, that's what you have here right in Tiburon. Look at those outside. Nothing but roofs. In all kinds of sculptural quality, you see? It is to me incomprehensible that nonsense.

And I was going to tell you some more-- What was it I just--?

LASKEY: We were talking about Neutra.

SORIANO: Neutra, yes.

LASKEY: His contributions.

SORIANO: Yes, it was really-- He started that, quality of housing, and unfortunately most architects don't give him credit for that. And it's sad. Really it is sad. More than anybody, he was the one who tried to bring real scientific thinking, a little more orderliness, to the housing; nobody else did that before.



I'll tell you an interesting story. I was at the-- I was in a debate with Skidmore-Owings. I think Owings, or Merrill-- I forgot now who it was [Skidmore, Owings and Merrill]; I have it on a newspaper. And Dorothy-- Who was it? She was the editor of *Architectural Record*. Thompson.  
LASKEY: Oh.

SORIANO: Dorothy Thompson. Do you know of her? Well, she was the editor of *Architectural Record*, [published by] McGraw Hill.

LASKEY: The name is familiar.

SORIANO: And I remember-- I was in the debate with them. And there were [William W.] Wurster, and there were some other architects who were teaching at Cal [University of California, Berkeley], and so on--They were talking. Who produced real innovations in housing? They immediately all jumped. There was this debate was right here in Northern California, San Francisco. They said, "Well, Wurster, of course; Wurster."

LASKEY: William Wurster?

SORIANO: Yeah, William Wurster. They kept eulogizing him.

LASKEY: What did he do?

SORIANO: Nothing! Nothing in housing that meant anything. Zero. You can quote me. And you are anyway--

LASKEY: I am quoting you. [laughs]

SORIANO: Yeah. And for reasons of reality. The only



thing is, he got this big publicity as a real politician. And he'd married that girl who wrote about housing or slums or whatever it was; I forgot his wife's name.

And so I let them talk-- They were talking, talking, talking, talking about Wurster: how Wurster did that, how Wurster did that. And then there was silence, that's it. And then I said finally, "Well, aren't we forgetting somebody? Someone?" Then they looked at me as if something strange had descended from the sky to question them. And then I said, "Yes." I said, "What's the matter with Mr. Neutra?" They said, "Oh, yes, yes. Shall we say--" Then immediately they picked up this stuff-- "Shall we say for Northern California, Wurster; for Southern California, Neutra?" I said, "No, no, no." I said, "Neutra did the only really contributions to housing; not Wurster." And I gave-- I give my spiel why, and so on. But, you see, this is the tragedy of all these romantic sort of playing politics, personal politics, politicizing statements, you see? And then they were entirely eliminating. And I said, "Mr. Neutra has done that more than anybody else. Wurster, what has he done?" Done all the same old little shacks all over the place. I said, "Is that a contribution to housing?" And of course they could not answer that one because they knew damn well that they were just talking not with knowledge.





I think I'll show you something. I think I may have something here-- What they did build in the USA. You have that one?

LASKEY: No, I don't have that one.

SORIANO: Well, this was published years ago. They have my nursery there and I'll show you what Wurster did. Then you will know what I'm talking about. [looks through book]  
You see, I have my nurseries here. Look at that.

LASKEY: That's beautiful.

SORIANO: See, look at all these pictures. Have you seen that?

LASKEY: Yes, I've seen several pictures--

SORIANO: Okay now, I'll show you. Now, [Pietro] Belluschi. Look what Belluschi used to do. Look at that wood. Look, this is completely unadmirable.

LASKEY: May I see that?

SORIANO: Yeah, yeah. Shopping center. But anyway, I just want to get to Wurster. And this is Mr. Wurster, the type of thing, office building. What is that, what is admirable about this nonsense? Any builder would do that.

LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: Nothing. There is Wurster, [Theodore C.] Bernardi, and [Donn] Emmons, okay. Now, I'll show you something else about Wurster with another thing--but the bicentennial brochure. Have you ever seen that



bicentennial brochure?

LASKEY: I don't think so.

SORIANO: Okay, well, now I am going to stop here for a minute until I find it.

LASKEY: Okay. [tape recorder off]

SORIANO: If I told you about the innovations in housing you can see for yourself any builder could do this kind of junk. So what is good about this? What is this innovation? Nothing. Yeah. These are all plain, with gimmickries, in reality, because of wood. There is not really a real contribution there. And yet you look at this, and you look at the houses of Neutra-- Here, I just opened it; look at how beautiful that is. He has quality.

LASKEY: I've been in that house.

SORIANO: Yeah, that's a beautiful house.

LASKEY: I think it's the Kaufman House.

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: Were you around, let's see, '29--?

SORIANO: Yeah, I was around--

LASKEY: Were you around when they were building the Lovell House?

SORIANO: Yes, I just came in--

LASKEY: Were you aware of--?

SORIANO: I was not aware of that one, no. This was, as a matter of fact-- I hardly-- At the time, I went afterwards,



I went to-- That was later that I saw-- I met Neutra when I heard a lecture with-- You see, that was five years after I came to America.

LASKEY: Yeah, it was awfully soon after you were here. I didn't know if you would have been aware of it or not--

SORIANO: No, I wasn't aware even of who Neutra was, or Frank Lloyd Wright. Yeah. You see how time marches on. But he made innovations in architecture, in housing particularly. He had a system of prefabrication of industrially produced things. And Wurster did nothing of the sort. And contrary to what they say-- And then I'll show you something else. Do you remember that I talked to you about the KQED station that I lost?

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: Okay. Now, they asked this guy, Johannson, to collaborate with this fellow. Look at the type of junk Johannson did. That is what he did. This was--

LASKEY: Well, that looks very much like Lewis Kahn--

SORIANO: Well, I know, the same as from the East--

LASKEY: The prefab-- The reinforced concete, bunker type--

SORIANO: Yeah, all these things, all this artificial nonsense.

LASKEY: I call it neo-feudalism.

SORIANO: Well, this is exactly a good name for it; you can call it that. I'm glad you did. [laughs] Well, this is



the type of individual they required. They associate themselves to do this, which is silly. And then look at [Robert] Venturi, all this nonsense. So big deal, they are really satisfied with their own just junk. So what? Look at this, Leeb House, with all this artificialities, again. They are playing with gimmickry again; those are not serious people.

LASKEY: Well, it's a game; it's game playing--

SORIANO: Of course.

LASKEY: It's neoclassical--

SORIANO: It's trivia, it's trivia game playing.

LASKEY: Taking, taking--

SORIANO: Look at Charles Moore. Any builder would do that, better. You should see what he did. This is C Ranch.

LASKEY: C Ranch, ah-hah.

SORIANO: And I've seen houses done by Swedish builders, all dollhouses, they did almost one hundred and some years. They were there in some area close by, because I developed a big acreage there, in the area of C Ranch, in that area. And, this is better than this, a thousand times, instead of this. And so they make a big to-do about this guy, who hasn't understood that he is playing a game with these trivia games. Yeah. So, big deal.

LASKEY: Architectural references.





SORIANO: This is the greatest man that I admire, one of the greatest, with Neutra.

LASKEY: Buckminster--

SORIANO: [R.] Buckminster Fuller, those are my two-- And [Pierluigi] Nervi, of course, I admire very much, [Ludwig] Mies van der Rohe. Yeah. Look how beautiful these are.

LASKEY: Oh, those are beautiful.

SORIANO: Yeah, of course. And this is the nursery now, which I'll show you, the Hallawell Seed [Company]. Look how beautiful that is.

LASKEY: Ah, there it is.

SORIANO: You see. In color, in the real-- Actually, this is so much more beautiful. This is a beautiful blue, blue, blue, blue, and this is a Chinese red, and this is a sort of a fuchsia color, the trusses. And this was painted also fuchsia color. The wood that I used, of the old wood stuff that they had--

LASKEY: That really is beautiful--

SORIANO: I am going to close the door because these people are going to make a lot of noise there. They are coming from the island now and they will make a lot of noise.

Okay, Marlene. Isn't that a nice magazine?

LASKEY: It really is--

SORIANO: Now, I'll show you something interesting, too.

"It is my great pleasure to thank you for the wisdom, the



charm, and the clarity of vision you have graced us with during your visit. And, your allusions to music were in a most beautiful and lucid manner of exhibiting the process of creativity." Isn't that interesting? These are the type of things--some students--I forgot now-- "Your delightful lectures, your graciousness and wit, your vivacity and inspiration to me, for these things . . . and the reference to Romain Rolland"--which I told you--

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: You see, he knew that. "My Sincerest Affection, [inaudible], I believe, [inaudible]." Is that the name? I don't know.

LASKEY: I can't quite read that.

SORIANO: No, neither do I. Yeah, a lot of things I had. I want to show you something very interesting. I've had-- I gave a--here--I gave this at the school. Remember I told you the new school of architecture in Chula Vista?

LASKEY: Right. That you were not very happy with.

SORIANO: No. Just look at the sign the professor did about my lecture, the advertising. Can you imagine the banality, the lack of any understanding even of calligraphy? What do you think of that?

LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: What, yeah what? Well, say it. Are you ashamed to say it?



LASKEY: It's pretty bad.

SORIANO: All right, good, I'm glad. And look, a day later, I gave a lecture in Chula Vista-- [knocking on door] Come in, come in, come in! I am being interviewed--

Can you imagine--? Anyway, I'm glad I recorded this. He doesn't know I have my attorneys. And this is what they did in the Chula Vista university. They did this sign. Now, can you imagine, this is a second-year student; a girl did that. Look at the difference. This is a professor did that. Can you imagine a thing like that? A second-year student, a girl? And this is a professor teaching at this Chula Vista university. This is in Mexico. Now, you just name it. How do you like that?

LASKEY: It's a little depressing.

SORIANO: It is. It is depressing to see what we are teaching in our schools. And this is what annoys me. And then I have to put up with this landlord of mine, he just came in to interrupt-- These kind of brutes, horrible human being. Can you imagine that? No finesse even. As if the world is coming to an end. And look at this letter I received from-- I want to stop this. It doesn't matter, I don't want to--

LASKEY: It says, "Greetings, Mr. Soriano, embellisher of life. You came to our college and in only one week's time augmented my knowledge of art more than it was in my



previous eighteen years of life. I now know to communicate art is not the way. Your debate with David Lawrence, the head of the art department, proved this point beyond any doubt. The artist explained his creation. You proved it insignificant. Your enthusiastic outlook on life and the sharing of your knowledge will never be forgotten by me or any of the undersigned." And it's signed, George Asch, and then a whole list of signs.

SORIANO: Isn't that interesting?

LASKEY: Now, where was this?

SORIANO: This was in San Bernardino, somewheres out there--

LASKEY: Oh, really?

SORIANO: Yeah, in the Valley college [San Bernardino Valley College of Law-University of La Verne]. I mean, this is the type of-- These are only a few of the letters I get from the people. I have hundreds of these letters like that, and it really touches me because the students are extremely intelligent. And you see the other thing I read to you--

LASKEY: Right--

SORIANO: It's really, to me, it's touching, absolutely touching to see what exists, and how-- The whole thing has been denigrated into all these banalities of people.

Yeah. Anyway-- So now you saw already my Hallawell [Nursery and Garden Center] you saw what Wurster did, you





saw a few documents which very seldom you find any place. Even in a library you won't find these, because this was given by the U.S. government for foreign consumption only. This is not for distribution in the United States; they don't do that. This is to propagandize our modern architecture in foreign countries. You get that in foreign consuls, but not in the United States.

LASKEY: That's a beautiful publication.

SORIANO: Yeah. Isn't that something? Yeah. And here you see what I have. What I have done, how I am appreciated, even by our own beautiful government. Our own country. And here I am totally effaced. I haven't done anything for the last fifteen years. I haven't built one single thing. Maybe I will do something. Today you have heard Mr. [Leo G.] Rigler. He wants to build a house. I hope so, because it has been going on for a long time. Yeah, that's the tragedy.

LASKEY: Well, what's the possibility of building more of your aluminum houses?

SORIANO: I've been trying. You don't know how many hundreds of brochures I've sent all over. I have even sent to the King [Faisal] of Saudi Arabia, we had correspondence with. [laughs]

LASKEY: Let's see if I can-- Let's see. I had-- Yeah.

SORIANO: Correspondence, correspondence, correspondence.



Ah-ya-ya-ya. His Majesty, King Faisal, [inaudible], Saudi Arabia. And this was '74, look at this. Now, totally describing my aluminum concepts of all these houses, they want that. I have letters from Iran, from the Shah of Iran-- I was going to do things in there and in a lot of other places. And also in the Punch Bowl in Hawaii, many places. But it is always they want money from the United States; they want capital from the U.S. Now, and if you don't have money from here, they just don't have it enough. They want always to be subsidized by us-- And I talk to people: I call here, I call there. Nobody wants to invest in all these--a turkey. I could have the whole damn turkey--housing, big buildings. They wanted funding from the United States. Big corporations, bankers, they don't want to spend anything there. They're scared. You see, this is-- I've had all these beautiful contacts, even from Finland; I can show you tons of correspondence. So what can I do? I've tried my very best, I can assure you. There's nothing I can do beyond that. Yeah. And it's really-- Sometimes I wonder-- Maybe when I die, then possibly my efforts will be--will come into fruition, you see. But in the meantime I have to put up with this thing you just heard, with my landlord. He is telling me, don't forget the-- As if the world's coming to an end. Well, anyway-- Yeah.



LASKEY: What's that? You have been evicted from this place?

SORIANO: Yeah, he gave me, he sent me a notice of eviction, a thirty-day notice. After thirty years of living here. It's insulting. Don't worry, I'll, I'll-- My attorneys will--

LASKEY: But what can they do?

SORIANO: The attorneys? Well, I mean, there could be certain tactics to use, to prevent him-- Because I told him, I said, "I'm looking for a place, and I'll be--" And I told him already, "I need at least until the end of August, because I cannot just simply leave--" And he gives me thirty days' notice. Ridiculous! It takes me that long to pack up. I've been telling him already that I've been looking for a place. The prices are so high, I can't afford to. I said, "Please, have a heart." I mean, what is this? The world is coming to an end? Is he starving to death? And, I mean, this is really-- It hurts, you know, this type of victimization that I have been put into, from a moron like that. And no finesse, you know. It's even "Okay, I'll talk to you for five minutes." I mean, even if you tell him, you know, "I am busy," you know-- No, he wants to, he thinks that is all there is to it in life, his own big nonsense. Don't worry, he'll have his just desserts.



LASKEY: Oh, yes, ultimate justice.

SORIANO: But in the final analysis, I am a victim in this case. Because--

LASKEY: You are definitely a victim.

SORIANO: I don't know where the hell to go. Because if I had money, there would be nothing to it. You know what I would do? I would say, "To hell with you, I'll move. I will hire something, a thousand dollars a month, an apartment, and move everything there. Okay, no problem." But I haven't got that kind of money to give. I don't even make it. And between us, all I get is \$317 Social Security. You know what that is?

LASKEY: Nothing.

SORIANO: It doesn't even pay my rent. I have to borrow money to pay my rent. And because Leo gives me some, and a few lectures I give here and there which Leo subsidizes, and sometimes my friend Desmond Muirhead, that I can make my two ends meet but from month to month. Beyond that, what is there? Nothing. And it's really tragic and serious, frankly. That's why I get so damn fed up with all those bums. Piece of garbage-- He has never done anything in his life-- At least I have done something.

LASKEY: Was it his father who owned the property when you started, when you first moved in?

SORIANO: No, no, no. He was-- He had it already.





LASKEY: Oh, he had it. He's had it for thirty-three years?

SORIANO: Oh, yes, yes--

LASKEY: For thirty-three years that you've lived here--

SORIANO: Oh, he was glad to have me as a tenant, \$85 a month it started out. He raised it to \$350, in this slum of mine. He has never done anything-- Look at this. It leaks. You should see over there, I have buckets behind that wall. Back where those panels are, underneath there. And it ruined many diplomas and books of mine from the beginning. Thirty years he has never fixed it. He goes there, and he puts a little paint here and there, and I tell him, look, the seal on top of the door above is where the leaks go to. Oh, no, he knows better. He has one of those little cheap guys from school. Gives him a pittance to put a little paint where he says. And he really is a very ignorant, miserable character. Aaahh--

LASKEY: But you will probably have to come back to Southern California then?

SORIANO: Oh, yes, I definitely am trying to. I am looking for a place in San Bernardino. I saw this friend, Professor David Hatfield from San Bernardino, and he is looking for a place for me. Maybe I can teach there. And then this David Hatfield is this director of this school of San Bernardino [Valley] College. He is a good friend of



mine, a lovely person. He says, "Don't worry, I'll come in with four, five students and we'll pack everything up and take you." And so he is looking for a place for me.

LASKEY: Yes, it's going to be an enormous job.

SORIANO: That's right.

LASKEY: To pack this all up--

SORIANO: But that's all right. That's okay. I have been cleaning things up and I've been throwing out a lot of junk, yes. And, it, it's just-- It's an annoying thing because I've been trying to-- He keeps disturbing me like that, every few months he's been like that. Raising the rent, this and that, doing everything he can to disturb me. Takes my pots, you know, throws them in there, which is so awful. But anyway, it doesn't matter. I'll leave here, so it'll be better off [inaudible]. I can't even want to see him. I close the door every time he's out there.

LASKEY: I can understand that.

SORIANO: Because it's an annoying mess.

LASKEY: It's very sad.

SORIANO: Yeah. What can I do? Nothing. You know, I hope Lloyd-- I've been telling Lloyd long time ago, I said-- He has several lots. He has a whole hillside in Hollywood where he wanted to build a house. And then he has several lots, seven, below that, below the hill, belonging to



him. I said, "Why don't you give me one? I'll build a house. It'll be yours anyway. And I'll bring my stuff--" "Yes, and no-- Oh, I don't want to be bothered to have a dear friend next to me. I'll be worrying; I don't want to worry." I said, "Okay." I said, "Don't worry about this."

Now he suddenly seems mellowing up a little bit, and then he has been doing the same thing with the house. His partner died, and then he told me, "I wish I had let Larry build this house." It was a beautiful thing. It would have been finished by now, and less expensive, and beautiful. But now this young guy says, "Well, when I die I'll leave it to Stephen." Okay. Well, Stephen wants wood, all this-- Tell me, what kind of a thing-- You know, like an old housewife that needs this. She wants to tell you, "I want a Spanish house." You know, that kind of a thing that I have to put up with. A young punk. I tried to reason with him. I said, "Look, I'll give you a beautiful house. You want woods, you don't want metals, you don't have to." I said, "All I do in the metals is just the structure. Because it's much more tenable, it's earthquake proof, better for you. You will stand, and then I will give you all the woods so you will see wood. And even I can anodize the aluminum-- You wouldn't even know that it's aluminum." Yeah. Hmm.



LASKEY: Has his friend ever seen your work?

SORIANO: Oh, sure. Well, Lloyd has a building--

LASKEY: That's right, the Adolph's Building--

SORIANO: Even Lloyd said, "My god, this is such a beautiful place," I'm working. "This could be a beautiful house." I said, "Well, yes." I said, "Can't you reason with him?" I said, "You're the boss anyway; this is yours. Why don't you step on it and do it?" I don't know. Hmm--





TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE TWO

JULY 21, 1985

LASKEY: I think we will start today by discussing, talking about your life after you left Southern California in 1953 to come to Tiburon.

SORIANO: Well, it was a very moving and exciting activity. I was very active, actually, even though I moved here. And naturally, in this case, I have already--I was married. Of course I married in Los Angeles-- And I had already made a family already with three kids, two daughters and a son, from my ex-wife.

LASKEY: How old were they?

SORIANO: Oh, they were, I think, little tots. One was about four years and the other one six, and another one was eight, nine.

LASKEY: And your wife was a photographer. Isn't that correct?

SORIANO: No, she wasn't. She was a girl from so-called a "good family" from Los Angeles, a socialite apparently. Her grandfather was a judge, and her father was an attorney, and so on. And she was very nice, very sensitive, intelligent girl in many ways. She was a lovely person. But then money meant a lot to her, apparently. And you discover a lot of things when you get married, when you don't discover before, you know. She had a drinking



problem afterwards that I discovered, which I didn't even know it, you see, that sort of thing. So I put up with seven and a half years of that. Then after that I said, "Halt," and I divorced her. And then she was vindictive, you see, because I was so sick in marriage. And then she got married twice again after me.

LASKEY: Twice after you?

SORIANO: Yes. And divorced. She was a very disturbed girl, apparently, with all this. And her background was very unmovable, apparently. Well, it doesn't matter. I don't want to talk to you about her. But the fact is that I moved here; I was very, very busy. I got the Adolph's job right away, which I did. And it was a very pleasant area. In those days Tiburon was nothing, just a little-- The terminus of Northwestern Pacific Railroad, that is all it was. Just the air--a little village. This was not even a town, or anything.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Yes. Nothing. There were Black Angus cows grazing on the hills.

LASKEY: How did you select Tiburon? Why not San Francisco?

SORIANO: Well, I love this area, this country was beautiful, and the bay looking-- In fact I looked at Sausalito-- It was lovely to look at the bay's very



beautiful vista, the grounds. And San Francisco was already a city, a crowded city, which I don't like. I like to be in a place with--a beautiful place, with gardens, and this appeals to me. Because I love gardening, and I love to grow things. And so this was my life. So I decided-- So immediately I got here to Tiburon-- Because I have seen this before, Marin County was very lovely. And so I bought a house in Tiburon with the property, with one of the parcels, where we lived right away. And then I bought property, the acres of land that I had, which my ex-wife took everything.

LASKEY: Now, this was on the hills?

SORIANO: Right--

LASKEY: Overlooking--

SORIANO: Overlooking the whole bay. The whole bay, overlooking Angel Island, from--overlooking from Berkeley, Richmond, to the Golden Gate Bridge. I have all that view in front of me.

LASKEY: It must have been beautiful.

SORIANO: It was exquisite, yes. It was one of the most choicest pieces of land. In fact, even the land was not even subdivided, the acres I got. Yeah. That is how you could have choices then, at the time, you see. I was not unwise. I was very wise. I knew what I was going to do, which I planned to develop this. And I could have had--



with the parcel where I had the house--could have been developed into units. Which I would have been safe today, receiving an income, and have my own studio there, overlooking this lovely bay. But unfortunately it just didn't work out. So anyway, then I got very active, and I did--I was busy planning and possibilities of a lot of work coming, you see. And then I did the job in Hawaii while I was here. And I had this proposal for Alcatraz, also from here, after that.

LASKEY: You might want to talk about that proposal for Alcatraz, because it was extremely interesting.

SORIANO: It was very nice. Before that I think I told you that [A.] Cal Rossi-- I think we recorded that in my other tapes.

LASKEY: No, we didn't record it so you may want to talk about it.

SORIANO: Didn't I? Really?

LASKEY: No, we talked about it at lunch, so it's not on the tape itself.

SORIANO: Oh, I see. Well, that hundred-story building that I had--all aluminum--was going to be offices and apartments for executives. Very elegant. Type of thing for rich executives. And that was going to be right across from the Fairmont Hotel in a lot, where the Stanford Court is now.





LASKEY: Right on Nob Hill.

SORIANO: Yes. And I think Allen Temko recommended me for that job. And Allen Temko is very gracious, very charming friend. And with his wife Becky; they were both very wonderful friends. They were the ones who convinced Mr. Rossi, who owned the property, the Stanford Court, to get me to do something creative, and I did that. And as I told you the story with the Alcoa. I was going to-- I designed this completely of aluminum.

LASKEY: That story about Alcoa is not on the tapes so you might want to tell it now.

SORIANO: Okay. Well, yes. I immediately saw-- You know, since I'd been interested in metals and aluminum. And I called Fritz Close, the chairman of the board of Alcoa at the time, who I met at the Boca Raton conference, creative conference of aluminum. Well, Alcoa, you know, had-- I think we discussed it previously.

LASKEY: We did discuss that. We discussed the conference--

SORIANO: Yeah, well, okay. Well, because of that I met Fritz Close, and therefore I decided to call him. He was in Pittsburgh, and I said I have a project that I think you will be interested in, Alcoa will be interested to participate. It's a very beautiful, hundred stories, and so on. And he said, "Oh, wonderful, can you fly up?" And I did fly up with my client. And we met over there, in



Pittsburgh, and I showed-- I had, oh, about, almost twenty, thirty chromostats of the project which I had the preliminary schemes done. All beautifully presented in color with details. And then at the executive luncheon we had a big huge table and a blackboard, and I put all these drawings, the chromostats, there. And Alcoa, Fritz Close, came in and hugged me and said, "Oh, it's a beautiful project." And so I even scolded him. I said, "Why didn't you do an aluminum building of aluminum for Alcoa in San Francisco instead of that stupid crosses with steel that Skidmore and Merrill made?" He says, "Well, you know how those damn architects are." And I said, "Well, it's up to you people to request that." And I said, "It's shameful to have--Alcoa to have a steel building and then clad it artificially with real aluminum facing of sheet metal, which is ridiculous, isn't it?" And so he laughed, and he agreed with me, of course. And so, then Hickman at the time was--I think in a finances-- He's the one who was the go-between for President [John F.] Kennedy and the steel companies, the big companies, not to raise the prices, and this and that.

LASKEY: Oh, right.

SORIANO: Hickman was one of the go-between for the corporations and the government. He sat on the meeting. And they asked him, "Do you think that will be a good



project? And do you think it will be feasible economically?" "Oh, yes," after he analyzed what I had. Because I had a tremendous amount of data with computer analysis and everything, which we did for the tower for Rossi, which worked beautifully. And so he thought it was excellent. And so that was agreed upon. Then when we were flying back, Mr. Rossi just kept hitting me with his elbow. He says, "You did it, you son-of-a-gun, you did it." He was so happy that Alcoa was going to participate.

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: Yeah. And so we started right away pursuing with them. Then unfortunately he got mixed up with somebody of his friends that did works before, some kind of cheap housing. I don't know what he did. And he made a lot of money, and then this other fellow right away wanted to put in a million dollars in a corporation to participate in that venture, you see. And that killed the thing. I believe that was the reason the thing didn't go through, because Alcoa in checking-- They thought they were dealing only with Rossi, with the property he had at Stanford Court. But now this other man with another million dollars comes into the corporation, that was another ball game which Alcoa did not like.

LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: And so I told Rossi that Alcoa did not want to



participate with him, and so on. And as a matter of fact I told him, I said, "Why do you want to bring this persona non grata? You have already Alcoa behind you?" Rossi said, "Well, I made a lot of money with him, you know. Having a million dollars in the corporation, we can do more businesses and stuff." So he came in later, about a year later, after the thing failed; you know, we didn't do anything. And apparently this man gave a million dollars to his corporation, and then he took him for half a million. You see. And he lost that, and he told me sadly what he did. I said, "Well, there you are." Unfortunately, you see. We didn't do the beautiful building.

And then when Alcatraz was going to be open and given to the city, immediately I thought, my god, that will be an excellent thing. And I devised a world university, an international world university, by putting that tower, which was very excellent, the same building I designed. Except instead of having apartments there and offices, I was going to have a revolving restaurant bar, television broadcasting, and all kinds of stuff. And also it would have been a light source for the aircraft to see, which would be above the clouds when it's foggy in San Francisco. That will guide the aircraft, you know, at least to see it from a distance. You know, instead of having the mediocre tower which they have now to broadcast





television, I was going to have that from there. Now at the time, there were five submittals. One, I was; the other one was Mayor [Joseph L.] Alioto at the time with H. L. Hunt. They were working together to make the Alcatraz Island into a sort of gay nineties type of honky-tonk San Francisco bit.

LASKEY: H. L. Hunt?

SORIANO: H. L. Hunt, yes. And they were coming here, and apparently all the supervisors were already bribed to do that. And they were all for it, supposedly, the H. L. Hunt-- It was already preset without any evaluation or judgment whether the proposals were there, even including mine. I was on television. And some of the others--there was another proposal from New York--they were going to make apartments or whatever, I don't know. But there were three or four, I believe. Well, I think, in my estimation, I think mine was the most logical and intelligent thing. It would have been the first of its kind, a structure of all aluminum. The first of its kind. Never before, I think, like that was. There was no building made of aluminum entirely. And I used two feet in diameter aluminum pipes, with the wall thickness at the base was six inches, thick of aluminum. Really. And I had the--was going to do the recycling of the waters and so on and so on.

LASKEY: How would you have gotten-- What would you have



done about transportation?

SORIANO: Transportation didn't matter because you can always get boats if they want to come there, because there wasn't an occasion when you have to have students. This was only for thinkers, for research scientists--

LASKEY: Oh, I see, okay--

SORIANO: Yes. And this was what we were going to do. And I had backers from different universities. The deans of several universities were backing me. Even some bankers were supposed to. And there was a woman, real estate woman, who was working with me at the time who was very astute, very nice; Ann Smith was her name. And she was doing a lot of running around with research and all that. And even the finance people.

But the tragedy is that, you know, politicians have a way of muddling things up and pursuing it to fit their own needs--with any means possible.

And of course there were a lot of-- You know, all these things were seen on television. And I remember KQED, you, know the educational television-- I remember Mel Wax was one of the guys who used to comment on the television, and he commented on the proposals for the Alcatraz. And all he had to say about mine-- He talked about the other, what the H. L. Hunt was, all this stuff, and all that at length-- And then when he came to mine: "Well, and this



is another one of those hundred-story buildings." And he dropped it like that. That's as much as he said. I mean, this is the comprehension of these people, which was sad, really. Instead of to realize what the project was, to talk about "another one of those hundreds"--as if this is the whole thing, whether it is a hundred stories or two stories. And even years later, as a matter of fact, an appointment was set with Mayor Diane Feinstein. Somebody told me, says, "Why don't you submit to her? Why don't you talk to her?" They made an appointment. A friend of mine knew her very well, since she was a little girl, and said, "Go and see Miss Feinstein." And by golly, I went there with my assistant, with all the drawings I had. And in the fifteen minutes I was there she was interrupted constantly with the telephone calls. It was an impossible experience.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: Yes. You know, I had the finesse of saying, "Will you please hold the telephones until I'm finished with you?" Then when I explained this and I came with a hundred stories--I was telling what it would do, how much money it would bring to the city, you see--she interrupted, "I don't want any hundred stories, oh, no, oh, no," just like that, "in San Francisco." I said, "Madame Feinstein, you come to Tiburon, I'll show you two-story shacks if you think that makes architecture or makes a city. It has



nothing to do with whether it's a hundred stories or two stories in a city. You must look at it. And then besides," I said, "how could you understand what I was telling you with all these interruptions?" In fifteen minutes, you know, we were constantly interrupted. And then finally I said, "Well, thank you very much for your time," and I took--and I told my students, my assistants, I said, "Let's take the drawings." We went; that's the end of it. That's the gross, miserable thing of these politicians, really. And this was very recently--

LASKEY: This was in 1970?

SORIANO: Some two, three, four years ago, five--

LASKEY: Pretty recently--

SORIANO: Five, six years ago. This was recently. But before that, when we submitted--that was in '69, I think--

LASKEY: 'Sixty-nine--

SORIANO: Yeah. And there was a big article in the [San Francisco] Chronicle. My friends got together and they wanted my project to go. And they had this Marget Larsen--she deserves credit, Marget Larsen--and with Bob Friedman who was the--with the publicity agency. And Marget was a graphics designer, a very beautiful human being. She's dead; she died last year, unfortunately. She was such a beautiful person. She made the graphics for the news--one-page newspaper ad--which some manufacturer of clothing--I





forget his name--paid for it.

It was for San Francisco, yeah. And they put coupons at the end. Marget devised that to send to Secretary [of Interior Walter J.] Hickel at the time, to the general services, Mayor Alioto, and all the supervisors. And the citizens of San Francisco flooded them with those coupons. And they put in the ad. They said, "If you feel like we do, this is the biggest steal since Manhattan Island from the Indians." And about the project Alioto was concocting with H. L. Hunt. And immediately the two supervisors who were in the minority, [Terry] Francois--which was a black man--and [Robert] Gonzales--which was a Mexican, Hispanic--they were appointed by Mayor Alioto. Now, these two men were accepting H. L. Hunt, the biggest reactionary. That was a vision, you can imagine. But immediately they went to television to say, "Well, gee, we didn't know the public felt like that, so therefore we are rescinding our vote." So they were ready to conclude the next morning with H. L. Hunt and Mayor Alioto's project, this honky-tonk gay nineties San Francisco on Alcatraz. And that was what stopped them. This page ad of Marget Larsen and--what was his name--this man, manufacturer of--I can't remember. And that was it. Stops them in their track. And that's when the Indians get in it. Then the federal government withdrew the island when they saw there



was this kind of dissension. And it was a federal property, all the islands. You see, they gave it to the city free.

LASKEY: Ah-hah.

SORIANO: Or for a pittance, I don't know what it was. So they withdrew the island, that's how the Indians got in. Yeah. Then they had all the problems.

LASKEY: That's very interesting.

SORIANO: This problem with the Indians. Certainly.

LASKEY: So it's still federal property?

SORIANO: It's still federal, part of the parks and federal thing. Now they go on boatloads, they charge admission--

LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: To show where Al Capone peed-- This is exactly what they're doing. This is the kind of a mess that it is now. And I did pursue that nice thing. And I attended meetings there, but they are in the hands of all these incompetent humanity. Because of our democratic process, you know, everybody seems to know everything, they all have something to say. Some lady said, "Well, we should have gazebos for meditation there," or we should do this-- There was another woman, as I came to one of the meetings, she said, "Well, is the meeting on?" I said, "Yes." And then she had a book. This is a true story. She had a book, and she said to me, "What do you think of that?" She didn't



know who I was or anything. I was just coming out in disgust; I was leaving the meeting and she was going in. And she had a color photo, one of the Egyptian murals-- She says, "How about this? Wouldn't that be nice in there?" I said, "Good luck," and I left. This is the kind of mentality. Some other person wanted to have a piece of sculpture with a diamond, some kind of jewel--shiny stone, this kind of trivia things. And so-- You know what happened with the Indians when they got to the island. They were stealing all the copper pipes from the jail. It was quite a violence, and so finally that was eliminated and taken off the island by force. And so then-- Now the island, as I told you, is being shown to the tourists where Al Capone peed or something. Great culture. Yeah. It's very interesting, isn't it?

LASKEY: Is there any talk any further about doing, or just leave it--?

SORIANO: I doubt it. I doubt it. I sent even to President [James E.] Carter and Rosalynn [Carter] a brochure telling them maybe that will be an interesting thing. I had a nice answers from the general services of HUD [United States Department of Housing and Urban Development] offices. "Oh, Mr. Soriano, we'll give you all the help if there is anything, if we have anybody to--" Who? I talked to many people but-- I went even to the



chairman of the board of Christian Brothers--somebody recommended, talked to me. He said, "Mr. Soriano, don't waste your time with this small brains, small officials. This can only be done by huge politician and going to be a credit to him. And if you think it is going to serve him, then they can do it. Otherwise, those little politicians, you're wasting your time." Like Mayor Alioto, Miss Feinstein, and all that. Yeah. That's the problem.

So, then from there on, you know, the chaotic conditions of the world and-- Just up and down. You know, recession, the--when was it?--the wars we had--what was it?--in Korea, and Vietnam-- All these things affect the building industry, architecture. Topped by the nostalgia of what a house should be. Therefore, I have all the strikes against me.

LASKEY: Well, isn't it the nostalgia, or what you call the nostalgia, that probably has hurt you more than any of these things?

SORIANO: Absolutely. That certainly is, plus with the economic condition, the recession up and down, the building costs, this manipulations by all these individuals, you know. The Arabs with their oil made a chaos of the whole economy of the world. Not just the Arabs, but the Arabs with their corporations which work with them, naturally. They can-- They made the biggest chaos of the whole





world. We are still suffering because of that. And that is why all the real estate is so damn expensive. It's due to all of that. Everything went up. It doesn't seem to be, but it is because of it.

So it's an insanity that exists all the way through, and we have to be victims of that-- How can you do anything intelligent? I've just sent so many brochures all over, as I told you. I'll show you the thing-- Even to the king of Saudi Arabia, and other places even before when things were amicable then. And nothing. And the Shah of Iran-- You know all this. But circumstances, the timing's wrong.

LASKEY: I think we've mentioned before with the high cost of real estate in the United States today, it's surprising-- at least it's surprising to me--that your idea of prefabricated aluminum houses--or prior to that the steel houses--prefabricated housing hasn't caught on, hasn't been more successful.

SORIANO: Well, because of that, because they don't do it. Nobody does it. I did this eleven units in Hawaii, and this purely because I found the client through a girlfriend of mine that I met at the airport in Honolulu. And we were both leaving-- She lived in Hawaii and I was coming back to San Francisco. She was very charming. She says, "Here's my telephone [number]; call me when you come back." And so a few months later I called her; she wasn't there, she was



in the States. Well, I was going there again. And then a Japanese fellow who was a friend of hers was taking care of her house and her car. And he said, "Oh you're a friend of Judy--" I forgot her name. And, "Yes." He said, "What do you do?" I said, "I'm an architect." "Oh, really? Come and have lunch with me." And then, "I have a piece of property in Maui. Maybe you can advise me." And this is how I did the job. And so I built the aluminum houses.

LASKEY: Really!

SORIANO: Yeah. That's just purely circumstances like that. That's what happens. And he was very nice and he said, "Well, I'll help you, and he was very amiable. I helped him get financing, I helped him even get credit from the different material people. And it took [me] to do all of this. I had it fabricated and shipped it-- I'll show you the pictures-- Even I have been there when they were pouring concrete. And so I took this effort and I-- You should see the meticulous plans that I made. I mean, the tons of the details. And I knew what I was doing. This is first time to dare fabricate and ship--

LASKEY: They were shipped from the United States--

SORIANO: To Hawaii. And erected, assembled there. Yes.

LASKEY: And it was still less expensive to do it that way than--

SORIANO: Of course. Because I had sugar workers. They



came after the work in the sugar fields and used to come and erect them. They didn't even need any expert craftsmen, as I told you, because I think it was so well detailed. All they had to do is just bolt them and just put them together under my direction. Yeah. We needed very, very few craftsmen that needed training, except the plumbing and the electric, which they did. But I ran the whole show, again. Again, I took the bull by the horn. I ran the thing. Otherwise, that would not even have been.

Now, the interesting pathos of this is again beautiful structures. All of a sudden my Japanese boy was interested in making money, like everybody else. Money, money, is always. So he found somebody from Holland that came in, and he bought that. He asked him to--if he could buy them. He bought them, and he put tiki roofs over that with neon signs. And he converted my aluminum housing to a whorehouse and a gambling joint.

LASKEY: Your housing development?

SORIANO: Yes. It was ruined. That's what happened. And so you can imagine the disappointment again. And you know, you keep wondering. I said, "What is all the effort, all this things?" And then my client--listen to this--he had a large piece of property. We used that. And I said, as he wanted to sell the other, I said, "Don't sell it; keep it. This is a lovely thing, maybe someday you can develop



this into possibly a hotel, or possibly something else." And he called me about three, four years ago from Las Vegas. He went there to gamble, apparently. He said, "Raphael, how are you? You made me a rich man, you know." [laughter] Yes, exactly that. And then he told me that story, that he sold that piece of property to someone who's building hotels there. And he sold the other one to this Dutchman who ruined the place. I think he kept one house for himself to live in, whatever-- Not my client, but the man who bought the whole thing. Yeah, that is the pathos of life, and that is the tragedy. It really hurts me inside when I see all these efforts, all these trials-- then what?--and my efforts ruined.

LASKEY: And not to be able to continue to do it must be very difficult--

SORIANO: It is.

LASKEY: Not to be able to build-- That was twenty years ago that those were built.

SORIANO: In '63. And I have been pursuing it, and then stop, and then I still am pursuing it. Yeah.

LASKEY: You built a couple of houses here, in Mill Valley, for the builder [Frank] McCauley. What happened there?

SORIANO: Well, McCauley was-- It was an interesting story there. I met him in Los Angeles. And he used to like what I did, and then all of a sudden something happened to





him. Something with his wife, some tragic thing-- And then he came over here, and he wanted to do some business if I could find a lot. We found two lots right in Mill Valley. He bought them, and I said, "Okay, I'll help you," and I did the same thing. I helped him build them. And they were just beautiful homes, exquisite homes.

LASKEY: And they are certainly beautiful from the photographs.

SORIANO: Yes, but then he sold them, with a builder, you know. He sold them, and then with the inflation prices, then they keep going--from sell, somebody else bought them to make profit, sold them again, again. Everybody else started adding their own little misconceptions. And now you should see, I'm ashamed even to see the way they are. Some hippies live there, in one of them. It's incomprehensible what they do, neglect, because they don't give a damn. You know, they rent them or sell them, and they're willing to rent them to somebody else.

LASKEY: Well, when they were built, were they built with the idea that possibly they would be developed into a series--?

SORIANO: Oh, yes, everything was, yes. But this poor man had some tragic life, which I don't want to even tell you what it is--

LASKEY: Okay.



SORIANO: And apparently this is what happened-- I couldn't-- But nevertheless, this was an idea that I was always thinking and developing and trying to pursue-- There were a lot of people who were interested in that. And I had tons of correspondence with Kaiser Aluminum, even to build this, with several other people. I can show you tons of correspondence.

LASKEY: Well, all of your works were published in the important architectural journals. Your name was known. I'm surprised that builders, other builders in other parts of the country at some--didn't pick up on these ideas. You know, it isn't that your works weren't there. That's what is so surprising.

SORIANO: Well, no. As a matter of fact, didn't you see in the write-up of the bicentennial what they say? Did you read what they--

LASKEY: No, because I was just looking at the picture yesterday--

SORIANO: Well, I'll tell you, I'll show you. You read it, and you can put it in there. I think it's in here, and-- Please, this is the beautiful copy; don't put your fingers too much on it. Read in the--in here, just about towards the last, you see, he says something about the influences I have had.

LASKEY: It talks about influence. What I was talking



about was your own--you being able to build the houses.

You contacted--

SORIANO: No, wait a minute. You say something else. It's amazing why in other parts of the world, the country, you mentioned that.

LASKEY: Yeah, I said they didn't contact you.

SORIANO: Well, yeah, but read there, read that. Read it aloud.

LASKEY: Well, "A few of his designs went beyond the prototypical stage. The logic of his modular structures influenced many similar developments in other parts of the world."

SORIANO: Exactly. You see.

LASKEY: But you're still not working, which is my point.

SORIANO: Exactly. Well, they don't call me, so they imitate me or they go, you know-- One client I had said this to me one day, he said, "Raphael, don't be a fool, don't be naive." He said, "It isn't how much you know, it's who you know." It is a series of circumstances. You see, apparently the world is very strange. I mean, in medicine, or another, if there is somebody that is quite a top, they go to him, isn't it? They call him. But in architecture, it is not the same thing. In architecture they all-- If somebody they get, somebody-- "Can you make something like that?" Or imitate, you know, if they have a



friend. Instead of calling me. And many of them are scared-- They think I'm very expensive because of my reputation. That's another strike I have against me, you see. And yet, I don't; I charge the same thing as anybody. In fact, less; I give more services than they do. Now, when I did a house for [Joseph] Eichler, you see, that first house for him-- It's an interesting story. The house was published, and it was exhibited for the heart-- The proceeds to go to the heart [American Heart Association]. For a few months it was open to the public to see it. And you should see the comments that U.S. Steel put--wrote there, pro and con on the house. Many people asked, "Well, why aren't there more houses like that built? They're so beautiful. They're so clean. There is-- I cannot see that any spiders will come into these"--this metal beams that I have. With the wood that Eichler was doing-- You see the wood beam cracks? The spiders love to nest in there. That's the comments of some of these neighbors who had Eichler houses. They came to see it.

LASKEY: Ah-hah.

SORIANO: They said, "The ones with wood that we are living in, the spiders all over the place because of the cracked beams of wood." You see, those big timbers like that, they have cracks--when they dry--

LASKEY: Right.





SORIANO: When they dry. And then the spiders collect there. This seems to be easy to keep clean. I'll give you a little thing like that, and you'll see what they say. And they keep asking, "Why aren't more projects like that built?" They kept asking that. Well, the answer is very obvious: ignorance, and the propagation is done by these imbeciles, by these ignorant builders and developers and bankers, who are familiar with whatever they are familiar themselves. Anything else, this to them maybe does not appeal as homes. The simplicity and clarity scares them, maybe. Yeah. Nothing to do with me, I can assure you. Or the house is not good. On the contrary, they are the most livable houses. You ask anybody who lived in my house. They loved them. I have letters from clients. Yeah. So. You give me the answer, I don't know. I know the answer exactly what I told you-- It's the ignorance of humanity, and also that of the builders and the architects themselves. My colleagues don't do that. They do the other thing. Therefore, they contaminated the taste of people by example of what they're doing. So the result is people think houses should look like that, houses are like that. Not like this, like the ones I do. And people are confused. People are like sheep: you can take them one way or the other. Most of them don't think. Again, I will quote Alain. He said, "Most people are like bones and a



stomach. There is nothing else." [laughs]

LASKEY: Bones and a stomach.

SORIANO: Yeah. So what else could I tell you? I don't know. It's exasperating, really. Maybe because I'm too severe in my lectures, in my criticism. I am very frank. And open. But I think I read to you the--what [Felix] Candela said.

LASKEY: Yes. Yes, you did.

SORIANO: You see, depending, those who are sincere and serious, they said, "With a stupendous conference [lecture] which you gave us which was very controversial and friendly at the same time," you see. In other words, it wasn't scared-- I wasn't-- Some people think, "Oh, well, you don't like--you've lost everybody. You've lost--" Well, rightly so. I have to say if I don't say that [Michael] Graves is doing wrong things, what can I say? How would people know? Or [Philip C.] Johnson is wrong in doing this armpit junk, on top of the skyscraper, a sixty-story building. Therefore-- Then how would that-- How do we make sense? How would they know that the errors that are being committed through my colleagues if you don't mention their names? Yes?

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: Then they will be confused. They say, "Well, everything is all right." Yeah. Architects are doing



their own thing.

LASKEY: You know, we've made reference to your feelings about painting.

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: I don't think we've discussed it in real depth, and how it applies to our architecture, and how that makes your architecture different from the standard architecture of the day.

SORIANO: Well, okay.



TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE ONE

JULY 21, 1985

LASKEY: Your attitude about painting and how it relates to your philosophy of architecture.

SORIANO: Well, do you think it relates to architecture?

LASKEY: Painting?

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: I think how you feel about painting relates to how you feel about architecture.

SORIANO: What do you mean by "how you feel"?

LASKEY: You're not-- You don't like painting as one of the art forms.

SORIANO: You mean you ask-- You're telling me that, or what?

LASKEY: No, I'm asking you that.

SORIANO: No, I'm asking you.

LASKEY: No, that's what I've understood you to say, is that you feel that painting is not--I don't want to misquote you, but--that it's a mythology, it's a retelling of mythologies. And that we don't learn, really learn from painting; we just accept other people's mythologies. And that it's not a legitimate art form in the sense that music is--or a universal art form.

SORIANO: Do you think so? Do you agree with that?

LASKEY: No, I don't.





SORIANO: You don't agree with that.

LASKEY: No.

SORIANO: You think painting should be part of architecture?

LASKEY: I think that-- No, I think of painting as a legitimate art form. And I don't see it necessarily just as mythological or myth-telling, and therefore, I don't see that the same way that you see it.

SORIANO: Yes.

LASKEY: But that doesn't-- You know-- But I'm interested in, since you do see it that way-- I don't see architectural styles then as necessarily just mythological or-- I can like other styles, or like traditional styles. I can like what you do and I can like modern styles. I can also like traditional styles. I don't necessarily see them as just holding back or perpetuating antique ideas. Is that fair?

SORIANO: Well, I'll tell you what-- No, it is not very clear yet, but I will continue in one second, excuse me.

LASKEY: Okay.

SORIANO: Well, I asked you that question because I want to know your idea. Then I will amplify myself, my thinking, on that score. The reason that I said the words that I said about painting is because I believe there is a certain amount of confusion that exists in the arts, supposedly,



quotation, "arts." You know? And you mentioned you like or I don't like, and then you mention style. What do you mean by style? What's your concept of a style? What does that mean? I'm really-- This is interesting dialogue. I'm asking you. And I'll tell you afterwards my thinking on that.

LASKEY: I don't recall how I used the word style. What did I say? Mostly I was asking your ideas on painting and how you related that theory to architecture. On architectural style, I'm using it in the most common sense, that if you talk about neo-Spanish colonial revival or neoclassical, or International modern--which are really just words that help us all talk about the same thing that are identifying-- If I tell you that a building is Spanish colonial revival, you basically know what I'm talking about and I don't have to go through a description. It's a shorthand.

SORIANO: Do you think I will know if this is Spanish revival?

LASKEY: Yeah, I think you will know. I think you will know.

SORIANO: How do you know that? How do you know that?

LASKEY: Because you're an architect and you've studied architecture, and you lived in Southern California and it's a kind of short-hand that I assume you would know. Now, I



have-- If I was talking to someone who wasn't interested in architecture, then no, they wouldn't know. It would depend on who I was talking to whether I'd use that term. But if I was talking to someone about architectural styles, that's what I would mean by a style. It would be a preagreed upon determination of a period. If I talk about renaissance, I assume that the person I'm talking to will know what the renaissance style is; it's a period and it looks a certain way. And that it's a short-hand that we've agreed upon to facilitate communication in a particular area. The same way with painting styles. If you talk about abstract expressionism or minimalism or landscape, or English portraiture as opposed to American portraiture, then we all assume a general class that we're talking about the same thing. That's what I mean by style.

SORIANO: I see. Well, does that give you understanding, really?

LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: Does that give you understanding?

LASKEY: Understanding-- Give me understanding of describing a particular thing. It describes something. And I know then I can know basically what we're talking about. It clarifies.

SORIANO: What? What will clarify actually? What does clarify-- What would it clarify?



LASKEY: What I'm talking about at the time.

SORIANO: Yeah. Is that--? You see, is it a precise understanding you have, or is it an abstract understanding?

LASKEY: It depends on what you're talking about at the moment. You can talk about a classification, or you can be talking a specific building. If you're talking about the Palace Ruccelai in Florence, and you're talking about a renaissance building, then you're talking about a specific renaissance building. If you talk about renaissance buildings in general, then it's an abstraction.

SORIANO: But then there are variations--aren't there?--in those buildings? Even in the renaissance.

LASKEY: Oh, of course.

SORIANO: Then how do you clarify? Then you call them all together in the so-called adjective of renaissance. Does that give you any understanding? Or give you an abstract understanding?

LASKEY: It gives you-- Well, again, if you're just talking about all buildings, you know, built from 1420 to 1480--or whatever it is in Italy--then you'll have an abstraction. And you know they're going to be essentially this tall, and they're going to have these kinds of windows, basically--

SORIANO: Maybe.

LASKEY: --and--

SORIANO: Maybe.





LASKEY: But that's the short-hand that I'm talking about. And there will be differences, but that's--

SORIANO: There are in the renaissance buildings or in any kind of building, let's say, where they use tremendous amount of sculpture, and ornamentation. Is that possible to talk about architecture? Or is it a mixed-up affair between the arts--so-called painting, sculpture, and architecture mixed together. Now, what rationale can you get from all these three mixtures and then talk about architecture? Is it possible to do that? That is, to communicate between us. Can you?

LASKEY: You mean-- Are you asking if it's possible to separate the sculpture and the painting from the building?

SORIANO: I'm asking--

LASKEY: Yeah, I'm not sure what your question is.

SORIANO: No, I'm asking actually whether you can really understand architecture with the admixture of painting, sculpture, and architecture. Or I will say-- I will put it another way: is painting and sculpture architecture? And if so, then it's like architecture; and if it isn't, then what is it? And why do we mix them together?

LASKEY: To create an environment would be my-- And I don't know that that would be your answer, but it-- Again, if we're talking renaissance architecture, there, we're creating a total thing. I mean, they did it, I assume--I



don't really know--to create a total thing of beauty by their terms. They constructed a structure which is what you'd call architecture. They embellished it with what I think would still be considered-- The embellishments aside from the painting, the sculpture, I think, could be architectural--architectural structures. But they're embellishments. Painting, I think, is something aside from architecture. It's something applied on to the architecture. It embellishes it, but it's not part of the architecture.

SORIANO: How about sculpture?

LASKEY: I think that sculpture-- It depends. Are you talking about--like what?--the pediments and window frames, or are you talking about structures--?

SORIANO: I'm talking about--

LASKEY: --or statues added on, you know, actual additions to it? Are you talking--?

SORIANO: No, you bring it down to a specific building or specific-- I'm talking now in general, since we are talking in big understanding that the human beings will understand. Generally, as a style, as you mentioned before, styles are this and that, that we can communicate one with the other, then you will even listen. You brought in the environment, and I just kept wondering whether actually-- Aren't we using just plain words which mean



absolutely nothing, which will not give us any kind of understanding, nor even with the word aesthetic or question of beauty?

LASKEY: I don't think so. I think if you want to carry it that far you can. But I think in the matter of getting on with life and simplifying things, if I'm-- If I use a term like a renaissance building, I think that you know what I'm talking about, that you get an image of what it is--

SORIANO: Maybe you know, but I may not know exactly the same thing you're talking about. Maybe abstractly we may know, yes. But abstraction is knowledge? Abstraction? Something abstract? I can abstract-- Say that the sun is a male virile torch. They have done similar things like that in the past.

LASKEY: But that's not what we're talking about when we're talking about--

SORIANO: But yes, symbolism, yes, we're talking. We're talking about that very same thing.

LASKEY: Not really.

SORIANO: No?

LASKEY: I don't think so. I think you're making it more complicated in that sense than what we're really trying to say. I mean, we're simply trying to, to communicate in a simple way.

SORIANO: Exactly.



LASKEY: And if you're complicating-- You can abstract anything down to a point of-- You can argue that this table doesn't exist, and you could probably argue it validly.

People have. But why bother? You know the table's there--

SORIANO: No, no.

LASKEY: It exists. And the same thing was what we're talking about, or what I was talking about, was styles. You can argue that there aren't any two buildings that are the same, or whatever. But I'm simply saying that for purposes of simple communication, that there is a difference between an International Style modern building and a renaissance building. And that for ease of-- If I'm talking to someone and we're talking about architecture, then the person is probably going to know basically what's being said. That people are communicating with these terms, generally, they're saying the same things to each other, if you're talking to people who know about the subject. If you talk about painting styles, it's the same thing. You can talk about, you know, the Dutch school, or the baroque, or the renaissance.

SORIANO: Excuse me. [tape recorder off] All right, this is good, I'm glad I caught it in time, by golly; otherwise it would have gone dead and I would have been in the same boat you were.

LASKEY: Good.





SORIANO: Damn battery. I believe that's what the whole cause of that, that defective battery.

LASKEY: Well, good.

SORIANO: And, well, in answer to all these things we just-- I asked you these questions purposely to clarify and to elucidate a bit on my thinking about the subject. First of all, you see, I will ask you another interesting question. And then we'll come back to the subject of architecture and the arts. A human being, just a human being, you're born a person. Now, do you call that a clear statement of nature? You're born already; you can see beautifully as a human being.

LASKEY: Is that a clear statement of nature?

SORIANO: That's what I'm saying. Is that a clear statement of nature? In other words, this was-- This conception and the resultant of the union of two species, two individuals, they produce-- They procreate another individual of themselves. Now, would you call that a clear statement? In other words, it's understandable, intelligible to everybody else who will see that baby.

LASKEY: That the baby exists? Yeah.

SORIANO: I mean, naturally they exist because they're crying and moving their legs; we know it exists. But in other words, everybody understands it's a baby. That's something that's happened, isn't it? Okay. Now, if you



take painting right away-- You start painting his face, making his eyelashes with rouge, and blue, whatever you want; the mother's decided to have a little fanciful thing. Would that clarify the individual? Or will it complicate the individual?

LASKEY: I don't know.

SORIANO: What do you mean you don't know?

LASKEY: I mean, if it doesn't--

SORIANO: Well, no, no, no. We know very well when we see a baby, it's a baby.

LASKEY: Yeah. If I see a baby with paint on its face, it's still a baby. It's just got paint on its face.

SORIANO: But then, what else do you ask in your mind when you see all of a sudden he's been painted with rouge and black eyelashes with mascara and blue, you know. What would you--come to your mind?

LASKEY: I don't know.

SORIANO: You mean you wouldn't ask anything? A brand new baby. I'm talking about a little infant, just first born, beautifully.

LASKEY: What are you saying?

SORIANO: Well, I'm asking you, what will come to your mind when you see a baby all of a sudden that's been painted with all this makeup?

LASKEY: Well, I think what you want me to say is why



would--

SORIANO: No, no, no, no, no, no.

LASKEY: --they do that, is what you're getting at.

SORIANO: No.

LASKEY: But the thing is, I don't know why they would do it. There may be a reason for it.

SORIANO: No.

LASKEY: It may be, it would depend on what the situation was that I can't know.

SORIANO: No. I didn't ask you that at all. I didn't ask you to say anything. I'm asking your reaction--

LASKEY: I have no idea what my reaction would be because it would depend on the situation that I was in when I saw it.

SORIANO: Oh, I see.

LASKEY: You see?

SORIANO: In other words, suppose you just happen to be there.

LASKEY: Be where?

SORIANO: Where the child is. All of a sudden you saw this infant, painted with rouge and the lipstick, big lipstick, and blue paint. What will come to your mind? Let's put it that way. Nothing?

LASKEY: I just can't imagine it, is what it is, because I just, you know--



SORIANO: Because they don't do that to the babies, do they?

LASKEY: Not babies that I know. There may be societies that do. So--

SORIANO: All right, if you haven't seen other ways-- Suppose you have seen one like that. Something will come to your mind to ask, "Why did they do that?" And the very fact that you asked the question, "Why did they do that?"-- It shows very well there is something weird or something queer--any word that you want to use--you keep asking, "I wonder why was that done?" Yeah. It had nothing to do with the baby, of course, all this rouge, lipstick, anymore than the lipstick that you girls put on the face. Even bring it down to you girls. If you put lipstick, and you put on the mascara, does that give you any kind of environmental clarity to you?

LASKEY: It makes-- It can make you feel good. It--

SORIANO: Personally.

LASKEY: Personally it can, if it's done right. It improves your opinion of yourself or how you look. It-- Yeah, it does something to you.

SORIANO: Yeah, naturally, because you girls have been brainwashed to put on all that stuff. It's correct?

LASKEY: It does something to men, too, I mean--

SORIANO: No, to me it doesn't. Actually, now, this is a





big generalization we think. But to me, actually, it repels me. I see you don't have any lipstick; you don't have anything on your face. That means you have certain ideas that the fact-- What do you need that for? Here I am, an individual, you have a lovely face, and that's it. Why do you need to put all this junk on? Some people think they need it, yes? Correct?

LASKEY: But it makes them feel better when they do it.

SORIANO: That's correct for them. I don't deny anybody to do anything they like to do themselves, for themselves.

Now, as a human being, as a creative person, if you do something for public consumption, don't you think that's a very serious thing to consider? If you paint, or if you do something that doesn't belong there, it will be quite questionable. And you have to be very careful and see, to ask the question, "What am I doing with this? Why am I doing this?" The same thing as I brought the baby. That it will be the question that anybody who will see this paint will say, "I wonder--" After you leave that, you're not going to insult the mother or father and say, "I wonder why did they do that to that poor baby?" That will be a question I would ask. And I'm sure you would, and many people would.

You see, again, this is the danger. We have been so contaminated with this behavioral pattern of doing anything



laissez-faire, doing anything I like for likes and dislikes, for aesthetics, for beauty in your concept. That never communicates. This is my theory, that these artificially applied things never communicate anything. And it is done by some individuals who thought like Madison Avenue, Hollywood, to sell you all this fantastic billions of dollars of cosmetics. They keep advertising all the time to make you look like a young fifteen-year-old-girl by putting on all this lipstick. And you find many ladies at the age of seventy putting all this pancake makeup, and then they don't realize when they go out in the sun you see the creases in their faces, even much more magnified with the pancake. You see, they don't see it, but in the mirror, they put that thinking that that is beautiful. That's fine for them. I don't say. But they have been brainwashed, you see. And this is what I'm saying. Now, coming back to architecture, I asked the question, "Is architecture and painting and sculpture the same thing?" Or are they really part of the same species, anymore than the paint and the rouge and the lipstick that you put on a baby? Or is it an artificiality imposed on the baby? And the same thing, I will ask the question of this painting and sculpture as an artificiality imposed on architecture. Now, we can elaborate this farther. Ask the question why people painted. Go back. Let's go back to



Lascaux, Altamira caves. Yeah? Okay. Lascaux and Altamira, they used to, society used to live in caves and how many-- What was society in a cave? How many people can live in a cave? Five thousand at the most? Ten thousand people? At least I haven't seen a cave that long, that-- There are not many. Now, the result would be that society was very tiny, tiny, tiny. Now, you go to Mexico City, there's seventeen million people in one city. It's a big cave, isn't it? Seventeen million people. What is society there? It's a big conglomerate--isn't it?--with a tremendous amount of complexities. Now, you cannot do today, say, in a city of Mexico with seventeen million people, what the primitive people of fifty thousand years ago in the caves--small related cult of the caves--what they did there. They used to paint the caves, yes; inside, you find all these bulls, you know--

LASKEY: Right, of course.

SORIANO: You have seen those drawings, didn't you? Did you ask the question why did they do that? I'm sure you have read, maybe.

LASKEY: Yeah.

SORIANO: Why did they do that? Why did they paint? And what subject was the painting. What did they paint? I'm asking you.

LASKEY: Oh, I'm sorry. Well, they painted ritual,



basically.

SORIANO: Okay, okay. Now, what did they paint? What's the subject?

LASKEY: Bulls. The hunting of bulls, the hunting of horses, animals, and the importance of animals--

SORIANO: That's right, to their society. Could that be applicable today? Suppose in Mexico City we keep painting bulls and horses in our buildings. Suppose we did that. What would you think of it? As a mural. Suppose I want to paint bulls and stuff in a building.

LASKEY: In a mural? It wouldn't-- I mean--

SORIANO: I'm asking you honestly.

LASKEY: No, I know, and I-- You know, if somebody did a mural, built a new building and did a mural in the lobby that had bulls and horses in it, I'd probably think it was fine.

SORIANO: Why would you think it was fine? Wouldn't you question it, why do they paint?

LASKEY: I would have to see the mural, of course, but I think--

SORIANO: Well, forget this thing about the quality of it. What I'm talking about--

LASKEY: But it wouldn't bother me to see a mural with bulls and horses in it.

SORIANO: You wouldn't question it?





LASKEY: No. I don't think so. I mean, if it were a bank building and--

SORIANO: You would accept that.

LASKEY: --and it was in Mexico City. They still have bull fights in Mexico City. It's still a part of what goes on, it's part of their culture. I, no, I wouldn't question it particularly. Now, if they went around doing frescoes on the walls, I would think that was sort of interesting. I don't think it would bother me, if they put horses and bulls. I don't know. I'm trying to think of where I might question it. But I don't think I would think too much about it. I might question the quality of the mural.

SORIANO: How would you judge the quality of the mural?

LASKEY: Whether I liked it or not.

SORIANO: Oh, well, is that--?

LASKEY: I mean, that's all I'm saying, is whether it's well done, yeah.

SORIANO: Is that how you evaluate things, by your likes and dislikes?

LASKEY: Some things. Painting, yes.

SORIANO: Do you evaluate the workings of this microphone because you like it or you don't like it?

LASKEY: I evaluate the workings of that whether it works or not.

SORIANO: But not because you like it.



LASKEY: When it works, I like it; and when it doesn't work, I don't like it.

SORIANO: That's correct. Okay, in other words, it's a question of performance, isn't it? Especially this tiny little thing that we're wearing, which is a little half an inch. Even less maybe.

LASKEY: You see, we like these.

SORIANO: Well, because they work well, don't they?

LASKEY: If they didn't work we wouldn't like them.

SORIANO: That's correct.

LASKEY: The same way with the mural.

SORIANO: Okay. All right. That's good. You bring up a good point. That means it has to work. What does it mean, that mural that works? What does that imply?

LASKEY: But it goes back again, I think, whether you like it or you don't like it, because it--

SORIANO: Oh, no, no, no, no.

LASKEY: Really, it gets back down-- You can use different terms.

SORIANO: We said you didn't like this because-- You say if it works, the performance of it is the thing that makes you like it or not. And I'm asking the question. When you see this mural of horses in a lobby, this modern building, a skyscraper with automatic elevators with electronic computers--pop, pop, pop, pop--you find a whole bunch of a



mural of horses. Then you will ask, "Is it function--? Is it working? For what? What is it doing?" Would you ask that question?

LASKEY: No. Because it doesn't bother me.

SORIANO: Okay.

LASKEY: And I think that's where we're different. And that's why we're interviewing you, because you do have different ideas on this.

SORIANO: No question.

LASKEY: And I think that that's-- I think that your attitudes on this are extremely interesting, and that's why I brought it up, why I want you to talk about it. Because I think that, well, as I said earlier when you asked me, I like painting, so I really would judge the mural of horses on whether I liked it or not; whether I thought it was well done--whatever style it was in--if I thought they were good horses, or they were abstract horses, or what, because by definition I like murals. Now, your feelings are much deeper about paintings and your reaction to it would be very different from mine. And that's why I want you to talk about your reaction to it.

SORIANO: Yeah, I would. That's the reason. The reason I brought this up is because, to illustrate the further point we've been discussing all this whole evening and the last two days--three days. That actually I think the biggest



problem in our society is because of this lack of communication, that because we are taking this as a personal likes and dislikes. I think this is the tragedy that has occurred in our society today, as you were complaining, with all this decadence, isn't it? In music and everything, you were complaining that two, three days, two days ago with-- We went over that. Now, the reason is because everybody accepts anything, that anything goes. You know, I do my own thing, that type of thing, okay. Now, therefore, we don't question it. And that's why I ask you. Wouldn't you question why they have horses in that lobby? And you said, "No, I like it." But the answer you gave me was, again, that personal thing that everybody else does. So that means here we have a very personal anarchism--anything goes then. Well, I like, so what? Anybody else-- So, I like it, or somebody else says, "I don't like it." Okay. Well, that doesn't have any significance in the total societal, really, understanding of the issues today in the twentieth century with the tremendous amount of knowledge we have. Consequently, you have to question everything. If you don't question critically with a critical eye, then you're accepting; you've become the sheep. As we said before, most human beings are sheep. You can be swayed one way or the other. They don't think. Therefore, you find the biggest





morons that shout loudly make billions in music, and a serious composer can't even sell one record. He will starve to death, yes. And this is what's happening. I think they have to be more critical and question why. I ask the question, "Why do we do this?" And I think an architect, or any type of endeavor, the first thing is he should ask--even if you put one line on the drawing board--he should ask, "What am I doing with this line?" What this line is doing. Is it a question that I like it? I like to make a line? It has nothing to do with it. Because society doesn't give a damn that you make one line or ten lines. What do they care? But society cares if you are doing this line for society. Then they'll ask you, say, "What are you doing? I ask you to design me whatever, and you're showing one line." I said, "Well, what is this?" He'll ask you this question. And I think this is where the problem really lies. We have to question, we have to be very serious, and we have to be very, very critical. Yes. And the question of aesthetics doesn't enter into it at all. As we said even with the microphone. If it works, I like it; if it doesn't, you don't.

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: Exactly. If it works, it's beautiful, call it that. If it doesn't work, it's an ugly thing. Yes.

LASKEY: Exactly.



SORIANO: So this is the area really where we have the big problem, I believe. That's why I don't think the sculpture and painting can be mixed with architecture, because originally it started out as part of the ritual, and they start-- You go back to your renaissance then. From the cave drawings we jump to the renaissance. All right? What did we find in the renaissance?

LASKEY: The church.

SORIANO: All right. That's the dominant thing, isn't it?

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: You find the only buildings that were really meaningful and studied carefully were the churches, built well. But where the people lived, all around the churches, it's chaos, isn't it?

LASKEY: Well, except for the very rich. The palaces--

SORIANO: Forget--

LASKEY: --the palazzos.

SORIANO: Yeah, well, palazzi were fortresses to begin with. All the palaces were fortresses for the gangsters. Remember, the pirates were the biggest gangsters before, and after they conquered areas, enslaved people, then became kings and princes and dukes and counts. Therefore, they built palaces. What were those palaces? They were fortresses, actually. They built these fortresses, châteaux, they were fortresses. Why? To defend



themselves, their own clan, in huge acres of land. They didn't want another gangster, another pirate, to come and conquer. Therefore, they had these as a protective fortress. I had a woman come to me one day, she wanted a château, a French château. And I said, "Well, are you French, madame?" She said, "No." And I said, "Why do you want a French château?" She said, "Because I like it." That's exactly the thing that she said. You like it.

LASKEY: She wanted you to design her a French château?

SORIANO: A French château, yes. And I said, "Well, do you know--" I see you're laughing at this, but yet you didn't laugh when you were saying to me that you like the horses.

LASKEY: Well, just that it seems incongruous that--

SORIANO: Well, naturally.

LASKEY: --someone would come to Raphael Soriano for a French château.

SORIANO: Well, wouldn't that be the same incongruity somebody to say I want you to paint a mural of horses on a brand new skyscraper with modern equipment?

LASKEY: If they said it to you. They could say it to somebody else.

SORIANO: Wait a minute.

LASKEY: But now I'm talking about you in particular as doing a château.

SORIANO: I know, but I'm asking-- I'm bringing this as a



philosophical thing; this is what you're interviewing me, what about my ideas. And I'm telling you how we are non-thinkers, how we corrupt everything with muddling. That's what I'm trying to bring about.

LASKEY: I see.

SORIANO: Okay. And it's just as preposterous when somebody comes and says, "I want a mural with horses in there." Or with bulls, with impalas, or whatever. Okay. But then, the question is the same thing, "Why?" In a brand new building that millions of people will go up and down on business or research, or whatever it is; not one person, you see. And then he imposes that because he likes it. It has this nostalgia, or whatever his idea, to commission a mural of horses, which were done originally as ritual. Which were art, supposedly, they call it. But they were not art; they didn't call it anything. They were ritualistic. Yeah. This is what I've been trying to clarify, this area. And therefore all this brings obscurantism. All these complexities. Manipulations as one person will dictate. I like it; therefore, I want it. It's mine, I'm paying for it. This is what this lady said. "Well, I want a château."

I said, "You know what a château is?"

"Oh, I know. Don't you have a book here? I'll show you."





I said, "I know what a château is; you don't have to show me." And then I said, "Well, you know, to build a thing like that today will cost you money."

"I have money. No problem with that. I want it."

And I said, "Well, do you know what a chateau is?"

Again she said, "Well, I know I like it."

And I said, "Fine, but they were fortresses, you see." She just looked at me; she didn't even know it was a fortress-- Originally they were fortresses. And then finally I couldn't convince her, I said, "Why not have something for you, the way you want it and that suits your needs. You give me all your requirements, your likes and dislikes--" and to solve the problem.

"No, I like to have a French château, because I know what I like." Well, she was impossible to convince.

I said, "I'm sorry, madame, I don't think I can do that because it'll be a fake, funny imitation." And I said, "I can bamboozle you if I really wanted to make money. I can give you a château; you won't even know the difference even. I can make all kinds of sketches to tell you this is a château, looks like, but it won't be a château, it will be nonsense, really."

"And do you know any architect?"

I said, "No, madame, you open the telephone directory, I'm sure they'll be many, many architects that will love to



do it for you." And that's it. And the door was open, I said, "Good-bye, madame." That's it.

So, where are we? Questions again. You brought something else up of style. Do you know what a style is? What's a style?

LASKEY: Only what I said in the previous conversation.

SORIANO: You said a lot of things with it; you mixed very back and forth. The great total thing of beauty you mentioned. I just might--

LASKEY: I didn't say that was a style.

SORIANO: No. No, I understand--

LASKEY: I was talking about the creation--

SORIANO: Yeah. Yeah.

LASKEY: --what they saw as--whether architecture included painting and sculpture, or whether architecture should be sculptural. Which is something that according to what you wrote, or what I read in the Paul Heyer book [Architects on Architecture], that you don't think that even in its structure architecture should be sculptural.

SORIANO: I didn't say that.

LASKEY: Didn't I--?

SORIANO: No. I didn't say that. Even structure shouldn't be sculptural. I never said that.

LASKEY: Shouldn't be sculptural.

SORIANO: Exactly. Now, don't misquote me, you see?



Imagine, if you-- No, I'm just--

LASKEY: No, that's what I thought I said.

SORIANO: Yeah. No, you thought I said, should be sculptural.

LASKEY: Shouldn't be.

SORIANO: Shouldn't.

LASKEY: Should not be sculptural.

SORIANO: Well, good, I hope so.

LASKEY: Because particularly--

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: --when you talked about [Eero] Saarinen and it's TWA terminal--

SORIANO: That's correct.

LASKEY: --and the [Solomon R.] Guggenheim [Foundation].

SORIANO: Which was [sculptural]. That's correct, yeah. This is correct. This is correct quoting me. Now. For that reason, I feel the same thing. You go to the renaissance cathedrals, as we talked before. The public, as I said, where people lived was chaos. Maybe you don't agree with that. I don't know. Did you--? You've been to Acropolis? To Athens?

LASKEY: No, I haven't.

SORIANO: You haven't been to Rome?

LASKEY: I've been to Rome, yes, but not to Athens.

SORIANO: All right, you've seen the Saint Peter's



[Cathedral]? And then what else is there around Saint Peter's? Nothing but chaos, all kinds of buildings where people lived.

LASKEY: Well, I know the tenements in which the Romans lived were terrible. I mean, they used to collapse and kill thousands regularly.

SORIANO: Sure, sure, sure. And in Athens, the same thing. Here you have a temple beautifully, logically done with a lot of space on the very top. Just down below, as you go down below Athens, what's called--just nothing but a whole bunch of helter-skelter or pell-mell tenements.

LASKEY: Tenements. It's exactly what they were.

SORIANO: But people lived-- Not a single detail or attention to these. These grew any old way. But the temples, ritualistically, were okay.

LASKEY: And the villas.

SORIANO: That's right. And then, sculpture and painting was together there. Yeah. Now, let's get it further down. Where the people lived there was no sculpture, no painting. They were barely interested in living and having enough water to run, which they didn't have.

LASKEY: Would the tenements in which they were living, would you call that architecture?

SORIANO: Would I?

LASKEY: Yes.





SORIANO: To me, what is today architecture is not. I wouldn't call it that. They were simply happenstance due to several variety of things, for people to live.

LASKEY: Do you think that architecture is something that needs to be designed--

SORIANO: Absolutely--

LASKEY: --to be architecture?

SORIANO: It should be done, certainly. Today we do it, especially today. We are past the stage of the--what do you call that?--the pioneer stage, when we went through the Wild West, chop any tree and build your own shack any old way. We have passed that stage already. In fact, I wrote that in one of that book I read to you from there. You'll see. The stage is gone. We've finished that. And yet some people are still doing the same thing: chop trees, building them the way the pioneers did with log cabins.

LASKEY: Log cabins.

SORIANO: Okay. Now, many people still love this style.

"Oh, I love log cabins. I love English renaissance or Chippendale--" You name it. All these names. Adjectives are concocted nonsense; they don't mean anything, yeah.

But they make good sounding words for some artificial people to discuss in an evening. "Oh, yes, but I, I appreciate this impressionism, I appreciate the dadaist. Oh no, the dadaist is for that. Oh, no, oh, no, no, no,



no." They keep on-- It's a nice conversation piece to say nothing. Trivia conversation for an evening. And that's what occurs all the time. And I remember I lectured once at San Bernardino, to the museum there. One of the curators to the museum there, a lady, who was there, and I was taking one of the professors and the classes. And she was trying to, all of a sudden, to show us certain things, to tell us certain things about a piece of sculpture that was exhibited--a huge mess of nonsense that some young man did. And she was trying to give us as if we were housewives that came in Thursday afternoon to get a little culture, we're going to the museum. And she was saying--even trying to speak French--"Well, I'm passed-- Well, there were the impressionists, and the dadaists, and there were the exhibitions of the les refusées." She said refusees. Now, if she knew French, wanted to be French, she could have said refusées, not refusees--such a thing. And then finally--she kept on talking, ruminating all these Frenchy words--and finally some student asked, "Well, I don't understand what you're telling us." I said, "What does that mean?" "Well . . .," then she kept on in the renaissance--puta, puta, puta, puta, puta-- Excuse me, I have to go somewhere, pardon. [tape recorder off]

So then I'll go back to the renaissance, the building in the Saint Peter's, let's say, a good example. And you



find the subject matter of the painting and the frescoes in the cathedral, isn't it? What's the subject matter there, inside of the Saint Peter's?

LASKEY: In Saint Peter's? Religious.

SORIANO: All these murals.

LASKEY: Religious.

SORIANO: Exactly.

LASKEY: Of saints and--

SORIANO: That's right. That's the society at the time of the renaissance for the people who did it, commissioned it. And this was part of the commission that requested, and therefore, they mix painting. Because in those days they didn't have newspapers, they didn't have television, they didn't have any of that propaganda machine. And I call this purely propaganda poster; that's what they were. I'm not talking about the dexterity of Michaelangelo, whoever, all this, that they knew how to draw. This is fine, this is lovely. I admire the dexterity. But, the subject matter interests me. What is it? Religious murals telling me all these fairy tales, contrived by somebody, a couple of artists. Isn't it? Few artists, whatever they were. They were painting the things from the Bible.

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: What's the Bible? A lot of fairy tales.



Unfortunately, many people don't believe that. But they were concocted stories, yes? And you know very well without industry today, without scientific knowledge, with the validation we have and going into space, we know very well the world wasn't created in seven days, or six days--whatever it is--and the last day God rested. We know this is a nice little story, yes? If you want to believe that, go ahead; but we know very well the world is more complex than that. Don't you think so?

LASKEY: Oh, yes, of course.

SORIANO: Okay. So therefore, you don't accept. Yet those things are painted in the murals. They're telling you all of that. Yes. The Michaelangelo with a man floating there in clouds says God creating the universe, or so God creating the sun and the moon. Now, even when you look at that, when they tell you that story, a thinking person will say, "What is that? What is he telling me? Do I have to look at this anymore? Do I have to read it?" Suppose you read that. You will say, "Oh, bush." Literally has nothing to do with it. The story is, literally, you throw it away, anymore than these funnies in the newspaper. Some people write this stuff in the funnies which are literally "Why is there nonsense--" They're not good English to begin with. And from a semblance of art or drawing is also equal to zero. The third one, the philosophy, is equally as





nonsensical platitudes, isn't it? To me they are. Whatever I have seen. And so, the result is we are here brainwashed with all these things, and we make them sanctified; you can't even question that. So, therefore, it comes to us now as the thing to do. The cathedrals or the buildings must have painting, must have sculpture, because they did in the past to make these propaganda posters. And I question that. I say today we don't need that; today we have a tremendous amount of knowledge. That is our era. This lovely little microphone is your era. This lovely tape recorder with our voices-- We can do anything we want with this, and this is the era. Our travels. You came here on a plane, didn't you? How beautiful, you know? In less than an hour you came here, from Los Angeles.

LASKEY: Right.

SORIANO: Yes. Imagine if you had to take a horse and buggy how many--

LASKEY: Days.

SORIANO: It would have taken two or three days. Yes.



TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE TWO

JULY 21, 1985

SORIANO: And, where was I? Oh, yes, I was telling you about the horse and buggy. The interesting-- One of the students at Miami University once was lamenting at all this mechanization, all this technology, and all that and all that and all that. I said to her, "What are you afraid of it? It's a question of misuse or you use it properly, isn't it?"

And she said, "Well, I still don't like it."

And I said, "Well, that's all right. This is your privilege. I'm not questioning." But I said, "How did you come here to school?"

"What do you mean?"

I said, "What did you do? What transportation do you use?"

"Oh, I came, I have my car, automobile."

I said, "Really." And I said, "Why didn't you use a horse and buggy?" Yeah. That hit home, really. And I said, "Do you cook? Do you have an apartment?"

She said, "Yes."

I said, "Do you have the facilities for cooking? Yes? What kind?"

"I have an electric stove."

I said, "Oh, no. It's best to make fire outside and



bring it in and cook it with--"

"Oh," she said, "well, I like that, too, when I do barbecues."

I said, "Well, that's not what I asked you. That's a different question again, another." I said, "You are complaining about all this industrialization, all this mechanical things, disastrous, and yet you're using all of that, which helps you. This is our society. We have to progress. We cannot regress or stay in the same area. This is why we have to think, even in architecture, too. We have to check and evaluate. We discard things that don't serve anymore. Certainly. And that's what we haven't done in architecture." I said, "Once we are--looks like we are in a house full of garbage in the backyard, we'll never have emptied that garbage. It's been accumulating for years and years and years and years, until it stinks to high heaven," as they say. Yeah. Now, what other question you have?

LASKEY: What would you do with architecture if you--? If you were putting together an architectural school today, what would you teach?

SORIANO: Oh, that's a very deep question. The fact is, I would simply not teach any art, number one, or any kind of art will be absolutely taboo. I will make them think first of all.



LASKEY: Now, when you say no art, you're not talking about drawing, that is, drafting--

SORIANO: That's entirely different. That's technological drafting. You say it's like taking shorthand and using a pen and plume. That's got nothing to do with architecture.

LASKEY: Okay.

SORIANO: You have to indicate, you have to present things. Writing a score, like music, you write a music, you write score. Or you can write some other ways. This is purely a medium to be able to communicate or translate the thought to be audible or listenable or visually viable. That's something else. It's a technique. It's nothing to do with what we're talking about. The teaching-- Meaning you have to make the students to think, first of all. They have to use their brains. You have to direct them in areas. What does that mean? What is thinking? What's knowledge? We have to clarify all these things. Then we bring it down to architecture eventually, all of these things properly. And to analyze all these things whether what we discussed before about thinking of the process of inventiveness, which is the creative aspects. And find out whether these were really inventive things, or were they ruminating things, you see. So therefore, I will eliminate all this. I will not teach any such things. I will concentrate on scientific thinking a great deal,





sciences that will encourage it, really, because that's what brings us knowledge. We learn more about us and the universe by teaching sciences. Yes. And the arts are purely a mythological thing. Unless you want to be a medicine man, go ahead and study, but don't come to the school of architecture such as I will make. And then we begin to really work in the areas of great, great thinking, and advancing of thought, and really evaluating what are we talking about with all this. When we say environmental design, or the environment, or a building, what is this? To really in depth to pursue this, to find out, what are we talking about? Is it all this silly self-expression of all kinds of little arty work? Or is it something else? Yes. Same thing as when you are making a shoe. It cannot be a little pie. Or it cannot be a bracelet. A shoe's a shoe. That means it has to serve. Doesn't it? Has to fit your foot. You have to measure it; it has to fit certain, wherever it will go, and we have these sizes and all that for that reason. As a matter of fact, this brings me back to the word art--artisan. You know what the artisan, the etymology of art? *Artisana*. Your daughter who studies French, she should know that. You ask her if she knows what an artisan is. It is the doers. The breadmaker was an artisan, yes. The candlemaker was an artisan. The shoemaker was an artisan. The tailor was an artisan. The



peasant who tilled the soil was an artisan. These were all doers, yes. And in doing, they have to do something that performs, like this little microphone. The people who design these microphones--there was one brain, or because this is very complex now. Now we come to a realm of many scientists that feel great dedication and application to the scientific facts; validate knowledge to make this tiny, tiny little microphone--which is so beautiful--to work, yeah, yeah. So that's an artisan. And therefore, after that, some of the people who devise those definitions of impressionism and da-da-da-da-da, they're babblers, jugglers of words who know nothing, have degenerated this into art, artist. That's it. That's the big tragedy of our lives, is this contaminant called art. And this is what architecture is suffering about. It has nothing to do with architecture or solving a problem. Whether it's designing a microphone, building a city, or designing a building, or a design on a matchbox. It's all the same process--the process of evaluating, validating, and doing things for performance, period, that does the thing well. Then, it's an accomplishment, yeah.

LASKEY: Should architecture be permanent?

SORIANO: I don't know what permanence is. What is permanent?

LASKEY: Do you build monuments for the future, or do you--?



SORIANO: What is monument? What do you mean by monument?

LASKEY: The Acropolis is a monument, Saint Peter's is a monument.

SORIANO: Yeah, but they taught that as monuments. It was nothing but structures to house certain things; some people later on called it monuments. There are also monuments in the cemetery, aren't there? Don't they call that monuments?

LASKEY: They're built to last.

SORIANO: Well, not in the cemetery.

LASKEY: Well, those monuments are built to last, too. They're meant to mark the graves for a long time.

SORIANO: Well, I know. They eventually are all destroyed by the-- Time destroys everything. Yeah.

LASKEY: But I did wonder if you see a constant use of the materials at hand, and the studying of the technology to incorporate all the newest technologies into architecture, if you see buildings as temporary. If you, in other words, do you see a structure as a functional--you're serving a functional need, you build an office building to house a certain kind of office. Well, chances are that office, that business is going to change over a period of years. Would you see--? Do you build into your buildings an obsolescence? Do you build them for the time, for the need, with the idea that they will be taken apart, or



dismantled, or something happens to them in the future? Or do you build them with the idea that they will be there two hundred years from now? Because that's sort of the feature theory.

SORIANO: No, no. This question, the question is a very big question. [tape recorder off] Now they interrupted my train of thought.

LASKEY: We were talking about whether buildings should be built--

SORIANO: Permanently--

LASKEY: --to last.

SORIANO: --yeah, yeah. That I don't know. It doesn't even enter into my mind. But it does enter into my mind that when I do something, that thing should perform well. And it should last, naturally. Because a person who commissions you to design a house or a building, doesn't make any difference. It requires to be done in the best way possible according to the budget, use certain materials, naturally. That dictates the type of materials that you use. And if you want, if you have a lot of money, you can build them of gold. Gold will not tarnish, will stay there. Now, platinum, or some space materials which last forever, yes, you can do that, but depending on all of the budget, depending on the requirements of the client. Therefore, the materials you use are accordingly. Whether





they last three hundred, two hundred, one hundred, I don't know, this depending on many, many factors. There is pollution today, in the atmosphere, with all these acidic and chemical things which destroy and eat some of the materials. So the idea is to do the best you can with what you have with your requirements. And according to the monies, because it always enters into this. The first question a client asks you is, "How much is it going to cost?" It's the first question you hear. "How much is it going to be?" How much I can afford. That's how much I have. Therefore, you do the best you can to devise what materials you can use. You can eliminate some materials which are extremely expensive, but there is a very limited budget, naturally. And inexpensive, meaning that sometimes these materials will last a long, long, long time, will not require any upkeep. And sometimes you give them materials that they want to have a house that they will live maybe forty, fifty years in the house, or more. And most, even those jerry-built houses live for a couple hundred years. So, that's the scenario.

LASKEY: But you don't-- You don't have as part of your theories or thinking on architecture a real notion that there is a limit, that building should only function for a limited time.

SORIANO: No. No, never. In fact, you do the best you can



and hope it will last for three centuries or more. It will stay there forever. But then, I don't know, sometimes depending on a lot of elements which destroy it. Yeah. I never, no, this never enters me as monument--to build monuments and all that. That's not for me. Monuments are the same thing as museums. They are places of internment, burial places. This is not the area of architecture, I don't think so.

LASKEY: You've been concerned with low-cost housing for most of your architectural life. Does that have any relation to your political philosophy where you've been involved with concerned people?

SORIANO: No. No, nothing to do with politics. What's politics? What's my political philosophy? What's your political philosophy, since you ask me that question?

LASKEY: Well, you've talked about politics off and on in--

SORIANO: Yeah, politicians I talk about them, you know, it's true. But I don't have any political philosophy as an architect. No, that doesn't enter into my mind. Even in the housing, because I am interested in the public to live well. And I'm sure Mr. [Richard J.] Neutra was concerned. All the really top architects were concerned to do really better things for the people to live in. And I think for the first time in our history, because I will say to you Neutra-- I complimented Neutra so much because he



did so many things. Because he was one of the first, actually, who really gave attention to housing for the public.

LASKEY: Well, it is interesting that-- Was it in the fifties--the forties or the fifties--that there was an explosion of architects concerned about public housing when the public housing program were developed in Los Angeles-- but I think they developed across the country. And that I-- It was suddenly a consciousness of what I would call a political consciousness, that doesn't seemed to have happened before or have happened since.

SORIANO: No.

LASKEY: And I was curious as to what happened then. Why that sort of upwelling of public consciousness developed with architecture at that time.

SORIANO: I don't think so. I don't think this at that time, 1950, was any public conscience. Those are the people who jumped in the bandwagon like they jumped in the bandwagon of all the politicalisms or all these cults. Yeah, these are the type of people. No, no. You have to go way, way, way before the--in the twenties and the thirties, what some architects were thinking about planning properly for the public so they can have better housing. And not only just in planning, has nothing to do with politics. Has to do with really the concern of the



integrity of the individual, concern for the well-being of a human being when it does something that they think will serve them well. And then he went further to say, "Why not plan in totality so the community could live better?"

These things came forth, I think, in the early thirties, yeah. Even in the twenties about that. They were people--

LASKEY: Well, the Bauhaus, I think the people--

SORIANO: No, Bauhaus, nonsense. Well, that's a talk afterwards. The Bauhaus was another nonsense. They were another one, contaminated cultists. That's another story. But actually, architects were concerned. Some of the very important architects were very much concerned in giving proper planning and proper housing with proper environment for society. And they were interested in that. And not only the planning of totality or groups of communities, but the buildings themselves were equally as intelligently planned, you see. And not like the Levittowns. Levittown is also another mess.

LASKEY: Planned community.

SORIANO: Planned community. Yes. Big words. What does that mean? Nothing. There were the biggest slums of junkyard by some incompetent, ignorant human beings. Like [William] Zeckendorf, like [Joseph] Eichler and the rest of them, thinking they were accomplishing something. All they were interested in was making money. Nothing to do with





planning anything. They were not interested in that.

Because that's why they left all these messes. Isn't it?

Levittown, is that a planned community?

LASKEY: I think it was designed as a planned--one of the first of the major--

SORIANO: Well--

LASKEY: --sort of middle--

SORIANO: --it wasn't really, was just-- To me it was nothing but another big slum, only it was made with playgrounds. Apparently, to make it more palatable, sugarcoated with a little bit of planning, yes. Because they gave them a little shopping center here, or a little facility there. That's not what I call. Now, Mr. Neutra and his Rush City Reformed, which he called it. And even Le Corbusier when he made this La Ville Radieuse. So he had very wonderful concepts, and they were planned properly. Not just this kind of little communities done by Zackendorf or by Eichler, all the rest of them. All this is rubbish. These are cults. Nothing to do with planning. Yeah.

LASKEY: Well, you were appointed to the state board [California State Board of Architectural Examiners], state architectural board by Jerry [Edmund G.] Brown [Jr.], and you're still on the board.

SORIANO: Yes.



LASKEY: Right. How do you feel about the state's attitude toward architecture?

SORIANO: It was a mess. They made misconceptions. I think Jerry Brown was wrong in his conceptual affair of what the board should be, because-- I think he hated professionalism; he thought the professionals will tend to protect themselves rather than protect the public. Therefore, he appointed, he denigrated the board-- We have only three member architects on the board, three architects, and six public members which are non-architects, who know nothing about architecture.

LASKEY: What was the--? What is the function of the board? What are you supposed to do?

SORIANO: Well, they just simply check on the candidates who come to be licensed as architects. They check, they give examinations. And then they check also for violators; those who don't have a license. They bring him to court, you know. We give them penalties or they revoke his license. I mean, again, this is a sideline. As far as I'm concerned, they're a waste of time for that. They should really involve themselves in the quality of it, bringing forth fine architects. And to see to it that the qualifications of other universities should work together to develop better programs, better education to bring really architects. But they don't do that. The whole



thing is just a farce. It has become nothing but a political manipulation by all these legal entanglements with all the public members. Since they have no knowledge of architecture, they're involved with all this political rubbish. Yeah. They make nothing but fights and fights and fights between the different boards, and it has become a big comedy, really. A soap opera. Yeah. I think it's a tragic thing. And I think Jerry Brown made a big miscalculation in his thinking. And he was trying to do the same for the doctors, and the doctors didn't let him. But the architects did. The architects were very, very subservient, apparently thinking that they will get jobs from the state, you see. Then they didn't want to antagonize the governor, therefore, they acceded to all these things. And the result is it's a big mess now. Once they pass the laws they become part of the statutes. Therefore, to undo that it will take another eight years, ten years with new membership, with new fights, new resolutions, to get new members, new thinking; they have been fighting towards that. It's almost like a hopeless case. You have no idea the waste of time.

LASKEY: Have you made any progress? Do you feel like you've made some progress.

SORIANO: Yes, I made a little progress. I think I read to you a little letter on that, didn't I?



LASKEY: Yes.

SORIANO: Of what the-- How they are aggrieved, even nationally, from Washington, D.C. And I've been hollering about this for the last two and a half years I've been on the board. Yeah. And, of course, they think I'm too severe, I'm too critical, and all that; that I don't understand the legalities. Yeah, of course, I don't understand the legalities that they fostered in order to protect themselves, their politicization, you see? They just play ball with each other to protect their lack of knowledge by hiding behind the agendas in all this verbiage of politics and meaningless words. It's a pity because the society loses, and it was supposed to protect the health, welfare, and safety of the public. It's supposed to be the protectors of that, yeah. And the board is like the Supreme Court. If there is a grievance between architects and clients, then eventually they have to come to the board to adjudicate what has occurred. And, it's a mess, really.

LASKEY: Well, if you move down to Southern California again when you have to leave here, will you stay on the board?

SORIANO: Oh, of course, nothing to do-- The appointment has nothing to do with where I am.

LASKEY: I just-- I assumed that you met in Sacramento; that may be wrong.





SORIANO: We meet all over.

LASKEY: Oh, you meet all over, oh, okay.

SORIANO: Sacramento, Los Angeles, we go all over. San Francisco, San Bernardino, San Diego. We meet in all regions to accommodate everybody, all the regions. And we give the exams in different areas, too.

LASKEY: You actually oversee the exams? Or do you--?

SORIANO: Yeah, we have-- No, the board itself does not, is not supposed to be involved in that. We have proctors, we have examiners, but we oversee the whole thing, that it is done properly and not to have any problems. If they do have problems, they come to us. Yeah.

LASKEY: Do you think the exam is fair?

SORIANO: The exam is as fair as the people who write them. And that doesn't say much because there's a lot of ignorant unhatched eggs--I will repeat that again--who are graduated from our universities, which is a very dangerous state of affairs. Hideous. And therefore, they-- It becomes a serious matter, really. Because they are the ones who-- Ignorant people write those exams, which are ignorant exams, and then these people who examine are also equally as ignorant. They don't even know what it's all about. They have become sort of a personal subjective nonsense. And that's not the way. And especially architecture is a very, very ticklish thing due to the fact



that there's a great deal of this subjectivity that enters into design, you know. But yet, above that there is a transcendental, a very good objectivity that should occur, really, in knowledge and science. But most architects don't practice that way. They like to make it very subjective, as if they were artists, you see; that again, I'll bring that. That's the biggest disease they have. Our universities are contaminated with that.

LASKEY: Is that reflected in the exam?

SORIANO: Sure. Sure. Yeah, those who even evaluate the candidates' examination, you should see the words they use. I've been taking issue with all of it. Yeah. They talk a lot of nonsense.

LASKEY: Getting back to the question of if you were to open a school and formulate a curriculum, would you include architectural history in the school of architecture?

SORIANO: You could. You could, but then possibly as a reference, I would say. Go to reference school, but don't make a big case. Because history doesn't teach you anything, really. And then besides, what is history? Who writes history? Whoever writes has his own input there. It has nothing to do with the real facts, really.

History's something of the past. I think the future we don't give a damn because we don't know. The future will have its own requirements, its own qualities, its own



advancements, its own knowledge. It's the present that counts. The future, you can understand the future, and don't copy it or imitate it or perform with the future. That doesn't make sense. Today. Today we have tremendous top men that are questioning today's knowledge; that's the important thing. And don't be the messiah that you're going to do for the future. You're going to-- You know, we are to think of the future. Forget it. That's presumptuous of you-- The future may have so many sophisticated things that will boggle your mind. Who are you to tell what the future will be? Even the scientists don't know. All you can do is operate today with what we know what we have today. Then you're doing very well. And then keep always advancing and have broad aspects, yes. You can conjecture, you can abstract, you can postulate about the future, yes. And the past, well, you can read about the past and you'll be ruminating. You're taking a lot of junk said by a lot of people that may or may not be. They may be fairy tales. I have a dear friend of mine, David Daub, used to be a regents professor at Oxford University. And he used to officiate at Passover. Sometimes he used to come in from England, used to give a little séance of sort of a Passover, you know, the Jewish holiday of the Pesach. And he was a scholar of Roman and Greek law. And he used to tell exactly the ceremony the



way the Jews would practice it. In other words, they used to use matzohs. And they used to hide a little piece of leg of lamb, or a little bone, or a piece of little bread, hide it for other people to come, whatever the rich one was. And a lot of other ceremonial things within that thing there. And then he used to come and tell you this whole thing came from the Greek mythology. It has nothing to do with the Jews.

LASKEY: Really?

SORIANO: And he used to give a lot of interesting data on the fact that all of these things go back to the mythology of Greece. And with every new generation, every rabbi added his own little fairy tale, little story to it. Therefore, you have what you have today. You see? And this is very interesting, isn't it? I mean, those who think have thought of that, and now come up with these ideas. Sure. And even the fact that they have-- I questioned some people writing about Chanukah-- You know Chanukah?

LASKEY: Yes.

SORIANO: The holiday? How do you write Chanukah?

LASKEY: I don't know. Sometimes I've seen it spelled with ch--

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: --and sometimes just with an h.





SORIANO: That's correct.

LASKEY: So I'm not sure.

SORIANO: Now, what do you-- What do you think? Well, you would think now Ha-nu-ka. How do you pronounce that and how do you write it, Chanukah? Haiku. How do you write haiku? Ch?

LASKEY: H-A-I--

SORIANO: That's right, h, yeah?

LASKEY: --K-U. Well, but the-- I think, I don't know Hebrew, but I think the ch--

SORIANO: Yeah?

LASKEY: --sound in Hebrew is like a chhh.

SORIANO: Well, chhh is "chaih." It's not "haa," is it?

LASKEY: No, it's a "chhh."

SORIANO: Okay, now do you know why the ch is done?

LASKEY: No.

SORIANO: Who did it? Some young punks. I took issue with a couple of young rabbis-- Christmas. How's Christmas come to be ch, isn't it? Okay. They want it to be sort of related to the modern Christianity, possibly. Chanukah, ch, think in relating to that kind of celebration as it is. Yes. I had this discussion with a couple of young rabbis. And I said, "Are you crazy?" I said, "This is silly." Well, they thought it was part of the same ritual; after all, you know, Christ was a Jew, too. Christos, you



know?

LASKEY: Oh, I know.

SORIANO: And, but the point is that it's Chanukah, which is silly. And I know I wrote the one rabbi that, and you know, he changed it the next time. He wrote it with an h. Yeah. And they keep ruminating without thinking. Some write it, they should know better. Because the ha-nu-ka, it's "haa." It's not Chanukah. No. Charles, ch, isn't it? Yes.

LASKEY: But what is the ch in Italian?

SORIANO: Ch--

LASKEY: It's a c.

SORIANO: No. "Ciao." "Ciao" is c-i.

LASKEY: Yeah, it's c-i,--

SORIANO: Yeah.

LASKEY: But I think ch--

SORIANO: "Ca."

LASKEY: --is not a "tsh."

SORIANO: "Tsh," no.

LASKEY: It's a "k."

SORIANO: No, but it's different, different. It's not--

LASKEY: And so I assume that the--

SORIANO: No.

LASKEY: Hebrew, it was the same thing--

SORIANO: Never, never, never.



LASKEY: --the ch was an h sound.

SORIANO: The h sound is "haa." Yeah. And that's the whole thing, that people don't think. They'll use that, they'll ruminate that again, and it keeps propogating. All of a sudden you find it becomes an accomplished fact. And then you'll see, as you say, you saw it written twice-- Two different types. Sure.

LASKEY: And are you saying then that the h is the proper way--

SORIANO: The h is the proper way--

LASKEY: And the ch is a corruption.

SORIANO: --is a corruption with the young so-called nonthinkers. Yeah, it was some kind of a-- Well, anyway, that's a lot of people who don't think. Especially since the fifties, we have had a lot of those beatniks with beards-- Let me put a little grease on that chair because it bothers me. Once, yeah.

LASKEY: Do you think from what you were saying about Chanukah, then, that this is the problem, one of the problems, related to the teaching of history? That subjective ideas become collective ideas, they get incorporated, and then get passed along as fact?

SORIANO: That's correct. That's exactly it. And then many of them are corrupt untruths. They become like little stories, little fairy tales. And then they become an



accomplished fact. And most people don't even bother to check the sources. They keep using them, they read some words and they think, "Well, yeah, I bet that guy studied that and it validated that," you see? And then he takes it and uses it. And they teach that in the universities by reading a book that somebody wrote about architecture, yeah. And they write whatever according to what this sort of person wrote. Yeah.

LASKEY: Well, if you taught architectural history and you did it through pictures, do you think that would be corrupting?

SORIANO: No, if you can illustrate. If you can illustrate the pictures and show why, show the reasons they were there, as we were discussing here-- When I give lectures I illustrate these very same points very extensively. And they begin to realize that. Yeah. Yes.

LASKEY: We haven't touched at all--and this will be one of the final things we'll probably discuss--but we haven't touched at all on the subject of vernacular architectures and--

SORIANO: What's that? What's that?

LASKEY: Well, native things like igloos, or tree houses. Could a modernist--? Would you recommend that someone like yourself, a modernist, would study what people, indigenous people did as a means of simplifying even further the ideas





of architecture, or incorporating these ideas? Or would you throw them out and deal strictly with technology?

SORIANO: No, the question is a very good one actually. I don't think really that the question of studying igloos, studying tree houses-- Tree houses are, to me they are playthings of kids, isn't it? And the apes do that, they build their own. And it's not a house; they just bend some branches to make a place where they can lie down and sleep. And they don't build shelters. Tree houses are done with children to play; something else we don't bother with that. Igloos are differently. Teepees by some of the primitive Indians, yes. You can study that; some knowledge that comes from there, yes. I don't deny that one bit. I accept that, all the time. In fact, it's good to study this, and if there's anything you can learn from it, you take them; that's perfect. And if there is something that doesn't give you, there's not enough substance, then you throw them away in this. Not everything that the primitives did is admirable. There are some things that are excellent. Same thing, as the Japanese people say, "Oh, the Japanese house is superb." But it's a lot of nonsense. Not all, the whole house is not superb, because there are a lot of things in that house which are just as full of mythology as any place else. Yes.

LASKEY: The Japanese house?



SORIANO: Yes. Some things are very lovely, yes. Some of these--the way the sliding doors and all these things that they made--is a wonderful thing. And then the tatamis, the modular way of sitting with the little tatamis, those are wonderful. You can learn from these. But there are a lot of other things which you cannot take in totality. I've lectured and taught there-- They know me very well over there. And I know them quite well, too. I discussed some points. Not all of them are good. Some are intelligent. It depends. The human being is a very interesting species. I don't care if it's Japanese or Chihuahuan. It doesn't matter. The brain is a very beautiful thing of a human being. Nature has blessed us with that particular instrument which is absolutely superb. It's up to us to evaluate objectively, with great dedication to objectivity. Yes. If we don't do that, then-- There are people who are incapable of doing this. They don't have the instrument in their computer; the brain. Unfortunately, nature has given each one of us a different pattern. And some with much greater euphony than others, with some that can abstract with great virility and big broad concepts. Others can't even think beyond their nose. But we're not sort of denigrating anybody who's not-- doesn't have the fortune of having these faculties. On the contrary. We accept humanity as it is with compassion.



And those who dedicate themselves with this virility of investigation and employing their faculties to the utmost, they're admirable. I admire those people. For that reason, those are the ones who really contribute, who bring illumination, who bring understanding. Those are beautiful people, and they devote their whole life to that. Instead of making money--they don't give a damn about money--their whole beauty is to understand, they want to know. This is what knowledge is. This is what we don't teach in our schools. We're going to make everybody a great genius, a great talented thing, and it's impossible to do that, you see. And this is the tragedy. We try to equalize everything as if it is equal. But it's impossible. Yeah. LASKEY: That's an excellent point. And it is true. We don't accept failure. Or we eliminate it.

SORIANO: Yeah. We-- Not everybody-- I mean, we are so cold, this pseudo, these politicians again making this a pseudo-democracy, and that everybody's equal. But everybody's not really equal. They're all equal as human beings, yes. They're equal to have the love of each one of us, yes, and the compassion. In that respect they're-- we're all equal. But from their contributions, we're not as equal. And therefore, if you want to make somebody who's impossible, incapable of grasping something, to make him on an equal basis with somebody who understands this



quickly--will be a tragic mistake. Because we, first of all, we waste his time that he could be more useful in another field. And waste the time also of the other one who has to remain in that same class trying to explain to this other one. And in the meantime the other one gets bored, gets upset, and it becomes chaos. And this is exactly what we have in our educational system. Yeah. Complete chaos. Because, the democratic thing, everybody has to go to college, everybody has to do this. Well, not everybody is material for college. Impossible. Yeah. College, college, college. What is that? Nothing. Maybe it's better off if they plant trees. If they go and cultivate the earth, it will be better. They will be more useful and they will be happier. Instead of going to college and they don't comprehend, they are full of stresses because they fail. What are we doing? And you try to question that and they say, "Oh, you're an elitist." They call you that. They call me that, yes. They call me many other things. But I don't care, doesn't make any difference. Let them call me. So what? Well, anyway, when are you going to come with this document? Are you going to have another session? You said possibly two sessions, or what? What was that? Go ahead. Are you recording?

LASKEY: I'm recording now.





SORIANO: So these tapes, the paper, the contract form, you see, to me it was absolutely incomprehensible to present me with that right in the beginning. They should have sent this to me before. And therefore, I must tell you that all the statements I made here, they're my own privileged statements, naturally. Because I'm writing a book, my autobiography. A great deal of this will be in my book, too, you see. I don't want the misunderstanding on that, you see. So now I send this form you sent to me to my attorney to see what he says, and then maybe we can communicate from there on further on that same subject. But I want to emphasize that. Because I'm using a great deal of that in my book, and I don't want this to be afterwards, in case this appears in my book, "Oh, well, this is our own privilege." You know? Because--

LASKEY: Yeah, I--

SORIANO: --that's for that reason I didn't sign that document you sent to me. It's in the hands of my attorney. And that's clear, I hope.

LASKEY: I hope so.

SORIANO: Okay. Well, very pleased to meet you and hope I will have a chance to see you again. Give me your telephone number, both at home and so on, okay?

LASKEY: I will. And--

SORIANO: Go ahead, say it.



LASKEY: It's been very--

SORIANO: Say it, say it.

LASKEY: --intense.

SORIANO: Say it, because I have a couple of words; go ahead. And here, I'm just about finishing.

LASKEY: I just want to thank you for the last three days and for--

SORIANO: My pleasure.

LASKEY: --your graciousness and--

SORIANO: My pleasure.

LASKEY: --the interview.

SORIANO: You're very charming yourself. Thank you.

LASKEY: And I'm exhausted. [laughs] It has been intense.

SORIANO: What are your two telephones at home--?

LASKEY: I'll give you a card with the numbers.

SORIANO: Okay.

LASKEY: Thank you again, Mr. Soriano.

SORIANO: Okay, my pleasure, and good wishes to you, okay?

LASKEY: Thank you.

SORIANO: Thank you.



# INDEX

- Acropolis, 350, 362
- Ain, Gregory, 72-73, 76-77
- Alcoa, 215-16, 300-3
- Alcoa Aluminum Conference, 215-16
- Alioto, Joseph L., 304, 308, 311
- American Heart Association, 319
- American Institute of Architects, 52, 67
- Architectural Forum, 214, 244-46; "The New House in 194X", 246-47
- Architectural Record, 214, 278
- Architecture: and the arts, 322-29, 337-61, 379; Bauhaus, 367; Beaux Arts curriculum, the, 49-58; and climate, 263-73; comparative skill involved in metal versus wood design, 182-85; and durability, 361-65; ecologically sound, 109-13; expensive real estate inhibits innovations in, 311-12; exploitation through imitation, 317-19; International Style, 74, 264; in Los Angeles of the thirties, 273-75; and low-cost housing, 365-68; of non-Western cultures, 379-81; philosophy of, 323-32, 337-61; prefabricated housing, 246-61, 312-14
- Asch, George, 287
- Bach, Johann Sebastian, 20, 44, 61, 74, 79, 241-42, 267
- Baldwin, Clayton M., 57
- Banham, Reyner, 12
- Barnsdall Art Center (Los Angeles), 197-99
- Bassett, Charles, 109-12
- Basso, Johnny, 236
- Beatles, 64-65, 70
- Bechstein, Karl, 79
- Beethoven, Ludwig van, 163
- Bellé, Gertrude, 44
- Bellé, René, 43-44, 48, 50, 55
- Belluschi, Pietro, 280
- Bernardi, Theodore C., 116, 280
- Buxtehude, Dietrich, 20
- Blake, Peter, 204
- Bowles, John, 164-67
- Brown, Edmund, G., Jr., 368-70
- California Arts and Architecture, 200-203, 214
- California Institute of Technology, 120
- California State Board of Architectural Examiners, 368-72
- California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, 56-60;
- Candela, Felix, 9-11, 321
- Carter, James E., 114, 310
- Carter, Rosalynn, 114, 310
- Case Study Houses 1945-1962, The, 210
- Case Study house program, 115, 181, 191, 200-204, 206-11, 214
- Casals, Pablo, 60-61
- Chaplin, Charlie, 52
- Chermayeff, Serge, 223-24
- Chicago Symphony Orchestra, 46
- Chilynski, Richard, 56-58
- Close, Fritz, 215, 300-301
- Consolidated Voltee Aircraft Company, 119-21, 244



Couperin, François, 54, 79  
 Daub, David, 374  
 Davidson, J.R., 72-73  
 Day, James, 195  
 Dworsky, Daniel, 232-33  
  
 Eames, Charles, 12, 206-8;  
     Eames House, 206-8;  
     Eames-Saarinen House,  
     207-8  
 Eames, Ray, 207  
 Eckbo, Garret, 67  
 Eichler, Joseph, 115-17,  
     319, 367-68  
 Ellwood, Craig, 11-12, 190-  
     93, 206  
 Emmons, Donn, 116, 280  
 Emmons, Frederick, 115, 220  
 Entenza, John, 75, 115,  
     201-5, 207  
  
 Fairmont Hotel (San  
     Francisco), 299  
 Federal Housing  
     Administration (FHA),  
     122-26  
 Feinstein, Diane, 306, 311  
 Fleishhacker, Mortimer, 195  
 Friedmann, Bob, 307  
 Fujikawa, Joseph Y., 11,  
     193-94, 232-33  
 Fuller, R. Buckminster, 284  
  
 Gallion, Arthur B., 220,  
     223  
 Gershwin, George, 80  
 Goodman, Michael, 247  
 Graham Foundation, 194, 204  
 Graves, Michael, 185, 321  
 Griffin, Cassatt, 89, 91-  
     92, 105, 134  
  
 Hallawell Seed Company,  
     128, 151-54, 228-30, 284  
 Hancock, John Allan, 47  
 Hancock Hall (Los Angeles),  
     47  
 Harris, Harwell Hamilton,  
     72, 75-76, 117, 205, 247;  
     Entenza House, 75  
  
 Hart, Gary, 114  
 Hatfield, David, 292-93  
 Heyer, Paul, 136, 349;  
     **Architects on**  
     **Architecture**, 136, 349  
 Hollywood Knickerbocker  
     Hotel (Los Angeles), 68  
 Honnold, Douglas, 221  
 House and Garden, 214  
 Hunt, H.L., 304-5, 308  
 Huntley Apartments, 98-99  
  
 IBM Building, 164-69, 195  
 IBM Corporation, 164-69  
 International Who's Who,  
     242  
  
 John Reed Club, 81-84  
 Johnson, Philip C., 185-90,  
     193, 204, 321; American  
     Telephone and Telegraph  
     Building, 188; "glass  
     box" house, 187-89;  
     Seagram Building, 187  
 Jones, A. Quincy, 116, 213,  
     220-23  
  
 Kahn, Lewis, 282  
 Kaiser Aluminum, 317  
 Katz, Milton, 135-36  
 Kennedy, John F., 178, 301  
 Koenig, Pierre, 11-12, 190  
 KQED (San Francisco), 195-  
     96, 282, 305-6  
  
 Larsen, Marget, 307  
 Lattice Steel Corporation  
     of California, 133-35,  
     153  
 Lawrence, David, 287  
 Le Corbusier, 368; Ville  
     Radiieuse, la, 368  
 Levittown, 367-68  
 Lietz Company, 166  
 Lipetz, Helen, 79-80  
 Lipetz, Manny, 79-80  
 Los Angeles, 37-38  
 Los Angeles Coaching  
     School, 41  
 Los Angeles County Board of





Supervisors, 198-99,  
Los Angeles Philharmonic  
Orchestra, 85  
Los Angeles Philharmonic  
Auditorium, 41, 87-88  
Lukens, Glen, 139-43  
Lyndon, Maynard, 220, 222-  
23

Makarova, Natalia, 62-63  
Mann, Thomas, 50  
Man Ray, 52  
McCulloch, Irene, 47  
Mendelssohn, Eric, 223  
Merrild, Knud, 52  
Meyer, Douglas, 246  
Miami University, 357  
Michelangelo, 354-55  
Moore, Charles, 283; C  
Ranch, 283  
Morris, V.C., 160-64  
Muirhead, Desmond, 291  
Music, Soriano's  
appreciation for, 17-21,  
45, 54, 61-65, 70, 241,  
260-61  
McCauley, Frank, 315-16  
McCoy, Esther, 12, 43, 71-  
72, 86, 133, 136, 149-50,  
192, 194, 205, 210-11  
McNabb, Esther, 229-30  
Mies van der Rohe, Ludwig,  
88, 108, 186-87, 190-91,  
193-95, 284

National Cornice Works,  
158-59  
Nervi, Pierluigi, 284  
Neutra, Dionne, 86  
Neutra, Frank, 86  
Neutra, Raymond, 77  
Neutra, Richard J., 44, 73,  
77, 80, 86-88, 106-8,  
117, 124, 206, 214, 247,  
264, 275-84, 365-66, 368;  
Kaufman House, 281;  
Lovell House, 281; Rush  
City project, 77, 368  
New Architecture and City  
Planning, 241-42; "Some

Problems of the Low Cost  
Home," 242-43  
Nicholson, Eric, 246  
Northwest Pacific Railroad,  
297

Office of Price  
Administration (OPA),  
156-57

Olds, Alan, 203  
Orkin, Ruth, 84  
Oxford University, 374

Paisiello, Giovanni, 18  
Pani, Mario, 82; Pan-  
American Congress  
buildings, 82  
Pearson, Drew, 181  
Pelli, Cesar, 191-93, 210  
Philosophical Library of  
New York, 241-42  
Project Architects, 220-23;  
Los Angeles Airport bid,  
220; San Pedro Community  
Hospital, 221, 226, 262-  
63

Rameau, Jean Philippe, 54,  
79  
Reed, James H., 211  
Reed, John, 81  
Rex, John, 221  
Rigler, Leo G., 197-99, 288  
Rolland, Romain, 50, 285  
Ross, Bruce, 111-12  
Rossi, A. Cal, 299-300,  
302-3  
Royal Institute of British  
Architects, 51, 265  
Ruppell, Fritz, 133-35,  
143-44, 153, 183

Saarinen, Eero, 207-8, 350;  
Eames-Saarinen House,  
207-8; TWA terminal, 350  
Saint Peter's Cathedral  
(Rome), 350, 353-54, 362  
San Bernardino Valley  
College, 293  
San Francisco Chronicle,



- 307  
 Scarlatti, Alessandro, 54, 79, 267  
 Schindler, Rudolph M., 73, 76-79, 275  
 Schoenberg, Arnold, 61-62  
**Second Generation, The**, 72, 191  
 Semple, Paul, 45, 54  
 Shankar, Ravi, 61  
 Shulman, Emma, 213  
 Shulman, Julius, 149, 170, 211-13  
 Shulman, Olga, 212-13  
 Siqueiros, Blanca Luz, 82  
 Siqueiros, David, 81-82  
 Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, 278, 301  
 Smith, Ann, 305  
 Smithsonian Institution, 47  
 Society and superfluous design, 240-44  
 Soriano, Alfredo (brother), 6, 12  
 Soriano, Raphael: accident and recovery from, 95-100; immigrates to California, 27-38; at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, 58-60; philosophy of aesthetics and utility, 323-65; view of history, 374-79  
 Soriano, Raphael--architectural projects: Adolph's Building, 144-46, 175, 197, 217, 238, 257-63, 295, 297; Alcatraz proposal, 299, 303-11; Alcoa Aluminum Office Tower (planned project), 301-3; **Arts and Architecture Case Study House**, 200-4, 209-11, 214; Austrian House, 133, 141; **Ciro's**, 157, 223-27; Colby Apartments, 217, 227-28, 231-40, 262-63; Cook House, 257; Curtis House, 170, 172-82, 217; Dixon House, 97-98; Driver House, 141; Ebert House, 149; Eichler House, 114-15, 319; Gato House, 135-38, 182-83; Gogol House, 97, 126-27, 141; Hallawell Nursery and Garden Center, 150-56, 228-30, 287; Latz Memorial Jewish Community Center, 94, 103, 128-30, 134, 137; Lee and Cady Warehouse, 133-34, 143-44; Lipetz House, 79-80, 85-86, 88-89, 92-94, 105-6, 141; Lukens House, 139-43; Pep's Restaurant, 156-57; Polito House, 133, 137-38; Ross House, 133; Shulman House, 170, 172; Strauss House, 149-50  
 Soriano, Rebecca (mother), 1, 5-6, 13-17, 21, 23-26, 36-38, 101  
 Soriano, Simon (father), 2, 5-6, 9, 12-17, 23-24, 26-27, 32  
 Soriano, Vittorio (brother), 6, 17  
 Spanish Inquisition, 1-2  
 Spence, Delia, 265-66  
 Spence, Robin, 265-66  
 Stanford Court (San Francisco), 299-300, 302  
 Sullivan, Louis, 76, 275-76  
 Technion (Haifa, Israel), 62  
 Temko, Allen, 300  
 Temko, Becky, 300  
 Thompson, Dorothy, 278  
 Tidmarsh, George, 120  
**Time**, 186  
 Toscanini, Arturo, 46  
 United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, 310



United States Plywood  
Company, 232-33  
United States Steel, 319  
University of California,  
Berkeley, 131, 278  
University of California,  
Los Angeles, 131  
University of La Verne--San  
Bernardino Valley College  
of Law, 287  
University of Southern  
California, 41-50, 53-58,  
61, 72, 77, 140, 220

Varda, Agnes, 52  
Varèse, Edgard, 51-52  
Venturi, Robert, 283  
Vivaldi, Antonio, 267

Watson, Thomas J., Jr.,  
165-67, 169  
Wax, Mel, 305-6  
Webster, Robin, 265  
Weiss, Adolph, 61-62  
Weatherhead, Arthur, 43,  
48, 53, 57  
White, Durham, 247  
Works Progress  
Administration (WPA), 89  
Wright, Lloyd, 162-63  
Wright, Frank Lloyd, 44,  
72, 75-76, 87-88, 159-64,  
190, 197, 205, 275-76,  
282; Guggenheim Museum,  
350; Hollyhock House,  
197; V.C. Morris Company  
store, 159-64  
Wurster, William W., 116,  
131, 278-82, 287

Yale University, 187, 192,  
270

Zeckendorf, William, 367-68

IX-279













