CRAFT AND FOLK ART MUSEUM
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW OF SAM MALOOF

by Joan M. Benedetti

October 27, 2008

Sam Maloof
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BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Sam Maloof was born in Chino, California, January 24, 1916. He passed away May 21, 2009. The sixth of eight children, whose parents emigrated from Lebanon, he graduated from Chino High School in 1934. He began work at the Vortox Company in Claremont. In 1939, he went to work for industrial designer Harold Graham. He married briefly while in the army, but divorced after coming home. In 1945, he went to work for Angelus-Pacific, a commercial art firm in L.A. and made furniture for himself out of scrap lumber. In 1946, he began working for Millard Sheets, an artist and head of the Scripps College art department. In 1947, he met his future wife, Alfreda (Freda) Ward, outside of Sheets' classroom.

Maloof married Ward on June 27, 1948. A graduate of UCLA, an ex-Navy WAVE, and a painter, she had worked for eight years for the Indian Service. The couple moved into Freda's house in Ontario, California. There he designed a suite of furniture for their home, again out of scrap lumber. They had a son, Sammie, and an adopted daughter, Marilou.

In 1949, Maloof set up his own business and began to acquire wealthy customers. Henry Dreyfuss commissioned 25 pieces for his contemporary home and business. In 1951, Maloof attended the Asilomar American Craft Council conference. (Later he served on the ACC board.) In 1953 the Maloofs moved to Alta Loma, where he built a studio and hand-crafted home that became a City Historic Landmark and is now on the National Trust for Historic Preservation's list of Historic Artists' Homes & Studios. In 1957, the Museum of Contemporary Craft included Maloof's work in its first exhibition of studio-craft furniture. In 1966, his first one-man show was at The Egg and The Eye gallery. Edith and Frank Wyle, founders of the gallery and the Craft and Folk Art Museum (CAFAM), commissioned Maloof furniture for their homes in L.A. and North Fork, and for Frank Wyle's offices at Wyle Laboratories. Maloof was later on the CAFAM board.

In 1985, he received a MacArthur Foundation "genius" award. In 2001, "The Furniture of Sam Maloof," was mounted at the Smithsonian's Renwick Gallery. His rocking chairs are in three presidents' collections: Jimmy Carter (who also visited Maloof's home), Ronald Reagan, and Bill Clinton. His furniture is in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and many others.

In June 1990, an eight-lane expressway was announced that would have destroyed the Maloofs' property. Eventually, CalTrans paid $2.4 million for the property and dismantled, moved, and rebuilt it on a new site. Freda helped choose the new site in Alta Loma, but on September 23, 1998, she died. In 2001 Sam married Beverly Wingate, a long-time friend. Since Maloof's death, Wingate has overseen Sam's legacy. The historic home is filled with art; woodworking shops turn out Maloof-designed furniture; and there is a Maloof-designed Education Center.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Interviewer: Joan M. Benedetti. B.A., Theater; M.A., Library Science, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. Related Experience: Milwaukee Public Library Decorative Arts Librarian, 1967 – 1968; CAFAM Museum Librarian 1976 – 1997. From 1998 – 2012, Benedetti worked to process the CAFAM Records, 1965 – 1997, which are now part of Special Collections at the UCLA Young Research Library. From 2008 – 2010 she conducted oral history interviews with seventeen former CAFAM staff and trustees; almost 60 hours were recorded and transcribed. She is the author of several articles on folk art terminology and small art museum libraries and the editor of *Art Museum Libraries and Librarianship*, Lanham, MD: ARLIS/NA and Scarecrow Press, 2007.

Time and Setting of Interview

Place: Maloof's home on Carnelian Street in Alta Loma, a community within the City of Rancho Cucamonga, California.

Date: Monday, October 27, 2008.

Time of day, length of sessions, and total number of hours recorded*:* One interview took place in the morning and was 1 hour, 41 minutes, 31 seconds in length.

Persons present during the interview: Benedetti and Sam Maloof, with Beverly Maloof available in the next room.

Conduct and Content of Interview: To prepare for the Maloof interview, Benedetti reviewed the relevant documents in the CAFAM Archives; a biographical file of clippings and résumés in the CAFAM Library collection at the L.A. County Museum of Art Research Library; and two books on Maloof's life and work: *Sam Maloof: Woodworker*, by Sam Maloof (Tokyo and New York: Kodansha, 1983) and *The Furniture of Sam Maloof*, by Jeremy Adamson (Washington D.C. and New York: Smithsonian American Art Museum and W.W. Norton & Co., 2001). After Maloof's death in May 2009, she also consulted with his widow, Beverly Wingate Maloof. The interview follows a very roughly chronological sequence with frequent detours. Sam doesn't remember a lot of the later history of the museum. Most of the talk of the Wyles, The Egg and The Eye, and CAFAM does not begin until about half-way through the transcript.

Editing: After Maloof died May 21, 2009, Joan asked Beverly Maloof to review the transcript. It was edited by Benedetti and Beverly Maloof for spelling of names and Joan added full names and opening dates of CAFAM exhibitions where appropriate. Both Tomi and Joan also added further information in brackets for clarification and deleted with ellipses some back-and-forth comments that did not add to the reader's understanding of the narrative. Time stamps have been added to both the table of contents and the transcript at five-minute intervals; the time stamps make it easier to locate the topics in the transcript that are mentioned in the table of contents.

Table of Contents

CRAFT AND FOLK ART MUSEUM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW OF SAM MALOOF

Monday, October 27, 2008. Interviewed by Joan M. Benedetti

JB: This is Monday, October 27, 2008, and I'm here in Alta Loma, [part of the Rancho Cucamonga community] in Southern California, with the multi-award-winning woodworker and furniture designer, Sam Maloof. He's agreed to talk with us about his involvements with both The Egg and The Eye Gallery and the Craft and Folk Art Museum, as well as his friendship with Edith and Frank Wyle, and my name is Joan Benedetti.

Sam, because your life is so well documented in books and magazines and now on the Internet, we'll talk today only about the earliest—and then later—about the most recent years of your life. But your personal history is relevant to CAFAM's history because it reflects, to a large extent, the history of contemporary craft in this country and I think it provides a kind of context for the emergence of The Egg and The Eye gallery, and I know that you were there at the beginning. The Egg and The Eye gallery opened on November 1, 1965, and it was a commercial gallery before it became a museum devoted to folk art and contemporary craft and it was very successful, but that success didn't happen in a vacuum. The ground for its success had been tilled for many years by people such as yourself, both here and in New York City and I'd like for you to just talk for a little bit first about what it was like to set out on your own as a furniture craftsman in Southern California in 1948.

SM: Well, my background—I don't know when I wasn't able to draw, but I got out of high school and I was accepted to go to school at the Disney Studios for 18 weeks. They had a school and if you were selected you went for 18 weeks and if they liked you, they hired you, and I had just gotten out of high school and it was quite a thrill but, coming from a small town and all, my mother, not wanting me to go to Los Angeles—I didn't know anybody. I didn't know where I was going to live or anything, and she persuaded me not to go. So, I had to write to the Disney Studios and I wrote and said that I regretted that I couldn't go. I didn't tell them the reason.

JB: Was that a big disappointment to you?

SM: Well, in a way it was, and in a way, it wasn't. I was scared to death myself of leaving home and going in to live in Los Angeles all by myself, because we were a very close-knit family, and if my mother had said, "Go," I think I would have gone, but she didn't want me to go. And it did turn out all right. I graduated from high school and I'd won a poster contest for the Pasadena Playhouse and Padua Hills Theater that were combined at that time, for a play called—well, it was *Oliver Twist.* And there were hundreds—I found out

later—there were just hundreds of posters designed and made to advertise it. I remember my art teacher, Miss Corwin—I had sort of a studio . . . by myself in a little separate niche at school and the day before they were to be turned in she said, "Sammy, you haven't done a thing." She said, "If you don't make a poster, I'm going to give you an F. So there." So, I said, "OK." So, I knocked one out and it happened to win the first prize.

JB: Oh my.

SM: And there were contestants from all the Los Angeles school systems. Some were very professional . . . I got to see them at a later date. **[5:00]** But anyway, they gave a little party or whatever it was at Padua Hills for me and my class and we got to see the play and that was it. And as we were walking out of the theater, going to the car, the owner, Mr. [Herman H.] Garner, who owned [the] Vortox Company (who owned Padua Hills) asked me what I was going to do after I graduated . . . in June—and this was May--and I said, "Well, I don't know, but I want to go on to college. I want to go to art school somewhere." He said, "What are you going to do this summer?" I said, "I have to find a job." And he said, "Well, when you graduate, you call me, and we'll see what we can do." So, I told my art teacher about it and about a week before school was over, she said, "Sammy, have you made contact with Mr. Garner?" And I said, "No, we don't have a telephone. We don't have a car." And she said, "Well, I'll call." So, she called and made an appointment for me and--

JB: This was Eleanor Corwin.

SM: Yeah.

JB: Ah!

SM: And she had a little Model A Ford. She drove me to the place and waited in the car for me, and we talked a while and Mr. Garner said, "Do you like to wash windows?" And I said, "Oh, I love to wash windows." And he said, "Well, as soon as school is over, you come and you have a job." And I was thrilled about that. But it was a factory and they had a great—I thought it was a great big building and hundreds of panes of glass that had never been washed--

JB: Oh, my goodness!

SM: And so, I washed windows for three months.

JB: Oh, my goodness [laughing].

SM: And I never—I thought, well, you know, they hired me to work in the art department and here I am washing windows. But anyway, about three months after I washed them inside and out, and I got to know all the workers in the factory because I was always in their way--

JB: Yeah [laughing].

SM: And he called me into his office and he said, "I think you've proven to be a good worker." He said, "Would you like to work in the art department?" And I started to say, "Well, that's what you hired me for," but I knew better and I didn't [say so]. Well, the art department only consisted of a girl who ran the photography and then they had a little printing press, a little lithograph machine that someone ran and that was it. And whenever they wanted art work done, they would—Millard Sheets did some for them and all—and Millard was sort of my idol—but I went to work for them and I worked for them for three years. I not only did all the little advertisements for the different plays at Padua Hills--and they had some in conjunction with the Pasadena Playhouse—but I also started doing catalogs--

JB: --for the Vortox Company--

SM: --for the Vortox Company. And I could do—you know, I could—mechanical drawing was easy for me, and I did a lot of drawings and all for—and I still have some of their books. Well then, there was a man [Harold Graham, an industrial designer] that had a shop about two blocks away, and I used to walk in the alley and look in the door—they were garage doors—and they were doing fascinating things. I really didn't know what they were, but they were fascinating. One day, months later, I designed a great big exhibit for Vortox—I have a photograph of it yet. I made letters about four feet high, cut out.

JB: I think I saw [that] in the book by Jeremy Adamson.

SM: Probably.

JB: Wonderful book.

SM: So, I got nerve enough and I went over and he—the owner—wasn't there, but one of the workers (he only had one worker) was. He said, "Can I help you?" And I said, "Well, I'd like to talk to the owner." And he said—he's a real cranky guy—he said, "Well, if I were you, I'd just leave." Well just then the owner walked in. I don't think he heard him, but I was in the shop and he asked if he could help me, and I told him--and he said, "Well I know that you stop and look in at the door all the time."

JB: Oh, he had noticed you.

SM: He'd nod his head at me and all. But they did window decorations for Bullock's and interiors and all. And I said, "Well, I designed something and I have to have a band-saw to cut out these big letters." And he said, "Have you ever used a band-saw?" **[10:00]** And I said,

"Sure I have." And I never had. And I told him what I was doing and so he came over to see it. He said, "Sure. You'll have to do it when we're not busy in the shop and all," but I cut out these great big letters and he said, "I'd like to see what you've done." So, when it was all completed, when we had it all put together in the courtyard of this manufacturing place, he liked it. And it won first prize at the big oil show in Chicago. But he asked me if I'd like to work for him, and I said I'd love to. And so, I'd quit [at Vortox] at five o'clock, walk across the tracks to where he was, and I'd work until midnight, and I did this for about four months.

JB: You were working both places.

SM: Both places.

JB: Wow.

SM: Then he asked if I'd like to work steady. So, I had a miserable time telling them at Vortox that I was leaving.

JB: Yes.

SM: I mean they didn't—they could hire somebody else easily, but anyway, I went to work for Harold [Graham]. And he and Millard Sheets and Bill Manker had formed a little company to do design and all for store fronts [. . .] and they'd dropped out and it was just Harold, but I worked for Harold for about three years and then I was drafted and went into the army and I was in the army for four years.

JB: Excuse me, but when did you meet Millard Sheets?

SM: Well I met Millard Sheets when I worked at Vortox. [Millard Sheets (1907 – 1989) was an American painter, illustrator, muralist, printmaker, and architect and designer of mosaics for Home Savings of America banks throughout California. He taught at Chouinard Art Institute and Scripps College and was director of Otis Art Institute 1954 – 1960.] Because he used to come in and do some of the drawings on the plates.

JB: But you knew what he had done?

SM: Oh yes, he was a hero. I just—you know—but he couldn't letter, and I could letter directly on the plates that he would do drawings on. But he would do one or two a year, but I did the posters and I did all the other stuff that they had. But we became friends, but he and Harold and Bill Manker, who was the potter, formed this little company. It didn't last long because it was too much friction between three artists and all. But I went to work there and I learned to work with tools there, and then Harold's stepfather—he'd been a master sergeant in the army—and when I was drafted I didn't—I could have gotten out, because he was doing things for the armed forces then--but I thought, no, I better get drafted or go

when they call me, and I remember his stepfather saying (he was retired), he said, "Young man,"—now what was it?—he said, "Never argue with an officer; never argue with the—just do what they tell you to do." And that's what I did.

But they had a little mascot, an ocelot, and it was an outfit from Panama, so I started drawing this little ocelot, cartoonish, like Disney would. And I had him doing all kinds of things, fighting, guns and all. One of the kids that worked in the office slept next to me—we were at the Hollywood Turf Club—they took it over—and he said, "Can I show these to the officer in charge? They're looking for a little something about the ocelot." Well, as soon as he saw them, he called me in, and I thought—I didn't know what it was all about. He was a—I think—a lieutenant colonel and he said, "Did you do this, soldier?" And I said, "Yes, I did sir." He said, "Hmmm. Can you do engineering drawing?" And I said, "Yes, I can sir. I've done it in the past." And he gave me a drawing of a gun emplacement—it was horrible—and I did it just like I did when I worked at Vortox. I started doing a lot of drawings of gun emplacements and all. And also, my little ocelot. He thought it would make a good emblem.

JB: Kind of a mascot? Is that what it was?

SM: A little ocelot, yeah. And I made him in a cartoon thing. And I'd worked--where I first had my job--we used to do printing and all. **[15:00]** So, I took it to a friend of mine--they'd left and gone to work for another company--and he printed them for me. You know, you tore 'em off and put 'em on windshields and all. So, I did all kinds of 'em. But anyway, I went to work in a battalion. I was still a private, but I'd do gun emplacements, did all kinds of drawings, and then engineering drawings. And I'd have 'em printed, then send 'em to headquarters. Then one day I happened to take it myself and there were three big drawings of gun emplacements and this general came out and—er--a full colonel, and he said, "Soldier, do you know who made these drawings?" And I gulped. I was scared to death, and I said, "I did sir." He said, "Hmmm," and he took my name and all, and about a week later I was called into battalion headquarters. They wanted to transfer me to regiment headquarters. "But I want you to stay here," [he said], "I can make you a staff sergeant." And I was only a private. And I said, "Whatever you say sir." And about a week later, I was called back in to the [headquarters]: "They want you there, but I'm not going to let you go until they make you a staff sergeant." So, one week I was PFC; the next week I was a corporal; the next week a sergeant; the next week a staff sergeant."

JB: Oh, my goodness!

SM: And I was transferred to headquarters.

JB: Now where was—was that--?

SM: This was in Englewood.

JB: In Englewood. So, you were in the L.A. area.

SM: And the headquarters were at the Hollywood Turf Club. And--

JB: Was your family able to visit you? Were you able to visit them?

SM: Well, at that time you could have visitors, but you had to go out to the car to see them; you couldn't leave or anything. But anyway, then we were shipped—I was there about six months—and then we were getting moved. We didn't know where. But it was a convoy, clear from Los Angeles to San Francisco. And we got on a—I forget what they called them—but it was a landing ship that had a big thing that dropped and you could drive off of it. And all of us were seasick. We were just young kids, most of us. And we landed in Kodiak. And we were in Kodiak for about three weeks. Then we found out we were going to invade Kiska. It had already been invaded and so we got on a bigger ship and went to Kiska, and found out there was nobody there. The Japanese had evacuated--

JB: That must have been a relief!

SM: Well, a lot of people had been killed, but we saw—the bombers dropped bombs on it for weeks before we landed. And little two-man submarines--. It was just a ruin. And then a lot of soldiers were killed, like one of them, there was a big bomb that didn't go off and he was trying to do something with it and had his foot on it and hit it with a hammer and it blew up and killed him.

JB: Oh my.

SM: But I didn't see any fighting at all. But I saw a lot of ruin. And by then I was a master sergeant. I was the youngest master sergeant in the army. I was a master sergeant before we left Los Angeles.

JB: Uh-huh.

SM: I was in Kiska for two years. And there was nothing there. We lived in tents. They finally brought in quonsets and then I was asked if—well, I wasn't asked; I was told to go to Anchorage and be the master gunner there for the division. So, I went there, and that was civilization. **[20:00]** But I was only there about six months when I was asked—or I wasn't asked—I was sent to Kodiak—no it wasn't Kodiak. I forgot—well, anyway, one of the islands where they had their advanced headquarters. And there was no fighting or anything. [The island of] Attu had been taken over by Americans and there was not much to do, just sit and read and all. I was listening to the radio and I heard that Japan had surrendered.

JB: Oh!

SM: So, I walked into the colonel's office and I said, "Sir, did you hear the news?" And he said, "What news?' And I said, "I just heard that Japan had surrendered." And he hadn't heard a thing. But anyway, I stayed there about a month more and then I could have stayed in the army if I wanted to but I didn't want to do that, so I came home--

JB: You probably missed your family a lot.

SM: Well, I did. I married while I was in the army. I married a girl and I was making about $450 a month, which was a lot of money--

JB: Oh yes.

SM: And I sent it all to her. But when I got home I found out she had another boyfriend.

JB: Oh my!

SM: So, we got a divorce. But I went to work for a company that made decals . . . and I worked there for about a year and then Millard Sheets and Harold Graham, who was an industrial designer I worked for, heard I was back and he called and asked if I would have dinner with them and I did, and Millard asked me if I would like to go to work for him. Well, I—you know, it was like, you know, him asking me to go to work for him was something that I'd never in my life thought of, and here he was, a very well-established painter, world-renown, especially in the United States, and more so in California. So, I went to work for Millard and I went back, lived at home, and I worked for Millard, and I had worked—I was like one of the family; I worked day and night on stuff. And I did about 30 serigraphs of his paintings—I don't know if you know what a serigraph is--

JB: Yes, I do. [Serigraphs are prints made by a high-quality screen-printing process. They are individually hand made by craftsmen who push printing ink through stencils attached to a fine screen onto hand made paper, one color at a time, to produce a work of art.]

SM: You know, we'd make 100 of each and I'd say, "Oh Millard, we'll never sell them." But they sold like hot cakes. You know, instead of paying $1,000 for a painting, you paid $10 for a serigraph.

JB: Do you have any of those now?

SM: Yeah, I have some. I wish that I'd have saved one of everything--

JB: Yes, I'm sure!

SM: But, I don't know, I just felt if I took any it would be like stealing. And I didn't. I really didn't keep a one without him knowing.

JB: Yeah.

SM: But after he died, his daughter, who was a very dear friend of ours and was Beverly's best friend, gave me about 15 of them.

JB: Oh my.

SM: But I just felt, Millard never said "Take what you want." And I just felt it would be stealing if I took any. And it was the same way with his painting. I remember one rainy day he was separating them and he had a pile about this high and a pile about that high and he was like shuffling them and we had a fire going in the fireplace in his studio and he said, "Throw these in the fireplace." And I said, "What?!" I said, "Millard you can't." He said, "Throw them in the fireplace." He left and I would look at one and see that they were beautiful paintings. And I told somebody about it later and they said, "You should have taken them home, and then later given them to him." But I said, "That would be stealing." And I didn't. I just didn't even think of doing that and I wouldn't. But anyway, I worked for Millard and then [at Scripps] I met a girl who was the director of arts and crafts in the Indian Service, who was there. Her father had died, and her mother was an invalid. She came home to take care of her, and then she went to Scripps to get her master's, and I met her the first day she came, and I saw her and I just fell head over heels. We got married.

JB: That was Freda. **[25:00]**

SM: Yeah. So, we lived in a little house that she'd bought on her G.I. and I remember she paid $1,200 for it—no $2,400—and I thought—we had to pay $35 a month [for the mortgage] and I thought, "How are we ever going to do it?" But we did and I made furniture for it.

JB: That was the first furniture you made, isn't that, right?

SM: The first furniture I made, and I do have photographs of it. In fact--

JB: I was really struck, in looking at the Adamson book--and reading it--at how many photographs you had of the early work that you did. And I guess you had been the photographer--

SM: Beverly—can you come here a minute, sweetheart?

JB: I'll pause. . . **[Interruption in recording]**

SM: I did furniture. Then Millard Sheet's brother—I wasn't working for Millard then; I was working for myself and I made this out of dunnage. I'd walk along the railroad track. They used to unload cars out of boxcars and there was all kinds of dunnage that--

JB: The wood crates that cars [were shipped in]?

SM: Well, they weren't wood crates; they were actually—they'd build a platform, put a car on it, and all—but anyway, say crates—and they'd just throw the dunnage alongside the track.

And then they'd pick it up a week or two later. So, I went to the station agent that I knew, and he said, "Oh, you can take all you want." And so—it was all kinds of wood—oak, not any walnut, but most of it was oak and I took it home and I started making furniture out of it.

JB: Now, let me just backtrack a little bit. You said that at this point you were working on your own. That was a pretty big decision to come to—you and Freda talked about it—and she encouraged you--

SM: Well I worked for Millard. I worked for Millard when I was married and five o'clock would come and he'd come in and say, "Well, let's get going," and we'd work until midnight, two o'clock in the morning. And this went on for about three months and I'd get home and I saw that the table was all set. Freda'd cooked. She was very gentle and when I came home about one in the morning she used to say, "Sammy, who are you married to, Millard or me?" And she'd start crying.

JB: Aw-w-w.

SM: The next day I was home at 5:30, and so the thing went out that I wasn't the same since I'd been married. So, I quit—and started making furniture. And I didn't have a penny to my name, but people saw it and liked it. And then I think my first big break on furniture—well, the *L.A. Times* saw it and did several articles on it. And I didn't know from week to week if I was going to have a job or something to make. And I remember my mailman—I worked in a one-car garage without any power tools, and one day I got a check for $500 from--

JB: Oh—hold on just a moment **[recording interrupted]**

SM: Where were we?

JB: Well you were talking about how you first got some publicity in the *L.A. Times*?

SM: Well what it was—I'd met Harry Sims Bent—he was a very good friend of Millard's--and Harry Sims Bent during the war was head of the design department at the war office in Washington and Henry Dreyfuss worked for him. And I found out that [. . . Harry] had fired him and he turned out to be the finest industrial designer in the world. And they remained friends, but he was just—he didn't go to college; I didn't go to college—I'm self-taught; Henry Dreyfuss was self-taught and became the most prominent industrial designer in the world.

JB: Oh, yes, yes.

SM: He had a wonderful office and all. But unfortunately, his wife, who ran the office, ran the business, died. **[30:00]** They committed suicide together.

JB: Oh my goodness! I never heard that story.

SM: He knew she was dying. She knew she was dying. They'd just built this great big house in Pasadena and, through Harry Bent, he found out that I made furniture.

JB: Yes.

SM: And so, he called me one day from New York. He had an office in New York, then an office in L.A. where they bought this big new home. One of his daughters had something, she couldn't live in New York—they were just small girls—and he called me up, and he said, "This is Henry Dreyfuss. You probably don't know who I am, but I know who you are." I just about collapsed because he was my idol.

JB: [laughing] Yeah.

SM: And I went to see him when the house was complete and he said, "I'd like to have you make furniture for it."

JB: Oh, my goodness.

SM: I said, "You want to design and you want me to make it?" He said, "Absolutely not." He said, "You design it. You make it." And Henry Jaegers designed the house. It's still sitting there. It's a big, big house. So, I did about 35 pieces for him.

JB: Oh, my goodness! Did you have any assistants at this time?

SM: No, I didn't even have a table saw. And Harold Graham had a table saw that tilted—the table tilted. He let me use that. But that was the only power tool I had. And I worked in a single-car garage and I made the refectory table, twelve chairs, a buffet, another cabinet, a coffee table, then I did another sort of sitting room, and then three pieces for each of the children's bedrooms. And then four pieces—but anyway, it was a lot of furniture and I got around $2,400 for all of it. And Doris [Dreyfuss] says, "Henry, that seems like an awful lot of money." And he says, "Dear, we haven't bought furniture since we were married. Prices have gone up."

JB: Mrs. Dreyfuss thought that was a lot of money. Oh! Well, of course it was at the time. But for all of that furniture—still.

SM: Well, the house that they built you couldn't buy for $2,000,000 now.

JB: No.

SM: On five acres. The acreage is worth $2,000,000. But I thought, "Great." So, Henry and I became very, very good friends. But then his wife became ill and they committed suicide together—which was a heartbreaker—but I remained friends with the children. John, the son, I did a beautiful rocking chair for him, and then he died quite young. He died about

six, seven years ago. I think he was about—not even sixty. But anyway, then somebody else saw it and somebody else saw it. It was all word of mouth, except I did show my work at—I can't think of the name now (they're still in business)—I'll think of it [Kneedler Fauchere]. But anyway, it was one of the finest outlets for furniture in the Los Angeles area, and they handled my work. But there the decorator got a third--they took a third and I got a third. And after five years, I got wise enough to know that people would come directly to me.

JB: Yes, a lot of the information that I have about you--

SM: It's probably the same thing--

JB: --is from Jeremy Adamson's book. Of course--

SM: There's a lot of it that isn't in there, though, that I'm telling you.

JB: Oh, I'm sure. I'm sure. [. . .] But when you were getting started, there wasn't a lot of support for contemporary craft at that time.

SM: Oh none at all! If it hadn't been for--

JB: I mean in terms of museums and galleries and even collectors.

SM: No—but Kneedler Fauchere were the leaders, I think, in Los Angeles, but all of it was manufactured furniture. **[35:00]**

JB: They were the design firm—the decorating firm?

SM: Yeah. They're still in business. And they've been in business now for fifty-some years. In fact, I'm going to an anniversary dinner that they're having next week.

JB: Oh boy.

SM: But Kneedler is still living and Fauchere sold her interest out, but they still call them [selves] Kneedler Fauchere. And their daughter, who is about fifty, is one of our docents—so we are very good friends.

JB: You have been very talented at keeping people close to you for a long time.

SM: You know, if you treat people nice, they treat you nice.

JB: I just wanted to ask you—in this early period—there were a few organizations that were supporting contemporary craft.

SM: Well we had—of course, the Museum of Contemporary Craft in New York--

JB: --in New York--

SM: --that Mrs. Webb started. [Aileen Osborn Webb was the founder of the American Craft Council, which ran what was then called the Museum of Contemporary Craft; in 1986, it was renamed the American Craft Museum; as of this writing it is the Museum of Arts and Design, but it is no longer associated with the American Craft Council.]

JB: Yes.

SM: It was the first craft museum that I knew of, and they asked if I would show—I'd never even heard of them [at that time]. [In 1957, five of Maloof's pieces were shown in *Furniture by Craftsmen* at the Museum of Contemporary Craft.] And I shipped a couple of pieces and they sold immediately. And then they had one or two one-man shows of mine. And then they—their store--I don't think it exists anymore.

JB: Well, there was a store called America House.

SM: --America House.

JB: It doesn't exist anymore.

SM: I don't know if it exists anymore.

JB: No, but it was important at the time.

SM: They sold my things. They were all on consignment. But I sold everything I ever sent to them. And then when Mrs. Webb died--they had it on 53rd Street—and then—they've just opened—they bought the old—oh gosh, what's the fellow's name? [The building on Columbus Circle in New York City, designed by Edward Durell Stone in 1964 as the home of the Huntington Hartford Museum, was radically renovated in 2008 to house the Museum of Arts and Design.]

JB: Yes, I know what you mean.

SM: Well, the new museum in New York.

JB: Yes, and they changed the name.

SM: Huh?

JB: They changed the name.

SM: Changed the name to M.A.D.

JB: M.A.D.

SM: Museum of Arts and Design.

JB: Yes.

SM: You'd never know that Mrs. Webb had anything to do with it.

JB: Yes. Did you go to the opening, by any chance?

SM: No, I don't want any part of it.

JB: Yeah.

SM: You'd have thought they'd have named it after her or something. But they didn't. If it hadn't been for her, there would never have been a movement like we had.

JB: Yes, she was quite remarkable. She even visited the Craft and Folk Art Museum [in 1978]. I think that maybe you were there that night.

SM: Well, she stayed with us.

JB: That was when you were on the American Craft Council board.

SM: Yes.

JB: Oh, that's right! She stayed with you, didn't she?

SM: We all went to Japan together, Mrs. Webb and a bunch of us and then they came and stayed overnight with us in our little house. No, no, they stayed in the house up there. I remember—she locked both doors and we—"Is she all right? Is she all right?" I'll have to show you that house. It's much more interesting than this one. But anyway, I'm not in contact with them hardly at all, but they own—they have three or four of my pieces and the Metropolitan has about three or four of my pieces.

JB: I think every major museum--

SM: What?

JB: I think that *every* major museum in this country and several in the U.K. and other European--

SM: Oh no, my work is shown in a lot of museums that I don't even know of. But it—but anyway what happened was after I married Freda and I worked in a one-car garage I kept saying "I wish I had a bigger place." So, Freda said, "Well, why don't we do it instead of talking about it?" I said, "But we don't have any money." But we went on and we found one acre and there was a *huge* avocado [tree] on it; the biggest I've ever seen, and an old house, and then a chicken house that was just all down and all. But the lemon grove was very nice, and so we traded what equity we had in our house with them and that's where it all started. And I worked in the chicken house for about three years. **[40:00]** And then we laid a concrete floor and as I was able to pay for it, I built a shop up there that was [eventually] moved here. And then I built Freda that house on that property.

JB: Yes.

SM: That was moved. And then when the freeway came through, they declared it a National something or other and they couldn't tear it down, so Freda and I—they gave us twenty spots to pick [from] and Freda picked this one. And it was the lemon grove. And we terraced it off and I designed this as a museum and—but she died before it was completed. So, I was alone for about four or five years. And this house was completed; I lived in it. And then the other house I left just like it is and that's the museum. [The original home, now a museum, was deemed eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.]

JB: Well, it's wonderful to have virtually your whole life still around you here.

SM: Yeah, it is. Then Beverly [Wingate] was about 22, 24, when I met her. I made furniture for her and she paid me $15 a month whenever she could. And I never stayed in touch with her, but we were all friends, and then she'd been divorced for about twenty-some years and then I just happened to run into her in Claremont. I went to an exhibit and she and a friend came and we got married. So, we've been married about eight years now.

JB: That's wonderful.

SM: But it--the whole thing—I never got mixed up with a big firm or anything.

JB: No.

SM: After Kneedler Fauchere, I decided I could sell it just by word of mouth and that's what we do.

JB: Yes. I wanted to mention a couple of places that showed your work early. You've mentioned the Museum of Contemporary Craft, which opened back in 1956 in New York. There was another arena for your—for exhibiting your work, which was sort of unlikely, unless you know—which I now know—because of reading Jeremy's book—and that's the L.A. County Fair.

SM: The L.A. County Fair. Yeah, yeah. I remember when I left Millard—I wouldn't get home until two, three o'clock in the morning—I'd be working on a mural, and one night I think I started—I was trying to keep it going—but the lights were still on when I got home and the table was set and Freda said, "Sammy, I don't think you're being very fair." I said, "What's wrong?" She said, "Here I had dinner all ready, and you don't call or anything," and she said, "Who are you married to, Millard or me?" That's all she said. Well--

JB: But Millard was the organizer of the Arts and Crafts exhibits at the County Fair.

SM: That was Millard.

JB: Yes. And he started doing that in 1931. When did you—it must have been in--

SM: Well, it wasn't until 1948 [. . .] Well, maybe '52. [Maloof's furniture was included each year from 1952 - 1955.] I started showing there, and I remember the first piece I brought. I'd left Millard to work for myself and so he was upset that I had just left and so I didn't even see him for about two years. And then I took one of my chairs and it was sitting there and all of us were talking—different artists and all that I knew—and Millard walked in—"Who did that?" And Sue Viertel, who was his assistant, ([she] took my place), said, "Sammy did." And he said, "I didn't know that you were making furniture." I didn't say anything. But then he gave me a whole room to do, and so I did a whole room and I did that for about three years. **[45:00]** 'Cause they kept changing what they were doing.

JB: Yes. But that was a fairly important venue. There were collectors who went to the Fair.

SM: That was an early—what Millard did, he would invite—well, this one—*House Beautiful*, Elizabeth Gordon--

JB: Yes, that was an important connection.

SM: --was going to do the whole thing. And she did the whole thing except Whitney Smith designed the room that I was [or used?] to do. And it was sort of an entertaining bit of television. And I did all of that.

JB: That was quite an innovation at that time to have a TV room.

SM: Yes, it was. Hmn-hm. But Millard, after I left him, then I say I took a chair and—because I was making furniture, but he wondered who—he said, "Who did this?" and Sue Viertel—it was Laman at the time—who worked for Millard, said "Sammy did." He said, "I didn't know you were making furniture, Sam." Well, I didn't say, "Yes, you did." But anyway, we became good friends after that. And I showed there, oh, about four or five years in a row. Then Kneedler Fauchere became my agent, but [eventually] I dropped them. They were taking a third, a third, a third, and I knew I could do it on my own. But that's the way it's been since. I've done work all over the world. I've shipped things to Japan, Germany, to Israel, to Lebanon. In fact, I have quite a few pieces that somebody—I think they're in Germany—or France—have ordered. But I've never solicited.

JB: Well, I think you've had several angels in your life.

SM: I think so. I think Freda's looking after me up above.

JB: But I do believe that having those photographs available was a very good idea. You may have started doing that for your own documentation, but then it meant that you had a—something that you could give people to show.

SM: But then, too, I—the Metropolitan owns four or five of my pieces. The Boston Fine Arts Museum owns about thirty of them.

JB: And the Boston Museum—I was just looking at one of those Sister Wendy documentaries, and I had forgotten that they have this policy of having their—some of their furniture—including yours--out for the public to sit in.

SM: Yeah, um-hm.

JB: I thought you probably enjoyed that a lot.

SM: Well, see, Jonathan Fairbanks—I was on a panel with him—and he was the director of Arts and Crafts [at the Boston Museum] and we got to be good friends and he came to visit me and he got one of his patrons to put up money for the exhibit. And I did, I think, eighteen pieces that I shipped back, and the name of the show was *Please Be Seated*.

JB: Oh yes.

SM: So, you could sit on the pieces.

JB: Yes.

SM: Well, then, a patron of his bought them all for the museum.

JB: Oh!

SM: And they're still sitting around.

JB: So, he bought them specifically to have them available to sit in! That's a wonderful idea! Wonderful.

SM: And there's a little sign that says, "Please Be Seated."

JB: "Please Be Seated."

SM: And—but then they bought about five of my pieces for the collection later.

JB: Yeah.

SM: And then they got a new director in who—crafts were a dirty word--

JB: Oh no!

SM: And he and—Jonathan had one year to go for full retirement and I don't know what it was—it wasn't about the furniture. **[50:00]** It was—because—Jonathan was—if somebody came in with a very beautiful American pot or something and wanted $10,000 for it, he could call up (well, they're my clients now, some of them) but there were several that were very, very wealthy. [Jonathan would say]: "There's a pot that we have to have; we don't have the money," and they'd buy it. Well, the new director came in from England and didn't know from nothing and he felt that—in a way he was, he was doing things without the permission of the director, but he'd always done it, and the director asked him when he

was retiring, and Jonathan says, “I haven’t even thought of retiring.” But about three months before he could retire with a pension and all—the director came in and he said, “I want your keys. I want this and that.” And he said, “You’re fired.”

JB: Oh, my goodness.

SM: Jonathan was just stricken. He couldn’t believe it. And—but the papers had “Boston”—what is it when the Indians were mistreated and all?

JB: Massacre?

SM: Boston massacre. That was it.

JB: Oh, oh my—how sad!

SM: Exactly that. But he ended up getting his pension. But he didn’t get the job back . . . .

JB: Aw-w-w.

SM: But his hands were tied. I mean [. . .] of course, he could have said, “I’ll retire” [. . .], but anyway, Jonathan did get his pension and all, but it was a disaster, and they’re not interested in crafts anymore.

JB: Well, that’s a shame because their permanent collection is full of wonderful crafts of all kinds. It’s one of their strengths.

SM: Oh yeah. And I don’t even know—well, they were going to build a big, new decorative arts building, and I don’t know if they’re—Jonathan, I think, the last time I talked to him, said that it was under way. I don’t know. But I haven’t been back there since. But--you know, now I get—well, this last month there were four magazines that had big articles about me.

JB: I saw the one in *Sierra Magazine*. It just came to us.

SM: Well, these others were even bigger magazines. I didn’t even know they were doing it. And then somebody sent me the—one of the San Francisco papers—had a full-page with a rocking chair on it.

JB: And you didn’t know about that ahead of time?

SM: I just got it three or four days ago.

JB: Well, that’s a pleasant surprise.

SM: It was a friend of Beverly’s--that Beverly grew up with. But I’ve never, ever asked for publicity. I’ve never sent out a newsletter that this was happening or that was happening. And this property all of sudden has become a mecca. We’ve built a new museum—I’ll show it to you. We get huge crowds; it’s open to the public on Thursdays and Saturdays.

JB: Well, even before—I think it was sometime in the 80s that I came to your old house.

SM: Well, our house was open then, yeah.

JB: Yes, it was one of the--

SM: [He calls to Beverly.] Beverly—the museum—Thursdays and Saturdays?

[Beverly comes in]: Thursdays and Saturdays—one, two, and three tours. And then other times by special appointments. We're finding more and more special tours during the week. I'm going up to the office.

SM: We have a lot of special tours. This house isn't open to the public. But once in a while I'll invite people to come down. But the other house I left exactly as it was when Freda was living.

JB: Well, it was a wonderful thing when it was available. And you used to also give classes. **[55:00]** My—I gave my husband [a gift certificate for a class with you] for a 50th birthday present--

SM: Yes, I still do that.

JB: Yes—do you still? Well, I'm sure those are very popular.

SM: I do it through the University of California at Riverside. I just got a letter that it was their outstanding class of the last five years.

JB: Oh, I'm sure.

SM: We keep it at thirty.

JB: And you could easily do several, I'm sure [laughing].

SM: I can't even work with tools anymore with thirty people. So, most of it is chalkboard; I'll use the bandsaw, make enough space so I can do something with the bandsaw. Then [Cal State University] San Bernardino also does the same thing. But they have a beautiful museum and I had the opening exhibit at their new museum about two years ago.

JB: Oh, well, that's wonderful. Well, maybe we should skip ahead to talk about the Wyles and The Egg and The Eye. [. . .] What I've been asking people is, "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" In other words, did you meet the Wyles first or did you first hear about The Egg and The Eye gallery? Do you remember if--

SM: Well, I had done work for Edith and, in fact, I think the first piece I did [for her]—I don't know if you remember Rico Lebrun?

JB: Yes, well, he was her teacher. I never met him but--

SM: Yeah, well he was very ill and dying and he was at her house.

JB: Yes.

SM: And they had a nurse there and all.

JB: Yes.

SM: And he died in their house.

JB: Yes, I heard that. [He did not actually die in the Wyle's house. In a recorded interview made in 1993 for the Archives of American Art, Edith Wyle says the following: "He [Rico Lebrun] spent about the last two months of his life in our house. He almost died there. Two weeks later he died in his own house." The Lebruns were having a house built in Malibu and it was not finished at the time he became ill.]

SM: And [Edith] quit painting completely. After he died, she just cut it out completely.

[. . .] And—but I remember, she had a dinner party and we were invited and I didn't know her too well then. In fact, The Egg and The Eye hadn't been started yet.

JB: Oh-h, OK.

SM: But he [Rico Lebrun] wanted an easel made where he could have it where it went over his bed and he could draw.

JB: Oh-h-h.

SM: And I made it, but he died before I got it finished.

JB: Oh my goodness.

SM: And I forget who—I sold it to somebody, but I had regular ones that I made up at the other house, but—and that was when Edith started her—she was just starting the museum [i.e., the gallery].

JB: Yes, in 1965. Now the story that I heard, and I heard it from Edith—actually from—you know she did an oral history for the Archives of American Art—that you can look at online—and she tells the story about how Frank—I don't know if it was the first time he met you, but apparently she got him to go to the L.A. County Fair one September back in the sixties and it was about the time that they had bought the property for their ranch—I don't know if they had started building their house, but they were talking--

SM: No, the house was completed when I—well--

JB: You tell the story.

SM: Well, Frank bought, I don't know how many hundreds of thousands of acres--

JB: I think it was over four thousand [eventually].

SM: Yeah, and I was with him—Freda and I were with him on the plane. She [Edith] wanted to start a museum [i.e., a gallery].

JB: That was when she started talking about it?

SM: Frank blew his top. And she didn't say a word. She didn't say a word. And then she called me about two weeks later and she said, "Frank said I could." That's when they started the [gallery]. Frank wasn't for it at all, but then it was his money [**1:00:00] [. . .]** That's when the gallery] was started.

JB: That was the seed of it, the idea. And were you on your way up there to see the property before you started to make furniture--?

SM: Oh, I'd made furniture for years--

JB: No, I mean, for them, for the Wyles.

SM: Yeah, she wanted me to do the bedroom furniture. That's—so we flew up—and then they had a big fire—I don't--

JB: Oh!

SM: They had this huge fireplace; it was like this, and a fireplace there, and then a little entry there, and it was down about three feet, and the chimney caught on fire. And of course, they were out in the middle of nowhere. So, we—and here the table was all set for dinner, and--

JB: This happened when you visited them?

SM: We had water hoses and we tried—we called the fire department, which was about—miles away going all over--

JB: Yes.

SM: And we saved the house--

JB: Oh, my goodness!

SM: And the [conversation] pit was full of water like a swimming pool. And after we got it all out, we just sat down and had dinner!

JB: Oh my goodness! That's a story I haven't heard before!

SM: I don't think she'd started [the gallery]--

JB: --at that point--

SM: --at that point.

JB: Yeah, I think that may have been—I've been trying to piece together the little bit of information that I have--

SM: Yeah, but that was the first furniture I did [for them]. I did their dining table, chairs, I did about fifteen pieces for them.

JB: Yes, but also that was the first time that you had heard her talking about the [gallery].

SM: Oh yeah, because on the plane she says, "Frank are you going to let me—"And boy, he got madder than heck, and he usually didn't. He said, "I'm sick of that. Don't you ask me again?" And about a week later, she called me, and Freda and I were going back east, so she went with us. She met Mrs.--

JB: Mrs. Webb?

SM: The lady that started the craft museum [the Museum of Contemporary Craft].

JB: Mrs. Webb.

SM: Mrs. Webb. I introduced her to Mrs. Webb. And we had a lot of fun, but it was after the trip [to the Wyle ranch] where he said, "Don't talk about it." I knew she'd get it [. . .]

JB: That was actually the start of the gallery, right? The Egg and The Eye gallery.

SM: Oh yeah. And then [later] they had the courtyard. Then they rented the corner building [at 5800 Wilshire]—which would have made a beautiful museum and all. And they wanted to buy it. I don't know what happened, but it turned out that--

JB: Well, it was very complicated and very sad--

SM: You probably know more about it than I do.

JB: Well, I'm learning more [all the time]. Of course, I was there, but I was a staff member and so I wasn't always in on, you know, exactly--

SM: I know they wanted to buy it and they were paying only $1,000—I thought it was a fortune—they were paying $1,000 a month--

JB: Oh, it was $17,000 a month rent on that building.

SM: When they first started?

JB: Oh, no—I was talking about [the rent on] that corner building [when we leased it from 1992 – 1997]. I don't know how much rent they paid [when they first rented 5814 Wilshire].

SM: Well, I thought it was a lot for that, you know. They were going to have it to the corner. They had a beautiful place where you could sit and eat and all—and then somebody came from under and just bought it. [Sam is talking here about the renovation of the museum

and the effort to buy the corner building in the nineties.] I don't know what happened, but that cut that whole thing off. And then they had the earthquake or whatever it was. And it cost millions of dollars to redo the building.

JB: Well, The Egg and The Eye and the Craft and Folk Art Museum have a long history and many things went on and I guess part of the personal reason that I'm doing this is to try to figure out some of these mysteries because, for example, the earthquake retrofitting that the City insisted on doing—**[1:05:00]**

SM: Cost an awful lot.

JB: But it's a good thing that they did it, though, because we had the [6.7] earthquake a few years later [in 1994] and it didn't do any damage. But that was sort of mixed up with the plan for this big Museum Tower, which was why they had tried to buy the corner building [to begin with]—and [in the late 80s] a developer named Wayne Ratkovich was putting together a plan for what would have been the first mixed-use development—[a 22-story high-rise, with CAFAM on the 2nd and 3rds floors] and we were all excited. It was a really happy time.

SM: Well, at that time I didn't know that much about it except I know Frank was—his heart wasn't in it. [Maloof is here remembering Frank Wyle's initial reaction to the idea of a gallery back in 1965.]

JB: Well, I don't know. He certainly seemed to be [enthusiastic about it at the time]. His public—the impression that he made publicly was that he--

SM: But then she [Edith] died too, though.

JB: Well that was later [in 1999].

SM: I think that was the thing that stopped it all. Then I think, if I'm not mistaken, one of her grandchildren got on the board.

JB: Well Noah Wyle is on the board.

SM: Yeah, Noah Wyle. He's the one that made quite a bit of money in the movies.

JB: Yes, yes, he was on ER for a very long time.

SM: Now, how is he? I've never met him.

JB: Oh, he's very nice young man. He's—well, he's not that young anymore—he's I guess in his thirties at least.

SM: You don't hear about him at all anymore.

JB: Well, he has a production company and he makes movies occasionally--

SM: Oh, he has a production company--

JB: But I don't think he's on ER [now]—that was the show, the television show that he was on.

SM: But the museum—I go to it—and the shows have been very nice, but a lot of times I'm the only one in there.

JB: Yes--

SM: They cut out the restaurant.

JB: Yes, what do you think about that? About not having the restaurant?

SM: Well, the restaurant was a big drawing card. And it was profitable.

JB: Yes.

SM: And it didn't take that much room. Well, it took up quite a bit of room upstairs, but it drew a lot of people. And I don't know why [the museum] doesn't draw people now. I've been there when Beverly and I have been the only people in it.

JB: Well, not having the restaurant certainly does make a big difference. And I--

SM: Beverly [he calls to Beverly]—(pardon me)—Beverly—have you ever—you've been to the--

BM: I've been to the Craft [and Folk Art] Museum, but not when they had [The Egg and The Eye restaurant].

JB: . . . And The Egg and The Eye restaurant stayed through the first [thirteen] years or so of the Craft and Folk Art Museum, but then, when we had to vacate that building [in 1989] because of the earthquake retrofitting--

SM: Then they cut it out.

JB: Well, the May Company had made us an offer that we couldn't refuse. They offered 10,000 square feet of space free in the May Company--

SM: But you had to go through the dress department. I mean you could hardly find it.

JB: Well, it was where the furniture department used to be [on the fourth floor]. There were problems there. But it was free and we had to have a place to go.

SM: Were you on the board then?

JB: I wasn't on the board. I was on the staff. I was the librarian--

SM: Oh—well what was that fellow's name—I know him really well, I can't think of--

JB: Patrick Ela?

SM: Patrick Ela.

JB: Yes, he's on your Foundation board. Yes, Patrick was the [Administrative] Director from 1975 until [1984 and then the Executive Director from 1984 until] 1996—a very long time—and so the Museum had to move to the May Company and, unfortunately, there was no way that the restaurant could move there, but we all thought that the new museum that we would come back to was going to have a restaurant. And I haven't quite figured out yet why [it didn't].

SM: I think Edith had died then hadn't she?

JB: Well, no . . . . We were at the May Company until the end of 1992 and then at that point the plans for the big Ratkovich development [the Museum Tower] were abandoned because there was a recession and they were not able to obtain the financing for that. **[1:10:00]** So—but the Museum needed more space and the Ratkovich development had included this corner building at 5800 Wilshire and so even though [the Museum Tower] plan was abandoned, the board made a decision to lease that building for the staff to come back to while the work progressed on the original building [at 5814 Wilshire]. And so, we all assumed that that [corner] building was going to be purchased and we were in that building [at 5800 Wilshire] from 1993 until the Museum closed temporarily in 1997. And we had this grand reopening in 1995--

SM: Well I thought Frank was going to buy it.

JB: We all thought that he [would buy it]—probably with some help from some other people, but—the assumption was—yes, that it would be primarily his purchase. But that didn't happen and I'm not absolutely certain why that didn't happen.

SM: Well, you know, Patrick Ela was on our board. I don't think he is anymore, but--

JB: I thought he was still [. . .]

SM: Maybe he's still on our board, but he's having sort of a rough time.

JB: Well, he's working on his own and he gets work as an appraiser. He got his appraiser's license.

SM: Yeah.

JB: So, he's doing a lot of different things.

SM: That's right. He's with some lady that's an appraiser.

JB: Well, he did remarry, but I don't think his wife is an appraiser. He may have a [business] partner. I don't--

SM: No, a lady that's an appraiser. She owns it and he works for her.

JB: Oh, well, I didn't know that.

SM: But he got a divorce, didn't he?

JB: Well he and Lisi divorced, yes.

SM: A long time ago.

JB: Yes, yes.

SM: And that really knocked him for a loop.

JB: Yes, yes. That was a very sad time for him.

SM: They were going to build a house out on the [Wyle] ranch. They owned some property on the ranch.

JB: And he had to give that up.

SM: Did he have to give that up?

JB: Yes, he did. That was very sad. I have just been interviewing him, and--

SM: Oh—but he--

JB: But he did remarry, yes, a woman named Phyllis Ginter, who I guess is an artist also. So—and he has an office in Frank Romero's studio. [. . .]

SM: Well, Frank Romero married one of the Wyle girls.

JB: Yes, [their daughter Nancy], and they divorced, and he's remarried too [laughing]. So many changes, yes.

SM: But, you know, Patrick hasn't been to the last two or three meetings. Is he doing all right?

JB: I think so. He's very busy. I had scheduled three meetings with him and [. . .] we got two done, but he's--

SM: Because he came by and left me some Indian pots that he had—but I know all about Indian pots. I have a lot of them. He wanted way—he thought he had a fortune and he didn't—I mean they weren't very good pots and all. But he was a nice person and it's too bad they—I don't know why they got rid of him--

JB: He resigned in 1996.

SM: He what?

JB: He resigned in 1996.

SM: Yeah, I think he was sort of forced to.

JB: I don't know the details of that, but the museum was having terrible problems, I think primarily related to the building—the new building--

SM: Well, finances—I think—well, I'm not going to say because it was just hearsay, but he didn't want to leave, but he was sort of pushed out.

JB: Well, it was a very unhappy and unsettling time for everyone.

SM: And I'm amazed that it's still going.

JB: Yes, one thing that I sort of hate to bring up in a way, but I feel like I need to--is that in 1996, a year before the museum closed down, we were planning a major retrospective of your work **[1:15:00]** and Patrick was going to write the introduction to a catalog, and I believe they had made arrangements with the American Craft Museum to take the exhibition and we just got into terrible financial trouble, and I know everyone felt just awful that we couldn't put on your show. Do you remember anything about that?

SM: No—I may have been approached, but I don't remember anything about it. I really don't.

JB: You know, we're kind of skipping around here a little bit, but I have to ask you—I was just looking through the Jeremy Adamson book again last night, and I was reminded, of course, that back in The Egg and The Eye gallery days, they gave you a one-man show in 1966—just a few months after the gallery opened, Edith gave you a one-man show.

SM: I remember that.

JB: And I was wondering if that was, in fact, the first one-man show that you had.

SM: It was.

JB: I think it was.

SM: Yep. It was.

JB: [Adamson's book] didn't specifically say [it was your first one-man show . . .] but I couldn't find any [references to one-man shows earlier than that]. You had been in some very important [group] shows before that. You had been in a couple of shows at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, but I think The Egg and The Eye gallery show was your first one-man show.

SM: Yep. It was.

JB: And then later when the gallery turned into a museum, you did come on the board.

SM: Yeah, I was on the board for quite a while.

JB: Yes, for quite a while.

SM: I was until it just—when they had all that—[. . .] development trouble and all—and Frank put a lot of money into that.

JB: Oh yes.

SM: Frank put a lot of money into it.

JB: He did. Let me ask you—this is a much more basic question and I guess maybe it even goes back to the gallery, but the idea from the very beginning was to have [both] folk art and contemporary craft. What did you think about that?

SM: Well, you know, I didn't give it any thought at the time. I really didn't. But it turned out to be more folk art than craft.

JB: Well, you know—now I have to say this because I've just been going through—I have my list of all the [CAFAM] exhibitions. And if you divide them into folk art and/or contemporary craft—and, of course, there were some that were really both or neither. But it's pretty much even--

SM: Is it pretty much even--?

JB: There were a little more folk art [exhibitions], but only very slightly.

SM: See, that didn't bother me a bit.

JB: Well, you've been a collector of folk art.

SM: Yeah, that's what got me started [as a collector].

JB: Really!

SM: Yeah.

JB: Well, talk about that a little bit—what do you--?

SM: Well, I've always liked folk art. Actually, what got me started, really, was the Indian Market [in Santa Fe, New Mexico].

JB: Because of Freda's connection—

SM: Because of Freda. [Sam's first wife, Alfreda Ward Maloof, worked for the Indian Service in New Mexico from 1935 – 1943 before she met Sam; for a while she taught children at the Santo Domingo Pueblo and then she was director of arts and crafts at the Santa Fe Indian School. Sam and Freda continued throughout their lifetimes many of those early contacts and friendships Freda made.] We have a huge collection of Native American Indian art and I'm still collecting . . . I've collected a lot of Mexican folk art also--they're going to be here in a couple of weeks—Mata Ortiz. [A group of Mexican craft artists from several regions, including Mata Ortiz, Tonala, Oaxaca, and Santa Clara de Cobre are in residence at the Maloofs for a week each year, doing demonstrations, and selling their crafts.]

JB: Oh, yes, the Mexican [pottery]--

SM: I love their stuff!

JB: Oh yes, the Mexican ones [from Mata Ortiz]—they're fabulous!

SM: They've just gone through the roof in pricing.

JB: Amazing. But they're still less expensive than the Native American pieces.

So—I wanted to ask you—you were on the board of the Craft and Folk Art Museum, but you had also been very involved with the American Craft Council and on their board.

SM: Yes, for quite a few years.

JB: Could you just talk about the differences between the two boards?

SM: Well, when I was on the [American Craft Council] board, Mrs. Webb was living, and it [the Museum of Contemporary Craft] was very much like the Craft [and Folk Art] Museum [was]. Edith went back with me to meet Mrs. Webb.

JB: You introduced her to a lot of those people. **1:20:00]**

SM: Yeah. **[Interruption in taping] [. . .]** So, she flew back to New York with us, with Freda and me. And she met Mrs. Webb. Mrs. Webb was very, very nice. We went to see George Nakashima. We were gone for about a week.

JB: So, you went to Pennsylvania to George Nakashima's--

SM: Oh yeah, it wasn't very far. [George Nakashima, woodworker, architect, and furniture maker (1905 – 1990) lived in New Hope, Pennsylvania.] But she met Mrs. Webb and Mrs. Webb was very nice and then they started the museum [i.e., the gallery].

JB: Yes. Well, did she talk at all about her idea of including a restaurant?

SM: Well no, we knew she was going to have a restaurant. That's what really made it. I mean that was—do you remember the restaurant at all?

JB: Well, I remember the restaurant when it was part of the museum. I arrived in L.A. in 1975--

SM: After it was closed.

JB: Well, no, it was just when it was being transformed from a gallery into a museum in 1975.

SM: Because the restaurant was a money maker.

JB: Yes. [. . .]

SM: Yeah—well, they moved to the May Company because of the earthquake.

JB: No, no—well, we moved to the May Company because the City said, "You can't be in that—you can't occupy that building—"But it wasn't because the earthquake had happened. It was before the earthquake. It was in order to do the earthquake retrofitting. [. . .] And then four--no five years later, in 1994, we had the [6.7] earthquake. And luckily, the earthquake retrofitting had been done, so it [the original building at 5814 Wilshire] remained standing.

SM: Oh, I thought you had moved over there [to the May Company] because of the earthquake.

JB: No, [when the earthquake happened in 1994], we were [already] in the corner building—and the new configuration of the museum that reopened in 1995 was being constructed—the one that was designed by Hodgetts + Fung—Craig Hodgetts and Ming Fung, you know, came in and designed this museum that merged the corner building with the original building. And that was *after* the earthquake retrofitting had been done. [. . .]

SM: I thought the retrofitting was done after the earthquake.

JB: No—it was before, thank goodness! No, we had to leave [the 5814 Wilshire building] because the City insisted that we leave because that building was not safe. [. . .]

SM: That's when you went to the May Company?

JB: That's when we went to the May Company.

SM: That was the beginning of the end. Because you had to walk through all that—as I recall—and I don't want to be—I may be wrong—but the May Company—had really gone from way up there to down here. And you had to walk through an area where—of dresses and all--and you finally got to the museum. I was only there one time—so not very many people attended.

JB: Well, I don't know what the attendance figures—whether they were worse or better—but there were certainly people on the board who didn't like the May Company. [. . .]

SM: The museum was on the second floor.

JB: [The museum] was on three levels: the library was on the mezzanine, which was just above the perfume department [on the first floor]; the gallery was on the fourth floor where the furniture department used to be; and then all of offices were up on the top floor, the 5th floor. **[1:25:00]** So that was confusing and we never got the cooperation of the May Company employees.

SM: Were they given the space or were they paying rent?

JB: No, it was donated. It was free space.

SM: That's what I thought.

JB: And the gallery was really quite attractive. The floor was a wood floor because it was [on the 4th floor] where the furniture department [had been].

SM: But see nobody knew where it was.

JB: Well it could have been better if the May Company employees had been more helpful. But they never understood. And people would come in and ask where the Craft and Folk Art Museum was and they—they really didn't know—or they might be misdirected to the wrong floor. And it was a struggle. But I always loved department stores, so I--

SM: But I don't know what's happening to the craft museum now. Are they still going now?

JB: Yes, they are. Maryna Hrushetska is the director and she seems to be a very energetic person. Frank just stepped down as board chair and the new chair—you may know him—Wally Marks—well, his background is in real estate. He—I think he . . . [is] an owner of the Helms Bakery—what used to be the Helms Bakery—you know that big complex of furniture stores--

SM: Oh, yeah. They just opened a big—just opened a great big showroom there. [. . .] I went to the opening.

JB: Oh, you did?

SM: [Maloof calls out to Beverly.] Beverly, what was the name of the furniture maker, you know, that I know. They moved into the old Helms Bakery.

Beverly: Thomas Moser. I'm going to go down and get Debbie--

SM: Thomas Moser just opened a huge showroom.

JB: I haven't been there yet. I have to go.

SM: We went—they asked me to give a talk. And they had about 800 people.

JB: Wow. That's a lot. Let's see. Let's get back to the Craft and Folk Art Museum for just a little bit. What do you remember of Patrick Ela at that time? [. . .]

SM: Patrick was the director but Edith was still right there. Her office was right with him and Patrick was the director in name only. [. . .]

JB: Well, the title that they gave Patrick was Administrative Director and Edith was Program Director. So, Edith, I think, in some senses was more the public face of the museum and she organized the exhibitions--

SM: It ought to have been the other way around. I mean Edith's had some good shows, but Patrick wasn't a very good administrator I don't think.

JB: Well, he was there for quite a long time--

SM: Oh, he was there for--

JB: --after Edith retired in 1984, of course, he was made Executive Director and did the whole thing. [. . .]

SM: He had some good shows there--

JB: He did and he was responsible for bringing design in—product design, which [. . .] at first I think some of us were puzzled by—but actually I think it was a good thing. Because it then made the museum involved in all objects that had any everyday significance. And so, it did make sense in the long run. But you had some concerns about the museum at that time? **[1:30:00]**

SM: Well, no, I wouldn't have had him on my board [if I had had real concerns]. But I think his hands were tied by Edith and then by Frank. Frank was the money man.

JB: Yes, he was really the power behind--

SM: He was the power behind the whole thing—even with Edith.

JB: It must have been a difficult situation for Patrick.

SM: Well, you never saw it. [. . .]

JB: Patrick was a very charming—is a very charming man.

SM: Well, Patrick is on our board. I see him all the time. [. . .]

JB: Now do remember John Browse? He was from Kenya and he managed the shop—well, he was a partner to Edith, really, in the gallery. [. . .]

SM: No, you know, I don't even remember--

JB: Let's see. There were some—how about Bernard Kester, now he--?

SM: Oh well, Bernard Kester. He was very good. I don't know if he's still living or not.

JB: Oh yes he is. I actually interviewed him a couple of months ago. He resigned—he retired I should say—from UCLA.

SM: From UCLA.

JB: But he's still designing installations for LACMA—for the L.A. County Museum of Art.

SM: I didn't know that!

JB: Yes, it's amazing. He's still there every week, at least two or three days a week. He curated an important show [at CAFAM] that included your work—*Made in L.A.*--back in 1981. [. . .] It was a show that honored many craftspeople, but you had several pieces in it, and it traveled to Washington, D.C. too.

Now, we talked a little bit about the re-opening of the museum. There was a grand re-opening—and I know that this is confusing because the museum closed and opened and closed and opened a couple of times. But I'm wondering if you remember what we called the "Homecoming"? Which happened in 1995, when the reconfigured museum opened? And this was—it was gala re-opening. We had a big tent out in the back. And there was a big--

SM: No, I don't—you know, Freda died about then.

JB: It was a few years later [September 23, 1998], but, yes, she must have been ill at that time.

SM: She died suddenly.

JB: Oh.

SM: She hadn't felt well. [. . .] I don't remember that one [the re-opening] at all.

JB: Well, right after that wonderful re-opening we went into this downward spiral of all these financial problems and then the museum closed at the end of 1997. [. . .] As it turned out, it was just a temporary closure, but it was closed for about 14 months. [. . .] We really thought the museum was closed forever at the time.

SM: That's funny. I didn't know anything about that.

JB: Well, I'm sure you were probably concerned about Freda. Patrick resigned in 1996 and they hired a fellow who had been working at Williamsburg, a fellow named Paul Kusserow, and he was there for about a year, but he couldn't turn it around. And so, the museum closed. **[1:35:00]**

SM: I didn't know that—that's new to me.

JB: That's when—well, all of the staff was laid off. I went to work at the L.A. County Museum of Art. The files—all of the staff files going back to the Egg and The Eye days—all of that was given to UCLA, and the library, which was my bailiwick, was given to LACMA. And I went to work at LACMA. And the museum was closed for about 14 months, but Patrick actually was very instrumental in the reopening of the museum.

SM: Oh-h-h!

JB: Yes, because he knew Al Nodal, who was the head of L.A. Cultural Affairs. And he went to him and talked to him about the idea of merging L.A. Cultural Affairs with the Craft and Folk Art Museum.

SM: I didn't know that.

JB: Yes, that was really Patrick's doing. And that was before Edith died, so she did get to see the museum re-open in 1999, not too long before she passed away. But it was re-opened under the administration of [the City of L.A.] Cultural Affairs.

SM: This is about when Freda went away. Freda went away in '98, so I guess I was clear out of everything for a long time.

JB: Yes, I'm sure you were. I'm sure you were. Well, I did want to talk a little bit about what happened to you, then, and your house, and all of . . . this incredible adventure that you had.

SM: It was. Freda was alive when we started all of this. And in a way, I think that it was a little too much for her. But they gave us 20 properties to select [from] and Freda selected this property and it came right straight down. This was just like this. And we have—you can see a blue roof up there—I'll show you around.

JB: All right. It's wonderful that she got to choose the location.

SM: Well, she saw the location. She never got to see this house. We recently just built a big gallery that cost us about $3,000,000 and we raised the money for it before it was built.

JB: That's wonderful.

SM: Beverly has pretty much taken over. She does an awful lot of work. [. . .] Up high I have four storerooms and then the new museum and then the old house with the [woodworking] shops and all--and the guest house and then this down here.

JB: And all of the old property was moved—was cut apart, I assume—and put on trucks and moved.

SM: So, the old house is the way it was. The shops are the way [they were]. I've added new buildings. I've added one, two, three, four, five, six, seven--about eight new buildings for storage, for storing lumber.

JB: Oh, my goodness.

SM: Then we've built the new gallery—the new museum, I guess. You'll have to see that. And what time is it about now?

JB: Well, it's about time for us to wind up, [but . . .] I just want to mention a couple of things. I thought this might be a good time to mention that in addition to all of the important famous museums that your work is in, your rocking chair, which has become kind of your signature piece, is in the collection of three former presidents.

SM: Um-huh.

JB: Ronald Reagan. Jimmy Carter. And Bill Clinton.

SM: Uh-huh. **[1:40:00]**

JB: And I—it just seems to me that you have pulled together here the best of the past and the present and the future and I think it's quite remarkable. You have your new residence and a new studio and you have your old house, now a museum, right next door. And you have your Foundation, and you have Beverly. And that represents the future.

SM: Well, Beverly [he calls to Beverly]—Beverly--? Did she go up—? I think she probably went up to the other place.

JB: I think she went to the other place. Well, I just want to thank you so much

SM: Well, let me take you up to the other place.

JB: We'll do that. Thank you.

SM: Yes, we have an upstairs. We have two beds where people can sleep up there. And then Beverly and I liked it so much that we made this into a little bedroom/sitting room.

JB: Up above there.

SM: Yes, we go up there and sleep once in a while—and we look out over the whole valley. There's a balcony.

JB: I'm just noticing how tall this space is.

SM: It goes up for quite a-ways.

JB: It's really three stories isn't it?

SM: Yeah.

JB: Really beautiful.

SM: Let me give you [a tour].

JB: All right. I'm going to stop the recording now. Thank you so much. [. . .]

[End of Session 1:41:31]