

The Minnesota
Women in Architecture
FAIA Legacy Project

Julie Snow Oral History Interview

Introduction

Legacy Project

The Minnesota Women in Architecture FAIA Legacy Project, is a joint effort of the Minnesota Architectural Foundation (MAF) and the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Women in Architecture Committee. In 2018, the Legacy Project began to amplify the achievements of our female fellows by documenting the stories of the women architects in the Minnesota recognized with the AIA's highest membership honor, Fellowship (FAIA).

The project's primary goals are: 1) to increase the visibility of women architects to break down stereotypes that may be instrumental in the formation of unconscious bias about the women in the profession and 2) to increase the visibility of women architects to encourage more women to seek a career in architecture and to stay productive in the profession despite adversity.

Funding from the Minnesota Historical Society supported the first eleven interviews and oral histories; with this template, the project will continue to grow.

Julie Snow



Elevated to Fellow in 1999. Through practice and teaching, Julie Vandenberg Snow emphasizes an exploration of the authentic experience of architecture, characterized by refined detail, lightness, spatial clarity and structural directness.

Interview

Julie Snow, Interviewee

Kimberly Long Loken, Interviewer

February 5, 2018

Kimberly Long Loken: **KL**

Julie Snow: **JS**

Track 1

00:00

[General discussion]

KL Today is the 5th of February, 2018. This is Kimberly Loken and I am here today interviewing—

JS Julie Vandenberg Snow. Oh—September 6th, and now you have to send me a card.

KL September 6th it is. I will send you a birthday card [laughter]. Alright, so, as we go through the topics, it's going to be roughly chronological, but lots of room for conversation. So let's start with talking about how you found architecture or how it found you. How did you meet this profession?

JS You know it's kind of interesting, I was in high school and sort of casting about for something to do—to study. And my dad was a doc [doctor], and I was nerdy enough to think medicine was really a good idea, and he didn't—he disagreed. He thought there were too many long hours. So he thought architecture was a better idea. And so I don't think he knew how many long hours there were in architecture. So that's what I studied. However, I didn't apply to architecture school. I just signed up for it. And it turns out you were supposed to apply. So I never had a portfolio submission. I just signed up and they put me in the classes. Fortunately, I did very well, and so they couldn't retract, although they did make me take an architectural aptitude test.

KL Interesting.

JS Apparently I passed. I don't know what—I don't remember a thing about what was on this aptitude test for architecture. I mean they were struggling to get women out. I mean—it was clearly—their intention was to educate male architects. They made that point clear in the sort of introductory section.

February 5, 2018

KL And what school did you attend?

JS It was at that point, I didn't graduate from, but I was attending Miami University in Ohio. And there were two women in the class. We both ended up transferring.

KL And what era is this or year?

JS Early 70's. Yeah, it was pretty nuts.

KL So what do you think made your father suggest architecture? Do you have—did he have an acquaintance with architects?

JS Yes, absolutely. He was a high school roommate of John Dinkeloo, so Roche Dinkeloo. Actually, he referred to him as “Dink”, which seemed like a really rude thing it was his nickname. So, yeah, my dad went to the University of Michigan and John Dinkeloo did his undergraduate degree there. And he might have done graduate there too as well. So, yeah, they were both very Dutch.

KL As we go, I'm just going to be writing down names to assist the transcription.

JS Yeah, because nobody will spell that right.

KL Exactly.

JS There was a whole thing. I worked in his office after a year or so of school and there was this whole collection of envelopes to Roche Dinkeloo Associates that had misspelled Dinkeloo or Roche, and they were pretty funny.

KL So you spent a year at University of Miami and then transferred?

JS Yeah, a couple years and then left—got through calculus there and thought, “Okay, time to go.” [Laughter].

KL And then where did you continue your education?

JS University of Colorado. So I finished up—there was a really interesting—Dick Whitaker had just taken over out there from MLTW [Moore Lyndon Turnbull Whitaker], and he was heading up the school at that time, and he was very—first of all, he was very welcoming to transfer which I thought was great. So I didn't lose any time—I didn't lose any credits. And he was just a great colleague. He was collegial about his students which was really cool.

KL What was the culture like at Colorado? Were the numbers of women different like in addition to Dick Whitaker, what was the—

JS There was another woman there, Penny Saiki, who is a very good friend of mine. I still see Penny a lot—S-A-I-K-I, or as I call her “psycho.” Anyway, so yeah, Penny and I got through school together. And I don’t think there were any other women there—no. But it was very—I mean, it was a male culture. There’s no doubt about it—if there were 30 people in the class and two were women, it’s going to be a male-dominated culture. But I think I never felt out of place. I never felt like I was less taught to.

KL Alright, so, then after Colorado, what was the next step?

JS I worked in firms; I basically went out and got jobs. My father was very clear that he was going to stop paying for my education if I travelled—if I took a year off to travel. So that was my goal. I basically took a couple jobs and made enough money to travel. So that was just amazing. I started out travelling with my friend Penny, and then something came up and she had to leave, and then I travelled by myself through Europe which was kind of odd for that time. I know it worried my parents, but it was great. It was—I mean, you could just do anything you wanted to do and take your time doing it. It was great.

KL So the first firms you worked in, they were in Colorado?

JS No, they were in Michigan. And then I travelled in Europe, when I came back, then we came back and we landed in Minnesota. And then I started working with HGA [Hammel Green & Abrahamson Inc.]

KL Are you a native of Minnesota?

JS No. Penny was—I basically—my husband and I came back. We were travelling—this was like a second Europe trip, and we came back—we were living in Spain where Jack’s sister lives—and came back to the United States, and it was pretty much a recession. And so we basically got in the car. And we were just going to kind of go from Michigan to Minnesota, where we knew Penny, to the West Coast—or no, we were going to stop in Denver where Jack’s mom was and then the West Coast. And so we got kind of hooked in the middle. So we basically were going to sort of try getting jobs in any of those places. It was not a very intentional thought through plan I would say. It was a pretty immature plan.

KL Am I correct that your husband is an engineer?

JS Yeah—wow—

KL So comparable—

JS —you did your research.

KL —professions.

JS He's a retired engineer. Yeah, he's now home with Cooper. Basically, his major activity is dog parks and tennis.

KL Lovely.

JS Yeah, and he cooks dinner.

KL Very important.

JS Really.

KL I've got one of those too [laughter]. So tell me a little bit more about establishing your professional identity in Minnesota. You were with HGA a couple of years and then—

JS Yeah, it was really interesting. I came here not knowing anybody. And Minnesota is a pretty—well, other than Penny—a very tight culture, and was probably more so then. So basically, if you were an architect in Minnesota, you had studied at the University of Minnesota. You might have done graduate work somewhere else, but you pretty much went to the University of Minnesota. And, frankly, I was an outsider. And so that was really kind of weird to people because there were all these inside jokes about the professors and who they were and Ralph [Rapson] stories and all this stuff, and I was like, "I don't know."

10:00

So I really—I have to credit Bruce Abrahamson at HGA who hired me with being open-minded enough not only to hire a woman, but one that wasn't educated at the University of Minnesota.

KL What kind of projects did you work on at HGA?

JS Oh man, I worked on everything. I mean, that was—the great thing about HGA is they have a huge range of projects. And so I did a lot of different types of projects there. The last projects that I worked on were a couple projects for Phillips Plastics, and that was about the time that my son needed another surgery. And I just had to suddenly leave my desk one day, and that was kind of my last day at HGA. Although Bruce was really cool. He said, "Well, we'll just have lunch and renew your leave of absence every three months." So it was great. I mean, he was such an amazing guy—architect, person, the whole thing. He had it all.

KL So how did you reenter the profession then after your leave of absence?

JS Well, basically I felt like there was just no way I could go back to a big corporate firm and continue to put out just more enclosed space. In other words, at that time, there weren't really high design values. And so it was really hard to go back and just make more interior space out of the world. And so I felt that, if I were going to do something, it would have to be something important to keep me away from David. So, at that time, Bruce had been talking with Jim [James] Stageberg, and they wanted Bruce to come in and teach or to do reviews. And so he suggested to Jim that I could come in and do a review which was fun.

KL So that was your first teaching gig.

JS Right.

KL So this is mid-70s, late-70s?

JS Yeah, I was doing a bunch of reviews and then—oh, no—yeah, this was 80s. David was born I believe in '81, so he was like four or five. So that was fun.

KL And then practice—

JS Oh no, he was '84. Kate was '81.

KL [Laughter]. Your whole family not really interested in the years.

JS [Laughter]. Right.

KL We'll just skip over the years [laughter].

JS Right. They were born—for sure.

KL So then, starting to practice on your own, was that something that just accumulated slowly and casually or is it—

JS No, a little bit more intentionally than that. I was on my little leave of absence and I had a call from my former client at Phillips Plastics, and he wanted me to do building for him—design a building for him that then would be taken over by a contractor. And documents would be done. So I was just sort of the front-end design. And then later on allowed me to do the whole package, so go through CDs. And so, at that point, I had a building built and one of my colleagues from HGA wanted to collaborate. So he suggested a collaboration, and so then we began a practice. And I was—we were both in clearly not wanting to do residences. And that was kind of—not that we didn't want to do them. It's just that we felt that, if it were a residential practice, probably it would be hard to transition into other building types.

And so he was working on a residence and it didn't get built, but my factory project—manufacturing plant project was built, so we built on that. We basically leveraged. Oh, and he was also doing a—what would you say—a study for a children's museum in Milwaukee. And so, when the children's museum RFP came out for the Minnesota children's museum, we collaborated with the Architectural Alliance to make a proposal. And won that. So that was really sort of the foundation—it was Vince James—James Snow. So that started James Snow. And that lasted for a couple years and split into two great firms.

KL Yes. So let's talk a little bit more about the most recent generation of Snow-Kreilich and how you came to grow your own practice into this current practice.

JS So I started out as Julie Snow Architects—I'm going to say '94—I think that's right. And I was teaching, and we had a couple projects in construction. So just leveraging that, and I kept doing one semester a year teaching, and so it was really kind of a teaching practice was sort of the phrase. And I think it was great. It kept us small, so we would range anywhere from six to fifteen people, and it was exhausting. You would basically do everything in that position. You have to get the work. You have to be the architect of the work. You have to be the designer. You have to be the project manager. You have to be the—

KL To run an office and pay the bills and—

JS Everything. So I slowly built some senior staff, but it wasn't until probably Matt [Kreilich] joined the firm that we really started building senior staff and creating a—not so much a transition plan, but a way of bringing people into the studio on a senior level. So that was great. And I think that was 12 or 13, well, maybe 14-15 years ago. And so the idea, I think, is to have a design principal led the studio. So both Matt and I are designers at heart, and we have senior staff to rely on for things like business development and operations and documentation and all this. And we have many, many colleagues in the studio that have little pockets of specialization. So that's created, I think, a really dynamic studio, and I think a studio in which people are very able to find a place or make a place for themselves. It creates, I think, a great deal of diversity in terms of interests in the studio which is fantastic. And so I think it's really been, I would say, over the past maybe five or six years that we've been really stable at 30-some people and kind of being able to leverage what 30-some people can generate in terms of resources to everybody.

KL Right. And, of course, you all recently were awarded the AIA national firm of the year, so a tremendous recognition. Can you talk a little bit more about how you grew your client types, sought client types, partly the expertise that you were leveraging among the staff but also GSA projects, finding those niches?

JS Yeah, I think the GSA really leveraged us into more public work.

But I would say at the foundational level of the studio—and this goes back to Julie Snow Architects—was we are not specialists in building types. We tend to do our best work when we're doing a building type for the first time. So I've never sort of thought that, if you've done your ten hospitals, your eleventh hospital is going to be the best hospital you've ever done. I think it gets stale and it gets old. And I think people—really good staff that we have—aren't going to put up with that. They're not interested in repeating the last building they did. They're interested in finding new ways of looking at architecture or new potential for architecture's performance in the world. And so it's not—I mean, we do projects for the second time or the third time. But then we're always looking for a way to innovate or to modify how they operate.

KL I feel like that's very much how we're educated with a great diversity in what we're challenged to design in school, and that I think the architect's mind is naturally hungry for that. It attracts a person who seeks that variety. But there's always that challenge in—especially as you're growing your firm and developing your identity and communicating that to a client. So in that time, before the regional and national awards start piling up—

JS It's tough. I think it's a really important time to stay agile—to really say, “Look, we're a firm that's about architecture and we're a firm that's about design. We're not about creating the 50 billionth library or hospital or museum. I think even the museum people get stale, although they have such a broad birth—I'm going to say breadth of formal opportunities with that particular type.

KL Like the stadium work.

JS Yeah, isn't that cool.

KL CHS field—like that's such an interesting type to be able to wiggle your way into.

JS Isn't that crazy? Well, I suppose there was some wiggle, but I think for the most part, I had a client that introduced me to the [St. Paul] Saints because he was sure he had a site that they were going to want to go on. And so, I literally—like this is the craziest thing—he asked me to go to the Mall of America where the Lego people were challenging people that were doing new projects—new architecture projects in Minneapolis and St. Paul to go out and build the new Minneapolis and St. Paul out of Legos. So the Saints were going to go, and I went out there and built out of Legos a stadium—we call it a ballpark. And so I just stayed in touch. I went to games and sort of understood that they're not your typical baseball team.

KL No, they're not.

JS And it was getting an understanding their culture that was more important than understanding exactly how to design a ballpark. So we collaborate with specialists all the time and so, for us, that's how we do things for the first time. We are very careful that we find people that have not only all the pragmatic knowledge but can kind of hover above and see possibilities with us, and that is super fun. So we worked with Aecom and then we worked with the Ryan Companies, and so they were fantastic partners. Ryan Companies were just terrific. They were doing all the pricing, all of the engineering side, and they were the architect of record. So they were just really terrific to work with. So yeah it was kind of—it was really fun.

And, of course, I got to know people like Tom Whaley and Mike [Veck] Veeck and Derek Sharrer and Annie Huidekoper who was—I'll spell all those names. Especially Huidekoper—that's not easy. So they were really amazing people and they didn't want your typical ballpark. So we had a phone call—this is hilarious where we were kind of the first programming meeting, and we were working with the City, the Parks Department, and the Saints Club. And so we had—Mike Veeck was on the phone, and I can't remember if—yeah—so he's basically saying, yeah, that we were asking everybody what their expectations were—what were their aspirations for the projects. And Mike said that he had gotten together with Bill Murray and their basically directions to us were, surprise me, which is like seriously! How long do you have to wait in an architectural career to have that sort of movement?

KL Well, it also speaks to having a client who is inherently creative. The culture and the team—

JS Oh, they're creative [laughter].

KL —is incredibly loyal. And of course, Bill Murray is a co-owner.

JS I'd swear Mike is just as—we had a crazy meeting at—I can't remember the name of the restaurant—Palazzo or something in St. Paul for all of the legislators and Bill was coming. And so Bill roles in late but, to keep the conversation going, Mike stands up. And everybody's just rolling with this guy. He is so funny. And then Bill comes in, and he has everybody in stitches again. And I remember leaving and there were just all these people hovering around Bill, but I was just like, to Veeck, you are the funniest man in the room. You're still the funniest man in the room [laughter]. He's great—amazing person.

KL And then with the GSA, you have a growing international portfolio.

JS Well, yeah—not quite yet—we wish.

KL Stradling and—

JS We're working on the international side, but the GSA was basically not even on my radar. I had no idea how much work they do and what their values are. So I got a call one day from the chief architect from Region Five. And he said, "We're going to be in Minneapolis. We're going to be visiting some firms there. We'd like to come by." So, "Ok, sure." And he comes by, and it was great. We had a great conversation and pretty soon he says, we want you to apply for this IDIQ [Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quantity] project and then we'll be able to hire you to do some studies for us. It was fantastic, and I had no idea that they were so design-aware. And so people still when I say, "Yeah, we do a lot of work for General Services Administration," they go, "Oh, that's too bad. You must do that just to keep your studio alive." But it's not at all true. Their design excellence program I think is a brilliant program for any public client. And we've taken some of the ideas of that, particularly the [Senator] Daniel Moynihan design excellence mandate which is like maybe 600-700 words—maybe it's 1000 words. It's brilliant statement of what governments should expect from buildings. And so, that really turned into something. That was kind of great. So with design excellence, it really became just a great opportunity for us and many, many other firms. I had been—so let's see—I had started in 2000 as a peer reviewer for the design excellence program.

30:00

So I was able to travel around with these people and look at projects, look at people that were doing important work for the government and see kind of how they were presenting and what their design strategies were, what their presentations were like. So it was really a leg up to be a peer reviewer at that time. And that was—I think Garth [Rockcastle] had recommended me for that—Garth Rockcastle. So you can see kind of a thread here, that there are all these people that kind of push you along, right?

KL Always. And that's actually that's a really good lead into another topic that we wanted to discuss with you is people and events that have greatly influenced your career. So Bruce Abrahamson, the relationship—

JS Absolutely. All those people. Garth was amazing because, when I left HGA, I had no health insurance, and so he was great. He said, "We'll give you a teaching position in which you can purchase health insurance at the U[niversity]. So that was—I mean, obviously for my family that was really important. So I think there's, in terms of influence, Bob Cervenka from Phillips Plastics, the gentleman who hired an unknown—I mean he was amazing. I learned so much from him because he was such a visionary leader. And he had a very creative business believe it or not—plastics manufacturing in which they were inventing new processes. And so they had a very rich research and development arm, and they were

trying new things. And so he basically would use architecture as instigator to make something happen within his company. And to me that was really interesting—to be taught by a client the power of architecture is a pretty amazing thing. So I would say Bob was one of the—Bob, Bruce, Garth—I mean just [unintelligible].

KL We've talked about a couple of projects already. Is there another project, a favorite project, that you want to take a deep dive?

JS No, I don't have favorites. I don't play favorites. We've always felt like every project that comes into the studio has to have the same investment of time, talent, commitment to find the best possible outcome. And I think elevating the practice of design on every project is our goal on every project as well. And so we don't play favorites. But I did have to answer that question for the 2018 Design Award. And the way I answered it was quite coy, but it's actually true. It's the next project. It really is. I mean, you come into the office every day for the next project.

KL Oh, absolutely.

JS We're totally committed to every project we work on, but when you are at that stage where you just see so much potential in a project and you're just grasping it for the first time, and you're learning who the players are and how they think, it's pretty exciting.

KL And you just can't turn your brain off. It's just always popping.

JS No, you can't—exactly. That's a good feeling.

KL So maybe are there any other projects that are inflection points in the chronology that we just don't want to leave out—Phillips Plastic is an important inflection point.

JS Yeah, the GSA—

KL [Unintelligible] GSA—are there any other—

JS [Unintelligible]. We're doing a really interesting facade project now for the Social Security Administration in which they have a building that was built in the early 60s and the facade, the skin, the envelope was failing. And so they wanted to strip it down, redesign all the interiors and mechanical systems and a new facade. So that one was incredibly interesting because it was a chance to collaborate with a facade consultant. We were working with HGA and Studio NYL. So, again, kind of going to the specialist Studio NYL in facade design. And so we're really looking for a rather conventional skin, but one that performs in a very high-performance way.

KL Right. And this is in Washington D.C. or—

JS It's in Baltimore—interesting. Yeah, Social Security landed in Baltimore. Who knows—I think they're hiding [laughter]. Yeah, whatever. They'll never read that.

KL Well, also looking at inflection points in your career, expected or unexpected challenges that shaped your career additionally that was within or out of the office.

JS Well, I think growth was really tough. I mean, to go from 16 people for many, many years to bump up to 30 was really, really interesting. So that and then leveraging a local practice into a regional practice into a national practice is also interesting. And I think those were sort of major points of interest. I think going from more private work to public work has been fascinating because you find that we, for maybe a smaller project, your site may be and for an individual—for instance, when my client's Bob Cervenka, he can make decisions in 15 seconds. I mean, there is no committee meeting and long process and you're not meeting with the community—well, you might be meeting with zoning people, but it's very—the decision process and the decisions at the table are very controlled. And so then you're really talking about the context of the project really being the site and the project really erupting out of confluence of site and program. At one year really starting public work you begin to realize that there are many contexts to this and the political, economic contexts are really interesting and very much control the outcome. And the social and cultural contexts are also incredibly critical. And so those are sort of the pieces that we really think are not attended to on a conscious level by many architects.

KL Are you comfortable talking more about any examples about something political or economic and its impact?

JS Oh, sure, of course, yeah. So a sort of combination political economic is the project for Social Security. Because while we understood this to be—I mean, this is a building that is a ten-story building that sits on a crest of a hill in sort of the rolling landscape of Baltimore. And so it's a pretty dominant location. It faces Security Boulevard, so there's a lot of traffic. So, designing this façade, we wanted to have some impact. We wanted to relate to this idea—this very public building—that is not at all what Social Security wants. They want something that conveys very clearly that this is using taxpayer dollars wisely. So, not only are we using taxpayer dollars, but now we have to save energy along the way. And we have security issues. I mean, you have huge—I sort of lump this into political, but if you've got stand-off distances and you've got blast protection and you've got all of these issues that are paramount to keeping people safe in the building.

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And, for instance, the ports—we have ports in which these are basically people that are keeping a safe trade and travel in the United States, and are going to pull people out of their cars that aren't complying with those rules, so the general description of a land port of entry has been a combination of toll booth jail and a “Welcome to America” sign.

And the political part is making the “Welcome to America” sign bigger than the other two. So that to me has been a really interesting challenge. And, frankly, the work that we've been doing with the Department of State, I think its architecture has the power to serve our country well. I think it has diplomatic power. I think it has power to welcome people into the United States. And we need to leverage that now more than ever. So that's what we're going to do.

KL So other challenges shaping your career. You talked about the long hours at the very beginning, the thing that your father was trying to protect you around.

JS [Laughter]. Trying to avoid.

KL And you've alluded to your family. Do you want to talk a little bit about—

JS Well, I will say this that—

KL —balancing?

JS Yes—about the balance piece. When we were awarded the firm award, I was kind of starting to think, ok so what we really need to do is use this seven minutes on a stage to say something about architecture culture. And I think it's incredibly important that we welcome a more diverse group of people into architecture, women as well as minority architects. So, in thinking about this, one of the things that I believe in is that we have to be able to offer people a reasonable work schedule. And, yes, there are going to be times when you're going to want to put the kids to bed and you're going to come back to the office which I did a lot. And that's fine, but it just can't be all the time. And you do have to go home and put the kids to bed. They have to be picked up from daycare. They insist that you pick them up [laughter]. So I really feel, if we're going to create diversity in the profession, we have to offer people a reasonable work week. And we shoot for a 40-hour work week for our employees.

Now when I say a 40-hour work week in front of a group of architects, they laugh and they clap as if I had thought of that myself [laughter]. And what is really interesting is that I think that for me that makes better architecture. There was some data on the creation of the iPhone that the iPhone would have rolled out two years earlier if people had actually slept during the period of time that that phone was being designed. Because basically, when you're exhausted, you're going to make some bad decisions and you're going to spend hours the next day fixing them.

So, I would say the 40-hour work week is self-serving because I don't want people to have to backtrack every morning and redo what they did the night before. And I think it's a better product. I think you have more focus and you have more energy and you're smarter in the way you work. That's not a bad thing. And I think we can welcome people to the profession. We can give them a very interesting and open professional experience without having them choose between doing this or having a family or having interests outside the studio. And I think that to me is incredibly important. I love people that are interesting and I want to work with them. And they can't be interesting if they spend all their time here.

KL Yes, absolutely. And the nature of a collaborative profession is you need people to be refreshed so that they can actually relate well to each other.

JS Yeah, so they can be civil, but also bring those interests that they now have time to pursue back to their work. And I just think it's really important that we have people from other communities, even other professions coming to work in architecture. That its just—it makes the work richer.

KL What are the external interests that you bring back to the office?

JS I don't have any. That's the weird thing. I don't. I realize this, that I basically had three things that I was doing when I created this office: It was I had a family, I had teaching, and I had an office. And that's all pretty much I had time for. So I am so amazed. I look at my daughter who has two daughters and a career and she and her husband have friends—whoa! What a thought! So yeah, I don't have any interests—I read and I'm interested in art. I like to look at art. I can't afford it [laughter].

KL Travel.

JS Travel.

KL We talked about the importance of travel earlier in your career.

JS Travel—absolutely. So, yeah, I do have interests. Thank you!

KL So that kind of leads into the next topic and maybe even already wraps it up, just talking about complimentary skills and interests. What are things from travel in particular that you've pored over? Things from art that you've pored over?

JS You know, one of the things—I'm particularly interested in conceptual art and experiential art. And so experience of the world through the art experience is kind of really interesting to me. I like art because it challenges us to sort of think differently, like Apple did. No, they asked us to think different. Travelling is kind of the same way. I think travelling for me is it teaches you to be an observer. It teaches you to maybe not create explanations but create

experiences for yourself that are unfamiliar and to begin to understand why they would do it that way. So, I think that's really important.

KL What advice would you give to emerging professionals just beginning their career? You talk about nurturing a certain culture within your office. What would you say to someone who's contemplating architecture or just entering it?

JS One of the things that I wish were taught better is time management skills. And that would help. I wish that people would understand that a little better. I just finished teaching a semester at Yale, and these are smart kids. These are really, really smart people. And, even the smartest of them, are not good at time management. They don't print stuff in advance. They don't finish the model and then finish the drawings. It's just a mess; it's chaos. And everything is half-done. And so that's—and, at the same time, really good [laughter]. I should not leave that out because my students were amazing. So I wish that that were—but I also think along with that—you know in time management you have to kind of break it down. You have to break down tasks. You have to understand that there are certain tasks. Design isn't like that. Design is like trying to connect dots and bring things in that might come from other places. But production is breaking a task down. And I would really think, when people start their career in architecture, they have to understand what is it about this field that draws them. And how to create a career, how to design a career, how to break down the tasks. What do I want to do? What do I need to know to do that?

49:54

And to be able to navigate their career and to steer their career—to encompass all the things they're going to need to know to do what they want to do.

The other thing is don't be shy. I mean, to really say this is my interest and I want to pursue it—I think there is something really interesting in the past couple years in the studio where we've had young people coming in that have ideas of what they think we could do in the studio differently, and we try it, and I think that's really great. And we go, okay, you're now in charge of that. And to me that's really important because that is about creating that diversity and creating that specialization still allowing somebody to be the generalist architect.

KL Do you think you have an innate sense of time management that has served you well throughout your career?

JS No—no. I was terrible. I was terrible because I had no idea. To me it's really—particularly design—when you start design, it's like you know there aren't steps per se. I mean there's a design process. We like to think we have a design process, but it's kind of an unknown how much time this will take or how much time that will take. I mean, now we can do that pretty well. We're pretty good at figuring out how much time it's going to take. We also are quite driven by our client's schedules [laughter]. So that puts that limitation. But I don't think I had any—in fact, what I really love is having a weekend and being able to go up North, having a couple hours in which I can just think through some things. And just having that space to kind of not have a deadline on it—it's nice.

KL Talking about not being shy, what were some moments where you maybe followed your own advice, asserted something that—

JS Too many times [laughter]. Well, you know, anytime I tell a story like that, it's going to make me sound like a jerk [laughter], but I remember going once to a meeting at the AIA, and it was pretty early on. But our practice was getting some legs and people knew who we were. So I was invited to become part of this group at the AIA that was kind of creating—talking about how to make the AIA a better organization. So I go to this thing, and it's an hour meeting. And so, about 45 minutes—50—maybe 60 minutes had gone by, and they were talking about a lot of things that they wanted to do with the AIA. But I said, “Are you guys going to get around to talking about the elephant in the room?” And they said, “What elephant?” Kind of like, I don't understand what you're talking about. And I said, “What about the perception that the AIA is an old boy's club?” And they were shocked. I mean, I was the only woman in the room, and there were—everybody was Caucasian—everybody. And they just—it was so interesting because they just didn't see it that way. They just didn't see that as being an issue. So I thought there was something really—I mean, at that time, there was already the National Organization of Minority Architects. People were reaching out to become part of this profession. And they just didn't see it. And so, I mean, that had absolutely no impact whatsoever—the speaking up part, but I did. And I was never asked back to another meeting [laughter]. That conversation just ended right there. I don't know if they carried on or not.

KL You still got the gold medal.

JS Yeah [laughter]. And I don't want to make it—understand that I'm just giving you a list of people that have influenced my career, and they're almost all men. And so I don't want to give the impression that everybody is cut from the same—

KL Not at all.

JS —pattern. I mean—yeah—it was just the group I happened to be with at the time.

KL I had a number of excellent male mentors in my career too.

JS Yeah, and they totally—

KL Because that's what mentorship is—it's about the skills.

JS Yeah.

KL So talking a little bit more about—oh, before we leave students any advice, you mentioned Yale. And we know that you started teaching at the U [University of Minnesota] pretty early on, which is just a quick arc through your teaching history. Have you taught at other schools? How did you start at Yale?

KL Oh jeez, I don't think I can do my whole teaching history.

JS I don't want to leave out significant—

KL I taught for 12 years at the University of Minnesota and just loved the students. I loved many of my colleagues on the faculty. It was a way of having that sort of conversation about architecture that you can't have with yourself. You can't have that sort of tension of a conversation. So, after 12 years, it became less comfortable at the University. So I just decided to take a break. And, soon after that, Marlon Blackwell said, "Hey, come down and teach at University of Arkansas." So I went and did that. And, following that, there was an invitation to do a studio with Tom Oslund, my landscape colleague—great guy—at Wash U [Washington University]. And then Garth was then at Maryland, so I went to Maryland. And I had an invitation from Toshiko Mori to teach at Harvard. I taught three semesters there. I went to USC. So it just kind of carries on from there. So it's been—it's super fun. So you do this traveling thing.

KL Yeah, talk about more balance.

JS You don't—yeah, it's a lot. But it's nice because you just have the students and you don't have to do the faculty meetings and the—you don't have to do tenure stuff. You don't have to do admissions. You don't have to do pretty much anything. You have to do a lecture and it's just you and the students, so it's really cool. It's super fun. That's that story.

KL I'm envious of that.

JS Would you like to do that? You should do that. It's so fun.

KL Right now I'm doing the everything teaching load, so maybe I'll roll it into the—that.

JS No, that's actually really good. Full-time faculty are amazing. I had a chance to teach with a full-time faculty member. Well, he's not a full-time faculty. He was a Ph.D. student at Yale, and Surry [Schlabs] was fantastic. It was just so much fun. I mean, teaching with—okay, I was in awe. I mean, he knew so much, and he could bring this sort of wealth of references

and—I wouldn't say theory, but conceptual basis of design to our students that was just fantastic. It was so much fun teaching with him. So I think that sort of collegial thing is [unintelligible]—it's a really valuable thing.

KL So let's talk a little bit more about your legacy to the architectural profession. I know you're not talking secession plan, but the FAIA distinction is still a reflection of accomplishment.

JS Oh, the F—thing?

KL [Laughter]. So we could sort of move on to the third act of our conversation which is more reflective.

60:00

So what are the marks that—proud of?

JS Yeah, it's kind of something you hate to talk about, right? I would say that I hope that, when I leave this studio, that I've left behind a legacy of curiosity, of asking questions, of asking important and cogent questions, not just any question. But I think that's—to me there is I would say a really strong belief in the potential of architecture. I think we tend to undermine architecture. We tend to think that it can only be as good as the last thing we did, but it can be better. And I think that maintaining a trajectory of the work is really critical. And we talk about that a lot here, about how do we keep raising the bar for design excellence. How do we keep stretching and going for better questions for architecture to answer?

KL And you talked about the importance of the seven minutes that you had on stage with the national award. So, at various points in our conversation, you've alluded to—

JS Seven minutes—so actually I had Matt do all the hard work in that and then I just got to sort of throw in a few lines at the end.

KL [Laughter]. But, throughout our conversation, you've talked about when you were one or the only one or one of two women in the room, these sorts of things, how do you think being a woman has influenced your career or do you think it's [unintelligible]?

JS That is so impossible—like what if I were a man?

KL And nobody ever asked that question, right [laughter]?

JS Everybody asked that question and I have no idea how to answer it. I mean, I can't even imagine. In a way, maybe it would have been easier to fit in or to be mentored because people like to mentor people that look like them. But, on the other hand, it might have been harder to stand out. I don't know. I just can't—I mean, people also tend to think you've brought something different as a woman to the profession. And I can't think of what that would be [laughter].

KL It's not like a discrete super-power necessarily.

JS Exactly, yeah. It's just—I don't know—I think it's a hard one. I can say that I think it's important for women to be in the profession, but then that's hard to follow that up with a reason why other than I think just a different perspective, a different mentality. But then, every individual that comes in has that, right?

KL Exactly.

JS So it's really hard. I think it's a tough question to answer. So I won't [laughter].

KL You don't have to.

JS It's tough, isn't it? But you do have to ask, don't you?

KL Well, it's an important question for our committee as we try to support women in architecture broadly in AIA Minnesota. But I feel like, in the conversations that I've had so far with the other FAIA women I've had so far and in this conversation with you, that I keep seeing a parallel where, like you, many of my mentors have been men and I've had completely positive experiences which is—shouldn't be remarkable, but in 2018-19 is somewhat remarkable. So I don't know where I can look at it and piece it out and see where it's different. I experienced the roughly 50-50 numbers in college, but not in high school. I was the only woman in the room in high school whenever I did mechanical—

JS Right—AP Physics [laughter].

KL Yeah, that kind of stuff. Right, but I just—there were days when I didn't think I needed to be a feminist because all the work had been done. And then other days—well, I've got to step up and do this work and be a feminist. So I think it's something that is very situational and ebbs and flows.

JS But here's the sort of line. There's a divide at one point and that is with the #MeToo movement. We can't have sexual predators in architectural offices. That can't happen. That's done. That's over. That's it. And so I think having more women in the profession makes it safer, frankly—hopefully. Because that to me—that is kind of the moment at which you go, “Oh my gosh, the work here is not done,” right?

KL Right. But I think it's also easy to extrapolate that out in a way in which it's not necessarily about gender, but just saying when there's more people in the room, it's safer. And it's not just practically safer, it's emotionally safer. You're getting to ask the curious questions and have that conversation instead and bring it back to being architecture. So I think it's being—I think it's about seeing the demographics of the world being reflected in every profession and just what does it take to get there so it's an option for all those who desire it, right?

JS Yeah, and I think that's going to take a while. One of the things that people—I remember being asked at one point, “When do we see equity in our profession?” And I thought, “It's going to be also important to see equity in our clients so that it's not a thing.” I mean it has to not be a thing.

KL Right. Yeah, that goes way back to like equity in pre-school and all—

JS Yeah [laughter].

KL So dammit—another generation—take more time.

JS It's going to take a while.

KL So, in wrapping up, can you talk a little bit more about what it means to be FAIA to receive the recognition from your peers?

JS To be a fellow? [Laughter].

KL A fella [laughter].

JS That never worked for me. So this is kind of bad, but I talk about being F-ed. I think there was—so back in the day, Garth suggested I do this. He nominated me; he was my nominator. And I went—jeez dude, I'm really busy. Do I really want to take the time to do this? And he goes, “Oh, yeah.” And I say, “Okay Garth. Will I get more clients?” [Laughter]. He goes—there were very few metrics I had at that time. And he said, “Well, maybe,” and he said, “but what I really want you to do is to stand in that room, and have somebody put this over your head and have you feel that sense of communion and fellowship with your architectural colleagues across the country. So I thought about that. So I went through with it, and we were at the dinner after this deal, and I said, “Garth man, I didn't feel it.” [Laughter]. And I was just like—it was like 400 people and 250 words about each one of them. And it was like, oh, man.

And so, at the dinner we were all sitting down, and I go, “Dude, I really didn't feel it.” And he—so then they still call out your name there. And so, when they did that, everybody at the table stood up—this was after a few drinks—and wiped their napkins around and

made a big ruckus. And I said, “Okay, I felt that.” So I think that’s the goal. I don’t know of any other. Sad [laughter].

KL I mean, I think because you’ve earned the firm award and had that recognition, that’s maybe that feeling of communion was more palpable in that moment maybe?

69:58

JS No, I think—first of all, I’m not looking for that, I mean, isn’t just a thing that makes me super happy. I think maybe I’m just not a social person, but I do believe that recognition is—I mean, it’s never a bad thing to be recognized. And you always feel an honor and a sense of responsibility that comes with it. And so, to me, medals are—first of all, they’re so weirdly military [laughter].

KL They are.

JS So, that’s a little odd. I won the Ralph Rapson Teaching Award, and it’s like huge. It’s like this cast piece, and it’s heavy. It’s like soap on a rope, only it’s heavy. And so that’s kind of the—it just feels not me to have medals. But at the same time, I think I owe the profession at least a responsibility to continually elevate design and advance the profession in whatever way I can.

KL I think—

JS That’s it.

KL —that’s a lovely note to end on. Alright, thank you for your time.

[End of Interview]

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