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Claude Cormier
ORAL HISTORY
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Interviews Conducted
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By Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA, FAAR

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BIOGRAPHY

CHILDHOOD

Princeville Dairy Farm and Sugar Shack

BIRNBAUM: You were born in 1960 and grew up on a family-owned dairy farm outside Princeville in rural Quebec.

CORMIER: In a very small town called Princeville, in a rural world, in a dairy area and sugar shack. So, my father passed away early, when I was seventeen, and I remember at the age of sixteen, I received a chainsaw for my birthday, a chainsaw because we had sugar shack. We were heating the house with wood. So, it was a kind of a natural thing, because we received gifts that was almost tools, that's how I grew up on a farm. Nature was never something that I loved. Nature was something, it was a resource that we're making a living off. I was looking at trees in a way that if we had to cut it, where do you direct it on the ground? So, my idea of landscape was completely whole, but it was very pragmatic of feeding the world.
I had a happy childhood, normal childhood. We had two brothers, two sisters. My mother was teaching. My father was a very avant-garde kind of guy. He was involved in politics in Quebec UPA. Was interested for the goodness of people working the land. And he was also very progressive in a way that was using technology. So was my mother in education. So, I come from a background that we were on the farm, but my father was very proud of what he was doing. So, I think for me, my father was a huge mentor, still now. I would love to take him to my project. You have no idea. Just to show him where the transition that I've made from the farm

with the cows, with the gardens, with the sugar shack, and moving into creating the kind of landscape that we're making, which is not about nature, but which is about completely something different. So, but that's, it won't happen, but I carry him with me all the time. I look at my younger brother, who has a sugar shack. He's exactly like me, but in a rural world. So, it's quite kind of interesting with the same attitude that we received from the education that we had on the farm to where we are now.

Work and Play

BIRNBAUM: Let's begin by discussing your childhood on the farm.

CORMIER: So, what were we doing at the farm in Princeville? Small town; work and play, it was all combined together. My father was a passionate man of what he was doing. My brother and I, we always followed him everywhere he was going. Right? The little boys and then my dad, we were always behind. So, I spent all my life as a kid following my father. So, this notion of play does not really exist other than working indirectly. Like for example, at the sugar shack, we had an amazing land, but everything was going quickly under the story. So, my brother and I, we'd go and spend days cutting twigs of the sapling underneath. Right? You could spend the whole day. We loved doing it. But is that play? Or is that working?

And I also remember vividly when we were harvesting hay, because the farm was located in the front of a major regional road, and in the summertime, in July, you all see the urban people with a trailer, with the car, and the kids in the back, going away. I thought, I would never do

that, unfortunately. And I was very envious of those children being able to go away. So, for me, the trailer has a huge impact on my life of getting out of the farm. But I never did it, until my father passed away when I was seventeen. So, it's quite interesting, the notion of evasion as a kid was in my head. I was very aware of that. But at the same time, not feeling trapped. So, there's a kind of equilibrium between work and play and the feeling good of where I was that was quite well-balanced. But when my father passed away, I was ready to get out. Right?

Nursery Salesman

CORMIER: When I was a kid, I worked in Quebec City in a nursery for one summer. There were 100 salesmen on the floor. At the end of the summer, I was the number one salesman. Because during that summer, they gave me a little helper next to me who was *trisomique*. One of the sons of the owner was *trisomique* and I don't know why, they thought, "Claude, I think you're going to work well with him." So, him and I, we became a kind of personality within the nursery. This little guy was fantastic. And we became a team. People sensed it. They wanted to be served by us. Because we, I don't know what we brought, but at the end of the summer, I was number one salesman. Pretty good.

BIRNBAUM: Was it fun?

CORMIER: It was so much fun. I loved that little guy. [LAUGHTER] He loved me. We had so much fun. And I could do, he could do anything for me, but I would do everything for him. And the trust that we had among ourselves I think was bigger than us, and people sensed it. He was

following me everywhere. [LAUGHTER] "Ok, bring that to the car. Bring that to the car. Bring that to the car." [UNINTELLIGIBLE] It was so, I could just see how beautiful it was. And you think some people would want to be associated with that? There's no way. But I embraced him. Embraced him. It was. Wow. So that's why nowadays in my career, when we need to deal with handicapped people, whoa. Right? "I'm sorry, but it's important." And I have sensibility toward them. And I want to be part of a solution that they would be within it, not on the side, not hidden, but in the center, with us.

EDUCATION

Death of Father and University Laval

BIRNBAUM: You first attend the University Laval in Quebec City. What did you study? You only stayed one year. Why?

CORMIER: I remember very vividly, when my father was 44, he was diagnosed with cancer. It was very quick. He was sick for three months, and he said, Claude, at the hospital he told me once, "you should become an agronomist. I think it would be good for you. You don't need to have a farm. But to work with the science, I see you doing that." So, what did I do? Right? I enrolled at university as well in agronomy, and I was not interested in production, but I was more interested in the notion, slowly, of genetics. This notion is potentially to invent a new flower. I loved plants at that time in my life. I knew all the plants. I knew all the flowers, all the trees, the shrubs, that last, I was very interested by that. And I thought, OK, that's what I will do. I will become a geneticist, plant breeding, and invent something new. And after a year, I

think I had a, not a sickness, but I had to get out of Quebec somehow. I was suffocating on my past.

University of Guelph

BIRNBAUM: Next you go to the University of Guelph, Ontario, where you completed undergraduate studies in 1982. Again, what did you study? Did you have any mentors or muses? Any classmates worth noting? What about you personally? It's been noted that you had a dream to "invent a new species of flower." Tell us about that.

CORMIER: I went to Guelph, thinking, great genetics school. So that summer I was able, because we had a sugar shack that my brother and I operated after my father died, and we kept the farm for a year after my father died. I said, "well, it's a bit crazy." So, I did a kind of an over, I overdid it, and I was really, really, really fed up with all that. So, with my mother, we sold the cows, the equipment, but we kept the land, and that year later, that's when we did sugar shack while I was at Laval University, driving back between Quebec City and Princeville, which is an hour and 20 minutes, to boil, and then back to the city to do my exam and all this. Crazy, crazy. So, I just got so fed up and realized that I was dealing with my father's responsibilities, and they were not mine. Clearing my head. So that summer I told Mom, "I'm going to go away." And I applied to Guelph and got accepted, and in those days, they were exciting. So, I decided to go to California, and I hiked to Vancouver and down to California, learning my English, because [I'm a] 100% French boy., So, that's what I did. So, that's the beginning of a new relation[ship] of the farm and getting to cities, meeting people, different cultures, different races, the

beginning of opening up a whole new world that I didn't know existed. Right? When one black student who came here, whoa. Right? And then in Guelph, Chinese, Indian, [UNINTELLIGIBLE] right? It was, whoa, whoa, whoa. Right? A little white Catholic boy, French, getting in this new world. But I loved it.

Year Off and Travel

CORMIER: So quickly I realized when I left Quebec City, and I was preparing myself to go to Guelph, that I had to get out of Quebec reality, my childhood reality of the farm. So, that summer, by the fact we did the sugar shack in the spring - had lots of money. So, I decided to take the year off. I wanted to be that little guy in the back of the seat and explore the beginning of a new world. So, I told Mom and my younger brother, who was fifteen, that "I'm going to go away for the summer", and in those days, hitchhiking was a very cool mode of transportation. My mother was freaking out, but I said, "Mom, I'm a big boy. I'm twenty. I'm going to do it," Jack Kerouac, right, that whole period of time. And I decided that's what I'm going to do, and I did that. My mom drove me to the corner intersection in the village, with my bag, and she said "goodbye". To [me] it was pretty, it was quite the implicit moment. So, I took three months, hitchhiked all the way across Canada to Vancouver, and then from Vancouver all the way down to San Diego. And then back and back to Montreal. Twenty years old. I don't think I had sex once. [LAUGHTER] I recall, I don't think I had sex once, because sexuality these days was not somehow existing on the farm. And I didn't have that urge, thank God, or too bad, or whatever. [LAUGHTER] So it's just interesting to see how, and that's not very long ago. This is in the late '70s, early '80s. And the reality of kids of twenty years old now having no sex, well,

there's a problem. But anyway, that was not an issue that got in my way, and I'm just thinking now about that, it's like hm, a bit weird. But it was fantastic. Fantastic trip. Discovering the world, discovering myself in places I never thought would have existed. California was an amazing place. Wow. So, my experience of traveling across Canada and my traveling down to California was very different. And the one from Vancouver to down south California, all the way down to San Diego, beautiful landscape, seashore, people, rural, mountains, cities, beaches. There are people spending their summer, their life there. That's not fair. Right? So, this is the kind of a think I was thinking, "oh my God, Claude, you've been missing out. There was some amazing experience there that you will never have known if your father hadn't died, because that freedom that he gave you could be, go and be who you want to be." Right? Huge liberation. My father gave me that possibility to become who I want. And that was very clear when I was young. So, kind of those mixture of experience that somehow indirectly starts shaping my desire to do something with all of that. But I was going to Guelph in science and plant breeding. So anyway - there's a kind of information that comes in late in my consciousness that would eventually work its way on.

So, you don't want to come back to the farm. Boring. Nature? Boring. Right? Cities? Yeah, it was like that.

BIRNBAUM: Is this when you return to Guelph?

CORMIER: Came back - did my two years of science at Guelph. I didn't really like it. Science and I are not that compatible. I didn't like it at all. Period. So, my next thing was, I'm going to apply in landscape architecture because I love plants. I love the environment. I love this, I didn't know what it was, really. But it was a feeling, not architecture, but landscape architecture seemed very attractive, that there were things in there that I would find. I applied to the University of Manitoba. Didn't get accepted. Well, too bad. And so, I said, I'm going to pursue my English reality, and I applied at University of Toronto, got accepted.

University of Toronto

BIRNBAUM: Next, on to the University of Toronto. Tell us about your time there; your studies; fellow students that were memorable; mentors and muses.

CORMIER: Fell in love with the city big time. Night club, having sex [LAUGHTER], art, urbanity, community, it was phenomenal, and discovering the world of architecture, a built environment. That turned me on. But I remember also when I was living in Toronto, that I felt a little bit trapped in the city. There's nowhere you could go at the water edge, and that's going to bring me to [UNINTELLIGIBLE] competition that we did when I was 40. This relationship that I had lost with the land, spending a day at the lakeshore of anywhere.

Moved to downtown Toronto. Whoa. Loved it. Right? The farm boy in the city, with the experience of the farm but also discovering culture. The school of design is pretty amazing, because it opened up the world, the way of thinking, the way of doing, the notion of invention,

the notion of creation. I loved it. By the fact that my father was very progressive with all these kinds of notions and ideas, [I] fit right in. So, I did my four years in landscape architecture, discovered night clubs, loved the beginning of going out, the notion of gender, the notion of gay clubs. Whoa. It was great. [LAUGHTER] Wow, wow, it was fantastic. Art museums, art galleries, a bit of shopping, but secondhand shopping, because we didn't have any money. I remember I was living in Kensington Market. Whoa, it was phenomenal. Culture. Food from different ethnicities. I just was in Heaven.

Master's Thesis

BIRNBAUM: Tell us about your Master's Thesis on the topic of the St. Lawrence River as it met City of Montreal. Tell us about the role that Blanche van Ginkel played. Other mentors or muses that were impactful at this time?

CORMIER: So, this is the moment there's a kind of switch in landscape architecture that I realized, plant world, eh. But I was very more into the urban built environment. Not knowing about any precedent of others, but I was learning about it, and I felt so good at it. My last year final project at University of Toronto as a thesis student, I picked the Old Port of Montreal. That was my big project. And I was actually picking out all [of] the site[s] and going back to this shoreline and creating a promenade. My thesis at the moment was [with] Michael Hough, this great Canadian [landscape architect and] ecologist. He said, "I don't want to work with the students because it's taking a site out that could be amazing to create landscape architecture

on it." I said, "Michael, I'm not doing this. I don't want to do this." That was not what I wanted to do. Not knowing exactly what I was doing, but I was very convinced about that.

The University of Toronto had also a school of architecture. So, I went to see if someone at the school of architecture would take me as their student to do my thesis project. [Enter]Blanche van Ginkel. van Ginkel is an amazing urbanist who saved Montreal by not allowing a highway going through; was very knowledgeable about the city of Montreal. She said, "Claude, I'm going to work with you." Totally. So that was the beginning of me not fitting in what landscape architecture was. And I just dived into it with her. It was amazing. She was amazing. She taught me things as a landscape architect that I hadn't learned yet at school, which is called urbanity, urban design, and city making. Right? "Yes, you can take your site out, Claude, I support it. We'll do it. Let's go for it." So, I have some quite interesting drawings of my final plan and designing towers, designing with concrete, which is not what I needed, I'm not about sustainability. But then as a young student, I was ready to embrace new ways of thinking. And she supported me. Working with Blanche, after four years of being in a landscape school, was refreshing. She brought a completely different way of thinking and looking at different precedents. Looking at architecture, not just landscape, looking at urban design: Planner and theorist Kevin Lynch - movement in the city, the way that you circulate in space. Architect and theorist Christopher Alexander- design pattern, pattern language. All these kinds of different things. And meanwhile, I had another professor called Jim Beligh [sp?] who was doing philosophical conceptual thinking. Loved it. Just being able to talk about ideas. And I was able, then, to take that with Blanche, and create something new. Right? Doing an urban landscape is not just about doing

landscape architecture, but something that will respond to the beginning of the history of urbanity. And I'm a student. I can explore. I could take risks. And I totally embraced it. And Michael [Hough] thought it was not interesting. I'm willing to take risk. And he didn't allow me. Blanche did. Very good. Right? So somehow that's finished my education at University of Toronto in undergrad. At the end of my four years, I was radiating something that was big. So, I got this huge medal, finished my landscape architecture, and started working in Toronto.

Early Professional Practice

BIRNBAUM: You worked for landscape architects Diana Gerrard and Gunta Mackars in Toronto. Tell me about this period. What was the studio environment like?

CORMIER: The next chapter that is important in my development is that I started working with a small firm in Toronto, Jordan Mackars. And it was a very small firm, and they were working for Phyllis Lambert to create the landscape for the public ground for the Canadian Centre for Architecture located in Montreal. It could be anywhere else in the world, but Phyllis Lambert decided it should be Montreal, because she loves Montreal.

BIRNBAUM: Tell me about your work on the team that designed Parc Baile and the garden at the CCA in Montreal. How did you engage with Peter Rose, Melvin Carney and Phyllis Lambert? What was your role? Any "a ha" moments here?

CORMIER: So big new step. We're an office of four or five people, with not much, that was not my best experience in my career. But working with Madame [Lambert] was, whoa, that was something. And the architects were Peter Rose and Melvin Charney. So, in terms of landscape architecture, we didn't have much to do, because Peter was deciding everything and was designing everything, and landscape was subservient to architecture. So, it's very much of an architect's vision of what architecture is, to set up a building, and come out as a tableau, building as a pavilion in a green space. And Melvin Charney is a fantastic man. He's also not an easy cookie. And oh, that's an amazing moment. Tragic meeting. Oh, painful meeting, drama, drama, drama. Quickly I realized that was way too much for me. Diana Gerrard put me in charge of the project. She was a good landscape architect. She has design abilities but was not interested either by landscape. So anyway, I had to chew up a big thing. I couldn't do it. I failed. So, I had to remove myself from the project, because Madame is a bulldozer. Right? I was flying to Montreal alone, not with my boss, had a meeting with Peter, just biting your head out. And Melvin Charney is saying, "oh, you're doing *pubic* trees. I don't want planting under the trees. Take those pubic hair out. I don't want any." Right? So it was, I was alone with no experience, dealing with this. And I couldn't. I couldn't. So, on my own, I said, "Diana, I can't work on this. They're [UNINTELLIGIBLE] Right? I don't want to kill. I'm too stressed out. I don't have [UNINTELLIGIBLE] yet. So, you need to find someone that will do it. So, my first experience was a kind of, not a failure, but I couldn't do it. So, I let that one go. But I had already established a great contact with Madame, because she thought that I was quite involved. I was a little bit of a fighter. And I was on my own, fighting the monster. And she knew it. But boy, my head flew a

few times up the wall. And so anyway, that was the beginning of learning your own ability, and when you're not.

Phyllis Lambert

BIRNBAUM: Tell me more about Phyllis Lambert and the role she would play in your future. Do you remember your first meeting? Give me a sense of Lambert.

Cormier: Who is Phyllis Lambert? Phyllis Lambert is the daughter of the Bronfman family, who was the richest family at that time in America. Phyllis Lambert changed her name because she didn't want to be a Bronfman, because of the association of power and money. She always wanted to be of her own self and not be inscribed with that. So, she married Mr. Lambert just to get the name, and that was not a happy marriage. But she was not a Bronfman anymore. She studied under Mies van der Rohe, I believe, in Chicago at that time. And her father hired him to design the Seagram Building in New York. And the Seagram Building, as you know, is a different kind of insertion in the city, and she fought with Mies to make this happen in New York City, set up a building, creating a plaza in the front, and all this. So, she's a huge, important player in city building. So, she was doing this urban center, Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal. So, you have to understand that this woman is quite radical. She has no patience. And if she asks a question, give me the answer. And if you don't have the answer, "I will know exactly, I'm going to cut your head off." Right? So, [LAUGHTER] she's quite the personality. And you need to be equipped to do it, and I was not. But I developed an amazing appreciation of this woman. So, I come back later in the equation two years later, because she saw something in me, and once the Centre was built, she asked me - she said, "Claude, I'm going to give you my eye. I want you

to do the landscape management vision of how the garden would evolve. So, I did that for seven or eight years. We had once a year, her and I, [UNINTELLIGBLE] in the *jardin*, and I was, she was pointing out the things that drove her crazy, and I was pointing out to her also things that drove me crazy. So, we started developing a kind of a nice rapport of exchanging, and sometimes as difficult as she is to be, she's so beautiful, naïve, and if you can take it, puts you in a good mood. So, we had developed this love and hate relationship. And that went on for many, many years.

So, I have to say, my meeting with Phyllis - working with Phyllis Lambert, and being with kind of a failure, was not a failure, because when I decided to go to Harvard, I asked Madame if she could help me. When I decided to go there to the Graduate School of Design at the University of Harvard, I didn't have any money, because I got a notary fraud on a new building I just bought, when I was 32. I'd been working for seven years. And I really, really, really wanted to go there. I was determined to go. And I said, "Madame, I'm going to propose a deal to you. I'd like to keep doing the landscape maintenance that I've been doing with you, for five, six, seven years, whatever time it needs. And in return, you're going to pay my tuition to get in." She said "yes. Let me write you a check." I realize now, today, that was a game changer in my whole life and practice.

Harvard's Graduate School of Design

BIRNBAUM: Tell me about your first visit to the GSD and meeting Martha Schwartz in 1993.

CORMIER: One summer when I was in Kennebunkport with my friend, it was raining, my friend Ann said, "let's go to Harvard. You always talk about it. Let's go see it." Oh, pretty good idea. So, we walked onto the campus, *coup de foudre*. We walked in the GSD, met Martha Schwartz in the hall. Oh my God. I was struck. I said, "this is where I'm going to, I have to come here." I had a calling. Never had that moment in my life. Big time, I said, "Claude, you need to be here. You need to come here." But I didn't have any money. I applied for many scholarships and all this. I didn't get any. So, I guess the little entrepreneur in me decided to approach Madame, and said, Madame, I like to do a deal with you.

BIRNBAUM: You chose not to get an MLA, but a Master in Design Studies. Why?

CORMIER: I could have applied also to MLA, but it's a two-year program, Master in Landscape Architecture, which is double the amount of money. I didn't want to go there - pick your choice of this.

I had to enroll in MDes because it was a one-year program. Right, a Master in Design [Studies]. I selected history and theory as the category that I was going in, not knowing what theory was. Oh my God. My dream was actually to be, to have some top world landscape architect as professor. So, I said, "when am I going to get there?" I'd been trying somehow to get my way in the design studio. I was not able to.

BIRNBAUM: Tell us about your mentors. In addition to Martha (who you worked for one day a week and should tell us about); What about Mirka Benes, Linda Pollack, Richard Forman, and John Stilgoe. Others?

CORMIER: So, I just did classes in theory and history. First semester, I hated it. Second semester, poof. That whole thing started to open up. I started to understand, started to draw lines and make connections, with Heidegger, Miller de Poncy, history, [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. Michael Hays was my instructor, my professor in theory. Not anything to do with landscape architecture and design. That was excellent. I had time to take classes on real history, had classes with Stilgoe. I had classes with Mirka Benes, which is this very strict historian on art history. Fantastic. Did classes on Olmsted, understanding who that man was. Wow. If I had done studio, I would not have gotten that. So that gave me a year to reflect about, "what do I do with all this?" But I think the best thing that I've learned at Harvard, it demystified the star system. They all have issues. They all are complicated, unhappy people. So, you don't need to be part of this, right, if you don't want to. And that became very clear. So, I was not intimidated by knowledge. I could be who I wanted to be. And I did that. And it's fantastic. It just opened up the whole world.

Martha Schwartz and Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.

BIRNBAUM: In 2015 you spoke at a conference TCLF organized when you proclaimed that Olmsted and Schwartz were your landscape architecture parents. Please explain.

CORMIER: I understood Olmsted's- value was fantastic. But all of his landscapes are man-made. Nothing is natural. All man-made. On the other side, Martha Schwartz, my hero, my mentor. All of her landscape[s] is about culture, not nature. Man-made, like Olmsted. The two are creating man-made, constructed landscape from scratch. Where do I fit in? Right? I fit right in the middle. I borrow Olmsted's vision about the notion of working for people, creating healthy environment, bringing nature in the city, to bring recreation, enjoyment, bringing people together. And then on the other side you have this subversive woman, which I love being subversive in a way, because it changes your way of looking at things. Martha [Schwartz] using artificial elements in the creation of her landscape. The most two extreme people, but somehow, I was able to bring them together. And this is when I say that Frederick Law Olmsted could be my father, and my mother could be Martha Schwartz. I'm their kid. I'm a mixture of the two. I am not a naturalist. I am not a conceptualist. I'm postmodern. I take the best of the two, and the notion of wanting to study genetics fits right in, because if you do hybrids in plant design, you take the quality of one element, and you take the quality of the second. You bring them together, and a new type happens. That's what I am. So, I guess my science study helped me to reconciliate art and science, to reconciliate science and art together. And I somehow was able to define what my landscape[s] would be about, and being able to defend it, not just being totally intuitive, but also being able to rationalize and explain where it comes from. So that's why my Harvard education has been the key to understanding what I was doing.

Social Life at Harvard Graduate School of Design

BIRNBAUM: What was it like to be gay at Harvard's GSD at this time?

CORMIER: My classmates at the GSD - I quickly realized that they were like me. I had a major love affair that I just, my heart was broken in the early '90s, and I had to get out of Montreal, because my soul was just so in touch with this man after four years. I had to leave him, but I was heartbroken. So, I said, Claude, "get out of here. Go do something else. Pick yourself up." Landscape was my saving grace. And when I got there, many of my friends were in the same state, mature students, broken hearts, had to go away from home because they needed a kind of a restart or a refresh. So that was quite interesting. We all had this kind of thing in common that we don't see at first, but we all are somehow fragile and broken and need to fix us. Big realization. So those people are still my friends now, today. Right? And then the thing that we have in common, it's the passion for architecture, landscape design Pretty amazing. So, the notion of gender at GSD, for me, was not something that I was looking for or had any expectation. And I had to somehow fix myself. I had to heal myself from this major love affair that I lost, which was great. But I had to heal. So, for me, once again, it was not about looking and finding new mates.

But the gay reality at the GSD was not very out there. You had to look for it. And there's a lot of gay men, but they're - everybody's hiding it. There's no flamboyancy. I remember the first day I arrived at the GSD, I was wearing all leather. Right? Because I was Mr. Night Club here in Montreal, and all this, and we're like, but not the New York style, but the stylish style of urban fitting in leather.

So anyway Jennifer Luce, a friend of mine at the GSD, when I walked into the school, and she said, "who is this guy"? Poof. A bit like clashing or not fitting in. And quickly I realized, "uh-uh, not here, baby. Not here. You don't need to wear [a] necklace or things that are too trendy. Right? The kind of the clubwear and all this kind of stuff. Not here." A year later, I came out of school, wearing all the Harvard clothes with a letter on the back, Everything I had was Harvard. [LAUGHTER] God. Just a total suck up. Right? That's me. I go in an environment, and I just totally live it. It's great. So, a kind of transition within a year, coming - urban cities, downtown, where nightclub scene was and all this. Uh-uh, not in Cambridge, Massachusetts. So quickly I understood the rules, and I played the rules.

Well, I had had one year [which] was enough. One year was enough. I have to say, it's a bit boring. Right? Instead of doing bar hopping, I was doing library hopping. For a year. But it was good for me. It was good. And a year was enough. So yeah, the gay culture, not very prominent. But I would, I was fine with that, because that was not what I was looking for. I'm not sure 20, 40, 30 years later, it's very much part of the thing. Grindr did not exist in my time. So, I supposed I'd be curious to see how it is this, now within this.

First Office

BIRNBAUM: Following graduation in 1994 you returned to Montreal. How was that decision made and why? Where was your first office located? What was it like?

CORMIER: Interesting. My first office, I did not want - I was not supposed to have an office. Right? I never wanted to have an office. My dream as a young architect was - I would have loved to work in a big city. Like at SOM. Right? In a tower, up there with an amazing view, having resources all around to do the project: the real image of what an architect could be, or should be, or what we were looking after. It didn't start like that because there was no office I really wanted to work [at]. And I could have worked with Martha [Schwartz], but I wanted to come back home. I don't know, I was ready to come back home. And it's a turning point that you become a Canadian-American, and then you work in the States, and bye-bye Canada. I couldn't do that. And I had to come back for Phyllis [Lambert], because I had an agreement to deliver. So, in a way it was a good way to bring me back home. So, I started on a project that was quite interesting. And I started on my own. And I had my office in my bedroom next to the washing and the dryer, the washing machine. Isn't that amazing? Very different than the high tower, with a nook, and an amazing view of the city. I was in the back with the washing machine and working away.

But it was great. I was not frustrated. That's a decision I made - I want to do this. But I made compromise. And you have to start making a bit of money, and all that, right? So, we started from scratch, from nothing. But with passion. So, I think that that's rule number one. And then if you have that, I would say, "go for it big time." And it grows, and I never thought I would get to this level. Right? A bilingual office, respected internationally, I think. [LAUGHTER] So quite far away from that washing machine.

But [the] second washing machine in my career, is when I started to work on the CCA in Toronto for the project of Madame Lambert. I was at the [UNINTELLIGIBLE] and I was back downstairs in a basement next to the washing and the dryers. And a big dog. [LAUGHTER] Alone in a room. Isn't that amazing? So, I thought, OK, God. So, the setting is one thing. But I think the frame of mind is the biggest thing, and the purpose by which you want to work. And then it goes from there quickly. But a little bit of this kind of entrepreneur in you, that needs to be there too, because it does not happen on its own. You've got to fight. You've got to voice up. You have to be clear, and you have to start learning to negotiate. We don't learn any of that in school, unfortunately. And I think it's a really important component. So, do we call that business development? Question mark.

On Design

Defining a Cormier Landscape

BIRNBAUM: Describe what makes a Cormier landscape?

CORMIER: What is the Cormier landscape? Right? I think Cormier landscapes are simple and complex. But it doesn't show that complexity. They're always about just one idea. I have learned quickly through a professor [UNINTELLIGIBLE]- an historian in Quebec City at Laval University . . . I think there's many things on that aspect. But I think it goes back to a little bit of what my overall activities in life that it needs to say something. It doesn't have to say everything. But I think it should say one or two things. And the projects in my career - I've

learned quickly that you can't win all the battles. What are the battles on each project that you will keep? And those you're going to fight for. And they're usually one or two things. So, a project has to be simple in its way of telling the story, but within that, it takes a huge amount of complexity, I would say. But Cormier landscapes are usually fun. They usually have a little bit of subversiveness, because that's my nature. I don't like to look like everybody else. I like to bring history, not the decade history. We like here to understand the history of a place, and then rechew it, and then add components to it, because history is alive. It's not dead. It's just the past. But the past needs to be regulated, retold, and looking towards the future. So, it's a kind of a merging of the past and future together in a very straightforward way. As a young landscape architect, I always wanted my friends to understand what we were doing, because landscape architecture 30 years ago was - "you're not an architect. You're, what, a shrubby? Or you just work around the building, and you come at the end, and you just do the planting?" No. Right? It's everything but that. And so that's why I think we started doing, I started doing stuff in nightclubs, because my friends were not architects - [they] were not landscape architects. And I wanted to be part of the game. Right? So then how do I translate that for them to get it? So, there's a kind of really, really, early on, my notion to be able to describe what I was doing, clearly, simply, and you could understand and be part of my journey. I was not hanging around landscape architects. That was not my world. I was interested by everything in that sense, and all of that, I took it in the making of landscape. So that's why when I say when I was young, I loved plants. My upbringing on the farm taught me good, common, basic principles. You need soil. It needs to be the right plants. It needs water. It needs maintenance. If you're not having any of these things, don't [do] both. So, then it somehow helps to define a design solution

quickly. And I've never been afraid of having a landscape with no vegetation, per se, because vegetation is great, fantastic and necessary, but it can't go anywhere if it doesn't have the room for it. So that's why I was able to embrace the notion of bold pattern, to deal with other aspects than soil and plants. And I think also, I am a bit of a closeted architect. I wish in a way that I would have been an architect, but I'm so happy I'm not. [LAUGHTER] Because I think we have a fantastic profession. But 30 years ago, 40 years ago when I started, there's nowhere I really, really wanted to work with, because I was not interested much by the outside product. Right? Filling up a program, just as kind of a, but the lack of expression would drive me, I wanted more. I wanted more. I didn't know how. But slowly I, by doing smaller projects, I found room in there, and I need to be a provocateur. And I really, really loved it. And I learned my rules of dealing with media and understanding the power and importance of media in the profession and being able to talk about it publicly. And very often we did the news, and I was interested in publication, not in landscape architecture magazine, but any other type of magazine for us to have a visibility. So, a Cormier landscape is [LAUGHTER] it's a bit of everything. But it is for people. It is to take a center place in the day-to-day life of people. We were not a specialty. We were essential to everybody's life. And being able to create something that would create commotion, and people not being happy when we did Lipstick Forest in Montreal with these concrete pink trees. It was fantastic. Cab drivers talked about it. Wow. Creating these kinds of discussions with people not knowing what we're doing.

BIRNBAUM: This idea that creating commotion, right? I mean, that to me was an intriguing choice of words in the way you just answered that. But what does creating commotion mean for a landscape architect?

CORMIER: I think creating, yeah, OK. I always have been interested as being in the subversive category. I don't want to duplicate something that is all based on the status on the normative side. I can't stand integration. I think integration is a bore. I like things that have something distinctive and can stand on its own next to other things. Right? It's like two people in a relationship that are alike. Oh my God, that's the most boring? Right? I like when there is not conflict, but I like when things are a bit of clash, not too much, but things that stand on its own with its own expression [and] is respectful of what it's around. It's not about competing. It's about having a personality. If you don't have one, stay home. Right? I don't want to live in a city that everything looks alike. I don't want everything that is based on just standard. I love breaking the rules. So that would be a Cormier landscape.

One Big Idea

CORMIER: I remember Phyllis Lambert screaming about another project that she was evaluating, and she just took a pile of paper, and she said, "I can't stand when design is just about style. Can you tell me what this project is about?" Well, pretty good, eh? Style and substance. Two different things. Right? When you think about it. And Madame taught me quickly in life that if you cannot tell me in one or two or three sentences what your project is

about, you can get out of this room. Come back. You're not ready. Right? The notion of being clear of what you do.

And I've learned quickly that projects for me - it's one idea per project -not four. One. Pick the right one, and quickly it needs to resonate with the site, with the history, but not duplicating it, but making it evolve, making it with a twist, making the connection, so it's going to anchor itself, and it's going to grow, and it's going to have its own life, and it's going to fit in. Right? And watching the work of Martha, and the way that it grows and ages, versus the one that Frederick Law Olmsted did. And my criticism about Martha [Schwartz] is sometimes [the projects] don't age well, because they're so conceptual high level that needs a little bit of grounding. It needs a little bit of historical footing. But that's my own notion of just how does a project evolve? Not just about style. Right? You want to be subversive, but somehow it needs to resist the potential controversy. You want the mayor to able to run with it on its own. Simply, you want the mayor to talk about it simply. I went to Harvard, but I don't need to show it in the project. But it shows in the clarity of the design intention. And it looks simple but it's not. Right? It's not. But I guess that moves into the kind of a book that we wrote, *Serious Fun*. The work is serious, but it's [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. And the work also brings this notion of hope and joy and beauty. So, this is what I've been after all my life, not really knowing yet. And as I get older, it's become quite clear. It takes a long time to become a landscape architect. It takes a long time to know what you're about. It takes you a long time [LAUGHTER] to understand life, how you fit in it or not. Our projects are the same. They have a life. And it's not just about

fitting a stupid program or filling up a sheet of sustainability, of being worried about climate change. It's about all of it.

Bruce Mau – Three Ps and Manifesto

BINBAUM: You have credited graphic designer Bruce Mau as having an impact. Did Mau's mantra of "Projects, People and Profit" influence your work? What did this mean? What about Mau's idea of working across disciplines, sectors and cultures as part of a "brand experience?"

CORMIER: Over the years, we have developed a kind of a level of tools that help us to design, to choose projects, because there's weeks that we are bombarded by requests. We have developed the ability to be picky. So, if we have developed that, let's do it correctly. So, we're doing it with this rule of the Three Ps that we have borrowed by this graphic designer - well-renowned- Bruce Mau, in Toronto, now in Chicago. And because this man can do anything that he wants in the world. How do you pick? And Mr. Mau was always saying the rule of the Three Ps. That made sense. You need a minimum of two of the three Ps, being if the project is interesting? Does the project talk to you? Does it hit your cranks? And you believe in it. The second, the people. The people that you're going to work with. Are you going to work together, or is it going to be a fight? Essential. And the third one is profit, which resonates very clearly in my head - that if you don't make profit, you won't be existing next week. So that's almost essential. Otherwise, it's a contribution you do for the world. If you're willing to do this, you could do two projects a year, but it cannot be all about contribution, because you can't do research. You cannot spend time developing options. So, you need to make money - some

money has to be left for expansion and that you look [like] a solid enterprise. Everybody is, so why can't we be there? So, it's not a shame wanting to be profitable. So, he made that very clear: I said, "OK, I would, this is an important element. Making a bit of money." And if you don't have the Three Ps, don't bother, because if your project is always limping, or limping on the other side, and all this - no solid practice. You won't have an impact on the world. Make sure you have all the abilities to do it. You need someone that's going to protect you, that there will be someone that works with you, and there's a purpose in the project that you want to achieve. Right? There's a kind of an end element that will make you grow as well. So those are the basic rules of how you pick projects. So, when you start applying that, there's many projects that, bye-bye, bye-bye, bye-bye. It's not because we met in the meeting somewhere else that you think I wasn't going to work with you. Sorry. [LAUGHTER] I'm here picking, right, a picky guy on the dance floor. [LAUGHTER] Yeah, I think those are essential lessons, because we don't learn business development at school. It's a big lack. It's a big thing that we should be doing a little bit. We are in, I think, you know, that to succeed in the profession, you need to have this entrepreneurship thing in you. Otherwise, if you don't have it, you're going to be eaten up by the system. You need to be a fighter. You need to be able to sustain the risk and the development of ideas that you could also be able to support. But being an entrepreneur is a key element in terms of leading a group in this profession. Absolutely.

I remember reading the mantra of Bruce Mau. How can you express simply what you're about? I thought I could do that. I like communication. I like those punchy sentences. I like something

that's very clear. There's no doubt when it's, one example, I'm going to put this [UNINTELLIBLE] And that still conducts us. Yeah. It was positioned in one of the articles somewhere.

It started with Bruce Mau. He did an amazing one. And I thought, I have something to think through, like this. What am I about? And it just came up. I wrote that with Marc [Hallé]. Yeah, and that's the rule that we still follow.

BIRNBAUM: Take that from the top.

CORMIER: So, once again, I think there's a gene that I've been driven by doing things not knowing what I was doing. But I remember reading the mantra of Bruce Mau. How can you express simply what you're about? I thought I could do that. I like communication. I like those punchy sentences. I like something that's very clear. There's no doubt when it's, one example, I'm going to put this. [UNINTELLIGIBLE] And that still conducts us. Yeah. It was positioned in one of the articles somewhere.

BIRNBAUM: Is that what this is? *[Birnbaum presents Claude's Manifesto to him that he has not seen in several years].*

CORMIER: Oh, they're pretty good. [LAUGHTER]

BIRNBAUM: I wonder who wrote these.

CORMIER: Yeah.

BIRNBAUM: Love, "history is made through those who reject it."

CORMIER: Yeah, they learn.

WOMAN: [[UNINTELLIGIBLE] In which context did you write that?

CORMIER: This? 2008. It just grew [over time]. But it was, we had it at 40, and then it just kept growing.

CORMIER: It's French, perfect. "Unreal is real. Override noise." That's some good stuff.

[LAUGHTER]

BIRNBAUM: We see the word - we haven't used the word authenticity at all. So, wow, that is surprising.

CORMIER: Where is that?

BIRNBAUM: Number sixteen.

CORMIER: "Artificial but not fake, authenticity above all else." It's not because it's artificial that it's bad. Right?

BIRNBAUM: Right.

CORMIER: But at least you're authentic about it. Plastic is plastic. I would not pretend it's wood. Then everything is possible then. "History is made by those who reject it." It's so right. Love it or hate it, the action is always good, trigger emotion. They're very good. [LAUGHTER]

BIRNBAUM: You know what, Claude, I think you should hire that guy. [LAUGHTER]

CORMIER: He might be expensive. [LAUGHTER] "Crossbreed the seemingly incompatible. Invent something new." This is a rule that we wanted to do in each project: invent something new. One thing, per project. "Substance over style." That's Phyllis. Avoid trends.

BIRNBAUM: We'll have a scroll of some kind.

CORMIER: So, this manifesto is quite rich.

BIRNBAUM: Can I ask you to start with looking at me, and then you can look down if you'd like, but let's keep getting, looking at me.

CORMIER: I haven't seen this piece of paper for ten years. Reading it again is still what we do. I love them all. Right? The colors on the decoration, ecology, and aesthetics. Remain humble. Your greatest project may be very well.

Well, this is quite interesting. I haven't read some of the manifesto that I wrote in 2008. And now I look at this, it's like, "oh my God, did I write that?" They're all right on. I would say exactly the same thing now. And I realize that we have worked with these. For example, and this is from the Harvard history classes: "History is made by those who reject it." Pretty good.

"Nostalgia is a killer." [LAUGHTER] I guess I've never been nostalgic. Right? When I left the farm [and] nature behind me - bye-bye - and changed that for culture. Right? I don't need to be nostalgic, because it ties you down.

"Ideas should be strategic, flexible, and open to the [unintelligible]." A good idea should have all that. Because if the idea is too fixed, and something else happens, it won't work. It needs to be - an idea should be strategic at the beginning. And one, only one, but it's open, and you can do a lot of things with it. That's, I have that, I have experienced this - Place d'Youville. The quilt of sidewalks on history. There [were] thousands of ways we could have drawn it. But you have the quilt of different things put together - it was totally about flexibility.

"Artificial but not fake." Authenticity above all else. Lipstick Forest. I'm going to celebrate the artificial. And we're going to be authentic about it. And we will not pretend these are real trees.

And then that color came with a meaning about the lipstick chart and selling cosmetics, because they were, you could be paying for the project. Honesty. Right? I think it's fantastic.

"Crossbreed the seemingly incompatible. Invent something new." We are always thinking on each project to invent. We don't repeat the same thing. But we twist it. The fountain, for example, right: the basin that we sliced. We put dogs in it. Right? And we started just by doing the first one at the Four Seasons, and the water was taken out, because the client didn't want to have water. He didn't want to manage it. So, we did it. It failed. But we learned how to build this big thing. Park Berczy came along, and we put dogs in it. And we came in Montreal, and we saw cut it in two. So, right? So, this idea of inventing something, but not repeating.

"Wanting is good." Well, wanting is much better than needing. Right? And if you want something - Jennifer Luce told me that when we are at [UNINTELLIGBLE] in New York. And she said, "wanting is the best thing that you can have - desire." Right? Because you're going to go for it. You're going to make it happen. So anyway, I think this is extremely interesting.

I remember when I wrote that, it was based on Bruce Mau's manifesto that he wrote a few years before. And I remember reading it, and this is again about communication technique. This man is able to say a lot of things with only a few words. So, I thought, I'm going to try. It's always great to have models, to have people to look up to. Right? To have mentors. So, I think as young students, you should always do that. You could be yourself, but it's nice to watch others of how they've done it, because it can teach a lot. So, it's still totally pertinent. And I

think you can be pertinent for a long time for a practice. These are guiding rules. These are the value that you start defining by the rules that you're going to work with. I think everybody should try to do it as a thing and see where it goes. You don't need to have 40. Just ten. Try ten. And it would be great to talk about it. So, yeah. It has a purpose. Huge purpose. It gives you direction.

Simple Solutions for Complex Problems

BIRNBAUM: You had suggested, and this may be redundant now, you've suggested that the purpose is "simple solutions for complex problems." Can you cite a couple of examples to illustrate this approach? It's a way for us to get in. And before you do that, this is also an opportunity for you to daylight a lost project.

CORMIER: Well, I think failed projects informed me tremendously. In one fantastic projects that I would have loved to see established - it's one of my earlier ones in downtown Montreal at Square Phillips. We designed a project that dealt with an historical monument in its center that was done 150 years ago. It's the Prince of Wales, King Edward VII - in the middle of it. I'm always interested by monuments and try to understand what they represent in history. King Edward VII, - it's a beautiful, sculptural statue. Beautifully, beautifully rendered here in downtown Montreal. And we had to redo the whole park around it - the plaza. There was a public washroom underneath that was done by Omer Marshall [sp?] in the late 1900s that no one saw. And I thought it would be interesting to re-active them. But also, I wanted to bring

somehow the idea that King Edward VII could fit in there now. He was a king that loved the French culture. But he was a dandy. He loved fashion. He invented the Prince of Wales pattern.

We're in downtown Montreal, the main shopping area. Shopping and fashion, there's something that we could make connect. Dead washrooms underneath that could be reactivated. And then what a cool place to go and be underground for, a small and amazing discotheque. Right? Once again, it's bringing history, using it, but keeping it in motion for the future.

So, we did approach this idea. The company that we did the first installation for, when I started the key push on Big Bamboo, was a business club, who were kind of a Studio 54 in Montreal. Right? The Holder brothers. They loved the idea. So, we started working with a plan that we could restore the bathroom underground into a kind of a very small underground club. We did that. And then I started thinking that we could [atop that, on the ground plane] we could launch a park that would be paved in a bold houndstooth pattern, the Prince of Wales pattern.

And then, we could have a campaign on the whole street of all storefronts that will face that pattern. Right? So, activate the main street, St. Catherine's Street in Montreal towards the future of a new reshaped plaza, and it would be King Edward VII in the middle, being the personality of the place, and of Montreal. They freaked. [LAUGHTER] They freaked. I didn't care. We pursued the drawing. So, we made the whole ground [plane] with square bricks to redevelop the pattern based on different fabrics that we studied, that we had to compose,

black and white granite, and the Peribonka [granite] and the, I forgot the name of the white granite, but creating this kind of a supersized pattern that we developed. So, we finished the construction documents. Heritage Montreal were horrified [LAUGHTER] with that whole idea of being somehow disrespectful. Indeed, Montreal Heritage was horrified by what we were proposing, and we had a government at the municipal level that was in minority. And they were going to call…. [interruption]

BIRNBAUM: Let's hold it for a second.

CORMIER: We completed the construction documents. We're working for the City of Montreal Parks. And that was my real first public project, not understanding all the rules and how to work sensibility. I forgot to bring all the players and the stakeholders together. Our fault. Because then it backfired on us, and Heritage Montreal were horrified because restoration is not about bold design. You know, I was just out of school, fresh, gung-ho, and I was put back at my place. The city called back the project and cancelled it. We would have no nightclub. We would not have bold patterns. They just wanted the same design that was done 50 years ago.

I think everything in life can be an opportunity, and you have to jump in. You need to be a little bit more strategic. And that was a great lesson. Right? But I wish it could have been done, because I think it would have been a fantastic thing, bringing other aspects in a plaza that would be a nightclub, making noise, adding people, bringing life of the now into a place that was made 150 years ago, as a kind of an important urban plaza in downtown Montreal.

BIRNBAUM: I noticed there was some background noise. Let's take it again from him being a dandy, and then go from there.

CORMIER: So, trying to understand who was King Edward VII? Quickly through research, we understood that he was a dandy. He was man of fashion, who loved beautiful things and through [an] economic crisis in England he designed [and] invented the pattern of Prince of Wales - a houndstooth. And there were so many types of houndstooth, but he was the creator of this.

Quite interesting, when you're in the downtown commercial street, with all the fashion stores, and also Montreal being a very historically important city in the textile industry. Contextual, historical, grounding for something that could be big.

So, bringing the notion of fashion now in the city, into the plaza - we went with a big pattern on the ground plane with a supersized black and white houndstooth pattern that [King Edward VII] would have been dressed [in] as a dandy. For the opening and conception -do the same pattern, over scaled, loud, and develop with the BIA, the Business Improvement Area, a kind of a fashion season of having it back in the fashion as doing the stores all along Saint. Catherine Street, connecting this future development for the story to make a relationship and a story. I thought it was brilliant. Maybe a little bit too bold - Heritage Montreal were horrified by this

idea, because it was not duplicating history. But there's no way I wanted to duplicate history, and the city called the project back, because they were saying we will overthrow the municipal government because they were in the minority. So, I remember I was brought in, called into the director's office with a huge bouquet of flowers. He said, "Claude, sorry. We can't do your project." The contractor was to start in two weeks. We were within the budget. We met everything. But for a kind of a representation of what that square would be. No one wanted to back up what we would get. So, for safety reasons, it was called, and the fear was the element that killed it. Big lesson for Mr. Cormier. [LAUGHTER] You need to do your class in the way that you bring stakeholders together. And that was very important, because it taught me that we are, as designers - we're very much in our heads. We get excited. We see it done. But many people don't have the ability to see things built. It's incredible. So, once you understand that, it helps you to see, don't go too fast. Inform and develop drawings more that would express what it is, and the narrative needs to be really clear. So that's a huge lesson.

BIRNBAUM: You know, I was sitting here today reflecting on nearly 40 years of practice. I mean, do you think that there would be, ever be an opportunity, and what would it mean to you to see that plan realized? Is that something that is possible, even?

CORMIER: Well, yes, 35 years later. We have a developer who is building adjacent to the square, and we were selected to do the public ground. And I thought, huh, the story that we did 35 years ago, we're going to bring it across the street. And the project was called "the Phillips". We did this beautiful - it's under construction, and we're doing a beautiful courtyard all with

the Prince of Wales pattern. Supersized. It's stunning. And we, yeah, and it branded the project. It branded the development and what we wanted to do at the square is now done on this private development across the block. Unfortunately, it would have, it's not at the right place. But there is a kind of a contextual relationship that makes that development unique.

BIRNBAUM: Let's take the ending again, because it could be interpreted that you're saying it's not at the right, right place, it could be misinterpreted by your clients.

CORMIER: No, the client loved it.

BIRNBAUM: No, no, but I'm saying this idea that we're doing it here, but it's not there. Right? So, I would rather hear an ending, and I'm not saying [OVERLAPPING VOICES]

CORMIER: Alright, so maybe we're not going there, then, actually.

BIRNBAUM: No, I love it. But I think my bigger question is, people in Montreal, people in Toronto have learned to read a landscape that they couldn't read 30 years ago.

CORMIER: Yes.

BIRNBAUM: Right? So, they had to take beginners and intermediate classes with you to prepare for this conversation today. This developer has an understanding because he can go

see your other works, and he understands from looking at those projects what you've done with the ground plane. And what you've done to promote urban living and the kind of kaleidoscope of light that plays out on that stage. So, what I think might be more interesting as a conclusion to this story, because I love kind of carrying it through like this.

CORMIER: Shifting it.

BIRNBAUM: Is to talk about, I've changed, and the world has changed. I mean, I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, but it feels like this happens. You can point to these projects, and say this is what I want to do, as opposed to pointing at a board and saying, don't you see my vision for this enthusiastic person who's 30 something years old. It's very different. So, I think it might be worth kind of just reflecting on that whole circle. You know, it's funny how life plays out.

CORMIER: I thought that Phillips Square was dead forever. And I know when they re-did the square five years ago, and construction was finished last year - the end product is beautiful. But all the landscape architects in the city know about the Prince of Wales pattern at Square Phillips. So, no one wanted to touch it. And everybody saw the power of it. But it stayed unspoken for the new design that just came out, which is much more neutral. And I know the designer who did it. She was just like, "oh my God, that was so good." But there's no way that she could reference it. So, two years ago, there's a developer who wanted to develop a 60-story level with two towers, with a courtyard in the middle. They came to us and said, "Claude, we want a signature courtyard." Huh. That was pretty easy. So, we carried this idea that came on

the square 35 years ago and brought in their courtyard and became the brand of the development called “the Phillips”. And the Prince of Wales pattern has been used in their marketing campaign, has been used as the kind of a key element that expressed the development of that 60 story and the 40-story building next to it. So, it’s quite interesting that something that I did in my much younger age was able to transfer it into a project next to the square, and that would make sense. And it branded the architecture. And it was ground plane. Landscape has power. Right?

Landscape can be the driving force of a huge urban development, more than architecture, because with architecture, it's hard to make architecture stand in a tower development, the substantial tower. But the ground plane, we were able to use this, and they capitalized on it, big time.

Ground Plane

BIRNBAUM: The Four Seasons in Toronto. We still haven’t talked about that yet. So maybe that would be a good example, because I don’t know this will be a case study project, but I think the ground plane treatment relates to this conversation.

CORMIER: Yes, perfect. The power of the ground plane. We had been hired by developers many times, because we do bold design. And they see the ability to bring value to their own project. Density is a thing that they love, and they could build as much as they can, and the little leftover public space that there is - they want it to be good. Four Seasons Hotel Residence in

downtown Toronto is a great example. Building two towers in this very sensitive white, privileged neighborhood where lawyers live in every building, and they wouldn't defend any tower that would create shadow in their neighborhood. So here we are with the client for the Four Seasons Hotel building - these two large towers creating shadow in the hood. The towers are in the center of Yorkville in Toronto - it has a very rich history of the Victoria era. So, we thought that we could create a supersized car drop off - an urban carpet, made with eight different types of color: a Victorian carpet made of granite. In the middle of it we invented this idea of a supersized fountain - a Victorian fountain. The fact that we're supersizing it - it creates a kind of the "now" reality. We made a planting: the garden of a large scale, over scaled rose. All in the relationship to the history of the Victorian. When we presented[it]to the city counselor, he loved it. Loved it. It was incredible. It was pretty good, as a kind of a design strategy, being able to use the ground plane to help them sell these two towers that were creating shade. The project was approved because of the quality of the landscape that came along with it. But meanwhile, the client said, "I'm not building that fountain, [UNINTELLIGIBLE]," but the city counselor was able to make it in the law agreement that they were obliged to build it, because they loved it so much, and they wanted everything to be the same. So, "you want your project, sorry, man, you've got to deliver it as it was designed." So, it was quite interesting, if you will, right, when you sell something to the population, you need to deliver. The power of a ground plane, with a good design that is contextually fitting as huge value.

Kitsch

BIRNBAUM: How do you define kitsch? Where do you see its place in your work?

CORMIER: Many people think that what we do is kitschy. There's a lot of kitsch in our work. I kind of like that when they say this. And I somehow agree. But I don't think we're kitsch, per se. We're always at the limit of the kitsch, and I don't know what's on the other side. But there are references that we use often [that] are kitschy. Like using a big heart as a kind of an element that will define [Love] Park is kitschy. But somehow, I don't know, we always are able to get out of it, and something else comes out. Once again, I am not an intellectual. I like things that are clear, and I want it to be clear for everybody. So, it has to remain simple. The shape needs to remain simple. The reference needs to remain simple. The reference needs to remain simple.

And yeah, I think kitsch goes well to describe some of our work. But we are always able to elevate it into something else. The Balls - when we did the [Blue Tree] in California, we had $8,000 to do the project. Right? You know how much that is? It's Nothing. So, we need to get something that we could just use in repetition: [like] Martha [Schwartz or members of the] land art movement [did]. We were able to buy 100,000 of those balls for eight cents each. That's the money we had. But we had 100,000, not six. Right? We had so many that it exploded into kind of a kitsch and became s something else. So, we covered the trees with 80,000 balls attached together, and the Blue Tree became bigger than life. Was it kitschy? I don't know. But I know it was powerful. I don't know, I think the kitsch is, [LAUGHTER] I don't know where did it

start, where does it end? But we like to traffic the elements that we pick and turn them into something else. So, the kitsch somehow leaves the project and turns into something different. But what is kitsch? Right? It's *culurte populaire?* It's something that you pick here simply, and you throw it on something else? Yeah, it's not me to answer the question, because I am a doer. I am not someone that would analyze the final product. And I like to leave this to the academics, because they're much better than me to do it. But I think it's a compliment that turns something that has no value and brings value into it, is a pretty talented element. As a challenged position to do that, and that we do very well.

I would like to ask, for example, is the Dog Foundation [at Berczy Park] that we recreated of an assemblage of different things, kitschy? Maybe. We use a nineteenth century over-scaled product that already existed with the [J.L] Mott [Iron Works] foundry in New York - that was purchased by Robinson Iron - and they supersized the fountain three times the size. We added dog studs on it. I think we had 600 studs, bolted all around it. We added cast pug faces to get water off. We took the toys of this German company, supersized them, and fixed them with pipes to have water coming out of them. Once again, they were supersized. Made a bone topping the fountain - made with a cow femur- scaled one to one, down in Alabama- cast in bronze, installed on top of it. "Is this an assemblage of all these elements that has no relationship together? Is it kitsch?" The answer would be, "yes." But it's also surprising and magical. We have a cat in the composition, because throughout the public consultation, some people said, "yeah, but you're thinking just about dogs. What about cats?" "Yes ma'am, we'll have your cat on it, looking out, and all the dogs look at the bone." It was great. People were

loving it. And we gave two birds for that stupid - that poor little cat on its own, to have a point of interest on the light standard. So, the whole thing. And when you're on site, you hear people talking about it and pointing out all these things. So, there's something that is working. Is it kitschy? Maybe it is. But I think it's great. Meanwhile, when we were presenting this, the culture department - for them it's kitschy, and it's negative kitschy. And they said, "there's no way you're going to do this. This is not artful." OK? When they told us that, we went back, we came back, did the research of dog and art. Poof. [LAUGHTER] Dogs are really important in the art culture. We prepared a PowerPoint: 100 slides, 100 tableaus in 500 years of history: dogs being the main element within an art piece. They were speechless. They couldn't say a word, because at the end I said, "so what do you think? Dogs and art, nothing to do with each other? I think your vision is very limited. We've been hired for this commission. We have done two public consultations. People are loving it. Are we doing it for people, or are we doing it for you guys?" [LAUGHTER] So I was quite angry with the culture department and the City of Toronto killing it because it was not to their intellectual satisfaction of what is called art. A lot of public art is shit, I would say. Total shit. I like to understand simply, I am not an expert. But I like to see a piece that somehow, I can relate to. First degree, not three levels of interpretation that is so disconnected that I don't know what that piece is. 90 percent of public art is that. We need better public art, and I think public art is getting better. And I will not accept this kind of criticism by them if they don't like it. Once it was done to public consultation. Right? When the woman says, "I want it, it's not just dogs." OK, we added on. People were laughing. People were happy. So, that gave me the answer. And we were able to overrule them.

Or Sugar Beach: “pink is not a color for Toronto.” Sorry, Toronto is changing. Toronto has changed. Toronto is fantastic. Come on, let’s have the courage of pushing a little bit. And it became the branded element that defines the City of Toronto waterfront for many years, these pink umbrellas. So, thank you to Waterfront Toronto that had the courage to believe in our vision of what they could be. But we had to work to make it happen.

Color

BIRNBAUM: Well, that’s the perfect segue into talking about color. What is the role and meaning of color in your work?

CORMIER: Color in our work - I think it’s a simple answer. Color is not a decoration. Color is full of meaning. When you look at the buses of children, they all are yellow. Right? When you look at the swimming pools, all swimming pools are blue. But color is also political. Color can say a lot. And we can, I think, challenge the color of things. I think a yellow bus for children will always be yellow. Right? This convention that I will not challenge. But why does a swimming pool have to be blue all the time? Can it be pink? Could it be the color of a grapefruit? Could it be the color of watermelon? I’d say yes. I’d love to swim in a swimming pool that would be this welcoming, embracing element, and I soak in it. So, these elements sometime challenge what color means. What does it represent?

When we did the Blue Tree in California, Somona, in this garden festival [the Cornerstone Festival of Gardens] in 2005, when we decided that instead of cutting down the trees - because

we had sick trees on our site, and that was the purpose of keeping it on a little lot. When the client said, "what do you want as a site? Do you want it clear cut, or are you going to keep this huge Monterey pine that needs to be removed?" I said, no, "don't remove it. That would be the purpose of the project." So, we, in order to do it, instead of using a chainsaw, we used this tool that we use in offices, which of Photoshop. We thought that we would do the, that we would cover the tree with an element that would be cheap, and we were doing this project during Christmastime. I was looking at my mother's Christmas trees, and you look at those ornaments on a tree. Oh, I said, these things are pretty interesting. Pretty powerful. They're cheap. OK, let's do one that will be the color of the California sky. And the composition of the two together would make it somehow disappear. That's pretty kitschy. [LAUGHTER] That's pretty stupid and pretty like, risky, doing it from Montreal to Sonoma, $8,000 budget. But in a way, the client liked the idea. We did a few drawings showing this. And at the opening day, the son of Chris Hougie, who was the client there, he was four years old, stood under the tree and said to his father, "Dad, the sky's not blue". That little boy understood what this project was about. It was not the same blue because daytime - the color of the sky changes – and the kind of light phenomena involved in this. So Blue Tree in Sonoma, at the gateway of the whole region, became world famous. Full page photography in the *New York Times* [LAUGHTER] of this huge Monterey pine saturated with 80,000 Christmas balls on it, trying to pick the right blue that we thought would be California sky. We were right when it's lunchtime. But not in the morning, or not if it was stormy, or if the air was moist, or it was dry. It was very interesting to bring the phenomena of light into that project, which we never expected would be there. But the blue Californian sky, versus the blue hue that we used on a color chart that was sent to China to

make those balls, make real, and then they arrived. We had 100,000 of those balls in the same color. And then we started applying them. We thought, OK, let's go for the ride. [LAUGHTER] It was only $8,000. That's all we can do. And then if it's not interesting, cut it down then, and we missed the boat. But the tree was supposed to be there for six months. And they kept it for two years, $8,000, as a landmark for the garden, Cornerstone Garden in Sonoma. Pretty good. Right? So, color is important. You need to pick the right tone. Just not blue. When we did Lipstick Forest in Montreal, I wanted it to be really bright and vivid. Right? Like a color chart. We picked the color of the trees based on the lipstick chart. So many of those projects where color is part of the end result - the language of what the project would be, were extremely, extremely well-selected. The Blue Stick [Garden] in Métis - the stick was referencing the Himalayan poppy, a blue poppy that grows only there in Quebec. It has to be the same hue, because we were making reference to something - that was what the project is about. It's about the blue poppy. So, it has to be exactly like the blue poppy. And it's really hard to pick a color that will be the exact same thing, and in there we brought this element of different hues, so the whole thing would be vibrant instead of being uniform. And it worked beautifully. When we did the big pink balls in Montreal on Saint Catherine Street, they're all different hues of pink. But they all somehow, like the, what's the name of the movement - the Impressionists. When we did the Pink Balls in Montreal, we used five different kinds of pinks, so it would be like the tableau of Monet. And it worked. Instead of just being monochromatic. It is monochromatic, but it has a nuance that creates this vibrancy. So, all these little things just by observation of art - Mirka Benes - University at Harvard taught me this. "Pay attention to everything in the tableau, and you're going to understand how it reads, like color distinction."

Huge. So, these elements in the fine arts, art history, is brought into the making of a landscape. So, color is not decoration. Color is a very, very powerful element of representation, and it means a lot, and it needs to be well-picked. And that's an art. I have a guy here in Montreal on my team. He's so good at this, so good at matching color, and everything works and becomes vibrant, and drawings start to talk instead of all being the same, or boring - run like a drawing by a company in China that I can't stand. Right? So once again, art in what we do is part of it. But I have not had one art [class] at school, like I have not learned business. I learned it through time, so I learned fake can fail, but when it works, it works, and you know why, and you start paying attention to the importance of it. Color is important. Pick the right one.

Humor

BIRNBAUM: How did the uniquely Quebecois phenomenon of *humour* influence you?

CORMIER: In Quebec, we have the notion of humor as a very cultural [UNINTELLIGBLE] business as a thing. They now fill a stadium with a humorist doing a show. That was not there. But that's very particular about Quebec. I grew up with this all my life. Now the prime minister is able to pass messages to the population using a bit of humor. Well, we're not with Donald Trump here, right? Or whatever. We have had important artists that have defined show business. Celine Dion. We worked in the past with Cirque du Soleil, and the notion of using *mise en scène* theatricality, bringing a notion of mood, feeling, and experience. I don't think we have that anywhere else that I can recall. So that has somehow also tinted the work in Quebec, that we go, and we design places that always bring the notion of a smile on your face, that brings this

notion of attention to detail for people. Not for the academics. Not for us as landscape architects, but for people. Handicapped, diversity, poor, the rich, the white, the colored, the diverse, all this. And I think our work is tinted with this, it's tinted with this indirect background culture that we have in Quebec of using humor as part of an element that you would experience in a show, in a place, not in a building, - other than Robert Venturi. Right? But I think that's a Quebec distinction within the rest of Canada, and not in America. The sense of humor is something that, as a general culture, we have developed very well. Cirque du Soleil, phenomenal. Right? The one in Quebec City, not La Paz, what's his first name?

BIRNBAUM: Take that sentence from the top.

CORMIER: I think Cirque du Soleil has taught us also the notion of - the notion of - we worked with them for many years, when they wanted to develop a hotel and development in the world. So, we're working with them quite, trying to do the landscape with it like that. So we work with them as the [FRENCH 10:33] taught us a lot, that thinking differently, a bit too much commercial to my taste, but we did it for a while. They wanted to buy us out and move all this to Cirque du Soleil, and I said, no, no, no. I didn't go to Harvard to work for a circus. Right? [LAUGHTER] So we pulled out, but they had an important input in us. Right? I'm a total postmodern[ist]. I take anything, and I flip it on its side, and I try to crossbreed it with something else.

Thoughts on Postmodernism

BIRNBAUM: You have now used the term, postmodern, several times. So, I think for our audience, I'd like you to define from Claude what postmodernism is, and what it means to be a postmodernist?

CORMIER: Gee. Well, my definition of being a postmodern is, well, that's when I was a young student, postmodern is the era that I was in. Right? Robert Venturi, Charles Ward, bringing different types in reference to.

I got my education during the postmodern movement era. In the beginning - the constructivist [movement] That was too intellectual for me. Oh boy, - could not understand any of it. But that's the merge of literature and whatever. Right? But postmodern is something I could understand. Look at Robert Venturi's buildings. I could get it. Contextual, historical - different types brought together - a bit of tackiness, sometimes overtly and not well-done. But I remember then, 40 years ago, eating pizza with wine, - or just a kind of a blurring of things that were not compatible together, and make it happen and forge something that would create an expression. So postmodern is, yeah, I am not an intellectual of this. But I think it's the category that I fit in, that you could put things together and force them to exist and take a certain context and meaning and become something. Right, almost be overtly tacky, right, taking some iconic element and bringing them into a building that could not always come out well. But I think that's certainly a huge influence in my making. I am not a modernist. I don't think everything needs to be in straight lines. Sorry. I don't think everything needs to be extracted to

the minimal element. I live in a house that frankly drives me a bit crazy. Right? [LAUGHTER] So yeah, I am made of so many different things. And I think I made with so different experience that I have always embraced in my life, and I don't need to negate, but I would accept and embrace.

Thinking back on what I said earlier with this notion of being a postmodern, but I cannot really define what postmodernism is, because it's a complex thing. Maybe I'm more of a conceptualist. Take many things together and distill it into one idea. That's what I'm good at. Right? So, I think it's near it, but I'm not a [UNINTELLIGIBLE] that can answer that question. I will leave that to others to do. Where do I fit within this kind of a genre of style, not style, but substance? I think Martha [Schwartz] is the conceptualist. And I always like calling myself a landscape conceptualist - clear idea per project. Clear naming for a place, a thing, an object, a park. Yeah, this notion of understanding communication, media, the art of transmitting a message quickly, the notion of being able to tell a story about a project, storytelling. I think it's all attached, and to be attached towards landscape conceptualist which has never existed as a movement. But land artists in the '60s were conceptualists. So maybe I fit within this. But the difference between art and landscape architecture is that we're not artists. We have to fix a certain problem to a site. We never have *carte blanche* to do whatever you want. Right? You have to answer a program. You need to answer to a certain element of performance. Right? We have drainage. We have climate. We have storms. We have users. We have social dimensions. We have political aspects. Artists do, but not in the same way. We're problem solvers in landscape architecture. We're much more than artists. And the big element that I'd learned

when we did the Ring at Place Ville Marie in Montreal, that was a pure piece of art. But it has a whole set of issues as well. But also, we had to make it happen from an idea to reality. So, I guess that's public art in that sense.

BIRNBAUM: It's presented to the public that way. *(Birnbaum shows Cormier a photo he took of the signage at The Ring that refers to Cormier as "the artist.")*

CORMIER: As public art, yes, exactly.

BIRNBAUM: I guess what I would say as an extension of this conversation, taking into consideration your personality and your gravitas and your increased visibility with the Canadian public, have you found the ability to get the big idea realized has shifted? Is there a greater level of trust? So maybe we can talk a little bit about that in the context of this question as well, that you know, that there is a cachet, perhaps, or because of the recognition of the other projects, that people can better conceptualize your vision, because they've seen other things that they know inherently, they may like.

CORMIER: As a more mature landscape architect, I worked in different cities, and have experienced some pretty good successful projects in my past. The future has been easier, slightly easier, just slightly. My earlier projects, all my best - all of our best projects - they all have been declined somehow, by different departments. Berczy Park - the fountain -the Culture Department, they said, "no way are you doing this in our city." Right? So, I think the fountain in

Montreal - Minister of Culture in Quebec said, “there’s no way you’re going to do this. This is unacceptable.” But I’m a little bit suborn. The pink umbrella [at Sugar Beach]in the middle of Toronto City: “uh-uh, not a good color here. The beach, yes, but not pink.”

We are fighters. We are fighters here. Right? When we feel it - I remember when flying to Toronto, me sitting with Marc Hallé changing the color of the umbrellas, going to a Jackie Kennedy pink, they freaked out. And we said, “nope, this is what this is” - we were determined that was the right color. So, we had, we made a different presentation. But all of those projects who has become iconic. They were all rejected. Isn’t that interesting? Because it was about risk taking. And if no one has done it before you, “it's not good. What you’re presenting is not good, and it’s too daring.” But that, Martha Schwartz teaching - of keep going. “No. Sorry bureaucrats, I’m being hired for this. You do bureaucracy. I’m going to do [a] project. Let’s be clear.” Right? Martha was so good at this. And she was an amazing professor of standing up for what you believe. We’re the artists. Right? We’re the conceptors.

So, when we sold The Ring, I thought, oh my God, that’s going to be a nightmare. It took us a day to design - a day. And we were so excited about it downstairs when we came up with the idea. We knew that was it. You know what - when you know, that’s it. We presented to the client, same feeling. They were on. But you have to know that at The Ring, there’s a visual corridor that is protected, because we have Olmsted at the end, and we’re doing an element in front of it. I thought, “it will never get approved.” That was my easiest project in my life to get approval. Ka-ching, ka-ching, ka-ching. Is it because I’m getting old? [LAUGHTER] Is it because

our client was Ivanhoé Cambridge - an important player in the Quebec industry? I don't know. But it was an easy score that we - the Balls in the village [Pink Balls and 18 Shades of Gay.] They were all rejected, and became the iconic element for more Montreal tourism, as an international destination for gay place to be and visit. Right? And we had no money. So going for all the rejection, and when nine years later we say "we're getting out of here. We never had any support from you guys. We're out." And this, "oh, no, no, no. Please, please, please, stay with us." It was too late. We're fed up. And then COVID hit. So that was the end of that in itself.

So, it's interesting that it's all about risk taking. Right? The balls in the village became an iconic place that everybody wanted. We had enough because we're not protected from anybody at the bureaucratic level, and we usually -because we were doing it and making it, so they don't ask for anything. Nowadays, I would do it differently. I think I would be more pushy. But it took me 35 years to get there, to get the confidence that we have in our idea, and being able to, but we did all along the way of pushing back to bureaucrats that were not warm to the idea - to say, you're getting there, and finding the approval. And these projects, they're all fantastic. But I'm at the end of my career. [LAUGHTER] Boy there's so many more things I would do, but I'm OK. I'm content. I think I have realized a lot in a short period of time, and I don't think we need to be a big firm to have an impact. We can compete with 3,000 firms. Oh my God, that's the easiest thing to do. [LAUGHTER] Right? The easiest thing to do, compete with big firms because that kind of vitality, persistence, the notion of clarity - they don't have it. There are too many people. It gets diluted. But with my team, small, coherent -, that is essential. I remember a long time ago, Michael Van Valkenburgh telling me, "Claude, the best number that I have in my life

was a team between fifteen and twenty people. After that, it's a whole different thing. But the idea of being an entrepreneur with a vision, with an attitude about what you're doing, a purpose, was the key. And thank God I was able to preserve that all along the way. So, I'm very, very proud, and I'm proud for the succession with me, because they have it. I think I was able - we were able to build it together. We took it. I see them at the beginning of running - beautiful, beautiful. I love my guys. [LAUGHTER] Big time. Yeah, so I think I've done my part.

Waterfront Development

Birnbaum: Access to the waterfront for the public benefit was another goal of Olmsteds, who bemoaned the loss of the waterfront to industrial use. You have reclaimed waterfronts for the public benefit in Toronto (Ht0 and Sugar Beach), Clock Tower Beach in Montreal and Breakwater Park in Kingston, Ontario. For you, what is it about being on the water and the unique planning and design opportunities?

CORMIER: Hmm. [LAUGHTER] Five-dollar question. [LAUGHTER] Waterfronts, well, big topics. I've been on design review panels for twelve years in Toronto. It was an amazing experience. But before being on the design review panel, we designed [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. And when we came up with this idea, for me, this is going back as a student at GSD - being trapped in the city and having no relationship to the edge of the lake, because the lake is part of the personality of the city. I think nowadays [the] Toronto waterfront is amazing because it has opened the window to [the lake], and they have understood the huge value that it has on its development.

Unfortunately, they're all contaminated lands. But the overvalue of the price on those lands brings the capacity of being able to clean it. I think waterfront edges, cities that have those elements of water edge, I think you have a stronger element in terms of being healthy. They have a stronger ability to create an identity to the city. Identity is huge. It's important. So, I think bringing use to those edges, not for all development, but for access for the public, and be open, and I think over the years, it has been much, much, much better. And we keep - we need to keep pushing to protect, to develop those edges for people. Not for machinery, not for equipment, not for urban development, per se, but for democracy.

I think the water edge needs a kind of a special treatment. People are always attracted to the water edge. I think the notion of program is important. And I have this fascination with urban beaches. Right? The farm boy stuck harvesting the hay, has always wanted to go somewhere else that would bring this notion of the open - that I could have views, I could breathe air, feel the wind, feel all kinds of weather. And I think we have to take advantage of that for people. And that's why I guess we have developed so many urban beaches, because of my appetite for this that was never fulfilled as a child. In Kingston we worked on Breakwater Park, on the water edge, with an amazing pier that people on their own - they jump into the water. Wow. Into Lake Ontario. OK? Can people go swim? Yes, they can. So, we've turned Breakwater Park into this amazing destination at the foot of Queen's University. It's a place for young people. It's a happening place because we turned something that was not well, not advertised, but that was not, you were not welcome to do this. We give the possibility of it. It's phenomenal. Right? Simple. Just notion that you could throw yourself into Lake Ontario. I drive to this park, three

hours from Montreal, on the weekend sometimes, because the energy of that park is beautiful. People are having fun. It's simple. You are- you can touch the water. You can jump into it. Water edge, as in the future of our city, is important. In many, in a few many years, I think you're going to be able to swim in the Seine in Paris. Could you imagine? As they were able to do 100 years ago. But [due] to the pollution we've lost all those abilities. So, I think for future generations there's a lot of work to be done. But never forget the central of this kind of adding an experience of diving off the bridge into water. I think Olympic 2024 in Paris may change the future of the city. There were diving competitions into the Seine. Right? In Copenhagen we built pools into the water edge to recreate what could have been possible. We need to do more of those pools into the water's edge to bring the wish and the desire for people just to have access to something that we would have naturally, that we have lost. So, gaining them as an experience will not be easy. But I think those are the future things that we as a society need to do. Water edge is for people, not for equipment, as it was before. And I think we're there. I think we're there, and I think in 25 years, the edge of the Toronto waterfront will not be the same. The edges of many cities will not be the same. Berlin, right, you do beaches, clandestine, on edge because people want to go there. That was ten years ago. So, there's a kind of a natural wish and desire for people to be on the water edge. I think there's a lot of activities, and if we put all of our effort into it, it would be phenomenal.

Social Design – Landscapes are for People

CORMIER: So, in terms of social design, I like to have this kind of - three elements of people - groups that work very well, that influence [my] work indirectly, or directly: William Whyte, this

New York social activist, with all the principle of good design; Philippe Starck , by the way he sees people in the composition in his design, and it's being people driven. And I'd like to add a third one, which is Cirque du Soleil. We were able to work in the past with, for many years with Guy Laliberté and his team. And they are about theater. They're about staging things. So, it's very much alike with William [Holly] Whyte and Philippe Starck are doing. But the Cirque brings a kind of a notion of magic on top of that. So, I think I'm once again, I like to mix things together and create a new genre, a new type, blurring edges of all these. So, I think these three groups of people are - who create events in the world by place, shows, urban space, hotel development, but it's always about the people in it. So, I think when we design a public space, the program is developed along these things together. Right? There's a bit of the Cirque. There's a bit of Starck. And there's a lot of William Whyte. And they never give you the recipe, but you need to make sure all those conditions are there to a different level of intensity. And it works. It works. Because Berczy Park is phenomenal. Sugar Beach is magical. And Love Park - there's a feeling of, and a mood of love - quietly - into a park. Which is quite interesting to watch people in there. So, I think it's all these things. Once again, it's 35 years of practicing. It's 35 years of making things, making mistakes, but about observing these things in public space. Right? And this is the thing I love the most. Just to watch the world by, and just watching behaviors or people. And that's the biggest lesson. Design is important, but the mood is also important of what you feel, its beauty, and sometimes not beauty. Conflict is great. All these things together. So, I think landscapes are for people, after all.

There's a moment in my practice that it was really clear: I don't want to be in this room. And I'm going to end this quickly. And by mistake we were pulled in - not because I wanted it. It's because they wanted us. I am not a marionette that would provide drawings for your approval. Sorry. With a private developer, it's easy to pick. If it's just for you to make money and us nothing, the notion of you win, but I win is fundamental. Earlier on I remember clearly residential design. Right? I remember being in this beautiful estate outside Montreal, beautiful estate, with this woman and this man, and they wanted me to redesign their whole domain. After twenty minutes, I thought, "ugh, get me out of here. I am not doing therapy." And I am not interested to just work for these individuals for their own domain. Not interested. I want to work for the people. I [don't] want to be Robin Hood, but I want to help the world. I'm interested by people. Right? Very, very, very much, as much as [Ian] McHarg would say, "it's for nature." I think for me, "it's for people." That's rule number one. When we worked in the village, with the Balls, in seeing every summer all the time the group of handicapped people, poor community - spending their summer under the sky of the Balls and having a great time. Oh, that was fantastic. Right? Providing something for people who don't have the ability to have anything. It's something that talks to me big time. Right? There was a group of wheelchair men and women on the south side of the Balls on Saint Catherine Street. They were there every day. If we didn't have the Balls, they would be in their bad place with nothing. But being able to bring them with the public, with everybody else, was phenomenal. So that I understood quickly this is what I wanted to do. And I, yeah, the private reality of people, which is a whole different kind of business. And I'm not saying it's bad. Not for me, not my cup of tea. I am, I like to give a little bit back to society as well, very much. Yeah, that's for sure. Neurotic design for neurotic

people is not the thing I want to do. I can do it. I know I could do it. I want to go back home at three o'clock and finish. Right? I would not do extra. But for the other thing, I could do it all the way out for them, and just seeing their face at the Balls was phenomenal, seeing them and then after a while they knew who I was, and I would go and say hello, and oh, they were so happy. And they understood that it was a gift, and they were taking it as a gift. What a great reward. Bringing handicapped people to Sugar Beach. Having an area for them to be able to spend time together in the shade, not in the burning sun - was phenomenal. Right? They're there, spending the afternoon on the beach. Wow. Pretty good place to go.

The Social Life of Small Urban Places, 1980, written by William Whyte. This New Yorker who has studied the behavior of people in urban space, a guy who was looking and watching people's behavior, and by watching that, he defined some basic rules: people like the sun, but they also like the shade. People like to watch people. A place with people attracts people. A space should be activated by an element of triangulation, an element that brings people together, by creating interest. A place that you feel secure. A place that is connected to the city but is not introverted. So, this notion of security is very important. A place where you could have food and drinks, just create an environment that is vibrant. We used this principle to design Berczy Park. We used it to design Love Park. We used it to design Sugar Beach. And it works. Simple, but you design for people. Their behavior and how they interact, is the key.

But over the years, I also learned, maybe to add other elements into it, that would be quite interesting. That's based on Philippe Starck, the beginning of design on his Boutique Hotels in

Paris. In Philippe Starck, we're using people as the center of attention to create an attraction. I think the notion of voyeurism in a beach is quite interesting, but also the notion of being an exhibitionist. So that's why we brought the pathways right in the middle of the park, and instead of the edges. People could use this as a runway to walk, to show themselves, or to watch others. And I think it was an amazing lesson of adding this aspect to what William Whyte says. People are voyeurs. People love to show off. And it's almost like stating it as [Starck] was doing in 1980s, with the Hotel Costes in Paris. He changed the whole design of hotels. People are the center of the décor. You don't have the people, it's not interesting. Right? And bringing this kind of an energy, the combination of the two, which is very subtle, but by watching how people behave on a beach, it's quite interesting. Some people love to be in the middle. Some people like to be on the edges. So, you need to create middles, and you need to create edges. In the shade, in the sun, the feeling of being secure in all this, where William Whyte comes in, and a piece of attraction somewhere in there of triangulation. We'll even bring it in the further element. In Berczy Park, we invented this concept of the water fountain, with dogs that would shoot water into it. We did that because we had dogs as an issue in the city. We have 2,000 dogs a day visiting the park. We had children that wanted a playground. And we had tourists that wanted a nice space. But we had such a small space, we had to [have] everything. So, we brought these things together, and we created this *mise en scène* where you could bring water, you could bring the dogs to the water edge, because there's a huge bowl of water at the edge. The water, dogs, dogs shooting water in the fountain, and having people watching it. And having real dogs coming in there. So, there's an amazing energy in that park, because it's all about showing off, showing your dog off, or looking over the dogs, and creating a social

interaction. I have never seen a park where there's a social interaction of other people together, different social classes, workers, tourists, kids, mothers- phenomenal. So, this object, this element and triangulation creates the life of the park. It's magic. Right? So, at Sugar Beach, I think it's the notion of being at the water's edge, but also having something to watch in the park. [LAUGHTER] That when there's people, it's different when there's no people. Love Park is a huge fountain- this huge basin in the shape of a heart is an element of attraction, but also it becomes an element of where people hang and people watch each other, and something just, there's a kind of a *mise en scène* that developed and created an amazing, amazing sense of place. So, I think it's all this William Whyte, Philippe Starck, and a bit of the Cirque du Soleil that I've learned through [to] create a kind of magical element that has, that becomes a center of attention within the space.

Taking Risks

BIRNBAUM: If there's going to be anything at all, but we touched on you, and you alluded to it a little bit with the inventing the flower here, and you touched, I don't know if we want, because it comes up so often, I feel like at least I want to give a chance to air it out, like OK, so let's just sort of, in a two to three minute thing, all by itself, isolate it, and say, so where did this idea of, you know, and then where did it find life? Because I feel like...

CORMIER: It needs to be, yeah.

BIRNBAUM: It needs to be given its own little moment in the sun.

CORMIER: Yeah, but I guess it takes, yeah, OK. I think, yeah. My God, you're like your film director. [LAUGHTER]

BIRNBAUM: We're storytellers.

CORMIER: Yeah, exactly.

BIRNBAUM: That's what we're doing here. And it's your story. It's not mine. I mean, yes, I'm trying to tease out what I think is important.

CORMIER: No, no, totally, totally. Storytelling, if you can't talk about it, then don't even bother. Right?

BIRNBAUM: Yeah.

CORMIER: OK, yeah. One word maybe of me at twenty years old, with this desire of creating something, inventing something, not repeating. But I have this entire desire. I look at myself, 40, 45 years later, and I think I've done it in a different way with landscape architecture, because my education [was] essential. Good education is a fundamental. It's the best element that I did - going to GSD and not doing studio. It's not about creating another project. But it was about understanding what the whole thing is about. And that's what the GSD gave me. It gave me a facility to understand [Frederick Law] Olmsted and Martha [Schwartz]. And this is where

the hybrid comes in. Loving Olmsted to death. That man, 150 years later, could be today. He is so actual. He is timeless. All of his value[s] are the value[s] that we all are working with. Martha - this wild woman that came in early as a wild cat, and the GSD, a woman deciding that: "I would do my own thing. I'm from fine arts. I love fine arts. It would help me to do it, I'm going to bring this into landscape architecture." Well, this is the level: I'm a second-generation Martha. Martha, she's the authentic one: land arts, all the notion[s] of seriality, repetition, subversiveness and all this, and making the profession quite a different thing, a change, a shift in paradigm. And me fitting, right, looking at these two things, and 45 years later, I realized that kind of a, the input of these two phenomenal people that I've done in the world to many others, and Martha was raw, totally raw, artist. The notion [of] the profession has evolved. The notion of building has evolved. The notion of politics has evolved. Me, in the middle, in a different generation, I'm different, being a doer more than a thinker - understand the power of and the importance of politics, and bring the notion of strategy in the way that we get things built. I think the idea is easy. Getting it done, built and delivered is another game. Right? And I guess the notion also that in my practice, we did temporary landscape where we were testing ideas. Martha didn't do that. But for us, the notion of doing temporary landscape architecture, like for example, Jardin Blue Stick at Métis-sur-Mer in Quebec, we tested planting a garden with stupid stick, painted into the plants. Who would drive six hours to go see a plant garden that would not be mature at the end of the season? "I'm not doing this. I'm not interested by that." So, this is why the notion of stick became a transposing what [UNINTELLIGIBLE] has taught us in planting design, using the same rules, but using artificial elements as Martha taught me. And this garden became famous. People were offended. Love that. People loved it. But testing this

idea for $25,000 - phenomenal. So, we did many of those. But I would say, as a young practitioner, having those small projects were essential. It gives you the ability to trust your intuition and the notion of being bold and the notion of being able to defend on a smaller scale, something yet to be big. So, I think that's how I grew in the profession slowly, bringing all these things together, risk taking. That's where success resides. If you don't take any risks, not interesting, I think. Right?

I love eccentric people. I love people with subversive ideas, who would defend them. So, you do step by, and then you end up doing a tacky Love Fountain, or Love Park. That's how you were able to turn - to present in a design competition - a stupid heart that takes the entire space for Love Park in Toronto. Right? It's almost at the edge of being tacky, but at the same time, so we took the risk. And the project is fantastic. So how did, so the notion of how to bring an idea so far. But tacky is not tacky, but it needs to be at the level that general people, general, I don't know, *culture populaire*, can take it and become a huge thing.

Blurring the Lines

BIRNBAUM: Where do you see yourself in the interface between landscape architecture and art? How do you see this often-segmented divide?

CORMIER: A few years ago, I was giving a lecture at the GSD [Harvard Graduate School of Design]. And Pierre Bélanger did my introduction. Pierre said, "Cormier is always a lone star in

Canada." I think that was quite accurate. And somehow with being a misfit in this profession - it's been love and hate. I love it, but sometimes I hate it. I think Cormier has been a misfit in the profession in Canada. We have kind of a unique position that I think we've created, and I fed into it. The thing that I like to do is blur the lines. Public art groups in Montreal and Toronto, they never know where to put us: as public artists, as landscape architecture, or urban design. I said, "don't worry about it." Landscape is not just planting. I can address architecture. I could [go] into architecture. We could do all of it." It's not drawing a line: "this is landscape architecture, this is public art, and this is interior design." No. I can blur the line as what the practice is. And I think that has led us to some amazing commissions. For example, The Ring as Place Ville Marie. We're able to understand the urban context and are not afraid of architecture - not afraid of designing a thing that could be called art. But for me, they are landscape. Landscape is a very broad, broad word. It's everything. Right? It's everything. And when you have this attitude, of course, [LAUGHTER] it creates - people don't know where to put you or to place you. But we are landscape architects. We're not artists, because we have problems that need to be fixed. So, we have to find solutions that would do it. It's not just a creative gesture.

I think there's a misconception about what is a landscape. I believe that in a professional world, the profession needs to explain more of what landscape architecture can be. The profession has evolved 200 years, and I think the profession is widely open. It's not something that says, "this is the beginning, and this is the end." I think landscape architecture can lead the development of projects. That we call a landscape driven project. Instead of being engineering driven, or

architecturally driven, I think landscape is about system. It's not just about planting and shrubbing and shrub it up. Landscape is everything. The systems intertwine, and that understanding can lead the vision of architectural projects, or transportation projects in the city.

The REM [Réseau Express Métropolitain] is a great example. Last week I went for a train ride at the opening with the chief project on that, Jean-Marc Arbaud. And I asked him, "what was the project, how was the project led?" He said, "it was led by the urban fabric." Wow. Not by engineering. And then we rode, and I saw it, because where we were driving - where the path, the line of the train and the system - you were riding in good places. And then the engineer has to make it work, instead of saying, "oh, no, no, we can't do this, because the radius needs to be this, and then there's that. There's a slope and all this." It was developed according to urban fabric. Pretty good. Highways are developed by the highway itself. And we're going to demolish everything. So being able to go, being able to avoid sensible areas, sensible neighborhoods, but at the same time connecting them. "Where are we going to land? Where are we going to do this?" And 26 stations have been thought out that way. Wow. No map. Felicitation. I feel it. It's great. Right? Not underground. Above ground. Seven minutes. Seeing the city. I think once you have this - go above the city, it's amazing. The view, the train is designed with windows. You see the whole urban fabric. Pretty amazing. If it's all underground, four times the price, first that will never happen, because it's too expensive. And then we as architects, urban planner, urban designer, urban landscape - we need to develop to this new reality in our cities. Right? The whole city, everything is saturated. OK? We may need to think further and be more creative

with it. Usually, a problem is a good way to create an opportunity. We can't fight and say, "no, I don't want the train above." Because you may not get it, because we don't have the money. It's going to be billions and billions and billions and billions. So how do we do that? We need to be creative. And I think those are new issues that the new generation will have to think upon. So, the REM for me, it's a huge success. For four times the price that could have been. Right? Six billion instead of 38 billion if it was underground. That would never happen. And all the future development that goes with it is kind of a no-brainer. It's pretty amazing. And I like what it did to Montreal. I love what it did to Montreal. And when you're in Chicago, the train system, it's all above ground. And when you enter Chicago, you enter the city, and you see the whole city. Pretty good. In Paris, in London, you have segments of that, too. That's how you get introduced to a city. Anyway, so that's- I think there's a great lesson. But by the fact it was urban driven and not engineering driven, I am not against engineering, but they always lack that sensibility. And we could work as a team, not as a position, but together. But we have the sensibility on understanding the land and the context. Let's have a place. We need to fight for that.

Power of Team

CORMIER: If I was alone in my practice, I would be nothing. Claude Cormier on its own was nothing. And I learned quickly that I need people along with me that think alike, and I've learned quickly the power of a team. It doesn't have to be big. But having people that I can work along - that I like - that I share similar values, is essential. And over the years I've built this fantastic team. Fantastic team. And I'm glad that now they're going to take it over and bring it to another level. It doesn't have to be the same. But yes, there was a Cormier school, for sure. For sure, and they've been willing to take the ride with me, and they're better than me, I'd say.

I could do some drawings. I speak on the phone. That's what I do best. Right? I'm a salesman. I'm not an architect. I can't draw. But I have ideas. That comes quickly. Oh my God. [LAUGHTER] Like lightning. So easy, having ideas. So easy. But to develop them properly, I need the key that brings me elsewhere, that challenges me, and that we could develop options, and that's what I've done with my team. We can do a lot with the number of people we are. We've learned to be efficient. But there's a vision. And I think I was able to design a vision. I was able to define a vision for us to operate together. Yeah, my team is the thing that, the most important thing that I have in my life. They're my family. They're my support. We, I need to like my people. And I love them all. If I don't, it doesn't work. Quickly, I know [the] first week it will not work. We have a great sense of hiring people. We know right away if we fit or not. And we've been pretty good at this. And so, it's, yeah, it's fundamental in an office, is your team. The respect, listening, laughing, and dealing with stress. Right? [LAUGHTER] Yeah, what a funny career and profession we're in. Never fast enough. You need to invent yourself every day. You need to be fresh and all this. So, it's pretty demanding. But if you don't have fun along the way, it's not worth it. Put the key in the door and do something else. So, I have been extremely fortunate to have assembled this fantastic team that stayed with me for a long time and that we were able to attract people. We need, once again, the P of the profit. We need to be attractive. So, the whole thing is a kind of a complex thing, but it's pretty simple. Right? Having fun. Can be stressed out, but if you don't have fun, are you going to this for 35 years of your life? No. And you need to make a little bit of money, too, along the way, because it's not worth it otherwise. So, this kind of manufacture an element. But I think we're a good business model for others, I would say. Not knowing that we were that. But the notion of transition also is important. How do I get this

legacy to the next level? To their level? And when I'm gone, it's OK. I think that, but we now have and share the same values. But values it's like history. It evolves. It transforms itself. The practice will also do that. So, what we do and what we did and what we will do may be different. I accept all of it. Let go. And I'm able to let go because they're there. And they give me a peace of mind that is, that I have to have. And they got it. Is that amazing? I'm a privileged man. That's all I can say. I got everything. Privileged. And that's because of my team.

Respect Landscape Architecture

All this seems to be lovey-dovey. I'm going to have my little bitchy moment: Opening day of Love Park. Thousands of people were there. Lots of people know us in Toronto as being, I don't know, a unique group from Montreal who has given to Toronto some unique element that they didn't have anywhere. And so, we're loved, totally, by the community. We were not in charge of the organization of the event. To find out at the opening day that we're not in front. Four politicians talked. They asked me to come and hold the ribbon at the end. No word. And this woman said, "yay, could you come and hold the ribbon?" I said, "where am I? We don't even have a seat in the front?" I said, "I am fucking offended. Who do you think we are? I don't even know the four people who spoke in front of people. Never met them. And they take the entire credit. But design in a city happened because we have Waterfront [Toronto]." They're not even there. City of Toronto and some people that we work with for four years, not even there. "We came up with this concept of love and they've been talking about love. Why we do not exist as creator of our cities, of public space, city builders." Right? Just politics driven for opening. I said, "I am so offended that we don't even exist." Isn't it amazing?

So next year, when they're going to open the Don River, I hope Michael Van Valkenburgh and his team would be mentioned. They have done amazing for this city. Yes, I understand politics, but politics needs to understand that we work with them, and we work for them. We have to have a place to [show] the world - to show that we exist. Right? We're a creator. We're a thinker. We make things happen. We're not political. We are involved. And that, I don't know what we have to do to make this a reality. This has happened everywhere. I've been watching. On the REM, [Réseau Express Métropolitain] right, there's some people that have been working for years. They don't even exist. What about the people who designed, thought, made it happen? We don't exist. So yeah, in a way, it gets me so angry . . . They don't give us the possibility to be recognized and acknowledged that you work with talented people, dedicated people. I left, I was so angry, so angry. I think she got the message.

BIRNBAUM: I know, but I think you have to be direct- landscape architects are shaping our cities. Here in Toronto, in Montreal…

CORMIER: Everywhere.

BIRNBAUM: Right. So, if you agree just let's say landscape architects

CORMIER: Yes. We, as landscape architects, are shaping the city. Can we be acknowledged? It happens in Toronto. It happens in New York. It happens in Montreal. It happens in Quebec City.

Why do we not exist? Public realm. Landscape architecture. We work with tiny, tiny, tiny projects. We create so much value, and that's taken for credit. No. I think this needs to change. We, as landscape architects, has to fight for this. We have to fight to show our presence in what we do for [the]community and our cities. We're huge players. We create values, big values. It's incredible. Where are we on this publicity? We don't exist. Her profession needs to voice her, we need to be. We need to scream, I think. We're undervalued. We're not understood as what we do. We don't just do shrubbing up. We just don't do planting. We do it all. Right? Social, economics, the cultural, the environment, climate change. We do everything. Artistic. But no, people don't know what we do, still. Isn't that amazing? Yeah, we have to be loud and clear about it. So, for me, that was a very strong moment, and I'm thinking next year, for Michael Van Valkenburgh and his team, and all the consultants around it, the complexity of what they're working with, and they're going to deliver, they need to be invited at the opening and be in the center front, not holding the ribbon at the end as a whatever. They should be holding the ribbon, and you should be in the center. It's simple. No debate. Right? It's clear. I don't know what we will have to do about it, but we have to do something about it. Clearly. Yes.

Montreal and Toronto

BIRNBAUM: We talked about the Madame and her influence on the city. And you know, you can't throw a rock without hitting a landscape that you haven't touched in some way [in Montreal]. And to some extent, as well, in Toronto. But this is home.

CORMIER: Yes, Toronto is home, too.

BIRNBAUM: Right, OK. So then knowing that, what does that mean to you, to know that here we're talking about the practice as a legacy component. What does it mean? And you told us earlier today that this is all for the public. Right? This is for them. So, what does it mean to you when you walk around Montreal or Toronto, and…?

CORMIER: When I look at the projects that we have left in both cities, and how people are using [them], it's the biggest gift that I get back. Right? Yeah, I think it's what we've done. I think we've made a huge contribution to our cities. And I can see it by how people are using it. And I have become a star, not knowing it. As I'm getting older, I start seeing it, that with a small office of fifteen people, we make a bigger contribution than office of 3,000 people. Is that amazing? Why so? I don't know. Why so? I, yeah, I think we have done a huge contribution, and I am extremely touched by it, because I think in all this, I've always been a humble man. And I think it's good quality. Right? Just to be aware of your weakness, not knowing that you have talents, because I always thought had no talent in my life, because I'm not good at anything. Right? I can't draw. I can't do anything. But I'm a good salesman. [LAUGHTER] I could sell anything. Yeah, that's one of my biggest qualities.

When I walk in Montreal, which is my earlier work, and I see how it evolved - it touches me. But also, when they don't take care of it, oof, it does the same way, but the opposite direction. But I think over the years, our love affair with Montreal has been somehow transferred to Toronto.

And I have to say that Toronto is my second home, as much as Montreal is my first home. I love both cities for different reasons. But believe me, Toronto, oh, it's here. But Montreal is here for other reasons. And I love the ability that we could exist equally on different grounds in each city. Right? Montreal is a weird city. Marc Hallé brought this article from *The Montreal Herald*, and it was quite interesting. They said in it that "everybody loves Montreal, but Montreal may not love you back." We have attitude here. We think we're hot shit. I don't know why, but there's something unique about Montreal that I, I love it. But I don't know what it is. Celine Dion always said that Montreal has this entertainment uniqueness in the country. And I think she's right. Right? We have this newspaper about the stupid thing that happened to all these artists, just Quebec driven centric. That's Quebec. Right? The gossip world of the artistic world. I remember as a kid, and 50 years later, it's still there. I don't know what it's all about. But there's something that ties us together. Has it has been a cultural minority in the country? Maybe. But just having this in my life, I would say, fuck it. I need to get out of here once in a while, as I did as a kid when I went to Guelph and then Toronto, then Boston. But I had to come back. [LAUGHTER] It's weird. But I need Toronto in my life, big time. And as many told us, "I don't know how you did it, because Toronto is a hard nut to crack." We've been, I don't know, welcome in there. We've been accepted with our differences, our kind of colorfulness, our humor. I don't know how we made it work. But this is a beautiful leveling condition that we feel part of the city. And, the same in Montreal. But differently. One fault of Montreal: if you succeed somewhere else, you're bad at home. And I've experienced that, that people say, "oh, yeah, Cormier. Yeah. No. Right? He thinks he's hot shit." I don't think that we're hot shit. It's that we see other things. And that's the fault of Quebec. Sometimes we're like this. And what

saved me and what made me is that I got out of here when I was a teen. I got an amazing solid education, but I came back. So don't bite at me because I went out. So, this is always the soft spot, and there's no way you could drop the Harvard word in Quebec, because it's like, then you're like this. "Oh, yeah. No, too snobby." Right? It's a funny thing, the Harvard perception that we have in Quebec, it's like, don't drop the word, because you're going to pay for it. So, I've learned that. Keep your mouth shut. Only in an emergency. [LAUGHTER] Right, you want to play games. I can play games, too. So anyway, it's been a great thing - being bicultural in my own country. And now we're getting work, and we're doing more work in Alberta. It's a different game. Different game, because Quebec and Alberta are, whoo. We went down to Chicago to do a project. Oh boy, super alpha Illinois. Well, what a great light it was. People are bold. People are clear. People are forceful. And I remember when we did this project, and most of my team were gay- we were with these guys. We did very well. We survived it. So once again, I don't know what it's all about, but it's about just being true to yourself and feeling good and not being intimidated. Thank you, Harvard. It taught me that. Stand up the ground. Do it. And you could beat Americans any time. [LAUGHTER] Claude and its competitiveness. Right? It's good. It's good. It keeps you on the edge. So, it's all great. But being open to the world is phenomenal and so amazing. Europe is a whole different beast itself than America. It's amazing how the rest of the, all the persons that we've learned, it's mostly Americans in America. But there's a whole world there which is totally different. And that's the one I'd like to explore in my next life. Right? Which has different values, and it's very attractive. But that's going to be next life. So yeah, life is rich. Embrace it.

On the Fringe

BIRNBAUM: OK, this is my last question of the day. In a 2020 interview, Martha Schwartz noted, "the people who are most interesting to me are the ones on the fringe of things. People who don't quite fit, who are going on their own track." When I look at your body of work, it exists in celebrated iconic spaces, as well as new public spaces that have been much talked about and loved. Is it fair to say you are no longer on the fringe? How does that make you feel? Is acceptance important to you? Or do you prefer being on the fringe?

CLAUDE CORMIER: Hm. Interesting. I think within this relatively short career, 25 years, right, for architecture is pretty short. I think we went from being on the fringe to more of the center of attention. And it's interesting, because a couple of years ago with Marc Hallé, this notion of being pertinent or not. And I have the feeling that we are less pertinent than before. I think I was wrong. Because last year, when we opened The Ring, and we opened Love Park last month, a friend of mine, who I told her that, she said, "you're a joke." She reminded me that. She said, "look at the thousands of people here, at The Ring." It was a gigantic urban party. At Love Park, we had thousands of people in the park. She said, "Claude, do you think you're relevant?" And I had a little tear. [LAUGHTER] I said, "tell me. Yes, I think we're pretty good. And I think the pertinence is being able to do everything and pretend that you don't do anything." Right? Nowadays, just an ability, I don't disagree with that. Climate change, I don't disagree with it. Right? It's there. It's real. But I think as we are a maker of things, the notion of design still exists. And we cannot make this that does not exist. We need to bring design within it that encompasses all that. Right? Who knows that Love Park is 100% sponge? That we don't send

any water in any system. We don't take all of the problem[s] from the city, and we deal with our own. We don't depend on anything. We're sustainable, 100 percent. Do we talk about it galore? No. And I think the power of design is essential, because in the end, beauty is the key. Everybody has a relationship to beauty: the gangster, the poor, the rich. I think we cannot forget that. How do we do it? I don't know. But I think it's the end result that we should aim at, while fixing or dealing with climate change, dealing with sustainability, dealing with societal inclusion, dealing with diversity, all that. But this is not the end. There's something bigger, which is a kind - and also creating positivity in our cities and places. So, the notion of being on the fringe - to being the front, I think nowadays, I don't care about neither. But I have to say that I always love eccentric people. I love those people. Boy, do we need them. Outstanding, clashing, wow, are necessary in our life and cities, and we need to be more inclusive to them with us, because they're essential. Otherwise, we're all the same. This notion of integration, this notion of going to sleep. We've done that. We don't need to do that. I think we need to be open of people who think differently, people who do things differently, and we don't need to all fit the same mold. So yeah, misfits are great.

Projects

Lipstick Forest

CORMIER: One phrase that would really summarize who I am is that "you could always take the boy out of the country, but you cannot take the country out of the boy." So, the way that I'm thinking and the way that I've been working, the way that I've been existing, is to be myself,

and I'm proud of my path. I am proud of all of my making. And I'm trying to be authentic and true to myself, as my father always told me. So, I think I have honored his wish. But it gave me the possibility to do it. Right? So that could lead us to this notion of gender, as it were. Right? For me, being a gay man, it's never been an issue, because when my father passed away, I didn't have to negotiate with that, because he would have been very strict.

My mother, not an issue. And I had a few mentors in my life: older men- in law, a judge, gay men, and they were my model, because they never hide who they were. And the notion of gender was not an issue to debate. It was just a matter of fact. So, all my life I was, I decided I would not be a militant to defend the gay cause, but I could do it in my own way.

When we did Lipstick Forest 25 years ago, with bright pink trees at the Montreal Convention Centre, it's pretty out loud, and it stood out. The government freaked out. But when we had the commission, they say, "you have to make the building a little bit more feminine, because it's too masculine." OK? I can do that. So, when we presented it, with pink lipstick color on it - and the reason why we did that is because we didn't have enough money to do the project correctly, and I wanted to do this artificial but not fake forest. Martha [Schwartz] and Fred [Olmsted]. And it was creating this - we had this huge ice storm in Quebec in 1998, and we had a huge tree downtown that had to be cut, and I thought it would be interesting that we take these tree trunks, we bring them inside, and we create this kind of a natural forest and a kind of reminder of that period. We couldn't do it because of the way that wood ages, cracks, and also insects, and all this. So, this idea was taken out, but I thought, here we could make them fake,

but authentic to what they are. But I will not paint them brown, because that will look like Walt Disney - bad looking. So, I thought, OK, we will certainly run out of money. Let's get a sponsor, MAC Cosmetic, that they could have a MAC counter in the forest, at the Convention Center, selling products. I had a friend working at MAC. I approached the CEO. They were willing to do this. So, presented the forest with pink color. Oof, I remember the meeting. Not a word. [LAUGHTER] Dead silence. They couldn't deal with it. Right? It was too much. But the architects of the building loved the ideas. So, he protected us in the whole process. I have learned that sometimes too much information is not good. You need to go bit by bit, because we think quickly, and we're clear in the head, but there's a lot of education that needs to [be brought] to bureaucrats, engineers, and to get them at the end. So anyway, that was my lesson of don't go too quick. But anyway, we were able to do it, and I remember at the beginning of the construction site, her people- the landscape contractor building the trees painted them pink and bringing them on site. Oof. Gender confrontation between builders. The contractors of the building were calling our guys "faggots." We were in like in 1998. It's the year that the ASLA should have been in Montreal, and because of that ice storm, they had to cancel the whole year, unfortunately. So, and again, of when the forest was installed, the "faggot" became the champion. Isn't that amazing? They got respect from all the other workers, because this thing was being done exactly - it brought some other dimension to a building that is too masculine. Right? So, the government told us to do this, this is what we've done, and we accomplished it. So, pink like this - pretty much about gender. But we never talked about it. It was never brought out. But that's what everybody was thinking about and screaming and not able to mention. So, we were able to get through by [LAUGHTER] in the hiding. So that's my beginning in the

practice, to be out there, standing up, and being present, and not being ashamed. So, Lipstick Forest, in that sense, is very important – [the] beginning of me not being ashamed of being a gay man, doing public landscape, and doing public landscape that would create - or creating a kind of subversive landscape. Martha, Fred. I'm in the middle. Artificial, but not fake. So there's a whole world between what is authentic, what you want the notion of representation, what are we representing? And how are we delivering the piece by the materiality that we picked. They are now 25 years old. And when you visit the place, it feels like very young, as young as yesterday. This notion of timelessness.

Dorchester Square – Place du Canada

CORMIER: The remake of Dorchester Square and Place du Canada in Montreal. Once upon a time, it was one of the most important public spaces in Canada. And after 125 years, it became the most unloved public space in Canada. It was a bit like Bryant Park [in New York City] full of people smoking pot, people sleeping over. We had no vegetation left -we had Norway maples, everywhere overshadowing everything. But remember, a tree's a tree and you can cut it.
So, we won an RFP, and we worked on this for twenty years. And when we won it, we almost had to have it done before we started. Politics approved it. Right? So anyway, we started with this purely 100% historical park. But once again, we were doing it because this is not a specialty, but it is. And as we did research and all this - it was so rich. So, the park, the way it is now, - it's a kind of a collection of many best tricks that you have on different projects.

And so, the first thing was actually trying to clean up the park from invasive species such as the Norway maples. We had mud everywhere. We had puddles everywhere. We had the most important monuments of public art - 225 years of history. The idea was to go back to what it was, but with a twist, just a little bit - we're not duplicating. Remember, we don't duplicate - we move forward. But we wanted to correct the main concept of the crisscrossing - but the crisscrossing has been cut in the '60s. Also, 100 years ago when a quarter of the park [was cut] to bring the cars in. So, we had to get the cars out. But we had the parking garage right underneath with the slab four inches below. But that was green, historically. So, we wanted to bring it back green. So that was clear, clear, clear. So, by extending it back, we thought it would be important to have the monument there. We thought it would be great to do the water fountain, because Montreal always had a fountain in their parks. So, we brought this green photosynthesis color in it, like an army green, that can mimic the color of the green. It's a quite difficult color to pick. That it doesn't clash, because a bad green against other green looks horrible. So, we did quite a bit of research on that. And as we had this done, we wanted it to be as big as [the park's] Boer War monument - about eleven meters tall. So, we wanted this to thing not [to be] dwarfed, [by the monument] but [be] equal. So, we had this fountain up to eleven meters strategically placed onto a column underneath [in] the parking. And as we were doing this, the city asked us to bring a road for buses for tourism in there, and it was exactly going where the fountain was. So, they told us, "take the fountain out, or make it smaller. We need [space for] the bus." So, we basically said, "we can't get it smaller. We can't move it. So, we're going to slice it to get the route by." And I remember as we were presenting it, they were

freaking out, and Sophie Beaudoin, I winked at her. I said, "this is the right answer. Your [UNINTELLIGIBLE] tells me this is where the success of this client will reside."

The grading of the park is done with the principles of [Adolphe] Alphand's parks in Paris. Just creating a little slight berm, because every year the city rented the park for events on the grass, and they kill it, and they go away, and they don't fix it. So, we don't want to do that, so we want to create something that is just curved enough for not being able to put a tent, right? So, that worked beautifully. So, that gave us this opportunity to do beautiful edges all around the green islands, - this is the paving. And when in the park, the cars behind disappear, because you have already this notion of green surrounding you. It worked beautifully.

In the park's axis - there is a monument in the honor of Prime Minister [Wilfred] Laurier. We have the [Belle Centre] hockey stadium two blocks away. So, we made this gigantic black puck as [if] it flew out of the stadium, and in[to] the park. So, we have Wilfred Laurier sitting on a black hockey puck that talks about hockey in Canada - in Montreal. The Montreal Canadiens. Big thing. So, there's many little details like that that talk about Montreal in a way, that made a great solution.

The car ramp in the middle of the park that leads you into the [below grade] parking could not be moved, because we didn't have the money and the budget for it. So, when we were working on that part, I was just coming back from Venice. Venice is the bridge - it's canals everywhere - a perfect solution. So, we started duplicating that way of stepping from one side to the other

and it did the job beautifully. So, it's a collection of different moments in different cities that we brought in there, fitting with the context, fitting with the history, and fixing the problem of integration. So, I think it's a very contemporary park in a very important historical context. This is the, once again, right, crossing two things that you think don't fit together, and at the end, they just find their place, and the context is quite right.

BIRNBAUM: Two questions: the fountain. You mentioned the structural column, but there's also this very purposeful decision to include it on the historic axis.

CORMIER: Yes.

BIRNBAUM: Yeah, I mean, you could see it right there. Right? Everything lines up, and there's the fountain. But if we could speak to putting it to the theme. Right?

CORMIER: Yes. Everything is based on a very symmetrical composition - the Victorian composition of the park. They had to be all lined up. And each of those monuments has a meaning, a purpose. So that fountain needed to be very much in the center. It could not be anywhere else. And the sequence of it and the space between each was also kind of a consideration. So, when we had to remove it for the car, it [would] have been like kind of a missing tooth. So, and it had to be as big as it is as an entry, as a gateway. And that was for us a no brainer that cannot be argued. But we also wanted the scale to be as big as possible, because then it's not dwarfed, and it has the "now" and the "history of a park of 125 years" -

bring us another 150 years. Because this park's going to be there forever. But it's quite interesting. Right? In the history of public space, they all go to a level of degradation. And it takes so many years to be able to bring back money into it. Central Park, right? This is our Central Park, or Bryant Park of New York City. But I think we brought it back to its full glory.

BIRNBAUM: The pedestrian experience. Did you think people would be treating the bridge as a stadium style seating when you designed that?

CORMIER: No.

BIRNBAUM: You also made a conscious decision not to put any bars to prevent people from laying down on these longer benches.

CORMIER: Yes.

BIRNBAUM: And then finally, you mentioned Bryant Park, which is the first time we had moveable tables and chairs, and also the color choice of blue for those. So, let's talk a bit about the sort of way in which it's furnished.

CORMIER: Yes. Olmsted always said that the movement in a park - the way that people circulate - it's the landscape. What you see, what you don't see, and what do you reveal. And I think this notion of moving, the experience of moving into the park, was very important. So, the

furniture - the comfort for it was essential. And based on the way that parks are done in Washington - all the little benches - or New York City - they juxtapose next to each other. Montreal has never done that. So, we said, let's put them together instead of the individual, individual, individual. Let's create [a] massive way of seating, and then it becomes, I don't know, there's a feeling of being together that is a mood, I don't know. It's comfortable instead of just being singular, singular, singular in the way it's organized. So, these things were brought together, compressed. And I think it works beautifully. When we did the bridge, the designer did - we never thought it would become a stage. And it's used for graduation at McGill. It's used as a ski slope. They do - kids bring snow on it in the winter, and they ski down it. It's so amazing. So, right, I like when a design is still open for others to transform it to their own need. So, I think the staircase has been a total, total success. And it's done with the same wood. We didn't want to have cedar, because it doesn't age well. And I remember a discussion that I had with Michael Van Valkenburgh when they were doing the bridge in Brooklyn. Michael is a fan of black locusts. He's a farm boy like me. They were doing wood fencing on their farm when he was a kid with black locust. And he said, "Claude, I want to develop wood, black locust wood on decking because I think it's the most sustainable kind of way that we could use wood in urban projects." We did that. So, mine is kind of a camaraderie that we have among professionals. I love it. Right? That we could share some issues right? "What do you do about wood? What about your sustainability?" Right? We don't want to use teak. We don't want to use paint. And Michael was so generous. And I remember, we did the same back to him with the umbrellas: "How do you do your umbrellas? Who's the supplier? And then, right?" So, it's just - I love this ability to exchange with other colleagues. So, Dorchester, there's a lot of that sharing, learning,

watching others, and making it fit for our own reality of issues that we have. So, it's quite a rich park. You don't need - everybody doesn't know anything about it. It does not matter. But I think it gives it this solidity.

BIRNBAUM: And just to go back to the moveable tables and chairs as well. And the blue chairs and tables. Were those yours? Or did those come later?

CORMIER: They came later

BIRNBAUM: Ok. I had a, the color didn't seem like you.

Place d'Youville

BIRNBAUM: Place d'Youville is approaching its 25th anniversary. This seems like a good time for reflection.

CORMIER: Yeah. But once again, the issue of maintenance is real. Right? Making the trees a little bit more clear. But it's not happening. Yeah. Place d'Youville Montreal, about 25 years ago, it was a design competition - a national design competition that we won. This is my first major, public project. I was 37 years old. And it's a place that is full of artifacts underneath. This is old Montreal, 400 years of history, and everything underneath needs to be preserved. There's a river that has been channelized to bring the sewers over time, which is a scale of about - you could walk in these things about twelve feet [x] twelve feet. It runs under it. It has issues of

weight. It has issue of -you cannot dig anything on that project because of the archeology sensibility that was underneath. We had the Museum of Archeology on one side, and the Museum of History on the other. So, this is right downtown old Montreal. So, we came up with this idea that we would do a blanket - a quilt, that could be deposited on top of existing. We're just going to take the asphalt out, remove 20 centimeters, 30 centimeters of the existing granular stone underneath, and then we would cap the rest and would not [add] too much weight. And the project making the connection east and west would be a sidewalk that would collect people instead of collecting the sewer that was underneath - instead of something that was a river flowing across the site. That would be the kind of the main connector. The cross section became a kind of a slightly mounded, and we would have crisscrossed sidewalks that would connect each front door - possible front doors of the buildings on either south side or north side. And if they were residential homes, they would be made of wood. If they were cultural institutions, they would be made of limestone. And if they were [UNINTELLIGIBLE] in the city, it would be made of concrete. That's the notion of quilt. And the collector of pedestrian in the center would be made of stone, like the channel underneath, for the sewage, made out of the granite stone. And everything else between the spaces of those sidewalks could be trees and green open space. And digging not too deep - bringing the trees, and during construction if we [found] new elements, we could simply shift that whole logic. It was 100% flexible. But we had this, that created this idea for us of knowing about the material: about trees, soil volume, and having just grass because maintenance is always an issue. Once you deliver a [final] park [design], you don't know what they're going to do with it, unfortunately. And you look at it 25 years later, it's like, "hm - I'd like [for] it would [to] have a little bit more

love." I knew that we had to design with these parameters that they would not get any love. I think that [the] design strategy of being flexible and open was the winning element of this. And because [it's] all based on the issue of archeology and the sensibility of what's underneath. And on the west side - this is where they - that was the second phase - 25 years later, it's still not built because this is where the Parliament of Canada was. And it was burned 150 years ago by the English Canada. And we have not been able to resolve the kind of a language of what that would be. We have an idea of what it will be, but it has never been approved, because there's always - it's so political, and I don't think it's going to be ever finished. It's one of those pieces of land in the city that we don't know why it's not developed. [Perhaps] because of the complexity of what sits underneath it.

But that's, yeah, 25 years ago, and I think it has, it brought greenery, softness in old Montreal that didn't have any. And this contrast was a kind of a beginning in Montreal, also, of shifting concrete space, parking space, into open space with a bit of softness and contrast. So yeah, they chose us unanimously, and it was great. And we did this with a bigger firm, because then we were a two-person office. But we drove the vision because it was very clear for all, and that's pretty amazing. When you have a clear vision for everybody – it's so much easier to manage: from conception, from vision to construction document, and change order into construction site.

BIRNBAUM: I have two questions. The first is the easy one. When we see the Museum of Archeology, which was built in 1992 - I'm wondering about the challenge, you know, if we

haven't really talked about the building in context, when you have these incredible, all the other blocks, you have very early, what, nineteenth century, some maybe a little bit, a little baby toe into the twentieth century - 1900, 1910, but mostly you know, last quarter of the nineteenth century. And then you're having to absorb something.

CORMIER: At the end with the new museum?

BIRNBAUM: Yes. So, I'm wondering, did that really affect this?

CORMIER: The Museum of Archeology was a gift from the government -federal provincial, and the city, to celebrate the 350th anniversary of the City of Montreal. The building was designed by Dan Hanganu, a famous Romanian Canadian architect that passed away a few years, a very bold, eccentric man. [The building is] very solid, very bold, and reference[s] what that site was.

The notion that we had a quilt gave us the flexibility of taking everything around it. Right? And the notion of style and diversity of time, and construction of those buildings, somehow were considered quietly. So, I think the quilt was a kind of a driving force of the public space. And it was something autonomous as a language to the rest, because Old Montreal was a quilt of buildings. Right? Bricks, stone, different types of stone, many different types of stone, different style and era. So having a public space designed with this was, I think, the right direction. Instead of taking a vague approach: to have one plaza made with one thing. But no, we did the opposite. We worked with the eclectic elements that compose Old Montreal, eclectic, and

eclectic without clashing too much. So, I think that building is going to be many different things. And that was never an issue in the approval process. Never. And it fitted quite well in it.

BIRNBAUM: One of the things we were just talking about is the number of obelisks in this city. Can you speak to the one here.

CORMIER: Yeah, I think that obelisk - it was to celebrate the general worker in the city. And when we started the project, that obelisk had been already moved twice. I said, "we would not start moving monuments again to fit our design. The design should fit what is there." Right? So, the modernist needs to do *carte blanche*. Right? [UNINTELLIGBLE] We didn't do that. It's the opposite. We accept the existing condition, and we will not revisit history by fixing the placement of things. So that was a given.

BIRNBAUM: Last question, this is my wild card question. So, when we came back here last night, I was looking in your library where a number of the books are in the office collection. But I pulled off the shelf, *Peter Walker: Experiments in Gestures, Seriality, and Flatness*. And you have your students' signature inside of it. It's 1995. It's just a little tiny paperback that Linda Jewel was the editor of. . . .

CORMIER: [LAUGHTER]

BIRNBAUM: So again, we've spent a lot of time talking about the ground plane. And when I first looked at, if I were to look at it in black and white, and the zigzagging and the crossing, I also think as much as you have Yorkville, which comes later in terms of the different materials, but clearly postmodern, I found myself thinking about, and it was in this monograph. It doesn't survive anymore. Peter Walker's Burnett Park in Fort Worth, where it's an island.

CORMIER: With the crisscrossing and the water.

BIRNBAUM: All the same modernist material. Right? Clean, minimalist, and the water. But I was just kind of curious, because you know, we've spent a lot of time talking about Martha. And I thought, this is interesting, and I thought, OK, this was, you had this as a student. And it's here in the library. I mean, Peter Walker's graduate thesis is on Swedish landscapes, and this is when he started bringing in circles and all of the shapes to animate the ground plane. And so, it just made me want to ask you about Walker as well, because we haven't touched on it, and I just look at that, and I couldn't help but think about that project. And maybe it's just back here. I don't know. But it's also just a few years after Harvard for you. It's the first project. So, you still have whatever's going on there in your Kool-Aid, and I just kind of wanted to raise it.

CORMIER: I just want to do this thing. I just want to show you one image. I gave this little collage to Phyllis Lambert years ago when I was in my office next to the washing machine. I remember I took a flier, a food flier - there's a company: Transcontinental Montreal. They do a printed flier: IGA special this week. Metro Special this week. Right? Blah, blah, blah, special this

week. And so on. Because of the bright color. Color, dah, dah, dah. So that became the element that drove the entire project. This is it.

With the collage, that was the design intention for Place d'Youville. And I think it was done without - it's not a modern interpretation, like the Peter Walker park. It's a different resolution. Because if it [had] been modern, it would have been too fixed. And not knowing what's underground was not the right answer. Because if you find an element, an artifact that has to be protected, your scheme is broken. So, it had to have this flexibility into it. The project has not been defined yet. We were going for an RFP. But it's nice when you answer an RFP with an idea of what you're going to do. Because then you're much more organized. You're much - you have a purpose. Right? When you have no purpose, then you're just blah, blah, blah. And it shows. And when you have a candidate that comes in with clear set objectives, not knowing what they are at, but there's something underneath that you feel that, well, they know where they're going. So that's how we went there. And this is how we were able to be shortlisted, and this is when we won the thing. RFP's a funny thing.

The Well

CORMIER: The Well, Downtown Toronto, a gigantic project. Right downtown: Front Street, Spedina [Avenue], Wellington [Street]. And the site is within half of it in an old residential hood, and then the other thing is - downtown bus link. This site is in transition of all this. Massive development. They're not tall. They're only 40 story buildings, which now is small. [LAUGHTER] Toronto, we're now at 100 level towers. Right? So, 40 stories is a little project. But yes, seven of

those next to each other. High, high-density site. We were in charge of the public realm. How are these towers going to sit on the ground, and how do you circulate with them? And on that, on one site with an historic park fighting with the other one, and we have a right of way of eighteen meters wide. That's now a parking lot that was taken out. So, we created this linear connection, east and west, with an eighteen-meter park. We had this eighteen-meter-wide park connecting the historical park. So that's the main spine of the project, and then south of it, we have those seven towers. So, it was designed with this intention of *feng shui*. And it's an outdoor mall, not indoor. And all the retail at the ground level is all commercial, 100 percent. No sign to tell you where to go. You could find [it] intuitively, because there's always an open vista. And there's a spine in the middle, which is curved, but reconnects with the old downtown, and reconnects with the hood. Very simple. Right? North, south. On your way, you always see where you're going. And you find your orientation that way. It's all done with beautiful granite, like in Copenhagen. We fought for four years to get the stone, and we were never promised it, because it's always a question of budget. And when you build seven towers, nowadays, and with COVID, was pretty intense delays, cost, cost, cost. But we were still there fighting for granite. This is concrete. We went to bid. We were right on. We won the thing, and now it's almost completed under construction.

The project is extremely simple in idea, but extremely complex in the making and coordination. Whoa. So many engineers, British architect doing the ground plane, and Canadian architect doing all the other. So, in terms of coordination, it was a completely challenging element. Guillaume Paradis, in my office, did a fantastic job of holding this for twelve years. And here it's

the opposite of Place d'Youville. We did one unified ground plane. I'm a man of contradiction. Right? It's one stone repeated everywhere, because we have seven styles of architecture. It was something that would unify everything. And I think it does it very well. Again, a full simple project. But very happy with the result. It's [a] public, urban, open space project that consolidates the kind of [UNINTELLIGIBLE.] Amazing collaboration with architecture, amazing collaboration in respect to the client, and we were so consistent that they could not talk to us about it, because we were just not dropping the ball. Because you could easily drop the ball, but then it's too late. So, you need to hold on, hold on, hold on even in the install to say, stop, we don't want to hear about it. I just want to remind you, it's essential. And anyway, so now they're very happy about us to be pain in the ass. [LAUGHTER] Just sticking to our principle and guns. But when you can explain something clearly, simply, people are not stupid. Right? It was not intellectual. It was just good common sense that we're fighting for. And that you can defend and stand on the ground big time. So, the Well is a very different type of project that have we done. But we do a lot of projects with developers. There are good ones, and there are bad ones. Run away from the bad ones right away. Stick up with the good ones, because there's a possibility to do good design and to bring value [to] the public realm. So that was a great, great, great adventure. We fought. We fought the city - we had to meet a level of soil volume, because those are new rules in the city within the last ten years. So, we could grow a forest in there, if we wanted to.

BIRNBAUM: What are you planting?

CORMIER: We're planting a large tree canopy. We're planting elm, we're planting maples, and we're planting oaks, and Kentucky coffee trees. So, it's a beautiful *mélange*, but they all have a tall canopy to free up the ground plane and bring light along this. In order to bring 30 cubic volume of soil per tree, you need to negotiate with the engineers and the architects to drop the slab. So that's a big task. But we did very well. And interesting enough, with the fire department, usually you need fifteen meters between the front door and the sidewalk edge. Our public ramp was eighteen meters. We didn't want to bring the building to the edge of fifteen. We wanted to keep it eighteen. So, we had an approval of building code, fire regulation, accepting eighteen instead of fifteen. That took a few minutes. [LAUGHTER] But if the city is looking for open space in the city, other departments have to agree, too. Because fire regulation will not be driving, I think, open space in that work in the city. So, things need to adjust and have a little bit of flexibility, and the chief planner was awesome. They made that possible, with a kind of, everything seemed like a, everything is an approval nightmare, and the level of approval that we had to go through was huge. But we never once changed the design. Isn't that amazing? Because it was clear, and so something somewhere has to give. And the approval [process] provided an opportunity for it to happen. So, the city was great. It was challenging, but it was great. A good project is all about good approval. Right? If you don't have good approval, it won't happen. So, there's so many components in each project in play that once at the end it's built, it looks like it's, eh, no big deal. It just has been a battle from day one to day ten. And that project is a great example of that. So, I think it's a pretty successful project. It was the largest development in the city of Toronto for the last twenty years. One construction site. We did a project in Chicago, right in a corner of the river. Chicago, they built

ground up. Toronto, we start ground down. The money difference in the execution must be huge. Huge. They must make a lot of return, when I look at the cost that we have to go through in Toronto. The numbers of, millions of trucks, excavation, the complexity of this must have been a nightmare. Chicago, that doesn't exist. You go up. So, it's quite interesting to work in different cities, because you understand the reality - all of them. And so sometimes when they start crying, it's oh, well, [LAUGHTER] I remember in Chicago, they said "I think you're OK. I think you won't lose your shirt here." So, we could add stone into the concrete paver. Right? Anyway, that's just an interesting background story that will help us to also negotiate with them. *En aparte*.

Sugar Beach

CORMIER: Sugar Beach - international design competition. When we approached that project, I would say we were in a meeting in Toronto with Marc and I at the launch of it. As they were talking, I just did a little drawing, right, so it's a rectangle site. I just need the oblique. I pass that to Marc Hallé next me. I said, "bitch: number two." He said, "Ok." So, it went on. I had always been thinking about the waterfront and creating a kind of a language of open space, a typology: beaches. Right? And I thought that we could carry on with the tableau of [Georges] Seurat: going from An Afternoon at the Grande Jatte [*A Sunday Afternoon on La Grande Jatte*], to Les Baignade Asnières [*Bathers at Asnières]*. When you look at the two tableau, there's something familiar and similar. But the one in Asnières - they are in the industrial part, going into the water with the industries in the back. We had that with the Redpath [Sugar Factory]. But they're both part of a system. So that was actually the reference that we used right away.

Beach Number Two: Sugar Beach, because the site is full of sugar mist. Not salt mist on a highway. Sugar mist. Everybody was afraid that they would be kill trees - sugar shack boy. Sugar doesn't kill trees. [LAUGHTER] Done. So, we had the wind, sugar coated element. So, this notion of calling it Sugar Beach. Day number two, we had the name of it. Instead of adding a promenade that was designed by the kind of a general urban planning commission, we said we're going to put it in the oblique. Philippe Starck hotel: you walk in, you're in the center of the place, not at the edge. You are the attention. So that became the divided part of the beach. And the plaza on the other side. And then we did the tree promenade to have the tree count that we had wanted to have. And filled the other piece of a sandbox overlooking the lake. No one passing in front of you. You're on the beach, like if you were in the ocean. And we brought these gigantic rocks made of granite [from] the cottage country north on Ontario - right downtown. And the notion of the sugar-coated element - we had the sugar pink umbrellas that were making reference about this, and we took the Jackie Kennedy color kind of pink to make it soft - pastel color with pastel blue sky - beautiful match. So that was pretty much as simple as it was. We won the competition [UNINTELLIGIBLE] and this, again, is open for flexibility. There's 100 ways you could do the beach, 100 kinds of ways that we could do the promenade. There's 100 ways that we could do with the rocks. It's all about flexibility.

And it turned out to be a fantastic open space on the waterfront. Right? It branded the Toronto Waterfront for many years as a place. And once again, the kind of a risk taking about the color, the risk taking about this idea. We're not repeating; we're adapting a beach condition to its context. And eventually we had this idea for Whisky Beach. That was never possible, but it

would have been another, I think, another amazing element that would tie into the kind of conception of the language of these unique beaches on the waterfront.

So, Sugar Beach was named by itself. It became the real name of the new park. And it was a kind of a no brainer. So, it's interesting to design something kind of a thinking of the name of the place first. [LAUGHTER] And give it life and its language. And this is where we start bringing in furniture - openly flexible into a park. We had to tie them to the umbrella at the beginning, but the umbrella was designed by Andrew Jones, beautifully done. Looks like it's fabric, but it's fiberglass. They were very expensive. They created a commotion during the city election a few years later, and so anyway, it was quite interesting that an open space become also a subject of element in a campaign of mayor saying, "this is not what we want to do, because that's spending too much money." On the other end, tons of people said, "hey, that's what we want." So, Sugar Beach is a kind of a very simple idea that takes, but again, multiple issues in one solution.

BIRNBAUM: I think you've covered a good amount of it. A couple of other things that you haven't mentioned that I don't know if you want to or not. The first are the berms, themselves, and the gradient that, I mean, I can't help, when you mention the painting of *La Grande Jatte*, I think of that guy leaning back, that kind of slope is always puts the users [UNINTELLIGIBLE] at ease. And then the other is, yes, the rocks, and their candy striping.

CORMIER: Always try to think about value engineering in design. How can we save money? So, the grading, because the site was a contaminated site. It had to be excavated. But we took a lot of the excavated [materials] to create the base of mounds that were somehow hiding the background of the city. And we made them as big as possible to create those moments of dunes, that create the background to the beach. And too, it's saving money on excavation. So that is why the dune got to the project. Shaping the ground.

And the second one - once you do the rocks, when you do them on a drawing; it's great. You win the competition - it's great. But then you've got to build it. [LAUGHTER] Well, that's a challenging idea. Right? [UNINTELLIGBLE] in, so you're stuck with it now. Right? Careful of what you propose. So, we know many of the quarries, suppliers, stone in Canada. So, we approached one of them that we like working with. Can you find us a rock? Right? Martha Schwartz did one in Cumberland Park. But it's done differently. We got with this granite company, they said, "yes, we have a top of the mountain of the quarry that we could save for you, that we would just shave, cut into pieces. We could put it in a truck and send it from Quebec to Ontario." Woo. [LAUGHTER] OK. Give us a price. And it was high. So, if you want to do your rocks, you may have to save elsewhere. It's always this composition of value. So, OK, let's dig into this. So, then you reassemble the rocks. You're going to have a big joint. You're going to have a gap. So, it will be, we don't know yet how precise this whole thing will be. So, it became this huge puzzle of pieces of rock, sliced in line, and then we thought, "OK, maybe we could do this sugar-coated element with the hard rock candy, right? - the white and red generic candy." So, we used this element that [is] used in the city for crosswalk, that would be, somehow be kind of a tape that would be

in line with the cutting. And then we had some fake ones. We had some real ones. So, we created a pattern of this candy - supersized into which you would sit. And we picked the red and the white color, and we reassembled onto the site with a fantastic contractor. And everything is complicated. The winter comes - no accessibility to the road and the quarry during the winter. We have a deadline. [LAUGHTER] God. Boy, we met the deadline. But the management opening road in the winter to have access added cost. So, it just, anyway, right? It's just a series of one thing to another, to another, to another. So, careful of what you propose in your design competition, because if you win, you've got to deliver it. Right? So that was a, oof, but we did [it]. But we had to scratch our head a little bit to find solutions for this. Those stones [are] from Quebec - Should be from Ontario. But we don't have a mountain in Ontario. We have to slice, with the equipment on site - that we would be saving on that. So, it's such a - it becomes political. But we survived it. [LAUGHTER]

BIRNBAUM: I think, I guess the only other question I have, and it's not in any of the images behind you, is that sort of large ship still there with the sugar scoop? Or is that gone? That was there off to the side when I…

CORMIER: On the boat?

BIRNBAUM: Yes.

CORMIER: Yeah, they're still there. This is how they were unloading sugar.

BIRNBAUM: Right, and that's part of, isn't it part of the theater? Like when you're there…

CORMIER: Yeah.

BIRNBAUM: So, we should mention, I mean, to me, I was so struck by the idea of treating this industrial vernacular narrative as the "borrowed" view animating the space.

CLAUDE CORMIER: Yeah. [FILMING DIRECTIONS] When the big ship comes into Toronto to unload raw sugar, the gigantic ship. Beautiful. So that became a little bit of, and this is exactly in line with Jarvis Street.

Yeah. When the big ship comes into Toronto to unload raw sugar, a gigantic ship, it's beautiful. These boats are gigantic, and we thought that it could create a kind of a backdrop, almost like a theater, like a show. And you could watch the boat coming in, for a few hours, and they leave. They're gone. You have the crane taking the sugar in and out and all this. So, we thought that every day would not be the same scenery at the beach. Because when we did this competition, we had critique that people said, there's no way I'm going to go there. It's pollution. There's a big boat. It's ugly. We didn't have to do anything. But it became the force of the project, the animation of the site around. We will never take away sugar. Can't go away. So, it's part now of the composition of the park. It's fantastic. It's urban choreography. So specific in Toronto and

the waterfront. We have industry. We have culture. We have people. We have open space. And so, it's a whole mix that makes the Toronto Waterfront unique. And it's embracing the context.

I think the uniqueness of the Toronto waterfront is this composition of some site will remain industrial for years, because you can't move these big infrastructure that's been there forever... So, Toronto waterfront is unique by the diversity of program, I mean down to the industrial aspect. That was the making of the port. Right? So, you need to work with it. You can't work against it. So, I think the beach is an element that would take that into account beautifully. Back to the tableau of Seurat, the *Baignade Asnières*. Like the one at the *Grande Jatte*, in the context of, I won't say a polluted city, but a city that has industry, and people going to go and jump in the water, and into the Seine. Maybe one day we'll be able to jump in Lake Ontario. Right? So anyway, I think the poetry of the project is built in that tableau, that day one, we knew that we would be working with that and embracing the reality of that and enhancing it. Not hiding it.

Berczy Park

CORMIER: Berczy Park, a downtown park, in Old Toronto. A park that was designed by Ken Greenberg's group when he was a director of the Director of Urban Design and Architecture for the City. Ken is an amazing man, and they did a great design - thirty years later people still loved the park. But the vegetation didn't do anything in that time. Only a few trees grew, really. The rest was shit.

And it's an RFP that we won. We really wanted to do it, not knowing what we would do with it. We won the proposal. We started public meetings, because the public wanted the same park rebuilt. "Yes, but no-yes." [LAUGHTER] So we listened, listened, and listened:

"We want more green."

"But you guys, look at your trees."

"What's wrong with our trees?"

"They're not performing. When we plant the trees - go to Sugar Beach. Ten years later, they're like this (*Claude gestures to image behind him on the wall*). Your trees are like this after 30 years. We could do better."

So, there was a bit of education within these public meetings. We cut 80 percent of the existing vegetation that was in bad shape. But we had to teach them why we would do it. They agreed. We used the same basic principle of composition: crisscrossing, connecting corners and corners and corners, and we had a water fountain. That was the program. But they said, "oh, we would like a children's playground, please. Oh, there's so many dogs. So, we need a dog park."

For many years, they had the Woof Dog Festival in there - they were bringing dogs as a central element of a festival - Woofstock- that we love. I went for a few years, because I thought it was so unique. Right? Parade show of dogs, and they'd dress up dogs, and there's like, anyway, it was one of a kind. So, for us, when they said, "we would like a dog park", it was great. The dogs became somehow an element that we had to bring in. And we have lots of tourists. We have people in the hood that like to use the park. So, we have multi-type of users: Family, worker,

tourist, dog, children in a very small park. We said, “we’re going to use - we’re going to use a supersize Victorian fountain to celebrate Old Toronto. But we could add stuff into it to contextualize it, and maybe we’re going to bring the children and the dogs together.” William Whyte: the element of triangulation. Create something that would bring attention to the park. So quickly we developed this idea of the fountain having dogs shooting water. We had people loving it in the public consultation. They wanted it. Then we had to go to the city for approval, and this is when Culture Department said, nuh-uh, no dogs in the fountain, please. This is not artful. We don’t want to do this. We’re going to a piece of public art independently.

OK. Let’s go back here. [LAUGHTER] We’ll show you what dogs are in art history - 500 years. So, we did the amazing PowerPoint with 100 slides with dogs and art, showing their presence in art, but also in historical photography. Mr. [William] Berczy [the co-founder of York – now Toronto] had a family portrait with his dog on it, adding to the composition. And so, they somehow had to approve it, because this is what we wanted to do. And this is what the public wanted. And so, we had the city councilor involved to tell us yes or no, Pam McConnell. It’s fantastic - fantastic city counselor. She got it. And during the meeting [she] said, “you’re going to have your park.” Right? “Because it’s too good.” She got it. A sense of humor: pushing the boundaries. Right? A bit of being subversive. She got it all, completely. We got the dog fountain.

The fabricator [of the fountain] is Robinson Iron: this fantastic ironmaker company that could build anything. They’re the one who bought the pattern - the patent of the [J.L] Mott [Iron Works] Foundry in New York - they’re doing all those little Victorian fountains all across the

country. And when we met them, they told us we could do anything. “OK, guys. We’ll come back.” [LAUGHTER] So they’re the ones who fabricated the whole thing.

The making of the fountain was quite an element of interest, because when we presented the 27 dogs that would shoot [water], and 27 different kinds of dogs, this woman just raised her hand. She said, “yeah, yeah, yeah, the dogs, the dogs. What about the cat? I’m a cat lady. Where’s the cats?” I said, “great idea. We’re going to add a cat into this.” But the interesting thing is the dogs look at the bone [at the top of the fountain], like an element of desire. But the poor cat; not interested in the bone. So, we had the cat turned away, looking at two Canadian warblers, bright yellow, standing on the light post, and there’s this *vis-à-vis* connection, which is quite clear. And the dogs are over there. The woman was, she said, thank you. And the bone is actually a real cow bone that was cast in Alabama.

We had a water bowl of fresh water at the foot [of the fountain] - because you go to the store, there’s always a little bowl of water for dogs. Well, we thought: “a fountain, we have fresh water for the dogs”. And so, they were so happy that we were taking care of them. The dogs, and kids go there, and it becomes a playground. They jump on the dogs. They sit on [them] . The dogs drink water. They [kids] go and pet them. Their mothers are talking to each other. The tourists come in, take pictures. It is such an amazing choreography. And on the fountain, we’ve used those dogs studs on collars - supersized - and did it all around of the two rims of the bowls. The dogs were made from dog figurines from a toy company [based] in Germany – we had the approval to duplicate them at the larger scale. We developed the casts. We got the

approval. They said, “it’s for children in the park; we approve. No money in return.” And so those dogs were designed to be able to pass a pipe into their legs with a nozzle in their mouth. Robinson Iron in Alabama- they were fantastic. Fantastic. We worked with Dan Euser, a fountain specialist; the guy did the 9/11 Waterwall in New York City. Fantastic team. Fantastic man. So, with all this, we created something that was new, and all of this worked beautifully. The guys in Alabama were geniuses. They loved working on it, because Mr. [Richard] Robinson said, “I love dogs. Love dogs. Everybody loves dogs.” So, we just - it brought such an amazing energy of our team of construction. Right? I remember Maurice, one of the contractors at Somerville [Alabama], was taking the cat out in the daytime and bringing it inside at night to protect it. He wanted the cat to see the sunlight. Anyway, it’s just these elements of pure joy in how people took care, and the notion of ownership, so big. The construction of this was amazing, amazing. People were engaged. They were having fun. And they were so proud of it. So, it was a unique experience. That’s what we brought to Love Park, with the same attitude of getting everybody charged, because they wanted to be part of that. So, it’s pretty outstanding. There’s also the issue of the paving that we’d used for this, triangular, pear-shaped [section] facing the St. Lawrence Theater [St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts] on the south side. And [the] Culture Department, once again, they said, “Your motif is too bold; can’t stand it.” I said, “too bad.” Go to your city all around. The old history, the old historical City Hall, a block away, on King Street, walk in the lobby and tell me what you think. The same pattern that we borrowed from them, from the City Hall, to bring into the public space.” They couldn’t say anything. So we did that. Right? Piazza San Marco in Venice - done with a bold pattern. What’s wrong [with] being bold in Toronto? Right? So again, we won our point. We built it. We have trees. It has 30

cubic meters of soil. Well, the trees are doing very, very, very well. So, it turned out to be a fantastic addition in the City of Toronto Parks portfolio of parks. People are loving it. Kids are loving it. Mothers are loving it. Strollers are loving it. There's buses of people and tourists to get out, and they go crazy when they see the fountain. And so, it's just amazing, I'm just hoping that the City of Toronto will take care of it. And they will not let it go to nothing - because it's such a good place for people. I'm already fighting to make sure that the dogs are being repainted. The water jets need to be adjusted. Just to keep the simple poetry of this. That will be a sad thing if they don't do it, because we worked so hard for them.

Berczy Park is a kind of a new type of park in the City of Toronto where we take this notion of humor, the William Whyte principle of creating a place that will bring a kind of a magic element. And I think it's a perfect example [of what] William Whyte was after, because this park is unique in itself. And it's so contextually fitting. Right? Invent something new. This dog fountain was something new. And [it has] the same composition of the park of 30 years ago, but, adapted for now. So, history is always an evolution. History is always part of the thing, but it's not a duplication. It's an invention that respects what it was and brings it further along. So, it was a great class for us - a great class of fighting for what we thought that the park would be, because when you do an RFP, they asked us to create and design something. Can we do it? Right? Let us do it. You do the bureaucracy. We're going to do the design. Don't worry about it. We'll deliver. We were in budget. We met everything. And it's a huge, huge, huge success. It always brings a smile on people's face. So, it was a, yeah, all the principles that we have in the

manifesto, many of those apply to that park, clearly. So yes, Berczy is a, it has a next 30 good years ahead of it. Maybe that's it after that, but it has a good new future, as it has a good past.

Enchanted Forest at Business Club

BIRNBAUM: Throughout your career, temporary art installations (at garden shows and urban environs) have been a big part of your work. What draws you to this type of work? You don't label these projects "art" or "design" tell us why.

CORMIER: As a student, or a fresh graduate of landscape architecture, you know our profession always lacked visibility. And in my sense of insecurity, I always wanted to be part of the game, and I wanted to be understood by my friends. Right? My friends were doing all different kinds of things. This is the years I was going out in clubs and loving it. "But what are you, a landscape architect? What does that mean?" So, it was always in the back of my head, I want to be hip. [LAUGHTER] The farm boy wants to be hip. Living in Toronto, living in Montreal, doing the club scene, and my boyfriend was in Montreal. Right? The bartender at Business Club, which was quite a big club. It's a kind of a Studio 54 that we had in Montreal for ten years. You [would] get picked at door if you're going to make it or not, right there. Right? The doorman decides who comes in and who does not. 500 people, huge - blocking the sidewalks, merging into the street, and you come in, wait two minutes, you, you, you, come in. Everybody is like this. Come in, come in.

Anyway, the owners were friends of mine, because the club was designed by Jacques Rousseau, an amazing professor of architecture at the University of Toronto and a kind of a free minded artist. And he designed a club by having installations change in the club every six months. They asked me if I would like to do an installation, and I said "yes". $25,000 or $40,000 budget. Nothing. Right? And this pretty groovy place. So, I decided to do it. And I want to be understood by what I do with my friends as a kind of a, not public artist, but as a creator. So, I came up with this idea that I would work with when I was young with my chain saw in the forest cutting trees, bringing logs that we would buy at the mill for not much, bring them in the city, and install them vertically in the forest as posts and creating a forest with real trees, real bark: rough, tough, can survive things. That's what we did. Based on this notion that in the forest, this is where you have Red Riding Hood, lots of bad wolves, or many red hoods, wolves, this notion of, right, the flirt, running home, overnight, overnight sex, and this kind of thing. Because that's what happened in those clubs - with amazing music. So, we did this installation with the chain and the background of my past, bringing into right downtown in the hottest club in Montreal. It worked beautifully. Beautifully. What an amazing experience of trusting your intuition. Right? Embrace your past. "It's OK. You're cool. You're cool. Don't worry about it." So, that led us eventually to Lipstick Forest. But not real trees. In this case, they were real, because it was cheap. It was all made, and then we're going to send them back to the mill, cost basically nothing. So, it was kind of a brilliant idea to start on.

Pink Balls / 18 Shades of Gay

CORMIER: So, this notion of temporary installation spoke to me, and we did Blue Stick [Garden] afterwards. Again, $25,000 budget: created the world. We had so [much] media on it. Right? And that brought us eventually, s later in the Village - when they asked us, "could you do an installation for Saint Catherine Street? But we have no money." [LAUGHTER] First year, I said, "no, not touching this, because: no money and, right, one kilometer to cover. You want something big? But no." So, during the year, we kept thinking, and I remember the treadmills at the gym - I got the a-ha moment. Plastic balls. They saved us at the Cornerstone [Sonoma, Festival of Gardens] a few years before. But they would not be blue. They'd be pink. On a string. When we did the blue ones, they came all on string, prearranged, cut, ready to install. So, the next year they came back, and I said, "yes, we're going to do it." So we came up with this idea of 200,000 balls on a string, pink, bought in China from the same company, toy factory, and they loved the idea. The city hated it. And they tried everything to kill it. And of course, we [needed] them to be Quebec built - no China. So, it's like, oh. [LAUGHTER] And basically derailed the plan. It means you have to do your own balls. You need to install them on the string yourself. And to install them with the same amount of money. Can't do this. We found a company in [UNINTELLIGBLE] outside Quebec City that they're going to build those balls for 25 cents each. Not eight. Different size. Different pink color. And we had the community at the Village to install them on a string. We had this fantastic guy who managed the whole thing to make it happen. All these women together, sitting and gossiping and knitting. Right? It was amazing. There were people working in stores, in restaurants, in clubs, who came and volunteered to do it. Took four months to assemble these things. Then assembled with a crane.

Designed and lined, [so that they could] be cut [in the event] of fire; the fire department went after us that this is not doable. And if you cut the thing, the whole thing doesn't plunge. So, we had to design a structural system with basically no engineer, because we didn't have things for an engineer. So, we had to pay for the engineer to do it. We installed them: first year it was great, but not that great. But it created a big impact. We were able to get the approval, finally, from the city, because we were not getting it, and then I called the city director, the number two. We need help here. Because we're not going anywhere. "You want something bold in the city? You think the City of Montreal is the city of design? We need help. We have no money. You don't give us any money. So give us at least approval." Right? Boy it's a little bit, "I don't care if we do this again. Because not knowing it, we're taking responsibility of it, which is not good." Young, and a little bit driven. So, we did this. We did year number two with no money. Approval again a nightmare. We did it for a few years. People on the ground loving it. The Village: loving it. Montreal Tourism: loving it. They changed the bus tour [routes] that they have tourists going in the city on a double decker, going into the Village. OK? They have money. They support it. But they're not giving us anything. So, I started to bark. [LAUGHTER] "Help us to help you." Got a little bit of money here, little bit of money. So we ended up doing it for six years. The pink period. And then people said, oh, we're tired of pink. OK. Frédéric Metz a professor at the School of Design and Communication, always said, stick with the same idea on public space. And all the store owners and people and say, "oh, we're sick of pink. Sick of pink. Give us something else." But pink was never an issue, by the way: for gender identification, all this. Never raised by anyone, which is great.

OK. Let's try something else. [LAUGHTER] We're going to keep the balls. And we thought that maybe we could bring the color of the [rainbow] flag. But the colors of the flag are not pastel. They're bright, solid, saturated color. Not nice color; ugly color, but solid. We're going to turn those bold colors into pastel. We're going to have a gradient of all those six colors, because then the flag was only six bands. Isn't it amazing? In five, six, seven years, all the color-coded elements that represent the LGBT or [UNINTELLIGIBLE] the name of it now with so many letters that no one can pronounce what it is. But we're only six colors. So, we took from "six" times "three", and ended up with eighteen colors, and we said, following the film "50 Shades of Grey", we would have eighteen shades of gay: "I am an asexual, I am a bisexual, I am lesbian." We're forcing this ability to change the numbers of type that exist within the culture of the LGBT. So that became *18 Shades of Gay*. We did drawings - [UNINTELLIGBLE] that was beautiful. Something that I thought would not be great - the kind of devolution, the second degree of representation of what everybody understood. We did that. We did some samples of the balls. And it was approved. With no more money. With the same amount of money. So, we did it. Boy, it was amazing. It almost looked like a velvet painting - when you were young, as a cheap representation of a painting on black velvet. Right? The color saturation in the sky with this pastel and the addition was so powerful. We did it to year number eight. And then we said, "we quit." We resigned. We would like to have other designers in the city express themselves in the Village and be other participants. "We're going to pass the baton to someone else." The mayor said, "there's no way you're going." I said, "why not? We've done it for eight years with no money. You want us to stay, you need to put money." So, she opened and gave money. We did one more year, and that was, I couldn't do it anymore. I did my share. Right? I'm nearly 60

years old. I am sure there will be others in the city that do it. And then it went all over the place. The BIA, the new director said, we're going to do a design international competition, not using Montreal brain. They went all over the world. They had 29 submissions. They didn't pick any. The cost of the competition was bigger than the budget that we had per year. Hm. Pretty good management. Right? So, I said, I'm so glad I'm out of here. [LAUGHTER] And four years later, nothing has happened yet. And the Village is not doing well. It needs attention. It needs a bit of love. It's socially very difficult with the street people, with the drugs, with the prostitution and street violence and the homelessness. It breaks my heart. But we did that in a different time, using the Jane Jacobs principle of adding community, loving its community, having people in the community involved, doing their own self-security, looking out for each other. And the Balls did that. By the way that we assembled it, by the way that we constructed it. Springtime's coming: the Balls are coming. It was pretty powerful. We built a bold identity in gay tourism in Montreal. Montreal Tourism used it, all over the world, to attract gay tourists to Montreal. This project could bring money. But no one in it, in the management of it made it happen. It's not me the designer that would start to do that. It's not my role [to make it happen.] There are so many possibilities for young people to have a huge contribution - creating teams, - some people are good at raising money - Some people are good at bringing people, building a team. That could be Montreal driven. [We] would have our own talent, our own culture. I don't think having someone from New York or someone from Paris, huge plane ticket costs to come and do it. We don't have the money. And I think Montreal - we could do our own self.

They didn't understand that. They thought they were a world-class institution because we got worldwide attention. They missed the boat. And they killed it, on their own fault. But that's why after nine years, we, it was time to go. But so glad we did it. And that taught us so many things. And then The Ring came. [LAUGHTER] These little temporary installations in my whole career were essential. They were not Three Ps. [LAUGHTER] Some of them were Two Ps. Some were one P. But within a range of projects, you can have two or three of these like this, as a kind of a social commitment, giving back to our community, to our city, to a cause. And we all have to do this. We all need to contribute. So that's been major. Major projects for us are learning [opportunities], testing ideas, and once again, we bring value big time. Big time. When you understand that, then you can start negotiating and being a little bit more demanding to help, more return. So, it's a kind of a win/win condition. And when it's not there, time to go. So, it was a nice trip.

National Holocaust Monument

CORMIER: I got a call from [architect] Daniel Libeskind asking us to join his team to do the competition for the Holocaust Memorial in Ottawa, for the Canadian [Holocaust] survivors that came to Canada. I said, "Daniel, there's no way I'm going to touch this. I'm a Catholic boy. There's so many of you as architects - Jewish - that know what it's all about. I would be honest: I do not. So, I'm not doing this. So, thank you very much. But I would bring nothing to your team. He called back the next day. He said, "Claude, I'm asking you again to join the team." He said, "you bring light. I'm the darkness. We need light in this. And I think you could do it." We have a consultant working with us, Professor Doris Bergen at the University of Toronto.

Amazing woman. You're going to love her. She's going to drive us. She's going to direct us." I said, "I'm going to do this, but you need to know that I may not give you any points for your competition. So, if you want to do it, we're going to go for the ride." So, we entered the competition. I brought on my team this German woman: Nicole [*last name?*], who's fantastic. And I wanted her to work on it, because she's the right one. But I said, we're going to have a German woman on our team. He loved that. He said, "yes, absolutely." We met. It was so easy. What a fantastic man. His team; him as a person. Talking about his experience as a Poland guy, lived it, went through it, and I have to say that a few years before, I went to the Jewish Museum in Berlin. This is the most, this is the highest experience I had in a building. I loved it so much. I don't know much about it. I had this visceral experience entering the building right to the end. It was so powerful - that architecture spoke to me big time. I said, "Daniel, you're a master. You're more than a master. You can translate horror into physical experiential element as you enter the building. We don't need anything on the wall. The building is so, so poignant."

We had on our team [photographer] Ed Burtynsky. Wow. I'm going to cry, sorry. What an amazing man. We had a meeting, the three of us. Boy, I'll remember [it] forever: Pure, I don't know, the mood, what it was, but it was so, I could say anything, and I wasn't afraid of it. And Doris Bergen was making the adjustments, the kind of editing. She was phenomenal.

The concept of the project; it's pretty simple and straightforward. A real Daniel Libeskind. [He] used the most iconic element that represents Jewish culture: the Star of David, the star with six different points, supersized. This started creating the kind of disequilibrium that he does with

his walls that are so unique. So, the star becomes dramatic. It could become that you end up in a kind of a darkness moment or set up for light. He said, “pick up the light.” [LAUGHTER]

OK. So that’s what we did. Two ground planes, one ascending towards the light, one descending into the ground plane. Three at the table [for], fifteen minutes. Clear. We knew what to do. The light, the darkness, and representations of tableaus in different settings. All made of concrete - and a little bit of struggling vegetation around [it]. So that was the straightforward concept that we all worked with. Daniel’s team ran with it. And then Ed and us added to it. It was great. But it was really a Daniel Libeskind driven project. We just followed him, and Doris Bergen was our advisor all the way along to make sure that we were coherent and complementary to what Daniel was doing. Fantastic. It was great. What a magical project. Humble without being humbled. So yeah, there’s so many architects, I mean, they didn’t know what we were doing there. But I think we delivered it quite well, with the master. What a master. What a professor. He’s a professor. Right? It was such a joy to work with him. And Burtynsky as well. Boy, it’s amazing how these big, big, masters are just standard people.

It’s clear. I think. Daniel is loved, but also not loved, because he did the museum, the ROM, the Royal Ontario Museum. That has not been well-understood by the general public. But he did what the OCAD [Ontario College of Art & Design University] building [the Sharp Centre for Design by architect Will] Alsop- did. [Libeskind and Alsop] brought architecture into the foreground of the city, and people could talk and have opinion on architecture. That’s pretty

amazing. To make architecture for the general public existing in a city. Wow. I think he's an amazing and a huge player in the City of Toronto.

We won the competition, out of 75 or 79 teams internationally. We built it. Ed Burtynsky went to Auschwitz, took photographs of basements, of train tracks, of [concentration] camps, that still exist as remnants. He brought them back. And he said, we're going to [have] four or five of these huge photographs printed on concrete. We realized in the process of the making, that duplicating photograph on concrete wall takes the whole budget. [LAUGHTER] Once again, value engineering: This man came up with this idea that we would paint it. He got it with all the tone of black to gray to white: dotted. You see on the monument these exact photographs duplicated by an artist who painted it. Amazing. Amazing. Daniel is a genius. The whole experience was so beautiful, and I thought it was something that we could not do. But we brought light in this moment of darkness. - Those people are still alive. They're not dead. So, it cannot just be – there should be also some moment of relief. And that's what Libeskind allowed us to do in the composition. It's a beautiful monument. I think it speaks for itself. It's worth the visit.

I had to do the press conference, because Libeskind missed the plane in Ottawa. Can you believe it? I did the press conference, me. Catholic boy. I did very well. Doris [Bergen] was fantastic. She prepared me. She coached me. I thought it was something I would never be able to do, and I did it. Because I don't know what, I got into that mood, and I am a sponge, and I take it, and it becomes - at the moment, who I am. Totally invested in the project. Amazing.

When we presented to the NCC [National Capital Commission], design review board, this woman, the bureaucrat, started reviewing the PowerPoint presentation. And she said, "take this out, take this out, take this out." I said, "you've got to be kidding. I'm not doing a presentation. It's our project, no bureaucrat tells us what we're going to say. You want to do it? I'm not doing this." I cancelled the meeting. We won this competition worldwide. "Don't tell me what to say and what not to say." So offended. Anyway, the bureaucracy always come in. Boy, we need to defend and fight and pick your ground. She said, "I'm going to lose my job." It was pretty intense I thought, "just hold on." I cannot. You tell us to design something that is unique. And now you're going to start editing it. No. And [you] don't speak to Daniel? Right? You start with the landscape architect because you think he's soft. No. So anyway, and once again, there's always this roller coaster. You need to be clear and defend your ground.

The Ring at Place Ville Marie

CORMIER: When we were asked to do a piece at Place Ville Marie, they wanted us to create the Place Marie, which was done by [architect] Henry Cobb in the '60s, which is 60 years ago, and the client had just refurbished the whole development with $200 million. At the end, the art curator thought something was missing in the project. She said, "let's get Cormier and his team to create a piece that will somehow bring the whole ensemble together. He's going to do it." Oh, we had to do a piece that was floating in the air, because on the couloir - McGill College, flanked by two buildings by Cobb, 30 meters apart, 30 meters tall, and open space - to do a piece that floats, "don't touch the architecture, because we just finished the construction of it,

and don't touch the membrane and the stone." This is all to be approved by the [UNINTELLIGBLE] - we're not going back. OK. But don't touch the ground, because it's under construction, and we're going to finish in six months, and this has to be completed. You want to do it?" [LAUGHTER] "Hmm, not sure." [LAUGHTER] "Because I can't make something float in there." They say, "try. We believe that your brain will be able to come up with something." Of course, we did. It took - it was easy. It took us a week. We created this element that would be in a total opposition and of integration, because I can't stand it. Cobb works on the grid. Everything is square. Everything is framing. Right? Everything is . . . it's a pure modernist - and we have a window 30 meters, 30 meters of perfect square overlooking to the mountain [Mount Royal], Olmsted - pretty good. We knew that this visual corridor was protected, that you cannot do anything there. I liked that. Right? [LAUGHTER] "Don't you dare." OK. So, we just basically did a ring, of 30 meters dimension that would fit perfectly, touching lightly the building, not the ground, but just floating. And it would bow underneath if it was Frank Lloyd Wright. And you have the vision of the McGill corridor, with the university, and Olmsted with the white cross that is the identity of the city. Wow. We could enter 200 years of historic development of what McGill College is, and that's real symmetry of Montreal. So, we knew we had an amazing idea. How do you make a ring suspended in the air? We wanted stainless steel. We wanted it to be beautifully made. But we were not touching the building. But how do you hold it? We worked with the same engineer who designed Place Ville Marie 60 years ago: Franz Knoll - fantastic man, fantastic man. We were in the meeting - we presented it to the client. They loved it. They wanted it. We were starting COVID. So, it was kind of a difficult, a new way of working - We cannot have meetings. And I said to the client, "if we don't have the person meeting, I'm not

presenting you the idea. I want to see your face, your body language, and then I would know if you really like it or not." We had to get approval, but I said, "that's a deal. I'm not presenting it through a Zoom. Sorry." So, we were here downstairs, and we presented three ideas. When we presented that, they were all like - their mouths were open. Perfect. That's what we're going to do. But how are we going to do it? I don't know. And we got this engineer with us, and we built an amazing team of consultants, amazing. All working with the same vision. People got it. And instead of being six months later, three years later we were able to deliver it. The cost exploded. The feasibility? Anyway, it was just COVID. Right? But the idea was simple. The site was complex. But these two things, seems that The Ring now, when you look at it, it floats. Right? And then we were able to define the whole solution to make it work and happen. And I think this new piece of art at Place Ville Marie does what they wanted: creates something that would bring the whole hood together, simply, but powerfully. So simple, but not simple.

BIRNBAUM: I think just the idea that you're putting up, you're lovingly putting a frame on Olmsted? I mean, so you're putting a ring on Olmsted. [LAUGHTER] And so, I feel like we need to sort of bring Olmsted into the conversation. You know, it's funny. When we did the oral history with Stu Dawson, he said, "I go through life. I have Hid [Sasaki] on one shoulder, and Pete [Walker] on the other. And I looked to them, when I'm alone, and I ask them questions. And I think what would Pete do? What would Hid do?" Right? So, we talked about Martha. We've talked about Olmsted. They're both here. I see them.

Cormier: Yeah. I think it's, yeah. I think The Ring is quite interesting, looking back at it my two mentors are here: Martha [Schwartz], with the bold unintegrated language, but at the same time, fitting in. And then Papa in the background. The mountain defines Montreal. Right? Olmsted has brought something to Montreal that is unique. The mountain is so revered by everybody. And I, at the beginning, when we were starting to work and create, came up with an idea - we knew it was there, but we didn't know how to be part of it. And then we did this, when we did the circle, the background became [integrated] in the composition, and all in between [has] its own identity- and that's Montreal, right? We have to understand that McGill College Avenue was protected by Madame Lambert, because her brother, who is a developer, wanted to build on that avenue 30 years ago. Madame stood up and said, "There's no way we're going to do this in my city. Put it anywhere else, but not there." She fought, fought, fought, and won it. So, Phyllis [Lambert] [was instrumental] making [McGill College Avenue] an avenue in Montreal.

While we were developing the concept [of The Ring], I thought that the avenue, McGill College Avenue, should be named "Avenue Phyllis Lambert." Because she just gelled those 200 years of history together. But I was told, "Claude, don't go there. It's going to be more difficult getting it [renamed] than [getting The] Ring built. So, I'm just saying that today; because I believe that history is built over time, and by passing the baton, maybe to someone else. I still believe that it should be Avenue Phyllis Lambert. I may not make that happen, because first she has to be deceased for five years. And she's still on. Madame is still on. So, I may go before her. Right? [LAUGHTER] But I would like someone else to do that in the future. Because Phyllis Lambert is a

huge, huge player in Montreal. She gave us so much preservation in architecture. She gave us the CCA - that could be New York City. It's in Montreal. Right? She believed in Montreal. She loved Montreal. So, something important needs to be named after her. Avenue Phyllis Lambert.

The Ring bookends the south side [of the avenue] with the mountain [on the] north side. So, the Ring brings this union between these two elements. And The Ring is also the location of where the REM, [Réseau Express Métropolitain] the new transportation - the new train that is being developed currently by Caisse de dépôt [et placement du Québec], enters into the station right underneath. And Place Ville Marie is also the beginning of the whole downtown business development area. So, it has many connotations as bringing things together, that unify things as a kind of a symbolic element. The Ring is really powerful in many, many, many aspects. And that's why the approval of it was quite easy, actually. The easiest approval in my whole career. So easy that I thought, "is that good? Is it good enough? It's too easy." I got really concerned because we always get "No, no, no, no no." Right? And here, poof, "go, do it." But then they were, they came back with a lot of things. But it was not luck. It was widely accepted, and [the culture department] was excited about it. OK? So that's why I was worried, a little bit, for a while, not long. But yeah.

BIRNBAUM: How was The Ring fabricated and installed?

CORMIER: Two placed on one side, two placed on the other. Where the columns and floor come together- strangling it. The whole thing becomes so stable. We had to take one row of

stones out of the building. We had to change the building's mechanicals because they were within the column. It became extremely complex. So, the budget exploded, exploded. And we don't do any of these things. I'm a landscape architect. Right? But my team is fantastic with consultants. It was great. The client wanted it. But during the process of it, I also learned that we as designers, we can't take all the risk. These big companies, these big developers, they always do risk management. And then you realize, slowly [that] they give you all the risk, and they make sure they're clear - protected, and you're in a wagon. Whoa. Not doing this. We're going to share the risk. I can't. "It's your Ring. It's not my Ring." So, we had to be really out there to protect ourselves, to protect The Ring, and I would not take all the risk, because I'm not paid for that. And if there's money missing, we will find it - because on a 50 development of this, that's a no-brainer. Don't tell me that the money that we have is the only thing that we have, and you can't make it. Because you have equity.

So, it was great. We had a fantastic client, and they got it. And they said, "Claude, we hear you. We're going to order the steel." I said, "thank you," right? [LAUGHTER] So within all this, it's not just art. There is a business lesson, right? Artists, architects, landscape architects, need to keep their territory clear, and we're not at the mercy of everybody else. They all want to make money. You know what? - Me, too. So, then there's a whole negotiation. I wished I had learned those lessons earlier on, because I can negotiate - because I bring value. And the value builder in the city for all you guys. So, remember that. Right? I'm not just someone that you push, and you're going to milk me out. So, this is the - [LAUGHTER] and now I think, this is the part I love in a project. Make sure that we're going to get paid, because we also need profit in order to

exist. We need profit to do research on projects. And you wait. At the end, you win. So, it's a win/win condition. So, it's quite interesting in the development of my career. Essential. Essential, and I think I taught that to my group, and I am so happy. Like, "you want us? We're not cheap." If the project is interesting, we have no time to waste. And if the people that run it are with us, and share the risk, and get us as a team, I don't want to fight with[them]. If we do, I'm out. So, this is the Bruce Mau lesson: You pick a project with the Three Ps. The project: is it interesting? The people in it? And if there's any profit for us. If there's only two of the three, think about it. Do you want to do it? Basically, you need the three Ps. And with this, Bruce [Mau] was always saying this is how you're going to build a solid practice. And I really, really believe it.

Love Park

CORMIER: Love Park. Another design competition. You have to know that I'm competitive. When we decide to enter a competition, it's because we want it. [LAUGHTER] Right? And we do everything to do it. We do our best. We get a brain. We're trying to be succinct, to be clear. Love Park happened when a big tragic event happened in the city north of Young Street, where eleven people were killed by a mad driver overrunning them on the sidewalks. And this illustration on *Toronto Life* magazine's cover. It was beautiful: an arial view of Young Street looking down to the waterfront, having hearts drawn on the street; big red hearts [drawn] by hand, on this arial photo. Oof. That was a solution for Love Park. Love in our city. A mood of love. A park with a mood. We found a photo of a park in Japan, you know, a photo of the mountain, a lake in the shape of a heart in the forest. There you go. The City of Toronto, day

one at the presentation of the project, Janie [Romoff] the park director, said "we want a green oasis". So, that's what we did. We did an oasis of green, sustainable, draining into itself as a sponge, not depending on the urban infrastructure around. We would be autonomous. We designed that with Arup, a fantastic water management plan. We were keeping all of our own water, and not discharging into the system. We created this water basin as big as we could, bigger than an Olympic swimming pool. And we stretch it, stretch it, stretch it, 55 meters diameter, taking basically all over the park. Saint-Germain in Paris - big water pond. People sitting next to it, spending the whole afternoon in there. If it's good for Paris, I think it's good for Toronto. So, we did this, almost tacky as a thing. Right? Kind of a where tacky becomes real or not real. So, we said, yeah, it's a bit tacky. But we love it. We want to make sure that this mood of love will be clear and understood. It needs to scream out. We have towers all around the park, 75 stories. One is 90 story. People overlooking down with an amazing view of the park on the waterfront next to the lake. So, we were designing it for these people in the tower. We were designing it for the ground plane. We were designing it for the waterfront. But we were designing it with something that would be unique, like Berczy [Park], like Sugar Beach. We were not copying them. We're going to invent something new, based on love, bringing people together when atrocity happened in the city. It's pretty good to get all together in a space that has a good mood. We did this in Montreal when there was an attack in Orlando, when this mass murder that happened in a night club, that night when it happened over there, everybody was under the Balls in Montreal, because it was something that would bring people together in the sense of being. Public spaces have power. This is when I did a seminar with Gina Ford at the ASLA [Annual Conference] about the notion of hope in public space. Love is not tacky. Love is

essential. And we're going to be bold about it. And the rim of [the water basin], all around it. It's this red tile, like Park Güell in Barcelona. And that will be timeless. Love is not strong enough? Let's make sure it's there, like bright red, as an outstanding color in the winter under the snow, with the snow and all this. But the notion of what the water is, that was completely done because of hygiene in the city: skating [or] no skating? So, we decided no skating. We don't have the budget for this. We have very, very little budget. So that was in our favor, that we were not going to do a Zamboni and all that kind of stuff and that, so it just became a simple water basin, like in Paris. We won the competition. And took over two years. Two years of approval with Waterfront. Waterfront [Toronto] are amazing, but they're very specific about things. So, we worked with them. We did every aspect of it. We had the structure done by gh3* - Pat Hanson, with this kind of green gazebo. We got the BIA to give us furniture, and we'd say, "we will not attach them. They're going to be free." So slowly and slowly, we thought, OK, maybe we could do a little bit of Canadian fauna moment, not knowing that it would become the public art. We casted eleven, ten or eleven animals of Canadian, the Canadian fauna catalogs. Like we have a beaver, we have a wolf, we have a *raton laveur,* we have squirrels dispersed into the park for children to jump and play with it. So, you need to find them in the park. That was a donation by the BIA, and they're all cast beautifully. They're not painted. Knowing that Berczy would have to repaint the dogs at some point, and that may never happen, so let's not go there. They're cast bronze. And so, the park is a composition of all these little elements: long bench; the park not over lit; with a romantic quality. At dusk, it's so nice. People are using the park. They come with their partner, or they come alone. They sit. They contemplate. It's so amazing. Right? Loitering in the park. What a great thing. The grading, like

[Adolphe] Alphand: hide the background of the cars. You just see the top. You see into the park. You're safe. You're secure. Not too much horticulture, because it may not be taken care of. And added 47 trees, not overly planted, shade, shade, sun, sun. This composition opened and protected. We have a dog park as an independent thing because it was a request from the hood. A standard dog park, not reinvented: the classic. Works beautifully. We opened the park in June, two months ago. Big success. Big success. But it's not ours anymore. It's for the city. Once again, my hope is that they will take good care of it. But they were so, so engaged by it. They've been great. With the waterfront, they've been fantastic. The contractor was the same at Berczy Park. It's a public bid procurement, fully transparent. They did magic. What amazing to work with people that you love.

The amazing part of this is that we did value journey all the way along, because it was done with a very small budget, $10 million. I think we did magic. But we did it with love. And it comes out so strongly. So, love is not tacky. [LAUGHTER] Love is huge. We need this in our cities. And I think it does exude it beautifully.

Chateau Noir

BIRNBAUM: Chateau Noir? How did it come to be? And what is its role in your personal and professional life?

CORMIER: I guess the Chateau Noir is the beginning of my next profession, next career and my next life: a developer. [LAUGHTER] Because we worked with so many developers, and boy, these guys; they have these nerves made of steel, I have to say.

But when I was at the GSD, Jennifer Luce, my classmate, an architect in La Jolla, she said like this one day, she said, "oh, I hope one day I would be able to live in the house that represents my value." Hm. What are my values? [LAUGHTER] What does that mean? And two years later, I went to a house opening of my friend, Jacques Bilodeau, this conceptual space maker. I walk into this building, and I was struck by a house, a type that I had never seen before. It's not a loft. It's not an open space. It is a fabrication of instability and miscomfort. [LAUGHTER] Right? Boy, that spoke to me. And so, I met Jacques - fantastic guy, ten years older than me. A guy, a complex, rich individual, but with a sensibility that artists have. And anyway, Jacques and I had a fantastic fit. I said, "Jacques, one day I want a house by you." He found me this building, where we are, that was a little shack of a contaminated garage. And I bought the thing. And I said, "Jacques, let's do this. Let's do this adventure together. I'm your client. You're my architect." So, we started that. It was a beautiful, beautiful collaboration. We worked like this. And we created this landscape in the house. It's a building that was contaminated that needed to be excavated. So, without a basement, but with a half basement, and when it was decontaminated, he said, "there's no way we're going to fill up that space." And he started playing with ramps. And having enough space that you could have a kind of a double story in there, and the ramps that would open up and then close. And being able to hide or reveal. And Jacques was a fan of Claude Parent, a French architect who worked *de oblique*. That was his

whole thing. Not the horizon, the oblique, the notion of not comfortable, but being aware of this space, body and space. This is when I understood that concept that we talked about so much in school: body and space. What does that mean? This notion of the instability and, right, you just need to be involved within the space. So, we designed that. We built it. It was just a one level bunker. A few years later, I wanted to get a bigger office, because our office was next door in a little - half of the building went to the house, and the other half was the office, but it became too small. So, my reference had always been Martha Schwartz [who] lived and worked in the same space. And as a kind of a little developer in me, say "it's great that we just need to take one rent and give it to the pocket, and then we start building a whole thing". So, I never paid rent in my whole life for office space. So, then Jacques, step number two, let's do a couple of more steps on the building. So, then we had developed the office on the second floor, and three units for rental. So, the whole building paid for itself, completely. So never, it was a good business development element, which I enjoyed, because I watched developers going, and they're smart people. So, taking this as a lesson, a business class, was very effective. My accountant would disagree. And I told him, I'm doing it. Best decision ever. Right? So, then the house starts to keep growing. And the office was on the second floor, and tenants, and an amazing roof space. And I've been here for over 25 years. Now again, the notion of instability within my new life condition. It's a big challenging. But anyway, that's something else that I will have to address. But I love this house. I love the kind of instability that it always provided me. "Don't fall asleep, boy. Just stay active and be involved." Right? So, anyway so Chateau Noir has been an amazing, a little machine where I had all my life, and when this notion of work and play and live, now with the bigger redevelopment, that happened here. I live, I work, and I play

within the whole same space, which is very in sync with the reality of development. But the difference here - it has something unique. Design about, it's not a piece of design. I think it's a piece of art, because there's so many things not working. [LAUGHTER] But that's what I love about the house. I never cursed about it. But when you design a piece as an element of art, it's not something that's been predesigned and done fifteen or 100 times. This is false. But that's an element that one day I leant my house to an art curator, and he said, "Claude, your house is a piece of art, because not everything is working." [LAUGHTER] Right? It's unique. it's not a piece of design. It's a piece of art. And yeah, so I'm trying to keep it as a canvas, and take an authentic piece as an element, and it's part of who I am. And it was the best decision I made, and yes, the house reflects my value. But this notion of play in my life is also a kind of a thing. As I was a young boy merging the farm with the element of working but not working, but cutting [UNINTELLIGBLE] that were in the forest, clear and creating the beauty and all that kind of stuff. I think in my life, the notion of traveling has done that. And fantastic. Right? Explore new cities, explore different environments, but I like cities that I can relate to. . . For example, I spent two weeks in Copenhagen. Well, now you understand transportation. You understand bikes in the street. But I can never leave work behind me. It's a bit in the series of *Emily in Paris*, right, that little Emily, that Chicago girl, that moved to Paris, and we always say, stop working. But she's always working. It's a bit like me. Because when I'm in those cities, I always look at things. I love looking and being an observer, voyeurism. Right? Observe how and what things are, and why am I feeling good here? What is so fantastic? Why is that? And spending time to look at things. So, I'm like Emily. [LAUGHTER] I can't stop it. And that's been my life. My only, not deception, but not regrets, I wish I had more time in my life, that I could do it now. Just for

pleasure. Not to return it in a kind of a project that we could make better. Stop it. Right? Just enjoy the ride. And that's something I still have to learn, because I'm too much of a super "Type A". I worry, but I'm a planner, and this is kind of a combination of things. I'm always foreseeing, OK, what's next? But then at the same time, trying to pay attention and bring the baggage that I could use into a project. Finished. Just enjoy the city.

Looking back at my life a little bit - I have done that, and I'm still doing it. One interesting thing that I remembered as a young professional, I always wanted to be famous. Very interesting. That was somehow written somewhere. That was my wishes. But I didn't care about money. Right? And I think reading and getting all the letters and the email and texts that that I've been getting within the last few months, wow, I realized through those readings, that I think I'm going to leave something behind. Which I didn't think so. But boy, it's amazing, the love that I receive from all my colleagues in the world, my family, my friends, about this notion of love in what I have left on the site and being able to somehow have a first look at the profession. I never thought I would do this in my life. But these mentors, like Martha [Schwartz], Olmsted, huge. Huge. And my father said, just be yourself. Right? So, I think I could have a small regret, but that's OK. I think it's, I am a content man, happy, and at peace. So, it's awesome. Life has been great. My life has been generous, totally privileged. I had a privileged life, but I worked. It was not free for me. It was not free, thinking of the day that my dad passed away, boy, that was difficult. Right? Seventeen, a farm on your hand, with your brother at fifteen, and I remember the day that he died, August 26. I was starting [UNINTELLIGBLE] in pure science. I look at the clock then, and I remember clearly, I said, well, your life is starting. But I had a fantastic life.

Fantastic life. Involved, and lots of generosity around me. And just be yourself. But it takes a while, but I'm, yeah, there's nothing more I could ask. So, thanks. Thank you.