

## TRANSCRIPT

**SCRC Series:** Lewis Clarke Oral Histories Project – MC 00191

**Field Notes:** Donald L. Collins (compiled May 4, 2012)

**Interviewee:** DONALD L. (“DON”) COLLINS

**Interviewer:** Yona R. Owens

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**Location:** Raleigh, North Carolina

**Length:** Approximately 138 minutes

YO: Today is Friday, April 27, 2012. My name is Yona Owens and I’m interviewing Don Collins in Raleigh, North Carolina for the Lewis Clarke Oral Histories Project. Don graduated from North Carolina State University School of Design in 1968 with a degree in landscape architecture and he earned his master’s from Harvard Graduate School of Design in 1969. Over the last four decades he has run two, if not three, illustrious careers simultaneously. In addition to awards earned over the more than thirty years as a volunteer firefighter, Don was accepted as an ASLA fellow in 2003, and in 2006 he received the Jot D. Carpenter Teaching Medal. Don, thank you for agreeing to be interviewed today.

Don Collins: I’m glad to be here.

YO: To start us off tell me a little bit about where you’re from and what kinds of interests you had when you were growing up.

DC: I grew up in Charlotte, North Carolina. I’m the son of a professional firefighter, which explains that firefighting connection, and my grandfather was a builder and a developer of land. I think those two things influenced me probably the most. I think I was a landscape architect at age six but I didn’t know that’s what you called it. I can vividly recall that my grandfather was one of these builders that didn’t waste stuff. He brought materials back to a yard behind the house and it had a very fine gravel in it, and I would take those scraps of wood and blocks and things and make villages and roads and connect roads to villages and so on. I think today OSHA, Occupational Safety, would have a conniption with the idea of me playing in the work yard, but that was my play lot because my mother kept my grandfather’s books. She was his bookkeeper. So, it went from there.

I got into the Eagle Scouts. I’ve always been an outdoor person and an active person. I don’t understand people who say they’re bored. There’s too much to do and experience. But I think those were the primary things. I did like to draw, I did like to make things and create things. I’m a bit dyslexic and reverse numbers and “bs” and “ds” and things like that, so I ran into math in the fifth grade, long division. I understood the concept, but often had the wrong answer and back then if the answer was wrong no one made any effort to find out where along the string of long division you’d made a mistake, so anything to do with math or physics—

So, I gravitated toward the more creative things. I loved creative writing; I loved any kind of art classes. I’d rather draw you the answer than mathematically model the answer. Then along the way, I got interested in cars and car design and things like that as well. I discussed briefly going to Art Center School in Los Angeles, California to study transportation design. I remember

vividly a conversation with my mother and she says, well, if that's what you want to do we'll figure out somehow how to make it work financially, but you realize if you have that kind of degree there aren't many places you could work. If you had a degree in some other kind of design field you can work anywhere. And that made a lot of sense to me. Then I talked to a high school counselor and I described to her some of the things that I was interested in, and I can remember being fascinated with roads that were changed and there was the old bridge and there was the new bridge and things like that, and she says, oh, well, that's civil engineering. And I was like, no. [Laughs]

YO: [Laughs]

DC: I couldn't do that. So, I actually then went into the military out of high school, about six months out of high school, and I had a job that was extremely intense for about four hours a day, and then the rest of the four hours was down time. It was like an 8 to 5 job. So, I started visiting the base library.

YO: Wait a minute, what was the job?

**05:02**

DC: I was the flight simulator operator and we flew a classified mission. So, I would brief the pilots on the mission. In the simulators, we had flight engineers and instructor flight engineers and instructor pilots. I wasn't either of those. I was enlisted, they were officers, but I monitored the route that they flew and it was to ensure that they stayed in line, and then would tell them—

YO: And this was during the Vietnam War period.

DC: Yes. It was during the Vietnam—

YO: Just to put a context on it.

DC: It was actually slightly before that. Vietnam was ramping up about '65 and I actually got out of the military in August of '63 in terms of active duty and then started school.

YO: So, you went to the base library.

DC: Right. Well, I actually had started, out of not wanting to be bored in the evening, Furman University had a program and I started doing that. I barely graduated from high school, by the way. I was one of those kids that kind of hit a wall about the end of the tenth grade, and it was boring, and I just spent more time with my friends and fooling with cars and girls and that sort of thing. Back then you had to have fifteen or sixteen units to graduate and I had sixteen, but a typical student going to college would have twenty-one or twenty-two units. My tenth grade English teacher said I'm giving you a "D" so I don't have to teach you again. [Laughs]

YO: [Laughs] That was encouraging.

DC: Yes. So, I went to Furman and made an "A," so the incredible programs that the faculty at Furman had, you know, I thought well, I can do college. This proves it.

So, then I went to the base library and started looking at college catalogs and found architecture and I thought about my grandfather and [how] I used to go in his basement and look at the plans and things. So, I picked architecture, not realizing that when he built something I was more fascinated by the streets and the roads and the neighborhoods he built. Like Midwood Park in Charlotte. He gave that to the city. It was part of one of his developments. I can remember his sons thought he was nuts using that land for a park and he said it'll make those houses sell, that kind of attitude.

But I didn't know about landscape architecture. So I found architecture and actually enrolled in Furman University because I had been transferred from South Carolina to Illinois and when I got up there they didn't need me. I mean seriously, they didn't need me so that was idle time in the military, and that's not bad because when you have something like the Cuban Missile Crisis when I was not working four hours a day, but almost twenty-four hours a day you understand why you have excessive players in the military.

But anyway, I ran into a guy and he says, you know, since you're not doing anything you ought to go ahead and seek an early discharge to go back to college. And I said I didn't know there was such a program and he said, yeah, if you get accepted they'll let you out. So I was actually due to get out in January, but I got separated from active service in August in order to go to Clemson in architecture. I had been stationed near Clemson and knew about Clemson and my wife had the opportunity to go back and have the same position that she had when we transferred away from the Clemson area. We were stationed at Donaldson Air Force Base nearby. So that's why we went to Clemson. And my first year at Clemson one of the first lecturers that came was Dan Kiley.

YO: Whoa.

DC: And I was like, whoa.

YO: [Laughs]

DC: That was exactly my reaction. I'm like, holy smokes. Here's something that looks more interesting to me than architecture. Now I'm in a dilemma, what do I do, because Clemson didn't have a—

YO: Not at the time.

DC: In South Carolina they would send you to the horticulture program and then to a master's at Georgia or somewhere else. So, I began to look at that and I also began to look at the financials. Tuition at NC State was a hundred and twenty-eight dollars a semester.

YO: Oh my gosh.

DC: And tuition at Clemson was three hundred and fifty-eight dollars a semester because I was out-of-state.

YO: Right.

**09:59**

DC: And I thought, hmm, well, they have a landscape architecture program at NC State, so I applied for a transfer admission to NC State. But I still wasn't quite sure. NC State had a common first year and then you had a semester of architecture in second year and a semester of landscape architecture. So, I arranged to take the semester of landscape architecture under Bob Phillips first and make sure this is—and after that semester it was like, oh, this is what I want to do.

YO: That was it, huh.

DC: Then I had Larry Wodehouse for the architecture section. I don't know whether you remember him.

YO: I know his name.

DC: I think he went on to Tennessee after that year. So that's how I got to landscape architecture. It wasn't some light bulb turned on someplace till I got to Kiley, and I was already in college, so Dan Kiley was—

YO: Do you remember something he said that was the key to it, some little word that said, oh, this is a remarkable profession?

DC: No, not particularly, I just remember the images of the things, I mean the idea of taking a house or a building and finding elements within that and extending those into the landscape so that there was an engagement between dwelling or structure and land. I had just never—I think I probably was aware of it, but I'd always assumed that the architects had done that. I didn't realize it was a profession.

What's really fascinating is in early April, they had the dedication of the addition called, Lee III at Clemson. The design architect was Tom Phifer from New York City, who was an architecture student that I taught at Clemson, and he showed a project, and he said this is the last project Dan Kiley ever did. How about that?

YO: Wow.

DC: And he talked again. Tom used the term of landscape architecture over and over again in his projects, talking about the idea of wedding the two together. But I was really struck with the fact that Dan Kiley, who had influenced me so much, and Tom saying Dan Kiley had influenced him so much as an architect. So, that was pretty remarkable. Tom Phifer also did the Art Museum here in Raleigh. That's the same architect.

YO: Oh really?

DC: Yeah.

YO: Okay.

DC: That's who I'm talking about.

YO: Oh, that's right. Well, the landscape architecture faculty members while you were in school were Richard Moore, Gil Thurlow, Lewis Clarke, Bob Phillips, and Wayne Maynard and—

DC: Dan Young.

YO: Dan Young?

DC: Mm hmm.

YO: Oh, I didn't know that.

DC: Yes.

YO: Well, tell me about Dan Young then. I don't know who he is.

DC: Dan came in I believe the same year that Wayne Maynard did, and one of the reasons you probably may not know about Dan is he died quite young with a rare blood disease, in his probably early forties. [Pulls out a booklet] Stone Mountain, here in North Carolina?

YO: Right.

DC: This is the project that we did with Dan and that—

YO: This is a booklet, *Stone Mountain*.

DC: This was a booklet we did as a team project. I did it with Don Jones and Warren McCormick. We were on the team. That project led to the state acquiring the property for Stone Mountain.

YO: Oh, that's wonderful.

DC: So I had Dan—I had Lewis in the third year all year long—not Lewis, Richard Moore—and I had Lewis in fourth year, and then in fifth year I think I had Dan Young first semester, and I believe I had Wayne Maynard the final semester. I'm not sure, but I did have both of them. I only had Gil Thurlow for a technical course, a technical studio. I loved the way they did it. It was a design project first and then you did the technical drawings for that.

YO: In the same semester?

DC: In the same semester, yes. Then I had Lewis Clarke in the third year the same way. There was a small scale design project and then you did all the technical drawings for that. But I think that—I'm sure you know Richard Moore, but he can be a little bit brash or—what's the word—

brusque at times, and third year it was like, I don't know about this guy. I don't know about this program. I was like, wow.

**15:06**

I remember one time there was a state ASLA meeting, I believe it was in Wilmington, and he told the students that we should go. I said I didn't think I could afford to go and I'm thinking I have to take my wife and this sort of thing. And he said, in his office well, you want your cake and you want to eat it too. He said, she'll be all right for the weekend. You go to that meeting. Well, at that meeting I met up with a guy named Loddie Bryan.

YO: Oh yeah.

DC: He's one of the people I worked for, and ended up then working for Loddie. Because I had had the work at Furman and that was essentially a year, I was in a position of taking fewer courses per semester than the typical student.

YO: Right. I knew that you worked while you were in school. I was wondering how you did that because most people say they hardly had time to breathe when they were doing their coursework.

DC: Well, our coursework was a hundred and ninety-one hours credit. That was the curriculum.

YO: Wow.

DC: And we had—a typical semester would be eighteen, nineteen, I think one semester had twenty-one hours.

YO: That's unbelievable.

DC: Clemson just made them cut their program back to a hundred and fifty-six hours.

YO: No kidding? Now, I was going to ask you before we got too far along chronologically here, you also had a couple of very interesting summer internships. One summer you worked with James Godwin and another summer you worked with Dick Bell.

DC: That's correct.

YO: Those were graduates of the class of 1950.

DC: And had been partners at one time in their practice.

YO: That's right. So, when you ran into them they had separate offices.

DC: Yes.

YO: Well, Dick Bell's still around and Godwin is, too, but we don't know that much about James Godwin. Tell me something about him. What was it like working for him?

DC: I don't think you could have two more different personalities than Dick Bell and James Godwin.

YO: No kidding?

DC: I'd worked the summer before—actually Bob Phillips suggested or maybe said I can set you up an interview with Dick Bell. So, I got that position and just did a—out of second year you don't get a lot of responsibility. You just do a little bit of everything, one of which was sorting his slides. I got that job.

But onto Godwin, to answer your question—and I don't know why I ended up at Godwin's office the following summer, other than looking at the idea that if I can get as many different perspectives on the thing, and I already knew that Godwin's practice was a little different. What he was doing was a lot urban renewal work that was around at that time. He was also doing a good deal of work for the military, like officers' housing and NCO housing at Fort Bragg, for instance.

Godwin had a glassed-in office that he sat and faced everybody in the studio, and there were like six or seven tables out from that in a row and it was on the ninth floor of a high rise building downtown whereas Dick Bell was on a lake in a garden with his house behind it. Again, they were very different. When Mr. Godwin arrived in his office at 8 o'clock in the morning, he expected you to be standing in the hall ready to go in when he unlocked the door and at 5:00 in the evening he would open the door and that meant it was time for everybody to file out. So, it was a very regimented type of practice. But I learned something. I learned something from every one of those people. I thought about him on the way over here and I'm drawing a blank. They're four brothers that were here.

YO: The Coulter brothers.

DC: The Coulter brothers. Well, Ken Coulter, he was the senior person and he was right behind me and boy, did I learn a lot from him.

YO: At Godwin's office?

DC: In Godwin's office.

YO: Oh, I didn't know he worked for Godwin, too.

DC: Yes, he was at Godwin's office, and I remember one, very quickly, he told me, he says if Godwin comes out and asks you, do you know how to do something you tell him yes, regardless of what it is, and I'll show you what it is that you have to do. So, I remember that—I think we had had some work on vertical and horizontal alignments of roadways in school already in one of the tech classes, but he threw this thing at me and I thought of what Ken said and I said yes. So Ken then helped me with what I couldn't do, but I was able to do it and do it quicker than Godwin had thought about it.

**20:24**

So, I happened to go downtown when my parents visited and this was just after having completed this work. I think it was on a Saturday because there was no one in the office, and I

don't recall whether I had a key to the office by that time or not. I don't think I did, but I knew that Mr. Godwin would go in a lot on Saturday and that's when he would sort of plan what everybody was going to do for the next week.

Well, I went there and was showing my parents where I worked in downtown Raleigh and Godwin was there, and I'll never forget this. So, I'm showing them around, showing them the projects I had worked, and he announced to my parents that I was getting a raise effective Monday.

YO: Whoa!

DC: Of twenty-five cents an hour.

YO: [Laughs]

DC: That was a lot of money then, you know.

YO: That was a huge amount of money.

DC: That was a huge amount of money, to go from I think it was two dollars to two twenty-five an hour. But I felt good about that and good about the job I was doing.

YO: I guess so.

DC: The other little funny tale I remember is that I had job—I worked on the Hayes Barton Church. I'm not responsible for the design or the concept, but I did work on some of the construction details and I remember very clearly picking the drains from the catalogs, and things that we used, and how we would drain it and so on. This was when they had widened the intersection a little bit, and they had lost some of their front, and I think the church had burned and they rebuilt it.

YO: Oh really?

DC: But there was a space carved out in the back, it was a courtyard, and I haven't been in it in years. But I was working on a residence, and he didn't do very many residences, but for somebody that knew him and knew what it was he would do one. I don't even remember where it was, but there was a place that I designed the fence gate to the backyard and Godwin, as he would do from time to time, he'd go around the tables and see what everybody was doing and he looked at that gate and he said where did you get the design for that gate? I said I just made it up. It's my design. He said we're not going to do that. All our designs come out of the detail book. You know about the detail book, don't you?

YO: Right. [Laughs]

DC: So he said you pick one of the two or three gates out of that detail book and that's what we're going to use. [Laughs] So, he was a little more rigid than Dick Bell was who was a little—

I won't say the word "loose," but the project became what it wanted to be and it became a little bit more unique. But Godwin was a character.

YO: Well, I interrupted you on Loddie Bryan. What was Loddie working on at the time?

DC: Loddie was doing golf courses and golf course communities, that was all he was doing, and Loddie had built a new house out in the Cary area, and deliberately designed it so the basement, which was like a half basement, was light and airy and that's where he had his studio. But the interesting thing about Loddie was he was also a singer.

YO: Oh, I didn't know that.

DC: So he was always in a singing engagement. There were lots of days I was there working by myself because he was singing for somebody's wedding reception or at a wedding or at a funeral.

YO: Solo? Was it solo singing?

DC: Oh yeah, and he would often come down and have on a tux and a white shirt and a bow tie to check in with me just before he was going to his gig. So, he's the only singing landscape architect that I've encountered.

YO: [Laughs] It's a talented bunch.

DC: So again, I worked there part time during my third year. Is that right? I worked for Bell after my second year. I worked with Godwin after my third year. So I either worked with Loddie before Godwin or just after Godwin.

YO: I believe after Godwin and Bell you worked for Loddie.

DC: Yeah. And I started working for Lewis in my fourth year. And Lewis and Dick both, they wouldn't hire you if they hadn't had you as a student, and of course they wouldn't hire you while they were working, and the way Lewis did it, when I asked him did he have anything available—because it was so much closer. His office was right across there on Hillsborough St. He said I don't know. You'll have to ask Charlie Burkhead. And I guess that was his way of not being so direct when he hired you because of the conflict of interest between a student working for a faculty member. So, Charlie did all the hiring and firing, but I'm sure Lewis was in on any discussion of the thing.

**25:33**

So I started working there in the fourth year, or perhaps it was the fifth year. But anyway I was working there and that's where—

YO: Actually I think it was your last two years you were working part time, so fourth and fifth year.

DC: I would work over there in the morning. There was a little hamburger place on the corner across from where Pullen Hall used to be and I'd get a hamburger and have it eaten by the time I got to the studio. So, I would work over there and I probably would put in fifteen to twenty hours a week.

YO: I was wondering what your days were like. How did you work and—

DC: In the mornings.

YO: —go to school too?

DC: Yeah, well, I've always been a workaholic.

YO: What kind of projects were you working on at Lewis Clarke's?

DC: I did work on Palmetto Dunes. Don Basile was sort of in charge of it. The entry road off of the highway into it, I must have drawn that thing six thousand times—

YO: Really? [Laughs]

DC: —trying to get it just right. One of the things that was really interesting about Lewis' office is that Lewis, being a teacher and not being there all the time, but as a way of keeping up with what was going on, we would have juries once a week.

It really wasn't a jury in the same sense of a jury at school, but nonetheless there was this room, a windowless room upstairs, and everybody put up what they were working on and if that was a proposal you were working or some written specifications or a schematic or a conceptual design, no matter what it was you put it up. He and Charlie would sit there on stools in the center of the room and you would tell them what you were doing and they would give you feedback on your project.

One of the clearest lessons I had there from Lewis is that I had been given a project to design a courtyard outside the school of journalism at UNC-Chapel Hill, and he looked at my design, which was on yellow trash with colored pencil and everything, and he said is that what you really want to do? And I said of course not, but they only have a twenty-five thousand dollar budget. He said well, do a two hundred percent scheme. Do a fifty thousand dollar scheme. That way it gives the client the opportunity to cut back so they control the project but you'll probably get more than your hundred percent scheme.

YO: Right.

DC: And he said I know UNC will find the money somehow, and lo and behold, they—I mean it's still a very modest, I mean extremely modest little space, but they discovered that some money had been given by somebody named Gifford in honor of their daughter, a journalism student, who had been killed many years earlier and that money had just sat there. So they put that money into it so it's called the Gifford Memorial Courtyard.

YO: Isn't that something?

DC: And so I tried that two hundred scheme from then on out in my own practice, saying do what needs to be done and then if the client either buys into that or you get something less than that, but if you do just the minimum program that they're asking a lot of times it's less than what you would be proud of. So it was—

YO: A little strategy there.

DC: —a strategy that Lewis gave me that has served me throughout my career, even in the fire trucks.

YO: Right. Well, out of your 1968 school of design graduating class of seven, grand total of seven—

DC: I think there were seven that graduated on schedule.

YO: Yeah, I checked it, and Pat Hale, who was a female student, was in your class of 1968. That was an unusual occurrence to have a female student.

DC: We started with Jane McNairy, but she dropped out along the way. She eventually became a landscape architect but she didn't finish with us.

YO: Right. Anyway, you and two other students were accepted into Harvard's MLA program. What was Lewis' "Harvard talk?"

**30:08**

DC: At the time that I was working for Lewis they shared an airplane with several other design offices. None of them were big enough to have their own plane, and the rule of thumb was if it's over forty miles take the plane if you can. So we had flown down—

YO: Actually they owned the plane themselves. Lewis Clarke owned the plane. They shared ownership for a short period of time with an engineer named Ezra Meir.

DC: I remember that name.

YO: But that was the company plane.

DC: Well, there was something about the pilot's salary or something like that.

YO: Oh, I don't know.

DC: Of course, I'm not in on the principals' discussion—

YO: I have no idea on that part.

DC: —but I knew there were other people involved in the plane, other firms.

YO: Yeah. The pilot's name was Gerry Rooney—

DC: Now that you mention it I do remember that name.

YO: —and I know he was on the Lewis Clarke Associates' payroll, but like you said whatever other arrangements they had beyond that I don't know. But anyway, I was just clearing up that one point.

DC: Well, I went with Lewis, and I was working I think more with Charlie Burkhead on the project than Lewis, but it was the Sandhills Community College project. We flew down and on the way back—this is a little aside. I can still hear that airplane today. It has a distinct sound. I can hear one in the sky. There's some of them still flying and every once in awhile you'll see them, because they had a motor in front and a motor in the back.

YO: A push-pull, they call it?

DC: It was a push-pull, yeah.

YO: It must have been terrible to ride in. Several people have mentioned how loud that thing was.

DC: Oh, but it was a smooth airplane.

YO: Really?

DC: It was a nice little plane, yeah. I thoroughly enjoyed it. But we had flown down, just Lewis and I, and that's all I remember. And he said to me, Don, what are you going to do about graduate school? I said what do you mean? I haven't given it any thought. He said you still have some GI Bill left, don't you? I said well, yeah, when I filled out the paperwork for the GI Bill I did, just as a hedge, put through a master's degree.

He said I think you ought to go ahead and go to graduate school. And I said I just started working here. It sounds like you're trying to get rid of me. He said no, no. It's not that. If you go to graduate school now, you'll come back to the office. If you work for the office for five years after graduating—because I already had a job lined up to go work for him, because this was in the—I don't know when it was in terms of the fifth year, but some time during the fifth year. He said if you leave to go to graduate school five years later, you won't come back to the office. You'll go someplace else. I said hmm. Where should I go to graduate school? And he said well, you should go to Harvard. I knew he was a Harvard graduate. I said Lewis, I couldn't get into Harvard. And he said, Don, it's like buying an Irish Sweepstakes lottery ticket. That was the only ticket you could buy, even though it was illegal in the States then.

YO: Right. [Laughs]

DC: He said if you don't have a ticket you can't win the lottery. If you don't pay twenty-five dollars to Harvard for an application fee you'll never know if you can get in. Well, I was still convinced that there was no way that I could get in, so I applied to Harvard, Michigan—because

of Bill Johnson who had a reputation there—and I applied to Berkeley because well Berkeley was just Berkeley. [Laughs]

YO: Right. [Laughs]

DC: And then I applied to the University of Illinois because I had lived in Champaign when I was in the military. I pretended I was a student. I was stationed twenty miles away. But Illinois had something they called, “creative fellowships,” and they would pay you two hundred and twenty-five dollars a month to do nothing.

YO: That's creative. [Laughs]

DC: Yeah, I mean you didn't have any—what I mean by doing nothing, you didn't have to teach a class, you weren't a graduate assistant. They just looked at your portfolio and said this is the kind of student we want to get in here. And I knew that Sasaki had had some connections to the University of Illinois so I thought that might be interesting to do too. It was all a hedge against not going to Harvard. So, I got accepted at all four of them.

YO: Whoa. [Laughs]

**35:00**

DC: So Berkeley was like, well, we'd love to have you come, but we have no money, so that kind of eliminated that. Michigan said we would love to have you come, we're going to offer you, I think it was ten thousand dollars a year, but you have to teach three courses. So, it was essentially a faculty position going to school part time. Then the University of Illinois offered their money, and I got accepted at Harvard. And I was in a terrible dilemma about what to do. I knew since Lewis had said go to Harvard I didn't feel like seeking his counsel, so I went to see Kamphoefner. You remember him?

YO: Oh yeah.

DC: Well, Kamphoefner, because I'd had a couple of run-ins over a welding project once, if he gets irritated—

YO: A what kind of project?

DC: Welding.

YO: Oh, welding.

DC: I was working on a sculpture. I was making a bumper sculpture and he thought I was repairing the bumper on my car.

YO: [Laughs]

DC: He walked into the shop when I was doing that. When he would get irritated his moustache would kind of quiver a bit, you know. [Laughs] But anyway, I went to see him and asked for an appointment about advice about Harvard. I told him, I said look, the University of Illinois is willing to pay me two twenty-two a month to go, but Harvard is offering nothing other than you go and you pay the fee. I'll never forget that. He looked at me and that moustache started quivering and he said, Collins, you're a damn fool to come in here and ask me a question like that.

YO: Oh gosh.

DC: He said you can always tell somebody that you graduated from Harvard, but you can never tell them that you got accepted and didn't go. I don't care if you have to steal the money, you find the way to get to Harvard, because every dean in North America will jump to have a Harvard graduate on their faculty.

YO: Wow.

DC: And I tucked my tail and left. So, I called an uncle in Charlotte who was a long time senior sales associate at a Chevrolet dealer downtown and he was one of the kind of dealers that—I saw Godwin buy a car without even going to the dealership, and this was the way my uncle worked. People would call him, he would take a car and swap it out in a parking garage somewhere, and that's how, you know.

He just had that many customers, and I thought maybe he knows a customer or something that would—he said I'll see what I can do. He called back the next day and he said you need to call—I don't remember his name now—he's the treasurer of the Charlotte Central Lion's Club Educational Foundation and they're going to loan you the money. So, I went to see this fellow and they loaned me the money interest free.

YO: No kidding?

DC: I was getting to go to Harvard, and that made the difference.

YO: Right.

DC: Now, doing all this I had no idea that Randy Hester had applied to Harvard.

YO: Really?

DC: And probably Lewis had a similar conversation with Randy at some point. It just wasn't even in my thoughts until that conversation with Lewis when he said you need to look at going to Harvard.

YO: And Bill Taylor was in this crowd too, right?

DC: Bill Taylor was and Bill had a Naval ROTC thing that he was doing so he had four years of military first and then he went to Harvard, and there was a guy named Evans a year behind us.

YO: Max Evans?

DC: No.

YO: I wouldn't know who that is.

DC: Oh, he was in partnership with Jordan in Charlotte for awhile [Edward "Edd" Evans]. Anyway, a guy behind us went to Harvard, so there were four in a two-year span of classes. That Dick Moore-Lewis Clarke era was, to me, the pinnacle of NC State's program. I can't really speak of later on, but I just know it was so super for me to go there at that time.

But Bill went on to Harvard—Bill Taylor, I'm talking about—and then he started working part time for Carol Johnson, who's an internationally recognized landscape architect, and stayed, and to this day I mean he's a principal or senior something at, I think they call it CRJS or CRJA now. I think she's retired from the firm, but he spent his entire career working there.

**40:01**

YO: Well, when you got to Harvard Hideo Sasaki had been either a professor or head of the landscape architecture department for nearly eighteen years, so he kind of owned the landscape architecture department in everybody's eyes. Then he was also in partnership though with Stuart Dawson and Kenneth DeMay.

DC: Right.

YO: Now, once again Don Collins ends up getting a job with some of the illustrious people of the profession. You did some work for Sasaki's office. How did that come about?

DC: Well, Sasaki had actually resigned as chair—

YO: Oh, he was?

DC: —the summer before we got there. He was still on the faculty, but no longer chair. Chuck Harris was chair. So, my first encounter with Sasaki was when they had a—you sat on one side of the table and the three faculty advisors sat on the other side and they talked about your program.

So they said, you know, well, we're going to do this air photo interpretation course, and I said I've already done an air photo interpretation course at NC State. Can I take something in lieu of that? And I think the same thing happened to Randy. We had such an incredible program that—you understand, of course, that Harvard was geared to take graduates from four-year programs and two years of graduate school, and here we were coming in with a five-year program. So, that's some of the overlap that we had done. So instead of taking air photo interpretation, I took Oscar Handlin's course on the world cities, which gave me a different perspective.

But going back to your question about Sasaki, we really didn't see him that much in the studio. In fact I don't recall ever seeing him in the studio, at least in the studios that I was in. But

my studio had been working with Peter Hornbeck and Dick Tose and Carl Steinitz, but some people out of Sasaki's office were really driving the project.

What it was, it was down in Providence, Rhode Island, where Brown University is, and I think it's called Moses Brown Academy, which is a K-twelve school, and then Rhode Island School of Design, and Bryant College. The issue was the universities were growing and wanting to expand, but the historic district was there so there were conflicts between the advocates for the historic district and advocates for the university.

So we did this comprehensive plan for what's called College Hill. One of the colleges, Bryant College, was moving to Smithfield, Rhode Island because the owner of the Tupperware Company had given them an endowment so they were moving to an entirely new campus. So, I had worked on that project, it was a team project, and then we did presentations in Providence and we did presentations to Bryant College. But Harvard would have what they called, a post mortem. You would go back the next day or the next couple days and in the basement of Robinson Hall, where we were located, there would be another jury in which the faculty would not only critique the project that you were working on but would critique your presentation previously.

So, Sasaki was there for that review, and this was right at the end of the semester. When the jury was over I was filing out with everybody, going up the stairs, and I felt somebody [touch] my elbow. I turned around and it was Sasaki and he said could I speak to you for a moment? I was like, oh, you know, what have I done?

YO: [Laughs]

DC: That kind of thing. So we went on up the stairs and got out of what I call the "eddy flow." We got over in the corner somewhere and he said, very bluntly, I'd like for you to go to work for me. And I said—and I think it was in response—down at the original presentation when somebody asked me about a road design that went up a hill, up to the campus on top, I noticed a certain reaction in him when I gave my answer. It was like, oh boy, he nailed it. That was a great answer. And I don't know that there's a connection, but I think there was.

But anyway, he asked me. He said I would like for you to go to work for me. And I said oh. When? He said well, the holidays start in about three or four days. Why not work the thirty days of the holidays? Like an idiot I said Mr. Sasaki, I've already made arrangements to go home for the holidays.

YO: Oh no. [Laughs]

**45:00**

DC: I went to my apartment that night and I thought, oh my goodness. You don't tell Hideo Sasaki that you'd rather go home than go to work for him. So, I called my parents and I said we're not coming home for Christmas. I mean I'm sorry, we're just not coming home, and I caught the bus the next morning to Watertown, which is like the next little—the cities, you know how they are. They're one after the other there. I go to the office, find the main entrance, because they were in storefronts. They were all over downtown Watertown.

YO: Oh really?

DC: Yeah. I go in and of course there's this big reception area and the receptionist or administrative assistant or whatever her title was, she says may I help you? And I said yes. Mr. Sasaki asked me if I would go to work for him. He asked me yesterday. She said oh really? He didn't say anything to me about it. [Laughs] You know, and I was like—

YO: Oh no.

DC: —you know, pushed down again. So she said let me make a phone call. I don't know who she called, whether she was talking to him or someone else. So she hung up the phone, and it was a brief conversation, and she said okay. You need to go down to this place, this street address, go in and be issued a tool kit, and then you need to go to this address and see Mr. So-and-so. I'll never forget that. My tool kit number was two-seventy-eight, and it was like a fishing tackle box with stuff in it that you would use in a design office. I thought, wow, are there really two hundred and seventy-eight employees here?

YO: Really. [Laughs]

DC: I mean I don't know, but two hundred and seventy-eight was my toolbox. So I went into this basement location, and I don't remember the fellow's name that I was to work for, and we were working on a medical office park in Natick, Massachusetts, and that's what we—

YO: What was the name of the town again?

DC: Natick.

YO: Natick?

DC: Yeah. It's one of the western suburbs of Boston, maybe fifteen miles out. So, I worked on that. There's another little funny story about Sasaki, if you want to hear it.

YO: I'd love to.

DC: I was working on that and they sent me upstairs to work on another project that was in what must have been a Masonic lodge ceremonial place at one time because there was this long barrel vaulted room on the third floor and a long table in it, and on the table was a drawing of Columbus, Indiana. You know of Columbus, the "Athens of the Prairie," they call it.

YO: Right.

DC: Sasaki had a design for their main street and laid out on each side of the Main Street design was the elevations of every building along Main Street.

YO: Good heavens.

DC: And someone had come in and put a little color swatch on each of those buildings, so my job was to color render the elevation of downtown Columbus. It was more like a coloring book than anything else, you know.

YO: Right.

DC: So, I'm in there working on one—and it's a long drawing—and this guy comes in on the other end and takes out a Sharpie pen, and he starts drawing on what to me was a finished drawing.

YO: Right.

DC: And I'm thinking, do I say something to him? What do I do? I thought well, I'll go get my boss, the guy I was immediately assigned to work for. Well, this was like five thirty or six o'clock in the evening and I go downstairs and they had already gone. Then I thought, well, what do I do? So I go back upstairs and the guy that was drawing on what I thought was a finished drawing, he's gone. I thought well I'd better hang this up and wait till tomorrow and see how this sorts out. Well the next day I did take the guy up there and show him and he said I'll find out who did it and what this is about, but you don't work on it anymore till we see what's going on.

YO: Right.

DC: I think it wasn't the next day, it was probably three or four days later, it was the office Christmas party. And I go in there and of course all the big guys from, you know that I—my professors, the people from Sasaki who had been the professors on the College Hill project were there, and there were people I could talk to, but I was standing beside my boss and I said there he is, that tall guy over there. That's the one that was drawing on the thing. He said, Oh, that's Stu Dawson.

YO: [Laughs]

**49:58**

DC: He can draw on anything he wants to. [Laughs] And I never met him, but I did get a chance to—when Stu came to Clemson interviewing for a project many, many years later, I took my students in to watch the interview. I got permission to bring classes over to—they interviewed Diana Balmori and Stu Dawson and I think J.J.R. Smith was—

YO: And this was for what project on the Clemson campus?

DC: I don't even remember what—oh, I think it was— [Pause]

YO: A project on campus, though.

DC: It was a significant project on campus, and I don't even remember who got it. But I related that story to Stu Dawson at that time and he got a good laugh out of it—

YO: I guess so.

DC: —and said I'm so glad you told me this.

YO: Well, how about DeMay? What was he like?

DC: DeMay was the architect in the project, and I think Stuart Dawson had actually been a student of Sasaki's at Harvard—I mean not Harvard, but at Illinois. There was a connection there somehow.

But DeMay was the architect in the crowd, so they would do some architecture work and as the firm grew and matured it began to do more and more architecture work because as Stuart told me later, they did a lot of campus master plans, and that's probably why they were at Clemson, was interviewing for a master plan update. He said they would get such good working relationships with campuses and campus presidents that a lot of times they were getting requests. Well, can you do this building that's where you're proposing? Can you just do the building as well? So that's when they decided they would gear up a little bit more their architecture wing of it.

But DeMay was—and I never had any chance to work with him and never worked with Dawson or Sasaki directly, other than that one thing. But that was my experience of working there as a student.

I didn't work there as a professional because like any well known firm everybody wants to work there and because everybody wants to work there they don't have to pay anything. So, three graduates of Harvard that were all single could share an apartment and work for Sasaki and do quite well. I was married with a pregnant wife. It just wasn't going to work in Boston for what they would pay.

YO: I have to ask this. Did anyone ever mention Palmetto Dunes in Sasaki's office?

DC: No.

YO: The reason is because, you may not know this, but Lewis Clarke Associates beat Sasaki for the Palmetto Dunes project.

DC: Oh, I remember Lewis' discussion—

YO: You do?

DC: —about fees and everything on that project. We won't talk about them on this interview, but I'll tell you that I think there were five finalists, and Lewis was at the top of the fee thing, but he had done what he called a "Dixie cup" approach. We're not only going to design the master plan, we're going to design your logo, we're going to do the graphics for the brochure, we're going to design the initial sales office, and so on. So, there was a guy in product design that was brought in to design the—

YO: Don Masterton.

DC: Yeah, I believe it was. He did the “p” laid over the “d.” That came from his work. Now again, I had a minor role in it, but I was still aware of—

YO: But you were around the discussion.

DC: Oh yeah, I was aware of what was going on. The other thing about Lewis’ office is my table at the old brick house was at the top of the stairs, and in Palmetto Dunes we had done the golf courses and every lot except those initial ones that were already there on the waterfront were either on a lake, on the ocean, or a lagoon that was dug, or they were on a golf course.

So they brought in Robert Trent Jones, you know, and my father was an avid golfer so golf magazines were around and I knew what Robert Trent Jones looked like. I had no idea he was coming to the office, but the door downstairs would rattle—and I’ll tell you another story about the rattling door one time. A man came in, he went around the back where Lewis’ office was, and I’m looking down the stairs and the next thing I know here’s Robert Trent Jones coming up the stairs in front of me. And of course being an impressionable young kid my jaw dropped and I must have pointed and stared, but he walked by with a big grin and said good afternoon.

YO: [Laughs]

**54:58**

DC: And I’m like, wow! That’s Robert Trent Jones! But the other story about Lewis’ office, Lewis was a great talker. He came in one day and rattled that door and it was close to lunch time and I think I must have been the only one upstairs in the office and he shouted I need some slides or something to that effect. So, I go downstairs and I say what kind of slides? He said don’t we have anything that’s trayed-up? And I said well, there’s a tray in the credenza in the conference room. He said well, get it.

So I went and got it and handed it to him and he goes out the door. He had no idea what was in that tray, but he did tell me that he had to make a talk at some kind of downtown business association. I don’t know what it was.

YO: Oh no. [Laughs]

DC: Oh yeah, you know. Not more than a week later one of my clients that I was working with said oh, listen. Last week Lewis gave this marvelous presentation in downtown Raleigh and he’s such a fabulous—you know. And that man had made a presentation from those slides that he hadn’t even seen. He had no idea what was in that tray, just that it would come up and he would look at it and he would talk about it.

YO: Do you know what any of the slides were?

DC: No, I have no idea.

YO: [Laughs]

DC: I have no idea. I just know that there was a tray of slides—

YO: It could have been anything.

DC: —in the credenza. It could have been—

YO: Any combination.

DC: —*Playboys*. I don't know.

YO: [Laughs]

DC: I'm sure he pulled a couple out before he got to that point.

YO: Well, let's hope so anyway, right. Well, after you graduated from Harvard in '69 you started two of those three simultaneous careers I mentioned earlier. You started your own practice and you began your teaching career, not at Clemson but at Ball State University.

DC: Right.

YO: What attracted you to teaching landscape architecture?

DC: Actually, when I was at Harvard I don't know what the issues were at Lewis' office, but there was a reduction in force, and that comes with the territory in a design office. You know that. So two people had been working there out of school, one was my classmate Don Jones and the other was Warren McCormick who I think was working there part time, maybe full time. I don't recall. Warren ended up going to Florida and Don Jones went to Campbell Miller's office in Louisville.

I heard about this shrinkage so I called them and they said well, you know, there were some layoffs. Things are not the best right now. Then Don sort of flippantly said we're hiring. Why don't you come out here? Now let me back up to say that in the last few days of working on the exit project, the final project that Randy Hester and I did together, Charlie Sappenfield walked through the studio. Now Charlie Sappenfield—

YO: Now this is while you're still in the [NCSU] School of Design.

DC: I'm still at school. He'd been my freshman faculty teacher at Clemson University where I did my first year. We chatted a little bit and he said what are you doing? I said I'm getting ready to go to graduate school. He said well, I'm now a dean. Are you going to do it so you can go teach? I said no, I'm just going to do it to use up my GI Bill. He said oh. Well, if you ever think you might want to teach just give me a call and I'll see we can do, and he walked away, visiting other people in the studio. He was just curious about what was going on at NC State.

So, I never gave it any more thought till I went out to Louisville. I interviewed with everybody in the office. Campbell Miller at the time was national president of the ASLA so his office was the last place for me to interview. We sat down and I remember he had already changed into his tennis shorts and his tennis racket was laying on his desk and it was a very brief conversation. He said you've done very well here, everybody thinks we ought to put you on, and David Lose, by the way, was already working there.

YO: I was going to say, that's where David Lose was working at that time.

DC: Yeah, and I don't know whether I interviewed with David that day or not. But Campbell said well, what do you think we should pay you? And I still remember I said, sixteen thousand. This was the time at Harvard that Sasaki was paying twelve, you know, to work. He looked at me and he said, do you think that Harvard degree is really worth that much? This little voice said, call his bluff. And I said, yes I do. And he said well, I don't think we have anything else to talk about. [Laughs]

**1:00:10**

YO: [Laughs]

DC: And he got up and said thanks for coming. Well, like I said, Don Jones and his wife were there and we'd already agreed to have dinner that night, so I'm sitting there in a restaurant on the Ohio River with Don thinking, man, I blew that interview and I've got a pregnant wife and no job and graduation in six weeks.

I thought about Charlie Sappenfield saying he was a dean in Indiana and I said to Don, where's Indiana? He looked at me like, idiot, it's across the river, you know. And I said I'm sorry, I mean, where's Muncie, Indiana? He said I don't know but I've got an atlas at the apartment. So we went back and looked and I called Charlie Sappenfield, the dean of that college, at nine thirty on a Friday night [Laughs] at home.

YO: You did?

DC: Yes.

YO: [Laughs]

DC: He said well, we do have a position coming available. We've added a landscape architecture program and we've hired one person. And he said I'll be at the office tomorrow if you care to rent a car and drive up. So I did and showed him my portfolio and what I'd been working on in graduate school. And he said to me would you like to see what the housing stock is like in town?

YO: All right.

DC: And I thought that's a good sign.

YO: [Laughs] That's good.

DC: That's a good sign. So with no prior thing other than the night before, that was my introduction to teaching, and when I got out there I taught one year in the combined second-year studio and they moved me to third-year architecture. The chair of the architecture program said Collins knows more about architecture than most of the faculty in architecture. So, I taught the third-year architecture studio there for a couple years. Everybody said if you stay in Indiana more than three years you get used to the winter weather and everything—

YO: Is that true?

DC: —and my practice was going great guns.

YO: Was it?

DC: Muncie was a hundred thousand. Anderson was thirty miles away, a hundred thousand, and between those two cities I had a lot going on. I made more money in one summer than I made teaching. I had two students working in the kitchen. We had a huge kitchen about the size of this room so we used one end of it as my studio.

But it was a question of I was going to have to either quit teaching and practice full time or find a Charlie Burkhead and get a legitimate office and run the thing, and the question was, is Muncie, Indiana where you want to do that as opposed to a Raleigh or a Charlotte or a Greensboro or some other larger place with a little what I thought would be more sophisticated clients. I didn't realize how sophisticated they were out there in Indiana, but I had some great clients out there.

So I decided I would see if there were any possibilities in the South, so I contacted State, Virginia, UNCC, and Georgia and Clemson. My family and her family were from Norfolk to Atlanta so—

YO: So relatives all around.

DC: —that's—and we had a young son at that point, the one who now lives here in Raleigh.

So it got down to Georgia, Virginia, and Clemson for interviews. I got snowed in, in Muncie and couldn't make the interview in Virginia. In the meantime, they gave it to a classmate of mine from Harvard named Lance Garnham, I think, and then called me back and said I'm sorry to tell you but we didn't get the funding for both positions. You were our choice but we didn't get it.

So that left Clemson and Georgia, and Georgia offered more money than Clemson, but it was a program that was just landscape architecture and I prefer the programs like State where all the design disciplines are together. So, I told Clemson, this is what Georgia's offered me, so the dean wrote me another letter and said I'll match that salary, but if they beat that salary don't come back. That's as high as we'll go.

**1:05:06**

YO: Right.

DC: So I left there to go to Clemson as a professor in architecture, which I did for eighteen years. A landscape architect there had just resigned to do his practice full time at Hilton Head Island. He had gotten in good and was doing a lot of work for Charles Frazier. Sasaki was losing ground there and Ed Pinckney and Associates [was gaining], so he moved his office from Clemson down to Hilton Head.

YO: And Charles Frazier being the developer/owner of the Hilton Head property.

DC: Right.

YO: What was the landscape architect that went down there?

DC: Ed Pinckney was the principal, he's the one that left Clemson, and John Broadbrooks, who is now in Asheville practicing, and Truitt Rabun was there and he's got his own office now.

YO: When you got to Clemson there really wasn't what we'd call a landscape architecture department, was there?

DC: No, no, and I didn't think it was my role there to teach the architects how to be landscape architects. What I concentrated on was to try to teach the architects to do contextual buildings, buildings that were of the site. To me buildings are either cerebral—TWA terminal at Kennedy [Airport] is like that. There's no other reason. It just came out of Saarinen's brain—they're programmatic—hospitals are certainly great examples of programmatic buildings—or they're of their context, and so I tried to do that.

I taught second year there for a couple years and then they moved me up to third-year architecture studio. So something like fifty-five percent of the practicing architects in South Carolina had me as a professor in architecture and I'm not an architect, and many of them didn't know that I didn't have the credentials. When the chair of the department there had a heart attack that's when I became the acting chair for one semester and then later on, on another chair, when he resigned, the faculty said we would like Collins to be the interim chair. So, that's where the three semesters of being chair of architecture—I'm probably the only landscape architect that's ever been chair of an architecture department.

YO: I haven't seen that on anybody's résumé. [Laughs]

DC: And in fact the dean, who's now the president of the University, he called me in toward the end of my second time as acting chair and he said the faculty really wants you to be the chair permanently, but I'll have a problem trying to sell that to the architects of the state, I think. I don't think he understood how much I was connected to the architects of the state. In fact Doug Quackenbush, who had his first professional job in my office, in my landscape architecture office, when he became president of the state AIA chapter introduced and got me elected as an honorary member—

YO: No kidding?

DC: —of South Carolina AIA.

YO: So, politics-wise it worked out okay.

DC: Oh yeah. I still have very good relationships with the architects that are in their forties and fifties practicing in South Carolina.

YO: Which completely negates the premise that landscape architects and architects can't work together.

DC: Right, right.

YO: What's the clue? What's the way to do it?

DC: Well, in South Carolina there are a lot of firms that have landscape architects on board as one of the employees.

YO: I guess I'm thinking when it's reversed, when it's landscape architects—like in Lewis Clarke Associates' office where they're landscape architects who hired architects and hired engineers, or even in David Lose Associates. They had theirs set up that way, as a landscape architect is the principal and then hires—

DC: Oh yeah.

YO: So, I get the impression from some other landscape architects I've talked to that when it's architects hiring the landscape architects then it works okay, but when it's landscape architects taking control of the job and it's their project, and they go hire the architects sometimes that's a bit trickier dynamic to deal with. What did you find?

**1:09:58**

DC: I never had a—of course you have to understand with a faculty you have a limited practice and the unwritten rule everywhere, and certainly I think it is there, and it may not be in the case of Lewis' office here, but down there if you were a practicing faculty member you didn't compete for work. You only did the work that found you.

Now, that didn't mean that when I saw something in the paper for something being organized called, the Clemson Area Retirement Center, a group of retirees looking to build some kind of community to live in, that came out in the paper, I called an architect named Jimmy Neal who had used my services a number of times, and I said Jimmy, let's go after this project together.

YO: Right.

DC: And again as we got into it, it looked like it was a big thing so I let him then be the lead on the thing, but I did the master plan for this retirement village there and then he did the buildings. But the contract was his and so I was paid by him, but it wouldn't have happened if I hadn't gotten the project under way and said let's go after this together.

YO: Right.

DC: You'll get some of that. I can remember I was called about a project in Chester, South Carolina, which was an amphitheater project, certainly landscape architecture, but the ad called for proposals. It didn't say architects or landscape architects.

Well, I got a call from the state registration board in architecture, their investigator, about submitting a proposal, saying you're not a registered architect, are you? And I said no, I'm not. And he said well, why do you think you had the authority to go after this project? And I said, well, I'm a landscape architect. He said oh really—just like that. And I said yes. He said are you a registered landscape architect? And I said in three states—four states, at that time. He said,

well, are you registered in South Carolina? And I said I certainly am. He said what's your registration number? I said nine. He said oh, thank you very much. [Laughs]

YO: [Laughs]

DC: So he realized that he wasn't talking to some guy with a pickup truck and a shovel and that I'd been around a long time.

YO: Right.

DC: We didn't get the project, but—

YO: Well, at least you got to educate at least one person, right?

DC: Oh yeah. So, it's a fairly decent relationship, I think, in South Carolina. There are a number of landscape architecture firms that stand alone. A lot of the landscape architects, like Seamon and Whiteside, they don't have in-house architects, but they have in-house civil engineers, and I think that's probably harder to make it work, but if you get the right civil engineer they understand that you understand design and line and they understand what the psi of the concrete should be in that curb and gutter, but you do a better job of laying it out than they will. Seamon and Whiteside has made a great practice for themselves in South Carolina with civil engineers.

YO: Today, the students, they ask what does a landscape architect do? So having been there and still there and an observer traveling around the country different places, how would you answer the question? What does a landscape architect do?

DC: Well, I can only use my own example. I do anything I want to do. I've done purely graphic design, logos and letterheads, all based on what I learned going back as a student. I've actually done half a dozen buildings. In South Carolina, if it's under five thousand feet and not a place of assembly you don't have to have an architect.

I had a client who owned a small world travel agency and wanted me to see a site that was only forty-five feet deep, would it work, and I just did a little sketch of conceptually how he could have a lobby and the agents on each side of the lobby and the backup space behind that and a very narrow building. He said can you design it? And I did a little calculation and it was about thirty-six hundred square feet on the footprint and I said yeah. Now some of my architect friends call me a frustrated architect, but designing the fire trucks was the same process, what does it need to be, what has to happen, how does it happen, can we make it better?

**1:15:04**

And then I was always interested in the urban design scale of the thing down to the larger more complex sites. I've done very little in the way of residential design. I bet I cannot identify more than fifty plants. In fact, I'm getting ready to do my house, some work there. I tore out the garden that was there for forty years and I'm going to do it over. I'm going to hire one of my graduates to do the planting plan because she knows a lot more about plants than I do.

YO: Right.

DC: On the other hand you get the landscape architects who are working at the large, you know, I think two thousand—no, two hundred square miles was the largest project I worked on in graduate school at Harvard. It was the upper Charles River watershed. I just didn't enjoy that kind of project when you're starting to deal in the ecologies and those kinds of things.

I am first of all a maker. I'm happiest when I am making and that means making it on paper and then seeing it go into place, and a couple times I even acted as the contractor. I did some design-build work here and there. I bought a thirty-eight hundred square foot American four square house for a dollar and moved it and converted it to a commercial space.

So to me, it's decide what's fun as a landscape architect and go do it. A lot of people, as you know, that get a degree in landscape architecture don't end up practicing landscape architecture. They may for awhile and then they go do something else. But all of them will tell you, I couldn't be doing what I'm doing if that hadn't been in my background, because that led to this and led to this and this connection with this person who said I would like for you to, you know.

You mentioned Pat Hale earlier. When she got laid off the second time and was working with Michael Paynter in San Francisco, the first time she got laid off she got a job as a house painter and the second time she got laid off there was an architect in the office and they said instead of us getting jobs as—he was a house painter. Instead of us filling in as a house painter let's go and become contractors, and we'll get a contract, and we'll hire other painters. So they started that and that led to buying and remodeling and repainting painted ladies in San Francisco.

YO: No kidding?

DC: But Pat would tell you, and she's told me, without the color theory and things that we learned in school I never would have been able to do what I was doing. Now, I haven't talked to Pat in twenty years. I don't even—I heard she retired and came back to South Carolina.

YO: That's what I understand.

DC: She was from Aiken. But it's been a long time since I've talked to her. But I think Bill Hube graduated in landscape architecture and he left. Don Jones went to work for his father-in-law in the construction industry and then went back into landscape architecture for a guy named Bill Daniel I think it was who may have been a civil engineer. I'm not sure.

YO: Well, this fits sort of with my next question. What experience did you have at NCSU School of Design that should always be included in the curriculum for today's students?

DC: That's a tough question and a large question. The thing that I liked is that our faculty members were practicing professionals, and that's the biggest problem with programs today. Universities used to recognize, and some still may, recognize professional practice as your research. This is what you do. And they would say because of the inherent liability of your research that's off site, you have to do your work off site because we can't assume the liability for something you did on your project.

So, we're going to recognize that you're going to spend your research time in your design office. Now the programs have turned into what I call, "white paper programs." The emphasis is on how many books have you written or how many papers have you delivered at this, that, and

the other conference. In fact CELA, the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture, was founded just to give a venue for landscape architecture faculty members to deliver papers because it was hard to get a landscape architecture paper accepted somewhere else, and if you gave a presentation at an ASLA national conference, that doesn't count. That's not a scholarly paper.

**1:20:22**

YO: Oh.

DC: And it doesn't count in some schools. So it's gotten very difficult to do that so I think a lot of schools have attracted faculty members in who are not practice oriented, who have had little or no practice, and that's like having a surgeon teach somebody surgery and he's not practicing surgery.

I think that was the best thing I liked about it. Dick Moore had a practice, Bell had a practice, Young and Maynard were too young, but certainly Gil Thurlow had a practice, and they would show this stuff. They would share sometimes the work that they were doing. In the case of Lewis, a lot of times—I heard in one of the earlier interviews something about a sailing club. That wasn't a sailing club project that Lewis had, but the topography that he had he brought with him and made it into a sailing club project and put a shoreline on it. There was no shoreline there, and I know that because I found the topo later on—

YO: Really?

DC: —when I was working in his office. But you always had—

YO: So, it was an invented project, but it could have been—it was an actual topo somewhere.

DC: Yeah, it was a topo of another project, and I think that was probably the first project that I did for Lewis and he looked at it and the grading—I made grading part of the design. He looked at it and said maybe this guy's got some talent here. It was a fun project. I loved it.

But I also liked the idea that you actually had two studios. You had your major studio, which would start with a large scale issue. In fourth year, we did Texas Gulf Sulfur, but we ended up designing at site scale. It never stayed at the large scale whereas, at Harvard when we did a large scale project, it never got into any kind of “on the ground” kind of design out of that.

Then we had the technical studios, which you would design a little small project. One of them was a residence in Durham that we actually got to go see. It was Gil Thurlow's project, but before he did anything here's the house, here's the project. We didn't even know the answers. I gave them imaginary names. B.E. Hive for beehive, you know, and I still do that, or was still doing it when I was teaching. I'd give flippant and off the wall names to projects, but it made students look forward. What's the next crazy thing he's going to come in with?

YO: Right.

DC: But you did these small projects and you did the construction details, and I think it was because of that that I was able to go to work for Dick Bell, and able to work for Godwin, and

able to go to work for Lewis, and able to work for Loddie Bryan, without direct supervision and could do it early on.

It certainly made the difference between me being able to go from NC State to graduate school and right to teaching. I've been the chair long enough. You can't hire—I would never hire somebody out of graduate school to teach that didn't have a year or two or three or four years of office experience. But I think that's one of the problems we have now is that there are some programs that are losing that touch with what the professionals have to do to get the job through zoning, through code reviews, and all these sort of things.

YO: Is it the economy that's perhaps contributed to this, where people can't support their practice so they're looking to teach?

DC: No. Those people who can't support their practice who can teach get into teaching and make good teachers. The ones that don't make good teachers are the ones that have been all the way through—

YO: Oh, just never practiced at all.

DC: —graduate school and never had any office experience at all. They don't make good teachers, I don't think.

But at Clemson, the reason the program came about, we had submitted a program at the graduate level to feed off the undergraduate program, architecture, planning, and landscape architecture, and it was rejected by the president of the university, who was a civil engineer.

So, we decided that we would just let it sit for awhile. But Jerry Reel, who was the senior provost and a fan of design and had actually wanted to study architecture himself, he said, Don, why don't you make an undergraduate concentration in landscape architecture in that program you already have and students can go get a graduate degree somewhere else.

**1:25:15**

So we did that and ran that for about four or five years, and one of the students came up to NC State for his master's in landscape architecture and is still in Raleigh. But when Max Lennon then became president, he was from Ohio State where Jot Carpenter was the chair, and it was a very program and a very visible program. He hadn't been here, but just a couple months and one day he asked Dean Barker, he says why don't you have a landscape architecture program at Clemson?

It was in the summertime or late spring and [Barker] comes down to my office straightaway, sweating from the trip across campus, and he says do you still have the material you put together for Dean McClure about the master's program? And I said yeah and he said, well, get it out and go talk to Jerry Reel. We're going to do it again because Max Lennon is interested in it.

So, I went to see Jerry Reel and Jerry says I tell you what. Right now it's easier to get an undergraduate program through the Commission on Higher Education than it is a graduate program because of the way graduate programs were funded. He said let's go for a professional undergraduate degree this time. And I said well, I'd rather do a professional five-year undergraduate degree anyway, and he said perfect.

So I rewrote everything, put it together, and it went through the university process in about two weeks.

YO: Whoa.

DC: Normally it takes, you know, two or three months to a year.

YO: Yeah, right.

DC: It went right through. The president signed it, sent it to CHE. The CHE sends it to a Ph.D. in education for staff review and she wrote this page and a half letter and said she didn't understand why Clemson needed five years to do what the tech schools were doing in two years.

It was obvious she didn't understand what landscape architecture was. So, I called her and I said I would like you to come to Clemson, and then I contacted every practicing landscape architect in the state and said send me slides of your projects that I can show for this purpose. Dean Barker was going to be my backup. We got her into the room, just the people that were on the committee, José Caban and—

YO: Who was that?

DC: José Caban. He was the head of planning at the time. I had used him to write the statistical parts, how many students will this program attract, that sort of stuff. So anyway, I did this presentation, and I showed her a lot of projects in South Carolina, and turned the light back on, and she stood up and she says you know, I had no idea that those projects were done by landscape architects. I thought that was by and large what architects did. I think I'll have to go back to Columbia and rewrite my report.

YO: All right.

DC: So she wrote a glowing report of the program, the need for it, and it went to the CHE, and of course I'm nervous at the CHE, and this guy from Spartanburg stands up and he said Mr. Collins, I want to tell you. It's been a long time coming. This should have been here a long time ago. We're tired of sending students out of state to study landscape architecture.

Because South Carolina belongs to what's called Southeastern Educational Compact, North Carolina does not, and they share programs. Like South Carolina has no vet school. They go to Georgia. So people who were looking for landscape architecture would petition the CHE and the CHE would make arrangements for them to swap students, so they got in-state tuition at Georgia or wherever. So, they approved it in May and we had students in August.

YO: Very good.

DC: And we weren't ready for the students. [Laughs]

YO: Weren't ready. [Laughs]

DC: No, not by any means. But we've struggled through it and there's about a hundred and thirty students there now. I have a hard time understanding why State can't attract undergraduate students. I don't think they're trying.

YO: Well, it's a long story at this point, but I always point out that even though the undergraduate landscape architecture program is being phased out at NC State, we have A&T's landscape architecture program, which has been around almost as long as State's program has been around.

**1:30:01**

DC: Well, no, it was started after I graduated. State's been around since '47.

YO: '48.

DC: '48?

YO: Yeah.

DC: Okay, when Kamphoefner came.

YO: Right.

DC: Or shortly thereafter.

YO: Well, A&T sent—I know we have photographs of a landscape architecture professor at A&T—

DC: Dr. Fountain.

YO: Right, sending students over to visit when Pete Frazier was in school and Pete was in school in '52 to '53, right in there.

DC: There was some thing—I think it was more of a landscape design—

YO: Oh, was it?

DC: —rather than a landscape architecture program.

YO: I see.

DC: It certainly was not an accredited program.

YO: We have at least the seeds of a program over there for awhile.

DC: Well, it is now. It is an accredited program there.

YO: Oh, absolutely.

DC: And Perry Howard and I are friends and so—you know Perry, probably.

YO: Right, and also, what's our star player out of A&T right now, Walker? Oh, can't think of his name right this second, but anyway [Walter Hood]. What is the—no, let me ask this. I understand your father was in firefighting, right?

DC: Yes.

YO: But when did you start volunteering and making this a part of your life to the extent that you have now?

DC: At Ball State. And it came about when Dean Sappenfield called me to his office one day and I came in and he says, Don, don't you come from a fire service family? And I said yes, there are nine members of my family that are professional firefighters in Charlotte. He said well, let me ask you something. The city of Muncie has approached us about doing a station location project—Ball State was in the city of Muncie, in the northwest corner—would you be willing to take that on? I said of course, and he said, you know, negotiate some funding for it. But the city was looking for something for nothing, so even back then there was emphasis on if you can get it funded, fund it, you know.

So the conversation didn't go very far, but it went far enough to identify one site that I had always said that would be a great place for a fire station because we need one in this area where I live, which was a growing part of town.

So, I was already teaching in third year. Well, one of the annual events was a concrete and masonry association competition for students, so I wrote a project to do a fire station on that site with concrete and masonry as the principal material, and it was a fairly successful project in terms of—you know, I got three or four very good projects out of it, which I added to my student portfolio. I had a portfolio of my work and a portfolio of student work. So, when I went to interview with Dean McClure at Clemson, I had both portfolios and I got hired and I think I had been there like five years or so and he called me into his office one day and he says don't I remember some fire stations in one of your portfolios?

YO: [Laughs] Whoa!

DC: And I said yes and he said well, we have a nearby volunteer fire department whose fire chief is a faculty member and they would like some help designing a fire station, some ideas. You can't design it for them. You can't be a practicing professional. The school's not a registered entity as a firm, so you give them ideas.

So I ran the project and I did a switcheroo-type project in which the person who started the design didn't finish the design. Students had to swap designs, and that simulated what happens in an office. Somebody's working on a project, they up and leave, somebody else has to come in and own it where it is and take it further.

YO: Good idea.

**1:34:46**

DC: So Scott Collins, no relation, did the initial design and then a kid named Joe Moore drew the fire station design. So when it got time to do the jury, I invited the City of Anderson fire chief. I knew the University had a fire department so I invited the fire chief of the university and the fire

chief of this department and I think I invited two or three more, but only a couple of them showed up for the jury. They weren't used to this kind of thing.

But Charlie Owen, the chief of the University fire department, was kind of a nosy character type person and he drove over to see what it's all about. So he sat through the jury and it lasts all afternoon. And the next day I was at a building supply place and he came in and he said I want to ask you something. How do you know all the jargon of the fire service? And I said, well, when I go home the conversation with those nine firefighters around the dinner table at my grandmother's is not about design.

YO: [Laughs] Right.

DC: It's about firefighting. But I said I grew up in it and I would ride my bike to downtown Charlotte sometimes to visit my father, and always hung around, and thought probably I'd be a firefighter just like the rest of the family. A nepotism rule that was put in place kept that from happening.

But anyway, so he said well, why don't you be a firefighter for us? And I said, I thought you were a career fire department. He said well, we're mostly career, but we do have some people. The director of financial aid, Marvin Carmichael is a firefighter. Stephen Lightsey, who's a faculty member in food science, is a firefighter, and he named several people in the physical plant that had other jobs. And he said when the alarm sounds you go, and I said—well, I had to run this by my dean.

So I went and got an appointment with Dean McClure and he listened to it and he said that's very interesting. You know you've been so busy here, I've given you so many assignments we've never defined your three-legged stool. And that's what they would call, you know, a land grant, you know, "teaching, research and public service."

YO: Oh, right.

DC: Those are the three things. They call it a three-legged stool at Clemson. He said you've got your teaching. You work for the fire department, that'll be your public service. And he said—what was the other thing?

YO: Research?

DC: He said research—you've got your practice. You've already got that covered. He said if you do the public service I won't call on you to go make speeches for the University or take my place at some hearing or something. I'd already done that a couple of times, been with him for some things. He didn't honor that part of the agreement. [Laughs] I still had to do a lot of that.

YO: [Laughs]

DC: And I said but, Dean McClure, do you understand? [A fire may occur] in the middle of an afternoon studio. He said well, go fight the fire, and you have my permission to do it, if you come back and tell the students how the building design contributed to fire spread or prevented fire spread. And he said but I know you. If you lose time in the studio you'll come back that night and make it up. You're over here a lot at night anyway, seeing what's going on.

YO: Right.

DC: And I had already had two years of running the lecture series and he was very—that was when he realized, give it to Collins. He can do it. He'll do a good job with it.

YO: Right. [Laughs]

DC: So he gave me permission to do it. So, at that time they had a thing called, a Plectron, so I had to carry this box about that big—

YO: Plectron?

DC: Plectron. That's how they notify you. They set off an alarm and this thing would make a huge racket and they would announce where the fire was. So I had to carry it to all my classes and I would plug it in and occasionally I would get called.

Now, I had discretionary things. You can tell by the inflection in the dispatcher's voice that they're getting multiple calls of something and there's something to it, so I didn't run "bells and smells," which, you know, somebody smells an odor in one of the labs or there's a fire alarm going off. Occasionally those really are something to them, but most of the time it's a malicious false alarm or on campus there's an unbelievable amount of construction and renovation and the dust will set off the alarms.

So, that's how I got started. I didn't even go—I got my gear on Monday and had my first working fire on Thursday. Of course at that time I knew which end of the nozzle to point, but I knew nothing about fire, but they're not going to let you get in trouble as a rookie. But I ended up going to the burn building at Columbia so I have all the training that the career guys do. So that's how I started and then got promoted, and unless you're career you can't go above captain, so that's why I'm stuck a captain for life.

**1:40:24**

YO: So fast forward thirty or so years and you're getting ready to retire from teaching and you have amazingly acquired all of this knowledge of how fire stations should be designed, and fire trucks.

DC: Yes.

YO: So, that was—

DC: Well, the fire trucks started when another chief called me one day in the office at school and says, you write construction specifications, don't you? And I said not if I can help it.

YO: [Laughs]

DC: That's not one of the fun things in the practice. I said why? He said well, we need to purchase a new fire truck and I need somebody to work on the specifications for it. I thought I knew a lot about fire trucks and I said let me think about it. So, I thought about it a couple of hours and maybe after studio went by the station and said if you will send me to the six major

apparatus manufacturers and to the three major trade shows and let me look and understand the process I'll do it, and he said okay.

YO: You drive hard bargains and get lucky, Don. [Laughs]

DC: Well, I figured—I've always wanted to go see how a fire truck's made.

YO: I was going to say.

DC: And I'm never been able to go to these major trade shows.

YO: Sure. [Laughs]

DC: So, I did that and thought I knew something, but I learned so much. We came back, and South Carolina, the University, had the first fire truck in South Carolina with an electronic pump panel. And I learned that by going to a trade show and there was somebody there with this new gizmo and instead of having levers to pull you just punched some buttons.

Everybody was skeptical but now all fire trucks have it. The other thing that we did, when I was writing it a Charlotte firefighter—they had already gone to enclosed cabs, but a firefighter had stepped out of the cab at night and the water meter cover was missing and his boot went into the hole—

YO: Oh dear.

DC: —and it broke his leg right below the knee completely in two. I thought, is there any way I can prevent that, so I came up with this idea of putting ground lights on the truck that would shine out from it. So, we designed our truck with nine of these ground lights, one at the rear, one at the front, and then—maybe it was eight—and then down the side.

When we had the truck built by Sutphen Corporation one of their chief engineers came into the conference that we were doing and he says you guys have got an interesting idea on your fire truck I've never seen, these ground lights. Would you have any objections if we took that idea to the National Fire Academy? The National Fire Academy has all kinds of standards and one of them is the minimum standard for fire trucks called 1901. So they took it there and in the next revision of the standard, that ground light is now required on any fire truck built in the United States.

YO: Well, congratulations.

DC: But that's the kind of thing, you know, so we have very innovative fire trucks, and I didn't do it alone. There are always three or four firefighters that are interested in what you're doing.

Now, the fire station thing, the university wants you to go to conferences, they want you to present papers and they want you to attend the ASLA national, and they want you to be visible.

YO: Right.

DC: But a lot of times there would be a down cycle in budgets and you wouldn't have any money to travel, and I thought you know what? I'll just stay at a fire station. So, I would call or write a fire department, and I've stayed in Chicago, I've stayed in New York, I've stayed in many smaller stations and—

YO: Very inventive.

DC: —and I would go in and so that was free lodging.

YO: Right.

DC: There's a brotherhood among firefighters. You go in and they find out you're a firefighter and they really understand that you can talk the language, hey, have some coffee, eat dinner with us, you know.

So, I started staying at fire stations and I'd go to these conferences. As I put it, I will tell them, I'd rather hang out with you guys than the academic types, you know, and that was just a way of getting my foot in the door. I love the academic people too.

YO: Right.

**1:44:39**

DC: But inevitably when I was there the conversation in the dayroom at night or around the table was like, what do you do, what department are you from, how does it work? Oh, you're not a full time firefighter, what else do you do? I'm a design professor, and some of them will say well, this building was designed by an architect who didn't know crap about what a fire station should be like or do. And I said well, show me what you're talking about, and they'd go show me something and I'd say do you mind if I take a picture? I always had a camera with me. No, take a picture.

So I started collecting pictures of fire stations and then I started in the literature. When one would get published I would make copies of it and put it in my file and all like that. Well, then Tom Parker, who had designed one of the fire stations as a student at Ball State, had gone to be a faculty member at Texas A&M, but he had the parallel practice called Group 4 Architects. He calls me up sometime in the '80s and he said hey, Professor. I won't tell you exactly how he said it. He cusses like a sailor because he used to be a sailor before he became an architect. He and I are the same age. He did his military first.

Tom said are you still fooling around with fire stations? And I said well, I've done eight or nine here over the years with students. He said I've got a chance to do a fire station here in College Station. How about coming out and working with me on it?

So I went out and actually, I did the assessment of the station and then he asked me to do the design. It was a redesign of an existing station, had all kinds of problems, I mean unbelievable problems with this station.

So that was my first station. Then a friend of mine in the fire service came in and said Don, knowing how you are, that you're a nuts and bolts kind of guy, a gear head, there's an organization that I attended a meeting of recently called the Fire Industry Equipment Research Organization, and their next meeting is in Asheville. You might want to go.

What it is, people from different fire departments get together and these are the ones who would specify hose and axes and pipe poles and any and everything that you use and abuse, and some of them would bring stuff in that was broken. Anybody else having a problem with this breaking? The hose connection on the large diameter hose, the water main you lay in the top of the street, that's called a Storch connector. Well, it's a German invention, but the Americans were using—German's is all machined—this was all cast with some machine and it didn't have the same tolerances. So, you'd throw water pressure in it, and it was twisting this hose enough that it would break that connection.

The Kannapolis fire department showed it there at that meeting and it wasn't long after that that the Americans' were redesigned. The Americans have now what's called, a thumb latch. You've got to push it down with your thumb in order to [latch?] so it keeps it from rotating with pressure.

So, I got hooked in this organization and then started doing stuff. They had me do fire apparatus presentations and every two or three months there'd be a meeting and something was presented. So they invited me to be on the board of directors because I'm a teacher, I'm a vocal person, and I would speak out at these meetings.

Then they were looking for program ideas, and Robert Tutterow, who was a safety officer from the Charlotte fire department, he said, Don, don't I remember you saying you had a lot of slides of fire stations? I want you to do a fire station presentation. I said, Robert, those slides are in a box. I've taken them. I've never sorted through them. That would be a lot of work.

I mean when you had these FIERO meetings you might have twelve people show up, you might have fifty. I said that would be a lot of work for that. He said well, I've got an email list from people all over North America. I'll send it out to them and invite them to the thing. And I said well, why would they fly from Phoenix for an hour, hour and a half presentation? He said you've got a point. What if we got some other speakers and we just made a day of it? I said I guess you could. I mean I don't know, if you can talk some of these architects into doing some fire stations. I didn't think any more about it.

He calls me back about two months later and he says hey, you're good for this now because I've got you down as one of the speakers. We're going to make a FIERO meeting one whole [day] long, and it ended up being like two days.

YO: Wow.

DC: That was in the year 2000 and people would say when are you going to do it again? So we did another one in 2002 and did another one in 2004 and then [since] 2005 we do it annually. So now it's an annual national symposium on fire station design. I've been one of two speakers that has been at every one of them. I do the opening thing about here's a lot of the issues and things that are being done wrong in fire stations, and I capstone it with here are some fire stations that really have been done right. Well, over the years I'll do presentations and a fire chief will approach me and say can I talk to you about being involved in my project?

**1:50:12**

YO: [Laughs] Right.

DC: And then the architects found out about this thing so they to my knowledge would never have a landscape architect in, but architects would come to me and say would you go in with me as a fire station consultant going after this project?

So that's how I got involved in it and, let's see, I've done two in Manitoba. I'm working on four in Beaufort, South Carolina right now. We've got six in Oklahoma, which we're just doing the assessment of the existing six stations. I've done another project in Oklahoma, and I probably have been on thirty submissions of projects that we didn't get.

But that's how, because I began to talk to firefighters who are the end users. I call them post occupancy evaluations. It's not a term I invented, but that's what it is, and I tell each fire chief you start by evaluating what you've got or evaluating somebody else's station or somebody's else's new station, and let that inform you as you start the process. So that's how I got into the fire station consulting business.

YO: For a landscape architecture student listening to this interview, what do you think your story tells them to do? What are some suggestions for them that they can learn from hearing your story?

DC: It's about understanding the design process and it's about asking the question, not what's the answer. The questions that you ask in the beginning will inform the design.

Now you have to pay attention to things around you, what other designers are doing. I have my favorites out there. I love their work. But again, it's understanding the design process. What does this thing want to be? How can I make it better? How do people understand the space? How do they subconsciously read the visual clues? I can make anyone go down the street and turn left and you don't even know I've done it to you—just the way I design it. I began to learn that from Lewis and Dick Moore, especially those two.

But you also have to understand that what you learn in school is how to teach yourself, and landscape architecture and architecture and graphic design and any design profession is a lifelong learning process. I mean there are materials that we're using today that weren't invented that long ago. I use the computer all the time now. I never once had a computer course. They didn't exist when I went to school.

YO: Right.

DC: But you have to learn this new technology, and how to use it, and how it can serve you. You have to use new products, go to trade shows, not necessarily the ASLA trade shows. You go to horticulture shows, you go to architect shows, you go to builder shows, you go to home shows, because I guarantee you'll find something and say, ah ha! That product has potential in something I'm working on or something I might work on in the future.

YO: So, just get out there and look, right?

DC: Get out there and look and you cannot stop educating yourself. In a way continuing education for architects and landscape architects as a requirement is stupid.

YO: Really?

DC: Because we do it anyway.

YO: [Laughs]

DC: If you're going to survive you're going to do it anyway. Where it's good is that it's one of those things you do it because it convinces the other legislatures that it makes it worthwhile, that you are continuing to grow. There are very few landscape architects that are doing stuff now like they did thirty years ago when they started their practice. The schools keep saying well, why don't you, as a landscape architect, do some research to introduce this new kind of project. Well, first of all, who's going to fund it? It doesn't work that way. But the product manufacturers, they're constantly looking for a project, but they rarely have enough budget to fund an academic research project.

**1:55:06**

So my thing is I think landscape architecture is a profession more about what President Barker at Clemson calls "applications research." It's not raw or pure research. It's finding something that may not have been intended to be used for this, but you can think it through and say, wow, I can use this, this way. So it's like I say, you apply something in a new way. That's applications research and I think that's what I've been best at and good at and I think that's how—the vast majority of practicing landscape architects, that's what they should be paying attention to.

YO: What's the one important thing to know about Lewis Clarke?

DC: [Pause] I think he was an incredibly positive person. When I knew him as a faculty member I was in awe of him, but I was always so—Lewis, like me and I think a lot of other teachers, my job is not to tell you what to do or how to get started. My job is to take what you've done and see if I can help you make it better. If you can't come up with a concept then you're not worth very much. I don't want you to take my concept and do it. I want you to get it started and then I'm going to try to show you how to make it better. That way I'm not making clones of myself. I'm trying to find the next Lewis Clarke and nurture them, and I think that's what he did with us. They critted—at least that's my experience of it—he critted what I was doing and showed me ways that I—

I remember on the sailing club, for instance, and he didn't see this until it was all over with, and he said the principal thing wrong with the sailing club was he says you've got the tennis courts on the waterfront. And he said tennis is an internal game, it's focused in. It can be anywhere, it can be anywhere on this site. That's too valuable a property to have it that close to the edge of the waterfront. And I thought, wow. What an observation. It had never occurred to me that that problem was there. I think again that at least from my point of view he nurtured me as a designer, not only here, but in his office. He didn't take the Gifford Courtyard and draw it out and say this is what I want you to do. Go do the working drawings for it.

YO: Right.

DC: He gave it to me to do it and come up with a solution, and I always appreciated that, that he had that kind of faith in his students, and I think it comes from belief in himself, that he could

recognize a good idea when he saw one, and he could recognize a bad idea when he saw it. He had this way—like I say, Dick was a little more rough—

YO: That's Dick Moore.

DC: —Dick Moore—in his criticism and Lewis—I mean I can—I can almost feel him at those tables when he was sitting beside us and he would pick up a pen and say let me show you something. Look at this line here. Look how that line now picks up that line over there. It was an incredible experience. There's no doubt in my mind—I might have been a designer of some stripe because again, I'm a maker, I'm a creative person and I think that way. I'm an off the wall thinker.

YO: Well, what's the one important thing to know about you? All those things, but what's the one important thing?

DC: [Pause] I guess that I always tried to do my best. When I started the landscape architecture program—I didn't start it, I was asked to start it, but when we started the landscape architecture program at Clemson, I knew initially I was only going to have three faculty members for a five-year program. So you can't cover the entire spectrum of what landscape architects are involved in, so I brought it down to a design-centered program, and the year after I retired it was rated twelfth in the nation.

2:00:32

YO: Very good.

DC: In *Design Intelligence* magazine. That's pretty good for a program that only started with its first student in '87, considering that there are about sixty-five programs out there.

YO: That's right.

DC: I don't know what it's rated since then. It may have gone up, it may have gone down. I don't work there anymore.

YO: Right.

DC: But I tried to—Lewis inspired me and I think in a way that I tried to emulate Lewis in attitude, and I tried to do that with my students, not to emulate me, but to understand that there's no problem that you can't solve. You've just got to find out what the questions are and go through it.

But I tried to give them problems that they couldn't solve from their past experience. They didn't have it in their background to do it. I'll give you the last project I taught. It was in two parts. One part was called, "Six Pack of Heroes," and they had to take beer bottles or whatever clean bottle and design a carton and design labels for it that were design heroes, and that was a six pack of heroes. That was their theory project. It made them go out and study other great designers. That's where they discovered Hargraves, and Peter Walker, and Eero Saarinen, and Eliel Saarinen. I think the last time I said it had to be somebody from 1950 forward.

So it makes them go look at stuff that they wouldn't ordinarily look at. But that was an example. But their major studio project—and this was in the same studio, but there were two projects—I sent them—this was actually when I was called back as a sabbatical replacement the year after I had retired. I sent the students a postcard. I got their home addresses and sent them a postcard with two quarter-inch dots, one green and one red, and on that card [was printed]: "Pair of dots paradox."

YO: Oh!

DC: And that's all it said.

YO: Right.

DC: They didn't have any idea where it came from. I even mailed it out of town so it wouldn't have a Clemson postmark. So I was like, what am I going to get? Some of them threw it away. One kid told me I spent hours on the internet trying to find what this was.

YO: [Laughs]

DC: But as soon as I came into class, and I held up my copy of pair of dots it was like, oh!

YO: Oh no. [Laughs]

DC: And what this is? So then the pair of dots, I don't remember where I got the dimensions, but they had to take that dot and then enlarge the two circles, and cut them out of a white piece of Strathmore board, and then take one of the images they had gotten for their six pack of heroes project, and slide it around on that image until they found something that compositionally spoke to them.

You could hear them go, ooh! And I said now listen to when you get that "ooh." That's when you know as a designer you've found something that works. Then they had to draw that "ooh" on another piece of white Strathmore board, and color it with Prismacolor, old fashioned. I wouldn't even let them use the computer. And each project step had a funky title, just like "Pair of dots paradox."

So they would take those parts—they had to take it apart, so the yellow and the green, they had to do an inventory, and this created an inventory board. Then I said now take those inventory pieces, that's your kit of parts, and put that into a design, a two-dimensional design that gives you an "ooh." When you say, "ooh," that's cool.

So they had these pieces that were prescribed, and I said now, look at those pieces that you've got. You see the edge of that one right there? If that one then described a line that sliced through the other one, you can make that green one relate to the red one whereas now it's just beside it.

So we would take these designs and they could modify it, but at the same time they modified it they had to keep a spreadsheet of cost. So I gave a cost for if you cut a piece or if you discarded a piece, you had a recycle cost involved in it, so this made them start thinking about—  
**2:05:23**

YO: Oh, right.

DC: —the cost implications of design. When you cut a four-by-eight sheet of plywood, there's a cost involved in that. So this was what this was about. If they even changed the color of the piece that was a painting charge. So, this is what they had to do and at the end we took that money, and I think nothing was over a quarter, and they had to put that money in a jar, which we gave to the Habitat for Humanity house on campus that was being built.

YO: Wow.

DC: But these evolved into these fabulous looking two-dimensional designs that were very graphic in nature, almost like logos sometimes. Then for the final project, they had to extrude it up in three dimensions and extrude it down, and they had to develop the logic. Why did you take that piece up? Why did you take that piece down?

So the downs became water, so we have these fabulous urban-design-like things, and they had to build it in wood. We have a very fine woodshop at Clemson and so they had to do it with a fine grain of wood. They couldn't just use balsa or something like that. So all these things are these polished and painted three-dimensional urban-design-like, you know.

There's a project outside of Indianapolis by Roche and Dinkeloo, which is Eero's [Saarinen] old firm. It's like six pyramids at the edge of a lake, and some of these things kind of recall that except their pyramids were all the same and these were different shapes.

So they end up with these urban-like or garden-like or memorial-like forms with water and implied pathways and then we would add trees, and then trees would go in and I would say trees are not just trees. Trees are a spatial-forming element as well. So, where you may have something where the space is starting to be felt you can use the trees to really give a sense of place or space to it.

YO: So you started from a very, very abstract—

DC: Very abstract.

YO: —approach and brought it through the conscious stage of their thinking to be something—

DC: In the end we had scale figures in these projects.

YO: So, then it became something more recognizable and tangible.

DC: Yeah, so at the end, kind of my final day in class, I say, look, if you can take the pair of dots and you can make it into that, that's all it is.

YO: Amazing, Don, amazing.

DC: That's all it is. It's just whatever you've got to work with, and the clues may be very weak, but move something. Move something and something will happen. You'll say, ah ha! There it is. So I'm very keen on understanding the "ah ha." There it is.

YO: Right.

DC: I know that it works. I know that there's a relationship.

YO: I have a feeling that's why you stayed in teaching, was to hear the "oohs" and "ahs" out of those students, right?

DC: Oh yeah. Yeah, and my students have been doing very well. There are some that are out of work now, but the best ones, they're still moving along.

YO: Right.

DC: Like one of the things, I talked to a student—we were with the Legislature on Wednesday. One of the students is doing Dollar General or one of those stores.

YO: Dollar General, the—?

DC: He's doing site works for them.

YO: Oh.

DC: And he's doing that to put food on the table, but I've seen a couple of them and when I pass one I say, wow, somebody's doing a little bit more than Dollar General used to do.

YO: Right.

DC: And it's one of my students.

YO: I'll be darned.

DC: So, anyway.

YO: That's great. Well, those are all my questions for today, Don. Do you have anything else you'd like to add?

DC: Well, I'm just flattered with the opportunity to do it, glad to do it for Lewis. When I was first approached about it, I thought it was going to be more anecdotal things about Lewis, [Laughs] and I have some of those I could add to it too, but I—

YO: Well, give me one. Have you got one in mind? And then we'll close it with that one more anecdote.

DC: Well it's another little funny tale. There are two I want to tell, both of them funny.

YO: All right.

**2:09:45**

DC: Lewis and Charlie [Burkhead] would sort of meet initial clients and set it up and sometimes they would stay with the project, but more often than not they would turn it over to one of the senior people in the office.

There was a project we got for a medical office park somewhere and Don Basile was going to be in charge of it. So they sent Don and I out to the North Hills Mall when it was the mall, and it wasn't very old at that time, to meet with the clients that we'd never seen. All we knew was there were five of them and they would more than likely be in suits. They named the restaurant and they asked me [did I] know where it was, and I had been in the mall the week before and knew it was on the lower level and they said yes, and so we go into this restaurant.

Now, the restaurant had already been there long enough that it had succeeded to the point that it had taken over the store next to it and had cut an opening about the width of this room from one store to the next store. So I walk in the door in front of Don, and stop and look and sort of case the place, and I don't see anybody that's looking particularly like people are coming to meet them. Nobody's eyes catch my eyes. Except back through that opening to the other side of the store, back in the corner, I can see some guys around one of these large round corner booths.

I turned around to Don and I said that might be them back over there. We'll go see. So we walked to that opening and I put out my hand and I stopped Don and I said I don't think that's them. They're not all—but a couple of them were looking at us. We looked around and I looked around, again casing the joint, and I said maybe we're in the wrong restaurant. There's another restaurant on the upper level.

So we leave, go outside, I'm again ahead of Don, I'm going up the stairs in the mall, right outside the restaurant, and I hear somebody holler halt, FBI. And I thought, wow, what's this about? I turned around, and these guys are at the bottom—Don's behind me, a couple stairs below me, and they're showing me they're armed, and they said would you two gentlemen back down the stairs, please? I'm thinking, Don, what the crap have you done?

YO: [Laughs]

DC: And Don's thinking, Don, what the crap have you done? Crap, I shouldn't be saying that. But anyway, we back down the stairs and they said do you have identification? And I—and he said I'll get it. He didn't even let me reach for it.

YO: Oh no.

DC: He pulled it out and he looked at mine and he got Don's out and looked at his and he asked us a few questions and he said gentlemen, I guess this was a case of mistaken identity. Mr. Basile looks like somebody that we've been looking for, and Mr. Collins, you behaved like his bodyguard.

YO: Oh my gosh!

DC: When you put your arm out in front of him in the doorway there and turned around and whispered to him, we thought that you had recognized who we were.

YO: [Laughs] Right, right.

DC: So we're sorry to detain you. We hope we haven't caused you any embarrassment here in the mall, you know. We went up to the other—we never did find the clients that day.

YO: You didn't? [Laughs]

DC: [Laughs] Don managed to link up with them later on.

The other story about Lewis is—again he had made a contact in Goldsboro, North Carolina, outside of Goldsboro. The people lived in Goldsboro and they were building a very nice home and I had seen the drawings, had the plans, been working on it, but I'd never been there.

And this couple, he was the son of one of the brick manufacturers down in that area and [Lewis] said you need to go down today and meet with them on the site. Do you know how to get there? And I said well, I know where Goldsboro is. I can figure it out. It was in a rural area and it was somewhere along a river because there was an escarpment and you had to go down the driveway and then you turned and went back up—

YO: Switching back up the hill.

DC: A switchback to get up on top of the hill. Well, there was a company car, it was a station wagon, and so I had already told them I'll take the company car and go down, sure. So, I was a little late getting things rolled up and ready to go and when I went out in the back, the company car's gone and there's no cars out there except my van, a blue Chevrolet van. I had a van before vans were hot tickets and it had been rolled over. It had been in my uncle's business and somebody had beat the top back out and it didn't—

YO: [Laughs] Not a client car, right?

**2:14:55**

DC: No, not a client car. So, I go down there and I'm riding along this escarpment, and it was in the late fall because the leaves were off of the trees, and I could see the house up there. So I'm riding along, trying to see if this is the right house, because there were several under way, and I finally found that driveway that I recognized as the one we'd been working on. I pulled up to the house and of course there's nobody there.

YO: Oh no.

DC: I get out of this car and I start walking toward the house and then finally this guy says can I help you? I said I'm Don Collins from Lewis Clarke's office. And he said oh, okay. Well, come on in.

So we went in and discussed the back terrace kind of thing and took care of our business and they didn't say any more to me about it. I got back to the office, walked in that rattling glass door, and Lewis' administrative assistant was sitting there and she had a [2:15:50] and she says, Lewis wants to see you and he said now.

YO: Uh oh.

DC: [Laughs] I walked into his office and he said don't you ever take that damn van to meet a client again. [Laughs]

YO: [Laughs]

DC: He said you scared the dickens out of those people. I said well, I said I was going to take the station wagon but somebody else had taken it. And he said don't you know how to rent a car? [Laughs]

YO: [Laughs]

DC: So that was another lesson from Lewis, and I told that to a friend of mine who was an architect in Clemson and he was doing a project for a dentist and was driving a Fiat, little teeny early Fiat. And he said you know what, I think I'm going to rent a car before I—so he drove the Fiat to Columbia and then rented a Lincoln.

YO: [Laughs] To drive to the client's house.

DC: Yes. [Laughs] And it worked. It was the image that this client—

YO: A little bit of image—

DC: —thought he ought to have.

YO: Yeah, polished that image a little bit.

DC: So that's two of my funny Lewis Clarke tales. Both of them were educational.

YO: I can tell. Well, I have thoroughly enjoyed our conversation—

DC: Thank you very much.

YO: —and really appreciate you doing this for us.

DC: My pleasure.

YO: Thank you.

Transcriber: Deborah Mitchum

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