



Transcript for

**AUTOMOTIVE DESIGN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**INTERVIEW WITH FRANK A. BIANCHI, 1987**

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## **NOTE TO READERS**

This PDF-format version of the Frank A. Bianchi interview transcript was created from a Word document, created in turn from the transcript available on the *Automobile in American Life and Society* Web site (<http://www.autolife.umd.umich.edu>).

The Automotive Design Oral History Project, Accession 91.1.1673, consists of over 120 interviews with designers and engineers conducted by David Crippen of The Henry Ford during the 1980s. For more information, please contact staff at the Benson Ford Research Center ([research.center@thehenryford.org](mailto:research.center@thehenryford.org)).

Staff of the Benson Ford Research Center  
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## AUTOMOTIVE DESIGN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

### The Reminiscences of Frank A. Bianchi

Reminiscence from the 1987 Interview with Frank A. Bianchi. Automotive Design Oral History, Accession 1673. Benson Ford Research Center. The Henry Ford.

This is Dave Crippen of the Edsel B. Ford Design History Center , and this is May 24, 1987 . We have with us today Frank A. Bianchi. Mr. Bianchi is a long-time Ford employee, having come with the company back in the 'Forties in the days of that incredible transition period between Henry Ford Senior and Henry Ford II. Mr. Bianchi has been in the forefront of design activities at Ford since those days until his early retirement in 1982. We would like Mr. Bianchi in this interview to fill us in on events as he saw them in that marvelous history of Ford design over the last forty years. So we'll ask Mr. Bianchi to tell his own narrative.

A: I was born in Long Island , New York -- Flushing -- and my parents moved to a place called Long Beach , in which my father was part of a developer. He was in real estate -- he and my mother. They did very well at real estate and owned a couple of nice homes on Long Beach , Long Island . At that time I went to Long Beach High School , which had a very, very wonderful art teacher named Evelyn Steiner Auslander. I knew her when she was Evelyn Steiner before she got married. She married George Auslander, a banker in Freeport , New York . My brother and I and a fellow by the name of zuckaberg and Sam Diamond were the top artists in the school. I'm talking high school now. Even in junior grades, she picked us up a little bit, but she kept us up there.

And every moment we had, we did Buick posters and General Motors posters. At that time, General Motors had a school. They had a design center. Harley Earl had started a design center about 1938/'39, and they were looking for people, so we aimed towards this. So all during my high school years I worked on Buick posters, and General Motors, and cars and things for G.M. at the time. Ford hadn't really started designing cars yet, although Edsel [Ford] did start designing a Continental, which took the eye of everybody early.

Q: You had the New York World's Fair?

A: The New York World's Fair, right, and it just turned everybody on. The Delahaye's and all these cars. So we worked towards this, and we made a great portfolio. At that time, Jules Andrade at General Motors put out a call to all design schools and colleges-with art and design courses for trainees. I think Jules Andrade, and another I think his name was Agramonte. I don't remember his first name.

Q: Jules. Yes.

A: Jules Agramonte, right. And these people set up a design school at General Motors up in the General Motors Building , and they picked two or three people from each art school, and it happened to be Pratt that I went to. Eveyln Steiner started me at Pratt. I went through the three years at Pratt and won my certificate.

Q: What years were those? Do you remember?

A: I guess '37, '38 and '39. I graduated in '39.

Q: Tell us about Pratt. That was a unique institution.

A: It was a unique school. It had a fellow by the name of Donald Dohner who did the Pennsylvania locomotives and the Westinghouse steam iron -- the double-ended locomotive and the beautiful Westinghouse steam iron -- and he was a great industrial designer, and he had done many other things. He ran this industrial design department with a fellow called Larry Brulin. We were brought in from all parts of Long Island and New York and the areas around. Richard Arbib, Elwood Engel, Joe Oros came from Cleveland , Jack Whittelsey from Birmingham/Bloomfield Hills, and Dick Hitchcock from Bloomfield Hills/Cranbrook, and all these people met and were put into this school. And Reg. Bennett, an old Texan friend of ours, was head of the school. At this time we went through the school, and it was just like a pregnancy period. You went to nine months.

We were taught line drawing, at which time -- every three months -- so many people were let out of the school and two or three more brought in. Well, I was one of the lucky ones that made it through along with Oros, and Engel, and Arbib, and there are many.

Anyway, we were brought into General Motors. Some were put in the Buick studio, some were put in this studio as trainees at the end of the end of the nine months, and we stayed there....

Q: You were recruited by General Motors?

A: We were recruited by General Motors, yes. Andrade brought us in - the school.

Q: Where was that located?

A: It was located on the seventh or eighth floor of the General Motors Building -- East wing. The very East wing overlooking which was then the Stevenson Building right across the street on Cass Avenue right above the Western Union Offices. Just beautiful.

Anyway, we did very well in the school, and most of the wonderful people were brought over to General Motors and put in various studios. Some of us made it, and some of us stayed.

Q: There was a high attrition rate in those days?

A: Yes, it was a very high rate. And Harley was tough. Agramonte was tough and so was Jules Andrade, and these people were wonderful people, but they would take only the best. So I managed to make it, and I stayed.

It just so happened George Snyder at that time was head of

Oldsmobile studio, and George left General Motors, and he was taken in at Ford –not as a V.P.— but head of the styling department [at Ford Motor Company, and after he left G.M.]. Naturally, the raids started, and he offered every one of us young kids that were in that school just about so much more money a month. And we thought seven/eight hundred dollars a month was fantastic, and he started to rob General Motors. I was one of the young people who George talked to, and he said, "Come on over. They need you at Ford. I need as many designers as possible, and it's going to take you awhile to make it here at General Motors. You can see what you've got to go through the ladder to get ahead, and I can put you right at a good level at Ford Motor Company seeing your talent and what you've got. I'm asking you, and you should be proud of it, to come with me, because I wouldn't ask you if I didn't think I wanted you." So that made me feel good. Elwood Engel wasn't one yet, but there were a few others. DeLaRossa wasn't in it yet. He hadn't come in it yet.

Q: Bordinat get in on that?

A: Bordinat got in on it, but I don't know whether Bordinat came right away.

Q: What year was this?

A: This is '39, maybe '40 -- probably around '41 or '42, and we started at Ford Motor Company.

I worked for quite a few months, and I met wonderful people there. I met a fellow that used to be a lifeguard on the beach where I was a lifeguard and my brother was a lifeguard. His name is Gil Spear.

Q: Which one, Long Beach or Flushing ?

A: Long Beach . And Gil Spear was a lifeguard at Long Beach , and I knew him from Long Beach but not too well, but I knew him as one of the great swimmers. He used to race in the mile race off the beach.

Q: He's still swimming.

A: Oh, yes, and he still swims and still goes to the pool. We continue. We went to the Ford pool before it was torn down over here, and Gil and I and my brother. So I worked for Gil Spear.

Q: What was his capacity then?

A: Like an assistant or a third man in the studio. The studio had two or three people, and you'll see some of the names in here: Jack Mills, Wes Dahlberg. There are quite a few people. Dick Caleal, Melokowski. Did you ever interview him yet? You ought to get Melokowski. He was head of Mercury studio at the time.

I was given head of Ford studio. Gil Spear was made the head of special projects and started projects – like the Ford Convert. Hard top. Melokowski was made head of Mercury studio, and I think Dave Ash was made head of -- wait, Melokowski was given Mercury studio, I was given Ford studio, and Melokowski was given another studio -- Lincoln . I guess they had three studios and an advanced studio, all fake partitions. They all had partitions in it over here in the Triple E Building.

So we started out, and as you'll see here, you'll see the papers collaborating what I'm telling you right here. Anyway, we started, and we stayed there quite awhile. I worked for Ford for quite a few years.

Q: Let's go back to those days. George Snyder had already gone?

A: Yes.

Q: he recruited you and a number of people to start the nucleus of Ford design.

A: That's right.

Q: This was heading, obviously, toward the postwar years?

A: That's right. And Henry Ford II was just starting to take over. Dad hadn't died yet, but he was very sick. [Harry] Bennett was still kind of powerful in the company, but, I guess, Henry managed to get rid of him somehow. I didn't know all the intricacies. There were other people there. I don't know when Mr. Crusoe came in, and I don't know when Ernie Breech -- Tom Hibbard came in.

Q: Hibbard came in from G.M. -- one of Snyder's...?

A: One of Snyder's, yes. That's right. And, I guess, Hibbard ran the design center. I don't know when George Snyder left exactly, but I know Hibbard took over from Snyder.

Q: Then there was the administrator?

A: Charlie Waterhouse. Charlie Waterhouse came in there and took over from Hibbard. Now I don't know what happened to those people or where they went. I know George Snyder left. I don't whether he got an offer from something in England or whatever, and Hibbard took over, and then Waterhouse. And I don't know how long I lasted there as head of the studio, but I didn't stay too long because a tremendous chance came from George Walker at the time.

Q: Was this about '47 then?

A: Yes. I'm trying to remember. I'm trying to put it together. I may get things backwards and recant a little of this and reverse a little bit. But, anyway, George Walker was in Ford as a consultant, and he was helping us with the '49 Ford. He'd come in, and his people happened to be Elwood Engel, who was at Pratt, and Joe Oros. And they were two great people, and they would come in and help us. We were doing the full-size clay models, and they had smaller models -- 3/8th models -- which they'd bring in.

Q: This, of course, was the...?

A: '49/'50 Ford.

Q: You were in the South wing of the...?

A: North wing, East side overlooking the power plant and had big double windows laying out, and that was our studio. Right next to it was a partition, and that was Mercury. Then in the other corner -- the Northwest wing -- was Mercury. No, the middle was Mercury. The end was Dave Ash's studio, which I think he had Lincoln .

Q: When he first came there?

A: Yes.

Q: So this was the design center, really, of the company in the Engineering Laboratory?

A: And in the middle was Gil Spear. And, of course, it wasn't Bordinat yet, but it was Snyder, Hibbard and Waterhouse. Then came Gene a little later. I don't know what happened at Ford. I can only remember when I had the papers here, and I don't know how long I stayed, but at this time I went to -- oh, Dick Teague called me.

Q: Where was he?

A: He was at Packard. And he said, "Frank, I want to make you my assistant at Packard." So I went to Packard.

Q: This was some years later, wasn't it?

A: Some years later, right.

Q: Let's go back to the Walker period. I'm fascinated by the fact that you were involved with the Walker effort on the '49 Ford. Can you detail those years?

A: When I was in there as head of the studio, Walker was the consultant, because, like I say, they had George Snyder there, but they didn't have a real designer or head of the group known for his success in design yet.

Q: George had done the Nash, had he not?

A: He had done the Nash, and had done some nice General Motors cars, but George Walker was famous for some of the things that he had done, and he had two great people with him who were Elwood and Joe Oros who left General Motors at about the same time I did and went with George Walker. And George would come in and check the cars out and make criticisms, and Elwood Engel and the boys would bring their sketches in, and we would work along with them in the studio. And we did all these things -- some work. Now that's what I'm saying, I don't know when I ended up going with Walker. I think I went to Packard first with Teague. Teague called me to Packard. I don't know why I left or when. There might have been something in between here, but I remember Packard because I remember that Walker called -- who was the head of Packard about that time?

Q: Alvin Macauley.

A: Alvin Macauley. That's right. He was Dick Teague's boss, and Teague was head of the design, and Macauley was his superior. I was working for Teague. I had gotten to Packard and we were designing and sketching and doing things. Dick Teague received a call from George Walker, and George was quite powerful in the field. He influenced people and did things because he was around and did many things, and he had a great design office, and had a great reputation.

So he asked Teague and got a hold of Teague and said, "Can I use Frank Bianchi? He does some good sketches, and he's quick, and he's prolific." I do a lot of things. I'm not the greatest designer or the greatest artist in the world, but I do a lot of things, and I turned out many sketches.

Q: Just the person they need?

A: Yes. Just a lot of stuff. "We need somebody who can kind of get in there and sketch for us." And George Walker was one of the ones chosen -- Brooks Stevens, George Walker and two or three others were chosen as designers to do the Mark III -- this new Mark III that was coming out. And everything was looking like you should do it like the Delahaye with the swoop-down doors or the Darrin/Kaiser. Remember the Darrin car that had the drop-down doors, and there are lots of sketches on those. And I have some sketches on those, by the way, that I kept on the books. These books were made for Henry Ford in which Gene Bordinat had me make. Little, quick sketches, and you'll see them all. I'll bring them in. I was brought to George Walker, and I worked there quite awhile.

Q: What year was this?

A: Now we're getting along, and I had just....

Q: You said the Mark III?

A: Yes, the first Continental.

Q: The Mark II?



A: The first Continental, the Mark II. The fact is they built a building over -- they made a building for us special. This was going to be a special, elite, super car that nobody -- in fact, the quality was going to be great. Speed and time had no effort. It was going to be the finest thing, and it was. It was one of the finest cars of its time. I don't know what year that started. Oh, yes. Ford had a design center over where the farm was. The main building hadn't been put up yet, and the central office hadn't been put up yet. The World Headquarters hadn't been built yet. There had been nothing in there. It was a farm land, and a long road went off Michigan avenue to some white farm houses.

Q: The old Trade School?

A: The old Trade School. And who had that? He's in California now. Bob Thomas ran that department. He was given that department to do a Continental -- to do a Mark II. You call it a Continental. Brook Stevens was given the job to do it. There was somebody else, and then there was George Walker. George Walker and, of course, Henry Guerr at this time was working at Ford. Henry Guerr wasn't a great designer. Henry was a super rendering man. He could take that airbrush and just make it talk. And all the renderings were supposed to be done -- a Prussian blue -- the dark blue -- white sidewall tires. And, of course, everything had to be the same size. But George was interested in super quality. He wanted the finest renderings, and he wanted to win this con- test. He wanted to win. And George said, "I've got all you people here, and you're the best there is, and we're going to win. We're even going to do better than the company is doing." So he says, "Frank, you get started on sketches and what we're going to do, and Elwood and Joe and all us people will get together and find out what kind of car we're going to do." You'll see some of it -- little sketches.

Anyway, they got going. And, of course, George did very well, and I don't whether he won the contest or not, or whether it was an amalgamation of all the cars, but George was still in on this thing. Now, I don't know when George left. He never did. He was with Ford into these later years. He was even here when Elwood and Joe took over -- when they built the new styling section.

Q: He left in '60.

A: Did he leave in '60?

Q: Yes.

A: He left in '60. Okay. You're well aware of that, all right. Geez, that far back? So he left in '60!

Q: He stayed on as a consultant for a couple of years.

A: Yes. He stayed on as a consultant and still came over to the new building, didn't he?

Q: That's right.

A: Because I don't remember the new building. I was gone. I don't know where I went. Oh, yes. Here's what happened. Exactly what happened. Let's see we're at the Ford. We're at George Walker.

Q: May I take you back to an earlier...?

A: All right.

Q: The competition for the '49 Ford. Were you involved in any way with that on the Walker staff?

A: I wasn't involved with it on Walker 's staff, although I did it. I worked on the car in the studio. The Northeast corner. We worked on the thing. The fact is we had a fastback. It was called the Flow Line, that was the name for it, and they were going to come out with it.

Q: What I'd like to explore in some detail is the competition for the '49 Ford. Gregorie was still there.

A: Gregorie was still there.

Q: Gregorie had made his model.

A: Oh, yes. And Dick Caleal was there. You'll see some names here.

Q: Tell me about -- one of the things we'd like to clear up with your help is exactly how that competition went, where the model came from, who was responsible for the so-called Caleal model and how that came about, and then who was responsible for the final design?

A: Okay. The '49 Ford -- now I don't know, you had Hobbs , you had Hermann Brunn, you had....

Q: Who was Hobbs ? What was his first name?

A: Let's see, Ted Hobbs was head of fabrics and interior, and I'm trying to remember. I remember that very well that Dick Calleal had done a '49 Ford.

Q: He had been down in South Bend ?

A: He had been down in South Bend .

Q: Working for Studebaker?

A: Yes, he was working for Studebaker. He did a....

Q: And I understand that he had been laid off, and Bob Bourke had said, "Go see George Walker. He's got a job?"

A: That's right. I think he worked with George Walker and Elwood and the boys, and they made up a -- I guess it was a 3/8th model, although we went smaller than 3/8ths.

Q: It was a quarter?

A: Yes. Here's one on the quarter scale. That's one of the first ones. Now I don't know whose that is. I have no idea whose car that is.

Q: That's one of the early...?

A: That's one of the early quarter-scale models in the wooden bridge like they used. Here's another one. You can probably go through here and find some more.

Q: From an audio standpoint, see if you can remember just what the progression of events were, because it's kind of important. We need to fill in some of the details of just how much people like Dick Calleal were involved, how much Oros and Engel were involved, and who did what on the car?

A: All right. I can help you out there. Dick Calleal had done a model and done some work on it.

Q: All done by his old friends in South Bend ?

A: That's right.

Q: Bob Koto and Bob Bourke?

A: That's right. And Dick Calleal came up here, and I don't remember the period of which time he was with George Walker, but I do remember the period of which he came to Ford. And he worked at Ford. Now Dick was an unfortunate person in one respect, and that was that Dick was not an artist. He was more or less a talk designer or a work designer, and he knew good line, and he knew good surfaces and everything, but he couldn't sketch, or design, or make a model to work on.

Q: He really didn't have those talents?

A: He didn't have those talents. But Dick was in on working on the car on whatever he did. I don't know how much he did, but I will tell you that Joe Oros and Elwood Engel had an awful lot to do with that car -- very much. In fact, I would say that they were the ones more responsible for it, although the full size was done in our studio. The full size and the 3/8th were done right in Ford studio.

Q: Now who was on the staff at that time? Who worked on that with you?

A: Gil Spear worked on it. I was head of the studio a little after Gil Spear. I don't know whether I was on it as head of the studio, but we took most of our orders through Snyder and Walker. And then Hibbard came in, and Walker was still there, so most of our orders came from Walker, and the car was basically done by Walker and Elwood Engel, although we were the hands in the studio that did it. And it was like I say, there was a flow line and the two door. And we did the cars in the studio. George used to come in and tell me to do the taillights. Then when the '50 or '51 came in, he said, "I want two bombs on it to make it look like jet exhaust pipes coming out of there, Frank. And I want a little bomb in the front there to look like an airplane engine and the propeller, and that's what I want you to do with a wing on it. I want to give this the new, modern, clean look. We're going to have a car that nobody else will have done."

Q: There's some contention about who actually proposed the spinner. Bob Bourke said that he proposed it on the Calleal model that was done in South Bend.

A: I don't know.

Q: He said that Bob Koto did the slab sides. But Joe Oros tells me that it's true that Calleal brought back a model from South Bend because he'd been asked to do one with the package sketch, but all of that came into a design mix out of which came similarities but not the whole car.

A: Let's see, I was at Ford. I'm trying to wonder when I got out of the Navy for the simple reason -- the only reason I'm saying this is I had quite an influence on the bomb and the spinner. I was a bomb and spinner boy from way back because I was a Navy pilot, and bombs and spinners were on jets. I'm only saying this because I remember here when I went to work back in 1964/'65 when they were doing the Mustang. So when I walked into the studio, Gene Bordinat said, "Frank, I don't want any more bombs and spinners. I've seen enough of that."

Q: But it was successful?

A: Yes. It was successful on that car, and, of course, Cadillac and the rest of them, it was a big era for them -- wings, and airplane, and jets. Everybody was coming out of the war. I was a great fan of wings, and jets and propellers. I even did 'em when I went to Chrysler on the DeSotos, because the reason for the Chrysler move was everybody had gone on this Chrysler thing for 1957, which was just fantastic.

Q: At this point, the car is pretty much finished -- the '49 Ford?

A: The '49 Ford is finished, and I would say...we had a winner

Q: You're all convinced you've got a winner?

A: I am convinced, and I would say that Elwood Engel, Joe Oros, George Walker men, and the men in the studio at that time. Gil Spear was a great designer, one of the best artists you've

ever seen. Fine artist – the top . And Jack Mills and Ben Kroll. You'll see all the names. Wes Dahlberg. I'm trying to remember names. And all these people were involved.

Q: John Najjar, was he involved?

A: Johnny Najjar was in Mercury. He was in Mercury with Melokowski and some of the other boys there. But these were the people in the Ford studio at the time, and these people are responsible for your Ford. I remember when it came out, we were very proud. The fact is I'm trying to think of the fellow. His name was -- gee, I can't think of his name right now. He has recently died, and he was a major in the army, and he was Ken Spencer's uncle.

Q: MacGuire.

A: Bob MacGuire. Well, Bob MacGuire was there in those days, and he is responsible for the Crestliner in which the green car came out with the black side, and it had gold lettering on it. It was called the Crestliner.

Q: That was '51?

A: Yes. I'm trying to think of who did the instrument panel, whether it was Johnny Najjar and Hobbs .

Q: I think Najjar did have something to do with it.

A: Yes. It was a beautiful instrument panel. It was black lighted a tube with the same wing that was on the front of the car. It was just a super car, and it was the most modern that anybody had ever had -- it just made General Motors -- especially, with the V-8 in it. It made General Motors stuff look like -- well, they weren't in the field with the Chevrolet. It was a lovely car. And it was painted up with a few extra accessories on it. It was beautiful. The convertible was super.

Q: That black scallop on the side was nice.

A: Oh, just marvelous.

Q: And they'd bring it with purple and black and red...?

A: They had so many colors. I remember the one that was wild green with a black panel and gold stripe called the Crestliner. It was just beautiful. And it was a back lighted instrument panel. I can remember the convertible. The fact is I had a little two-door coupe. I just loved that car. I love it 'till today. It's just beautiful.

Q: So George called you back to work on the Mark II. That was probably the early 'Fifties?

A: That had to be the early -- you'd have to get the dates pretty close because I am pretty bad.

Q: Dick Teague was sorry to lose you, and said, "Well, go ahead, Frank?"

A: Oh, yes. The fact is in those days things were a little different than they are now, and things were loose. Al Macauley was a very good friend of George Walker. They were in the same club -- the Detroit Athletic Club -- and when they wanted to trade people, they would say, "Hey, Al, I'll lend you Frank Bianchi for so and so for a few months," and you just went. And you can't say whether you were a puppet the way you were handled. No, you weren't. I'll tell you why. I loved George Walker, I loved Macauley, I liked all the people I worked for. Dick Teague was a great guy. Just fantastic people. Elwood Engel; Joe Oros. And they said, "Hey, come on over here, we need you for a little while. We may not keep you for a long time, but you'll go back."

Q: You were a valuable person to them?

A: Yes. I'm trying to figure out when I went to the Navy, and I was gone for a few years, because when I came back, I was with George Walker, and George Walker was finished with the Mark II program, and he didn't need all these people. He had a small design studio in the New Center

Building, so he put me into Chrysler. He called up Harry Cheesbrough -- I'm so bad on names. But, anyway, I went with Chrysler. Exner wasn't there quite yet, but they put me in the Chrysler studio.

Q: Was this before the Mark II? Tell me about the Mark II experience. What happened there?

A: Okay. The Mark II....

Q: George Walker brought you back to help on the early work?

A: Yes, on the Mark II. Okay. And we got Henry Guerr, and we got a couple other people. The fellow's out at the West Coast, and he did things for Disneyland. Henry Guerr was the rendering man. I did sketches and designs along with Elwood and Joe. This kid was a great artist -- just great. He did the little cars on the Disneyland thing. He left and went to Disneyland.

The Mark II was finished. All the work was in. Everybody presented their drawings. I do not know what happened to them because, of course, George took these beautiful portfolios we made, and it was submitted. The car turned out very much like the one we did, but, you know, it was so surprising, they all looked very much alike. Although I would say that George Walker's entry was beautifully done. It was so beautifully done and beautifully handled, and I'm sure that it was our car pretty close. When I say our car -- George Walker's car -- that was pretty much put right on the thing.

Now I don't know who did the full sizes or where it went, but it didn't come to the studio.

Q: It didn't?

A: I don't know, for the simple reason that at this time George closed the studio down and sent me to Chrysler. He didn't close it down; he went back to industrial design and sent me to Chrysler.

Q: What was the reason for that?

A: He was trying to place me again. And the thing was that I had left as head of Ford Motor studio, and I don't know who took over the styling section at that time. I don't know whether Hibbard was there, Water-house, or Bordinat took over yet, but they said they were loaded and could not put me in there as head of a studio, so that they would send me to Chrysler. At that time I was made assistant in Chrysler studio.

Q: Who did you work for there?

A: I worked for....Herb Weissinger (formerly with KaiserFrazer)

Q: Virgil Exner hadn't arrived yet?

A: No, Virgil Exner hadn't arrived yet. I worked for the head of the engineering section, and I can't think of his name.

Q: Cheseborough?

A: I worked for Cheseborough. Cheseborough brought me in.

Q: Harry Cheseborough?

A: Harry Cheseborough, right.

Q: Who was a very nice guy, I understand?

A: Oh, a wonderful person. These people are really nice people, and he took me on immediately and put me in because of my experience and my experience with the Ford program, and he knew all about me before I got there. I didn't have to say boo. He just said, "Look here, I want you to set it up because we need cars too now. We are badly lacking." And he was a brilliant fellow at that time because the powers to be at Chrysler were still the old-fashioned people, and I could mention names, but, like I say, I don't remember them very well. (Breer-Zeder)

But they were still making funny-looking cars. They were spaghetti and designed for no reason at all. So they were looking for new beautiful cars which started the whole trend toward the '57 program. We started to upgrade the Chryslers and put stuff on them, and they had these monstrosities -- the wooden convertibles and things like that.

I'm trying to get to the point where I went -- because somewhere in between here I left and went to the Navy. Now I know I worked for George Walker. I hadn't gone to the Navy yet. George

Walker sent me to Chrysler, and I don't know whether I went from Chrysler to the Navy or not. I'm just trying to remember. It was World War II.

Q: That would have put you just before the postwar period?

A: Yes, right.

Q: Did you get in after the war was over?

A: I'm trying to figure when we went to -- we went to the war, and I'm trying to remember. There are some periods there which are a complete blank in my head for the simple reason I went to the Naval Academy . I did some studying there, and I flew in the carriers in the Pacific.

Q: Were you in the V-5 program?

A: No. They took us right in out of the V-5 program. I had gone to school and finally gotten my degree.

Q: What was that?

A: Bachelor of Design.

Q: Where?

A: I did some work at Wayne [ State University ]. I did a little more studying, and the Navy took me, and I went right through the V-5 program. I went right into cadet training. I learned how to -- Eddie Glowacke from General Motors and I had been flying out at City Airport, so I had twenty/thirty hours, and the Navy took me on that basis and put me right into trainers, and then I went to Atlanta for basic. Out to Seattle , and after I had a couple of hundred hours, they sent me out on in the fleet.

Q: Was the war over by this time?

A: No. The war went on for quite awhile. I came back and went to San Francisco.

Q: What did you fly in the Navy?

A: I flew Douglas Dauntless', and then I went on a second tour as a dive bomber. I went out on the first tour. The second tour I went out in Wildcats and Hell Cats. They did away with dive bombers and things like that, and they went into fighters -- solely fighters -- because Japan started to lose the war, and they didn't need bombers any more.

Q: So you were picking off the Zeros?

A: Yes, oh, yes. It was quite an exciting and quite a thrilling era.



Q: Were you on carriers?

A: You know what, I came back from the Pacific before I ever went to Ford. I came from the Pacific. Let's go back to when I first went to Ford -- '39/'40/'41. I came back from the Pacific and went back to General Motors, then I went to Ford.

Q: Was Jules Andrade still there?

A: Yes, Jules Andrade was still there, and they still took us on.

Q: Howard O'Leary, was he there?

A: Howard O'Leary was administrative head. Jules Andrade was his design head and Agramonte. They had Art Ross, Henry Lauve. There's one of Henry Lauve's sketches in this packet. But, anyway, Henry Lauve was head of Buick studio, and I went into Buick studio with Henry Lauve. I was working for Henry Lauve.

Q: Henry is still around you know?

A: I met him down at the Homer LaGassey's Art Fest a year ago, and Henry still looks good. Art Ross and George Snyder was head.

Q: Was Bill Mitchell there at that time?

A: Mitchell was head of Cadillac studio.

Q: A great period?

A: Yes, a great period. I worked for Henry for a long time. I went into Cadillac studio for a little while. I worked for Bill Mitchell. Then I'm trying to figure what happened. The war came. Bill was going to go to war. He became a lieutenant commander. The rest of them tried to get in, and they were put into different areas of drafting and stuff for the airplane. At that time, General Motors was doing an airplane called the Fisher. They did an airplane called the Fisher, and it had double Allison's -- one was inverted -- an X engine. It flew and did very well, but it couldn't be used as a fighter. It had to be used as a bomber, and they never did go into production on it, but they did build a dozen of them.

At that time they built the Fisher. I came back from the Navy, and I talked to Harley Earl and things, and I brought home some souvenirs for the fellows, and then I went to Ford. From then on it's a straight progression right into Chrysler.

Q: Mr. Cheseborough was building up at that time in the late 'Fifties a design effort for...?

A: That's right. He was building a design center, and he opened a new building on the end which wasn't anything as beautiful as Ford or anybody had done, but they were a much smaller company.

Q: What buildings were those?

A: It was the very North building on the front side facing Oakland Boulevard and there was one running vertically back along the parking lot that became the whole design center. It had many wonderful people in it.

Q: Do you remember some of the names?

A: Oh, yes. Al Nixa, Henry King, that wonderful designer Herb Weissinger who admired my boss -- his buddy Buzz Grissinger worked for Mercury studio. They had a design business. I worked for him for awhile.

Q: Would Bill Brownlee be there?

A: Bill Brownlee was there, and Elwood Engel hadn't come yet. He came a little later.

Q: Cliff Voss?

A: Cliff Voss was there, right. Then Exner came in and took over, and Cliff Voss became his assistant. Maury Baldwin. Dana Waterman was chief engineer. Jack Kewitz, a very good designer. Maury [ Baldwin ] was head of the advanced studio and they later put him and myself and Eddie Francois over on Outer Drive -- the old Briggs Beauty Ware -- and they made a special advanced studio over there -- Exner did -- in which we set up new designs for Chrysler and new Imperials. The great Imperials came with the headlamps and the little things in the back and some of the DeSotos with the fins and stuff. They came out of Murray Baldwin and Jack Kenonets and people like that.

Q: It must have been a great matrix for you to get into?

A: Yes.

Q: What were you doing? You were still the sketch man?

A: I was the assistant, and then I went over, and I was the assistant to Maury Baldwin. I worked for Maury Baldwin. A great designer and a great man. He came out of South Bend with the rest of the gang. I'm still trying to think of the name of the designer. He later headed Mercury studio. Grissinger

Then we worked under Exner, and Exner was a pleasure to work for.

Q: Tell me about working with Exner; what was it like?

A: Exner was a great designer. I would say that Exner, of all the superiors that I had and all the people I worked for, Exner was probably the best automobile designer in the business. He was by far, in my estimation, the best automobile designer I have ever met. He did some great

cars. And he was a great designer. And it's too bad he wasn't noticed. Of course, Exner did go do a stint with General Motors, and I don't know why Harley Earl didn't recognize him as one of the supers. He recognized people like Frank Hershey and people like George Snyder and people like that, but he didn't recognize Exner. Exner was one of the very best.

Q: Do you think he might have realized that he was going to be a rival?

A: I thought maybe there was a little problem there, and there was a problem in which Exner was so superior in design to all the rest of the people that it just -- well, he did the '57 cars that Chrysler came out with -- just walked all over the field -- which was what we called the "forward look." And he just was out of this world.

Q: I think the pattern has been at General Motors, you had to be an Earl man, and, if you weren't....

A: That's right.

Q: Frank Hershey was fired.

A: George Snyder must have been, and finally Art Ross.

Q: And then the man he chose for his protege, Bill Mitchell?

A: Bill Mitchell, yes. And Bill was kind of a "go along with it" man. Bill was a good designer. He was a good sketcher. He did some nice wild little sketches, but Bill was more of a "go along with it." He was a General Motors man. But, boy, I sure wish Ford would have gotten Exner. I wish he would have worked right along with George Walker. That would have been a super thing. But, anyway, that's the way it went.

And after I worked it out and tried it for awhile, and then after Exner went, Elwood Engel came in. Elwood and I didn't get along. I was head of the training program at that time doing all the schools and bringing all the young people in.

When Elwood dissolved the training program -- I don't know whether he dissolved it or the company dissolved, but the training program went away. Money was tight, and I don't know why money was tight, because the company had done so well in '57. But in '58/'59 the cars were starting to look a little stodgy again and a little funny, and they didn't keep the old power in them. Elwood came back, and the training program went away, of which I was training students. I had my own room, and I did the thing. Exner had set this up. I'd go to Cleveland, I'd go to Chicago Art Institute, I'd go to Pratt, and I'd pick up students. We had some great people. Great students; great people.

Q: What happened to the Exner regime? Did things get a little static?

A: I don't know what happened. I know that -- who's the fellow that has the design studio in Grosse Pointe? Bill [Schmidt]. Anyway, he came in and took over for a little while, and he didn't last. Then Elwood came in.

Q: Apparently had been recruited through George Walker?

A: Yes, he'd been recruited. No, he opposed George Walker. George Walker was in at Chrysler, too, for awhile. Bill Schmidt came in for awhile at Chrysler, and he wasn't there too long. And then came Elwood, and that's where my training program fell apart and went to pieces. I don't know why they did away with it. Maybe they felt they didn't need it.

Q: You'd been an old schoolmate of Elwood's?

A: Elwood and I were roommates here in Detroit for years. I got into a little discussion with Elwood, and we had our problems. I kept saying, "Look, why aren't I a head of a studio? Why don't you put me here? Why don't you put me there? I'm your old friend. I can handle. I can do things. I can work for you." And I don't know what Elwood's reason for that was. I have no idea. This was the second back at Chrysler, because I had gone to International Harvester -- no, I went to Sundberg & Ferrar for awhile.

Q: Oh, yes. They were the body...?

A: Yes, that's right. And I went to Sundberg, and I did some things for Sundberg. I worked with Dick Hitchcock. Then I went to International Harvester up on Eight Mile, and I did some things for them, but that was very boring. It was trucks. It was good, but it was boring. There I met a young fellow who turned out to be -- I guess, he's pretty much heading the European thing for Ford now. I can't think of his name. [Ray Everts]

Q: Was he in design?

A: Yes, European design. Like I say, I'm very poor on names right now.

He turned out to be very successful at Ford. Did a great job and is doing a great job. I think he's back in Europe now again. Came over here for awhile and went back again. Then I came out of International Harvester and went back to Chrysler.

Q: What happened?

A: But then Elwood was there. That's when Elwood was there, and that's when the training school went to pieces. And Elwood wouldn't put me in a manager's job at the time. So I said, "Hey, I could do just as well," because at this time Dave Ash was looking to set up a new studio. It was called special projects studio.

Q: An advanced studio?

A: An advanced studio. And he remembered me from the old times. We got in touch with each other and talked about it, and he said, "I can beat your salary at Ford even in a grade eight.

Q: At Chrysler?

A: At Ford. This was at Ford. I was at Chrysler at the time. He said, "I can beat you even at a grade eight. Now I can't take you back as a grade nine or a manager, because we don't have the positions open, but I'll take you back as a grade eight and into my top studio, and I'll beat them by a hundred bucks. You want to buy it?" Well, at this time, I was pretty well down at [Chrysler] Ford, and things were looking not too good, and I didn't have a studio, and I was just going to be a grade eight at [Ford] Chrysler again, although nobody ever did anything about salaries, but Dave says, "Look, I'll beat 'em by a hundred bucks. Is that good enough for you?" And I said, "Dave, just wanting me back makes me feel great. Just wanting me back and wanting me in your studio is enough for me." So Dave Ash at this time -- Bordinat had taken over Ford. And the new building was built, and many years had gone by that made me at Chrysler -- nine or ten years because I was at Chrysler nine or ten years. I had come back, and I'd gone the route. The '65 Ford was looking -- the little Mustang -- the rumor was out on that, and I wanted to get back with an outfit that was really moving. So I went with Dave Ash, and there I spent the last quite a few a years, and I worked for wonderful people like Jack Telnack, Fritz Mayhew, Dave Turner.

Q: All great people.

A: Great designers; absolutely great designers.

Q: They're in the forefront today?

A: Yes. And Jack, I understand, just made vice-president. Whatever happened to Don Kopka? Did he retire?

Q: Don will retire June 1.

A: I guess so. He must be somewhere near my age because I knew that Don Kopka got to Chrysler, and we used to visit and go to each other's houses and go back and forth. Don Kopka and I were very good friends.

And, chances are, that Don would have given me a top job at Ford, although, at the time, I was getting older, and I wasn't feeling very well, and I didn't want to push Don or anybody into things, but I did have a very nice position. I worked for a person who I think is one of the greatest designers of the day, and they are going to use him at Ford. He is going to be a top -- he is a top man! Toshi Saito. Now Toshi came in the studio that I was in this year -- advanced studio under Dave Ash. John Middlestead was running the studio, and I helped Toshi....

Q: Who's studio was it?

A: It was called corporate projects studio.

Q: John Middlestead was running it?

A: John Middlestead was running it. No, I think Romine Hammond was running it at the time I first went in it, and then John Middlestead took over. First we started under Romine Hammand, and we went down the basement under Gil Spear, came upstairs to Middlestead. Okay, it went that way. I enjoyed myself. It was a great, great number of years, and, of course, Dave Ash was a director. I think he was a director then over the studios. At least his office was up front.

Q: A pipe-smoking intellectual?

A: Yes. And I moved back and forth, and I moved across the way under.... But I was finally put in with Mayhew and under -- let's see, there were a few other people that were in there. And under Dave Turner. I worked with George Barbas and people like that. Did you meet George Barbas? He'll tell you some beautiful stories. He was in on the Mexican thing where they did the airbrushes for Mexico , and they did the full-- size renderings.

Q: When you say Mexico , what do you mean?

A: They sent the group down to Mexico for a Mexico centennial to do some Ford airbrushes. Ford was well represented down there, and they did some beautiful things.

Q: Dave Ash is one of your heroes?

A: Dash Ash is a very wonderful person and a good designer. He and I didn't get along in many respects. The fact is he practically threw me out of a studio one day when I was kidding one of the brothers -- Howard Payne -- Howard and Philip Payne. Howard is still with the company, and Phil is with American Motors now. Howard was doing some pencils, and we used to take these prisma color pencils, and we put all the reds with the reds and the blues with the blues. Howard was doing this so he could sketch with a pencil. You'll notice a lot of our stuff is prisma color. I kidded Howard, and I said, "Howard, what are doing, painting by the numbers again?" And I don't know how that got out, but Dave heard about it, and he just chewed me out. He said, "You know you're older than that to be saying things like that around the studio.

Q: Howard is still very much with the company?

A: Yes, and he's doing some nice things. I understand he's doing some wonderful things. I met him down at the Automobile Show just recently. But, like I say, I've been out of it for quite a few years since about '82.

Q: What were the assignments there in the late 'Seventies and early 'Eighties that you worked on? You must have been in on the revolution when Jack Telnack...?

A: That was a very interesting period.

Q: Can you tell us about that?

A: I don't know what happened, politically. I know that Mr. Bourke came in, and Jack was a Bourke man. Bourke was kind of a big man in North American Operations.

Q: Right. He was president.

A: He was president. Bill Bourke. Jack was with him working with him.

Q: Apparently, they'd worked together in Australia ?

A: They had. And, I guess, when he came in, he brought Jack with him. At this time, Bordinat wanted Kopka as -- when Bordinat left, he suggested that Kopka be the V.P. -- so they split up and made two design centers, really. One was an advanced under Kopka, and they named Kopka as vice-president; they named Telnack as head of North American Design.

Q: I guess they felt at that time that Telnack didn't have enough executive experience to be vice-president.

A: I feel that maybe he didn't, but Jack was always sharp, a well- dressed man, a good designer, and he knew good design when he saw one. He knew good people when he saw them. He is the one who brought Fritz Mayhew along and Turner. He is the one who made those people. He's the man who made a lot of other people there. Let's see who else? What's the fellow's name? Graham Bell. Now, Graham Bell was a tremendous designer. There's a great designer from General Motors. I worked for Graham Bell for quite awhile.

Q: What are his duties today?

A: I think Graham Bell is a manager, but I don't know what studio. I worked for Graham Bell for quite awhile.

Q: A good man?

A: A wonderful designer. And, of course, Graham Bell did some great designs. He did some beautiful stuff on the new Mustang which is being proposed at about this time. Now I don't know what's happening to that program. I understood they took it to Japan and had Mazda look at it and a few people, because maybe Mazda will build it. I don't know how this is going to work.

Q: I hear they're going to.

A: Are they?

Q: Yeah.

A: Because they want that quality, and they want that kind of an auto- mobile. Graham Bell, you should talk to him. He's a former General Motors man, gave it up, and came here under DeLaRossa. DeLaRossa brought him over. He worked for Telnack and these people.

Of course, I worked for a long time under Ken Spencer. Ken Spencer is a very good designer and a very good manager. Although Ken is very Maine. When I say Maine, I mean he's very stubborn in his ways and very strong. See, he's from the State of Maine, and when I say Maine, I mean that type of people. And Ken did some great cars. And, of course, Graham Bell was under him. Toshi Saito was under him. He was the exec of the studio, and I liked Ken, because Ken remembered me when I was head of a studio, and he came in many years after me when I was running the studios at Ford. So Ken remembered me, and he kept me on his list, and he kept me as a manager and had me do special jobs, in which I always did all the special things for the studio. Ken would use me that way. Because when they wanted something or had to go someplace, so I had to know somebody, I had to do something, they called me because I'm the old boy that was with Ken when he first started. Bob McGuire and, of course, Gene Bordinat.

Q: He was Ken's uncle?

A: Bob McGuire, yes.

Q: Did you ever work with Joe [Oros]?

A: I never did work for Joe, although I worked with him in the school. But I don't remember Joe as being a great designer, but Joe knew what he was doing. Joe was sharp, and he did some nice cars. But Ken Spencer was just a super man and a super designer.

Q: I've heard that.

A: Yes. Ken Spencer, and, of course, he went through his problems, being like he was -- like I was -- and not being promoted. We always sat there and wondered why, and why Gene kept passing me over, because I was an old friend, and I was an old friend of Oros, and I was an old friend of Engles, and I was an old friend of Walker, and they never -- then the second part. This is the second after the war. I call this my second half. I was never used in a manager's capacity again. I was always a grade eight, but I was always asked for in certain things. Always brought in on meetings, always brought in for opinions on the Mustang later on when they did the Telnack Mustang and cars like this. I was always brought in. My picture was always shot with these different pictures. The fact is, I have a bunch more pictures. And I was always used in this capacity, and Bordinat would always refer to me as his "famous grade eight." And I loved Gene.

Q: What did he call you?

A: "His famous grade eight." His old time grade eight. "My old grade eight." But he would never promote me or, maybe, the design group wouldn't promote me. Maybe they had other people in mind, but I never did have a hurt. I never did have a mad. I never was mad, because I enjoyed my work, and I enjoyed being on the board, and this kept me out of trouble.

Q: Anyway, you guys were the shop troops down there. You're doing all the work.

A: If I was put into management, maybe I wouldn't have made a good manager. Maybe I wouldn't have been, because I later worked for people who were my students, like Toshi. Not my



student, really, but I helped Toshi draw, and I helped Toshi start, and he turned out to be one of the best men. And Toshi, on many occasions -- at one time, I was reprimanded. I was sick, and I had gone through my first operation, and I was sitting in a chair at the back of my desk, and I can remember one of the -- Ken Spencer had gone, and a new man had taken over as exec. He saw me sitting down.

Q: Who was that?

A: He is now a director. Dave Rees. Now, Dave I never could understand, and I never could understand his great success at Ford, and I don't understand Dave today, and we don't get along.

Q: A Britisher?

A: Yes. I don't quite understand Dave. But he came in and he really reprimanded me. So we were coming up for performance reviews, and instead of the grade "Excellent" that I used to get - - outstanding and excellence -- I was going to get a "Satisfactory Plus" or something like this, which isn't a bad performance review, but it unnerved me because I knew I was better than this. So Toshi, at this time, came back in as head of the studio. I had a fellow by the name of Bob Adomeit, and Adomeit was great, too. He's upstairs now in art and color. And, anyway, Bob didn't pay much attention to the performance reviews as they were coming through, but Toshi finally came in and took over for Adomeit, and said, "Frank, I got a performance review here, and this is the lowest one you've ever had." Toshi said, "What is going on here?" I said, "I don't know, Toshi. I've been loading the wall with sketches, and I've been doing my job. I've been sitting down having a little problem, but I've been doing all right." He said, "Frank, you're better than that. I'm going to rewrite this performance review." So he rewrote it, giving me an "Excellent." I don't know what's in my records, and I don't know what kind of performance reviews I've been getting, but he did take me and say, "Frank, you're one of my top men, and I love you." And this fellow is a Japanese fellow. I fought against his people. His people have now taken over with their automobiles. I despise this kind of thing because I'm an American. I fought in the war, and I still remember these things, and here is a Japanese fellow being one of the nicest, best friends I've got. He is sent to Japan all the time now by the company. In fact, he's one of Telnack's right hand men.

Q: I think this would be an appropriate place to end with a paen to your friend and mentor, Toshi Saito. Thank you very much, Frank Bianchi.

A: Thank you, Dave.

END

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