

MILLER: far as commerce goes, and /that/ our chances in this nation of going back to mass transit over the next 20 years are pretty small. I think we're going to have different vehicles and different fuels, but I just don't think we're going to give up very quickly on this individuality.

On the other hand, if a mass transit system does come up because these are regional, you know, it's still all concentrated in one place.

JH: That's true.

MILLER: And there is no competition in the sense that those little . . . the neighborhood strips, whether they're north or whether they're east, never had the vision to go any further. They never tried to enclose them in a mall or provide the circumstances that people like. You go to Honey Creek Square and the phenomena is that this is a social center for teenagers and for older people. And you see all of your . . . you know, if you want to see all of Terre Haute, you sit on one of those benches down there. And it's the new Town Square. And unlike Indianapolis that has a whole series of these on the ring road where, as regions, they pull only from that region and the downtown still has a function of being the centroid. In Terre Haute this has become the centroid, and I don't think you're going to shift that very easily. And the other centroid is sort of the governmental-university thing, and so 3rd Street is going to be now the most viable street. And the old National Road has lost its prominence, not only because of I-70 but because it's not on the pole any more of attracting forces, you know.

JH: Um hmm.

MILLER: So it's become just another arterial in the town. Really, that's what it amounts to.

JH: Before we kind of wind this thing up, I would like to ask you what you think the future of architecture . . . apparently the practices of architecture have changed radically in your lifetime.

MILLER: Oh, I'll say they have!

It's very hard to be a predictor of things and at most you have a short-range view because you . . . the things that affect architecture the most heavily

MILLER: being economics and then the political facets, the social facets, and to somewhat technology, I don't think will change as rapidly in the future as the change we've seen. If anything, they're going to diminish a bit and perhaps more thought will go into things before they're done. When you get into a golden age like this, it's surprising how little quality came out of it. Because things were so rushed, the demands were so great, money was so available, you had to get it up and get it in use, (laughs) you know. And I don't think that probably we produced any more quality as far as the real architecture of roots is concerned than our grandfathers did in percentage. It was just more.

JH: Are we training fewer architects now?

MILLER: No, we're training more architects. We're training . . . there are as many kids in the schools studying architecture right now as there are in the whole professional practice.

JH: Oh, my goodness!

MILLER: And we're sort of like lawyers and everything else; we don't know what we're going to do with all of these people except that it's a good background for a number of things to go into. It makes you more aware. It's a very fine study of the humanities and of history, and it's a good liberal arts thing, you know. And you can go into many fields with it, so I'm not really concerned about it so much.

JH: But you chose to move from Terre Haute to Indianapolis.

MILLER: Well, I did that with the demise of building at Indiana State University and with the expense of travel, and we found it somewhat impractical to go all the way to California to keep our office open out there. In '73 there was a recession in architecture and firms such as ours in California that were highly specialized All university work stopped at the same time, and I felt it best to close the office because we had only been there a short period and we weren't as well established in other segments of the market as we were in university work.

I think the expensive travel is going to make

MILLER: architecture much more regional. We've had a very close partnership arrangement with a Fort Wayne office. We're now making . . . we're still going to be partners, but we're making those offices absolutely independent because we can no longer afford to shift people back and forth and keep them at the local hotel while they're working in Indianapolis. And we're going to have to be more autonomous.

I think it's going to computerize heavily on information retrieval, and I think that architects will be able to study things, probably no better than they did but faster than they did. You'll be able to do your perspectives on a light tube, and you'll be able to sit there and rotate the building in front of you so that the perspective . . . and you can be able to really walk around that building.

JH: So the presentation will be quite different?

MILLER: Presentation will be quite different, and you I hope that architecture never loses that ability to draw, but that may be one of the things that we may be sort of coming in because the computer can take the worst scribbles and make them look pretty good.

JH: What's the bulk of your work now?

MILLER: Oh, ah, hospitals. We are doing some university work still for Indiana University, a big project. Jails are popular in the marketplace (laughs) today in our law-and-order society.

JH: What about banks?

MILLER: Not much in the way of banks. We do banks but we don't do many of them. I think that the bank building era is sort of over. I think banking is going through quite a crisis.

JH: Indeed.

MILLER: And it's being infiltrated by all other kinds of people that offer you better checking accounts and more for your money and money-mover certificates and things like this.

JH: Does the economy now dictate to a very large extent what can be built?

MILLER: Well, the economy has been dictating because the government has emphasized certain things. We've done a lot of housing for the elderly, because the bonds were tax-free that were sold to people with a lot of money that they wanted to shelter. That may be on its way out. I think industry . . . in the immediate future I think the rebuilding of American industry is going to be the biggest things. And I think that defense department contracts . . . until we get over this little ruckus we're in with the Russians, they're probably going to be fairly big right now.

I think many of the social kinds of architecture and, certainly, university work is just not going to be very frequent. That's going to be quite infrequent.

I think that the re-establishment of churches and schools and everything is hanging, waiting to see what happens with the city fabric. There is quite a tendency to move back into Indianapolis right now. It's the only way that you can get a lot of space somewhat cheaply. That's going to be gone in a very short period of time, and whether we'll start rebuilding to accommodate people moving back in to get away from energy costs You know, we figured in our office the other day that the outlying periphery right now of Indianapolis suburbia, the place where all those who are on the up (laughs) -- those who are climbing the economic ladder -- want to go and where most of the people coming in from out of town settle is a place called Carmel. Now, if you leave Carmel and come downtown in a normal size American car and park and go back, it's about a 7-dollar trip.

JH: Good grief!

MILLER: And there are not many secretaries that can afford that, and there are not many junior executives that are going to be able to afford that; so I think everybody's waiting to see what happens with the city.

JH: Well now, how would that compare to Terre Haute?

MILLER: Well, Terre Haute doesn't have the distance problems, and they certainly don't have the cost of parking problems because there's more parking downtown in our place right now than there are buildings.

MILLER: Honey Creek Square, of course, is a freebie sort of for parking; you pay for it in the purchases you make there, because somebody has to pay the freight for that space. And our distances aren't very great in a town this size. I think that probably all of the housing that exists sort of south of Wabash will continue to be well used. That never did deteriorate that much really. It was the avenues to the north that sort of deteriorated, so that might be all reinforced and fixed up again. And I think the suburban development is going to be small, but I think we've seen it -- that it is developing mostly on the south side because it's following the shift of the center, again, of the town.

JH: Was that perhaps, initially, a factor because of the railroad? I had the feeling always that going north . . . maybe it's because I always lived in the south, but going north you ran the risk of getting hung up on the railroad.

MILLER: Getting railroaded, yes.

I don't know. People who live north, and particularly those very nice houses up around the park, never seemed to think that that was nearly the problem that those of us who lived south thought. (laughs)

JH: Well, perhaps that's true.

I think I need to ask one more question before we finish and this is, what's going to happen to all these new architects that you're bringing in now? Are they going into urban planning more than just architecture?

MILLER: I think that there will be a lot of continual planning, yes. They are going into that. I think that many of them are going off to be architects for industry or architects on staff at universities, architects on staff at hospitals, particularly; I think many of them move off into the field . . . many of them move off into art. Some of them move off into being manufacturers' representatives. It's going to be interesting to see how we absorb an awful lot of our professional youngsters that are coming out in the fields of law. And they may have to all transfer over and be doctors. I don't know. (laughs)

JH: And in closing, what about the mobile home? That is a whole new ball game, is it not?

MILLER: Well, it's not so new. It's been with us ever since the end of World War II, and it's been upgraded, and it probably is the only way that people of small income can get a house of their own; and it certainly has changed the concepts of space. Now, the builders say that if we get enough people changing their concepts of space . . . and let me give you an example.

Young people right now are very content to buy homes of 1,000 and 1200 sq. ft. We haven't seen that since the end of World War II when the . . . what was the huge developer on the East Coast that turned out those homes by the millions for our generation that really started raising their families in very small homes and then added to them? Evidently we're back into that kind of an era. In just a couple of years, it changed people's perceptions that much.

JH: Don't you think this is partly because so often now both the husband and wife are working? There is much less maintenance time.

MILLER: Oh, sure. There are two things about mobile home design. One is that because they're built in a factory they don't have to observe all of the local codes that a regular house has to, so that they can do them cheaper. That's the first thing.

Secondly, they have concentrated on a very intense set of built-ins which makes small space exceedingly useful.

Now, what's coming out of the design profession right now is just this. If you move into smaller quarters, it's going to have to be better designed, not worse because it has to really open up to take in 20 people or close down and make you feel like you've got a variety of things that you can do in the same space. And that's a thrust that we're not used to and that we have to re-accommodate ourselves to do.

Somehow, to get housing that's affordable, great compromises have to be made between the building trades unions and the product. And we've got to eliminate . . . as we know, these kinds of politics are very hard to do. The mobile home industry has not really risen to the occasion with what is good design. And maybe we have to re-adapt what can go on our big

MILLER: highways and give them a chance to have wider homes, you know, instead of these long, narrow slits that we have to live in because of the load . . . or of the limits of width that they can travel the highways.

JH: Most mobile homes, as I understand it, really are never mobile. They bring them onto the lot and they . . .

MILLER: That's right.

JH: . . . pretty much stay there.

MILLER: Then they stay there; they take the wheels off of them, and they put them on a foundation, and they weatherproof them, and they do all these kinds of things. Now, they are poorly insulated, and they oftentimes don't have very good furnaces, and there are tragic results because of this. But, on the other hand, it's all some people can afford in the lower economic ranges of society.

JH: So perhaps the new architect should address himself to this problem?

MILLER: Well, if he does, he's going to have to do it within industry. He's going to have to become an industrial architect and cope with this kind of production and all. It's a whole different set of technology, you know. Mies Van der Rohe thought in his theory of buildings that he was going to bring design into the industrialized, technical world where it no longer mattered whether a building reflected what went inside it. It reflected only the use of the materials. And all of his buildings were put together, practically, by sculptors (laughs) to get what he wanted, you know, in that refinement because he never really did get to the point where he could address bringing in component pieces from a variety of industries and putting them together in an industrialized way. And that's a whole . . . it's a different design discipline. Really it is.

The furniture people approach it more than anyone else. By the way, we were talking about how things change, and, of course, the Italians are now the great interior and furnishings designers. They have the most in their sort of bulbous use of foam, and they're really taken the field right away from the Scandinavians which

MILLER: looks a little quaint. Isn't it funny that this happens in your lifetime?

There are a couple other things that I think we should say in ending up. I've mentioned briefly that Terre Haute failed in its political leadership and in its business leadership. And the merchants couldn't get themselves together to act as a cohesive unit; they were all trying to out-struggle one another. And we didn't have an Irwin Miller like Columbus [Indiana] had that unified that city. Lugar did it under the political umbrella for Indianapolis, and Fort Wayne just had a very cohesive understanding among their business people of what they wanted to accomplish. So, these three cities sort of moved ahead; and Terre Haute, unfortunately I think, has ended up in the south end in its shift of centroid with buildings that are even less well done for its era than Wabash Avenue was in its era.

Now they're no longer of wood and they're no longer the firetraps. But as you pointed out, the planning is atrocious and the quality of the aesthetic environment is even worse. It just . . . it looks . . . it is so barren. There is no thought to landscaping; there is no thought to a formalized statement; it really looks as though you're doing all of your shopping in buildings that are very temporary in nature.

And . . . so . . . when I was studying urban psychology with this Bryan Hulme, I came to the conclusion that cities are reflective of attitudes. And I think that Terre Haute . . . the greatest importance in Terre Haute is really in the home and in the various clubs that people belong to -- all the way from the Country Clubs to the American Legion. And consequently, little thought is given to where it [the population] does its business. It's meant to be purely utilitarian and it looks that way. And also I think that we're at a level of consciousness in this community where beauty is . . . beauty of surroundings is sort of like dressing too well; it's a little suspect. It's suspect of being immoral (laughs), and [there is a feeling] that we shouldn't really put that good a face on things, you know. We ought to be more common man. And those aren't bad values, but they're different values from what can keep an architectural firm engaged and busy, and that's another reason why I felt that I had to leave. Indiana State reached

MILLER: out in its golden period and really tried to do something and gave the leadership, but it didn't quite have the power to carry the rest of the community along. And it was just a circumstance of time, I think, that we had the kind of people we did. One man could have made a difference in that period of time, and it /he/ wasn't there.

JH: Well, maybe that person will come along in the future. We hope so.

MILLER: It could be. Could be.

JH: Thank you, Ewing Miller.

MILLER: Oh, you're welcome! (chuckles)

END OF TAPE