

University of Miami School of Architecture
Faculty Oral Histories

Interview with Allan T. Shulman
Associate Professor
Director of Graduate Programs in Architecture
Miami, Florida, September 28, 2016

Interviewed by Gilda Santana
Recorded by Gilda Santana

Summary: Allan Shulman, FAOA, LEED AP. For the past 17 years, Shulman has explored the interrelationship between 20th century urban culture and architecture using the cities of Miami and Miami Beach as a laboratory. As a scholar, he has found in these modern cities ample material for investigations into regionalism, tropical architecture, and the cultural idea of tropicalism. These crucibles of urban transformation have also served as the inspiration for Shulman's formulation of a design principle that he calls "urban assemblage": the redevelopment of existing cities through the layering of artifacts of the contemporary landscape. The intersection of tropicalism with urbanization has opened multiple opportunities for funded research and publication. His academic activities also include exhibits, design competitions, charrettes, lectures, and panel discussions targeted to expanding understanding of South Florida's built environment. Shulman founded the architecture firm Shulman + Associates (S+A) in 1995.

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Gilda Santana: What are the challenges you are facing as a researcher and a teacher?

Allan Shulman: As a researcher, the biggest challenge is finding materials easily. Richter Library is a great resources, but often the materials that I need are off-campus, or not part of the University's holdings. I'm always looking at materials in other collections, but even though many materials have been digitized, they may not be readily available on line, and you must still travel to view them. For instance, I was recently doing research on an Australian architect, who worked in Canada. (Name of the architect?) I was able to visit the Andrew Archives in Calgary, where they were very accommodating, but there were boxes and boxes of unprocessed materials to sort through.

Another challenge is that a lot of the research I do is not American, and goes across borders. I wonder is there an equivalent of the Avery Index of European nations? How can I get access to these materials? I often come across European journals that are not indexed through the Avery.

I recently mounted an exhibition on Alfred Browning Parker at History Miami. Most of the materials, which are archived at the University of Florida, Gainesville, are digitized and available on line, which made it much easier to sort through. I would like to have more of our materials scanned. It would be helpful. I am doing research on the West Lab, which was designed by Robert Little. I found a couple of drawing by the architect. I presented a paper on the West Lab, but I really could have used more information.

GS: I suggest you contact Koichi Tasa, the University Archivist, who may be able to help you find more materials relevant to this topic that haven't been digitized. How is the field changing?

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AS: I don't think it's (architecture) fundamentally changed, but the complexion (complexity?) has. When I started teaching, it was more usual for students to launch into architecture immediately, but not so anymore. The cultural reference points are not strictly limited to architectural construction. Multi-disciplinary connections are moving architecture in directions that were not considered in the past. We need to always keep expanding on that. Many grad students are interested in other things and we need to adapt to that trend.

GS: What are emerging areas of emphasis for the department?

AS: Interdisciplinary connections with other parts of the University such as the Abess Center, Engineering, Rosenstiel, and extra-mural institutions. I'm working right now with biology faculty on a project in Grenada. Re-focusing on core-relevancies, i.e. sea level rise, coastal resilience. Those are critically important, but Miami could also be a laboratory for new thinking on topics such as infill development, transportation infrastructure, affordable housing, parks systems, etc. Miami IS a great lab so we should use it as such.

GS: What are your hopes for library support?

AS: When I was doing research for my book, "Miami Modern Metropolis: paradise and paradox in midcentury architecture and planning", the hardest problem we had was finding

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information about Miami master planning. A lot of things got lost over the years. I found a really good resource in the FIU website [Miami Metropolitan Archive](#).

I believe the University should take a bigger role in digging up a lot of these lost and/or inaccessible resources. We should be collaborating with city and county offices and working through consortia. Maybe the City of Miami Beach's Planning Department for instance. I know that they have all of the zoning codes for the city of Miami Beach, but these are not easy to access.

Also, the Architecture Library should be a research hub, not an annex of the main library. We need an environment that functions as a component of the premier research facility that the University administration aspires to like the ones at Columbia and Cornell. We need to raise money to support such endeavors, and the architecture library should be its own new facility.

END OF INTERVIEW
Gilda Santana
09.28.16