University of Miami School of Architecture

Faculty Oral Histories

Nicholas Patricios

School of Architecture Professor and Dean Emeritus

University of Miami, March 3, 2017

Interviewed by Gilda Santana

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Interview Length: 1:14:51

GS: today is March 3, 2017 and I am speaking with Nicholas Patricios who is a retired faculty from the School of Architecture. Professor Patricios can you tell us what your title was and then also when did you start working here?

NP: My current tile is Professor and Dean Emeritus. And I first came to the school in August 1978 as a full professor. Then a few years later—at the that time we were a department in the School of Engineering, and the Dean of the school of engineering, Norman Einspruch, appointed me director of the Urban Regional Planning Program because we did not have an accredited program. So, my first plan was to get the program accredited which I did, and then John Steffian, who was the chairman of the department, was appointed Dean at the School of Architecture in Maryland. Right about the same time, Professor Tad Foote was appointed, President of the University in 1982. He had a strong interest in Architecture due to the undergraduate course he had taken with Vincent Scully at Yale University. He was also very interested in the residential college concept so one of his first decisions was to transform our Department of Architecture and Planning into the School of Architecture and also establish the residential colleges. So now with Professor Steffian leaving, they looked to me to step in and act as interim dean so basically, I was the first dean of the school which was an enormous task. First of all, to convert the department into a school; secondly, we had the top floor of the McCarthy building in the Engineering school and now we were given two buildings that were residences which we needed to convert into studios and offices. That was my responsibility as well to do the conversion. It was fortunate that our faculty member, Jan Hochstim was the architect of record doing the conversion plan and I supported his idea of returning them to the Marion Manley style, Bauhaus style, basically from the mid-40s. I would meet with Jan every few days after work

GS: That would be these buildings here or over by Engineering?

NP: It's these buildings. I would meet with Jan over there while he was doing the conversion drawings for these buildings so we could talk about where to put the studios and offices and so on. I worked pretty closely with Jan on that. We did the move in February, well the school was established on June 1, 1983. That's the official inauguration date.

NP: In February 1984 we actually moved to these premises. One of the problems we had at that stage was that we had all the student models, and if we'd had hired packers to pack them and put them in boxes it would've been an enormous cost. So, we had a great idea—we had the students put them on their heads and we had a parade from the McArthur building across the lawn around the lake to our new home. So, there was a photograph in The Hurricane of that. Maybe you could track that down. The other thing that happened was that...

GS: You think that was around 1984? February of 1984?

NP: The other thing is that on January, the third Friday, I remember very clearly coming into the office and that everything was different, but everything remained the same as the new dean. I had organized an inaugural party for Friday, June 3 at the Biltmore in the adjacent ballroom building. At that stage it was *the* metropolitan museum of art. I organized the inaugural party and reception around 5 o'clock with the Mayor of Coral Gables, the President of the University, Provost, faculty, students and staff. One of the highlights was that I tracked down an Alumni from the first Architecture program of the 1930s.

GS: Which was whom?

NP: I don't remember his name, but he was the only one of surviving from the 1930s first Architecture program which was then part of School of Fine Arts in the Gables at the Pace Building.

GS: Before it was part of the school of Engineering, it was part of the School of Fine Arts.

NP: I believe so. You'd have to verify that, but I believe it was. And it was in the so called "cardboard college" and then of course you mentioned earlier about relationships with the community. Well I could mention separately, maybe, relationships with the City of Coral Gables – we could keep that in mind. So really it was the inauguration of the school, the inaugural party, and the transfer to a new home.

GS: Why were what is essentially Bauhaus colors chosen for the buildings? Was there something about the Bauhaus pedagogical concepts that you wanted to promote? From my research so far, I understand that there was a Beaux-arts affiliation in the 30s. These kinds of intersections and transitions are interesting to me.

NP: Well of course, in the past, the Bauhaus movement really dominated if not predominated in the United States but around the world. And I would say that amongst the faculty that was our approach. The Mediterranean style, any other style that we didn't teach at that stage in the 70s. There was a strong feeling for the Bauhaus pedagogy and the architecture, and also of course the fact that Marion Manley's original concept was Bauhaus. So, we wanted to, with faculty support because we discussed it with them, restore the buildings back to the original concept so it was both pedagogical and restoring Marion Manley's original concept.

GS: And, so since the 70s it was more of the Bauhaus? When did they start doing classicism?

NP: It's difficult to pin that down.

GS: It seems like a shift.

NP: It was a shift**,** definitely. It would be difficult to pin it down. It was gradually that it happened. I would say late 80s, 1990s when we became very concerned with historical preservation. And then through historical preservation and study of that we became conscious of approaches to Architecture other than the Bauhaus style. My book *Building Marvelous Miami* published in '94 showed that Miami actually had used these styles successfully before the second world war – the Mediterranean style, mission style, Art Deco, Streamline, and all of those. I would say it was late 80s and early 90s, is when we began to be concerned with other approaches.

GS: Can you talk about your research?

NP: Well, I'm basically an Architectural historian. The first book I just mentioned, *Building Marvelous Miami* was the first one to really cover the history of Miami, South Florida, and relate the development of the different architectural styles, the open development of Coral Gables, Miami Beach, the City of Miami, and all the others like Hialeah and other places. There were other publications on the historical style, but what was different about my book was that nobody had covered the modern. My book actually covered all the best examples of modern architecture up to the early 90s. It was comprehensive historical view of the development of this area, the open development and architectural styles and how they evolved. It showed that the predominance of the post-war examples had received AIA awards weren't Mediterranean, or streamline, or Art Deco.

(13:00)

GS: Have we lost any of those buildings?

NP: When I started writing the book, we had already lost two of the most notable of the art deco hotels on Miami Beach. This is when Barbara Capitman came in and stopped the demolition of notable hotels and established the preservation movement. From then on the declaration of the Art Deco District helped. I think it was the New Yorker Hotel and Edison Hotel had already been demolished. There are pictures of those in my book. But the rest of them from the 1920s and 1930s by architects such as Henry Holhauser have been preserved.

GS: How involved were you in the preservation movement?

NP: I can't say that I was part of it, but I communicated with Barbara and I supported it. Occasionally I would speak out against intentions to demolish any hotels and spoke firmly against a moratorium that there was for south of 6th street in Miami Beach. A developer wanted to raise the whole area and create a Venice-like place with canals. Others and myself spoke strongly against that. Fortunately, that was defeated. We still have some beautiful art deco hotels in that area. Have you accessed any of the old files in the Dean's office?

GS: I have a timeline that Ralph Warburton put together. I also have all of Paul Buisson's lectures that were in Ari's collections. It would be nice to have more space.

NP: In our original (Jan and my) layout for this campus, we had buildings A, B and C. A has disappeared because Eaton college wasn't there. The ground floor of what is now the Master's residence at Eaton college was our jury room. That space was our School of Architecture jury room. It was the most fabulous

space anywhere. There were floor to ceiling windows looking out onto the lake. It was very distracting because students were looking out onto the lake while we were conducting juries. So we lost that space when they established Eaton as a financial college. The library wasn't here. Originally, the end room here was our conference room, and the room next to it was the Dean's office. And there were other faculty offices here. I've forgotten what year we brought in the library. Then the Dean's office moved to the second floor of the other building.

GS: I've been told that there was a cabinet of books—that was the library.

NP: I don't know the exact date that we established this library. Do you have any plans of this building?

GS: I have these original plans for the veteran's housing buildings that you may be interested in looking at.

NP: As a new school, the other thing that President Foote did was establish visiting committees for every school. That was another task that fell to me to have a visiting committee to identify faculty members from other schools who would be interested in serving. I haven't got those files anymore that included the names of the visiting committees. We had top people from MIT, Harvard and other universities on the visiting committees. We had to do "state of the school" report, and they would come, meet with the faculty, tour the facilities.

GS: What were there recommendations?

NP: They were very pleased that the University had established us as a School. They were very supportive of that. They were ecstatic that we were in Bauhaus style buildings so that the students could actually experience first-hand the detailing of a Bauhaus type building. As it turned out, for students it was tremendous because of the large windows.

NP: I have reservations about that new building they're putting up.

GS: Where did you go to school?

NP: My Bachelor of Architectural degree was University of Wittwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. I did my graduate planning degree at the University of Manchester in England for which I was the first post graduate to receive a distinction and the Heywood medal. Then I did my PhD. at University College, London.

GS: I'm doing a graphic visual of the faculty education, so this is great. What inspired you to become an architect?

NP: Well, as a small boy I was always interested in design and drawing, so it was a natural thing for me to study architecture. I didn't think of any other profession.

GS: Did you grow up in South Africa?

NP: Yes, and then when I was awarded the my bachelor degree, I got married and we went to England where I did my post graduate planning degree and PhD. Then for three years I worked for one of the top private firms in England, Hugh Wilson and Lewis Walmsley. Wilson had designed the famous new town of Cumbernauld, in Scotland, and Louis Walmsley had designed the famous Park Apartments in Sheffield, which had the first streets in the air. It was the first building that tried to overcome the problem of multi-story residential buildings by having wide corridors so that people could congregate and meet in them. So I worked for them for three years working on the new town of North Hampton. That's where I became interested in neighborhood planning and design. There are over 13,000 downloads of my neighborhood planning and urban design papers. These are published papers that are now available online through the University of Miami's Scholarly Repository. People are downloading them, I don't know why.

GS: Well, pedagogically, the school is known for town planning and design. How did your knowledge in this area translate to teaching at SOA?

NP: I can't say it influenced what people were doing in the school, because I was primarily doing that in the studios. I was doing social aspects of design.

GS: Did you use Miami for case studies?

NP: Yes, I remember doing quite a few projects in West Miami because it was convenient and we had the raw characters to do that. Coral Gables of course. I got interested in neighborhood planning because of the work I was doing on the expanded town of North Hampton. The New Town program in England started with completely new towns outside of London. (28:25)

Those weren't successful or very critical, so the Phase II like North Cumbernauld, where everything was about being able to walk to the center of town from anywhere. The problem with the first phase of the New Towns was that you needed a car. People didn't have cars. It was a huge problem. It was difficult to start from scratch. Phase III of New Towns was taking the existing towns and expanding them. You have an infrastructure where you have a town center. Northampton was a Phase III type new town, so we were just adding to new neighborhoods. After that I worked for the London borough of Southwark that stretches from the River Thames—it's a complete cross section of London because you have the waterside, the industrial area with a mix of medieval portions. That's where the new Shakespeare theater is. I was involved in finding the site and planning for it. We also had low income group housing in the industrial area like Rye Lane, and then there was the upper class of Dullwich. That was from 1967 to 1970. Our group was also responsible for three things. One of them was historic preservation. A big problem was what to do with empty churches. This was the beginning of historical preservation. The idea of designating a whole area was something new. Redevelopment of town centers into walkable places for people to gather. We were one of the first to hold public participation meetings which we had learned from the United States. We took a vacant shop in the middle of one of the towns and we put out maps and showed people ideas and asked them for their responses. We had them write things out. It was the first exercise in public participation in London. The other important thing I was involved in was doing the planning briefs for the public housing area. A lot of the industrial era housing had to be demolished and replaced. I had to establish design layouts and that's where the neighborhood planning came in again. Other places in London were building high-rises based on LeCorbusier's idea of a town in a park, but that was a failed concept. I already knew first-hand by talking to a parson who lived in Rowhampton, which is one of the most famous examples in London of the Le Corbusier idea of town in park, and he told me how it was a failure. You take people from the East end of London who live in Rowhouses and you stick them in a hi-rise and it's a problem. It was a prevalent problem in the United States. Not only a London problem. We did in Southwark, which I insisted on, was we did no hi-rises. Our tallest building was eight stories. We believed in the slab block idea. We used what we learned from the Louis Wallmsley idea of wide corridor streets in the air. If you

put people in hi-rises they become isolated. There's no communication. Normally, you think of public housing particularly in the United States as inferior to private housing, but in Southwark it was the reverse. Our public housing was of a higher standard than our private housing. I'm very proud of that. That was a great experience.

GS: When did you come to Miami? What happened in between? (34:39)

NP: By this stage we had two small children who kept asking for their grandparents. We returned to South Africa, to Johannesburg, where I was appointed Professor and Head of the Department of Town and Regional Planning. We were there for eight years. Something remarkable happened in October of last year, my alumni from the class of 1976 held a forty-year anniversary in South Africa to which I was invited as the guest of honor. We'd actually had a thirty-year anniversary in 2006, and out of the 14 graduates, 13 turned up from all over the world—Australia, Europe, Spain, England, Canada, USA.

The 40th year anniversary wasn't only the class of 1976. That class organized and initiated the reunion and invited all the students that had known me as a professor from 1972 to 1978 which was about 30 alumni from those years.

GS: That's quite an honor to be remembered like that. Was that an emotional experience for you?

NP: The reunion, definitely, yeah. The class of 1976 was exceptional. I remembered them all. I remembered their names. It was the most fantastic group of students I've ever had. They kept on thanking me for teaching them how to think critically. Half of them remained in urban planning, but half of them moved into real-estate and other professions. They felt that the process of thinking that I had encouraged paid off. It was different from Miami. Miami had a fixed curriculum because of accreditation requirements.

When I was there [Johannesburg] I was able to shape the curriculum by taking this critical thinking approach to help the students be independent thinkers.

I came on sabbatical leave to the United States, to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, in the Fall of 1976. Then in the Spring of 1977 I was a visiting scholar at UCLA. I happened to go to an architecture conference in Champagne-Urbana where I gave a paper, and it happened that the then Chair [Basil Honigman] of the Department of Architecture and Planning from the University of Miami was there and invited me to Miami—so that's the connection. On the way back to South Africa we stopped in Miami. I thought it would just be a social visit, but some months later I got an offer for full professorship.

GS: Did you think twice about it?

NP: Yes. It took me six months to think about it. Although we were unhappy with the apartheid situation in South Africa, I was working against it. I established the first graduate program in architecture in South Africa to include blacks. I was working with Urban Action group which was trying to ameliorate living conditions in Soweto. I was a consultant to the big mining company, Anglo American, in how to introduce family housing into their mining areas. At that stage there were just single males living in barracks. They were very progressive in asking me to design family housing and develop neighborhood planning for the mining companies.

GS: Were any of those realized?

NP: I believe one of them was after I left. It took six months to make that decision because of the work I was doing there, and I had this fantastic group of students. I was doing everything; research looking into

human perception, teaching, consulting, community work. Basically what made me decide was the future of my children. They were around ten years old. If we'd moved later when they were teen-agers it could have been more difficult and problematic for them. I knew they'd have a better future in America.

GS: Are any of your children architects?

NP: My daughter is an architect. She graduated from UM, but she's not in architecture, like a lot of her friends that moved into other fields. My son went did accounting and then law, mainly health law. He has a firm in Coral Gables.

GS: How did you get involved in teaching the courses on Alvar Aalto? (43:12)

NP: I was teaching a freshman class, *Human Factors in Architecture*, and of course the emphasis there is on the individual. Many architects say that we're designing for people, but that's just a cliché and then they don't really do it. I wanted the students to know what it really meant. The freshman course was about teaching them the psychology of individuals, social interaction, perception, community, aesthetics. For case studies, students were sent into residential colleges to observe and analyze social interaction to see how it actually worked and arrive at some objective conclusions from that research. There was a substantive aspect for them learning about individuals and the relationship of spaces. Where do you put the elevators, the post boxes, the laundry? These can be social spaces if they are properly designed, and they found this when they were studying the residential colleges. There was both substance and process that I was trying to teach them. So, for the course, I tried to find modern architects that really design for people, and I found hardly any until I discovered Alvar Aalto. I read up about him and went to Finland to experience his

buildings first hand. That's when I started the course on Alvar Aalto, which has that focus. He didn't write a lot, but from his speeches he said that he was designing for people. He did it deliberately and showed how he did it. The students would each select an Aalto building and try to follow the same process.

GS: What were some of the challenges that you faced as a teacher here, or perhaps as a researcher?

NP: That's difficult to identify. I don't know that I had any difficult challenges.

GS: How does the library fit into your teaching and research?

NP: The library has been absolutely essential. Both the Architecture Library and the Richter Library. I would not have been able to write my books without those resources. I love to come an look at the magazines to keep up with the latest publications and what people are writing and thinking.

GS: What do you think is ideal for the architecture library in the future?

NP: I chaired one committee on the future of the library for the school, and was also on a university committee for the Richter Library. In both cases we had the conundrum that if in the future everything is online, why do we need a library?

GS: People.

NP: That's the conclusion we came to. It's important for people to be able to feel a book, because electronic items have a different quality. For the architecture library it was essential for students to have direct experience with books and magazines. Our point was that the library was more of a social place than anything else—a place of exchange of ideas, thoughts, philosophies. It creates a bonding relationship between faculty and students. The library has more of that social aspect to it that it did before and for that reason it is still essential. In architecture, as you know, you have to look at precedents. It's difficult to do that online. It's better to see a photograph than seeing it on the screen. The quality of the shading, which is important in architecture.

We suggested a new wing for the Richter that would come out at a right angle that would face the green with a café and lounges. Now they have Starbucks right there. It was a question of funding.

GS: I found a great photograph in the University Archives of you and Ari Millas and Honigman, who was the Chair of the Department of Architecture conducting a class. University Archives are a great resource. Much of it is online. [the conversation continues as we go through library digital collections and pull up pictures and articles from *The Hurricane*]

NP: Ari and I did a lot of projects for the city of Coral Gables with the students. We had some professional awards from the American Planning Association. We both got letters of appreciation from the Mayor. We were very conscious about working with the city and involving the students with that work. Every few years there's a new idea for what to do with Miracle Mile. Ari and I were the amongst the first to come up with some ideas for the Miracle Mile.

I was Master of Stanford Residential College. Do you know what happened there? When I was appointed it was called *The Residential College*. We had Eaton and Mahoney, and I thought it was

ridiculous that we didn't have a name. Foote went to the Board of Trustees and said we're going to call it Stanford.

I remember distinctly making sure that the documents of the first year of the school were preserved. We used a blueprint of the Biltmore as the backdrop for the invitation to the inaugural party. The date was June 3, 1983.

END OF INTERVIEW

Gilda Santana

05/22/2018 (transcribed)