University of Miami School of Architecture

Faculty Oral Histories

Interview with Jose A. Gelabert-Navia

Professor at SOA UM

September 19, 2018

Interviewed by Gilda Santana

Recorded by Gilda Santana

Interview Length: 1:18:25

Jose A. Gelabert-Navia is a Professor and former Dean of the School of Architecture at the University of Miami. A graduate of Cornell University, Jose has been part of the Faculty since 1981. His primary teaching focus has been in the areas of Architectural Design and History of Colonialism and Globalization in Architecture. He was the founder of the School's Rome Program and as part of it, he teaches a course in Italian Culture every Spring. Prof. Gelabert-Navia has been the author of numerous articles and has also been a practicing architect, directing the Miami office of Perkins + Will. He has lectured in Europe and Latin America, most recently on the Sustainable Hospital in Brasilia and in Santiago, Chile.

Gilda Santana: Today is September 19th. I am interviewing Professor José Gelabert-Navia who is faculty at of the School of Architecture at the University of Miami.

Jose Gelabert-Navia: I appreciate your persistence.

GS: I was just transcribing another interview and your name came up in relation to Vincent Scully, and in relation to Cornell [University]. At one point you were the Interim Dean at the School of Architecture. That was moment in the history of the school that Scully was here, and it seems that it was a pivotal point the construction of the intellectual framework of pedagogy at the School of Architecture, because it was still a very young school. Can you speak about that time and about your relationship with him or his influence on you and how that was negotiated?

JG: Well, it might have come up before except the person that proceeded me passed away. I became the Interim Dean, and it was actually an interesting job interview, the former dean Tom Reagan which was also a funding dean said, "I am going to leave the School, would you do you have any ideas who might take my place when I leave?". He left somewhat suddenly. I suggested three names of people that could take his place once he left. And he said to me, "Well, I was actually thinking of you and I was going to give your name to the Provost". I was flattered and I was scared. At that point, I was an Associate Professor, not a full professor, certainly not senior enough. I felt that I needed to know if I would have the support of the faculty. I asked Lizz [Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk], Joanna [Lombard], Tom Spain, and Paul Buisson and I told them, "I've been asked to do this, would you support me if I do this?" They all said, "yes". Paul who was a

wonderful man, said, “I support you but I don't agree with it. I don't think we should have someone who is at your level right now being an associate professor, and so young, but I will support you”. And he did. Unfortunately, he passed away during my brief time. I think it was about a year and a half altogether. A number of things happened, but a number of positive things happened. I would say the Scully thing was initiated by Lizz who said to me “They're asking Vincent Scully to partly retire out of Yale, because of his age. He can still teach there, but not full time. We're looking to see whether he will come here”. I thought it was pretty exciting. Actually, Cornell, my teacher in Cornell was Scully’s great rival...

GS: Who was your Teacher?

JG: His name was Colin Rowe. He and Scully disliked each other. I was, being from Cornell, close to Colin, not that close to Scully. I knew about him because of the book, Scully had never been my teacher, so, but I thought it was exciting. I went to the Provost and they went to the president and, and they basically endorsed it. Our former president [Edward Thaddeus] “Thad” Foote [II], always used to speak about what a strong influence Scully had been on him and spoke about Scully’s legendary class in Yale where it had a thousand students. Then, the freshman took it, no matter whether you were a lawyer, you were an architect and everyone was impressed by it. The president was for it, the Provost was for it. We agreed on a salary which is looking back on, it was more than anyone made here, on the other hand, it was a pittance compared to what it meant to have him here. So we got him to come here half of the year, while the other half he was at Yale. I think he obviously raised the the legitimacy of the School. I would like to take credit for making

it possible administratively for him to come, but really he came because of Lizz. But the great thing is, he came here even though he was old by that point, he still had enough of the energy and he came here also as an advocate for traditional planning. So, he made a lot of books also possible. He wrote the introduction to the *[Between] Two Towers,* which again, his introduction obviously legitimized the book. So, it wasn't only a book of drawings by the faculty and students, but it was him giving his blessing to it.

Jan Hochstim wrote a book on [Louis I.] Kahn's drawings. I am sure that Rizzoli picking up his gorgeous book on Kahn had to do with the fact that there was not only Kahn's drawings, but it was Scully's introduction. Scully made the publication of Jan's later lifework possible. He was an advocate for Seaside, and he became a mentor, and frankly, a protector of Jorge Hernandez. He was not that because of the friendship George won the competition, but he was on the jury for a traditional Virginia Courthouse.

JG: Jorge won the national competition, and Scully was on the jury—obviously, he had something to do with it. But it's not because he knew Jorge had done it, but because the design was traditional. Jorge had been a student of Jack Robertson, who was the dean of the University of Virginia, who was also a friend of Scully and the building that Jorge did was very much in the colonial Virginia tradition. All of a sudden we had a faculty member who'd won a national competition. He did not really teach a mega-class like he did at Yale. One of my little achievements, when I was the dean was to really get the Rome program started. Lizz came up with the idea of doing a European visit for the potential donors for the foreign programs where Scully would be the guide. And they did it, but it was never to be repeated because Scully didn't like doing it. He didn't want to be Rick Steves. But he was game, and he did a lot of good things that really raised the level of the school.

It was a period when Lizz was our most famous faculty member and she was attracting other faculty and other visitors, and there was an added thing. They would come to see Lizz, they would come to see Andres [Duany], they would also come to spend time with Scully. It was wonderful having him here, and even though he was old, he really was active.

GS: When did you come here? Was still a department within Engineering? Can you talk a little about that?

JG: When I came to Miami in 1981 I worked with an architectural firm that is still around.

GS: So, you're not from here originally?

JG: I'm originally from Cuba, but my family went to Puerto Rico. I went to school at Cornell and then my family moved to Venezuela, and then from Venezuela I came here in 1981. I started working with an architectural firm and I hated it. I seriously thought about studying law or something else because I thought, "If this is architecture, I don't want part of it." A mutual friend of mine and Andres and Lizz, said, "You should look up, Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk". I mentioned it to Lizz the other day, but she had forgotten. I went to visit them at their house around seven o'clock at night and they were both there. Within 15 minutes, Andres said, "There is a position available in the University [of Miami], you should go and apply for it". And I said to him, "Well, you don't even know me. How do you know I would be good for them?" And

then he said, “You're coming from Cornell, that is good enough for me”. I said “Great, I will do it, who should I see?” It was John Steffian, who was the chairman. Twenty minutes later Andres says, “I'm sorry, I have to go to sleep”. He got up and went upstairs to sleep. It wasn’t that I was wearing out my welcome, I was there half an hour. Lizz was flustered and apologetic. She said something like, “Es un malcriado. [He is spoiled.]”. So, she and I talked for another half hour. I applied for the job and I got it. I was so desperate, frankly, to leave the firm that I was working for that I took a pay cut just to get out. We were still back in the Engineering building and I was there at least maybe, for one year or two years. I know Jorge [Hernandez] came after me and and after Jorge came Teofilo [Victoria]. Joanna was there before me. Steffian approached President Foote about starting a new school and that's when we got Eaton hall, and then we all broke away from the engineers.

GS: What were you teaching?

JG: I was teaching design and drawing. Gradually I moved away from the drawing and then into the history classes. I still do believe that even though I draw, that's what Victor [Deupi] was talking to me about because hopefully a book will come out ornmy drawings, I'm not so sure you can teach it. I felt the history was stimulating. It allowed me to do research. The drawing was drudgery to do. It was wonderful to do it myself, drudgery to teach it, but it was always design. I did the whole evolution from there, the other building to this one and that eventually to all of this. I went to Cornell and Cornell still is considered the best undergraduate program in the country.

JG: I went to Cornell when it was a really good time, with great faculty. Eventually there was a lot of turmoil and a lot of that faculty left. It was a bad time politically because again, a lot of the people, but it was an exciting time intellectually.

GS: You mentioned Colin Rowe.

JG: Yes Colin, it was, but this is not a Cornell story. That were basically two camps of people—the ones that followed Collin Rowe, and the ones that followed the a very famous, great architect called [Oswald] Mathias Ungers who was the Chairman at the time. Even though Colin Rowe had brought Ungers, Ungers wanted to bring his own people. Ungers and the Dean systematically denied tenure to all of Colin's people. But they were all there while I was there. It was exciting and frankly for these people, being denied tenure was the best thing that could have happened to them because because one went on to become the Chairman in Princeton and the other one went on to become the Dean of Yale. Then when I came here. It was also a fantastic time because, even before Scully, there were some good faculty like Tom [Spain]. When Lizz came, they set up these lecture series, with this architectural club [The Architectural Club of Miami]. She got a lot of the younger generation of architects here, which at that point included me, and they brought a lot people that, were not that famous. Those people came for the friendship, the companionship. Lizz sort of set them up to do buildings in Seaside, but a lot of them stayed in their house. We didn't have really the lecture series here in the school. You would go to the Architectural Club lectures at the Douglas [Coral Gables] entrance. There would either be a visiting critic or someone from within the school. All of a sudden there was all of his new blood that came in, which was

fantastic. There was also a lot of new blood with faculty because I came in the same year that "Tad" Foote came in. The University saw a huge change during his time. A number of teaching positions became open. It was an opportunity for a lot of Ivy League faculty like myself, Joanna, Lizz, Andres. Jorge came, then Teofilo came and a number of other people. There was an old guard then...

GS: Millas...Hochstim...

JG: Those were the good guys. One of the things I did in my time, which was not very politically smart looking back on it was the way that I handled the Provost's inquiry, "What about this planning program?" He had looked at the numbers and said, "It looks like we have 4 faculty and if I count all the full-time students, it adds up to about eight students which amounts to 2 students per faculty". Basically, he charged me to dismantle the program.

GS: The planning program.

JG: Either the program fessed up to account for the numbers, or he wanted it closed. I was pretty dutiful about it. I did challenge them on the number of faculty vs students that they had. I found out that a professor who has since passed away, Ralph Warburton, who had such few students that he taught the same class back to back, on the same day. He would teach, let's say, the first one from 6:00 to 7:30 with eight students, then teach the same class from 7:30 to 9:00 to the other eight

to justify he had two classes. Warburton was the Chairman of the Planning Department. They needed to have five full time faculty to qualify for accreditation, but they had only four. This is a funny story...He counted Arthur Bowen, who was legendary at the school and who was part of the 'old guard'. The problem was that Arthur had passed away as the fifth.

GS: He has already passed?

JG: Yes, so I got the packet for the Graduate School and it had Nick [Nicholas] Patricios, Richard Langendorf, Ralph Warburton, and another one whose name I forgot, but that has also since passed. There was a form that required that the "status", status mean fulltime, part-time, whatever, be designated, and Ralph wrote "deceased". I asked the Dean of the Graduate School, "Okay, how do we handle this? Ralph has included a dead faculty member as part of the Planning team." It sounds like a *Monty Python* skit.

So she brought Ralph in to discuss it, and with a straight face said to Ralph, "I see you have included Arthur Bowen as part of your faculty, but I notice here that it says deceased. Did Arthur pass away?" He said, "Yes, about a year ago". Again, with a straight face she asked, "But why are you including him?" And Ralph said, "Well, it feels like he's part of us still". Again with a straight face she said, "Ralph, I'm going to ask you a favor. Please, you cannot submit a dead faculty." It just fell apart by itself. This is where I missed. If only I had been a little more astute politically. The program ended, but the faculty stayed, because they were all full professors and they were all tenured. All of a sudden I had four enemies in the school. When I stepped down from being Dean, I was still an Associate Professor, and now I was left with four full-time people

whose program I had closed. I thought it was the right thing to do because it was a scam. On the one hand it was a negative thing in terms of the experience. On the other hand, it was, other than people like Nick [Patricios] who was always an eagle scout, always trying being honest, trying to do the right thing. Nick was bunched up with these lazy people whose program was being phasing out. These guys didn't have to be integrated into architecture and all of a sudden they had to teach design, and they weren't the best people to teach design.

On the positive side, the Rome program was happening. The former dean, [J. Thomas] Tom Reagan asked me if I would do a program in Venice because nobody else wanted to take it on. I said, "Sure, but instead of doing it in Venice can we do it in Rome?" I'd been to Venice a number of times and I didn't think we could take the students there for an entire semester. They would be climbing up the walls if they were there for an entire semester. Whereas Rome had whole layers of history. He said, "Whatever, just make it work". So that's how the Rome Program started.

I called an old friend of mine who had taught at Cornell when I was there. She was an extraordinary woman by the name of Astra Zarina. Astra was a Latvian architect, a really interesting character. She had left Latvia after the war, had gone to Rome, but then went to teach at the University of Washington, in Seattle, then won the Rome Prize and did a famous book, "On Rooftops in Rome" [*I Tetti di Roma: le Terrace, le Altane, il Belvedere, 1976*] with Balthazar Korab, who was a famous architectural photographer. She had set up this amazing program with the University of Washington in Rome. She worked on out of the Palazzo Pio, which was where we had the program for many years. It's an amazing building built on top of the structure of Nero's Theater of Pompeii where Julius Caesar was killed. It had an XVI century palazzo, it had a basement, which were one scene of the Dolce Vita was filmed. It was fascinating.

GS: What a spiritual Patina.

JG: Oh, it was just extraordinary. Joanna [Lombard] had done a program in Venice, but it was like the ones we have now in Tokyo. It was not formal.

GS: The studio?

JG: The studio, but we wanted it to be formal and we've worked out of that facility. The thing I'm really proud of is that not only that it was formalized, although Carmen [Guerrero] has taken it to a whole different level, but for people like Tom [Thomas] Spain, who had never left the country, who I got to go teach in Rome. It transformed his drawings. Before going to Rome all his drawings were black and white. They were very, very detailed, which he's doing again now. But all of a sudden he began to use pastels, many of which you can see in his book that's coming out right now. It was just like the second flowering of Tom. One of the highlights of people going to the Rome program was sketching with Tom. A lot of people began drawing like Tom, and it was a completely different dimension. One of the highlights of my own education was going to Venice one summer. I would tell students that working in Rome would be one of the highlight of their time in school, and for many of them it was. I also, in my time. raised the money for the book on Coral Gables, which did not end as happily as I would have liked.

GS: Which book on Coral Gables?

JG: The one that [Roberto] Behar[1] did, and all of a sudden Scully took it upon himself to write--

[Jean-Francois Lejeune interrupts with a question]

Jean Francois Lejeune: Did you find a publisher?

JG: I found the publisher, now I have to find the money.

JF: That was fast.

JG: Yes. He's doing a mockup of the book, which he's going to send me next week and I have three people that ... [crosstalk]

JF: Getting the money is always the issue, so, it is nice to have the publisher.

JG: No, but what he offered, this is the book on the drawings and said he really wanted to do it, he loved the drawings. Then he said, "I'll do this for you to help you in the book". I don't know

[1] In reference to title "Coral Gables: An American Garden City", 1997

whether he does it all the time, but certainly what I'm going to do is to these three people, take him the mockup of the book, show him Tom's book, and hopefully get them to write a check.

GS: I am taking your advice. Listening to him. That made me, that gave me the impetus to write you again.

JG: Well, so what happened is, Scully wrote this thing on Village at Merrick Park, which I had been involved with, and it belongs to the City of Coral Gables. The Mayor was pissed about the article and was really upset with the university. One of my funding sources was Coral Gables who found themselves with something written against their project.

GS: Whose project is this?

JG: The village of Merrick Park. And now that's all history, but when Village at Merrick Park was done, there was one proposal by DPZ[2] and there was one proposal by ELS with the Rouse Company and DPZ with Lincoln Properties. The proposal that was selected, which was the only one that was buildable, was the one by the Rouse Company. They are no longer around. The company was called the Rouse, were the people that did the Faneuil Hall in Boston, the South Street Seaport in New York. They did these kinds of things and in here it became sort of the University, since Andres and Liz were heroes, took the side of that proposal and began criticizing

[2] Architectural company founded in 1980, by Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk.

the other one, but the City of Coral Gables unanimously wanted that one, which is the one that was built. They were upset about that and they were upset that it appeared in the book that they funded.

GS: So, they were not arguing for Rouse or they were arguing for Rouse?

JG: Scully was criticizing Rouse, and actually it led the whole -- not only because of that -- but it led to the city final having a referendum to see whether the city wanted it or not. That delayed the project for a year and a half and it costed the Rouse Company a couple of million dollars. They weren't too happy; the city wasn't too happy. This was not the high point of the School, but for whatever it was worth, I got the money from the Bank of Coral Gables.

GS: What year was that about?

JG: That must have been 1990. There basically two candidates for the Deanship to continue; there was me and then there was [Javier] Cenicacelaya, and the faculty wanted Cenicacelaya; the administration wanted me. But this election was by the faculty. Cenicacelaya was a disaster. And he was not a disaster as an architect or—

GS: But he was as an administrator not effective.

JG: Well the former vice president of the university told me if he hadn't quit, they were going to fire him. He didn't attend meetings. He referred to meetings with the president and the Provost as a waste of his time. I am not talking about meeting with faculty, I am talking about meeting with the top people at the Ashe building thing was a waste of his time. That ended my time which frankly, at that point I was glad, because strange thing happen when you become Dean. All of a sudden, you're not faculty and people perceive you as an administrator. The faculty basically fell I was there to get the money, to get them published, to do things for them, but I was not a colleague anymore. I was glad to not have to be in that position anymore. But it was great, and it was exciting to see it from the other side and, and to see how each of us, I think, took the school to a different level. And I think right now this guy, Rudy, [Rodolphe El-Khoury] is doing really a great job.

GS: It's the next phase...

JG: We had an option to either get Rudy, or to get another person who was very closely aligned with Lizz, but he was sort of Lizz-like, and frankly a number of us felt Lizz was something so wonderful for the school, that we need something different. We don't want to repeat it in a lighter way—a diluted way. Most of the people that come in, they begin to clean house of anyone that they don't feel are in the same camp. Rudy didn't do that. If you know what he is all about, he is not for traditional architecture, he's not for classicism, he is not for any of those things. He obviously wants to bring in new blood, so one way to bring in new blood is getting rid of the old blood and create openings. He's been fortunate in that he came at a time where there were a lot of retirements, so he has not been forced to get rid of people. They have either retired or passed away.

I feel that with me, and I hope Lizz feels the same, that he has been very deferential. He's been respectful of what we do. I am probably closer to what he does, but even Teofilo told me the other day, “He should be diametrically, and is diametrically opposed to what I do as a designer”. But that to him is like, “You do that thing and that's fine, I will support you. Just keep on doing it”. He has taking the School to a different level without destroying it.

JG: I was recently asked about him as a references, “What is your greatest fear, your greatest concern about this Dean?” And I wrote, “that he would go away, I am afraid he goes away.

GS: His momentum, has been rising steadily. It's always going to be painful when there is change, but change is necessary. It's essential to growth and we need to take this place to the next level and I think he will take it there.

JG: Yes, and the great thing is that he has done it without destroying it. This building and the Arquitectonica building couldn't be more different, but they are together and that is fine. I think, that shows a maturity in what he does in a breath. To be honest, I think the last few years of Lizz, she had lost energy, she was tired. In fact, she told me one time -when she took that time off- she said, “If I didn't take the time off, I would have to take the time off.” She was tired and it reflected, it was not the exciting time at the beginning.

GS: She made more than her lion's share of the contribution to this establishment. Kudos to her.

JG: Yes, she did a great thing, and he is made it exciting again. But if you want to follow her track, she is here and she is supportive.

GS: It's part of the DNA of the school.

JG: Yes, it is, it hasn't been shut down. She hasn't been banished. If anything I think he has been supportive of her the same way, supportive of me. I really think he has been trying to be supportive of everyone; even the people that are trying to destroy him, he extended his hand to them.

GS: I don't know who they are and I don't want to know.

JG: Fortunately, there are a minority.

GS: You assert that you came from the Colin Rowe camp. He and Scully were sort of diametrically opposed. Theoretically, architectural camps seem to fall into one the categories of either the Whites or the Grays. You already spoke about how faculty here were networking with other people from different places, particularly Lizz -I am sure had a lot to do it. Lizz and Andres- bringing people in for the Architectural Club of Miami. Intellectually, where would you have placed yourself within these discussions as this discourse that was happening.

JG: Colin and Scully disliked each other. A lot of it I think—well, I am sure you probably have read about it—really blew up. There was a direct confrontation. I remember, I was in school. [Robert Charles] Venturi had designed this Yale Mathematics Building, which frankly was awful. I think Venturi is an incredibly important architect, certainly the two books he wrote, *Complexity and Contradiction*, and *Learning from Las Vegas*, are extraordinarily important. There were a lot of things that I think Colin would agree with. Charles Moore wrote a book on the competition for the Yale Mathematics Building. Scully was very good friends with Venturi and he wrote a glowing review. Colin was asked to write an article, and his review was scathing. I know we all read it, but it was like the pirated version of Colin's thing that really even split them further. But that was the personalities. In actual fact, the whole traditional design group, they really were born out of both because the urban design ideas were really Colin's ideas. Frankly, I think Colin had more depth to what he was saying. Scully was more about style. Colin, other than his fascination with mannerism, which he hated afterwards, even though it was based on modernism and ignored design because he was clearly the high priest of whites—Scully was the high priest of the grays—Colin had a photographic memory. The quotes from different periods in architecture and how you could take a building by Giulio Romano and compare it to one by Le Corbusier, at a really intellectual level. Colin's most famous essay, *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays*, had the comparison with the *[La] Malcontenta*[3] and the Villa Garches by Le Corbusier was an intellectual mathematical proportional comparison. Obviously, I don't think Le Corbusier, for one moment, thought he was being inspired by Palladio; Scully it was more direct in terms of the allusions and all that. Both of them were great influences. When I came here, I actually didn't feel that there was that many contradictions because I knew how the two of them were more or less in

[3] La Malcontenta, also known as Villa Foscari, is a patrician villa in Mira, near Venice, Italy designed by the Italian architect Andrea Palladio.

the same camp except at the end of the day, people like Colin Rowe really believed in the modernism that was the spirit of their age, more than people like Venturi, who wanted to go back in time. There was a memorable debate between Andres Duany and Peter Eisenman at the Lowe [Art] Museum where Andres took the side of classicism. It was fascinating was to listen to the two of them go back and forth.

GS: Do you know if that was taped or recorded?

JG: I doubt it. It was exciting to see those two going at it. We had Peter Eisenman in here talking about all these things and we had one of our own debating with him. Liz and Andres had more buildings going on than most of us had as faculty.

GS: Were they gone from Arquitectonica at that point?

JG: Oh yes, they were. I remember we had the Beaux Arts Ball which now has turned into a very nice party for the students. Unfortunately, very few faculties attend now. The first few we had were really memorable. We had one in the Victor Hotel that we actually restored. We did it when it was half in ruins and we had a Beaux-Arts Ball in the picture and it was modeled on the famous Beaux-Arts Ball in the twenties when different architects came in dressed as buildings. I didn't because I don't like to dress up, but I remember Tom and others doing these big cardboard masks...I hope that someone kept them...we actually had a Beaux-Arts Ball and in a building that has

changed so much that you would never think DPZ did it in Hialeah, a giant residential complex. It was under construction and we all thought this was the most exciting thing going. We actually had a party in a building that was under construction. There was yellow tape all around it. And all of us thought this was the greatest thing. It added to whole feeling that we were in something special here and the school actually had a lot of supports since this was one of Tad Foote's babies. He, he wanted the school to be successful.

GS: What's your relationship with Miami? How would you classify your relationship to the city?

JG: I lived in Puerto Rico and afterwards in Venezuela. In Puerto Rico there used to be about 30,000 Cubans. In Venezuela, there were less. The Cuban population in Puerto Rico and in Venezuela used to think that all the Cubans in Miami were *Cubanazos,* these vulgar Cubans that, we [Cubans] in Puerto Rico or we in Venezuela, had nothing to do with.

GS: Neither did those of us in New York.

JG: We were never going to come here because this was a vulgar place with loud people with no class. We came here from Venezuela because my father felt there was going to be a political upheaval. So, we came here and I think it was the best thing that happened to me because to have the practice that I have, or to teach in this place could not have happened anywhere else. Actually, after I was Dean, I was offered to be the Dean at Tulane [University] and I turned it down, even

though I thought the school was great, New Orleans was great, but I asked one of my mentors if he thought that I should take the job.

-And he said, “Unequivocally no.”

-I asked him, “I'm sort of leaning towards not taking it, but why do you say it with such conviction?”

-He asked me, “Do you want to practice? You are practicing in Miami, right? Do you like what you're teaching?”

- And I said, “Yes”

-” Do you like the people around you”, and I said, “Yes”—Although I was sort of pissed off after not being selected as a Dean.

So, he said, “Why would you want to go to New Orleans? Yes, you would be the youngest Dean in the country. Two years from now, the faculty won’t like you, even though they selected you. Three years from now, the students won’t like you, because they want things that you cannot give them. Then, five years from now, you do not have the faculty behind you, you don't have the students behind you; the administration can only get rid of one person and that is the Dean. And then you're stuck in New Orleans. So, why would you want to do that? Don't you have everything you want in Miami now? What were you thinking about?”

So, turned down the job and it was the best thing because really the practice that I have now in the last few years, especially since that it's turned towards Latin America, I couldn't have done that in Atlanta or in New Orleans or in Texas. All of these people in the school, it was a good time in the school. There were a lot of people like me, as opposed to, let's say a school like Tulane,

that the faculty entrenched and it took many years for the faculty to change. My wife, who is an Anglo said, “You like it here because there is a lot of people like you”. I said, “No, most of the people that have supported me here over the years are not Cubans”. Most of my friends and colleagues are anglos, my classmates, in Cornell were Jews from New York. And then there's all the foreigners that have come here. I would have never found that anywhere else.

GS: No, there is a uniqueness. I scratched and clawed and thought about coming here and I said, never, never, never. It's been the best thing that's happened to me in terms of my career. I will attest to being a snob about Miami Cubans, but that's not really what has provided me with the whole package. The thing that you come here -and for me, I don't know if you feel this, and I see this from other people- you get here and you realize the tremendous amount of potential that this place has and to be able to contribute to that in some way. Maybe that's just me, but I get that people feel that when they come here it's a struggle. It's not an easy place to live. It's not an easy place to navigate socially, culturally, geographically- but it is what it is, and there's nothing else like it.

JG: I just came back from Chile a couple of weeks ago. I met this person who was originally a client, an architect, turned developer, turned builder, extremely successful. He is older than me by about 20 years. He and his family, his wife, have an apartment here and every time he would come, he would say, let's go out to dinner. I don't think we were his only friends, but he said we were his best friends here. He kept on saying, “You have to come.” I've been to Chile a few times- and he said, you have to come stay with us in Chile.

GS: Where in Chile?

JG: Santiago. I kept on thinking, Abraham hasn't offered to pay for it, I mean it's not around the corner. Finally, one time he said, "Come—we're taking care of it, right. You know that" and I said, "Oh, sure". Where else would I find and spend time with a Jewish Chilean who actually –I have learned this time, his whole family was killed in a pogrom in 1905, in Russia - come here, then feeling at ease with us, then inviting us to go to Santiago to meet their friends and be with their families? And now being invited to do a project with him there. Maybe, in Atlanta I would have met someone like that. I remember when I was in more of a hot commodity after being the Dean here and I got a few offers, whether it was Tulane, another one was the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, and I would tell my wife, "Why would I go to Knoxville? People in Tennessee don't like people like me, you know?

GS: Now you have a bunch of *Kentubanos* you know about Kentucky?

JG: Oh, really no, I didn't know.

GS: *Kentcubanos* was a huge Cuban population in Kentucky.

JG: Even in Florida. I remember years ago when I was trying to get Perkins and Will started and I was trying to get a job in Jacksonville and the guy in Jacksonville after my third visit said, “Jose, I’ve really gotten to like you, but can I be really honest with you? Perkins and Will have an office in Atlanta, right? Why don’t you have your guys in Atlanta go after this job? I like you. I'm from Fort Lauderdale, so I am just trying to give you advice. People in Jacksonville don't like people from Miami. Jacksonville is southern Georgia.”

GS: It's the south, this is not the south.

JG: Miami is not Florida, it’s Miami. I wouldn't like to be in Orlando, I wouldn't like to be anywhere else, I wouldn't even like to be in Fort Lauderdale. But in here, there is this incredible richness of people. I don't know if you've ever heard it in New York, but in Venezuela, in Puerto Rico, they used to refer to Miami with the Cubans as the cemetery of the elephants, because the elephants will go to one place to die. So they called Miami the cemetery of the elephants and yes, I guess, we become like that. My wife has her way because she wants to move one more time, not now, but she doesn't want to die here.

GS: I don't either.

JG: She is from New York, so she wants to die in Manhattan.

GS: I want to go back to upstate New York.

JG: I have to tell you that the years in Cornell were just magic. But you know, I went to Cornell for first time in a number of years -two years ago and it almost looked exactly the same as it was. I walked downtown, almost every building that was there is the same. But here, even in our time, and I have been here for a long time, that building [points to structure] wasn't there, the new Arquitectonica building was not there. There is a capacity for change here. Not only is the Dean is doing a great job, but in the last few years I've gotten some of the best students I ever had.

GS: I think the quality of the students has increased dramatically from the time when I came here. Our best students, from what I could tell, we're coming from Miami Dade.

JG: Well, when I started teaching here, we had a great initial generation. I don't know if you were here when Rolando Llanes was teaching here. There were people like Rolando who came from Miami Dade and the first good group of students we had here were *Cubanitos* that didn't have the money to go through UM. They went to Miami Dade [College] for two years, they transferred here in their third year. Now I have one of our Chinese students working in the office. But it's people from all over.

GS: Because of the political climate I've seen less middle easterners for the obvious reason. We kids from all over, China. Not just Latin America and the Caribbean, which, I think, that it's

amazing. I have watched this place; I know it had its golden years, that kind of came in after those golden years. It is a piece of it that was kind of in the doldrums. I see it, happening—there's going to be another golden period.

JG: It needed a shot in the arm. I think it's Rudy, I also think it was making Carie [Penabad] and Allan [Shulman] directors of the undergrad and grad programs. People have become complacent. One thing I have always sworn myself—like you said, I don't want to know who they are—there was this recalcitrant group that was trying to block everything that he [Rodolphe El-Khoury] was trying to do. I loved Paul Buisson. Unfortunately, he died, now younger than me, but he became an old curmudgeon. He resented anything that had to do with change. I said to myself, "I am never going to do that, because I cannot help that my body is growing older, I cannot help that I get illnesses, but I can certainly do something about my attitude. I am not going to be a person who resents everything around me because of change". Some people are resisting any type of change and they want to go back to what they perceive as the good old days. They were productive in some things. You need it to get someone like Carie—she's had had a tough time because she's getting personally attacked—people like Allan, people like Rudy [Rodolphe el-Khoury] and Carmen [Guerrero].

GS: Last question. I have taken up a lot of your time and I want to have more conversations--What do you think has been your biggest contribution to the school?

JG: Well, I think the two main things that I contributed to this School was actually getting the Rome program started. I think, the other one is that I have given the students a combination of the perspective of the academic and the professional. We have a number of faculty here who are practitioners, but most of the practitioners are practitioners of small firms, boutique firms. "Teofilo", he says chuckling, "says, well, I have a practice...It's a very small practice, it is more like a hobby...I guess you could say it's a joke." It sounds funny when you say it, but it is different when you have a boutique practice and you have three students that work with you, like monks, like apprentices and that's a path. Most of the faculty that teach, that's the type of practice they have. This was almost unplanned that I became involved with Perkins and Will. I be teaching now for 37 years and I have been with Perkins and Will for 22 so, I have also made a big career with them.

GS: What was your proudest moment at Perkins and Will? I know what your least proudest moment was because you talked about it in class.

JG: A number of things. I'm really proud of a hospital we did in Ghana, Africa, which really changed the lives of the people there. But, to do that kind of project, you need a big firm, you need to have people working at an incredible level. I was used to when we were in academia that the academy was better than the profession and then that the most amazing things were being done in the academy and not in the profession. I can tell you now that most of the amazing things are done in the profession. Not only because of the technology but the technology is allowing us certain complexity of building that wasn't been possible before. I can only hire a certain number

of students, in fact, I can hire very few. However, there is a different path that is not the boutique firm, but it is the big firm. The big firm does a number of things really well. For example, we have people that only design schools, people that only design hospitals.

GS: They specialize.

JG: They specialize and that's a path and most schools don't offer that. We can offer that. To a certain extent, because I don't like to combine it to the level that I give to a student a project of Perkins and Will and that but, they see that kind of path, that they might have because I can show them.

GS: Is a possibility, an option.

JG: There is a world out there. A lot of my students want to come to work with us, but again, we might have one opening two openings a year. Then, if they don't work for us, they work for maybe a similar firm and that makes me really proud. The thing that makes me the happiest professionally or academically, and I know this sounds hokey, but I really feel it—it's seeing the students succeed.

GS: That's why I get up in the morning.

JG: Because I've been teaching so long, a number of our clients, if they themselves are not the former students, they are working for one of the institutions that I represent. The other day we're doing these airport lounges for American express all around the country and this lady comes up to me and says,

- "Do you remember me"

-and I said "Rebecca?" - I didn't remember her last name, I did remember her first name-

-She said, "Yes! You know, when I graduated, I began doing this thing and then, I began working for the airport. Then I became specialized in program management for airports and I have a successful little firm. My daughter just started architecture."

It was funny, that same afternoon, I had a client that came with his right-hand person, basically the person who picked up after him for everything he did—a big developer here in town—her name is Ellen Buckley. I said "Ellen you don't know how happy it makes me to see you doing so well". She's a single mom right now with two kids. Seeing her brought it all back and that, I tell you, means the world to me, back to see her, to see Rebecca, to see all those people and people in our office who have now graduated 20 years ago. I used to teach a course in Italian culture to prepare people to go Rome, one student came to me and she said, "My mom says hello", and I say, "Who's your mom?" And then she said her mom's name. I looked at her and she said, "She was your student. she took this class too" and I said, "Oh my God, she took this class and your here now." She took the class at least 20 years ago. I found that touching, because at the end of the day, I'm not the greatest teacher here, there are other people that are better, I'm not the greatest architect.

GS: You made an impact.

JG: The biggest legacy is those kids walking around that now have their practices, their families and all that and to see them. That's the other thing about having stayed here this long. I am very fortunate that I've been here this long rather than some people that jump around, they were here three years, five years. It's been a really great run.

GS: Thank you on that note.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Gilda Santana

02.18.19