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[Start]

Joanne Shimotakahara: Today is April the 23rd, 2023. My name is Joanne Shimotakahara. This is an interview of my brother Bruce Kuwabara, architect and founding partner of KPMB Architects, in regard to his involvement with the JCCC renovated building at 6 Garamond Court, Toronto. Thanks very much Bruce, for agreeing to be interviewed for the JCCC archives. Let's start with your early years in Hamilton. So first of all, how did you become interested in architecture?
Bruce Kuwabara: You know, I was thinking about that and a lot of it revolves around growing up in the north end and looking for, you know, something interesting to pursue as a– as work. And I went to the public library, the main one up on Main Street, and I can't remember how old I was, but I remember riding my bicycle so–I may have been, maybe in grade five maybe, but I think I was around nine or ten, somewhere in there. And I went up town, on my own, and the librarian came over to me and said, "you look like you're bored." And I said, "a little bit" and he said, "well, follow me" and he led me to the section on architecture and he pulled out–the first book was on the Parthenon, and it was on this Greek sculptor Phidias who was the–sort of the art director for the Parthenon. He did all of the murals and the entablatures, and I found that book to be very fascinating because I never had looked at temples before and there were concepts in that book about entasis, which is how the Greeks shaped the stone columns to visually correct the perspectives so they didn't look like they were tapering too quickly, so they–if you look at the columns, their actually sort of shaped, their not straight, they sort of bulge. And that had to do with the Greek's notion of beauty and correction. So, I thought that was fascinating. And the second book that came off the shelf was a smaller book that was called, "So You Want to be an Architect?" And that was a British publication, kind of like the books you might get at a guidance counselor's office, and it outlined all of the things you needed to do and, you know, schools to attend and essentially get the experience to become an architect. And I thought, well that's interesting, you have one kind of classical inspiration and then you have a really practical handbook for the profession. So, I kind of kept it all to myself because I felt I had discovered something that I had never encountered before, in fact, the word architecture and architect were rarely used in the neighborhood. No one ever talked about that before, we just took everything for granted, so that–that was really a–and that's–then there were other things that I think later on to that, I think that–in school, I was very interested in art and drawing, and I could draw. But I was also fairly all-rounded, I was very good at mathematics and I remember someone saying that to be successful in architecture, you had to have all-rounded skill sets in mathematics and

architecture and then materials and you had to have some feeling for structure and geography because, so much about architecture is about placemaking as well as making, you know, objects, buildings–so I think that was interesting to me because I wasn't specialized in only one area of academics. And I thought, "hmm this is really interesting, I could do everything in architecture", I could do the art part, I could really work on the technical parts, so I like that. And when I was in school,

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I was often given a lot of responsibility by my teachers to help organize larger-scale art projects with all the other people in the class. And I remember one year, the theme of the project was Africa and animals and so I drew in chalk a very large-scale African landscape, to the best of my ability, with mountains and trees and a kind of–plains. And I had the other kids all drawing the animals, so they were all drawing individual animals and then they would be double-face taped to the landscape which, you know, I kind of art-directed the whole thing. And the other kids were bringing their artwork to me, and I was approving it and, I actually think in that little project, which was a group effort, you really have all the aspects of architecture and project-making where there has to be a concept–a big idea. There has to be, otherwise you'll never get anywhere. And then, a lot of different people actually do different parts of the whole building. No one single person, unless you're designing a cottage for yourself, there are very few projects where I've done them entirely by myself. There are always structural, mechanical, electrical engineers, so you're constantly orchestrating–and then the clients obviously. All of our clients would have a big say in their buildings and so, you're part of a larger orchestration of the team and it's very much focused on leadership and collaboration. And I think a lot of people never really come to terms with that, they think that somehow architecture is a–just an individual stroke of genius and then–it's not, it actually–the best buildings in the world have all been the result of many many many different kinds of thinking about all of the various subjects and issues. There's a lot to resolve in a big building and I don't–do not–I would never profess that I did everything because it's just not true.

JS: Well Bruce, that's interesting. I also wanted to ask you whether your interest in chess and–your skill and interest in chess and pool had any part to play in your–

BK: Well they're both important and I've thought of that before as well, I mean chess is a remarkable game because it is about space and time. And the space is very regulated. You know, there are six–no, 64 squares and no two pieces can occupy the same square and so, within the range of moves, you have to create a strategy which is essentially planning. It's sort of strategic planning to deploy your pieces to the greatest advantage to win the game, which is really modeled on, kind of, warfare. But the part that relates to architecture is, in architecture no two pieces can be in the same space either and so, a door can't be in the location of a column or a window. And I constantly say that the mental skills that I was able to develop in chess which is the kind of logical progression of thinking and, it really has informed

the way I look at problem-solving. I mean, chess is one giant problem-solving exercise, and the really great players really see beyond the first few moves, they can–some of them can actually see pretty much the whole game unfold. And they're geniuses, I wasn't like that. But I got to play at a high enough level because I played competitive chess in high school and we won the championship every year I played. I wasn't the best player on the team, but I was the third best player on the team, and I won every game I played in many many years, I can't remember losing a game. And so I really developed a skill set. It's the skill set of thinking of space and time, because you can make the right move at the wrong time in a game and lose the game. That happens all the time. People jump in and make a move and they just didn't see it coming. The real issue was two moves away and you didn't set up

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BK: the board and the lines of power. It really is about power and force and how to control the center part of the board. All chess masters that are really great, they really get control of the middle of the board, not the perimeter–the middle. And they maximize the power and control of all of their pieces over those 64 squares. So, it's really interesting and you know, again, it was less the war aspect, it was just a game, you know–it comes–it has a great history that game and it's still being played. In fact, there's a kind of renewal of interest in chess today with players like Magnus Carlsen. There's some Japanese player that's really really good, there are players from India, from the United States, from Russia–Russia's always had great players. And all the great games in history have been recorded so it's like music.Its like classical music. There are all of these grand masters, they have committed to memory some of the great games of chess. And they're written–they're published in books, you can choose a grand master, you can study every single game they've ever played since they were teenagers and walk through with them their career. There are all sorts of chat lines, you know, where people from around the world play against each other internationally. And then there's a kind of commentary–there are these commentators about the game, it's really pretty amazing what's going on today with chess. But yea, it's good for a lot of things but it's certainly good for space, time, planning, and thinking.
JS: Well Bruce, what about a couple thoughts on pool? Because you spent a lot of time playing pool when you were a teenager.
BK: Pool was-
JS: Does it have a lot to do with architecture?
BK: I played snooker and it's such a beautiful game. It's very much about physics and mathematics and angles. And, you know, the table is proportioned two to one, there are six pockets, the British game of snooker is played on a table that is six-feet-wide and 12-feet-long. I follow, even today, the international competitions. There are so many many really really great players. A lot of them are in the UK but there are many new young snooker players coming out of China now, where they're teaching Chinese students the game. And it has a lot to do with the control of the cue ball which is the white ball. The white ball is like a sheep dog, kind of, running around the table, making sure everything is in the right spot. It's very similar to chess in that

way where you have to foresee what's going to happen, not after your immediate shot but, for sure, after your immediate shot, you have to know where that cue ball is going to land because it sets you up for your next shot. But the players who are really great, really understand what's called 'cue-ball control' and it is how you can move the ball–the cue ball after impacting the shot that you have to make. How you can move it, say, three inches to the left. People don't understand that, you can see how people play, they have zero control over the cue ball, they think it's all about just making the first shot. And you think you've done something, but you've done nothing really unless you can make your next second shot, the third, the fourth, and the fifth, and so on, and not get yourself, the term is 'snookered' which is blocked by another ball to your next shot. That's when they say you're snookered, you can't literally see your next shot because your pathway to it is blocked. The great players, they just move the balls, they curve the balls off the side rails, they just open up continually. It's very similar to chess that way, except that it's a physical game like-Chess is not a physical game in the sense that you're just using your hands to move these pieces,
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BK: but you're using your mind to think through all of the possibilities. That's what chess players do, they know all of the games that have been played before, so when they see a situation, they are quickly–you know–going through all the possibilities that they know about because a lot of these games have been written about. And then they choose their path. And the ones who are really brilliant, they've actually read all the possibilities but they see something else that no one else saw before. That's what Bobby Fisher did and that's why he's a phenom, he's still written about. But he was the player–the American who beat all the Russians. Because the Russians dominated the field and so you had this brash Bobby Fisher coming out very young and just shocking, shocking the world. And you have that in snooker as well. There were these young players, I don't know how they got so good, but they are extraordinary, they play perfect games. A perfect game in snooker is 147 points, there were 15 red balls. That means that you're making a red ball, then you shoot a colour ball. The colour balls all have point assignments, so there's a yellow that has two, the green has three, the brown has four, the blue is five, the pink is six, the black is seven. So, to get the perfect score, which is 147 points made consecutively, you have to shoot and make a red ball, and then a black, a redand a black, 15 times without missing. And then you shoot the yellow, the green, the brown, the blue, the pink, and the black all in consecutive order, and that gives you a total of 147. And there's some players like,one of the players I watch the most is this British player, Ronnie O'Sullivan. He has the most perfect games of anyone in the world. He's won seven world championships. It's really hard to do because it's grueling and all of the players from Australia, from all around the world come, you know, to the tournaments. It's an annual tournament and it determines who the best player in the world is year-round. It's like tennis or golf, those kinds of sports.
JS: Well Bruce, it's clear you've got a lot of enthusiasm for your childhood–teenage hobbies, both chess and pool or snooker. But now I want to just ask you about how you and your partners established KPMB.

BK: Well, all four of us at the beginning had worked as associates of an architect who had dual citizenship, Canadian and American. His name was Barton Myers, he's still alive. And we had a firm that had sort of 20-some-odd peoples thereabouts. We had just won the Phoenix City Hall Competition, which was an international competition in Phoenix, Arizona. And we won that in 1985, 86, around there. And it was a shock–shocking win because I think when you look at the competitors, they were so strong and they were from Mexico and Japan and the United States, and we were the Canadian entry, and somehow, we made it to the shortlist of four. And then we went to the full-on competition, and we won on a majority vote of an eight-person jury, so it wasn't unanimous–I mean eventually they voted unanimously, but as soon as we won that, Barton Myers wanted to move our practice to Los Angeles. And he has been teaching at UCLA, in fact, I was his teaching assistant. And so, this was not a surprise either because he really liked Los Angeles and the number of opportunities that there would be there for him. There were a lot of developers and, you know, if you're a professor at UCLA, you would be pretty eligible to take advantage of being in LA and, you know, he was American already so it's a good life, the climate he liked. So, one day, he just announced

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BK: to the whole office, that come February 1st, 1987, that he and his wife would be moving the office to LA. And it was shocking because it was announced in the July before that. So, we had seven months of trying to decide what to do and, you know, I have to say that even though all the individuals in the office were invited to make the transfer to the United States, no one did. And a lot of that had to do with the fact that the terms of that transfer were never made very clear to people and so they didn't know what they were deciding. Like for example, were we going to be making American dollars? And how would our salaries in Canada relate to what we would make in Los Angeles, which is a very expensive place to live. Who would be paying for the moving costs? Would the firm pick up the moving–all those kinds of employment issues were not handled well. So we ended up meeting all the associates, of which there were seven, and we decided that we wanted to try to form what you would say is a kind of successor firm because all the people in the new firm had worked for Barton, so that's why you could say it's a successor firm. And ultimately, only four of the seven remained because of the circumstances in the lives of the others. One of them, who's very talented, won the Prix de Rome, so he went to Rome. One of them got married to a woman in New York and he moved. And the other was married to a French architect and they moved out of Canada. And that kind of left four people, Thomas Payne, Maryanne McKenna, Shirley Bloomberg, and me. We did it–so people think we were just forming this firm with just four people, but the four actually emerged through a process of almost elimination because the other people left, it left four of us. And so, we then worked very hard, we were scrambling working with lawyers and really negotiating, you know, the terms of setting up a new practice which I had no idea–none of us had had our practices, our own practices. So, it was very much new territory, and we were going back and forth. And on of the things that was really important in the negotiations was that the

new firm would take over all of the existing contracts on all of the projects that, you know, Barton Myers had in Canada. There's a lot of ongoing work. At any one time, you could be working on a large project that lasts four years, a shorter project that lasts smaller, could last two years or one year. So as an architect, you have a legally binding contract for all of these projects and all of this revenue, you have responsibilities that you can't walk away from. Plus, as an employer, you can't just say, well to the 20 people, so long, I'm going. There were labour laws which mean that you have to pay out people severance, which is very expensive. So, the real advantage for Barton handing over his practice to us was that we would take on the lease of the space. You couldn't walk away from your lease, or you would have to have paid out some sort of another form of severance. We took over all of the leases on the equipment–the printers and equipment. Essentially, we took over all of the, you know, the salaries and benefits for the 20 people. And we took the liability of all the contracts and the responsibility for all the contracts. So, the good news is we had cash flow because we had ongoing work. A lot of firms, they try to start and they're starting from a dead–dead start. But we actually had this sort of firm that was moving. What was

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BK: good for Barton is he was able to leave Canada clean. He didn't have to pay any severance, he didn't have to do anything, he just walked away.
JS: Mmhmm.
BK: This is called contingent liability in professional services firms. You just can't walk away when you have contracts like that,
JS: So-
BK: when you're an architect.
JS: So, it really worked out well for both sides.
BK: It gave him freedom, it gave him freedom, it gave us responsibility and cash flow and revenue. And so, when we started, we instantly had this 20–I think it was just under 20, some people left. But we had won the Art Gallery of Ontario project a week before we set up practice. And so, we were in really good shape.
JS: Yes.
BK: And that momentum was carried forward very quickly because we had so much experience running his practice that it's kind of like the owner left but all the associates were still working with all the same people on all the same projects. Plus, we started getting new work because we all had developed a pretty good set of, you know, connections and networks, you need that in architecture. And we were seen to be a very attractive group of two women and two men, and there was diversity before diversity became such a large issue, an important issue. We were diverse in the very conception and organization of the partnership.
JS: Well Bruce, now I wanted to ask you how KPMB got involved in the expansion of the original JCCC at 123 Wynford Drive building by [Moriyama Teshima?]?
BK: There was a group of sansei, also including people like Sid Ikeda, but in a large part led by some professionals at the–in the sansei generation. So Gary Kawaguchi and [Connie Sugiyama?], [Steve Oyakawa?], [Marty Kobayashi?], there were others.

And they were looking at 123 Wynford Drive, which is really quite a great work of architecture by [Ray Moriyama?] and [Ted Teshima?]. And- But the building was relatively small, it was really a large, multipurpose room that was up, raised up above the ground. It's almost like a split level, and I remember our mother having a problem getting up those stairs. And then there was another half level below where there were different facilities, meeting rooms, there was a dojo with ceilings that were too low for kendo. There was a kitchen for culinary arts. But the problem with it was that if you had a wedding or a large event, nothing else could go on in the building. It just took over the great hall upstairs, it was really good for that one event. But, you know, it's very limiting for a building where you're offering a diversity of programs to have one space or a building where when one activity is going on, the other ones are always told, you can't be yelling or making noise because there's a wedding going on. Or the wedding was making so much noise that you couldn't have a meeting downstairs. So that was the problem, and the reason it was so compact was, if you look at the site, it's a ravine site, and it has a lot of slope on the edges. So whatever the area of the total property is, the actual buildable table land is very limited. And the restrictions by the Toronto conservation–the Toronto Region Conservation Authority, were always setting back the allowable line of building close to what's called the top of slope because they want to do what's called slope stabilization.

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BK: If you build too close to the edge of the slope, the whole thing, the earth will cave in. And there's so many examples of that, so part of the conservation method is, you know, you can build on the site, but you have to move back away from the edge of the top of slope. And the top of slope is a surveyed line, it's defined on a survey, it's not made up. Like someone doesn't just walk out there and wave their hands, it's a legal line. And so, the site was very constrained and they wanted to build a new dojo which was for martial arts. Like really, it's kind of small gymnasiums for kendo, judo, karate, yoga even. And separate from the original building because the original building would be its single multi-purpose functional hall, but they wanted these other rooms. They wanted a better kitchen for teaching Japanese cooking, they wanted multipurpose rooms for language and [Ikebana?]. They wanted more and the site wasn't, the existing building didn't give them more and so they retained Moriyama and Teshima but Ray has two sons, Jason and Ajon. And it was a great narrative because you have now the next generation of the founding partners in the firm, or Ray is really the founding partner, but you get his sons, you know, becoming the next generation. So, I remember that's the way the story was told. And they did a scheme, and they had some issues with–they tried to do some underground parking, they- It was nice, it was great to look at the scheme. It was a separate building connected to the main building, and it was accessible and all of that. But the problem was that it came at a price tag of eight and a half million, which the Japanese Canadian Cultural Center didn't have that money, they just didn't have it. And so, they were at an impasse. And so, the younger generations said, this site is with–with all the meaning tied into the site, all of the memories and so on, they said, we have to

find a different location where we can expand our programs and create new sources of revenue and new membership. Otherwise, we're gonna wither away because we're not going to be able to grow. We're just going to stay here, if we stay here, we're going to just, the center will just never flourish.
JS: Hmm.
BK: Okay, and people intuitively knew what was coming. You know, it meant leaving the site, selling the site. And so they put out a request for proposals and they included Moriyama and Teshima but they refused to even participate in the selection because it was obvious, like you would be part of a selection process to move to a different site and give up the building, which is what happened. And then we were invited and, just like we were invited for the expansion of 123 Wynford, where I knew for sure that Moriyama would get it because it was obvious, it was sort of obvious. And so anyways, we proposed–made a submission and there were other firms, there was an interview committee and I think they had three or four firms. There aren't that many firms that have Japanese Canadian architects, that was one of the criteria. Obviously, they wanted someone who had some connection, real connection personally to the community, even though, you know, I was not a member of the Japanese Canadian Cultural Center. But we interviewed and we were picked and I–and then we looked at a number of sites all over the GTA, including sites–I remember going to look at buildings in Markham out near the airport in [North?]--I don't know. You know, there were all these buildings and all of them, they were in completely different locations way over to the east or way up north. And then, we got the news, and they weren't very good. They, you know, the buildings that were on the sites that we

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BK: saw were, were not suitable for, you know, a cultural center. And so all of a sudden, we found out that there was this other property, which was at 6 Garamond. And I was asked to go up there and look at it. And it's interesting because Garamond Court is really Don Mills, and it is the, one of the hallmark suburban developments in the post war. Canada was really growing, Toronto was really growing. The building at 6 Garamond was designed by one of the professors at the University of Toronto, [Bill McBain?], and it was designed for a company that printed the forms, paper forms, for the legal industry. And so that explains why on the street you have a two-storey head office, and then the back part of it is all one storey, which was the plant. That's where all the printing was going on. That's where all the trucks were pulling in. There were all sorts of skids with all, you know, legal forms. And it didn't look like much, it was just two kind of boxes- one long, two storey boxes, at the front. And then there was- you know, the greenhouse was added on the south side and that was for the employee's cafeteria. It's still there, the greenhouse. And it was quite nice because you were in the suburbs and people needed to eat lunch and the workers would come and they would all eat lunch together. And there was a white brick wall. So, the building is white; the building was a white brick. And then the shed part of it was fantastic because it was a steel old building. When you use steel,

it is very lightweight, and you build on a 30-foot grid. So, if you actually look at the plans of the centre it was a like a one storey- primarily a one storey building, with 75 thousand square feet on one floor. You know, the old, older 123 building, I think the total area of the building something like 18 thousand square feet. So now you're looking at a property at Garamond, which cost two and a half million, that's the number that I remember. So, they had been facing eight and a half million to build the Moriyama-Toshima scheme at 123, and now they realized, for two and a half million you could buy 114 thousand square feet. That, that's incredible! Like just as a real-estate move. And they were smart, they said, well, we'll have so much space we'll be able to, you know, bring in other tenants and get revenue. We'll have infinite flexibility, like a huge amount of flexibility. Plus, the other thing that Garamond had was 200 surface parking spaces. So, it was a no brainer. And it was in the same location. Generally, you could orient people to the virtually the same Wynford Drive, you know, Garamond. And so that was a huge decision. Okay so, to make that decision, they needed to get approval from the membership of the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre. And there was an Annual General Meeting. And it would be really good to find the exact date. I- I-, Shirley and I- My partner, Shirley Bloomberg and I attended it. And the proposal was made to a huge audience, that, there must have at least been a couple hundred people that showed up. And it was at the Wynford, Wynford Drive. And we had some plans and diagrams, and- And then people started to speak. And it was one of the most emotional community meetings I've ever been at in my life. Where the Nissei in the room were basically against the proposal to move. And it had to do with the fact that, I think, 25 families had mortgaged their homes, to finance the building. The original building.

[40 minutes]

JS: It was actually 75 families.
BK: [Leans forward in shock] It's really 75? Wow. That's even more impressive. But in other words, you know, it would be as though, you know- Today we would go and remortgage our houses, to take out a mortgage on a house so you can give money to fund, you know, a cultural centre. I mean, that's a huge commitment. So these, these people where saying to their children essentially, or to the sansei, "you have no idea, of what this building means to the community. That we- we invested everything. We sacrificed our own financial situations in order to build something for the community and you just want, you want to sell it. You want to move onto something else". And then there were all sorts of memorials on the site and you know, all the weddings were in the building. There were so many events. And so, the whole cultural history was on the table. And then the sansei were speaking, taking the opposite position, saying "if we stay here, we will not survive".
JS: Mmm.

BK: “We will not flourish.” “This will be the end.” You might have this building on this site, but we’ve done the numbers. We know what our membership is. We know what our revenue is. We have rising costs to maintain the building. We don’t have revenue coming in, to this building, and it's just not good for the future, and we are recommending to the annual general membership, to the full membership, to buy this other property. It’s just on the other side of the DVP [Don Valley Parkway]. And it went to a vote, and they won the vote. And it split the community. And people were like really, really, emotional about it. And then I know that- I don’t think Ray was at the meeting, I think he was already so despondent. And then he just cut ties with the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre and [shakes head] didn’t come out for any events or anything. We then started on the project. And what’s interesting about the project is that they didn’t have enough money, it all about economics and finance and funding. These things just don’t happen out of thin air because someone decides it’s a good idea. You actually have to go to the bank and arrange a construction loan. And you know, there are people on the committee like Gary Kawaguchi, who really was a leader and understood the fundamental concept of creating a centre, was not only that it was larger, but that for every space that we created there was a revenue stream attached to it. It sounds like a developer, like a real estate developer, but you know, you’re really dealing with a cultural institution. But for him it was very much like if we build a space, we need to have a program that goes in that space that can drive membership, that can attract sponsorship, that can drive revenue. Otherwise, we will have a bigger building, but we will also fail, we won’t flourish. So that was the plan. And they didn’t have a lot of money to start with, because they still owned 123 Wynford. Ultimately the sale of 123 Wynford comes into play in terms of the, you know, of the JCCC, but it comes in much later. The first phase of work was very small. It was, I think it was- I think it was, one point- I think it was under a million dollars. It was one- maybe it was a million dollars. It basically built the Ikeda Tower. And that, I remember cost 150 thousand dollars. And I had to present it to the committee. And they said, “we can’t afford it”. You know, we, you know- We need space inside. We don’t- We can’t afford this tower outside. And I said to them “you can’t, you cannot *not* afford it.”

[45 minutes]

BK: I said, “this does not look like a cultural centre, a Japanese cultural centre.” And this one vertical element, which is for me, inspired by Noguchi lamps, is the most effective architectural move that will mark the entrance to this building. And everyone will pass through it. And it will symbolize, with one move, the new Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre where they have the symbol [traces the symbol into the air with finger] of the two bowls, that are the two open bowls. It's quite elegant. That’s a graphic. And you know, the light would stream through it, so it's fairly inexpensively put together. It’s just fibreglass. But that’s what we proposed to

the committee. And they voted on it, they accepted it. And the rest of the money went to making what is now called the Shokokai Court. When you come into the building, you turn left. And there, there's a large square with one column right in the middle. And that Shokokai Court is sponsored by all of the Japanese owned companies doing business in Canada. So, it's Toyota and Panasonic. I mean, there were a lot of them. And they gave a million dollars. Which was a huge gift, you know, for the centre. And the organizing committee worked very hard to basically sell the concept for the new Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre. It was not just moving what they had onto a new site, but it was reorganizing the way in which the whole idea of the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre could exist. And it was really about a growth model about attracting people who are not necessarily Japanese Canadian to the centre, because they would say, be interested in arts, or cooking, or music, or film, or whatever, dance. So, the first stage didn't have that much programme. It was basically, you know, the Shokokai Court, which you could have fundraising dinners in. I once went to fundraising dinners in the space, and there wasn't, you know, Kobayashi Hall or anything else. And then we did the gallery street, which people questioned that. They said, like, "Bruce why are you building? Its- Its empty." And I said, "no, no, it's not empty." I mean, a lot of the food festivals and when they had events- Well, actually, they organized chairs and tables on that street. It was very wide, and there were just three classrooms along the way. And they were multipurpose. That was stage one. That was all they could afford. So they got it going. And they had the rest of the building was unrenovated. But then for the second stage, it was really about making the dojos, the martial arts, as a complete entity. When you enter the main reception, you keep going and there was a wing- And we had done- We had been working on the National Ballet School. So, you know, we developed two really good dojos. One is a hard floor for kendo, and the other one has a mat which is for judo. And we did it by- If you could imagine, you know, the 30-foot grid, in each room we took out one column in the middle. That's how you get clear space. So, when you walk into those spaces the renovation work was to remove the central steel column. [Puts hands up and moves them in opposite directions] And we did it by putting a beam on the roof, which you don't see. [Acts out a roof with hands] And it hangs that, it supports the rest of the roof on the perimeter columns. And we did sprung floors, and we knew how to spring the floors from the ballet school. It's a- It's a woven- Its actually really, really good. It's like a professional dance studio, so you don't sprain your legs or ankles or anything like that. We did change rooms, and we did an office. And that was it. But the martial arts continues to be and has always been one of the profit revenue generators. Because you see all kinds of people were getting into physical fitness. And it's really quite remarkable.

[50 minutes]

BK: So that [pushes both hands out] martial arts wing just really took off well. And then they were very entrepreneurial, and they got onto the site- they negotiated the space for the Ikebata Japanese emersion school. And it occupies a whole wing. It actually uses the original drop off for the 1960's building. And you know very successful as for a lot of children of Japanese executives who were doing business in Canada. Their kids were going to daycare and in a Japanese language school, so it was fantastic. And then they cut the deal for the Hashimoto, the restaurant, which is, I think they are one of the top, you know, Japanese izakaya. Everything is imported from Kyoto. It's a husband and wife and their son. They built the restaurant themselves. They imported everything. I've never been there. I've toured it, I've seen it. It only has limited number of seats, but it's a kind of destination. And a lot of Japanese companies, they would do their entertaining there and bring guests there. And so-
JS: Mmm.
BK: People don't realize that because the ground floor is so big, and those two elements are oriented sort of to the east.
JS: Mhmm.
BK: But for the centre, you drive in on the south side. You don't- Some people don't even know they're there, those other two pieces. And then they rented on the second floor- So, we built the spine, the street, the court, the tower [brings hands down as if to form a tower]. Then, that created [makes quotation marks with fingers] identity. And then, the dojos were like a major sort of wing of the cultural centre. At the same time, we then looked to the second floor and opened up the second floor where they had their administrative offices. And they rented out space to Japanese community newspapers and social services. And then the really interesting thing, to me, was that for a period of time, on the ground floor, the Government of Japan rented something like, almost 8000 square feet. Its where the Heritage Centre is now. But it was actually rented by the federal government of Japan. For a lease term. Because what they realized is that there were more people, more curious people, coming to the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre. So that they would move their information services from the Toronto Dominion Centre, up to the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre. That was amazing. The Centre has always been very, very smart in connecting to the Consul General of Japan and to-
JS: Bruce, so when was the renovation, and the design as you have discussed it, at 6 Garamond, when was that completed? Sometime in the two-
BK: I think it was completed around 2008.
JS: Yes [nods head in agreement].
BK: But by then, we had worked on it for over 12 years. Not continuously. See, see the real story is how nimble and strategic the leadership of the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre was over a very sustained period of time. Looking at government grants, looking at revenue, the business, the business model of running a cultural institution. Really looking at every potential to find revenue, through sponsorships,

through fundraising, and through rentals. Leasing rentals but also leasing the space. So then what happened- You know we- And that's really the story that, that needs to be told, that it is, it was a kind of incremental, phased renovation, that was designed, but it's running in parallel to a business model and having the right people, the right instructors, the right partners, the right donors.

[55 minutes]

BK: You know, they partnered with, I remember, I think Sony and Panasonic, and they donated all these flatscreens when the building opened. So, you know, it was a kind of showcase for, you know, the current technologies that these companies were having. It- There was, you know, they were building a synergy between, you know, the Shokokai, the Japanese agencies. Oh, it's the Japan Foundation! That's what it is.
JS: Yes.
BK: Okay. Very important group and they operate, it's like a cultural centre. So, there were all kinds of things that were going on. So, they were also connecting with, you know, groups of people who were very interested in film, and in dance, and you know. It was sensational that just as a- as an entrepreneurial development and vision. I mean, that's what it's about, it's not like, "oh, they have a tower, and they have, you know, this maple floor." It wasn't that. To me the genius of it is the synchronization between making the space and connecting that space to programs that had a need and an audience. And connect it to people who were willing to pay membership, and use fees, for the use of the facility, and rental fees. And Gary Kawaguchi in particular, you know, I think he said, its like he used to say its like a three-legged stool; we have membership, we have donors, you know, and we have other rental revenues. These are our sources of revenue, and we can build our annual business plan off of that. And it's a growth model. We want more people, we've got a bigger building, and we have more to offer. So, the fact that it's a model, its all of these factors that are all coming in. Then they have, James Heron, who is not Japanese Canadian, but speaks fluent Japanese, as the Director. I find that to be really remarkable, and very open. I think he's been really, really good for the Centre. So, the last phase was the building of the- it wasn't really the final phase, because it an ongoing project where they still want to do things, but we built, designed and built, Kobayashi Hall. Kobayashi Hall seats something like 400 plus people at a sit-down dinner and were able to really look into that because we've done a lot of projects for cultural institutions, like the Gardiner Museum, or you know, universities. Where it's really important for these institutions to have a space where you can have a major celebration, where people will pay and buy tables. And you know, Kobayashi Hall was funding by a gift from Kobe Kobayashi, and his family and his wife. And they were, they're the parents of Marty Kobayashi. And that room, James Heron said, without that room the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre would not exist. It's so important in terms of the revenue generation to the institution. Plus,

it gives, it gives, a very large space which a lot of people covet. It has excellent acoustics, it wasn't - It wasn't planned. It has- It was planned a bit, but it has to do with the shoebox shape of the room and, the treatment on the sidewalls, and the ability- I don't know if you've ever seen a film there, but we have these dark, sort of black-blue, midnight blue curtains that can cover up the upper sides of the walls which cancel out light and really dampen the room. So, there's pullout retractable seating, which we've used in a number of projects we've done. And a stage.

[1 hour]

BK: And so that space, it also has the sprung floors.
JS: Oh. Mhmm.
BK: Okay. People don't really realize it, I mean, you don't notice it. But they can hold, you know, a martial arts tournament in that space. They can do dancing and square dancing. There're all these clubs, you know, that were doing, you know, square dancing. And so- And it just had- It gave them something that, you know, a lot of other cultural institutions covet. Which was this very big, very flexible- it has a projection room, it has room for translation. It can be used for weddings. It can be used in multiple formats. We test drove the planning you know, with round tables, with linear tables, with orientation of the stage at the long end of it. And then- And then, also the stage has sometimes been on the side, and everyone's in closer. So, this part of the design really changed the scale of the enterprise. And then they came up- this was brilliant, I think- The Sakura Ball program. Whoever came up with that, really, really smart. Because what they were doing was, they were honouring individuals related to the history of Japanese Canadians. But for example, I think one of the first ones that they honoured, people they honoured, was Brian Mulroney. And it had more to do with him being Prime Minister at the moment of the Redress Movement.
JS: Mhmm.
BK: And because they invited Brian Mulroney, all of the banks showed up, you know. Just all of the Conservatives and all of the financial institutions were at the Cultural Centre honoring a former prime minister. It was sold out. And then they made another brilliant move. And, you know, you should look at the history of them because it's really strategic. They recognized [Ray Moriyama].
JS: Yes.
BK: And that recognition brought him back into the Centre and he then had more of an involvement with the Heritage Centre, and you know, they've had other events recently to honor him. And he really deserves that. But, you know, it's the organizing leadership group that deserves huge credit for thinking, how do you do this step by step? And who do you honour first, second, third fourth? You know? And then they even did, you know, there was that one with [Doctor Yasufuku?].
JS: [Yeah?]

BK: And he was my surgeon. But I mean, that was brilliant too, because it brought in all of the hospitals. The Toronto General Hospital supporters were all there. And, you know, it's remarkable, Joanne, because the actual population of Japanese Canadians is very limited. So, you're- They're really doing something way beyond the scale of the community. They reached out to other communities and drew them in, and it, it's such a model. And it wasn't happening at 123 Wynford.
JS: No.
BK: All these things I'm talking about were not possible.
JS: Well Bruce, I wanted to just ask you, since you raised up Raymond Moriyama being brought back to the, to 6 Garamond Court. Did you ever get the chance to talk with Raymond about the, about 6 Garamond Court or as to how the new centre has done?
BK: No. I never have. And I've seen him at, you know, I went to the Sakura Ball where he spoke, and he gave a great speech about his history and I think its recorded.
JS: Yes.
BK: Its really interesting that the people at the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre told them that they- That I was absolutely the best choice to do the work given that they weren't going to do it.
JS: Oh [nods head].
BK: Like he placed a vote of confidence, but he didn't tell me that I think.
JS: No.
BK: I think he expected us to do something that was intelligent.
JS: Mhmm.
BK: And I never talked to him about the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre.

[1 hour 5 minutes]

BK: And then Moriyama and [Teshima?], they renovated it for that group. And it, and it, it's quite a nice renovation. They opened it up and tried to solve some of the problems of, you know, the lower level was all chopped up.
JS: I just wondered, just to conclude, 'cause you've given us a lot of your time here, just as a sansei, Japanese Canadian sansei, how do you feel about the 6 Garamond Court, the current JCC? You've given a good sense of how it was developed and how the team has, what their vision has been? But how do you personally feel?
BK: Well, I'm very proud of it because, I learned a lot about how a culturally specific cultural centre can eveolve to meet contemporary needs and grow. Even though the actual sort of membership is changing by generation. I mean, it's not lost on me that in the sansei generation there was 96% intermarriage. I think that the question of you know, who is the membership? Where is it going? What are the demographics of it? Where's the growth in it? What's the relevancy of the programming to the future? Who will succeed James Heron? How does the Centre flourish coming out of the

pandemic? I at one time, I heard, because they were shuttered for a while, and they are now kind of reopening, but it's like any other, any other enterprise, like how do you truly recover and start to generate, you know, new possibilities. I mean, it's interesting that in the area that Garamond Court is, is the Aga Khan Museum, and the prayer hall. I mean, those are outstanding facilities for Toronto. So, there is a kind of cluster of things. I think there is a lot of respect between the institutions. I'm not sure whether they actually do things together. Although, you know, we were selected by the tri-state temple, Buddhist temple, in Denver to do their new temple. And the Japanese American Cultural Centre in Downtown Denver. And they came and visited the Garamond Court project, and they thought it was amazing, they just- Because it's very big and generous and flexible, and it has a really great working model. And we ate lunch in the Aga Khan Museum, which, you know, obviously they really that liked as well. But they met with Gary, they met with James Heron, they really learned. And a lot of- I think we've set a kind of, reset the model, for how a cultural institution can change. You know, nothing is forever. Unless you have stewardship. And really ultimately it does come down to the economics of all of this. It all, it's all wonderful, you know, Japanese culture there's so much to learn from it. But bottom line is that, you know, you're paying the upkeep of a 14 000 square building. You're paying taxes, you have staff, you have heating costs, maintenance costs. You have to renew building services. You have governance issues, management issues. You have leases with businesses you hope stay in place because they're contributors to the total offering of the centre. So, it's really complex, you're looking for the next generation of leadership coming out of the community, and from outside of the community. It's very challenging. Its- And I think what you're doing is really good because you're also trying to the memory, the institutional memory of the institution itself. I think that's very very important. But-
JS: Well, I was just gonna say that I'm quite new to the, to being a volunteer at the Cultural Centre but I think I read somewhere that they have about a thousand volunteers.
BK: I think, I think there are people like John Ota, who's on the board now,

[1 hour 10 minutes]

BK: So, I have a different sort of connection-
JS: Yes.
BK: through them to programs. And he has, you know, he brings a different energy. But you need-
JS: Oh yeah.
BK: that on a constant basis, you know, I, you know, I chair a board in Montreal, and how you do succession planning-
JS: Yes.
BK: Is really really important. That-

JS: Yes.
BK: You know, how you get younger people involved. The fact that they have that many volunteers, out of those volunteers, you have the potential leaders who will ultimately be on the board. One would hope. But all the variables are the same, you know, content, space, time, revenue, operations, all the financing, you know. Gary, like who will replace someone like Gary Kawaguchi? I think he's, he was the president. But someone, some group has to have the whole thing in their mind's eye. They have to see the edges, they have to know what the central focus is, you know, for the sustainability-
JS: Mhmm.
BK: of the Centre. You know, hopefully forever. But there, you know, I realize like nothings forever.
JS: No. Well Bruce, I just wanted to end by saying thanks very much for all of your thoughts. I've learned a lot just listening to what you've had to say today. And I think that the heritage archives, they'll appreciate having this interview as part of their work. And I think that Mom and Dad would've- I don't know if you ever spoke to them about your role, I know they had come a few times to 6 Garamond Court but I think they were very proud to have you and KP&B so involved with this next phase of the Cultural Centre. So, I just wanted to thank you very much, and I'll be seeing you eventually. Bye [smiles].

[End.]