Artists Documentation Program

Video Interview Transcript

DAN FLAVIN

INTERVIEW WITH STEVE MORSE,
ARTIST'S ASSISTANT TO DAN FLAVIN, 1991-96
NOVEMBER 19, 1998

Interview by Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, Founding Director, Artists Documentation Program, and Chief Conservator, The Menil Collection

Video: Laurie McDonald | Total Run Time: 01:08:10

Location: Dan Flavin Installation, Richmond Hall, The Menil Collection

This interview is part of the Artists Documentation Program, a collaboration of the Menil Collection, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, Harvard Art Museums.

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About the Artists Documentation Program

Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, artists have experimented with an unprecedented range of new materials and technologies. The conceptual concerns underlying much of contemporary art render its conservation more complex than simply arresting physical change. As such, the artist's voice is essential to future conservation and presentation of his or her work.

In 1990, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded a grant to the Menil Collection for Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, then Chief Conservator, to establish the Artists Documentation Program (ADP). Since that time, the ADP has recorded artists speaking candidly with conservators in front of their works. These engaging and informative interviews capture artists' attitudes toward the aging of their art and those aspects of its preservation that are of paramount importance to them.

The ADP has recorded interviews with such important artists as Frank Stella, Jasper Johns, and Cy Twombly. Originally designed for use by conservators and scholars at the Menil, the ADP has begun to appeal to a broader audience outside the Menil, and the collection has grown to include interviews from two partner institutions: the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, Harvard Art Museums. In 2009, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded a grant to the Menil Collection to establish the ADP Archive, formalizing the multi-institutional partnership and making ADP interviews more widely available to researchers.

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[Speakers (in order of appearance): Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, Founding Director, Artists Documentation Program and Chief Conservator, The Menil Collection; Steve Morse, Artist's Assistant to Dan Flavin]

[BEGIN RECORDING]

[00:00:49]

CM-U: Today is November 19, 1998, and we are in the new installation of Dan Flavin at Richmond Hall in Houston. This is part of the Mellon Artists Documentation Program, and I am delighted that Steve Morse [Artist's Assistant to Dan Flavin, 1991-96] has agreed to be with me and talk about this installation. I guess my first question is, when did you start working with Dan?

Steve Morse: I started working with Dan in March of 1991, so that makes my relationship with the Flavin establishment now up to seven years.

CM-U: And were you in – how did you meet him? And were you an art student? Or what were you doing?

Steve Morse: Yes, I was working in New York as a building contractor, and I was an artist myself. And a friend of mine knew the previous technician to Dan, and that he had another commitment, and that he would be leaving Dan's corporation; and so he said, "Would you like to meet Dan?" And he set up a meeting with us through the Morgan Spangle Gallery. My friend at the time was working for Morgan Spangle, and he was also a friend of Dan's. And so we hit it off right away. For some reason, Dan liked the fact that I was living in Brooklyn at the time, and I knew where he had actually made his first fluorescent works on Broadway in Brooklyn, which is not far from where I lived. And so we just kind of hit it off in the usual Flavin quiet way.

CM-U: Is that right? I don't know that way, because I never met him, actually.

Steve Morse: Yeah. He was – he always impressed me as the gentle giant. He was a big, rotund Irishman; but he had a very soft voice, and twinkling eyes, and a very sly wit. So you were relaxed around him, but you were on your toes at the same time.

CM-U: So what sort of things did you do? What was the first type of project that you did?

[00:02:39]

Steve Morse: Really the first thing that I did for Dan was a show for the Mary Boone Gallery ["Dan Flavin: Tatlin Monuments," March 2-30, 1991]. She had an abrupt hole in her season's schedule that year.

CM-U: And this is '91 still?

Steve Morse: This would be '91 still. The spring of '91.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Steve Morse: I believe. And so we put up a Tatlin show, which could have been done, really, without Dan's involvement. But I was glad that he was there because I was new at all of this.

CM-U: Right.

Steve Morse: New at handling his work. And also it gave us an opportunity to know each other better. I could hear what he had considered important, basic concepts to these pieces; and I think he learned that I could understand those concepts. I could understand his sensitivities to them. And it was difficult because Dan liked to talk in kind of an encryptic [sounds like] sort of language, dropping first names only, and a lot of implication that I knew exactly what he was thinking all the time. So I learned to follow into that, and we became closer during that show.

Steve Morse: So this is Mary Boone's Tatlin show in that spring. And I think the nicest thing for that show, for me, is it proved how the scope of Dan's work is expanding. A lot of my artist friends said, "Well, you're working for Dan Flavin now. Is there a show going on?" "Yeah, there's a Tatlin show. But they're older pieces. I don't know if you're that interested. We've all seen them in the art history books." But sure enough, when people went, they came back saying, "My God, that show was so beautiful."

CM-U: Um-hum.

Steve Morse: And that allowed me to (breathes deeply) loosen up and say, "Okay, this is not just some contemporary artist from the seventies putting something up," and then I started to really appreciate the expansion of Dan's scope, and that it was touching the development of new, upcoming artists as well as people from his generation and the art establishment.

CM-U: Hmm.

[00:04:39]

CM-U: So then after that were you still just working on projects in America, or were you also working abroad?

Steve Morse: We worked abroad quite soon. I believe it was winter of '92, Karsten Greve had a show in his gallery that I would have to say was a mid-scale show. Small gallery space that we really filled it full of light on two levels. The works were a serial work. Not unlike here. Not unlike the show we just did in Oldenburg, Germany, where there was a consistent format of fixtures, and there was different light treatment, different bulb combinations, color combinations in each of those configurations.

CM-U: And now what would you do with something abroad? Would you bring fixtures with you, and bring lamps with you?

Steve Morse: It depends. If it was a large-scale installation that was either on loan, on a semi-permanent – that is a long term situation, a periodical situation – or it was just of a vast scale, then we would contract the job out to a local electrical contractor because it made the most sense, and we would use electrical equipment. Dan never, while I was working for him, disagreed to this; but I understand – never hearing it directly from him, but I understand in the beginning of his career, he would insist on using American equipment because the bulbs are a larger diameter.

CM-U: Hmm.

Steve Morse: The standard European fluorescent bulb that's the closest equivalent to what we use is exactly the same length, but it's one inch in diameter and not one and a half inch in diameter. And looking at these bulbs here, and looking at any of the Flavins that you'll see in the United States, you get an idea for the time period of the early sixties because this fluorescent lighting, in a way, reached its apogee during the fifties with the use of color ornamentally. And

you can really tell that there's a sixties look to the thicker bulbs, and there's a more contemporary look to the thinner ones.

CM-U: That's interesting.

Steve Morse: The Europeans did something with fluorescent lighting that they've done with electricity, that they've done with plumbing to an extent. They take a technology that Americans have invented, and they develop it further. They are a little more radical with their development and in making it more efficient, etc. And so it was really their impetus to make these smaller diameter bulbs. And you have to remember that in fluorescent lighting, you are never really expected to look directly at the bulbs.

CM-U: Hmm.

Steve Morse: That's not the point. It's what the bulbs – the light that the bulbs will emanate.

CM-U: So did you ever do an installation with the narrower bulbs?

Steve Morse: Yes, we did. Getting back to Karsten Greve, those pieces were built in Flavin's studio. I built them myself. There were, I believe, seven units in that show, all with American bulbs, American fixtures; but we were able to obtain European electronics for the inside of them to match European voltage. So the look was American, but they could just be plugged in anywhere in Europe.

CM-U: Well, that's interesting.

Steve Morse: And this is something we do normally. There is a number of – just in terms of electronics, you can have them made basically to any voltage you need. It's just a transformer. And I've run into some interesting technical problems with the Europeans because they say, "Well, if – that this fluorescent bulb that we have is a European bulb – It won't work even if you produce a European voltage ballast." And that's incorrect. The voltage that these lamps run on is about 600 volts. Period. In Europe, or in the United States, or on the moon, or wherever. And so all you need is a transformer to either convert 110, or 220, or 277 to 600 volts. That's all a ballast is.

CM-U: Hmm.

Steve Morse: That's it.

[00:08:41]

CM-U: So then, we're sort of in '92, I guess, at that point. Or somewhere around there.

Steve Morse: Right. So the show in Paris was of individual works that we were able to create an entire installation out of. We treated the entire gallery as an artwork.

CM-U: Wow!

Steve Morse: Much like we did here.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Steve Morse: The exterior, the interior, and the foyer, we consider all part of the building being transformed into an artwork by this lighting. And we did the same with the gallery. Shortly after that – I believe it was the winter of '92 – we did our first show at the Frankfurt Städel Museum. And this is one of these periodical loans where they bought the piece and retained it with the idea that they would put it up on a relatively regular schedule, but make a long-term commitment to showing the piece over and over again.

CM-U: Hmm.

Steve Morse: It was a piece that was specific to the Museum, to the architecture in the Museum. And I smile because there is a little bit of a joke about the architecture, and certain elements of the architecture. These rather interesting double pairs of columns that appear [sounds like].

CM-U: It's an older building, right?

Steve Morse: No, this is a new building by an Austrian architect whose name I don't remember right now [Gustav Peichl]. And there were in these double columns with spaces maybe this wide (holds hands approximately one foot apart) between them, and I think they were there really to barricade some windows that were beyond them. And Flavin chose to put fixtures inside those columns in that space. And that was the first time that I experienced using ultraviolet with Flavin because he went with these same colors we have here, pink, yellow, blue, and green, with ultraviolet combined.

CM-U: Wow.

Steve Morse: These fixtures – there were room for three fixtures that could pass vertically in this space, so we created a device that could hold these fixtures in this space. And on one side, there would be – of the three fixtures, one of the colors such as pink. In the center, ultraviolet. And then pink again, flanking. And this passed up through the whole space.

CM-U: Wow!

Steve Morse: Yellow, blue, and green. And on the back it was all pink and ultraviolet. So the room was really lit up with lots of color and lots of pink.

(laughter)

CM-U: And when – you say they do these periodically. You know, every few years or whatever.

Steve Morse: Um-hum.

CM-U: Do they need to buy new bulbs each time?

Steve Morse: No, the fixtures were fabricated by the electrical contractor who did them. And we used local equipment. We used European fixtures and European bulbs, and used a device so that it could be easily dismantled and easily put up again, and easily maintained. So in a way we created lighting machinery that could be put back into place and then taken out without interruption.

CM-U: Do you tend to go every time they install it? Or at this point they are able to…

Steve Morse: No. What I did is, I supervised the original setup, which basically is just watching the electricians and answering any questions that they have, and asking my own questions. Then after that, after we express our concerns for the future of the piece with the Museum in terms of maintenance, we can leave them alone to it.

CM-U: Um-hum.

[00:11:56]

CM-U: Now – and this will lead us into this commission, too – when Dan is planning one of these installations that involves both the interior, exterior, and foyer of the building, he sees the site first? He usually visits the site first?

Steve Morse: He usually did.

CM-U: Usually.

Steve Morse: Dan was a victim of diabetes, and in his later years was not very mobile. So when this building was made available to him, he had me come here, and I videotaped the building.

CM-U: Here. Richmond Hall?

Steve Morse: Right. To Richmond Hall. Inside and outside. And I was able to get architectural drawings and really put together a proposal so that, without overburdening him with a lot of information, and pages and pages of drawings, etc., he could look and get the idea and the feeling of what the building was about, and then ask me questions. "What is this site really like?"

Steve Morse: On the other hand, he had been here – I don't remember exactly when…

CM-U: Right.

Steve Morse: …a number of times. And he liked this building very much. And when I brought the videotape to him, it was one of the tapes that we would watch over and over and over, just because he wanted to see the building. He liked it. He would continually talk about the parts of the building he liked. He never said very much about what he wanted to propose, but I could tell he was taking in a great deal just by seeing it.

CM-U: When you came and did the videotape, was this space open like this? I don't ever – I only remember us being like this once before, I think.

Steve Morse: No, it wasn't.

CM-U: Right.

Steve Morse: And I concentrated the videotape mostly on the exterior. The interior – the ceiling was different at the time, and we had already asked that the ceiling be

changed to what it is now. And at the time, I believe, the little cathedral was in here.

CM-U: Right. The little chapel. The Byzantine chapel frescoes.

Steve Morse: The Byzantine chapel frescoes, with the dome set up and everything.

CM-U: Right.

Steve Morse: So the space was really well chopped up. But really what Flavin needed to see, which he could see in drawings at that point, would be the proportions of the rectangular plan of the space. And just how extensive, how far back would his space be in the building.

[00:13:59]

CM-U: What about the exterior, and the relationship to the neighborhood, and that sort of – those issues? Was that something that involved him as well?

Steve Morse: He was always very sensitive to what it would do to the outside. Would this bother the neighbors that much? So we asked questions to that effect. But in the end, I think, he went for – in the treatment of the building – the most light effect that he could get with the least application to the building.

CM-U: Um-hum. That's interesting.

Steve Morse: The trick with dealing with the building, which we saw from watching the videotapes over and over – in making the videotape, I knew that he would be attracted to all of the ornamentation like the relief work in the parapet, etc. Also details like drain spouts coming down. Not that he liked those aesthetically, but these are things that can get in the way of lighting. What we would face in terms of legal lighting requirements on the exterior for safety lighting, etc. And what we worked towards, and what Dan really wanted to achieve, was a simple line of light that didn't get in the way of any of these qualities that the building had. And to do very little to the building. To treat it as it was, pretty much.

Steve Morse: The interior, no. The interior was going to be a big space.

CM-U: Right.

Steve Morse: But, exterior, that's what he was going after.

CM-U: Hmm. And how *did* you get around those spaces?

Steve Morse: We just – by looking, we found, "Well, look, if we keep it. You know, if we aren't breaking up the space vertically, we have a nice horizontal band [sounds like] here. Would you consider something in here?"

CM-U: Um-hum.

Steve Morse: And he thought about it, and we watched the tape again, and we noticed that, yes, there was that line of that space down through there, and that was someplace to start from.

[00:15:51]

CM-U: Have you, in your experience with lights on the exteriors of other buildings, have you – are you concerned about vandalism, or breakage of the bulbs? Or how much of that has happened in the past?

Steve Morse: Well, you're concerned about it all the time. But, you know, it's just as much as any building and any building's exterior treatments are considered in terms of vandalism. You just have to deal with it as it occurs. You do what you can to prevent it. The reason that the lighting was positioned up high in the places it was, was totally aesthetic. My concerns, as the technician, was sure, to purchase the most vandal-proof and strong fixture enclosure that I could. I found a company that could make a Lexan lens for these lights that was undiffused. It was absolutely transparent. Which is exactly what we wanted. But it was also very tough material. Also, I found the bodies of the bulb, of the fixture, the trunks, the enclosures, and the clips that hold the covers on. They are made of reinforced fiberglass but are vapor proof. They are the most weather tight. My concerns here in the Gulf region is not so much vandalism from little guys on the street. It's vandalism from big Mother Nature above.

CM-U: Right.

Steve Morse: And leakage is something that we took a lot of pains to avoid any problems with.

CM-U: So you ended up going with the thick Lexan covers?

Steve Morse: Um-hum. Yes.

CM-U: Have you ever used those before?

Steve Morse: We've used similar ones before. Ironically, the ones – I smile again – ironically, the ones we used before were developed for uses in car washes where streams of water would be blasted at them from time to time. But we've had leakage problems with those, so that's why I went the extra mile to get a vapor-proof fixture. Really a lot of overkill, but as long as it stayed out of the way of the aesthetics of the fluorescent lighting, this is what we could go with.

CM-U: So it actually comes out and covers the tube? The length of the lens. [sounds like]

Steve Morse: The lens actually covers the tube, yes.

CM-U: Right.

Steve Morse: But the lens is all clear and transparent.

CM-U: Right.

Steve Morse: So you can see in. Particularly at night, you can see in and see what you recognize as Dan Flavin – bare, fluorescent light fixtures.

CM-U: Right.

Steve Morse: And this type of enclosure, some people are not very happy with because they think it interferes with the work. But it was Flavin's actual favorite, and he had used them, I believe, as far back as the late sixties…

CM-U: Hmm.

Steve Morse: …in a different form. Not this brand, and not this type. But the basic same animal, yeah.

CM-U: So, in the future, should it be – should one be unable to get this particular brand and type, the directive is to have something that would protect the bulb and be clear, and not interfere?

Steve Morse: I think that there won't be a problem in the lenses, which are the most susceptible to ultraviolet degradation. But I think that those – those will be able to be obtained because they were custom made. And I think that any plastic injector can come up with a mold for these things.

CM-U: Hmm.

Steve Morse: It's a standard piece that I don't really see going obsolete in the near future. As far as the rest of the fixture goes, it's relatively serviceable. There's a soft rubber gasket we call a *goumi*, which creates the effect of weather seal, that will break down over time as well. These fixtures are not horizontal, staring up, with water that could sit on them.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Steve Morse: They are on their side, and water runs down. So the critical leak element is somewhat removed. There's no sitting water on them. But those seals can break down over time, and they'll have to be monitored. But we're talking about time like 20, 25 years.

CM-U: I see. Hmm.

[00:19:31]

CM-U: And how do you – I mean, were you able – was there a straight line at the top of the building? Or, you said you followed this space. And was it straight, or did you have to…

Steve Morse: Well, like in anything built by people, there's no such thing as a perfectly straight anything. So a perfectly straight line, as close as we could get to it, was created by using a laser, by the electrical contractor.

CM-U: How does that work? I've never seen…

Steve Morse: Well, basically, a laser will shoot an exactly straight line with an intense point of light that you can see somewhere. So if you set it up at a certain level here, and then you shoot and see that red dot there, you know that the distance between the two is a straight line.

CM-U: That's interesting.

Steve Morse: This is where you literally shoot for. There are brackets that are built – that were attached to the building prior to the fixtures being placed on those brackets, and these also were created in a straight line, not only on the level but also laterally this way, so that…

CM-U: Hmm.

Steve Morse: Because the wall of the building does go in and out, as we say, as you look down the side of it.

CM-U: Sure. Wow.

Steve Morse: So what they were able to do – "they" meaning the electrical crew; and this is one of the best I have ever worked with – is they were able to create a very perfect straight line.

CM-U: By building the brackets out where necessary? Or…

Steve Morse: Building the brackets out. Creating this form that was absolutely perfect, and understanding – understanding that with Flavin, every pure element counts. There isn't much out there, but what's there does a lot. And if you allow the line to not be perfectly straight, then you'll detract from the piece.

CM-U: Hmm. So the contractors were local? They were Houston…

Steve Morse: That's right.

CM-U: Co you remember the name of the company? [Merit Electric Co.]

Steve Morse: (shakes head)

CM-U: I don't either. Okay.

Steve Morse: No.

[00:21:08]

CM-U: All right. So the green bulbs on the exterior. Should one bulb or two bulbs go out – let me ask you about that. How do bulbs go out? Do they tend to sort of all go out at once, or…

Steve Morse: No.

CM-U: No?

Steve Morse: No.

CM-U: Okay.

Steve Morse: They have a varied life span. I mean, they'll all make their relative projected life span, whether it's 11,000 hours or 11 hours. But what they do after that is pretty much an individual situation.

CM-U: And then if you go and replace one, does it ever occur that the color doesn't match the rest of them?

Steve Morse: Usually there's a maturing process that goes on with a bulb. Typically, especially with pinks for some reason that I don't understand, a pink bulb will appear very vivid when it's first lit up, and then that intensity of key will drop off significantly in a few hours. But other than a few hours, the drop off is not significant.

CM-U: So there have been instances where you would replace just one bulb, or two bulbs?

Steve Morse: There have been instances where, yeah…

CM-U: And then after a few hours it tends to even out?

Steve Morse: It tends to even out. I mean, I have to be careful here because, you know, different manufacturers will say, "We create *exactly* the same color," because it makes exactly the same wavelength – Well, whether that's true or not, you look at it – it looks different – it's different.

CM-U: Right.

[00:22:21]

Steve Morse: And I think that you *can* tell somewhat of a difference in an older bulb to a newer bulb, but it has to do not so much with the intensity or key of color; it has to do with the actual aging process of the bulb. Dark spots. The

unevenness of the phosphor coating inside the tubing, etc. These sorts of things start to show up.

CM-U: Can we just talk a little bit about that? Because I'm not informed about the kind of aging that occurs on a bulb.

Steve Morse: Um-hum. Sure.

CM-U: What do you see first?

Steve Morse: What you typically see – it can be a number of things. Here again, it's an individual situation. One thing that occurs is – that can reappear and disappear – is a phenomenon called – that we call frosting. It's just an unevenness in the coating of the bulb. There is something going on chemically with the triphosphor inside the tube, so that when you look at it, you see this streak of a difference – usually it's a little darker – of the color inside the bulb.

CM-U: Hmm.

Steve Morse: We reach a difficult time, a difficult point here, because in lighting manufacturing, this is never an issue for them. Fluorescent lighting fixtures, fluorescent bulbs, lamps, as we call them, are actually not made to be looked at, as I said before. They are made to produce a certain amount of light. And it can be a relatively cheap and inconsistent device that will produce a very good quality light by fluorescent standards. So sometimes we have to let a little bit of this kind of frosting, or the darkening of the ends, go. But over time you'll see a fluorescent bulb degrade. You'll see its ends go dark, and that's the first indication that it's getting a little tired.

CM-U: It happens.

Steve Morse: It happens. I think what's happening there is, over time – the way that I understand that fluorescent light bulbs work, is that the voltage of electricity is converted to something that will pass efficiently through a gas that is contained inside this tube. That's passed through by electrical contact into an electrode. Which looks light an incandescent light bulb filament, but it doesn't glow so intensely. And it helps pass this electricity through the gas inside the bulb. As the electrical current passes through the bulb, it excites this coating on the exterior, and that causes that coating to fluoresce and illuminate. And that's basically it. So it's a rather indirect approach, but it is

beautifully simple, and you don't have a dependency so much on a little physical thing like a light bulb filament, which can break down.

CM-U: Right.

Steve Morse: But that's another issue. A fluorescent bulb will just go totally blank on you. Totally dark. Will not light up. It can be a filament broken in the electrode.

CM-U: Um-hum. Can you think of any particular instances that have happened over the years with bulbs that surprised you?

Steve Morse: Not me, but the previous technician did something once, and I don't know exactly what happened. But he plugged – he had a wall setup, a serial piece – not unlike this, but I believe there were more fixtures involved. And when they plugged the old girl in, it just – every bulb in it exploded.

CM-U: Ahh!

Steve Morse: And I don't know what did that, and I don't think he really found out. Something wasn't wired correctly.

CM-U: Wow!

Steve Morse: It may have been in – one thing that we encounter with European wire connections, we have – a typical 110 volt is a 3-wire configuration. And as I remember, black is hot, white is what we call neutral, and then we have a green ground. In Europe, they have a blue which corresponds to our white. Brown corresponds to our black. And then they have a yellow, green one. There is a lot of confusion because some people think, "Well, blue, that should not be – that should be white." And if they wire these things incorrectly, they usually leave one leg out. It can burn out a transformer. And it may have been something like that on a larger scale that popped these bulbs. But it's – for me, I've thought about that a lot. That's like your worst nightmare.

CM-U: Right.

Steve Morse: As a Flavin technician, the bulbs exploding. And I really don't know what could make them burst like that. I haven't figured that out.

CM-U: Well, good, I'm glad it hasn't happened in your tenure.

Steve Morse: Well, we're going to make sure it doesn't.

(laughter)

[00:26:45]

CM-U: Okay, let's move back onto Richmond Hall and kind of the commission. So you have the videotapes, and he's getting a sense of the space.

Steve Morse: Um-hum.

CM-U: Are there drawings that are then made?

Steve Morse: Yeah. At this point, Dan would depend on me basically to create the drawings from his verbal description. And I would say, "Okay, something like this?" And he'd say, "Yes," or he would make the changes on some sketch I would make, and then I would say, "I'm going to clean this up. I'm going to apply color to it so you can see exactly what you're doing." And then we would go through a second step of refinement from that point.

CM-U: So you mean he would just talk to you…

Steve Morse: He would tell me…

CM-U: …about the way he envisions this?

Steve Morse: Yeah. Because – and one thing he said again and again is that people don't – "People always think that I don't really know what's going on, but I've done fluorescent lighting for so long, I know the situations that will be created. So people have to trust me."

CM-U: Was he concerned about the cupola, the opening – it's not really a cupola, but the opening in the ceiling?

Steve Morse: Once, when we did the Guggenheim Museum on Fifth Avenue, as an example, with the skylight blazing in. And they had just – the Museum had just restored…

CM-U: That's right.

Steve Morse: …the entire Museum.

CM-U: Opened itself up, right.

Steve Morse: Restored the skylight to its original plan, which was transparent glass. They said, "How do you want us to cover up the dome?" And he said, "Why?" "Well, there's a lot of sunlight coming in." "I'm happy for the interaction."

CM-U: Hmm.

Steve Morse: So the skylight here was always proposed – I was first approached about this project by Heiner Friedrich, and he said that Dan should really concentrate on the entire space and the skylight. And Dan's way of dealing with a skylight, in this instance, is to leave it alone, but certainly not to block the sunlight from coming in. Because there's a very pleasant transformation that will occur during the day affecting the fluorescent lights with sunlight.

CM-U: I wanted to ask you, what was Heiner's involvement with this? I mean, did he sort of envision this space being a Flavin space?

Steve Morse: I don't really…

CM-U: Initially, you don't know?

Steve Morse: Initially – I don't really know. I mean, Heiner came to me, saying that this building would be made available for Dan if he wanted it. But beyond that, I don't really know.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Steve Morse: And it was always a little bit of a mystery to me how much of an official capacity Heiner had with this whole thing. But Heiner knew the building well, and Heiner knew Dan well; and I think that – of course, Heiner has an immense passion for Dan's work, and I think he saw that this would be a good opportunity for Dan to achieve a permanent installation in a major city with a major institution that could be seen again and again by the people of a large city.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Steve Morse: So I think that was – other than his official capacity, I don't know.

CM-U: Yeah. Okay. I was just curious that you mentioned that.

Steve Morse: Yeah.

[00:29:30]

CM-U: Okay. Let's go back to where we left off, then.

Steve Morse: Hmm.

CM-U: You know, you've sort of made the drawings. Dan's talking to you.

Steve Morse: Uh-huh.

CM-U: You made the drawings, and you added, I guess, with color pencil or something…

Steve Morse: Right.

CM-U: …the idea of the color?

Steve Morse: Yeah. The way that Dan worked. Like I said, diabetes was a very exhausting type of illness for him, so the idea was never to overwhelm him with too much information, large things. So everything would be on an 8½ by 11 [inch] format. A small drawing that would give him the information as quickly as possible. And I found over the years, learning to work with him, that he just needed to know what it was fast. He didn't need quality. He didn't need a big presentation. He needed to get to the bottom of it right away.

CM-U: Would you be drawing the entire space? Would you be just giving a section?

Steve Morse: Typically, it would be a combination of everything. There would be a plan of the space so that he could see the overall effect of his concept. But then there would be probably a section and an elevation of a certain segment of the piece, so that he could see – for instance, this piece here is a cyclical piece of four colors. So he would see at least one full cycle, and then where it would start, and where it had come from in the progression. And he would also see the point of origin, which is down there. As far as how it affected the entire space, he would see that from the plan. That is, how it ended off at the end. Where it stopped short of the wall. That sort of thing. But, yeah, he had a combination of drawings that he could hold, and he could look at, and get the picture of the whole thing from a combination of views.

CM-U: Did you ever do mockups or scale models or anything like that?

Steve Morse: No, he wasn't fond of working that way.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Steve Morse: Dan liked TV. Lots of times we would spend the afternoon watching a movie on TV, an old war film or something, before we would get down to work. And so, I realized this and figured, a great way to present. After numerous failed attempts with large drawings and an elaborate approach, and in some instances a model, I discovered videotape. And I just ran out and bought a video cam, and it started a new dimension. And this, like I said, this building, he watched the videotape over and over. I think because he had a true fondness for the building. Of course, the Menils in general. But a fondness for this building in particular.

CM-U: Hmm.

[00:32:01]

CM-U: Okay, so let's get into the building then.

Steve Morse: Um-hum.

CM-U: So now we're inside, and you are dealing – you had to decide ceiling height. Were they willing to…

Steve Morse: Well…

CM-U: That was pretty much determined?

Steve Morse: That was pretty much determined, and I think that for Dan, except for a number of instances where he has created his own spaces and done it brilliantly, like in the Bridgehampton Museum in New York, he was more comfortable given a situation that he could exploit, or he could improve on. So this building basically had its ceiling height created as high as it could be. And then he just dealt from that point.

CM-U: Um-hum. Was he concerned about the breaks in the ceiling? The kind of vents? The placement of the vents? That sort of detail?

Steve Morse: Yeah, he always was; but any time that Dan was working with a situation that had to be – let's say, "We have to move so many cubic feet of air. We need to have a sprinkler location here. We need to have an exit light." He accepted those things as a reality and worked around them.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Steve Morse: So it wasn't like he never insisted on some kind of change; but if there was a high level of quality in the space, he could see that, and he would work with that.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Steve Morse: And in this case, it's a very high level of quality.

CM-U: Um-hum. What about the treatment of the floor? I mean, given the reflectance of the lamps on the floor…

Steve Morse: Um-hum.

CM-U: …it seemed to me that the nature of the floor, the surface of the floor, would have a certain importance.

Steve Morse: It does, but there was never any kind of predetermined importance put on, imposed on the floor.

CM-U: I see.

Steve Morse: Because it reminds me of some other installations we've done. This floor in particular is a beautiful slab of concrete that is not painted. It's treated somehow to allow the concrete its essence – and it gives a nice neutral surface for the lights to interact with in a subdued way. The vibrancy of the piece reflects that architectural element. All of these things were considered by Dan before any choices were made.

[00:34:10]

Steve Morse: But to give you an example of how he would go the other way, I think the largest, the first large commercial commission that I did with Dan was for the Chase Manhattan Bank. [Dan Flavin, *untitled (to Tracy Harris)*, 1992, Metrotech Center, Brooklyn, NY, Collection of Chase Manhattan Bank]

Through the Rubin Spangle Gallery, the Chase Art Program wanted a Flavin for a building called the Metrotech Center in Brooklyn, which was going to be the Chase Bank's back office building. And they had an immense lobby. I don't remember the name of the architect on this project, but they created in the lobby – one wall was all Japanese black glass. So you just had an immense reflecting…

CM-U: Goodness!

Steve Morse: …wall. And Dan was invited to do whatever he wanted. And the floor was a polished terrazzo of medium dark gray. And when Dan saw all the reflective qualities going on, he did something that I don't think he's done in any other instance. He said, "Can you get stainless steel fixtures for me?" And we produced brushed stainless steel fixtures exactly the way standard fixtures are produced, but in brushed stainless steel. Because he said that the whole interior was really too slick for paint and metal. And I think he was right.

CM-U: Interesting. You mean, because the fixture would have too much dominance as a painted metal?

Steve Morse: The fixture would have a heavy look to it in this rather reflective and large environment…

CM-U: Interesting.

Steve Morse: …that would approach awkward.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Steve Morse: And we didn't want anything close to that. That was a challenge technically because I had to find somebody who was willing to make – punch these fixtures out on their standard breaks, put a union and a UL sticker in them. Otherwise we couldn't get them installed. That was a union job. I was hands off. And that was – the union was very tough to deal with that way. Putting the fixtures up, fine; but if you dared come in there with anything that wasn't union, union-made, of course they had problems with it. Real problems.

Steve Morse: But the fixtures, the fixture combinations as we had them put together, had only one flaw, and that was the sockets. They are still this kind of dead white. But as a theft proof, a thing we put – what's called the bulb guard – on them. Which is just a little band of metal – in this case, stainless steel – that

surrounds the socket, and maybe a quarter of an inch of it extends into the space that the bulb takes; so that even if it's the single pin bulb, which is the type that you push in and spring back…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Steve Morse: …or if it was the double pin bulb, which you turn in place – and this piece used both of those – this device would prevent them from being removed by anybody. This was really done as a vandal proof thing because Dan was very concerned about the vandalism aspect of this piece. It was put on this wall at a height where it could be reached. It was a horizontal work.

CM-U: So then how do you – alright, so these bands are put on the end. Then do you take – there must be a way of getting the bands off.

Steve Morse: You remove the bands. They have a security screw on there. So they come off, and the maintenance people will deal with all of that.

CM-U: So it solved your problem, both being a security, and to cover the sockets?

Steve Morse: And certainly a visual problem that we had with them as well. So in essence the overall effect was not only stunning…

CM-U: Wow.

Steve Morse: …but it was very consistent and it was very – it was not self-consciously slick at all, but it blended in with this reflective environment that he was concerned with. So he won again.

CM-U: It's wonderful. You're describing someone who is willing to take the set of parameters – take what's there in the building, appreciate what's there, whatever it is – and then make his work to augment and live within it.

Steve Morse: Um-hum. I found that, as I have gone around – because I just came from the Chinati Center in Marfa, and we're working towards completing that project [*untitled (Marfa project)*, 1996, Chinati Foundation, Marfa, TX] – that the most effective way for me to work is not unlike the way that Dan worked, in an environment. He would come in, and he would visit it. He wouldn't say very much. He would look around. And he would spend some time, and then, "It's time to go." And he kept his cards very close to his chest. He didn't say very much. I don't think it was really the thinking that went on, as

the feeling that went on. And that, he went away with. And that's how all of these decisions such as the stainless steel decision would come up. It would be after he had time to let this sink in. So he was keenly aware of what his surroundings were, but I think more on a level of feeling rather than going and looking, thinking, analyzing.

CM-U: So there's where the videotape helped?

Steve Morse: There's where the videotape helped because there's a way to revisit the space if he needed to do his analysis later, or just visit again. The feeling he got really from being there, in the instances where he could, the videotape helped. But I think also, I spent a lot of time just describing to him what the architecture was like. What qualities it had. What it lacked. Trouble spots. Potential trouble spots, and things like that. And then just handed that whole thing to him.

[00:39:23]

CM-U: My question – what I wanted to ask you is, what were the potential trouble spots? Do remember some of those? And I am interested in that answer, but I don't want to put you on the spot in that regard. But I'm interested also in sort of getting everything straight in the decision, this linear treatment of the wall.

Steve Morse: Um-hum. Yeah. Your question is…

CM-U: My question is, what were the trouble spots, number one, that you foresaw, if you're willing to tackle that one. And the second one is, you know, how did you go about getting – once this plan was made, how did you go about making sure everything was level, and working that out?

Steve Morse: The trouble spots here, there really weren't many because the space was already presented to us in a very austere and clear state. So I can't say there really were any. The challenge, of course, was how to deal with the skylight, and what do you wanted to do there. An original proposal that I actually did draw up, that was never really acted on in any way, had just simple bands of light going down, up at the ceiling level, and more of them within the skylight.

CM-U: So, lights high up on the wall and in the skylight?

Steve Morse: Yeah, but this was disregarded by Dan after a little bit of consideration, that it just didn't interact with the space enough. And the skylight was always an issue that was presented to us as a very important element in here.

CM-U: Right.

Steve Morse: Well, okay, this in some way makes a trouble spot. Sometimes such an important element just needs to be left alone. So there it is. And by leaving it alone, then we gain the benefits of its interaction was with what Dan chose to do here.

Steve Morse: Now your second question about the straightness of the wall. He didn't really tell me exactly what his intentions were in this piece, other than the space was a very large and long one, and that he just – he wanted to exploit that as much as possible. I think, looking into it now – and this is just interpretation – but this reminds me of a few other attempts that we made. One for a bank in Munich [Dan Flavin, *untitled (to Janet Chamberlain)*, 1995, Hypovereinsbank Munich, Installed 1998] where Dan had decided to put rows – in this case, diagonal four-foot lights, but pink, yellow, blue, green – in combinations of a series one after another like these are, as opposed to, let's say, blocks of color, which he had done in the past, or like you see in the exhibition where you have the corridor with pink on one side. That's a big block of color. Yellow on another side. And the interaction of the two blocks is very intense.

Steve Morse: And I am reminded of this bank in Munich as I look at this piece. That he's not really making that situation. That's he's going ahead and allowing, you know, color after color, one after another, to create something different in the space. And in this case it creates a very pure and clear light because the pieces all – the pieces with individual colors combine to make a very true white complete spectrum light.

Steve Morse: I think it's great in here because people look good under this kind of light. When – such as, if you have one color, especially blue and green dominating, it tends to be a little unkind to us viewers.

CM-U: Hmm. A little.

Steve Morse: Not that we matter that much, but…

CM-U: But we're there. (laughs)

Steve Morse: Yeah.

[00:42:45]

CM-U: What about the ultraviolet light and the ultraviolet tubes?

Steve Morse: There was somewhere – and, I mean, Dan's writings are hard to come by, unfortunately, and we're working to remedy that – but I believe it was the early eighties Dan made a statement that he was interested in experimenting with filtered ultraviolet light. Filtered ultraviolet is very significant. These bulbs are filtered ultraviolet bulbs, generically known as "black light blue." Those of us lucky enough to have been there remember these from the sixties and the black light posters and all that sort of psychedelia, but the reason that Flavin was interested in ultraviolet is, it had a tendency to blend and intensify light colors. And you'll see a lot of them in his later pieces.

Steve Morse: As a matter of fact, his last piece, in Milano, [Dan Flavin, *untitled*, 1996 (installed 1997), Santa Maria Annunciata, Chiesa Rossa, Milan] is yet again pink, yellow, blue, and green. In large blocks. But in one case the blue and green are together in the same fixture with ultraviolet. All the other banks, the pink banks also have ultraviolet. The yellow banks have ultraviolet in them. It acts as a unifying component, but it also blends the colors and intensifies them in the same way through the whole space. And that does this here. These bulbs actually are run by a ballast that's made for a smaller lamp. And the reason for that is it slightly under-fires these lamps. They last longer, but that's only a nice side effect. The real reason for using that is to de-intensify these lights slightly because as you can see, you already have a very intense effect just the way they are. The ultraviolet is helping that along.

CM-U: So they are intentionally under-fired?

Steve Morse: These are here because of the volume of light we deal with.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Steve Morse: This isn't something that we did normally, especially on individual pieces, because you don't have that volume of light. But here you have a very large volume of multicolored light.

CM-U: Now you said – you seemed to make a point that these were *filtered* ultraviolet.

Steve Morse: Filtered ultraviolet, as opposed to any number of other ultraviolet bulbs. Just a fluorescent lamp that can emit ultraviolet radiation. And these are the ones that you put in and you can see. They are used for irradiating food. They are used for a number of reasons. They are used in the medical field. They create the ultraviolet light visibly, but they are not really safe to look at. These have been filtered out, and that's why they look almost black. But if one is shut off, it will turn completely black. And after careful looking, you'll see that they do give off a very slight purple luminescence. And that is caused – there is actually a very bright light going on inside that tube, but there is a very heavy filter of – this blackish-violet filter – to prevent that visible radiation from escaping the bulb. So really what you have – what does escape is not visible to us. It's certainly not harmful to us, but what it does do, is interfere with the wavelengths of the other lights, which are very specific, the red, or the pink, the yellow. These are all very specific wavelengths of light. That's why you see them as intense colors as they are.

CM-U: Um-hum. Did he use ultraviolet lights – when did he start using ultraviolet, do you know?

Steve Morse: No, I don't know exactly when.

CM-U: Okay. Fairly recent…

Steve Morse: But – no, no, actually he did use them. I remember a number of pieces. One was an entire room installation with ultraviolet light.

CM-U: Wow.

Steve Morse: Of strictly ultraviolet light. This goes back as far as the early seventies, to my recollection. Perhaps even further. Yes. And there was a work, a very early work, called *Ursula's one and two picture*, [1964, First installed at Galerie Rudolf Zwirner, Cologne]. This is made – it's an interesting object because it is made of European exterior fluorescent fixtures. Quite different from these in appearance. They are gray plastic. They have large ends that cap the bulb with a weather seal. Not that it was intended to go outdoors. This piece was in the [Giuseppe] Panza [di Biumo] Collection, I think donated to the Guggenheim Museum. I restored it for them. And that's a piece from the mid-sixties, and that is all ultraviolet bulbs. Three two-foot ultraviolet and two four-foot, that create a rectangular frame, much like the primary picture in the exhibition here.

CM-U: Um-hum.

[00:47:13]

CM-U: It's interesting. You said you restored it for them. What does that mean?

Steve Morse: That means I got it from the Panza Collection, as it was probably installed by an electrician there. This is something we have a problem with from a technical point of view. One of the ways that Dan worked in the early years, especially the show in Los Angeles, is, a crew of electricians came in with a lot of equipment, and pieces were made on the wall from sketches that Dan had. But they would be moved, and he would direct the entire installation with this crew. And I understand that certain pieces would even be fabricated from this point. That is, that they were generated at that point, by taking one fixture at a time and putting them up on the wall. When it's time to take the exhibition down, what do you have? You have a bunch of fixtures.

Steve Morse: Luckily there were little wire pass things called Chase nipples that protected the wires from the sharp sheet metal of the holes, the pass holes for them to go from fixture to fixture. These were screwed into place with a nut, and that held the whole thing together. But it's like an accordion when you take it off the wall. So what he insisted on doing, once he established the studio to the point where I am working in it, the previous two, three people worked there, was to create a framework behind these pieces, these individual pieces, to make them stabilized; so that when they came off the wall, they didn't create this kind of problem.

CM-U: So this is something you had to do with the Panza piece?

Steve Morse: This is something I had to do with the Panza piece, and this is what this restoration was about. I got three, four, five loose fixtures; and I put it together with a framework behind it. Then, other than that, I mean replacing bad connections, putting new electronics in it, replacing the cord, the wiring, etc.

CM-U: Now what about replacement parts? Let's say it's a piece that was made in the seventies.

Steve Morse: Um-hum.

CM-U: Are you still able to get them? Those parts?

Steve Morse: Which parts?

CM-U: Oh, I don't know. What you might be replacing, you know.

Steve Morse: Some yes. Some no.

CM-U: A socket or something, you know?

Steve Morse: Yeah. Sockets are relatively standard all over the world. There are may be slight variations on them, but the distance between these pins on the end of the sockets is consistent here and in Europe, regardless of the bulb's diameter.

CM-U: Hmm.

Steve Morse: Down to a point, of course. So that these sockets are relatively universal. The only tricky part is where the socket joins the metal casing. Here in the United States, all of those are very consistent. In Europe they deal with other types that are snap-in, or integral with the actual end of the fixture channel; and of course then you have a problem. As far as we're concerned, I am assured right now that anything that we need, we can get made. The people who made the stainless steel fixtures for the Metrotech Center are the type of people I can go in and say, "You know, I need this fixture, and it needs to look like…" Let's say, a one-light eight-foot fixture. Which we call a one-ninety-six. One 96-inch light.

CM-U: Interesting. Um-hum.

Steve Morse: "I need a one-ninety-six. But, you know, I'd like you to make it for me a little wider because I have a specific concern here." "Oh, no problem." They just turn a dial on the brake, and they bend it out. So I still get a standard manufactured fixture, but it has been customized slightly to my dimensions. But it's still a standard electrical component. They can make anything I need, and they'll be in business for a good long time.

Steve Morse: The bulbs, we are going back to a supplier called Duro-Test [Lighting, Philadelphia] that has a source who can bench make, bench produce these bulbs for us on a custom basis. What I mean by bench producing is that they don't need to have a huge factory to set this up. It's a rather small facility.

CM-U: Hmm.

Steve Morse: And all we have to do is buy a certain minimum of these bulbs. At relatively great expense, but we are at least getting a very good and consistent product out of it. And this will be the future of our colored bulbs, whether they are all the range of the white colors, or the pink, yellow, blue, green, ultraviolet, red that we use.

CM-U: I assume when this is made, when one of these bench companies makes one of these, they make a fairly large run…

Steve Morse: Um-hum.

CM-U: …maybe a couple hundred?

Steve Morse: Maybe a thousand.

CM-U: Maybe a thousand?

Steve Morse: Um-hum.

CM-U: Okay. Do you envision having an archive where you might have many of these bulbs? Or do they not have a long shelf life, so you couldn't do that?

Steve Morse: They have a relatively long shelf life. But, here again, you know, we question the wisdom of keeping so many thousands of very fragile pieces of material around for who knows how long. The problem that we've found over time is that packaging is what will degrade. Not the bulb. And packaging can collapse, and these bulbs, although they are light-weight, have substance to them. And we've had damage occur because of that.

CM-U: Hmm.

Steve Morse: So what we would do, in terms of our own self preservation, is make sure that this source – which is what we are doing an ongoing research project with now – "Can you do this for us? How long do you project that you can do this for us? If you can't, who can? What's involved in doing this?" You'd be amazed how much of this is actually quite standardized. A guy up in Connecticut we'll call up to get the little end caps for the bulbs. He orders those by the swillions [sounds like]. He blows the glass. He orders the triphosphor to go inside. He has the machine to spray it in, and then he can gas it.

Steve Morse: So there isn't all that much involved, and I don't think it is going to be a problem in the future, of making this kind of bulb obsolete. People say, "What do we do when the bulb becomes obsolete?" And we say, "Well, it already is." This is – like I said, this is an old, fat American fixture; and we are going to make sure that we have them.

[00:52:49]

CM-U: I am getting a sense that what you're saying is that it's very important, for obvious reasons, this be a fat American – or type of American fixture.

Steve Morse: Uh-huh.

CM-U: And if you don't have it, make something that will look like that.

Steve Morse: That's right. Yeah.

CM-U: And that would be really the directive for the future?

Steve Morse: Um-hum.

CM-U: I mean, when we are no longer here, and there's a whole 'nother generation of people dealing with this, we're saying, "This is the facture. This is what they look like, and this is the way they always have to look, and the technology is there to make them."

Steve Morse: Right. Right. They almost stand as their own record. I mean, we look at these things. I mentioned that they are already obsolete. Fluorescent lighting was invented, I believe, in the twenties. Perfected for commercial use in the thirties, and really popularized in the forties. So you're looking at something that is already really quite old, but it also stands as its own record. People already know what fluorescent light will do.

Steve Morse: Right now, fluorescent light, we are beginning to catch up with European development just on a household level of usage. Which isn't interesting to me except that it means that fluorescent lighting is not going anywhere.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Steve Morse: It's not like this technology will be buried and forgotten about. It has a future on a newer technological level, which always allows us to say, "Let's back up. We need this old product."

[00:54:06]

CM-U: Okay. Let's go now to the specific bulbs that are in this piece. Lamps that are in this piece.

Steve Morse: Um-hum.

CM-U: There are greens on the exterior of the building.

Steve Morse: Um-hum.

CM-U: And there are greens on the inside.

Steve Morse: Um-hum.

CM-U: And I'm not sure that they are exactly the same green. How do we determine what color to replace the bulb with?

Steve Morse: Well, these are as close as we can get to exactly the same green. But really what we do is, you go back to the same manufacturer. They would go back to their same source of the triphosphor, the powder inside that actually glows with the excitation of the electricity, the electrical current. And their formulation is what makes the color visibly consistent as we see it. Ironically, when I first started working with Flavin, the first thing that happened with blue bulbs, all of a sudden became discontinued.

CM-U: Hmm.

Steve Morse: I went downstairs and discovered that we had in stock over seven hundred eight-foot green bulbs. Why? The previous technician heard that they were going to be – becoming discontinued, and he found a good deal on them, and he bought this pallet of them. There they were. Then pink went. All these things are cyclical. They're all coming back.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Steve Morse: So I'm refusing to really panic about this sort of thing. But in those times when I first started working, if we ran out of, let's say, blue, and Dan absolutely required blue for a certain project, there was one brand that I could get very quickly called Interlectric, and I was never very happy to do so. The colors, although very pleasant, were distinctly different than the generic range of the other suppliers, the other manufacturers like Sylvania, Phillips, and General Electric; and their consistency of the coating in the tube was abysmal. You always saw, in the ends the electron – the electron gun showing through. And they didn't last very well. But they were really easy to get our hands on, so sometimes we had to use them. And then as soon as we could replace them with something better, we did.

CM-U: Is it important – and this really may be a naïve question on my part, but – is the actual color important enough that we should be doing colorimeter readings, for example, of each of these colors, so that in the future there will be a digital printout of what this color should look like?

Steve Morse: Well…

CM-U: Or, should we just do as you say, kind of survey the market and take the general blue?

Steve Morse: …I think that, for the moment, I am going to say, survey the market. Take what's available. Because this was always what Flavin did. Will what is available in the market vary so much that it's different than the original concept? That's possible. Right now we are in the process of determining just how strict will our guidelines be in terms of restoration, versus replacement, parameters of acceptable quality. These sorts of things.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Steve Morse: So the best I can say for you right now is, we'll stick with what the market has until we have finally defined how far we want to go. And this is something – Dan's death is very recent; this wasn't an issue until now.

CM-U: Right.

Steve Morse: Now all of a sudden we're all looking for – we have a body of work that has a distinct future but is very fragile. What do we do about it? And we have – "we" meaning the people that work within the corporation – there's only a

handful of us – have our own ideas. We want the input of others who knew Dan throughout the years…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Steve Morse: …to help us come up with some kind of consensus, and then that will be it. And then at that point I'll be glad to answer that question further.

CM-U: Yeah. No, I certainly appreciate that.

CM-U: Just before we get off the actual bulbs, I do want to ask you about these yellow bulbs. Because members of our staff were very surprised to see that they were labeled "Insect Repellent," or "Insect Gold," or something – Are they particular – do these bulbs do something other than just give a yellow color?

Steve Morse: No. That's a popular generic terms for these bulbs. We've had bulbs that have been called – yellow bulbs have been called yellow; they've been called gold; they've been called insect repellant; they've been called insect repellant gold. The idea with the insect repellant is, the basic yellow light bulb that you'll see on mom and dad's front porch does not attract insects as much as a white bulb would. Fluorescent light followed that lead with their yellow bulbs; and yellow bulbs, therefore, are the easiest to get our hands on of all the colors because they have this actual purpose in insect repellency.

CM-U: I see.

Steve Morse: That's it, though.

CM-U: Okay. So there's nothing special about them in any way?

Steve Morse: No. A yellow bulb is a yellow bulb.

CM-U: Okay.

[00:58:45]

CM-U: Let's go back just finally to talk about the work as a whole. As the building in general. That the work isn't just the inside, the outside. It's the entire work.

Steve Morse: The entire – the fluorescent light treatment was intended to create an entire artwork in its own. There is no exterior. There is no separation of the foyer. It's a complete experience. So we don't say that, "Well, you know, is it appropriate to consider just the outside pieces alone?" No, it's not. There's a relationship going on in how the entire artwork treats the building. You can't look at the outside at the same time you are looking at the inside, but everything is there for your consideration. So, really, it's a light treatment that turns it into one entire piece.

CM-U: Um-hum. And what about this piece? I mean how – you were making comments early on about, there's a certain difficult aspect, or challenging aspect about…

Steve Morse: Challenging aspect to this piece because I think it is somewhat overwhelming. And it's a little bit confusing. You are looking at a treatment of the walls that breaks up the space into all of these multicolored cells, and there's a lot going on there. And my fantasy of the best way to view this space is to come in, after you've seen the exterior, and take it in. And don't try to think about it. And don't really try to respond to it. See what's here, and then come back. And keep coming back. Because the more that I do the same, the more I get back from this piece. So Houston, it's the gift that keeps on giving. So keep coming back.

(laughter)

CM-U: Keep coming back. All right. This would be a great ending except I do have one other thing I have to ask you.

Steve Morse: Fire away! Okay.

CM-U: So sorry.

Steve Morse: That's all right.

[01:00:42]

CM-U: We have not talked about white bulbs.

Steve Morse: Um-hum.

CM-U: And there are certain pieces where there's a real distinction between cool white and warmer white and so on. Again, how do we go about determining what that is? Maintaining those distinctions over time?

Steve Morse: Over time? The way to – it's good that you bring this up because white bulbs are a particular problem. Ironically, after going through all of the *mishegas* [Yiddish term for craziness] that we did with the colored bulbs, and now things seem to be relatively stabilized in their availability, we find that a bulb such as warm white, or as in the Peachblow piece, [Dan Flavin, *Untitled (to the 'innovator' of Wheeling Peachblow)*, 1966-68] daylight, is becoming very hard to get ahold of because daylight has just been plain discontinued because it's been superseded by a technologically superior bulb. A bulb that will put out the same type of ambient light, the same color temperature, but it's a slightly fuller spectrum, and it's slightly more user friendly. We can take a bulb like that and use it, as long as it's for the type of Flavin application where you don't – where you are not allowed to see the actual source without great effort. Such as one of the pink pieces in the exhibition that belongs to _____ [word inaudible] Smith. A large pink that's visible, that faces out from the corner…

CM-U: Right.

Steve Morse: …but a daylight in behind. Now that can be used with a new bulb called this Aurora because it will put out the same ambient light color in its color temperature. But if you use that directly facing you, next to an actual daylight, you'll see a difference. And this is a problem for us.

CM-U: Hmm.

Steve Morse: So…

CM-U: What is the difference that you see?

Steve Morse: In this case, the Aurora is actually more blue looking. And I've had – I mean, I – in my – working as a technological person for Dan, I've had the problem of having to go to the electrical supplier, and they'll say, "Oh, no problem. You need daylight. We've got this new bulb for you." And they have a hard time understanding that it is the bulb that we are concerned with and not the light that it produces. We are looking at the bulb directly. A fluorescent bulb was never intended to be looked at exactly directly, except for maybe the colored ornamentation things you saw in the fifties. So using it in an aesthetic

application like this is a little beyond their scope. So once I do bring them around to, "No, it is the exact same bulb, running, that needs to be looked at here," then we get to the point where, "How can we remanufacture daylight?" And we can do this. It's just a matter again of digging up what the triphosphor formula was, and using that for the new run of bulbs.

CM-U: Are those formulas something that the companies have at this point?

Steve Morse: Oh, yeah. And that will be something that – the companies know that; the distributors know that; and even the suppliers will know all of this information. So it's not like they have the number, or the exact chemical breakdown of it; but they know how to get that. So we still have a lot of sources for these things. But whites are an issue for us.

CM-U: Yeah, they are. And this is the kind of information, oddly enough, that passes. We find this in the paint industries, which is what painting conservators deal with all the time. You think it's just standard, and it's been standard; but sometimes, when you're looking fifty years later, it's very hard to get this. So that would be really helpful if it ends up in your archive, which I'm sure it will.

Steve Morse: It will. I mean, this is some – this is a place that we are pointedly directed towards. I mean, for instance, warm white has been absolutely discontinued. It was never considered a very high quality type of light. People were attracted to it because it was the closest to incandescence in fluorescent, and now the replacements for warm white creates a light that has the same warmth but has an entirely different spectrum. We are having to deal with going back to our same old, rather faulted, warm white because that's specifically what we need.

CM-U: Because of the appearance. Yeah. Thank you. That's exactly what we needed to know.

Steve Morse: Great.

CM-U: You were really helpful.

Steve Morse: My pleasure.

CM-U: This was really wonderful. Thank you for doing it.

Steve Morse: You're welcome.

[Image montage, Dan Flavin Installation, Richmond Hall, The Menil Collection, November 19, 1998-ongoing]

[END RECORDING]