MENNA:  [00:00] Are you going to be sitting there?

SICULAR:  Uh-huh, but I have to introduce you.

MENNA:  Oh, OK.

PASSERO:  And action.

SICULAR:  Hi.  I’m Patty Sicular from the Ford Model Agency, director of archiving, together with Professor Karen Cannell from Fashion Institute of Technology, we’re archiving the history of fashion, beauty, photography, and Ford Models.  We’re at the Celebrity Vault in Beverly Hills.  Today’s date is July 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2010, and we’re with one of my favorite models, Bob Menna, from the era of the 1970s and 1980s.  We’re so happy to have you with us.  It’s quite a thrill for us.

MENNA:  Oh, I’m really happy to be here.

SICULAR:  You’re a heartthrob to all the girls who worked at Ford and all the clients when we used to hire you, when I was in advertising.

MENNA:  You’re making me blush now, Patty, please.

SICULAR:  But it’s true.  So where did you grow up?

MENNA:  Manhattan.

SICULAR:  Manhattan, New York City?

MENNA:  New York City, Manhattan.
SICULAR: Wow. I didn’t know that. I thought you were from --

MENNA: Yeah, right down the street from Ford’s really, you know, on 54th and First.

SICULAR: Wow. I didn’t know that. And how did you come to model?

MENNA: I was managing a pet shop across the street, and it was one summer when it was like 107 degrees eight days in a row, and I just closed the doors, left the keys with the deli guy next door, and took off. I asked a friend of mine who was producing television commercials, is there anything in his office that I could do, get coffee or whatever, and he said they didn’t have any openings. But he sent me over to somebody who was producing a Playboy fashion show. My hair was a little longer than yours then. So I went over and they put me in some frontier-type outfit and some Star Wars metal-looking thing, you know, and the guy said, “OK, you’ll do.” I walked up and down and they gave me a $300 check and I sat there and said, “This is interesting.” I made the rounds, because I was asking the other models, what do you do, and I made the rounds of the different agencies, and everybody sent me out and kicked me back, Joey, or Willie, you know, “Get your hair cut. Then come back and take some pictures.” It was Dawson who was working over, Ted Dawson --
SICULAR: Ted Dawson.

MENNA: -- was working over at Paul Wagner at the time, with Zoli, right before Zoli had opened up. He kind of told me I didn’t have to cut my hair right away, so that was like, OK, I’ll listen to what you have to say. And slowly, you know, he got me to cut my hair, took the pictures with it pulled back at first, and then got it cut bit by bit by bit by bit, and that was no problem.

SICULAR: And then which agency did you sign with first?

MENNA: I was with Wagner, and then from Wagner I went to Zoli, and then from Zoli I went to Ford, and then I think I went from Zoli to Ford, Zoli to Ford, probably a couple of times.

SICULAR: Do you remember the first time you met Eileen and Jerry Ford?

MENNA: I think I met Eileen first, before I was with Ford’s, because Susannah, my ex, was one of the Ford Models. I really never saw Eileen when I was over there working.

SICULAR: How about Jerry?

MENNA: Jerry, Jerry I saw quite a bit.

SICULAR: And what were your impressions of Jerry?

MENNA: He was just one of the coolest people in the industry, that I remember. Because I remember I had some fairly offbeat ideas, you know, at the time, union [04:00] this or
that, and I was comfortable speaking to him about it, and he was comfortable expressing his opinions about it. He was just very real and direct and to the point.

SICULAR: Do you remember your bookers at Ford, who they were, and did you feel close to them? Did they guide your career?

MENNA: You know, I never really looked at my booker as guiding my career. I pretty much felt that I was going to be responsible for whatever career I was going to have, but all of them were nice. I never ran into any sort of personality issues or anything.

SICULAR: So when you started modeling, you had to make the rounds. Then what was your first big break, besides walking in the metal suit on the runway in the cowboy outfit?

MENNA: My first big break was actually my second job, which ended up being a cover for GQ.

SICULAR: Wow, that’s amazing, because that’s like being on the cover of Harper’s Bazaar or Vogue.

MENNA: [05:00] Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

SICULAR: Wow. Who photographed that?

MENNA: [Bert Brankan?].

SICULAR: Did your whole career skyrocket after that?
MENNA: Oh, yeah. I didn’t have to do hardly anything after that. I mean, I never had to do a lot of pavement pounding. I mean, you know, I did my share, but I didn’t have to do that half a year or year of pounding the pavement.

SICULAR: Your second job was a GQ cover?

MENNA: Yeah.

SICULAR: That’s amazing.

MENNA: Yeah.

SICULAR: I mean, some people work decades and they never get it. Everybody wants to be on the cover of GQ. Do you remember when you first saw your cover, how you felt?

MENNA: Oh, yeah. I mean, when I first saw it I definitely went over to the newsstand and was standing around like this going, da-da-da. Nobody put me together with the guy on the magazine though, no matter how close I got. But after that it was, that was it. I remember that day, and after that it was no big deal.

SICULAR: I can’t ask if people treated you differently after, because you were such a short time [06:00] in the business.

MENNA: You know, I think people pretty much treated me the same all the way through. I never felt like I was getting any sort of different treatment from people. I was whoever I was, and they were whoever they were.
SICULAR: Do you think the male modeling business has changed a lot from the time you started?

MENNA: Yeah. Yeah.

SICULAR: How so?

MENNA: I think during the time that I was there in the ’70s and ’80s, you did have career models, models who actually did that as a business, way more than today. I think towards the end, in the ’80s and mid-’80s and the ’80s, then you started getting many more people coming into the business who were off of college for a year. So people would be in for a year or two years and discovered by whoever. So I think the turnover now is so much greater, I don’t know many people, unless they’re the odd few who are still working as models, that have made a career of it.

SICULAR: What would you say is the biggest surprise of your career, if you have one?

MENNA: Oh, gosh. Probably meeting my daughter’s mom.

SICULAR: That’s nice. How did you meet her, and what was her name?

MENNA: Susannah Schoenborn.

SICULAR: Oh, yes. Quite famous.

MENNA: I was on some shooting in the South of France with Helmut Newton and her, and they’re at dinner. She was
eight years older than me, or nine years older than me, and very sophisticated. I was 21 years old, you know. I take one look at the table, and the 10 place settings, and I have absolutely [08:00] no idea what’s going on. But for me it was love at first sight. I was just enthralled with this woman, and I thought I was James Bond, in the South of France. During the time there, I discovered she was married, so the first thing, I go, I say, well, that’s that. That’s not going to happen, not going to go there. During the shooting, you know, we have to do a lot of touching, a lot of holding, a lot of hugging. And even though we never said anything to each other, any time that I even touched her I just felt this thing going through me. Came to the end of the job, and I’m still, I haven’t voiced anything to her. This was just like looks at dinner and stuff. I go to leave to go to the airport, [09:00] and I get halfway there, and I’ve forgotten my passport at the hotel. So the guy turns around, goes back to the hotel, which was like a dream hotel in Cap d’Antibes, one of the best five-star hotels with the palatial staircase going up and the elevator that goes up in the middle with the glass. So as I’m coming in, she’s coming in the other entranceway to go up to her room, and we both end up in the elevator.
I’m just looking at her, and I’m going like, this is it? I just took her in my arms. (laughs)

SICULAR: It’s like a movie.

MENNA: Yeah, oh, it was. I just took her in my arms.

SICULAR: What was the booking for, do you remember?

MENNA: It was for Elle. Yeah. Yeah.

SICULAR: Wow, that’s a pretty intense story.

MENNA: Yeah, it was. It was absolutely out of a movie.

SICULAR: I bet that was your favorite booking you ever did.

MENNA: I got a lot of favorites.

SICULAR: Well, we want to hear them.

MENNA: [10:00] Oh, gosh.

SICULAR: That’s a pretty amazing story.

MENNA: Yeah, that was a very amazing story.

SICULAR: When you started your career, on the onset of your career, did you have any perception of what you thought it might be, and in reality what --

MENNA: Absolutely none. I just took it every day as it came. Fortunately, through the mentoring of Ted, you know, Ted was a very business-like --

SICULAR: He mentored me, too, because I was one of his bookers, so he --

MENNA: -- person, yeah. So he just basically told me, “Look, this is you. You’re going to do it. You just do it, treat
it like a business.” Basically that was my whole thing. I think I was late twice in 20 years.

SICULAR: That’s not too bad.

MENNA: Because basically you just have to be there. What a great job.

SICULAR: Did you ever have to do bookings that you didn’t like, certain types?

MENNA: You know, [11:00] I didn’t do well in the catalog market.

SICULAR: What were most of your bookings, campaigns and editorial?

MENNA: Yeah, it was mostly advertising and editorial, and I did a lot of newspaper work. Some catalog, they would always seem to whatever it was that they put me in in the catalog must have sold, because I’d be wearing the same thing next year at the same time. But how come I didn’t get to go to Brazil with the rest of the guys? But I think for me the issue with the catalog is it was much more difficult for me to stay still. I was not a good staying-still model. I was just -- as soon as somebody said, “OK, don’t move,” then I’m like, eh.

SICULAR: I remember booking you for a booking when I was a client, and it was in Central Park and it was at night, and
it was supposed to be a cowboy scene, scenario. [12:00] I have a picture at home, and you were in that.

MENNA: Oh, yeah?

SICULAR: Yeah. And then also another night on, we did a shooting at night on a ferry going around New York City, and you were in those, too. I’ll send it.

MENNA: Yeah, oh, I’d love to see --

SICULAR: It’s for [Alexander’s?], it was their first catalog they ever did, and we did it all at night.

MENNA: Oh, Alexander’s.

SICULAR: You starred in it.

MENNA: Well, you know, the store catalogs weren’t, you know, they were a little looser and stuff. But, you know, the Sears and the Spiegels.

SICULAR: I bet they were great clients, they just were for a corporate, yeah.

MENNA: Yeah, I mean.

SICULAR: So who were some of your favorite photographers you got to work with?

MENNA: Oh, gosh, and I hope I don’t leave any -- my apologies to any that I leave out, because there are so many wonderful, creative people to work with. Albert Watson, Helmut Newton, Anthony Crickmay, Bob Gothard, Jack [Mullenyoung?], Gilles Bensimon. I have to keep going
[13:00] with the French. McKinley, Barry McKinley. [phone rings] Luckily I only have one ring. Bruce Lawrence, Art Kane, Richard Noble.

SICULAR: I mean, you worked with the best.

MENNA: It’s so many, and I’m sure I’m forgetting over half or more of them.

SICULAR: Did you prefer working in a controlled environment, like a studio, or did you like out on location, where you could be free to move about and be more creative?

MENNA: Yeah, I preferred locations, yeah.

SICULAR: Like the South of France?

MENNA: Yeah, like the South of France, because I could be a character, you know, I would be wherever I am. I enjoyed that. I think it was -- my first location job was [14:00] for GQ, and it was I think my second cover.

SICULAR: How many covers did you have for GQ?

MENNA: Three. So they asked if I could ride, and I can ride, but I’m not a rider. I’m like a get-on-the-horse-and-go kind of guy. It was with Barry McKinley, and he used to be a vet, so he was a big horseman, too. So we get down there, and they say, “OK, we’re going to go location scouting today,” and so we hop on, you know, they have the horses, and I get on the horse. We’re in the Dominican Republic. I go like this, say, “What’s the horse’s name?”
and the guy tells me whatever the horse’s name is in Spanish, and I go OK, andale, and I kick the horse, and this horse took off so fast that the G force had me flat on his back. [15:00] I’m flipping around like this stuck in it. One of the other guys comes and saves the horse and me, while I’m half hanging off by the stirrups.

SICULAR: Did he get that? Did Barry get those pictures?
MENNA: Oh, no, I mean, I seriously embarrassed Barry, because apparently these were polo ponies, which apparently I’ve learned since you’re not supposed to even -- you whisper to them, and they do what you want.

SICULAR: That’s very funny. That’s very funny. Did you do much runway? Any runway?
MENNA: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SICULAR: Did you enjoy it?
MENNA: Yeah, yeah. Mostly the backstage part. (laughs)

SICULAR: I’m sure with the women, yeah.
MENNA: Yeah.

SICULAR: Did you do much television, and did you enjoy that?
MENNA: Yeah, I did some commercials. You know, I never got into really doing series or that stuff. There was a moment there when they were fishing [16:00] for models, but actually, and a lot of people came out and were being paid
to do nothing. But at that time, it didn’t pay enough to balance off, you know, what I was doing.

SICULAR: Well, what would you say is the best part of your career?

MENNA: The best part?

SICULAR: Your favorite part, looking back?

MENNA: God, it was all great.

SICULAR: I remember I wanted to just ask you about one picture you did, we were talking about before, with the cards -- I wish I had a copy, and I’ll see if I can find one to attach -- where the cards were going up in the air. And I didn’t realize that it had to be so precise that you were telling me that the joker had to be at eye level or whatever.

MENNA: Yeah, right covering the eye.

SICULAR: And that was for, did you say British Vogue?

MENNA: Yeah, I’m pretty sure that was British men’s Vogue.

SICULAR: And the photographer?

MENNA: Was Anthony Crickmay, who was just a fantastic photographer. I mean, there were a few people working in a studio with them, as much as I hated working in studio, and that was your basic white, no seam, there’s nothing there, you know. It’s you have to make something happen. There are just very few photographers who I was able to get that dynamic with, and he was certainly one of
them. It’s a combined effort of thinking up what we’re going to do with the next shot, right. So he’s asking me can I handle cards, and I go, “Yeah, I can handle cards.” I always liked to do card tricks and fool people and stuff. So I had to like release all the cards so that they would go flying in an arc while I was in the suit, fairly rigidly positioned, and almost like one thing had nothing to do with the other, kind of. Then he liked it. [18:00] He saw the joker over here, and so he says, “Can you get the joker over your eye?” and I go, “Yeah, sure. Why not?” We’ll try.

SICULAR: And did you, in the last shot?

MENNA: He got the shot. He got the shot.

SICULAR: You know, when you did your most creative editorial, did you think that the photographers were almost movie directors, directing moods and giving you a mood or a look?

MENNA: Yeah, I mean, I think it’s really a collaborative event when it works the best. There were some photographers --

PASSERO: All right. Hold on. [18:40]

(break in recording)

SICULAR: You still have fans, you see.

MENNA: Hey, love those fans.

SICULAR: I know. You still have those fans.
MENNA: You [22:00] know.

SICULAR: So you were talking about that fabulous shot from British men’s Vogue, which is fabulous.

MENNA: Oh, yeah. So anyway, eventually somehow the jack ended up over my eyes. There was a whole -- I think there was a series of five or six shots that were --

SICULAR: But that was the best. That was the best. I’ve seen a copy, but I always think of the original.

MENNA: Yeah.

SICULAR: When you started out, were you sent to Paris or Milan like the women models who started out?

MENNA: No, not -- actually I always wondered why. I mean, I was doing fairly well in New York, but of course I wanted to go, just to go around and travel. I remember my first trip to Paris was not very, I didn’t see sunshine for I think 32 days. It rained.

SICULAR: Wow. What were you there for?

MENNA: I just went on my own to go around and see how work was. [23:00] I didn’t get taken so well in Paris, I think because there were so many European models from Italy and European looking. They were going at that point for the all-American type guys.
SICULAR: That’s so funny. But the funny thing is in the United States at that time, if you had to count on one hand the top five models, you were one of them.

MENNA: Yeah.

SICULAR: And it’s funny that they might not have known, you know, some people might not have. I would have thought you would have been scooped up.

MENNA: That’s how it is, you know. Over there, one place you’re a bigger fish in a smaller pond. Over there, you go over to Italy, there were at least 10 guys looked like me.

SICULAR: When you were younger did you have any style icons, men or women, that you looked up to before you started modeling, whether they were movie stars or models?

MENNA: Yeah. The only one was James Bond.

SICULAR: James Bond. Bond, James Bond.

MENNA: Yeah, I had my James Bond [24:00] fantasies.

SICULAR: Was that your look on the set sometimes?

MENNA: Oh, sometimes I would think of James to get me through, yes. Yeah.

SICULAR: And did you want to share the story about when you were on location with the three models in the elevator? When you were going to ask them all out for dinner? Or you don’t want to talk about it. It was Beverly Johnson and
was it Patty Hanson and one other model, where you were
going to ask them all out for dinner.

MENNA: Is this a story you’ve heard and now you’re --

SICULAR: No, you told me. You told us. Remember, he was going
to ask them all out for dinner, and there was someone else
in the elevator?

MENNA: No, I think this was somebody else.

CANNELL: I don’t remember that.

MENNA: I think that was somebody else (laughs). That’s not
my story. I mean, I might have asked them out for dinner
sometime, but I don’t remember this one.

SICULAR: Was that the one with -- Warren Beatty was in the
elevator.

MENNA: No, I’ve never been in the elevator with Warren
Beatty.

CANNELL: I don’t think you’re getting the elevator there.
(inaudible)

MENNA: My elevator was with Susannah. (laughs)

SICULAR: No, I [25:00] thought someone told us this story. Did
you tell us at breakfast?

CANNELL: No. He told the story of the three or four girls --

SICULAR: And you were going to take them out for dinner.

CANNELL: -- saying go out -- you were going to go out tonight,
and you thought, oh, they want me to go out to be the great
guy with them, and then they said someone else is coming, and it was Warren Beatty, like in ’79 or ’78.

SICULAR: Didn’t you tell us that story?

MENNA: No.

SICULAR: It wasn’t him.

PASSERO: Jack Scalia.

SICULAR: Jack Scalia?

CANNELL: Oh, yeah.

MENNA: Yeah, that’s probably Jack. Yeah, that sounds like Jack.

CANNELL: I shared that story with you. Mums the word.

SICULAR: OK. I hope we can edit this out.

CANNELL: Never mind.

SICULAR: Did you want to add anything else or talk about what you’re doing now or add anything else? Because you moved to California. You live in California now.

MENNA: Yeah. Yeah.

SICULAR: How come you moved to California from New York?

MENNA: You know, I needed to get out of New York. I ended up going to Australia for a while.

SICULAR: Did you model there?

MENNA: No. No. [26:00] I just did nothing for about a year.

SICULAR: Did you like it?
MENNA: Yeah, I loved it. Then I came back, basically broke, and that was where my ticket landed. And I had a bunch of friends that lived out here, so I picked up modeling again when I was out here. This was in the '90s, actually, for a while.

SICULAR: We’re going to close soon, but what’s the one thing that you’re most proud of, or do you have one or two defining moments in your career that you’re just so proud of?

MENNA: Well, probably when I was director at Elite, you know. That was something to make the move from -- there were some things that I discovered when I was modeling that I wanted to see a little bit changed or modified.

SICULAR: Were you able to do that, to change those?

MENNA: Yeah. Yeah.

SICULAR: Like what?

MENNA: The main thing was upping the price for the men, because up until that point if you were working with a super model, no names named, but you were working with a super model, and if I’m there selling Jim Beam or some sort of rum and I’ve got the glass and I’ve got the super model with her head turned away and just her hair here, and if she’s getting $5,000 I want $5,000 because I’m
selling the ad. So, yeah, I instituted that in those cases
where there was a parity for pay.

SICULAR: Well, that’s something to be really proud of.

MENNA: Yeah. Yeah.

SICULAR: Did you want to add anything else before we close.

MENNA: No, I think that’s it.

SICULAR: Thank you so much.

MENNA: You’re welcome.

SICULAR: Thank you.

(applause)

CANNELL: Good job.

END OF AUDIO FILE