ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF THE FASHION INDUSTRIES

FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

JUDITH LEIBER

HANDBAG DESIGNER AND MANUFACTURER

JUDITH LEIBER, INC.

THE FASHION INDUSTRY LEADERS

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INTERVIEWED BY

Mildred Finger
Judith Leiber, Inc. is a high quality handbag firm, established in 1962 by Judith Leiber. She is the designer and manufacturer; she learned her craft and her art in Hungary. The firm is entrepreneurial, totally private, and still operates according to the principles of the small, quality directed business. In this account, Mrs. Leiber describes the methods she learned in Europe and how she applies them here.
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Q: Will you start by telling us about yourself? Where you were born and when you came here, and so on?

A: I was born in Hungary and I learned the trade there.

Q: When were you born?

A: In 1921. And I originally was going to become a chemist, but then the war broke out and I went back to Hungary, and I became an apprentice in the handbag...

Q: I'm sorry. Excuse me. You said you went back to Hungary. Had you already come here?

A: Well, I went to England...

Q: Right. That's it. In other words, I'd like to hear about everything...Where you went to school....

A: I grew up in Hungary. I went to a "gymnasium..."!

Q: Uh huh. In Budapest?

A: In Budapest. And then my parents sent me to London to study. They felt that I should leave the country because of Hitler, and the imminence of war coming on. Everybody felt times were going to be bad. My mother's family is from Vienna, so they were hit very badly in 1938. So I went to England in '39, end of '38, and I passed the "matric" there and I was going to go to King's College to study chemistry. It's sort of crazy. My whole background is a lot of coincidences. I have an aunt whose husband made a great deal of money doing a face cream called the "flora creme" in Rumania, and my mother...

Q: F-i-o-r-a, which I'm sure is obsolete and nobody knows
anything about it because this must have been in the '20s. And they made a great deal of money and she felt maybe this would be a direction in which I should go.

Q: Were you an only child by the way?

A: No. My sister wanted to be a pastry cook, after I came back from England. Anyway, I went to do the "matric" and... It was the summer of 1939 and I went home for the vacation, and the war broke out and I never went back. I was registered to go to school, so, what was one going to do? Everyone felt you have to emigrate, so the best thing is to learn a trade. And another crazy coincidence—my mother loved beautiful bags and my Dad took trips all over Europe and always came back with one, so somehow...

Q: What was he doing that he made these trips all over Europe?

A: Well, he was in the grain business. He worked for a grain company, and he used to travel to Western Europe a lot. So, he did a lot of that. And then his brother-in-law was in the real jewelry business and they started a business in Milano. When one of my aunts needed a livelihood when she wanted to leave Austria... we used to go to Italy, and naturally handbags there were always very beautiful, so she always got something. And we always admired good workmanship in everything, because I grew up in a home where we had a seamstress who came and did our clothes to measure, and she was sort of a fixture in our home.

Q: When you said the bags you saw in Austria were so beautiful... Were these beaded bags?
A: No. They made all kinds of bags. You know, in Vienna... Vienna was really the source of very good workmanship; very fine leather workmanship. It was sort of a high point. You know, it was France, Austria, Italy. In Germany, you always had good work but they didn't have style. And in the days before the war, Vienna was important in style. But then it sort of died off. They never were as stylish as the French in those days but they did a very wonderful product.

So, I became an apprentice in one of the finest little shops in Budapest.

Q: This was in '39?
A: In '39. Because the way to learn a trade was in the guild system, which, unfortunately, in America doesn't exist.

Q: What is a guild?
A: The guild system is that you go to work as an apprentice. You aren't really getting paid for it; you're just getting your carfare. You're starting at the bottom. You swept the little factory. You...

Q: Now, you said you went to work for a retail shop.
A: No, it was...They made...they sold retail. They were behind the Ritz Hotel, which is sort of...you know...shows...indicates the quality of the place. Everything was custom made. Like, you could have a pair of custom shoes made in Hungary without trouble. You went to a shoemaker. He took your measurement and he carved the "last" and he made the shoe. I mean, this is not very easy to do nowadays. But the same thing was true of handbags. A lady came into the shop, she selected the leather;
they put her name on it; she selected a frame, they made the pattern for it, and they made the bag.

Q: In other words, they didn't have a finished model to show her...

A: They had finished models. But they did changes. Everything was very individual. It was the days of the monogram made individually, you know. Things that are today so difficult to come by. So the owner of this shop was also the head of the manufacturers, and his factory was the one where everybody's examinations--guild examinations--were held, once a year. So first you were an apprentice, normally for three years. And then you became a journeyman for one year--or three, depending on how good you were. And then you passed an examination where you made a complete bag all by yourself, and you had to figure it and give them a complete breakdown of all the costs and...

Q: Who sat at the examination?
A: It was like a...it was a guild...

Q: There was an actual organization.
A: You know, if you remember the "Meistersinger." If you go to the "Meistersinger," they have this scene where all the people come, the guild members...One has...some have their tools on a flagpole, and some have a piece of...You know...a loaf of bread, and so on. This is a medieval idea, because this taught people a trade, from start to finish.

Q: Describe the guild a little bit, would you? Because I don't think I've had anybody talk about it.
A: Well, you know, I don't remember it all that well, but they...You see, you went to work in these little shops, or factories, because usually there would be 10-12 people working there. And most of the really highly skilled men would be masters. They would just be working for an employer.

Q: Now, was the employer a member of the guild?
A: Oh, sure.

Q: The employers were really the heads of the guild...
A: The employers ran it. Yes. Pretty much.

Q: And then they...The people they took on as apprentices later became journeymen and masters.
A: You would work for them or go to work elsewhere.

Q: They had to be members of the guild, so to speak.
A: I don't think that that was a criterion. The criterion was the knowledge, I think. They had a little guild book. It was somewhat like a union, but on the other side of the fence, more or less.

Q: Yes, because it was the manufacturers...
A: Pretty much. It was an enormous idea. So that basically you learned how to make something from start to finish, and they also gave you a rudimentary idea of how to figure it in order to be able to sell it. So if you had a little initiative and gained the experience, you could go into your own business, and understand the basis...I mean, that didn't mean that you would be a success, but you would still have a real general idea....So if you see a handbag somewhere you know what's in it and how it's put together. Which, unfortunately, today, is no longer existent. Because in our...
in America, you hire people to work...They do have a union...And today, of course, F.I.T. and Parsons are teaching handbag design. But, unfortunately, the young people all want to be designers. They don't want to know how to really make a thing. And without knowing how to make it, I don't think you can become anything really great. Because everything you draw on a piece of paper is somewhat amorphous if you don't understand what it's supposed to do.

Q: All right. Now, let's go back to the chronology. You were there as an apprentice in 1939, working for a shop near the Ritz. And then what happened?

A: Well this...You see, I had education, which most of these kids didn't. They came from elementary school; they would have been about 14, and I was 18 years old, and I had high school, or "gymnasium," and so I was an apprentice only for a year, and then I took the exam as a journeyman and a year later I became a master. In the meantime, times got very tough and you couldn't...These people had to close their shop and I had to work at home and make bags for my mother's friends. So I pretty well worked through 1943 and '44 at home. I had...you know...All you need is a sewing machine, a stone and the tools. It wasn't that difficult. But then, of course, the war got pretty tough. And the Germans...in '43 the Germans came to Hungary and they had a lot of...you know...we had terrible problems. It was a question of survival. You know, they started taking people to the camps. Once the war was over, though, I went right back to work, and the fellow who taught me at his shop (which was called Pesl....
Q: How do you spell that?
A: P-e-s-s-l.
Q: P-e-s-s-l.
A: Pessl. It was a Jewish couple. The wife was from Slovakia and he was from Greater Hungary. I think he came from Budapest. And they were very sophisticated people. Her brother had gone to Spain and worked there. So there was a lot of input from the West, and modernized ideas. Because basically, in Hungary, there were very few types of bags that were made. You know, there was an envelope and a frame bag. Maybe a zipper ...a facile. That was it.

Q: F-a-c-i-l-e?
A: F-a-c-i-l-e. Sort of a patented, two pieces of steel that evolved...Usually has little loops in the center and the lady pulls it open. It snaps open and then it snaps shut. It's a very clever idea and very reasonable. It's very easy to get. It's not expensive so a lot of people use it today.

So, once the war was over, the fellow that I learned the trade from, who was one of the masters working for this couple, went into his own little business, and after the war I met several girls who worked at the American Legation and I made bags for everybody there. And I got paid in dollars, which at that time...My family was wiped out. We didn't have a dime. And it was marvelous...We had enough to eat from that. And then I met my husband, who was in the Allied Control Commission. You know, Hungary was under Russian occupation, and the English and the French and
the Americans sent a token force in. They really just maintained radio communication. And they were sort of a benign presence that couldn't do very much against the Russians. But my husband was there for a couple of years and then we got married, and then I came to...

Q: What year was that?
A: In 1946. And in '47 we came to the States. And, of course, I was looking for a job. And my first job was a company that, I think, is still in business, called Garray.

Q: G-a-r...?
A: G-a-r-r-a-y. They made a very low priced bag in a tremendously mass produced manner. You know, once they made up a bag they threw them in a basket. It was that kind of an operation. I was horrified, because I used to do everything by hand and we used the finest materials, from alligator to whatever you could dream up, to the finest silks. And it was frightful. But one of the operators felt sorry for me and took me to the head of the union. At that time he was Phillip Lubliner, who has since passed on.

Q: Could you spell his name?
A: Yes. L-u-b-l-i-n-e-r. And he said to me, "I don't believe you can do what you say you can do." And I said, "Well, I can prove it. I can make a bag from start to finish. I can make all the patterns."

So he sent me to Nettie Rosenstein. And Nettie Rosenstein had an accessory corporation that made costume jewelry, at that time of sterling silver. They made handbags, and they also had a perfume business. Well... You know.... They're all defunct, I think, with the exception of the perfume business, today. I think that is alive. I'm not sure. But the owner, and the moving force,
JUDITH LEIBER  Tape 1/Side 1

was Sol Klein there. And I worked for them for fourteen years. And I gained a tremendous amount of experience there, because, first of all, they had, you know, the collections were quite extensive. And I had to make many, many patterns. Of course, I wasn't the chief at the beginning, I was an assistant, and I worked myself up as the chief; what they call a sample maker. Because... I think in our industry, the only designers in the handbag business, are the owners. If you work for somebody... It's not as developed as it is in ready-to-wear, where you have a sketcher, like Bill Blass, who really puts his stamp on something, you know. Basically, the people in the handbag business, the men (they're usually men) who come out, up from the ranks, and they're usually European, because the American system didn't allow you to learn the trade from start to finish. You would have to actually be a genius to pick up everything when they sit you at a bench and you're doing one thing. Because we have section work, so... It's quite different.

Q: Yeah. Well, that would be something for you to go into...
A: Yeah. I'll go into it. So... They would be Europeans. They would be men. They would... Most of them wouldn't have either the background of culture or style to come up with anything that a lady of fashion would want. I mean, be it expensive or not. And years ago, the whole handbag industry lived off of European ideas. So the owner would go to Europe and look around and get things, and then they would copy them and adapt them to the American way of working, of trying to produce it. Because some of the European things are too complicated work. I don't think today it's as much as it used to be because it's all been watered down terribly. But -9-
years ago, the bags that were made in Europe were quite complex. Especially if you bought an alligator bag, it would be extremely difficult to do, because it would all be hand labor and be very specialized and very complex. So that the owner would come back, bring the root of the collection, and then they would have sample makers who would more or less be like a pattern maker; a workmanlike person who would get this thing and the owner would say, "I want you to make it smaller, or larger, or wider, or change something on it." I mean, a perfect example of this was Dick Koret. He was the greatest editor there was. He didn't have his own ideas, but he bought the best that Europe had to offer and then adapted it to American tastes. And he was the biggest innovator of all because he brought in color into handbags, and he really made very extensive collections. And he knew what he could sell, because originally he was a salesman. Most of the owners are salesmen. So that they sort of have the retail customer and the retailer in mind when they design the line, which isn't a bad idea at that.

Q: So, in your fourteen years with Rosenstein...

A: With Rosenstein, I gained a tremendous experience. For about two or three years I worked as an assistant, next to an Italian pattern maker they had who was insanely jealous of me. But, you know, my background was completely different from theirs. I grew up in an upper middle class...Hungary was...Like here, the upper classes...We lived very well. Very comfortably. We had very fine things. I had an extensive family who were all interested in fashion. My grandparents were in ladies' hats in Vienna. So that it was somehow related to it, and it was...We lived a
life that...you were interested in clothes and you knew what went with what. We didn't maybe have the chic of Paris, or the Western countries, but there was nevertheless a great emphasis on quality, on fine materials. My mother used to buy a piece of English wool to have a suit made. You knew what good silk looked like. What a nice piece of brocade was like. It was sort of, I grew up with it. And then I think the difference between me and most of the people that make handbags is that I'm a woman, and my attitude is different. What I would like to carry, has a great bearing on what I make. And, of course, you know, the 20 years that I'm in my own business has taught me more than all the years that went before.

Q: Is there anything else in those fourteen years that...?
A: So, when I worked for Rosenstein we did everything there. They did beaded bags that were hand beaded because he had a beading company on the premises, at the time, which later became defunct, because he did the beading for Rosenstein dresses. So it was very easy...

Q: Is this Sol Klein?
A: Yes. Sol Klein. And...of course, they had this jewelry business, which...It was very easy to take parts of the jewelry collection and use them on handbags, which he had done. Which...you know...naturally opens your eyes to a lot of possibilities. And so it went from alligator to silk. Anything, everything. Big, small, boxes, soft things, stiff bags. So I had...Not that I didn't have...I had the basic knowledge, and I learned a great deal there. And then they decided to change their manufacturing to Italy, because he felt that the production was too expensive in the States
and it was too difficult, and he made a deal with somebody and moved the factory. So here I was, out of a job. So the first...

Q: So in other words, they didn't just do the production offshore, in this case in Italy. They also took the design room away? Were you working in a design room?

A: Yes. Everything...

Q: The whole thing.

A: Yes. Well, I worked right in the factory. You know...

Q: There was not a separate design room?

A: No, there wasn't. And it's not...See, the last couple of years I ran the floor, too, because in the time that he was in business, which I don't remember how many years...He must have had 16 foremen. Today you couldn't find 16 foremen in the whole industry, no less to think of one that's qualified. Anyway, once he fired the last one, I took the factory over and I ran that too. As my husband says, I was training all my life to go into my own business. I learned about figures, I learned about...I knew how much...what their volume was. What the salaries were. It was like a school to me.

And then I had to look for a job. The first offer I got was from Dick Koret so I went to work there and I worked there for six months. And then I felt that...You see, he was a man who had his own ideas and there was no possibility of creativity there. And at Rosenstein I had a pretty free hand, even though I never was regarded as if it was my own idea, and I never pushed that. But Sol Klein and I both knew in
our hearts whose idea this was or that was, and towards the end, particularly, most of the things that were developed were my own thoughts. But, naturally, they were...some of the seeds came from the bags that he brought back from Europe and past successes, because that's how we all work. I think ready-to-wear is the same thing. It's not a revolution, it's an evolution. It's from one season to the next, you hold things, you develop them. Sometimes you design something and it's a total flop, and two years later it comes out of your head and it's a big success, because finally you grasped it in a manner that's feasible and pleases the customers and it's good design. Sometimes it's...first it's somewhat of an abortion, and then it becomes something.

Q: And then the timing is right...
A: The timing is right. Of course. One never knows, sometimes...This is a marvelous thing in fashion, I think. The timing. How it works. And I always wonder how the French couture does it. Do all the assistants get together for coffee in the coffee houses and exchange ideas? They're all coming up with the same kind of thing half the time. The skirt length, the bat wing sleeve, or the white collar, or whatever it is. It always seems to be coming in waves. And I think that that is something that either it's in the air and you feel it, or maybe in the couture it somehow hangs together. I don't know how they do it. It is a strange thing isn't it?

So anyway...Once I...I worked for Dick Koret for six months, and I was very unhappy there because I hate to copy. And then I went to Morris Moskowitz, where I worked for two and a half years. In the beginning
they let me design a little bit, but then they felt that they knew better and I was back to doing this sort of what I call wood chopping. They gave you a bag; they said you should make it bigger or smaller, or put a little bit of pepper into it. But basically it was the same thing. Very boring. And then their business dropped about 30% in 1962, and luckily I got fired in October.

My husband, who is a fine artist... I don't say he is a businessman, but he is brilliant... He said to me, "Judy, you're not going to work for any of these shnooks anymore. You're going into your own business." And I said, "How could we afford it?" I used to get good salaries, but still... You know... My parents came to the States. We had to help them. We had all kinds of little problems. So we didn't have very much money. I rented a 280 foot loft on Madison Avenue and the corner of 33rd Street in a little broken down building with a tiny elevator, on the top floor, and I started to make the bags. I hired a cutter... and an operator...

Q: Now, let's do this slowly.... You went into business with about how much money?
A: I think $5,000.
Q: $5,000. And you had a small place. You paid rent...
A: We paid rent. It was minimal... I really can't recall what it was, but later, when I became a little bit successful, in the very beginning, when I got l. Magnin as an account... At that time they had three buyers. One for the north, one for the south, and one for, I think, Seattle. Northern and Southern California and Seattle. And the place was... the elevator was so small that along with Ruth Haber, the resident, they couldn't...
come up. So Margaret Robinson, who is now long retired, was a marvelous 
woman with a good sense of humor, and said, "Well, Judy's making bags in 
her bedroom." And it was just about that size. We used to make the bags, 
sell them....My husband used to have a hand truck and deliver them to Saks 
Fifth Avenue.

Q: You opened this little bedroom sized place and you 
hired...?

A: I hired about three or four people, I had working for 
us. And I packed every bag myself because I didn't have a packer. I wanted 
to do it as reasonably as I could. And one of my first customers was Berg-
dorf, and they wanted very special things, and we made them up for them 
and we were very proud to be able to work for them. And then I got Neiman-
Marcus, Henri Bendel...So little by little...We did very small lots. You 
know, very few pieces. And in a year we outgrew this factory. We couldn't 
stay there because we had 6-7-8 people and 4-5 sewing machines. We couldn't 
work there anymore. So then we moved to 12 E. 33rd Street, and we took a 
loft that was, I think, 1800 ft., and in 2-3 years we outgrew that. And 
then we moved to 14 E. 32nd Street, where we had a loft with 6,000 ft., 
and this got, by 1980, we just couldn't exist there. Everytime I passed, 
a box of work would fall on the floor. We would have people in nooks and 
crannies. It was unbelievable. And the building changed hands very many 
times and we were considering taking another floor. And then we felt it 
didn't make much sense, so we came here, which is 12,000 feet...

Q: At 20 W. 33rd Street...
A: At 20 W. 33rd Street, and now we have 75 workers.

Q: Over this period of time, how many workers did you have and then how many.

A: Well, I think we had about 30 or 28, when we worked on 33rd Street. And then we moved to 32nd Street. We began to grow; we had 38, we had 42. And then in the late '70s, business grew a lot. Well, first of all, in 1970, I started making belts. And that added a great deal of volume to our business. Although I made jewelry too, costume, but it was all contracted. It's very difficult to get good workmanship when you do it outside. I think it's quite different from 7th Avenue in this sense. And I felt that it would be too detrimental and didn't pay so I gave that up.

Q: Yes. Well, that, of course, leads to some of the questions that I have. In the methods of production, let's talk first about your kind of business, and then, if you could relate to other businesses that are in a different level of production--do you use only an inside shop?

A: Yes, I do. Because we may have a lot of 250 bags in which you have 18 colors. Now, if you imagine that each bag contains many pieces, of which the leather alone...You know, we're using a lot of snakes so we cut it into a lot of little pieces. You would have 30 pieces of snake, and if you farm that out to somebody, first of all, there are very few people who could make it properly. But assuming that there are people who could handle it properly, all you would be doing half the time is replacing the little pieces that they lost. They lose them in here too.
Sometimes. But, when you have your own plant, in a very high grade business, you have much better control. You know...I control everything from start to finish. I don't have a foreman; I do my own running of the plant, and I make all my own patterns. So that I'm actually really completely in control, which isn't usual. In the usual handbag factory, you have a foreman, who runs the floor, and you have a patternmaker, who makes the patterns. The boss may generally give them the directions or the ideas of what they're to do, but they're doing all this while I'm doing this all myself. It's somewhat...controls it tighter. Especially in today's labor market, when you no longer have this wonderful European craftsman, who's been in the leather line since the age of eleven. They have died off, most of them. You know, they came over between the wars. The Fussgehers that came over from Poland, and ..... 

Q: You'd better spell that. Fussgeher. How do you spell that?

A: F-u-s-s-g-e-h-e-r.

Q: Okay. So that you...

A: So that most....many people...many Jewish workers, wonderful ones, from Russia, Poland, Germany, Austria, and then, of course, there were wonderful Italians and wonderful Germans who came between the wars because of the...You know, that terrible depression in Germany. So there was really an influx of fully formed craftsmen. They all knew their trade from start to finish because the guild system taught them how to make something. And even if they didn't....You know....I mean, they knew how
to cut it. They knew how to put the parts together. How to turn the edges in. How to frame a bag. How to sew it. Even if they didn't do it anymore, but they understood it. So that the understanding made them make it better than a person who only knows a segment of it. This is the unfortunate thing about our whole fashion industry, I think. I don't....I've thought about it a lot but I don't know if it's solvable at this point. Because the element that goes into it is not a cultured element. You know, the people that came from Russia or Germany or Italy or Poland were people that may have come from simple circumstances, but they were hard working, dedicated. But they didn't pass the business on to their kids, or their knowledge. They sent their kids to college. They became doctors and accountants and lawyers and this is a dying industry as a consequence.

Q: Is it?

A: I think it is. It's totally a dying industry. Unless the Chinese, the Vietnamese, the Puerto Ricans, the Cubans and the Blacks are able to learn what the others knew. But there is no possibility for it. Because you cannot learn everything in school. You can only learn it in the place of work; in a factory. How to make things. In school they show you something, but you don't have the...You know....The learning process is a process of repetition. You do it over and over so you get it right and you do better and better. But being that we are in a mass produced system and a section work system, the work is divided. X does this; the next one does that; the third one does that. And Charlie Chaplin, in modern world idea... One person is doing one thing. They do it well, they do it fast, and that's all they do. It also kills their initiative. They're not interested, since
that's all they're doing.

Q: The big volume firms....Are they still producing here, or do they produce...?

A: Well, many of them produce out of town. I mean, Meyer...

Q: Out of town, or out of country?

A: Out of country, I think. Most people are buying. I don't think anybody actually has their own plant. But I don't know that much about it. You know. I mean, there is Korea, that will turn out a bag that costs $19 retail, and it has 10 feet of suede in it. I mean, it's unbelievable at the cost. Because you couldn't make it here. The labor would be half of it. The whole...The whole...You know, it's a completely different setup over there.

Q: But you don't know if it's American firms who...?

A: Well, I don't think that American firms manufacture there. I think they all go there and they have...There is a manufacturer willing to make it and they buy it from them, whether it's a manufacturer or a retailer who is doing it.

Q: But as far as you....

A: But as far as I know, I don't think there is anybody that has their own plants. You know, I could ask...somebody about it. I know somebody that's doing a tremendous business in Taiwan, but I have a feeling they don't have their own plant. First of all, they'd be involved in all this...all their labor problems. And there is a language barrier and
so on. But there are places, you know...Fitchburg, Massachusetts still has a lot. There are....Meyers Manufacturing, for instance, makes all their bags in Connecticut. And Coach is made in New York, at the end of 34th Street.

Q: And they are a fairly big volume firm...

A: Oh, they're a very big volume firm. But it's a completely different operation. It's an unlined bag. It's clicked and it's put together. It's very simple. You know, it's cut out on a clicker. A clicker is a machine. It's a hydraulic machine that you...You press a button, and a head, which has tremendous weight, goes down over a die, that's laid over a piece of leather, and it cuts it out with all the markings in it that they need. So they put it together. It's more like a jigsaw puzzle. It's not quite as complex as something a little bit more...A finer kind of product. It's very well made, and durable...because the leather is very, very strong, that they use. And they make a very classic, simple product. That...

Q: They use their own hardware don't they?

A: They use a little bit of hardware, not a great deal. But of course it's all geared to the price they have to get, so it's a really mass produced hardware. Which is also done in a very machined way. All the hardware I use is handmade. I mean, even if it's done on a lathe or a phrasing machine, but it is all finished by hand. It's quite different. I mean, you do produce quite a bit, but not thousands and thousands that these people can turn out.
Q: So, as far as you know, there is some production in
New York, some in Pennsylvania...

A: Some in Pennsylvania, some in Massachusetts. I think
there are places in the Midwest. Of course, the West Coast has a lot, and
they use a lot of Mexican labor. They also had this problem with the
wetbacks at one point. But I think that has probably been solved to a great
extent.

Q: And all of this is piece work? Or section work?

A: It's section work. Some people may work piece work.
I don't think so.

Q: Would you explain again the difference between section
work and...

Q: Well, section work is dividing the work... so one per-
son does a certain operation and the next person picks it up from there,
and does the next operation. Piece work is making something and getting
paid by the piece. The section worker doesn't necessarily get paid by
the piece. He gets paid by the hour. It's not... It's a section of the
handbag, you see, that they're doing. One person would be turning in all
the pieces; one person would be lining up all the pieces; one person would
be punching out all the buttons. One person would be putting them in.
And then a framer would be putting the frame on it, if it's a frame bag.
But basically, usually, the framers are the only ones who do piece work.

Q: And section workers are paid by the hour... There is no
such thing as a week?
A: Weekly pay?
Q: Uh huh.
A: Well, they usually work a full week, but they are paid on an hourly basis, because they get overtime, if you work overtime. So they get time and a half if they work overtime. And if they work on a holiday, they get double time.
Q: What is the story with the union? Which union organizes this industry?
A: It's called the #1 Local of the Pocketbook Workers Union, which is part of the International...
Q: Ladies Garment Workers Union.
A: Yes. Uh huh. I think it is.
Q: Yeah. I think it is too.
A: And...Well, the union at this point is very weak. What can they do? I mean...They can't supply you with any good help, because there isn't any. The bulk of their members are minorities at this point. The people who run it are naturally oldtimers. Old time framers, old time pocketbook makers, whatever they were, that came...That became President and Secretary, etc. They are trying to get help for you, but it's very difficult because, really, all the good people, the handful that are still around are working. And all the manufacturers are looking to get one from somebody else because there is nobody. It's very, very difficult to train people. It takes a great deal of money. It takes a very long time. And in all the years I've been in business--20 years--the only person that I found...You know, girls that you hire come up as a cementer. They take a
brush and they use the rubber cement to glue the edges of the interlining to the leather. Or they glue the edge in order to turn it over so you make a finished edge. And I... In all the years that I've been in business, I found one girl who had the talent and potential to become anything more, and we made a pocketbook maker out of her. I think she is with me, maybe, four years. She's a young girl, and she's very talented, and you can give her anything. And she's very willing and she's very ambitious and she works very well. But the rest of the so-called cementers, in the women's area, wouldn't be... There is no possibility for them to advance, because they are not interested. They don't have the talent to grow.

Q: Have you always used the union as your potential source of labor? Is that...

A: Well, what else is there? Either you import them from Europe—which is a tremendously costly and risky thing, because you don't really know if these people are going to be capable. You know, in my despair I called up one immigration lawyer and I asked him what the situation was to get somebody in. I have this old friend of mine, from whom I learned the trade, said he would have two potential people who would be willing to come to the States. So it takes two years, $2,000 worth of legal work, and then... Let's say the person gets here... You know, communism is not conducive to ambition and good work. I don't know if you read the New York Times this last Sunday. I read an article by an American writer who worked for a... Soviet. Did you read it? I didn't read it, but my husband said the workers just go to the office. They don't do anything. They don't produce
anything. They're not interested in anything. They don't care about anything. All they care about is they have a good time at home. I mean, the whole attitude is very poor. So that you don't know what you would be getting. Would it be the same attitude, or would it be somebody who would give you a day's work? After you've trained them for a year or so to do it your way. Because they do it differently there. You know, they do a complete thing, and it's much slower.

Q: Does that mean that most of the people you have working here--or all of them--are European trained originally, except for an occasional person, like the girl who cemented...

A: Well, I have another couple of girls who are very, very good. One of them was a helper already, when I hired her, and she still is, but she runs a whole section of, you know, preparing the bags to get to the craftsman, who then finishes it. And I have a French woman who was born in Grenoble, that's a leather area, who's very, very good. And then I have an old gentleman who is 77 years old, and you know, you look at him and you say, "The most productive man in the place." He was a pocketbook maker. His father was a pocketbook maker, which is a rarity. Then I have a young Cuban boy that we fished up recently, who learned it from his father who was in business there, and had his own shop. So he's very good. Then I have a Hungarian man, who learned the trade in Hungary. So it's... But it's very, very difficult to find top notch people. My cutter is from Bratislava. And then... all the others... I have one Italian cutter, and the others are from Ecuador, Cuba, Puerto Rico...
Q: Did they come here trained already?
A: Well, somewhat. Somewhat...

Q: They were interested and they came here and...
A: And they were all union people. Came from the union, or word of mouth. Like, you know, somebody said, "Gee, you looking for a job? There is a job up there." You know. That's one way of getting them. But to train somebody from scratch...I think it's our own fault. The manufacturer's fault, I suppose. We should have a training shop. I was talking to the Chairman of Saks. We went to Dallas to the opening of their new store, and I was talking to the Chairman, and he said, "Well, you should train people. What are you going to do ten years from now?"

[Side 2]

A: Of course, Mr. Aronson is quite right, and we're all at fault. But I don't know. In the sense that we have to spend such a great deal of money to do this. Where do you recoup it? When you train a person? You can't put it into the price of the product. I guess you would have to.

Q: You have to think of it as an investment, I guess, in the future, or you won't have workers to make your bags.
A: Yes. That's very true. You know, we're all getting on. I'm not saying...I want to work as long as I'm around. If I'm 85, I hope they'll push me to work in a wheelchair if I have to. Because I love it, and I think it's stimulating and it's exciting, and it's wonderful to be able to make something and be able to see it hanging on the arm of the President's wife, or a movie star, or just a lady at a concert, or walking
down the street. You can count a few. It's very...It's a wonderful, gratifying feeling, if you see that people love it. Or if I go to the stores and ladies come in and they say, "I have 15 of your bags and I love them all, and one of them is 18 years old and it's just as good as new." And I say, "Oh, gosh, I wish it would fall apart," and they all laugh.

Q: Yeah. Well, that brings me to a subject which I was going to get to later, and then we'll go back to other things, and that is the succession. Do you see any way that your business can go on? If the time comes on if you are not able to, or do not wish to continue?

A: I don't know. I've never really given it any thought, which may be quite foolish. But...You know, we have no children, my husband and I, so there is really nobody to leave it to. On my side, my cousins are all in other countries, so they wouldn't be interested, or knowledgeable about it. And on my husband's side, there isn't anybody that anyone could say would be able to follow it through. I really don't know. You know...Maybe it will be like Koret, which was...After Koret died in this airplane crash, they sold the business to another man who was in the handbag business and the name remained, but nothing else is the same. I don't know. I really haven't thought about it. Yet, it would be nice if you could continue it. But I don't know how it could be done. Because you would have to have a person continue it that has the knowledge that I have, in order to continue making the kinds of things that I've come up with.

Q: Okay. As I say, that was a question we were going to get to anyway...Let's go back to some other things. First of all, financing.
You had mentioned that when you started your business, it cost you about $5,000 to do it. I assume that no one could start a business like that today.

A: No. But you see, even then, for a couple of years we didn't draw salaries, my husband and I. We just, you know, maybe, for three or four years, we really struggled. And we were very naive. We thought we were doing very well. Our volume was $75,000 for the first year. Which, when you think of it, is really a laugh. Even then, in 1963, it wasn't very much. But...

Q: When did it begin to grow?

A: It grew steadily. That was the first year...I can't remember the figures anymore, but it took us about 5-6 years to get to a point of solvency, where you could draw a salary, no matter how modest. Because we pumped all the profits back in order to have working capital.

Q: This was something like 1970 or '68....

A: By '68 we were all right. I think it took about three years. See, we went to Europe in 1964. That was the first year we went, and it was just...It was just thrilling, because I had never been back since I came over in '47, and I had never gone for handbags per se, so to me it was like a wonderland. And as the years go by, it's less and less and less of a wonderland. I don't know if it was so exciting because I had never done it before, or things were so much better than they are today. But you know, when you read books, they tell you, "all the good old days." They weren't all that good. So I don't think it makes a difference. It's just your attitude.
Q: Okay. As to the financing, before we get to Europe, in a little greater depth... You were saying that as time went on, and you kept putting your money back into the business so you could have working capital, does that mean that you did not borrow from banks, or that you borrowed some...?

A: Well, you know, at first it was very difficult to borrow. I remember once we were really stuck and my Dad gave me $1,000 and my sister gave me $1,000 and then, you know, whatever we had in the bank we used. And finally we got to the point where we could borrow from the bank because we were, you know, solvent. What the amounts were I really can't recall anymore. But we grew slowly, and once... You know, in this kind of a business, once it is over $1 million volume, you begin to make money. Up to then, you can't make money on it. Because, even with the... You know, if I hired a sample maker and a foreman today, that would cost between $100-$150,000 a year for the two, which I don't have. So I don't have to worry about that. Which is... that's my input into it besides running the business. So that I have a little more freedom than most people in this sense. And I'm not tied to that part of it.

Q: How much volume approximately do you do?
A: Well, we do well over... between $6-7 million.

Q: Really. Out of this one place, with 75 workers.
A: Well, our units are very high. We could have done more last year if we could have delivered. We took a tremendous amount of orders we couldn't fill. So that, you know, the fact that there is a recession hasn't hit us very much because we really couldn't deliver what we booked.
last year. And this year we hope to deliver most everything. You know, there are always things that you can't ship because something happens, either the leather doesn't come in or the frames aren't big enough or something happens.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about store relationships. You mentioned going down to the opening of a store of Saks, and a conversation with Mr. Aaronson. When you started, how did you start to sell the stores?

A: Well, it was...You see, when I worked for Rosenstein, a few people I knew...Because I used to come into the showroom and they used to know me. When I went into business, I called those that I knew. And then I called those that I didn't know. I never went to the so-called sample room, which I always thought was horrible. I didn't have the temperament for it. But I was very fortunate, because when I worked for Morris Moskowitz, his personality was such that he trotted you out and showed you off. You know, when he hired me first it was sort of a feather in his crown. So I met some of the buyers that I didn't know. Then they remembered me. I called them up and I said, "You know I used to work, etc., etc...I met you at such and such a time. Would you come and look at the things?" And once they look at the things, I was very fortunate. They liked what I was making. My first big success was a tiny bag. Which at that point, in 1963, I brought back snakes, which at that time were not in. I started to make quilted rib snakes, which is interesting, because they're back again. And then I made very tiny bags with a little rhinestone hoop. As a
matter of fact the distinction of it was that Dick Koret copied it. It was very funny. And I sold quite a bit of them. I mean, looking back on it, it was absolutely ridiculous, the amounts that I sold.

Q: Small or big?

A: Small, small. But I remember when Frank McIntosh, who now is in Table Top at Bendel, but used to be the handbag buyer, came down and said, "Will you make me this shopping bag in snake?" You know, the Bendel shopping bag—wide and shallow. And I said, "Sure." And that was the year that they made the mink coats cut across? Well, I cut the snake across. With long strips. It was terrific. And he said, "You've got to confine it to me." And then he bought 12 pieces. And somebody knocked it off and made a lot of money on it and I didn't. I only sold it to Neiman and Bendel, because I was always very honorable. I wouldn't do anything that I didn't say I would do. So that taught me a lesson. Not to do that. But I had, really, the best stores in the country very quickly. And even though in the beginning they bought very little... But little by little they sold the things and they bought more, you know. Like Bonwit Teller. I knew the buyer, or maybe... she died... But at the time, I knew her, when I was working at Rosenstein's, so it was very easy for me to call on her and ask her to come, and she became a big booster. And then when she quit the store the next one took it on. So I knew some of the merchandisers.... Accidentally.... Just being around... So it was very easy for me. And then little by little they asked me to make personal appearances. I'll never forget, the first one I ever made was at Bonwit's. They took a photograph of mine and they
put it out on the stand, the way they do it, near the elevator. And the buyer took my hand and she took me back there and she said, "Look. Isn't that nice?" And I said, "Yes, it is. It can't be me, I'm so surprised." And she said, "You know, as long as you are like that, you're going to make good bags. But if you get very fancy, and you're going to think you're somebody really special, you're no longer going to make these terrific bags, and you're going to be just like the others." And I always remembered that. So then later I made a personal appearance at Saks and... You know... They'd like to drag you through the stores like waving a flag. But if you have to produce merchandise and deliver it on time, you really don't have all that much time to go, so I basically only go to store openings. Because that's sort of a special occasion, and it's fun, and you see the setup and you see the city, and it makes it very interesting and it's educational. You see how people dress.... Very often that helps you make something that is lacking in your line. And I'm also very critical about what I do, in my own things. If I make... You know, you start designing a handbag by making a dummy. It's made of a flannel cloth. Just like they make a toile in the dress industry. So if I look at it and it doesn't strike me, I'll just throw it away. I don't belabor anything that I don't feel is going to be of any value. So I must have thrown away a lot of them that may have developed, but who has time to think about that?

Q: That's really one of the big things I wanted to go through with you. That is to say, how do you get the idea for a collection? I mean, you show how many collections a year?
A: I show spring, fall, and holiday/resort, really.

Q: So that's three.

A: Yes. Pretty much. They...You know, today they spread them out to such an extent. There is this tremendous pressure for showing new continually, and it's getting more and more difficult. But you see, I love hardware, so I would take a piece of paper over to Europe and have them make a frame from a paper pattern that I made, because I think this would make a good shape, and I use for inspiration, you know, the geometric forms. I love art deco. I'm absolutely crazy about it. Whether it is something that has a Marcasite look....That used to be so beautiful, that was done in the '20s. Or something very geometric, that's taken from a chair or a table or possibly a box, as a detail. I use that and have it made. Adapt it to the way that it would work practically. Because if a bag doesn't open and it doesn't lock properly, and if it isn't easy for a lady to carry...She isn't going to buy it.

Q: Now, when you start to design a collection...Let's say your spring collection, because we're heading now to where you'll be showing for spring. When do you start to plan it and how do you think about it?

Q: Well, the hardware, you have to plan a lot earlier, like in...You know, I go to Europe twice a year. In February and in September, usually, so the September trip is more or less for the fall of the following year. But sometimes they get ambitious and they make a couple of pieces up right away and it comes in and we use it, because if you're attracted to it, you want to use it right away. It's a real exciting thing.
Like getting a new dress. But usually the February trip is mostly...
Some of it comes in for the fall, and some of it for the following spring, which we usually show in November, because the Europeans have this long vacation period in between, and you very often don't get things in on time.

Q: Well, now...Do you start...Can you analyze it a little bit? Do you start with the idea of the shapes of the bags or the colors or the fabrics...?

A: Well, the colors are really governed by what the shoe and dress industry are doing, and I am using European tanners, who usually come up with a color card, long before the ready-to-wear is shown, or the couture. So that those colors are usually the right ones, because they coordinate.

Q: So you still have to pick them out.

A: You pick out what you feel...I've been very lucky with that. Most of the time. Well, you know, let's say this year purple is in... They will give you the right shade that will go with most things that they will show in clothes. So that if you feel that these are the colors that you like and you show them, you generally come out all right. Once in a while you miss one, so you quickly catch up. That can be done. You know, if the customers say, "Well, you don't have such a color," and I say, "Is this it?" And they say, "Yes." And then you call the tanner...

Q: Because you have the card. Right. And what about the size of the bags and shapes?
A: Well, you know, size and shape is something that I think I do just by instinct.

Q: You don't sketch first?

A: Well, I may, but my sketch isn't really a good sketch. I really sketch with a knife.

Q: You carve right into the leather?

A: Not into the leather. A piece of paper. And then into the leather. But basically the idea is formed. You can't just take a piece of paper...Well, I do a very full spectrum. I make big bags and I make little bags. And some years I feel that this very "baby doll" is going to be great, and I did it for this last fall, and I was wondering if people would accept it, and it really went over. These very tiny boxes in rhinestones. Very little ones. Really...just holds a credit card, money, lipstick, a comb and a powder box. But really tiny. And then I made handbags that were very tiny, with very long handles. And they were very successful. But then I make very big things. So I really run the whole gamut, more or less. You know people sometimes associate me with evening bags, which I do make, of course, a lot of metals, but I also do very classic and very casual bags. They may not be that many, but we sell an awful lot of them. Because...You know, I think the lifestyle today is such that people wear very casual clothes. I don't know if you've been to Italy lately, but if you walk down the Via della Spiga it's incredible how they all look in their jeans and their T-shirts, in contrast to about five years ago where you saw the best trends of Europe coming out of there. You walked down the
street...There were the clothes, everything the way it was going to be. But I think...Life today, such...communication is so fast that there is no differentiation anymore. If you look at men in the street--You name any country, I mean, any European country--you're not sure if they're Americans or Europeans. They're wearing American clothes, English clothes, French clothes. That goes for New York. You don't know if it's a New Yorker or not. Years ago you could tell from the shoes whether they were Italians or French. Today you can't tell anything. There is such an exchange of everything. Such an influx. An outfall of it all that it no longer exists. There's no differentiation. And I think this is one of the reasons for the great lack of ideas today. You know, there is such a fast exchange, there is no newness. Everything is...Whatever comes up, it's absorbed and it's gone.

Q: When you make your trips twice a year, what do you look for now?

A: Usually I look in all the shops, because here and there you get the seed of an idea, like the folded something or a shape that you may be attracted to. But basically I go for the hardware. That I have made.

Q: The locks and clasps.

A: The locks and clasps and metal bags. So that most of that I do design it myself, so that they are really mine, and the customer will say, "Where did you see this?" I say, "Over here, in my head. That's all." So that part of it is...When I go to Europe I don't run to get ideas for handbags basically. There aren't that many there. And everybody else is
going so we would all be making the same thing. Which is what's wrong with the industry. There is no creativity now. Young people have come into it who have done interesting things, but the problem is that they don't have the technical knowledge, so that whatever they make is not done well.

Q: You think the creative talent has to be backed up by the technical skill.

A: Maybe the reason 7th Avenue is able to do it is that the designers had the contractor or the workmen behind them. I don't know... They say, though, that the tailors are dying out, on 7th Avenue.

Q: Yes, the tailors are dying off, but they have a lot of...They have a lot of trained people coming in from the schools. And of course they have changed the methods of production. Just as in this industry, I gather, there are changes in the method of production. Much more use of machinery....

A: Well, it's basically a hand industry. You know. I mean, you can turn an edge with a machine, but it's a limited thing. I mean, it would cost a tremendous amount of money to turn it by machine on a complicated shape, and then it isn't always satisfactory because it has to be actually...the absolute right thickness in order to turn properly on a machine. So it's very complicated.

Q: Do you find that you use your leather and other materials from American sources, or are they American sources who buy...

A: Well, unfortunately, there are no American sources.
Most of the skins that I use come from the other side, be they from Indonesia and tanned in Switzerland. Or there are alligator skins going from Louisiana to Italy or France and coming back tanned. Calf skins I buy from France.

Q: What kind?
A: Calf. From France or Austria. Cape skins I buy usually Italian tans from an American importer. I like to buy from American importers, because if the material isn't good you can return it. If you buy it direct, you're stuck. It's not that good a way of doing it. Sometimes you're forced to do it, but basically it's better to buy it locally. Plus the costs are slightly higher. But that really, in my area, isn't so tragic. What we want is really good material, so we make a very fine product out of it.

Q: I think I've only got just a couple of things left to ask you. What...How do you feel about the promotion of handbags and your other line—which I want to go back and talk a little bit about too. I know you're doing belts.
A: Yes.
Q: Do the stores do much promotion, or do you do it with the stores, or...?
A: Well, we do it basically with the stores. The sore point that I have is that the fashion magazines and the Fashion Group are not promoting accessories properly. Because they're not paying attention to them. Of course, I understand the reasons. If a model, dressed in a
wonderful dress goes down a runway and she happens to have a jacket, she doesn't know what to do with the handbag. But it's not realistic...

Q: That's true in Europe too.

A: Yes, it is. It's very bad though, because it puts...

You know, accessories are second class. I once was talking to Beth Levine, and she said, "Someday they ought to send the models out in their stockings without shoes, and then they'd see how they look." And I think...I once had a big fight with the Fashion Group and I resigned, because I said there was no point in my paying membership to an organization that completely ignores me and everybody else in the accessory business. They wanted me to stay there, and Eleanor McMillen [formerly Fashion Group Director] came down to see me, but I said I don't think that they're doing anything. It's very rare that they use the handbag in anything, and it's very difficult to show a handbag without the clothes, because it looks unrelated. What do you do? Put the woman in a leotard and run her down a runway? Nobody would even pay attention to it. And the only way I think you can promote it is with huge photographs or films.

Q: Do you do ads with stores?

A: I do ads with stores. I don't do trunk shows.

Q: No. But you go down to the store openings.

A: The stores usually buy all the merchandise and I just go down to show my face and kibitz around pretty much. But I do co-op advertising with the stores, because it makes sense. The store buys...backs up that ad, so that you do contribute money, but you generate money. And I think
it's more beneficial to a maker than it is an ego trip type of institutional ad. It's not...Unless you have a tremendous amount of money where you can do it. That's wonderful, to promote your name. But I think it's much better to do it with stores, if you're a moderate size manufacturer.

Q: When did you introduce belts. And why.

A: In 1970. You know, we always had...Well, you know, you have all the leather around. You can match a bag to a belt, which the customers enjoy doing. And I used to...You know, being that I used to be in the jewelry business, I had the basis for what to do with a buckle, and I had the knowledge of how to design it or what to do with it. On this, I use a model maker, of course. I couldn't design the buckles, which are usually cast in light metal or made of brass in Europe, but I give them all the ideas, and they make it. Well belts...First of all, it uses up a lot of material, and one time, when alligators were banned, you know, because of the environmental agency's feeling that the alligator is in danger...But everybody's business who used alligators dropped a great deal, so I felt that it would bring business to us if we made belts. So we decided to do it, and the year I started (I think it was 1970 or '71), and it was one of the peaks of the belt business. And then it dropped...It was very strong till '73 and then it sort of slowed down a little. But this is...It's a business that fluctuates up and down, because depending on whether they're wearing sacks or suits, you sell more or less. But I became an established name in belts as well, so we always sell enough to make it worthwhile. Then there are peaks and valleys in it. This is another peak. I thought last year was the strongest year we ever had, and that we would
fall right on our faces. But it's going on this year. I guess the tight waist that the French have brought in and everybody's done since...because of...depression/recession, people feel this is a more enduring way of dressing, and that the customers will be more attracted if they can buy something that they think they can have in their closet for the next few years instead of just a flash in the pan; for one season and then goodbye. I think the whole industry...I mean the whole fashion industry is turning somewhat like Europe used to be. That people feel they'd rather buy less and let it be finer so they can have it for a while and wear it and use it instead of having lots of things that are poor quality and they get rid of it and throw it out and get tired of it. Which has brought us new customers despite the recession, because some of the people feel they'd rather spend the money and have something that endures.

Q: Just one last thing. If a young person came to you.....or comes to you, and I'm sure there must be some who do, for advice.....What kind of advice can you give them about entering the accessories market?

A: Well, you have to know your craft. You have to try to learn it. I mean, these schools have very competent people in them. In the handbag industry. I think F.I.T. has somebody very good teaching. Parsons has a manufacturer teaching. But I think you have to...You know, you shouldn't get too complicated about what you design. You should do things that are comparatively...You know, good design isn't necessarily complex. It's usually very simple. But proportions are very important. It's just like, you look at a beautiful French chair. It's just right, but somebody figured it out so that it's just right. You should be very critical of the proportion of something that you do.
It shouldn't be too exaggerated. None of the things that you put on it. No big flaps that are oblique. No complicated handles with too many knots or too many curlicues. I think that the best things are the classics, like a Chanel sweater, right? Like a cardigan sweater....

Q: So you're saying you would tell a student, or somebody going into the industry, to...

A: Not to be too complicated. If you do a really good design, it looks very simple. It looks like it was born that way. That's what you should aim for.

Q: And you're talking, really, of the route to the business being through the design area.

A: Yes. Well, I think that is the way you have to do it. If your designing's good, you should be able to sell it and be successful at it. Of course, it helps if you know your materials and you know your construction, because it avoids a lot of pitfalls, and you should make things that have good openings; that open easily. Handles that hold on strongly, because the ladies certainly pack tons of stuff into their bags, and if things fall apart, they're not going to be buying them again.

Q: But are there opportunities for people to go to work for manufacturers who, as you say, so often are the ones who do their own style direction?

A: Well, there are many people who have inside designers. The only problem is that I think if you make a sketch and you don't know what is behind it, it's very difficult to do it successfully.
Q: So you're saying that basically...

A: You should try to know your trade. I mean, you look at...I think the best people in the clothing area are the ones who know how to make a product. Galanos, Norell...They knew how to make it, didn't they?

Q: Yes.

A: And Balenciaga did. You know, I saw a picture of Chanel with the pins in her mouth. Look at Pauline Trigere. Whatever she makes has form, it has shape, it hangs right. It's the same thing with a handbag, if it's done properly. The trouble is there's too much slipshodiness all over the place. This is the problem. And it's very difficult to learn it, because it takes years to learn how to do it, unfortunately. If we had a guild system in this country, maybe...You know, if a young person who has design ability...Like, say, somebody comes out of F.I.T., and would spend a couple of years in a factory...But which one is going to? They want to make big money. They want to be...You know, this is today's syndrome. It's not just in America. It's worldwide. I mean, I talk to people in Italy. They all want to wear grey flannel suits and punch a computer. Nobody wants to do anything that may soil their fingers. It's very sad. Because basically, when you look through the fine art in the museums, you know, where you look to applied art, the most wonderful things were done years ago. Nobody can do them anymore. Nothing is done that's really...Very rarely. Very little, literally. There's this craft magazine, and sometimes I look at it. They're certainly weaving wonderful fabrics. But they're doing them
for hangings and so on. It's not that it applies to clothes or to what you wear or what you use. They're more for interiors. But nevertheless, they have ideas. But it's not applied in a practical sense. I think that... I don't know how it is solvable. Maybe somebody will be bright enough to come up with it. But we are all to blame. We should have taught people to do things properly, and learn it. But, you know, I think it takes, in fact, five years, ten years, to learn it. It's like medicine. You really have to apply yourself to get to the core of things. And if you really want to design, you really have to understand the basics that are behind it. And I don't know how this can be achieved without practical experience.

Q: Thank you very much.
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