

Jack Lenor Larsen Oral History Project:

Interview with Ellie Karanauskas

Stephanie Zollinger: It is Thursday evening, May 21, 2009, and I'm here with Ellie Karanauskas. She's going to tell us her Larsen story. If you would, before you tell us how you arrived at Larsen Studio, would you talk about your background and where you grew up?

Ellie Karanauskas: Yes. I grew up in Los Angeles. I was born in Europe and came over here with my family after the war and grew up in L.A. I graduated high school there and went on to college in San Francisco. I went to Lone Mountain College and studied English Literature, which didn't prepare me for a great deal but I had a good time with it and loved to read. That was my favorite thing. After I graduated from college, not knowing what I should do with my grand degree, I moved to Europe for a while and idled around for about a year and a half, much to the distress of my parents. But I had a very nice time. When I came back, I decided to move to New York because I'd never lived there.

Stephanie Zollinger: How did you land your job with Larsen?

Ellie Karanauskas: I didn't know who Jack Lenor Larsen was. I had no idea about design at all. A very dear friend of mine, who was a friend from kindergarten on, was an interior designer in Los Angeles. He told me when I arrived in New York to contact a friend of his. His friend was someone that he had met at an American Society of Interior Designers conference who he thought was a lot of fun. His name was Frank Huggins. Frank Huggins was the then National Sales Director and Vice President of Sales for Larsen. I didn't know, as I say, who Larsen was, but I dutifully called my friend's friend and introduced myself. We had a long-running conversation back and forth for a number of months as to what I was doing in New York and what I should be seeing. He gave me his thoughts about the latest shows at the museums or architectural tours I should take. When we finally did meet for lunch one time we got along very well. I still had no idea of his position, the company, or anything. I just thought he was a very nice man. Then he invited me to the Larsen Christmas party which I honestly did not want to go to because I thought, "Someone's office Christmas party, I don't know. It doesn't sound like a lot of fun." But Frank convinced me that it was a very unusual group of people and that I would just love it. So that was my very first time going

down to the offices at 41 University Place on the 11th floor. I came in and everyone was just lovely. It was very much a family type of Christmas party. Everyone had brought food that they had made. Frank was serving something that someone had carved up. I had a very nice time. Everyone talked to me and, towards the end of the party, Bob Carr, who was the Director of Operations there, called me aside and said, "Frank wants you to work for us and we've been interviewing you." I thought that was a little shocking. I'd just come to New York, I'd just got a job—not that it was anything special—but I thought, "I've just started." So I said, "How nice," and that was the end of that. Frank kept calling me and telling me that this was a phenomenal firm and that I really had to come and work for them and that I was the right type of person. I thought, "This is exciting." He said I didn't have to take dictation, so that sounded good.

Stephanie Zollinger: Did they tell you what your role was going to be?

Ellie Karanauskas: I was going to be Frank's assistant. Yes, I would occasionally type a letter. Yes, I would occasionally take a little dictation, but I would get involved with the working of the company, learning about the product, finding out what was happening in Customer Service, dealing with any problems, and generally helping him as his assistant. He traveled a great deal. So that's how I began. In fact, when I went back to my company, I told them a big lie. I had never been in the job field before so I didn't quite know how to say I'd been offered another job. I said, "They're offering me a tremendous amount of money" and they said, "What is it?" At the time, this was in 1972, I said, "It's \$150 a week," and they said, "We'll match it." Then I thought, "Oh, no," because I hadn't even got what they were going to offer me at Larsen and it certainly was not \$150 a week. So I worried, "What have I done? What have I done?" But I never looked back. It was the most wonderful experience from day one. I started off as Frank's assistant in the downtown and, because he traveled a great deal, he would give me projects and explain things and then leave me alone to work on them.

Stephanie Zollinger: Projects such as?

Ellie Karanauskas: Projects such as organizing the roadlines for the sales reps. In other words, not actually making the roadlines because that was done by the Sample Department, but making sure that everyone got what they needed or knew where were they going to be at certain times

for us to mail their roadlines to them. I began to learn about having outside sales reps and how they worked. I knew we had a showroom and I did go to the showroom. One of the things that Frank did right from the beginning was have me spend three weeks in every single department, from the Sample Department, to the Shipping Department, to the Customer Service Department, to the showroom and so on, so I could get a sense of what it was all about. What was wonderful was I had never worked for a company that took so much time to explain everything to me.

Stephanie Zollinger: Can you explain what a roadline is?

Ellie Karanauskas: A roadline is for what we call the “road warriors,” the sales reps who actually travel the territories. Instead of having a showroom and memos at their disposal, they usually have a full-yard split with one pattern, flagged at the bottom with different colors of the same pattern. They would either show in someone’s office or in a hotel room. Oftentimes they did hotel presentations where they would have a series of clients come in. They would take sample requests from these people in the various territories, people who had no ability to get into a showroom easily. They would have their own sample libraries that they kept for their clients, called roadlines.

Stephanie Zollinger: At the start, you were easing your way into sales?

Ellie Karanauskas: I guess so. I’d never realized it, you see. Whenever there was a problem, which there would be occasionally because we had very unusual fabrics, Frank would go into great detail why this was a difficult thing to do. He would explain why it took so long for the mills to do certain things. Why was there a possible problem with this or that? I would write the letters for him and I would follow up with the mills. I’d be the go-between with the salesperson and Customer Service, or the Production Department, or whoever. I knew I was doing all these things but I didn’t realize at the time how much I was learning. About nine months into my working for Frank he said, “We’ve got an opening in the showroom and I think you’re ready to go into sales.” I said, “I don’t think so. I really don’t.” He said, “You’re going to be great at it.” The opening was for an outside salesperson. This was a person who left the showroom and called on the contract accounts. I didn’t know quite how they did this, but I was going to follow through with the woman whose job I would be taking. She was Nancy Denno, a very short, heavysset, Japanese woman

who was pregnant, so the two of us looked like Mutt and Jeff. She dragged me around to her clients. The unfortunate thing was she had a photographic memory and I'm always a little bit spaced-out. So, for the first six months, I would get her clients saying to me, "But Nancy would know these numbers. Nancy would know," and I'd reply, "I'll get back to you. I'll get back to you." Finally I said, "I'm not Nancy. I'm me." It was a wonderful job. My very first presentation that I did on my own was to Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. I'll never forget being outside with my bags thinking, "What have you got yourself into?" But one of the things that I found was they had their expertise and I, by working with the products, and knowing about them, and being told about them, had my expertise. If I didn't know, I would get back to them. That was the reality of it.

Stephanie Zollinger: In this job, you weren't really in charge of the showrooms. You represented the showroom and would go and call on these architectural firms?

Ellie Karanauskas: Correct. I had all of the major architectural firms. I had Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. I had I. M. Pei. I had Poor and Swanke, which is now Swanke Hayden Connell. I had all of the major contract firms and a lot of the top residential firms that had their own libraries and wanted people to call on them. John Carl Warnecke was another client. It was a lot of fun and it was a great learning process. I did that for about eight or nine years and I had so much fun. It was just wonderful.

Stephanie Zollinger: How did you, with this degree in literature, come to understand textile technology?

Ellie K: The thing is, and I think this is what Frank Huggins saw, if you have a brain, if you're a fairly bright person and you're willing to learn, you find out, for example, what "abrasion" is about, what does the term mean? Why is there pile on a velvet? Why should it be upholstered with the pile going down? Why is this done? You learn and it makes sense to you. It's like, "I get it." It's just another language.

Stephanie Zollinger: So you picked it up rather easily?

Ellie Karanauskas: Yes, because it was not explained in grand terms. It was very simple. This means this, and this is why, and so on. I understood it. If it had been really intricate things then I don't think I would have understood it. Later on I learned a little more about the intricacies because I already understood the simple basics.

Stephanie Zollinger: You talked earlier about a system of cataloging the fabrics. Can you talk about what the numbering system meant?

Ellie Karanauskas: Yes. I wasn't that aware of the other firms in our industry at that time, to be honest, but, looking back on Larsen, things were categorized in such a great way. All patterns would have four digits, a slash, and then two other digits. The first four digits would indicate the pattern number. I honestly don't remember now which ones were which but let's say the 9000 series always indicated that it was a casement, a sheer fabric. Let's say the 4000 series indicated that it was another type of fabric. The 5000 series was a print. Immediately you would know that it was a print or a casement. The last two digits would indicate the color number and it always started with the lightest color being 01, 02, going up to the deeper tones. So you would have a pretty good clue what the colors were. Also, if a client asked you if there were other colors of something that ended with the number 10, you knew there were nine previous colors at one point. It was not a difficult thing and, whenever we wrote orders, I thought this was very orderly and correct. We always wrote the name of the fabric, the number, and then the colorway name. Everything had a name and I always remembered them by their names and their numbers. This was double checked to make sure that you had it written down correctly because if you just wrote numbers you could get a digit wrong.

Stephanie Zollinger: One thing we're trying to do at the university is catalog the textiles in the archives. One of the challenges has been trying to put the fabrics according to collection. What I have found is that some fabrics belong in more than one collection. I think I worked it out that it really depends on the colorway as to what collection it belongs in. Am I correct in that?

Ellie Karanauskas: The colorway and the collection? I'm not sure.

Stephanie Zollinger: I can't think of any good examples but I think it has more to do with the solids. For instance, in the African Collection there

Ellie K / Ellie K.mp3

may be a fabric that's in the African Collection and I know it's also in the Great Colors of China Collection.

Ellie Karanauskas: That was before my time so I really am not sure about that. In general, the collections came and went and then they just became part of the line. So, you might remember that it was from the Afghan Collection or Terra Nova but couldn't remember was it a weave, was it a print, was it a sheer?

Stephanie Zollinger: What you're saying is, you never thought about them as collections. You thought about them more in terms of numbers and names?

Ellie Karanauskas: You thought of them as collections to begin with because there was always a story. That was what was so wonderful about it. It would help you remember why was this part of the Terra Nova Collection, because of this and that. There was a whole history of why something was part of it. There was another collection called, I think, Mushrooms and Wildflowers.

Stephanie Zollinger: There was a Mushroom Collection that dealt with sunflowers.

Ellie Karanauskas: And it had fabrics called *Truffle*, and they were very nubby, and natural, and earthy. There was a theme that went through it but, once it got into the collection, once you went out to call on clients, the client didn't really care if it had an Aztec feeling. They were looking at it, thinking, "How is this going to work in my project? I'm looking for textures. I'm looking for wools. I'm looking for sheers for the window. I'm looking for strong prints", or whatever it was. I guess that's how I looked at it. Maybe other people saw it differently.

Stephanie Zollinger: Did you help create any of the stories that went along with these lines?

Ellie Karanauskas: Not at all. I just took them in.

Stephanie Zollinger: I know that by 1972 there was Larsen International, there was Larsen Carpet, and there was Larsen Furniture. Being in sales, did you have a hand in any of the other entities?

Ellie Karanauskas: Other than selling? No.

Stephanie Zollinger: Did you sell Larsen furniture?

Ellie Karanauskas: I did. I sold Larsen furniture and I sold Larsen carpet. And we also had Larsen Leather. These were our other divisions. At first I was resistant to selling carpet because it was difficult and hard to work out. You had to do the drawings and work out where repeats fell and math is not one of my strong points. But, little by little, I learned that I loved it because it was just fabric on the ground, and it was also wonderful. It was the same thing with our furniture.

Stephanie Zollinger: I think he contracted Billy Baldwin?

Ellie Karanauskas: No, it was Ben Baldwin, a good friend of his. Ben Baldwin did a lot and, of course, we had the Germans.

Stephanie Zollinger: Was there a Dettinger?

Ellie Karanauskas: Yes. I should have looked at this a little more carefully.

Stephanie Zollinger: But that was contract work?

Ellie Karanauskas: Yes, exactly.

Stephanie Zollinger: And then what was your job?

Ellie Karanauskas: To go out and sell it. We did very well with these new divisions. The thing is, Larsen was such an exciting place. Designers were excited by everything that we came out with. We were very innovative. I threw myself in there but I was just one of the ones who were

happy to pass the word along. I think one of the things I said when I spoke in Minneapolis was that the company got you so involved in everything and explained the process. The company really explained things so you understood and you got excited by it, "Oh my God, do you know how this is done? Do you know how ikats are done?" No one knew about ikats, I think. They were around for hundreds of years but the typical American designer didn't really know what an ikat was. So, for them to come in and show you how the yarns were tied into patterns and how it was dyed, and re-tied, and re-dyed, got you excited. Then you would take it along and you would show your client and they would get excited. Then they would tell their client, who was the ultimate end-user, about it, "This is so wild, can you see how this is done?" and that sort of thing. I think that was the great thing about Larsen and it probably was partially due to the time. Now people are much savvier. There are a lot of young people who have traveled all over and they've had all these experiences.

Stephanie Zollinger: At this time, Larsen was very global when not many other people were.

Ellie Karanauskas: Exactly. I remember a party for the Afghan Collection. That was very exciting and had pictures of Jack on a bus in Afghanistan. The bus is painted and the fabric's flowing. It was very exotic, very wild, very wonderful.

Stephanie Zollinger: Did you ever accompany him on any trips abroad?

Ellie Karanauskas: No, I don't believe I did, not abroad. I did go to Paris when he had his show there, but it was after the actual opening. I went about a week later because most of the company, various people, had gone there but I was working. I went on my own. I felt that that was more fun anyway. I could do my tour by myself.

Stephanie Zollinger: What did you think of the show?

Ellie Karanauskas: I loved it. I thought it was brilliant. I thought it was so great. There was a piece of silk velvet and I went over and I wrote, "Hi, Jack," in it with my finger because, with silk velvet, the pile moves. I took a photograph and then the guard came over and he said, "Oh, no, no, no."

And I said “No, no, no, I work there.” And I smoothed it out again and he was all fine about it.

Stephanie Zollinger: That’s a great story. Did you have a lot of involvement with the mills?

Ellie Karanauskas: No, I did not. The only time that I ever got involved with the mills was when I was working for Frank. Also, when I was working through the Production Department with the mills, getting the information to the client in cases of problematic orders. But no, I really didn’t work with the mills.

Stephanie Zollinger: You became essentially Head of Sales. How many people did you oversee or have working with you?

Ellie Karanauskas: I was in the New York showroom as an outside salesperson, so I was just one of the showroom staff in New York. In 1984, Jack made me an offer to open a showroom in Seattle, his hometown. That was the first time I began managing.

Stephanie Zollinger: Did you live there?

Ellie Karanauskas: Yes, I moved to Seattle. I lived there for two and a half years. I was torn because I loved New York and I thought, “Oh, no.” In 1984 Seattle was not as cool as it is now and I remember saying to Jack, “I don’t know anyone who’s been to Seattle but you and you left.” But I went and I fell in love with Seattle. I thought it was a wonderful place. All of Jack’s friends and acquaintances made me feel very much at home so that was really good. I had a staff of three, more or less, two and a half, besides myself, so it was a small staff. I was there for two and a half years. At that time, in Chicago, our showroom manager left. We were splitting up. We had had a space that we shared with Lee Jofa so the showroom was called Lee Larsen. They asked me to come to Chicago and manage that team. There, there were about ten of us.

Stephanie Zollinger: How long did you live in Chicago?

Ellie Karanauskas: About two and a half years.

Stephanie Zollinger: How did you end up back in New York?

Ellie Karanauskas: I was not in love with Chicago. It's a beautiful city. It has wonderful architecture, et cetera, et cetera. Maybe it was a funny time of my life because I did not want to be in Chicago. Finally I came to them and I said, "I think I need to take a sabbatical." They said, "You've never done that before," and I replied, "Oh well, I might have to leave then." Then they said, "When would you like to start your sabbatical?" So I took a year off, or I asked for a year off and, about nine months into that, they came back and asked me if I would come back to New York as National Sales Director.

Stephanie Zollinger: What does that job encompass?

Ellie Karanauskas: That encompasses managing the various showrooms across the country and going out to see them, and training them, and going out on sales calls with them. Basically a manager on a bigger scale.

Stephanie Zollinger: Did you have any involvement with the international showrooms?

Ellie Karanauskas: No, except when we first started. They would, of course, be part of parties and things like that so they'd come in from Stuttgart, or wherever. You got to know them but, no, I didn't have any involvement with them.

Stephanie Zollinger: Did Jack train them? Who took control over them?

Ellie Karanauskas: I don't know. I really don't know that. I would imagine it would be Jack, but I'm sure that they were savvy design types to begin with and knew what they had in Jack and the product.

Stephanie Zollinger: What was your interaction with the designers? Did they have their own space and you were working in another building? Or did you interact on a daily basis with them?

Ellie Karanauskas: When I was in outside sales, for example, I had very little interaction with the designers, other than at parties. Or, if we had custom jobs, then I would get involved in working with them. Sometimes there would be a custom job for Neiman Marcus, for example, and you would work with the Design Studio and be the liaison between the client and the Design Studio, that sort of thing. There was very little real involvement with the Design Studio. Once I was National Sales Director, I worked downtown in the general offices and my office was basically right across from the Design Studio. I was always going in to see what they were working on, what did we think of these colorways, what kinds of comments were we getting from the field, what were people looking at, "This is fabulous, this is not so."

Stephanie Zollinger: Did you give them feedback?

Ellie Karanauskas: Yes, exactly. It was funny because, at Larsen, it really wasn't controlled by what was happening out there because Jack was the innovator. He came out and said what he felt the new colors were. Still, you could say, "People are not looking at this at all, trust me," and he could take it or leave it, as the case may be.

Stephanie Zollinger: You just reported back?

Ellie K: You reported and you said, "This is what I'm hearing from my salespeople and also from the clients that I'm calling on."

Stephanie Zollinger: I know he was one of the first designers to license his name. Do you know anything about how that came about?

Ellie Karanauskas: It began before me certainly but, during my time, he did the Terra Nova Collection. He did work for Mikasa. He did things for WestPoint Stevens or West Point-Pepperell at that time. Who else? We did several things. He had done licensing before but how he got involved with that, I do not know.

Stephanie Zollinger: So you don't know if it was his idea or somebody else's?

Ellie Karanauskas: I don't. He was always surrounded by very good people and they all adored him. Everyone would try to help him out. I think that was one of Jack's great successes, too. He's brilliant but, because of that brilliance, he pulls in people who want to help him. Do you know what I mean?

Stephanie Zollinger: Maybe he was smart and the people he brought in were strong in areas that he had a weakness in?

Ellie Karanauskas: Maybe. I don't know.

Stephanie Zollinger: We know that he was a brilliant promoter.

Ellie Karanauskas: He was, absolutely.

Stephanie Zollinger: Did you have any involvement with the advertising or the marketing pieces that went out?

Ellie Karanauskas: As I said, when I was National Sales Director, I was working with a woman by the name of Gerry Cerf. Gerry Cerf was the Marketing Director at the time. She and I worked a lot together and we would bounce things back and forth. But was I instrumental? I wouldn't say that, no.

Stephanie Zollinger: The advertising pieces that went out were just as innovative as some of his fabrics.

Ellie Karanauskas: Yes, absolutely. They went through various stages of who was in charge of marketing at that point. I think it's towards the end that I was more involved with it, not really in developing but we would bounce ideas back and forth, "What do you think of this?"

Stephanie Zollinger: Tell us some of your most memorable events or stories.

Ellie Karanauskas: There were really so many. The parties were very exciting. I well remember one thing and, to this day, I totally believe it.

Jack would hate to see two people that worked together at a party talking to each other. This was not the point of the party. It was to go out and talk to the clients who came. I've always thought, absolutely, that makes all the sense in the world because this isn't just to sit there having a cocktail.

Stephanie Zollinger: Did he give you lectures before the party?

Ellie Karanauskas: No. He wouldn't lecture you but he would make a comment to someone if they were talking to a buddy. He would tell people to mingle. He was good about that because he did understand the importance of promotion, and being there, and networking. He was very brilliant that way, I think. That stands out in my mind. Also, there was an excitement and hoopla about the partying and the culmination of it. It was just a very exciting time and people wanted to come to those parties.

Stephanie Zollinger: Is there a collection you can think of that, when you went to sell it, there was a tremendous feeling of excitement?

Ellie Karanauskas: There was a tremendous amount of enthusiasm about every collection. Maybe some incited more enthusiasm than others but, in general, people were excited to see it. One of the things, too, instead of just saying, "Here's our new collection," and plopping it down, we would take the new collection and show how it worked with the older lines. We'd say, "Here's the new collection, but look at this." We would throw in some classics from the line. It's something that we do at Pollack.

Stephanie Zollinger: Do you have an all-time favorite?

Ellie Karanauskas: Fabric?

Stephanie Zollinger: Fabric or collection.

Ellie Karanauskas: I have different favorites for different things, everything from the wow of *Magnum*--when I first saw that, I thought it was so strange and so weird--to more classic, simpler things. I like some of the Thai silks. I like so many things. For example, I was walking through a very nice thrift store a number of years ago and, as I was walking out, out of the corner of my eye, I saw *Laotian Ikat*. That was the name and it

was on a wonderful chaise and the pillows were all *Laotian Ikat*. I had to buy the piece because of the fabric. The fabric looked so good.

Stephanie Zollinger: So you ended up with a chaise?

Ellie Karanauskas: Exactly. I had favorites and then they would change depending on what it was.

Stephanie Zollinger: Talk about Win Anderson if you can. Did you work much with Win?

Ellie Karanauskas: I did not work much with Win. She was there when I first came, of course. She worked in the Design Studio. She and Jack were great friends. I really did not have much involvement. We would occasionally get people who came in and said, "I'm a good friend of Win's. She's very blah-blah-blah. Can I have a discount?" I would think, "You don't know Win at all." People would drop the name, "Jack and I are friends," "Win and I are friends," but they didn't know who anyone was. I didn't get to know Win until long after she retired. I was living in Seattle and would see her there.

Stephanie Zollinger: Larsen has been known to be cutting edge and for pushing the boundaries. Is there anything else that we need to know that you would consider to be significant of a Larsen textile, or why Larsen should go down in history as an innovator?

Ellie Karanauskas: It had a lot to do with the company in general. As we say, which came first, the chicken or the egg? I don't know if Jack surrounded himself with people who made things wonderful or vice versa, but it was a magical time. I could not wait to go to work every day. It was the most exciting thing I had ever experienced and I didn't know anything about this coming into the industry. It was just an eye-opener. It was, "Oh, my God, it's so pretty and it's so much fun". And the people were lovely. Everyone had an excitement like that. I would say the first 10 years I worked for Larsen, I was on cloud nine the whole time. I don't think I had more than six sick days in my whole 23 years there.

Stephanie Zollinger: But you knew, working there, that he was significant and he was a man that was doing something special?

Ellie Karanauskas: Right, I learned that later. As I said, when I came I didn't know who he was. In fact, the first week I was there, they said, "Jack's going to be on television." They got a TV monitor and he was being interviewed by someone. I had not met Jack yet at this point so I thought, "This is some hotshot thing." I had no clue what I had entered into but the more I learned, the more I came to respect him. He frightened me if he ever called me in. He'd call you into his office and he'd say, <in a deep voice> "You're doing a fine job," and you'd reply, "Thank you." I was thinking, "I hope he doesn't pay attention to me." Once you began to know how important he was, he was sort of frightening, especially to a young kid who was stupid.

Stephanie Zollinger: One last question. Since you were in sales, I know you probably kept track of the sales volume for each of the fabrics. Do you happen to know what the all-time best-seller was?

Ellie Karanauskas: I should, but I don't.

Stephanie Zollinger: Was it more the weaves?

Ellie Karanauskas: I think it was more the weaves. I may be wrong on that but I think it was more the weaves. It depends. We had spectacular jobs that would do a big boom. Wolf Trap Farm had *Swazi* and that was an exciting and big thing. The Sears Tower had banners that we had done in silk. They were special jobs but, overall, I don't know. It could be one of the simple weaves like *Doria*. As far as yardage amounts that were sold, I don't know.

Stephanie Zollinger: Because of the complexity and the maintenance involved, his signature fabrics, *Swazilace* and *Magnum*, didn't really sell?

Ellie Karanauskas: They were not the big sellers but they were the dazzlers. That was also a thing that was very brilliant of Jack. He kept things in the line that would dazzle, that weren't the biggest sellers, but they would just catch your attention. The client would say, "Wow, I don't know how I could possibly use that, but..." and then you'd go on to show them the things that they could use.

Stephanie Zollinger: Didn't Johnny Carson buy *Magnum*?

Ellie Karanauskas: Yes, it was used and was photographed, I think, in *Architectural Digest*.

Stephanie Zollinger A window treatment?

Ellie Karanauskas: I thought it was on pillows or a sofa or something like that but I can't remember now.

Stephanie Zollinger: And he had clients such as, I think, Liz Taylor?

Ellie Karanauskas: Oh, yes. In the early '80s, you'd get sheiks that would come into the showroom with their bodyguards. They'd have lots of cash on them and want to buy all these things. I remember counting thousands of dollars worth of cash with bodyguards and we'd be saying, "Oh, God, who's going to the bank?"

Stephanie Zollinger: Any other clients that you remember?

Ellie Karanauskas: Ashford and Simpson came to an opening and they were clients. They had bought fabric. They were always glamorous people, always glamorous. Egon von Fürstenberg and Diane von Fürstenberg, when they were married and a couple. They were just very glamorous people. Dale and Pat Keller, architects, who are now in Hong Kong. They lived in New York at that time and they would come. They were always done up to the nines and people would "ooh" and "aah." It was like having a premiere.

Stephanie Zollinger: Thank you so much. Is there anything that I should have asked that you think is important for students to know?

Ellie Karanauskas: I just think that it's sad, when I talk to students nowadays and you ask them if they've ever heard of Jack Larsen and many of them say no. That, to me, is sad. It's like saying I don't know who Frank Lloyd Wright is. You understand what I mean? It's that kind of thing. I think it was a very, very special time and I think it's a very important piece of American design history. He was an innovator and is an innovator in many, many ways. I think that people should know about him. I was very proud to be part of it.

Stephanie Zollinger: Thanks for keeping history alive for us.

Ellie Karanauskas: Hopefully. Thank you.

Stephanie Zollinger: Thank you.

End of Ellie K.mp3