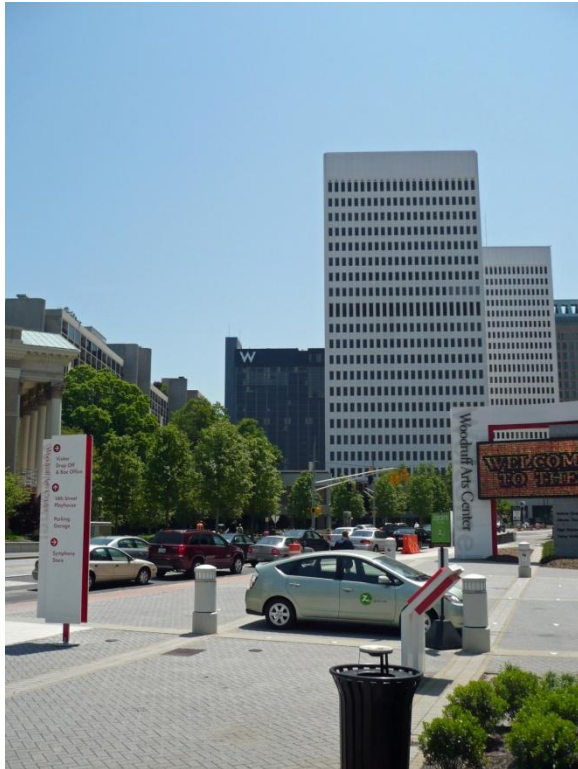


Interview with Henri Jova, FAIA Design of the Colony Square Project by Jova-Daniels-Busby Architects in Midtown, Atlanta, GA



Interviewed by:
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for Oral History Project
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[italics in brackets indicate transcriber's interpretation of intent of conversation]

JP: Henri, how did you get the job to design Colony Square?

HJ: That's the not the first question you asked here *[on the outline prepared for the interview]*, but I'll be glad to say, well, we had just formed our new office, which opened in January of 1966. I had been working for several years for Abreu and Robeson as Chief of Design. I had come down from New York, or I worked for a big firm in New York.

JP: Who was that?

HJ: Harrison and Abramovitz. I came down here *[to Atlanta]* thinking I was coming for a year and a half

or two years at the most. When I was due to go back where it all happened, I thought. This was in 1954, and I'm still here. I worked for Abreu and Robeson for twelve years. I finally decided that it was time to do something else, and I had been moonlighting with John Busby and with Stanley Daniels. We decided to formalize our relationship in a new firm. Very soon after that, Jim Cushman¹ came to see me one day at home. He talked a little bit about acquiring some land. He took me

¹ Investor-Developer who instigated the Colony Square project

out to see a project that he had done. It was a townhouse project, and he asked to come in and see us at the office and talk to us.

JP: This was the project down on Paces Ferry?

HJ: It was out on... Well, it was called Paces Ferry Place.

JP: Yes. I think he mentioned that development to me in my conversations with him.

HJ: He came into the office. We talked. He said, "I'm looking at a piece of property that would comprise maybe ten or twelve acres." And he told us where it was. He said, "If you got the job of doing it, what would you put on it?" And we got, of course, extremely excited. We'd only done, at that stage in the game as a firm, we'd only done some residential remodeling and small scale things. We thought, "Gee this would be fun." We said, "What about a mixed use project with offices and a hotel and retail and residential and townhouses?" That got him very excited. We talked to him a little bit more, and he finally made us a proposal. He said, "What if you became my architect and I paid you out of pocket expenses. I know you're just starting out, so I'm sure that cash flow is a problem." Cash flow was a problem, and has always been a problem. Anyway, we thought that was a very fair proposal. So he said, "I'm coming back in three or four days. I'll be interested to see how you think this ought to be developed." So in three or four days with a plat, we sketched some office buildings and some retail and hotels.

That's the way it all got started. He got very excited by the whole idea of it. He said, "This is a new concept in the South." And I said, "Well, it's a good concept really in the whole country and the world." We then took it another step further and started hard lining it a little bit. Our office at that stage in the game consisted of Stanley, John and myself. We had a part-time maid-of-all-work who came in and did some typing for us. And we had some earnest young people who'd come in on a moonlight basis and do some work for us. But all in all, I suppose we had three or four people besides ourselves working for us. We started right in, and right from the start, one of the things that was exiting about the project is that he would include us in a lot of his financing conferences and so on. We immediately started doing some elaborate design work. We did a homemade model of a project. Later on we expanded that and did a better homemade model. At one stage in the game, he had an interview in New York, and he called us at the last minute and said, "Can you get the model up here and be ready to present?" Well we had a crate made for the model and we took it up together, and we found that once in New York, it was not the easiest thing to find transportation for it. Only certain cabs were big enough to take it, and many of them didn't want to stop for us. We finally developed a technique whereby one of us would stand in the shadows with the crate, the other

one would hail a cab, only the right cab, and then once the cab had stopped, we would reveal our true colors and carry this big box out and put it in the back and take it there. The first interview we had was successful and exciting to us, but it did not excite the client very much, and so...

JP: Jim?

HJ: No. Jim was with us.

JP: But was he the one who wasn't excited?

HJ: Oh no. He was excited. He was plenty excited. But the perspective money lenders were not excited. So we packed it back up and I think we spent the night in New York. The next morning, he said, "I hope you haven't sent the model back, because we've got another prospect." We unloaded the model, which indeed had gone to the Airlines Communication Center, which in those days was on the east side. We put it back into another taxi, took it to Rockefeller Center, and presented it again. This time we got a better reception. And he was very encouraged. We went back to Georgia and started working on it again. Let's see... Fairly soon, he did get successful financing for the first building, which was 100 Colony Square, which was built finally in the form that you now see it. By the time it was finished, which was in, I suppose, 1970, maybe a little bit earlier, we were hitting one of our societal depressions, recession. And it stood alone there for a long time. A matter of years. And then finally Jim got the financing for the rest of the project, and he

said, "Can you do this?" He initially looked at the same finishing *[completion]* date that we'd given him at the first go around. He did not alter that calendar at all, so we, from a six or seven man firm, suddenly became a forty or fifty man firm. We set up several different teams, one for each phase, or one for each function of this game. We had one batch working on another office building. Another batch working on the residential projects. Another batch working on the retail mall. Another batch working on the underground garage, which was very important. It was pivotal to the success of the building of the project. And another batch working on the hotel. All of these proceeded more or less at the same pace. And that's the way it was really done.

JP: Henri, that must have been a very interesting set of feelings to have so much of the cash flow dependent on one project.

HJ: First of all we were doing other jobs, but this was by far the biggest one, and it was the most exciting one, of course. At that stage of the game, Midtown² was an unknown territory. The only other new building in Midtown that was going up at that time was the Arts Center³, which Joe Amisano and his team

² *Neighborhood of Atlanta in which Colony Square is located, bounded roughly by North Avenue on the south, the Downtown Connector Expressway on the North and West, and Monroe Drive on the East.*

³ *Woodruff Arts Center, originally known as Memorial Art Center, containing the High Museum of Art, Atlanta Symphony Hall, and Alliance Theatre.*

collaborated on, was being built. We finished some of our work about the same time that the Art Center was finished, but those were the only two things up here.

JP: One of the things that Jim Cushman mentioned to me that attracted him to you was the fact that you moved to Midtown.

HJ: Yes.

JP: That you had publicly staked a claim on it as a livable environment.

HJ: Yes.

JP: Amidst what I gather was a fairly rag-knot, hippie sort of image.

HJ: Oh yes. It was very. This was almost pre-hippie. It was semi-slum. But I saw some potential there, and of course, by the time we did Colony Square we got a certain amount of bad press from the counter-culture who were taking over the bulk of Midtown. I kept saying that I felt the development of Atlanta was going to happen in a series of nodes going up Peachtree and that this was merely one of those nodes. And indeed that turned out to be true.

JP: What prompted you to decide that Midtown had qualities that merited your investment at that time?

HJ: Well, I felt it was a very convenient location, in that it was close to downtown, where at that time, I was working, and where people normally had their offices. It was halfway between downtown and Buckhead, which was the best living environment that we [*Atlanta*] had. And it was right next to Ansley Park, which was the only intown living

environment of any charm and appeal at that time. I felt that we were due to get the positive effect from the project's adjacency to Ansley Park, which I have great confidence in. And at that time, even Ansley Park was sort of a questionable area. Of course, Ansley Park turned out to be very viable, and we did get a lot of people who couldn't afford Ansley Park, or couldn't find the right slot in Ansley Park moved into Midtown. But really, the true growth of Midtown had only just begun to happen.

JP: I would agree with that. I'd like to focus a minute on how the concept evolved for the complex as a whole. I'm aware that the Galleria project in Houston was in this same time frame, maybe even a little before this project.

HJ: A little bit before, but we did go out and see that.

JP: Colony Square had a skating rink in common with the Galleria. One feature of interest to me is the orientation of the Colony Square towers off axis with the Peachtree Street.

HJ: Well, that we did very, very... with a lot of consideration. We realized that Peachtree Street was a pivotal address. We said if we put a phalanx of towers there, what was going to happen with the rear of the project? There's a lot of land there. So that led us to putting the towers on the diagonal, and feeding the activities of the project into the depth of the project as well as the front, and that, I think, was the pivotal decision that we made.

JP: I had a specific question about the garage that it is important to the design... One of the things that Jim told me was that he had, and I thought it was a gutsy move if I understood him correctly, that he had prematurely sold the dirt from the area of the below grade garage prior to obtaining financing for the balance of the project *[after the completion of the 100 Tower]*. Were you aware of that?

HJ: I don't know. It's possible. That may have been true. I don't recall.

JP: But the garage was critical from the outset in that the structure for improvements above had to be accommodated in its design.

HJ: That was true, but also the fact that we had 2000 parking slots available to the use of the project was absolutely pivotal. As you know, already Tenth Street, which had a rather attractive little sort of down home type shopping area was faltering because of the fact that there was no parking.

JP: Do you mean Tenth and Peachtree?

HJ: Yes. So this we recognized as being a very important generative factor in the whole project.

JP: Is there anything say about the role of the market analysis and leasing folks regarding their effect on the design?

HJ: Well, of course, yes. I will say that naturally they wanted as much rental space as possible. They downplayed the idea of the residential. They wanted much more marketable space than living space. We kept stressing the fact that one of the things that

was giving vitality to the concept was the mixed concept of its usage. And we held out for a lot of the residential.

JP: Cushman bought into the whole living aspect?

HJ: Oh yes. He liked the idea of the mixed use, the mixture and the fact that this was one of the first examples of a thorough mixed-use place. It broke his heart when we weren't able to finance and make go the townhouse aspect.

JP: The roof of the development of that original townhouse site *[Ansley Terrace Condominiums]* is what I see from my balcony. My sense is that Jim operated from his heart as well as from his pocketbook...

HJ: I think that's true.

JP: ...in dealing with some of these things where he had the financial or the marketing people he had to depend on for harboring his debt.

HJ: He was very loyal to us, too. I mean, there were plenty of opportunities for him to have said, "Well, I've paid my debts to you all, and now maybe I ought to get a national star." So he was very... he kept bringing us back to the table and exposing us to the pivotal financing people and so on. And we're grateful to him for that.

JP: Yeah. That's very interesting. I'd be interested to how you decided to use concrete.

HJ: Well, it was absolutely a financial decision. We investigated and at that stage in the game, it was cheaper to use concrete, not only in terms of the material, but in terms of expediency. There were slow-downs in delivery of steel

and so on, and so we decided... Of course, the first building was really a combination of steel and concrete. But from then on it was concrete because of that.

JP: Did you all actually do a design concept for the townhouses?

HJ: Oh yes. Several. Several. And several, more or less, pre-sold.

JP: Is that right? I'll be darned.

HJ: Well, when I say pre-sold, we did specific designs for several clients. But it never did get off the ground.

JP: Let's talk about the residential building a little bit. This building seems particularly complex to me.

HJ: Yes.

JP: How did that...

HJ: Well, one of the... the first building, which was Colony House, started out with that scheme. Let me put it this way: at the time we did that residential thing, it was thought that everybody would want to have a view of Ansley Park, so we designed a scheme in which more than fifty percent of the buildings have an Ansley Park view. A few of them have two views. And a few of them have views. Well, it turned out by the time we built them all, the view across the complex towards the city had a magic that we hadn't really contemplated on. But that sort of explains what we were doing on the original building.

JP: I see. Did you do the half up, half down [*crossover*] in order to get across...?

HJ: Yes. Exactly.

JP: Well, I will tell you a rumor on the street. A rumor on the street was

that you had been quoted as saying you designed it that way, so that it wouldn't become an elderly building because of the stairs.

HJ: No.

JP: But that didn't make sense to me. I don't remember who told me that. But that makes sense, the view and everything.

HJ: Then, of course, the second building was built on second terms because of the lessons we'd learned and also because it was already contemplated that that one would become condominiums. The first one was really built as a rental. And it was "condominium-ized" later.

JP: What effect did having the Fairmont involved have on the project?

HJ: Well, of course, the Fairmont... we wanted a hotel. They wanted an outlet here. They were very difficult to deal with. We designed two or three hotels for them, and they went ahead and did that one, or a hotel that we designed. It was not... The interiors were designed by a Fairmont chosen interior designer⁴ and it was not terribly well-accepted by Atlanta and by a public visiting Atlanta, so if it fell in bad financial rounds. And of course, it was sold and redone a couple of times. I think it's a pretty good hotel now, and I thought it was a pretty good hotel at the outset, but it was quite special and quite glitzy in a west coast way that nobody who really knew Atlanta would have found acceptable.

⁴ Barbara Dorn, an interior designer favored by Richard Swig, head of the Fairmont chain.

- JP:** What about the retail part? It seems like it was a real pioneer exercise.
- HJ:** It was, and it was a bit of improper marketing at first. They rented... In order to get something like that acceptable, you have to concentrate the pieces of property that were rented and producing. They all have to kind of feed off each other. And it was done in a different way, and somebody wanted a little piece of rental property for a certain purpose was given one even though it was remotely accessible only to the rest of it. And so a lot of them failed. And it was a long time before that really took off. Meantime, of course, you ask here about the ice rink. That was simply to get some vitality and vigor to the whole thing. And of course, eventually ice rinks fell out of fashion and that disappeared.
- JP:** I guess I was aware that Rich's come up with a concept just for? Or did they have...
- HJ:** They did have a rather large place.
- JP:** But it was small. I mean, it was not a traditional department store.
- HJ:** No it was not.
- JP:** It was a boutique almost.
- HJ:** It was a boutique. And once again, hindsight is wonderful. And boy do I ever have hindsight. I felt that it was badly merchandised in that I felt that women, and this was primarily oriented towards women's clothing and so on. And they liked to go in and feel that they were finding something that was more or less unique. This

thing was marketed so that all of the black dresses were hung in one rack, and all of the... And so consequently you had that feeling that if you bought one that was your size, everybody else could look at it and find one very similar. I think that's a bad psychology, and it apparently proved to be so. It didn't last.

- JP:** I'll be darned. How did the Calder⁵ get there?
- HJ:** Well, that was one of the things that I forgot who found Calder and got it franchised, and it was painted by somebody locally to Calder's design and specification. And it was subsequently repainted, but I think they're unearthing it again now.
- JP:** I'll be darned. Well it's up there. I mean, I haven't seen it when it wasn't up there, but...
- HJ:** It was gone for a while.
- JP:** Is that right? I'll be darned. One of the things that's undergoing some change at this point is the parking cord between Colony House and Hanover. You know, it had the fountain?
- HJ:** Yes.
- JP:** I'm interested in the introduction of the fountain.
- HJ:** Is that upstairs?
- JP:** Well, you know, it's up that ramp where you hit the lobby area. Do you remember that?
- HJ:** Yes. Under the glass.
- JP:** Well, it's open, but you come up the Fifteenth Street ramp. And you come... Colony House is on your left, and then you can...
- HJ:** Oh yes. That one.
- JP:** There's a square fountain.

⁵ painting by the Alexander Calder studio that hangs on one wall of the atrium of the Colony Square Shopping Mall.

HJ: Yes.

JP: And then there's one upstairs on the exterior plaza. And then one inside. I was just interested in how... Did you all do the site features as well, or did you...

HJ: We did. There have been some changes, but we did do it. We introduced originally what we wanted. Moving water and so on, to enliven the place. The one disappointing thing to me, looking back, is I think the signage that they're permitting there is a disaster. Starting with the Corner Bakery, what have you, which really blasts the... the place has a certain strength and dignity and for a while the signage adhered to that. Now they just let anybody put anything up, including the last one, which is facing...

JP: Fox Network.

HJ: What's that?

JP: Fox Sport Net, or whatever it's called?

HJ: Yeah, well, that one is bad, but there's one the faces Fifteenth and...

JP: INVESCO.

HJ: Yes.

JP: Yeah. It's kind of on the corner.

HJ: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Very bad. But they're all kind of bad, and it seems to me that somebody should have held the line a little bit on that, because it really kind of destroys the integrity of whole. I also, and this is between you and me, I'm not crazy about the money that has been spent on the interiors of the mall and so on. It seems out of character. It seems to be losing strength, rather than reinforcing what was

there. But of course that's easy for papa to say about baby.

JP: Well you know, I hate, of course as I told you, Henri, all we do now is preservation work, so my whole sphere of consciousness is based on how people deal with old buildings and their original character and that sort of thing. And I sort of view this as a step before it's restored. See, my interest in this project and talking to you is: one, living there, but to me I think it's going to be a historical eligible property, and should be at its proper age, which is fifty years.

HJ: It's getting there.

JP: It's getting there. And when that happens, I think this underlying character will then re-emerge.

HJ: Oh, that's good.

JP: I mean, I think it will happen.

HJ: Do you know Herbert Brito⁶?

JP: I do.

HJ: Well, Herbert has a... he feels very much as I do, that the bones of the place are what's preserving, and he feels that sooner or later that will be recognized as you do.

JP: Yeah, I think it will be. And I think the important thing, and really why I'm interested in this, is I want there to be a good record of it, so that it can be...

HJ: Yes. Well, I think that's... most of the stuff is...

JP: It's impact. It's underneath there.

HJ: Yeah.

JP: And certainly the ability, the information to take it back, is there as well.

⁶ a prominent interior designer who has resided at both condominium buildings at Colony Square.

HJ: Yeah. Of course, I also feel that a project of that sort is a living entity, and it should allow for a certain amount of updating, and so on. But I think that expediency is sometimes overriding good taste and good sense.

JP: Yeah. Henri, tell me about the exterior plaza, the upper plaza.

HJ: Yeah.

JP: An interesting space to me. It's a lot of space.

HJ: Yeah.

JP: And it doesn't seem like it's...

HJ: Ever used.

JP: ... Ever really been used.

HJ: I don't know whether it ever will or should be. We felt that it would be the lounge of the... It would be nice to be able to go up and get away from the congestion of downstairs and so on. And I suppose it still has that function.

JP: See, now, that's where our office is. We're in those little offices that back up to the residential building.

HJ: Oh good.

JP: I was curious why those ended up there. Do you remember why?

HJ: No, I don't.

JP: I mean, it seemed they're attached... No, they're not even attached to the... You've got that space that goes with the conference center. But these are just now, I think probably, my sense is, the backed up to the mechanical room of the residential building.

HJ: They might.

JP: And it seemed better to have it more animated and active than have just this black equipment room.

HJ: I guess maybe I feel that way even now.

JP: Yeah. Yeah. My sense on the upper plaza is that it's a bit of a hard spot in that from a roofing standpoint, you don't necessarily want to encourage a lot of wear on it, because it could produce leaks. And yet, it's got to be one of the, per square foot space, one of the most underutilized in Midtown.

HJ: Well, I wonder if at some stage in the game, maybe a boutique restaurant or something like that.

JP: That could have some outside tables. They could take a place like the Goethe Institute, you know that elephants out onto it, and that'd be a great spot. Umm. I guess the one question I have is: looking back on it, are there any particular things you would have done differently.

HJ: Well, if we were doing it today, we would have done it differently obviously. But I think that I'm happy with it, and for its time I think it was a good design. And I think that you're right that it is a very strong... there are an awful lot of things that have been done since then, that I think will probably die before it does.

JP: I know. Absolutely.

HJ: One of the things that I sort of regret is we did commission a big bronze statue in front of... and that's been moved around to the side in a place where it's not even visible.

JP: Over by the hotel?

HJ: Yeah.

JP: Yeah.

HJ: It's in the trees, where originally there was a bank, a bank drive

- up facility and so on. And it was moved around from in front, and it is really kind of a strong piece, and I'd like to see that used in a better way. Maybe that goes up to the...
- JP:** To the plaza.
- HJ:** To the plaza.
- JP:** Did Trizec-Hahn move them? The owners now.
- HJ:** Yeah. Well, either that or...
- JP:** The ones before that, whoever it was.
- HJ:** Everything is... But it's still alive, but it's not visible really.
- JP:** Yeah.
- HJ:** It was by a lady sculptor by the name of Dorothy Burge. And there is one by her that is when you drive up the ramp into the entrance to the residential units, there is sort of a slab-like sculpture that she also did.
- JP:** I'll be darned. I'll go around and, you know, Jim mentioned this one around by the bank, and I vaguely remember it. I think it must have been moved by Prudential, or prior to that, because I moved there in 1990, and I don't ever remember seeing it.
- HJ:** No. That I think was taken away before then. But I mean, it was a recognized sculpture. We paid a lot of money, because... Well, I say a lot of money, probably a hundred thousand dollars. It was probably be even five-hundred now. And I kind of regret that that isn't being better used.
- JP:** *Yeah. Was she from here?*
- HJ:** She was.
- JP:** *Uh huh. Has she done other works in the area?*
- HJ:** I don't know of very much around here, but she was very good. She had several exhibits. We chose this piece out of an exhibit and then had it doubled in size, because of its prominence.
- JP:** *How did that fit into the pro forma? You had a budget for art?*
- HJ:** Well, Jim had a budget for art.
- JP:** *What other things about the project, do you think, would be worth knowing about?*
- HJ:** Well, we've discussed all of those.
- JP:** *Let me ask you this, Henri: What role did... How did the city and its involvement in permitting and all approvals affect the project?*
- HJ:** Well, the one area of impact was we traded the city a nose of land on Fourteenth Street in order to let them have a more direct access across Peachtree and down the other side. And we exchanged that for some permitting that permitted the slip-ramp in front to be built. And the city was cooperative, although I don't think they realized what the impact of this whole thing was going to be. Jim was very persuasive with them.
- JP:** So you didn't have any monumental problems in terms of the mixture of uses or proximity or anything.
- HJ:** No. Not really.
- JP:** What about the approval with the neighborhood. The NPU⁷ probably...
- HJ:** Oh yeah. We had to do lots of selling there.
- JP:** *Who were the people who were...*

⁷ *Neighborhood Planning Unit, an element in the governance structure of City of Atlanta*

HJ: The Ansley Park Civic Commission and so on. We had to do lots of unveilings of the model on several thousand. But they were in general were... What we were attempting to prove to them was that we were giving them a planned unit. Otherwise, all of that land facing Peachtree was a series of Damocles' Swords, and they would have to fight each one as they came along. And I think that we've been, on the whole, very good neighbors. We tried to reduce the land use, and the size of the building, and so on -- as we dropped away toward the neighborhood.

JP: How does this project fit in? How does it fit in for you in your career in terms of what you've done in your spectrum?

HJ: Well, it put us among the big boys. We proved that we can handle a big project, and have done many since then. You know, there was a lot of financial insecurity at one stage in the game, and we were paid not completely, but we were paid. People say, "Well, don't you bear a grudge?" I said, "No I don't

really," because we were paid, but in the meantime we were given an opportunity that a six month old firm seldom gets.

JP: Absolutely.

HJ: And so consequently I feel that we earned our spurs by working and cooperating.

JP: What happened with the firm after you got through that big, sort of, build up? Were you able then to expand?

HJ: Well, we never got to be a fifty man firm again, but we have accomplished a lot in our day.

JP: That's great. Okay. I think that covers things in my mind.

HJ: Well, Jack, you know, if going over these you find some blanks that you want filled, give me a call.

JP: Okay.

HJ: We might do it on the phone, or if we could meet again.

JP: Okay. Let me do that. Because I'm going to go back and talk to Jim again. And when I do that having some information, some other things may come up.

HJ: Sure.

JP: But I appreciate that.

HJ: And you got it.