

# STEPPEWOLF HALFHOUR

## Season 2, Ep: 9 – Gordon Gill: “Collision”

**Air Date:** 8/3/21

**Featuring:** Gordon Gill and James Vincent Meredith. With Cliff Chamberlain, Audrey Francis, and Laura D. Glenn.

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**Gordon Gill:**

You’re looking for an opportunity to move me. You’re looking to do something that would make you say, “Wow.”

**Audrey Francis:**

From Steppenwolf Theatre Company in Chicago, Illinois.

**Gordon Gill:**

That’s what great actors do and hopefully that’s what good buildings do.

**Audrey Francis:**

This is *Half Hour*.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Friends. It's great to see you.

**Audrey Francis:**

Yes, we're back! Happy to be here with you two.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

I'm Cliff Chamberlain. We've got—

**Audrey Francis:**

Audrey Francis.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

And me, James Vincent Meredith.

**Audrey Francis:**

James, you sound like you're so far away.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Aloha from Hawaii!

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

From Hawaii? Audrey, where are you?

**Audrey Francis:**

I'm in Chicago, Illinois.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

And I'm in Peabody, Massachusetts, which is where my mom grew up.

**Audrey Francis:**

Peabody

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Peabody.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Yeah, Peabody. James, this week, we've got a conversation with you and a true visionary. Seriously a big deal, right? In a discipline far afield of our own, yeah?

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Yes, yes. I was lucky enough to sit down with the renowned architect Gordon Gill.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Gordon Gill, a huge deal. How was it?

**James Vincent Meredith:**

It was incredible, he's a visionary. He's someone who came to mind when we kind of thought about this season and I think because his visions as an architect, the buildings, the projects that he's been a part of are just incredible and defy explanation in some sense. And so I was really excited to, to meet with him and have him explain some of his process to, to me. He's part of a company called ASGG, which will refer to on occasion in the interview, which stands for Adrian Smith and Gordon Gill Architecture. And those guys, along with Robert Forrest, started with the company, an iconic company in Chicago, architecture firm, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. And they kind of branched off from those guys and created their own architecture firm which is known literally around the world.

**Audrey Francis:**

I listened to your interview in a car and I called you right after because I was so inspired in a new way about Steppenwolf and the history of Steppenwolf, but also the future of Steppenwolf after hearing this conversation between you and Gordon. And then I walked through the new arts and education center and it was— I don't know if either of you have been in there yet but it's opening in the fall, and it truly does feel like a love letter to Chicago. And it's— I am huge on education, and also that theater. When I walked into this building, I felt humbled by the art that this man envisioned and created and the fact that we'll get to create art and education in it for decades to come. So thank you for this conversation.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Oh, yeah he's, he's really incredible. And he's, you know, I always thought of him as sort of an artist, but this dude is an *artist* like, he does what we do.

**Audrey Francis:**

Yeah.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Well I can't wait. Cannot wait. So without further ado then, let's open up the door to this interview and let's go, let's go inside. Get a listen. Alright, here's James Vincent Meredith with Gordon Gill.

**Stage Manager:**

Half hour top of the show please. Half hour. Half hour please. Top of the show, half hour.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Gordon Gill, I can't tell you how excited I am that you have joined our podcast, our *Half Hour* podcast.

**Gordon Gill:**

Oh, thanks, James. It's just great to see you and hear from you. It's my pleasure.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

So I wanted to have you on because I have thought of you over the years as an artist. You are a creator, just like us as, you know, in the theater world. You know, you tell stories with your work, right? And I don't think you're afraid to dream. And I think you have to dream, right?

**Gordon Gill:**

That's for sure. That's for sure. You know, we're constantly kind of dreaming about the future and dreaming about ideas and thinking about people and experiences. And you're right there is, there is a pretty close affinity between what you do and what we do. Except you do it, I think, much better.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

I have a feeling a lot more people see your work than see mine. *[Laughter]*

**Gordon Gill:**

I don't know, I don't know.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

So, um, I know you've, your company has done, Adrian Smith and Gordon Gill Architecture, also with Robert Forrest. You guys were created in 2006.

**Gordon Gill:**

Yeah. 2006.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Now you— I got to move it back a little bit because I had no idea. I was doing a little bit of homework and I saw that you were born in Jamaica.

**Gordon Gill:**

Yeah, I'm Jamaican.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

I could hear it.

**Gordon Gill:**

Oh really?

**James Vincent Meredith:**

No, no I can't, I'm joking. *[Laughter]* But, but, so you were there though, for, until age 11, is that right?

**Gordon Gill:**

Yeah, yeah. And we still go down, still go, you know, as often as we can, we still have a place down there. Yeah, I grew up in Jamaica, then moved to Toronto, and then came to the United States when I went to school.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Do you have any— because I have an eight-year-old and I know he's not gonna remember anything, you know, from his age now or very little. But do you have any memories of that time?

**Gordon Gill:**

All of them.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Yeah?

**Gordon Gill:**

All of them. Yeah. I'm gonna tell you that your, I think your eight-year-old will remember everything.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

I hope he doesn't remember everything. But yeah. *[Laughter]*

**Gordon Gill:**

I love, I love, I loved growing up down there. You know, it was, I still carry a lot of those memories and experiences with me and they run deep. They're, you know, the whole, the whole idea of nature and environment and people, and this kind of strange relationship between, let's call it formality and informality. Or, you know, oppositions like the built environment and nature or, you know, elegance and relaxation, or, you know, I think there's all these things that, that pop up that I still carry with me. Yeah, I love the place.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

When did you start to imagine a world in which you could create places for people to, to move around in?

**Gordon Gill:**

So I had, I, when I was a kid in Jamaica— you have to remember when I grew up in Jamaica I grew up in the middle of the island. And like, from, from where we lived, you couldn't see another house. So at night, like, you couldn't see another light.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Wow.

**Gordon Gill:**

Just pitch dark. And I told my kids about going to Jamaica and going outside and holding up your hand and not being able to see your hand and they're like, "Ah, come on Dad." And then we went to Jamaica and we did it and they're like, "Holy cow!"

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Wow.

**Gordon Gill:**

But when I was little, I would draw plants. You know, take a crayon and draw buildings, what I thought were buildings. I would draw them over and over and over, and it got to the point where my parents would buy me bags of cement. [*Laughter*] And like, send me over in the corner of the yard. I had, I had a little corner in a garden on the backside of the house on the hillside and I would go there and build cities. I would mix the concrete and build little blocks of buildings, put my cars in there and plant trees. You know my father always told me, "Wherever you go, plant a tree." So I actually went there, back there years ago, like, you know, let's call it 15, 20 years ago, 30 years later. And of course everything was gone except that tree.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Wow.

**Gordon Gill:**

That tree is still there. So I was doing stuff like that. And, you know, my mother never told me this but she, my mother is 94 now and I saw her a few years back and she said, "I have something for you." And she gave me this piece of paper, it was a letter. It was a letter from my kindergarten teacher and it said "Gordon will be an architect." And I was six. So I just, you know, this is just something. I don't know if you're the same way, James, I think maybe you are, it's just kind of like in your blood. It's just what you do.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Sure.

**Gordon Gill:**

You're not really sure why. I can't explain it. I don't know why I was doing stuff like that. But that's what I love to do.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

So there's, early on, there was this idea of wanting to build these cool kind of buildings and, and design these, these places. And yet also your father saying, you know, "don't forget to plant a tree." Right?

**Gordon Gill:**

Yeah.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

And it feels like that ethos has kind of traveled with you decades later. Right? The idea that—

**Gordon Gill:**

Yeah

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Every project that I see that deals with, with ASGG involves nature.

**Gordon Gill:**

Yeah

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Involves energy, involves conservation of energy. Did those through two things then grow together, or?

**Gordon Gill:**

Yeah, yeah. It kind of, it didn't manifest itself for me until I did my first master's degree at University of Texas in Arlington. And I took a little time to look at my projects and try to figure out why I was doing the stuff I was doing. And then I realized that I have this, this, this issue. And the issue is, and it's just not mine, I think it's everybody's issue, everybody's thing, you know. On the one hand, we crave technology and we love innovation and we like making amazing things. I was always fascinated by, you know, aircraft and space and all the amazing things that human beings endeavor to, you know, conquer. But at the same time, in contrast, in some ways, we find, I think human beings find nature to be their most comforting environment. Almost impossible to compete with nature from an architectural standpoint. And so, what do you do? What do you do? I have this job to design buildings and cities, but at the same time I know that those who inhabit them crave natural environments and they can't live without them. So it became this kind of relationship, but I wrote about and tried to practice which was the integration of the natural environment with the built environment. And it's evolved over the last, you know, 27 years to be more than just putting a tree, it's more than just a tree, right? It's, it's kind of a DNA that we have to understand, what are the, how to make buildings better, how to make how to make cities better.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

It's so wild to me because that goes into, to every part of the process, it seems to me. Like, like the—

**Gordon Gill:**

Yeah.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

You know the, that energy, the performance of, of a building, you know. And yet I also see these, I have to say when people think of ASGG they think of, you know, these buildings that are shooting way up into the sky. I think there's one you guys are working on now, the Jeddah tower, the Kingdom Tower I believe that is—

**Gordon Gill:**

Yeah.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Over twice the size of our Willis Tower. So how does that work when you deal with a building that is that tall?

**Gordon Gill:**

Yeah. Well, yeah. So that's Jeddah Tower in Saudi Arabia, that's under construction now, in, you know, we did a couple of things with that building. That building is a very simple diagram in terms of its form, and it's shaped that way because for those buildings, super tall or even mega tall—

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Right, right

**Gordon Gill:**

The wind loads on them are very determinant to their performance. You know though, if you can confuse the wind loads on that buildings or reduce the wind loads on those buildings, you're really going to save yourself a lot of redundant structure. So what you're trying to do is like an airplane. You're trying to, you're trying to design it so it performs as well as possible in the wind at those heights. And in doing so, you can really take out a lot of the structure in the building. And that's where the carbon is, that's where the carbon lives. Then body, carbon of those buildings are, are really majority in the infrastructure that goes into holding that building up. And on that building, one of the, one of my favorite parts of that building that people don't even know about is when we do these things, we're often looking at not just how our building is performing, but what is the impact that our building has on others. And you might remember stories of buildings in London that didn't understand their reflectivity or didn't understand what they were doing and, you know, set, like, a car fire that parked outside because of the concentration of the sun.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Wow.

**Gordon Gill:**

Do you remember that?

**James Vincent Meredith:**

I don't remember that. That's crazy.

**Gordon Gill:**

Yeah, it's crazy. So, you know, when I went to school in Toronto, I remember there was a building that was built and they didn't understand that. This was, you know, in the 80's. And the reflectivity from that building was heating up the building across the street, and the building across the street sued them. And they had, they had to replace their mechanical system because the impact that they had was that, that significant. So here we said, "Okay, we're working in the desert. It's a very intense environment. What does the reflectivity of this building mean?" And when we looked at it and we looked at the angle of incidence on the sun on the surface of the glass, we realized that we were concentrating light and heat toward the base of the building. So we created these massive canopies at the base of the building.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Wow.

**Gordon Gill:**

That really shade the arrival and shade the lobby, but their entire surface are laced with photovoltaics. So those are little power plants at the base of the building that are not only protecting the user and creating, you know, beautiful lobbies to arrive in, but they're generating power for the building.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Wow.

**Gordon Gill:**

So we're always finding some, some, some method and some means by which to create this kind of balanced ecosystem around, around the projects.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

And yet there's, there's, like, to bring it closer to home, like, even the designs that you guys do that, because honestly a lot of us are never going to get to the top of those buildings. But I will say like, what's really cool about one of the designs you did even closer to home, one of your designs for the Tribune East Tower.

**Gordon Gill:**

Yeah.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

There was a, not the one that had like three buildings, but there was one design that had a single tall building, and at the very bottom it almost rippled out, like, like a dress or like a skirt or something.

**Gordon Gill:**

Yeah. Oh, yeah.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

And each of those ripples had, like, an opening with like, these great windows and all that. I thought that was fascinating just because it allows people who are walking by who may not have any business, you know, taking them up to the 120th floor whatever it is, to still admire the beauty of this building from street level.

**Gordon Gill:**

Yeah, yeah, that's, that's very important. You know it, no matter what scale building you're doing, it's operating at a number of levels, right. It's operating at the pedestrian human level, you know, if it's a mid-rise building, it's speaking to that context at that height. If it's a super tall, it has another conversation at the skyline level.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Right.

**Gordon Gill:**

But the, I think one of the failures of many super tall or high-rise buildings is that they simply just come down to the street and stop. And there are two things about the work that we try to do. One is that we're always trying to create an experience for the pedestrian at the street level. And we're always trying to protect that pedestrian at the street level, so then behavior and comfort is very important for us at that level. And also, at the very top, you know, we tend not to reserve the top of the buildings for just the mechanical, you know. We want to get you in a position where you will have an experience that you've never had before. We're looking for opportunities to, just like you do in your work, right? You're looking for an opportunity to move me, right? As an audience member, you're looking to do something

that would make you say, “Wow,” you know, “I just got goosebumps watching that.” And, you know, that, that's what, that's what great actors do it and hopefully, that's what good buildings do

**Stage Manager:**

Fifteen minutes, please. Fifteen minutes to the top of the show. Fifteen.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

So now really bringing it closer to home, tell me about how Steppenwolf knocks on your door and how does that work? How does the process happen?

**Gordon Gill:**

It was a very unique meeting. The first meeting was a visit to the office by David Hawkinson and Martha Lavey, which is probably now 14, 15 years ago.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Wow.

**Gordon Gill:**

And to be honest, they came in and talked to us about what they were hoping to achieve and I said to them, “I think that's fantastic. You know what we do with our work. I could probably give you the name of a bunch of architects that would love to do this project.” And they said “What? What are you talking about?” So they said, “How would you approach this?” So we walked around the office and I described an approach. I did not, we did not talk about our projects or our buildings or our experience. We just talked about an approach. And we came back in and Martha had her scarf. She had a, I think she had a bottle of Pepsi or a Diet Pepsi or something like that as well.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

This all sounds right.

**Gordon Gill:**

And she, you know, she crossed her legs on the conference room chair and she said, “I think we'd like to work with you.” And that was the beginning of it. The brief, there wasn't a brief in the sense of a written, programmatic document. And this is why I love the project. The program, and this is something we talk about in the office all the time, the program was not defined by X amount of square feet. The program, I would say, was more spiritual. I don't know if I can, if that makes sense. It wasn't about you know, we need this much back of house, this much theater, it wasn't that. It was, we need to create an environment for an ensemble and our people and kids that will take us to another generation of work. And as the years went by and we did options for them, we learned more about you and you learn more about us, and the conversations were like this. Just very frank, very easy. And then David Schmitz and Anna came along and, you know, that was a whole new explosion of energy and vision which essentially led to the building that you see today.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Which I got a chance to walk through yesterday. Claire Haupt was so kind to kind of walk me around and I got to go into that theater, which I think also you guys worked with Charcoal Blue—

**Gordon Gill:**

Yes.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

With, and you know, from walking into that lobby and seeing— at one point Claire actually stopped and said, “so this is where the collision happens.” And she used the word, she's very pointed about the word collision. And I said, “Hmm, okay, I better ask Gordon Gill about this word collision”. Can you speak on that a little bit? Like how did you, did they bring up that word collision? Was that something that you guys came about together? How did that happen?

**Gordon Gill:**

That is Anna Shapiro.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Okay.

**Gordon Gill:**

100% Anna Shapiro. So when, you know, Anna was always present in the process, but in different roles.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Sure.

**Gordon Gill:**

And was always very strong about her ideas. Very clear, very strong. So when Anna became Artistic Director, I sent her an email and I asked her, because I'd been with you guys, you know, forever at that point. And I would hear Frank Galati talk about where he thought theater occurred, or Martha would talk about where she thought theater occurred. So I asked Anna, I said, where do you think, what do you think this means? What do you think this building is about? And she wrote me an email that I still have and will always keep. And it was about her idea of where theater occurs. And that is in the some space between you and me. And it's not formal. It's, she, she referred to it as a collision. And she said that collisions can be scary. They can be threatening. They can be joyous. But they always happen in an environment where you feel safe. You don't, you don't, you never feel that you are uncomfortable to the degree of not engaging. And she, and she wrote this, she wrote this amazing email. And I basically took that email and translated it into an architecture. And it was fantastic. I mean, that, that, that, that dialogue, and we still have it, you know. We, Anna is always talking about the layers of narrative in that building. So if we walk through that building, and if you have enough time to walk through that building, and pick it apart, you'll notice that there are some, the materials, the materials have a role in the building. The structure has a role in the building. The skylight has a role. Every, every piece of that building has a narrative around it. And it all comes together in this, I would say, dynamic relationship that is, blurs the lines or blurs the distinction of space. Because you're, sometimes you're actually not sure if you're inside or outside in that building.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Which is cool because in walking, I couldn't help but notice the idea that that theater is its own building. Does that make sense?

**Gordon Gill:**

Yeah. You know, that's, that's a little bit of a commentary. You know when, when we, when we talked about this project, we, we took the attitude that we could, we could have done a box and hidden the theater inside.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Right.

**Gordon Gill:**

And there's, that's, that has that has a certain validity to it. But at the same time there was an opportunity here to reveal the theater, reveal the heart of this project to the public. So when you go by on the street there is no mask that conceals the program.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Sure.

**Gordon Gill:**

The program is revealed to you through the transparent facade, and it occupies the heart or center of this project. And everything, literally and metaphorically, revolves around the theater. So then again when I, when I talk about the narrative of it, it's a, it's a statement. And that's, that is, we don't have to call it a criticism, but it's a commentary on the typology, which is, we're not hiding behind a mask. This is who we are.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Right.

**Gordon Gill:**

But it's also at the center of your life. Because that is who you are. And from an orientation standpoint, because there's a lot going on, and it's dynamic it doesn't make you feel uncomfortable because you always have a relationship to the most important piece, which is the theater. And so there's, you know, this was, this was absolutely intentional. It was absolutely a driver. And you know, it's so different than the existing theater that we wanted to offer those kind of alternatives of experience. And just like you do from your shows, you want to offer a kind of different perspectives sometimes. There is a very unique layering that happens here, you know, as a campus or on the street, you look and you see three buildings.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Right

**Gordon Gill:**

Right, you see the existing building, you see 1700 to the north, and you see the new building to the south. You go inside, and they have three very different experiences, but in the lobby space, they're actually linked, right? You can walk through all three lobbies and tie them together, so that that creates that kind of harmony. And then when you go in the back of house, that gets blurred because that's where, that's where the business of it happens

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Sure

**Gordon Gill:**

And now it's about, you know, connectivity and efficiency and functionality. And now it doesn't matter. Because now, now we're running sets, we're flying, you know, you know, screens, we're doing

everything else back there. We're in the traps and, and now becomes, that's just, that's the heart of your home. That's the, that's the, that's the back door.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

And yet even where the sausage gets made, so to speak, back there, upstairs in the costume area. The way that the floors are made of materials that make it not as hard on people who have to stand all day. The way that the windows are designed in such a way that it's respectful to the neighbors.

**Gordon Gill:**

Yeah.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

You know, I could not get over the fact that every single thing that I saw had a purpose.

**Gordon Gill:**

Yeah, it's, you know, it was very important for us to have a relationship with a neighborhood. You know, it's a neighborhood theater, for Pete's sakes, right? And it's a city theater, and it speaks at different scales, just like we just talked about other buildings speaking at different scales. And you know, I'm just very proud of the project. I think it's gonna be a lot of fun for a lot of people.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

I can't wait to get in there and have it be filled.

**Gordon Gill:**

I'm waiting for when I get to sit in a chair and watch you do your thing.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

I think I'll, I'll find a spot for you. I think I'll find a spot for Gordon Gill.

**Gordon Gill:**

I don't care where I sit. I don't care where I am. I could be in the back. I don't, I could be in the, in the corridor, I don't care.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

The good thing is every seats a good seat.

**Gordon Gill:**

That is true

**James Vincent Meredith:**

And I can say that honestly having sat, you know, in the farthest seat, which is like, what, 20 feet away from the stage, so—

**Gordon Gill:**

You know where came from?

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Where?

**Gordon Gill:**

In the search for what type of theater this was I think Anna, David, and a number of people went on a tour in England and they visited a number of spaces. And upon the dialog that came out of those spaces, there was a conversation with Tracy Letts, and Tracy Letts said, "I want them to see me sweat." I sat in a rehearsal of *August: Osage County* in the Yondorf once. You know, those are raw kind of environments, right? And I sat in a chair probably about 10 feet from the action. And I watched Amy Morton rehearse. And I will never forget the power of that performance. When I say powerful, you know what I mean, I mean—

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Yeah.

**Gordon Gill:**

Moving, moving to the point where I saw other actors in tears offstage, trying to compose themselves after Amy, you know, was kind of speaking to them in the performance. It's extremely powerful. And that's what Tracy is looking for. He wants you to feel it. He wants you to see him sweat, he wants you to feel it. And I think, you know, when we talk about never being more than 20 feet away, and there's not a bad seat in the house, that's what I think Charcoal Blue and us and Steppenwolf was able to achieve in this theater. And you're gonna feel it.

**Stage Manager:**

Five minutes. This is your five-minute call. Five minutes.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

So now we come to the, my favorite part of the show. And, and—

**Gordon Gill:**

Uh oh.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Probably your least favorite part, we'll find out.

**Gordon Gill:**

[*Laughter*] For sure.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

This is the lightning round section.

**Gordon Gill:**

Uh oh.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

This is what we do for every *Half Hour* podcast and this is a chance for you to give your quickest, least thought out—

**Gordon Gill:**

Oh no.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Answer to these questions. *[Laughter]*

**Gordon Gill:**

That sounds dangerous, James.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Only if you make a dangerous, right? Okay, so... what animal do you, Gordon Gill, most identify with?

**Gordon Gill:**

Birds.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

What artist is giving you the most inspiration right now?

**Gordon Gill:**

I'm a old school kind of guy. You know, I was, I was just, I was just looking at Tina Turner's work the other day. Stevie Wonder. I'm a Motown kind of guy. I love reggae. I grew up in Jamaica, so Marley and Peter Tosh. I don't know if you know, Peter Tosh.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Yeah sure.

**Gordon Gill:**

But Peter Tosh, I love. Today, you know, my kids, send me stuff. And, you know, I'm, I'm always inspired by anything that's high energy and thoughtful.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

What job didn't you get— and this is an interesting question because you guys aren't salespeople. I've seen that. That's not what you do.

**Gordon Gill:**

Yeah.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

But what job did you not participate in or did you not accept. What job was that that I guess you could say broke your heart to a degree?

**Gordon Gill:**

I can't think of one that we didn't get. But I can think of jobs that we've started, like Masdar Headquarters, that because of the economy of the world stopped and didn't get finished. And that was, that was hard.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Yeah, and that one was so beautiful. The drawings of that on your site are just, just incredible. What do you daydream about?

**Gordon Gill:**

You know, I dream about a space. Can I actually tell you this?

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Uh, yeah!

**Gordon Gill:**

I dream about a space that is cognitive. I dream about a space that humans live in that understands what they need and is in balance with their, with the natural environment. I don't even know what that means. But I'm working on it.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

I was gonna say, you're in the right career to figure that out.

**Gordon Gill:**

Right. I'm trying.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

What's one thing you do every day?

**Gordon Gill:**

That people I sketch every day. I doodle every day.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

What's your favorite place to unwind in Chicago?

**Gordon Gill:**

Any Park. Oz park, the lakefront, you know. I, I was writing a lot before the pandemic, we're putting some books out soon and I would go and, I would go and hide in the, in the Front Bar. And I would sit in the Front Bar. I like anywhere where, I like anywhere where people wouldn't expect to find me.  
[Laughter]

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Last question. If you were a character in a play,

**Gordon Gill:**

Oh no.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

What would your character's description be?

**Gordon Gill:**

Quiet.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

We'll leave it there.

**Stage Manager:**

Places, please. Places, please, for the top of the show. Places, please.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Gosh, I could just spend a lifetime in the, in the building of that conversation. I could just, I would just sign a lease—

**James Vincent Meredith:**

That was pretty good.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

In that conversation and I would live forever.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Just take up residence.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Well seriously, for someone who says quiet is their character description I'm like, sorry, I could listen to that guy talk—

**Audrey Francis:**

Yes!

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

And you talk forever. James, wonderful, wonderful conversation.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

I don't know if you remember during rehearsals for *Ski Dubai*, when he came and he talked to us and he spoke very, very, very softly. And it made us lean in, like lean in, like, he is so used to being heard because he just has such, such great ideas and stuff to say. And he doesn't have to speak above barely a whisper and we were all leaning in at that table.

**Audrey Francis:**

When you talked about what does he dream about? I audibly gasped at that answer. And then I think I will always now try to incorporate the idea of collision into my, into my daily routine. That was really inspiring.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Absolutely. The way he talked about architecture and the way he talked about the buildings, especially the building that we're going to get the, you know, have the joy to play in. It's a character. I especially love that detail you talked about with the floors being designed for people who stand on them a long time, right?

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Yeah.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

But the big picture of it, you know, like a play, you talk about the how it feels. The experience of being moved. And he talked about that, like, right? He wants to do something that moves you and that the building has a narrative to it. It was like, "Oh my gosh," like, "he's a storyteller too!" And just the idea that you think like, an architect, an artist, like, oh, we're in all these different worlds, and we're not. I mean, he's out there trying to tell stories and move people like we are. It was so cool to hear.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

I don't think I've ever met anyone like him. I'm really genuinely happy that, that I've come to know him over the years. I'm honored that, that I've come to know him so well.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Well it really comes across too, your mutual admiration for each other is just, that kind of thing is fun to listen to as well.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

He's a good dude.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Yeah, gosh, I had a good time listening to this. But sadly, that puts the final piece of plywood on this conversation. [Laughter] That brings us to the end of today's episode of *Half Hour* brought to you by Steppenwolf Theatre Company. Thank you so much for listening.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

And thanks again to our guests this week, Gordon Gill

**Audrey Francis:**

*Half Hour* is produced by Patrick Zakem, mixed and edited by Matthew Chapman.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

The theme music for *Half Hour* is by Michael Bodeen and Rob Milbourn.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

The voice of this episode stage manager was Laura D. Glenn

**Audrey Francis:**

Special thanks to Claire Haupt, Tom Pearl, Joel Moormon, Madeline Long, Christopher Huizar, Kerstin Adams, Anna DeNoia.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

And all the folks that Steppenwolf.

**Audrey Francis:**

Follow us on Twitter @Steppenwolfthtr or on Facebook and Instagram.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

You can always get in touch by emailing [halfhour@steppenwolf.org](mailto:halfhour@steppenwolf.org). Listen, we're not just saying that just for fun guys. We want to hear what you thought of these shows. It means a lot to know that you're out there and listening and you know, someone's paying attention to us. *[Laughter]*

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Till next time, this is Cliff Chamberlain,

**Audrey Francis:**

Audrey Francis

**James Vincent Meredith:**

And James Vincent Meredith. A lifetime to engage, half hour to places.

**Audrey Francis:**

Please email us.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Email us, please.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Please, please.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

We'll write you back. We'll read it. And we will—

**Audrey Francis:**

Clickity click click click on your tappity tap taps.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Just send us anything.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Save it. We'll put it in our, put it in our, we'll flag it and put it in our saved inboxes.

**Audrey Francis:**

Yeah, somebody DM me.

**James Vincent Meredith:**

Please stop recording this.

**Cliff Chamberlain:**

Airdrop, you can airdrop...