

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Cecil Hayes

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Hayes, Cecil
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Cecil Hayes,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 18, 2002
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2002
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:06:05).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Interior designer Cecil Hayes (1945 - ) opened Cecil's Designs Unlimited, a family-owned and -operated firm that features design concepts that combine both art and interior design. An interior design expert, Hayes possesses a keen appreciation for African art and uses this to influence her work. Hayes was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 18, 2002, in Coconut Creek , Florida. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2002_066
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Interior designer Cecil Hayes was born on April 25, 1945, in Malone, Florida. Graduating from Dillard High School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in 1963, Hayes received her B.A. degree in art education from Florida A&M University in 1967. She went on to attend the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale and graduated in 1973 at the top of her class. Hayes taught art at Alma High School in Alma, Georgia, from 1967 to 1971.

From 1973 to 1975, she worked for Santa Stevens Interior Design. In 1975, Hayes opened her own shop called Cecil's Designs Unlimited. This family-owned and operated firm features design concepts that combine both art and interior design. Since 1983, she and her husband, Arzell Powell, have operated their own manufacturing division.

Hayes' clientele include a Who's Who in entertainment, sports and business, including actor/producer-Wesley Snipes, actors/producers-Mr. & Mrs. Samuel L. Jackson, Music mogul-Tim "Timbaland" Mosley, NBA's Phoenix Sun's All Star guard-Anfernee "Penny" Hardaway, NFL's New England Patriots Pro Bowl MVP-Ty Law, Retired NBA's Miami Heat-Jamal Mashburn and PJ Brown, Retired-NFL's Miami Dolphin-Louis Oliver, H.I.P. Insurance CEO Anthony Watson, Seaway National Bank of Chicago's CEO-Jacoby Dickens, Renowned Philanthropist-George and Cynthia Marks and the historic African-American Research Library and Cultural Center of Broward County.

Hayes' design works have been photographed for lead articles in *Architectural Digest*, *Who's Who in Interior Design*, *Ebony*, *Southern Living*, *Florida Design*, *Boca Raton Magazine*, *South Florida and Haut Décor Magazines*, *The Sun Sentinel*, *The Miami Herald*, *Boston Globe* and *USA Today News Papers*; just to name a few. In 1999, she was honored with the prestigious Presidents Award of Excellence from the Florida A & M University National Alumni Association. In 1998, she won the notable African American Achievement Award; and for

several years, she has received the distinguished Designer of the Year Award from the Designers and Decorators Guild, as well as Service Firm of the Year Award in 1985-1986-1993 from the C.B.E.D. Cecil was chosen as one of the Top Ten Female Interior Designers in South Florida.

Hayes is the author of two Interior Design books, “9 Steps to Beautiful Living” and “The Art of Decorative Details” published by Watson-Guptyl Random House.

Hayes is one of the first African American designers to manufacture furniture, case goods and upholstery; and the first African American designer to grace the pages of Architectural Digest. She is the first and only African American as well as the only designer from the South to be named to Architectural Digest’s Top 100 list of influential designers in the world.

Cecil Hayes was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 18, 2002.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Cecil Hayes was conducted by Samuel Adams on April 18, 2002, in Coconut Creek , Florida, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Interior designer Cecil Hayes (1945 - ) opened Cecil's Designs Unlimited, a family-owned and -operated firm that features design concepts that combine both art and interior design. An interior design expert, Hayes possesses a keen appreciation for African art and uses this to influence her work.

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## Restrictions

### Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

### Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

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## Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Hayes, Cecil

Adams, Samuel (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Hayes, Cecil--Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

Interior Designer

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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## Administrative Information

### Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

### Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Cecil Hayes, April 18, 2002. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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## Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Cecil Hayes, Section A2002\_066\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:58 ?

Cecil Hayes describes her family's background. Her mother, Edna Hayes, was born to Ed and Trudy Bowers in Malone, Florida in 1923. Edna Hayes began to work to support her family at the age of ten. At age fourteen, she dropped out of school and worked as a cleaning woman full-time after her father's death. To escape her household, Edna Hayes married John Hayes, whom she had courted for many years, in 1939. She was sixteen, and he, only eighteen years old. The descendant of slaves from Georgia, John Hayes was born in Malone, Florida in 1921. The couple gave birth to Cecil Hayes on April 25, 1945. John Hayes worked as a hotel porter, while Edna Hayes worked as a maid to provide for their family. As a result of having to sacrifice their own educational aspirations, the strict couple impressed the values of academic excellence and hard work upon their children. Hayes shares memories of her paternal grandmother, and talks about the significance of The Bauer Family Reunion, as well.

Video Oral History Interview with Cecil Hayes, Section A2002\_066\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:46 ?

In 1939, John and Edna Hayes married and settled on the Hayes family farm outside of Malone, Florida. The couple later moved within the city limits of Malone, where John Hayes traveled for work. He moved to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and sent for his family in the mid-1940s after saving money to do so. Nicknamed "Jack Rabbit" for his lively personality, John Hayes was a fun-loving man who valued integrity and timeliness. Edna Hayes was a strict woman who valued hard work; her rigid personality led to tensions with her daughter, Cecil. John Hayes was the family breadwinner, yet Edna Hayes worked as a maid and managed the household. She required her three children to perform a regimented set of chores weekly, and mandated that the family ate dinner together each evening. The Hayes' sheltered their children from racism and discrimination in the 1940s and 1950s. However, Fort Lauderdale's status as a tourist attraction prevented it, and much of South Florida, from being a hotbed of racism during the Jim Crow Era.

Video Oral History Interview with Cecil Hayes, Section A2002\_066\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:29 ?

The Hayes family moved to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in the mid-1940s, eventually settling in a middle-class neighborhood. Cecil Hayes' mother, Edna Hayes, organized neighborhood activities like weenie roasts. The Hayes children also organized an imaginary neighborhood safari called "Africa USA". The most memorable sound of Hayes' childhood is that of the train near her home. Hayes became aware of her artistic talent as a student at Dillard Elementary School. That talent was further nurtured at Dillard High School, where Hayes tended to remain alone and focus on her art. Hayes graduated from Dillard High School in 1963 with the intentions of attending art school. However, she enrolled at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in Tallahassee, Florida at the insistence of her parents, and majored in art. After graduating in 1967, she worked as an art teacher to help integrate schools in Alma, Georgia. Hayes enrolled in the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale in 1971, and graduated with top honors in 1973.

Video Oral History Interview with Cecil Hayes, Section A2002\_066\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:12 ?

Cecil Hayes began attending Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in

1963, and graduated with a B.A. degree in art in 1967. With few job prospects, Hayes took a job as a high school art teacher in segregated Alma, Georgia, where she struggled to adapt. In 1971, Hayes moved to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where she enrolled in The Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale to study interior design. Hayes excelled as a student, and graduated with top honors in 1973. Hayes had difficulty finding a job because she was black, and eventually took a position cataloging books at Santa Stevens Interior Designs. A little over a year later the firm went bankrupt, forcing Hayes to work part-time at a hardware store. The store owner helped her secure a job with Decorators Unlimited in Plantation, Florida, yet within a few months it went bankrupt, as well. After securing a \$6,000 loan from the Small Business Administration, Hayes started her own company, Cecil's Designs Unlimited, in 1975.

Video Oral History Interview with Cecil Hayes, Section A2002\_066\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:05 ?

In 1975, Cecil Hayes started Cecil's Designs Unlimited in Coconut Creek Florida. Hayes initially struggled to find clients, and worked for other interior designers to make money. Hayes' first client paid her \$1,400 to complete an interior design and space planning project for a 45,000 square foot home in Plantation, Florida. The design was published in the "Miami Herald" in 1976. Hayes' stream of clients increased steadily, and was primarily made up of wealthy Jewish individuals. Hayes refrained from building her African American clientele until the 1980s, when she realized the importance of "globalizing" her business. While hosting a party at her home in the 1990s, Hayes was introduced to Marian Snipes. Impressed with Hayes' home, Snipes referred her son, Wesley Snipes, to Hayes' work. Snipes hired Hayes to redesign his home, and the design was featured in "Architectural Digest" in 1997. Hayes was also hired to design by Samuel L. Jackson's home, and this work was featured in "Architectural Digest" in 2000.

Video Oral History Interview with Cecil Hayes, Section A2002\_066\_001\_006, TRT: 0:21:16 ?

In the late 1990s, Cecil Hayes was introduced to LaTanya Richardson Jackson in Chicago, Illinois. She was later hired to design the home of her and her husband, Samuel L. Jackson. This work was featured in "Architectural Digest" in 2000. In 1997, Hayes was selected as the interior designer for the African-American Research Library and Cultural Center in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. She also organized a celebrity fundraiser that raised over \$125,000 for the completion of the Center. Hayes' design process includes getting know her clients and creating functional, pleasing, and cohesive spaces. She also works with her husband, Arzell Powell, to manufacture custom pieces, allowing her to complete the entire design process in-house. According to Hayes, interior design is more than a process; it is an art form. Though there are an increased number of African American interior designers, Hayes feels that opportunities for them are limited. She closes by sharing her hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Cecil Hayes, Section A2002\_066\_001\_007, TRT: 0:15:19 ?

Cecil Hayes describes her management style at Cecil's Designs Unlimited, where she treats her employees like family. No matter the design, Hayes' signature is one of good taste and comfort; she wants the spaces she creates to look beautiful, but be inviting, as well. Hayes desires to leave behind a legacy of creativity and hard work. She also wants to be remembered for not following the rules, or listening to what others told her. Hayes closes the interview by narrating her photographs.