

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Robin Wilson

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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>	Wilson, Robin, 1969-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Robin Wilson,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 26, 2010
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2010
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:59:56).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Interior designer Robin Wilson (1969 - ) was the founder of Robin Wilson Home, the author of, "Kennedy Green House," and a noted designer of eco-friendly residences. Wilson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 26, 2010, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2010_005
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Robin Wilson is an interior designer acclaimed for creating eco-friendly designs for homes and commercial spaces. Wilson was born September 26, 1969 in Austin, Texas. She is a fourth-generation member of a Texas real-estate family beginning with her great-grandfather who owned several rental properties. As a child she was “pan-allergic” and diagnosed with asthma. To accommodate her allergies, her parents made changes to their lifestyle including switching to organic foods and replacing carpet in the house with hardwood and tile. These steps later influenced her desire to work with eco-friendly materials. In 1987, Wilson graduated from S.F. Austin High School and received her B.A. degree in history and economics from the University of Texas at Austin. In addition, she worked through college as a runway model and her first internship was with the Lower Colorado River Authority focused on energy efficiency.

In 1991, Wilson moved to Boston to work for Mercer Management Consulting in the energy division. In 1993, she changed careers and joined Isaacson Miller as an executive recruiter and a year later was hired at Houghton Mifflin Company as a national recruiter. By 1996, she joined Heidrick & Struggles in their Boston office, and a year later was transferred to their New York office to work for the lead partner in the financial services area, where she worked on CEO and Board level projects. In 1999, the privately-held company conducted an IPO and Wilson received a windfall. She used the money to purchase an apartment, become an entrepreneur and enroll in New York University to earn her M.S. degree in real estate finance. Before receiving her degree, Wilson founded the WSG Consulting firm and began her entrepreneurial role as a project manager for clients in New York – earning the moniker “the busy homeowner’s best friend.” In 2006, she rebranded the firm to the eponymous Robin Wilson Home and the business grew exponentially after being profiled on television and in magazines. Robin Wilson Home is distinguished for its focus on eco-friendly lifestyle, with a combination of design and healthy living. It has expanded to include an online retail store, *The Nest Store* which sells to consumers. She is the first woman to license her name to eco-friendly kitchen cabinetry, sold by over 500 kitchen dealers nationwide.

Wilson has designed showhouse projects including the Esquire “Ultimate Bachelor Apartment” terrace (2007), the

Good Housekeeping “Greenest House in New York” LEED-certified Harlem brownstone (2008) and since 2004, she has worked on renovation projects in the Harlem office of former President Bill Clinton. In 2008, she was selected to become part of a “green dream team” who worked on the private residence of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. In 2010, she completed her first book, *Kennedy Green House* which details the project.

Robin Wilson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 26, 2010.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Robin Wilson was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 26, 2010, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Interior designer Robin Wilson (1969 - ) was the founder of Robin Wilson Home, the author of, "Kennedy Green House," and a noted designer of eco-friendly residences.

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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:

Wilson, Robin, 1969-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Wilson, Robin, 1969- --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 Robin Wilson, April 26, 2010. 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Robin Wilson, Section A2010\_005\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:18 ?

Robin Wilson was born on September 26, 1969 in Austin, Texas to JoAnn Scott

Wilson and Rubin Wilson. Her maternal family was descended from Richard Hill, a prominent white lawyer who helped his black son start a real estate business in Angleton, Texas, at a time when it was illegal for African Americans to own property. Wilson's maternal great-grandfather, Robert Scott, opened a general store to supplement the real estate business, and was also a bootlegger, which led his son, Robert Scott, Sr., to become a minister in the Church of God. His wife, Wilson's maternal grandmother Willie McNeil Wilson, was a lay minister in the church, and grew up without her mother, who was abducted by the Ku Klux Klan. Wilson's mother was raised in Angleton, and studied at Huston-Tillotson College in Austin, Texas. Wilson's paternal grandfather helped build the railroad in the Littig, Texas, which became a ghost town after the trains were rerouted.

Video Oral History Interview with Robin Wilson, Section A2010\_005\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:53 ?

Robin Wilson's mother, JoAnn Scott Wilson, was born to a well-known family in Angleton, Texas. Her maternal great uncle, John T. Scott, was the first black police officers in Chicago, Illinois, and his brother, Joe Scott, was a divinity professor at Huston-Tillotson College in Austin, Texas. Wilson's father, Rubin Wilson, was born in the railroad town of Littig, Texas. His sister, Bobbie Wilson, left college to start a family, while his brother, Doris Wilson, received a Purple Heart for his service in World War II, and suffered from workplace discrimination upon transitioning to civilian life. Wilson's father worked for The Greyhound Corporation, where he became one of the first black interstate bus drivers under the mentorship of Frank Rucker, who was among the first African American city bus drivers in Austin, Texas. Her father went on to drive charter buses for the Kerrville Bus Company, where he met golfer John Mahaffey, President Lyndon Baines Johnson, the Dallas Cowboys and the Texas Longhorns.

Video Oral History Interview with Robin Wilson, Section A2010\_005\_001\_003, TRT: 0:27:46 ?

Robin Wilson was born with severe allergies and a spine and leg deformity; and, as a child, wore braces and orthopedic shoes to help her walk appropriately. She began her education at St. Martin's Lutheran School in Austin, Texas. After the first grade, she transferred to Pease Elementary School, where she developed an interest in drawing. She was also selected for the school's gifted program, through which she participated in the beta testing program for the Apple IIc computer, and learned the BASIC, COBOL, and Fortran programming languages. Wilson went on to attend Austin's O. Henry Junior High School, where she was inspired to take up writing by the school's namesake author. She joined the school newspaper staff, and wrote articles on an electric typewriter given to her by her maternal grandfather. Wilson then graduated to Stephen F. Austin High School in Austin, Texas, where she became involved in student government. She also talks about her early experiences with religion.

Video Oral History Interview with Robin Wilson, Section A2010\_005\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:51 ?

Robin Wilson attended O. Henry Junior High School in Austin, Texas, where she was editor of the school newspaper. She went on to study at Stephen F. Austin High School, where she ran for class president. She was recruited as a model by Debbie Branda of the BLVD Company, Inc. agency, and modeled at local malls while a student. During her senior year, Wilson joined the Lower Colorado River Authority's (LCRA) half-day training program; and she began an LCRA internship after enrolling at the University of Texas at Austin. There, Wilson studied history and economics. She took one summer off from the LCRA to intern at a consulting firm in San Francisco, California, where she was exposed to the work of world leaders like South African President Nelson

Mandela and USSR General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev. She decided to leave Austin after earning her bachelor's degree, and moved to Boston, Massachusetts, where she secured a position with the Mercer Management Company.

Video Oral History Interview with Robin Wilson, Section A2010\_005\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:51 ?

Robin Wilson graduated from the University of Texas at Austin in 1991. She accepted a position as a consultant at the Mercer Management Company in Massachusetts, where she was involved in the layoffs at AT&T Inc. In 1993, her brother, Russell Wilson, died in a motorcycle accident. These two events caused Wilson to reevaluate her career, and she decided to become an executive recruiter. She advanced quickly; and, in 1999, was hired at the top international search firm, Heidrick and Struggles. Then, Wilson was inspired by her maternal grandparents', Willie McNeil Scott and Robert Scott Sr.'s careers in real estate management, and entered the home design and renovation industry in New England. She was highly successful; and, in 2006, hired new staff and rebranded the firm as Robin Wilson Home. In addition, Wilson talks about her maternal uncle, William Leland, who was the brother of U.S. Congressman Mickey Leland. She also had close family ties to Barbara Jordan, another U.S. Congressperson.

Video Oral History Interview with Robin Wilson, Section A2010\_005\_001\_006, TRT: 0:30:17 ?

Robin Wilson was the owner of Robin Wilson Home, a home renovation firm that focused on environmentally conscious design. She was influenced by her early experiences as a child with severe allergies, which led her to recognize the importance of a healthy home; and she learned about business management from her maternal great-grandfather, Robert Scott, who worked in the real estate industry as a landlord. Wilson's firm was selected to rehabilitate Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.'s family home in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts. The project attracted the attention of the media, and inspired Wilson to write her book, 'Kennedy Green House: Designing an Eco-Healthy Home from the Foundation to the Furniture.' She went on to be interviewed by media mogul Oprah Winfrey, and developed educational lectures for parents who were interested in home cleanliness. Wilson concludes the interview by reflecting upon her legacy and her hopes and concerns for the African American community.