

Sustainable Urban Planner and LEED Fellow

Enzo Tessitore from Brazil | Transcript

00:02

Charlie

Welcome to Green Building Matters, the original and most popular podcast focused on the green building movement. Your host is Charlie Cichetti, one of the most credentialed experts in the green building industry and one of the few to be honored as a LEED Fellow. Each week, Charlie welcomes a green building professional from around the globe to share their war stories, career advice, and unique insight into how sustainability is shaping the built environment. So settle in, grab a fresh cup of coffee, and get ready to find out why. Green building. Hey, everybody. Welcome to the next episode of the Green Building Matters podcast. Today I've got Enzo with us. He's going to tell us all about sustainability in Brazil. He's a LEED Fellow. We've been catching up, and I just can't wait to hear a little more of his story. So, Enzo, welcome to the podcast.

00:48

Enzo

Well, thanks for having me, Charlie. It's a pleasure.

00:50

Charlie

Thank you, I know we have some mutual friends in the region. We're growing our relationship, and I just can't wait to hear a little more of your story. Take us back, though. I ask all of my podcast guests where did you grow up and where'd you end up going to college and university.

01:05

Enzo

I grew up mostly in Sao Paulo in Brazil, and for some number of reasons, I ended

up starting architecture school in California. Started architecture school in California, and that's where I got in touch with just a whole different culture, really, because my dad has a real estate development company. Grown up going to construction sites and being around meetings and all that. But then I got to architecture school, and then that's actually where I first learned about green buildings, I think I had a class. It was probably like green building 101 or something. And it just amazed me how different things could be from day to day. Whatever regular construction process that was going on.

02:01

Charlie

I love that. Came to school there and then architecture, a little influencer staying, curious. And so I like to follow up and say, what about that sustainability, though, when you were going to college there? You know, I mean, did you see, like, lead, or was it about energy efficiency? Like, when did sustainability start showing up for you?

02:19

Enzo

I think it was maybe all at once, probably. I remember one of the classes I had. It was an energy efficiency class. It was probably my second semester, I would say. And it was this whole lot of content that you could do the math and predict how buildings would behave, and that was quite interesting. I also got in touch with LEED because I think, I want to say bank of America had a grant for us to take the lead exam. So sign up for that. Why not? But mostly what I found more, I don't know, probably exciting is that it got everyone on the same page. Like I told you, I grew up around many buildings being built by my dad's company. Once an architect sits down with an engineer, it was just two different worlds, two different universes, and then once they started learning about special certifications, it's something that's across the board, and everyone has to speak the same language, everyone has to come together. Integrative design. All that sort of new kind of design or new way of designing. That was, I think, what drew me to wanting to learn more about it.

03:32

Charlie

So now you've got that real estate development background there with your dad's company. I'm sure you spent a lot of time there. And then the architecture degree, sustainability, is coming on the scene, and you're right. Two different worlds, massive construction. So what was the rest of that early career like before you got to where you are today? So what kind of work were you doing?

03:50

Enzo

I did two years of school in California, and then I came back to Brazil. And the first thing that I thought of coming back to Brazil was like, man, I kind of like that LEED stuff, the US Green daily calls and how they operate. I might as well open one here in Brazil and to my amusement, I wasn't the first one to think about it. So Brazil was already operating for a number of years, and so I transferred back home to finish my degree in architecture in urban planning, and I worked at two or three architecture firms before getting to green building council Brazil. And by August 2015, I joined GBC Brazil. And I've been here for a number of years.

04:39

Charlie

You built it up, man. I love it. You have a whole team there, some GBCs, and maybe we could clear that up for our listeners. Some of our listeners have been doing this a while. They know what the US Green building Council is. They may not know there's a world GBC, and then there's a local chapter, but why don't you help us with that? So give us the structure. There's world GBC, there's the US Green building Council that invented and keeps leed updated. But how does all this fit together?

05:05

Enzo

Briefly, USGBC was the first green building council founded right after a bunch of

people came up with LEED certification. And they were responsible for developing the market and maintaining the whole certification and updating it as well. Soon after that, they started a group to create the World Green Building Council, which creates global projects. So other GPCs can swim the same tide, I would say. So we have, I think it's advancing net zero, which creates tools for different countries to promote net zero projects. They have the better places for a people program, which is more about health and wellbeing and the built environment. And now they have the circularity accelerator, which we need to transfer the whole industry to a circular economy. So it provides tools for that. And as independent GBCs, I think there's more than 80 now they can align with those projects regardless of which activity or which certification scheme they promote in their own country.

06:09

Charlie

Thank you for demystifying that for us. I know, sure the USDBC and LEED is really a global program, but depending on the country, right. I've taught classes at the Sweden GBC and there, while they do support LEED or while they have Millet Brignad, another program. And so I think you're just like, hey, let's promote green buildings and sustainability and. Oh, but we can tell you about some good programs that might work. So thank you for that. So, okay, so you land there at GBC Brazil, as I understand it, as you look to Latin America, Mexico and Brazil are the two biggest economies there. So you're in this huge country, it's a lot of cities, a lot of land, a lot of people, man. How do you tackle sustainability? And since you've been there about ten years, have you seen it change? How's the attitude towards green buildings?

06:55

Enzo

When I got back a little before I joined GBC Brazil, the country was going through a construction boom, right? So you had all those infrastructure projects and there was just a really slush economy. So you get to see more modern buildings being built, you get to see stricter requirements by investment funds and all that. So you do see here and there more green buildings, more certified buildings. We got to a

point where a big corruption scandal, that sort of puts the whole industry to a halt. And sort of the good thing is the aftermath. Only companies who are doing it right, I would say, are doing it a little bit better. They're the ones who stayed in business.

07:47

Enzo

So that helped in the medium term or more long term picture to a scenario where there's more and more green buildings. It's a constant growth. And that's one of the really cold looks or harsh truths. In a way. While we do get great growth in terms of percentage, we're still a niche market because unlike the US or maybe Europe, we currently have no legislation that supports green buildings or that even incentivizes green buildings. It's all through the private sector. And we're currently the fifth largest market for LEED, which means we have two 2300 projects, which obviously, if you take a look at the size of Brazil, it's not much, but it's constant growth. And that's all backed by the private sector because we have barely any green finance lines or any legislation. It's changing. We're seeing some movements to change that, but it's working with the federal government. It's a whole different thing.

08:58

Charlie

It's a lot of lead projects, though, and it's good that just, it's the right thing to do. We want to do it. Little friendly competition in the private sector. And imagine when these mandates finally come through and the green financing finally comes through like we do have in some other places, should just skyrocket. You've built this platform for it. So now I've noticed the amount of lead projects, but I hope what happens is those that work one lead project, even though their next five might not be lead. Right. It rubs off on them, the green best practices. And so there's probably that ripple effect. Right.

09:30

Enzo

And at the end of the day, we really are a change movement. A certification tool is a tool to change how an industry works. So my dream would be to one day leave the office, turn off the lights, and return our little office to whoever owns it and say, hey, we don't need a green building console anymore because everyone is doing what they shouldn't be doing, or they could be doing all right.

09:57

Charlie

You sound like Rick Fredries, one of the athletes. I love to hear that. That's good. And you're right, that's what we are working towards. So one more look back question, Enzo, then we'll get to the present day. I love to ask my guests what's on the highlight. As you look back so far, what are you really proud of?

10:14

Enzo

Looking back, it was my first year working at GBC Brazil. We were hosting a whole bunch of people from USGBC. It was back in 2015 still, and someone asked me to translate a presentation. It's like, ohthere's this guy from USGBC and he's going to present but he wants his life. Can you translate it? You know, I did because I went to school in California, whatnot. So I translated and I met the guy, and it ended up being Peter Templeton. Right. And not only it was Peter who now is the president CEO of USGBC and GBCI, but he actually speaks Portuguese. Good thing my translation was right, small. He was such a nice guy. From the beginning.

10:58

Charlie

He was, for those listening, I mean, yeah. Peter Templeton has been a longtime USGBC team member, and he took over leadership there, president, CEO. And he's just doing some great things. So that's cool you had that connection so early. I'd be proud of that, too. But what else stands out?

11:14

Enzo

Well, definitely my time learning California, because, like I said, it's a whole different scenario from what the construction industry does here. So being able to learn from people who were, for what I know, which is kind of hard to follow, California's construction code, and they were doing innovations on top of that. So that was pretty exciting to be able to bring that experience back, actually teach people herewhat is being done abroad witheconomic visibility, technical visibility, and that can be replicated here.

11:52

Charlie

And you have credentials. I'm a big fan of credentials. Letters after your name and LEED Fellow. You know, somehow they let me in the club a few years ago, but what does that mean for you?

12:02

Enzo

I was actually really proud of that, too. It only happened last year, but as far as I know, another country fellow was the youngest LEED Fellow in the world. I think he got it when he was, like, 35, and I got it when I was 30. I want to see someone beat that.

12:21

Charlie

There we go. Man, that's really impressive, actually, those listening, you start with your tier one credential, your lead grant associate, and the tier two is your lead AP with, especially BDNC or new buildings, existing buildings. LEED Fellow. You can't take a test. And it's a rigorous process, very selective. But you have to have been doing this work for at least ten years, probably more. So for you to get in at 30, pretty impressive. So congrats.

12:50

Enzo

Started early, right?

12:51

Charlie

I love it. Okay, so that's. Looking back. I love to go to the present day. What's a day in the life of Enzo look like today? And tell us more about what GBC Brazil is doing.

13:02

Enzo

Like any GBC, we have to develop the market for green buildings, whether it's for lead or for another certification, or working with the federal government, with investment funds or whatever you can think of a way to develop the market towards a more sustainable future. So now, especially this year, we're starting to discuss with a lot of people from the financial market. They're now realizing that a green building, a certified green building, offers less risk for who is invested in it. So we started off with one bank that has a green financing line for real estate developers. And now this year we're spending a lot of time with different folks from different banks, investment funds and whatnot to create actually a whole market ecosystem for better financing for those real estate products. We've been, as a director of operations and marketing at GBC Brazil, I'm spending a lot of my time meeting with those kind of people.

14:09

Charlie

I love the energy, too. And it's good to hear some of that green financing is starting to line up. It's just going to accelerate development, because overall, as I understand it, lots of buildings are happening. Let's just try to influence them to do a little better. We have seen a little bit, correct me if I'm wrong on this, it's not just new buildings in your region. But a little bit of retrofit. Right. How do we benchmark the existing buildings? Where could we save energy and save water on an existing building and how do we operate green? Are you starting to see a push on the existing building side, too?

14:43

Enzo

Yeah, we are. I was just talking to a colleague of mine last night, and we have, I think it's 3200 or over 3200 projects. And for those of you who don't know, ArC is the benchmarking platform by USGBC, and you can also use it to get the O and M certifications. It is part of a push that we're doing because most buildings are already built in the main areas of the big cities in Brazil. So in a way, the buildings that were built even not that long ago, maybe 710 years ago, need to be updated to maintain competitively. They have to attract new customers and all that. And if a tenant is looking for only leasing certified space facilities, people have to improve their operations. And seeking certification is a way to measure how you're improving your operations. We're seeing a lot more folks starting to, first of all, gather data about their buildings, and then once they improve their operations, maybe do some retrofitting, then they're also seeking certification for existing buildings.

15:57

Charlie

We need that. We need both. And there's mandates here on the existing building side cities like New York, where I am in Atlanta, a lot of other cities at least benchmark. And that takes some buildings that don't even know how they compare to others. And we find the no and low cost, the capital ways. Where can we still save some energy? Let's always start there first. So that's kind of the present day. Are there any notable projects you're just excited about? Maybe you're seeing some others working in your region, and then we'll talk about the future. Anything else you're kind of excited about?

16:29

Enzo

We're still not sure what's going to happen in the cop meeting next year, but it's going to be in Brazil and there's some momentum going on. As a movement, us GPCs are getting ready to use that opportunity to leverage Brazil's position in global rankings and our capability of doing great green buildings. So we have that

going on, which is still happening next year, but it's something exciting we're working towards.

17:01

Charlie

Talking earlier about there every year we have our green build conference this year in the US. That's in Philadelphia and November. But as I understand it, you're going to have a green build conference in your region. Tell us a little bit about that coming up.

17:19

Enzo

Yeah, this year we're moving to a different city, actually. We used to do it here in Sao Paulo, but I'm sure you and many people heard of what happened earlier this year in the southern part of Brazil. So we partner up with the union for construction companies in a rough translation of the state of the Sioux. So we're moving our two day event there. So it's going to happen on the fifth and sixth of November. It's a smaller version of green building that you're used to in the US, but we gather a whole bunch of people who are excited about green buildings and want to contribute and want to participate to pretty much share experience. That's what it's mostly about.

18:00

Charlie

I'm going to check the calendar. Might need to show up there, man. I'm sure it's going to be a heck of an event. We'll put a link in our podcast show notes, though, for our listeners to check it out if they're in the region or want to come down. Okay, fun conversation here. I love to talk about the future, what's coming at us. What's something you're reading up on, Enzo, that you're kind of excited about in this green building? Movement.

18:22

Enzo

The whole discussion around decarbonization. It's the same way the certification gets everyone on the table talked in the same language. Decarbonization is starting to do the same with folks from different industries and maybe encompassing the whole value chain or more players from the value chain. So as long as those discussions keep growing, we're seeing more and more companies getting involved and hopefully more people getting to know the importance of theme and then discovering green buildings. Right. We're obviously also seeing a lot of AI. How large a part that's going to play, we're still unsure of. But we do know it's going to make projects more efficient, better, and help with the design process as well. So maybe with less effort, we can have a standard building, have a standard almost green building, and then we can put our efforts into, like, the really deep engineering that makes the most efficient buildings possible.

19:27

Charlie

Decarbonization is arguably the new umbrella. We have sustainability, we have ESG. Some like that, some don't. But decarbonization you can't argue with. And so I would agree with you there. Let's talk about those words. What resonates with those decision makers in Brazil? Is it high performance building? Is it reduced operating costs? Is it decarbonization? Or do people not know what that is like? What are people really kind of understanding right now? This is the focus, right.

19:56

Enzo

Well, there's a turn on the news every now and then you hear government officials talking about decarbonization. I think that's linked to a number of not requests, but probably mandates. We'll have our NDCS. So that's linked to that. Next year, it's going to be a year of revisiting those NDs. So like I said, carbon is a common language between players in the private sector as well as players in the public sector. So once they go to G-20 meetings or even cop, that's happening in Brazil next year, they're going to talk about carbon. There is a discussion whether it's how impactful the construction industry is in Brazil in terms of carbon and if it should be the main priority. And that's because our electrical grid is mostly

renewable. So there's discussion going on. Maybe it's not carbon that we should be focusing on. Maybe it's the loss of biodiversity. So we're seeing those two themes going on at the same time, I would say. But since there's a lot of people in the northern world discussing carbon, that's surely something that will be discussed here. Or is it?

21:13

Charlie

It's one thing if that affects our operating costs, our energy or water, but sure, decarbonization, operational carbon and body carbon. But I love what you're saying here. What else is there? There's more. And we should get back to some of these things, too, and that biodiversity and other impacts we're having. Just keep up the great work there. We're going to put some links in the podcast show notes to some of the work you're doing there. Let's get to know you a little more. And so kind of have this rapid fire part of the podcast interview. So do you have any really good habits or routines, rituals? What helps you stay on point?

21:51

Enzo

It's sort of funny to think of the habit, but always doing something different, right. At times I'm helping review, I don't know, a certification that we have, and then you get too focused on that and you start not only missing being contact with other people, but it happens three, four months into that process, and then all of a sudden I have to go out and give a presentation. That's always, it can be a rough restart. So whenever possible, I try to, as probably my title gives away, and I work in an office, I try to help everyone perform better, and for that I need to know what every part of the office is doing, which means doing a little bit of whatever everyone's doing. I think it's always healthy to be able to be more of a generalist approach, and it just helps me commit on point.

22:43

Charlie

Good. Now, it is just you ask great questions, you try to invite yourself to some other things to be a good listener, take that one level deeper.

22:53

Enzo

I always try to go to, as a GBC constantly invited to participate in different things. So, like, whether it's going to a meeting with a bank president to learn what his needs are and how we can translate our mission into something that he can use that the bank can use that will, at the end of the day, improve the green building market. Whether it's participating in a meeting with our members to hear from them and to tell them what we're actually doing and how they can leverage us as something for their business, whether it's, I don't know, traveling for some different event to participate in committees, to participate in a government committee, to learn from them what they're doing, what we're doing, see what matches, what doesn't not trying to predict the future, but trying to see how we can help each other. That's mostly listening as far as now that I'm saying. But Doing things that are a little bit out of your comfort zone. So I'm an architect, right? So I have a technical background. I'm not necessarily or I didn't necessarily study to be a public speaker, so doing that helps. Asking to be invited for meetings that are not necessarily related to what I'm doing right now puts me a little bit out of my comfort zone. You have to study for the meeting, you have to do some research. That's always good that sort of flexibility.

24:24

Charlie

I hear that flexibility, nimble. And that's one kind of related, is not just good habits and rituals, but what's your specialty or gift? And it sounds like we unpacked some of that. But what else would you say that you're really good at?

24:37

Enzo

Yeah, I discovered that once you get into the corporate world or relating to the corporate world, we have 600, 650 member companies. So we constantly, or talk

to big corporations. People are not really good at talking or clearly communicating. And I think it's vital for the work at any green building, really, to be able to link person a to person b or to know what is happening here that can impact here, there and how they can collaborate. So I think in a way creating that collaboration field or place that people can gather and one plus one is free, not two, right?

25:25

Charlie

Yeah, it sounds like you can bring people together, you learn how to really talk, captivate an audience, but at the same time be a good listener. I think you're a listener by asking great questions. So love it, man. So one more on just the habits, though. I mean, is it, are you a good note taker? Do you exercise? Do you go on walks? Where do you think it is? Do you do a podcast? I don't. Give us a couple ninja tricks. What else have you got?

25:48

Enzo

I don't want to sound cliché, but definitely exercising, definitely waking up early, you got those because once you get to the grind, once you're at the office, things are going to happen. You're going to have to put out fires and like that, the day's done. So it really helps me to get an early start, get my endorphins going where I can have that aha moment, whether it's at the gym or you know, in the shower, that's what really helps me. And also taking some time for yourself. You cannot always be boring, always be at the office, always be putting out fires. You have to find some hours in your day, every day too. I don't want to. It's not being idle. It's more about looking from a different vantage point and realizing. Trying to recognize patterns or trying to look for opportunities which you wouldn't be able to see if you were just putting out fires and doing your day to day stuff.

26:55

Charlie

Well, earlier you said that you got your LEED Fellow at 30, and that was last year.

So you're 31 or so, and I'm 41 or so. And so you're speaking a lot of wisdom for someone that's ten years younger than me. So I can tell you've learned a lot and you're willing to share some of these best practices, what I kind of call life best practices. Enzo. So thanks for doing that, man. Bravo. Okay, so as we get to know each other more, you'll learn that I'm a fan of the bucket list. Not everybody has a bucket list, but is there a place you want to travel to one day or go back to one day? Is there some adventure you want to do? Do you want to write a book? What are a couple things on the bucket list?

27:35

Enzo

I really like different vehicles. I grew up around classic cars. My family has quite a few of them, and I always found that driving a vehicle is something. I don't know, it maybe translates a little bit to freedom. First time you ride a motorcycle you get the wind a little bit, fresh air, and it gives a sense of freedom. One thing I always wanted to do, and I'll do it for sure maybe in the next coming years, is to learn how to fly a helicopter or small airplane, which is kind of cool. And as far as places go, definitely visiting china. I've got some friends who went there and spent some time there, and it's just learning how. It's a really different culture. So learning a little bit of that. That's definitely on my bucket list.

28:28

Charlie

That's cool. I, too, want to fly their helicopter. Plane. I've done the test flights in the east. So let's compare notes, man. That'd be.

28:37

Enzo

I know China is the same thing as Brazil is a whole continent. I have no idea where I want to go. I just want to know. I just want to point out that I know it's not one thing. I want to go somewhere there. And if someone can help me out, pointing towards what's cool, what's nothing.

28:59

Charlie

All right, well, you heard it here. Our thousands of listeners need to reach out, send a LinkedIn message to Enzo, and give them some tips. There's some LEED Fellows in the region I can connect you with, too, when you're ready. How do you like to consume content? Do you like to read books, audiobooks, podcasts, or Ted talk? I don't know. How do you like to consume information?

29:20

Enzo

I tried getting to audiobooks, but it just wasn't for me. I'm mostly a reader. I got my Kindle and access to the whole content that's up there. So I do read a lot, actually. It's a lot of fun. It's part of my process of decompressing. Because you can get into a whole different theme and just switch your brain's mode for a little while.

29:45

Charlie

That's good, man. Well, is there a book you'd recommend to our listeners? It doesn't even have to be about buildings.

29:50

Enzo

It's funny enough, it is about buildings, but it's. It's a book that I found very interesting. It's called four walls and a roof. I think the subtitle is the complex nature of a simple profession. It was written by one of the departments, partners at the office for Modern Architecture, and he just basically tells stories how great buildings by their office were built. And it's interesting to see because they're very important for architecture. They do a lot of construction for governments. So maybe I felt isolated that in Brazil, projects take too long. It takes a decade. We just got, I think, two or three years ago, one of the most important builders in Sao Paulo that leaked platinum, that had a really top of the notch building. It took the

guy twelve years to build it from buying the plot and then getting it done. Twelve years. And then in this book, the guy, Reiner, I wouldn't know how to pronounce his last name because I think it was Dutch. He comes up and tells us how those big projects took 25 years negotiating with different people who were in different terms of the government. So it just gives you some perspective that the struggle is similar, whether you're trying to convince a developer to do a green building and they're not going to do in the first building they're not going to do in the second, maybe in the third, maybe in the fifth. It takes a long time to change the whole process, to change the culture of how we design, how we build, how we really operate in this field.

31:32

Enzo

It's just sharing stories about how things can be delayed for a number of reasons. And you have to be resilient. That's another hot topic of the green building movement now, by the way.

31:43

Charlie

It's an important word, and you're you. The individual needs to stay the course. Stay. It's not easy, but I love that story you told there. Twelve years. Wow. Okay, so just a couple more questions. As you look back on your career, is there anything you wish you had known earlier?

32:01

Enzo

I thought at first, especially starting architecture school, that I was like I got too maybe my second year, I was like, are the Brazilian architects not as good? Like, what's going on? That we cannot build a minimum energy efficient building? What's going on? So at the start of my studies, I actually thought that being better technically would allow you to build better things. As you know, and probably most of our listeners know, that's not necessarily the case. So I wish I had known that there's a lot more at play and that learning how to, like I said before, clearly

communicate or clearly make your statements, or to operate in a more collaborative environment, how beneficial that can be. I mean, whoever learns this early on, for sure it's gonna have better results or going to navigate this carpet world easier.

33:04

Charlie

There's more sage advice. I love it. All right, last question. Man, I'm just. This is fun. Let's say someone's listening to this podcast and they're getting really excited about your story. They might be making a career change, getting into green buildings now, or there might be a young professional, maybe an architect like you were, and jumping, in any words, of encouragement, Enzo, to someone just now, jumping into this movement as we come to a close.

33:30

Enzo

Definitely green buildings are not going away. Like you said with decarbonization, that it's an umbrella. Green buildings are an umbrella. There's a whole bunch of things underneath it, whether you're an energy efficient geek or you really love to study how the built environment affects our forests, whether you're really into passive design. There's a whole bunch of things that are underneath that sort of green building umbrella. And like I said, there's going to be more and more legislation that requires your building to be efficient. There's going to be more and more incentives for your building to be efficient. I hope at some point we're not allowed to build inefficient buildings unless it's for a really good reason. So it's not something that's going away. It's definitely something that's only going to grow even though it's still large in some places in the world. So learning about that can only add value.

34:27

Charlie

Tremendous. Wow. You summed it up well. Green buildings are here to stay. It's going to continue to build and stack. And I love that visual of the umbrella. And to

our listeners, there's so many places you can plug yourself in here in this green building movement. Enzo, thank you for sharing your story. Congrats on not just your LEED Fellow, the work you're doing in the region. Keep bringing the energy, man, and have a wonderful conference later this year. Thanks for being on the podcast.

34:53

Enzo

Thank you so much for having me, Charlie. It was a pleasure.

34:57

Charlie

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