

Research Triangle (North Carolina)'s LEED Guru Alicia Ravetto

Introduction ([00:02](#)):

Welcome to Green Building Matters. The podcast that matters for green building professionals learn insight in green buildings. As we interview today's experts in LEED and WELL. We'll learn from their career paths, war stories and all things green because Green Building Matters. And now our host and yes, he has every LEED and WELL credential. Here's Charlie Cichetti

Charlie ([00:33](#)):

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Charlie ([01:00](#)):

Hi everybody. Welcome to the next episode of the Green Building Matters Podcast. I'm your host, Charlie Cichetti and I'm really excited this week to interview another LEED Fellow today. We have Alicia Ravetto. She's coming to us from North Carolina. She's an FAA, a WELL AP, and LEED Fellow. I've gotten to know her as part of the LEED Fellow group, and I'm excited to hear her story today. Alicia, how are you doing? I'm doing great. Thank you for having me. Well, I can't wait to learn more about how you got to where you are in this green building journey, but number one, take us back. Where did you grow up and where'd you go to school?

New Speaker ([01:39](#)):

I grew up in Rafaela Santa Fe province in Argentina, I went to school in Argentina for architecture school, which is a six year professional degree in Rosaria at the university. I got a scholarship to work in Mendoza, which is on the West side of Argentina. I moved across the country, which was my first move across the country. My intention was to go abroad with a scholarship, but they promised me that it was going to happen maybe in a couple of years. I took the position and it was to do research in Passive Solar Design. This was in 1981 in Argentina. Consider we were a little bit behind the US in that research, but still it was a unique opportunity for me to really dive in and do research in a Passive Solar Design. My

Bible, my book was the Passive Solar Book by Edward Mazria. I also learned English at the same time because all the material that I was studying was in English.

Alicia ([02:59](#)):

I worked in Mendoza for four years doing research, and then I got a Fulbright Scholarship to come to the US to do a master's of architecture at UCLA. The Fulbright Scholarship was half of my money needs for the master's. The organization that gave me the scholarship in Argentina provided the other half. It was a combination of things. It was going to be for a year and then added two years so that I could stay longer here and they renewed my scholarship. I did my masters also focused on Passive Solar Design and daylighting. Graduated in 1987 and I got a job in North Carolina to work in exactly what I was trained to do in a company called Innovative Design in Raleigh. Again across the country from LA to North Carolina, sight unseen. It was quite an experience, but Fulbright allowed me to work for two years as a practical training. I knew that this was temporary because I eventually had to go back to Argentina because of my visa.

Charlie ([04:25](#)):

What a journey, a cross two countries. Architecture, but also sustainability. Did you know you wanted to be an architect and then also Alicia, the passive solar. Did you get to pick that topic or did someone kind of suggest that topic to you at the time?

Alicia ([04:44](#)):

It's interesting. The last year of architecture school in Argentina, we focus on, there are three specialties that you can choose from. In 1980 one was open for the first time. This one was called by automatic architecture, basically climate responsive design. I chose it because that topic was very interesting to me. The scholarship was a result of my studies in the last year of architecture. Since then I have been on this journey on the same topic for 40 years. At every turn in my profession, when something didn't seem to go in the direction of a certain job, people would say, "Why don't you just get a regular architect job?" And I said, "Well, what is a regular architect job? For me, it is my automatic architecture.

Charlie ([05:41](#)):

That's the only way. I love it. You gotta stay with your passion there. Would you say there's anyone along the way that maybe opened the door for you or someone you looked up to? You mentioned the book and the author, but who would you call a mentor as you built your green building career?

Alicia ([05:58](#)):

A few people were mentors along the way. My professor at the architecture school last year, then my director of the scholarship in Argentina, mostly men. There were really few women that were my mentors early on. When I studied at UCLA my advisor and Mary Milner, who was my professor. More recently, or in my time in North Carolina, there are two people that have been influential over time, Dave passed away several years ago and a retired professor from NC state. She has always been there whenever I have a change in focus or things to guide me in the right direction. There have been a lot of people along the way that have certainly helped me and that Brinkley who was critical in both submitting for LEED fellowship and AIA fellowship.

Charlie ([07:08](#)):

It's so important to have someone that can help guide you. Let's talk about that career journey, practice architecture for a number of years in North Carolina, and then you started your own firm. What was going through your mind at the time? What are some of those early projects and tell us about your firm.

Alicia ([07:27](#)):

So that's interesting. I worked with Innovative Design for a total of five years because in between I had to go back to Argentina for two years. I spent two years thinking that I would never return to North Carolina, but I did eventually because the economic situation in Argentina was terrible and my job wasn't quite there. When I returned, I continued working for Innovative Design. I worked with another architect doing mostly residential design, Charles Landon and we were working on a co-housing project here in North Carolina, 33 homes. We're going to be Passive Solar and (inaudible) in some cases. I wanted to get my license so, in 1997, I got my architectural license. I turned 40 at the same time, and I got a job that I was going to do with these other architects, but our paths were going in different directions. I decided totally without a plan to open my own business with this one project that turned out to be a pretty impressive, small project, but working with a nonprofit organization in Pittsboro, North Carolina. A very small

town where I live now that was focused on sustainable agriculture. To do a sustainable building was a natural fit and that was my first project. When I started my business almost 24 years ago.

Charlie ([09:07](#)):

Congratulations, love entrepreneurship. It's interesting. You came back to North Carolina, you're probably happy you did because of the research triangle. There's just a ton of opportunity there. For those listening to the podcast, can you tell us about that region and what's around you there and why there's just a lot of construction going on?

Alicia ([09:28](#)):

Yeah, it's really good in the sense that there are three major universities in the area, UNC in Chapel Hill, Duke University in Durham and NC State Universities. Education is a key aspect of the area and the research triangle park that has a lot of companies, pharmaceutical, technical companies that keep growing significantly. So there has always been a lot of work available for architects.

Charlie ([10:04](#)):

A little bit. That's a very important place to be right now. What's keeping you busy today? What kind of projects and opportunities are you working on today?

Alicia ([10:13](#)):

In my business, I have two sides. One side is residential design, Passive Solar Design, green building and another half of me works in LEED projects, LEED consulting for other architects, contractors, owners, developers. I am finally finishing several, LEED projects that I started back in 2016. It takes several years to get them designed, built and certified. I'm finishing those up and due to COVID-19 there haven't been new projects coming my way. Although there has been construction in the area, a lot of developers are sort of on hold, waiting to see what happens with rentals, but in general, the area has grown significantly. I am at the moment, I am doing more residential design renovations and new construction than consulting, but I love both sides of my job.

Charlie ([11:19](#)):

It's great to have those so you can ebb and flow. With the pandemic, I mean healthy buildings, and now you're a WELL AP. And there's a lot of focus on that,

but also with work from home. I know I recently did some renovations around my home. I'm sure that's good for business too, as people really are appreciating what they have in their homes more than ever. I know you've been really active with the US Green Building Council and even tying some of that back into, as you've mentioned, South America and Latin America. Tell us about what LEED and the US Green Building Council has meant for you? Has that been a tool? Has it been a community? How has that helped you in your career?

Alicia ([11:58](#)):

It is my community. I became a LEED AP in 2002, early on building design and construction. I got very involved. I was very involved until that point in the American Solar Energy Society. US GBC opened up new venues for my networking community. When I applied for the LEED fellowship in 2011, I was in the first class of the LEED fellows. I became more involved in the LEED fellows committee. I was a chair for a couple of years, and then I stayed as a reviewer of applications and I participated mostly in task forces and smaller community organizations, particularly here in North Carolina.

Charlie ([12:51](#)):

Thank you for that. It's so important that we be a part of not just the national US GBC or for those listening, make sure you check out the World GBC website because your country may have its own and that's very important. Of course, the LEED is really the most well-known around the world as the green building rating system is going strong. Let's look back. What's on the highlight reel? What are you really proud of? What kind of accomplishments come out when I ask that question? What are you really proud of?

Alicia ([13:22](#)):

Well, I guess the biggest accomplishment is to have been able to dig deep into climate responsive design, green building for over 30, 40 years. The Fulbright scholarship was a great opportunity, a great accomplishment at the time. I didn't know that Fulbright was such a big name scholarship for me. When I applied, it was the last one ballet I applied and got. It gave me the opportunity to come to the US and the first stop when I came to the US before, getting to UCLA was a short three weeks in Davis, California. It was a village home, which was a development that had opened recently in recent years, all Passive Solar, 220 homes in 70 acres that Judy and Michael Corbat have done. I was in heaven

because I interviewed all the people in the community because I never had seen actual Passive Solar Homes where people were living in Argentina. It was mostly research. Another accomplishment, definitely the fellowship at AIA was a highlight and 2015 I became a WELL AP in 2017. Those were all very big accomplishments that I didn't expect to line up that way, but it was sort of a natural evolution of what I was doing.

Charlie ([14:59](#)):

Although you have the credentials, you have the awards and you're still humble about it. You love working on projects. I can tell from this conversation that you really enjoy it. Are there one or two projects that are just, it's hard to say, what's your favorite, but are there one or two that were just a lot of fun for you to work with?

Alicia ([15:17](#)):

I don't know if it was a lot of fun, but it was very challenging. In the last three years, I have worked on a very large project here in the triangle area of North Carolina and a pharmaceutical company. Novo Nordisk was developing, building a new facility to manufacture diabetes medicine, which was like a \$2 billion project, a million square feet. It was the largest project I have ever been involved with and I got involved on the construction side of the project. I was onsite to help develop the systems to document LEED for the whole project. We hired a person full time that did the day-to-day documentation. That was fabulous. We finally got all LEED certified gold recently within the last month. It's a long process. It started in 2017 and it just ended. I'm very proud of that project. Other projects are significant projects in Raleigh with a developer. I worked for the Bain Architects as the LEED consultant. The Delon is a significant project in Raleigh also LEED.

Charlie ([16:43](#)):

Those are great projects. Thanks for sharing. Let's look to the future. I love to ask this question to my podcast guests, if you had a crystal ball, where do you think this sustainability green building healthy building movement is targeting? What's the niche? What are you reading about?

Alicia ([17:02](#)):

Well, I think next is if we look at the energy, the energy in general in green buildings is moving towards positive energy buildings and LEED for communities

and cities and also healthy buildings. The WELL health rating system has become significant in the workplace now for people that are returning to work. I think that's going to be a major focus in the future.

Charlie ([17:33](#)):

No, you are absolutely right, healthy buildings, more indoor air quality in real time. Right now, it's returned to work. How do we get people back to our buildings? Is this a healthy building or not, but are you starting to see some of your developer clients saying LEED and Wellness or how are those conversations?

Alicia ([17:53](#)):

Not so much, WELL yet here in my area, but some discussions are happening. I would say it seems to not be that significant at the moment. Hopefully that will be a sign that we are moving in the direction that this is a way we design and build buildings. LEED should be part of it, but there's not a significant issue for them to develop,

Charlie ([18:26](#)):

Oh, that's fair. It's coming and it will take some time for now and just healthy building best practices. Let's talk more about you. What would you say your specialty or gift is?

Alicia ([18:37](#)):

I guess I'm a good facilitator and connector. So that has been very hard during the COVID-19 because the lack of possibilities of meeting people, but I think green building and indoor air quality, as it relates to human comfort have been my key gift in the technical proficiency that I acquired over the years. I think that has informed my possibility of interacting with the architects and engineers in a way that regular architects don't do. I'm always sort of the communicator with engineers and the architects about the energy models, for example, about daylighting and analyzing that as part of the early phases of design, not just at the end as an evaluation topic. My technical background and interests, particularly in human comfort have come very handy over the years.

Charlie ([19:45](#)):

It's a great skill set to have, and it probably is a gift of yours. I can just tell that even from talking to you, you're a great communicator, and I know you like to

teach about green buildings as well. Do you have any good habits? Any rituals, routines that help keep you productive?

Alicia ([20:00](#)):

Well, I think right now I'm focusing on walking and exercising which keeps me awake and alert in my daily routine.

Charlie ([20:12](#)):

You know, when it comes to habits. Do you have any tips on even projects, you know, LEED projects, you've been a designer, but you've also been a consultant. What if someone listening that hasn't worked on a lot of LEED projects yet. What do they need to know about working on their first project? A couple of tips for them?

Alicia ([20:30](#)):

Well, I think the first thing is to start early in any project, don't decide you're going to pursue LEED down the road. When you're in construction, it is very hard to do if you haven't incorporated all the principles in the earlier phases of design. I'd say get on the project and discuss it with the client. If you have the opportunity to participate in meetings with the clients, with the consultants, make sure that you discuss all the aspects that are involved in LEED from the site, to water, to energy, to materials, to indoor air quality.

Charlie ([21:12](#)):

That's a good tip. Thank you. I'm a fan of a bucket list. So would there be something on your bucket list you could share? Some adventure, some travel, maybe you want to write a book. I'm not sure, but what's left to do on the bucket list?

Alicia ([21:26](#)):

Write a book. That's an interesting concept. I have many friends who have asked me to do that, but I don't think I'm a writer and I'm terrible at telling stories. I don't think that's going to happen anytime soon. I miss traveling. Certainly that would be first on my list when we get back to being able to travel, I would like to go to Spain and to Argentina. We have done a very nice trip to Argentina. About five years ago now to the very South of Argentina, [inaudible] very nice places that

I haven't visited before. I don't think I will do that anytime soon, but I would like to visit some other parts of the country.

Charlie ([22:13](#)):

That's a good one for the bucket list. I like it. Tell us if there's a book you would recommend that the listeners can check out. It doesn't even have to be industry specific, but is there a book or two you recommend?

Alicia ([22:26](#)):

I recently read an interesting book called the *Four Winds* and it's about the dust bowl in the thirties and forties in the US which I didn't know anything about. It was very interesting about the migration of people from the South to California at the time looking for work. I read *Becoming*, recently, and I liked it. I had been interested in learning a little bit more about racism in this country. I've been reading about caste the book called *Caste* and how to be an anti-racist, which were very heavy books, but very interesting to read. One of my favorite authors is Isabella Allende and I'm looking forward to her new book every year. She comes out with a new book, so I'm totally caught up with her books and the next one is going to be *Soul of a Woman*. I'm looking forward to that.

Charlie ([23:27](#)):

Those are all some great titles, great books. We'll put the links in the podcast show notes so others can check out those books.

Alicia ([23:36](#)):

Yeah, I like to read in Spanish, but it seems I'm doing less and less of that.

Charlie ([23:41](#)):

Oh, that's interesting. I've heard that those that speak multiple sometimes dream in a different language too. Two questions as we start to wrap up here. This has been a great conversation to see your journey. First, what advice do you wish you'd received a little earlier? Any good advice for someone listening that early in their career?

Alicia ([24:05](#)):

Don't take no for an answer. I have encountered over my whole career people that said, "No, you cannot do that. No, you cannot go there. No, you cannot achieve

whatever you are expecting to achieve. " I follow my passion over time and I didn't take no for an answer. I would say, make sure that you clearly identify what you are searching for and find the right people that can guide you in that path. I think that would be my two senses.

Charlie ([24:46](#)):

It's great to know that you're rooting for someone listening that is going to make a career here. Any closing words of encouragement? If someone really is just getting started in a green building movement that you've been in, I've been in for a while. Any words of encouragement here as we wrap up?

Alicia ([25:07](#)):

We are in a good time right now with climate change and the healthy crisis that we are having right now to really take major steps towards a more sustainable and healthy future. I wish I were now in my thirties and starting again. I still have a lot of time left to try to pursue some impactful projects that have a bigger impact in the sustainable future.

Charlie ([25:41](#)):

You're still inspiring. For everyone here, listening, if you would connect with Alicia on LinkedIn and to everyone this has been, Alicia Ravetto coming to us from North Carolina, LEED fellow, and so much more. Thanks for sharing your story today. I really appreciate it. Thank you. Thank you for having me. I just want to say thank you to our loyal listeners. We actually are celebrating over one year on the Green Building Matters Podcast. Me and the entire team were stoked and just so glad you continue to listen every Wednesday morning to a new interview with a green building professional here in this industry, or just some pro tips that we want to make sure that you are getting straight from us straight to you. Thank you for listening to this episode of the Green Building Matters podcast@gbs.com. Our mission is to advance the green building movement through best in class education and encouragement. Remember, you can go to GBEs dot slash podcast for any notes and links that we mentioned in today's episode, and you can actually see the other episodes that have already been recorded with our amazing, yes. Please tell your friends about this podcast, tell your colleagues, and if you really enjoyed it, leave a positive review on iTunes. Thank you so much. We'll see you next week.