

## LEED Fellow from Japan - Hiroki Hiramatsu

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

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. Settle in, grab a fresh cup of coffee and get ready to find out why Green Building Matters.

Charlie ([00:34](#)):

Hi everyone. Welcome to the next episode of the Green Building Matters Podcast. I'm your host, Charlie Cichetti. I love it. Every week I get to interview green building professionals somewhere in the world. Today we're going to Tokyo, Japan, and I've got Hiroki Hiramatsu. He is not only a LEED expert. If you look at his profile, he is into a lot of the great green building programs that all of us get to use on our projects. Thanks for making time for us today. I can't wait to just learn more about you and what's going on in Tokyo, where your team works on projects, but take us back first where'd you grow up? Where'd you go to school?

Hiroki ([01:16](#)):

Okay. I was born in Osaka and I grew up there. I went to university and I majored in Indonesian language and the culture and the history undergraduate.

Charlie ([01:44](#)):

Early in your university in your school you also started to get into landscape architecture. Where did that come in?

Hiroki ([01:48](#)):

Landscape. I worked in my 20s in Japanese houses and I moved to a USA investment bank. I was 30 years old, I spent 10 years there. When I was 40 years old, I changed my career and I really wanted to get involved in the landscape. I went to another university and majored in landscape design.

Charlie ([02:50](#)):

You had a whole career at Merrill Lynch in finance and then later got into sustainability. Is that right? If you want to talk about that time coming out of university and Merrill Lynch, we can, or if you want to jump to sustainability, we can talk about that. How was that in that early part of your career and what made you want to make a change?

Hiroki ([02:54](#)):

I spent 10- 20 years in the finance and the investment universe. That was fun. When I was in my late 30s, money chases, more money that type has dominated the whole industry. I couldn't motivate myself anymore and decided to change my career.

Charlie ([03:30](#)):

I'm glad you had fun there, a whole career managing director there in Japan and Merrill Lynch, and now sustainability. It sounds like it wasn't green buildings yet for you, but landscape architecture. That's something that was a passion of yours. You went back to school and trained on that. Is that right? How was that going back to school? I know if I ever went back to Georgia Tech, my Alma mater, I would be a better student the second time around. How was it maybe going back and learning a little later in your career?

Hiroki ([04:05](#)):

Oh, that was a very exciting and interesting learning. Something new is always exciting to everyone. I noticed too, we need to rebuild the cities around the nations. I noticed that automobiles dominated the whole street, nothing was walkable then. We need to change it from an automotive city and streets into human centric streets. You could see that need for it.

Charlie ([04:47](#)):

Was there anyone else that was influencing you about sustainability? Someone said, "Hey, Hiroki you need to get into this? Like what kind of conversations were you having at the time?"

Hiroki ([04:59](#)):

I knocked on the door of the home of a landscape architect. He advised me, I wasn't fully convinced at that time that it was the right time to change my career at 40 years old. Usually an easy decision is to continue that job for 5 or 10 years. I wasn't fully convinced when it was the right time, but my landscape architects and the mentor pushed me to let me know it's the right time to change my career.

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

Anyone listening here? I hope you're getting inspired to hear this is really the second career that Hiroki's had. He's gone all in on green buildings, healthy buildings. Talk about anyone else you were following at the time, or you might consider a mentor as you were getting into the green side of things.

Hiroki ([06:16](#)):

I participated in a seminar and I met Jim Weiner, Juliana, he's a LEED Fellow and the lecturer at the seminar. He has been my mentor for the past 15 years. He is a LA based architect and the consultant and was my mentor for a long time. At the time I decided to jump into sustainability, sustainable development and the green building universe. I decided to take the exam or LEED AP. At that time, the exam was not over in Japan. I had to fly to any city in the States and I went to San Francisco. In a few days I successfully passed the exam. I had a few more available days and I went to the seminar.

Charlie ([07:31](#)):

What a good story. That's so cool and now there's several LEED APS in your region, but you were one of the originals there and really have grown that movement. Let's connect the dots a little bit on your career path. Let's talk a little bit about now you've got the landscape architecture background. When did you start seeing green buildings and even LEED, you passed the exam. What was one of the first projects you got to do a LEED certification on?

Hiroki ([08:06](#)):

I started my own company in 2006 after spending a couple of years as a landscape architect. A mentor, he ran the environmental focused, EO landscape design. After spending a couple of years on that ENZO, I decided

to start up my own company in order to have a larger influence on society. At that time, no one knew about the LEED in Japan. There was a local rating system called CASBY. I made a report to promote that we need to align with [inaudible] and with the global fund. I have been saying that for quite a long time. I actually had an opportunity in 2008 or 2009. The projects went well, but suddenly that the (inaudible) shop and a crisis happened, then that project stopped. Yeah, that was kind of a night then after that, (inaudible). Then 2012-2013, after the huge tsunami tragedy hitting Japan, everybody started realizing the need to reduce the energy because nuclear power plants are suspended. We need the whole country to reduce the energy use intensity. Everybody started focusing on that energy efficiency and it might be a good idea to incorporate the LEED rating system, then a couple of warehouse logistics, warehouse operators, and the shopping mall operators decided to follow LEED. That was a kind of a start.

Charlie ([10:58](#)):

The tragedy of those hard times to the crisis was one the financial crisis, but it sounds like the tsunami made everyone realize, "No, no, no, we've got to build back differently." A lot of that happened during hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. When something major happens, how do we do better? How do we build back better? If we look at your credentials, your team, I see a LEED and WELL, and WELL health, safety rating and SIGHTS and TRUE, and just, these are amazing programs. Have you really wanted to make sure you could do any of these programs? Does each client maybe have different needs? Tell us a little bit about maybe even today, how's it going and how do you decide which programs to use?

Hiroki ([11:45](#)):

Since I started a new company as a social entrepreneur we successfully increase our human resources. Now we have a model 40 personnel. We have completed the more than 16, LEED the project and the similar number, all the projects that are in the pipelines. I don't have an exact number, I completed more than 10 WELL associations, also the two we haven't gone through yet, but we are trying to get the certification for our own offices.

Charlie ([12:45](#)):

Transparency, right. Be transparent, better policies. For those listeners to the podcast, buildings can get certified and get a plaque. Hiroki, it's great. Your team works on just coming out of IFI and living buildings, right. How can a business kind of be greener and be better for the social side of things and their people. That's really neat for you to also help on the just label. That's really good. What kind of projects is your team working on today?

Hiroki ([13:13](#)):

A lot of diversified projects. We have been involved in neighborhood scale developments and communities, among them. In February this year we established ARC, Japan. Also a development bank or with Japan, which is a hundred percent owned by the Japanese government. (Inaudible).

Charlie ([13:58](#)):

Let's talk about that for a minute. Again, to our listeners, a lot are architects and engineers and contractors. They understand the LEED BD + C policy and new construction. You and I also get to work on existing buildings. While you do LEED for existing buildings, certification path, the scorecard, you can also do ARC and it's a great tool. Performance-Based scoring. You've helped really establish that partnership in Japan and you get to benchmark more and more buildings. Tell us a little more about that. Building owners and operators, are they really starting to do this and get into ARC?

Hiroki ([14:40](#)):

Oh yes. Our target is to grow segments. We are excited to have this new benchmark. We try to promote that platform to other building owners and occupiers, tenants, property investors and financial institutions who make laws against the properties. One of the reasons why we teamed up with this bank DBJ is a growing interest in de-carbonization driven by sustainability financing. Finance sector is quite powerful in this country and all of them, focusing on sustainability and ESG financing. It makes a lot of sense to me to align with Japanese financial institutions, like the DBJ, which operates globally. That can be the driver to expand, the whole or the sustainability initiatives.

Charlie ([15:46](#)):

You gotta keep pushing it. If you don't know where you're at, you have to measure, benchmark, and then you can determine where to improve, but you can get some certifications and LEED EB recertification. Make sure everybody here listening knows that LEED for Existing Building Side ARC, can help you with those certifications and recertifications. Let's talk about just achievements. What are a few achievements you're really proud of?

Hiroki ([16:14](#)):

My company achieved similar, LEED ND projects, a couple of projects in Tokyo, (inaudible) project and the (inaudible) Olympic Suite Village project, and the Kanazawa, Hatt Patel project, Osaka's University's campus relocation project. Those, LEED ND. The project is the first LEED ND project.

Charlie ([16:50](#)):

LEED ND, it's the whole infrastructure, right. It's not just one building. It's the whole live, work, play community. Right. It's a big development. You are early in LEED ND, it sounds like it was a really great project.

Hiroki ([16:59](#)):

As a landscape architect, I have been more interested in the neighborhood scale initiative rather than the single building initiatives. That is part of the reason for me to focus on LEED ND. A coalition of LEED for Cities, and the communities is also my favorite.

Charlie ([17:26](#)):

Those are fantastic and LEED for cities and communities. I love that you're into all these rating systems. I think the wayside, I think it's coming there's gotta be a business case for it. I think the True program is a good program, but I love all these other programs you're working in. Obviously LEED Fellow, congratulations for everything you've done on that front. Let's talk about the future. If you were reading ahead, if you had a crystal ball Hiroki and you could predict the future, what else is coming at us? Where do you think the green building movement, the healthy building movement? Where is it starting to shift? What do you think is next? You obviously have WELL credentials, your team works on WELL projects. How are healthy buildings in Japan right now? Are you starting to actually get more certifications or more returned to work?

Hiroki ([18:44](#)):

Japanese people used to be called workaholic, working very hard and no vacation. The man went to work from early morning to late evening and just come back home just to for the need for sleep and eat. That kind of lifestyle is changing. WELL certification gave us the very good tips. We might want to change our lifestyle. It gives us a big clue to change the lifestyle. The gender gap of Japan is around 120. The gender gaps still exists here and is large. Many people overseas on just a work fist lifestyle, but the whole, whole, whole country is changing, I think LEED gives us the guidance to change our business as a usual economy side and the building design through to the sustainable one and the will gives us the same kind of guidance to change and transform our old fashion lifestyle. As I mentioned earlier, it'll still dominate this countries freed, but, thoe ratings system, because those ratings, we just noticed the whole infrastructure needs to be recreate.

Charlie ([21:01](#)):

What I'm hearing, we have ESG. I want all of our Podcasts listeners to really know that the social side of it is a little harder to measure. It's a more leading indicator. We think as a company, we're doing the right things as a real estate company. What I'm hearing is, obviously the Japanese culture is known for hard work and innovation and you really want to focus on quality of life. It sounds like LEED is helping policies. It's definitely a great program, really happy to hear that. I hadn't heard that when I asked the question what's next, but that is going to affect all of our businesses. It sounds like it's affecting yours and some of your clients, and that's good that you took us there. Can I ask about the Olympics? Obviously we've had, COVID, it's been this global difficulty over the last 18 months. The Olympics were very recently. How was that for your country? It's always a place to bring the world together, which was nice to see, but how was that and the buildings by chance for those green buildings that were erected, can you talk to that?

Hiroki ([22:14](#)):

The Olympics is a sensitive, tricky and a controversial issue that helped to divide the country substantially. The COVID-19, infection rate was up quite dramatically, and the Olympics were just over. It was good to see the games

on the TV, but a lot of people were coming and the infection rate was actually up, unfortunately.

Charlie ([22:54](#)):

Thank you for answering the question. When we were looking in and watching, I wasn't sure, but I know the Olympics are coming to any city in the world, it's a big investment and it's complicated, but I'm glad that Tokyo hosted. It seemed like a great game and hopefully everyone can get past this together. I know we will. Let's talk more about you, Hiroki. What do you think is your specialty or your gift?

Hiroki ([23:24](#)):

I have a unique and likeable combination of job, career, almost 20 years in Brisbane and the financial industries and all of us, 8 years in green buildings and landscapes, it gave me a great knowledge base, diversifying, expertise and human network. I hadn't imagined at all, when I left investment bank 18 years ago, that I would have this opportunity to collect the green building and the ESG investment in this way, which is never better.

Charlie ([24:07](#)):

I really liked that. Thank you. It's fascinating. Two different careers and you've done well at each of them. Let's talk about good habits or routines. Do you have any good habits you could share?

Hiroki ([24:25](#)):

Whenever I have some options available, I try to take the half one, then, then I try to look for the longer term objectives.

Charlie ([24:42](#)):

Take the tougher path. Do you do that because you'll grow from it. You don't mind a challenge. Why take the tougher option?

Charlie ([24:56](#)):

I really like words. Landscape Designer Olmstead said, "I have all my life been considering distant effects and always sacrificing immediate success and applause to that of the future." I really like his words and I try to do the same thing.



Charlie ([25:27](#)):

Good. Thank you. Let's talk about what we call the bucket list. Is there another one or two things you could share any adventure or travel or anything that you still want to do? What are one or two things maybe on your bucket list?

Hiroki ([25:52](#)):

I just opened up a satellite office that is near my hometown which is surrounded by a lake, the oceans and the mountains. I just bought an orange orchard near me at that satellite office there. I'd like to transform this mediocre (inaudible) area into the most sustainable town in Japan.

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

Wow. I love that. That's exactly it. Is the heritage there. It sounds like a beautiful place. What was the name of the town? One more time? I'm gonna look it up. It sounds amazing. Well, glad you're there. Let's talk about books. Is there a book you'd recommend to our podcast listeners?

Hiroki ([26:50](#)):

Once again, the biography of Frederick Law Olmsted, but the name is A Clearing In The Distance. That is the name of the book. I bought this book almost 18 years ago when I just changed my career. I traveled a lot in the US cities, and I happen to have this book, which is very, very good. I love it. I decided to translate it into Japanese. I spent a lot of time, maybe in the next couple of months, I will successfully be publishing the translation in this country.

Charlie ([27:44](#)):

Oh, wow. That's exciting. Thank you for the recommendation. We'll put a link in the show notes, and then we'll track some of the other work you have coming up. Hiroki, two final questions. I really enjoyed our conversation today. One, is there any career advice you wish you'd have known a little earlier?

Hiroki ([28:03](#)):

That is good, Charlie, I should have gone to the States or Europe and studied abroad. I actually didn't do that. Financial constraints didn't allow

me to do that, but if I could have that kind of opportunity, I definitely should have studied abroad when I was much younger, late twenties.

Charlie ([28:49](#)):

My last question is, let's say someone's listening to this podcast right now and they're getting really excited. They're just now getting into the green building movement. Maybe they're recently out of college or maybe they're like you. After 20 years of success in one career, they're like, "What, I really want to also do this." What words of encouragement do you have if they're just now jumping into green buildings?

Hiroki ([29:18](#)):

Once again, when I was four years old, I changed my career. Thanks to my mentor, a landscape architect. I saw great opportunity in this new segment of the business. In Japan there is a lot of room to improve our landscape, sustainability and green buildings. I liked the financial world (inaudible) I like it. When things are not sure and there is uncertainty people tend to hesitate to jump in. If you have your own and are on a convincing factor just to take it. The green vertical market opportunity is quite solid compared to the one 20 years ago and this is really a growing market. Huge upside is, I live here. I encourage people to jump in.

Charlie ([30:44](#)):

Hiroki is coming to us from Tokyo, Japan, and now a satellite office, obviously a LEED expert, a social entrepreneur, and a 40 person team. Doing some amazing things. Hiroki thank you for everything you're doing and sharing your story today. Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

Charlie ([31:05](#)):

I just want to say thank you to our loyal listeners. We actually are celebrating over one year here on the Green Building Matters Podcast. Me and the entire team are stoked and just so glad to 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 at [gbes.com](http://gbes.com). Our mission is to advance the green building movement through best in class education and encouragement. Remember, you can go to [gbes.com/podcast](http://gbes.com/podcast)

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