

Historic Preservation Specialist & LEED Fellow Jean Carroon

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

Welcome to Green Building Matters. The podcast that matters for green building professionals. Learn insight in green buildings as we interviewed 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 ([01:01](#)):

Welcome to the next episode of the Green Building Matters Podcast. I have a lot of fun every week. I get to interview a green building professional, somewhere in the world. Today I've got Jean Carroon with us. She's up in Boston and she's a principal at Goody Clancy. Jean, how are you doing today? I'm good. Thank you, Charlie. How are you? Fantastic. All things considered. I know earlier we were talking about maps, I can't wait to ask you about your bucket list and also about your LEED Fellow and some other things. I always ask my podcast guests first, where'd you grow up and where'd you go to school?

New Speaker ([01:35](#)):

Well, where I went to school is easy. I did both my undergraduate and my graduate at the University of Oregon. Where I grew up is more challenging because my father worked for the US Geological Survey and we moved every two or three years.

Jean ([01:51](#)):

I have lived in multiple states and as a child, we traveled a lot across the country. Before I was 18, I had been in every state in the continental United States on a family trip. As we talked about maps and read lists of how we check off states.

Charlie ([02:15](#)):

Before we started, it's a bucket list of mine to go to all 50 states. I've been to 38 out of 50, but you've got all 50.

Jean ([02:23](#)):

I haven't been to Alaska and Hawaii and I'm embarrassed to say I haven't been to Puerto Rico. A few places still to go and old favorites.

Charlie ([02:34](#)):

Growing up with that kind of influence and nature connection and then later going to Oregon, such a beautiful state and getting your degree. Tell us Jean, the early respect for nature. Was that part of your upbringing with a family member doing that kind of work?

Jean ([02:45](#)):

It was part of my upbringing. My father was actually involved in surface water management. Part of my childhood was actually physically going with him out to the streams to measure how much water was in the stream. I was always very aware of water, watersheds, and flood potential. We always lived in houses where there was no flood potential. My father didn't believe in flood insurance. He thought if you lived in a flood zone, you shouldn't have insurance for it. You should be smart enough not to live in a flood zone, but that was perhaps a little harsh. We were in nature a lot and in my twenties and into my thirties were somewhat unconventional. I graduated from high school in Jackson, Mississippi, and I did not go to college.

Jean ([03:51](#)):

I was a professional Questran. I worked on the race track in Florida and in Southern California. Somewhere from there, I migrated up to Oregon and left the horse world. I actually spent 10 years as a rafting guide, a whitewater guide in the Northwest. I would say my commitment to sustainability and the environment really did spring from my childhood. Through my twenties, a real concern for how we were living on our planet and how we were treating our home. Somewhere I started getting really interested in architectural history and taking architectural history classes. I decided to go on to architecture school and graduated in 1986. I've been here almost 40 years and I am a huge advocate for our profession. It is always interesting and fun. You never, your learning curve, never flattens.

Charlie ([05:13](#)):

I can hear that enthusiasm there. Thank you for the fun facts about what you did after you got into architecture. Can you tell us about that architecture journey? In the last 25 plus years. How have buildings changed, especially on the environmental side for you?

Jean ([05:29](#)):

My career has been all completely in Boston, Massachusetts. My husband and I met in graduate school. When we graduated in 1986, there was a recession. In the long ago past, recessions were often regional and not across all of the country. Although they weren't hiring in Oregon, they were hiring in Boston. We moved to Boston, thinking that we would just be here for a few years, but Boston, like architecture, has turned out to be endlessly interesting with a wonderful succession of work.

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

We've both been fortunate in our different careers to ride through all the recessions in the past 40 years and are still trying to do that. I work in existing buildings in Boston and the East is a wonderful repository of existing buildings that are valued for their heritage. What is most exciting to me now is that I would say the last 20 years, and then, and now the last five years, it is very exciting to see how the market is turning and obviously LEED started that market transformation. I can remember being on Mayor Menino's, Boston mayor's green task force, and having conversations about how to incentivize developers to use LEED. That was back in probably 2005. I also remember taking the LEED exam in 2002, because the general services administration had mandated that all of their buildings would follow LEED.

Jean ([07:37](#)):

That was a huge stepping stone in terms of making sustainability within buildings dominant. I appreciate the leadership of the general services administration and they have just recently done something similar in embracing embodied carbon calculations in all of their projects.

Charlie ([08:01](#)):

So important, you're right, that shift now to embody carbon, not just operational carbon. A lot of my podcast guests, especially a lot of LEED Fellows that we can all

say thank you to LEED. It has been a great tool for 20 plus years. It has helped us have conversations with building owners to do the right thing. There is more work to do and obviously net zero, net positive, embodied carbon and all that. When you look back on your career is there anyone maybe you follow or track their work or maybe someone you could call a mentor that had some influence?

Jean ([08:37](#)):

Well, perhaps not one particular person, but I'm very active in The Association For Preservation Technology (APT). APT is an organization not unlike the US Green Building Council that embraces multiple professions, engineers, contractors, and architects. People that are passionate about existing buildings and heritage in that community, as well as the sustainability community has really been my mainstay of people. Like-Minded people that are generous with their knowledge, generous with their expertise, generous with their mistakes and model for me, what it means to be a professional that is a part of a larger community.

Charlie ([09:32](#)):

That's really good. I liked how you worded that too, generous, not just for their expertise, but, mistakes we all can learn from each other. What are some of your proudest accomplishments as you look back?

Jean ([09:57](#)):

I would have to say writing a book, which is the title, Sustainable Preservation, Greening Existing Buildings that was published by Wiley in 2010. I know that has influenced people. Actually, even though much of it now probably is out of date, the basic concepts aren't. I know it's still used as a teaching tool in numerous programs. I think within projects, the project that both shaped my career and been proud to help steward is I've worked with Trinity Church in the city of Boston for over 20 years. An HH Richardson, National Historic Landmark Designation. It is a must see if you're an architect and come to Boston. It was a building that was built in the 1870s that actually is considered the building that put American architecture on the map. It became internationally known. It wasn't by any means HH Richardson's first building, but it launched The Richardson Romanesque Movement, which obviously in the late 19th century influenced almost every community in North America, whether it was an HH Richardson building or an imitation of HH Richardson.

Jean ([11:13](#)):

Having the privilege of helping to steward that building has really been a gift that any architect would be grateful for. As part of that, we installed or helped install or designed or advocated for the first GeoExchange System in Boston. The geo exchange system uses a well system. That area Boston obviously is on wetlands because it's filled and the well system is a vertical drilling of six vertical holes. The church we only have about 10 feet of property on the outside of the building, but within that 10 feet, there are six vertical wells that if you ever come to Boston, they're about 1500 feet deep. If you look up at the Hancock building, that means they go into the earth about twice as deep as the Hancock Building. It's a nice metric to understand what oil drillers from Texas can do with a new technology.

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

Wow. That's cool. I'd like to link to that project and then your book also, I'll definitely put a link in the podcast show notes. Can you connect the dots one more time on the preservation side? Obviously that has become your specialty. You've gone all in on that. Was that what there was to work with and that was your canvas in Boston? You said so many buildings needed to be preserved that you volunteer along the way in your firm. How did that become your specialty on the preservation side?

Jean ([13:14](#)):

Let me ask you a question. Do you carry your own water bottle that you refill as opposed to buying a new one? Yes. Do you have your own coffee mug that you refill as opposed to buying a paper one? Yes. How many coffee mugs do you think are in an existing building? If you're going to take care of the planet, it seems like the first and most important thing that we're going to do is reuse what we already have as opposed to continuing to demolish what we already have and make new things. Back in the seventies, we didn't call this embodied carbon. It was really actually at that point called Embodied Energy, acknowledging that materials all take energy in order to make them. If you already made a material, you might as well use it again. Buildings are our biggest objects, but I would take it farther than that. I would say that if you look at the data that's promoted by the United Nations or the World Resource Institute, that in my lifetime, we have actually consumed more raw materials than in all previous humanity before us and that continues to escalate. Every year we are consuming more and more raw resources. Almost a little over half of those raw resources actually go into the built

environment. I don't think we can keep mining the world the way we are. We are concerned about energy, but we actually should also be focusing on embodied water. The amount of water that goes into materials is substantial and water will be a crisis that already is in some places more intense than any crisis about greenhouse gas, because there are other options for energy besides fossil fuels. There are no other options for water. Water is a finite resource, and if we move it around the planet and we create water, we create droughts and water shortages, they hit the most vulnerable populations. I feel very strongly that it's a sort of, as a friend of mine would say, 'it's a silent duh", we should reuse what we already have. Buildings are those biggest objects that can be reused.

Charlie ([15:28](#)):

Thank you for that. One could argue that LEED, a program like LEED, should give us more points and more credit for reusing an existing building. As you get to know me and more, you're speaking my love language. My team's worked on about 300 LEED EB projects. I love that side of our movement. Several in Boston, too. Let's talk about today. What's keeping you busy today?

Jean ([16:00](#)):

Actually today, literally today, I'm working on assembling case studies for a group called Climate Heritage Network, which is an international group focused on heritage and sustainability that sprang from the sustainable development guidelines about goals of the United Nations. We're getting ready for Cop 26 which will be in Scotland in the fall.

Jean ([16:35](#)):

My particular task group is about existing buildings and the importance of existing buildings and helping policymakers understand that basic concept that reusing existing buildings is the fastest, most powerful way to address climate change. We know from our calculations, even within my firm, we know from looking at the calculations, the amount of greenhouse gas that we release from renovating a building are usually paid off within two to three years in terms of the greenhouse gas emissions that are reduced from even modest improvements in operations. We know in our new construction, that that payback might be 10, 20, 30 years from now. We feel pretty strongly about it. If the billions and billions of existing square footage, that if we can get that two year payback, then the time value of that carbon. I'm sure you know, the sooner we can bring down carbon emissions,

the more opportunity, the more potential we have for actually meeting the goals of the Paris agreement.

Jean ([17:59](#)):

If we can even bring a few policy makers to the table that haven't been there before, recognizing the policies that they can put in place for their communities that help support the reuse and modification of existing buildings, that will be a win for us. So that's what I'm doing today. Our draft is due tomorrow by five o'clock, but it's just the first draft. We have a little time to refine it. We're trying to pull in case studies from across the globe. Any of your listeners who have actually done embodied carbon calculations against operational carbon, we'd love to get those. Okay.

Charlie ([18:42](#)):

We'll put your LinkedIn link and please reach out to Jean, let her know what you thought of her story here and if you can help. I love your cool, calm and collected activism here, but I know you've got this deadline coming. Tell us a little more about your firm, a Goody Clancy. Zoom out a little bit and tell us about your company you've been at for 21 plus years.

Jean ([19:06](#)):

Well, Goody Clancy is probably in the third or fourth leadership transition. I'm a principal, but we have younger people than me that are our principals that are exciting and inspirational. It's a joy to work with them. We are about a 60 person firm and we've been around for over 60 years. We work across the Eastern seaboard. We are a higher education firm. We focus a great deal on the academic sector. Although many of my projects have actually been with the general service administration because of their commitment to heritage agenda sustainability. The larger part of our work is really with the schools like Harvard and MIT.

Jean ([19:53](#)):

We're currently working at Babson and Wellesley. Perhaps we're not at Wellesley right this minute. I should have pulled up my marketing notes before I talked to you, but we have wonderful clients. Our clients are mission driven which is part of what makes it all so much fun. They're very smart people with strong commitments and we love problem solving with them.

Charlie ([20:22](#)):

It sounds like a great team, great firm and really awesome clients. Let's look into the future. Jean, let's say you had a crystal ball and you kind of hinted at some things that are coming, but what else do you think is coming down the road with this green building and the sustainability movement?

Jean ([20:45](#)):

I think the conversation about embodied carbon continues to be the most exciting thing that is happening. I am optimistic we'll advance beyond just embodied carbon to talking about things like embodied water. I am optimistic that the AIA and others like the US GBC with the LEED AB will continue to focus on existing buildings. I do see architects, as a group, they seem a little bit like homing pigeons. They sort of veer back to Zuni new buildings. I appreciate, it's always better to make new buildings better than they used to be. I really believe that if we're going to save the planet, it's a wholesale effort on existing buildings. I think there are a lot of design opportunities there that can really help transform buildings that may not be heritage buildings. In fact, I would advocate for focusing on buildings that are mundane buildings, because there are so many of them. If we made every mundane building a better building, think what we would be, how far along we would be towards the climate agreement. To the Paris agreement.

Charlie ([21:49](#)):

That's amazing. Thank you for that. Let's talk about you a little bit more, a few rapid fire questions here. What do you think of your specialty or gifts?

Jean ([22:08](#)):

I think I'm a pretty good storyteller. Although in this interview, you're going to have a hard time editing me because I've done a lot of run-on sentences. I apologize I'm out of practice. A good editor will be able to clip me mid sentence.

Charlie ([22:20](#)):

You're doing great. I'm enjoying your stories and that's what our podcast is about. Someone can kind of understand your journey, your stories, what you've gone through and what you were saying earlier, and you are being generous with some of your experiences here. Do you have any good habits or routines or rituals?

Jean ([22:37](#)):

Well, my new COVID habit is that I get up about 7:00 AM, which would have been late in the old days. I spend about an hour reading newspapers. I subscribed to the online. I subscribed to the Boston Globe, the New York Times, the BBC, and actually, The Guardian in England. I must admit that I subscribed to The Guardian and the Telegraph in England, purely because of their travel sections. My fantasy travel is alive and well, and that is one of my favorite hobbies during COVID.

Charlie ([23:18](#)):

Oh, that's great. A good segue to my next question, which is bucket lists. Is there any adventure travel? I usually say or write a book, but you've written a book. What else? One or two things, Jean on your bucket list?

Jean ([23:31](#)):

Well, actually I have another book in mind that I'm going to write with a young woman in our firm who is a superstar. She's on the committee for the environment, Laurie's Therapist. The title of the book is going to be Building Reuse Is Climate Action. We are putting together the proposal and starting to shop it to different publishers, but we feel like we need to have a book that people can rely on to help shift policy, to help understand the issues. This is not a how to book, but a book that will provide critical data. Often gloomy data, but also hopefully inspiration why building reuse is so important if we care about climate action. I'm excited that it's in the works. My personal bucket list, my three grown children and my husband and I are finally coming together after 18 months.

Jean ([24:39](#)):

We're going to eat ourselves silly in Asheville, North Carolina in a few weeks. Looking forward to that. With any luck, we're going to go to England at the end of the year for a family celebration. After that, my next bucket list is Vietnam. I always have a long bucket list of where I could go traveling.

Charlie ([25:06](#)):

I think a lot of it's the excitement knowing you're going to get there and planning. Asheville, I'm in Atlanta, so Asheville is one of my favorite spots. Thank you for sharing that with us. Let's talk about books. Is there a book you'd recommend and doesn't even have to be industry specific?

Jean ([25:23](#)):

Well, that's good because I'm not doing industry specific books right now. Other than the fact that everyone's listening to both of Obama's books, I'm not doing political books right now. I love books and I read prodigiously and I use audio books a lot.

Jean ([25:43](#)):

My mother was a librarian, but the book I just actually finished yesterday was *The Good Earth* by Pearl S Buck, which was written in the thirties. I didn't realize it was part of a trilogy. I had read the first one, I'm sure decades ago, but now I'm going to read all three of them. She's won the Pulitzer. It's beautifully written. It's a story of life in China. She lived there as a young person and it's evocative and thoughtful. A great, great story about families, people, and things that change and things that don't change us. I'm enjoying that. I would highly recommend it. I'm going back to a lot of my old favorites.

Charlie ([26:34](#)):

I love it. I could just tell you really enjoyed it and we're going to put a link to the books, so everyone can check it.

Jean ([26:44](#)):

I did enjoy Obama's book too, although I must admit, I blanched a little when I realized that Barack was only in volume one. I was doing it as an audio book.

Charlie ([27:01](#)):

How do you choose between which ones you'll pick up a hard copy and which ones you'll listen to?

Jean ([27:08](#)):

It depends on what my library offers. I do it through the public library. It's a little bit of what's available. The Obama books were both available and I was happy to be on the waitlist for them. One of my husband and my worst habits is that we've never walked by a used bookstore in our lives. We've been known to actually have to ship books home because we couldn't walk by a used bookstore. I'm better than he is about always going for small paperbacks, but he's not. We have an endless supply of books to pick up and read around the house that are all different subjects.

Charlie ([27:52](#)):

I love that visual. That's great. Thank you for that. I'm enjoying our conversation here and I want to ask you about career advice. Is there something you wish you had known a little earlier in your career?

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

I think as I said, perhaps at the beginning, the thing that is so wonderful about being an architect or being in any part of the building and design industry, is the fact that there's an endless learning opportunity and it isn't a team sport, we rely on each other's expertise. We rely on what our engineers know, what the contractors know, what the owners know, the team sport aspect of it is so satisfying. It's such a gift when you get the really exceptional team that allows exceptional projects to happen. I appreciate that. I think for young people, I would perhaps say, I know there's a certain amount of tedium sometimes in architecture or design or construction. Projects can take tremendous endurance. Friday afternoon requests for information are always somewhat exhausting, but it is so satisfying to see our visions come to fruition, whether it's one room or a whole building or a whole community. The ability to actually change the world and impact people. What more could anyone want?

Charlie ([29:41](#)):

I was going to ask you what words of encouragement do you have for anyone jumping in, but I think you just shared it. That was pretty eloquently said, but is there anything else you'd say if someone's jumping in right now? Green buildings have been good to you. They've been good to me. It is a team sport but any other kind of closing words of encouragement?

Jean ([30:02](#)):

Just remember that building reuse is the most powerful climate action that there is. Reduce, reuse, recycle. Let's reuse our largest objects and that's our buildings. Let's reuse them with grace and talent and joy.

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

Oh, fantastic. Thank you. Thank you for your time today. Everyone connect and check out the links from today's podcast. 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 were 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 were getting straight from us straight to you.

Speaker 4 ([30:54](#)):

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