

## Sustainability Consultant at SIG - Jessye Vitier | Transcript

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, everybody. Welcome to the next episode of the Green Building Matters podcast, where I get an interview with green building professionals, somewhere in the world, every single week. I hope you're getting inspired hearing these stories. I was putting together the green building careers this week, very special because I've got one of my colleagues. I've got one of my upcoming rockstars on the podcast. I've got Jessye Vitier on our SIG team on our consulting team. Jessye, how are you doing today? I love the podcast. I love teaching and we've got listeners that every week just want to get inspired as they're putting together either their new green building careers or heck maybe they've been doing this a long time and they want some validation. I really need to look into that more just excited to get to know you more. One of my first questions. Jessye is, where'd you grow up and where'd you go to school?

Jessye ([01:31](#)):

Awesome. I grew up in Florida, a small, very heavily Cuban town in Florida. I went to high school here in Marietta, Georgia. I moved when I was about 11 years old to Georgia. And I went to culinary school for about two years. I got my culinary degree. I was a chef for about a year, but I didn't really enjoy the chef hours and working on holidays and stuff like that. Kudos to all the chefs out there. It's a lot of hard work and I couldn't do it for a living. I went to Georgia State after culinary school where I started a biology degree. I did originally start as pre-med because I was working at a clinic at the time, internal medicine clinic and I wanted to get into medicine, but I took a really awesome ecology class and I kind of the tier over to doing

ecology. I completely fell in love with everything, environmental and that my biology degree with a ecology concentration and a sustainability certificate.

Charlie ([02:58](#)):

Jessye you might not know this about me, but I want to be a chef when I grow up. Look at us now doing green buildings. Who's had some influence on you early in your career? Any mentors or someone you looked up to or met with along the way so far?

Jessye ([03:17](#)):

Yes, I have two. The first mentor I would say was my bio teacher. I had her for many classes, Rebecca Chapman. She is just a nature loving knowledge encyclopedia book when it comes to anything in regards to the outdoors. I took this really awesome class called Natural Environments of Georgia, where we were able to go around different regions of Georgia and look at the geology and the different native plants based on that region. We had one class specifically where we went to Pinpoint, Georgia. It's a really, really small town, but it's known for its oysters and it's crabs. There used to be a lot of factories around there for oysters and crabs. One thing that was really eye opening for me was I spoke to a local there when I was visiting Pinpoint and they were telling me, I asked when we went to the Pinpoint museum that used to be an oyster and crab factory.

Jessye ([04:33](#)):

I asked them, "Why did this factory close down? You guys are right here on the marsh. Why didn't you keep it going?" The factory shut down because they built a huge highway called the Diamond Causeway. They built it over the marshes and they did not do sedimentation control. They weren't careful with it. All of that stormwater runoff went into the marshes and literally suffocated the crab and the oysters in that area and that's the reason that the factory closed down. The biodiversity just completely left. At that moment, I think that's the moment that I was like, "Oh my gosh, I need to do something with this and figure out what career I can get into that is going to help mitigate these types of issues." My first big mentors slash ideas.

Charlie ([05:40](#)):

Yeah, it was really like an aha moment there for you too. What a cool trip. Thank you for sharing that story. I can tell you that it really had an impact on you.

Jessye ([05:49](#)):

Definitely. I will never forget talking to that local. She gave me her address and I write letters sometimes. She's amazing, but yeah, it's really sad to see things like that happen. I think that was a big, "I gotta do something about this." The second who is actually a mentor is my grandpa. My grandpa's a farmer. He'd been a farmer his whole life. He was a farmer in Cuba. He was a farmer when he came to the United States and he lives on a farm still to this day. 15 minutes from my house in Georgia close to Six Flags and he still actively farms. He does squash. He has a lot of animals, chickens, eggs. They only go to the grocery store for necessities, like milk and other stuff. A lot of what my grandparents do is live off of their land. I think that is so cool, sustainable and so helpful for the environment. I love how my grandpa always instilled in me that we really need to protect the land and the earth because it literally gives us everything we need to survive. He's been my biggest mentor my whole life. His name is Theodore.

Charlie ([07:20](#)):

Awesome. Thank you. It's good to give a shout out there. That's fantastic. Let's talk a little bit now about the green building career. How'd you first find our green building consulting firm, SIG? Could you talk a little bit about your internship time and how you're also helping oversee some of our amazing "farm system" as we call it for young recruits. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Jessye ([07:45](#)):

Before I interned at SIG, I actually was interning at Blue Heron Nature Preserve, which is a 30 acres of green space in the heart of Buckhead, which a lot of people don't know about. I helped to restore the wetlands there and I helped with trail maintenance and absolutely loved it. I was looking for something a little more like sitting in an office, I liked doing paperwork and I also liked going out on site. I wanted something that had both. I looked for another internship and I found SIG and I saw that the interns get to go do site visits with their managers. I'm going to be in an office. I also get to do on-site work. I applied and I was super, super happy when I got the

internship. I didn't know what I was getting into, to be honest, because I didn't really study sustainability like that. I got a sustainability certificate through college, but it was more of looking at sustainable systems in regards to nature, not really the built environment specifically. I started at SIG and I immediately looked at just everything in regards to like, I think my favorite thing was just all of the knowledge and the great organization that has to prep, interns and get them really well known with what LEED is and what FitWELL is and what WELL is. It's just a really good baseline to start with when you really don't know much about the green building movement. I really enjoyed everything that I was doing at SIG.

Jessye ([09:48](#)):

I was so happy when I got hired full time, February of 2020. I became a full-time sustainability consultant and I started working on projects and actively running them. It's really, really nice to feel that you have the ability to influence somebody, it could be a client, a friend, or really anyone. Even if somebody random asks me what I do, when I tell them I kind of open up a new spot in their brain where they're like maybe I should look into that in my house. We have to do this at our building, but maybe we can do similar things at home because it's going to be better for the environment.

Charlie ([10:38](#)):

That's awesome. Thank you for connecting the dots there. I know today you're working on all kinds of great green buildings and even healthy building projects. Can you speak to that a little bit about what's keeping you busy today, Jessye? LEED and FitWELL and all of these great programs. What kind of work are you doing today?

Jessye ([10:59](#)):

I am working very heavily on a lot of LEED 4.1 ONM recertification projects through ARC score that looks at the operations and maintenance performance of a building through a 12 month period. I've got a lot of things happening right now. Actually, I'm super excited about this one in particular, one Sutter, it's a paramount group, a building located in San Francisco, and this is the highest scoring project I've ever submitted for recertification. They are pending the final score, but the score currently pending is 91 points. I want to give them a huge shout out because it's been the highest scoring point that I have worked on. Super exciting. Another

type of project that I work on is the FitWell project. Fitwell looks instead of the operations and maintenance side, like LEED, it will focus more on the actual health and wellbeing of the occupants that are coming to the building looking at having fitness centers at the building, being close to parks and different amenities around the building and stuff like that. I would say my proudest moments for Fitwell would be my Resurgens Plaza. Fitwell three star certification. It is the first three stars that will be certified. It is here in my hometown in Atlanta. Super, super, super exciting for that project. I will be the other most thing I'm working on, which is actually the newest thing that I'm working on is a site project. We're looking at putting in a site certification at the Minnesota Zoo. I'm working with the team there and it is everything I studied in school. It is literally 150% ecological and I am absolutely loving it. I cannot wait to get really, really into sites because it's, I already know, like every time I work on anything with sites, I'm just so happy. I'm like, "Oh my gosh, they know how to do this." I had a project doing this at school. It feels really good when you are strong and knowledgeable in one area, especially with me because I came into this field, not knowing much and having to really work to gain the knowledge that I have today, but the sites one is like a natural baseline of knowledge that I have. I'm excited for more SITE projects to come in.

Charlie ([13:57](#)):

That's a great program that is just now really growing. What I heard there, Jessye was LEED platinum 91 points, but three states now Sites. It sounds like you're really enjoying working on all these green building and healthy building projects. I like to just give an opportunity, a task, a humbling question here is if you look back so far on life and career, what are a couple accomplishments that you're really proud of?

Jessye ([14:28](#)):

I would say not giving up there. I get it. When you're in university, there's a lot going on. There's homework and tests and you might have a full-time job at the time. I even had a child at the time. I understand there's some breaking points and it gets very difficult, but not giving up and staying ambitious. I would say it would be one of the main things. Another one is just staying passionate and really being true to yourself on what you really enjoy doing. Lastly, finding like-minded people or like-minded organizations reaching out to them, doing interviews and information interviews with people at these companies that you want to see more of

what they do. I actually get a lot of those through LinkedIn. I get a lot of people reaching out, asking what I do, and it's a lot of young professionals and I actually I'm in the USGBC emerging professionals committee.

Jessye ([15:39](#)):

There are so many resources out there. You just got to look. If you've got that passion and you've got that drive and you're not giving up, there are resources and people out there that are going to help and that are willing to help you get to the next level of where you want to go in your career or what you want to do. It's really important to have the foundation of the passion of not giving up and going out and doing the work, finding people that are like-minded and finding internships or volunteering, literally anything you can get your hands on to really see if that is something that you truly desire and want to do.

Charlie ([16:27](#)):

Some great advice for those listening that want to do this kind of work. Jessye, thank you. Let's look to the future. What do you think next? What are you excited about or what are you reading up on? What's next in this green building movement?

Jessye ([16:48](#)):

I've been seeing a lot of the news, the trend right now is a lot of net positive prop, talking about regenerative energy. What I personally would love to see in the future is having a more symbiotic relationship between buildings and nature. We can keep the biodiversity up because it's really, really low right now. It hurts my heart and I'm really connected to trees, nature, and animals. If we design buildings to be more symbiotic with nature or with any animals that are native to the region, I think that would be so great because we would help each other flourish in its world and not just necessarily look at only buildings, but buildings and it's areas and what it's affecting.

Charlie ([17:50](#)):

It's exciting and inspiring how you worded that. Thank you. Let's get to know you a little bit more here, Jessye, what would you say is your specialty or gifts?



Jessye ([18:00](#)):

I would say my gifts would be personal relationships. I really enjoy making relationships with anybody that I meet, making sure there's that respect, but also that humor and fun and being myself. It's really awesome to have a lot of friends all around the world, then reach out to. If I go traveling or something, I can reach out to whoever I've made so many friends at once with our clients. It's crazy how you can get close to someone through email. I think that's probably my strongest gift and the other would be. I think that's just making relationships. I'm a very personable person and I love talking to people and making relationships and really seeing.

Charlie ([19:07](#)):

What I heard, if you were to ask me, and this is just a good thing. If you ask the other person, "Hey, what did you hear? People, you can get more done when you're aligned and you really care about people and relationships. Who knows where that's going to take you and you make the time for relationships. That's what I heard. Definitely a gift of yours. Jessye, obviously I've known you for a while now. I'd say that energy. One of my mentors says "you can't fake passion." You've got that and you've just got energy and curiosity. I've always liked that about you. Let's talk about habits, routines, or rituals. Do you have any good habits?

Jessye ([19:52](#)):

I love to be organized. I need to be organized so my brain will not function. There's this really cool app called a sauna that I've been using that I'm really enjoying. You get to build out a project and you get to assign different people to it, to do different tasks. That's been really helpful, but also communication. I really like to make sure there's transparency. If there's something that I don't know, or I have a question about, or I have this weird feeling, I go and I tackle it just like a running back. I just run to it and I'm like, "All right, let's fix it. How can I make it clear? What do I need to do to fix the problem? How can I fix it?" I go and I fix, but I think communication, especially in today's time where we're all on video, we're on phone, it can be very easy to just ignore it and not face the communication. I think it's super, super, super important to make sure and let your team know, or really anybody, what is going on and how you can

collaborate together to fix the problem instead of hiding in the background and not really facing the issue.

Jessye ([21:21](#)):

I think that is a very strong thing that I have is just being communicated. If there's an issue trying to fix it and finalize it. Secondly, organization, I love writing, I have a Sauna app that helps me a lot. I also just have a notebook that I love to write my things in and it just keeps me organized and I love it really helps me go through my day to day basis.

Charlie ([21:52](#)):

Those are all very good tips. Thank you for sharing your systems. When you really became a project manager. There's multiple projects, a lot of things coming at you, then you're like, I need a system. Like when did you really create this system?

Jessye ([22:10](#)):

I've always had a system, but it's never been this intense of what it is today. I've definitely learned what does it work for me and what does, and I think being a project manager here at big and having so many projects has really moved me into an amazing organizer. Slowly but surely I have learned how to up my organization game, but definitely came with practice and some not so great organizational things that I was doing that weren't working for me that might work for somebody else, but just exploring everything. Finding what works well for me and just keep moving with it is where I'm at right now.

Charlie ([22:59](#)):

Very cool. Thanks Jessye. Let's talk about a bucket list. I'm a fan of the bucket list. Do you have any adventure or travel or whatever? What are a couple of things on your bucket list?

Jessye ([23:11](#)):

Yes. This has been on my bucket list since I was five, because I remember my mom telling me this when I was little. When my mom got here from Cuba, she went with her uncle in an RV to all 50 states. I want to do the same thing. I'm thinking of one day purchasing a nice little mobile home or something. Definitely has to be sustainable. Maybe it could be a LEED



certified mobile home who knows, but getting one of those and going around and just staying in each state for a couple of days. I could even work in the RV if I have to, but just going, driving, exploring, looking at all the different regions that the US has and taking photos. I think that's like the biggest, really one thing on my bucket list right now.

Charlie ([24:12](#)):

I love it. A big trend, especially with the pandemic and coming out of the pandemic. It can work pretty much more than ever. I definitely know some, some folks that have even taken their families kind of do remote school, remote work and just see this great country. Let's talk about books. I don't know if you like to listen to audiobooks or you like to pick up a book in your hands, but is there a book you'd recommend?

Jessye ([24:40](#)):

I haven't really read recently, but my favorite book ever that I think everyone should read at least once in their life. I've read it like 50 times because it's my favorite. It's called the Alchemist. And this book is incredible. It is about looking at, it was this guy that was looking for treasure and where he found the treasure. I can't say it because I'm going to spoil it, but it's, this book shows people that it's not necessarily about wanting something and then getting it, what do you do after you get it? What's the next thing? Really showing people how to appreciate the actual journey and the hard work and the day-to-day struggles. Finally getting the treasure, looking at it that way, I think is very inspiring and like will help with anything that you do in this world, work relationship, really anything looking at the journey of it instead of the, what I want. Okay, cool. I think that book is very powerful and I love it so much. It's called the Alchemist by Paulo Coelho.

Charlie ([26:02](#)):

It's a classic. We'll put a link in the podcast show notes so everybody can get their copy. Thanks for telling us that. Jessye, two final questions. We've gotten to know you more, your exciting work you're doing on the green building movement. Is there any career advice you wish you had known a little earlier?

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

Just to ask more questions, not be afraid to ask more questions. I think a good career advice would be, like I mentioned, really try to do internships as early on as you can, you can really see if you like to do that work or not. I remember when I was working at the clinic at Emory. I was like, I can't do this. Kudos to all the nurses out there, but I was very sad when I would go to work. I'd have patients, as I told you, I'm a very personable person. I will get very close to my patients. They will pass away and I will just be in a dump for like two weeks and then it will happen again. I couldn't really do that. It's important to really go out there and get your hands dirty, see what these companies do that you're interested in, get an internship, do the work, and then you'll know then if you like it or not, and then you'll never go back to it if you didn't like it, but at least, and you tried it and you can keep it moving either way.

Jessye ([27:33](#)):

I think it's important to get your hands dirty and get out there into the sites and try different things out. What's gonna feel your fire that you have.

Charlie ([27:47](#)):

Oh, that's great. That's great advice. Let's say someone's listing Jessye to the podcast. Again, inspired hearing your story and everything you got inspired by on the environmental side. What you're doing with buildings and in your career, do you have any words of encouragement for them?

Jessye ([28:06](#)):

Yes. You guys can do it. You can definitely do it because not to brag, but I did it as a single mom. I did it with the toddler and yes, if you've got the drive, you've got the ambition, you've got the passion to smooth the legs and do it. Don't be afraid. There's going to be scary things coming out your way, and it might be scary to reach out to a CEO of a company for an informational interview, but you'll never know if you don't do it. Ask questions, get in there and, and just don't give up, do not ever give up because you can totally do anything that you want to do. You just gotta keep moving.

Charlie ([28:55](#)):

Some great encouragement and you need to give yourself some credit there. Jessye. I know it's not easy. You're doing fantastic. You're an inspiration to

so many and I'm really proud of you. I'm just so glad you're on the team. Hope everybody can connect with Jessye, reach out, let her know what you thought of the podcast. If you have a follow-up question, ask her what she likes to cook, things like that. Make sure you connect with Jessye on LinkedIn. We'll put her LinkedIn, bi in the show notes, the Alchemists book link. We hope you have an awesome day, Jessye. Thanks for being on the podcast today.

Jessye ([29:28](#)):

Thank you so much, Charlie. Thanks everyone for listening. Definitely reached out.

Charlie ([29:35](#)):

I want to say thank you to our loyal listeners. We actually are celebrating over one year here on the green building podcast, me and the entire team are stoked and 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 at [gbs.com](http://gbs.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) for any notes and the 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 in next week's episode.