

Founders of Alter Eco -- Joe Lombardi and Brian Falcon

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 and 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](#)):

Everybody welcome to the next episode of the Green Building Matters Podcast. I'm your host, Charlie Cichetti. I love that every week I get an interview with green building professionals, somewhere in the world while I'm based in Atlanta, Georgia, I usually travel a good bit for work. I've got two gentlemen today, it's going to be a dual interview. I'm excited to learn more about Alter Eco on the residential side of the green building movement. I've got Joe and Brian here today with me. Guys, how are you doing today? How are you doing? Really enjoy just getting to know them, especially those that have been doing green buildings for quite some time. What are your little nuggets? What's your advice? How'd you get to where you are today? I know you two are based outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and right now I think we're recording this year in Paoli, Pennsylvania. Guys how'd you end up there? Let's just go back. Where did you grow up and where'd you go to school?

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

I grew up about 15 minutes from here in a town called Bryn Mawr. It's close to Villanova University and a lot of other universities, Bryn Mawr College, pretty much that area. I'm one of seven kids and grew up playing music in our household and always liked to draw and to build things connected to nature. I ended up deciding to go to architectural school, got my bachelor of

architecture at Temple University. I worked for some architects and I was getting a lot of work on the side, so I started to start my own architectural firm, which is Architetra which is daily as well. Our work with Brian actually runs those firms. Later on we decided we wanted to pursue energy efficient, sustainable housing, and then we slowly started Alter Eco together.

Charlie ([02:35](#)):

Fantastic. You're close to home there. Brian, How about you? Have you also been in the area for a while or where did you get your start? Where'd you grow up and go to school?

Brian ([02:57](#)):

Actually I was very fortunate when I was very young. I was two years old, my family moved to Madrid and I spent a good five years traveling all over Europe and seeing castles and medieval palaces all through Europe. It had such a profound impact on me that I wanted to be an architect probably since I was five years old. We moved up to this region in Southeastern Pennsylvania when I was about eight and pursued architecture school, Spring Garden College, which is outside Philadelphia as well. Actually the school closed down while we were there because they did not get their accreditation. I actually transferred to Tempe University and then finished up my undergrad and got my first job working in a small firm in this area here. Actually, Joe was my mentor during my internship.

Charlie ([03:52](#)):

I love it. Sustainability wise, it sounds like both of you architect wise yet, Brian, your influences with your travels and Spain. It sounds like Joe, your upbringing in the arts. You both ended up being architects. Let's double down on that and then we'll take it to sustainability. Did you want to do residential, have you done some commercials? I'm not an architect. I did go to Georgia Tech, but not an architect. Walk me through the decision-making process to make a career in architecture. What kind of influences did you have along the way? I will go back to Joe first.

Joe ([04:19](#)):

I was introduced to all types of architecture, commercial and residential first. I've worked where we did a lot of different things. When I started my practice we didn't necessarily make a decision. We worked on the projects that came to us and luckily I had friends who were builders and we had a

good amount of residential work. The architect I worked for, he did focus on energy efficient housing because he actually had me research and helped write a business plan for an energy efficient, modular housing, but we never got off the ground. It was kind of the basis for what Brian and I did. We really researched the systems approach. One thing I realized was that there were many products and technologies that were out there that weren't being utilized. You didn't have to invent it. You just have to use what's available to you but a lot of builders don't use it. Being an architect and then deciding to build, we have all those materials and technologies at our fingertips. We don't have the test, anybody, it's okay to use it. It's kind of why we decided to start on the residential side because it's much more achievable scale-wise.

Charlie ([05:43](#)):

I want to follow up later about modular two and the timing of that and how that's entering into residential homes. Brian, anything to add about those, influenced that for you to decide to be an architect and also sustainability? Any other influences there for you?

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

Again, looking at all this amazing architecture all throughout Europe was so inspirational to me and I was fascinated. Professionally, I would say I spend more of my time on commercial work, but my passion was residential and always has been. I do a lot of work on my own homes with relatives doing different renovations to our houses or adding on doing different things. I've been very interested in sustainability for a long time. Similar to Joe, I grew up always outside as a kid, fishing, hiking, camping, and riding bikes through the woods in the summers. When we were in school, it was sunny up to as late as we were allowed to be out, we were goofing around. I always had a very strong connection to nature. What I found was as a young architect, I had a bit of a conflict internally. You work for certain developers and you would see huge tracts of land bulldozed, and then covered in parking lots. I started to struggle with them. I decided to go back for my master's degree in sustainability and there weren't a lot of options in the late nineties at the University of Arizona.

Charlie ([07:18](#)):

They've been a leader there in the last four or five years, and I have a good friend who got a master's in sustainability leadership, even. They've really done a good job out there. Let's talk about mentors. It's great that, think

Brian, you called Joe a mentor. That's where you guys connected. Tell us a little bit about that, but also who else had some influence? Was there someone's work you really looked up to, or maybe there were others that opened some doors for you along the way. Joe we'll go to you?

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

Bob Gilmore, who was the first architect I worked for and I was very lucky that he taught me a lot of really good things about how to be an architect. One thing that he was passionate about was this energy efficiency. He went to Rensselaer Polytechnic back in the fifties and they were researching the use of sips back then, structural insulated panels. We know they're available now, but still not that widely used. But that kind of technology is what led him to want to try to pursue that in a modular housing company level. He was my mentor and kind of got me started.

Brian ([08:24](#)):

I would say professionally Joe's has always been a mentor. In the early two thousands I actually decided to pursue LEED AP. It was actually when I was in graduate school, one of my professors said, "Hey, have you heard of this LEED course I did in 2003?" I started to look into it and he said, "You might want to go check this out. When I got back to Pennsylvania, as I was preparing for my year, I decided to throw in the meeting and the two guys that were leading the course that I took. I forget if it was one day or it was multiple, it was the Seven Group guys, John Boecker. I know you spoke to John. I remember during that course I literally felt almost like a kid meeting a superhero. I was jaw-dropped at the amount of knowledge these guys knew back then, early two thousands about sustainability. From the technical side, with all the ASHRAE and the other requirements, but also more holistically having an understanding of how one decision may affect in a positive manner, 10 other areas within a project.

Brian ([09:40](#)):

I thought to myself, and I still think this way now, If I could be a fraction of what those guys are, I would consider myself successful. A few years later along a similar line, Scott Kelly of Revision Architecture was an influence on me. As I developed with a few colleagues, first Lancaster green building association, Pennsylvania, which got absorbed into the Central Pennsylvania Champion. I'd often bounce some thoughts and ideas off, but again thinking, "Well, how should we approach this? Or we don't have money for that." He always had such profound answers. It was a completely

different way of thinking, but I was used to, and I found it very inspirational.

Charlie ([10:20](#)):

Those are great words. I love that. A kid meeting a superhero. Thank you for that. Let's talk a little more about today and then we'll talk about some other accomplishments, but today helps us understand the structure. You each are architects, you have your firms, but you've come together with Alter Eco. Give us the lay of the land here, Joe, tell us about some of the projects that you get to work on today.

Joe ([10:45](#)):

The first project that Brian and I worked on, and this is a bit of words of wisdom, is if you don't ask, you won't receive. We want to work on certain projects. I knew he owned some properties in Uptown. I said, "Do you have any land we could do a prototype for?" He said, "yes." We started designing our first zero energy ready home. It was actually two pairs of twins in Bridgeport, Pennsylvania. It's how we started with this client of mine who was willing to help finance us building these homes.

Charlie ([11:24](#)):

There's so many things in life you don't know unless you ask. I do want to get to that readiness, that zero energy readiness in a minute. Help us understand Alter Eco. How'd you come up with the name? It's full service, right? Design, construction management, some consulting, sustainability consulting. How'd you come up with the name and then let us know a little bit about how the company works?

Joe ([11:52](#)):

We hired a designer, Amy Bond, that was going to help us do our website and things like that. We were trying to think of names and Amy's company name is interesting (inaudible). She came up with the name for us, she said, "Oh, I like all those names, but here's, what do you think about this?" It's kind of stuck. I have an architectural practice with a partner of mine, Todd Pencil, and Alter Eco is a construction management company where we can either do the full designs for construction. We have projects that come through architecture that we have been building for clients, which is like the first project we did and architecture, designed it and Alter Eco, built them. What we're able to do as the designer and the contractor is during the

process we can start to price out options for the client and build the budget and the construction while we're doing it.

Charlie ([12:56](#)):

Brian, the European background, you've probably got some projects and clients. At Alter Eco obviously the focus is on sustainability and reading through your website, which looks great, is the zero energy readiness. Let's say, I want to hire you guys in Pennsylvania. Are you starting with sustainability? Here's what we should do and we come down from there? Is it like, where do you start to make sure you're backing inasmuch sustainability as we can? How does that conversation go, Brian?

Brian ([13:32](#)):

We were fortunate that we have other means of supporting ourselves so we can be extremely picky with what Alter Eco does. Our minimum standard that we will do is DOE ready program. A combination of a whole bunch of different programs. From a performance standpoint, I tell people it's sort of halfway between Energy Star and Passive House. It's kind of here just on steroids and not quite Passive House. It incorporates indoor air plus programs for materials and off gassing for new buildings, water sense for performance, all your plumbing fixtures and of course the DOE program itself, it handles all the mechanical performance and resiliency for the envelope of the building to make sure it's going to last a long time. Years of looking at all the different green building rating programs for residential, in our opinion, the DOE program is the best bang for your buck. As a program it doesn't cost anything but you need third party verification. You have a home energy rating. There's things you have to do, obviously above and beyond code some premiums to what you're putting in the house. From my standpoint, I see LEED, as a commercial tool, maybe a neighborhood development, and some larger projects. Passive House is the next step we've done. We did a Passive House up in New York. My opinion that the HERS rating difference between the nets zero ready homes and the Passive House that we did, was not great enough of a difference for me personally, and maybe my skill level at this point to justify the additional cost in time for really advanced energy modeling and all that stuff. As we grow, maybe that will be our new benchmark to get to true net zero through Passive House. The way we see it now is next year already as our minimum target and folks that are interested in that are reaching out to us to do this.

Charlie ([15:31](#)):

Thank you for that. I've been doing a LEED for a long time and I think the last recession, 2008 while LEED For Homes, might've started getting some momentum, it just got hammered and it was a big setback. I think it's a great program. In some states it's going to be more popular than others. A lot of multifamily developers do more LEED For Homes, but you can do it. Of course, for those listing on a single family home, a major renovation or new construction, some states might want to check. You can even abate your property taxes if your local municipalities adopted that. It's something in New York state, but it's coming around. I understand the framework of how you two work together and the really cool buildings and homes you work on. Let's go back one more time. What are some of your proudest accomplishments? Joe, we'll go to you first.

Joe ([16:22](#)):

I guess, on a personal level while I was passing on something my parents passed on to me, is that you can achieve whatever you decide you want and put your mind to it. With Alter Eco, I was in a personal coach and business coaching class, and I talked about wanting to do this, but then by reconnecting with Brian, just how to decide, wanting to do it, and then surround myself with the right people. We liked building that first zero energy ready home and it was pretty rewarding.

Brian ([16:57](#)):

Similarly on a personal level, of course, I guess my kids are my greatest accomplishment, watching them go through life and start to find their own successes and paths is very rewarding. Professionally. I would say years ago doing my first project was a huge accomplishment for me because we actually did the first weed pharmaceutical pilot plant in the world which was really fantastic for us. I would say beyond that, same as Joe mentioned, starting Alter Eco to really put our shared passion and interests forward in a way that is reaping success already is probably professionally my biggest accomplishment and the thing I'm most proud of right now.

Charlie ([17:46](#)):

I thank you for that. I'm a proud dad of three boys there by the end of the summer, 13, 10 and 8. I know we want to put good kids into the world. Let's talk a little bit more about programs like LEED. I know you're both LEED professionals. You've been doing that for a while. It's a great framework. It's a great tool. I think you also have a Passive House. As a good option. You've been well trained and certified there. You've got these DOE programs like

on the net zero on the readiness side. What have programs or certifications meant for you all? Has it been excellent training? Is it always an option for a client? Is it easier to have the conversation when the staff is trained on these? Is it the list of best practices? One of these programs like LEED and Passive House and some of the DOE programs, what has that done for you in your businesses?

Joe ([18:32](#)):

Once we started pursuing the DOE program we got one of our homes built and we won an award. We're on their DOE website now people can find us and it's really opened up. The fact that we're out there doing this, and apparently there aren't that many groups doing it. The fact that people are coming to us now because we're associated with this group is great. It took a long time before clients actually asked me in my architectural practice for these energy efficient principles and systems that I've been wanting to do and that's happened over the last few years. That's very encouraging to try to get it in there without bringing too much attention to it sometimes. People realize energy efficiency in their home is something that they reap the benefit of every day.

Charlie ([19:38](#)):

We're paying those energy bills. You're right. I know when I bought my home, my home is an older home built in 1970 here outside of Atlanta, Georgia. I wanted copies of the power bills and the gas bills. I want to know what it costs to operate this house, which is pretty eco-friendly to start with. I'm glad that it's giving you some business. When you're doing that hard work, you're doing something that others aren't, it's good to get recognized and get those calls. Brian, let's go back to you. How about these programs, these rating systems, even some of the trade organizations, like some of the USGBC chapters or other green building chapters, like how do we network, how do we use these programs?

Brian ([20:15](#)):

From the programs, what I find very helpful is it provides a very clear framework that you can show a client, someone who may not be educated on this, of how it's done and it gives you a verifiable method of doing things. It gives you a predicted end result that will be certified and showing that it really is the key to any of those programs at the heart of embracing this integrating process. It's a different approach than your typical owner to architect, architect to his contractors and then you hand it off to the

builder. It's a cyclical process where everybody's providing feedback. To me, that's the heart of any of these programs. Some groups do better than others. You see it in the results of the buildings. On the train side I was fortunate enough after we got the green building group started I served as the chapter lead or the branch lead.

Brian ([21:17](#)):

I also served on the board of the Central Pennsylvania chapter and played a regional role in the CRC for a while and that was really exciting. We go to DC every quarter or a couple times a year. Of course you're doing a little bit of networking, but we're talking about what are our goals for the region. What are we trying to do? Are we trying to vote? What sort of events are we going to have? Of course the heart of that is networking. You meet all kinds of trade folks that are interested in the same thing and putting your energies together to create these better projects.

Charlie ([21:51](#)):

I love it. Thanks for covering both of those, guys. I want to learn more about the residential industry and how things have changed, maybe even in just the last couple of years.

Speaker 3 ([22:00](#)):

My world, I'm mostly commercial. We do some 23 story multifamily apartments, but I'd love to learn more about your world on the residential. What are some of the harder things with sustainability in a home and what are the ones that maybe there's a misconception on? It's actually really easy to do that, but maybe the lay homeowner just thinks it's going to cost way too much. Can you walk us through that? What are the things that are a little harder to do sustainability wise and some of your projects. What ones do you do on every project, even though some people think it's hard, you've mastered it. It's not too bad. Who wants to take that one?

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

I'll start, I would say some of the misconceptions are that the upfront costs are prohibited to do. One of the benefits I think Joe and I have as architects, is that we can sort of steer the ship as soon as the pencil hits the paper. The concept of trade ops, when you look at a building as a whole system where all the parts relate to each other. If we look at better windows, of course, if you're looking at that as a line item, they're going to cost you, but if you're working with your mechanical guy and you realize that better

windows can be a 30% reduction, potentially in mechanical system size then that premium just went away. It's looking at these things all together. How do they relate? How can they benefit multiple areas to cost-effectively deliver? I think about the bigger picture, some of the things that are difficult on the trade side. Folks that do this for a living everyday don't want to try something they don't do every day. For example, talking to a framer about doing sips versus stick framing. Every time we get no, no we don't do that. When we tell them, it's like stacking up giant Legos. It's very easy to do and once you get the buy-in, these folks are like, "Wow, that really was easy. It went up much faster and created something more efficient, more from the municipal side." We are starting to get into educating some municipal folks and giving some presentations to some of them on what's different. What's the same from an inspection side? What should they be looking for for this type of home? For example, why ventilation is critical in a very air tight room, things like that. In Pennsylvania, for some reason, the state has relaxed the air tightness requirements from IECC, which to us seems extremely backwards. We tried to discuss with the municipal folks, although the state has relaxed, we would recommend that you hold builders in your areas to the law that has been defined. A lot of it is education and a lot of back and forth.

Charlie ([24:47](#)):

I like that. Joe, what would you add there sustainability wise? What's still tough but we do this on all our projects.

Joe ([24:54](#)):

Like you said, some of the easiest things are the attention to the insulated envelope. Making sure of the air tightness of the house. Let's say insulation, there are times you can relax the installation requirements, but installation pays for itself every day. Those are things. If you don't need more energy to heat or cool a house, why use it? The installation allows you to kind of pull that.

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

We kind of proved in our first homes that we built, that we can achieve this level of a home at the same cost as a code built stick-built home. We were right in the same range of construction costs as the builders who are building code compliant. It can be done. Like Brian said, Hey, we have an advantage because we can think that through as we're designing, simplifying details.

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

Just stick to these things we know will work. Let's pretend we had a crystal ball guys as green home practitioners, what's around the corner? What are you reading up on now that is coming at us?

Brian ([26:06](#)):

What I think we're going to be moving towards and you're starting to see a little bit in California with all the 2030 targets is homes and commercial eventually are going to be required to be net zero. The sooner that we can get on board with them, whether we want to, or not, the better we're going to be as professionals in the AEC industry. I think it's a no-brainer, it's moving in that direction. Incorporating renewables on all buildings is practical with solar and wind going to be also standard. I think there's also going to be a bigger push towards understanding, not only operation, but the life cycle carbon effects of our decisions on what we're building, what materials are going into the building, and how much it costs to operate and that sort of thing. At some point the entire supply chain through the operation and eventual end of life of buildings is going to be much more of an important factor.

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

You're right. That embodied carbon, even on the residential side. I know a lot of my commercial developer clients are going all in on embodied carbon, not just operating carbon. How efficient is a building or home? The embodied carbon. Any laws coming out of either New York, New York City or California are gonna really shape residential first across the country. Joe, what would you add on what's coming down the road here? What's coming up residentially.

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

We have to be happy with a smaller home too. The young people, like my kids, are both in their late twenties, early thirties. They're not interested in a 4,000-5,000 square foot home. They're happy with a nice, comfortable space. A lot easier to use less energy if you don't have a big home to keep cool. We need to trend more towards that. The zoning in the municipal level has to maybe give some incentives for that to make sense.

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

You two have been designing for a long time. Is it safe to say that maybe smaller homes, I'm just trying to create a visual here, there's just more efficient storage and the rooms are more efficient. It might feel like a bigger home, but the square foot is a little compact. Whereas before you'd have some wasting space in design. Help me understand, say a 2200-2500 square foot home. It might feel like it's much bigger these days. Walk us through that for a minute.

Joe ([28:35](#)):

The trends and maybe, I think we're still in this trend of the open plan. Living, dining, kitchen, people don't need a separate living room and separate kitchen. Growing up, we lived in our kitchen. We had seven kids and we had a kitchen that was probably 10 by 10 that's where everybody hung out. If you can open the kitchen into the living space, to the dining space and it gives a home that a bit much, and then you still have your standard bedroom sizes and you can reduce probably home by 15% by eliminating those rooms that you hardly ever use.

Charlie ([29:09](#)):

That makes sense. There's a good debate around electrification and all electric buildings and homes. I like to cook and they said, "Cooking with gas," but are you guys starting to put more induction ranges into your homes? Are you preparing your customers for this yet? Are they pushing back and they'll wait until it's required. How are we doing on the all electric side of things, even with something simple, like an appliance? I mean, we're,

Brian ([29:37](#)):

We're designed to be all electric at this point, anticipating more incorporation of renewables and battery storage and things like that you were looking into because Tesla gets more efficient with their delivery on their solar roofs that they have. Incorporating that on our projects and eliminating natural gas and things. If we can. I know it is a bit of a polarizing thing. I know my mom is an amazing cook and she will not cook on anything with gas. Depending on who your audience is, I think our goal in everything we do is flexibility. Whether from our services from just design to design construction or just construction, you're working with other architects. Same thing with clients is when someone swears that they need to have gas, then we'll take care of them. Our preference, if we had a blank slate, is having everything be electrified.

Charlie ([30:39](#)):

That's what I'm hearing, all electric net zero ready. Thanks for answering that. I think we're going to have to continue to push and as those mandates come. Let's talk about materials. What do you recommend: get prefabbed or even cut off sites versus some of the more modular components. And this can be brought in entire systems. The whole systems thinking you mentioned earlier. What are you guys seeing? What trends are you seeing and how can we build a home? What do you still recommend? For part of a home construction to be assembled off site and brought in, but maybe this part of course we're not doing that or are you starting to see that in some of your projects?

Joe ([31:18](#)):

We had mentioned that we've been using sips on some of our homes because we just wanted to follow through with a complete envelope that was sent home. Obviously that takes a little more upfront planning, which as architects, we're used to seeing shop drawings and approving them. Once again, it's easy for us. I think along those same lines, there's a lot of panalyzing of stick frame assemblies that you see a lot of the bigger home builders using and I think that's important. You limit the amount of onsite waste, which is good. It's more controllable in a plant, like when your waste materials get reused and things like that. I think we're definitely seeing a trend towards more panalyzing and even modular as well.

Charlie ([32:06](#)):

Got it. Good. Thank you for that. All right. Let's just learn a little more about how you stay productive. I've got a few rapid fire questions here, Joe, back to you. What are you really good at? What's your specialty or gift?

Joe ([32:20](#)):

I think something I'm pretty good at is connecting with like-minded people and my personal life in music and in business. I somehow get attracted to, or attract people who are on the same wavelength with me. The best way to accomplish things is when everybody buys in. I think I'm good at using my abilities to bring those teams together and get things done there.

Charlie ([32:46](#)):

Even on the music side too, man. That's great. Brian, how about you?

Brian ([32:49](#)):

I'd have to say that anyone who knows me would have to say it's my level of energy for things that I'm interested in. People say I have no differences. I'm either zero or a hundred miles an hour. For things like sustainability, where I'm extremely passionate about, I talk someone's ear off at a party all night. I think that my energy and enthusiasm for doing this is infectious. It gets other people's energy and brings them on board. Like Joe mentioned about being on the same page because you get that better. With additional people, you get more accomplished.

Charlie ([33:25](#)):

The right energy too. How about habits? Good habits, routines, rituals back to you, Joe.

Joe ([33:31](#)):

Good habits over the past two years. I've realized that I did this when I was young too, but didn't know it, but I meditate at least 10 minutes every morning, I eat healthy and at regular hours during the day to stay healthy, exercise is really important to me as well. I've got to play or listen to music every day. I played guitar, but I also started playing piano. I have to put my hands on an instrument and whether it's just for 10 seconds, 15 minutes, an hour or whatever, it's just something that's part of me. It just grounds me for the therapeutic.

Brian ([34:10](#)):

I've incorporated in the last few years an hour of personal time every morning. I get up and I try to accomplish a series of things from exercise, to meditation, to gratitude, journaling, goal-setting and hydration before anybody else gets up. I'm up before the sun. I find that that quiet time before the chaos of the day starts is really, really helpful for me to keep me on track. Of course, similar to Joe I'm about 95% plant-based with my diet. I do a lot of endurance sports and that's a lower carbon footprint there.

Charlie ([34:53](#)):

Brian. bonus points for that. A bucket list, as you get to know me, I'm a fan of a bucket list. Just curious, what are one or two things on each of your bucket lists? Is there any adventure, any travel, maybe you want to write a book? Joe, how about you?

Joe ([35:10](#)):

The benefit of living in another country and traveling as much? I definitely want to travel to Italy where my family is from. I do have an interest in books. I've met a lot of clients over the years that ordinary people like all of us, but we're able to bring their business or things in their life to just the next level. What was the one thing or the decision they made or the opportunity that took them to the next level? It's kind of like what I said before you don't ask, you're not going to receive. If you have an idea and you need to find out if someone might be interested. Go for it. Finding whether there's a key thing amongst these people that brought them to the next level, it would be interesting to me that I could share with other people.

Charlie ([35:57](#)):

I really liked those kinds of books too, where you're getting lots of good nuggets. It's consolidated, it's interpreted by you like that.

Brian ([36:05](#)):

There's a couple that jumps out. One is that I used to race bikes years ago and I always had a plan to do the trans America, which is essentially from the west coast, east coast on a bike. Sorta threw that out the window for the last 20 years. At some point, I'd really love to do that again, get back to planning to do that. I think that'd be a pretty amazing way to see the country 10 to 20 miles an hour for a few months. Similarly my wife and I are campers with our kids. I'd love to get an RV, drive in class, A or B, RV and spend a year just seeing everything that's in our future, driving all over the place. I've been fortunate enough to see a lot of the world. I just think that'd be an amazing opportunity to not be in a rush, but wake up one day and decide to drive to whatever town, see what America has to offer. I think that'd be pretty amazing.

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

That's fantastic. A couple more things here. One is books. I'm not sure if you'd like to listen to audiobooks or pick up a book in your hands and read it, but is there a book you'd each recommend that doesn't even have to be about our industry? Any good books, Joe.

Joe ([37:24](#)):

Yeah. One good book. It's not about our industry, but it's about life. It's called Buddhist Brain, the neuroscience of happiness, love and wisdom. The fact that you can use your mind to change your brain, just because you

think a certain way now doesn't mean you have to pick that way tomorrow. You're in total control. Once you change how you think you continue, you can continue to think positively. You're training yourself to put you on a path in a certain way.

Charlie ([37:47](#)):

I'll put a link to that in the podcast show notes.

Brian ([37:50](#)):

I generally jumped from the motivation self-help books, the healthy eating, and nutrition and wellness books, but one that really stood out. I actually just read it for the second time. A few months ago, *The 5:00 AM Club* by Robin Sharma was a really, really amazing book. Actually, what started me on this 5:00 AM thing a few years ago. It's essentially a fable or it's a self-help book disguised as a fable as follows. These people who meet this guru, who teaches them all these different ways to become more efficient and how to make their lives better. I just found it really inspiring taking nuggets of that and that's how I sort of started my mornings.

Charlie ([38:26](#)):

I am a fan of Robin Sharma. I'm glad to give that book a shout out. Again, guys, and to our listeners, I'll put links to Alter Eco check out the website. I'll put links to these books and some of the things we've discussed in the podcast, show notes. Guys, two closing questions. Let's talk about careers. Is there some advice you wish you to know a little earlier in your career?

Brian ([38:49](#)):

I would say probably the biggest advice I would either give myself or a new young person would be. Don't be intimidated by not knowing stuff. We've all been there and follow your passion. If you're excited and passionate about sustainability or preservation, whatever it is wholeheartedly, chase that down with every ounce of energy you have. You might sound goofy sometimes asking questions you think are silly or, or whatever. I would say don't ever fear that. Embrace that. Embrace the beginner's mind, whatever you're doing, because it's only going to help you learn along the way and be more successful.

Joe ([39:29](#)):

Don't wait to do the things that you're passionate about and that make it happen. There's no reason to start. You can't start now at some level, we all

are entitled to be happy, huddled to do things we love to start now. Don't wait.

Charlie ([39:44](#)):

That's totally good. In closing guys, let's say there's someone listening to this podcast right now, and they're inspired to hear your story to hear what's going on on the residential side, especially maybe they're just now jumping into the green building movement. What words of encouragement do you have for them?

Joe ([40:00](#)):

Just go for it. Don't be afraid to take chances. The worst someone can say is no, but the best they can say is yes.

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

There's so many things in life. You don't know unless you just asked and I think that's part of going for it there. Brian in closing. What words of encouragement do you have?

Brian ([40:26](#)):

I would say similar to what we're talking about is jumping full speed ahead. Volunteers, see if you can get involved in green building organizations. If you know of local folks that are either designing or building these things, or even green building supply places, or even more holistic groups that are into wellness and sustainability, those are all avenues of like-minded people. Like Joe said, all these people know each other, we all gravitate towards each other. Even if it's something along more of a spiritual wellness path that he might know, somebody starts asking him questions about it and say, "Hey when you think about green buildings or sustainability, but what do houses or offices go up?" You'll be amazed to find if you ask those questions, it'll steer you where you need to go. And you'll find incremental growth along the way. You'll blink and all of a sudden you'll be an expert.

Charlie ([41:19](#)):

Fantastic guys. I've enjoyed getting to know you. I can see your work behind you there at your office. You're beautiful and eco-friendly homes you're doing for yourselves and your clients. Really enjoy getting to know you, both Brian Falcon and Joe Lombardi. Everyone. Please connect with these guys on LinkedIn, check them out if you're in the Pennsylvania area. Guys keep up the great work. Thank you.

Charlie ([41:44](#)):

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 the 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.

Charlie ([42:10](#)):

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.com/podcast](#) for any notes and links that we mentioned in today's episode. You can actually see the other episodes that have already been recorded with our amazing guests. 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 on next week's episode.