

## **From Furnishings to Renovations, Eco Interior Designer Lisa Tharp**

00:00:01

*Charlie:* 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 green building professionals from around the globe to share their war stories, 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.

00:00:34

*Charlie:* Welcome to the next episode of the Building Matters Podcast: I'm your host, Charlie Cichetti, and today I've got Lisa Tharp with us, she is with Lisa Thorpe Design. I Can't wait to talk about her career and also get into some echo paints and some cool, innovative things she's doing in Boston. I can't wait to learn more about you. I've got to ask all my podcast guests. Just take us back. Where did you grow up and where did you go to school?

00:01:10

*Lisa:* I grew up mostly in Connecticut and I've had a lot of different interests: architecture, design, journalism, film. I went for the best city I thought, so I ended up with Boston College.

00:01:26

*Charlie:* I know you're still up there. Did you move around a little?

00:01:29

*Lisa:* Actually asked my parents for \$200 on graduation day because I already have a job lined up in New York and I was having a tough time

about leaving Boston. It's a place near and dear to my heart, but it took me a long, circuitous route to get back up here.

00:01:53

*Charlie:* As I understand it, you went to NYU and you got an MBA there?

00:01:59

*Lisa:* I was recruited out of school into package goods marketing. I got my MBA at night, which I wouldn't necessarily advise as I turned it into a workaholic. I started to crave doing something even more creative. I started classes in Films Schools and that's when I decided to move on to get into something in New York in the more creative field. I joined HDL at that time.

00:02:33

*Charlie:* HDL, That is an early career. Time Life, It sounded like you got into the creative and later we're going to talk to you. Talks through what it is like there?

00:02:47

*Lisa:* It was a wonderful place to work and I had a wonderful lifestyle. I was living on the upper west side, and was willading in Central Park every weekend. Even as a city dweller, I felt very connected to nature and really surrounded by inspiring architecture. The lifestyle alone was worth the ticket to ride and then was doing a lot of inventive things at the time and I was surrounded by so many creative and collaborative, lots of inspiring little models that it was just a wonderful experience and I probably would have never left had I not been recruited down to Time Live video by a boss at HDL. A little bit of my early career before I made the career switch to design.

00:03:44

*Charlie:* I Love New York! We work on a lot of things. Greening of buildings in New York. I can only imagine that it is quite a fun place to live there! Tell

us? How did you get into the interior side of things, especially the green side?

00:04:05

*Lisa:* The green side actually started quite young. I was raised on stories of waste, not want not. Stories of my great grandparents, Bartolomeo and Maria, who immigrated from Italy with little more than their creativity and resourcefulness, growing their own food and making clothing and reusing and repurposing everything, and that was really very inspiring to me. I was also very interested in design from a young age and thought maybe one day, since I'm a person who loves variety, maybe one day I'd try my hand, and back in 2010, that was the culmination had spent a few years researching green design and healthy design, because those aren't always the same things and we built the Conquered Green, Healthy House. Our goal was to model best practices in both sustainability as well as being very careful of the health of workers and the occupants. It turned out it would be us, but we are trying to model those best practices in this house and we got a number of participants. And that really launched my career switch as well, because the architects with whom I worked did a great job publicizing the project. I started to get inquiries from blogging about the project and that's how I started and launched the design firm.

00:05:35

*Charlie:* I love to influence your parents, then your grandparents with the eco friendly side of things. I always like to ask my podcast guest, did you have any other mentors or someone you looked up to, maybe even open some doors?

00:05:49

*Lisa:* There was in the package goods world. I got great training from a young rising star named Caroline Brig, and she went on to actually run a bunch of major companies, but she was extremely disciplined. She had this great sense of humor and she taught us really that rare balance of being a

good manager and being a good leader. The manager part of doing things right and the leader part, which is do the right things, and I've taken those lessons with me throughout my career and I'll always be grateful to her for those.

00:06:27

*Charlie:* That's a lot of wisdom. The manager vs a leader. Looking back, what are some things you are really proud of?

00:06:40

*Lisa:* I will say that the Conquered Green Healthy Home was a real proud moment. Going from having a germ of an idea and then doing all that research and really teaching myself sort of technical design, work and draw interior elevations and and learn how to choose products that make sense and collaborate with builders and architects. So much good came out of that project, including improvement of my own health and the opportunity to combine the best of historic, traditional building principles with the latest in modern technology. That project has continued to yield gifts many years later.

00:07:30

*Charlie:* What's keeping you busy? Tell me about your design firm and publications. I know you have been on TV. Tell us more about it.

00:07:50

*Lisa:* We have a nice variety of types of projects that we work on. Some are just the furnishings, traditional interior design and others include renovating as well. We sometimes work on renovating historic properties that have very classic bones, which are very inspiring to us. We're working on a beach house or a modern city apartment. We really run the gamut and enjoy that variety and try. Rather than having a certain look, we try to bring a bundle of strong principles to each design project that we do. We try to honor the architecture, create a sense of place, and honor to enhance the connection to nature, views, location, neighborhood and community.

Reflecting the clients themselves. Those three muses really inform every one of our projects. It's a luxury business what we do by large so we are working very hard to expand the reach of our company goals and our values. We've launched a furnishings collection that focuses on local making and sustainable and healthy making practices. Our collaboration with Egos Paints, our newest venture, is another way for us to bring designer results in a healthy package to anyone who is looking for a better option for paint. t

00:09:42

*Charlie:* What made you want to start that organic line of organic? How is that going? Was that kind of hard to do or not?

00:09:52

*Lisa:* It was actually a labor of love and a way to pay forward my gratitude towards and belief in the company ECOS paints. When we were building a house ten years ago, I discovered the line of these nontoxic paints and varnishes and stains, and they were only available in the UK at the time. They tested better than 25 other paints that tested for the house. I told the painter we're going to try this nontoxic paint. We're going to use it for floor paint and I'm paying a lot of money to ship it over, which I don't feel great about. It's my only option and the painters were very skeptical. We can't guarantee it because we've never used this product. I said I will bear the risk. Afterwards they were thanking me. "I go home without a headache, I can paint with the windows closed." They were calling it 'liquid gold', to have long time painting contractors converting to the product was very satisfying. More recently started connecting with ECOS paints on social media and we were taking their products and they reached out to connect with us and the conversation just started from there. I felt there was a way for me to help them. Now that they were available, they started up a plant in South Carolina and were shipping from the US and made it less energy embodied in the product line. It's all made to order. I offered to create and edit a line of tried and true 60 colors from a designer standpoint. These are

favorites and we'll put pallets together so you can easily choose your colors and put other colors with it. And out of that came least our colors for egos, NOTOC paints.

00:11:56

*Charlie:* A lot of fun for you and, like you, said a way to give back. Great testimonial there. The simplest form with headaches and air quality and healthier homes. It's focused on what's made out? It's obviously a big healthy building movement, so that's good to see. I'm curious, you've got the eco-friendly side covered and you're restoring. There's nothing greater than restoring an existing building. That's very friendly. What about this healthy building movement as we try to get out of a pandemic are you getting requests for?

00:12:39

*Lisa:* I am optimistic that both the climate crisis and the pandemic are further accelerating the focus on healthy indoor air quality, sustainability, fossil free buildings, self-sustaining buildings, and less adaptive reuse. I really am optimistic that more and more individuals are making informed choices. There are so many wonderful products available now that weren't available 10,12 years ago, when we were first embarking on the Concord Green Healthy Home Project. With all of our clients we try, even if they're not asking for these attributes, we are offering them to them. We are educating them about better choices that they can make and I'm really hopeful for our cities. The more we can focus on human scale, human centric nature, centric decisions. Cities are obviously very sustainable in that there's greater density. With the pandemic there is a huge exit from cities and I think it's giving cities a chance to rethink what the experience of living in a city is like and how do we make it more pedestrian, bike friendly, more accessible for all. Green space, urban gardens, all of these things are coming to the forefront in a way that might not have sped up as quickly had we not had the pandemic.

00:14:35

*Charlie:* Can you talk a little more about Concord healthy home?

00:14:37

*Lisa:* It was actually built, planned and built as a family home for myself and my family. It was really born out of a combination of my strong interest in design and combining the best of old and new methodologies, but also my both interest and need to create a healthy indoor environment for myself and my family. We found a piece of land in Concord, Massachusetts, and it was in a very historic neighborhood. We developed, we worked in partnership with, put together an amazing team, I must say the best of the old and the new. Concord Homes out of Vermont was a historic reproduction design firm and they agreed to work with zero energy design out of Boston, with a bunch of Cornell grads on the cutting-edge and still are in green and sustainable and Passive House principles. The team worked together and I learned so much in collaborating with them in designing the home. And then eight, construction was the builder and we had a lot of great participants. We used a lot of reclaimed materials, recycled materials, yet the esthetic was very sort of almost gallery loft by the beach, kind of esthetic and the house fit in very well with the neighborhood. That was very important. It looked like it didn't just sort of pluck down from a different style. The vernacular was respected and we learned about a lot of products along the way. Everything from the better choices of installation to the right fresh air system. We did radiant heat and plumped for many splits, for rather than doing the forced hot air, which is never great for anyone who is susceptible to Asthma because it really drives you out, like Europe is filled with radiator heat. When people from Europe move here and they encounter forces to dare, I think they're not very happy about it for those reasons, but anyway. I think that the project was very much about the best of old and best of new.

00:17:17

*Charlie:* Let's talk a little more about what's keeping you busy today? What do you find yours spending time working on?

00:17:24

*Lisa:* We've got a number of great and varied projects and really inspiring clients and we appreciate their trust. It's really a privilege to work in a personal residence and create a home for someone. We really treasure that. We are expanding our furnishings line and creating a mix of classic traditional pieces as well as more contemporary sculptural pieces. Really fun and thinking about how we can further expand our reach with our values and exploring some new collaborations with focus on passive, self-sustaining small homes. I have a real interest in that and thinking about where do we go from here?

00:18:18

*Charlie:* This next question to green building professionals like you, What's next? What are you reading up on or what do you really think is down the road in this green building movement?

00:18:33

*Lisa:* There needs to be a lot more focus on urban development and thinking about everything from how do we make our cities more human friendly and also thinking about everything, including public housing, oftentimes the unhealthiest type of housing. A lot about a book I read years ago, which I still turn back to, which is a pattern language by Christopher Alexander. I don't know if you know of this book, but for me it's incredible. It should be required reading for anyone interested in architecture, design, city planning et cetera. His research team identified 200 and 53 patterns that explain why certain environments feel good and work well for us humans. There are some traditional or even ancient design principles that work with nature rather than conquering it or worse, defying it. Many great principles in there that if you read them and you see the little illustrations that go along with them, you have these moments chapter after chapter. I've



always liked this or that is why I've always felt good in a room with windows on two sides rather than one, because the light is balanced and you get more natural light and there's no glare and humans just feel good in that or a pattern number 214, story limit high. Once you go past four stories high, if you're living in a tall skyscraper or working there, the people are ants on the street, you're not connected to nature. Going outside is a big event and you're losing light and views of an open space. When your cities are built-up up up and you think about a place like Paris, which is universally loved as a city, and the parts that you always see in the movies, they're really not more than a few stories tall. All the buildings that surround the characters in the movie walk through a scene, and it's no wonder that it's so loved, because Paris has at least historically been very protective of building height limits. When you think about something like public housing, when you see very tall buildings that are just monotonous and almost inhuman you have a discouraging experience. My hope is that some of these principles will become much more to the forefront as we think about what is sustainable, what is healthy and what is human centric design.

00:21:24

*Charlie:* Thank you for that. The next few questions are more about you. Lisa, what's your specialty or gift?

00:21:37

*Lisa:* I have a certain fearlessness to pursue a passion, even if I have a lot to learn about it and that has served me well in my winding career path. I do tend to get a little bored at times so craving that variety sort of pushes me to go after things that I just have a real passion for. I don't necessarily have all the skill set to go after it, but I'm willing to be a lifelong learner and get inspired by others who are pursuing a better way of doing things.

00:22:14

*Charlie:* Let's talk about any good routines or good habits?

00:22:22

*Lisa:* I find myself regularly asking why not. I think that that question leads to a lot of interesting endeavors and I think it makes life a little bit richer or a lot richer. I would also say on the rituals front, I would say: Mondays are for team meetings and no outside meetings.

00:22:59

*Charlie:* I am a fan of bucket lists. Could you say one or two things may be on your bucket list, maybe travel?

00:23:09

*Lisa:* Charley, I think on the travel front I have. I think an abiding love of inland skating would love to hear Barcelona is great for that. I wouldn't mind trying that out some day. I've long dreamed of building and living in a small, self-sustaining house by the sea and I think it's been amended to a house high above the sea, unfortunately, given rising sea levels. But that's always been something I have not yet done in a permanent way and would love to do that.

00:23:49

*Charlie:* I was in New York City recently. We were given some clients this coffee mug that when you pour a hot beverage in it a map of the world that it actually shows the rising sea levels. It's very depressing. At least it's the conversation starter. Two more questions: is there any career advice you wish you had received earlier?

00:24:39

*Lisa:* Yes, definitely tell young people to question, examine, don't just follow a path, because it's expected of you or people recommend it to you. You really owe it to yourself to find your jam, and if you follow your passion, you will be better allied with who you are in your work and your mission and your purpose. I've seen time and time and time again when people align themselves with their highest and best potential. Success will come and a reward will come, and that's not necessarily monetarily, although that usually also accompanies the ride. But you will find much

more happiness and satisfaction in life. I believe, and I also say, don't assume you have to wait until you have experience, which is the theme. Be a bit fearless, make your own opportunities to apprentice, learn at the feet of people who have learned before you and, and you know, there are a lot of people that are generous, who are willing to share their knowledge with you if you just show real interest and passion.

00:25:55

*Charlie:* A lot of good wisdom today and thank you for that.

00:26:07

*Speaker2:* You know and wisdom.

00:26:08

*Charlie:* On your experience and good advice. Lastly, let's say there's someone listening to this broadcast that's going to be inspired by your story and they're thinking of jumping into this green building movement, this green home movement. Maybe they'd love to hear your words of encouragement?

00:26:36

*Lisa:* I would say you know it. It can seem overwhelming. You go online and you can go down that rabbit hole of endless information and, and I would say, keep it simple. This is one more place where less is more, that if you start by focusing on one area, where something that's meaningful to you, that addresses a personal need, it's a bit akin to authors being told to write what you know or artists you know paint what you know. Focus on an area that is meaningful to you because you will make a difference and if you have that need, others very likely do as well. You can find your niche, you can find your purpose in pursuing a simple one problem to solve for yourself.

00:27:30

*Charlie:* Everyone reach out and connect with Lisa, on LinkedIn. She's got some amazing signature pieces. The organic, eco friendly paint line and check out some of her and her team work on some of their designs.

00:27:51

*Lisa:* Charlie, thanks so much for having me. Thank you for your great questions and for what you're doing in helping bring more information to people who care about these things.

00:28:01

*Charlie:* Thank you. 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 you continue to listen every Wednesday morning to a new interview with a Green building professional in this industry, or just some props 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 at [gbes.com](http://gbes.com). Our mission is to advance the Green building movement through vesting class education and encouragement. Remember, you can go to [dotcom slash broadcast](http://dotcom/slash/broadcast) for any notes and links that we mentioned in today's episode and you can actually see the other episodes that have already been recorded. With our amazing yes, please tell your friends about this podcast, tell your colleagues and, if you've really enjoyed it, leave a positive review on it. Thank you so much and we'll see you next week's episode.