Kristen DiStefano on Designing for Future-Ready Sustainability | Transcript

00:02
Speaker 1
Welcome to Green Building Matters, the original and most popular podcast focused on the green building movement. Your host is Charlie Cicchetti, one of the most credentialed experts in the green building industry and one of the few to be honored as a lead 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. So settle in, grab a fresh cup of coffee, and get ready to find out why green building Matters. Hey, everybody. Welcome to the next episode of the Green Building Matters podcast. I've got the easy job. Once a week, I just meet amazing people all over the world that are doing this green, sustainable work a lot of times around buildings.

00:46
Speaker 2
Right.

00:46
Speaker 1
That's what I titled the podcast, Green Building Matters. We've been kind of branching out a little bit lately, but I've got a long time green building expert with us from the San Francisco area. I've got Kristen on today. Can't wait to unpack her story. Kristen, how you doing today?

00:59
Speaker 2
Hey, I'm great, Charlie. How are you doing?

01:01
Speaker 1
I'm doing great. I know we're connected through some circles. Excited to unpack your career here. And so for our listeners, if you would take us back, where did you grow up and go to school?

01:11
Speaker 2
Sure. So I was born and raised in a small town in upstate New York, Hamilton, New York. It's actually where Colgate University is located. So I spent first 18 years there. Then I went off to college to pursue a degree in civil engineering,

actually at Bucknell University in Pennsylvania. Did that for about three and a half years until I think, realizing that I was very interested in architecture and buildings, and so finished out that degree with a focus on studio art, with an intention to pursue a master's degree in architecture. So I graduated from Bucknell and then went on. I did some, actually some exhibition design for about a year for a nonprofit, which was quite a cool break, and then returned to upstate New York to complete my master's degree at Cornell. So that was kind of my educational.

02:07
Speaker 1
Arc to another beautiful part of upstate New York. I've got, while I'm in Georgia, outside of Atlanta, got family up and down the Hudson river, kind of the Taconic Parkway north of New York City. But I've been over in your area before and Cornell's another great school. So that's really neat. You went back there. Okay, so you know, that engineering background and then going architecture, you know, I see more and more where that's a huge Benefit. I'm just kind of looking ahead. Do you think that helped you, though, with your design career to have that kind of engineering basis first?

02:38
Speaker 2
Yeah, I mean, absolutely, I think, you know, so I. The company I'm with Now is at Tele 10. And I'd say very much a lot of the folks that work with us kind of sit. They may be trained in architecture, they may be trained in engineering, but I'd say all of us sit very much in the middle of those two disciplines. And of course, we continue to coordinate with architects and engineers every day. So, yeah, I think having those different backgrounds and understanding how you might approach problems differently or solve them differently was pretty critical.

03:08
Speaker 1
And sustainability. So did you have an aha summer growing up or college or early career? It's like, oh, this sustainability stuff, I kind of like it.

03:19
Speaker 2
Yeah, that's an interesting question because I think if I really, really think back, it was always there. A really deep interest in sustainability was probably in my head from a very early age. You know, that's not to say I knew what I wanted to do as a career. You know, I had no idea what I wanted to do, but I don't think it ever occurred to me that it wouldn't be through the lens of sustainability. So, you know, I think when, yeah, that goes back. You know, when I was in

elementary school, I remember we had to do one of these living history assignments. You know, pick a notable human, learn all about them, learn their background. And I remember that the person I selected was Rachel Carson. And I think at the time it was because I love the ocean.

04:12
Speaker 2
I was fascinated with sea creatures. I thought, oh, she's this incredible marine biologist. But looking back, you know, I think it really was equally about that and about somebody who was kind of sounding the alarm in a big way about our impact on the environment and, you know, also seeing what somebody could do, what an individual could do about it. So she continues to be a big inspiration today. But I think it's interesting to think back and say, oh, that really was there from a very early age. I think it was really in college when I started pursuing a civil engineering degree that I became interested in buildings. You know, I think the structural part of that was really interesting to me.

04:53
Speaker 2
But I think what I really wanted was both the ability to, you know, work on really incredible building projects, but also think about the human experience within those buildings and what they could do to decrease our impact on the environment. So it was in college when I figured out that the built environment was my avenue in the sustainability and went from there.

05:15
Speaker 1
All right. But there was a sustainability thread for a long time it sounds like.

05:19
Speaker 2
For sure, for sure. Yeah.

05:20
Speaker 1
Love that research project too. We'll connect the career a little bit and then I'm going to ask you about some mentors. So tell us a little more about early career. What were you doing?

05:29
Speaker 2
Yeah, so after I finished my master's degree I actually first went into teaching. So I stayed on at Cornell while I had been. I've been one of the leads for their

Solar Decathlon team when I was a graduate student. So that was a really fun project for folks who are familiar with that. It's a competition where teams build a net zero energy home. @ the time I was doing it, we had to transport that home to the mall in Washington D.C. so that was. It's quite an undertaking. So I did that while I was in grad school and then remained at Cornell as their faculty advisor for the next team. And I also was teaching professional practice course at the time, some teaching at Cornell. And then I went to the University of Oregon to teach in their architecture department.

06:22
Speaker 2
So there it was just a year appointment filling in for someone on sabbatical. I taught environmental systems and controls with Alison Kwok and then I also taught design studio for first and third year architecture students. So that was the entry into my career in general. But following that I think where I really started to go into practice was after I left the U of O, I moved to San Francisco. It was kind of the beginning or the middle of the recession. It wasn't a great time to be somebody looking for an entry into the career. But I was very lucky. I found a position at an architecture firm called Group for Architecture. They're located in San Francisco. They do a lot of civic work. They do a lot of work on libraries.

07:11
Speaker 2
And my first project there was an adaptive reuse project in Scotts Valley, California and it was adapting an existing indoor roller rink into a public library. So it was a really nice way to enter into the profession. It gave me a pretty broad view of what somebody does in the architectural discipline. So from there I went on. I worked at Gensler a little bit and then landed atelier 10. And that was about 14 years ago. So I've been here ever since.

07:44
Speaker 1
I can't wait to talk more about present day. So some amazing journey in there. Mentors is something I do. One more look back. Is there anyone that you might call a mentor along the way?

07:56
Speaker 2
Yeah, I Mean, I. I haven't. I haven't had what I would say someone formally as a mentor, but there have certainly been folks who I would consider mentors who are. Have been transformational or inspirational in a lot of ways. So, you know, I think I mentioned Allison Qu, who I worked with at the U of O. She is just incredible. I met her when I was at Cornell. She. At the time, I was still a grad

student. She. She invited me and a couple of my fellow grad students out to the Hoax Conference at the University of Oregon. It's a sustainable building conference that their architecture program puts on. You know, she invited us. I had just met her. She invited us to stay at her house while were there. And I kind of came to see that, you know, that's just.

08:45
Speaker 2
That's just who she was. She had so much interest and passion for kind of, like, helping people come up into the world of sustainability. And, you know, in addition to just being, like, an incredibly smart person and a real leader in terms of this discipline, she really was, like, very invested in people and in students, and that was a really nice way to kind of begin to meet folks in the discipline. I would say more recently, a lot of the people that I still work with Today atelier 10, I would very much consider mentors. I've got Claire Maxfield, who founded our San Francisco office, Nico Kinzel and Paul Stoller, who founded New York, and then Sydney. And I've got Patrick Belloo, who founded London and the entire firm. They are.

09:36
Speaker 2
They are all folks I got to work with and still get to work with a lot. So I very much learned from them from the very beginning, you know, a lot about what it means to be a consultant. I think the biggest thing that I learned from them was that it is, you know, it's equally about technical knowledge and communication and being a people person and kind of building relationships. And so, you know, each of them had a very different approach to doing that, but they all. They're all very passionate. They're all very curious. They all are very enthusiastic. And I think that really shaped the way that I came to kind of come into my career and talk about projects and engage on projects. So, yeah, a great. A great list of folks there that I feel very lucky to have worked with.

10:32
Speaker 1
Well, you got a great firm there and some great name, some I've maybe even had on this podcast. But you're right, mentors. And to our listeners, it could be someone that inspires you and influences you. You read their material, you See them from stage. Could be someone maybe you work alongside or someone that maybe is a little more formal and challenges you open doors. There's different forms of mentors. So one more look back. I love to ask my podcast guests, Kristen, what's on the highlight reel? You know, what's, what are some of your proudest accomplishments so far?

11:00
Speaker 2
Yeah. So I think one that comes to mind is. And this is a bit of an older one, but this is my work on the Mission Rock sustainability strategy. So this was one of my early projects atelier 10. And the Mission Rock development is. It's about a 3 1/2 million square foot mixed use development in San Francisco. It's developed by the San Francisco Giants. Tishman Speyer is the other developer, and it's just south of the Giants ballpark. So this was a development that was planned for, you know, it was, I mean, it was a parking lot at the time. It still is partially a parking lot. But just recently they completed the first phase of that project. So four buildings and an eight acre park.

11:56
Speaker 2
And so I think that one's front of mind because I had this project I worked on over 10 years ago and a strategy that we worked on over 10 years ago, and we're just starting to kind of see it come into being, which is always exciting for master plan. So that one, when we started, were working on the master plan team and I think some of the questions were asking with regard to sustainability were, what's going to matter for this project? What are the key issues we want to focus on? What are the unique opportunities? Opportunities? And knowing that we'd have a pretty long time between the master planning phase and when the project was built out. What types of things were ambitious but still achievable, and what would be ambitious in 10 years or what might be ambitious in 20 years?

12:47
Speaker 2
There's a bit of crystal ball gazing that happens on these projects. So some of the strategies that were defined during that phase that are now coming into effect were. There are a couple that I think are pretty cool and leading edge. I mean, there's a lot, but I'll focus on these. So the first is the project has. The project essentially connects all of the buildings within the master plan for water treatment and reuse, and then also for thermal energy. So the project's got and is planning, you know, one of the largest private blackwater treatment systems in California. It essentially connects all the buildings, it treats their wastewater, and it uses that water for irrigation and for flushing. At the time were writing the strategy for this project. Water reuse wasn't even, I don't even think it was legal in San Francisco.

13:42
Speaker 2

But by the time that first building was getting built, it was required or water reuse was a requirement. And so I think that was a big teachable moment in terms of how quickly things change in terms of regulations and how important it is to be future ready in some of these master planning projects. So that system is now coming online with the first four buildings. And you know, when this whole project is fully built out, it's estimated it's going to save about 16 millions of gallons of water per year, which is a huge amount. Yeah, there's no small deal there. The other thing that it has is a shared thermal energy system. So all of the heating and cooling for the project is provided by a district system.

14:29
Speaker 2
And eventually that system will interconnect with the bay to exchange heat and get free heating and cooling and have a very low carbon approach to how they heat and cool the district. So, you know, I'd say those two things in addition to others. You know, it really is one of the most ambitious sustainable communities today and really informed the approach that we took on future master plans. So we then went on to work on the new basin master plan along the San Francisco waterfront and the Portrero power station master plan. And you know, I think Mission Rock sticks in my mind because it was the entrance to those, but it was the beginning of really being involved in shaping the sustainability strategy for a lot of development along the waterfront.

15:19
Speaker 2
And you know, all of those projects are so special because they're this dense development, they're transit oriented, we're building density in a place with public transportation, which is a huge win from a sustainability perspective. They're delivering meaningful open space for the community, they're connecting people to the water, they're designing for sea level rise for the future. I mean, they're kind of doing it all. So they're some of my favorite projects that I've worked on.

15:49
Speaker 1
Glad I asked. That's a great highlight. I can tell you're lighting up about those projects.

15:54
Speaker 2
I get excited about them for sure, sir.

15:56

Speaker 1
Well, one thing I noticed, I mean, I know you've worked on like a lot of leap projects, is you didn't really mention certifications. You mentioned the impact the water and here's what else it all led to. And I think that's important and we need to be reminded of that. So. Okay, so let's talk present Day. If you could talk to our listeners a little bit about Atelier 10 and what's a day in the life of you, Kristen, as a director there?

16:19
Speaker 2
Yeah, so atelier10, we're a group of sustainability consultants in the US and energy analysts in that were founded in the UK about 30 years ago as a group of mechanical engineers. And there was always a sustainability focus to that discipline of engineering within the London office. But I think they pretty quickly realized that there were whole aspects of driving sustainability in buildings that you almost needed to be involved before the engineering piece to impact. So things like building massing, building floor form, envelope design, human experience. So they created a spin off what we call environmental design, focused on reducing resource use, focused on designing better places for people.

17:10
Speaker 2
And that is really the piece that we have here in the US So my role and the folks I work with here in the US is are as a group of environmental designers, we work a lot with architects, developers and owners. So we work on all sorts of things, like every scale of project, we work in all different locations. And so I think, you know, a day in the life is. It's very different every day, which is, I think, what folks like about it. You know, we get to work on multiple projects at a time and it keeps it really interesting because there's always something to learn about, you know, what's new, what's the newest thing coming in terms of sustainability that we really need to stay on top of.

17:58
Speaker 2
So, you know, mainly my role is I run the office here, but I'm also involved in project work and, you know, are the things that we pride ourselves in being very good at is one, figuring out like what the big sustainability vision for a project is and how we align that with the owner's goals, with the other project design goals, and then really backing that up with deep technical analysis to figure out how to implement it. And so that's, you know, I think that's our role on most projects. We come on early and then we're usually on for the duration, really

working closely with the design and engineering teams on making sure we kind of carry through the vision till the end.

18:43
Speaker 1
Well, it helps when you're involved real early.

18:45
Speaker 2
Yeah, it does.

18:47
Speaker 1
We'll set the vision and I can tell what our listeners can't see. There's a great office behind Kristen here. I look forward to visiting next time in San Francisco.

18:55
Speaker 2
Yeah, absolutely. Please come by.

18:58
Speaker 1
I know your team really practices what they preach too. So let's talk a little bit about certifications. Right. You've been in this industry a while. I have too. And, you know, I think we could both argue that lead has been a great tool. It's just been this mechanism. We're about to have Lead version five coming up. I don't know how. Have you seen maybe some of your clients? How have those discussions changed about certification or not? Which one should I do? I don't know. What's your take on where we're at with that conversation right now?

19:26
Speaker 2
Yeah, it's a good question. I'd say it varies a lot, depending on the client, depending on where you are in the country. Our office does work all around the western part of the US There's a lot of different attitudes to sustainability in those areas. The conversations around certification are quite varied. I think our approach to it is to say that we think they can be extremely useful tools. They can be a carrot, they can be a stick. So they can be something that motivates a team to really do the right thing holistically on a project or in a lot of cases. I think we like to really define what's important for sustainability outside of a certification system and then use that system as a reflection of that goal.

20:20

Speaker 2
And kind of, because there's multiple pathways within, for example, lead certification system of kind of how you get to your goals, we like to say that we can kind of fine tune that to match and align with the objectives of a project. So one of the things that I think is pretty exciting about lead v5 coming up is there's, at least from what I see, there's a big shift in what's required at the beginning of a project. So, you know, there's a real focus on resilience plans, looking at decarbonization plans and kind of doing some of this early stage work to chart a really aggressive pathway for every project. And I think that we're pretty excited about that because that's something we really believe in for all of our projects, is figuring out what matters in the path to carbon neutrality.

21:19
Speaker 2
What are we going to focus on? And I think to see that coming into a certification system as a requirement gives us a real opportunity and tool to not only define that pathway, but then to have it as reference and have it as a guidepost on more projects than we have it now. So I think that's pretty exciting. And we haven't had our first V5 project yet, but I know they're coming soon.

21:47
Speaker 1
Yeah, that's a good attitude towards it. And I'd agree with all of that. Anything else kind of present day. I mean, we have 20, 30 challenges. We have a shift from ESG to maybe call it decarbonization, maybe that's a safer word. I don't know what else is kind of current state or something else you're excited about. And then we'll talk about the future.

22:09
Speaker 2
Yeah, yeah. So I think, you know, some of the things I'm really excited that we have a number of projects that we've been working on that really have set very early carbon neutrality goals and have kind of figured out pathways to get there. And, you know, one that we just finished last year that just recently opened was the California College of the Arts campus expansion here in San Francisco. So this was in. It's an art school. So it's kind of a dream project. Right. It has a whole bunch of maker spaces. It has an architecture school in there. It's really quite cool. But they were consolidating. They had a campus in San Francisco and a campus in Oakland. And this project was intended to bring the Oakland campus to San Francisco. So we worked on this project with Studio Gang.

23:02
Speaker 2

We went to our first stakeholder meeting with CCA's board and they said, we want to know what it takes to get to carbon neutrality for this project. And we just said, yes. That's the thing, you don't always hear that in meetings. And we'd love to hear it on this one. That project has. We were really focused on how do we make this the lowest energy demand project possible. As a starting point, it was interesting because we know how a lot of academic buildings use energy, but we really didn't know how this project, with all of its kilns and glass furnaces and kind of laboratories like how this would use energy. So went through this whole process of building up a kind of energy profile for the project. So we knew what to focus on when were looking to reduce our demand.

24:00
Speaker 2
And I think the interesting thing about this one was that over 60% of the building's energy use was coming from the equipment in those maker spaces. So it became a two pronged conversation to say, what can we do on the architectural side to drive down energy use as low as possible? We had natural ventilation, we have really well designed shading. You've got very low cooling in the building. But then also, how do you drive down that equipment demand? And so to do that, we worked with a lot of folks within the team who were running those studios and kind of got ideas from them. So I think that's you know, that building just opened with super efficient energy demand. It has, it's a mixed use, mixed structural. So it's timber on the upper levels and exposed timber for some of the upper pavilions.

24:54
Speaker 2
And then we have a plan for the future to essentially use a large rooftop of the existing building for PV to meet that entire energy demand. Then a lot of the discussion was also focused on how you really make smart use of that energy that's being produced on site. The project's also designed to accommodate a future micro grid battery storage, a smart control system that really begins to control how that building is interacting with the local electricity grid. I bring up that project because I think that is really one of the things that we're seeing our industry, especially here in California, head to, which is yes, renewable energy production, but also the ability to control when that energy is being used, when we're drawing from the grid.

25:47
Speaker 2
And that being a very intentional move to support a move towards renewable energy on the larger grid. So the building's role in that I think is something that's pretty exciting and I expect we'll see a lot more of that, both in terms of benefits

for renewable energy, but also in terms of resilience benefits throughout the U.S. well.

26:08
Speaker 1
That'S a great transition to just. Yeah, where is it all shifting? And you're right, a lot of that's here now. It's not just the batteries. You mentioned some thermal energy, even storage. We see that popping up even in New York City and some skyscrapers going, heat pumps, just, you know, it's not like this was 10 years ago, it's here now. We need to do more then. So, so yeah, what's, what else are you excited about reading up on what's next in the green building movement?

26:33
Speaker 2
Yeah, I mean I mentioned it in the last project, but zero carbon, I think we as a baseline, and I know we're not there yet, but as a baseline, you know, all of our projects really need to be zero carbon projects. And you know, when I say that, I don't just mean building operations and I don't just mean build embodied carbon. I think we need to broaden the umbrella of what's included under the purview of the building. So the energy it takes to run the building, the carbon emitted by the materials within our building, but we also need to fold in refrigerant emissions, which industry is very much starting to focus on landscape and site work and the embodied carbon embedded in that.

27:21
Speaker 2
And then transportation, I think, both for the people coming and going from the building, but also make a shift towards more electric vehicles. That demand for transportation that used to be very separate from all of our buildings is now fully becoming a part of our building's energy demand. So I think this big umbrella in terms of, like, when we talk about carbon, what do we mean and what do we care about really needs to capture everything and not ignore pieces of it like we maybe have been doing for a bit. And then, you know, we need to figure out through similar to the process I just talked about on cca, you know, how do we reduce demand for the remaining demand? How do we find a really smart, renewable way to meet that?

28:07
Speaker 2
And then how do we make the best use out of that energy that we're providing? And I, you know, I think eventually the goal would be really nice to never be emitting carbon to begin with, but we're not. We're not quite there yet. So I'd say that's the baseline of where we should be headed in the future. And then on top

of that, you know, we obviously should be going beyond just doing less harm to actually providing a positive impact. So I think the word regenerative is probably the best term we have at this point, although it gets thrown around a lot. But I think for the purpose of this, I'll just focus on that. And that's much harder. It needs to be hyperlocal.

28:50
Speaker 2
Very, very deep understanding of context and not just climate, but also the physical location, the ecology of a place, the natural flows of things like water, social context. And so I'd say as designers, we have a lot of projects, some that do that really well now, but I think we like to be doing it across the board for our buildings, for every topic.

29:15
Speaker 1
That's right. One of my favorite buildings here at Georgia Tech, my alma mater, the Kendeda Building, while it is a building in Lake Putnam. I know we have those showcase projects, but one thing I've seen in this industry, and this is for our listeners too, let me know if you agree, is I think we're doing a better job of let's not just design to a target like Lead Silver, Lead Gold, but instead these prerequisites with lead v5. I can tell you're excited. I'm excited. Or like, well, what. What's possible? Yeah, and let's see where we land. And then maybe someone else can pick up on the what's possible. Right. I know you work on a lot of new buildings, but also probably some existing building retrofits.

29:52
Speaker 1
And it's okay to say to someone that owns an existing building, look, here's how you would go all the way to carbon neutrality. Here's five steps. Oh, okay, you can budget for steps one and two right now. Great. Maybe the building sells in five years. Hopefully someone will pick up on step three. So I think it's just kind of a challenge I'd make to our listeners. I'm starting to see the industry do a better job with that, is here's what's possible, here's the ultimate goal, and which parts of it can you do now and maybe someone else can pick up on later and stack on top of that. So I'm starting to see a little bit more of that. That's not widespread. I'm starting to see the glimpses of it.

30:26
Speaker 2
Yeah, I think that's right. And I think that's where that pathway becomes really important. Because you say, well, what are the things that we absolutely need to do in the beginning? And it comes back to all of the good design work that we

know in the sustainable community. Right. Like drive down energy demand, reduce what we need first. And that efficiency part still within these bigger aspirations, becomes the foundation on which everything else is built. But I agree with you. See how, see what it looks like and how far you can get and chart that pathway and then see how far along the way you can go.

31:03
Speaker 1
Yeah, that's right. Okay, so that's what's next. Well, let's get to know you a little more. Kind of the rapid fire part of our podcast interview here. What would you say is your specialty or gift?

31:14
Speaker 2
I think one of the things that I do really well is, you know, I, I, like I talked about with most of the folks here, you know, we can go deep technically, like really nerd out and get into a technical issue, but then also step back out of that and see the big picture. I think, you know, at Intellia 10, we spend a lot of time doing deep, detailed technical analysis, whether it's on energy use or doing a water balance for a project, or, you know, really looking at passive design strategies. And I think the superpower is to take that analysis and translate it into something that's easily understandable and ideally in a visual way so that folks can kind of look at the results or look at what you're trying to communicate and immediately understand.

32:05
Speaker 2
Oh, yeah, that's why option A is better than option B. Or, you know, this is what it means for a human in this space to have the facade designed in this way. You know, this is what they feel, this is what their eyes see in a space. And so I think that piece, that ability to translate data into something understandable and recognizable is, I'd say, one of my superpowers.

32:31
Speaker 1
That is a great superpower to have. Do you have any good habits, routines, rituals that help you stay on point?

32:41
Speaker 2
Yeah, I've got, you know, I think the basics and more. This is becoming more important. But real sleep, real breakfast, I think those are just, you know, those are my minimums for being a functional human in general. But I think the thing

I've been really experimenting with and trying to figure out is how you find time in a creative discipline, in a world in which you're getting pinged every five seconds to really find deep thought time and deep creative time and deep problem solving time. And so there's a couple things I do. One is I do. I am a runner. So I kind of use my run. I go in the early morning. Wakes up my mind. It gives me a bit of uninterrupted time to kind of just prioritize and organize my day. So that's usually on my run.

33:32
Speaker 2
I'll think a little bit about, you know, trying to plan out and figure out what I'm going to do for. For the day ahead. And then for the. The creative thinking time. One of the things that I try to do is if I've got a problem to solve or a big meeting coming up, I'll try and do my research on the topic, you know, in one day, and then let it sit and percolate, like during. While I'm doing other things for a couple days before I kind of come back to it. And when I do come back to it, I will get away from my computer. I will take a pen and paper and I will go sit at a desk somewhere else in the office or in my home and try and like, work through drawing or notes those ideas.

34:16
Speaker 2
And I think that really helps. I think just being away from a computer helps me not get so distracted.

34:23
Speaker 1
Everything's pinging at us, other people all the time.

34:26
Speaker 2
Yeah. Put away the phone, put away the computer.

34:29
Speaker 1
Eric, I'm a big fan of deep work. Any other tips on maybe how to protect that thinking time, problem solving time? I almost. To treat it like it's your best client's meeting time. I mean, how do you do. You just have to build up that discipline. I heard you change environments a little bit. I don't know. How do you pretend?

34:46
Speaker 2

Yeah, yeah, I'LL block it out on my calendar if I know it's coming up so things don't get scheduled during it. I do. I use my calendar a lot to block work time because otherwise, yes, it does seem to fill up pretty quickly.

35:00
Speaker 1
Thanks for sharing that. Best practice. That's great. I love to ask my guests about bucket list. Not everybody has a bucket list, but Bucket list, hey, maybe it's adventure travel. Write a book. I don't know. What are a couple things on your bucket list?

35:13
Speaker 2
Yeah, that's a good one. I, I the idea of a bucket list terrifies me a little bit. So I don't have one. I think it's cute too.

35:26
Speaker 1
But.

35:27
Speaker 2
But I do there are things that I really want to do. You know, I think the usual things, more travel, more time with family. But you know, one of the things that I really do would like to spend some dedicated time doing is more time making things, more time just getting a tinker in the art world. I'm not a, I'm not an artist, but I, I had a moment, maybe it's probably almost 10 years ago now, but I had an opportunity. I have a friend who's a glass artist and she had a residency at Corning Museum of Glass again, upstate New York. And she asked me to come along to help her out and assist her. And I had this week of just unobstructed making time with students.

36:14
Speaker 2
And then at night I could kind of work in the studio and work on glass fusing and sandblasting and kind of do my own projects. And it was one of the most enjoyable parts of my life that I'd have that I have in a memorable future. And I'd love to do that again. I'd love to just get some time to dig back into that with no expectation on the outcome.

36:38
Speaker 1
Thanks for sharing. That's really neat. Maybe we'll call it a life list. I watched, I

think it was Netflix romantic comedy with my wife the other day is called Life List.

36:47
Speaker 2
I like my video.

36:50
Speaker 1
How about books? If not a book you'd recommend, it doesn't have to be about buildings, a podcast document, or any pro tip here our listeners might want to check out.

37:00
Speaker 2
Yeah, I recently read this book that I've actually been recommending to folks in the office here called the Light Eaters by Zoe Slanger. I'm pronouncing her name correctly, but it is just a fascinating book about plant intelligence. And so it's digging into advances in current plant Science and the understanding of the way that plants communicate with each other, the way that plants understand their environment and how they send signals to one another, whether those are kind of chemical signals through the air or through the water. And it is fascinating.

37:40
Speaker 2
So I think one of the things I was reading that I was entirely unaware of is that, you know, there are certain plants like corn, cotton, tomatoes, have the ability to do this, that if they're being attacked by a species, something like a caterpillar, they can summon predator insects, the predators of these caterpillars, to come through kind of chemical signals. And it's wild that this is a defense mechanism that they have and that, you know, I think that field is just starting to uncover these complexities. So that was a really enjoyable book to basically learn a lot that I didn't know about plants. I thought one of the really interesting things about it is then when I read about the author, I found out that she typically covers climate change and was looking for something to refresh and find wonder in the world.

38:40
Speaker 2
And I was like, oh, that's. That's. It's funny, but I guess maybe not entirely random. That ended up picking up a book that gave a little break from that and something really interesting.

38:50
Speaker 1
Yeah, meant to be. I won't put links to that book in our podcast show notes. I'm gonna get a copy of that for my mom. She runs a nursery and landscape business in the North Georgia mountains too, so.

39:02
Speaker 2
Oh, yeah, she can start her own experiments.

39:06
Speaker 1
That's amazing. A couple more things. This has been. Been so much fun getting to know you more here as you look back on your career. Kristin, anything you wish you'd have known earlier?

39:16
Speaker 2
Yeah, I think. I think it's something a lot of people told me, but I don't know that I fully embraced the importance of it until later in my career. So I think the importance of connections, personal connections, the importance of getting out in the industry and really just meeting people who do the things that you hope to do and even now, the things that you want to collaborate with. So I think the reason I ended up at a 10 was I'd had my eye on them as a firm for a long time. When I moved to San Francisco, I had heard they were having a party. So I heard my call their office manager, and I said, hey, do you mind if I come? And she said, oh, sure, no problem. Come on by. And I thought, okay. It'll be. I was really young.

39:57
Speaker 2
I thought, oh, it'll be okay. Nobody will know. I don't work there. And I walked in and there were four people there because I was early and said, oh, shoot, this is very obvious. But I ended up meeting a lot of the folks I work with today and really just having wonderful conversations with them, really getting a sense for who they were and how they worked. And a couple years later, when a position opened up, I applied and we already had that connection. So I think it's really important. And I've seen how important it can be for me personally.

40:32
Speaker 1
Way to take the initiative. And it worked out. I love that story. Sure was a fun

party. That's cool. Okay, so let's say there's someone listening right now and they're just jumping into this green building movement. Maybe they're making a career change. Maybe it's a young professional. Any words of encouragement to someone that's just now jumping in as we wrap up?

40:53
Speaker 2
Yeah, I think we need all the folks we can get. So welcome. But you know, I think there's so many topics right. There's such a broad range of issues that we really are addressing when we talk about sustainability in the built environment. And I would say it means that no one in our industry can possibly know even close to all of it. So I would just encourage folks coming new to the profession too. For the things that you find that you're really interested in, dive deep, get into it, learn about it, volunteer to be the one who works on it. And I think you'll see that you pretty quickly will become the expert in that area and people will come to you to understand something about it. I mean, that happens in our firm all the time.

41:41
Speaker 2
That, you know, we rely a lot on knowledge share. We rely a lot on other people's work. And so we'll reach out and say, hey, who's. Who's the most recent one who's done the Leap V5 project? Or who's the most recent one who's kind of looked. Done analysis of this kind of like micro grid for resilience and you know, they become a go to resource. So I would just say find a thing that interests you and go for it.

42:05
Speaker 1
Go for it. Come on in. Well, everybody make sure you connect with Kristen on LinkedIn. Check out the really cool work that A10 is doing out there. All over, but definitely in San Francisco. And I just want to say thanks for being on the podcast today. That's been great.

42:17
Speaker 2
Yeah, thanks, Charlie. Really appreciate it.

42:21
Speaker 1
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