

From Forest to Future: How Sustainable Wood Can Transform Green Building | Oscar Crespo Pinillos | 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. Green Building Matters.

00:34

Speaker 2

Hey, everybody. Welcome to the next episode of the Green Building Matters podcast. You know, over the years, we've talked about just this, sustainability, this green building movement, decarbonization, and esg. And today I've got Oscar with us. He's an ESG officer at the headquarters there for Garnica in Spain. Just excited to talk about some of their products, how it supports green buildings. So, Oscar, welcome to the show. How you doing today?

00:59

Speaker 3

Thanks, Charlie. Thanks for letting us in.

01:02

Speaker 2

And you learned before we started. I do like bourbon whiskey, but also some good red wine. So, yeah, we'll talk Rioja later. So for our listeners, kind of give us that origin story. So where did you grow up? Excuse me? Where did you grow up and go to school?

01:15

Speaker 3

Well, I actually grew up here, so I was born here in La Rioja, this small region in the northern part of Spain. So the city that I live in has like 150,000 inhabitants. Small, small size city, we say, we can say. And this is where Guernica was also created, in a nearby town like 30 minutes from here in Banas. It's small town mostly, as traditionally work with the meatpacking industry. Right. And actually my. My grandfather used to be a forest ranger. So as well as my great grandfather, they used to sell locks to the early, you know, start of the Guernica company as a sawmill nearly 100 years ago. Wow. From now. But I actually never thought I would work there. I was born here, but then I moved away for school.

02:09

Speaker 3

I went to a couple of universities in Spain and also I spent over a year in Finland. Then I moved to Maine, to the U.S. to Maine, where I finished my forestry engineering degree. And then I came back to Spain, and then I ended up going back to the US for doing my master's program in the US as well.

02:31

Speaker 2

Okay, well, I'm sure that early exposure to forestry and logging, you know, maybe. Maybe that did, so to speak, plant a seed for where you'd be later in your career. So.

02:43

Speaker 1

Yeah.

02:44

Speaker 2

When did you first feel sustainability? Though, was it some of that upbringing, your connection to nature and the forest or maybe buildings? I don't know. When did you get the bug for sustainability?

02:54

Speaker 3

It was from the very beginning and I would say it was a more holistic concept of sustainability compared to how we sometimes ambitions or see sustainability being reported these days. And it came from mostly my relationship with my family. As I mentioned, my grandfather was a forest ranger.

03:14

Speaker 2

Right.

03:14

Speaker 3

So I would go out there in the off road vehicle just with him to check some of the forest or we always grew our own vegetables, you know, in the mountains, in some vegetable gardens that we have over there, beekeeping, you know, those type of things. I wouldn't say they connected, not with a conservation maybe approach into nature, but you know, having roots on the ground, I think having roots is fundamental, you know, being connected to. Being connected to the land, being connected to the people and to the environment that surrounds you.

03:53

Speaker 2

I love that. Well, it sounds like it was all around you, it was just part of your day to day life. That's amazing. Wow, what a great upbringing. So early career. So yeah, you get out of school, you get your advanced degrees. Tell us about your early career and how did that get to where you are today?

04:11

Speaker 3

Yeah, so I started working actually in conservation with an internship in a foundation here in Spain in the preservation of biodiversity. Okay. But I was in big city in Madrid, not a big city person, you know. So I ended up coming back over here in several type of jobs, consultancy wise and also some web development and so on related to forestry. Actually those were not like the best times in employment wise in Spain. We were just coming out of the crisis, you know. And then I ended up working actually for a company that's related to Guernica is the one that manages the forestry operations. Right. So the plantations, the popular plantations over here and so on. I was working there and then I moved to the US for my graduate degree.

05:08

Speaker 3

Kept doing a little bit of field work out there in the US and consultancy work. And then I came back to Spain and I joined Carnegie where I'm now since over eight years now and heading into the ninth year now.

05:24

Speaker 2

Congratulations. That's awesome. Okay, so that's early career. I also like to talk about mentors. Right Oscar, Sometimes a mentor is someone we read their material, we see them from stage, they influence us. Sometimes a mentor challenges us, maybe opens the door. Have you had any mentors along the way?

05:44

Speaker 3

Yeah, actually, and fortunately I would say the person that has most influenced me from a professional perspective is no longer with us. He was Pedro Guernica, one of the co founders of the Guernica's company as it is today, and the former president of the company. And he was just so driven. He was so driven into this business, into sustainability, into popular, into creating, you know, wealth in rural areas. And he was probably one of the most driven persons I ever seen. And actually this is something I even struggled myself when I went to my, for my graduate studies. So I went to the U.S. i, I went there with a full scholarship. I went to the Yale School of Forestry. And you know, you have this big image of, you know, this Ivy League university. And I was kind of disappointed.

06:48

Speaker 3

I didn't really find, you know, this kind of mentorships. I would say that I didn't feel as connected to some of the people that I was exposed over there versus other, you know, opportunities that I had in life. You know, you know, people that are more connected to the reality or the, or like business or rural areas. Whereas, you know, this kind of, you know, this connection with academia and so on, it felt like it was, you know, like more far from reality. And I didn't really connect as much with that type of approach which I obviously from other points of perspective was, it was super written, you know, it was an incredible opportunity in life. But from that perspective, I wouldn't say it had influenced me as much as other people that I met. And I will definitely highlight Pedro over there.

07:51

Speaker 2

Drive and ambition and doing good work here in sustainability too. I see how you've connected it all. And Yale, obviously one of the best universities in the world there. Okay, so let's keep moving. Let's talk about what's on the highlight reel. What are some of your proudest accomplishments so far?

08:11

Speaker 3

I don't know. Sometimes it's hard to accept some of the achievements. I know you meet so many people out there that you know, that are overachievers. I remember that my period in grad school, you know, where you were humbled to the ground, I would say, by the exposure to all of these people that have done like anything out there. So I mean, it's small things, I would say. And to me the important part is that just in my day to day life I'm contributing to something that I believe it's good for the environment, it's good for the rural areas, the jobs that we provide out there in places where there are very limited economic opportunities apart from forest industry. And I think that you need a reason to wake up to Devote all these hours of work into that. I think that's extremely important.

09:14

Speaker 3

And obviously I recently became a father just last year, but that's definitely my biggest achievement. Well, congratulations so far.

09:24

Speaker 2

Yeah, I love that. I love being a dad. I've got three boys. They're 18, 15 and 13. So three teenage boys. So if you need any advice, just look me up, shoot me a WhatsApp, I'll give you some tips. Oscar, that's great. Well, I like to look at the highlight reel because this is hard work. We do big things. So let's talk present day. So why don't you tell us more about the company. You've been there about 10 years. What kind of products do you put out there? So tell us about your role and your company.

09:53

Speaker 3

Yeah, so Guernica, it's a wood based pinellas manufacturer. We want to factor plywood in our operations here in Europe. We have mills in Spain and France. We use sustainable raw materials like European poplar grown by small forest owners out here in Spain and France. The idea is manufacturing the best quality plywood that meets the highest standards out there for the most demanding applications anywhere. Basically because the US is an important market for a company. But we do export our products in well over 40 countries all over the world. So you can find a Carnica supply panels. You know, wood products do not travel as much usually when you compare this is not like a. It is a global industry because everything is global these days. But these are iPhones.

10:51

Speaker 3

You know, you can get an iPhone anywhere on the planet unless it's band, you know, but then, but you could find a Guernica panel anywhere from Argentina to South Africa to, to New Zealand or Vietnam or any European countries. Right. So that tells the story that makes we make a unique product that meets the demands from customers anywhere in the world in any type of application being it like the marine industries or like a super yacht or a campervan, a caravan furniture, a high end kitchen cabinet for a single family home in the US you name it, we supply somewhere, man.

11:45

Speaker 2

Yeah, that's a pretty big reach. 40 Countries and it sounds like the US too. So. So how have you seen your industry change? You know, I've done a lot of LEED buildings over my career for example and they might push FSC or you know, other certifications, you know, is everything recyclable? I don't know. How have you seen your industry change one hand and on the other in your role as an ESG officer, You know, what are you Doing to lessen the impact.

12:13

Speaker 3

Yeah. So, I mean, it's a pretty sustainable industry from, to start with because we in plywood cannot be made on recycled materials because we use wood. In this case, we use veneer. Right. That we peel ourselves or that we purchase in the open market. But in our manufacturing process, we use 100% renewable electricity. We use close to 100% removal heat as well. That comes from the byproducts from our operations for biomass. So it doesn't get much more efficient than that. Right. And much better. And also our carbon, our products are carbon positive because there are good products, they capture more carbon than the one that released into the atmosphere. So every single ton of plywood that we sell out there in the market is capturing well over.

13:03

Speaker 3

Sorry, I took our units like 500 kg of CO2 being captured in each of these cubic meters of wood that we saw out there. Right. And this is. And so, I mean, there is a move towards sustainability everywhere in the industry. But some types of products are gaining market share with sort of false claims of sustainability tell me that they are less unsustainable than other alternatives. But the real thing about wood is that it's really sustainable. It's a sustainable material that grows well, that keeps growing, that it can be sustainably harvested into the future. It is not an endless material as any other. So we must make a wise use of it and we must integrate it into the most circular economy or the most secure process, manufacturing process as possible.

14:05

Speaker 3

But there are not that many materials out there and we are really good with engineering and AI and anything, but we cannot really beat trees at this. They create wood that captures carbon out of, you know, the energy from the sun, whatever they come from via their root systems. And so we cannot really replicate any material at the scale that wood can be. And also with this sustainable impact, you know, so I think, you know, in this trend towards sustainability, green building, industrialized housing and, you know, more the use of more green materials, I think wood will have a big part of it, but I also think woods will have a big park in other applications in life. Right. Not only in construction.

14:59

Speaker 2

No, absolutely. But I know there's sometimes a need for like a. Maybe it's a lead project or maybe it's a, you know, a project in Europe and different certifications, like, are you sometimes asked for EPDs and just information on how is this sourced and what are you doing? Are you seeing more and more of that or is it just implied that, you know, these projects, you know, are using a sustainable Material. Just kind of curious. How much documentation are you being asked for these days?

15:29

Speaker 3

Honestly, less than I wish. Because we invest a lot of time, effort and money into, you know, having. Well, we have a bunch of certifications, but we have environmental product declarations, the EPDs, as you mentioned, for our products. Since many years ago we measured the carbon footprint of our company, scope 1, 2, 3, since scope 1 and 2 over 10 years now. We started with scope 3 a few years back and we have all these commitments towards sustainability, but we don't see as much pressure from the customers on this front. You see that maybe architects and designers are very involved with the trend, but then the intermediate steps in the supply chain, you know, sometimes this drive is lost. I think as another manufacturer is really making a push for this.

16:27

Speaker 3

But regulation definitely also making a push, particularly here in Europe where we have a hub for regulation, as

you know. But you know, in the whole supply chain things will move faster. And we must also be aware that we play in a role market, you know, where there are different rules in the game. If you operate in Europe or the US you are not playing by the same rules. Whereas if you are operating in some other parts of the world where there could be deforestation, there could be forced labor, etc. Etc. And many times these type of products still not in the same supply chains. And that's this kind of.

17:10

Speaker 2

Thank you. And I want our listeners ask for this documentation, right? Have a conversation, talk to your manufacturers, your building product manufacturers, like, you know, you're putting in the work here and it can lead to, you know, say look, this is helping make you project more eco friendly. So. Okay, well, let's look at the future. Oscar, what's next? What are you reading up on in this esg, this green building movement? What's next?

17:36

Speaker 3

I mean, I really wish that there's a big push in the demand for our products and good based products overall, you know, with all these trends and so on. Because there is a lot of talk and there are definitely some products out there, you know, that are signing, let's say. Well, there are examples of, you know, large timber buildings, skyscrapers and so on. But this is not, you know, that's when I talk about construction, but it's not the case in every single application. And wood products are also being displaced in some applications just because of price or even sometimes because of recyclability by other types of raw materials. And many of them be plastics.

18:24

Speaker 3

And this doesn't make much sense, you know, and on the Other end, I think we need also to focus on where we source our raw materials and you know, rely on trustworthy suppliers and trustworthy origin just to make sure, you know, that our supply chains are as compliant as possible. As green as possible. Right?

18:50

Speaker 2

Yeah, no, the entire supply chain. You know, it's one thing if we talk briefly about scope one and two emissions, maybe scope three. You know, I'm sure you're doing a lot of work there too, but you know, is this making you change anything? Is it, is it being asked for? Like, how far upstream do you go? What, what's your thoughts on scope 12 versus 3?

19:12

Speaker 3

Scope 1 and 2, we decreased those that have fears top of my head by close to 80% since our baseline year, which was 2019. So we did a big order there which was mostly driven towards say, you know, investing in the use of renewable energy. But now we see that our largest footprint or the largest of our products is the remaining footprint is scope three. And scope three is harder, you know, because it falls outside of your own company. So it's mostly ties with your suppliers. In the case of our industry, it's mostly on the chemical footprint. You know, we glue our products with binders. These binders are resin based and they are DEI from fossil fuels. Many of them, the chemicals that are being used in the resins and those definitely have more of an impact.

20:09

Speaker 3

So we have a lot of research going on and we have also launched some of our products like our natural mind product, which do use alternative materials, alternative chemicals for these glues which are bio based, to eliminate that part of the production process that was tied into fossil fuels and make product as bio based as possible, as close to 100% bio, even if it's an engineered product. So it's not a solid piece of wood. It obviously has a binding into it that binds different layers. But if we can make this glue as green as possible, we'll make the whole product as green as possible. And that's what we try to do with our Natu 1 product, for example. We have other R and D products, R D projects related to this.

21:12

Speaker 2

Wow, that's quite improved, man. Way to go. You got a big footprint, moving a lot of material and those are impressive numbers. So something you should be proud of.

21:23

Speaker 4

All right, real talk, you just delivered a LEED certified building saved energy, Reduced carbon, Optimized daylighting, and then you slap a tiny generic plaque on the wall like it's a participation trophy. Come on. With buildingplaques.com you can actually show off the brains behind the building. Your scorecard, your strategies, your team, the stuff that made the project great. Architects, engineers, contractors. This is your mic drop moment in plaque four. They're fully customizable. Look sharp enough for your lobby and take like a few minutes to design. If you did the hard work, don't hide it behind a boring plaque. Go to buildingplaques.com and build a plaque that actually earns lead and inspires twice.

22:13

Speaker 2

All right, well, let's move to the kind of rapid fire part of our interview. Oscar, this is great. Let's get to know you more. What would you say is your specialty or gift? What are you really good at?

22:22

Speaker 3

Well, I become very interested in a lot of topics, which is both a scene and a nightmare sometimes, especially these days, with the support of AI, I think my brain is going to explode one day, you know, getting exposed to all the information. But, but yeah, I think this industry is so interesting. There are so many things to learn out there, you know, from the raw material all the way from the sourcing, the knowledge of the species on the wood, on the product and the applications. It's like, you know, it humbles you every single day. You know, the more you learn, the more you know that you don't know enough. So you need to keep learning. And I think this is a fundamental part in our industry, you know, keeping us being interested, you know, and keep the pace.

23:12

Speaker 3

You know, sometimes it's, it's really, it's. It's really tough. But I think that's something also very motivating, you know, because if you don't have something, you don't learn something new, well, you're kind of feels stagnant. I would say definitely smell that industry that feels that way.

23:30

Speaker 4

Yeah.

23:31

Speaker 2

Well, that's good to kind of reflect on what are some of your gifts and strengths and what have other people said and how do you use it, you know, use it for good. Do you have any good habits or routines, Oscar?

23:42

Speaker 3

Well, I think. Well, it's. It's harder with this a small kid, but I would say that.

23:47

Speaker 2

No, no sleep. Yeah, you got no sleep.

23:50

Speaker 3

Besides, that's another great habit, you know, but spending time in the outdoors or just growing your own. I have my own vegetable garden, tomatoes and so on and on, those type of things. And in the future, I would like to also expose my kid to it, you know. Yeah. And just, you know, that exposure into the outdoors, hiking, you know, I think this. Well, the more that you are out there, definitely, the definitely better, you know, and the better that you will also understand life and how things operate. And, you know, these days, we sometimes see conflict, you know, between, you know, rural areas or urban areas about some of the use of natural resources or how do we understand nature and our role as humans into it. And I think a lot of it is.

24:41

Speaker 3

Relates to this, that we have somehow lost the connection, you know, to nature, to. To the ground or even to the supply chains where, like, how do our products, how they are manufactured, where they come from? So where is that milk coming from? You know, and so we need. We need keeping that connection to the land and to the ingredient, connection to nature.

25:07

Speaker 2

It's so important. It's calming and just reminds us why we're doing this work. And as we learned earlier, a little Rio ha definitely helps too. So get. All right, well, let's keep moving. This is exciting. I'm a fan of the bucket list. Oscar. Not everybody has a bucket list, but if you were to have a bucket list, what are one or two things maybe you'd put on the bucket list?

25:28

Speaker 3

You said this bucket list, like things to do, right?

25:31

Speaker 2

Yeah, things to do. You know, some people it's travel. Some it's adventure. Some it's write a book. I don't know. What's something you definitely want to do? A place you want to go, A place you want to revisit one or two things on the bucket list.

25:44

Speaker 1

Yeah.

25:44

Speaker 3

I will say a long hike and hopefully one with my family one day, either in the Pyrenees Alps or some other, like, beautiful mountain. Okay. Out there. That's definitely on the. On the bucket list.

25:57

Speaker 2

And the Spanish Pyrenees.

25:59

Speaker 4

Spanish.

26:00

Speaker 2

Bernice.

26:00

Speaker 3

I do love the Alps as well. The Rockies are also majestic. You know, I only spent a very little time.

26:08

Speaker 2

Don't forget, you've got the El Camino. You can do that too, but you.

26:13

Speaker 3

Know that one passes right in front of my door. So you don't do it. One day I have to do it.

26:20

Speaker 2

One of my business mentors here in Atlanta, where I live, Tim Fulton, he's done the El Camino three times. You can start in different places, but it's takes him a month, you know, and he loves going through the villages, so.

Okay. But you want the mountain hikes, a long mountain hike. That's a good bucket list item. Anything else, though, you'd put on the bucket list?

26:41

Speaker 3

Yeah, I mean, I haven't served this with anyone. I would say, well, you know, like, you know, work in the wood industry and so on, and. And one day I would like to find a time really to work with wood, you know, on a. As a hobby. It's not that easy. You know, you live in an apartment as you have the big houses that are more going on there in. In the U.S. but, you know, just spending some more time with the material, being able to craft something more expert. We have done until now. I think that will be. That will be beautiful. I mentioned the connection, you know, to the nature before, and I think these days of, you know, computers and online meetings and all of that, I think many people are also, you know, missing this connection with Kathmandu and so.

27:31

Speaker 3

So to say. But, yeah, I mean, some of these plans have been postponed by recent decisions in life. Kids, you know, take a lot of time from us.

27:43

Speaker 2

I hear you. It's. Well, it's this thing called life. Let's just be intentional. Make time. Sometimes the bucket list items are something you could do tomorrow, but you want to wait till the time is right, you know, so that's good. So just a couple more questions. This is great. You know, is there a book you'd recommend to our listeners? It doesn't have to be about buildings or ESG, or it could just be maybe a podcast or a documentary. Just something. Hey, I got something out of this. You might want to check it out.

28:09

Speaker 3

Oh, wow. Let me think about this one. You know, something that is readily available out there. There were some books out here that really marked my childhood, but I don't think those would be ready to be available out there. Well, I remember the. This is more of a teenager, you know, book, but on this Jack London, you know, adventure. Oh, my God, that was. I will create all these stories, you know, being out there in the Yukon, you know, combining. Yeah, I remember the movies that I would create in my mind about that. And, you know, I kept those landscapes to. And that's definitely my bucket list also.

28:53

Speaker 2

All right.

28:54

Speaker 3

Like Alaska or like Yukon in Canada and so on those, you know, landscapes out there.

29:02

Speaker 2

Okay, well, we'll put some of those books like, you know, the Call of the Wild and White Fang. Those were some of the more popular Jack London books. So we'll put those links. Those are great. Actually, I enjoyed the Call of the Wild when I was young, so I'm glad you reminded us. That's, you know, that's great, man. All right, last two things as we wrap up. One is if you look back on your career so far, Oscar, is there anything you wish you'd have learned earlier or any career advice you wish someone would have told you earlier?

29:32

Speaker 3

It's really good question, you know.

29:34

Speaker 2

Well, I've done 450 interviews, so I'm getting a little better at it. Good question.

29:42

Speaker 3

If I could talk to younger soul, you know, I would dunk to ask, you know, as much as possible.

29:51

Speaker 2

Yeah, yeah. Notice the question isn't regrets. You know, most people don't. It's like, this helped make me who I am. But just, gosh, is there something you wish you'd have known earlier? Some of my podcast guests wish they'd have told themselves or heard, hey, take the chance, take the risk. You know, believe in what you want to do or learn this earlier and build up confidence. I don't know, what do you wish you'd have heard earlier?

30:12

Speaker 3

Take the risk or even take the risk of asking, you know, or getting close to people, to these people that will become mentors or to the people that really have knowledge. Because sometimes we are in our late, you know, close to 20s, you know, you're getting educated and so on. You, you know, you just take on knowledge. You assume that you are learning. But if you don't really, you know, obtain this critical point of view, I think, I mean, this is sort of unrelated and saying two things out here, you know, but especially into the future generations that would be exposed to, you know, endless knowledge just with access to artificial intelligence, like creating your own critical thinking from the very beginning, and that can only be done via your own reading.

31:07

Speaker 3

You're talking with people, you're socializing, you know, even memorizing or too, which maybe doesn't make much sense with AI, but I think it still does. You know, I think if how this question to a younger soul, like 20 years ago to a younger self, reverse today, I think will be extremely different because we are going to change a lot as humans into the future just by this, you know, incremental exposure into technology. Well, and this interaction with technology, because before you can call sound, but now you can have a conversation, that's a whole different story.

31:50

Speaker 2

No, it's, you know, I can tell if we could hang out, we'd have fun, right? It's about storytelling. Life's about seasons, life's about the right questions and all that means, hey, we gotta stop and think sometimes, right? Don't just do, do, busy, busy. And I'm pointing the finger at myself. I've got a pretty busy calendar. But, yeah, I like what you're saying. And that can affect Our mission driven work here. All right, well, last question. It's related. Let's say someone's listening, Oscar, and they're really excited to hear your story. Maybe they're just now jumping into the ESG and the green building movement. Any words of encouragement for someone just now jumping in as we come to a close?

32:28

Speaker 3

Well, I think it's a super interesting topic on the ESE part. I will recommend to focus specifically on something, you know, because if not, it's very vague. So you need to focus on a sector or a specific thing within sustainability. Because if not, we thought we get into vague terms and everything is sustainable. And that's not really true in many cases. So trying to become an expert on something, trying to become an expert in a specific industry, in a specific sector, you know, because that's. I mean, nobody is really an expert in yet. But try to learn as much as possible about something, because if you are doing generalistic on this, on the environmental world, I think you. You are missing a lot of concepts.

33:15

Speaker 2

Okay? Become that expert. You know, understand what SME. Subject matter expert means. There's a joke with subject matter experts we can wrap up on, but some courts say you're an expert if you've read two books on the subject. So let's just make sure we do a little better than that. Let's go practice it. Let's make a difference. And so everybody listening. Hey, make sure you connect here with Oscar on LinkedIn. Check out all the really cool work they're doing at Guernica. If you're out there in Spain, make sure you look them up. And Oscar, I just really appreciate you being on today. This is great.

33:49

Speaker 3

Thanks, Charlie. It was a great interview. I'm not very used to this related things, you know, but I really appreciate it. I think it was really nice.

33:57

Speaker 2

You did great. All right, well, everyone connect with Oscar and thank you for your time.

34:04

Speaker 4

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