

Entrepreneur and LEED Fellow Guido Petinelli from Brazil

Transcript

Introduction ([00:01](#)):

Welcome to Green Building Matters, the original and most popular podcast focused on the green building movement. Your host is Charlie Cichetti, one of the most credentialed experts in the green building industry, and one of the few to be honored as a LEED Fellow. Each week Charlie welcomes a green building professional from around the globe to share their war stories, career advice, and unique insight into how sustainability is shaping the built environment. So settle in, grab a fresh cup of coffee and get ready to find out why green building matters.

Charlie ([00:33](#)):

Hi everybody. Welcome to the next episode of the Green Building Matters podcast. I've got another green building expert with us this time from Brazil. We've got a LEED Fellow. I've got Guido Petinelli here, and I can't wait to hear more of his story. I know he is in a few different countries and really his business, all things green buildings in that part of Brazil, how are you doing today?

Guido ([00:56](#)): I'm pretty good. Thanks for the invite.

Charlie ([00:59](#)):

Oh, you're welcome. We've crossed paths a couple places and just wanted to get on here and let everybody learn a little more about you. What I do for all of my podcast guests is I say, Hey, take us back. Where did you grow up and go to school?

Guido ([01:13](#)):

I was born in Southern Brazil, but immigrated to Canada as a teenager and that's where I was raised and went to school and university. First I lived in Toronto, then moved to Montreal for university where I got my master's degree in architecture. I never really expected to go back to Brazil, but the 2008 financial crisis came about and an opportunity arose to come back to

my birthplace and start a green building company. And that was about 14 years ago. We've been around for a little while now.

Charlie ([01:56](#)):

Sometimes things happen for a reason. It's hard to see it at the moment, but that's a little bit of how I started my green building companies too. It was some results coming out of the 2008 changes in recession, and I started my first company in May, 2009, so we're sharing that.

Guido ([02:14](#)):

It's probably only a couple of months away from when I started

Charlie ([02:19](#)):

Tell us about architecture. Did you know you wanted to be an architect? Were you around buildings growing up? How'd you make that decision?

Guido ([02:28](#)):

I've always been obsessed with buildings ever since I was a little kid. Everybody who met me said, this kid's gonna be an architect one day. This kid's gonna be an architect one day. Both my parents are entrepreneurs. My dad is in manufacturing. My mother was in retail for a long time, and on the first day of architecture school, one of the professors made a joke. How does an architect become a millionaire? He starts out as a billionaire. At that point I'm like, oh my God, what the hell am I doing?

Charlie ([03:05](#)):

There's a few other professions you might say that about, but that's a tough one to hear as an aspiring architect. You had this obsession with buildings and you studied architecture. Tell us even in your early career, did you start right outta college working at a firm?

Guido ([03:24](#)):

I wasn't gonna be an architect fairly early on, but architecture education was fantastic. Working, I was in groups and I'm not a classroom kind of guy, so being hands on, I became a model making shop rat. And that was fun and that was the point of it. But in my last year of undergrad, I stumbled upon a studio that was about green building. I had no idea what it was about, but I was lucky enough to have an adjunct professor, Kevin

Hinds. Kevin is founding board member of the Canada Green Building Council, was chair of the US Green Building Council. When I met him, he was just elected and eventually he went on to the World Green Building Council and I went with him. When he took over the chairmanship of the World Green Building Council, I was graduating and I worked with him and worked there for two years before moving back to Brazil. Which is how I got my start in the Green Building Movement.

Charlie ([04:28](#)):

Wow. Just that access to maybe not just programs like LEED, but literally a view in the World Green Building Council. To our listeners, LEED may come from the US Green Building Council, a 501 nonprofit, but that rolls up into the World Green Building Council and what do you do in all these different countries? I think the common goal is green buildings and decarbonization. Tell us more about the World Green Building Council.

Guido ([04:55](#)): It's really about how we accelerate the transformation of the construction industry towards green practices. The construction industry is about 10% of global GDP. Almost one in every 10 human beings works in the construction industry. We have a huge impact on the environment and we've seen very little productivity. I have a greater affinity for engineering and love architecture, but in the end, I end up in the engineering field. For me, it's a question of productivity. How do we do more? How do we do better with less? How do we improve resource efficiency and the World Green Building Council was a great platform because you have like-minded people, and I had a chance to work helping get these young GBCs at the time. Now they're all grown up, but GBCs in Latin America and in Europe, were coming up. My job was with Kevin's guidance to tutor them along. It was fun to see this at the beginning, how quickly this was spreading. And personally, I eventually became a board member of Brazil, GBC, and that's how things happened was one important reason for me being back here. This was 2006, 2007. If it hadn't been for the Green Building Council movement, I probably wouldn't be in Brazil right now.

Charlie ([06:22](#)):

I'm connecting all the dots there. But a great mentor to also have access to that literally took you to the global view and you helped get this going in different countries, man. Speaking of mentors, anyone else that maybe you looked up to along the way in your career so far? Or maybe someone opened a door for you?

Guido ([06:43](#)):

I was a lucky guy because at the time that I was graduating both Kevin Hines and Houston Newbank. Houston Newbank was a secretary for the World Green Building Council. His former RMI is a great guy. Houston was a major influence, obviously Kevin, someone that I keep in touch with, and he was changing careers. He was starting integral engineering at the time that I was starting Elli. Those two guys have had a major impact outside of that, obviously, my dad, who's been a business guy for over 40 years who runs a manufacturing plant in Brazil who spoils his kids. He went to build a new factory. It's a LEED zero energy LEED, zero carbon LEED platinum, a manufacturing facility in southern Brazil. He does everything that I want and I get to benefit from all his wisdom.

Charlie ([07:52](#)): Amazing. You put a little pressure, this is what you should do on that next building, so that's fantastic.

Guido ([07:59](#)): He's the lab, he's the Guinea pig.

Charlie ([08:01](#)):

Test it there to bring it to other clients. Green building sustainability you jumped to the World Green Building Council when you ended up back in Brazil. Was it LEED, was it just energy efficiency? What were you doing in the early days as you started your business?

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

I think what clicked with me was building performance and I think there's no truer expression of building performance in terms of trying to bring it to the non-architect engineering crowd when we talk about cost. And so Armis work on tunneling through the cost barrier and the idea that increasing productivity is increasing the output for every unit of input. That our green building is a better building for the price of a conventional building. It

doesn't have to cost more. There's enough inefficiency with the way we conventionally design, build and operate buildings, that if we capture a little bit of that, we can drastically change the way we, we, we think about the built environment without necessarily thinking about how long and how many years does it pay for itself. That trade offs and exploring how whole systems think that kind of outlook.

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

That's what got me hooked. The idea that we're talking about innovation, which is how do we reach ever higher levels of performance? When I talk about performance, I think it's the ample spectrum, efficiency, comfort, and wellbeing and environmental impact. It's how we measure the quality of a building. For me, performance and if we can improve on every one of those fronts, the control factor is: am I spending more to improve performance or am I getting better performance for every unit of cost? And the work we do is basically focused on that.

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

I like where you took high performance buildings. It's not just really efficient buildings. There's so many other things you could classify there. Tell us about buildings though. In Brazil, as I learned more about Latin America, I'm based in the US but fortunately I've been able to do some travel for training and teachings and some projects. Brazil is obviously a huge country, but also a very large economy there. What's kinda easier to do when it comes to green buildings and what's still a little harder to do than it should be with green buildings in your market?

Guido ([10:44](#)):

Just to give your audience perspective, Brazil is larger than the continental United States in terms of land mass to exclude Alaska. Brazil is actually larger than the continental US. It's difficult to generalize the same way. It's difficult to generalize anything about the US but something that I think more recently fits with what you've asked is I think Southern Brazil, which is not tropical, it's subtropical. We are in that Goldilocks kind of situation where it's not hot enough, it's not cold enough, it's not too dry, it's not too

humid. It rains pretty much all year round. It's not concentrated in any one period. I think that has played a factor in how we've been able to advance with the concept of net zero buildings down here. The world's first LEED zero energy, and the world's first LEED zero water are Ku Chiba sub in Brazil. These buildings were operating at zero way before LEED, or at least zero came around. Part of that is because we've got the right environmental conditions to explore and experiment. Things are within reach for projects in this region.

Charlie ([11:58](#)):

Thank you for that. You're right. I think we take it for granted sometimes, just what you've actually got right there. And then that milder climate is allowing you to probably have some naturally ventilated buildings and really get to that zero. So that's fantastic. As you look back on your career, what are some of your proudest accomplishments so far?

Guido ([12:22](#)):

Anyone who starts a business would share into that. If you start a business that depends on human capital I think my proudest achievement is my team and the culture we've built. It's certainly personally a huge highlight. I think when we think about where we've gone working on projects that are focused on children, net zero energy, WELL, platinum certified schools, hospitals and now even a theme park, there's no way you can't smile when you work with these projects. It's those projects that make life purposeful. I'd say professionally is being able to do what I love, which is work with buildings, innovate, being at the cutting edge, working with projects that are reaching the highest levels of performance and being recognized for it. But working in projects for children has that special kind of aspect, if I could, that's all I do. Schools, children's hospitals, theme parks, that kind of stuff. It's the best.

Charlie ([13:42](#)):

Thank you. That's really that's really great. You've been able to work on all that and you're passionate about it. So fast forward to the present day, tell us more about today your company of about 14 years maybe even your role

and what keeps you busy in your role and any cool projects you're working on?

Guido ([14:01](#)):

We're an engineering consulting firm out of Brazil. We work exclusively on green building projects for about 80 engineers. I am now the chairman of the company. I don't have an executive role anymore. I work with clients to help set more audacious goals and work with the team to find creative solutions to reach even higher. I think that describes what I'm doing right now. I've got a great team in place that keeps the building the business running, and I get to work with clients on these special projects. Been working with Coca-Cola for over 10 years now, and their first LEED, zero energy, LEED zero carbon LEED zero weight site in the world is in a small town in the interior of Brazil. I think that's work that we're incredibly excited about.

Guido ([15:00](#)):

The idea that we've got an industrial facility with a hundred percent onsite renewable energy using less water to produce Coca-Cola than any other plant in the world. That's something that these are the types of projects that gets our blood racing these days and working on some, working with clients to reach scale. We do a lot of feasibility studies, financial feasibility studies, and when we talk about net zero energy and carbon these days, what I like to say is if you make ends meet for one school be, it meets for all schools. If you make ends meet for one hospital, it meets for all hospitals. And so working with the clients that have large portfolios, retail portfolios, the schools, financial institutions to scale up and help them reach their 20, 30 goals much sooner than 2030, what we like to say it, why wait until 2030? That's, that's the, the what's happening in the lab right now at Benell

Charlie ([16:13](#)):

Land. A lot of fun projects, and I love how your role has changed. That's what we want entrepreneurs to continue and need us differently. You've said a lot of engineers I've noticed in South America especially, but maybe in Latin America do this green building consulting work there. It seems

like, and this is for our global listeners, it seems like in your market, help us out that you really drive the sustainability conversation. It's really expected for you to help with sustainable design. Maybe here in the US we might be fortunate that an architect has a lot of LEED professionals and maybe they drive it, then you hire a LEED consultant and then we drive it more. But, it seems like in your region, it's part of your job to get involved early and really drive sustainability. And some of that is kind of the engineering technical side of it. Is that true?

Guido ([17:08](#)):

It certainly is, but one of the, comparing the North American experience with my experience, and I like to say to what I've done in Brazil, I probably would have a hard time doing in North America, which is we wanna have a direct relationship with the client, with the whomever owns, occupies and operates the building. In North America, I think if we did that, we'd be excommunicated from the architect's world. But I was too young and too ignorant that we couldn't do it. We knocked on doors and we built relationships directly with clients and in that process we became advisors. I think in that sense we are a true consulting firm more so than engineers in the sense of how we operate having the engineering know-how and expertise engineers are problem solvers. I call my guys creative and audacious engineers. We're not there to do the engineering that your local engineer can provide. You only hire us if you want to reach higher. And that is something that worked for us. As change agents establish direct contact with the client, set us aside. I don't think I've categorized us as an architecture engineering player. We're really consultants working to advise clients, and we have the engineering know-how so that we can help achieve these moral D goals.

Charlie ([19:01](#)):

Thanks for showing us how it works in your region. It is different here. You're a LEED Fellow, I think you got that 2018. What does that mean to you? It must mean you've advocated for LEED, worked on several projects, of course, but what does that mean and how did that come to be for you?

Guido ([19:21](#)): It's a bit of work to fill out those forms, and so I didn't know how much work it would be otherwise I probably wouldn't have done it. But when LEED Fellow came around, Kevin Hines was in the first class of League Fellows, and he asked that I write him one of the endorsement role letters. And I told him, listen, one day you're gonna have to nominate me. And one year I said, listen's about time let's do it. But it was like a week before the deadline, I had no idea how much work that was. And because I asked him, I felt embarrassed. I'm like, listen, this year it's not gonna happen, but I promise next year I'll be ready. And that's how it happened. It's fun.

Guido ([20:11](#)):

I'm a big fan. I like to say that LEED is best when it's aspirational. It's human nature to wanna improve your own self, your own condition. You get up every morning, you work hard to get a promotion, to make more money, to provide your family with better opportunities, education, more comfort, wellbeing and so on. I think that any program or initiative that works to encourage and promote this human kind of instinct when it's for a noble because like it is the green building movement, I'm all for it. It's a good thing that I didn't know how much paperwork was involved because otherwise I wouldn't have done it. But now that I've done it, I'm glad I did.

Charlie ([21:04](#)):

Congrats. You're deserving. For those listening though, your tier one LEED credential is the LEED grant associate. Your tier two is the LEED AP with a specialty. Five specialties. But the LEED Fellow you can't test into, you have to be peer nominated four to six letters talking about really a decade of all of this green building work. And then still it's very selective, so somehow they let me into the club too. I love this. Next question, if you've been doing this a while, I've been doing this a while, but what's next? What's exciting? What are you reading up on what's next in this green building movement?

Guido ([21:44](#)):

I think a couple things for us are exciting. I think one of the hard to reach sectors, or net zero or net positive for regenerative is the real estate market.

And now we're seeing discussions around it and the idea of developing both the technical solutions, but also the business models around it. I think there's gonna be a lot of innovation around how we structure these things financially. And I'm not talking only about energy. Implementing net zero waste in residential buildings is something that I think in five years we'll be doing it and we'll have demystified it. And so I think there's some cool stuff going on at least how we look at it, which is how do we bring to market these concepts and how do we scale them up on the health, comfort and wellbeing side of things?

Guido ([22:51](#)):

Net zeros are great because zeros absolute it. You either are or you aren't. You either met your goal or you didn't. And that idea of measuring results if you think about LEED is a big promise right now, it's an IOU. And if you never check, how do you really know you're getting what you paid for and the idea of zero energy water waste you've gotta have the data and to back it up. I think that's critical to scale up the green building movement. We've gotta be able to quantify the benefit and deliver on what we promise, but for health and wellbeing, that becomes a lot harder. We're focused and excited and exploring, and we don't know if it's gonna work or how well it's gonna work, but we've just become, well PT o a well performing testing test a well performance testing organization, and we're applying it to ourselves and to our clients, and now there's more interest. It'll be interesting to see the lessons we learn as we also apply this and learn from these experiences.

Charlie ([24:02](#)):

I agree with a lot of what you're seeing coming at us, a few things kind of coming out of the pandemic related to healthy buildings. It's not just about better air quality and cleaning. Let's get back to what I call proactive wellness real estate. Just get back to the really important well features that maybe we set aside a little bit. You've mentioned some, well, platinum schools, some other projects.

Guido ([24:28](#)):

But I'd like to think that we learned a few lessons from LEED. Let's keep the promise phase and let's try to understand how we can quantify this, how we can measure how we can bring some expression, I heard it from Michael Bloomberg first. I'm sure it's not his, but you know, in God we trust everybody else. Please bring data. We've learned a lot in 20 years, 20 plus years of building certifications. I think a data driven approach that is committed to results can be tested and verified. If we can advance on that end, whether it be energy efficiency, water waste, health, wellbeing and health and waste is gonna be hard. If we can advance on that, I think we'll make real progress.

Charlie ([25:15](#)):

I hadn't heard a quote like that. That's good. We do a lot of work in New York City and, and Bloomberg did a lot with local laws and energy efficiency, retrocommissioning and so much more there. Let's get to know you a little more for our listeners. What would you say is your specialty or gift?

Guido ([25:34](#)):

Attracting crazy clients and convincing them to do crazy things.

Charlie ([25:39](#)):

Do repeat clients almost think what's the next crazy idea you have? They kinda get you challenging new things. Are you seeing some existing buildings LEED for existing buildings or E S G or gre? I've noticed a lot of new construction, green building work across Latin America, but it seems like the existing building portfolios are warming up in your region?

Guido ([26:07](#)):

We do a lot of engineering work, so energy efficiency, comfort and wellbeing, especially industrial clients that are not pursuing certification, that's an important part of our business. As far as the traditional green building, when we think about it hasn't caught on. I think the problem is there's no budget available for, it's difficult to engage clients in that discussion. It's something that we've done. Brazil's first LEED zero carbon

building is an existing building, a LEED oem, ARC certified building, but these are the exceptions and not the rule.

Charlie ([26:55](#)):No, thanks for giving us that peak. Okay. Do you have any good habits or routines you could share with us?

Guido ([27:03](#)):

I woke up early. I'm a gardener, I'm a woodworker, but I do not do sports. I drink coke every day. I'm more of a warm buffet kind of guy, so no, no healthy habits for me. But if you enjoy gardening, woodworking, and that counts as healthy habits, I guess that that would be

Charlie ([27:22](#)):

I love that man. It's probably a nice mental escape, a little bit of exercise in the garden, maybe some healthy eating, so it balances out. I'm in Atlanta, Georgia. That's where Coca-Cola's headquarters are. If you're a fan, you have to come to the Coca-Cola Museum secret recipe.

Guido ([27:41](#)):I know, I know. I am a fan.

Charlie ([27:43](#)):

As we get to know you a little bit more , maybe we could discuss a bucket list. I'm a fan of a bucket list. I'm kind of curious, what are one or two things maybe on your bucket list?

Guido ([27:57](#)):Let me think. There are a few places that I haven't visited that I'm keen on visiting, especially Japan as an amateur woodworker. You can understand why.

Charlie ([28:07](#)):

It's adventure. Some it's to travel, some write a book, learn, learn another hobby. You've got a couple good hobbies. Thanks for sharing. But Japan, my middle son, he really wants to go to Japan, so we're trying to plan that in the next couple years. He's really into that culture. He is even studying Japanese on duolingo, so I'm really proud of him.

Charlie ([28:31](#)):

Is there a book or a documentary or something you'd recommend to our listeners? Does it have to be about buildings?

Guido ([28:38](#)):

I'm a big fan of biographies and I think true books, one is a biography and the other one's a business book that for me, were important. One is a biography of Winston Churchill, by Roy Jenkins Kings. I could list a number of biographies that premiere important, but it's a great book. It's a big book. It covers an incredible period of time with an incredible character, and there's lots to take away from that. I'm a big fan of Good to Great by Collins. It's a book that really impacted how I think about business and what matters about business by Jim Collins. I'll share with you guys that he has a concept of what it requires to be a great leader of a company that goes from being good to great and he calls it leader level five. And when I read it, I said, listen I wasn't born one, it's not part of my nature, but I'm gonna try to learn it and practice and build habits and I've greatly benefited from it. Good great's a good book to read for anyone who's starting out a new company.

Charlie ([30:11](#)):

Fantastic. Recommendations: we'll put links to those books in our podcast show notes and good to great. We've read that within my company, too. It's not just the leaders or business owners, it's the entrepreneurial team too that really wants to make this a great company. You're having a lot of fun, you've got a good culture, but something can help you break through to become that great company. We'll put links in our notes here. Great recommendations. Just two more questions as we start to wind down. When you look back on your career, is there any career advice you wish you'd have known earlier?

Guido ([30:47](#)):

I'll share with your audience career advice that I got pretty early on, and I probably only understood the meaning of it later, but it definitely, definitely was the best advice I got as I started out in the green building movement. I share it with whomever I can, whenever I can, which is don't waste time with non-believers. We don't have to convince everyone. The green building movement started out small. All we have to do is identify the innovators.

We've gotta sift through the hay to find the needles, and those are the guys that don't need to be convinced, and we should focus our efforts and our energies in doing fantastic things with those people and the rest will follow. I think by not wasting time with non-believers, I saved a lot of time and energy that was better spent doing things that were more productive and fruitful and it was the best advice I got.

Charlie ([32:01](#)):

That's really good. That's really good advice to all our listeners. Pay attention there. We don't have to be convinced, everyone can still make change. All right, last question. Let's say someone listening right now is getting really inspired by your story and they're just now either making a career change or maybe they're a young professional jumping into green buildings. Any words of encouragement for them?

Guido ([32:22](#)):

Just do it. I mean, it's a great community. I mean, it's a community of people that have a sense of purpose. It's a community of people who wanna change the world. So you've gotta be a little silly to believe in that. And the community does, if you've ever been to a green building, and you probably haven't if you're just starting out, but I describe it as evangelical, right? It's the community. And so if you are considering it, if it's something that you are curious about, I mean, there's if you enjoy buildings or you've got a skillset or a vocation that aligns with, with the industry I don't think you can go wrong. I think it's how the future will be. It's already the present. We're surfing the E s G kind of wave, but just do it right. You, I'm gonna steal it from Nike, but that's, that's the advice. I give it a jump. Just do it, Charlie ([33:20](#)):

Jump in. ESG is booming right now. It feels like all of a sudden it's just, just speeding up. Hey everybody connect with on LinkedIn. Check out all the great work he and his team are doing all throughout Brazil and, and other regions. And just wanna say thanks for being on the podcast today.

Guido ([33:36](#)): I appreciate it. It was a pleasure,

Speaker 4 ([33:38](#)):

Fun. I just wanna 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 here in this industry, or just some pro tips that we want to make sure that you are getting straight from us, straight to you.

Speaker 5 ([34:04](#)):

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