

OTEC Sao Paulo's David Douek - Driving Efficiency, Performance, and Sustainable Development | Transcript

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

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 been doing the podcast for almost six years now. It's unbelievable. It's one of the funnest things I do. Once a week, I get to interview a green building professional somewhere in the world. And today I'm coming to us from Sao Paulo down in Brazil. I've got one of the newly minted LEED Fellows. I've got David Douek here. He's the development director at OTEC. Can't wait to learn more about sustainability down there in Latin America and just kind of David's career. So, David, welcome to the podcast. How are you doing today?

David ([01:05](#)):

I'm fine, Charlie. It's a pleasure for me to be here with you today. I hope that people enjoy that I'm sharing my experience, and hopefully they're gonna take advantage of it.

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

You're gonna inspire many here. I know a little bit about your background, and I know you have a lot of credentials and experience after your name. Give us some framework about you David, take us back. Where did you grow up and where did you go to school?

David ([01:37](#)):

I grew up in Sao Paulo. I am married. My wife and I are proud parents of a lovely daughter who is crazy about singing and acting. Regarding my educational journey, it began at McKinsey University where I pursued a bachelor's degree in business administration. I believe that this course ignited my passion for the world of business. Afterward, I ventured into architecture and urbanism at the University of Sao Paulo called uspi in Brazil. I returned to USPI for a Master of Science in Business Administration. But my educational journey didn't stop there. I am currently working towards the end of a PhD in business administration at USPI as well. Wow. In addition to these formal educational experiences, I sought to enhance my skills in various additional programs such as urban analytics and big data analytics research. And I also explored programming in r at the Mathematics and Statistics Institute, gaining valuable insights into that analysis. I also took part in the real estate investment program at Jet Tulio Viga Foundation, and in 2007, I ventured to Colorado State University in the United States, of course, for a green building certification program, embracing the principles of sustainability to enhance my understanding of financial markets. I completed the financial Market Operations program at SEA as well. And lastly, I have also earned the titles of LEED AP LEED Fellow, well, AP Fetal Ambassador and Azure Expert. So this is pretty much my educational background, which has been a blend of diverse experiences, each contributing to my growth and perspective.

Charlie ([03:39](#)):

I love it. For those listening, you gotta check out David's LinkedIn profile. You're a lifelong learner. All these amazing universities, these credentials, these certificates you must just love learning. I've gotta ask part of your story business, and you're still going for more business degrees, but architecture. Did someone influence you? How'd you get the crazy idea to study architecture along with business?

David ([04:05](#)):

I believe that this has a lot to do with what we do at OTEC. Strongly believe that to improve the quality of the buildings, we have to understand what

they represent for the market. It is that in microeconomics terms buildings have to serve the society. And in general, decisions come from people who are gonna decide where to put their money. Our understanding is that technicalities and finances have to work together. So this is why I got so involved with both architecture, construction, design, and business and finances. This is the reason why I decided to pursue both of them because I thought that this way I could help my clients in a better way.

Charlie ([05:19](#)):

I love that. No, thank you for connecting. What about sustainability? I love to ask my podcast guest, David. When did sustainability or even green buildings, when did you first see that in your studies or in your career?

David ([05:33](#)):

Before I started I ran a design and construction firm for 10 years. And I started to think about what I was doing and what was the meaning of designing and building for society. And I started researching for what I could do to improve the quality of the services that we were providing at that time sustainability and the US GBC existed already in the United States, of course, and I started to research about it until I met Ms. Tass Vanek, the founder of the Brazilian Green Building Council. But at that time, the Brazilian Green Building Council didn't exist yet, but she was involved now with the foundation of it. And her name was on the US GBC website. I called her, I said, I wanna help. And we spoke for about four hours, and she introduced me to a couple of interesting guys now, involved with this industry in the United States. One of them is Professor Brian Dunbar. I went to the US to study with him. So this is when it all started I was able to find something that would fulfill my needs of improving the quality of the real estate industry in Brazil.

Charlie ([07:24](#)):

Is exciting. And sounds like a great early mentor, someone to study with. And that's kind of my next question. Who else, David maybe had some influence? Did you have any formal or informal mentors along the way?

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

In addition to Ms. Tass Vanek and professor Brian Dunbar, Mr. Michael the former owner of Architectural Energy Corporation, a firm based in Boulder, Colorado. His company was a great consulting firm and one of his colleagues at the company, one of my professors at the Institute for the Built Environment. And when I saw what they were doing there, I said, I wanna do this in Brazil. And he introduced me to Mr. Michael both. He looked at me, he said, why not? Let's do it. I spent some time with them learning everything. The American way. In American culture data is important. Procedures the standards. Culturally, technically the background I had with AC was amazing. And a couple of weeks later, I flew back to Brazil. I started the company together with who is our technical director today. Ms. Anna, she's a PhD in architecture as well. She's a great researcher. But back to Mr. Michael Ho, she decided to support our endeavor. He wanted to know the green building industry to grow. He saw an opportunity in the way I was expecting it to be. And not only we worked together, we became very close friends, even attended my wedding. So it was an amazing opportunity, an amazing history, and I'm glad it happened this way.

Charlie ([09:37](#)):

You've told us how you got into business and architecture. Let's just do one more look back on the career so far, and then we'll talk about the present day. David, what are some of your proudest achievements?

David ([09:51](#)):

I take immense pride in all of my achievements. Each one holds a special place in my heart. However, if we focus on accomplishments that have garnered recognition in the market, I would emphasize our pioneering endeavors. This includes being the first in Latin America to have a soccer stadium certified with LEED, achieving the first certification for a cultural center, and securing Brazil's first LEED platinum certification among others. I believe that blazing the trail as pioneers certainly comes with a set of challenges, but the satisfaction of overcoming them in collaboration with my team and clients was truly gratifying.

Charlie ([10:41](#)):

And you've got a lot of credentials. You love to learn, I can tell. And then you get a LEED Fellow. What has this meant to you? I know there's been a big celebration at the recent Greenbuild Conference, and what does that mean to you?

David ([10:57](#)):

A very good question. First of all, it brought me the opportunity of getting to know people like you. So this is huge for me. I believe that the clients are proud of getting to know that their consultant is one of the leaders in the market. On a personal level, I was happy to have the opportunity of looking back and seeing how much I have done. And I believe that this idea of having special recognition for those who began the industry. In my case, in the Brazilian market, it was really something to celebrate. I am pretty happy with it.

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

Congratulations. For our listeners, tier one is the LEED Green Associate exam. A hundred questions, multiple choice. And, tier two is a LEED AP with a specialty, but this tier three LEED Fellow, it's peer nominated, it's a pretty selective process. And just know this is something, if you dedicate your career to green buildings, you have to have been a LEED AP for at least 10 years. It's a really exclusive club out of 200,000 LEED professionals in the last 20 years. There's only about 360 or so LEED Fellows. Again, congratulations and thanks for telling your story on our podcast. So let's talk about the present day. Tell us about OTEC. You've told us that you had a design and construction company for 10 years, and you got into this company, OTEC. Tell us a little more about your company, your team, and what you're really good at.

David ([12:45](#)):

Well, at OTEC, I had the privilege of serving as a development director since 2007 when I founded the company. I take great pride in the achievements and contributions I have made to the company and to the green building industry. So far before my current role at OTEC as I mentioned, I worked with design and construction. When I started the firm,

I knew exactly what were the challenges. A designer, contractor, a developer, has to incorporate sustainability within the process. I believe that this is one of the reasons we established ourselves as a great consulting firm. We are not the largest, but certainly one of the most respected. But as I said, no, this is really important for me because when I see clients getting back to us for other projects, We have clients working with us for more than 10 years now. So it means a lot. And this is the part of the story. I hope I answered this question of yours.

Charlie ([14:10](#)):

I can just see your excitement about business entrepreneurship, creating jobs, and being very respected there in Brazil, which as I get to know Brazil, is a large country, large market, and a lot of sustainability. One thing I see on your bio is a lot about, WELL, so could you speak to that a little bit? Are you still seeing some, WELL, WELL HSR some, WELL, certifications post pandemic it's still a need for healthy building certifications. How's it going in Brazil?

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

It's been great, but we have to take a few steps back Charlie, because I would like listeners to bear in mind that nowadays they shouldn't only be looking at the environment or wellness. They should think about what we have already talked about ESG and our environment, social and governance. They should look at the role buildings have within a company's context. What I mean by that is usually companies interested in, for example getting more investment, they wanna show to potential investors or stakeholders in general, that they are more sustainable than the others. That the risk is lower than in other companies. So when you have this idea that the buildings are part of the organization, and if they are more sustainable, more socially aware, they are gonna help the performance of the company and where you wanna go. I believe that wellness is important, but should be incorporated in a much larger perspective. That's it.

Charlie ([16:15](#)):

That's a good read. Now, thank you for reminding us of that. What else is keeping you busy today? Any neat projects you wanna talk about?

David ([16:25](#)): We have a wide variety of projects nowadays, but I believe that what's been keeping me busy is I really try to keep my clients updated with all that is happening. For example, the LEED five , which is about to come, new certifications such as WELL equity, in addition to, WELL health and safety. As far as I'm concerned, there are still plenty of people not aware of all the possibilities they have in the market. For example, there are certifications for carbon, for energy, for water, for waste. So nowadays you don't need to certify your whole environmental impact. You can certify your carbon footprint. What I love the most is to help my clients and whoever's interested in understanding their ESG strategy regarding their facilities.

Charlie ([17:47](#)):

I know you and I have been doing green buildings a long time. It used to be one building at a time. Now it's what's your company's ESG strategy? What's your portfolio? I We've had to zoom out and now we can make a bigger difference.

David ([18:01](#)):

Speaking of that, Last week I had a meeting with GREB, for example. And for those who are not acquainted with GREB, it's not a certification though, it's an annual report I know on the portfolio level. So mostly real estate funds know, like I would pursue the high performance in this report. And so what I'm trying to say here is that when we started with LEED we were only looking at the asset we have to bear in mind that sustainability in the construction industry began with the certification of an office building. You, you are aware of that, right? So nowadays we can do whatever we want. We know with anything that's built, it can be, for example, a road, an avenue, a plaza you have the Envision certification as well for those built environments, which are not the regular floor ceiling and walls. So we need to help them with their strategy, not only with providing a certification consultant consulting services.

Charlie ([19:36](#)):

We've come a long way since that first green office, that's for sure. I love it. So let's talk about the future. What's kind of exciting to you? What are you kind of reading up on or excited about? What's kind of next in this green building movement?

David ([19:51](#)):

First of all, we have to know where we wanna be. I like to think that ideally we would have a society in which we don't need to worry about sustainability, about wellness. It's something that 's incorporated already in the design and construction process. Does it make sense Charlie then?

Yeah, but we are not there yet. Our goal, and this is why I told you that I don't wanna explain the background of how we look at things is we wanna drive the market towards this I G O situation. No, we have a long way to go, but this is what moves us and now figure, try to understand what's the ideal situation, where we are and how we can move from where we are to where we wanna be. In practical terms, this means that first of all, this is not gonna happen like magic. It's an ongoing process, it's an ongoing improvement. Those familiar with the ISO certification it's an ongoing process in which you improve from year to year. So what drives us today's help the clients increase their performance towards a concrete and a reasonable goal.

Charlie ([21:34](#)):

I'm optimistic, you've been doing this a while and you've got your LEED Fellow now and there's certain green building things in Brazil that are harder to do and certain things that are easier to do. When I interview someone outside the US I'd love to ask David just where maybe your country really gets it and where, is it still kind of hard? Is it kinda like recycling or renewables? I don't know where do you think Brazil gets it right currently with green buildings? Where do you think you could do a little better?

David ([22:04](#)):

As I said, we can always improve, but if you consider that I have been in the market for 16 years now I can tell you we have gone a long way since we

started. I remember a time when you would call suppliers asking for performance information and they would say, wow, this guy's crazy. He doesn't know, I dunno what he's talking about. And now mostly with known large and medium companies, you can call them and ask for information about heat transfer or whatever you need for your energy model, for example. And they will at least understand what you're talking about. So I believe that the main difference between the American and the Brazilian market is the level of standards and procedures and legal demands to incorporate criteria into the building design. So our hope is that in the coming years more and more procedures will be legally included to know the design and construction procedures.

Charlie ([23:29](#)):

Got it. No, well said. Let's get to know you a little more, some kind of rapid fire questions. What would you say is your specialty or gift?

David ([23:38](#)):

Well, to be sincere, I believe that my specialty or gift so far in my career could be summed up by just saying the more I've worked the luckier I am, I believe in the power of hard work and education. So to me, hard work is the key to success and achieving one goal. So probably my gift is the willingness to put in the effort required to go the extra mile.

Charlie ([24:10](#)):

Good stuff. Do you have any good habits or routines that help you?

David ([24:15](#)):

Well, the routines and reach that contribute to what I do is a toughest commitment to my goals and deep sense of respect to everyone I interact with. Whether their clients, collaborators, colleagues, or anyone else. Again, hard work is also a key component, but of all a prioritized thought selection that aligns with both my personal objectives and the goal of my clients.

Charlie ([24:45](#)):

Love it. Well, as we get to know each other a little more, you'll learn, I'm a fan of the bucket list. Some people like travel adventures, maybe you wanna write a book. What are a couple things maybe on your bucket list?

David ([24:59](#)): Well, the first one and I'm about to accomplish is to finish my PhD. I fell in love with researching and I have two passions in addition to my family, of course, which is my company and researching. So finishing my PhD is something I'm proud of. Seeing my company grow and help many other facilities, projects is something I hope I will be able to do in the future. I think that I'm a hardworking man. I love to work and see many other buildings and many other projects increase their level of sustainability. And I know it might sound like what I'm saying, but it's really from the bottom of my heart.

Charlie ([26:01](#)):

I love it. Now, travel, is there a place you've never been you want to go? Or is there a place you want to go back to? What's, what's one spot?

David ([26:09](#)):

Well, I love to travel. I've been to a few amazing places. I go quite often to the United States. I've been to Europe a few times. I've never been to Japan or China. So these are probably the next countries I'd like to visit.

Charlie ([26:33](#)):

I love it. How about books? Is there a book you'd recommend to our listeners? Maybe even a documentary? What would you recommend? Doesn't even have to be about buildings.

David ([26:44](#)):

Oh, sure. Well I'm currently reading the fourth Turning. Have you ever heard about it? It was recommended by a great friend. It's a book that proposes a theory of generational cycles in American history. It suggests that history unfolds in a repeating pattern of four turnings, high awakening, unraveling, and crisis. Each turning has characteristics and societal changes according to the theory, these turnings repeat every 80 to 100 years and can help predict and understand the dynamic of historical and societal changes. The fourth turning is characterized by a major crisis that forces society to come together and rebuild. If you observe Charlie, the current state of affairs with conflict erupting worldwide and reflect on how long ago the Second World War concluded, one could say that we may be on the cusp of

another significant turning point. Hopefully we will witness the unfolding of what lies ahead.

Charlie ([27:59](#)):

Man, I'm gonna put a link to that in the show notes. I'd heard about it, not read it. So thank you so much. Alright, David, as we start to wrap up, two final questions. I'm really enjoying getting to know you here and your story. When you look back on your career, is there any advice you wish you'd have known earlier?

David ([28:17](#)):

Well, I consider myself fortunate to have received unwavering support from my wonderful parents and amazing family close friends, and a fantastic team and dedicated mentors who we spoke about and have been my guiding light on this journey. So I genuinely have no reason to complain. I wouldn't do anything different from what I did. I'm very thankful for the support I had. And I'm happy that I don't have to face my challenges alone.

Charlie ([29:01](#)):

And last question. So let's say someone's listening, they're getting inspired by your story. Maybe they're in Latin America and they really want to get into green building. If someone's just now jumping into this movement, this green building movement that's been good to you, it's been good to me. Do you have any words of encouragement for them as we wrap up?

David ([29:20](#)):

Well, certainly I do. First, I would ask this personnel to bear in mind that the realm of green building has undergone substantial transformation. So those who believe in their ability to affect change in this world should consider entering this market. Though it requires the introduction of innovative materials, innovative technologies, fresh procedures, and above all individuals committed to driving the necessary changes or at the very least, improvement. So if anyone sees himself bringing to the table this novel material, this innovative technologies and fresh procedures should definitely enter the market. He is certainly gonna be successful and help our industry reach the goal we were talking about previously.

Charlie ([30:23](#)):

Well, everybody, make sure you connect with David on LinkedIn. Check out the work he and his team at EC are doing down in Brazil and other regions. And hey, I just wanna say thank you for your time today. Congrats on your LEED Fellow and I know we'll be seeing more of each other. Thanks David. Really appreciate it.

David ([30:38](#)):

It was a great pleasure, Charlie. Nice chat. I hope we see each other again soon.

Charlie ([30:44](#)): You did great.

Speaker 4 ([30:47](#)):

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