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Interview with Bettina Hoar, Sustainable Building Advisor. Passionate about sharing her lessons learned.

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MAKING
BUILDINGS
BETTER

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Bettina explained the importance of the "P of People", talked about her personal life, and her vision of the future.
An honours graduate from Indiana University’s School of Business and MBA from ESADE (in Barcelona, Spain), Bettina became a Certified Sustainable Building Advisor in 2012.
A Subject Matter Expert on Indoor Environmental Quality for Sustainable Buildings Canada’s Saving By Design program, Bettina is passionate about sharing her years of lessons learned from doing myriad home renovations, providing impartial expert advice about how to have a healthy and sustainable home.
BBCM: What are you good at?

Bettina Hoar: I think I'm good at understanding where clients are in their quest for a suitable building, and helping them get to a better building. Often this means explaining the importance of integrated design. Overall, my best work is explaining the importance of the "P" of people in the 3P's of sustainable buildings: why paying attention to the people who inhabit our buildings matters and how we can do it.

What are the tasks that give you the most satisfaction?

BH: Teaching; showing how simple change can be and how simple changes can make a big difference.

How did you decide to start your business?

BH: The spark for my business started when I lived in Uruguay. The idea of reusing, recycling and re-adapting is engrained in Latin America and it's the complete opposite of where I grew up, in the US, where we buy, use and throw away. No where is this more evident than in the "HGTV" culture of renovations. I was appalled by the waste and ignorance of most homeowners and determined to share what I had learned. My prior careers in research, finance, advertising and teaching were the perfect combination to help me form a consulting firm that educates people about health and well-being in the sustainably built environment.

What didn’t you know when you started?

BH: I knew nothing! My husband and I have lived in several countries, and every time we moved, we bought crappy homes and renovated them. It wasn't until we moved to Canada that I realized that I (nor our previous builders!) knew nothing about building science, wellbeing in the built environment, or energy conservation. I realized the importance of this expertise from my amazing green builder and green architect, both of whom inspired me to learn more!

What have you built in the 5 last years?

BH: Terrific connections in the green building world and a network of honest, reliable, knowledgeable colleagues and collaborators.

How do you envision the world in 10 years?

BH: I have high hopes that this year is the year that starts a truly regenerative recovery in our built environment, and a recovery that includes the "P" of people as a central tenet. With everything that is happening now, we are really beginning to understand the impact buildings have on humans. Buildings need to honour, respect, and reflect the people that inhabit them.

What kind of impact do you want to contribute to the planet?

BH: I think the impact that I am here to make is about the "P of People". It is easy to focus on reducing costs, energy or impact on the environment, because these are measurable and quantifiable. People are more complicated, and at the same time it's all about the people, so I think that's my role. Is to remind us that buildings ultimately are about the people who inhabit them, that it takes thinking about all of those people, respecting them, including all the various stakeholders - from the designers to the builders to the people who will touch the building in any way now and into the future. It is not as tangible, or quantifiable or measurable. It's more qualitative and intangible, and requires us to think creatively, equitably and inclusively as well.
The role of buildings in promoting occupant health and wellness has emerged in recent years due to a confluence of factors including:

- Growing business interest in health and wellness
- Growing recognition of the role of buildings in health
- New research and technology
- Enhanced building certifications and measurement.
- Growing evidence of importance of Indoor Environmental Quality on health and wellness.

**WHO ARE WE BUILDING FOR?**

One definition of sustainable development comes from the Bruntland Report, Our Common Future (1987): “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”
While the Bruntland definition provides a high-level vision, more is needed to apply the concept. This year marks 26 years since John Elkington coined the “Triple Bottom Line” of People, Planet and Profit (also known as the 3Ps or TBL). Up to today it is still gaining popularity and has become part of everyday business language (Forbes).

This concept applied to sustainable building means that buildings need to be both profitable to build and affordable to inhabit. It means careful and thorough consideration of the impact buildings have on the environment (i.e. including embodied carbon). And, of course, it means considering all of the people involved with the building now and into the future. Really until you have the intersection of those three bubbles (Figure 1) you do not have sustainable building.

BUILDINGS AFFECT OUR HEALTH & WELLBEING

Research by the Global Wellness Institute shows that 80 to 90% of our health outcomes depend upon external and environmental factor factors in our ecosystem. We know that buildings can have a direct effect on us, for instance through the transmission of communicable and environmental diseases; and they can also have an indirect effect on our behaviour and lifestyle. Many of today’s most prevalent chronic diseases, like obesity, are preventable. Rather than providing obesogenic environments (think sofa pointed at TV) the built environment can be a part of the solution to encourage healthy behaviour (think beautiful stairways and water bottle filling stations).

Environments that put people first imbue inclusivity and belonging, providing spaces that are inherently attractive and comfortable. Although we talk about them in the same breath, it’s important to distinguish between health and wellness. Health, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) is a state of physical mental and social well-being whereas Wellness, as defined by the Global Wellness Institute, is a proactive approach with six dimensions: physical, emotional, social, intellectual, spiritual and occupational.

How do they relate? To understand how health and wellness relate, we can look to the shift in the paradigm of the practice of medicine, and how that is beginning to be reflected in our built environment.

A Reactive (treatment) vs. Proactive (wellness) Approach

Disability > Symptoms > Signs > Awareness > Education > Growth

Neutral Point
Adapted from John W. Travis, 1972
The "treatment" paradigm in medicine describes how we might seek medical help only if we signs or symptoms of disease; seeking treatment to get back to "neutral" (a reactive approach). However, medicine has evolved to the point where we recognize that we can take a more "proactive wellness" approach, regardless of where our health is. We can seek health practitioners who encourage awareness and education about nutrition, movement, rest and relaxation, etc. and help us to continually grow.

**THE PARADIGM SHIFT FOR BUILDINGS**

We're at the nadir of this focus in the built environment. Rather than a "treatment" approach of avoiding things in buildings that make us sick (i.e. asbestos, lead, etc.), we're seeing a pro-active wellness approach: what can we do to make holistic, evidence-based improvements to create a better built environment.

**SO HOW DO WE MAKE BUILDINGS BETTER?**

To make buildings better for the people who inhabit them will you take a reactive or a proactive approach? Unfortunately, our current regulations are woefully behind when it comes to regulating (i.e. limiting formaldehyde). An add/avoid approach might include specifying some healthy materials, limiting or avoiding some obvious hazards such VOC's, etc. Or there's the proactive and holistic approach of using the lens of human wellbeing as a central focus to help you make decisions throughout a project.

This holistic approach can be seen in new building rating systems such as WELL and Fitwel. It can also be achieved through integrated design.

**INTEGRATED DESIGN IS KEY**

It's no secret that to build better buildings more efficiently at less cost, integrated design is key.

You can shift the cost effectiveness of making decisions by making them earlier in the process. Often, this isn't a linear process but an iterative collaborative effort that takes a bit more time and effort up front, but provides reduced cost, added value and synergies. This integrated process requires a team approach, where professionals work collaboratively.
WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM BUILDING CERTIFICATIONS?

There is demand for health and wellness certifications. What gets measured gets done (be careful about how and what you measure and interpreting results). It’s not about getting certified, it’s about knowing what’s out there. Look to products, processes and building certifications that acknowledge and focus their effect on human health & wellbeing. Don’t rely on regulation or standards to guide you for proactive approach to health & wellbeing.

Look to see how the building rating systems are developing to find what might resonate with you. Energy savings and thermal comfort goals can be at odds.

Comfort is more than thermal comfort.

For further info visit: wellcertified.com or fitwel.org

Common themes addressed by WELL and Fitwel

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