

Sean Ronnie Hill on Passive House Design and the Future of Low-Energy Buildings | Transcript

00:02

Charlie

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. Green Building matters. Hey everybody. Welcome to the next episode of the Green Building Matters podcast. Can't believe I've done this for hundreds of interviews. And it really, actually selfishly gives me a lot of energy every single day. I love this green building movement. We've talked to technologists, corporates, consultants, engineers and architects. We've got a sustainable and regeneration architect with us today. Coming over from Europe. I've got Sean on the show. Sean, how are you doing today?

01:00

Sean

And good, thanks for having me on the show.

01:02

Charlie

I know we got connected through some of our green building circles and that's one thing for our listeners, we do have international listeners, but just reach out to someone when you're traveling. You know, sit down and have a cup of coffee and just talk about this industry. So, Sean, give us kind of a background though. Where did you grow up and eventually go to school?

01:22

Sean

I. So I grew up in Belfast in the 80s and 90s in A. Actually in a post war bungalow that was in many ways an example of how not to build a house. It was very poorly constructed. And I remember during the winter months we would be, we would actually sleep in our sleeping bags in the house under our duvets just to stay warm. Because my father had given up on the idea of heating the house because it was. There was no insulation whatsoever in the roof or the walls. It was just a, like a very rudimentary shelter that there's so many different parts of it had been forgotten to be taken care of. And on top of that had been extended by a series of quite a few cognitive builders. And I grew up sort of surrounded by the consequences of workmanship.

02:13

Sean

And I remember my father and I having to repair walls that had all newspapers stuffed in as insulation and fixing issues with a damp. And I'm unblocking drainage lines. And so there was, it was a lesson on how not to design it. And then what happens when shortcuts are taken?

02:32

Charlie

I can. You're describing very vividly. I mean, that had a big impact on you there and.

02:37

Sean

Wow.

02:37

Charlie

And when did you know you might want to become, say, an architect? When did that start showing up for you?

02:43

Sean

I suppose in addition to growing up in a house that was incredibly badly constructed, I spent many summers, I think the majority of my summers growing up at my grandfather's farm in country Antri, which had been the north of Ireland where my father was from. That was a totally different experience. It was just hands on, practical, lots of learning. My grandfather taught me how to hang a door, build a brick wall basic stuff like wiring up electrics and fixing old farm buildings and. Yeah, making little things that would help around the farm. We made this thing that he called a boogie, which is like a little cart that was drawn by a person or a couple of people to move heavy stuff around the farm.

03:29

Sean

So there's lots of problem solving and it was a great hands on environment and it kind of shaped the way that I think about architecture today.

03:41

Charlie

Wow, man, I love that. Thank you for that origin story. Okay, then you go off to university and you're starting to study architecture. So I guess you did kind of start narrowing it down. That's what you wanted to do, huh?

03:52

Sean

Yeah, yeah, it was my. I suppose my grandfather pushed the idea of architecture. He was a builder, as I was saying, and he. I suppose he never had the chance. He was post war, he was in the Royal Navy, he fought in World War II. You know many stories about that. He left the war and then one of the things he was good at was using his hands and he saw that I was too, growing up. So he taught me what he could. But he always pushed me to go one step further and to study architecture and to be involved in the beautiful art of designing buildings. And having had that experience of seeing in a small part at spurt how they were built and the practical side of architecture, it had a huge impact.

04:40

Charlie

Okay, and you got your degree there in Manchester and so I guess that maybe moved you around a little. What about sustainability ability? When did it first start showing up in your life or maybe in your studies? I think we're probably about the same age. I graduated from Georgia Tech 2004. I think you graduated 2005 with your degree. So just, I don't know, was it just solar panels? Was it efficiency? When did you first hear about BRI M or leed? When did that first start showing up for you?

05:10

Sean

I suppose it was for post university. Well, during university there was. I don't know about your uni, but our uni was not really glued up on sustainability or it wasn't something at the forefront, it was actually something that was in some ways a lot of tutors frowned on it and I remember there was one. Yeah, there was one quite influential tutor who really pushed it. So he had some influence on my thinking starting to. Because if it's not around you and if it's not if you're mentors and people who are teaching you and appreciating it's a very difficult thing to get into.

05:48

Sean

So wasn't until after I left after my part two, so after I did the first two degrees in architecture, I started working on a practice that was working on low energy homes and it was actually working on adaptive reuse of houses on a coastal town in the northwest of England in a little place called Morecambe. And it was used to be very popular during the Victorian era and it was the holiday resort of Victorians. So they would get the train and they built all these really beautiful houses along the seafront. And now it's kind of in the past sort of 50 years or so it's fallen in disrepair and obviously not many people in UK go on holiday to. It still happens but obviously you got cheap flights. So everybody tends to get away to the sunshine there.

06:38

Sean

A lot of these houses have fallen in disrepair and one of the projects that worked on there was to have a think about how these houses can be adapted for flats. So they wanted to create flats, they were very large buildings. So the idea was to take the backs off them and then insulate internally the front. And then were able to create a super insulated skin on the back which was a part that was less seen because you only had an alleyway between the different terrace rows. So I think that was the first and that was there was a thing called the code for sustainable homes which is something were following as well as looking at pream for that project.

07:17

Charlie

Fantastic project, sure. Still beautiful place to go to and visit and it's just, you're right when you're thinking of in 50 year chunks you've just set them up for another 50 years there. How about mentors, John? Sometimes the mentor someone you read their material, you might see them speak on stage. Sometimes it's you meet with, they challenge you, maybe they open a door. You've mentioned your dad, your grandfather. Who else would you maybe call a mentor?

07:44

Sean

Well, I suppose through since university there was three people that were quite influential in terms of architecture, not necessarily sustainability because you know, when I graduated. Yes, there was a fair bit of talk about it in the uk, but it wasn't at the forefront, I would say. And whenever I did my year out at uni, I went to Australia. So I went to Melbourne and I got a job working for Techne Architecture and Design. So they were. When I was working there, it was just me and two directors. One of the directors was a guy called Nick Travers, who's a great guy, a very charismatic designer. And I suppose a little memory from the very first day I was walking across, so I lived on the other side of town.

08:30

Sean

So I was walking across town and he phoned me as I was walking into to work and he says, where are you? And so he came to where I was, picked me up. And he had a vintage Porsche Carrera. So it was pretty classy guy. And the office was in this really cool converted 1950s diner which was complete with a table tennis table in the middle. And there was five other architecture studios within space. So it was a very fun and creative environment. He had a way of thinking about architecture that really stuck with me, which was that his idea about architecture was that we design a kind of theater for life.

09:15

Sean

So he taught me about the drama of architecture and always be considering the composition of architecture and how we create that drama in terms of a narrative and experience and how to design moments for. For people that live through inner space. So yeah, that was Nick in Melbourne. And then when I came back after finishing my second degree, another practice I worked for was called John McCasland Partners and there was an architect there called Joe Morgan and he was, yeah, he was quite an influence. McCasland was a much bigger studio. So I was part of one of many. And there was one design director. You had a tight grip on the creative process, the level of rigor and that they had in terms of design there was quite intense. Everything was reported back to one design director.

10:09

Sean

Their philosophy was it all came back to the diagram, both in plan and section. It was about achieving harmony and clarity with every design moves and I had to connect back to the concept. So it taught me a huge amount about discipline, about being precise and how to defend a design idea. And then after that, I suppose pre rise, I worked at a practice called ADP Architecture and Joe had actually moved there as a director and I got

to work under him. And they had a completely different approach. They were. He sort of glided. He was very talented architect. He sort of glided through ideas effortlessly, testing option, sorry, option after option. And he had this Cam energy about him exploring until he find the right solution both aesthetically and practically. So Joe taught me that design is rarely linear.

11:10

Sean

It's about exploration, it's about iteration and a bit of intuition to. So yeah, looking back, I suppose each of these mentors gave me something a little bit unique. Each, each one of them, some of it was boldness, some rigor, some I suppose, fluidity, deep thinking.

11:29

Charlie

I saw how they all thought and problem solve web teams. Man, what a great experience and great mentors too and I'm sure that really helped you as you built your.

11:40

Sean

Your firm.

11:41

Charlie

So maybe what are some of your proudest accomplishments? So one look back and we're going to talk about rise the last 14 plus years too. But what's on the highlight reel?

11:51

Sean

Yeah, well I would say that one of the proudest accomplishments achievements would be just that I suppose of building the practice Rise Design Studio from the ground up over the past 14 years has to be up there

with a. So we, I suppose through Rise we've completed products that we consider to be beautiful but also genuinely low energy. And yeah, I suppose we're really proud to have a studio that talks and so that works walks the walk on sustainability and yeah, absolutely man.

12:29

Charlie

Well, I love entrepreneurship, I love the built environment, I love green buildings and you've combined all of that. So yeah, why don't we talk present day. So Sean, tell us more about your design studio, your approach towards sustainability, wherever you can add it in and just what's keeping you busy today.

12:48

Sean

Yeah, so Rise is an architecture studio which mixes innovation, sustainability, materiality and we throw all this into the mix and hope that we create really beautiful, practical and low energy buildings. So we like the idea of combining the use of physical models as well as digital 3D. So and then going into the detail of the material specification where more and more we're looking at natural materials because the market is expanding a lot in that area and we think that it has a huge potential. There's obviously still a lot of arm tested and so we have to sort of tread carefully to make sure that we are specifying the right thing for the right material for the right project. But yeah, in terms of what we're working on at the moment, we have a number of projects. They're quite a mixed bag.

13:52

Sean

We have a retrofit, an extension of a Victorian home and that's to Enerfit standard which is the, as you know, it's the house of standard for retrofit projects. Whenever you're renovating an existing building and we also have a low energy tennis pavilion which we're currently working it up towards planning submission. So requesting I'm not sure what Colorado states whenever you submit project to the council to gain permission.

14:25

Charlie

Yeah just to get your building permit and then you have your later your certificate of occupancy and so yeah, definitely have a start and then inspections and then that certificate of occupancy at the end.

14:36

Sean

And not so long ago we completed a a really cool cultural project which was called the Lexi Cinema and that was in northwest London which is something we're really proud of as the first cinema in the UK to use air to air source heat pump and MBHR for controlling air temperature of the auditorium of the additional screen that we built which made the cinema two screen cinema. It was a small charity cinema and yeah, the whole process was pretty credible. Getting involved in that early on were working pro bono to help the client because they were a charity. We actually were just appointed to help them out with very minor issues. I would say to the project.

15:24

Sean

And what actually happened was they had a strip of car park at the back and I remember calling Ryan one day and I was there with the founder and I didn't realize they had this strip of car park and she's turned around to me and said can we do with this? We.

15:38

Sean

And then we started to look into it and then we came up with different ideas and because there's an idea to create something that was maybe more food orientated because of the revenue that the charity could create from that and then it went to the idea of a second screen with a second bar and yeah, so we had this quite amazing, really beautiful journey of working with the charity, working with the local community and there's a lot of community

involvement and due to funding period where we managed to secure the majority of funding from local funding as well as the council had a funding pot which they very generously donated to the second stream.

16:25

Charlie

That sounds like a fantastic project. So this is the Green Building Matters podcast. What's your approach towards sustainability? You've mentioned low energy, natural materials. I mean do you and your team just try to bake as much as you can? Do you pursue certain certifications? I don't know. What's your approach to sustainability?

16:46

Sean

Our approach has been over the past couple of years before I became passive designer it was to actually follow passive voice principles. It was something that from a previous some from some colleagues that were working with on certain projects a number of years ago were working together and they were interested in it. We'd always had an interest in it. We saw that as the, probably the most easily accessible way of us being able to upgrade the existing buildings we're working on, but also the new buildings that were designing to create as low energy as possible. So a lot of the building didn't meet the accreditation and, but were following the principles.

17:30

Sean

So you know, the hr looking at the air tightness, the glazing solutions, the super insulation and as well as looking at micro generation, it's become more and more, it's the solar energy, solar panels has come on a lot in the past 20 years and as well as air source heat pumps. So there's a big push for air source heat pumps. And recently we've completed two projects where we've cut off the gas supply to the houses. Whereas in the vast majority of houses in London they have a gas supply where obviously the gas is heating up, the gas water that's providing hot water for the house, the heating as

well as hot water. So more and more people are becoming aware, I suppose in part it was to do with the Ukraine war.

18:22

Sean

A lot of people solid energy prices adopted because of the impact on the energy that were getting from Russia. And so there is a huge surge in energy prices and a lot more people are obviously a lot more aware of it. And pre that moment I don't think people would have had thought that it would fluctuate so much. So it definitely has had an impact and it's kind of been a push towards if you, if I was say 10 years ago starting, I said to the client, you should cut off the gas in your house. You know, it would have been, they would have last a lot and said what the reason for that be why would we do that?

19:07

Charlie

It's happening, right? All electric, let's get some induction cooking and you know, like you said, some heat pumps. I mean this, the shift, I mean I work on a bunch of large buildings in New York City and even the 50 storage skyscrapers have to have a plan to get off of gas and steam. And it's happening, but especially on the residential side. So you know, you're in Europe. We've got the European taxonomy, the taxonomy, we've got the green deal, we've got some different legislations. So I think that's pushing some of it. But hopefully your clients, right, they still are like, hey, I appreciate this, my utility bills will be less. I do want to do the right thing and you have some customers, some cl, that are asking for it, or as you bring it up, they're like, yeah, let's do that.

19:55

Charlie

That sounds right. How is this conversation with clients? Is it, do anyone come to you and say, hey, I want to work with you because you're known as a sustainable architecture and design firm, they bring in sustainability

ideas, or is it more expected from your side? Just curious, how's the conversation go so far?

20:17

Sean

It's going more towards that. It's going more towards. As we're known for having experience in sustainable design, it's more and more clients are coming our way. But I would say that's quite a recent thing. But also to do with the general shift in mindset, press has a big play on it. You know, whether if press are giving sustainable buildings or sustainable whatever, a lot of people are taking heed of that and not actually seeing how important it is to go down that route.

20:51

Sean

Whereas I suppose what we're finding is from whatever political belief that you have, we're finding more and more clients are wanting to be a lot more aware and they want to be there and want to make sure that whatever work that they do, because oftentimes they're spending very considerable budgets on if it's their private home or if it's a community cinema or if it's a community tennis club. You know, they're really concerned that they want this building to be able to perform sustainably in terms of its operational energy, but also they want longevity and sustainability, and longevity go hand in hand because of if it's a really well detailed building and it's sustainable, you're really, you're preparing that building for a long life.

21:43

Charlie

Resiliency and so much more. I know you do a lot of existing building work too. Retrofitting. Nothing greater than an existing building. Yeah. So I love working with architects, John, because you always have the most beautiful offices and the most beautiful websites. And to our listeners, make sure you check out the Rise website. It's just, it's gorgeous. And I love seeing all of your different projects and you have a sustainability mission statement and

I think that's great. You have it out there like, this is what we believe in. If you're going to work with us, this is how we do it. Right.

22:12

Sean

Let's talk past it.

22:13

Charlie

Us. You had mentioned that it was something you were well trained on. You were already doing it in your firm, but then you literally got that certification. I just can't help but think back to the house you grew up in and how it was the exact opposite of a passive house design. Right, that airtight new home and let's force in some fresh air through some systems. So I don't know why passive house? What do we need to know here in the U.S. It's growing not nearly as popular, say Leed, but we are seeing more passive house for residential and commercial. But what do we need to know about passive house design?

22:49

Sean

I would say that, yeah, I mean, it's interesting you bring up that about growing up in a cool, drafty house and you know, feeling, seeing the condensation of my breath as I woke up. You know, it's very extreme growing up in a life like that. But I suppose that experience did Planet Seed and Paciflois. Not only is it about creating the kind of ultimate low energy space, whether it's a hobby school or an office, any building, it's actually an incredibly comfortable space because of the way that it's designed. It maintains an optimum temperature for the occupants. And so oftentimes when we're speaking to clients and they're asking about pacifiers and they're trying to get their head around all the technical aspects of it, which we discussed earlier.

23:47

Sean

But what I really tried to hammer home is the fact that it's an incredibly comfortable space to be in. You know, you have constant trickle of fresh air that's not only filtered, but it's actually taking the heat from the exhaust air. So you don't have cold air coming in if it's the winter, for example. So you're, I think comfort is one of the, the big factors with passive. One thing I didn't touch on earlier was that it minimizes thermal bridges. So where you have a structure that's bridging internally, externally and that can create cold spots and can create condensation, more growth, things like that. So the tacit house has a rigorous procedure of trying to design out cold bridges to avoid mold growth, et cetera.

24:42

Charlie

They want to eliminate that. Okay, so everybody pay more attention to passive house. It's definitely a great approach for many building types. Let's talk about geography. As I understand it. You know, obviously you're in London, you've got your connection to Manchester there, you've let me know you're expanding more even to Barcelona. And then I think you've got your Australia connection. So just how are you going about really growing your Company and you know, I guess you have different challenges in different markets. Right. Different building codes, different priorities. So what's your approach to the geography that all these great cities you're working in?

25:20

Sean

Yeah, so, I mean, Australia was a long time ago and my connection to there was just a year out in 2003, I think it was. So it was more an experience. I mean, I'm not sure if you've ever been, but Australia is a thing. I mean, Melbourne is a really beautiful, happening, vibrant city. Really, really cultural city. But I suppose that with the practice it's geographically it would be too much for us to.

25:53

Charlie

It's going to be your focus.

25:55

Sean

Yeah. London and Barcelona. So we're opening up in Barcelona. We have a connection there. As I was explaining to you before, I used to live there and I met my wife in Barcelona who's actually a Londoner. And so it's actually an exciting city for. For sustainable design. There's a more of a growing awareness about energy performance and adapted reuse. We've met some really interesting people who are logging the materials of existing buildings. They're called Lenny Studio and we're hoping to work with them on any small shop fit out where not only are they.

26:39

Sean

Not only are they logging materials of existing buildings and looking at the potential reuse and the adaptive reuse of these buildings there, they have a connection with some local quarries where there's a lot of cut stone or off cut marble and the marble had been tagged for being thrown away. So what they have done is they have come up with this idea of reusing it. So whether it's for bathrooms or whether it's for a worktop for kitchen or for potentially cladding walls, they have this really amazing collection of marble. So with this store that we're doing, it's for a fashion label called ndoi and we're looking to use that marble because the fashion label is a highly sustainable brand. So it kind of goes hand in hand with the proposals.

27:32

Sean

So porcelain is definitely something that we are hoping to do more projects in that city and obviously in London we're growing.

27:43

Charlie

I know it's going to be successful for you. I've fortunately been to Barcelona

a handful of times. I've got some great sustainability contacts there that can help you in any way. I think you're right. It's ripe for the work that you want to do there. And hey man, I'm rooting for you. I think it's going to go really well. Let's talk about the Future. It could be the future of green buildings. You've mentioned you have a lot of innovation within your firm. What's next? What are you reading up on what's coming and at us in this? You could call it architecture and sustainability movement.

28:15

Sean

I would say more and more we're looking at so we're moving beyond just operational energy which is obviously what it takes to run a building from a day to day basis. And we're seriously looking at embodied carbon which is something that we've have researched slightly over the years but now it's becoming more and more of a skill that we wanted, they wanted to bring on board and to all the projects that we're working on. So we are working with some really amazing structure engineers in London who are working on for example they're working on a software that is able to calculate the embodied carbon in all the structure so whether it's timber structure, whether it's steel reinforced concrete. So that we are able to design knowing these figures. So whenever we're able to present to the clients.

29:20

Sean

So that's, we have that on a structural side where a lot of the embodied carbon is obviously then the other elements is something that we're trying to understand and be able to communicate to clients. So they have a choice and they have an understanding of you know, every brick, every beam, every insulation board. They, they all have a, a carbon storage. So we've, we're part of this fantastic group called acans A C a natural materials. They're promoting the use of natural materials. So that's throughout a building. Everything you can think of something that has been a real eye opener for us.

29:57

Charlie

You know, it's embodied carbon. I'd bet the entire farm on embodied carbon if I needed to. I 1000% agree. Right. One day to go get a building permit, you're going to need to have a total carbon plan. It's not just hey, let's have the energy efficient operating carbon, but how about along the way our embodied carbon, a lot of it is the structural materials, but it's also the during construction phase.

30:23

Sean

Right.

30:23

Charlie

How do we green up the dirt construction phase and that embodied carbon you're working also on some existing buildings, there's already some embedded carbon that you should be calculating, getting credit for. So you and I could talk a lot about that. And it's great to see you're working with some structural engineers that are giving you those calcs saying hey Cross limited timber, structural steel, concrete. It's not just the cost of petroleum stuff. It's the embodied carbon, right?

30:51

Sean

Yeah, absolutely. So it's. And as well as that how far do the materials help to travel to get to the site? So that's another thing, I suppose that is become. We're becoming more and more conscious of. And over the years it's never been an issue. It's been more down on price and quality than anything else.

31:14

Charlie

Okay, so we've got that. How about technology? I mean, these days I almost have to ask all of my podcasts get just one podcast a week. You know, what are you seeing with technology? Are you using any AI now? Do you think you might in six months? I don't know.

31:28

Sean

How's that going to affect things in terms of technology? We're using 3D modeling and BIM tools like Archicad. So yeah, we're creating a full digital model of whether it's a new building or whether it's an existing building. It works especially well whenever it's an existing building because you have a full understanding and you're able to design with a lot of knowledge.

Whenever we start working on a project, we are scanning the buildings in 3D with a laser scanner. So then we have this digital twin which enables us to really understand what we're dealing with and how best to adapt it. It allows us to look at many different multiple options and find the best solution according to the location, the client budget, the planning regulations, et cetera.

32:24

Sean

So I suppose as far as we've got so far in terms of technology, and I know that you're building schema AI and how are you finding that?

32:38

Charlie

Yeah, thanks. Well, first we need to hang out because into our listeners. I agree with everything Sean's saying. I mean, get familiar with digital twins. You can call it something else, you can call it reality capture. Let's use that for this next design bim. You've mentioned archicad, there's other tools. Just there's a lot of information there in those 3D models. Maybe it is a digital twin. We could call it something else. While that's been around for a while, I think it's speeding back up again. So please everybody make sure you've got a good familiarity with that body carbon. We can talk about that all day. I 1,000% agree. Yeah, it's schema. Thanks for asking me, my co founders and our entire team and a lot of our teams based in Europe.

33:20

Charlie

Not everybody knows that we're building an AI tool where we can ingest your previous BIM data. Maybe it's archicad, maybe it's Revit and we can learn from your previous designs. Our software, when you lay out your next project, we're giving you about a two month head start, about a 65 to 70% completion. We can give you a little bit of initial structural. We have a partnership with Thornton Tomasetti and their AI tool. It's called Asterisk for initial Structural. There's another company called Augmenta for a little initial mep. And so just the reality is there's not going to be one software that you're going to use that does it. All those times are over. It's as my co founder and CTO Marty, who is the original product manager at Revit 20ish years ago, says it needs to be this connected tool chain.

34:07

Charlie

Let's have these great design, tech and construction tech apps that are in the cloud, so they're fast. You can access them in any web browser and they share data. Right. And maybe have some AI. And so that's the world we're living in. And we're doing our part to be a fast forward button for designers. And I'd love to, outside of the podcast, show you more about Schema. We're having a lot of fun building our software in our company.

34:31

Sean

Sounds excellent. Yeah. Really interested to find out more.

34:33

Charlie

Let's do it. Okay, so that's the future. Let's get to the kind of rapid fire part of our interview. Sean, I'm really enjoying getting to know you more and just your journey. You're a great storyteller. So what would you say is your specialty or gift?

34:49

Sean

And I had to think about this one. And then I was asking some people I knew, asking my wife.

34:55

Charlie

Yeah.

34:55

Sean

And. Yeah, well, she actually said listening. She said I was listening to something that I think I'm pretty good at. And whether it's my wife, whether it's clients, buildings or places, sort of really tuning in before acting. And I think that is such a critical part of architecture and it's that ability to really understand what you're dealing with in all the different aspects that correspond with architecture that is a.

35:26

Charlie

Special gift that not everybody is a good listener. Do you find that you're probably also good at asking really good questions, then you're able to sit back and just really listen. So you're probably a good question asker. Do you make sure you stay present? Do you repeat things? I don't know. Any tips for someone that thinks they're not a good listener?

35:47

Sean

Yeah, I think Technology, I mean, without diverging too much technology is such an amazing thing. And obviously we've talked about your venture AI and we talked about different parts of technology, how that helps architects in architecture, but in terms of the smartphone and we're entering a world or we're already in a world that is so distracted. And there is a real issue with technology, especially the smartphone. Whenever, for example, when you're at a meeting and if you're sitting around a table and then people are placing their phones on the table and then notifications start to go off and almost people are getting distracted and you're not really having a

productive meeting and it's almost, it's quite disrespectful to whoever you're with.

36:35

Sean

And I suppose that goes to anything to anytime you're meeting someone, if you're constantly looking at your phone because you're on beck and call, go to those things, sending notifications. And most of them, I would say a lot of them aren't that important. So yeah, I think touching on presence is huge and it's something that we should all really focus on.

36:54

Charlie

You're absolutely right. You want to show the person you're meeting with that you have their full attention. Right. You're giving them full attention and you're right. Just that one time, you look over to that text message or something that dinged, it's lost. And so yeah, put that on silent, turn it over, leave it in your pocket. On my iPhone, I have the setting. If it's a number I don't recognize, send it straight to voicemail. It's like, hey, right? So it's good. Okay. That is especially your gift, being a great listener. Do you have any good habits or routines, rituals that help you stay on point?

37:28

Sean

Well, at uni, I used to do martial arts and then I got into. I had a really close group of friends. I got into running, cycling and swimming and they were. They actually started doing triathlons. And since then I've found those three sports, those three disciplines, something that I really enjoy. I love open water swimming. I'm often swimming in Serpentine Lake in I park throughout the year. And I have some good friends that I go swimming with and I find these are quite essential for me and it helps clear my mind and reset my energy. Often helps with clarity, design decisions and well, just generally important decisions. Whenever you're exercising, I think there's an easy mind to be said for that.

38:16

Charlie

Swim, bike, run, is there a certain distance? Do you like sprints, Olympic Half Ironman. I don't know. What's your distance?

38:26

Sean

Well, I should. When I started I was. So whenever I was 2003, 2004 I think I started. So I was doing sort of half ironman and Olympic and a few sprints. But mine, I'm older, less time for kids, family and too many commitments. So I end up, I just do sprints.

38:47

Charlie

As we get to each other. I hope to hang out with you maybe next time in London. I'm a big guy and actually I done several sprints and one Olympic. So the Olympic distance to me was my Ironman as the guy. So I just, I really, I'm always appreciated. Swim, bike, run, man, that's good stuff. Thanks for sharing. Do you have one coming up? You think you'll do a sprint this year?

39:07

Sean

I went to Barcelona last year and it was fun. It was a bit unfortunate though, the weather was a bit rough so they cancelled the swim which is the part that I love the most. Or getting him running in the water, swimming, lights and sea. But anyway they did a duathlon instead. So I had to run. Abs. I find that quite tough actually sprinting twice with the cycle in the middle.

39:32

Charlie

I didn't know that. It's better if it's open water. Thanks for sharing man. I have a lot of respect for the triathlete. How about the bucket list? As we get

to know each other you'll learn. I like the bucket list. It could be travel, adventure, maybe you want to write a book. I don't know. What are a couple things on the bucket list?

39:51

Sean

I would say it actually one of them is to do a long distance platform. So to do a full automat before I'm 50. So time is closing in on me fast and so I had booked to do one whenever I was doing my chartered exams for architecture and then this life was just a little bit too much. So I was with a group of friends and then so I had to pull out and then since then I've been really keen to actually give it a shot. But as you know it's a huge amount of time you've got to invest. So that's why the other one would be designing and building my own off grid home and something that sort of embodies all the ideas that we've just discussed. I think that would be like a true test of design.

40:41

Sean

And then the Ironman would be the endurance. Even now that I'm talking to you about it, I'm just thinking a full ironman. Maybe not. Probably just be a half arch.

40:50

Charlie

Yeah, I got you. How about this? I'll make sure you have my number. I can't wait for you to text or WhatsApp me when you do. Let's call it the next half iron. And that'd be quite the achievement.

41:01

Sean

Absolutely.

41:03

Charlie

Let me know when you do that. Send me a picture and I'll celebrate with you. Okay, so I love to ask about bucket list. Next is a book or a podcast or documentary. Is there anything for our listeners you'd recommend?

41:14

Sean

So I had this book by my bedside for many years and eventually I managed to get through it. It's quite a long one and it's quite detailed, incredibly detailed. It's called the Fountainhead by Ann Rand. The novel dives deep into the psyche of an architect and explores, I suppose, the tension between your own individual vision and what society expects. I don't agree with all those brands' philosophies, I would say, but the book does raise some powerful questions about integrity, creativity, and you're trying to stay true to your principles, so these ideas resonate strongly.

41:56

Charlie

Put a link in our podcast show notes. Everybody can check out that book. And I'm glad you said it because I wasn't familiar with that one. I'm familiar with Atlas Shrugged, which is famous. Little controversy there and some outlook, but it makes you think. And if this other book makes you think and you applied it there to architecture, means we've got to check it out. So thanks, that's a great recommendation. Okay, so we got the book. Just, just two more things here as we start to wind down. I'm really enjoying our conversation. As you look back on your career, is there anything you wish you'd have learned earlier?

42:27

Sean

I had to think about this and you sent a question through and I suppose I would say that. And we did touch on this earlier on and it would sort of don't wait for permission to start. Start building the world that you believe in. You know, even. Even if it's small ways, small themes and I suppose I wish I trusted my instincts a little earlier and stepped into the green building world with more momentum, more energy from back at uni days.

42:56

Charlie

All right. Well you've had a varied career, different firms, different mentors, and it's good that we'd gone back in time. Just a little more push there, a little nudge. Right. And that just builds up that confidence. Okay, last thing. So let's say someone's listening. They're getting really excited about jumping into the green building movement, maybe the design side of it. Any words of encouragement for someone that's just now jumping in?

43:21

Sean

I would say. But yeah, I mean you. I think, I think the most important thing here is to surround yourself with people who care. Who's they curious? And don't forget that beauty and performance can actually go hand in hand, which a lot of people sometimes think.

43:41

Charlie

That's not the case, I'd say jump in. Make sure you connect on LinkedIn here with Sean. Check out the Rise website and I just want to say thanks for being on the podcast, man. I've learned a lot about what you're doing in and around London. Can't wait for you to expand more in Barcelona. It's an amazing place. I think it's right for all the work you're doing. I'll make some connections for you if that would help. And I just want to say, man, thanks for sharing your story, Sean.

44:05

Sean

That's been great. Thanks very much for having me on the show. Yeah, really enjoyed chatting with you and yeah, let's stay in touch.

44:13

Charlie

Thank you for listening to this episode of the Green Building matters

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