

Colombia Green Building Council Founding Member Angelica M. Ospina Alvarado | 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. Once a week I get an interview with a Green Building Professional somewhere in the world. And this week we've got Angelica coming to us from Columbia, South America. I can't wait to hear more of her story. I think you're gonna really enjoy this talk, her technical background, her work with Columbia, GBC, and just so much more in that region. Angelica, how are you doing today?

Angelica ([00:59](#)): Hi, how are you?

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

I'm doing great. And I'm getting to know the Columbia region a little bit through some mutual LEED Fellow friends there that we know. And you just were highly recommended to come on the podcast. So for my podcast guests, I like to kind of get your origin story. Where did you grow up and where did you go to school?

Angelica ([01:21](#)):

Yeah, Charlie, I grew up in Les Manes, a smaller city in Colombia, and I did like my high school at everything there. And then I moved to Bogota, where I started my career like my bachelor program there. I studied civil engineering and environmental engineering at the same time. I think that

that really led me to start thinking about sustainable construction. And then I moved to Atlanta, Georgia to study my master degree and my PhD at Georgia Tech.

Charlie ([02:01](#)):

I think I just told you that's where I got my undergrad and I'm here in Atlanta, Georgia right now, so I love that connection. All right, so civil, starting to line up on that side of things and environmental, but why Georgia Tech? And tell us a little bit about what you were studying there.

Angelica ([02:18](#)):

Yes, of course. I like when I was doing my undergrad program, like in the final years of the program we had a visiting professor from Georgia Tech here in my university in Colombia. I am about green building sustainability? This was like a new topic for me. I hadn't seen that before and I was actually looking at my career path in another way, but after that class, it was like a summer summer class with a visiting professor, and I realized or I found what I wanted to do. And I looked at how to continue studying that because we didn't have much on sustainability, green construction here in Colombia, and that's why I went to Georgia Tech.

Charlie ([03:19](#)):

Okay. And then when you got through the masters, later added even another degree and then started the career. So tell us even what was next after that.

Angelica ([03:28](#)):

While I was doing my master's degree and PhD there I had the great opportunity of working there in a construction company. I started having some experience in that specific company. At that time they were starting to do all the work in green buildings, so that was very interesting. They started organizing one group of different professionals in the company to start green building projects. I had that great opportunity of being in that company at that time. After I finished my studies, I was very clear that I wanted to come back to Colombia. I had that expectation while I was also doing my PhD study. And I started thinking, okay, if I'm going to go back to

Colombia where I'm going to, if there are not many things in green buildings in Colombia and start looking for different opportunities also in that arena.

Angelica ([04:43](#)):

And that's why I got the opportunity to know, like the work of the world GBS. And I think that that was like a very, very important thing for me. I met a Houston Ang, I think an incredible person, and he told me like I was asking, I was very young at that time, and I was asking him, okay, how can I bring this to Colombia? And he said, you have to start GBC like a green building council in your country. I didn't know how at that point, but he also connected me to Cesar in Mexico. And, he was like a great, very, very important person because he started explaining to me how in Mexico they started that movement. I started making some connections here in Colombia with different countries with different people that were doing some things in green building. And so while I was doing my PhD, I started doing this work here in Colombia, trying to bring like these people together to start the green building, get the green Building council in the country. So after I finished my PhD, I came back to Colombia. I continue supporting Colombia GBC but I also founded a consulting company with one partner and started working straight on green building in the country.

Charlie ([06:29](#)):

That's fantastic. And we'll hit on that, your balance between teaching and professor, the G B C and then the technical and the consulting and doing all this green building work. Looking back a little bit more, were there any mentors, anyone that you looked up to along the way or maybe someone that even opened a door for you? Anyone you would call 'em mentor? I, Angelica ([06:51](#)):

I would say we adapt that Houston <inaudible> was very like a key person in my career. Also Cesar, as I told you. I would say also (inaudible), he was from Taiwan, and they really helped me and they really guided me and also they opened different doors for me. I still keep in touch with all of them because they really made a difference like in my career.

Charlie ([07:29](#)):

That's so cool. Thank you so much. As you look back on your career and kind of life so far, what are some of your proudest achievements?

Angelica ([07:41](#)):

I would say my firstest achievement is to have been able to to bring all these different companies together to start the Columbia Building Council when we have anything to offer at that point. I guess now seeing the council being so strong, big, like doing technical development, having an enormous impact in public policy in the country. And also when you go outside and you look at the different construction companies, like big construction companies, all of them doing green buildings projects in the country. I'm very proud of that.

Charlie ([08:31](#)):

That's something to be proud of. I always like to ask a green building professional, like you, are there a couple really neat projects that stand out? It's hard to pick a favorite, right? But are there a couple kinds of unique projects you've been able to work on?

Angelica ([08:43](#)):

There is one that has been very important for me. It was a project that I worked on like several years ago, I would say probably 2013 or something like that. There's a big store here in Colombia called Home Center, and it's a store where we included a lot of things in natural ventilation. When we started working with LEED here in Colombia that was like one of those things that really pushed back like some people. It was difficult to include natural ventilation. And here in my country, we use natural ventilation a lot. We have a very mild climate, so we'll have seasons, so it's very different. And, that project was like a lab for me and, and for a lot of professionals that were there. We have an opportunity to understand how to include natural ventilation, and how to do different simulations. And we also had the opportunity to work very closely with US GBC because for US GBC, this was also very new. This was the first project with natural ventilation in the world. So that was very interesting. At the end, the project was also like the

first platinum project in Colombia. I was very happy to be a part of that project.

Charlie ([10:21](#)):

Those are fantastic projects, the first platinums and more. Fast forward to today. What's a day in your life like, Angelica, what's kinda keeping you busy today? I know you still have, again, technical work, some professor work, GBC, but what's keeping you busy today?

Angelica ([10:43](#)):

I'm working at Columbia, DEIC, after like nine years or more of working in a co consulting company outside. I came to work at Columbia, d e c. I'm doing very interesting things. Last year I was working on directing like the national Broad, but to natural buildings. Like moving also to those topics and having a huge impact in public policy. Also you mentioned that I work at the university and this university as professor, and that's also like a great experience for me to be able to have and to teach to all these different young professionals, everything about green buildings. I guess those are my things now.

Charlie ([11:41](#)):

Funny, funny, busy. I've been able to travel to Latin America in the last 12 months you know, I've learned that Edge was very popular down there. Not just LEED, not just some of the other great programs we work in. So can you educate our podcast listeners a little bit about EDGE and maybe why that's popular and maybe how that compares to LEED?

Angelica ([12:05](#)):

I think Edge came probably five or six years ago. It has had a great success, especially related to housing programs housing projects that we're not doing anything before so that was very interesting because while we were working with all these different LEED projects we were working very hard in, especially like in commercial buildings and those type like institutional buildings those types of buildings. And I think EDGE has had a great, great impact in the social and in housing. I think that that's what we found here. We have also worked in Colombia specifically with another certification.

There is a CASA it's called CASA Colombia. There is also a certification for housing projects.

Angelica ([13:10](#)):

There is a certification that is, I would say similar to, to LEED in terms of like CASA access, like the difference like the sustainability aspects having like a more integral version vision of that. So we are also working with that system in the country. And I think these two systems like Edge and Casa have had a great, great impact in the residential sector because here in Colombia, like mostly like 70% of what is built are housing projects. So it's a huge difference and impacts what you can do there.

Charlie ([13:57](#)):

Absolutely. And that's good to see that it's still growing. I guess Angelica has made sustainable construction in Columbia, maybe growing faster there than even neighboring countries?

Angelica ([14:11](#)):

I think the influence of the banking sector, I think like the financial institutions have had a great influence here. And also that the topic has become very strong in terms of public policy as well. Here in Colombia now we have incentives like tax incentives for this project. We have green loans from the banks. It makes sense to build a green, green project because from the economic perspective it makes sense. And that has had a huge influence.

Charlie ([14:59](#)):

Thank you for that. Decarbonization, that's a big push right now, even on our existing buildings, not just building new green buildings, but are you seeing a shift to also retrofitting existing buildings as one of my favorite programs is LEED for existing buildings. I'm not sure how much that is happening, but just in general, decarbonization, how's it going with existing buildings where you are and what are some hurdles in Columbia towards decarbonization?

Angelica ([15:31](#)):

I think with existing buildings, we're moving forward not as fast as other countries, and especially because our energy intensity is not so high in buildings it's very different from our countries. Here as we don't have, for instance, cooling or heating in a lot of buildings, like the energy consumption is lower. It's difficult. It's more difficult for existing buildings to find the business case of becoming green. That's what we found, however we're moving forward. I think ARC has had a great influence here, a lot, a lot of projects reporting their energy consumption where consumption using arc here in the country. So, that's great. Investors also have that specific target in terms of carbonization. We launched the roadmap for the country last year, and we have some goals in terms of new buildings, but we also included some goals in terms of existing buildings. But in Colombia we still have to build new buildings a lot. We still need to do that as a developing country. We need to focus on both in order to move to a decarbonized economy.

Charlie ([16:59](#)):

Thank you for that. It's a reminder that I'm here in the US. We have some very old cities and of course in Europe, even older cities, but where you are still growing, developing. Let's get that new construction, right first and, and we're gonna continue to retrofit though. We need both. Let's talk about the future. I like to ask this question just, hey, what are you excited about that's coming down the road in the green building movement? What's next?

Angelica ([17:27](#)):

I think what is coming next is to move to more urban development to have a broader scope to not only focus on green buildings, but more like in green communities. I think that's something very important. And I guess decarbonization is a must now and moving to that. Also something very, very important is resilience. Our countries really have a huge problem related to climate change. We have at this point very important, like reigning events. I think we also need to move to that faster because I think we have not mapped those effects of climate change in the country. I see that we're moving in that direction. I would say that's something that we at

Columbia, GEC have always worked on, but every time it is getting more important it is like the social problem and how from brain construction, we can also contribute to that. We're focusing a lot in terms of affordable housing and how we can make everything, every community greener.

Charlie ([18:55](#)):

You've got a really good feel on it for it. And I think you're right on the community side. That's fantastic. Well, let's get to know you a little bit more here. What would you say is your specialty or gift?

Angelica ([19:08](#)):

I would say that I'm a very sensitive person in terms of nature, in terms of people, and, and I think that really distinguishes me. And also I'm a person that is always thinking how to act and how to move forward. And I think that that has helped me to do different things in my life. So I would say that

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

That's fantastic, thank you. Do you have any good habits or routines, rituals that help you stay productive?

Angelica ([19:44](#)):

First always learn like always like every day you have to learn something new. I think that's very important. I meditate every day. That's something important for me. I try to exercise every day and I guess those two things have become like my personal gift to myself and that's important.

Charlie ([20:13](#)):

You have to invest in yourself first. They tell you on the airplane, make sure you put on your oxygen mask first, so before you help others, you gotta take care of yourself first, so you can do it better for everyone around you. So learning though, can you give us a pro tip? Do you like to read or listen to audiobooks or certain news sources or how do you like to consume information?

Angelica ([20:38](#)): I try to read, I try to listen also to podcasts like now when I go on the way, I always try to listen to different podcasts and I would say that but reading is great.

Charlie ([20:58](#)):

I've picked up on a lot of Audible and podcasts myself. My wife can do both. She can do Kindle audio and pick up a hard cover. She's a good reader, so I love that. Thank you. Next is bucket list as we get to know each other more. I'm a fan of the bucket list. Hey, what are one or two things maybe on your bucket list?

Angelica ([21:22](#)):

I don't think I have like, like anything very great or, or, or different that I want to I guess like what really likes me and where I try to always is to spend time with my daughters. I have two daughters, so that's what I try to do and I guess my biggest desire is that they do whatever they want to do in their lives and support them. I would say that.

Charlie ([21:57](#)):

We all usually like to travel a little, some adventure. Is there a destination one day you definitely wanna try to go to?

Angelica ([22:07](#)):

I would like to travel more. Like in my country, I've had the opportunity to travel a lot, but I guess there are very nice sites here that I haven't gone to like going to the Amazon or things like that. That's what I really want to do.

Charlie ([22:29](#)):

Yeah, I gotta visit both Bogota <inaudible>, but I've not been to Coda hang, I've not been to, I heard up North. There's even long hikes you can take and I want to come back and explore myself, so it's exciting. So is there a good book or podcast you mentioned? Is there a book or a podcast you'd recommend to our listeners? It doesn't have to be about buildings.

Angelica ([22:54](#)):

Oh, yeah, because I want to say that like, I love to read, but when I read, I try to read like these shred things, like novels, things like that. I read some time ago a book that is very interesting, in Spanish it's called, it's a Common Story.

Charlie ([23:16](#)):

A Common Story. Okay, we're gonna put it there. If you could share that link, I'll put it in the podcast show notes. Thank you for that. Well, as we

start to wind down we really enjoyed our conversation here. Two more things. One is, if you look back on your career, is there any career advice you wish you had known earlier?

Angelica ([23:34](#)):

I would say that probably the most important advice if you're starting a career in building, it's always to set like we are, like very clear targets, but also like flow with, with everything to move to, to those targets. But I think that that's the most important thing also, to try to listen a lot I get, like some years ago I didn't listen so much. I now try to always be listening to, to everyone. And I think that that has helped me a lot to grow professionally.

Charlie ([24:16](#)):

Great advice, a lot of wisdom there. Well my last question. You've been doing green buildings a while. Literally help start an entire green building council in your country. You've gotta be proud about that, like you said. And you know, I've been doing green buildings a while, but let's say someone is listening, they're just now jumping in. Maybe they're making a career change or maybe they're a young professional, but they're just now jumping into the green building movement. Do you have any words of encouragement for them as we come to a close?

Angelica ([24:44](#)):

I think that this is a great career. It's where you can merge technical work, but also do something that is helping you. I guess that that's something very important. It's like you are doing a purposeful work.

Charlie ([25:04](#)):

Purposeful work. Thank you so much. Yeah, I see that. I can tell you're growing all things green buildings in Columbia and everything around you. And so thank you for being on the podcast today. You're an inspiration and everyone was right that told me to have you on the podcast. Well worth it. And just keep up the great work. Thanks for being on the podcast today.

Angelica ([25:25](#)):

Thank you very much, Charlie. It was great being here.

Speaker 4 ([25:30](#)):

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