

## Many LEED Firsts With Italian Green Building Expert Marco Valerio Ceccotti | Transcript

Welcome to Green Building Manners, the original and most popular podcast focused on the green building movement. Your host is Charlie Cicchetti, one of the most credentialed experts in the green building industry and one of the few to be honored as a lead 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.

**00:34**

Charlie

Hey, everybody. Welcome to the next episode of the Green Building Matters podcast. Once a week, I get an interview, a green building professional somewhere in the world, and I have one of my Italian friends with us today, based in Rome, Italy. We have Marco Ceccotti with me, and he's got a similar name to me. A lot of vowels in our name. I'm Cichetti, but we've got Ceccotti and can't wait to just kind of unpack Marco's story, talk a little bit about this amazing title he has as an evolution guide and regenerative architecture specialist. But I know he's a green building guru. Marco, welcome to the podcast. How are you doing, man?

**01:09**

Marco

Hey, Charlie. I'm fine. Really happy to be here with you. Thank you for this invitation, and, so excited to share with you some insights about my work.

**01:18**

Charlie

You're welcome, man. I always enjoy seeing you. We have big plans together,

and yes, we have similar last names and their roots, but here we go. I like to ask my podcast guests, Marco, to take us back. Where did you grow up and then go to university?

**01:33**

Marco

I was born in Rome, Italy. I grew up there.. It's a huge, incredible city. Not huge as American cities.. I studied still in Rome. I studied economics, actually, and I studied environmental development economies. I met very early in my studies, the environmental topics. Then I also went to engineering things. So from economics, I also had a master's degree in industrial engineering. And then I also discovered the LEED rating systems and all the green building movement because I also worked design firms in my early days, and there I worked really precisely on green buildings. I really enjoyed to do so.

**02:27**

Charlie

Love that. So in those studies you mentioned the environment, the economics, but buildings, the built environment, did you know what you wanted to be when you grew up, so to speak, how did you know you might get into buildings or what inspired you?

**02:42**

Marco

As I mentioned, in environmental studies, at the beginning, I studied externalities. This is a kind of economic concept that is now well known. But back in 2008 to 29, it was not so common to talk about externalities. And I was really passionate about how to balance the profit business with something that also respects the environment and gives back something to people. So this was my first session with this topic and then I started working since my father is an engineer. I started working later on at a science firm, a disciplinary design firm, and I knew the lead rating system and I soon fell in love with that rating system and that way to balance externalities and to push back

environmental things into business. In that case, Washington built the environment. So that was the first spark that enlightened me and was really a passion that is still growing in me. So that was where I first met the real building.

**03:57**

Charlie

Oh, I love that. Those early inspirations. Now how about LEED? Later we're going to talk about how you've worked on one of the first LEED v five projects. It's not even coming out next year, Marco. When did you first hear of the program called LEED?

**04:11**

Marco

They were working in Italy with American projects. So in 2012 or 13, they were working on campuses, on military bases and as you know, military bases from us had the mandatory to pursue LEED in those years. I started with direct experience and I learned a lot from that criteria and requirements from the US starting to build in those days. And it was really exciting because they were kind of new concepts. In Europe, we had some permits and a lot of regulations, but those were mandatory regulations. Here we are talking about something additional, something more virtual, something else about code compliance.

**05:06**

Charlie

Those American companies bringing LEED over, I know there's programs in Europe like Briem and there's others, but it seems like Italy has received lead and, well, fairly well, right? I mean, do you think there's a good amount of lead projects across Italy now?

**05:22**

Marco

Absolutely. This is the first benchmark in Italy, Norway. I think in Europe it's the most recognized nowadays. In Italy. We tried a program at the beginning called ITAca. It was very similar to LEED. We tried to replicate, but the strength of lead in terms of communication and engagement was too strong to be substituted from Italian protocol in that moment.

**05:51**

Charlie

Let's look back a little bit on some influences. I like to ask about mentors. Sometimes a mentor, Marco, is someone that you look up to, maybe hear them on stage, but you don't really get to talk to and sometimes it's someone that you meet with and they open doors for you. Did you have any mentors along the way in your career so far?

**06:12**

Marco

Yes. So still in that engineering and architectural firm, I had this very beautiful person, Carlo Rossi is an engineer now, is not with us anymore. So one thought of mine went to him, and he was a great person both, like professionally, of course. So a lot of nice tricks. I mean, he suggested to me a lot of very nice ways to face difficulties and issues during work. But from a human perspective, he was a great guy. So that's my first mentor. Later I met Matiba. This is the company where I worked for, for seven, eight years now. I also met the founder of the company, Paul di Cesare, Eric and Segueli. They are actually two co-founders. And also Stefano Pierretti, which I think you knew, like in Athens back in the days. They were really strong, inspiring people with huge visions. And they taught me how to add that vision for sustainability matters.

**07:24**

Charlie

Those are some great mentors. I've met some more of your team there and can't wait to talk about some of the great work you're doing even today. One

more look back. I like to give my podcast guests permission to highlight some of your proudest achievements so far in this kind of green building career.

**07:43**

Marco

I think that looking back at five, six years ago, we started a project with a pharmaceutical company called KC. I think you already heard about him, about her. And they were a really proud company, very committed. So they had allowed us to work deeply on sustainability, on team building without looking too much at economics or communication, but just because they wanted to have impact. So we started this program that is called Better building program. Its purpose was to harmonize the whole multi company to a certain level of sustainability, of building. So we worked together on 1442 sites with the Graham building standard that in this case needs operational maintenance. And we studied a process involving waves, different clusters of these buildings. We arrived like last year to have 100% of the whole building assets of this multinational company to be included in harmonized standards in our specifically. And most of them are pursuing certifications at a higher level. So apart from certifications and AHRQ, there is also a set of good practices, best practices, and we had the opportunity to share across the whole world. So the strength of the dream building movement is still that they can provide guidance at the multinational level, not as a single nation. It's a single regional portion, but at the multinational level. So that's been one of my greatest achievements. To provide impact for a multinational company worldwide in 30 different nations.

**09:39**

Charlie

Man, that is incredible. And I know you did it. As I understand it, Marco, with lead version 4.1, the latest version at the time, that's even harder, maybe on materials and this or that. And you did it in 30 countries. And then in a minute, you'll talk about lead v in a first. It's cool in this green building movement to have these first, because it's tough. You gotta figure it out. Not everybody's

already used the new program. Bravo, bravo. Let's talk about today. Tell us a little bit about your company and your role in the company, and then we'll talk about some projects.

### **10:13**

Marco

Today, our evolution guide. And Nativa, why do we say evolution? Because we want to drive the company from their higher level of management to a better impact for people and the planet. It seems common nowadays, but again, ten years ago, it was not so common. So our purpose is to accelerate the transition we all want. And so we are a consultancy, but we define ourselves as designers, regenerative designers. So we define ourselves as someone that tried to figure out and to design the perfect shape of a new century company. This is what we pursue every day of our life. Of course, we also try to provide a balance between private life and work life. But we are very committed all together in a big group of seven people. Most of them are under 30 years old. So we can understand how true these feelings are in our company. Then we try to push forward on this transition. And as Natiba, in Italy especially, but in Europe we are known because we started with a movement called the benefit corporation movement that again, was born in the US with the benefit corporation. And we are the first benefit corporation in Europe, actually. And we also reached the release of the law in Italy that allows companies to benefit corporations other than business companies. So our thought is that companies must exist not just to make profit, which, of course, remains something basic and incredibly important for our company's life. But the company still exists for a purpose. And the purpose is to also have a positive impact on people and on the planet, of course. So we call this double purpose mindset for a company. And we strongly think that in the future, this will be the standard. So in the future it will be the standard to be a double purpose company and will be forbidden to be a single purpose of companies like only business company.

### **12:37**

Charlie

What a fantastic vision. It sounds like a great place to work too. And the first B Corp benefit Corp in Europe. Yeah, for our listeners. Check it out. And it's almost like the environment and society is like a shareholder, right? It's like they have consideration, right. In the things we do and the decisions we make. So, man, I'm impressed. So you've built up this green building expertise and talk about maybe lead version five. Now we are kind of in the middle of 2024. We've got a draft of it, and next thing you know, we won't have to use it until really next year. But you're kind of like, no, let's use it now. So tell us about LEED v five and how are you already working on one of those projects?

**13:21**

Marco

Yes, Charlie. So we had the opportunity to work on a v5 on an R and D project. So it's the newest version. And the project is very challenging because it's a 30,000 square meter R and D building. And we found a lot of very interesting things, as in the new version, because we pushed forward, of course, on the degree of urbanization topics and of course on wellness and health of people living inside the building. But what we really like is that the work that we did in the last years, it's mostly aligned with a new version. So we found that the green building council and us, our vision are aligned to this purpose. And so we had the opportunity to use most of the strategy that we built a long time into the new rating systems. For instance, this building is pursuing decarbonization very strongly and so we could achieve a 90% reduction in JG emissions. Ready for decarbonization, a new aspect for decarbonization, a new version five and 30% site energy reduction, just to mention one of the most discussed topics. And still were going through the ongoing monitoring of indoor pollutants, for instance. And the new version five also goes in that direction because it provides more points and more strategies. So incentivize the use of continuous monitoring rather than spot monitoring rather than single spot testing. So we find that the new version is really aligned with our hope, with our purpose, and that we can. And then this is really disruptive in terms of rebuildings. And we think that this version can really help companies and also finance markets,

decision makers to understand when a building is pursuing trunk decarbonization and wellness or not.

**15:35**

Charlie

Green finance, you're right, is showing up more and more. But I'd say it sounds like it's aligning, as our Greek friends would call it, with your ethos. So I love it, man. A couple others though, true zero waste park smart. I mean, there's these other programs maybe some of our listeners haven't even heard about, and they're great GBCI associated programs. Do you bring those to clients and say, hey, we can do this as well? How does that conversation go?

**16:03**

Marco

Yes, since we really liked the GBCI work, we also studied additional ranking systems and we found that really exciting. So we're also starting to propose debt programs to clients. And the response was great. So, for instance, on par marts, we now are talking with the owner, developer and owner of most of the multilevel parking in Rome. Okay, these are quite different from maybe multi level parking in us that are quite common and bigger. But in Rome still, we have some needs for them and we are trying to still not only pursue the certification, but to use that as a standard for them, for all their design projects. So that's our purpose is to not only to pursue certification, but to use that criteria, both design, construction and management. A long time to inspire, to inform these designers, these owners. And in this case, we really hope that we still have to start with the core of the work. So it's something that you have us as an insight, but we really hope that this will go on because it will be, I think it will be the first ParapSmart project in Italy, similar to true zero waste. So true zero waste still is something very inspiring for some of our clients. And we think that this could also help multinational companies to provide a harmonized approach to waste management. Because once again, these programs may be used in different nations with different local regulations, with different local aspects. And so we are very close to saying



that we are applying hold guideline of waste management based on the true zero waste criteria.

**17:59**

Marco

And for most virtuous projects, we will try to push for the true zero certification and that will be a first in Italy as well.

**18:09**

Charlie

These are fantastic programs to our listeners. Make sure you go to the GBCI website and check out these other programs that really can build on and extend from great programs like LEED. Okay, let's talk about the future. Marco, I love to ask a green building expert like you, what are you kind of excited about what's coming at us? What do you think's next in this green building movement?

**18:31**

Marco

I think that the gross portfolio approach is still something that will be really strong in the future. Of course, single projects remain something that developers like and will still go through more of them in Europe and us in Asia. But I think that is also a view on the portfolio. So with programs like grass or steel art programs spread worldwide will be something that people that company will be involved in. But this is just the first step. So we already arrived at that point. I strongly think that finance and the global markets will continuously find in the green building certifications, in third party certification for infrastructures, something that they can rely on. So I think that finance will move on financing with a better interest rate, with better taxes. Also institutions may think about some incentives for these programs because they ensure that these programs ensure that money is going in the right direction. In Europe we have the CSRD, the new regulation concerning reporting. The CSRD is linked to the EU taxonomy and the EU taxonomy

screens the investments you are doing in that direction. So in the next few years, each European company will be, I mean each over a certain revenue, will need to disclose where their money is going. This approach from the European company is really robust and will allow us to see a lot of nice things in the future.

**20:24**

Charlie

Well said, and I agree with all of that. Let's go to some rapid fire questions. Let's get to know you more here. Marco, what would you say is your specialty or gift?

**20:35**

Marco

Nice question, Charlie. I think that my special gift is to have both this knowledge. I mean, I'm not a full economist, I'm not a full engineer, but these two things together can let me see things a little bit, like with a nice vision. And so this multidisciplinary background that I have, both in terms of education, but also in terms of work experience, can be really my gift. Also in these times, in these periods when the market is still on, evolution change. Very often if you find a way to know more things, you can be effective in conversation with clients and conversation with the stakeholders you are meeting.

**21:28**

Charlie

I agree. You need to be that technical kind of customer service, that technical sales. You have to understand buildings, understand what's possible and not just say, here's the minimum we could do, but here's what we should do. You want to encourage, like this is what's possible and that's what I'm hearing here. Multidisciplinary, do you like to learn? How did you pick up on all these other skill sets?

**21:54**

Marco

Most of the time I think that I've been inspired by rating systems. So as you know, the US GPC is really proactive on that. In that case, they often provide a lot of framework, maybe not in use, but they study ahead. So GBC studies ahead of the market, tries to address the market and provides a framework in different disciplines. So of course, GBC is one of my inspiring movements. Still, I am really lucky, because in my company we are not talking only about rebuilding, as I was telling you, we are also talking about supply chain product evolution. And also the European market is really dynamic on regulation. So I think that in this period here, you cannot study everything because there are too many things on sustainability right now. But I think from my work and from the GBC, from standards, from voluntary standards, and from my work position, I can learn and understand where I have to move to study forward.

**23:00**

Charlie

Love that. So do you have any good habits or routines, rituals that kind of keep it on point?

**23:07**

Marco

Still from Viva, from my company, I learned this kind of funny thing. So we used to work together on a blackboard. We used to say, let's make a blackboard. So we stayed together under the same rule. With the blackboard, we try to write down the strategy we want to push for our clients, for our projects. And you have more voices there because you have the younger and you have the older guys, you have the founders sometimes. So you can collect information from each one. And we also say, in Italian, we say la vagnata. That means blackboard, of course. And also our clients sometimes do not understand because we used to tell them, let's make a blackboard. But sometimes also the client is involved. So we are really familiar with this one.

**24:01**

Marco

Another really interesting thing is that we try to push forward our communication with the client with something that we call human exploration. It's something that we do with our clients directly, one one. So me and my direct client, or my colleagues and their clients, and we try to talk about human things, not about building business. So we sit with them and we try to understand where they come from, what are their thoughts, what are their strengths. Sometimes their weakness is kind of similar, what you're doing with me, actually. So we are aligned on that one. But this brings the client very close to you, and you understand first what they want, and you keep in touch with him. So things on business are going more easily, maybe?

**24:55**

Charlie

I love that, the brainstorming, the blackboard and just you can learn from everyone around you, but you have a lot to teach as well on my podcast. Next time I see you, maybe in Europe, I need to bring you a shirt for our podcast, since you've been a guest. And it says, teach everything you know. Teach everything you know. So I think you're learning from everyone around you, we're hearing that. I think to learn, you have to be a great question asker too. So I sense some of that in here. Stay curious and ask questions. Questions. And peel back the onions. I love that. All right, so as you get to know me more, I'm a fan of the bucket list. Not everybody has a bucket list. That's okay.

**25:34**

Charlie

But if you did, what are one or two things on your bucket list? Any place you want to travel to or travel back to. Any adventure. Maybe you want to write a book. What's on the bucket list?

**25:44**

Marco

Yeah, I want to be. To be tough, but one of the things is my bucket list. I would really like to go on through the old accreditation of green buildings. I know this is kind of maybe boring.

**25:57**

Charlie

You love it. No, you love it. Get all those letters after your name. So which ones do you have and which ones do you want to get next?

**26:04**

Marco

I have the operation and maintenance certificate, accreditation, building design and construction. I'm pursuing a WELL accredited professional, but I think that I could have more for what I studied. But I didn't have the time, Charlie, to give all the exams, you know. But I can have an id and see because I went to a project of 20 different retail projects all around the world with a fashion company. It was an incredible project. It was another one of my great achievements that I didn't mention, but a project in LA, New York. So like six projects in the US, five projects in Europe, five projects in Asia. That was great. So I also would like to go through a true zero way advisor. Of course, if I reach that project that I'm struggling for and maybe something about the new ASHRAE decarbonization professional that I saw that it's coming on the market really strongly. I really think that Ashrai decarbonization professional credentials work better. Very nice. With, with the dollar market.

**27:13**

Charlie

Yeah, maybe send me a link to that. I'll put it in the podcast show notes. Everybody can read up on that new credential. But when you want to pass your, well, AP or some of the other lead AP's, you let me know. I passed them all. Some are tricky, so just reach out and I'll give you a few secret tips.

**27:29**

Marco

Okay, thank you, Charlie.

**27:31**

Charlie

Then you just tell me where all the best places in Rome to eat are. All right, we'll have a trade off there. But I gotta ask in the travel thoughis there a place one day you wanna go and travel to if you were to also add that to the bucket list?

**27:45**

Marco

Yeah, I will. I really? Go to Japan. It's a place. I don't know, maybe it's one of the most beautiful places in the world. In the east. In the west. Yes, in the east. I will appreciate going there. It's not very cheap, but I will try to go there. And still I miss South America. Brazil. Did you know that we opened Brazil affiliates last year from Nativa? Nativa is now in Italy, is in Rome, Milan, and now in Brazil, in Rio de Janeiro. I will probably go there. It may be closer than I think. Of course, I would like to go back to the US, of course, just because I'm kind of us oriented. I also played basketball in my lifetime. I would like to go back in the US, maybe New York or in LA, where I've never been.

**28:48**

Charlie

All right. There. We got it on the bucket list. I love it, man. All right, so for our podcast listeners, is there a book you'd recommend that doesn't have to be about buildings? Is there a book you'd recommend?

**29:00**

Marco

Yes. This time it's not about dream building. I'm an artist, writer. It's called

Yual Harari. He's a great student. I mean, he studied history, but also science. So he's a scientist. He loves history. It's really inspiring because he talked about the past, because he wanted to understand about the future. So he teaches the lessons from his perspective on what we have to do as sapiens, as homo sapiens, as human beings, to face the new challenges in the new centuries. And one of the most interesting things he says is that coming back to the multidisciplinary things is that it will be very. It will be more important in the future to be dynamic. So in the last century you had a job, you worked on that job, you got specialized, and you will probably never change. That job nowadays, not like this. Nowadays it is more about how dynamic you are. The more dynamic you are, the more you can learn to learn, the more you will be successful, because things will be changing very soon. And so we need to adapt to these changes, hopefully with a positive purpose. So this is just one of the very few things that he says in his books. The books are Sapiens and Homo Deus, as two of his famous books, and I kind of difficult to read very deeply on these topics, but kind of inspiring.

### **30:43**

Charlie

We'll put links in the podcast, show notes. Everybody can check out the books. For those recommendations. Marco, just a couple more questions as we wind down. One, as you look back on your career, is there any career advice you wish you'd have known earlier?

### **30:58**

Marco

Nice question, I think you should be hungry. You should be ambitious. So that thing that once said, stay hungry, stay foolish, okay. It's something very common. But I remember that when I was at a tipping point in my career. I was like, a little bit out of money, a little bit not so happy about my working life. And that brings me to the force and strength to study, go deep and find the correct direction. So I know this is not really advice, but just my personal history, but I think it is important to understand that it mostly depends on

your mentality, not on external conditions. It's mostly on your attitude, on how you face your difficulties, the issues that you are coming into.

**32:00**

Charlie

Yeah, well said that's some good wisdom. Last question. Let's say someone is listening right now, they're getting real inspired hearing your journey, your love for all the certification programs and all the credentials, and you're doing some LEED v5 already. Say someone's just now jumping into this movement, any words of encouragement for them, Marco, as we come to a close.

**32:26**

Marco

Yes, Charlie, I think that everyone jumping in should be excited because this is our moment. This is the moment when sustainability professionals become too important for projects, especially when the investment is a long term investment. Things must be studied with sustainability in mind, because otherwise, we will have in the future something that we regret often. So this is our moment, and also a very important thing is that in the green building, you can basically now, with these trends, you can basically work on very different topics. So you can start with a green associate credential. You can start understanding what rebuilding means. But then you can, of course, you can specialize. You can specialize in social aspects. You can specialize on technical HVAC management assets, on decriminalization. You can own equity on social topics, on community topics. As a facilitator, you can specialize in a lot of different aspects. So you can be free in a certain way.

**33:35**

Charlie

There you go. You heard it right here. Connect with Marco on LinkedIn. Let them know what you thought of the podcast. Marco, I can't wait to come visit you in Rome one day, hopefully not too far in the future, and just keep up the



great work. Thanks for bringing the energy and the wisdom today and sharing your story. Thank you very much.

**33:53**

Marco

Thank you, Charlie. It's been a pleasure. Come soon. Please. See you.

**33:58**

Speaker 4

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