

Kelly Lerner's West Coast Green Early Adopter's Workshop Interview

What inspired or caused you to get involved in green building & how many years ago was that?

Growing up in a Mennonite community, I was inspired as a kid to be sustainable. Then I attended the University of Oregon in the early 90's and under the Architecture program learned about passive solar heating and cooling among other things. As a student on a limited income, I was always looking for free energy sources. Seeing what was happening to the environment in Oregon at the time (deforestation) also inspired me to work toward sustainability.

2 or 3 examples of what do you do to keep you on your edge?

1. Networking with other professionals who have similar values, especially through the Northwest EcoBuilding Guild and Cascadia (USGBC chapter).
2. Research through independent reading and going to conferences.
3. A lot of hiking and outdoor activities to be reminded of how nature works and be inspired by its elegance.

What are the next steps for you to get to the next level?

1. Focusing on fine tuning net zero energy solutions and really delving into net zero water. Monitoring of the energy systems that we have already built, to learn what to change next time. I need to push the water side more to get where I want to be.
2. Working on our demonstration home design in Spokane that will meet the Living Building Challenge.
3. Doing more global networking that informs local working solutions.

What feelings come up for you when you think of these steps?

Some trepidation and some excitement, plus overwhelm. But mostly excitement!

What are a couple of success stories of bringing along your network to their next level

1. Well, I wrote a book (Natural Remodeling for the Not So Green Home) that is changing people's idea of what a remodel should entail, by assessing site and climate first.
2. The other thing that comes to mind is meeting with other designers and builders and passing on details, seeding of ideas for future straw balers

If you were to describe your network as a metaphor that comes to mind...what would it be...

Like an underground mushroom mycelia system, all interconnected and supporting each other, with many who do not know each other, but that know others who know others. It feels like a safety net.

Next steps in working with your network in helping & inspiring them to the next level

1. Working with Al Gore's Climate Project and connecting others with the project.
2. Attending Green Drinks to make my network a bit wider, rather than just building and design professionals. It also is a bit more social and a bit more fun!
3. Working with the City of Spokane Climate Change Task Force, where I am the co-lead of a workgroup on the built and unbuilt environment.

Which ones are you most drawn to?

The Climate Project, because it can have an incredible impact – and Green Drinks for its social aspect and community building.

Resources you'd suggest

I'd say tap into whatever network is around you and their network, especially local green building groups. The Architecture 2030 website has really good information. For publications, try Environmental Building News, Home Power, and Mother Earth News.

Anything else you'd like to tell me that I haven't asked

The Living Building Challenge is a rating system that seems to be doing it the right way, with basic sustainability prerequisites in really big steps. Baby steps aren't going to work. Performance based systems are also really good, leaving it open for someone to come up with a creative solution that hasn't been thought of yet.

Interested in interviewing others?