

Interview with Jerry Yudelson, author, “The Green Building Revolution” (Island Press, November 2007)



Where did you find the original impulse to write *The Green Building Revolution*?

Green building is the fastest-growing phenomenon to hit the building industry since the Internet. It is no longer a trend; it's a full-fledged revolution. Between 2000 and 2006, the number of green buildings has grown from a handful to more than 5,000 projects actively seeking LEED certification.

With many corporations, the federal, state, local and regional governments implementing sustainability requirements including green building requirements I saw a need to outline the basics of green buildings and introduce the projects and people that are advancing this movement.

Green buildings are part of the solution toolkit to today's environmental crises – global warming, species extinction, droughts, severe floods, and hurricanes. *The Green Building Revolution* fulfills the need to accelerate the public's understanding of the importance of the green building revolution in addressing the climate-change, energy and environmental challenges of our times.

Did you have specific readers in mind as you were putting this book together?

The Green Building Revolution is a chronicle and manifesto of the green building movement. It is for anyone who wants a thorough introduction to the rationale for green building and an overview of how it's being implemented. Architects, developers, building owners and managers, contractors, engineers, and builders will discover why and how to start thinking about high-performance environmentally aware buildings... and how to do so on conventional budgets. It is also designed for public officials and anyone dealing with sustainability or green building requirements. *The Green Building Revolution* is not exclusively for people in the industry, I wrote it for the interested citizen as well – someone is perhaps not actively engaged in the industry but wants a quick introduction to the rationale for green building and an overview of how it is being implemented throughout the US.

How does this book differ from other books about green building?

The Green Building Revolution describes the many “revolutions” that are taking place today in commercial buildings, schools, universities, public buildings, health care institutions, housing, property management, and neighborhood design. Through interviews and case studies, this book outlines the broader “journey to sustainability” influenced by the green building revolution and provides a solid business case for accelerating this trend.

The Green Building Revolution addresses several key questions: How large is the green building movement today? How is it affecting commercial, primary and secondary school, higher education, hospital and government building? What are the economic benefits and costs of green buildings? And what can you do to further the green building revolution?

Is the green building movement gaining momentum?

The green building industry is experiencing dramatic growth; new projects registered under the US Green Building Council’s LEED® rating system grew 50% in 2006 (vs. 2005 year-end cumulative data) and are on track to grow more than 70% on a cumulative basis again this year.

We’ve also seen a *sea change* in consumer attitudes toward everything green, including green buildings and green homes. There is a momentum that will sweep across the entire design, development and construction industry over the next three to five years. Firms have to prepare for this or risk being left at a considerable competitive disadvantage.

What do you think is the future of green building?

The green building revolution will continue to accelerate no matter what Congress or the President does. The new energy bill in Congress will help renewable energy systems (especially solar photovoltaics) to become more widespread in green buildings and it will undoubtedly spur energy conservation efforts in both new and existing buildings. Green buildings weren’t created by Washington and they will continue to gain in popularity no matter what Congress does.

Is green gaining greater acceptance in the building and development community?

Over the next three years, we will see architects and engineers routinely aim for 50% reductions in building energy use from today’s baselines. I predict that more than 2,500 new building projects will register for LEED certification this year and 3,500 will do so next year, to bring the total of registered projects to nearly 12,000, each with an average size of about \$10 million. Green building growth will far outpace the general growth of the building industry over the next five years.

Looking even further into the future, the industry will begin looking at how to move beyond LEED requirements and toward buildings and neighborhoods that are “restorative” or “regenerative.” We will start seeing “intelligent buildings,” buildings that provide all of their own power and water as well as restore habitats.

You included a chapter on international green building. What can the US learn from what’s happening abroad?

While the US is the global leader in green buildings, based on the rapid adoption of the LEED system, some European countries have been using green building assessment tools for the past ten years. Other countries have also moved ahead to develop their own green building rating systems and further transform the building industry. There’s a lot we can learn, not only from technology, but from incentives and institutional arrangements.

Why does the LEED rating system play such a prominent role in the book?

LEED has become the *de facto* US national rating system for commercial, institutional, and high-rise residential buildings. LEED has defined what it means for a building to be sustainable and how architects, engineers, builders, owners, and developers should approach creating green buildings.

That said, the green building movement is not just about LEED and the USGBC. It is a broader movement by the building industry to become more responsible: toward the occupants of its buildings; toward community infrastructure, energy and water, and other natural resources and materials; and toward the global environment.

What led you to be a green building advocate?

I have spent most of my career engaged in energy and environmental affairs, working to make our current economy and way of life more appropriate to long-term sustainability. I see my role as a communicator between green building professionals and the larger business and governmental public. This is my passion, and I want to share it with others. Together we can make this transformation happen.

How can green buildings make a difference in terms of global climate change?

The greatest sources of carbon dioxide emissions are vehicles and the electricity generated to run buildings. These emissions are the primary cause of climate change. Green buildings can reduce carbon emissions by about 40% compared to conventional buildings.

What aspects of green building do you feel are most misunderstood or underutilized?

Cost is the biggest obstacle for green building right now because there is a perception that green buildings cost more. Cost is obviously the single most important factor in development and construction. And it is true that green projects between 2000 and 2005

were more costly than conventional projects. However, this was largely because the transition to new methods of design and construction involved a lot of social learning that was accompanied by construction mistakes, poor designs, unproven new products and a myriad of reasons leading to extra costs.

In 2005 and 2006, many design and construction teams had done enough green projects to start lowering costs to conventional levels.

The most important thing is this: project teams should take the first 30 days of a project design effort (which influences 65% to 85% of total costs) to assess innovative project options, make choices among key cost drivers, and developing a clear vision of results. This is where the integrated design process comes in. The basic principle of integrated design is that by looking at the whole building's energy and water use, not just focusing on individual systems in isolation from each other, the increased costs of some things will be offset by reduced costs of others.

What should a reader come away from *The Green Building Revolution* with?

Readers of *The Green Building Revolution* will know how to talk about green buildings to their clients, management, investors and other stakeholders. However, the primary takeaway from *The Green Building Revolution* is the abundant evidence supporting the business, economic and policy cases for green building. In my final chapter, I call on all readers to become “green building revolutionaries.”

*Jerry Yudelson is the author of *The Green Building Revolution* (Island Press, 2007) and five other books on green buildings and green marketing. He can be reached through his web site at www.greenbuildconsult.com.*