

Thought Leadership in the Green Architecture Movement - An Interview with Jason F. McLennan

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In October of this year IMAGINiT hosted the Design Green Roadshow in several cities across North America targeting professionals in the Building Industry interested in Sustainability and the Green Building movement. Jason F. McLennan, CEO of [Cascadia Region Green Building Council](#) (CRGBC) and the [International Living Building Institute](#) was one of our keynote speakers in several of the cities.

Jason is considered one of the most influential individuals in the green building movement today. He has authored three books; *The Philosophy of Sustainable Design*, *The Dumb Architect's Guide to Glazing Selection*, and the *Ecological Engineer*, with his fourth book - *Zugenuruhe* scheduled to be released in 2010. McLennan's ideas have been published extensively in many magazines and newspapers across North America and he was recently named one of the most influential people in the City of Seattle by Seattle Magazine.

IMAGINiT has recently signed up to sponsor the [Living Building Roadshow](#), an event born out of the Living Building Challenge, an international green building program that Jason created.

IMAGINiT: So... who IS Jason F. McLennan? Why don't you start by telling us a bit about yourself and your background?

Jason: Well, where should I start? I am Canadian. I was born and raised in Sudbury, ON, a nickel-mining town which really set the stage for my perspective on the environment, and how important green techniques and processes really are.



As far as schooling, I was educated in Oregon, Kansas and Glasgow, Scotland and was trained as an architect. I then went on to become a principal at BNIM Architects, one of the founders of the green design movement in the United States where I had the chance to work on many of the leading high performance projects in the country including LEED Platinum, Gold and zero energy projects. Now I "teach and preach" the Green Building mission full-time.

I: What made you make the move from architect to educator?

J: As the youngest member in a prominent architectural firm, I felt that I had reached some of my professional goals as an architect early on. I felt compelled to leave the practice (at least for some time) to devote my energy to making a difference in life much more broadly. Instead of working on greening one project at a time, I could effect change for dozens of firms and developers simultaneously.

I was compelled by the sense of urgency I felt, particularly around climate change and global habitat loss and wanted to help provide the tools, vision and ideas necessary for the building industry to do their part to address these critical issues. This motivated me to pack up and move to Seattle, where I became the CEO of the Cascadia Region Green Building Council - the largest chapter in both the US and Canadian green building networks.



I: How did the Living Building Challenge Emerge?

J: I was the original author of the Living Building Challenge, which was the culmination of almost 15 years of work on the subject. In order to help define what a truly sustainable building is for a project we were working on in Montana in the 1990's, Bob Berkebile, my mentor and former partner at BNIM Architects collaborated with me on this concept from the very beginning. What started out as concept and metaphor (buildings that operate as elegantly and efficiently as natural systems) turned into a fully developed rating system which I released as part of Cascadia in 2006. An idea this important needed to 'live' within the framework of an NGO instead of a single firm.



Since 2006 we have been overwhelmed (in a good way) by the immense support and excitement around the challenge. It's from this interest that the idea of doing an international roadshow emerged. We have projects popping up all over North America - currently we count over 70 projects in 20 states and 3 provinces - with a project now in France as well. Architects and consultants have been trying to push to this level of performance for quite some time. I used to speak ad-hoc about these topics a lot, doing keynotes at various conferences. I saw the latent demand for training on our protocol to be done in an organized fashion and we decided to package a deliberate curriculum, which could be delivered to many cities.

We chose to take it on the road where we could capture a diverse audience to hear our message. People pay to attend and receive a full day of training from various trained Green Building/living building experts. Visit <http://www.ilbi.org/> to see if we will be visiting a city near you.

I: What accomplishment would you say you are most proud of?

J: I love how the Living Building Challenge changes the way people design. On Living Building projects we've seen a much higher level of integration between disciplines than ever before. As buildings become so performance driven, there is a need for greater analysis and cross fertilization early in the process. This is where companies like IMAGINIT come into play. They sell the tools and technology that help facilitate design and information modeling early on.

These Living Building Projects are also changing regulations. The program is getting legs and finding its way into the hearts and minds of people. I'm thrilled to announce the first Living Building will be certified in 2010. This is a different paradigm than LEED certification. Projects need to be built 12 months before they become certified. We have instilled a rigorous process to make sure they perform to the standards that were set. The Living Building Challenge is currently the most stringent and comprehensive green building standard in the world. It defines cutting edge. Our new version - 2.0 also applies for existing building renovations, site designs and whole campus or neighborhood scale interventions. This is the first rating system to address social equity issues, transportation and urban agriculture as a mandatory requirement in the program. I encourage people to download the current version of [the standard 2.0 version](#).

I: What keeps you awake at night?

J: Well, that's a hard one. I feel both excited and anxious. Maybe anxious isn't the right word. I feel incredibly concerned and dismayed about the state of the planet, but hopeful at the same time. It's clear that we have to make huge substantial changes now or these changes will be forced upon us in some very unpleasant ways. Yet its exciting to see so many people building the living models of the future that we need to replicate everywhere.

I: How does technology tie back into it all?

J: IMAGINiT has been the first technology company I have seen smart enough to understand and embrace this huge opportunity to promote their products through the lens of the Living Building Challenge. They have been early adopters while everyone else still has had blinders on. There is a huge business opportunity to address a large customer base with practitioners needing tools that do more and more. People need to really understand the role that technology brings in building better buildings and communities. IMAGINiT is one partner we are quite excited about.



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