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Finally, we can design healthier buildings

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People frequently ask me, as an architect in the green design arena, "What is next for green building?"

I believe U.S. Green Building Council COO Mahesh Ramanujam gave the correct answer at a March 2014 conference when he said, "A new market is emerging for which we all must be at the ready: buildings that promote human health."

I think about how far we have come in the last 20 years from what I would consider the beginning of mainstream sustainability. For many of those years we had been working with an old kit of parts.

Through organizations like the USGBC, the design and construction industry has been very successful at implementing what would now be considered the preliminary steps in green building design: reducing energy use, water use, and construction waste.

As the green industry has evolved, so has the demand for not just using current resources wisely but creating new and more environmentally friendly products with which to build our green buildings. It is time to push the boundaries. The market is finally transforming.

A major component of promoting human health through design is specifying healthier building products.

The Health Product Declarations Collaborative <http://hpdcollaborative.org/> encourages manufacturers to disclose the chemical contents of their products. This allows consumers and designers to make more informed decisions about the products we put into our buildings.

Another organization that has been in existence for a while, but with the help of HPD requirements, is finally coming into its own, is Cradle to Cradle <http://www.c2ccertified.org/>. This organization certifies products for their sustainable attributes. Cradle to Cradle is making it easier for architects and consumers to select the most holistically sustainable materials in many aspects of life, not just building materials. As an architect who focuses on healthcare design, I find this tool to be an easy way to help my clients make informed decisions about the materials we incorporate into their projects.

I have struggled for many years with my desire to design healthier hospitals. This building type is one in which people go to in order to get healthier; doesn't it seem contradictory if the materials within the building could make a person sick?

Now, I feel I finally have the resources at my fingertips to make future buildings healthier.

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