



The road to sustainability: An important objective for building owners, architects and designers

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On its 40-year journey from the backwaters to the mainstream, sustainability has become an important objective for building owners, tenants, and architects and designers; it is embodied in building codes, implemented in good practice, reflected by good citizenship. And it has become increasingly broad in the number and variety of issues it encompasses, challenging the building community to find truly inclusive and workable approaches and definitions.

One approach emerged with the founding in 1993 of the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), an industry-based group that brought different disciplines together to arrive at a consensus definition of sustainable design. The result was the USGBC's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system, which awards points for different sustainable approaches and certifies projects on a scale ranging from "certified" to "platinum." The LEED systems - there are different checklists and metrics for new projects, renovations, buildings, and interiors - allow for flexibility: no project can incorporate all possible sustainable features. Thus, owners, architects, designers, and contractors must work in close collaboration to identify the best and most efficient approach for each project.

This last point is critical. There are multiple paths to LEED certification, and every decision affects multiple elements of the project. Every LEED certified project Mancini*Duffy has completed - from interior renovations to new buildings, and for clients ranging from global investment banks to New York-based real estate companies to international software firms - has required and benefited from intense and continual collaboration among team members. When the sustainability goals are clearly defined and articulated at the beginning of the design process, and each team member has an explicit responsibility for attaining those goals, the results are vastly improved communication, thorough integration of design, and an outcome that supports the client's strategies.

While the LEED rating systems are an evolving mechanism, and the USGBC continually re-examines and updates them, LEED has become the industry standard for defining sustainable design. Sustainability has become a standard element in the definition of excellence in design. For interiors in particular, that includes both good stewardship of the environment and protecting and enhancing the health and well-being of the people who work in those interiors. Whether or not a company pursues LEED certification for their buildings and office spaces - and businesses do, in growing numbers - most now recognize that sustainable design is not a costly frill, but a bottom-line essential. It attracts a more environmentally aware generation of employees, promotes job satisfaction and productivity, reduces work-related health problems, and cuts energy costs. Businesses with LEED-certified offices find they have a valuable promotional and marketing tool, a way of showing that they are responsible global citizens, taking meaningful steps in the present to ensure the future.

On the other hand, owners do not necessarily need to adopt the LEED rating system in order to build more sustainably. There are some additional costs attendant on a LEED project, primarily for the additional documentation and commissioning required. For those who choose not to register their project with the USGBC as a LEED project, there are many sustainable measures that can, and in some instances must, be incorporated into project design. Improved energy efficiency, for instance, is now required in most jurisdictions; the New York Energy Conservation Construction Code specifically calls for all projects to achieve higher efficiency in lighting and air conditioning. Industry practice has now largely eliminated indoor air pollution during construction; paints and carpets today give off few fumes - that "just painted" smell is a thing of the past. Whether or not a project is pursuing LEED certification, we can specify a higher proportion of recycled or locally produced products.

Mancini*Duffy's commitment to excellence and sustainability in design is evidenced in our people and our practice. More than 25% of our designers and architects are LEED Accredited Professionals; they have mastered LEED's complexities, devised imaginative approaches to sustainable design, and guided projects through to LEED certification. Because the field changes constantly, with new products and practices, even new rules, we continually look for ways to innovate and to provide our clients with the best, the latest, the state-of-the-art. To that end, we have also adopted the EPA's ENERGY STAR energy performance rating system into our practice. Sustainable design is not an alternative way to design: it is integral to Mancini*Duffy's vision, one of the many factors - from programming and planning to aesthetics, from budgets and schedules to branding - that help reduce cost, enhance productivity, contribute to excellence, and make a project an enduring success.

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