Architecture and Innovation- Blair Davies video

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It's, you can really highly differentiate yourself. But it's not really a business answer. It's more of a personality answer, which goes back to that, knowing I don't know.

**Tom:** From the office in manufacture. CERACLAD Incorporated in Redmond, Washington, and on location. This is the architecture and innovation podcast featuring one on one interviews with architects, designers, contractors, city managers, and thought leaders committed to sustainability, innovation, and solutions that are proven and create a healthy and sustainable future.

Living environment for our, guests today. We're honored and excited to welcome Blair Davies, professional engineer, an expert and agent for high performance facade systems that are innovative, aesthetic, sustainable, constructible, [00:01:00] affordable, and proven. For more information, feel free to visit their website at facade systems, Inc.

com. That's facade systems, Inc. com Blair. Welcome to your show today. Thank

**Blair:** you very much, Thomas.

**Tom:** What did you have a quote or a mantra we talked about in our digital green room that means or matters much to you. I'd love to your audience. I'm sure we'd love to hear it as well.

**Blair:** It's, it's a title that I use.

And there's a lot of background and history and sort of colloquial ways to say this, but I say high performance facades should not be left a chance. And that is a comment on. The status quo, because the status quo is people do leave it to chance. [00:02:00] I happen to live in Toronto, Canada, and it's a really bad place to have a facade because we have everything here cold, wet.

Freezing, sunny, hot, wind, storms, hail, all in the same week. And so getting it right is it's not easy and but it can be done right with the right people at the table.

**Tom:** When you say the right people, how do you select? Do you have a criteria? That you go through mentally or even quantifiably where you go, these are the people that I know are going to do the job and do it well.

**Blair:** It's a soft art. Uh, I came to a conclusion within the last month. That the people that I work the best with are those that know they don't know. So they're entering [00:03:00] a project or they're entering a situation and they try and they expect, architects and sometimes engineers, but mostly the architects and the builders, they, if they enter it with, they know they don't know, then they go seeking experts in the space and bring those experts in a very collaborative fashion.

And that's where folks like myself thrive. And if you're, if you go, so it's almost, there is knowledge and there is skill and you can measure it by somebody's statistical years in the business or their degrees or how many projects they've done. But it says it's as much as who the person is and I get brought in on lots of meetings where people try to narrow it down to some very specific questions and it never works that way.

And, um, let me tell you a story about that's [00:04:00] happening right now. And so I'm working on a pretty big job and honestly, I've tried to walk away from it three times. And I've told the general contractor the way this is being organized. It's just being asked to be a disaster and I don't want to be part of a disaster because even though I might make some money because I'm an agent of products and systems and, I, and in the end of the day, I'm not a consultant.

I get a commission off of what I sell, I could end up selling stuff and put some money in my pocket, but I'm also going to get called to the job site. People are going to call me all sorts of bad words. They're going to denigrate the products that I'm involved in. And it just creates a whole bunch of negative vibes that I just don't want.

And I don't enjoy. And I'm in this business because I like all the positivity when you do it right. And I like the feedback that I get from all sorts of people that say I [00:05:00] need more of you. This particular person, I've been saying we need a meeting for weeks. And they, we have a meeting now finally booked for tomorrow.

And And they've asked me to write down the questions that I have, and I'm just deathly afraid that I'm going to ask some questions. They're not going to quite understand them. They're going to send them to a third party, like the architect, because I don't think the architect's been invited to the meeting.

And I'll be waiting for questions that relate to my questions. In some cases, I'll get the answers. But we're going to go on for several weeks before we're going to get decisions. And I suspect he's also going to try to push some of the decisions back on me. And I don't want that, because I'm not designing his building.

And things like the depth of the wall, how much insulation, the [00:06:00] detailing, how you How you interact with the windows. What's the panel layout, what size of panel, what color of panel what are you, what's, what aesthetically you're trying to create, what are the corners look like what's the parapet you're trying to detail a whole myriad of things that all interlock with the other one.

So it's not like picking paint, you pick paint, it's blue. That's all you need to know. There's your blue. This is if I, if you give me an answer to one thing, there's three other questions that follow on to that answer. And I'm really afraid that I'm going to spend the next two hours documenting all sorts of questions.

He's going to, he's going to have more questions to my questions and I'm going to end up with three more meetings instead of one. And I can I can tell. He thinks it's easy and it's not, we're not putting men in space, but this still is a very collaborative very much [00:07:00] a, Hey, what if this, and how do you want to do that?

And then this affects this and that affects this and what's your budget. And you've just made a decision to affect your cost on the project. Now, what do you want to do about that? What the envelope is got a lot of moving pieces. And that's why I like it. I'm an engineer. I like digging in. I'm curious. I'm always finding new things and new ways to do things.

People come to me for that aspect. But when I get somebody who wants to narrow it down to three questions we're just not going to get it done. And I just, radars up that this thing's going to go, sideways or worse.

**Tom:** That was fabulous insight. Thank you for Letting us know that because I think people in other facets, because not everyone is an architect and engineer or even in the built environment that listens to our show, but that gives them a real clarity, thanks to you of [00:08:00] the dynamics and the challenges and constraints, even constraints of of the work you do.

And on that subject of constraints, how do you work with constraints? It might be a general question, but I'm curious to hear your your thoughts on when you do have constraints and how do you navigate them through them?

**Blair:** I'm a one man band. So it's the first constraint is my time and how much time I want to spend on one thing or another. I do look for profitability. It's just as much work to do interesting facades on a really big project as it is for a smaller project. However, really big projects tend to go to tender, and everybody gets a shot at them, and it's hard to differentiate.

So there is this balance between scale, so I can make more money and differentiation. So if I'm not, [00:09:00] if I'm selling something that other people have, or I'm working on projects that other people have, and I pour my heart into it, and it goes out to tender, I haven't accomplished that too much, but if I can find that sweet spot where somebody wants me on the job and it's likely going my way and I'm really differentiated, then then I've got a more of a one to one relationship between my time spent, energy spent, mind into it, thoughts thoughts after hours and and results that's I guess it's, can I get a leverage or a a high value add for every hour that I spend on something on a project or something.

And it's not always project based, so I've got a couple new products and new systems that have come to me. A cool one tomorrow I'm talking to, and if I'm able to bring it into, my marketplace successfully, I will have a lot of leverage. So the hours I'm [00:10:00] going to be spent on launching this new product into my marketplace, I'm going to have a whole lot of differentiation and lots of projects because of it.

Right now I'm launching glass fiber reinforced concrete. And ultra high performance concrete into the market, including in Canada and into the States. So basically, every hour I spend on that has quite huge returns. And it's very engineering oriented. It's not easy to go figure out. It plays right into my strong suit.

It's highly differentiated. And when a job comes out for pricing, we have a very high success rate. So I hope that answers the question.

**Tom:** Yes.

**Blair:** As an entrepreneur, you have to know that the hour you spend has.

**Tom:** Curiosity. You mentioned, you talked about, we didn't talk about it, but you mentioned the curiosity that you have a [00:11:00] level of it. How much does it play into the work that you do in general, just to have a curiosity? For the projects and the people that you work with.

**Blair:** You just defined my whole life.

Um,

Can't see me online, but I'm not a young man. But my whole life has been full of, I'm curious and there's no such thing as that's always, that's the way we always did it. I never thrived in that. A little bit of interesting background is I've only been in the building industry technically since about 05.

I studied civil engineering a long time ago, but I spent 20 years in tech great companies like HP and IBM, and they don't. They don't stand for people who aren't curious. If you ever sat in one of those companies, oh, that's the way we always did it. That was your your, they're going to show you the doorway in a search, a certain period of time.

Cause that every one of those were on super high growth [00:12:00] processes and opportunities that everything was changing at all times. And then you join the building industry and you it's a bizarre thing, but like in tech, a good idea here goes to Silicon Valley and then goes to, Asia within days here.

A good idea on one side of the city to the other side of the city might take months or years. It's crazy. So if you can be the person that's curious about finding new things and connecting different people and. Being curious at what happens over in New York City versus Toronto versus Paris, then you can be very unique.

It's, you can really highly differentiate yourself. But, I think it's not really a business answer. It's more of a personality answer, which goes back to that, knowing I don't know.

**Tom:** You're listening. To the architecture and innovation podcast. We're talking today [00:13:00] with Blair Davies, professional engineer and an expert and agent for high performance facade systems. For more information, feel free to visit their website at facade systems, Inc. com Blair obviously collaboration. You've mentioned several times in your interview.

Today's is a trust. How is trust a factor in all that? Collaboration with the people, because it really does come down to people. How's trust a factor for you and what you do in the completion of a successful project?

**Blair:** The easy answer of course, is it's huge because it is a people business.

And people are counting on you to be an expert, but they're also counting on you to have made decisions, not just bring ideas and stories and facts to the table. They're looking. They're looking for decisions. So yeah, so they have to trust that your [00:14:00] decisions are good. It's you're not just delivering a brochure or something.

I do have this interesting thing in my business I find, and I've been really figuring, trying to figure out how to get through it. So there is a huge gap between those people that. Highly trust me and wouldn't do a building without calling me, whether I have a product or not who always say I've got a new one, you got to come and see me and this group of people that I might reach out to cold and they, there's like a very low hit rate when I reach out to people I don't know.

And there's like a feeling in this industry. That, oh, that's just another sales guy trying to call me. Why would I call him back? And it's such a weird thing because my impact to the people that trust me really serious. And these people say this to me. Meanwhile, this group of people over here who haven't heard of me yet, and they will haven't heard of me yet, they Oh they're just another salesman.

[00:15:00] And there is a lot of that in this industry. There's just another salesman. The way I get through it is I do a lot of marketing and I do a lot of webinars. I post a lot. And I try to do a little bit of what you're doing, which is be very educational and that way it finds the people that know they don't know and bridge that gap.

But I find it really odd and I haven't figured out a way to let people know that they should, lower their firewall. And when they, and trust somebody who makes a case for the fact that they add a lot of value. And, if you want to talk to three of my customers about the kind of value I offer, it's off the charts.

**Tom:** That low. I love that line that you just said, lower your firewall. This you being on this podcast [00:16:00] while being educational and for informative and informative does do such thing. And that's why I've been doing it. Obviously. You may have known a number of years at Stanford university here in Northern California and and everywhere else is I like that lower the firewall because it does present a really neutral, engaging, curated program.

What's your thought on that on, on, on even just podcasts. I'm curious. I've not ever asked anyone yet what's your thought on podcasts of how useful they are. If useful to you.

**Blair:** They're fun. I only, I've only done one other one. I do think you can cover a lot of waterfront in a podcast that you can't in other vehicles, because other vehicles only take little snapshots of things.

And I think you also. You miss out on some of the nuance stuff about this business. It is so much of a [00:17:00] soft art building a building correctly and interacting with all the people that are involved. So I do think podcasts with the depth that you can bring in an hour, 40 minutes is very valuable to the discussion now that.

The only fear I'd have is I gotta find the people who know they don't know, right? That's the challenge here. Are the people who know they don't know, are they finding these mediums? That's the, that's what has to happen.

**Tom:** The, actually, the strategic placement of your Message is is key in this.

How about in your expression, lowering the firewall? Do you have a specific without giving away your secret sauce tell the lower that your firewall so that people get a real strong sense of go back to it, trust in you that you're going to deliver what you say you will.

**Blair:** Hmm. Two thoughts come to mind. One is call it for what it is, to sound like I [00:18:00] have this job that I'm, I've tried to walk away from and they keep trying to bring me back in. And that's pretty bold. I had another one where I'm at a meeting with a developer who I'm meeting again next week.

And when I first met with them, I said I said, it was like, you tell me why I'm here, people don't usually do that. And I said, you do precast and window wall all the time. If you think you're going to need a guy like me, who is more involved with building better building envelopes. Then I need to know that.

Otherwise, frankly, if you're going to build precasts with window wall, and all I'm doing is sharing, knowledge, go read a website. Think first of all is call it for what it is. Um, this and the other side of that coin is used to say claim the right to have an opinion.

You gotta have a story where you broke through. [00:19:00] That, firewall that reticence usually the way I've done it, yes, it's good to be smart about products and systems and details and how you can walk on a job site and how you can sit in a meeting with very successful architects.

That's all hardcore. But there's a very soft art with how do you balance this crazy network of contractors, architects, spec writers where the job site is, potential products and systems that may have come from other parts of the world. The ability to make two phone calls and go find out that answer.

Not everybody can do that. And I do have this one page in one of my PowerPoints where I showed this crazy crazy hodgepodge of connecting circles. One of which is in color is new products, which, so a lot of people don't look for those. And I'm the one [00:20:00] managing this web of crazy things that go on.

It's a and so I think calling it out for what it is and then bringing value and working through that very complex web of relationships and ideas and people

**Tom:** to the people there. Is there a common thread or a similar thread for the caliber of clients that you work with? That might be a bit of a. General, big general question, but is there a theme you could say so to all the successful projects that you've done with the people that you've worked with, what is it about them other than just the, do you know what you don't know and that acceptance.

**Blair:** You and I having a nice discussion and a lot of this is just human nature and probably relevant to a lot of industries because the answer is listening and when somebody calls you and they're looking for help, I have a [00:21:00] story where I let the client know when the spec came out that the spec had a lot of apples and oranges in it.

And I told him I was late to the table and I said don't put me in the spec. And I told him Which product was going to win and then I told him which contractor was going to win And I told him that the two of those don't go together Because he was going to get the cheapest Installer with the most complex product because it happens to be cheapest That was that's what happened And then that subcontractor Begged out of the job because his price was too low You So then he came to me with a, what can you do now?

He came to me with a, what can you do? And then he listened. And we ended up doing the job because I happen to have some solutions that, for example, it was a simple thing where we incredibly we do reduce scrapped on zero, like we. So we took waste on the [00:22:00] project, which is a big bone of and I almost call it a bone of contention for me.

I'll comment on that. Where we reduce scrap to 0. All of a sudden the job was affordable. And we, I was able to bring a contract to the table. A design to the table, the whole subsystem, the panel and work on all the details brought my supplier to the table to help out with the construction and brought it all together.

And I just went to the job yesterday. I'm pretty pleased. Thing, about it is, when I brought my ideas to the table on how we're going to go do this, although I had to answer some questions, they are all listening questions. And the idea that I worked on an idea that was useful to this person and this person, the architect.

Did due diligence with me to make sure it met requirements, but he really listened to what, whatever, what I was going to achieve for him. And back to what I was saying a minute ago salesmen just don't do [00:23:00] that, like, they just, they can't intellectually solve some of these problems by just trying to run around and flog with a sample on a brochure.

They just, it's not in their DNA to do those kinds of things.

A waste. Yeah. Every meeting I have is about sustainability and global warming and carbon and, please send your and all this kind of stuff, which is fantastic. But when they design the building, and it has, I'm working on this for this meeting tomorrow, and it's going to have 19 to 30%.

Waste. You can have the, you're going to have the most carbon efficient, beautiful, translucent, gorgeous product that, does nothing to our nature. And then throw out 25 percent of it into the garbage. What have you just accomplished? So waste is one of my big flags that I like to mount, land on the top of that [00:24:00] mountain.

If we don't, if we don't design around it, where all that nice thinking is garbage,

**Tom:** you're listening to the architecture and innovation podcast. We're talking today with Blair Davies, professional engineer and an expert and agent for high performance facade systems. You can find him on the web at facade systems, inc.

com. What would you like to share that we may not have touched on that you feel is important for the, our audience? Or even your audience where

**Blair:** I guess I guess the thought that comes to mind is, in North America, and maybe particularly where I live in Ontario the knowledge of what can be done on a global basis. In the world of facades is still very young. And I market the whole theory of, basically, not new, but new here. And so I, I represent some [00:25:00] really interesting things that come from billion dollar companies, and I've been successful at going to find out more of those, and they can come from relatively far away, but I still need.

People here to know they don't know. And then, oh, that came from Turkey, or that came from Germany, or that came from, Japan, or, and the marketplace in North America needs to be open to the fact that we're not the best. Where I guess I would not have a business if we were right. If North America had all of these great things and we're building against, a rain screen facades with all these really cool facades that work then, people like me wouldn't exist but we don't so our early adoption.

And then, of course, maybe learning enough that we design our own. Is a key success factor for the growth of [00:26:00] the building better in the building industry.

**Tom:** Excellent. Blair, it's been a real honor and pleasure speaking with you today on our show. Thank you very much for being here. We're honored, truly.

**Blair:** Thank you. I enjoyed it, Thomas.

**Tom:** You have a nice day. Thank you as well. You've been listening to the Architecture and Innovation Podcast. Our guest today was Blair Davies, professional engineer, an expert and agent for high performance solutions. Facade systems that are innovative, aesthetic, sustainable, constructable, affordable, and proven For more information, feel free to visit their website@facadesystemsincorporated.com.

Again, that's facade systems incorporated.com. The Architecture and Innovation Podcast is recorded on location at Sarah CLA in Redmond, Washington, and on location. Our [00:27:00] executive producer and host is yours truly, Tom Dior and our chief audio engineer is Steven Blanton. Thank you for listening, and thank you again, Blair.