

Interview with Lloyd Macfarlane, Chief Executive at Alive2green, South Africa Green Building Conference and Exhibition 2011

Compiled by Catherine Scott, March 2011

CS: The Green Building Conference and Exhibition is in its 5th year now. How has the industry changed since the first event at CSIR in 2007?

LM: As has been predicted every year, green building becomes more entrenched in conventional architecture, engineering and design each year. The 2007 event brought attention to the concepts of climate change and sustainable design and helped to create awareness amongst the architectural fraternity. In 2007 and 2008 we were encouraged by the degree to which there was a thirst for knowledge and a desire to listen to the world's leading thinkers. However, as green building has become mainstream in South Africa we have seen a shift in what delegates want to hear about. Feedback suggests that delegates are no longer interested in hearing about climate change in as much detail as they were in earlier events – the issues are known and generally understood. Rather, there is a shift towards wanting to know about practical solutions for professionals and decision makers – real, case study, return on investment projects and examples that are applicable in the local context. Delegates want to learn about things that they can use every day. This feedback has played a role in the change that will be evidenced at the 2011 Green Building Conference which has been structured to maximize the practical learning experience.

CS: What are the key distinguishing factors of the Green Building Conference as against other industry events that have emerged in the last year or so?

LM: Over the years we have focused on four key differentiating factors and for the most part we have succeeded because of these factors.

The first is value, which is a function of what delegates receive for what they pay. We continue to bring the best speakers from around the world to South Africa and we have been privileged to host designers such as Emilio Ambasz, Ken Yeang, Kam Sing Wong, Christoph Ingenhoven, Ryan Gravel, Mick Pearce, Charles Kibert and many others. We have delivered top speakers consistently and have managed to keep the cost of delegate attendance to the event the same for 5 years. The cost to attend the Green Building Conference is still the cheapest in class by some stretch.

We have also focused heavily on independence – we are not limited to who we bring or by what our speakers present. In fact it is this independence that makes the dialogue at the events more meaningful. Being purely a media company, our only objective is to offer the best, independent world class content to our delegates and I think we have managed to achieve this.

Lastly, we have always focused on ensuring that the delegates in attendance are principally built-environment professionals and other relevant industry decision makers. In 2009 we had approximately 500 professionals in attendance out of approximately 700 delegates. This makes for the best possible business and design networking conversations at the event and adds terrific value for exhibitors who are not only interested in numbers but also in the ability of the delegates to use and or specify their products or services.

CS: You have been quoted as saying that last year's event was not your best. Why was that?

LM: Yes, this is true. The 2010 event at Gallagher Estate was not as successful as the prior 2009 event at Sandton Convention Centre which was by all accounts outstanding. There were some external factors which played a part in this, such as the economic circumstances that the built environment industry found itself in, as well as the FIFA Soccer World Cup which played havoc with the timing of the event. These factors affected delegate numbers and we were down on the 2009 numbers by approximately 10 percent.

However, there were also certain event features that were not well received by delegates. One of these was the inclusion of two speakers in the plenary whose reputations were exciting but whose presentations were not to the requisite standard, relative to the other presentations and to previous standards at the conference.

Delegate feedback from 2010 was also critical of the breakout session format which was deployed for the first time that year – it appeared to be too complex and therefore too difficult to manage. This breakout session format was designed to be linked to the Green Building Handbook chapters but was, it seems, not as effective or as popular as expected.

CS: Is there a plan to address these issues in 2011 and what how will the event continue to add value?

LM: Yes, I'm pleased that you asked me that! We are of course the oldest and most established brand in green building eventing in South Africa and so we are constantly working to ensure that we remain the first choice for industry professionals based in Gauteng, and hopefully also for those from other provinces.

In the first instance we are pleased that in the absence of the Soccer World Cup we are able to occupy our conventional dates in the calendar – July, and we are also very pleased to be bringing the conference back to the Sandton Convention Centre in 2011.

The format of the Green Building Conference in 2011 has been carefully crafted so as to ensure that delegates receive a more structured agenda from speakers who have been through a vigorous quality control approval process. Even international speakers have been required to fulfill the new requirements as set out by conference chairman Llewellyn van Wyk. Break-out or parallel sessions are no longer part of the program and instead delegates will enjoy one and half days of plenary sessions and for the first time will have the chance to participate in one of three organized design charrettes that will take place in the afternoon of day 2. The design charrettes, under the headings of retail, commercial and residential, are practical group design sessions facilitated by top professionals, in which a selected building will be retrofitted with the assistance of building modeling design software. The objective of the Charrettes will be to involve the delegates in the creation of the retrofitted building and to provide them with a summary, take-home pack, including a CD, that they can use practically in their own work environment. We have worked with the South African Institute for Architects to ensure that we deliver brilliant and applicable content to the highest levels in 2011 and the general sessions as well as the design Charrettes have been validated by SAIA for 2 x Category 1 CPD credits. There is more information on the Design Charrettes on the greenbuilding.co.za website

CS: Who are the delegates that attend the event every year?

LM: The large majority of delegates attending the Conference are architects, engineers and other built-environment or design professionals. We also receive good attendance from government managers, property owners, NGO's and product and technology manufacturers and distributors. This year we will encourage and formalise government attendance in particular in order to facilitate opportunities for design professionals who wish to provide services for public sector projects. Delegates will receive the contact information and details of the government delegates prior to the conference.

CS: What can delegates expect to receive this year?

LM: Delegates attending the 2011 event will receive a bundle of industry relevant value- add items in addition to their full access conference pass. These are:

- *The full set of published Green Building handbooks, volumes 1, 2 and 3, now peer reviewed*
- *A voucher to register for the EcoBuilding eLearning Certificate course, which uses the handbooks as the reference text books*
- *An annual listing on the greenbuilding.co.za professional directory*

This bundle is valued at approximately R3000, which is roughly the price of a conference ticket for registered professionals.

CS: Where and when is the event and how can delegate's register?

LM: The event takes place at the Sandton Convention Centre on July 13th and 14th 2011 and delegates can register by logging onto www.greenbuilding.co.za or www.greenbuildingconference.co.za