Archispeak 332 - AU - Embracing Sustainability

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Evan Troxel: We're joined today by Thomas Ventura of Gensler and Thomas; can you just tell us about yourself? Give us a little bit of what you're doing now at Gensler. And maybe if, if you want, I would love to hear a little bit of your background on how you got to where you are.

Thomas Ventura: Yeah, sure. Um, Gensler now be almost 10 years, almost a decade, which seems kind of crazy, about 30 years in the industry. I started up in Oregon, at University of Oregon, and then, was up there for about 14 years in Portland. And then made my way back down to, Southern California by way of Northern California. so worked for a couple different firms here and there, but my focus was primarily on mixed use, multifamily, and then eventually into hospitality, which is kind of my primary focus here at Gensler now.

A lot of hospitality and mixed use planning, a lot of big projects, and, and I'm fortunate to be in the Newport Beach office, which has, four studios, about a hundred [00:01:00] people total, um, but all the studios are kind of flex studios, so it's a wide range of projects from retail to hospitality and mixed use to office.

So you get a, you get a little bit of everything, which is kind of fun, keeps it interesting.

Evan Troxel: and Gensler's a small firm, right? When it comes to firms overall, give us an idea of the, of what Gensler looks like today.

Thomas Ventura: Yeah, right now, I think we, I don't know if we've actually hit 7,000 but we're close to 7,000 employees. It's a massive firm. We've got, I believe, over 50 offices now, maybe 51. Um, the newest I think we just opened in Riyadh, um, Saudi Arabia. Um, it, Genso's kind of comprised of different regions, and then within each region there's a hub office and then multiple offices.

So I'm based in the southwest region. Um, the hub's LA, um, but we've got LA, Newport, San Diego, Vegas, Denver, and Phoenix in our region. So, and it's, it's, that's probably about a thousand in the region.

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Evan Troxel: I just saw a news article recently about the LA office and they're talking about redesign of that office. And, and I'm sure that that's just a constant thing that's going on at Gensler offices around the world. It's like, and you're not only adding offices, but you've got to be constantly updating what the stock that you have as well.

It's just got to be a big ordeal.

Thomas Vemura: L.A's got a great, great location right on Figueroa downtown, and they've got kind of the three story, we call it the Jewel Box, and then they've got, a connection back to the tower, and But that was done, you know, probably almost 10 years ago by now, so it's kind of the new refresh.

We just went through a refresh here in the Newport Beach office as well, just kind of updating technology, making sure we're up to speed, you know, making sure conference rooms are dialed in, um, making sure there's no coffee stains on the carpets, those kinds of things.

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Evan Troxel: Yeah. Well, our main topic today is sustainability, and I know that sustainability has always been a big issue in the building industry. Maybe you could lay out just kind of the, the landscape of, of what we're dealing with, with 2030 and commitments and what firms are doing to address this from an architectural perspective.

Thomas Ventura: Yeah, I mean, Gensler, you know, their mantra is, you know, basically change the world through the power of design. Right? And so, they recognize, especially the firm as large as they are, the global platform they have to really make an impact and specifically with, climate change and, and the firm has, um, has committed to what's called the GC3.

So the, um, Global Cities Challenge. But basically by 2030, all of our projects are to be completely carbon neutral. It's kind of the charge. Is it possible? We're working towards that. It's, it's a huge Herculean effort to do that. Especially when you're looking at massive projects all the way down to the small tenant improvement.

I mean the range of projects is huge. So how do you do that across all that?

And so, we're starting to implement some new, some new practices with that.

Obviously, we've got you know, a lot of the push from the company to, to really, uh, have sustainability and resilience at the forefront of, of what we do and it, and embedded in all projects from the very beginning.

So it's not just a greenwashing, and so they're starting right now with what we're calling the GPS. So it's, it's the, um, basically global products standards or specifications. So it's adapting all of our specifications to basically use the most sustainable and sort of game changing materials within the projects in order to, to reduce a lot of the embodied carbon in the projects.

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Cormac Phalen: me ask. So

Thomas Ventura: Mmhmm.

Cormac Phalen: think we all know that, you know, one of the big challenges with going carbon neutral, um, and, implementing the the 2030 challenge across the board, both in the profession and in the offices themselves is really the knowledge of the staff, right? Because in a way you can only go so far with, the kind of embedded knowledge.

How are you guys going ensuring that, your staff is actually trained up on what it actually means to go carbon neutral and support that challenge as you move forward.

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Thomas Ventura: there's a huge effort by the firm to make sure everyone has a level of, of education on that. and I'm by no means an expert, but one of the ways is, is really just bringing awareness to it. And so there's a constant effort to make wise material choices, make good design decisions based on the orientation of the building, the type of fenestration on whatever, you know, what elevation you have.

But. We have, what we call design synergies. And so, there's like a design experience, which is kind of more focused on the actual built environment design purpose, which is kind of the why behind a project, but we also have design resilience where we have, we sustainability experts within the office that will basically be embedded in each of the.

Each of the, the project teams, and as well as, you know, like a typical QC form, QAQC, when we go through our project checks, you know, you typically have like a project manager, a project architect signing off on that. We also have a process where we have review from the design directors, as well as the resilience director, or resilience, member, basically making sure that the project is kind of hitting All the parameters that we want to do as a company, but there are, there's constant, um, seminars, lunch and learns, opportunities for education, um, throughout the firm, um, in terms of bringing best sustainable practices together, we consistently try to gather as much metrics as we can from all of our projects and working with the engineers to make sure that we're successful.

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We're specifying systems from an HVAC standpoint, from a lighting standpoint, to have the, the least impact in terms of energy usage, um, that, that we can. And we continue to collect those as data points, and with the, the, the broad range of projects we have, we can actually start to really see what, where the impact is happening across the portfolio of, of, of work.

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Evan Troxel: One of the things that when I was working in a large firm was that I thought was really an interesting shift culturally that I saw happening was that young graduates, emerging professionals, Just had this level of citizenship when it came to sustainability and environmentalism that we hadn't seen in previous generations.

It was an ethos that they brought to the firm and where you might have older generations and obviously totally generalizing here at this point. But it's, it was like. An option on projects, whereas with the younger generation, it was embodied in every single project.

It was table stakes like this is the direction we have to go. This is our world that we're going to be living in. It's our kids and our grandchildren's world that they're going to be living in and really took it a lot more personally. I'm just wondering from your perspective. Are you seeing something like that as well?

Or have you seen that?

Thomas Ventura: Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. There's definitely, a much more heightened sense of awareness from all of the younger staff coming in. Um, and certainly that's been a focus of a lot of the education that's happening through the universities. But it's definitely, even here, just been a complete culture shift.

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Um, to really make that a key focus on everything that we do. Like I said, from the very beginning, the base ideas of the project, there have to be some measure of a sustainable goal that's the ethos of each project, and kind of the why of what we're doing.

Clients will, it resonates with the clients as well.

And we try to, we try to bring them along as, as partners. Obviously we have to, the projects have to serve the client, but want to be partners with the clients and we want to have clients that align with our goals as well as us aligning with their goals as well. So we're, we try to be a little selective with, with the clients as well as the employees to, to focus that.

Cormac Phalen: Yeah.

Evan Troxel: I mean, that, that's a, that's a, I don't know. Sometimes maybe some architects might think that's kind of a privileged position to be in, but it's also, I, I know what you're saying. It's like, it has to be mutually beneficial. It's

Thomas Ventura: Yeah,

Evan Troxel: completely one sided. Yeah.

Let's talk about some of the stats that kind of drive this.

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Thomas Ventura: Yeah. Two that are like, pretty important is if you look at sort of the embodied carbon of a project, like 18% of, of that, of. Carbon emissions is based on making a building, building a building. But if you look at the operational use of a building, about 40 percent of, of the carbon is from operation of the building.

So, if we can affect how buildings perform, it can drastically have a reduction in terms of the overall, you know, carbon emissions for the, for our projects. And, you know, ultimately just have a huge impact with, again, with the amount of work that we do as a firm. So we recognize that it's a responsibility we have, uh, as a firm.

Evan Troxel: And that energy consumption really is like around the clock, right? I think that's one of the big things that we have to recognize. I remember even during the pandemic, during when, when nobody was in the office, that building was still, the lights were still turning on every day. The HVAC was still running every day.

It runs at night. So that the building, you know, during the summer, it's cool when you walk in the doors in the morning. And again, even if nobody's [00:10:00] showing up. And so these are the kinds of things that I think. Need to be top of mind for everybody who's practicing today, which if there's anything we can do to lower those numbers, it helps in really big ways because it really does add up.

Thomas Ventura: Huge. Oh, absolutely.

Cormac Phalen: And that typically is kind of the kind of educational factor or educational point, talking point, as we call it, when we're talking with clients, when they're asking us kind of like the why, why is our first cost so high? You know, why are we spending this much for this? and having that conversation with them about, the return on their investment how quickly, spending something that is more energy efficient in the long term, one, help reduce that 40 percent of the operation budget, but also start to see a return on their investment a lot quicker than if, they just went with, any manufacturer off the road, that's just your typical kind of like bargain basement, affordable, you know, piece.

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Thomas Ventura: Yeah. And a lot of that comes with.

One, just understanding kind of what the long-term goals of your client are, right? Are there, is it a long-term hold? Are they, are they buying this? Are they developing a project for a quick sale? You know, and if that's the case, you still have to look at the performance metrics to actually make that a more, more valuable asset, right?

But really, it's about working and partnering with, with good consultants, good engineers, um, to kind of have a full strategy for. for each project that makes a lot more sense than your sort of traditional building methods. You know, you talked about having buildings running 24/7, you know, there's ways, obviously, to augment that.

You all know about motion sensors, turning the lights off when no one's in the room, but also in terms of HVAC, you know, having night purges, you start to look at Solars and battery systems, and looking at all the systems, how they can kind of offset each other, so that it's, everything's operating as optimally as possible.

But also, you know, those are all active systems. How do you design it for passive systems? Passive ventilation, passive cooling, not gaining the heat from solar, you know. There's a lot you can do in terms of the base level of design that is kind of old school design, if you will, right? But it's trying to really pay attention to how the building's put together so you're not so reliant on the actual active systems.

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Evan Troxel: passive design and then, and then augment with active. Yeah. After the fact.

Yeah.

Cormac Phalen: Constant conversation that we have with our own staff, but, we also have that same conversation with our clients, too, so that, they understand what the importance of the design decisions that we make are.

Evan Troxel: One of the myths I think that, that some have heard over the years is that, and I, you know, we talked a little bit about energy consumption for indoor spaces, but that there's, there's some people see outdoor spaces, they see heaters running, they see lights on, they see all kinds of things, you know, air movement, you got to keep fans blowing and things like that.

There, there's this idea that outdoor spaces also consume a lot of energy. And I'm sure in some cases that's true, but, but generally when we, when we look at indoor versus outdoor, have you seen any shifts more towards outdoor because of the need for natural ventilation? I mean, obviously we're still talking about passive design a lot of times to, to control sun and shade and, and wind and things like that.

But what, what do you, what do you got from that side of it? Right.

**[00:13:00]**

Thomas Ventura: the board, in all different practice areas, whether it's hospitality, office, you know, retail, especially like dining, there is always, um, a, a need for, for good outdoor space and, and a demand for it now. And especially like in light of, with, with Covid, it's like everybody's looking for the outdoor option, right?

cause we, we all moved to outdoors. We're having lunch in the parking lot but no one wants to go back to going back inside. 'cause it was such a great space being outside and having, and you know, here, here, being in southern California too, we have, you know, the benefit of great weather so that, that helps.

And with the expectation of having good outdoor space, there's also the people are a little more accommodating in terms of temperature swings and, and being not really uncomfortable, but, but their range of comfort widens when you're outside because the expectation of that's not 72. 6 inside. Right?

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Cormac Phalen: Right, Right?

Thomas Ventura: It's going to, it's going to vary. You know, you're going to be in the sun. It's going to be a little hotter. You're going to be a little more exposed. You may have some wind and it's, but. Obviously, you do things to control that and still make that a comfortable environment, but I think there's a little more tolerance for, uh, for, for some variety.

 And that's, and that's what people are searching for.

Evan Troxel: Talk a little bit more about that. Like, what, what are some of the design strategies for outdoor spaces? Because there's natural light, right? But you don't want 100 percent direct sunlight, right? You, you want to be able to control that. There's, there's a need for temperature control. There's a need for wind control, ventilation, things like that when it comes to, you know, yeah.

I got people, people do like fresh air too. So, but, but, but again, there's, there's a range that people are comfortable with. Right. And the other thing I want to tag onto that before, before you take it and run is

Thomas Ventura: Sure.

Evan Troxel: you're seeing a lot of this in California, Southern California, as [00:15:00] far as, because the, the temperate climate.

We're talking to other people in this series that are saying that across the country, people are asking for

these types of spaces and there's obviously seasonal differences, temperature differences and But the demand is still very high across the board. So taking all that into account, I mean, what are you seeing? I'm looking,

Thomas Ventura: you're absolutely right. I mean, like I said, we do projects all over the country and all over the world, and we're absolutely seeing that in all climates, all project types, there is a need and appetite and a demand for good outdoor space. And you talk a little bit about the design of that.

I mean, the key is really, you know, you start kind of with the light and the shadow, right? It's got to be well lit. But you don't want the glare. So you, this dappled light idea is, is great. You have some access to shade, but still some access to, to direct light should you want that, you know. Ventilation's huge, air movement's a big deal, but not too much.

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It's just enough that you have, you have, you know, a comfort level there. Um, and then with that, you, then you moderate the temperature. You know, whether it's, you've got a great breeze coming off, you know, uh, a bluff, or, you know, or if you're in an urban environment, you know, how do you, how do you screen those elements and actually provide a buffer from What's happening outside.

So you kind of create a little microclimate within what you're designing is kind of key. So it's really understanding the context that you're designing for.

Cormac Phalen: um, curious about, you know, you had mentioned that, you, or you guys just opened up a RIAD office, and you Just so happens that that is a project that I'm working on right now is a brand new university in Riyadh.

Thomas Ventura: Mm hmm. Right.

Cormac Phalen: things that you know, we're, we're doing is, very much to the point that you were just making is a lot of the exterior spaces are designed to be, essentially, let's not say 24 hours a day, you know, seven days a week kind of spaces, but, pretty much where you're able to, you know, Be outside comfortably during the day in, some of the more. scorching [00:17:00] heat and be able to actually spend that time because one of the things that? in the now, three and a half years of working on this project and visiting, uh, overseas quite often is that we'll have a lot of the exterior spaces really come to life.

 Once the sun goes down, and then it's, it's really kind of employing, okay, now we know that the desert doesn't really hold heat. So, how do we make these spaces comfortable as, well as just the whole gamut? I mean, are you seeing spaces like that throughout, lot of the projects that you're doing where, You know, you're you're really trying to extend them, not just during like, you know, the The daytime operations, but, you know, really like. all hours of The of the day and night.

Thomas Ventura: Absolutely. I mean, and especially when you, when you look at Middle Eastern or even European countries, you know, it's, their schedule is a lot different than, than in the States, right? Your dinner time, an early dinner sometimes is 10 o'clock at night, right?

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And especially like in the Middle East, like I traveled quite a bit in Abu Dhabi and Dubai and you'd see families out there at 11 o'clock midnight kicking a soccer ball around, whether having a barbecue until two in the morning, and that's just the normal course.

 of, of, a day. You know, obviously the day starts, starts a little later. Um, but yeah, I, I think it's, it's under, also understanding the culture you're designing in, and, and designing for. That's, that's a key thing. But absolutely, the, the need to try to activate at all hours of the day is, is key. And, and honestly like, we're looking at a, at a, at a project now, um, Here, even locally in Irvine where, you know, it's traditional, it's an no traditional office park, tilt up office building two story.

But they're looking for ways, how do you activate this campus? How do you, you know, it's all about how do get people back to the office. 'cause everyone's been home, you know, way. But it's, it's really about creating a vibrant, active space that's not just about the office, it's about, it's a destination that you, it's close to rooftop where people live.

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It's, it's, you know, there's great food and beverage, there's great amenities on site. There's a reason to be there. After the eight to five, you're not there for the office. And so it's, it's trying to find ways to, to use those in between spaces within these campus settings that, that, you know, really make this, make the space come alive.

And a lot of it has to do with just making a mixed use, you know, so having a lot, a lot more use than just office.

Cormac Phalen: How are you?

Evan Troxel: seems like there's a, there's a lot of expectation from users now around the types of mix of spaces that they want to see in places and corporate America, for this example, is, is having to react to that to, like you said, like to entice people back to the office. You're talking about a new office park, but I could also assume with, with existing office parks that like, they've got to find ways to do that.

Can you just talk about those like changing expectations in the marketplace when it comes to types of spaces that people want?

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Thomas Ventura: Yeah, absolutely. And I think that's one of the big things we're looking at, you know, certainly here in Orange County, but, but nationally as well. There's a huge, um, depression in the office market, right? Because offices that were totally full, um, now are in a hybrid schedule, so you don't need as much.

Work area or, or you know, floor area or they're com they're compressing or, or they even closed cer certain wings, people just aren't coming back. Um, and, and the market that's out there is highly competitive and so you've got a huge vacancy in the lease rates for, for offices. So we're seeing a lot of sort of office to resitype of conversions that are being looked at, or office to, to hospitality, or hospitality, I mean, there's basically, there's a lot of crossover that's happening, and so in a lot of these office parks where there is a high vacancy, and they are trying to entice people, a lot of times it's a change of use that makes a huge difference, and it's not just the whole thing, it's, you know, bits and pieces of that, so you have a range and a variety of uses, and that outdoor space is kind of what stitches and knits those altogether.

Evan Troxel: does seem like there's a lot of challenges in incorporating outdoor spaces just because of kind of baggage isn't the right word, but maybe, maybe you understand what I mean. It's like, like, this is how we've [00:21:00] always done it. Right? And so this is a new component that we're adding in. And so a lot of times the outdoor spaces have been thought of as an afterthought, or just a, you know, those aren't something that are prioritized in the types of spaces that we need in our new building, but I think that's shifted. Is that, is that the

Thomas Ventura: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, because I, I think, and again, I'll just look at the office market, if, if there's an expectation for a highly, highly amenitized Outdoor space, you know, and so the office isn't just the office anymore, you've got outdoor meeting rooms, you've got outdoor gathering spaces, you've got access to food and beverage, you know, company events, I mean there's a lot of different things that, that is an expectation for a lot of different users, same thing for, for, you know, your residency or your hospitality.

Um, you, you, there's a certain expectation of, of having access and, and amenity outside.

Evan Troxel: How much of that is driven by like mental health awareness, do you think? I mean, I, I'm just

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Thomas Ventura: A lot, some, some is.

Evan Troxel: and the reason I ask is because I know personally, like, I, I don't want to be, I, I work out of my house, and I want to be in my house all the time. And we've seen Tech companies for many years try to build it all into the one place.

They've got the breakfast bar and they, they've got the cafe and they don't want people to leave. Right. And, and I think working in architecture, we know what a long work day could possibly look like. Right. But we also understand the need to get out. And I can, if you're in an urban area, when I was working in LA, it was like, yeah, we go out and we walk and we go to lunch and we, you you're on foot and.

You go somewhere to have that and then you go back to the office and that does give you a chance to kind of do a mini reset during the middle of the day. Is that a big driver? Do you think that just people's awareness of their own kind of,

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Thomas Ventura: I, I think it is both a conscious decision but also subconscious need. They just, they want to be outside, you know, it's, it's, it's, that's how, it's why you get cabin fever, right? It's like, you're cooped up, you need to get out, and it's like, you don't know why, but it's like, we, we need to have fresh air.

We need vitamin D, we need to get out and, and, and out of just four walls, so. Uh, I think so. I think it's that, that subconscious drive. But I think there again, there is more of awareness and I think that's starting to be programmed into a lot more spaces intentionally. And those spaces are now able to kind of be monetized as well, which means that they're willing to put the investment into do it right.

Cormac Phalen: Right. So how does these exterior spaces contribute or support the kind of sustainable aspect of your project designs?

Thomas Ventura: I think it, it offers a var, again, a variety of spaces. It allows your large space inside to be extended so you have this great sort of indoor-outdoor setting, especially in this kind of market. Um, but, also helps reduce the load on the building in terms of how much energy is being used in the building.

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If you can bring in natural daylight, you can obviously reduce the amount of light levels that are needed. If you can bring in natural ventilation, it Obviously augments what's necessary for the HVAC system. And again, once you start to now incorporate outdoor space with the indoor space, it's one sort of seamless pieces.

Again, it gets back to that sort of expectation of comfort that people have. There's more of a tolerance now for people inside the building, as well as what's happening outside the building.

Evan Troxel: it also poses challenges security wise though, right? Because you're potentially creating more connections indoor, outdoor, you've got stuff that's outside that you've got to lock down or put, you know, so what, what about that side of it?

Thomas Ventura: That's a huge part of it. I think that's part of the reluctance, probably, when you kind of think of the old, the old way of thinking of it, right? It was always like, yeah, let's do a nice corporate campus, but it's locked down. You've got to have security badges to get in, and this is, this is my space.

No one else can join it, right? But now I think there's definitely more of this, push for a communal space where it's the whole community that's part of this. And that's also part of the reason for having that 24 seven is that there's always eyes, right? There's always things that are happening.

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There's always things that are active and engaged. So security is part of that. But when you have a lot of people and a lot of activity that's happening,

Less opportunity, I mean there's always opportunity for, for bad stuff to happen, but you know what I mean, there's, there's, there's always people that are present that, that maybe more of a deterrent than, you know, than not.

If you're like in an empty space trying to sneak

Cormac Phalen: Exactly. More, more eyes outside means kind of like more eyes on, points of entry and things like that.

Evan Troxel: about kind of the. Picking the right products, right? You, you talked about, I don't know if Gensler has like a database where it's like people are applying to be part of it or how you're actually figuring out because there's, there's just so many products out there. So maybe you can talk a little bit about that, but Cormac and I have both worked in the K 12 and university schools.

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And, and one of the things that we've talked about many times on this podcast is how design decisions are driven by maintenance a lot of times because of, and so that's another way that. to interpret sustainability, right? Is, is how long are things going to last? How long are they going to serve the client?

Because this is expensive stuff, right? So I, and so getting back to the product part of the question, right? Is, is, is that, I kind of assume that's also part of it. It's just,

Thomas Ventura: That's a huge part of sustainability, right? It's, it's not about getting the cheapest thing out there. It's about getting things that are going to last. And, and when you start thinking about design, and like schools obviously are like one of the heaviest users of any material, any product. You'll wear it out the quickest.

Probably second to that is hospitality. And so if you think about a hotel lobby and a chair, what does that chair have to upholster? What does it have to be in order to withstand as much use as it's going to get? But also, That you're, it's not so trendy that it's going to be out of, out of date, out of design in a couple, couple of years.

So you want to pick timeless things that are going to last, that also have durability as well as, you know, from an aesthetic standpoint have, have a level of durability as well. But in terms of what we're doing, um, mentioned the, the specifications. So again, we've got the, the new GPS that we just kicked off in January and global, uh, product standards.

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And those are kind of, they're, right now it's kind of in its infancy, so it's a small list of, of items, but it's about 1214 of sort of the most frequently used materials in, in buildings that can have sort of the biggest impact. You look at your carpet, your carpet tiles, your ceiling tiles, your, your LVT, you know, those, those type of products that are sort of mass surfaces, but that have huge impacts.

So it's one, it's it's durability. You, they need to have a certain level of durability so you're, they're not being changed out every couple years that has. A five to 10 year, you know, life cycle to that or even longer, you know, as well as just the style of, of it's gotta be appropriate. So it has a timeless element to that, but also each product that we're requiring to have their own EPD, so, which is, we kind of equate that as like the, the ingredients list when you buy a box of food, right?

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It has everything on there. Well. Products will have an EPD, which basically is a declaration of how the product was made, what's in the product, where is it manufactured, and that gives a specific rating based on those metrics. And so that goes into our database, which then we can say, okay, this is acceptable within the GPS standards, or it's not acceptable, or it's a market differentiator, where it actually is something we really want to push to use because it has that level of impact.

And so that's what we're trying to do as well as, um, To educate the staff here as well, to understand what products have sort of the biggest level of impact and really trying to push to use those type of products. And to your point, you know, vendors, we're trying to work with vendors, um, to make sure they have the EPDs for their product, but also that they're trying to push to have a better, more sustainable product.

Evan Troxel: costs, right? And, and we're talking about longer lasting building materials that may not be the cheapest. And so, I'm wondering, you know, as an architect too, like, we've had so many conversations with clients where there are options of things that they can [00:29:00] choose. And oftentimes, especially in public work, they want to go with the cheaper option because of that first cost, but there are trade offs.

How do you have those conversations with clients? Because I think there's going to be a lot of architects who are listening to this show and, and they're all going to be nodding along. Like this totally makes sense from our standpoint and they're the ones. the clients or have to spend the money and you have to have that conversation about long term cost versus first cost.

And I'm just wondering, what are some strategies that you employ during those conversations to kind of help paint that picture so they can make the right decision?

Thomas Ventura: it start, it starts at the beginning. It's, it's, you know, getting them to buy into what the project goals are from the very beginning, right. And so if you can, if you can do that, and from a sustainability or resilience standpoint, you, you're nine tenths the way there because now you've got a partner in that if, if it's a hard sell at the very end.

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Oh, by the way, we want to use these products because there's, because they're gonna, because they're going to, you know, make the building better, but, but yeah, but I'm paying 20 percent more. Why am I going to do that? They have to understand why and have a desire to have a building that wants to perform at a higher level from the beginning.

So that's, that's kind of the starting point. And it's just an education process through the whole, the whole project. But I think architecture is as much of a business as it is a design profession. And you have to understand where their business is. And understand the, a little bit of the economics about that so that you can, you can be able to paint the case that okay, if we're using this type of a product that's going to last X amount of years, you know, operationally, it's going to help you in the long run.

You know, same thing when you're picking HVAC systems or lighting systems, you're looking at the overall performance of the building, the same approach is with materials, things that are going to be part of the building for a longer period of time. You're not going to have renovations for, you know, for a longer period of time.

The building has a larger, longer lifespan. And lower maintenance is, is kind of the key. So, if you can start to help paint the picture for them, as far as how, what's the value for a better-quality product and a better-quality design, then that's kind of the starting point there.

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Cormac Phalen: think it's always kind of driving home that 40% You know, as part of like the overall operation, and then how does that impact their operations? the finances to just maintain the building to, potentially have to replace a piece of equipment or, something that maybe is a little bit more expensive, has a different type of. maintenance regime than other things. and you know, it's just that we always, you know, talk about and I know everybody, you know, all architects try to be transparent about the materials that you use throughout from day one. You said it perfectly, you know, setting a goal. on day one and really kind of talking about that and then reinforcing it throughout All of the different stages about how you're supporting that initial goal, and then if it comes up, it's like, oh, well, we've decided that we had to go this route rather than this route, but at least telling them how it's supporting the goal.

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Thomas Ventura: think there's another part of it too, that it can be a little more self serving, but again, it's knowing your

Cormac Phalen: Yes. Yeah.

Thomas Ventura: Knowing what their goals are, but if there's a way that their efforts are recognized and set them apart as a differentiator as well. You know that that's something that could be part of their part of their branding effort part of their marketing effort It can be something that provides them some tax benefits or even development benefits So it's it's trying to understand look at all the different avenues that again You can help the client make that decision and help them make the right decision

Cormac Phalen: one of the things, uh, that, both of you guys were talking about a little bit earlier is, you know, about like how the younger architects, emerging professionals are coming in with this kind of like goal of sustainability as something that they learned in school. And one of the things that we've noticed because we do a lot of.

Uh, what we do all higher education work and, know, one of the things that we try to, to do with the client is really talk to them about, you know, this is the sustainability goals and how they can reinforce it, but they do absolutely use that as a, as some form of marketing one way, either, whether it's, you know, pulling in donors or, you know, pulling in students to like attract the best, you know, the best students, the best donors, the best sponsors.

Principal investigators, all of these things that, are able to like, say, okay, I'm working for a company that is on the forefront of sustainability and really takes, the future of the environment seriously.

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Thomas Ventura: that's one of the one things I love about working with Gensler is that, again, because as large as they are, it affords you a lot of resources and a lot of tools to do what we do, and there is a very strong push for research and for kind of pushing the boundary In design, but also, but just in looking at new print, new ways of doing things, trying to be as innovative as possible, whether it's partnering with another firm, whether it's doing internal research.

 But every year we have a basically a research grant that we put out and it allows [00:34:00] younger staff as well as older staff to want to partner to kind of create up with, come up with, you know, Just new and innovative ideas and the firm really celebrates that and and it's it's kind of part of the culture here Which which I which I really love and I think is is refreshing to a lot of younger younger Employees coming and coming right out of school because it kind of still has this some level of sort of that Academic pursuit right and striving for for new things And study

Cormac Phalen: we talk a

Evan Troxel: of that research gets published externally, right? Like that, that's not just an internal thing. I, I know I've consumed those research reports too. You'll do a workplace study. You'd, and, and so I, you maybe talk a little bit more about that because I think it's a great plug right now.

Thomas Ventura: Yeah. I mean, we do, we do a lot of that. So each, each of the, each of the practice areas that we have, we kind of look at, you know, design, we call it design forecast. And so there's a design forecast for what are the new trends coming out? What are, what are the kind of the hot topics or key topics that are going to be driving design for, for us as a firm, but also just in the industry at large?

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there's also our, our research catalog that's published every year as well, that kind of has result of a lot of those research grants that are a lot more in depth. A lot more in the weeds, but it allows us to basically ha just continue to catalog some, just some great in depth knowledge, um, that kinda help us be a market leader in, in a lot of the different, uh, practice areas.

Cormac Phalen: The thing that I love about that is, one of the things Evan and I talk about a lot on the podcast is sometimes the lack of research and development from, the AE community, you know, more of the architectural community and, this is, somewhat self serving because it's like, okay, how do we push our design, but we push our design in high performance, in sustainability and things like that, but then in turn, what it does is it basically shows, you can do.

 an all curtain wall with, some kind of scrim over it and all that other stuff, but how does that benefit the overall like support of sustainability, the overall support of, of the resilience that, you know, you were talking about in, in these are the things that, you know, I'm kind of glad that firms are taking the leadership role in the research and development side of, the future of the, of the practice.

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Thomas Ventura: yeah. Agreed. I, it just, I, I'm very uh. Very fortunate and blessed to be part of it, so I enjoy working here, it's great.

Evan Troxel: One of the things that, want to touch on is just We, we, we touched on it earlier, which was kind of just the kind of afterthought that outdoor space with the combination, you know, when you're, when you're looking at a new campus, like you brought up earlier, and how those spaces are outfitted versus what people are kind of expecting nowadays.

And then maybe you can talk a little bit about what types of things you're doing in those spaces with building products, things that you're seeing, that area to make those places to, to ensure that they actually get used. I think that's one of the things that, that a lot of clients have a concern over is that they're going to spend money on a space.

They're not going to put enough into it to, to truly make it a destination of a feel for, for someone to actually use it, and then they, it's a complete waste of money. But I know that there's strategies that are employed to. Ensure usefulness of those. So I'd love to hear

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Thomas Ventura: Yeah. I think it starts with making a space you want to be in. And so, sometimes it starts with, you know, a great view. Sometimes it starts with, a destination that you've kind of created. That's, that's kind of removed from everything. Like if you're again, like in your urban environment, you want this little oasis.

You're looking for things that are one, it's a discovery, right? And it's like, Oh wow, this is amazing. I want to spend it. But then once you're there, it's gotta be a comfortable space. It's, it's gotta, it's gotta engage all your senses, right? It's gotta be pleasant place to be in. Pleasant to look at. You know, we, we look at outdoor spaces with the ability of kind of, you know, integrating with the landscape in terms of the, the, the, the smell and the olfactory senses and being able to, to have this sort of great experience, water, the sound, the sound of water or wind coming through a certain type of tree.

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Like there's all those sort of senses that you really have to start to curate that experience. And so as long as you're really paying attention to all of those, you know, that's, that's kind of a, that's kind of exciting. Uh, recipe for success, but again it's, at the end of it, it's gotta be a place you want to be.

And, it's also knowing the type of space. Is it meant to be a contemplative space for a singular? Or is it meant to be a loud space with a lot of people? And so it's, it's kind of tuning it for what you, what it, what you're trying to create.

Evan Troxel: I like how you started that off because I immediately thought of spaces that I've been to where it's like Seattle or San Francisco or, or it could be my, my local town where it's like you, you feel like you found something special and that was the initial draw, but then you have to really follow that up with the things that will keep you there and keep it useful for you.

And then there's, there's also the kind of unseen stuff like. You know, is there background music? Are there, are there things that are, is there Wi Fi? Right? Connectivity? There, is it, is it, are there comfortable options to sit depending

Thomas Ventura: you you only you only notice it when it's not there.

Evan Troxel: Right.

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Cormac Phalen: True.

Evan Troxel: The absence of.

Thomas Ventura: Right. So it ha, I think, and I think there's an expectation for all of those things. You know, there's an expectation. I can, I can get onto a WiFi signal. There's an expectation. Or, if it's specifically to disengage, there's an expectation there isn't one.

Right? You don't have phone reception. So, it, it's, it, again, it's understanding what you're designing that space for. Right.

Evan Troxel: Yeah. And then environmental constraints, uh, you know, bringing it back to kind of across the nation, across the world and really understanding the microclimate of the area, really understanding the useful hours and how you can, how you can really make it work for, for as much time as possible.

Thomas Ventura: Yeah, I mean, thermal comfort is probably key to that. You know, whether it's if you're in a hot environment, providing shade, providing air movement, so that you can bring the temperatures down, the ambient temperature down, or maybe introduce some, some cooling through water, um, or if it's getting, you know, nighttime hours, it's getting cold. How do you, do you, you have access to natural light or do you, do you augment that with, you know, different heating elements, whether it's fire or actual, you know, heater element of, of some sort? There's a lot of different ways to, to, obviously we can, we can do that, but I think ultimately it wants to be an integrated solution to, to make it, more impactful. You know?

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Evan Troxel: And just bringing that back to sustainability, like even thinking about, thermal mass, right, coming, like, like going back to those passive design principles for, for how can we create a heat sink so that this will be a more comfortable space through more hours of the night, for example.

Thomas Ventura: Right. Right. Or, you know, well, like a trope mall, right? Like, during the day, you think about this big, massive piece that's collecting sun at one point, but it's providing shade in the hot hours of the day and the night hours. It's hopefully radiating that heat back if it's designed properly.

But yeah, it's, that's, absolutely.

Cormac Phalen: enough people talk about the Trombe Wall.

Evan Troxel: Not enough.

Thomas Ventura: I'm an Oregon duck. I graduated up in Eugene, so we talked a lot about trombe walls up there.

Evan Troxel: Yeah,

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Cormac Phalen: an, I'm an Auburn Tiger and we talk about Trombe walls too.

Evan Troxel: Awesome. I, maybe we'll just finish up with, with the future of, of this kind of sustainability aspect and where you see things going with indoor, outdoor expectations of what people are looking for with offices and shopping. Like there's, what I think we're really seeing is a convergence of a lot of different types of, space design and incorporating, a lot of multiple use zones into a lot of these where things used to be really specific use cases.

But I'm really curious because Gensler touches so many projects in so many markets, if you're really seeing trends,

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Thomas Ventura: I think, you think you said it, we're looking at very flexible spaces, right, and it's, there aren't many one liners anymore. Things have to be multiple uses, very, able to adapt and convert, that being from a use standpoint, as well as from a thermal standpoint, from, you know, inside, outside, being able to expand a room, contract a room.

Uh, or space, it's, I think there's, there's a lot of need to do that, just because buildings are becoming so expensive to, to build and to operate. And it's, the, the more bang you can get for the buck, I think the better, the more value you bring to the client, to the space. And so, yeah, I, I think there's definitely a need for, fully considering all aspects of, of a design. Again, it's not, it's not the one liner space anymore.

Evan Troxel: And it's not just trying to be clever for being clever's sake, right? It really is about doubling the value of these things or, or even more because that's when owners because they're spending more, more money on this than anything they've ever spent any money on. Right. And so it's like when, when you can really make things double the value because of the flexibility or because of the adaptability or because of, you know, this can be used for lots of different types of things.

I think those are really the things that they notice and, and are willing to spend a little bit more on than they would on the baseline. But, but it's kind of has to be like a double value, a twofer, right?

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Thomas Ventura: But it allows, it allows you to have Operations beyond just the normal window that was typically there, right? We talked about having these campuses that are open, you know, 24 7. Well, that same space can't function 24 7 the same way. If it's truly engaged in the environment and part of the place that it's designed for, right?

It has to breathe. It has to move. It has to adapt just like we do. And so it's thinking of the building as an organism, if you will, and having the ability of opening, contracting, opening, closing, that allows it to engage and adapt as. The environment changes and adapts.

Evan Troxel: That's like a perfect place to wrap it up. I think that was, that felt really good. So Thomas, thank you so much for taking the time to spend with us and share some amazing insight into the, the amount of work that you guys are doing. So, again, thanks for hanging out with us today.

Thomas Ventura: Absolutely. Pleasure.

**[00:44:00]**