

PRACTICE

Living Breathing Buildings Proponent Is Honored as Entrepreneurial Trailblazer

by Tracy Ostroff
Contributing Editor

Summary: Teresa Coady, AIA, MAIBC, FRAIC, LEED AP, chief executive officer and founding partner of the Vancouver-based architectural practice of Bunting Coady Architects, has recently been selected as the winner of the “Bell Trailblazer” category of the 2008 RBC Canadian Woman Entrepreneur Awards (CWEA) for outstanding leadership within her company and business sector. Her work is pioneering new ways of creating mainstream architecture that turns away from mechanistic systems to harnessing the “natural intelligence” of buildings for sustainable and energy-efficient designs.



How do you ... mesh sustainability and energy efficiency and good business practices?

Coady is the only architect to have ever received the award from the CWEA. Her firm is also the recipient of many other accolades: more than 50 awards for design quality and building performance and international recognition as the only firm to have won the BOMA Earth Award on four separate occasions. The architects also report they have designed more square footage of LEED®-NC Gold-certified institutional and commercial projects than any other firm in North America.

Coady's core belief is to create Living Breathing Buildings™ that imitate nature and enhance the environment. Her firm accomplishes these high-performance, sustainable buildings through an Integrated Design Process evidenced through a [Venn diagram of eight principles](#): orientation and massing, site design

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and water, envelope, ventilation, lighting and power, heating and cooling, materials, and quality assurance.

She writes that computational processing power has helped architects effectively model the performance of buildings at increasingly sophisticated levels using the “fuzzy logic” of natural systems. “This is leading to softer and more efficient organic forms that connect natural systems with building mechanical systems in the form of natural daylighting, ventilation, geothermal heat exchange, and green roofs,” she writes.



Humane development

Coady regards humane development as the “natural progression of our understanding of physics expressing itself in building engineering science.” She questions what these scientific breakthroughs mean for construction. “There is a growing belief among architects and developers around the globe that the future of building and real estate development lies in the creation of natural, passive systems, rather than mechanical ones. These systems support the eco-systems of their sites, instead of paving them. This approach favors humane development, the creation of community-building initiatives that are deliberately people focused.”

She’s been touting the natural system of design since her university days in British Columbia in 1983. “I identified the

progression of art and architecture out of the progression of math and philosophy and science and technology. I realized we were moving away from the Newtonian mechanics way of thinking and a paradigm around the type of building where so much of the space is sacrificed for mechanical systems, and so much of the land around the building is sacrificed for machines and cars and trucks—and moving toward a completely new building language that responds to fractal geometry and nonlinear algebra and works within the constraints of the natural systems.”

Coady points to many soaring modern glass buildings as key offenders of the “building as machine culture,” and offers an alternative. “Our buildings are really going back to fundamentals and looking at biological principles and working within those constraints to create an architecture that responds passively to its environment.”



Successful business

Coady says her firm particularly targets clients who potentially would have an interest in developing this new type of architecture. “We didn’t set out to do sustainable buildings. We set out to create a new form of architecture based on biomimetic design that coincidentally has become very popular as a means to deal with the issues around climate change and building impact.”

Coady says she thinks some design purists think that there should be a

schism between technology and aesthetics. “I see that as the complete reverse. This is all about shaping the building itself as a sculptural form to do most of the comfort-enhancing work. This is a building that is self-illuminating, self-conditioning, self-ventilating, acoustically comfortable, and naturally without intervention. I don’t think there is a building in the world, yet, that I have discovered that gets all of it perfectly and passively, but we’re moving toward

that.”

The business model for the 50-person firm is working. The Web site reports that their client retention rate is 95 percent and that referrals account for 82 percent of their business. Coady is also optimistic for their future, even amid global economic uncertainty. “If we’re really looking at a green-collar revolution, and at industries that are going to move us forward, then we really need Living, Breathing Buildings now because they are a solution.” It’s as simple and as architecturally viable, she says, as using plants instead of an HVAC system.

Bunting Coady’s goal is to transform the market. “Our ultimate dream is that everyone would see our buildings and say, ‘I can do this.’ The only way for that to happen is if we inspire people to copy us, and if they realize that it’s a no-brainer because it doesn’t cost any more. That’s why I’ve been telling everyone: ‘This is our time.’”



