

HPH316

Ben Adam-Smith 00:00

This is House Planning Help episode 316. Hi there, I'm Ben Adam-Smith, and this is the podcast for you if you're interested in self-build or retrofit. I'm exploring what houses we should be building in the 21st century and try to break down the major roadblocks that may get in our way.

Ben Adam-Smith 00:18

Having said that, actually today is slightly wider. We're zooming out, because Lloyd Alter from Tree Hugger is my guest today, and we're discussing his book "Living the 1.5 Degree Lifestyle". So it's going beyond housing today. We will talk about houses, of course we will because he used to be an architect, he was a real estate developer, a prefab entrepreneur. He now teaches sustainable design at Ryerson School of Interior Design, and for many years has been writing at Tree Hugger. So we'll be talking about his book.

Ben Adam-Smith 00:46

And I thought, before we get going, I wanted to say, please support what he's doing, what others are doing as well, when you come across people who are doing these great projects like this. I've always got my eyes open. And I'm always thinking, what can I personally do? It might be something as simple as sharing it again on social media, or in this case, yes, buy the book. I'm sure I'm going to remind you again before this podcast is out. So Lloyd is someone I've actually known for nearly a decade now. I can't quite believe it and he's done a lot of fantastic work. But have you ever looked at the state of the planet and thought, we've got to do something about this? Hopefully, the answer is going to be yes to that by the way. Have you ever changed something that you do, your habits, to be more in sync with the planet? Again, hopefully the answer is yes to this. It might be the food you eat, it might be how you travel, the way you live, hopefully, if you're listening to this podcast, the house you're building, how you spend your money. It could be any or maybe even all of these areas. Well, Lloyd Alter has taken this to the extreme and carried out his own research project, deep in Excel as we're going to find out more. And he believes that we can all make a difference.

Lloyd Alter 02:04

One of the big problems in environmental reporting and on getting people involved is the whole question of personal responsibility. Do personal actions matter, or is this all a collective thing? And there was a Guardian headline in 2017, that said 100 companies are responsible for 70% of the emissions. And suddenly, it wasn't anybody's fault. It's all the oil companies fault. And there were all kinds of other people who say, British Petroleum invented the carbon footprint to distract us from them producing all the carbon dioxide. And I fundamentally disagreed with this. We're buying what the oil companies are selling, and we're putting it in our gas tanks. It's us. It's the consumption that matters, not the production that matters.

Lloyd Alter 02:56

And I came across a study that was done by Aalto University and a few other organizations in Finland, called The 1.5 Degree Lifestyle, that discussed what the IPCC report had said, that we have to keep temperature rise below 1.5%. And they said 72% of emissions come from the choices we make in our consumption. Now you can question that number, and a lot of people have, but their position was, we decide if we're going to drive, we decide what we're going to eat, we decide how we're going to live. And these are the decisions that drive consumption.

Lloyd Alter 03:37

So I started going into that report, followed it through and decided, well, this is the way to plan your life. Look at the various divisions in that book: the mobility, the nutrition, the housing, the leisure, and try and follow this lifestyle.

Lloyd Alter 03:56

Now, concurrently, at about this time, an activist in London and erstwhile candidate for being mayor named Rosalind Readhead, had basically been doing the same thing. And she decided that she was going to live a lifestyle with the carbon footprint that we're going to have in 2050, which is one tonne of carbon per year. And I looked at that and said, this is impossible. I mean, that's basically background noise. But at 2030, the average carbon footprint that they say that we have to reach, and this is an average for the entire world, was 2.5 tonnes of carbon per year. And I looked at that, and I said, I think I can do that. And basically set up a spreadsheet and started tracking and seeing if I could do it and thought, you know, there might be a book in this. And I contacted New Society publishers and said, what do you think? And they said yes. And so that basically started the project of what can I do to produce less than 2.5 tonnes of carbon emissions for an entire year.

Ben Adam-Smith 05:07

It's so interesting, because I feel like we're all on this journey. A lot of us collectively are worried about the state of the planet and the environment. And okay, I haven't written the book, but I am constantly looking at my life and what I can do. And one thing that I think I should mention from that introduction that you did is, are we not just caught in the system, you're almost born into where you are in the world and this system, and you've got to now call out. Because, one of the big factors I know that you mention in the book is almost where you live, you're in the middle of Toronto, which sounds like a perfect place.

Lloyd Alter 05:45

Well, it's not a perfect place, but it's certainly much better. You're absolutely right, that we are caught in a system, not necessarily of our making. And when you want to make personal changes, it happens to be easier in some places than another. I happen to live in a location where they closed all the coal fired power plants, they built a fleet of nuclear reactors in the 60s and the 70s. And I'm 100 kilometers away from Niagara Falls, the biggest hydroelectric power generation place in the world. And so the power here is almost entirely carbon free. Which means if I'm calculating my carbon footprint, and I'm running things electrically, I don't have to worry about it. That's not the case for you. That's not the case for people in the states just 100 miles away, because they've got a lot more coal power. So I started off on a basis where I had it really easy when it came to worrying about electricity.

Lloyd Alter 06:44

I also happen to be living in a place I don't think that dissimilar from where you live, where what I'm in is essentially a streetcar suburb. It was designed in 1913, so that I could get off a street car, pick up some groceries on the high street, walk home past relatively narrow houses that were built that way so that everybody would be close to that high street. And so for me to say, okay, I'm not going to drive for a year wasn't really much of a problem at all, because I happened to be in that kind of neighbourhood.

Lloyd Alter 07:20

I was talking to some people in North Bay, Ontario just last week, and it's a community 350 kilometers north of here, where it's really, really cold and everybody drives pickup trucks. All of their food is coming long distance and big tractor trailers. So I said, it's not going to be possible, because society was designed around driving cars. And as soon as you drive a car, you've blown your footprint in this. And so many people live in suburbs where they have to drive cars, or they think they have to drive cars.

Ben Adam-Smith 07:55

One of the things that I took from your book, is that okay, consumption yes we're all a bit over the top in all sorts of different areas. However, the ebike is something that you've made me, well certainly put this question mark about if there is something that I think might help us where we are, in particular, you mentioned my location. Well, before I was right in the heart of the town, but I'm a bit further away now. And I like the idea that at some point in the book, you mentioned how it flattens the landscape. So yeah, a lot of the cycling is easy. But if you've got that big hill that you've got to get up, maybe that deters you from going out on your bike.

Lloyd Alter 08:32

Well, I absolutely think this is a major point. The real ebike revolution is going to be in the suburbs, not in the cities, because in the cities, people have alternatives: they can walk, they can get good transit, and they don't have long distances so a regular bike might just be fine. It's the suburbs where there are almost no alternatives to the private car, where the ebike is going to make a huge difference because you can go farther without any effort, you can carry big loads without much effort, and you can be not so fit: a little older. When I got mine three years ago now, I spoke to the person who had a shop that was devoted to ebikes and asked her who's buying them. She said boomers and delivery people. And that's where it basically started.

Ben Adam-Smith 09:24

Well, it's on my Christmas list, so we'll see how we go there!

Ben Adam-Smith 09:28

When we look at this 1.5 degree lifestyle and living it, for me there are a number of things that come up straight away, perhaps just from what I've read in the past decade or so: flying is obviously going to be a big one, red meats. But what else did you discover? Are there any other things that almost on the next level down that float up to the surface?

Lloyd Alter 09:52

Well, the one that totally shocked me more than anything else, is my obsession with having all the latest Apple products. And so I'm talking to you on my MacBook Pro, I'm looking at a big screen, I've got my watch, I've got my Air Pods, I've got my iPad. And when you look at how much electricity these things use to operate, it's negligible, because Apple's designed them all to use very little electricity. But when you look at what's called the embodied carbon, the carbon that is released in the manufacture of the products, it's huge. Like, my iPhone weighs 80 kilograms, when you measure it, in the carbon footprint of making it, and I can't lift 80 kilograms very easily. The phone weighs nothing, but that's what went into the atmosphere making it.

Lloyd Alter 10:40

And I think embodied carbon is a terrible name. I think it should be called upfront carbon, because it goes into the air up front. But when you look at everything through the lens of embodied carbon, it changes everything. Everybody says electric cars are absolutely wonderful. But an electric pickup like the one that Ford is like promising the world, is 40 tonnes of carbon and upfront carbon! That's basically a lifetime allowance under the 2.5 tonnes that I'm allocating per year.

Lloyd Alter 11:12

So this is a critical point, that when you look at things this way, it's very different. All of my Apple stuff turned out to be the biggest part of my carbon footprint after the gas bill for the gas furnace behind me, which is shocking. So that was a surprise.

Ben Adam-Smith 11:30

We're obviously a housing podcast, so that's going to be of interest to us. Are there any takeaways? We've talked about the location, as in that would really help if you're somewhere that's connected well, and there are, there's transport locally, but what else?

Lloyd Alter 11:45

Well, the key factors that I've learned through this whole thing is so much of this has to do with moderation. With not building or buying any more than you really need. It's the concept of sufficiency. How much is enough?

Lloyd Alter 11:59

I was reading a recent study by one of the thinkers about this, who said that without sufficiency, efficiency is lost. That you know, you can build a house that's big and really efficient, but because it's big, it's using more energy than a little house would.

Lloyd Alter 12:16

So this is one point, that you have to look at life through this lens of sufficiency. Do you need a car to go to the neighbourhood store to get a quart of milk when the bike or the ebike will be enough? Or if walking will be enough? Is my iPhone 11 enough? I used to think oh God, a new one's out I want to upgrade. But once I learned about the embodied carbon in it, I realised that I have to make it go as long as possible. So is the 11 enough? Is it sufficient? Yes, I bought it because it has a fantastic camera, and it's still got a fantastic camera. So I don't see any real need to upgrade. And when you start looking that way, things last longer, you save money.

Lloyd Alter 12:58

Now, 10 years ago, if you were designing an efficient home, you'd probably fill it up with polyurethane foam because it's got the best R value per inch of anything. And then it turns out, it's got a huge upfront carbon, at least it did until recently. In Europe, they changed the rules so that they had to change the blowing agent that makes it and so it's half as bad as it was 10 years ago. It's still a fossil fuel. And it's still much worse than say, using cellulose or as everybody likes to talk about now straw though I think it's sort of hard to work with.

Lloyd Alter 13:36

So you want to build with the right materials that have the low embodied carbon, and you want to use materials that are relatively local, so they're not being shipped very far. And this is of course why there's the huge increase in wood construction, the interest in building out of wood for larger buildings, mass timber as it's called.

Lloyd Alter 13:59

But I think that the issue of upfront carbon has to go way beyond buildings, it has to be in everything that you do, from the car that you buy to the electronics that you buy. When you look at it that way, then you just look at it differently.

Ben Adam-Smith 14:16

Yeah, sufficiency, I think we do need to underline is just key. Are there any tips on actually how we become more sufficient? You know, maybe you are someone who's had a house with a home gym in the past. You like the idea of building a new house with a swimming pool and having a tennis court and just doing all these things? Because I struggle with this sometimes when I'm advising people, I like to say please use less but everyone has a different marker of how big their house should be.

Lloyd Alter 14:47

With what you're seeing in the UK with the increase in fuel prices and everything going mad there because of the Ukraine war, two years ago when I would talk about efficiency, nobody really cared. Like, if I was promoting a Passivhaus, I had to talk about comfort, and I had to talk about health, because energy was so cheap that putting in more insulation didn't pay.

Lloyd Alter 15:15

Well, that has been totally turned on its head now. What we've got now is we're really worried about building for resilience, so that if in fact the gas gets turned off, the house won't cool off overnight. So, you want a house that's got lots of insulation, you want a house that uses as little fuel as possible, because of all these crises that we're having. And necessarily, if you've got a given budget, and you build better with more insulation, and higher quality windows, and all of that stuff, you're going to have to probably build a little bit smaller.

Lloyd Alter 15:53

This is what was always the challenge, wasn't it? The trade off between, oh, I want the gym and I want the extra room and I want this and I want that, or I want triple glazed windows and I want R50 walls,

people would always go for the flash, go for the granite counters instead of the laminate counters, instead of putting in more insulation.

Lloyd Alter 16:16

I think that the current crisis is going to change people's perceptions a little bit. My home is really a lifeboat that we've really got to be in something that's not going to leak, that's going to stay warm if the power goes out, that is going to protect my family. These are priorities that I don't think people thought about as closely just before the war.

Ben Adam-Smith 16:40

Yeah, with energy prices doubling, and ironically, the fuel companies are announcing record profits at the same time, which seems ridiculous. Maybe this is a good point to talk about our money and how we spend it. What did you discover about the money that you were paying for various things? And is there a better way that it can be used, or how every time we go to the pay button, we think, what else could I be doing?

Ben Adam-Smith 17:12

Well, I mean, it is in fact a direct result that if you consume less, because you're trying to live a sufficient lifestyle and a low carbon lifestyle, even if you're not trying to save money you do because obviously you're buying less, and you're being careful in your choices. Like I do believe that because embodied carbon, for instance, is a function of how long something lasts, that it pays to buy high quality, the best quality, and it pays to maintain it well, instead of throwing something away and just replacing it. That these conditions, you might spend a little more for something, you might spend more for clothes because you want clothes that are made of natural materials, because they have lower carbon footprint than clothes made out of plastic, fast fashion.

Ben Adam-Smith 18:01

So when you buy things that last you might pay a little more. But overall, when you look at the whole thing, the whole lifespan of it all, you end up saving a lot of money. You know, I'm sitting here right beside my desk. My desk is a 1954 Herman Miller classic. So I bought it at an antique store for very little money 20 years ago. You go to IKEA and buy a piece of furniture, and it first of all is giving off formaldehyde gas as all of the stuff dries out, then if you bought a cheap piece, it doesn't last very long and you're replacing it. And it just becomes worth less and less and less. I like buying vintage furniture, everything I own is used. And what's happened is that this desk is now worth about five times as much as I paid for it at the time. So buying used, buying secondhand, it has so many benefits. And again, it's got zero embodied carbon, it's all been paid for and over the years already.

Ben Adam-Smith 19:04

I actually find as well that I'm quite slow to purchase things because I'm always checking them out and thinking. I'll give you a couple of examples just because they're fresh in my mind. So I've bought a new pair of running shoes, and you could buy something very cheap, that's plastic, that will probably last you for a couple of years but then it's going to be dumped afterwards. And that factor of paying a lot more, I think I'm paying about three times as much as I would if I had gone down the other route. Then just moving on to my belt, this was another one that I thought, I had a leather belt that lasted me years

and years and years, and then eventually gave way, and then I went through two belts that I thought were quite good ones and they fell apart within a matter of months. And I'm now on trialing an old bike tyre actually belt, but you know all these sorts of things, I just feel, in some ways the pressure of every purchase I make.

Lloyd Alter 20:05

Well, it's hard, there is a pressure to it. And the problem is that I found in my book, you don't want there to be pressure. You don't want people to feel that life is not going to be as good, as pleasant, or as enjoyable if I start doing all of this stuff. It is, it's just different.

Lloyd Alter 20:23

My favorite example that I use is I used to love my snowboard. And every winter we would drive two hours north to get electrically winched up a hill that then I would slide down artificial snow made with electricity and water pumped from the lake and then drive three hours back. And I thought, well, I can't do that anymore. But I used to love cross country skiing. And I went and got myself a set of cross country skis, and I bungee corded them to my ebike and I went to the nearest big park. And cross country skiing is lovely, and it's good exercise. And I wasn't spending three hours I was spending 10 minutes getting there. And so I wasn't trading something for a more marginal experience. I was trading it for a different experience.

Lloyd Alter 21:17

I found the same thing with food. You know, a big juicy steak is a lovely thing. And meat every night is great. But red meat, ruminant meat that comes from lamb, goats and cows, has a huge carbon footprint because they're burping out methane in their digestion. But pork is nice. Chicken is nice. Tofu is nice. I have a wife who is a wonderful cook and she was willing to humour me and cook less of the ruminants and more of the other stuff. And it's not like I didn't have as interesting a diet, I got a more interesting diet because she started looking into Indian cookbooks and Chinese cookbooks and looking at different styles of cooking that basically used less meat and had more options for vegetarian food. So I wasn't really giving anything up except an occasional giant steak I suppose, which I don't actually miss.

Ben Adam-Smith 22:17

Yeah, I think if you start cooking more plant based food, you develop a taste for it. It's a funny thing, particularly if you've got good recipes. And I will now very rarely order that red meat dish, because there are other things that I like. And I think my point before was, even if it does take me time to buy the right item, I'm perfectly happy, I just would like to be doing the right thing.

Lloyd Alter 22:45

Right! It's not a matter of saying this is less satisfactory, less enjoyable, less pleasurable. I did go through an experience before with my wife who was writing for a website, and we were looking at the issue of local food. So we spent one year eating what is essentially a 19th century Ontario diet. And Ontario was then populated by English and Scottish, which meant a lot of meat because you could have a cow standing all winter, and a lot of root vegetables, turnip and more turnip, and more potatoes and more parsnips, and all of these things, and no fresh vegetables, anything like that. She had to be really imaginative. And then when the first asparagus comes up, it just tastes so glorious, and the first

strawberries come out, and they just melt in your mouth. And you realise that this life of imported food is not necessarily a better one.

Lloyd Alter 23:47

And this is a real lifestyle change. I have to tell the story of my mother, who grew up in the depression with no fresh vegetables in winter. And then in the 50s, with canned and then with the 60s with frozen. Whenever I would go to her house in the middle of winter, there would be fresh asparagus and I said, Mom, this is flown from Peru, this you should not be doing this. She said I've gone through this whole life where I couldn't get this. This is the most wonderful miracle of modern technology that I can get fresh asparagus in January.

Lloyd Alter 24:18

There are a lot of people who think that. You have to change the attitude and realise, well what is the cost of that? She didn't care about the cost in carbon of living that lifestyle, instead of let's have something local and we'll wait for the fresh stuff to come. You can enjoy that life as much as the one that you're getting all the airfreighted food.

Ben Adam-Smith 24:40

We're also experimenting as we've had time now that we finished the house to start growing some more vegetables. And yeah, you don't have to go miles, do lots of extraordinary stuff. Life can be simple and have a lot to cherish.

Lloyd Alter 24:58

The thing that is going to kill me, this is the one thing about writing my book during the pandemic, is that it wasn't very easy to travel. And the thing that is going to kill me in all of this is flying, because we don't have the options that you do in Europe and the UK of taking decent trains.

Lloyd Alter 25:17

The last time I was in Europe, because I get asked to lecture every year at this conference in Portugal, I went up to Porto and I took a tour for the day and everybody else who was in my group had just flown in from London for the weekend. That this was a very common thing that you're not going to take a train because you only have a weekend and the Ryanair and the Easyjets are so cheap for you guys, that everybody just hops on planes like this.

Lloyd Alter 25:45

I don't know what we're going to do about that, because flying, I had to fly to New York to meet the new boss when our company got sold. And that 130 hour trip to New York had a month's worth of carbon footprint for me. So this is going to be the hardest thing for people to adjust to because travel is wonderful. And we're just going to have to change the way we do it, you know, no wild little weekend trips. But maybe you pack them together, take two weeks, go somewhere and really enjoy it and amortise that flight over a whole year worth of carbon.

Ben Adam-Smith 26:23

So going back to this year that you spent, do you think there's lasting impact of the journey that you went on in your life?

Lloyd Alter 26:34

Absolutely, yes. I now when I get in a car for any length of time, get really uncomfortable. I mean, in the seat with my wife driving, I hardly drive at all anymore. I just find this is such a waste of time, I'd rather be on my bike. Even in the middle of winter, I thought do I want to take transit? No, I still have lingering fears because of the pandemic, I'm going to bundle all up and I'm going to get on my bike. And I had studded tyres on it to get through the ice. I can't imagine getting my snowboard out and wanting to spend three hours in the car just for a bit of recreation.

Lloyd Alter 27:14

So I think some of these changes are going to be permanent. I know that the issue is probably going to come up in November, and I'll be asked, will you come to Portugal again, because they love having me speak at this particular Passivhaus conference. And after doing it two years virtually, I think you're gonna get in a plane to go to Portugal? That is going to be the real test.

Ben Adam-Smith 27:37

But you've also got your sister over here, which is another incentive to come over! What about for other people? I think this has been a fantastic exercise, total eye opener. But you've been through it, so you've had the benefit of the exercise. Is there anything we can do? We can obviously read the book, but is that the same? Do you think that will give us the same experience?

Lloyd Alter 28:00

Well, I have had many, many people, much to my surprise, saying how much they loved the book, how much they hadn't thought about these issues at all, and how it's changing the way they live, because they frankly just hadn't thought of the issues.

Lloyd Alter 28:16

They would agree that if the single biggest thing that you can do in your diet is give up red meat, they said, that's not so hard. The other thing that they got is that you don't have to be doctrinaire. If you really do like a steak occasionally, have it occasionally. Because again, you're saying, I'm cutting back on the things with the biggest footprints. And if you take that attitude, that you can amortise things over a while, which is what I'm going to do with travel, you know, if I'm going to travel here, I'm going to cut back there.

Lloyd Alter 28:55

And this is the thing people have said to me, most of all, I can't tell you how often now I think, oh, I'll just take a bike instead of driving. That people are just doing it more because they're realising the footprint of it. I've had people say we've sold the second car, we're down to one car, and we got an ebike for using the other time. So people are making changes.

Lloyd Alter 29:18

I think the most important change that comes out of it, is that we've got to get away from this stupid thinking that personal actions don't matter, because they do. Personal actions set an example for other people as well. If they see you're doing it, then they do it.

Lloyd Alter 29:35

My favourite example, my favourite parallel is following what happened with smoking. You know, everybody used to smoke everywhere and a lot of people did smoke, and then it came out that it wasn't very good for you. But what changed? What got smoking to drop so much? There was a combination of government regulation and limiting where you could buy them. There was taxation which really raised the price of it. But then what it really made, I think one of the biggest differences was social pressure. And I really hope that what's going to happen with carbon will parallel that. People will realise that secondhand exhaust is like secondhand smoke was. And so if you're driving a gasoline car, you're poisoning your neighbour. And your neighbour with carbon, unlike cigarette smoke, could be a neighbour on an island in the South Pacific, because the stuff spreads over the whole world.

Ben Adam-Smith 30:34

I do wonder sometimes whether we're going to have to get more deliberate as a world. I've been waiting for the opportunity to talk about population, and particularly Western lifestyle population, because that's what does the real damage, but we're doing all this good work, let's say more and more people do it. But if the population is rising anyway, when it doesn't seem like it's going to come with many benefits, in fact, I find it very hard to see how it's not going to damage more habitats and so forth. But we need to get more deliberate about well we need to protect this rainforests, we need to divide up land use, because otherwise, I think we're destined to choke ourselves, are we not?

Ben Adam-Smith 31:13

No, I think that worrying about population is one of the big diversions. We're going through what's called the demographic transition. Every country when it gets wealthy, the population, the birth rate drops. I mean, England, Canada, even China now, nobody's at the replacement rate, in terms of having kids. If you look at the countries that have populations growing dramatically, their carbon footprint is negligible. They're living now below the 2.5 tonnes per year because they don't have any money to buy anything. So population isn't the problem. It's distribution. I mean, the top 10% of the population is putting out 49% of the carbon, according to Oxfam. The top 1% is putting up 15, and all of us are in that top 10%, in the northern and the western world.

Ben Adam-Smith 32:10

And so, as an aging baby boomer, I can tell you the biggest worry we're going to have is that there's not going to be enough nurses, there's not going to be enough care workers. There's not going to be enough people to do these things because of what's happening with population. The problem isn't population, it's wealth, it's inequality, and it's the western world's consumption.

Ben Adam-Smith 32:31

All right then, one more thing. What about those people that they're hearing what we say and just choosing to ignore it, or maybe they're not understanding how serious this all is, but they're going to live however they want to live until the such and such hits the fan?

Lloyd Alter 32:50

This is a problem that we have to face all the time that there are people who make a business of actually ignoring or denying it. You've got a whole zero carbon working group that says we shouldn't be doing this trying to cancel everything. You have David Cameron, who got rid of the green crap, I think was his favourite thing and put you in much of the position you have. You have the Republicans in the United States who don't believe in this and would rather pump more gas as the solution to every problem. You'll have them everywhere.

Lloyd Alter 33:24

First of all, the fossil fuel companies are very, very wealthy. And basically, our economy has been built on fossil fuels. This is what makes it work. This is why we've had the boom that we've had in the last 50/100 years since the industrial revolution, is turning fossil fuels into money. So how you decouple that is the problem of our age, how you can still have people making money without fossil fuels, is the problem that we have to face.

Lloyd Alter 33:57

And, you know, I couldn't believe it that in places like British Columbia, Canada, that last year got hit by fires, they got hit by heat waves, they got hit by floods, they got hit by every single thing that climate could throw at them, and they still have people out there saying, oh, God, we can't be dealing with this climate change and carbon prices because it's too expensive. So if it's staring people in the face, and they don't want to deal with it, I don't know what the answer is!

Ben Adam-Smith 34:26

I also feel that we all have a part to play. But yeah, I think it's fantastic what you've done with this book. What happens now? Are you just trying to proliferate this material?

Lloyd Alter 34:40

Well, I'm trying to do exactly that. And I'm doing a lot of talking about the book. I'm thinking about my next book, which will likely talk about what I said earlier that when you look through the lens of embodied carbon, everything changes. So I might just write about everything that way. And do you know how much this thing you're doing weighs and put everything into these terms of the weight of carbon will be an interesting exercise.

Lloyd Alter 35:09

People are obviously getting concerned about it. I mean, if you go on the Apple environmental website, you can get detail on every product they make. Unilever is now promising carbon labels on everything that they sell. The EU is beginning to talk about demanding labels and information on every product in terms of embodied carbon. So I think that there's progress coming, and it's a movement I want to keep pushing and working on.

Ben Adam-Smith 35:39

Now, I'm aware in my own life, for example, that I have tried to refine as I've gone along, and as I've learned things, but do you think there can still exist certain blind spots that you have that someone else

might see in your lifestyle? Or do you think you've pretty much covered your carbon footprint, you've looked to analyse your life enough?

Lloyd Alter 36:04

There are lots of blind spots. And the biggest blind spot I think that I have, is the blind spot of privilege. I won't say arrogance, but privilege that I started this project, I am a boomer of a certain age that was able to buy a house for what would be considered a joke price. Now you can't buy a condo parking space for what I bought my house for. I have a lifestyle that, you know, I could adapt and change because I have the money to do it, I have an internet based job. So I don't have to figure out how to drive to the factory when the pandemic came, I didn't have to go through any terrible shock or anything like that, my life continued.

Lloyd Alter 36:50

We have to always be careful not to get caught up in our own privilege, that it's easy for me because I know for someone who's poor, I know for someone who has to spend an hour driving to some hospital where they're a cleaner, where they have to feed their kids with the cheapest food from the store, they don't have the options that I have. That's the hardest thing that we all have to look at. It's not to think, well, the example that I'm setting is something that works for everyone. We have to change society to the degree that the structure is there, so that people do have choices that they don't have to choose between food and heat in their houses. We have to make it more equitable and more fair. And I think that's my blind spot.

Ben Adam-Smith 37:41

Yeah, very good point. Well, I would recommend that if you haven't read the book already, certainly get a copy. I've got one for my dad as well who I know enjoys this sort of thing, so I'll have to check up with him and see how he's getting on! But we'll put a link in the show notes. Lloyd always fun to catch up with you. Thank you very much for sparing time for us.

Lloyd Alter 38:03

It was a pleasure.

Ben Adam-Smith 38:05

Head online to take a look at the show notes that accompany this session: houseplanninghelp.com/316, where you can review the main information again in our summary. We'll link you to Lloyd, we'll point you to somewhere you can buy the Living the 1.5 Degree Lifestyle, so you can get stuck in and get all the detail on the full story on how he went about things. If you've got a comment or you'd like to ask a question, you can do that within the show notes or on social media. We'll provide you with all the links: houseplanninghelp.com/316.

Ben Adam-Smith 38:41

And another place actually we can be talking about this is our free Facebook group: [talkselfbuild.com](https://www.facebook.com/talkselfbuild.com) is the way to get there. Just be a nice easy thing to remember our free Facebook group: [talkselfbuild.com](https://www.facebook.com/talkselfbuild.com).

Ben Adam-Smith 38:54

But let's finish on a hub update. The Hub is our membership community that we run alongside House Planning Help. Designed specifically if you want to take the learning further, you want to enjoy some of the videos that we have produced over the years, because we've put a lot of resources into this. We've got courses we've got live training with guests experts, you can chat through your project with me in our regular office hour calls. You can network with like minded folks in our private forum. We've got the works, but yes, the in depth video case studies. These are when we followed entire builds all the way, through filming and then chopping it up into different segments. So they're normally 10 to 15 minute videos. Each build probably has about 20 chapters to it.

Ben Adam-Smith 39:44

And we've added a new chapter to our retrofit story. This is the Kinver Passivhaus that's I would say about midway through as we're looking in our videos. So retrofitting heritage buildings comes with a lot of challenges, and in order to preserve the look of the house from the street an internal wall insulation strategy has been adopted on this project. If you're going down this route, you've got to be so careful with moisture because you don't want any interstitial condensation, so we talk about that. But also have a look at a product that they're using to make sure that it is all breathable. And this is a lime and cork product called Diathonite. And it's being plastered on, there's going to be wood fibre insulation going on top and another lime plaster. Really interesting episode. I would almost say this is the, this is the pinnacle of the retrofit. This is the moment we've all been waiting for, the lime plaster going on. So yeah, that is what we offer in The Hub: houseplanninghelp.com/join. Come and find us.

Ben Adam-Smith 40:47

Next time, Kit Knowles from Ecospheric is my guest. We'll be looking at pushing the boundaries when it comes to sustainable design.

Ben Adam-Smith 40:56

That's your lot today. Thank you so much for being there. The House Planning Help podcast is produced by Regen Media - content that matters.