Before going into my personal experience I'll set the scene.

Many lifestyle magazines refer to natural light, cross-ventilation, inside/outside living with gardens watered from a rainwater tank out the back. Green editing at this level is about reinforcing today's positives. On the other hand, green thinking more often than not focuses on the ravages of nature, on melting ice caps, devastated national parks and threats to species.

The built environment is a major emitter of greenhouse gas. According to September 2007 economic analysis commissioned by the Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council, it is responsible for 23 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions and substantial energy use – and I'm not even counting the hard physical infrastructure of roads, rail, airports and so on.

All those materials with their embodied energy; all those production processes; and all that electricity from lighting and information technology alone. But fear of upfront costs may make practitioners and clients decide against double glazing, for instance, even though increasing recognition of long-run operational savings offers hope of an overall change in attitude and practice.

The built environment is less mentioned in the popular press than other aspects of the environment. Hybrid or electric cars, vegetable gardens, jobs in renewable energy and office retrofitting, and emission trading or carbon pollution reduction schemes, dominate. Yet wellbeing in the office and at home does get a look in. Shifts in terminology such as moving from talking about the dangers of sick building syndrome to the need to improve indoor air quality show how this sector with tremendous energy efficiency potential might reveal a balanced approach to the content and terminology of green editing.

I will discuss how I got into building industry publications and some of the main green editing projects I have worked on. These have either been for commercial business-to-business, or niche not-for-profit organisations or custom publishers. Sorry, no traditional book publishers and I would love to hear later from any of you who have worked on environmental publications in publishing houses.

I will touch on some of the articles I have written as a journalist as they reveal an editor's choice of content, showing how something once regarded as cutting edge and non-commercial has become a topic building industry people and editors should know about.

I will discuss greenwash and reaction to a more sophisticated readership. I will list the most important knowledge bases for checking and verifying project and product information that over the last 5 to 10 years have become the shorthand for checking the credibility of building projects, products and

materials claiming to be environmentally friendly. I will also discuss my own working environment and the areas where I might get a tick and others where I would be reprimanded.

Sustainability and sustainable development have been defined in many ways but the most popular definition is still the one from the 1987 Brundtland report, Our Common Future. "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

Meeting these needs it is widely agreed means integrating economic, social and environmental implications of decisions and actions (the triple bottom line) and taking a long-term rather than short-term perspective. Building industry sustainability criteria for verification and procurement include indoor environment quality, embodied and renewable energy, water, materials and enhancing human health. The Building Code of Australia (the BCA) has energy efficiency measures and mandatory minimum home energy targets.

With growing consumer and industry awareness and legislative force, knowledge of sustainability will only become more crucial and green editing I believe will become part of the furniture, and endlessly recyclable. The future beckons and catering for posterity is a great motivator for editors especially when you are feeling particularly overworked and underpaid.

First, how did I get into publishing for the building industry? By the way, any comments I may make about publications are in a personal capacity; I do not represent any publisher.

I was a freelance writer in London and Hong Kong, mainly about the performing arts and sociocultural issues. I came to Australia in the mid 1980s, travelled across country twice, and through contacts worked as a proofreader and then technical editor at computer company Fujitsu's documentation department in Sydney. As a casual I was laid off in the early 1990s recession. I began freelance writing again and went on the dole so had to apply for jobs. I answered an advertisement in the Sydney Morning Herald to revamp a magazine's editorial content. I was on deadline for an article and did not really want the editing job so was relaxed during the interview and, of course, was offered the position.

And so began three months of market research, interviews with architects, engineers, quantity surveyors, clients and would-be clients of the magazine, Building Products News. BPN was regarded as the best source of product information but not the most influential on professional issues. I was very lucky to have this crash course in the industry and competing publications. A rival magazine has since identified that there were over 30 building and architecture magazines; nowadays there are probably more

We decided to increase project application and product research stories as well as the stock-in-trade new products. This desire for wider editorial content led to BPN running the first Eco-Guide in December 1994.

While thinking about this topic, I was amazed to remember that during my BSC Economics and Sociology at the London School of Economics I did a course called Man and His Physical Environment. What a title but this was 1975. Our main discussions were about how to give monetary value to environmental externalities, such as pollution and poor water quality, externalities still not accounted for in the gross domestic product. Sometimes it is easy to think we are still at square one.

BPN was then published by Thomson Business Publishing (it has been part of the Reed Business Publishing stable for more than 10 years). The Eco-Guide was its first dedicated green publication and, as far as I know, was the first such environmental publication for the building industry by a large commercial publisher. With only seven pages of advertisements mainly from windows and lighting companies out of 26 pages, it was a commercial gamble. It was inserted into the main magazine which ironically had a bloke in blunstones pushing down on a Hitachi pile driver on the main cover.

There were articles from industry associations on timber, glass, concrete, brick and steel, and application stories including a renovation by the Eco Design Foundation (EDF) of a public junior school which EDF was turning into a Display and Research Centre. They were trialling renewable energy and demand management – a photovoltaic solar system was going to be installed. There was a stormwater and roof water project, and interior refurbishments using recycled and long-life materials such as floor coverings and furniture from recycled or plantation growth timber.

Proving that serendipity does play a part in our careers, I found out about this project because Anne-Marie Willis, deputy director of EDF, was a lecturer in my Masters of Australian Studies course at the University of New South Wales. EDF's work was leading-edge and she was prepared to explain decisions such as using natural linseed based linoleum rather than vinyl and compensating for its brittleness and irregular edges by adding skirting or beaming, an interior design compromise they were prepared to live with.

There was a seven page Eco-Guide survey on building products and materials that manufacturers said met a number of environmental marketing criteria such as non toxic, UV resistant, biodegradable, made from recyclable products, ease of disassembly, durability and energy efficient – including solar, natural light, thermal, wind. They had responded to our questionnaire and we had included all manufacturer contact details so readers could check with them. The production department assigned the best designer to the Eco-Guide and we spent hours aligning and checking dots with manufacturers' responses. As I will discuss later, probably one of the main changes has been the

growth of credible third-party organisations and independent sources of information that editors can turn to without having to rely on manufacturers' brochures and research.

In the late 1990s, the National Specification System (NATSPEC) published the 170-page Timber in context – a guide to sustainable use, as part of its technical guide imprint. The discussions I had had with Anne-Marie Willis about the importance of weighing up environmental impacts and how they relate to each other, had stayed with me

A product made up of recycled materials may have an energy intensive manufacturing process or need a lot of maintenance. Life cycle analysis traces product impacts from land and water, for instance, through manufacturing, use, disposal and possible recycling – cradle to grave, and in some cases, back to cradle. The complexities of these impacts had to be explained to builders in clear and understandable language, which meant clarifying and simplifying much of the author's cultural studies and discourse vocabulary. I asked lots of questions and Willis rewrote sections. This took almost a year on and off. We had to bring their thinking to designers, builders and specifiers who needed convincing that sustainable products were worth the upfront costs to be offset later by lower operating costs.

Bravely, we had tables of timber applications and species, listing the timbers in order of environmental preference based on criteria such as forest source, timber availability, appropriateness of timber's inherent characteristics for the application, and significance of non-forest impacts such as use of preservatives or adhesives. The applications went from formwork and landscaping to flooring, cladding, external and internal joinery and furniture. Timber properties were taken from Australian standards and experts from diverse organisations such as the Woodworkers Alliance for Rainforest Protection to the National Association of Forest Industries.

Sustainable Nation – Managing Australia's Future was published in early 2008 by custom publisher ETN Communications. The 238-page colour book covered climate, energy and water, carbon trading and corporate social responsibility. The publisher had set the direction of the book before I was contracted as managing editor to complete the final commissioning for expert articles and steer through the sponsored editorial, mostly case studies written by journalists including interviews with the client's managing director or similar. I also completed the main structural and copy editing alongside production subeditors who did most of the Indesign work. I also liaised with the designers at their design studio. This type of arrangement may soon be over because many designers now work from home and prefer final corrections and checks via email and pdf. This always seems to result in far more rounds of corrections than with face-to-face contact.

In Sustainable Nation I was surprised by the number of experts who pulled out at the last minute after offering to write on a particular issue. It was difficult to get a different voice because the organisation's replacement authors were usually already well-known. I began to realise why the same names appear again and again in publications: they deliver the goods.

The two main building related stories were from a well-known architect working on several sustainable homes, on how to act against climate change, and another from a property research company about the need to monitor buildings from design to day-to-day operation, doing the right thing "socially, environmentally and commercially".

We relied on stock photos or Getty Images or images from clients that we could use throughout the book as long as we gave them full credit. Besides having a stylised tree hug and a footprint we avoided clichéd images and "green" in the headings.

All sponsored editorial is written by journalists but clients have the final say. I asked writers to get client approval before sending the article to me to edit, usually for further clarification of technical points. The clients' main complaint was our use of lower case for titles, as in lower case m and d for managing director, but once they knew it was house style, they were OK about it.

Initially, when commissioning experts – academic, government, corporate – to write the issues-based pieces I was worried they might not want to write for a publication with sponsored editorial as well, but when I explained the mix and that the sponsored editorial had a different look and that I was genuinely interested in the experts' stories, they were happy to contribute. It then took countless emails, phone calls and extended deadlines to finally see their contribution, mind you.

With articles I have written for other industry publications editors now seem to expect their readers to know environmental basics. This may partly be a reaction to greenwash. Take the cover of a newspaper careers section in April, which showed a young blonde Caucasian stretching her arms in victory or relaxation, with the cover line, Green collar workers – the new jobs saving the planet. She was sitting in a typical office chair in a green field.

Green growth, green economy, green practice – the phrases were all there within an article promoting new jobs in building, constructing, retrofitting and trades work and in specialist areas such as environmental scientists and carbon researchers collecting data from forests and plantations. These jobs, it can be said, do not grow on trees and the article focused on potential opportunities only.

I haven't read a once-favoured description of water savings as "the equivalent of seven Olympic-sized swimming pools" in a while though comparisons can still be fraught. "The Houses of Parliament and

the Bank of England together consumed enough electricity and gas to emit 21,356 tonnes of CO2 a year, the equivalent of more than 14,000 people flying from London to New York," appeared in the Guardian Weekly. In what type of plane? I wonder. What time of day? How windy was it? What type of fuel was used?

Much better these days to refer to studies such as the one for CH (Council House) 2, the 6-star Green Star rated City of Melbourne offices (more on those stars later), with its $11.3 million floor vents, shower tower evaporative cooling system, windows that open at night, and gas-fired co-generation plant. Productivity increases were around twice what was expected, saving more than $2 million a year and reducing the payback period for these extra costs from 10 years to seven.

The Australian Association of National Advertisers recently published an Environmental Claims in Advertising and Marketing Code that will establish principles for claims made about a product or service, that they are truthful and factual, relating to the service and its environmental impact and can be substantiated and verified. For instance, to say a product is CFC-free is no longer relevant as CFCs have been phased out and are no longer a pressing issue.

Environmentally sustainable design was showcased by the local council in a story I wrote for the February 2009 Indesign magazine on a leisure and community centre in Sydney's west. The louvres, air flow system and rainwater tanks within the former diving pool were as important as the open meandering corridor and scattered furniture.

When I wrote about the ecospecifier database for the Sydney Morning Herald in December 2004 it was identified as, "innovative website tracks goods with environmental benefits", whereas now its life-cycle assessed information on over 3,500 products, materials and resources, is regarded as the main way to differentiate product reality from product hype. Funnily enough the story generated more enquires about the Herman Miller typist's chair made of recycled material in the accompanying photo than about ecospecifier itself. Still it was listed on the database and brought traffic to the website.

Procurement of sustainable products relies on knowing and trusting the environmental value of a product and in particular agreeing a life cycle methodology. Last December I wrote an article for BPN on LCA Design from the Cooperative Research Centre for Construction Innovation, a national database widely recognised (by ecospecifier among others) as having the first credible consistent life cycle measures on health, water and other environmental damages aligned with the cost of these. Whenever the architect or designer changes the design or materials on CAD (computer-aided design) software, the measures and costs change accordingly.

But perhaps the biggest change that editors should know about is the acceptance of star ratings for buildings. When I wrote an article for Commercial Property Gazette, in June 2004, their approach was "how sustainable development is finally spinning a buck". 30 The Bond, Bovis Lend Lease headquarters in central Sydney, was the first commercial office building to commit to a five-star rating in the Australian Building Greenhouse Rating energy efficiency system. The building has since achieved a five-star Green Star rating in office design and as-built (i.e. construction) from the Green Building Council of Australia (GBCA). The rating tools, developed since 2003, also cover healthcare, retail centres, education and interiors. They award credits for criteria such as indoor environment quality (no formaldehydes for instance), energy, transport, water, materials and emissions; and recognise certified projects verified by accredited third-party assessors. Four stars is for best practice, five, Australian excellence, and six, world leadership. As of 4 October there were 185 certified projects – and growing fast.

More and more building owners and tenants are also likely to opt for a NABERS rating too, which measures the ongoing performance and operating costs of existing buildings. This National Australian Built Environment Rating System is managed by the NSW Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water.

You won't be surprised to know that there are more built environment-related energy and verification organisations and acronyms. I have listed some of the main ones and their websites. Each has its own history of corporate and private involvement or government funding. I have also listed major sources of information on sustainable design and buildings.

There are constant changes. For example, Good Environmental Choice Australia is restructuring to separate its powers as the setter of voluntary environmental performance labelling standards and as an auditor, which will pass to another body. The GBCA has recently established a new assessment framework for product certification schemes so products and materials certified by GBCA-recognised certification schemes will gain Green Star credits.

As with all verification agencies though there is an element of trust, in the organisation itself, in the source of information and in the experts who reference them. Perhaps it is best to think of this as attaining something as foolproof as possible at the moment, which is possibly a good way to treat your own work environment as well.

I live in a two-storey townhouse in Sydney's inner-west. We grow tomatoes and herbs in outdoor pots, and have a worm farm in the garage.

Ashfield train station is around eight minutes walk away. We have a Honda Jazz, small and fuel efficient, but use the train during the week. The second bedroom is also the office. Storage is a problem and we will probably have to buy an extra cupboard for the garage and more shelving for under the stairs and the office. We need to repaint the interiors and will use a water-based low-volatile organic compound paint.

I wear clothes to suit the weather and use a fan and convection heater for extreme temperatures. Luckily, there is cross ventilation, natural light streams in, the house is insulated. We do not have air conditioning. The windows are single glaze standard aluminium. We mainly use energy efficient compact fluorescent lighting but I have not upgraded the task lighting desk lamps which still use an old-fashioned incandescent light bulb.

I have UV resistant vertical and horizontal blinds and adjust them to reduce glare and help control temperature. We aim for the four-minute shower. The plumber fitted a flow regulator and our water consumption has gone down. We have a mixer tap in the kitchen. The place came with a dishwasher but we mainly wash up – as well as saving water, it helps me unwind. We have a gas hot water system and gas oven. We also have a clothes dryer but prefer the clothes line in the garden or indoor lines.

We have gradually replaced the original carpet, mainly to reduce dust mites and risk of allergies, and have a mix of laminated wood, vinyl and linseed-based linoleum. The office is far from paperless but I use recycled paper. Every night I turn the computer off at the power board. Half-drunk cups of coffee mean there is a lot of activity around the kettle. We use those fantastically strong polypropylene shopping bags. I fly to England to see my mother and friends and have offset those kilometres. We flew on the A380 with Singapore Airlines on the last trip, which besides being spacious, comfortable and well-ventilated, is touted as the most fuel efficient plane around.

How we work, like the nature of the work itself, evolves. The fact that the term and concept of greenwash is now part of the vernacular, that green star-rated buildings are named as such in the mainstream press and that green has passed the stage of being the new black indicate that green editing has a future catering to the growing professional and public awareness and need for more information, analysis and certainty. I believe that green editing will become a staple part of editing within the main subject area be it architecture, design, building, science or economics.

Contacts

http://www.gbca.org.au – Green Building Council of Australia – star ratings
http://www.geca.org.au/homefront.htm - Good Environmental Choice Australia – labelling standard

http://www.nabers.com.au - National Australian Built Environment Rating System

http://www.ecospecifier.org – eco-product knowledge base

http://www.environmentdesignguide.net.au – produced by the Australian Institute of Architects

http://www.yourhome.gov.au – collaborative project of government – technical guide material

http://www.asbec.asn.au – Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council – peak body of key organisations

http://www/yourbuilding.org - portal to advice on greening the performance of commercial property

http://www.fscaustralia.org – Forest Stewardship Council

http://forestrystandard.org.au – Australian Forest Certification Scheme

http://www.nathers.gov.au – Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme

http://www.wers.net – Window Energy Rating Scheme

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