

# The different facets of sustainability

By  
JUAN CARLOS BAUMGARTNER

Illustration  
ZAMARRIPA



@zamarripa.mx

**I HAD** the opportunity of beginning my professional career a little over two decades ago in Chicago, in a period which, luckily for me, saw an unprecedented growth in the American economy, and in which that city was going through a re-invention and transformation which, years later, would place it among the best in the world. It was the perfect storm for a recently-graduated young architect: to work in a city undergoing an unparalleled transformation and in a field in which a revolution was beginning. The opportunities for learning from thousands of subjects related to the architectonic task were everywhere, but from the beginning there was one subject which attracted my attention: sustainability.

I grew up in a family of four brothers in which my father, ever since I can remember, was convinced of the damage we were doing, as society, to the planet due to the misuse of resources, the generation of waste and the lack of a recycling culture. This assuredly remained engraved in some part of my memory.

During my career I had little contact with sustainability matters, and what we were taught in the majority of cases were very extreme things of abandoning everything and living in the woods without water and without light. There was definitely a responsibility towards the environment, but it was nothing that attracted me either for living or for designing.

Living in Chicago in the midst of this architectural madness taught me that sustainability is a very important item. In the 90s, the city began with a super aggressive program in order to become a greener place by means of initiatives such as the generation of green rooftops and making the streets more friendly for cyclists.

## Each facet of sustainability responds to the context, to the user and to our responsibility.

It was in this way that, in 1998, I decided to join USGBC, the American board for a green building (from the initials in English), and began studying to be a LEED AP accredited professional in order to be able to certify sustainable buildings.

The vision of certification, although not the panacea, gave me an opportunity at that time to come closer to a vision of sustainability which utilized new technologies and put forward a clear method; it was everything contrary to living in the woods without light or water. However, for a while I asked myself what was happening on the other side of the sustainability, where here are no international clients investing in new technologies in order to save power or for dynamic controls of lighting.

That is how last December I arrived in Punta Pájaros a few kilometers from Puerto Escondido, a lost paradise on the Pacific Coast.

A project designed by Alberto Kalach that is composed of a group of 8 eco-friendly villas and that in some manner responded to my previous question about sustainability: each villa is an example of the architectural profession and care for details with a simple but significant ecological awareness.

The villas are elevated on wood columns so that they barely touch land; all have a maximum land footprint of 10%, leaving the rest for nature, which also gives a sensation of respect for the environment, fed by solar energy. While I am writing these words and missing the evenings in Punta Pájaros it became clear to me that today Mexico can be proud of the examples of sustainable architecture we have generated over the last few decades. We have projects with platinum LEED certification (the highest global level) and at the same time we are a country that also shows the other face of sustainability, manufactured by craftsmen without unnecessary luxuries. **g**

📷 @baumgarj