

Conference Talk Prospectus / Continuing Education Overview

Living Retaining Walls Used in Green Infrastructure Applications

The history of retaining walls has always been rooted in the creation of structures and therefore slanted towards hard-scape and solid facing elements in order to resist the forces of the earth pushing against it. Today with advances in manufacturing and materials we have a growing interest in softer facing materials that can also support plant growth. The changing mindset of development is moving towards low impact and “green” or sustainable development. Living structures and more exactly, living retaining walls, fit right into that niche but to date there has been a lack of viable products with good national and international distribution and service. That is now changing due to demand and we will explore that fully in this course.

Today retaining walls in all forms are being viewed as site development tools with opportunities to manage erosion and storm water runoff. Trends toward sustainable site development are on the cutting edge of this movement. We will explore the drivers of this emerging living structure market and strategies for success in it. To do that well, we need to explain the components that have become commonplace over the past 20 years and contrast them with the components that are emerging as viable alternatives to hard-scape. These new components are all about creating healthy plant culture and therefore the capacity to grow over the required structure for maximum benefit and improved aesthetics. In the past a retaining wall only had to hold back the earth to be successful. Today we must expect more from our structures. Performance characteristics going beyond just holding back the earth are required. Living retaining walls perform the engineering and structural function equal to their predecessors but they also create opportunities for green-space, habitat, heat island moderation and runoff water retention/detention.

Our course attendees will gain a clear understanding of where the market has been, where it is going and strategies to grow the new living market niche with confidence.

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