

# An American in Istanbul....

Published on **25 Mar 2011**

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Posted in **Advocacy and policy**



## **Or: How The Turks are Poised to Help Win the Future of Green Building in Europe, Asia and the Middle East**

On a recent trip to Istanbul, I was inspired not only by the stunning culture, beauty, dignity and economic vitality of that city but also by its fast-growing commitment to high performance green building. The vision for [green architecture in Turkey](#) combines forward thinking ideas from the rich history of Ottoman culture with the most cutting-edge principles of modern global trends in architecture and engineering. Today, a number of its business and professional leaders are helping to ensure its huge construction and contracting industry (second largest in the world according to McGraw Hill's Engineering News-Record) goes green.

I want to tell you about some of the remarkable individuals who have made Turkey a global green building leader. For some basic orientation about Turkey, [click here](#).

I want to be clear that I would not have been able to make the trip to this remarkable place without the generosity of Alarko-Carrier, a key member of the 100 member [Turkey Green Building Council](#), known in Turkey as CEDBIK. Alarko-Carrier is an economically productive partnership (now in its 12th year) between the U.S.-based [Carrier Corporation](#) and Turkey's conglomerate known as [Alarko](#). The two companies have partnered on a range of important green building projects and products. I had the special privilege of spending time with the chairman of the board of Alarko's holding company, Ishak Alaton. He is something of an institution in Turkey for both his business as well as other diplomatic and philanthropic enterprises, and after just a few minutes in his office, interrupted by phone calls from the Minister of Education and other senior government officials, it was easy to see why. He is a great Turkish patriot but also a genuine citizen of the world in a way that suddenly makes the globe seem like a very small place. His support for the green building movement in Turkey is an important milestone in its evolution. Notably, Hırant Kalataş, a key member of his team, serves on the board of the Turkey Green Building Council.

Another Turkish visionary entrepreneur and businessman of national renown that I had the privilege of spending time with was Ali Nihat Gökyiğit. Nihat is one of the founders of [Tefken](#), a company that has grown to include agriculture, banking, real estate development, construction contracting and various investment and industry services. Most significantly, from my standpoint, Nihat was chair of the Turkey Green Building Council, a role he takes extremely seriously. And that is saying something about the importance of the council, as Nihat is a very busy man in the broader environmental movement in Turkey.

He founded the largest natural conservation organization in Turkey known as [TEMA](#). TEMA's critical mission is to combat soil erosion and deforestation for the protection of natural habitats. It now has almost 400,000 members termed "volunteers" under Turkish law. Nihat regaled me with startling insights into the importance of certain bee and floral species in various parts of Turkey. His solutions always seem to involve preserving nature while at the same time creating more robust markets and related job growth (a version of social entrepreneurship) involving Turkish exports, including, of course, honey. Most remarkably, perhaps, is the fact that he has created an absolutely unique and breathtaking botanical garden and arboretum located inside the urban void of a busy Istanbul highway cloverleaf interchange. (For more about that remarkable initiative, [click here](#). He and his brother spent the good part of a day taking me through that remarkable facility.)

My guide for most of my very busy itinerary in Istanbul visiting green buildings and meeting leaders in the movement was Dr. Duygu Erten. She received her doctorate in civil and environmental engineering from Rutgers University. A Turkish native with educational training in both Turkey and the U.S., Duygu is one of very, very few women who have broken into the field of civil engineering in Turkey and as such she has faced and overcome challenges that make her a genuine pioneer. She is now serving as CEO of the Turkey Green Building Council and she seems to have less than two degrees of separation from everyone in the entire city, including both Turkish and U.S. business leaders and government officials. She travels the world tirelessly looking for ways to advance the interests of green building in Turkey. Certainly the growing amount of international and Turkish companies – including respected architectural firms - that are supporting that enterprise are testimony to the market traction she has helped create.

Trips such as this one remind me of the powerful way that business and professional savvy and creativity can sometimes be linked to a range of socially responsible enterprises to advance market transformation at a huge scale. The U.S. Green Building Council and its LEED rating tool have encouraged and leveraged that dynamic synergy in a powerful way. It was exciting to see that same synergy alive and well and beginning to move the market in Turkey.

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