

GARY LAWSON, STEVENS LAWSON ARCHITECTS PRESENTATION SUMMARY

Presentation Summary: 2026 EBOSS Specifier Conference

Presenter: Gary (Stevens Lawson Architects)

Summary: Matthew Duder

Topic: Navigating Material Specification, Envelope Performance, and Sustainable Architecture in Aotearoa

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Key Takeaways & Presentation Highlights

1. Context & Systems-Based Envelopes

- **Regulatory-Driven Shifts:** Overhaul of Building Code Clause H1, doubled R-values, six climate zones, and the phase-out of the prescriptive "Schedule Method" force a holistic, systems-based approach to thermal and moisture management.
- **Addressing Thermal Bridging:** Advanced air/vapour barriers, warm roofs ("outsulation"), and thermally broken slab edges/joinery have shifted from premium upgrades to baseline necessities.
- **Prefabrication & Mass Timber:** SIPs and hybrid mass-timber systems (CLT, Glulam, LVL, PLT) offer fast, low-carbon pathways. Success relies on solving off-site waterproofing/cladding supply chains and managing complex fire and acoustic requirements.

Key Takeaways & Presentation Highlights

2. The Climate Crisis & Architectural Responsibility

- **An Immediate Mandate:** The built environment is directly tied to planetary health. With buildings designed today still operating in 2050, waiting is not an option; design-stage decisions lock in environmental impacts for decades.
- **Embodied Carbon as Baseline:** Carbon reduction can no longer be an afterthought. Architects require real, verified, product-specific Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) data and Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs). Suppliers who cannot answer the carbon question will simply be designed out.
- **Holistic Framework:** SLA guides its sustainable design practice through its proprietary in-house **S.U.S.T.A.I.N** framework. This internal ethos informs every project, balancing environmental stewardship, local ecology, adaptability, and carbon/energy goals, ensuring decisions serve future generations without compromising design integrity.

Key Takeaways & Presentation Highlights

3.The SLA Specification Framework: What Suppliers Need to Know

Eight crucial criteria SLA uses to evaluate and select products and systems:

- **1. Carbon Transparency:** Moving past generic marketing to specific, verified EPD and LCA data to justify product choices against imported alternatives.
- **2. Real-World Durability:** Tested performance across New Zealand's harsh, variable microclimates and exposure zones (UV, salt air, wind-driven rain, seismic).
- **3. Whole-of-Life Costing:** Providing total-cost-of-ownership data (installation, ongoing maintenance, service life, replacement) rather than just upfront sticker price.
- **4. Dual-Front Quality:** Balancing long-term structural performance with aesthetic weathering and strict batch-to-batch consistency.

Key Takeaways & Presentation Highlights

3.The SLA Specification Framework: What Suppliers Need to Know

Eight crucial criteria SLA uses to evaluate and select products and systems:

- **5. Trust & Relationships:** SLA specifies people as much as products. Long-term loyalty is built by suppliers who communicate honestly, back their products on site, and collaborate to solve unexpected issues.
- **6. Single-Source System Accountability:** Navigating liability under the Building Act and professional indemnity insurance means SLA increasingly favours complete, single-source warranted systems over fragmented, multi-supplier components.
- **7. NZ-Specific Detailing:** Ready-to-use CAD details, producer statements, and clear documentation written specifically for NZ climate zones and consenting workflows.
- **8. Digital Footprint & Researchability:** Transparent online technical data and responsive support that make a product easy to research and shortlist during early design phases.

Key Takeaways & Presentation Highlights

4. Practice Culture & Material Selection

- SLA's collaborative studio culture heavily shapes material choices, where the team openly evaluates learnings, supplier experiences, and product reliability.
- SLA continuously challenges its project team and engineers to "first design in timber" and push technical boundaries, maintaining a rigorous balance between creative design excellence, structural efficiency, and planetary health.

Key Takeaways & Presentation Highlights

Looking Ahead

Architects, suppliers, and contractors sit at a pivotal intersection.

By prioritising low-carbon choices, system-level accountability, and transparent collaboration today, the industry can meet its climate obligations and deliver enduring, high-performance architecture for Aotearoa.