

Letters

READER FEEDBACK

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

We need to keep doing DERs

In issue #314, *Fine Homebuilding* published an article titled “The End of Deep Energy Retrofits” by Rachel White of Byggmeister. The premise was that deep energy retrofits are not as cost-effective as moderate envelope improvements and heat pumps. The article was grounded in data and demonstrated flexibility and honesty in being willing to follow new evidence and make subsequent business changes. This is a perfectly rational approach in a normal context.

Unfortunately, we are not in a normal context. We have blown past the limits of Earth’s carrying capacity with remarkable speed and therefore must include the cost of not doing DERs in our analyses. An argument that prioritizes the family-level economics of a home above all else applies a microeconomic analysis to a very macroeconomic problem. The tool does not fit the task.

The argument that DERs are counterproductive because they are not the “most efficient path” to decarbonization justifies doing less than might be perfectly reasonable and achievable, and risks blinding us to the fact that every kilogram of CO₂e avoided counts. As “experts,” much of what our clients consider depends on the information and options we present to them. We need to have the guts to discuss the real cost of carbon even if the market does not recognize those values as real. To suggest preemptively that it just doesn’t make sense to do a DER is to circumscribe our creativity and our client’s conception of what is possible.

I do not see myself in a polarized debate with Byggmeister, who presented a much more nuanced approach than the article title implied. In fact, together we have been discussing how we can design a more holistic analysis of climate mitigation efforts. We know we need to force the cost of failure onto the balance sheet so that practitioners, policy makers, and homeowners can make better decisions as we enter into a very uncertain future.

—MICHAEL HINDLE
Passive to Positive
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Read the original essay
and the full response at
FineHomebuilding.com/DER.

Give the whole picture

I’ve been an *FHB* subscriber for decades, and Josh Salinger’s recent article “The Pros and Cons of Panelization” (*FHB* #321) is a good example of the reason why. I’ve been impressed with the practicality, efficiency, realism, and detail of

the Birdsmouth Design-Build team. I look forward to hearing more from them.

I’m sure it’s tempting to tout only the benefits of something such as panelization (or other subjects like trusses for floor joists, wood foundations, ICFs, PVC trim, etc.) without cover-

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