

BEFORE YOU PURCHASE PACKAGED PLANS:

Letters (continued)

and design services can work together to provide the services and products that that underserved market clearly wants.

Beware of packaged house plans

Sarah Susanka's essay "Why Architects Should Sell House Plans" (*FHB* #147, pp. 6, 8, 10) makes brief reference to "supermarket" plans, but doesn't go into detail. Typically, you order a plan book (or now visit a Web site) and select a floor plan that you like. You then can order sets of drawings (or even "original" reproducible sets that allow you to run as many sets of blueprints as you want) to submit for a building permit and give to contractors for bidding.

Our engineering firm has dealt with many sets of packaged, or "canned," plans. As with anything else, the quality of packaged plans varies greatly—probably according to price. But the following scenario is becoming too common: The owners have a parcel they want to build on. They find a floor plan that seems to fit their needs for space, room layout, orientation of view windows, access from their existing driveway to the garage, etc. They spend several hundred dollars on plans and waltz into the building department expecting to get a permit. The building inspector reviews the plans, which always seem to come from out of state, and notes on the correction sheet for plans: "Need complete structural analysis, from roof to foundation." Outraged because they thought the plans should somehow entitle them to a building permit, the owners come into our office. We have to tell an already angry and disappointed couple that a "complete structural analysis" and resulting plans and details will cost them several thousand dollars and set their schedule back anywhere from two to ten weeks, depending on our workload.

Consider several issues before buying a set of drawings from a plan book:

Is the design firm in your area?

Will your local building department accept plans from another state or region?

Do the plans conform to the current building code used in your area?

If you order reversed ("flopped," or mirror image) plans, will the printing also be reversed?

BUYER BEWARE!

Does the design account for local climate conditions?

Will your building department let you deviate from the plans without getting the changes approved (either by a local designer or by the original plan provider)?

Has the particular design that you want ever been built?

Does the firm selling the plans have licensed professionals who can assure that the plans meet the current building code used in your area?

Would the design firm provide you with electronic (CAD) drawing files?

There may be packaged plans out there that meet these conditions; we've just seen too many that don't. I suggest that people seeking plans find a designer in the area where they will build their house, whether the designer sells plans out of a plan book or is a local contractor, home designer or licensed architect. Most important, do some research before you order a set of off-the-shelf plans.

—Thor Matteson, structural engineer, Roger Stevens Engineering, Mariposa, CA

Concerns about covered meters

Having worked for a natural-gas utility for 20 years with meter reading as part of my duties, I am concerned about the recent article "Electric-Meter Covers" (*FHB* #148, pp. 106-107).

First, let me say that under no circumstances should you ever cover or obstruct access to a gas meter. As for other meters, I cannot stress enough that you check with your utility company and even your fire department and building inspector before covering your meter. In an emergency, it may be necessary to remove the meter, and

About your safety:

Home building is inherently dangerous. From accidents with power tools to falls from ladders, scaffolds and roofs, builders risk serious injury and even death. We try to promote safe work habits through our articles. But what is safe for one builder under certain circumstances may not be safe for you under different circumstances. So don't try anything you learn about here (or elsewhere) unless you're certain that it is safe for you. Please be careful.

—Kevin Ireton, editor-in-chief



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