

In his November/December 2004 *Solar Today* article, "A Declaration of Interdependence," architect William McDonough describes one of his projects, Oberlin College's Adam Joseph Lewis Center, as "... designed to generate more energy than it consumes." This oft-repeated claim is not supported by facts.

In the four years 2001-2004 this all-electric, 13,600-square-foot building consumed 597,000 kilowatt-hours (kWh) of energy, 37 percent furnished by its rooftop photovoltaic (PV) array and the remaining 63 percent by Ohio's coal-fired power plants. Absent the \$420,000 PV array, which would benefit any building – but is not to be credited to the architect – the building's source energy consumption is 110,000 Btu per square foot per year, just 10 to 20 percent lower than that for comparable academic buildings. (Site energy, the alternate benchmark preferred by the architect, fails to account for the off-site energy used in generating electricity.)

Oberlin College commissioned the building in late 2000, confirming that it was built to specifications laid out in the construction documents bearing the seal of *William McDonough & Partners (WMP)*. The engineers and other design consultants were hired by WMP as part of their \$1,500,000 fee.

For a detailed design history see  
[www.oberlin.edu/alummag/oamcurrent/oam\\_summer2002/feat\\_enviro4.htm](http://www.oberlin.edu/alummag/oamcurrent/oam_summer2002/feat_enviro4.htm).

Two independent, peer-reviewed studies conclude that, as designed, the building is incapable of achieving its goal of being a net-energy exporter within its own footprint (see Scofield, ASHRAE Transactions, Vol. 108 Part2, 1214-1230, 2002; and Torcellini et al, ASHRAE Journal, September 2004, pp. S4-11). A second, \$1 million PV array is now to be constructed over a nearby parking lot to makeup the energy shortfall.

Michael Ivanovich got it right in his February 2003 editorial, "Green is as green does," in *HPAC Engineering*. Architects like William McDonough can talk all they want about their supposed designs – but for me, the truth lies in the construction documents and performance data.