

RISE

Retrofit information,
support & expertise

Women in Retrofit with Her Retrofit Space

Rise Discoveries

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Summary

Meeting climate, energy-efficiency and fuel-poverty targets requires more than technical retrofit solutions; it depends on a resilient, diverse and well-supported workforce. Women play a growing role in this landscape, both as built-environment professionals and as key household decision-makers.

This case study examines women's contributions to retrofit delivery, the barriers they face, and the support mechanisms that can strengthen confidence, capacity and long-term careers. Drawing on sector insights, it highlights the value of visibility, community, mentorship and inclusive skills development in building a more effective retrofit industry.

Introduction

In this RISE podcast, Clare Brown speaks with Ellora, Founder and Director of Her Retrofit Space, about the role women play in driving retrofit awareness, delivery and innovation. Drawing on lived experience, professional practice and community-building, Ellora reflects on the structural challenges women face in the retrofit sector, alongside the opportunities that inclusive networks, mentorship and visibility can unlock. Readers that would like this document in a more accessible format should contact rise@turntown.co.uk.

Women as drivers of retrofit decision-making

A central theme of the discussion is the positioning of women at what Ellora describes as the *"intersection of influence and insight"*. Women occupy a distinctive position within retrofit as both **users and shapers** of retrofit outcomes. Their influence spans domestic and professional spheres, creating opportunities to bridge technical delivery with lived experience.

As Ellora notes, women occupy a unique position within retrofit delivery:

"Women sit at the intersection of influence and insight – whether as homeowners or professionals, they bring lived experience into the retrofit conversation."

Key observations include:

- Women frequently act as **primary decision-makers in the home**, particularly around comfort, wellbeing, long-term value and legacy.
- These priorities align closely with retrofit objectives such as thermal comfort, indoor air quality and affordability.

- As professionals, women often bring a **user-centred and systems-aware perspective**, ensuring retrofit solutions respond to everyday life rather than abstract performance metrics.
- Increased visibility of women in retrofit roles encourages participation from younger professionals and underrepresented groups, strengthening the future workforce pipeline.

“Women homeowners are very much motivated by wellbeing and legacy – and they can become exceptional advocates for retrofit.”

Ellora, Founder and Director, Her Retrofit Space

Structural barriers and professional misrecognition

Despite their contribution, women in retrofit continue to face structural barriers related to credibility and recognition. Ellora identifies persistent assumptions that women are less technical, resulting in the need to over-prepare, self-justify or defer expertise within project teams.

There is also a tendency for women to be steered towards coordination or communication roles, despite possessing technical or strategic capability. Ellora challenges the idea that these roles are secondary, arguing instead that retrofit requires a combination of skills rather than a hierarchy of expertise.

“We don’t think there’s a dilution when technical and so-called ‘soft’ skills are combined – that combination is actually a strength.”

Supporting women to confidently articulate the full scope of their expertise is therefore central to strengthening retrofit delivery.

Her Retrofit Space responds to this gap by supporting women to articulate the full breadth of their skills, positioning listening, collaboration and client-centred thinking not as secondary attributes, but as essential capabilities in complex retrofit projects.

Building visibility through storytelling and networks

Visibility is identified as a key enabler of both confidence and opportunity. Where women can articulate and share their work, professional recognition and demand for services increases. Effective mechanisms include:

- **Peer-led knowledge sharing**, where professionals showcase their experience and learning.

- **Storytelling approaches** that focus on retrofit journeys rather than just end results, highlighting the process, decision-making, and lessons learned.
- Informal and formal **peer referral networks**, connecting women with clients, collaborators and specialist expertise.

Ellora describes several tools used within Her Retrofit Space to elevate women's profiles and attract meaningful work.

One example is the “member spotlight”, a webinar format that allows women to present their expertise, career journeys and retrofit projects in a supportive environment. These sessions often reveal the depth of knowledge held within the network, challenging both internal self-doubt and external perceptions.

Skills, entry pathways and career sustainability

Although retrofit is frequently described as a sector facing labour shortages, this case study suggests the challenge lies less in attracting people and more in supporting them to enter, remain and progress. For many women, pathways into retrofit are fragmented, slow and poorly resourced. Key barriers include:

- **Limited access to funded and timely training**, particularly for early-career entrants and career returners
- Long waiting periods for accreditation, often without guaranteed employment
- A perception that comprehensive technical mastery is required before entry, despite the sector's diverse roles
- Unclear progression routes for essential non-traditional functions such as coordination, engagement and administration.

These entry challenges are closely linked to issues of **career sustainability**. Women often enter retrofit driven by strong purpose, yet face burnout as they balance technical credibility, high levels of emotional labour and visibility within male-dominated environments. Contribution is not always matched by recognition or progression, increasing the risk of attrition.

Ellora emphasises that confidence, not capability, is often the missing piece:

“Women often feel they need to know everything before they start – but retrofit is such a broad field, that can actually become a barrier.”

Community-led support helps to normalise shared challenges, reduce isolation and enable incremental learning without requiring mastery from the outset.

“One of the biggest shifts is realising you don't need to be an expert in every aspect of retrofit to be a meaningful advocate.”

Elora, Founder and Director, Her Retrofit Space

Guidance for new entrants and sector growth

For those considering entering or transitioning into retrofit, several practical lessons emerge:

- **Start small, but start** – confidence and competence grow through participation
- **Retrofit relies on diverse strengths** – detail-oriented planners, empathetic communicators, curious problem-solvers, and hands-on doers.
- **Collaboration is essential**, with expertise distributed across teams so no single role carries the full burden of knowledge.

At a sector level, growth depends on moving beyond established retrofit audiences. Engaging professionals in real estate, property management and development is essential if retrofit is to become mainstream rather than niche.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of retrofit delivery is closely tied to **who is supported to participate and lead**.

Links to resources referenced:

Women in Retrofit with Her Retrofit Space by RISE podcast

Her Retrofit Space

Elora

Links to relevant RISE resources:



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