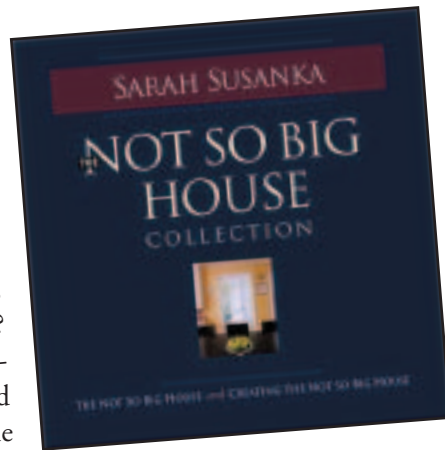


## *“The Not So Big House”* by Sarah Susanka

After hearing Sarah Susanka speak in February I was all the more impressed with this author and architect’s vision for a home that addresses the way people really live. What she said resonated with me fully and I realized much of what she espouses I have felt for years but hadn’t used her same language to express it. One quote from her book, “My house feeds my spirit, and it is with this insight that I share with you how to make your house do the same, (p. 5)” is particularly poignant. Isn’t this what we all need in our homes, a “feeding of our spirits?” The question is, what do we need to do to achieve this? Do we need more rooms to have a separate space for each need or do we need a well-designed, reasonably sized home with each need addressed but fit into the smaller whole? “More rooms, bigger spaces, and vaulted ceilings do not necessarily give us what we need in a home. (p. 3) “Lest you think she is advocating a less-expensive home, not necessarily. Susanka advocates putting the money you are saving in fewer square feet into details that truly make your house “work” and add charm and character to boot. She calls it “soul.” The end result may not be less expensive.



itself. Collect magazine photos of rooms you enjoy (or not) and note the reasons in your journal.

One detail she advocates that may raise some eyebrows is a lowering of ceiling heights, at least in some areas of the home. She wonders what is wrong with an 8 foot ceiling. Well, we may prefer 9 foot but do we need 15 or 20 feet? All that volume makes for less intimacy. Conversation areas in particular are recommended to be at 8 foot, other areas can be somewhat higher, she believes. Beautiful stair railings, well-crafted moldings, and useful, finely tailored built-ins all add function and beauty to our homes but “because most people start with a desire for more space than their budgets allow, anything more than basic space, minimally detailed, will exceed the budget” (p.12).

A key component to the success of any home is a balance between public and private spaces. If the floor plan is too open, the lack of privacy can cause friction between those living in the home. In general, she suggests an open floor plan for the kitchen, dining, and living areas but always includes an “away room.” This is a room adjacent to the main living areas but with French doors so the occupant can see what is going on but have needed privacy. Putting a door on a space defines it as private. A space that is visible from several different views in the home automatically becomes a public space and will be well used.

Sarah Susanka has an excellent website, [www.susanka.com](http://www.susanka.com) with many examples of her work and local resources to help with the planning and implementation of creating your own Not So Big House.



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**Kathy Barry, I.D.S.**  
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*“My house feeds my spirit, and it is with this insight that I share with you how to make your house do the same”*

Neither does she necessarily believe everyone should live in small houses. Rather she encourages us to think about what we really need in a house to feel at home, and don’t settle for sheer size and volume. Rooms that only feel comfortable when they are filled with people rarely get used, she feels, so take the time to think through how you live and use that information to make your decisions, not on what is trendy or expected. Those who entertain often and need large spaces may appreciate smaller, detailed spaces for their private areas.

She advocates keeping a “place journal” to assemble data about the places in your life that make you feel comfortable and those that make you feel uncomfortable. Document sizes, take photos, and make diagrams to describe your response. Just as the colors in a home evoke an emotional response, so can the space