

Guest Column,

“The Not So Big House”

By Ronnie Godfrey, CGB, president, R Godfrey Homes

Is the title of a book by renowned architect Sarah Susanka. Most people mistake the title to mean that she wants you build little house only. What she proposes is that you build homes for the way you really live. That you build a home with spaces you use every day. She has been called a cultural visionary for her notions of “build better, not bigger”.

Often you will find a home for sale that is advertised as expansive, formal and spacious, with soaring ceilings. Those terms seem to me to be the opposite of comfortable, cozy and inviting; or big and cold vs. warm and cheery. Hear her words, “...a Not So Big House ... favors the quality of its space over the quantity.” Part of her philosophy is that a home should nurture you not be built just to impress.

Ms. Susanka built a home for her own family using her principles and had this to say, “The Not So Big House isn’t just a small house. Rather it’s a smaller house filled with special details and designed to accommodate the lifestyle of its occupants. I’ve discovered living in my own Not So Big House that the quality of life has improved. I’m surrounded in my home by beautiful forms, lots of daylight, natural materials, and the things that I love. ...My house feeds my spirit...”

Her book and the subsequent ones authored by her are filled with ideas to make a home better, more livable. I think it would be must reading for anyone considering building a new home.

That being said, how do you get from the floor plan drawn on the kitchen table on notebook paper to a set of working drawings suitable to construct your new house? You could purchase floor plans from the internet ready to use or from plan books from a bookstore or the home improvement stores. I have built many houses where this is just what the customer did and it worked fine for them. And while these are good solutions, it doesn’t get you the customized house that reflects you every desire.

It may be that you need your plans drawn from scratch. An example of how we would do this in a builder's office would be to use software that is capable of drafting floor plans. There are advantages to doing this. The most significant is your input and the ability to make quick changes until you get it like you want. The drawing is worked up from your sketches and displayed on a duplicate computer monitor across the desk facing you. "Move that wall" you say. I click, drag and presto! The wall is moved. With this software you can push and pull until you get the floor plan just to your liking. But wait that's not all. If you give us the dimensions of your furniture, we can digitally place them in the rooms and you will be able to see how well they fit.

One of the most impressive features of this software is its ability to display your new home in 3D and color. You can view the rooms as though you were standing in them or see the home as you fly around over it with the roof removed looking down into the various rooms. I can even give it a background scene. What would you like, a mountain, a lake, or a forest? We can apply colors to interior and exterior walls, cabinets, floors, etc... We can experiment with window sizes, bath arrangements, kitchen arrangements, closets, door swings, porch rails and so on.

Another advantage to this type of floor plan development is that we can email these back and forth as we strive to get it like you want and you can send them to friends and relatives the same way. You could even send a video of a digital walkthrough or flyover. Then when you feel it is complete, we print them and distribute to the various engineers, suppliers and tradesmen. The end result is a home that reflects your personal desires and meets your specific family needs.

Books by Sarah Susanka: "The Not So Big House," "Not So Big Solutions For Your Home," and "Home By Design." And her web site is www.sarahsusanka.com/

For comments about this article contact Ronnie Godfrey at RGodfreyHomes.com or call 817 988 0149.