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Sarah Susanka has a not-so-insignificant idea in *Creating the Not So Big House*. She contrasts the glamorous, glossy-photo house plans of vaulted ceilings and palatial living rooms with the livable, day-to-day pleasure of cozy window seats and comfortable breakfast nooks, and her conclusion is resonating with families across the country: bigger but shoddier isn't better than smaller and well made. Descriptors like "spacious" and "expansive" fill the real-estate promos, but Susanka seeks the elusive yet affordable qualities that turn a house into a home. And she provides more than mere ideals around which to rally. She selected 25 house designs, from a southwestern adobe to a Minnesota farmhouse to a New York apartment to a Rhode Island summer cottage, and she profiles each home in great and well-illustrated detail.

Her ideas for interior as well as exterior views, airy stairways, diagonal views, and framed openings translate well in an array of different houses appropriate to childless couples and large families, as well as hot climes in Texas and cooler regions in Vermont. There are traditional designs to fit in with Massachusetts styling and contemporary designs to adapt to California cliffs, and they range from country spaces to suburban homes to city apartments.