

The Not So Stupid Show House

Most show houses are stupid. They're chest-pounding testaments to their designers' egos and their sponsors' pocketbooks. Touring a typical show house is like walking the midway at a busy carnival. Every person and every product screams for your attention, hardly the makings of a good house. I thought all show houses were stupid until I visited one designed by Sarah Susanka at the 2004 International Builders' Show in Las Vegas. A contributing editor to Fine Homebuilding and the author of the best-selling book *The Not So Big House*, among others, Sarah based the show-house design on a house of hers that we had published the year before (FHB #156). Consequently,

thousands of people actually got to tour a house by one of our country's best architects. The open floor plan was thoughtful, with ceiling heights defining the spaces. The detailing was subdued, but it unified the house and created a sense of calm. The only major failing was that this house didn't fit its site very well. But perhaps that's forgivable when you consider that the house was built in the parking lot of the Stardust Hotel. Despite the hassles of building a show house, Sarah is doing it again at the 2005 International



Builders' Show in Orlando, Fla., which runs Jan. 13-16 (www.buildersshow.com). She's teaming up with building-science consultant Steve Easley (who also was involved last year) and green-building expert Ron Jones. The principal sponsors are the U.S. Department of Energy; the Green Building Subcommittee of the NAHB's Construction, Codes and Standards Committee; and the Sustainable Buildings Industry Council. And this time, the house will be built on a real site, just outside Orlando. The Not So Big Showhouse will embody the design principles that Sarah espouses in her books, mainly that "comfort has almost nothing to do with how big a space is. It is attained, rather, by tailoring our houses to the way we really live." Combine this sensibility with a commitment to sustainability and energy efficiency, and you've got the recipe for a great house. I hope you can make the trip to Orlando to see for yourself. To learn more about the show house, go to www.notsobigshowhouse.com.

—KEVIN IRETON, editor