

AIA National Convention 2005
How to Grow Your Residential Practice
Presenter: Sarah Susanka, FAIA
www.susanka.com and www.notsobighouse.com

This is the third in a series of presentations given at the AIA National Convention each year. You can listen to and view the two previous presentations by going to www.susanka.com, and clicking on the Architecture and Design Button at the top of the left hand menu. The handouts for these two presentations, as well as for this year's presentation, are also downloadable from the same location.

Description of the entire series:
Intermediate level

There is a firmly held belief amongst architects that it is hard to make a living designing houses with so little money to be made, and such high client expectations. So how do you explain the success of the few residentially oriented firms whose work load is steadily increasing and whose financial status is robust? There are answers to these questions, and such success is not simply attributable to luck. Grow your residential design practice and discover how to take your practice to the next level.

Learning objectives:

- Analyze the ground rules for developing a residential clientele
- Discover how to serve and delight such clients
- Identify what professional services are appropriate in this market and how to effectively deliver them.

Bio: Sarah Susanka, FAIA

Sarah Susanka is a cultural visionary leading a movement that is redefining the American home. Today, her "build better, not bigger" approach to residential architecture has been embraced by homeowners, architects and builders across the country and her Not So Big philosophy has sparked a national dialogue.

As a leading advocate for the re-popularization of residential architecture, Ms. Susanka has improved the quality of home design while countering the elitist image of architects so commonly held by the public.

Sarah Susanka is a sought-after resource by industry groups and members of the media. She has shared her revolutionary insights on big ideas for small spaces with The Oprah Winfrey Show, USA Today, Boston Globe Magazine and Charlie Rose. In February 2001, Fast Company named her to their debut list of "Fast 50" innovators whose achievements have helped to change society - an honor preceded by her selection as a "top newsmaker" for 2000 by *Newsweek* magazine and an "innovator in American culture" in 1998 by *U.S. News & World Report*.

Susanka has earned similar accolades for her books. Her first, *The Not So Big House* (Taunton Press, 1998), spent two years among the top five best sellers on Amazon.com's Home and Garden list. *Creating The Not So Big House* was released nationwide by the Taunton Press in October 2000 and was ranked among the top 15 books in the *New York Times* "Advice & How To" best-seller list.

Through her columns in *Fine Homebuilding* and *Inspired House* magazine, Sarah explores issues commonly encountered in new home design and remodeling. Her third book, *Not So Big Solutions for Your Home* (Taunton Press, 2002), is a compilation of the best columns, and provides 30 everyday design solutions for people of all skill levels and budgets. Her first three books combined have sold more than 700,000 copies.

Her latest book, *Home By Design*, illustrates thirty principles that govern how we experience space, light and order in our homes, and reveals the tricks used by architects and designers to make their creations comfortable and engaging. Sarah Susanka believes that by giving names to the key ingredients of good design, and by explaining how they can be applied in any home, builders, designers, and homeowners will be able to dramatically improve the quality of house design.

Prior to her work as an author and public speaker, Sarah Susanka was a principal and founding partner of Mulfinger, Susanka, Mahady & Partners, Inc., a firm specializing in residential architecture in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She spent 16 years at the company, which was selected to design the 1999 Life Dream House. Susanka is a registered architect, a fellow of the American Institute of Architects and is a certified interior designer. You can find out more at www.susanka.com.

Outlines of Previous Lectures in the series:

S37 Practicing Residential Architecture **AIA National Convention 2000**

- ⌘ Changing our thinking about the residential market
- ⌘ Where are the clients and how do you find them?
- ⌘ What is a remodeling client looking for?
- ⌘ What is a new house client looking for?
- ⌘ Marketing your services
- ⌘ What happens when an architect is NOT involved?
- ⌘ Understanding the residential builder's needs and expectations
- ⌘ Achieving an Agreement of Services
- ⌘ Educating the client about the variety of services an architect can offer
- ⌘ Determining the Spectrum of services that you feel comfortable offering
- ⌘ Working with the Client through Construction
- ⌘ Fulfilling the client's expectations
- ⌘ Preparing the client for the inevitable frustrations of construction
- ⌘ Playing the Role of Trusted Navigator from start to finish

TH20 How to run and manage a residential architecture practice

AIA National Convention 2004

- ⌘ The way architecture firms are typically structured
- ⌘ The Law Firm model
- ⌘ Grow incrementally
- ⌘ Types of people you'll need long term for the Architectural Work
- ⌘ Other Staff required
- ⌘ General comment about architecture firms and management
- ⌘ How the system works
- ⌘ The Structure
- ⌘ Each project architect is like a mini-office
- ⌘ Each person in the firm "markets" their services to others in the firm
- ⌘ The Weekly Lunch Meeting
- ⌘ The Call Intake Process
- ⌘ Getting Paid—Money In, Money Out, Money Shared
- ⌘ Make the System profitable for everyone
- ⌘ Decision Making and the Welfare of the Firm

TH20 How to grow your residential design practice

AIA National Convention 2005—Sarah Susanka

Synopsis:

- Marketing
- Telling the stories
- Creating a structure that allows for growth
- Getting feedback

Explaining clearly what you do
Investing in your staff
Pursuing the ideas that interest you

Introduction

Everyone has a dream home in their heads
It's what makes marketing residential architecture so easy
But they don't really know what architecture is
So let's first understand what we're up against

Assumption that all of suburbia is designed by architects
The worst of the worst is assumed to be our handi-work
Architects often get a bad rap, as well as a good one, thanks to Wright,
—elitist, arrogant, unrealistic, or avant garde
The Farnsworth House an interesting form, but not what all architects do

Something seriously out of kilter in the marketplace
Our profession is the only one really capable of fixing it
Houses getting bigger and bigger
Tear downs happening in all major metro areas
The American house needs help

What do architects do really?

The third dimension
Exercise of remembering back to childhood
How we see, and what we assume our clients see
Architects are 3 dimensional adepts
But our job is to translate that capability into normal language for our clients

Brief Summary of last year's presentation

Residential Practice Structure and Management

The Law Firm Model
Growing incrementally
Promoting every project to the press
Explaining the story behind every house
Creating project boards to explain to next set of clients
Building models to help clients understand their project better
Putting together proposals for projects—paper architecture
Having a booth at the local H & G Show

Investing in the people within the firm

Finding the right people
Helping to make them the best professionals they can be
Pursuing your own delights and passions
Making them your work
Examples from my own life

Gaudi examples

Understanding that when you follow your dreams, they'll take you where you want to go, but in a different way than you ever imagined possible.

Growing your own partners, or future competition

Firm Structure

Sharing information

The lunch meeting

Not getting lost in the drift wood

Sometimes in our work, we'll see the same patterns arising over and over

This is our work, to see clearly what it is we are doing

Understanding that you all grow through sharing the good and the bad

Retreating together

Visiting each others work

Celebrating the successes

If things feel crystallized or dead, have a retreat together to search for reasons

Understand that these are your traveling companions

You learn through working with each other

Learning about Yourself as You Create Your designs

Who do you think you are?

Discovering that everything you need for your own development is within

Through the engagement in both inner and outer worlds you grow

In turn, you move towards harmony both inner and outer

It's no accident that the most extraordinary buildings arise from people who've really worked to understand themselves

Through your own process of inquiry, you build a tree on which others can grow and flourish.

You add to a stairway that stretches back deep into history

Even over time we help each other.

The Psychology of Client Relations

Focus of client satisfaction

Client's perception of what we do

Importance of keeping focus of project goals

We should really have honorary degrees in marriage counseling

What people are looking for

Designing a place for themselves to thrive and grow

Dejargonizing architecture

The Not So Big House

Home By Design

New Ventures