

KUNI Radio Series “Unplugged”
Show #17: Not So Big House

From the Center for Energy & Environmental Education at the University of Northern Iowa, this is Pat Higby with a series of programs on KUNI to help you save energy.

If you are building a new home, you have a unique opportunity to build in energy savings that will lower your utility bills. The money you save each month can be used to pay a larger mortgage to finance the higher cost of the improvements. Another way of paying for the features you want in a new home is to get rid of its dinosaurs!

Dinosaur rooms are what Sarah Susanka calls the areas in your home that no one uses. The formal living room is left over from the Victorian Period, when the social code of the day required visitors to be ushered into a formal parlor. In this new Millenium we are quite informal, and our guests feel most comfortable in our kitchens and family rooms. If you only use a formal living room once or twice a year, consider leaving it out of your new home! The square foot building costs, added to the cost of carpet, furniture, and drapes can be used for other features.

Another area to evaluate is the formal dining room. How many eating areas will you have in your new home? Is there a breakfast nook, seating at the kitchen counter **and** a formal dining room? How often do you actually **use** the dining room? A raised countertop can hide messy areas of the kitchen from your eating area, and special lighting can give the table an intimate feel for special occasions. Saranka, an architect, has found that you can save at least 200 square feet by combining the informal and formal eating areas into one.

These same ideas apply to the remodeling of older homes. If you are thinking of adding on a family room, take another look at your existing floor plan. Could you tear down walls to open up the area your dining room, living room, and kitchen share? You may be able to get the useful area you **want** by eliminating the areas you **don't use**! And you'll have less space to heat and cool, keeping your energy costs low. This is an opportunity to add insulation to outer walls as well. With the money you have saved, you now have quite a few options to think about!

Sarah Susanka has named this approach to designing and building homes “The Not So Big House.” We have copies of her books at the Resource Room in the Center for Energy and Environmental Education on the University of Northern Iowa campus. Ask for “The Not So Big House” or “Creating the Not So Big House.” You may also search **”The Not So Big House”** on line to see floor plans and photos.

I'm Pat Higby, Energy Educator at the Center for Energy and Environmental Education at the University of Northern Iowa.