

## The American Dream...Slipping Away

There are a lot of people watching their “American Dream” slip away as the mortgage crisis deepens. They realize they reached too far, too big, too expensive...just too much. So how did we get here? How did the American Dream, our home, our symbol of success turn into this, a huge mess?

Some would say it's the government's fault, whose goal of home ownership for all Americans led the system astray. Home ownership is at, or was, at an all time high of 69%. Great, I think. Some would say the fault lies squarely with people that bought houses they couldn't afford or speculated on a property. The truth is somewhere in the middle with plenty of blame to pass around.

After World War II, the government made home ownership a priority. Soldiers returning from the war purchased homes that were about 1000 square feet. These houses were the dream houses of the day. By 1970, the average home grew to 1600 square feet and by 1990 to 2000 square feet. Today the average home has more than doubled the post WWII house to 2400 square feet.

Many of you are thinking, “Wow, 2400sf, that's nothing, that's not big enough...my house is...or my neighbors' house is...” I'm currently designing a home in Montana that is 6000 square feet. My question is, why? Why do you need such a big house? Are we living bigger rather than better? Maybe, maybe not, but it is a question worth asking.

I am in the midst of designing a home for my family and my goal is to build a smaller nicer home, better not bigger. There is an architect, Sarah Susanka that started asking the better not bigger questions several years ago. She wrote a book called, “The Not So Big House,” in which she talks about making spaces really work. I often speak to my clients about this in terms of be able to live well through the use of good design.

The American Dream doesn't need to bankrupt us or impress or neighbors. What it really needs to do is fit like an old pair of jeans. We should be able to live well in the house we own, consider making it better, rather than going bigger.