The book you have in your hands is an important and much-needed tool in building a house that is green—a house that respects the value of our planet’s natural resources, that protects its occupants, and that recognizes the impact and legacy it will leave for future generations.

When I first became an architect, back in the 1980s, I was a passive solar “nut,” convinced that it was time to loosen our dependence on fossil fuels and embrace the abundant energy available from the sun. Then I moved to Minnesota and discovered that, though this might be an excellent strategy for warmer climates and lower latitudes, in Minneapolis in December there just aren’t enough hours of sunlight, even on a really sunny day, to make passive solar strategies work effectively. So I turned into an energy-efficiency nut instead, learning everything I could about how to minimize heat loss in the winter and heat gain in the summer, while still designing homes that were comfortable as well as a delight to live in.

Over the twenty years I practiced residential architecture and energy-efficient design in the Twin Cities, my colleagues and I developed a strategy for building better, not bigger, which came to be known as building Not So Big. My first book, The Not So Big House, published in 1998 by Taunton Press, spelled out a recipe for a more sustainably made house—one that was about a third smaller than you thought you needed, with every space used every day. Such a house is filled with the special details of design and construction that make its structure last for centuries rather than decades, and with a character that encourages generations of inhabitants to take care of it, and make it their own, just like the homes of the Arts and Crafts movement did a century ago.

I believe that the very first step in building a green home is to build it just the right size for the way you want to live—you can read more about how to make this happen in the Not So Big House series of books, as well as my latest, Home By Design.

With a house design that’s properly tailored to the activities of your life, and with spaces proportioned to fit our human scale, it is then time to select the products that support your efforts to make a healthy environment for your household, without hurting the planet in the process. For many years, this has presented a quandary. You’ve known what you WANT to be able to do—to make product selections that align with your values. You’ve known that you want to do what’s best for the Earth and for future generations, and only purchase items that are in keeping with the natural order of things. But until now the problem has been how to find them. Simply having the values is not enough. You need a guide to help find the companies that share your goals and have made the effort to create sustainable products that can fulfill your dream for a truly green home.

This book is that guide. It’s written in a way that makes it easy to find the information and product advice you need, and it’s a must for anyone—builder, designer, architect, or homeowner—who wants to know the unbiased and unembellished truth about what’s really “green.” The editors at BuildingGreen, including Alex Wilson and Mark Piepkorn, are among the most knowledgeable people in the world on sustainability, energy efficiency, and environmental characteristics of building products. They provide an enormous service to all of us in documenting, in laypersons’ language, the ins and outs of product selection for a green home.

Green Building Products provides the most comprehensive and useful resource for fulfilling the dreams that so many of us share for a sustainable future for our planetary—as well as our personal—home. Together we CAN make a difference, and this book points the way, giving us the tools to make the decisions that will ensure a better, though not necessarily bigger, future.

Sarah Susanka is an architect and author of the highly acclaimed Not So Big House series of books, published by Taunton Press.