



# OUT ON A LIMB

## POSH PERCHES HIGH IN THE TREETOPS

BY ELLEN SCOLNIC

Imagine a room of your own — perfect for solitude or romance. Colored light filters through stained glass windows. Your writing journal is open on the desk. Music sets the mood. A chocolate brown velour blanket beckons you to snuggle up in a comfy armchair.

Hold that image and carry it out to the backyard. Now hoist it 50 feet up a tree. There you have it: the height of leafy luxury.

Grown-ups building treehouses for themselves — as an art studio, home office or quiet retreat — is a trend that's catching on as local enthusiasts spread the word.

In our neck of the woods, Jonathan Fair Oaks is the guy to call. He has been climbing trees and caring for them — his father owned a nursery — since he was a child. A certified arborist and a member of the board of directors of the World Treehouse Association, he says, "I can't imagine life without a treehouse. I feel sorry for people who don't have one."

**Top:** An inviting staircase to a heavenly treehouse says 'come on up and set a spell.'

**Top Right:** A treehouse-in-the-round, built by The Treehouse Workshop, provides a 360-degree view.

## SPEND THE NIGHT STAR-GAZING

Five years ago, Fair Oaks built a treehouse for the Eisenberg family in Merion, Pa. "It all started during a big storm. Our mulberry tree lost a large branch," Joyce Eisenberg explains. She called Fair Oaks to cut down the fallen branches and prune the tree. But when he had finished, he pulled out a gorgeous, coffee-table book about treehouses and laid it open on the hood of his beat-up truck. He announced that our tree would be perfect," Eisenberg recalls.

The Eisenberg's roost has windows with a view of the playground across the street, a full-size front door, a sleeping bag platform, and a pulley to hoist up supplies. "In the summer, Ted and I sneak away up there to play backgammon together," Eisenberg says. "Our daughter, Samantha, used to go up there with a sketchpad and crayons, to be alone and get inspired."

Another Fair Oaks customer, the Korns of Villanova, Pa., treat their treehouse as a quiet getaway spot, steps from their back door. "My wife and I go up there, light a few candles, drink a bottle of wine and spend the night looking at the stars," says Scott Korn. "It's awesome."

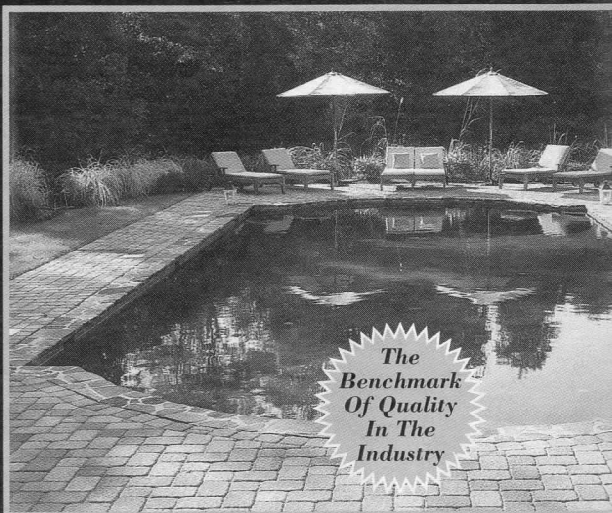
If you're thinking, "I want to have one," Fair Oaks says the first step is to check out the trees on your property. "I look at the tree's body language," he explains. "If you observe it carefully, you can gauge its strengths and weaknesses. I factor in the age, the type, the branch structure, where it's planted. Working with my client, I let the tree guide the design of the treehouse."



Robinson Crusoe would be right at home in this treehouse with built-in wood furniture.

Photo courtesy of Hideaways, published by editions Flammarion, 2004

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**Treehouse builder Jonathan Fairoaks (left) built this one on his Glenmore property for his own use.**



If you're thinking, "I want to visit one," there are hotels in trees. The Out 'N' About Treehouse Treesort in Cave Junction, Oregon, boasts nine treehouses for overnight guests and hosts the annual World Treehouse Convention. Treesort owner Michael Garnier is a legendary treehouse builder; the Garnier Limb, an innovative steel bolt used in treehouse construction, is named for him.

#### AN 'ADDITION' WITH ELECTRICITY

The Treehouse Workshop in Seattle, Wash., is the most famous treehouse construction group. Co-owner Peter Nelson has written several books on treehouses and leads demonstrations in treehouse construction. The Treehouse Workshop specializes in using salvaged wood, including cedar shingles, as well as leaded glass windows and other architectural elements.

"We consider a treehouse an extension of the home, a quiet retreat," explains Workshop spokesperson Anna Daeuble. "We have one client who has a smaller house, on a modest lot. We built a treehouse for her that she uses as her writer's studio. Her house is crammed full of stuff and she says that she likes to have her clean, serene tree 'addition' to go to. It even has electricity."

Anxious tree-huggers who worry that construction might harm the tree can rest easy. In fact, a properly constructed



**Above: The "Suite," left, and "Forestree" are lodgings for rent at the Out 'N' About Treehouse Treesort in Oregon.**

treehouse can support and strengthen a tree, and does not impede future growth. Pruning before construction pushes the tree's center of gravity toward the middle. Then "we float the structure by building it on beams that are suspended from cables or chains," Fairoaks explains. "Rather than bolting through the center of the beam, we cradle the beam. It's stronger and more flexible. If a storm comes up and the tree wants to dance, the treehouse has to be able to move too."

#### THE WORLD'S HIGHEST TREEHOUSE

Fairoaks' own personal treehouse in Glenmore, Pa., is the highest recreational treehouse in the world. "It's 90 feet high up in a Tulip Poplar tree — a specimen not noted for its structural integrity," Fairoaks notes with a shrug. "It's up so high that I had to make it small."

To reach his treetop aerie, he first climbs a ladder but then must transfer to a system of mountain climbing ropes. "It's pretty exciting up there when the wind blows," Fairoaks says with typical understatement. "It's like being on a boat on a rolling ocean in a storm." Why so high? "I gain more perspective on life the higher my feet leave the ground," he says.

Although some clients insist in the beginning that the treehouse will be for their children, Fairoaks notes that they also insist on a six-foot head clearance. He knows that once the adults have experienced the treehouse for themselves, they won't be able to resist spending time up there. "What could be better than enjoying a beautiful view from the top of a tree?" he says. "You're that much closer to heaven."

## Resources

- **Jonathan Fairoaks**  
610-952-5209, [www.livingtreeonline.com](http://www.livingtreeonline.com)
- **Out 'N' About Treehouse Treesort**, Cave Junction, OR  
541-592-2208, [www.treehouses.com](http://www.treehouses.com)
- **The Treehouse Workshop**  
206-784-2112, [www.treehouseworkshop.com](http://www.treehouseworkshop.com)
- **Hideaways: Cabins, Huts, and Treehouse Escapes**  
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