

Home Branch

Thomas Jackson, 05.13.02

What you need is a treetop haven, far above earthly concerns.

There are certain childhood fantasies you'll never fulfill, such as marrying your fifth-grade teacher and subsisting solely on Lucky Charms. The treehouse you always wanted, however, you can have. As a grown-up, you could make one yourself, and shatter every building code in existence, or you could call in the experts. Since 1997, a Seattle concern called the Treehouse Workshop has built about 30 arboreal manors from Washington to Massachusetts. Its treehouses, which price from \$60,000 to the sky, are marvels of improvisational design, cleverly adapted to the trees they're made for. Their owners use them as offices, guest bedrooms, art studios, cigar rooms or what the Treehouse Workshop guys call "escape pods." The original inspiration behind the Workshop is Pete Nelson, a master builder and author of a number of treehouse books. The technical heft comes from a timber framer named Jake Jacob, who doubles as a professional wood scavenger. Thanks largely to Jacob's efforts, many of the treehouses are built from exquisite materials salvaged from demolished industrial structures, old houses and the Columbia River, which is full of boom logs left by the logging industry. As for the trees themselves, Nelson and Jacob always solicit their consent. "If it's the kind of tree that's climbable," says Jacob, "I'll climb it and spend a little time in it." *The Treehouse Workshop, Inc., 303 N.W. 43rd, Seattle, WA 98107; (206) 782-0208; www.treehouseworkshop.com.*

A House Fit For a Hobbit

Nestled into a seven-stem big leaf maple, this treehouse has 27 separate wall planes. The foundation timbers, the railing and the pickets are all reclaimed Douglas fir, former boom logs plucked from the Columbia River, while the outside walls are beautifully crafted board and batten western red cedar. Inside are lanterns Jacob found in a village in Provence, and handles along the inner staircase are from the steerage decks of an English passenger ship. The treehouse is wired for power with seven electrical outlets. It was originally built for the adults, but the children have since taken it over. Cost: \$200,000.

Pied-à-Terre en Air

Built on a six-tree stand of Douglas firs and western hemlocks on a horse farm in Washington state, this one story, 315-square-foot treehouse has a living room, a bedroom and a bathroom equipped with an incinerating toilet. The cathedral ceilings vault to 15 feet. The outside railings are Douglas fir, and the vertical pickets were all gathered up from around the property itself. The Workshop built another treehouse nearby, which serves as the property manager's office. Not bad, as work spaces go. Cost for both treehouses: \$390,000.

A Fir Runs Through It

Built for a Microsoft executive, this treehouse, is fittingly the most modern-looking of the lot. It embraces an old Douglas fir growing from the upper lip of a ravine and hangs nearly 20 feet over the ground on one side. Two stories tall, the treehouse stands 23 feet top to bottom and weighs about 18,000 pounds. It is attached by seven supporting knee brackets at the bottom, and doesn't touch the tree anywhere above. The extra space around the trunk on the floor, gives the tree room to sway, permits it to grow in girth and, very importantly, allows for insect traffic. Yes, insect traffic. The outside walls are board and batten cedar, while the beams inside are recycled Douglas fir, all milled by Treehouse Workshop's own sawyer. This place is a sanctuary to its owners--Mom and Dad use it to practice qi gong and the children have slumber parties and raise hell generally. Cost: \$100,000.