

A room of one's own



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As a new mom, I'm enjoying looking at the world from a different angle as I watch my kids explore. The anticipation, the wonder, the excitement that comes for them with each new day has been a great energy booster and I find myself laughing more than I ever have in my life. Recently my daughter has started creating her own forts and hiding spaces. From the couch to the coffee table to an upside-down wheelbarrow, she can turn anything into a clubhouse, fort or even castle, depending on her mood or where her imagined story takes her.

This got me researching ways I could help her create a fun place that she could call her own. I came across [Barbara Butler's website](#), and what I saw was nothing short of a childhood dream come true! Butler is the fairy godmother of playhouses, tree houses and forts for kids.

She has a unique ability to get into the mind of a kid, creating outdoor play spaces that have everything a little adventurer could hope for. From secret hiding spaces to escape doors, these structures can adapt to any kids' game or scenario. With places to climb and carvings in the walls, these structures can be turned from castle to pirate ship to house in a heartbeat.

Barbara has been building play houses since 1987 when singer Bobby McFerrin went looking for a play structure for his kids. Seeing Butler's work with her company, which at the time was called Outer Space Designs (started in 1983 when Barbara moved to San Francisco specializing in building unique decks, hot tubs and surrounds), McFerrin and his wife thought she may be able to come up with something special for their kids. That was the turning point for Butler. After working on the project for the McFerrin clan she realized she had found her passion and as it grew so did her client list, which now includes Robert Redford, Will Smith and Lindsay Buckingham of Fleetwood Mac.

Butler also believes in connecting kids with nature via her play structures (they are primarily for backyards), so she builds them in an eco-friendly way. She uses green materials, construction methods and site practices and she and her company recycles as much as possible.



Playhouse in a Tree: overview
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Some of the green materials Butler uses includes sustainable second-growth redwood (which resists decay naturally), which is air-dried as opposed to energy-sucking kiln-dried lumber. She's also created her own paints and stains called BB Colours. They use a traditional recipe that is non-toxic, free of fungicides and biocides and helps to preserve the wood so that structures can last for generations. All the structures use a modular design, so that if something should happen to a particular section only that section needs to be replaced. Butler and her team also work with you and your yard space to help find a area for your structure that will not involve removal of trees or other natural obstacles.

Butler's kid structures are so inspiring, even if you can't have one designed for your backyard, they'll set your imagination free dreaming of what you could build yourself. It's like being a kid all over again!



TreeTop Sculpture: overview
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