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Courtesy of Barbara Butler

## Barbara Butler Treehouses & Play Structures Are Like Portals To The Land Of Imagination

By [Kelly Hoover Greenway](#)

If you were lucky enough to grow up with a backyard that had a tree house or a play structure, then it's likely you'll be able to recall the countless hours spent outside climbing, day-dreaming, and coming up with your own imaginary worlds before the sun started to set and you had to come in for dinner. Today's world is a bit different; it seems kids spend more time on tablets than in trees. But one look at these [treehouses and play structures from Barbara Butler](#) will remind you of the importance of outdoor play, and have you wishing for one of your own.

In case you're not familiar, [Barbara Butler](#) is a multi-talented artist and builder who dreams up, and then designs, elaborate tree houses and other play structures using all-natural redwood. She started her company in 1987, and has since built swoon-worthy creations for

celebrity clients such as Jada Pinkett Smith and Will Smith, Robert Redford, and Kevin Kline. And, while she tells Romper her most expensive design to date was somewhere in the range of \$300,000 (yes, you read that right), Butler doesn't believe you need a lot of money in order to capture the essence of what her designs are all about: imagination and privacy.



Courtesy of Barbara Butler

As Butler tells Romper, "Kids today are more controlled and under adult supervision than when I was young. We want them to have a space where their imaginations can run wild and even though they're still within the family's property, they feel as if they've 'gone away' and have a space that's just for them." This can be done, she notes, by creating a space kids have to "enter" in order to access. One idea she gives is to create a nook using shrubbery as the entrance.

Once they have that space, she explains, "then you can get [natural materials such as log rounds/tree stumps](#) they can use as seats or stepping stones to jump around in a circle." Another idea for how to build a play space on a limited budget, she adds, is to find cheap (or free) furniture on Craigslist or other sites and then have the kids paint it themselves. "It's okay if it won't last for many seasons," Butler explains. The point, she says, is that you're allowing them to be in charge and express their own creativity.

One of Butler's biggest motivations in all of her work is to create a shell, as she calls it, so that the play within them can grow and change as the children do. She believes the same should be true of anything parents create at home as well, stating, "Don't give them a story

already written — give them a *setting* that invites a story." In other words, try to stay away from play structures that are designed with individual characters in mind. Just because your little one loves *The Little Mermaid* now doesn't mean he or she will in two years. By buying them pre-made structures that have already "written the story," so to speak, you're hindering their ability to create their own.

Another thing Butler says is important for parents to remember about creating a play space is actually what allowed her to tap into her [creativity as a child](#) in the first place: boredom. She explains, "A lot of great ideas come out of boredom. A [little bit of boredom](#) is a fantastic thing for kids. Eventually, they will start to create their own world of play."



Courtesy of Barbara Butler

So whether you have the money to shell out for one of [Butler's custom-made creations](#) or not, everyone can use the principles of her designs to carve out a little space that allows their children to tap into their own creativity as they play, explore, and create... just like most of us used to do!