

1 Tip top

Shoogly is a good Scots word, which perfectly describes *Takasugi-an* (meaning tea house built too high). Designed and built by Japanese architect Terunobu Fujimori on top of the trunks of two chestnut trees, as a retreat and a tea house, it is very simply kitted out with *tatami* mats and a perfectly placed window overlooking the Japanese city of Chino.

2 Plane and simple

This platform sits comfortably in the crook of a plane tree and is accessed by an elegantly sweeping staircase. Designed by Dominique Lafourcade in the gardens of Les Confines, near Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, France, it is high on my ever-changing list of Perfect Places to Sit with a Cup of Tea.



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VIEWPICTURES/GETTY IMAGES



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2 COLVENCIOUS / GAF PHOTOS / DESIGNER: DOMINIQUE LAFOURCADE, 3 PZCHNER / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO, 4 BRITTASPENSIONAT SE, 5 REDWOOD TREEHOUSE CO NZ / IDESIGNARCH.COM



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3 Partridge pad

Perching precariously in a pear tree, this may lack the sophistication of many of the others on this page but it is, in some ways, more charming. I can imagine scrambling up there to escape for an hour with a book. Or to just sit there and watch the clouds scud past.

4 Nesting instinct

Behind the twiggy exterior is a hotel suite with two bedrooms, a bathroom and sitting room. All suspended from trees in the forests of northern Sweden – access is by ladder, which is then retracted to leave you in what is basically a bird's nest. It was designed by Bertil Harström in 2010.



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5 Golden globe

The Redwoods Treehouse, built around a redwood tree near Warkworth, north of Auckland in New Zealand, can host a party of about 50 people (provided they remain standing most of the time), and is designed to look like a hanging chrysalis. The 12m-tall pod is built 10m up a 40m tree, and was built in a couple of months from sustainably grown pine and poplar.



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## Hi-rise living

Why leave all the fun of tree houses to children? James Alexander-Sinclair has never lost the urge to sleep among the branches and finds some tempting designs

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What do the Swiss Family Robinson, Bart Simpson, Ewoks, Tarzan and the Korowai tribe of the Indonesian Province of Papua, have in common? They all live in tree houses – although, to my knowledge, the Korowai are the only ones with a tradition of cannibalism. Anybody who has grown up in a garden with a climbable tree will understand the attraction: the enhanced view, the oneness with nature and the marked thrill engendered by the ever present possibility that you might fall out.

This feeling, for me at least, has continued into adulthood and I will take any opportunity given to climb a tree and sit in the canopy feeling the branches sway beneath me, listening to the leaves whisper in the wind. I would like nothing more than to sleep in a teetering nest of branches high up above the forest floor listening to the owls hoot at the gibbous moon. That, coming from a man who is worse

than the princess and the pea when it comes to spending even a night in a tent is quite something, but such is the lure of the tree house.

The genus tree house divides into two distinct species: those that are built into the branches of trees and those that hover around the canopy but are actually supported by sturdy poles concreted into the ground. The former is, obviously, preferable as then you are at one with the tree – although you may have to endure the inconvenience of having a branch bisecting your living room. However, it also means that you have to adapt your architecture to suit the tree as it is generally frowned upon to start banging nails into the trunk or lopping bits off to secure your perch: for the health of the tree, try to use ropes and convenient forked branches instead.

The second option is not only more secure but also much more adaptable – you can put in as many levels as you wish and join the ▶

### 6 Hide in plain height

You know the tribe of Korowai, I mentioned in the main text, well this is an example of the sort of tree house in which the tribe have lived for centuries. High up in the forest canopy, they did not come to the notice of the wider world until the 1970s.

### 7 Lofty ideas

Like the Bird's Nest (see 4 on previous page), the Cabin is a snug hotel room overlooking the Lule River in Sweden. You access this one by a long bridge through the trees, which delivers you to a deck on the roof of the capsule. It seems to hang on the side of a pine tree with an amazing view across the forests of Lapland. Cosy but undoubtedly very romantic.

### 8 Multi story time

This is in Chongqing, China and is built around a concrete 'tree'. Brightly coloured and quirky, it has become a bit of a tourist magnet, and you can see why. What child would not be enchanted? There are nine rooms in total with the topmost one being about 12m off the ground.



6 GEORGE STENNETZ, 8 BARGROFT MEDIA / GETTY IMAGES

▷ structure to other trees by way of rope bridges, trapdoors and all sorts of things. I made one in my last garden using some telegraph poles that I had lying around. It consisted of a high platform, which afforded a great view across the garden to the fields beyond, and was accessed, as is traditional, by an extremely rickety ladder that nobody much liked climbing. Below this platform was another layer for younger children with a jerry-built shed and its own escape hatch.

Which neatly brings us on to the subspecies of tree houses: those designed as play equipment for children and those intended for adults (there is a bit of overlap but we will conveniently ignore that for the moment). They obviously hold great attraction for children and tree climbing should always be encouraged. I have one very important word of advice when considering tree houses (or any other sort of play equipment): position it as close as possible to the

house – children like to be watched while playing and are not happy if shunted off out of sight next to the compost heap. A children's treehouse can be very simple – as what is really needed is a place for the imagination to run wild. Many a great tree house has begun with a couple of builders' pallets from which a modest something can be erected in an afternoon and then become anything from a pirate ship to a fairytale castle. If DIY is not your thing then there are companies, such as Cheeky Monkey ([cheekymonkeytreehouses.com](http://cheekymonkeytreehouses.com)), that can create tree houses to satisfy every fantasy.

Adults are rather more demanding but their tree climbing urges are well serviced by boutique hotels across the globe that offer lofty luxury – to include indoor plumbing and room service – to well-heeled travellers. This has sparked off some pretty exciting design from mirrored cubes to giant barrels suspended from the



9 FREESPIRITSPHERES.COM

### 9 Eye in the sky

One of a series of three houses that form another tree house hotel, this time on Vancouver Island, Canada. They are suspended from the surrounding trees by a network of flexible and stretchy ropes so that, while snuggled up in your varnished wood and brass eyrie, you will sway with the winds and feel as if you are floating. Possibly not one for anyone susceptible to seasickness.

### Further reading

*Tree Houses: Fairy Castles in the Air* by Philip Jodido and Patrick Hruby (Taschen GmbH, 2012).

*Exceptional Treehouses* by Alain Laurens, Ghislain Andre and Daniel Dufour (Harry N Abrams Inc, 2009).

*Tree Houses You Can Actually Build (A Weekend Project Book)* by David and Jean Stiles (Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

branches of trees from which you can watch the northern lights or deer grazing in glades. You cannot beat an experience that gives you the thrills of childhood combined with the soothing calm of the outdoors – especially if there is also a good Wi-Fi signal. It is probably going too far to say that every tree needs a tree house but there are some that are crying out to be climbed and colonised. If you have such a specimen in your garden then it would seem churlish not to give in to the temptation. □

### READER EVENT

Don't miss James's talk on Sex, Death and Gardens at the *Gardens Illustrated Festival* on 25-26 March 2017. See page 8 or go to [gardensfestival.com](http://gardensfestival.com) for details.

### Useful information

You can book the Bird's Nest and the Cabin through Treehotel ([treehotel.se](http://treehotel.se)) and the Tree House Hotel in Canada (above) through Free Spirit Spheres ([freespiritspheres.com](http://freespiritspheres.com)). Closer to home you can spend a night in the trees at **Treetops at the Fox and Hounds Hotel** in Devon ([foxandhoundshotel.co.uk](http://foxandhoundshotel.co.uk)) or **Into the Woods** on the Isle of Wight ([isleofwighttreehouse.com](http://isleofwighttreehouse.com)). The Redwoods Treehouse in New Zealand is available to hire for functions ([redwoodstreehouse.co.nz](http://redwoodstreehouse.co.nz)).

There are planning implications for the more exuberant tree house builder. Broadly speaking, your treehouse should not be more than 4m high but, if worried, then it is sensible to ask your local authority before you get too carried away.