

## Tree of Dreams

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I never had a tree house as a kid. My friend's father built him a tree house, and I begged my parents for one, but deep down I knew I'd be out of luck. When I finally became a father myself, I was still a child at heart, so I got to work.

It's not as if my kids—Alison, 8; Douglas, 6; and William, 3—asked for a tree house. But I figured, If you build it, they will come. At first, my wife, Phyllis, wasn't so sure: After all, did we really need a construction project sprawled across our lawn?

I'm a financial analyst, but I have a degree in engineering and didn't have much trouble making the plans. The kids also gave me their ideas for features, such as a bucket that they could raise and lower with a pulley.

Building the tree house took all of last summer. For the first 30 hours, it was fun. But as 60 and then 90 hours of my weekend time disappeared, I just wanted to get it done. The kids helped when they could, painting or handing me tools.

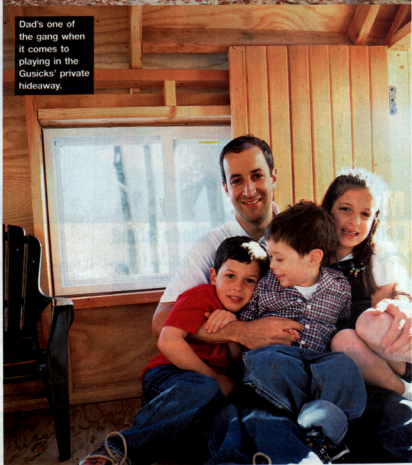
My neighbors didn't exactly pull up lawn chairs, but I'm sure I provided comic entertainment for them as I wobbled up the ladder carrying building supplies, crawled around on the grass searching for dropped tools, and teetered on the roof 15 feet above the ground, hammering in the shingles.

Long before I pounded in the last nail, the kids started hanging out in the tree house, and once I finished, in October, we all celebrated. My wife stresses how meaningful it is for our kids to know that I created this wonderful hideaway just for them. Plus, I think it makes her understand just how important fatherhood is to me.

My children love playing in the tree house, and it's a big draw for their friends. Seeing them enjoy something that I built with my own hands is very gratifying to me. When they're up there, I'm with them in spirit.



Dad's one of the gang when it comes to playing in the Gusicks' private hideaway.



Inspired to build something for your child? Log on to [www.parents.com](http://www.parents.com) for tools and basics, project resources, and safety tips.