



Pop Up Tree House Inspires the Imagination for One Day

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by Dakota Arkin Cafourek

A tree house is a place for play and wonder, a safe haven set aside in nature for exchanging secrets and dreams. Whether we grew up with one or merely seen its wonder depicted on film with curious children and a loyal dog, the tree house is a magical place where fairy tales are as true as our imaginations. And like magic, a tree house will rise in Herrick Park in East Hampton, NY for one-day-only appearance that may end up lasting a lifetime in memories.

Husband-and-wife creative duo David and Jeanie Stiles have been commissioned to design and build a tree house in Herrick Park where everyone can climb aboard for the second annual East Hampton Chamber of Commerce Fall Festival, taking place on Saturday, October 20, 2018.

David Stiles is a designer, builder, illustrator and author of numerous how-to books, including "Garden Projects," "Rustic Retreats," "Tree Houses," "Playhouses," and "Sheds." Together with his wife, Jeanie Stiles, the couple have written 21 how-to books on woodworking projects ranging from tree houses and playhouses to sheds, gazebos, garden houses, cabins, and workshops. The pair divide their time between New York City and East Hampton, NY, making the tree house ask a natural one.

Jeanie Stiles said in a recent interview that their Fall Festival project got started when the couple met with a very receptive Steve Ringel, the new executive director of the East Hampton Chamber of Commerce. The three swapped ideas about how a tree house might "attract kids, draw attention to the festival and make it come alive," Jeanie Stiles said. "We all thought it over. David got some ideas and Riverhead Building Supply offered to donate the lumber."

Unlike most tree houses, this one will be a temporary structure, installed solely for the day's event. "The whole design is based on never putting a single nail, screw or bolt into the live tree or even into the roots," David Stiles said, "So, we had to design something that wouldn't touch the tree at all and could be taken down and put up somewhere else later."



Tree house illustration by David Stiles, presented to East Hampton's Chamber of Commerce. Courtesy of David and Jeanie Stiles.

The tree house will first be assembled at the couple's barn in East Hampton, NY in a trial run, then disassembled and reassembled on site at Herrick Park on the morning of the festival. In the park, the center point of the structure will be a tree with a straight trunk and substantial high branches. The house will measure 12 by 12 feet and will be built on four different platforms, held up with posts and fitted together to encompass the tree. The posts, made from cedar trunks with the bark stripped, will be 8 by 12 inches in diameter.

"Those are the four corners," David Stiles said, "and so we'll screw lag bolts through the beams around these four posts and lock it together. Of course, it will have more bracing on the inside, too, to make sure it's strong."



First steps in setting up the tree house. Courtesy of David and Jeanie Stiles.

Rope railings will be installed around the edge of the platforms and around the tree. "The rope railings are our signature element," he said. "We like to put them into almost every tree house we do, because it sort of gives a nice woodsy, organic look to it." There will also be a stairway built at the rear of the tree house so adults can easily climb up, "provided the kids allow them," he said.

Adding some piazza to their signature design element is a special dramatic entrance piece that adds a fairy tale quality to their tree house.

"I wanted to make it more eye-catching, color-wise," Jeanie Stiles said, "and I thought if we paint a flat, almost like a theatrical flat, to look like a bright castle or cottage with a window and a flag on it then it would be more noticeable from the road."



Theatrical flat for the front of the Fall Festival tree house. Courtesy of David and Jeanie Stiles.

Once nestled inside the tree house, there are even more attractions for children including shutters that open in the "cottage" window.

"At one corner there's a space for a kid to wind up your ubiquitous pulley and hoist bucket to bring supplies up," David Stiles said. "It's going to have a little ratchet that makes a sound as you turn it." There will also be a treasure chest with a secret way to open it and a try-your-luck spinning wheel for kids to play with.

Jeanie Stiles added, “The biggest logistical challenge is that it’s awkward and heavy. The rope railing takes a while, too, and David will be doing that on site at Herrick Park.”

To help make the process go smoother, the couple have enlisted the aid of Toby Haynes, an artist and friend who divides his time between Cornwall, England, and East Hampton, NY for design and construction support. They have also called on long-time friend Andrew Cafourek to pitch in with the tree house raising in Herrick Park, commencing the very morning of the festival.

“Typically, a build like this would take five to six days,” Jeanie Stiles said. “It’s kind of an experiment. It’s fun, but it’s going to be a challenge.”

David Stiles traces his love for tree houses back to his childhood, when he first began learning about their construction and at the same time relishing the pride and responsibility that came with building things by himself. His passion continued with all kinds of building projects and a gift for teaching others. As the authors of numerous do-it-yourself construction titles, David and Jeanie Stiles have enjoyed empowering people to bring their ideas to life on their own.



David Stiles adding the finishing touches to the try-your-luck wheel. Courtesy of David and Jeanie Stiles.

“With tree houses, you have the whole idea of family involvement,” Jeanie Stiles said. “You’re getting kids and adults away from looking at screens all the time. They can learn how to start something from the beginning and finish it and be proud of it.”

David Stiles offered his own assessment. “I was just in our tree house in the backyard, sitting there amongst the leaves and up in the air,” he said. “The tree house is just something you don’t experience in normal life; it’s just very peaceful, rewarding.”

BASIC FACTS: See (and climb upon) David and Jeanie Stiles tree house on Saturday, October 20, 2018, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., in Herrick Park on Newtown Lane in East Hampton Village, NY. www.easthamptonchamber.com.

To learn more about David and Jeanie Stiles, visit www.stilesdesigns.com.

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