

052210 | 1001

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Project Type:
Elevated Playhouse

Client:
Morgan + Denise Strate

Budget (CAD\$):
Withheld

Size / Program:
188 sq. ft. / 17.5 sq. m.

Building Design:
010110 | Architecture + Urbanism, Strate Grandchildren

Services:
Architecture, Design-Build

General Contractor:
Strate Family

Project Date / Status:
2010+ / Completed (but evolving)



Winter on the Prairies Near the Pothole Creek

TREETOP HOUSE

MAGRATH, ALBERTA, CANADA

This is a place of playful imagination, childhood serendipity and family gatherings. It is the ultimate elevated 'fort' to defend, observation tower to climb, treestand perch and safe sleeping space for grandchildren (or adult children at heart).

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Treetop House sits reverently in a protected coulee depression amid old cottonwood trees on rolling acres of southern Alberta prairie. Initially an ambitious family idea to create a place of enjoyment for several grandchildren, the work has become a seasonal destination for spontaneous family gatherings and other social events. In the act of making, the often assumed prerequisite of high expense is proven less essential to the success of architecture.

Constructed in dutiful service by the broader family, the project facilitates social play-making in a natural outdoor rural setting. Grandchildren who have occupied the treehouse have imagined tales of contextual transformation into the defensible 'fortification' protecting them against advancing foes, created an evening movie amphitheatre or established a basecamp for summer sleepovers accommodating more adventurous youth. The elevated perspective in the otherwise unreachable high tree canopy is now always safely within arms length of the dwelling's perched balconies.

The vernacular 'farmhouse' appearance of the treehouse is consistent with a prairie context. Materials enclosing the treehouse are permitted to weather. Views expand between openings in the tree canopy toward the Rocky Mountains, the Pothole Creek coulee and the vast ephemeral prairie sky. Southern Alberta winds are diffused through the slightly spaced horizontal clad openings made of rough sawn wood obtained locally. The treetop house employs two elevated balconies which cantilever from the principle structure and orient to key views. A simple dumbwaiter and hatch access system allow conveyance of 'overnight supplies' and other gear while openings for balloon missiles and water guns have been strategically located by the grandchildren themselves. The balconies provide a high perch for spotting wildlife and under grandpa's supervision become shooting places for archery practice into several large round hay bales placed numerous meters distant.

The project continues to spark evolving ideas of expansion among family. Slated work in the future may include completing a 23 foot high climbing structure or installing a zip-line off a balcony.



Spencer Court



Treetop House in Season

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