

MONKEY BUSINESS

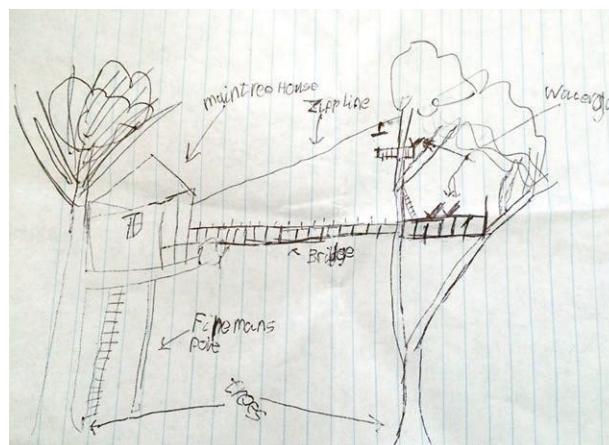
FOR ONE WINNETKA FAMILY,
CHILDHOOD DREAMS
ARE ENCOURAGED—AND
SOMETIMES FULFILLED.

By Katie Ann Orr

For 9-year-old Jack Forrest, superpowers are alive and well. His artistic work using a black ballpoint pen and lined notebook paper was transformed into a real treehouse mansion: a sturdy Western Red Cedar creation of gadgets and snares that turn afterschool life into an adventure. “There’s a superfast slide, two trap doors and a crow’s nest at the top where you can see everything!” he says. “The whole thing is really cool.” Jack’s younger brothers and sister—ages 7, 5 and 4, respectively—pipe up about the fireman’s pole (25 feet long!), bucket on a pulley, orbit net swing, rock climbing wall and monkey bars. This treehouse is effectively a tree *fortress*.

When the family moved to Winnetka all the way from Singapore in 2014, dad John promised the kids a treehouse. Little did he know that Jack would dream up and draw something so elaborate it would involve multiple stories. Gauntlet thrown, the family enlisted landscape architect Jim O’Brien—a man whose handy wisdom of many years belies a heart that remains young. “When I was a kid, I always loved being in a tree, climbing it, being a part of it. Then I went to summer camp and learned how to build a treehouse, which expanded that love,” he says. “Twenty-five years later, married with kids of my own, here I am.” Along with construction mastermind Virgil Aguilar and Design Assistant Roger Castro, O’Brien used branches for railings, repurposed a dead elm for posts and sealed overlapping cedar planks for a waterproof roof—to build the ultimate Robinson Crusoe-like creation. Thick black deer netting encloses the crow’s nest, so the kids can camouflage themselves (but mom JP knows they can’t launch any rocks or fall out and break bones). “It honestly feels like you’re living in the canopy of a tree, watching birds fly by on a horizontal level,” says O’Brien. “It was fun to create an heirloom structure that will still be around when the kids return home from college. I believe it’s important to grow older, but you should never grow up.”

DREAM HOME
From top: A similar treehouse would cost about \$25,000 to construct; the drawing that started it all.



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