



4-1999

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Recommended Citation

Owen, Laura (1999) "Principles of Tree House Construction," *Inscape*: Vol. 19 : No. 1 , Article 4.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/inscape/vol19/iss1/4>

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Principles of Tree House Construction



Laura Owen

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OB AND JANE were building a tree house. Jane thought the tree house ought to have more rooms, for her cocktail parties and reading-club meetings. Bob disagreed because he had been reading Thoreau and felt that two people who wanted to live in a tree should be satisfied with two rooms. The tree house said that two rooms were not enough and began to expand across the branches, crushing the tree's leaves and buds. Jane rushed to stop it, explaining there were less violent ways to solve a disagreement,

although current trends in composition allowed for absurdity on the part of a tree house in short works of fiction. The writer, who had always wished she could afford a vanity, gave Jane one more room for a boudoir.

The writer then began to decorate the front room. She added a crystal chandelier but decided it was preferential to privileged persons. Instead she tried writing a mop and bucket in the corner next to an ironing board but felt that this affirmed traditional symbols of female subjection. She deleted both the chandelier and the bucket and replaced them with a bust of Augustine. Bob felt that this was a bit high-handed. The writer penciled in a totem pole and a plate of Jell-O next to the bust.

Suddenly the tree house became a teahouse. The writer had made a spelling mistake. The tree house did not want teacups and sugar cubes.

“I have been improperly defined,” it complained. “I demand a reconstruction.”

“Damn,” said Bob. He didn’t know why.

The writer was experimenting with offensive material. She wanted to remain religious, but not naively religious. Mild cussing on Bob’s part was sufficient. Bob began to bury his children under the tree without telling Jane. This upset the tree, who disliked Bob’s corruption of its roots, and the plant threatened to topple and leave its inhabitants in a pulpy pile underneath the trunk. Jane considered involving herself in a fiery love affair with a writer in order to legitimately escape Bob’s neurotic behavior. The writer began to consider alternate means of attracting readers.

She asked Bob and Jane to take a look at the draft and propose possible changes.

“I suggest a more terse style,” said Bob, who was a man of few words and who didn’t particularly care for the rococo clock in the tree house’s bedroom.

"I think this whole tree house project is demographically misplaced," complained Jane, "and the cumbersome diction has made dents in the paneling."

"Are you sure about the efficiency of employing an Iowa workshop method?" asked the tree house.

Bob and Jane noticed a hole opening up in the west corner of the tree house.

"I am excluded," the reader suddenly chimed in. He/She had slipped in through the hole.

"We know you are excluded," Bob and Jane and the tree house and the writer explained, "but we are aware of your exclusion and exist for the Other. We cannot make a whole, only holes. After all, we are not final, only informed."

The reader grumbled. "I want to be part of this interpretive community, too."

"Think of me as a womb," the tree house said, trying to console him/her. Several branches reached tenderly for the reader.

"Is there a tree in this house?" Bob asked.

Jane sat down and began to read *The Unauthorized Biography of Martha Stewart*.

The writer said nothing. Another hole had opened up in the tree house floor, and she had clumsily fallen through.