



ESCAPE THE REAL WORLD WITH A RELAXING SPACE AT HOME

By Cody Wiesner

For many of us, finally going home after a long work week is a tremendous and reassuring feeling... for a moment, but then we're faced with some impossible questions. Namely, what's there to do this weekend? That's when the dreaded "weekend paradox" takes hold. It would be great to escape to somewhere unforgettable with breathtaking scenery, but there are people, and getting there would require movement. And that's just way too hard, especially when a semi-comatose weekend alone at home is far more inviting after an exhausting week.

Fortunately, there's a third option: private retreats. Here in the Fox Valley, creative homeowners are working with innovative contractors to create relaxing spaces perfect for them, all without having to face the outside world.

"I think what's great about retreat kinds of projects, they're all just individual and creative with the homeowners," says Steve Tuma, landscape designer at Lowney's Landscaping Center in Appleton. "No home I've ever done is the same."

As Tuma says, private retreats come in all shapes and sizes, so here are some unique rejuvenating spaces that might just inspire your perfect retreat that keeps weekend paradoxes at bay for good.

PHOTOSYNTHESIZE IN AN OUTDOOR PATIO

The outdoor patio is a great way to inject some sunlight and fresh air to a calm Sunday afternoon. According to Tuma, patios are a popular choice of a private retreat, but that's for good reason as they reinvent the standard backyard and are flexible, working well for entertaining guests and for private reflection alike.

Best of all, with the right design, they can provide an unparalleled sense of isolation, which was the primary goal of a recent landscaping project in which Tuma was involved.

"There were three other backyards actually facing [theirs], so we went around that with landscaping," Tuma says. "We put together an outdoor space with an arbor to confine that

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John Hofferber, founder of BerHoff Homes in Neenah, has worked on several home theater projects and says the low lighting makes them perfect for “escaping from the world” and forgetting about life’s obligations for a moment. “You can come in and turn the lights off and get into that movie, whatever you’re watching,” Hofferber says. “And that’s really fun.”

Hofferber says installing a good theater system is less about size and more about placement and having the right technology. In fact, he says most home theater projects are in standard room sizes.

“The whole thing goes down to the size of the screen,” Hofferber says. “You pick out the screen size, and there’s an optimal viewing distance on it. We work with different sized rooms.”

to a portion of their patio area. Then we closed it in with different seat walls and pillars. That gives them more of a sense of an outdoor room.”

Because everyone has different ideas of what makes for the best relaxing space, Tuma starts by asking prospective patio-owners a few questions.

“What’s really important to you? Is it the ultimate privacy, is it shade or sunlight, is it the feeling of the texture of materials we’re going to use in that space? ... What are some of your [likes and] dislikes?” Tuma explains. “We’ll let the customer lead us because certainly they’ve thought about a lot of what they’re considering for that space already.”

The result is an individualized and picturesque spot completely dedicated to unwinding.

“It’s great to come home and be like, ‘I can relax in this space.’”

MAKE EVERY NIGHT MOVIE NIGHT AT AN IN-HOME THEATER

If you prefer relaxing indoors, home theaters upgrade movie-watching and bring the theater experience into the home, no crowd required.

In the beginning stages of any theater project, Hofferber works with customers to determine a plan based on the customer’s room size, budget, and goals, and from there they decide on a projector, sound system, lighting and seating. Customers ask for all sorts of interior decor, from classic theater atmosphere to their favorite football teams. Hofferber says one client even asked for a “20,000 Leagues Under the Sea” theme.

“We took portholes that came off of Japanese destroyers,” Hofferber says. “I like to pull in a lot of reclaimed stuff as much as we can.”





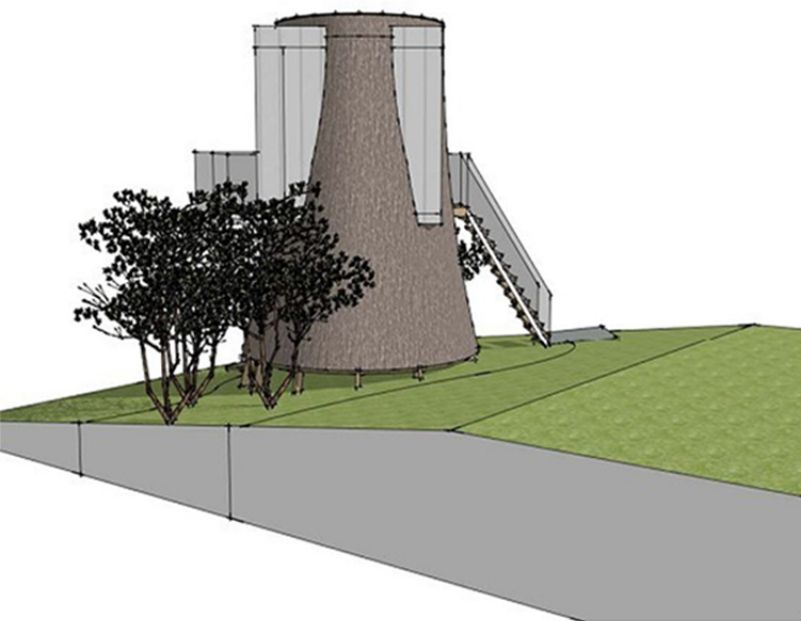
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BECOME ONE WITH NATURE IN A TREEHOUSE

This “modern treehouse project” is a unique undertaking by Timber Innovations, based in Kimberly, that satisfies everyone’s childhood dream of having a treehouse while giving it an adult feel.

“[The customer’s] house is contemporary, so we wanted to inject some level of contemporary-ness with windows, but yet have it very organic,” says Paul Driessen, Timber Innovations owner and president. “The idea is that it’s reflecting of the trees and the shrubbery that’s around it.”

This modern treehouse, located in Wrightstown, challenges standard perceptions of what a treehouse is by being completely manmade. The structure is built to resemble a very large tree trunk by lining the outer walls with bark. The first floor interior is “open air,” Driessen says, and gives the feeling of being inside a hollow tree trunk. A stairway then leads to the second floor, part of which is an open-air balcony, and that leads into an interior room surrounded by glass windows. Driessen says the combination of modern and natural styles creates the feeling of being inside and outside at the same time.

Driessen says the homeowner conceived the project with two goals in mind, as a recreation area for her grandchildren, but also as a personal space to relax.

“It’s kind of a dual purpose as a play area for the kids but then it’s also a personal retreat for her,” Driessen says. “You’re away, you’re connecting with nature and there’s a nice panoramic view of the river. There’s this whole level of [immersion], and there’s also an engaging architectural style to it.”

In meeting those goals and creating the optimal sense of natural immersion, Driessen said choosing the right location in the yard was the most important choice.

“Location was really key,” Driessen says. “We looked for what the perfect location was, with the view of the river, the privacy that it offers, so it’s a lot of those things. When you’re in there, no one knows you’re up there, so it’s about making this camouflage in nature.”

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