Home of their Own

Barbara Butler, a playhouse and play structure builder working out of South San Francisco agrees that more parents want their children to play at home. Butler says a backyard playhouse or play structure creates a controlled yet creative environment.

“Kids can play in playhouses for hours,” she says. “They open a shutter and say ‘This is my house you can’t come in!’ Then they open a door and let you in.” Public play structures also have gotten “boring” Butler says. They usually don’t include playhouses for fear of giving an unsavory adult a place to hide.

A backyard playhouse becomes the new neighborhood park, Butler says, much to the delight of parents.

In Menlo Park, Wendy Fisher’s kids Lee, 7, and Andy, 5, spend their time outside on their play structure which Butler built.

Fisher says she bought the play structure about six years ago after seeing a similar one at a nearby home.

“I looked at it and thought ‘Wow, this would be cool to have,” she says.

As she leads a tour around the play structure, which includes two playhouses at its base, she pulls a pillow from a cranny here and toys from a nook there. She shows how the doors on the playhouse close without pinching fingers and lets visitors in on the secret entrance and exit.

She says the kids love the structure. They bring blankets to it and close themselves off from the rest of the world. They climb up to one of the structure’s balconies and proclaim they are rules of the universe. They play cops and robbers, banishing playmates to jail in one of the playhouses.

“Because it’s so bright, the kids from the front door see it and come running” she says.

Butler has been designing play structures for 18 years, focusing on colorful and fun play in a home’s backyard. Her standard play structure’s run from $4,000 to $20,000.

Barbara and her team have built more than 400 custom playhouses, play structures and tree forts, delivering and installing them all over the country and internationally.

As for the play structure that Fisher owns, Fisher says it grows with her children as they grow. They recently added water cannon at the top and restored its bright colors with a new paint job.

“Once you think of all the memories you’re creating it seems like a good investment”, Fisher says.

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