



**Two-year-old Levi Isaacs is growing up** in a tree house but it's a far cry from the traditional children's hideout made from two planks linking a couple of branches. Designed and built by Levi's parents, Steven Isaacs and Lisa Saville, this contemporary take on arboreal architecture stands on a bushland block bordering a waterfront reserve near Cunninghams Reach on Lane Cove River.

Completed two years ago, the house is one of a pair built on a steep site near Boronia Park at the northern end of Hunters Hill. "The way property prices are in Sydney, we would never have been able to buy a big new house like this," explains Isaacs. "But when we saw the land, we recognised the potential for two dwellings – one for us to live in, the other to sell."

Although close to the river, the property has no water views. But it does have a spectacular treescape – and this inspired the design of the two adjoining houses. Since completion two years ago, these "tree houses" have

scooped a swag of design and construction industry awards for Isaacs, 39, a senior associate of the architectural firm Marchese Partners, and Saville, 37, a consultant for Brian Meyerson Architects who works from her home office.

These awards include a commendation for ESD (environmentally sustainable design) and another commendation in the Best Residential Interior NSW category at the 2006 Interior Design Awards. "We chose the building materials to ensure minimal impact on the untouched bushland setting," says Isaacs, "and we opted for non-toxic paints on the walls and a food-grade oil to seal the floorboards."

When the couple detail their cost constraints for construction, these awards are even more impressive. "Our budget was very tight," says Isaacs. "The building had to be done extremely economically to make it viable."

You enter the two-level house via a footbridge that straddles a chasm between the driveway and the front door.

Once you step inside, the entire entry level is filled with light from a floor-level strip window that looks onto the trees. At the other end, the view is captured through a wall of sliding glass that opens onto a huge timber deck wrapping the trunk of a towering blackbutt.

"We live on this deck," says Saville. "It's Levi's play area, an outdoor dining space and a great entertaining area when we have parties."

Partly hidden by a three-quarter-height wall at the rear of the living area is the sleek white kitchen. "When cooking and entertaining family and friends, Lisa likes a bit of privacy in the kitchen," says Isaacs. "My wife is an excellent cook so she had a clear idea of what she wanted in there."

Adjacent to the kitchen is Levi's glass-walled playroom, which looks straight into the trees. Apart from a brightly coloured rug on the floor – and a splash of duck egg blue on the back of the front door – the rest of the house is almost entirely white. A white coffee table in the living →

# treehouse

Margie Blok discovers a home among the gum trees that is the perfect environment for a growing family.

Photography Anson Smart

**Opposite page**  
Dramatic use of glass walls keeps Lisa Saville and two-year-old Levi in close contact with nature.

**Below left**  
The open-plan design of the living area adds to the airy feel.  
**Below**  
Filmy white linen curtains help to soften the bedroom.







**Above**  
The felt runner on the dining table is actually a blind.



**Right**  
A rug in Levi's playroom adds a splash of colour.



#### Wheretheyshop

##### Koskela

Level 1, 91 Campbell Street, Surry Hills.  
Phone: 9280 0999.  
"All our major pieces of furniture are from here," says Saville. "It's all locally designed and made from Australian woods."

##### Ikea

Rhodes Shopping Centre, Off Homebush Bay Road, Rhodes.  
Phone: 8002 0400.

"I'm a big fan of Ikea as designers and architects create their stuff."

##### Spirit Level Designs

Level 1, 722 Bourke Street, Redfern.  
Phone: 8399 0660.  
"This is one of my favourite places. A lot of my ceramics are from here."

##### Design 4 Space

20 Bruce Street, Rozelle.  
Phone: 9555 8308.  
"The white bowl on the coffee table came from here – it was a gift."

**"We chose the building materials to ensure minimal impact on the untouched bushland setting."**

##### Left

The sleek white kitchen adds to the minimalist look.

##### Bottom left

White plasterboard walls are used throughout the home.

area holds a sculptural white bowl. Eight white chairs are grouped at the dining table. Filmy white linen curtains drape the bedroom windows. Throughout both levels are white plasterboard walls.

For furniture and furnishings, the couple have two favourite haunts: Koskela and Ikea. "All the furniture in the living area is from Koskela – the coffee table, zen bed, dining table and chairs, lounge and timber benches," says Saville.

On the recycled blackbutt dining table is a white felt runner from Ikea. "It's actually a blind but I like the look of it draped across the table," says Saville, a self-confessed Ikea addict. Among the numerous bargains she's unearthed during hunts around the Scandinavian mega-store are white timber photo frames "that cost about 50 cents each". Placed on shelves, walls, tables and niches, these frames showcase favourite family snaps and portrait shots of parents and grandparents.

"Because the interior is simple, solid and clean, I like to introduce warmth and texture," she says. Saville has placed a grey knitted cushion and a cosy cream rug on the zen bed. An adjacent wall niche holds sculptural strips of bark she found in the front garden and on a long shelf near the entry are her treasured items: ceramic pots; tiny wooden spinning tops picked up on a trip to Prague; precious stones found in Namibia by her grandfather. Another shelf houses her extensive collection of cookbooks.

Paintings by the emerging South African artist Medina Morphet – a high school friend of Isaacs – hang on walls in the living area. "On major occasions, such as Steven's graduation and my 30th birthday, we give each other a painting."

The artistic effect continues in the main bedroom, where another glass wall offers views through the trees. "The view onto the bushland from our bedroom is like a painting," says Saville. "It changes with the light throughout the day."