



A stark sculptural presence in a forest setting, the glass-clad Tower House is a treehouse with a twist. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** the unembellished rooftop deck pays tribute to the building's *raison d'être*: an unencumbered view of New York state's Catskill Mountains. **Details, last pages.**





*up.*  
*in the air*

AN ARCHITECT'S VISION OF A  
FAMILY RETREAT FROM NEW YORK  
CITY IS REALISED IN A SOARING  
GLASS EYRIE, WITH AN OUTLOOK  
TO MAKE YOU FORGET ALL ELSE.

PHOTOGRAPHER **RICHARD POWERS** WRITER **DOMINIC BRADBURY**





Clear vision glass wraps around the staircase, **ABOVE**, creating a continuous connection to the leafy surroundings and a natural ventilation stack to let out the hot air in warmer weather. **BELOW:** Gluck chose to paint the oak floors of the main bedroom white to heighten the impression of floating amid the trees. The chair is a gift from his father. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** a 'Shaker' stove by Wittus is a focal point of the open living area, while a 'Nelson Platform' bench by George Nelson for Herman Miller doubles as a coffee table and seating.



**W**hen architect Thomas Gluck decided to build a weekend and holiday house for himself and his family, the fact that he already knew the land intimately gave him a head start. Gluck had spent part of his childhood on this 17.5-hectare parcel of land in Ulster County, around two hours' drive north of New York City, and wanted his children to enjoy the freedoms offered by this escapist rural enclave as much as he had. Picking out a particular spot on a forested plateau, Gluck came up with the idea of a 'tower house' among the trees that would make the most of a panoramic view northwards to the Catskill Mountains.

"Accessing the view and creating a living experience up in the treetops became the generator for the whole project," says Gluck, who shares the house with his wife Anne Langston, and their children, Skyler, 10, and Miranda, six. "It's really the experience of being in a tree house. Looking northwards to the mountains, I would say that you can see 20 or 25 miles [32 or 40 kilometres] on a clear day and the money shot is the big view. But the trees are around you on the other three sides, so when you look out you see the trees swaying in the wind."

Completed in 2012, the Tower House is a striking and unexpected sculpture sitting in the forest, with a tall, vertical shaft climbing upwards and intersected at the fourth storey by a horizontal, cantilevered box holding the main living spaces, looking outwards to the mountains. Gluck, who started thinking about the design of the house back in 2003, built a full-scale scaffold tower on the site before starting construction, just to test that the idea would work and that the view would be open enough.

It's one of a number of buildings on the property that has been in the family for many years. Peter Gluck, Thomas's father and a founding partner at what is now the architecture-led design build firm Gluck+, started with an 1820s cottage that he extended in the 1980s. Later, he added a guesthouse, called the Bridge House, at the base of the forested plateau. There's also the Scholar's Library, a sublime study and book repository designed for Thomas's mother, Carol, who is a professor of history at Columbia University. The Tower House, which was designed and built by Gluck+, is the latest addition to the site.

"The real function of the property is to bring family and friends together, and we've been going up there for over 40 years," says Thomas Gluck. "The Bridge House serves as the guesthouse and dormitory for friends. There are often 20 or 30 people up here and we are rarely alone. But with the Tower House, there was this desire to access a new kind of experience on the property, and optimise the sense of difference and the unique aspect of being up on the plateau."

The house is linked to the other buildings on the property by a woodland path that leads you through the trees and to the base of the tower, which has a modest footprint on the lower levels of around 4.3 by 10.7 metres. The base of the tower is anchored into the bedrock of the plateau, an idea echoed by the use of local bluestone pavers for the flooring of the entrance hallway. The children also have a bunk bedroom on the ground floor, with bespoke beds and storage painted a vibrant yellow. The same colour is used for the timber staircase — a playful touch but one that also emphasises the verticality of the building and the importance of the upward journey. The next two storeys hold the master bedroom and guestrooms on an identical floor plan. Bathrooms are contained within a central core that holds all the plumbing and services. During winter, when the house is not being used, this core alone is gently heated to protect the building and its water pipes from frost damage.

Climbing upwards again, to level four, the house opens up into the horizontal living area — the elevated hub of the house. This is a largely open-plan space, the seating area arranged around a wood-burning stove, bespoke window benches to one side with bookcases and storage set underneath them. A dining area also sits within this universal space, with the floor painted grey rather than white and a slight recess in the ceiling above, both marking out the footprint of the supporting tower below.

"Everything that is painted white is floating over the air," says Gluck. "The reason for picking the painted oak floor rather than a simple wood finish is that it contributes to the idea of being in a space that is floating above the ground. Because the floor is the same colour as the walls and ceiling, it does create this pure volume and adds to the feeling of floating up in the trees."

Mid-century classic furniture by Eero Saarinen, George Nelson and Hans Wegner mixes with custom designs by Gluck+, including the dining table. The plywood kitchen is another bespoke design. >











A spare interior aesthetic takes nothing away from the inimitable view. Mid-century modern classics, including the Arne Jacobsen for Fritz Hansen 'Series 7' dining chairs and Hans Wegner for Carl Hansen & Son 'Shell' chairs, are interspersed with bespoke pieces by owner/architect Thomas Gluck's design firm Gluck+, such as the dining table that cantilevers off the kitchen wall, and the window benches with bookcases and storage space underneath. In front, a 'Puzzle Rug Imperial' rug from Contraforma adds pops of colour next to the more classic black 'Paramount Sofa' from Blu Dot.







**ABOVE:** 'Eames Wire' chairs by Herman Miller and a Knoll 'Saarinen' dining table make up a simply furnished corner. The ensuite, **BELOW**, with green tiles from New York's Nemo Tile reference the muted green of the home's exterior. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** clad in opaque green fritted glass, which mirrors the natural environment, the treehouse forms an arresting silhouette against the landscape. **Details, last pages. For more information, see Sourcebook on page 219.**



< The kitchen is the one part of the upper level that can be sealed off with pocket doors, both from the living space and the stairway, forming part of the central core of the building. A roof terrace sits on top of the tower, offering a platform for drinking in the panorama and connecting with nature.

The timber- and steel-framed tower is completely clad in glass, helping the house to connect with the surroundings and dissolve into them. Clear vision glass is used around the main living areas, on the staircase (which also provides a natural ventilation stack for throwing out hot air in summer) and for edited openings in the bedrooms and bathrooms. The rest of the glass cladding is opaque green fritted (enamelled) glass, which reflects the trees with a mirror-like quality. "We wanted the building to feel as though it was in the woods, but obviously we have chosen this very artificial and geometric form," says Gluck. "One of the underappreciated aspects of glass is its reflectivity. It becomes this instant camouflage because you are mirroring the view and the trees, so it almost makes the house disappear. It's a counterintuitive way of trying to integrate the tower with the natural setting, as opposed to using natural materials like wood cladding."

Residing in a walk-up fifth-floor apartment in New York City most of the time, Gluck's family is well used to climbing stairs. Just in case they ever tire of it, there is a plan for a slim elevator tower alongside the main building, with a bridge at the upper level. For now, though, all are enjoying the experience of staying in the Tower, which adds a new dimension to the family compound.

"The children love it," says Gluck. "We can get away from everything and they can run around in the countryside. There is a lot of freedom here. And it's amazing being in the living room because you really are up among the trees. You never tire of it because it's constantly changing — at dawn, at dusk, when it rains, when there's a snowstorm. There's something very peaceful about getting away from our crazy lives in the city and being able to be in a space that is so contemplative." **VL**



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