

# LIVING THE HIGH LIFE

Branch out and take a bough in Sweden's stylish tree hotels

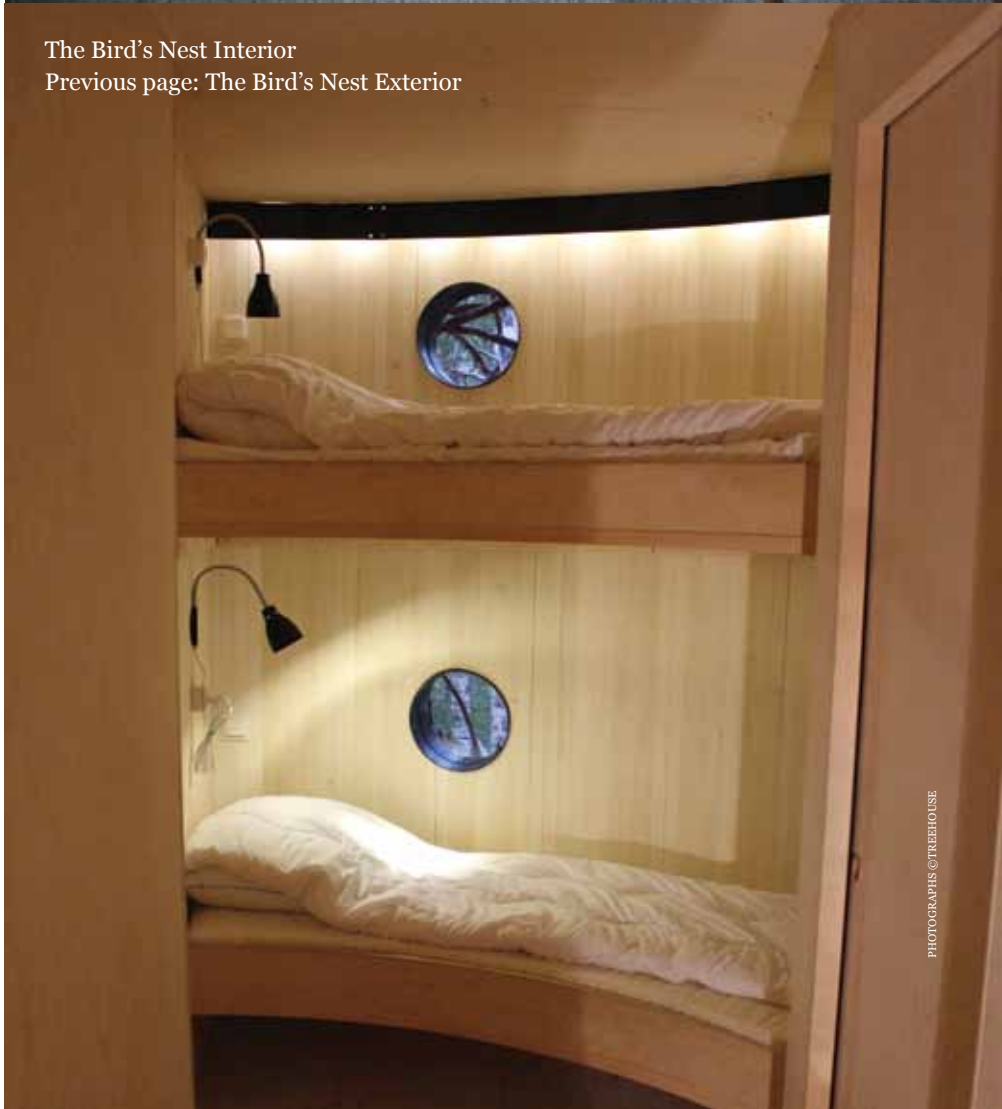
If you go down to the woods today you're in for a big surprise, especially if it's the forest outside Harads, a small town in northern Sweden 60 kilometres from the Arctic Circle, where you'll find not one, but five tree hotels, each an eco-based design concept the work of a leading architect. Tapping into but not taking advantage of developers' current craze for tree-house canopy chic and growing conviction for eco-travel, Britta and Kent Lindvall, proprietors of Brittas Pensionat (a hotel nearby at which guests check-in) bought the land to save it from being logged and anticipate opening as many as 24 rooms in the next five years. They will supplement the accommodation with a chapel, forest sauna and other service facilities. Treehotel [as the firm is called] even got the royal seal of approval when Swedish lovebirds Princess Victoria and Prince Daniel visited last November and inaugurated Victoria Path.

It must be the child in all of us, but nothing lifts the spirit like the thought of tree-house living; symbols of escape and adventure from Robin Hood and Winnie-the-Pooh to Swiss Family Robinson and Peter Pan, tales of other worlds and their arboreal accommodation options have enchanted young minds and imaginations. Watching the Northern Lights from the comfort of the canopy and a stray moose trudging through snow beside the frozen Lule River at Treehotel in Sweden serve to reinforce that sense of wonder.

One which has been enchanting - and challenging - the designers and architects that Lindvall commissioned; Sandell & Sandberg (Thomas Sandell), Interior Group AB (Bertil Harström), Marten Cyrene, Tham & Videgard Architects (Martin Videgard and Bolle Tham), each of whom has imagined these mini-playgrounds in the pines. There's Harström's Bird's Nest, indistinguishable from the real thing except for its pterodactylian size. With discreet windows hidden by a network of branches, the space boasts modern design with beds for a family



View from The Blue Cone



The Bird's Nest Interior  
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and two children. Its antidote - also Harström's - is UFO, which opens this month; so natural was the Bird's Nest the architect was inspired to create its contrary and conceived every boy's dream - to climb aboard a spaceship that's also a tree house. The ultimate two-for-one fantasy - Tarzan meets *The Thing From Another World*. Then there's Sandell's Blue Cone, a traditional wood construction with a facade of split birch which looks more like a red rectangular lego house and has two levels with a loft; it would be surreal in any other context but this eclectic canopy. Cyrene's Cabin is the most practical application of tree-house construction. A footbridge leads to the spacious deck affording a view of the valley of the Lule River. The capsule, with double room, is suspended from the deck and offers potential for future expansion, with additional tree houses, footbridges and even viewing platforms. The Cabin might one day branch out and network the entire canopy like an interlocking settlement.

But the pod that's gaining maximum wow factor is Stockholm-based Tham & Videgård's Mirrorcube, a practice that has won numerous awards for its designs. A lightweight aluminium structure hung around a tree trunk, Mirrorcube is a 4x4x4



The Mirrorcube



The UFO



The Cabin

## “Climb aboard a spaceship that's also a tree house”

metre-box clad in mirrored glass. The exterior reflects the surroundings and the sky, creating a camouflaged refuge. To prevent birds colliding with the reflective glass, a transparent ultraviolet colour is laminated into the glass panes visible to birds only. Inside, all is plywood and windows give a 360 degree view of the surroundings. Slick, cool and glossy this eye-and-sci-fi-cube is the pod *Predator* would have lived in - “there's something out there waiting for us and it ain't no man”, - the highly-intelligent all-but invisible alien jungle hunter from the 1987 Arnold Schwarzenegger film.

The heady mix of fantasy, fairytale and science fiction works because it's so grounded. “It's important that we find another way to value the forest rather than cut the trees for industrial use,” says Lindvall. “This Boreal forest is one of the Earth's lungs, we need to look after it.” And dream a little, too.