

Canopy construction in a class of its own

The Countryside Education Trust's New Forest Study Centre scooped the Best Sustainable/Technical Project Excellence Award at the LABC South East Building Excellence Awards 2009, held at the Thistle Hotel in Brighton in June



The New Forest Study Centre is the brainchild of Blue Forest Design Ltd, The Solent Centre for Architecture & Design and The Countryside Education Trust.

Situated in the picturesque Beaulieu Estate in the New Forest, the tree houses will attract more than 8,000 children and young adults from across the region each year. The provision of this inspiring setting encourages visitors to get close to nature and care for the world around them. The tree house structures are in complete harmony with their environment and several trees pass directly through the structure.

The centre comprises two tree house classrooms as well as offices, toilets and store rooms. Visitors are able to move from one classroom to the other using an adventurous rope bridge and several raised walkways. The project is an exemplary one with extensive use of timber, solar-powered lighting and rainwater harvesting. It will become an inspiring development that will champion these sustainable approaches and continue to deliver the Countryside Education Trust's environmental education programmes.

Samantha Sherwood, an architecture student from Oxford Brookes University, won a design competition with her innovative, sustainable concept for the study centre, which incorporates sustainable materials such as Forest Stewardship Council

wood, biomass heating, solar panels, natural insulation and rainwater collection for use in flushing the loos.

Blue Forest worked on the New Forest Study Centre project from design to completion, and their high standard of workmanship has been recognised with this regional award for building excellence. It confirms what can be achieved when the client, designer and builder are passionate about their product and are committed to working with local authority building control – New Forest District Council's building control team provided the site inspection service throughout its construction. It also provided specialist technical advice regarding Building Regulation requirements including design assessments, fire safety and accessibility.

John Brian, Building Control Manager, New Forest District Council, said: "The New Forest Study Centre is an inspiring, innovative and sustainable building, which is used to deliver environmental education."

"New Forest District Council was delighted to support the entry of the New Forest Study Centre into the 2009 LABC South East Building Excellence Awards."

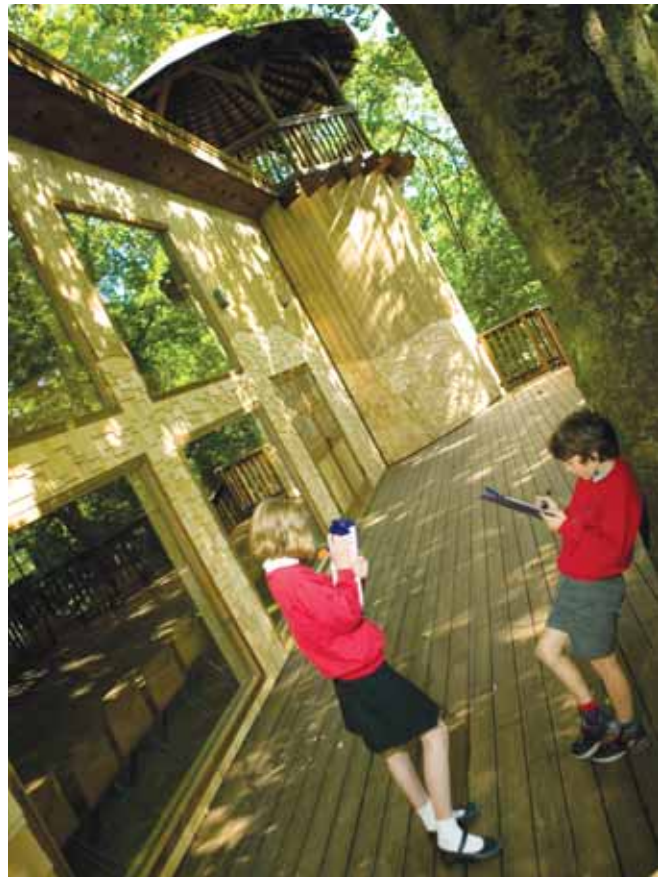
This project encompasses a carefully designed and constructed building which uses traditional sustainable materials that have been integrated perfectly into the sensitive forest environment."

He added: "The technical challenges associated with the construction of this building and the unique environmental location was significant. From

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a building control perspective, all matters were dealt with in a positive and professional manner. Queries raised under the Building Regulations were responded to and the appropriate information supplied. Matters raised on site were quickly investigated and resolved by the contractor. This approach and co-operation created a very positive working relationship with building control."

David Bridges, Director, Countryside Education Trust, said: "The purpose-built study spaces within the Tree House Study Centre and its ancillary buildings will be suitable for





use throughout the community, providing a stimulating environment in which local children, as well as those from inner-city areas, can get close to nature and experience the range of fieldwork activities which the CET offers. We always wanted the tree house design to be inspirational and sustainable and an education in itself. Now we have the reality, and it is more amazing than we could have imagined! Everyone's reaction, whether young or old has been 'wow'. I am delighted."

Nigel Matthews, The New Forest National Park Authority's Head of Visitor Services, added: "More people will now be able to experience the wonders of the National Park in and around this amazing building. Its superb natural design speaks volumes about the forest and how we can live in ways that help preserve it for generations to come."

Ralph Montagu of Beaulieu Estate (and Chairman of Trustees), said: "My father and I have been encouraging environmental education on

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the estate for many years, and we are very pleased that the courses run in the woods at Beaulieu will now have the benefit of a first class centre, not forgetting of course that the real learning experience is the great outdoors."

The UK's first ever treehouse study centre was officially opened in September 2008 by Alan Titchmarsh, countryside aficionado and Hampshire resident.