



The Team Behind *Out on a Limb* – a Tree Adventure exhibit

Despite bracing winter temperatures, construction of *Out on a Limb* began in early January. Together, Morris Arboretum staff, Metcalfe architects, and structural engineers from CVM Engineers, Inc., spent countless hours addressing every detail of the design and construction of the exhibit.

From an architectural standpoint, Alan Metcalfe, Principal of Metcalfe Architecture & Design, designed the exhibit to incorporate places that encourage people to stop, look, turn, move and linger – offering them a chance to “play” with something so familiar, yet see it in a new way.

Collaborating with Morris Arboretum’s Director, Paul Meyer and his knowledge of Chinese and Japanese garden design, Metcalfe broke the design into 30-foot lengths of walkway. Each section terminates in a balcony with an exhibit or observation area. The zigzag journey forces visitors to slow down and stop, look, and physically engage with the surroundings. Metcalfe incorporated the idea of Chinese “moongates” that frame views in gardens and create a sense of transition at important spots. The moongates are located at the pavilion entry and at the entry to the suspension bridge to a giant bird’s nest. The entrance of *Out on a Limb* features an arched trellis designed to create a magical transition from being anchored to the ground to climbing upward into the trees. Comprised of a series of 10-foot diameter wood hoops and covered with vines, the entrance is modeled after a trellis from Versailles.

While determining exactly how the tree canopy structure would be built among the trees, preservation of the surrounding trees and their rooting environment was paramount, in addition to achieving maximum stability and safety. Working with Metcalfe, CVM served as the structural engineers and construction managers for the project, overseeing subcontractors and supervising the day-to-day operations. Winter saw bitter cold temperatures and snow, while spring brought significant rainfall, creating challenges for the crews. Working collaboratively, steelworkers, carpenters, masons and workers from many other trades endured countless 12-hour days to ensure the project was completed on time.

Finally, the New England firm of Forever Young Treehouses, brought their expertise in creating accessible treehouses to *Out on a Limb*. Forever Young Treehouses specializes in the construction of treehouses for children and young adults with special needs, who are routinely confronted with barriers to fun and play in their daily lives. An accessible treehouse removes these obstacles, bringing people of all abilities together and closer to nature. Forever Young Treehouses are not only ADA-compliant, but also safe, unique in character and craftsmanship. Further, they use building methods that protect the health of the trees, echoing Morris Arboretum’s Tree Adventure central theme – *We need trees and trees need us*. Forever Young Treehouses harvested much of the wood that was incorporated into the *Out on a Limb* exhibit, bringing a unique perspective to their work on Tree Adventure.