

Making the Porch

It started in a dream of woods,
Sequoia, Douglas Fir, and Cedar,
The giants in this Western earth,
Blending down the coastal range:

I lay on moss in redwood valleys,
Looked up through tiered branches at worlds
Of birds, insects, three hundred feet,
Touched long-grained shingles, whole and scented
Though cloven and stacked for eighty years.
And up the hills were darker fir
With limbs like ladders crowding up
Until I could glimpse the silent sea,
The same cold current from Oregon
Where Indians carved sixty foot canoes,
Massive lintels, forests of totems
From the bouyant, spirited cedar logs.

I chose the wood in the dream's retreat,
White, close-fibered fir for strength
In the supporting beams and joists,
And for delight the redwood heart—
Soft, buried for its centuries
Inside the living tree, the grain
True in sixteen foot lengths, and graced
With patina for deck and rails,
And for variety, above,
On the balcony, seen from below
As well, the knotted cedar planks
Whose grain bleeds rich, brown in the rain.

My daughter helped, clumsy but calm
And careful as the structure grew
And rhythms grew upon our minds:
Evenings lengthening into June,
The ritual of measure, mark, and cut,
Driving each nail with four slow strokes.
We planned and changed and found our way,
Fitting the dream to what was there:
Supports bolted to brick spanned out
To posts for rails and steps, one joist
On the stump between two trunks of a tall,
Three-pronged juniper we'd saved.
The sap of juniper and fir
Melded on the stump, welding house
To tree. We molded the decking free
Only an inch for the trunks to sway.

The whine of power jarred against
The rhythms, so I sawed by hand;
And even speaking slowed until
We moved on silence in the dusk,
Increasingly obsessed with fit—
Spacing, adjusting lengths of scrap,
Spare cedar from another job,
So that it seemed mere time would hold
And let us make the pieces blend,
With only sawdust left, to feed
The earth—and us, to lie on wood
And make a dream again of dreams.

—Eugene England