

Notes on Winnie-the-Pooh's house-tree

1. It is impossible to determine where the tree ends and where Winnie-the-Pooh's house begins.¹ The house could equally have been built around the structure of the tree (*primitive hut* model) or the tree could have grown around the house (*over your cities grass will grow* model). In this sense, it is a typology that combines both the primitive and the post-apocalyptic.



— Winnie-the-Pooh's house-tree, *Winnie-the-Pooh* (2011).

1. Could a plant be defined on the basis of how someone claims that it relates to other objects and where they draw its limits? Winnie-the-Pooh's house could be either 1) a house within a tree in the Hundred Acre Wood or 2) the Hundred Acre Wood. Limits, hierarchies, and relations between objects are often demarcated by their scale or quantity; one can find, for instance, one hundred small plants that exist within a house or a house that exists within a giant plant (as in the case of Winnie-the-Pooh's house).

2. "Winnipeg". Ian Fleming is believed to have named the arch-enemy in his 1959 James Bond novel *Goldfinger* after his eccentric and temperamental neighbor in Hampstead: the architect Ernő Goldfinger.

Goldfinger, who would later become famous for designing the Trellick Tower, built a modernist house in 1939 for himself and his family on Willow Road, a quiet Victorian street opposite Hampstead Heath. To make room for his project, Goldfinger demolished some pre-existing traditional cottages. In that conservative period (and neighborhood), such a modern development was met with disapproval, and many local residents, including Ian Fleming, were fiercely opposed to its construction.²

Goldfinger was known for his bad temper, and perhaps that explains why his fictional eponym is much better known than the irritable architect's progressive social visions for public housing projects. Ever since we heard this story, we have been fascinated by this possible origin of the Bond villain.

A. A. Milne, the original creator of Winnie-the-Pooh, was born in Hampstead on 1882. Although the precise address of his family home is unknown, we do know that his school was a few hundred meters from Willow Road in Mortimer Crescent.

No satisfactory explanation exists for why a sign reading "Sanders" hangs above the entrance to Winnie-the-Pooh's house³, but it could be a nod to Frank Sanders, a friend of E. H. Shepard, the illustrator who created the drawings for A. A. Milne's book. Shepard, who designed the interiors of Winnie's house, also lived near Hampstead Heath.

The empty interior of Pooh's house consists of a single element: piles of honey pots amid a few pieces of rustic furniture. Perhaps the most iconic piece is a three-legged milking stool—a utilitarian design that can be found in many cultures. This modest type of stool was the model for Alvar Aalto's Stool 60, found inside Ernő Goldfinger's house in Willow Road.⁴



— Winnie-the-Pooh's house-tree interior, *Winnie-the-Pooh* (2011).

Winnie's name comes from the visits that A. A. Milne and his youngest son, Edward, made to the London Zoo, where a Canadian brown bear was on display during World War One. The brown bear was named Winnie after Winnipeg, the capital of the Canadian province of Manitoba, where it is believed he originally came from.

The London Zoo was a place of architectural experimentation during the 1930s: It seems reasonable to apply models of modern architecture to create imaginary landscapes and enclosures for animals. The best-known example of this architecture is the penguin pool designed by Berthold Lubetkin in 1934, where an arctic landscape is represented by an open expanse of white concrete pools and ramps.⁵

Winnie-the-Pooh does not live in a modernist house like the flesh-and-blood animals in London Zoo.⁶

The house and the surrounding landscape inhabited by Winnie and his animal friends were inspired by Five Hundred Acre Wood, within Ashdown Forest, in East Sussex, England. However, it is thought that Shepard used to sketch trees from Hampstead Heath to complement his notes on vegetation, topography, and landscape of the Hundred Acre Wood.

In 2007, superstar singer George Michael publicly admitted he had been cruising in Hampstead Heath, but he claimed that this did not pose any problem for his relationship with his partner Kenny. He was arrested for having sex in public with a van driver named Frank in 2006 and again in 2008 for possession of cannabis in a public toilet in the same park.

Ian Fleming's world-famous spy novels are a highly romanticised version of the life and adventures of a real-life spy named William Stephenson.

William Stephenson was born on 1897 in Winnipeg, Canada.



2. Interior of 2 Willow Road, designed by Ernő Goldfinger and built in Hampstead, London in 1939.

3. "Once upon a time, a very long time ago now, about last Friday, Winnie-the-Pooh lived in a forest all by himself under the name of Sanders.

"What does 'under the name' mean?" asked Christopher Robin. "It means he had the name over the door in gold letters and lived under it."

"Winnie-the-Pooh wasn't quite sure," said Christopher Robin.

"Now I am," said a growly voice.

"Then I will go on," said I."

Milne, A. A. 2005. *Winnie-The-Pooh*. Puffin Books.



4. 2 Willow Road Bath.



5. The Penguin Pool at London Zoo, designed by Berthold Lubetkin and the Tecton Group and built in 1934.



6. Gorilla House at London Zoo, designed by Berthold Lubetkin and the Tecton Group and built in 1933.

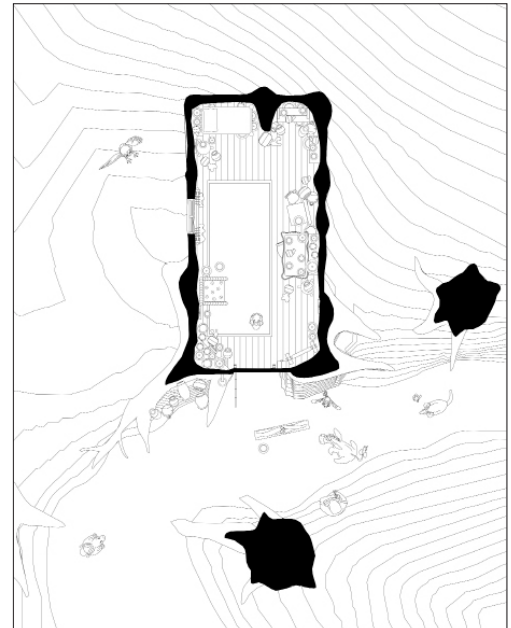
3. "Agoraphobia". Unlike most cartoons, Winnie-the-Pooh's adventures develop almost entirely within the characters' homes or on journeys between them. This is not because the interior items are animated—the furniture and interior decoration of these animal dwellings are disturbingly ordinary for a universe of anthropomorphic animals—but because the adventure unfolds within the epic realm of comfort. One classic example is the scene where the bear bursts into the rabbit's warden to gorge on his friend's honey. Having depleted the

rabbit's sustenance, Pooh gets stuck while attempting to exit through the same hole by which he entered. Rabbit then takes advantage of this situation by turning the now obstructed entrance to his house into a piece that is both decorative (by painting a face and adding two branches that resemble moose antlers and a frame around Pooh's backside) and functional (by placing a shelf with a candlestick, a tablecloth, some jars, and a pipe underneath Pooh's bottom). Trapped between the inside and the outside of the den, the episode parodies the adventurous desire—the adventure takes place in the impossibility of *going-out-to*.



— Sequence from *The Many Adventures of Winnie-the-Pooh* (1977)

4. "Imagination". As in any other illustration, animated film, or video game, the fact that Winnie-the-Pooh's house is not a physical space allows it to be transformed (to grow, shrink, morph, etc.) to fit the frames that work best for each narrative. If we transfer this strategy to the design processes, we will surely be able to imagine⁷ new spatial qualities: By using media seldom employed by architects (illustration, animation, film, video, videogame), traditional typologies ("a house", "a bar", "a school", etc.) can easily be transformed ("a house within a plant"). Imagination, as a method, makes it easier to change course; it broadens an object's expressive potential and is essential for the creation of new meanings.



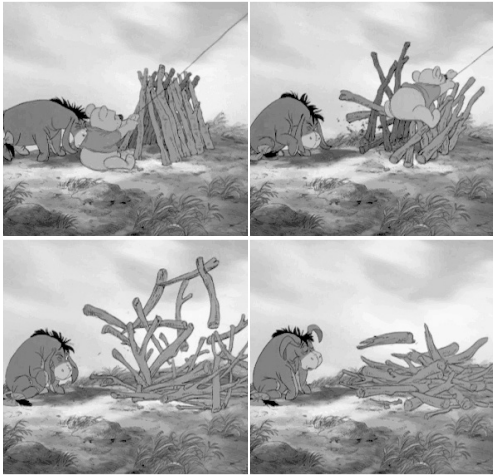
— Architectural survey of Winnie-the-Pooh's house-tree (ground floor).⁸

7. "I want to address the issue of a radical conception of imagination, arguing that it should have a central place in fine art education. However, I see imagination as central not only to art, but to all educational, social and political concerns. The philosopher Paul Ricoeur has, for example, stated that: 'It is no extravagance to formulate the problem of the future of Europe in terms of imagination.'"

https://www.elia-artschools.org/userfiles/Image/custom-images/products/38/Inain_Biggs.pdf

8. If one wanted to translate the imaginary space of Winnie-the-Pooh's house into a physical one with actual measurements, one could use Christopher Robin's height as a reference to proportion the rest of the house. Considering that it is a nine-year-old boy, that the average height of a child of that age is around 1.20 m, and that he is about twice as tall as Winnie-the-Pooh, one could assume that Winnie-the-Pooh is 0.60 m tall.

5. The only character in the Hundred Acre Wood that does not live in a house integrated into nature is Eeyore, the anhedonic and depressive donkey. His self-supporting house is an elementary hut made with logs but no foundations. Being separate from nature, it is constantly prone to accidents: a gust of wind, running around, or even a false move by Eeyore himself within his house can cause it to collapse. The insistence on the fragility of autonomous architecture—and the pleasure shown by its creators in destroying it over and over again—is a sign of Winnie-the-Pooh's anti-modernism that associates what is organic with the natural and the natural with safety (the highest possible idea of well-being in Pooh's universe). However, in one of Disney's versions of *The House at Pooh's Corner* where the emancipation of architecture from its primitive state is staged through the construction of Eeyore's hut, the donkey states a seemingly ironic phrase that also proves premonitory and contrary to the creators' anti-modernist logic. After crawling into his home, in what seems like a parody of minimal modernist housing, the donkey looks around at the other characters and confirms: **"It's the best house yet"**.



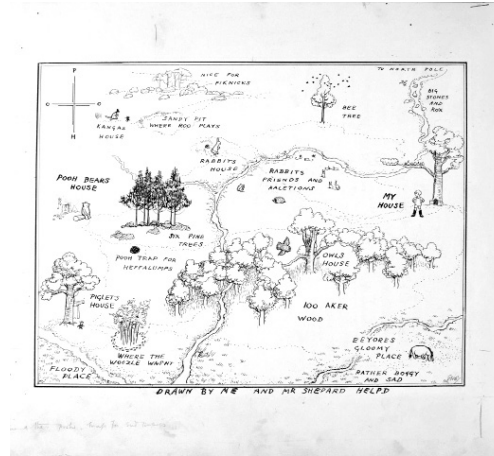
— Sequence from *The Many Adventures of Winnie-the-Pooh* (1977)

6. **"The most photographed barn in America"**: In the most commented-on scene of Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, its protagonist, a university professor who parodies the American twist of post-structuralism, pays a visit along with his squire to "the most photographed barn in America." Tormented by the idea that its infinite photographic reproductions have destroyed the possibility of seeing the barn for what it is, the professor trusts that critique will save him from the ghosts of the simulacrum: recognizing that the barn cannot be seen is the first step toward seeing it. In this parody of post-structuralism, the professor sees photographic reproduction—the proliferation of representations—as the place in which reality is destroyed. If Don DeLillo's barn is the most photographed in America, Winnie-the-Pooh's house is the most reproduced. Winnie-the-Pooh is the third most profitable franchise in Disney's stable, grossing 5.5 billion dollars annually, behind only Mickey Mouse and Star Wars, and the only one in which the houses are as important as the characters themselves. For the professor in DeLillo's novel, Winnie-the-Pooh (himself a simulacrum) is a machine for consuming reality.



— Image from *The Many Adventures of Winnie-the-Pooh* (1977)

7. **"Slesinger v. Disney"**: If anything like the original barn in *White Noise* existed in the Winnie-the-Pooh universe, it would be the first drawing of the Hundred Acre Wood map, which was auctioned off at Sotheby's in July 2018 for £ 430,000⁹, the highest price ever paid for a book illustration. Of course, the rights to reproduce Winnie-the-Pooh's house are worth much more than any original drawing. Shirley Slesinger fought a legal battle against Disney for eighteen years and lost a two billion dollar lawsuit¹⁰. The widow of Stephen Slesinger¹¹, a literary agent who saw Pooh's potential in 1930 and bought the rights to sell related merchandising, began to exploit Winnie's image in clothes, toys and dolls that he sold in department stores. Walt Disney himself approached Slesinger and persuaded her to sell the rights to Winnie-the-Pooh in order for him to make television programs in exchange for royalties. Twenty years later, while visiting Disney World in Florida, Slesinger realized that she was not receiving royalties for much of the Winnie-the-Pooh merchandise on sale and sued Disney. The legal suit that Slesinger would eventually lose¹² later became entangled with another copyright lawsuit filed by the granddaughters of A. A. Milne and the illustrator E. H. Shepard.



— Original map of Hundred Acre Wood, drawn by EH Shepard in 1926

9. "Sotheby's on Twitter: "#AuctionRecord: The original drawing of Winnie ... " Accessed August 9, 2018. <https://twitter.com/sothebys/status/1016644955987742720>.

10. "Disney wins Winnie-the-Pooh copyright case | Business | The Guardian." Accessed August 9, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2009/sep/30/winnie-the-pooh-disney-law-suit>.

11. Stephen Slesinger is credited with the idea of giving Winnie-the-Pooh its red shirt. This decision was probably not the result of prudishness—if anything, the shirt emphasizes the nudity of Pooh and friends—but to distinguish him from other teddy bears, and possibly to facilitate copyright registration.

12. "She was often seen sharing the back seat of a chauffeur-driven Cadillac - licence plate POOH 1 - with a 3ft Pooh figure belted in beside her." "Shirley Slesinger Lasswell - Telegraph." Accessed August 9, 2018. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1559378/Shirley-Slesinger-Lasswell.html>.

8. **"The House at Pooneil Corners"**. En uno de los clips que Jean-Luc Godard rodó para su película inacabada sobre la contra-cultura americana, *I A.M.*, se puede ver a los miembros de Jefferson Airplane interpretando la canción *The House at Pooneil Corners* en una azotea de Nueva York. El concierto en la azotea era un producto diseñado para presentar la profecía—que se enteren los vecinos que ha llegado el rock and roll—como espectáculo—los vecinos no se enteraban porque abrieran las ventanas sino porque la televisión producía, registraba y difundía la noticia. Esa dimensión espectacular se traduce en las imágenes rodadas por Godard de dos maneras distintas: la multiplicación de puntos de vista desde los que se graba al público dan la impresión de que cualquier ventana puede esconder una cámara y la imposibilidad de decidir quiénes de entre los vecinos que se asoman a la ventana o de los paseantes que se detienen en la calle son actores y quiénes espectadores. *The House at Pooneil Corners* es una canción sobre el apocalipsis nuclear en la que figura una extraña fantasía de Paul Katner, guitarrista de Jefferson Airplane, según la cual el fin del mundo llegaría cuando Winnie the Pooh se fusionara con Fred Neil—cantautor a cuyo nombre le ha

sobrevivido su famoso *Everybody is Talkin'*—. Al parecer Katner veía a Pooh y a Neil como dos principios opuestos, yin y yang, el bien absoluto de Pooh y la pulsión de muerte de Neil.

9. Where does the critical drive that seeks to restore the hidden meaning of mass-culture come from? In cartoon animals, Hollywood films, or advertising, critics see a non-formulated ideology; and in their work, they try to show them for what they "really" are: products designed to satisfy the desire of capital. That process creates a hierarchy in which mass-culture products are beneath the level of reality—as if the simulations of the possible were not truly real. So what is this drive toward demystification a symptom of? Or, in other words, how could we take the Hundred Acre Wood as nothing more than the Hundred Acre Wood? **"Winnie-the-Pooh is Winnie-the-Pooh is Winnie-the-Pooh is Winnie-the-Pooh"**.



— The Chinese government has censored messages and images of Winnie-the-Pooh to avoid its comparisons with its current president, Xi Jinping

— **APRDELESP, Fabien Cappello y Xavier Nueno Guitart**
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