

Abused children can't wait

Winners of that contest designed three of the 16 houses in this year's Parade of Playhouses which runs July 10-26 at NorthPark Center.

"I don't know how you'd say no when CASA asks," said Borson, a Dallas architect. "Between the challenge of designing a playhouse and the cause Dallas CASA stands for, there's not a way to say no."

The idea for running the contest came to Borson after he first helped with Parade of Playhouses. The challenge of scaling down a structure, incorporating design and imagination and keeping within design specifications invigorated him. Borson thought the contest would appeal to young architects, and he was right. Now in his fourth year of running the contest, Borson received 162 designs from 59 countries on six continents in 2015.

What Borson loves is the diversity of both nationality and age represented in submissions. Each year, submissions just keep getting better, he said.

Judging takes place in three rounds. An initial review by Borson weeds out any houses that violated design or safety rules, then a panel of judges whittles the list down to 30. Judges are architects, designers, contractors, artists and even a couple of kids who play the vital role of tie-breakers.

"The grown-ups think about budget, constructability, safety and such," he said. "The kids just know if they want to play in it or not. Their filter is very simple."

The playhouses are figurative representations of a child's desire to be a grown-up, but that's only the start of the appeal of the playhouses to adults and children alike.

"These are small, bite-sized structures, both simple and complex," he said. "What's amazing to me is how unifying they are. You can't look at the designs and tell where they came from."

In the end, Borson said the greatest unifier is cause.

If people didn't feel good about Dallas CASA and the difference their volunteer advocates are making the community, they wouldn't do it," he said. "The cause we're doing this for is what matters most."

