



# **SIMALL WONDERS**

Liz Sutton, left, and Ashley Lee show one of the two dollhouses they designed to sell in the silent auction of the Gigi's Playhouse 2018 Gala, "I Have A Voice."  
PHOTOS BY KELLY WILKINSON/INDYSTAR

## These dollhouses are so intricate, they look real

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A 2,400-square-foot custom-designed mid-century modern house — with apron sink, marble counters, spacious balcony patio and personally curated art collection — might sell for \$400,000 or so in the Meridian-Kessler neighborhood.

Bidding for these two houses start at \$500. But, they're only 30 by 40 inches. Or 1/12 the size of a regular house.

Potted plants sprout from beads. A Christmas ornament, halved and attached to a necklace chain, serves as a hanging bubble chair. A globe light in one of the rooms is a high-gloss-painted ping-pong ball and some of the "artwork" is cut from an Anthropologie catalog.

These precise and intricate details are just a few of the hundreds inside this dollhouse interior designer Ashley Lee created to auction off at the Gigi's Playhouse "I Have a Voice" Gala on Feb. 24 at the Indiana Roof Ballroom.

"It's kind of a way to be a kid again," Lee said. "At least that's how it felt when I was working on it."

Lee, along with coworker Liz Sutton, each

designed a dollhouse to auction off at the gala, which will benefit Gigi's Playhouse's Down syndrome achievement center. The two are both interior designers at Axis Architecture, and have spent most of their spare time this year working on the houses.

"All of the little pieces have a personality," Lee said. "It's not something we just went to Michael's and bought off the shelf. We curated a look like we do in our real projects. We imagine a client living here, what kind of artwork they would collect. It was all thoughtfully picked out. Nothing was just put in here for no reason."

Bidding for each of the two houses start at \$500 during the gala's silent auction, but the designers hope they'll go for \$1,000 or more.

"It'll be really exciting to hear people's reactions," Sutton said. "Everyone sees a dollhouse and see something different."

The project is personal for Lee, who had wanted to build a house since her daughter, Zevie, was born with Down syndrome two years ago.

"When I dreamed about having a daughter, my whole life I dreamed about building doll-

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A close-up of Sutton's dollhouse, created to auction off at Gigi's Playhouse 2018 Gala, a benefit for Gigi's Playhouse Down syndrome achievement centers.



Rooms are seen in the dollhouse designed by Ashley Lee, to sell in the silent auction of the Gigi's Playhouse 2018 Gala, "I Have A Voice," a benefit for Gigi's Playhouse Down syndrome achievement centers. PHOTOS BY KELLY WILKINSON/INDYSTAR

## Dollhouse

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houses and playing with dollhouses with her, because I did that when I was little," Lee said. "So when I had her and I got the diagnosis of Down

syndrome, I felt like I'm never going to be able to do that. I'm never going to be able to do all the things I thought I was going to do with a daughter. It took a minute, but I realized I will be able to do those things and it's going to be fine. And it is fine."

Sutton jumped at the opportunity to build one of the Zevie Hazel Houses, as they're calling them.

"I was like, 'I have to do this with you, it just sounds like so much fun. What do you mean I could build a house? Heck yeah I want to build a dollhouse,'" she said. "So it's like I had my own little dollhouse for a couple of months."

Lee and Sutton used professional software to design the frame of each before taking it to Midwest Studios, which donated and cut the birch plywood exterior.

"I've never made anything small, so I think why this was so much fun was because I kind of figured it out as I went along," Sutton said. "I messed up a few times along the way."

The two have personalized each house, down to building furniture, textures on the cabinets and



Pictured is a view of the kitchen Liz Sutton's dollhouse.

designing miniature chairs printed on a 3D printer.

"We have a lot access to samples of materials, so the materials are pretty high end," Lee said.

Working on the dollhouses was a nice change from the ultra-modern work the two design for Axis clients.

"Mid-century modern is very much a part of me," she said. "It actually is really nice to work on something that you're making all of the decisions and you're not presenting to a client. Nobody can tell you no. It's very refreshing. Even at this — especially at this

—size. It's like instant gratification."

Although the two houses might look delicate, they're sturdy and meant to be played with.

Zevie, though, will have to wait until she's older to get her own.

"Someday she'll find out that you built this and she can't play with it, and she'll be sad," Sutton said to Lee, laughing.

Interested in bidding on one of these houses? You can do it online here.

Call *IndyStar* reporter Amy Bartner at (317) 444-6752. Follow her on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.