

The Ghost of Splinter Cove features a naturalistic basement setting where two siblings and their friend spend the night on a pretend camping trip. Though the architecture of the basement is fragmented and abstracted, the set dressing and items within the basement are naturalistic and real. Their imaginary friend, known only as “J”, narrates as the three children set up their tent and supplies. This domestic space reflects the idea of a naturalistic setting which is both a part of the home for the children and home for “J.” However, there is also the supposition of a fake transformation via the technology of a phone app—which is supposed to control sound and lighting effects to make the space simulate an outdoor campsite for the children. In this way, Dietz sets up a domestic space that is transformed into a fantasy that lives within the reality of the naturalistic setting. However, what follows next is a true architectural transformation of the space into an actual wilderness. While this presents a break from the naturalistic idea of domestic space, it introduces a fascinating and unexpected vision of what home means.



The Ghosts of Splinter Cove, by Steven Dietz, produced by Children’s Theatre of Charlotte, 2019.
Directed by Courtney Sale. Photo by Fritz Bennet.



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On page 46 of his script, Dietz says, “All evidence of the basement vanishes . . . leaving the tent alone in what feels like a dark wooded clearing . . . surrounded by a dark, moonless sky.” This *au vista* transformation is achieved by slowly clearing any vestiges of realistic set dressing, removing some of the basement walls, and jumbling the rafters above the set. The audience comes to learn that this is an unexpected version of domestic space—the wilderness that houses the memory of a little boy who (in the past) goes to find help for his injured grandfather and disappears—the space that the ghost of “J” as a small boy has inhabited for so many years. The children must surmount a cove, a cliff, and a dark forest to try to find this little boy, who they believe is missing in real-time. Ultimately the two domestic spaces merge when the boy is “found” and reunited with his grandfather, who has also recently died. Home does not always equal house—domestic space in the second half of this play is a place where memory resides. The scene design thus focuses on transforming a concrete type of domestic space to an unexpected imaginary wilderness that seems real on stage yet houses only the ghosts of J and his grandfather.