



◀PETE NELSON

TREEHOUSE ~MASTER~

Meet a master and get some tips for building your own treehouse.

By Kim Fernandez

Pete Nelson's parents always told him to follow his dreams. But even they were surprised when he announced he wanted to build treehouses as a career.

Today, they and the rest of his family are thrilled about his choice. Star of Animal Planet's "Treehouse Masters" and the owner of Nelson Treehouse and Supply, Nelson is well-known for his fantastic treehouses that serve as everything from play structures to full-time homes, restaurants and hotels.

STARTING YOUNG

"I used to fantasize about treehouses while I was supposed to be thinking about other things in school," he says. Nelson spent a lot of his boyhood working with hand tools in a workshop with his grandfather. The former Scout remembers being impressed by things guys in his troop built. When he grew up, he became a homebuilder and thought about how the houses he built on the ground might work up in the branches above.

"In 1987, it hit me like a ton of bricks," he says, when neighbors built their kids a treehouse. "It was perfect. It had a gaslight hanging off and antlers in the eaves and

a pulley and a little ladder. It was just the quintessential treehouse."

Nelson immediately built one himself — never mind that he had no children — and decided he wanted to build treehouses for a living.

He'd studied economics in college but started brushing up on math and biology — two things he says are critical to building successful treehouses. He and his wife moved to Seattle, Wash., and he built houses there, learning about stacking beams and floors and asphalt roofing, and about

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spanning distances, working with living trees as structural elements and being creative with design.

In 1994, he wrote *The Treehouse Book* about building treehouses. The book's success helped launch his treehouse business.

STAR OF THE SHOW

"Treehouse Masters" debuted in 2013 on Animal Planet.

"The meat of the program is us building," Nelson says. "There's not a lot of fantasy in

the show. It's really what we do."

And what he does, he says, is the best thing in the world.

"We're treehouse builders," he says. "We're about the happiest group of people you can find."

When he's not designing and building his own treehouses, Nelson teaches other people how to build them; his company started selling treehouse supplies to amateur builders several years ago.

"We have no intention of building every treehouse in the world," he says. "We want to describe to people the steps involved and how to do it responsibly. There are big forces involved, and it's not to be taken lightly." ♣



THE BED FOLDS INTO THE WALL!



LISTEN TO THE TREES.

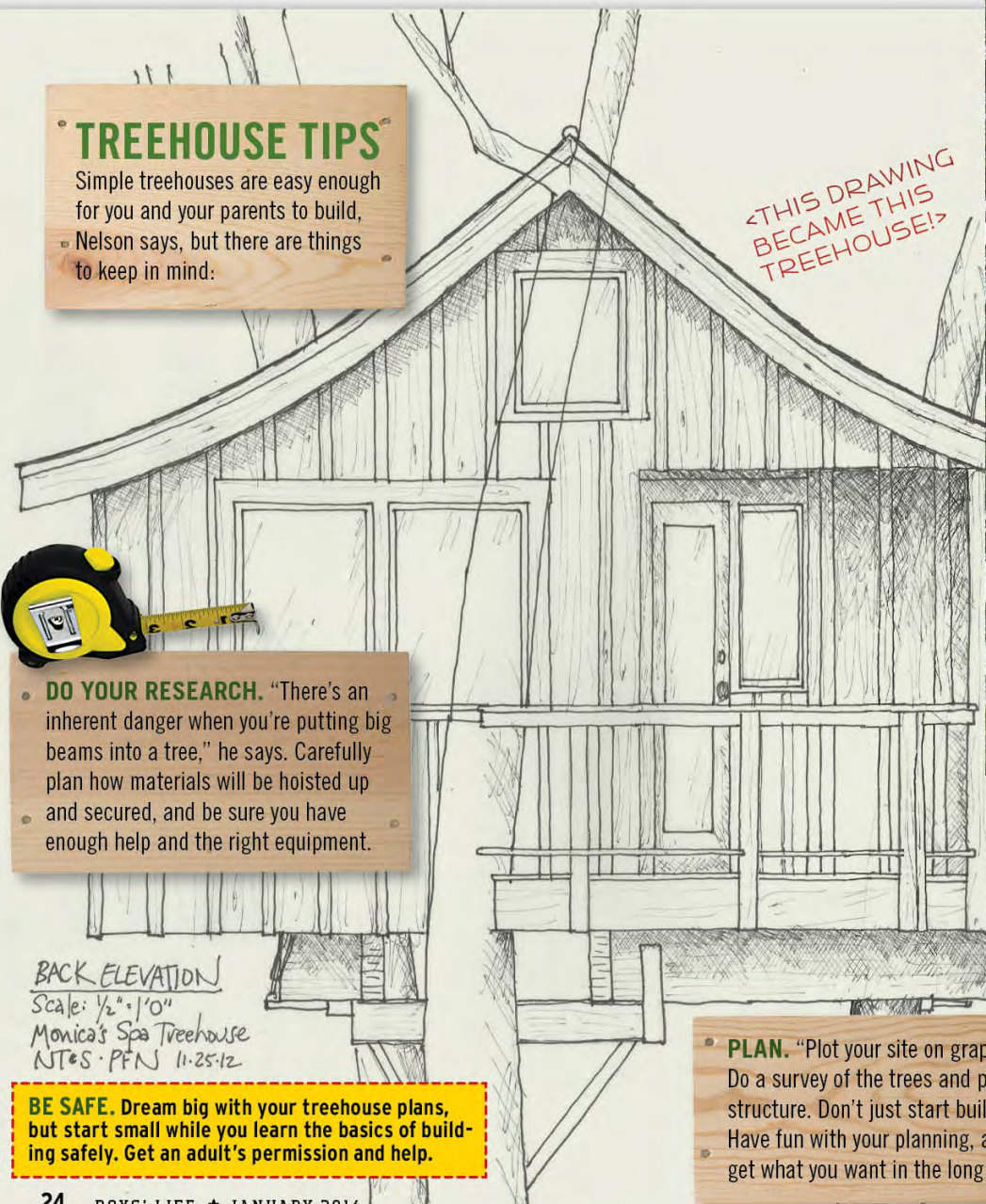
"Every tree is different," he says. "The layout of one tree to the next and its position to another is different every time. The best part of my job is interpreting what the trees are giving us."



TOOLS BY JOHN R. FULTON JR. (3)

TREEHOUSE TIPS

Simple treehouses are easy enough for you and your parents to build, Nelson says, but there are things to keep in mind:



THIS DRAWING BECAME THIS TREEHOUSE!

DO YOUR RESEARCH. "There's an inherent danger when you're putting big beams into a tree," he says. Carefully plan how materials will be hoisted up and secured, and be sure you have enough help and the right equipment.

BACK ELEVATION
Scale: 1/2" = 1'0"
Monica's Spa Treehouse
NT&S · PFN 11-25-12

BE SAFE. Dream big with your treehouse plans, but start small while you learn the basics of building safely. Get an adult's permission and help.

PLAN. "Plot your site on graph paper. Do a survey of the trees and plot your structure. Don't just start building. Have fun with your planning, and you'll get what you want in the long run."



USE THE RIGHT TOOLS. Nelson is a big fan of the treehouse attachment bolt (TAB), which is featured on his website (boyslife.org/links/nelson). You can also buy the bolt from suppliers or get your local machinist or fabricator to make some. Then, he says, learn how to properly use it and other tools. "If you do this incorrectly, it's a dangerous thing."

FIND THE RIGHT SITE. "If you've got 12 to 16 feet between trees, you've got a sweet spot for something spannable. Anything more than 18 feet and you need really heavy beams and heavy-duty engineering."

GET MORE DETAILS:
New Treehouses of the World by Pete Nelson. Abrams, \$37.50.
Treehouses & Playhouses You Can Build by David and Jeanie Stiles. Gibbs Smith, \$19.99.
Bookzoo
Buy the Life



"TREEHOUSE MASTERS" SECOND SEASON PREMIERES JAN. 10 AT 10 P.M. EASTERN TIME.