

Q&A: TY PENNINGTON: EXTREME RENOVATOR

'We all need that space where we can be ourselves'

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'Move that bus!'

This is Ty Pennington's trademark roar on *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, the ABC reno show known for its four-tissue rating.

On it, the charismatic star with movie-star good looks (he is a former model) demolishes and rebuilds houses for disadvantaged families within a week. Across the pond, he has also appeared in *Ty's Great British Adventure* for the BBC, which had him shake up the sleepy Cornwall town of Portreath with a similar, American-style redo.

When he's not doing TV, the graphic designer-cum-carpenter-cum-recent-cultural-phenom finds time to create wood furnishings for his online company Furniture Unlimited, a home-decor collection for Sears and storage products and clocks for Howard Miller.

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This fall, fans can check out his second how-to tome, *Good Design Can Change Your Life: Beautiful Rooms, Inspiring Stories* (Simon & Schuster) and start stocking up on Kleenex for Pennington's upcoming Christmas special.

What is 'good design' anyway?

My mom was a child psychologist, so I know all about being right-brained and having this intense creative side. But good design also involves your left brain, mathematics and logic. Carpentry is actually a very intense science where you have to work out exact calculations: What is the direction of the grain? Are these stacked pieces even and balanced? Can this construction support weight on top? Then, it's about fulfilling a need.

For Howard Miller, I did this one [home organization centre]; it comes with a cellphone and BlackBerry charger, an iPod USB port, a laptop hookup, all that stuff. One day, even all this will be obsolete, but that's what's central to good design; you gotta change with the times.

Which designers inspire you?

There's a Japanese-American designer I really admire, [George] Nakashima. He was really into woodworking, too.

Then, of course, I like the modernists, like Eames, Mies van der Rohe, etc.

There is also great work coming out of Brooklyn - guys making amazing stuff out of recycled furniture.

Where did you get your training in carpentry?

I don't have formal training from a big place like Cooper Union, but now I certainly work with people who do. My training has been my experience.

How would you describe your woodworking style?

I call it Modern Primitive. The lines are clean and simple but, when you look closely at it, you see that the construction - the joints, the fittings, the butterflies, the finishing - has quality. It all looks like it was made by hand, a skilled hand.

Home shows are hugely popular right now. Why do you think so many people are interested in decorating and renovation?

There is something about building your nest that I think really resonates with a lot of people. We all need that space where we can be ourselves.

And then there's that twist when design makes you feel good. I just made a headboard from a family's old porch, which had sentimental value for them.

I like doing that, taking old material and working it into something new and meaningful.

Your current show has a strong emotional component. Is that intentional or does the subject of home naturally inspire it?

A home is a very emotional place. And on *Extreme Makeover*, I meet so many incredible people. Their stories just blow me away. Let's face it, it's really about the people on the show and their struggles and how they cope.

It's rough, though, when people on the show start to cry because then I start to cry. But the emotion is real and I think that's what people connect with. It's a good feeling to give a person hope. I say it all the time, but I have the best job in the world.

Do you think the U.S. mortgage crisis will affect what you do?

That's a good question. And let's be real here - in my opinion, the people who are really suffering are the ones who went out and decided to buy a second home. But, you know, sales at Home Depot have not changed. Although people are not buying homes right now, they are still spending money and wanting to make their homes better.

Pennington by design

BORN

In 1964 in Atlanta, Ga.

EDUCATED

Graduated from the Art Institute in Atlanta with a degree in graphic design

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Modelled for J. Crew, Diet Coke and Levi's

Worked as a set designer for the film *Leaving Las Vegas* (1995)

Began his television career as the jovial carpenter on TLC's *Trading Spaces* (2000)

Made his debut as host on *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* (2003)

Released his first book, *Ty's Tricks: Home Repair Secrets* (2003)

Launched Ty Pennington at Home, a quarterly consumer magazine (2007)

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