

california

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FRESHEN UP

THE ULTIMATE
KITCHEN + BATH
ISSUE

MILL VALLEY
A HARMONIOUS
RENOVATION

LOS ANGELES
READY FOR
PRIME TIME

PETALUMA
THE FRESHEST
LUNCH IN TOWN

Designer Ryan Brown
of *Beavis Flipping Out*
brings a historic home
back to life, p. 108



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Los Angeles photographer Jonn Coolidge wasn't the only one to capture the Spanish Revival house designed by Ryan Brown—the home starred in an episode of Bravo's reality television show *Flipping Out*.



NECESSARY LUXURIES

OUR HOMES ARE WHERE WE
REFRESH AND RECHARGE. THE
KITCHENS AND BATHS ON
THE FOLLOWING PAGES ARE
DESIGNED TO NURTURE
BOTH BODY AND SOUL.



REALITY REMODEL

Flipping Out designer
Ryan Brown dishes the dirt
(and the dust) on renovating
in front of the camera.

BY JULIE CARLSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JONN COOLIDGE

When Los Angeles-based interior designer Ryan Brown goes to the supermarket these days, he steels himself for the inevitable. A cast member of the Bravo reality show *Flipping Out*, Brown is often recognized by fans as the even-keeled business partner of real estate entrepreneur Jeff Lewis, who was described by *The New York Times* as "a man balancing multiple mortgages like bricks on a noodle."

"People come up to me as if they know me," Brown says. "I'm very polite, so I always stop and have a conversation, but in the back of my mind I'm thinking, 'Do I know you, or do you recognize me from the show?'"

For the uninitiated, the formula for *Flipping Out* is simple: Quirky (read: "rivetingly dysfunctional but somehow appealing")



real estate developer and his eclectic cadre of employees work together to buy low, renovate big and sell high. Their territory is Los Angeles, and their specialty is finding bedraggled properties, overhauling them from top to bottom with quality materials and tasteful finishes, and selling them for a handsome profit.

The undeniably entertaining spectacle attracts 10 million viewers per episode worldwide. The show's tagline, "Drama for Sale," sums it up. Lewis delivers diva-like rants, fires employees and orders assistants to rearrange his refrigerator with all labels facing out. It's hard to turn away.

At the core of the show's success is the Lewis/Brown partnership. While Lewis handles the financials and the contractors, Brown focuses on the design and plays a cucumber-cool foil to Lewis' occasionally deranged persona. It's a partnership that has evolved over a decade, morphing from romance to business. "We have a longstanding

TOP LEFT: The renovated Spanish Revival house on Nottingham Drive. ABOVE: Ryan Brown (pictured at right) restored the home's entry to its original grandeur.

For the dining room, Brown sourced a rustic wrought-iron chandelier from Arte de Mexico and commissioned a round walnut dining table from a local artisan.





friendship, and although there have been rocky moments, I fully trust him," Brown says.

Season One of *Flipping Out* featured the overhaul of a graceful Spanish Revival house on Nottingham Drive in L.A.'s historic Los Feliz neighborhood. When the partners first toured the house, with its characteristic stucco exterior and terracotta-tiled roof, "it had been completely bastardized," Brown says. The wood beams had been ripped out and the architectural details decimated—the home's essential aura had been destroyed. "It had been stripped of its charm," says Brown. "Our strategy is to pick the ugliest house around."

As experienced speculators, the partners immediately recognized the property's potential. Nestled between other large, historic homes on a street just below the Griffith Observatory, the house's location was ideal. And despite the state it was in, the 5,000-square-foot 1920s house had much to recommend it: expansive common rooms, exceptionally high ceilings, an indoor/outdoor flow and loads of aesthetic potential.

"We did a full-scale renovation, taking the structure down to the studs," Brown says. "Our intention was to restore the original look and feel of the house."

Brown went to work sourcing both new and vintage elements to revive the house's sense of history. He scoured secondhand stores in Ventura for vintage lighting fixtures, haunted Liz's Antique Hardware for original doorknobs and hinges, found tiles for the stair risers similar to those produced by the historic Malibu Potteries and designed wrought-iron railings for the sweeping entry staircase. The original ceiling beams had been destroyed, so Brown re-created them.

ABOVE: For the living room mantel, Brown chose reclaimed Douglas fir for its time-worn appeal. **RIGHT:** Brown used the same wood for the kitchen peninsula.





The partners enlarged the kitchen by knocking out an unnecessary wall, and installed a richly variegated tile floor using San Felipe concrete pavers from Arto Brick. "They're an amazing source," Brown says. "I ordered the tiles in seven different shades of terracotta, to avoid the uniform look of a new floor. I'm such a control freak that I had to be on site when they laid the tiles so I could make sure they did it randomly and not in any sort of a pattern."

Brown adhered to the Spanish Revival theme in the kitchen, installing dark-stained, reclaimed (or "predistressed," as Brown says) Douglas fir cabinetry and a white subway-tile backsplash enlivened with a band of intricate mosaic tile. Oil-rubbed bronze faucets and a Mediterranean-style iron-and-glass lantern from L.A.'s Foundry complete the period look. Because the kitchen features a butler's pantry and ample under-counter storage, Brown did away with upper cabinets. "I'm a big fan of open shelving," he says. "Cabinets can close a kitchen off. I like everything at arm's reach and easily accessible."

In the dining room, Brown commissioned a massive, eight-foot round table with a distressed walnut top. He also called on decorative painter Michael Sullivan

The master bath features new materials that look old: Moorish floor tiles and a double vanity made of reclaimed Douglas fir, topped with a slab of Carrara marble.





In the master bedroom, Brown mixed traditional and contemporary pieces, reupholstering a pair of vintage chairs in Kelly Weastler's Imperial Trellis fabric and placing a cowhide bench at the foot of the bed.



Brown and Lewis were initially attracted to the house's vintage architectural details, like the wrought-iron balconies and the oculus window.

To create a discreet medallion on the ceiling, from which a wrought-iron chandelier from Arte de Mexico is suspended. "I had him paint the design on the ceiling and then sand it to look as if it had aged naturally," Brown says. In the living room, Brown restored the fireplace using more stained, distressed Douglas fir for the mantel and Mediterranean-style mosaic tiles for the hearth. A sleek B&B Italia sectional sofa adds a note of modernity, while a vintage cart from Cleveland Art, repurposed as a coffee table, offers a nod to the past. "I like a good mix of periods," Brown says. "None of my work is super-traditional."

Even before the paint was dry on the project, the house had a new inhabitant: Brown himself. Watchers of *Flipping Out* may remember that Brown and Lewis made a bet that whoever sold his house first would move into Nottingham (as the house was referred to in the series). As fate would have it, Brown's house sold mere hours before Lewis' did. Hilarity ensued. In the last episode of the season, Brown moved into Nottingham—but not before a psychic blessed the space. When the second season resumes this summer, viewers will discover that, despite the house's cosmic potential, Brown sold it and moved on to bigger and better projects. ■