

# WHAT CAN BROWN DO FOR YOU?

FLIPPING OUT STAR RYAN BROWN TALKS ABOUT LIFE ON TELEVISION, WORKING WITH HIS EX AND THE PLUSSES AND PERILS OF FLIPPING IN TODAY'S ECONOMY.

BY TOM FITZGERALD AND LORENZO MARQUEZ



**RYAN BROWN ENTERED THE RANKS** of gay reality television stars in summer 2007, with the debut of Bravo's *Flipping Out*. Centered around the Los Angeles-based real estate development business of obsessive-compulsive Jeff Lewis, *Flipping Out* documents how Lewis torments his employees in his never-ending search for perfection. Brown is Lewis' current business partner and former boyfriend, which makes for a highly entertaining on-screen relationship. Brown is also partnered with his brother Josh in Brown Design, Inc. ([browndesigninc.com](http://browndesigninc.com)), an interior design firm coming up on its 10th year of providing clean and simple design to commercial and residential clients.

Let's start with the 30-second Ryan Brown biography.

I grew up on the beach right outside of L.A. I lived there my whole life until I went away to college in San Diego. My major was neuroscience and I planned on going to medical school, but the summer after I graduated I took off for Spain and lived there for a little while, where I kind of put my plans on hold and started doing photography.

From there, you and your brother formed Brown Design, Inc., right?

We decided that we were going to split off and slowly started taking projects, client by client, squeezing them into our normal schedule. It grew to the point where we had to leave our day jobs to focus on the business, and now we have seven people working for us. I remember when we first moved to L.A., driving around and looking up in the hills and saying, "Someday, we're gonna be working on places like this." Now it's commonplace for us.

Let's switch to your personal life for a minute: How long have you and your husband Dale been together?

Although we live in California, we're not technically married.



Any plans to do so?

We talked about it and I think that's something that we'll end up doing in the future. We've been together for seven years now. Had it been an option seven years ago, I'm sure we would be married now, but the fact that we've been living together for so long and we have a daughter together — we're basically a married couple.

How old is Chloe?

She's a little over two years.

She's adorable.

Thank you very much. She's a great pleasure. In fact, she's at ballet class right now with Dale.

What's the public reaction to the glimpses into your family life on the show?

It's been amazing. I get emails on a regular basis from viewers of the show saying, "Wow, it really helped me realize that I can have a child." Here in L.A., it's so common for gay people to have kids. It's easy for me to forget that outside the major metropolitan cities, that's not always the case. We had some hesitation about showing my private life on the show, but I'm glad I did it, if it helps [show] that gay people can live a normal life and have children and be happy.

How did you meet Jeff Lewis?

He and I met through a mutual friend of ours who was an interior designer as well. He introduced us years ago. I had heard some stories about Jeff, and a lot of my friends were completely in love with him.

We didn't work together when we were dating. We broke up, and there was a period of six months to a year where we talked about doing some projects together. We bought our first house together and started working on that. It was certainly a rocky road at first. I don't recommend it to anybody — working with your ex right away — but it seemed to work with Jeff and me, for some reason. I think what it came down to was that he's one of the people in my life that I absolutely trust. To this day, we get along great. We fight, we scream and yell — you know, everything that's shown on the show — but at the end of the day we are a family, and we realize that.

How did *Flipping Out* come about?

It was basically the brainchild of Jeff's assistant, Jenni Pulos. She had an idea for a show [featuring] her and her husband called *The Wannabes*. They were trying to be actors, and they came up with what I thought was a great concept: [The show would follow] their everyday life, going to auditions and

trying to become actors while at the same time working for Jeff. But when they got Jeff on camera and saw what a big personality he was, Bravo ended up really liking that concept, so the show revolved more around Jeff than Jenni. Jenni is amazing. Honestly, [she's] one of the best people I know.

Has being on a reality show been good for business?

Absolutely. There's been a higher level of exposure. People see the types of design that Jeff and I do. I like to think that we do good work, and it shows. It's certainly drawn more attention to us and in that respect, it's been great.

Describe the Brown Design portfolio.

Quite varied. I think that the sign of a good designer is that they can do many styles. We do very modern, and we do very traditional. We've done Spanish and Cape Cod, and right now we're doing a project in Arkansas, building a 15,000-square-foot house from the ground up. It's going to be a Georgian, which we've never done before. So we get to go and research and really take it all in. It's a learning experience, and it's also great fun.

What are your general thoughts on the real estate market in light of what's happening



CAST OF FLIPPING OUT

with the economy?

The honest answer right now is "Who knows?" I think everybody is kind of in that phase. But I really have faith that in terms of a commodity, real estate is and always will be one of the best things that you can invest in.

Aside from everything else that's going on, it's a tangible property. In fact, Jeff and I are looking to buy properties right now because it's a great time to buy — when no one else is buying.

What are the up-and-coming markets right now?

There are microclimates that we see occurring. You'll have certain areas where just outside L.A., the property value is going down but we've got little areas, pockets in

the Hollywood Hills or certain others seeing a decent amount of growth. For people with solid jobs and steady incomes who are looking for homes, it's a great time to buy.

What are the absolute essential areas of the

home that we need to pour money into? People always look at kitchens and bathrooms. It's where we spend our time. The kitchen has always been a meeting place for families, but now the trend is definitely going more in the direction of rooms that combine the kitchen and the family room. On our properties, that's something that we always try to create, a joint space. That really grabs people when they come in, as opposed to small, boxed-in kitchens.

What are people looking for in modern bathrooms?

I think that a spa-like experience is what really draws people to a bathroom. Lately, what I've been doing is making the shower bigger. If you can have a separate, free-standing bathtub, I think that's great. But I think on a daily basis most people are taking showers,



and they love these shower rooms that have a glass wall and rain showerheads. We're also raising our cabinets off the floor, so visually the whole room looks a lot bigger.

How do you determine if a house is worth flipping?

We've trained ourselves to know how much we're going to spend based on past experiences, but it's not something I'd recommend to just anybody. You really need to make sure that you've figured out — depending on where you live — what taxes are involved when you buy and sell a house, the agent commission and closing costs, in addition to the money you're going to put in to fix it up.

What are common mistakes do you see rookie flippers making?



People grossly underestimate what they're going to spend on a project. We see it time and again on these other house-flipping shows, where people think they're going to spend \$20,000 and it ends up being \$60,000 because, inevitably, when you get to the middle of renovating a project, you open up a wall to change a little bit of plumbing, and you find a disaster. You always have to have a contingency plan built into your budget.

And finally, how do we determine which contractor to use?

Get bids, meet a lot of different contractors, ask your friends who they've used and get referrals. Just do your homework. There are also a lot of online resources. The Franklin Report (visit [franklinreport.com](http://franklinreport.com)) lists everyone from contractors to designers. Just check up on people. Like anything else, it's about doing your homework and being smart about it. 