

SURVIVING

THE REALITY OF REALITY

Why home renovations usually take 30 days to complete, not 30 minutes like on reality TV programs.

BY MARK NOONAN

Turn on the TV and your favourite world-class chef is putting the final touches on a feast fit for a king, or at least your Saturday evening dinner guests. One more tap on the channel selector and the good old boys from the sunny south are dropping in a big block engine and putting the final touches on a perfect classic restoration. Moreover, it all happens in 60 minutes or less.

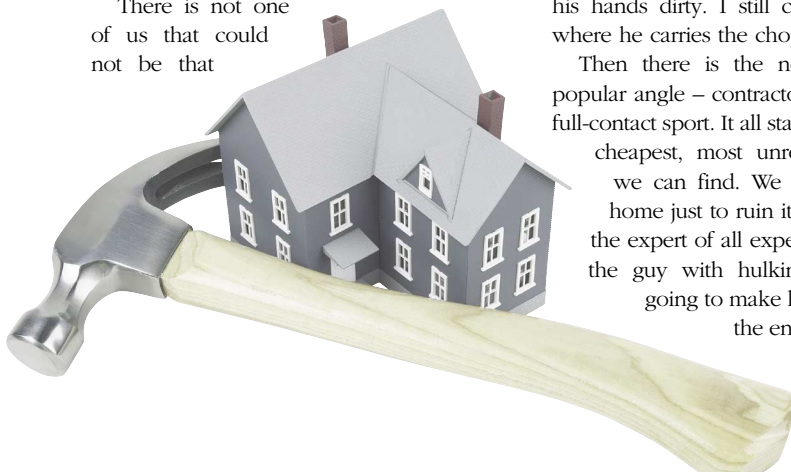
What does this all mean? It means that as a society, we have arrived. When we can take what were our basic daily human challenges and turn them into nightly entertainment for the family, it must mean that we have too much time on our hands. I hope that this is a good thing, as long as we remember that it is Hollywood that is telling the story.

There is not one of us that could not be that

culinary wizard if we also had six sous chefs helping us with it all. As for mechanics, we all know it can take half a day of fighting rusty nuts just to change a tire, so who is fooling whom with these fast-paced TV shows?

As a home renovation specialist, I do not know if I should feel excited or nervous that renovations have gone mainstream and caught their own little wave of Hollywood's attention. Miracle makeovers, expertly planned and managed by your neighbour, no less, are completely created to your full satisfaction in less than 30 minutes. Or better yet, a classic restoration in the trendy part of town is trusted to a contractor who arrives at the site on two wheels instead of four – while never missing a hair appointment, nor ever getting his hands dirty. I still cannot figure out where he carries the chop saw.

Then there is the newest and most popular angle – contractor bashing. It is a full-contact sport. It all starts by picking the cheapest, most unreliable renovator we can find. We let him into our home just to ruin it. Then we call in the expert of all experts, the real deal, the guy with hulking biceps who's going to make life perfect before the end of the show, all



THE RENO FILE

at no additional cost. It is almost too good to be true, is it not? Yes, it is too good to be true.

Folks, home renovations are one big, complicated mess that usually take 30 days or more to complete, not 30 minutes. What makes the difference between a nightmare and a perfect renovation? Surviving the reality of reality, and that means proper planning and proper executions, with no shortcuts and no compromises.

How many of us go out and spend top dollar on that new car we have always wanted, or perhaps the plasma television with surround sound? No matter what the spending option is, price is not the deciding factor – it is the fun factor that guides our spending habits. It is that lifestyle we are seeking that determines where our dollars do our bidding. Life's good; a good lifestyle is better.

So why is it that this same spending philosophy does not carry over to home improvement purchases? When it comes to adding on a new roof, new windows, that long-needed bathroom or a perfect new kitchen, we want to squeeze out the lowest cost at the expense of all other project considerations. This is typically how we shop for home improvements in North America, and frankly it makes no sense.

Your home will be the single biggest pur-



chase you ever make in your lifetime and it will ultimately be considered your single biggest asset once the mortgage has been exhausted. So if your home is worth \$350,000 and you are considering, say, a new bathroom at a cost of \$17,500, this upgrade represents only a 5% investment in your single biggest asset.

Sounds like a good business decision, right? Then why do so many of us try

to hammer the cost down by \$500 or maybe even \$1,000? We have seen what we want and it is \$17,500, but we keep looking until we find a willing renovator who can do it for less. That is how we author the script for our own reality show.

The reality is that things really cannot be done well for less money. You can always find a cheaper price, but be assured that compromise and sacrifice will be the hallmark of the finished project. Ultimately your satisfaction with the renovation will be tempered by your disappointment in your choices.

Avoid this. Understand what it takes to enjoy a really good renovation. Look to make the right decisions, all the while respecting the investment value of your home and the lasting value of the improvements to it. ✨

■ *Mark Noonan is president of the Toronto-based Plumbing Mart Group.*