

# Live With What You LOVE



Makeover master Paul DiMeo

By Lauren Hammack

If you've been a fan of ABC's hit series "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition," you're familiar with the urge to reach into the screen and hug its co-star, Paul DiMeo, whose human compassion, emotion and sense of humor have endeared him to millions of fans for the past nine seasons as the show's rugged carpenter with a tender heart of gold.

Despite being one of America's most recognizable TV celebrities, DiMeo personifies the genuine, "regular guy" quality that resonates so clearly with his fans. During the hour we

spent on the phone together, DiMeo spoke as candidly about his family and childhood as he did about his plans for the future, as this season marks the conclusion of "EM:HE."

DiMeo is *such* a regular guy, in fact, that the last 15 minutes of our conversation took place on speakerphone. "It's Friday," he said. "My job is to wash the sheets – do you mind if we talk on speaker while I get these off the bed and into the washer?"

Not at all.





JESSICA COVIELL

**I've read that you got an early start on your career as a home renovator.**  
Yes – I wasn't quite six years old when our family's home burned to the ground.

**How did that shape you and your approach to your work?**

It's had a huge effect. We lost everything in that fire and what I learned at a young age is that nothing is sacred. I look around my house now and yeah, I love my guitar, the piano, the things I've collected over the course of doing "Extreme," but those are just things. The last thing I tell a family when we leave is, "This can all come out. If you don't love these things, it's OK to get rid of them. Don't feel like you have to keep them because they were part of a TV show. Life's too short to live with things you don't love."

**Nine seasons of the show have probably changed you as a person, haven't they?**

Well, it's nice to be part of something that does so much good for so many people. Obviously, I'm free to emote in that situation because so many of the circumstances surrounding the families we've helped are so tragic.

**You really have to get into the fetal position to watch that show!**

You know, I never watch the show. I've lived it. And I'm not a big fan of TV to begin with, even though it's what I've done for a living for many years.

**You're a self-professed "dumpster diver," so you must watch "Hoarders," at least. Is it fair to say that you recognize that one man's trash is another man's treasure?**

I have watched "Hoarders" – um, that's a little different than just using some "found objects" in a project. With "Hoarders," first we have to get rid of all the rats. I don't get that. I think, no matter what we have, it seems important to keep things clean.

But I do agree that one man's ceiling is another's floor. And I love it when someone says, "Wow! You found that and did that?!"

**Is there one area of building or renovation that's always worth the splurge?**

The kitchen. When I was growing up, we had a living room we couldn't go in. I'm a huge fan of using all the space you have. Everyone gathers in the kitchen, so I love an open kitchen. That's why I love dining room tables, too. There are so many memories that are made around the table. Stories are told there. Life decisions are made. That's where life happens.

**What do you hope someone experiences when they walk into a room you've had as a project?**

It's going to sound ironic, but I don't want them to notice the room at all. I just want them to have a sense that something about it is inviting and makes them feel that they can sit down and be comfortable.

**Fans of your work will know that you've created some amazing children's bedrooms. Does that appeal to you because of your theater background?**

Of course! And that's what I try to do – I try to "read the script" of the project. I also think I can think like a child about what makes sense in the room from a child's perspective.

**Did you have a great bedroom when you were a kid?**

My room had a patriotic theme. It was red, white and blue.

**I'm familiar. My mom pledged allegiance to the Bicentennial in every room of our house.**

My parents eventually moved to kind of a brandy wine color everywhere.







**Did you tell them what you do for a living?**

I know...

**But if they're happy...**

That's right. I try to be careful about judging anything that someone has in their house. If someone walked into my house, they'd see all the sports stuff, a mishmash of nine years of doing the show, a million photos...

**Do you still have a dream project on your wish list?**

This is going to sound crazy, but I want to raise goats and make goat cheese. And I'd love to do some organic farming. I think it's so important that, somewhere in your yard, you have a place to grow stuff you can eat, even if it's just some tomato plants or something.

**What are your plans, post-"Extreme?"**

I'm looking at projects that focus on downsizing for smaller spaces and transforming those spaces to make them really functional.

**That's a very relevant subject as Baby Boomers are starting to downsize.**

I lived in New York City in a 1,200-square-foot loft that had no walls. I later lived in an apartment that my wife and I shared that was 120 square feet - 10' by 12'.

**I believe that's called a "cell."**

Exactly. And let me tell you, if you live in an apartment that's 120 square feet, you really have to prioritize what stays and what goes.

**The warden says the same thing. What else is on the horizon?**

I'm getting ready to do the Fan Cave again with the MLB. We'll be doing an all-new design. A big part of that is creating a place where a player can go into a space that brings out something else in him. Maybe there's a guitar on the wall and he can play it and give fans a glimpse at another facet of him as a person.

**What will you be talking about at the OKC Home Show?**

I'll be there to talk about some tips for makeover projects and there will probably be a Q&A, but knowing me, I'll probably end up ranting and raving about all kinds of things.

## Ideas for Your Personal Space

The OKC Home Show takes place March 23-25 at Oklahoma State Fair Park.

Paul DiMeo is scheduled to appear, where he'll reveal behind-the-scenes details from "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" and share money-saving tips for home makeover projects.

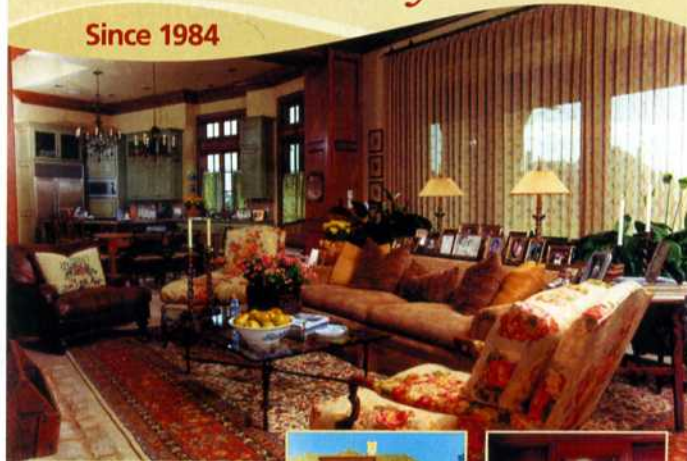
In addition to DiMeo's appearance, Sasha Andreev of HGTV's "Curb Appeal" and "Decorating Cents" will present an elite selection of new products from local businesses and give simple steps for do-it-yourself projects. More than 200 exhibitors from around Oklahoma will also participate.



Sasha Andreev

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