

## NEWS

# Interior architect learns reality behind reality TV

By Aaron Broverman  
Tribune Staff Writer

TORONTO — At Club 751 on Queen St. W. contestants on season two of *From the Ground Up* with Debbie Travis gather with friends and family to watch their reality television debuts, if only they could get the cable to work.

Without a second thought, contestants Clay Rochemont and Andrej Ciesielka spring into action, one stringing up the audio feed across the room and the other standing on a table pulling wires from the ceiling, straining for a clear picture.

"This looks just like another project challenge," says Dvira Ovadia, the show's only Jewish contestant. She, like the others in the room, lived her life with cameras capturing her every move, not to mention the rounds of pre-screening, auditions and psychological aptitude tests, all for a chance to become Debbie Travis's chief designer for her branded line of condos and homes.

"I didn't go there to be on TV, I didn't go there to get my 10 seconds of fame," said Ovadia, whose fiancé, Bryan Lipovetsky, pushed her into giving the show a shot. "I wanted to gain the prize. But more than that, I wanted to learn from every second of the opportunity, take advantage of Debbie's knowledge and bring that out in myself."

Debbie Travis has a lot of knowledge to spare. Now a British design icon, Travis made a name for herself internationally as host of *The Painted House*,



Contestants Dvira Ovadia (left) and Christopher Artymko with *From The Ground Up* host Debbie Travis.

one of the world's first design shows, in 1995. She then moved on to HGTV's *Facelift* and now, along with her latest show, books and syndicated column, designs her own collection of paint and house wares for Canadian Tire. Regis Philbin calls her, "the reigning queen of renovations" and Oprah Winfrey says, "She is the master of paint and plaster."

Ovadia, an Israeli-born interior architect, has always been a fan of Travis's practical designs since the time of *The Painted House*.

Ovadia says working within Travis's firm-but-approachable style really heightened her ability to think on her feet and think practically about everything she does.

"[Travis] is a woman who's gained a lot of her experience and success on her own. She wouldn't be here today

and her success wouldn't be as grand if she wasn't a fighter."

Travis's toughness and resilience is something Ovadia can identify with, being Israeli. It has served her well during the competition. "I definitely have that in my roots, that's something in my blood, it's part of my family and part of my growing up, being able to overcome every obstacle that stands in my way."

Her childhood in Israel and then Belgium and her travels throughout Europe also provide inspiration for much of her work.

"Europe has a better way of preserving their architecture. They are more design conscience where as in America things are built for the masses without any thought to design," she said.

Ovadia spends every moment of her professional life within design con-

sciousness so the average person doesn't have to.

"It's about whether your tables are the right height, whether your night table is on the right side," she said. "Practical design for everyday life."

Even though, she believes Israel takes much of its design sensibilities from America, she concedes that she borrows Israeli materials for her own projects, from their Moroccan style fabrics to their use of terracotta and ornate gold fixtures.

This was no more evident than on the first show's very first task. Contestants were instructed to design a door that would serve as windows to their souls for Debbie Travis. Dvira expressed herself with a series of copper shelves supporting a golden wire mesh that oozes between them. On that episode Dvira

managed to avoid the chopping block and she also says she managed to avoid conflict with her castmates during the taping.

"My strategy in life and my strategy on the show were the same. I try to get along with everybody," she says. "I try to make peace, not war."

Ovadia realizes that the show's production team can make her look any particular way they want, but when facing the reality of reality television her Israeli resilience shines through.

"I take it with the territory, it's part of the reality show and you can't hide from it," she says. "If they try to make me look like an evil person that's their prerogative. I know who I am, my parents know who I am, and my family knows who I am. I just tried to stay neutral and focused on my task."

Her drive and focus is what she hopes to impart to the viewing audience and the members of the Jewish community. She hopes they will engage fully in everything that they do and bring design awareness into their everyday lives.

"This is just the beginning," she says. "There are so many doors being opened and so many avenues you can go down in design. North America is only just developing its own awareness of what's to come in the future."

*From the Ground Up* with Debbie Travis Season 2 airs Thursdays at 9 p.m. on *Global TV*.

To keep up with the contestants, visit [www.globaltv.com/fitgu](http://www.globaltv.com/fitgu) and for more information on Dvira Ovadia visit her web site: [www.dvira.com](http://www.dvira.com).