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Debbie Travis searches for talent

Innovation, teamwork key to success

She's known as the guru of paint and plaster; the reigning queen of renovations. But Debbie Travis climbed the ladder one rung at a time and in her newest design drama, she has plenty of lessons for those eager to follow in her successful footsteps.

From the Ground Up with Debbie Travis Season 2 on Global Television showcases 14 candidates vying for the opportunity to work with Travis as a chief designer on her newest initiative, Debbie Travis Designed Condos & Homes with building partner Tribute Communities. It's set to launch this fall.

"I'm looking for someone who has exceptional talent and who will shake up the world of condos and homes," Travis told her protégés in the first episode. Their initial task of designing a door was about creating a first impression. "It was a blank slate to tell me who they are as designers and people," Travis says.

In the next episode, candidates were divided into teams and instructed to create signage in children's camp cabins using only discarded materials found at the site. Weekly tasks are designed to test the limits of candidates, which include an architect, production designer, window dresser, lighting consultant and urban artist.

Though Travis had no formal training or education in interior design, she encourages those interested in a career in interior design to get qualifications.

"From there, it's all practice and gaining experience. Offer your services to family and friends," she says. "Experiment with things. If you can get into a design firm, offer to do anything and everything."

A former fashion model and freelance editor and producer, Travis honed her skills while redecorating her Victorian home in Montreal. After establishing a successful painting and decorating business, she produced several instructional videos. In the mid-1990s, she merged her passion for design and TV production, hosting *Debbie Travis' Facelift* and *Debbie Travis' Painted House*.

The Montreal resident has eight books under her belt and has also launched her own paint line and created a line of housewares under her name. On her show, Travis instructs candidates to check their egos at the door and applauds hands-on workers.

"It's not always about being the cleverest or the brightest. It's about being able to work in a group, someone who's not shy," she says. "I don't want a nodder... I need to be challenged. You need to be a

wee bit brave and to think on your feet."

As the show continues, innovation and being able to work with one another will be key. Travis points to candidate Jodie Fletcher, an industrial designer, as an example. "Give her a task and she just stares while everyone else is running around. You're dying to see what she's going to come up with."

Dana Cote, a visual artist, is another one to watch. "She's a hidden talent, but she's a loner... This is a chance for her to break out of her sad background," Travis says.

Passion is key. "All you need to do is love it. When I go to trade shows, my heart feels like it's going to explode as I look at all the new products and ideas," Travis says. "You see so much brilliance. There's nothing more exciting."

- Linda White, Special to Sun Media



Paul Gosselin



- Tim Lyles photo

Debbie Travis (seated, middle) poses with a new crop of protégés from her new show *From the Ground Up with Debbie Travis Season 2*.

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