

Dvira Ovadia



Toronto designer battles for top prize on reality show

By **SHERI SHEFA**

Staff Reporter

"Growing up, as a child, I always wanted to do something in design. I was always very creative. Whether it was fashion or design or product design, it was something I knew I really wanted to do," she said. Having an Israeli mother and an Egyptian father, and having travelled the world, Ovadia said that being exposed to so many different cultures has shaped her own style.

"I definitely have a diverse cultural style, and I think that helps me a lot, because my mind is very open to mixing things... It has definitely influenced my design, who I am, how I think and how I analyze."

When Ovadia's fiancé found out about the show, he urged her to apply.

"I hesitated at first, but I read up about it and I'd seen a few episodes of the first season, so I decided that I would take on the opportunity and apply for it. Before I knew it, I was accepted," she said, adding that she had to resign from her position at Munge/Leung Design Associates to participate in the competition.

Although it was impossible for Ovadia and any of the other contestants to know what to expect, the biggest surprise was how well she was able to cope with the pressure of thinking on her feet.

"The tasks... were very unusual, and they weren't the conventional kind of tasks. It wasn't like, 'Here's a room, now go decorate it.' It was really about thinking outside of the box, being innovative and being able to come up with designs and ideas on the fly because there is no time. Somehow you have to pull it out of yourself, and it amazed me that I was able to come up with stuff so quickly," Ovadia said.

She said that it was physically and emotionally draining, but most of all, it was a great learning experience.

"Debbie made me realize that innovation and cleverness is the key to design and

that's what she preaches... What I learned is that you have to make something out of nothing," she said, referring to her task in Episode 2, where she had to design a cabin using nothing but materials that were laying around the camp site.

"I think it made me stronger. I realized that I'm so much more capable than I ever thought I was, and I realize that if you want something you have to go out and get it... It gave me a deeper perspective in life."

She said that since the first few episodes have aired on Global Television, she has received a number of job offers.

"I've had a lot of job opportunities and a lot of people have contacted me. I guess people realize that there are only 14 people that were selected across Canada from thousands, and I guess that puts me up there and gives me more exposure within my industry. I have had a few job offers, but I'm trying to wait it out and see what's going to happen."

She said that no matter where she ends up, she hopes that she'll be in a position to reach the masses and make design accessible to everyone.

"I think that everybody in this world is starting to get a little more design conscious... I'd like to develop a philosophy that will be able to help the general public, for those who don't have a lot of money, but do want to have something unique in their house."

Ovadia said that she couldn't have gotten to where she is today without the support of her friends and family.

"My parents have always been extremely supportive. That might be the backbone of everything... Just to know that all my loved ones are behind me and are supporting me in everything that I do, it is definitely a big help."

Find out how Ovadia does in the competition by watching *From The Ground Up* on Global TV Thursdays at 9 p.m.

Debbie Travis, front row, centre, is in the process of deciding which of these From the Ground Up contestants will be her chief designer for her new line of condos and homes.

[Tim Layes photo]



She's got a degree in architecture, diplomas in technical design and a master's degree in interior design, but nothing could have prepared her for this competition.

Dvira Ovadia, the only Jewish contestant on the second season of design icon Debbie Travis' show called *From the Ground Up*, spent several weeks last fall battling 13 other contestants on national television for the coveted title of the new chief designer for Travis' line of design condos and homes.

Whether she was asked to design a fun yet functional cabin for summer campers, or create a chandelier for a hip, new restaurant, Ovadia had to be on her toes and work under immense pressure.

"It is not very often that someone throws a bunch of tasks at you, and you have to do it because you put yourself in this situation and everyone is watching you. You have the pressure, and on top of that you have the pressure of coming up with something usually within minutes, not even hours," Ovadia said, adding that they would have just two days or less to complete a task and could only work from 9 a.m. until 9 p.m.

Israeli-born Ovadia, 27, grew up in Brussels before she settled in Thornhill. While the city she calls home changed a few times, her desire to work in the design world remained constant.