



The Delaware Valley's exclusive source for NASCAR Nextel Cup Racing

Welcome **Guest**
[Sign Up](#) | [Sign In](#)
[Member Benefits](#)

[Back to Home](#) >

Friday, Sep 17, 2004

[email this](#) [print this](#)



Posted on Tue, Sep. 07, 2004

- [Front Page](#)
- [Local & Regional](#)
- [Philadelphia & Suburbs](#)
- [Montgomery County](#)
- [Chester County](#)
- [Bucks County](#)
- [South Jersey](#)
- [US & World](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [High School](#)
- [Outdoors](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Daily Magazine](#)
- [Editorials & Commentary](#)
- [Metro Commentary](#)
- [South Jersey Commentary](#)
- [Pennsylvania Commentary](#)
- [Community Voices](#)
- [Columnists](#)
- [Personal Finance & Investing](#)
- [Tech.life](#)
- [Health & Science](#)
- [Food & Dining](#)
- [Home & Design](#)
- [Weekend](#)
- [Arts & Entertainment](#)
- [Travel](#)
- [Sunday Neighbors](#)
- [Real Estate](#)
- [Education](#)
- [School Report Card](#)
- [Religion](#)
- [Automotive](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [Photography](#)
- [Books](#)
- [Currents](#)
- [Image](#)
- [Special Reports](#)
- [Interactive](#)

Home sweet 'Real World'

How a former bank in Old City was transformed into the hippest pad in town. For four months, anyway.

By Michael Klein
Inquirer Staff Writer

What underemployed college kid could live on the 28th floor of a Las Vegas resort, in an august mansion in New Orleans, in an old firehouse in Boston, on a pier in Seattle, in a chateau outside Paris, or in an architect's palace on an island in Miami's Biscayne Bay?

A cast member of the MTV series *The Real World*.

The seven strangers thrust together for a four-month season know they'll fight, party and love.

And live large.

This will be evident tonight on the 10 p.m. premiere of *The Real World: Philadelphia*, when they shriek "Awwwwwesome!" and "Oh, my God!" at their first glimpse inside the neoclassical building at Third and Arch Streets in Old City.

The 10,000-square-foot interior, more than four times the size of a typical suburban house, was stripped down to its granite and marble. The first floor of the former bank was stocked with designer sofas, chairs and furnishings; a curved, brushed-

FOUR SEASONS SUNROOMS

2 Showroom Locations to Serve You!
3026 Lehigh Street - Allentown, PA
1022 Leiper Street - Eddystone, PA

IMAGES AND RELATED CONTENT



Designer Norm Dodge ordered a 22-foot olive tree for the atrium. At rear is the "facade" that ensured privacy for the cast. Photos by ROB IKELER / For the Inquirer

Multimedia

Services

[Subscribe](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Help](#)

[Archives](#)

[Online Store](#)

[History](#)

INQUIRER PHOTOGRAPHY



» [View our best work](#)

» [Special Reports](#)

» [Scene in Iraq](#)

» [Pennsylvania](#)

[Voters](#)

Top Jobs

- [Physical Therapist](#)
Health South Center
- [Dental/General](#)
Aston Family Dental
- [Retail](#)
Best Buy Hub Finance
- [Physical Therapist](#)
The Rehab Place
- [Restaurant](#)
Starr Restaurant
Organization
- [Dental Hygienist](#)
Aston Family Dental

[Search all Jobs](#)

powered by
careerbuilder.com

aluminum kitchen; an atrium with a 22-foot olive tree (fake); a pool table; a basketball hoop; and a custom-made 90-gallon saltwater aquarium. The seven also had an office with computer and books, and a semiprivate telephone room (the phone was tapped by producers).

Upstairs were three bedrooms with thin curtain partitions, plus a "guest bedroom" full of pillows (a popular spot for late-night entertaining), two tubs (one hot, one cold), an exercise area, and a smoking lounge. The seven dressed in a coed locker area, near three glass-basin sinks, two frosted-glass showers, two toilets, and - why not? - a hammock. The bank's vault was wired with cameras and a VCR to become the show's "confessional," where cast members were encouraged to spill their private thoughts.

Forty-two fixed cameras kept an eye on the proceedings 24 hours a day; images were piped to the third floor, where a director dispatched crews carrying handheld cameras when something "good" happened.

Tracy Chaplin, the season's supervising producer, said he chose the former Seamen's Church Institute, built a hundred years ago, because of its bones. "The ultimate goal was to maintain the architectural integrity while making sure we had a hip, sleek space," he said.

Chaplin called on Norm Dodge of Norm Dodge & Associates, who does residential and commercial renovation and interior design, as well as film and television design, from his offices in Paoli, New York and Los Angeles.

"*The Real World* houses have established a strong tradition of being cutting-edge and colorfully hip," Dodge said. "It was really important to me to incorporate a design that's reflective of the city, to re-create the essence of Philadelphia in a building. ... Tracy told me from the outset, it's most important that the cast love this house. [Producers] want them to feel this is the most wonderfully comfortable and accommodating house they've ever seen."

The cast has no input into site selection or interior design. Not every house has succeeded. "Several houses were beautiful to look at, but they were very problematical from a camera standpoint," Dodge said. "Others looked great on camera but the cast didn't like them."

Another issue was the location, on busy Arch Street next to the Betsy Ross House. Dodge had a wooden door and wrought-iron fence - a false facade - built just inside the front door. "It offers some sense of privacy," he said. "We needed something that would create a visual block every time they opened the front door."

Dodge did not have to look far for much of the furniture and art. Gallery Siano is down the street. Local artists, including Laurance Rassin, knocked on the door and offered work. Dane Decor Downtown, a block away, provided several pieces, as did the nearby store Minima. (Dane is selling copies of the house's red curved sectional sofa and a twisted coffee table, and hopes to offer others.)

"I designed this with an eye toward what I wanted, and not to what exists," Dodge said. He fancied large, curved concrete benches and found a South Jersey firm, Massarelli's Lawn Ornaments, to



The upstairs hall.

[More photos...](#)

RELATED LINKS

- [Jonathan Storm | A poignant touch amid the prurient](#)

the show's "confessional," where cast members were encouraged to spill their private thoughts.

make them. When he dreamed up a beaded-glass curtain to separate the game room from the atrium, he approached a woman in Texas. "It was fabricated in two weeks," he said. "It's amazing how much cachet [the project had]. When you say, 'This is for *The Real World*,' those three words opened doors for me.

"I was a prima donna wherever I could get away with it," Dodge joked.

According to Dodge, although about \$3 million worth of furnishings and construction went into *The Real World* house, producers didn't pay even close to that figure, because the show becomes a giant promotional showroom.

Dodge recalled a nervous few days in March. Workers were two-thirds finished with drywalling when producers announced they were leaving because of a squabble with local trade unions. The work was delayed several weeks but was completed in time for the cast's arrival on April 30.

Shortly after the cast's departure on Aug. 20, the house was stripped and furnishings were put into storage. MTV may auction off the contents for charity, as it has done in previous seasons.

The Seamen's Church Institute, meanwhile, is due to become retail space.

Contact staff writer Michael Klein at 215-854-5514 or mklein@phillynews.com.

 [email this](#)  [print this](#)

Ads by Google

[Colorado Interior Designs](#)

Quality Service. One-Stop Shop For All of your Home Furnishing Needs!
www.MountainHomefitters.com

[Interior Design](#)

Find an Interior Design School in Your Area. Free Info Available!
design-schools.org

[COOL House Plans Company](#)

Search 15,850 home plans from 103 the nations leading designers.
COOL-House-Plans.com/15850_Plans