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Keeping it real "Real World: Denver"

To give MTV's LoDo home an authentic sense of place, wildlife trophies, Aspen wood and ski memorabilia gave viewers a feel of the Rockies.

By Sheba R. Wheeler
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Article Last Updated: 11/16/2006 10:29:36 AM MST



(Post / Helen H. Richardson)

At first glance, MTV production designer Chuck Aubrey's vision for "The Real World: Denver" is an over-the-top, West Coast idea of Colorado living.

Wildlife trophies, Aspen wood and ski resort memorabilia abound at 1920 Market St., the former LoDo home of B-52 Billiards, where seven strangers became fodder for primetime melodrama.

"The Real World: Denver" premieres at 6 p.m. Wednesday on MTV).

Not even the Colorado state flag is a sacred cow in this "house" where the roommates regularly shot hoops on a patio basketball court fashioned from plastic tiles painted like that state emblem.

Aubrey was on a mission to reclaim something in the Denver digs that he believes some of the other "Real World" residences missed during the show's 18 seasons: a sense of place.

"Once you actually got the cameras inside the living space, you had no idea where the roommates were," he said

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Showers and bathroom basins, above, offered little privacy for the cast. Shower stalls were made from hundreds of glass and aluminum tiles. (Post / Helen H. Richardson)

recently from Los Angeles. "They could have been living in a giant warehouse or in a studio anywhere."

In some cities, MTV crews filmed cast members in residences that were decidedly regional. What's more Seattle than living on the Pier, more Las Vegas than lounging around a hotel suite, more Parisian than overtaking a historic chateau or more New York City than squeezing into a SoHo loft?

In other locations, however, Aubrey says the mystique and character of those places stopped at the front door of "The Real World" house. "There wasn't a real sense of place or an understanding of what they felt like while they were in that space," said Aubrey, who worked on the San Diego "Real World" house as well as other MTV sets.

In Denver, Aubrey merged regional design influences with an urban loft look by using Rocky Mountain-inspired motifs, a Denver-based design team, and artwork and materials created by local vendors.

Such heavy reliance on local artists turned the house into a virtual showcase of Colorado talents. For instance, Todd Caudle's graphic photo murals of snowcapped mountains and Keith Price's steel sculptures of rock climbers helped bring the outdoors in to the LoDo house.



The Jeep bar wowed visitors as soon as they entered the building. (Post / Helen H. Richardson)

Mineshaft and ski lift murals painted by Ann Marie Auricchio, and the life-size jeep-turned-art forged by Poison Spyder Customs, Discount Muffler Brake and Mickey Thompson Performance Tires & Wheels created a sense of Colorado adventurism.

Humor resonated in the confessional room with fabricated Aspen trees that seemingly grew out of the floor. Snowshoe sconces and an antler chandelier punctuated the telephone room.

Kentwood City Properties listed the 21,297-square-foot building last month for \$3.3 million. The design features several high-resale hallmarks including stainless steel appliances from Frigidaire and Kitchen- Aid, granite counters and fireplaces in the bedrooms.

And there's more eye candy in the second-floor bathroom: four sinks, three floating mirrors and a frosted mountain scene on two separate shower stalls that barely cover nude bodies rounded out that space. The stalls themselves are pieces of art with hundreds of recycled glass and aluminum tiles in cheery red, blue, green and yellow hues.

Modern furnishings supplied largely by CB2, the cooler kid sister of Crate and Barrel, and industrial touches like original brick walls hinted at the decidedly hipper, younger side of Colorado.

"Real World" houses are known for that kind of "wow" factor. Consider the brass pole inside the former Boston firehouse, the 18-foot version of the state fair icon Big Tex that stood guard inside the Austin warehouse, or the jellyfish tank lounge inside the Las Vegas that housed that city's cast.

In Denver, the challenge Aubrey and his crew faced meant transforming a cavernous former nightclub building into a cozy communal living spaces - in just five weeks.

Their layout is characterized by intimate seating areas and lounging spaces anchored by comfy furnishings and soft lighting. A decadent chocolate brown sectional in the living room was instantly popular with the cast mates, according to Aubrey. But no "Real World" house is complete without a hot tub and fish tank. This season's fish bowl stands out because it was built inside a fake fireplace.

The kitchen bar, the LoveSacs and even the I-Joy massage chairs were all opportunities for the roommates to connect. In most rooms, these furnishings were pulled away from the walls for better camera access.

"It's important to design a home first," Aubrey said. "The (the cast members) have to live there and feel comfortable in their surroundings before they can open up to the fact that they have a camera in their face 24 hours a day."

- Check the complete scoop on The Real World - Denver at www.getrealdenver.com.

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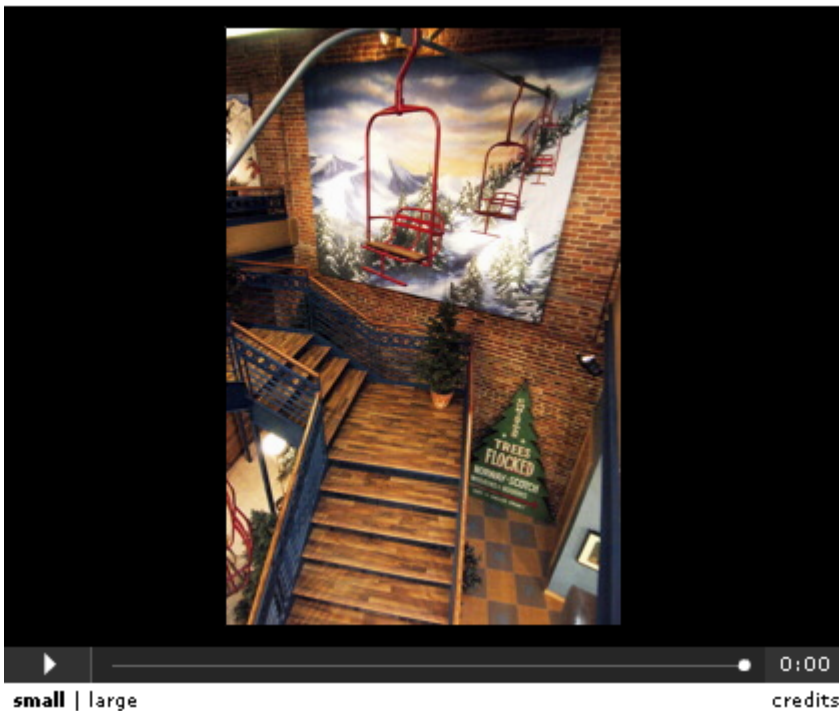


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