

Peek inside houses that reality built

As the real estate market heats up, so does our passion for fabulous houses. Some of the coolest, and oddest, pop up on reality shows. USA TODAY's **Sarah Bailey** unveils the history of summer's fantasy houses.



The Surreal Life producers went with a circus theme for Season 5. The production team repainted the walls when the owners came home.

VH1

Rock Star: INXS

VH1, Sundays, 8 p.m. ET/PT

CBS, Tuesdays, 10 ET/PT, and Wednesdays, 9 ET/PT

Dubbed "The Paramour," this Hollywood Hills mansion exudes celebrity. Gwen Stefani, Lucinda Williams, Fiona Apple and Sarah McLachlan retreat and record here. Sting, Elton John, John Mayer, the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Beck have played benefits on the grounds.

But the home's story began in 1923 with oil heiress Daisy Canfield, who lived there with her silent-movie star husband, Antonio Moreno. A decade later, driving home from a party, Daisy veered off Mulholland Drive and plunged 300 feet to her death.

The 14-bedroom mansion became a school for girls, then a nunnery. After years of neglect, it was severely damaged in a 1987 earthquake.

"Here was this rotted, crumbling, beautiful, gorgeous girl waiting for someone to fall in love with her," says designer Dana Hollister, who bought the home in 1998 for \$2.25 million and set about restoring its original beauty. Then reality super-producer Mark Burnett came calling. "The whole house has been busted out to be like a diamond for that man."

She moved in with her boyfriend in Maine during the taping, but plans to return home — and keep the house rocking — after the show's run.

The Real World: Austin

MTV, Tuesdays, 10 p.m. ET/PT

Strangers living together in spectacular settings to spark drama has been the archetype for every reality show from *Survivor* to *The Bachelor*. But that idea originated when producer Jon Murray launched *The Real World* from a New York City loft in 1992.

Detractors argue that reality shows should take place in normal homes, but "this is television — people don't want to look at (crummy) houses!" Murray says. What happens is still real, but "it happens in a beautiful, fantasy environment."

For the show's 16th season, local designer Joel Mozersky brought Texas flavor to a 23,000-square-foot warehouse — abandoned by a failing dot-com — and transformed it into a Tex-Mex fantasy home.

When Murray and Mozersky arrived, they were greeted by a huge hole in the living room. Unflustered, they converted it to a sexy indoor pool. Another of Murray's favorite features: an 18-foot neon cowboy in the front hall that says "Big Tex." After the show's run, the house will become a Mexican restaurant.

The 70s House

MTV, Tuesdays, 10:30 p.m. ET/PT

When producers sought a house for this groovy reality show, in which a dozen twentysomethings live like it's the decade of Nixon and smiley faces, they stumbled upon a perfect neighborhood in Pasadena, Calif. "The entire place was frozen in that era," says designer Paolo DeLeon. "The facades had kind of a *Brady Bunch* feel."

The production team rented the home from a vacationing widow. They transformed it in two weeks — amplifying her sparse beige '70s color scheme to olive-green and burnt-orange, creating a funky hangout decked out with a disco ball and turntable — filmed for five weeks, then restored the place to its old self before the owner returned.

DeLeon's favorite item: the white 8-track player. "It was like the iPod of the '70s, but it was about the size of a bowling ball," says DeLeon, noting that the kids had the hardest time adjusting to life without their own music.

The Surreal Life 5

VH1, Sundays, 9 p.m. ET/PT

Drive up to the *Surreal Life* mansion and you pass through large gates sculpted with the iron initials "GC," for Glen Campbell, who built the house.

But those gates are the last trace of the rhinestone cowboy. Now the house bears the mark of designer Scott Storey's bizarre "themes." (This season's look: "carny trash," including a 25-foot clown mouth as the entrance.)

For the first five seasons, married doctors owned the house and relocated for about eight weeks during every shoot. "Every time the parents walked through the (redecorated) house, they would look around in total abject horror, but their kids ran around happily and wanted to keep it," says Storey.

Mom and Dad won that battle: Before the family moved back in, the production team repainted all the walls Benjamin Moore's Cottage White.

No word yet on whether the house will return for Season 6: It just sold to a new owner.

Big Brother 6

CBS, Tuesdays, 9 p.m. ET/PT, Thursdays, 8 ET/PT and Saturdays, 8 ET/PT

After five seasons in the same one-floor house, CBS built a new two-story urban funhouse on the studio lot. The made-for-TV home features secret rooms on both the "downtown" (vibrant colors) first level and "uptown" (earth tones) second.

Designer Scott Storey (*Surreal Life*) built safety into the set, such as double railings on the balconies to keep people from falling off the second floor.

Other cool details: 47 cameras and 76 microphones hide in even the tiniest spaces — including the toilet — so the cast can't escape spying.

Storey's favorite area: the subway station room, which has a gritty city feel. And that number 3-17 on the subway car? It's Storey's son's birthday, March 17.

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