

San Diego is for 'Real': MTV roomies meet in local house this fall

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HOLLYWOOD – The house has been picked, but the deal hasn't been signed.

And the producers don't like to talk about the location because "people start hanging out," but this much is known – MTV's "The Real World" will start shooting a new series in San Diego in October.

This will be the 15th round of "The Real World," and it's set to begin airing in January, said Mary-Ellis Bunim, co-creator and producer of the series with partner Jonathan Murray. Cast members are being picked right now, she said, but none will be from San Diego.

"We never cast people from the area," Bunim said Friday in an interview, "because they have their own support system. We want them to be dependent on their roommates."

Bunim and Murray addressed TV critics meeting here to preview fall TV programs, but they were plugging another reality show, "The Simple Life," a Fox effort premiering Aug. 13.

In that series, celebrity party girls Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie spend a few weeks living with an Arkansas farm family. (If you've never heard of them, not to worry. They're famous for being famous.)

But it was "The Real world" that in 1992 started the current craze of TV shows that train the cameras on regular folks, and it only happened because MTV wanted a soap opera but couldn't afford to stage a real one.

MTV needed, Bunim said, "a less-expensive soap opera. It wasn't possible to do a written and directed soap opera with actors. It was an economic factor. Also, people weren't writing to that voice, and we felt this was only way to give that audience their voice."

It was 1991. Bunim was working as a consultant for MTV, and Murray had been a documentary filmmaker. "And we thought, suppose you trained the cameras on real people. Put them in a contained space, and film them. If you cast it well, if you cast really compelling people, could you get something?"

They found "six articulate people who weren't self-conscious, who had interesting ways of expressing themselves," and housed them in a New York loft for four days. "Within an hour, we knew there was a series there," she remembered. "We went to series and had to start all over again. It took three months developing the style, editing and cutting to new music for that generation."

The first round of "The Real World" aired in 1992, but "The pilot never aired. We did it for a dollar-ninety-eight. But if you look at the pilot, it's still 'The Real World.' It's still the style."

She said she is not surprised that the series has remained popular with MTV audiences so long after the initial novelty wore off. Like Disney movies re-released every few years for new generations of children, "The Real World" constantly attracts new crops of teenage viewers. "We weren't surprised that it worked the first time," Bunim said. "When it worked the second time, we weren't surprised that it worked from then on."

"Each year it keeps its audience, because a new generation grows into it. 14-year-olds find the show, and people who should be growing out of it don't leave.

"We reinvent it every year. We have a new cast, we take it to another city, and the city becomes a new backdrop." San Diego was chosen, she said, because "it's close to home, it's a beautiful city, it incorporates the Hispanic community."

But San Diego will have a tough act to follow. The San Diego version of "The Real World" will air just after the Paris edition.

'Hillbillies' redux CBS hasn't given up on its proposed reality "Beverly Hillbillies" project, network CEO Leslie Moonves told critics yesterday. Unlike Fox's "Simple Life," which is a reality-based version of "Green Acres," this show would move a real-life poor, rural American family into a Beverly Hills mansion. The idea has been sharply criticized by advocacy groups for the poor, labor unions and politicians. The Louisiana state senate has passed a resolution opposing it, said Moonves.

"We're still considering it," Moonves said. "Obviously, there's a lot more controversy involved in the show than I ever imagined would be. I was surprised by the outrage of it. We're still considering the show, we haven't made any decisions."

One definite plan at CBS, Moonves said, is for a November miniseries based on the lives of Ronald and Nancy Reagan. To be called "The Reagans," and starring James Brolin and Judy Davis, the drama will cover the Reagans' lives beginning just before Reagan began his run for the governorship of California.

Moonves called it "silly" that an NBC special saluting Bob Hope's 100th birthday and "AFI's 100 Years ... 100 Passions," a compendium of clips from old romance movies, were included in the "Reality-Competition" category of Emmy nominations with CBS's "The Amazing Race" and "Survivor" and Fox' "American Idol."

"I think it's silly to put the Bob Hope special in the same category as 'American Idol' and 'Survivor,' it really is. It clearly belongs in different categories. ... I think they will do better next year, I would hope."

Critics' kudos

Speaking of awards, "American Idol" was named Program of the Year by members of the Television Critics Association at a Saturday night dinner.

NBC's "Boomtown" received awards as the best drama and the best new program of the 2002-2003 season, while Comedy Central's "The Daily Show" won in comedy.

Jon Stewart, host of "The Daily Show," won for Individual Achievement in Comedy, and the award for Individual Achievement in Drama went to Edie Falco, co-star of HBO's "The Sopranos."

"Frontline," the PBS documentary series, won for the sixth time in the news and information category, and the critics voted for the Steven Spielberg-produced "Taken," carried by the Sci-Fi Channel, as the season's best miniseries.

"Buffy the Vampire Slayer" was given the critics' Heritage Award for cultural impact.

Veteran Carl Reiner, co-star of the classic "Your Show of Shows," creator and producer of the "The Dick Van Dyke Show" and longtime movie director, received the critics' Lifetime Achievement Award in a separate presentation.

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