

Brice Cooper

Photography by Dave Chen

Some of the most popular shows on TV are home improvement shows. One of the most popular ones is *Design Invasion*, seen every day on Fox. We had a chance to catch up with Chicago-native Brice Cooper, one of the show's designers.

SOAK: Tell us about *Design Invasion*.

Brice Cooper: *Design Invasion* is a television show that incorporates elements of design and somewhat of a game show element. We find people with horrible design. Friends, parents, and loved ones turn these people in because their design is so bad! Some of these people haven't changed their living rooms in 25 years. We knock on their doors and say stuff like, "Bob, we're here because you have nasty design!"

SOAK: How'd you get started doing this?

BC: It was really sudden. One day I was at the NEOCON show at the Merchandise Mart downtown. I was on the elevator when a woman named Kristy asked me if I was a designer. I said no, because I didn't want to be bothered, but then it occurred to me that everyone there was in the design field. The jig was up, so I plead guilty as charged. She told me she was the casting director for *Banyan Productions* and wanted to know if I was interested in auditioning for a new show the next day. I auditioned the next day and a few weeks later, we were shooting.

SOAK: What makes your show different than all the other interior design shows?

BC: The show's got the design elements, but it's also got some twists and turns like the game, *Choose it or lose it*. Before we kick the owner out for the day, we let them save one item of furniture to be reincorporated into the new room. What they don't know is that when they come back, we'll give them the opportunity to give up that one item for what's behind the door of a truck. Now, that item on the truck could be anything from a plasma TV to something really crappy like a pink flamingo. On one occasion I actually gave away a jar of olives. The main thing is: we have fun!

SOAK: The owner must have been pissed!

BC: Yup, he was *not* happy! Our show is not a comedy, but it's more like everybody has fun and therefore the show is fun. We walk into people's houses and change their lives. I believe that your house is your sanctuary. It's where you get up in the morning and go to sleep at night; it's your creative and relaxation place.

SOAK: Anything weird ever happen on the show?

BC: Well, when we send the owners away for the day, we send them on a picnic or something like that. One time we sent the owners to a restaurant and they came back hammered! They were loud as hell! One guy said, "Hey dude, this is awesome!" and then proceeded to give me a friendly punch on

the arm. What he didn't realize was that the punch was pretty hard and not too friendly. I was like "Ow!"

SOAK: What was the strangest room that you've seen so far?

BC: We re-did a kid's playroom and when we walked in, there was literally (I'm not exaggerating) two and a half feet of toys covering the entire floor. It was like a snow pile of toys. Santa must have missed every house on the block and dropped everything off there! The mother told us she wanted some space for her child to crawl around. I was thinking, just clean up the damn toys! But what we ended up doing was doing some massive storage solutions. That was pretty weird.

SOAK: Have you ever knocked on the door and some naked woman answered?

BC: Since we knock on people's doors at 7AM, I've seen some crazy stuff. Once we knocked on the door with a large square peephole and a woman's face appeared, and then she bolted. I looked in and saw her running away naked! She reappeared in a robe a few seconds later.

SOAK: Have you ever found something so outrageous that that it didn't make it

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on air?

BC: Pretty much anything I say doesn't make it on TV! I'm the youngest one out of six designers on the show and I'm the newest one at what we're doing. So, I would say that at times, I am under a microscope. So, let's just hope an outtake reel never surfaces, because I sometimes say some off the wall stuff! In daily conversation, people lob these softballs of humor over the plate and the other designers pull back and let them slide and don't capitalize on them; I just knock them out of the park! Anytime I hear stuff that I think is funny, I just have to laugh out loud. So pretty much 90% of what I do doesn't make it to the television.

SOAK: Has anyone been annoyed when you surprised them that early?

BC: I had one lady who wasn't mad at me, but she was really mad at our accomplices. Apparently she had never been seen without her make-up. She wasn't really mad but more disgruntled. When it's that early, you generally catch people at their worst.

SOAK: We figure most people are pretty psyched to be able to get a home

makeover. Has anyone not been happy with the changes that you make?

BC: On all of *my* shows, I've never had an unhappy customer. Some of the other designers have had one or two. One lady was like, "You've ruined my life!" But in this case, I think she made up her mind to hate it before we started. Other times, the people are really excited and tell me that they watch these types of shows all the time. I take look at their room and its like, "What did you watch with the sound off?!"

SOAK: There is a common misconception that all designers are gay. We gotta ask...

BC: Well, I think you're cute, but we just met! [laughs] I definitely like the females. The weird thing is that I really don't like watching sports on TV, but I could watch HGTV all day!

SOAK: Now that you're on a hit show, do more people recognize you on the street?

BC: Yeah, a lot of people do come up to me; I get a lot of housewives and college kids. You know, people that can actually watch a show in the afternoon. For example, I have a friend who's a big, scruffy biker type. He was in a bar and he looked up at the TV and said, "Hey, I know that guy, he owes me money!" I've also gotten calls

from like 15 ex-girlfriends.

SOAK: Are the women hitting on you left and right?

BC: More like just left. [laughs] There are definitely more than before.

SOAK: Give our readers a tip: what's the easiest thing you can add to an apartment that will impress the ladies?

BC: A bear trap and some chocolate...just kidding! The best and easiest thing is to add a passionate color, like red. It helps to show people that you are a passionate person. It also helps warm up the place. Also a good inoffensive, clean scent is always good. The sense of smell has the strongest memory. The last thing you want is for someone to remember that your house smells like crap.

Don't miss Design Invasion on FOX every weekday at 2PM. You can read more about Brice and the crew at designinvasiontv.com. Thanks to Brice for doing the interview even though he had a broken collar bone, torn rotator cuff, and a broken rib all sustained while doing wheelies on a motorcycle.