

# where

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SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2010

Q&A

with celeb  
TV carpenter  
**Ty Pennington**  
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## FASHION FORWARD

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# a Handy Man

## Extreme Makeover: Home Edition's Ty Pennington comes to Calgary

BY LAURA PELLERINE

**W**hen Ty Pennington's mom used to send him outside because he kept taking apart her furniture, little did she know that her son's future would involve rearranging more than just coffee tables.

A self-taught carpenter, the name Ty Pennington has become synonymous with home improvement.

After using his woodworking skills to get through school, he worked as a set designer for movies like *Leaving Las Vegas*. Pennington eventually got his big break on TLC's *Trading Spaces*, where he stole scenes as the show's playful carpenter.

He also dabbled into acting (appearing in a music video, and an independent film) before landing the job as host of ABC's show *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition (EM:HE)*. Aimed at giving deserving families an improved living space through the help of volunteers (some of them celebrities), the show's success has helped make the 46-year-old Californian into a household name. The past few years have led to partnerships with the likes of Sears and Marketplace Events (the largest organizer of home décor and remodelling trade shows in North America), as well as two new TV series and a published book.

Pennington stops by Calgary for the first time as part of the annual Home & Interior Design Show—a show that he's officially endorsed for three years. In fact, Calgary is the only trade show stop he'll be making this fall.

We chatted with him about how he deals with his emotions when working on *EM:HE*, what he's looking forward to most about coming to Calgary, and whether he wears boxers or briefs.

### A CRAFTY BUSINESS

**WC:** How did you get into carpentry?

**TP:** I was pretty young when I started taking apart my mom's furniture and putting it back together differently. She got sick of that and sent me outside. That's when I started bartering with my friends to get them to lend me their dad's tools. I would trade comic books, candy, baseball cards—whatever I had worth anything—for the use of a drill or a saw. Together with my friends and their dad's tools, I built a three-storey tree house.

**WC:** What do you like most about working with wood?

**TP:** Wow, I don't know if I can narrow it down. I'd have to say that it's the versatility of wood that I love so much. You can keep it very simple and do basic joints and create a table or chair, or you can get really intricate with a router and chisel and carve a piece of art. Mixing woods together is also fun because you create your own grains and patterns. I'm a purist, so you won't see me painting wood very often.

**WC:** What is an affordable and easy project that people can do to make their space more functional?

**TP:** Function is a funny word—we throw it around a lot, but here's

the thing about home design: most times, "function" means storage. If you're handy with a saw and drill, one of the easiest things to build for your home is a storage ottoman. It's basically a hinged box on wheels. Paint, stain, or decoupage the base, do a simple upholstery on the lid, and it's done. You can use the ottoman to stash away video controllers, toys, or home office stuff when company comes. With a good cushion on top you have extra seating, then when you're alone again, it's all about relaxing. A simple ottoman project is easily done in a weekend and you can probably make it happen for under \$50.

### ON CALGARY

**WC:** What are you looking forward to most about coming to Calgary?

**TP:** I have heard that it's an amazingly beautiful place. I get a lot of my design inspiration from nature, so I look forward to exploring the natural resources in the area and comparing the western Canadian culture to our wild, wild west.

**WC:** Why did you feel that it was important to endorse the Calgary Home & Interior Design Show?

**TP:** Home shows are excellent places to find out about the latest design trends and to gather great resources for projects. I chose [to come to] Calgary this year because it's a place I've always wanted to visit, and I've been doing a lot of work in Canada over the last year and wanted to meet more of the Canadian fans.

**WC:** What can people expect from your appearance here?

**TP:** We're going to have fun. I'll answer some questions and talk about my life on the road with *EM:HE* and my new Canadian series, *Inside the Box*, show some special backstage videos, and maybe help out a few people with their own DIY projects. Mostly though, I want to meet some of the folks who are always so supportive of me and the work we do on *Extreme Makeover*.

### THE SHOW

**WC:** You're known for pushing through personal injury to get a job done. Where do you get your work ethic from?

**TP:** I've always had to work hard in my life—first as a kid to try and keep up in school, then in my 20s to make ends meet while I pursued my passion for art and design, and then in the last 10 years on television because it's a cutthroat industry.

But day to day on *EM:HE* the work ethic comes from watching the hundreds of volunteers who show up in all sorts of horrible weather and help build these houses just because they feel compelled to help. When you see these total strangers working together for another stranger then you tend to roll up your sleeves and get to work.

**WC:** How do you choose the families for *EM:HE*?

**TP:** I don't. Thousands of applications come in every week so there is an entire team assigned the difficult task of going through them. The




show producers look for families who don't let their circumstances define them as sad or needy. If you watch closely, almost all the families we help are already committed to helping others—when we say “deserving families” we mean it.

**WC:** Some of the situations of the families you work with are so unfortunate, how difficult is it to keep your composure when you get to know their stories?

**TP:** Very difficult—so difficult that I fail week in and week out. Let me tell you, I was never one to show much emotion before I started working on *EM:HE*. But now the tears flow easily and I've learned that's okay. Most of these families are very forthcoming about their situations and they wouldn't be on the show if they weren't. So yeah, we cry because it's awful. And that's okay. Awful things should be mourned. The show is called “extreme” for a reason—and some of that has to do with the extreme emotions we and the viewers feel during the process. Those emotions are both sad and, ultimately, really happy.

**WC:** How gratifying is it to present the families with a new house?

**TP:** I'll be honest: sometimes the builds are excruciating. Whether it's the weather or something else that causes things to fall behind or fall apart, there are times when nobody sleeps, nobody eats, and we all stand there wondering if we'll ever get it done. Then that bus moves and the family sees their house and it's amazing. Each and every time it's simply amazing. 

## TY BITS

**“Tygert” is an interesting name—did you like it growing up?**

“Yeah, I did. But people still think I'm Tyler or Tyson.”

**Boxers or briefs?**

“Why must we choose?”

**If you had to describe yourself in one word, what would it be?**

“Grateful.”

*The Calgary Home & Interior Design Show runs September 16 - 19 at the BMO Centre in Stampede Park. Tickets range from \$11 - \$14. See Ty's session, “Extreme Makeover: ‘Home Show’ Edition,” from noon - 2 pm, on Sunday, the 19th. For more information visit [calgaryhomeshow.com](http://calgaryhomeshow.com).*

