Dream Homes and DIY:
TV, New Media and the Domestic Makeover

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'There's not a house in Britain left untouched by the Changing Rooms attitude'

Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen
'Changing Rooms' designer
(The Mirror, August 7th 2004)

Running from 1996 until its last season in 2005, the TV reality show Changing Rooms has without a doubt been a fundamental contributor to current representations of the home. The programme features two neighbouring couples, who exchange their homes for two days, redecorating each other's space under the guidance of an interior designer and with a fixed, limited budget. By 1998, Changing Rooms was regularly attracting 12 million viewers to its prime-time slot on BBC1 and was soon to generate numerous international spin-offs.
While interior designer Llewelyn-Bowen's claim that it has left no house untouched might seem at first to be far-fetched, its profound impact on mainstream ideas of the home, domesticity and the design of interiors can hardly be denied. Through programmes such as Changing Rooms, and other interior design series such as Design Rules or Home Front, reality TV domestic makeover shows have developed and established an overarching discourse of design in the home that seamlessly merges traditional perceptions with the latest lifestyle and cultural trends.
The long-standing Victorian premise of the home as a safe haven, a retreat from the cares and worries of public life that provides the stage for the most intimate expressions of individual identity through design and decoration, is given a post-modern twist in an attitude that refuses to engage with notions of good or bad taste. The New Age's design gurus no longer tell one what to like. Rather, they aim to help us find ourselves, announcing that 'there is no right way, no wrong way, but only your way.'[1]

But this domestic ideal of the home as a personal sanctuary, constructed by means of regulated aesthetic practices and individual expression, is a composite

[1] Llewelyn-Bowen, Laurence, and Diarmuid Gavin. *Home Front Inside Out*. London: BBC Worldwide, 2002, p25.

picture in more than just its relation to aesthetic form. If the medium is the message, as Marshall MacLuhan proposed almost half a century ago, then this message is a very fragmented one. Following the economic logic of contemporary merchandising and product tie-ins, programmes like Changing Rooms and Home Front have spawned their own microcosm of multi-media incarnations, offering branded products across a diverse range of technological and media platforms, from books, to computer software, to the internet. Each one of them elaborates its particular variation on this narrative of home, giving rise to a unique phenomenon in which these discourses are adapted to suit varying modes of representation and mediation..

The TV programmes favour dramatic tension, drawing the viewers into a private space where the ultimate success or failure of the makeover is above all an expression of the home as a site of emotional investment. At the same time, working with the flexibility inherent to new media, the BBC's Changing Rooms website presents the home as a blank canvas made of pre-defined colour-in areas, the discrete receptacles of a seemingly endless choice of possible dream-worlds. The books, on the other hand, engage comfortably with a long tradition of advice literature, providing know-how, inspiration and practical tips from the experts. But more importantly, they offer to position our relationship with domestic interior design as a natural outcome of our personal engagement with the zeitgeist. They tell us, in other words, that 'home' is the ultimate expression of who we are right now: diverse, creative, expressive, changeable, unique, and in control.

Essentially an evolution of DIY and design advice, contemporary domestic makeover TV shows are part of a culturally and historically framed discourse on the home, design and interiors. Drawing on the mass appeal of reality TV and celebrity culture, they have popularised a vicarious, shifting and essentially 'spectacular' experience of the contemporary domestic interior.

The Good Home

There is an absence at the heart of domestic makeover shows, as has historically been the case with other attempts to help homedwellers improve their domestic environment. Put bluntly, a perceived absence of taste. But it is the pre-supposed absence of a very particular kind of taste that drives design advice, the ever-elusive *good taste*, as well as the lack of a certain type of skill in the general public: the specialist know-how that underpins *good design*. Interior decorating has long been a 'middle-class ritual',[2] largely officiated by women. **(Fig.**

[2] Tiersten, Lisa. "The chic interior and the feminine modern: home decorating as high art in turn-of-the-century Paris." *In Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*, edited by C. Reed: Thames and Hudson, 1996, p.20.

'Disagreeable views') If the 19c saw them mostly as the sensitive agents that shaped the private sphere, by the turn of the century the emphasis of an emerging modernist discourse was on the interior as the manifestation of an artistic individuality, an outlet for every woman's creative drive.[3] In that sense, while remaining somewhat distant from the lofty realms of High Art, amateur home decorating was seen as a practice strongly linked both to aesthetic skills and to individual expression. Expert advice on such matters, therefore, can be seen as a constant endeavor not just to educate an easily misled public, but also as an attempt to police the formal boundaries of this creative drive, circumscribing its expression to the limits set by the professionals.
Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, an ever-increasing abundance of books, specialized magazines, exhibitions, commercial fairs, trade manuals, museum displays, offered encouragement and inspiration on how best to be an artist of the domestic sphere. Home makeover shows therefore participate in a now well-established historical lineage of multi-media design advice, mediating design ideas and representing an ideal dwelling space. Before the advent of television, and in this particular case reality television, trade shows and model homes were the main sites where prospective homemakers could come as close as possible to 'real' interior design solutions. The Ideal Home Shows, for instance, established in 1908 and still a yearly event today, would have supported their quest for inspiration and advice, offering a commodified palette of fashionable trends, new materials, emerging domestic technologies and shifting cultural priorities.
In America, the Idea House project, which took place in 1941 and 1947 under the auspices of the Walker Art Center of Minneapolis, Minnesota, was a striking if little-known example of the merging of art and commerce in the construction of the domestic sphere.[4] Idea House was a Modernist exercise in design promotion, developed in the context of economic recession and American post-war reconstruction. **(fig. Idea House interior)** It offered fully-fitted, architect designed display houses as a source of ideas for the visiting public to choose from. The two houses were constructed with the support of manufacturers who contributed materials, furnishings and fittings. While none of these were listed in the show houses themselves, information leaflets were made available to the public with full details of items, prices and suppliers. In the words of Daniel Defenbacher, the project's instigator, 'As a consumer, every man uses art… His medium he obtains from stores, manufacturers and builders. His composition is his environment'.[5] An unprecedented combination of cultural and commercial aims, Idea House offered the home artist a catalogue of tools. It has been suggested that 'the discourse around the modern house is fundamentally linked to the commercialisation of

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[3] Tiersten p28
[4] Griffith Winton, Alexandra. "'A Man's House is his Art': the Walker Art Center's Idea House Project and the Marketing of Domestic Design 1941-1947." *Journal of Design History* 17, no. 4 (2004): 377-396.
[5] Griffith Winton, Alexandra. "'A Man's House is his Art': the Walker Art Center's Idea House Project and the Marketing of Domestic Design 1941-1947." *Journal of Design History* 17, no. 4 (2004): p380

domestic life'.[6] While these various settings of ideal interiors were undoubtedly a direct manifestation of this trend, they nevertheless upheld the enduring rhetoric of the homeowners as artists, inspired creators of the everyday.

From the mid-1940s, television offered an even easier way of consuming the art of homemaking, as well as what seemed to be a perfect platform for the dissemination of notions of good design. An early attempt to do the latter joined in an increasingly uneasy partnership the newly established Council of Industrial Design and the BBC. The 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1946 provided the perfect occasion for a joint effort between the two institutions to raise public awareness through programmes such as 'What Is Good Design?', 'What's in a Chair?' and 'The Designer Looks Ahead'. These extremely didactic offerings soon gave way to a slightly more consumer oriented approach, in which the BBC left behind the CoID's concerns with reaching out to designers, retailers and manufacturers, shifting instead towards productions that tried to address the needs of the average homeowner and provide a modicum of televisual entertainment. Thus in 1951, 'Rooms to Let Unfurnished' followed a family of four in its upwardly-mobile relocation from a basement in Bermondsey to a larger, three-bedroom modern council flat in Streatham. With the help of a designer and a budget of £150, contemporary furnishings were carefully chosen to enhance their new environment, while considering how best to adapt the family's existing possessions to fit in with the modern style.[7]

Given the rather tenuous links between contemporary domestic makeover programmes such as Changing Rooms and the established canon of high design, however, it is tempting to place them more squarely in the DIY camp. The rise of self-built home improvement in 1930s and 1940s America coincided with the launch of government-sponsored loans aimed at creating better quality housing, by encouraging home ownership and facilitating projects such as electrification and the installation of new technologies and appliances in the home. It was therefore closely linked to the structural modernisation of households, driven by a social agenda that sought to promote a better standard of living through the shared effort of federal funding and individual labour. DIY was presented as a patriotic activity, first in the context of a make do and mend war-time ethos, and later as a practice that enabled returning war veterans to settle down into a well-deserved, comfortable suburban life. The remodelling of homes was also intensely pushed by manufacturers, who engaged both with the government's economic plans and with the domestic dreams of a whole generation that was accessing home ownership for the first time. By the 1950s,

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[6] Colomina, Beatriz. Quoted in: Griffith Winton, Alexandra. "'A Man's House is his Art': the Walker Art Center's Idea House Project and the Marketing of Domestic Design 1941-1947." *Journal of Design History* 17, no. 4 (2004): p379.

[7] Jones, Michelle. "Design and the Domestic Persuader: Television and the BBC's Promotion of Post-War 'Good Design'." *Journal of Design History* 16, no. 4 (2003): 307-318.

DIY had become a huge industry and a mass culture phenomenon. **(fig. Cover, TIME Magazine)** Ambiguously positioned between work and leisure, it was associated with a cult of suburban family life that presented the home not just as an essentially feminine space, but also as a space protected from the alienating drudgery of corporate life, where men could engage in the construction of domesticity through suitably gendered practices. DIY therefore, posited the home as a space of empowering self-regulated male work, creative freedom, and constructive leisure.

In Britain, the 1950s had also seen the appearance of televised home improvement programmes, most famously Barry Bucknell's 'Do-It-Yourself' BBC series, which attracted over seven million viewers, and what was possibly the first ever home makeover show, Bucknell's 1962 'House'. **(fig. Bucknell at fireplace)**. Through the course of 39 weekly episodes, Bucknell transformed a derelict Victorian house in Ealing into a sleek and modern home. Gone were the quaint fireplaces, moulded doors, picture rails and other period features. Walls came down to make way for more up to date open plan layouts, while modular functional furniture and the latest appliances completed a breath-taking transformation, dragging British interiors into the future and leaving behind a cloud of paint fumes and particle-board sawdust. As had been the case in America, the post-war government supported home improvements through the Housing Act of 1949, and the Rent Act of 1954, which enabled Local Authorities to provide generous loans to that effect. By the late 1950s, ideas about how to transform the home, and how best to do it oneself, had been made accessible to the public in a staggering variety of venues. These included the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition of 1946/47, the successive 'British Industries Fairs' after the war, the 'Festival of Britain' in 1951, the annual national 'Handicrafts and Do-It-Yourself' exhibitions in the Empire Hall at Olympia from 1953, the 'Do-It-Yourself Theatre' at the Ideal Home Exhibitions from 1955, and the 'DIY' exhibitions at the Empress Hall, Earl's Court, from 1958. **(Fig. Modern Homes Exh. 1946)** The first British DIY magazine, 'The Practical Householder', appeared in October 1955. By March 1957, it had become the biggest selling technical journal ever, with a circulation of one million.
As with other forms of making, DIY involved the development of specific skills and was an expression of personal aesthetic judgement. It also celebrated thrift, being in part a result of economic necessity:

> From the large number of letters we receive from both men and women readers it is apparent that the Do-It-Yourself movement is here to stay and not, as some thought, a passing phase. It is also evident from those letters that two reasons are responsible for it. The first is the enormous charges now being made for repairs and decorations […] and the second is the deterioration in the quality of the work, notwithstanding the heavy prices asked…[8]

[8] Camm, F. J. 'The Practical Householder', Vol 1 No 9, August 1956, p.671

For the average home owner in 1950s Britain, DIY represented a manageable way of negotiating the rather daunting, if appealing, post-war modernity that Bucknell and the Design Council were so earnestly promoting through the BBC.[9] Self-built home improvements offered scope for the customisation of the modern, both in terms of cost and of formal appearance, providing the know-how to construct a domesticated and affordable version of contemporary 'good design'.

The emphasis on design-led 'making' that is part and parcel of domestic makeover TV shows might lead one to locate them within a historical narrative that stretches back to the emergence of DIY and the popularisation of 'good design', as a modernist project of self-constructed material progress. However, it is the ways in which makeover shows diverge from that story that define the particular nature of this all-pervading contemporary mode of representing the home and our relationship to it.

Throughout the twentieth century, the idea of the home as a site of social reform, the 'good' home as utopian project, has been contending with the idea of domestic space as an expression of middle-class taste, and an emotional sanctuary. This tension can be easily mapped onto the contrasting narrative styles that structured the early DIY programmes, on the one hand, and home makeover shows on the other. While the former's educational vocation focused on the clear, step by step presentation of a process and on skill acquisition, makeovers prioritise narrative, appearance, outcome and drama. They lay bare a shift from function to representation in terms of the media's contribution to the self-made domestic interior.

These programmes are not about improving standards of living, or incorporating new domestic technologies in order to make positive structural changes to dwellings. They certainly don't have a background ideology linking them to a social agenda promoted by governement institutions or current public policies. If anything, they are one of many extremely successful manifestations of the priorities of contemporary consumer culture, a site for the mediation of versions of middle-class taste and their relation to lifestyle as a vague, and vaguely life-enhancing, thing. Crucially, however, the way in which they present the transformation of the home, or rather, the transformation of rooms within the home, subjects the conceptualisation of the domestic interior to the overarching demands of the medium itself. As a consequence, television is no longer only a channel through which pre-existing ideas about the home and its appearance can be conveyed, but the very process through which they are constructed.

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[9] Oram, Scott. "'Constructing contemporary': common-sense approaches to 'going modern' in the 1950s." In *Interior Design and Identity*, edited by Susie McKellar and Penny Sparke. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004.

Domestic Intrusion

Through its constant and banal presence at the heart of the everyday experience of domesticity, television as a medium is by its very nature linked with the spaces of the home – and not just the home as a physical space, but as a space of the mind as well:

> 'Once one takes seriously the fact that television is a domestic medium (and is characterised by programme forms specifically designed for that purpose), it becomes clear that the domestic context of television viewing is not some secondary factor, which can be subsequently sketched in. Rather, the domestic context of TV viewing, it becomes clear, is constitutive of its meaning.'[10]

These meanings arise out of the sharing of televisual experiences, the interpersonal dynamics involved in what is watched when, how, and by whom, or the transformation of TV programmes and topics into a common currency that can be exchanged in the cultural economy of everyday life.

Home makeover shows have been described as a hybrid between two separate television formats, talk shows and reality TV.[11] On the one hand, the hosts engage in conversation with the homeowners whose rooms are being redecorated, encouraging them to share their ideas and concerns about the process that they are participating in. On the other, these programmes transgress the boundaries of the home, perverting the intimacy of the domestic environment by subjecting it to the gaze of millions of viewers, who watch them from the privacy of their own living rooms. This is the paradox that underpins the voyeur's pleasure, which reality television has made safely available to all.

In breaching the boundaries between public and private, domestic makeover shows embody one of the main tenets of modernist architecture's utopian vision, that which sought to erase the visual limits between the inside and the outside. Television itself was from its earliest inception presented as a technology that would erase physical distance and conquer space, as an open window through which 'the outside world [could] be brought into the home, and thus one of mankind's long-standing ambitions [could] be achieved'.[12] It is the home that is now being brought to the outside world. Whether we really want an open window into our bedrooms is debatable, but the phenomenal succes of domestic makeover shows seems to suggest that we do. It would appear that we have become comfortable with the notion that our homes might be subject to surveillance, that reality TV can do on the inside what CCTV cameras do on the outside, that Big Brother is not just a necessary evil, but actually good fun.

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[10] Morley, David. 'Theories of Consumption in Media Studies', in Daniel Miller (ed.) *Acknowledging Consumption.* London: Routledge, 1995, p.321.

[11] Everett, Anna. "Trading Private and Public Spaces @ HGTV and TLC: On New Genre Formations in Transformation TV." *Journal of Visual Culture* 3, no. 2 (2004): 157-181.

[12] Hutchinson, Thomas H. Quoted in Spigel, Lynn. "Installing the Television Set." In *The Everyday Life Reader*, edited by Ben Highmore. London: Routledge, 2002.

However, this suggestion of a relaxed domesticity, at ease with the idea of a foreign gaze accessing the intimate sphere of the home, is belied by the dynamics that are responsible for the fascination that programmes like Changing Rooms exert on their audiences. The high narrative point of home makeover shows, the final moment of truth known as ‘the reveal’, is in fact the dramatic representation of domesticity under threat. As the veil is lifted on the changes made over the course of the programme, the audience holds its collective breath and watches the participants’ reaction to their revamped swahili-themed living-room – secretly hoping that they will hate it. Subjected to the often excentric creative whims of the designers, themselves bound by the producer’s need to generate a televisual spectacle out of watching paint dry, homeowners are caught between the contradictory demands of show business, aesthetic judgement and an improved domestic environment. While design can help provide a more impressive dining room or a more sensual bedroom **(fig interior from Design Rules book),** it can also be threatening to a placid, simple and enjoyable domestic life. Style is one of the ways in which the home can be put at risk: ‘Maybe it’s too arty for them’ says a concerned neighbour about the scheme that is being suggested for her friends’ bedroom. ‘We could do it safe […] but we won’t’ counters Laurence Llewellyn-Bowen, ‘Come on, be brave. Trust me, I’m a designer’.[13]

The disruptions caused by the intrusion of a stranger into the safe haven of the home are a longstanding theme which has provided literature and cinema with some of their most dramatic narratives. The anxieties so often expressed by makeover show participants, about the emotional havoc that might be caused by an inappropriate assessment of the owners’ taste – or by TV designers blatantly disregarding the owners’ aesthetic preferences – speak of a deep-seated perception of the home as an emotionally vulnerable site. This very personal, carefully calibrated emotional balance, constructed in part through home possessions and visual form, can be easily threatened and destroyed by professionals. It is precisely this aspect that shows like Changing Rooms or Home Front exploit to the full. Every lime green brushstroke, every MDF folly, is the potential harbinger of a breakdown in the owners’ pre-established sense of what is, for them, an appropriate visual expression of domesticity, leading to live televised distress and a surge in ratings. In 2000, the Changing Rooms team gave an 18th century vicarage an ‘outlandish and funky’ makeover. On returning to her home the following day, the owner was furious:

> ‘I think it’s absolute crap, I really do. I think it’s a traditional house and you’ve put a modern design in. The sooner we get it out, the better. I mean, breeze blocks in a house of this age? It’s appalling’.[14]

At the same time, the design of the makeovers recognises the primacy of our emotional attachment to domestic objects in the configuration of a pleasurable experience of the home. Cherished possessions are frequently singled out as

[13] *Changing Rooms. Trust Me, I’m A Designer.* DVD, BBC 2002.
[14] *Changing Rooms. Trust Me, I’m A Designer.* DVD, BBC 2002.

focal points for the reorganisation of a room, or given pride of place in especially designed display features. Unfortunately, this doesn't necessarily diminish the risk involved in letting a designer manipulate those objects, as the owner of a valued collection of antique china teapots discovered when some hastily put together hanging shelves collapsed halfway through the makeover process.[15]

Although they pay their dues to the logic of commercial televison in their quest for dramatic confrontations, TV makeover shows are the popular expression of an evolving and tense relationship between high-cultural or design-led discourses about the aesthetics of domestic interiors and mainstream taste. It is a conflict that has been with us throughout the 20th century, and which has seen the home as the main battleground between highbrow and lowbrow taste, experts and neophytes, professionals and amateurs. It is taken to its extreme in these reality shows where the conflict sometimes ends in tears, in front of the nation's eyes. But television has also provided a platform for equally intense, if more high-cultural, confrontations, such as Nicholas Barker and photographer Martin Parr's *Signs of the Times* documentary series, shown on BBC2 in 1991. Constructed as a series of interviews about the way in which people decorate their homes, *Signs of the Times* (with its apparently candid subtitle: 'A Portrait of the Nation's Tastes') extended Parr's interests in class and consumerism into the interior. It preceded the onslaught of reality TV makeover shows by just a few years, and in its producer's words, it set out, 'film narrative permitting, […] to record as objectively as possible a wide range of contemporary tastes, and to present them so that viewers could judge them for themsleves.'[16] Nevertheless, the result was a subtle but damning critique of middle-class tastes in home decoration and the discourses of social aspirations and personal identity that surrounded them **(fig. ruched curtains).**

Multimedia

While the concept of the makeover, which is essentially about highly visible and spectacular transformation, has a natural affinity with the medium of television, domestic makeover shows have found their way (as have others) into a whole range of different media. The rise of this type of programme from the mid-1990s coincided with the consolidation and expansion of the World Wide Web and of internet access as something that was no longer restricted to the workplace. As the numbers in PC ownership and personal internet accounts grew, the domestication of new technologies established a more organic connection between watching home improvement programmes, using makeover software and browsing related internet sites in a domestic context.

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[15] *Changing Rooms. Trust Me, I'm A Designer.* DVD, BBC 2002.
[16] Barker, Nicholas. *Signs of the Times. A portrait of the Nation's Tastes*. Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications, 1992, n/p.

Essentially driven by commercial interests rather than by the intention to disseminate a particular idea through a variety of communication channels, this cross-media expansion adapted the televisual model to a variety of platforms. As a result, their discourses about the home, interior design and visual form, were often contradictory. They responded to the internal logic of the media without always presenting a cohesive approach.
This is particularly evident in relation to the role of both designers and owners in the process of home improvement. The TV programmes, by the nature of their format, emphasise the agency of the designers, while paying lip service to homeowners' requests or suggestions as to what they would like their interior to look and feel like. **(fig. Interfering neighbour cartoon)** Ultimately, the owners' degree of control over the decisions taken and the final result is extremely limited. They are asked by the show's designers to perform certain tasks, ranging from painting walls to others that might involve a greater degree of personal contribution, such as making drawings, for instance. In most cases, however, not only have they not 'designed' what they're making, they also have no information as to how their work relates to the greater scheme under construction, and no choice as to where particular objects will be placed. TV domestic makeover shows are the celebrity designers' playground, an expression of their, not the owners', tastes. By being excentric, demanding, stubborn or inspired, they reconfigure the home as a locus of dramatic narrative, presenting the practice of home improvement as a fun and exciting experience. The owners become a cast of secondary characters supporting the stars, in a script that involves celebrity design snobbery and populist entertainment. **(Fig. Llewellyn-Bowen at fireplace)**
In contrast, the spin-off books that accompany the series tend to reinforce more established notions of home improvement, that engage both with traditional approaches to design advice and contemporary discourses of individual control over the interior as an expression of personal identity. They graciously hand over the baton of taste to the amateur designer, reassuringly stating that 'your design should be down to your own personal taste – the concept of good and bad taste no longer has any credibility.'[17] Indeed, much of the advice and suggestions contained in these books, often proposing highly ornamental schemes, a mixture of period styles, homecraft practices like stencilling, textile dyeing or goldleaf application, would make any follower of 'good design' and 'good taste' shudder. **(fig.?)** But these are combined with more general information about colour, composition, the use of light and the effect and manipulation of materials. With the judicious application of all this, the amateur home improvers should be able, in contrast to their televised peers, to truly experience the home as a site of individual expression and creativity. 'Somewhere,' as the books suggest, 'where

[17] Llewelyn-Bowen, Laurence, and Diarmuid Gavin. *Home Front Inside Out*. London: BBC Worldwide, 2002, p9

you, and you alone, have total personal control'.[18] Here, the populism of the TV shows, built around crowd-pleasing drama and celebrity appeal, turns into a populism that seeks to pacify middle-class taste anxiety:

> '…change in design was led by the dictates of powerful taste gurus who pronounced … that rococo was out and neo-classical was in. Design [has] moved seamlessly overnight from an autocracy to a democracy and the bloodless revolution was effected by us, the people'. [19]

Yes, the books seem to imply, by your home you shall be judged. Our living rooms are us, our kitchens an expression of 'what [we] want to say about [ourselves]'.[20] But we have now postmodernly moved beyond taste. There are no more taste gurus, is the earnest message of the domestic makeover gurus themselves. We are all creative, taste is a democratic commodity, we can all do it ourselves, and we will always get it right.

The BBC's website presents yet another vision of domestic space. Changing Rooms nestles under 'Design', as part of a hierarchy that structures, tellingly, the 'Lifestyle' section of the site. There, the 'Home' subsite is an umbrella for areas such as 'DIY', 'Design', 'Property' and 'TV and Radio'. This is the place to find 'design inspiration' online, and that particular menu takes the browser to a page where the BBC's design celebrities offer expert solutions for transforming and redesigning interiors. The home is shown as made up of a series of separate spaces: the bedroom, the kitchen, the dining room, the lounge, the attic, the playroom, the study. It is a traditional, essentially middle-class organisation of domestic activities, and offers no radical re-configuration of space. **(fig: website: the schematic house)**. While colour or a favourite designer can be selected as the guiding source of inspiration, it is style, or better still, styles, that are offered as the main building blocks of the self-designed interior, the alphabet of the domestic makeover. They come neatly packaged, in a hybrid DIY reinterpretation of period features, design movements and ethnic influences. **(fig. website: page with room designs list)**

The website forcefully presents domestic space as a themed environment, an Aladdin's Cave of available styles to suit a variety of tastes. Or even, as the online test linking attitudes and individual behaviour patterns to styles ultimately suggests, to a range of personalities. And if style and taste reflect our personality, then who could doubt that the alchemy of the domestic makeover will always be successful: as intimated by the gurus, it's not good or bad, it's 'me'.

Finally, the CD-ROM software, with three levels of 'design guidance', a range of layouts and styles, customisable inspiration boards, colour palettes, furniture selectors, and photo-realistic mock-ups, is perhaps the ultimate tool for the DIY representation of the domestic interior. Coming full circle, it provides the instant

[18] Llewelyn-Bowen, Laurence, and Diarmuid Gavin. *Home Front Inside Out*. London: BBC Worldwide, 2002, p17

[19] Llewelyn-Bowen, Laurence, and Diarmuid Gavin. *Home Front Inside Out*. London: BBC Worldwide, 2002, p16

[20] Llewelyn-Bowen, Laurence, and Diarmuid Gavin. *Home Front Inside Out*. London: BBC Worldwide, 2002, p25

means not so much to physically alter our home, but to endlessly indulge in constructing changing representations of what it could be. **(fig. Software still)**

In its dizzying and ever-accelerating journey through the television screen, the home has undergone some fundamental transformations. While some of these have been for the most part a mediated reflection of various preestablished perceptions, the medium itself has increasingly become the crucible in which ideas of domesticity have been formed. Over the course of more than half a century, television has shifted from representing the spaces of the modern home as the site of rational, progress-informed agency, to offering a vision of domesticity that foregrounds drama, vulnerability, emotional attachments and scenographic display. This move from making to feeling mirrors a wider cultural transfer from post-war civic priorities to the more spectacular, and often self-indulgent, dynamics of our post-industrial consumer culture, and from a moral dimension to a fundamentally visual one. Certainly, the home has not been the only site where these changes have taken place, or even where they might be traced most accurately. Nevertheless, it does offer an exquisite setting for doing so, and has proved to be particularly responsive to the impact of mass-media representations of the domestic space.
In their recent request for advice to the interior design magazine LivingEtc., a couple explained their dilemma in the following words:

> 'We have been slowly converting each room of our house with a theme. Cocktail Kitchen and Two-Tone Living Room were the first couple, and now we're moving onto the bathroom. We want it to be rock inspired…' [21]

Enhanced by the do-it-yourself capabilities of computer software and interactive websites, the 'themed' home seems to have struck the mainstream. Proactive home-makers experiment with styles as they would with colour or patterned wallpaper, cutting up their home into neat, discrete boxes and painting by numbers. Historically, the different rooms in a house have often had a particular visual character, generally derived from or related to their use. The modernist home resisted such discrimination, insisting on a clear overarching discourse of interior space. What emerges here, however, is not just a return to interior 'decoration', but the notion of fragmented spaces separated from their entire domestic system. Defined through form at least as much as through function, indifferent to 'good taste' as much as to 'good design', eclectic, playful and descriptive, they painstakingly construct a themed narrative of domesticity that courts spectacle, acknowledges ephemerality, and celebrates representation itself.

[21] T&S. *Livingetc*, March 2005, p121.