

STREET TRADE NOT STREET AID

THE BIG ISSUE

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EXCLUSIVE! Mark Brunetz cleans house in South Africa

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Crossing borders

Mark Brunetz is the American interior designer on Style Network's top-rated reality makeover television series *Clean House*, which airs on DStv [The Style Network, Channel 183]. Recently, Mark started a charity called Design Without Borders, which he will be coming to South Africa with in September. He has partnered with *The Big Issue* to provide our office in Woodstock with a complete makeover.

By Donald Paul

“The moment I catch myself complaining, I ask myself, what can I do to make a difference in this situation?”

Launched in 2004, *Clean House* gives families professional help to overcome the clutter and mess in their homes. In each episode, hosted by comedienne Niecy Nash, a team of experts removes the offending junk, sells it at a yard sale and uses the profits to redo the space. Mark typically uses objects from the family's home as design inspirations.

Recently Mark decided to take his design skills further afield and started a charity called Design Without Borders. The non-profit organisation is “committed to providing design makeovers to underprivileged individuals and/or groups in developing areas of the world.

“The charitable organisation

seeks the partnership of philanthropic individuals, corporations and foundations”.

Mark will be bringing Design Without Borders to South Africa in September and has partnered with *The Big Issue* to provide our office in Woodstock with a complete makeover. Corporate partners in the venture include, among others, Builders Warehouse and Boardmans.

In addition, Mark and *The Big Issue* will be running a makeover competition, the winner of which will get a Mark Brunetz designer makeover. Details of the competition will be included in the next edition of *The Big Issue*.

We caught up with Mark at his Los Angeles home, and asked him a few questions.



NO BORDERS: Mark Brunetz

The Big Issue: What are your Big Issues?

Mark Brunetz: My big issue is personal integrity. When I speak of integrity it goes much deeper than simply doing what I say I'm going to do. It's more about integrity as a foundation for my life, living a life that is consistent with my purpose. It seems most of my upbringing was about staying safe and feeling protected due to family circumstances. Over time, this agenda crept into my adulthood. At some point in my late 20s, however, I started noticing that whatever thoughts I was having about myself were, in turn, directly shaping my relationships, my career and ultimately, the world I lived in. Once I realised the two went hand-in-hand, I became more aware of what I was thinking in each and every moment. In doing so, I changed my view of the world from a place of uncertainty and unrest to a place of infinite beauty and endless possibility. It was at this time I launched my interior design firm (my true passion), began working in television and became involved with a variety of local and national charities. Over time, I realised that I was in the driver's seat and the only one who had a true say in my life. Once everything turned full circle, I realised I had no right to complain about something unless I was doing something about it. The moment I catch myself complaining, I ask myself, what can I do to make a difference in this situation? Inevitably, the answer presents me with an option. Then it's

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simply a matter of getting into action. This is a daily challenge or “big issue” in my life. It's never perfected, only something I can work at, day in day out.

TBI: What are the one or two things you know for sure, be it about yourself or the world in general?

MB: That we all seek the truth and that we all desire to live the best life possible. And, whether people know it or not, we are profoundly affected by our environments and the spaces that we inhabit.

TBI: What made you decide to launch Design Without Borders?

MB: I firmly believe in the power of design and its ability to transform lives. A truly inspiring space, one that accurately reflects its inhabitants, can build self-esteem, create endless opportunities for personal growth and productivity and, above all, allow people to share their lives with people in ways they never knew possible. I started Design Without Borders as a way to share this with as many people on the planet as possible. It's why I work in television and why I'm now penning a series of books on the subject.

TBI: What legacy would you hope to leave with such an organisation?

MB: A worldwide awareness that regardless of country of origin, cultural upbringing or personal beliefs, we are all not only cut from the same cloth, but global citizens by design and that it's everyone's birthright to live in a space that nurtures and fosters one's greatest ambitions.

TBI: What is your favourite building?

MB: La Sagrada Familia Church in Barcelona, Spain. Long after Antoni Gaudi's death, it continues to be a work in progress based on his original design. That shows the infinite power of great design.

TBI: Which is your favourite city, and why?

MB: Florence, Italy. (Although, I hear



Cape Town may be in competition.) I love Florence simply because it's like walking through a history book. I get so excited finding undiscovered pockets of the city and mostly eating the food—I love fresh food! I also love checking out hotels. I was there in March of this past year and stayed at the Hotel Lungarno which is owned by the Ferragamo family. I'm always fascinated by the use of state-of-the-art technology in buildings that are over a thousand years old. It's artistry at its best!

TBI: Who is your favourite clothing designer?

MB: It's Miuccia Prada. The way she captures the cultural climate in fashion is brilliant.

TBI: Who is your favourite designer?

MB: I love the buildings of Frank Gehry, the imaginations of Charles and Ray Eames, the fabrics of Manuel Canovas and



The Big Issue and Design Without Borders will publish an sms number for competition entries in the next issue, on 31 July. Watch this space.

the clean lines of Ralph Pucci. The list goes on and on. As you can see, I find myself in many styles and periods.

TBI: What do you think is the most important thing that should be taught to people studying design?

MB: The art of listening. Clients will tell you everything you need to know if you ask the right questions, you simply have to listen. And if design is in your blood, it's your birthright to express it. Go for it!

TBI: What are some of the biggest or most common mistakes that people make when designing their own space?

MB: Trying to emulate someone else's style. Great design, like beauty, is in the eyes of the beholder and only you know what you truly love. Don't second guess yourself! Trust your instincts.

TBI: Is there any particular style or era of design that you personally favour?

MB: No. I believe people are multi-dimensional and are unable to be defined by one style or period. And since I'm in the business of people, my designs are across the board representing all styles. As a human being, I fall into the same category.

TBI: Do you tend toward natural fibres (wood, linen, etc) or toward synthetics (chrome, glass, plastics)?

MB: Definitely natural fibres. With a degree in biology, I became very aware of life beyond humans at an early age. I've always migrated towards a natural and simple way of life especially in decorating.

TBI: What was your most challenging design job for a private client?

MB: Designing a backyard space for Chris Vrenna, the drummer for the band *Nine Inch Nails*. It was one of my first celebrity clients and I was terrified because I thought this guy was such a creative force, how could I possibly measure up? Turned out, he loved everything I did, which included a gargoyle garden fountain spewing red water. It made me realise I could handle any job as long as I listened to the client and my instincts.

TBI: When you started Fortis Films with Sandra Bullock, the first film you made was *While You Were Sleeping*, directed by Jon Turteltaub. What was the biggest learning experience making that film?

MB: Watching first-hand, Sandy go from the girl-next-door to one of the highest paid actresses in Hollywood. It was meteoric. And as a close friend, I witnessed how people would treat her differently and, in turn, she was treating them differently. In many ways, it prepared me for life in the public eye. No matter how well-known I become, I strive to remain true to myself.

TBI: You want to be a racing car driver. What car do you drive?

MB: Yes, I'm obsessed with speed.

Currently, I drive a Nissan 350Z (I limit the miles because it's a gas guzzler). For my last birthday, I drove an Indy 500 car at top speed. If I could do my life all over again, I'd be a professional race car driver. Who knows, that may be in my future.

TBI: If you had a choice of having any car, would you opt for speed or design?

MB: Without question, speed. Despite my work as a designer, I'm more interested in function and performance than pure aesthetics.

TBI: What is your favourite car in terms of pure design?

MB: It's a toss-up between the Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren and the Audi R8. I'm a Speed Racer fan at heart so I'm drawn to a more sleek automotive design.

TBI: What was the most recent album/song/artist you loaded on your iPod?

MB: Deluxe. *The Ultimate Chillout Experience*. I'm listening to it now.

TBI: You were commissioned by Comcast Cable to do a series of \$5 000 Dream Room Makeovers for its employees: what was the biggest challenge doing this?

MB: It was my first ever makeover on the road, away from Los Angeles. I knew I was well-resourced in the LA area, but the biggest challenge was finding local resources. In the end, these makeovers proved to me that I "work my magic" no matter where I am. Of course, South Africa is going to be an entirely new ball game.

TBI: If you could makeover the Oval Office in the White House, what would you do?

MB: What I would do in the Oval Office is completely dependent upon who is president at the time. Currently, it's Barack Obama and since I doubt he's into 18th century Neoclassical architecture, the first thing I would do is rename it since the oval shape is 200 years old.