

TV duo make home repairs humorous

By SUSAN BALCOM

You're 30-something. You've just bought your first house. And, guess what? It leaks.

You could ask your dad for help (and admit that you should have taken industrial arts in high school).

Or, you could sit down and watch TV.

Owning a broken house puts you smack in the middle of the target audience for *Broken House Chronicles*, a zany new home improvement show on HGTV geared to young homeowners who can't afford to hire a professional whenever a drainpipe gets plugged with leaves. Best of all, there's no attempt to hide the inevitable mistakes that happen when enthusiasm overtakes know-how.

The half-hour program is produced by Mountain Road Productions Ltd., the Ottawa-based company that also produces the design show *Lofty Ideas*. It premiered Jan. 8, with "Gutters and Order," the first episode in a trial run consisting of six shows.

Producer Tim Alp says early feedback has been so positive, talks are already underway with HGTV for a full season with 13 new episodes.

In typical Canadian style, *Broken House Chronicles* takes a soft-sell approach — some bits are really quite silly — but under all the light entertainment, there's plenty of reliable information.

Neither show host George Brook nor his roommate/co-host Leigh Uttley are trained in home repairs. The two actually met in their 20s when they played in the same band and toured the country together.

It was only years later, when Brook bought a somewhat neglected house in the Quebec hills just north of Ottawa, that the do-it-yourself team emerged.

"I would be tackling all these projects and Leigh, being a good friend, would always help out," Brook says. "He was hilarious. I couldn't get anything done because I was laughing too much. At some point we thought we should make a show out of it. Three-and-a-half years later, here we are."

Projects shown on *Broken House Chronicles* range from installing new rain gutters (episode one) to repairing a water-damaged living room ceiling (episode five) — a task made much more problematic when Brook and Uttley notice that one water stain looks an awful lot like Jerry Garcia, the deceased member of the band Grateful Dead.

Music adds character to the fast-paced show, which breaks regularly for short musical segues by the Broken House Band (featuring tunes such as *The Trouble With Wiring*).

"Doing the job has got to be fun," Brook says. "You're always going to have a job to do, so enjoy what you are doing."

Alp says the whole idea behind the show is to present average people doing home repairs and to reassure viewers that it's okay if the job doesn't go like clockwork.

In the first episode, Brook discovers that somehow he's cut a length of gutter too long. But the water drains away anyway, so where's the problem?

"If it works, you leave it," Alp says. "You just do the best you can."

Sun Homes columnist