



George Brook and Leigh Uttley sometimes go over the top when tackling a home improvement project.

It's staining a floor and finding yourself painted into a corner.

It could be trying to attach a hook onto the back of a hollow-core door and smashing the hammer right through the wood.

Although certainly laughable, these are real-life home repairs.

Few of us, except maybe Martha Stewart, can spackle a wall with great finesse and ice a cake at the same time or replace panes of glass in a tool shed window without ever breaking a sweat (or spare pane of glass).

But these perfect images of household fix ups are the ones commonly purveyed on most home improvement television shows.

When we turn on the TV to be inspired or informed about how to proceed with home projects, we see experts effortlessly scoring shower tiles without a single wrong crack and cutting carpet to fit perfectly on the first try.

But watching these flawless endeavours can be frustrating because they are not the stuff of real-life renovation adventures, done by everyday people. They don't show how to fix up messed attempts and pull a project (not to men-

tion our motivation and confidence) out of the gutter.

Granted, as average do-it-yourselfers, most of us are not quite as inept as a Tim the Toolman, slicing, dicing and electrifying ourselves into an emergency ward on a regular basis.

But stuff can certainly happen when we take power tools and paint brushes in hand.

Things spill, break and go over budget. Tools are usually missing when needed most and used incorrectly or don't work when they are around.

Which brings us to a new type of reality TV program called *Broken House Chronicles*. It's sort of like *Survivor* meets Bob Vila.

The program is a weekly half-hour saga that chronicles learning how to do something not as an expert, but as a

Zany guys give solid advice

novice. Not only does it depict the true trials and tribulations of home repair, but it shows that you can (and should) laugh at the mistakes and misadventures that ensue when repairs inevitably go wrong.

While other shows employ home improvement wizards as hosts, the weekly half-hour series features hosts with little renovation experience, but keen sense of humour.

George Brook, a real-life first-time home owner, and sidekick/roommate Leigh Uttley lead viewers through their own ongoing attempts at home improvements as the show premieres this month on HGTV.

This season, the duo set out on a variety of projects such as fixing rain gutters, which leads to lessons in buying the right ladder, and embark on a living

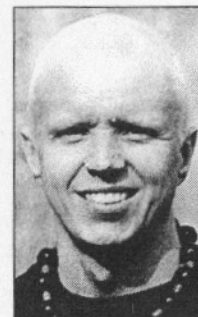


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MODEST BEGINNINGS



George Brook



Leigh Uttley

room archeological dig to uncover and restore a floor.

They also replace a window that is the victim of an unfortunate encounter with a model rocket, repair a ceiling water stain that bears a resemblance to Jerry Garcia and attempt to unplug a toilet, ending up breaking the porcelain and then learning, instead of how to unclog, how to install a new toilet.

While entertaining and unquestionably zany in both their analysis of the project and the way they go about tackling it, this duo of anything-but-expert renovators do manage to include some good advice about home projects.

Their mistakes and miscalculations not only form much of the humour and freshness of each show, but can help viewers learn how to do things right.

Broken House Chronicles both satirizes and celebrates mainstream home improvement culture.

But what you may really gain most from the program, if not solid home improvement help, is the lesson that if these two can do it, anyone can.