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Coming In Loud and Queer: Trading Closets



joel
nichols

Try to watch The Learning Channel's "Trading Spaces" everyday. It's the home decorating show that pairs two couples with a designer each and a thousand dollars. With the help of a carpenter and a host, the couples trade a room in their houses and go to work for the weekend. I love this show.

It's full of things a gay should love: decorating and design, some divas and a hunky male carpenter for the boys, and for the girls a dyke

inside someone's basement, he consistently produces the most revolting rooms.

Each designer gets a couple and a room, but share one carpenter, either Amy Wynn or Ty. Amy is talented and fun to watch. Aside from the fact that she is a carpenter, I had no reason to believe she was gay. Then I saw one episode where she wore camouflage pants and an oversized army jacket and the lesbo alarm went off in my head. Ty is approaching middle-age, but

have married couples make up the team. There have been some all-women teams, but they are explained away as sisters or best friends working together, always with a reference to a husband. There was at least one possible lesbian couple on, but they stayed closeted the whole time. The only other obvious gay was helping his straight best friend decorate her apartment and he kept mum about it the whole time.

Additionally, the probable gay designers (and carpenters) act heteronormatively. Frank, of bad-taste fame, is one of the most gay-acting men I've ever seen. All my evidence is circumstantial, though: he has a gay voice, gay movements, and is an interior designer, for God's sake, but mentions his wife every few shows. If that man has a wife who isn't named Steve, I'd recommend couples counseling. Doug and Vern are also somewhat stereotypically queer, but laugh happily at heteronormative jokes and participate willingly in every sort of straight convention there is.

Some might ask why it's important that there are visible gays on The Learning Channel. It's legitimate to wonder if it matters if the audience knows the sexual orientations of designers on a television show. Do we really need to know if Amy Wynn has a girlfriend or if Ty and Doug have made out, if they are only concerned with dry-wall, banquets, and counter tops?

I say yes. If gay is as normal as we all would like to think it is, then it's appropriate to bring it up at all times. Anytime someone might assume that a character on Trading Spaces is straight, it's the right time for them to be openly gay. As far as I'm concerned, if they are going to act gay, they should say they're gay. All the time is the appropriate time to be out, even on The Learning Channel. In the meantime, I'm going to watch the Christopher Lowell Show, whose innuendo is much more fun. ■

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carpenter and some hot women. The former host, Alex MacLeod, had sexual tension with everyone in a really hot bisexual sort of way.

She flirted with Ty, the hunky carpenter, was playful with Doug, one of the fruity yet classy designers, but knew her way around Hilda, the most sophisticated person on a reality show ever, and knew exactly what the lesbian-acting carpenter Amy Wynn liked. I haven't seen enough of the new host to fairly judge, but because I loved Alex, I will anyway... she stinks.

There is a group of designers that rotates elegant Hilda, obnoxious but usually tasteful Doug, young, hip Genevieve, boring and forced Laurie, wacky Dez, perfectionist Vern, and tacky Frank. Frank has bad taste. Whether painting flowers and trees freehand on a wall or building a tiki-hut and karaoke stage

you'd never know it because he dresses young, acts young, and pulls it off. One of my favorite things about him is that he is a little fruity and has a wonderful dynamic with both Alex and Doug. When Doug and Ty are on at the same time, there is enough homoerotic tension to cut through concrete. These two (along with Hilda and Genevieve) are enough to carry the show.

Then comes my frustration. The show, although it has the potential to be the "Will and Grace" of The Learning Channel, functions as a big sad closet. Sure, it's fun for gay people to watch because we can see right through the deception, but imagine a world where straight people understood why Frank lisps, too!

The first problem with the homo-ization of the show is that they almost always

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