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### Paul DiMeo: The people's carpenter

You know Paul DiMeo as the caring carpenter and designer from television's "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition." This week, he'll be an in-town expert, dispensing advice to those at the Minneapolis Home and Garden Show.

By **KIM YEAGER**, Star Tribune  
Last update: February 24, 2010 - 9:57 AM

You know Paul DiMeo as the caring carpenter and designer from television's "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition." But this week, he'll be an in-town expert, dispensing design and carpentry advice to those at the Minneapolis Home and Garden Show. We caught up with him by phone for a glimpse of the man behind the makeovers.

**Q** Why do you call Minneapolis-St. Paul one of your favorite places in the world?

**A** We've done some wonderful builds there. My best buddy, Gary Brown, is from Minnetonka. We were builders together, starting out -- finish carpenters in the Hollywood hills; the rich and famous were our clientele. He used to speak so highly of Minnesota.

It's true that there's a work ethic there that you don't find anywhere else. You have great artisan cheesemakers up there. And that farmers market in St. Paul is known all over.

**Q** Your official website says you were the first to cry on "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition." Tell me about that.

**A** Does it really say that? My word. I need to change that! Yes, I cried during the pilot. I cry pretty easily. I'm a bit of a crybaby. They're tears of joy.

**Q** So you're a sensitive carpenter.

**A** It's important to be sensitive. You can pick up on things you wouldn't otherwise. But I think it makes me a better person, carpenter, designer. You can be sensitive

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**When:** Noon-9 p.m. Wed.; 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Thur.; 9 a.m.-10 p.m. Fri.-Sat. and 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Sun.

**Where:** Minneapolis Convention Center, 1301 2nd Av. S., Mpls., 1-800-466-7469.

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to someone else's needs and wants, as opposed to being insensitive. Which means you would miss the subtle things that would make someone's life a little better.

**Q** You were 5 when your family home burned to the ground? Did that drive your interest in carpentry?

**A** The five children and my mom and dad and grandmom had to be split up for a while as the new home was being built. I stayed with some friends of my parents. The builder went on strike so we couldn't finish it; my dad had to finish building the house. He was already doing two jobs. I would be with him while he was running trim or baseboards or putting in the mantel. I would do anything I could do to help him.

**Q** Sounds as if you got the bug early.

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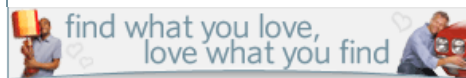


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Continued: Paul DiMeo: The people's carpenter

A All my mom and dad wanted was to get their family back together under one roof. I watched people come and help my dad; the Knights of Columbus would come over, the ladies from Our Lady of Charity would come over, plumbers from the neighborhood. I watched people come and put it together to get us back under one roof. Now I'm doing the same thing!

Q You are a noted dumpster diver. Share some of your secrets.

A You have to be willing to look, to dig through, to go down the darkest alley to find the brightest jewel. You need to learn the places to go to find the good stuff. In New York I'd come out of all the theaters, and when they strike a set you can pull some good wood and make something out of it.

Q What's your best found treasure?

A I found a good oak library chair in 1979 that we still have today. Actually, we have found three others. They are slightly different, but for the most part they're all white oak, done well.

Q What are some of your other notable items?

A Here's the thing about being notable, what makes something notable? I'll talk about that at the Home and Garden Show.

We can walk into someone's house and they have a beautiful poster of a Van Gogh, let's pick "Starry Night." We've all seen it, and here it is in this lovely couple's house. Or you can walk into someone's house anywhere and maybe they've had their child do their own version of that.

Manipulate that with the computer and then we can put it up on our wall. No one else in the world has that. That's an original that your child did. That makes it

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notable.

**Q** So you have a lot of original art?

**A** We have over 200 framed pieces of artwork up on the wall, and all of them come from friends and children. My dad does watercolors, so we have a few of his up.

**Q** What do you consider to be the center of your home?

**A** The dining room table. It's the gathering place. It's like the fire. We gather around it, we eat, we tell stories. Our memories are there. I can shut my eyes and tell you the scars that are in the dining room table that we had when I was growing up. I can put my hand down and feel the groove in the piece of wood that was right in front of me, where I sat from the time I was 2 until I was 18 and left the house.

**Q** What's your best personal home renovation?

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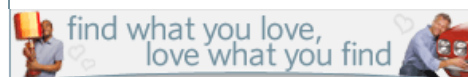


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A We were renting a loft out in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, long before it was in vogue, would have been 1987. We lived on the second floor and the first floor extended longer than ours so we had a rooftop we could walk out on -- and when you did, the J Train passed right over us. In three days we built a deck for a party we threw. Kelly made masks for everyone and we built this wonderful 400-square-foot-deck.

Q What three things should no home be without?

A Dogs, friends and a piano. There has to be music and there has to be life itself.

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