

B14

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MAKEOVER TAKEOVER

For a pair of mother-daughter teams, redoing each other's bedrooms means big surprises (and good television)



Jessica Ardito, left, prepares to have her room redecorated by her longtime friend. Below is the finished product.



BEFORE
DURING
AFTER

Newsday Photo / Daniel Goodrich

Newsday Photo / J. Michael Dombroski



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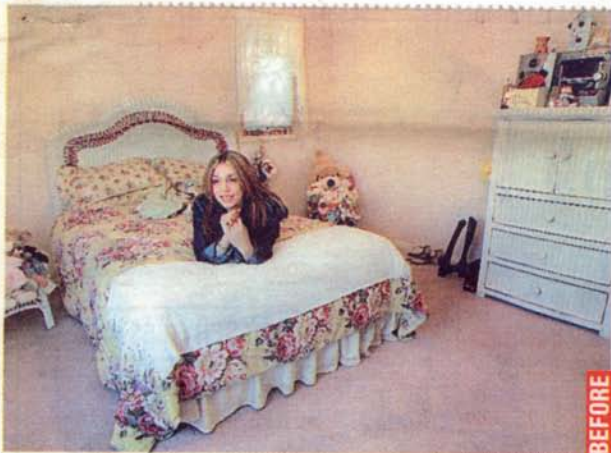
By Carol Polsky
STAFF WRITER

A TELEVISION crew, lights glaring, cameras rolling, waited inside Jessica Ardito's Huntington bedroom. Jessica and her mother, Mary, waited outside. The room would look nothing like it did when last they saw it. "I'm so scared," Jessica murmured. "I wonder if you can hear my heart through the mike." Alex McLeod, host of "Trading Spaces," a cable show where neighbors

ALEX McLEOD

NEWSDAY MAY 10, 2001

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Allison Edelman goes from little-girl frills to sophisticated sleekness in TLC's "Trading Spaces."



BEFORE
DURING
AFTER

Newsday Photo / Bill Davis

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trade rooms and redecorate them in two frenetic days with a designer and \$1,000, barred the door a moment longer.

"Try not to say 'Oh my God,' or 'awesome,' but be yourselves," she said before leading them through the doorway, "but if that's what comes to mind, then so be it."

"OK, open your eyes."

"OH MY GOD!!!!" gasped Jessica, 26, gaping at what designer Douglas Wilson and her neighbors, Loraine Edelman and daughter Alison, 23, had wrought. "OH MY GOD!"

It may be going too far to call this a religious experience, but there are definitely elements of transfiguration — and a leap of faith. You think: Who would hand over control of a room to some neighbors and a designer and sign a waiver letting them do anything they want to it? Who has that kind of blind trust?

Lots of people. "Trading Spaces" has been in production since August; the episode filmed April 27 and 28 in Huntington was show number 36, with number 37 set for Lynbrook two days later. Shown Sundays on TLC at noon,

with repeats at 4 p.m. daily, the show (based on a British version called "Changing Rooms") has been signed up for daily segments starting next season.

It's easy to see why. There's the reality-programming thrill of seeing people jump off cliffs, literally or metaphorically: the fun is in seeing how they'll land. It's not always pretty.

"I don't like it when homeowners lie and say they like it when they don't," said McLeod, whose big blue eyes turn

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mischievous during filming as she prods and questions and stirs the pot.

"One man said, 'Very nice, nice job' 18 times. I said, 'You've got studs in leather in your pillows, the room looks like the Brady Bunch on acid and all you can say is 'nice job?'"

It was just such high drama that made Mary Ardito and later her daughter fans of the program. In February, Jessica, a segment producer for VH1 television, e-mailed the show with the Ardito-Edelman package: two women, close friends for more than a quarter century, enduring recent divorces together, living alone with their daughters in suburban splanches a two-minute walk away on streets awash in cherry blossoms.

"Mother-daughters, best friends, the whole shebang," Jessica recalled. "I knew once they read that, they'd get back to us."

They did — the next day. When the mothers declined to have their own bedrooms redecorated, the girls jumped in. Jessica hated her bedroom's "prison-gray wall paint" and the "gray Formica furniture."

... very late-'80s, to go with the big hair." She wanted Zen, relaxing, an environment to counter her insomnia and the stress of her job.

Alison, a store manager who enjoys a good party, still had her taupe and white wicker, little-girl bedroom, with heaps of stuffed animals on tiny chairs. She was ready for "romantic Victorian," burgundy walls; maybe lace draped from the ceiling.

But it was out of their hands now, as the television production team pulled in, installed cameras, set up the carpentry tools in the Arditos' driveway and the sewing machines in the Edelmanns' kitchen. (The \$1,000 budget doesn't include the labor of Amy Wynn Pastor, the carpenter on this job, or of Daniel Hawk, who sews the bedding, pillows and curtains.)

The designers — there are seven who make regular appearances on the show — get photos of the rooms and information about the homeowners' desires two weeks ahead of time, then come prepared with fabrics and objects they've collected along the way.

Other materials, like lumber, accessories and hardware, are bought locally. Existing furniture is repainted. While they take into account the wishes of the homeowners and neighbors, the designers are clearly in charge.

Designer Vern Yip, an architect and show regular with a patter that flows like paint ("Let's roll the carpet, I am so excited to see what the floors look like — Wow, this floor looks so good. We totally lucked out!") got the

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Loraine, left, and Alison Edelman, right, with the host of "Trading Spaces," Alex McLeod

Newsday Photo / Daniel Goodrich

TRADING SPACES

assignment to transform Alison's bedroom with the help of the Ardito mother-daughter team.

"She was expecting lace and bunnies," Jessica said of her friend on day one. Her clothes were protected with an oversized green "Trading Spaces" shirt, her paintbrush dripped the bright lilac paint Yip had chosen for the walls. "It's not what she expected, but I think she'll love it."

Yip prefers minimalist design and strong structural lines, but said he chose a floral bedspread, for the first and probably only time, to cushion Alison's shock.

Jessica and her mother worked till midnight plucking staples from the uncovered wood floor and searching for a verse to paint on the wall from a book of love poems (Jessica's idea) that turned out to be Bible passages. They chose "For where your treasure is, there will be your heart . . ." Mary stayed up till 1:30 a.m. lettering.

Meanwhile, Alison and her mom, Loraine, spent their two days of filming trading jibes with Manhattan designer Douglas Wilson, who ribbed the duo for not working hard enough. ("What do you want me to do, Doug?" Alison asked.

"Stand there and look good; you've mastered that.")

Lori Stryer, the executive producer, beamed. This was good television, especially when Alison started sawing away at a piece of wood in her hand, or waved her painted fingernails at the camera, warning future marital prospects, "I don't do carpets."

"I don't mind telling you, we're really tired," Loraine said on day two, after going to bed at midnight and being awakened repeatedly by her friend's cuckoo clock (the duos switched houses for the project.) "We're not used to hard work . . . but it's fun."

The participating homeowners are often surprised by how much hard work there is and how long the hours are, McLeod said. But they don't have to make many design decisions.

"Ideally, I want to give them a space they can live in that suits their personality," Wilson said. "But this is a design show and I want to push them into things they wouldn't have thought of on their own. I want to show them they can take a risk even if we have to take it for them."

(Sometimes these imaginative flights don't pan out: no fun for anyone, but good television. McLeod especially liked the episode where a husband walked into his newly redone living room and shouted, "I hate it — It

looks like Beetlejuice lives here," and later turned to his friends and neighbors and asked them, "Do you even know me?")

In Ardito's room, Wilson took the Zen theme and gave it his own spin. He designed a floor-to-ceiling, off-kilter mirror frame for the wall, which Pastor built out of rough 4 by 4s, using two planks and a pond pump to create a fountain with water trickling into a galvanized tin bucket.

He hung thrift-shop Malaysian baskets from the ceiling as lampshades and used the excess rope from the lamps as tie pulls for the repainted bureau. He chose a sage khaki color for the ceiling and a neutral grass-paper wall covering, beige fabric for the duvet and African print bed pillows.

It worked. "OH MY GOD," said Jessica. "It's so good."

She stared around the room, stunned.

"Oh my God, Jessie," said her mother, pointing to the corner. "There's a fountain. It's perfect."

"I want to go to sleep on the bed right now," Jessica said.

At the Edelman house, designer Yip stared intently at a small monitor to see Alison and Loraine enter the bedroom. "This is the big payoff," he said. But then he wasn't sure they liked it. When Alison opened her eyes in her bedroom, she was very nearly speechless.

It was awed admiration. And fear.

"It looks like a magazine," she murmured, looking at the lilac walls, the huge circle of candle sconces forming a wall clock with battery-operated arms. There were deep indigo velvet drapes covering the wall behind her bed, flowing around oval mirrors on either side. There were purple glass grape-cluster bedside lamps and a chandelier with beaded lampshades. "It's gorgeous . . . gorgeous. I'm not a little girl anymore."

The piece de resistance: four sconces suspended over the bed holding glass bowls, each filled with sparkling marbles and a single Siamese fighting fish.

"You can say she's petrified of the fish," her mother said later. "She said, 'Ma, I can't sleep under those fish.'"

"I'm afraid they'll jump out," Alison said.

Otherwise? "I love it. Those mirrors and drapes; it's like Snow White."

She tenderly touched the stuffed bunny placed on the wicker rocker in the corner. Yip had given in to Mary's insistence that they leave at least one little stuffed animal in the new "sophisticated, chic" bedroom.

"I wasn't going to leave that child without any animals," Mary said.

(The show featuring the Arditos and the Edelmanns will air June 3 on the TLC network.) ■