

HGTV's 'Hot Properties: San Diego' as real as it gets



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Columnist

In the first episode of HGTV's new "Hot Properties: San Diego" series, which debuted on Sunday, the show's stars — Realtor Seth O'Byrne, real estate agent Mia Tidwell and contractor Andrew

White — were up to their eyeballs in wall-to-wall drama.

The \$2.6 million house in Del Mar needed to be remodeled on a ridiculously tight time frame, and there were cabinets in the yard. Also a challenging master-bath situation. And that 11,800-square-foot estate in Rancho Santa Fe? The one with its own 2,000-square-foot saloon? It needed a very particular kind of buyer with a particularly large wallet.

Could White make the Del Mar house's \$70,000 worth of renovations happen in two weeks? Could Tidwell and O'Byrne throw the kind of open house that would bring in high-rollers with a soft spot for animal-skull decor?

And perhaps most importantly, can three friends make the art of selling million-dollar houses in sunny San Diego County look like the real-life adventure that it really is? Quips included?

The answer to the first two questions was yes. The answer to third question is, "Heck yes."

"People ask us all the time how much of the show is scripted and how much is real. It is 100 percent real," said O'Byrne, a licensed Realtor with Pa-

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cific Sotheby's International Realty who has worked with White and Tidwell for years. "I came to the table with a preconceived notion of reality TV being made up and that all of these shows are scripted, and I wanted this show to be real. I didn't want to be fed lines."

The half-hour series, which airs on Sundays at 10 p.m., follows O'Byrne and Tidwell (also of Pacific Sotheby's) as they go about the high-wire business of selling prime real estate in a

county that everyone loves to visit, but where not just anyone can afford to actually live. As you might imagine, high-stress situations are as ubiquitous as the San Diego sun.

"(Seth, Mia and Andrew) are true experts in their fields, and the audience will have a behind-the-scenes look at the wide range of properties that they renovate and sell," said Betsy Ayala, the senior vice president of programming and development at HGTV. "They provide the HGTV audience with an approachable view into a high-end world, where the audience can see what it takes to sell some of the most extravagant and beautiful homes in Southern California."

For O'Byrne and Tidwell, that could mean throwing a huge, saloon-themed open house to rustle up a buyer for that Western-themed Rancho Santa Fe estate, which the owners were hoping to sell for \$7 million. It could mean looking for a condo fit for a Corgi. It also means dealing with potential dream-home nightmares while the cameras are rolling.

"As you film a TV show, things can change course at any moment," said Tidwell, whose pre real-estate life included a stint as a rock-girlfriend contestant on VH1's "Rock of Love with Bret Michaels" and six years as a casting agent on Bravo's "Millionaire Matchmaker" dating show. "When we started filming the show, we had all of our real clients involved in real renovations. It is rare that a real estate transaction goes smoothly. You don't know what is going to happen, and you have to deal with it as you would in real life."

And for every home that just needs some creative staging to sell, there is another "Hot Property" that

needs more. Sometimes, a lot more.

So while O'Byrne and Tidwell are exclaiming over a picturesque deck or the great light in the kitchen, White is examining dangling electrical cords and unfinished kitchen islands and unpacking his reality checks. Each episode includes one of White's magical makeovers, as the contractor re-imagines backyards, turns abandoned master-bath projects into spa-level mini-retreats, and makes something like the first episode's major remodel happen in a two-week blink of an eye.

"With TV, there is no option (for not finishing). If something happens, the episode doesn't air," said White, who works at Method Development, a full-service design, planning and remodeling company. "If we have to, we'll work 20 yours a day. That was one of the most compressed time lines (of the series), but when it was done, it was nice. I definitely slept on the floor a few times."

Another feat of "Hot Properties: San Diego" magic includes the camaraderie that O'Byrne, Tidwell and White share, which withstands everything from the threat of code violations to drones falling into swimming pools. There are no villains here. There will be no drink flinging or tantrum throwing. It's just three enterprising friends bringing the high-end San Diego real-estate dream within the reach of your remote. Which could be as real as it's ever going to get.

"When HGTV came to us, it was with the concept of people doing high-end real estate in a real friendly and accessible way," O'Byrne said. "They felt that the city was so fascinating, they steered away from the de-



sire to manufacture drama.
They just wanted the city to
be the story.”

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Real estate agents Seth O'Byrne and Mia Tidwell discuss their current project with contractor Andrew White on “Hot Properties: San Diego.”