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LONG ISLAND JOURNAL; Crafted by Committee, a House to Vie For

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IT is known as the "She House," a home touted as being designed with a woman's needs and desires in mind. The retreat is on nearly an acre of some of the most desirable real estate on the Island, professionally decorated down to the fluffy comforter, throw pillows and king-size outdoor barbecue. The spanking new 2,600-square-foot house on a quiet lane on Shelter Island oozes curb appeal: a broad veranda in front, tall double-hung windows and a gabled wing to one side.

It is available, but not to the highest bidder. The \$860,000 home is being given away in a sweepstakes by the Jericho-based Women's Entertainment cable network on Sept. 26. Including the value of its fully furnished interiors and lush landscaping, the house is worth more than \$1 million.

"It's not just about winning the house," said Elaine Griffin, one of a Charlie's Angels-style trio of interior designers who sketched plans for each room. "It's about designing your own space."

Sixty thousand contestants have submitted more than a million entries to win the cottage since two-to-four-minute home-design infomercials began appearing in July during breaks in "She House Cinema," a weekly movie program on the WE network.

Entrants weren't told exactly where on the East End it was being built. But from the infomercials they were already familiar with the frilly bedroom that screams mistress rather than master suite, the great room's flowing floor plan and masculine décor that blends seamlessly with the bisque-colored cabinets in the kitchen beyond. They decided that the upstairs media room should have the only television in the house, coveted the laundry room off the kitchen and had to choose between a maid or a chef as the best house perk, though the network hasn't decided whether domestic help will be part of the winning package.

While the foundation was being dug and the windows installed, viewers voted online at www.we.tv each week for a different room and the cutest carpenter. Today is the last day to enter the sweepstakes.

Peggy Bunker, 31, of Manhattan, narrated the infomercials, scooping viewers on the design process and whetting their appetites with tours of the East End. Ms. Bunker repeatedly asked the audience to vote on what the She House should look like.

"The viewers had everything to do with it," Ms. Bunker said. "'Tell us what you want. What would you do if this was your kitchen? What would you do if this was your bathroom?'"

Fluff and frou-frou were not what the audience clamored for, except in the bedroom. Ms. Griffin's sophisticated, manly yet casual designs were selected for the great room, kitchen and master bath.

"This house is really designed for me," said Ms. Griffin, 39, a Yale-educated former publicist who lives in Harlem, standing in the great room of the Shorewood Road house recently as carpenters added finishing touches. "Sophistication and comfort are not mutually exclusive."

Ms. Griffin, who attended the New York School of Design when she switched careers nine years ago, said she drew from her memories of growing up in Georgia with tons of relatives, neighbors and friends streaming in and out of her home, talking to each other in small groups. She sprinkled seating clusters throughout the great room.

"It's a country house and I wanted to be very, very informal," Ms. Griffin said, having selected a subdued palette of mossy green, buttery khaki and rich grays. "You should be stylish wherever you are. If you go camping, you should be stylish on a campground. You should be stylish in a mobile home but you can definitely be more relaxed at the same time."

The bedroom, said designer Celerie Kemble, was the room where women were most likely to be "whimsical and wistful."

In her winning design, Ms. Kemble, 29, of Manhattan, sheathed the walls in hand-painted light blue-gray and white stripes and draperies that drop to the floor.

"The whole idea is to create a sense of drama," Ms. Kemble said, placing a table with two chairs in the squared-off bay window nook as if she were planning a clandestine afternoon tea. "A lot of the time the men get the library, they get the media room. The bedroom is where the woman gets to express her design. It's a space men are more comfortable letting it be a little more sensual and a little more soft."

Ms. Kemble, 29, has been on House Beautiful's 100 Top Designers list for the past four years and is launching her own furniture line.

The third designer, Nina Seirafi, 29, of Manhattan, earned the votes to decorate the laundry room and turn a bonus room upstairs into a media room with chocolate-colored walls and a flat-screen television.

"I hate to see the television in the living room," Ms. Seirafi said.

But even a million-dollar getaway that comes with a complete stock of house and garden tools has its limitations. Though the website touts a water view, the private beach on Peconic Bay is a five-minute stroll away. The designers had to select all the furnishings from Pottery Barn, one of the project's sponsors. Though the room has dual walk-in closets, a full-size Victorian-style metal bed barely fits between the windows in the 15-by-15 master suite. There is no garage. The basement is accessible only from the outside.

According to Susan Smith, director of WE's trade marketing, the network bought a general plan for a house that seemed "female-friendly" from a South Carolina design group, then hired Frank Notaro of Architecnologies, a Mattituck architectural firm, to tweak the design to fit the local vernacular.

Charles Murray, a custom builder based on Shelter Island, constructed the cottage in four and a half months. Mr. Murray designed the mantel and bookcases in the great room and enlarged the screened porch, adding mahogany decking and hand-cut posts.

Ms. Griffin said the look of the house was helped by having three designers.

"Homogeneity, in design as in life, is a tragedy," Ms. Griffin said. "The more you mix it up the better it is in anything you do, and decorating is no exception."

The winner, the one of three finalists whose key will fit the front-door lock, can always redecorate. But she will have to pay the 28 percent income tax on the value of the house. Property taxes are less than \$3,000 a year.

"If they want to move here, it would make an amazing vacation home," said Ms. Smith, noting that entries

came from all over the country. "There are a lot of people who would rent it -- it's a huge vacationing place. Or they could sell it."

Art for Heavy Hearts

Surrounded by his artwork, Peter Max stood in the middle of the Wentworth Gallery in Roosevelt Field recently, dispensing advice for young artists.

"Just do it," Mr. Max said, resorting to the Nike slogan as he talked about creativity. "Do it without thinking. If you think ahead of time how to be creative, you have a mindset that sets itself up for disappointment."

The pop art icon said he tries to stand at his easel without a preconceived notion.

Jacquelyn Hobbs, 13, of Baldwin admired Mr. Max's bold acrylics and took the artist's advice to heart. Since Jacquelyn's father, Thomas, then 41, was killed on Sept. 11, Jacquelyn has been attending art therapy classes as part of the World Trade Center Child and Family Therapy program at a Rockville Centre office of South Nassau Communities Hospital.

"Mostly I don't feel comfortable enough to talk, so I just color or draw," Jacquelyn said. Mr. Max pointed out the series of patriotic paintings of the Statue of Liberty he created after the World Trade Center disaster. He said he planned to create and sell at least one original new work, worth around \$50,000, and donate the proceeds to the program, which helps children and families who lost a family member that day. Other funding for the program is scheduled to be cut off when Project Liberty monies are discontinued on Oct. 1, according to Harry Kassel, chairman of South Nassau's board.

Art helps children be creative, optimistic and productive, Mr. Max added.

"Disappointment and worry and fear are the opposite of healing," he said. "Young kids who have lost their parents need to spend time in creativity. It will heal them."

Photo: Nina Seirafi, Elaine Griffin and Celerie Kemble designed the interiors of the WE network's giveaway house. (Photo by Deirdre Brennan for The New York Times)