

## Holmes on scoundrels

Sir Lancelot of the renovation world saves the vulnerable from sketchy renovators, while launching a new book on everything you need to know before buying or selling your home

**Jennifer Campbell**

The Ottawa Citizen

*Saturday, July 05, 2008*

Mike Holmes is dressed in his signature overalls and wearing the face of a man who wishes his work world was free of scoundrels and incompetents.

It's a beautiful day in Ottawa - even for a couple of homeowners who were deceived by their contractor, a fellow who meant well but was at best skilled as a painter, not a general contractor.

After months of upset, what with lawyers and a half-done job, the homeowners are now being saved by Holmes on Homes. The TV show, fronted by Mike Holmes who is a folk hero among suburbanites for rescuing folks from their home-based hells, shows how to get the job done right.

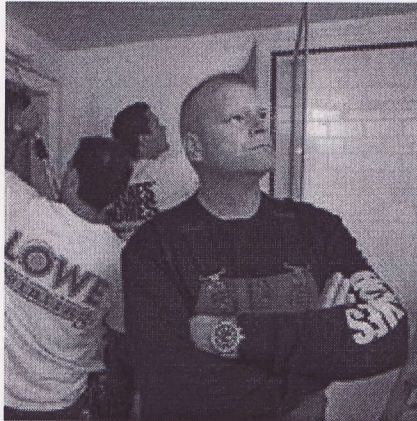
"In this case, I don't think the contractor did anything on purpose. I think he truly tried. I just think he didn't know enough about what he was doing," Mr. Holmes says as he takes a break from the set while his 25-person team puts the Humpty-Dumptyed room together again.

One of the leading team members, Damon Bennett, is originally from Ottawa. "I love Ottawa," says Mr. Bennett. He grew up here and then headed west to work, originally as a mason's labourer. Now, he runs the renovations when Holmes isn't on hand. "It's really nice to be back."

This particular case caught Holmes' eye because he wanted to do an episode in Ottawa, but by the standards of his show - which receives 65,000 e-mails a year from homeowners begging to have him get them out of renovation quandaries - it's small tubers.

"I get e-mails every day from people begging for help," says the big man with the bigger heart. "It's actually depressing - very depressing. I read e-mails of people losing their homes, going bankrupt all the time."

There's no doubt he is a compassionate and a busy man. He's headed to New



CREDIT: Chris Mikula, The Ottawa Citizen  
Mike Holmes of Holmes on Homes looks over the progress of a bathroom renovation in Barrhaven: 'In this case, I don't think the contractor did anything on purpose. I think he truly tried. I just think he didn't know enough about what he was doing.' The HGTV episode is expected to air this summer.

Orleans to film his Make it Right program and many of his staff members have not only volunteered their time, but have also agreed to pay out of pocket to get themselves there because they believe in the project. In addition, he runs a foundation that helps Canadians, including the couple in Ottawa, and supports youth training in skilled trades through scholarships.

And he's just released his second book: The Holmes Inspection.

"On my website, the No. 1 complaint we receive is about home inspections. From all the complaints, and every time I do home inspections, I see nothing but problems," he says. "In writing this book, we inspected four homes and each had been inspected by a home inspector."



We showed what they found, what I found, and one of them paid \$300,000 for a house, which was the nicest on the street visually, but it needed about \$300,000 in repairs."

In that case, the television renovator ordered the house torn down.

"It was a complete cover-up, a flip. No permits. It was one of the worst I've seen- everything, electrical, plumbing, fire hazards, structural. I could not believe what I saw in this house.

They bought it after a home inspector said it was pretty good, with a couple of problems. He wasn't even close."

Mr. Holmes says the home inspection industry isn't properly or rigorously regulated. It takes just 12 weeks to become a home inspector. But he also thinks the would-be homeowner could use some buyer-beware tips.



"The homeowner needs to know everything they possibly can in order to buy this house, or sell it," he said.

In the book, he covers all aspects of buying or selling your next house. "I'm positive everyone out there that's buying and selling will find it useful."

And then the friendly giant smiles: "I just wish I could give everyone the book."

His main message: document, document, document. He advises homeowners to keep records on every bit of work they do on their homes -- what materials they used, where they bought them, who did the work, and when. He also suggests getting permits for everything and taking before and after photographs.

"Then, when you sell the house, you have proof of what was done," he says. "Fifty per cent of renos in this country are done without permits."

When it comes to inspecting a potential purchase, he suggests that instead of hiring someone who may only have 12 weeks experience, you hire licensed specialists in specific trades.

"Shouldn't we have licensed electricians, licensed plumbers, licensed or certified fireplace guys looking at homes? Does that sound like a lot of money? Yes. But how much is the house in the first place?"

In short, rather than spending \$400 where you might not get the full picture, spend \$2,000 to find out if a house is truly worth the sizable investment

you're about to make in it.

The Holmes Inspection is available in book stores and online and sells for \$29.95. The Ottawa episode is expected to air on HGTV over the summer.

© The Ottawa Citizen 2008

CLOSE WINDOW

---

Copyright © 2008 CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc. All rights reserved.

CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc. All rights reserved.