

# Winning art of bargaining, bartering and begging ... or how Jill Alexander wheeled and dealt her way to a home renovation on reality TV

BY SHEILA BRADY, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN FEBRUARY 12, 2011



Ottawa artist Jill Alexander increased the value of her home by \$20,000 by bargaining, begging and then bartering with her art work to help fund the renovation.

**Photograph by:** Wayne Cuddington, Ottawa Citizen, Ottawa Citizen

When most folks were busy getting ready for Christmas, Jill Alexander was bargaining, bartering and begging her way to an impressive home makeover.

"It was crazy, crazy and very exciting," says the cash-strapped, gregarious artist.

The makeover will be featured next Thursday on W Network's reality home renovation show, All for Nothing.

The aim is to sell the revamped two-storey home near the Bayshore Shopping Centre and move to an environmentally smart home the artist and her husband, Jeffery Alexander, are building on a scenic point of land that stretches out into the Ottawa River near the small Ontario community of Castleford.

"It will be like living in paradise. It is a happy place. It is right on the river and good for the soul," says Alexander, who gave up an income at Michaels, Arts and Crafts Super Store in the '90s to take on the art world and economic uncertainty.

Alexander has never looked back, painting furniture, creating giant tulips for the Canadian Tulip festival and last May delivering an Obama tulip to U.S. ambassador David Jacobson.

Her latest artistic-charity endeavour is participating with other artists at an art show on Sunday, Feb. 20, to raise money for the Heart Institute and then a vernissage the next day at the Sante Restaurant/Gallery.

It's not a surprise the walls in her Kevin Avenue home are packed with her colourful art.

Then there are her plans for an art studio in their home overlooking the Ottawa River.

Alexander is now facing the prospect of painting and giving art lessons to a long list of daughters and sons of suppliers and friends who helped her take her Ottawa house from tired to polished and ready for sale.

It's not a terrible job, she says. "I estimate it will take about a year to do all of the paintings and give all of the art classes. I did a lot of bartering, but it's been worth it," says Alexander, who first contacted Mountain Road Productions, the organizers behind the 13-week All for Nothing show, last September.

She didn't hear anything, then made contact again in November

and within 20 minutes Mountain Production's Sonja Osberg was on the phone setting up an appointment to come over. "She arrived with a video camera, talked to us, shot the house."

Within days, the Alexanders were approved and video cameras followed Ottawa designer Penny Southam and real estate agent Paul Rushforth into the house, documenting their advice to paint, overhaul the kitchen and upstairs bathroom and refinish the hardwood floors.

"It was all good advice and we listened to both," says Alexander, who estimates the suggestions would add \$20,000 onto the value of their home.

Watch the video of Jill Alexander's cheap reno at

[/homes](#)

The only problem was they didn't have the ready cash and the reality show was all about doing renovations for almost nothing. That's when the Alexanders called on friends for muscle power and colleagues for favours. "I begged, borrowed and bartered," says the artist. "We sold an old car for \$500.

"We ended up spending only \$300, yet raised the value of the house by \$20,000" says Alexander.

Habitat for Humanity's Restore came to the rescue with tiles for the bathroom and kitchen at a fraction of the price of retail shops, friends offered to help stage the house and even supplied some furniture. They pulled a glass dining room table intended for their new home out of storage, setting it up in their Ottawa home.

Alexander's brother, Murray Robinson, volunteered his professional painting services. Two weeks and countless hours after starting this mad dash of reality television in December, they were finished.

Now the Alexanders' home is up against the Kanata home of Denise Reid and her daughter, Melanie. "The competition was very, very close," says Rushforth.

While the winner gets Rushforth's real estate commission for free, both increased the value of their homes based on Southam's design advice. Win or lose, the Alexanders are committed to moving and host an open house this weekend.

"We want to be out of here by the spring, with enough money to finish our river home," says Alexander. She is listing her home at \$349,500.

You can see Jill Alexander's Kevin Avenue home at [ottawa.kijiji.ca](http://ottawa.kijiji.ca).

The Alexanders versus the Reids episode of All for Nothing airs on W Network on Feb. 17 at 9 p.m. and again on Feb. 20 and Feb. 22. The show has been renewed for 26 episodes and shooting begins in March. If you are interested in going in front of the cameras for a makeover, contact Mountain Road Productions at 613-237-4447 or visit [www.mountainroad.ca](http://www.mountainroad.ca). Mountain Road is interested in featuring older homes that can be buffed with paint and a kitchen or bathroom renovation. It also takes folks who like to perform on television.

Sheila Brady is the Citizen's Home editor. You can reach her at [sbrady@ottawacitizen.com](mailto:sbrady@ottawacitizen.com)

© Copyright (c) The Ottawa Citizen