

Four couples with totally different styles and \$40,000 each – you be the judge

Time for viewers to walk The Block

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Property Reporter

THE Block — home to Sydney's most talked-about abodes — will be open to the public for inspection for the first time this weekend.

Ahead of the eagerly-anticipated event, *The Daily Telegraph* was yesterday given a special sneak peak inside to see the tolls of the four couples battling it out for TV's renovation crown.

We showed our exclusive pictures to a prominent architect and interior designer and asked them to assess the finished products.

"They concluded the work was generally impressive, given the couple's \$40,000 budgets, and more than just the scene of dramatic hissy fits and tense personal relations.

"It's great to see they all seem to keep up with the latest design trends and have some sense of style," architect Caroline Pidcock said.

Interior designer Damien Mulvihill was less enthusiastic but agreed they were jobs well done, given most couples had little or no experience.

"The quality of the finishes are excellent and there are some good attempts at utilising strong design principles, with mixed results," he said.

Based on the phenomenal interest the show has aroused, thousands of sticky beaks — and some genuine bidders — are expected to wander through the pads, which have become a national obsession.

Executive producer and co-creator David Barbour said tight security would be in place to control the expected massive crowds during the twice-weekly home open leading up to the August 16 and 17 auctions.

Mr Barbour expected more than 10,000 people to turn up the apartments when they go up for auction.

"When we auctioned *Dream Home* [the focus of another reality show in the late '90s] about 7500 people attended the auction and that was in regional Victoria. But this is Bondi — honestly I think it is going to be huge," Mr Barbour said.

"It will become the Super Bowl of real estate auctions."

The network have applied to have the corner of O'Brien and Roscoe Sts barricaded for the weekend and police and crowd controllers will provide security for the event.

The winning couple will be decided by whichever apartment, sold fully furnished, reaches the highest price. They will pocket a bonus \$100,000 on



Blockheads ... Adam and Fiona

top of whatever the apartment sells for over the \$395,000 reserve (the reserve is the same for each couple).

Real estate agents who specialise in the area estimate the apartments will bring the gavel down at more than \$650,000 — although they could fetch more because of their celebrity status.

Mr Barbour said *The Block's* phenomenal success had far exceeded even his expectations.

Hosted by gardening guru Jamie Durie, the Channel 9 show has captivated the nation, with more than 2 million viewers tuning in week after week since it first went to air.

Last week it peaked at 2.4 million — making it one of the most watched reality shows in Australian history.

He conceded the key to the show's success has been its human drama.

The competitors were clearly chosen for their distinct differences: budget-conscious perfectionists from Banksia Fiona and Adam, ebullient Elizabeth Bay "boys" Gav and Wazza, Engadine battlers Paul and Kyle and well-heeled Kirribilli couple Phil and Amity.

But Mr Barbour said the show also tapped into Sydney's love affair with real estate and renovations.

The show's formula has been on-sold to a British production company and negotiations are currently under way in the US.

Europe has also been targeted as a potential market.



The verdict — Gav and Wazza's lounge room
Caroline Pidcock: Great wall colours and selective use of wallpaper. The play with ceiling levels, lighting

and mirror at end of corridor is effective, and the classic furniture is well chosen. Textured rug effectively reduces the impact of knotty timber floors.



The verdict — Paul and Kylie's kitchen
Caroline Pidcock: Classic stylish kitchen with good colours. Pity the glass splashback doesn't

go up to the overhead cupboards. It also looks like the gap between benches will be too wide for easy use.



The verdict — Phil and Amity's second bedroom (above)
Caroline Pidcock: Least stylish of the four rooms. Nice try to reuse old furniture but too many different pieces. The colours generally aren't strong enough to help and neither is the rug which adds further clutter.



The verdict — Fiona and Adam's main bedroom
Caroline Pidcock: Crisp use of colours, materials and timbers, and the art work fits well. Door finish to cupboards and blinds work well and do not compete with the furniture finish in the room.

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