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# CARTER CAN!

*At home in his Michigan Victorian, handyman Carter Oosterhouse dishes on his new design shows, his farm-style kitchen and the trend of going green.*

BY SHALENE ROBERTS : PHOTOS BY JAMES YOCHUM

PERHAPS BEST KNOWN FOR HIS ROLE AS A CARPENTER ON TLC'S "TRADING SPACES," AS WELL AS FOR APPEARANCES ON NBC'S "THE TODAY SHOW" AND THE "OPRAH WINFREY SHOW," **THE AFFABLE CARTER OOSTERHOUSE** HAS UNDENIABLY MADE A NAME FOR HIMSELF IN THE WORLD OF HOME DESIGN.

As the face of Nautica Voyage and the host of two new shows—HGTV's "Carter Can!" and the DIY Network's "The Inside Job"—Oosterhouse's star continues to rise. But no matter his celebrity status, this handyman remains a grounded Midwestern boy with a warm sense of humor, a welcoming personality and a gracious farm-style home in the heart of Michigan.

**BUILDING SUCCESS** A seasoned veteran, Oosterhouse has been cutting his carpentry teeth since the ripe age of 12 when he helped his family construct an addition to their Traverse

City, Michigan, home. Summer jobs soon ensued. And with his two older brothers paving the way, it wasn't long before Oosterhouse was following in their woodworking footsteps.

His skill set eventually carried him through college, and the rest, we could say, is history. In 2003—the same year he was featured as one of People magazine's Sexiest Men Alive—Oosterhouse was cast as a handyman for the second season of "Trading Spaces." The role instantly catapulted him to celebrity status. "I don't think I've stopped working since the day I started," he joked. Though the national television platform was a boon for his career, "Trading Spaces" also taught Oosterhouse a host of lessons that still impact him today. "We had 12 different designers on the show, and everybody has a different style and taste," he said. "So you're constantly evolving and changing, but at the same time, you're pushing yourself. ... And that's when you find yourself constantly getting better at what you do."

Though true to traditional design shows, "Carter Can!" stretches Oosterhouse beyond his typical role. The show pairs him with homeowners who want to change their house but can't discern what specific needs to address or exactly how to address them. His task: listen diligently to discover what they desire and make it a reality. To hear Oosterhouse say it, the show



**'HOUSE AT HOME** Standing in his self-designed Michigan kitchen, Carter Oosterhouse takes a moment to unwind and enjoy the fruits of his labors. During the space's renovation, Oosterhouse maintained its farm-style appearance but also integrated modern upgrades, such as stainless steel appliances, concrete countertops and satin-nickel-finished hardware.





Oosterhouse began dabbling in carpentry and design at a young age, so it was only natural progression that led him to host HGTV series "Carter Can!" Now with thousands of projects in his portfolio, Oosterhouse is the go-to guy for remarkable redesign advice.

is an amalgamation of ideas and personalities. "My dad was a farmer, he grew up on a farm, he's a hard worker. So he's given us the attitude that you can always be doing something, always improving yourself, and whatever it is, you can figure it out," he said. "And my mom is the nurturer, and I think [the way] both of those two different people and their ideals morphed into me is what we're trying to showcase on the this show. ... And we're not doing it just because we want to make TV, but we're really doing it because we want to improve the quality of people's lives."

**HOME, SWEET HOME** But when it's time to relax, there is just no place like home. Oosterhouse's traditional circa-1890 Victorian features farm-style décor throughout. And though the home has been remodeled several times, it was still a bit too dated for the handyman's liking. To infuse new life into the dwelling, Oosterhouse recently renovated the

kitchen. Situated as the heart of the home, the kitchen boasts an open floor plan and is the communal gathering spot. "When people come in, they definitely hang around the kitchen," he said.

True to the home's heritage, Oosterhouse maintained the farm-style design while infusing a bit of youth into the space. Working in tandem with his brother, the siblings finished the kitchen remodel in three weeks. "Quick is all we know right now," he said.

The kitchen features concrete countertops, which replaced the existing counter-topping material and lent the space a younger, edgier aesthetic. A farm-style sink paired with a two-handed gooseneck faucet maintains the design theme. Oosterhouse then replaced the cabinetry with white beadboard and completed the look with satin-nickel finished hardware. All stainless steel Electrolux appliances—a gourmet's dream come true—modernize the space. An Electrolux ICON Professional Series All Refrigerator All Freezer Pro, 48-bottle wine refrigerator, undercounter ice maker and commercial-grade range round out the appliance package.

"The range has two ovens with six burners, so you can cook a gourmet meal any day or night," Oosterhouse said. And though he's not an avid cook—"I think I cooked more before I was on this crazy schedule," he admitted—Oosterhouse does enjoy frequent entertaining. "I feel like I'm at an age and a lifestyle where I love to entertain and hang out," he said. "I love living for the moment and having fun and enjoying life. I think that's definitely a representation of my house."

Rounding out the kitchen remodel, Oosterhouse and his brother added an expansive deck topped with a pergola just beyond the culinary space. French doors allow access out onto the space, and when one peers through the doors, the line of site leads straight out into the backyard. The TimberTech deck allows Oosterhouse newfound freedom for alfresco entertaining during the temperate Michigan summers—an

activity he relishes. "Michigan summers ...," he said. "I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. Just hanging out on the lawn, barbecuing, playing bocce ball, throwing the Frisbee around. It's definitely a fun thing."

**AN AMBASSADOR FOR CHANGE** Between his own home and the thousands others he's renovated, Oosterhouse has seen it all, and he has the scoop on some of the hottest trends for kitchens and baths. The one he most advocates: going green. When doing so, he urges homeowners to get creative. Concrete countertops, he suggests, are a green alternative to naturally occurring resources such as granite. Additionally, the material lends itself to customization. "You can put aggregate into it, you can put color into it. And of course, concrete is used throughout anything in building. So you can put shapes into it, you can put a cutting board into it. I have a little groove cut out so once you dice everything up, you can just slide it right off into the sink." He also advises considering energy-efficient appliances and other green materials readily available on today's market.

Furthermore, Oosterhouse urges homeowners to employ common sense and be mindful of the cleaning products they use. "A lot of people think that once it goes down the sink, it's gone forever. But that's not the case

at all," he said. "If you're throwing stuff down the sink that shouldn't be thrown down the sink, over time, it's going to corrode, and you'll have to get new pipes, and that's a big chunk out of your pocket. And it's also messing with the earth and the environment. So think about what you're putting down your sink." It's a bit of advice we'd all be wise to heed.

And though doling out advice is a frequent occurrence for Oosterhouse, he never tires of his tasks. "I'm fortunate," he said. "I'm one of the lucky people, I guess, in that percentile of people who like or dislike their job. I love it. I have a hunger for it every day."

With such love for his work, Oosterhouse has no intention of slowing down. He recently founded Carter's Kids, a charity that constructs playgrounds for the Los Angeles school district. Additionally, he's established a production company and is working on producing two shows. "One is strictly with green building and design, and then one is a kid's show," he said.

His is a life with which he's quite content, and who wouldn't be? His work inspires others as much as others inspire him. "Doing this remodeling, rebuilding and helping people, we work with people who are very inspirational to us. ... It's definitely something that has changed my life for the better." And in turn, Oosterhouse is doing his part to improve the lives of others, one day—and one design—at a time. «

## CARTER'S TOP TEN

With thousands of design jobs beneath his tool belt, Oosterhouse's 10 no-fail tips will ensure success in any remodel.

- 1 It's never too early to start.
- 2 Always prepare; your due diligence will pay off later.
- 3 Interview potential designers and builders and find the fit that best suits you and your family.
- 4 Ask friends for advice; review your plans with them and listen to their input.
- 5 Don't dive in uneducated. Review the array of products available on the market.
- 6 Buy local materials. You'll be helping your local economy and preventing greenhouse gas emissions from cross-country transports.
- 7 Use energy-efficient appliances.
- 8 Plan to incorporate as much natural light in the space as possible.
- 9 Install ample outlets in the walls; it's much easier to add these now versus at a later date.
- 10 Be patient and take your time. Your remodel won't happen overnight, and you'll live with the results for a while.