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TLC's Kelly Goes Natural in Kent

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By Julia E.M. Halewicz

KENT- Clinton Kelly is relishing the perks of country life-no hair gel, less fuss and sometimes he doesn't even shower for a day or two. It's an unexpected admission from one of television's most famous and important style gurus. He is, after all, co-star of TLC's mega-hit reality show "What Not to Wear" with Stacy London and famous for wearing Burberry checked pants while helping those with less inspired looks transform their wardrobes from ratty to realistically fashionable. In a short period of time, Mr. Kelly has acquired a legion of cyberspace fans with "crushes" on the "fashionista hottie."

But the cargo pants and T-shirt-wearing Mr. Kelly is here to stay, specifically in Kent, where he purchased a contemporary circa 1969 fixer-upper with an addition from 1982 on eight acres. The renovation and interior design of the house will be the subject of a forthcoming one-hour reality special for TLC.

"I think people will be surprised when they see me on this special," said Mr. Kelly, who also holds a Master's Degree in journalism from



Northwestern University and was an editor at Marie Claire and Mademoiselle. "It's nice to have a place in the woods where nobody cares what I look like. I am a big believer in dressing for the occasion."

Most weekends, Mr. Kelly drives from his apartment in TriBeCa to Kent and spends "23 hours of the day on the property," most of it outdoors admiring the wild turkeys, foxes and deer that sashay through his land and through his sprawling view. "We have a nest of Eastern Phoebes under the porch. I didn't even know there was a bird named Phoebe," he said.

Mr. Kelly purchased the property a year ago after searching for a retreat that was within a two-hour driving distance from the city. He knew that he wanted to work on the home and shape it to his specifications, but even he "didn't realize what a fixer upper it was until I bought it." Aside from dismal interior styling that included a gray toilet, wall-to-wall carpeting and linoleum flooring, barely one acre of the property was usable. When John Camp of Reliability Plus in Cornwall Bridge signed on as Mr. Kelly's general contractor-he was recommended by a neighbor-he promised to salvage the property.

"Televisions were thrown down the hill and smashed, parts everywhere, among the trees," said Mr. Camp. "Clinton's idea was to take advantage of the natural landscape."

Mr. Camp enlisted local contractors to do the

work, including GMR Trades, Cornwall Hardwood Floors, Kochman Tile Setting, PM Painting Corporation, Morgan Wilton Landscape Services, Algonquin Field Stone, Greg Weik Excavation and Hedden Electric, and Mr. Kelly's father, Long Island, N.Y., contractor Michael Sciabarasi, worked on the bathroom with his company Elegant Home Improvements. ("They all really need a makeover," Mr. Kelly said with a laugh of the men who worked on his home.)

Inside the house, the floors were replaced with Brazilian walnut in a dark stain, and the knotty pine vaulted ceiling was painted white to better complement the floor. A Japanese overflow soap tub was installed next to a picture-frame window with views of the mountains and the gray toilet was removed. Large windows and sliding glass doors run throughout the house, capitalizing on the views.

"John is such a workaholic and perfectionist," said Mr. Kelly. "I really just trusted him." As promised, the land has been restored to its original beauty-with some additions. In place of a crumbling retaining wall is a 140-foot-long stone wall that measures nine feet high and is built entirely of materials from the property. "I call it the Great Wall of China," said Mr. Camp. Where the wall ends, a steep, twisting staircase made of 800-pound slate slabs leads to an organically shaped slate patio and a freshwater pond that is fed by a spring that runs through the property. Eventually,

the path and patio will be lit.

While he may be shifting his focus to interior design and landscaping, Mr. Kelly continues to work on "What Not to Wear" and find inspiration in fashion. "When it comes to clothing, you should choose colors that make you feel good and look good on you. The same applies to decorating your house," he said. One of his favorite Etro shirts inspired the icy blue and purple color scheme for the open living and dining area-a grape-colored Mies van der Rohe couch provides depth against the icy walls.

The centerpiece of the living room is an antler chandelier that measures five square feet and is spray-painted black. It served as the inspiration for the décor. "I wanted a natural feel with a modern twist," said Mr. Kelly. "I didn't want just any old antler chandelier ... the look is modern lodge."

An original Andy Warhol print will hang in the orange and hot pink guest bedroom and the master bedroom theme is fuschia and brown. Botanical-inspired wallpaper by Osborne & Little and Harlequin will accent the painted walls.

In addition to working on the house, Mr. Kelly wrapped his fourth season of "What Not to Wear" and signed a book deal for "Freakin' Fabulous," his second book, scheduled to be released in 2008. As for what may come of the special on his home, there had been discussions of spinning a reality decorating show from it, but TLC's new president, Angela Shapiro-Mathes, "thinks there might be an even better show" out there, said Mr. Kelly.



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