

# Alison Victoria Takes on High-Stakes Renovations in HGTV's New Series 'Windy City Rehab'

By:

In one of the most anticipated series premieres in HGTV's new season lineup, home renovation star Alison Victoria heads to her home town of Chicago to restore vintage homes in the city's historic neighborhoods. (And she's got a few other irons in the fire as well.)



Alison Victoria — who many viewers know as the vibrant and vivacious host of the DIY Network's long-running series *Kitchen Crashers* — may be our latest nominee for 'hardest-working woman in show biz' — at least within the sphere of HGTV and home-improvement television. She's just wrapped shooting on a brand-new renovation series, *Windy City Rehab*, set in her beloved home town of Chicago. (More on that in a minute.)

Peter Wynn Thompson

Alison Victoria, host of HGTV's *Windy City Rehab*

Viewers will get their first look at the new series when it makes its debut on HGTV on New Year's Day at 9pm ET/PT. And speaking of New Year's Day, Alison will be hosting a special '**All Premiere New Year**' **lineup** on the network beginning January 1 at 1pm ET/PT. (The lineup for that special event will include several new HGTV pilots as well as season-premiere episodes of fan faves like *My Lottery Dream Home* and *House Hunters*.) And were all that not enough, she's also unveiling of HGTV's spectacular 2019 Dream Home in Whitefish, Montana — in a 1-hour special airing at 8pm ET/PT, also on New Year's Day.

Back to *Windy City Rehab*. Alison's ties to her home town of Chicago run deep. She has a clear and perceptible passion for the city so, in a sense, this series is a perfect match for her. Moreover, these renos go beyond simple home improvement. These are vintage homes that Alison and crew are rescuing, reviving and — wherever possible — keeping true to the original spirit of their history, architecture and community roots. As such there can be more at stake than just, say, a stylish kitchen or a cozy master suite.

And apropos to the city where it's set, as renovation shows go, this one's less the soft and cuddly design-and-decorating series, but is instead a little tougher, brassier and imbued with suspense arising from outright risk. It deals with the tough situations that builders and renovation pros face when undertaking major building rehabs in urban settings and a tough real-estate environment. "It's my dream to flip houses in my hometown of Chicago," says Alison, "but renovating homes in this price point leaves a ton of money on the line. These are high-stakes projects that could spiral out of control at any minute. It's big risks and big rewards."

Taking a look behind the scenes, this is one series that took quite a while and a rather extraordinary amount effort to bring to air, and some of that is due to the real and adverse challenges — both logistical and financial — inherent in the renovations themselves. The bottom line on these projects is that obstacles come up,

deadlines have to be met and, once each renovation is complete, Alison must attract high-end buyers or risk losing a substantial investment. Facing factors that include things like structural damage, permit delays, failed inspections and brutal Chicago winters, Alison remains determined to create gorgeous homes and earn top profit.

If all of this seems a tad heavy and serious, fear not. You can rest assured that — as those familiar with Alison will know — challenges notwithstanding, there are certain to be outlandish and hilarious on-camera moments arising from surprises along the way and interactions with crew and coworkers.

The premiere episode finds Alison and lead contractor Donovan Eckhardt updating a dilapidated brick two-flat built in 1903. The home is in Alison's own neighborhood of Bucktown, an eclectic and popular area near Lincoln Park characterized by quaint streets, a thriving nightlife and lots of restaurants. Architecturally there's a mix ranging from elegant brownstones to modest townhouses to converted industrial lofts.

Over the course of a nine-month project, Alison and crew deal with setbacks that include crumbling walls, a stop-work order from the city and construction in sub-zero temperatures. Essentially a reworking of the entire structure in its original footprint, the renovation ultimately creates an open and friendly home with striking curb appeal that's certain to appeal to buyers who are eager to move into the historic area. Alison pays tribute to the home's historic roots, integrating features such as the vintage brick exterior, antique wood doors, dark stained hardwood floors and a showpiece antique mantle.

Viewers are likely familiar with Alison from her popular series, *Kitchen Crashers*, which ran for nine seasons on DIY Network and featured Alison surprising customers at home-improvement centers and presenting them with the opportunity for a radical, rapid and spectacular kitchen makeover. What they may not know is that her career in home improvement began at the age of 10 when her mother agreed to let her make over the family basement. It's an interest that must have been genuine because some years later she could be found running her own interior design firm with offices in Chicago and Las Vegas, and eventually creating her own line of furniture and home furnishings.

**Tune in on New Year's Day for HGTV's special all-premiere lineup, the *HGTV Dream Home 2019* special, and the series premiere of *Windy City Rehab*.** You can also follow along via social media at [#WindyCityRehab](#) and find exclusive behind-the-scenes videos, photos and more at [hgtv.com/WindyCityRehab](http://hgtv.com/WindyCityRehab).

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## **Psst: Alison Victoria is the Queen of Chicago AND a Millennial Whisperer**

In her new digital series, the star of HGTV's all-new 'Windy City Rehab' proves that she's also the (avocado) toast of the town.

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## Related To:

Alison Victoria knows her way around her home town (understatement of the year): She and her lead contractor, Donovan Eckhardt, make their living turning dilapidated Chicago properties into the epitome of cool.

That's the premise of her much-anticipated new show, [Windy City Rehab](#) — but when it comes to making the city over, she's just getting started. For [High Heels High Stakes](#), her new digital series, she's remaking the rental market, too.

“If we can make a living and a killing with rental properties that are high end and boutique that no one else is building,” Alison says, “why would we *not*?”

[via GIPHY](#)

That means going undercover and hanging out with millennials to find out what makes *tenants* tick — and giving Donovan a makeover?

[via GIPHY](#)

Naturally, Alison's cultivated a look for her woman-on-the-street interviews with local college students — but, well, don't eye her tech accessories too closely.

[via GIPHY](#)

Her *moves*, on the other hand, are the genuine article.

She and Donovan learn that their young tenants-to-be are languishing in impersonal, underequipped spaces (and — surprise — they *want* to cook!). Their mission, then, is clear: To lavish their units with the design details and conveniences the rental market is so sorely lacking. (Alison: “I'm going rogue with the appliances.”)

So, does all that market research pay off?

[via GIPHY](#)

Reader, it pays off.

[via GIPHY](#)

It *really* pays off.

Will Alison score signed leases on all four of her brand-spanking-new units? Can she kill it in the rental game? Is a man bun for Donovan on the horizon? No spoilers here, folks, but we have our hunches.

Catch all of Alison and Donovan's High Heels High Stakes adventures on the [HGTV GO app](#), [HGTV Insider Facebook Watch page](#) and [HGTV.com](#) — and tune in to HGTV for the [Windy City Rehab](#) premiere on Tuesday, January 1 at 9/8c!



### **Millennial Marketing 06:11**

Alison and Donovan go undercover to learn about Chicago's student rentals.

Now Viewing

## **1920s English Cotswold-Style Home Gets Refreshed for Chicago-Area Family of Eight**

Tasked with making a 1920s English Cotswold-style home comfortable for a family of eight, Chicago architect Michael Abraham honors the original design of the home while updating it for the 21st century.



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**Q: What was important to your client during this remodeling project? What was the inspiration for the design?**

A: The main goal was to remodel an old home for a modern family of eight without losing the charm of the

original design. The home was originally designed by R. Harold Zook, a locally renowned architect from the 1920s-1950s. Many original elements of the house remained and were the source inspiration along with other homes of his that remain in the western suburbs of Chicago.

**Q: You chose a contemporary aesthetic for a traditional-style house, which worked out beautifully. How did you know the design would come together?**

A: Originally the house was considered somewhat avant-garde when it was completed in the 1920s. So, we thought, "What would Zook do to this house today?" He certainly would not redo a 1920s period piece; he would modernize it with a twist.

**Q: What changes did you make to the home to help it function better for a large family?**

A: Initially the rooms were very small, and you could not see from one room to another. We removed walls, combined small rooms to create larger, open areas and enlarged openings from space to space. This created better flow for a large family and allowed light into the center of the house.

**Q: What was your biggest obstacle during this project, and how did you address it?**

A: The largest obstacle we had was needing to add living space that would seamlessly blend into the original design. An older, dated addition was removed, and a more contextual addition replaced it. With such a unique design, lots of care was taken to create a new living space that was undetectable from the existing one.

**Q: Why did you select a neutral color palette for use throughout the home?**

A: We chose a lighter palette for the walls to contrast with the existing (mostly dark) feature elements, such as the interior stone, wood beams and special doors.

**Q: What is your favorite room or space in the home? What about your favorite feature?**

A: The left side of the kitchen, which was designed by Kathy Manzella of DeGiulio Design, is bright, clean and modern. On the right is the pantry wall designed by Michael Abraham Architecture, which includes the dark wood pantry. The way the two sides contrast yet complement each other is my favorite feature in the house.

The front door is amazing -- it is rough and slick at the same time. It's original to the house, but it was fabulously modernized by Tim Thompson Designs.

**Q: Was there a specific element that was essential to bringing together the finished design?**

A: The chevron pattern is a staple feature in a Zook-designed house. We embellished those original patterns and subtly added similar patterns throughout.

**Q: What are the hidden gems in your plan that really made a big difference in the overall success of your design?**

A: This house started with many hidden gems -- the classic Zook spiderweb leaded glass window, the use of the chevron pattern throughout and the detailed beams and half timbering inside and out. Our objective was to continue to add the small details without overwhelming the house. Reuse of the home's metal windows in interior rooms, detailing the home's exterior stone around the bar opening and installing new metal work designed by Tim Thompson in the den and family room gave just enough to make a big difference.