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Pamela Anderson returns to her childhood home and stirs some moving memories

Words: Prue Miller

Designing for a mermaid; Pamela Anderson's new TV project is all about her old home.

"I'm a freak of nature," says Pamela Anderson, former Baywatch TV star turned activist, conservationist and vegan. After watching her new Foxtel reality series Pamela's Garden of Eden, you can find new truth in that statement.

The soon to premiere reality show is set in two and a half glorious hectares of waterfront land on Vancouver Island, Canada, a property she bought from her grandmother decades ago, abandoned, but now feels the need to save. Sort of.

This series is about seeing how Pamela goes about creating her Eden – and for that she needed a small team of construction guys (including her ex-husband because well, why not?), and the talented, endlessly patient designer, Francesca Albertazzi (pictured far right).

"There was a phenomenal intensity to it," says Francesca from her Vancouver studio.

No newbie to reality TV with many seasons of Love it Or List It Vancouver under her belt, this project however meant being in front of the camera. It was Kenny Gemmel, a construction worker and friend from the Love it or List It series who first called Francesca about the show.

"It was a very, uh, vague. He couldn't



disclose anything," recalls Francesca. "I don't think he even mentioned celebrity status, he just said the client is just like you; loves horses, dogs, roses and antiques. I thought who is this person? When I heard it was Pamela Anderson I was like, what?"

The project was huge; there's The Roadhouse (a former teahouse her grandmother used to run), then The Cabin, and then The Boathouse and eventually a pier. Later more is added such as a greenhouse, which is so, so beautiful.

All run down, and all awfully important to Pamela who runs the project in a passionate but highly disjointed way.

From a designer point of view, this sort of nervous, high-end, flighty energy is hard to manage, yet Francesca, a diminutive, calm, quietly spoken woman (with a deceptively dry humour) is charged with just that.

"I think she really enjoyed the chaos," says Francesca.

The brief is encapsulated in the expression 'quirky but fun', which is, of course, hard to define.

Francesca had to find a way, as do all designers, of working out what Pamela actually wanted, needed and expected, with her work on camera divided between presenting good ideas to her client, and

cajoling Pamela out of bad ideas, and finding the middle path to success.

"I often say (to clients) the design is inside you, it's about drawing it out from you. I'm not here to impose a design on to you. I just manifest it," she says.

The series is particularly honest, and very interesting. Pamela is portrayed in an unfiltered light, wandering around in very little clothing, which at first seems ridiculous, until you realise that's how she rolls – most often in sheer white linens and bare feet. The cast includes Pamela's lovely parents, (who have nominated to have their ashes scattered in Pamela's rose garden 'when they're gone'), who add a sort of timeless commentary as the project continues.

Much like the property itself, there is generational consideration, which Pamela imposes on Francesca. Salute the past, live well today and protect everything for tomorrow.

"She wanted to make sure she was getting it right, and getting it right from an historical angle, all the years that had preceded her, and from a first nations perspective, this beautiful land and all the plants and animals, the owls and the deer that wander about ... so she had a lot of self-imposed pressure on her shoulders, which I respected but there was only so much I could do with that anxiety," says Francesca, with not even a suggestion of animus.

There is a lot to reconcile with this Hollywood bombshell turned good-girl



character; and the series is the better for her complexity.

“I’m a mermaid!”, declares Pamela more than once. She decries ‘bad energy’ and demands the project be ‘magnificent’, she hates overhead lighting and when confronted with budget matters says “money’s an illusion”, but wants to go over the figures anyway.

For Francesca and the team, there is a warning from the actress when things are not going to her plan – it involves the unleashing of her ‘dragon’ persona.

This makes presenting ideas a fairly intimidating affair and part way through the series, the delightful Francesca, when discussing cushion fabrics, grabs a swatch of fabrics and gingerly approaches Pamela with the opening line, “Now, don’t fire me – but look at these.”

Francesca remembers that moment, “I think Pamela was intrigued, it was like ‘why would I fire you? What are you going to show me?’”

Indeed, there is much shown, as Pamela aims to intertwine her diverse life with those of her forebears and her parents. Featured here, in the same room as antique, tiny tea cups and genteel, pastel wallpaper was the work of David LaChapelle, famous for his series of Pamela Anderson nudes. Awkwardly she showed off the finished front room of The Roadhouse to her parents.

“There’s penises in those pictures”, Pamela tells her mother with a wave of a manicured hand, “so don’t look too hard”.



“If you love something, it will work. If it’s an orange couch, and you love it – I don’t mean like, but LOVE it, then we’ll make it work”

“What?” replies her mother, a woman who has no doubt been surprised more times than she’d care to remember. “Oh, my god!”

No surprises here for Francesca.

“Yes, very eclectic, definitely the most extreme version of ‘quirky fun’ I’ve ever worked on,” she says, always defending her client’s passion, no matter what. “If you love something, it will work. If it’s an orange couch, and you love it – I don’t mean like, but love it, then we’ll make it work.”

I had to ask her how she managed to not lose her cool, in the face of a more than a few issues. “I think I probably did,” she admits with a giggle, thinking back to a tearful scene near The Boathouse.

“It was definitely a challenge, keeping up with her, because she’s away thinking, you don’t know that she’s thinking, meanwhile you’re working on the idea that she left you with and she comes back and says OK, now this is what I want.”

It’s that sort of run-on sentence that best describes the tension of the series. The show, which airs on Foxtel this month is worth a look for many reasons; the location, the design, the teamwork, the honesty and also for a glimpse of someone who continues to reveal herself, in ways you’ve not seen before.

“She’s an icon, she’s an actress, she’s an activist,” says Francesca of her former client. “She is a complex, beautiful person.”