



DAVID BEBEE, RECORD STAFF

Colin McAllister (left) and Justin Ryan ham it up with designer Cheryl Torrenueva during a break in taping Home Heist in Toronto.

# Meet The Boys

## Wacky Scots Colin McAllister and Justin Ryan take Canada by storm

By Susan Chilton, Record staff

**TORONTO** — They're known by a few names: The Design Duo, the Divine Duo and the Divine Design Duo. But to their fans, who are legion, loyal and close to cultish, irrepressible Scots Colin McAllister and Justin Ryan are simply The Boys.

The Boys first gained renown in Canada through their British TV shows, the best known of which on this side of the pond would likely be the Million Pound Property Experiment and How Not to Decorate. In the U.K., though, they're also famous for Wedding Belles, Trading Up, Housecalls, The Farm, Colin and Justin on the Estate, Colin and Justin's Home Show — and more.

They write weekly columns in The Sunday Mail and The Sunday Mirror (a combined readership of roughly 3.5 million), and co-host Colin and Justin's live Music Makeover on BBC Radio Scotland when they're at home. Abroad, the twosome is ubiquitous.

Now, their designs for conquering this country are well underway. They live in the condo they purchased in Toronto nine months ago, and are applying for dual citizenships.

It's Day 7 — "dress" day — at a renovated and now breathtaking loft that will be featured in season two of Colin and Justin's Home Heist, their hit show on HGTV Canada. Dress day means finishing touches are being done, key to instructing viewers on how to accessorize their own homes.

Organized chaos reigns as crew members, assistants and associates bustle about. Colin and Justin kibitz and kid around with everyone, but their eagle eyes are taking in every detail. An adjustment here. A question there. A modification.

They've provided exacting specifications to their Canadian designer, show regular Cheryl Torrenueva, in a 5,000-word document. However, they also trust her implicitly — rave about her, in fact — and grant her some latitude.

"At first, I was a bit afraid to tell them I couldn't get something or other," Torrenueva admits, with a laugh. "Now, if some-



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Colin and Justin spontaneously trap Cheryl under a plastic bubble chair.

thing can't be done or found, we work together for a solution. They're great guys. When they go back to Britain, they're so high energy, it's like there's a vacuum."

That energy is evident. The Boys are boisterous. One break in filming finds Colin and Torrenueva up on two cube tables, dancing and belting out Lady Marmalade — they could make a record. But then it's back to reshooting the show's unscripted comments from a different angle; with only one camera, those quick cuts give Home Heist a sense of movement.

Director Cheryl Zalameda, back for her second season, knows precisely what she needs. "Justin, give me a 10-second reaction," she instructs, as he peers at a wall of photographs. "Now, everyone look at the wall."

And so it goes, until Colin (he's dark-haired) and Justin (he's blond) surprise the room, and themselves, by spontaneously trapping tiny Torrenueva on the floor under a plastic bubble chair they've flipped on top of her.

"You can come out if you promise to be good," Justin chides her.

"This is not in my job description," she giggles up at her tormentors. Her voice is a bit muffled beneath the dome, so several shots from different angles ensue, the soundman working to pick her up crisply.

And so it goes all morning. Ad lib, recapture; ad lib, recapture; do it again for continuity. . . . The stop-start nature of a set is on this day exacerbated by a motion detector outside the loft that keeps going off.

"How do we maintain the glamour?" Colin wisecracks.

"It's usually a lot smoother than this," Justin jokes. "It's usually seamless."

It isn't, but the 15 to 18 hours it takes to tape a reality show that will be edited down to 42 minutes is well below the industry average. The Home Heist team consists of consummate pros, with seemingly endless good humour and patience.

However, beneath the joviality lies a shared and unmistakable commitment to getting everything perfectly right.

"It's a very well-oiled team," Justin explains in the car on the way to the next location, Ontario Place. He and Colin employ 50 in Canada, and another 50 in the U.K. "We're equal parts god and devil to them. We like to have fun, we encourage that, but we run things sharply. We're in business to stay in business. If we're demanding we get the best turn at all times and they share that vision."

The Boys themselves run on three to five hours of sleep a night. They're up at the crack of dawn for transactions over the phone with the U.K., where they're launching a vast collection of products, including bedding, towels and luggage, at 200-store chain Matapan. They liken Matapan to Canada's Home Outfitters, and are, in fact, working on licensing products for various retailers in this country.

They've just authored a third book, Colin and Justin's Home Heist Style Guide, which will be in stores on Tuesday, to coincide with season two of the show. They also pen columns not only for the papers in the U.K., but for Metro and Sharp Magazine here.

Remarkably, these recently married partners of 23 years, who own two homes in the U.K. (including a 21-room, five-storey mansion) do not seem to be fatigued.

"We are having fun," Justin enthuses. "We get out of bed in the morning and we have a pinch-me moment every single day. We were very happy boys in Britain with a really good, buoyant career but we've found in Canada a new strata to our life that we never expected to find. It's liberated us."

"It just keeps growing," he continues, "and we hope it does for a very long time. But we're also very pragmatic. Television is a fickle bitch. And while we're having a million opportunities now, in five years' time that could change, so we're riding the crest of opportunity at the moment and stopping off at all the interesting points on that coastal tour, enjoying every minute of it and loving Canada."

They find it amusing that Canadians constantly ask them what they're doing here; why Canada? The couple had such a warm reception two years ago when they came to publicize How Not to Decorate, that they more or less never left.

"It's funny," Colin muses, "that Canadians are almost like Scottish people, not really good at saying how fabulous they are. There's a kind of reticence. People want to know, 'Is Canada your gateway into the United States?' No! We love it in Canada. You don't need an agenda to come to Canada! The country makes us feel so happy and so centred, so we found a way to make our careers in Britain work around our life here."

### ON THE TELLY

Season 2 of Colin and Justin's Home Heist launches on Tuesday, Sept. 30 at 9 p.m. on HGTV Canada ([www.HGTV.ca/homeheist](http://www.HGTV.ca/homeheist)). Their tip-filled book, Colin and Justin's Home Heist Style Guide, will be in stores on Tuesday as well.

"I don't think the States are ready for Colin and Justin," Justin grins. Home Heist is broadcast in 23 countries but has not hit big in the States (yet). "For America, there's maybe a slight fear about a show with two gay blokes who are strong personalities. People 'get' us here."

They're considering a second property in Prince Edward County, which could form the basis of another reality TV show.

They've also carefully crafted a quiz show that they're confident could be franchised for multiple markets. For now, that's on the back burner, though, as they focus on "their baby," Home Heist.

It is, as Justin puts it, "a monolithic brand, it just gets bigger and bigger all the time. I'm not sure why it's picked up this roller-coaster effect; it's almost like a snowball gathering momentum, catapulting itself across the globe, picking up more as it goes. . . ."

"We've come to realize," Justin says, leaning in conspiratorially, "and it's a sad admission, that there are two types of taste: bad taste, which is everybody else's, and good taste, which is ours. Were it not for this seismic ability to spread decorative opportunity, were it not for this, people would be living in benign bad taste, hallelujah! We're like Tammy Faye Baker with paint charts."

"We want to be another option in the emergency services," Colin nods, pretending to pick up a phone and dial. "Police, ambulance, fire, paramedic, Colin and Justin."

With that The Boys erupt into laughter; an exuberant state in which the rest of the afternoon was spent, replete with all the quips, crazy antics and solid advice that have endeared them to Canadian TV viewers.

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For Canada's Top Five decorating mistakes and five ways to decorate on a budget, as well as other Colin and Justin quips and quotes, go to Chilton's blog.

