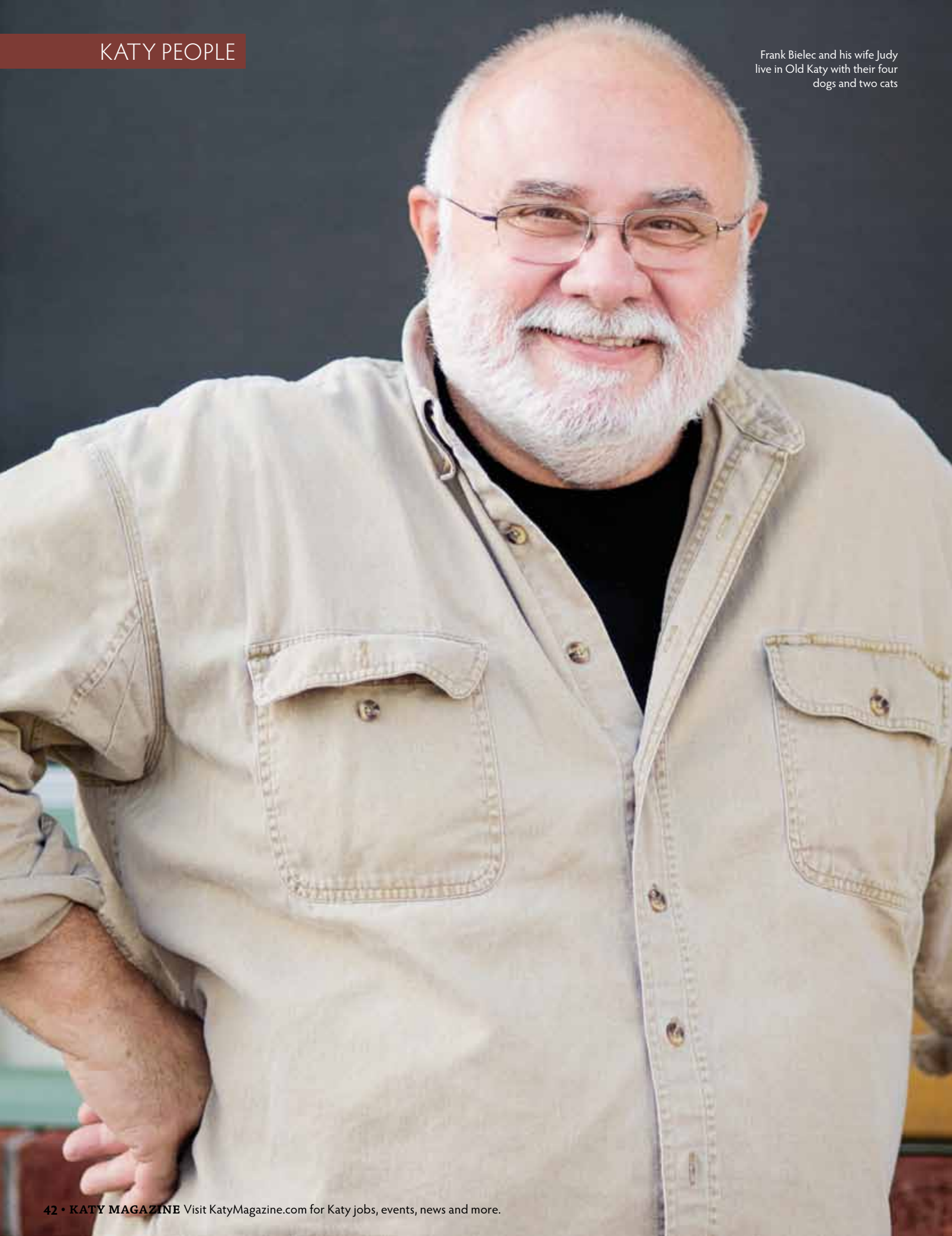


Frank Bielec and his wife Judy live in Old Katy with their four dogs and two cats



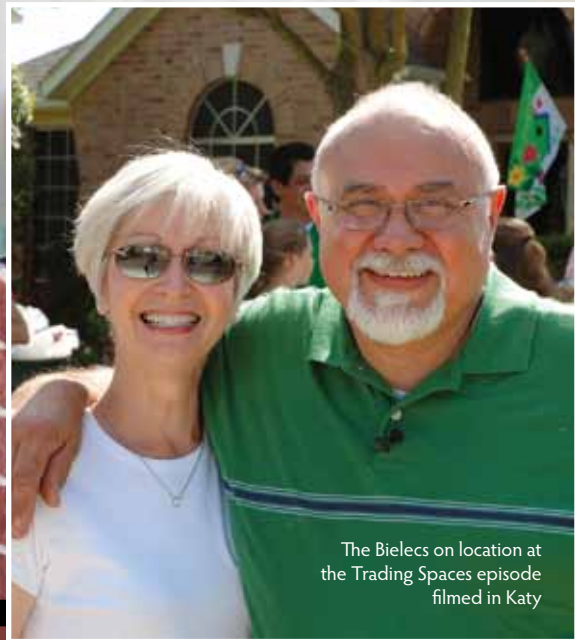


Frank Bielec starred on TLC's Trading Spaces from 2000-2008

Familiar Faces of Trading Spaces

*Frank Bielec is Back Home
and Enjoying the Simple Life in Katy*

Written by Katrina Katsarelis Photography by Marisa Hugonnett



The Bielecs on location at
the Trading Spaces episode
filmed in Katy



For eight years, Katy resident Frank Bielec starred as the lovable, quirky interior designer on TLC's *Trading Spaces*, alongside other newcomers Ty Pennington, Hildi Santo-Tomas, Vern Yip, Laurie Smith, Genevieve Gorder, Amy Wynn Pastor, and Doug Wilson. *Trading Spaces*, a show that was not expected to make it past the first season, became a surprise hit, and transformed a handful of unknowns into instant TV celebrities. Frank landed the gig after he was discovered at a decorative paint convention in Nashville. While stepping in for a demonstrator who had fallen ill, the wise cracking Frank caught the attention of many spectators; one of them was a Home & Garden TV producer. After a few guest appearances on HGTV, Frank found his way to TLC and *Trading Spaces*. At first, Frank enjoyed the simple premise of the show; homeowners would swap houses and one designer/carpenter combo would decorate a room in the home on a modest \$1000 budget. But as the years went by and ratings slipped, the show lost its purity and began implementing some wacky stunts for added shock value.

Almost Fired

According to Frank, *Trading Spaces*' producers were planning to ax three of the cast members in the first season; Frank, Ty Pennington, and Hildi Santo-Tomas. "They were gonna let us go because I didn't fit the demographic, Pennington was a loaded cannon, and Hildi was not good for the show because she was such a defined, independent character." (Ty Pennington eventually went on to host the hugely popular *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*.)

Frank recalls the early days when network heads complained about the way he dressed in comparison to the fashion-forward designers. "I always wore shorts and crappy clothes because I was working and

it was hot," whines Frank. "I figured if the carpenters could dress that way, I could too, but boy did we get phone calls." The show decided to keep the three principal characters after seeing their high likability scores when the ratings came out. "I was the oldest one on the set so they treated me like gold. They looked to me like a father figure," says Frank. For this former teacher, artist, and floral designer, life as a TV star was good and the salary was definitely better than previous jobs. As soon as *Trading Spaces* became a hit, dozens of designer shows followed, each slightly different, but almost all with the famous *Trading-Spaces*-flavored 'reveal' at the end.

Fervent Fans

Fans young and old quickly bonded with the *Trading Spaces* cast and each one had their favorite. As one of the more popular characters, Frank quickly adjusted to being recognized at airports, hotels, and restaurants in cities all over the U.S. He laughs as he recalls the crazy fan that followed him into an airport bathroom and slipped a piece of paper and pen under the door stall for an autograph. Frank happily obliged, but instead of returning the paper, he tossed back a signed roll of toilet paper.

Adding Shock Value

Over the years, as the show's ratings began to slip, producers were 'traded' and new ones started looking for ways to blend reality TV with a dose of drama. There were feuding mother-in-law shows, feuding couple shows, and even a feuding firefighter episode – anything to drop jaws. Frank started getting frustrated. "At the very end, it was like how much drama can we suck out of this?" Plus, the show had been moved from Philadelphia to Los Angeles – one of Frank's all time least favorite cities that he openly compares to Hell.

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Frank and Judy Bielec were first featured in Katy Magazine's Summer 2005 issue



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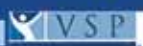
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The once simple show was now simply trying too hard. "It no longer became that little uncomplicated show. It was part of that whole dynamic of drama and problems," says Frank. "I don't understand why people would want to see other people's lives collapse in front of their eyes. I get a greater kick out of a show that gives me a sense of well being. I think that's why *Dancing with the Stars* is so popular."

It's a Wrap

Early in 2009, few were surprised when *Trading Spaces* was cancelled after eight years. A semi-relieved Frank headed back home to Katy from Los Angeles for some well-deserved down time. For now, Frank is enjoying some quality time with his wife Judy and their four dogs and one cat. The Bielecs also have a grandson, Mason, 17 months, who brings a newfound joy into their lives. (Frank and Judy have a grown son Matthew who is married to Summer and lives in St. Louis, Missouri). Frank is stepping back into the family business, *Mosey 'n Me*, while considering some other artistic endeavors and opportunities as well. The Bielecs are versatile artists who do everything from designing cross stitch patterns to painting canvasses, from photography to rug hooking, and much more. Katyites will be excited to learn Frank teaches several local art classes at *Mosey 'n Me Artworks* studio located on Katy Hockley. (Visit moseynmeartworks.com for class schedule.)

When asked if he was sad to see the show end, Frank lets out a Santa Claus style belly laugh, "NO-HO-HO!" But Frank admits he does miss the cast and crew he worked with. "That show was like a huge family and I still think about them." Frank says that during the show, however, producers had expectations of what he was supposed to be and they sometimes got angry if he didn't deliver. "That's why I love living here in Katy because nobody ever takes me seriously, which is a hugely liberating thing." KM

KATRINA KATSARELIS is the Editor-in-Chief and Publisher of Katy Magazine. She first met Frank and Judy Bielec at Hasta la Pasta in 2004 and interviewed them for the story published in 2005.

Frank says wife Judy is a 'class-act'



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Judy works on a project at the studio

Frankly Speaking

The End of Trading Spaces

“That show should’ve ended at the beginning of the sixth season. It was a show that had some integrity. It was a little show that couldn’t. And then all of a sudden it was still the cash cow so they decided they were gonna make it a little more up tempo, and add some drama to it.”

About Fame and Fans

“I’m recognized more now in the past six months than I ever was when I was on the show. And the kids are huge fans. It’s really odd to be recognized so much. Because I was more accessible than most people were on that show I got the more real people. I didn’t have screaming, semi-nude bimbos like the ones trying to get Ty Pennington’s phone number.”

Fans in Katy

“They totally leave me alone in Katy. But sometimes people will come up to me at the hardware store and say, ‘what do you think of this paint color?’ People don’t understand I was never an interior decorator.”

Living the Simple Life

“Believe it or not, I’m a really simple person. But I have my moments of chaos too. Sometimes you gotta leave the monastery and get a little grease on you.”

Katy Pet Peeve

The New Katy/Old Katy mindset. “We’re all just one Katy!”

The Bielecs admit they are total opposites which is one reason the marriage works



Frank's Faves

COLOR – *Brown*

CELEBRITY (dead or alive) – *Oscar Wilde*

DREAM CAR – *Beat up rusty pick-up with a dog in the back*

HOLIDAY – *Halloween and July 4th*

TV SHOW – *Becker reruns*

VACATION SPOT – *Home*

MOVIE – *The Orphanage. Witness for the Prosecution*

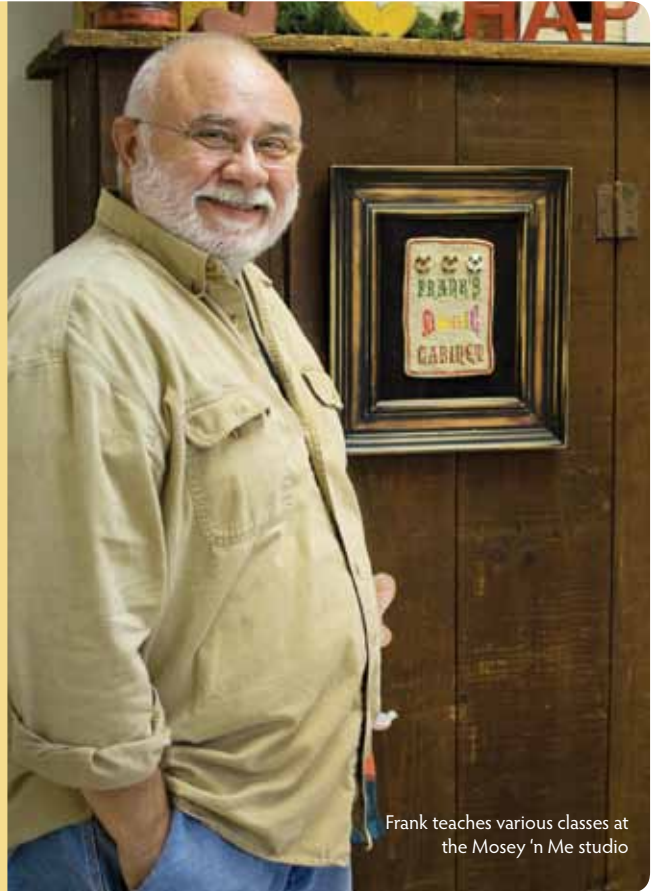
SONG – *At Last*

DECADE – *The one coming up*

VOCALISTS – *David Byrne, Peggy Lee, Nina Simone, Annie Lennox, Bette Midler*

FOOD – *Anything but raisins*

ICE CREAM – *Vanilla (Bluebell)*



Frank teaches various classes at the Mosey 'n Me studio

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