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TELEVISION

El Moussa embraces flip side of life

Anika Reed
USA TODAY

Tarek El Moussa fans have a few reasons to flip out.

The house-flipping reality star and real-estate mogul is back on HGTV with ex-wife Christina Anstead for a new season of "Flip or Flop" (Thursdays, 8 EDT/PDT), but he's branching out on his own for a solo show: "Flipping 101 with Tarek El Moussa."

The 14-episode series, set to premiere early next year, will see El Moussa mentoring real estate novices and helping them through the process of successfully flipping a house.

"I'm really excited about the project because it takes everything I love — investing in real estate and TV — and it's all in one format where I get a chance to really help people out who are new to flipping houses," El Moussa says in an interview with USA TODAY.

Although he initially thought the flippers would take all of his advice, "it turns out that I was totally wrong, and they know way more than me. I'll tell them what to do, and literally half the time they don't listen to me and it makes for good TV."

Along with a new show, El Moussa, 38, has another reason for fans to flip: He's in a new relationship.

He confirms he's dating Heather Rae Young, 31, a former model who stars on Netflix's real-estate reality show "Selling Sunset."

"I officially have a girlfriend," he says. "She's absolutely amazing. It's new, it's exciting, we're having fun. ... I never thought I would be in this position again, finding romance or having a girlfriend."

Though they're having fun now, El Moussa wouldn't quite describe his first date with Young that way.

"The first second I saw her, her smile lit up and right away I felt that energy, and I haven't felt that in a long time," he says.



Tarek El Moussa will star in a new HGTV show, "Flipping 101." He continues to appear on "Flip or Flop" with ex-wife Christina Anstead. ERIK VOAKE/GETTY IMAGES

"I go on a date with her, and I was so nervous and there was a heat wave in California ... and for some reason I put a sweater on, so the whole dinner I'm sweating. I had to go to the bathroom, like, 47 times to cool off," he jokes. "Why did she go out with me again?"

El Moussa says he's more comfortable opening up about his personal life,

especially since calling it quits with Anstead in 2016.

"Going through a public divorce was the absolute worst thing in the world... and I used to hate it," he said. "Now I embrace the fact that people know all about me."

The post-divorce "Flip or Flop" episodes weren't exactly amicable at first,

but El Moussa says the former couple are in a good place now.

"At the beginning it was like pulling teeth," he says. "Today, we have a good working relationship, we co-parent (our two kids, Taylor, 8, and Brayden, 4). I'm happy for her and her new husband (Ant Anstead)."

El Moussa began selling real estate at age 20, when he was "totally broke," and after working "harder than I ever worked" for 90 days he earned \$120,000, setting the stage for his career. When the late 2000s recession hit, he reinvented himself and got into the house-flipping game, turning his first flip into a casting video that would eventually catapult him to HGTV fame with his then-wife.

After six years of flipping houses, El Moussa is a pro at flipping and not flopping.

"When you're flipping, you're flipping for the masses. I always do high design on flips, because I'm an experienced flipper," he said. "A lot of new flippers will focus on really cheap materials and save maybe \$2,000 at the end, but then their design's not good."

He also describes which popular design trends help a house sell in today's market.

"Most designs nowadays are a simplistic feel — white cabinets, quartz counters, neutral-color floors — but then you'll see a lot of accent pieces: cool lighting, really fancy wallpaper, unique fireplace tile, a wooden beam in the ceiling."

One trend that might be on its way out? Marble, he says.

"Marble is definitely not being put in like it used to be," he said. "Everything was marble for a while there. You're still seeing marble, but now you're seeing more cement tile, more patterned tiles."

Along with the new HGTV show, El Moussa recently launched a podcast, "Life By Design" and an HGTV digital series about his personal life, "Tarek's Flip Side."