

Do-It-Yourself Date Night Advice from HGTV Host Monica Pedersen



By **Krissy Dolor**

and **Whitney Baker**

In the summer, spending time with your partner may give you the desire to take a vacation or book a weekend at one of those posh beach houses, but, if you're on a budget or simply nervous about fluctuating gas prices, you'll need to find other ways to keep your relationship exciting without breaking the bank. A do-it-yourself (DIY) date night is the perfect solution.

Monica Pedersen, lifestyle expert and television co-host of *HGTV Dream Home Giveaway 2011*, recently dished with us about her own relationship with husband, Erik and five ways to plan a romantic evening that won't break the bank.

“Everything I do is under budget, real do-it-yourself,” explained Pedersen, who taped *Bang for Your Buck* this summer, a show where she works with a realtor to evaluate newly-renovated houses and help people figure out how to redecorate their home on a smart budget.

This fashion-model-turned-design-student always had an interest in interior decorating, perhaps because of her parents: her father was a handyman, and her mother enjoyed to sew. But what caught HGTV’s eye in hiring Pedersen was her ability to put together a room that would sell, without spending a fortune.

It’s no surprise, then, that this TV personality enjoys the simpler pleasures in life when it comes to creating intimacy with her husband. “We’ve always had a chalkboard in our kitchen, and my husband writes me love notes on it, says Pedersen. It can be anything like, ‘Welcome home,’ or ‘Good luck on your shoot.” She even takes pictures so she can cherish the sweetest messages forever. “It’s silly, but it’s a romantic little thing that means a lot.”

Writing a message to your partner doesn’t cost a thing, and it can really increase the intimacy in a relationship. If you’re tight on money, start thinking outside the box for ways to spice things up!

Here are five tips from Pedersen to make your very own at-home date night feel like a special occasion:

1. Light the scene: Create a romantic atmosphere with candles. If large pillars or candelabras are out of your budget, purchase some inexpensive tea light candles and place them in small glass votives on a table, around a room, or by the bathtub! In the world of design, nothing sets the tone faster than lighting.

2. Make it a tradition: Uncork a great bottle of wine and toast your partner. Pedersen is a fan of Rutherford Hill

Merlot from Napa Valley, CA, which was served at her wedding. She advises writing your toast ahead of time so you can read it to your date. It shows that you put thought into the evening. To start a new tradition, date the cork from that night and tuck it away. Pedersen has a collection of corks marking special date nights in a glass box on her coffee table.

3. Create the perfect pair: If dinner is part of your date night, make a dish that you know your partner will love, bring out the fancy table settings (using the “good stuff” is a great way to turn a typical evening into a special occasion) and turn on some “mood” music.

4. Add a thoughtful touch: Save money and time with inexpensive take-out and a mixed bouquet of fresh flowers. These two items can make a simple date at home feel unique. Bouquets usually cost under \$10 at most grocery stores; if you’re near a Costco, pick up a bouquet of their fresh-cut roses for a bargain price. Remember, it’s making the effort that counts.

5. Invite the crew: If getting a babysitter is a problem, include the kids in your plans. For instance, let them each create a list of all the reasons why Mom loves Dad and Dad loves Mom. Or have them choose a romantic comedy DVD that you can all watch together.

“Never apologize for having a small budget,” Pedersen emphasizes. “It pushes your creativity!”

Pedersen adds that her father gave her the most important piece of relationship advice. “He said, ‘You know kid, you need to find a hobby, something that you guys can do together.’” So what do the Pedersen’s do during their time off? Golf!

“When we got married, I said, ‘I want you to teach me to play golf.’ Now, it’s something we do together; we’ve traveled all

over the world to different courses,” said Pedersen. The couple plays every Saturday afternoon and then enjoys takeout for dinner at the same place each week. “His friends always say, ‘You want to play golf with your wife?’ But it’s our thing that we do together – cell phones off, no Blackberries – it’s just him and I, spending time together in nature.”

Pedersen recommends that all couples pick something that they can enjoy with their partner – whether it’s fly-fishing, wine-tasting or simply grabbing take-out from your favorite restaurant – make a tradition out of it.

Monica Pedersen is an interior decorator, lifestyle expert and television host. This summer, she will be working on a book about home entertainment, due in bookstores early next year. She can be seen regularly on HGTV’s Designed to Sell, Bang for Your Buck, Showdown, and the HGTV Dream Home as well as on appearances on Live with Regis and Kelly and The Today Show.