



DREAM HOUSES

Mark Bennett's obsession with make-believe TV homes turns into a blueprint for success

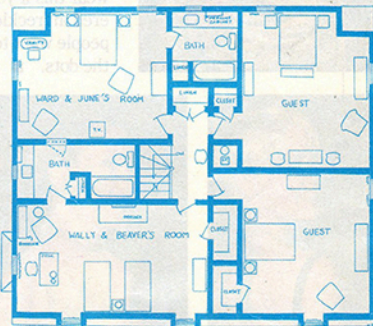
GROWING UP IN CHATTANOOGA, Mark Bennett dreamed of living somewhere else. Jim and Margaret Anderson's place on *Father Knows Best* would have been perfect. Or Mary Richards's Minneapolis apartment. Or the Beverly Hills Hotel, where Lucy and Ricky Ricardo sometimes stayed. "Whenever it was a rainy day in Tennessee," he says, "I'd see them with the Hollywood Bowl behind them and think, 'Why can't I be there?'"

Bennett, now 40, did make it to Beverly Hills, as a mail carrier on Wilshire Boulevard. But he never forgot his fantasies. Over the years, he created detailed blueprints of his favorite TV homes—the Brady family residence, Archie Bunker's house, Ralph and Alice Kramden's Brooklyn apartment. Now, his 47 original draw-

ings—he has sold 26—sell to collectors for as much as \$3,000 each. And *TV Sets: Fantasy Blueprints of Classic TV Homes*, a book of his drawings, has just hit bookstores. All because of an obsession with TV.

"I was a fearful child," says Bennett, the son of a textile executive father and a homemaker. "I couldn't just walk down the street and find other kids to play with. I'd race home to watch *Leave It to Beaver*."

At age 11, Bennett, who is divorced and lives in Los Angeles, began compiling notes on the TV characters' lives. He kept everything from phone numbers (Mary Richards's is 555-2312) to June Cleaver's cookie recipe, and began painstakingly sketching the places where they lived. Despite his devotion to his calling—and an art degree—he was unable to sell his work. In 1995,



A blueprint (detail shows part of the Cleaver home) takes "eight hours of drawing and 20 years of research," says Mark Bennett.

though, desperate to raise money for an overdue credit-card bill, he exhibited the blueprints in a Hollywood restaurant, where they were discovered by Christopher Ford, director of the Mark Moore Gallery in Santa Monica. "I think Mark is surprised that people feel the same way about these TV shows as he does," says Ford. "We all haven't escaped into them the way he has, but we all know what that escape is about." ■