

FAMILY AFFAIR

When designer Anthony Bruno of River Edge needed a partner for an HGTV show, he knew just whom to call: his mom.

HGTV's *That Thrifting Show* with Lara Spencer debuted on Hulu in March of 2026 with a simple premise: two interior-design duos, different each episode, have two days and \$2,000 to transform a room entirely with thrifted or upcycled pieces. (It's a natural fit for Spencer, known for hosting *Flea Market Flip* for 14 seasons.) And if you caught episode five, you saw interior designer Anthony Bruno, 35, of River Edge team up with his mother, Stephanie Pappas, 65, of Mahwah.

Pappas, a newborn care specialist, grew up in Harrington Park, raised Bruno and his two siblings in Paramus and moved to Mahwah when it was time to downsize. Bruno spent time in theater design—including a stint as an artistic director at a theater in Boston—before returning to Bergen and focusing on interior design. He lives with his husband, Gian, whom he married in September 2025.

Does design run in the family?

ANTHONY: I think so. Some of my earliest memories are of decorating the house with my mom for holidays.

STEPHANIE: Even though I'm not a professional designer like Anthony, it's been a hobby my whole life. Both my parents were huge DIY-ers. We had four sewing machines, and they would be going all weekend. My dad was a gardener, and my mom loved garage sales—there's the thrifting connection.

What are your design aesthetics?

A: Narrative and dramatic.

S: Serene and refined. And I really started to gravitate toward warm minimalism as I got older.

A: In contrast to when I was growing up, she was really into the early-2000s Tucson thing. Lots of roosters everywhere.

S: [Laughs.] Yeah, lots!

How did you get involved with *That Thrifting Show*?

A: The producers reached out to me on TikTok, where I post design content. I thought it was a scam at first. They were looking for duos, and I knew right away I needed to ask my mom. My friends have been telling me since high school that it would be the biggest loss in television history if my mother was never on a reality show.

Why's that?

A: She's the quintessential New Jersey mother. I remember being a teenager and hanging out at Cool Beans in Oradell, which doesn't exist anymore, and the server came up and said, "Uh, is there an Anthony here? Your mother called us and is looking for you."

S: Well, you didn't have a cell phone yet!

Memories from being on set?

S: I was surprised by how many people you need to produce a show like that. Every duo had a producer and a six-person camera crew.

A: And a lot of the time is spent on production things. For every 24 hours you have to design a room, you really have more like 10.

Were you ever starstruck?

S: Yes, from meeting Lara Spencer. I watched a lot of *Flea Market Flip*, so it was wild to work with her. She's incredible—so authentic, down-to-earth and kind.

A: We also didn't know who the guest judges were going to be until the day of. When they walked in, my mouth dropped open—I've been following these people [Preston Konrad, Robert Hartwell and Dani Klaric] for years, and suddenly they're here! I panicked a little bit.

Challenges?

A: Well, filming took place two weeks before my wedding.

S: The wedding he designed, for the record.

Tell us more about that.

A: I need to give my husband major props for being as supportive as he was. It was kind of an insane thing to do, but he really stepped up and took everything on—he said, "I'll take care of the vendors, I'll take care of the caterer. You go chase this opportunity." The wedding was at the Bok Building in Philadelphia, which used to be a technical high school. Perfect, because we met in high school—at Bergen Technical Academy.

Lessons from working together?

A: My mom's superpower is that she never sees the obstacles. She's adept at problem-solving and finding a workaround to any snag. I really want to be more like that.

S: And Anthony says all the time, "Trust the process." He believes that in a way I admire. If the solution isn't in front of him, he believes it will reveal itself.

Memories from growing up in Bergen?

S: I raised my kids right across the street from the Bergen County Zoo. We could see some of the animals from our yard. And one time the peacocks—

A: [Laughing.] Oh my God! I forgot about that. Yeah, the peacocks escaped! There were five peacocks in our backyard.

S: Anthony and I needed to corral them into the garage and then call the zookeepers. "Could you please come get your birds?"

A: Only in Bergen!

—Kirsten Meehan



Clockwise from top: Anthony Bruno and his mother, Stephanie Pappas, on the set of *That Thrifting Show* with Lara Spencer; Pappas has lived in Bergen County for nearly her entire life, and Bruno grew up in Paramus and lives in River Edge; The duo also had a chance to compete in a live decorating contest on *Good Morning America* to promote the show, and they took home first prize; Bruno describes his design aesthetic as "narrative and dramatic."

