

House & Home

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Muscling In on Martha Stewart

TRICK OR TREAT?

Home-decorating gurus (from left, with Halloween projects): Chris Cannon Mudd on "besting" choice; Bart Lynn with mannequin scarecrow; Barbara Smith with tree; Colin Cowie with flowers; Mary Emmertling with basket; Froot Loynette Jennings with centerpiece and Kasia Brown with lamps.



By JAMES RYAN

ARMED with little more than a sheaf of recipes, a glue gun, some dried flowers and a puritanical zeal for modern home-keeping, Martha Stewart has built a multimedia empire worth \$200 million, by one conservative estimate. Thus, it comes as no surprise that pretenders are cropping up thicker than sprouts on a Chia Pet.

Haunted by Ms. Stewart's success and eager to promote their own domains, seven gurus of the homely arts gathered last week in New York for a Halloween photo shoot. These arbiters of design and entertaining, cooking and crafts were armed with enough moss, glitter, candles, dry ice, scarecrows and baled straw to raise Mrs. Beeion from the dead, and were escorted by assistants, publicity agents and stylists. Must have already written books and landed half-hour slots in the rapidly expanding soufuffle of life-style television. But they're just treading water compared to Ms. Stewart, a polar-ice-breaking juggernaut who has churned out 22 books and by January will fill five hours of television programming a week.

Why the audience? Home-decorating shows are soothing — like those devoted to golf or bass fishing. Burton Jablin, the programming chief for the fledgling Home and Garden network (HGTV), said his company had predicted a downturn in morning ratings the day President Clinton's grand jury testimony was shown. Instead, there was an increase. "People want something safe and apart from what's out there," Mr. Jablin said. "We call it 'informational escapism.'"

Caroline Goldstein, the author of "Do It Yourself: Home

The Queen of the House haunts a host of competitors.

Improvement in the 20th Century," said shelter advice is, and has always been, about "wanting to be upper middle class."

Then again, some people just don't aspire to Ms. Stewart's "casual country buffet for 40" or \$750 German glass tree ornaments. Annabelle Gurwitch, a host of TBS's life-style parody show, "Dinner and a Movie," said Ms. Stewart and her ilk were depressing: "Watching some of those life-style shows is like watching porn. There are some very tantalizing things happening in front of me that I know that I'm never going to do in my lifetime." But for those who have the time, cash and inclination to gild their pumpkins, homemaking is back.

"Domesticity for a long time got a dour, matronly rap," said Katie Brown, 35, the anti-Martha who is the host of Lifetime's "Next Door With Katie Brown." "It was embarrassing to say, 'I baked these. Women of my generation are embracing nesting again.' What does this Gen X'er bring to the table? She uses a shower curtain as a tablecloth."

A healthy economy helped spark the explosion of decorating shows, which range from impressive to infuriating. "There are a lot of wannabes out there," said Chris Casson Madden.

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Photographs by Abe Freundlich for The New York Times; pumpkin carving by Hugh Michelson

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30, the author of two coffee-table books, "Kitchen" and its sequel, "Bathroom."

"There are businessmen thinking, 'Let's create the next one,' like Miss Vanille. But this isn't an easy job—syncing a song."

Then again, maybe it is. Ms. Madden has a program called "Interiors by Design" on HGTV whose slant content includes house tours and discussions of barrel chairs and pastelerie. Now, she is planning her home-decorating empire. "I'll probably do a fragrance at some point, but it doesn't have to be tomorrow," she said.

The number of imitators grows weekly as HGTV, Lifetime, Discovery, TBS, Romance Channel and E! scramble to fill time slots. Many will be chosen. Few, if any, will succeed. But here are some helpful tips, including a few from Martha Stewart herself, who says, "I do not usually in the business of giving free consultations to competitors."

CHOOSE A NICHE Barbara Smith, a New York restaurateur and former model, is the host of "9 South with Style," a syndicated show. She has emerged as the African-American Martha Stewart. "My show has niche rhythms," said Ms. Smith, 49. Her January 1995 tome, "9 South's Entertaining and Cooking for Friends," features South-west recipes, no-frills party tips and bearing children in red and yellow kwanzaa outfits. Then there is Mary Emmerling, 36, the Country Martha Stewart. Ms. Emmerling is the host of an HGTV show called "Country at Home." (Though she glorifies the American West, Ms. Emmerling has lived in Georgetown in Washington, D.C., Bridge Hampton and, for 20 years, Manhattan.)

Ms. Brown, an actress/waitress turned food columnist, emcee, landed "Next Door With Katie Brown" last year. She's a Southern Martha in the feisty, cranky mold who never stops writing casual, even when writing fabric ballets for an indoor picnic, making handmade paper in a brooder from boiled newspaper pulp and rose petals.

Gaila Cowie, a celebrity party planner, is the host of a Reemoo Martha. "I'm on a mission to 'redefine' and 'recreate' our social graces," said Mr. Cowie, 38. He is the author of "The Voyeuristic Paperweight: Weddings" and "Effortless Elegance." Not always hands-on, Mr. Cowie believes that ef-

fortless elegance is achieved by having a chief assist him during cooking, signifying a "Everyday Elegance" with Gaila Cowie. "I'm not above painting a winter in a cub to fetch Indian takeout."

A glance around the cable spectrum reveals slots open for A. Laina Martha, a Sports Martha and a Book 'n Roll Martha.

Martha says: "I never wanted to go after a niche. I want to touch as many people as possible."

OUR MARTHA MARTHA Ms. Madden and Bart Lynn, the former home correspondent for "Good Morning America," have taken on Martha hard to hand, down to the crusty sister and the straw-socker-blond hair. "The dream is to turn me into a brand name and license products: crystal chins, window treatments, bedding," said Ms. Lynn, 35, who is looking for her own television show.

Martha says: "Why anybody would want to copy me or replace me is kind of crazy." **TAKE A SIGNER ON "OPRAH"** Appearing on "Oprah" was a turning point, said Ms. Madden, who landed her own show after making herself unavailable to the busy Ms. Winfrey, redesigning her private office to include workstations of Ms. Winfrey's design. Mr. Cowie says he is now recognized at airports, thanks to his arrival "Oprah" appearance. "I get a whole hour with her," he boasted. Other Stewart wannabes have appeared on "Entertainment Tonight" (Gaila Cowie), "Good Morning America" (Ms. Madden, Ms. Lynn) and the "Today" show (Lynette Jennings). The telepage Ms. Smith has appeared on "Oprah," the "Today" show and "Good Morning America."

Martha says: "If you're an expert, in something very specific, you may be invited to try it too."

MAKING HOPES Mr. Cowie, who is doing an all-Pratt Halloween wedding this weekend in Beverly Hills, Calif., has been a natural coordinator for such time events as Heidi Heitner, Kenny G, Paula Abdul and Charlie Sheen. "Because of the celebrity angle," he said, "I have been inundated with offers to do licensing agreements."

Ms. Brown's press kit mentions that she has catered for Queen Tamarina, Mrs. Katherine and Diane Keaton. Ms. Madden trumpets that she is Ms. Winfrey's favorite designer. One of the most popular names to drop is that of the one Miss Madden. She

was touted as a guest, chef or book subject by at least four of the seven interviewed. "She is the widow," Martha says. "Every Oprah has said to me, 'Where do you get your ideas?'"

EXPLOIT A COLORFUL PAST Ms. Stewart, 57, was voraciously a model, a sculptor and a designer before she turned to life-style management. Ms. Jennings, 56, studied architecture and owned a company that regularly built homes. Ms. Smith's career as a model has given her pose, and 12 years of running her own restaurants in New York, Washington and Sag Harbor have made her comfortable with a wooden spoon.

Ms. Brown said she learned cooking tips by pestering chefs during her years in New York as a waitress. A childhood in Kewaunee, Wis., and studies in pharmacy provided Mr. Cowie with inspiration to become, as he begrudgingly states, an "intermittent author of taste." And Ms. Madden's success suggests that a background in public relations works, too. She spent time in the publicity departments of Random House, G. P. Putnam's Sons and Simon & Schuster before becoming a design writer. "I know a trend when I see one," she said.

Martha would like to grow up to a more colorful goal, she says. "I don't remember the last time I made a mistake."

FIND A NEW GIMMICK So far, no one has come up with a trademark to match Ms. Stewart's signature pliers. "It's a good thing." But that's not for want of trying. Ms. Emmerling is the doyenne of five-minute decorating and prominent decor that might best be termed "it" or "stuck." Check her book "Quick Decorating" for details, but it involves piles of books, things hanging from coat racks and folded blankets. "Folding just comes naturally to me," she said.

Ms. Madden so believes women need personal spaces that she wrote a book, which includes an exercise on a nur's advice call in Santa Fe, N.M. Mr. Cowie, who employs the term "habitus" as a temporary use a truck stop waitress uses on hitchhike, has the air of a table-top deck (contains many any-one?) to an art worthy of a Habitat card.

Martha says: "I look for what can't eat diets. My nice book is about herbed soups. There's a good one and there for a good hand-pull art here at home."

Smith, third; Andrea Gent and Martin Lynn, a husband-and-wife team who have worked for Martha Stewart Living. Ms. Madden has one-upped them all, per editor at Clarkson Potter, America's Hamish, used to be Ms. Stewart's editor.

Mr. Cowie and Ms. Madden say they will start their own magazines within a year.

Mr. Brown, the new spokesperson for Arm & Hammer baking soda, said she currently has book offers from 21 publishers. **MARTHA SAYS** "Whatever it's on simple as making a chicken or its complicated as making Leon-Grosgorski's chocolate delight dessert, readers want to know the real way and no short-cuts. People never put the real way in their books."

GET YOUR OWN SHOW Without a weekly show, you're just another guest stylist. Ms. Brown has managed to snagging her campaign, "Come January, her show will expand to five half-hour segments a week." Ms. Jennings, a pioneer in the genre, has spent 10 years on the Discovery Channel. Her highly professional series, "Lynette Jennings Design," combines instructional

home tours with practical decorating tips. "I consider myself more of a teacher than a celebrity, a business or a star," said Ms. Jennings, the Ted Koppel of the genre.

Martha says: "I tap the network at night, seeing how other people are doing. People are not being offered quality programming except for mine."

RECYCLE, RE-USE Even Ms. Stewart in recent weeks has recycled stanzas like "How to Love a Dishwasher" and "How to Hang a Backyard Chicken." How can any more material consistently come up with new ideas? "Everything's recycled these days," Ms. Emmerling said. "I don't care who you are — you can't do it all yourself. You get it from magazines, from books, from home windows. Why did I see 'Out of Africa' 20 times? I wanted to see that living room again."

Martha says: "I come up with 25 ideas a day."

THINK FRAGRANCE Create a brand, and make it glamorous. Not everyone will have the longevity of Ms. Stewart, whose line of Everyday shows and towels for Knott is expected to top \$1 billion in sales this fiscal year. "Except for Martha, it comes and goes for everyone," said Ms. Emmerling, who just her line of sheets for J.C. Penney and is now down to wallpaper and American Country Wed furnishings.

While most empire builders want to expand quickly, Ms. Jennings held off until this year, when she became the spokeswoman for Home Depot and signed deals with Delta (for credit products), Crown Craft (for bedding and throw rugs) and Time-Life (for books and videos). "We wanted to wait until we could work with the top people in each field," she said.

Martha says: "I must have learned down at parianos. I've never learned top cooking. That is not something that is going to be fabulous."

Bart Lynn salutes Hasbrouck with antique marraquin, straw and feathers.



SCARECROW

SPAWN A PARODY Ms. Stewart is a target because of her perfectionism and apparent lack of humor, an attitude who ridiculed her book "Christmas Tree with cotton candy on the Day of Lorraine" show can attest. So far, none of the seven contenders to Martha's throne has been proved worthy of parody. But what happens to the others? **MARTHA SAYS** "Love the late-night jokes that the parodies are in target. I could do those better myself."



THE MARTHAS-IN-WAITING

Barbara Smith

Host of the syndicated show "Barbara Smith with 30/60."

SIGNATURE STYLE Martha With "More Rhythm."

MARKETABLE GIMMICK Happy Kwanzaa!

PREVIOUS INCARNATION Model, restaurateur.

HALLOWEEN IDEA B. Smith's Halloween-themed T-100—a temporary made-of painted branches, hanging mist and ornaments.

BAD IDEA Plywood and cedar block picnic table.

ACTUALLY USEFUL TIP Ask everyone, including the man, to show some "determination."

RATING



Chris Cisson

Madden

Host of "Interiors by Design" on HGTV.

SIGNATURE STYLE "Elegant touches of the Ruff and Puffman's Life."

MARKETABLE GIMMICK Country restoration.

PREVIOUS INCARNATION Publicity agent, lifestyle journalist.

HALLOWEEN IDEA A woman's "person's choice" for the holiday: a chaise à trois made of pine, maple, and birch. (Note: In the episode, however, an antique oak chair and several built-in chairs are used.)

BAD IDEA Display assorted dried paper roses in grapevine baskets.

ACTUALLY USEFUL TIP "Store books away from steam, heat or humidity."

RATING



Colin Cowie

Host of "Everyday Elegance With Colin Cowie" on Roman Channel.

SIGNATURE STYLE Formal, Precious.

MARKETABLE GIMMICK Eddie's jewelry.

PREVIOUS INCARNATION Party planner in the city.

HALLOWEEN IDEA A bowl (shades) with Indian Summer roses.

BAD IDEA Dancing with a Hindu Hindu in the living room.

ACTUALLY USEFUL TIP "If the guy down the street looks a better form, fart, bro, bro."

RATING



Bari Lynn

Contributor to shows on the E! Channel, author of "Electric Living."

SIGNATURE STYLE Martha Stewart Extra-Lite.

MARKETABLE GIMMICK Heat transfer applicator.

PREVIOUS INCARNATION Creative director of Soif magazine.

HALLOWEEN IDEA Use a red, brown & tan antique monogrammed hat.

BAD IDEA Chase-pinning, retrace the into a cookie sheet to make it easy to move.

ACTUALLY USEFUL TIP "Don't break up china by shopping. If break your two-story window."

RATING



Katie Brown

Host of "Lorraine's Next Door With Katie Brown" on HGTV.

SIGNATURE STYLE Swap-Meet Chic.

MARKETABLE GIMMICK The Atlas Martha.

PREVIOUS INCARNATION Actress (and news anchor).

HALLOWEEN IDEA "re-imaged" wooden candy bowl, chaise à trois with pumpkins and blue.

BAD IDEA Print out her Los Angeles area, Epic, magazine, "favorite color of the month."

ACTUALLY USEFUL TIP "Woman's biggest obstacle is to use top quality paint."

RATING



Mary Emmetling

Host of "Country at Home" on HGTV.

SIGNATURE STYLE Country Back to Back.

MARKETABLE GIMMICK Folded in our blankets.

PREVIOUS INCARNATION Shelter journalist.

HALLOWEEN IDEA A country open vintage leather filled with candles and pumpkins.

BAD IDEA A wooden peg rack hung with a high-contrast painting and wicker fishing creel, all topped with a bleached cow skull.

ACTUALLY USEFUL TIP "Clutter isn't always bad."

RATING



Lynette Jennings

Host of "Lynette Jennings Design" on the Discovery Channel.

SIGNATURE STYLE Dr. Dreck.

MARKETABLE GIMMICK Every-thing from craft kits to throw rugs will be color-coordinated to projects in the show and do-it-yourself books.

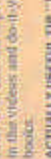
PREVIOUS INCARNATION Designer, decorator.

HALLOWEEN IDEA Construction of tiny candy-filled houses.

BAD IDEA Everything from craft kits to throw rugs will be color-coordinated to projects in the videos and do-it-yourself books.

ACTUALLY USEFUL TIP "It doesn't matter what the neighbors or your relatives think."

RATING



Rating Key:



Glue guns represent Marthability.

Photograph by John Proffitt/Photo Disc/Getty Images