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ONE DOLLAR



Left and center photographs by Richard Perry/The New York Times; right, Bill Cunningham/The New York Times

Some potential contenders for Martha Stewart's throne as domestic queen: from left, Chris Casson Madden, Katie Brown and Barbara Smith.

## Now, the Search for the Next Diva of Domesticity

By WILLIAM L. HAMILTON

The race is on to be the next nearly Martha.

Chris Casson Madden, the author of 16 books on the home, is trying to do for J.C. Penney what Martha Stewart did for Kmart. In May, Penney will introduce over 1,700 products — everything from bath towels to furniture — that Ms. Madden and her staff designed and that will be called the Chris Madden With J.C. Penney Home Collection.

Barbara Smith, the restaurateur, and Katie Brown, an author of decorating books, who have both put in their time on cable television, say they have been barraged by calls from networks, venture capitalists, furniture companies and people from Hollywood scouting the contenders to Ms. Stewart's throne.

Now that Ms. Stewart has been

convicted on criminal charges, the would-be heirs have begun measuring that throne very carefully.

Few can hope to completely fill the void. After all, Ms. Stewart spent two decades building her empire, and for many of those years she had the field largely to herself. And yet, with television producers, magazine publishers, book editors and product developers calling by the hour, others in the lifestyle business are looking for opportunities to grab a slice of her business.

For now, each wants to promote himself or herself as the best positioned.

"This was like a tectonic plate shifting," Dan Gasby, Ms. Smith's business partner and husband, said yesterday. "We have a network television meeting this afternoon, and a major brand meeting tomorrow, for products for every room in the

home."

Ms. Brown, a host of an A&E television decorating show, was walking out the door of her apartment last Friday afternoon when the television began blaring the news about Ms. Stewart.

"My phone's been ringing off the hook," she said. "Branding, branching out — how can we bank on my name. Everyone's trying to second-guess what will happen next, and how to capitalize on it."

Ms. Brown added that she thought the situation was a double-edged sword.

"Martha's bad news is good and bad news to me," she explained. "There's more trepidation about giving shelf space to products with personalities attached. People don't know whether to push forward or

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The White House said President Bush would privately answer all questions raised by the panel investigating the 9/11 attacks. PAGE A14

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# Now, the Search for the Next Diva of Domesticity

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pull back with a name."

The generals of the lifestyle field, from television producers to product manufacturers, agree that there is no one clear and complete successor to Ms. Stewart, with her expertise in decorating, food and homemaking and her experience in empire making. But few deny the new opportunities for others, even as the commercial liabilities of being tightly tied to a high-profile personality are debated.

"The theory is that there are many opportunities that we can't take advantage of without someone leading the collection," said Charles Chinni, the executive vice president of merchandising at J.C. Penney who worked with Ms. Madden. The company, which reached its agreement with her two years ago, reviewed 20 candidates. Mr. Chinni said that even after the conviction of Ms. Stewart on federal charges last week, he had no reservations about the strategy.

And yet, unlike Kmart's deal to have Ms. Stewart design linens, kitchenware and other goods, Penney is not giving Ms. Madden exclusive domain. The company has also hired Colin Cowie, a television lifestyle personality, as its spokesman for bridal products.

Mr. Cowie is not seeing that as a limitation. Beyond his Penney arrangement, he says he is now in negotiations to develop two new television shows and a magazine.

"A brand without a name without a face is never as effective," he said. "A brand cannot go on a segment of 'Oprah,' but Colin Cowie can."

But then, Oprah Winfrey, a media franchise in her own right, could conceivably enter the competition, with home design magazines or television programs — although a spokeswoman for Harpo Inc., Ms. Winfrey's television production company in Chicago, denied an Associated Press report that a decorating make-over show was being developed. But Ms. Winfrey evidently sees possibilities in the house-and-home niche: her publisher, Hearst Magazines, is about to test a new magazine, *O at Home*, with a first issue to appear in May. Ms. Stewart built her success on the synergies of magazine publishing and television programming,



Richard Perry/The New York Times

J.C. Penney is about to introduce more than 1,700 products from towels to furniture designed by Chris Madden and her staff.

to which she added product development.

Others trodding the Stewart path include Scripps Networks, which operates five networks: HGTV; Food Network; Fine Living; DIY; The Do It Yourself Network; and Shop at Home, a shopping network the company purchased last year.

"If you look at Martha's enterprise, from 'on air' to product, we're able to do that now," said Cindy McConkey, a Scripps spokeswoman.

Scripps, working with the Meredith Corporation, publisher of *Bet-*

*ter Homes and Gardens* magazine, is also producing books.

"It's unlikely any single person could replace Martha," Ms. McConkey said, "but we have the television personalities, we have the print, we have the syndicated columns, we have the product."

For its part, *Better Homes and Gardens* has a number of product lines already in stores, including garden accessories at Wal-Mart. Last year the magazine entered a partnership with *Home Interiors and Gifts*, a company with 80,000 direct-sale representatives who visit homes nationally with a collection of home décor accessories.

"It's the institutions that will always be with us," said Samir A. Busni, a magazine industry analyst. "Everyone knew that Martha Stewart Living would never celebrate a 100th anniversary, like *Better Homes and Gardens*. It's hard ultimately to brand a magazine after a person — look at *Lears* or *Rosie*. If Oprah vanished, how successful do you think *O* would be?"

Such thinking may explain why other magazines have been based on building strong newsstand identities, not in-house personalities — like *Real Simple*, a Time Warner publication that was developed in 2000 by Susan Wyland, a former editor of Ms. Stewart's magazine. The magazine is in the process of creating books for the fall as well as television programming, which the magazine's executives declined to discuss.

But many other media and product properties continue to be based on the premise of people as brands. Certainly, the "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy" style-advice television series, books and CD's depend on the appeal of Carson Kressley and the other members of the Fab Five.

"Anything personality-based will rise and fall on whether the talent is trendy or not," said Ava Seave, a mar-

keting consultant and adjunct professor at the Columbia Business School.

Another living brand name is Kathy Ireland, the former model who now has an array of licensing deals for apparel, jewelry and home and garden accessories, in addition to books and television specials. Ms. Ireland said, though, that she was not interested in such Stewartesque brand extensions as weekly television programming, because it would take too much time away from her three young children.

Besides, she is not yet willing to declare the reign of Queen Martha over. "I really believe Martha's brand will endure," Ms. Ireland said. The criminal conviction, she said, is "one chapter in her life."

But Ms. Madden, the home design auteur, is intent on pursuing a strategy much closer to Ms. Stewart's. An author and television host who had several licensing arrangements and product lines before signing with J.C. Penney, Ms. Madden now has a proposal for a magazine, *Chris Madden Haven*. Mr. Chinni, at Penney, said the company would help her start it if her collections did well.

Ms. Madden, who said she was in negotiations with a network she would not identify for a television series, addressed the impact of Ms. Stewart's conviction on her own lifestyle business.

"I'm already set up, and Martha's demise wouldn't be that much to me," she said. "My moment is now. If we get new shoppers because they can't go to Kmart, so be it."

Ms. Madden plans to move her operations in two weeks from Rye, N.Y., to a new larger 5,000-square-foot office loft, an old Fruit of the Loom factory, in nearby Port Chester. And she is considering expanding her 10-person staff.

A veteran of the lifestyle wars who is in perhaps the best position to assess the Stewart uproar is Mary Emmerling, the creative director of Meredith's *Country Home* magazine, who has been there, done that, seen it all come and go, and come again.

The author of 20 books, Ms. Em-

## A search for a star, despite doubts about building a brand around a personality.

merling hired Martha Stewart at both *House Beautiful* and *Mademoiselle* in the 1970's, when she was decorating editor. Ms. Emmerling seemed ready for her own rustic throne in 1992, with the debut of *Mary Emmerling's Country*. Its publisher, Gruner & Jahr, folded it three years later. She developed a line of licensed products for the home with J.C. Penney in the 1990's, but they were discontinued after five years.

She joined *Country Home* seven years ago.

"I peaked early, before everyone was doing branding or licensing," Ms. Emmerling said. "I'm curious what's going to happen to Martha. I think all licensing peters out at some point. You get in there — you do well, you don't do well. The stores go on in the next one."

Ms. Emmerling said she was happy to be just a person and not a product now.

"When Martha signed her Kmart deal, it gave her a huge push, jumped her ahead about 30 spots," Ms. Emmerling recalled. "People always asked if I was jealous."

"No one's asked me that in the last two years."

## At home

## For Katie Brown, 'cute' won't cut it anymore

## Sky's the limit for 'Year Round' domestic diva

By Olivia Barlow  
USA TODAY

NEW YORK — Katie Brown is tired of the comparisons to Katie Couric, that other preternaturally perky brunette.

"I really don't want to be cutesy. I want to be sophisticated and mysterious," says Brown, the down-home domestic goddess, perched on her kitchen counter, her leg swinging. "I want to be the girl who walks up to the bar and asks for Scotch on the rocks."

That might be a tough call for someone who arranges pinecones for a living, she readily admits.

Which is all part of her charm. This Midwesterner, perpetually poised to take over for Martha Stewart, is as solid and unpretentious as her cherry red clogs and pockmarked dining table. (She found it about a year ago, when she moved into her airy Lower East Side loft, a former sewing factory.)

With her new A&E show, *All Year Round with Katie Brown*, and with Stewart's future increasingly cloudy, Brown, 40, seems closer than ever to ascending Martha's throne.

"Wouldn't that be exciting?" says Brown, her enthusiasm genuine.

Fans find her eclectic, no-frills aesthetic refreshing — and accessible. If Stewart is a professor of the domestic arts, "I'm the best friend who's learning with you," she says, squeezing a visitor's arm.

In her 3,500-square-foot apartment, plain white Ikea chairs and thick white Crate & Barrel rugs share space with zebra-print Jamie Young lamps and a sleigh-shaped settee culled from an antiques store. There's a renaissance-looking painting of a mandolin player on one wall (snagged from her parents' Michigan house) and her own abstract canvas on another.

To Brown, recycling is a means of decorating. Flea-market finds are spread out over the loft, quite literally, such as the living room rug she picked up in nearby Chelsea — for \$25. She took a set of sliding-glass doors from her weekend home in Bridgehampton, N.Y., and turned them into her loft's shower stall. The lovingly worn white porcelain double sink in the guest bathroom? She plucked it off the curb of the Bowery, a block west.

"The grittiness of the neighborhood, it's kind of inspiring," says Brown, pondering the heavy iron gates along her block and the shuttered storefronts strewn with graffiti. Replete with inexpensive lumberyards and fabric stores, the Lower East Side also is convenient if you're doing it yourself on a dime. "It's our orbit," she explains.

But unlike a lot of the gentrification going on around the corner,



Don't call her "cutesy": Katie Brown, 40, in the kitchen of her Manhattan loft, has a new show on A&E, *All Year Round with Katie Brown*.



In the bedroom: From-the-street finds abound here as well. "The grittiness of the neighborhood, it's kind of inspiring," Brown says.

there's no hipster pretension here on the third floor. This is a woman who has always preferred iceberg lettuce to arugula before it became kitschy-trendy to do so, and who doesn't shy away from cooking with Crisco, something her celebrity-chef friend Bobby Flay regularly teases her about.

The wood floors are sprinkled with squares of tin for reasons of function more than form — to cover the holes below. The result just happens to look stylishly distressed. Design and utility blend again on the chalkboard-painted wall behind her cement kitchen counters. The wall doubles as a menu board during dinner parties.

The shelves in her crafts room are stacked with clear plastic tubs, stuffed with scissors, glue guns, gloves and the like. *Rooster Room*

for grown-ups," she says.

Unlike Stewart, she doesn't insist on perfection. When she took red paint to the white wall of her guest bathroom, drawing an arrow so visitors could find the commode around the corner, she misspelled the accompanying sign: "toilet," instead of toilet. The error remains, and she doesn't intend to fix it.

And she doesn't take the success of a project for granted. During taping of her TV show, the directors are "always yelling, 'Cut, cut, cut! Katie, can you look less excited when you pull the cake out of the oven?' I tell them, 'No, I can't.'"

That perky image is going to be hard to shed.

► Take an interactive tour of Katie Brown's hip Manhattan loft at [lifa.usatoday.com](http://lifa.usatoday.com)



Spice simplicity: Brown keeps them in plain containers.



Found items: The sign and table are from an old restaurant.

## Katie: Don't waste time or money

Katie Brown's scrappy decorating sensibility — a hodgepodge of high and low, deliberate and accidental — is both budget-minded and time-sensitive. "I grew up with TV," she says. "So if it takes longer than 15 minutes, you're going to lose me."

A sampling of Brown's creative credo:

► Don't feel guilty about taking a cake from scratch and popping open a tub of Duncan Hines to frost it. "It's about taking short cuts, but still making it feel like it's yours," she says.

► Dean & DeLuca has nothing on her: Instead of forking over big bucks for fancy, prepackaged spices, Brown buys curry and company in bulk from a local restaurant supply store and keeps them in metal containers, labeled with a black Sharpie. But "don't get me wrong," she says. "I love a good Ciarella purchase once in a while," referring to the New York chain of gourmet food shops.

► A bottle of Joy dishwashing liquid positioned by the kitchen faucet need not be a tacky oversight. "I'm kind of into the Andy Warhol-label thing," she explains. "Pop art is cheap."



Eclectic decorating: In Brown's living room are zebra-print Jamie Young lamps, rugs from Crate & Barrel and more found objects.