



Cooking Channel serves food cool, with a splash of spirits

Updated 4d 2h ago

By **Olivia Barker**, USA TODAY



By Robert Deutsch, USA TODAY

Drink Up! host Darryl Robinson is an actor who has spent 15 years behind the bar. There's a trick to making good mojitos, he says.

Iron Chef Michael Symon's new Cooking Channel show is titled, aptly, *Cook Like an Iron Chef*. Symon, who won the title in 2007, makes a mean crab taco.

By Robert Deutsch, USA TODAY

	8:00 PM	8:30 PM	9:00 PM	9:30 PM	10:00 PM	11:00 PM
abc ABC	<u>Jimmy Kimmel Live</u> New	<u>NBA Countdown</u> Live	<u>NBA Basketball Live</u>			
CBS	<u>NCIS</u>		<u>NCIS: Los Angeles</u>	<u>The Good Wife</u>		
NBC NBC	<u>America's Got Talent</u>		<u>America's Got Talent</u> New	<u>Losing It \ Jillian Ne</u>		
Fox FOX	<u>Hell's Kitchen</u> New		<u>Glee</u> New	Local Programn		
CW CW	<u>90210</u>		<u>Life Unexpected</u>	Local Programn		

[View complete TV Listings](#)

Advertisement

Mom Dilemma #36:
Your daughter insists on wearing her princess costume to the grocery store. Allow it or not?

YES, at least she's dressed!

NO, I have some rules!

momslike.me.com
where Local moms meet

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



NEW YORK — The walls are exposed brick and burnished wood. The seating is black industrial steel. The lighting is makeout-friendly dark. Outside, an elevated subway train rumbles by.

SUMMER TV CALENDAR: What else are networks serving up this summer?

Inside the Dram bar in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, standing before a half-dozen crew and a single camera, is Darryl Robinson, who Scripps Networks Interactive, the Food Network's parent company, is hoping will become one of the next food TV stars.

But Ina Garten's sunny kitchen this ain't. Robinson, who sports black-framed Prada glasses, a shaved head and sculpted biceps, is host of *Drink Up!*, a bar-hopping, cocktails-and-conversation show on Scripps' latest concoction, the newly launched Cooking Channel (formerly the Fine Living Network).

Drink Up!'s hipster ground-zero location is key: The Cooking Channel aims to attract a younger, edgier audience than the Food Network's, a sophisticated group of people in their 20s and 30s who brew their own beer and drink Pabst Blue Ribbon only with tongue firmly in cheek. Having grown up on sushi, they're ready to learn about sweetbreads — carved from grass-fed cows, of course.

Cooking Channel's programming is "a little grittier, a little more about food and information and a little less about pure entertainment," says network general manager Michael Smith, who worked in marketing at the 17-year-old Food Network for 12 years. The personalities, for whom Food Network became famous (think Rachael Ray and Bobby Flay), "are still going to be entertaining and charismatic," Smith says, but the shows they host are going to dig deeper into a broader range of topics, from Indian food to veganism.

Never mind that nosh TV has grown from a niche to a full-on genre, that food programming is available on everything from prime-time Fox (*Kitchen Nightmares*) to prime-time Planet Green (*The Fabulous Beekman Boys*, a new series about a New York couple who trade a city life of magazines and drag queens for an organic farm adventure of goat cheese and pigs).

"There's an enormous appetite" for more, says Lauren Deen, executive producer of *Drink Up!* and another Cooking Channel show, *Food(ography)*, a

quirky exploration of food culture hosted by hipster-geek funnyman Mo Rocca.

"The tattoo artist who makes ice cream cakes? We found her," says Deen, a 15-year food TV vet who has worked with everyone from Flay to Martha Stewart. Not that body ink alone brands Cooking Channel fare. Some subjects and stars "are people doing really cool things who happen to be tattooed and groovy," Deen says. (Robinson's sole stamp, incidentally, is his late mother's name, Eutine, imprinted on his chest.)

Seeking a separate identity

But to perhaps ease the channel's introduction, a few familiar faces are hosting new shows on the network, including Ray (*Rachael Ray's Week in a Day*) and Flay (*Brunch @ Bobby's*). Stirring in top talent is a top ingredient for the Cooking Channel's success, says Francois Lee of ad firm MediaVest: Big names lend credibility and draw viewers.

But once the network is, well, cooking, "the next step is giving it its own edge or identity," Lee says. If the goal is to position the channel as younger, "you don't want to make it like a Food Network 2.0." Otherwise, Scripps "could end up cannibalizing its own audience." (Cooking Channel's initial distribution is 58 million households, vs. Food Network's 97 million.)

Deen's former boss isn't worried about an increasingly packed food TV pantry. "As a one-stop resource and pioneer for all things food, we have c

Advertisement

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



continued to provide viewers with access to the world's best chefs, award-winning restaurants, beautiful cookbooks and delicious recipes," writes Martha Stewart in an e-mail. This fall, her daytime show moves to a place that's also jumping on the food TV trend, the Hallmark Channel. "We have built a loyal and passionate fan base, and we will continue to provide ideas and inspiration."

Over at Bravo, home of food TV juggernaut *Top Chef* (the latest season, set in Washington, D.C., premieres June 16), there's a similar lack of concern over new competition for eyeballs (and stomachs). "Our MO is that this has to appeal to not just people who are intensely interested in food, but also people who don't know how to boil water," says network executive vice president and general manager Frances Berwick. The latter group "can still have a deep engagement with our shows on the basis that everyone has a point of view, and everyone enjoys eating."

And drinking — especially communally. *Drink Up!* is about "what happens behind the bar as much as what happens in the glass," Deen says. Robinson, an actor in his 30s who has spent 15 years behind the bar, most recently at Manhattan's Hudson Hotel, always felt there was a void in the food shows he flipped through: Where were the cocktail segments? And when they did air, "they seemed like an afterthought," he says.

Pour on the spirits

So today, for the sixth half-hour episode of *Drink Up!*'s 13-episode run, rum is as much the star as Robinson. Standing in front of a shelf of vinyl records and behind a mint julep cup stuffed with mint sprigs, he mixes up a raspberry mojito, muddling limes and raspberries together "just enough to break the skins," he tells the camera in a smoky baritone.

"Good energy," chimes in Deen, watching a nearby monitor. (Robinson reminds her of when she first met a fledgling Flay: "nice guy, sincere, talented, ready to work.")

He pours the ruby liquid into a glass over a single chunky block of ice, which melts more slowly than a handful of rocks and won't ruin "the integrity of your drink," he explains. The audience also gets a lesson in etymology: "Mojito" comes from the likely African word "mojo," which means "little spell,"

under which, of course, someone is placed after imbibing the rum-soaked beverage.

An L train ride away in the West Village, tequila is the tippie of choice on the set of *Cook Like an Iron Chef*, a hybrid of old Food Network and new Cooking Channel hosted by Iron Chef Michael Symon (who's one of those heavily tattooed types). The Mexican spirit is "delicious" with the crab tacos he's crafting, Symon tells the crew. Today's secret ingredient is fresh — not pasteurized, Symon stresses — lump Jonah crabmeat.

Cook Like an Iron Chef, which premieres in July, was inspired by the *Iron Chef* parties that popped up in the wake of the original series' popularity. Here, *Kitchen Stadium* has been stripped down to a set of steel girder supports, rough wood plank floors and a set of copper cookware that's definitely not for show.

Symon, whose T-shirt reads "Eat more meat," is standing before bowls of avocado, cilantro and pickled onion. He demonstrates how to squeeze a lime with a pair of metal tongs and then carefully fold in the crab. "Be gentle. Caress it — just like that. It's gonna be money."

And so, Scripps hopes, will the Cooking Channel.

Advertisement

USA TODAY
AutoPilot 
 The new travel app for iPhone® and iPod touch®
 Presented by: 
SEE HOW IT WORKS >>

Print Powered By 