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Visual Bites: A Cookbook Author Weighs in on the Best Food Shows

by [Brette Sember](#) on November 7, 2011 · [5 comments](#)



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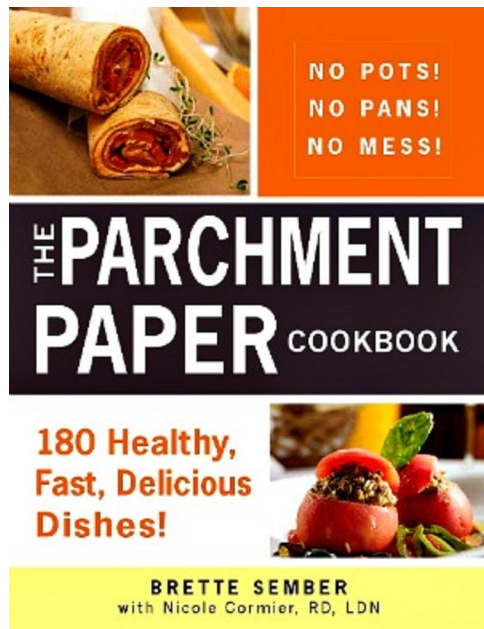
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Editor's Note: Many thanks to cookbook author Brette Sember for this post. Her many credits and books are listed at the end, so be sure to visit her sites and check out [The Parchment Paper Cookbook on Amazon](#).

Shhh. Don't tell anyone, but I'm a couch potato when it comes to food. I love to cook and taste food, but sometimes I like to sit back and watch someone else do all the work in the kitchen while I put my feet up. Sometimes I watch food shows while cooking, but I also love to just sit down and relax with them at night. Here are the best visual bites I've found on TV:

[Paula's Home Cooking](#): I love Paula Deen's older shows, where she starts each show by saying "Hi y'all" and cooks by herself and makes all of the recipes that made her restaurant, [The Lady and Sons](#), famous. I have had the pleasure to dine there, and it was the best fried chicken and lemonade I've ever had.



Bubbly Paula Deen

She also talks to her dogs while she cooks, which I do all the time. If you're looking for down home cooking that doesn't count calories, this is the show for you. There's something about Paula's Georgia accent that relaxes me and makes me feel like I have plenty of time to whip up a [gooey butter cake](#), with lots and lots of butter. My one complaint about Paula? She cashed in and hawked everything from hams, coffee, and her son's cookbooks to pots, pans, tours and cruises featuring her.

[Top Chef](#) and [Top Chef Just Desserts](#): Sometimes I feel sorry for the chefs who compete on this show because they're given such crazy challenges (create a dessert using chicken or make a meal by going door to door and asking homeowners for ingredients). I love to see what creative dishes they come up with under pressure, though, and it always makes me feel like I have NO excuse for not being able to pull something together for dinner.

I also adore judges Tom Colicchio and Johnny Iuzinni, who are tough, but fair. Contestants need to stop cooking with liquid nitrogen though, since those of us at home have no chance of trying those recipes.

[The Next Food Network Star](#): I guess I'm a sucker for food contests, because I always watch this show, in which lucky contestants vie to get their own show on [Food Network](#). It's about the food, but it's also about how they portray themselves on camera, which adds an interesting twist.



Ina Garten, a.k.a. The Barefoot Contessa

Barefoot Contessa: I adore Ina Garten and all of her “How easy is that?” recipes. I own several of her cookbooks, and some of my all-time favorite recipes come from her ([her Lemon Chicken with Satay Dip](#) is my go-to for casual dinners with friends). Ina used to work for the government as a nuclear policy analyst, which I think somehow taught her to be so calm.

She bought a take-out shop on Long Island and created a food empire. She comes across as relaxed and easygoing, and you can always trust a gal who isn't skinny to make great food. Ina cashed in, too, though, and now sells baking mixes and frozen meals. I avert my eyes and stay focused on the food she makes on-screen.

Sandwich King: I can't get enough of this show, starring cute and personable Jeff Mauro. He makes everything into sandwiches ([chicken mole sandwich](#) anyone?) and I always applaud his creativity and yummy creations. I want to have lunch with him every single day.



Chef Robert Irvine dishes it up on Restaurant Impossible

Restaurant Impossible: This is one food show my husband likes to watch with me. Chef Robert Irvine barrels in and remakes a failing restaurant each week. He tells them their food is bad, their décor horrible, and their servers subpar. He's actually softened in the second season and now offers encouragement and platitudes, as well as barked orders.

The restaurant is remade in 48 hours with only \$10,000, and he reworks the entire menu, showing line cooks how to make gourmet fare. In one episode, he sent the owner home and packed up the man's petting zoo that was supposed to draw customers in but instead, just emphasized the uncomfortable connection between farm and table.

The Frugal Gourmet: I couldn't list my favorites without mentioning the recently deceased Jeff Smith who had this PBS cooking show about 20 years ago when I was a newlywed. We watched him often, and he got me started cooking Asian food at home. He's my Julia Child – he got me into the kitchen and made me feel I could do it. And when I cook, I find myself repeating his words, "Hot pan, cold oil, food won't stick."



Brette Sember and Furry Pals

*Brette Sember is the author of [The Parchment Paper Cookbook](#), published by Adams Media. She blogs about parchment paper cooking at www.NoPotCooking.com. She also writes the popular food blog www.MarthaAndMe.net. She is also the author of the upcoming titles *The Organized Kitchen* and *The Muffin Tin Cook Book* from Adams Media.*

*Sember is a former attorney and author of more than 35 other books, including *How to Parent with Your Ex*, *The Complete Credit Repair Kit*, *The Divorce Organizer & Planner*, and *The Complete Divorce*. She is a member of the International Association of Culinary Professionals. She lives in Buffalo, New York with her husband, two children, and two golden retrievers. Her web site is www.BretteSember.com and you can follow her on Twitter [@brettesember](https://twitter.com/brettesember).*



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[1 merr](#) November 7, 2011 at 1:25 pm

What an great post! I, admittedly, have never seen a single one (except for 5 minutes of Paula Deen while waiting at the doctor's office and I understood how much she likes butter)...but this gave me a sense of them! Fun, fun!

merr recently posted..["The Writing Class That's Like Therapy" With Lynda Barry](#) ❤️

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[2 Sheryl](#) November 7, 2011 at 3:35 pm

Great suggestions. Sometimes while I'm at the gym I'll turn on the food channel. Seems strange to watch a show about food while I'm exercising, but it's fun, especially Paula Deen, since everything she cooks is just so...fattening.

Sheryl recently posted..[Walking for \(More Than\) Fitness](#) ❤️

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[3 Susan](#) November 7, 2011 at 4:36 pm

Love how you tied in cooking shows with the cookbook release! My favorite cooking show is Take Home Chef. The chef on that show has an adorable accent, and he's not too bad on the eyes either. 😊 Plus, I think he's great at making food accessible and tailoring the menu to the people he meets. Susan recently posted..[Guest Post: Parchment Paper Provides Solutions for Surplus](#) ❤️

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[4 MyKidsEatSquid](#) November 7, 2011 at 4:55 pm

My kids and I were hooked on the worst cooks ever awhile back. What's the Travel Channel Show? Man v. Food, we're catching up on those via Netflix. Funny, when I watch that show I'm always less hungry.

MyKidsEatSquid recently posted..[What to do with 10 pounds of tomatoes](#) ❤️

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[5 Roxanne](#)

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November 7, 2011 at 5:46 pm

See ... I kind of like Chopped and sometimes Iron Chef America ... just to see what they pull off. Gosh, I remember watching The Frugal Gourmet as a kid. I had not heard he died. That's sad.

Roxanne recently posted..[Dog Book Review and Giveaway: Awkward Family Pet Photos](#) ❤️

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