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Ted Allen gives it to this chef...er... straight on *Chopped!*.

*Iron Chef*, *Top Chef*, and now *Chopped!*. Starting tomorrow night, the Food Network is hedging its bets on another one-hour reality-based cooking competition with the focus (finally) on—what else—the cooking! We took a moment to speak with the show's host, gourmand and reality show vet Ted Allen, who regaled us with tales of his proliferation as a food personality, the differences between *Chopped!* and *Top Chef*, and the best way to cook with gummy bears. ***Chopped!* premieres tomorrow night at 10pm on the Food Network—see our post-show commentary**

first-thing Wednesday back here on the Feed.

**What was your trajectory like, from being on *Queer Eye* to where you are now as the host of two Food Network shows?**

Well, I was really into food and cooking when I was in magazines—I was a restaurant critic at *Chicago* magazine. Then when *Queer Eye* happened, I always felt so lucky to be in the food category because it's so limitless. You can do a roasted chicken lesson, a champagne lesson. It's always fascinating, and if that's what your passion is, it's a blast. When *Queer Eye* ended, I was fortunate in that I'd already landed judging spots on Bravo (with *Top Chef*) and Food Network (with *Iron Chef*). Those went on for a couple of years, during which I had a lot of meetings at Food Network and did some pilots and voice-overs.

**How'd you eventually get to *Chopped!*? Was it your creation?**

*Chopped!* was the brainchild of a company called City Lights Media. They'd been working on the concept for quite some time and had even done a previous pilot.

**And what's the show like? How is it different from the other cooking competition shows out there?**

The network wanted something straightforward; it's very real. There are chefs who are fairly young or mid-career or sous-chefs. Most of them are New York chefs and whatever drama results is based on whether they can cook or not. We start with four chefs who compete through three rounds of courses: appetizer, entrée and dessert. Each course comes with its own ingredients, and they have 30 minutes to cook it.

**Are the ingredients chosen because they're meant to go together or are you just throwing a bunch of stuff in a box?**

There's a balance we need to strike between wacky ingredients and ingredients that could logically result in something good. We don't want to make it too easy, and the way it worked out, people would get three or four things that were honest, straightforward, real food. But we might throw a curve ball with something like bran flakes or gummy bears. You can actually make a decent glaze for a ham with gummy bears.

**You mentioned that many of the chefs are from NYC. Given the lack of love that *Top Chef* has shown our city this season, what do you make of the casting?**

We're not making a conscious effort, but there are so many young, passionate, crazy chefs [in this city] who have something they want to say.

**Do you have a favorite episode? Anything we should be looking out for this season?**

I'd have to say the first episode because I just really love this cast of chefs. There are two in particular. One is Sandy, who is a gentleman who cooks at—of all places—the Union Theological Seminary in Chelsea. He's this gentle, sweet guy with a lot of talent. The other is a young chef named Katie Rosenhouse, who I think is 21. I mean, I think this was her first television experience. Casting these people is a really important part of the show, and we got some real characters.

**And the judges are all NYC luminaries, yes?**

We have eight New York chefs as judges. Alex Guarnaschelli from [Butter](#), who has the most amazing mixed metaphors. Then there's [Geoffrey Zakarian](#), [Scott Conant](#), [Amanda Freitag](#), [Aaron Sanchez](#) (whose name you can only say with the accent). It's amazing, this process of dialogue between people who are just starting out, or on their way, and the more experienced judges. When everyone's on a certain level, you can really learn a lot. It's something I could watch all day.

**Did you learn anything interesting while judging?**

During the second episode, there was a chef who was doing something called an oblique cut, which is not a cutting style I'd actually done before and it produces a very pretty looking slice.

**Do you think there's room on TV for another cooking competition?**

I think that all these shows, they all have their own personalities. Our show is strictly about cooking. Whatever panic, cheer, or bloodshed that results is based on the chefs' abilities. I always say that you're making a good episode if your cameramen are laughing so hard that their lenses are bouncing up and down. And we had a lot of that.—*Zachary Feldman*