



Press Contact: Lauren Sklar  
Phone: 646-336-3745; Email: [lsklar@foodnetwork.com](mailto:lsklar@foodnetwork.com)

## **FOOD NETWORK STAR**

### *Season 11 – Finalist Bios*

**Emilia Cirker** 36 (Reston, VA), is a beauty pageant veteran with a French Culinary degree and wicked sense of humor. Her parents passed their love of food to her, and she is currently a culinary instructor and software company executive. Emilia is also a former head pastry chef for the Washington Redskins. This natural born leader and single mom is determined to inspire viewers with her global ingredient, technique-driven cooking style.

**Jay Ducote**, 33 (Baton Rouge, La.), calls himself a food ambassador for South Louisiana, and he's ready to take the gig nationwide. Jay's passion for cooking started at LSU tailgates, and now this charismatic chef has his own culinary media company. His deep connection and appreciation for the Louisiana food scene has led to cooking competition victories and media awards, and he is primed to bring that award-winning personality and charm to the screen.

**Christina Fitzgerald**, 29 (St. Louis), grew up in a big family with six brothers, so she developed a competitive spirit and ability to stand out at an early age. Encouraged by her late brother to follow her passion and enroll in culinary school, Christina went on to graduate at the top of her class and win several cooking competitions with her internationally inspired cuisine. Now married with a six-year-old daughter, she still loves to travel and bring new flavors home to her kitchen.

**Rosa Graziano**, 38 (Los Angeles), is a first generation Italian American who grew up in her family's deli and catering business in New Jersey and learned to cook at her Neapolitan mother's side. She eventually moved to Los Angeles and noticed a void in Southern Italian cuisine, so she decided to bring a taste of her mother's dishes to the west coast with her own food truck, which she operated for several years. From arancini to zeppoles, Rosa is ready to share her love of Southern Italian food and culture with kitchens across the country.

**Matthew Grunwald** 22 (Scottsdale, AZ), is the youngest finalist, but don't let his age and exuberance fool you: he's got the experience of a chef twice his age. At sixteen, he began working in professional kitchens and became a food writer by seventeen. Matthew eats, sleeps and breathes food and is dedicated to bringing today's online food trends and social media experience to the masses.

**Eddie Jackson** 33 (Houston), is a former NFL player who is a fierce competitor, both in the kitchen and on the field. Now a food truck owner, private chef and personal trainer, he is dedicated to making healthy food taste absolutely delicious. In Eddie's world, there is no need for a "cheat" day, because his good-for-you food is packed with flavor and does not leave you feeling deprived.

**Michelle Karam** 39 (Santa Barbara, CA), is a master multitasker who does it all – she is a mom of three kids under ten-years-old, website owner, radio host and private chef. Inspired by her Mediterranean roots and her husband's Latin culture, she loves fusing the two cultures together for unexpected flavor combinations. As a busy mom, Michelle knows that the pantry often dictates what's for dinner – so she wants to dive in and teach families how to use what they have to make a delicious, fresh meal.

**Sita Lewis**, 47 (New York) is a veteran television producer and culinary instructor and now it's her time to be in front of the camera. She has produced countless food segments for daytime television shows, and knows just what it takes to succeed. Sita has an African-American and Italian background, and both food cultures come together to form her "Italian Soul" food philosophy with dishes like sweet potato stuffed shells, and sinfully good Soul food classics like mac-n-cheese, candied yams and fried chicken.

**Alex McCoy** 31 (Washington DC), brings a killer combo of culinary chops, passion for travel, business skill and charm to the competition. He started working in restaurants as a teenager, became an executive chef in his twenties,

and opened his own restaurant before turning thirty. His restaurant is a Washington DC hot spot, where the menu is filled with dishes inspired by Alex's world travels, including his many trips to Asia.

**Arnold Myint**, 38 (Nashville), grew up in his parents' restaurant, one of the first Asian restaurants and food markets in Nashville, where he used to roller skate through the aisles. After a career in professional figure skating, he attended culinary school and returned to restaurant life with three restaurants of his own. An accomplished mixologist, restaurant consultant and event caterer, Arnold's food is bold, unexpected and fun – just like him. Arnold also has a drag alter ego, Suzy Wong, who is known to host charity events and mix a fierce cocktail.

**Rue Rusike**, 26 (Brooklyn, NY), is originally from Zimbabwe but has lived all over the globe. She is a private chef who is passionate about Southern African cuisine and believes good cooking comes from love, patience and a happy soul. Rue is ready to introduce her favorite dishes and heritage to a bigger audience by taking away some of the mystery and making the cuisine approachable to the everyday home cook.

**Dominick Tesoriero** 30 (Staten Island, NY) is a charming, funny New Yorker who has been hamming it up for his friends and family all his life. His culinary training took him to Italy, where he refined his skills and placed second in an international cooking competition. Dom believes in quality ingredients, solid technique and simple cooking. He now owns New York's first and only mac and cheese food truck.

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