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FOOD NETWORK STAR

Season 12 – Finalist Bios

Rob Burmeister, 45 (Staten Island, NY) – Rob started out washing dishes 25 years ago and hasn't looked back since. His culinary resume is quite extensive and includes being the executive chef/owner of his own catering and private chef company in New York City. Rob would like to teach viewers how to use and combine meal leftovers to make delicious dishes.

Erin Campbell, 24 (Woodbury, MN) – As a child Erin was introduced to a vast array of food types during childhood but eventually realized that sweets were her calling, learning how to decorate cakes in her grandmother's kitchen. After graduating from pastry school and working at a variety of bakeries, this California girl moved to snowy Minnesota in order to run her bakery's flagship store. While she loves sweets, she also cooks flavorful comfort food, which she describes as "grandma food kicked up a notch."

Damiano Carrara, 30 (Moorpark, CA) – Growing up in the Tuscan city of Lucca in Italy, Damiano spent most of his childhood in the kitchen cooking alongside his brother. The two brothers always dreamed of opening their own business together, and they left the Italian countryside for California in 2009 to follow their dreams of opening an authentic Italian pasticceria. Sticking to his roots with traditional Italian recipes, Damiano wants to share his vast knowledge of Italian cooking with a wide audience.

Aaron Crumbaugh, 36 (Spokane, WA) – Aaron grew up in a small town and spent a lot of time working on his grandparents' farm, learning to cook at the age of five when he would make meals for his family. Since graduating culinary school, he's had a successful career in Chicago working in restaurants and now finds himself in Spokane, Washington, running his own catering company. Aaron's determined to go after what he wants and he wants to be on Food Network!

Tregaye Fraser, 31 (Atlanta, GA) – A seasoned chef who likes to twist old-fashioned recipes with her own unique flair, Tregaye has a passion for the untraditional. She learned the basics at Le Cordon Bleu, but she soon realized that her love for cooking came from her youthful soul and love for fusion cuisine. As a successful, self-employed mother who relates best to a younger generation, Tregaye's dream is to have a culinary talk show.

Yaku Moton-Spruill, 33 (San Francisco, CA) – Standing at 6'9", it was pretty much guaranteed that Yaku would have the basketball world's attention from an early age. But even while playing professionally in Europe, he couldn't shake the fact that nothing made him as happy as cooking did. Born in Inkster, Michigan, Yaku learned the art of the hustle, selling chicken dinners out of his dorm room in college to make money. Yaku's food philosophy draws from his Southern and Caribbean heritage, and specializes in Latin American, stick-to-your-ribs, shareable comfort food.

Melissa Pfeister, 34 (Los Angeles, CA) – Melissa trained her whole life to play basketball and when an injury ended her career, she turned to cooking for inspiration. Melissa now takes the everyday foods we love and recreates them in a healthy and delicious way. Melissa moved from Ohio to Los Angeles to pursue her culinary dream and would love to combine her passion for food and sports on her own Food Network show.

Ana Quincoces, 49 (Coral Gables, FL) – A former lawyer of 20 years, Ana's dream is to win her own Food Network show and is confident that she is the one thing Food Network is missing. Ana is passionate about showing viewers how to spice up their dishes with Cuban flair; Ana has written Cuban cookbooks and currently produces her own Latin-inspired food line.

Monterey Salka, 26 (Nashville, TN) – Having deprived herself of culinary indulgences for so many years as a model, Monterey decided enough was enough and finally gave in to her one true love: food. Holding onto skills and confidence gained through trial and error as a chef and caterer, Monterey knows that food isn't something to be scared of - it's meant to be celebrated. Inspired by her unrelenting culinary wanderlust and her jet-setting past, Monterey has discovered that her best dishes are made from the adventures and flavors she's experienced on her travels.

Joy Thompson, 40 (Thomasville, NC) – Between owning a restaurant and bakery and wrangling her five children, Joy has a lot going on. Drawing inspiration from her childhood, Joy manages to maintain a self-deprecating wit through all the chaos, creating upscale Southern food that looks good but also satisfies, such as fried green tomatoes and chicken and waffles. Joy is ready to teach accessible Southern cooking without any of the stuffiness.

Havird Usry, 28 (Augusta, GA) – Havird took over his family business, running one of Augusta's most popular restaurants since the '40s. Havird grew up learning how to cook in the family restaurant and received a formal culinary degree from Helm's College, where he graduated first in his class. With a focus on modern Southern cuisine, Havird creates fresh, modern dishes from staples such as fried chicken and shrimp and grits. Ultra-competitive, he won't hold back when it comes to going after what he wants.

Jernard Wells, 37 (Atlanta, GA) – With a wife of 16 years and nine children, Jernard has deemed himself "The Chef of Love." He believes food and love go hand in hand and wants everyone to know how easy cooking can be, and how much excitement it can add to your life. As an Executive Chef, Jernard has traveled all over the world, including cooking for Tyler Perry, and has even published three cookbooks. Currently the General Manager of a tavern in Georgia, Jernard loves to infuse any dish with his Southern flavors and a Cajun twist.

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