



# The next big Martha

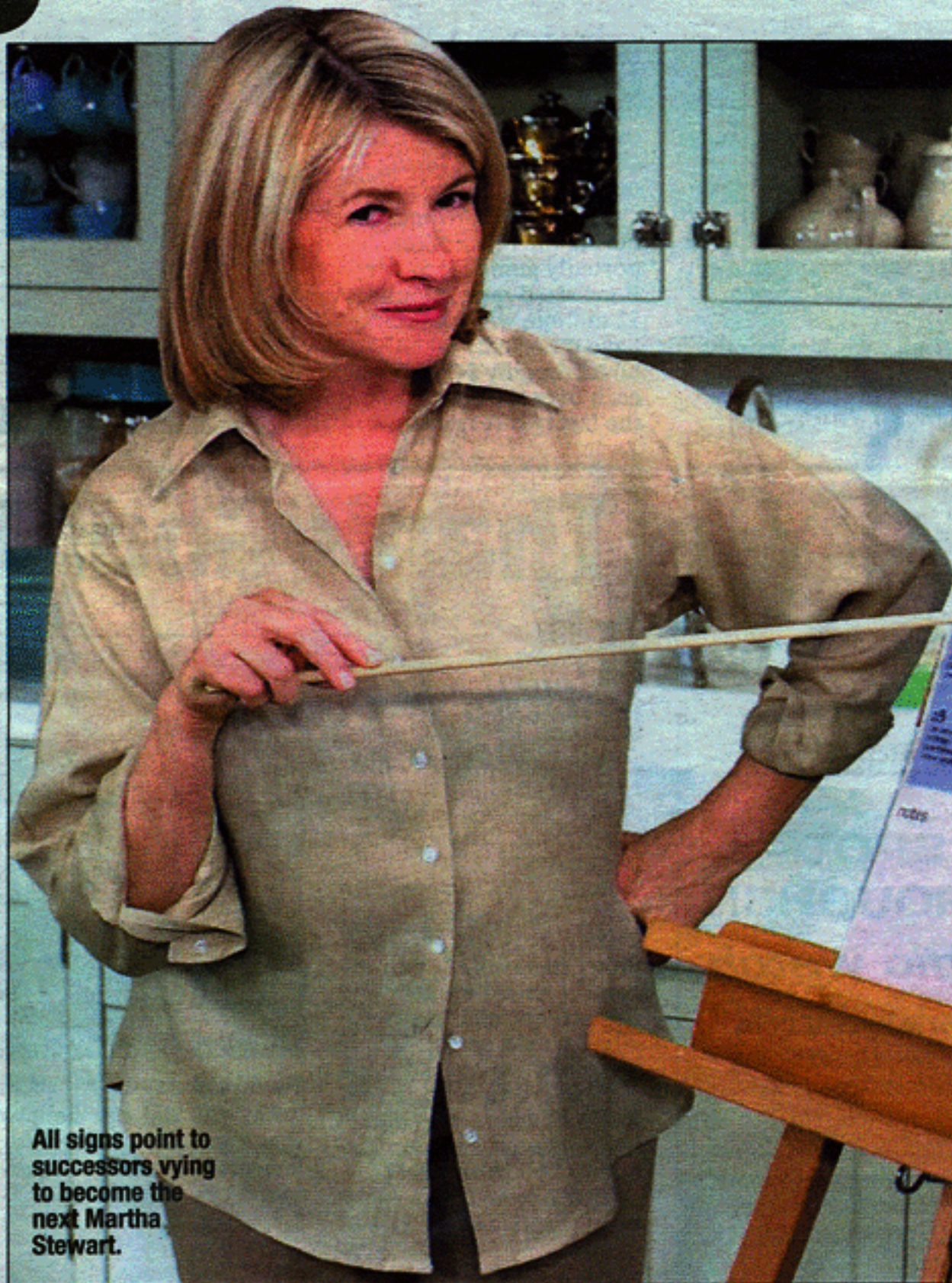
## Tasteful crown up for grabs

By DIANE CLEHANE

IT'S hard to watch "Martha Stewart Living" these days. First of all, it will take you a while to find it. CBS last year bumped the show from its 9 a.m. time slot for the unwatchable "Living It Up with Jack and Ali." Stewart's show airs weekday mornings on WLNY — the home of infomercials and "Roseanne" reruns. Hardly a suitable home for the diva of domesticity.

Love her or loathe her, Stewart has to be credited with, if not inventing, then certainly perfecting the home/garden/cooking show.

It's impossible not to wonder what Stewart is really thinking when she's chopping vegetables on "From Martha's Kitchen" on HGTV. Can she really be focusing on preparing the perfect dinner party while her career goes down in flames? This week, Stewart faces charges of obstruction of justice in Manhattan federal court, and there will be no shortage of coverage of the trial. To paraphrase the woman herself — this kind of wanted attention is not a good thing. Love her or loathe her,



All signs point to successors vying to become the next Martha Stewart.

Stewart has to be credited with, if not inventing, then certainly perfecting the home/garden/cooking show. There would be no HGTV if this modern-day June Cleaver hadn't turned millions of homemakers on to the joys of perfect pancakes, color-coordinated wrapping paper and meticulously maintained rose gardens. Just turn on the Discovery Channel, TLC and, of course, HGTV, and you'll find lots of shiny, happy

people extolling the virtues of building their own birdhouse. Most of these folks have Stewart's trailblazing to thank for their careers. Sure, some of them are good at what they do, but Martha did it first — and in most cases she does it best. As Stewart's (bad) luck would have it, these shows have never been hotter. Everyone from the fab five of "Queer Eye for The Straight Guy" (yes,

they owe Martha a debt of gratitude, too) to "Trading Space's" Paige Davis are having their moment. "People are looking for a fresh face," says designer Chris Madden. Here's a look at the top contenders who have as much to gain as Stewart has to lose should Stewart's trial end with a guilty verdict. Their worthiness to take over as 'The Next Martha' is ranked on a scale of 1-4 paintbrushes.

## Heirs to the throne

WHILE "Trading Space's" resident hottie isn't a builder or a baker, Davis has got lots of girl-next-door appeal that's helped her become the breakout star of a series with plenty of wannabes. It's easy to imagine this all-American girl in a spin-off.

But home isn't really where Davis' heart is. She's always wanted to be a song and dance gal. Her resume boasts stints on Broadway in the chorus of "Chicago," and she's even toured with the Beach Boys. At the end of the day, she's more likely to wind up in a sitcom than on the Food Network whipping up soufflés.



Paige Davis

CHRISTOPHER Lowell, the Richard Simmons of decorating, has his own show on The Discovery Channel and the requisite line of furniture — among other things. Low-



Christopher Lowell

ell's specialty of making easy, inexpensive changes that "will add color and fun to your surroundings" have earned him lots of fans — but not enough to unseat Stewart. His hyperkinetic style is, at best, an acquired taste.

LIFESTYLE expert" Colin Cowie is considered to be the master of celebrity weddings. He produced Jerry Seinfeld's and Lisa Kudrow's nuptials. Women's Entertainment brought his upscale ideas to the masses in "Everyday Elegance with Colin Cowie" but recently stopped production on the series after four



Colin Cowie

seasons. Now he's a man without a television show — but probably not for long. Also in his favor: His creations aren't predicated on perfection. "There's nothing wrong with buying a wonderful pie at a bakery, serving it on your favorite china and passing it off as your own," says Cowie. That's a no-no in Stewart's world. She would never lie — about pie.

THE front runner in the 'Next Martha' sweepstakes is Chris Madden, who has designed "personal spaces" for Oprah Winfrey and Katie Couric. "Oprah elevated me to another level," says Madden, who has served as the show's design correspondent. While Madden's empire is considerably smaller than Stewart's (she's got books, various branded products and, until recently, an



Chris Madden

HGTV show); it's clear she's on the brink of something big. She beat out scores of big names for a multi-million dollar deal with Penneys. In the post ImClone era, the executives "took a year to check me out," says Madden, who will introduce her new line this year. She's planning a network special for later this year and there's also talk of launching a magazine. Sound familiar?