

New Kid in the Kitchen

He's only 25. But some folks think Dave Lieberman has all the ingredients to be the next celebrity chef



By JEREMY CAPLAN

JUST TWO YEARS AGO, DAVE Lieberman was an aspiring diplomat in the department of political science at Yale. But one April morning in 2003, as he walked out of a class on the cold war, he flipped on his cell phone and found six new messages that sent him in a radically different direction. "Three from publishers, two from TV stations. Oh, and Letterman," he recalls. Jay Leno phoned later. They all wanted to know more about *Campus Cuisine*, Lieberman's public-access cooking show that had been mentioned in that day's *New York Times*. "I had no idea what was going on," says Lieberman, who hadn't seen the article. "They told me to get in touch with an agent. Fast."

He did. On April 13, Hyperion will release *Young and Hungry*, Lieberman's first cookbook in a two-book deal. It's an intro to entertaining for twentysomethings, organized by eating occasion, with chapters like "Lazy Mornings" (chive pancakes, mango-ginger lassies) and "Cooking for a Crowd" (beet salad with goat cheese, potato-chip-crusted salmon). And on April 16, he will hit the culinary jackpot when his new cooking show, *Good Deal*, premieres in the daytime lineup of the Food Network (1:30 p.m. E.T.), making him, at 25, the channel's youngest host ever.

Since the meteoric rise of Britain's

chise forward. "We look at thousands of tapes, trying to find new cooking stars," says Bob Tuschman, the Food Network's director of daytime programming, who was impressed by Lieberman's boy-wonder cooking skills and boy-next-door charm. "The moment we saw him, we just knew. He makes incredible food and has pop-star looks. We're already hearing from moms wanting to set him up with their daughters."

Growing up in Philadelphia, Lieberman started cooking with his stay-at-home

dad when he was 7. His food-loving family had two kitchens (kosher households keep meat and dairy separate), and he quickly learned which oven was best for baking his brownies. Lieberman sharpened his kitchen skills during a year abroad before college, apprenticing with a cook in Italy and studying local specialties in Germany, Spain and France. At Yale, he was known for throwing legendary dinner parties, single-handedly roasting, frying and baking while mixing drinks for dozens of friends and even matchmaking between courses. On a lark, he and some film-student buddies decided to whip up a show featuring his cooking exploits. *Campus Cuisine's* authenticity—Lieberman was a real college student showing his contemporaries how to do things like make smoothies out of dining-hall fruit—helped the show gain a cult following. Students would stop Lieberman after classes to ask for a "hookup" recipe. Tapes of the show were passed around, spreading his fame beyond the New Haven campus and eventually to the Food Network.

Like its predecessor, *Good Deal* will teach tricks such as how to peel ginger with a teaspoon and will offer tips on shopping in a gourmet supermarket on the cheap. Food Network execs hope experienced TV chefs like Bobby Flay and Mario Batali will guide Lieberman along. They seem ready to welcome him into the kitchen. Flay says Lieberman's approach to cooking frugally and shopping efficiently will help the young chef find a niche on the competitive network. Batali says Lieberman's charisma is key. "Food TV isn't just about cooking anymore," says Batali. "It's about your personality and finding a way to keep people's eyeballs on your show."

But Lieberman isn't putting all his eggs in one basket. After taping the first season of the new show in a fancy loft in Manhattan's SoHo (borrowed from touring heavy-metal guitarist Richard Bernstein), Lieberman



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"Naked Chef," Jamie Oliver (nicknamed for the simplicity of his food, not a lack of wardrobe), the Food Network has been looking for a hip, young American equivalent. As stars like Emeril become familiar fodder for foodies—and slightly stale to some—the network's execs are hoping Lieberman will help carry the fran-

COOKING UP STARDOM Lieberman prefers jeans and polos to chef's whites

DINNER PARTIES—AND MATCHMAKING BETWEEN COURSES



was back in his own cramped Manhattan kitchen preparing gourmet sandwiches for executives from Song Airlines. The budget carrier was looking for a chef to come up with appetizing, economical and easy-to-make menu options to serve on its flights. Lieberman got the job. ■