

homemakers | Sandra Barrera and Valerie Kuklenski



Who'll be the next Martha?

As lifestyle guru ponders a jail term, the way is clear for a new leader of the Western (home) world to emerge.

She was the ultimate homemaker, the wonder woman who could muck out a barn and scatter the manure in her freshly tilled vegetable bed, prune a few herbs, lay a spectacular table with clever placecards and whip up dinner for 12 with an ever-serene smile.

And that's just what Martha Stewart did in front of the cameras in the United States on her syndicated *Martha Stewart Living* and other television appearances. Behind the scenes she was a publisher of books and monthly magazines; overseer of her own furniture, paint, flooring and home-goods lines; a newspaper columnist and even an online florist. America was on a first-name basis with her.

With her conviction last month for conspiracy and other charges stemming from stock sales, the share value of Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia has plummeted, her television program has been dropped and advertisers are fleeing the pages of her magazines. She has yet to be sentenced to prison, but her empire is in chaos.

Time magazine had me in there a couple of weeks ago, calling me the Pioneer Martha. It's degrading.
— Mary Jane Butters, Idaho-based organic farmer

All over the world, scores of home-oriented television personalities, authors and magazine columnists (and more waiting to be discovered) owe the public's insatiable appetite for their insights to one woman. The question is, who will be the next Martha? Or will there ever be another?

Not everyone in the field is trying to be "the next Martha Stewart." "I'm just me," says Mary Jane Butters, an Idaho-based organic farmer. "But the news media keeps putting this on us. *Time* magazine had me in there a couple weeks ago, calling me the Pioneer Martha. It's degrading."

Stewart's millions of fans have a certain bond with her — a sort of one-way friendship — that is not likely to be shattered by a projected 10- to 18-month prison term. It's quite possible she will be welcomed back after serving her time. But there is an undeniable opportunity in the short term for another guru to emerge. Here are a handful on the inside track to succeed her:

Sheila Bridges has been named the US's best interior designer by *Time* magazine and CNN.

She has been showcased in magazines from *House & Garden* to *Vanity Fair* and — yes — *Martha Stewart Living*, and is a fixture on US cable television and NBC's *Today*. Her portfolio includes Bill Clinton's New York offices. But is she interested in the job? "I certainly wouldn't ever try to market myself in any way as the next Martha Stewart," she says. "I think that would be a tough bill to fill."

Another clear contender is Susie Coelho, author of *Susie Coelho's Everyday Styling* and *Susie Coelho's Styling for Entertaining: 8 Simple Steps, 12 Miracle Makeovers*. With 20 years of television experience, she even tops Stewart. But her forte is styling and she would have to strengthen her kitchen expertise to be as well-rounded.

Hugh Hefner, Kenny G, Paula Abdul and Charlie Sheen might vote for Colin Cowie, the event planner who organised their weddings. He's abreast of the latest Hollywood and New York events and is Martha-like in his practicality: he recommends hosting a dinner party in one's wine cellar. A writer, too, he has penned *Dinner After Dark*, *Effortless Elegance With Colin Cowie*, *Colin Cowie Weddings*, *Colin Cowie for the Bride* and *Colin Cowie for the Groom*.

The jury is still out on Butters (Pioneer Martha). A former carpenter and a wilderness ranger, she publishes the magazine *Mary Jane's Farm* and recently signed a \$US1.3 million two-book deal with Clarkson Potter, an imprint of Random House. "I am a farmer, I am accessible, I am at the end of a dirt road; you can call me, you can visit," she says.

There are some worthy Niche Marthas. Lucy Pereda is Martha en espanol. Her weekly Galavision home-decorating and cooking show, *En Casa de Lucy*, reaches 18 countries. Another Martha might be found in former Oil of Olay model Barbara Smith (books: *B. Smith's Entertaining and Cooking for Friends* and *B. Smith's Rituals & Celebrations*; TV show: *B. Smith With Style*). She can pull off catfish and portobello mushrooms on the same menu, but has no New York Stock Exchange listing.

And finally to the Fab 5 from *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. They can advise on interior design, grooming, food, fashion and culture. But it takes at least three of them to do the job of one woman.

Los Angeles Daily News

AUSSIE CONTENDERS



Noni Hazlehurst

An actress, mum and a whiz with a hammer, Hazlehurst is the face of *Better Homes & Gardens* — the television series, magazine and stable of specialist publications. Very camera-friendly.

Website www.bhg.com.au

Martha factor Cooking, renovating, gardening. She has a wholesome look and even the credentials to play Martha in a future TV miniseries. ★★★★★

Tonia Todman

The queen of decoupage and other strange craft, Todman is the woman you call if you have to turn a doily into a wedding gown on short notice. She was a standout when Ten launched *Healthy, Wealthy & Wise* and is still dispensing handy advice on *Good Morning Australia* and through her website.

Website www.creativeliving.com.au

Martha Factor Lots of glue but not enough grit between her finely manicured nails. ★★★★★

Katrina Warren

Australian TV's favourite vet is a rising star in the US with *Beverly Hills Vet* for Animal Planet and the makeover series *Sit, Stay, Style* for the cable net Fine Living. Pet-friendly renovations are one thing; a book on clever ways with dog food and she'd be a sure starter.

Website www.finelliving.com

Martha Factor She's bright, and likeable, but she's no renovator. Animals are cute, but there's more to Martha than playing with the pooch. ★★



Jamie Durie

Durie's TV work — *Backyard Blitz* and *The Block* — have made him a household name. Coupled with his design business, and its spin-offs, including the books *Patio* and *The Outdoor Room*, he is a media empire-in-the-making.

Website www.patio.com.au

Martha Factor He's handy with his tools, and he knows his Pantone colour wheel back to front. A male Martha? You bet. ★★★★★

Gaz and Waz

The Block's resident gay boys now specialise in property-for-sale styling. They're good, but we still can't get past the fact that they turned a two-bedder in Bondi into a one-bedroom with no storage space and a bar fridge in the kitchen.

Website www.designerboys.com.au

Martha Factor There's more to Martha than a Balinese pot and some mondo grass. Can these boys even spell d-e-c-o-u-p-a-g-e? ★★

Margaret Fulton

The woman who taught generations of Australians how to cook now ironically fronts a prepared-food business for those who are too busy to bother. She's a charming and wholesome everymum.

Website www.margaretfultonskitchen.com.au

Martha Factor She's a superstar in the kitchen but the cut and jib of her power drill remains untested. ★★★



Tara Dennis

With *Our House*, *Changing Rooms*, *DIY Rescue* and *Renovation Rescue* to her credit, plus a publishing sideline that has produced instructional art books, she's a strong starter. But at her tender age, she lacks Martha's leathery sense of experience.

Website www.ninemsn.com.au/renovationrescue

Martha Factor The package, and still so young — Martha Stewart for the 16-39ers. ★★★★★

Michael Idoto