

Chris Styler

A culinary producer does more than insure that all the food arrives on the set at the right time in its proper state of preparedness. He or she is instrumental in constructing the shows from the ground up, contributing knowledge of what makes a cohesive, interesting show, what looks good on camera and pointing out procedures and ingredients in advance that the director should be sure to capture on tape.

Ideally, a culinary producer is familiar with the recipes being prepared on camera and the style of cooking of the host(s) preparing them. The smoothest shows I have worked on were those in which I was involved in writing the companion book. (I'm an author, too.) It is helpful if the recipes are tested and written before the shoot, not that having written recipes is a guarantee of what will happen on camera. In fact, the single most important key to being a successful culinary producer is to be prepared but flexible. For all the thought that goes into setting up a show—which ingredients are prepped beforehand and so on—nothing matters as much as how quickly you can bring additional or different ingredients to the set when they are requested. A thought may suddenly pop into the talent's head (or the producer's, or the director's) and how long it takes to follow through on that thought makes or breaks the rhythm of the show and the concentration of the host.

That's the big picture; here are two rules that are posted on the refrigerator door during every one of my shoots. The first I call the "Jacques Rule," as it was developed during my stint on "Julia and Jacques: Cooking at Home":

- Always keep on hand some of every ingredient in its unprepped, uncooked, untampered-with state. Never shell all the shrimp, string all the snow peas or bone all the chickens. You can never anticipate what the host will want to do during a scene. If it isn't the script, it will most likely end up on camera.
- Never dump anything for any portion of the show before the director wraps the entire show. You may be done with a scene, but not until the show is wrapped are you in the clear. Technical difficulties or bumpy spots on the talent's part may not rear their head until well after a scene has been shot. It is better to face these situations with the backup prep you so wisely prepared than another trip to the supermarket.