



Chef Roger Mooking

Behind the Sce at the *Food*

By Pamela Steele

Lights! Camera! Action! The scene behind the scenes at the Food Network (foodtv.ca) is exciting, delicious chaos. From our comfy chairs at home we watch cool and collected star chefs like Roger Mooking and Anna Olson cook up a storm from their seemingly perfect kitchens.

Everyday Exotic

Roger Mooking grew up in a culinary family. Playing in the kitchens of their many Caribbean restaurants, he cultivated a love for the business. That, and music. Before settling in as a chef, Mooking enjoyed fame with his band Bass is Base. But that was the 1990s and the lure of the kitchen called him back.

His career couldn't be hotter. Executive chef at two ultra hip Toronto restaurants, Nyood (pronounced nude) and Kultura, Mooking and his team couldn't function without their beloved natural gas equipment. "Natural gas is king at the restaurants; you can't beat it for responsiveness. It's reactive and consistent and you need that in a busy kitchen. In terms of style for home kitchens, I think a natural gas range is coveted as an aspiration item; everybody's dream of a perfect home kitchen is to have a restaurant-style kitchen. And everyone in restaurants cooks with natural gas."

Mooking lost any camera shyness he may have had back in his music days. Good thing because this fall he's headlining a different kind of gig. His new cooking show, *Everyday Exotic*, is premiering on the Food Network on Oct. 2, 2008. Now he spends his days cruising from restaurant kitchens to his cooking set where organized chaos is the order of the day.

There are 25 to 30 people on set. There are prop stylists, the food team, three people doing continuity, the director of photography, the sound engineer, on-set producer, the director and the lighting guy. Plus the star; don't forget the star.

The show is broken up into acts that run between commercials. Mooking must do each shot three times. The food team must

prep for each angle so it looks exactly the same as the dish Mooking was working with in the first shot. It's more difficult than it sounds.

Each episode of *Everyday Exotic* is based on a single 'obedient ingredient' which Mooking takes and works up with a classic technique from around the world. "I take classic ideas and give them a little extra love." In the end he likes to keep it simple, feeling that will stand the test of time. "The Great Wall of China is only a wall made of bricks; it's the length of the wall that's spectacular. It's the same with grilled chicken; it's the way we interpret and contextualize the dish that's exciting."

continued 8

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*Anna Olson,
Star of Fresh with Anna Olson*

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Chef Anna Olson

Fresh *continued from 7*

Anna Olson, star of *Fresh with Anna Olson*, tapes her show from her Niagara century home. During the months that the show is in production, she says, “It’s like going back to university; I share my house with a production team of 12 to 14 people.” She’s even converted the upstairs of the house into a prep kitchen for the food stylists and prep team. The show’s art director styled their kitchen in tones that will please when seen through the camera’s eye.

The hustle and bustle on set reminds Olson of a restaurant kitchen. “We’re working in such close quarters, we have an agenda and we’re only as strong as our weakest link. In a restaurant the dining room is relaxed and serene; that’s my camera time. The crew members hold their breath while we’re shooting, they can’t even take a step because the old floorboards in the house creak. So the viewer is experiencing this calm moment, then they yell, “Cut!” and its crazy again.”

So, how does a dish end up on the show? Most of the food that appears on *Fresh* began as something Olson was preparing at home in her well-loved commercial natural gas oven for a quiet dinner with chef husband, Michael, or for company.

“I love my natural gas oven because it keeps a great consistent temperature.”

If the Olsons think a dish is show-worthy, she’ll pass it on to the food team. The food stylists then test the recipe and begin thinking about the ‘beauty shots’, or the finished product we see at the end of the show. Then she cooks the dish for the cameras. And, like Mooking, she cooks the same dish three times. The editors need three different angles to make a polished show. They’ll shoot each step as a wide shot, a medium shot then a close up. To make it all look like a fluid process, there are people on set whose entire job is to ensure continuity. Olson must use the same props held at the same angles every time. It’s not surprising that it takes two 12-hour days to shoot one half-hour segment.

The Olsons have owned Olson Foods and Bakery in Port Dalhousie, Ont. for four years and this July they opened a second location in nearby St. Davids. Both bakeries are equipped with natural gas stoves. Olson says, “I like the responsiveness of natural gas; when I’m doing something like caramelizing sugar, I need the quick heat that only gas provides.” 🔗

Chef Roger Mooking’s Golden Cashews

1 cup unsalted cashews (250 mL)	Pinch of paprika
1 tsp butter (5 mL)	Pinch of salt

In a small frying pan, melt butter over medium heat. Toss cashews in warm butter and sauté until golden brown. Remove from heat and sprinkle with salt and paprika to taste.

Chef Mooking dresses barbecued chicken or salad with these yummy nuts.



Chef Anna Olson’s Apple Cranberry Crisp

1/2 cup all-purpose flour (125 mL)	1/2 chopped pecans (125 mL)
1/2 cup rolled oats (125 mL)	4 Mutsu or Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored and cut into 1/2” dice
1/2 cup dark brown sugar, packed (125 mL)	1 cup cranberries, fresh or frozen (250 mL)
1 tbsp ground cinnamon (15 mL)	1/3 cup sugar (75 mL)
Dash of salt	Zest and juice of 1 small orange
5 tbsp unsalted butter, room temperature (75 mL)	

Preheat oven to 163 C (325 F). Grease an 8” square baking dish or six 5 oz ramekins.

For topping, combine flour, oats, sugar, cinnamon, salt and butter in bowl. Work together with fingertips until crumbly. Stir in nuts and set aside.

Toss the apples and cranberries with sugar, orange zest and juice. Spoon into prepared baking dish(es). Sprinkle topping evenly over the fruit. Bake until bubbly and apples are tender, about 30 minutes. Let cool slightly. Serve warm with ice cream or cream if desired.

Makes one 8” crisp or six individual crisps.

[These and many more recipes are available at bestthings.com](https://www.bestthings.com)

