

The Left Atrium

Culinary dissection

Close to the bone: surgeons & chefs

An 8-part television series

Fresh Cut Entertainment, Calgary, Alta.

Created by Richard Hu

Hosted by Allan Shewchuk

Produced by Doug Hodgson



Fresh Cut Entertainment

If you enjoy “Asparagus Battle” and “Kamo Eggplant Battle” on *Iron Chef*, have an intense relationship with *The Naked Chef*, like nothing more than to nibble along with Nigella Bites, or spend hours sitting in the dark double-clicking on photos of curvaceous red peppers and tomatoes on foodporn sites, you would approve of *Close to the Bone: Surgeons & Chefs*. The premise of this eight-part television series was cooked up by Richard Hu, an orthopedic surgeon at Foothills Hospital in Calgary, Alta. Each episode features a specialist surgeon preparing two gourmet meat dishes.

Given the smorgasbord of cooking shows already available, skeptics might argue that the creation of a cooking show that tosses home cuisine into a stew containing surgery and comparative anatomy is like serving fugu fish with Worcestershire sauce on Belgian waffles. However, in an exercise of cultural fusion that combines the dining table with the operating table to create a platform for a truly *nouvelle cuisine*, *Close to the Bone* outflanks competitors and claims new ground as the television program that blends surgery and lessons in human anatomy with gourmet cooking and educational visits to a butcher shop.

The series is filmed in a studio designed to resemble an operating room. The set includes surgical drapes, an illuminator, knives and other surgical implements, and a guest surgeon dressed in standard-issue OR greens. Hosted by Allan Shewchuk, a personal injury lawyer and chef with the requisite cooking show host personality,

each episode features a visit to Darrell the butcher, a short lesson in comparative anatomy that explores the relationship between the human body and the food being cooked, and a guest surgeon whose specialty serves as the narrative hook for each episode’s meat dish. Joseph Dort, an ear, nose and throat specialist, prepares succulent dishes of pig snout and calf’s tongue. Urologist Gerry Todd makes lamb kidney and deep-fried bull’s testicles. Gary Gelfand, a thoracic surgeon, prepares braised short ribs and oven-baked glazed ribs. Vegetarians beware: the program is for hard-core carnivores.

Interested viewers who cannot gain access to the main course are welcome to sample a light appetizer from the program. Fresh Cut Entertainment provides a video clip (<http://www.freshcut.tv/bone.html>) featuring Vaughan Bowen, a hand surgeon, preparing steaming dishes of tender zamponi (stuffed pig’s trotter) and osso bucco (veal shank). The episode quite successfully demonstrates the similarities between the human forearm and a pig’s trotter. With a close-up shot of the knife slicing through succulent osso bucco and the ritual clinking of the chefs’ wine glasses at show’s end, the clip left me glancing at my forearm and wondering if it might make a nice soup stock.

Notwithstanding professional production values and the show’s all-star cast of established Alberta surgeons, *Close to the Bone* garnered few nibbles when Hu dangled the idea before television executives. Viewers who like to keep their peas separate from their potatoes might pucker their mouths at

the visits to Darrell the butcher and the close parallels drawn between human anatomy and the food humans eat. *Close to the Bone* might find itself limited to a niche-market audience, but will surely attract interest from the ranks of gourmet chefs currently closeted as surgeons; cultural *bricoleurs* who would like to melt the barriers separating surgery, human anatomy and home cuisine; advocates of consensual cannibalism who have exhausted the cooking tips provided in *The Silence of the Lambs*, and television programmers looking to appeal to the same popular sensibilities that make *Extreme Makeover* such a hit. While *Close to the Bone* does not quite



Cooking with surgical precision

reach the culinary martial art form of *Iron Chef*, Hu, Shewchuck and their surgeon friends are a genial bunch. The series had its debut eight-week run on the *Canadian Learning Television* on consecutive Tuesdays from March 23 to May 11. The series will likely be re-broadcast later this year; aficionados will be happy to learn that another 22 episodes are in the works.

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