

Making a stir with a cooking compote

The Best in Australia
7.30pm, LifeStyle Food

COOKING shows have come a long way since the austere documentary series on French provincial cooking shown in the early days of SBS, and those homely home economists from the black-and-white days.

Now cooking must equal entertainment and shows are laced with macho attitude, lovely-jubbly jargon and suggestive spoon lickings, or that's how the British do it. Perhaps the number of their cooking shows is in inverse proportion to the quality and finesse of the food the general population consumes? But I digress.

Here the genre has something for most tastes. There's the blokes, barbecues and boardshorts school (*Surfing the Menu*), and its offshoot, one bloke, his braces and a barbie (Iain Hewitson).

Kylie Kwong is deliciously non-sense, and the Adelaide duo in *The Cook and the Chef* eminently watchable. Maeve O'Meara is the perennial culinary tourist and we shouldn't forget the gallant folk who attempt to whip up something yummy between the ads on morning television.

Someone, somewhere, decided that preparing and cooking food wasn't enough: sport should be part of the recipe. Hence *Ready, Steady, Cook* (Britain, again) and the insane *Iron Chef* (only in Japan).

Which brings us to the second series of *The Best in Australia*, a show that's something of a compote. One kitchen and three attractive chefs with two dishes each to prepare, cook and present to a panel of judges makes for a very busy — occasionally too busy — program.

Best is shot in the West, in Fremantle, which looks sunny, heal-



Taste test: Ben O'Donoghue, Anna Gare and Darren Simpson share recipes

The next six dishes make you want to rush to the fish market for a giant crab

thy and cosmopolitan enough for a tourism advert in the opening credits, as Anna Gare, Ben O'Donoghue and Darren Simpson duck and dive into various provedores.

Gare is a well-known caterer and was a member of the Jam Tarts all-girl punkette band during the 1980s. She's still as cute as a button and has a nice way with a recipe.

O'Donoghue is as cheeky as he is talented, with a quirky penchant for breakfast cereals, while Simpson veers between schoolboy humour and finely wrought cuisine. In this first episode they compete over a breakfast

egg dish and main-course veal. The three share stove, benches and refrigerator, so there's much jostling for space (and some wonky camera work) but also a nice rapport. They are all willing to stir someone else's sauce or help plate the food.

While variations on veal and eggs are OK, the competition moves up the delectable scale in episode two: West Australian shellfish and white chocolate. The ensuing six dishes make you want to rush to the nearest fish market for a giant crab, or whip up a chocolate mousse just for the pleasure of licking the bowl.

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