



Delicious Designs

danAppelcreative Concocts a Logo Smorgasbord of Succulent Sweets

By Justin W. Sanders

When it comes to competitive culinary entertainment, no matter how famous the judges, how notorious the contestants or how outrageous the challenges, the show's real stars are always the mouth-watering dishes.

Bravo took this to heart in the summer of 2011, when it made a "big" deal out of its season premiere for the sweet-toothed *Top Chef* spinoff series, *Top Chef: Just Desserts (TCJD)*. While the season's chef contestants taunted the camera with over-the-top culinary machismo, the commercial's real stars hovered alongside them, strong and silent: an array of giant-sized layer cakes, tarts and other sweet treats that were nearly as big as the humans.

The campaign set the tone for the series as a new course in the network's successful portfolio of reality programming, but for the Season 2 premiere, the challenge was to "come up with something new that would build upon last year," said Amy Troiano, VP of on-air promotions at Bravo. "We wanted to go beyond giant, amazing desserts and do something that really catches the viewer's eye."

The solution? Leave the confections normal-sized this time around, but go big on the quantity of sweets – so many, in fact, they could be pieced together to form the *TCJD* logo itself, completely out of, what else, *Top Chef* desserts.

● *Concept*

Incorporating *TCJD*'s competitive vibe, Troiano's team decided to present the logo as a "creation" of the Season 2 chefs, who would jostle for position to build it as the spot progressed. They called upon production company danAppelcreative to bring their unique vision to life. Company founder Dan Appel, who also directed the spot, was excited by the challenges presented by the giant logo.

"In order to have a bunch of desserts that when seen from above actually create something legible, it was going to have to be very big," he said, "and yet it could only be so big because we had to get a camera up so high [looking down on it]."

danAppelcreative's producer, Rob Knox, had the idea to put the desserts on square plates in order to better fit them together. Then came the math portion of the problem. Appel's team used 144 dessert plates that were each 7.75 square inches. When placed together they created a *TCJD* logo approximately five feet, 10 inches wide by 10 feet and four inches high set on a six-and-a-half by 11-foot custom stainless steel table.

While Bravo typically exercises tight control over its brands' logo coloration – the lettering for the *TCJD* is always orange, brown and silver – they decided to loosen the reins for this spot, allowing the resulting letters to be a combination of rich, chocolaty browns, velvety reds and purples, and other mouth-watering hues.

● *Production*

To address the challenge of working under hot lights with delicate and easily destructible dishes, Appel called in Food Fanatics, a company of food stylists, to create nearly 150 unique desserts that would fit into the color scheme. Using a combination of real food ingredients and, by Appel's account, a "bunch of materials from Home Depot," Food Fanatics ➡



Clockwise from top: 144 individual dessert plates were used to create the logo; the completed logo lies on a custom six-and-a-half by 11-foot steel table; contestant Amanda Rockman adds her "piece" to the puzzle; contestants Rockman, Orlando Santos and Chris Hanmer jostle for position; the logo in progress; a test version on the floor.

whipped up dishes ranging from coconut layer cake to tiramisu, Rice Krispies treats and a plethora of fruit tarts. Although the desserts were delicious to behold, they were basically inedible.

"The ice cream looked like the most appetizing ice cream I've ever seen in my life," Appel said. "But I think it was made out of plaster or something."

After three long days of prepping, Food Fanatics' dessert logo materialized beautifully during the shoot on the floor of a soundstage with Appel's crew successfully capturing it from high above. However, there was one last piece of the puzzle to incorporate, or "pieces," as it were. The spot needed to show the competing chefs bringing their desserts to the table and actually building the logo from scratch.

Since there was not nearly enough time in their shooting day to dismantle the intricately designed logo and actually choreograph a rebuilding of it on camera, Appel's team created an illusion of logo-construction using an old-fashioned camera trick. They had each chef walk into the shot from off camera, remove a dessert plate and then walk backwards out of the frame. Played in reverse and sped up, the chefs appear to be moving up to the table to add their contributions to the logo.

"It was asking a lot of the chefs, but they were great sports about it and ended up having a lot of fun," Appel said. "We actually would have gotten it on one take except for one of the talent, who was wearing high-heeled platform shoes, totally fell on her butt about a third of the way through."

In the end, the production was a successful combination of old- and new-school techniques, ranging from reverse playback and elaborate prop-making to the ultra-modern iPhone app, Artemis,

which allowed Appel to figure out what lens could best capture the giant logo from above. The resulting spot feels both classic and contemporary, and the dessert logo, as promised, is richly textured and beautiful to look upon.

"When you put it all together in post, and that last plate is going in and that finished logo is revealed, it's a huge accomplishment," Appel said. "And believe me, it takes a village." ■

● Credits

Client: Bravo
Writer/Producer/Editor: Glen Richardson
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VP Brand Strategy and Creative Director: Trez Thomas
Graphics Designer: Kathy Valladares
Production Company: danAppelcreative
Director: Dan Appel
Producer: Rob Knox
DP: Vincent Passeri
Production Designer: Robert Fox
Food Styling: Food Fanatics