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In the fall of 2012 I wrote two of SeattleMet.com's recaps of Top Chef Seattle – they're listed here.

<http://www.seattlemet.com/eat-and-drink/nosh-pit/articles/top-chef-seattle-episode-1-the-ultimate-chef-test>

Top Chef Seattle Episode 1: The Ultimate Chef Test

We jump into the Seattlecentric season right away with a rousing trip to... uh, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and Atlanta.

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By **K.A. Skahan**

Each week, Top Chef fanatic K.A. Skahan will chronicle how Seattle represents in the show's tenth season. Here we go.

What do you get when you combine a slew of Healthy Choice meals, the siren call of \$125,000, and Tom Colicchio's piercing blue eyes? A new season of *Top Chef*, of course. Unless you've been living under a rock, you know this season is happening in Seattle. As such, it's our civic duty to recap each episode for the citizenry (and cry foul over every gratuitous Starbucks challenge or ferry shot).

We jump into the Seattlecentric season right away with a rousing trip to... uh, Los Angeles. Okay, so there's no Seattle at all this episode. Instead, the 21 contestants are split among the four chef judges' restaurants, only to endure challenges personally designed by Tom Colicchio, Emeril Lagasse, Wolfgang Puck, and Hugh Acheson. If a chef deems a contestant worthy, he'll offer up a *Top Chef* coat and ship 'em off to Seattle.

Predictably, each restaurant lands four or five nice ones and one total tool who just cannot stop talking about how awesome he is and what a piece of cake it will be to make a stupid soup or something. You fools! Haven't you seen this show before?

First stop: Craft in Los Angeles. We meet Lizzie, whose delightful South African accent somehow makes her massive crush on Tom totally acceptable, and Jorel, whose Snidely Whiplash 'stache makes him a Seattle shoo-in on the style front, and Micah, whose gauged ears are very distracting. There's also Anthony, who sweats more than anyone else on the planet and tells Tom, "I enjoy using a small knife," a slogan which will probably not appear on a novelty T-shirt any time soon. Finally, John, who's older and sort of cocky ("I owned a hot restaurant in the Hamptons in the mid-'80s") but has mad knife skills. Tom's making them all work the line during dinner service.

Next we head to Las Vegas, where Emeril is torturing some contestants with a deceptively simple challenge: making a totally awesome soup. This group seems likeable enough: Joshua's moustache rivals Jorel's as far as Seattletude, and Stephanie and Kristen are close friends from home who bonded over matching boob sweat and got matching tattoos to celebrate. Jeffrey's playing to make his partner proud, and Tina doesn't want to make a puree. Fair enough. When all is said and done, Jeffrey's watermelon gazpacho, Kristen's supermodel-y good looks and

English pea broth, and Joshua's roasted corn soup are good enough to go to Seattle. Chef coats are distributed—our first three official contestants. Joshua, by the way, will miss the birth of his daughter while he's competing in Seattle. No big deal.

Next stop, Beverly Hills to visit Cut by Wolfgang Puck, the newest judge. Wolfgang remembers when his first boss called his omelets "shit," a word which sounds totally charming in his Austrian accent. His challenge: make him a damn omelet. The men and women subjected to this egg-driven torture include Carla, who sort of knows Wolfgang from that one time she cooked for him when she was married to the owner of Rao's (awkward!), Eliza, who does funny voices and takes Wolfgang's advice to make him a steak, Chrissy, who's from Chicago, and Tyler, who isn't half as charming as Wolfgang when he says "shit." Kuniko was a banker in Hong Kong before she taught herself to cook. Oh, and Daniel, who explains that he gets awesome Yelp reviews, thus locking down the role of "Season 10's Biggest Tool" in his first 10 seconds of screen time. Burn—Tom hands out chef coats to everyone but Daniel. He presumably heads home to dive into piles of printed Yelp reviews, sort of like Scrooge McDuck and his moneybin.

Meanwhile, in Atlanta, Hugh Acheson challenges his group of contestants to create a salad in the kitchen at Empire State South. His merry band of chefs includes Bart, who's been knighted in Belgium, Gina, who growls like a tiger, Brooke, who has a tattoo behind her ear, Danyele, whose name is spelled really unusually, and Sheldon, who's from Hawaii (and was a *Food & Wine* People's Choice Best New Chef and James Beard Rising Star Semifinalist, so what's he doing here?). Sir Bart's spiny lobster salad, Brooke's fried kale, Danyele's grilled watermelon, and Sheldon's fried Brussels sprouts make the cut. Gina's grilled zucchini is too, well, grilled. She's dunzo, proclaiming that *Top Chef* is missing out, since she's not just a chef and nutritionist—"I'm a movement." Bye, Gina.

Back at Craft, Tom's making cuts. Old dude John is totally in, and so are delightfully accented Lizzie, and Micah with the gauged ears and a soul patch to rival Tom's. Mustachioed Jorel and sweaty Anthony aren't quite up to par.

We're left with 15 contestants by the end of the night, all of whom will presumably head to the 206 next week to let the drama begin. And now that we know a little more about this group, seeing previews of their bickering is all the more meaningful. Will Kuniko be totally sick of coffee by the time this season ends? Will Carla and Lizzie continue to make eyes at the judges every week? Will Joshua's 'stache win by default? There's only one way to find out. See you next week.

Line of the night: "A stove is like a woman. It never does what it's supposed to do." – Wolfgang Puck

Gratuitous Pike Place Market shots: 2

Gratuitous Space Needle Shots: 3

Most stereotypical Seattle moment: Kuniko says she wants to go to Seattle to drink the coffee. Yawn.

Most legit Seattle moment: Joshua has an awesome 'stache. You'll fit right in here, mister.

<http://www.seattlemet.com/eat-and-drink/nosh-pit/articles/top-chef-seattle-episode-2-a-shock-at-the-space-needle>

Top Chef Seattle Episode 2: A Shock at the Space Needle

Who is the bigger geoduck, Stefan or John?

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By **K.A. Skahan**

Each week, Top Chef fanatic K.A. Skahan chronicles how Seattle represents in the show's tenth season.

To phallic references. And big fish in small towns. And road trips never taken. Photo via Bravo. Greetings, *Top Chef* devotees and my mom! This week's foray into the wild culinary world of Seattle was titled "A Shock at the Space Needle," which means we can reasonably expect both something shocking and a trip to Seattle's most famous landmark. Lucky for us, the episode totally lived up to its name.

First, the shock: This episode takes place in Seattle! Alright, well, that's sort of to be expected actually. But then we find out something slightly more shocking: Josie and CJ and Stefan from *Top Chef* seasons past are judging the Quickfire challenge. Chrissy says Stefan looks like a thumb, an observation so astute that it should earn her immunity. The contestants will have to break into teams of three and prepare a dish using local shellfish in 20 minutes.

This challenge basically conveys two things: Geoduck looks pretty phallic and Carla is essentially a superannoying version of Sofia Vergara. When it comes to the former, for some reason a bunch of the chefs want to use geoduck. Hmmm...wonder why that is? Kristen helpfully explains, "Geoduck is great except it looks like a penis. A really big one." Well, it didn't take the show very long to make that obvious joke. Now, how to fill the rest of the season's episodes? As for the latter, Carla herself says it best: "When I cook, I want to look good. I want to be a James Beard, and I want to have a nice ass." Then she basically spends the rest of the episode rolling her r's just to make noise. No, really, she does.

The blue team wins with its geoduck sashimi. John-the-most-hated-chef-in-Dallas wins immunity, which he says is one of the top five achievements of his career. Really, dude? Where does it rank with *D Magazine* naming you the most hated chef in Dallas? Because you mention that every 30 seconds.

Then, we get the *actual* shock of the episode: Josie and CJ and Stefan are competing this season. Like, the whole time. For the title. The new contestants' reactions includes a lot of bleeping, but the viewing audience everywhere rejoices at the dramatic possibilities. Over/under on the episode in which John and Stefan get into a huge fight? Six? Anyone? Padma informs the judges that tomorrow they will be cooking for...Tom Douglas!

Cue B-roll of boats and the monorail, then a short clip of the cast oohing and aahing over the view from their apartment at Olive 8, a brief discussion of the problems that come with roommates, and a hint at the drama to come. Oh Bravo, you never let us down.

When it comes to the first actual challenge of the season, the producers decided to just cut to the chase and head straight to the Space Needle. We can picture this conversation as they plotted the episode: "We need a sophisticated, subtle, highly regarded restaurant in Seattle to really set the tone this season." "Book Bindery?" "More iconic." "Canlis?" "Too obvious." "The Walrus and The Carpenter?" "Eh..." "Oh, I know! SkyCity!" "PERFECT, because it SPINS." Thank goodness the very tall CJ is on hand to explain, "It's like an iconic place." He went once when he was seven years old, and will never forget the "good potatoes" he ate there.

Each team has to put together a dish using the Pacific Northwest's bounty of beautiful proteins in the 47 minutes it takes for SkyCity to make a complete revolution. Wait, is Tom Douglas wearing a sportcoat? This is a special occasion, indeed. Our esteemed guest judge explains such Pacific Northwest-y things as singing scallops, Vashon Island, and perfectly translucent centers on fish. Way to represent, mister.

The Quickfire-winning blue team is up first. John-the-most-hated-chef-in-Dallas, Kuniko, and Sheldon poach cod in chili sauce, and the judges dig it. Gail actually sings its praises a little too enthusiastically: "For the first thing I put in my mouth in Seattle? Not bad... oh, that came out wrong." And here I thought this was a family show.

The blue team shares the kitchen with Carla, Chrissy, and Lizzie of the orange team, who put together a poached salmon and beurre blanc combo that Padma kind of loves. What really matters about the orange team, though, is that Lizzie will likely kill Carla before the season is over. Every confessional Lizzie gives this week is about how annoying she finds her teammate, which means the ish is gonna hit the fan very shortly. Stay tuned.

Next, the veterans on the red team share the kitchen with the new kids from the gray team. Josie, CJ, and Stefan decide that since everyone's making fish, they're going to make quail. (You know, because of all the wild quail in Seattle. Duh.) The gray team's Brooke, Jeffrey, and Sir Bart put together some roasted halibut and mushrooms. T-Doug tries to be nice, but the whole panel is less than pleased overall and thinks both dishes are overcooked. We might have our chopping block, ladies and gents.

Now it's time for a weird interlude in the middle of the commercial break, where Tom Colicchio tells the judges about the time he almost moved to Seattle. He was 22 and needed a road trip because he was having girl problems, and "Seattle was the next up-and-coming West Coast food town." He bailed at the last minute, a stroke of laziness that T-Doug says he appreciates: "I'm a big fish in a small town." Ouch, T-Doug. Just, ouch. Are people throwing truffle popcorn at the TV screen over at Bottleneck Lounge right now?

Finally, the yellow team and the green team face off. The yellow team—Josh, Danyelle, and Eliza—makes cod with mushroom, apple, and fava beans, and the judges are pretty into it. The green team—Micah, Broncos fan Tyler, and Kristen—makes a bunch of peppermint mochas and pumpkin scones...err, wait, no, that was my barista this morning. Wrong green apron. These guys actually made seared salmon and vegetables, and the judges think it's the better salmon dish of the night.

After all the food is devoured, Padma and crew waste no time getting to the judging table and hand the blue team their second win of the night. The overall winner: coffee-loving Kuniko,

whose fish was pretty much perfect. Aww, she's adorable, and more than deserves the win after being called "Origami" and other random sorta-racist comments these past two episodes. John-the-most-hated-chef-in-Dallas delivers the bad news to the rest of the group: the red team and gray team are on the chopping block.

The judges proceed to lecture the veterans on the red team, who can't seem to figure out what they did wrong. "I think something possibly was imperfect," says Josie. "Clearly," snaps Padma. Way harsh, Tai. The gray team gets a slightly less severe verbal lashing, but in the end they're the losers. Poor Jeffrey goes home for the unpardonable sin of overcooking the halibut, and our happy bunch of chefs loses their first member.

On next week's very special Thanksgiving episode (filmed in what, July?), look for Thierry Rautureau, along with the answers to these pressing questions: Will Kuniko get to drink any coffee? Which contestant will flip out at Carla first? Who is the bigger geoduck: Stefan or John? We can't wait to find out.

Gratuitous Space Needle references: 7

Phallic geoduck references: 1

Accidental dirty jokes by Gail: 1

Line of the episode: "I'm used to bigger breasts usually."—Stefan, on the quail he's preparing. What a geoduck.