

BEING BETHENNY

How one woman turned 15 minutes of fame into an empire BY KYLE WRIGHT

HERE'S THE SKINNY: Bethenny Frankel first entered the homes of reality gawkers during her stint on *The Apprentice: Martha Stewart*. She came in second in the 2005 finale—and received a sharp-tongued send-off from the Mistress of White Sales—but you probably don't remember that. The show was a flop. She should have faded into the darkest recesses of human memory, forgotten in a sea of *Flavor of Love* contestants and *American Idol* rejects. But six years later, the former BU student's star has never been brighter.

Reality TV was still a budding phenomenon in that pre-Snooki era, its cast members rarely afforded more than the standard 15 minutes after they'd made their exit (save for a few *Survivors* who extended their lifespan by releasing sex tapes or spouting off on *The View*). Bethenny didn't follow her elimination by landing a bit role in a Rob Schneider movie or trying to become a pop star. She returned to her vocation as a natural-foods chef for clients like Tommy Hilfiger. It wasn't until 2008 that she resurfaced on *The Real Housewives of New York City* as the flailing entrepreneur/BFF of fabric doyenne Jill Zarin, with a boyfriend who wouldn't commit and ovaries aching for a baby.

Oh, what a difference three years has made. Viewers connected with Frankel's headstrong ambition and unhinged emotions. Though in her late 30s at the time, she was the embodiment of a doe-eyed dreamer, a woman with a no-nonsense exterior, a quick wit and a flawed core. Over the course of her three seasons, she lost a great deal (including her friendship with Zarin) and hid nothing (America has seen this woman urinate on at least two occasions). Her biting comments about her costars, particularly Kelly Killoren Bensimon, made her the comic relief and fan favorite. Not even Bravo honcho Andy Cohen's staff of fortune-tellers could have known that Frankel's quip comparing Bensimon to Madonna would escalate to a rumble at the Brass Monkey and an all-out war in St. John.

Housewives was never just a side project for Frankel; it was also a tool to market her brand, Skinnygirl. Her best-selling books and cocktail prompted Bravo to give her a spin-off chronicling her new life as a mother and wife. (The third season is currently in production.) *Bethenny Ever After* lacks the bitchiness of *Housewives*, dwelling instead on Frankel's sensitive side. This is particularly evident in her often brutal therapy sessions with Dr. Xavier Amador, where the talk typically touches on the scars from her broken childhood: Her father was a thoroughbred trainer who was too preoccupied to parent and her mother also failed to take much of an interest, a family history that's been one of the show's central dramas. Intrigued by her neuroses and her honesty, fans keep tuning in to watch her fail and succeed in a tug-of-war that she finally seems to be winning. It's a long way to have come for a former Paradise Rock Club waitress.

The past year has seen Frankel turn 40, take the silver in *Skating With the Stars*, embark on a multi-city speaking tour and be psychoanalyzed on *20/20*. Her biggest news, of course, is that she sold her signature margarita-in-a-bottle for a reported \$120 million to Beam Global Spirits & Wine, Inc. Now there are whispers of an Ellen DeGeneres-backed talk show, plus the promise of other Skinnygirl cocktail varieties. No matter what's next, the woman seems committed to always topping her own personal "Best." 🍸

BETHENNY'S BOSTON'S BEST

PLACE TO SIP A SKINNYGIRL MARGARITA

Cactus Club, the Border Cafe
or the Barking Crab

RESTAURANT Clio

PLACE FOR A FAMILY-FRIENDLY VACATION

Cliffside Beach Club and
Hotel, on Nantucket

BEACH

"Berklee Beach, ha-ha."

TIME TO VISIT

Fall

PLACE FOR AN OUTDOOR WORKOUT

Rollerblading on
the Esplanade

HOTEL

The Four Seasons

MEMORY FROM BOSTON UNIVERSITY

"Spilling a whole tray
of sex on the beach shots
while cocktail waitressing
at M-80, Seth Greenberg's
first nightclub."