

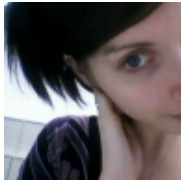


Cook With Nikki

Anyone Can Be A Chef!

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Toronto's 2009 Hot and Spicy Food Festival Review

September 8, 2009 in [Reviews](#) | Tags: [Toronto](#), [culinary](#), [spicy food festival](#), [sauces](#), [review](#), [pomegranite](#), [mango](#)

After missing last year's Spicy Food Festival, I decided to make sure that I went to this year's festival. We didn't stay for long, but we got a taste...

First, the bad.

Well, I've got to say that as a spicy food enthusiast, I was honestly disappointed this year. I did miss last year's festival, but the year prior was pretty good if my memory serves me correctly. *(It's not that this year was "bad", but I just had really high expectations.)* 😊

I won't go into my issues with a coconut costing \$7. I promised myself I wouldn't go there... *(Really?? \$7 for a coconut with a straw in it??...Go onto Spadina near Kensington Market, they're much cheaper there...Plus, I wanted spicy food, not coconut with a straw. Anyways...)*

Upon our arrival to the festival, it wasn't nearly as crowded as I had anticipated. *(Though, that's not always a bad thing...)*

We went to the tented area to scope out the different booths, only to see that there were maybe 6 or 7 booths in total.

As I remember it the last time I went, there were more than that. There were a couple of booths set up along the side of the harbour front building, and even there we only saw a few.

A handful of these places seemed to be heavily promoting sauces that have a lemon-ginger taste to them, or different fruit flavours mixed with a bit of "Canadian spice". I wasn't quite sure why this term "Canadian spice"

was so popular this year. I go to the spicy food festival to try international sauces and marinades. If I want "Canadian spice" I'll just take a walk over to Sobeys and grab some Frank's Red Hot sauce, or better yet I'll make my own sauce.

That being said, mid-search for some hot sauces, I changed my mind on what I was going to look for. *(The Canadian spice was starting to appeal to me after a few samples of different things...)*

I decided that instead of looking for the next super spicy yet somewhat tolerable sauce, I would look for something fruity with a bit of bite to it. Something I could either put on my chicken, or on my salads.

I had high hopes for the Hot Mama booth, but was a little let down. I even tried some chilli heat chocolate sauce, but couldn't imagine putting it on anything even though I liked the taste of it. *(Doesn't Lindt have a chilli heat dark chocolate? I would just buy that for \$3 a bar instead of paying \$12 for a small jar of it from this festival...)*

There is some good!

I DID however, find a hidden gem. Chef Jono. Not only did he have a booth here, but he also did a demonstration *(that I unfortunately did not get to see)*.

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His booth seemed simple enough. There were a few pictures of the product he was selling, and a display of some of his artsy foods. *(I saw a picture of a fancy salad wrapped in a shaving of a cucumber. Very impressive!)* He was selling a pomegranate balsamic, and a hot mango pepper sauce. Both were very tasty and appealing, so I purchased one of each. He also gave a pointer on how you can cook the balsamic on its own to thicken it, and then drizzle it over cooked chicken and salad. I'm looking forward to trying this, and even to just using the balsamic on my salad as is!

****Edit: upon having this balsamic on my salad, I loved it. It was the perfect flavour to go as a side to some spicy chicken. ****

He really seemed to know a lot about food, and was able to give information and pointers about his product. This is so much more than I can say for some of the other booths at this year's festival. One booth that had a hot sauce called "Obama Sauce" (*haha*), didn't really seem to interact with the customers. Even though the sauce was pretty tasty, I probably would have been more inclined to make a purchase if they had shown that they even cared that customers were checking out what they had to offer.

I strongly encourage anyone who happens to stumble upon this, to check out Chef Jono's website: <http://www.chefjono.ca>

He has many recipes posted on his website, and you can contact him. He also does catering as a personal chef for groups ranging from 2-20 people. Even more interesting, he will cook WITH you if you like, so that there's a sense of involvement and so that you get to learn. All of the stores that sell his sauces are also listed.

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September 10, 2009 at 2:49 pm

Tina Brooks



I want to thank you for writing this review of the Hot and Spicy Festival and for your wonderful review of ChefJono.ca I agree, his products are fantastic. I know, because we (Brooks Pepperfire Foods Inc.) co-pack his recipes for him.

The key difference between this year's show and the last one that you attended was the lack of distributor's booths. They didn't like competing with the people whose products they are carrying, so they (seem to) have ceased coming. Fine by me, as we are also a producer with our Peppermaster(R) brand. What made this show different was that everyone offering hot sauces was the producer of the product. I will quickly mention that it would be nice if we could get the large name hot sauce companies at the show, but unfortunately, they do not seem to think that Toronto is worth their while, they are too busy to come or have some other reason for not attending.

As for the "Chili Heat Chocolate sauce" you tasted, it is correctly called Peppermaster Chili Chocolate Sauce and there were no small jars for sale at any price, we did not have them at the show. For clarification, were you to purchase them, they are \$7 on our website, not \$12. The large bottle, 250 ml, which was for sale at the show, is pricy, indeed, at \$15, but you get what you pay for. We use fair trade certified organic chocolate as the base and the peppers in the product are fairly traded, we could tell you the name of the farmer, and have no pesticides or chemicals sprayed on them; to my knowledge, Lindt uses extracts and/or powdered chillies not fresh ones in their product and their chocolate is NOT fair trade certified, nor is it guaranteed peanut free. Unlike Lindt, Brooks Pepperfire Foods is a TransFair licensee with a mandate to create the market for Fair Trade certified chilli

peppers and Peppermaster(R) Chili Chocolate is Fair Trade Certified.

I am surprised that you simply allowed yourself to walk away from the booth simply wondering "what on earth" you would put the Chili Chocolate sauce on, because whoever was manning the booth would have gladly volunteered the fact that it is a dessert sauce, designed to be drizzled over ice cream or fresh fruit. Two of our regular customers compete on the world stage as biathletes and add it to their hot chocolate in order to shorten their training breaks and our Peppermaster uses it as the secret ingredient to Chill Con Carne.

The recipe for that is on our website. I am glad that you tasted it though, because I agree it is delicious. Hopefully, this note will bring you to consider tasting it again?

Also I will note that had you spent more time at the Peppermaster booth, you would have discovered the hottest sauce at the show, our Hurricane Mash. It is made from a blend of fresh habaneros and scotch bonnets crushed in fresh squeezed lime juice. The "fruit juice" is most definitely NOT the highlight of this product, as it is over 90% pure pepper solids. It is extremely hot and delicious, if you can handle the heat. We had a line of several of these mashes available, all of them showing off the flavour of the individual chilli, ranging from pure red fresno to pure Haitian Goatpeppers, which we have grown for us by a farmer in Haiti. Said mash is changing the lives of the people who work on that farm. Brooks Peppermaster Foods is well known across Canada for our mashes and are currently the only TransFair licensee for Fair Trade chilli peppers.

I am unsure of when you attended the show, but we and every vendor was thrilled not only with the attendance of the show, but also with the sales that we all enjoyed. This was in all of the 5 years we have been attending this show, the best one yet.

I would like to invite you to attend the coming One of a Kind show, which opens on November 26, at the Direct Energy Centre, as our guest. I would be most pleased to walk you through our product line. We'll have some choice delicacies designed to delight the most discerning chilihead at the show!

If you would like to take me up on this offer, please email me at tbrooks@peppermaster.com and I will arrange to mail a pair of passes for you and a companion. We highly recommend that you come on opening day as that is the day on which we have our best selection of mashes.

Tina Brooks, VP Marketing for the Peppermaster Brand of fresh pepper sauces.

Reply

September 10, 2009 at 4:59 pm

Nikki



Thank you for the comment in response 😊

It did seem that there were less booths at this year's festival, and that does make sense as to why. It would almost be a waste of money for them to come and promote a product they got from someone else that is also there promoting the same thing. Though I was hoping that there would be a little more variety this year, a few people I know that had gone to this year's festival mentioned the same thing to me. Maybe I'm just being picky though. 😊

I'm thankful that there weren't any of the "larger named" hot sauces, as I like to try new things that I can't find every day. So even if they don't think enough of Toronto, it works out to our benefit either way.

In regards to the chocolate sauce, I believe a couple of different booths actually had a chocolate sauce. Or it was some sort of fruity chocolate sauce, it was the most promoted sauce at one of the booths there. I believe it was the booth directly across from your booth, and they did call it a dessert sauce...

(After looking at your website and product displays, I do remember seeing your booth there, but hadn't gotten to try the Hurricane Mash as the person tending to that booth was busy with other customers -there were a LOT of people there when we came by in the evening.) But I did (as a chocolate fan) try the chocolate at your Peppermaster booth. Unfortunately I couldn't find anyone to talk to. 😞

Now I wish I had gotten this chocolate sauce! The idea of microwaving it and pouring on ice cream sounds great!

The main issue I found with the surrounding booths (mainly the ones that were next to Chef Jono's, the Hot Momma booth, and another one with a quiet woman selling a hot mango sauce -can't remember the name) was the fact that most of what they were heavily promoting were lemon-ginger flavours, or sauces in that range. Even trying some of the hottest sauces, I was surprised to find them tame. (I'm not tough, but I do love heat in my sauce!) I do remember trying a jerk sauce at the Peppermaster booth that was quite tasty though..

My husband is the hot-head of the relationship (haha), and he tends to not favour spicy foods/sauces with a fruity hint in it, so it was also hard to find something we both could enjoy.

I'm glad to hear that this year's festival was a success for the vendors though! I was wondering how good they would be able to do this summer compared to the previous summers with the way spending has slowed.

As for the One of a Kind Show in November, I would love to take you up on that offer! 😊 That is very generous, thank you!

I will definitely send you an email, and I look forward to that. I hope that there's the Hurricane Mash that you mentioned, and other similar sauces. 😊

[Reply](#)

September 10, 2009 at 4:17 pm

Mike Bolwell



Hi ya, great blog that Jono forwarded to me. I am the other fellow that was helping staff the booth. You were sure right about some of the other booths, there seemed to be very little interaction. All I know is I lost my voice for a day after talking to 10,00 people about his mangoe hot sauce and tamarind sauce which I guess you did not get a chance to taste.

Thanks again for buying,

P.S We sold out of everything!

Mike Bolwell

[Reply](#)

September 10, 2009 at 6:10 pm

Nikki



I can only imagine the amount of talking that would have happened over the course of that weekend! That booth was definitely one of the busier ones for sure. We had walked past it once and weren't able to stop by, but the second time around we got in there. 😊 I did not get to try the tamarind sauce, no... But the two that I got were definitely worth waiting in line for! I'm just glad that I got to the balsamic before you guys sold out. 😊

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