

PRODUCTS I'M LOVING RIGHT NOW

## Put Your Endorphins on Alert

### Sweet Sunshine Chili Sauces

There are hot sauces galore on the gastro-landscape today—but, as with knives above, it's tricky to find a real Point of Difference. Well, me buckos, put your endorphins on alert...for this new line from Connecticut really does have something extra.

As Paul Sarris, the founder and owner of Sweet Sunshine puts it—even on his labels—that something extra is “flavor before fire.” Bravo! That’s what I’ve been touting for years! Far too many hot sauces have names with images of thermonuclear destruction, or mental illness—and proceed to lend a hand in facilitating those things by burning the bejesus out of your mouth!

It is gratifying indeed to see a whole company devoted to the way that hot sauce tastes, not the way that hot sauce burns.

Sarris started the company recently with a home recipe, and has now had enough success to, in his current batch—only the fourth!—employ slightly larger-scale production techniques. But he is still there, batch by batch, tasting away, creating a very artisanal version of a hot sauce.

The entry-level sauce is the Sweet Chili Sauce—a dark reddish-brown, fairly thick purée, with good layers of

flavor: heat (from ancho chiles), a mustardy touch, and hints of sweet spices. It also has a Worcestershire kind of kick, like Pick-a-Feppa Sauce...and thereby hangs a tale. Sarris was looking for that flavor, and originally added Worcestershire sauce to the blend. But he wanted his sauce line to be “all-natural”...and, after he realized that Lea & Perrins contains some “non-natural” ingredients...found a way to create a Worcestershire-like dimension by other means. The end result is a fairly sweet sauce, not unlike a complex BBQ sauce, with some heat. I like it. But it gets better.

Sarris has three more notches to go on his basic “chili sauce.” One rung up is the

Warm Chili Sauce, which, in addition to the base sauce above, gets a mixture of dried habañeros and a little extra vinegar. It is slightly lighter in color, slightly thinner in texture, but with a big upgrade in flavor: still medium-sweet, but with the fruity dimension of habañero chiles. It is hotter, but not distractingly so.

The Hot Chili Sauce, a little runnier still, and a medium brown-orange-red, is definitely hotter—but with a huge rush of the fruity quality in habañero peppers. With this sauce, you begin to say: “wow! those are great habañero peppers!” And they are. Sarris researched



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different sources for habañeros, and came up with the “red savina” habañero from Cartagena, Colombia. He receives 50-lb buckets of habañero mash from Colombia, kind of a purée with little chunks in it. When the buckets are opened, he told me, “the whole bottling plant starts to cough.” But that’s thermonuclear talk. Sarris has the good sense to make sure his Hot Chili Sauce, yet another variation of the base, has only 10% by weight of this incendiary, super-tasty mash. The heat, by the way, is in the back taste: wicked, direct and clean.

OK...if you really want it...you can go all the way to the fourth variation on the base, the Atomic Chili Sauce. Oh no!...I guess even Sarris had to get into the arms race. And, admittedly, this one would not be my favorite of the line. But you do get 25% by weight of that special South American habañero mash, and you do get an even fruitier flavor than in the others...if you can take it.

Now here’s what I’d really like to take: two other sauces, special blends that Sarris makes outside of his basic Sweet-Warm-Hot-Atomic continuum. I’m sure that you, like I, have tasted many hot sauces with onion and/or garlic in them—and have felt, many times, that the flavor seems kind of industrial, powdered-soup-like. Not here! The Roasted Shallot and Garlic Chili Sauce is one of the best lily family-to-bottle conversions I’ve ever tried. It’s a laborious process for Sarris; what goes into his sauce is the result of long-browning of fresh shallots and garlic in a large steam kettle. The sauce itself is a medium-thick purée, a slightly orange-y brown, with a real caramelized taste of fresh shallots. The background is medium-sweet, quite hot, with a definite buttery dimension. I don’t normally do steak sauce—but I’m sure this

would be killer on a hunk o’ steer.

However, I have saved the best for last: Sarris’ Jamaican Jerk Chili Sauce, which doesn’t need to be dedicated to “jerk”—for this is one of the most flavorful hot sauces I’ve tasted in a long time. Yes, it does taste exactly like great jerk tastes in Jamaica—but I’d go wider than that in my applications. It is a dark reddish-brown, pulpy-thick sauce, with a killer Jamaican taste of allspice and clove, anchored by a fruity hit of chilis, and a hearty meatiness. The heat, though not excessive, is very penetrating: your mouth hums for minutes after a few swabs of this stuff. If you wanted to try only one sauce from this very special line, I’d say this one is it.

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