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Serious Heat: Winning Salsas and Hot Sauces

Posted by [Gretchen VanEsselstyn](#), October 20, 2008 at 5:15 PM

Editor's note: Spicy thrill-seekers have been getting their fix from *Chile Pepper* magazine for more than 20 years. Editors Gretchen VanEsselstyn and Andrea Lynn, plus a team of intrepid tasters, testers, writers, and photographers, put together the bimonthly print magazine, temporarily paralyzing their taste buds by working through the newest hot sauces, salsas, and more. And now you'll reap the benefits, as they'll be sharing thoughts and observations from the fiery food world with Serious Eats readers. Check out their posts for the hottest products, recipes, events, and news around.

In case you missed the first part of [Your Spicy Food To-Do List](#), here's a quick primer: Every year in **Fort Worth, Texas**, culinary professionals and hot food aficionados gather to judge the longest running and most prestigious competition in the zesty food world, the [Fiery Food Challenge](#). Hundreds of products are blind-judged in a grueling three-day process until only the finest, fieriest foods emerge victorious as winners of the Golden Chile.

At [Chile Pepper](#), we dabble in pepper relish, dawdle over dry rubs, and graze on fiery jerky. But we always come back to our favorite zesty products: hot sauce and salsa. These are the condiments that flow through our veins and haunt our dreams.



Here's a selection of our favorites from the winners of the 2009 Fiery Food Challenge. They are made by dedicated producers large and small, from New Jersey to Colorado

to Antigua. For the whole list of winners across more than 80 categories, visit chilepepper.com.

Salsa (Bean)

1st place: Rosa Mexicano Kitchen, Pomegranate-Black Bean Salsa.

www.rosamexicano.info

Fruity-tart, earthy and hot, this salsa is the secret ingredient in our house chili.

Salsa (Hot)

1st place: Pace Foods, Pace Picante Sauce Hot.

www.pacefoods.com

We often reach for this tomato-rich, sparky, classic blend. Whenever we hit the road and tell folks where our magazine is based, Pace's "New York CITY?" ads ring in our ears. It's okay, Pace, we forgive you.

Salsa (Specialty)

3rd place: RoBear's Hickory Smoked Salsa Hot

www.ro-bears.com

Super-smoky, like tossing a handful of tomatoes and chiles in a campfire, this slightly sweet blend is dynamite on tacos, brisket or burgers.



The gang from Pace Foods with their awards.



All Spice Cafe, John "CaJohn" Hard, and John Dilley of Defcon Sauces.

Hot Sauce (Caribbean Style)

1st place: All Spice Café Caribbean Spice

www.allspicecafe.com

This sauce has all of the flavors we love in a great jerk seasoning—it's sweet, spicy, and earthy. All Spice Café also took home our Best Overall award for their saucy, mustachioed label.

Hot Sauce (Specialty)

1st place: CaJohns Oaxacan Taco Sauce

www.cajohns.com

With 19 awards across 16 categories, CaJohn didn't get much time to rest on his laurels at our awards banquet—he was too busy raking in the Golden Chiles. (This delicious, mild, cuminy sauce also got the unofficial award from our emcee for hardest name to pronounce.)

Hot Sauce (Fruit)

1st place: Susie's Hot Sauce, Susie's Tamarind Tango

www.susieshotsauce.com

The tart pucker of tamarind is a natural match for Caribbean food, and we love this mildish Antiguan sauce in marinades, stirred into rice or just shaken from the bottle.

Hot Sauce (XXX Hot with Extract; Wing Sauce Hot)

1st place: Defcon Sauces Defense Condition #1 Extreme Heat

www.defconsauces.com

The first time I tried this sauce, I went temporarily blind. I banged my head against the wall for a while, and the pain eventually stopped. Yum. For non-masochists, we recommend the delicious Defense Condition #3, which won first place for Wing Sauce Mild.

Whew! After all that, we need a drink. Our favorite across all beverage winners:

Bloody Mary Mix

2nd place: Danny Cash Devils Highway Habanero Bloody Mary Mix

www.dannycash.com

This kickin' mix of tomato juice, habaneros, serranos, fresh garlic, lime and onion is so good that you don't even need the vodka.

Enjoy all of these hot products! And check out chilepepper.com for the full list of winners.

20 October 2008: <http://www.seriousseats.com/2008/10/chile-pepper-magazine-presents-fiery-food-challenge.html>

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