



## All Spice Café (part 1 - interview)

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JD Cowles, the mastermind behind **All Spice Café's** wonderful wing sauces, was kind enough to send me 3 of his most popular concoctions. I have here in my grubby little hands "Caribbean Spice", "Chipotle Garlic" and "Cayenne Habanero..(the 'XXX' version...yeah!). All three are a brilliant orange color and all natural. I'll write a short review of each but first I'd like to share the conversation with the man himself, JD Cowles. So without further ado... Mr. "Pepper Face" himself...

2008 has been a great year for **All Spice Cafe**. We had our first booth at the Fiery Food and Barbecue Show in Albuquerque. In August, the "Best of LA" issue of Los Angeles Magazine voted JD Cowles as the Best Hot Sauce Maker. In September, All Spice Cafe becomes a vendor for Whole Foods. Also in September at the Zest Fest in Fort Worth, TX, All Spice Cafe wins 3 Golden Chile Awards and a 3rd place Award and in November, All Spice Cafe wins 7 Scovie Awards in Albuquerque, NM.

### **Chuk: Where did you come up with the name "All Spice Café"?**

JD: The name, All Spice Cafe, started out as a dream to have a restaurant down the road one day. I decided to use it as the name for the hot sauces with the hopes that the sauces would help in making All Spice Cafe a reality where everything on the menu would be spicy, spice for flavor not necessarily heat. For the short term I'd like to see ALLSPICECAFE.COM become a virtual cafe and eventually the real deal.

### **How did you get started making hot sauce? Do you have a culinary background?**

I grew up with a Mom who is a great cook and started hanging out in the kitchen at an early age. By age 11 or 12, I was cooking cube steaks with onions, garlic, chili sauce, Worcestershire sauce and a dash of Tabasco. I really enjoyed making up these spicy little steaks for lunch on the weekends. Went to college in upstate NY in the 70's, Buffalo wings were the rage and really took a liking to them. I Started making a hot wing sauce in 1980 for use on my grilled chicken wings, for dipping carrots and celery, mixing with salad dressings, on eggs, etc. The list goes on and on . . . I brought the sauces to parties and barbecues but never thought about selling the sauce until years later.

### **I gather you like to grill as much as I do. What's some of your favorite things to grill? What special techniques or tips can you share?**

Grilling is something I've been doing almost as long as I can remember. Some of the things I like to grill these days are tri-tip roast, boneless leg of lamb, baby back ribs, seafood, most veggies, some different fruits, most using spice rubs and one of my hot sauces. For the tri-tip, leg of lamb and the baby backs, I like to sear and finish with low temperatures on indirect heat. The slow cooking really makes a difference on some of the thicker cuts of meat. Different spice rubs and marinates for some delicious spicy flavor.

Over the last 2 years I hooked up with a few of guys from Orange County, CA, called Two Guys Grilling. We grill at private parties, corporate functions and charity events around southern CA. I met these guys at a Kansas City Barbecue Society event at the Autry Center in Griffith Park in Los Angeles. Traded a few hot sauces for some of their cook books and have become a Pit Master, grilling with them ever since. These guys love to grill as much as I do and will throw just about anything on the grill!

### **Charcoal, gas or wood?**

All depends on what I'm cooking! If I'm doing a lot of marinating or using some heavy spice rubs, it doesn't really matter to me. Time also has a lot to do with it, very little time, gas is the answer. If

you've got time to build a fire and need some nice hot coals wood or charcoal suits me just fine. Obviously, smoking meats requires some wood chips or chunks and with Two Guys Grilling we like to use pecan wood in our smokers - great flavor on the smoked brisket or pork shoulder.



**Pecan is my wood of choice as well. Do you think the Weber may be one of the greatest inventions of the 20th century?**

The Weber really did a lot for the world of barbecue as did the invention of the gas grill back in the 50's. They allow you the ability to cook outdoors anywhere in the world under all types of weather conditions. I've grilled many a meal outside on a grill at temperatures way below freezing.

**I noticed you grill your hot wings instead of frying them. How do they compare to the traditional method of frying and saucing?**

Being such a fan of the grill and not having a deep fryer, I started cooking wings on the grill rather than in a dutch oven or deep fryer in the kitchen. Very little mess and a little more healthy for you. I'd sprinkle a spice rub on them as they hit the grill and when they were done, throw them in a pot, pour on the sauce, shake them up and pour them in a bowl. Very simple and quite delicious!

**Do you use a mash for the aged peppers or age them yourself?**

Currently use a pepper mash for the sauces. I'd love to have the time and resources to age them myself but I don't have the storage facility and with a day job don't really have the time. Many of my spare weekends are taken up with hot sauce tastings at various gourmet shops and super markets around LA.

**Was it difficult to find a co-packer who could duplicate your homemade recipes?**

Back in 2006, I entered the Scovie Awards for the first time with all 3 sauces, Cayenne Habanero, Chipotle Garlic and Caribbean Spice. That fall I got word from the folks who run the Fiery Food and Barbecue Show that I had won a 3rd place Scovie for my Cayenne Habanero sauce in the Habanero category and a 1st place Scovie for my Caribbean Spice sauce in the Caribbean category. I figured it would be a good thing to check out the show in Albuquerque the next February and talk to all the other hot sauce makers to find out about co-packers and all things hot sauce related. I found out about a food manufacturer Red Hot Foods in Santa Paula, CA, about 60 miles from where I live in Venice and contacted them about bottling the sauces for me. Spent a day with them weighing out all the ingredients for making a gallon batch and they turned it into 50 gallon batches. They've worked out very well and for a startup like me they require small minimums (50 cases at a time).

**Would you consider your sauces to be more like cooking sauces than condiments? They seem to perform well in that role for me.**

The sauces are very versatile, are all interchangeable and work great equally well as cooking sauces or condiments. Try some grilled shrimp using the Caribbean Spice as a dipping sauce or as a cooking sauce with butter for sauteed scallops! The Chipotle Garlic makes an awesome steak sauce as well as a great marinade (see the recipe on the bottle). The Cayenne Habanero works well as a grilling sauce with chicken, mixed with a marinara sauce for a spicy Arrabiata sauce, on pizza, etc.

**I like how you include recipes right on the side of the bottles. What beverages would you pair with food prepared with your products?**

An ice cold beer goes really well as does a nice glass of wine, whatever suits your fancy.

**Beer suits my fancy most of the time but I could see some of these dishes going well with a nice Riesling. Are there a lot of chileheads in L.A.? I don't recall many hot sauces originating from there; at least the ones I have encountered.**

With a strong Mexican and Central American population, LA has a lot of chileheads. Many of them grew up eating hot peppers since they were little kids. One customer, who grew up in Central America,

started eating habaneros as a little kid - she loves hot sauce and the hotter the better! Most of them find my sauces to be pretty mild, looks like I may need to make an even hotter sauce to satisfy their addictions to heat.

**I would highly recommend exploring that avenue. I'd like to see you create a REALLY hot sauce. I bet it would be tasty. What's the hottest chile you have ever eaten raw?**

I've eaten some some habaneros as well as thai bird chiles and several other varieties. About 10 or more years ago at the House of Blues in Las Vegas, 6 of the people in the group ordered their Jambalaya which comes with a raw habanero on top. After coming back from the men's room there were 6 habaneros on my plate of Jambalaya. I cut them up and mixed them in with the shrimp, andouille sausage and rice, very delicious and fiendishly hot! A little sweat build up on the top of my bald head as well!



**I didn't find your "XXX" sauce to be hot at all. Am I just a maniac or is this intentionally a bit mild?**

The Cayenne Habanero comes in Hot and XXX. The difference is in the amount of habanero. 95% of the people who taste the sauces find the Hot to be quite hot and the XXX extremely hot. There is also a slight difference in taste, the XXX has more of the fruity habanero taste which I've grown to love. For me it's more about flavor than heat and all spice all the time!

**I have to agree to disagree with you there. I think heat and flavor can coexist but I realize those sort of things aren't for everyone. .... You have caused a stir with all the awards. Congratulations, BTW. How are things going regarding distribution?**

Distribution is starting to pick up a bit and the awards definitely help. My biggest problem is having a day job to pay the bills (and occupies 50 - 60 hours a week on average) and very little spare time to make the necessary connections to really get the sauces going. Currently, All Spice Cafe Gourmet Hot Sauces can be found in several Whole Foods stores as well as a bunch of gourmet shops and restaurants in the LA area. Starting to expand to a few other states and hoping to be in all of the Whole Foods stores in the southern pacific region. Also sending samples to a couple other regions and to restaurants and gourmet shops around the US.

**Do you plan to expand your line of products? If so, what is in the works?**

Definitely looking to expand the line of products. Hoping to have at least one more sauce by the Fiery Food and Barbecue Show in Albuquerque next Feb/Mar. Thinking about a Green Jalapeno Roasted Garlic sauce. Other thoughts include a spicy marinara sauce, a fiery hot teriyaki sauce and a few other surprises!

**Spicy marinara sounds good; the world needs more spicy marinara. The hot teriyaki sounds exciting as well.**

**Thanks for the interview JD!**

You're welcome.

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