

Mark Arnold tracks down the best new Fine Food products

The Speciality & Fine Food Fair never fails to turn up something interesting in the way of new product. Brambles Foods' sandwich creative Mark Arnold sent us this report from the show

Events like the Speciality & Fine Food Fair always creep up on you: although you know it's in your diary, you've got your ticket and the best intentions, you still manage the day before to find as many reasons as possible not to go.

You can guarantee that if you do make it, the mobile will start as soon as you've been scanned to enter, with major dramatics from the office about a disaster that you cannot help with anyway, which leaves you making numerous calls in the corner of the exhibition hall, usually by the toilets.

It is, however, important to make time to get out of your normal routine, and make the effort to visit these shows and see what is happening out there, particularly a show as important as this one, a sort of scaled down IFE.

It's predominantly UK biased, if you ignore the 37 single estate Extra Virgin Olive Oil representatives and the 10 truffle suppliers, and it

frequently features less well-known manufacturers, although some familiar faces such as H and B, along with Fresh! Naturally Organic, were showing their wares.

With over seven hundred suppliers represented and a full programme of seminars in the Fine Food Forum and Small Business Forum, you really need to plan your time carefully, or the day has gone. The list of contributors is long and quite impressive, including Antonio Carluccio, Adam Potts from Acorn House, and where would a show be without Henrietta Green?

I decided to focus in on an area that would be of interest to sandwiches, as there was otherwise too much to look at, and homed in on an area dear to all our hearts: chutneys and pickles.

Even then the task looked a little daunting: the product locator indicated that there were 38 exhibitors for fruit chutneys, 29 for pickled chutney, 37 for vegetable chutney and, lastly, 22 for hot pickle chutney. Luckily, many of these were duplicated results, but there were still over 35 possible producers, many small and local.

Larger producers were represented such as Tricklement, Forest Products, and Atkins and Potts, and even Baxters (who were not there) had managed to win a Gold for their 'Tomato, Pepperdew and Horseradish Chutney', so I hope someone let Audrey know!

The best thing about smaller producers is they are very dedicated and determined about what they do, and also very proud - in many cases justifiably so. They try new ideas and combinations, not just because they sound fancy or would look impressive on the label, but because the results are often well worth the effort.

Regrettably, there's a tendency, I think, for some larger manufacturers to pop along to the show, plagiarise some ideas and recipes, and then pass them on to their current supplier to match and copy, knowing that their supplier has all the relevant paper work, certification and the technical standards that they require, as an easier route to market. This is sad, and undermines the point of such shows, which is to highlight the entrepreneurial skills and imagination of these small producers. We should nurture them, encourage them to supply us, and help them meet the

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standards that we require.

On that front, it was very interesting to see a new accreditation on one stand (well, new to me anyway) of 'SALSA' - a very apt acronym considering the content of this article, standing for 'Safe Local Supplier Approval'. It's a fairly new standard aimed at smaller producers, a sort of stepping-stone to higher approval such as the BRC. It has been approved by the likes of ASDA, a definite step in the right direction.

The list of Gold Awards for chutneys and pickles was reassuringly full of smaller producers, and included such delights as:

Curried Rhubarb Chutney - *The Good Chutney Company*

Beetroot and Ginger - *Chef on the Run*

Beetroot chutney - *Sarah M*

Welsh Leek Chutney - *Chef on the Run*

Hot Pear and Date - *Bentleys*

Thai Pear Pickle - *Ludlow Food Company*

Hot Apricot - *Mr Vikki's*

Mediterranean Fig Chutney and Aged Wine

Vinegar - *Savine*

Fig and Apple with Armagnac - *Claire's Handmade.*

There was also a rather lovely Apple, Ale and Chilli Salsa from Rannoch Smokery, a company you do not really associate with chutneys, but now have a range of five to complement their wonderful smoked offerings, that includes a not often seen 'Smoked Goose', a must for a Christmas sandwich.

A few suppliers seemed to stand out from the crowd: a very new company called Le Mesurier, started this summer; a slightly older Mrs Massey's, now three years old, and a very grown-up sounding Woodchester Fine Foods.

Le Mesurier launched a range of 26 products across chutneys, relishes, mayonnaises and sauces in July this year, and have managed to get a Gold already for their BBQ sauce (although I must admit I have an aversion and hatred to any BBQ sauce, gold star or not). Patrick Le Mesurier certainly has the right pedigree to produce some good results having trained and worked with the Roux Brothers over an eight year period, as well as running some award winning Gatropubs. "I make it a personal mission not to compromise on the quality and sensitive handling of my ingredients," he says

The ones that stood out were the cucumber and green tomato relish, along with curried marrow and mustard; it's about time that marrows took centre-stage again.

Mrs Massey's stated with seven products three years ago and now have a range of roughly 30. They now produce a range under their own label for Fortnum and Mason, so must be doing something right. They too have gained a gold award for their 'magic mustard and courgette', which is pleasing, courgettes and marrows being the same vegetable.

Their products are also aimed at being multi-functional and are used as marinades, cooking sauces and dressings. Mrs Massey also seems to



have a sense of humour, and has some quite quirky names for her products: Orgasmic Orange and Chilli Relish, for instance. Now, although the product tasted fantastic, and would go great with some duck, I am not sure how well it would be received on a sandwich pack in the chiller cabinet.

Lastly Woodchester Fine Foods, who set up roughly two and a half years ago and have quite an extensive range, their best seller being Wasbi and Lime Dressing, which was just a little too tame for my taste. Their two little stars that shone out were a red pepper and basil chutney, alongside a festive date and brandy Christmas chutney, too late for this year, but maybe next. My favourite was a gooseberry curd, that I have not seen before, but was still under development.

My favourite find of the show, was, however, the rather brilliant Wild Boar Chorizo with Red Wine from The Real Boar Company, made from boars that happily roam in the Cotswolds, foraging naturally on acorns, fungi and cherries. The only problem now is technical approval!

So overall, a day well spent. It was good to have made the effort and a date worth putting in the diary for next year.

