

All About Olive Oil

WHY THE BOTTLE IN YOUR CABINET RIGHT NOW IS NOT WHAT YOU THINK IT IS



A FEW YEARS BACK WHILE SPENDING THE DAY IN PRINCETON, Bobby McVicker had an epiphany as he and his wife did some window shopping. That is when they came across a specialty store that sold olive oil and the business concept seemed quite curious to McVicker. "I used to buy big jugs from Costco, so I thought to myself, how can this guy have a whole store that just sells olive oil?" he recalls.

After being "dragged" into the store by his wife, he began to sample the many varieties and everything he thought he knew about olive oil was turned upside down. Now, years after that chance encounter, McVicker gets to share similar experiences almost daily as the owner of Blue Moon Premium Olive Oil and Vinegar, which houses stores in both Collingswood and Bordentown.

"Our main goal is to have people have that same experience I had when I walked into that store," he explains. "I felt deceived. It really educated me and opened up my eyes. I don't look down on anybody because I was the same way."

Similarly, Marcello De Feo, owner of Valente's Italian Specialties in Haddonfield, says the only way to become better educated

about quality olive oil is to do your homework.

"Olive oil is no different than beer or wine," De Feo says. "You need to taste and savor different oils to become better versed. ... Take notes, it's going to be impossible to remember every oil you taste, let alone the details. So, writing tasting notes in a notebook or in your phone will help you make a more informed decision."

that shelf. Any olive oil store you go to is going to tell you when it was crushed."

"The most notable food products from Italy are knocked off, including San Marzano tomatoes, parmesan reggiano and olive oil," De Feo says. "Producers count on you not paying attention to anything other than the price tag and they make a fortune doing that ... It's best to steer clear from super-market oils in most cases."

THE GOOD STUFF

"It all starts with the quality of the olives," De Feo says. "If an olive oil is made without defects and is unrefined, it can be granted the status of 'extra virgin.' This status does not mean that it is great, per se, but all great oils have attained extra virgin status. The variety of the olives used determines the flavor profile, making different oils good for different uses—and subject to your particular palate. If you are going to invest in a high-

tor it up and make it taste like olive oil. The U.S. doesn't have the regulations that Europe does, so it gets to skate by."

GLOBAL IMPACT

"Olive oil is regional and grown in both hemispheres. Most people think Italy, Spain, Greece; and I get good oils from there, sure. But some of the best I get come from Australia or South Africa," McVicker says.

"Spain and Italy lead the pack, but any country surrounding the Mediterranean will have good quality options. Just follow the olive trees and you will find great oils in Greece, Croatia, Turkey, Tunisia, Lebanon and so on," says De Feo. "My favorite olive oils come from Tuscany, but it is important to be open to oils from different regions, since each one has its own olives and unique flavors."

WHAT SHOULD IT COST?

"There are different oils for different purposes. If you fry with it, a cheaper oil does the trick. If the oil is a featured ingredient, like in a vinaigrette or to finish a dish, then you are going to want a high-quality olive oil. You could easily spend \$50 on a good finishing oil, but a little bit goes a long way and the taste is well worth the price," says De Feo.

"I think you can find a good small bottle of olive oil for between \$12 and \$20, that's a good starter" to introduce you to the higher-quality offerings, says McVicker.

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**BOBBY MCVICKER,
OWNER, BLUE MOON PREMIUM OLIVE OIL AND VINEGAR**



In order to get a better understanding of all things olive oil, we asked McVicker and De Feo to give us some pointers so that you, too, can see what all the fuss is about.

AVOID THE SUPERMARKET

"Yeah, it's cheap and convenient, I get it," says McVicker, "but when you are going to the supermarket and picking up a clear bottle ... without even tasting it, it's already expired. Light and heat affect olive oil and so you have no idea how long it's been sitting in a warehouse or in the backroom or on

quality oil, do not let it sit as a showpiece on your kitchen counter. Make sure you use it."

"It's all about the condition of the fruit at the time of the harvest. When they are harvesting the fruit, is it ripe? Is it overripe? There's a time period that is upheld to ensure quality. It's got to be within six hours between harvest and crush," McVicker says. "Store-bought oils are often made with fruit from off the ground, what's left after the first harvest. It has to go somewhere, so [manufacturers] refine it. They add saffron oil, doc-

ARE INFUSED OILS A GIMMICK?

"It's an easy way to add flavor without adding anything extra," McVicker says. "Butter olive oil is great for eggs. Mushroom and wild sage oil is great on popcorn. I make a chocolate cake and instead of using vegetable oil, I use a blood orange olive oil. You can use it for baking, sautéing; the possibilities are endless."

"Infused oils need to serve a purpose for me. Little touches like infusing an oil for a specific dish can have a big impact on the outcome. To me, that's what it means to do it correctly," De Feo says.