

Spicing IT UP With Vancouver Island Hot Sauce

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LISSA ALEXANDER

Eben Sedun's love for hot sauce started sizzling in his early twenties, and when he met his future wife Karita a few years later, he was smitten with both. Eben met Karita in Canmore, Alberta, and while she was a moderate hot-sauce user, he was on a whole other level.

"It got to the point that when you opened the fridge, the entire door was a collection of various hot sauces," says Karita from the deck of their Nanoose Bay home. "And he would take them to people's houses as a party trick, and line them up mildest to hottest to see who could get through them."

Eben said that of the hundred or so hot sauces that he had, there was about five that he used regularly. He puts them in three categories: Party Trick, Curious Label, and Flavourful. As someone who enjoys cooking and experimenting with flavours, he decided he wanted to make something that landed in the last category.

When the couple set their wedding date, they decided the party favour would be a bottle of homemade hot sauce. They had about a year to perfect it.

"We started making small batches and having friends try it and seeing what worked and didn't work," he remembers. "And then I think I ended up throwing all my favourite flavour profiles together and that's essentially the inception of what is now our Owl's Screech [hot sauce]." They called it Red Hot Monogamy.

In 2014, the couple moved to the Parksville Qualicum Beach region, with Eben banking on getting a specialised job based on his experience. When that didn't work out, they threw caution to the wind and started up the hot sauce business.

"I was like alright, well, let's just make hot sauce, everyone at the wedding said it was good," Eben chuckles.

They decided to take the summer and sell their two sauces at local farmer's markets. Eben made the sauces while Karita designed the labels and took on the administrative side. Vancouver Island Hot Sauce Company was born.

In Eben's words, "it went crazy." Good crazy. They continued selling at markets until time became too scarce. Eben got the job he'd been looking for and Karita continued working, so they switched from markets to selling in retail stores. They are now in more than 40 stores, mostly on Vancouver Island, and they have collaborated with several businesses, including Arbutus Distillery, which has a vodka named Owl's Screech.

Now with two young children and careers, they are finding it challenging to keep up. But they are excited for the next chapter.