

SAN DIEGO WEEKLY - Reader

COOK LIKE A CHEF — BUT FAST

By Naomi Wise | Published Wednesday, May 27, 2009

<http://www.sandiegoreader.com/news/2009/may/27/cook-chef-fast/>

ORGANICVILLE:

Normally, when food publicists deluge me with burbles and squeals about the latest junk, I just hit the spam button — but Organicville caught my attention. Their products, available at Whole Foods, Henry's, Keil's, at their website store (organicvillefoods.com), and on amazon.com, are kitchen staples certified organic, gluten-free, dairy-free, vegan, no sugar added. The person behind them is Rachel Kruse, a third-generation vegetarian from the Midwest. She invented this line of foods because she didn't like the available organic bottled dressings. (I hear ya, sister!) Her products don't have that awful "good for you" bad-tasting flavor of virtue.

The ketchup enticed me. I use the stuff rarely, but in quantity, for dishes like Oakland-style homemade barbecue sauce and a favorite Venezuelan version of chili. In place of high-fructose corn syrup, this brand has low-glycemic agave nectar — turning a carbo-bomb healthy. Organicville's ketchup tastes like Heinz. Try it in salsa americana, Chile's minimalist version of Russian dressing: good mayo (see below), a little ketchup to taste, a scotch of Scotch or Cognac, and a few optional drops of fresh lemon or lime juice. Presto! — instant dressing for chilled cooked shellfish or artichokes. (BTW, Trader Joe's also sells an organic ketchup. Haven't read its table of contents yet.)

(Re Mayo: several mainstream brands now offer olive-oil mayos — hurray! — although they still contain superfluous sugar. If you don't have time to build an aioli from scratch, olive-oil mayo is a more authentic aioli-starter or salsa americana ingredient than bottled mayos based on no-flavor, genetically engineered soy, canola, and/or corn oils.)

The other Organicville products I've tried have been gentle tasting, a bit flowerchildish. Products include salad dressings, sauces (barbecue, teriyaki), and salsas. The Herbes de Provence Vinaigrette is much closer to a Frenchwoman's homemade dressing than mainstream brands are — delicate, mild, no childishly sweet undertones. Use on mild lettuces like Bibb, ripe tomatoes, and summertime salade niçoise. The Miso Ginger looks like a winner for Asian-style salads — I can already taste it on ready-shredded bagged "cole slaw mix" from the salad case. The Sun Dried Tomato Dressing obviously gravitates toward Italian greens — and green beans.

With my own crazy schedule of restaurant dates and writing deadlines, buying perishables is chancy, so I often use marinades to preserve meats (and the occasional procrastination-prone fish) until I can get around to cooking them. Surrounding protein in liquid in an air-tight zipped freezer bag (or a vacuum-sealed marinator-container) extends its life several days. I was attracted to Pomegranate Vinaigrette, since it mingles pom and rosemary, both natural allies to lamb. The dressing proved too mild in that application, but might make a pleasing marinade for chicken breast or fish (even, subtly, for grilled salmon). Or, duh, it can also dress salads, especially with sweet ingredients like fruits, beets, or firm-tender cooked carrot strips (add touches of cilantro and roasted cumin to the latter for a Moroccan spin).

Organicville's Pineapple Salsa: Instant faux-Hawaii, great on fish or simple grilled pork — it livened up a hopeless hunk of leftover farm-raised supermarket salmon. (Trader Joe's refrigerated papaya-mango salsa is a good alternative.) The tomato-based Mexican-style salsas are fresh-tasting but not extraordinary.

Tangy BBQ Sauce proves very different from smoky, tomatoe-y Texas-style bottled supermarket brands. It's light and bright, and to my delight, it's not all that far from a Memphis-style pulled-pork sauce. It would be fine with chicken or game hens, too. Play with it. Mopped on leftover pork ribs reheated under the broiler, it made a great, crunchy caramelized coating, without any nasty burned flavor. The Original BBQ Sauce, described as "sweet and smoky," is certainly sweet and molasses-y, but I'd add a few drops of Liquid Smoke and hot sauce. (The inventor's a midwesterner, remember? And she's probably barbecuing tofu.) I haven't tried any of the teriyakis (I don't really love the saltiness of teri), but apparently they double as Asian stir-fry sauces.