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**aceface: The Salsa Boys of Summer**

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## **The Salsa Boys of Summer**

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*- Barbara Bruederlin*



Photo by Jayson Goddard

*Gandhi in Sixty Seconds – Jon Bon Fire – Screaming Hippie – Alan Jackson* - these are some of the whimsically named and diversely flavoured salsas that you may have sampled if you have ever wandered about the Market Collective in Kensington on a Saturday afternoon.

You would certainly remember if you had ever encountered Jay Bilyk and Joel Brideau. They are the guys with the table near the back, close to the stage, cheerfully offering up samples of Adam Patterson's Fine Preserves. An Environmental Scientist and a Sales Representative for a recruitment company by day, salsa wizards by night, Jay and Joel have just recently celebrated one year of catering to the near-insatiable salsa cravings of Calgary, providing a flavourful alternative to the "tomato water" that you get from your local grocer.

It started innocently enough, during Christmas 2008. They wanted to give their friends and families gifts that were a little more personal than the usual gloves and gift cards from the mall. Joel tapped into his inner foodie and suggested salsa, Jay retrieved an old family recipe, and with some free canning jars that they scored off Kijiji and some local produce, they were soon creating what would quickly become their own brand of sunshine in a jar.

With my sharp investigative journalism skills, I couldn't help but notice that neither Joel Brideau nor Jay Bilyk was actually named Adam Patterson. So who, then, was this mysterious Adam Patterson, I asked them, and what did he know about salsa?

"Contrary to many people's beliefs, Adam Patterson is a real person," they assured me. "He doesn't know a lot about salsa, but he knows that it's delicious." Adam Patterson, it turns out, is the good friend who inspired them to start the enterprise and who provided them with many of their infamous salsa names. In return he is immortalized on each and every jar of salsa that is meticulously produced in the secret lair that Jay and Joel rent for their regular canning sessions.

Each session yields 40 jars of salsa, which are sold through their website and at events like the Market Collective. And sales have been overwhelming. "We sold out (over 100 jars) at each Market Collective we attended last year," they inform me proudly.

It's not that surprising. A couple of young men selling homemade preserves at a market do tend to stand out in a crowd, demonstrating that we haven't really come a long way after all, baby, in our attitudes toward gender expectations. But Joel and Jay have learned to turn this uniqueness into an advantage. "We have learned very quickly that babes cannot resist our salsa," they laugh.

Being male artisans in a female-dominated business, at least at the grassroots level, has not only garnered them valuable attention, it has also earned them several nicknames along the way. “Lately we have often been introduced as The Salsa Boys,” they admit. “However, this had led to people assuming that we are a dancing Latino couple. This is not true.”

What is true, though, is that there is a huge market in Calgary, craving the varied flavours using fresh local ingredients that Adam Patterson’s Fine Preserves are committed to producing. There is never a shortage of people willing to sample the salsas that Jay and Joel cheerfully dole out at each Market Collective.

A friend of mine has surmised that in general, men are more condiment-minded while women are perhaps more dip-oriented. Joel and Jay allow a nod to the macho cowboy culture that still runs rampant in this city by assigning a moustache heat rating to each of their products. A whopping eight moustaches allotted to some of the varieties should be more than ample warning that the contents are not for capsaicin-wary. And true to form, according to the Salsa Boys, “our spiciest flavours, ‘Bunsen Burner’ and ‘Alan Jackson’, are always a hit with the guys and free samples almost always end in a sale or two.”

Perhaps my friend was right; one really can’t argue the science of food biology.

However, attracting attention and offering samples will only sell that initial jar of preserves. What continues to make Adam Patterson’s Fine Preserves increasingly popular is the commitment to freshness and sustainability achieved by using only local produce in each jar. And that means that if there is no fresh local produce available, there is no salsa being ladled into jars at the headquarters of Adam Patterson’s Fine Preserves. As it currently the case. “Due to lack of affordable local produce in the winter months, we are on hiatus,” they explain to me. “It’s against APFP’s principles to buy ingredients that are not locally produced.”

Fear not, city salsa aficionados, the Salsa Boys are not just sitting about idly, waiting for the snow to melt. As always, they are actively looking for new ways to tempt your taste buds. “This summer we were experimenting with some mustards and nut-butters,” they reveal, “but this took a backseat to the large amounts of salsa we had to produce to keep up with demand.”

And hot new taste for 2010? “This fall we sold a few jars of a new flavour which we like to call ‘Cinco de Mayo’, a chili-lime salsa that was very popular,” I was informed. “We also created a honey-garlic recipe which we sold in our Christmas gift-packs.”

The demand for salsa made with fresh locally grown produce is not abating, as sales of Adam Patterson's Fine Preserves will attest, and the purveyors of these salsas are now reaching a crossroad, after only a year in the kitchen. The way Jay Bilyk and Joel Brideau see things, they can either "continue to make salsa part-time and satisfy the needs of some customers, or put all of our tomatoes into one pot – quit our jobs to make salsa full-time for the masses. Right now we are looking for potential investors to turn our salsa fantasies into realities."

You can find Adam Patterson's Fine Preserves at the Market Collective in Kensington or order them at [www.apfinepreserves.ca](http://www.apfinepreserves.ca).



Photo by Nicoleirene Dyck [www.wordsarecameras.com](http://www.wordsarecameras.com)

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