

Editor's Choice

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BY JAMES MELLGREN

Bouquet of Fruits "On Track" Fruit Energy Bars

I learned recently, after a chance meeting at the Winter Fancy Food Show, that not all fruit bars are created equal. In fact, many of them contain barely any fruit at all. Not so with Bouquet of Fruit's new On Track All-Natural Fruit Energy Bars. Located in California's fecund San Joaquin Valley, Bouquet of Fruit is all about fruit, although up until now they were best known for their fruit baskets, confections (with fruit, of course), and assorted gift baskets. Each 2-ounce On Track All-Natural Fruit Energy Bar contains two servings of fruit and they have no added sugar, trans fats, or gluten. They are high in fiber and are a natural source of vitamins C and D. They are raw and not enriched, and there are no added proteins or vitamins. They are a delicious alternative to candy bars, only with sustainable energy, and best of all, they really taste like fruit. As they say, "We don't just reference the fruit on our bars, we include it." When you tear open the wrapper on one of the bars — any flavor, it doesn't matter — the aroma of that particular fruit is immediately evident. The real judge turned out to be my 7-year-old grandson who now can't get enough of them. I also keep them at my desk for a bit of energy when I start to flag, that is, until my grandson finds them. MSRP is \$1.75 for a 2-ounce bar. For more information, call 800-243-7848 or visit www.bouquetoffruits.com.



Recycline Preserve Kitchen Line

Up until recently, environmentally friendly products made from recycled materials left something to be desired in the design department. These products were usually better suited to a college apartment than a grownup kitchen. A company called Recycline is helping to change that perception with their Preserve Kitchen



line of products, all made from 100 percent recycled plastic. The company, known previously for housewares products like razors, toothbrushes and tableware, feels that design should not have to be sacrificed in order to make products that are better for the planet. Preserve Kitchen has begun with three products: a wonderful colander, cutting boards and storage containers. Vibrant in bright primary and secondary colors, the line is lightweight, well-designed in terms of use, very durable, and everything can go in the dishwasher. The colander is particularly useful, with sturdy, comfortable grips on two sides, pour spouts on the other two sides, an ample bowl with lots of holes for quick draining, a round footed base to allow the water to run out if set in the sink, and a small notch in the foot for the same reason. The storage containers, available in 19 oz. and 25 oz. and packed two per package, are perfect for most leftover amounts, and the lids screw down for a good seal. Color-coded cutting boards are handy if one wants to separate those used for poultry or seafood from those used for vegetables, etc. All in all, this is a terrific line of products and the company says they have plans to expand the line later this year. MSRP is \$12.49 for the 3.5-qt. colander; \$9.99 for 10 x 8 cutting board and \$13.99 for 14 x 11; \$7.99 for both 19-oz. and 25-oz. storage bowl sets (packed two). For more information, go to www.recycline.com.

Grind Pepper & Salt Mills

Just when I thought there could be nothing new in regard to pepper mills, I discovered the line of Grind mills recently at the Fancy Food Show. Although the company produces several conventional mills from wood and bamboo, the ones that caught my eye, and that I subsequently tested at home, are sleek modern designs made of stainless steel and plastic, and can be operated with one hand with a motion that is like clicking a standard ballpoint pen.



I've seen plenty of one-handed mills before but they either fail to work properly or rely on batteries to do the work (I'm not sure which I hate more, running out of power in the middle of a meal or the annoying sound they make). The Grind mills, however, function beautifully and accurately. I was given two sets: the 6.5"

Executive Pen set, a pair of mills in stainless steel with a band of plastic in the center to see the contents and a black plastic stand (they look for all the world like a pair of fat, beautifully designed pens); and the 4" Mini 'On-the-Go' set. The latter pair also comes with a stand as well as a leather pouch for taking them on the road (great for the car, briefcase or your luggage, especially if you're a pepper freak like me). Both sets operate with one hand and they feel like they will last a very long time. I also received their 3" Stainless Sugar/Spice Box, a charming, finely-tooled round box with a lid. The lid has a hole cut out of it, into which fits a sleek scoop that also serves to close up the opening. Smart, stylish design and efficient use make this line of mills my new favorite tools in the kitchen and at table. MSRP is \$50 for the Pen set, \$45 for the Mini, and \$20 for the Sugar/Spice Box. For more information, call 888-51-GRIND or visit www.grindpepper.com.

Caramoomel Veggie Caviar

Although they are not so new in Canada (British Columbia) where they are based, Caramoomel, a family-owned and operated company, made their U.S. debut at the Winter Fancy Food Show in San Diego this year. I like everything about this company, all women as far as I can tell (the men must be tending the fields), who start with heritage family recipes that have been handed down from mother to daughter for generations. They grow most of the fruits and vegetables themselves on their own farm with the remainder coming from other like-minded local farms. They eschew any artificial additives ("I am a cook, not a chemist," insists Antonia Dudka, the matriarch, company founder and head food creator), and that philosophy can be tasted in every jar they make. The unique company name refers to their first product, Dulce de Leche, which the family developed a taste for while living in Argentina for a number of years. Because of the fresh milk in the caramel, Cara-MOO-mel was born (originally the name of one product and subsequently the company name). My favorite, and apparently a lot of other people's favorite too, was the Veggie Caviar, a delicious and versatile blend of vegetables and spices that can be a spread, a pasta topping, a side dish, or a condiment. The same is true for all the products I tasted, from their crisp, refreshing wine jellies to their seductive caramel, including, of course, the incomparable Dulce de Leche. I like the Veggie Caviar simply spread on a cracker or a piece of good bread. It practically makes a meal all by itself, and a very quick one at that. MSRP is \$6.99 for the 8.5-oz. Veggie Caviar. For more information, call 888-765-0574 or go to www.caramoomel.com.



Mastering Knife Skills With Kitchen on Fire

Olivier Said and Chef MikeC are not your typical cooking instructors. They operate a cooking school in Berkeley, Calif., called Kitchen on Fire (KoF, hopefully in metaphor only), where one of the most popular and successful classes has been Chef MikeC's Basic Knife Skills class (he has taught hundreds of sold-out sessions up and down the West Coast even before KoF, and was the educational director for Sur La Table prior to opening the school). The pair of unorthodox teachers have just launched what will be the first in "The Basic Series" of cooking DVDs with *Mastering Knife Skills: Cutting-Edge Tips, Tricks and Techniques Used by Professional Chefs*. I've seen a lot of instructional videos — food and otherwise — and they are usually enough to put the most severe insomniac to sleep. This one, however, is lively, funny, visually arresting and presents a brilliantly organized system for learning to properly use a kitchen knife, techniques that can be applied to, as Chef MikeC says, "literally anything edible on the planet." The duo is a great team, never letting the class get dull or mundane, and they don't stop at cutting. The instruction includes information about the different types of knives available today, how to set up an efficient cutting station, safety tips, the skinny on cutting boards, sharpening and honing your blade, and cleaning and storage tips. The DVD is 45-minutes-long and packed with information and solid techniques by one of the foremost knife skills teachers in the country. MSRP is \$14.95. To learn more or to see a trailer, go to www.kitchenonfire.com. Also, look for the DVD in the Harold Import Company's booth this summer at the Fancy Food Show.



Amish Naturals Organic Pasta

Pasta from the Amish country? Who knew? I certainly didn't until they sent me several samples of their delicious Organic Fettuccine Pasta. To call an Amish product organic seems redundant to me since they practice centuries-old farming techniques, and organic ingredients for them are a way of life. Amish Naturals Organic Pasta comes in five forms of fettuccine: Plain, Tomato Basil, Garlic Parsley, Whole Wheat, and Fiber-Rich.



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The secret to why it's so good can be found in the production technique. Starting with the finest organic ingredients and ultra-purified well water, they roll out the pasta into paper-thin sheets and then cut the pasta into individual strands that are gently air-dried to preserve the flavor and texture, resulting in pasta that is as close to handmade as it can be. Because the pasta is not extruded the way most commercial pasta is made, it has minimal air pockets and loss of density, meaning that the pasta doesn't soak up as much water in the cooking process and stays perfectly al dente without ever getting mushy. This pasta is so good that it requires little more than some olive oil and grated cheese to enjoy, but it also holds a sauce very well because of its texture. For many years, it has been said that Americans don't make good pasta. Leave it to the Amish to prove that adage wrong. Packed 12 ounces to the bag, the MSRP is \$3.89 for the Fiber-Rich pasta and \$3.69 for all the rest. For more information, and to read more of the wonderful story relating to Amish Naturals, go to www.amishnaturals.com or call 330-279-2510.

Kitchens of India Rice Dishes and Desserts

The wonderful products from Kitchens of India address two significant trends in American dining today: the desire for authentic, pre-made meals, and our unflagging taste for Indian foods. I first encountered their products at Anuga last fall and then again at the Fancy Food Show. The few ready-to-eat dishes that were prepared for me at those shows

tasted as if they had been prepared in a fine Indian restaurant, which is exactly what their background is. The company, ITC Limited, operates what are arguably the finest hotels and restaurants in India, and this line of products is the result of their expertise. The ready-to-eat line includes many classic vegetarian and chicken-based dishes, as well as chutneys, curries, cooking sauces, and a frozen line offering complete meals including rice and Indian breads. I have just tested some of their newest products: Basmati Rice Pilaf with Vegetables & Nuts (Kashmiri Biryani), Basmati Rice Pilaf with Vegetables (Hyderabadi Biryani), and two desserts, White Pumpkin & Milk Pudding (Petha Halwa) and Yellow Lentil & Milk Pudding (Moong Dal Halwa). As you can tell by the Indian names, these dishes represent authentic dishes from varying regions of India. They are also absolutely delicious and couldn't be any simpler to prepare. Having a fondness for both Indian rice dishes and desserts, I was particularly excited about receiving these samples. The rice dishes tasted freshly made and the desserts were so luscious I had trouble sharing even though they are meant to serve four people. The products



are all-natural, certified kosher and are perfect for vegetarians. This kind of product seems to be the direction the industry is going, and Kitchens of India has set the bar very high indeed. For more information, contact Liberty Richter at 973-338-0300 or visit www.kitchensofindia.com.

Robert Rothschild Farm's Champagne Garlic Honey Mustard Pretzel Dip

A pretzel dip might seem like an odd product to get excited about, but the Champagne Garlic Honey Mustard Pretzel Dip from Robert Rothschild Farm is not only deliciously addictive, it offers far more versatility than merely a dip

for pretzels (although it is a great cocktail snack, especially with their Gourmet Pretzel Twists). After devouring the first jar with pretzels over a couple of evenings with Manhattans, I began to experiment with the second jar. First, it made an unbelievable condiment for some warm roast pork sandwiches. Then we used it to baste a pork loin one night with similar results. I understand it goes well with fowl and fish, too, but it pairs with pork so beautifully that it seems they were made for one another. In fact, the only downside is that it may be impossible to cook pork loin again without a jar of their Champagne Garlic Honey Mustard Pretzel Dip on hand, for the roast as well as for the sandwiches the next day. MSRP is \$8.69 for a 13.5-oz. jar and \$1.99 for the 6-oz. bag of pretzels. For more information, call 800-356-8933 or go to www.robertrothschild.com.



Brown Family Farm Maple Dollops

Sometimes a dollop is all you need to liven up your food. When that dollop includes fresh fruit, maple syrup and spices, a dollop goes a long way. Brown Family Farm has introduced their Maple Dollops in three flavors: Apple Dollop, Blueberry Dollop and Cranberry Dollop, and they are as delicious as they



are versatile. As they say, these Dollops are neither jams nor jellies. Instead, they are a simple blend of maple syrup, maple sugar, spices and the fruit. They are perfect for spooning over ice cream, pancakes and waffles, crepes, cake, or even just a piece of toast. Beyond breakfast and snacks, however, they also make wonderful condiments for pork roasts, ham or chicken. While you're at it, try their new Vermont Maple Mustard and Horseradish Maple Mustard, both of which are amazing with the blend of sweet maple and spicy mustard. These are great condiments for sandwiches and for cooking. For more information, call 866-254-8718 or go to www.brownfamilyfarmmaple.com.

Frog Hollow Farm Organic Conserve

Here in Berkeley and around Northern California, Frog Hollow Farm is something of a legend, and now apparently in the rest of the country as well. I first knew of them for the extraordinary peaches they produced, the likes of which I hadn't tasted since I was a child. Sweet, juicy and bursting with peachy flavor, they are often featured on the dessert menu at Chez Panisse all by themselves, just a perfect peach and a knife. Now they are branching out (pardon the pun) with their peaches and

other fruit by making delicious conserves. I tried the Organic Peach Conserve, Organic Navel



Orange Marmalade, and Organic Apricot Conserve. Eating either the peach or the apricot conserves is very close to eating fresh fruit out of the hand. The line also includes (all organic) Cherry Conserve, Peach Chutney, Blackberry Jelly, Apricot Orange Conserve, Nectarine Plum Conserve, Asian Pear Chutney, Meyer Lemon Marmalade, and Nectarine Blood Orange Conserve. As

far as testing the products, I really didn't get past slathering one or the other on my morning whole grain toast, accompanied by a pot of tea. I was so smitten with these conserves and the marmalade that I am now buying them regularly at my local market; otherwise, mornings just wouldn't be the same. MSRP ranges from \$3 to \$6. For more information, call 888-779-4511 or visit www.froghollow.com. GR



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