

Q&A

Success Served Straight Up (with a Little Luck)

BY DENISE SHOUKAS

When cooking enthusiast Myra Sable met Toronto chef Carol Rosenfeld, they developed a bond—and soon a business—over family recipes. Forty years later, Sable & Rosenfeld has grown into one of Canada's most successful privately owned gourmet food companies and an award-winning brand, offering mustards, bruschetta, and the now-famous Topsy line of cocktail garnishes and sauces. Here, Sable talks about growing her business, introducing inventive products and her favorite part of the job.

How did you approach growing your business?

Our first product was Sweet Honey Mustard until Garfield Weston, owner of Fortnum & Mason in London, said, "I have German, French and American mustards on my shelves but I don't have Russian mustard." The strange thing was that it actually was an authentic Russian recipe as it came from a Russian uncle of Rosenfeld's. I have always let that story guide me.

I like my products to fill a need, just as Russian Mustard made Mr. Weston a happy man, and I also like a healthy dose of good luck. In 1982 *Esquire* magazine featured Russian Mustard as a gift to give men in its Christmas issue. Lucky me. An order from Neiman Marcus followed, which launched my company in the U.S. market. And I always had a booth at the Fancy Food Shows. This has kept the line in front of top retailers and distributors and given me the venue for introducing new products.

What makes your products so popular?

They're always current and never imitative. Our three incredibly popular cocktail garnishes—Topsy Olives, Onions and Cherries—were launched in the 1980s at the height of the cocktail scene, as martinis, manhattans and gimlets came back into fashion. Our products were positioned perfectly to fill this emerging niche.

What is the biggest perk of your job?

There is no doubt that the people I have met in the industry, so-called foodies today, have been and continue to be the most fun. I love to follow the new chefs and visit their restaurants in various cities of the world just for the experience. And when I see Topsy Olives on their martini menus I'm a happy woman.

I have also enjoyed the travel that comes with the job. In the early '90s I went on a tour across the U.S. and Canada to promote my first cookbook, *Elegant Entertaining*. In every city, I was able to

meet some of the retailers who were my friends and business associates. Travel is what whets my creative juices.

When Carol Rosenfeld retired from the business, what were your greatest challenges?

How to manage three teenage children [and] continue supplying our retail outlets with European products while producing Sable & Rosenfeld's products at the same time. I did it by closing the retail outlets and focusing on the Sable & Rosenfeld brand exclusively. The two cookbooks I wrote were wonderful marketing tools.

If you knew you were having your last meal, what would you choose to eat?

All I know is it would start with a dry gin martini with three large, crunchy Topsy Olives hovering on the side. |SFM|

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